

Women in Elections: Observation and Assessment of Nomination & Candidacies

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**TRUST FOR DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION
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1. Introduction

With only four women candidates out of 327, the 2020 Gilgit-Baltistan Elections reinforce the need for a serious rethink by all relevant stakeholders interested in a more gender-representative electoral system. It is pertinent to note that while the number of women candidates was the same in the 2015 elections, the number of men candidates has increased by 28 percent. As many as 323 male candidates will contest the 23 constituencies where 252 male candidates contested in 2015.

This update covers observation of the nomination and scrutiny process and the candidacy dynamics from a gender-specific lens. The significance of the monitoring and the findings shared here rests in the argument for an inclusive democratic system that guarantees equal opportunity to all citizens to contest elections. Women, constituting half of the population, have remained significantly under-represented in the GB region. Observation of the nomination process and the final candidates' list aims to highlight the issue.

Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) is conducting an assessment of the implementation of electoral laws, rules, and regulations as part of its multi-phase observation of elections for the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly (GBA).

The legislative assembly has 24 general seats and nine reserved seats (six for women and three for technocrats). Since the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order, 2009, the first general elections took place in November 2009 and the second in June 2015. The Election Commission of Gilgit-Baltistan will hold the third GB Assembly elections on **November 15, 2020**, under the Elections Act, 2017.

This update covers the direct observation by FAFEN's 24 long-term observers (LTOs) deployed in each constituency to monitor the pre-election phase, including the scrutiny of the nomination papers at returning officers (ROs) offices.

The purpose of this observation is to contribute to the evolution of an election process that is free, fair, inclusive, and transparent and under the requirements laid out in the Elections Act, 2017.

2. Nomination and Scrutiny Process Observation

A total of 547 candidates submitted nomination papers between September 25-30, 2020, for the upcoming general elections, and 327 candidates appeared on the final list to contest 23 of the 24 constituencies. The death of a candidate led to the postponement of elections in GBA-3 Gilgit III. The observers found the returning officers (ROs) generally adhering to the due process while scrutinizing the candidates' nomination papers per the legal and regulatory requirements. The monitors reported that the women candidates did not face social, political, and administrative barriers during the process.

The Returning Officer while scrutinizing nomination paper of a candidate, shall not ask any question which has no nexus with the information supplied in the nomination paper.

Section 62(7) A of Election Act, 2017

Of the 547 total candidates filing nominations, only eight were women. FAFEN's long-term observers monitored the nomination and scrutiny of 331 candidates; of these, five were women.

The scrutiny observation recorded the acceptance of nomination papers of 95 percent (313 out of 331) candidates. The officers rejected the remaining five percent (18) nomination applications on technical grounds. The observers also witnessed compliance by almost all ROs regarding displaying scrutiny schedules at their offices except for three constituencies, i.e., GBA-4 Nagar-I, GBA-9 Skardu-III, and GBA-15 Diamir-I. Similarly, as per Section (64)1 of the Election Act, 2017, all ROs except one displayed the list of validly nominated candidates (Form 31) from September 30 to October 5, 2020, the observers reported. GBA-4 Nagar-I was the only constituency not meeting the requirements. Objections raised by ROs

The Returning Officer shall, after the scrutiny of nomination papers, prepare and display in the prescribed manner a list of validly nominated candidates.

Section 64(1) of the Election Act, 2017

In most nominations (214 out of 331), ROs carried out an inquiry for the scrutiny of nomination papers. During the 24 constituencies' scrutiny process, 295 candidates (three out of five women) were present.

In a majority (88 percent or 292 out of 331) of the observed cases, ROs did not object to candidates' nomination papers. However, in 39 observed cases, ROs questioned the authenticity of the information provided on nomination papers. Of these, the officers directed one question at a woman candidate. The reason cited for the objection was the proposer's employment in a government department.

Any voter of a constituency may propose or second the name of any qualified person to be a candidate for Member for that constituency: Provided that no voter shall subscribe to more than one nomination papers either as proposer or seconder.

Section 60 (1) of the Election Act, 2017

2.1. Question's relevance to the candidacy process

The observers noted the officers were asking a few candidates questions that appeared to contradict Section 62(7) A of the Elections Act. According to the observers, 11 of the 331 candidates (all men) were asked questions not related to their nomination papers. However, the officers did not ask the women candidates such questions.

Among the unrelated questions, some pertained to religion, while one was about a candidate's disinclination to back a specific political party. The nomination and scrutiny otherwise remained within the legally prescribed framework.

3. Candidates' Gender: Political Affiliation and Constituency

With four women candidates, the final candidates' list of the 2020 GB Elections has a similar number of women compared to the 2015 elections. However, women candidacy decreased by one constituency as one of the women candidates in the 2015 elections contested from two constituencies, whereas the four candidates for the 2020 elections are contesting from one constituency each.

Only eight women filed nomination papers, of which four withdrew their candidacy. The remaining four women candidates appearing on Form 33 (list of contesting candidates) are contesting from GBA-6 Hunza, GBA-18 Diamir-IV, GBA-20 Ghizer-II, and GBA-23 Ghanche-II.

3.1 Candidates: Gender & Party Affiliation

Only one woman filed nomination papers as an independent candidate, while the remaining three have affiliation with political parties. Section 206 of the Elections Act, 2017, requires parties to award five percent of their tickets for general seats to women. The legal requirements' mandatory nature translates into at least one woman ticket-holder if a party grants 20 tickets.

A political party shall make the selection of candidates for elective offices, including membership of the Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament) and Provincial Assemblies, through a transparent and democratic procedure and while making the selection of candidates on general seats shall ensure at least five per cent representation of women candidates.

Section 206 of the Election Act, 2017

Political Party	Men	Women	Total
Pakistan People's Party	22	1	23
Pakistan Muslim League (N)	21		21
Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf	20	1	21
Pakistan Muslim League	15		15
Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Pakistan	11	1	12
Islami Tehreek Pakistan	8		8
Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan	4		4
All Pakistan Muslim League	3		3
GB Qomi Movement	3		3
Jamat-e-Islami Pakistan	3		3
Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen Pakistan	3		3
Pak Sarzameen Party	3		3
Pakistan Rah-e-Haq Party	3		3
Barabri Party Pakistan	2		2
Pakistan Awami League	2		2
Awami Workers Party	1		1
Independent	199	1	200
Total	323	4	327

As reflected in the table above, only three parties have fielded a sufficient number of candidates where the legal provision for awarding at least one ticket takes effect. Of these three parties, PPP and PTI, meet the minimum requirements and have fielded at least one female candidate. However, PML-N has not complied with the legal requirements by not fielding even one woman candidate among its cohort of 21 candidates. It is worth noting that Forms 31, 32, and 33 do not contain any information about the gender of the candidates. The conclusion that PML-N has no female candidate was made primarily relying on the names and confirmations from the field teams. The observation may be subject to correction in case of a gap or mistake in the information collected.

While the leading parties barely meet the legal requirement, it is interesting to note that JUI-P, while not obligated by law to field at least one woman candidate, has awarded a ticket to one female out of its 12 candidates.

3.2. Women Candidates: 2015 vs. 2020

As in the 2015 elections, four women candidates are contesting the 2020 elections. This summary reading of the number of women candidates in the 2020 elections, compared to the 2015 elections, needs to be seen alongside other figures to realize the decline in women's participation in polls as candidates.

Table 2. Candidates by Gender and Constituency: 2015 vs. 2020

Constituency	GBA Election 2015			GBA Election 2020		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
GBA-1 Gilgit-I	23		23	25		25
GBA-2 Gilgit-II	18	1	19	26		26
GBA-3 Gilgit-III*	11		11	Elections Postponed		
GBA-4 Nagar-I	8		8	18		18
GBA-5 Nagar-II	20		20	26		26
GBA-6 Hunza	11		11	14	1	15
GBA-7 Skardu-I	7	1	8	6		6
GBA-8 Skardu-II	6		6	9		9
GBA-9 Skardu-III	6		6	4		4
GBA-10 Skardu-IV	9		9	11		11
GBA-11 Kharmang**	8		8	10		10
GBA-12 Shiger***	4		4	4		4
GBA-13 Astore-I	11		11	12		12
GBA-14 Astore-II	33		33	22		22
GBA-15 Diamir-I	8		8	17		17
GBA-16 Diamir-II	13		13	13		13
GBA-17 Diamir-III	10		10	11		11
GBA-18 Diamir-IV	7		7	8	1	9
GBA-19 Ghizer-I	9		9	13		13
GBA-20 Ghizer-II	17		17	25	1	26
GBA-21 Ghizer-III	15		15	20		20
GBA-22 Ghanche-I	1	1****	2	10		10
GBA-23 Ghanche-II	5	2****	7	14	1	15
GBA-24 Ghanche-III	3		3	5		5
Total	263 (252 in 23 constituencies)	5	268 (256 in 23 constituencies)	323	4	327

*Elections in GBA-3 Gilgit III were postponed after a candidate passed away

**GBA-11 Khanmang was GBLA 11-Skardu V in 2015 Elections

***GBA12-Shigar was GBLA 12-Sakardu VI in 2015 Elections

**** One woman candidate contesting from these constituencies

For the 23 constituencies that can be compared for this analysis, the overall number of candidacies has increased from 256 to 327. It reflects an increase of 71 candidacies compared to the 2015 elections. The distribution according to gender, however, shows a net decrease of one woman's candidacy. It also shows an additional 72 male candidacies compared to 2015. To conclude, while women's candidacy has decreased, the trend of increasing candidacies among men presents a 28 percent increase. This remarkable and disproportionate rise highlights women's dismal participation in the election as candidates.

To underscore women under-representation as candidates, it is worth considering that the combined number of all women candidates falls short of the average number of candidates contesting a single constituency (there are four women candidates while the average number of candidates per constituency is at 14). Furthermore, there is not a single constituency where two or more women are contesting elections. The general trend, predominantly determined by men candidates, paints a diametrically different picture. Only two constituencies have four candidates—the least among the constituencies. Categorized by the number of candidates, six constituencies have 5-10 candidates; seven have 11-15 candidates; three have 16-20 candidates while the remaining five have over 20 candidates. These figures express the gravity and urgency for measures to alleviate women's participation in elections as candidates cannot be overstated.

Another concern from the perspective of women's participation in elections relates to the lack of consistency among women candidates from the 2015 to 2020 elections.

Table 3. Women Candidates of GBA Election 2015

Constituency	Candidate Name	Party	Party Name
GBLA-2 Gilgit-II	Parveen Ghazi	IND	Independent
GBLA-7 Skardu-I	Fatima Syeda	IND	Independent
GBLA-22 Ghanche-I	Amina Bibi Ansari	PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf
GBLA-23 Ghanche-II	Amina Bibi Ansari	PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf
GBLA-23 Ghanche-II	Shereen Fatima	PPP	Pakistan People's Party

Barring Amina Bibi Ansari of PTI, the three candidates who contested the elections in 2015 are not contesting the 2020 polls. There could be several reasons for this, but the implications are clear. Being a one-time candidate, the position of those women candidates within their constituency and the broader political context would take a significant hit as absence from electoral politics has diminished the political capital of individual candidates and parties alike.

Table 4. Women Candidates of GBA Election 2020

Constituency	Candidate Name	Party	Party Name
GBA-6 Hunza	Mehnaz Wali	JUIP	Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Pakistan
GBA-18 Diamir-IV	Sadia Danish	PPP	Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarian
GBA-20 Ghizer-II	Shehnaz Bhutto	IND	Independent
GBA-23 Ghanche-II	Amina Bibi Ansari	PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

As mentioned earlier, among the women contestants for the 2020 elections, only one candidate (PTI's Amina Bibi Ansari) contested the 2015 elections. The other three are first-time contestants.

4. Key Observation Points

The chronic issue of women under-representation remains an ever-increasing concern that mars the inclusive and participatory credentials of elections and, by extension, the democratic setup. The participation of women as candidates is an even more serious concern. The shrinking share of women candidates reflects a political culture and system with little regard for establishing a balance among the two genders.

The issue of gender-parity and equitable representation of women will require a serious rethinking by the political parties and other key-stakeholders with direct bearing on the matter in the short and long run. In the short-term, a concerted effort to highlight the gender imbalance severity needs to be reinforced with a move towards:

- a. Legally or by mutual commitment, adjusting a more significant number of candidates among the major political parties, especially in Gilgit-Baltistan where the smaller number of constituencies renders the legal provision of 5 percent representation of women among party ticket holders largely ineffective and redundant.
- b. A gradual push to bring the reserve seats within the ambit and framework of direct elections. The measure will establish women's pathway to contest elections, develop their mantle as leaders, and cobble together their respective constituencies among the broader electorate. The action will also push the political parties to focus on identifying, developing, and preparing women leaders to contest these elections.