

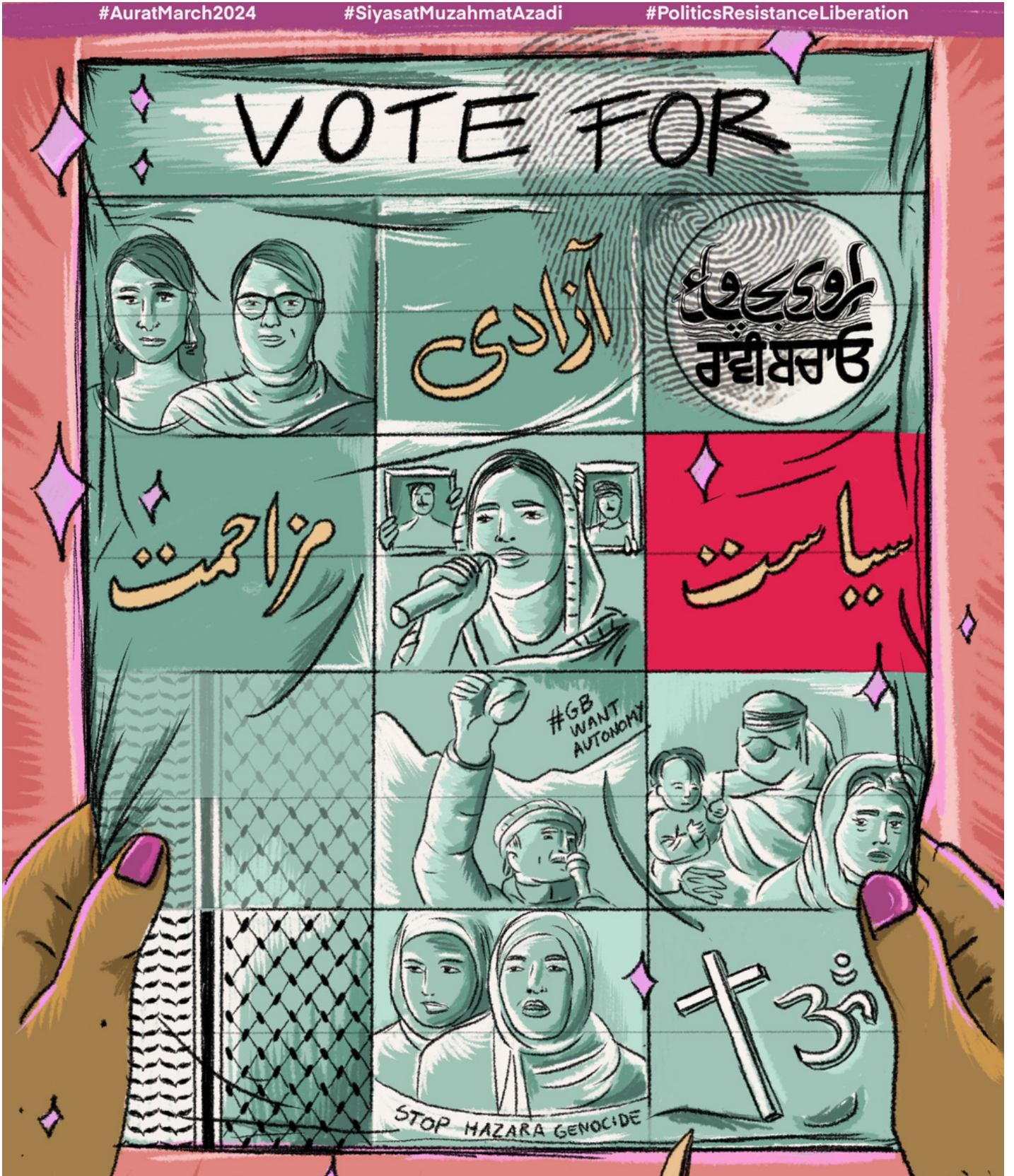
Aurat March 2024: Manifesto

Politics. Resistance. Liberation.

#AuratMarch2024

#SiyasatMuzahmatAzadi

#PoliticsResistanceLiberation





TOWARDS A FEMINIST POLITICS

In the aftermath of the General Elections on February 8, 2024 we are experiencing **a range of emotions regarding politics**, how we engage with one another, and the future of this country.

Politics remains steeped in patriarchal norms that shun emotion, deeming them irrational, indulgent, and weak.

Our emotions of disappointment, heartbreak, and grief are not mere footnotes in our political engagement; they are central to our experience and fuel our organising.

Today, days after the elections, we want to **make space for emotions** of alienation, anger, cynicism, disappointment, indifference, fear, frustration, guilt, despondency, resilience, uncertainty, but also hope.

These conflicting emotions are the starting point of our politics. We marched on March 8, 2018 because we felt **anger**, but we continued to march each successive year because we see **hope**.

Our activism seeks not only to dismantle unjust systems, but also to build a liberatory future grounded in our shared humanity. It is defined not solely by what we oppose, but by the hope of what could be.

Through our choices, actions and communities, we prefigure the world we wish to actualise – one where those pushed to the margins feel a sense of belonging, freedom and justice.

We march because we do not see space for ourselves in mainstream politics. We march to create our own politics—one that dismantles power structures rather than aspiring to exist within them. Mainstream electoral politics, in its singular pursuit of power, has largely ignored our emotions and rendered them non-political. Our theme this year, "Politics. Resistance. Freedom", responds to what we're feeling. In 2024 we imagine,

A politics that makes room for empathy and love.

A politics that accepts us for who we are instead of boxing us into narrow categories of representation.

A politics of resistance.

A politics of liberation.

A politics of feminism.





Aurat March is a political movement and struggle. Our presence on the streets every March 8 is a **political act**. Our resistance within our homes is political. Our art breathes politics. The issues tied to our bodies are inherently political. Our sorrows carry political weight. Our joy is political.

We vehemently reject narrow constructions of what constitutes politics and who gets to participate. Our issues are labelled “women’s issues”—to the exclusion of all non-binary and diverse gender identities—or they are categorised as “social issues”, **stripping them of political relevance and urgency**.

Attempts to trivialise and mock our March aim to strip it of its political significance. Our slogans, dismissed as emotional, are deemed unworthy of serious political discourse. Yet, our resistance is intrinsically political, not solely due to the severity of the violent reactions it provokes[1], but because politics permeates every aspect of our lives—every choice or lack thereof. We aren't accidentally political; we are consciously so. However, the spaces, forums, and ideas that are considered siyasat are exclusionary, unrepresentative, and patriarchal.

EXCLUSIONS

1. **We deserve representation because we exist.** We strive for genuine participatory and transformative politics, beyond mere tokenistic representation.
2. We question what representation means within current patriarchal and capitalist systems, where we are reduced to restrictive and one-dimensional quotas. Politics of representation force us to choose singular identities – “Pakistani”, “women”, “transgender”, “minority”, “disabled”. However, politics that we seek is one of solidarity and interconnected struggles. As Aurat March, we speak not just of women, but center intersectional oppressions. We speak in plural because oppression is never singular and must be resisted in plural.

3. As we watch the horrific genocide unfold in Palestine, we are reminded of the historic injustices and genocides in our midst:
- Our solidarity is not demarcated along lines of faith: we fight for the Ahmadiyya community which cannot participate in elections because of electoral laws that disenfranchise them [2]. We fight for Christians who are routinely subjected to mass violence as was seen in Jaranwala [3], as well as systematic discrimination and everyday indignities. We fight for Shias facing a genocide perpetuated by broken electoral politics where members of banned outfits such as the Ahl-e-Sunnat-Wal-Jamaat (ASWJ) can freely participate in elections [4].
 - Our solidarity is not dictated by ethnic hierarchies: we resist alongside the brave Baloch men and women fighting a genocide against their very existence [5].
 - Our solidarity is not bound by nation-states: we fight for the right of refugees to call this country their home and feel the pain of hundreds of thousands of Afghans violently extricated from their homes by an illegitimate interim government [6].
 - Our solidarity is not muddled by hateful prejudice: we stand with our transgender, khwaja sira and non-binary allies, who march alongside us each year as they face brazen attacks on their rights, bodies and safety. Their struggle for bodily integrity and privacy is a shared one.
4. Our politics is expansive enough to resist all these oppressions. So why must we choose the “lesser evil” when we stand at the ballot box? That too amongst parties who make compromises, and field candidates with histories of sexual assault and hatemongering against Shias and Ahmadis [7]. Participation should not be this difficult. It should not exclude so many of us.
5. All this underscores the fact that electoral politics, though touted as universal and a basic civic duty, is not accessible to the majority of the population. Women and gender-diverse people feel unsafe in public spaces, thus making the process of travelling to and visiting polling stations challenging. Furthermore, male family members often cite women’s safety and security as the reason for preventing them from voting [8]. Lack of women’s mobility is linked to larger issues of control over their activities and movement, which creates further barriers to meaningful electoral participation. Older people and persons with disabilities find it difficult to access polling stations [9] or take part in ableist electioneering methods.
6. While these are often posited as “fixable” problems in the electoral process, they are rooted in larger systems of exclusion. These exclusions are an endemic problem rather than glitches in an overall inclusive system.





7. Substantial barriers exist for women and gender-diverse groups when exercising their voting power. The voter gender gap in Pakistan stands at 9.94 million [10]. In the recently concluded 2024 Election, overall voter turnout was 47.9%, however, women had a turnout of 41.5% compared to 50.3% for men [11]. The gap in women voters' turnout is worse in larger metropolitan areas than in rural areas, e.g in 2018 the gender gap in Lahore was 12.5%, double that of the rest of Punjab at 6.3% [12]. This is despite special measures taken by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to enhance women's political participation and representation [13].

8. The 2017 Elections Act stipulates a paltry minimum of 10% of women voters in any constituency for the election to be valid. In multiple constituencies, polling results have been nullified and elections have had to be held again because women's participation failed to meet the bare minimum threshold as per the law [14]. On election day, February 8, 2024, some polling stations in Tappi, North Waziristan were taken over by the Tehreek-i-Taliban (TTP), barring women from voting [15].

9. Without addressing structural patriarchal barriers, top-down reforms focusing on the issue of women's electoral participation, are inert. Women's electoral participation involves grappling with complex issues within and outside the home. According to a 2019 study, 82% of women stated that they did not participate in political assemblies and processions due to cultural barriers and 71.5% reported needing "permission" to cast votes [16]. Another study showed that 55% of men in the sample thought it was acceptable to prevent women in their household from voting if they voted differently from them, and 8.3% thought it was inappropriate for women to vote in a general election altogether [17]. These studies confirm what we already know to be true.

10. However, even metrics such as voter turnout should not be seen as indicative of political agency. For instance, it has been seen that women are much more likely to vote as part of a "voting bloc" in rural areas which are organised and driven by male family members [18].

11. Low turnout and participation by khwaja siras and transgender persons remains an under-researched area and statistics are hard to come by. Activists have stated that only around 3,000 people from the khwaja sira and transgender community are registered to vote [19]. The problem is partly linked to the difficulty in obtaining state-issued identity cards, institutional misgendering by NADRA, and the trickle-down impact of the regressive Federal Shariat Court (FSC) judgement last year [20]. Furthermore, polling stations are bifurcated along the gender binary, forcing many transgender persons into voting booths which might not conform with their self-identified gender [21].

12. Political parties do little to mobilise women and the khwaja sira community, often seeing politics as a traditionally cis male concern. Implicit in the modes of campaigning and the issues that are prioritised in campaigns, i.e. infrastructure and the economy, is that women belong inside the household and their concerns are limited to the private sphere. This public-private dichotomy in politics completely erases the diverse experience of women and gender-diverse people, several of whom are the sole breadwinners within their household and directly impacted by economic policies. Women, even when performing roles such as homemakers, feel the impact of the economy as they are tasked with preparing food and running the house on a budget. Research finds correlations between the increase in rates of domestic violence during times of economic hardship [22]. Many transgender and khwaja sira individuals in the informal economy and engaged in precarious work feel the burden of inflation. Yet, we are excluded from subjects deemed as “political”.

13. On the other hand, unique concerns of women and khwaja siras are rarely electoral issues. In the 2024 elections, major political parties included issues of “women empowerment” and “women’s rights” in their manifestos [23] but these documents carry little value and constitute mere lip service. Women’s issues were not centered in speeches by political candidates, rather women’s bodies, appearance, and character often are. Sexist remarks, sexual and personal attacks, and the choice of candidates with a history of misogyny do not inspire confidence in women voters [24]. Gender becomes a political concern when political actors need to stir up moral panics to gain political mileage, such as Jamat-e-Islami’s (JI) weaponization of transphobic disinformation in the recent past [25].

14. Promises in manifestos ring hollow when they are not reflected in the performance of mainstream parties, once in government; often feminist critique and calls for genuine structural reform are trivialised and rejected in lieu of more “pressing needs”. Jamaat-i-Islami's manifesto [26] is a great example of how superficial women's rights agendas can be when they fail to dismantle oppressive patriarchal structures.



For instance, JI's manifesto heavily focuses on inheritance rights of women who are often denied their rightful share in property, but the underlying impetus is on upholding the traditional, patriarchal family structure. This fidelity to "family values" is the reason JI blocked and publicly opposed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2021. Similarly, when the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act, 2016 was being passed, JI and other Islamic parties openly denounced the Act [27], calling it "anti-Islamic". While these laws are not perfect, the opposition by these parties is based on a regressive understanding of women's role within the family and society, one where violence is a "private" and "familial" matter.

15. Very little is done to adopt feminist, or even gender-responsive, ways of organising as political parties stick to jalsas and corner meetings [28]. Political parties exacerbate this by having small women cadres and not mobilising enough among women, leading to disinterest among women voters [29]. Women were three times less likely than men to have been mobilised by political parties in the run-up to the 2013 general election or to have made contact with political representatives after elections to resolve their issues [30]. When women do establish contact with representatives, it is largely mediated by men in the household. Door-to-door campaigning—which if done right, can build trust and access to women—has done little for the sustained participation of women in the areas targeted and women rightfully feel that politicians only approach them when they need votes [31]. These methods of organising are never meant to engage women and marginalised communities, rather, only for mobilisation of their votes [32].

16. Within Pakistan's patriarchal, mobility-restrictive culture(s), the internet has come to provide a useful alternative for marginalised communities to participate politically [33]. Their participation varies from writing and sharing posts, or generating meaningful conversations in digital spaces [34]. Shutting down the internet and networks sever opportunities for connection, dialogue, and collective action. Measures such as mobile network shutdowns also disproportionately impact marginalised groups and compound barriers to political participation; persons with disabilities might rely on internet-enabled applications. The blanket suspension of mobile services on Election Day in 2024 compounded the challenges these groups already faced for political participation.

17. While the internet has been a boon for many, it is still inaccessible to a vast number of the population, particularly in light of the gendered digital divide [35]. Further, the internet has been a site of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and disinformation for many women, khwaja sira, transgender and gender-diverse people and communities, including the Aurat March. Immense backlash is faced by feminists commenting on issues deemed to be "too political".



18. As part of our politics we must think about the ways in which information is disseminated and the kind of communication infrastructure available to us. Given the nature of the communication landscape, we are forced to rely either on privately-owned, algorithmically-structured platforms that do little to ensure our safety, or centralised channels subject to state surveillance and censorship.

19. Women constitute only 6.1% of the National Assembly candidates and 4.32% in the provincial assemblies, highlighting the continued challenge of achieving gender balance in Pakistani politics [36]. Pakistan ranks 112th in the world for its percentage of women in national parliaments [37]. In the 2024 Election, there was a significant increase in the number of women contesting general seats, with 882 women candidates contesting elections on national seats (312 in 2024 and 183 in the 2018 elections) and provincial assembly seats (570 in 2024). Out of these candidates, 27 women won general seats (12 in the National Assembly, 11 in Punjab Assembly, 2 in Sindh Assembly, and 1 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly) [38]. Despite this being the highest number of women parliamentarians in the country's history, they are still a mere 4.5% of the general seats at the national assembly. Accounting for the 60 reserved seats, women will only account for 21% of the national assembly. These same patterns will play out at the provincial level.

20. Throughout Pakistan's history, mainstream political parties have been led by women, such as Fatima Jinnah, Benazir Bhutto, and Maryam Nawaz; however, these women's political legitimacy has been tied to that of their male family members [39]. Elected women are often perceived as having inherited constituencies from their family members. Women are often asked to step in when male family members are jailed, disqualified or killed, and in some cases have been asked to step aside once the male family member is in a position to return to politics [40]. Further, these women, despite their privilege, are subject to misogynistic attacks and their authority undermined on the basis of their gender. Notwithstanding their contributions to women's place in politics, they carry with them a class privilege and propagate dynastic politics that uphold systems that should be dismantled.

21. Opposition by religious authority figures on the political participation of women has been a perennial issue. For instance, during the local body elections in 2000, religious groups in Swabi decided to launch a campaign against the candidature of women who had filed their nomination papers. This included pressuring the families and harassing women to withdraw from the contest [41]. These intimidation tactics continue to this day [42], a fatwa was issued by Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Pakistan-Fazl (JUI-F) clerics ahead of the 2024 Election against canvassing by and for women election candidates, declaring the practice "un-Islamic" [43].



This year, in districts like Miranshah, the TTP distributed pamphlets forbidding women from voting, occupied polling stations and only allowed men to vote [44]. These practices are not exclusive to religious parties, in 2013 the PTI in Upper Dir signed a written agreement with other parties barring women from voting and stipulating large fines for anyone breaking the agreement. In the end, just one woman's vote was recorded [45]. This demonstrates how easily women's political participation is sacrificed at the altar of political expediency.



22. While reserved seats are a hard-fought demand of feminist activists and necessary for ensuring women's representation in our assemblies, some serious limitations of the reserved seats system have emerged. Women candidates and those from religious minorities get limited to reserve seat candidates and cannot develop their constituencies as they are kept away from electoral politics. Reserved seats can discourage nomination of women or religious minorities for general seats, as parties assume that they are adequately represented through reserved seats already. Further, nomination for reserve seats tends to go to women from prominent families, to the detriment of grassroots political workers.

23. The minimum requirement to nominate women on 5% of general seats mandated by the Election Act, 2017 [46] is a small ask, but it was alarming to see that most mainstream parties failed to meet even this low criteria [47].

24. The gender-based reserved seats also assume and perpetuate a gender binary, rather than being available to the khwaja siras, transgender or non-binary individuals.

26. The logic behind reserved seats is an important one—one that we do not wish to undermine [48]. Affirmative action measures are needed given the insurmountable barriers women face, but without a radical overhaul of these systemic barriers, quotas risk becoming mere cosmetic gestures.



26. Quotas have in fact been used by military regimes to claim legitimacy through "pinkwashing." Under Musharraf's military rule in 2000, women's quota in political participation increased to 33% at the local government level [49]. The number of women increased to 17% in national and provincial assemblies before the 2002 election. Women's political inclusion was used to mask the undemocratic and manipulated elections during military rule. True feminist participation requires dismantling militarism, as women's rights cannot meaningfully advance alongside dictatorship, surveillance and violence. The liberation of gender minorities is inseparable from the struggle against all forms of oppressive power.

27. Representation alone does not guarantee participation—a few women gaining access to power does very little to transform the realities of everyone else. If the women nominated on reserved seats come from an upper-class, feudal or industrialist background, how can they represent the needs and vision of working class, peasant, disabled, transgender or disempowered women?

28. Our discomfort with the politics of representation is that it revolves around the individual – individual candidates, leaders, party heads – as opposed to the collective. More needs to be done to make our politics truly representative of the diversity of our population. The federation requires consistent work to ensure representation of grassroots groups in local government and better resource distribution across provinces. These problems are only worsened by enforced disappearances, illegal arrests, laws targeting religious minorities, heavy state surveillance and censorship. Law and legal apparatus are weaponised by powerful actors to undermine political processes. In the past year alone, we have seen how problematic laws [50] were deployed in the systematic dismantling of the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) [51]. Many protestors, including a number of women, who took to the streets on May 9, 2023 are being tried in military courts. The extent of the subversion of the law was exemplified by the reprehensible judgement in the Iddat case, that violated woman's privacy and dignity for political expediency.

29. This weaponisation of the law is not new, but these recent examples should serve as a reminder that the law is not a liberatory tool for feminists. We demand better laws and a more compassionate legal system—what we call asal insaf [52]. We see the instrumentalisation of the legal system by the military as one of the foremost issues of the feminist movement.





30. Even when women or gender minorities gain access to political spaces, they rarely wield legitimate influence or power due to ongoing discrimination and marginalisation within political parties and systems. Women politicians face sexism, tokenized, patronised, and relegated to lower positions devoid of decision-making power. They are only expected to talk about women-related issues. They are further demeaned as our politicians regularly trade insults and jokes with women as punchlines*.

31. Sexist remarks feed into the perception that political participation is not for women. Without women and diverse genders wielding legitimate influence, political possibilities remain narrowed to what male-dominant discourse deems permissible or imaginable. Their voices never expand political alternatives beyond patriarchal norms. This chokehold on political imagination prohibits radical re-envisioning of more equitable participation.

* While Aurat March remains non-partisan, we must point out Khawaja Asif's repeated use of slurs on the floor of Parliament and the PML-N's failure to censure him. Nawaz Sharif repeatedly shames women's enjoyment of political rallies. PPP's Nabeel Gabol went as far as to comment, "If you're so helpless that you can endure rape, then just enjoy it". This statement did face censure from party leadership, but it was a mere rap on the knuckles for remarks supporting rape of women. PTI regularly engages in tirades and sexist remarks about women journalists and political leaders, including KP Chief Minister-in-waiting Amin Gandapur, and even Imran Khan's sexualisation of Maryam Nawaz in front of crowds of thousands. Sherry Rehman has repeatedly been heckled on the floor of the Senate when bringing up issues concerning women, even as she has bravely fought back.

"Gandapur draws flak for using 'sexist remarks' against Maryam," The Express Tribune, July 24, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2311871/gandapur-draws-flak-for-using-sexist-remarks-against-maryam>.

Imran Khan said in 2022 that "takreer jo mujhai beji social media pe, us mein us ne itni dafa aur is jazbay se aur is junoon se mera naam lia ke mein us ko kehna chahta hoon, daikho Maryam thora dehaan karo tumhara khawan hi naraz na ho jayae jis taran tum bar bar mera naam laiti ho." Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0vr6aR10UM>.

"Misogyny v selective criticism: Imran Khan's sexist remarks about Maryam Nawaz divide Twitter," The Express Tribune, May 21, 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2357646/misogyny-v-selective-criticism-imran-khans-sexist-remarks-about-maryam-nawaz-divide-twitter>.

VOTE FOR



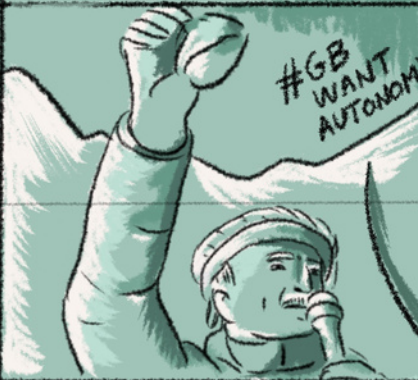
آزادی

لو کی کڑی رہی سچا

مزاہمت



سیاست



STOP HAZARA GENOCIDE

3

Lahore Press Club,
8 March, 2pm

لاہور پریس کلب، ۸ مارچ، ۲ بجے

عورت مارچ ۲۰۲۴



Elections reward aggression, domination, combativeness and zero-sum politics. Candidates are pressured to embrace patriarchal performances like populist sloganeering, fear-mongering, and hateful rhetoric to amass power. The very standards of “effective” participation celebrate socially constructed “masculine” traits like individualism, egoism, authoritarianism and reactionary policymaking over cooperation, compassion and care.

Feminist participation involves reconstructing political thought itself, moving from hierarchical conceptions of power to collective action. Beyond status quo politics, we look towards the politics of resistance and politics of change, the work of which is done primarily by gender minorities, religious minorities, and those living in peripheries.



Our resistance exists because injustice exists.

In our resistance, we must confront and resist power and deconstruct it in equitable ways. This requires acknowledging that power is violent and structural, thus resistance to it will require confronting the violence of the state, patriarchy and capitalism. We saw this naked demonstration of power being enacted on families of enforced disappeared persons in Islamabad in December 2023. We see patriarchal violence every day in our homes. This violence does not deter us, it crystallises for us how power needs to be decentralised, redistributed and exercised in accountable ways.

Our resistance is because of our lived experience of injustice. These experiences are rarely acknowledged in status quo politics. Women and gender minorities alleging assault, harassment and abuse are silenced and systematically discredited. Thus, our resistance is about asserting our lived experiences in a political landscape that hitherto has no space for our truths.

Lastly, we resist because of the material conditions of oppression, patriarchy and capitalism around us. We are mired in multiple crises: economic, political, environmental and security. These crises mobilise us to act with urgency because our survival depends on it. We build a politics of feminist resistance to tackle another crisis—the crisis of imagination.



Electoral politics alone will not deliver the systemic overhaul we seek. Aurat March Lahore underscores the need for consistent, creative and united resistance beyond the ballot box. We resist:

- By bearing witness to the violence wrought upon our bodies and communities—be it against the transgender, Shia and Hazara, Afghan refugees, Baloch or Pashtun communities.
- By actively affirming the severity of injustice, searing it into memory, and letting the heartbreak radicalise us.
- By creating a space for shared purpose and moral courage, a space for oppressed individuals to take shelter under a collective and give voice to silenced narratives and taboos forcibly thrust upon us.
- By exposing the violent underbelly of structural inequality encountered in our daily lives—on the streets, within polling booths, courts, police stations, and the *chaar dewaari* of our homes.
- By taking to the streets in protest. We march on March 8, and throughout the year, upholding our right to dissent and demand accountability. The public space is ours to occupy and will continue to do so without fear.
- By creating and performing art, music and theatre that is inherently feminist and radical in its creation. Public art makes visible our despair, anger and hope. Through art, we shock and provoke. We show society its mirror, in the hopes of creating a visceral empathy.

HOW WE RESIST?

- By promoting a culture of organising that de-emphasizes traditional structures of centralised power or emphasising the charisma of individuals, we seek - through painstaking self-reflection - to come up with a model of leadership that can inspire others towards true collectivism.
- By building solidarity across movements. It is through a lens of radical interdependence that we understand our struggle for liberation—not as a series of individual battles but as a cohesive movement towards the realisation of a world where every individual's freedom is inextricably linked to the freedom of all. As Aurat March Lahore, our commitment is to not only stand as allies to movements on the peripheries, but to actively engage and co-organize with them. This demands of us to learn, to share, and to shoulder the responsibility of dismantling the oppressive structures that affect us all differently yet are rooted in the same system of domination.



VOTE FOR



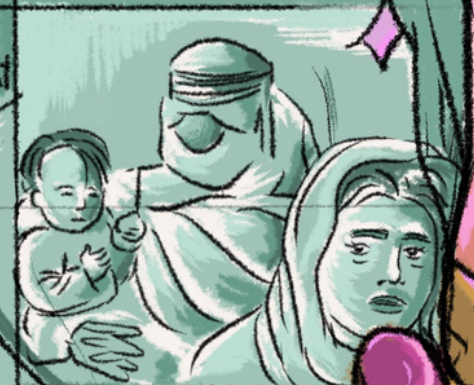
آزادی

لوک بک و رہنما

مزاہمت



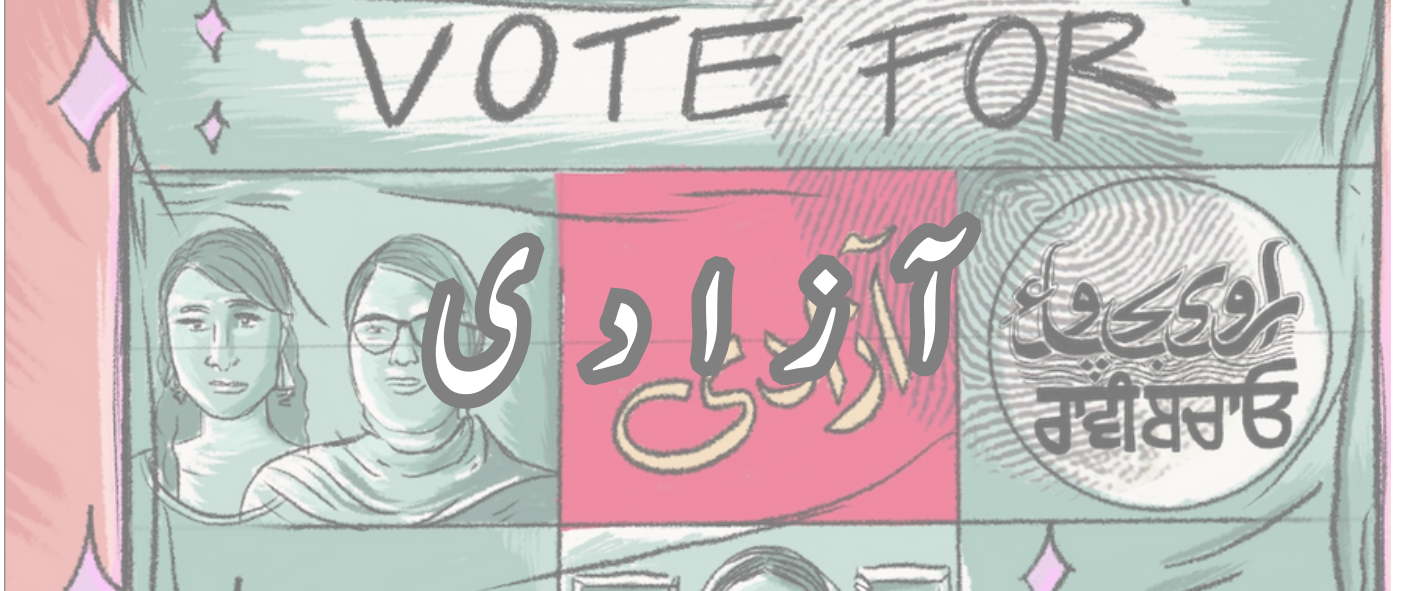
سیاست



Lahore Press Club,
8 March, 2pm

لاہور پریس کلب، ۸ مارچ، ۲ بجے

عورت مارچ ۲۰۲۴



Our politics of resistance is not an end in itself, the aim is to create capacity for new possibilities and liberation—a feminist world. We envision liberation from capitalist, patriarchal, colonial, and imperialist structures that create hierarchies predicated on oppression, exclusion and violence. A world beyond these systems is hard to imagine given the all-encompassing and totalising nature of these structures. However, that is what makes the act of imagining a world beyond so important and revolutionary. Nor is this work of imagining a mere thought exercise—for many of us, it is a matter of survival. What this feminist world looks like is not for us to determine alone, it will be built through meaningful and inclusive political participation, particularly from marginalised communities. As a movement, our vision of a liberated world evolves and becomes sharper as we build a collective understanding.



We strive towards greater accountability. We envision accountability that can hold multiple truths: the pain of harm-doers and those harmed, the needs of the individual and community, and the reality of the structures that cause us harm. Most importantly, we strive towards accountability that creates pathways for healing—individually and collectively. In 2022 we demanded **asl insaf**, an invitation to reimagine what justice looks like to us, beyond cycles of retribution and violence [55].

ACCOUNTABILITY

In light of the political crisis we are currently mired in, **we demand** that:

- **Campaign finance laws** be amended to eliminate capitalist interests from our politics by placing reasonable caps on electoral spending to create a level playing field for all candidates, regardless of party budget and personal wealth. Currently, Pakistan lacks a transparent, effective and class-inclusive campaign financing regulatory framework [56].
 - The Election Act 2017 allows for National Assembly candidates to spend up to Rs 10 million and a maximum Rs 4 million for Provincial Assembly candidates—and it is an open secret that much more is spent during elections with no checks from the ECP [57]. Moreover, money spent on digital campaigning is completely unregulated.
 - Further, recent amendments through the Elections (Amendment) Act, 2023, make it even more difficult to hold candidates responsible for exceeding these limits. This lack of transparency and accountability has, in fact, hurt the very political parties who have benefited from the unregulated party financial system, as was seen when PTI was selectively targeted for obtaining ‘foreign funds’. Even ticket fees charged by political parties run up to Rs 200,000, foreclosing entry for candidates from lower socioeconomic backgrounds [58].
 - **We demand a comprehensive campaign financing regulatory system that bars corporate entities from financing campaigns and spending limits** that ensure that electoral politics are **class-inclusive and accessible to marginalised communities** who lack access to capital.
- The ECP ensure radical transparency regarding the results of the 2024 General Election, and structural reform of the institution to **restore public trust** in its ability to administer elections. The election process in Pakistan has always been devoid of trust, with rigging accepted as a part of the process and this time has been no different [59]. The extent of pre-poll rigging, harassment and detention of political opponents and the environment of censorship has caused immense damage to public trust in the electoral process. Further, the inordinate delay in election results [60] and irregularities alleged by parties across the political spectrum have served as a death knell.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- We demand that a **truth and reconciliation commission** be set up, with representation from people-led movements, marginalised communities and all political parties, to ensure transparency in the voting and results process, accountability for irregularities that occurred during the 2024 Election, and immediate reforms in the election process to ensure participation of marginalised communities from across Pakistan.
- Accountability for state violence against Baloch and Pashtun populations, particularly for practices such as enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Militarised forces, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, such as the Frontier Corps, Counter-Terrorism Department, Rangers and intelligence services engage in practices such as racial profiling, abductions and “kill and dump” with complete impunity [61]. Civilian police are no less culpable in this state-mandated violence.
 - We demand that all those persons subject to enforced disappearances be **released immediately and unconditionally**. There needs to be an explicit acknowledgement from the state of the denial of liberty to these individuals along with **an unconditional apology from the state**.
 - We stand in complete solidarity with the women-led Baloch March Against Genocide and all movements by families of the disappeared, including the tireless and grief-ridden call for accountability for the killing of Hidayat Lohar [62].
 - The government and state institutions must **discontinue their disinformation campaign to malign victims of enforced disappearances** and their families by falsely branding them as “terrorists”. This rhetoric, seen most recently from officials of the interim government [63], is immensely damaging and serves to further alienate marginalised communities.
- Accountability and end to religion-based violence, hate speech, weaponisation of blasphemy allegations, and mob violence against religious minorities. This past year, sectarian flare-ups in Parachinar were a stark reminder of the ongoing genocide against Shia Muslims in this country. In between the last march and this one, the Christian community has had to mourn the loss of its churches and entire communities during the attacks in Jaranwala.
 - We stand with all those marginalised on the basis of their religion and condemn the cowardice of the state in its silence towards religiously motivated violence. We understand that the state has used religious parties and sectarian outfits for its own ends, willfully refusing to hold them accountable.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- All laws used to clamp down on assembly, speech, and dissents be immediately repealed to ensure that the legal system ceases to be complicit in this repression. Colonial era and newer laws, such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, have been used to intimidate, harass and silence movements and dissidents. On May 9, 2023 we saw, as has happened time and time again in Pakistan's chequered history, that these laws were used to clamp down on protestors. The state's surveillance apparatus employed to identify and penalise the very people it was brought to "protect" [64].
 - We strongly condemn the trial of civilians in military courts and agitate that the use of military courts be abolished once and for all. The Supreme Court's 2015 ruling approving the use of military courts is a stain on this country's history, and must be course corrected. We demand that the May 9 detainees currently under trial in military courts and prisoners such as Idris Khattak be released immediately. Further, we resist the application of military laws such as the Pakistan Army Act 1952 and Official Secrets Act, 1923, strengthened through recent and rushed amendments [65], to citizens.
 - We demand that defamation laws, sections 499 and 500 of the Pakistan Penal Code and section 20 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, be decriminalised and that safeguards put in place to ensure that civil defamation laws are not used to silence and punish victims and survivors of patriarchal violence.
 - We call for the repeal of the colonial-era section 124-A of the Pakistan Penal Code on sedition. We welcome judgements such as the Lahore High Court striking down sedition laws [66]; however, given the law's continued use, we demand a comprehensive and final repeal.
 - Having been on the receiving end of gratuitous use of section 144 (Code of Criminal Procedure), and witnessed its corrosive impact on movements and protests across the country, we demand that the government urgently scrap section 144, and recognise that the right to assemble and agitate is the foundation of any political system.
 - We agitate for the repeal of repressive laws allowing for internet censorship and shutdowns, particularly the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, which has been used as a silencing tool against dissidents and employed to block online platforms [67]. We reject narrow conceptions of "internet safety" that focus on criminalising speech and concentrating absolute power in the hands of the state to shut down our access to mobile services and the internet [68].

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Surveillance systems brought forward under the garb of “protection” be dismantled and expansion of surveillance through technologies be defunded with immediate effect. The billions of taxpayer rupees spent on safe city projects have done little to enhance safety of women in public places—in fact footage from these cameras has been leaked to shame and infringe on the privacy of women [69]. Even in cases where harassment has taken place in plain sight, these cameras have been of little assistance [70].
 - We demand that safe city projects across the country be immediately defunded, and instead the money be redirected towards shelters and survivor-support programs for patriarchal violence.
 - We demand transparency from the government regarding its acquisition of surveillance technologies, such as spyware [71], and web monitoring systems used to block internet content [72].
 - We are appalled by the government’s covert purchase of Israeli phone-hacking spyware, UFED [73]. This duplicitous use of hacking software from the Zionist government is a betrayal to the people of Palestine and demonstrates the state’s blatant disregard for our politics and privacy.
- Structural reform be undertaken of the justice system to develop survivor-centric systems and justice that work to move away from carceral mechanisms of accountability.
 - We demand that the government allocate more funding for survivor-centric welfare systems, such as shelter, housing, healthcare, economic and psycho-social services to survivors of patriarchal and state violence.





We fight for a world where we are not merely represented within unequal, oppressive systems but can exercise meaningful participation that transforms the very systems we are part of. We wish to move beyond superficial inclusion, to radical participation.

The Pakistani state has systematically undermined elections at the local government level, delaying local elections in most parts of the country and depriving community-driven politics the chance to evolve beyond its infancy stage. While the local government structure is far from perfect, particularly in its representation of marginalised communities, we feel that local politics provides the blueprint for a more feminist framework of power that focuses on strengthening community relationships. We invite political actors to think of community-building and relationships predicated on care when shaping local governance. It is only through embeddedness and a culture of care that centers the welfare of individuals and the communities that we can work towards a future that nurtures our selves, our communities and the environment around us.

Our vision is not to erase the violence that happens within communities, particularly directed at women, khwaja sira, transgender, gender-diverse people and religious minorities. We acknowledge that local systems have a history of violence, particularly in the form of jirgas and panchayats. We seek to create community-driven systems that acknowledge these harms and ensure accountability for them. We reject any local governance structure that recreates patriarchal, oppressive and capitalist logics of power detrimental to marginalised communities.

We demand:

- Reform and **overhaul of local government laws** and systems to ensure meaningful devolution of power and autonomy to local communities. For far too long local governance structures have been sabotaged through passage of provincial laws restricting their autonomy and failure of the ECP to conduct elections, leaving many local governments defunct.
 - The ECP must ensure that local government elections are held in all provinces and territories transparently and on time. Inordinate delays are nothing short of denying local communities their right to self-govern and take decisions for their welfare.

COMMUNITY-CENTRIC PARTICIPATION

- We demand that local governments be provided with adequate resources by Provincial Finance Commissions to ensure provision of basic services and infrastructure driven by local needs.
- We demand that there be adequate gender representation of women, khwaja sira, transgender, and gender-diverse communities as well as other marginalised groups such as religious minorities and persons with disabilities within local governance structures through political and structural safeguards to ensure that their interests are not only represented but centered in local governance.
- Strengthening of collective communities of care and structures of support already found in our local communities. The state must ensure that resources are directed to strengthening local support systems geared towards mutual aid, bystander intervention, and support groups.
- **Mandatory public and community consultation** for all state interventions that impact communities, environment, and rights, particularly so-called 'development' projects and legislative interventions such as the rushed legislation passed by the PDM government in the last two months of its rule.
- The **restoration of student unions** on campuses that preserve the right to organise and ensure meaningful representation of students, particularly of women and gender minorities, to exercise their right to organise.
 - We echo calls by students across Pakistan to reverse education budget cuts and restore Higher Education Commission (HEC) scholarships.
 - We urgently demand measures to end the epidemic of harassment on campuses, resist militarisation of campuses and use of surveillance apparatus to blackmail [74], profile [75] and harass students, particularly women [76] and ethnic minorities.
 - We require the elimination of gender discriminatory practices such as the imposition of curfews that perpetuate regressive cultural norms of moral policing, and eventually curtail women students' freedom of movement.



COMMUNITY-CENTRIC PARTICIPATION

- That there be equitable distribution of resources to and representation of all federative units, as well as Gilgit-Baltistan.
 - We strengthen the demands of protestors in Gilgit-Baltistan which include fair share in the National Finance Commission (NFC) award and land ownership rights to locals [77]. Gilgit-Baltistan has been historically denied provincial status and integration with the rest of the country due to geostrategic interests, ignoring the wishes of the people on the ground.
 - We demand that financial and infrastructural resources and reparations be awarded to communities that have historically been “under-developed” through strategic and wilful decisions by the state.
- Increased participation of women and gender minorities in trade unions, as women in Pakistan constitute less than 2% of trade union members in the formal economy [78]. Gender-specific economic issues are neglected due to this lack of participation. Unionisation must be a feasible choice for domestic workers, agricultural workers, workers in the garment industry – professions which disproportionately employ and exploit women [79].
- Climate adaptation support by the government through proactive disaster resilience measures to vulnerable communities and rehabilitate those affected and internally displaced by climate catastrophes.
 - Communities in Sindh, Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan are at high risk of climate catastrophe. At the same time, they harbour indigenous knowledge and local practices that understand and respond to these complex and unique challenges. It is imperative to provide resources to these communities to respond and adapt to climate change while respecting local ecosystems.
 - The government must translate its rhetoric at international forums, seeking ‘loss and damage funds’ and international reparations, into meaningful support for disproportionately impacted communities bearing the brunt of climate change, particularly those engaged in farming and fishing.





Building a more just world requires centering the most marginalised amongst us and creating a world that works for them. Marginality, for us, is not just experienced through gender but class, disability, nationality status, ethnicity, colour, race, religion, sexuality, among others. Liberal iterations of an inclusive world seek to integrate marginalised groups into existing oppressive structures. The inclusiveness we seek, however, is transformational, one that makes the systems it becomes part of more equitable.

We demand that:

- The state and society take tangible steps towards ensuring participatory, feminist, and community-driven governance– beyond superficial measures to inflate gender and minority representation in existing patriarchal governance frameworks.
 - The ECP must, at the very least, ensure compliance with the minimum requirement of 5% women’s nomination on general seats for all political parties, until this requirement is not raised to at least 30%. We also advocate for quotas for transgender and gender-diverse persons.
 - We also recognise that quotas will not solve larger structural issues, and advocate for reform of party structure, decision-making processes and ticket allocation systems that ensure inclusion of marginalised groups.
- Parliament reject all proposed Bills violating the dignity and privacy of the transgender and khwaja sira community. Given the immense challenges that the communities face, affirmative measures should be taken to eliminate institutional misgendering and discrimination across all systems and institutions, including healthcare, policing, education, and public spaces.
 - Provisions of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2018 protecting the transgender community be strengthened and the Federal Shariat Court judgement is immediately overturned to ensure there are no impediments to the transgender community accessing their rights.
 - We have learnt that while legislative victories are hard-fought, political battles lay the groundwork for their sustainability and effective implementation. We demand that the government take a firm position affirming the rights of the transgender and khwaja sira community, disavowing disinformation campaigns that have endangered the lives of the community. We see the fearmongering and intellectually dishonest transphobic narratives perpetrated by social media influencers profiting off the attention economy, and we demand accountability for their hate-fuelled and opportunistic lies.

INCLUSIVENESS OF MARGINALITY

- Safety from harassment, abuse and violence to ensure our public and political participation. Laws designed to eliminate harassment in public and workplaces are rife with issues of implementation. Furthermore, despite amendments, women working within the informal sector and unregularised professions are largely excluded from the protections of workplace harassment laws.
 - We deserve public spaces that are accessible, safe and welcoming built on affordable transport, accessibility for all abilities and attendant to the needs of all, including animals. We demand that the government invest in infrastructure inclusive of class, gender and disabilities.
 - Redressal systems for addressing harassment and patriarchal violence are often traumatising and inaccessible. While progressively more inclusive laws are being passed, the systems that implement them are mired in oppressive structures, holding the capacity for small victories but never complete justice. We demand systemic overhaul of reporting, investigative, evidentiary and adjudicative processes for victims and survivors that are trauma-informed and survivor-centric.





Finally, our vision of azadi imagines economic, social and political systems that ensure autonomy and engender just worlds.

We demand:

- Accountability for neoliberal, exploitative economic reforms such as IMF-mandated austerity measures that put the crushing burden of systemic economic and political crises on the most marginalised, disproportionately impacting women and gender minorities, who are predominantly part of the informal sector with no social safety nets.
- Universal social protection and regularisation of work which guarantees living wage and decent work conditions in formal and informal sectors.
- Dismantling of the gendered division of labour. The state and society must recognise and value unpaid labour, including care work, as an integral part of the economy.
 - We agitate for the reduction and redistribution of women's unpaid care work burden that is linked to gendered gaps in labour force participation and pay.
 - The state must provide infrastructure and services that reduce the time and effort required for care tasks, including affordable and accessible childcare and health care services.
- An end to the undue restriction/surveillance/bureaucratic hindrances that impede the work of women's rights organisations' and feminist movements', and ensure that national women's institutions/machineries are democratically run and possess decision-making powers, are funded, fully functional and operational.
- Cuts in defence spending and that funds be redirected to the restoration and efficient running of gender-transformative public services such as healthcare, public transportation, infrastructures and social protection systems.
- That all government projects are required to conduct an independent environmental impact audit that is made public through digital disclosure and otherwise. We recognise that human-centric and capitalist systems have undermined the rights of other beings we share this planet with. Our politics incentivises development models demonstrated through rushed projects and infrastructural development to garner votes and ceding to elite interests, with little regard to the impact on the environment around us.



- We demand that the dispensation of funds for each government project be dependent on approval from the impacted communities, and project funding should be subject to community vetoes.
- We advocate for the protection of farmland and livelihoods that ensure fresh, nutritious and affordable food for a growing population. We demand government facilitation and support of agroecological approaches to farming.

Electoral and formal political representation pre-defines the nature of our participation and places limits on what we can imagine.

We want more.

Collapsing distinctions between the personal and political, our political participation transcends traditional markers of representation. True participation reflects the freedom for women and gender minorities to speak out without bounds of respectability, to assemble, associate, and substantively take part in shaping public affairs at all levels [80].

Political participation means reclaiming power not just in the halls of government but in the very act of defining what constitutes political discourse and action. This is a call to action to not only change the participants in political conversations but also fundamentally alter the nature of the conversation itself [81].

Feminist political participation means political systems acknowledging the different ways in which women and gender minorities collectivise and create political meaning. Politics is when we gather to discuss politics, it is the whisper networks and support systems created to keep each other safe, and it is when we march for our rights.

Lahore, 25 February 2024.

ARTWORK BY:

Laiba Raja

Shehzil Malik

and other generous artists.





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 - b. All victims of enforced disappearances should be released immediately;
 - c. Dismantle the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) and "state-sponsored death squads" operating in Balochistan;
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In Gaza, the West Bank, and beyond, the genocide faced by Palestinians reveals the monstrous underbelly of imperial power. The numbers are staggering - over 28,000 killed in Gaza, including over 12,000 children. Nearly 400 more have been killed in the West Bank, including over 100 minors. Thousands injured. Hundreds of thousands displaced and dispossessed. Gaza's homes, hospitals, schools lie in ruins. A world where such atrocities persist cannot be one we accept. Their liberation is bound up with ours.



END NOTES

Afghan Refugees

Pakistan is culpable for fueling the very conflict and Taliban resurgence that displaced Afghans in the first place. Now, after building lives here for years, Afghan refugees are being discarded through no fault of their own. This is an unconscionable act of violence. Over 500,000 Afghan refugees have already been deported. Up to 3 million more await this dreadful fate as part of Pakistan's reckless deportation drive. Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, Afghanistan has descended into even greater instability and violence. Extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, attacks on civilians, and the decimation of women's rights have become commonplace. Over half the population faces acute hunger. To force refugees back to this nightmare is collective punishment. The notion of a "safe and dignified return" is utterly farcical. Deportation consigns the most vulnerable to needless suffering, even death. The blood of any harm that befell deportees lies squarely on the shoulders of Pakistan's caretaker government. The racism and dehumanisation underlying this deportation drive must end immediately. No more harm must come to Afghan refugees due to Pakistan's geopolitical maneuvers.

Margins of our national imagination

Our liberation is bound up with those relegated to the margins everywhere. In Gilgit-Baltistan, the call for constitutional rights and democracy continue to face suppression. In Balochistan, enforced disappearances and killings of activists by the state has terrorised communities for decades.

Across the country, transgender women and men face abuse, exclusion and life-threatening violence while disability rights remain an afterthought.

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