

# PUNJAB LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION MONITORING REPORT 2015

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*PUNJAB COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN*

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## ❖ INTRODUCTION

Between October and December 2015, Punjab Commission on the Status of Women monitored local body elections in districts across Punjab from women's perspective to observe any infringement of the political rights of women or incidents of election related violence against women. The Commission had also advertised SMS # 0321-4724161 and email ID [comp.pcsw@punjab.gov.pk](mailto:comp.pcsw@punjab.gov.pk) for reporting of election related violence or any other incident where women are deprived of their political rights.

The Commission observed elections in almost 30 districts including Lahore, Kasur, Nankana Sahib, Chakwal, Rawalpindi, Bhakkar, Vehari, Lodhran, Okara, Sahiwal, Bahawalpur, Multan, Narowal, Shiekhupura, Chiniot, Muzaffargarh, Gujranwala, Attock, Sargodha, Sialkot and Faisalabad.

A monitoring framework was drawn up and provided to the monitors. In areas where complaints were received before the elections, the Election Commission was approached to pre-empt the prevention of women from voting, and any incidents of violence against women. On the ground, the Commission found elections to be generally well managed although a number of serious issues surfaced in multiple locations. It was observed that ballots were delivered punctually and polling began on time in most places with some exceptions across Punjab. Female Polling Staff of the ECP was also generally well trained, well behaved and aware of their functions. Nonetheless, severe lapses in the ECP Code of Conduct were observed in a number of female polling stations. Similarly, while a sizable number of women were able to come out and cast their votes in most districts, certain areas continued the age-old tradition of barring women from voting. This issue requires strict action from the authorities, by declaring the electoral process of the UCs void unless women are also allowed to participate freely.

The monitoring teams observed relatively few rigging allegations but a number of areas remained tense. Lack of security in such high-risk areas, specifically the lack of female police, was found to be a major setback. There were few if any local observers aside from the Commission, and the media were also not present except at a few select spots. Moreover, the decision to locate some polling stations inside health care facilities like Tehsil Headquarters Hospitals proved adverse for both female patients and voters.

The Commission found that there were very few women or members of minority communities fielded by political parties on general seats. Where women were contesting, it was usually as independent candidates. Nonetheless, women voters were aware and enthusiastic about exercising their right to vote, in both rural and urban areas. In conversation with the Commission members and staff, many women voters expressed their resolve to vote for a candidate of their own choice and at times departing from the choice of family members. The credit goes to the Members of the Commission who very keenly and objectively observed the elections and reported the elections with objectivity and neutrality. The Members of the Commission also appreciated the Government of the Punjab and the Election Commission for their efforts towards conducting peaceful and fair elections and increase female participation, and expressed their hope that the arrangements for female voters and staff will continue to improve in the coming years.

No.	District	Phase	Names of Monitors
1	Lahore	1 <sup>st</sup>	Ume Laila Azhar
2	Faisalabad	1 <sup>st</sup>	Shazia George
3	Chakwal	1 <sup>st</sup>	Sameena Nazir
4	Kasur	1 <sup>st</sup>	Fauzia Viqar
5	Bhakkar	1 <sup>st</sup>	Qaisera Ismail
6	Lodhran	1 <sup>st</sup>	Ome Kasloom Seyal
7	Nankana Sahib	1 <sup>st</sup>	Muhammad Usman
8	Khanewal	1 <sup>st</sup>	Zia-ur-Rehman

9	Vehari	1 <sup>st</sup>	Zia-ur-Rehman
10	Okara	1 <sup>st</sup>	Mohammad Jalil Butt
11	Chiniot	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Shazia George
12	Shiekhupura	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Muhammad Usman
13	Gujranwala	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Umm-e-Laila, Maria Kokab
14	Attock	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Fauzia Vigar
15	Mianwali	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Naheeda Abbasi
16	Sargodha	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Qaisera Ismail
17	Muzaffargarh	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Ome Kalsoom Seyal
19	Rawalpindi	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Romana Bashir
20	Narowal	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Muhammad Usman
21	Multan	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Zia-ur-Rehman
22	Sialkot	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Maria Kokab
23	Khushab	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Qaisera Ismail

Table 1: Number of Districts Monitored by Phase

The following report summarizes the observations of the Commission’s monitoring teams across Punjab, spread over three phases of the elections. In every district both rural and urban polling stations were visited, and an effort was made to visit a polling station in a minority area. The report points out the problem areas and mentions specific untoward incidents that were reported. Such incidents directly and indirectly caused problems for female voters and polling staff, and reduced the number of women’s votes that were eligible in the final count. In light of these observations and problems, the Commission has also included its recommendations to further improve the election process with respect to women, and ensure their full participation in the political and governance sphere.

❖ **FEMALE VOTER TURN-OUT**

The Commission observed that the overall female voter turnout remained relatively high in most districts, although there were disparities between the number of male and female registered voters, women being significantly less than men in a large number of polling stations.

Serious issues with respect to female voter turnout were observed in certain areas, including District Mianwali. In Tehsil Esakhel, UC No. 27, Ward 1-2, women have historically been denied their right to vote, and the same was the case at the start of voting this time. But due to the visit of the Returning Officer to the area, and his decision to render the entire vote casted void unless women also voted, men were forced to allow their women to come to vote in at least two polling stations that were observed. Men of the area shared their unease with this decision, but the women interviewed were quite happy. Despite this, women's turnout remained low compared to the number of female registered voters in the entire district of Mianwali, even in polling stations where there was no bar to women voting. Women also faced difficulties due to lack of facilities available for them.

Similarly, in UC 67 of District Chakwal, Tehsil Talagang, women were denied their right to vote in at least two polling stations. This was the result of a Jirga decision before the election, which consisted of elders of the area as well representatives of political parties. In District Khanewal, women were barred from voting in UC 25's area known as Mohri Pur. Despite complete arrangements having been made for female voters, only male voters were seen at the polling stations. Women were not willing to speak to members of the monitoring team, but one elderly woman informed the team that a local religious leader had issued a decree against women voting back in 1946, and since then women had never voted in any election in the area. Only 22 women appeared to cast their votes from the neighboring Union Council as their votes were attached to one of the three polling stations.

In District Sargodha, women were denied access to the polling station in Pindi-Koot. Nonetheless, under pressure from the monitoring team, women were allowed to vote from 3pm onwards, but only 63 votes were cast against a total of 713 registered female voters. In UC 34 and UC 35 of village Lalyani, not a single female vote was cast because of the traditional bias against women voting.

In District Khushab's Ghagh Kalam area, polling station No. 10 of UC No. 16, women were not allowed to vote on the pretext that the government had failed to deliver basic needs for the villagers, and therefore government's demand with respect to allowing women to vote will not be heeded.

On the other hand, a surprising observation was made in Syed Wala area of District Nankana Sahib where female voters far outnumbered male voters.

❖ **CODE OF CONDUCT**

In general, it was observed that the number of staff was adequate, and the Code of Conduct prescribed by the ECP was followed. Female staff was provided Rs. 3300 for Presiding Officer and 3150 for Assistant Presiding Officer, Polling Officer and Assistant Polling Officers. The APOs and POs had received training on elections, conducted often by ROs who also visited the polling stations in their area for monitoring. Female election staff was aware of their roles and discharged duties efficiently for the most part. In most polling stations, no campaign material was displayed, and no unnecessary persons were allowed inside. The process of counting was also well conducted in the stations observed. The following issues nevertheless cropped up in certain areas:

*i. Voting List Errors*

Errors in voter lists were observed in multiple districts. These included issues related to missing or outdated voters' lists, mismatch between ballot papers, voters' lists and serial numbers as well as misprinting and sequence-disturbance of ballot papers in districts Gujranwala, Kasur, Vehari, Lahore, Multan and Faisalabad. Some women in District Gujranwala were sent back and forth between different polling stations, and eventually returned home without casting their votes. In District Multan, some female polling agents were without electoral rolls and they did not have any idea what they are doing there in the polling station. In District Lahore, tender votes were observed in UC 10. Moreover, errors in statement of accounts and the lack of space of columns in ballot

papers were noted in various districts. Because of these issues, many votes cast by women were wasted, thereby adversely affecting women's participation in the electoral process.

*ii. Mismanagement*

While the election process ran smoothly in most areas, grave mismanagement and chaotic conditions were observed in one polling station in Attock, and a few in Lahore, Multan, Bhakkar, Khushab, Faisalabad and Okara, that adversely affected women's free participation in the elections. In Attock, the polling station lacked female staff, and there was no one to manage the flow of women, which caused a lot of confusion for voters. Lack of female polling staff was also reported at Nawabpur Polling station in District Multan, and at a number of venues in Lahore including UC 193 and UC 70. In Okara, instances of mismanagement were observed in polling station no 3, 4 and 6 of Gogira area, and polling station no. 5 of Raizabad. In all of these, there was no coordination between presiding officer and subordinate polling staff and the staff did not appear to be properly trained for election process. Polling Station No. 3 of UC 4 was in fact closed due to chaos and tension between voters. Female voters at multiple locations in Okara expressed their frustration with the polling staff and the way the entire election process was being conducted. In UC 27, Ward 6 of District Faisalabad, the monitoring team observed that the CNICs of female voters had been scattered on a table in plain sight, the ballot box had not been placed properly, and the polling had been halted. The staff at this polling station had also not been informed about the criteria allowing polling agents to participate in the polling process. In Lahore, the situation was tense and chaotic at a number of female polling stations, due to altercations between opposing candidates. In UC 10 and UC 169 of District Lahore, the presiding officers complained about the Returning Officers' mishandling of the election material, which was not transferred to the POs in time, which hampered their ability to successfully cater to the female voters. In UC 168, the polling process was observed to be extremely slow, and the female voters waiting in queues were found complaining. In one polling station of District Chiniot, Pashtun female voters faced a lot of difficulty in

communicating with the polling staff who did not speak the language, and their questions were not answered.

Another important and widespread issue noted by the monitoring teams was that a number of female polling staff were pregnant, had diabetes or other illnesses, because of which they could not manage large crowds of voters and work at a fast speed. While some of the women appointed by EDO Education managed to relieve themselves of their polling duties, many others could not do so, which created problems for their own health and well-being, as well as slowed the female polling process and rendered it less efficient.

*iii. Secret Balloting*

Secrecy of ballot was observed in 90% of the polling stations visited. But issues related to lack of privacy for female voters while casting votes arose in in District Vehari and District Multan. In Vehari, polling booth screens in some UCs were placed in an open yard, surrounded by other voters. Moreover, a number of polling agents were observed standing close to the booths and telling women where to place the stamps. Certain polling booths in Vehari were not user friendly due to their height and therefore women found it difficult to utilize them. Most of the time women were seen stamping votes out of the shaded private screens of these booths. The secret balloting was also not in practice at UC 74 and UC 58 of District Faisalabad, and UC 14 of District Chiniot. All these incidents adversely impacted female voters' full and independent participation in the elections.

*iv. Interference in the Polling Process*

In District Chiniot's polling station at Municipal Officer Club Chiniot, three female voters complained that the polling officers did not allow them to insert the ballot paper into ballot box, but rather insisted on doing it themselves. Similarly, in UC 89 of Faisalabad, women voters' complained about a man from PML-N who was stamping and casting votes, which led to an altercation between various political parties, and left



one police constable injured. The polling stopped for half an hour. The entire ambience at this site was tense and extremely chaotic. In UC 2, polling agents and candidates continued to disrupt the polling process, and eventually help had to be sought from police to manage the situation.

In two polling stations in Faisalabad, the presiding officer had brought her husband along for support, but they had begun interfering with the polling process. In UC 58, the monitoring team noted that the man's hands were marked with ink, and he seemed to be running the entire polling station, instead of the presiding officer. He even instructed female voters to vote for his preferred candidate. When the monitoring team identified his suspicious activities, the male candidates and polling agents became aggressive and started shouting at him, which led him to leave the polling station immediately.

In District Multan, male supporters of various political parties were wandering within the premises of the polling station. In one polling station, a male candidate was caught red handed while bribing an elderly women voter to bring more female voters along, however he left the place immediately upon the criticism by police and public. He was not arrested. Similar incidents were witnessed in District Lahore where in UC 193 and 138 candidates from PMLN were present outside the polling stations, chanting slogans, and in some instances trying to influence female voters to vote for PML-N.

❖ ACCESSIBILITY OF POLLING STATIONS AND TRANSPORT FACILITIES

Most polling stations were located at a convenient distance for female voters, but a number of issues with respect to accessibility were highlighted:

*i. Facilities for Female Polling Staff*

Lack of transport facilities for female polling staff emerged as a major issue in all districts monitored by the Commission. While some staff were provided transport by the ECP, most depended on candidates for this purpose, and the rest had to arrange transport for themselves. Some female presiding officers from Lahore expressed their concern regarding the safe transportation of the election material, as they depended on public transport to travel to and from the polling station, and there was a high risk of displacing or damaging the material in this way.

In District Gujranwala, polling stations were difficult to get to and voters had to travel long distances to reach them, which caused a great deal of difficulty for female voters.

*ii. Facilities for Female Voters with Disabilities*

A majority of districts lacked provisions to make the polling station as well as the polling process accessible for senior citizens and women with disabilities. A number of polling stations in various districts including Kasur, Attock, Vehari, Faisalabad, Chiniot, Lahore and Rawalpindi were found to be either on the first floor, or be only accessible through a raised platform or a flight of stairs. In one polling station, visually disabled female voters were observed to be having a tough time, and the appointed staff unable to provide adequate assistance. Nonetheless, the ECP staff was seen to be generally helpful and courteous towards voters with disabilities.

❖ **VOTER AWARENESS**

The illiterate and old aged female voters in various polling stations received assistance in casting their votes. However it was observed during the counting process in one polling station in Sargodha district that voters used stamp and thumb print simultaneously on their ballot paper that made their votes invalid, and revealed that they were not very well aware about the voting processes.

In one polling station of UC 14 of District Chiniot, the staff did not facilitate the female voters, who remained confused about whether they were required to put a thumb impression or stamp on the ballot paper. The ballot box was also closed, and women were observed putting their ballot paper on the surface of the ballot box as they don't know how to open the lid to insert their ballot paper.

Similarly, in UC 80, polling station of District Faisalabad, women voters were not aware about the election procedure and therefore were found arguing with the polling staff over putting their thumb impressions publically rather than secretly during the process of issuance of ballot papers. The polling staff had to explain the process in detail to them, which consumed a lot of time. In other places, women voters were found to be unaware about where to put the ballot paper after stamping it.

In District Vehari, two or three women were casting their vote in one booth at the same time, and this was happening in almost all the rural polling stations in the district.

## ❖ **PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES**

### *i. Inadequate space and seating arrangements*

While the seating arrangements for female polling staff were found to be adequate by and large, in certain polling stations this was observed to be a major issue. In District Sialkot Ward No 5, the female presiding officers were sitting in a corridor and under the staircase. In District Chiniot, congestion and lack of adequate space was observed in nearly all female polling stations. In District Sargodha, in one polling station, multiple booths for female voters were put in a ground, whereas rooms were available but not utilized. In District Faisalabad, UC 80 did not have proper furniture like chairs and tables for the female staff. The UC 89 polling staff had to arrange for all facilities themselves. Ward 1 of UC 25 was also congested and difficult to access for women. In District Rawalpindi, many polling stations were in primary schools, because of which chairs and tables were too small. Some female polling agents also faced difficulty due

to pregnancy, and lack of facilities to cater to their needs. In District Lahore, similar issues were faced by polling staff in UC 39, UC 193, UC 136. In UC 193, male electricians were present in the polling station, working on electricity fixtures of the building leading to a very crowded and uncomfortable environment for female voters as well as polling staff. Moreover, polling for three important areas in Lahore i.e. Shaddi Pura, Libiya colony and Momin Pur was combined in one polling booth, which was extremely small and not at all suitable to serve as a polling station, which discouraged female voters.

The monitoring teams notes that more polling stations and booths are needed in some areas, as some venues witnessed huge and uncontrollable crowds, making the environment unwelcoming for female voters as well as increasing the chance of women's votes going to waste because of lack of time and more chances of mismanagement. In one polling station in District Chakwal, it was observed that the polling booths for men were in a very spacious, whereas very few men were present to cast their votes. On the other hand, a large number of women were present but their booths had been placed in an extremely small and congested room, which caused many problems for female voters as well as the entire process. The male presiding officer refused to take initiative and switch the booths when asked.

The monitoring teams also observed that this time, many polling stations were located in buildings of Basic Health Units and Tehsil Headquarter Hospitals. This was a bad decision on the part of the Government as it adversely affected the patients, who could not receive treatment while the polling took place.

*ii. Miscellaneous*

In District Multan, female presiding officers were not happy regarding the arrangements, as toilets were not available in the polling station buildings. Moreover, sub-standard stationary items were provided at two polling stations in Multan.

## ❖ SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS

Most female polling stations observed had some form of security arrangement, with a few police officers managing the crowd flow. Nonetheless lax security was observed in a number of polling stations in District Okara, Lahore, Multan and Faisalabad, especially in areas already declared to be high risk due to political rivalries. Fights broke out at a number of venues, and one constable in Faisalabad was injured, whereas more police had to be called in a few places. In Lahore, a monitoring agent was harassed by the crowd and blamed for rigging elections in favor of PML-N in UC 138.

### *i. Female Police*

The most widespread issue faced in the elections was the lack of female police contingents to facilitate women and regulate the crowd flow. It was noticed that male police officers failed to manage unruly female voters, especially in District Narowal, and in general queues were broken because of the lack of female police. In certain places like UC 59 of Faisalabad, the behavior of male police staff was abusive with the women voters. Women belonging to political parties and families also threatened the presiding officer for restricting them from violating the electoral rules, and could not be dealt with because of absence of female police. Many women also managed to take their mobile phones inside the polling station for the same reason. In District Shiekhupura, Tehsil Ferozwala, and District Narowal Tehsil Sahargarh, there were incidents of mismanagement, violence and altercations on polling stations, which could have been better controlled if female police were available. In District Gujranwala, the environment outside the polling stations was not female friendly, as large crowds of men had gathered who were chanting slogans and creating a racket. Lack of female police therefore created further problems for women here.

❖ **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

In light of these observations, the Commission suggests the following measures be implemented to further improve the provisions for women in the next elections, increase voter turn-out and voter satisfaction, reduce wasted female votes, as well as enable the staff to better fulfill their duties.

**HUMAN RESOURCE:**

- The number of monitoring teams for female polling stations must be increased for all districts
- Only well-trained and healthy female staff should be appointed to conduct the polling process, to ensure that the elections are conducted at the optimum level. Headmistresses of the schools should be consulted before appointing female teachers for polling duties, to confirm the ability of the particular individuals to work in the stressful conditions.
- While male assistants have been allowed to help female presiding officers for the purposes of carrying election material on election day, it should be ensured that they do not interfere with the voting process and do not try to influence female voters in any way.

**PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND FACILITIES**

- ❖ Number of female polling stations should increase to help manage crowd flow and make the process smoother for female voters
- To reduce wasted female votes, ECP Envelopes should be printed and updated before conducting election, ballot paper, serial numbers and family and other information must be printed carefully without errors.

- ECP should increase the space allocated for columns of ballot paper account and statement of account, as presiding officers in female polling stations faced difficulty in filling these columns, thereby increasing the risk of wasted female votes
- Female polling stations should not be set up in same premises as male polling stations. This often causes difficulty for female voters, as well monitoring teams.

### ACCESSIBILITY OF POLLING STATIONS AND TRANSPORT FACILITIES

- The polling premises for female voters should be selected carefully, depending on their size, ease of access, space to contain crowds, availability of functional toilets and appropriate furniture. Elementary schools, hospitals, basic health units and under construction buildings should be avoided to ensure better participation of women in the electoral process.
- Each polling station must be made accessible for women with disabilities, and senior citizens so more women are able to cast their votes without difficulty.
- ❖ Transportation must be provided to female presiding officers before starting polling and after finalizing results in time, to ensure that they arrive on safely and on time, and the election material to be used by female voters is not at risk of damage or loss. The appointed drivers must know the exact location of polling stations.

### SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS

- ❖ It's pertinent that security be provided to all female polling staff, as well as any teams monitoring the elections, so they can perform their duties better.

- Sufficient number of lady police officers must be posted on duty at female polling stations, to improve the efficiency and security of the voting process.
- Police officers deputed at female polling stations should be briefed about the limitations of media interventions during polling.

**RIGHT TO VOTE:**

- Government must initiate campaigns to raise awareness amongst female voters about the electoral process at grass roots level, in order to decrease confusion and wastage of female votes on the Election Day.
- Strict action should be taken in areas where women have been barred from voting. It should be announced ahead of time that the entire UC's elections will be declared void unless 10% of women cast their votes. Moreover, steps should be taken to encourage women to vote in such areas, for example by running awareness campaigns.. ECP should also bind candidates to raise awareness of electoral process amongst female voters of their constituency.