



BY-ELECTION

# OBSERVATION REPORT

NA-154 Lodhran-I

## Procedural irregularities in relatively low turnout Lodhran by-election

ISLAMABAD, February 12, 2018: Unchecked campaigning and canvassing and suspicious voting patterns mark the NA-154 by-election that remained peaceful amidst heavy presence of security personnel inside and outside polling stations, says Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) on Thursday.

On average, 2.7 violations of electoral laws, rules and codes of conduct per polling station were reported. The observers witnessed 99 violations of campaigning and canvassing rules inside and around polling stations on polling day. As many as 90 violations related to the availability of critical materials including the ballot books, counting forms and sealing packets for election materials. Moreover, observers recorded 77 violations regarding voters' identification process, 26 regarding breach of voters' secrecy, 21 regarding polling station security and 11 relating to other polling processes. The security officials barred as many as 12 accredited FAFEN observers from observing the voting or counting processes.

FAFEN observed the pre-election process and polling day through 50 trained and non-partisan observers. Observers spent between 30 and 60 minutes in each polling station to document their observations and findings on a standardized checklist that is based on the provisions of the Elections Act, 2017, the Elections Rules, 2017 and instructional handbooks that the ECP has provided to election officials. This preliminary report is based on the observation findings from 122 (36%) of 338 polling stations established for the by-election in NA-154.

FAFEN recorded suspicious voting patterns at 21 polling booths in 19 polling stations. In these polling booths, the reported votes were higher than 45 per hour at the time the turnout data was documented. In following the voting procedure as prescribed by the law, polling staff can process a maximum of 45 votes at one polling booth in one hour. The highest average voting rate was recorded at 93 votes per hour at a polling booth in one polling station.

FAFEN observers reported that the number of copies of the Result of the Count (Form 45) was less than the number of candidates at two polling stations. Similarly, the number of

### CONSTITUENCY HIGHLIGHTS ...



#### REGISTERED VOTERS

There are 431,002 registered voters in the NA-154 Lodhran. Among them, 236,496 are men and 194,506 are women.

#### BY-ELECTION 2018

MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
236,496	194,506	431,002

#### GENERAL ELECTION 2013

MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
205,433	164,717	370,150

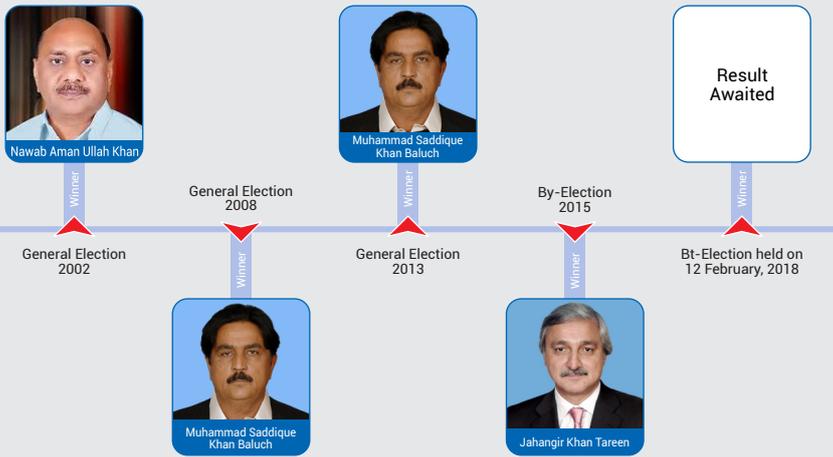
#### POLLING STATIONS (PS)

Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has set up 338 polling stations – 49 male, 49 female and 240 combined for the by-election. Overall, 1,043 polling booths – 566 male and 477 female – were established.

MALE PS	FEMALE PS	COMBINED PS
49	49	240
<b>1,043</b> POLLING BOOTHS		

copies of the Ballot Paper Account (Form 46) did not match the number of candidates at five polling stations. The ballot papers issued by the Returning Officer were less in number than the total registered voters at 79 polling stations. Moreover, four Presiding Officers reported that they did not receive the packets to be used for sealing election materials at the close of the poll.

### TIMELINE OF ELECTIONS



FAFEN observers reported that the Polling Officers were not calling out the names of voters loudly during the voter identification process at 74 of 240 polling booths observed during the day. Not calling out the names of voters creates difficulties for polling agents to challenge the identity of the voters. Moreover, polling staff did not cross out the names of identified voters from the electoral roll at three polling booths where polling agents were also unable to effectively monitor the voting process.

FAFEN observers reported from 28 polling stations that the workers of several political parties had set up camps within 400 meters of the polling stations in violation of the electoral rules. Voters were seen carrying vote vouchers (parchis) with visible symbols of the contesting parties or candidates inside 16 polling booths. Similarly, in nine instances, election officials did not remove campaign materials inside and outside polling

## CONSTITUENCY HIGHLIGHTS ...

### MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES

As many as 10 candidates – 3 representing political parties including PTI, PML-N, and PPPP and 7 independent candidate contested the by-poll.



### TOTAL CONTESTING CANDIDATES

MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
10	0	10

### ELECTION HISTORY

The seat fall vacant due to disqualification of Mr. Jahangir Khan Tareen (PTI).

#### GENERAL ELECTION 2013

VALID VOTES	REJECTED VOTES	VOTER TURNOUT
236,523	9,904	63.9%

#### GENERAL ELECTION 2008

VALID VOTES	REJECTED VOTES	VOTER TURNOUT
172,769	3,783	66.3%

#### GENERAL ELECTION 2002

VALID VOTES	REJECTED VOTES	VOTER TURNOUT
176,802	3,687	54.3%

### MARGIN OF VICTORY

2002	2008	2013
17,712	2,372	10,222

### ELECTION OBSERVERS TRAINED

MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
31	19	50



stations as required by the law. Moreover, party or candidate supporters were observed providing transport to voters outside 46 polling stations.

According to FAFEN estimates, the overall turnout of voters in this by-election is expected to be approximately 45.4 percent – 47.4 percent for men and 42.7 percent for women. The observers reported increasing number of voters turning out to cast their vote in the afternoon. However, amidst the strict security, only a couple of voters were being allowed to enter a polling station at a time while the rest were made to wait in queues outside the polling stations. The observers reported the congested arrangement of polling stations at a number of places. As many as three polling stations comprising 11 polling booths were set up in a primary school building at Basti Risala with a total of 4,178 voters assigned.

The ECP did not use the Biometric Verification Machines (BVMs) or Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) at any of the polling station in the constituency.

Some of FAFEN's key findings include:

### **1. Voter Turnout**

A total of 431,002 voters – 236,496 men and 194,506 women – are registered on electoral rolls in NA-154. According to FAFEN estimates, the overall turnout of voters in this by-election is expected to be approximately 45.4 percent – 47.4 percent for men and 42.7 percent for women. There has been more than 50 percent turnout during last four elections in the constituency. During the by-election 2015, NA-154 registered a turnout of 59.81%, while in the general elections 2002, 2008 and 2013, the turnout was recorded at 63.90 percent, 66.32% and 54.32%, respectively. The following graph illustrates the estimated turnout in the NA-154 by-election by gender.

### **2. Opening of Polling Stations and Availability of Critical Materials**

FAFEN observed the opening processes at 36 polling stations. The election staff was present by 8:00 am at all of these polling stations. The critical election materials i.e. ballot books, secrecy screens, electoral rolls, ballot boxes, indelible ink and necessary stationary were available by the official start time of polling at these polling stations.

However, FAFEN observers reported that the number of the copies of the Result of the Count (Form 45) was

less than the number of candidates at two polling stations. Similarly, the number of copies of the Ballot Paper Account (Form 46) did not match the number of candidates at five polling stations. The ballot papers issued by the Returning Officer did not match the total number of voters registered at 79 polling stations. Moreover, four Presiding Officers reported that they did not receive the packets to be used for sealing the election materials at the close of the poll. The female polling staff was also found missing from the women polling booths at two out of 115 women polling booths observed in the constituency.

### **3. Restrictions on Independent Observation**

FAFEN observers were stopped from observing the voting processes at seven polling stations and from observing the counting processes at five polling stations by the security officials. The ECP allows its accredited observers to monitor all stages of the election, including the opening of polling stations, voting and the counting process. However, FAFEN observers reported that the election officials under close supervision of the security forces were hesitant to allow the accredited citizen observers to enter the polling stations and carry out the observation.

### **4. Voter Identification and Ballot Processing and Voting Pattern**

FAFEN observed that the Polling Officers were not calling out the names of voters loudly during the voter's identification process at 74 out of 240 polling booths observed during the day. This practice creates difficulties for the polling agents to challenge the voters. Moreover, the observers witnessed the polling staff not crossing out the name of the identified voters on the electoral rolls at three polling booths. FAFEN observers did not report any irregularities in the ballot processing throughout the polling day. The Assistant Presiding Officers (APOs) were observed filling in the particulars of voters on counterfoils and signing and stamping the counterfoils and the back of the ballot papers according to the ECP guidelines.

However, suspicious voting patterns were recorded at 21 polling booths in as many polling stations. In these polling booths, the reported votes were higher than 45 per hour at the time the turnout data was documented. The highest voting rate was recorded as an average of 93 votes per hour at a polling booth in one polling station.

## 5. Breach of Voters' Secrecy

The observers reported a total of 26 instances of breach of voter's secrecy while casting their votes for the candidates of their choice. According to the observation reports, the voters, other than disabled or elderly, were accompanied by irrelevant persons behind the secrecy screens at 12 polling booths. The election officials and polling agents were witnessed stamping the ballot papers on behalf of the voters at nine and five polling booths, respectively.

## 6. Unauthorized Presence Inside and Outside Polling Stations

The observers did not report any instance of unauthorized presence of local influential or public office holders in the polling stations. The male presence at female polling booths was reported at two polling booths. Armed civilians were observed to have been present in the party camps around six polling stations.

## 7. Campaigning and Canvassing around Polling Stations

FAFEN observers reported from 28 polling stations that the workers of several political parties had set up camps within 400 meters of the polling stations. The electoral rules bar canvassing and campaigning inside 400 meters of any polling stations. The voters were seen carrying vote vouchers with visible symbols of the contesting parties or candidates inside 16 polling booths. Similarly, at six polling stations observed, election officials did not remove campaign materials as required by election laws. Moreover, the supporters of the candidates were observed providing transport to

the voters outside 46 polling stations. The observers noted the presence of campaign materials inside three polling stations.

## 8. Facilitation to Disabled Voters

FAFEN also observed the facilitation provided to voters with disabilities. The ECP provided ramps to make the polling stations accessible for voters on wheelchairs at 57 out of 122 polling stations observed.

## 10. Polling Stations Security and Violence

FAFEN observers did not witness any incident of violence inside or around polling stations throughout the polling day. The observers reported heavy presence of the law enforcement agencies outside and inside the polling stations. The armed security personnel were seen present inside 120 polling stations. The ECP has authorized the security officials to stay inside the polling stations and polling booths. Under the usual circumstances, the electoral rules allow security personnel to maintain order only outside polling stations in order to ensure smooth polling and they can only enter polling stations or booths when requested by the Presiding Officer. At 13 polling stations, the security personnel denied having received the election security training before the polling day.

The ECP had declared six polling stations as highly sensitive and 42 as sensitive. The authorities had been directed to install the security cameras as well inside these polling stations. Moreover, the ECP had sought help from the Pakistan Army to ensure the polling day security. The Army personnel were deployed inside and outside polling stations on election-day.

## Estimated Turnout by Gender

