

# BASELINE ASSESMENT

## Strengthening Diversity and Democracy through Minority Engagement in Electoral and Political Processes

### Research Design

Farshad Iqbal

### Research Team (KP)

Jamshed Thomas  
Mahwish Ashraf  
Fakhr-e-Alam

### Data Analysis & Reporting

Farshad Iqbal  
Maheen Malik

### Research Team (Sindh)

Amna  
Nathi  
Muhammad Ali  
Humaira Sorath  
Ghulam Abbas Kasar



## Acknowledgements

SPARC would like to thank Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) for providing the necessary financial support which made this research study possible.

SPARC would like to acknowledge the cooperation from government and elected officials from Tando Allahyar (Sindh) and Peshawar (KP), who provided our research team with expert insight regarding various issues related to minority communities. SPARC is thankful to MS Sana Kanwal (Deputy Assistant Director of NADRA, Tando Allahyar, Sindh), Mr. Shah Jahan (S.P. Police, Tando Allahyar, Sindh), Mr. Sajjad Khattak (District Election Commissioner, Tando Allahyar, Sindh) and Mr. Ghulam Shabbir (Mukhtiyar, Tando Allahyar, Sindh), Mr. Sattar Bachani (MNA, Sindh), Imdad Pitaffi (MPA, Sindh), Mr. Zahid Nadeem (District Nazim, Peshawar, Town-1, KP), Mr. Azeem Ghauri (MPA, KP), Mr. Shoaib Khan (Assistant Director, Social Welfare Department, Peshawar, KP) and Mr. Mera Jan (Assistant Director, and Local Government Department, Peshawar, KP).

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## Acronyms

CNIC (Computerized National Identity Card)

FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas)

FGD (Focus Group Discussion)

KP (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)

Mukhtiarkar (Assistant Deputy District Officer (Revenue) Administration)

NADRA (National Database and Registration Authority)

NGO (Non- Governmental Organization)

PKR (Pakistani Rupee Rates)

SPARC (Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child)

UC (Union Council)

## Introduction

In Pakistan, minority communities vote bank has reached close to three million where Sindh and KP host a significant proportion of population<sup>1</sup>. Hindus are mostly concentrated in Sindh where their number comes to over 1.39 million. A total of 4,022 reside in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and 586 in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Christians form the second largest non-Muslim voters, totaling 1.32 million with 209,083 in Sindh and 26,814 in KP and 1,345 in FATA.

District Peshawar (KP) is home to a sizeable Christian population, which are ethnically Punjabis. Being the descendants of the camp-followers of British Army of the late 19th century; they are mainly employed in menial work who form about at 80% of the Christian community. Most Christians have been unable to improve their social and economic status. They remain unskilled, poorly educated, and economically are poorest of the poor<sup>2</sup> which adversely affects their participation in political processes whereas their inclusion is imperative to ensure a democratic State.

In addition to reserved seats for minorities in the national and provincial assemblies, the recent re-introduction of local government system has paved way for minorities and youth to come to the forefront and voice their rights. Following the 2015 local government elections under Articles 104 (A) and 219 (d) of the Constitution, 1,175 councilors, under the category of minorities and youth, were nominated in Sindh respectively. The process has for the first time brought members of minority religious communities into the local government arena as important stakeholders. Many of them are community leaders who interact with minority citizens in their neighborhoods, understand their problems, and are motivated to support and resolve their issues.

Given the overwhelming numbers, there remains a need to bring the minorities to the mainstream through active political participation since their human rights protective mechanisms are weak. These groups are politically, socially, and economically marginalized and subjected to discrimination, with limited legal recourse.

Although more recently, the Sindh government has introduced minority friendly laws, yet there remains a need to educate local minority population on their rights, who otherwise remain largely ignorant of it. This includes the Hindu Marriage Bill in Sindh and Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013 whereby a large number of minority population still weds off girls before the legal age of 18 years.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.dawn.com/news/1307120>, Minorities vote bank reaches close to 3m, January 8, 2017

<sup>2</sup><http://www.peshawardiocese.org/peshawardiocese.asp>

Over the course of many years, SPARC has identified some significant issues to be addressed to amplify the political voice of the minority communities. Firstly, the real problem lies at the policy level where the country's top leadership remains unreceptive to the problems of minority religious communities and has done little to provide them legal protection. Secondly, legal identity especially for the uneducated minority groups remains to be a challenge. Access to resources, social services and economic opportunities are all linked to proof of legal identity. A large percentage of Pakistan's population lacks the country's core legal identity document, the CNIC issued by National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA).

In some areas of Sindh with concentration of minorities, landlords exploit symbiotic relationship with the bureaucracy, police and courts to deprive their workers of their rights and attempt to sway their votes<sup>3</sup>.

The present state of affairs for the minority communities can only be rectified if the government and the communities at large work to create a more inclusive social and political environment in the country. As representatives of the people, political parties can play an important role in fostering such an inclusive and diversity respected environment. In addition to this, the elected representatives of minorities need to be galvanized to take lead in improving the quality of lives of the minorities and their children.

In order to assess the impact of the aforementioned a baseline assessment was carried out in Peshawar district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Tando Allahyar district of the Sindh province. The focus of the assessment was on electoral education of minorities, with special emphasis on the inclusiveness of women. Additionally, the study aimed to assess the social, political and economic constraints of minority communities in both districts and to assess their level and capability in participating in the election process.

This baseline assessment is a part of a program aimed at empowering minority citizens, young people and to devise a gender strategy for women to vote and participate in the upcoming elections; building the capacity of minority parliamentarians to better represent members of their communities and to support newly nominated youth and minority councilors in local government to address issues faced by minorities at the grassroots level.

SPARC aims to apply a focused approach towards minorities within the purview of human rights, as per CFLI guidelines and utilize its experience to strengthen democratic governance systems, support free and fair elections, mobilize women and minority councilors, sensitization on newly passed minority laws, engage political parties to protect human rights of minorities, and trainings of parliamentarians and elected local government representatives on religious freedoms. This would be further complemented by involvement of youth to actively engage in policy related interventions to safeguard the rights of women, minorities and youth in general.

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<sup>3</sup> Enhancing Household Livelihood through Women Economic Empowerment, Baseline Study, Tando Allah Yar, 2016, SPARC

## **Research Methodology**

### **Methodology**

The research was conducted using FGDs with people belonging to the minority communities of Tando Allahyar and Peshawar districts. The baseline assessment conducted in Tando Allahyar focused on the Hindu minority community of two Union Councils, whereas the targeted community for Peshawar included the Christian community of the district, mainly from the Kohati Gate area.

The data was collected using both qualitative and quantitative methods. There were five forms created with both quantitative and qualitative questions, these included forms for conducting FGDs with minority communities, with a separate template designed for males and females. This is because the FGDs were conducted separately from male and female groups in order to acquire information regarding the inclusiveness of women from minority communities without any bias. Furthermore, the cultural context of both targeted districts also required segregated conducting FGDs. This was also the reason behind the collection of data using FGDs (with sections containing both open ended and quantitative questions), instead of including a separate survey questionnaire.

The sample group included 407 people from KP including 187 males and 223 females, whereas Sindh included a sample size of 468 people including 218 males and 250 females.

In order to acquire the views of key informants, individual interviews were conducted with government officials, elected representatives and social activists.

### **Key Research Questions**

1. Are the minority communities in Tando Allahyar and Peshawar districts able to exercise their social and political rights with complete freedom?
2. Are women from the Hindu minority community from district Tando Allahyar and Christian minority community from district Peshawar able to freely exercise their social and political rights?
3. Are there any major gaps that are curtailing the ability of minority communities, especially women in in Tando Allahyar and Peshawar, districts from taking part in the political process?

The research questions were focused on various thematic areas such as; voting & participation in the political process, assessment of knowledge of minority specific laws, and constitutional rights, major problems faced by minority communities (discriminatory attitude, access to basic facilities, economic hurdles, etc), female inclusivity, as well as views of individuals from targeted communities, government officials, elected representatives, and social activists regarding the aforementioned.



### Target Area

The targeted area for the survey included; Jhando Mari Taluka (sub-district) and Chambar from Sindh, and Kohati Gate area from district Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

### Limitations

The research study was limited to a few Union Councils and not all UCs from each district. This might have excluded some strata with different views. Furthermore, since this research study is limited to merely two districts, the views and circumstances surrounding the targeted communities are not representative of the state of minority communities in the whole country. However, both targeted communities are from heterogeneous groups due to the difference in culture, language, and religious beliefs, making the research a useful snapshot into the state of two distinct minority groups in Pakistan and can help further investigate underlying constraints faced by minority communities in acquiring political inclusiveness and exercising their fundamental rights.

During the course of the research there were various social, political and economic constraints identified that have severally hindered the progress of the communities under discussion. However, many of these constraints are not necessarily a direct result of religious discrimination or societal bias, as many of these constraints can be directly tied to common issues such as bad governance, flawed poverty alleviation policies, the perpetual influence of elite segments of the society on political life and the generally low literacy rate in the country. To what extent are minority communities in the country affected by factors solely tied to their religious background and status in society requires a deeper study on a more massive scale.

The baseline assessment, however, provides enough information to build a strategy to propose interventions that can help uplift the social, political and economic status of the affected communities, which can be in future replicated across other minority communities in Pakistan affected by similar constraints. This is because certain factors identified in the study are proportionate to the typical constraints many politically disorganized minority communities face, resulting in exclusion from provincial and national level strategies that can cater for their specific needs.

## Peshawar (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa - KP)

### Background

Christians form the second largest non-Muslim voters in Pakistan, totaling around 1.32 million of the population with around 26,814 living in KP<sup>4</sup>. These groups have historically been politically, socially, and economically marginalized and subjected to discrimination, with limited legal recourse. The types of discrimination and violence faced by different minority communities, particularly Christians in the selected district in KP have in the past included; targeted/mob attacks, damage to worship areas, graveyards, kidnappings, discriminatory behavior towards their children in schools and a biased curriculum.

Other discreet forms of discrimination have included policy failures at the provincial level which have been deemed unresponsive to the problems of minorities, thus leaving them deprived of concrete and conclusive legal protection. Moreover, obtaining legal identity for uneducated minority groups remains a challenge particularly for the women in this cohort which further exacerbates issues of access to resources like social services, equal economic opportunities and participation in electoral processes.

In order to gain in depth insight into these claims SPARC conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), separately for males and for females with the Christian community of Kohati Gate in District Peshawar of KP. A total of 407 respondents formed part of the FGDs with 184 males and 223 females. The survey targeted a diverse socio-economic group with respondents ranging from the lower to lower-middle class of the society. Respondents from a diverse range of occupations were selected to make the observations representative of the problems endemic to the Christian minority in the province.

The demographic for the males included students, private sector and public sector employees, self-employed and retired individuals. The females interviewed belonged to a similar diversified group including housewives, students and women working in formal and non-formal sectors of the economy.

The average age of male respondents was 36.6 with the highest being 85 and lowest 17, while that of females was 36.7 with the highest being 70 and the lowest being 18. The age distribution was selected to get an accurate analysis from the demographic who has or would be participating in the electoral process in 2018.

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<sup>4</sup> Minorities' Vote-bank Reaches 3 million: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1307120>

## Focus Group Discussions

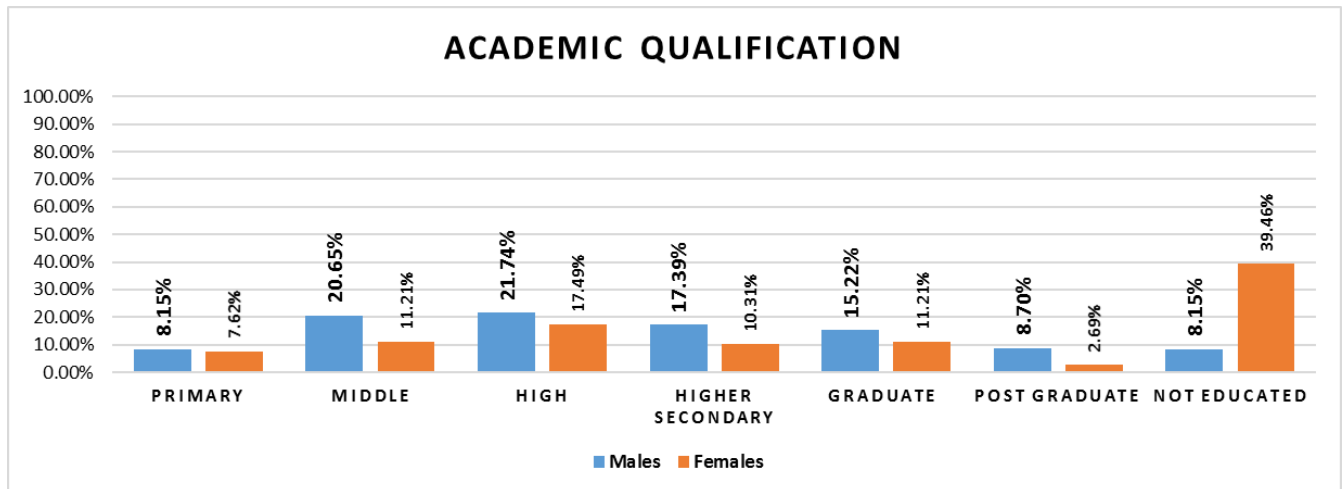
The FGDs conducted in the area helped identify some of the concerns and challenges the minority community faces in KP with respect to the reforms undertaken thus far, representation of the minority community and awareness of election policies and procedures.

## Employment & Educational Status

### Academic Qualification

A total of 91.85% males were found to be educated at least till the primary level while a considerably less proportion of 60.4% females was found to be educated till the same. Accordingly, the education attainment levels for males were higher than females for every category with significant gaps in all except primary education. The highest number of females were found to be in the “Not Educated” section while the lowest number of males is found in the same section. This highlights the general trend of insignificance associated with girls’ education and reaffirms its prevalence in the minority community as well. Similarly, it was observed that the difference between the percentage of male and female attained education increased towards higher levels of education indicating that fewer girls continue on for higher education vis-à-vis their male counterparts.

**Note:** The educational attainment levels of the respondents have been classified according to the following categories; Primary (Grades 1 to 5), Middle (Grades 6 to 8), High (Grades 9 to 10), Higher Secondary (Grades 11 to 12), University further divided into Graduate and Post Graduate levels. A separate category has been made for those not educated.

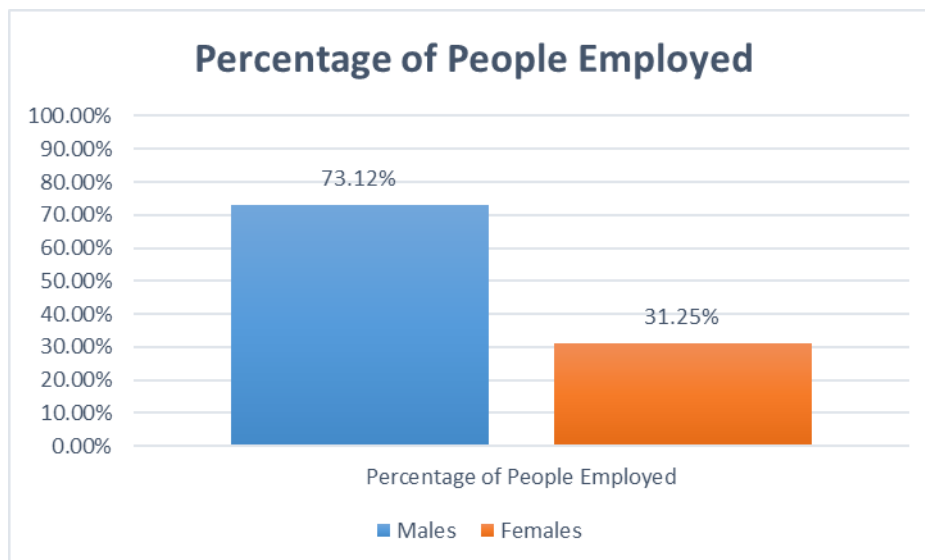


### Employment Status

During the survey it was seen that 73.12% of the males were employed with a significant proportion (48%) found to be involved in government service. 14% were involved in small-scale private enterprises or in self-employment, 5% were found to be local business owners while the

remaining 7% including professionals like teachers, social activists and political workers. 9% were found to be students and 10% were retired individuals and hence beyond the definition of employment in this context. Half of those unemployed had acquired education till High School level or above (i.e. had 10 years or more of education) while the other half was educated till the primary level (i.e. had 5 years or less of education).

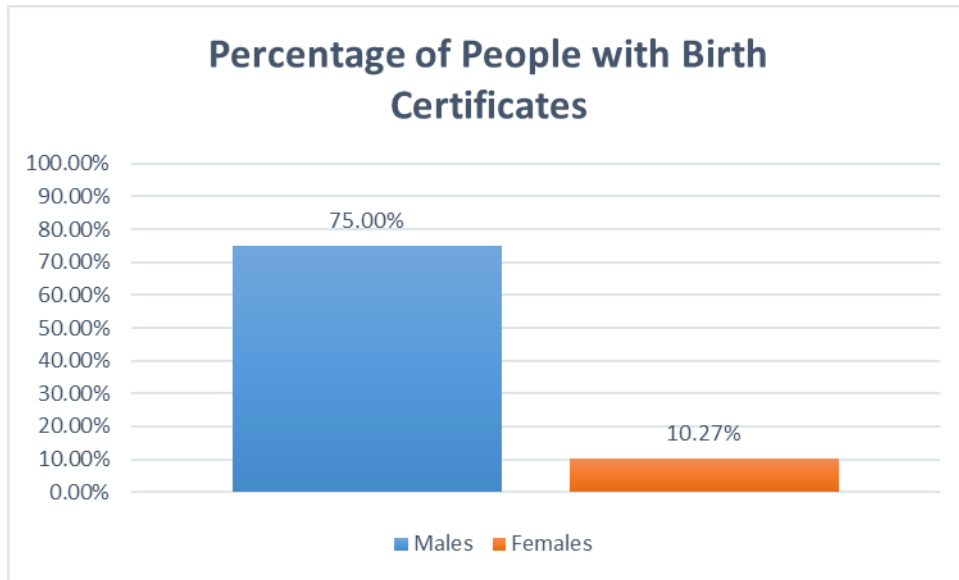
Among the females a lower rate of employment of 31.25% was found with 14% working as teachers, 3% working as nurses or midwives, 4% working as domestic labour (house-maids) and 9% working in miscellaneous jobs as tailors, saleswomen and beauticians. 4% of the respondents were students while 66% of the women interviewed were housewives. No specific levels of education were associated with the cohort of “housewives” since they ranged from those who were not educated to those having Graduate level education.



### Birth & Voter Registration Status

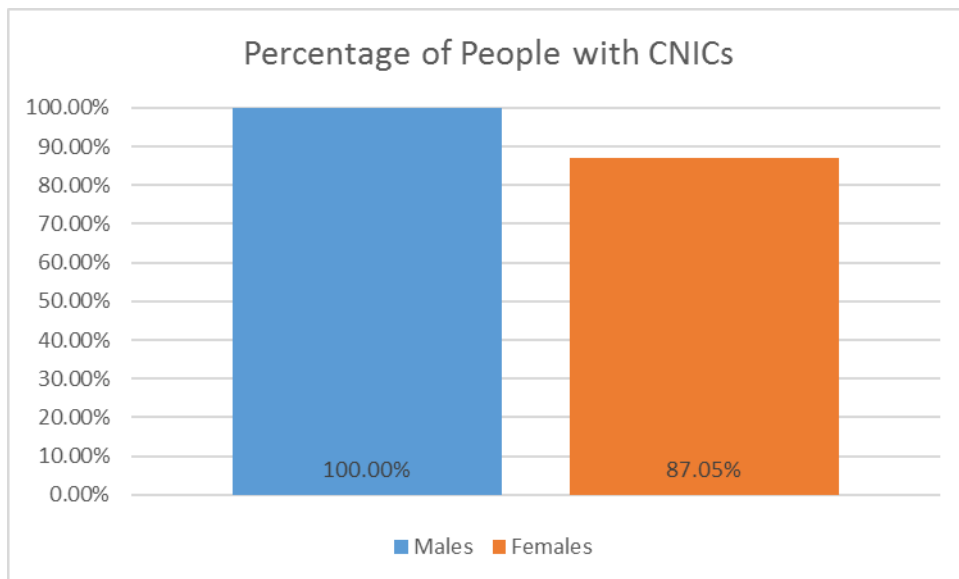
#### Birth Registration

Birth registration is the process by which a child is officially recognized and documented by the state. It is fundamental towards establishing his/her existence and legal identity without which certain freedoms and protections are likely to be removed from the individual. These problems can further be heightened if the child belongs to an ethnic or religious minority. It was found that 75% of the male participants had acquired birth certificates while only 10.27% of the females had their birth certificates. The data reflects a significant gender bias as customarily people attach little importance to girls’ registration but the deficient numbers for males also points to a lack of awareness about the necessity of registration and/or economic or social hurdles to procuring it.



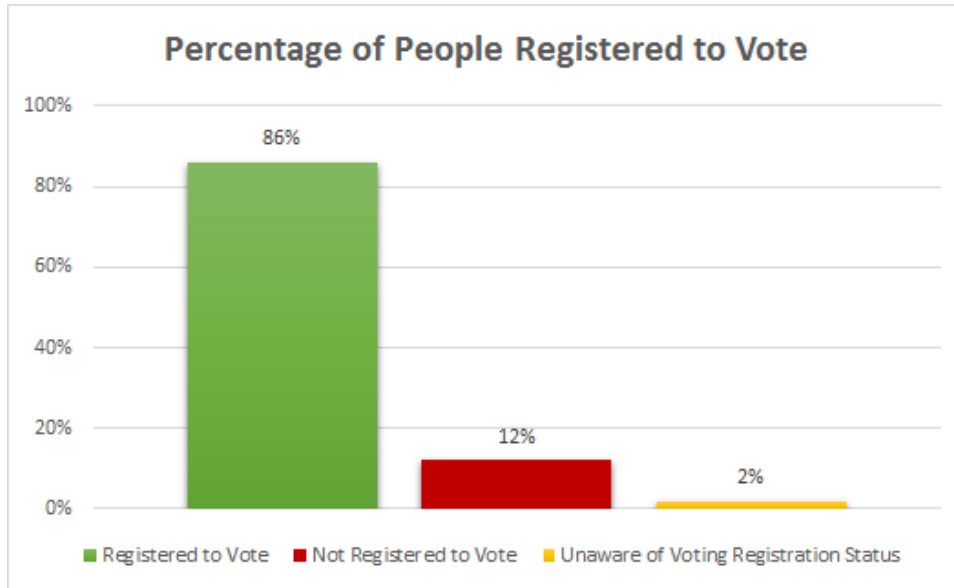
### Legal Identity Documentation

The percentage of people in possession of legal identity documents (Computerized National Identity Cards – CNICs) was promising with respect to males while around 13% of the women participants did not have their CNICs. This highlights one of the major hindrances to women participation in the electoral process as it prevents eligible women voters from registering for the electoral rolls.

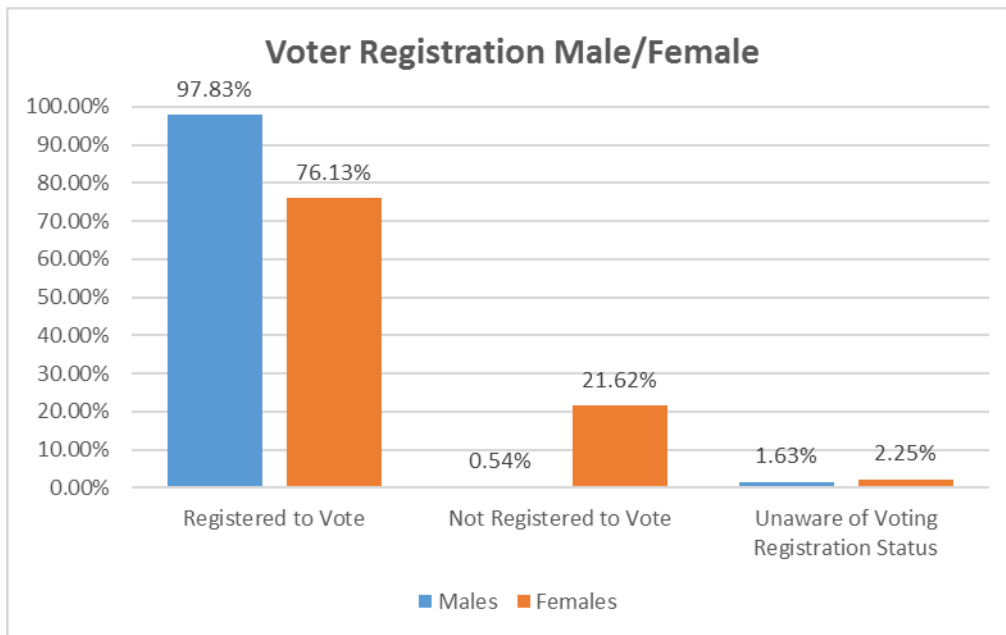


### Voter Registration

With regard to voter registration it was found that a sizeable majority of 86% from the Christian community was registered to vote.



Responses segmented on gender basis revealed that more men compared to women were registered as voters as 21.6% women were not registered to vote while 2.25% were unaware of their voting status. In comparison only 0.54% male respondents were not registered to vote while 1.63% were unaware of their voting status.



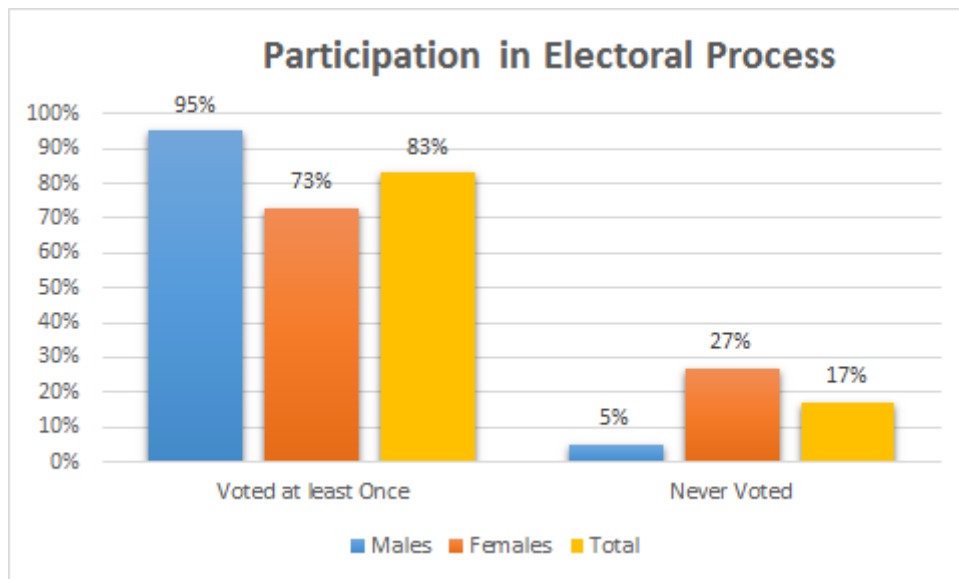
The data therefore suggests that the minority community does not have problems with access to legal documentation (CNICs) and voting registration since the males are aware of and able to access these. With regards to women a troubling trend of lack of CNICs and voter registration was presented. According to women’s responses there were no women participants who faced any restrictions from their families or male members of the household on getting CNICs or to

register for polls. So, the lack of women participation can be attributed to people's, in particular women's lack of interest and or unawareness about the necessity of voting for women's social and democratic inclusion.

### Voting & Participation in the Political Process

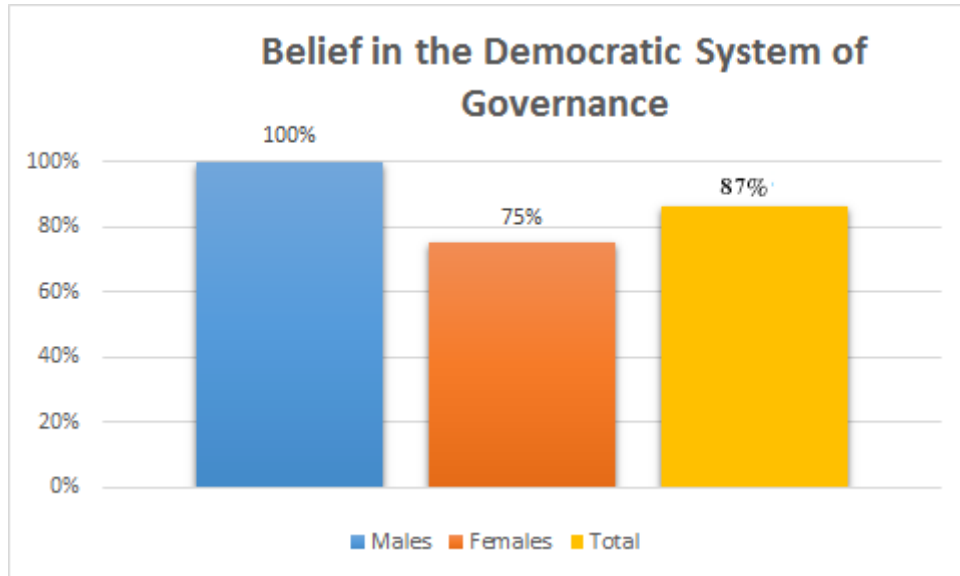
There was reportedly a high percentage of participation in electoral processes with 95% men and 73% women conveying they had voted at least once. A small proportion of men and a relatively larger proportion of women had never voted.

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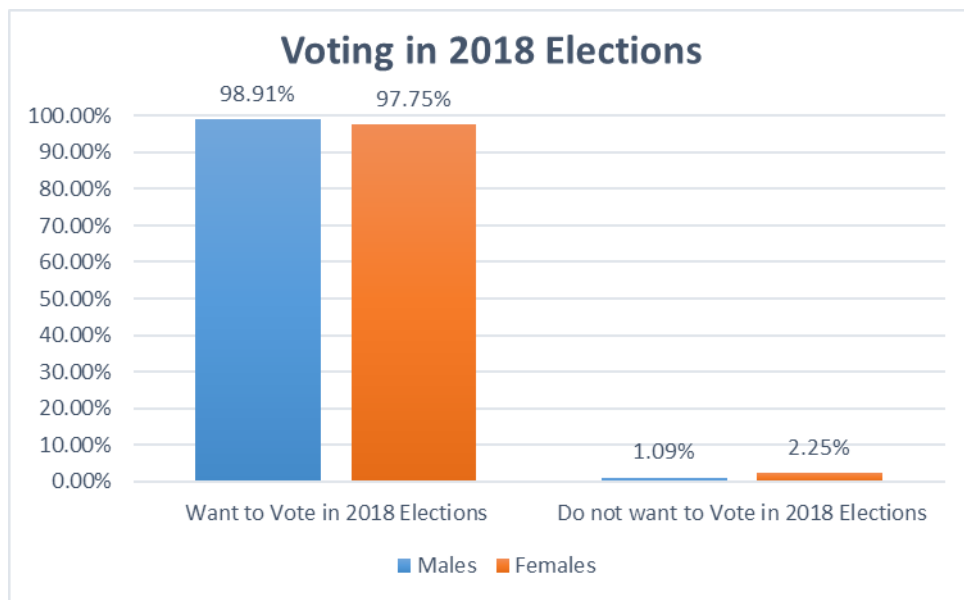


### Belief in the Democratic System

The indicators for this question revealed certain gaps between male and female responses with the men registering complete confidence in a democratic system of governance while 25% of the women said they did not believe in it. This belief did not coincide necessarily with the education levels or employment status of the females as uneducated and educated and working and non-working women both comprised this group. Their responses were generally associated with their perception that democratic selection of their representatives was not in fact representative.



There was a high degree of awareness regarding the upcoming elections of 2018 and the question regarding peoples’ choice to vote received overwhelmingly positive responses from both males and females.



### Participation in Electoral Processes

#### Government Responsiveness to Minority Issues

The respondents were of the view that past elections had not implemented minority specific reforms to improve conditions or status of minorities living in the area. However, they expressed optimism at the efficacy of some systems like the National Testing Service (NTS) which have since provided opportunities to young educated individuals and have eased their access to gainful employment on a merit basis. Likewise, the increase in job quotas from 3 to 5% was regarded as a positive move by the government. Similarly, they added that improvements to infrastructure



while not solely aimed at minority rights per se had made life easier. Strict policing particularly against illegal encroachments had also improved the quality of life and security. While these policies have not been aimed at improving the status of minorities, the focus on justice and equal access to rights had improved the status of minorities along with other communities existing in the area.

### **Lack of Awareness Regarding Minority Rights and Representation**

The respondents also highlighted some reasons why they felt effective and adequate representation of their issues and concerns was lacking. The foremost reason for this was a lack of coordination between the minorities' representative and his/her constituents. The people expressed disdain that their representatives from the minority community are not elected rather selected by the political parties on reserved seats which resulted in a lack of coordination and communication of their problems and their redress. They lamented that they *“did not even know the names of minority representatives in the provincial and national assemblies”*.

The participants also expressed their grievances by saying that the representatives tended to be political with little to no initiative for change for the rights of minorities. *“Most of them pay for the tickets to get the reserved seats. They come without visiting or planning to uplift their communities”*. With regard to the local representatives the respondents had a more positive view and said that the issue was one of insufficient funds from the town and district government which prevented them from addressing the concerns of the people.

This lack of ownership towards their representatives therefore resulted in a general unawareness and lack of interest in the electoral and voting process. The respondents were unaware of any laws or amendments to laws made in the province related to minority rights. There was general unawareness about the process through which minorities were allocated seats even among the educated individuals. Similarly, the respondents were unaware about the percentage of budget that is allocated annually to minorities in the province and at the district level. The participants also cited that their unawareness was due to a lack of awareness raising programs regarding their rights. The majority of the participants were not aware of political manifestos and what these documents entailed.

### **Minority Demands for Upcoming Elections 2018**

In spite of this the respondents registered an interest in the electoral process since 98% of them reported they would be voting in the upcoming elections of 2018. There were active responses to the questions of which political party to vote for, depending on the individual's perception of delivery on promises, while a significant majority remained undecided.

The protection and facilitation that the respondents unanimously demanded from all incumbent parties included issues like employment opportunities, admissions quota in schools and colleges and appropriate protection against forms of institutionalized discrimination.

### **Status of Political Rights for Women in the Area**

#### **Women Participation in Electoral Processes**

There was a general consensus among the respondents on equal participation of women in the electoral process as they reiterated that they enjoyed equal rights. The male and female

respondents expressed a favourable stance for capable women to be able to participate in the electoral process and represent their community. The male respondents noted a high participation rate of women during the election process as they rated women participation at 4 out of 5.

The male and female respondents were however, only aware of one woman from their community who had been selected in the last general and local body elections. They were not aware of any member of their community who had been selected for any cabinet as advisor or ministers.

### **Freedom to Vote**

The respondents highlighted that women in their community had the freedom to choose who to vote for but it was usually the case that they relied on their family members' advice and instructions. The need to do so highlights the lack of information, political awareness that women suffer from. It was highlighted that the issue of access and right to vote was limited to women from rural areas and that there was a need to address these issues and challenges by the government to ensure equal participation of women.

### **Minority Women Demands for Upcoming Elections 2018**

The respondents voiced their opinion about improving the coordination and communication between representatives and their constituents. They highlighted the need for representatives to be more aware of the salient issues and concerns the minority community faces. They further added that only with this pertinent information the representatives would be able to formulate laws and policies regarding the protection of women and children.

### **Freedom and Inclusion of Minorities**

#### **Freedom of Religious Practice**

Majority of the participants reported that they rarely faced religious discrimination in terms of practice of religion. However, they did highlight that there was institutionalized discrimination in terms of equal employment opportunities, admissions to colleges and universities and distribution of development funds. They further added that the areas where the minorities resided in were marginalized and lacked adequate infrastructure such as paved roads and streets, sanitation facilities and allocated burial grounds.

#### **Voter Freedom**

In terms of freedom to vote the respondents said that they based their vote purely on choice and not on the instructions of any influential individual. They did add however, that the poorer and economically vulnerable sections of their community were often exploited by the political parties who offered them money or rations in exchange for their support during election time.

### **Views of Parliamentarians & Government Officials**

The in-depth interviews were conducted with three parliamentarians including provincial and local government representatives and three government officials. These included Mr. Saleem Rahim (local government elected member, Kohati) Ms. Humair Yaqoob (local government elected member, Kohati) Mr. Azeem Ghauri (Member Provincial Assembly, KP).

The government officials included Mr. Zahid Nadeem (District Nazim, Peshawar, Town-1), Mr. Shoaib Khan (Assistant Director, Social Welfare Department) and Mr. Mera Jan (Assistant Director, Local Government Department, Peshawar).

Regarding representation of minorities in KP the parliamentarians interviewed during the survey were of the opinion that the number of reserved seats allocated to represent minorities in the provincial and national assembly were not enough to ensure adequate representation. They further added that due to lack of support and attention by the current government to the issues of minorities bills introduced in the houses were not supported and hence not tabled. The parliamentarians did however highlight that they had complete freedom to practice their religion.

Some issues faced by minority communities that were highlighted were similar to the ones highlighted by the community members which included unemployment, low standards of living and lack of quotas in medical and engineering colleges. The government officials interviewed said that change had been observed in terms of increased job quota for minorities particularly through the NTS system which had levelled the playing field. They also highlighted that government had provided representation for minorities in local body structures and provided sufficient funds for infrastructure improvement projects which are executed by their town and district members.

The parliamentarians were optimistic and reported an increase in political engagement by the minority community and claimed that 80% of the minority community now has birth registration and CNICs while they rated free women participation in the electoral process at 7 out of 10. The government officials interviewed also expressed that women participation had increased in electoral processes and noted an increase in independent voting rather than bearing influences of male household members.

They highlighted that the support of civil society organizations was crucial for promoting inclusion of minority communities in political processes and expressed the need for minority specific projects and advocacy for minority specific legislation.

### **Views of Social Activists**

Key informant interviews with social activists also helped gauge the status of minorities in the community. The interviewed activists expressed that there had been a notable increase in number of minority members who possessed legal identification documents due to increased awareness. They also highlighted that women participation in the political processes had increased greatly but stated that a large majority of women still relied on their male family members for voting decisions.

According to them, the minority community in the area did not face any religious discrimination in terms of freedom of practice and there were no disruptive activities reported in the area. Problems facing the minority were of unemployment, limited job and admission quotas and a lack of awareness of political and minority rights.

According to them, the civil society had tried to address these issues by advocating with government departments and raising awareness among the community members. However, they

also highlighted that there was limited political and space for them to highlight minority issues due to a lack of awareness and motivation on the part of community members and a lack of political will on part of policy-makers and authorities.

### Recommendations

Given the context that emerges from the conducted survey it is seen that the overriding problem in the area is one of lack of awareness on the part of minority constituents regarding their rights, particularly for women. Despite an overall improvement in the area a significant population percentage of women does not have CNICs and is not registered for electoral rolls. The minority community in general lacked knowledge of minority specific legislation and their constitutional rights along with an unawareness about the political parties' manifestos. It is further gleaned from the information that the community feels under-represented as they lack communication with their representatives. Similarly, the parliamentarians interviewed also said that the number of reserved seats for the minority community were not sufficient. With regards to these the following measures are thus recommended;

- Community awareness sessions conducted with the minority community particularly with women to encourage their participation in the electoral process.
- Conduct capacity building trainings for local and provincial representatives, highlighting minority grievances and needs. These trainings should also impart technical knowledge of gaps in minority-specific legislation, and build capacity of the representatives to undertake parliamentary interjections, debates, lobbying, and advocacy.
- Formation of Community Action Groups (CAGs) with volunteers from the minority community:
  1. Volunteers from the minority community should be trained in minority rights and capacitated to communicate effectively with the representatives in order to bridge the gap between constituents and representatives.
  2. Volunteers should be trained and capacitated to facilitate voter mobilization drives to improve access particularly for women to procure their CNICs and to register for electoral polls.
  3. Volunteers should be trained to undergo a process of reviewing political party manifestos and give recommendations for gender mainstreaming to party representatives.
- Dissemination of IEC material (in Urdu, Pashto) explaining recent and already existing legislations on minorities, political party manifestos and demands of minority rights.
- Airing radio and TV shows to promote minority rights and their participation in the electoral process.

## Tando Allahyar (Sindh)

### Background

The targeted areas for the baseline survey included Jhando Mari and Chambar from District Tando Allahyar in the Sindh province. These areas are home to a large number of Hindus, many of whom live under conditions of extreme poverty. The baseline assessment was meant to determine the level of political inclusiveness, especially among the women of the community, as well as to identify gaps and propose recommendations to enable the people from these minority communities to be able to freely exercise their democratic rights.

A large percentage of Pakistan's population lacks the country's core legal identity document, the CNIC issued by National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA). This was further confirmed by SPARC research on women empowerment in Tando Allah Yar (Sindh) where it was found that a vast majority of minority women over the age of 19 years don't have CNIC owing to long distances of NADRA office, restriction on female mobility etc. This also impedes access to ATM machines to draw the Benazir Income Support Program offered cash offers. These findings were further validated from NADRA data where 151,782 females are registered against a female adult population of 307,978.<sup>5</sup> This also curtails a woman from minority to exercise her right to vote in absence of CNIC. The Hindu minority communities in Sindh are also marginalized by their lack of access to education and exploitative feudal system.

### Focus Group Discussions

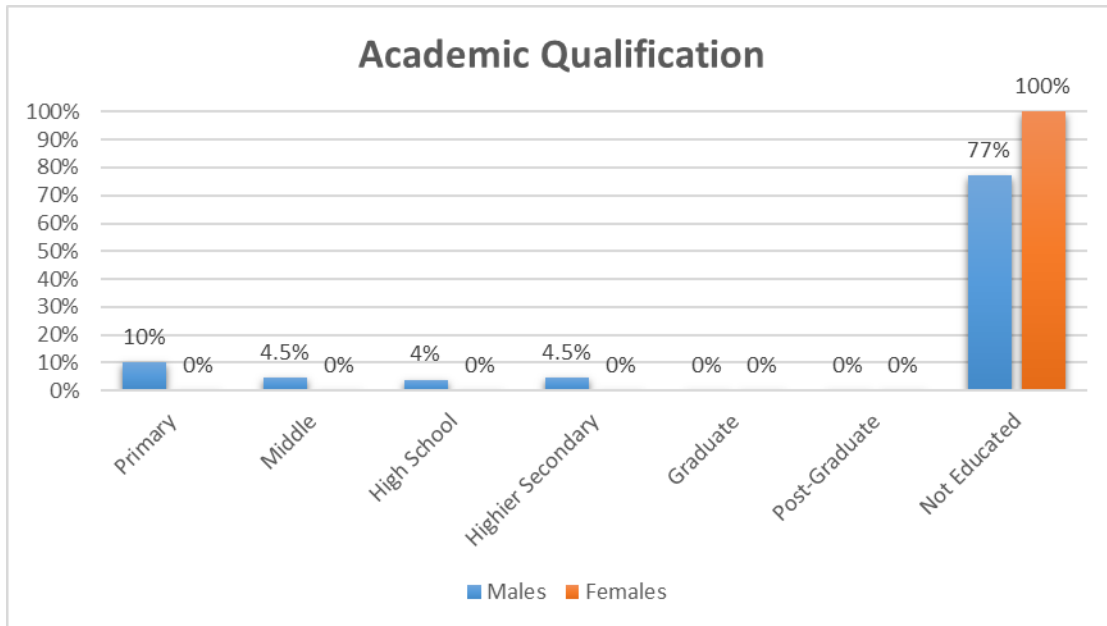
Focus Group Discussions carried out with the local community brought a number of issues to light. These included major concerns related to inclusiveness, economic and social freedom of the Hindu minority community of Tando Allahyar.

### Employment & Educational Status

#### Academic Qualification

The low living standards can be attributed partly to the low literacy rates in the area. Among the sample group none of the women were found to be educated, whereas the proportion of men who had acquired some level of education was merely 23%. Among these, 10% had acquired primary education, 4.5% Middle, and nearly 4% had completed High School or Higher Secondary. None of the men interviewed had completed graduation or acquired a post-graduate degree.

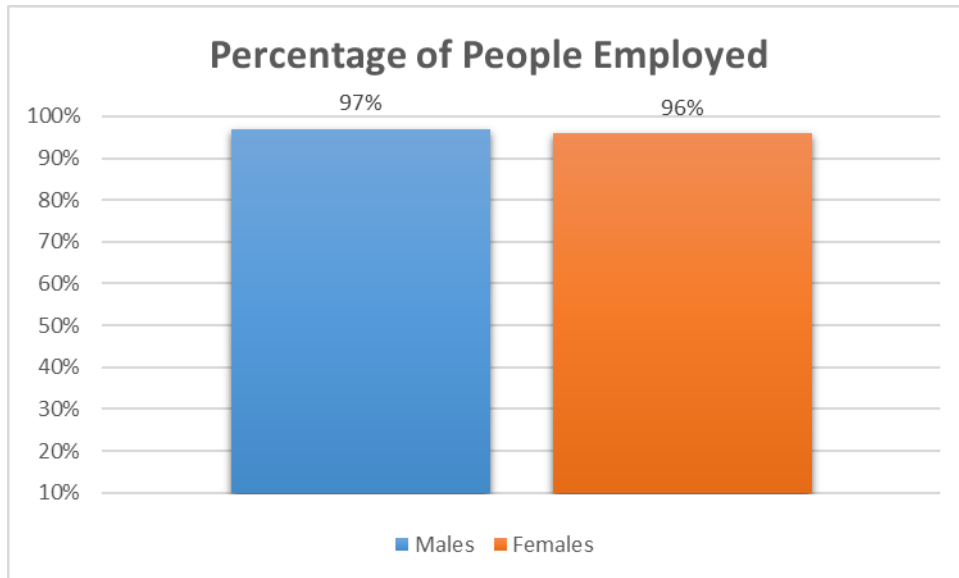
**Note:** The educational attainment levels of the respondents have been classified according to the following categories; Primary (Grades 1 to 5), Middle (Grades 6 to 8), High (Grades 9 to 10), Higher Secondary (Grades 11 to 12), University further divided into Graduate and Post Graduate levels. A separate category has been made for those not educated.



### Employment Status

During the survey it was revealed that 97% of males and 96% of females were employed, mostly in agricultural work. Due to conditions of extreme poverty entire households work in farms. A small number of people are engaged in other professions, since the primary occupation in both Chambar and Jhando Mari for minority communities is farming. A few men are small scale retailers, drivers or engaged in menial work. A small proportion of women are housewives.

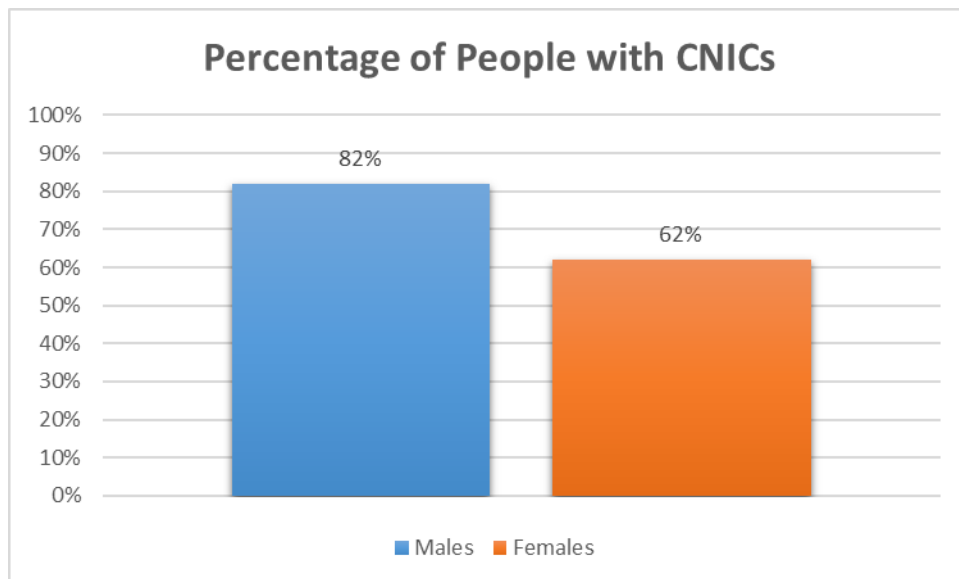
While the proportion of women from minority communities in the workforce is almost equal to men, this however does not mean that households enjoy better living standards. It is in fact the opposite that leads to most family members in the household to be engaged in some kind of work.



### Legal Identity Documentation

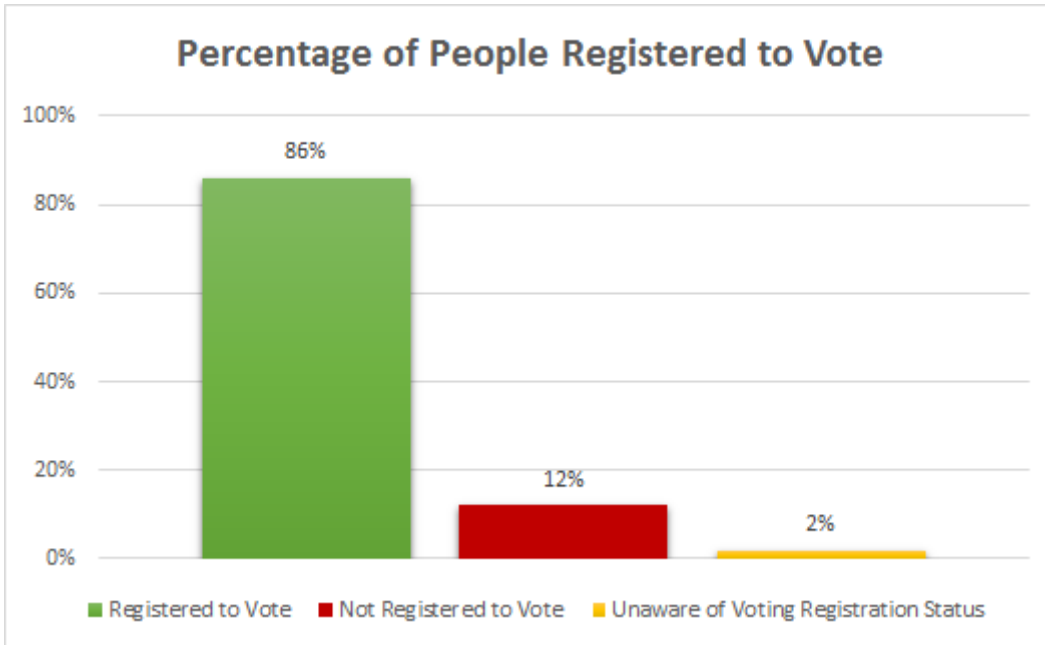
#### Birth & Voter Registration Status

None of the 468 people (including 218 males and 250 females) from the sample group had birth certificates. Whereas, 82% Males and 62% Females had acquired Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs).

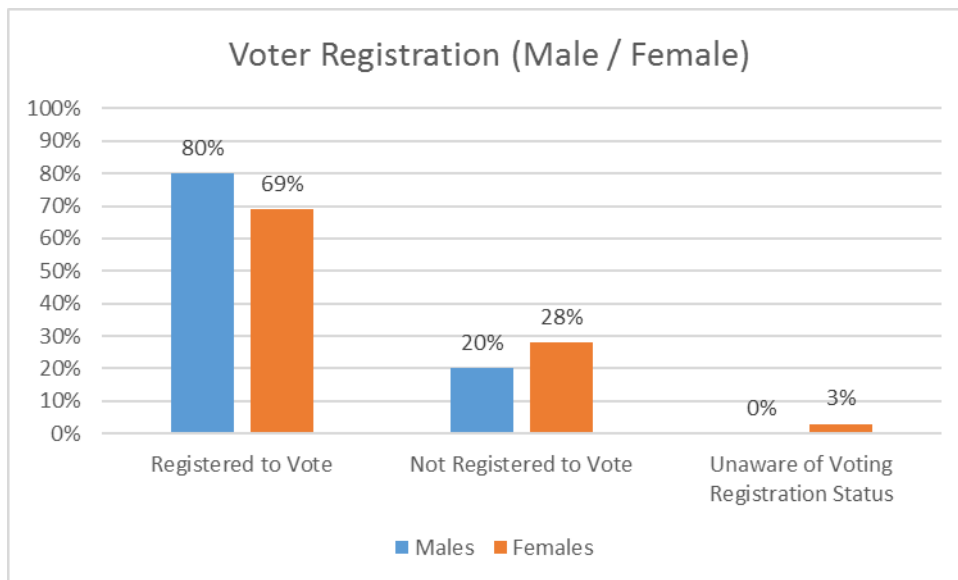


#### Voter Registration

Among the respondents, 86% were found to be registered voters, 12% were not registered to vote, whereas 2% didn't know whether they were registered to vote.



80% of males and 69% of females were found to be registered to vote, whereas 20% males and 28% females were not registered to vote. 3% females did not know whether they were registered to vote. Hence, women made up for the entire 2% of people in the sample group who were unaware of their voter registration status.



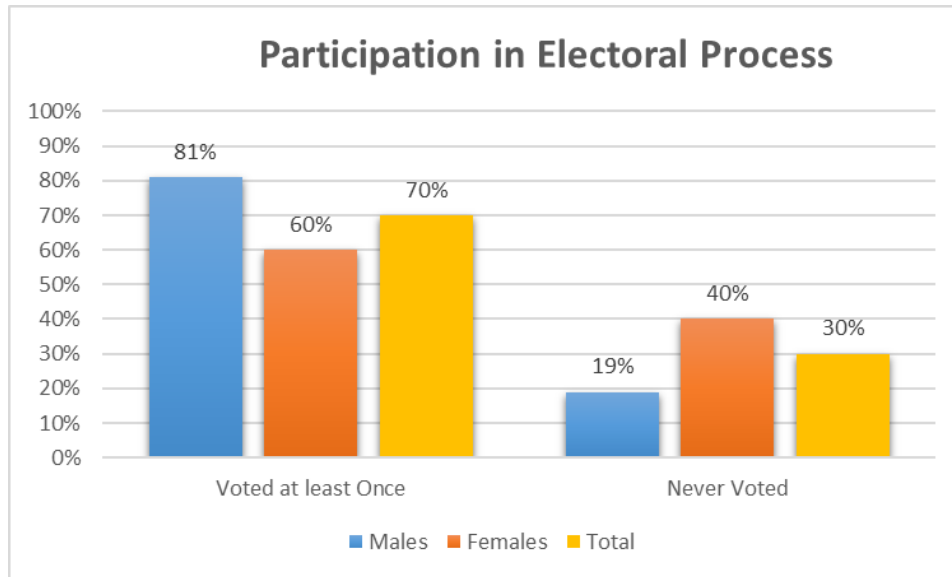
### Voting & Participation in the Political Process

Impoverished districts like Tando Allayar are often political hubs, dominated by influential local political leaders from feudal families that have had an influence in the area since generations. This is why places like Jhando Mari and Chambar are often quite lively during elections. However, this does not ensure political inclusiveness for the poor, since their votes are often



available at the beck and call of an influential individual. Similar sentiments were raised by people from both Union Councils during the baseline assessment.

While 70% of people, including 81% of males and 60% of females had voted at least once in their lives, the respondents overwhelmingly disowned the political process (as further explained in later sections).



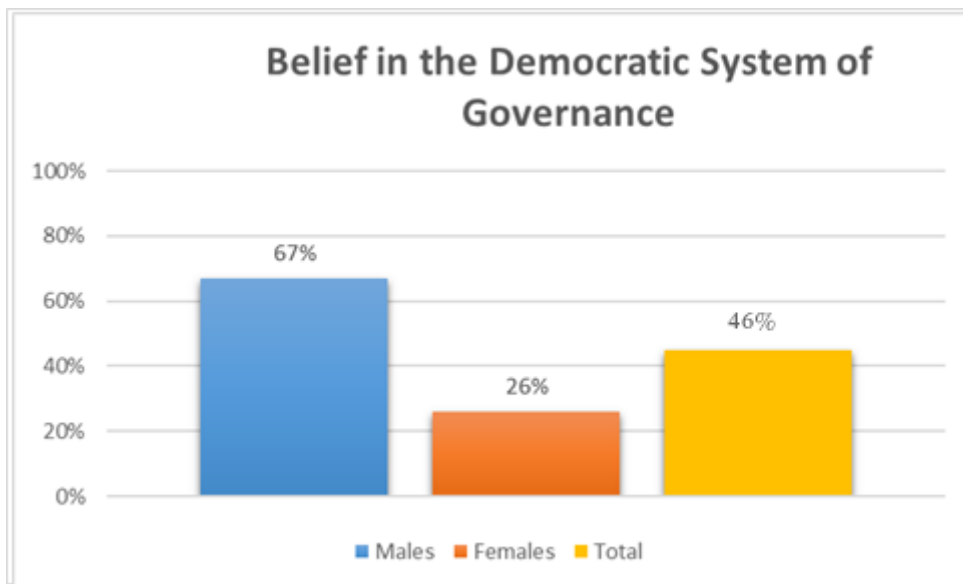
### Belief in the Democratic System

Among the total number of respondents, merely 46% of individuals said they believed in the democratic system of governance. While 67% males seemed more optimistic, only 26% females favoured the system. People from areas like Tando Allahyar are often provided with minor benefits prior to elections as a means for pre-poll rigging.

This includes anything from cash handouts to feasts during political events. Furthermore, the decision to decide a candidate is often at the behest of the landlords, who are revered in an almost divine manner by the poor populace that is dependent on resources allowed by the influential individual for them to be able to acquire sustenance. This includes everything from provision of land to farm on, loans, to permission to access resources like water for farming in the area.

It is also worth mentioning here that many of the people in the targeted areas are heavily influenced in terms of ideas and beliefs in accordance of what is asked of them by their landlord, which are also the local political leaders or are the ones to decide who their 'subjects' vote for. This essentially means that many of the respondents who did say that they believed in the democratic system of governance, said so not because they understood the democratic system of governance, but this is because of what they are to believe in line with the views of the influential people in the area. Further probing by the research team revealed deep rooted resentment against the local landlords and a fundamental lack of understanding of political rights and the democratic process of governance. Hence, the 46% total respondents and 67% male

respondents who answered affirmately, did so not because they actually believe or understand the system that governs them but because it is the politically correct thing to say in the area.



### **Elections & Elected Representatives**

When asked whether past elections have made any difference in the lives of minorities in the area, both men and women overwhelmingly declared that the elections had changed nothing for them and they still face the problems that were faced by their forefathers.

The respondents during these open ended questions seemed to stray from more 'politically correct' narratives and a deep rooted sense of resentment was observed by the research team. An overwhelming number of respondents claimed that they are required to vote for a certain political party because they are 'living under the shelters provided by their landlords'. Not voting in accordance with the wishes of the landlord will result in losing their very homes.

100% people claimed that they would vote in the next elections, however, the reason for that was that it was deemed mandatory for a majority of the respondents by their landlord.

Both male and female respondents had no idea regarding individuals they had voted for or the ones selected via reserved seats. The respondents cited their weak economic conditions, their reliance of local landlords and lack of education as the reasons for their inability to gain the necessary knowledge and insight regarding their political rights and to hold their political representatives accountable.

### **Knowledge of Minority Specific Laws, Rights & Knowledge of the Political Process**

None of the respondents had any knowledge regarding minority specific laws that affect them at the provincial or national level. However, there was a strong desire among respondents to acquire equal rights and gain knowledge about their constitutional rights.

There was a sense of resentment among certain respondents that perhaps their deplorable condition is due to their religious background.

A small number of male respondents had some knowledge regarding the allocation of minority seats, however, a vast majority of the respondents, including all female respondents were neither aware nor interested in learning about the process. The apathy among the majority of respondents appeared to be due to their lack of education, which made it hard for them to comprehend the intricacies of the political process. Furthermore, the respondents seemed more concerned with more simple things such as improvement in the provision of basic needs.

### **Knowledge of Budgetary Allocation**

While a majority of individuals did not know about the budgetary allocation specific to Sindh or Tando Allahyar, some respondents had some knowledge regarding funds allocated for their Union Council, however, they complained about corrupt leadership which according to them usurped the money and did nothing substantial for the UC. Furthermore, lack of education was once more cited as one of the reasons for the inability of most people to understand the complexities of political inclusiveness and budget related allocations.

### **Status of Political Rights for Women in the Area**

#### **Views Regarding the Right of Women to Vote**

There seemed to be no opposition by male members of the family in allowing women to vote. However, it was also widely mentioned that during election days the landlord provides transportation for households to go for polls and vote according to his instructions. 50% males answered that the women cast their vote according to their own choice but 50% males answered that women also cast their vote as instructed by the landlord.

The overwhelming majority of female respondents considered voting as a part of their obligation to the landlord, rather than a means for political participation and inclusiveness.

The male members had no objection for the women to participate in polls. Half of the candidates claimed that the vote of the female members of the family is determined by the landlord and the rest claimed that they had the freedom to choose a candidate.

#### **Views Regarding Female Political Candidates**

Both male and female respondents had no objections to female candidates participating in elections. People in general considered female political participation as a positive step and hoped for an increased role of female political leaders in the future. Both male and female respondents believed that female candidates would be better geared towards understanding household level constraints. This was cited as a reason which would make female candidates more suitable for taking initiatives for improving the status of people in their community.

Female respondents also believed that a female candidate is more likely to better understand their problems such as maternal health, financial constraints and the need for taking initiatives for improving the status of women in their community to help them claim their due rights.

### **Major Issues & Women Rights**

Both male and female respondents overwhelmingly demanded provision of basic facilities such as schools, hospitals, toilets, better sanitation conditions, and initiatives that can help alleviate poverty and offer better paid jobs.

Some respondents also complained of forced conversions and demanded that adequate laws and the law enforcement authorities must protect them from being forcefully converted.

A vast majority of the respondents claimed to be living in conditions that require work similar or equal to conditions of bondage; where entire households, including children require working at the behest of landlords. These landlords own the people like their personal property, which places a large number of people from the respective minority communities in conditions that can only be described as modern day slavery.

Lack of education was cited as a major hurdle for women to participate in the political process and float a female candidate for local body elections or reserved seats. This was cited as the reason that no female candidate was elected till date from both Union Councils, i.e. Jando Mari and Chambar.

Only one individual was identified to have been selected for a major political position from the local community from one of the UCs. It was claimed that the elected representative did not cater to the needs of the people. No other candidate from the local communities from either UC was identified to have been elected to any major position. The political candidates from the area are usually only from the elite.

### **Freedom & Inclusiveness**

#### **Religious and Caste Based Discrimination**

There were mixed reactions from different segments of people from both UCs regarding the prevalence of discrimination. While some individuals seemed to have faced no discrimination from any community (including Muslims or Hindus from different castes), others complained of forced conversions, and kidnapping of Hindu girls to Islam. Some respondents also claimed that many Hindu girls elope with Muslim boys by choice. However, the respondents claimed of inaction by courts in either case.

While no respondent claimed that their religious freedom regarding prayers and worship was breached, there was a sense of mutual distrust and ethnic hatred expressed between the Hindu and Muslim community. It was claimed by a majority of respondents that both Hindu and Muslim communities avoid mingling together.

### **Views of Parliamentarians & Government Officials**

When conducting in depth interviews with government officials the research team gathered statistics, views of key government officials including; MS Sana Kanwal (Deputy Assistant Director of NADRA), Mr. Shah Jahan (S.P. Police), Mr. Sajjad Khattak (District Election Commissioner, Tando Allahyar) and Mr. Ghulam Shabbir (Mukhtiyar).

The research team also interviewed elected representatives from Tando Allahyar including; Sattar Bachani (MNA), Imdad Pitaffi (MPA) and Ghulam Ali Khaskheli (Counselor).

According to NADRA officials, there are 70% votes registered in District, Tando Allahyar and the voter turnout was approximately 75% in the last general elections. Whereas, the District Election Commissioner, said that the voter turnout during the last general elections was 61.65% (NA 223 Tando Allahyar).

When asked about CNIC and birth registration, the research team was informed that 95% people (including people from minority communities) have CNIC while around 50% have birth certificates.

Various government officials interviewed during the course of the baseline assessment expressed the desire for more female participation in the political process. However, there was an acceptance that female inclusiveness was very low. On a scale from 1-10, 1 being the least and 10 being the most inclusive, the average rating given by government officials for female inclusiveness in the district was 3, whereas the inclusiveness of minorities was rated at 6.

Lack of education was cited as a major hurdle in including women in the political process, whereas feudalism and the influence of the ruling elite was identified as another major hurdle in ensuring political inclusiveness for both men and women.

Among the recommendations from government officials, it was recommended that civil society organizations should arrange awareness raising programs, conduct independent surveys to assess the condition of minorities in the area, and take initiatives that can help elevate the level of knowledge of people regarding basic rights of minorities.

### **Views of Social Activists**

The research team conducted In-depth interviews with five social activists from the targeted areas. During the interviews the activists pointed out the lack of birth registration among minority communities in both Union Councils. While a lot of people do eventually acquire CNICs, birth registration according to the interviewed individuals is next to none.

The social activists pointed out towards the deplorable living conditions of the Hindu minority in the district. These communities lack fundamental utilities such as access to clean drinking water, toilets, sanitation, schools, hospitals, etc.

The social activists were not very optimistic about women and minority participation in the political process and cited lack of education and the feudal system as a major hurdle in this regard.

A demand that echoed across all social activists was space for a separate graveyard, as the Muslim community didn't allow burial of Hindus in their graveyards and space for burning the dead seems to be a major issue for people from the Hindu minority community.

## Recommendations

During the research it was revealed that the Hindu minority communities of District, Tando Allahyar are living in conditions of extreme poverty; with many living in conditions of bondage. This however is not necessarily due to the fact the individuals are from a minority community but is similar to conditions of people living under a colonial style feudal system which usurps the fundamental rights of the people living under the dominance of landlords. While none of the people interviewed during the course of the research said that there have been any disruptive activities or riots in the area, there seemed to be a deep rooted mistrust among the Muslim and Hindu community, owing to inter-marriage disputes and religious bias on either side.

- The prevalence of alleged forced marriages warrants more investigation, as there have been conflicting views observed in this regard. While some individuals claimed that forced marriages exist as a phenomenon in the area, others were quick to dismiss it. Moreover, some even claimed that Hindu girls elope with Muslim men and convert intentionally.
- The local Hindu community requires initiatives that can improve their living conditions and free them from debt bondage. Moreover, an alternative means for earning a living is also the need of the hour, since people freed from bondage might end up in the same bondage trap due to lack of alternatives. The implementation of laws such as the Sindh Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act should be practiced in letter and spirit, with livelihood related initiatives for the community to uplift their economic status. This would eventually also lead to more political inclusiveness and free the largely agrarian community from the yoke of landlord driven political dominance.
- Other than increasing the availability of educational and healthcare facilities, initiatives related to adult education, particularly for women are also direly needed. Such initiatives can help improve the ability of minority communities in the area to better understand the nature and scope of their political and constitutional rights and improve political inclusiveness for both men and women.
- In the short-term it would be necessary to disseminate messages related to social and political rights among the community, however, owing to low literacy rates radio and TV programmes in the local language would be more effective than written content. Furthermore, audio and video message playable via mobile phones can be another effective means of disseminating information owing to the availability of mobile devices in the local community.
- Community Action Groups and advocacy drives in the area can be another means of disseminating information regarding social and political rights and to encourage female participation in the political process.
- Conducting seminars with key stakeholders, including elected representatives, media personnel and representatives from the targeted communities could help highlight the issues identified in the baseline assessment. This could help raise awareness, conduct

effective lobbying and highlight the issues of the Hindu minority community from Tando Allahyar via the media.

## Conclusion

This baseline survey report has attempted to analyze information regarding the minorities', in particular women's status of political participation in the context of KP and Sindh. Taking representative samples of Christian and Hindu minority communities in KP and Sindh respectively the study was designed to assess the degree of awareness of minorities representation and interest in participation in the electoral processes. Specifically, it has provided baseline values for indicators in a range of areas, including: education, employment, birth and voter registration status, minority representation in legislatures, women's participation in voting and political involvement and freedom and inclusion of minorities in the regions. The findings from this study are expected to be used as the benchmark against which progress made by SPARC's initiatives and activities in the target communities can be established.

Given the vastly differing cultural, political and socio-economic circumstances of the two identified regions, likewise the respective responses by the participants differed in significant measure. The cultural landscape of Tando Allahyar(Sindh) is largely governed by a typical landlord-serf dynamic which makes meaningful political inclusion, particularly on the part of minorities a challenge. While in Peshawar (KP) minorities are not burdened by servitude or indenture to influential political or economic elite, there problems involve a discrimination or exclusion of an institutional nature. These fundamental differences therefore can explain the diverging indicators of academic qualification and employment status. Attainment of education being a powerful indicator of development highlights this reality clearly with 75% of respondents in Peshawar being educated while only 23% of those in Sindh had acquired some level of education. The education levels for women were relatively unfavourable vis-à-vis their male counterparts in both Peshawar and Tando Allahyar.

Similarly, the employment statistics also relay the socio-economic landscape of the two regions and highlight the differing needs of the minority populations in both. Occupation of the Hindu minority in Sindh mainly revolved around agriculture while in KP for the Christian minority, a more diversified sample of urbanized forms of employment was found. These indicators are commensurate with the level of meaningful political participation that was recorded for both regions, with people in Peshawar being relatively more aware of their political rights and the process of political participation while for those in Tando Allahyar the exercise was mostly a compliance with their landlord's wishes.

The lack of education and awareness in Tando Allahyar also explains the non-existence of birth registration certificates which could principally allow the respondents access to social security and social protection mechanisms. A discouraging trend regarding birth registration was also found in Peshawar with a significant gender bias. More consequential to this study was the non-acquisition of CNICs by 13% of women in KP, 18% men and 38% women in Sindh which presents a major hurdle for minorities to exercise their voting rights. Consequentially 24% of people in Sindh were not registered to vote including 28% women while 12% people in KP were not registered to vote including 22% women.



In case of Sindh these figures can be attributed with little meaning given the nature of their political participation so it is mandatory to analyze the quality of their representation through in-depth qualitative indicators as was done in the FGDs. For them even participation in the elections via voting is not an adequate form of representation since it is done under pressure of the landlords or the political elite of the community devoid of any information as to who they are electing or why. For KP, however the figures indicated that access to legal documentation and participation in electoral process was an issue for women, not due to restrictions from their households but due to disinterestedness stemming from a lack of awareness.

It was noted in both regions that there was a dearth of information available about elected representatives to the constituents. This resulted in a lack of ownership and consequent feeling of apathy towards the practice and process of election in Peshawar and Tando Allahyar. It further distanced the minorities from following the changing policies (if any), proposed minority-specific changes to legislation, and demanding accountability from their representatives, all of which are necessary elements of meaningful political participation. The respondents in both regions also cited lack of communication, coordination and interest of the selected representatives as major hurdles to their socio-economic development and progress.

Both communities put women's participation in electoral and political process at a high priority and highlighted the efficacy of women representatives to be more responsive to demands of improvement in women and child rights. It would seem that women in these areas do not face gender-based discrimination from male members of the respective minority communities, but the political process is constructed as such that it does not allow for their equal and participatory involvement. For instance, given that minority representatives are selected by the party leaders and not elected, it removes the element of choice from the voters who might, given the chance, vote for a woman who is capable of fulfilling their demands.

With regard to freedom and inclusion of the respective minority communities it was discovered that the Christian minority of Peshawar did not face any discrimination in terms of practice of religion but they reported elements of bias set in the system which created hurdles for minorities' socio-economic development. In Tando Allahyar, however, it was seen that the Hindu minorities faced discrimination in the forms of forced conversion and inadequate access to legal recourse, problems which were intensified given their poor economic status.

It is thus seen that minority communities in these two regions have specific problems which require immediate and substantial redress. For Peshawar the communities suffer from inadequate representation, poor communication and coordination with representatives, information outreach, and restricted women's involvement in the political process. For Tando Allahyar the problems are of similar nature but are deeply rooted in their socio-economic position in the community. Nevertheless, their oft-cited problems of representation and political participation also included provision of insufficient information for making educated decisions, lack of communication with elected representatives and low literacy rates for involvement of more women in the political processes.

