

## **Chapter 5**

### **Voting, Counting and Results**

#### **Background**

Polling was scheduled to take place from 08.00 hrs to 17.00 hrs in 69,729 polling stations across the country. In most instances polling stations were divided into male and female streams.

Polling stations were mostly located in schools. Campaigning was prohibited on election day and no campaign materials were supposed to be present in a 100 yard area around the station. There was also a security area around polling stations of 400 metres and no armed persons were allowed in that area except for police and security duty officers.

In many places political parties set up 'camps' in front of polling stations to help voters identify their place on list, and issued slips of paper (chits) to the voters on which they had written the voter's serial number.<sup>15</sup>

Poll officials were directed to be present two hours prior to polling to ensure the proper setting up of the polling station. In addition to the presence of polling officials inside a polling station, candidates, polling agents and accredited observers were also permitted to be present.

#### **Key procedures for opening and voting**

The key prescribed procedures for opening and voting are as follows:

##### *Opening*

- Prior to the commencement of polling the empty ballot boxes are to be shown to all candidates, agents and observers who are present at the polling station
- The seals are then affixed on the box and the serial numbers noted
- Polling agents present sign a form certifying that this was done

##### *Voting*

- Upon arrival at the polling station, the CNIC of the voter is checked by a poll official
- The name and serial number of the voter is called out
- The voter is checked for indelible ink, and if the ink is absent he/she is marked with indelible ink, on the right thumb nail for a female voter and the left thumb nail for a male voter

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<sup>15</sup> Some parties also distributed these chits to voters in advance of the election by delivering to their houses.

- The name of the voter on the electoral roll is crossed out
- The National Assembly ballot counterfoil is completed with the voter's details and the voter marks the counterfoil with a thumbprint
- The counterfoil is stamped with the official seal
- The poll official signs the back of the ballot paper and stamps it on the reverse with the official seal and then gives the ballot to the voter
- The voter is instructed how to fold the ballot
- The voter then moves on to another official and the process for the issuing of the ballot is repeated for the Provincial Assembly election
- The voter goes behind voting screen, stamps the ballots to mark their preference, folds the ballots and puts the ballots in into the relevant ballot box
- The voter exits the polling station

Persons requiring assistance can be assisted by a person of their choice but not by a polling agent or a member of the polling staff.

### **Assessment of opening and voting**

On election day, Commonwealth observers reported positively on the process. In the vast majority of cases the opening and voting procedures were well conducted, although late opening was experienced in some places. Voters turned out in very large numbers, often from quite early in the day. The large turnout of women voters and youth was also commented on by Commonwealth observers. Given the level of violence in the lead-up to the election, and some incidents on the day, this large turnout of voters was quite remarkable. Queues were formed at the polling stations and in most cases these were orderly and calm. Security was present around the polling stations and it was felt that officers had a positive effect on the process and were helpful where required.

The electoral rolls proved to be accurate on election day and the use of the CNICs was applied and helped with voter identification and the integrity of the vote. A range of polling agents were present in places visited, which is a positive feature and provides for transparency and accountability.

Where there were inconsistencies in processing voters these were within the spirit of the regulations and reflected varying levels of capacity rather than any ill-intent. Secrecy of the vote was provided for, as screens were present, and was respected in most instances. However, it was compromised sometimes by the crowded conditions and at other times it was not practised by voters, who chose to vote in the open for the sake of convenience.

As mentioned, there was a large turnout of voters, and this created some strain on the administrative process in polling stations. This was exacerbated in instances where the premises provided for polling were quite small or at least inadequate for the numbers of voters assigned to the polling station. In affected cases this led to lengthy waits for some voters and a less orderly process inside the station. In parts of Lahore there were further problems where some voters struggled to identify their correct polling location.

Observers also noted that some polling stations were not located in premises with easy access for persons with disability or the elderly etc. For instance, some polling stations were located on the second floor of a school even when there appeared to be suitable rooms on the ground floor.

There were some particular and more extreme problems reported in parts of Karachi (see below also for the Karachi team report). On the day of the election there were at least two bomb blasts in the city resulting in a number of dead and injured. Further, there were some serious delays in opening in some locations as well as a failure to deliver all materials in some cases. It was also observed that in quite a few polling stations not all the polling staff had turned up for duty. In one constituency, NA-250, which was particularly affected the ECP ordered the re-polling in 43 polling stations due to the problems encountered.

In response to the large turnout and also the various delays, the ECP announced after 16.00 hrs that voting was extended across the country by one hour, from 17.00 hrs to 18.00 hrs. It also announced that in Karachi the extension was until 20.00 hrs. However, this was not clearly communicated down to polling station level leading to some uncertainty and inconsistency. Once presiding officers (POs) heard of the order officially they responded but not always in a consistent manner. In some instances it required unsealing closed ballot boxes and re-opening the premises. From our observations it appeared that those wanting to cast their ballots were able to do so; except potentially those who were turned away after 17.00 hrs and did not hear of the extension or could not return. During this period the ECP did not issue clear instructions nationally or locally, and media speculation over the extent of the extension caused a degree of confusion.

### **Key procedures for counting and results tabulation**

The key prescribed procedures for the counting and results processes are as follows:

- Five minutes prior to closing, the PO announces that voting is to end in five minutes time
- Only persons inside the polling station at the time of close are allowed to vote
- Once the polling station is closed, ballot boxes are sealed shut
- The National Assembly ballots are counted first
- The box is opened and ballots are emptied out
- The total number of ballots in the box is counted
- Then candidate specific ballots are identified and counted
- Invalid ballots are separated
- The process is then repeated for Provincial Assembly elections
- At the completion of the count the required paper work is completed
- The polling station result is announced, copies of the results are provided to polling agents and a copy is posted at the polling place.
- The results and materials are sent to the returning officer at the constituency level.

## **Assessment of counting and results tabulation**

Commonwealth teams reported positively on the counting process at the polling stations. As mentioned, there was some confusion over the extension of polling and POs appeared to deal with this in a pragmatic manner depending upon their local circumstances. The process was transparent and agents were able to get a copy of the result and a copy was also posted at the polling station.

The counting procedures were not followed in a consistent manner, but observers considered this was not from ill-intent so much as due more to varying understandings of the precise step-by-step procedures to be followed. In some places there were ballots from one election type in the box of the other election type, but these were easily separated during the count.

It was observed that polling agents were sometimes involved with the sorting of ballots. While no problems were observed in these cases this is not prescribed in the regulations.

## **Overview of the countrywide observation**

Commonwealth teams were deployed to two of the four provinces of Pakistan plus Islamabad. Our teams observed the voting, counting and results tabulation. They also met with electoral officials, observers and other stakeholders at the constituency level to build up a broader picture on the conduct of the process.

### ***1. Islamabad (Federal Capital) / Rawalpindi (Punjab)***

- We observed twenty polling stations in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. At one polling station, the Presiding Officer opened late due to the late arrival of polling agents. The first vote was cast at 08.29 hrs. Long queues kept waiting outside.
- Policeman with rifle wondering in and out of polling booth but was not perceived as intimidating.
- One case of election materials and ballot papers not received until near midnight.
- Time taken to vote in one booth was over six minutes from time the CNIC was presented until vote was cast. In the shortest time, two minutes.
- Polling stations closed at 17.00 hrs. In one polling station, at 17.15 hrs, the polling agent received a cell phone call informing him that the polling time has extended to 18.00 hrs. The Presiding Officer made a call to confirm. Confirmation obtained at approximately 17.25 hrs. Doors and gates reopened, but only a few voters appeared.
- Many women, including mothers and daughters each casting their first vote.
- Two polling stations located in a narrow crowded lane. Polling booths in small inadequate rooms made polling conditions chaotic. No space for observers
- In one polling station, the female booth was located upstairs and male booth downstairs. Access for pregnant women, the elderly and disabled difficult.
- No information in the ECP handbook regarding observation of Returning Officers (RO) procedures for consolidation. One RO was not expecting observers. Another RO had no room for observers to observe.

- Long, enthusiastic, good natured and patient queues at most stations.
- No disruption or confrontation observed
- Opening and closing of polling stations all genuinely compliant with handbook. Deficiency minor and no evidence of ill-intent.
- Street firing broke out in Rawalpindi at 18.27 hrs between PML-N and PTI supporters. Two killed and six injured.

## **2. Karachi (Sindh)**

- Security considerations confined Commonwealth observers to one constituency (NA-250) in Karachi South District: a mix of working urban communities (Old Town/Saddar) and more prosperous residential areas (Clifton/Defence Housing Areas).
- The earliest opening of a polling station observed was at about 09.00 hrs, i.e. one hour late. Lack of staff, and consequent slowness in unpacking materials, seemed to be the main cause.
- Much more serious delays were encountered later in the day in the southern part of the constituency, where we found polling stations that had only opened at 11.30 hrs or 12.00 hrs, with large queues of angry voters waiting in the sun. The cause was mainly the non-arrival of ballot boxes, which we understood were being delivered by the Army. Some polling stations in fact did not open at all.
- Another item missing in several polling stations visited was the large stamp used to mark the reverse of the ballot papers. Polling staff were resorting to use of the small stamp designed for voters to use to mark their vote – raising doubts as to whether their votes would ultimately be counted.
- The general impression gained – in contrast to other parts of the country – was of a relatively poor standard of training on the part of polling staff (acknowledged in a subsequent conversation with the district Returning Officer). This, plus staff shortages which often meant that only half the designated number of booths could be opened, and higher than expected turnouts, made the voting process very slow in some places –further angering the queuing voters.
- While the secrecy of the vote was generally respected, we saw instances of poor placing of voting cabins and use of inadequate, improvised materials. We also saw one person openly leaning over successive voters in the cabin offering 'help' in casting their vote (though we later saw him ejected by polling staff).
- The generally poor performance in the constituency was reflected in the decision, referred to in the general assessment above, to rerun the poll at 43 stations, now scheduled for 19 May.
- Since the election, the press has reported claims that some 25 polling stations in NA-250 were 'captured' – i.e. polling staff ejected and materials commandeered. We have been unable to verify these reports.

## **3. Lahore (Punjab)**

- The polling stations observed at one opening of the poll opened on time. The

- presiding officer complied with all the procedures in the presence of polling agents.
- The polling officials were composed and exercised the required authority and competence in undertaking the tasks required of them.
  - All the election materials were in place and in sufficient number.
  - We observed the presence of polling agents in all the polling stations we visited.
  - The layout of some of the polling stations was not adequate and thus resulted in overcrowding. Some of the voters who had waited for several hours to cast their vote became impatient. Some of the polling officials took an inordinately long time to process the voters and then added to the general frustration.
  - Despite the pre-election violence and that which reportedly occurred on election day in parts of the country, the polling process in the stations observed took place in a relatively peaceful environment.
  - Active campaigning was observed within the vicinity of several polling stations with flags being raised on motor vehicles and voters shouting campaign slogans.
  - Several voters could not find their names at the polling stations where they thought they were assigned. These voters were directed to check elsewhere.
  - The close of poll procedures at the stations observed at Queen Mary College, were executed in accordance with proper procedures and in a transparent manner with the delivery of copies of the statement.
  - The counting process was slow but transparent.
  - We were pleased to note the large number of women and young voters.

#### ***4. Multan (Punjab)***

- Observed polling stations opened on time in accordance with stated procedures.
- Voting was observed in 12 polling stations, rural and urban, male and female, in NA 148,149, 150 and 151.
- There were long queues of voters at almost all polling stations, including a high number of women and young voters.
- In general, polling procedures were followed. However, overcrowding in some stations, either due to the size of the polling place and/or poor queue control, compromised the transparency and efficiency of polling. Secrecy of the ballot was not always observed, with voters stamping their ballots in full view of others present.
- Citizen observers (FAFEN or the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan) were present at almost all observed polling stations, thus enhancing the openness of the process.
- The polling station chosen to observe the count closed at 1700 hours. It is not known whether the ECP decision to extend polling by one hour reached the Presiding Officer.
- Counting took place in an open and co-operative manner, largely according to procedures, and in the presence of polling agents and citizen observers. There were some minor procedural mistakes, but none that affected the transparency and integrity of the count. The statement of the count was displayed for public scrutiny. Election materials and the results were then transported to the constituency returning officer in a timely and efficient manner.

### **National Assembly results<sup>16</sup>**

PML-N	124	seats
PPP	31	
PTI	27	
MQM	18	
JUI-F	10	
PML-F	5	
JI	3	
Others (11)	15	
Independents	28	

**261 / 272 general seats<sup>17</sup>**

### **Recommendations**

- Where possible the ECP should ensure that adequately-sized premises are provided for polling relative to the number of voters assigned to the station. Further, again as far as possible, the ECP needs to ensure a reasonable equalisation of numbers between stations, so that one station does not have several hundred voters while a neighbouring station has some thousands.
- In selecting the premises for polling stations more account should be taken of the ease of access for persons with disability, the elderly and other persons for whom access may be an issue.
- The ECP needs to ensure that on the day of the polls election officials at all levels are able to communicate with their respective colleagues. For instance, POs should be able to effectively communicate with ROs, possibly through an intermediary where necessary, in order to seek clarification on any matters of concern. Likewise, instructions from the ECP, such as an instruction to extend polling, should be able to be communicated from the ECP, through officials at other levels and to POs. This process needs to be timely and effective to prevent misunderstandings and inconsistencies.

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<sup>16</sup> These are the results as of 21 May 2013 taken from the ECP website

<sup>17</sup> These were the results as of the time of writing, with a couple of constituencies yet to be reported on ECP website and five not being held on 11 May (two constituencies were terminated; one was postponed; and two were withheld).