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Minority Voting Dynamics in Urban Pakistan: The Case of Christians in Lahore

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ABSTRACT

Minority voting behavior is an important study in the context of evaluating the quality of democratic inclusion in postcolonial states. Institutional arrangements, socio-economic inequalities, and religious identity have historically determined the electoral participation in Pakistan. This research paper focuses on voting patterns of the Christian community in the second largest city of Pakistan Lahore, the major urban center of Christians concentration. It examines the impact of electoral systems especially that of separate electorates, socio-economic marginalization, and party politics on the Christian voting trends. Drawing on secondary literature, electoral data, and case-based analysis, the study argues that Christian voting behavior in Lahore is shaped by a combination of structural exclusion, strategic adaptation, and limited political agency. Although this inclusion has been enhanced through the restoration of joint electorates in 2002, it is still limited by socio-economic and institutional factors. The paper contributes to broader debates on minority politics, urban electoral behavior, and democratic representation in Pakistan.

Keywords: Minority Voting, Christians in Lahore, Electoral Behavior, Political Participation, Pakistan, Urban Politics

1. Introduction:

Electoral participation of electoral processes by religious minorities in Pakistan is a critical prism through which the democratic inclusion can be evaluated. Although Pakistan has a formal democratic structure, the situations of minority groups tend to demonstrate that in many cases there is a vast gap between the guarantees provided by the constitution and political practices. The second-largest minority religion is Christians, who are highly concentrated in urban Punjab, especially Lahore. Lahore is a special place in the socio-political life of Pakistan. It is home to one of the largest Christian communities in the country with a population of Christians who are around 5% of total population. This community has been a significant contributor in the fields of education, healthcare and public service. Nevertheless, Christians have been marginalized in politics even after making their contribution to the society in terms of socio-economics. The main question that will be used to conduct this study is, what role do Christians in Lahore play in electoral politics and what influences their votes? This paper will contend that minority voting patterns in Lahore are determined by three interconnected factors that include; (1) institutional constraints, which are based on historical electoral systems, (2) marginalization caused by socio-economic factors, and (3) tactical political involvement with mainstream political parties.

2. Literature Review:

The literature available on minority politics in Pakistan shows that there is an endemic difference between rights on paper and real presence. Christians make about 1.6 percent of the Pakistani population, but have been historically disadvantaged in terms of political representation. Research highlights that although the provisions of the constitution ensure equality, minority participation is usually curtailed by social and institutional aspects (Ahmad et al., 2023). Studies conducted in Lahore itself suggest that there is socio-economic and

political marginalization of Christian community. Research indicates that Christians tend to live in economic underprivileged urban areas and are vulnerable to employment, education and political success. Furthermore, the geographic clustering of Christians in places like Youhanabad and Kot Lakhpat forms a paradox: the communities have numerical power on the local level, but since the electoral system is not based on proportions, they do not have corresponding political power. One of the key factors that can determine the voting behavior of the minority is the electoral systems, as identified in the literature. The separate electorate system (1985-2002) is often seen as a break point that institutionalized minority exclusion. Having restored joint electorates, the structural inequalities remain, impacting voting trends and political participation.

3. Historical Context of Minority Voting in Pakistan:

The minority voting in Pakistan has a historical context that Minority voting in Pakistan has a long history that is embedded in the constitutional, political and ideological development of the state since its formation in 1947. Pakistan was left with a plural society with a high degree of religious diversity at the time of independence, which comprises of Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and other minority groups. The issue of minority political representation was central to the nature of citizenship in new state in early constitutional debates. Although the Objectives Resolution of 1949 asserted the idea of democratic principles, it also focused on the ideological underpinnings of Islam, which set an early clash between the idea of universal citizenship and religious affiliation. This conflict came to be a hallmark of electoral politics, especially concerning minority voting rights. During initial 20 years of independence, Pakistan mainly followed a joint electorate system, which meant that all citizens irrespective of their religious affiliation could vote common candidates in general constituencies. At this time, the minorities such as Christians take part in electoral politics and had representatives in both provincial and national legislatures. Christian legislators were elected in 1947-1955 in Punjab, and were allowed to debate and discuss the policies in the parliament. The joint electorate system also enabled them to have some integration into mainstream politics and minority voters to have a say in electoral results in their local constituencies, despite their limited numerical strength. Nevertheless, political situation started to change greatly in times of military government and constitutional reform. The most significant change happened during the tenure of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) when the state undertook a wide-ranging program of Islamization. Other elements of this ideological restructuring included change of electoral system. The 1980s introduction of separate electorates was a breakthrough in minority political involvement. This system deprived the non-Muslim citizens such as Christians of being included in general electoral lists but put them on different lists. They were only allowed to vote in minority candidates who were running in reserved seats but the Muslim majority constituencies were not open to them. This essentially broke the connection between the minority voters and mainstream politics.

Separate electorate system had far-reaching consequences on political agency of minorities. This was officially supported as a tool to guarantee minority representation but practically it minimized their political voice as they were not involved in overall electoral processes. The representatives of minorities were also elected on nationwide constituencies instead of local districts and hence lost their accountability to particular communities. To Christians in Punjab especially in cities such as Lahore, this implied that they did not directly influence success of local government or decision making at the areas of the constituency. This led to the symbolic, but not the substantive political participation.

During 1985–2002 period, minority political participation remained constrained by this institutional design. The Christians had a predetermined number of reserved seats in the National and Provincial Assembly, but they could not affect general policy nor compete in mainstream electoral contests. It was also the time when there was a growing political division among minority communities as only a very few positions were reserved and candidates fought over them. This lack of access to mainstream political party politics also diminished their bargaining power since the major political parties were not interested in involving the minority voters in general constituencies. It was only abolished by General Pervez Musharraf in 2002, as Pakistan reverted to a joint electorate system. This reform was popular among the minority groups and civil society organizations as minority population was returned to their right to vote with the majority population. This change theoretically was to bring back the minorities into mainstream politics and increase democratic inclusion. But the heritage of the separate electorate system still influences political behavior. Trends of political marginalization, ineffective representation, and inaccessibility to party formations have remained, especially in the urban minority groups like the Christians in Lahore.

Minority voting pattern after the year 2002 has changed but is still based on structural limitations. Although Christians are now making to the general elections, their participation is still limited due to the social-economic inequalities, political underrepresentations, and poor institutional involvement by mainstream parties. Minority reserved seats are still occupied by party nominations and not by direct constituency elections, and this brings about issues of accountability and true representation. This has meant that the formal obstacles to participation have been eliminated but the issue of substantive equality in political participation is still a challenge. History of minority voting in Pakistan has shown a pattern of inclusion and exclusion in alternate phases. The early joint electorate system gave a relative level of integration and the separate electorate system gave an institutionalized segregation and political marginalization. Although there have been reforms in the 21st century, historical structures of these institutional arrangements still affect the minority political behavior especially among Christians in the urban centers such as Lahore. This historical evolution is essential for understanding contemporary voting dynamics and the persistent gap between formal democratic rights and actual political empowerment.

4. Voting Trend of Christians Population of Lahore in its Constituencies:

The socio-economic status of Christians is also important in determining their votes. Most Christians are of lower-income and work in the sanitation and labor industries. Political awareness and participation are curtailed by education differences. Isolation through residential segregation strengthens social and political. All these serve to make political efficacy low and this is one of the important determinants of voting. General Elections were held on 18th Feb. 2008 to which all minorities participated with an exception of Ahmadis. With increased enthusiasm among voters and happiness among workers, the minorities were justified in participating in the General elections in Pakistan following the restoration of joint electoral system in Pakistan. Based on the allocation of 33 representative seats on the National and provincial and National Assemblies, various minorities such as Christians, Hindus and Parsis submitted the nomination papers of their candidates to the election. The religious minorities were madereserved to about ten seats in the National Assembly. In those seats, nearly ninety-five (95) women and males candidates submitted their nomination papers to the elections. The Ahmadis failed to vote in the General Election of 2008 since they had a separate voting as the voting list of the Election Commission, Pakistan covered all non-Muslim communities except Ahmadies. During a joint press meeting on August 22, 2007, to nominate

the minority candidates also to National and Provincial Assemblies in the 2008 elections, they said; that minorities had fought so hard to have the joint electorate system restored in the country, but were still left out of the mainstream politics.

The Pakistan communities of the minorities had no overwhelming wish that Pakistan major political parties would select candidates, who had to be members of minorities in all such constituencies where they had major and greater population share in the district. And a part of the Lahore District like area of Youhanabad is a manifestation of such majority population of Christian. The most valuable reason why such minorities wanted it was that the minorities needed to be highly assimilated into the national political stream and their national integration would provide them with the opportunity to cease their political alienation which the separate electoral system of Pakistan created. And this could only be achieved by offering a really democratic environment in the nation. To this end, the Pakistan Christian National Party petitioned in Supreme Court of Pakistan, which was making attempts to request the introduction of the constitutional amendments in the Constitution of 1973. They also prayed that all these articles that divide and classify Pakistani citizens based on religion should be eliminated.

The Christian voting in the Pakistani society could contribute largely in the fortification of liberal values and democratic trends in the society on firm and robust grounds. The political analysts view the minorities as having an insignificant presence in Pakistani politics due to their smaller size, which limits their great input. This was a new trend in the General elections of 2013 when one could see a popular support in the Christian areas such as Youhanabad and Joseph Colony Lahore where the flags of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazl) (JUI-F) group could be found. JUI-F is the greatest religious party of Pakistan which is closely related to the Taliban. The Christian community and the JUI-F are not a natural fit, however, there is a big challenge to establish any connectivity and relationship between both these since a Muslim mob attacked the Joseph Colony, Lahore in March 2013 as a protest against a blasphemer, the resident of it. These attacks rendered hundreds of Christian people homeless and the homes of around 50 Christians were burned. Here however was the general tendency of endorsing JUI-F in Christian regions in Lahore during the general elections of 11 May 2013. To this, the straight response of Christian inhabitants of Joseph Colony Lahore was founded on an argument by Daniel, a 30-year of age local Christian inhabitant. , "JUI-F leaders were the only one to come to us in the aftermath of the carnage and asked about how we were able to cope in the open air during the hard times. It was the Jamaat-e-Islami who came to us next to render A monetary relief was later initiated by the Punjab government led by Shahbaz Sharif to the affected people by announcing financial packages to the Christian homeless people to enable them to rebuild their houses. Conversely, the indigenous residents announced the financial resources were also availed by the JUI-F to initiate the rebuilding of their homes. It is viewed as a derailment of non-Muslim groups especially Christians towards Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) which is also a new event in the history of Pakistan politics.

In 2008, JUI-F was the first party to nominate a Christian woman, Aasia Nasir, to one of the women-only parliamentary seats. In the parliament, Mrs. Nasir was performing remarkably well with a strong resonance of voice in defense of the rights of the minorities and at times used harsh words against these miscreants, who were behind the 2009 riots in Gojra, where a Christian life had been lost, and twenty-two houses had been burnt. Mrs. Nasir explains the democratic atmosphere that was in the Muslim religious party of JUI-F in the following words, "Had I belonged to another party I would have been kicked off because of the language I would have been using in the parliament. rather she and other minority members of the JUI-

F are consulted regularly on issues affecting minorities and other issues that are mostly of major concern in the parliament. It is in our best interest to close the rifts between Muslims and religious minorities, as we, at JUI-F, are ideally positioned to do so,

The biggest reasons which the Christian community of Lahore was well remembered and started sides with the Muslim religious parties such as JUI (F) and Jamat-i-Islami who came to the fore to provide a relief to the affected families of the two mentioned incidents were the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, a former minister of minority affairs in 2011 and the incident of Joseph Colony, Lahore. This is due to the fact we have a real Muslim religious leadership that is well respected within Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Pakistani tribal areas. Mrs. Nasir set about a tremendous publicity campaign of making of JUI-F popular and vote bagging party among the Christian quarters of Lahore and Joseph Colony in which JUI-F had its provincial and national assembly candidates.

The other factor that led to the political support of the JUI-F in the Lahore minority Christians is the endorsement of the Christian view of Rimsha Masih which also enabled this Muslim religious party to become acceptable among the Christian voters in Lahore. Akram Waqar Gill, who has been in the party for eighteen years-long, is currently serving as the President of the minorities wing of JUI-F in Punjab and another prominent campaigner of the party in Lahore. He boasts of his spearheaded work in investigating the case of Rimsha Masih. To this end, JUI-F committee conducted internal hearings and ruled the girl innocent and the religious clerics wrong on her to occupy the lucrative in Islamabad. The court later dismissed these charges on her. According to Akram Waqar Gill, JUI-F does not object to the controversial law on blasphemy in Pakistan, but party chief Maulana Fazlur Rahman does agree that something needs to be done to prevent the legislation's abuse by commercial interests and land-grabbing mafias.

5. Lahore Representatives on National and Provincial Level and Role of Christian:

The largest minority of the Lahore city, the Christians have never missed their part in electing their representatives to the legislative bodies of Pakistan, Assemblies. They do harbor much reservations to the system of electorates that the minorities have, however, their influence in the national politics, provincial politics and the local politics of Pakistan is very instrumental in getting any Muslim candidate to win in most of the constituencies of Pakistan especially in Lahore. A key empirical base of the minority political participation and electoral dynamics in urban Punjab is the demographic composition of District Lahore as captured in the 1998 Population Census. Lahore, with an already large population of 6,318,745, was already the biggest metropolitan district in Pakistan with a very dense population, high urbanization, and a high level of socio-religious diversity. The vast majority of 5,932,865 Muslim individuals and minorities as a group 385,880 persons. The Christians constituted by far the majority of this minority with 368,089 followed by Hindus (1,059), Scheduled Castes (15,210) and Qadianis/Ahmadis (548) and other (974). This population distribution shows that Christians formed about 95 percent of the minority population in Lahore, and hence they were the only group of non-Muslims that were politically important in the district.

Analytically, the agglomeration of the Christian population in Lahore has some significant consequences in terms of studying the urban minority politics. As opposed to the diffused minority populations in the countryside, however, the Christian community has a geographic concentration within certain urban and peri-urban areas in Lahore, which in theory could boost their political presence in the community. But numerical power does not necessarily convert into political power especially in an electoral system that organizes the participation in a particular manner. The fact that a big minority in the metropolitan district like Lahore has

resulted in the creation of a large minority population creates a significant analytical issue, that is, whether demographic concentration creates proportional political representation or whether institutional structures dilute such a potential power.

This can further be explained by the internal distribution of the minority population among tehsils. In 1998, District Lahore was further subdivided into two large tehsils: Lahore City and Lahore Cantonment (Cantt). The statistics reveal that there were 112,209 non-Muslims in Lahore City and much more minority population in Lahore Cantonment, 273,671. Such an unequal distribution implies that a significant part of the minority population of Lahore lived in cantonment and areas near urban-industrial areas, which are usually associated with mixed socio-economic status and closeness to state institutions like military base and administration offices. The increased concentration in Lahore Cantt is also a reflection of historical trends of settlement associated with working in the sanitation and municipal services and low-income urban labor sectors, in which the Christian communities have historically been overrepresented. This spatial distribution holds significance since electoral behaviour not only depends on the population size but also on the geographical and administrative boundaries. Urban electoral politics Tehsil level segmentation has effects on the delimitation of the constituency, access to political parties, and minority visibility in the electoral politics. Despite the high percentages of Christians in the populations of both tehsils, the conversion of demographic presence to electoral power was dependent on the boundaries of the constituency, party mobilization, and inclusion mechanisms in the institution. Thus, to a certain extent even in the comparatively concentrated urban setting, the translation of the population into political power was mediated by the structural factors. Additional information is presented by voter registration statistics of February 2007 which depicts the post-separate electorate phase after the reversion to joint electorates. The data provided by Election Commission of Pakistan show that the total number of Muslim voters in Lahore was 2,816,420 and non-Muslims were 146,836. In the non-Muslim group, Christians numbered 143,711 registered voters followed by the Hindus and Scheduled Castes with 283 voters, Sikhs with 41 voters and Qadianis/Ahmadis with 2,801 voters. This dissemination establishes that the Christians were not only the highest number of minority group, but they were also the majority of the electorate of the electoral minorities in Lahore.

In terms of political analysis, the voter registration numbers show both inclusion and structural limitation. On the one hand, the number of the Christian voters in one district (more than 143,000) signifies that the electoral inclusion into the democratic process after the abolition of separate electorates has become significant. Conversely, when considering it in comparison with more than 2.8 million Muslim voters, the numerical asymmetry of electoral influence is evident. In the joint electorate system, where all the citizens are elected to vote behind a common candidate, the minority voting strength is still weak in highly majoritarian constituencies like Lahore. In addition, the correlation between population (1998 census) and voter registration (2007) indicates a significant demographic trend. Although the 1998 census estimated that there were 368,089 Christians in Lahore, subsequent estimates indicate that by 2012 the Christian population in Lahore had increased to about 499,000, constituting about 5.8% of the total population in the district. This growth will be as a result of natural population growth as well as the rural-urban migration especially central and southern Punjab districts. But even with this demographic growth, there was no corresponding growth in political representation, which supports the thesis that demographic weight is not a sufficient condition to guarantee political empowerment in structurally unequal electoral systems.

Theoretically, the Lahore case can be described as a prime example of a so-called representation gap whereby the size of the population and the presence in the electoral process is not proportional to the political effects. This divide is more evident in the urban areas where minorities are geographically clustered but geographically spread across constituencies that are controlled by majority voters. This gap can be attributed to the persistence of this gap and indicates that the electoral inclusion would need to be studied not just in terms of voter registration but also in terms of a wider framework of party competition, electoral candidate selection, and constituency delimitation. The demographic and electoral statistics of District Lahore in 1998-2007 demonstrates a multifaceted interaction between numerical power and political marginalization. Although the majority of Christians form the largest minority group in Lahore in terms of population and voter turnout, they do not have much power in the form of their politics because the political system has structural asymmetries that limit the extent of their power. This highlights the key point that in urban Pakistan and Lahore in particular, demographic concentration does not necessarily generate political power and that institutional and systemic factors are still the determinant in influencing minority electoral results. The most important analytical finding of the survey and the data at the constituency level is that minority electorate, although a minority of the voters nationwide, act as localized electoral blocs in urban constituencies. The non-Muslim population varies between 10,000 and more than 40,000 in some seats in the National Assembly (NA) and the Provincial Assembly (PA), a large number given that this is enough to influence the electoral margins in competitive elections. This is especially important when the difference in winning and losing candidates in elections is within an equal range. In these instances, partial unity among minority voters can change the results of elections. This gives the theoretical conclusion of minority being not symbolic players but as swing vote blocs in some constituencies.

6. Lahore National Assembly Constituencies (1988-97):

The Lahore non-Muslim voting in the 1988-1997 data at constituency level shows that non-Muslim voters had already become an electoral force in certain constituencies of the National Assembly. An example: NA-93 Lahore-II had 17879 non-Muslim voters (1993) NA-97 Lahore-VI had 23518 non-Muslim voters NA-100 Lahore-X had 10071 non-Muslim voters. These numbers are important as they show that even when the process of the democratization of political relations in the 1990s was in progress, minority voters in Lahore did not play a negligible role. Such voter concentrations may have a possible effect especially in the constituencies where electoral margins were close and in case the voting behavior was coordinated or mobilized. Nonetheless, even with this numerical presence, minority influence was structurally limited because of the disjointed voting behavior, absence of party mobilization and Weak representation in the process of candidate selection. In this way, the political power could not be commensurate to numerical strength.

3. The 2002 and 2008 Elections: Potential of Electoral Influence Expansion.

The 2002 analysis of elections is a major change. Once the joint electorates had been restored, non-Muslim voters were once again included in mainstream constituencies. According to the data, 82 National Assembly constituencies in 2002 and 59 constituencies in 2008 there were more non-Muslim voters than the difference between the winning and the runner-up candidate. Analytically, this discovery is significant in the sense that it indicates that Minority voters in Pakistan can dictate the outcome of electoral results in a large number of constituencies. However, this potential is conditional rather than absolute. The analysis is correct in pointing out that 100% of voter cohesion among minorities is far-fetched, and this

constrains their real veto power. Practically, the voting is divided as there is multiple party affiliations, varying socio-economic interest and political awareness. Thus, minorities can lead to an outcome in theory but their practical effect on outcomes is determined by the effectiveness of mobilization and the unity of the vote.

4. Lahore National Assembly Constituencies (2002, 2008): Analysis of Detailed Analysis.

The 2002 and 2008 data of the Lahore NA constituency indicates that the number of non-Muslim voters was around 9000 to 43000 in the constituency with some of the constituencies having over 20000 voters. For instance:

- NA-125: 43,000 non-Muslim voters
- NA-127: 30,000
- NA-129: 32,500
- NA-130: 17,000

This distribution shows that there are three important trends: Certain constituencies (e.g., NA-125, NA-127, NA-129) have high-density minority populations, and they might become decisive in tight elections. In these situations where minority voters are also numerically big, they are still within the majority dominated constituencies, which restrict them to determining anything on their own. The minorities impacted on the results in a few constituencies in 2002 In 2008, the minority had a weaker effect on the results in many areas because of the shift in the political context. This demonstrates that minority electoral power is volatile and context-dependent, not structurally guaranteed.

7. Performance of Lahore's Major Christian Politicians:

The history of Christian representation in Lahore is a saga of struggle against institutional and constitutional marginalisation. As scholars have noted, minority participation in Pakistan's political system has often been constrained by structural inequalities embedded in electoral design and state ideology. In this milieu, several Christian political leaders from Lahore have played important roles in seeking to carve out a place for their community in an overwhelmingly majoritarian political system. Their efforts, while diverse in approach and effectiveness, demonstrate the opportunities and constraints for minority political participation in Pakistan.

7.1. Emmanuel Zafar: Mobilisation, Institutionalism and Political Organising:

Emmanuel Zafar represents a key figure in the organizational consolidation of Christian political identity in Lahore and broader Punjab. Zafar's political career has been marked by his efforts to mobilise disparate Christian groups and incorporate them into a cohesive political platform. His political agenda signals a form of community-based mobilisation politics, in which religious identity is converted into political identity. Zafar's major contribution is his efforts to politically mobilise Christians through party politics, most significantly efforts that led to the formation and consolidation of Christian political platforms, like the Pakistan Masihi League. His politics was underpinned by a conviction that minority empowerment needed to be institutional. Yet, his subsequent split and establishment of other entities, like the Azad Masihi League and later his affiliation with the Masihi Awami Party, also highlight the lack of unity within minority political leadership in Pakistan. Electoral participation during the Zia-ul-Haq period further demonstrates his institutional relevance. His election to the Majlis-e-Shoora in 1985 positioned him as one of the few Christian voices within a highly controlled political environment. His developmental and legislative record - in education and infrastructure in particular - suggests an evolution from symbolic to developmental politics for minorities. Examples of educational, community spaces and infrastructural connectivity (the road from Sargodha Road to the pilgrimage site at Mariamabad) indicate his focus on

uplift through state-linked development. Moreover, Zafar's involvement in the local government's efforts to include labor rights (such as pension and gratuity) of Christian workers in local development policy suggests an early effort to incorporate minority concerns into labor policy. His extensive scholarly contributions in legal education further suggest a dual role as both a political and intellectual actor within minority discourse. In general, Emmanuel Zafar's political relevance is his effort to formalise the politics of Christian identity within government bodies.

7.2. J. Salik: Protest, Civil Mobilization and Symbolic Resistance

J. Salik is an example of a different type of Christian politics focused on protest, symbolic resistance and civil mobilisation. In contrast to party politicians, Salik is strongly identified with activism and open politics of demonstration, especially in martial law. His political demands - such as equal representation of religious programming on public broadcasting and the scheduling of exams not on Sundays - highlight a concern for cultural and religious representation within the state. These demands, while seemingly administrative, carried deeper implications for the recognition of minority religious identity within public space. The hunger strike led by Salik in Lahore emerged as a significant moment of urban protest politics. It built a coalition of labour within the Lahore Municipal Corporation, in addition to the mobilisation of Christian municipal workers. The intersection of religious and class identities propelled the strike into a broader mobilisation against bureaucratic apathy and authoritarianism. This case provides an example of the interaction between minority politics and class activism in the city. The strike also had important political consequences. It generated significant pressure on local government authorities and attracted national and international media attention, thereby transforming a localized grievance into a symbolic challenge to state authority. The participation of prominent church leaders like Dr. Alexander John Malik underscores the role of religious figures in Christian politics. Analytically, J. Salik's approach to politics is an example of performative politics, in which symbolic actions like hunger strikes are used to gain visibility and engage in bargaining. His brief detention and some gains (such as the adoption of Sunday exam reforms) show the challenges and modest gains of protest politics for minorities. His experience highlights the use of extra-institutional political strategies by minority political actors when mainstream politics fails to provide effective representation.

7.3. Kamran Michael: Institutionalisation and Elite Minority Politics

Kamran Michael's political career represents a contrasting model of minority political participation based on institutional integration within mainstream party structures. Instead of being an activist or an organisational leader, Michael's career exemplifies institutional integration, especially within the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz). Starting out as a municipal councilor, Michael's rise to provincial and federal political offices involved serving in various ministerial capacities, including finance, ports and shipping, human rights, and statistics. As the Finance Minister of Punjab, Michael became the first Christian to occupy such a position in the province.

Michael's political journey exemplifies the potential for minority political representation within the mainstream political process; yet, it also reflects the precarious nature of minority inclusion. His appointment was often met with criticism rooted in religious prejudice, reflecting persistent societal biases against minority leadership in high state offices. However, his ministerial competency challenges the conventional stereotypes about minority administrative abilities. Michael often promotes patriotism, constitutional equality and national integration in his politics. His response to minority symbolism (restricting the

celebration of Minority Day) relates to an emphasis on material over symbolic integration. He confirms minorities as citizens, not aliens. Theoretically, Kamran Michael exemplifies elite incorporation theory, in which minority representation takes place through inclusion in majority parties, rather than independent political action. However, this type of representation also speaks to the issue of autonomy, as minorities represent their interests through majority-dominated political parties.

7.4. Shahbaz Bhatti: Rights-Based Activism and Reformism

Shahbaz Bhatti is pivotal in the history of minority rights in Pakistan. Unlike other leaders, his political identity was explicitly grounded in rights-based activism and institutional reform. Hailing from Lahore, Bhatti was politically engaged from his student days and his leadership journeyed from local advocacy to national policymaking. His founding of organizations such as the Pakistan Christian Liberation Front and the All-Pakistan Minorities Alliance reflects a sustained effort to institutionalize minority rights discourse. Bhatti's subsequent role as Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs gave him a rare opportunity to effect change. Bhatti's initiatives include recommendations for legislative changes, increasing minority representation in the Senate, interfaith dialogue platforms, and changes to the curriculum to promote religious diversity. His initiatives for interfaith dialogue and coalitions reflect a pluralist political strategy, emphasizing co-existence and constitutional equality. Yet, his political journey also highlights the perils of minority rights activism in Pakistan. His assassination underscores the vulnerability of reformist voices in polarized political environments. In terms of analysis, Bhatti exemplifies transformational minority leadership, as seen in efforts to change institutional structures as opposed to work within them.

7.5. Peter Gill: Electoral Stability and the Limits of Representation

Peter Gill represents a long-serving provincial-level politician whose career illustrates both the continuity and limitations of reserved-seat representation for minorities. His repeated elections to the Punjab Assembly through reserved seats reflect institutional stability but also highlight the constrained nature of minority electoral agency. While his longevity and his affiliation with prominent political parties like PML-N and later PTI might suggest his political success, evaluations of his political performance are varied. Academics like Peter Jacob contend that measuring minority political performance in Pakistan is problematic due to structural limitations, including the lack of opportunities for employment, privatisation of public provision and limited access to administrative authority in areas such as sanitation and urban management. Gill's political career is symptomatic of the difficulty in assessing performance in minority politics, where structural constraints impede the ability to link political outcomes to individual performance. His political role is best understood as part of a system of managed representation, where minority politicians operate within predefined institutional boundaries without substantial policy-making autonomy. The political experiences of Emmanuel Zafar, J. Salik, Kamran Michael, Shahbaz Bhatti and Peter Gill collectively represent the variety of minority political approaches in Lahore. These include institutional consolidation, protest, elite cooption and minority rights advocacy. Yet, while distinct, all leaders operate within a common institutional framework of powerlessness, majoritarianism and restricted agency. Their experiences demonstrate that Christian political leadership in Lahore cannot be evaluated solely in terms of electoral success or office holding. Instead, it must be understood within a broader framework of structural inequality, institutional constraint, and negotiated agency. Together, these leaders reflect both the resilience of minority political participation and the persistent limitations imposed by Pakistan's political system.

8. Christian Representation in Local Bodies Elections in Lahore:

The involvement of Christians in the electoral system of the local bodies of Lahore has historically shown a transformation of initial political cooperation with political marginalization and institutional experimentation thereafter with various regimes. In the lead-up to independence of Pakistan, Christian voters actively took part in municipal politics and even played decisive role in the 1946 Lahore municipal elections by voting in support of Muslim league candidate Ameer-ud-Din to office of Mayor. This initial example proves that minority voters used to be incorporated into a bigger urban political alliance, when electoral combinations overrode religious lines. However, the post-1947 political environment gradually restructured electoral participation in ways that reduced meaningful minority influence in local governance. In the post-independence and early state-building years, the political representation of Christians in the local bodies became more and more restricted. The introduction of the Basic Democracies (BD) system by General Ayub Khan was a pivotal change in the local governments. Though the system provided indirect election representation by union councilors, Christian representation was structurally weak because they were scattered as well as they did not have the numbers in the electoral college. Christian BD members tended to be numerically small in bigger constituencies and their electoral effect was also undermined by lack of cross-community vote. Even such influential Christian political leaders could not easily make significant votes, which indicates the fringe status of minorities in the indirect electoral systems. More changes on local governments occurred during the political regimes of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and then General Zia-ul-Haq and Benazir Bhutto. Although Bhutto had never held local bodies elections, Zia-ul-Haq reinstated the election with a distinct electoral setup among the non-Muslims where the minorities got a chance to be represented through reserved and multi-member seats. Even though this system theoretically guaranteed representation, it created separation, institutionalized separation by restricting minority political integration into mainstream electoral competition. Subsequent modifications in the 1980s and 1990s such as constituency delimitation and seat realignment had no substantial effect on giving the Christians substantive political influence. The last structural change is that of the Musharraf regime that implemented a devolution program to empower the grassroots democracy. In 2000, local government reforms came up with a new tiered system of union councils, tehsil governments and district governments, where women and non-Muslims were reserved seats. This system was first seen to increase the representation of the minority since direct representation was guaranteed at the level of the union council. Nevertheless, the non-direct election of representative at higher tier and the presence of major political parties curtailed the independence of minority councilors. The nomination-based system, in 2005 local government elections, further eroded the minority agency as the political parties were now in a position to choose minority representatives without consulting the community. Despite restoration of joint electorates, administrative practices in Lahore continued to reflect informal segregation, including separate polling arrangements for Muslim and non-Muslim voters. In 2013, further reorganized Lahore under the Punjab Local Government Act 2013 was divided into a system of metropolitan corporations divided into various administrative zones with elected mayors and deputy mayors leading each zone. Although this system was supposed to enhance the governance in urban areas, the effect on the Christian-majority or Christianity-concentrated union councils was minimal. There is empirical evidence that municipal government in practice has failed to effectively respond to socio-economic demands of Christian neighborhoods, especially in regard to infrastructure development, employment, and civic services. The 2015 local bodies

elections is a valuable case-study of electoral behavior and minority political alignment in Lahore. Pakistan Muslim league (N) was overwhelmingly elected with 229 seats out of 274 union council seats as compared to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) which performed very weakly. Although PTI had a good urban political story, it did not manage to convert popular mobilization to success at the grassroots level. In Christian dominated regions like Youhanabad, Esa Nagar and Hamza Town, party ideology was not a significant determinant of electoral behavior, but local grievances especially in reaction to government failure and violence against Christian communities.

The Youhanabad case is especially important to the case of religion, violence and electoral behavior. Since the attacks on the church in 2015 and the ensuing security measures, such as mass arrests of Christian residents, political trust to the ruling party dropped significantly. This led to an electoral backlash on the Pakistan Muslim League (N) in the Christian-dominated union councils (UC-245 and UC-246) with the independent candidates becoming prominent. The move towards independent candidates is part of larger trend of political disillusionment and local protest voting, instead of consistent partisan affiliation. Structurally, the shift in the size of union councils and boundaries of constituencies have further weakened Christian electoral power. Growth of the union councils' boundaries diluted the percentage of the Muslim voters in the areas that were earlier dominated by Christians and thus lowered the voting power of the minority communities. Also, the reinstatement of nomination-based selection of minority members has been challenged as a violation of constitutional provisions of fairness in the electoral process especially Article 226 which provides elections to be conducted by secret ballot. Field-level observations also highlight persistent social and institutional exclusion within local governance structures. Christian councilors have also reported low involvement in decision making, low access to administrative forums and token forms of segregation in the municipal offices. The most recent situation is that despite the existence of financial allocations to represent the minority at the district level, they can still not affect the policy agenda due to the majoritarian influence of legislative processes.

Some however, have seen joint electorates as a political integration mechanism. Local politicians like Tariq Javed believe that common electoral systems can facilitate inter-communal collaboration and diminish segregation as candidates will seek to reach out to minority voters. However, this positive view is in opposition to empirical explanations of further marginalization and disproportionate access to institutional power. All in all, the development of the local bodies elections in Lahore shows a complicated path where Christian representation has been alternating between inclusion and marginalization. While institutional reforms have periodically expanded formal representation, substantive political empowerment remains limited due to structural constraints, administrative centralization, and socio-political inequalities. The example of Lahore therefore demonstrates that local government reforms cannot be effective as a tool to guarantee meaningful minority representation unless it is accompanied by more fundamental reforms in the nature of political participation, party responsiveness, and accountability in governance.

9. Case Study: Youhanabad (Lahore) and Voting Trends of Christian Community:

One of the largest urban settlements in Pakistan with the majority of Christians is Youhanabad, which is found in the southern part of Lahore. It has become a major case study in minority voting behavior in urban Pakistan as it has been demographically concentrated, politically visible and has a history of collective mobilization. Youhanabad is a microcosm of identity, socio-economic environment, and political organization that influence the electoral process within the context of the larger electoral scene of Lahore. The voting pattern of

Youhanabad is important to give vital information on the involvement of the Christian community in electoral politics where there is structural constraint and the local cohesion is high. The main features of Youhanabad are predominantly Christian population (the majority of the residents), low-middle and working-class social-economic status, high level of employment in sanitation, informal labor, and small jobs with little personal employment, a lot of churches and community-based organizations, and high population density with low levels of infrastructure development. Although Youhanabad is demographically concentrated, historically, the area was underrepresented in politics at both the provincial and federal levels. In separate electorate (1985-2002), Christian electors in Youhanabad were not eligible to vote in general constituencies but were instead allowed to vote only reserved minority representatives. This somewhat detached local concerns and political results. Following the reinstatement of joint electorates in 2002, residents were once again given the right to elect mainstream candidates in the National and Provincial Assemblies. Nonetheless, the history of political exclusion has an impact on voting patterns. As per empirical observations and the studies implemented through the surveys, Youhanabad has a fairly high voter turnout (about 65-75 percent at the last election). But such turnout does not equate to corresponding political power given the divided voting across mainstream parties, limited nomination of Christian candidates in general seats and poor policy responsiveness by elected representatives. This shows the high participation but low impact pattern.

Youhanabad has a high degree of influence on voting by Church leadership networks, elders in the local community and informal neighborhood associations. These are the actors who tend to give direction to political preferences especially during the election campaigns. This gives rise to some sort of block or bloc voting, in which political decisions are influenced at the community level and not personal ideological preferences. The Christian voters of Youhanabad have demonstrated a wavering support among the key political parties in Pakistan such as Pakistan Muslim League (N), Pakistan Peoples Party and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. Nevertheless, this assistance is mostly transactional and issue oriented and tends to be associated with local development pledges, employment and security anxieties. There is no one dominant party that has a long-term dominance in the region. The electoral behavior of Youhanabad is greatly influenced by the socio-economic conditions. The poorer families are more inclined to focus on short-term economic gains rather than political correctness. The level of education is different, which has an impact on political awareness and participation. Unemployment predisposes one to patron-client. Interpretations of similar urban minority data using regression indicate that income and education have positive effects on participation and economic vulnerability exacerbates reliance on political patronage. During election times, the parties actively take part in the Youhanabad, generally on a short-term and election-oriented basis and through symbolic outreach instead of long-term development initiatives and mediated by the local Christian leaders instead of direct interaction with voters. Consequently, mobilization is an important factor in influencing the turnout, though not always influencing the long-term political trust. Party mobilization in regression terms turns out to be the most important predictor of voting participation, in line with the wider results in urban minority political behavior. Even though separate electorate system was abolished in 2002, its structural legacy remains in Youhanabad through poor integration into mainstream political decision-making, inadequate representation in party leadership structures and still-felt marginalization in politics. This has produced what scholars describe as "institutional path dependency," where past exclusion continues to influence present behavior. Youhanabad shows that there is a paradox of high participation in urban minority

politics with no equality of high political power. Strong community identity coexists with weak institutional influence. Voting is influenced more by mobilization than ideology. Theoretically, Youhanabad demonstrates limited democratic engagement, whereby citizens are technically a part of the electoral process, yet they are structurally disadvantaged to affect the results. The Youhanabad case illuminates the multicast of the Christian voting pattern in Lahore. Although community is politically active and it shows good voter turnout, it has a weak impact because of structural, socio-economic, and institutional limitations. Voting behavior is shaped by community networks, economic vulnerability, and short-term political mobilization rather than stable ideological alignment. Finally, Youhanabad is indicative of the general state of urban minority politics in Pakistan: engagement without equal power. This case highlights the fact that political reforms are necessary that transcends electoral inclusion in favor of substantive representation and meaningful political inclusion of minority communities.

10. Conclusion:

This research has explored voting behaviour of the Christian population in Lahore as a part of minority politics in Pakistan. It finds that electoral behavior is shaped not only by individual preferences but also by structural inequalities and historical legacies. The system of separate electorate contributed a significant role in making political marginalization an institution whose impacts are still felt in voter turnout today. Despite the introduction of the restatement of joint electorates ensuring a higher participation, some challenges persist. Minority political agency is still limited by socio-economic marginalization, lack of representation, and poor political integration. To have an inclusive democracy, Pakistan should go beyond formal equality and seek to deal with structural barriers that restrict the participation of minorities.