



Overcoming the exclusion of Karachi's migrant communities

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- Incorporating rural-to-urban migrant communities into the city's formal political process is crucial to ensure their representation and address their unique needs and challenges. This inclusion fosters social cohesion and promotes more equitable and sustainable urban development.
- This study is focused on the political behaviour and policy concerns of Karachi's largest internal migrant community: the Pashtuns. Pashtun migrants have been settling in Karachi since the 1950s, and this migration continues today. As a result, Karachi has many neighbourhoods with high concentrations of Pashtun migrants and their descendants (henceforth "migrant communities").
- Districts West and Keamari are the primary areas where these communities are settled. These districts face a plethora of public policy challenges, which are reflected in the findings of this study. The issue of water scarcity is the top concern for most study respondents, followed closely by electricity provision.
- Turnout rates are low in these districts, signalling a need for focused registration drives and sustained GOTV mobilisation efforts. In particular, reducing bureaucratic hurdles to obtaining CNIC cards and registering to vote, as well as targeting female residents in particular, should be a priority for stakeholders.

Overview of the research

Rural-to-urban migrants and their descendants play a pivotal role in Karachi's economy, serving as the backbone of its labour market across various sectors, from manufacturing to services. Since the 1950's, many neighbourhoods across Karachi's Districts West and Keamari have been focal points for migrant flows from the country's northwestern regions. These two districts are also amongst the most densely populated areas of the city. Rapid urbanisation and a growing population have strained its infrastructure, leading to issues like inadequate waste management, frequent power outages, and water scarcity.

Given the plethora of challenges faced by migrant communities, one important goal for stakeholders should be to ensure their incorporation into the policymaking process – i.e., into the formal democratic practices of registering and turning out to vote. With this goal in mind, this study conducted a representative face-to-face survey of 1,014 respondents in 100 Pashtun-dominant Wards in Districts West and Keamari. It asked the residents of these areas to provide information on the state of key amenities in their neighbourhoods (electricity, water, roads, waste management). It also asked which of these amenities is the most pressing concern and should be the top priority for policymakers. In addition, it collected information on registration and voting behaviour to better understand barriers to political incorporation amongst these communities. Below, these survey data are used to highlight key concerns and to suggest some ways in which stakeholders can better serve these communities.

Key findings and policy Recommendations

- **Improving the state of water and electricity provision in these areas should be a central concern for policymakers.** 86% of respondents report that the state of electricity provision in their neighbourhood is either “extremely poor” or “very poor.” For water provision, road conditions, and waste management, the percentage reporting the same are 77%, 72% and 54% respectively. While some efforts are being made to address these issues, the sheer scale of the challenges necessitates integrated planning, substantial resources, and long-term commitment from both local and provincial administrations. When respondents were asked to share which of these amenities should be the top concern for policymakers, water and electricity clearly emerged as the top concerns, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: "Which of these four amenities should be the first priority for policymakers to address?"

Amenity	% of Respondents Indicating as Top Concern
Water	47%
Electricity	42%
Road Conditions	8%
Waste Management	3%

- **The Election Commission should conduct focused registration drives in migrant communities.** Around a fourth of those who are not registered to vote indicate that their primary reason for not registering is because they lack the time required to go through the process, not because they are not interested in registering. Research from other developing country contexts indicates that local registration visits by election commission staff can be particularly effective in increasing registration rates, especially for poorer communities where many residents are time constrained.
- **Those without CNIC cards should be helped with acquiring them, and some consideration should be given to revising the documentation required for this process.** A large percentage of those who are not registered indicate that they do not possess CNIC cards (37%). Apart from disenfranchising this population, the lack of a CNIC can be a major hurdle for migrants in other realms, including in obtaining a job or proving their identity to the police. 42% of those without a CNIC indicate the primary reason as lack of time, once again pointing to the time constraints faced by many in migrant communities. Another 27% cite facing difficulty with providing all of the extensive required documentation and filling out the paperwork for this process. This latter concern came up during qualitative fieldwork as well, with many migrants indicating that they are asked for documentation that is not standard in unplanned settlements, such as official leases.

Non-partisan get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaigns may boost the representation of these communities in the upcoming elections and increase their visibility to those in power. Respondents who had been contacted by a political party worker through any medium (home visit, phone call, or SMS/WhatsApp) in the past 12 months were significantly more likely to turn out to vote in the 2023 local government election, indicating that mobilisation efforts are fruitful in increasing political incorporation. At the same time, only 14% of the sample reported being contacted by anyone, showing that these communities face neglect from political parties and that non-partisan efforts are required to demonstrate that their support should be courted in future election cycles. These GOTV campaigns should pay special attention to the mobilisation of female voters, who express significantly higher interest in political affairs than men but turn out at much lower rates.