

The generous grant provided by the American Institute for Pakistan Studies funded return travel to Pakistan, and within Pakistan, for the duration of Summer 2018. During this time, I visited my field sites in District South, Central and West in Karachi. I conducted over 40 in-depth interviews with communities, individuals and local politicians. The grant covered the cost of travel to Pakistan, travel within Karachi, and research assistant support within Karachi. This research is towards the fulfillment of my dissertation project, entitled “Empowered – citizenship and privatization in a developing megacity.” This book-length project uses mixed methods to examine the transformation of citizenship in Pakistan’s largest city as public goods and utilities are increasingly handed over to private actors. It illustrates in particular the decline in trust within communities as they face contracting social safety nets and welfare.

Travel to Pakistan in May 2018 was exceptional useful, casting citizenship and service delivery against the backdrop of a historic General Election. Speaking with women in Lyari, it was evident that the violence of the 2013 Operation against politically backed gangs had enabled a tense and uneasy peace. Individuals looked forward to the upcoming election, but with little investment or strong feelings of who to vote for. Faced with the internal deterioration of both the incumbent Urdu-speaking party, the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), and the Pakistan People’s Party, many young and educated individuals reported uncertainty in who they’d vote for in the upcoming election. In repeated interactions between May and July, it was evident that being closer to the election heightened uncertainty. This is a significant finding that counters political science theory that suggests middle-income groups form a politically engaged and active electorate. Under the pressure of rising inflation, and in the aftermath of prolonged party- and state-led conflict, several individuals reported feeling betrayed by political leadership. For women in Lyari, in particular, the retreat of the welfare state also comes with circumscribed mobility. According to a young woman at a locally-run vocational training center, “we come here as a way to pass the time – there is no where to go.”

According to a Union Councilor in Azizabad, District Central, part of the hopelessness (“*mayusi*”) comes from feeling that citizens have been “sold out” to private contractors at the hands of political parties. “Our collective (“*ijtimai*”) power has declined,” echoes another activist in Baldia, District West. “There was a time when my party leader would come with me to protest the public utility company. Now the utility company uses party leaders to get us to pay our (electricity) bills. Does my party leader work for me or for them?” Adding to this complexity, however, is evidence that populism struggles to fulfill its promise under a globalized capitalist state. A PPP veteran, who was running as an independent after being snubbed by his party in the General Elections, wistfully recalled the welfare system that embedded the PPP in Lyari in the 1970’s – “we were the chosen ones (“*laadlas*”).”

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I visited the offices of each of the six District Election Commissioners. With assistance from a local researcher, I compiled an original dataset of election results from the 2015 local government elections. These data, in addition to geo-spatial imaging files generously provided by the Karachi Census Commission, will form part of the analysis conducted during the course of this dissertation project. These long-term and meaningful relationships with local bureaucrats, researchers and leaders have been made possible by frequent and repeated visits to Pakistan, beginning in June-August 2017, followed up in Jan-May 2018 and finally between May and July 2018.