

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

7 December 2011

### PAK103866.E

Pakistan: Criminal activity and violence in Karachi perpetrated or directed by political, ethnic or religious groups, including the state's response

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

### Level of Violence

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) noted a "sudden" increase in 2010 in the frequency of violence and "targeted killings" in Karachi (Apr. 2011, 79). According to a *Dawn* article, the HRCP reported that 748 people were killed that year as a result of targeted killings, up from 272 in 2009 (*Dawn* 6 Jan. 2011). *Dawn* indicates that people were killed on "political, ethnic, and sectarian grounds" and "other grounds" (ibid.). The HRCP also says that ongoing gang wars in the Lyari area of Karachi led to the death of 81 people (Apr. 2011, 80).

By August 2011, according to *The Guardian*, the Prime Minister of Pakistan declared violence in Karachi as Pakistan's "'greatest challenge'" (28 Aug. 2011). Based on media reports on the "dismal condition of law and order" that had emerged in Karachi, "particularly in the months of July and August 2011," the Supreme Court of Pakistan took on " *suo motu*" [on its "own accord" (*Dawn* 27 June 2006)] the law and order situation in Karachi, issuing a ruling on 6 October 2011 (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 18). In its ruling, the Court noted that, in 2011, 1,310 "innocent citizens" died in the city as a result of ethnic violence and turf wars over "economic, socio-political interest[s]" (ibid., 149, 153).

### Explanations for violence

Marco Mezzera, an independent political analyst and author of several works on Pakistan's governance system, attributes the violence in Karachi to "political and ethnic rivalry," and describes the city as a place "where politicians, criminals, terrorists and migrants from nearby warzones compete for power and survival" (Mezzera 10 Oct. 2011). Mosharraf Zaidi, a political analyst in Pakistan who was interviewed by the Council on Foreign Relations, says the violence involves "armed gangs linked to rival ethnic and political groups" (Zaidi 15 Aug. 2011). Mezzera also explains that, along with "ethno-political competition," "[t]he boundaries between political activism, terrorism, assassination squads, land-grabbing mafia, and drug-driven criminality have become blurred, and at times intersect" (10 Oct. 2011). Zaidi adds that "an ineffective police force and judicial system is the root of the violence, leading ethnic, sectarian, political, militant, and criminal groups to use violence with impunity" (15 Aug. 2011).

### Type of Violence

In its ruling, the Supreme Court of Pakistan drew on information provided by, among others, the Advocate General of Sindh, the President of the Sindh High Court Bar Association, the Inspector General of the Sindh Police and the Chief Secretary of Sindh, (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 20, 22-23, 34). It notes that "countless" numbers of people in Karachi have been injured by the "brutalities" and "bloodshed" there (ibid., 34, 150). For example, sources indicate that bodies are being dismembered (ibid., 150; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; *The Economist* 27 Aug. 2011; *Dawn* 9 Sept. 2011a), "some people are drilled, burned, carved up and beheaded" (Reuters 28 Aug. 2011), and bodies or body parts are being placed in sacks (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 150; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; *The Economist* 27 Aug. 2011; AFP 29 Aug. 2011), and dumped in alleyways (Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; *The Economist* 27 Aug. 2011), gutters (ibid.), abandoned places (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 61) and on the streets (VOA 22 Aug. 2011; AFP 29 Aug. 2011).

As well, there are recent reports on the existence of "torture cells" in Karachi (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 150; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; *The Economist* 27 Aug. 2011; *Dawn* 9 Sept. 2011a). An August 2011 story in *The Guardian* indicates that interior ministry troops found torture chambers during raids in the Lyari district, a Pakistan People's Party (PPP) stronghold (23 Aug. 2011). The interior minister reportedly showed members of the federal cabinet pictures of torture cells during a September meeting, according to the Karachi-based *Dawn* newspaper (9 Sept. 2011a). The media reports that the torture is being recorded on cell phones and passed around (*The Guardian* 28 Aug.

2011; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; *The Economist* 27 Aug. 2011) and used to further spread "terror" (ibid.; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011). Information on the perpetrators of the torture cells could not be found by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Media sources also report the occurrence of kidnappings (Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; *The Economist* 27 Aug. 2011) and shootings (VOA 22 Aug. 2011; AFP 7 Aug. 2011; BBC 17 Aug. 2011; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011). The Reuters article also mentions criminals that are armed with machine guns, AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades (ibid.).

Sources report of extortion [also called *bhatta* or *bata*] (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 45, 150; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; HRCP 8 Oct. 2011; *The Economist* 27 Aug. 2011), and that its victims include both home and business owners in Karachi (ibid.). According to the HRCP, all businesses, small, medium and large, are subject to extortion by criminals "believed to have links with all political groups" in Karachi (8 Oct. 2011). The Supreme Court of Pakistan corroborates the HRCP's observation that criminals, backed by political parties "who are the stakeholders," are extorting money, approximately 10 million rupees a day [113,000.00 CAD (Canada 6 Dec. 2011)], from push-cart peddlers, shopkeepers, and top businessmen (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 45). *The Economist* identifies three rival political parties as being involved in the extortion of businesses: the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), the PPP, and the Awami National Party (ANP) (27 Aug. 2011). In addition, Pakistan's supreme court also names the Jamat-e-Islami and Sunni Tehrik as groups that extort money (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 45). According to the HRCP, "[m]uch of the violence" in Karachi is "linked to disputes over who collects from which area" (8 Oct. 2011).

The Supreme Court of Pakistan and the HRCP indicate that "land grabbing" is also evident in the city (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 150; HRCP 8 Oct. 2011). As the HRCP explains, "political power and state machinery have been used to grab land" since 2002, "while gangs of land-grabbers and mafias have tried to exploit the breakdown of law and order" (8 Oct. 2011). Sources also report of the destruction of property (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 150; HRCP 8 Oct. 2011; RFE/RL 8 Aug. 2011; AFP 7 Aug. 2011), noting that homes and businesses are being burned down (ibid.; HRCP 8 Oct. 2011; RFE/RL 8 Aug. 2011).

## Targets of Violence

Sources claim that people are being targeted based on their ethnicity (HRCP 8 Oct. 2011; *The Economist* 27 Aug. 2011; AFP 7 Aug. 2011; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011). Reuters writes that "security officials are hearing reports that identity cards of murder victims were studied to determine ethnicity before they were shot" (ibid.). *The Economist* explains that "language, clothes and even haircuts betray a person's ethnicity to the killing squads" (27 Aug. 2011). The majority of victims are "innocent civilians" (AFP 7 Aug. 2011) or, according to *The Guardian*, "innocent bystanders" (28 Aug. 2011). *The Economist* indicates that "[m]ost victims are ordinary folk randomly targeted for their ethnicity" (ibid.). Media sources report that citizens of Karachi are afraid of leaving their homes (UN 11 July 2011; *The Economist* 27 Aug. 2011). The HRCP indicates that journalists have also expressed fear about reporting from areas affected by the violence and have said that "it is extremely difficult to move from one ethnic-dominated locality to another" (8 Oct. 2011). A senior security official in Pakistan, cited in a Reuters article, described the violence in Karachi as "ethnic cleansing" (28 Aug. 2011). Political analyst Mezzera indicates that "[m]any of the dozens of militant and sectarian groups present in Karachi, including the Taliban, are also involved in violent disputes between majority Sunni and minority Shia Muslims" (10 Oct. 2011).

According to the HRCP, businesses usually run by Pashtuns [also called Pashtos (RFE/RL 8 Aug. 2011), Pukhtoons (IRIN 11 July 2011), Pushtuns (*The Economist* 16 Dec. 2010, and Pakhtuns (HRCP 8 Oct. 2011)], such as pushcarts, trucks, roadside restaurants, and rickshaws, are often targeted, regardless of whether they are affiliated with a political party (8 Oct. 2011). The HRCP told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) that the Pashtun population in the Kali Pahari district of Karachi has been particularly impacted by the violence (8 Aug. 2011). *Dawn* reports that some Pashtuns are leaving Karachi because of the violence (29 Aug. 2011).

Media sources also report of violence based on people's political affiliation (AFP 7 Aug. 2011; BBC 17 Aug. 2011; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011). In August 2011, for instance, a former PPP parliamentarian was shot in Lyari (BBC 17 Aug. 2011; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011). A year earlier, an MQM member of provincial parliament was reportedly assassinated in Nazimabad (*The Express Tribune* 2 Aug. 2010), causing an eruption of violence (ibid.; *The Economist* 16 Dec. 2010). According to Reuters, some political party leaders have also received threatening messages (28 Aug. 2011). A report from an HRCP July 2011 fact-finding mission in Karachi states that 15 lawyers were targeted and "murdered" (8 Oct. 2011).

## Areas Most Affected by Violence

Media sources report that most of the killings are taking place in the poor areas of Karachi (*The Economist* 16 Dec. 2010; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011). Katti Pahari [also called Kathi Pahari (RFE/RL 8 Aug. 2011)] is said to be one of the areas most affected by the recent violence in Karachi (ibid.; AFP 7 Aug. 2011; HRCP 1 Aug. 2011). According to RFE/RL, Katti Pahari is mostly populated by Urdu speakers (8 Aug. 2011). RFE/RL also reports that Kali Pahari, a mostly Pashtun area, has been especially affected by violence (8 Aug. 2011). Reuters indicates that most of the killings have been taking place on the edges of Karachi in an area clearly marked as belonging to the ANP (28 Aug. 2011), which the HRCP describes as Karachi's "emerging political force" (8 Oct. 2011). Reuters also lists Orangi Town as "one of the worst-hit places" (28 Aug. 2011). Other areas of Karachi claimed to be particularly violent include western Karachi (AFP 7 Aug. 2011) and Lyari (HRCP Apr. 2011).

## Ethnic Groups and Their Political Affiliations

Agence France-Presse (AFP) indicates that Karachi's ethnic groups include Mohajirs, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Punjabis, and Baloch (29 Aug. 2011). The Mohajirs [also called Muhajirs (RFE/RL 8 Aug. 2011)] speak Urdu (ibid.; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; AFP 7 Aug. 2011). They are Karachi's largest ethnic group (ibid.), and are represented by the MQM (Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; *The Economist* 16 Dec. 2010; AFP 7 Aug. 2011; ibid. 8 Oct. 2011; CSIS 7 June 2011, 119), the second party in the provincial assembly (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 81), and the dominant party in Karachi (CSIS 7 June 2011, 119; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011). The Mohajirs have been in Pakistan since migrating there in 1947 (UN 11 July 2011; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; *The Economist* 16 Dec. 2010).

The second-largest ethnic group in Karachi is the Pashtuns (RFE/RL 8 Aug. 2011; *The Economist* 16 Dec. 2010). The Pashtuns speak Pashto (BBC 4 Aug. 2011). The Pashtuns have arrived in Karachi "in recent years" (CSIS 7 June 2011, 119), having migrated there in large

numbers (Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; BBC 29 Aug. 2011) from the northern province of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa [also called Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (HRCP 8 Oct. 2011)] (ibid.; UN 11 July 2011). Displaced by anti-Taliban activities, the recent arrivals number in the "hundreds of thousands," according to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (29 Aug. 2011). Pashtuns are reportedly affiliated with the ANP (*The Economist* 16 Dec. 2010; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; AFP 7 Aug. 2011; ibid. 8 Oct. 2011; CSIS 7 June 2011, 119).

*The Economist* indicates that the Baluchis, whose ethnic homeland is the province of Baluchistan, support the PPP, the party that has led the coalition government in Islamabad since 2008 (16 Dec. 2010). Other sources indicate that the PPP has the support of Sindhis (*Dawn* 21 Aug. 2011; Zaidi 15 Aug. 2011).

## Relations Between Political Parties

Sources report of tension between the MQM and the ANP (AFP 7 Aug. 2011; HRCP 8 Oct. 2011). Although Reuters states that there has been a long history of ethnic violence between the MQM and the ANP (28 Aug. 2011), according to the BBC, Pashtun migration to Karachi has worsened tensions (29 Aug. 2011). The HRCP indicates that the "MQM fears losing the battle of numbers to its political rivals," while the ANP wants to increase its number of seats in the national and provincial assemblies (8 Oct. 2011). The Center for Strategic and International Studies corroborates the HRCP's statement that the MQM fears a change in demographics and therefore in political power (7 June 2011, 119). *The Guardian* explains that the MQM's power is "being challenged" by the ANP and the PPP (28 Aug. 2011).

According to political analyst Marco Mezzera, the increase in violence "may be regarded as a last-ditch effort by the MQM to retain its status within the capital of Sindh and at the national level" (10 Oct. 2011). Sources indicate that the MQM and ANP are engaged in a "turf war" (HRCP 8 Oct. 2011; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011). *The Economist* reports "territorial struggles" between gangs of Mohajirs, Pashtuns, and Baluchis (16 Dec. 2010). According to Reuters, these turf wars involve "land-grabbing schemes," extortion, and votes (28 Aug. 2011). *The Economist* states that greater control of territory can render more votes, and that, at times, members of political parties "forcibly take identity cards from voters in their areas and use them to cast fraudulent ballots" (16 Dec. 2010). According to the political analyst Mosharraf Zaidi, the competition between the political groups "requires the use of violent instruments like armed thugs, gangs, [and] murder" (Zaidi 15 Aug. 2011). Zaidi also states that the PPP and MQM "contest for space using violence" (ibid.).

## Political Parties and Violence

Sources link the perpetrators of the violence to the political parties (*The Economist* 16 Dec. 2010; AFP 7 Aug. 2011; BBC 17 Aug. 2011; HRCP 8 Oct. 2010; Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 149-150; *Dawn* 9 Sept. 2011a). The federal minister of interior reportedly stated that those who have been arrested "represent all political part[i]es" (ibid. 9 Sept. 2011b). Media sources link ethnic gangs in Karachi to the political parties (BBC 29 Aug. 2011; *The Economist* 27 Aug. 2011; VOA 22 Aug. 2011). In its ruling of 6 October 2011, the Supreme Court of Pakistan "observe[d]" that some groups have "political, moral and financial support or endorsement of the political parties" (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 149-150). Additionally, sources indicate that some political parties have their own military wings (HRCP 8 Oct. 2010; AFP 7 Aug. 2011), and that they perpetrate violence in Karachi (ibid.). AFP reports that a professor at Urdu University accuses the military wings of working to "maintain party influence, prevent rival groups from infiltrating their territories and force people to remain loyal" (ibid.).

Both the Supreme Court and the HRCP indicate that all political parties are responsible for the violence in Karachi (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 99; HRCP 8 Oct. 2011). *Dawn* states that arrested "killers" have confessed their affiliation with different political parties and have indicated that they were "specially assigned to kill people" for such things as not paying a political party and not following orders from superiors (9 Sept. 2011a). According to the BBC, the perpetrators of violence are protected by politicians (17 Aug. 2011).

Amnesty International (AI) states that "security forces, political groups and non-state armed groups have been blamed for targeted killings" and that police officers are also implicated in "numerous ... cases involving killings" (7 July 2011). Sources report that police also conduct extra-judicial killings (HRCP Apr. 2011, 76; Human Rights Watch Jan. 2011, 2; Freedom House 2011).

## State Response

Media sources indicate that "paramilitary units" (*The Guardian* 28 Aug. 2011), called Rangers, were operating in Karachi in July, August and September 2011 (ibid.; *The Nation* 9 July 2011; *Dawn* 26 Aug. 2011; ibid. 15 Sept. 2011). The Supreme Court of Pakistan notes that the government of Sindh empowered the Rangers "to apprehend the criminal elements involved in firing and killing of innocent citizens" on 8 July 2011 (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 24). According to *Dawn*, the Rangers were given temporary, not permanent "special powers of search and arrest" for 90 days only (15 Sept. 2011). *Dawn* also reports that the Rangers claim to have apprehended approximately 236 suspects and 327 weapons (15 Sept. 2011). However, *Dawn* questions the effectiveness of the Rangers and states that the apprehended individuals may be "petty criminals or innocent citizens" (26 Aug. 2011). The interior minister of Pakistan reportedly said that the efforts of the Rangers would be "futile" if the armed wings of the political parties continue to operate (*Dawn* 15 Sept. 2011). He also said that "a law should be enacted barring all political parties from having criminals or militant wings in their ranks" (ibid.). The HRCP reportedly stated that the presence of the Rangers is not a "long-term solution" to Karachi's violence (ibid. 9 Oct. 2011).

As well, the government of Sindh reportedly issued a "shoot-on-sight" order in July 2011 (UN 11 July 2011; AI 8 July 2011), instructing law enforcers to "'shoot on sight' armed men involved in the recent sectarian violence" (ibid.). According to the United Nation's Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), other measures taken by the state in response to the violence in Karachi include patrols of police and paramilitary troops in certain areas, installation of barricades and checkpoints on some streets, the routine questioning of people, and the detention of some suspects (UN 11 July 2011). However, AFP reports that the extra police and paramilitary forces that have been deployed "do nothing to help" (7 Aug. 2011). Reuters states that surveillance cameras are being installed (28 Aug. 2011). Media sources indicate that military involvement has been requested by businesses (*The Guardian* 28 Aug. 2011; *The Economist* 27 Aug. 2011; Reuters 28 Aug. 2011) and others (ibid.; AFP 8 Oct. 2011). The Voice of America reports that the chief of the army offered to "restore peace if the government asks for help" (22 Aug. 2011).

According to the HRCP, "the government has completely failed to ensure safety of life or property" (8 Oct. 2011). AFP indicates that police are regarded by citizens as "a politically appointed force" (29 Aug. 2011). The Supreme Court of Pakistan notes that police officers "may be punished for doing their duty if it runs counter to the political objectives of the party in power" (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 149). The

Supreme Court and the HRCF have called for the de-politicization of the police (*ibid.*, 150; HRCF 8 Oct. 2011). The Supreme Court added that unless the police are de-politicized and strengthened, the law and order situation "is likely to become more aggravated, no sooner the assistance of Rangers is withdrawn" (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 150).

Sources also indicate that police officers are powerless (UN 11 July 2011; AFP 7 Aug. 2011), lack resources (Reuters 28 Aug. 2011; AFP 8 Oct. 2011; HRCF 8 Oct. 2011), and are "ill-prepared" (*ibid.*). Political analyst Zaidi says that Karachi is "poorly policed" (15 Aug. 2011). According to Reuters, the time between violent attacks is diminishing, which means that police officers do not have sufficient time to gather intelligence (28 Aug. 2011). The Supreme Court of Pakistan indicates that various groups involved in the violence have designated certain areas as "no-go areas" (Pakistan 26 Oct. 2011, 152).

The Capital City Police Officer of Karachi reportedly stated that the police force is "doing nothing" about "target killers" in Karachi (*Pakistan Today* 18 Aug. 2011). *The Economist* says that police officers are "stay[ing] out" of the conflict (27 Aug. 2011). The HRCF reports that policemen often want to stay out of conflicts because hundreds of police officers in Karachi have been killed over the past 10 years (8 Oct. 2011). The Supreme Court also says that the police fear they will be shot by the individuals that they have apprehended or their "associates" (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 149). Sources indicate that the police are not taking any action in cases of extortion (*ibid.*, 86; HRCF 8 Oct. 2011). Police morale is said to be low (*ibid.*; Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 149).

According to the HRCF, emergency and paramedical staff must be cautious about whom they treat, as they could be viewed as supporting a particular ethnic group even though they are simply treating a victim of the violence (8 Oct. 2011). *The Economist* indicates that certain hospitals only accept patients of a particular ethnicity (27 Aug. 2011), while the HRCF states that victims are taken to hospitals that are "sympathetic towards one ethnicity" (8 Oct. 2011). *The Economist* reports that ambulance drivers must be of the same ethnicity as the district to which they are going or "gunmen" will not let the ambulance enter (27 Aug. 2011).

The HRCF states that the government has not provided justice to families of victims (8 Oct. 2011). According to the HRCF, "even when cases are lodged with the police and some arrests made, families do not see the judicial process moving forward" (8 Oct. 2011). Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Director says that "even when investigations have been opened in a few high-profile cases, they have either been inadequate or have failed to address the systemic problems leading to impunity" (7 July 2011). The Supreme Court called for an independent commission that would assess citizens' losses and compensate them "without partisan consideration" (Pakistan 6 Oct. 2011, 153,154).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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