

# The enclavisation paradox: Everyday insecurity and the perpetuation of violence in Karachi

**LSE** [blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2015/09/16/the-enclavisation-paradox-everyday-insecurity-and-the-perpetuation-of-violence-in-karachi/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2015/09/16/the-enclavisation-paradox-everyday-insecurity-and-the-perpetuation-of-violence-in-karachi/)

2015-9-16

*Karachi is widely regarded as one of the most dangerous cities in the world. Its residents are frequent victims of crime, terrorism, and other forms of urban violence. In her recent article titled 'Enclaves, Insecurity, and Violence in Karachi', **Sobia Ahmad Kaker** uncovers the paradox of Karachi's enclavisation, where insecurity and violence motivates the creation of defensive enclaves but these in turn perpetuate the violence and reinforce the sense of insecurity amongst urban residents.*



Karachi, the Pakistani megacity of approximately 20 million people is famously described in international news media as 'one of the most dangerous places in the world'. Although Karachiites are not strangers to urban violence, over the past decade, the scale and intensity of violence has reached unprecedented levels. Present-day violence is an outcome of changing dynamics of urban politics associated with in-migration following natural disasters and regional conflict, and from Pakistan's alliance with US and NATO forces in the 'War on Terror'.

Since 2001, an influx of Pashtun migrants from the war-torn Afghan-Pakistan border has complicated the balance of power between ethnically orientated rival political groups vying for power over rights to the city. In addition to this, Taliban fighters have also entered the city, swelling the ranks of existing violent actors such as ethno-political militants and other criminal groups. In these circumstances, urban violence has reached unprecedented levels. Socio-political violence has intensified due to contests of power between dominant ethno-political groups, while other forms of violence related to crime, structural, and institutional violence are also becoming increasingly common. Moreover, present-day Karachi has become a proxy-battleground from where Taliban groups target domestic and foreign targets across the city. Between 2007 and 2012, 1360 people were killed in terrorist attacks and more than 2000 were injured across Karachi.

This escalation of urban violence has struck fear in the hearts of urban residents, and has had a tangible effect on the physical environment in Karachi. In the absence of effective policing and adequate security provision by government officials, residents are bunkering down in privately securitised and fortified enclaves in order to ensure personal safety and security. Similarly to what is found in cities elsewhere, Karachi's enclaves are usually privately governed spaces that attempt to provide safety, exclusivity and order to residents living in an environment of fear. In such spaces, public access is restricted through various physical or social forms of securitisation, while those inside are protected from the insecure city outside by private security guards or community police.



Armed security guard outside gated house in Karachi. Image credit: flickr/ [Benny Lin](#) CC BY-NC 2.0

However, in her recent article *Enclaves, insecurity and violence in Karachi*, Kaker argues that such enclaves are not only socio-material responses to urban insecurity and violence, but are in fact responsible for further perpetuating urban insecurity and violence. The argument is supported by extensive qualitative field research that focusses on the politics of everyday life within enclaved spaces in relation to the city 'outside'. Kaker presents detailed empirical evidence from two residential enclaves of Karachi: Clifton Block 7, an upper middle class gated community; and Sultanabad, a low income gated community in a slum settlement. In a city where ethnicity, language, religious beliefs and political affiliation are all potentially volatile markers of identity, the evidence suggests that enclavisation adds another dimension to identity construction.

Kaker argues that enclaves might be physically bounded or open: for example, the public streets leading to Clifton Block 7 are enclosed so as to restrict circulation of non-residents. In contrast, Sultanabad is not walled and gated but the few wide inroads from the main road don't fully penetrate or cross through the settlement, thus restricting entrants who don't have business within. Both therefore become inward-looking, privately governed spaces which aim to restrict 'unwanted' elements. Such enclaves are organised in the face of extreme vulnerability and demonstrate high social control, but by creating safe havens in cities where crime and fear of crime is extremely high, enclaves result in shrinking public space, stifling democratic interaction and heightening contests over space. As a result, enclavisation perpetuates violence that is manifested by the politics of control as well as repressive state policies.

The latter is especially true since there is an increased interest by the state authorities in controlling 'ungoverned spaces', especially following the War on Terror, and various low-income informal settlements around Karachi have come under scrutiny. Local and international news articles, academic journals and policy papers label such spaces as 'breeding grounds' for militant political activism, and as potential hiding places for Al Qaeda operatives. Sultanabad, a densely populated inner city squatter settlement situated within Karachi's security red zone, is seen as such a community with parts that have been reported as no-go areas controlled by TTP.

Complementing this desire to control, international development agencies also progressively foreground security as a prerogative that showcases 'good governance'. Such reports are taken up by local policy makers and judiciary to campaign for paramilitary operations in the city's informal settlements, which are seen as sources of global and urban security threats. This provides impetus for local governments to use the trope of security in order to invoke a special kind of urban governance where repression and states of exception are normalised, or selectively

encouraged. For example, lacking capacity themselves, municipal authorities as well as police departments in Karachi encourage middle class urban residents to organise private security themselves at the neighbourhood level. In such spaces, enclosures, fortifications and restrictions on circulation are tacitly facilitated by city authorities in order to provide an effective solution for tackling the security situation. The daily organisation and management of enclaved spaces are usually handled by local or neighbourhood organisations, which come to wield considerable power within particular communities. This has been the case in Clifton Block 7, where the residents association has successfully bargained with the city administration on issues of collective security and premium municipal service delivery. This has resulted in, for example, permission was to enclose the public streets leading to Block 7 so as to restrict circulation of non-residents.

However, while affluent areas are assisted, similar enclavisation in low-income areas is viewed negatively. In the politically charged low income settlements, enclavisation is viewed by state authorities as a strengthening of non-state actors and mafia groups, and hence a threat to urban security. Processes of enclavisation in these areas rest on community cohesion and local political organisation. In low-income settlements, such organisation is often the first step to political bargaining. This has been the case in Sultanabad, which has fragmented into loosely organised ethnic clusters that seek to protect themselves from threats and violence in the wider community through further enclavisation. Within these areas matters of community life are overseen by a voluntary association, presided over by an Imam respected for his prowess over religious and legal issues.

These emergent community leaders play a significant role in influencing residents' votes. Residents are advised by the community elder to collectively vote for the political patron that promises the best neighbourhood development offer. In such a scenario, vote politics and the politics of patronage tie together with the political mobilisation that spins off from enclavisation. This situation is perceived as especially troublesome by state actors because urban conflict and violence in Karachi is inextricably linked to a tussle over power by various political parties eyeing to gain a majority vote in the different constituencies of the city. This conflict and the instability it causes often becomes a negotiation point between differing political parties at different levels of control.

The cases of Clifton Block 7 and Sultanabad showcase different types of enclaves, each with a distinct environment, context and urban form. In Block 7, enclavisation embodied a rejection of public spaces and public services, which were deemed as insecure, disorderly and chaotic. On the other hand, in Sultanabad enclaves emerged as exceptional spaces towards which the state felt no obligation. Yet, they also showed commonalities. In both cases social organisation and collective action became the first step to privatisation of space. Within this privatised space, public spirit was stoked. Political engagement and social networks were invoked to negotiate everyday life.

The fieldwork shows that the state has its own selective biases towards enclavisation but the fact that all such enclaves in Karachi create conditions of the possibility of hostility towards the state is largely ignored by the city's government. State representatives do not consider how the relational nature of enclavisation makes it impossible to separate the violent consequences of exclusive communities from the violence and insecurity that spurred the process in the first place. It can be assumed therefore that this kind of urban form generates a continuum of violence. Enclaves emerge as a tactic to deal with insecurity, while at the same time causing contests in space, which result in perpetuating violence. In this way, urban space itself is agential in generating conflict and violence in the city.

*This is an Editor's summary of Enclaves, insecurity and violence in Karachi, which was published in 2014 in South Asia History and Culture, 5:1, 93-107. Access the full article [here](#).*

*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the South Asia @ LSE blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.*

## **About the Author**

*Sobia Ahmad Kaker is a researcher at LSE Cities, working on the Urban Uncertainty project. She has recently completed her PhD titled 'Enclaves as Process: Space, Security, and Violence in Karachi' from Newcastle University. Her PhD develops a nuanced analysis of enclaves as dynamic urban spaces that operate with complex urban systems to re-produce inequalities, marginality, and disjunctive forms of citizenship in ways that intensify patterns of violence and victimisation in the city. Sobia is also currently Visiting Research Fellow at the Center for Research and Security Studies in Islamabad, Pakistan. Her research interests include urbanisation, urban socio-spatial relations, urban politics, governance, and conflict.*



- Copyright © 2016 London School of Economics