



CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR
WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL PROCESSES



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide. UN Women supports Member States in setting global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design the laws, policies, programmes and services required to implement these standards. UN Women stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on the following five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN systems works in advancing gender equality.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	4
FOREWORD	5
CHAPTER 1	
INTRODUCTION	7
1.1 Introduction.....	7
1.2 Methodology.....	7
1.3 Violence Against Women in Politics: Key Definitions.....	8
CHAPTER 2	
NORMATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK	11
2.1 International and Regional Normative Framework	11
2.2 Constitution of Pakistan	11
2.3 Electoral Rolls Act and Electoral Rolls Rules, 1974	12
2.4 Representation of Peoples Act and Rules, 1976.....	12
2.5 Political Parties Order and Political Parties Rules, 2002	14
2.6 Applying the Framework: The Electoral Commission of Pakistan	14
CHAPTER 3	
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN PAKISTANI POLITICS	17
3.1 Women Voters.....	17
3.2 Voter Registration.....	17
3.3 Voter Turnout	19
3.3.1 Barring Women from Voting	19
3.3.2 Coercing Women’s Electoral Choices	22
3.3.3 Effects of Generalized Violence as a Deterrent	22
3.3.4 Polling Station Issues	23

CHAPTER 4	
WOMEN CANDIDATES AND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT	27
4.1 Barriers posed by Political Parties	27
4.2 Women as Candidates	29
4.2.1 Assassination and Physical Attacks on Political Women	29
4.2.2 Regional Security Hotspots	30
4.2.3 Administrative Barriers	31
4.2.4 Campaign Finance and Access to Media	31
4.3 Electoral System Barriers: Quotas versus General Seats	32
CHAPTER 5	
WOMEN STAFF OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF PAKISTAN	35
CHAPTER 6	
WOMEN AS CIVIC AND VOTER EDUCATORS	37
CHAPTER 7	
CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS.....	39
7.1 Voter Registration Processes	39
7.2 Polling Procedures and Plans.....	39
7.3 Education and Awareness Raising are Important to Preventing Violence.....	39
7.4 Political Parties, Candidates and Members of Parliament.....	40

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANP	Awami National Party
ANFREL	Asian Network for Free Elections
APO	Assistant Presiding Officer
AGAHE	Association for Gender Awareness and Human Empowerment
CEC	Central Executive Committees
CNIC	Computerized National Identity Card
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CVE	Civic and Voter Education
DEC	District Election Commissioner
DRI	Democracy Reporting International
(D)RO	(Deputy) Returning Officer
ECP	Electoral Commission of Pakistan
EMB	Electoral Management Body
ECSP	Electoral Cycle Support Programme
EU	European Union
FAFEN	Free and Fair Election Network
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
GE 2013	General Elections 2013
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
IRI	International Republican Institute
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
MP	Member of Parliament
MQM	Muttahida Qaumi Movement
MVR	Mobile Registration Vans
PML(N)	Pakistan Muslim League (N)
PML (Q)	Pakistan Muslim League (Q)
NA	National Assembly
NADRA	National Database and Registration Authority
NCSW	National Commission on the Status of Women
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
PA	Provincial Assembly
PILDAT	Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf
RO	Returning Officer
ROPA	Representation of People's Act
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SMS	Short Message Survey
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAWP	Violence Against Women in Politics
WPC	Women's Parliamentary Caucus

FOREWORD

Throughout the public institutions of the country, women of Pakistan courageously struggle each day to build the future of their country. Many more Pakistani women and girls dream of holding ‘office’ someday to build a brighter future – whether in their communities, as a Member of Parliament or even a President. Despite their invaluable contribution and Pakistan’s commitment to building an inclusive society with equal opportunity for all, women face specific dangers and threats when they seek to hold public office. The problem of violence against women in politics, especially in elections, also extends to women voters and any other forms of civic and political participation. Despite a number of legislative and institutional reforms, women’s limited registration as voters, incidents of barring them from voting, fear of violence and cultural and social barriers are important forms of violence against women that impede their effective participation in electoral processes. This poses a threat to Pakistani democracy, where women constitute nearly half of the population, that must be overcome before Pakistan can realize its promise and also the targets agreed under Sustainable Development Goal 5 related to Gender and other International Commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action.

Understanding the problem is the first step in resolving it. It is time to take this from the shadows and bring it into the light of day. We must listen to the stories of women who have been victims of this kind of violence, heed the concerns of women who fear participating in public life because of the threat of violence. We must also learn from the experiences of the men and women of Pakistan and around the world who are finding new ways to combat and eliminate this kind of violence. We work together to create a world where the only battle involved in political engagement is one of ideas and policy options, the only arms are wit and intelligence, the only limits are those of imagination and hard work.

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Jamshed M. Kazi

Country Representative,
UN Women Pakistan

1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Pakistani women face unique and frequently more severe challenges to their political participation than men do. In particular, the violence faced by Pakistani female political candidates, and voters is a serious barrier to their full participation in civic life. These challenges are especially difficult to address because they often go unrecorded and unreported. Security actors and public bodies such as Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) may struggle to respond to protect and promote women's public participation because of the absence of documentation and understanding of the nature and magnitude of the problem, as well as lack of specific programming responses that may be appropriate to the context.

The present study seeks to fill this knowledge gap by documenting the distinct challenges to women's political participation in Pakistan, specifically examining the issue of violence against women in politics (VAWP) during electoral processes. The aim of the study is to produce an evidence base and identify the types of VAWP in Pakistan to encourage appropriate policy measures through legislative reforms by Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), and other key stakeholders. Specifically, the aim of this baseline study is to identify the forms of VAWP and to document its prevalence and magnitude in the country. Based on this analysis, the study offers a number of policy options to address the issue of VAWP as well as providing recommendations to develop effective measures for eliminating VAWP in consultation with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), media, political parties, women candidates and voters, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and ECP. The study concludes with recommendations for the development of mechanisms to monitor incidents of VAWP ahead of elections.

The study has its origins in several efforts carried out prior to Pakistan's General Elections of 2013 (GE 2013). In 2013, the United Nations Entity

for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) conducted a seminar on women and security to highlight issues and challenges being faced by women voters and candidates prior to GE 2013. Also in 2013, the ECP carried out a 'lessons-learned' exercise with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women, and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). This exercise brought to light the fact that women continue to face more severe and different challenges than men in relation to their political and civic participation.

1.2 Methodology

The methodology for this study was designed to draw upon the experiences of women who participated in GE 2013, both as voters, candidates, EBM permanent staff and the staff deployed for conducting elections. Hence the primary research involved undertaking post-election interviews and group discussions to identify types of violence women faced in the national elections as well as possible ways of monitoring and mitigating it. Data generated through these discussions was supplemented with a review of the existing literature.

- **Desk review:** At the onset, a review of the existing national and international published work on women's political participation in general and VAWP in particular was carried out. It also facilitated an understanding of the existing data and research available in Pakistan regarding electoral violence in general and VAWP in particular, as well as identifying the gaps in research and policy. The review identified good practices at regional and international level which could be adapted in the context of Pakistan.
- **Preliminary meetings:** In addition to the review of documents, the research team conducted meetings with the Election Commission, national and international observers to gain insight into existing setup of violence

monitoring, and the institutional mechanisms available in Pakistan during GE 2013. This included discussions reviewing the existing situation, cultural barriers and possible mechanisms for monitoring VAWP.

- **Data collection:** Key questions for the study were formulated based on the preliminary meetings and desk review of existing research. Interviews and group discussions were carried out with all key stakeholders including the Election Management Bodies (EMB), National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), government departments, international partners, CSOs, academia as well as women voters and women candidates. The aim of collecting primary data was to build an understanding of the issues pertaining to VAWP, particularly during general elections 2013 as well as the institutional mechanisms available and those that could possibly be put into place in order to monitor VAWP.
 - o **Interviews:** The study conducted 30 interviews each of women candidates and women voters and 15 interviews of women employees of ECP including permanent and short-term employees (presiding officers, assistant presiding officers, polling officers, returning officers). In addition, interviews were carried out with key government officials (ECP, NCSW as well as INGOs (Asia Foundation, IFES, Democracy Reporting International (DRI), National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute (IRI)) national NGOs (Aurat Foundation, Pattan, CSO networks including Fair and Free Elections Network (FAFEN, academia (Gender Studies Centers of Fatima Jinnah Women’s University, Quaid-e-Azam University and others¹).
 - o **Group discussions:** Group discussions were held with male and female parliamentarians, voters, candidates, and Presiding Officers (PO), Assistant Presiding Officers (APO), and Returning Officers (RO).

Separate group discussions were held with election observers and CSOs as well as the ECP. The study was also informed by discussions and seminars held by the ECP for lessons learned from GE 2013, with support from UNDP and IFES.

- **Programme scan:** The documents, research and knowledge products prepared by UN Women and UNDP’s Electoral Cycle Support Programme (ECSP) were reviewed prior to and during the course of the research, and substantial elements have been incorporated in this study.
- **Policy scan:** A content analysis of existing laws, rules and policies pertaining to women’s political participation was carried out.
- **Analysis:** The overall approach in this study is qualitative based on content analysis. However, the quantifiable data, wherever possible, was tabulated and analyzed accordingly.
- **Validation seminar:** The report was reviewed by NCSW to provide feedback, and findings were shared with Provincial Ministers of the Women Development Departments, parliamentarians and government officials for the validation.

1.3 Violence Against Women in Politics: Key Definitions

Political violence is commonly misunderstood as conflict between political parties. Political violence is better defined as “any act or threat of violence; be it physical or psychological, explicit or implicit—that is aimed at any person or property involved in the political process.”² This includes violence that targets state institutions or infrastructure; violence motivated by ethnic, religious, tribal, ideological, or other identities; violence based on organizational or professional affiliation; and violence based on political party affiliation.³

Some key definitions are provided below:

1 Long and short term observers were interviewed during the preliminary stage. Subsequent interviews took place in January 2016.

2 FAFEN <http://fafen.org/political-electoral-violence/>
3 FAFEN http://www.fafen.org/site/application/pilot/fopt/assets/publications/270_FVM%20Apr-June%2012.pdf

- **Women in Politics** is broadly defined to include women who directly or indirectly participate in different forms of political activity, including politicians at different levels, members of political parties, candidates for election, voters, election staff, and political activists and organizers.⁴ Depending on the context it may also include appointed officials such as government bureaucrats (municipal/provincial/regional/national), members of public boards, institutions, commissions, union members, community grassroots leaders and advocates
- **Violence against women in political and public life** is “any act of violence that prevents women from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces including the right to vote and hold public office to vote in secret and to freely campaign to associate, assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression.”⁵

Violence against women may be employed to influence the process or outcome of elections, such as preventing women from winning competitive races for political office or discouraging women from voting or otherwise participating in the election. Such acts can be psychological, physical, sexual and/or economic in nature and include loss of livelihood, intimidation, physical or sexual assault and battering, residential displacement, and murder. Acts of VAWP may take place in the context of family, community, or state, in public or private sphere. In any of these contexts they become acts of electoral violence when they negatively impact women’s participation in an electoral process or in their access to electoral justice.

A regional study in South Asia highlights a few notable dynamics of this form of violence in the sub-region.⁶ Specifically, the study found that character assassination, slander and violence discourage women from entering into politics. The

violence is rooted in structural factors, including the social and cultural norms of patriarchal system that result in a domination of men over women in decision-making in social, political and economic areas. The study found that women tend to lack political awareness, and are often unaware of their own rights to participate in civic and political life. Women’s inferior economic status and unequal access to education creates hurdles in accessing independent financial resources to women who wish to run for office. Finally, the study found that women are often discouraged from participation because of misperceptions about politics as a dirty game of bribery and deceit, making it an unfit field for women.

The present study draws on these definitions and findings to explore the nature of violence against women in elections in Pakistan.

4 Ballington, Julie. UN Women Policy Advisor, Political Participation UN Women. “Re: Definitions - violence against women in elections”.

5 Ibid

6 Violence Against Women in Politics South Asia Partnership-Pakistan 2006. http://sappk.org/?page_id=481

2

NORMATIVE AND POLICY
FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER 2

NORMATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Normative and policy frameworks define Pakistan's commitments and responsibilities regarding the protection of women in electoral and political processes. Likewise, just as it provides the framework for protection, gaps in the framework may constitute failures to protect. It is therefore necessary to review the framework to define Pakistan's commitments in this area, as well as to review the framework from a gender perspective to identify potential gaps.

2.1 International and Regional Normative Framework

By committing to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and acceding to Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, Pakistan has adopted international obligations in line with its constitution. Furthermore, in line with the UDHR, Pakistan ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 2010, which protects civil and political rights of individuals without discrimination and distinction of class caste nationality or sex. Since then, the right and opportunity of every citizen to vote (ICCPR Article 25) is recognized internationally and the freedom of speech, assembly and association are also specified for all citizens.

Pakistan is also a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Article 7 of SAARC's Social Charter asserts the position of the South Asian States (including Pakistan) in the promotion of equality between women and men in 'every respect'. SAARC members must be actively engaged in preventing violence and discrimination against women. The Social Charter states that:

"State Parties are of the firm view that at the regional level, mechanisms and institutions, to promote the advancement of women as an internal part of mainstream political, economic, social and cultural development be established."

2.2 Constitution of Pakistan

Pakistan's Constitution and legal framework recognizes the human rights and freedoms of its citizens and commits to protecting these. The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan guarantees participation of all citizens in different walks of life. Its Preamble states:

"Therein shall be guaranteed fundamental rights, including equality of status, of opportunity and before law, social, economic and political justice, and freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship and association, subject to law and public morality".

Article 17 of the 1973 Constitution expounds on the political freedom of 'every citizen' in the following terms:

"Every citizen shall have the right to form associations or unions, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of [sovereignty or integrity of Pakistan, public order or morality... Every citizen, not being in the service of Pakistan shall have the right to form or be a member of a political party, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the sovereignty or integrity of Pakistan ...".

Article 25 of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equal rights to all citizens without discrimination between men and women as:

"All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law... There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone."

The constitutional amendments adopted in recent years have also served to strengthen the democratic process in Pakistan. The Eighteenth Amendment, passed in 2010, strengthened the role and powers of the ECP. This is significant because the amendment strengthened not only the role of the Commissioner, but the Commission as a whole, which now includes a mandatory

minimum participation of women. This was the first step in creating more gender-responsive EMBs.

2.3 Electoral Rolls Act and Electoral Rolls Rules, 1974

The election laws reinforce and further specify the rights and freedoms defined by the Constitution. The electoral legal framework is comprised of several laws, notably including the Representation of People's Act 1974, the Electoral Rolls Act and Electoral Rolls Rules 1974 as well as the Election Commission Order 2002, the Political Parties Order 2002 and the NA and Provincial Assembly (PA) Allocation of Reserved Seats for Women and Non- Muslim Rules 2002.

One of the first and foremost rights of a citizen is the right to vote. Registration on the electoral roll is a prerequisite for voting in Pakistan. The voter registration process often serves as the first step to disenfranchise women in Pakistan. The Electoral Rolls Act, 1974 (Act XXI of 1974) and the Electoral Rolls Rules, 1974, provide for the preparation and revision of electoral rolls for elections to the NA and PAs. The Electoral Rolls Act, 1974 (Act XXI of 1974) and the Electoral Rolls Rules, 1974, deal with preparation, annual revision, amendment and maintenance of the lists of voters.

As per the Constitution of Pakistan, casting a vote is not compulsory and registration as a voter is a voluntary act. The Electoral Rolls Act 1974⁷ identifies the eligibility of a person (Article 6) for being enrolled in a particular location as: being a citizen, of sound mind, more than 18 years of age and residing in the electoral area. Whereas the first three elements are applicable to both men and women, the last element "resident" is further broken down in the next article.

A resident is considered to be a person who:

"resides, or owns or is in possession of a dwelling house or other immoveable property, in that area".

Servicemen and public office holders are

considered resident in the location of their posting and:

"the wife of any such person [servicemen and public office holders]... and such of his children as are entitled to be enrolled shall, if they ordinarily reside with such person, be deemed residents"

in the area where their parent/spouse is resident (Article 7 (4)).

By virtue of the legal definition for residency, it is assumed that men are public officers and their wives will require to be registered. The Act ignores the possibility of male spouses of female public servants who may require enrollment. In addition, it requires a person to prove residency by owning or renting immovable property. In a country where less than 9% of women own property in their own names, women must rely on the male heads of the household for registering them as voters. These are some of the legal barriers that result in a wide gap in voter registration between men and women in Pakistan.

2.4 Representation of Peoples Act and Rules, 1976

The Representation of Peoples Act (ROPA) and rules provide for the conduct of elections to the NA and the PA's. ROPA covers the establishment and functioning of the electoral commission, appointment of returning officers, the conduct of elections, election to reserved seats, election expenses, election disputes, offence, penalty, procedure and disqualifications. It is the key piece of electoral legislation. A number of areas covered by the ROPA are currently characterized by gaps that may affect the ability of ROPA to protect women's political participation, specifically protecting against acts that disenfranchise women.

Presently there is no specific provision in the ROPA, 1976, dealing with the issue of disenfranchisement of women. However, there are few indirect provisions that could be used for tackling this matter. Under Section 78 of the ROPA, corrupt and punishable practices include inducing, compelling or preventing a legal voter from voting for any candidate on the ground that person belongs to:

7 Substituted with Ordinance No LI of 2000, dated September 27th

“a particular religion, province, community, race, caste, bradari, sect or tribe” (the section does not cite gender among grounds for exclusion).

Section 81(1) of ROPA states that a person is guilty of undue influence if:

“in order to induce or compel any person to vote or refrain from voting, or to offer himself as a candidate, or to withdraw his candidature, at an election, directly or indirectly, by himself or by any other person on his behalf:

- (a) makes or threatens to make use of any force, violence or restraint;*
- (b) inflicts or threatens to inflict any injury, damage, harm or loss;*
- (c) calls down or threatens to call down divine displeasure or the displeasure or disapprobation of any saint or pir;*
- (d) gives or threatens to give any religious sentence;”*

ROPA defines illegal undue influence as impeding or preventing the free exercise of franchise by an elector or compelling or inducing an elector to refrain from voting through duress, abduction or other fraudulent devices or contrivances (Art 81(4)). Pertinently, the ROPA defines harm to include social ostracism or excommunication or expulsion from any caste or community – both of which are psychological forms of electoral intimidation with disproportionate impacts on women. Violations are punishable by up to three years’ imprisonment and/or fines.

These Articles of ROPA have been used with some precedent to defend women’s enfranchisement. Four petitions were filed in 2001 by Union Councils in Peshawar to protest the disenfranchisement of women from the local government elections in different districts, especially Swabi. Though the High Court dismissed all four petitions on March 17 2004, on constitutional technicalities the cases established an important precedent. The Peshawar High Court ruled that every citizen who was registered as a voter, regardless of gender, has a right to exercise their vote. The court observed that all such means and devices to prevent women from voting were repugnant to fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution, void, illegal and even criminal.

“There was no cavil with the preposition that every citizen of the country has a right to form or be a member of political party as enshrined in Article 17(2) of the Constitution, which included the right to contest and participate in election. There is also no cavil with the preposition that every citizen who is registered as a voter regardless altogether of gender has right to exercise his or her vote,” the bench observed.⁸

The court ruled that “There is also no cavil with the proposition that this right being inherent in every registered voter can be exercised by him or her alone and thus cannot be forgone and forsaken by an agreement entered into by any person how high-so-ever he may be, therefore, no means or devices including threats of dire consequences or agreements amongst the candidates for election to an office can curb, curtail or fetter it.” It had ruled that employment of such means by any person irrespective of his status and stature in the society would be illegal and punishable under the law.⁹

Almost a decade later, the ruling served as a precedent for cases of women’s disenfranchisement in Peshawar as discussed below. Despite this ruling, the language concerning punishable “corrupt or illegal practices” is weak and may still disadvantage women voters and candidates. Firstly, the Act and the Rules both systematically use language that assumes that both candidates and voters are male except in the case of women quota seats. Secondly, the election petition as defined by the ROPA (Article 54, 55, 56) states that a contesting candidate may file petition for “corrupt or illegal practice” and claim relief. However, the definition of corrupt and illegal practices is broad: corrupt includes someone who is guilty of bribery, giving a false statement or stops someone in any way from casting their vote. Illegal practices refer to tampering ballot papers, violating regulations including hoarding size, campaign meetings 48 hours prior to elections and disorderly conduct near a polling station.

8 <http://www.dawn.com/news/700194/legislation-needed-to-end-bar-on-women-voting-2>

9 <http://www.dawn.com/news/606110/barring-women-from-election-process>

Violations that disproportionately affect women, including violations of code of conduct as well as character assassination and slander do not fall under either of these terms. The onus of responsibility for election petition is fixed on the petitioner. In many cases, but especially those acts against women voters and candidates, this is a particular discouragement from filing a complaint and acts as a deterrent. Finally, the ROPA does not specifically identify barring women from voting as a criminal act or provide any penalty for it.

2.5 Political Parties Order and Political Parties Rules, 2002

The Political Party Order and Rules of 2002 regulate the establishment and operation of political parties in Pakistan. The Political Parties Order and Rules are both gender blind, however they assume that the leaders of parties and the members of parties are male.

Specifically, Order, 5(2) reads:

“Where a person joins a political party, his name shall be duly entered in the record of the political party as a member and shall be issued a membership card, or any other document showing his membership of such political party” (emphasis added).

Likewise, Rules article 7 states that:

“the Party Leader of each political party under his signatures...” (emphasis added).

Although the law forbids discrimination on the basis of sex, and despite the generic legal interpretation of the masculine pronoun, its use perpetrates the cultural perceptions of political parties as a masculine domain, sidelining women through their omission in the language.

2.6 Applying the Framework: The Electoral Commission of Pakistan

The ECP has the constitutional responsibility of conducting free, fair, transparent and non-discriminatory electoral processes for the country.¹⁰ The fundamental rights and principles

outlined in the Constitution (Article 25-37) define the ECP’s institutional mandate to include social inclusion, gender equity and responsiveness. In 2010 the ECP released its first Five-Year Strategic Plan 2010-2014. The plan was developed by the ECP based on consultations with voters, political parties, civil society, and international stakeholders working under the umbrella of the Election Support Group.

The Strategic Plan for 2010-2014 emphasized the need for gender mainstreaming within the ECP:

“The ECP will strive to establish a fair gender balance in its ranks by creating conditions for women to be able to work in the organization”¹¹

It also focused on the inclusion of marginalized groups in Strategic Goal 14, which strives to formulate laws and strictly implement them to ensure that marginalized groups including women, minorities and persons with disabilities are able to participate in the political and electoral processes.

2010 was also marked by Pakistan’s ratification of the ICCPR. The ratification of the ICCPR obligates all relevant authorities of the State of Pakistan to adopt such laws or other measures as may be necessary to protect the rights of peaceful assembly to take part in the conduct of public affairs and to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections (Articles 2, 21 and 25), among other election-related rights, without:

“advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence” (Article 20).

The Strategic Plan and the ratification of the ICCPR established an unprecedented normative framework during the 2013 Elections. The ECP responded to the challenge by taking strong measures to ensure participation of women, youth, minorities, disabled and marginalized groups. The ECP translated the national public

10 Constitution of Pakistan. 20th amendment.

11 Pakistan strategic plan 2010-2014 <http://www.ecp.gov.pk/sp/downloads/ECP%205-Year%20Strategic%20Plan,%20Full%20Version,%20English,%20May%202010.pdf>

service goals into its own Action Plan. Although it was unable to meet the goal, an important step was taken with the introduction of an internal quota to bring the number of women staff on the ECP secretariat at entry level and other levels to 10 percent. Women were appointed as presiding officers for all-female polling stations, as well as in some mixed polling stations especially at urban centres. Women were also deployed as security officers and/or observers during the registration process.¹² In order to increase outreach, the ECP carried out door-to-door verification of electoral roll, voter education and special measures for Election Day. Notably, the ECP provided either separate voting centers or separate voting rooms in combined voting centers for women. Voting centers designated for women were staffed by female personnel, and provided female polling security. In order to ensure maximum public access on Election Day, the number of polling stations was increased from 55,000 to 69,729.

As part of the ECP's Action Plan, civic education outreach was improved. A baseline survey was conducted to determine electoral participation rates for women and to discover the factors influencing participation and knowledge about the electoral process, in order to inform the voter education strategy.¹³ UN Women, in collaboration with UNDP under the ECSP, supported the ECP to mainstream gender in its policies and programmes. In the 2013 elections, UN Women technically supported the ECP in a number of areas including collection and analyses of sex-disaggregated data, voter education campaigning, and scrutiny in areas around women's participation as voters and candidates. Support was provided by closely

engaging with political parties, CSOs and the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC), as well as drafting a gender strategy to support ECP in ensuring women's participation in political processes. For sex-disaggregated data, the existing data collection Forms namely XIV, XVI and XVII of the ECP (Election Rules 1977) previously did not include provisions to record and report data disaggregated by sex of registered voters and voter turnout. However, in January 2013 the ECP approved UN Women and UNDP's assistance to include sex disaggregated voter data by amending and piloting Forms XIV, XVI and XVII, paving the way for sex disaggregated voter turnout data in future elections.¹⁴

The outcome of these efforts included some successes for improving women's participation during the GE 2013. In particular, the voter education and registration awareness drive increased voter turnout from 44% (2008) to 55%. Also, there was a small increase in the number of valid nominated candidates for NA and PA, from 64 out of 3,930 in 2008 (1.6%) to 158 out of 7,020 in 2013 (2.2%).

Despite these successes numerous challenges remain. While the voter registration process has improved, there remains a very significant gap between men and women's registration levels. Women confront violence as voters, including being barred from voting or having their choice coerced by male family or community members with high levels of general violence in the country deterring women from turning out, and issues in the polling stations. Women seeking political office face barriers and violence, notably from the political party system and campaign finance rules and norms. They also face administrative barriers in the electoral process and threats and acts of physical violence against their persons. Finally, women that engage with the electoral process as staff for the ECP also face threats and challenges to their participation, including security for working in polling and registration centers in insecure environments.

12 Strategic Goal #7 aims to increase the representation of eligible women within the ECP to at least 10%. According to IFES, "In the months leading up to the 11 May 2013 general elections, the ECP has recruited 31 new female employees at various levels, bringing the total number of female staff to 42. Despite this progress, women still account for only 1.8 percent of the ECP's 2,228 employees, and there are no women in senior management positions." http://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/the_election_commission_of_pakistan.pdf

13 Pakistan survey cited in UNDP/UN Women, "Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation". 2015

14 Pakistan survey cited in UNDP/UN Women, "Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation". 2015

3

VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN IN PAKISTANI
POLITICS

CHAPTER 3

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN PAKISTANI POLITICS

The 2013 Pakistani elections were a massive undertaking, with over 86 million registered voters in 849 constituencies¹⁵. The effort to improve the freedom of and access to the process resulted in an increase in voter turnout as well as in the number of candidates running for office.

While many changes were positive developments, the 2013 elections were marked by serious challenges as well. One of the most significant of these was an extremely high level of election violence.

The four months preceding the May 2013 elections witnessed an average of 600 casualties of political violence per month.¹⁶ In all, over 2,670 people lost their lives and almost 2,400 were injured in over 1,100 incidents of violence surrounding the 2013 elections.¹⁷

This destructive context had a distinct impact on the political participation of Pakistani women as voters and candidates in other roles during the electoral process. The following section presents the impact of election violence on Pakistani women in each of these roles.

3.1 Women Voters

A pivotal indicator of participation in democratic processes is the degree of voter turnout. Although GE 2013 saw a high general voter turnout, the estimated turnout among women was only half of that of men.¹⁸ The gender difference in

turnout reflects the many barriers to women's participation as voters in Pakistan. Here the focus is on only one of those challenges: the effect of violence on women's registration and turnout.

During the 2013 elections, political violence tended to discourage women from both registering and voting. In addition to the general dissuasive effects, some acts of violence were targeted specifically at women to prevent their participation on the basis of their sex. There were also regional hotspots for gender-specific election violence against women voters.

3.2 Voter Registration

Disenfranchisement of Pakistani women begins with the voter registration process. The roots of electoral violence can be traced to public registration processes and domestic barriers to registration.

Registered male voters outnumbered their female counterparts by 11.65 million in September 2015, up from 10.97 million ahead of the 2013 elections (an increase of approximately 68,000 over two and a half years). This constitutes a decline in the gender turnout ratio: in 2015, there were 75 female voters for every 100 men, while in 2008 the ratio was 82:100.¹⁹ The national average difference in 2013 was 22%, with up to 46% difference in registered women and men in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in 2013.²⁰ While this is an improvement from 2008 when the difference was 44%,²¹ it still reflects a deep inequality in political life.

Some prominent Pakistani groups have urged the ECP to declare a "women voter registration

15 http://ecp.gov.pk/Misc/GE-2013-Graphs/02_reg_votes_compari_son.png

16 Centre for Research and Security Studies, Pakistan Conflict Tracker. <http://www.cfr.org/global/global-conflict-tracker/p32137#!/?marker=7>

17 Centre for Research and Security Studies, Pakistan Conflict Tracker. <http://www.cfr.org/global/global-conflict-tracker/p32137#!/?marker=7>

18 International IDEA. <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=PK>; UN Women "Impact Stories: Sharp increase of women voters in Pakistan's 2013 elections

19 FAFEN, cited in <http://tribune.com.pk/story/998617/underrepresented-male-female-voter-disparity-rising-at-alarming-rate/>

20 ECP data. Accessed January 2016.

21 European Union Electoral Observation Mission Final Report, 2008.

emergency” in the country and to redouble efforts in cooperation with NADRA, political parties and CSOs nationwide to help women register as voters.²²

The Election Law was amended in 2011 to include a Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) as the mandatory legal document for the purpose of registering to vote and casting a ballot. This was considered a useful step to overcome the obstacles for women’s participation. The NADRA carried out an extensive campaign to register and issue CNICs. Although they emphasized outreach to women in 2013, there was a significant gender gap in the final results for voters registered on the ECPs electoral rolls.

Of the 94.4 million voters registered in 2013, 53.3 million were men (56.5%) and 41 million (43.4%) were women. NADRA estimates that, for 2013, 96% of the eligible male population of Pakistan was in possession of the CNIC while only 76% of women held their CNICs.²³

Indeed, according to a 2012 UN Women Baseline Study “Women’s Political Empowerment and Participation”²⁴, the number of registered women actually fell by 1.4 million between 2008 and 2012. In 2013, some 2.7 million women voters did not have photographs on their CNICs or on the electoral register, which left their votes vulnerable to impersonation.²⁵

While targeted national and internationally assisted programmes have helped boost the number of women with CNICs in rural areas, urban women lag behind.²⁶

Specific forms of violence have contributed to the gap in women’s voter registration. Firstly, some socio-cultural conditions that constitute barriers to participation sometimes also take the form of violence.

The UN Women Baseline Study indicates that women are deprived of being registered as voters mostly because of the decisions of male family members, cultural constraints which are often based on religious interpretations, lack of literacy in many areas, and lack of awareness about electoral systems and procedures. The patriarchal attitudes of male household leaders and of the electoral agents themselves often combine to impede women’s registration. Male enumerators usually contact male members of the family to compile the lists. Since men are often reluctant to reveal the names of their female family members in front of others, many women do not get registered. According to the UN Women Baseline Study such practices have been found to be most prevalent in areas of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

Furthermore, the Mobile Registration Vans (MRVs) deployed by the NADRA are often staffed only by men. This in itself is a reflection of patriarchal barriers that discourage women from participating as agents with MRVs. As a result, many women do not register because they choose not to have their photos taken by males, or because the male head of household refuses their permission to do so.

By preventing women from registering and thereby suppressing their right to vote, these acts constitute forms of VAWP. These restrictions on women’s participation cause stress and frustration for many. In one of the interviews for this study, a young first-time voter from Mardan in KP was nearly in tears saying:

“They said that they had to take a picture and it was all male staff so my brother didn’t allow any of us sisters, and we couldn’t get our CNIC. I tried to go to vote without it but they didn’t let me and I cried because it would have been my first time to vote”.

22 FAFEN cited in <http://www.dawn.com/news/1222385>

23 IFES/GTZ. “Survey Assessing Barriers to Women Obtaining Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC). February 2013. <http://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/277728362/962062828/IFES-PK-Survey-Assessing-Barriers-to-Women.pdf>

24 UN Women’s Political Empowerment and Participation, Baseline Study 2012 (unpublished)

25 European Union Electoral Observation Mission Final Report, 2013

26 IFES/GTZ. “Survey Assessing Barriers to Women Obtaining Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC). February 2013. <http://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/277728362/962062828/IFES-PK-Survey-Assessing-Barriers-to-Women.pdf>

Survey-Assessing-Barriers-to-Women.pdf

From Pishin in Balochistan one woman voter proudly reported:

"I went to the mobile van unit which came to our village, but they kept asking for more papers I didn't have. They promised to come again but they never did. My father took the papers of all our family members to the district office, and that is how we got our CNIC, but many women didn't because no one took the documents to the office and couldn't vote".

3.3 Voter Turnout

Before they even get to the polls, Pakistani women voters are already disadvantaged by barriers and violence that exist during the voter registration process. Additional forms of violence on Election Day target women voters and prevent their free and fair participation. Women's turnout is consistently lower than men's, ranging from only 7% in North Waziristan, FATA, to 48% in Wazhuk, Balochistan.²⁷

The most common violence issues affecting women voters on Election Day are (1) male family or community members barring women from voting, (2) generalized violence resulting in intimidation of women voters, and (3) polling station issues. There are also concerns with the coercion of women's freedom of voting choice by male-family members (family voting) and challenges specific to disabled and minority women.

3.3.1 Barring Women from Voting

Over the past decade, the banning of women from voting has become a critical issue in Pakistani elections. Media reported cases have emerged from various parts of the country of women being barred from voting by male community leaders, family members and party leaders. In some cases, this action is taken privately within the homes and families of the women concerned. However, in other cases, formal and public pacts are made between actors to bar women from

voting in a specific community or region. As a result, tens of thousands of legal voters have been disenfranchised specifically on the basis of their gender. Examples in recent years abound:

During the 2008 elections, there were confirmed reports of agreements in tribal agencies, KP and some rural areas of Punjab and Sindh by local leaders (sometimes with the participation of political parties and candidates), barring women from voting.²⁸ According to the European Union observation mission, in Khyber Agency:

"local Lashkar-e-Islami leader Mangal Bagh was seen driving around the district in a convoy of 50 or 60 trucks with armed men, warning women not to vote over a loudspeaker, and announcing a shoot-to-kill policy for those who did. Similar agreements were also reported in Bajaur, Kurram and Mohmand agencies, and in Dir and Peshawar districts of KP province. At constituency results centres in three districts of Peshawar, European Union observers noted 87 polling stations where no women had voted at all. According to FAFEN, women were barred from voting in 564 polling stations in 2008."²⁹

During the 2011 by-elections, more than 59,000 female voters were not allowed to vote in PK-87 Shangla-I (a constituency in KP province) due to an accord among political parties and candidates to shut out female voters at 14 female polling stations and 69 combined polling stations.³⁰ According to FAFEN:

"The [political party] ban on women voting was reinforced by election officials deputed at the polling stations who did not set up female polling booths despite having been notified by the ECP in the Polling Scheme for the constituency."

In the 2012 by-elections, reports emerged of women being barred from voting in some areas

27 European Union Electoral Observation Mission Final Report, 2013

28 European Union Electoral Observation Mission Final Report, 2008

29 <http://www.upi.com/UPI-Next/2013/03/26/Women-Face-Bars-to-Voting-in-Landmark-Pakistan-Poll/81363307951483/>

30 FAFEN <http://fafen.org/more-than-59000-women-voters-barred-from-voting-in-shangla-by-election/>

of Mardan in KP and Mianwali in Punjab through agreements reached on local level between representatives of different political groups.³¹

2013's General Election were marked by this problem as well. The European Union Observation Mission found two written agreements (Lower Dir and KP and several verbal pacts by jirgas³² in Upper Dir, Buner, Mardan, Nowshera, D.I.Khan, Battagram, Malakand, Mianwali and Sarghoda.³³ The ECP preliminarily reported that some 500 polling stations had zero women's turnout.³⁴ Women were reportedly stopped from voting during Election Day in several polling stations in Mandi Bahauddin, Mianwali, Lakki Marwat, Nowshera in Punjab constituency.³⁵

The problem continued into 2015. During parliamentary by-elections in Lower Dir in May 2015, none of the 53,000 eligible women turned out to vote. It was reported that:

"mosques broadcast warnings to women, and polling stations were guarded by 'baton-wielding men' who blocked the few women who did try to vote."³⁶

Women reported that male family members do not allow them to attend political gatherings, refuse to discuss elections or politics in the home, or vote.³⁷

Later in 2015, during local government elections, pacts to prevent women's participation emerged in Hangu and parts of Malakand, in the KP

province.³⁸ The pacts were based on a Fatwa (a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority) issued by a local mosque to prevent women from taking part in the election and were backed by the four major political parties.³⁹

There has been some positive action taken to address this issue. In 2013, following reports that women were prevented from voting by-elections in 18 polling stations in constituencies in NA-5 (Nowshera) and NA-27 (Lakki Marwat), Peshawar High Court ordered a re-poll and ordered the arrest of elders who had prevented women from voting.

The ECP was ordered to conduct an inquiry and run an awareness campaign before re-elections so that women could fully participate in the polls.⁴⁰ In his verdict, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court noted that, in addition to the polling stations with zero women's turnout, other polling stations reports only 1.4% - 3% women's turnout, which was "unacceptable".⁴¹

The original ECP election amendment bill in 2012 included a provision declaring null and void the results of polling booths where women were not allowed to vote. Although the 2012 bill was not approved, on 8 April 2014 a private member bill was moved in the NA to amend the ROPA and declare null and void the elections where women have been barred from voting.

While this is a positive step, the ECP officials note that they can only take action when they receive a verified complaint. They further said that in many instances when the District Election Commissioners (DECs) investigate these incidents,

31 <http://www.dawn.com/news/700335/legislation-needed-to-end-bar-on-women-voting>

32 Jirga is a traditional assembly of leaders that make decisions by consensus and according to the teachings of Islam. It predates modern-day written or fixed-laws and is conducted to settle disputes among the Pashtun people but to a lesser extent among other nearby groups that have been influenced by Pashtuns

33 European Union Electoral Observation Mission Final Report, 2013

34 <https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI-ANFREL-Pakistan-EOM-Final-Report.pdf>

35 <http://www.dawn.com/news/1037543/terrorist-attack-women-ban-mar-biggest-by-polls>

36 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/29/women-barred-voting-pakistan-khyber-pakhtunkh>

37 <http://www.dawn.com/news/1188981>

38 <http://www.upi.com/UPI-Next/2013/03/26/Women-Face-Bars-to-Voting-in-Landmark-Pakistan-Poll/81363307951483/>

39 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/women-barred-from-voting-in-pakistan-local-elections-10285305.html>

40 <http://tribune.com.pk/story/595677/nowshera-lakki-marwat-re-polling-in-stations-with-women-vote-bar/>

41 <http://tribune.com.pk/story/595677/nowshera-lakki-marwat-re-polling-in-stations-with-women-vote-bar/>

the women state that they did not vote by choice. As a result, the ECP lacks evidence to investigate and or make a claim of misconduct.

Following the May 2015 by-elections in Lower Dir, a petition was lodged with the High Court by twelve women who alleged that female voters had been intimidated by men with batons blocking them at polling stations. The petition stated:

*"The candidates made the decision that women of the constituency would not be allowed to cast their ballot and special arrangements were made for this purpose. It included creating an atmosphere of fear and non-availability of women polling staff."*⁴²

The petition was dismissed by the Peshawar High Court and became a topic of contention. After objections by civil society groups, women's rights organizations and the media, the ECP decided to cancel the result and rerun the election in a historic decision, stating:

"the by-election of constituency No PK-95 Lower Dir-II is hereby declared void for the reasons of disenfranchisement of female voters".⁴³

However, the Peshawar High Court overturned the ECP decision on a technicality resulting in strong protest from civil society, especially women's rights groups.

Even when women are allowed to vote, they may suffer at the hands of their community. During a municipal election in November 2015, only a single woman came to vote in a Northwest polling station, apparently the first woman to vote in over 70 years due to local pacts to bar women's vote. She described:

"becoming a social outcast overnight".

42 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/women-barred-from-voting-in-pakistan-local-elections-10285305.html>

43 <http://tribune.com.pk/story/896645/may-7-vote-ecp-annuls-result-of-lower-dir-by-polls/>

In an interview with National Public Radio, the voter stated that when she first told villagers she was considering voting, they advised her to:

"shut up and never to talk about it again."

Before the election, she took the precaution of going to court and obtaining a judge's ruling ordering election officials to ensure that she would be allowed to vote. However, the right to vote did not prevent her from becoming ostracized by the village and many of her own relatives. She stated to the US National Public Radio that:

"My brothers and sisters are receiving calls from members of our own family, saying that I have done a very bad thing, and that I have humiliated them,"

And that her husband had supported her campaign to vote, but that his family is now living in fear for their lives, and that the abuse was so significant that she was forced to temporarily leave her home to seek refuge elsewhere.⁴⁴

In addition to pacts between public actors, women are often prevented from voting in the private sphere of their homes. Politics is generally perceived to be the exclusive domain of men and in many parts of the country women's citizenship and political rights are deemed unnecessary or considered inappropriate. Patriarchal values are translated into male domination in the field of politics. As a result, women are frequently barred from voting by their male family members. For those women that do vote, their choices may be coerced by the male heads of family as discussed below.

Finally, in addition to the progress of the legal reform movement, there is also evidence of positive impacts of voter education in changing customs and mindsets. For example, the UN Women Baseline Study noted that almost 2,000 women voters in the town of Paikhel, in Mianwali Tehsil, could not cast their votes in a 2012 by-

44 <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/11/21/456797947/will-the-first-pakistani-woman-to-vote-in-her-village-also-be-the-last>

election because of the 'mutual understanding' of their elders, a longstanding tradition. Just a year later, during the 2013 elections, the women of Paikhel voted for the first time since 1947. A woman voter from Paikhel stated:

"We have not been able to have this right since Pakistan was made. Our elders of the community had sat in a Jirga and at that time made a prayer together that none of the tribes living here would allow their women to vote. Over the last few years media and CSOs have worked together and there has been awareness among our men but still I couldn't believe it when suddenly our men sat together and said yes we will let our women vote. Not all women went to vote and not all men gave them the right to vote but I did and my sister and my sister-in-law and my neighbor. We were so excited --- I have no words to explain this experience"

A World Bank study of women's participation in 2013 also noted the importance of education to overcome these barriers. They found that information campaign had a strong impact on increasing both participation level and the freedom of choice of vote.⁴⁵

3.3.2 Coercing Women's Electoral Choices

Pakistani women are often constrained by tradition, tribal and family bindings and by being economically dependent on male family members. As such, they are likely to vote according to the preference of male clan and household heads (family voting).⁴⁶

For many women who vote, the decision for whom to vote is taken by the male family and/or community members. The women may be allowed a day of "picnic" to go out to vote, but they are told for whom to vote. For many poor families the male members are offered benefits or threats to ensure that the whole family casts

their votes for a particular party/candidate. This situation, coupled with their limited access to information, makes it difficult to make informed choices.

A report "Political Parties in Pakistan; organization and power structure" published by the Lahore University of Management Sciences notes that women are rarely seen as a priority for political parties and that most voter mobilisation focuses on men. The underlying assumption is that the male family members will determine the pattern of voting of their households, especially their women family members.⁴⁷

3.3.3 Effects of Generalized Violence as a Deterrent

The ECP's statistics show that there are nearly 800 polling stations where women's voter turnout was less than 10% in 2013, out of nearly 70,000 polling stations.

The threat of physical violence and the dangerous security situation in many parts of the country has limited women's access to polling stations, notably in Karachi and Quetta as well as some areas of Baluchistan and KP. For instance, one of the constituencies in KP (NA-32 Upper Dir) had 138,910 registered women voters but according to data filed by the RO, only one woman's vote was counted in the constituency during the 2013 election. In some parts of Balochistan, women's turnout was as low as 2.9%. Similar examples exist in other constituencies. In interviews, social mobilizers lamented the deterrent effect of the violence on turnout:

"We struggled very hard, we went to all the community elders and discussed the importance of women's votes and voting in general. We risked our lives reaching out to these people and these locations but what do we do, they didn't vote – not even the men".⁴⁸

45 Xavier Gine, World Bank. http://www.poverty-action.org/sites/default/files/day_2_s1_gine.pdf

46 Xavier Gine. World Bank http://www.poverty-action.org/sites/default/files/day_2_s1_gine.pdf

47 LUMS Political Parties in Pakistan; organization and power structure 2012 LUMS

48 Male social mobiliser, Khuzdar, Balochistan

3.3.4 Polling Station Issues

A number of issues at the polling stations in Pakistan affected women's participation. In some cases of violence, women experienced physical harm at polling stations or refused to go to vote, for fear of violence, as described in the cases below.

- **Security at Polling Stations:** Prior to the elections, UNDP trained more than 32,000 security personnel; these were primarily in KP with a small number (less than 5%) of women. Senior security personnel in other provinces were trained as lead trainers to give briefings to the security personnel on election duty.

A substantial number of polling stations particularly in Balochistan and KP were designated as sensitive or highly sensitive by the ECP, thereby implying security threats. The security personnel were not fully trained on gender issues or on the issues specific to the security management of women-only polling stations/booths. There were reports from across the country where women polling stations were not secure and faced violence.⁴⁹ Such real and perceived threat restricted the number of women who were able to cast their vote.

- **Physical violence:** Threats of physical violence during campaign rallies and on Election Day further limit women's freedom to cast their vote, because women are often more vulnerable to harassment and, according to local custom, hurting a woman is considered a direct attack on a man's honor.

The 2013 campaign period saw fewer women-only large meetings, and candidates relied on door-to-door meetings for reaching out to women.

In Hyderabad, there were reports of physical threats to minority women and employers firing women employees to dissuade them from casting their vote for a poor Hindu Dalit woman. Such instances were reported by other women candidates as well. This served

as a major deterrent for many women to cast their vote.

- **Female Polling Stations:** Separate male-female polling stations have been seen as both an advantage and a drawback to improving women's enfranchisement. The lack of separate polling stations for men and women was an impediment to women's voting in a number of regions. According to Aurat Foundation, nearly 300,000 women were disenfranchised in the Frontier Region in KP because all polling stations were combined i.e. had male and female polling booths in one location.⁵⁰ In Mateela Sargodha in Punjab, the community informed DEC that their women would not cast their votes because there were no separate female polling stations. On the contrary in Multan, Faisalabad and Haripur in Punjab, as well as Sindh, male and female polling stations were not in the same location. As a result, it was reported that women did not vote because they were not able to be easily accompanied to the polling stations by their male family members. Logistic challenges added to the mixed analysis of separate polling station. Polling station arrangements were only announced fifteen days prior to the elections, and in 2013, the changes were made by some DRO/RO as late as one night before the election. This tight timeline caused confusion and left limited opportunity for any person or community to request changes in polling arrangements in order to address enfranchisement issues. This is considered to have negatively affected women's participation in particular.

In 2008, the EU observers found that:

"Female [polling] booths had inferior conditions to male booths in 18% of cases, often being more cramped and crowded, and sometimes in more remote locations. Perhaps linked to these conditions, EU observers found that

49 UN Women voter interviews.

50 Aurat Foundation. <http://www.af.org.pk/news/1390295273.pdf>

female booths had more instances of disorder (17% in female booths, 7% in male) and procedural irregularities, such as violations of secrecy and the presence of unauthorized persons.”⁵¹

These problems were repeated in 2013, with 15% of women’s polling stations rated as poor or inadequate (compared to a 9% overall average for male, female and combined), secrecy of the vote not being protected in 20% of women’s polling stations (compared to 20% general average) and inadequate facilities, including toilet facilities hampering participation.

In 2013, NDI and Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) observers found that “polling personnel did not consistently follow counting procedures that required them to determine women’s and men’s ballot totals separately before mixing them together for the counting of results.”⁵² As a result, data on women’s turnout was expected to not be comprehensive.

- **Lack of Female Polling Staff;** According to the rules, the ECP has to appoint female staff in all female polling stations and polling booths. In locations where female staff are unavailable, senior male members are to be placed on duty. In FATA and interior Balochistan there were limited women who could take the responsibility as polling staff, so senior male members were placed on duty in the women’s polling stations/booths. This was determined to be a major constraint by women interviewed for this study. Women in Awaran and Gawadar districts in Balochistan and in other locations also reported that, due to this reason, male members of their households did not allow them to go and cast their vote.
- **Access to Polling Stations:** After the Supreme Court directive to have polling stations within a two-kilometer radius, the ECP increased its polling stations from 55,000 to nearly 70,000. However, in urban areas, reports from Lahore, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad and other major cities

in Punjab indicate that the distance and unavailability of transportation proved to be a problem for access.

In other instances, where candidates traditionally provided transport to their voters, in 2013 the “no transport by candidates” clause of Code of Conduct was implemented more strictly by the ECP. As a result, some voters who did not plan accordingly found themselves without transport. Finally, the cost of public transport was cited as a deterrent for some women’s access to polls.

- **Polling Station Access for Disabled and Minority Women:** Even though women broadly face disenfranchisement, minority women, disabled women and women from other marginalised segments continue to face challenges far greater than others. Anecdotal evidence from CSOs, as well as from women voters, reveals that in many places, like Hyderabad, women from minorities faced many distinct challenges in polling stations. In some cases, women of ethnic or religious minorities were made to stand separately in long lines. Veeru Kohli, a Hindu Dalit woman candidate from Hyderabad, said:

“This was one thing I had not been prepared for, that the polling staff would be biased. All Hindus and people from other minorities were made to stand in a separate line, for hours. No one told them that they couldn’t vote but no one was letting them vote either.”

Even though all polling stations are supposed to facilitate the disabled, according to the electoral rules many polling stations did not have any provisions for doing so in 2013. Aurat Foundation reported numerous cases where polling booths were upstairs and disabled, pregnant and elderly women were unable to cast their vote.⁵³

Where women-only polling stations did not allow men to enter, disabled women voters were required to seek assistance from a female family member, which was sometimes difficult, especially where they accompanied

51 European Union Electoral Observation Mission Final Report, 2008

52 NDI. <https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI-ANFREL-Pakistan-EOM-Final-Report.pdf>

53 Aurat Foundation. <http://www.af.org.pk/gep/images/publications/AF-GEP%20Election%20Monitoring%20Initiatives.pdf>

to the polling stations with male family members only:

One disabled woman from Khattak in northern Punjab said:

“As a blind woman I was extremely frustrated when I was told by the Association for Gender Awareness and Human Empowerment (AGAHE) Team⁵⁴ about the 8300 service of ECP.⁵⁵ It meant that I had to rely on someone else to tell me where my polling station was because there was no sound Short Message Service (SMS) facility available”

A disabled woman from Khairpur in Sindh said:

“I didn’t think it was worth it, but the team convinced me to go and vote and when I went to the polling station they had no facility for a wheelchair. There were three polling booths and each was on the next floor. I had spent so much money to get to the polling station and I didn’t even get to vote,”

54 AGAHE was the CSO partner working with UN Women on CVE in Punjab and facilitated in arranging voter group discussions.

55 This SMS service was introduced by the ECP to help voters to locate their polling booths.

4

WOMEN CANDIDATES
AND MEMBERS OF
PARLIAMENT

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN CANDIDATES AND MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Pakistani women who run for political office, and those who succeed in holding a publically elected seat, may face violence from many fronts, ranging from their families to opposing parties, as well as from members of their own parties and the media.

Political culture is male-dominated and often hostile to women's rights and participation. In the recent past, male Members of Parliament (MPs) have allegedly been involved in the honor killing of a female family member⁵⁶, and, similarly, the head of a Jirga awarded five young girls as compensation in the settlement of a grievance.⁵⁷

In such an environment, where women may be viewed as property, women politicians often struggle to be heard and taken seriously.

Although media coverage of women candidates and politicians has increased in recent years, it has failed to influence popular acceptance of women politicians in society because media "largely and generally portrays women politicians as fashion celebrities or in television debates as non-serious politicians," frequently analyzing women candidate's appearance, weight, marriage status, etc.⁵⁸

These issues, as well as social and religious conservatism, play significant roles in disempowering women in politics and enabling violence against them. This section explores some specific forms of violence experience by women in politics in Pakistan.

4.1 Barriers posed by Political Parties

Politics has traditionally been a male domain in Pakistan. All political parties have very few women in decision-making positions. According to reports,⁵⁹ no exact statistics are available for women in political parties or in their decision-making structures. However discussions with political parties highlight the fact that the women are primarily in the women's wings, which may "serve as ghettos"⁶⁰ for women's issues, rather than ensuring that women are included in the mainstream of decision making. All parties recognize that decisions are primarily taken at the top level where women's wings are not included.

Political parties pose significant barriers to women's participation. In some cases, there is violence involved.

Research by different CSOs and educational institutions⁶¹ highlight the fact that although women are present in the assemblies, they have as yet not been able to break into political party decisions.

Women remain marginalized within party structures and leadership positions with a few exceptions. In addition, the structures adopted by the parties to accommodate women's participation within the parties have actually served to marginalize their voices.

Most political parties have established separate

56 Rukshanda Naz interview. January 2016.

57 <http://www.dawn.com/news/261512/sc-orders-arrest-of-jirga-members-handing-over-of-minor-girls-to-victim>

58 Munir, Shafqat, Hassan Shehzad, and Aoun Sahi. "Media Analysis of Women's Participation in Politics." *J Mass Communicat Journalism* 4.183 (2014): 2.

59 Women's Political Empowerment and Participation: Baseline assessment. UN Women Pakistan. 2012.

60 HBS round table conference report Nafisa Shah Secretary WPC statement 2011

61 *ibid*, FAFEN 2013 election monitoring and observation reports, Bari Farzana women in Politics 2009 and gender deficit in politics 2013

women's wings, arguing that these serve to facilitate women's participation in party matters. The rationale for this approach is that the cultural position of women in society restricts their interaction with men causing reluctance among women to participate effectively in mixed gatherings.

In 2011-2012, a number of seminars on the issue of women's participation within political parties found that women needed stronger representation within political parties and should not just be limited to the women's wings. Discussions and interviews with women candidates also reinforced these concerns regarding women's weak role in political parties.

A female party candidate from Sindh said;

"Please, one of our key recommendations is to make laws to make political parties give positions to women. They will never do it otherwise,"

Some movement has been made to formally enhance women's voices within the parties. Women candidates have raised the concern about their minimal participation within political parties, particularly at decision-making levels. Even where women play important roles within their political parties, they are often sidelined and ignored in the decision-making processes.

Most political parties have less than 5% of women as members of Central Executive Committees (CECs).⁶²

In 2012, the women parliamentarians congregated across party lines under the umbrella of WPC, and passed a resolution to ensure that women should have greater representation in party leadership and the strengthening of the party's women's wing. They further demanded that the women leaders in Pakistan's political parties should also have a greater say in the financial and management matters.

Despite this multiple-party advocacy, women remain on the margins of the political parties in Pakistan. The elections of 2013 saw a record number of women candidates filing papers on general seats: 158 as compared to 63 women in 2008 in NA, and 297 as compared to 116 in PAs.

62 National Commission on the Status of Women. Undated report. <http://www.ncsw.gov.pk/previewpublication/8>

However, the percentage still remained below 5%, with only 3.4% of women elected to general seats in the NA and 2.7% to the PA.

Most political parties did not give a ticket to women candidates for the general seats. Out of 105 political parties, 82 (78%) did not give any ticket to women candidates.⁶³ Some suggest that even where they do, it is a choice often made reluctantly or due to circumstance rather than merit.

For example, in a candid interview, a female candidate from KP stated:

"I am proud that I got the party ticket – of course I also knew that they were giving it to me because my husband died and my brother-in-law was not contesting, otherwise given a choice, they would have given it to him."

Furthermore, where women are given a ticket, it is most often not for a "winnable" seat. Placing women in unwinnable contests reinforces the notion of their inferiority in politics, creating a downwards spiral.

One candidate from Sindh said:

"This gave me an opportunity to contest elections to compete with men, but I was hoping to win and losing means that they will think 'oh yes, women lose so don't give them tickets'."

In addition, 59.5% of women candidates for the NA, and 67% for PA, stood as independent candidates. This implied that they had to compete with candidates of large political parties who had far more resources and clout.

"I went door to door, I went to every household in my constituency and I know they didn't, they only had larger events but they could give Biryani and Pulau⁶⁴ which I couldn't and they won"

said a female candidate from Sindh.

Another candidate from Punjab was very angry:

"I couldn't afford billboards so I only got two, I made sure they were in the right size

63 http://www.electionpakistan.org/featured/women_party_tickets

64 Rice and chicken dishes which most large party candidates, wealthy people gave to participants attending their event.

as required by ECP but two days later I find out that my billboards have been taken off and replaced with those of a big party candidate. Anyone could see that the size of these billboards was huge and in total violation of the rules defined by the ECP, but if we could see that why couldn't the ECP and their supposed monitors. This gives an unfair playing field to the rest of us."

4.2 Women as Candidates

For women that succeeded in becoming nominated as candidates, despite the numerous barriers they face in society and in the political party system other challenges and forms of violence awaited them as candidates.

Pakistan has a quota system that ensures a minimum 17% of reserved seats in the NA. Beyond these reserved seats, the prospect is bleak for women candidates: in 2013, only 6 women (2%) were elected to general seats.

Despite a two-fold increase in the number of female candidates in 2013, the majority of parties awarded tickets to three or fewer women, and in the media women candidates were hardly visible.⁶⁵

Almost all the elected and non-elected women candidates interviewed reported experiencing intimidation and other manipulative tactics including defamation, attacks on their character, false announcements that a woman candidate was withdrawn in favor of male candidate, threatening the male members and family of the woman candidate, bribing male family members to compel their female relations to withdraw from the race, getting the woman candidate fired from her job or canceling a tenant lease or threatening eviction to pressure a woman's withdrawal from the race.

The interviews suggest that one of the most widespread forms of violence against women candidates and politicians is the expectation of sexual favors and threats of physical violence (rather than actual acts of violence). The threats of death or bodily harm are significant, physical attacks against women are motivated by political interests, misogyny or a combination of both intents.

65 European Union Electoral Observation Mission Final Report, 2013

4.2.1 Assassination and Physical Attacks on Political Women

In interviews and discussions, all women candidates and elected representatives reported that security had been their top most concern throughout their electoral campaign. Physical security for candidates is a risk for two reasons. Firstly, Pakistani elections have been characterized by a high degree of election violence across the board, for male and female candidates alike. This is a threat for candidates of both sexes, and is an important deterrent for women.

Numerous Pakistani women politicians and civil activists have been killed or wounded in this violent context. Prominent examples include Zahra Shahid, Tahira Asif, Parveen Rehman and Sabeen Mahmud. While these cases are arguably primarily politically motivated, other acts of VAWP are specifically motivated by misogyny, including the cases of Najma Hanif and Zil-e-Huma Usman.

The most prominent attack on a woman politician in Pakistan was the assassination of Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 2007 after a political rally. Twenty-four others also died in the tandem shooting-suicide bomb incident. Ms. Bhutto survived a previous attempt on her life that killed 139 others and had spent several months in exile. A high-profile candidate from one of Pakistan's most powerful political families, Bhutto's assassination is considered both an act of general political violence as well as an act of gender-specific violence.⁶⁶

The assassination reflects a general pattern of violence in Pakistan sadly embodied by her own family's history: her father, former Prime Minister Zulfikar Bhutto, was convicted and executed by the military regime in 1979; her brother Shahnawaz Bhutto died in mysterious circumstances in France in 1983; her brother Provincial MP Murtaza Bhutto was arrested for terrorism by his sister, Benazir, and subsequently killed in an armed encounter in 1996.

Some have also suggested that the attack against Benazir Bhutto may have been partly motivated by misogynistic anger at Bhutto's pro-women policies, including her resistance to the Hudood

66 Farahnaz Ispahani, comments during NDI Roundtable on Violence Against Women in Politics. December 2015 Washington DC. Used with permission. And, Rukshanda Naz interview. January 2016.

Ordinance, allowing women to join the Pakistani police force and introducing the first all-women police stations, the creation of the First Women Bank (Ltd), Women Studies Centres in Pakistani universities, and her campaigns against domestic violence and promotion of women's health and planned parenthood.⁶⁷

These tragic examples of assassinated women politicians illustrate the severity of political violence for women in Pakistan. Many other women politicians report experiencing violence and threats, or have been wounded:

- A Parliamentarian - Awami National Party (ANP), reported receiving threats on a daily basis. She campaigned against the practice of barring women's votes in Lower Dir, notably breaking with her own party which denied the existence of secret pacts.⁶⁸
- A Parliamentarian - Pakistan Muslim League Q (PMLQ) was the target of a fatwa issued by clerics after appearing in photos in a parachute jump in France in 2007, which was viewed as "un-Islamic". Following calls for her removal, she resigned the following month.⁶⁹
- A Prominent Human rights activist, and her family have been physically assaulted, threatened with death, taken hostage and had their home broken into after her involvement in a 1999 honor killing case. She experienced public degradation after organizing an awareness-raising event about violence against women in 2005.⁷⁰
- Members of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) reported receiving threats via SMS stating "You must step back from the campaign or else you will be shot in the head."⁷¹
- A minority woman candidate from Sindh, reported in a seminar⁷² how her convoy had been attacked on four different occasions and police were unable to find her assailants.

- The first woman candidate from Mithi in Thar, was threatened and cited that her family was at extremely high risk. Moving on an emotional pendulum from feeling sad to triumphant she said:

"I took on everything, I risked my life and went all out to meet all the women and men to convince them to not vote for these big landlords. They fired in-front of my house, they broke windows of my house. I kept on going but one day I did shake and that was when one of my ardent supporters from the neighbouring locality told me not to come to his area because he couldn't guarantee my safety. ----- I remember my triumph, I went to his locality and survived. These big guys then offered me money which I refused. I got threats from them to the extent that finally they said you go wherever you like, do not come to my hub, but I did and then I felt that even if I lose I have proven something. I could take on these big guys and make them bend".

Any candidate facing threats of violence is permitted to request security from the local administration. However, in reality there are constraints in implementation.

The candidates requesting security are responsible for paying the cost of honorariums, food and lodging for security personnel, as well as transportation costs. For women candidates, who generally have less access to financial resources than male counterparts, this is an important impediment. Secondly, security personnel is limited and it is often assigned to high profile candidates and/or candidates with strong political connections, which are generally men.

Finally, interviewees reported that prejudice among local administrators limited their access to security services. They stated that, because local administrators do not believe that women should stand for elections, the administrators tell the female candidates to make their own arrangements for security since they had "chosen" to stand for elections.

4.2.2 Regional Security Hotspots

KP and Balochistan faced greater security challenges during the 2013 elections, and both male and female candidates found it a challenge to campaign. Women in these areas had particularly powerful stories to tell about the

67 http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~ahmad22e/Benazir_Bhutto/Womens_Reforms.html

68 <http://tribune.com.pk/story/888516/ecp-inquiry-disenfranchisement-of-women-a-tradition-in-lower-dir/>

69 <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Pakistan-clerics-issue-a-fatwa-against-female-2565629.php>

70 <http://www.rightlivelivelihood.org/jahangir.html>

71 <http://lahoreworld.com/2015/10/11/shahbaz-sharif-notice-the-threats-to-mpa-maiza-hameed/>

72 UNESCO World Diversity day seminar May 2013

violence they faced as women candidates, both physical and psychological.

One female candidate from KP described trying to campaign in the insecure environment:

“Even in the city I couldn’t go out, the whole atmosphere was filled with fear and trepidation. I honestly didn’t know what to do, I had no support, I had no assistance from security agencies they were only focusing on the men and particularly those from the political parties. They said get guards yourself, we cannot spare guards for you”.

One of the brave women candidates from Balochistan said:

“In some ways I was more scared, my mother said to me look at your children what if something happens to you. My husband supported me and said do this because you want to, but I was scared and I was afraid for my children. I believed in the issue and was willing to risk everything but now I am not sure whether it was worth it”.

One religious minority woman from Balochistan said:

“I was harassed, I was stopped, the roads leading from our community into Quetta were blocked, lest I was able to fly out of the province. They wanted to make me an example by killing me. They have done it to women educators, women leaders and anyone who wanted to step into their arena. It is a power game and I am a Marxist I believe in this. But I refused to give up. They even banned our community from voting, even men were threatened. How do you expect the environment to be conducive for democracy?”

4.2.3 Administrative Barriers

The ECP revised the nomination forms for candidates (both general and reserved seats), requiring all candidates to give information on their nationality, assets and tax information. The ROs/DROs were designated officers for accepting nomination papers and interviewed candidates before accepting their nomination papers.

According to interviews, these proceedings led to significant harassment of women in numerous

cases. The women candidates interviewed reported being questioned on their appearance, dress codes, marital relationships, permission of husband to contest elections and other such aspects which they considered to be “extremely harassing.”

4.2.4 Campaign Finance and Access to Media

The issue of campaign finance and access to media have also been notable barriers for women candidates. Many women candidates on general seats carried out their campaigns through corner meetings and door-to-door visits:

“I sold everything that I had, I had some assets of my own, some small pieces of jewellery etc. but nothing much. My husband said he had no issues. I gave everything to the elections. I calculated all costs carefully before starting. I knew what I could afford and what I couldn’t. I cut down on my transportation costs and went door-to-door to each house in the constituency, took a rickshaw and went to different muhallas. And yet this was not enough. The party candidates were richer, male, stronger with support of party and nothing I did seemed to be enough”.

stated an independent woman candidate from Punjab in the interview. Similar comments were made by others from Sindh.

In 2013, the focus of the media remained on the male candidates and did not highlight women candidates or their campaigns, except in paid advertisements.

According to reports from FAFEN and Pakistan Institute for Legislative Development And Transparency (PIDAT), the national media (electronic and print) primarily gave coverage to well-known candidates. Some women and transgender candidates whose candidacies were unusual for their communities, like Nusrat Begum from Dir, Hajiani Lanjho from Thar, and Viru Kohli from Hyderabad, were given coverage by the press. However other candidates’ profiles were covered by only small, district-level media. Character assassination is pervasive:

“Women politicians such as Nilofar Bakhtiar, Hina Rabani Khar and Sherry Rehman have also

rumours regarding their character while being high in the political echelon.”⁷³

Coverage about women candidates’ relationships, type of clothes and sensational character-maligning elements were reported in the interviews conducted.

Discussions with women candidates showed that a majority of them did not take the media packages for campaign advertisements, simply because they were too expensive.

As one woman candidate from Sindh said:

“I looked at the packages that they [media groups] were offering, they were unbelievable. I told my husband I could spend my whole campaign budget on the lowest bracket of coverage and it would still not be enough. I wanted to reach out to people, to be able to talk of change directly. All these large parties were given these media packages and we all know their candidates took them. Where is their accountability?”

One candidate from Punjab said:

“I wanted to but I really couldn’t afford it, women can’t, what do we do then, we are in any case not at par with these men who have party tickets”.

According to UKS a national research, resource and publication centre on women in media:

“Newspapers did not give enough importance to female candidates, especially the ones with ordinary backgrounds who were contesting elections for the first time, and mostly placed news about them on the inner pages instead of in the front or back page.”⁷⁴

4.3 Electoral System Barriers: Quotas versus General Seats

Pakistan has an unusual and oft-criticized form of gender quota where reserved seats are indirectly elected from women’s lists in accordance

with party seat shared in the national polls.⁷⁵ This system places full authority for women’s participation through quotas in the hands of the primarily-male political party leaders. Women must be both nominated and elected by the male-dominated leadership of the parties. There is no system of elections within the parties or for contesting candidates within a party to compete for allocation of a position on the party list. Therefore, nomination of women may be due largely to their political or family connections. Moreover, their position on the party priority list is also pivotal in ensuring their entry into the parliament, requiring much negotiation and networking.

According to the ECP data, out of a total 1,718 women who filed papers on reserved seats in 2013, only about 50% were deemed valid for nomination.⁷⁶ Out of 488 candidates who filed their nomination papers for the NA, 255 (53%) were rejected, while for PA out of 1,230 women, 562 (46%) were rejected. A review of the reasons for rejection⁷⁷ showed that more than 90% were rejected due to the fact that the names of these women were not on the final party lists submitted to the ECP. Although these women sought to contest the elections, they were ultimately blocked at the level of their party’s leadership.

Despite their protected status, women elected through quotas are at a disadvantage. Christensen and Bardall⁷⁸ note that Pakistan’s unique quota system has:

“diminished the political efficacy of the women elected and resulted in a ‘ghettoization’ of women candidates. The criticisms are fair: without ...the political capital of a constituency base, the women occupying these seats may be at a disadvantage against directly-elected members.”

The quota system places women in a position of dependence on the male party-members that select them. As a result, women candidates and MPs report feeling intimidated and silenced,

73 Ibid, p 41

74 Fair, Balanced and Unbiased? A Gender Analysis of Pakistan’s Media Reporting on Elections 2013 UKS 2013

75 Christensen and Bardall, 2015

76 ECP data

77 Gathered directly from ECP and PECs as well as ROs and DROs

78 Christensen, Skye, and Gabrielle Bardall. "Gender quotas in single-member district electoral systems." Politics, Groups, and Identities (2015): 1-22

compelled to subvert their own political positions to those of their male colleagues.⁷⁹

Women running for general seats face distinct barriers as well. As discussed, women represent less than 5% of the total candidates of general elections. Women are rarely issued tickets for winnable seats and even fewer receive any financial or other support from the political party. Additionally, women nominated by parties are very often related to party leaders while the women party workers at grassroots are bypassed. Hence the norms and political environment tend to obstruct the emergence of women's leadership from the grassroots.

Women candidates on general seats have also faced fatwas which, in most instances have proved retrogressive, whether these women are from majority or minority groups, independent or affiliated to political parties. The fatwas have been used by male candidates to malign women and to argue against their participation in elections. Anecdotal evidence also exists of how male candidates have used character assassination as a means to malign women. In addition, women candidates have also reported being threatened by men in order for them not to campaign. Unsurprisingly, none of the women independent candidates won a seat.

79 Farkahanda Aurang Zeb. Interview. January 2016.

5

WOMEN STAFF OF THE
ELECTION COMMISSION
OF PAKISTAN

CHAPTER 5

WOMEN STAFF OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF PAKISTAN

As with most Pakistani institutions, the ECP has reflected aspects of traditional patriarchal society. While much positive change has been enacted, there is still a long road ahead. Although the ECP is mandated to ensure recruitment of 10% women within its own employees, this has been a struggle. In September 2012, there were only 15 women working for the ECP, a 0.6% of the total ECP staff. Of them, most were primarily employed in non-managerial levels. With such low representation of women in the core staff, the responsiveness to the needs of women voters and candidates is difficult. In 2012, the ECP issued a directive to all its offices to implement the 10% quota for women in recruitment, especially to managerial positions. Although this successfully doubled the number of women in a 6-month period, by the end of 2013 women still only accounted for 3% of the ECP staff. The ECP continues to struggle to meet its recruitment goals and therefore has difficulty in staffing polling stations and developing more gender-sensitive policy as a whole. This is important as it has a broader effect on women's participation across the electoral process.

The ECP is also committed to hiring women as temporary staff, as per the law which requires women be appointed in polling booths and stations. Women are infrequent in leadership positions, even at this level. In the elections of 2013, there were no female DROs and only 11 women were ROs. Part of the low levels of recruitment of women may be due to non-conducive working environment of the ECP, including forced relocation for professional postings and inadequate facilities.

While these issues are partly explanatory, a significant cause for low levels of women's participation in electoral jobs reflects real and perceived threats. Women and men employees of the ECP face threats of violence and require proper security arrangements. ROs are expected to take the election material with them a day

before elections. Transport or security is not provided, which makes ROs and their families more vulnerable to potential violence; it is also a security risk for the election material to be left at a private residence overnight. The Election Day security also poses great challenges as female staff are at times deterred/unable to reach the polling station as was seen in Karachi, Awaran, Gawadar and other locations across the country in 2013. Women employed as DECAs also face greater threats. They have to work long hours, interact with local police, district administration and in general face all the security threats and challenges related to their position.

District and provincial officers of the ECP are generally posted to different locations from their personal residences. Women employees have to travel in unsafe and intermittent public transport, which is particularly challenging during election time when they are required to have late sittings or pick-up electoral materials late in the evening. Senior officers (generally all men) often provide transport to their male brethren for late evening sittings; women are unable to find seats in the transport since there are a large number of men. Given the overall political and security situation of Pakistan this creates an even greater challenge, leaving women election workers more vulnerable to potential violence.

6

WOMEN AS CIVIC AND
VOTER EDUCATORS

CHAPTER 6

WOMEN AS CIVIC AND VOTER EDUCATORS

Many Pakistani women are engaged in CSOs that contribute to voter and civic education. They do so to help fill the gap in access to information often experienced by women voters. Pakistani women traditionally have limited access to sources of information, TV, radio and mobile phones. More women than men are illiterate (70% male and 47% female)⁸⁰ and consequently are unable to access the written information through pamphlets, magazines and newspapers. In addition, the space for political discourse is primarily public spaces including Hujras, Jirgas, Panchaits, Autaks and Baithaks⁸¹ which traditionally have only male membership.

For every female candidate there are 2,956 male candidates,⁸² whom, in most instances, are unable to reach out to a vast majority of women voters. Women voters are therefore not able to hold informed debates on the merits or demerits of each candidate and/or party mandate.

There is evidence that many women civic educators face violence in their role as educators.

One female social mobiliser of Society for Human Assistant and Development (SAHD) (a CSO working with UN Women and the ECP on Civic Voter Education (CVE) for women in Khuzdar, Balochistan) had to resign since she and her children allegedly were receiving threats. UN Women and UNDP's civic and voter education campaign to facilitate the ECP in Baluchistan had to be rolled back prior to its completion due to threats to the field workers of CSOs.

In such environments, it was even more challenging for women to step out of the house and exercise their right to vote.

Hannah Roberts, the DRI team lead for observing elections in Balochistan, termed the situation:

“as a black hole, we do not know what is happening in far flung districts, places like Awaran and Gawadar where even the polling staff and security officers find it difficult to reach we are unable to say things for certain.”

80 Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) Survey 2013-14

81 All different names for congregation and decision making bodies/discussion platforms

82 For NA there were 158 women and 4671 male candidates

7

CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Mitigating and preventing VAWP is critical to improving the quality of electoral and political processes and enhancing Pakistani democracy. All citizens should have equal rights in participating in electoral processes without fear of facing physical or other harm or subjecting their family and friends to such threats. Actions can be taken in a number of sectors to further this objective.

7.1 Voter Registration Processes

Voter registration processes mitigate the risk of violence by when they improve and secure access. Improved access limits openings for manipulation and exclusion based on misinformation and allows security officials and the ECP to better plan protection measures, such as appropriate location of registration centres and planning for MRVs. Specific actions that may be taken include:

- Review the possibility of linking voter registration with NADRA MRVs to make this a one-stop operation and minimize paperwork.
- Raise awareness about SMS service of the ECP for seeking information on voter registration through mass media, educational institutions and community leaders. Identify locations and means through which women can be provided greater access to information on elections.

7.2 Polling Procedures and Plans

Polling procedures and plans must take into account the risks that are faced by different segments of the population, notably by women voters. Through gender-sensitive planning and preparation, electoral procedures can help reduce violence against women during elections. Also, effective planning for Election Day can help ensure the safety of women working for the ECP. Securing female poll workers is linked to securing female voters. Specifically:

- Develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and ensure compliance of security agencies that all security personnel are trained in gender sensitive manner. The security personnel on

duty at the women polling stations and polling booths should be specially trained to ensure that they are well aware of their role and responsibility. It is of paramount importance that they are able to provide a safe and secure environment for women to cast their vote.

- Develop SOPs and train all polling staff to ensure that gender disaggregated data is mandatory and generated at each combined polling station.
- Review curriculum and checklist of polling staff and security personnel for engendering these further based on lessons learned in 2013 and other elections. Gender sensitization sessions may also be incorporated in all trainings of the ECP permanent and temporary employees.
- Directive may be issued prior to any elections to relevant government departments for ensuring provision of transport and security to all women presiding officers at every polling station.
- Possibility of providing transport to permanent employees of ECP may also be explored. This deserves special consideration where women are required to work late hours.
- ECP may implement the government's Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act 2010 and ensure that anti-sexual harassment policy is visible and displayed, the staff is aware of the policy, a committee is nominated and the law is implemented.

7.3 Education and Awareness Raising are Important to Preventing Violence

Campaigns for women candidates and aspiring candidates help them understand their rights, responsibilities and recourse when needed. Voter education allows women voters to demystify the process and feel confident and safe in voting.

- Identify mechanisms to monitor and record incidents of violence against women in politics and issue regular reports on the status of the

issue. Include verified incidents of violence against women in human rights reporting and shadow reporting.

- Establish a Civic and Voters' Education (CVE) wing and a women's issues or gender mainstreaming wing in the ECP. Each wing may be headed by trained, senior-grade officer and sufficiently staffed.
- Develop a CVE Strategy based on gender-sensitive principles and country-specific research. Train the ECP officers in CVE to maximize efforts. The field offices of the ECP may be encouraged (through directives and trainings) to develop linkages with CSOs, media and academia at local level for better outreach and to motivate voters, particularly women and girls to register as voters and to cast votes.

legislative process, women's quotas, issues regarding women's CNIC and voter registration, relevant provisions within the political parties act and election laws, reasons for low voter turnout, gender issues at national/provincial level as well as mechanisms to ensure that women's concerns are reflected in mainstream legislation.

7.4 Political Parties, Candidates and Members of Parliament

Political parties, candidates and MPs have a critical role in preventing and mitigating electoral violence. Both male and female party members and candidates, at all levels, are essential actors in efforts in this area. Specifically:

- Political parties may adopt codes of conduct and zero-tolerance policies regarding discrimination and violence.
- Promote women's participation through merit-based candidate recruitment practices, fair access to media and campaign resources offered by the parties, discouragement of family voting practices and proactive support for women's voter registration.
- Build awareness of the issue of VAWP and the importance of women's political participation. Options include conducting policy dialogues with political parties and parliament on women's role in parliament, organizing gender sensitization sessions for male parliamentarians in collaboration with CSOs and the NCSW.
- Build the capacity of men and women MPs to develop gender-sensitive legislation to enhance participation and prevent violence. Options include capacity building of candidates and new MPs, particularly exclusive sessions for women parliamentarians including topics of role and responsibility after 18th amendment, ECPs role, rules and regulations governing candidature,



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