

**FREE AND FAIR ELECTION NETWORK**

**Observation and Analysis of PP-16 By-Election**

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| **PP-16 By-Election: Peaceful but Marred by Irregularities** |

**Islamabad, October 6, 2015:** Heavy presence of Police, Rangers and Army personnel both inside and outside the polling stations ensured by-election that was largely peaceful but not without its share of irregularities, says Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) in its preliminary report.

The seat fell vacant following the assassination of PML-N MPA and Punjab’s Interior Minister, Mr. Shuja Khanzada, in a suicide attack on his political office in August. In the 2013 general elections, Shuja Khanzada had won securing 38,791 votes while an independent candidate, Raza Khan, remained the runner up, bagging 25,931 votes.

The number of registered voters increased 8.8% from 189,894 (105,748 male and 114,027 female) in 2013 to 206,669 (114,027 male and 92,642 female) in today’s by-election however, the number of polling stations established by ECP remained 137 like it was in the General Election 2013.

FAFEN deployed a total of 33 trained, non-partisan observers to observe the election process. The observers spent between 45 to 60 minutes at each polling station and documented 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. This report is based on the observation from 117 polling stations (45 male, 36 female and 36 combined).

The election staff was largely cooperative as there was no such incident of barring FAFEN’s observer from observation of the election process.

According to FAFEN’s initial observation, police officials were reported to be present inside 87 polling stations; army personnel were present inside 102 whereas Rangers were seen to be present inside 85 polling stations. Under electoral rules, even at sensitive polling stations, police or other security personnel are only authorized to maintain order outside the polling stations to ensure smooth voting process. They can only enter polling stations or booths when requested by the presiding officer. However, according to media reports, ECP had made an exception this time and allowed presence of security forces both inside and outside the polling stations until the counting and result consolidation was not concluded[[1]](#footnote-1).

Two incidences of violence were reported from two combined polling stations (PS-66 and 77).

FAFEN observers also reported from 20 polling stations that the workers of contesting candidates had established their camps 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 one such party camp. Such display of arms inhibits voters from turning out to vote as well as compels them to vote under pressure.

Presence of armed civilians was also witnessed inside one female (PS-44) and one combined polling station (PS-48). Unauthorized persons wearing party badges or symbols were observed to be present inside four polling stations. Similarly, there were five polling stations where voters who had exercised their right to vote were still lingering inside the polling station. Candidates were seen with their guards at two polling stations while political leaders were present with their guards at another two polling stations.

FAFEN observers also reported 12 instances where the election staff had filled the counterfoils in the ballot books with voter information in advance. At another two polling stations, polling staff was seen issuing ballot without filling the counterfoil with the required voter information.

At three polling stations, persons including candidates’ workers were seen persuading voters to vote for a particular candidate or party while political party leaders and their workers persuaded voters at another three polling stations.

**Recommendations**

1. The ECP should ensure that all unauthorized personnel, campaign materials and party camps are removed from inside and around the polling stations.
2. Polling staff should be sensitized regarding processes such as filling counterfoil, which are vital to deciding quality and fairness of elections. Failure to comply with ECP rules by the election staff should result in legal action.
1. Information retrieved from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1210355> on October 6, 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)