

VOTER REGISTRATION: Identifying the Voters

Ali Cheema, Haris Gazdar, Mohammad Farooq Naseer and Asad Sayeed

Voter turnout is measured as the proportion of registered voters that actually voted. While political factors are expected to affect turnout rates, the established history of pre-poll and polling-day rigging in Pakistan means that these ratios can also alert us to possible administrative interference with the electoral process. Before these elections a key complaint of the opposition parties related to the preparation of electoral rolls. These parties had argued that the Election Commission's original lists had excluded a large number of voters, as the total number of voters in those lists amounted to a decline in voter numbers compared to 2002.

The lists were then rectified and in the event the number of registered voters in 2008 was around 13 per cent higher than 2002 (Table 1). This seems reasonable if we expect the voting age population to increase by an annual rate of around 2 per cent. The breakdown of the change in voter registration shows, however, that the increase was highly uneven across regions. In Islamabad, Sindh and NWFP voter registration increased by over 20 per cent, while in Punjab it rose by a mere 8 per cent. If the 2002 benchmark was a true reflection of the actual voting population, then given a population increase of 13 per cent over the period, Punjab actually witnessed a decline in voter registration.

These variations are too wide to be explained simply by reference to differences in regional population growth rates. In the absence of further evidence it would also be premature and unfair to ascribe the variations to electoral manipulation. But the fact that such wide variations exist does mean, at the very minimum, that voter registration is subject to high degree of administrative discretion.

Table 1: Registered voters and turnout rates, by province or federal territory

	Registered voters 2008	Per cent increase over 2002
Pakistan	78,611,986	13
Islamabad	482,801	26
Punjab	43,428,613	8
Sindh	19,219,940	21
Balochistan	4,365,274	11
NWFP	10,163,936	20
FATA	951,422	11

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

This picture gets reinforced if we look at Punjab sub-regions (Table 2), ethnic segments (Table 3), urban and rural areas (Table 4), and rich and poor areas (Table 5). Registered voters increased by 19 per cent in northern Punjab, and only 5 per cent in the neighbouring central Punjab. In ethnic Balochi segments voter registration actually declined by 3 per cent, whereas it increased by a massive 27 per cent in the ethnic Urdu-speaking segments. The difference in voter registration in urban areas was almost four times higher compared with rural areas, and over twice as high in rich areas compared with poor areas.

Table 2: Registered voters and turnout rates, Punjab regions

	Registered voters 2008	Per cent increase over 2002
North	4,862,905	19
Centre	23,959,600	5
South	14,606,108	8

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

Table 3: Registered voters and turnout rates, Ethnic segments

	Registered voters 2008	Per cent increase over 2002
Punjabi	31,031,733	7
Sindhi	10,981,254	11
Pushto	9,353,203	21
Saraiki	5,630,374	12
Balochi	1,687,819	-3
Urdu	1,581,685	27
Others	2,356,550	17
Heterogeneous	15,989,368	21

Table 4: Registered Voters and Turnout Rates, by Rural-Urban Area

	Registered voters 2008	Per cent increase over 2002
Rural	37,494,856	7
Mixed	19,864,931	11
Urban	21,252,199	26

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

Table 5: Registered Voters and Turnout Rates, by Regional Wealth Rankings

	Registered voters 2008	Per cent increase over 2002
Poorest	23,518,614	8
Middle	26,770,341	11
Richest	28,323,031	18

Source: Dawn Election Cell Data

These variations would not be possible if the Election Commission applied uniform criteria with equal levels of commitment and integrity across the country. It is possible, of course, that regional variations were not systematic or motivated, but simply resulted from different degrees of efficiency, and pro-active efforts on the parts of individual voters and political parties. It may be argued that in places where voters or parties were more pro-active the Election Commission machinery responded and larger numbers of voters were actually registered. It is also possible that the electoral rolls for 2008 were actually comprehensive and fair, but those of 2002 were

distorted. The variations in changes in voter registration may simply have compensated for past inefficiencies.

Whatever the real story behind regional variations in changes in voter registration, it is obvious that administrative discretion opens up spaces in which electoral manipulation can thrive. Election results tell us something about those who went to the polling station and were able to vote. They do not count the number of people who ventured out on the day only to be told that their names did not exist in the electoral rolls, or that it was probably listed in some other area. For democracy to thrive the state must take the entire electoral process, from start to finish, much more seriously than it has done thus far. This requires, in the first instance, a thorough and transparent investigation into the preparation of electoral rolls, with the view of removing administrative discretion from the process.

Table 6: Constituencies with extraordinary increase in voter registration between 2002 and 2008

Constituency	Per cent increase in registered voters	Winner 2002	Winner 2008
NA - 250 Karachi - XII	68	MMA	MQM
NA - 1 Peshawar - I	65	MMA	ANP
NA - 251 Karachi - XIII	60	MQM	MQM
NA - 253 Karachi - XV	60	MMA	MQM
NA - 258 Karachi - XX	59	PPP	PPP
NA - 248 Karachi - X	56	PPP	PPP
NA - 249 Karachi - XI	55	MQM	MQM
NA - 257 Karachi - XIX	51	MQM	MQM
NA - 219 Hyderabad - II	49	MQM	MQM
NA - 262 Killa Abdullah	48	PMPA	MMA
NA - 221 Hyderabad - IV	46	PPP	PPP
NA - 2 Peshawar - II	45	MMA	PPP
NA - 66 Sargodha - III	45	PPP	PPP
NA - 231 Dadu - I	45	PPP	PPP
NA - 256 Karachi - XVIII	42	MQM	MQM
NA - 232 Dadu - II	41	PPP	PPP
NA - 96 Gujranwala - II	39	MMA	PMLN
NA - 150 Multan - III	39	PMLN	PMLN
NA - 97 Gujranwala - III	38	PMLQ	PMLN
NA - 196 Rahim Yar Khan - V	38	PPP	PPP
NA - 239 Karachi - I	37	MMA	PPP
NA - 21 Mansehra - II	37	MMA	PMLN
NA - 204 Larkana - I	36	PPP	PPP
NA - 226 Mirpur Khas - I	36	PPP	PPP
NA - 149 Multan - II	35	PPP	PMLN
NA - 255 Karachi - XVII	35	MQMH	MQM
NA - 56 Rawalpindi - VII	35	IND	PMLN
NA - 245 Karachi - VII	35	MQM	MQM
NA - 242 Karachi - IV	34	MQM	MQM
NA - 254 Karachi - XVI	34	MQM	MQM
NA - 20 Mansehra - I	34	PMLQ	PMLQ
NA - 220 Hyderabad - III	33	MQM	MQM
NA - 241 Karachi - III	33	MMA	MQM
NA - 95 Gujranwala - I	33	PPP	PMLN
NA - 243 Karachi - V	33	MQM	MQM
NA - 233 Dadu - III	33	PMLQ	PPP
NA - 126 Lahore - IX	33	MMA	PMLN
NA - 185 Bahawalpur - III	33	NA	PMLN
NA - 197 Rahim Yar Khan - VI	32	PPP	PMLN
NA - 266 Nasirabad	32	PMLQ	PPP
NA - 40 Tribal Area - V	31	IND	IND
NA - 29 Swat - I	31	MMA	ANP

NA - 55 Rawalpindi - VI	31	IND	PMLN
NA - 237 Thatta - I	31	PMLQ	PPP
NA - 64 Sargodha - I	31	PPP	PPP
NA - 144 Okara - II	30	PPP	IND

Table 7: Constituencies with extraordinary decline in voter registration between 2002 and 2008

Constituency	Per cent decline in registered voters	Winning party 2002	Winning party 2008
NA – 206 Larkana – III	42	PPP	PPP
NA – 269 Khuzdar	26	BNP	IND
NA – 154 Lodhran – I	20	PMLQ	PMLQ
NA – 136 Sheikhpura – VI	18	PMLQ	PMLN
NA – 155 Lodhran – II	17	PMLQ	PPP
NA – 137 Sheikhpura – VII	16	PMLQ	IND
NA – 134 Sheikhpura – IV	16	PPP	PMLN
NA – 131 Sheikhpura – I	16	PMLQ	PMLN
NA – 163 Sahiwal – IV	15	NA	PMLQ
NA – 113 Sialkot – IV	15	PMLQ	PMLN
NA – 159 Khanewal – IV	15	PMLQ	PPP
NA – 156 Khanewal – I	15	PPP	PMLQ
NA – 115 Narowal – I	15	PMLQ	PMLN
NA – 116 Narowal – II	15	PMLQ	IND
NA – 109 Mandi Bahauddin – II	15	PPP	PPP
NA – 77 Faisalabad – III	13	PMLQ	PMLQ
NA – 161 Sahiwal – II	13	PSPP	PPP
NA – 140 Kasur – III	12	PMLQ	PPP
NA – 235 Sanghar – II	12	PMLF	PMLF
NA – 164 Pakpattan – I	12	PMLQ	PMLN
NA – 78 Faisalabad – IV	12	PMLQ	PPP
NA – 76 Faisalabad – II	12	PMLQ	PPP
NA – 157 Khanewal – II	12	IND	PML
NA – 79 Faisalabad – V	11	PMLQ	IND
NA – 166 Pakpattan – III	11	PMLQ	PMLN
NA – 75 Faisalabad – I	11	PMLQ	PPP
NA – 114 Sialkot – V	11	PMLQ	PMLN
NA – 81 Faisalabad – VII	10	PPP	PPP
NA – 139 Kasur – II	10	PPP	PMLN

Table 8: Constituencies with extraordinary increase in turnout rates between 2002 and 2008

Constituency	Per cent increase in turnout	Winner 2002	Winner 2008
NA - 206 Larkana - III	85	PPP	PPP
NA - 219 Hyderabad - II	83	MQM	MQM
NA - 246 Karachi - VIII	69	MQM	MQM
NA - 38 Tribal Area - III	65	Indep	Indep

NA - 247 Karachi - IX	65	MQM	MQM
NA - 45 Tribal Area - X	60	Indep	Indep
NA - 244 Karachi - VI	60	MQM	MQM
NA - 243 Karachi - V	55	MQM	MQM
NA - 241 Karachi - III	48	MMA	MQM
NA - 220 Hyderabad - III	44	MMA	MQM
NA - 254 Karachi - XVI	44	MQM	MQM
NA - 269 Khuzdar	44	Others	Indep
NA - 255 Karachi - XVII	40	Others	MQM
NA - 209 Jacobabad - II	38	PPP	PPP
NA - 39 Tribal Area - IV	37	Indep	Indep
NA - 249 Karachi - XI	36	MQM	MQM
NA - 263 Loralai	35	PML(N)	PML(Q)
NA - 81 Faisalabad - VII	34	PPP	PPP
NA - 223 Hyderabad - VI	34	PPP	PPP
NA - 230 Tharparkar - II	34	PML(Q)	PML(Q)
NA - 242 Karachi - IV	34	MQM	MQM
NA - 267 Kachhi	34	PML(Q)	Indep
NA - 203 Shikarpur - II	32	PML(Q)	PML(Q)
NA - 123 Lahore - VI	31	PML(N)	PML(N)
NA - 131 Sheikhpura - I	31	PML(Q)	PML(N)
NA - 139 Kasur - II	31	PPP	PML(N)
NA - 268 Kalat-Mastung	31	MMA	PPP
NA - 270 Awaran-Lasbela	31	PML(Q)	PML(Q)
NA - 75 Faisalabad - I	30	PML(Q)	PPP
NA - 229 Tharparkar - I	30	PML(Q)	PML(Q)

Table 9: Constituencies with extraordinary decline in turnout rates between 2002 and 2008

Constituency	Per cent decline in turnout	Winner 2002	Winner 2008
NA – 43 Tribal Area – VIII	46	Indep	Indep
NA – 29 Swat – I	43	MMA	ANP
NA – 30 Swat – II	39	MMA	PPP
NA – 259 Quetta	29	MMA	PPP
NA – 210 Jacobabad – III	26	PML(Q)	PML(Q)
NA – 265 Sibi-Kohlu-Dera Bugti	23	Others	PML(Q)
NA – 36 Tribal Area – I	21	Indep	Indep
NA – 1 Peshawar – I	20	MMA	ANP
NA – 96 Gujranwala – II	20	MMA	PML(N)
NA – 44 Tribal Area – IX	19	Indep	Indep
NA – 197 Rahim Yar Khan – VI	18	PPP	PML(N)
NA – 33 Upper Dir	17	MMA	PPP
NA – 66 Sargodha – III	17	PPP	PPP
NA – 64 Sargodha – I	16	PPP	PPP
NA – 9 Mardan – I	14	MMA	ANP
NA – 34 Lower Dir	14	MMA	PPP
NA – 63 Jhelum – II	14	PML(N)	PML(N)

NA – 98 Gujranwala – IV	14	PPP	PPP
NA – 194 Rahim Yar Khan – III	14	PML(Q)	PPP
NA – 232 Dadu – II	14	PPP	PPP
NA – 86 Jhang – I	13	PML(Q)	PPP
NA – 89 Jhang – IV	13	Indep	PML(Q)
NA – 7 Charsadda – I	12	MMA	ANP
NA – 183 Bahawalpur – I	12	PML(Q)	PPP
NA – 233 Dadu – III	12	PML(Q)	PPP
NA – 101 Gujranwala – VII	11	PML(Q)	PML(N)
NA – 147 Okara – V	11	PML(Q)	Indep
NA – 189 Bahawalnagar – VII	11	PPP	PPP
NA – 196 Rahim Yar Khan – V	11	PPP	PPP
NA – 14 Kohat	10	MMA	ANP
NA – 35 Malakand Protected Area	10	MMA	PPP
NA – 91 Jhang – VI	10	PML(Q)	PML(Q)
NA – 169 Vehari – III	10	PML(Q)	PML(N)
NA – 185 Bahawalpur – III	10	PML(Q)	PML(N)
NA – 250 Karachi – XII	10	MMA	MQM