

Christians 'Have No Voice' in Upcoming Election, Fear Rise of Islamic Militancy

Tens of millions of registered voters in the majority-Islamic nation of Pakistan are preparing to head to polls on Wednesday for historic national elections. It is only the second time in this South Asian nation's 70-year history that power is being transferred from one civilian government to another. The first was in 2013.^a

A record number of 11,855 candidates are vying for 892 seats in Pakistan's national assembly and parliament. More than a hundred political parties are taking part as voters hope to elect a new prime minister and political party to lead the world's second-largest Muslim nation.

Of the thousands of candidates vying for seats in hundreds of local and national races, not a single Christian candidate is running.

"Pakistani Christians matter least in social, political and economic matters of the country," said Asif Aqeel, a Pakistani journalist and advocate for the rights of religious minorities. "Especially in these elections, there's not a single Christian, of any party, who has been given a ticket to contest at the national or local level," Aqeel told CBN News from Lahore.

Aqeel said Christians feel severely marginalized in this year's national elections.

"They have no representation whatsoever and therefore this has given them a sense that they've been left out of the system and have no voice," Aqeel told CBN News.

One of the biggest concerns for Christians has been the unprecedented number of Islamic extremists and sectarian groups vying for political influence.

Some of the candidates have campaigned on promises to enforce Pakistan's controversial blasphemy law, while others have called for implementing stricter Islamic laws. {eoa}

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