

### Introduction

Preparation of accurate and credible electoral rolls is a key step towards inclusive, free, fair and transparent elections. Accurate electoral rolls ensure that eligible citizens are allowed to vote and that they only vote once. Use of biometric data, such as fingerprinting, significantly improves an electoral roll as it virtually eliminates the possibility of duplicate entries. In Pakistan, the voter list is tied to the civil registry, which contains biometric data for all registered citizens.

### History of Electoral Rolls in Pakistan

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) uses the same electoral rolls for general elections (National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies), local government elections and referenda. The electoral rolls in Pakistan have experienced a gradual evolution from a paper-based, hand written manuscript to a semi-computerized, partially paper based system in 2000-2002 and 2007, and finally to a completely computerized system in 2012. The 2002 Electoral Roll, while partially accurate, was riddled with errors and subject to severe criticism by all electoral stakeholders. Since the system was not fully computerized, there was no good way to identify and remove duplicate names or systematically search for unverifiable entries.

After the 2002 General Election, the ECP began developing an electronic system based on the voters' National Identity Card (NIC) number that acts as unique voter identification. Voters were allowed to use either the valid Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) number or the old, invalid, NIC number. Because of the nature of the data associated with each CNIC, including biometric data, the new identification card could act as a unique voter identifier, whereas the old NIC was not as reliable.

The ECP prepared the Final Electoral Rolls 2007 (FER-2007) containing 54 million voters after door-to-door enumeration followed by a comprehensive display process. Despite the shortcomings of using the old NIC number, many stakeholders considered these electoral rolls to be fairly accurate and credible, with the caveat that they were missing an estimated 27 million eligible voters. The missing voters were reportedly not included in FER-2007 for two major reasons. Either, they were missed during the door-to-door enumeration and display process, or they did not possess a CNIC or NIC. Benazir Bhutto filed a petition with the Supreme Court regarding the large number of missing voters, and the Supreme Court ultimately directed the ECP to include all voters who appeared on the 2002 Electoral Rolls but were missing on the FER-2007 in a supplementary voter list. Accordingly, the ECP included 27 million voters on the supplementary list, bringing the total number of registered voters to 81 million. Despite the increased accuracy of the main electoral roll, many of the voters on the supplementary list were missing CNIC and NIC data, therefore lacking unique voter identification. As a result, there was no way to cross check entries, remove duplicates or verify the entries.

### Formulation and Preparation of Electoral Rolls 2012

In April 2011, the Pakistani Parliament passed a bill making possession of a valid NIC mandatory for voter registration and casting a vote on Election Day.<sup>1</sup> In 2004, the government invalidated all old NICs, making the CNICs the only valid identification. The 2011 law paved the way for collaboration between the ECP and the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), the government agency working under the Ministry of Interior tasked with issuing CNICs.

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<sup>1</sup> Election Laws Amendment Bill 2011

The ECP handed over the Electoral Rolls 2007 data to NADRA along with head-of-household data captured during the 2011 Housing Census. NADRA prepared draft electoral rolls based on their CNIC data, cross checking all CNIC numbers and old NIC numbers in the 2007 list with their database. Out of 81 million entries, NADRA was able to verify about 44 million entries on the 2007 list. The rest of the 37 million entries were found to either be duplicates or have unverifiable data (missing C/NIC) and removed. NADRA then went through its own database and identified approximately 36 million citizens who were not included on the FER-2007, but were eligible to be placed on the voter list automatically. It is very likely that most of the non-duplicate entries that were excluded during the verification process were then re-added using NADRA's data. All the voters were then assigned to electoral areas based on the 2011 Housing Census data.

After NADRA finished compiling the data, ECP validated the draft electoral rolls through door-to-door verification. Over 75 million or 92.87% of voters on the draft roll were verified either in-person or through a family member. After verification, the ECP displayed the preliminary rolls for 21 days at 52,166 display centers established across the country. The locations of the display centers were publicized through a print and electronic media campaign. The public was invited to verify that their information was complete and accurate, and to file claims for inclusion of missing names and information, objections to registered voters who were not entitled to be included on the list, and to correct their personal information. During this time, citizens filed 3,191,910 corrections/objections. After the display period, the ECP made the changes based on these claims. They also added about 1 million voters who had obtained fresh CNICs since NADRA handed over the data.

## **Electoral Rolls 2012-2013**

The ECP published the Final Electoral Roll 2012 on 31 July 2012 through its countrywide district offices.

Compared to FER-2007, the new rolls are significantly more accurate and credible since the CNIC acts as unique voter identification. The biometric technology used by NADRA in the form of fingerprint collection significantly improved the quality of the electoral roll by virtually eliminating the potential for one person to register for multiple CNICs.

NADRA and the ECP have designed a semi-automatic procedure for adding new CNIC holders to the voter list ahead of the General Elections. NADRA sent data on 781,735 new CNIC holders who were issued cards between June and August 2012 to the ECP's field offices for verification. The ECP has sent the verified data back to NADRA for entry into the electoral rolls database. The same process will continue for citizens who registered for a CNIC from 1 September 2012 until 31 December 2012. Citizens who received a CNIC from 1 January 2013 until the election schedule is announced are able to register to vote at their ECP field office, but will not be automatically included on the roll before the election date is announced.

As of 5 March 2013, the electoral roll contains 85.74 million registered voters, of which, 56.47% are male and 43.53% are female. Figure 1 on the following page illustrates the registration breakdown by province and gender.

**Figure 1: Electoral Roll by Province and Gender**

Province/ Area	Male Voters		Female Voters		Total Voters
	Total Male	Percentage	Total Female	Percentage	
Punjab	27,624,870	56.37	21,380,771	43.63	<b>49,005,641</b>
Sindh	10,335,800	55.23	8,377,773	44.77	<b>18,713,573</b>
KPK	7,049,265	57.26	5,261,736	42.74	<b>12,311,001</b>
Balochistan	1,922,628	57.48	1,422,439	42.52	<b>3,345,067</b>
FATA	1,153,073	65.92	596,258	34.08	<b>1,749,331</b>
ICT (Islamabad)	330,777	53.86	283,399	46.14	<b>614,176</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>48,416,413</b>	<b>56.47</b>	<b>37,322,376</b>	<b>43.53</b>	<b>85,738,789</b>

The ECP and NADRA have implemented an SMS service for eligible voters to check their registration status by sending a text message with their CNIC number to the telephone number 8300. The voter receives an automated response with the CNIC number confirmation, name of his/her electoral area, block code and serial number. During by-elections in February 2013, the ECP piloted using 8300 to give voters their polling station location. The ECP plans to implement this country wide in the General Elections. Citizens can also check their particulars by visiting their respective District Election Commissioner office, which has a copy of the electoral roll on file. The Final Electoral Roll 2012 will be open for changes, additions or deletions until the schedule for General Elections is announced. Any person, contesting candidate or political party can obtain a copy of the electoral roll or an extract thereof from the ECP field offices at a fee of Rs. 10 per page.

In 2012, leaders of two political parties filed petitions with the Supreme Court challenging the movement of large numbers of unverified voters' entries on the voter list from their current addresses in Karachi to their permanent addresses elsewhere in the country as specified by their CNIC data. The petitions alleged that the electoral rolls prepared by the ECP were "tainted with irregularities and errors in the Province of Sindh, especially in Karachi." They requested the Court to declare the electoral rolls in Karachi to be illegal and order the correction the electoral rolls "on the basis of the present address of the voter in the city where he[/she] is residing."<sup>2</sup> On 5 December 2012, the Supreme Court directed the ECP to carry out a complete door-to-door re-verification of the existing electoral rolls in Karachi with the assistance of the Pakistan Army and the Frontier Corps. The ECP completed the door-to-door portion of the re-verification in February 2013 and handed the data over to NADRA for inclusion on the electoral roll.

## Electoral Roll on Election Day

For the first time in the General Elections, the electoral rolls at the polling stations will have voters' photographs, with the exception of some women who, for religious or cultural reasons, do not submit a photograph when applying for their CNICs. The rolls will also have a blank column for the voters to provide their thumbprint on election day using magnetic ink. The thumbprint will be used for voter identification in case of any electoral disputes.

The ECP prepares the electoral rolls based on electoral areas, or census blocks, with separate rolls for male and female voters in each constituency. Since one polling station generally covers several electoral areas, there are multiple voter lists used at each polling station on election day.

Currently, electoral rolls are sorted based on household or *gharana* number, which is not reflected on voters' CNICs. To facilitate voters and polling officials in locating the voters' names on the

<sup>2</sup> Const. Petitions No. 31/2011, 45/2007, 111&123/2012 Judgment, Paragraph 7

electoral rolls, supporters of political parties and contesting candidates establish camps adjacent to or in front of polling stations and issue *chits* or *perchis* containing the voters' particulars. In many cases, they also deliver *chits* to voters at their residences. In addition to the voters' information, the *chits* usually contain the candidate's name and his/her election symbol.

## Eligibility

The eligibility requirements to be enrolled as voter in an electoral area are:

- 1) Citizen of Pakistan;
- 2) At least eighteen (18) years of age and in possession of a CNIC issued by NADRA;
- 3) Not declared to be of unsound mind by a competent court; and
- 4) Resident in the electoral area. (A voter is considered a resident if he/she resides in or owns a house or any other real-estate property in that electoral area. There are also residency considerations for civil servants, military and their spouses, and prisoners.<sup>3</sup> There is no minimum time requirement for residency).

## Method for Inclusion, Correction and Deletion, and Cut-off

The Election Commission is responsible for preparation and annual revision of electoral rolls<sup>4</sup>. Citizens can visit ECP's countrywide field offices at any time to register to vote, correct their information or apply to delete their own record or their immediate family members' in cases of death or official declaration of unsound mind by the competent authority. However, once the election schedule is announced for a constituency or for general/local government elections, the process stops temporarily in the concerned constituencies, or, in the case of General Elections, countrywide. The whole process resumes once the election(s) have been held.

Instances that trigger a change to the voter list include:

- 1) Persons who reach the age of 18 years and are in possession of a CNIC are added to the list;
- 2) Registered voters migrate from one electoral area or constituency to another, and therefore need changes made to their registration records;
- 3) Deceased persons are removed; and
- 4) Previously unregistered persons or persons with CNICs may be added to the voter list

Voters can transfer their names from one electoral area to another by filing the relevant form found on the ECP website or in any ECP field office.<sup>5</sup> An eligible person may only register in one electoral area. If a voter meets the residency requirements for more than one location, the voter may choose the location where he/she wishes to vote. To register, a citizen must go to his/her ECP district office, present his/her original CNIC and submit the registration application along with a copy of the CNIC.

## Ahmadi

Both Muslims and non-Muslims are on the same joint electoral roll, except, controversially, the Ahmadi, a religious minority that is included on a separate list. While Ahmadis consider themselves Muslim, the Constitution of Pakistan recognizes them as non-Muslim. All voters must declare their religion on their voter registration and when obtaining a CNIC, and one of the options presented is Ahmadi. If a citizen declares him/herself Muslim, he/she is required to sign a declaration of faith in the finality of the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), a statement that goes against the beliefs of most Ahmadis.

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<sup>3</sup> The Electoral Rolls Act 1974, Section 7

<sup>4</sup> Constitution of Pakistan, Article 219 (a)

<sup>5</sup> The Electoral Rolls Act 1974, Section 11

Although the electoral rolls for Muslims and non-Muslims were combined in 2002, Chief Executive's Order No.7 of 2002 passed by General Pervez Musharraf maintains that Ahmadi status is to remain as non-Muslim, but they are to be kept on a "supplementary list." If an Ahmadi is placed on the main electoral list, his/her entry can be challenged. If someone files an objection against the entry, he/she will receive a notice to appear before the Revising Authority within 15 days to sign the aforementioned declaration of faith. If the voter refuses to sign the declaration, he/she shall be deemed a non-Muslim and his/her name will be deleted from the joint electoral rolls and added to "a supplementary list of voters in the same electoral area as non-Muslim."<sup>6</sup> If the voter does not turn up in spite of service of notice, an order may be passed against him/her in absentia and the voter's name will be transferred accordingly.

In 2007, Kanwar Idrees, a former Sindh Government official, filed a petition with the courts arguing that the use of separate lists only for Ahmadis is unconstitutional. In February 2013, the Supreme Court of Pakistan revived the pending case and appointed a three-member bench to review the issue.

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<sup>6</sup> Conduct Of General Elections Order, 2002