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Minorities at Risk



Assessment for Mohajirs in Pakistan

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Pakistan Facts

Area:	803,943 sq. km.
Capital:	Islamabad
Total Population:	159,196,336,000 (source: CIA World Factbook, 2004, est.)

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Risk Assessment

Mohajirs are likely to continue their nonviolent protest strategies for the foreseeable future, especially so long as grievances remain neglected and the military remains a powerful influence in the Musharraf government. Even though there were no acts of violent rebellion from 2001 to 2003, Mohajirs, as represented by MQM activists, are unlikely to completely abandon sporadic violence in the near future, although their concentration in urban areas with a high concentration of police somewhat militates against escalation of violence beyond a certain point. Mohajirs are highly mobilized, despite factionalization, in the Sindhi province's urban center of Karachi. Both the Bhutto (PPP) and the Sharif (PML) governments targeted Mohajir activists and political organizations for repression, and the current Musharraf (PML) government has continued to do the same. The Mohajirs have a strong sense of political and economic grievance, and their history demonstrates their unwillingness to be ignored. Karachi and the well being of Mohajirs are intrinsically related. Until the Pakistani government can alleviate the social, economic and political problems plaguing its major city, Mohajir grievances cannot be addressed.

Yet, perhaps the greatest risk to Mohajir well-being is continued in-fighting among the different factions of MQM (INTRACON01-02 = 1). Intracommunal violence has arguably cost more Mohajir lives than Mohajir-government or Mohajir-Sindhi clashes. While prior to 2001 inter-communal fighting between Mohajirs and Sindhis was a significant problem, these two ethnic groups have since been able to build a political alliance, reducing tension. Overall, though, the lasting basis for mutual accommodation with the government, with other ethnic groups, or between Mohajir factions, lies in developing the country's capacity to satisfy the claims and counterclaims of deprivation, both political and socio-economic. Pakistan's continued democratization and economic growth seems to be the only possible long-term answers.

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Analytic Summary

Mohajirs, which means literally "refugee," are the Urdu-speaking Muslims who fled India after the 1947 partition of the sub-continent and their descendents. Although both Urdu and English are official languages, English is the lingua franca of most of the Pakistani elite and government ministries, which are dominated by the Punjab majority (who also speak Punjabi), so language does culturally divide Mohajirs and the Punjabis (CULDIFX2 = 2). Concentrated in the urban

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areas of Sindh province (GROUPCON = 1), they constitute two-thirds of the population of Karachi, Pakistan's commercial center. Mohajirs are both Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. They are ethnically distinct from the Punjab majority (CULDIFX1 = 2). However, most Mohajirs' primary identity is not religious but revolves around their "outsider" status. Competition with native Sindhis has defined Mohajirs' political and economic situation in Pakistan more than any other factor. Sindhis, who have become a minority in their own province, have resented Mohajir political and economic influence in the urban centers (ECDIS01-03 = 0). Furthermore, the primary Mohajir political organization was reportedly organized by the Punjabi-supported Zia government to counter the power of the Sindhi Pakistan People's Party. At the same time, Mohajirs have claimed that they are not represented proportionately to their population or to their financial (tax) contributions (POLDIS01-03 = 3). The competition between Mohajirs and Sindhis has often escalated to violence, especially in Karachi. Recently, however, these two groups have formed an alliance that focuses discontent on the Punjab-dominated government rather than on each other, though there is no guarantee that this alliance will last.

Mohajirs are mainly represented by the Muttiheda Qaumi Movement (MQM, originally the Mohajir Qaumi Movement) and its various factions. Factionalization among Mohajir groups is severe (ORGCOH = 7), with each party claiming its own territory in Karachi. Violence between MQM factions (FACTN = 1) often exceeds violence between Mohajirs and the government or Mohajirs and other ethnic groups. Despite political factionalization, Mohajirs share a relatively strong group identity (COHESX9 = 5). The MQM and its factions are also generally held responsible for the extreme levels of violence in Karachi (COMCO98X = 5), although MQM routinely denies charges of terrorism. Police frequently arrested Mohajir leaders and members (REPO201-03 = 1) and regularly harassed activists at MQM functions (POLIC401-03 = 2). Throughout 2001 and 2003, there were also reports of torture, extra-judicial killings, and limited force used against protesters. In 2003, the government shut down Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM-H) headquarters Bait-ul-Hamza, setting off protests. Mohajir protests have focused on the government repression of Mohajir activists, unemployment, more equitable distribution of funds, and the Punjab military government.

The MQM, since it first declared itself as a political party in 1986 (it was founded as a student organization in 1978; originally it was called the Mohajir Quami Movement but was formally transformed into Muttahida Quami Movement in 1997, led by its founder and leader Mr Altaf Hussain—sometimes it is referred to as MQM-A), has become increasingly adept at playing the political game. Initially preferring to forge alliances with the non-Sindhi Pakistan Muslim League (the party of Nawaz Sharif and Musharraf), the MQM has branched out to form alliances with the Sindh nationalist Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz party and Baluch and Pashtun nationalist parties. In 1998, Mohajir, Baluch, Pashtun and Sindh parties allied to form the Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement (PONM), which seeks to challenge Punjab hegemony in Pakistan's political life. Another group that represents Mohajirs, Sindhis, and Baluchis is the Grand Democratic Alliance. Possibly as a result of these new alliances, violence in Karachi hit a low in 2000 after being in decline for several years. However, these alliances remain fragile, and nothing is to prevent MQM political maneuvering. Additionally, the MQM and its rival faction, MQM-H (splintered off in 1992) still engage in violent combat over territory and legitimacy.

Currently, Mohajir discontent is focused on the return of self-rule for the Sindh province. A major player in the provincial assembly since local elections were first held in 1988, the MQM lost political leverage when the Sharif government dismissed the provincial legislature and imposed direct rule in 1998. They have since regained some of that leverage since provincial, National Assembly, and Senate elections have been reinstated since 2001, though many ethnic groups in Pakistan and the international community regard the elections as deeply flawed. Mohajirs also lobby for increased resources to be devoted to Sindh urban centers. Karachi has a population of more than 12 million and population growth that is double the rest of the country. The city's population has rapidly grown to outstrip any and all available resources and infrastructure. Mohajirs have consistently protested since the 1980s for increased access to political and economic resources (PROT80X = 2) until peaking in 1995 (PROT98 = 3). They have also resorted to armed struggle (REB90 = 2, REB95 = 5). One of their political tactics of choice is the strike (which they have in the past enforced with snipers). The strikes often result in property damage and numerous injuries and deaths of MQM activists, civilians and police. Some observers estimate that each strike in Karachi costs millions of dollars a day. The Mohajirs primarily wage their political campaign alone, without support from transnational sources.

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