The Mohajir: Identity and Politics in Multiethnic Pakistan

KRITI M SHAH
SUSHANT SAREEN

ORF OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kriti M Shah is a Junior Fellow with the Strategic Studies Programme of Observer Research Foundation.

Sushant Sareen is a Senior Fellow at Observer Research Foundation.

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ABSTRACT

Upon the creation of Pakistan in 1947, millions of refugees and migrants from India made Karachi their new home, settling alongside the native Sindhi population. They identified themselves as *mohajirs*, and have since been part of the long process of assimilation into Pakistan's multiethnic, multilingual, Islamic republic. The political mobilisation of the group has led to the formation of a number of Mohajir parties, the strongest of which remains the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM). Over the years, the Mohajir population and the MQM have evolved, learning to adapt and respond to a social environment that is largely influenced by the volatile relationship between civilian, military and Islamic institutions. This paper traces the nature of Mohajir nationalism from its inception to where it stands today, and explores the shape it could take in the future.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE MOHAJIR IDENTITY

Karachi, in Sindh, has grown in both size and importance since its British conquest in 1839. In the aftermath of Partition in 1947, as millions migrated from India to Pakistan, the city served as an important transit hub and promised greater economic prospects. Consequently, Karachi's population rose rapidly. While many Punjabi Muslims migrated west to settle in Pakistan's Punjab province, the majority of Muslims from the rest of India migrated to Sindh. This changed Karachi's demographic, ethnic and cultural landscape, making it entirely different compared to the rest of Pakistan. While the Punjabi migrants assimilated with the dominant groups of the state due to cultural affinity, the migrants who settled in Sindh came from different parts of India—including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bombay, Rajasthan and Delhi—and belonged to different social and ethnic backgrounds. What they had in common was their shared history of migration from India, their Muslim identity, and their physical and psychological separation from the host population of Sindh.[1]

In Urdu, the term 'Mohajir' means a migrant or refugee whose decision to leave their homeland is directly related to the preservation of their faith. A mohajir is someone who has performed the act of *hijarat*, which comes from Arabic and connotes "separation, migration, flight, specifically the flight of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina."[2] The term united the refugees on religious grounds and gave them a common cause; having sacrificed their homeland to be part of Pakistan to protect their faith, they believed that the state should give them special status.

Across the world, multiethnic nations are frequently forced to confront issues that arise from accommodating different ethnic identities. Pakistan was created as an Islamic nation but has always been

ethnically heterogeneous, and based on their origin, different attributes of ethnicity dominate people's identities. For the Bengalis of East Pakistan, for example, their ethnicity is rooted in cultural, linguistic and economic motivations. For the Pashtuns, meanwhile, it is racial and historic. The Baloch saw tribal cultural and territory as the dominant factors of their ethnicity, while the Sindhis prioritised their cultural and linguistic affiliations. The Mohajirs projected their linguistic identity.[3] The Punjabi community remained the most powerful within the state and the political structure. Pakistan's multiethnicity forced the Muslim League and the early Pakistani leadership to promote Islam and Urdu as the "binding factors" that would bring together the Muslim community of Pakistan.

II. THE MAKING OF MOHAJIR IDENTITY: EARLY HISTORY

From Migrants to Mohajirs (1947–'70)

In the early years of Pakistan's creation, Mohajirs constituted a privileged community, with state policies geared towards their benefit. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan's quota system, for example, was introduced to increase Bengali representation in the civil services, but was designed in a manner that did not affect the Mohajir representation. Consequently, the Mohajirs dominated politics, bureaucracy and business. Despite constituting only three percent of the population, they held nearly 21 percent of the jobs. By 1950, due to the quota system, the One Unit Plan (which blocked all of western Pakistan into one province, West Pakistan, to counter the Bengali majority in the east) and a high literacy rate amongst migrants, the Mohajirs' share in the civil service increased to around 47 percent.[4] The Gujrati-speaking migrants from Bombay controlled seven of the 12 largest industrial houses.[5] By early 1970s, Mohajirs held 33.5 percent of gazetted positions in the civilian bureaucracy, nearly half of the senior

positions in public enterprises, and 11 out of the top 48 (23 percent) senior positions in the military.[6]

Over the years, Pashtuns, Punjabis and migrants from Afghanistan and East Pakistan (Bangladesh) settled in Karachi. The increasing population of the city resulted in competition for resources, and the Mohajirs found themselves at repeated odds with the Sindhis, Punjabis and Pashtuns. During the 1950s and '60s, Karachi began to witness restiveness between the Sindhis and Mohajirs, and the Mohajirs and Pashtuns. The Mohajirs were politically represented by religious parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Jamiat-i-Ulema- Pakistan (JUP), while other groups preferred a number of different parties until the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) came into existence in the 1960s. Until the 1970s, there was no delineation between ethnic parties and political parties in Karachi.[7] Therefore, the JI and JUP, while not based on any particular ethnic nationalism, emphasised political–religious manifestoes, which the Mohajirs supported.[8]

Ayub Khan's arrival in 1958 set in motion the relative decline of the Mohajirs, especially after the capital of the Pakistan was shifted from Karachi to Islamabad. Khan's policies about administrative structure infuriated the community and tilted their support towards Fatima Jinnah, against Khan, in the first presidential election in 1964. Thus, Khan's victory and subsequent clashes between the Mohajirs and Pashtuns in Karachi triggered a sense of alienation among the community.[9]

Political Mobilisation of Mohajirs (1970–'90)

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's regime and the political platform of the PPP prompted the beginning of a new form of Mohajir politics in 1970. The decade would prove to be an important one for the Mohajirs. Bhutto

implemented a series of policies that the Urdu-speaking population viewed as an assault on their political and economic rights as well as cultural identity. These included the forceful retirement, dismissal or demotion of over 1,000 Urdu-speaking officers; the introduction of an ethnic quota system in government job allocations; and the passage of the Sindhi Language Act, which imposed Sindhi as the official language in Sindh, with equal status to Urdu.[10]

The quota system introduced the allocation of a greater number of job opportunities to the rural population of the province, which included more Sindhis than Mohajirs. This worsened Mohajir–Sindhi relations in Karachi, costing innocent lives from both communities. Even before the Sindhi Language Bill was passed, Urdu supporters galvanised against the Sindhis in one of the bloodiest language-related riots the country had seen in its short history. Sindhi settlements were attacked by Urdu speakers, while shops and vehicles were set on fire in Urdu-speaking localities. In July 1972, members of JI went so far as to torch the Department of Sindhi at Karachi University.[11] The large number of protests and movements set the tone and foundation for the rise of the Mohajir/Muttahida Quami Movement. Groups such as the Mohajir Mahaz (MM), Urdu Qaumi Council (UQC) and Muttahida Talaba Mahaz Karachi (MTMK) were formed in opposition. The MTMK asked car owners to change their number plates to Urdu as a form of protest. They attacked English signboards, leading to riots in Karachi and other parts of Sindh.[12]

Bhutto undertook a tour of the province—at the time governed by his cousin Mumtaz Bhutto—and announced a formula for reconciliation, whereby the knowledge of Sindhi or Urdu would no longer be a prerequisite for obtaining government jobs. The most ominous consequence of the language riots was the legacy of bitterness it sowed into Karachi and Mohajir psyche.[13]

During this time, Altaf Hussein became an active member of student politics. Hussein was a young student at Karachi University, whose Urdu-speaking religious parents had migrated from India. In 1978, he established the All Pakistan Mohajir Student Organisation (APMSO) to contest the discrimination against the Mohajirs and provide a channel for the redress of their political and economic frustrations. Hussein put the blame on the first-generation and upper-class Mohajirs for not fighting for their rights sooner.[14] Even as tensions remained high between the Mohajirs and the Sindhis, there was a steady of influx of Pashtuns (as Karachi offered better employment opportunities) and Bihari Muslim migrants (after the creation of Bangladesh), forcing more intense resource competition amongst the different groups.[15] Mohajir entrepreneurs tried to retain control over squatter settlements as well as public transportation in the city, which enjoyed a Pashtun monopoly, fuelling ethnic conflicts and leading to riots in April 1985. Due to the competition between the Punjabis and Mohajirs, intelligence agencies forged an alliance—the Punjabi–Pashtun Ittehad (PPI)—to challenge the Mohajirs. Since then, the Punjabis, the Pashtuns and the Mohajirs have been engaged in ethnopolitical clashes over the control of Sindh's infrastructure and resources.[16]

From 1978 to 1988, under Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship, the Mohajirs intensified their search for identity and mobilised their ranks along ethnic lines. As their sense of economic and political deprivation reached its peak, the slogan of "Mohajir Nationalism" was frequently raised, promoting the unity of Mohajirs under a common leader and party.[17] In 1983, six days after Zia extended the quota system for another 10 years, the APMSO evolved into the Mohajir Quami Movement (MQM) on the platforms of countering Punjabi hegemony by working towards a fair share of jobs for Mohajirs in civil service and educational institutions. The militant approach of the MQM

contributed to the group's popularity. The party promoted a militancy that "managed to successfully weave subversive urban youth culture, with aspects of gender, leisure and global youth culture, into an ethnic-religious ideology of protest and revolt, thereby contributing to political crises that seriously undermine the legitimacy of the state."[18] MQM meetings allowed young men to assert their strength and display their masculinity, while encouraging their Punjabi hatred. Hussein's oratory and aggression made him a natural leader, and his following reached cult status with him being regarded as their 'saint'.

During the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan at the end of the 1970s, the US supported *jihad* against the former and supplied the Afghan Mujahideen with weapons and other resources. Karachi was the main point of entry, and according to many estimates, roughly half the arms destined for the western border with Afghanistan never made it to their destination. The city became an underground market of drugs and arms, and young MQM leaders captivated by weapons took advantage of the political situation at the time.[19]

Zia-ul-Haq implemented oppressive Islamisation policies in an effort to create a monolithic Islamic identity for the country, based on religious parties and ideas instead of Urdu and the nationalist history of the Muslim League.[20] As the Punjabi-dominated military grew stronger and scores of Afghan Pashtun began to settle in Karachi as a result of the civil war in Afghanistan, Urdu speakers protested fiercely, already threatened by the Sindhi and the Baloch. Riots broke out in Karachi in 1985 after a Mohajir college-going girl was run over and killed by a bus being driven by a Pashtun. The MQM took this as an opportunity to target the Pashtuns, who had a monopoly on public transport in the city. The party further accused Afghan refugees of introducing guns and drugs in the city with the help of the Pashtun community and usurping Karachi's economic resources.[21]

Thus, the MQM manipulated and capitalised on the Mohajir community's frustration to promote its ethno-militant agenda. It mobilised the youth into a rigid hierarchical organisational structure, with the leaders in the supreme position. Many claim that the party was an outcome of Zia's 'political engineering'. According to JI leaders, it was created to neutralise their support in Karachi, while PPP leaders believe that it was created to 'balance out' their influence in Sindh.[22] Regardless of their reason for formation, the MQM successfully whipped its followers into a frenzy, combining street nationalism with a cult-like status of the leader; this soon translated into electoral success, making the MQM the third-largest party in Pakistan in 1988.[23] While the PPP won every National Assembly seat in rural Sindh (38), which included three of five seats in Hyderabad and one of 12 in Karachi, the MQM swept the rest (13). In the Sindh Assembly, the PPP won 70 seats in rural areas, while the MQM won 24.[24]

In 1988, the MQM won the Mohajir vote in National and Provincial Assembly elections, becoming coalition partners with the PPP. At the national level, it received 5.2 percent of the votes, compared to the PPP's 38.7 percent, winning only 13 out of the 207 National Assembly seats. This discrepancy of support shows how much the MQM, in its ethnic subnationalist form, was inextricably tied to the politics of alliance-building in Pakistan, in its quest for political power.[25] Given the PPP's margin of victory, it depended on MQM's 13 seats to maintain its parliamentary majority, making the latter the 'kingmaker' in deciding who would rule Islamabad. However, while the MQM and the PPP parties joined political forces, on the ground, Mohajir and Sindhi animosity grew. The two parties signed a 59-point agreement for their partnership—including some controversial points and vague, unreasonable demands—yet disagreements soon surfaced.[26] In October 1989, the MQM leadership formally left the coalition, announcing its

support for a no-confidence motion against the Bhutto government at the Centre.[27] The end of the alliance brought about one of the darkest periods of violence in Karachi's history.

In May 1990, the police raided the Pucca Qila area of Hyderabad, inhabited mainly by Mohajirs, after cutting off essential supplies for three days, including water. In the ethnic riots that ensued, over a hundred people were killed across the province.[28] While the MQM blamed the PPP at the Centre, many suspected this to be an attempt to pit the MQM against the PPP, with military involvement. Nawaz Sharif's Islami Jamhouri Ittehad (IJI) wanted to topple the Bhutto government at the Centre and felt that PPP's provincial government no longer adequately represented the interests of urban Sindh. Consequently, the IJI actively wooed the MQM, and the two joined forces despite the inherent contradictions in their alliance, the Combined Opposition Parties (COP). The COP included the JI, which had lost its urban Sindh constituency to the MQM.[29] The MQM's focus on winning a share of central power damaged its legitimacy, as it formed alliances with parties with which it had ideological and political conflicts. Following the alliance, factionalism emerged in the MQM, ultimately leading to the creation of a separate wing of the party.[30]

The alliance represented the high point of MQM's street power. The party targeted newspapers' offices and homes of journalists that did not give the party the coverage they wanted. Sections of the Mohajir population that had not joined the MQM fold were seen as a threat to the credibility of the party. These people were called traitors and were sometimes beaten, tortured and abducted to teach others a lesson.[31] Over the years, several torture cells were discovered, which were allegedly operated by the MQM; it is where their members brought people they have kidnapped for ransom.

III. THE TROUBLED 1990s TO DISINTEGRATION

The 1990s started off with sporadic episodes of violence between the Mohajirs, Sindhis and Pashtuns. In 1992, under the PPP government, the Pakistan Army launched "Operation Clean-Up" to cleanse the city of militias and anti-state elements. The operation was subsequently handed over to the paramilitary Rangers and the Sindhi police. It specifically targeted the MQM and its followers, declaring top leaders of the MQM, including Altaf Hussain, as offenders and forcing them into exile. Many leaders and party workers went underground to avoid arrest, with the army unearthing MQM torture cells and their "anti-state plans" for the division of Sindh.[32] As a result of the operation, the MQM also began to face challenges from other Mohajir parties, albeit with minimal electoral strength, which denounced MQM's politics as detrimental to the cause of the larger Mohajir community.[33] While the army had promised an "even-handed policy" in restoring law and order in the province, it patronised MQM dissidents and orchestrated the formation of a rival faction called MQM (Haqiqi). This group played a crucial role during the operation, with youth members carrying out raids against the MQM, most of which were supported by the Pakistan Army.[34] Long after the army concluded Operation Clean-Up, Karachi continued to experience violence and instability, with vendetta killings by the two MQM factions.

Betrayed by both the Nawaz Sharif and the PPP governments, the MQM boycotted the 1993 elections. However, it participated in the provincial elections and won 27 seats in the Sindh Assembly. In 1994, the Suppression of Terrorist Activities Court sentenced Hussein to 27 years in prison. In response to this, the MQM launched major attacks against civil administrative institutions in the country, prompting a new "Operation Clean-Up" in July 1995. During the 'cleaning up', the PPP government, along with elite security and intelligence agencies, carried out fake police encounters, tortured MQM workers and their families,

and carried out extrajudicial killings.[35] Several commentators, even those not entirely sympathetic to the MQM, believe that the human rights violations and harassment to which Mohajirs and the MQM members were subjected further alienated them, driving many to extremism and to seek retribution.[36] Overall, however, the ruthless operations and killings weakened the MQM militias, leading to a decline in ethno-political violence in the late 1990s and early 2000s.[37]

In 1997, the MQM changed its name to "Muttahida" Quami Movement to appeal to a larger social base and distance itself from ethnic nationalism. However, it neither introduced any real change in the internal politics of the party nor allowed non-Mohajirs to become party ticket holders.[38] In 1999, the military under General Pervez Musharraf took control of the government, ousting Nawaz Sharif and declaring martial law.

The Musharraf Years: Post-9/11 MQM (2001–'08)

When General Pervez Musharraf came to power through a military coup, the MQM decided to end hostilities with the state and ally itself with the Musharraf dictatorship. In an interview in 2004, Altaf Hussein famously said that following 9/11, the only two choices for his party were to choose between 'mullahs' and Musharraf, and they chose "the liberal General instead of the religious fanatics."[39] Musharraf, a Mohajir himself, patronised the MQM as he needed local support for his non-elected regime. The party thus became an influential coalition partner with the Musharraf supported Pakistan Muslim League (Qaid), or PML(Q), in Sindh.

While Musharraf projected an aggressive liberal image, removing some draconian Zia-era laws and positioning Pakistan as a bulwark against radical Islamist rule, nothing could be further from the truth. The

military had done full-bore Islamism a favour by removing Sharif from power.[40] After the September 2001 attacks, under tremendous pressure from the US, General Musharraf promised to crack down on militant jihadi groups. This fundamentally affected politics in Karachi, as the MQM used Musharraf's policies to its advantage. It targeted Pashtuns in Karachi by manipulating the domestic environment, which had become hostile towards militants and terrorists. The best example of the MQM's support for Musharraf was the May 2007 killings in Karachi. When Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhary, who had spoken against Musharraf, visited Karachi, the MQM went on a rampage across the city, causing the deaths of over 30 people and injuring more than a hundred. Despite the heavy deployment of law enforcement, the Sindh police were helpless in controlling the situation.[41] The deposed chief justice was unable to exit the airport and returned to Islamabad the same day. When Musharraf gave a public speech in Rawalpindi later the same day, the general showed no remorse about what had transpired in Karachi, making it clear that he considered such steps necessary to protect his reign.[42]

Musharraf used his position to support his allies and raised the total number of National Assembly seats from 207 to 272, increasing the number of seats in all provincial assemblies. This allowed him to create 65 new constituencies by gerrymandering previous constituencies.[43] The MQM benefitted from this, despite the demographic changes the city had seen over the years. Further, the Sindh Local Government Ordinance (SLGO), introduced during the Musharraf military regime, also aided the MQM. Under the colonial era, the country's divisions were governed by commissioners appointed by a provincial government. The SLGO divided the country into smaller administrative districts and allowed for the position of an elected mayor (*nazim*) and the equivalent of a city council.[44] The ordinance transferred a large part of the resources of the provincial bureaucracy (which was dominated by the Sindhis, and

thus the PPP) to local representatives. It allowed power to be decentralised to empower ethnic communities in Sindh. In the case of Karachi, it strengthened the MQM greatly because of its demographic edge over other communities such as the Sindhi and the Baloch.[45] This later had a major impact on the maturation of practices of criminal brokering in the Karachi neighbourhood, which resisted the MQM.

Between 2005 and 2008, the MQM not only controlled municipal functions but also exercised de facto authority over state-owned land around the city, which formally came under the jurisdiction of the provincial government. At the same time, the party began to implement a shift in its public rhetoric. It sought international acceptance as a voice for liberal secularism, building upon its past struggles against Islamist parties. It also focused on urban issues and became a proponent of large-scale infrastructure projects, such as express roads and flyovers. However, it faced the rising threat of marginalisation in Karachi, as migrants from across the country and from rural areas of Sindh began to settle there. The 'megacity' image of the party came into conflict with the communities that began to live in irregular settlements in and outside the city.[46]

The party demonised its political opponents to advance its own political goals; in particular, it linked the Pashtuns with terrorism and fundamentalism.[47] Pashtuns, predominantly inhabiting the northwestern areas of the country, were labelled as fundamentalists because of their close geographical proximity to the Taliban and because a large number of the Taliban members happen to be Pashtuns. By exploiting the fear of jihad, the MQM targeted the hundreds of thousands of Pashtuns; displaced from their home, the latter settled in Karachi. The MQM leaders were further threatened by their arrival and the subsequent impact it could have on economic opportunities in the city. Therefore, the party presented the Pashtun migration as the

Taliban's "taking over" the city.[48] Ultimately, the MQM was unable to transition to non-ethnic politics, even when it enjoyed virtually unchallenged authority in the city. This provoked a backlash, paving the way for the PPP and the Awami National Party (ANP) to win back supporters in the poorer settlements populated by migrants.

Descent into Madness (2008–'18)

The end of the Musharraf regime in 2008 brought about a reversal of fortunes for the MQM. During the general election, the MQM won 16 out of 20 National Assembly seats from Karachi and managed to insert itself into the PPP coalition at the Centre and at the provincial level in Sindh. However, it still had to contend with the ANP (a part of the PPP coalition) emerging as an electoral force in the city. The ANP's traditional base was Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but it had made inroads in Karachi because of its rapidly increasing Pashtun migrant population. The PPP enjoyed a majority in the Sindh Assembly but chose to keep the MQM in its alliance for two reasons: a) the MQM's capacity for disruption in the province; b) to balance out the PML(Q), which in turn was part of the alliance to balance against the MQM. The MQM, already isolated in national politics because of its alliance with Musharraf, simply welcomed the opportunity of retaining some power.[49]

As is the case with politics in Pakistan, extreme bandwagoning by smaller parties around an ascending power broker eventually leads to the former reaching the top only to vacate their defensive positions and join the attacking side.[50] This has been the MQM's steady practice: while being a part of a coalition, their alliance with the PPP and ANP was unstable from the get-go. The MQM repeatedly attacked, blackmailed and protested the Asif Ali Zardari and Yusuf Gilani government, even as the PPP made efforts to appease the MQM to protect itself from being blackmailed by the PML(Q).

With the PPP in power, Sindhis dominated in Karachi, both in terms of violence and governance.[51] The PPP devised strategies to 'activate' the Lyari (a small town in Karachi) vote bank, which had since lost its relevance. Through a settlement with criminals such as Rahman Dakait, the PPP indulged in MQM-style politics, allowing Dakait a free rein in return for votes and 'street presence' for the PPP. Dakait became the head of the People's Aman Committee (PAC), founded in 2008, comprising the Baloch drug lords of Lyari.[52] The PAC's main aim was to wrestle turf away from the MQM and the ANP, serving as the PPP's enforcer while it was in power in Sindh from 2008 to 2013. Initially, the PPP and the PAC shared a patron–client relationship, with the latter receiving support from the former in exchange for votes. However, the PAC soon began to present itself as a political player.

The MQM is suspected to have used the criminal Arshad Pappu's group and the Kutchhi Rabita Committee (KRC) militants against the gangsters of the PAC, until they broke from the party in 2012. During this time of the PPP's rule, violence in Karachi hit a new high, with militant groups collecting protection money in its neighbourhoods. Lyari became a hub for drug smuggling, weapons trafficking, extortion, kidnapping and robbery. With strong political differences between the MQM and the PPP, as well as foot soldiers in the forms of criminals that terrorised the city, Karachi witnessed the emergence of hundreds of well-armed and well-organised criminal gangs.[53] Since most members of the PAC were ethnically Baloch, their increasing involvement in the city's political–criminal nexus added another dimension to Karachi's urban violence.

Eventually, the militancy in Karachi evolved beyond ethnic conflict to include sectarian and religious killings. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) established its base in the city, and an influx of internally displaced people migrated to Karachi, evicted from their homeland after

the army's military operations against them in the tribal areas of the northwest. This fuelled ethno-nationalism amongst the Mohajirs, the Sindhis and the Baloch all of whom had affiliated themselves with different political parties. Violence became an enforcement mechanism amongst political players, with each party having its go-to criminal organisation. Barriers emerged in different parts of Karachi, cordoning off neighbourhoods and creating no-go areas for civilians, which were controlled by militants and insurgent groups. Such groups used the city as their hideout and a cash cow, terrorising the local population with extortions and kidnappings to fund their activities. Political parties, in turn, grabbed this opportunity to make a point about how certain ethnic groups, which supported them, had been affected by the no-go areas, causing further law-and-order problems.[54]

In 2011, the Supreme Court took *suo moto* notice of the violence in the city. It held several hearings to investigate the causes and perpetrators and declared that the violence was not only an ethnic war but also a turf war between different political parties. The Supreme Court further criticised the politicisation of the police force in the province.[55] As an immediate solution, the paramilitary Rangers were empowered with special policing powers to conduct strategic operations and raids across the city, and arrest those suspected of involvement in violence. The political parties did little to resist the operation and abandoned the criminal networks they were supporting. This allowed the Rangers to eliminate all no-go areas in the city, as per the court order.[56] The director-general famously described the security situation in Karachi as "worse than North-Waziristan Agency," the tribal area where the Pakistan Taliban and other Afghan militants sought sanctuary.[57]

The 2013 elections, which saw the victory of Nawaz Sharif and the PML(Nawaz), marked a turning point in the MQM politics. The PML(N)

won 124 seats in the National Assembly and did not require the support of the MQM to form a government. Similarly, in Sindh, the PPP won a simple majority (65 seats) and formed a government at the provincial level without the MQM (which won 35 seats). The election also marked the emergence of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as the new political force in the country. The party received 18 percent of the popular vote, i.e. 24 directly elected National Assembly seats, and formed the government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. While the PTI could not defeat the MQM in Karachi, it polled a large number of votes from the heartland of the MQM, signifying a shift in the city's politics.[58] The PTI was able to cause a dent in the aura of invincibility that surrounds MQM. Out of the 20 seats in Karachi, the PTI secured one seat but was a runner up in 80 percent of the seats.[59]

With his political influence significantly reduced, Altaf Hussein was put under increasing political pressure. Over the years, Altaf has been accused of murder, money-laundering, hate speech and incitement of violence, amongst other offences. During the Musharraf regime, over 72 criminal cases against Hussein were dropped; many of these were now reopened. After the election, Imran Khan targeted Hussein and blamed him and his party workers for the killing of a senior leader of the PTI in Karachi in the weeks following the election. He accused Hussein of being directly responsible for the murder and criticised the UK government for not acting against the MQM chief in London.[60] The 2010 murder of senior MQM leader Imran Farooq in London also received renewed attention, with the investigating authorities questioning Hussein and his associates.[61]

Soon after the elections, the Sharif government sought domestic political consensus for action to be taken against criminal gangs and terrorist networks.[62] The army launched Zarb-e-Azb in 2014 to target groups such as the Pakistani Taliban and other foreign militant groups

operating in the country. The operation prompted the Pakistani Taliban's brutal attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in December 2014, killing a hundred student. The attack lent further steam to ongoing army operations in Karachi, with the establishment seeing this an opportunity to go after the MQM and the militant–criminal nexus in the city. In March 2015, paramilitary forces raided "Nine Zero," the MQM headquarters, recovering a large cache of weapons, allegedly stolen from NATO containers. This was followed by a series of raids of MQM offices across the city, and senior members of the party were taken into custody.

Disintegration

With Musharraf no longer in power, the military turned its back on the MQM. While the party once served the deep state's political objectives, it had outlived its usefulness and had become more of a liability. The Pakistan military's objective has always been to weaken political parties and have increased control on civilian and government institutions. This explains their historical tendency to oscillate in their support of different political actors.

The military operations and raids against the MQM further weakened the already damaged legitimacy of the party, forcing many senior leaders to abandon it. In March 2016, former major of Karachi and MQM member Mustafa Kemal accused Altaf Hussein of being an erratic bully with a drinking problem, disregarding the advice of senior party leaders, and taking money from Indian intelligence agencies. Subsequently, Kemal announced the formation of his party, the Pakistan Sarzameen Party (PSP).[63] Many saw Kemal's return to active politics as an 'establishment-sponsored' move aimed at further breaking apart the MQM. Soon after, a series of senior MQM leaders defected, many blackmailed and intimidated into announcing their intention of leaving the MQM and joining the PSP.

In August 2016, Altaf Hussein addressed his party workers protesting outside the Karachi Press Club against extrajudicial killings. Sitting in London, Hussein gave his now-infamous speech, criticising Pakistan.[64] Not only did he speak against the country but he also called it "a cancer for the entire world … the epicenter of terrorism for the entire world" and called for the downfall of the country. After his speech, MQM party workers attacked a media house that had been critical of the MQM, resulting in the death of one person as police clashed with the MQM mob. Hussein's speech was highly criticised, and he later issued a formal apology to the army chief.

However, Altaf's outburst was seen as an unacceptable attack by millions of Pakistanis, especially for those in uniform. The establishment responded by shutting down Nine Zero, sealing or demolishing MQM offices across the city. The MQM's second-rung leadership tried to distance itself from Hussein's comments, while others left the party, unable to justify the comments and seeking their own political glory. Senior leader Farooq Sattar—the 'good cop' to Altaf's 'bad cop'—first tried to dissociate the MQM from Altaf's comments but was later forced to sever ties with the party as a means of self-preservation. He founded the MQM (Pakistan), or MQM(P), to be distinguished from Altaf's MQM (London).

The Pakistani establishment's main goal at this point was to split the Mohajir vote. The Punjabi-dominated army was not comfortable with an ethnic party such as the MQM, alleged to have links with not only Western intelligence agencies but also India. They hoped that that Kamal's clout as ex-mayor and the MQM(P)'s influence at the local and grassroot level would deal a fatal blow to the MQM. Historically, the military has always been uncomfortable with the PPP's influence in Sindh, and it hoped that the formation of a powerful coalition between the PSP and MQM(P) would defeat the MQM and the PPP, allowing new

parties such as the PTI to emerge, which would owe their loyalty to the establishment. However, this was not the case. The MQM(P) split into two factions—PIB and Bahadurabad—due to internal squabbles over senate seats, deepening the wedge between the party leaders before the 2018 general election. Sattar, earlier wooed by the PSP, was now isolated, with many of his party members refusing to recognise his authority.[65]

Consequently, the 2018 general election was disastrous not only for the MQM but also for Mohajir politics. While Altaf Hussein had called for a boycott of the elections, voters in the Mohajir areas rejected his appeal and voted overwhelmingly for Imran Khan's PTI. The PTI bagged 14 out of the 21 seats in Karachi, winning the Mohajir vote and demolishing the PPP strongholds. The MQM was reduced to only four seats, compared to the 17 seats it had won in 2013.[66] Both Farooq Sattar and Mustafa Kamal lost the two constituencies from which they were contesting, handing the Mohajir vote over to the PTI, a party Hussein had once warned. Ultimately, the MQM was brought down by internal squabbles, lack of funds, organisational weakness, the surge in non-traditional voters, and a damage to their legitimacy.[67]

IV. WHO TRULY REPRESENTS THE MOHAJIRS?

The once politically powerful MQM of Altaf Hussein is now divided along ideological, political and personality lines. Broken up into various factions, the idea of a single united party for Mohajirs has virtually collapsed due to a series of organisational and ideological problems. For now, the movement can best be described as 'diasporic', since its leader has been in exile since the early 1990s, although he has been somewhat successful in steering the party from London, addressing rallies via video and telephone. However, currently, the MQM has little political strength and has lost most of its power over Karachi. The Pakistani

establishment continues to slap a series of treason and financial crime charges on Hussein, hoping that something will stick.

Meanwhile, Hussein's absence from the country and continuous hysterics has created an urgency amongst the senior leaders to redefine the MQM without him. This has been difficult, since all the different factions of the party claim to be the true representative of the Mohajirs' cause. The power struggle amongst Mohajir leaders, who were once on the same side, demonstrate not only Hussein's failure to build an indestructible idea of Mohajir unity but also the establishment's commitment to the 'divide and rule' approach, ensuring that they remain the true power-holders in Karachi.

The MQM also has a number of international branches that, ironically, focus on shedding light on human rights violations against the Mohajirs in Sindh.[68] Other international organisations run and funded by the Mohajirs are working to develop narratives that further the Mohajir cause abroad, organising protests and sit-ins.[69] One such US-based organisation recently released a map proposing the creation of "Greater Karachi," an autonomous region that would comprise urban Sindh and Karachi, with an independent parliament and elected chief executive.[70]

While such political developments are on the rise, the population of Mohajirs in Karachi is steadily declining. According to some studies, the Pashtuns in Karachi will outnumber Urdu-speaking Mohajirs in less than 30 years. While the MQM has tried to reposition itself as a national party, its identity remains forever entwined with the Mohajir community and is geographically limited to Karachi and some areas of urban Sindh, e.g. Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas and Sukkur. Political parties see the city as a feudal landholding, equating access to land and municipal resources with political power.[71] What this means for the

political mobilisation of the Mohajirs in the future will be determined by whether the different parties can work together to represent the community's interests.

Over the years, the MQM has been keen to expand the party's social base beyond the Mohajir community and to be seen as a national party. Altaf Hussein has awarded party tickets to some Pashtuns, Punjabis and Sindhis, to contest elections in Mohajir towns. The party has also established offices in Punjab and rural Sindh. While this does not automatically mean that the MQM's popularity is increasing, it does indicate that the party now acknowledges the limitations of ethnic politics and intends to contest elections as a national party, throughout Pakistan.[72]

It is too soon to tell whether the Mohajirs will vote as a block for the PTI or whether their vote has been permanently split between MQM factions and other national parties. Whichever way the Mohajirs vote, either as a unified vote bank or divided, as long as Urdu speakers feel a sense of alienation and deprivation, the Mohajir identity will persist.

V. CONCLUSION

The Muslims who chose to migrate to Pakistan after August 1947, did so out of fear of being targeted in post-independence India. Their struggle for identity already existed when they were in India and, unfortunately, continued for generations after they moved to Pakistan. The Mohajirs initially constituted a privileged, elite and educated class, but their standing amongst other ethnic groups in Pakistan diminished over the decades. The stirrings of a Mohajir consciousness began in the early 1970s, prompted by the government policies that negatively affected their education and employment opportunities in Sindh. Over the years, demographic changes, ethno-political conflicts, militant and sectarian

groups, and vested political interest groups coloured the Mohajirs' view of their place in Pakistani society. The MQM emerged as a party that claimed to represent Mohajir grievances but soon became a criminal enterprise, diluting the legitimacy of the Mohajir cause.

The Pakistani establishment has projected the situation in Karachi as a law-and-order crisis stemming from a power void. However, the political parties and state law-enforcement bodies have been at the forefront of violent and criminalised politics, supporting terrorists, militants and criminal groups at times of convenience to control civilian groups, institutions and movements.[73] Thus, the law-and-order situation is a direct result of the establishment's refusal to address the grievances of different ethnic groups in Pakistan, such as the Pashtuns, Balochs, Siraikis or Mohajirs.

The question remains: What is the place for the Mohajirs in Pakistan's current sociopolitical fabric? The answer lies where it always has, at the centre of Pakistani society. The Mohajirs remain a sizeable community—almost entirely urban and part of the working, middle class that is free from the influence of tribal chiefs and feudal elites.[74] Yet, they continue to struggle to define their identity. It is now up to the community to evaluate whether ethno-political groups such as the MQM are the best choice for them, given the party's extensive militarisation and fragmentation, or if they should put their trust in the mainstream parties that align with their cause, depending on the military establishment's preference at that time.

The nature of Mohajir mobilisation has always evolved—from a nationalist group to an ethno-nationalist party, and later to an ethno-militant political, social and economic identity. As the boundaries of what constitutes Mohajir identity continue to unfold, it remains to be seen whether the community will hold on to its *Mohajir* identity (as

descendants of migrants from India) or begin to identify as Pakistanis, assimilating into the nation-state. It is also too soon to tell whether the current political environment in the country will eventually give rise to an MQM 2.0, which might be more violent, demanding and challenging than Altaf's MQM. ORF

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26. Some of the points of the agreement refer to the protection of rights of the local population. This includes carrying out a census in 1991 based on the same criteria for the 1961 census including language and birth place of parents. This would help the Muhajir numbers in Sindh. Another point of disagreement was one of the points in the agreement referring to "those Pakistanis living abroad by choice or compulsion will have all privileges accorded to citizens of Pakistan." This was a reference to the MQM"s demand for the repatriation of the Bihari Muslims who were living in camps in Bangladesh and was a source of disagreement with the PPP.

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