



# INCLUDING THE EXCLUDED

An in-depth analysis based on experiences and observations of Women, Persons with Disabilities, Transgender Persons and Non-Muslim Minorities during General Elections 2018



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Including the Excluded: CIP General Election Observation 2018

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ACRONYMS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>5</b>

## **CHAPTER 1** Introduction and Methodology

1.1 Legal Framework for Electoral Participation of Marginalized Groups .....	5
1.2 Election Observation Methodology .....	7
Pre-Election Observation .....	7
Election Day Observation .....	8
Focus Group Discussions with Non-Muslim Minorities in Pakistan .....	9

## **CHAPTER 2** Observation of Pre-Election Environment

2.1 Insights of Local-Level Political Parties' Representatives on Electoral Participation of Marginalized Communities .....	10
2.1.1 Findings of Interviews Conducted by PWDs LTOs.....	11
2.1.2 Findings of Interviews Conducted by Transgender LTOs.....	12
2.1.3 Findings of Interviews Conducted by Women LTOs.....	13
2.2 Insights of Returning Officers (ROs) on Electoral Participation of Marginalized Communities .....	14
2.2.1 Findings of Interviews Conducted by PWD LTOs.....	15
2.2.2 Findings of Interviews Conducted by Transgender LTOs.....	15
2.2.3 Findings of Interviews Conducted by Women LTOs.....	16
2.3 Insights of District Election Commissioners (DECs) on Electoral Participation of Marginalized Communities .....	16
2.3.1 Findings of Interviews Conducted by PWD LTOs.....	17
2.3.2 Findings of Interviews Conducted by Transgender LTOs.....	17
2.3.3 Findings of Interviews Conducted by Women LTOs.....	17
2.4 Experiential Study of Acquiring Nomination Papers.....	18
2.4.1 Experiences of PWD LTOs .....	18
2.4.2 Experiences of Transgender LTOs.....	19
2.4.3 Experiences of Women LTOs .....	19
2.5 Experiential Study of Submitting Nomination Papers .....	20
2.5.1 Experiences of Candidates with Disabilities .....	20
2.5.2 Experiences of Transgender Candidates.....	20
2.5.3 Experiences of Women Candidates .....	21
2.6 Experiential Study of Candidates' Scrutiny Process .....	22

2.6.1 Experiences of Observers with Disabilities .....	22
2.6.2 Experiences of Transgender Observers .....	22
2.6.3 Experiences of Women Observers .....	22
2.7 Experiential Study of Voting through Postal Ballot .....	23
2.8 Marginalized Communities' Participation in Political Gatherings .....	24
2.8.1 Experiences of Observers with Disabilities .....	24
2.8.2 Experiences of Transgender Observers .....	25

### CHAPTER 3

#### **Observation of Systematic and Attitudinal Barriers for Women, Transgender Persons and PWD Voters: An Experiential Data Analysis from Polling Day Proceedings during GE-2018**

3.1 Polling Stations Accessibility .....	26
3.1.1 Observations by PWD EDOs .....	27
3.1.2 Observations by Transgender EDOs .....	27
3.2 Facilitating Voters Belonging to Marginalized Communities .....	28
3.2.1 Observations by PWD EDOs .....	28
3.2.2 Observations by Transgender EDOs .....	29
3.2.3 Observations by Women EDOs .....	29
3.3 Perceptions of Election Officials on Polling Day Arrangements for Marginalized Voters .....	30
3.3.1 Experiences of PWD Observers .....	30
3.3.2 Experiences of Transgender Observers .....	30
3.3.3 Experiences of Women Observers .....	31
3.4 Observation of Party Camps .....	31
3.4.1 Observation by PWD EDOs .....	31
3.4.2 Observation by Transgender EDOs .....	31
3.4.3 Observation by Women EDOs .....	32
3.5 Interviews with Voters from Marginalized Communities .....	32
3.5.1 Insights of Voters with Disabilities .....	32
3.5.2 Insights of Transgender Voters .....	33
3.5.2 Insights of Women Voters .....	33

### CHAPTER 4

#### **Insights of Religious Minorities Regarding Electoral Inclusion: Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Discussions**

4.1 Electoral Opportunities for Minority Communities in Pakistan .....	35
4.1.1 Access to Opportunities for electoral inclusion: Perceptions of Hindu Community .....	35
4.1.2 Access to Opportunities for Electoral Inclusion: Perceptions of Christian Community .....	36
4.1.3 Access to Opportunities for Electoral Inclusion: Perceptions of Other Communities .....	38
4.2 Voter registration process as a hindrance towards electoral participation: Insights of Minority Communities .....	39
4.2.1 Perceptions of Hindu Community on Low Voter Registration .....	39



4.2.2 Perceptions of Christian Community on Low Voter Registration .....	41
4.2.3 Perceptions of Other Communities on Low Voter Registration.....	45
4.3 Political Inclusion of the Marginalized: Perceptions of Minority Communities on Freedom of Speech, Association, and Expression in Pakistan .....	46
4.3.1 Insights of the Hindu Community on Freedom of Speech, Association, and Expression in Pakistan .....	46
4.3.2 Insights of Christian Community on Freedom of Speech, Association, and Expression .....	47
4.3.3 Insights of Other Minority Communities on Freedom of Speech, Association, and Expression .....	49
4.4 Opportunities Related to Electoral Participation and Representation of Minority Communities .....	49
4.4.1 Perceptions of Hindu Community .....	49
4.4.2 Perceptions of Christian Community .....	50
4.4.3 Perceptions of Other Communities.....	53

## CHAPTER 5

### Research Findings

5.1 Challenges and Opportunities Regarding Electoral Inclusion of Women .....	55
5.2 Challenges and Opportunities Related to Electoral Inclusion of PWDs .....	55
5.3 Challenges and Opportunities Related to Electoral Inclusion of Transgender Persons .....	56
5.4 Challenges and Opportunities Regarding Electoral Inclusion of Religious Minorities .....	56
a) Social and Systematic Barriers facing Hindu Community .....	56
b) Social and Systematic Barriers facing Christian Community.....	57

## CHAPTER 6

### Recommendations







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Shahid Fiaz  
Chief Executive Officer

## CIP Partners

- Aware Girls
- Balochistan Alliance for Transgender and Intersex Communities
- Blue Veins
- Digital Rights Foundation (DRF)
- Disabled Welfare Association (DWA)
- Forum for Dignity Initiatives (FDI)
- Gender Interactive Alliance (GIA)
- Khawaja Sara Society
- Shirakat
- Special Life Foundation (SLF)
- Special Talent Exchange Program (STEP)
- The Special One (TSO)
- Today's Woman Organization (TWO)
- Voice Society
- Women Development Foundation (WDF)



# LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ANP</b>	Awami National Party
<b>APML</b>	All Pakistan Muslim League
<b>BAP</b>	Balochistan Awami Party
<b>BNP</b>	Balochistan National Party
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CIP</b>	Coalition for Inclusive Pakistan
<b>CPRW</b>	Convention on the Political Rights of Women
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>DEC</b>	District Election Commissioner
<b>ECP</b>	Election Commission of Pakistan
<b>EDO</b>	Election Day Observer
<b>FAFEN</b>	Free and Fair Election Network
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>GDEWG</b>	Gender and Disability Electoral Working Group
<b>GE</b>	General Election
<b>JIP</b>	Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan
<b>JUI-F</b>	Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam (F)
<b>KP</b>	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
<b>LG</b>	Local Government
<b>LTO</b>	Long-Term Observer
<b>MMA</b>	Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal Pakistan
<b>MNA</b>	Member of National Assembly
<b>MPA</b>	Member of Provincial Assembly
<b>MQMP</b>	Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan
<b>MWMP</b>	Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen Pakistan
<b>NA</b>	National Assembly
<b>NADRA</b>	National Database and Registration Authority
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NIC</b>	National Identity Card
<b>NOC</b>	No Objection Certificate
<b>NRC</b>	NADRA Registration Center
<b>PA</b>	Provincial Assembly
<b>PB</b>	Provincial Assembly of Balochistan
<b>PK</b>	Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
<b>PML-N</b>	Pakistan Muslim League-N
<b>PP</b>	Provincial Assembly of Punjab
<b>PPPP</b>	Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians
<b>PS</b>	Polling Station
<b>PSP</b>	Pak Sarzameen Party Pakistan

<b>PTI</b>	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf
<b>PTI-G</b>	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-Gulalai
<b>PWD</b>	Person with Disability
<b>QWP</b>	Qaumi Watan Party
<b>RO</b>	Returning Officer
<b>TDEA</b>	Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability
<b>TLP</b>	Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan
<b>UC</b>	Union Council

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The General Elections (GE) 2018 were held under the new Elections Act, 2017, which mandated the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to adopt special measures for mainstreaming marginalized segments of society. The promulgation of the law was a positive development that will increase the political and electoral inclusion of traditionally excluded groups, specifically persons with disabilities (PWDs), transgender people, women, and religious minorities. Despite being progressive legislation, its implementation remained a challenge as there were a significant number of administrative and attitudinal issues hindering the electoral participation of these marginalized groups, mainly in exercising their right to vote. This report is an attempt to make qualitative assessments of the electoral processes through a first-hand experiential study by the trained and non-partisan PWDs, transgender people, and women. The study also includes the information systematically gathered through focus group discussions (FGDs) with religious minorities across Pakistan.

This qualitative observation was carried out under the aegis of Coalition for Inclusive Pakistan (CIP) in collaboration with the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN). The findings of this study reveal systematic and attitudinal barriers restricting the electoral participation of PWDs, transgender people, women, and religious minorities. For instance, PWD voters and candidates faced accessibility issues at polling stations due to infrastructural barriers. Transgender and women voters also reported similar problems, which are otherwise different, requiring legal and procedural reforms for more inclusive elections in Pakistan.

Transgender voters were engaged in the electoral process for the first time in Pakistan during GE 2018 after being officially recognized. According to the experiences shared by transgender observers, the attitude of law enforcement agencies and election officials towards transgender voters and candidates was generally positive and respectful. However, public perceptions and their acceptability remained a grey area. Transgender observers reported instances of public scorn and ridicule, which necessitates the ECP to run educational and awareness campaigns to address such unfortunate incidents.

The experiential study also includes specialized observations by trained and accredited women observers. Except for a few harassment incidents, women observers generally reported that election staff complied with the ECP regulations vis-à-vis electoral inclusion of women and positive and respectful behavior by the general public.

Concerning the inclusion of religious minorities in the electoral processes, this study highlights social and administrative obstacles hindering their participation. The FGDs conducted with religious minorities reveal that persistent prejudice endemic in society poses threats to their inclusion in the electoral process. Minority communities face administrative barriers such as the complicated voter and National Identity Card (NIC) registration. Lack of resources and transport facilities also remain significant issues resulting in their lower turnout.



# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

CIP, a network of 15 civil society organizations, works to promote the rights of women, transgender persons, and PWDs. It led this research initiative intending to enable the representatives of traditionally marginalized social groups to observe, analyze, and comment on Pakistan's GE 2018 collectively and form their distinct perspectives for the first time in the country's history.

This report focuses on critically analyzing the application of the Elections Act, 2017, and its subordinate legislation and regulations in expanding opportunities and mitigating challenges for electoral participation of the marginalized groups. The experiential nature of this research helped identify gaps in laws and regulations concerning the groups mentioned above to suggest recommendations for future policy implications.

This chapter of the report is an introduction to the legal framework governing the electoral participation of marginalized groups and includes the methodology opted for this study. The second chapter covers the observation during the pre-election period, while the third chapter consists of the Election Day observation conducted by women, transgender persons, and PWDs observers. The fourth chapter presents perceptions of the non-Muslim minorities regarding the opportunities and challenges for electoral participation. The fifth and the sixth chapters summarize the findings of the research and the recommendations for improving the electoral participation of all marginalized groups.

Below is a review of the international conventions and national legal and regulatory frameworks for inclusive and equitable participation of marginalized groups in the electoral process.

## 1.1 Legal Framework for Electoral Participation of Marginalized Groups

Women, transgender persons, PWDs, and non-Muslim minorities have historically faced numerous challenges to become part of the electoral processes. The Elections Act, 2017, introduced several crucial changes in the legal framework for the elections and mandated the ECP to take special measures for an inclusive electoral process. The enactment of the law led to the adoption of several inclusive practices in the elections, expanding opportunities for the political empowerment of the marginalized groups. Besides the reformed election law, the Parliament also provided for the protection of political and electoral rights of the transgender persons through the enactment of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018. The increased emphasis on the electoral participation of women, transgender persons, and other marginalized groups under the new laws yielded an encouraging trend in GE 2018. These legal and regulatory developments had followed the establishment of the Gender and Disability Electoral Working Group (GDEWG) in the ECP during 2016. Listed below are the legislative initiatives taken before the GE 2018 and the actions mandated to the ECP for the promotion and facilitation of the electoral participation of marginalized social groups.

### Measures for Registration of Marginalized Groups as Voters

The Elections Act, 2017, emphasized the registration of women and other marginalized groups as voters. Section 47 of the Elections Act mandated the Election Commission to annually

publish disaggregated data of registered men and women voters in each National Assembly (NA) and Provincial Assembly (PA) constituency highlighting the difference in the number of registered men and women voters. In case the number of men and women on electoral rolls varies by more than ten percent, the law directs the Commission to take special measures to reduce such variation, including expediting the issuance of NICs for women.

Similarly, Section 48 of the Elections Act requires the Election Commission to take special measures for registration of non-Muslims, PWDs, and transgender persons in the electoral rolls as voters including “coordinated action with the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to expedite the issuance of NICs for these voters.

### **Postal Ballot Facility to PWDs**

The Elections Act, 2017, extended the facility of the postal ballot to PWDs. Under Section 93(1) (c) of the Act, a person with any physical disability, who is unable to travel and holds a NIC with a logo for physical disability, is eligible to vote through postal ballot.

### **Measures for Women's Participation in Elections**

The Elections Act, 2017, introduced special measures to ensure women's participation in elections as voters and contestants. To curb the practice of restraining women from casting their votes through an agreement or any other means, Section 9 of the Elections Act empowers the Election Commission to declare the result of the poll void at one or more polling stations or in the whole constituency, if the turnout of women voters is less than ten percent of the total votes polled in a constituency. Similarly, to encourage women contestants, Section 206 of the Elections Act binds the political parties to ensure five percent representation of women candidates while making the selection of candidates on general seats. Additionally, Section 91 of the Elections Act, 2017, instructs the Presiding Officers (PrOs) to prepare a gender-disaggregated statement of voters showing the total number of men and women voters at the polling station and the total votes cast by men and women voters. Besides, a PrO can also prepare and send a special report to the RO and the Commission if he or she has reason to believe that women voters have been restrained from exercising their right to vote based on any express or implied agreement.

### **Political Rights of Transgender Persons**

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, enacted in May 2018, also provides for the protection of the political rights of transgender persons. It allows them to have their preferred gender identity on their NICs and affirms their rights to vote and run for public office. Section 10 of the Act provides for transgender voters' access to the polling stations assigned to the gender mentioned on their (NICs). Section 11 of the Act prohibits any discrimination based on sex, gender identity, or gender expression for transgender persons who wish to contest an election to hold public office.

### **International Conventions on Participation of Marginalized Groups in Elections**

The measures introduced in the Elections Act, 2017, and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018, are in line with the international conventions on political rights.

Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) says that states should ensure the elimination of discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country. In particular, the states should provide to women, on equal terms with men, the right to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies.



Articles 1 and 2 of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (CPRW) postulates that women should be entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms with men, without any discrimination. And that women should be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies, established by national law, on similar terms with men, without any discrimination.

Likewise, provisions for the electoral participation of PWD are in line with Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

## 1.2 Election Observation Methodology

TDEA-CIP employed a participatory and experiential methodology to observe GE 2018. Fifteen Long-Term Observers (LTOs) and 375 Election Day Observers (EDOs) conducted the exercise. These observers were non-partisan, trained, and accredited with the ECP. TDEA provided CIP member organizations support for the training of observers. They were oriented on the following themes:

**Electoral Rights of Transgender Persons, Women, and PWDs**

**Pre-Election Observation by Transgender Persons, Women, and PWDs**

**Election Day Observation by Transgender Persons, Women, and PWDs**

The observers recorded their observations on standardized checklists, developed by TDEA for pre-election and Election Day phases. These checklists were explicitly designed to document the experiences of transgender persons, women, and PWDs as observers, candidates, and voters. Questions focused on observing structural barriers facing these groups during their electoral participation, as well as the attitudes and actions of election administration authorities, including polling staff, law enforcement officials, members of political parties, and other citizens.

### Pre-Election Observation

CIP deployed 15 LTOs, among them five women, as many transgender persons, and five PWDs to observe the pre-election processes starting from June 1, 2018, till the night before the polling day.

The observation during the pre-election phase included:

<b>Observation Period</b>	June 1, 2018 – July 24, 2018
<b>Observation Scope</b>	Lahore, Peshawar, Karachi, Quetta, and Islamabad Capital Territory
<b>Type of Observers</b>	LTOs
<b>Total Observers</b>	15

### Meetings with Election Officials

LTOs from marginalized groups visited the offices of District Election Commissioners (DECs) and Returning Officers (ROs) across four provincial capitals and Islamabad to observe preparedness of the election administration to facilitate voters belonging to the marginalized groups. Women, transgender, and PWDs voters also recorded attitudinal issues faced during the entire exercise causing hindrance to the electoral participation of said communities.

### Meetings with Political Parties' Leadership

LTOs visited local-level party representatives to record their insights on the arrangements made for the inclusion of marginalized groups in the electoral process. The observations ranged from studying behavioral aspects of local-level political party representatives about the electoral



participation of marginalized factions to the perceptive analysis of political parties' representatives in the wake of the Elections Act, 2017.

### Experiential Observation of Election Nomination Process

LTOs belonging to the marginalized groups observed the process of acquiring and submitting nominations for GE 2018 as participant observers. They filed nomination papers themselves as candidates to note the implementation of ECP's directions for special arrangements to facilitate the candidates from marginalized groups.

### Observation of Political Gatherings (Rallies, Jalsas, Corner Meetings, etc.)

LTOs also attended *jalsas*, rallies, and corner meetings of political parties across the four provincial capitals and federal capital to observe and record the behavior of political workers and supporters towards the marginalized factions in their political gatherings.

### Observation of Provision of Postal Ballot Facility

Voters with disabilities availed the service of the postal ballot during GE 2018 that enabled them to cast their vote through post because of their accessibility issues. LTOs with disabilities observed the entire process and also cast their votes through postal ballots.

### Focus Group Discussions with Non-Muslims

To assess the situation of electoral participation of religious minorities in the elections, TDEA-FAFEN conducted 220 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the local-level councilors and members of the non-Muslim minorities in 130 districts across the country.

## Election Day Observation

TDEA-CIP deployed 375 EDOs, including 125 women, as many transgender persons, and the same number of PWDs on July 25, 2018, in four provincial capitals – Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta – and Islamabad to observe the polling process and the general political environment at and around polling stations. Each EDO spent nearly an

<b>Observation Period</b>	July 25, 2018
<b>Observation Scope</b>	Lahore, Peshawar, Karachi, Quetta, and Islamabad Capital Territory
<b>Type of Observers</b>	Election Day Observers
<b>Total Observers</b>	375 (125 Women, 125 PWDs, and 125 Transgender)

hour at his or her assigned polling station to fill in the standardized checklists comprising questions on the quality of elections, and the participation of marginalized communities in the polls. Besides filling in the lists, the observers also shared issues of urgent nature on Election Day through telephonic and online communication. EDOs from each of the three groups (i.e., women, transgender persons, and PWDs) mostly visited their assigned polling stations in pairs.

## Focus Group Discussions with Non-Muslim Minorities in Pakistan

To assess the participation of religious minorities in elections, FAFEN conducted 220 FGDs with the local-level councilors and members of the non-Muslim minorities in 130 districts across all four provinces and Islamabad Capital Territory. FAFEN's District Coordinators conducted these FGDs with the local minority councilors in their respective areas and the members of the minority communities identified by those councilors. FGDs were directed by the semi-structured interview guide that included questions related to:





## CHAPTER 2: OBSERVATION OF PRE-ELECTION ENVIRONMENT

Beginning from the announcement of election program, CIP observed various pre-poll processes till the night of GE 2018. This chapter includes the perception and initiatives of election administration and political parties regarding the participation and protection of electoral rights of women, transgender persons, and PWDs along with the administrative and attitudinal challenges faced by the aforementioned marginalized factions while participating in the electoral process. LTOs interviewed election officials (DECs and ROs), provincial level representatives of major political parties, and observed the political gatherings (rallies, *jalsas*, corner meetings, etc.) and scrutiny process of nomination papers. The following figures present an overview of the scope of this phase of CIP's election observation:

No. of Observers	No. of Meetings with District Election Commissioners	No. of Meetings with Returning Officers	No. of Political Gatherings Observed	Observation of Nominations for Election	No. of Interviews with Political Parties' Representatives	Acquisition of Postal Ballots
<b>15</b> LTOs deployed in Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta, and Islamabad	<b>15</b> interviews — three each in Lahore, Peshawar, Karachi, Quetta, and Islamabad	<b>35</b> Interviews — seven in Islamabad, nine in Lahore, seven in Peshawar, eight in Karachi, and five in Quetta	<b>57</b> political gatherings — 15 in Islamabad, 11 in Peshawar, 13 in Lahore, 10 in Karachi, and eight in Quetta	<b>20</b> nomination papers of the candidates acquired and submitted – four each in Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta, Karachi, and Islamabad	<b>54</b> interviews — nine in Karachi, six in Quetta and 13 each in Lahore, Peshawar, and Islamabad	<b>14</b> PWDs applied for postal ballots and used their right to vote through postal ballot in Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, and Islamabad

### 2.1 Insights of Local-Level Political Parties' Representatives on Electoral Participation of Marginalized Communities

Political parties can play a vital role in the protection of the electoral rights of women, transgender persons, and PWDs. TDEA-CIP LTOs interviewed the political parties' representatives to gauge their perception of the electoral participation and rights of marginalized communities. Besides recording their impressions, LTOs also acquired information on the representation of these traditionally excluded groups in political parties' structures and focus on them in parties' manifestoes.

The engagement with the political parties encompassed the study of behavioral aspects of local-level political parties' representatives about the electoral participation of marginalized factions, and the perceptive analysis in the wake of progressive and inclusive provisions of the Elections Act, 2017. Mostly, PWDs and women were treated respectfully at the political parties' offices. However, transgender LTOs had to face significant attitudinal issues from the political parties' representatives and the staff present at the offices of political parties.

This section describes the experiences of women, transgender persons, and PWDs LTOs at the offices of political parties. It also includes the perceptions of political party representatives on the electoral inclusion of the marginalized factions.

The following table shows the figures for meetings held with various political parties' representatives:

Meetings with political parties' representatives	Women LTOs		Transgender LTOs		PWD LTOs	
<b>Total Meetings (55)</b>	<b>21</b>		<b>17</b>		<b>17</b>	
<b>Political Parties with whom LTOs met</b>	<b>PML-N</b>	3	<b>PTI</b>	5	<b>PML-N</b>	2
	<b>PTI</b>	3	<b>PML-N</b>	3	<b>PTI</b>	3
	<b>PPPP</b>	3	<b>PPPP</b>	3	<b>PPPP</b>	1
	<b>JI</b>	2	<b>MQM</b>	1	<b>QWP</b>	0
	<b>AWP</b>	1	<b>TLP</b>	1	<b>MQM</b>	1
	<b>MQM</b>	1	<b>MMA</b>	1	<b>PJDP</b>	1
	<b>JUI</b>	1	<b>PMAP</b>	1	<b>JUI-F</b>	0
	<b>TLP</b>	1	<b>PTI G</b>	2	<b>APML</b>	1
	<b>PTI G</b>	2			<b>PSP</b>	2
	<b>ANP</b>	1			<b>ANP</b>	1
	<b>BNP</b>	1			<b>AWP</b>	1
	<b>NP</b>	1			<b>MWM</b>	1
	<b>JDP</b>	1			<b>MMA</b>	3

### 2.1.1 Findings of Interviews Conducted by PWD LTOs

CIP LTOs with disabilities met 17 representatives of various political parties across four provincial capitals and the federal capital. All 17 interviewed representatives considered steps taken by ECP in ensuring electoral participation of PWDs inadequate with five representatives emphasizing the need for representation of PWDs in provincial and federal legislatures. The MQM representative also raised concerns about the official number of PWDs and called for avoiding understating their population. All interviewed representatives urged the government and ECP to take steps for improving political participation of PWDs with a former legislator from Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal Pakistan (MMAP) suggesting inclusion of PWDs' rights in educational curriculum. In response to the question on the steps taken for ensuring PWDs participation in elections, the representatives expressed dissatisfaction with the ECP's efforts in this regard and highlighted the following issues:

Non representation of PWDs in Legislatures

Unreliably low estimates of the PWDs' population in National Population Census 2017

Lack of Awareness among ECP, political parties and public on PWDs' issues

In response to the question of the ECP's awareness campaigns regarding PWDs' electoral participation, 15 out of 17 interviewees denied knowing any ECP-led awareness campaign aimed at improving PWDs' electoral participation. Similarly, seven representatives said that PWDs held at least one official position at the provincial or national level in their parties. Only two political parties — Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League N (PML-N) — awarded tickets to PWDs for contesting elections on general seats.

Similarly, seven respondents mentioned their parties were making efforts to earn the support of PWDs voters for GE 2018, while only one respondent belonging to PPPP spoke about their party's role in presenting The Disability Act in the Parliament. Only one respondent knew of his party's initiative to distribute wheelchairs to the PWDs. However, none of the 17 respondents could provide details of any particular campaigns by their parties, highlighting the electoral participation of PWDs. Four party representatives belonging to PTI, MMAP, MQMP, and Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen Pakistan (MWMP) shared that their parties had a separate wing for the PWDs. In terms of attitudinal issues faced at the party offices, one observer suffered ridiculing behavior from the security staff at the Islamabad office of APLM. However, none of the other LTOs reported any incident where they had to face ridiculous, humiliating, or insulting behavior. Rather, the staff at the relevant office honored every respondent.

*"We only had to face issues in PTI office where we were not allowed to meet senior officials. The general secretary who met with us was very arrogant."*

— A PWD LTO from Karachi

## 2.1.2 Findings of Interviews Conducted by Transgender LTOs

CIP's transgender LTOs visited 17 offices of various political parties to assess the understanding of political parties' representatives on transgender rights and their efforts towards making the process of electoral participation easier for the transgender community. Out of the 17 parties, only Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-Gulalai (PTI-G) had appointed a transgender individual as their focal person.

*"There are only 10,418 transgender persons in Pakistan according to the latest population census. So, why should we include such a minority group in our manifesto?"*

— PML-N General Secretary, Lahore

PTI-G also had a separate wing in Islamabad for transgender members with a proper organizational structure and issued tickets to transgender persons for two National Assembly (NA-53 ICT-II and NA-63 Rawalpindi-VII) and one Provincial Assembly (PP-26 Jhelum-II) seats.

The respondents showed a mixed response to ECP's efforts towards protecting transgender persons' voting rights. Six respondents hailed the proactive efforts for NIC registration of transgender persons, and four out of 17 representatives emphasized ECP's role in transforming public opinion about the political participation of transgender persons.

*"A party representative misbehaved with me, saying that he did not have time for people like me, and it was useless talking to us."*

— A transgender LTO from Islamabad

The Awami National Party (ANP) was the only party that claimed to have incorporated transgender persons' rights in its electoral manifesto. A representative from PTI-G also claimed to have nominated transgender candidates for GE 2018.

*"Ruqqiya Hashmi scolded her staff on learning that they misbehaved with me. She asked them to apologize to me. She very politely answered every question I asked."*

— A transgender LTO from Karachi

Overall, the behavior of party officials and their staff was normal towards the transgender LTOs except for two cases where transgender observers had to face unethical behavior by political parties' workers or office-bearers. In one instance, none except a general secretary at a party's office was willing to see the transgender LTO, whereas some officials chose not to answer the questions. Similarly, a transgender LTO from Quetta shared an incident of facing harassment from a staff member at the Balochistan Awami Party's (BAP) office.

Transgender LTOs reported receiving sarcastic comments from staff at many offices while political parties' representatives were seen reluctant and shocked upon seeing transgender persons as observers.

### 2.1.3 Findings of Interviews Conducted by Women LTOs

CIP women LTOs interviewed 21 representatives of political parties contesting elections across four provincial capitals and Islamabad before GE 2018. Almost all of the interviewed parties' representatives shared that they have included women's rights in their electoral manifestoes. They also stated that their parties gave due importance to women's rights and political participation while framing their intra-party policies.

The PML-N representative expressed his satisfaction with the women protection legislation in Punjab. Similarly, ANP's representative shared his party's initiatives for women equality, including equal opportunities for party ticket allocation. A representative of the Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) also claimed to have mainstreamed women by allocating party positions to women. A representative of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JIP) mentioned having included sections in their manifesto for the abolition of unnecessary cultural ceremonies from the society that adversely affect women. Despite the claim of including women-related provisions in party manifestoes, none other than the ANP representative knew about the specific part of their election manifesto that highlighted the women empowerment.

*"A JI representative told me to do my job (i.e., household chores), asking that what was the point of a woman interviewing a political party representative?"*

— A woman LTO from Peshawar

*"We had to bear with the 'usual' taunting like we get to hear from the public."*

— A woman LTO from Lahore

*"They [party representatives] all gave a very shocking response upon coming to know that we were conducting election observation."*

— A woman LTO from Lahore

**Four parties had at least four women designated at official party positions.**

**Seven parties had at least three women at their national or provincial party positions.**

**Ten parties had at least one woman who held a national or provincial party office.**

**Eighteen parties had nominated women candidates to contest election on at least one national or provincial assembly seat.**

Thirteen out of 21 respondents said 'yes' when asked if there were separate women wings in their parties. The same number of respondents hailed ECP's efforts towards improving conditions for women's participation in the electoral process. However, eight thought otherwise. All except one party representative believed that ECP had shown significant commitment towards the political empowerment of women by launching an awareness campaign for their inclusion and participation in the electoral process. They also praised the mandatory requirement for political parties to nominate at least five percent women candidates for the general seats while praising the provision for invalidating the results at constituencies where women turnout remained less than 10 percent of the polled votes.

The parties' representatives also praised ECP's role in facilitating women by establishing separate polling booths for women and men voters. MQMP representative showed reservations over the unchecked implementation of the requirement of five percent representation of women among general seat candidates, as she feared that parties would nominate women in those constituencies where they had little chances of victory. JIP



representative considered the 'five percent quota for women on general seats' a western agenda and emphasized maintaining equality between men and women without quotas.

Women representatives of PML-N and PPPP expressed concern over the practice of nominating female relatives of influential male party officeholders on reserved seats and shared that this is common across all political parties in Pakistan. The following are some significant responses shared by political parties' representatives:

<p><b>The representatives stressed the need to make more efforts towards political empowerment of women by increasing the quota for women on general seats from five percent along with pushing political parties to motivate women to contest elections.</b></p>	<p><b>The representatives called for ECP to engage more women in the electoral process by running awareness campaigns. An interesting suggestion by a party representative sought to allow the online voting facility for pregnant women and provide transport facilities for such voters.</b></p>	<p><b>The majority (17) of the respondents claimed to have taken steps to facilitate and encourage women to participate in elections.</b></p>
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PPPP's representative interviewed in Balochistan claimed to have helped women in getting their blocked NICs unblocked and the expired ones reissued. Another one said that they ran campaigns mobilizing women to participate in the electoral process. A BAP representative stated that their party ran campaigns educating women on how to cast a vote in GE 2018. Representatives of PPPP and PTI claimed training women through awareness campaigns on the importance of the vote. Similarly, QWP collaborated with non-profit organizations in educating women in Peshawar about the significance of voting for their empowerment.

*"A PML-N representative from Lahore questioned the need for women to observe elections and the rights and liberty for them."*

— A woman LTO from Lahore

Generally, the respondents received the women LTOs well. However, LTOs interviewing JI and PML-N representatives complained about their unwelcoming attitudes.

## 2.2 Insights of Returning Officers (ROs) on Electoral Participation of Marginalized Communities

Election officials play a significant role in ensuring smooth electoral processes. There have been instances in the past where political parties and contestants raised questions on the conduct of election officials in conducting electoral processes impartially. LTOs were trained to observe the administrative and attitudinal behaviors of election officials.

LTOs from marginalized groups visited RO offices across four provincial capitals and federal capital to record their observations related to preparedness to facilitate voters belonging to the marginalized groups. Women, transgender, and PWD voters also recorded attitudinal issues faced during the entire exercise causing hindrance to the electoral participation of the said communities.

The following is a detailed analysis of the observations made by the LTOs:

Types of LTOs	Islamabad	Karachi	Peshawar	Quetta	Lahore	Total
<b>Women</b>	3	3	3	3	4	16
<b>Transgender</b>	2	2	3	1	2	10
<b>PWDs</b>	2	3	1	0	3	9



## 2.2.1 Findings of Interviews Conducted by PWD LTOs

CIP PWD LTOs visited RO offices in nine constituencies, including NA-52 Islamabad-I, NA-53 Islamabad-II, NA-123 Lahore-I, NA-132 Lahore-X, NA-133 Lahore-XI, NA-254 Karachi Central-II, NA-255 Karachi Central-III, and PK-75 Peshawar-X to learn ROs' point of view on the inclusion of PWDs in the electoral process. Also, LTOs made observations on how PWDs are treated at the RO offices.

### Special Arrangements for PWD Voters

Three of the interviewed ROs in Lahore and Karachi said having received instructions from ECP about making special arrangements for PWD voters. However, the rest denied receiving any such instructions. The RO in NA-254 shared that PWD voters would be allowed to be accompanied by an attendant while casting votes. An Islamabad-based RO refused to meet the PWD LTOs under the pretext that LTOs did not have the No Objection Certificate (NOC). Responding to a question about making special arrangements to facilitate PWD candidates at the time of submission and verification of nomination papers, three ROs from Lahore and Islamabad claimed to have assisted PWD candidates. Upon responding to the questions related to making special arrangements for PWD voters at polling stations, three ROs in Lahore, Quetta, and Peshawar claimed to have made special arrangements for the PWD voters.

*"The Returning Officer was over-sympathizing and constantly made statements like, "how you would be able to do this observation? It will be too difficult for you."*

— A PWD LTO from Karachi

*"The Returning Officer from NA-53 was not willing to meet a PWD observer. I met his assistant who also, he did not allow me to meet the RO without a No Objection Certificate."*

— A PWD LTO from Islamabad

### Attitudinal Issues facing PWD observers

Overall, the behavior of ROs, security personnel at the RO office and the staff in Lahore, Peshawar, and Quetta was recorded as honoring and respectful. However, PWD LTOs in NA-52 Islamabad-I and NA-53 Islamabad-II had to face humiliating behavior from the ROs. Contrarily, the same LTOs did not suffer any demeaning or ridiculing behavior from any of the officials or the security staff working at the RO offices. Rather, they were supportive and encouraging.

## 2.2.2 Findings of Interviews Conducted by Transgender LTOs

CIP transgender LTOs met 10 ROs across four provincial capitals and the federal capital to identify information gaps and record their interests, efforts, and behavior towards the inclusion of transgender community in the electoral process.

### Special arrangements for electoral inclusion of transgender voters and candidates

Two out of ten ROs interviewed by transgender LTOs denied any special provision for transgender candidates in the Elections Act, 2017. The same number of ROs acknowledged having received the instructions of ECP regarding distinctive arrangements for the transgender persons' electoral inclusion. Only four ROs claimed to have made special arrangements for accommodating transgender candidates, which mainly included providing necessary information to the transgender candidates at the time of submission and verification of nomination papers.

*"The staff at RO office carried my wheelchair to the second floor and brought me downstairs as well. They were very cooperative."*

— A PWD LTO from Karachi

## Behavioral Issues facing Transgender LTOs

Two ROs from the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan (PB-28 Quetta-V) and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (PK-78 Peshawar-XIII) showed ridiculous and insulting attitude towards transgender LTOs. There were four instances of the staff at RO offices showing unwelcoming behavior towards transgender observers, which included inappropriate verbal and physical gestures.

*"The Returning Officer humiliated me, saying that I should be best at singing and dancing, and not in election observation."*

— A transgender LTO from Quetta

### 2.2.3 Findings of Interviews Conducted by Women LTOs

CIP women LTOs visited 16 RO offices across four provincial capitals as well as the federal capital to observe administrative arrangements related to women voters and candidates. The observers recorded prevalent prejudices along with incidents of bias or any other attitudinal issues faced by women at these offices particularly, and among the public in general.

*"A RO posted in Karachi said his team was making efforts to ensure at least 10 percent women voting. He assured to do everything to facilitate women on polling day."*

— A woman LTO from Karachi

### Special arrangements for electoral participation of women

Out of the 16 ROs, 11 were ready to meet women LTOs. Those who could not meet women LTOs sent representatives on their behalf to speak to them. However, only five ROs knew the exact number of registered women voters in their constituencies. Seven ROs (NA-265, NA-30, NA-123, PK-78, PS-107, PS-110, and PS-111) said they had received instructions from ECP to

*"Out of three ROs I interviewed; one was friendly; another was reluctant to share information while the third rejected the request for an interview."*

— A woman LTO from Islamabad

make efforts ensuring women's electoral participation in the GE 2018. Further, they claimed to have taken necessary steps to comply with ECP's directions related to women's participation, mainly by making security arrangements and providing separate polling booths for them. Seven ROs (NA-266, NA-265, NA-54, PS-107, PS-110, and PK-72) claimed to have made special arrangements to facilitate women candidates at the time of submission and scrutiny of nomination papers. The provisions included separate designated places for women to submit nomination papers and giving priority to women candidates throughout the process. A RO in Karachi claimed to have designated female polling staff at polling stations and provided the facility of washrooms for voters, especially women.

### Attitudinal issues faced by the women LTOs

All of the interviewed ROs behaved positively and welcomed women LTOs except one in PP-151 Lahore-VIII who tried to harass a woman LTO sexually. ROs in Islamabad were reluctant to share any information with the CIP observers. Other than that, there were no attitudinal issues faced by the observers at the RO offices.

## 2.3 Insights of District Election Commissioners (DECs) on Electoral Participation of Marginalized Communities

Women, transgender, and PWD observers visited DEC offices across all four provincial capitals as well as the federal capital to record administrative and attitudinal barriers faced by the electoral participation of groups mentioned above. It included monitoring implementation progress of ECP's directives in the wake of the Elections Act, 2017, which mandated election

officials to make significant infrastructural and systematic arrangements to facilitate the groups above. The detailed observation follows in the subsequent sub-sections.

Types of LTOs	Islamabad	Karachi	Peshawar	Quetta	Lahore	Total
Women	1	1	1	1	1	5
Transgender	1	1	1	1	1	5
PWDs	1	1	1	1	1	5

### 2.3.1 Findings of Interviews Conducted by PWD LTOs

CIP PWD LTOs faced significant accessibility issues at the DEC offices in Islamabad and all provincial capitals due to the infrastructural barriers. There were no ramps, wheelchairs, or elevators to help them access the DEC offices. One PWD observer from Islamabad had to climb more than 40 flights of stairs to meet the DEC. However, no incidents of attitudinal issues were reported. It was also noted that ECP had instructed DEC to make special arrangements for PWDs as four out of five DEC said 'yes' when questioned regarding the matter. The special arrangements included accessing Postal Ballot service as well as allowing attendants while casting votes. However, Peshawar-based DEC denied having received any such instructions from ECP.

ECP had issued instructions for DEC in Karachi and Islamabad to allow PWDs to take their attendants along to cast their vote freely.

Voting certificate was issued at the request of observers, but they had to pay Rs300 and Rs20 in Karachi and Islamabad respectively. In all the other places, PWD LTOs had to pay Rs80.

### 2.3.2 Findings of Interviews Conducted by Transgender LTOs

CIP transgender LTOs visited DEC offices in Karachi, Quetta, Lahore, Peshawar, and Islamabad to identify gaps in the arrangements to facilitate transgender persons in GE 2018 along with recording behavioral trends at DEC offices towards electoral participation of transgender persons.

#### Special instructions on the part of DEC for electoral participation of transgender

DECs in Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad refused to meet transgender LTOs. Only the DEC Quetta knew about the exact figures of transgender voters registered in the district. He claimed to have made adequate security arrangements to ensure the safety of transgender voters' during the voting process. DEC Peshawar shared information about the formation of working groups at the provincial level to monitor and ensure implementation of Election Commission's policies for greater inclusion of transgender voters in the electoral process.

#### Observation of the attitudes of staff at the DEC office

There were no behavioral issues reported at any of the DEC offices visited by the transgender observers who found the attitude of DECs, staff, and security personnel as dignified and respectful. The observers were also provided the voting certificate on their request for a fee of Rs10. However, in one incident in Peshawar, an LTO was denied the voting certificate because of the unavailability of NOC.

### 2.3.3 Findings of Interviews Conducted by Women LTOs

Women LTOs visited DEC offices in Lahore, Quetta, Islamabad, Peshawar, and Karachi to interview DECs on administrative arrangements to ensure electoral participation of women in

GE 2018 along with identifying any attitudinal barriers towards women's electoral participation.

### Special arrangements made for women voters and candidates

DECs from Islamabad and Karachi denied any knowledge of ECP's recent efforts in making special arrangements for women voters and candidates. The remaining three DECs, however, mentioned infrastructural arrangements such as provisions of toilets for women, separate gates at polling stations for entry and exit, and security arrangements for safe electoral participation of women.

*"The DEC office was overcrowded, and full of men, but the DEC was good and responded well."*

— A woman LTO from Quetta

All DECs highlighted in their responses that political parties were bound to nominate at least five percent women to contest elections on general seats. They said that the election results may be invalidated in the constituencies where women voter turnout remains less than 10 percent of the polled votes.

### Attitudes towards women LTOs

All DECs and their staff welcomed women LTOs with honorable and respectful behavior. All the LTOs were issued voting certificates on request without any hindrance. However, two LTOs from Lahore and Islamabad were charged Rs20 for the voting certificate while the others did not pay any fee.

## 2.4 Experiential Study of Acquiring Nomination Papers

CIP LTOs belonging to the marginalized groups recorded the problems faced by candidates from these groups, not just as independent observers, but also as participant observers. They acquired and filed nomination papers themselves as candidates to observe the implementation of ECP's directions for special arrangements to facilitate the candidates from marginalized groups. The subsequent sub-sections contain a detailed analysis of the observations made by the observers from marginalized factions. The following are the number of nomination papers acquired in each of the project districts:

Types of LTOs	Islamabad	Karachi	Peshawar	Quetta	Lahore	Total
Women	1	1	1	1	1	5
Transgender	2	1	2	1	2	8
PWDs	1	1	1	1	1	5

### 2.4.1 Experiences of PWD LTOs

PWD observers visited RO offices in federal and provincial capitals to obtain nomination papers. PWD LTOs applied for getting nomination papers at five constituencies i.e., NA-254, NA-265, NA-133, NA-54, and PK-75. Permission to enter RO offices was granted to PWD candidates at all five constituencies. Similarly, all candidates were provided the nomination papers after submission of applications.

There was no infrastructural arrangement for the facilitation of PWDs in RO offices. A PWD LTO in NA-54 had to go up 40 flights of stairs to reach the RO offices. None of the PWD observers faced any attitudinal barriers while obtaining nomination papers. Even the supporters of other candidates present at the RO offices behaved respectfully with the PWD LTOs.

## 2.4.2 Experiences of Transgender LTOs

Transgender LTOs observed the entire process of obtaining the nomination papers in eight constituencies as candidates, including NA-124, NA-53, NA-54, PK-77, PK-78, PB-28, NA-265 and PK-54. LTOs also accompanied the transgender candidates to observe the attitudinal and organizational barriers in the process. The transgender LTOs filed nomination papers themselves. They did so to figure out the administrative and attitudinal barriers in the process of transgender candidates contesting elections.

### Attitudinal and systematic issues as barriers in obtaining nomination papers

Transgender candidates did not face any difficulty in accessing RO offices. However, in two instances, a person accompanying the candidate was denied permission to enter the RO office in PB-28 and PK-77. All except one transgender candidate were provided the nomination papers on their request. Only one application for nomination papers by a transgender LTO was rejected on the pretext of the vote not being registered in the relevant district. At three RO offices in Peshawar - PK-76, PK-77, and PK-78 — during the process of obtaining nomination papers, the RO used inappropriate language while addressing transgender observers. According to LTOs, two information desks were established to provide easy access to information for the transgender candidates and voters at RO offices in PK-76 and PK-78.

*“The staff was more interested in knowing about who was supporting me and constantly taunted me.”*

— A transgender LTO from Quetta

### Attitudes of other candidates present at the time of obtaining nomination papers

Candidates present at the RO office observed hostile attitudes towards transgender candidates during their visit to obtain nomination papers. ROs' offices in PK-76, PK-77, PK-78 and NA-54, other candidates, and their supporters demonstrated an insulting and discouraging attitude seeing transgender candidates obtaining nomination papers. Some supporters of other candidates were discourteous towards the transgender candidates while few others mocked and taunted them, making inappropriate gestures and comments. Transgender LTOs were encouraged by the other candidates present at the RO office in Lahore and Quetta.

## 2.4.3 Experiences of Women LTOs

CIP women LTOs filed their nomination papers in five constituencies, including PS-107, NA-54, NA-77, PP-153, and NA-265. The aim was to record the administrative and attitudinal difficulties faced by women candidates during the process of filing nomination papers. The women LTOs also accompanied the other women candidates during the process to observe the possible hurdles.

### Systematic issues as barriers in obtaining nomination papers

Women LTOs visited the RO offices at five constituencies across four provincial capitals and federal capital, both as candidates as well as observers. All the candidates were allowed access to the RO offices for obtaining nomination papers without any hurdles. Further, the candidates were granted the nomination papers on their request.

### Attitudes faced at the RO office

Women candidates did not face any harassment from any official or security staff present at the RO office. Surprisingly, the other contestants present at the RO office for acquiring nomination papers had a very encouraging attitude towards women candidates. However,



at one RO office in PP-153 Lahore-XVII, a candidate present in the office discouraged women candidates.

## 2.5 Experiential Study of Submitting Nomination Papers

After acquiring nomination papers, aspiring candidates are required to submit the nomination papers at RO's office to officially become electoral candidates. Observers also monitored the process of candidates from marginalized groups submitting nomination papers by both filing papers as candidates and as independent observers. For this task, the same LTOs who observed the previous stages once again observed the organizational and behavioral barriers obstructing the process leading to submitting of nomination papers. The aim was to see the systematic and behavioral barriers hindering the inclusion of marginalized candidates. The following sub-sections entail the experiences recorded by the women, transgender, and PWD candidates/LTOs.

The following is a summary of the nomination papers submission process observed by LTOs:

Types of LTOs	Islamabad	Karachi	Peshawar	Quetta	Lahore	Total
Women	1	1	3	2	3	10
Transgender	1	1	2	1	1	6
PWDs	1	1	1	1	1	5

### 2.5.1 Experiences of Candidates with Disabilities

The same PWD candidates who observed the process of obtaining nomination papers also saw the process of the submission of nomination papers across the same cities. However, none of the Ros received the nomination papers saying that they could not be submitted without paying the fee.

*"They [staff at the RO office] were over-sympathizing with me. Many of them asked, let us complete your work. You should have told us; we would have submitted the papers for you."*

— A PWD LTO

#### Overall:

*The PWD observers did not experience any attitudinal barriers as no case was reported that indicated inappropriate behavior on the part of the RO or security staff present at the RO office.*

*The PWD candidates and observers hailed the entire process calling it inclusive.*

However, the Islamabad-based observer reiterated the difficulty he faced in climbing stairs at the RO office.

### 2.5.2 Experiences of Transgender Candidates

Five constituencies in Lahore, Islamabad, Quetta, Karachi, and Peshawar (NA-53, NA-124, PK-76, PK-77, and PK-78) were selected where LTOs observed the process by collecting first-hand experiential data during submission of nomination papers. Data was collected almost five weeks before the GE 2018.

## Structural barriers in the submission of nomination papers

At the very first step, all the ROs except one in Islamabad (NA-53) refused to receive nomination papers from transgender candidates partially on the pretext of inability to pay the nomination fee and partly because of incomplete documents. In Peshawar (PK-78), NOC was demanded from the transgender candidates to get their nomination papers submitted.

*"One person asked me, are you a real transgender person or a fake?"*

— A transgender candidate

## Attitudinal barriers hindering the process of submission of nomination papers

The Peshawar-based ROs in PK-77 and 78, ridiculed transgender candidates, whereas the attitude of the staff at the RO office was also insulting towards candidates with disabilities in PK-76. The security staff at the RO offices mentioned above also behaved ridiculously, making inappropriate remarks. The behavior of the other candidates present at the time of submitting nomination papers towards transgender candidates at PK-76 and 78 RO offices was discouraging as some candidates behaved disrespectfully, seeing transgender candidates file their nomination papers. Other than that, there were no incidents reported where transgender candidates had to face any attitudinal barriers in Lahore, Islamabad, Quetta, and Karachi.

*"The transgender people will now contest the elections. Once you become part of the government, serve the people by dancing and singing for free."*

— A supporter of a candidate

## 2.5.3 Experiences of Women Candidates

Five CIP women LTOs, both as candidates and independent observers, observed the entire process of submission of nomination papers and recorded systematic irregularities or bias towards women candidates.

### Systematic barriers faced by women candidates during submission of nomination papers

Six out of 10 ROs rejected the nomination papers of women candidates under the pretext of them not having paid the submission fee.

Additionally, all ROs accepted nomination papers without any hesitation and provided a receipt of acceptance to the women candidates. Moreover, other candidates present at the time of submission of nomination papers reportedly had an encouraging attitude towards women candidates and LTOs.

*"The behavior (of the staff) was good. I faced no harassment. Submission of papers was an issue for every candidate because I didn't know if there was any fee to be paid. We were repeatedly asked to pay the fee for submitting the nomination papers."*

— A woman LTO

Apart from the cases mentioned above where the ROs rejected nomination papers in NA-53 and PK-78, all the other women candidates had their names in the list that appeared at the RO office one day after the submission deadline.



## Observations of the behavior during submission of nomination papers

The behavior of the RO, the office staff, and the security personnel was respectful towards the women candidates and women LTOs who submitted their documents for further processing. There was not even a single reported case of any unethical and humiliating behavior on the part of the officials mentioned above and the security staff. Additionally, there were no incidents of bias during the entire process of paper submission.

*“Overall, the environment was unwelcoming, and the behavior was rude and inappropriate. The RO did not take us seriously and refused to accept our papers. Women were degraded and mocked. The RO was rude.”*

— A woman observer from NA-77

## 2.6 Experiential Study of Candidates' Scrutiny Process

Once the candidates have submitted the nomination papers, the scrutiny process follows. The ROs verify and finalize the nominations. CIP LTOs observed the process of verification, as outlined in the research methodology. They recorded behavioral and organizational barriers hampering the process of verification of nomination papers earlier submitted by the candidates from marginalized groups. The following sub-sections detail the experiences of women, transgender persons, and PWD LTOs through the process of verification of nomination papers.

### 2.6.1 Experiences of Observers with Disabilities

In NA-133, the supporters of the nominated PWD candidate were not permitted to enter the RO office. The ROs from Karachi, Quetta, and Peshawar did not receive the nomination papers from PWD LTOs because of the non-payment of the submission fee. No observer received any special assistance from the staff at the RO office during the checking of nomination papers.

The candidates with disabilities were allowed to observe the verification of other candidates as well. There were no behavioral issues reported by PWD candidates during the verification of nomination papers. The ROs and their staff behaved appropriately.

### 2.6.2 Experiences of Transgender Observers

In NA-53, a transgender candidate was nominated to contest the election. Though no special assistance was provided to the candidate apart from the regular arrangements, there were no accessibility issues on the day of scrutiny. According to the observers, the RO, the staff, security personnel, and other candidates present at the RO office were encouraging and honoring towards the transgender candidates. During the verification process, neither of the ROs asked any irrelevant questions, nor did the other candidates raise any objections over the nomination of transgender candidates.

### 2.6.3 Experiences of Women Observers

Women LTOs nominated for contesting elections did not face any trouble entering the relevant RO offices. During the scrutiny process, women candidates were given priority in NA-77, NA-265, and PP-153 constituencies.

Male candidates also present at the RO offices at the time of verification of nomination papers had a very encouraging attitude towards the women candidates. Overall, there was not a single incident where women LTOs had to face any prejudice, harassment, or humiliation by either the RO, the staff, or other contesting candidates.

*“Separate sitting arrangement was made for women while the staff dealt with us on a priority basis. They promptly provided all the relevant information.”*

— A Woman LTO from Lahore

## 2.7 Experiential Study of Voting through Postal Ballot

Voters with disabilities were allowed to make use of the facility of the postal ballot during GE 2018 to cast their votes through post because of their accessibility issues. CIP's observers with disabilities came to know about postal ballot service through social media. In contrast, they got information about the procedure of application for the postal ballot through electronic media i.e., television. Application for the postal ballot was submitted by hand to RO almost two weeks before the GE 2018. Observers collected their postal ballot from RO the same day. An affidavit (*iqrar nama*) was to be attested by a government official who displayed a complete lack of knowledge regarding the postal ballot service. The postal ballot was posted back through regular mail three days after it was obtained. The postmaster had a clear understanding of filling out the postal ballot form along with stamping and signing the envelope. Overall, there were no behavioral issues faced by observers with disabilities throughout the process.

The following is a summary of PWDs who applied to avail the postal ballot service across all four provinces and Islamabad:

Name of city	Applied	Received	Cast
Islamabad	2	2	2
Peshawar	3	3	3
Lahore	3	3	3
Karachi	3	3	3
Quetta	3	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>

Fourteen PWDs applied for the postal ballot; 13 of these applications were accepted while one got rejected. All PWD LTOs agreed that it was difficult for them to comprehend the content of these forms as they were in English. They also shared that the Form-38 created difficulties for them and required attestation by a Grade 17 officer verifying a voter as a PWD. PWD voters were of the view that this certification of disability by a Grade 17 officer needs revisiting, and disability NIC should be considered as proof enough to determine the disability of a voter.

According to observers, the application form shared by RO to apply for postal ballot only mentioned 'Constituency Number' and did not clearly mention NA and PA constituency. As it was the first time PWDs were using postal ballots, they found it confusing. Those who mentioned the NA constituency number got the ballot paper for their respective NA constituency and did not get the ballot paper for PA constituency and vice versa.

Out of the total 14 PWD LTOs, five said that they got information regarding postal ballot service through electronic media. Three PWD LTOs applied for postal ballot by hand; however, the rest of LTOs applied for the postal ballot through registered post. All except one Quetta-based

PWD LTO spoke about not receiving a postal ballot from the RO. Further, PWD LTOs had their respective affidavits (*iqrar nama*) attested by Grade-17 officers before they could send them back to the RO. Ironically, half of the officers had little knowledge regarding the postal ballot service. Their behavior, however, was honoring and respectful towards the PWD LTOs.

All the postmasters had to fill the postal ballot form, and they knew about the postal ballot service. The behavior of postmasters was commendable as they treated PWD LTOs with respect. In terms of accessibility, two post offices in Peshawar and Karachi were not accessible for the PWD LTOs. Other than this, no incidents of inappropriate behavior towards PWDs were reported.

## 2.8 Marginalized Communities' Participation in Political Gatherings

The last of the eight pre-election processes observed by the LTOs was the collection of experiential data from the voters belonging to marginalized groups at the political gatherings LTOs visited. The LTOs attended rallies and corner meetings of political parties across four provincial capitals and the federal capital to observe and record the perceptions of women, transgender, and PWD voters.

Observation of Political Gatherings	Transgender LTOs		PWD LTOs	
No. of Gatherings Observed	19		38	
Details of Political Parties	PML-N	4	PML-N	7
	PTI	5	PTI	8
	PPPP	3	PPPP	9
	MQM	1	MQM	2
	PSP	2	BAP	1
	MMA	1	BNP	1
	PMAP	1	ANP	2
	TLP	1	MMA	3
	PTI-G	1	JUI (F)	1
			PDJP	1
		AWP	1	
		PMAP	1	
		IND	1	

### 2.8.1 Experiences of Observers with Disabilities

Before GE 2018, CIP PWD LTOs observed 38 political gatherings arranged by different political parties, including but not limited to PPPP, MQM, PTI, and PML-N. The LTOs noted a meager presence of PWD political workers, activists, or supporters in these gatherings. Generally, the behavior of the organizers and other participants with the PWDs was honoring, while venues of these gatherings were also accessible for PWDs.

Out of all the observed gatherings, the organizing parties of only two meetings, i.e., PTI and PPPP, mentioned the disability rights at their events and made certain promises to the PWDs. In contrast, the attitude of people was pitiful towards the PWDs while watching them attend and observe political gatherings. Infrastructure at most of the meetings was inaccessible for PWD observers, but they received assistance from various people all through.

## 2.8.2 Experiences of Transgender Observers

Transgender LTOs attended 19 political rallies and corner meetings of PPPP, PML-N, PTI, TLP, and MMA. Transgender LTOs also attended rallies of transgender candidates in Islamabad to see if there were any special arrangements made by the local administration to ensure the safety of such communities, because of the stigma associated with their electoral participation.

Transgender LTOs observed stark attitudinal issues. The supporters of different political parties as well as the organizers behaved discriminately with the transgender persons. In many instances, the participants and the organizers of these rallies and corner meetings made ridiculous remarks and unethical gestures towards transgender LTOs. Incidents of sexual harassment were also reported during observation.

The organizers of a TLP corner meeting initially barred a transgender LTO in Karachi from attending the event. However, on disclosure of being transgender, permission to attend and observe the political gathering was granted.

A CIP transgender LTO from Quetta shared that political workers were hostile towards her when she went to observe a corner meeting of BAP. However, Dr. Ruqqiya Hashmi, a party leader, treated her with respect.

In terms of organizational arrangements, there were no specialized systems to accommodate transgender participants in the rallies and meetings. There were no security measures to stop participants from bullying transgender persons and the organizers themselves indulged in mocking, harassing, and intimidating transgender LTOs. Similarly, there was no mention of transgender rights in the speeches of the candidates and their supporters at the rallies. No transgender person was asked to deliver a speech at the observed rallies and corner meetings. A transgender LTO from Lahore shared that political workers of MMA did not allow her to observe their corner meeting in Ghaziabad because of her gender. She also shared that a large number of transgender people reside in Dharmapura. While attending a PML-N rally in their area, they were stereotypically asked to dance, against their will.

# CHAPTER 3: OBSERVATION OF SYSTEMATIC AND ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS FOR WOMEN, TRANSGENDER PERSONS, AND PWD VOTERS:



## An Experiential Data Analysis from Polling Day Proceedings During GE 2018

Election Day observation was an essential part of this research activity, which was conducted to analyze the attitudinal and administrative barriers hampering the electoral participation of women, transgender persons, and PWDs in the wake of regulations mandated through the Elections Act, 2017.

The Coalition for Inclusive Pakistan trained 375 EDOs from four provincial capitals and federal capital comprising 125 transgender persons, 125 women, and 125 PWDs to record systematic and behavioral barriers faced by the marginalized voters. This study aimed at finding the loopholes in the administrative and legislative frameworks obstructing electoral participation of the aforementioned marginalized groups in the wake of the Elections Act, 2017. The study, simultaneously, aimed to spot the endemic social prejudices in Pakistani society, excluding the said groups from participating in the electoral process.

This chapter particularizes the observations of the polling procedures made by 375 EDOs on July 25, 2018, across the country. Historically, these marginalized groups have been denied their right to participate in the electoral processes, mainly because of systematic and attitudinal barriers.

The following is a summary of the polling stations visited:

Type of observers	Islamabad	Lahore	Karachi	Quetta	Peshawar
Women	25	25	25	25	25
PWDs	25	25	25	25	25
Transgenders	25	25	25	25	25

The independent, non-partisan EDOs visited the polling stations and recorded their observation not only as independent observers but also as participants to observe the entire process while casting their votes. The EDOs recorded their experiences keeping track of administrative hurdles as well as attitudinal barriers they had to face on the Election Day from the polling staff and voters.

The following sub-sections illustrate the observations experienced by PWD, transgender, and women observers.

### 3.1 Polling Stations Accessibility

Accessibility remained an important issue during GE 2018 for the marginalized factions, traditionally excluded from freely participating in the electoral process. Women, transgender, and PWD observers tried to record their observations related to accessibility to the polling stations across four provincial capitals and Islamabad. Each EDO visited four polling booths on Election Day to measure the intensity of attitudinal and systematic barriers obstructing them from using their right to vote freely.

The following sub-sections illustrate the accessibility and attitudinal issues faced by the voters from the marginalized groups.

### 3.1.1 Observations by PWD EDOs

Out of 125 visited polling stations, only 37 had special arrangements to assist voters with disabilities. Eighteen polling stations were on the first floor, out of which only two had special arrangements such as ramps to facilitate the voters with disabilities. Therefore, they had to climb stairs to reach the polling booths. Despite being accredited by ECP to observe elections, there were five polling stations in Peshawar, Lahore, and Karachi, where EDOs were initially denied permission to enter.

*"The security guards weren't letting me in and were pitiful [towards me]."*

— A PWD EDO from Lahore

*"People on wheelchairs were not facilitated at the entry point."*

— A PWD EDO from Lahore

However, later, they were let in after showing their NICs and accreditation cards. The PWD EDOs were treated mainly respectfully by the polling and security staff present at the polling stations other than ten instances (NA-131 Lahore, NA-246, NA-53 ICT-II, NA-54 ICT-III, NA-27 Peshawar-I, NA-245 Karachi East-IV) where they were ridiculed/mockered, or taken pity upon.

Out of 125 observers, 37 did not get permission to meet the PrOs at the 37 polling stations. Overall, the behavior of security and polling staff with the PWD EDOs was normal.

### 3.1.2 Observations by Transgender EDOs

Out of 125 visited polling stations, transgender EDOs were initially denied entry at 40 of them. They were later allowed to enter after showing their accreditation and national identity cards. However, in three constituencies (NA-124 Lahore II, NA-129 Lahore VII, and NA-133 Lahore XI) the security staff misbehaved with EDOs. At one of the polling stations (NA-265 Quetta II), the security forces confined the transgender EDOs and challenged the validity of their accreditation cards. However, they were released later on the order of the magistrate and prohibited to re-visit the polling station for observation. There were no separate polling stations for the transgender voters anywhere in the country, and they had to cast their votes at either those of the men, women, or combined (male/female) polling stations.

*"The security staff did not allow me to enter the polling station, saying that the pictures on my NIC and accreditation card did not match my appearance. They asked weird questions like why I have a masculine name despite my feminine outlook."*

— A transgender EDO from Lahore

Mostly, transgender observers were allowed to enter the polling stations without any visible hurdle. Still, as compared to women and PWD observers, transgender EDOs had to confront more attitudinal issues. They faced ridiculing gestures and comments on 29 occasions from the security staff deployed at the entry points of the polling stations.

There were 29 instances where transgender observers faced sexual harassment and immoral gestures from security at the entry points. Transgender observers reported unwelcoming behavior from other people present at the polling stations as 20 incidents were recorded where inappropriate comments were made against transgender voters along with sexual harassment of them. Security staff put a deaf ear to the harassment matter, one of the transgender observers said: "The security staff witnessed the harassing behavior of voters and



camp staff but they did not bother.” However, an Islamabad-based observer had a different observation: “the security staff was very cooperative and escorted us to the polling booth.”

Fourteen out of 125 PrOs refused to share any information with the transgender observers, while 46 denied having received any instructions from ECP to facilitate transgender voters. On two occasions in Peshawar and Quetta, the PrOs either ridiculed or adopted disgraceful attitude with transgender observers.

## 3.2 Facilitating Voters Belonging to Marginalized Communities

EDOs visited the polling stations to observe the facilities for the marginalized groups. Despite the enactment of the Elections Act, 2017 that called for special provisions for ensuring electoral participation of marginalized groups, EDOs observed and faced accessibility-related issues inside polling stations. EDOs also reported having faced attitudinal issues from election officials and staff present inside the polling stations. There were instances when EDOs reported having faced harassment from other voters inside the polling stations.

The following sub-sections have a detailed analysis of the experiential data collected by EDOs.

### 3.2.1 Observations by PWD EDOs

Each observer with disability visited a minimum of four polling booths to record their observations inside the polling stations about facilitation steps provided to the voters with disabilities as per the Elections Act, 2017.

Out of 500 polling booths visited by 125 EDOs with disabilities, there were 132 instances where they did not face any difficulty while accessing polling booths. However, PWDs faced trouble accessing the 274 polling booths because of a lack of an accessible infrastructure. Due to the limitations of the study, data related to accessibility from 94 polling booths could not be gathered as EDOs with disabilities were unable to enter the polling stations. Similarly, 30% (38 out of 125) EDOs with disabilities could not access the polling staff inside the polling station. However, polling staff was accessible at 49% (61 out of 125) of the polling stations. Data could not be collected for 21% (26 out of 125) polling stations because of their inaccessibility. EDOs reported 120 instances where voters with disabilities faced difficulties while casting a vote behind the secrecy screen. In one instance, in NA-130 Lahore VIII, the security staff stood next to the secrecy screen and helped people stamp the ballot papers. In 222 cases, however, the observers did not face any issues while casting their votes behind the secrecy screen. For the remaining polling stations, EDOs could not gather data because of the limitations of the study. Voters with disabilities reported having easily accessed the ballot box at 47% (237) polling booths out of the total 500, whereas the ballot box was not accessible for the voters mentioned above at 109 polling booths. Three EDOs reported that other voters present at the polling stations in Lahore, Islamabad, and Peshawar ridiculed them by making inappropriate comments.

*“When I went to cast my vote (in the same polling station that I was observing), people were laughing at my back.”*

— A transgender EDO from Peshawar

EDOs with disabilities did not face any attitudinal issues at the polling stations. The PrOs, as well as the other polling and security staff, behaved respectfully with the observers with disabilities. However, at the polling station in Icchra (Lahore), a PrO misbehaved with one of the observers. Generally, EDOs did not face significant attitudinal barriers from the other voters, polling staff, and the security personnel at the polling stations.



### 3.2.2 Observations by Transgender EDOs

One hundred twenty-five transgender EDOs visited four polling booths each across four provincial capitals and Islamabad, to identify systematic and attitudinal barriers inside polling stations along with observing facilitation steps for them.

Out of 500 polling booths, 305 had no special arrangements to facilitate transgender voters despite ECP's instructions to the polling staff, whereas 71 polling booths had special arrangements (priority lines). Although transgender EDOs were treated respectfully by the polling officers of 264 (52.8%) polling booths, there were instances where transgender voters were ridiculed. Sixty-seven incidents of inappropriate behavior with transgender EDOs were recorded.

Experience of transgender voters and EDOs in Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi was positive in terms of their interaction with security officials and police. With a few exceptions, they were helped by police, security, and polling staff and facilitated in casting their votes. Three transgender voters in Islamabad were given priority in casting their votes early. However, the PrOs did not allow transgender EDOs to remain in the polling stations for long citing security reasons. There was an instance in NA-133 Lahore-XI, where a transgender voter experienced physical violence at the hand of other voters, and had to leave without casting a ballot.

*"Young male voters formed a crowd around us and harassed us. The security staff, along with the polling staff and voters, ridiculed us, saying a transgender person's job is to sing and dance only."*

— A transgender EDO from Lahore

*"The polling staff misbehaved with us saying they would not give us interview as we were not as dignified as them."*

— A transgender EDO from Islamabad

### 3.2.3 Observations by Women EDOs

There were significant systematic challenges women voters had to face. There were no separate entry points for them at almost half of the 203 combined polling stations. Similarly, out of the total visited stations (375), 69 had no mention of the polling booth numbers for women at the entry point of the external gate.

<b>Total Polling Stations Visited</b>	375
<b>Male PrO at Women Polling Stations</b>	82
<b>Female PrO at Men polling stations</b>	23
<b>Polling Booths with Special Arrangement for Women</b>	200/500 (40%)

Out of the combined polling stations, 83 had women PrOs, whereas the number of male PrOs exceeded 150. There were 82 male PrOs at the women polling stations against only 23 women PrOs at polling stations reserved for male voters. Observers collected data related to special arrangements to facilitate women voters at the polling stations. Forty percent (200) polling booths had special arrangements made according to ECP's orders against 46% (231) polling booths with no special provisions. Observers could not collect data from 14% (69) polling booths due to the limitations of data collection.

#### Attitudinal barriers facing women voters

Mostly, polling staff behaved positively with the women EDOs at 61% (308) polling booths, whereas only two incidents were recorded where the polling officers ridiculed women

observers. In one instance in Quetta, a woman EDO faced sexual harassment in the form of inappropriate gestures and language by the Polling Officer and Assistant PrO.

### 3.3 Perceptions of Election Officials on Polling Day Arrangements for Marginalized Voters

CIP's 375 EDOs interviewed PrOs to record their perceptions about the Election Day arrangements. They also made observations about PrOs' behavior towards electoral participation of marginalized groups such as women, persons with disabilities, and transgender persons.

These EDOs visited the PrOs at 375 polling stations across four provincial capitals and Islamabad to inquire about special arrangements for electoral inclusion of marginalized groups mandated by the Elections Act, 2017. EDOs also recorded behavioral prejudices against these marginalized factions' participation in the electoral process.

#### 3.3.1 Experiences of PWD Observers

Out of 125 PrOs interviewed, 119 provided information on the request of EDOs with disabilities. However, six PrOs (NA-131 Lahore-IX, NA-264, NA-255 Karachi Central-III, NA-253 Karachi Central-I, NA-52 ICT-I, and NA-53 ICT-II) refused to provide any information to the EDOs. Sixty PrOs acknowledged having received instructions from the Election Commissioner and ROs to ensure accessibility for PWDs during polling. Contrarily, 59 PrOs denied having received any such instructions from ECP. PrOs who acknowledged to have received instructions from the Election Commissioner also claimed to have made arrangements to ensure the electoral participation of PWDs. Overall, the PrOs mostly behaved nicely and respectfully with the EDOs with disabilities. However, one incident was recorded by a Quetta-based EDO where the PrO behaved arrogantly and made fun of the EDO.

*"The staff was sitting on the floor as there was no furniture, but the Presiding Officer arranged a seat, especially for me."*

— A PWD EDO from Quetta

*"The PO was rude, arrogant, and was not answering. The polling agents were friendly because I knew them already. They talked nicely."*

— A PWD EDO from Karachi

#### 3.3.2 Experiences of Transgender Observers

Out of 125, as many as 111 POs welcomed the transgender observers and provided relevant information on request. However, 14 POs refused to share any information with the transgender observers. When asked about any instructions from ECP to make special arrangements to facilitate transgender voters, 40 POs denied having received any such instructions. Eighty-five POs acknowledged ECP's directions to provide special treatment to transgender voters.

Further, 29 PrOs said having made special arrangements for facilitating transgender voters. All the PrOs behaved respectfully with the transgender observers. However, a

*"The Presiding Officer was more interested in knowing about me and my profession. He asked if I go to dance parties. He asked for my phone number and wanted to know if I was a sex worker."*

— A transgender EDO from Lahore

*"The PO was a lady who was very rude and proud."*

— A woman EDO from Lahore

Quetta-based PrO made fun of one transgender observer, whereas another based in Diyal Bagh showed sympathy towards the observer.

### 3.3.3 Experiences of Women Observers

One hundred and twenty-five women EDOs interviewed the PrOs across four provincial capitals and federal capital. Of these, 122 EDOs were welcomed by the PrOs and provided the required information at their request. Yet, there were three PrOs - one each in Islamabad, Lahore, and Quetta - who denied giving information to the EDOs. Out of 125 PrOs, 80 acknowledged to have received instructions from ECP for making special arrangements to facilitate women voters. However, 45 PrOs denied having received any such direction from ECP officials. In all, 102 PrOs claimed to have made special arrangements for the electoral inclusion of women voters. However, 23 said they did nothing in this regard.

Mostly, there were no unpleasant events except one incident where the PrO ridiculed the women EDOs. Similarly, three women EDOs faced sexual harassment by the security officials at the gates of the polling stations in Lahore, Islamabad, and Quetta.

## 3.4 Observation of Party Camps

Each EDO visited five political party camps, set up outside polling stations, to observe arrangements made by the political parties to ensure inclusive electoral participation of marginalized groups such as PWDs, transgender persons, and women. The observers tried to identify attitudinal barriers faced by voters of marginalized groups restricting their electoral participation.

### 3.4.1 Observation by PWD EDOs

Each EDO with disability visited five party camps outside the polling stations and recorded observations related to the political inclusion of PWDs. Out of 625 party camps visited by EDOs, 182 had made considerable arrangements to facilitate PWD voters as compared to 194 camps where no such arrangements were made. The EDOs could not collect data for the rest of the 249 camps because of various limitations. At 94 camps, ramps were installed to ensure access of PWD voters. Mostly, the EDOs were received respectfully by the camp administration - 411 responses from EDOs confirming this. In only ten instances they were ridiculed, whereas seven EDOs faced sympathy.

Other people present at 399 camps received PWD observers respectfully. However, there were 13 incidents where the observers with disabilities were taken pity upon, along with 15 instances of people making fun of them. Due to several limitations, data for other voters' behavior towards PWD observers could not be collected for 198 polling stations.

### 3.4.2 Observation by Transgender EDOs

Transgender observers also visited political party camps, set up outside the polling stations. The aim was to record the unwelcoming or aggressive attitudes towards transgender voters and to observe the infrastructural arrangements to facilitate them. Out of 625 party camps visited by 125 transgender EDOs, the political parties made no special arrangements for transgender voters at 305 camps. However, there were some special arrangements at only 71

*"The PTI workers tried to grope us from behind and pulled my shirt."*

— A transgender EDO from Quetta

party camps to facilitate them. The behavior of party administration and workers was majorly positive. Yet, still, the occurrence of inappropriate, ridiculing conversation and immoral gestures were seen little more frequently by transgender observers as compared to women and voters with disabilities. Around 41 transgender observers faced ridiculous comments, whereas about 16 suffered sexual harassment at the hands of other voters as well as the camp administration.

Generally, the attitude of political workers was positive towards the transgender EDOs, but still, a considerable number of voters and the general public showed behavior, which was not appropriate.

### 3.4.3 Observation by Women EDOs

One hundred twenty-five women EDOs visited 625 party camps set up by the political parties and contesting candidates outside the polling stations. The visit aimed to understand the behavior of the political party workers at the camps, along with observing the arrangements made by the political parties to facilitate women voters. Out of all responses, almost 50 percent of the party camps had female workers to assist women voters. Other party camps had no female presence.

Also, half of the camps had no special arrangements to accommodate and help women voters. The other half made arrangements to facilitate them. On the behavioral side, the camp administrations and the party workers behaved positively and respectfully with the women EDOs. However, 50 incidents were recorded where women EDOs faced sexual harassment in the form of objectionable gestures, and inappropriate remarks by either administration of the camps or the other voters present there.

Other people, such as polling agents and party supporters present at the camps, also behaved nicely with the women EDOs.

## 3.5 Interviews with Voters from Marginalized Communities

The last exercise of this experiential survey of the EDO was to record the insights of voters belonging to marginalized groups such as PWDs, transgender persons, and women. The exercise aimed to document the perceptions of the voters related to the facilitation provided to them as per the instructions of the ECP towards inclusive electoral participation.

### 3.5.1 Insights of Voters with Disabilities

PWD observers also interviewed voters with disabilities to record their concerns related to structural and behavioral issues they faced during the voting process. This exercise was meant to identify key systematic and attitudinal barriers facing PWDs for future policy implications.

One-third of PWD voters thought polling booths were not accessible to them while the rest felt that there was no issue accessing them. Similarly, a substantial number of PWD voters could not think of any facilitation provided by the polling staff to ensure their exercise of the right to vote.

*"There were two rooms for PWDs. One was easily accessible while the other had stairs and was not accessible at all. The ballot papers and boxes were brought out for the PWD voters. The process was time-consuming."*

— A PWD EDO from Lahore

Besides, a significant number of PWD voters also received special assistance from the polling staff who were doing their best in ensuring complete and uninterrupted participation of such voters in the voting process. Almost every PWD voter interviewed confirmed to have exercised their voting right freely. Yet very few expressed their concern over facing some obstruction in voting.

*"There were no ramps to facilitate persons with disabilities. All of them were made to wait until 6:00 pm as there were no voting arrangements on the ground floor."*

— A voter with disability from Karachi

PWD voters, mostly, did not face any attitudinal issues from the staff present at the polling stations. Primarily, they expressed satisfaction with the treatment they received from the staff, both inside as well as outside the polling stations with reports of very few instances of these PWD voters' facing any ridicule, mockery, or pity from the polling staff or other voters.

### 3.5.2 Insights of Transgender Voters

Transgender observers interviewed transgender voters and recorded their opinion about the process of including transgender persons in the electoral process. They were also asked to share behavioral issues they faced during the entire process of voting. In-depth discussions revealed mixed responses from transgender voters on arrangements made by ECP on the Election Day to facilitate transgender voters in exercising their right to vote. Since most of the transgender voters cast their votes freely without being intimidated, they expressed satisfaction over the arrangements. At the same time, they seemed concerned over instances of harassment committed by the staff and common voters. Overall, they were satisfied with provisions made for Election Day.

### 3.5.2 Insights of Women Voters

Women EDOs interviewed women voters regarding any systematic or attitudinal barriers that they had to face during the voting process. Almost half of the interviewees claimed having received some special facilitation by polling staff. Broadly, women voters expressed satisfaction over freely exercising their voting rights. However, there were few instances where women pointed towards systematic or attitudinal issues as a hindrance in exercising their right to vote freely. Almost half of the women voters denied having enjoyed any special treatment during the voting process, with some instances of these women voters denied entry into the polling stations being highlighted. The women voters also reported few cases of sexual harassment and inappropriate conversation, whereas other people present at the polling booths were generally well behaved and respectful towards them.

*"No ramp was arranged for the PWD women [voters], but they did not face any problems. The Rangers were very supportive and cooperative. Transgender voters were excited to vote and to be treated equally just like every other citizen of the country."*

— A woman EDO from Islamabad

*"Polling officials demanded voter slips issued by the political party camps to be displayed to cast a vote. Several voters were sent back to the political party camps to get voter slips. It was time-consuming."*

— A woman EDO from Islamabad



# CHAPTER 4: INSIGHTS OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES REGARDING ELECTORAL INCLUSION



## Thematic Analysis of Systematic and Social Barriers Obstructing Electoral Participation of Religious Minorities in Pakistan

The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) carried out an in-depth research study on non-Muslim minorities across Pakistan that aimed to understand their grievances related to political empowerment in Pakistan's electoral landscape. More than 200 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted to understand the nature of structural and attitudinal barriers obstructing the electoral participation of minority communities. Trained observers traveled across different regions of the country to interview members of minority communities and local government minority councilors and record their perspectives and discover key areas for policy implication for uninterrupted electoral participation of these communities. The study aimed to identify areas of intervention necessary for the political participation of the minorities.

FAFEN's 130 district coordinators across 130 districts of Pakistan conducted the study and followed a snowball sampling technique. First, the coordinators held FGDs with the minority councilors. The councilors then identified members of the minority community as potential respondents of this study. Initially, there were 114 FGDs with minority councilors involving 6-8 participants in each FGD. Later, these minority councilors identified participants from their communities for FGDs with the community. The analysis of FGDs conducted throughout this exercise is clubbed together theme-wise.

**Table 1** FGDs with minority community members

	PUNJAB	SINDH	BALUCHISTAN	KP	ISLAMABAD	FATA
<b>Christians</b>	23	5	9	8	1	4
<b>Hindus</b>	4	15	16	3	-	-
<b>Sikhs</b>	1	-	-	-	-	1
<b>Mixed</b>	7	2	2	5	-	3

**Table 2** FGDs with minority councilors

	PUNJAB	SINDH	BALUCHISTAN	KP	ISLAMABAD
<b>Christians</b>	30	6	7	15	1
<b>Hindu</b>	4	22	18	2	-
<b>Sikhs</b>	-	-	-	2	-
<b>Ahmadis/ Qadianis</b>	1	-	-	-	-
<b>Kailash</b>	-	-	-	1	-
<b>Mixed</b>	1	2	2	-	-



## 4.1 Electoral Opportunities for Minority Communities in Pakistan

Minority communities have faced numerous issues restricting their electoral inclusion for long. Systematic hurdles, as well as exclusionary politics, have marginalized minority communities from entering the political landscape. Barriers related to accessibility and resources have been major causes limiting their electoral participation alongside some critical issues related to attitudes of the majority. The following sub-sections elaborate on the nature of opportunities available to the minority communities across Pakistan.

### 4.1.1 Access to Opportunities for electoral inclusion: Perceptions of the Hindu community

Eighty-four FGDs were conducted with Hindu councilors and members of the Hindu community to explore hindrances in community's electoral participation. The issues ranged from financial insecurity to social exclusion and administrative glitches.

#### Structural issues and opportunities related to exercising the right to vote

Responding to the questions regarding opportunities available to the Hindu community for exercising their right to vote, the Sindh-based respondents expressed their satisfaction. They said they face no pressure in casting their votes. However, some respondents stated that there is a strong political and feudal influence at the time of elections. They said the people are forced to cast votes against their preferences. The respondents also termed the lack of transportation facility and difficulty in locating polling stations among the main reasons for low voter turnout.

*"Many of our community members work in factories in major cities and are not allowed to visit hometowns to cast votes. Lack of transport facility and difficulty in locating polling stations are other major issues that hinder their electoral participation."*

— A respondent

#### Political pressures faced by the minority Hindu community

The majority of the respondents complained of getting threats from political parties. Moreover, they said that most of the community members belong to the labor class; therefore, lack of funds and electoral support are among significant obstacles for them in contesting the elections.

*"Even if a candidate agrees to contest the elections independently, there is minimal chance of success due to lack of backing from a major political party."*

— A minority community member

Contrarily, respondents from the Tharparkar region showed satisfaction over opportunities available to them for contesting elections. According to one respondent, "the district president of a political party himself belongs to a minority community. There are two serving MPAs from the same community as well."

*"We do have the right to contest the local election, but that too is heavily influenced, and the candidates are 'selected' by the influential people. They are 'dummy candidates.'"*

— A minority community member

Eight FGDs were conducted with Hindu councilors and community members in Punjab, who shared a slightly different narrative over opportunities available to them for contesting elections. They spoke of facing administrative hurdles due to the non-registration of their votes. Most of the participants expressed their satisfaction over exercising their right to vote in Rajanpur District. However, the participants also shared that

*"We have the right to cast our vote freely, but many adult community members still do not have their NICs."*

— A respondent

their vote does not hold any significance because they cannot directly elect their representatives through a separate electorate.

Two FGDs were conducted with Hindu councilors from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. They shared that they do not face any intimidation. However, they thought that owing to the small population, their votes have no significant impact on the election results. Similarly, Hindu councilors and community members participating in the FGDs from Balochistan expressed their satisfaction over opportunities provided to them to become part of the electoral process. But they had concerns over the non-supportive role of the political parties in backing the Hindu candidates. The councilors also shared that the process of acquiring and submitting nomination papers was not as easy for the Hindu candidates as it was for the Muslims. Moreover, they had concerns over lack of transport facilities available for the Hindu voters as they have to travel more than 300 kilometers to get to Quetta and file papers. Further, they said that Hindu minority usually prefers to contest the Local Governments (LGs)' elections rather than the General Elections.

*"Our community is not restricted from contesting the elections; however, none of the political parties support our candidates, and since we have a small vote bank, our candidates do not succeed. Moreover, the decision of selecting election candidates depends on panchayat (an informal organization of community elders). Panchayat's approval is necessary for contesting the elections."*

— A participant of the FGD conducted with the Hindu community in Balochistan

## 4.1.2 Access to Opportunities for Electoral Inclusion: Perceptions of the Christian Community

### Insights of Punjab-based Christian Community and Councilors

Fifty-three FGDs were conducted with the Punjab - based Christian councilors and community members who mostly showed satisfaction over the process of acquiring NICs. They mentioned the political parties' representatives helping the Christian community getting access to polling stations. They also shared that local elected representatives facilitated voter registration campaigns. The majority of the participants said that they were free to cast their votes and appreciated the behavior of people. There were several concerns of the Christian community in terms of electoral opportunities available to them, as they could not directly elect the parliamentarians. Some Christian councilors and community members also reiterated the need for a separate electorate and termed the present election system as a check on their freedom to vote.

They also shared that they were pressured and harassed by the influential landlords who did not allow any other candidate to compete in the elections except for their supported candidates. The respondents also mentioned that they face cultural issues, as the minority females are not given adequate opportunities to contest the polls even as reserved candidates.

*"As per law, we have the right to participate in elections. Combined elections are an honor for minorities. As a minority, we cast our vote with full enthusiasm. We are not pressured."*

— A participant

*"We have been given the right to vote, but our issues are not given any importance after the elections. Our voters are not given importance because we are a smaller community."*

— A minority councilor

*"We can exercise our right to vote. We have meetings with different party members and are given the freedom to choose and vote for any candidate we feel is fit for the community as a leader."*

— A respondent

- **The Christian community is financially less strong as compared to Muslims and other minority communities of Pakistan.**

### Insights of Sindh-based Christian Community and Councilors

Eleven FGDs were conducted with the Sindh-based Christian community, leading to significant findings of no pressure or intimidation on them by any group. They also shared that the political parties' representatives encourage them and at times facilitate them during elections. However, they believed extreme security measures were creating a restrictive voting environment.

*One of the respondents disdainfully expressed, "We can elect our representative only in the Local Body election at UC and Tehsil levels, but cannot choose MNAs and MPAs directly. The minority members are not given tickets to contest the General Elections since the majority do not accept the minority candidates. The minority candidates who are closer to the ruling party are selected as candidates against reserved seats but not elected by the people directly. The process is biased and against merit. Our seats are reserved, and the members of the minority community do not actually elect the elected person."*

Some representatives expressed their discontent, saying that even the major political parties such as PML-F and PPPP ignore the Christian community and do not award them tickets except for minority councilors on reserved seats. Similar to all the other minority councilors, Christian councilors also demanded the provision of a separate electorate to ensure their electoral participation.

*"Most of our communities are scattered and live in far-flung areas, so we find it difficult to locate our polling stations due to which only a limited number of community members are able to cast their votes."*

— A Christian community member

### Insights of KP-based Christian Community and Councilors

Twenty-three FGDs were conducted with KP-based Christian councilors. They expressed satisfaction over the arrangements made by ECP to ensure their electoral participation. They thought that there was no discrimination, and minority members were treated with equality and justice. The participants said that they cast their votes freely, just like Muslims. Christian women voters were also treated respectfully.

*"We have all equal opportunities just like the majority community, and almost everyone in the community possesses NICs and our votes are also registered."*

— A participant

- **The participants unanimously agreed that they faced no issues during the voter registration process and felt free to exercise their right to vote.**
- **They also shared that they could freely participate in party meetings and campaigns.**
- **Overall, the response was positive, and all participants agreed that they were given equal opportunities as voters in General Elections, Tehsil elections, and the Local Government elections.**

The councilors shared that they never thought of contesting the General Elections as candidates, but preferred to participate in local polls. While responding to a question, the participants said that although equal opportunities are available to minorities, many community members are not interested in contesting elections due to lack of support as the Christian population is small. However, upon inquiry, the participants mentioned that only five percent of development funds were allocated for minorities, and they face discrimination in terms of allocation of such funds.

## Insights of Balochistan-based Christian Community and Councilors

Christian councilors and community members from Balochistan participated in 16 FGDs and had similar responses like those from KP. They thought that they were free to cast votes according to their will and were treated equally as the majority Muslim community. However, they also believed that being a minority community and having fewer votes, they were not able to contest General Elections. When asked about their interest in contesting elections, they said that even though there is no restriction on them, the political parties do not show a willingness to award tickets to them.

## Insights of the Islamabad-based Christian Community and Councilors

Islamabad has a considerable Christian population residing in the slums around the city. While sharing their opinions in two FGDs, the Christian community members and councilors expressed their satisfaction over the freedom they enjoy while casting their votes for their preferred candidates. According to them, there are no restrictions for the minority candidates for contesting local government elections. However, they cannot contest for general seats at the national level.

- **Similar to the responses of Balochistan-based councilors, the councilors from Islamabad stated that the political parties do not award tickets to the minority candidates against the majority community (Muslims).**

Further, they pointed out that lack of funds is another major obstacle for the aspiring candidates in contesting election.

## 4.1.3 Access to Opportunities for Electoral Inclusion: Perceptions of other Communities

### Perceptions of Balochistan-based non-Muslim minority communities

Four FGDs were conducted with other minority communities from Balochistan, who shared that the overall representation of the minority communities is not adequate as per their emerging needs and issues. No complaint regarding any form of intimidation or pressure from any political or religious group while casting a vote was made. They also expressed their satisfaction over the freedom they have to contest the elections.

However, there were a few incidents where political parties' representatives threatened the voters belonging to minority communities. The participants suggested that the interference of feudal families in the electoral process should be restricted to open new avenues for political participation of marginalized minority groups. One respondent said that minority communities should be allowed to contest against general seats at the provincial and national levels. Another respondent shared that the number of polling stations should be increased to make vote-casting process easier for those living in far-flung areas.

### Perceptions of Sindh-based non-Muslim minority communities

FGDs with the Sindh-based minority communities uncovered diverse responses from the participants. Some of them said that the political representatives had never done anything in their favor. They said that their needs and voices have never been raised in the Parliament, and the funds allocated for minorities never spent on them. Others, contrarily, responded that the elected representatives are concerned about the issues faced by the minority communities even though they do not have direct access to the political representatives.

## Perceptions of KP-based non-Muslim minority communities

Six FGDs were conducted with the Kailash community in KP. The participants shared that Muslim religious leaders have launched hate campaigns against them, telling people that it is religiously forbidden (haram) for Muslims to vote for Kailash candidates. The participants also suggested that ECP and NADRA facilitate communities living in distant areas in the NIC registration process as the people are unaware of it. They also emphasized the need for training of polling agents to enhance their capacity and make them familiar with the biometric voting system.

Two FGDs were conducted with the KP-based Sikh community. The participants said they face no pressure or restriction while casting their votes. However, they expressed reservations over the usual practice of casting votes based on religion. They also expressed a desire to contest elections on general seats. The Sikh community members also suggested that polling stations must be established based on population. They shared their demand over having separate polling stations for male and female voters along with thorough training of staff.

## 4.2 Voter registration process as a hindrance towards electoral participation: Insights of Minority Communities

Low voter registration is another significant issue faced by minority communities across Pakistan. Members of such communities face structural issues to get themselves registered as voters like the complicated process of voter registration and the unavailability of NICs.

### 4.2.1 Perceptions of Hindu Community on Low Voter Registration

#### Perceptions of Sindh-based Hindu community

Councilors and community members responded irately over the question of voter registration, as a considerable proportion of the Hindu population remains unregistered primarily due to issues related to a lack of accessibility, funding, and awareness. They also shared that the voter registration process is arduous, especially the provision of required supporting documentation such as domicile, marriage certificate, and utility bills, etc. There are few others issues, such as non-acquisition of NICs. Its possession is mandatory for voter registration. Moreover, people lack awareness because of prevalent illiteracy among the Hindu community, especially in rural areas.

*“There is a dire need for improving NIC acquisition process, and votes should be registered automatically from NADRA at the time of issuing NIC.”*

— A Hindu participant from Sindh

The councilors praised few campaigns run by ECP, DEC, and other non-profit organizations to educate voters but said that the scope of these campaigns is limited to accommodate all the unregistered voters. The participants of one FGD stressed the need for setting up voters' registration camps at Ward or Union Council (UC) level for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the voter registration process.

When asked about any administrative hurdles they faced other than this, they pointed out that the NIC-issuing staff at NADRA often misspells their names due to lack of clarity and training. For instance, a respondent said that his name 'Kohra' was misspelled as 'Ghora.' Rectifying this mistake can be a long and hectic process, which is why some of the respondents also demanded that someone from their community, having familiarity with names of minorities, should be hired by NADRA to enter the names.



There were some serious systematic and behavioral issues reported by the Hindu councilors and community members. They complained of having faced procedural obstacles, accessibility issues, and non-cooperation from NADRA personnel. Few respondents also sorrowfully expressed that NADRA officials consider them as second class citizens. Further, NADRA requires the marriage certificate for issuing NICs that members of the Hindu community do not possess thus far. That is why they called for abolishing this requirement. One respondent from Sindh shared that NIC registration is almost impossible for the nomadic tribes of the Hindu community as they keep migrating from one place to another.

### Perceptions of Punjab-based Hindu community

Similar responses, as recorded from the Sindh-based Hindu community were received from Punjab-based councilors and the community members. NIC and voter registration is also a cumbersome process because of the temporary-residence issues.

The majority of the participants of the FGD in Punjab said that ordinary farmers do not have any idea about the voter registration process, and ECP has not made any special provisions in educating the illiterate Hindu farmers. They (participants) thought that vote should be registered at the time of acquiring NIC. The respondents also acknowledged the efforts made by ECP to educate minority voters by distributing pamphlets and advertising in newspapers.

The participants made suggestions to ECP that officials should conduct quarterly meetings with the Local Government councilors at the Ward or UC level to discuss voter registration issues of minorities. Furthermore, the government should assign the responsibility of arranging community awareness programs to the UC representatives. They also emphasized the importance of running door-to-door voter registration campaigns, along with collecting data regularly. The participants of another FGD lamented the rude and unprofessional behavior of ECP and NADRA staff during NIC and voter registration process.

*"The process of registration is not easy due to lack of information, awareness, and the administrative difficulty in the transfer of votes from one polling station to the other."*

— A participant of FGD

*"They (ECP) also contacted us for supporting the campaign [of voter registration]."*

— A participant of FGD

*"Mobile registration van should be provided for NIC registration. ECP must finalize the voter lists after door-to-door voter verification."*

— A participant of FGD

### Perceptions of KP-based Hindu community

The participants of KP-based FGD with Hindu councilors and community members expressed their satisfaction over voter registration, elaborating that all the community members who possess NICs are also registered as voters, and all the adults have NICs. They also shared that those community members who do not have votes registered but own NICs will be registered as voters as per ECP guidelines. The participants appreciated ECP's efforts throughout the process of voter registration. However, a few Hindu female voters do not want to get their votes registered due to illiteracy and lack of awareness.

*"People have little or no money to cover travel costs to reach the NADRA office. The names are not clearly written on the voter lists, and the mistakes never corrected. Literate people who can clearly write names should be involved in the processes."*

— A participant of FGD



A couple of participants pointed to the process of shifting voters from one constituency to the other because of delimitation. Thus, the ECP should consult NADRA before making changes to the constituencies.

On the question of awareness campaigns, councilors and community members unanimously referred to a couple of awareness walks conducted by Community Support Organizations (CSOs). They termed these exercises futile and called for coordinated efforts between the ECP and NADRA to make the process of registration more people-friendly. Overall, they lauded the efforts of NADRA and ECP officials.

### Perceptions of Balochistan-based Hindu community

The Balochistan-based Hindu councilors expressed contentment over the role of ECP in the process leading to voter registration as most of the voters were already registered. One participant emphasized the role of *panchayat* (an informal organization comprising tribal elders) in deploying volunteers to guide ordinary people to get their votes registered. Like Sindhi Hindu councilors and community members, Balochistan-based members of the Hindu community showed their reservation over the requirement of marriage certificate for voter registration.

*"There is a requirement of marriage certificate for voter registration which the Hindu community does not possess. Around 20 percent of the youth do not have NICs due to non-cooperation of NADRA staff."*

— A respondent

Asked about any special awareness campaign to mobilize community members in getting their votes registered, the community members responded positively. They praised the role of DEC's efforts in conducting weekly awareness sessions and providing special guidance to the minority communities on political participation.

One of the respondents called for coordinated efforts and said the ECP should start a door-to-door voter registration campaign. He suggested that ECP should coordinate with *panchayat* because the local Hindu community reports all its issues to the *panchayat*. ECP and NADRA should work together in this regard, he said.

Answering a question on the acquisition of NICs, the participants of the FGD unanimously said that the majority of adult Hindu population in Balochistan possesses NICs. They hailed the continuous support of *panchayat*.

At the same time, they expressed discontent over the problems faced by their community members in obtaining NICs.

## 4.2.2 Perceptions of Christian Community on Low Voter Registration

### Perceptions of Sindh-based Christian community

Sindh-based Christian councilors, and community members shared that a large number of Christian voters are not registered due to varying reasons such as:

lack of interest

lack of awareness

process of acquiring NICs

Most of the respondents were of the view that the voter registration process is comparatively far more straightforward than the NIC registration process. Still, various issues in voter registration remain. Most community members are peasants and have limited time and

money to visit the DEC offices. Even if they do, they find it hard to fulfill the requirements such as producing electricity bills, marriage, and birth certificates, etc. A few respondents also pointed out that the process of obtaining NIC is so cumbersome that people avoid these processes altogether. Some even suggested that ECP should start door-to-door voter registration so that Christian community members belonging to rural areas can get their votes registered. They also expressed their satisfaction over few mobilization drives of ECP but only in major districts such as Khairpur. In some areas, political parties also initiated a few campaigns for voter registration.

The participants also stressed the need for improving voter registration by arranging awareness sessions with the help of local representatives at UC, Tehsil, and District levels with a particular focus on minority communities. Radio and television advertisements could also be helpful in this regard. A respondent said, "There should be a separate minority wing for voter registration of the minorities. ECP, political parties, and influential local leaders should start joint efforts to increase awareness among the local community members regarding voter registration."

Still, the most common issue faced by locals in acquiring NICs is fulfilling the documentation requirements, such as evidence of marriage, and death certificate of deceased parents. They also expressed discontent over the attitude of NADRA staff and termed it non-cooperative.

*"They [voters] must be registered along with the registration of NIC to make the process simpler. Door-to-door visits by local people, along with teachers and ECP officials, will be helpful. Involving local people and elected representatives will also expedite the registration process."*

— A participant of FGD

### Perceptions of Punjab-based Christian community

When asked about the voter registration process, Punjab-based Christian participants responded that the minority community does not consider it essential. They think it as futile since their community members cannot be elected in the General Elections. Still, they believe that most community members have been registered, whereas those who have recently migrated from other cities are yet to be registered. The councilors also commended the efforts of NADRA and ECP in collaboration with CSOs in launching campaigns to facilitate Christian communities to get their votes registered. They also appreciated ECP on adding a column of permanent address in the registration form, making the process of voter registration easy. However, Christian participants also expressed their discomfort over the cumbersome and slow voter registration process.

*"NIC should be made free of cost. It is a time-taking process. People are not registered as voters mainly because of lack of information and awareness, especially among women, and the hassle of traveling to the registration office."*

— A respondent

Some respondents saw the process of voter registration as complicated due to the requirement of attested photocopies of the documents, which discourages people from getting their votes registered. The participants said that the minority community must have a separate voter registration list, and the process should be made as easy for the non-government employees as it is for the government officials. Some councilors commended the initiative of voter registration through a text message to 8300.

*"A few door-to-door campaigns are being run, but this needs to be done at a broader level. Another organization, Sudhaar gave awareness through campaigns about the importance of electoral processes and the process of NIC registration."*

— A participant of FGD

Responding to the question of facing any challenges related to voter registration, most of them emphasized that they do not face many issues. However, few saw the process of voter registration as lengthy and complicated. They also thought that ECP should launch voters' awareness campaigns in the media to educate people about the registration/verification process. The respondents also shared discomfort over the complexity of the Form-21. Another major issue highlighted was that NADRA officials do not ask citizens about their preferred address as a voter. As a result, voters have to cover long distances for casting their votes only to find out that their name is not in the voter list and is registered elsewhere. Many participants shared that several facilitation drives have been launched with the assistance of community leaders to register minority voters.

*"People are not aware of the importance of voter registration. Many of them have never voted."*

— A respondent from Balochistan

The participants also recalled the voter mobilization campaigns run by different NGOs for registration. The campaigns focused on educating people on voting rights, processes involved in voter registration, and the importance of casting votes. They also acknowledged ECP's voter education committee but showed dissatisfaction over its efficiency.

*"ECP should introduce mobile vans as NADRA did to facilitate people at the grassroots level. Traveling long distances is an issue, especially for people of rural areas. The DEC should lead different meetings in local communities to spread awareness about the changing ECP processes and procedures."*

— A participant of FGD

The participants of the FGD unanimously stressed the urgent need to remove barriers in NIC registration. They stated that ECP should facilitate the voter registration process for minorities. They also demanded that NIC should be issued free of cost, at least for the first time. Further, they thought that NADRA staff should be trained to deal with the issues of minorities and to minimize the complications in their NIC registration process. The transfer of vote from one region to the other should also be facilitated, they said.

A participant advised ECP to treat minorities and the majority population equally. He said that NADRA should expand its mobile registration van service to remote areas. Besides, the local staff of the election commission should recheck the voter registration process through regular visits alongside launching awareness campaigns at the village level.

*"The officers at NADRA office do not register us, saying that you have no property. People are also not registered because they lack supporting documentation (birth, school, and marriage certificates) and also because most of the Christian members are illiterate."*

— A participant of FGD

The participants also called for introducing the biometric voting system. They said that people should be registered on their current residence rather than on the permanent address because many people migrate and face difficulty moving back and forth for casting their votes.

Responding to a question about procedural barriers the minority community faces while acquiring NICs, the participants said that people with disabilities have little or no access to NADRA offices, and the fee charged for NIC registration is very high. They also complained of the extended registration queues. They also found the behavior of officers with minorities as rude and disrespectful.

## Perceptions of Islamabad-based Christian community

The Islamabad-based Christian community members and councilors, on the contrary, shared that the majority of the adults are registered voters, and the process of registration has become more comfortable through the linking of NIC with voter registration. However, some of the community members complained that their votes were moved to other areas right before the elections, and the process of vote transfer is hectic. They could not recall any campaign in the area and said that ECP should launch a drive to raise awareness among the locals and make the process easier. When asked about the NICs, most of the participants said that since it is almost impossible to move in Islamabad without a NIC, therefore, majority of the local population has them and that people do not have any difficulty obtaining NICs.

## Perceptions of KP-based Christian community

The KP-based Christian councilors shared that votes of the entire adult community members are registered. Also, ECP, NADRA, and political party representatives cooperate with minorities in voter registration. Further, in Mansehra district, there are very few Christian families, but most of them have registered their votes. All participants agreed that the registration process is quite easy as the DEC hires competent staff for voter registration. They added that staff at NADRA Registration Centers (NRCs) also inquires during the NIC registration process whether to register a vote on the temporary or permanent address.

- **Voting awareness sessions launched by the civil society organizations led to an increase in NIC registrations in the community, and ECP and other local community political activists facilitate the registration process.**

They also acknowledged that the election commission office had conducted brief sessions with members of the Tehsil council to raise awareness. A survey for voter registration was also conducted before the elections. The community members themselves arranged mobilization for voter education in their respective UCs. The result indicates an increase in the minority voter turnout. A few respondents said that no such facilitation drives were seen and that ECP had not taken any initiatives in this regard.

All the participants unanimously said that the voter registration process could be improved if a mobile number was provided for registration. Some were of the view that the current system is good and expressed satisfaction. The participants said that voters must be automatically registered with the procedure of NIC registration. Besides, they thought that a separate electoral system must be introduced for the Christian community, as they are the largest minority in the country. A few participants of the FGDs thought that the voter registration campaign must focus on minority communities and that their representatives should be part of it. They stressed the need for door-to-door registration campaigns making verification of voters ECP's priority agenda. They also thought that ECP should link the voter registration process to village councils the way NADRA did. The participants emphasized that the new laws should be adopted to make the vote transfer procedure easier and more feasible. They pointed out that married women coming from other cities have to face many issues, especially when their parents pass away.

*"Filling the forms is difficult for us, and we can't understand it. Voter verification is also a difficult process."*

— A respondent

## Perceptions of Balochistan-based Christian community

Councilors and community members from Balochistan shared that the majority of the Christian population are registered voters. The remaining, however, are in the process of getting

registered. The majority of the respondents consider it easy, although a few thoughts that it is difficult for uneducated community members.

They also shared that the ECP has not launched any campaigns regarding voter registration. In a few areas, some local political parties arranged meetings to create voting awareness among the locals. The councilors suggested that votes should be registered on the permanent address. Minority voters should be mentioned in a separate list for their convenience. They also said that ECP should arrange more rigorous awareness campaigns.

### 4.2.3 Perceptions of Other Communities on Low Voter Registration

#### Perceptions of KP-based other minority communities:

The KP-based Kailash community members thought that lack of awareness is a significant cause for high unregistered votes. They did not recall any ECP led awareness campaign for voter education. The community members stressed the need for launching awareness campaigns at the university and college levels, and through media.

The Sikh community members, however, said that almost all of their community members in the province are registered as voters. They also shared that people are registered once ECP takes data from NADRA. The Sikh respondents identified a voting drive led by the ECP for minority voters and said it helped educate voters. They said that people should be informed through text messages after getting the registration. There are Sindh-based nomadic tribes such as Bheel, Oad, and Marvari, who are not registered voters because they are not settled communities. Therefore, they do not participate in the electoral process.

*"Most of the time, we face difficulties in the documentation process since we do not know what documents and formalities are required for obtaining NICs. Also, NADRA staff does not guide us. The most common issue that our community members face is that sometimes their spouses are from other cities, and it is difficult for them to obtain a NIC and it requires the presence of a blood-relative. Another issue is getting our documents attested by a Grade-17 officer. We are poor and uneducated; these officers do not sign our documents."*

— A participant of FGD

#### Perceptions of Sindh-based other minority communities:

The participants of the FGD from Sindh said that 30 percent of adults are not registered as voters. Since voter registration is a complicated process, particularly for the uneducated people, therefore, they do not make efforts for registration. According to a respondent, political parties help them during the registration process, but still, the process of registration is difficult.

Most of the respondents shared the difficulty they face in gathering the documents required for voter registration. Further, they stated that the population is mostly uneducated, which makes the process more difficult. Yet some other responses denied having faced any difficulty in the registration process because election candidates help them throughout the process to win their votes.

*"We are registered without any hassle the moment we get our NIC and are treated with equality."*

— A Sikh community member

There were mixed responses to the question of any facilitation drives launched by ECP or any other entity. Overall, the respondents thought that the efforts put in by ECP to educate voters



are insufficient and stressed upon the need to have more robust campaigns to inform voters on the registration process.

Responding to the question about NICs, the members of minority communities elaborated that almost 30-40 percent of their population does not have NICs, of which the majority lives in the rural areas where NADRA establishes no registration centers.

### Perceptions of Balochistan-based other minority communities

The Balochistan-based minority communities other than Hindus and Christians face no hindrance in getting their votes registered. They however, said that getting the documentation ready for registration is cumbersome, as they do not have enough knowledge about the process and the requirements. A few respondents pointed out that ECP had conducted meetings in a few areas informing people about the voter registration process. The participants of the FGD stressed that ECP should initiate more awareness campaigns focused on voter registration. Some community members do not have NICs because the NADRA office is far away from their districts.

*"Feudal influence is part of our culture, and General Election 2013 was no different. They [feudal] influenced us to vote for a particular candidate."*

— A participant of FGD

## 4.3 Political Inclusion of the Marginalized: Perceptions of Minority Communities on Freedom of Speech, Association, and Expression in Pakistan

There has been a constant threat to non-Muslim minorities from radical religious factions on freely exercising their right to freedom of speech and expression. This section details the perceptions of minority communities in Pakistan on the freedoms available to them concerning free speech, association, and expression universally deemed necessary for the political inclusion of marginalized groups.

### 4.3.1 Insights of the Hindu Community on Freedom of Speech, Association, and Expression in Pakistan

#### Insights of Sindh-based Hindu Councilors and Community Members

The Sindh-based Hindu councilors, and community members mainly responded positively about the freedom of speech, association, and expression available to them in terms of choosing their voting preferences and overall election environment. However, a couple of respondents came up with pertinent issues related to the discrimination they face during the electoral process. One of the participants of the FGD referred to the feudal lords of Sindh influencing their voting preferences by misuse of power. The participants also mentioned incidents of some severe discriminatory practices.

*"We have to travel 30-35 kilometers to get to the other district because we do not have any NADRA office in our area. NADRA staff is ignorant and rude; they do not provide any information and also treat us as outsiders. They demand old documents which we don't have. They also ask us to bring along blood-relatives for biometric verification. The process is very inconvenient for us."*

— Opinion of a Participant

#### Insights of KP-based Hindu Councilors and Community Members

The KP-based Hindu councilors, as well as the community members, did not share any experience of intimidation as shared by a few Sindhi participants. Still, there were some systematic issues related to the pre-election environment. A considerable number of cases related to the mismatch between real names and those mentioned on the voters'



list were reported. It led to some serious confusion ending up in lots of community members leaving the polling station without voting. Overall, the behavior of the polling staff was reported to be positive, according to the participants of the FGD. Similarly, they shared that they [Hindus] are free to vote for the candidate according to their preference and that they do not face any structural resistance or restrictions from any political group. The participants also said that they can contest elections, but the chances to win are slim because of low Hindu populations in their respective constituencies.

### Insights of Punjab-based Hindu Councilors and Community Members

The Hindu councilors from Punjab shared their grievances that ranged from systematic obstacles to being pressured by the influential political families and financial insecurity. According to one participant, lack of transport facilities restricted them from voting. He mentioned lack of will on the part of the elected parliamentarians in fulfilling their promises they make during electoral campaigns. Similar to KP, a considerable number of Hindu voters in Punjab could not vote because of the mismatch in their names and because electoral lists were not complete. Another important finding emerged that many of the Hindu families are bonded labor; therefore, their voting decisions are made by their owners and are held accountable to feudal lords.

*"Sometimes strict Muslim presiding officers (he used the word maulvis — commonly referred to a Muslim religious preacher) are appointed at the polling stations and on knowing that we are non-Muslims refuse to even touch our hand for getting thumb impressions."*

— A participant

Most of the councilors shared that it is almost impossible for them to contest elections due to widespread poverty. Similarly, they pointed to the power politics involved in the ticket awarding process of political parties.

*"We [Hindus] can contest elections but have zero support [from political parties] and cannot launch campaigns for voter mobilization on our own. We cannot contest elections because we belong to low-income families and also because of having this religious status of being Hindus. Political parties do not award party tickets to members of the minority community."*

— A participant of FGD

There were varied responses by the Hindu councilors and community members based in Balochistan regarding the freedoms they enjoy during the electoral process. A few participants considered the electoral process as peaceful and inclusive. However, many others mentioned that the law and order situation in Balochistan during GE 2013 was not stable and that there were threats of terrorist activities that restricted many people from participating in the polling process. They also pointed to errors in voter lists and shifting of votes from one district to another as the primary cause behind the Hindu community's low turnout. Overall, there were no significant issues related to the attitudinal barriers they face from the election staff as well as from other communities.

## 4.3.2 Insights of Christian Community on Freedom of Speech, Association, and Expression

### Insights of Sindh-based Christian Councilors and Community Members

The Sindh-based Christian communities showed considerable satisfaction over freedom of speech, association, and expression available to them during elections. The majority credited this to the presence of Army, Rangers, and the Police during elections. They also thought that behavior of the polling staff remained neutral. However, a few respondents stated that there was no facilitation from the political parties at polling stations, and the Christian community was compelled to wait for hours to cast their votes. There was fear of violence at some polling

stations that triggered a sense of distress among the minority voters. Further, there were instances where the names and addresses of the voters were either wrong or misspelled hence, many voters left without even casting their votes.

*"Army officials were helpful and friendly. We, as minorities, were treated with respect during GE 2013. Separate polling stations for women were another positive aspect."*

— A participant

### Insights of Islamabad and Balochistan-based Christian Councilors and Community Members

The Christian councilors and community members from Balochistan and Islamabad had similar experiences regarding freedoms available to them during the election. They expressed satisfaction with the election environment and stated that the polling process was peaceful and the election staff was cooperative.

*"A common mistake of ECP is that the name in the voter list and that in the NIC is different altogether."*

— A respondent

### Insights of Punjab-based Christian Councilors and Community Members

The Punjab-based Christian councilors said that the overall environment was friendly. Although there were some violations of ECP's code of conduct commonly in the election campaigns, overall it was organized. They also expressed satisfaction over the security measures taken during GE 2013.

Some instances of inter-party clashes violated ECP's code of conduct with the participants also sharing that members of political parties were breaking the rules and using inappropriate language. But these incidents took place outside the polling stations. Some Christian voters were forced not to vote.

To a question about the pre-election environment, the Christian voters in Punjab said that names were not registered in the voter list, or the registered name or address was incorrect. People were unable to vote mainly due to the non-availability of NICs and the transfer of vote from one polling station to the other.

*"The polling stations were overcrowded. Women had to stand for long hours at the polling stations. It was a hot day, and people were made to stand in the scorching heat. Agents at the polling stations were not trained and the counting of ballot papers was not fair."*

— A participant

The majority of the Christian community members said that the behavior of polling staff remained good as they treated everyone with respect and equality. On the contrary, few respondents shared that training of the staff was inadequate and they often misguided the voters.

### Insights of KP-based Christian Councilors and Community Members

The majority of the Christian members from KP expressed their satisfaction over General Elections. They thought that the process of voting was smooth and peaceful, except for a few unpleasant incidents. Some of them reported that the security arrangements were not satisfactory, but the voting and counting of ballot papers was fair.

*"It would be much better if we have separate voter lists."*

— A respondent

They also shared that no systematic or procedural issues were reported. However, they said to have faced difficulty in finding their names in the combined voter lists.

*favoritism was also observed on Election Day in the form of slogans and strikes. The security could have been better. Overall, the election results were unexpected."*

— A participant from the Christian community

Overall, the KP-based Christian participants said that they did not face discrimination of any kind from the polling staff, and they showed professional and respectful behavior.

### 4.3.3 Insights of Other Minority Communities on Freedom of Speech, Association, and Expression

#### Perceptions of Sindh and Balochistan-based minority community members

The Sindh-based minority communities expressed their satisfaction over the polling arrangements made by the ECP. They were satisfied with the peaceful execution of the entire polling process without the eruption of any violent incidents. They also thought that the polling staff was neutral and unbiased and did not favor any political party.

The minority community based in Balochistan also showed their satisfaction with the polling environment and arrangements on Election Day. They also stated that no significant issues were curtailing the fundamental freedoms. However, they faced some systematic problems. For instance, a mismatch of names between NICs and the voter lists was observed. Overall, the respondents said they were satisfied with the neutrality and un-biased behavior of the polling staff towards all religious and ethnic minorities.

#### Perceptions of KP-based minority community members

Similarly, the KP-based members of Kailash and Sikh communities shared their satisfaction over arrangements made by the ECP and local polling staff in executing the polling process peacefully without facing any significant obstacles. However, a few systematic issues were observed where votes of a few members were registered in polling stations based in far-flung areas that led to accessibility issues. A Kailash participant recalled, "The polling staff stopped the people from voting due to the resistance by a few political parties. Some people could not cast their votes and returned without even voting."

## 4.4 Opportunities Related to Electoral Participation and Representation of Minority Communities

Significant structural issues are making the electoral participation and political representation of minority communities, difficult. The following is a detailed analysis of minority perceptions on barriers making it hard for them to take part in the electoral process:

### 4.4.1 Perceptions of Hindu Community

Hindu councilors and community members in Sindh showed their concerns over Muslim parliamentarians. They were of the view that they held a bias against the Hindu community and did not spend on improving basic amenities for the Hindu population. They also said that the local bodies' government councilors show some sympathy towards the Hindu community, but they cannot initiate any substantial projects due to lack of funds. A very few councilors and community members showed satisfaction over casting their votes freely. Others shared that the landlords heavily influence voting decisions of minority communities. The councilors also shared that they are somewhat free to contest local bodies' elections. Still, they are not financially strong enough to contest elections on national and provincial assembly seats except for district Tharparkar where the Hindu community is strong enough to nominate their candidates. Some respondents said to have received serious threats from the ruling party or the local landlords in an attempt to restrict them from contesting elections on general seats. Most of the participants of the FGD demanded separate electorates for the

minorities and that ECP should take active steps to ensure the inclusion of minority community members.

### Insights of Punjab-based Hindu Community and Councilors

The Punjab-based Hindu councilors unanimously called for ECP's role in ensuring their community's electoral participation along with pushing the elected parliamentarians to fulfill promises they make during election campaigns. They also stressed the need to remove the administrative hurdles that limit electoral participation of Hindu voters, such as issuance of NICs, training of polling staff, and improving the accuracy of voter lists.

### Insights of KP-based Hindu Councilors

Hindu councilors from KP said that ECP should make provisions to allow them to contest elections on general seats instead of the reserved seats. They also demanded the need for legislation making possible the provision of a separate electorate from the election authorities along with urging the need of sharing voter lists with the Hindu community.

### Insights of Balochistan-based Minority Community and Councilors

Similar to the other provinces, the Balochistan-based councilors and community members also shared that ECP should ensure that elected parliamentarians honor their promises made to the community in improving their condition. They disdainfully said that once elected, the parliamentarians ignore their constituency's problems. Contrary to Sindh, the Balochistan-based councilors and community members expressed their satisfaction over

*"ECP should remove the column of 'Religion' from the nomination papers and should only have the 'Citizenship' column. As per the constitution, we are all equal citizens."*

— A suggestion made by a few participants

casting their votes as most of them thought the Hindu community is free to vote for the candidate of their choice. However, some of them said that panchayat (an informal organization of community elders) decides which candidate gets the Hindu community's vote. The participants of the FGD said that they do not face any inconvenience in contesting elections, but lesser electoral support and financial issues restrict them from contesting elections.

They mentioned not having faced any violent incidents so far. Still, the law and order crisis in the province places the entire community under constant threat because of their religious identity. Similar to the responses from participants from Sindh, they also demanded of ECP to make provisions for a separate electorate. Further, they also requested to include the Hindu community members as polling staff for peaceful electoral participation of the Hindu community. Almost all the participants stressed the need to establish polling stations for the minority within the minority areas to avoid any unpleasant incidents.

## 4.4.2 Perceptions of Christian Community

### Insights of Punjab-based Christian Community and Councilors: Barriers and opportunities related to electoral participation

Responding to a question on electoral participation and representation, the Punjab-based participants of FGDs said that the voters usually could choose and support the candidate of their choice. Still, sometimes, the influential groups threaten the minority candidates. In urban centers, however, they stated that the minority community has no freedom to choose the candidate of their choice as the political leaders make that decision for them. The participants also shared that they want to support the candidates belonging to their community but Muslim

politicians intimidate them. Even in rural areas, some authoritative landlords influence their decision. However, they believed that the social and political environment is conducive for the Christian community to contest elections. They added that political parties never award tickets to Christian candidates for general seats because they believe these candidates might not secure enough votes. Councilors also raised questions over political parties being non-inclusive as they would not include the members from the minority community in their executive committee. The respondents said that being an underprivileged community, they face religious, social, and economic threats, and this environment is not conducive to the minority community's political empowerment. All participants endorsed that there is a need to create a just and fair system for minority candidates and voters.

They said that they face religious marginalization in Pakistan and that social pressure and lack of financial resources to run campaigns is a major constraint towards minorities' political participation in the election process.

*"Politically, only those candidates can make their way into Parliament who have relationship or references with the top leadership of political parties."*

— A participant

## Recommendations

Christian councilors called for the introduction of proper systems in which the candidate gets votes directly through the community. Separate minority voter list was another key suggestion along with the arrangements of NADRA for having separate counters to deal with minorities so that they do not have to wait in long queues while seeking NICs and voter registration. Further, they stressed the need for ECP to advise the government to pass new legislation to facilitate minority candidates in contesting elections. They also called for introducing awareness campaigns for minority communities at a larger scale, along with increased accessibility to polling stations.

*"NADRA should establish offices at the UC level so that the maximum number of voters can be registered. The literacy level among Christians is low; they need to be encouraged to study. Their high illiteracy is also a hindrance. NIC and voter registration campaigns must be introduced at a broader level. The number of minority seats (especially women's) and allocation of funds must be properly reserved."*

— A suggestion from a couple of participants

The councilors and community members also suggested specific reforms to improve the voting process and called for ECP to visit minority community areas to discuss election-related issues directly with the Christian community. They demanded the provision for introducing the biometric voting system. The councilors said that there should be maximum facilitation at NADRA offices for the NIC registration of minorities along with the introduction of specific legislation for the registration of minority marriages.

*"ECP should separately publish minority voters' registration record along with setting up polling stations closer to the constituencies."*

— A Punjab-based community councilor

Christian members also said that trained polling agents should facilitate voters. Similarly, they stressed the need for starting door-to-door registration drives. The councilors supported the idea of setting up separate polling stations for women. All of the Christian participants of the FGD thought that the Christian minority should have a separate electorate. They demanded an increase in the number of minority seats and the minority

*"Minority data should be carefully checked during the census. Minorities need security; this must be ensured through laws."*

— A participant



councilor's salary. They also spoke about improving the separate quota system for minorities in government jobs.

### Insights of KP-based Christian Community and Councilors

The KP-based Christian councilors and community members said that they are free to choose the candidate of their choice and that they face no restrictions and resistance from any political party or member of any community. They also shared that they do not face any societal barriers restricting their political participation and commended the Muslim majority for being helpful and friendly.

*"We should be given equal opportunities to contest the General Elections. A separate electoral system must be introduced for the Christian community. Minority population's accessibility must be kept in mind while deciding different polling stations."*

— A participant

### Suggestions made by Community Councilors

All participants stressed the need for mobilization campaigns, awareness, and advocacy sessions to educate people on the importance of the vote, and separate polling stations for women. Some said ECP and legislative bodies should make provisions for separate electorate for minority communities.

*"Participation of minorities must be enhanced, increased, and encouraged at all levels. ECP must come up with separate electorates for minorities."*

— A respondent

A few participants commended the role of ECP in arranging special campaigns for educating minority communities regarding voter registration.

Adequate representation of minorities during the law-making process was another suggestion that came forth. The participants of the FGD made suggestions about training polling agents on the polling procedures and the importance of patience and tolerance when dealing with different minority groups and PWDs. Similar to the responses by the participants of the Hindu community, the Christian community also demanded of ECP to introduce a biometric voting system along with establishing separate polling booths for minorities. A respondent said that ECP should strictly ensure that all parties follow the code of conduct, failing which every party should be held accountable under the law.

### Insights of Balochistan-based Christian Community and Councilors

The Christian councilors and community members from Balochistan said that the elected candidates represent their interests adequately. They added that they are free to vote and contest elections. They expressed satisfaction that no violent incident during polling ever occurred. Responding to the question of what suggestions they would want to make, the councilors and community members shared that minority communities should be provided with necessary facilities on Election Day, such as transportation. Besides, polling stations should be established in the minority areas as well. They also suggested that ECP should organize awareness campaigns. A few participants suggested creating separate polling stations for marginalized groups such as women and senior citizens.

*"Elected members at the national level do not ever think of the minority groups. As a result, minority groups have to suffer even more due to major cuts on the administrative and financial powers of local government."*

— A respondent



### Insights of Sindh-based Christian Community and Councilors

The Christian councilors and community members from Sindh shared that the elected parliamentarians do not pay heed to the needs of the minority communities. Respondents also stated that the elected representatives do not care about the minorities, and the areas entirely composed of non-Muslim communities remain neglected.

Similar to the Hindu community members' responses, the majority of the Sindh-based Christian participants of FGD were of the view that the community members are not free to vote for the candidate they want to support. They stated that the feudal/landlord's pressure and political influence of prominent parties restrict them from supporting the candidates of their choice. Further, they said that the community members cannot contest the elections. Restrictions from the landlords, lack of funds, and smaller vote bank do not allow the minority members to contest the polls. A few respondents stated that they have to face resistance from the Pashtuns and the religious groups. The other respondents said that they do not get the opportunity to contest elections, so there is no question of resistance.

### Suggestions made by the community

The majority of the respondents demanded that there should be separate electorates for the minority communities so that they can cast their votes freely along with contesting elections without any external pressure. They also stressed the need for continuous awareness campaigns to spread awareness regarding the electoral process.

They also demanded making the process leading to the acquisition of NIC easier. Moreover, voter registration should take place at the village level, and there should be a strict check and balance on the political parties and influential local leaders so that they do not pressure the community members for casting votes or for contesting elections.

### Insights of Islamabad-based Christian Community and Councilors

The Islamabad based Christian community led by their local councilors complained that the interests of their community are not represented adequately by the elected candidates. Also, their population is deprived of the necessary facilities, and they are always left out of the government schemes such as housing, health, water supply, etc. However, they acknowledged that their community members are free to choose the candidate of their choice. They also expressed satisfaction over the equal opportunities given to the Christian community while contesting elections. Therefore, there has never been a hostile and unpleasant incident. One participant group unanimously stated that minority vote should be given more weight making it equal to two votes along with making provisions to increase minority representation at the national level. They also said that the elected parliamentarians should voice their opinion about such important subjects.

## 4.4.3 Perceptions of Other Communities

### Insights of Balochistan-based other Minority Community Members and Councilors

A Few other minority communities from Balochistan expressed their satisfaction over opportunities available to them. However, some expressed their desire to contest the local body elections, but due to insufficient resources, they were not able to contest the provincial or national assembly seats.

*"We are treated with equality like a normal Pakistani citizen and do not face any prejudice and difficulties in vote casting and don't face any restrictions."*

— A Sikh respondent

## Insights of KP-based other Minority Community Members and Councilors

The KP-based Kailash and Sikh communities shared that they are given total freedom to vote without having to face any issues. However, Kailash community members and councilors expressed their concern over restrictions they face from the members of political parties trying to stop them from contesting elections against the mainstream political parties.

*"People contest elections mostly at the local level (such as councilors), and because of that, we feel motivated to cast votes so that we can take up our issues at the higher level."*

— A minority member

## Insights of Sikh Community Members

The Sikh community members shared that they are given equal rights that every other Pakistani citizen enjoys. They said that they want to contest elections, but since their population is very less so, they cannot succeed. The members shared that they have the freedom to cast votes freely. However, there are other financial and educational issues responsible for limited electoral participation.

*"Our participation in contesting the elections remains limited due to lack of funds, education, and lack of interest of the community members."*

— A respondent



## CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

# Challenges and Opportunities regarding Electoral Inclusion of Marginalized Segments

After the adoption of the historic Election Act in 2017, ECP gave special instructions to include women, transgender persons, and PWDs in the electoral process and vowed to remove barriers obstructing the participatory inclusion of these groups into the electoral system as both candidates and voters. The current observational exercise carried out across four provincial capitals and the federal capital led to identifying critical areas for future policy implications.

The following findings can be inferred from the extensive data collected by CIP LTOs, EDOs from four provincial capitals, and federal capital, and the District Coordinators of FAFEN across 130 districts of Pakistan after the successful completion of the first-ever experiential study of this kind and scope. The findings of the report are broadly classified into four sub-sections.

### 5.1 Challenges and Opportunities Regarding Electoral Inclusion of Women

The report indicates that women were welcomed to participate in the electoral process of voting and to contest elections. However, there were certain areas, which require substantial intervention. For instance, political lineage and nepotism remained a decisive factor in awarding tickets to women candidates that damages the entire spirit of meritocracy and realization of the ideal of women empowerment. Similarly, it was observed that political parties usually award women tickets for the constituencies having little electoral support. The study suggests that women voters were welcomed mainly by their male counterparts. However, few perturbing instances were also reported where the polling staff and the male voters present at the polling stations harassed women.

There is little evidence to prove that election officials worked diligently to facilitate women voters as mandated by the ECP. Women voters faced systematic hurdles in the process of casting their votes at various constituencies.

The voter registration process remained a grey area that led to low women turnout. The study suggests that women voters faced substantial issues throughout the voter registration process.

### 5.2 Challenges and Opportunities Related to Electoral Inclusion of PWDs

The report suggests that PWDs faced welcoming and honoring behavior from almost all the stakeholders of the electoral process. However, in a few instances, the PWDs were subjected to ridicule and pity. The PWD voters and candidates faced serious accessibility issues throughout the electoral process leading up to the Election Day. Following this, the ECP instructed election officials to make adequate arrangements to facilitate PWDs.

Accessibility of polling stations remains an issue for voters with disabilities despite explicit instructions issued by ECP to relevant authorities for building ramps and making all polling stations accessible for PWDs.

Additionally, there were significant issues regarding availing the postal ballot service as the process of Postal Ballot service seemed too complicated and cumbersome for the PWDs.

### 5.3 Challenges and Opportunities Related to Electoral Inclusion of Transgender Persons

The report suggests that voters belonging to the transgender community faced substantial attitudinal barriers obstructing their right to exercise the vote. The attitude of the people was hostile and ridiculing towards the transgender voters on the Election Day. Even the transgender candidates found the attitude of the election officials unwelcoming and ridiculing, which included inappropriate remarks and immoral gestures.

There were hardly any special arrangements made by the election officials to facilitate the transgender voters, even though ECP gave clear instructions to assist the transgender voters and candidates throughout the electoral process. A Quetta-based DEC was the only election official who claimed to have made special security arrangements to safeguard transgender voters from any potential threat because of the stigma associated with their electoral participation.

The current report also identifies the hostile attitude of political parties towards the transgender community. Ironically, there was just one political party, PTI (*Gulalai*), that nominated a transgender candidate along with making a separate political wing for transgender persons during GE 2018. The religious political parties such as Jamaat-e-Islami and TLP showed resistance towards the transgender community, calling them dancers and drum beaters. A representative of Pakistan Muslim League-N, one of the biggest political parties, outrightly rejected the idea of including transgender rights in their electoral manifesto under the pretext of less population of the transgender community.

The report also points to a vital issue of understating the population of transgender persons as the census conducted in 2017 claims the total transgender population to be around 10,000, which is an underrepresentation.

### 5.4 Challenges and Opportunities Regarding Electoral Inclusion of Religious Minorities

Religious minorities in Pakistan face the brunt of exclusionary politics restricting their electoral participation. The current report points to systematic and social barriers limiting the political inclusion of such minorities. The issues faced by religious minorities are listed below:

#### a) Social and Systematic Barriers facing Hindu Community

1) The Sindh and Punjab-based Hindu communities face intimidation by the local feudal lords influencing their voting decisions. There are grave attitudinal barriers on the part of ECP and NADRA staff, causing difficulties in NIC and voter registration.

II) The Hindu community from KP does not face any intimidation; however, they demanded separate electorate for minority communities because of the existing joint electorate system suppressing their electoral participation.

III) The Hindu community from Balochistan primarily faces issues of accessibility and cumbersome voter registration process. They do not face any intimidation from the political parties. They also demand a separate electorate to recognize their electoral presence.

## **b) Social and Systematic Barriers facing Christian Community**

I) The Christian communities from urban centers of Punjab expressed their satisfaction for being able to freely exercise their right to vote. However, the members of this community from rural areas face pressures from influential political groups influencing their voting decisions. They also face financial issues to compete with influential Muslim candidates.

II) The Sindh-based Christian communities are neglected by the mainstream political parties such as PPPP and PML-F in awarding tickets. These communities also face political pressures from influential groups in contesting elections and casting votes for their preferred candidates.

III) The KP and Balochistan-based Christian communities enjoy similar electoral opportunities as their Muslim counterparts. They prefer to contest Local Bodies elections instead of General Elections since they do not have as much support as the Muslim contestants. Most of the Christian community members demanded a separate electorate.

IV) The Christian community in Islamabad faces issues related to representation, as their representatives do not address their problems, hence leaving them out of the government schemes such as housing, health, and water supply.

# CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS



These recommendations are based on the findings and analysis of the specialized observations carried out by accredited women, transgender persons, and PWDs observers deployed during the pre-election and on Election Day. Moreover, this three-set of recommendations (from the perspective of women, transgender persons, and PWDs) also incorporates the inferences drawn after carrying out a comprehensive clause-by-clause analysis and a Gender and Disability Audit of the Election Act, 2017.

## 6.1 CIP's recommendations to improve women's participation in the political and electoral processes

- The Election Commission should enhance the number of vacancies for women at all levels of its offices by ensuring and implementing ten percent women quota as prescribed by the government.
- Section 12 (C) of the Elections Act, 2017 requires that the ECP conduct awareness campaigns and take other special measures to improve the participation of voters, especially women. For the active and meaningful implementation of this section, the Commission should deploy at least one trained female officer at the district and regional levels to carry out awareness campaigns and other initiatives on political and electoral participation of women.
- The ECP should conduct a rigorous exercise before every General Election, local government elections and by-elections, to identify the electoral areas in the constituencies where the turnout of women voters remained very low. This measure will help ECP to strategize media campaigns in specific areas for awareness and importance of voting, especially for women.
- The Parliament may consider changing the modality of elections on the reserved seats to improve their representativeness. The direct elections on these seats may be beneficial in generating a wider acceptance for women's role in political and parliamentary spheres. The change in the modality of election will require amendment to the Constitution's Article 51(6)(d). Moreover, the Parliament may amend the Constitution's Article 51(6)(b) to provide for the intra-provincial allocation of seats reserved for women on divisional or district basis.
- Section 41(2), 79(3) of the Elections Act, 2017 may be amended to give out electoral rolls without the photos in CD or USB to the election candidates and agents as it compromises the privacy of voters particularly women.
- While deploying election officials including the DROs, ROs, AROs, and PrOs, the Election Commission should ensure women officials' participation among this cadre (Rules 46, 47 and 48, Election Rules 2017).
- Female election staff (PrOs, APrOs and POs) should be deployed at all women's polling stations and polling booths at combined polling stations, save in exceptional circumstances, for reasons to be recorded by RO.
- The votes cast at women's polling booths at combined polling stations should be counted separately.



- Improved polling stations should be established in such constituencies or electoral areas where the ECP is unable to establish polling stations with a distance of one kilometer between a polling station and the voters assigned to it.
- Section 93 of the Elections Act, 2017 may be amended to include pregnant women possessing a medical certificate of their pregnancy among the persons eligible for availing the facility of Postal Ballot to save them from the hassle of commuting to and from polling stations on Election Day. The harassment of women voters near or inside the polling stations may be included in the offenses punishable under the Pakistan Penal Code through amendments to Section 196 of the Elections Act, 2017 and Section 509 of the Pakistan Penal Code.
- The political parties should encourage the representation of women in their decision-making structures and forums. They must adhere to a minimum of 33 percent representation of women at all levels during the intra-party elections.
- To encourage women's representation in political parties, the Elections Act, 2017 may be amended to provide for a minimum threshold of women representation in the lists of political parties' members to be submitted to the Election Commission under Section 202 of the Act for party enlistment. A provision may also be added to ask the already listed political parties to comply with the minimum threshold. Section 202 of the Elections Act, 2017 may be amended to ensure that political parties include at least 50 percent women in the list of 2,000 members submitted to the ECP before the conduct of elections.
- Section 206 of the Elections Act, 2017, should be amended to ensure participation of women on general seats by political parties giving representation to at least five percent of female candidates while awarding tickets or one seat to women, whichever is greater. Since the existing provision of the Elections Act, 2017 of allocating minimum five percent representation on elected offices of the political parties did not lead to considerable improvement in the number of women contestants during GE 2018, CIP recommends amending Section 206 of the Elections Act, 2017 accordingly.
- To encourage aspiring women with disabilities, non-Muslim women, and transgender candidates, Sections 61 and 111 of the Elections Act, 2017 may be amended to reduce the sums of money required with their nomination forms for the election to the National Assembly, Senate or Provincial Assemblies.
- The training curriculum of election staff and the Code of Conduct, issued by the Election Commission (for candidates, media, observers, political parties, and security staff), should be gender and disability sensitive.
- The federal and provincial governments may ensure the provision of adequate female staff to the ECP for female and combined polling stations.
- The federal and the provincial governments may take steps to increase women representation in the law enforcement agencies to address the deficiency of female security personnel.
- The ECP may establish a gender and disability unit at its districts and provincial offices.

## CIP's recommendations to improve transgender persons' participation in the political and electoral process

- Section 12c of the Elections Act, 2017 may include transgender persons and non-Muslims as part of public awareness programs and media campaigns for voter registration and participation in the electoral process;
- Section 47(1) of the Elections Act 2017 may be amended to provide separate voter statistics of transgender persons.
- To facilitate transgender persons at polling stations, ECP should ensure that eunuch male and khunsa-e-mushkil should be made part of male electoral rolls while the eunuch female should be added to the female electoral rolls.
- The forms provided in the Elections Act, 2017 (including form A, B, C, and D), where the salutations including Mr., Mrs., and Ms. are being used, it may also include X for transgender persons for their inclusivity.
- Section 203 of the Elections Act, 2017 may be amended to ensure that political parties encourage transgender persons to become their members.
- Section 48 of the Elections Act, 2017 may be amended to ensure that ECP and NADRA jointly make special arrangements for NIC and voter registration of transgender persons.
- A new piece of legislation should be enacted by the Parliament and the provincial assemblies to ensure representation of transgender persons at the national, provincial, and local assemblies.
- ECP should include a trans-right organization in their Gender and Disability Electoral Working Group.
- Provincial assemblies should enact legislation to protect fundamental human rights of transgender persons in line with the national law.
- The relevant government department should prepare the requisite rules for the implementation of the Transgender Persons (Protection and Rights) Act, 2018.

## CIP's recommendations to improve PWDs' participation in the political and electoral process

- The ECP should increase the employment quota for PWDs up to five percent and ensure its implementation. This provision should be made part of the third Five-Year Strategic Plan (2019-2023) of ECP being currently finalized.
- ECP and NADRA should jointly take special measures for the NIC and voter registration of PWDs under Section 48 of the Elections Act, 2017.
- Section 203 of the Elections Act, 2017 may be amended to ensure that political parties encourage PWDs to become their members.
- Public awareness programs and media campaigns on the importance of voter registration should include sign language for PWDs. Moreover, all promotional materials and ballot papers should be printed in Braille for facilitating the visually impaired persons.
- ECP should ensure the content of its website is accessible to PWDs, and follows the international best practice provided in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0.
- ECP should include clear instructions regarding disability rights in the code of conduct for contesting candidates, media, observers, political parties, and security officials to facilitate PWDs.
- ECP should revisit the process of obtaining postal ballots by simplifying it and dropping the condition of verification by a gazetted officer.
- A polling station-wise electoral roll for PWDs including types of disabilities should be introduced so that appropriate measures may be taken to facilitate them.
- At least one reserved seat for PWDs should be allocated from each province in the Senate.
- At least one reserved seat for PWDs should be allocated from each province in the National Assembly.
- At least one reserved seat for PWDs should be allocated in each provincial assembly.
- Reserved seat for PWDs should be allocated at all local government levels.
- Ramps should be established at every polling station and polling booth to facilitate PWDs.
- Every polling station must ensure the provision of a wheelchair.
- ECP should make the Accessibility Code of Pakistan, 2006 part of the Election Rules.



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