



INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVER

ELECTION OBSERVATION INITIAL REPORT GENERAL ELECTIONS 2024

On behalf of International Human Rights Observer (IHRO) a team of 100 election observers (30 trained men and women observers with 70 local observers in four provinces in different districts including Islamabad , Rawalpindi , Bahawalpur , Layyah ,Bahawalnagar, Abbotabad, Sialkot , Peshawar , Lahore , Karachi , Hyderabad,Quetta ,Jacobabad , Jhelum, Khanewal, Mandi Bahauddin, Multan, Sargodha and others areas.

IHRO all observers were trained before general elections about provisions relevant to voting and counting processes at the polling stations according to the code of conduct , Elections Act, 2017, Election Rules, 2017 and ECP handbooks for election officials. IHRO also undertook its observation work on the basis of the principles of impartiality, noninterference, and independence as required by the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, and in accordance with other revised guidelines.

International Human Rights Observer (IHRO) is a NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and promoting and protecting the basic fundamental human rights of the masses and strengthening democratic institutions in Pakistan as a monitoring, Research, advocacy and training human rights organization in Pakistan since 1998.

IHRO has credibility as an accredited organization by the Election Commission of Pakistan to observe the general elections in 2002, 2008 and 2013 General Elections and 2015 Local Government elections..

Following is a brief initial report from IHRO observer team:

General Overview:

As per IHRO team's observation the voting process on the polling day remained smooth, peaceful and well-organized to a large extent. The team did not observe any incidence of violence at any of the observed polling station. IHRO observers did not see any serious irregularities at the polling stations during the polling time. Election officials were provided clear copies of electoral lists which minimized incident of fake voters attempting to poll votes. In most cases voters were allowed privacy to stamp their ballot papers. IHRO observed that despite pre-election violence and threats the voter turnout of both women and men remained considerably satisfactory in most areas. Nonetheless, IHRO team observed that several procedural deficiencies, administrative issues and problems of accessibility for voters remained major challenges during the elections 2024 due to caretaker government's suspension of cellular data services on the Election Day.

Approximately more than 60 million voters went to the polls in Pakistan to cast their vote on February 8, 2024, to elect their representatives in 265 National Assembly and 590 Provincial Assembly constituencies in spite of many constitutional confusions, judicial misadventures, communal stress, economic downturn which shows unconditional attachment and love with the country of every citizen.

FULL REPORT IS COMING AFTER MORE OBSERVATIONS

Access to Polling Stations: PODA observers noted that the Election Commission had not provided clear address and location of the polling stations causing confusion and problems for the voters. The message received by voters from 8300 phone number of the ECP did not mention the polling station number. Ground directions were not given for the polling stations which were located inside minor streets. A few notices displayed on main streets could help the voters find the polling stations easily. Also, the ECP message did not mention polling station number for the voter. PODA observers found that multiple polling stations were located in one school or college building and voters who by chance first reached a wrong polling station waited in line and finally were told that they need to go to another polling station. This was problematic for voters as well as the election staff. It delayed polling of votes and created confusion among voters. In four of the observed polling stations political parties were seen providing transportation facility to women voters.

Minority Voters: At two of the polling stations in Islamabad PODA observers found that a separate list of minority (Ahmedi) voters was available with presiding officers but no minority voters came to cast their vote.

Women Voters: For women voters in Union Council Dhurnal, district Chakwal, General Election 2018 was the first time in their lives that they exercised their right to vote. In previous elections not a single woman had polled her vote as the men in the community had barred them from polling their vote. PODA team observed in UC Dhurnal that out of 5,500 registered women voters only 14 women could reach the polling station and polled their vote. Eyewitnesses informed PODA team that another group of eight women coming to poll their vote was stopped on their way to the polling station and forced to return home. In Union Council, Lalliani, Sargodha not a single woman had polled her vote until 3:00 pm. PODA brought it to the notice of Punjab Commission on Status of Women (PCSW) which intervened and then a few women polled their vote after 4:00 pm on the polling day. Majority of the polling stations did not have washrooms for women. In all the combined polling stations there were fewer female polling agents. There were long queues of women voters at the polling stations and no shades to protect from Sun or chairs for sitting were available for waiting women voters.

Training of polling staff: PODA observed that polling staff was not properly trained that caused polling process very slow. At five polling stations it was also observed that the polling staff was not announcing names of voters loudly. In some cases the polling staff was also not providing clear guidance to voters about the polling process. Presiding officers were finding it difficult to complete several forms about election results which were required by the ECP.

Polling Agents: PODA observed that a large number of polling agents of various candidates were not fully aware of their role and rights. In most cases polling staff was not calling out names of voters loud enough that polling agents could hear them. At the time of counting presiding and assistant presiding officers were not showing the ballot papers to the polling agents at some of the polling stations but the polling agents did not raise objection to it. At some of the polling stations PODA team observed that polling agents were not provided list of voters which was necessary to verify the identity of voters. At most polling stations polling had started on time and the presiding officers had allowed polling agents to check that the ballot boxes were empty. In most polling stations, the polling agents were seated at such a position from where they could not fully view the polling process.

Disability-Friendly Access: PODA team observed that most of the polling stations did not have appropriate access for persons with disabilities. There was no wheelchair available at polling stations and wheelchair access was also not possible. At one polling station in Islamabad a physically disabled voter could not climb the stairs to reach the polling booth so the polling staff took the ballot paper and other material outside at the entrance to facilitate the voter. However polling staff was helpful towards persons with disability and allowed them to vote first. Polling staff was also allowing helpers for disabled voters to help them while casting the vote.

Security Personnel at Polling Stations: PODA team observed that at some polling stations in Islamabad the security was quite lax. Several voters had brought their mobile

phones with them which was not allowed as per the rules but the security personnel at the entrance were not informing the people about it. Inside each polling station two armed military persons were deployed which had created an intimidating environment there. PODA teams also observed that military personnel present in the polling station were maintaining a parallel count of votes at the time of counting which was to be conveyed to the relevant military authorities.

Voters' Privacy and Freedom: At six of the polling stations observed by PODA team, workers of different political parties were present within less than 400 meters of the polling stations and were persuading voters to vote for specific candidates. In at least eight polling stations, PODA team observed that polling agents, in violation of the rules, went behind the voting screen to help the voter.

Invalid Votes: PODA observed that voters were not aware of the correct procedure of casting the vote. Some of the voters did not know where to put the stamp on the ballot paper and stamped it twice or multiple times which made the vote invalid. In a number of cases ink of the stamp smudged during folding of the ballot making the vote invalid. Such minor mistakes led to rejection of votes in large numbers at the time of counting.

Counting of Votes: At all the polling stations observed by PODA the mobile phone app Result Transmission System (RTS) failed. The counting of votes was conducted in front of polling agents and observers. No dispute was noted during the vote counting in any of the observed polling stations. Out of 56 polling stations observed by PODA at six polling stations Form 45 (Statement of Count) was not posted outside the building after completion of vote count. PODA observed that the presiding officers found the required ECP forms quite complex and were facing problems in filling those forms.