



OBSERVATION REPORT

NA-249 Karachi West-II

Low Voter Turnout Marks NA-249 By-Election

ISLAMABAD, May 1, 2021: The NA-249 Karachi West-II by-election on April 29 saw a substantial decline in voter turnout, mainly due to the hot weather and Ramzan. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) ensured strict compliance to the COVID-19 standard operating procedures. Despite a competitive campaign, the poll recorded a turnout of 21.6 percent of registered voters—dropping from 40 percent reported for the constituency during General Elections 2018.

Observers representing the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) asked voters how satisfied they were with the voting process. Voters outside 98 polling stations—18 men's, 17 women's, and 53 combined—expressed their satisfaction. In contrast, voters outside the remaining polling stations said they were partially satisfied.

The observers found election material in enough quantities at all of the observed polling stations. Except for two incidents of unauthorized individuals going behind the secrecy screens at two polling stations, there were no other incidents that compromised voters' secrecy. Except for two cases, the observers did not see party workers persuading voters inside the polling stations.

On election day, FAFEN's trained citizen observers reported 143 violations, of which 55 related to the presence of party camps in the polling stations' surroundings. In 11 instances, the polling staff did not allow voters to cast votes and sent them back. At 19 polling stations, the observers saw the COVID-19 SOPs not implemented at all. The other 58 instances of violations pertained to procedural irregularities, mainly in voting and counting processes. On average, the observers reported 1.3 violations per polling station.

Twelve political parties fielded their candidates in the NA-249 by-election while 18 candidates contested independently. The winning candidate secured 22 percent (16,156) of the polled votes (73,471). The party analysis shows significant changes in the vote shares of different political parties.

Muhammad Faisal Vawda of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) won from this constituency during the General Elections 2018. He had secured 27 percent (35,349) of the total polled votes (131,190). Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) candidate Mian Shehbaz Sharif finished runner-up with 26 percent (34,626) of the polled votes.

Abdul Qadir Mandokhel of Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) won the April 29 by-election by securing 22 percent of the

CONSTITUENCY HIGHLIGHTS ...



NA-249 Karachi West-II

REGISTERED VOTERS

There are 339,591 registered voters in the NA-249 Karachi West-II including 201,656 male voters and 137,935 female voters.

GENERAL ELECTION 2018

MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
201,541	129,889	331,430

BY-ELECTION 2021

MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
201,656	137,935	339,591

CHANGE IN REGISTERED VOTERS

MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
0.1% ⁺	5.8% ⁺	2.4% ⁺

POLLING STATIONS (PS)

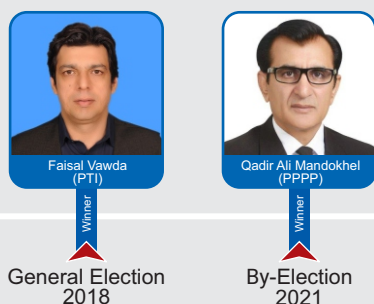
Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had set up 276 polling stations – 76 male, 61 female and 139 combined for the by-election. Overall, 796 polling booths – 458 male and 338 female – were established.

MALE PS	FEMALE PS	COMBINED PS
76	61	139
796 POLLING BOOTHS		

total polled votes. The party had secured only six percent (7,236) of polled votes during General Elections 2018. The NA-249 seat had fallen vacant due to the resignation of PTI MNA Muhammad Faisal Vawda, who became a senator in the election on March 3, 2021.

FAFEN deployed 28 nonpartisan and duly accredited observers—19 male and nine females—to observe the polling process at 112 polling stations (30 male, 20 female, and 62 combined). They reported that the polling process was generally well organized at the observed polling stations. Nearly 84 percent (94) of the monitored polling stations had polling booths in separate rooms. However, around 18 polling stations—five each male and female and eight combined—housed more than one booth in a single room. The polling agents of contesting candidates were present at all the observed polling stations. All were seated perfectly and could easily observe the process.

TIMELINE OF ELECTIONS



1. Campaigning and canvassing

The election code of conduct prohibits campaigning and canvassing in and around polling stations on election day. FAFEN observers noted the code's effective enforcement inside 95 percent (106) of the observed polling stations. They did not see any campaign material at these stations. However, they did report seeing camps of political parties or candidates in the vicinity of 55 of the 112 observed polling stations.

2. Conduct of Security Staff

ECP deployed Sindh Rangers at the polling stations due to the security issues in the constituency. The behavior of the security officials was generally supportive towards voters. However, at one polling station, the observer noted security personnel behaving rudely with voters. Only one incident of voters and polling staff exchanging harsh words occurred inside one polling station.

3. Enforcement of SOPs to Contain COVID-19

The observers reported that the security and election staff enforced SOPs to contain COVID-19 at 34 percent (38) polling stations. However, they witnessed weak enforcement at 49 percent (55) of the stations. Seventeen percent (19) of polling stations paid no heed to SOPs.

4. Voting Process

FAFEN's observation shows that 111 polling stations had properly placed secrecy screens at the polling booths. However, at only one polling station, the screens allowed the individuals present inside the booths to see the voters marking their ballot papers.

The polling agents had appropriate seats at all the observed polling booths of 112 polling stations and could see the polling firsthand. These

CONSTITUENCY HIGHLIGHTS

MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES

As many as 30 candidates including representatives of PTI, PPP, PML-N, MQM-P, PSP, PFP, PRHP, PP, PMA, PML-J, TLP, and ALI, and 18 independents contested the by-election.



TOTAL CONTESTING CANDIDATES

GENERAL ELECTION 2018		
MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
15	0	15
BY-ELECTION 2021		
MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
28	2	30

POLLING PERSONNEL

PRESIDING OFFICERS	276
ASSISTANT PRESIDING OFFICERS	796
POLLING OFFICERS	796

ELECTION HISTORY

REASON OF BY-ELECTION

The seat fell vacant after the resignation of PTI MNA Faisal Vawda from the District West-II constituency

GENERAL ELECTION 2018

VALID VOTES	INVALID VOTES	VOTER TURNOUT
128,506	2,684	40%

BY-ELECTION 2021

VALID VOTES	INVALID VOTES	VOTER TURNOUT
72,740	731	21.6%

ELECTION OBSERVERS TRAINED

MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
19	9	28

MARGIN OF VICTORY

GE 2018	By-election 2021
718	683

agents are candidates' representatives and can observe the polling and object to any irregularity defined by law. At two polling stations, the observers reported the assistant presiding officers (APOs) not signing the ballot papers' backside before issuing them to the voters.

The observers noted 11 incidents of polling staff disallowing voters to cast their votes and sending them back. Moreover, they reported two instances of unauthorized individuals accompanying voters behind the secrecy screens at two polling stations.

5. Counting Process

FAFEN observers were allowed to observe the counting process at 27 of the 28 polling stations. At one polling station, the polling or security staff did not let the observer witness the counting process. The observers reported that polling staff did not provide copies of Form-45 (Result of the Count) to polling agents at four out of 27 observed polling stations. Also, they did not paste copies of Form-45 outside seven of the observed polling stations. The staff refused to hand over a copy of Form-45 to observers at three polling stations.

6. Voter Registration and Turnout

The number of voters in the constituency has seen an increase of two percent (8,161) since General Elections 2018. As many as 115 male voters and 8,046 females increased in the electoral rolls between the 2018 polls and the by-election. Due to ECP's women registration campaign, women's voter registration in the constituency was much higher than men's voters.

Nearly 21.64 percent (73,471) of the registered voters exercised their right to vote on the polling day. The election turnout was almost half of what General Elections 2018 drew, around 40 percent, with 131,190 votes polled.

FAFEN received no reports of any bar on women voters on election day. There were queues of voters outside or inside 43 percent of the observed polling station buildings. The observers saw both male and female voters coming to cast their votes. The polling process seemed completely organized at 95 percent (106) of polling stations.

A party analysis suggests significant changes among the vote-share of three major political players in the constituency. PPPP share increased from six percent in General Elections 2018 to 22 percent in this by-election. However, the former winning party PTI saw its share decrease from 27 percent in 2018 to 12 percent (8,922). The vote share of PML-N also fell, down from 26 percent to 21 percent in the corresponding period.

7. Contesting Parties and Candidates

Thirty candidates, including 18 independents (16 men and two women), contested the by-election. Twelve political parties fielded their candidates for the by-election. The following parties contested: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Mutahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan, Pashtunkhwa Milli

Awami Party, Pasban Pakistan, Aam Log Ittehad, Pak Sarzameen Party, Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians, Pakistan Muslim League-Junejo, Pakistan Rah-e-Haq, Pakistan Falah, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan.

8. Setting Up of Polling Stations

ECP had set up 276 polling stations (76 for men, 62 for women, and 138 combined) for this by-election with 796 polling booths (458 for men and 338 for women) for 339,591 registered voters, averaging 1230 voters per polling station.

The Elections Act, 2017 highlights a limit of 1,200 voters for a polling station and 300 for a polling booth to ensure a smooth voting process. However, additional voters may be assigned in exceptional circumstances with the reasons recorded in writing.

Out of 276 polling stations, ECP declared 184 as highly sensitive (Category-A) and 92 as sensitive (Category-B) during by-poll in the constituency.

9. Independent Observation

Section 238 of the Elections Act, 2017 permits duly verified and accredited election observers to observe the proceedings, including the voting and counting process. FAFEN's trained, nonpartisan, and accredited observers were allowed to watch the polling process at 112 polling stations without any restrictions in compliance with legal provisions. Similarly, its observers were allowed to follow the counting process at 27 polling stations. However, they were barred from observing the counting process at one polling station.

FAFEN collected the findings of this by-election observation using a standardized, robust methodology. It is based on the Elections Act, 2017, Election Rules 2018, respective codes of conduct, and ECP handbooks for election officials. For this report, FAFEN analyzed the checklists received from 112 polling stations.

10. Brief History

The seat had fallen vacant following Muhammad Faisal Vawda's resignation. He was elected as a member of the senate in the senate election on March 3. As per law, the ECP publicly notified the registered voters of NA-249 Karachi West-II to elect their representative for the National Assembly on April 29. Due to the rise in coronavirus cases, Sindh's ruling party requested ECP to postpone the by-election. However, the ECP rejected the plea and ordered conducting the poll as scheduled.

11. The Extent of the Constituency

NA-249 Karachi West-II is an urban-dominated constituency. It consists of 18 census charges of Baldia sub-division and one census charge of sub-division of Mominabad of Karachi West district.