

Social Sciences Spectrum

A Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, HEC recognized [Y-category](#) Research Journal

E-ISSN: [3006-0427](#) P-ISSN: [3006-0419](#)

Volume 05, Issue 03, 2026

Web link: <https://sss.org.pk/index.php/sss>



Check for updates

Political Participation of Pakistan's Christian Community: Representation, Socio-Economic Development, and Pathways Forward

Imran Masih¹

Article Information [YY-MM-DD]

Received	2026-05-30	Revised	2026-07-01	Accepted	2026-07-22
----------	------------	---------	------------	----------	------------

Citation (APA):

Masih, I (2026). Political participation of Pakistan's Christian community: Representation, socio-economic development, and pathways forward. *Social Sciences Spectrum*, 5(3), 341-356. <https://doi.org/10.71085/sss.05.03.585>

Abstract

Pakistan is a constitutionally democratic, multi-party federation whose Christian community, just over three million people, or 1.37% of the population, is the country's third-largest religious group. This article examines how well the community participates in Pakistan's political system and what socio-economic and institutional factors shape the extent of that participation. Guided by three objectives and research questions, tracing the community's historical role in national political life, assessing the mechanism and extent of political representation from 2008 to 2026, and exploring lived experiences of civic and political inclusion, the study is organized around a three-tier conceptual framework distinguishing formal, representational, and felt (substantive) political integration. Document analysis traces the evolution of minority electoral policy from the 1970s to the National Commission for Minorities Rights Bill, passed in December 2025, alongside a review of the 2024 manifesto commitments of Pakistan's major parties. Findings show that national-level Christian representation remains largely dependent on party-nominated reserved seats rather than direct electoral success. Eight in-depth interviews, analyzed through Reflexive Thematic Analysis, surface five cross-cutting themes, symbolic versus substantive inclusion, poverty, low literacy, caution around visible political engagement, and cautious optimism about recent reform which are mapped explicitly against each objective and research question. The article concludes that stronger political participation depends less on symbolic gestures than on accountable nomination processes, sustained investment in literacy and civic education, and broader socio-economic development.

Keywords: Christian Community, Political Participation, Minority Representation, Reserved Seats, Democratic Reform, Socio-economic Development, Literacy, Poverty, National Commission for Minorities Rights.

¹ PhD Scholar, Department of International Relations, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: Imran Masih, **Correspondence through:** Imran.aqrub@gmail.com



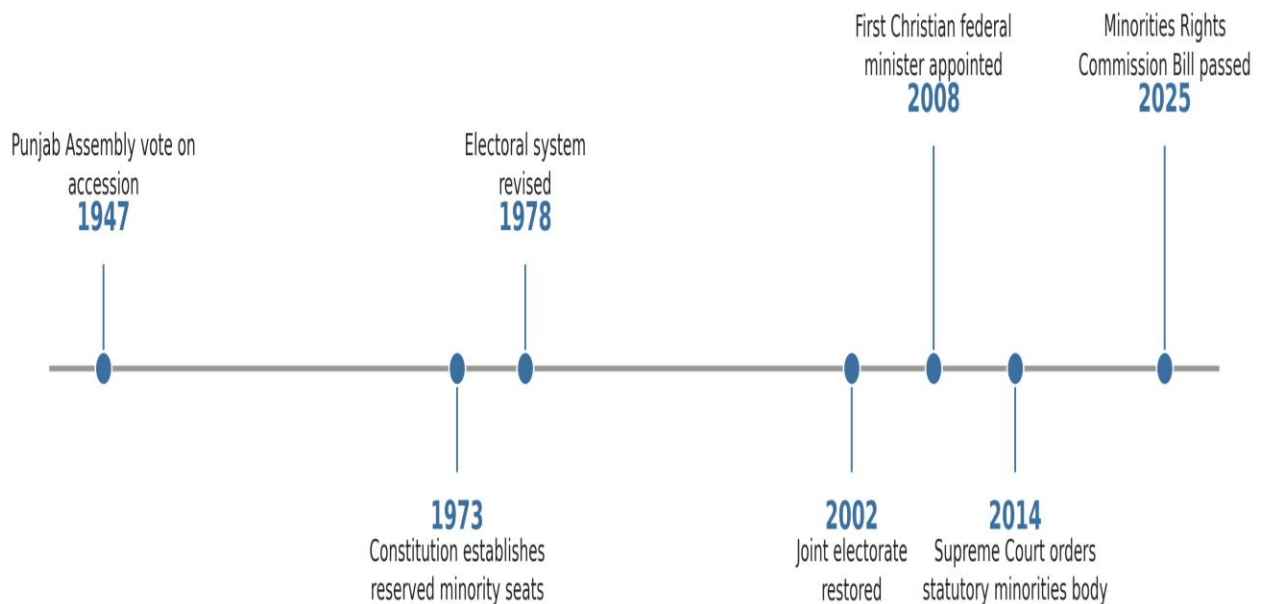
Content from this work may be used under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#) that allows others to share the work with an acknowledgment of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal.

1. Introduction

Pakistan describes itself as a parliamentary, federal democracy in which sovereignty formally rests with the people and is exercised through a multi-party electoral system (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2026). It has been one of the most competitive party systems in South Asia since 1947, with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), and a group of religious and regional parties alternating in and out of power. Pakistan is also a diverse nation, with the Constitution making certain distinctions between Muslims and non-Muslims for some positions, while ensuring reserved legislative seats for minorities (Hemnani, 2024).

Christians make up Pakistan's third-largest religious group, with more than three million people (1.37% of the population), the highest concentration of whom live in Punjab (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2024). This article asks a straightforward question: how has the Christian community participated in Pakistan's political system, and what socio-economic and institutional factors explain variation in that participation? The inquiry is timely. Pakistan has held three general elections since 2008, the most recent in February 2024, and in December 2025 Parliament passed the long-awaited National Commission for Minorities Rights Bill after more than a decade of legislative effort (Free and Fair Election Network [FAFEN], 2025). These developments make it possible to assess, with current evidence, how far formal constitutional protections for religious minorities are translating into substantive political participation, and where continued investment in representation and development could strengthen that participation further. The seat once held by the country's first, and to date only, Christian federal cabinet minister, Shahbaz Bhatti, illustrates the point concretely: the seat itself has persisted through every National Assembly since 2008, yet no Christian legislator has since held a comparable federal role, a pattern this article traces to a combination of institutional design and socio-economic factors rather than to any single cause.

Figure 1: *Timeline of political and institutional milestones for minority representation, 1947–2025.*



1.2. Objectives of the Study

This study pursued three objectives:

- i. To trace the Christian community's historical role in Pakistan's political life and the evolution of Pakistan's minority electoral arrangements.
- ii. To assess the extent and mechanism of Christian political representation, including manifesto commitments and reserved-seat outcomes, from 2008 to 2026.
- iii. To explore Christian citizens' lived experience of political participation, including the role of poverty and literacy, and identify measures that may strengthen it.

This study makes two contributions. It is empirically linked to electoral, legislative, and manifesto data to new primary interview evidence to bridge the gap in the literature between institutional analysis of minority representation and the lived experience of the citizens that minority representation is meant to serve (Raina, 2014). In practice, it is meant to guide the currently implemented National Commission for Minorities Rights and the development of future civic and literacy initiatives for the Christian community in Pakistan.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions were framed for this study:

- i. How has the Christian community's historical relationship with Pakistan's political development shaped its present-day political standing?
- ii. To what extent have reserved seats and party manifesto commitments translated into meaningful political representation for Christians between 2008 and 2026?
- iii. How do Christian citizens experience political participation, how do factors such as poverty and literacy shape that experience, and what measures do they consider necessary to strengthen it?

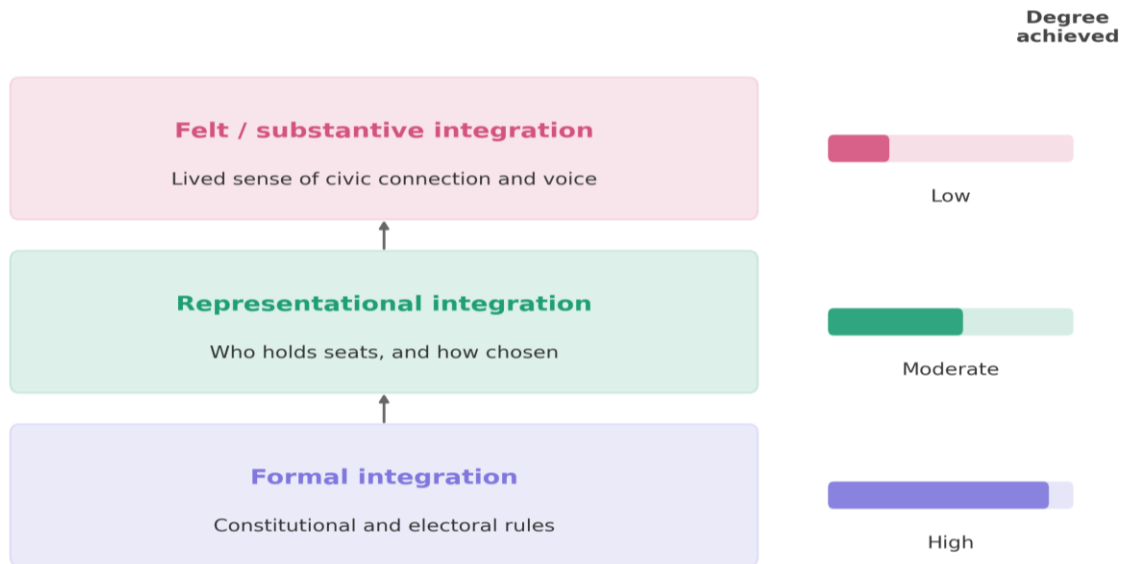
1.4. Conceptual Framework

This study follows a three-tier conceptual approach that separates formal political integration from representational political integration and from felt (substantive) political integration, in a loose approximation of Pitkin's (1967) classical theory of political representation, which distinguishes the formal delegation of authority to represent from the substantive representation of a group's interests (Arnesen & Peters, 2018; Sheaffer et al., 2024).

Formal integration is the constitutional and electoral structure that defines whether, and how, a minority community can elect representatives or cast votes, in Pakistan's context, the joint-electorate system and the ten reserved seats in the National Assembly. Representational integration refers to the presence of community members in legislative and executive offices, and how they are selected (party nomination or direct election) to be responsive to the community they represent. Felt or substantive integration is the extent to which citizens perceive the political system as responsive, inclusive, and capable of addressing their interests (Pitkin, 1967; Sheaffer et al., 2024). These perceptions are shaped in large part by socio-economic factors such as poverty, literacy, and access to development opportunities.

The framework suggests these three dimensions do not necessarily move together: a community can score highly on formal integration (guaranteed seats) while scoring lower on felt integration (limited sense of civic influence). This difference between tiers is treated as the central analytical problem examined in this study.

Figure 2: *Three-tier conceptual framework of political integration, with illustrative gauges showing the degree of integration achieved by Pakistan’s Christian community at each tier.*



2. Literature Review and Historical Analysis

2.1. Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of the Christian Community

The Christian community is mainly present in Punjab with overwhelming majority (98.7%) of Christians living in rural areas (Minority Rights Group International, 2024). The other relatively small group, with urban and professional affiliations, has deep roots in Karachi, and is historically more well-resourced. This difference is important for political analysis as it creates two different socio-economic socioeconomic starting points in the same community: higher average literacy level, rural land limitations and fewer economic mobility opportunities for only a small share, and lower average literacy level, greater rural land limitations and less economic mobility opportunities for a much larger share (Minority Rights Group International, 2025); Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2024; Shamsi, 2011). When the Christian community is discussed as a single political constituency, this internal socio-economic divide is often overlooked, even though it shapes how, and how effectively, different Christians engage with the political system (Patras, 2024).

2.2. The Role of Christians in Pakistan’s Political Development

A recurring theme in the historical literature is that Christian political leaders supported Pakistan’s political development from an early stage, at a time when the idea of a separate state was still being debated within Muslim constituencies themselves. The All India Christian Association is recorded as having pledged cooperation with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Christian delegates attended the 1940 Lahore session of the All-India Muslim League that produced the Lahore Resolution (Rashid et al., 2023; The Nation, 2015). Jinnah is recorded as having appointed the journalist Pothan Joseph, a Christian, as the founding editor of Dawn, the Muslim League’s flagship English-language newspaper (Kureshi, 2018).

A frequently cited episode concerns the 1947 vote in the Punjab Legislative Assembly on the province’s accession. Accounts describe a very close vote, in which the ballots of the Assembly’s

Christian members, together with the vote of the Christian Speaker, Sardar Bahadur S. P. Singha, contributed to the outcome (IndiaFacts, 2019). This episode has become a reference point in Pakistani Christian civic memory, invoked by community leaders when discussing the community's long-standing stake in the state's political life. The documentary record shows organized, early Christian political engagement in support of Pakistan's founding leadership, alongside assurances from Jinnah and the League leadership regarding equal citizenship for religious minorities in the new state (Bangash, 2025; National Assembly of Pakistan, n.d.).

2.3. Post-Independence Institutional Development

The post-1947 record is one of achievements and of gradual institutional change. Abdul Rashid Cornelius was the first non-Muslim Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, who was a Christian; Christians have also been serving in the Armed Forces, Education, Medicine and the Law (ibid). Meanwhile, the declaration in 1956 of Pakistan as an Islamic state and the position of President and Prime Minister being reserved for Muslims created differences that continue to affect formal eligibility for non-Muslim citizens while the seats reserved for minorities in the legislature were preserved and even increased (Khalid & Anwar, 2018; Rais, 2007; Singh, 2025). This is a theme that is repeated throughout this article: the growth of legislative representation and the ongoing limitations on the offices of the highest officials of state.

2.4. Political Parties of Pakistan and Their Manifesto Commitments to Minorities

The party system in Pakistan is highly polarized, with three major parties, the PML-N, PPP and PTI, dominant at the Federal level, followed by religious parties like Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), and regional parties like Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) in urban Sindh. The manifestos of the general election of February 2024 have been independently analyzed by the Public Interest Law Association of Pakistan and the Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research (CSCR) to provide the latest systematic evidence on the approach of each party to a policy issue of minority inclusion (PILP, 2024; CSCR, 2024). The PPP's manifesto was the most specific, calling for the revision of constitutional provisions that restricted the presidency and the premiership to Muslims, for a minorities commission based on the Supreme Court's ruling in 2014, for the updating of personal-status laws for Christians and Hindus, and for a five-percent job quota for minorities (Khan, 2024).

PML-N's manifesto likewise dedicated a section to minorities, proposing protective legislation, a strengthened National Commission for Minorities, interfaith-harmony content in the curriculum, and interest-free loans and expanded quotas for minority communities (Raza, 2024). PTI's manifesto, by contrast, was noted by independent reviewers as not using the term "minority," referring to non-Muslim citizens only through general references to "marginalized groups" within the broader framing of national identity (Khan, 2024; Public Interest Law Association of Pakistan, 2024). This has been attributed partly to PTI's constrained campaign conditions and partly to a lighter emphasis on minority-specific policy during its 2018–2022 term in government (International Crisis Group, 2024).

Two broader observations emerge from the manifesto analysis:

First, commitments to religious minorities are generally framed in terms of welfare, economic assistance, and equal opportunity rather than institutional or constitutional reform; no major party proposed replacing the reserved-seat mechanism with direct elections for minority representatives (Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency, 2024).

Second, party leaders tended to point to past records rather than set out forward-looking agendas: PPP representatives pointed to the party’s legislative record on minority protections, while PML-N leaders maintained that the party “believed in actions, not words.” Minority policy therefore appears to function less as a matter of electoral competition than as a marker of political credibility among established parties, with comparatively limited emphasis on structural reforms to strengthen substantive political participation (Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency, 2024).

Table 1: *Minority Commitments in the 2024 Manifestos, at a Glance*

Party	Explicit uses of "minority/minorities"	Headline pledge
PPP	Multiple, dedicated section	Revisit Muslim-only presidency/PM clause; statutory minorities commission; 5% job quota
PML-N	Multiple, dedicated section	Protective legislation; enhanced Commission; interfaith curriculum content
PTI	Not used	"Marginalised groups" referenced; no minority-specific pledge

2.5. Minority Policy and the Electoral Framework, 2008–2026

The institutional architecture through which Christians and other non-Muslim citizens access the legislature has evolved considerably over Pakistan’s history. Ten seats were reserved for religious minorities in the National Assembly, with a smaller allocation in each provincial assembly, under the 1973 Constitution and its early amendments, initially filled through separate electorates in which non-Muslim citizens voted for non-Muslim candidates on a distinct roll (Butt, 2025). This separate-electorate arrangement was formalized in 1978 and remained in place for over two decades before being reconsidered.

A first attempt at reform came in 1996, when the PPP government proposed a dual-vote system allowing minority voters to cast ballots both for reserved minority seats and for general candidates in their home constituencies; the reform lapsed before implementation (Hemnani, 2024). The decisive change came in 2002, when General Pervez Musharraf’s Legal Framework Order restored the joint-electorate system envisaged in the 1973 Constitution. Since 2002, all citizens, including non-Muslims, vote for general-seat candidates, with the ten minority seats in the National Assembly and twenty-four in the provincial assemblies allocated according to the general seats a party wins, and parties nominating individuals to fill them (International Foundation for Electoral Systems [IFES], 2024; Abid & Alvi, 2026). This system has governed the 2008, 2013, 2018, and 2024 general elections.

The main advantage of the joint-electorate system over separate electorates is that minority citizens have a say in selecting the government that will govern them. A structural feature central to this article’s argument, however, is that minority reserved-seat nominees are selected by party leaderships rather than elected directly by the voters they represent (Patras, 2024). A voter in Faisalabad casting a general-seat vote has no direct means of influencing who occupies the minority seat that nominally represents Christians nationally, since that decision rests with party leadership (Abid & Alvi, 2026).

In 2014, the Supreme Court directed the government to place a National Commission for Minorities on a statutory footing; at least eight legislative attempts followed from 2015 onward (FAFEN, 2025). The National Commission for Minorities Rights Bill was ultimately passed by both houses of Parliament and, after being returned once for reconsideration, was passed again in a Joint Sitting on 2 December 2025 (Christian Daily International, 2025, 2026). Civil-society response has been mixed: some organizations welcomed the Bill as fulfilling a long-standing constitutional commitment, while others noted that the Commission’s powers are limited mainly to recommendations rather than independent investigation, suggesting room for further strengthening as the institution matures (Library of Congress, 2026).

2.6. Christian Political Representation in Elections, 2008–2026

Table 2 presents the minority reserved-seat allocation in the National Assembly across the four general elections held between 2008 and 2024, drawing on Election Commission of Pakistan data reported by the National Assembly Secretariat, the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s Parline database, and independent election monitors. Two features are constant across all four elections.

First, the ten minority reserved seats are distributed among Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, and other non-Muslim nominees at party discretion, so the number of seats going specifically to Christians depends on the internal choices of whichever parties win the largest blocs of general seats, rather than on any guaranteed sub-quota for Christians.

Second, comparatively few Christian candidates have won National Assembly seats in open, general-seat competition in the period under review; Christian representation is therefore largely a function of the reserved-seat mechanism rather than of direct electoral success.

Table 2: *Minority Representation Framework in the National Assembly, 2008–2024 General Elections*

Election Year	Total NA Seats	Seats Reserved for Non-Muslims	Selection Mechanism	Notable Feature
2008	342	10	Party-proportional nomination, joint electorate	Shahbaz Bhatti (PPP) nominated as first Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs
2013	342	10	Party-proportional nomination, joint electorate	Minority seat allocation followed PML-N and PPP relative strength
2018	342	10	Party-proportional nomination, joint electorate	PTI-led coalition allocates seats after forming government
2024	336	10	Party-proportional nomination, joint electorate	Only 6 of 10 minority seats confirmed by March 2024 amid seat-allocation litigation

Sources: *National Assembly of Pakistan, 2025; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024.*

The 2024 election illustrates how sensitive this mechanism can be to procedural disputes. Independent candidates backed by one major party won the largest bloc of directly elected seats but, having contested without a shared party symbol, were initially not allocated a share of the

reserved seats, including the minority seats, pending a determination of their parliamentary-party status (Curtis, 2024). The resulting litigation before the Supreme Court left a number of reserved seats, including several minority seats, unconfirmed for months; by 1 March 2024, only six of the ten minority seats had been confirmed (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024).

The most consequential Christian officeholder in this period remains Shahbaz Bhatti, elected to the National Assembly in 2008 on a PPP reserved seat and appointed the country's first, and to date only, Christian federal cabinet minister, serving as Minister for Minorities Affairs until 2011. No Christian legislator has held a comparable federal cabinet role since. Minority affairs was briefly organised as a stand-alone Ministry of National Harmony before being consolidated into the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2013 (Community of Sant'Egidio, n.d.).

“The seat still exists, and it matters that it does. What would help now is a clearer path for more Christians to reach that level of office again.”
paraphrased from P5, former reserved-seat nomination aspirant.

2.7. The Developmental Case for Strengthening Political Participation

Two converging bodies of evidence support continued investment in Christian political participation. First is the demographic and welfare evidence: Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs together comprise roughly four percent of Pakistan's 241.5 million people, and higher rates of poverty together with more limited access to education and formal employment leave these communities comparatively disadvantaged in building the civic and financial resources that typically underpin sustained political engagement (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2024; Minority Rights Group International, 2025). Second is the representational evidence reviewed above: a reserved-seat system that channels Christian national representation almost entirely through party-controlled nomination lists, with limited constituency-level accountability (Abid & Alvi, 2026; Patras, 2024). Taken together, this evidence points toward modest, practical reform directions, introducing accountability into reserved-seat nominations and investing in literacy and civic education which the qualitative strand in Section 10 develops further and Section 13 sets out in full.

3. Research Methodology

The study combines document analysis with in-depth interviews because the two strands answer different parts of the conceptual framework set out in Section 3: documentary sources are well suited to tracing formal and representational integration, while direct testimony speaks to felt integration and its socio-economic drivers.

3.1. Document Analysis

The first strand was a qualitative document analysis of primary and secondary sources, most published between 2022 and 2026. Primary sources included the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan and its amendments relevant to minority representation, National Assembly Secretariat composition records, Election Commission of Pakistan reserved-seat allocation notifications for the 2024 general election, and the text and legislative history of the National Commission for Minorities Rights Bill. Secondary sources included peer-reviewed and think-tank commentary, party manifesto primers from independent monitors (PILAP, 2024; FAFEN, 2025), and mainstream reporting on minority affairs. Figures reported above were triangulated against at least two independent sources where possible.

3.2. In-Depth Interviews and Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The second strand consisted of eight in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Christian community members and representatives in Punjab, recruited through existing community and church networks using convenience sampling. The aim was exploratory: to surface a plausible range of lived experiences and interpretive frames around political participation, rather than to achieve statistical representativeness. Participants included ordinary voters, local councilors, a former reserved-seat aspirant, and civil-society advocates, capturing perspectives from both inside and outside the formal party system. Table 3 summarizes the anonymized participant profile.

Table 3: *Interview Participant Profile (n = 8)*

ID	Role / Position	Location	Gender	Approx. Age Band
P1	Local government councilor (minority seat)	Lahore	Male	40–49
P2	Community advocate / NGO worker	Faisalabad	Female	30–39
P3	Parish-affiliated social worker	Youhanabad, Lahore	Male	50–59
P4	Registered general voter	Lahore	Female	20–29
P5	Former reserved-seat nomination aspirant	Karachi	Male	40–49
P6	Registered general voter, daily-wage worker	Sialkot	Male	30–39
P7	Schoolteacher and community elder	Faisalabad	Female	50–59
P8	Youth activist	Lahore	Male	20–29

The interviews were in Urdu and Punjabi on participants' consent for translation and paraphrasing and lasted between 40 and 70 minutes, and included questions about their experiences with voting, party participation, their experiences with the reserved-seat system, and their views on the new minorities commission. Transcripts were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which involved the following six phases: familiarization; initial coding; construction of candidate themes; review of themes against code and full dataset; definition and naming themes; and final analytic narrative. Coding was conceptualized in an interpretive way that responded to the researcher's own positionality and not identified as one that might be “the correct coding” and themes were identified as a process over time instead of counting for frequency.

The coding decisions and candidate themes were not determined on the first pass through the dataset but were reviewed multiple times to ensure the analysis was credible, in line with the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) who recommended that coding be an iterative process rather than consensus inter-rater coding. Quotes in Table 3 are illustrative and chosen to represent the range of participant roles and locations in the data and not just the most vocal advocates.

4. Findings

Document analysis has been used to answer the two research questions above, which are Research Question 1 and Research Question 2. In this section, the focus will be on Research Question 3, which was a primary qualitative research question and not documentary. The interview data was analyzed into five cross-cutting themes which directly addressed Research Question 3 and Objective 3, highlighting the ways in which Christian citizens experience the formal architecture

outlined in Section 4 onwards and specifically the ways in which poverty and literacy influence the experience.

Table 4: *Cross-Cutting Themes from Reflexive Thematic Analysis*

Theme	Summary	Illustrative Participant Voice (paraphrased)
Symbolic inclusion, substantive exclusion	Participants viewed reserved seats as evidence the state formally acknowledges Christians, but not as a channel through which their own concerns reach policymakers.	P1 and P5 both described minority seats as decided “ <i>in party offices, not in our churches or our streets.</i> ”
Poverty as a barrier to political engagement	Daily-wage participants described being unable to afford the time or transport costs of political participation beyond voting and reported limited contact from parties outside election season.	P6 said party workers “ <i>often only visit our colony when the election is close.</i> ”
Literacy and information gaps	Older and less-educated participants reported difficulty following manifesto content or legislative developments, relying instead on church announcements or word of mouth.	P3 and P7 both said they first heard about the minorities commission through a Sunday sermon, not the news.
Caution around visible political engagement	Several participants described a general preference for discretion over high-profile political visibility, reflecting broader social caution within parts of the community.	P2 described local leaders as generally “ <i>careful</i> ” about how visibly they engage in politics.
Cautious optimism about the 2025 Commission	Participants welcomed the Bill in principle but were uncertain whether it would be resourced or empowered to act on complaints.	P5, drawing on his own nomination experience, hoped a resourced commission would open more paths into minority seats.

The first theme, symbolic inclusion and substantive exclusion, is the question about how citizens experience participation: that participation is not experienced as a way to get a voice, but it is experienced as real.

The second and third themes, poverty as a barrier to political engagement, and literacy and information gaps, look at the same issue from different perspectives, implying that the challenge of felt inclusion is often material and informational rather than institutional.

The fourth theme, ‘caution around visible political engagement’, builds on this by exploring the reasons why some of those who have opportunities to become engaged in politics prefer not to do so in the public eye.

The fifth theme, cautious optimism about the 2025 Commission, addresses the second leg of Research Question 3, what measures participants think are required, by revealing the community members’ desires for the new Commission to be well resourced and actually work, and not just be a sounding board.

Table 5 provides one illustrative but paraphrased statement for each of the eight participants to illustrate the spectrum of views in the entire sample.

Table 5: Illustrative Voices from All Eight Participants

ID	Paraphrased Voice
P1	Described minority seats as decided <i>“in party offices, not in our churches or our streets.”</i>
P2	Noted that local leaders are generally <i>“careful” about how visibly they engage in politics.</i>
P3	Said he first heard about the minorities commission through a Sunday sermon, not the news.
P4	Said she votes every election but has <i>“never once”</i> been asked by a candidate what she needs.
P5	Hoped a better-resourced commission would open more paths into minority seats.
P6	Said party workers <i>“often only visit our colony when the election is close.”</i>
P7	Said she first heard about the minorities commission through a Sunday sermon, not the news.
P8	Said young people in his circle <i>“want to organize, but don’t see where that effort would go.”</i>

“Party workers often only visit our colony when the election is close.”
paraphrased from P6, daily-wage worker and registered voter, Sialkot.

The two factors; poverty and literacy are not discussed in isolation, since they do not act as barriers on their own but act together in conjunction with other barriers, and are important to discuss in relation to the representational patterns identified through document analysis. Limited opportunities to develop local political capital within the community, especially for ordinary Christian citizens in the poorer and rural sections of the community, restrict the power of community leaders in the nomination processes of people holding reserved seats. The information gap that is created by low literacy rates can exacerbate the impact of the well-intentioned reforms of the 2025 Commission, reforms that, without poor understanding, aren’t likely to be poorly monitored by the community they are designed to serve. Both of these constraints strengthen symbolic inclusion: a citizen unable to attend party gatherings or to follow legislative proceedings needs to rely more on intermediaries, who are not necessarily able to be as effective as that citizen would be if he/she could be present. Both of these conditions enhance symbolic inclusion: a citizen who cannot easily attend party events or follow legislative detail relies more on intermediaries, such as clergy, NGO workers, or party contacts, who do not necessarily represent the community in the same way or to the same extent as direct participation by the citizen would.

5. Discussion

The study concluded that there is a community that exists with a formal presence in the constitution, that has a historical legacy in the political life of the state, but whose political visibility is not high in day-to-day politics (Pitkin, 1967; Bangash, 2025). The history of founding-era has

already secured a good civic argument for the presence of Pakistani Christian leaders in the National Assembly, whereas the reserved-seat and joint-electorate system has ensured a guaranteed but party-controlled presence in the National Assembly, and the evidence from the interviews indicates that the increased sense of political influence has not yet followed. This gap seems to be the cumulative effect of many factors, not just one, including processes of nomination that are largely disconnected from voter needs and want, and socio-economic challenges, principally poverty and illiteracy, that restrict grassroots political organizing (Patras, 2024; Abid & Alvi, 2026). It is relevant to the policy debate in Pakistan, where the fact of reserved seats can sometimes be interpreted as a signal that minority representation is being met, despite the fact that descriptive representation does not equate to substantive political power.

This study has definite limitations. The sample size of eight interviewers drawn by convenience sampling from Punjab is not representative of the larger population of Christians in Pakistan, which also has sub-communities with varying socio-economic characteristics, and a larger, stratified sample across provinces would be helpful to determine if the themes identified are more representative or not. For a number of recent developments in legislation, the document analysis also involved the use of secondary and journalistic sources, as official records were not always available in full; when they were available, they were cross-checked with at least two independent sources.

On the Pakistan side, there are religious and ethnic minorities that also have systems in place to ensure at least some representation of them, which work in other countries with plural societies, such as India and Bangladesh, and usually are able to guarantee descriptive representation (legislators who feel they represent their own community's interests), though they are less likely to achieve substantive representation (legislators who feel they represent their own community's interests). In Pakistan, this is the case: the reserved seat has always generated Christian MPs since 1973 in every National Assembly, except that Bhatti held the cabinet seat on minority affairs. Formal representational design alone seems to be a short-term solution for achieving increased participation unless it is complemented by nomination accountability and ongoing attention to literacy, civic education and economic opportunity. The pattern also indicates that additional formal integration strategies, such as greater reservation of formal seats alone, will not be sufficient to bridge the gap between formal and felt integration as highlighted in this article; development strategies will be at least as important.

5.1. Conclusion

Christian community has a unique role in Pakistan's democratic history: it was a community that participated in the development of the state in the very early stages of its political evolution, had a moderate presence in the National Assembly in Pakistan since 1973 because of reserved seats under the Constitution, and was also a community whose average members talk of "reserved-seat politics" happening to them, not them to it. The National Commission for Minorities Rights Bill was passed in December 2025 and is a true institutional milestone after over a decade of legislative work; it is to be read in conjunction with the manifesto record, in which all major parties had accommodated minority policy as an integral feature of their national agenda. Whether it will lead to increased political participation will depend on the practical steps outlined in Section 13: The Commission will be well-resourced and effective, the nomination processes will be more accountable, there will be an adequate investment in community literacy and civic education, and the socio-economic development of Christian communities in Pakistan will continue to be discussed.

5.2. Recommendations

These strands of evidence combine to yield four priorities for reform:

- 1. Strengthen the Minorities Commission:** The National Commission for Minorities Rights currently functions mainly in an advisory capacity; its resourcing and operational powers may be expanded so it can act effectively on the concerns it receives.
- 2. Introduce nomination accountability:** Political parties may be encouraged, through Election Commission guidance or voluntary agreement, to consult organized community bodies before finalizing minority reserved-seat nominations.
- 3. Invest in literacy and civic education:** Targeted programs delivered through churches and community schools may help narrow the information gap and make legislative developments more accessible to the citizens they are meant to serve.
- 4. Support broader socio-economic development:** Continued investment in education, vocational training, and employment access for Christian communities, particularly in rural Punjab, may strengthen the civic and financial resources that underpin sustained political participation.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

Funding

The authors did not mention any funding for this research.

References

- Abid, F., & Alvi, A. S. (2026). Voiceless in the ballot box: The struggle of religious minorities for political representation in Pakistan. *International Journal of Social Sciences Bulletin*, 4(5), 346–359. <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v4i2.2081>
- Arnesen, S., & Peters, Y. (2018). The legitimacy of representation: How descriptive, formal, and responsiveness representation affect the acceptability of political decisions. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(10), 1281–1308. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414017720702>
- Bangash, Y. K. (2025). 'Slow death in India against quick death in Pakistan ...': Indian Christian politics during the Punjab Partition. *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 53(4), 764–792. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2025.2484409>
- Bauman, C. M. (2023). *Christianity in Pakistan: A historical and contemporary overview*. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. Oxford University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Butt, S. A. (2025). From Inclusion to Marginalization: Christian Representation in Lahore's Local Government Elections. *Journal of Religion and Society*, 3(01), 909–915. <https://www.islamicreligious.com/index.php/Journal/article/view/479>
- Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research. (2024, August 23). *Pakistan's 2024 elections and religious minorities*. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/politics-governance/pakistans-2024-elections-and-religious-minorities/>
- Christian Daily International. (2025, December 12). *Pakistan's parliament passes law to establish long-delayed commission on minority rights, reactions mixed*. <https://www.christiandaily.com/news/pakistans-parliament-passes-law-to-establish-long-delayed-commission-on-minority-rights-reactions-mixed>
- Christian Daily International. (2026, February 23). *Pakistani Christians renew push for electoral reform on reserved minority seats*. <https://www.christiandaily.com/news/pakistani-christians-renew-push-for-electoral-reform-on-reserved-minority-seats>
- Community of Sant'Egidio. (n.d.). *Shahbaz Bhatti*. Retrieved July 3, 2026, from <https://www.santegidio.org/pageID/41772/langID/en/SHAHBAZ-BHATTI.html>
- Curtis, J. (2024, May 28). *Pakistan: 2024 general election* (Research Briefing CBP-10028). *House of Commons Library*. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10028/>
- Free and Fair Election Network. (2025, December 3). *Tracing history of legislation on minority rights commission*. <https://fafen.org/tracing-history-of-legislation-on-minority-rights-commission/>
- Hemnani, S. A. (2024, January 24). *76 years on, Pakistan's minorities struggle to make their voice heard through the ballot*. *Dawn*. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1808026>
- IndiaFacts. (2019, May 9). *How four Christian votes made Pakistan possible*. <https://indiafacts.org/how-four-christian-votes-made-pakistan-possible/>

- International Crisis Group. (2024). *Pakistan's election and the crisis of democratic legitimacy*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan>
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (2024, February 5). *Elections in Pakistan: 2024 general elections*. <https://www.ifes.org/tools-resources/election-snapshots/elections-pakistan-2024-general-elections>
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2024). *Pakistan National Assembly February 2024 election results. Parline: Global data on national parliaments*. <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/PK/PK-LC01/election/PK-LC01-E20240208>
- Khalid, I., & Anwar, M. (2018). Minorities under Constitution(s) of Pakistan. *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 55(2), 51–62.
- Khan, A. (2024, February 5). *Decoding the 2024 election manifestos of political parties in Pakistan*. International Centre for Peace Studies. <https://icpsnet.org/comments/Decoding-the-2024-Elections-Manifestos-of-Political-Parties-in-Pakistan>
- Kureshi, S. T. (2018, June 1). *How four Christian votes made Pakistan possible*. *The Friday Times*. <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/01-Jun-2018/how-four-christian-votes-made-pakistan-possible>
- Library of Congress. (2026, January 26). *Pakistan: Parliament creates National Commission to Protect Religious Minority Rights*. <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2026-01-26/pakistan-parliament-creates-national-commission-to-protect-religious-minority-rights/>
- Minority Rights Group International. (2024). *Christians*. <https://minorityrights.org>
- Minority Rights Group International. (2025). *Pakistan*. <https://minorityrights.org>
- National Assembly of Pakistan. (2025). *Composition of the National Assembly*. <https://www.na.gov.pk/en/composition.php>
- National Assembly of Pakistan. (2026). *Composition of the National Assembly*. <https://www.na.gov.pk/en/composition.php>
- National Assembly of Pakistan. (n.d.). *Speech of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11 August 1947*. <https://na.gov.pk>
- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *Pakistan statistical yearbook 2024*. <https://www.pbs.gov.pk>
- Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency. (2024). *Assessment of political parties' manifestos for General Elections 2024*. <https://pildat.org>
- Patras, A. I. (2024). *Examining Pakistan's relationship with religious minorities: A case study of the Christian community*. *NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability*, 7(1), 80–94. <https://doi.org/10.37540/njips.v7i1.163>
- Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The concept of representation*. University of California Press.
- Public Interest Law Association of Pakistan. (2024). *Primer: Party manifestos for election 2024*. <https://pilap.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/PILAP-Primer-Party-Manifestos-for-Election-2024.pdf>

- Raina, A. K. (2014). Minorities and representation in a plural society: The case of the Christians of Pakistan. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 37(4), 684–699. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2014.966945>
- Rais, R. B. (2007). Identity politics and minorities in Pakistan. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 30(1), 111–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856400701264050>
- Rashid, M., Fatima, N., & Iqbal, M. S. (2023). Rights and challenges: An overview of Christian minority in Lahore. *Current Trends in Law and Society*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.52131/ctls.2023.0301.0016>
- Raza, A. (2024, January 31). *Manifestos and minorities*. *Daily Times*. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/1166069/manifestos-and-minorities/>
- Shamsi, A. H. (2011). *Social status and political participation of Christian minority in Pakistan* [Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of the Punjab, Centre for South Asian Studies].
- Sheafer, T., Shenhav, S. R., & colleagues. (2024). *The Pitkinian public: Representation in the eyes of citizens*. *European Political Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-024-00489-2>
- Singh, A. K. (2025, December 9). *A commission without power: Pakistan's latest minority rights reform falls short*. *Times Headline*. <https://timesheadline.in/en/2025/12/09/a-commission-without-power-pakistans-latest-minority-rights-reform-falls-short/>
- The Nation. (2015, July 12). *Role of Christians in Pakistan Movement*. <https://www.nation.com.pk/12-Jul-2015/role-of-christians-in-pakistan-movement>