



CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN KARACHI

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ABOUT THE REPORT

Ethnopolitical, sectarian, militant, and criminal violence has claimed more than 7,000 lives since 2008 in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and financial capital. The city's violent dynamics threaten to destabilize Pakistan, and its precarious security situation has serious implications for the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship owing to its growing role in national and regional terrorism. Despite this, the city rarely features in policy discussions about Pakistani security. This report highlights Karachi's integral role in a stable and secure Pakistan. It describes the city's multiple and intersecting types of violence, identifies violent actors, highlights the systemic issues that drive violence, analyzes state initiatives to stem violence and reasons why these efforts failed, and calls for the government to tackle the violence's underlying causes.

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Cover photo: iStock. A rare photo of militants belonging to the People's Amn Committee, an underworld gang of mafia operating in Karachi's oldest slum, Lyari.

The views expressed in this report are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace.

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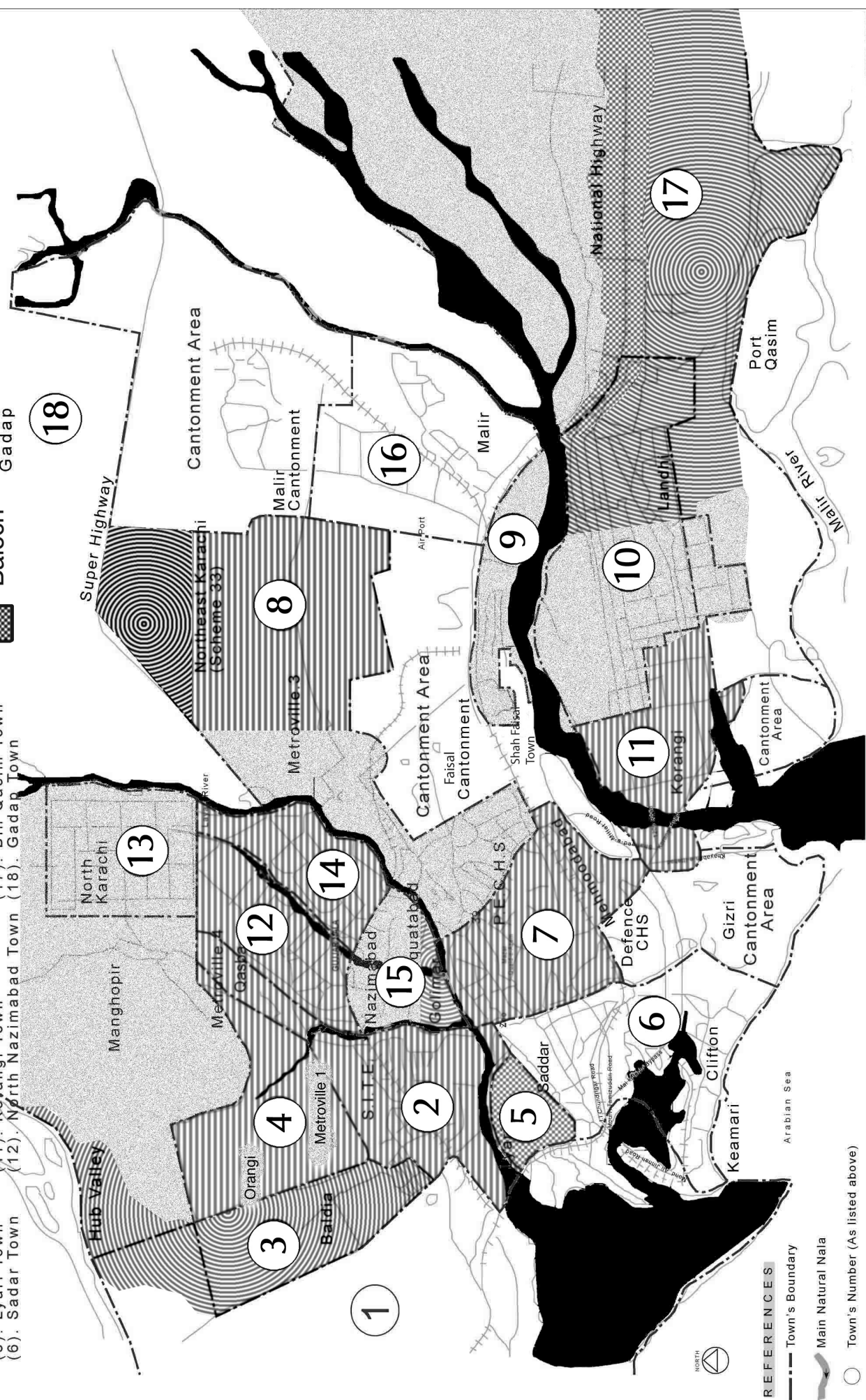


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[The key to Karachi's stability is a representative power-sharing agreement among the major political parties that reflects the city's evolving demographics.]

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☐ Town's Number (As listed above)

This map reflects the town boundaries in 2006 as they were demarcated under the Sindh Local Government Ordinance 2001. The original map, without the ethnic breakdown, was sourced from the Orangi Pilot Project: Research and Training Institute

Summary

- Violence in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, is multifaceted. Different types of violence—including ethnopolitical, militant, sectarian, and criminal—have claimed more than 7,000 lives since 2008.
- Violence in Karachi threatens to destabilize Pakistan for both economic and political reasons. The city contributes more than 25 percent of gross domestic product, and disruptions in urban economic activities necessarily affect the national economy. Moreover, the ethnically diverse city is a battleground for major political parties and thus key to domestic political stability.
- The armed wings of major political parties, including the MQM, PPP, and ANP, are the main perpetrators of urban violence. The parties clash over city resources and funds generated through extortion.
- Historically, Karachi's ethnopolitical violence has pitted Urdu-speaking *mohajirs* (migrants) of the MQM against Pashtuns represented by the ANP. But clashes between the rural, Sindh-based PPP and Karachi-centric MQM are increasing as part of a broader power struggle between the city- and provincial-level governments.
- Militant groups, including the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and extremist sectarian organizations, have consolidated their presence in the city. In addition to drawing new recruits and generating funds through criminal activities, militants increasingly attack state and security targets in Karachi.
- State initiatives to stem violence are superficial and ad hoc, and routinely fail to address the underlying causes of Karachi's violence, including poor urban planning, politicization of the police, proliferating seminary networks, and a flawed criminal justice system.
- High-level interventions by the Pakistan Army and Supreme Court have helped temporarily disrupt cycles of violence but do not offer sustainable solutions to Karachi's violent politics.
- The key to Karachi's stability is a representative power-sharing agreement among the major political parties that reflects the city's evolving demographics. However, the delay in conducting a transparent census and the failure to establish an uninterrupted platform for political negotiations continue to fuel violence.

Karachi is Pakistan's largest city and commercial capital. Home to more than 18 million people, the city sprawls across 3,530 square kilometers, boasts the highest literacy rates in the country—up to 90 percent in central Karachi—and employs the largest population in the manufacturing, retail, and services sectors. But the city's cosmopolitanism and economic growth are constantly undermined by violent disruptions. In recent years, ethnopolitical, sectarian, militant, and criminal violence have claimed thousands of lives and repeatedly paralyzed the city's economic activities.

Despite the scale and variety of violence in Karachi, domestic and international policy discussions about Pakistan's national security challenges have long focused on the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the northwestern Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, and southern Punjab, where militant groups such as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LT) have established strongholds. This trend was exacerbated when Karachi was largely spared the militant onslaught that led to the deaths of over 30,000 Pakistanis between 2002 and 2010.

But violence has soared in Karachi in recent years: More than 1,800 people were killed in the city in 2011 and more than 1,000 in 2010. By one estimate, politically motivated violence in Karachi alone accounted for 9.6 percent of all violent deaths in Pakistan in 2011.¹ Within Pakistan, the political establishment increasingly acknowledges Karachi's importance to national security. In March 2012 the Pakistani parliament's much-hyped strategic review of the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship was overshadowed by discussions about Karachi's security situation spiraling out of control. U.S. policymakers and the international community at large also need to recognize Karachi's key role in making Pakistan stable and secure. This paper therefore aims to describe the types of violence in Karachi and their causes, as well as draw out the implications of continuing violence in Karachi for Pakistan's overall stability.

Interior Minister Rehman Malik has argued rightly that destabilizing Karachi is akin to destabilizing Pakistan. His reasoning is primarily economic: Karachi accounts for more than 25 percent of Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP), 54 percent of central government tax revenues, 70 percent of national income tax revenue, and 30 percent of industrial output. In 2007 Karachi's per capita output exceeded that of the country by 50 percent.² Since Karachi generates Rs. 2 billion (\$21 million) in daily tax revenues, the slightest disruption in the city's economic activities affects the national economy.³ In recent years, however, citywide outbreaks of violence routinely closed markets and industries, leading to daily trade and industry losses of Rs. 3 billion (\$31.5 million) and Rs. 7 billion (\$73.6 million), respectively. Policymakers who have identified economic stability as a key component of Pakistan's national stability thus should also look to improving security in its financial capital.

Karachi's precarious security situation also has serious implications for the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship because the city has recently emerged as a hub of militancy and terrorist attacks. Against a backdrop of ethno-political tensions and demographic pressures, militancy has proliferated in Karachi in recent years. Numerous unconfirmed news reports indicate that the leadership of the Afghan Taliban has sought sanctuary in Karachi. Home to more than 3,000 madrassahs, the city is also one of the preferred sanctuaries, organizational hubs, and fundraising and recruitment grounds of the TTP as well as banned sectarian outfits and other militant groups. In 2011 one of the TTP's most audacious attacks unfolded in the heart of Karachi, when militants stormed the Pakistan Naval Station (PNS) Mehran naval base and battled security forces for fifteen hours, killing thirteen people and destroying two P-3C Orion maritime surveillance aircraft. Along with Pakistan's northwestern tribal belt, Karachi also has emerged as a vital hub of terrorism. In November 2011 Sindh Home Minister Manzoor Hussain Wasan acknowledged that the city remained under constant threat of terrorist attacks. That same month, the global consulting firm Mercer ranked Karachi 216th out of 221 cities—the lowest in the Asia-Pacific region—on a personal safety index that accounted for ethnic and sectarian violence as well as terrorist attacks.⁴

The TTP and other militant groups' consolidating their presence in the city, well out of reach of American drone strikes and counterinsurgency initiatives, could be perceived as Pakistani ambivalence about fighting terrorism within its borders and therefore further strain relations with the United States. The city's role in international terrorism already has been highlighted: LT militants trained for a few weeks in Karachi before setting sail from the city's port for Mumbai, India, where they launched coordinated attacks that killed more than 170 people in November 2008. Faisal Shahzad, the American citizen of Pakistani origin who attempted to bomb New York's Times Square in May 2010, successfully connected with TTP's network in Karachi when seeking militant training.

Unrest in Karachi also threatens the safe passage of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) supplies and equipment through the city. Before the supply route was suspended in November 2011, following an attack by NATO forces against a Pakistan Army checkpoint near the Afghan border, 1,300 containers containing sustenance supplies and 1,000 fuel tankers were being transported from Karachi Port to Afghanistan each month. At times of heightened U.S.-Pakistan tensions, these supplies have been subject to arson attacks in the city. Their passage is also impeded or blocked when ethno-political or sectarian strife paralyzes Karachi. If the Pakistani and U.S. governments reach an agreement regarding ground lines of communication, primarily to withdraw NATO equipment from Afghanistan as part of the drawdown process, NATO goods could be at risk of attack or theft while in transit through Karachi, not only because of the growing presence of militant groups, but also because of negative public opinion regarding the reopening of supply lines.

Moreover, consignments shipped under the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement, which came into effect in June 2011, are processed at Karachi Port. The U.S.-sponsored agreement is an important part of Washington's strategy to reduce Afghan dependency on foreign aid by spurring economic growth and fostering regional cooperation. Afghanistan-bound containers are also at risk of being waylaid, robbed, or attacked during citywide violence or related strikes in Karachi. Such disruptions could further strain Afghan-Pakistan relations and threaten the viability of the agreement. As such, Karachi plays a role in U.S. strategies to stabilize Afghanistan after the withdrawal of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops in 2014.

Foreign policy considerations aside, Karachi is key to domestic political stability and democracy in Pakistan. As the country's largest and most ethnically diverse city, it is a battleground for major political parties, which claim competing constituencies in its ethnically segregated neighborhoods. Violence in the city is frequently used as a negotiating tactic to sway provincial- or federal-level decision-making; when it gets out of control, it threatens the viability of the ruling coalition government. For this reason, Karachi is also one of the places in Pakistan most vulnerable to army intervention, making it a significant fault line in Pakistan's tenuous democratic setup. During bouts of ethno-political violence in the summer of 2011, Karachi's business, trade, and industrial communities repeatedly called for the army to declare a state of emergency in the city and assume control of security. Although the Pakistan army did not take this drastic step, choosing instead to work behind the scenes to pressure politicians to negotiate, such intervention could be seamlessly staged since the paramilitary Rangers, rather than the under-resourced police force, manage Karachi's security.

Given the importance of a stable Karachi to national and regional stability as well as the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, this report aims to document the city's multifaceted and evolving causes of urban violence. It does not attempt to recapitulate the history of ethno-political violence, militancy, and crime in Karachi, but to update and refine existing research on violence in the city by pointing to emergent political, demographic, governance-related, and criminal factors that have driven violence in recent years.

Until now, discussion of Karachi in the international media and among U.S. policymakers has been limited largely to its role as a possible sanctuary for the Afghan Taliban. Domestically, meanwhile, focus on the political dynamic of Karachi and its implications for federal-level political coalitions has overwhelmed any explorations of the overlapping systemic and security issues that drive violence in the city. By holistically analyzing the types of urban violence in Karachi and the challenges of mitigating them, this report aims to show how these disparate

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concerns emerge from the same circumstances. The report thus aims to generate a nuanced debate among Pakistani policymakers and with their U.S. and other international counterparts on Karachi's integral role in a stable Pakistan and the policies required to stem violence in the city. By drawing attention to Karachi as a potential fault line in U.S.-Pakistan security cooperation, it also seeks to prioritize the city's security in bilateral discussions on counter-terrorism initiatives.

The report also goes beyond describing violent dynamics to highlight the systemic issues and social conditions that drive violence. Present-day Karachi offers a glimpse into a potential future Pakistan, where the state has abdicated all responsibility for governance, service delivery, and maintaining law and order. By showing that the roots of Karachi's violence lie in political fragmentation, economic disparity, ghettoization, and a lack of governance resulting from poor land and resource allocation, this report seeks to inspire effective policymaking to tackle the underlying causes of violence. Such efforts would help prevent Karachi's violent history from being replicated in other cities, in a country that is urbanizing at the fastest rate in South Asia: 50 percent of all Pakistanis will live in cities by 2030.⁵

Karachi's Evolving Violent Landscape

Karachi has long suffered violent disruptions. The influx of *mohajirs*, Urdu-speaking migrants from northern India, to the city during the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 forced the creation of unplanned settlements. Until the 1980s, *mohajir* entrepreneurs managed and apportioned illegal subdivisions of the settlements. This status quo was challenged, however, by Pashtuns, who had been migrating to Karachi from northwestern Pakistan since the 1960s in search of work. As *mohajir* entrepreneurs sought to retain control over squatter settlements as well as the means of public transport in the city, ethnic tensions between *mohajirs* and Pashtuns mounted, leading to Karachi's first citywide ethnic riot in April 1985, which claimed more than a hundred lives.

In 1987 the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), a political party formed to represent *mohajirs*, won its first electoral victory, adding a political dimension to the spiraling urban violence. This violence was fueled by the flow of firearms into Karachi following the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, and the city quickly fragmented into enclaves controlled by ethnic militias. Since the 1980s the *mohajirs* and Pashtuns have engaged in ethnopolitical clashes over control of the city's infrastructure and inadequate resources.

In the early 1990s Pakistan's army launched Operation Clean Up to cleanse *mohajir* neighborhoods of militias. However, to avoid charges of targeting a political party, the army soon handed the operation over to the Sindh police and paramilitary Rangers. During the civilian operation, the extrajudicial killing of *mohajir* militia members was rampant, leading to extreme tensions between the MQM and the ruling political party—the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) under Benazir Bhutto in 1992, and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) in 1994. Through largely extrajudicial means, the operation eliminated or weakened MQM militias, leading to a decline in ethnopolitical violence in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In addition to ethnopolitical violence, however, Karachi witnessed the rise of extremist Sunni Muslim militant groups in the 1990s that targeted prominent Shia Muslims. Intense police action against such groups in the late 1990s, during which militants were arrested or killed, led to a significant decline in sectarian violence in the early and mid-2000s.

Since 2008 Karachi has again been racked with violence, in which more than 7,000 people have been killed. Particularly prolonged and brutal stretches of ethnopolitical violence killed more than 1,000 people in 2010,⁶ 1,891 in 2011,⁷ and at least 740 in the first five months of

2012.⁸ In September 2011 the director-general of the Rangers, tasked with restoring law and order in the city, described the security situation in Karachi as “worse than North Waziristan Agency,” the tribal area where the Pakistani Taliban and other Afghanistan-focused militant groups have sought sanctuary.

The ongoing stretch of violence in Karachi is significantly more complex and explosive than the situation in the 1980s and 1990s for several reasons. Previously, the armed militias of the MQM were the primary violent actors in the city. In the past decade, however, the demographic profile of Karachi has changed, owing to the steady migration of Pashtuns from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA. These Pashtuns increasingly enjoy political representation through the Awami National Party (ANP). Karachi’s Pashtun population has also benefited from the transportation boom triggered in 2001 by the supply of NATO goods from Karachi Port to Afghanistan. Their increased economic clout has allowed them to better organize and equip themselves to confront the armed wings of the MQM. Not surprisingly, a greater number of violent actors has worsened the security situation.

The federal government’s unwillingness to take strong action against perpetrators has also caused violence to escalate. In the 1990s the ruling PPP government was willing to crack down against the MQM because it did not depend on the MQM to stay in power. Since then, Pakistani federal-level politics has changed, with a coalition government replacing one-party rule. Since the 2008 general election the PPP, MQM, and ANP have been coalition partners. The ruling PPP is thus hard-pressed to act against the warring parties of Karachi, as doing so risks severed ties with either the MQM or the ANP and consequently its own ruling position. Karachi’s violence has contributed to the government coalition’s fragility. Disagreements with the PPP over how to share power and resources in Karachi led the MQM to quit the coalition three times during its tenure, leading to fears that the government could collapse.

At the same time, dynamics within the coalition have fueled violence in Karachi. The ANP has positioned itself as an indispensable PPP ally at the federal level, inviting increased cooperation in Karachi as well. The stronger ANP-PPP alliance has boosted each party’s political standing in Karachi against the MQM and led to more fierce clashes among all three political actors. Moreover, the PPP has been emboldened by both its ruling position at the federal level and its majority in the Sindh provincial government to make inroads in Karachi, adding a third political actor to the city’s violent dynamic.

Even as Karachi’s political landscape has become more complex, the city has witnessed the emergence of more than two hundred well-armed and well-organized criminal gangs, which operate independently and in conjunction with political parties. Their activities—including extortion, arms trafficking, smuggling, kidnapping, and robberies—have severely degraded the overall security situation in Karachi. The deterioration of law and order has also allowed militant groups with sectarian agendas to regroup and again contribute to urban violence. Most important, the city is vulnerable to new violent actors in the form of TTP militants and their proliferating affiliates. This militant threat adds a new dimension and potency to Karachi’s violence, giving it both national and regional significance in a way that ethnopolitical tensions in the past did not. The intersecting and overlapping forms of urban violence make the current security situation in Karachi particularly volatile, requiring a timely and comprehensive response.

Karachi’s Multifaceted Violence

As the above suggests, although long described as a conflict between *mohajirs* and Pashtuns, Karachi’s violence is multifaceted: It is ethnopolitical, criminal, militant, and sectarian. The

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distinctions among different types of violence do not imply that they are mutually exclusive; in Karachi, one type of violence often instigates killings in a very different context. In August 2010 the assassination of a prominent MQM politician on sectarian grounds led to widespread ethno-political violence between *mohajirs* and Pashtuns. Land grabs by organized criminal groups have sparked clashes between political parties, including the MQM and Sunni Tehrik, which vie for territorial control in different parts of Karachi. Moreover, Karachi is increasingly witnessing a trend of freelance militancy, whereby guns for hire simultaneously operate on behalf of militant and sectarian groups, political parties, and criminal gangs.

Ethno-political Violence

Karachi saw a dramatic surge in ethno-political violence in 2010 and 2011. In 2010 over 1,000 people were killed in target killings—tit-for-tat assassinations aimed at members of rival political parties and their corresponding ethnic groups—followed by 1,891 in 2011 and more than 740 in the first five months of 2012. The violence reached record levels in July and August 2011, when 324 and 229 people were killed, respectively. The main perpetrators of this violence were the armed wings of major political parties and criminals with links to those parties.

The connections between mainstream political parties and target killers are well established. A Sindh Home Department joint investigation team report— assembled by intelligence agencies representatives, including the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Intelligence Bureau (IB), Military Intelligence (MI), and Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and completed in September 2011—revealed links between criminals and political parties. The report included the testimonies of twenty-six accused target killers, allegedly involved in violence in Karachi in 2010, who confessed to affiliations with the MQM, ANP, and MQM-Haqiqi (a breakaway faction of the MQM) as well as various banned militant organizations. The report lacked credibility in public and media opinion because it did not identify any target killers affiliated with the ruling PPP party, but was nonetheless accepted by the Supreme Court and the Inspector General of Sindh Police, who assigned a task force to arrest those named in the report.

Historically, target killers and criminals have been deployed in ethno-political violence between Karachi's *mohajirs*, represented by the MQM party, and Pashtuns, represented by the ANP. As recently as 2007 a political showdown between the MQM and ANP threatened to spark widespread ethnic violence: On May 12 of that year, the MQM, which formed the government with then-president Pervez Musharraf, organized to prevent the arrival in Karachi of Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, a Supreme Court chief justice whom Musharraf had deposed. The MQM's plans were opposed by the ANP and PPP, which at the time formed the opposition at the federal level. MQM party workers were accused of launching highly coordinated attacks against ANP and PPP supporters, killing forty-three people, primarily Pashtuns. Fourteen MQM workers were also killed in retaliatory actions.

Since the May 12, 2007, clashes, the ANP has consolidated its political presence in Karachi. For the first time the party won two seats out of forty-two from Karachi in the Sindh provincial assembly during the 2008 general elections; the MQM won thirty-four, while the PPP secured six seats. By adopting a narrative of ethnic victimization, the ANP claims to represent Karachi's Pashtun population, which it estimates to be 22 percent of the total, up from about 12 percent in 1998. The party's reach has been bolstered by the migration of over 300,000 Pashtuns, who have fled to the city in recent years to escape the fallout of military operations against militants in Pakistan's tribal belt and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The ANP's political and demographic gains have led the MQM to fear that it is losing the grip over Karachi that it has enjoyed since a landslide victory in the 2005 general elections.

The party previously won control of the city during the 1988 general elections. *Mohajirs* currently make up 48 percent of Karachi's population, but the MQM, unlike the ANP and PPP, has no provincial base from which to draw new supporters. The recent surge in ethnopolitical violence is therefore understood to be a show of strength before the 2013 general elections, during which, some analysts argue, the MQM can be expected to resort to all measures necessary to maintain its dominant political position. In this context, frequent target killings aim to discourage further migration to the city. But violence is also used to accommodate for the city's shifting demographics: Since the transfer of a few thousand votes from one constituency to another can greatly affect election results, target killings have been used to terrorize members of an ethnic group into relocating to safer, ethnically homogenous areas. As such, violence has been used to demarcate electoral zones along ethnic lines.

The ethnopolitical clashes between *mohajirs* and Pashtuns also is no longer the only violent ethnic dynamic in the city: Ethnic Sindhis and Balochis, represented by the PPP, increasingly have taken part. Like Pashtuns, Sindhis have migrated to Karachi—the provincial capital of the Sindh province—in significant numbers in search of employment. Refugees affected by successive summers of flooding in 2010 and 2011 also relocated to Sindhi *goths* (villages) that cluster around the city's periphery, particularly near entry and exit points along the National Highway. With a growing constituency in the city, the PPP is eager to gain access to the city's limited land, utilities, and financial resources with which to woo potential voters. The PPP is also seeking better representation in Karachi: In the 2008 elections it won over a quarter of the popular vote in Karachi, but only three out of the twenty National Assembly seats from the city owing to outdated electoral districting.⁹

The PPP's growing constituencies are not, however, the primary reason for a widening MQM-PPP fault line in the city. The parties and the ethnic groups they represent have an antagonistic history. After Partition-era *mohajir* resettlement in Karachi, Sindhis resented being marginalized on their own turf: According to Sindhi nationalist party leaders, Sindhis constituted 60 percent of Karachi's population in 1947 but now amount to only 7 percent of the total.¹⁰ This resentment flared in the 1970s, when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, an ethnic Sindhi and founder of the PPP, came to power and instituted quotas for Sindhis and *mohajirs*, limiting the latter's access to government jobs, educational seats, and development benefits. These policies led to the language riots of 1972.¹¹ Subsequently the parties formed a coalition for the 1988 general elections, but their supporters continued to clash. In 1992 the army operation to cleanse Karachi of MQM's armed militias—during which thousands of party activists were killed in encounters with security forces—was launched under former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's first government.

Thus, while the violent history is rooted in specific tensions between rural and urban, province and city, bureaucracy and decentralized local governance, it is ultimately a clash between the rural-Sindh-based PPP and Karachi-based MQM over the city's resources and administration. Karachi contains 30 percent of Sindh's total population, employs 71.6 percent of the total industrial labor force of Sindh, generates 74.8 percent of the province's total industrial output, and provides 78 percent of all private sector jobs in the province.¹² Without Karachi, Sindh is relatively underdeveloped and impoverished, and yet Sindhis struggle for political representation and access within the provincial capital. Sindhi nationalist political parties, such as the Sindh Tarraqi Passand Party, Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz (JSQM), and Awami Tehrik (AT), often cite this grievance. More recently, some PPP elements also have seized the narrative of greater Sindhi representation in Karachi. In 2011, former Sindh home minister and PPP representative Zulfikar Mirza began championing Sindhi rights and issuing anti-MQM

comments. His diatribes led to intense ethno-political clashes in the summer of 2011. On July 14, after Mirza made slurs against the Urdu-speaking community during a televised press conference, gunfights broke out that killed fourteen people. According to Taj Haider, the general secretary of the PPP in Sindh, the party remains divided on this strategy for gaining political power in Karachi: While some argue that playing the Sindh card is an effective way for the PPP to counter MQM dominance, the majority are in favor of a good working relationship with the MQM.¹³

Whatever relationship the PPP and MQM establish, Sindhis are likely to have a growing voice in Karachi's political dynamic. In March 2012 the JSQM staged a rally in Karachi to call for an independent Sindh province. A few days later, to protest government delays in investigating the cause of the sudden death on April 7 of the party's leader, Bashir Qureshi, the JSQM announced a strike. The strike call was observed across the city as markets closed, public transport halted, and three men were killed in firing incidents, demonstrating the increasing street power of Sindhi nationalist parties.¹⁴ Two months later, on May 22, the Sindhi nationalist party AT organized a rally to oppose the increasing appearance of graffiti calling for a separate *mohajir* province to be carved out of Sindh. Unidentified snipers opened fire on the rally, leading to clashes throughout the city in which thirteen people were killed and thirty-five injured.¹⁵

Since 2010, *mohajir*-Sindhi tensions have also crystallized in a tussle over which local government system to adopt in the province. The PPP favors the Sindh Local Government Ordinance (SLGO) 1979, which retains powers—including land and revenue allocation—at the provincial level, relies on appointed commissioners, and divides Karachi into five administrative districts. For its part, the MQM favors the SLGO 2001, which devolves power from the province to the district level, empowers elected *nazims* (mayors), and unifies Karachi under one city district government, facilitating single-party control of the city. The MQM's appetite for the *nazim* system was nurtured during the tenure of former president Musharraf, who sidelined the mainstream political parties, the PPP and PMLN, and appeased his allies in the MQM by tailoring SLGO 2001 to enhance the party's political reach in Karachi and Hyderabad.

The PPP and Sindhi nationalist parties have long complained that the 2001 system undercuts the authority of the provincial government by creating fiefdoms under elected mayors over which the province has little control.¹⁶ Under SLGO 1979, the PPP would be better positioned to govern Karachi because Sindhis control the bureaucracy and have a majority in the Sindh provincial assembly. The MQM, meanwhile, has greatly benefited from the decentralized SLGO 2001 because it has been able to negotiate benefits for its Urdu-speaking constituents in Karachi without a significant presence in the provincial bureaucracy.

Disagreements over which local government system to adopt led the MQM to quit the coalition government in June 2011, after which the PPP revived the commissioner system under SLGO 1979. This move sparked prolonged bouts of violence in Karachi, causing the PPP to capitulate and revive the SLGO 2001 through a gubernatorial ordinance; the ordinance lapsed in November 2011, and Karachi is now governed under the SLGO 1979. The seesawing between systems has exacerbated the lack of governance and effective service delivery at the grassroots level across Karachi. It has also highlighted how widespread urban violence is used as a political tool for parties to gain the upper hand during deadlocked negotiations and extract concessions from their rivals. As such, Karachi's violence can be understood as a symptom of debilitated democratic processes.

Since the start of 2012 the MQM and PPP have been jointly drafting a new local government system based on stakeholder consensus and had exchanged initial power-sharing ideas by April. The new system is expected to borrow elements from both SLGO 1979 and 2001,

as well as from Z.A. Bhutto's 1972 draft of a system called the People's Government System and a 1986 draft of a system prepared by PPP activist Kamal Azfar. The PPP is expected to concede to MQM's demand for a decentralized system, but wants to implement checks and balances on the powers of the elected *nazims*; the PPP also wants MQM's support in appointing one of its own activists as the minister overseeing local government at the provincial level. Failure to finalize a compromise system before the 2013 general elections could spark further political violence as the two parties attempt to gain concessions vis-à-vis the draft in exchange for forming new coalition setups at the federal and provincial level, all while competing at the ballot box in Karachi.

Electoral violence is also likely if Karachi's major political parties do not uniformly accept the electoral rolls that the Election Commission of Pakistan has prepared. In March 2012 all the political parties represented in the Sindh Assembly complained of irregularities in the lists of registered voters and called for their verification. Disagreements on the composition of these lists could lead to violent clashes for control over polling stations during general elections. Concerns about voter lists—as well as contradictory political narratives by the MQM, PPP, and ANP about Karachi's shifting demographics—stem partly from delays in conducting the national census. Pakistan's last census was completed in 1998 and a new population count is more than three years overdue. The lack of accurate census data on Karachi perpetuates problems of inadequate service delivery and poor governance. It also fuels violence as political parties exaggerate or underestimate their total constituencies in the service of narratives of ethnic marginalization that, in turn, fuel interethnic clashes.

That said, all the major parties stand to be negatively affected by a transparent census: Official documentation of the expansion of Karachi's Pashtun population would lead to redistricting in favor of the ANP at MQM's expense. ANP's narrative of ethnic marginalization could be compromised if there are fewer Pashtuns in the city than the party claims. An accurate count of Karachi's ever-expanding population would lead to provincial revenue being directed away from PPP's rural Sindhi supporters to the city. It is thus not surprising that the first house-count phase of the national census, which commenced in Karachi in April 2011, was marred by violence as three census workers were shot dead. In the current political environment, a census count is simultaneously a panacea and potential trigger for ethnopolitical violence.

Crime

Karachi's ethnopolitical violence is facilitated by an overall crisis in law and order. Many of the gunmen involved in target killings were not political party activists, but members of one of approximately two hundred criminal gangs in the city, many of which boast affiliations with mainstream political parties. The gangs foster a perpetual sense of insecurity in the city by engaging in various criminal activities. In 2011 there were 1,490 reported vehicle snatchings, more than 12,500 mobile phone thefts, 113 kidnappings for ransom, and 1,683 armed robberies in Karachi.¹⁷ Police officials readily acknowledge that these statistics are gross underestimates, as most victims choose not to report crimes, demonstrating a pervasive lack of trust in the police. The incidence of crime in Karachi is extremely high, but criminal activities with political dimensions are the most disruptive to Karachi's stability.

Many criminal gangs operate land mafias that manage the apportioning and sale of encroached land. These mafias occupy commercial plots, government land, and illegal squatter settlements—often through violent or illegal means, including intimidation, forgery, bribery, and arson—and sell them to the highest bidders. There is necessarily a connection between the land mafias and political parties. Given systemic failures in urban planning in Karachi,

The incidence of crime in Karachi is extremely high, but criminal activities with political dimensions are the most disruptive to Karachi's stability.

political parties rely on land mafias to provide real estate, utilities connections, roads, and other infrastructure for their constituents in areas that have been illegally and thus poorly developed. Land grabbers, for their part, use political connections to regularize squatter settlements, gain permission to convert amenity plots (allocated for parks and community centers) into commercial or residential property, and secure permits to develop properties, often purchased for a fraction of their market value after threats or acts of violence.

Land grabs often spark ethnic clashes. Residents belonging to one ethnic group are pressured to evict a locality by land mafias affiliated with the political party of a rival ethnic group. Harassed residents then put up armed resistance, sparking citywide ethnic clashes. In 2011 ANP supporters tried to occupy a predominantly Christian area in Ittehad Town. The MQM, which boasts a secular mandate and seeks votes from religious minorities, retaliated, leading to two days of fighting and the closure of businesses in the area for over a week. Similarly, a tussle over land between MQM workers and members of a Pashtun land mafia in Gulzar-e-Hijri (Scheme 33) in April 2009 led to citywide ethnic riots in which twenty-three people were killed.¹⁸ Kati Pahari remains a major flashpoint. Conceived as a recreational park project by the city government that preceded the MQM—a coalition of religious political parties that came to power in 2002—the area has been encroached by supporters of both the MQM and ANP in recent years. Clashes between the rival groups are so frequent that ten check posts of the paramilitary Rangers have been established around Kati Pahari to maintain security.

Land grabbers have also been known to exploit ethnic tensions to attract new and often higher-paying tenants to a locality. Without the consent of political parties, they plant their party flags around an area, thereby creating ethnic zones; residents from ethnic groups not represented by that party then feel compelled to relocate. That said, land mafias are not strictly committed to promoting the political parties' ethnic agendas. While parties aim to create ethnically homogenous areas to secure electoral victories, land grabbers sell land and properties to the highest bidder, often creating heterogeneous dwellings. This practice will cause more frequent interethnic clashes in the short term, but it could prevent the complete ghettoization of Karachi along ethnic lines in the long term.

Criminal gangs also operate weapons mafias, supplying illegal, unlicensed, and prohibited-bore small arms to criminals and political party workers. The weapons mafias have been able to inundate the city with arms by forging arms licenses and illegally acquiring hundreds of weapons on a single license.

Karachi's largest and most powerful criminal gangs operate out of Lyari, a slum settlement with a population of over 1 million. Historically Lyari is a PPP stronghold and a hub of drug smuggling, weapons trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, and gang warfare. By 2008 Lyari's warring gangs had been brought under the control of Rehman Dakait, a notorious gangster who formed the People's Amn Committee (PAC) to sustain a durable ceasefire in the slum. Dakait's death in August 2008 led to a war of succession, during which Uzair Baloch took over the PAC with the backing of PPP minister Zulfiqar Mirza. Originally, PPP's involvement with the PAC was premised on gaining access to the vast funds generated by the committee's criminal activities. According to Karachi-based journalists, the PAC emerged as a de facto armed wing of the PPP during the violence of 2010 and 2011 and was used to counter MQM dominance.¹⁹ Notably, most Lyari residents, and thus members of the PAC, are ethnically Baloch; their increasing involvement in the city's political-criminal nexus has added yet another ethnic dimension to Karachi's urban violence.

Some of the most brutal incidents of abduction, torture, target killings, and corpse dumping have been blamed on the PAC, which focused its activities against MQM supporters

in the broader context of tensions between the coalition partners.²⁰ During an MQM-PPP rapprochement in March 2011, Asif Ali Zardari, the Pakistani president and cochairman of the PPP, banned the PAC as a goodwill gesture toward the MQM. The PAC then voluntarily closed its offices in Karachi in a show of loyalty to the PPP. But the committee revived its activities after MQM quit the coalition government in June 2011. As a result, July and August were the deadliest months in Karachi's history. The committee was officially banned in October 2011, following Mirza's resignation from the Sindh government.

Despite the ban, the PAC continues its criminal activities in Lyari and foment instability in Karachi. To counter the committee's grip over criminal activities, the MQM has cultivated links with rival Lyari-based gangs, including those from the Katchi-speaking community as well as factions within the PAC that oppose Uzair Baloch's leadership of the committee.²¹ In August 2011 Akram Baloch claimed to be Dakait's rightful successor, a contention that led gang warfare to flare within Lyari. Karachi-based investigative journalists report that the MQM has since established links with Akram Baloch.²² Infighting between Lyari's criminal gangs is thus likely to spark wider ethnic and political clashes in Karachi. In April 2012 violent clashes between Lyari's gangs had a ripple effect, leading to exchanges of fire in multiethnic neighborhoods across Karachi.²³

Another possible outcome is that the PAC emerges as an independent actor with the power to destabilize Karachi without heeding the directives of any political party. At the end of April 2012 the police launched a days-long operation on the directive of the PPP-led Sindh government against the PAC following the murder in Lyari of a local PPP leader. Numerous police officials were killed and wounded during the operation and Lyari's residents had to flee the battle zone.²⁴ According to news reports, the confrontation occurred because the PAC decided to break with the PPP and signaled this by killing the local PPP representative.²⁵ The PAC's decision was reportedly spurred by resentment against the PPP, which has consistently curtailed PAC's activities to appease its allies in the MQM.²⁶ The newfound autonomy of groups such as PAC could instigate further violence for at least two reasons. First, the groups are likely to pursue distinct agendas and political parties will no longer enjoy control over their operations. Second, other political parties are likely to vie for control over the rogue groups. News of the PAC's break with the PPP was quickly followed by speculations about their forming an alliance with Nawaz Sharif's opposition PML-N party.

Extortion

In addition to political power and land, Karachi's political parties have clashed over access to the enormous funds generated through extortion, by both political party workers and criminal gangs. According to news reports, over Rs. 12 million (\$0.13 million) are collected daily from more than four hundred markets and shopping plazas, transporters and tankers that need to park in the city, small business owners, traders, factories, and the residents of illegal encroachments.²⁷ Supreme Court hearings investigating the causes of violence in Karachi, which took place between July and October 2011, identified the city's political parties—including the MQM, ANP, PPP, Sunni Tehrik (ST), and Jamaat-e-Islami—as the main beneficiaries of extortion rackets. Subsequently, in April 2012, Interior Minister Rehman Malik publicly confirmed that all major political parties in Karachi, including the MQM, PPP, and ANP, were running extortion rackets.²⁸

Political parties extort money both to fund their activities and to mark their turf across the city. Disputes over which political party or criminal entity can collect funds from a particular area often spark violent clashes. The ANP, PAC, and Sindhi nationalist parties' attempts to

The growing competition over extorted funds and the increased involvement of criminal gangs in collecting these funds have led to a sharp rise in extortion-related violence.

increase their influence by extorting money from areas previously under MQM control have instigated violence in Karachi since 2009. The MQM also has clashed previously with the ST over the reach of each party's extortion rackets. The growing competition over extorted funds and the increased involvement of criminal gangs in collecting these funds have led to a sharp rise in extortion-related violence. Between March and June 2012, twenty traders were killed for failing to pay extortionists, and another fifteen were abducted to facilitate payments.²⁹

Not all extortionists resort to such violence; over the years, political parties have refined their extortion collection methods. Instead of brute intimidation and harassment alone, party workers approach businesses, traders, and transporters for charitable donations or contributions to party campaign funds. Residents of localities where the MQM or ST dominate are expected to donate the hides of sacrificial animals—which are sold to the tanning industry for a great profit—to political party workers. According to news reports, trader associations also have been deployed to collect money on behalf of various political stakeholders.³⁰ These indirect methods save parties from charges of running extortion rackets.

Karachi's traders complain that widespread extortion poses as great a threat to their business operations as does ethno-political violence. All Karachi Tajir Ittehad, a coalition of more than three hundred market associations, organized day-long, citywide market closures to protest extortion in April 2011 and March 2012. The Small Traders Association also lobbied the Sindh police to establish an antiextortion cell, which comprised eight hundred newly recruited police officials. However, in the ten days after its launch in March 2012, the cell received only fifteen complaints about extortion, indicating the extent to which victims fear crossing their extortionists and reiterating the lack of public trust in civilian law-enforcing agencies.

Militancy

The poor state of law and order resulting from the 2010–11 surge in ethno-political violence enabled militant groups to consolidate their presence and launch attacks in Karachi. There have been unconfirmed reports of the Afghan Taliban leadership relocating to the city. The TTP, an umbrella movement uniting militant factions in Pakistan's northwestern tribal areas, has increased its fundraising and recruitment activities in the city and launched several high-profile attacks. Additionally, Karachi has witnessed a resurgence of militant groups with a sectarian agenda. The multiple and frequently intersecting strands of militancy, described in depth below, are potentially the most destabilizing element in Karachi's short-term future.

Afghan Taliban

In recent years, the international media have pointed repeatedly to a significant Afghan Taliban presence in Karachi. In February 2010 Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the second-in-command of the Afghan Taliban, was arrested from Karachi in a joint U.S.-Pakistan operation. Baradar's presence in the city has been cited since as proof of Karachi's crucial role as an Afghan Taliban hideout and rehabilitation spot. In the same month, *The New York Times* quoted an anonymous diplomat in Kabul who claimed that Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar and his colleagues were based in Karachi.³¹ In January 2011, American newspapers reported that Mullah Omar was treated for a heart attack in a Karachi hospital under ISI supervision.³² However, the Pakistan army promptly denied knowledge of Omar's whereabouts.³³

Karachi-based journalists and police officials acknowledge the presence of Afghan Taliban commanders and fighters in the city. They explain that Taliban members seek sanctuary in Karachi, viewing it as a safe place to receive medical treatment and house their families. For this reason, too, Karachi could emerge as a flashpoint in U.S.-Pakistan relations in the run-up

to U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. After the discovery of al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, the further discovery of senior Afghan Taliban commanders in Karachi could be perceived as another sign of Pakistani duplicity or lack of commitment in the war against terrorism. The extent of Afghan Taliban presence in Karachi, however, remains unknown. According to one news report, between 7,000 and 8,000 Afghan Taliban fighters reside in Karachi's Pashtun localities. However, this number includes Pakistani citizens who voluntarily travel to Afghanistan, often during summer months, to participate in the jihad against international forces.³⁴

Although the Afghan Taliban do not engage in terrorist activities in Karachi, their presence in the city could negatively affect the security situation. Police officials argue that the Afghan Taliban's success in seeking sanctuary in Karachi's endless urban sprawl inspired the TTP and other militant outfits to do the same.³⁵ There are concerns that the Afghan Taliban might radicalize members of Karachi's Afghan community. There are more than 80,000 Afghan refugees in Karachi, many of whom have been based there since the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s. If these refugees are unhappy with the role Pakistan eventually plays in resolving the Afghanistan conflict, they could create havoc in the city with prodding from the Afghan Taliban.

Senior police officials also point to the Afghan refugee community's role in urban crime.³⁶ Afghans increasingly make up a disaffected and marginalized community competing with other groups for the city's scant resources. Many Afghans complain of a lack of opportunity and development. These complaints intensified when the city government arrested and deported over 2,000 unregistered Afghan refugees between 2008 and 2010, citing security concerns. At the time, employers, particularly factory and industrial unit owners, were pressured not to hire Afghan labor. This crackdown on refugees was preemptive—they are allowed to stay in Pakistan until December 2012 according to an agreement between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—and signaled the heightening competition over urban resources. Such violations of basic rights could spark clashes or make some of Karachi's Afghans more willing to participate in antistate activities.

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

The growing presence of the TTP in Karachi has often been treated as a sideshow to the main events unfolding in FATA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and southern Punjab. However, even as Pakistan witnessed a 35 percent decrease in suicide attacks between 2010 and 2011, the TTP waged several high-profile terrorist attacks in Karachi, indicating a significant tactical shift in the group's Karachi activities.³⁷

The TTP's heightened activity in Karachi should be of great interest to Pakistani and U.S. policymakers. Terror attacks in the financial capital of Karachi could paralyze economic activities, undermining the national economy and, by extension, national stability. Beyond the economic angle, Karachi is a key node in terrorism across Pakistan because it has become the main location for militant recruitment, fundraising, and collaboration. The TTP's successful entrenchment in Karachi will allow the group to reconsolidate after setbacks resulting from drone attacks in FATA and growing divisions among the militant factions that comprise the TTP. In other words, the growing terror threat in Karachi could herald a resurgence in terror attacks throughout the country.

There have been many indications of the TTP's consolidating its presence in Karachi in recent years. In November 2010 the TTP launched a suicide bomb attack at the headquarters of the CID, the police department tasked with conducting antiterrorism operations, which killed 24 people and injured 130.³⁸ This was the first in a series of attacks that

Karachi is a key node in terrorism across Pakistan because it has become the main location for militant recruitment, fundraising, and collaboration.

targeted state security personnel and infrastructure in the city. In April 2011, TTP militants attacked two buses carrying navy officials, killing four people and wounding fifty-six in the first major attack against the armed forces in Karachi in seven years.³⁹ The following month, on May 22, up to twenty militants armed with rockets, grenades, and machine guns laid siege to the PNS Mehran naval base for seventeen hours, killing ten security personnel and destroying two U.S.-manufactured P-3C Orion surveillance airplanes.⁴⁰ The ten-hour-long gun battle between TTP militants and commandoes of the Pakistani Special Services Group in the heart of Karachi emphasized the city's new vulnerability to terrorist attacks, particularly since the Pakistani Taliban had not attacked such a sensitive security installation successfully since the February 2009 assault against the Pakistan Army's general headquarters in Rawalpindi.

In a more targeted attack on September 19, a suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden car into the private residence of police superintendent Chaudhry Aslam Khan, the head of the antiterrorist CID, killing eight people.⁴¹ The attack occurred a few weeks after the TTP released a hit list featuring five senior Karachi police officials, including Khan, as top targets. Subsequently, in November, two police officers intercepted a van carrying three militants near the city's Sea View beach. The militants detonated suicide jackets, killing themselves and the two police officials.⁴² Investigations showed that the TTP's original target was a nearby Sufi shrine, the mausoleum of Abdullah Shah Ghazi, which had previously been attacked by two suicide bombers in October 2010.

The growth of the militant threat in Karachi is evidenced by a CID crackdown in 2011, which led to the arrest of 222 TTP militants. The CID also successfully arrested three consecutive *amirs*, or chiefs, of the Pakistani Taliban in Karachi.⁴³ Further arrests of militant commanders at the start of 2012 indicate that the TTP is relocating its leadership to Karachi to escape U.S. drone strikes, Pakistan army operations, and increasing volatility in Pakistan's northwestern areas and tribal belt.⁴⁴ Abdul Qayyum Mehsud, who was detained by Karachi police in January 2012 and is believed to be the citywide chief of the TTP, was previously the bodyguard of Baitullah Mehsud, the former leader of the Pakistani Taliban who was killed in a U.S. drone strike in August 2009. Abdul Mehsud was active in TTP operations against Pakistani security forces in the tribal belt before he relocated to Karachi.⁴⁵ Similarly, Mullah Hakeem, who was arrested from Karachi's Orangi township by Pakistani intelligence agents in February 2012, was a senior TTP commander in the northwestern Swat Valley, which fell under Taliban control in April 2009.⁴⁶ Yasin Shah, the chief of the TTP's Balochistan chapter, was also discovered and killed in Karachi during a CID raid in the city's densely populated Gulshan-e-Jamal area.⁴⁷

Enhanced TTP activity in Karachi signals a significant tactical shift. Previously, the TTP used Karachi as an organizational hub, drawing new recruits and financial resources from the city to fuel its operations in the tribal belt and seeking sanctuary in its endless squatter settlements.⁴⁸ The TTP has long generated vital financing for its activities from Karachi through bank robberies. According to the Citizens-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC), a public-private initiative to fight urban crime, fourteen major bank heists occurred in Karachi in 2009 and twenty in 2010. Pakistan's Interior Ministry confirmed in a 2010 statement that 80 percent of those robberies could be traced back to individuals originating in the tribal areas and believed to have links with the TTP. The trend continues: Seventeen local banks were robbed of more than Rs. 60 million (\$0.6 million) last year.⁴⁹

Since 2008 the TTP has also collected funds through kidnappings for ransom. More than a hundred kidnappings for ransom took place in Karachi in 2010⁵⁰ and eighty-nine traders

and industrialists were kidnapped between January and October 2011.⁵¹ Until recently, ransom money was primarily collected in the northwestern city of Peshawar or in the tribal belt. But kidnappings are increasingly aimed at funding TTP activities within Karachi. Members of the CPLC and the police's Anti-Violent Crime Cell in December 2011 conducted a raid to recover an abducted industrialist from Karachi's Korangi township. Three members of the TTP, who had demanded Rs. 70 million (\$0.73 million) in ransom from the industrialist's family, were killed during the raid.⁵² Subsequent investigations revealed that one of the kidnappers, Qari Shahid, was involved in planning the TTP attack against the PNS Mehran naval base as well as the 2010 bombing of the CID office.⁵³

In another new development, TTP militants are collaborating with criminal gangs that operate out of Lyari for fundraising through extortion. While most extorted funds are collected on behalf of the city's competing political parties, an increasing share is diverted to fund the TTP's militant activities, primarily as a result of agreements between militant and criminal groups whereby the TTP pays Karachi-based gangs to collaborate with it on a temporary basis, in the absence of its own grassroots networks. Recent news reports suggest that two TTP-affiliated groups, al-Mansoor and al-Mukhtar, have been tasked with fundraising in Karachi.⁵⁴ Members of these groups extort wealthy businessmen, particularly those involved with trucking companies that transport NATO supplies to Afghanistan.

To successfully conduct bank robberies and kidnappings for ransom, the TTP used to dispatch militants from the tribal areas to Karachi on a short-term basis. But the group's growing involvement in extortion rackets will require an ongoing presence in the city. Some senior police officers argue that the TTP leadership will gradually relocate to Karachi to avoid military operations and drone attacks in FATA. The city offers militants an opportunity to remain active without being on the front lines of the war against terrorism; with its concentrated wealth, urban sprawl, and lack of law and order, Karachi also offers greater opportunities for fundraising and recruitment.

Karachi's political landscape has not been immune to the TTP's recent rise. The MQM has repeatedly warned against the growing Taliban threat. However, given the city's charged ethno-political context, the party's warnings have been dismissed as anti-Pashtun propaganda. Since most Taliban militants are ethnic Pashtun and tend to seek sanctuary in Pashtun-dominated areas, the MQM's anti-TTP rhetoric is perceived as a way to justify infiltration of rival ethnic areas. The PPP, meanwhile, has downplayed the Taliban threat in Karachi, with Interior Minister Malik repeatedly blaming foreign actors for terrorist attacks.⁵⁵ This too is politically motivated: Given the alliance between the PPP and the ANP at the federal level and in Karachi, the PPP is reluctant to alienate the ANP by drawing attention to militant presence in ANP constituencies or calling for security operations that would primarily target Pashtun neighborhoods.

Sectarian Violence

Karachi has witnessed a surge in sectarian violence since 2009. Sixty-four sectarian attacks took place between January and November 2011, up from fifty-one in 2010.⁵⁶ Sectarian violence occurs between extremist Sunni Muslim organizations—primarily the Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jammāt (ASWJ), which was known as the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) until that organization was banned in 2002; its militant wing, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ); and Jundullah—and extremist Shia Muslim groups such as the Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP). Clashes between the Deobandi and Barelvi sects of Sunni Islam are also on the rise. A 2010 CID report stated that more than half of the 246 terrorists arrested in

Karachi between 2001 and 2010 were affiliated with sectarian outfits.⁵⁷ Speaking off the record, CID officials say sectarian violence is likely to increase in Karachi, and could further destabilize the city's security situation.

Karachi has a long history of sectarian violence, particularly Sunni-Shia clashes in the 1990s. However, sustained police crackdowns on banned sectarian groups reduced this kind of violence in the last decade. In April 2009 the SMP, having established a base in the northwestern Kurram Agency, regrouped in Karachi with the aim of protecting Pakistan's Shia community from extremist Sunni militant groups and defending broader Shia interests in the region.⁵⁸

In Karachi, the SMP targeted sympathizers and members of the ASWJ/SSP and LJ, resulting in the anti-Shia LJ strengthening its presence in the city. This process was fueled by the release from jail in 2009 of Naeem Bukhari, a hardline LJ militant who had been arrested in Karachi in 2007 in connection with the murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl, who was killed in the city in 2002. On his release, Bukhari traveled to the tribal belt, where he developed ties between LJ and the TTP before returning to Karachi to pursue a sectarian agenda. The reconsolidation in Karachi of the LJ and other sectarian groups was marked by attacks against Shia religious processions in December 2009 and February 2010. The ASWJ/SSP, along with the LJ and the SMP, then engaged in tit-for-tat sectarian killings throughout 2010 and 2011. In 2011 thirty ASWJ/SSP activists were murdered in target killings between March and December.⁵⁹ According to official police records, thirteen Shias were also killed in the city in 2011; the Jaffria Alliance, which maintains a record of Shias killed on sectarian grounds, claims the number is twice as high.⁶⁰

Karachi's recent history of sectarian violence demonstrates how militant developments elsewhere in the country affect the city, as in the SMP's consolidation in Kurram and growing TTP-LJ links in FATA. Militant activities in Karachi, which both influence and are influenced by nationwide trends, provide a useful snapshot of the security situation across Pakistan, making the city a microcosm of the country.

In addition to the SMP, the ASWJ/SSP, whose members hail from the Deobandi sect of Sunni Islam, is also embroiled in an ideological and turf war with Barelvi Sunnis, primarily represented by the Sunni Tehrik (ST), the largest and most organized among 4,000 Sunni Barelvi organizations in Karachi, many of which operate within a single neighborhood. The ST's militant wing retaliates against sectarian attacks launched by groups such as the ASWJ/SSP but is focused on gaining control of the mosques of rival sects through land acquisition. The clashes between Deobandis and Barelvis in Karachi are less about ideology and more about the city's limited land and financial resources and political power. In 2011 seventeen people were killed and twelve injured as a result of ASWJ/SSP-ST fighting.⁶¹

According to the CID, various Karachi-based sectarian outfits have formed links with the TTP after seeking logistical support, training, and sanctuary in Pakistan's tribal belt.⁶² These ties will spur sectarian violence in Karachi as the broad militant networks and improved resources that a TTP affiliation entails strengthen the competing groups. More important, the new networks could portend an increase in overall militancy in Karachi as banned groups step beyond their sectarian mandates to aid the TTP's antistate agenda. After training alongside al-Qaeda activists in Pakistan's tribal belt, LJ activists participated in the October 2009 attack against the Pakistan army headquarters in Rawalpindi. Similarly, police accused anti-Shia group Jundullah, believed to be responsible for the December 2009 blast at the Shia procession in Karachi, of setting off four consecutive blasts across the city in November 2011, one of which killed four Rangers personnel.

Various Karachi-based sectarian outfits have formed links with the TTP after seeking logistical support, training, and sanctuary in Pakistan's tribal belt.

Sectarian clashes also could spark citywide ethno-political violence. As groups such as the ASWJ/SSP and ST vie for control of Karachi's mosques, adjoining land, and funds collected under the pretense of charitable donations, they inevitably clash with political parties seeking territorial control of urban constituencies. The MQM and ST in particular have historically engaged in turf wars in Karachi, primarily because many ST recruits previously had been MQM activists and thus felt entitled to control the same resources. Sectarian violence can also be used more directly to trigger ethno-political violence, whether with the aim of destabilizing the city or distracting attention from the actual culprits. In August 2010 an LJ militant assassinated Raza Haider, a prominent leader of the MQM and a Shia. In keeping with the pattern of ethno-political violence in Karachi, Haider's death sparked a spree of target killings, which left fifty-three people, primarily Pashtuns, dead over the course of three days.⁶³ The violence only subsided when the MQM conceded that there may have been a sectarian angle to Haider being targeted.

Splinter Groups and Freelance Militants

The CID and intelligence agency crackdown against the TTP in 2010 and 2011 has led to a new phenomenon in militant organization. Radicalized militants now operate in smaller splinter groups—only three militants carried out the attack against the CID offices in 2010—to effectively evade law enforcement agencies. The groups organize at the grassroots level and then seek ties to the TTP or other banned extremist and sectarian groups, or are constituted by the TTP to carry out specific operations. The fluid and operation-specific nature of these groups mean that they operate under different titles that change frequently: Jundullah, Badar Mansoor Group, al-Furqan, al-Qataal, Kharooj, and Punjabi Taliban are among the groups that the CID has identified. This decentralized model has fostered increased collaboration and coalition building across militant groups; it has also made it much more difficult for the CID or other security officials to trace militants operating in Karachi.

The proliferation of splinter groups in Karachi is fueled by a growing culture of freelance militancy. The CID estimates that thousands of radicalized militants who fought in Afghanistan either during the 1980s or since 2001 now reside in the city. These militants maintain contact through Karachi's extensive seminary network and can be called upon to participate occasionally in different operations. As a result, Karachi-based militants today take orders from multiple militant groups, both major and obscure. This freelance model has made it increasingly difficult for law enforcement agencies to track militancy in the city.

Significantly, as a result of the splinter and freelance model, TTP-affiliated militants are no longer exclusively ethnic Pashtun. According to the CID, Urdu-speaking and Punjabi residents of Karachi are increasingly collaborating with the TTP.⁶⁴ The socioeconomic profile of Karachi's militants also varies: Although the majority of militants reside in the low-income, Pashtun-dominated squatter settlements at the city's periphery, a growing number hail from educated, middle-class backgrounds. The Karachi faction of the Punjabi Taliban comprises several students enrolled at the University of Karachi, Pakistan's largest public sector university.⁶⁵ These students were previously affiliated with the student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami, a religious political party. Kharooj, another splinter militant group, also recruits students. The diversifying profile of militants can be explained by soaring anti-Americanism and mainstream resentment against U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan. Well-funded militant groups have used sophisticated websites, social media outlets such as YouTube and Facebook, and other communications strategies to reach out to middle-class recruits and exploit their resentment against the West. As such, Karachi's changing militant demographic could foreshadow future trends across Pakistan.

The Broader Context of Karachi Violence

The political, ethnic, sectarian, and militant factors that cause violence in Karachi have unique dynamics and triggers and are ever-evolving. But underlying systemic issues drive and exacerbate each of these factors and perpetuate cycles of violence. The consistent failure to acknowledge and address these systemic issues has prevented other, more superficial initiatives at restoring peace in Karachi from being successful. This report therefore highlights the major systemic causes of violence in the city, including inadequate urban planning, demographic pressures, poor policing, and ineffective criminal prosecution owing to a weak judicial system.

Certainly the systemic failures are not unique to Karachi, or even to Pakistani cities, but they are worth highlighting here. As demonstrated above, broader socioeconomic factors and land use trends are the true drivers of Karachi's violence, but policymakers seeking to interrupt cycles of urban violence consistently neglect them. The prevalence of these social, economic, and judicial challenges threatens to replicate Karachi's poor security environment in other rapidly expanding cities. Only by emphasizing the connection between systemic issues and urban violence can Pakistani policymakers hope to heed the warning signs of Karachi. The systemic issues perpetuate violent politics, making cities with Karachi's planning and policy problems more vulnerable to multifaceted violence. In places where the state abdicates all responsibilities for services, utilities, and security provision, political parties cease to offer representation and instead provide an essential form of protection under the guise of ad hoc service delivery. In these situations, urban residents cannot hope for access to urban resources or advancement without participating in coercive politics. As such, Karachi's current predicament offers a glimpse of the long-term security implications of failing to improve urban planning and governance in other parts of Pakistan.

Of particular interest to policymakers is that Karachi's size, extensive seminary network, and chronic lack of governance and law enforcement makes it an ideal hideout for Pakistan's militants. More worryingly, urban trends toward marginalization—not only along ethnic lines but also in terms of employment and opportunity—make Karachi a prime recruiting ground for militant and other extremist organizations. As mentioned above, Karachi's educated, middle-class residents are increasingly being enticed by sectarian groups and the TTP. This is not only for ideological reasons, but also because in a violent and competitive city, affiliations with groups—whether the armed wings of political parties, militants, or sectarian groups—provide much-needed protection.

Land

The struggle to gain access to poorly developed land resources arguably predominates among the underlying causes of Karachi's political and ethnic violence. It also allows militancy to flourish, as militants evade civilian law enforcement in the city's endless squatter settlements. Karachi's violence is thus intrinsically connected to failures in urban planning, equitable land use, and resource allocation. Since the influx of migrants to Karachi during the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, communities have resorted to violence as a way to resist the state's attempts to manage land through arbitrary regularization and forced evictions. Since the 1980s political parties have maintained ties with the ubiquitous land mafia because the ballots of slum dwellers are most easily secured with the promise of housing, utilities, and infrastructure, such as roads in illegal developments. Understanding and addressing the violent turf wars that poor urban planning sparks is essential, especially as Pakistan is now the fastest urbanizing country in South Asia.

Population Explosion

Standing at roughly 18 million, Karachi's population has grown by more than twenty-five times since Partition. Between 1941 and 1961, Karachi's population grew by 432 percent, a rate of growth "no other city anywhere else in the world at any time in human history has ever experienced."⁶⁶ Today, the city continues to grow at an annual rate of 5.4 percent, making it one of the fastest growing cities of the world.⁶⁷ Each year, an estimated 1 million people from the rural parts of Pakistan migrate to Karachi and take up residence in unplanned slums, which are growing at a rate of 100,000 plots annually.⁶⁸ Low-income housing and slums have encroached on over 8,000 acres of land allocated for amenity plots and parks between 1986 and 2007 as the growing population demands accommodation.⁶⁹

Poor Urban Planning

Since the 1950s Karachi has been plagued by poor planning that has led to urban sprawl and ghettoization. Most damaging, in 1958 the Greater Karachi Resettlement Plan aimed at relocating the city's migrant and working class population along an urban periphery away from the city center and called for the development of two satellite towns twenty-five kilometers to the north and east of the city. The relocation of the inner-city population to the periphery transformed Karachi into an area of low-density sprawl.⁷⁰ Squatter settlements erupted in the corridors between these distinct areas of the city and have come to define the city's urban character.

Lack of Government Oversight and a Multiplicity of Claimants

The proliferation of slums and land encroachments in Karachi is exacerbated by the fact that the city's development falls to more than twenty federal and provincial government agencies, city authorities, port authorities, military cantonment boards, and private-sector developers. These entities manage overlapping territories and powers, vie for control of lucrative planning projects, and operate independently of one another without guidance from a centralized metropolitan authority. This multiplicity of ownership breeds irregularities. Private developers and land mafias working on behalf of political parties acquire land through corruption, bribe officials to tamper with land records, and pit agencies against each other to ensure that amenity plots are converted and commercialized.

Increased Pace of Land Acquisition and Regularization

After 2001 the pace of land acquisition and regularization of existing settlements by the government significantly increased. The consolidation of municipal control through the creation of the City District Government Karachi in 2001 spurred this trend, as the new government tried to bring as much land as possible under its direct jurisdiction. The government also launched huge infrastructure projects that further stressed Karachi's land resources. The construction of the Lyari Expressway, a highway connecting Karachi Port with the Super Highway, which runs upcountry, led to the destruction of 20,000 homes in irregular settlements, displacing up to 250,000 people and creating a higher citywide demand for low-income housing.⁷¹

Private Sector Development

Private developers also spurred land acquisition as they sought to benefit from a greater domestic demand for housing. This demand resulted from a sustained period of economic growth in the 2000s and increased availability of cash supplies thanks to new consumer banking and leasing programs.⁷² Private developers also began speculating in Karachi property as Pakistan

became integrated with the global real estate market, creating even greater demand for housing projects. The decade-long land acquisition drive put pressure on the city's existing squatter settlements and led to the inclusion of outlying areas, such as Sindhi villages near the Northern Bypass, in the municipal jurisdiction.

The crowding of Karachi's existing slums coupled with waves of Pashtun and Sindhi migration to Karachi after 2008 has provoked intense fighting over land between ethnic groups and the political parties that represent them. In recent years, parties such as the ANP and PPP increasingly have become involved in the politics and forceful acquisition of irregular settlements across the city. In the absence of legal land allocation and robust city administration, there are few effective formal means of obtaining land in Karachi. Political parties have stepped into the administrative vacuum and now participate in forceful land acquisition or regularization to attract new supporters.

Lack of Law Enforcement

In many ways tied to Karachi's flawed urban planning, consistent failures in law enforcement lead to the unchecked spread of ethno-political, sectarian, and militant violence in Karachi. Most problems stem from the police department being chronically understaffed: 32,524 police officers are available to police the city of more than 18 million.⁷³ Of these, approximately 12,000 officers are deployed on special security duties, including 8,000 officers tasked with protecting important persons and government officials. The 20,000 officers left to police the city—one police officer for every 900 people—are inadequate to enforce law and order. The acute human resource shortage has depleted public trust in the police: As the abovementioned example of the new antiextortion cell shows, there is a very low incidence of crime reporting, meaning that an accurate snapshot of Karachi's security situation is unavailable.

The police force is further compromised because it is highly politicized. According to the inspector general (IG) of the Sindh police, more than 40 percent of Karachi's police force has been recruited on political grounds. Political appointees fail to take action against land mafias, extortionists, target killers, and criminals operating on behalf of their patron political parties. The politicization of Karachi's police force escalated after the Sindh government repealed the Police Order 2002. Under it, the provincial police officer (PPO) had the power to appoint and transfer all police officers in the province. Since its repeal, the Sindh IG can only exert his influence up to the level of deputy superintendent of police. The provincial government must authorize appointments to positions higher than that. Since police appointees offer protection for the illegal activities of political parties that secured their posts, parties in the provincial government have used their powers to make Karachi's police force pliant and ineffective. The fallout of a politicized police force was evident in the immediate wake of a security crackdown against target killers between July and September 2011: Although 291 suspects were arrested and accused under the Anti-Terrorism Act, the police submitted only 130 charge sheets against suspects to the courts because many suspects with political connections were released on bail.⁷⁴

Police officers are also reluctant to crack down against criminals and armed party activists who participate in ethno-political clashes because they fear the repercussions. Since 1992, ninety-two of the police officers involved in Operation Clean-Up, the security initiative aimed at cleansing Karachi of MQM militias, have been abducted or killed. The police force's basic inability to protect itself has also made it redundant to maintaining the city's security.

Since the 1990s Karachiites have relied on the paramilitary Rangers force, which is headed by a serving major general and partially manned by Pakistan army soldiers, to reduce ethno-political violence and restore law and order after prolonged bouts of target killings. At times

The 20,000 officers left to police the city—one police officer for every 900 people—are inadequate to enforce law and order.

of heightened violence, the government empowers the Rangers with special policing powers, including the power to conduct searches and make arrests without a warrant, cordon off areas, seize any property that could be used to commit a criminal offense (e.g., weapons, explosives, firearms), and retaliate against attacks. Approximately 7,000 Rangers are stationed in Karachi, and up to 4,000 were deployed throughout the city in August 2011 to arrest target killers, carry out surgical strikes in no-go zones, and disrupt the two-year cycle of ethnopolitical violence. Although effective in terms of restoring law and order, the Rangers do not offer a permanent solution to Karachi's security problems. The multiple and intersecting causes of violence in Karachi require regular policing informed by hyper-local knowledge of communities and their dynamics. Such grassroots law enforcement can only be provided by a well-staffed, well-trained, well-equipped, and transparently appointed police force.

Weak Judicial System

Poor law enforcement is compounded by the failings of the criminal justice system. Of the more than two hundred suspected target killers Rangers personnel arrested during surgical operations in August and September 2011, not one has been successfully prosecuted. Some of the most prominent criminals involved in recent Karachi violence had been acquitted previously by district-level or parallel antiterrorism courts (ATCs). In June 2011 a Karachi court acquitted Ajmal Pahari, a notorious criminal accused of committing more than a hundred murders and running extortion rackets on behalf of a political party, owing to insufficient evidence.⁷⁵ The case against Pahari fell apart when none of the witnesses to a murder he committed appeared in court to testify. Pahari had also been arrested in 1997 on charges of killing four Americans, but an ATC eventually acquitted him. Pahari's acquittals point to significant flaws in the judicial system—some of which are listed below—that prevent the successful prosecutions of gang members and target killers that are required to stabilize Karachi in the long term.

Lack of a Witness Protection Program

Most criminals accused in the ATCs are acquitted because complainants and witnesses refuse to testify for fear of retaliatory action by the suspect's criminal gang or militant organization. The lack of a comprehensive and effective witness protection program is the primary reason that suspected target killers and terrorists are not successfully prosecuted. The Sindh Home Department in January 2012 submitted a proposal to the provincial cabinet to establish a Witness Protection Unit, but steps to establish it have not yet been taken. Separately, personal security concerns on the part of judges, state prosecutors, and defense counsels frequently lead to the postponement of hearings. No measures to improve security for ATC personnel have been proposed or implemented.

Most criminals are acquitted because complainants and witnesses refuse to testify for fear of retaliatory action by the suspect's criminal gang or militant organization.

Backlog of Cases

The variety of cases covered by the Anti-Terrorism Act—including terrorist attacks, murder, extortion, arms trafficking, kidnapping, hijacking, sectarian violence, and target political killings—contributes to the chronic backlog of cases at ATCs. At the start of 2012 more than 320 cases were pending in Karachi's three antiterrorism courts.⁷⁶ Over 100 of these were pending because of delays in repairing the roof of a courtroom in Karachi Central Prison; for security reasons, sensitive antiterrorism cases are heard within the prison premises.⁷⁷ Some cases have been awaiting hearings for over eight years. The backlog persists because ATCs are chronically understaffed, as described below. But cases are also disposed slowly because of significant

delays in the submission by law enforcement authorities of charge sheets against suspects. Frequent adjournments are also granted to both defense and prosecution counsels.

Flawed Judicial Appointments

ATCs are chronically understaffed owing to delays and flaws in judicial appointments. In 2010 the post of the judge for one ATC in Karachi lay vacant for more than six months. Public prosecutors, too, are hired after significant delays. Despite ongoing vacancies, the majority of prosecutors currently working in Karachi's ATCs have been hired on a contractual basis. The temporary nature of prosecutors' employment prevents their involvement in cases from start to finish and offers no incentives for performing at a high standard. Many prosecutors are hired on a political basis to guarantee acquittals or short sentences for criminals with political connections. This politicization is exacerbated by administrative flaws: Although ATCs and the public prosecutors that work within them function under the administrative control of the Sindh Criminal Prosecution Department, salaries are drawn from the Sindh Home Department. This means that the Sindh provincial government can influence appointments and offer incentives and benefits to certain prosecutors, further politicizing the system.

Faulty Evidence Gathering

The ATCs' ability to deliver prosecutions is also compromised by errors, omissions, and delays during the registration of cases and the police investigation process. Incomplete information on the first information report (FIR); delays in putting together a police line-up; eyewitnesses failing to identify the accused; unsatisfactory, discrepant, or tampered evidence; improper recording of confessions; improper recording of witness statements; and compromised medical or forensic evidence are common reasons for criminals, target killers, and suspected terrorists being acquitted. Moreover, since most of the accused confess to their crimes after being subjected to improper interrogation techniques or torture, their statements are inadmissible in the courts.

Inadequate Resources

State prosecutors work in the poorest conditions. They frequently have no offices, stationery, legal resources such as an archive of judgments, or clerical staff, let alone adequate security provisions. In 2011 most ATC judges and prosecutors received their salaries after two- or three-month-long delays. The lack of basic resources prevents ATCs from delivering prompt and effective justice.

Flawed Antiterror Legislation

The Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 is deeply flawed. In the present security context, its major shortcoming is that it does not specifically address terrorism-related offenses, such as suicide bombings. Moreover, the act does not apply to residents of FATA, who instead have to face justice under the Frontier Crimes Regulation, even if they are apprehended in Karachi. Additionally, the act facilitates human rights violations: ATCs place strict time limits on the investigation process, which makes investigating officials more prone to falsifying evidence and using coercive methods with suspects. A 2009 amendment to the act permits "extrajudicial confessions" to be used as evidence and has been critiqued by human rights groups for encouraging torture.⁷⁸ The act also stifles due process because terrorism suspects are denied the right to be tried in a public place, with a full defense, as well as the right to be presumed innocent until proven otherwise.

Madrassahs and Extremism

Across Pakistan, certain madrassahs spread religious extremism and intensify sectarian differences. In Karachi, home to Pakistan's largest and most dense madrassah network, they also fuel turf wars and ethnic stratification. There is no agreement about the number of madrassahs in the city: Government statistics suggest that there are more than 1,000 but civil society organizations estimate the total to be over 3,000.⁷⁹ The madrassah network in Karachi has mushroomed in recent years, indicating the rising numbers of impoverished, young Karachiites and the acute shortage of enrollment opportunities in secular government or private schools. Many studies have cautioned against equating religious school enrollment with extremism, especially as madrassahs comprise only 1 percent of the full-time education market in Pakistan.⁸⁰ However, in Karachi's case, the madrassah network's historic use by militant groups for recruitment purposes and its role in the city's violence dynamics makes it worth highlighting.

Karachi's major madrassahs have been key to incubating various extremist organizations. The Jamia Uloom Islamia in Binori Town has long supplied Deobandi militants to various jihadi organizations and helped establish groups such as the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and the Jaish-e-Mohammad. Presently, madrassahs continue to disseminate sectarian and extremist ideologies through unreformed curricula. Moreover, they house members of banned militant groups and give them opportunities to generate funds, approach potential recruits, and expand their network of freelance militants. Madrassahs are particularly important for militant fundraising because there is no monitoring of the funds that flow through religious schools and many resources are documented as charitable donations. Madrassahs also offer facilities to produce and distribute jihadi and sectarian publications, CDs, DVDs, and other material. As such, they are largely responsible for the spread of extremist ideologies across the city, including, as mentioned above, among university students.

The mushrooming madrassah network also fuels turf wars in Karachi. According to the land and revenue department, no land was allotted to construct new madrassahs between 1992 and 2007. However, this period witnessed a proliferation of madrassahs across Karachi, all of which were illegally raised. Building a mosque, which is frequently accompanied by a madrassah, is one of the easiest ways to occupy state land because only the state has the power to demolish it, and even then only after seeking the consent of religious authorities. In this way, extremist groups have been able to gain control of some of the most coveted properties in Karachi, including public parks and government amenity plots.

The rush to build madrassahs also has increased the incidence of sectarian clashes and extortion rackets linked to religious political parties and extremist groups. Different sects view madrassahs as platforms to attract new recruits, and therefore compete, often violently, over resources to build and sustain madrassahs as well as over land on which to house them. Many intrasectarian SSP-ST clashes in Karachi have been over control of mosques and affiliated madrassahs.

Madrassahs likewise add to the city's ethno-political tensions. As most madrassah students hail from Pashto-speaking households with ties to FATA, KP, Afghanistan, and the Northern Areas, they contribute to the city's ethnic stratification. Moreover, religious political parties enjoy street power by virtue of being able to mobilize Karachi's thousands of madrassah students. For the moment, the city's politics are dominated by the MQM, ANP, and PPP. But religious political parties could upset this tripartite dynamic, sparking further political violence.

Urban Demographics

Despite Karachi's multifaceted violence and the pervasiveness of the systemic issues described above, the city remains Pakistan's most developed, prosperous, and literate. According

to the Social Policy and Development Center, Karachi's human development index in 2005 was 0.7885 with an annual 2.7 percent positive rate of change, compared to 0.539 for the rest of Pakistan.⁸¹ According to the 1998 census, the city's literacy rate was 67.42 percent, higher than the national average of 49.9 percent.⁸² Current studies indicate that the literacy rate in Karachi's central business district is as high as 90 percent.⁸³ These indicators are threatened by the following demographic trends, which currently drive ethno-political violence and are likely to exacerbate the abovementioned systemic issues. The failure to create and implement policies to accommodate for these changes augurs a violent future for the city.

Youth Bulge

Almost 60 percent of Pakistan's overall population is under the age of thirty. This youth bulge is equally evident in Karachi. Devoid of education, employment, and entertainment, young Karachiites are prime targets for recruitment by the armed wings of political parties, criminal gangs, and militant organizations. According to the CPLC, most petty crimes such as car and cellphone theft are committed by people between sixteen and twenty-one, many of whom are school drop-outs.⁸⁴ And as described, militant organizations with ties to the TTP are increasingly recruiting students enrolled at the city's major universities, but who lack other advancement opportunities.

Unemployment

Although the national unemployment rate in 2009 was 14.4 percent, the unemployment rate in Karachi was 17.56 percent.⁸⁵ The ongoing migration of low-skill labor from Pakistan's rural areas results in higher levels of urban joblessness. About 75 percent of Karachi's residents work in the informal sector, and up to 3 million people are daily wage earners; in the main industrial hub of the Sindh Industrial Trading Estate (SITE), up to 70 percent of all workers subsist on daily wages.⁸⁶ According to the city government, Karachi's labor participation rate is 39 percent.⁸⁷ Owing to the high rates of unemployment and daily wage earning, more than 50 percent of the city's population lives below the poverty line. Daily wage earners in particular are affected by the frequent closure of Karachi's markets as a result of violent clashes.

Unemployment also has an ethnic dimension. In recent years, employers have been more inclined to hire workers from the same ethnic background to avoid tensions at the workplace. This practice, referred to as targeted unemployment, has forced many Pashtuns out of jobs, as most employers hail from Urdu-speaking or Punjabi backgrounds.

Socioeconomic Disparities

A significant wealth gap exists between Karachi's most affluent residents and its low-income or daily wage earners. The disparities among social classes have led to a surge in petty crime and armed robberies. It has also fueled ethnic hatred, as class divides broadly map onto ethnic groups as well. Urdu-speaking *mohajirs* and Punjabis are among the more affluent groups in the city, while Pashtuns and Baloch are among the poorest. That said, some members of the Karachi-based Pashtun community involved in the private transport sector have greatly profited from transporting NATO supplies from Karachi to Afghanistan since 2001. Their new wealth partly explains the increasing influence of the ANP. Still, Pashtun settlements remain significantly underdeveloped and socioeconomic disparities emphasize the perception that certain ethnic communities are ghettoized in Karachi.

Lack of Political Representation

Mohajirs account for 48 percent of Karachi's population while Pashtuns account for 22 percent. Yet the *mohajir* MQM holds fifty-one seats in the Sindh National Assembly—

Devoid of education, employment, and entertainment, young Karachiites are prime targets for recruitment by the armed wings of political parties, criminal gangs, and militant organizations.

thirty-four from Karachi—while the Pashtun ANP holds two. Sindhis are a marginal, albeit growing, ethnic group within the city, but the PPP holds six provincial assembly seats from Karachi. The lack of proportional political representation for Karachi's various ethnic groups, particularly Pashtuns, has resulted in unequal government spending on development and service delivery.

The power of Karachi's political parties becomes easier to understand in light of demographic trends. Political patronage is a significant advantage in the fierce competition for urban resources (land and municipal services), social advancement, and employment opportunities. As ethno-political tensions flare, affiliations with Karachi's political parties also offer security. Without addressing demographic challenges and improving social indicators, there is little hope of resolving the city's violent politics.

Antiviolence Initiatives

The resurgence in ethno-political, sectarian, and militant violence in Karachi has prompted government officials—at both the provincial and federal level—political party leaders, and civil society to propose solutions to stem the violence and prevent future clashes.

Empowering the Rangers

As described above, the government and political parties call on the paramilitary Rangers to restore law and order when the security situation in Karachi spirals out of control. Noting that their efforts only produce temporary results, the director-general of the Rangers in September 2011 called for their special policing powers to be made permanent. The government declined to do this, saying the move would go against the constitution. The government did, however, reserve the right to grant the Rangers special powers for ninety-day stretches whenever needed.

Deweaponization of Karachi

Acknowledging that the easy availability of weapons fuels violent clashes in Karachi, civil society actors, the representatives of all major political parties, and Pakistan's Interior Minister Rehman Malik have called repeatedly for the deweaponization of Karachi since 2009. In January 2011 the MQM submitted a deweaponization bill before the National Assembly, which was accepted for review by a standing committee. The bill calls for a countrywide ban on the manufacturing, possession, and illegal use of weapons. However, it was largely perceived to be an attempt at political point scoring. Deweaponization campaigns were launched in Pakistan in 2001, 2005, and 2007, but there have been no serious efforts to confiscate illegal weapons or discourage manufacturing. The lack of seriousness regarding the deweaponization bill was demonstrated by Interior Minister Malik, who publicly supported the MQM bill but then launched an initiative to counter its basic goals: In the summer of 2011 Malik declared that Karachi's traders should receive arms licenses quickly and without any hassle to enable them to protect themselves from extortionists. Between July 2011 and January 2012, 16,631 arms licenses were issued in Karachi.⁸⁸

Digitization of Arms Licenses

In November 2011 Karachi's city government launched the Computerized Arms License Management System, which aimed to create a digital record of all arms licenses issued in the city and to link arms licenses with citizens' official biodata records. Government officials

argued that such a system would make it easier to monitor the misuse of arms and thereby stem violence. However, a month after the system was launched, Karachi's local government system changed from a decentralized city government system to its commissioner system. All arms license records were transferred to the commissioner's office and the program had yet to be reinitiated in March 2012.

Special Parliamentary Committee

In August 2011 the speaker of the National Assembly constituted a special, multiparty, seventeen-member committee to review the law and order situation in Karachi as well as security issues in Balochistan. The special committee was directed to share its findings with the assembly within two months. However, the committee was unable to organize timely visits to Karachi and failed to reach consensus on how to monitor the implementation of the Supreme Court's recommendations for controlling Karachi's violence. The inefficacy of parliamentary committees in tackling Karachi's violence had been demonstrated the previous year by the National Assembly's Standing Committee on the Interior: Committee members took note of escalating violence in Karachi as early as August 2010, but their probes and investigations in the latter half of 2010 did not yield any political or policy-oriented solutions to the violence.

Police Recruitment

Government officials and Supreme Court judges who presided over hearings on Karachi's violence have called for the police force to be depoliticized and revamped.⁸⁹ In particular, the urgent need to recruit more trained officers has been emphasized. In March 2012 new recruits were sought to man antiextortion cells that the police force aimed to set up in each of Karachi's five administrative districts. However, no budgetary allocation has been made to allow the police force to significantly increase its ranks.

Banning Groups

In March 2012 the government banned the anti-Shia ASWJ in an effort to curtail sectarian violence. In October 2011 it banned the PAC. During the height of ethnopolitical violence in August 2011, the Supreme Court even considered a petition to ban the MQM, but declined to implement such a drastic move. Although the banning of groups conveys a strong political message, it does not affect levels of violence, especially as most groups reconstitute under a new name. The ASWJ, under its former name Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, was itself banned by General Musharraf in 2002. That ban proved ineffective, however, as no sustained effort was made to dismantle the group's infrastructure, prosecute its activists, or cut off its sources of funding.

Bounty

In April 2012 the Sindh police asked the provincial government to announce a bounty on thirty-five criminals, including the leadership of the outlawed PAC. This measure was widely understood to be symbolic since the whereabouts of the named criminals were known and many maintain close ties to politicians and police officers.

Inadequate Interventions

In October 2011, after two years of escalating ethnopolitical violence in which up to 3,000 people were killed, Pakistan's Supreme Court intervened in an effort to restore law and order.

The Supreme Court's investigations, security recommendations, and scathing critique of political party involvement in Karachi's violence did not help allay the problem. After a brief lull in violence at the end of 2011, more than 740 people were killed in the first five months of 2012. This section of the report examines the mechanisms that were used in 2011 to disrupt cycles of violence and their effectiveness.

Supreme Court Suo Moto Hearings

In July 2011 the Supreme Court took suo moto notice of the violence in Karachi and held ten hearings to investigate the causes and perpetrators of violence in the city. A five-member Special Bench directed joint investigation teams of intelligence agents from the ISI and other agencies to submit reports on likely perpetrators. The bench also interrogated the attorney general of Pakistan, the inspector general of Sindh Police, and the provincial chief secretary. On October 6 the Supreme Court issued its verdict, in which it clearly identified political parties as the main perpetrators of urban violence, going as far as to identify target killers and extortionists with political backing. The court also spoke against the politicization of the police force and directed the Sindh Police and Rangers to eradicate all no-go zones in the city. The Special Bench also identified failings in the ATC system and called for judges and public prosecutors to be appointed promptly and permanently. The Supreme Court's explicit naming of all the political parties involved in Karachi violence helped spur a political consensus to reduce ethno-political violence, as none of the parties wanted to be subject to further hearings in the run-up to general elections.

Political Consensus on Rangers Operations

In August and September 2011, paramilitary Rangers forces empowered with special policing powers conducted 985 strategic operations and raids in 30 areas, arresting 236 people suspected of involvement in Karachi's ethno-political and sectarian violence. The Rangers met with no armed resistance during search operations because Karachi's major political parties agreed to allow the Rangers to operate without political pressure or resistance. In this decision, the political parties were responding to the Supreme Court order for Rangers and the Sindh Police to eliminate all no-go zones and to the court's decision to publicly implicate political parties in the city's violence. The importance of political consent for effective law enforcement was separately highlighted in March 2011, when police officers publicly stated that the only reason they could arrest suspected target killer Ajmal Pahari was because he had lost the backing of a major political party.

Army Intervention

Investigative journalists and representatives of political parties report that the Pakistan Army's Corps Commander Karachi Lieutenant General Zaheerul Islam engaged with the leaders of all Karachi's major political parties and helped broker a stalemate. The army's interest in stabilizing Karachi was evident before this intervention: In August 2011, Pakistan army chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani announced that the army was willing to restore law and order in Karachi if the federal or provincial governments asked it to do so. In September the army chief visited Karachi to review the security situation and meet with political stakeholders and business leaders affected by the ongoing violence. Given Karachi's crucial role in the fight against militancy, its central importance to the transit of any NATO equipment through Pakistan, and its effect on the national economy, Pakistan's army is likely to monitor security developments in the city and launch future interventions if necessary. Army intervention is not,

Pakistan's army is likely to monitor security developments in the city and launch future interventions if necessary. Army intervention is not, however, a sustainable solution to Karachi's violence.

however, a sustainable solution to Karachi's violence for several reasons. First, increased army pressure would undermine political parties and Pakistan's tenuous democratic setup. Second, army crackdowns on criminal and militant gangs could lead to extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations that would spur resentment and create more armed resistance in the long run. Third, while the army is equipped to conduct security operations, it does not have the capacity to provide consistent, hyper-local, street-by-street policing, which is the only antidote to violence in the narrow alleyways of Karachi's endless slums.

Resignation of Sindh Home Minister Zulfiqar Mirza

Mirza, who had styled himself as the Sindhi nationalist voice from among the PPP, and who had cultivated the PAC as a counterpoint to MQM's armed wings, resigned from his post as Sindh home minister on August 28, 2011. Mirza had been an incendiary political figure, and his anti-MQM comments had sparked violent clashes on several occasions. His support for the PAC and its affiliated criminal gangs—which routinely clashed with other groups in the context of land grabs, arms smuggling, extortion, and other illegal activities—also gave an MQM-PPP political bent to widespread criminal violence in the city. Mirza's resignation empowered the PPP to ban the PAC and rehabilitate relations with the MQM.

The Challenges of Stabilizing Karachi

The failure to disrupt violence in Karachi in 2011 indicates that the initiatives and interventions aimed at restoring law and order in Karachi are not systematic or sustainable. Political pressure and exceptional interventions by the highest levels of the judiciary and army were required to suspend Karachi's ethnopolitical violence in 2011. The situation also benefited from the resignation of a divisive political figure. The only factor that can prevent future cycles of violence is political consensus; as such, it is the key to stabilizing Karachi.

Karachi's tragedy is that the political actors tasked with stabilizing and running the city are the major destabilizing forces. Mainstream political parties have chosen to approach Karachi like a feudal landholding, equating access to land and municipal resources with political power. Karachi cannot be stable until these parties are willing to participate in a representative, power-sharing arrangement that reflects the city's evolving dynamics and demographics.

One current challenge of stabilizing Karachi is that the issue of political representation cannot be determined without a transparent census. On this matter, the city is caught in a vicious cycle. Each political party will try to delay, block, or manipulate the census to reveal demographic trends in its favor. As mentioned above, all the major parties, the MQM, ANP and PPP, stand to both gain and lose in the face of accurate census data. However, without an up-to-date census, the issue of adequate political representation cannot be broached.

Another challenge is that the *mohajir* population is proportionally getting smaller and does not have a provincial base from which to bolster its ranks. According to some studies, Pashtuns in Karachi will outnumber Urdu-speaking *mohajirs* in less than thirty years.⁹⁰ In recent years, the MQM has tried to reposition itself as a national party to widen its base from urban Sindh. The MQM has contested elections in Kashmir, supported the creation of new provinces in the Punjab to appeal to Seraiki-speaking voters, and consistently spoken against extremist violence and the TTP. However, the MQM's national rhetoric and issue-based politics have been undermined by the 2010–11 violence in Karachi, which reiterated the MQM's original identity as a Karachi-focused party that prioritizes the defense of the Urdu-speaking community against all others. As long as the MQM does not find

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a viable future course for its political survival, it will try to maintain its stranglehold over Karachi, through violence if necessary.

The political devolution of power to the provinces under the Eighteenth Amendment also points to an escalation in tussles between Karachi's city government and the Sindh provincial government. The province urgently needs to draft an equitable arrangement for sharing provincial resources in light of Karachi's disproportionate size and revenue generation. Without such an arrangement, tensions between ethnic Sindhis represented by the PPP and Karachi-based *mohajirs* represented by the MQM will heighten, leading to new waves of ethnopolitical violence, not only in Karachi, but across urban Sindh. While the economic and developmental uplift of the Sindh province is the main solution to this province-city quarrel, few politicians or civil society actors have raised the issue.

Yet another factor preventing political negotiations is that the major political parties have no ongoing mechanism or uninterrupted platform through which parties can engage on contentious issues in a sustained manner. At times of heightened violence, the National Assembly has convened special standing committees to debate law and order issues. The Sindh governor also has organized core committee meetings bringing together representatives of the MQM, ANP, and PPP. However, agreements reached at these meetings are not seen as binding. Moreover, when ethnopolitical violence flares, parties refuse to participate in meetings. In 2011 Supreme Court hearings and backchannel pressure from the army was required to make the political parties reach a consensus about halting violence. Similarly, when violence flared again in March 2012, the speaker of the National Assembly had to make a special request for the interior minister to mediate between rival political parties. Owing to such ad hoc efforts, political negotiations cannot always be relied on to halt violent clashes.

One point of agreement between the parties—the need to scale back TTP presence in the city—is also held hostage by ethnopolitical dynamics. TTP fighters have taken up residence primarily in Orangi, Baldia, and SITE, administrative towns in Karachi that ethnic Pashtuns have long inhabited. Attempts to counter Taliban presence in the city thus have an ethnic dimension, with a dominantly Punjabi police force conducting raids or an MQM-led, *mohajir*-majority government ordering paramilitary operations in Pashtun areas. Attempts to root out TTP militants are thus likely to spark ethnic clashes that cause far greater disruptions than targeted militant attacks, and enable members of the TTP to proceed unhindered with their operational planning.

Conclusion

Given the many challenges of stabilizing Karachi, the only solution to incessant ethnopolitical violence and criminal activities such as extortion is political negotiation leading to a culture of representative politics. Other forms of urban violence—such as sectarian and militant—are not as intrinsically linked to political negotiations, and countering these forms of violence will require a revision of Pakistan's national security policy, madrassah reform, revision of antiterrorism legislation, and other nationwide policy initiatives. But the basic law and order required to control the fallout of sectarian and militant violence requires good governance, political will, and an efficient police force that operates without political constraints. Political reconciliation and power sharing are prerequisites for these factors.

Given the political bent of Karachi's insecurity, violence is likely to increase in the run-up to the 2013 general elections as political parties vie for voters through increased access to land, extorted funds, and other resources. The entry of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf

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(PTI) party to Karachi's political mix after a successful rally in December 2011 that attracted over 100,000 supporters could also fuel violence. Analysts suggest that the PTI could split the Pashtun vote in Karachi, a development the MQM is likely to encourage. A new political actor and a greater sense of marginalization among the ANP could spark further cycles of violence. Moreover, attempts to forge a new coalition government after the 2013 elections will also trigger violent politics as different political parties use citywide clashes as a pressure tactic to gain concessions, political patronage, and key cabinet positions at the federal and provincial levels.

The ongoing political violence is likely to create space for the TTP, sectarian, and other extremist groups to further establish their presence in Karachi. In the short term, the city's militant presence will be bolstered by the arrival of militants fleeing drone strikes, military operations, and other counterterrorism initiatives in northwestern Pakistan in a last push before U.S. troops withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014. Heightened ethnopolitical and militant activity in Karachi will also lead to a surge in land grabs, extortion, kidnappings for ransom, and robberies, as both political parties and militant groups seek to generate funds. In short, Karachi's security environment is likely to continue deteriorating.

Persistent violence in Karachi will have nationwide political and security implications. On the political front, a post-2013 coalition government comprising political parties with a stake in Karachi might not survive an escalation in ethnopolitical tensions and turf wars. On the security side, fundraising initiatives and collaborations between militant groups forged in Karachi will increase the risk of terrorist attacks elsewhere in Pakistan. More broadly, pervasive socioeconomic challenges and demographic pressures within the city will fuel militant recruitment and the spread of extremist ideology across the country. These security issues will continue to negatively affect the flailing economy as ethnopolitical, sectarian, militant, and criminal violence paralyze the city's economic activities. Pakistani policymakers invested in national stability must therefore urgently address Karachi's violence and emphasize comprehensive rather than cosmetic solutions.

In this context and given the central importance of Karachi, Pakistan's government should take the following measures to stem violence in the city:

- *Conduct a transparent census.* Gathering accurate census data is the first step to ensuring inclusive political representation.
- *Establish a standing committee comprising representatives of Karachi-based political parties,* particularly the MQM, ANP, and PPP. This committee should have formal and regular liaisons with the Sindh chief minister, provincial home minister, and Sindh inspector general to ensure that committee resolutions and policies are implemented. Regular political contact should be relied on to defuse violent clashes and the committee's agreements should be treated as binding.
- *Create alternatives to political parties* in the form of social, civil society, or community-based organizations that can provide access to urban resources such as land and utilities connections as well as legal protection.
- *Develop a robust job creation program* so young Karachiites are not vulnerable to recruitment by militias and militant groups or reliant on political connections for new opportunities and career advancement.
- *Streamline urban planning and make all bodies tasked with development and infrastructure projects accountable.* Policymakers currently have no plans to improve the city's basic infrastructure, public transport, or educational facilities. Without overall urban uplift, the various challenges of stabilizing Karachi will only become more entrenched.

- *Freeze all new urban development projects* until an accurate land use survey is completed. New developments should then be regularized on the basis of land use surveys and tailored to ensure the adequate provision of low-income housing and public spaces.
- *Implement measures to ensure the independence of police stations from political parties*, such as by regularly rotating high-ranking police officers.
- *Increase the access of police officers to federal intelligence resources* and personnel as well as improved intelligence gathering training. Facilitate better policing through improved interagency security cooperation.
- *Establish a system of community policing*. Karachi requires systematic street-by-street scrutiny and police officials are better positioned than military, paramilitary, or intelligence personnel to develop nuanced understandings of local communities, political dynamics, and crime trends.
- *Enhance the capacity of the legal system*, including ATCs and public prosecutors. The provincial high court and Supreme Court should monitor ATCs to ensure transparency, impartiality, and prompt disposal of cases.
- *Implement a world-class witness protection program*.
- *In neighborhoods inhabited by multiple ethnic groups, create multiparty committees to help promote ethnic harmony* and resolve disputes such as land grabs and extortion.
- *Reallocate portions of the Sindh Rangers budget to the Karachi police force* to enable new recruitment, better training, and the purchase of weapons.

U.S. policymakers, too, are advised to monitor Karachi's violent landscape, which is likely to emerge as a major fault line in the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship. In the medium term, U.S. counterterrorism initiatives in the region are likely to be challenged as a result of Karachi becoming the preferred hideout of TTP, Afghan Taliban, and other extremist and sectarian militants. As this report has shown, Karachi's urban density and sprawl offer the best militant hideout. However, U.S. counterterrorism initiatives such as drone strikes cannot be enacted in Karachi, which, unlike FATA, is Pakistan's financial capital and largest city. Intelligence gathering will also be difficult owing to the tendency among residents of ethnic enclaves to closely survey their neighborhood for signs of intruders from other ethnic or political groups.

The international community might perceive the growing presence of militants in Karachi as further proof of Pakistan's willingness to harbor militant groups on its territory. As militants continue to relocate to Karachi and plan both nationwide and regional operations, Pakistan and the United States will have to confront the challenge of fighting militancy in Pakistan's largest city. The city's security situation could hinder U.S. contributions toward creating a stable Pakistan, most of which are predicated on countering extremism and stabilizing the economy through jobs programs, infrastructure, and energy projects. The success of national and regional counterterrorist and economic programs hinges on the stability of Karachi. U.S. policymakers invested in creating a secure Pakistan have to confront the fact that destabilizing Karachi is akin to destabilizing Pakistan.

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Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and financial capital, is also wracked by ethnopolitical, sectarian, militant, and criminal violence that has claimed more than 7,000 lives since 2008. The city's precarious security situation has serious implications for the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship owing to its growing role in national and regional terrorism. This report analyzes the city's multiple and intersecting types of violence, identifies violent actors, highlights the systemic issues that drive violence, examines state initiatives to stem violence and reasons why these efforts failed, and calls for the government to tackle the violence's underlying causes.

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