



# Violence in Karachi



## Background

Pakistan's diversity is defined by the existence of distinct ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. At the same time, it is multilayered and multifaceted; thus, for instance, people belonging to a distinct ethnic or linguistic group may have different religious identities and vice versa.

The founding fathers of Pakistan conceptualized the country with equal rights for all religious, ethnic and linguistic groups. All citizens were supposed to contribute to the progress and development of the country while maintaining their distinct identities. It was hoped that the country's unity and integration will be maintained by ensuring a vibrant democratic culture underpinned by a diversity of interests and opinions.

Sadly, this very diversity is now being perceived as an existential threat. Violence between different groups has claimed thousands of lives throughout the country. In terms of sheer magnitude and brutality, however, Karachi has become a hub of ethnic, linguistic and religious strife. Statistics reveal that more than 2,700 people died in the city in 2013 alone: the total number of violent incidents reported in the city exceeded 40,000 in the same year. These tragic incidents have of course impacted the lives of people living in Karachi; it has, however, also taken a heavy toll on the country's economy.

Karachi's importance as an economic hub has attracted scores of people from diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Different groups have organized themselves in formal religious and political groupings which are expected to look after their interests and provide support in times of crisis. Such collective association has ironically placed these citizens at risk of being targeted by their opponents when the cluster was initiated to provide them with protection.

What causes violence in Karachi? Are ethnic, linguistic and religious identities irreconcilable? Is it impossible to live peacefully with one's neighbor if he is 'different'? Experiences of developed nations, home to diverse ethnic groups that are living in a peaceful co-existence, are a testimony to the fact that the latter is possible.

In order to overcome the violence, it is imperative to identify the major causes of violence in Karachi.



To begin with,

- ▲ One must realize that all the main causes can be attributed to the economic interests of various groups which use their identities as a mobilization tool. Land mafia and extortion money play a key role in this respect. Lack of resources and facilities results in a struggle amongst different clusters and communities to gain most from limited opportunities. This allows antagonistic boundaries to emerge amongst them, often resulting in conflict.
- ▲ Conspiracy theories and false narratives about each other are some of the factors that serve to create misunderstandings. Misunderstandings are created due to inaccurate and biased historical narratives. The uncritical acceptance of these accounts reinforces antagonisms amongst the various communities.
- ▲ Power wrangling amongst the elite result in overlooking smaller issues that affect people in their daily lives. Lack of development fuels misunderstandings and violence as the blame for hardships and absence of facilities is shifted to the 'other' cluster.
- ▲ Inherent prejudices are becoming socially entrenched. These trigger under changing social and economic conditions to instigate targeted violence against an ethnic or religious group.
- ▲ Negligible efforts are made to counter violent narratives at the school or university level. This allows violent attitudes to develop roots and the cycle of parochial biases not only prevails but expands in the younger generation.

## What is to be done?

It is sad that these diverse ethnic and religious groups that were supposed to provide strength and stability to Pakistan are now at loggerheads. The question is if the situation is redeemable.

There is little doubt violent discourses can be countered by developing a tendency to analyse things critically, especially among the youth and children. It is important to discern the vested interests behind the smoke screen of religious or ethnic biases.

Educational institutions can play a significant role in developing a positive outlook towards diversity. Teachers are highly influential opinion builders during formative years and can be a good role model in this respect. The youth should carry forward the agenda of peace and tolerance. It should mobilize the families and communities to look beyond their biases and develop a more inclusive understanding. It should develop a habit of reading books and newspapers. This can help in developing a better understanding of other cultures.



[www.sparcpk.org](http://www.sparcpk.org)

### **Karachi**

No. 304, 3rd Floor, Kashif Center,  
Shahrahe Faisal

Telephone: +92-21-3566 1731-2  
Email: [Karachi@sparcpk.org](mailto:Karachi@sparcpk.org)

### **Islamabad**

No. 151-b, Street 37,  
F-10/1

Telephone: +92-51-229 1553  
229 1559  
Fax: +92-51-229 1680  
Email: [info@sparcpk.org](mailto:info@sparcpk.org)

Text: Marium Soomro  
Quantity: 10,000  
First Edition/ December 2014