

Preliminary Findings of a Survey Research

by

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February, 2026

**Understanding postponement
of LG elections in ICT repeatedly**



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1. Introduction:

Isn't unrepresented and mind-boggling? The Election Commission of Pakistan literally cancelled local elections six times in five years. And each one's schedule had been announced by it. One of them (31 Dec 2022) was terminated just two days before the polling. As the news of the cancellation could not reach to many voters, they reached to the polling stations for voting. It was height of national humiliation. As many as 4,000 candidates were in the field. This angered the public. Next time - the sixth time - polling was cancelled well in time. For the latest aborted polls as many as 3,866 candidates had already paid nomination fee and had spent huge amount of money on election campaigns as the ECP had scrutinised and declared them eligible candidates. Approximately, according to our survey-based estimates they had spent PKR **544.30 million** on the aborted polls. This reckless mindset of political elite damaged trust of citizens in the state institutions, which deserves accountability. This survey research is being done in that perspective in mind.

Besides the above, the purpose of our survey research was - 1st, to understand socio-political and demographic background of candidates. 2nd, political affiliation of respondents as well as nomination processes of candidates. 3rd, campaign finance issues and voters thinking about local government elections, postponement of polls as well as arbitrary amendments in LG Act 2015. 4th, to develop recommendations for improvement.

2. Timeline of postponement of scheduled LG polls

Remember tenure of local councils expired on 14th Feb 2021. According to available data since 2021 local elections were cancelled six times arbitrarily and abruptly. First time the ECP announced the scheduled in June 2022, and then after 20 days cancellation was announced. And then after less than a month on 3rd November new schedule was announced, which was cancelled two days before the polling. On 8th August 2024 once again schedule was announced for polling for 29th September. This was also later cancelled. After two weeks on 20th August yet another schedule was made public for 9th October polling but on 4th September it was also cancelled. The last one the 6th schedule was announced on 9th December for 15th February. Sadly, that was too cancelled on 16th December. This level of frequent cancellations may not have experienced by any country.

2.1. Timeline of election schedules and cancellation of polls

	Announcement	Polling date	Cancellation date	Days before polling
First	2 June 2022	31 Jul 2022	22 Jun 2022	38
Second	20 Oct 2022	24 Dec 2022	NA	-
Third	3 Nov 2022	31 Dec 2022	27 Dec 2022	2
Fourth	8 Aug 2024	29 Sep 2024	NA	-
Fifth	20 Aug 2024	9 Oct 2024	4 Sep 2024	35
Sixth	9 Dec 2025	15 Feb 2026	16 Jan 2026	30

Source: ECP website

3. Financial impact of repeated postponement of ICT Local government Elections

Survey data from 61 participating candidates show:

- **40 candidates** had contested local elections multiple times;
- **5 candidates** had contested once;
- **12 candidates** had contested four times;
- **17 candidates** three times;
- **11 candidates** twice.

Nomination Fee Structure Under Election Rules: Under Election Rules (Rule 13), candidates are required to deposit nomination fees as follows:

- **Union Council (general/quota seats):** PKR 2,000
- **Union Council Heads:** PKR 5,000
- **Mayors/Deputy Mayors:** PKR 20,000
- **Metropolitan Corporation reserved seats:** PKR 3,000

As many as **3,866 candidates** filed nomination papers for the sixth local government polls in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). Each candidate deposited **PKR 2,000** as a nomination fee, resulting in the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) collecting **PKR 7.732 million**.

However, nomination fees represent only a fraction of the financial burden borne by candidates. Contesting elections entails significant expenses — including hiring lawyers to prepare nomination papers and supporting documents, mobilizing voters, and launching preliminary campaign activities.

Estimated Campaign Expenditures: When asked about their campaign expenditures at the time of election postponement, candidates on average reportedly had spent **PKR 136,074** each.

Based on available data:

- For the **December 2022 aborted polls**, approximately **4,000 candidates** were in the field.
 - Estimated average nomination fee: PKR 7,500
 - Total estimated nomination deposits: **PKR 30 million**
- For the **February 2026 polls**, **3,866 candidates** had already submitted nomination papers when the elections were suddenly cancelled.
 - Total nomination fees collected: **PKR 7.74 million**

Combined Financial Losses: When campaign expenditures are included, projected losses from a single aborted election exceeded **PKR 544 million**.

Candidates from just **two aborted elections** lost an estimated **PKR 37.74 million** in nomination fees alone. Our broader estimates indicate that since 2022, aspiring candidates for the five postponed ICT local elections have collectively spent **more than PKR 700 million** on nomination fees and electioneering activities. It is worth noting here that the amount of funds that have been spent on six aborted elections by the ECP must have been in billions. Citizens deserve explanation and apology.

Notably, the ECP has **never refunded nomination fees** following postponements. The relevant law and rules appear vague and do not obligate the Commission to return fees in the event of politically driven delays. This legal gap requires urgent amendment to protect candidates from arbitrary financial losses.

Projected expenses based as claimed by candidates (Pak Rupee)

No of elections contested	No. of Candidates	Total Expense on Elections	Total expense per election	Average Expense per Candidate
One Time	5	2,850,000	2,850,000	570,000
Two Times	11	1,438,000	719,000	65,364
Three Times	17	4,570,000	1,523,333	89,608
Four Times	12	4,124,000	1,031,000	85,917
Total	45	12,982,000	6,123,333	136,074

Average expenses per candidate per election	136,074
Total candidates (Dec 2023)	4,000
Total expense of all candidates in one election (PKR)	544 billion

4. Perceptions about repeated postponements of local elections:

As many 92% of the interviewed voters and 72% of the candidates categorically expressed their opposition to the abrupt cancellation of the polls repeatedly. It could be therefore concluded that the opposition to this brazen practice was widespread even amongst the voters and the candidates who said they belonged to the ruling parties as PMLN and PPP affiliated candidates said they opposed the postponements.

Moreover, when respondents were asked why the ECP postponed LG polls repeatedly despite each time it had announced schedule with the consent of the government, more than one-third of the respondents said that the ruling parties were afraid of losing election to the main opposition. 37% of them were likely to blame the bureaucracy, because civil servants did not want to work under elected representatives, while 12% believed Members of National Assembly did not want to lose monopoly over patronage and decision-making. In this regard 80% of the interviewed candidates who belonged to the ruling parties appear to agree with the opposition candidates.

Reasons for postponement of elections

In your view why did the federal govt postpone local elections so many times?	Responses (%)
I don't know	6
Fear of losing to main opposition party.	35
Bureaucracy didn't want elected members to run local governments.	37
MNAs don't want to lose control over patronage and decision-making	12
Other reasons	10

5. Candidates and voters' opinions about amendments to LG Act 2015:

More than 70% of the candidates and 61% of the interviewed voters were likely to reject the amendments in the LG Act 2015 because of two reasons: first, amendments were made through a non-transparent and illegal way, and second, neither the government and nor the ECP consulted the stakeholders for the purpose. Curiously a significant percentage of respondents didn't want to support or oppose it. Perhaps they wanted to have more information to form their opinion. Regarding abolition of Metropolitan Corporation almost half (49%) of the voters and 66% of candidates said they didn't support it, and more than two-third or 37% didn't express any opinion. When both the groups were requested to give opinion about indirect method of election for all the members and heads of town corporations more than 50% of each set of respondents rejected the amendment, while only 12% of the voters and 34% of candidates were found to be in favour of indirect election. Regarding inclusion of technocrats/businessmen in the marginalised category of peasants/workers quota seats, 90% of the candidates and 60% of voters opposed it. Only 33% of voters appeared to support this merger. In the case of reduction in women quota seats 90% of candidates as well as of voters strongly reject this amendment too.

Candidates and voters' opinions about amendments to LG Act 2015

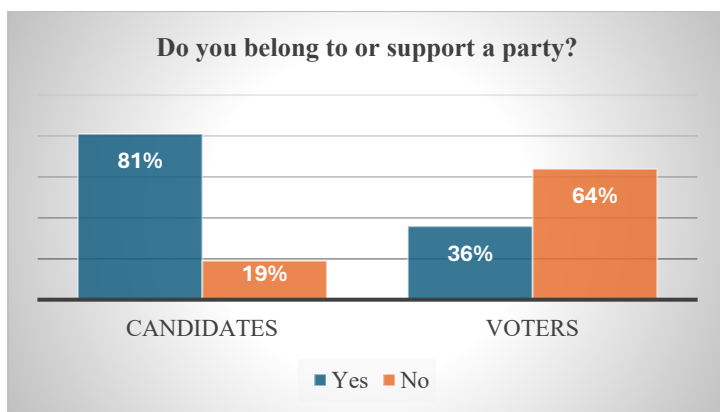
Questions/Issues	Voters (%)			Candidates (%)		
	Yes	No	DK	Yes	No	DK
Did you like abrupt postponement of LG polls repeatedly?	8.0	92.0	0	20.0	72.0	8.0
Did you like the way amendments were made in LG Act made?	11.0	61.0	28.0	10.0	72.0	18.0
Do you support abolition of metropolitan corporation?	14.0	49.0	37.0	24.0	66.0	10.0
All the members and heads of town corporations will be elected indirectly. Do you support this amendment?	12.0	54.0	34.0	34.0	60.0	6.0
Businessmen/technocrats have been included in the marginalised category of quota seats meant only for peasants & workers?	33.0	60.0	7.0	8.0	90.0	2.0
Women's quota has been reduced to 7%. Do you support this amendment in LG Act 2015?	10.0	80.0	10.0	6.0	89.0	7.0

6. Political affiliation of respondents:

Though most political parties in Pakistan don't make any sustained and organized effort to increase their party membership, many respondents of our survey perceived themselves as supporters of or claimed to be affiliated with some party. For instance, 61.5% of the respondents of our survey likely to fall in that category. This percentage jumps to 81% in case of the original Islamabadi's candidates that we had interviewed. However, a significant (19%) percentage of the candidates said they didn't belong to any party. Nearly 90% of the interviewed candidates claimed that they have been with the parties for more than three years. Ironically, 71% of them openly admitted that they had been appointed as office bearer by party leader/s, and only 29% of them said they had been elected by party members.

Interestingly, PMLN likely to have inverse relationship between its share in voters 24.6% and candidates 32%. The same relationship appears in case of JI. It could be interpreted that both the parties have more capacity to field candidates than their popularity in the interviewed voters. In case of PPP, it has more share in voters (19.7%) but could field only 8% of the total candidates.

Regarding party affiliation, 42% of the interviewed candidates were likely to belong to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), followed by Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) with 24%, and 19% claimed to be with Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP). Interestingly, not a single candidate claimed to be member of JUI-F or ANP, and only 8% said they belonged to Jamaat-e-Islami (JI).



Do you belong to or support a political party?

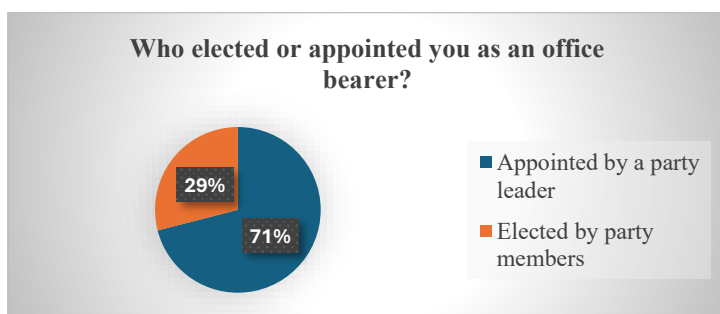
Category of Respondents	Yes	No	Total
Candidates	50 (81%)	12 (19%)	62
Voters	73 (34%)	140 (66%)	213
Overall	123 (45%)	152 (55%)	272

Party-wise affiliation of candidates and voters.

Party Name	PMLN	PPP	PTI	JI	Others
Candidates	32%	8%	42%	12%	6%
Voters	24.6%	19.7%	41%	8%	5%

Length of candidates' affiliation with political parties and as office bearer

Less than a year	Between 1 & 3 years	More than 3 years
6%	6%	88%



7. History of election contestation:

Despite frequent disappointments caused by repeated postponements of LG polls and loss of money and time, desire to contest election persisted and remained high amongst the interviewed candidates. Consider this. As many as 81% of the respondents had contested local elections in the past too, and only 19% didn't. And those who had contested local elections in the past, one-third of them contested three-times, 30% for four times, and 26% twice. When they were asked "did you win?" two-third of them said elections were postponed, and one-fourth of them said they had won once.

The research findings could also be interpreted as expansion and development of political capital at local level. Regarding candidates' political affiliation, interestingly no one mentioned names of some known parties i.e. JUI-F, and ANP, while JI and PPP were mentioned only by 4% each. PTI seems to have nominated largest number (36%) of the total candidates, followed by PML-N with 26% and 24% independents.

Did you ever contest local elections of ICT in the past?

Yes	No
81%	19%

How many times you filed nomination papers or contested ICT local elections?

Once	Twice	Three times	Four times
10%	26%	34%	30%

Which political party had nominated you most of the time?

PMLN	PPPP	PTI	JI	Independents
26%	4%	36%	4%	24%

8. Recommendations:

Repeated postponements of ICT local government elections have imposed **substantial financial losses on citizens seeking public office**, undermined trust in democratic processes, and created perceptions of politically motivated interference.

There is an urgent need to:

1. **Amend election laws** to mandate automatic refund of nomination fees if elections are postponed for non-technical reasons.
2. Establish **clear timelines and legal safeguards** against arbitrary postponements.
3. Introduce compensation mechanisms to mitigate financial harm to candidates.

Without reform, repeated cancellations risk eroding public confidence in local democracy and discouraging citizen participation in governance.

- Instead of holding all Union Council elections on a single day, elections should be staggered — every two years polls should be held in 25% of union councils. This is likely to ensure continuity of local governance.
- Given widespread opposition to key amendments, a referendum should be held to ensure local government institutions are democratic, transparent, accountable, and fully autonomous.
- Clear definitions of terms such as “businessman,” and guarantees of political, fiscal, and administrative empowerment must be provided, along with constitutional protection for local government institutions.

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9. Demographic Background:

Sample size (gender)

Category of respondents	Male	Female	Trans	Total
Voters	157 (74%)	55 (26%)	1 (0.5%)	213
Candidates	52 (84%)	10 (16%)	0	62
Total	209 (76%)	65 (23.5%)	0.5	275

1.1. Voters

Male	Female	Trans	Total
157	55	1	213
74%	26%	0.5%	100

1.2. Candidates

Male	Female	Trans	Total
52	10	0	62
83.87	16.13	0	100

In comparison to previous LG elections, there appears an encouraging trend regarding women’s participation as candidates, which deserves further investigation to understand the underlying dynamics of this development. Remember, in one of the aborted LG elections most of the reserved seats of women remained vacant. For the last postponed polls 16% of the respondents happened to be women who had filed nominations against general seats.

2. Age-wise:

Regarding age of the candidates, more than two-third of candidates belonged to the age group of 31-50 years, while about 30% fall in 51-70 years age group.

2.1. Candidates (age-groups)

Age Groups	18-25	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	Above 71
%	0.0	32.0	37.0	19.0	10.0	2.0

2.2. Voters (age groups)

Age Groups	18-25	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71 and above.
Percentage	7.0	13.0	24.7	34.7	16.5	3.5	0.6

2.3. Educational Qualification (candidates and voters)

Education	Illiterate	Primary	Middle	Matriculate	FA	BA/MA	Others
Candidates (%)	8.0	5.0	10.0	29.0	21.0	23.9	2.0
Voters (%)	6.5	3.5	9.4	18.1	19.0	47.0	0.6

3. Professions:

Regarding professional background of the interviewed candidates 56% of them were likely to belong to business (shopkeepers, car and property dealers) followed by housewives, skilled labour and workers of NGOs. Interestingly no one filed nomination papers as candidate from engineers, doctors and IT specialist or unskilled worker. On the other hand, most of the respondents from public appear to be employees of private sector and government bodies including CDA. It appears from the responses of the candidates that half (50%) of the candidates interviewed had 10 years and 12 years of education, while nearly one-fourth of candidates had attained 16 years of education. A small percentage of illiterates, semi literate and university graduates also tried to contest the postponed elections. About 50% of voters appear to have 14 years and 16 years of education.

4.1. Professional background of respondents

Category of Profession	% of Candidates	% of voters
Unskilled laborers	0	5
Skilled laborers	6.5	8
Housewives	10	2
Landlords	5	0
NGO workers	6.5	11
Govt/CDA employees	1.6	15
Private sector employees	8	27
Retired persons	8	0
Property/car dealers	20	3
Businessmen/shopkeepers	36	11
[Technocrat (lawyers, doctor, engineer, IT, journalists etc.)]	0	5
Others	0	5

4. Original place of residence:

The candidates and voters were also asked about their original place of residence. The survey results show that contestation level was likely to be higher amongst ICT residents than their share in ICT population. More than one-third of the candidates originally belonged to ICT, while 56% said they were originally from Punjab. Only 6% had moved from KP and 2% each from Sindh and GB/AJK, while no candidate with roots in Balochistan filed nomination papers. Interestingly, Punjabi speaking candidates were likely to be more than their share in ICT population. On the other hand, while voters who were from KP had 13% share in total respondents, their share in candidates dropped to just 6%.

5.1. Original place of residence (candidates and voters)

Category	ICT	KP	Punjab	Sindh	Balochistan	GB/AJK
Candidates	34%	6%	56%	2%	0%	2%
Voters	10.5%	13%	69%	3%	0.6%	5%

5. Mother tongue

Regarding mother tongue, as many and almost have been residing in ICT for more than five years. No candidate was found from Seraiki, Balochi or with GB, areas while only one was Sindhi and two were Urdu speaking. It will be worth further investigation to find out why some linguistic groups could not fielded candidates at all or less than their share in ICT population. Therefore, it could be argued that people of marginalised regions remain politically on the margins even after moving to the center.

6.1. Mother tongue (Candidates, voters)

Category	Punjabi	Pashtu	Hindko	Sindhi, Urdu, others
Candidates %	60.0	5.0	20.0	15.0
Voters %	65.7	8.5	10.5	11.0