

**FREE AND FAIR ELECTION NETWORK**

**Observation and Analysis of PP-196 By-Election**

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| **Heavy Police Presence, Restriction on Observation Mark PP-196 By-Election** |

**Islamabad, May 21, 2015:** Heavy presence of police inside polling stations and restrictions on citizens’ observation marked the by-election held in PP-196 (Multan-III) on Thursday, says Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) in its preliminary report.

The seat was vacated by Abdul Waheed Chaudhry of the ruling PML-N, who was disqualified by an election tribunal for possessing two Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs). Chaudhry had secured the seat with 40% of the polled votes in the 2013 General Elections, defeating the PTI candidate with a margin of 5%.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) set up 133 polling stations (67 male and 66 female) for a total of 176,315 registered voters – 96,121 male and 80,194 female. The 133 polling stations had 202 male and 178 female polling booths.

FAFEN deployed a total of 33 trained, non-partisan observers to observe the election process at all the polling stations in the constituency. The observers spent between 45 and 60 minutes in each polling station to observe the election process and document their findings on a standardized checklist based on the provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1976, Conduct of Elections Rules 1977 and instructional handbooks provided to the election officials by the ECP.

FAFEN observers were stopped from observing the voting and counting processes at multiple polling stations by their respective presiding officers. 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, most of the presiding officers (both male and female) refused to share any information on polled votes, tendered votes, rejected votes and in some cases, even their names and designations with the observers.

According to FAFEN’s initial observation, police officials were present inside 83 polling stations from where the observers reported their findings till mid-day. Similarly, officials of the Frontier Constabulary were also present inside seven polling stations. Under electoral rules, even at sensitive polling stations, police is only authorized to maintain order outside the polling stations in order to ensure smooth voting process. They can only enter polling stations or booths when requested by the presiding officer.

FAFEN observers also reported from 46 polling stations that the workers of contesting candidates were campaigning and canvassing in violation of election laws that bar the same within 400 yards of polling stations. The observers also reported the presence of armed civilians at five such party camps, while other unauthorized persons such as voters who had already casted their votes were seen present inside 23 polling stations. Such display of arms inhibits voters from turning out to vote as well as compel them to vote under pressure.

**Recommendations**

1. Security officials should not be deputed inside polling stations and should be instructed to allow local as well as international election observers to carry out their observation to ensure a transparent voting process.
2. The ECP should ensure all campaign materials and party camps are removed from inside the polling stations.