SPECIAL REPORT

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Exposure to Violence and Voting in Karachi, Pakistan

By Mashail Malik and Niloufer Siddiqui

A supporter of Imran Khan, whose Tehreek-e-Insaaf party ultimately won a plurality of legislative seats, wears a mask with Khan's face during a campaign rally. (Photo by Akhtar Soomro/Reuters)

Contents

Summary

- After a relatively peaceful start, the 2018 general elections in Pakistan were marred by violence, including a suicide attack in Balochistan Province that killed 149 people.

- Karachi, normally a site of political violence, saw relative levels of calm leading up to the elections, partly because of an ongoing government paramilitary operation against criminal and terrorist actors. However, the operation also weakened and splintered the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, one of Pakistan's major political parties; as a result, it was unable to campaign effectively and fared poorly.

- A survey conducted in Karachi just before the elections showed that exposure to violence had a significant impact on political behavior and views. The survey found that individuals exposed to violence are less likely to trust that elections would be free and fair, and more likely to expect and fear electoral violence. The impact of violence on political behavior was greater for respondents exposed to violence perpetrated by political or state elements, and such individuals are less likely to turn out to vote.

- The survey also found very low baseline levels of trust between ethnic communities in Karachi. Exposure to violence is correlated with higher levels of intolerance, a troubling finding in violent, multiethnic contexts such as Karachi (and in Pakistan more broadly).

- Narratives that framed Karachi's history of violence in distinct ways had minimal effect on decreasing prejudice, indicating that intergroup trust may be difficult to alter in the short term. It may be more critical to change the larger structural conditions that create intolerance in general and instigate violent activity in particular.

SPECIAL REPORT

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

ABOUT THE REPORT

Since at least the 1980s, politics in the megacity of Karachi, Pakistan, have been marred by violence between various ethnic groups, each represented by distinct political parties. This report, based on a household survey of more than 1,800 residents of Karachi conducted during the run-up to Pakistan's July 2018 elections, assesses the relationship between exposure to violence and political attitudes and behavior. The research was supported by USIP's Asia Center.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Army soldiers sit in the back of a pickup truck outside a distribution point for election materials the day before the July 2018 elections. (Photo by Akhtar Soomro/Reuters)

Introduction

The 2018 general elections in Pakistan marked the second time in the country's history that power transferred peacefully from one civilian government to another after a full term in office. This was a momentous event for a polity that had long oscillated between military and civilian rule. The elections also brought to power for the first time the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), a political party led by cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan. PTI's victory is notable, considering that democratic governance in Pakistan's political center historically has fluctuated between the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Many observers viewed these parties' defeat, and the ascent of a party that had not existed before 1996, as a positive indicator of the ability of voters to hold politicians—even firmly entrenched ones—accountable.[1]

However, allegations of pre-poll and post-poll rigging dampened the enthusiasm surrounding Pakistan's democratic transition and its prospects for democratic consolidation.[2] Violence and intimidation also marred the elections. Although the initial run-up to the elections was relatively peaceful—especially compared with the deadly elections of 2013, which saw 148 distinct attacks between January and May—the two weeks immediately before the 2018 elections proved dangerous for both campaigners and voters.[3] The elections also provided a platform for certain political parties to incite violence, particularly against Pakistan's minority sects.

Pakistan is one of many countries where political participation is not entirely free from "the shadow of the gun."[4] Karachi in particular has a long, complex history of political violence. Since at

least the 1980s, politics in this megacity have been marred by violence between various ethnic groups, each represented by distinct political parties. In 2011, more than 2,300 people were killed in ethnic violence in Karachi, with three hundred killed in July of that year alone.[5] Political violence has involved myriad

actors, ranging from more mainstream political parties such as the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), the Awami National Party (ANP), and the PPP, to parties affiliated with banned sectarian groups as well as overtly militant actors, such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The 2018 elections also saw the unexpected rise of a new extremist political actor, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), which won two Sindh Assembly seats from Karachi.

The particular context of political violence in Karachi raises a number of questions relevant to policymakers and scholars alike. In particular, in what ways does exposure to such violence affect political behavior, including a person's willingness to vote and his or her faith in the democratic process? What impact does electoral campaigning that draws on a history of violent conflict have on relations between various identity groups in society? Moreover, how can policymakers mitigate any negative effects of such campaigning on intergroup relations? Answers to these questions are critical to assessing the various electoral options available to political parties and, in turn, ascertaining the health of a country's democracy. For a country that has had only short-lived experiences with democracy, and where the military continues to hold considerable influence and popular support, it is all the more critical to study how exposure to violence affects support for democratic practices.

METHODOLOGY

This report uses results from a representative household survey conducted in Karachi during the four weeks before the 2018 elections (June 28 to July 24) to address these important questions. First, the survey assessed the relationship between exposure to violence and political attitudes and behavior. Are individuals who have personally experienced violence or the threat of violence different from those who have not? And does the type of violence experienced affect whether a victim intends to vote? The survey, conducted in Urdu, was carried out with assistance from the Pakistan Institute of Public Opinion, an affiliate of Gallup International in Pakistan, and was administered to 1,805 respondents. Men and women were interviewed by separate teams of male and female enumerators, respectively, who were trained by the authors.[6]

Additionally, a survey experiment was conducted to test an intervention to reduce prejudice in the face of violence and divisive campaigning by ethnic political parties. Research has shown that ethnic violence can have the effect of "hardening" the social and economic boundaries between ethnic groups, and ethnicity-based political appeals can similarly increase intergroup hostility.[7] This issue is of significant policy relevance because campaigning along identity lines is not unusual in Pakistan, and 2018 was no exception.

Violence and Intimidation during the 2018 Elections

The weeks leading up to the July 25, 2018, elections were marred by controversy. The military appears to have led a concerted campaign against the incumbent PML-N, effectively disrupting the playing field for it and other competing political parties.[8] A year before the elections, the Supreme Court had removed PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif from office on the grounds of corruption, and months later it ruled that Sharif could no longer be the head of a political party. Sharif and his daughter were arrested just two weeks before the election. At least three other PML-N candidates were also disqualified from running days before the elections took place. In addition to the charges of corruption directed against PML-N officials, there were credible allegations of state security officials pressuring former PML-N members to either switch parties or stand as independents.[9] The distribution of certain newspapers, specifically the English-language daily *Dawn*, was disrupted, and journalists were reportedly pressured to frame their coverage of the elections in certain ways.[10]

The Karachi-based MQM was also severely disadvantaged as a result of interventions by the military. In 2013, the government had launched a paramilitary Rangers operation in a bid to "clean up" Karachi by ridding it of criminal and violent elements. After a particularly incendiary speech by the MQM leader-in-exile, Altaf Hussain, in August 2016, the campaign against the party intensified. The MQM's party headquarters were ransacked and senior party leaders were taken into custody. Normally a well-organized political party with offices at the neighborhood level and strong ties with constituents, the MQM was forced to operate out of the home of one of its leaders. It splintered into factions, and its success in the elections was all but guaranteed to be limited.

In addition to intervention and intimidation, the pre-election period saw instances of violence. On July 10, 2018, ANP leader Haroon Bilour was killed in a suicide bombing during a party meeting in Peshawar. A convoy of the religious political party Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal was also targeted, resulting in four deaths. The western province of Balochistan faced the brunt of the violence. On July 13, a suicide bomber attacked a Balochistan Awami Party rally, killing 149 people and injuring 186 others. Among those killed was electoral candidate Siraj Raisani, who was the brother of a former chief minister of Balochistan.

The day of the elections saw a number of smaller-scale violent incidents. Allegations that a PTI candidate for provincial assembly had assaulted police officers were investigated.[11] Similarly, police in Bannu district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) registered a first information report—a written document prepared by police officials when they receive a complaint about any criminal offense—against a former KP chief minister for forcibly entering a women's polling station.[12] Party members and supporters were also injured in local-level brawls throughout the country. Election day also saw one large-scale attack: a suicide attack that killed twenty-nine people in Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan.

As deplorable as these instances of violence were, the many instances of *incitement* to violence seen during the run-up to the elections also worried Pakistan scholars, observers, and citizens alike. Perhaps most significant was the sudden rise of the TLP. The party's origins were rooted in violence,

having been formed in large part to oppose the execution of Mumtaz Qadri, who had been sentenced to death for assassinating the governor of Punjab Province in 2011 for defending the rights of a woman accused of blasphemy.[13] The TLP has not shied away from violent rhetoric. According to an Al Jazeera report, the party's "election posters often carry images of those who have killed in the name of the prophet's honour." At a rally in Lahore, Pakistan's largest city after Karachi, party supporters sang "hang them, hang them" to the tune of an election song.[14] A TLP member was also found guilty of the attempted assassination of a federal minister.

Other political parties arose in the place of banned predecessors. The Milli Muslim League, thought to be the political front of the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba, was formed in August 2017 and contested the elections. The elections also provided political space for anti-Shia, sectarian actors such as Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat, which is thought to be the political front of the militant Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. The organization's leader, Maulana Ludhianvi, was removed from a terrorist list just weeks before the elections.[15]

An Overview of Violence in Karachi

Karachi is a rich environment in which to study the relationship between violence and political behavior because its elections—and, perhaps more importantly, the periods in between elections—have historically been marred by considerable violence. Furthermore, election-related violence in Karachi is multidimensional, with many actors—whose motives are often difficult to disentangle—engaged in perpetrating it.

The primary contributors to Karachi's violence have been political parties.[16] A 2011 article in *The Economist* observed that

> ethnic warfare in Pakistan's most populous city has reached such a level that Karachi's ambulance service now has to send out a driver matching the racial make-up of the destination district to pick up the victims of gang attacks. Otherwise, the district's gunmen will not let the ambulance through. . . . As for the political parties, they seem to be able to turn the violence off and on as it suits them. This suggests that these are not mere criminals draping themselves in the party flag, but rather integral parts of the parties' political machines.[17]

Indeed, the previously most dominant party in Karachi, the Muhajir-centric MQM, is widely believed to have had a militant wing that targeted opposition parties and supporters, intimidated voters, and engaged in extortion (*bhatta*) to fill the party's coffers. Similarly, other parties have engaged in violence directly or outsourced violence to ethnic militias or gangs. For example, the Sindhi- and Baloch-centric PPP has long had a mutually beneficial, on-again off-again relationship with criminal gangs, most notably the notorious People's Aman Committee, in the city's Lyari neighborhood.[18]

Political violence carried out by the aforementioned parties has ethnic overtones, often inciting Karachi's Pashtun, Muhajir, Baloch, and Sindhi communities to mobilize against one another. The riots of May 12, 2007, which left at least forty dead and over a hundred people injured, are a case in point.[19] The violence was spurred by a political battle between the MQM, backed by General Pervez Musharraf, and the opposition alliance of the PPP and ANP. The parties were contesting the arrival of then Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhary, who had recently been

suspended by General Musharraf and, in the aftermath of his deposition, become the face of the opposition to military rule. The ANP used the memory of the riots to successfully campaign in 2008 for an ethnically Pashtun party, one that would protect Pashtun inter-

ests and prevent them from being victimized by their opponents. Indeed, the violence was characterized in ethnic terms—as a Muhajir-Pashtun conflict.[20] Such interpretations drew on a long history of clashes between Muhajirs and Pashtuns, including deadly ethnic riots that took place between the two communities as early as 1985 and 1986.

The five-year period that followed the 2007 riots was particularly bloody, with all major political parties in Karachi (MQM, PPP, and ANP) engaging in violence against one another's ethnic constitu-encies.[21] More than seven thousand people were killed in Karachi during this period alone.[22] Many interview respondents reported fearing for their lives during this time, and specifically indicated that they did not dare venture into non-coethnic areas for fear of becoming the victim of a target killing.[23] Some Pashtun respondents even recounted incidents of being mistaken for Muhajirs and being released only after they proved their coethnicity by speaking Pashto with their harassers. As in the vignette from *The Economist*, this violence was ostensibly organized along ethnic lines.

Yet it would also be incorrect to focus only on the ethnic face of this violence, or to divorce the violence from economic or political considerations. On the political front, ethnic political parties often attempt to use violence to further entrench voting patterns along identity lines, as they did in May 2007. On the economic front, these political parties are engaged in "turf wars" throughout the city, with extortion as a main driver of revenue. In the absence of strong state institutions and the existence of large informal settlements, an alternative illegal market for service provision has emerged.[24] In this environment, the provision of basic services such as water and housing is a profitable venture, which has led to the creation of politically linked criminal syndicates popularly known as the "tanker mafia" and the "land mafia."[25] And, as in other major urban centers in the developing world, drug trafficking and violent street crime are also major issues, with journalistic reports often claiming that few households in the city are unaffected by criminal activities.[26]

Furthermore, Karachi's violence landscape extends beyond political parties and criminal gangs. Nonelectoral terrorist groups such as the TTP have carried out militant attacks, and until recently they have also controlled large swathes of territory in the city. Such places were known openly as "no-go areas," where even police and security officials do not venture.[27] Apart from the TTP, Karachi has also been home to branches of other militant religious and sectarian outfits, including Jundullah and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.[28] These militant groups have engaged in bombings, targeted security and military personnel, and carried out criminal activities such as robberies and kidnappings.

Finally, any discussion of violence in Karachi cannot neglect the role of state security forces, including the Rangers and the police. The early 1990s saw the first comprehensive state paramil-itary operation against violent criminal and political elements in Karachi. This operation tempo-rarily degraded the operational capacity of the MQM's militant wing, but the Rangers' extremely heavy-handed methods resulted in the arrests and harassment of young Muhajir men who were un-connected to militancy.[29] To this day, many residents of lower-middle-class Muhajir neighborhoods

that experienced the brunt of this state violence believe it was motivated by ethnic—rather than purely security—considerations.[30] The ethnic composition of the Rangers, a force dominated by Punjabis, is an additional factor that supports such an interpretation. The ongoing Rangers operation, which began in 2013, is discriminate in comparison with its predecessor, but accusations of human rights abuses are common.[31] The Karachi police similarly has been accused of excesses in its actions: some police officers have engaged in extrajudicial killings (or staged "encounters") of suspected criminals and terrorists. The January 2018 killing of a young aspiring model of Pashtun ethnicity by the Karachi police catapulted the issue into the public eye, highlighting the discretion exercised by officers in the handling of (supposed) security matters.[32]

As the above discussion indicates, the history of violence in Karachi has various chapters and many different protagonists: political parties, terrorist groups, criminal gangs, and state security arms. Often these forces will work in tandem; for example, some political parties have had links to the roughly two hundred organized criminal syndicates that operated in Karachi before the current operation began.[33] For this reason, it can be difficult to accurately characterize individual incidents of violence as "sectarian," "ethnic," "political," or "criminal." Indeed, it is a key feature of the city's politics that violent incidents have multiple interpretations that spill over. One example is the December 2009 bombing of a religious Shiite procession commemorating the holy day of Ashura. Although the bombing ostensibly was a sectarian attack, some speculate that it was carried out by the MQM—but there is no way of knowing this for certain, since investigations into the attack have not been pursued and no group has been confirmed as the perpetrator.[34]

In sum, many of Karachi's residents have suffered violence or the threat of violence by parties, criminal gangs, terrorist groups, and state and military institutions. The extent of crime and violence has dropped substantially since 2013, but policymakers nevertheless need to study the impact of these defining events, and seek to limit their negative effects.

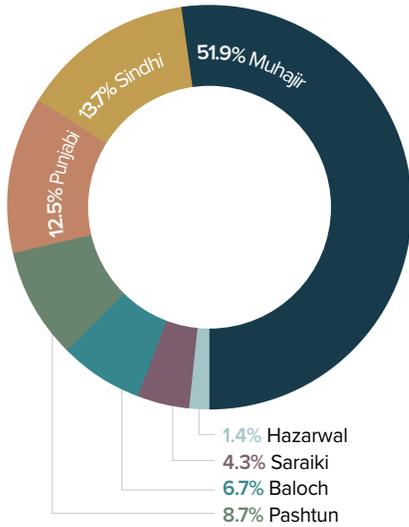# Exposure to Violence and Political Behavior

Does exposure to violence affect how people view the electoral process and, subsequently, their voting behavior? Existing research from diverse contexts yields contradictory results. One could expect that exposure to violence causes individuals to opt out of the political process. Indeed, survey data in Pakistan collected by Niloufer Siddiqui in 2015 found that individuals who had previously experienced victimization, had a family member who had been victimized, or had witnessed victimization were, all else being equal, less likely to vote.[35] In contrast, other studies have shown that those affected by political violence are *more* likely to participate in politics, but that they also are more likely to identify strongly with their ethnic group.[36] If this is the case, then victims of violence may be more likely to vote but may engage primarily in ethnic voting.

The survey data collected for this report help examine these relationships in Karachi, a multi-ethnic environment where violence by both state and nonstate actors has been commonplace—but also where systematic data collection on this topic is challenging and therefore rare.
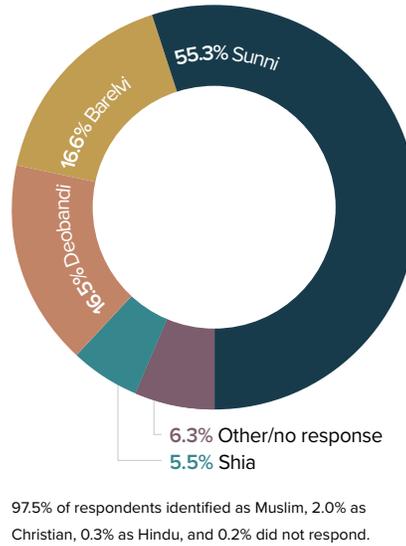
FIGURE 1. DEMOGRAPHICS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The data are from a representative household survey of 1,805 people in Karachi during the four weeks before Pakistan's 2018 elections.
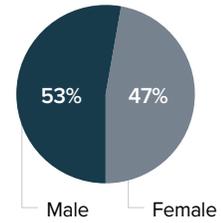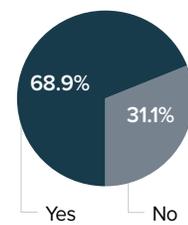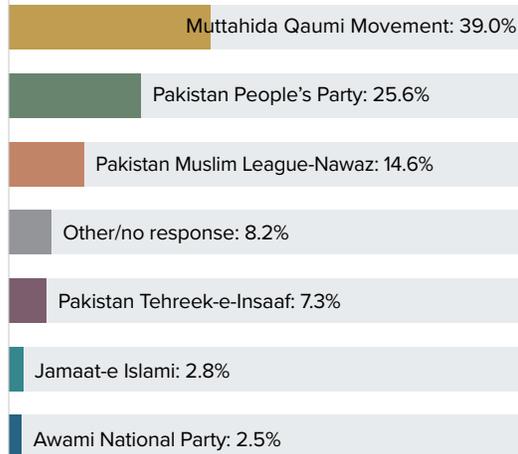
Ethnicity

- 51.9% Muhajir
- 13.7% Sindhi
- 12.5% Punjabi
- 8.7% Pashtun
- 6.7% Baloch
- 4.3% Saraiki
- 1.4% Hazarwal

Branch/Sect of Islam

- 55.3% Sunni
- 16.6% Barelvi
- 16.5% Deobandi
- 6.3% Other/no response
- 5.5% Shia

97.5% of respondents identified as Muslim, 2.0% as Christian, 0.3% as Hindu, and 0.2% did not respond.

Gender

- 53% Male
- 47% Female

Born in Karachi?

- 68.9% Yes
- 31.1% No

Party Preferences

Only 1,164 (64%) of the 1,805 respondents said they voted in the 2013 elections.

- Muttahida Qaumi Movement: 39.0%
- Pakistan People's Party: 25.6%
- Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz: 14.6%
- Other/no response: 8.2%
- Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf: 7.3%
- Jamaat-e Islami: 2.8%
- Awami National Party: 2.5%

By contrast, 1,340 (74%) of the respondents said they definitely planned to vote in the 2018 elections.

- Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf: 23.6%
- Pakistan People's Party: 22.8%
- Muttahida Qaumi Movement: 21.1%
- Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz: 12.1%
- Other/undecided/no response: 10.2%
- Pak Sarzameen Party: 5.4%
- Jamaat-e Islami: 2.5%
- Awami National Party: 2.2%
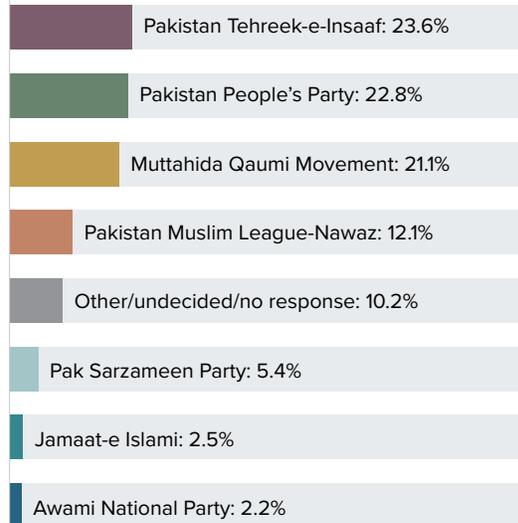
Exposure to Violence or Threat of Violence

Type of Exposure	Exposed	Not Exposed	Unknown/No Response
Personally Victimized	19%	78%	3%
Family Victimized	19%	74%	7%
Witnessed Victimization	20%	73%	7%

FIGURE 2. LAW ENFORCEMENT PRESENCE AT POLLING STATIONS

To what extent would the presence of Rangers security personnel at your polling station make you feel more secure?
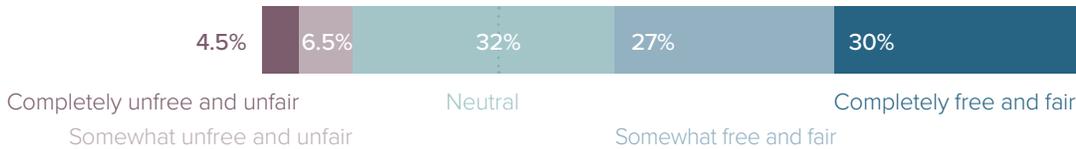
2%	4%	14%	22%	58%

Very Insecure — Neither Insecure nor Secure — Very Secure
Somewhat Insecure — Somewhat Secure
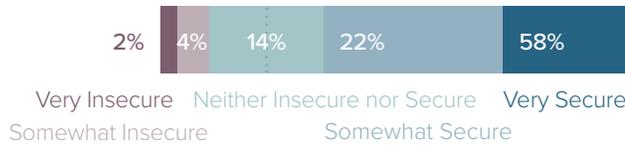
80% of respondents felt the presence of Rangers would ensure their safety.

To what extent would the presence of police security personnel at your polling station make you feel more secure?

26%	13%	26%	20%	15%

Very Insecure — Neither Insecure nor Secure — Very Secure
Somewhat Insecure — Somewhat Secure

But only **35%** of respondents felt the same way about the presence of police.

How much do you believe that the upcoming elections will be free and fair?

4.5%	6.5%	32%	27%	30%

Completely unfree and unfair — Neutral — Completely free and fair
Somewhat unfree and unfair — Somewhat free and fair

Only **11%** felt the 2018 elections would be "completely" or "somewhat unfree and unfair."

Figure 1 provides basic descriptive statistics of the 1,805 residents of Karachi surveyed for this report. Scholars and policymakers will benefit from a systematic assessment of the correlates of exposure to this type of violence; if violence affects how voters view the electoral process as well as their voting behavior, it may considerably affect the democratic process. To lay the groundwork for this analysis, however, it is first necessary to examine the rates of victimization in the entire sample. The table at the bottom of figure 1 provides descriptive statistics on survey items measuring exposure to violence. Respondents were asked to report exposure to violence or the threat of violence using three questions: one on whether they had personally experienced violence, another on whether a family member had, and a third on whether they had ever witnessed anyone else being victimized. Just under a third of all respondents (31.5 percent) reported having been exposed to at least one of these three categories of violence.[37]

Along with measuring exposure to violence, the survey asked respondents several questions regarding their political opinions and behavior with respect to the 2018 elections. The data provide interesting results. First, while Karachi's law-and-order situation had improved substantially since late 2013, a sizable percentage of the sample (37 percent) expected that fighting would take place in their neighborhood before the elections. To gauge respondents' expectations of being personally victimized, they were asked to rate their agreement with the statement that "during election campaigns in this country, I fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence." About a third of respondents (30 percent) either somewhat or completely agreed with this statement.

FIGURE 3. HOW EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE CHANGES EXPECTATIONS

Respondents who reported having been exposed to violence were slightly more likely to fear the occurrence of electoral violence and much less likely to expect elections to be free and fair. They were also much less likely to believe the presence of Rangers at polling stations would ensure voters' safety.
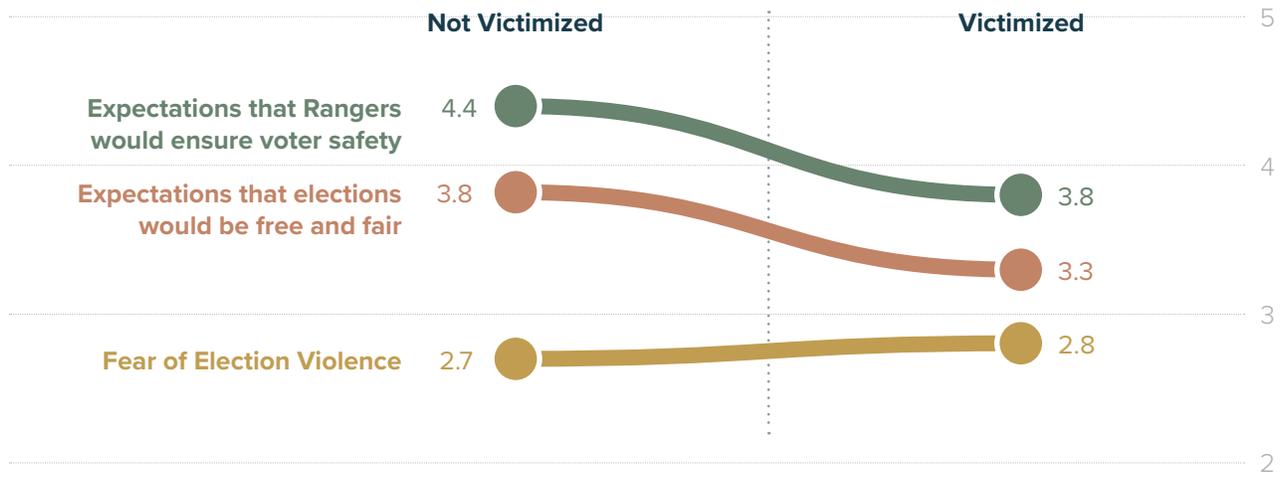
Note: Values show the average level of agreement, on a scale of 1 to 5, with statements measuring fear of victimization by election violence and opinions on the electoral process.

Respondents were also asked the extent to which they believed that the presence of law enforcement officials at the polls would make the elections more secure. The Election Commission of Pakistan has required that security personnel (army personnel, Rangers, and the police) be stationed at all polling stations, but little is known about how this policy might affect the electoral process.[38] According to the data, respondents were much more confident in the presence of the Rangers than they were in that of the police. Nearly four out of five respondents believed that the presence of the Rangers at polling stations would ensure their safety, while only about a third felt that way about the police. Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents who chose each level of perceived security, and shows that opinions on the police are more varied—and overall, are less positive—than opinions on the Rangers.

Along with direct questions about election-related violence and security, respondents were asked about the extent to which they expected the elections to be free and fair. About half of the sample believed that the elections would be somewhat or completely free and fair (selecting four or five on a five-point scale). Encouragingly, only 10 percent of respondents had low expectations of the electoral process (either a one or two on a five-point scale), with the remainder indicating that the elections would be neither particularly fair nor unfair (29 percent) or choosing not to answer the question (9 percent).

However, answers to these questions varied by exposure to violence.[39] Individuals who reported being personally victimized in the past were significantly more likely than others to expect fighting in their neighborhood, and to fear falling victim to political intimidation or

violence during election campaigns. Given these heightened fears, it is unsurprising that the victimized also were less likely to believe that the elections would be free and fair. Figure 3 illustrates these patterns by plotting, by victimization status, the average level of agreement with statements measuring fear of victimization by election violence, and opinions on the electoral process.

In addition, previously victimized individuals also were less likely than others to feel that the presence of Rangers at polling stations would ensure their safety. Figure 3 plots, by victimization status, the average level of security felt with the presence of Rangers at polling stations. This pattern indicates that the provision of election-day security is less subjectively effective—in terms of felt security—for exactly those individuals who likely need it most.[40]

Finally, the study's findings suggest that the identity of the perpetrator of the violence matters for whether the violence is associated with a change in voting behavior. For those who had been personally exposed to violence (a total of 340 people in the dataset), 36 percent identified criminals as the perpetrators, while 15 percent identified militant groups, 13 percent political parties, and 14 percent police or security agencies. (Twenty-one percent did not respond.) A total of 318 people identified noncriminal elements as the perpetrators of the attacks they had personally experienced, had witnessed, or that had been experienced by a family member. These individuals were significantly less likely to vote than those who had not been exposed to any violence or had been exposed only to violence by criminals. These results show that even though exposure to violence may affect individuals' voting patterns, *who* perpetrates the violence may matter more.

Interethnic Prejudice, Political Campaigning, and Exposure to Violence

Ethnic identities often are activated during times of political competition. Election campaigning provides greater opportunity and incentives for politicians to engage in rhetoric emphasizing the real or alleged crimes of ethnic outgroups, such as their involvement in violence. Because violence is thought to "harden" the boundaries between ethnic groups, engaging in such rhetoric is an effective political tool for political elites. Consistent with this mindset, political parties in Karachi have long campaigned on the basis of perceived or actual differences between the many ethnic communities in the megacity, making ethnic identity a salient cleavage during, and between, election times.

For example, between 2008 and 2013, members of the Muhajir MQM and the Pashtun ANP exchanged thinly veiled ethnic barbs which accompanied high levels of violence between the

Activists from the Awami National Party hold signs and chant slogans at a protest in Karachi on July 12, 2018, condemning a suicide attack during an election campaign meeting in Peshawar. (Photo by Akhtar Soomro/Reuters)

groups. In a particularly incendiary speech in 2010, ANP provincial president Shahi Sayed suggested that Muhajirs had come from India to Pakistan to seek refuge, and that, unlike Pashtuns, were not true Pakistanis.[41] Meanwhile, the MQM decried the increasing "Talibanization" of Karachi, claiming that it stemmed from the influx of Pashtun internal migrants from Khyber Pakhtunkwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.[42] Both of these examples demonstrate how politicians and parties attempt to paint ethnic groups as the "other" while creating doubts about other groups' rightful place in the city and blaming them for local violence and unrest.

LEVELS OF INTERETHNIC TRUST IN VIOLENT SETTINGS

Does this negative campaigning reflect—or has it had an effect on—attitudes toward ethnic outgroups held by residents of the city? The survey results cannot identify causation, but they do establish baseline levels of prejudice between the various ethnic groups that make up Karachi, an assessment that will be vital in outlining potential ways to improve ethnic relations.

The results do not paint a pretty picture.[43] In particular, they indicate a large degree of distrust between Karachi's various ethnic groups. Forty-one percent of all respondents said they do not trust members of other ethnic groups at all, or trust them very little. Only

The streets of Karachi. (Photo by Rabia Irfan/Shutterstock)

3 percent said they trust them very much. About 62 percent of all respondents expressed some level of agreement with the statement that "violence between different communities is inevitable in Karachi," with only 12 percent disagreeing. Respondents were as likely to hold Muhajirs responsible for the MQM's use of violence, and Pashtuns for ANP-related violence, as they were to not hold the communities responsible.

Results varied somewhat by ethnic group. Muhajirs were significantly more likely to be distrustful of other ethnic groups, while Pashtuns were somewhat more likely to be trusting. Additionally, only 29 percent of Muhajirs felt positively about the presence of Pashtuns in Karachi. Similar percentages felt positively about the presence of Baloch and Punjabis, with a higher percentage (38 percent) supporting the presence of Sindhis (likely because Karachi is part of Sindh Province).

The survey responses demonstrated that even though Karachi is an ethnically diverse city, it is heavily segregated, a finding consistent with qualitative research about interethnic relations in the city. For example, 52 percent of respondents said that they had no close friends or only a small number of friends who belonged to ethnic groups other than their own. In addition, approximately 75 percent of respondents said that half or more of their neighborhoods' residents consisted of members of their own ethnic group. Nonetheless, there is some room for optimism. The majority of respondents agreed that harmony was possible between different groups in Karachi if "self-interested" parties stopped exploiting differences. Older individuals were more likely to believe that harmony between distinct groups was possible.

Were individuals who were exposed to violence more or less likely to hold prejudicial opinions? Although there were some measures on which there was little or no difference, those who were exposed to violence were in general less likely to be tolerant and trusting of others. In particular, individuals who had been exposed to violence (as defined in the previous section) were more likely to believe that members of other ethnic groups were ready to partake in violence, and less likely to believe that harmony between the city's various ethnic groups was possible. These correlations, while they should be analyzed with caution, nonetheless suggest that exposure to violence is related to the persistence of prejudice and intolerance in Karachi society.

REFRAMING NARRATIVES ABOUT VIOLENCE

In times of increased political competition, what kind of messaging can help to reduce intergroup prejudice? Can framing ethnic violence as being primarily perpetrated by politicians and criminals for purposes of personal gain dampen prejudicial attitudes toward ordinary members of outgroups? And can such a frame counter the negative effects of electoral campaigning in which ethnic groups are attacked by rival actors? When politicians bring up outgroup crimes, such as interethnic violence, they want citizens to generalize from specific incidents to broad conclusions about all (or most) members of the outgroup.[44] One possible way to break the link between such hate rhetoric and its desired results is to emphasize that the purported crimes benefit only politicians and elites, and that most common people, regardless of group membership, suffer as a result.

To test this theory, the survey included an experiment in which some respondents were randomly assigned a description of violence in Karachi as having been perpetrated by criminals and "selfish" politicians who were looking only to benefit themselves by exploiting the sentiments of ethnic communities. Other respondents were provided a description of violence in which politicians were defenders of ethnic communities who faced attack by ethnic outsiders. A third group—the control group—was provided a narrative about pollution in Karachi that had no information pertaining to ethnic violence. The expectation was that the first group (those presented with the criminals/selfish politicians description) would exhibit an *increase* in tolerant attitudes toward different ethnic communities by distinguishing the politicians who carry out violence in the name of a specific ethnic group from the ordinary members of that community. The survey measured the effects of these different framings on prejudice toward other ethnic groups, trust of members of other ethnic groups, and belief in the possibility of peaceful coexistence among different communities in Karachi.

The survey provided mixed but ultimately limited results on the ability of framing to improve deeply entrenched attitudes of intolerance among groups in ethnically heterogeneous, segregated megacities with a history of ethnic violence. Across the board, respondents—regardless of which narrative they received—were equally likely to identify the primary cause of violence in Karachi as rooted in ethnic differences and as caused by the actions of criminals and politicians. Similarly, the treatments failed to move respondents along a number of measures of interethnic tolerance or coexistence—for example, whether ethnic groups should be held responsible for the actions of their coethnic political parties, or whether certain ethnic groups were more prone to violence and criminality.

The experiment did, however, affect the coethnic trust premium—that is, "the degree to which coethnics are trusted more than non-coethnics."[45] The results show that individuals who received the framing of violence as being perpetrated primarily by selfish politicians or self-interested criminals had a greater average coethnic trust premium than those who received either of the other two treatment conditions, a finding that was unexpected and contrary to prior expectations.[46] These results may be seen as a "backfire" or "backlash" effect—in other words, when faced with an appeal that explicitly rejects the salience of ethnic boundaries, individuals deliberately responded in ways *counter* to what they thought they were being asked to do. This interpretation is supported by an additional piece of evidence in the data: for the subset of respondents who were interviewed in the presence of (almost certainly coethnic) others, the

effect magnifies. However, the backlash effect disappears in the subset of individuals who were interviewed privately, indicating that explicitly antiethnic appeals may induce individuals to exaggerate ethnic loyalties in the presence of other ingroup members.[47]

Given that interethnic trust is low and many members of society hold prejudicial attitudes, it is not necessarily surprising that this study's reframing of the violence that has engulfed Karachi had a limited effect on bridging these gaps. In particular, it is possible that respondents had been "pretreated" on the study framings: very few residents of Karachi could have escaped exposure to an explicitly ethnic framing of the violence, as this is the dominant narrative propagated by ethnic parties as well as in media coverage of the violence. Consequently, narrative or framing changes alone are unlikely to alter deeply held prejudicial attitudes among ethnic groups in Karachi.

Policy Recommendations

In light of this study's research and findings, this report offers several conclusions and recommendations for researchers and policymakers.

First, exposure to violence has long-standing effects on political behavior and attitudes, resulting in a populace that is more fearful and less trusting of the electoral and democratic process overall. This makes it all the more important to curtail violence, particularly if policymakers want future generations to be committed to the consolidation of democracy in Pakistan.

Furthermore, when violence is perpetrated by political and state elements, the effect on political behavior is magnified. State and military forces need to be cognizant of the possible negative effects of crackdowns on terrorist and criminal actors—including spillover effects, through having family members be victimized—and must take these into account when conducting their operations. Because exposure to violence is also correlated with lower levels of interethnic trust and tolerance, policymakers will face an uphill battle in ethnically diverse cities such as Karachi, where much of the violence takes place along ethnic lines. It will be critical to counter these negative effects while upholding the democratic rights of both individuals and ethnic groups.

One approach to increasing security that was employed during Pakistan's 2018 elections was to station Rangers at polling stations. However, the survey data show that those exposed to violence were significantly less likely to think that the presence of Rangers at polling stations makes elections either fairer or more secure. In other words, the same people who are more likely to need security at the polls are also less likely to think that the type of security currently provided is beneficial to them. Policymakers should therefore consider alternative security arrangements in order to ensure the safety—and perceptions of safety—of the electorate.

Finally, because this study could not ascertain whether ethnic campaigning by political parties contributes to intolerance between ethnic communities or merely reflects this intolerance, future research should help identify the direction of the causal arrow. The study did, however, suggest that it is—and will be—difficult to alter deeply held feelings of prejudice and intolerance. This study's research demonstrates that changing the narrative or framing of violence has only limited effects on improving tolerance and increasing trust. Further research will need to be conducted on the best ways in which civil society and government actors can improve interethnic relations.

Notes

1. See, for example, Pamela Constable, "Khan's Victory in Pakistan Prompts Wave of Euphoria—and Ripples of Skepticism," *Washington Post,* July 29, 2018.

2. See Ben Farmer, "Pakistan Election 2018: Imran Khan Declares Victory As Rivals Decry 'Rigging,'" *The Telegraph,* July 26, 2018, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/07/26/pakistan-election-2018-imran-khan-brink-victory-rivals-decry; and Mehreen Zahra-Malik, "Arrests And Intimidation Fuel Fears of 'Dirty' Election in Pakistan," *The Guardian,* July 21, 2018, www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/21/pakistan-imran-khan-elections-arrests-intimidation.

3. For an analysis of the violence surrounding the 2013 elections, see Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, "Election 2013: Violence against Political Parties, Candidates and Voters," May 2013.

4. Paul Staniland, "Violence and Democracy," *Comparative Politics* 47, no. 1 (2014): 99–118.

5. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), "Karachi: Unholy Alliances for Mayhem" (Lahore: HRCP, October 9, 2011).

6. A completely randomized method was used to identify respondents to interview. The survey was carried out in the six districts of Karachi city in Sindh Province. All population estimates used were based on the 2017 census by Gallup Pakistan. To collect the survey samples, 142 sampling locations were randomly chosen across the six districts and eighteen towns (according to population size). Within each town, census circles were selected, also according to population size. Within each census circle, Gallup selected a random starting point and then conducted a random walk to select the first household. Within each of these sampling units/enumeration areas, twelve households were randomly selected. Within each household, the Kish grid method was used to identify individuals above the age of eighteen to interview, with a sample total of 1,805 respondents.

7. For example, see Dino Hadzic, David Carlson, and Margit Tavits, "How Exposure to Violence Affects Ethnic Voting," *British Journal of Political Science,* December 4, 2017; and Bernd Beber, Philip Roessler, and Alexandra Scacco, "Intergroup Violence and Political Attitudes: Evidence from a Dividing Sudan," *Journal of Politics* 76, no. 3 (2014): 649–65.

8. Maria Abi-Habib and Salman Masood, "Military's Influence Casts a Shadow over Pakistan's Election," *New York Times,* July 21, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/07/21/world/asia/pakistan-election-military.html. See also Saeed Shah and Waqar Gillani, "Pakistan's Military Wields More Influence Ahead of National Election," *Wall Street Journal,* July 20, 2018, www.wsj.com/articles/pakistans-military-wields-more-influence-ahead-of-national-election-1532088001.

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10. Abbas Nasir, "The Generals and the Art of Undermining Democracy in Pakistan," *New York Times*, June 2, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/06/02/opinion/pakistan-military-politics-press-freedom.html.

11. "PTI MPA-Elect Arrested for Beating Policemen," *Express Tribune,* July 29, 2018, www.tribune.com.pk/story/1768815/1-pti-mpa-booked-attacking-policemen.

12. Ali Akbar, "Police Register FIR Against Former KP CM Akram Durrani for 'Disturbing' Election," *Dawn,* July 28, 2018, www.dawn.com/news/1423448.

13. Niloufer Siddiqui, "What's Behind the Islamist Protests in Pakistan?," The Monkey Cage (blog), *Washington Post,* December 8, 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/12/08/whats-behind-the-islamist-protests-in-pakistan.

14. Asad Hashim, "Tehreek-e-Labbaik: New Far Right Campaigns against 'Blasphemy,'" Al Jazeera, July 6, 2018, www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/tehreek-labbaik-campaigns-blasphemy-180705154014562.html.

15. Asif Shahzad and Mubasher Bukhari, "Pakistan Takes Radical Sunni Leader off Terrorist Watchlist Ahead of Elections," Reuters, June 28, 2018, www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-politics-group/pakistan-takes-radical-sunni-leader-off-terrorist-watchlist-ahead-of-election-idUSKBN1JO0OQ.

16. Nazia Hussain and Louise Shelley, "Karachi: Organized Crime in a Key Megacity," *Connections* 15, no. 3 (2016): 5-15.

17. *The Economist*, "Into the Abyss—Violence in Karachi," August 27, 2011, www.economist.com/asia/2011/08/27/into-the-abyss.

18. See Niloufer Siddiqui, "Under the Gun: Political Parties and Violence in Pakistan," PhD diss., Yale University, March 2017.

19. *New York Times,* "Riots in Karachi Leave Dozens Dead," May 13, 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/05/13/world/asia/13iht-pakistan.5.5692979.html.

20. Huma Yusuf, "Conflict Dynamics in Karachi," Peaceworks report no. 82 (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, October 2012), www.usip.org/publications/2012/10/conflict-dynamics-karachi.

21. For example, see: Bilal Baloch, "Breaking Karachi's Cycle of Violence," *Foreign Policy* (blog), July 8, 2011, www.foreignpolicy.com/2011/07/08/breaking-karachis-cycle-of-violence; and "ANP, MQM-H 'Killers' Confess to Slaying Altaf Men," *The News,* April 13, 2011, www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/613121-anp,-mqm-h-"killers"-confess-to-slaying-altaf-men.

22. Yusuf, "Conflict Dynamics."

23. Interviews conducted by Mashail Malik between 2015 and 2018.

24. Hussain and Shelley, "Karachi."

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28. Mujtaba Rathore, Masror Hausen, Amir Rana, Safdar Sial, and Abdul Mateen, "Profiling the Violence in Karachi," *Conflict and Peace Studies* 2, no. 3 (2009).

29. Farhan Hanif Siddiqi, "Intra-Ethnic Fissures in Ethnic Movements: The Rise of Mohajir Identity Politics in Post-1971 Pakistan," *Asian Ethnicity* 11, no. 1 (2010): 25–41.

30. Interviews conducted by Mashail Malik between 2015 and 2018.

31. Mehreen Zahra-Malik, "Pakistan's MQM Party Pressures Government, Army with List of 'Executed,'" *Reuters,* September 24, 2015, www .reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-karachi-killings/pakistans-mqm-party-pressures-government-army-with-list-of-executed-idUSKCN0RO12Z20150924.

32. Meher Ahmad, "The Slain 'Militant' Was a Model, and a Karachi Police Commander Is Out," *New York Times,* February 6, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/world/asia/karachi-police-rao-anwar-naqeebullah-mehsud.html.

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34. A Shia respondent who was present at the bombing brought this interpretation to the authors' notice. A joint investigation team report leaked to the press also made a similar claim. For example, see Naeem Sahoutara, "In Cold Storage: Ashura Blast Case Goes to 'Dormant File,'" *Express Tribune,* November 8, 2012, www.tribune.com.pk/story/462260/in-cold-storage-ashura-blast-case-goes-to -dormant-file; and "MQM Rejects JIT Report," *The Nation,* February 9, 2015, www.nation.com.pk/10-Feb-2015/mqm-rejects-jit-report.

35. Siddiqui, "Under the Gun."

36. For example, see Christopher Blattman, "From Violence to Voting: War and Political Participation in Uganda," *American Political Science Review* 103, no. 2 (2009): 231–47; and Noam Lupu and Leonid Peisakhin, "The Legacy of Political Violence across Generations," *American Journal of Political Science* 61, no. 4 (2017): 836–51.

37. The nonresponse rate for this question was relatively high, indicating the above figures underestimate actual rates of victimization.

38. "Every Polling Station to Be Guarded by Four Army, Two Rangers Men in Karachi," *Express Tribune,* July 25, 2018, www.tribune.com .pk/story/1765826/1-every-polling-station-guarded-four-army-two-rangers-men-karachi.

39. All subsequent comparisons are based on Welch two-sample t-tests, assuming unequal variance.

40. There was no significant difference between victimized and nonvictimized individuals on whether the police made them feel secure at polling stations. This may be because overall faith in the police was already low across the entire sample.

41. "Wake up Mohajir Wake up . . . ANP Leader Shahi Sayed insults Urdu Speaking Mohajirs," YouTube video, 1:11, Khan Baba, May 21, 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqZ4Hdl_cug.

42. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan is primarily Pashtun. Syed Shoaib Hasan, "Violence Haunts Karachi's Streets," BBC News, January 16, 2010, https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8461192.stm.

43. For the results detailed in this section, the authors analyzed those individuals who received the control arm of the experiment.

44. Edward L. Glaeser, "The Political Economy of Hatred," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120 (2005): 45–68.

45. Amanda Lea Robinson, "Ethnic Diversity, Segregation and Ethnocentric Trust in Africa," *British Journal of Political Science*, December 19, 2017.

46. To measure the coethnic trust premium, the degree of non-coethnic trust was subtracted from the degree of coethnic trust. Trust was measured on a five-point scale (from "do not trust at all" to "trust them very much"), so the premium could range from –4 (when non-coethnics are trusted "very much" and coethnics are not trusted "at all") to +4 (where coethnics are trusted "very much" and non-coethnics "not at all").

47. For a formal, detailed discussion on the concept of the backlash effect, see Andrew Guess and Alexander Coppock, "Does Counter-Attitudinal Information Cause Backlash? Results from Three Large Survey Experiments," *British Journal of Political Science*, November 5, 2018.

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