

Causes and Related issues of Encroachment:

A Study of the State Land of Karachi Division

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Abstract

Encroachment on state-owned land in Karachi remains a persistent governance challenge that undermines planned development, environmental sustainability, and the rule of law. Despite the Sindh Public Property (Removal of Encroachment) Act, 2010, weak enforcement, institutional corruption, political interference, and a shortage of affordable housing have allowed illegal occupations to continue. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study surveyed 29 government officials and reviewed policy documents, legal judgments, and reports to assess the effectiveness of the existing framework. Findings show that 85% of respondents identified weak land management, 78% cited corruption, and 80% highlighted political interference as key drivers, while 70% considered the Anti-Encroachment Force ineffective due to resource constraints and poor coordination. The paper recommends legislative reforms, digitization of land records, stronger inter-agency coordination, judicial process reforms, and expansion of affordable housing to safeguard state land and improve urban governance in Karachi.

Keywords: *Encroachment, Urban Governance, Land Management, Karachi, Public Policy.*

1. Introduction

Illegal occupation of state land in Karachi continues to pose a significant challenge to effective urban governance, hindering sustainable development

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and the enforcement of regulatory frameworks. Although legislative efforts, particularly the Sindh Public Property (Removal of Encroachment) Act of 2010, were introduced to curb such encroachments, their impact has been limited due to factors including weak enforcement mechanisms, bureaucratic delays, and political interference (Khan & Yusuf, 2020). The pressures of rapid urban growth and population increase have further exacerbated the issue, resulting in the proliferation of informal settlements and unauthorized constructions (Hasan, 2019). The fragmented governance structure in Karachi, with overlapping responsibilities among bodies such as the Karachi Development Authority, Sindh Revenue Board, and Sindh Building Control Authority, has contributed to ineffective policy implementation and regulatory oversight (Siddiqui, 2021).

To address this important issue and to stop menace of land grabbing in Sindh, the Government of Sindh enacted and passed the law commonly known as Sindh Public Property (Removal of Encroachment) Act, 2010. This law was designed to empower the government functionaries to protect and retrieve state land and take necessary legal action against the encroachers. However, statistics as well as the field experiences have demonstrated that despite promulgation of law, the land grabbing or Encroachment on state land has dramatically increased for the last 12 years. This highlights that either there are still lacunae in the law leading to weaknesses at the implementation or operational level.

As per the Public Property (Removal of Encroachment) Act, 2010, Encroachment is defined as:

- a. Unauthorized occupation or possession of any public property.
- b. Unauthorized construction, erection or placement of any building, structure, or other installation on any public property.
- c. Unauthorized use of any public property for any purpose whatsoever.
- d. Any other unauthorized act or omission which results in the unlawful occupation, use or possession of any public property."

The statutory definition of encroachment includes a broad spectrum of unauthorized uses or occupations of public land, encompassing both open state-owned plots and spaces reserved for public amenities. Within the context of Karachi Division, the persistence of encroachment on state land represents a critical and complex governance issue for the Government of Sindh. As the country's largest metropolitan center and primary economic hub, Karachi has undergone rapid urbanization, much of which has been unregulated and inadequately planned. This urban expansion, in conjunction with deficient land management systems, an acute shortage of affordable housing, and the absence of a comprehensive urban development framework, has significantly

contributed to the proliferation of informal settlements on public land. These conditions reflect deeper structural and institutional weaknesses that continue to challenge effective public land governance in the region.

Primarily, this policy paper focuses on encroachment carried out purely on state land (Na Class or Unsurveyed land) of Karachi Division which is property of the provincial government meant to be utilized for futuristic public use. Land encroachment has significant economic, infrastructural, and environmental costs. Unregulated settlements contribute to congestion, loss of public revenue, and environmental degradation particularly in areas designated for green spaces and drainage systems (Shah, 2020). Weak implementation of existing laws, systemic corruption, and political patronage further enable encroachers to secure judicial stay orders, preventing effective eviction operations by the law enforcement agencies (Farooq, 2017).

This paper undertakes a critical assessment of the Sindh Public Property (Removal of Encroachment) Act, 2010, to evaluate its operational effectiveness and to identify the legal, institutional, and governance-related impediments that hinder its implementation. The analysis concludes with policy recommendations aimed at improving regulatory enforcement and advancing sustainable land management practices in Karachi.

1.1. Rationale / Purpose of the Study

The trend has developed as one of the most urgent governance issues in Karachi that has jeopardized spatial planning, environmental sustainability, and rule of law in the city. A serious lack of enforcement, interfering politics and corruption have enabled unapproved encroachments to flourish despite the Sindh Public Property (Removal of Encroachment) Act, 2010 (herein after referred to as the Act). Karachi which is the biggest metropolitan center in Pakistan is most susceptible because the steep increase in population and housing deficit only contributes to the land friction. This research proposed to explore how well the current anti-encroachment legislations and structures are performing to check illegal encroachment in the land. Using the survey to communicate with government officials that are involved in enforcement and secondary sources like judgment on law, government reports, and scholarly writings, the study will aim to influence an evidence-based measurement on the qualities of governance mechanisms. This is not only meant to bring out the areas of institutional weaknesses, but also to make an addition to the policy debate on the urban land governance in Pakistan. The theoretical solution in the study is highlighted innovations in reforms, such as digitization of land records, improvement of judge and some other innovations that will allow the state to regain control of land in society. Finally, the justification given is the consolidation of the urban governance system in Karachi to support its sustainable development and equitable access to land resources.



1.2. Theoretical framework

The question of encroachment on state land in Karachi can be analyzed or evaluated using various theories that focus on presence of interaction between governance system, institutional weaknesses and urban informality.

Theories of informality and urban land governance lay a great emphasis on the notion of secure property rights and good regulatory control. Hernando de Soto (2000) supports this with the assertion that in those areas where property rights have not been well established and where there are still insecure property rights, then there can be development in form of informal markets which may result in inability to regulate the settlements. This is especially true of Karachi where ambiguity of the ownership rights, paper thin ownership regimes, or multi jurisdictional institutional gaps permit illegal occupation to continue.

The public choice theory provides information on how bureaucratic and political players tend to use self-interest in a manner that harms the presence of the group. Enforcement is weakened in Karachi through a combination of political patronage, electoral incentive and rent-seeking that empowers lands grabbers to solidify illegal occupations. Tightly intertwined with this are institutional corruption structures, that describe how the collusion of land mafias, administrators and politicians corrupt third party institutions by skewing legal processes and further prolonging the weakness.

Regulatory capture theory also demonstrates how influential groups can use their bargaining position to encourage the institutions of the state to serve their interest either in policy design or its execution. In Karachi, this has come in the form of individual ability of politically related actors to obtain stay orders or confuse the land records thus ensuring that they will not be evicted. The notion of administrative fragmentation is also similar with the phenomena of overlapping mandates between the Karachi Development Authority, Board of Revenue, and the Sindh Building Control Authority suggesting the coordination failure that degrades the governance capacity.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Exploring the Phenomenon of Land Encroachment and Governance

Urban land encroachment has increasingly been framed in the scholarly literature as both a governance failure and a manifestation of broader socio-economic dynamics. Studies on urban informality highlight that rapid population growth, coupled with inadequate housing provision, often compels low-income communities to occupy public or state-owned land. Such encroachments are not merely the result of individual opportunism but are often embedded in systemic shortcomings, including weak urban planning

institutions, fragmented governance structures, and limited enforcement capacity (Bhan, 2016).

The literature also emphasizes that land governance in cities of the Global South, including Karachi, is shaped by overlapping authorities and a lack of coordination between municipal, provincial, and federal institutions (Hasan, 2015). This institutional fragmentation enables encroachers to exploit legal ambiguities, while enforcement agencies are frequently constrained by political pressures or corruption (Goodfellow, 2013). Comparative insights from cities such as Nairobi, Mumbai, and Jakarta demonstrate similar trends, where encroachments persist despite legal prohibitions due to the interplay of patronage politics, speculative land markets, and regulatory capture (Shatkin, 2017).

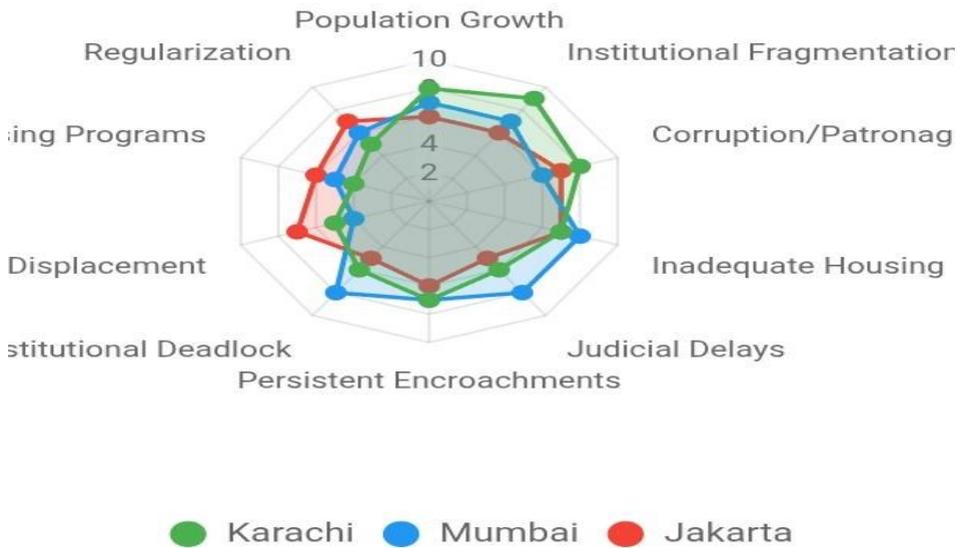
From a political economy perspective, scholars argue that encroachment often benefits powerful actors rather than just marginalized groups. Politicians and bureaucrats may provide tacit or explicit protection to encroachers in exchange for electoral support, rents, or illicit financial gains (Sethi, 2017). This patron-client dynamic perpetuates encroachments and undermines rule-based governance. Furthermore, the judiciary's role in land disputes has also received critical attention. While courts are seen as upholding property rights and due process, they can simultaneously slow down enforcement efforts through prolonged litigation, stay orders, or conflicting rulings, thereby creating institutional deadlock (Hasan, 2020).

An illustrative case is Mumbai in South Asia. According to Patel (2019), encroachment continues to occur despite many slum clearance policies due to the state merely responding rather late in enforcing encroachment cases, as opposed to preventing the occurrence of encroachment. Likewise, Sharma and Kumar (2021) point towards the existence of informal settlements in Indian cities where corruption results in a great proliferation of informal settlements active in Indian cities and the land mafia thrives along with politicians and authorities. Such results also sound familiar to the realities of Karachi as the politics of profitability and administrative indulgence have compromised the effectiveness of Sindh Public Property Act.



Figure 1

Factors, Outcomes, and Solutions for Urban Land Enforcement (2025)



Source: Khan & Javed (2020)

Further parallels are provided in Southeast Asia. In the example of Jakarta and the riverbank clearing activity examined by Firman (2017), it is clear to see how the use of an eviction-focused policy creates displacement with the absence of root cause solutions. Nonetheless, the experiences found in Bangkok and Manila show that the combination of the housing program with regularization of settlements can minimize the impact of encroachments in the future (World Bank, 2018). Such lessons suffered around the globe remind us that enforcement mechanisms are not enough in the absence of structural change in the management of land and housing provision.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the dynamics of unauthorized occupation of state land in Karachi Division. The quantitative element was reflected in structured survey questions that produced measurable trends (percentages of respondents citing weak law enforcement, corruption, political interference, etc.), while the qualitative element came through open-ended responses and content analysis of secondary sources, which captured deeper institutional insights and contextual factors. Using this design allowed the study to combine breadth (statistical evidence from 29 officials) with depth (narratives and explanations of governance practices).

The choice of a mixed-methods approach is justified because encroachment is a multidimensional governance problem, shaped by legal, political, and social factors that cannot be adequately understood through numbers alone. Quantitative data established patterns across respondents, while qualitative insights explained the underlying drivers and institutional dynamics. However, limitations exist: the quantitative sample was small and restricted to government officials, reducing representativeness; at the same time, qualitative data lacked triangulation with civil society or community perspectives, raising the risk of institutional bias.

3.1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study employed purposive sampling to ensure that respondents possessed direct operational knowledge of land administration and enforcement in Karachi. The inclusion criteria focused on government officials actively engaged in land governance, including Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners, Senior Superintendents of Police, Revenue Department officers (Mukhtiarkars and Sub-Registrars), and Anti-Encroachment Force personnel. These groups were selected because of their formal responsibility in managing land disputes, maintaining property records, or conducting anti-encroachment drives.

The exclusion criteria, by contrast, omitted participants from the public, political actors, and private real estate developers, as their perspectives, while important, fell outside the scope of this study, which aimed to capture insider institutional perspectives. Civil society organizations and NGOs were also excluded, primarily due to the study's focus on administrative practices rather than community impacts. While this limitation narrows the representativeness of findings, it enables a focused exploration of governance challenges as understood by state functionaries.

In total, 29 key stakeholders participated in the study. These included Deputy Commissioners, Senior Superintendents of Police, Assistant Commissioners, Revenue Department officials (such as Mukhtiarkars and Sub-Registrars), and personnel from the Anti-Encroachment Force (AEF), all of whom have either served or are currently serving within Karachi Division. The questionnaire was designed to elicit their perceptions on the root causes of encroachment, challenges in legal and administrative enforcement, the impact of judicial interventions, and potential strategies for long-term policy reform.

This combination of structured inquiry and experiential insight enabled a grounded understanding of both the systemic and operational dimensions of land encroachment, forming the empirical basis for the analysis and recommendations presented in this paper.



3.2. Study Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The sample size of 29 respondents is relatively small, and all participants were government officials or directly associated with enforcement agencies. This homogeneity may introduce institutional bias, as perspectives of affected citizens, community organizations, journalists, and independent NGOs were not included. Triangulation with these groups could have provided a more balanced view of the social and economic dimensions of encroachment. Future research may incorporate diverse stakeholders to reduce bias and strengthen the validity of findings.

The details of the questionnaire are provided on the table below having a total 20 structured questions:

Table 1

Questionnaire Format

Section in the Questionnaire	Focus Area	Number of Questions	Response Count
Demographic Information	Designation, Department, Years of Experience	3	29
Perceptions of Encroachment Issues	Major causes, responsible institutions, political influence	5	29
Effectiveness of Anti-Encroachment Laws	Awareness of the Sindh Public Property (Removal of Encroachment) Act, 2010, legal gaps, enforcement effectiveness	4	27
Institutional Challenges	Coordination between agencies, legal stay orders, corruption	3	25
Impact of Encroachment	Economic losses, environmental impact, infrastructure strain	3	29
Recommendations for Policy Reform	Legal amendments, governance improvements, alternative housing solutions	2	29

It is important to mention that secondary data was sourced from government reports, legal documents, and academic studies, providing historical insights into Karachi's urban expansion and encroachment trends. The answering containing statistical number were statistically analyzed to quantify key trends, while qualitative content analysis identified common themes in governance failures and enforcement inefficiencies.

4. Findings and Analysis

This section presents a detailed analysis of 29 survey responses collected from key stakeholders including key government officials working in land management, policing and Anti-encroachment force. The findings explore causes of encroachment, challenges in enforcement, legal barriers, the effectiveness of anti-encroachment laws, and potential solutions for addressing the issue of land grabbing of state land in Karachi Division. Where applicable, secondary sources have also been partially integrated into the discussion to further strengthen the basis and validate the analysis of factors contributing to unauthorized occupation of state land by various stakeholders.

Before going into the details of the findings, following chart shows the demographic information of the participants who took part in answering the questionnaires for this policy paper:

Table 2

Respondents of Survey

Designation	Number of Respondents (N=29)	Percentage (%)
Deputy Commissioner	6	20.7%
Assistant Commissioner	7	24.1%
Senior Superintendent of Police	3	10.3%
Director of Anti-Encroachment	2	6.9%
Other	11	37.9%

Based on the responses on different questions, the findings and analysis below will follow a structured pattern where I will cover the most pertinent issues related to encroachment of the state land and challenges in conducting anti-encroachment drives for retrieval and safeguarding of state lands in Karachi



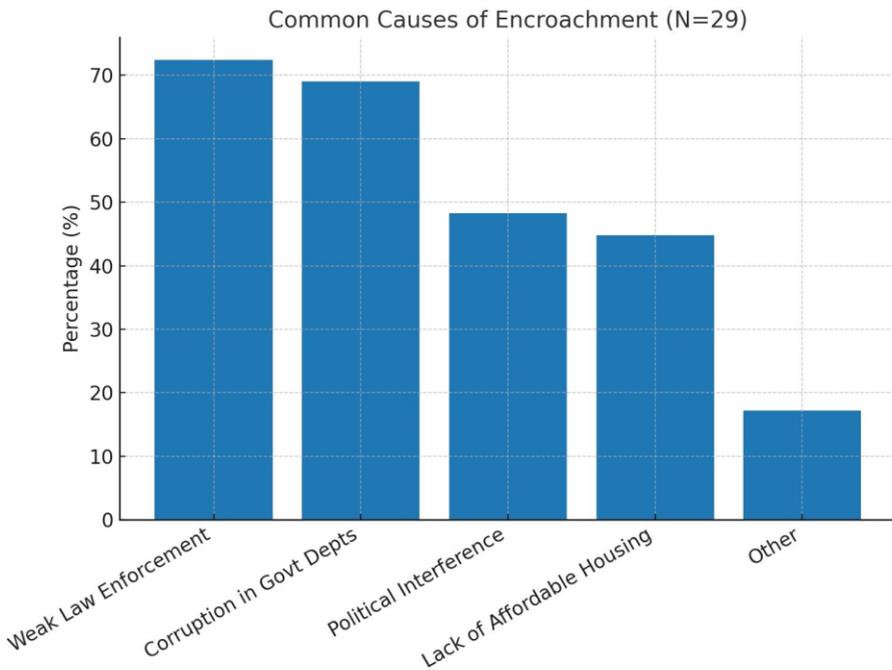
Division. The responses will highlight the causes of land grabbing on state land in Karachi and will further ascertain how much effective is the Sindh Public Property (Removal of encroachment) Act 2010 in addressing this key challenge in the city.

4.1. Reasons and Challenges of Encroachments on State Land in Karachi

Understanding the root causes of encroachment is essential to addressing the issue effectively. Several factors contribute to this challenge, following charts illustrate these contributing factors as noted by respondents:

Figure 1

Common Causes of Encroachment



The most significant cause, cited by 72.4% of respondents, is weak law enforcement. Authorities fail to take consistent action against illegal land occupation, allowing encroachment to go unchecked.

The second was corruption in government departments (69.0%), which helps the encroachers to manipulate land records in their favor. This menace of corruption compromises state authority resulting in ineffectiveness of enforcement. Political interference is another important factor reported by 48.3% of the respondents. Land grabbing is often given political patronage for

electoral gains or monetary interests preventing departments from intervention.

The lack of affordable housing (44.8%) is also a factor to encroachment, as Karachi's increasing population is facing high property costs and lack of housing policies. Because of unavailability of alternatives, low-income groups are prone to land grabbers by purchasing plots on low rates which are on state land illegally

The various factors like corruption, lawlessness, political patronage, and housing shortages lead to menace of encroachment in the city. These root causes need robust legal enforcement, anti-corruption measures, and clear policies.

4.2. Challenges in Addressing Encroachment

Encroachment issue in Karachi division is a long-standing problem generating from various interconnected factors including rampant corruption in departments, judicial delays, weak enforcement in the field, and political interfering.

These challenges are ranked in the following table given by the respondents:

Table 4

Ranking of the Challenges

Challenge	1 - Least Important	3 - Neutral	5 - Most Important
Weak Enforcement Mechanisms	5	4	7
Political Pressure	5	4	6
Social Resistance from Displaced Communities	7	5	3
Corruption within Departments	3	3	5
Delays in Judicial Proceedings	7	5	7

Given the above responses, corruption within departments contributes as the most serious factor in promoting encroachment Karachi division, with large number of respondents ranked it top. Delayed judicial proceedings is also considered a key obstacle in addressing encroachment issues in the city. Weak



enforcement mechanisms and political pressures are also major contributing factors besides institutional corruption and legal delays.

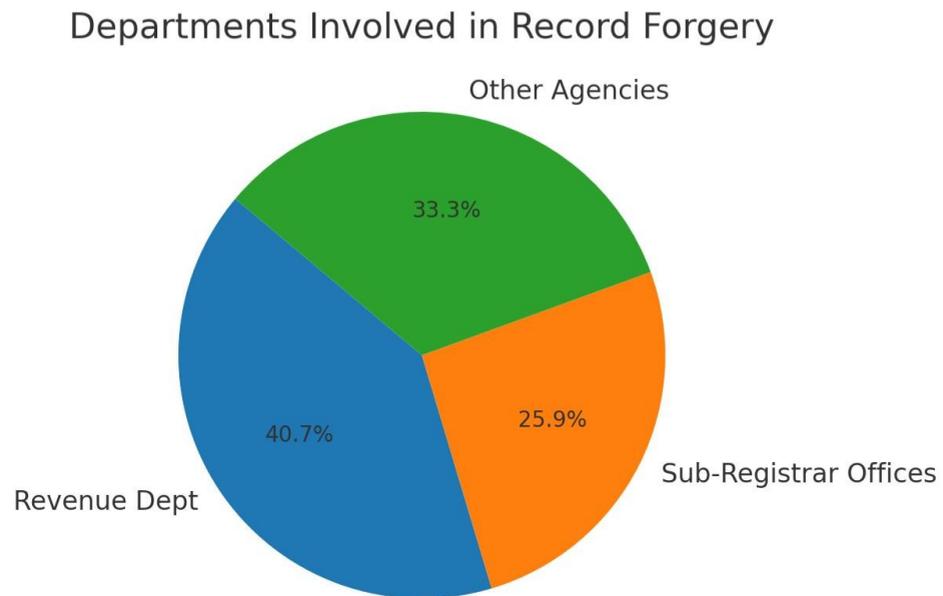
While social resistance from displaced communities was ranked moderately, it was not as significant as other structural issues, indicating that resistance from affected populations is a challenge but not the central cause of encroachment persistence. Weak enforcement mechanisms were also acknowledged as a key issue, but they appear secondary compared to corruption and judicial inefficiencies.

4.3. Analysis of Departments Involved in Official Record Forgery Related to Encroachment

According to the following responses collected regarding the involvement of different government departments in the forgery of official records related to 48.3% cases, the revenue department and sub-registrar offices have major involvement:

Figure 2

Departmental Responsibilities Related to Encroachment



The Revenue Department, specifically the office of the Mukhtiarkars as being the custodian of land record, emerges as the most responsible entity, accounting for 75.9%, indicating that the majority of fraudulent activities

related to land and property records occur within this department.

The Sub-Registrar Offices (48.3%), responsible for property registration, also demonstrate a significant involvement by registering forged or original sale deeds based on forged revenue documents.

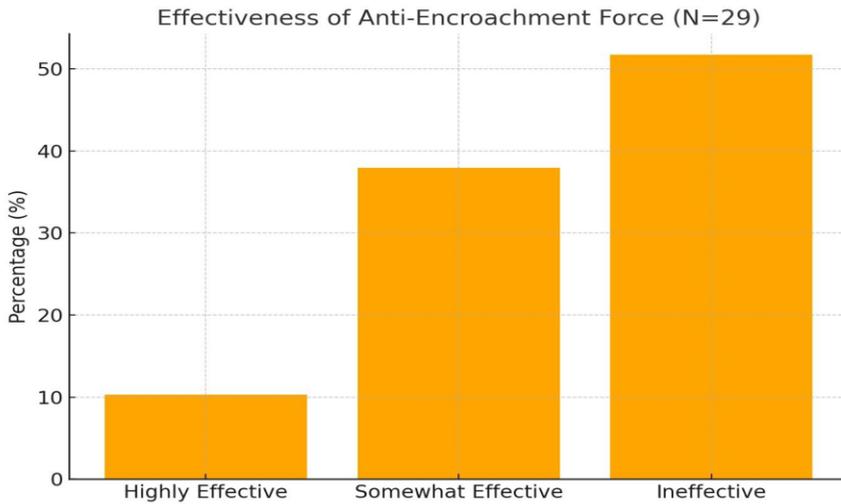
Moreover, the in "Other" category many land-owning agencies like Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC), Karachi Development Authority (KDA), Malir Development Authority (MDA), Karachi Port Trust (KPT) stands at 62.1%, which shows that a many other departments are also involved in forgery and manipulation of official record.

4.4. Role of the Anti- Encroachment Force (AEF)

The effectiveness of the Anti-Encroachment Force (AEF) in Karachi also remains questionable as per the available responses in the table:

Figure 3

Effectiveness of Anti-Encroachment Force



As many as 51.7% of respondents finding it ineffective and only 10.3% considering it very effective. While 37.9% termed it as somewhat effective.

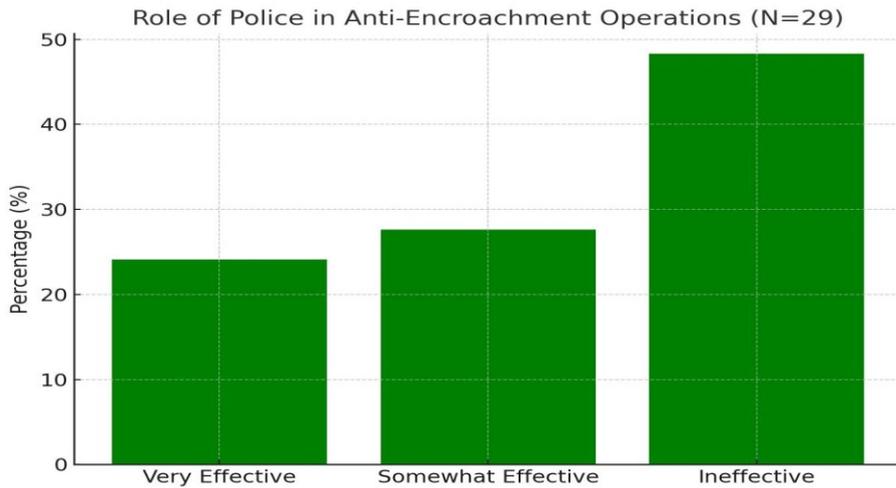
4.5. Role of the Police in Anti- Encroachment Operations

The given table highlights the responses given on a question which pertains to the role and responsibility of police department in anti-encroachment drives by the administration:



Figure 4

Role of Police Department in Anti-Encroachment Operations



48.3% of respondents find their role ineffective, while only 24.1% consider them very effective, and 27.6% view them as somewhat effective. To bring improvement, accountability, coordination among enforcement agencies, and impartial actions are necessary for effectively control encroachment.

4.6. Influence of Courts on Encroachment Cases

Honorable courts play a very crucial role in encroachment issues because most of the land matters have to undergo major legal complications. The below data provides insights about judicial influence in such cases.

Table 8

Influence of Courts

Response	Number of Respondents (N=29)	Percentage (%)
Yes	22	75.9%
No	1	3.4%
Not Sure	6	20.7%

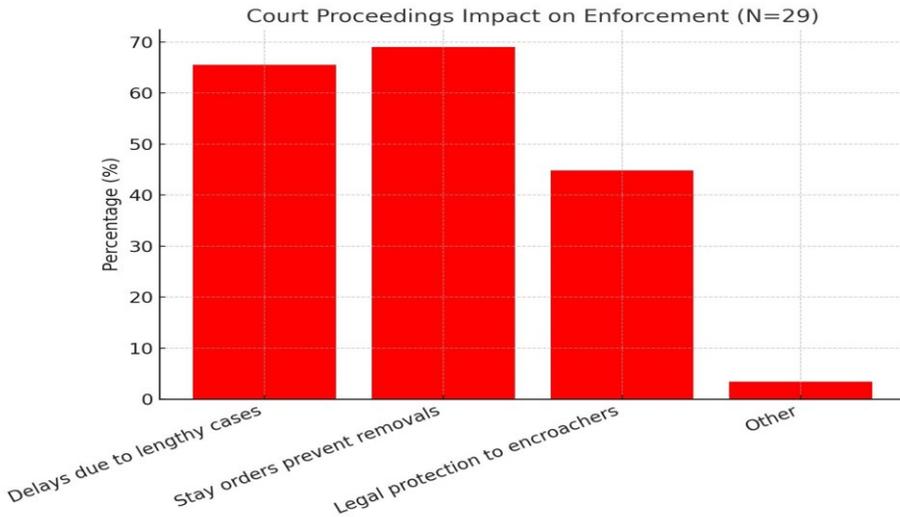
4.7. Court Proceedings and Their Impact on Enforcement

The findings indicate that many respondents perceive the judiciary as an impediment due to stay orders and lengthy proceedings. However, a more nuanced perspective is necessary. Courts play an essential role in safeguarding due process and protecting citizens from wrongful evictions, which is a critical element of land governance. Judicial delays may also reflect structural constraints such as case backlogs, under-resourced courts, or ambiguities in land tenure laws, rather than deliberate obstruction. Acknowledging these factors provides a more balanced understanding of the judiciary's role: while stay orders and delays can enable encroachment, judicial oversight also ensures fairness and prevents abuse of administrative authority.

The table below shows how court proceedings have a direct and indirect impact on the effectiveness of authorities which are legally mandated to take against the encroachments.

Figure 5

Court Proceedings



Honorable Courts easily grant stay orders to encroachers who approach honorable courts which accounts to 69% of the answers. The stay orders act as an impediment for enforcement agencies to initiate legal proceedings and act against the encroachers.

65.5% of the respondent's think that lengthy courts cases cause reasonable delay for acting against anti encroachment activities. Extensive legal battles like appeals and procedural delays create an environment where encroachers can continue occupying disputed land for extended periods. This encourages



the encroachers and reduce the moral of administrative departments responsible for acting against them.

Moreover, 44.8 % of respondents believe that courts are indirectly causing legal protection to encroachers. Judicial oversight is very necessary to ensure fairness by combating unauthorized occupation and give support to departments for taking legal action.

A small fraction (3.4%) thinks that besides courts interventions there are additional but reasonably less significant factors contributing to encroachment on state land. The overall trend demonstrates that while legal safeguards are necessary to prevent wrongful evictions, the prolonged delays and frequent stay orders emphasize the need for judicial reforms. There is a need of fair balance between due process and timely action so that encroachment issues are timely addressed without legal complexities.

4.8. Intensity by District in Karachi

Encroachment on state land in Karachi does not occur uniformly across the city; instead, its intensity varies significantly across districts depending on demography, institutional capacity, political influence/stakes, and the socioeconomic profile of each area. Survey findings, supported by secondary literature, suggest that Malir and Karachi West represent the most severely affected districts, with reported encroachment levels above 80–90 percent of respondents identifying these areas as hotspots. Malir, which is geographically the largest district of Karachi, has vast tracts of undeveloped state land, riverbeds, and peri-urban agricultural spaces. These open areas are highly susceptible to land grabbing, often under the guise of informal housing colonies and Katchi Abadis marketed to low-income families. Similarly, Karachi West faces intense pressures due to unplanned expansion, the presence of industrial activity, and the development of informal settlements around key transport corridors.

Karachi East and Karachi Central also experience significant encroachment, though at a relatively lower intensity. Encroachment in Karachi East is linked largely to rising land values, where politically connected groups and real estate syndicates take advantage of weak oversight to capture land in areas earmarked for commercial or residential development. Karachi Central, in contrast, is characterized by dense populations and housing shortages, which contribute to a steady growth of informal housing schemes on state land. Here, the problem is compounded by the manipulation of land records, often with the collusion of revenue officials and sub-registrars, who play a pivotal role in legitimizing illegal occupations through forged documents.

Karachi South and Korangi are comparatively less affected, though not immune to encroachment. Karachi South, being the most urbanized and commercially vibrant district, has relatively less open land available for large-

scale illegal occupation. However, encroachment here manifests in the form of informal markets, unauthorized street vending, and small-scale occupation of public spaces. Korangi, with its industrial base and moderate housing pressures, has encroachments primarily in peripheral residential areas and along key access roads.

Overall, the spatial distribution of encroachment intensity underscores the role of land availability, institutional weakness, and political interference in shaping patterns of land grabbing. Districts with extensive vacant land, weak enforcement mechanisms, and higher levels of political patronage tend to exhibit higher encroachment intensity. This highlights the urgent need for district-specific strategies, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. For instance, Malir and Karachi West require stronger perimeter monitoring and the deployment of GIS-based land record systems, whereas Karachi South might benefit more from urban design interventions to regulate informal street use. Without such tailored interventions, Karachi's uneven encroachment problem will continue to undermine planned urban growth, exacerbate inequality, and erode public trust in governance

4.9. Respondents Perspective on Anti- Encroachment Strategies

Multifaceted approach is required to Address the encroachment issues in Karachi Division, and respondents have focused on major policy initiatives that could improve enforcement and prevent unauthorized land occupation which is explained as below

Table 10

Proposed Solutions

Proposed Solutions	Number of Respondents (N=29)	Percentage (%)
Strengthening Legal Provisions	22	75.9%
Addressing Political Interference	23	79.3%
Enhancing Inter-Agency Coordination	17	58.6%
Implementing Relocation Policies	15	51.7%
Public Awareness Campaigns	11	37.9%



79.3% of respondents emphasized that addressing political interference is one of the major factors. This shows that political influence and interference is a major hindrance in implementing effective anti-encroachment measures.

Strengthening legal provisions to combat encroachment was ranked 75.9% by the respondents. This suggests that existing laws are either inadequate or poorly enforced, making it easier for encroachers to exploit legal loopholes.

Increasing accountability and oversight, as noted by 62.1% of respondents, further highlight the need for improved governance in managing land-related issues. Many believe that corruption and inefficiency within enforcement agencies contribute to the persistence of encroachments.

Besides, enhancing coordination between different agencies was supported by 58.6% of respondents. Improved inter-agency collaboration could streamline enforcement efforts, making them more coherent and impactful.

Implementing relocation policies, noted by 51.7%, highlights that many encroachments arise due to socio-economic factors, particularly housing shortages.

Lastly, 37.9% suggests that a segment of respondents sees education and awareness as a key tool in addressing the issue of encroachments. Many land disputes arise from misinformation or lack of knowledge about legal land ownership. Awareness initiatives could help communities understand property laws and discourage illegal settlements. A negligible 3.4% falls under the "Other" category, indicating that while additional strategies may exist, the primary focus remains on legal, political, and administrative reforms.

The findings presented are primarily descriptive, relying on percentages to summarize survey responses. While this captures broad trends, deeper exploration is also important. Cross-tabulation of responses could, for example, compare whether Deputy Commissioners perceive political interference as a greater challenge compared to police officials, or whether respondents with longer years of service view corruption differently than junior officers. Thematic coding of open-ended responses would further enrich the analysis, revealing recurring themes such as resource shortages, coordination failures, or the influence of vested interests that may not be captured in closed-ended survey results.

5. Discussion

The findings of this research report reveal a vicious cycle of weak governance, political interference and institutional corruption that are the main contributors to state-owned land in Karachi being encroached. Lack of adequate enforcement machinery, which is cited by the largest proportion of respondents, highlights the administrative failure of the system that eats at the effectiveness of legal frameworks that are in place. This relates to the wider

discussions on urban governance literature that states that just the fact that laws exist do not mean that they are enforced unless backed by good institutions and political will.

Another significant force came up as corruption in land administration. The respondents reported the manipulation of records by revenue officials and the sub-registrar offices as part of the gap in governance since the institutions charged with the protection of land ownership end up supporting death transfers. The given pattern can be aligned with the studies of urban informality in other cities, including Mumbai and Nairobi, where land grabs have been found to be facilitated by the institutional corruption.

There is also an issue of political interference. Nearly half of the respondents mentioned that land grabbing is usually politically patronized, making the administration bodies incapable of acting. This agrees with regulatory capture theories, where strong interest groups take over institutions in a bid to win elections or monetary benefits. The case of Karachi replicates the same results in Jakarta where informality of the land market has strengthened the political elites at the cost of formal governance.

Courts were also found to be one of the key impediments since they tend to issue the stay order that derails the enforcement process. The respondents mostly viewed this as an obstacle but there is depth that should be realized. Protections by the court are also essential to prevent the eviction of the wrong people, to respect due process, yet the delays and uncertainties of the law on land tenure swamps these agencies and are possible sources of exploitation. The same trend can be observed in other South Asia cities with burdened law enforcement systems resulting in prolonged law enforcement which can diminish credibility to enforcement. The Anti-Encroachment Force enforcement agency was also perceived to lack effectiveness by more than half of the respondents.

Close relation to the ineffectiveness is the limitation of resources, no coordination, and the lack of modern tools of operation. A decentralization effort at enforcement agencies must be accompanied by setting their reasonable budget. The cross tabulation of responses also indicates that the perception regarding political interference as a hindrance to good governance is reflective of the perceptions that the higher-ranking officials like Deputy Commissioners define the problem of governance in a particular manner.

These findings have great policy implications where both legal and administrative solutions are options to enhance urban land governance in Karachi. Although both are not a panacea, but it will also be required to offer a systemic change in administrative approaches, political responsibility as well as technological innovation. The processes of land digitization, enhanced inter-agency collaboration, and open judicial processes come to the fore as the key aspects of the restoration of the rule of law. Nonetheless, such reforms cannot



be enacted immediately, but should be implemented in several stages, taking into consideration the political opposition and institutional stagnation. A gradual yet a sustainable change may be offered through pilot-based strategies, which are advised in the feasibility matrix.

6. Conclusion

Encroachment on state land in Karachi Division represents a deep-rooted governance challenge, reflecting broader institutional weaknesses such as ineffective enforcement, legal ambiguities, political interference, and administrative inertia. Although the Sindh Public Property (Removal of Encroachment) Act, 2010 was introduced to safeguard public land, encroachments have continued largely unchecked over the past two decades.

The research highlights several critical factors sustaining this issue: poor inter-agency coordination, delays in judicial processes, widespread corruption, and the lack of a transparent, digitized land record system. Also, the chronic shortage of affordable housing has pushed many low-income families into informal settlements, blurring the lines between illegality and necessity, and further complicating enforcement.

Eviction operations alone, without systemic reform, offer only temporary relief. Addressing encroachment in a meaningful way requires an integrated response: strengthening and updating legal frameworks, digitizing and securing land records, limiting misuse of judicial stay orders, improving institutional coordination, and expanding access to affordable housing. Equally important is decentralizing enforcement and establishing firm accountability mechanisms for both political and bureaucratic actors.

Without urgent, cohesive reforms, Karachi risks continued erosion of its state-owned land, deteriorating urban governance, and deepening social inequality. A forward-looking, people-centered approach, grounded in legal integrity and sustainable urban planning, is essential to reclaim public land and protect the future of the city.

7. Recommendations

A comprehensive policy system is essential to address land encroachment in Karachi, integrating solutions for legal gaps, administrative inefficiencies, and socioeconomic root causes. The Sindh Public Property (Removal of Encroachment) Act, 2010, though a crucial legal framework, lacks effective enforcement mechanisms, exacerbated by judicial delays, political interference, inadequate inter-agency coordination, and ambiguous land records. To improve Karachi's land governance and strengthen enforcement procedures, several policy recommendations have been formulated based on stakeholder input and a thorough analysis of primary and secondary data.

Strengthening the legal system and implementing judicial reforms is vital to

eliminating encroachment. The Sindh Public Property (Removal of Encroachment) Act, 2010, should be amended to address existing legal loopholes and enhance enforcement measures. Currently, cases under this Act are referred to a single Anti-Encroachment Court in Karachi Division, which has been ineffective, and the Anti-Encroachment Tribunal remains largely dysfunctional. Special anti-encroachment courts and tribunals should therefore be established at the district level to expedite land disputes and minimize legal delays.

The judicial system in Sindh must also incorporate strong transparency measures to detect and eliminate fraudulent land documents. Courts should refrain from issuing stay orders without verifying land ownership through relevant government departments, and any stay orders should not exceed six months to prevent prolonged stagnation.

Digitization of land records is another critical reform requiring immediate attention. A high-level committee under the Board of Revenue Sindh (BOR) should oversee the reconstruction and digitization of land records, in compliance with the Land Revenue Act, 1967. Since no reconstruction has been undertaken since 1985, this process should be prioritized. While blockchain technology offers long-term resilience against tampering, implementation should be piloted in select districts before province-wide rollout to assess technical feasibility and political resistance.

Improving Anti-Encroachment enforcement requires reforms within the Anti-Encroachment Force (AEF). Establishing district-level AEF police stations with dedicated investigation staff would decentralize enforcement and further giving it under direct command of concerned Deputy Commissioners will enhance local responsiveness. However, decentralization should be introduced in phases, starting with pilot districts to evaluate performance before expansion. Equipping the AEF with protective gear, surveillance tools, and modern operational resources is a low-cost, high-impact measure that can be implemented immediately.

The role of law enforcement agencies must be reinforced. Police should monitor illegal construction activities proactively, ensuring no structures are built without approval from the Revenue Department. Law enforcement agencies must provide full support during anti-encroachment drives, with clear accountability frameworks to minimize collusion with encroachers.

Urban planning reforms and land protection strategies are crucial to preventing future encroachments. State land must be formally allocated to government institutions, with legal safeguards to prevent re-occupation. Open government land should be reserved exclusively for public services such as parks, graveyards, and community facilities. The possibility of lifting the ban on state land allotment should be considered, provided transparent auctions and revenue-sharing mechanisms are established to prevent misuse.



Accountability of officials and politicians is necessary for sustainability. Strict legal and financial penalties should be imposed on government officials who facilitate encroachment. Regular inspections by Deputy Commissioners and Revenue Officers must be mandatory, supported by an independent Anti-Encroachment Oversight Committee to enhance transparency and monitor progress.

Resolving Karachi's encroachment crisis requires phased implementation. In the short term (0–2 years), the focus should be on strengthening legal provisions, establishing oversight committees, equipping the AEF, and digitizing select land records. Medium-term measures (2–5 years) include establishing district-level courts, scaling up digitization, and piloting decentralization of the AEF. In the long term (5+ years), the goal should be complete blockchain digitization of land records, comprehensive reform of urban planning policies, and sustaining anti-encroachment reforms through institutional checks and balances.

To support this approach, the following Feasibility and Priority Matrix provides a structured roadmap:

Table 11

Feasibility and Priority Matrix – Policy Recommendations

Recommendation	Priority	Implementation Timeline	Feasibility Level	Estimated Resistance	Implementation Approach
1. Amend Sindh Public Property (Removal of Encroachment) Act, 2010 & establish special courts in each district	High	0–12 months	Medium–High	Political resistance from vested interests; legislative delays	Engage provincial lawmakers and judiciary; draft amendments with stakeholder consultation
2. Introduce verification protocol & cap on stay orders	High	0–12 months	High	Low–Medium (judicial procedural resistance)	Judicial policy reform; awareness sessions with judges and court staff
3.	Medium	1–3 years	Medium	High	Pilot in one

Recommendation	Priority	Implementation Timeline	Feasibility Level	Estimated Resistance	Implementation Approach
Reconstruct & digitize land records with blockchain	m		m	(from those benefiting from current record manipulation)	district; integrate NADRA & BOR Sindh for technical oversight
4. Decentralize Anti-Encroachment Force under DCs & establish district AEF stations	Medium	1–3 years	Medium	Medium–High (from centralized administrative structures)	Pilot in two districts; measure efficiency gains before province-wide scale-up
5. Assign police permanent anti-encroachment monitoring role	Medium	3–5 years (can start in year 2)	High	Medium (inter-agency turf concerns)	Joint monitoring teams with Revenue Dept.; formal MoU between agencies
6. Urban land allocation & protection reforms (including lifting ban on allotment)	Medium–Low	3–5 years	Medium	High (political pushback, public skepticism)	Transparent auction framework; public disclosure of land use plans
7. Institutional accountability measures for officials & politicians	High	0–12 months	High	Medium (bureaucratic resistance)	Enforce through executive orders; legal protection



Recommendation	Priority	Implementation Timeline	Feasibility Level	Estimated Resistance	Implementation Approach
					for whistleblowers; regular inspection reports

This structured roadmap allows policymakers to prioritize urgent actions, sequence reforms realistically, and anticipate resistance. Pilot-based strategies—for example, blockchain in select districts or phased decentralization of the AEF—reduce risks and build political buy-in. Without such phased and practical implementation, encroachment will continue to undermine Karachi’s urban governance and long-term development.

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