

[PEACEWORKS]



CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN SINDH

Huma Yusuf and Syed Shoaib Hasan



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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report, part of a broader series of work by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) to map and study conflict dynamics across Pakistan, analyzes the southern province of Sindh, focusing on areas outside the major urban population center of Karachi. The report draws on research as well as interviews conducted by the authors between January and April 2014.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Huma Yusuf is a Global Fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC, and a writer for Pakistan's *Dawn* newspaper and the *International New York Times*, among others. Previously a Karachi-based journalist, Yusuf won several awards for her reporting on subjects such as ethnic conflict, violent extremism, and flaws in state prosecution of rape cases, including the European Commission's 2006 Prix Lorenzo Natali for Human Rights and Democracy Journalism. Syed Shoaib Hasan currently writes for the *Wall Street Journal* from Karachi, where he is based. Previously, he worked as BBC correspondent in both Karachi and Islamabad. Hasan has won national and international awards for his reporting on human rights and militancy, the economy, and regional politics in Pakistan.

Cover photo: Aerial view of the southern province of Sindh, Pakistan. Photo by Capt. Paul Duncan (Defense video and imagery distribution system).

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

United States Institute of Peace

2301 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20037

Phone: 202.457.1700

Fax: 202.429.6063

E-mail: usip_requests@usip.org

Web: www.usip.org

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CONTENTS



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Introduction ...	5
Violence in Sindh ...	7
Sindh's Multifaceted Challenges ...	15
Conclusion and Recommendations ...	22

[Ensuring stability in Sindh is key to tackling the security situation in Karachi and in preventing the spread into the province of violent extremist and sectarian groups based in southern Punjab.]

Summary

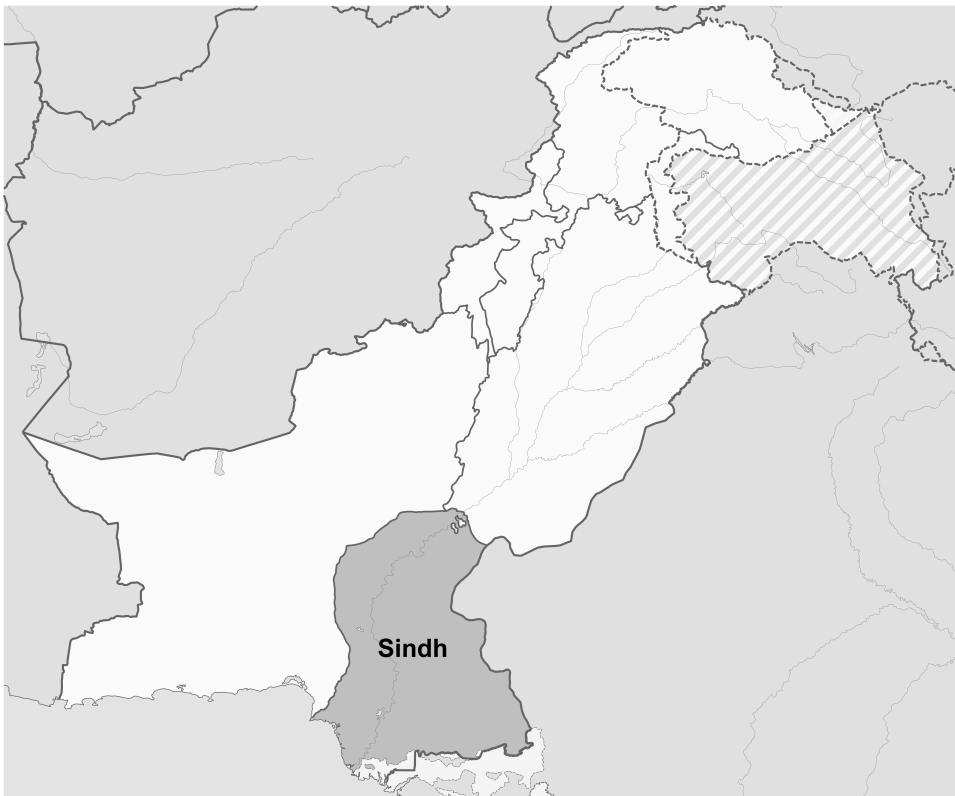
- Sindh, Pakistan's second largest province, is increasingly threatened by violent extremism, crime, tribal feuds, and nationalist and separatist movements.
- Ensuring stability in Sindh is key to tackling the security situation in Karachi and in preventing the spread into the province of violent extremist and sectarian groups based in southern Punjab.
- Extremist organizations are increasingly active in Sindh's central and northern districts. Sectarian militant groups and the antistate Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan are consolidating their presence in the province in rural areas.
- The escalating activities of extremist groups are having an impact on the province's pluralistic society. The failure to protect Sindh's religious minorities is likely to strain India-Pakistan bilateral relations.
- Organized crime, particularly kidnapping for ransom rackets, is the greatest current security challenge in rural Sindh. Criminal gangs operate unchecked with the patronage of political parties and influential landowners, and the politicized police force do little to clamp down on criminal activities.
- Tribal feuds marked by tit-for-tat killings of rival tribe members are the prime driver of conflict and are fueling the spread of extremism as extremist groups exploit sectarian affiliations.
- Sindhi separatist groups are increasingly active but lack capacity and resources and are unlikely to develop into significant threats given that they are the main focus of law enforcement and intelligence agency crackdowns.
- Conflict in Sindh is exacerbated by systemic issues, including socioeconomic factors, an extreme urban-rural divide, poor governance, and a centuries-old feudal system.
- The government in Islamabad needs to ensure that the province does not become a new base for militants in the same way that FATA and southern Punjab are.
- Six issues are key to enhancing stability, both within the province and across the country: political representation for religious minorities, law enforcement, legal system capacity, education policies, government accountability and transparency, and job creation.

Introduction

Pakistan's southern province of Sindh is a study in contrasts defined by sharp urban-rural and socioeconomic divides. Its politics have ethnic, nationalist, and separatist elements but ultimately focus on ensuring that Sindh's interests are well represented at the federal level. The province's extremes range from the wealth and density of Karachi, the mega port city that dominates the economy not only of Sindh but also of Pakistan as a whole, and the poverty of Tharparkar, which in December 2013 was struck by a famine that continued through 2014. The rural districts of Sindh are home to some of the most impoverished citizens of Pakistan, many of them *haris* (sharecroppers) who are tied to *waderos* (landowners) in bonded labor arrangements. Industrial and commercial activity in Karachi has long outpaced the agricultural economy that flourishes on the banks of the Indus in Sindh, further exacerbating the province's economic divisions.

Sindh is the second-largest province in the country, has an estimated population of 42.4 million in 2010, and holds seventy-five of 342 seats in the National Assembly to Punjab's 183 (see map 1).¹ The provincial capital Karachi's dominant position within Sindh defines the province's politics and drives both urban-rural and ethnic tensions. Karachi is home to one-third of the province's population, more than three-quarters of all employment opportunities, and influential federal government institutions, such as the Karachi Port Trust, Customs, and Civil Aviation Authority, as well as important military installations.² The province's schismatic landscape fuels resentments, and many ethnic Sindhis based in the province's central and northern districts believe that Karachi's assets and opportunities are denied to them.

Map 1. Pakistan and Sindh Province



Often described in terms of these contrasts and tensions, narratives about Sindh are also dominated by its reputation for diversity and tolerance. Sindh is bordered by some of the country's most underdeveloped districts in Punjab to the north and Balochistan to the west. Many Punjabis and Balochis have migrated to Sindh in search of work—indeed, up to 40 percent of Sindhis are of Baloch origin, hailing from tribes that settled in present-day Sindh in the sixteenth century. Karachi has a majority Urdu-speaking population that includes both *muhajirs* (migrants) from northern India and a large Pashtun population. The province is also home to 94 percent of the Pakistani Hindu community,³ the country's largest minority—three million of the country's 180 million people.⁴ The central and northern districts of Sindh are the heartland of Sufi Islam in Pakistan, an inclusive and pluralistic strand of the religion, and Sindhis pride themselves on fostering communal harmony.

A province historically known for its progressive politics, diversity, vibrant civil society, and Sufism is increasingly threatened by violent extremism, crime, and incidents of nationalist or separatist violence.

But Sindh, like other parts of Pakistan, is changing. A province historically known for its progressive politics, diversity, vibrant civil society, and Sufism is increasingly threatened by violent extremism, crime, and incidents of nationalist or separatist violence. Despite recent shifts in Sindh's security landscape, discussions about the province's conflict dynamics are dominated by analyses of political turf wars and militancy in Karachi and the tensions between *muhajirs* and ethnic Sindhis in the province's urban areas. However, the security situation in the central and northern districts of the province—known colloquially as rural Sindh, despite rapid urbanization—is less well understood even as it is deteriorating. This report addresses this knowledge gap by mapping different types of violence in Sindh outside Karachi. For clarity, references to Sindh indicate all the province's districts except Karachi.⁵

Understanding the conflict dynamics in Sindh is a timely and important exercise for Pakistani policymakers and Pakistan observers in the United States and international community for several reasons. The evolving security situation in Sindh is likely to have an impact on security and stability in Karachi and to have broader implications for the national economy, and vice versa. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) government that came to power in May 2013 has made a concerted effort to address ethno-political violence, terrorism, extortion, and crime that has escalated in Karachi since 2008. A security operation led by the paramilitary Rangers began in September 2013, resulting in the arrest of more than 1,800 suspected terrorists and criminals by March 2014.⁶ The operation fizzled out in August 2014 because of the reappointment of senior police officials, the interference of provincial political parties, and the lack of vision from the federal government. However, the need to stabilize Karachi remains urgent, and in this context it is important for policymakers to know how conflict dynamics in other parts of the province contribute to violence, particularly crime, in Karachi.

Moreover, the potential impact of law-enforcement initiatives in Karachi on the rest of the province should be clearly understood, especially given that the Sindh government has—for security reasons—transferred high-profile cases involving terrorism suspects from Karachi's anti-terrorism courts (ATCs) to those in Hyderabad, Sukkur, and elsewhere in Sindh.⁷ This heightens the likelihood of militant groups infiltrating Sindh to support their incarcerated colleagues or to plan jailbreaks with the help of militant networks currently spreading across the province.

Stability in Sindh is also key for the PMLN government to address one of its main priorities: tackling Pakistan's crippling energy crisis. The country's energy shortfall currently exceeds 6,000 megawatts and leads to nationwide power outages of up to twelve hours per day in the summer months.⁸ The government's National Power Policy launched in August 2013 emphasizes the importance of mining coal reserves in Sindh's Thar fields and requiring independent

power producers to convert their plants from gas or fuel to coal-based models as a step toward energy self sufficiency.⁹ In January 2014, the Sindh provincial and federal government joined forces to launch the Thar Mining and Power Project, which is expected to add 1,200 megawatts to the national grid. The project was initiated after repeated delays stemming from Punjab Province concerns about the Sindh government having sole control of Thar's coal resources and related revenues.

At the provincial level, the Sindh government has sought to attract foreign investment for the development of wind power corridors in Sindh to provide cheaper and more eco-friendly fuel sources for power plants. In April 2014, for example, the government secured \$1 billion from Chinese investors for the first sponsored wind power project, which will be developed in the Jhampeer corridor in Thatta and Jamshoro districts and contribute 650 megawatts to the national grid.¹⁰ Moreover, 60 percent of Pakistan's oil fields and 44 percent of its gas fields are located in Sindh, contributing 56 percent of the country's oil production and 55 percent of its gas production.¹¹ However, a worsening security situation in Sindh could impede developments in the energy sector—as it has in neighboring Balochistan Province, where separatists regularly target energy infrastructure and other commercial projects—and compromise interprovincial ties as well as the national economy, which suffers an annual 2 percent loss of gross domestic product as a result of the energy crisis.¹²

Since returning to power, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has also repeatedly expressed his desire to improve relations between Pakistan and India, particularly in terms of boosting trade. However, the growing entrenchment of extremist groups in Sindh could adversely affect this political goal. In recent years, the number of Hindu families migrating from Sindh to India to escape persecution has soared—according to the Pakistan Hindu Council, up to fifty per month, owing to forced conversions, kidnapping, and extortion.¹³ These migrations sour bilateral relations as Indian officials criticize Pakistan's human rights record and Islamabad in turn accuses Delhi of opportunistically maligning the country. The continued persecution of Sindh's Hindu community by extremist organizations could emerge as another point of contention between the two countries.

More important, an analysis of the evolving security situation in Sindh can both help identify the factors that enable violent extremism to flourish and highlight opportunities to stem its spread. To be clear, the districts of Sindh outside Karachi are stable and remain relatively free of the extremist violence that has wracked other parts of the country, such as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Incidents of violent extremism, though increasing in frequency at an alarming pace, are by no means the norm. Sindh is at a tipping point, which means that lawmakers continue to have the opportunity to implement policies to check the spread of violent extremism and crime in the province before it deteriorates further.

To this end, this report also identifies the factors making Sindh more vulnerable to the spread of extremism. These include poor governance and inadequate service delivery; changes in the feudal culture of Sindh, which has undermined the development of democratic institutions but is now eroding, leaving an institutional vacuum; the deep politicization of civil law-enforcing agencies; and socioeconomic factors, such as widespread poverty, underdevelopment, and failure to develop the province's educational system.

Violence in Sindh

Violence in Sindh—whether ethno-political, militant, sectarian, or crime-related—is concentrated in Karachi. Of all the reported violent incidents that took place in the province between

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1988 and 2010, 63 percent occurred in Karachi, including 70 percent of targeted assassinations and 66 percent of terrorist attacks.¹⁴ In 2013, 98.2 percent of the 1,668 killings that were reported in the province took place in Karachi.¹⁵ One major exception was the terrorist attack against the headquarters of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Sukkur in July 2013.¹⁶ The attack—the first of its kind in northern Sindh—has prompted growing interest in the security situation in Sindh outside Karachi. While announcing the recruitment of ten thousand additional police officials for Sindh in February 2014, Chief Minister Qaim Ali Shah called on law-enforcement agencies to check the spread of terrorism and crime and to prevent the rest of the province from facing the multiple security challenges that plague Karachi.¹⁷

For now, the presence in Sindh of Islamist militants affiliated with the antistate Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), al-Qaeda, and other Islamist groups remains limited. But other violent extremist groups—particularly sectarian ones such as the Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jammāt (ASWJ), known as the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) until it was banned in 2002, and its militant wing, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ)—have consolidated their presence in the province, particularly in northern Sindh. Law enforcement and politicians point to the increase in attacks against Sufi shrines and Shia politicians and the persecution of the local Hindu community as evidence of the entrenchment of banned extremist groups in Sindh. Growing interest in the law and order situation in the central and northern districts of Sindh is timely, given that the province is witnessing an escalation in militancy and violent extremism, crime, tribal warfare, and attacks by Sindhi nationalist and separatist groups.

Islamist Militancy and Violent Extremism

The spread of Islamist militancy and violent extremism in Sindh's central and northern districts has long been checked by the province's progressive politics and vibrant civil society. In the 1980s, when young Pakistanis from Karachi, southern Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (then known as the North-West Frontier Province) were being recruited to participate in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, Sindh was embroiled in the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), which began in 1983 to protest General Zia ul-Haq's military dictatorship (1977–88).

But Sindh is not immune to the spread of Islamist militancy throughout Pakistan spearheaded by the TTP and its affiliates, including al-Qaeda, that seek to overthrow the democratic system and impose Islamic (sharia) law. On July 24, 2013, suicide bombers and gunmen attacked the headquarters of the ISI in Sukkur, killing eight people, including three intelligence officials, and injuring more than fifty others. The Mohmand chapter of the TTP, which has a large presence in Karachi, and the Punjabi Taliban (comprising recruits from the Punjab province) claimed responsibility for the attack, the first of its kind against a military installation in northern Sindh.¹⁸ Subsequently, in November 2013, unidentified gunmen shot and killed four policemen in Hyderabad district in an attack characteristic of the TTP. Police investigations in July 2014 revealed that the militants who carried out a major militant attack at the cargo terminal of Karachi's Jinnah International Airport on June 8 purchased mobile SIM cards in Sindh's Nawabshah district, suggesting that TTP and its affiliated groups are increasingly active in Sindh's central districts and use them as a base for logistical planning and networking.¹⁹ Moreover, militants from Sindh believed to have al-Qaeda links were involved in an attempt to hijack a Pakistan Navy frigate from the Karachi Naval Dockyard in September 2014: Owais Jakhrani, a former navy sailor who helped plan the attack, hailed from Jacobabad; three other militants suspected of involvement were arrested from Larkana and Jamshoro.²⁰ "The next breeding ground of militancy in Pakistan will be interior Sindh, particularly the districts

bordering southern Punjab,” suggests Tariq Pervez, a former policeman and former director general of the Federal Investigation Agency.²¹

But these attacks were not the first sign of a militant presence in northern Sindh. In October 2010, twenty-seven NATO oil tankers were torched in Shikarpur, indicating that Taliban affiliates had infiltrated the province.²² Moreover, revelations in the media in 2009 that the United States was flying Predator drones from Pakistani soil, including the Jacobabad Air Base in Sindh, fueled anti-American sentiment in the province—as elsewhere in Pakistan—providing Sindh-based militants with a local example with which to drive recruitment.²³ According to several Sindh-based journalists interviewed for this report, young militant recruits from northern Sindh, especially Khairpur district, are traveling to North Waziristan Agency in FATA in growing numbers to fight alongside the Pakistan Taliban or join the jihad in Afghanistan. These recruits are facilitated and supported by the religious political party Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazlur Rehman, which is known to have links with the Pakistan Taliban and is increasingly active in northern Sindh, especially in terms of establishing new madrassahs.²⁴

“There is great potential for a big TTP presence in the province,” said a senior police official with experience in counterterrorism who served in Hyderabad Division until December 2013. He pointed to the many petrol pumps on highways en route to Sukkur owned by Pashtuns. Pashtuns are gradually developing unofficial settlements on land near the petrol pumps, including housing and seminaries. Local law-enforcing agencies are concerned that these settlements could offer networking opportunities and hideouts for the TTP as they try to further infiltrate the province’s central and northern districts.

According to Sindh-based journalists and politicians, various violent extremist organizations that emerged in southern Punjab in the 1980s—including Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad, and LeJ—are also active in Sindh, increasingly using the province as a recruiting ground. Jamaatud Dawa, the LeT’s welfare wing, for example, is popular in the central and southern districts of Sindh, such as Sanghar and Umerkot, where it established a presence following the floods in 2010 and 2011, during which Sindh was the most severely affected province in the country.²⁵ It is also consolidating its presence in the northern Sindhi district of Kashmore. Jamaatud Dawa gained prominence when the welfare group proved more adept than government bodies in providing relief goods and setting up refugee camps. Within a few weeks of the flooding in 2010, the organization had established thirteen relief and six medical camps.²⁶ In 2011, flood-affected refugees at camps set up by the Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation, the philanthropy arm of Jamaatud Dawa, received copies of the Quran and prayer mats in addition to twice daily meals. Camp residents, including Hindu families, were also asked to participate in Islamic education classes.²⁷ By cultivating support in the wake of a natural disaster, Jamaatud Dawa has been able to infiltrate Sindh and has gone on to establish madrassahs across the province.

Anti-Shia sectarian groups such as the ASWJ and its militant wing the LeJ have a growing presence in the province. The groups conduct their activities and establish networks through madrassahs, which have been mushrooming in central and northern Sindh in recent years.

“Khairpur is known to be a base for the LeJ,” the senior police official with counterterrorism experience explained.²⁸ The ASWJ has long maintained a presence in Sindh’s northern district of Khairpur—then leader Allama Sher Hyderi was killed in the district in August 2009. Following his release from jail in July 2011, Malik Ishaq, the founder of LeJ, addressed a major rally in Khairpur that was organized by the Jamiah Haidriah, a madrassah known to support LeJ’s activities. Moreover, Akram Lahori, a cofounder of the LeJ, was born in Mirpurkhas, and currency notes in his home town of Digri are commonly marked with anti-Shia slogans, according

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to senior police officials. The ASWJ is currently on a recruitment drive in Sindh—by some estimates the groups has signed up twenty-five thousand members in Sindh outside Karachi in recent years.²⁹ Its growing influence in many districts of upper and central Sindh, particularly Khairpur, Shikarpur, and Ghotki, which are proximate to the group's original base in southern Punjab, is evident in the increasing number of sectarian clashes.

In April 2012, for example, ten people were injured in an exchange of gunfire between Sunni and Shia Muslims. Violence erupted when shops owned by Sunnis were burnt down to protest an arson attack on the kiosk of a vendor hailing from the Shia community.³⁰ Similarly, ten people from the Sunni and Shia communities were injured during a sectarian scuffle in Khairpur's Mir Ali Bazaar in December 2011. Fighting began when members of one sect objected to members of the other sect listening to devotional poetry at a loud volume.³¹ Protests by sectarian organizations also regularly bring Khairpur city to a standstill, underscoring the groups' street power. For example, a strike was observed in Khairpur city in April 2014 in response to a call by the Sunni Action Committee to protest the arrest of its activists on charges of engaging in violent incidents.³² The city also came to a standstill amid protest demonstrations and a strike call in January 2014 following the assassination of a Shia activist by unidentified gunmen.³³

The potential for sectarian strife to erupt in upper Sindh is significant given the affinity of the local Sufi culture for Shia rituals and beliefs. Additionally, certain Sindhi-speaking Baloch tribes—such as the Talpurs in Khairpur and Umerkot—have historic ties to Iran and share cultural practices with the Shia community. Sectarian militant groups grew in strength in the 1980s in southern Punjab by channeling resentment against Shia landowners by primarily Sunni peasants. Groups such as the ASWJ are now looking to exploit similar divides in Sindh, particularly the sectarian differences between rival tribes: The anti-Shia rhetoric of extremist groups is reiterated by Sunni tribal leaders and politicians to undermine political rivals from the other sect.

The growing presence of extremist groups is having a discernible impact on Sindhi society and undermining the long tradition of Sufi Islam in the province. “Banned groups are growing in strength,” said Nasir Shah, a member of the Sindh provincial assembly from Sukkur affiliated with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). “Extremists started by targeting Shias then moved on to the [religious] minorities and are now even attacking Sunnis like the Sufis.”³⁴ Extremist groups are primarily members of the Deobandi sect of Islam, hard-liners who believe the religious practices of Sufis, who mostly hail from the Barelvi sect, are un-Islamic. “The centuries-old Sindhi culture that treats the [Sufi] shrine as the center of social activity is fading away,” said a Karachi-based journalist who covers Sindh and has written for Sindhi-language newspapers.³⁵ Numerous attacks have been made against Sufi leaders and shrines, and more violence against Sufi targets is likely. For example, in February 2013, a senior Barelvi leader, Syed Ghulam Hussain Shah, narrowly escaped a bomb attack in Jacobabad just days before a bombing at the Ghulam Shah Ghazi shrine in Maari village in Shikarpur killed four people and injured twenty-seven others.³⁶ The attacks heightened tensions between Barelvis and Deobandis and illustrated the growing capacity of extremist groups in the province. Intelligence agencies in February 2014 warned the Sindh government that eight major Sufi shrines remained at high risk of being attacked by militants.³⁷

Sindh's Hindus have been especially affected by the rise of violent extremist groups in the province. “The Hindu community in Sindh is a business community that has long been extorted and is vulnerable to kidnapping for ransom by criminal elements,” explained a Sindhi journalist who covers the province for an international media outlet.³⁸ “But that problem of criminality is now evolving into one of extremism.” Hindus are regularly abducted and forced

to convert to Islam. Up to twenty cases of kidnapping are reported each month to the Hindu Council in Karachi. In March 2012, then member of the National Assembly Azra Fazl (and the sister of former president Asif Zardari) acknowledged the scale of the problem, telling the assembly that abducted Hindu girls are detained in madrassahs across Sindh and forced to marry Muslim men.³⁹ Her comments followed the high-profile case of Rinkle Kumari, whose parents claim she was abducted and forcibly converted to Islam through marriage. Kumari's case was heard by a three-member bench of the Supreme Court, headed by then chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. The court decided that Kumari and two other allegedly abducted Hindu girls should be allowed to choose whether to remain with their Muslim husbands or return to their families. All three chose to stay. Their families claim that this decision was guided by intense political pressure, especially the close involvement of Mian Abdul Haq, then a member of the National Assembly and the PPP, in Kumari's case.⁴⁰

Hindus are also increasingly fearful of being falsely charged with blasphemy, which is punishable by death in Pakistan, or targeted in mob violence. Their fears are not misplaced: More than two hundred people attacked a Hindu temple in Larkana city in March 2014 following allegations that a Hindu man had burned pages of the Quran in a dumpster. The alleged desecration also led to business closures and strikes in subdistricts across northern Sindh as well as protests and related clashes with local police.⁴¹ In a more macabre incident in October 2013, members of ASWJ dug up the grave of a Hindu man in Pangrio in Sindh's Badin district to protest his burial in the same graveyard as Muslims.⁴² In light of such incidents, many Hindus are opting to migrate from Sindh to India to escape persecution. "These things have shaken our community, and people feel forced to migrate," said Khatau Mal, a leader of the Hindu community and former member of the National Assembly affiliated with the PPP.⁴³ For example, 171 Pakistani Hindus hailing from the tribal Bheel community in September 2012 arrived in India on pilgrim visas but announced that they would not return to Pakistan because they feared violence if they did.⁴⁴

Religious minorities other than Hindus are also increasingly affected by the shifts in Sindh's inclusive culture. For example, a crowd led by a member of ASWJ in May 2014 accused four Jehovah's Witnesses who had set up a stall in Mirpurkhas of blasphemy because they were selling books containing images of God and Moses.⁴⁵

Crime

Criminal activities, particularly kidnapping for ransom, pose the greatest security challenge for law enforcement in Sindh outside Karachi. The province's riverine area, which extends from Kashmore to the Indus delta, has been home to criminals—known locally as *dacoits* (bandits)—for centuries. But small-scale banditry has in recent years been replaced by organized crime carried out by well-networked gangs. These gangs comprise between twenty-five and thirty members—though some have more than fifty members—and are especially active in Shikarpur, Sukkur, Larkana, Nawabshah, and Hyderabad districts. Since 2010, Hyderabad in particular has emerged as a safe haven for criminals who find sanctuary in the slums of Qasimabad in Hyderabad city. The gangs operate across several districts. For example, one large Sukkur-based gang operates throughout the province between Hyderabad and Sukkur.

Criminal gangs in Sindh's riverine area are able to operate unchecked because they are patronized by influential landlords, tribal chiefs, politicians, and even *pirs*, Sufi leaders tasked with managing shrines. Criminal gangs work on behalf of these entities in exchange for protection from the law and facilitation of their activities by the police. "Criminals are not the pawns of

politicians and landlords,” one Kashmore-based landowner explained. “Rather they are independent entities that should be considered important stakeholders in Sindh.”⁴⁶

Tribal chiefs and landowners rely on criminal gangs to carry out revenge attacks and murders on their behalf in the course of long-running tribal clashes. Politicians, meanwhile, call on these gangs to rally—or intimidate—voters during election campaigns—as one Dadu-based landowner from a political family put it, “Muscle power works best during elections.”⁴⁷ High-profile members of the national and provincial assemblies from Sindh patronize the powerful heads of criminal gangs as a way to exercise control over their constituencies. Many political figures and high-ranking police officials also have financial arrangements with criminal gangs, receiving pay-offs in exchange for patronage and protection.

The criminal gangs of Sindh are primarily involved in kidnapping for ransom. The gangs have developed a kidnappers’ economy in which gangs sell kidnap victims to each other, the overall ransom cost growing with each sale. In many cases, kidnapping victims are sold onward to gangs in Balochistan or to the Pakistan Taliban in FATA.

The increasingly organized nature of crime in Sindh is affecting the security situation in Karachi. Kidnappings in the commercial capital are at an all-time high: 166 people were kidnapped from Karachi in 2013, up from 127 in 2012, according to the Citizen-Police Liaison Committee. These statistics are for reported cases; the actual number is significantly higher.⁴⁸ Moreover, kidnapping rings in Sindh support the revenue-generating activities of the Pakistan Taliban and its affiliated groups, which transfer kidnap victims from Karachi to the tribal areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, where they can demand higher ransoms.

The impunity with which Sindh’s kidnapping gangs operate is also stoking communal tensions, which are readily exploited by violent extremist groups. Within Sindh, the Hindu community is the most vulnerable to kidnapping. According to Sindh government figures, between March 2008 and November 2011, 143 people from religious minorities were kidnapped in Sindh, 116 of whom were Hindu (though representatives of the Hindu community say these figures are a gross underestimate).⁴⁹ Another survey found that Hindu children are more likely to be kidnapped in upper Sindh: nine of twenty-three minors kidnapped between January 2008 and December 2010 were from the Hindu community.⁵⁰ Hindus are more vulnerable to kidnapping because they are often among the most affluent members of their communities with significant investments in cotton ginning factories, fertilizer plants, and other agrobusiness. Many of the Hindus who have migrated from Sindh to India cite the high incidence of kidnapping in Sindh as one of the major reasons behind their decision to relocate.

In addition to kidnapping, criminal gangs in Sindh are also engaged in extortion, armed robberies, and the smuggling of arms, petrol, and consumer goods. The gangs also provide sanctuary to other criminals in the challenging terrain of the riverine areas. Concerns are growing among police officials in Karachi and elsewhere in the province that Sindh’s criminal gangs could facilitate TTP infiltration by providing militants safe haven. A growing TTP presence in Sindh would not only destabilize the province but also exacerbate the threat from militancy in Karachi, as illustrated by the June 2014 airport attack, which may have been partially planned in Sindh.

Gunfights between rival tribes claimed 832 lives—including those of 116 children—in 278 separate incidents across Sindh in 2013.

Tribal Clashes

Long-running tribal disputes marked by tit-for-tat killings of rival tribe members remain the leading cause of violence in Sindh and fuel the province’s criminal culture. Gunfights between rival tribes claimed 832 lives—including those of 116 children—in 278 separate incidents across Sindh in 2013.⁵¹ Members of tribes arm themselves with smuggled weapons and pay

criminals to assassinate their rivals to settle disputes, thereby fueling the criminal culture in the province. Police officials—many of whom have tribal affiliations themselves—often spur rather than check the violence or are pressurized by an influential tribal chief, landowners, or politicians not to interfere in tribal matters.

Tribal clashes are especially common in northern Sindh, particularly among Sindh-based tribes of Baloch origin, but the problem exists throughout the province. For example, eleven tribal disputes involving twenty-two tribes are under way in the Larkana division—an administrative division comprising the districts of Larkana, Kashmore, Qamber Shahdadkot, Shikarpur, and Jacobabad. Kashmore is the worst hit with five ongoing clashes between the following tribes: Jakhrani and Bhayo; Sawand and Sabzoi; Jhokrani and Kandrani; Chachar and Bhayo; and Sangi and Badani. In the first six months of 2013, 147 people were killed and seventy-one injured as a result of these tribal feuds alone.⁵²

In addition to claiming lives, tribal clashes paralyze society and undermine socioeconomic development in upper Sindh. According to a study carried out between 2010 and 2012, tribal warfare led to the closure of thirty-seven schools in Ghotki district, eighty-eight in Khairpur, and twelve in Shikarpur and to the destruction of three schools in Shikarpur's Kingri sub-district.⁵³ Tribal clashes also limit economic opportunities for young Sindhis because certain districts become *no-go zones* for members of warring tribes. Rural health units in conflict-hit areas also remain closed, causing further difficulties for the local population.

In addition to perpetuating crime in Sindh, tribal clashes are fueling the spread of extremism. One of the longest running and bloodiest in the province is between the Mehr and Jatoi clans in Shikarpur. Because the tribes have different sectarian affiliations—Mehrs are Sunni and Jatois are Shia—sectarian militant organizations have exploited the tribal rivalry to perpetuate their ideology. Ibrahim Jatoi, the head of the Jatoi clan and a member of the National Peoples Party, escaped a bomb attack in Shikarpur by militants affiliated with the anti-Shia LeJ in the run-up to the May 2013 general elections. According to a Sukkur-based journalist, members of the Mehr clan promoted Deobandi groups, such as ASWJ, to counter the political influence of the rival Jatoi clan, allowing them to operate unchecked in the area and coordinating political and charitable events alongside the groups. By taking advantage of overlapping tribal, political, and sectarian rivalries, groups such as the ASWJ and LeJ have been able to entrench themselves in upper Sindh.

Nationalist and Separatist Violence

The politics of Sindh has long been influenced by ethno-nationalist sentiments. The roots of Sindhi nationalism lie in the pre-Partition era and were exacerbated by the influx of Urdu-speaking refugees (mujahirs) at the time of Partition and the subsequent subjugation of the Sindhi language by Urdu (Urdu replacing Sindhi as the medium of instruction in 1958).⁵⁴ Over the decades, tense relations between Sindhis and other ethnic groups, especially mujahirs and Punjabis in urban areas, and the relationship between the province and national government have created a strong desire for Sindhi interests to be represented and protected at both the provincial and federal levels.

Despite this trend, Sindhi nationalist parties have always fared poorly at the polls. “The nationalists have never gained any real following on the ground and are only popular among students and youth from rural backgrounds,” PPP's Nasir Shah explained.⁵⁵ The father of Sindhi nationalism, G. M. Syed, lost his constituency in the 1970 elections to a candidate of the PPP, which has since dominated the province's politics. Sidelined from the political process,

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some Sindhi nationalist and separatist elements have taken up insurgents' tactics in an effort to defend the province's political interests, territorial unity, and resource rights. The most well-known of these is the Jeay Sindh Muttahida Mahaz (JSMM), the political arm of the militant Sindhu Desh Liberation Army (SDLA), led by Shafi Burfat, which was banned in April 2013 for its alleged involvement in acts of province-wide violence. Groups such as the SDLA and JSMM lack recruits, resources, and training and engage primarily in sabotage, such as small-scale attacks against railway tracks, electricity lines, and banks.

Baloch nationalists engaged in the long-running antistate insurgency in the neighboring Balochistan province are also active in the border areas of Sindh. Following a military operation in Balochistan's Dera Bugti district in 2006 in which tribal chief Nawab Akbar Bugti was killed, more than 175,000 members of the Bugti tribe sought refuge in upper Sindh and southern Punjab.⁵⁶ Baloch refugees from Kohlu and other insurgency-hit parts of the province have also increasingly sought sanctuary in Sindh in recent years. The presence of these refugees has caused the Baloch separatist movement to spill over into Sindh, especially in the border and northern districts of Jacobabad, Kashmore, and Qambar Shahdadkot. For example, two people were killed and ten others injured on August 29, 2012, when a bomb exploded on railway tracks in Jacobabad in an attack widely believed to have been carried out by the Baloch Liberation Army separatist group. Internally displaced young Baloch men based in Sindh who have few options for education or employment are increasingly joining the movement or being recruited by the violent extremist organizations that are becoming entrenched in Sindh.

Nationalist groups carried out twenty-nine of the 215 terrorist attacks documented in Sindh in 2012, which claimed thirteen lives and injured fifty-two people.⁵⁷ Sindhi nationalist groups have escalated their activities throughout the province in recent years, a trend that is likely to persist. For example, one person was killed and thirty others injured when an explosion derailed a passenger train near the Ghaghar Phatak bridge on February 4, 2014, approximately twenty-eight miles east of Karachi, an attack believed to have been carried out by Sindhi nationalist groups. Two JSMM activists were also arrested on January 25, 2014, after seventeen explosions caused by small improvised "cracker" bombs occurred in multiple towns across the province in the lead-up to a JSMM strike action.⁵⁸ Similar small-scale explosions took place in Hyderabad, Dadu, Kotri, and Nowshera Feroze districts ahead of another JSMM strike on October 29, 2013.

Sindhi nationalist groups are becoming more active for a number of reasons. One is the groups' response to the growing intensity of the insurgency in Balochistan, from which they draw inspiration. According to a Sindhi journalist, Sindhi nationalist groups have become increasingly popular on university campuses in the province since 2007, when the low-lying insurgency in Balochistan intensified, thus providing an example for young Sindhi nationalists to emulate. Police officials describe increasing levels of collaboration and knowledge- and resource-sharing between Sindhi and Baloch nationalist groups in upper Sindh, which also explains the growing capacity and increased frequency of attacks by Sindhi nationalist groups.

Nationalist sentiments were also stoked by the sudden death in April 2012 of Bashir Ahmed Qureshi, the former leader of the Sindhi nationalist political party, Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz (JSQM), a month after the party staged a rally in Karachi calling for an independent Sindh Province. The party and Qureshi's family believe that he was poisoned by representatives of the state or security establishment and have called for government officials and law enforcement to be charged with his murder. At the time, the JSQM called successful strikes that brought most Sindhi cities, including Karachi, to a standstill. Inconclusive investigations into Qureshi's death—coupled with the killing of two JSQM leaders in Nowshera Feroze on

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March 21, 2014—are likely to fuel resentment against the state and attract more support for Sindhi nationalist groups, which have historically enjoyed little support in the region.

According to a senior police officer with counterterrorism experience, Pakistan’s intelligence and law-enforcement agencies currently prioritize countering the threat posed by Sindhi nationalist groups above all others, including violent extremist groups and criminal gangs. Young Sindhis with alleged links to Sindhi nationalist groups are regularly intimidated and arrested, particularly in Dadu, Shikarpur, Jacobabad, and Jamshoro. As one Kashmir-based landowner put it, “For the security agencies, the nationalists are the only problem in Sindh.”⁵⁹ In December 2013, for example, the Sindh government directed the provincial police to launch a crackdown on banned Sindhi nationalist groups, especially the JSMM, and threatened to take legal action against Sindhi newspapers that had published the outlawed group’s strike calls.⁶⁰ According to a report published by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in December 2014, the mutilated bodies of nine Sindh nationalists and separatists, including those with links to the JSMM, were found across Sindh’s rural areas. Sindhi nationalist parties and human rights groups have accused the intelligence agencies of carrying out extra-judicial killings in an effort to crush the nationalist movement.

Journalists and police officials interviewed for this report also claim that intelligence officials are facilitating the spread of violent extremist organizations in upper Sindh in an effort to counter the appeal of Sindhi nationalist groups, which are secular in nature. “Sindh has always been a bastion of anti-establishment politics, and the state has always believed the best way to weaken leftists and nationalists in Pakistan has been through the use of religion,” the Sindh political correspondent for a national newspaper explained.⁶¹ This tactic is similar to the one intelligence agencies have used in Balochistan, where madrassahs managed by extremist organizations have been allowed to mushroom in recent years, particularly in insurgency-hit areas like Turbat.⁶² The rapid proliferation of madrassahs in upper Sindh, the spread of wall chalkings by violent extremist organizations calling for recruits and promoting sectarian messages, and the growing number of incidents of extremist violence suggest that a similar strategy is under way in Sindh. If it is not checked, this tactic could have serious consequences for stability in the province.

Sindh’s Multifaceted Challenges

As this analysis suggests, the province is at a tipping point—still relatively stable but vulnerable to threats from multiple violent actors. Extremist, criminal, tribal, and nationalist violence in Sindh is perpetrated by different actors with various motivations. Proactive and comprehensive policymaking could yet prevent Sindh from facing the levels of conflict witnessed in other parts of Pakistan, such as FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, systemic issues create conditions within the province that risk driving greater conflict and exacerbating cycles of violence. These issues include socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, and Sindh’s extreme urban-rural divide, poor governance, the lack of basic service delivery, and the erosion of a centuries-old feudal system.

Poverty and Inequality

The rural areas of Sindh have among the highest incidence of poverty in Pakistan—53 percent of the population in rural Sindh live below the poverty line.⁶³ Tenancy and sharecropping remain the most common form of employment in rural Sindh, and only a minority of farmers own their own land. Variations in rainfall—resulting in both extreme flooding and drought in recent years—make sharecropping an unreliable occupation, and many rural Sindhis are forced to seek seasonal employment in brick kilns and carpet factories. Thousands of others work in

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inhuman conditions as bonded laborers, forever indebted to waderos (landowners). The incidence of sharecropping and bonded labor varies throughout the province, but indebtedness is widespread. For example, according to a survey conducted by the Thardeep Rural Development Programme, 98 percent of the families of carpet weavers in Tharparkar were in debt in 2003.⁶⁴ Most indebted families had secured multiple loans and many were using the money to purchase food. This trend is likely to persist in the medium-term. According to the World Bank, nearly six hundred thousand people will enter the job market in Sindh each year as a result of the growing population and increased rural-urban migration, but only 350,000 jobs will be created, leading to soaring unemployment rates and further indebtedness.⁶⁵

Other development indicators are also extremely poor in rural districts. According to the National Nutrition Survey 2011, Sindh is the most food-deprived province of Pakistan. Only 28 percent of households count as food secure while 16.8 percent of households in the province face severe hunger. The number of malnourished children in the province is also increasing, up from 44 percent in 2001 to 49.8 percent in 2011, a pattern that partly explains the high number of child deaths during the drought and famine in the Tharparkar district, where drought conditions affected more than 250,000 families and led to the deaths of more than 470 people in the first eleven months of 2014.⁶⁶ Only one in every ten people in Sindh has access to safe drinking water, and only one in ten women are literate.

Politicians and journalists interviewed for this report blamed poverty and inequality for the rise of extremism in Sindh, arguing that students who enroll in madrassahs to receive a free education and free meals are recruited by extremist groups and that others turn to militancy out of desperation and a lack of better options. Recent research, however, has shown that this is not necessarily the case. In a 2012 study, Graeme Blair and his colleagues surveyed six thousand Pakistanis across the country and socioeconomic groups and found that poor Pakistanis dislike militancy more than their middle-class counterparts and that the dislike of militant groups is three times stronger among the urban poor living in districts that have experienced militant violence (likely because of the direct exposure to violence).⁶⁷ Such findings highlight that the causal link between poverty and rising extremism is difficult to establish, though, unlike the urban poor surveyed, who have experienced militant violence, many Sindhis have not been directly exposed to extremist rhetoric and the fallout of militancy before and might be more vulnerable to engaging with extremist groups. In the unique context of Sindh, poverty and indebtedness might also contribute to the rise in extremism because most moneylenders outside Sindh's urban areas are Hindu, and the resentments of those in debt can be exploited by extremist groups and fuel communal violence.

It is also clear that poverty often drives criminality and, as described, criminal activities increasingly facilitate militancy in Sindh and Pakistan more broadly, both directly and indirectly, through fundraising for militant groups, intimidation of communities, and creating communal tensions that extremist groups can exploit. Poverty also drives tribal clashes in Sindh as bonded and other indebted laborers are forced to participate in tribal feuds and carry out revenge attacks in partial fulfillment of their debt obligations.

Rural-Urban Divide

Sindh is often described as having a dual economy in which economic and industrial activity in urban centers such as Karachi does not translate into economic gains for the rest of the province. Karachi is home to 30 percent of Sindh's total population and 62 percent of its urban population. More than 70 percent of the total industrial labor force in Sindh is employed in Karachi's

large-scale industrial sector, and 78 percent of private-sector jobs in the province are also based in the city.⁶⁸ Sindh's major health-care facilities, educational institutions, and media outlets are also concentrated there.

In addition to Karachi, Hyderabad, Shikarpur, and Nowshera Feroze are all high-density urban districts. The population density in Sindh is higher than the national average, both because of Karachi's status as a mega-city of eighteen million and of rapid urbanization in other parts of the province. Urbanization rates in Hyderabad and Sukkur districts, for example, are over 50 percent.⁶⁹ Urbanization in Sindh is fueled by migration from rural to urban areas in search of employment, particularly in the wake of natural disasters, such as the 2010 and 2011 flooding. The population displacement is exacerbating the dual economy and the rural-urban divide, and consequently rural poverty, and contributing to the increase in criminality and recruitment by violent extremist groups in non-urban areas.

But rural-urban migration is also increasing the poverty in urban Sindh. According to the United Nations Development Program, urban poverty in Sindh is higher than rural by two percentage points.⁷⁰ High levels of poverty in urban Sindh are contributing to soaring criminality throughout the province. Poor migrants from Sindh participate in criminal activities—including extortion, smuggling, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, and militancy—in Karachi, underscoring how security in the port city depends on stability elsewhere in Sindh, and vice versa. Kidnapping gangs, for example, take advantage of the rural-urban disconnect in Sindh, detaining victims from the urban centers of Karachi and Hyderabad in the riverine area of upper Sindh. The failure to address skewed development in the province could fuel various types of conflict and criminality in the near future.

Education Crisis

Pakistan currently faces what has been termed an education emergency—twenty-five million children are currently out of school. The situation is especially acute in Sindh. Half of all children between the ages of five and sixteen—approximately 6.1 million—are not in school. The number of government schools is also inadequate: a total of 47,394 schools, of which 91 percent are primary schools and only 1 percent are higher secondary schools. Attendance in Sindh's public schools is lower than in other parts of Pakistan and dropout rates are also high.

The province also has the gravest problem of ghost schools—that is, nonfunctional schools that nonetheless draw funds from the provincial government and maintain ghost teachers on salary. In January 2013, the Supreme Court responded to a public petition to investigate the state of education in Sindh and ordered the Sindh High Court to conduct a survey of government schools in the province. The survey found 6,164 ghost schools in Sindh to a total of 8,252 throughout Pakistan and that every seventh school in Sindh is nonfunctional, and the districts of Thatta and Tharparkar have the highest number of these, 897 and 858, respectively.⁷¹ Where schools do exist, they are in an appalling condition. The Sindh education department reports that 77 percent of government school buildings are in an “unsatisfactory condition” against a high of 50 percent elsewhere in Pakistan.

The problem of ghost schools is a symptom of the high levels of corruption and bureaucratic obfuscation that plague Sindh. According to Transparency International, teachers collude with administrators to falsify school documentation to make it seem as if a school is functional in order to draw government funds.⁷² The problem is exacerbated by the government policy of building state schools on land donated by local communities. Often those who donate land do so to receive government funding without ever having to follow through on the commitment to build a school.

Failings in Sindh's public school system coupled with widespread poverty are contributing to the growing popularity of madrassahs throughout the province. The majority of new madrassahs in Sindh are managed by the religious political party JUI or the ASWJ, which by some estimates has a network of four thousand seminaries in the province, including Karachi,⁷³ though in many cases, madrassahs fly the flags of both organizations. Banned sectarian groups such as the SSP and LeJ circulate militant and anti-Shia literature via madrassahs and organize public anti-Shia and pro-jihad gatherings in which young madrassah students are forced to participate.⁷⁴ According to Sindh-based journalists, large-scale demonstrations to protest an attack against JUI Sindh general secretary Khalid Soomro in Larkana on March 31, 2014, were populated primarily by madrassah students, underscoring their growing numbers and street power.

Although madrassah enrollment does not necessarily have to lead to radicalization, Sindh observers directly link the growth of madrassahs to the creep of extremism in the province. A Sindh Home Ministry survey conducted in July 2013 identified six hundred madrassahs that it termed dangerous based on the institutions' role in radicalization of students and militant recruitment.⁷⁵ The majority of these madrassahs are in Karachi, but a growing number are in northern Sindh, where sectarian militant groups are increasingly active. These madrassahs give extremist groups greater visibility and access to local communities as well as convenient hubs for networking among themselves. By developing madrassahs in a province with a paucity of government schools, extremist groups are also positioning themselves as stand-ins for the state with the ability to deliver services, a strategy that served the groups well in the wake of the 2010 and 2011 floods. Moreover, by running madrassahs, representatives of extremist groups are able to position themselves as authorities within local communities, increasingly settling disputes and intervening in civic and financial affairs, a role that is likely to grow as the traditional feudal system declines.

In 2005, Sindh Governor Ishratul Ibad passed the Societies Registration (Sindh Amendment) Ordinance, making it mandatory for seminaries to register with the government. The amended law also made it compulsory for madrassahs to submit annual reports and audits of their financial accounts and outlawed teaching or publishing content of a sectarian or hate-inciting nature.⁷⁶ However, the law has had little effect. For example, in Khairpur district, the home base of Sindh Chief Minister Shah, ninety-three of 117 madrassahs are not registered. The Sindh government's continuing failure to improve the public education system and regularize the seminary network is certain to fuel the spread of violent extremism—and especially sectarian strife—within the province.

Eroding Feudal System

Feudalism has existed in Sindh for centuries, and the exploitative system is largely to blame for the sharp economic disparities that differentiate the province from other parts of Pakistan. Sindh has the highest incidence of landlessness and tenancy and the lowest share of land ownership. Waderos holding more than one hundred acres make up only 1 percent of the province's farmers and own 150 percent more land than farmers holding fewer than five acres, who make up 62 percent of the province's farming population.⁷⁷ Landowners have long been quasi-state entities, maintaining private security forces and jails and enforcing their writ over demarcated territories.⁷⁸ In upper Sindh, inequalities in land ownership are overlaid with class hierarchies arising out of the ancient tribal system, especially among Sindhi-speaking Baloch tribes.

The gradual erosion of these systems is also driving conflict in Sindh and creating space for new entrants who can influence the local economy and security, such as criminal groups and

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violent extremist organizations. “The tribal structure is fading, but it is not being replaced by a viable option—a vacuum is emerging in its place,” a Kashmore-based landowner explained. “Other institutions like the police, judiciary, and *patwaris* [land record clerks] are politicized and corrupt, so where is one to go?” The answer to this question is increasingly the mosques and madrassahs managed by sectarian or violent extremist organizations.

Landowners and sharecroppers are not immune to the urbanizing trends present throughout the province. Landowners increasingly live in large cities such as Karachi and Hyderabad and visit their lands with dwindling frequency. Tenant farmers are also less loyal to feudal landowners and tend to seek out jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities in small towns and cities.⁷⁹ The growing disconnect between landowners and their tenants means that they are less effective in their traditional roles as settlers of disputes and creditors. These roles are increasingly being played by clerics or religious leaders affiliated with the mosques and madrassahs mushrooming throughout the province. Religious and sectarian leaders offer prompt dispute resolution in matters ranging from water-sharing to marriage and law-enforcement issues. These leaders have growing local networks among politicians and police, which landowners are increasingly unable to match. They are also able to enhance their credibility by emphasizing the Islamic correctness of their decisions. “The wadero used to be at center stage [in Sindhi villages], but now it’s the mosque,” said a landowner from Dadu.

In addition to dispute resolution, individuals affiliated with extremist organizations and seminaries are increasingly serving as moneylenders. “Because of the stigma attached to bonded labor and the constant vilification of landowners by the vibrant Sindhi media, landowners are increasingly hesitant to act as moneylenders,” one landowner from Dadu explained.⁸⁰ Clerics and representatives of banned organizations are increasingly playing the role instead, which was traditionally held by landowners or Hindu merchants. In Beto village in the Maher subdistrict of Dadu, for example, the imam of the local mosque emerged as the main moneylender and succeeded in driving away Hindu moneylenders. The mosque therefore has growing influence in the village, leading to mounting communal and sectarian tensions without addressing widespread problems of poverty and indebtedness.

As the landowners’ social position weakens, they are more likely to pander to the extremist groups that emerge in their areas as a way to enjoy proxy influence over locals. Landowners lacking authority also increasingly resort to the tactics of extremist groups to retain power; for example, according to Sindh-based journalists, landowners—particularly those who participate in politics—in areas where ASWJ has a growing presence stoke sectarian and communal tensions to undermine or pressurize rival politicians, landowners, or affluent Hindu businessmen, as described in the case of the Mehra and Jatois.

Landowners and tribal chiefs with declining authority are also increasingly willing to collaborate with criminals to retain their local influence and maintain the upper hand in tribal warfare. As described, landowners give criminals free passage or sanctuary on their lands in exchange for bribes or a cut of the takings from smuggling or kidnapping for ransom. They also rely on criminals to intimidate and control sharecroppers and voters at election time. Criminal groups are also often tasked with enforcing the decisions reached by waderos and tribal chiefs when they resolve disputes. With more space to operate and access to the province’s feudal elites, criminal groups are emerging as independent and highly organized entities on which landowners and local politicians’ fortunes increasingly depend. Not surprisingly, the growing links between waderos and criminal groups has fueled criminality, especially kidnapping for ransom and smuggling, throughout the province.

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As with crime, the gradual erosion of the feudal system is exacerbating tribal warfare in upper Sindh. Since no tribal chief commands enough authority to bring an end to long-running disputes between tribes over issues such as land ownership, a woman's 'honor,' or water sharing, tribal clashes continue endlessly, fueled by the ready availability of criminals to carry out abductions and murders. "There are no longer *sardars* [tribal chiefs] at the highest level who have the authority to put a stop to cycles of violence," explained a landowner from Kashmore. "As the traditional system collapses, violence increases."⁸¹ The failure to replace weakening feudal and tribal structures with viable democratic institutions, including an independent judiciary and police force, is likely to continue to drive violence in Sindh in the foreseeable future.

Poor Governance and Political Disillusionment

The politics of Sindh has long been dominated by the PPP and the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), though other parties have occasionally performed well, such as the sweep by the PMLN during the 1997 national elections. MQM dominates in the urban parts of Sindh with an Urdu-speaking muhajir population, primarily Karachi and Hyderabad, but has only a limited presence in other districts, such as Sukkur and Mirpurkhas. The PPP, meanwhile, dominates throughout the rest of the province. Sindhi nationalist sentiment runs high outside Karachi, but nationalist political parties such as the JSQM have not performed well at the polls. This is largely because, since the 1970s, the PPP has capitalized on nationalist sentiments and is recognized as the only political party representing the interests of Sindhis that is able to succeed in politics at the federal level.

The PPP has entrenched its position in Sindh by developing strong patronage networks among landowning elite and the provincial bureaucracy. Landowners who historically commanded the loyalty and obedience of sharecroppers serve as the party's members of provincial and national assemblies, using their influence over sharecroppers, shrines, and local police to secure votes during elections. This patronage politics leads to governance failings and poor service delivery: "Waderos and sardaars control the bureaucracy and government services, such as the police, road construction, and electricity supply companies. That means when one landowner loses an election or becomes involved in a tribal feud, rivals take over, leading to a lack of continuity in service provision," an apolitical Kashmore-based landowner explained, adding, "There is no space for institution-building in Sindh." The political setup also leads to widespread corruption and rent-seeking at all levels. "Ninety percent of the people from my constituency who come to see me ask for illegal favors," said Imran Leghari, the PPP National Assembly member from Dadu. "Everyone in Sindh wants a government job or a government handout."⁸²

In terms of the province's conflict dynamics, the most relevant fallout of Sindh's patronage politics is the politicization of the police force. "The majority of officers are political appointees, so they do nothing, or worse, engage in criminal activities," said a high-ranking police official who served in the Hyderabad division.⁸³ Federal intelligence agencies in September 2013 reported that more than ten thousand appointments had been made to the Sindh police force on a political basis since 2002. The Sindh Home Department, which oversees the police, was under the MQM's control from 2002 to 2007 and the PPP's from 2008 to 2013.⁸⁴ Government officials from other departments, ranging from federal intelligence to media regulation, are regularly transferred by politicians into the Sindh police at high-ranking positions.⁸⁵ Within the force, political appointees enjoy out-of-turn promotions and assignments in their preferred locations. Political appointees in Sindh's police department exacerbate the province's security

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problems because they either ignore or facilitate the attempts by politicians and landowners to cultivate ties with criminal and violent extremist groups. They also do not interfere in tribal clashes, enabling decades-old cycles of violence to persist. In many cases, the police are complicit in violence, either by aiding or receiving bribes from criminal groups or in their failure to crack down on hate-inciting activities by extremist groups.

The toll on governance and service delivery of Sindh's patronage politics was highlighted in the wake of devastating flooding in the summers of 2010 and 2011. Sindh was the most severely affected province in both years: 6.7 million people in the province were affected by the floods in 2010, and a survey by the Finance Ministry after the 2011 floods found that Sindh had suffered 94 percent of the total damage of \$1.8 billion.⁸⁶ The provincial government, however, was not seen by Sindhis to be effective in providing immediate relief goods and rehabilitation services or long-term reconstruction. Ayesha Siddiqi has described how the state in Sindh is perceived as absent; her flood-affected interviewees repeatedly expressed disappointment with the state that they were relying on for help but found to be inadequate.⁸⁷ This perception persists despite the fact that the PPP government launched and implemented new unconditional cash transfer programs in the form of Watan and Pakistan ATM cards to support flood victims, underscoring the extent to which governance failings and poor service delivery have affected state-citizen relations in Sindh.

While leading both the national and provincial governments between 2008 and 2013, the PPP also introduced a nationwide cash transfer program for women known as the Benazir Income Support Program. The government of Sindh under the PPP also published a proposed Priority Development Plan (2011–13), which called for major investments in energy projects, road infrastructure, education, and health; started construction on several dams; and initiated work on the M8 motorway, a highway linking Ratodero in Sindh with the Gwadar Port in Balochistan. However, the slow and uneven implementation of these projects and concerns about corruption in their implementation have fueled rather than allayed public grievances against poor governance. “No one expects anything from the PPP,” a Sindh-based journalist said, “but they vote for it because they have no options.”⁸⁸

The PPP's governance record in Sindh was further weakened between 2008 and 2013, when it led the federal coalition government as well as the Sindh provincial government, because the party focused on enhancing its control over Karachi rather than implementing development initiatives in Sindh's rural areas. The schismatic politics of Sindh, whereby the MQM controls Karachi and PPP dominates the rest of the province, is a main driver of Sindhi nationalist sentiment because Sindhis feel marginalized in the provincial capital and resent not having access to its significant revenues. To address this, the PPP has been engaged since 2010 with the MQM in a tussle over local government laws. The PPP seeks to restore a commissionerate system in Sindh that would retain powers (including land revenue) at the provincial level, divide Karachi into five administrative units, and amalgamate Hyderabad into one, thus weakening MQM's hold over these key urban centers. The MQM, meanwhile, supports devolving power from the provincial to the district level and unifying Karachi under a city-district government, which would facilitate single-party rule of the city.⁸⁹ The political tussle has been accompanied by PPP's efforts to increase its influence in Karachi by participating in the city's turf wars over land and the takings from extortion and criminal rackets. This has not only worsened the security situation in Karachi but also led to further neglect of the rest of Sindh province and resultant disaffection with the state.

Growing frustration with poor service delivery and the erosion of public support for democratic forces is felt acutely in Sindh, long home to Pakistan's secular politics and the base of the MRD movement against military rule in the 1980s. Disillusionment with the state and bureaucracy,

Journalists interviewed for this report felt the PPP's failure to craft a preemptive counterterrorism strategy for Sindh was among its most serious governance failings.

and the PPP in particular, has created a vacuum now filled by extremist groups. “The main reason for the rise of religious parties and extremist groups in Sindh is the fact that political parties have increasingly been discredited or have scaled back their mass outreach programs,” said the Sindh political correspondent for a national newspaper.⁹⁰ Following the 2010 and 2011 floods, in particular, public support for Jamaatud Dawa and other extremist groups has significantly increased because of their, rather than the state’s, prompt and effective delivery of relief goods. That the PPP and Sindh nationalist parties have not taken a strong stance against the creep of Islamist and sectarian militant groups in the province’s central and northern districts does not help the situation; in fact, journalists interviewed for this report felt the PPP’s failure to craft a preemptive counterterrorism strategy for Sindh was among its most serious governance failings.

The involvement of the political elite in criminal activities and tribal clashes also fuels criminality and violence throughout the province and further erodes their credibility with locals. Moreover, the politicization of the police force has rendered it unprofessional and nonfunctional in many parts of the province, leading to greater insecurity. Given the lack of viable political alternatives, the PPP was able to win the majority of seats in Sindh in the May 2013 general elections and form the provincial government. But this continued political success without corresponding improvements in governance and service delivery is taking its toll on the province in the form of the growing appeal of violent extremist organizations and outlawed Sindhi nationalist and separatist groups. The failure to revitalize Sindh’s secular political culture and improve the transparency and accountability of government institutions, especially the police, is likely to drive conflict throughout the province in the coming years.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Unlike other parts of Pakistan, Sindh outside Karachi remains relatively stable and continues to have limited exposure to violent extremism. However, as described, the province is at a tipping point. Extremist groups are increasingly active in the central and northern districts, disrupting the pluralistic culture that has long defined the province. Other forms of conflict, including sectarian clashes, tribal feuds, and violence connected with organized crime, are currently the main security challenges in the province but, in the long run, are also likely to contribute to the spread of extremism.

The province is also affected by—and contributing to—the worsening security situation in Karachi, making it likely that the city’s significant problems will increasingly extend to the rest of the province. At this juncture, the Pakistan government, with support from international donors and other partners, needs to make a concerted effort to halt the conflict trends in Sindh to ensure that the province does not become a new base for militants in the same way that FATA and southern Punjab are. The government should also take advantage of the evolving situation in Sindh to develop and test strategies for managing the spread of extremism in the province and elsewhere in Pakistan. Addressing the security situation in Sindh is a vital component of stabilizing Karachi, which should be a top priority given the national economic ramifications of growing turbulence in the country’s financial capital. In this context, the government should prioritize the following six measures to manage conflict in Sindh:

- *Ensure greater political representation for religious minorities*, especially Hindus, to ensure that communities can voice their concerns and demand protection. Religious minorities have been the worst affected by the rise of violent extremist groups in Sindh and are likely to continue being the focal point of Islamist and sectarian efforts to mobilize support and drive recruitment. Increased political representation will

provide these minorities with greater access to law-enforcement agencies and provincial and federal resources that can be used to promote communal harmony.

- *Strengthen law enforcement throughout Sindh*, particularly by building the capacity of the police through improved resources, recruitment, and training that includes how to manage communal sensitivities and stem sectarianism. An independent and well-trained police force is key to tackling Sindh's multifaceted challenges, particularly with regard to stemming extremism, criminality, and tribal warfare. Police with access to local communities are well placed to monitor the emergence of violent extremist groups and check their activities, such as the distribution of hate-inciting publications and graffiti. The regular rotation of high-ranking police officers could also help depoliticize the force and allow it to stop cycles of tribal violence through third-party interventions.
- *Enhance the capacity of the legal system*, including establishing mobile courts or other rapid mechanisms for dispute resolution. The lack of access to speedy justice is one of the main reasons that the feudal system has endured and that its gradual erosion is empowering clerics and the heads of madrassahs who increasingly play the role of arbiters. By reducing the backlog of cases in Sindh's district courts and establishing responsive legal mechanisms at a hyperlocal level, the judiciary can provide an alternative forum for dispute resolution that will both check the powers of waderos and imams and promote the growth of democratic institutions in the province.
- *Develop and implement education policies to address the problem of nonfunctional ghost schools* and ensure government-funded schooling is accessible throughout the province. In the face of continuing urbanization, Sindh's rural population is increasingly likely to seek educational opportunities for social advancement. At present, that demand is being met by seminaries, many of which are also hubs for militant recruitment. The growing pull of seminaries is likely to increase sectarianism in Sindh and drive cycles of violence unless government-funded schools with a secular and inclusive curriculum are available as viable options.
- *Improve government accountability and transparency by supporting Sindh's privately owned print and broadcast media* through trainings for journalists and grants for investigative projects. Sindh's vernacular media is among the most vibrant in the country, including well over a dozen established and regular print publications and several Sindhi-language news and current affairs channels, including KTN, the only regional language channel to feature among the top ten Pakistani channels that receive television advertising expenditure. Sindhi media increasingly holds district and provincial-level politicians accountable, particularly with regard to poor service delivery, and regularly highlights violence against religious minorities. At a time of transition, the media is key to mapping changes in Sindh's political and religious cultures and can support the functioning of the police and judiciary by highlighting injustices.
- *Develop a job creation program* focused on Sindh's central and northern districts. Rapid urbanization is likely to lead to increased joblessness in Sindh, as elsewhere in Pakistan, in the coming years. Unemployed youth in Sindh are at risk of being recruited by violent extremist groups or joining criminal gangs. Moreover, urbanization itself is likely to drive conflict as new arrivals in the province's towns and smaller cities compete for scarce resources, such as housing and water supply. Increased employment opportunities in central and northern Sindh will not only moderate the pace of urbanization but also check conflict.

In the coming years, growing access to media and urbanization are likely to increase awareness among Sindh's rural population and fuel grievances against the state for its lack of service delivery. These grievances are likely to be fueled by the continued erosion of the wadero's role in Sindhi society as well as a deteriorating security environment resulting from the entrenchment of violent extremist—and particularly sectarian—groups and organized criminal gangs. Unless the PPP dramatically improves its record for service delivery and development, Sindh is also likely to see the emergence of a more diverse political landscape with new entrants from among the Sindhi nationalist and religious political parties as well as national parties, such as the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf. After decades of PPP rule, this political flux is likely to increase instability in the short term and could introduce a new dimension of political violence to urban Sindh beyond Karachi, including Hyderabad and Sukkur. Without strong and consistent government interventions to check the spread of extremism and criminality and the further decline of democratic institutions, Sindh is likely to face growing instability and increasing levels of violence in the coming years.

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Although still relatively stable in comparison with the rest of Pakistan, Sindh Province is at a tipping point. Extremist groups, particularly anti-Shia sectarian organizations, are increasingly active, and religious minorities that have inhabited the province for centuries increasingly feel compelled to migrate to secure their safety. Political elites are involved in criminal activities and law enforcement is politicized, unprofessional, and in many areas nonfunctional. Tribal clashes fuel criminality and violence. This report analyzes these challenges and outlines steps the government might take to manage the growing incidence of conflict in Sindh and ensure that the province—the country's second largest—does not become a new base for militants, as FATA and southern Punjab currently are. Recognizing that Sindh is at a crucial juncture, this report aims to highlight the factors that enable violent extremism to flourish as well as opportunities to stem its spread.

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