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**About C38**  
The Coalition 38 aims to influence the state institutions for the implementation of Articles 3; 29; 37, and 38 of Pakistan's Constitution in letter and spirit through research, awareness raising, social mobilisation, networking of civil society including marginalised people and women.

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## PRESS RELEASE

**“Widespread dissatisfaction against preliminary delimitation exists as gerrymandering is feared in most of the petitions. Violation of guiding principles for preliminary delimitation exercise are likely to lower voters’ turnout in coming elections. Highly centralized hearing regime for preliminary delimitation is a recipe for elite capture”**

Islamabad, 21 November: Except one district the preliminary delimitation has been challenged from every district of Punjab - the battleground province for grabbing political power through election in Pakistan. Overall preliminary delimitations are being challenged from 124 of 143 districts of the country. About 80% of the examined petitions alleged that gerrymandering had been committed by delimitation committees. Almost, every petitioner has alleged in his representation that most of the delimitation principles that are mentioned in Section 20 of the Elections Act 2017 have been ignored while drawing preliminary constituencies. These are major findings of the analysis of PATTAN-Coalition38.

Moreover, our examination showed that nearly 90% of the petitioned have been filed by former MPs or their immediate family members. Interestingly, only four women – three from Sindh and one from South Punjab have filed petitions and all of them also belong to known political families. Since, almost all petitions appear to have been filed by politicians, it appears the public has little interest in the preparatory phase of electoral processes.

PATTAN’s analysis of the petitions also revealed that out of 452 audited petitions, 52 or 13% prayed to keep the preliminary delimitation intact. And interestingly some of the for-petitions appear to have been drafted by same persons, as the format, sequence of words, and arguments are literally same. This is likely to be a new phenomenon in the history of delimitation in the country. Interestingly 56% (29) of the for-petitions filed from KP.

Remember section 20 of the Elections Act 2017 mandates the ECP to strictly observe the stated principles while delimiting the constituencies. PATTAN-C38 research team examined 32% or 452 of the total 1403 filed petitions para by para and according to our findings, the alleged violations of delimitation principles have been mentioned 1,545 times. On average each petition stated 3.8 violations of the principles. Disaggregation of the violations showed that geographical compactness and common facilities (public convenience and communication) principles were mentioned in 46% of the petitions, while 35% mentioned violation of administrative boundaries and homogeneity. Fifteen percent alleged that physical features were ignored.

If the Preliminary Delimitation is maintained by the ECP, it is likely to have a cascading effect in many constituencies. First, alleged gerrymandering may be perceived as a serious disadvantage by many petitioners (potential candidates and political parties), which may force them to opt for litigation, and that can cause unnecessary delay to hold general election. Second, absence of geographical compactness, homogeneity and public facilities can deter voters from polling, which will lower the voters’ turnout in coming election. It is worth stating here that Pakistan has one of the lowest turnouts in the world and the ECP had rightly determined increase in voters’ turnout in its Strategic Plan. Sadly, during the voters’ registration and the delimitation exercise these strategic objectives could not be translated into action.

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Out of total 1403 petitions filed against the preliminary delimitation, 1039 were about provincial and 364 national assembly constituencies. Overall, the petitions were filed from nearly two-third of NA and 83% of PA constituencies. Region wise breakdown shows 100% constituencies of ICT, followed by Punjab 84% and 88% from NA and PA seats respectively. Sindh has the lowest percentage of petitions 51% from NA and 72% from PA seats.

Besides, examination of petitions PATTAN also interviewed few petitioners. Based on our discussions it could be argued that the whole process of filing and hearing of petitions is extremely expensive as it is highly centralized in Islamabad. An aggrieved person who belongs to a far-flung district such as Panjgor or Kech must travel to Islamabad, stay here in some hotel, and must have some local connections etc. and this would cost him huge amount of money. This is one of the best examples of perpetuating elite capture in the country. Therefore, we would like to recommend decentralization of the hearing regime. As off today, most petitions have been heard by the ECP. Therefore, decisions of the heard petitions may be announced without any delay.

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#### **About PATTAN-Coalition38**

PATTAN is one of the leading civil society organisations of Pakistan and has been working to help improve electoral system of Pakistan through participatory observation and participation in elections. Currently, PATTAN is a secretariat of Coalition38 - a largest network of CSOs, labour unions, CBOs, and intellectuals.