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**Local government dissolution in Karachi: chasm or catalyst?**  
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**Local government dissolution in Karachi: chasm or catalyst?**

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**Abstract**

Karachi's history has left a city riven by tribal, ethnic and sectarian divisions, which exhibits dimensions of fragility typical of 'post-conflict' cities. Pakistan has faced many challenges in establishing transparent government, and local government dissolution in 2009 led to a rapid increase in informal service provision, ghettoisation of low-income settlements, as sectarian violence left large parts of the city ungovernable. Through a case study of North Nazimabad, this paper explores the ensuing chasm and governance mechanisms that filled the gap, examining what happens when local government fails, and how groups and communities contest political, social and physical space.

**Key words:** Karachi, local government, informal land controls, informal settlements

## Introduction

For the first time in 10 years in December 2015, Karachi voters went to the polls to elect representatives to the newly formed district corporations and union councils and committees. The elections, the first in Karachi's history to be held under national democratic rule<sup>1</sup>, established the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC), the six districts of South, East, West, Central, Korangi, Malir and 247 union councils and committees<sup>2</sup>. Karachi's controversial Muhajir-dominated political party MQM (Mottahida Qaumi Movement) won a resounding victory holding 136 of the 247 union committees and councils<sup>3</sup>. Polling was marred by accusations of vote-rigging but security was tightly controlled by the Rangers' paramilitary force<sup>4</sup>.

The new local government is being reinstated after a long gap and chequered history. Devolved local government was set up under the *Local Government Ordinance, 2001* and parallel *Sindh Local Government Ordinance, 2001*, but dissolved in 2009 when a third round of elections were due. After 2009 problems reached their peak, and Karachi witnessed widespread informalisation of service provision, ghettoisation of low-income settlements, and a spate of killings and sectarian violence that left large parts of the city ungovernable. A myriad of informal service providers – political parties, religious authorities, *baradary*, and tribal authorities – gained ground, dominating urban management, security control and the day-to-day running of many low-income settlements. This arrangement came at a price – as ethnic-based political parties consolidated their territories, emerging leaders built a power base and coopted the remaining government funds for personal gain – with extortion and violence used to quell dissent, resulting in acute segmentation of neighbourhoods on ethnic lines. The challenge for the newly elected district and union councils and committees is immense.

This paper explores the process of informal governance that emerged during the interregnum between 2009 and 2015, and how socio-spatial segregation intensified as opposing groups claimed territory. The research is based on extensive fieldwork in 2014 in the neighbourhood of North Nazimabad, District Central, Karachi, and follow-up interviews in 2017. North Nazimabad was selected following a systematic analysis of areas exhibiting different types of spatial segregation – political/ethnic; faith-based; ethnic, and socio-economic – as a complex area representing a range of divisions with a history of urban tensions and violence. The area studied included both planned settlements, and informal settlements now mostly regularised through land titling though still informal in their management.

The paper argues that the absence of the lower tier union-council government left a contested space into which many informal power-brokers and service providers emerged. Fieldwork draws on extended interviews with 53 people, including city-level professionals and civil servants to assess governance and security issues, and local-level community and religious experts, leaders and representatives to assess tensions over politics, space, ethnicity, and services. The focus was on informal urban management processes, particularly land controls, service supply and dispute resolution. Work on the ground was challenging because of the security situation, and took place over several months with the knowledge and approval of local community leaders.

The paper is structured in four parts. In the first section, the literature review examines the debates on conflict-affected cities and their management. The second section explores the context of Karachi and its local government, and the third section examines the case study of North Nazimabad. The concluding section, argues that the critical challenge for the new elected local governments will be addressing issues of security and equitable service delivery to Karachi's complex neighbourhoods.

## Local government in fragile and conflict-affected settings

The concept of 'fragile states' is widely debated. Whilst there is no internationally agreed definition, the terms 'fragile states' or 'fragility' generally refer to a fundamental failure of the state to maintain core services, e.g.: supporting security and the rule of law, and providing basic services and economic opportunity; fragile states are thus often characterised by ongoing violence, and insecurity, legacies of conflict, weak governance and inability to deliver equitable distribution of good and services<sup>5</sup>. The concept

of fragility is also used where states or institutions lack the capacity, accountability or legitimacy to mediate between citizen groups, making them vulnerable to civil conflict or every-day violence<sup>6</sup>. Fragility can result in a 'parallel state' with clandestine collaboration between political leaders, self-interested factions with government, and organised crime<sup>7</sup>. The OECD's 2015 assessment of fragile states that included Pakistan, suggested five broad factors that help reduce fragility: reduction of violence; access to justice for all; accountable institutions; economic inclusion and stability, and resilience<sup>8</sup>.

More recently the concept of fragility has been applied to cities, both as a reflection of state fragility, and the potential means for reconstruction and recovery. Drawing on research in 15 cities, Beall et al. suggest that violent conflict has become increasingly urban, and distinguish between *sovereign conflict* involving international actors; *civil conflict* between organised groups one of which claims to represent the state, and *civic conflict* covering a range of violence including gang warfare, terrorism, riots, rebellions and other violent protests, ultimately '*a reactive expression of grievance by urban populations vis-à-vis the state or other urban actors*'<sup>9</sup>. Muggah describes the fragile city as a 'discrete metropolitan unit' whose governance is failing to deliver on the social contract, but also sees fragile cities as sources of local resistance and agency<sup>10</sup>.

The fallout of rapid urbanization such as large informal settlements and persistent exclusion of specific groups and the urban poor often exacerbates civic conflict. For example in Ahmedabad in Gujarat, the 2002 riots were the result of Hindu and Muslim tension in the city, but Hindu identity also became associated with the building of modern Gujarat<sup>11</sup>. Moser and McIlwaine<sup>12</sup> argue that poverty, associated with unequal access to economic, political and social resources intersect to precipitate violence. Although homicides are often taken as a headline indicator of violence, in practice urban dwellers often experience multiple forms of interconnected violence that become an everyday reality<sup>13</sup>.

Access to land becomes a central element of the control exercised by political, social or economic elites, which heightens spatial segregation in conflict-affected cities as low-income communities are displaced from prime land. In 2009 Yiftachel put forward the concept of 'gray space', characterised by informal practices and delegitimising and criminalising discourse that create boundaries and divide urban groups, reflecting the expansion of dominant interests and exploitation of marginalised groups<sup>14</sup>. In a later paper he identifies 'property transaction' as a form of spatial control excluding minority groups<sup>15</sup>. Similar methods have also been observed in Karachi, where use of violence has been reported as tool for excluding 'others' from territory<sup>16</sup>, and property transactions are monitored by land agents and middle men<sup>17</sup>.

Local governments are important in conflict-affected environments as a means of re-establishing the presence of the state and for demilitarising politics in divided communities. Thus local government has a critical remit to respond to local needs, interact with local communities, and support economic development and service delivery, a role that is both political through the reconstruction of local polities and developmental in supporting social reintegration and economic recovery<sup>18</sup>. Brinkerhoff argues that reconstruction demands action across three domains: reconstituting legitimacy to expand participation, create accountability and combat corruption; re-establishing security to replace unaccountable, corrupt or subversive security forces, and rebuilding the effective provision of fundamental goods and services<sup>19</sup>. However, while effective local government can reduce the causes of conflict, ineffective local government can increase the risk of violence, particularly when dominated by elites or presiding over inequitable resource allocation<sup>20</sup>.

Although Pakistan has not suffered from civil war or major upheaval, its experience of insecurity, weak governance, and social division bears many of the hallmarks of fragility. Anten et al. suggest that governance in Pakistan takes place through a '*complex web of alliances, loyalties and competing interests*'<sup>21</sup>, and that bargaining takes place at all levels of government, federal, provincial and local. Provincial governments have sought to distribute favours to win support from local government, while local government is linked by loyalty obligations to tribal and feudal networks. In Pakistan, local leaders may be

selected from various tribal and ethnic groups, but shift political loyalty to command the highest price – those with more followers can bid higher and small groups continually lose out<sup>22</sup>.

As cities expand, the structure, financial management and accessibility of the local state becomes increasingly critical to ensure access to basic services, environmental protection and basic security for the urban population. Karachi, with an urban agglomeration of around 20 million people<sup>23</sup>, has been particularly affected by some of the social and economic divisions endemic in the country. Thus examining its history, and learning from the bottom-up processes of governance that emerge in the absence of lower-tier administrative units, may create important pointers for future local government operations.

### **Karachi's local government**

Karachi is a city of migrants, with politics often aligned with ethnic and religious identities<sup>24</sup>. Conflicts between political parties and religious groups have severely affected social life, leading to the emergence of ethnic and identity-based enclaves throughout the city, with resulting segregation that has added to safety issues and violence<sup>25</sup>. Here the term 'enclave' is used to define socio-spatial units with an identity that contrasts with the surrounding area, rather an area of exclusive use.

Since partition in 1947 there have been five waves of migration into the city reflected in the city's ethno-political enclaves<sup>26</sup>. During partition in 1947 around 600,000 Muhajir Muslims from India arrived, more than doubling the city's population<sup>27</sup>. Newcomers were resented by the Sindhi population, but Muhajir leaders dominated city politics<sup>28</sup>. From 1960-1980, Punjabis and northern Pashtoons moved to Karachi, mostly to informal settlements around the SITE industrial area and the Orangi Hills. The 1970-90s saw an influx of rural Sindhis moving to the city. The 1980s-1990 was the most turbulent period as Afghan migrants moved to Karachi following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and MQM gained political influence. During this period, Karachi's role as a transit port for licit and illicit goods was intensified<sup>29</sup>. Finally, since 2000 in-migration intensified after the 2005 earthquake, 2010 flooding and Taliban insurgency in the North. Over time each group established enclaves in the city, segregating areas and heightening conflicts during unrest and elections.

Violence has become endemic with almost 18,500 homicides recorded between 2000 and 2015, an increase of nearly six-fold from a low of 471 in 2000, with a sharp escalation after 2009 to a peak of 2,789 killings in 2013<sup>30</sup>, and Karachi was ranked as one of the least liveable cities in the world<sup>31</sup>. The violence was mostly attributed to ethno-political and religious conflicts over territorial control and concentrated in lower-income areas of the city, although a focus on homicides misses the more hidden crimes for example extortion, theft and domestic violence, that are often underreported. Political parties play an important part in segregation, the main tension being between MQM, which has been prominent at city level, and both the Pashtoon-dominated ANP<sup>32</sup> and Baloch and Sindhi group, PAC, somewhat aligned to the PPP<sup>33</sup>.

The establishment of local government in Pakistan has been highly political. During the colonial period, local governments were never substantively empowered, but had nominated members and extremely circumscribed powers – thus at the time of independence Pakistan had few developed systems of local government<sup>34</sup>. Pakistan is now a federal republic with three tiers of government, federal, provincial and local<sup>35</sup>, and since independence in 1947 has experience intermittent periods of military and civilian rule. Local democracy was broadly nurtured under military rule, and replaced by unelected local structures run by civil servants during civilian rule. Up to 1999, the history of local government falls into four main periods<sup>36</sup>. After independence the country inherited local bodies mostly run by government-appointed administrators. In 1958 under the first period of martial law 'Basic Democracy' reforms were introduced at all levels of government, with urban and rural councils indirectly elected through an electoral college. In 1971 under the imposition of 'civilian martial law', local bodies were dissolved and their functions transferred to official administrators. From 1979 under the military rule of General Zia Ul-Haq, elected local government was introduced based on adult franchise. The *Local Government Order, 1979*, expanded local governments and empowered Deputy Commissioners<sup>37</sup>.

Following the coup in 1999 and under pressure from donors, particularly the World Bank, the military government introduced a radical decentralisation programme through the Devolution of Power Plan, 2001 (DOPP), based on subsidiarity and the transfer of power from provinces to the local level<sup>38</sup>. The ensuing *Local Government Ordinance 2001 (LGO)* removed the urban-rural divide and established 3-tier local government: district, town (*tehsil/taluka*), and union councils. Districts were responsible for health, education, agriculture, etc.; towns for water, sanitation, roads, waste disposal etc., and union councils for monitoring service delivery and small development works. In Karachi the act was implemented through the *Sindh Local Government Ordinance 2001 (SLGO)* which created the city district council, 18 Town Councils, and 178 Union Councils.

At national level, the LGO created more than 6,000 councils in the country and established several *fora* for strengthening citizen involvement, including and District Monitoring Committees and Citizen Community Boards to improve service delivery through local participation and voluntary and self-help initiatives. The voting age was reduced from 21 to 18 to involve young people, and 33% of seats were reserved for women at all tiers. The district chief executive office and police superintendent reported to an elected mayor. Two local government elections were held in 2001 and 2005.

After general elections in 2008, when a PPP-led government came to power at both federal level and in Sindh province, local government's protection under the 17<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment expired. Tense national politics meant that local government elections were deferred, the federal Ministry of Local Government was abolished in favour of provincial administration, and the advisory bureau was disbanded, effectively dismantling the DOPP<sup>39</sup>. In Karachi, in 2009, the powers were transferred to the Commissioner-led Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, the five pre-2001 Districts were reinstated, and 18 Towns retained as administrative sub-divisions. Town offices remained as woefully under-funded administrations run by KMC, and union councils were abolished.

In April 2010, the 18<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment ushered in a new era, which again devolved federal powers to provinces. Local government is protected under Articles 32 and 140(A) of the constitution, which made elected local government mandatory, but devolution was contested<sup>40</sup>. Provincial leaders were reluctant to pass local government laws preferring the old commissioner-led system, but unprecedented urbanization, a growing civil society lobby, and critical court decisions made it impossible for provincial governments to further delay local elections<sup>41</sup>. Pakistan's four provinces have now all passed local government laws, and in Karachi the *Sindh Local Government Act, 2013*, set up the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, in urban areas district municipal corporations and union committees, and in rural areas, district and union councils.

All the acts devolve key service delivery functions to local governments, with some exceptions, notably the revenue-earning Karachi Water & Sewage Board and Sindh Building Control Authority. In Sindh KMC, controlled by MQM, was largely stripped of influence and large areas of the city remained outside KMC control, including large cantonment and defence areas. Union councils are authorised to facilitate dispute resolution<sup>42</sup>. Meanwhile, unplanned settlement continued apace, both on the urban periphery and on marginalised urban land, and complex land markets emerged in which state and non-state players vie to control land and engage with different layers of the state<sup>43</sup>. These are less a problem of land scarcity but of procedures that disadvantage the poor – challenged through community-led actions such as the Orangi Pilot Project, which borders North Nazimabad.

In 2011, the deteriorating safety and security in Karachi led to a *suo moto* notice by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, which blamed political militants, sectarian organisations and crime syndicates for the lawlessness in Karachi<sup>44</sup>. The court directed the government to take action. Thus, in 2013, the federal government, through the interior ministry, launched the Karachi Operation, operated by the police and the Rangers (a provincial paramilitary force) to 'root out criminals and terrorists'<sup>45</sup>. After initial results, police performance declined and the core police team was dismantled, although the Rangers continued the Operation<sup>46</sup>. By 2014 and 2015 crime levels were falling, but allegations of violence and extra-judicial

killings by the security forces had started to emerge<sup>47</sup>, and it is unclear whether the Karachi Operation stabilised unrest or led to further violence that undermined local government and police authority. Since 2013, while petty crime has slightly increased, homicides have fallen from 2,789 in 2013 to 343 in 2016<sup>48</sup>.

Pakistan is considered to be a transitional democracy with teething problems for the evolving federation, and complex relations between global, federal, provincial and local government. A critical problem has been that, as subsequent military regimes promoted local government while retaining centralised control at federal level, local government came to be identified with military rule<sup>49</sup>. The 2001 devolution process missed the opportunity to integrate traditional structures into local government<sup>50</sup>. While each period of military rule introduced its own type of grassroots democracy, under the LGO 2001 substantial progress was made towards effective decentralisation and democratic local government<sup>51</sup>. However, even under the LGO, local power brokers often with tacit support from state institutions had hijacked the new institutions and local elections could easily be rigged<sup>52</sup>. After 2009 the lack of lower-tier union councils, and poorly resourced districts left significant gaps in local administration as the North Nazimabad case study shows. Unrest has been on-going, with violence endemic, although as Gayer argues, such conflicts never cross the line to become a city level civil war, highlighting presence of *'regulatory mechanisms'* that maintain order within the visible disorder<sup>53</sup>.

### Managing North Nazimabad

An area in North Nazimabad was chosen for study because of the range of ethnic enclaves it exhibits. It is one of the 18 towns in District Central established under the SLGO, 2001, which stretches for about 1.8 kilometres along Shahrah-e-Noorjahan Road (SNJ Road). To the west is the steep divide of the Orangi Hills, and to the north the dramatic Kati Pahari Road, built in 2009 through a cutting through the hills to connect North Nazimabad to Orangi. There is an acute physical divide between areas formally laid out in the 1953 Planning Scheme and informal areas – land invasions that climb up the steep slopes of the Orangi Hill (Figure 1). Unless otherwise attributed, all the information in this section comes from key informant interviews.

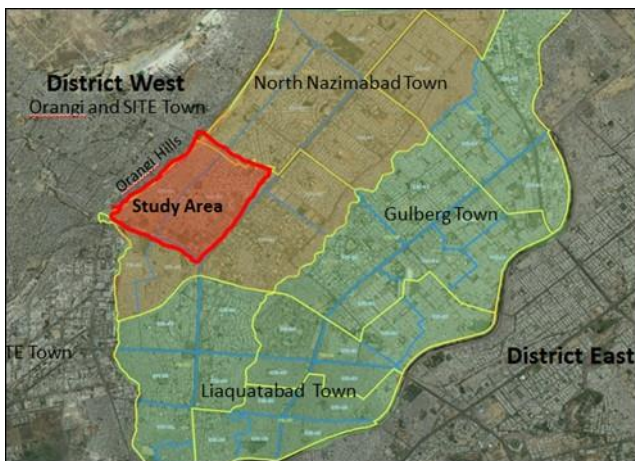


Figure 1: North Nazimabad: location in District Central  
Source: base map Google, 2014, analysis author



Figure 2: Ethno-religious enclaves in North Nazimabad  
Source: base map Google, 2014, analysis author

The informal areas were originally squatted, and although now mostly titled and no longer technically informal, they remain distinct in many ways. The formal area has remained peaceful, but the western zone on the boundary with Orangi Town has been the focus of Pashtoon-Muhajir conflicts since the mid-1980s, as it forms a border between Muhajir and Pashtoon strongholds<sup>54</sup>. The violence increased during 2007-2013, especially after the new road opened, and the Kati Pahari area is now one of the most violent flashpoints in the city<sup>55</sup>. During 2011-2012, SNJ Road Police Station registered 35 political killings,



and Taimuria Police Station registered 28<sup>56</sup>. Most of the violence has been around ethno-political conflicts, but street crimes and rent seeking of all sorts are widespread.

The area has a population of about 195,000<sup>57</sup>, and within both formal and informal areas there are several distinct localities marked by tribal and religious affiliations (Figure 2). The informal area is mostly occupied by Pashtoon communities, with distinct neighbourhoods including Umer Farooq Colony settled by Balti, Kohistani and Hasan Zai Pashtoon communities; Deer Colony occupied by Pashtoons from Deer District in NW Pakistan, and Pahar Gunj occupied by Punjabi Christians. In the formal areas there are Bohri and Ismaili neighbourhoods, with other areas mainly occupied by people of Muhajir descent. Politically the area has always been divided, with the formal areas largely supporting MQM and the informal areas ANP strongholds, although ANP has lost ground since 2013 when Pakistani Taliban started attacking ANP offices and representatives. Other strong affiliations are with Jamat-e-Islami, another rival party to MQM. However, irrespective of political affiliation, ethnic identity plays a vital role in politics.

Under the old LGO 2001, local government poured unprecedented development funds into the city, particularly into MQM constituencies, which were mostly in formally developed areas. The former union councils were funded by grants from district councils and local tax collection, and were run by a directly elected mayor (union *nazim*) and deputy mayor (*naib nazim*) (who automatically became members of the City District Councils) and four elected councillors<sup>58</sup>. They were supported by a small staff in local offices, serving about 40,000-50,000 people. More importantly they were local and accessible. Many interviewees said that, after the 2009 abolition of the local tier they felt alienated from city administrators and the elected provincial and national legislative assembly members, who rarely visited the areas because of opposition politics or security threats, and that the union council and elected local government system was much better.

To examine the gap left by disbanding the union councils, the fieldwork looked at five dimensions of governance: leadership and power groups, security provision, dispute resolution, services, and land control, examined in more detail below.

### **Leadership and power groups**

It is widely recognised that ethnicity and politics in Karachi are closely intertwined, as vividly illustrated in the quote from Yusuf below.

*Historically, Karachi's ethno-political violence has pitted Urdu-speaking Muhajirs of the MQM against Pashtoons represented by the ANP, but clashes between the rural, Sindh-based PPP and Karachi-centric MQM are increasing as part of a broader power struggle between the city and provincial governments. ... The armed wings of major political parties, including the MQM, PPP, and ANP, are the main perpetrators of urban violence<sup>59</sup>.*

Ethno-political divides were also reported in the interviews for this research, summarised in the sections below. Traditionally, MQM dominated Karachi's municipal politics, but with successive migrations into the city, ANP emerged as a major political player with some areas so tightly controlled by political vigilante groups that they are 'no-go-areas' for the police and security forces. Competition between parties is acute, with conflict over control of public-sector resources, including jobs, health, education and services. In North Nazimabad, political affiliation followed the dividing line between formal and informal areas; in the formal area, 'street control' rested with MQM, while in the informal areas ANP had traditionally held sway although in the 2013 general election the new PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) won votes. The PPP (Pakistan People's Party) which dominated the provincial government was not widely represented in North Nazimabad<sup>60</sup>. After 2009, four main types of power groupings emerged.

Political parties retained their hold with active political offices and workers but were often affiliated with religious and secular groups. Establishing 'turf' is an important part of political control, which can include organising rallies and political gatherings, wall-chalking and flag-flying, the operation of vigilante groups and threats of violence. Billions of rupees are earned through various forms of rent-seeking, mainly

by criminals affiliated to political parties, who win votes but also earn impunity from local power hierarchies and the state. 'Extortion' from businesses, demanding protection money, or cooption of funds for service delivery is common. In 2012 Baldia Town in District West, more than 250 textile workers died when a factory was burnt down, reportedly because an owner refused to pay extortion demands<sup>61</sup>.

Cultural and tribal governance systems are important in the Pashtoon-dominated informal areas, operating as an extension to political parties, except in Christian-dominated Pahar Gunj. One leader in the informal area was a former union council *nazim*, renting property to the union council for their offices. After 2009, he continued to occupy the property, and run the locality as before, raising private 'taxes' to cover costs. Loyalties are deeply engrained as one interviewee indicated:

*MQM has carried out so many atrocities on (Kohistani) Pashtoon communities that even if they dug a canal of milk for us here, they cannot win our hearts. Many young men have been killed in the city, just because they were Pashtoos (informal area resident).*

The *baradary* – family, tribal or kinship networks, widespread in rural Pakistan – have flourished in ethnically-dominated urban localities. *Baradary* is a brotherhood of people linked through tribe or kinship, supervised by community elders that organize the community, and solve problems and conflicts according to unwritten social rules. Each *baradary* is headed by a resourceful, knowledgeable and widely-accepted elder, sometimes a hereditary leader or a person of social standing and ability. Pashtoon *baradary* are defined by their tribes and places of origin, such as the Hasan Zai Tribe, Afridi Tribe, Pashtoos from Deer and Pashtoos from Kohistan, and together they form a larger *baradary*. Political relations are subservient to the *baradary* system to the extent that political leaders have to be community elders or leaders to stand for election.

Religious power-structures also predominate amongst some communities. The *Punjabi-Christians* are grouped into four main clans, each with tribal elders who look after community affairs. Social life is centered around the church, the pastor is appointed centrally, and they also operate a *baradary* system. The *Balti-Shia* are organised by the prayer leader at the local *Imam Bargah*, or congregation hall, supported by community elders. The *Gujarati-Bohri* community has a centralised administration based in Surat, India, and the local *Jamatkhana* (place of gathering) is run by local religious leaders. The *Gujarati-Ismaili* have a strong institutional fabric linked to the Aga Khan's leadership.

In the formal areas, many interviewees confirmed that residents of these areas often try to avoid active involvement in political parties, even where there are strong ethno-religious groups, e.g. amongst the Bohri's and Ismailis. However where there is no other local leadership and to protect their interests residents tend to form neighbourhood committees. Such committees focus on security, setting up and manning road blocks and gates, and lobby when there is a breakdown in service provision, but do not challenge the political parties and their controls.

The importance of these controls can only be fully understood in contrast to areas without such structures. In the north of the study area there is a locality that was segregated from its former union council area after the construction of the Kati Pahari Road. Political leaders from the former council no longer had an interest in this settlement. A drug gang temporarily emerged, but the gap re-emerged once the drug gang was curtailed. As one interviewee said,

*Since this area was controlled by famous drug gangs, people try to avoid coming here. There was a committee developed by Afridi people who were also asked by the locals to sit here and look into matters, but that did not work out... and few political parties take an interest in the area (informal area resident).*

Thus, power groups bring various benefits, including services, tenure regularisation, security and stability to areas experiencing inefficient local government and service provision. However, such service provision comes with trade-offs of social, political and economic control.

## **Security**

In general policing did not reach most of North Nazimabad, especially internal streets and the informal areas, and security was provided by vigilante gangs affiliated to local leaders. The prevalence of illegal weapons, increase of crime and drug gangs, and the initial ineffectiveness of the Karachi Operation, a military operation started in 2013 with the aim of reducing crime in the city, were also blamed on weak security services. Throughout North Nazimabad in both formal and informal areas residents had erected gates and barriers to restrict pedestrian and vehicle movement, manned by private security guards.

The presence of the Rangers also complicated the security provision. Rangers are an elite paramilitary security force operating throughout Pakistan. An office block for the forces and government housing for Rangers and their families is located in the formal area of North Nazimabad. The Rangers' headquarters and offices had been attacked several times and the residential complex threatened, so that many roads in the vicinity had been closed. Rangers' patrols restricted parking in the area, particularly near Pahar Gunj Roundabout, in order to avoid terrorist attacks, but this badly affected the car mechanics' businesses in the area. A resident of the formal area said that the Rangers put up a guard post near his house and restricted car parking nearby, but when he complained he was told to '*just follow the orders*', otherwise he might vanish. Interviewees reported that the dead bodies of missing people were routinely found on the roadside.

## **Dispute resolution**

The *jirga* is a traditional decision-making assembly of leaders and is widespread amongst Pashtoon communities in North Nazimabad, particularly in the informal areas. Under the *jirga* system community elders sit together to reach consensus about general community problems, contract enforcement, or an individual's issues. Each community has their own *dera/baithak* (guest /community area) where elders gather regularly to meet residents. The verdict of a *jirga* becomes the binding on all parties in a dispute. The relevant parties – community or individuals, are responsible for the food and other needs of the *jirga*.

Amongst other communities, a two-layered governance and dispute-resolution system exists, consisting of the religious authorities, and then the community through the community leaders. Political parties resolved some disputes, but in addition, there were some groups with a narrow influence, such as Punjabi-Barelvi Muslims in Pahar Gunj and the Shia families in the formal areas. The Punjabi-Christians of Pahar Gunj were distinct, from their appearance, language and the freedoms given to women; as non-Muslims they had different customs and were allowed to consume alcohol, but were looked down on because they were traditionally *bhangi* (sweepers and sanitary workers) which is linked to the Hindu scheduled-caste and is a derogatory term. Thus Punjabi-Christians were a relatively weak community, despite having around 5,000 voters, and moving into diverse professions.

## **Services**

There are significant differences in service provision across North Nazimabad. Although trunk infrastructure is available, in both administrative and physical terms services are poor or non-existent in some localities and the infrastructure is not maintained or serviced. After 2009, the union committee functions of solid waste management, cleansing and infrastructure maintenance were transferred to various state agencies: KMC (Karachi Municipal Corporation) was responsible for solid waste management, cleaning and maintenance of infrastructure, KWSB (Karachi Water and Sewerage Board) for sewerage and water supply and K.E (Karachi Electric) for the electricity supply and SSGC (Sui Southern Gas Company) for the gas fuel. Under the 2013 system, only cleaning and infrastructure maintenance has been returned to the union committees, and many other functions have been transferred to the provincial government.

The interviewees revealed a huge gap in KMC services. Service provision was not a complete failure, as it worked when there was influence from powerful actors, political parties or individuals. In the informal areas, during the first period of elected local government from 2001-2005, services were reasonable as the

*nazims* had enough staff to service the area properly, but since then, the service has declined except in the area of Rangers' family housing, which is relatively secure and well-serviced.

In the informal areas, especially on the hill, the electricity company representatives did not repair faults or disconnect illegal connections because of the difficult terrain and threats to company employees. Thus, most residents on the hill had illegal electricity connections and did not pay their bills. To recover the costs of illegal connections, the company distributed the cost of power losses to all paying customers.



Figures 3: Winding street pattern and illicit water and electricity connections in Chamra Chum, North Nazimabad

In the informal areas, water shortages were acute. Supply was provided every 16-18 days, and each settlement gets water for only 2-3 hours on supply days. The residents on the upper slopes were worst hit as, although the water pipelines existed and the pumping station was working, there was insufficient pressure to reach the top, so people used two or three suction pumps along a pipeline to get the water. There are various reasons for failure. First, the main Karachi water reservoir, the Hub Dam, ran out of water in 2014 due to a relatively dry season, but the formal areas in North Nazimabad continued to receive water. Second, supplies were diminished by illegal water hydrants established by the water-tanker cartels in adjacent areas; the water tankers then sell the water to residents. Finally, many community leaders also owned illegal hydrants, and also operated water tanker services. The only neighbourhood in the informal areas to get regular water was Deer Colony, because of the effectiveness of its leadership.

Several attempts have been made to address the issue. Previously, there was no mechanism for distributing water during a shortage, and the valve operators had to be bribed to get the water to the settlement, as there are 64 valves in the informal area. This led to many conflicts so the elders decided to set up a water management committee to oversee the distribution. The committee included the community representatives and the illegal hydrant owners. By 2014, supplies had improved, especially for those who lived at the bottom of the supply line. Some leaders invested in water wells, and sold water to their communities, for example in Hasan Zai, Kohistani and the Balti neighbourhood. The *Imam Bargah* (congregation hall) in the Balti neighbourhood built an underground water storage tank, supplied by water tankers, and permitted residents on the hill and beyond the reach of tankers to pump water to their homes.

### **Land control**

Informal land controls are one of the defining characteristics of the study area, and took place through a number of mechanisms.

*Access control* was operated through a series of barriers, gates and guardposts, which restricted through traffic and access by strangers, and served to control both crime and political activism by

opposition forces. Barriers mostly affected vehicles but also showed pedestrians that they were entering an observed area. Most of the *baradari*-led areas did not have barriers but used social signals as mechanisms of control. In the informal areas the narrow and steep streets meant that security forces could not use vehicles, so these areas had become a hiding place for criminals who were concealed by the community if they were kinsmen.

*... there are all kinds of criminals on the hill,, just because no one goes up there. Police and Rangers don't go there, so these have become safe sanctuaries criminals .... no-go-areas (informal area resident).*

However, residents of these areas could also avoid paying electricity and water bills. Access was controlled through both organised and informal surveillance, by setting up watch-and-ward systems often operated by political workers, or by questioning outsiders or passing information to leaders. Flags, graffiti and wall-chalking were also used to identify and demarcate the boundary of political or other territories.

*Property control* was another means through which power groups consolidate territory, through tactics which tend to heighten ethnic segregation. Occupants from different sects or opposing parties could be intimidated and forced to move. Near religious buildings, the community controlled rental property. Pashtoon leaders were often explicitly involved in property contracts, while some of the richer communities bought up property at higher-than market rates. Deer Colony under tribal leadership in the informal area had strong land-use controls, with a defined boundary marked by a controlled entrance and check post, designed to reduce crime and bolster identity. These rules restricted bachelor housing; banned tea-houses and hotels; imposed informal property-transaction taxes to fund the mosque; imposed sanctions through community elders, and decided the voting choice of the community.

Land invasions were also common particularly on the hill. *China cutting* refers to the illegal encroachment of amenity plots, parks and playgrounds, which were then sold or developed for apartments to political followers, with 'thugs' (vigilantes) protecting contracts. This practice peaked during the 2005-2009 local government term. One interviewee reported that a new apartment block had been built with a bullet-proof wall facing the adjoining opposition stronghold.

*Rent-seeking* was also common, with extortion in the name of political parties or criminals masquerading as Taliban supporters. Sometimes the extortion was aggressive and came via a phone call or letter. One resident reported that his extortionist included a Rs.500 note to buy a coffin if the demand was not met. Some demands asked for a cut of property or other transactions, while others requested goods as 'welfare' or 'religious' donations, for example the valuable hides of animals slaughtered during the Eid festivals. Public funds were pilfered – for example residents were charged for a new water pipeline which was laid over an existing, functioning one.

## **Crossing the chasm**

Pakistan has faced many challenges in establishing modern and transparent government over recent decades, and while it cannot be described as 'post-conflict', it nevertheless shares many dimensions of fragility identified in the literature. The fortunes of local government have varied – local democracy has broadly thrived under martial law and waned under civilian rule, so in popular perception local government has become identified with military regimes.

The migrant city of Karachi, with its diverse ethnic and religious communities, has struggled for many years to reconcile the deep-seated rivalry between the MQM-dominated city and PPP-led provincial government, and new political players now emerging. Effective local government has in part been a casualty of this contest, as ethnic tensions have descended into civil conflict. The introduction of devolved local government under the SLGO 2001 and massive development spending led to a period of stability, although the dominance of MQM at local and briefly at provincial level led to resentment amongst other groups in the city. Politically-motivated violence started to emerge around 2005, but escalated rapidly after

local government dissolution in 2009 until around 2013, although a self-regulating social balance meant that conflicts never became full-blown civil war.

In North Nazimabad after 2009, as union councils were abolished and local government returned to an administrative-run system on pre-2001 boundaries, various informal mechanisms grew in strength to fill the chasm that dissolution had left. These demonstrated a complex system of control, drawing partly on the domination of political parties, but also on religious leadership, tribal elders, and the strong-arm tactics of vigilante groups, which intensified segregation through various forms of informal land control. As Yiftachel notes spatial control is an important means of excluding minority groups<sup>62</sup>. While friction was often violent, nevertheless an unofficial balance was retained. The result is a multi-layered system political affiliation overlapping with religious, ethnic and tribal loyalties. Street control is exercised by political workers, but tribal elders and religious leaders mediate conflict and oversee contract enforcement. The *baradary* networks of rural Pakistan are thriving in the city.

Security is an on-going contest between government law-enforcers and vigilante gangs, but steep topography means that many areas are beyond the reach of official security control, where petty criminals with tribal affiliations can hide from the police, shielded by their community. Water and electricity supply have been co-opted by political and local leadership and government infrastructure funding is syphoned off to benefit political parties and elite power groups. Land control is administered through the erection of gates and barriers, control over rental contracts and property purchase, rent-seeking and land invasions. The result is an accentuating of religious and ethnic segregation that sharpens the potential for conflict.

The critical contribution of this case study is a detailed analysis of the way in which large, complex urban areas operate when local government fails. Urban areas do not simply collapse, but leadership is established, 'taxes' are raised, security operates, urban services function, disputes are regulated, and land is traded and exchanged. The processes through which this informal urban management happens are complex, negotiated and contested – sometimes power is exerted through the deliberations of respected elders, and sometimes through force or intimidation. Both mechanisms favour those from within the 'community' or ethnic group rather than the wider urban citizenry, although as Gayer suggests<sup>63</sup> regulatory mechanisms maintain order within visible disorder.

The most remarkable finding of the study is the gulf between formal and informally developed areas. In the formal areas people shun political parties and act to protect their own interests – many residents are resourceful and have the education and finance to solve problems without political support, and their relative wealth and education gives them some freedom, exercised through the formation of neighbourhood committees. In contrast, in the informal areas, although nominally regularised as land title has been granted, involvement in both party politics and informal practices of urban management are rife.

Without functioning local government, there is little transparency in decision-making, taxation or urban management. Local government is not perfect, but its absence in Karachi left little scope to challenge the appropriation of assets by force. As in Brinkerhoff's analysis of reconstruction<sup>64</sup>, in Karachi the critical challenges include: establishment of an effectively resourced and competent city-wide local government; the reconstruction of legitimacy for union government amongst diverse populations with very different tribal and religious customs; demilitarising politics and dismantling vigilante gangs by returning security to local government officers and to the police, and the effective and equitable delivery of water, electricity and other basic services. There are also positive lessons from studying the institutions that have thrived since 2009, suggesting the need to incorporate respected elders and religious leaders into the new local administrations, to find employment for young political workers who formerly roamed as gang members, and to break the stranglehold of political voting blocks along ethnic lines. Charismatic leadership, effective management and transparent service delivery will support this renewal.

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<sup>1</sup> For the first 35 years the country had no elected local government, and the widespread informal urban governance systems that emerged are a result of this gap.

<sup>2</sup> Karachi Metropolitan Corporation now includes 209 urban union committees and 38 rural union councils. According to the *Sindh Local Government Act (Third Amendment), Sindh Local Government Act 2013* (p. 1-3), each union Committee should have 11 members, of whom 6 are elected, including the chairman and vice-chairman, and 4 ward councilors. The chairman sits on the Metropolitan Corporation, and vice-chairman on the District Corporations. Committees also include two female members, one non-Muslim member, one labourer/peasant member and one youth member, and they serve a population of between 40,000-50,000 (*Sindh Act LIII of 2013*:.7). The district council covering rural areas includes all 38 union councils, each with a population of around 10,000-15,000 (*Sindh Act LIII of 2013*, p.7).

<sup>3</sup> PEIP, Pakistan Election Information Portal, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ghori, MQM bagging Mayor's office, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> McLoughlin, *Fragile states*, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank, *Conflict, Security and Development*, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> McLoughlin, *Fragile states*, 2012: 13.

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<sup>14</sup> Yiftachel, 'Gray cities', 2009.

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- <sup>29</sup> Anwar, *Urban transformations in Karachi*, 2016.
- <sup>30</sup> Arfeen, 2789 people killed, 2015.
- <sup>31</sup> World Bank, *Karachi City Diagnostic*, 2016.
- <sup>32</sup> MQM (Mottahida Qaumi Movement), ANP (Awami National Party), PAC, PPP (Pakistan People's Party)
- <sup>33</sup> Yusuf, *Conflict dynamics in Karachi*, 2012.
- <sup>34</sup> Alam, *Pakistan's devolution of power plan*, 2013; Khwaja et al., *Local government reforms, Pakistan*, 2006.
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- <sup>54</sup> Gayer, *Karachi: Ordered Disorder*, 2014; Gayer, *Guns, slums, and 'yellow devils'*, 2007.
- <sup>55</sup> Dawn, *Flashpoints in Karachi*, 2013.
- <sup>56</sup> Hashim, *Killings seep Karachi*, 2012.
- <sup>57</sup> The last census was in 1998, so it is impossible to estimate the population from formal sources. This estimate is thus derived from union council estimates and from the local knowledge of key informants.
- <sup>58</sup> Alam, *Pakistan's devolution of power plan*, 2013.
- <sup>59</sup> Yusuf, *Conflict dynamics in Karachi*, 2012: 3.
- <sup>60</sup> From 2013, since the neutralization of ANP, other political parties have emerged, and in the 2015 local government elections, PPP managed developed a coalition to win Pahar Gunj Union Committee UC-20.
- <sup>61</sup> Sahoutara, *Baldia inferno*, 2015.
- <sup>62</sup> Yiftachel, *Epilogue from 'gray space'*, 2015.
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- <sup>64</sup> Brinkerhoff, *Rebuilding governance*, 2005.

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