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<https://islamicreligious.com/index.php/Journal/index>Print ISSN: [3006-1296](#) Online ISSN: [3006-130X](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**From Inclusion to Marginalization: Christian Representation in Lahore's Local Government Elections****Dr. Saeed Ahmed Butt**

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saeedbutt@gcu.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

This paper looks at the shift in the direction of Christian representation in the local government elections of Lahore, and how the earlier patterns of inclusion have shifted to new patterns of structural marginalization. Using historical institutional analysis and secondary electoral data, the paper traces shift in local governance from pre-independence municipal cooperation to post-independence exclusion, the Basic Democracies system, the 2000 devolution reforms, and the 2015 local bodies elections. The findings suggest that although institutional reforms periodically expanded formal participation, substantive political power of Christians in Lahore remained limited due to electoral engineering, constituency restructuring, party-controlled nomination systems, and socio-political exclusion. This paper maintains that local government reforms in Pakistan have resulted in procedural inclusion and no substantive empowerment of the Christian communities in urban governance that has taken place.

Keywords: *Minority Politics, Local Government, Christian Representation, Lahore, Devolution, Electoral Systems, Pakistan.*

Introduction

Local government systems are regarded as the most readily available avenue of democratic participation by the minority communities. The case of Christian political participation in local bodies elections in Pakistan however, presents a complicated path that is determined by changing institutional structures, political regimes as well as socio-religious forces. Being a big metropolis city where the Christian population is greatly concentrated in places like Youhanabad, Kot Lakhpat, and Esa Nagar, Lahore is a valuable case study to consider the minority representation in urban governance. Despite numerical presence and periodic institutional reforms, Christian political influence in local governance remains limited. This paper seeks to answer the main question: how has local government elections in Lahore changed to include and then marginalize Christians? The main thesis is that, although the formal inclusion has been growing over the years, the substantial representation has been dwindling as a result of structural and institutional limitations inherent in the local government system in Pakistan.

2. Historical Background: Cooperation to Exclusion:

Prior to the establishment of Pakistan, Christians in Lahore were actively involved in municipal politics. Inter-communal political cooperation was evident as Christian voters gave their support to Muslim League candidates in 1946 local elections. This period reflected a relatively open municipal political environment where religious identity did not fully determine electoral alliances. Prior to the Independence of Pakistan, Christian had also assisted the Muslim politicians during the elections of the local bodies of Lahore by voting the Muslim League candidate Mr. Ameer-ud-din, in July 1946, to represent Lahore in the mayorship of the local body. He was an electoral candidate to Mayer ship of Lahore being one of the presidents of Anjuman-e-Hamayate-Islam and a prominent Muslim Leaguer. Some of his Muslim friends and party Leaguers had

fooled him over the issue of voting in the elections, but he could only succeed with the aid of the Christian members. After independence in 1947, however, the political environment gradually shifted. The new post-colonial state came with the centralized governance systems that minimized the independence of the local institutions. Though Christians still remained in the municipal life, they lost more and more influence because of their numerical minority and decreased possibilities of getting political patronage.

3. Basic Democracies System and Structural Weakening (1959-1969):

However, post-independence scenario demonstrates that there were no favourable conditions in which the Christians representation in the process of election could have been made. They were protesting the broken electoral system in Pakistan, but they attempted to adapt them to the existing electoral system that they could use. The advent of the Basic Democracies (BD) system by General Ayub Khan was a significant change in the local governance. The system involved indirect elections by representatives of union councils, but it falsely disadvantaged minorities. The first local bodies elections in Pakistan were conducted by General Ayub Khan under Basic Democracies System (B.D System). Under this system, a member of each street (ward) was to be directly elected by Mohallah (ward) voters. And when BDS electors ultimately came to elect a national or provincial member, by indirect election, of the national and provincial assemblies, the Christian BD member was only garnering two votes on the aggregate. Dispersed settlement patterns, Lack of electoral coordination and absence of cross-community voting support led to fragmented Christian representation.¹ When Christian candidates were chosen as Basic Democrats, they had limited influence in the bigger electoral colleges. The system virtually diminished the minorities to mere observers in a very centralized political system.

The period during which the government was reorganized to create local governments represents the fourth phase of local government history.

4. Local Government Discontinuity and Controlled Representation (1970s-1990s):

Local government elections were also suspended during 1970s under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto which also weakened the political contribution at the grassroot. There were no Local Bodies Elections in the period of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1972-1977). Local bodies were reintroduced in the subsequent Zia-ul-Haq regime in 1979 but in a controlled political system. In the year 1979, General Zia-ul-Haq gave an announcement that Local Bodies Elections would be conducted in the whole of Pakistan. In the case of non-Muslims, right of representation would be conferred by separate electoral process that would have the constituency of multi-membership. In the case of the candidate of the city councilor, the constituency was the whole-city multi-membership and in the case of the candidates of the district councilors; the constituency was the all-district multi-membership. This formula continued to be in contact till 1983, when the constituencies of non-Muslims were delimited in 1987. During period of Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990), the elections of local bodies had not been held, but the government of Mian Nawaz Sharif increased the representation of minorities by doubling their seats in elections of local bodies in 1990. The system also supported segregation instead of integration although the representation of the non-Muslims was formally introduced with the help of reserved seats. The minority members were usually elected under multi member constituencies without effective accountability systems. The Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif periods witnessed further institutional inconsistency. Some reforms have resulted in more minority representation in office; however, it was not accompanied with a corresponding administrative power or policy.

5. Reforms and Devolution (2000-2008) and Musharraf Era.

¹ Akhlaq Hussain, Social and Political Participation of Christian Minority in Pakistan, p.31

The most dramatic reorganization of local government in Pakistan was the Devolution of Power Plan (2000) put in place by General Pervez Musharraf. It established a three-level system: union councils, tehsil governments and district governments. Although joint electorates were again established, Muslim and non-Muslims had separate voting booths in Lahore.² With the take over of the control of Pakistan by General Pervaiz Musharraf as Chief Executive, on 12th October 1999, he introduced system of separate electoral system to provide the real genuine and maximum representation to non-Muslims in Pakistan. In 2000, Local Bodies were introduced to an election process at a grass-root level whereby maximum representative was given to the people at grass-root levels. This system also brought about a scheme of small constituencies where people would directly elect councilors and chairman. In the meantime, special seats to women and non-Muslim councilors were also reserved in this every union council so as to give maximum representation to the minorities in all the constituencies of the district. In the meantime, maximum tier of union council would be related to the municipal /tehsil and district council where elected chairman and vice chairman would indirectly elect councilors of municipal/ tehsil/ district councils. This tier system of representation guaranteed maximum representation of the minorities in every province district. The system of minority representation in general changed in second Local Bodies Elections, 2005. The right of electing the minorities candidate by minorities was overthrown and the representation of the minorities was completely left to the mercy of the Muslim Political Parties who by virtue of their proportional representation had the right to nominate any Tom, Dick or Harry among the minorities without consulting them. The reforms were, at first, promising to minorities (in the case of Christians in Lahore) since the non-Muslims would have their reserved seats, direct elections would be held at the union council level, and the increase of the political participation at the local level. However, structural limitations persisted higher-tier representation remained indirectly elected, Political parties influenced candidate selection and Minority councilors had limited decision-making authority. By the 2005 elections, the shift toward party-controlled nomination systems weakened direct community accountability. Minority representation also was more reliant on political party choices than the voting preference.

6. Structural Constraints and Lahore Metropolitan Governance (Post-2013):

In Punjab Local Government Act 2013, Lahore was reorganized into a metropolitan corporation consisting of nine administrative areas. Although this system was expected to enhance efficiency in the governance system, its consequences to minority representation were minimal. Although there were elected mayors and deputy mayors, Christian communities in Lahore complained of poor policy consideration of minority-majority neighborhoods, lack of developmental investments in Christian localities and lack of focused welfare programs. Therefore, institutional decentralization failed to correspond with empowerment of the minority groups. Punjab Local Government Act 2013 states that Lahore comes under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Corporation Lahore and proclaims Lahore as a metropolitan area. The district of Lahore is further divided into nine (9) administrative zones each of which has its own Deputy Mayor that is elected by the people. The mayor of the Lahore is directly elected by the elected councilors and has a term of four years plus nine (9) deputy town mayors. The mayor of Lahore city oversees the administrative affairs relating to Metropolitan Corporation Lahore with the assistance of nine (9) deputy mayors. The other nine (9) deputy mayors and the mayor of the city of Lahore, are all elected by the people of the union members during union council elections. Lahore Metropolitan Corporation has got numerous functions such as city planning and its designing, land use and its zoning, provision of municipal services and formulation of laws to guard the environment of the

² Ahmad Salim, Non-Muslims in an Islamic State A Case Study of Pakistan, p.64-65.

city. But the office of Mayor of Lahore is extremely limited where his performance is observed in Christians Union Councils of Lahore. These districts indicate that he has not planned out any method to improve the living of Christian residents with that of the rest of the Muslim community in the district.

7. Local Government Elections 2015: Electoral Reality in Action:

The 2015 Lahore local bodies elections demonstrated the superiority of the major political parties, especially the Pakistan Muslim League (N), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and the Pakistan Peoples Party. PML-N secured 229 seats in 274 union council seats in Lahore, PTI secured 12 seats and PPP secured 1 seat. Independents won 27 seats. The Christian majority Youhanabad, Esa Nagar and Hamza Town experienced a drop in trust in mainstream political parties because of failure to govern and grievances after the attacks at the Youhanabad church in 2015. This resulted in more support of independent candidates that would have been a protest-based vote and not a political representation. The 2015 local bodies elections in Lahore are a critical case study of what may be learnt about urban realignments of electoral politics, party organization, and mobilization ability of voters in the largest metropolitan centre in Pakistan. Though the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) produced high political expectations due to its enormous mass mobilization following its mega rally at Minar-i-Pakistan in 2011, which symbolically projected the notion of a Naya Pakistan, the party did not manage to transfer the mass mobilization into the electoral process at the grassroots level during the 31 October 2015 local government elections. The electoral result shows empirically a strong asymmetry between the political symbolism and the real conversion of votes. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), a party, won 229 seats out of a total 274 seats of the Union Council (UC) seats in the Lahore District, which makes up about 84.5 percent of the overall electoral victory. This dominant performance indicates not only organizational penetration at the local level but also entrenched patronage networks and administrative influence across urban constituencies. Contrastingly, PTI could only win 12 UC seats that represents about 4.4 percent of the results. This underperformance points to a major disconnect between urban political popularity on the level of the national narrative and proper organization of electoral efforts on the grassroots. The failure of the party to mobilize voters at the union council level implies that the party has weaknesses in terms of candidate selection, campaign infrastructure, and strategies of engaging the constituency level.

The second force of the electoral scenario was the independent candidates who managed to win 27 seats or about 9.9 percent of the total. This shows a significant level of voter division and localized political agency more so in constituencies where discontent with the major structures of the parties was observed. Meanwhile, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) only obtained 1 seat, or about 0.4% of the overall electoral result, a further indication of its ongoing loss of political ground in urban Punjab politics. Also, the outcome of five Union Councils was still awaiting their first reporting; but their addition would not materially change the overall domination trend as achieved by PML-N. The final distribution of seats thus confirms a highly centralized electoral outcome, with one party controlling more than four-fifths of the local governance structure in Lahore. The percentage distribution further reinforces this structural imbalance: PML-N (84.5%), PTI (4.4%), Independents (9.9%), and PPP (0.4%). This information depicts an evident electoral hierarchy and highlights the lack of competitiveness of opposition parties in the local governance environment of Lahore at this time. Analytically, these findings indicate that the local bodies elections in 2015 in Lahore were asymmetrically party consolidated, in that the success of the electoral process was not as heavily reliant on the national-level popularity narrative but rather reliant on localized political organization, delivery of services to the constituencies, and established patron client

networks. This low performance of the PTI is therefore not just the defeat of the election, but a structural failure to infiltrate entrenched local political systems even as it is able to mobilize nationally. The PTI is brought into the limelight in elections by local bodies. In most UCs the PTI was not able to secure a candidate in the seats of Chairmen and Vice Chairman and the result of the election was that those PTI candidates who won in the election had their own bank of votes which saw them win neck on neck with their rivals. Assuming the percentage of the votes obtained by the PTI candidates in which in most of the UCs the PTI candidates were second and majority was below 40 percent of the votes secured by the winning candidates. And this indicates that the PTI does possess a vote bank but not to the extent of winning the election. The explanation that is self-evident to all the PTI workers is that the party is taken over by people who have been known to switch loyalties. Any reasonable politically conscious individual would observe this in the Pakistani political situation where parties always consider electable. Yet, the electable, who became members of the PTI and practically assumed the leadership, by affecting decision-making, failed to even bother to conduct the local bodies election campaign in a proper manner.

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf was the candidate challenging the by-elections of National Assembly-122 (NA-122) in Lahore. It was regarded as one of the costly elections in the Pakistani political history. Although the PTI candidate and winner PTI, Aleem Khan lost in the elections but also appeared to bolster the PTI in one of the urban centers in the Lahore constituencies. However, the outcomes of the local body elections had left everybody bewildered as it failed to get a substantial number of union council seats during the elections. The October 31, 2015 has once again demonstrated that Lahore is the stronghold of the PML-N as the PTI did everything to weaken it to no avail. But the change is a slogan of the PTI that attracts people but the party itself in a denial of a political culture that exists in society. Rigging aside, there is a day of election, there are voters and you must take them out since they are not so accustomed to the norms and responsibilities of democracy. It is now high time that the PTI reinvigorates it ranks since people still have expectations of its improved performance. PPP once dominated Lahore had reduced to one union council position. The residents of Christian majority regions of Hamza town, Esa Nagar, Asif town and Youhanabad appeared to be angry about the PML (N) policies. Despite a few panels, which were going to challenge the local government elections in 2015. These panels are independent candidates, and do not want them to be identified with the ruling party, PML (N), as the people of Youhanabad residents have boycotted the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), and generally, they are not ready to vote their candidates. Hence, the political activity was transformed into corner meetings as opposed to open meetings in the vicinity was transformed into corner meetings. It seems that the native population has chosen Mian Shahbaz Sharif to the Punjab Assembly by casting their ballots but he was able to listen to the issues of the Christian population residing in Youhanabad. One of the pharmacy owners, Javed, of Youhanabad, writes about how Youhanabad residents are angry at PML-N due to the neglect of their concerns most especially when non-Muslims are involved... He cites several cases such as the Gojra massacre, the Shantinagar episode, and the more recent Joseph Colony, Kot Radha Kishan and Youhanabad incidents.

Talking about the performance of the PML (N) in the area, Mrs Aazim who is a housewife says; we voted PML-N last time but we have not seen a single work done in this area in terms of job creation and basic facilities. The terrorist attacks on Churches of Youhanabad also taxed the livelihood of the factory workers, as the population of the both Union Councils (UC-245 and 246) is mainly made up of factory workers, and belong to the Christian community. It is also said that the factory workers were fired by their Muslim factory owners following incidences at Youhanabad. The events of bomb blasts, lynching, and being picked up by security agencies

brought great changes. All these occurrences introduced some change into mind-sets of employers towards Christian workers who were residing at Youhanabad and its surrounding regions. The Muslim neighbourhoods also embraced even harsh stance towards Christians. Under these conditions alteration of local bodies elections to change the size of Union Councils would reflect that such conditions would limit the Muslim voter to vote to a Christian panel. Mr. Tanvir Akhtar, a local resident explains, the so-called lions do not have the guts to campaign to this area.... PML-N candidates have been threatened with social ostracisation by the locals. So, they are now embarking on an independent campaign. The provincial constituency of Shahbaz Sharif was lost by PML (N) in elections conducted in both Union councils that are dominated by Christians; UC-245 and UC-246. It is a Christian majority voting area with a base in Youhanabad, which is regarded as the predominantly Christian populated area of Lahore. Traumatic impact of terrorist attacks on the Churches of Youhanabad and arrest of 250 Christians people following the lynching incident and use of excessive force by the Police were the reasons behind this defeat. Thus, the Punjab government led by Shahbaz Sharif was unable to provide any relief to the minority group of the affected region, Youhanabad, which is paid out in democratic revenge by the local people in the form of voting against PML (N). As in the case of the General Elections, the Christian people representatives would have two choices. The major Muslim political parties would pick the Christian candidates; otherwise, they would run against the elections on independent candidatures. It was biased towards favouring the independent candidates over the candidates of any of the major political party in the Union Councils (UC-245 and UC-246) of Lahore. Both these Union Councils had fallen under the constituency of Shahbaz Sharif. This is translated into the Christian alienation of voting due to the fact that they had the motive that the Punjab police mercilessly tortured the over 250 Christian youths in the Union Council (UC-246) of Youhanabad, Lahore who were not part of the lynching of Muslims incident and then the two bomb blasts in March 2015. The use of the term of the Secretion System by the major Muslim political parties in the both the Local and General Elections only serves to consolidate the Muslim majority supremacy and definitely gives a contradiction to 226 Article of 1973 Constitution which states; All elections under the Constitution, other than those of the prime minister and the chief minister, shall be by secret ballot. Conversely, the native social worker believed that the Christian angeriness towards PML (N) is because of numerous reasons. The slow pace of the attitude of the PML (N) leadership to acute problems and issues of Christian populated areas can be one of the reasons. The other reason, however, may be the reforms in Union Councils which made them furious. The Union Councils, which had an average number of two hundred (200) families with varying voting strength of two to five thousand voters, were made up in the era of General Pervez Musharraf; however, the worst part is that no one treats united Christian population, which has been divided into two or three UCs to face a very large number of Muslim votes. A controversial amendment, LG Elections Ordinance has been put in place in Punjab that removed the ability of native Christian people to elect their own representative which made them bitter.

8. Case of Youhanabad: Marginalization and Political Alienation:

Youhanabad is the largest Christian political group in Lahore. Nevertheless, regardless of the demographic concentration, the region suffered systematic political alienation due to the acts of violence, police intervention and state neglect. The church attacks in 2015 and the arrests that followed left political mistrust in the ruling parties, a poor turnout in the elections to mainstream candidates and a move to independent and community-based panels. This example demonstrates that the political marginalization is supported not only by the electoral systems but also by the failures of security and the administration. There were some excited people in Youhanabad who

had begun campaigning even before the elections started, and had no idea that this amendment had been reintroduced, but then, when they found out by Protest and announcement of churches in Lahore, that the chairman and general council would only select a candidate by means of secret balloting, they felt fooled; so they spent money on campaign advertisements, but now they saw that they had been cheated. The enormous dimensions of Union Councils imply that the voters would need more transport which would raise the spending of candidates as well. Apparently, the piles of garbage on the streets corners, and stagnant sewerage water are but some of ills afflicting Youhanabad that has been largely overlooked by political leaders.³ Tariq Javed, in union nazim seat of Youhanabad in union council of Lahore, has won the seat with a mix of population equally divided between Christians and Muslims, he always takes a Muslim candidate to fill his naib-Nazim.⁴

In an explanation of the local body system in Lahore, when General Pervez Musharraf completed separate electorate of non-Muslims and introduced joint electorate; Sunil Gulzar⁵ explains; there was a house of 21 councilors in a Union Council which made the election of a single non-Muslim councilor in the Union Council compulsorily. In his description of the worst conduct of Muslim chairmen and vice chairmen in offices of Union Councils, Sunil Gulzar quoted the case of an elected Christian councilor in a union council of Manawan, Lahore where Chairmen of the Union Council put a special glass in the place of his minority elected councilor. Should he feel thirsty he would drink out of his own separate glass, and this indicates the social repulsion of him. However, on the other hand he was lauding the contribution and the approach of the elected members of the district council where they accorded respect and dignity to the non-Muslim members. Dwelling on the Christian funds in the district council of Lahore, he explains that a certain sum is paid out to all the non-Muslim members of the district council as part of the annual budget. However, when it came to introducing resolution in the district council Lahore, he too witnessed oppression and marginalization. Discrimination began when any minority councilor was allowed to propose resolution and speech once in a district council Lahore meeting, or he could not speak.⁶

9. Conclusion:

The example of Christian representation in local government elections in Lahore shows that there is a definite shift between the initial inclusiveness and the modern marginalization. The institutional reforms of various political regimes increased formal participation, but did not guarantee political empowerment. This paper concludes that the Christian presence in Lahore is typified by a symbolic inclusion into an unequal system of structure. Local government reforms, instead of addressing historical marginalization, have often reproduced it through administrative redesign and political centralization. To truly be inclusive in democracy, reforms should not just be numerical but aim at enhancing local accountability, minority participation that is autonomous, lessening party-dominated nomination procedures and increasing socio-economic integration. It is only under this condition that local governance within Lahore can shift towards formal inclusion to substantive equality.

³ *Xari Jalil*, Report Published in Dawn, Dated: October 13th 2015.

⁴ Tahir Mehdi, *Religious Minorities in Pakistan's Elections*, Church World Service, Dated: August 2012.

⁵ He himself was elected in 2003, later was also elected in 2017 election. He was serving as a member of District council of Lahore and a prominent Christian politician at the level of union as well as and district councils. Sunil Gulzar was elected in Rang Mahal, *Lohari* gate of Lahore City. Meanwhile in the by-elections of local bodies in 2003. In the next elections, he was elected unopposed. He was most qualified and degree holder councilor amongst the whole elected councilors of Lahore' Union Council.

⁶ *Ibid*,