

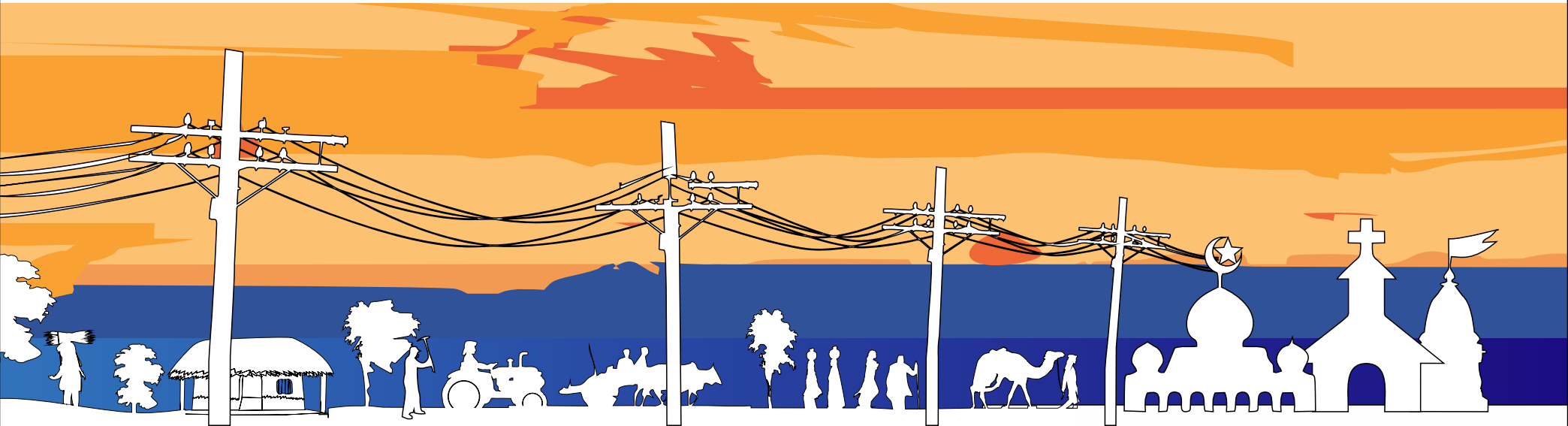
The Right to Democratic Participation

Improving the Electoral Participation and Political Empowerment of Marginalised Groups

AN HRCP NATIONAL CONFERENCE REPORT



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.
Pakistan



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Introduction

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has long advocated for the meaningful political participation of marginalised groups, particularly women, religious minorities, the transgender community and persons with disabilities (PWDs). To embody the true spirit of democracy, it is essential to ensure representative political participation that reflects the composition of the electorate since this empowers citizens across the political spectrum.

Political inclusivity results in effective political accountability as it safeguards the interests of all segments of society and compels policymakers to be cognisant of the particular needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups. The recent strife over the



'The electoral framework should be transparent and accountable to the voters.'

Birgit Lamm, Head of Country Office, Pakistan, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018, widening gender disparity, and continuing misuse of the blasphemy laws all point to a political system that further excludes the already marginalised sections of the population, particularly women, religious minorities and the transgender community.

While Pakistan has enacted many legal and constitutional safeguards to ensure women's political participation as both voters and candidates, politics largely remains a male-dominated affair in the country as patriarchal norms continue to constrain women's participation in political rallies and election campaigns. Moreover, election tickets are mostly awarded to women from well-entrenched political dynasties, and women legislators on reserved seats are treated as lesser lawmakers.

The political participation of religious minorities is constrained by constitutional provisions and security concerns that hinder them from openly declaring their political leanings. The transgender community's disillusionment should be evident from how not even a single one of its members has ever made it to the National Assembly of Pakistan or the four provincial assemblies. Similarly, PWDs are sorely underrepresented in state legislatures, while voters with special needs continue to find it difficult to reach polling stations to cast their votes. These marginalised groups also lack the fiscal resources and social connections needed to progress in politics; therefore, empowering them and increasing their political participation is direly needed.

The lack of inclusivity in Pakistan's political system can be attributed to the pervasive feudalistic ethos that results in a ruthless elite capture. A handful of military, bureaucratic, religious and industrial elites continue to wield power, thereby ensuring

Making the political process more inclusive is essential to ensure that policymaking in Pakistan is responsive to the needs of historically disenfranchised and marginalised communities.



'A level playing field should not only be provided to political parties and their leadership, but also to voters who should be empowered to participate in the electoral process against the political elites of their respective areas.'

*Harris Khalique, secretary-general,
Human Rights
Commission of Pakistan*

that public resources are biased towards the few in detriment to the welfare of the larger population. Even those political parties that overtly shun the idea of dynastic politics often give tickets to 'electables' from established political families.

Making the political process more inclusive is essential to ensure that policymaking in Pakistan is responsive to the needs of historically disenfranchised and marginalised communities. To achieve this end, HRCPC held a series of five provincial consultations from May to July 2023, followed by a national conference with stakeholders in Islamabad on 19 September 2023.

The provincial consultations were held in Karachi on 4 May 2023 (for the province of Sindh); Lahore on 30 May 2023 (for the province of Punjab); Quetta on 5 June 2023 (for the province of Balochistan); Peshawar on 19 June 2023 (for the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa); and Islamabad on 17 July 2023 (for the Islamabad Capital Territory).

These consultations aimed at directly listening to representatives of marginalised groups regarding the obstacles they face in political and electoral participation, as well as exploring avenues to amplify their voices in decision-making forums. Leaders of political parties and representatives of government line departments were also invited to respond to the concerns shared by the marginalised population. The consultations further sought suggestions from the participants regarding the role of political parties and the government line departments concerned.

This report presents highlights of the national conference held in Islamabad in September 2023, along with a summary of the salient recommendations made at the provincial consultations and the national conference.



Breaking barriers: Women's political empowerment

Women's limited electoral participation and the necessity for their political empowerment were widely discussed throughout deliberations at the provincial as well as the national level. Farkhanda Aurangzaib, member of the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), encapsulated women's political vulnerability by stating that 'women are treated as a minority despite being in majority'. In other words, despite their numeric strength, they remain a minority in terms of decision-making. This makes their political presence merely cosmetic. Independent candidacy for women is hindered by the high expenses associated with election campaigns. She added that men in Balochistan often discourage national identification card (NIC) registrations for women as they equate it to women empowerment, a concept they consider antithetical to the patriarchal ethos prevalent in their society.

Bushra Khaliq, executive director at Women in Struggle for Empowerment (WISE), emphasised that NIC registration affects more than just electoral empowerment; it implicates citizenship rights, including women's right to inheritance. Seema Batool, general



Chandni Kakar, Joint Secretary of the Awami National Party

secretary of the Hazara Democratic Party, underscored the importance of local government for women's political training and facilitating their ascent to higher political echelons. She also stressed the significance of student politics in political training, but expressed concerns regarding tribal norms that bar female students' participation in it. She further stated that 'inclusive political dialogue is the need of the hour to analyse political manifestos regarding the political vision for women's empowerment'.

Chandni Kakar, joint secretary of the Awami National Party, attributed women's political marginalisation to dynastic politics and advocated for an increase in women's quota in the provincial legislature. Sangeen Khan, advocate for the Peshawar High Court, suggested that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) should make it binding on political parties to award tickets to female candidates on at least 5 percent of the general seats which they had either won or were runners-up for in the previous general elections. Lawyer Usama Khawar suggested various measures to ensure that such a condition on general seats not be abused or remain merely cosmetic in nature.

Tahir Mehdi, a political analyst, proposed raising the quota for women's seats to 30 percent in legislatures nationwide to bring about a significant impact on the existing state of affairs. Romana

Bashir, executive director of the Peace and Development Foundation, stressed effective women's participation and representation instead of an increase in the number of seats reserved for them in the assemblies. 'Our constitution enhances the exclusion of marginalised populations instead of the opposite,' she said. She further highlighted the prevailing gender gap in the issuance of NICs and voters' lists, and also demanded that political parties introduce criteria for the selection of women on reserved seats in the assemblies. Bushra Rind, secretary of the Services and General Administration Department Balochistan, added that women are allocated seats only to fulfil legal requirements.

Sana Durrani, secretary of the Balochistan women's wing of Pakistan People's Party, called for a special quota of signatories from marginalised groups, including women, at the time of a party's registration. She added that the nomination process for candidates to reserved seats is heavily biased towards women from established political families. She also recommended a binding requirement on political parties registered with the ECP to nominate a woman as their secretary-general if the president were male instead of forming toothless women's wings, and condemned the insulting language used in mainstream media and on social media against political figures with marginalised identities. Shagufta Malik, a former parliamentarian from the Awami National Party, stressed that 'women's political empowerment must involve more than casting ballots – they must also be trained in making educated voting decisions and exercising political accountability afterwards'. She added that the abolishment of the district tier from local government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has only added to women's political marginalisation.

Journalist Arifa Noor asserted that women's voting choices are frequently influenced by the men in their families. To address this, she recommended introducing smartphone apps to make polling booths more accessible, enabling women to cast their votes without relying on men to transport them to polling stations. Rahila Durrani, former speaker of the Balochistan Assembly, recommended increasing women's representation in parliamentary committees and training potential women candidates through the establishment of political academies at the national and provincial level. She further recommended increasing awareness among women regarding new laws concerning their rights; issuing NICs to as many women in remote areas as possible before the upcoming elections through National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) Mobile Registration Vans; and establishing a separate political party for women so that their representation does not remain merely cosmetic and actually brings about a positive societal change. Tanzeela Ummi Habib, member of the Sindh Assembly, highlighted the dual burden of patriarchy and ethnicity faced by Sheedi women since the community is treated as a minority despite practicing Muslim faith. Mehnaz Rehman, resident director at the Aurat Foundation, stated that 'our society is not only patriarchal but also classist', compounding the marginalisation of low-income groups, especially low-income women. She suggested that all segments of civil society collaborate to bring about holistic, enduring change. HRCP Council member Farhatullah Babar said that Pakistan's electoral system is structurally antithetical to the welfare of marginalised groups: 'In the 2018 general elections, 11 million women were without NICs and therefore deprived of the right to vote. Moreover, the voter turnout among women was 10 percent lower than that of their male counterparts, thereby implying that 12.5 million women eligible to vote did not vote in the last elections.'



*Tanzila Ummi Habiba,
Member, Sindh Assembly*

Overall, the discussions highlighted entrenched challenges in women's electoral participation and political empowerment, including high campaign costs, cultural barriers to NIC registration, and the paradox of women composing a majority demographic but being a minority stakeholder in decision-making. The need for comprehensive effort beyond legal quotas was emphasised, particularly a holistic approach to dismantle systemic barriers and truly empower women in the political landscape.

Empowering religious minorities: Electoral and political participation

Political representation for religious minorities remains a serious challenge in Pakistan, with many rights activists raising concerns about indirect electorates, upper-class dominance, and the lack of adequate representation of women from minorities.

Yousaf George, a social activist from Peshawar, raised concerns about an indirect electorate for religious minorities leading to a disconnect between the electorate and their representatives. Chandan Malhi, the NCHR coordinator for Sindh, noted that Hindu political representatives were predominantly from a higher socio-economic standing, and emphasised the insufficient number of seats allocated for scheduled castes. Margaret Manzoor, a Christian rights activist from Karachi, raised similar concerns about the Christian community by highlighting that party tickets are allocated to wealthier Christian representatives who are often disconnected from their community's challenges, and lamented the lack of senior positions for Christians within parties. Sandeep Maheshwary, a rights activist from Karachi, criticised separate electorate lists for Ahmadiyya community members, noting how such practices jeopardizes their safety by revealing their identities.

Peter Jacob, executive director of the Centre for Social Justice, also voiced concerns about the disenfranchisement of Ahmadiyya community members. He stated that the 2017 amendment to the Elections Act only increased their marginalisation in the political landscape by retaining the provisions regarding their status. If anyone raises an objection against a particular voter identifying them as non-Muslim, the ECP can summon the voter and request them to either declare that they are not Ahmadi, or be put on a supplementary special voter list¹. Amir Mahmood stressed the need to end separate voting lists entirely: 'there are currently two voters' lists in Pakistan—one for both Muslims and

Prejudices against non-Muslims are enshrined in the Constitution as well as subordinate legislation; for example, the bar on non-Muslims to assume the office of the country's president and prime minister.



Civil society activists Peter Jacob and Tahir Mehdi

1. Human Rights Watch. (2018, June 28). *Pakistan: Ensure Ahmadi voting rights*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/29/pakistan-ensure-ahmadi-voting-rights>

non-Muslims, and another one exclusively for the Ahmadiyya community. Once this barrier is removed, the community shall pro-actively participate in the elections'. He also pointed out the harassment that members of the Ahmadiyya community faced on the occasion of the last Eid-ul-Azha, when they were persecuted for offering ritualistic sacrifice even at their homes since the separate voters' list contained details of their addresses. Romana Bashir called for the allocation of a 5 percent quota for women from religious minorities in assemblies, highlighting how no political party in Pakistan nominates them on seats reserved for women. Former senator Afrasiab Khattak attributed the violation of the rights of marginalised groups to the 'overdose of religion' in all spheres of life since the country's independence. 'Prejudices against non-Muslims are enshrined in the Constitution as well as subordinate legislation; for example, the bar on non-Muslims to assume the office of the country's president and prime minister,' he said. Naazir Mahmood, researcher and columnist, suggested that the sections of the Constitution and subordinate legislation which perpetuate marginalisation based on religion should be immediately done away with. He further suggested increasing the total number of seats in the assemblies for a more effective reservation of seats for those marginalised groups whose numbers are limited.

In conclusion, the key recommendations that emerged from these discussions included ending separate voters' lists, addressing systemic biases in constitutional provisions, and increasing the total number of seats in assemblies. These actions would be crucial for fostering more inclusive political participation and mitigating marginalisation based on religion.



Panelists Sangeen Khan, Usama Khawar, Afrasiab Khattak and Naazir Mahmood

Fostering inclusive participation: Empowering transgender individuals in the political arena

Transgender rights activists and experts voiced concerns about the challenges faced by the transgender community, ranging from healthcare access to legal recognition and political representation.

Arzoo Khan, transgender rights activist, expressed concerns about obstacles to healthcare access for transgender individuals. She stated that 'whenever a transgender person visits a hospital, the administration is unable to ascertain where to admit them: in a male ward or female ward'. Transgender individuals suffering from HIV find that their ailments are further compounded by social ostracisation. Similarly, Afghan transgender refugees face difficulties in accessing

Not only were transgender persons undercounted in the 2017 census, but also only 17 percent of those counted had their NIC numbers registered.

healthcare without identity documentation on account of both their gender and nationality. Physician Sadia Salar expressed concerns about the shortage of trained healthcare professionals, citing instances where psychologists breached confidentiality by involving parents in their treatment of transgender clients over 18 years old. Zanaya Chaudhary, Victim Support Officer at the Punjab Police, criticised the use of the term 'transgender' as a pejorative by politicians to humiliate their opponents. She also expressed disapproval of the ECP's rule mandating the casting of votes in the constituency of one's permanent address, citing safety concerns for many transgender individuals who find it unsafe to return home to vote. This implicates their right to vote as

well as their right to contest in elections. Moreover, she criticised the absence of special polling booths for transgender persons, stating that 'polling agents often treat them as men even if they clearly state that they identify as women', forcing transgender persons to cast their vote at polling booths for men. She also expressed concerns about the quota for transgender persons in legislatures and inadequate security measures for those contesting elections. She emphasised the importance of including transgender persons in the ECP to ensure that the community's concerns regarding the electoral process are addressed.

Nayyab Ali, a transgender rights activist, brought up uncertainties around the NIC registration of transgender persons by referring to the discontinuation of their registration following the Federal Shariat Court's decision against the Transgender (Protection of Rights) Act 2018 in May 2023. She



Arzoo Khan, Tahira Habib and Akbar Khan



Farhatullah Babar, former senator and HRCPC Council member.

added that not only were transgender persons undercounted in the 2017 census, but also only 17 percent of those counted had their NIC numbers registered. She recommended postal ballots for transgender persons to mitigate security risks related to returning to their hometowns to cast their votes. Senator and HRCPC Council member Farhatullah Babar lamented that though the Federal Shariat Court's ruling against the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act has been challenged in the apex court, NADRA has already started implementing the decision before waiting for the final outcome of the case, thus disenfranchising the transgender community.

Shahzadi Rai, a transgender member of the Karachi Municipal Council, lauded the Sindh Local Government Act for mandating the formation of transgender wings in every political party. However, she lamented the organised hate campaigns and violence against transgender persons across Pakistan following controversy around Transgender (Protection of Rights) Act 2018. Kailash Kohli, a retired justice of the Balochistan High Court, recommended that NADRA should register transgender individuals based on affidavits or under the guardianship of their gurus as parents often disassociate themselves from them. Dawood Muhammad from NADRA

responded that NIC registration may be done under the guru's guardianship only if the concerned guru is registered with the social welfare department.

Mehrub Moiz Awan, a transgender rights activist, said that the marginalisation of transgender persons is mainly a problem of the urban elite, based on a social construct that has its genesis in the colonial rule of the subcontinent. She demanded a separate electorate for the transgender community owing to the lack of awareness among the general population and elected representatives regarding their gender and rights. Romana Bashir suggested that instead of introducing separate electorate for the transgender community, they should be allocated a specific quota in the reserved seats for minorities in the assemblies.



Kulsoom Chandio, Amir Mehmood, Rahila Durrani and Mehrub Moiz Awan.

Inclusive democracy: Ensuring equal participation of the differently abled

The political participation and representation of PWDs remains a pressing issue, and suggestions to bridge these gaps and create a more inclusive polity were sought from the participants.

Karamatullah Khan, chief executive of Women Breaking Barriers, called attention to the underrepresentation of PWDs and stated that lengthy NIC registration processes at NADRA discourages members of the community from registering themselves. Kailash Kohli attributed the complexity of the registration process to disability verification by a board of physicians who share the results with the social welfare department for certificate issuance. Journalist Naseem Sheikh recommended a one-window operation for PWDs' NIC registration. He added that those who face issues with mobility should be facilitated by providing an at-home registration service.

Zulqarnain Asghar, rights activist for PWDs, said that 'there's a need to understand that accessibility goes beyond wheelchairs as the nature of disability varies'. He also pointed out the shortcomings in media reporting, noting that rather than advocating for the facilitation of PWDs, the media often sensationalises their challenges, particularly when they cast votes under unfavourable circumstances on polling day. He emphasised the need to understand that 'PWDs are dignified humans, not mere inspirational figures'. Zarwar Khan from the Special Life Foundation emphasised the need to make every polling station accessible, and train polling staff in accessibility measures to cater to the unique needs of all PWDs. He further suggested the enactment of special measures to ensure the confidentiality of votes casted by visually impaired persons, and said that 'a quota of PWDs should be introduced at all political tiers from the local governments to provincial and national assemblies'. He also raised concerns about the non-implementation of the Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance, which was instituted in 1981, leading to a dearth of resources for the community.

In conclusion, the participants underscored the urgency of enhancing accessibility in polling stations, training polling staff members, and implementing quotas for PWDs across political levels. They also called for reframing media narratives to avoid sensationalism and recognise PWDs as dignified individuals. The discussions further included a demand for streamlined registration processes and comprehensive policy measures to empower PWDs in their electoral participation.



Zulqarnain Asghar, Jennifer Jaggiwan and Nayyab Ali



کے لئے ہم کہاں

اپنی حفاظت کہاں جائیں؟

Unpacking the political economy: Elite capture and exclusion

In Pakistan, the phenomenon of elite capture within the political economy has resulted in the systematic disenfranchisement of marginalised groups. The concentration of power and resources in the hands of a select few from the economic and political elite has perpetuated a cycle of exclusion for disadvantaged communities. This elite capture often leads to policies and decisions that primarily benefit the privileged class, widening the socio-economic gap and limiting access to political representation and resources for marginalised populations. Consequently, the disenfranchisement of these groups deepens, exacerbating issues of inequality and hindering the establishment of an inclusive and participatory democracy. Addressing elite capture is hence crucial for fostering a more equitable and just political system in Pakistan.

It is within this context that the political economy was discussed in consultations and a session was held on the topic during the national conference. Anis Haroon, a member of the NCHR from Sindh, argued that the 'system is lopsided, favouring the elite'. Dr Asim Bashir Khan, an academic, shed light on the political implications of elite capture, stating that the input process of the electoral system are highly skewed towards certain ethnic and political preferences, as are the development preferences and outcomes of the electorate constituted under these circumstances, thereby adding to the already long list of marginalised groups.

Aisha Ghous Pasha, former minister of state for finance and

The input process of the electoral system are highly skewed towards certain ethnic and political preferences, as are the development preferences and outcomes of the electorate constituted under these circumstances, thereby adding to the already long list of marginalised groups.



Sana Durrani and Aisha Ghous Pasha

revenue, highlighted elite capture by emphasising that 'over 95 percent of the country's population is increasingly being excluded due to hyper-inflation, while a handful of elites have managed to maintain their living standards and power bases, and are still the primary focus and beneficiaries of decision-making at the national level.' She explained that policies were framed in Pakistan to provide benefits to the elite class through a host of measures, including a favourable taxation policy, provision of subsidies to select sectors, and formation of cartels to determine prices of inputs and outputs.

Sana Durrani, chairperson at Ewajee Alliance, elaborated on the nexus of elite capture with women's underrepresentation by highlighting how the nomination process for reserved seats candidates was heavily tilted in favour of women from established political families.

Pakistan's political system strives to maintain the status quo by maintaining the same voter bank. No mass campaigns are conducted to motivate new voters.

She added that the women would not be able to receive their due share in the political system until they contest through direct elections. Aasim Sajjad Akhtar from the Awami Workers Party suggested a system of proportional representation as those belonging to lower socio-economic strata cannot afford electoral expenses. Arifa Noor argued that Pakistan's political system strives to maintain the status quo by maintaining the same voter bank. No mass campaigns are conducted to motivate new voters. She further highlighted the futility of progressive legislation as such laws are rarely implemented.



*Aasim Sajjad Akhtar
Awami Workers Party*



Conclusion and recommendations

These discussions underscore the imperative of inclusive political participation for marginalised groups in Pakistan. Addressing challenges faced by women, religious minorities, transgender individuals, and PWDs is vital for fostering a truly representative and equitable democracy.

The discussions also revealed deeply entrenched issues in Pakistan's political and electoral systems, from patriarchal norms limiting women's political involvement, to the disenfranchisement of religious minorities and the complex hurdles faced by the transgender community.

The recommendations made by the participants are summarised as follows:

Women

- Amend the Constitution and Elections Act to recognise NIC possession as a right rather than a responsibility that puts the onus on citizens. NADRA must be held legally responsible for issuing NICs to every eligible woman to bridge the gender gap in voter registration. They must hence conduct a rigorous NIC registration drive, using data from maternity hospitals as well as the latest figures from the ECP, and draw on the support of local civil society organisations for targeted interventions and better outreach.
- Investigate and rectify underreporting in the census to ensure an accurate representation of women in the population and political processes.
- Introduce smartphone apps for e-voting for women who cannot travel to polling stations to vote.
- Introduce inclusive measures at polling stations to accommodate requests for change of polling stations, transfer of votes and postal ballots for women to accommodate their specific needs and circumstances. Separate polling stations for women must especially be set up in the constituencies of provinces that traditionally report low female voter turnout, such as in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- Analyse and address factors contributing to lower voter turnout among women in the 2018 general elections, implementing strategies to enhance participation.
- Implement the ECP's condition mandating at least a 10 percent female turnout for an electoral contest to be valid.
- Develop campaigns to challenge societal norms restricting women from contesting elections and voting. The ECP should also develop monitoring teams to areas where *jirgas* traditionally bar women from voting.

- The ECP's District Voter Education Groups should conduct special training sessions to educate female voters about candidate selection, political accountability and the importance of their electoral participation.
- Increase the quota for women's reserved seats to 30 percent in legislatures across the country for more effective representation. The ECP must also introduce eligibility criteria for these seats similar to the criteria used for candidates to reserved seats for technocrats in the senate.
- Institute legal safeguards that mandate parties to give election tickets to female candidates on seats that they have a better chance of winning, either because they had won those seats previously or because they had stood as runners-up in the previous general elections.
- Introduce a special quota of signatories from marginalised groups, including women, at the time of a party's registration. If a party does not fulfill this quota, it should not be registered.
- The parliament must fix a minimum quota for women in federal and provincial cabinets, as well as in the chairs of parliamentary and standing committees.
- Make it binding upon political parties to nominate a female secretary-general if the chairperson is male to effectively represent and include women in decision-making.
- Ensure that women's wings of political parties are functional to empower women within their party's political structure.
- Ensure that party manifestos have a clear stance on women's empowerment and inclusion.
- Combat the use of derogatory language against women legislators and political leaders on social media and mainstream media.

Religious minorities

- Empower religious minorities to directly elect their representatives and hold them accountable, thereby abolishing the indirect electorate on seats reserved for minorities.
- Scrap special electoral rolls for the Ahmadiyya community to ensure their privacy and address their safety concerns.
- Introduce a 5 percent special quota for women from religious minorities in legislatures.
- Revise constitutional provisions, such as the bar on non-Muslims from assuming the office of the country's president and prime minister, to ensure the political inclusion of religious minorities.
- Investigate the recent census and rectify the number of religious minorities.

- Combat the use of derogatory language on social media and in curriculums targeting religious minorities.
- Provide opportunities for individuals from religious minorities to contest elections on general seats in constituencies where their community is in a majority or sizable number.
- Address specific problems faced by ethnic minorities, such as Afghans, Bengalis, and residents of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Transgender community

- Simplify the NADRA verification of registration process for transgender persons by allowing an affidavit confirming the status of their gender. NADRA's staff must also be trained in gender sensitivity. Moreover, an online registration facility must be provided to transgender persons.
- Allow transgender persons to cast votes and contest elections from constituencies they reside in rather than their home constituencies. Otherwise, introduce a postal ballot system for them.
- Mandate wings for transgender persons in political parties.
- Introduce separate polling booths for transgender persons.
- Combat the derogatory use of the term 'transgender' during political debates.
- Introduce a separate electorate for the transgender community.
- Introduce a special quota of seats for the transgender community in legislatures across the country and at all tiers. Moreover, the provincial governments of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab must introduce legislation for the inclusion of transgender persons in local government, fixing a percentage for their minimum representation.
- Institute a robust school system for the education and empowerment of the transgender community across Pakistan.
- Include transgender persons in the ECP to ensure their effective representation and connection with stakeholders.
- Revise the NIC registration process to end the need for parental documentation for transgender community members. They should be registered on the basis of affidavits affirming their trans identity or under the guardianship of gurus.
- Address specific problems faced by transgender persons from ethnic minorities, such as Afghans.
- Stem the rising wave of hate speech and violence against transgender persons, ensuring their safety as both voters and candidates.

Persons with disabilities

- Simplify the NADRA registration process for PWDs by reducing the number of steps involved and conducting the process – medical examination, certification and registration – under one roof, ideally with a permanent medical board on the lines of provincial social welfare departments. People facing issues with their mobility must be facilitated by doorstep services.
- Update voters' lists to denote disability next to a voter's name in order to ensure specific accessibility support is available to the voter during the elections.
- Make polling stations accessible for PWDs by either introducing the requisite measures at every polling station, such as the availability of Braille ballot papers or a transport service. Alternatively, special polling stations for PWDs may be designated in each constituency. Such measures will also improve their voter turnout.
- Encourage political parties to introduce special wings for PWDs to ensure their involvement in inter-party decision-making.
- Train polling staff to cater to the unique needs of PWDs and ensure the confidentiality of their votes, particularly those of visually impaired people.
- Train media outlets on ethical standards for reporting issues faced by PWDs, focusing on solutions rather than sensationalism.
- Implement awareness campaigns to discourage expressing pity for PWDs, emphasising their dignity and equal status.
- Introduce a quota for seats for PWDs at all tiers, from local government to the national assembly.
- Ensure that those with congenital disabilities are certified in infancy to circumvent lengthy registration procedures afterward.
- Rectify the under-representation of PWDs in the census to accurately represent the size and needs of this demographic.

These multifaceted recommendations call for comprehensive reforms, emphasising on education, awareness, legal protection, and policy reforms to create an inclusive and equitable society, as well as implementation of these reforms. It is also especially important to tackle elite capture in the political economy, a phenomenon perpetuating the systematic disenfranchisement of marginalised groups.

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