

Evaluating the Empowerment of Religious Minorities through Quota-Based Inclusion in Pakistan's Federal Bureaucracy: Providing a Policy Direction for Institutional Inclusion

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Abstract

The paper assesses the inclusion process via quota in the empowering of religious minority officers at the Pakistani federal civil service. Even with a five per cent quota on recruitment instituted, religious minority officers, especially Christians and Hindus, are still underrepresented in substantial bureaucracy. By applying sequential explanatory mixed methods design, the researchers compare the career paths, institutional experiences, and the level of empowerment of officers who had been recruited using quotas and those recruited using open merit. Based on the Representative Bureaucracy Theory, the Institutional Disempowerment Model, and logic of Affirmative Action, the findings have shown that inclusion through a quota approach frequently leads to representation symbolically but not in reality as empowerment. The creation of quantitative data showing 120 officers shows statistically significant differences in promotion rates, mentorship opportunities, and policymaking positions, as well as perceived discrimination. The regression analysis indicates that the type of recruitment is the most negative predictor of empowerment, whereas the availability of mentorship and department type become the most important positive predictors. Qualitative interviews also provide context on these differences, including ongoing informal gatekeeping, identity obscuration and stigma against affirmative action, and institutional silence of discrimination. Despite resiliency and community-based intent expressed by certain officers, the overall organizational culture still restricts their career movement and power. The results present an argument that access-based approaches to inclusions should be replaced by structural interventions that focus on mentoring, fair

promotions, and inclusive leadership. The study provides empirical data and theoretical analysis and falls into the sphere of knowledge of public administration and can educate policymakers on how to improve equity and representation beyond symbolical inclusion.

Keywords: Religious minorities, quota-based inclusion, Pakistan bureaucracy, affirmative action, representative bureaucracy, institutional disempowerment, symbolic representation, empowerment, public administration, mixed-methods research.

Introduction:

The unrepresentative state of religious minorities within the civil service of Pakistan is one of the controversial matters of the nation, where the border of constitutional promises, political force, and institutional bads join in many ways, over a long-term span. Though according to the guidelines issued by the establishment division, the Government of Pakistan officially instituted a five percent quota of religious minorities in the employment of the federal public sector, the actual results of such policy remain questionable. The question is particularly whether inclusion in quotas has brought significant empowerment or symbolic representation. Religious minorities groups like Christians, Hindus, and others have in the past been underserved as leaders of administration or only serving in administrative judgeship roles. The development of such a system continues even after policy interventions, reinforcing a framework of vertical exclusion within bureaucracies.

As recent evidence indicates, minority officers acquired through quota recruitment face numerous structural issues in their career paths. The seats available for religious minorities are underutilized, concentrating in low-influence departments, and so little access to promotions and capacity-building opportunities (Bhul, 2023; Gisselquist et al., 2024). In addition, qualitative data offer an image of these officers frequently experiencing a more subtle type of institutional

exclusion and diminished confidence in career promotional opportunities (Hayat, 2024; Mumtaz and Nakray, 2025). Although the quota policy is consistent with the worldwide affirmative action policies seek to redress the historical imbalance in the bureaucracy, the success of inclusion policies implemented in altering the bureaucratic culture and access to power is yet to be sufficiently explored in the Pakistani context.

Despite the increased literature on the topic of religious minority rights and quota systems, the majority of the studies are concerned with legal rights. There is a lack of systematic comparison of experiences between quota-based religious minority officers and open-merit officers in the bureaucracy. Only a few studies have used mixed method to reveal both quantitative and qualitative disproportions and lived experiences. This paper focuses on this exclusion by examining the empowerment results of minority federal civil service Pakistani officers through a mixed-method framework based on Representative Bureaucracy Theory and the Institutional Disempowerment Model.

Research Objectives

- To compare the career progression and institutional inclusion of quota-based and open-merit religious minority officers in Pakistan's federal civil service.
- To identify structural and organizational factors that moderate the relationship between recruitment mode and empowerment outcomes.
- To assess whether the current quota policy functions as an effective affirmative action mechanism or reinforces symbolic inclusion.

Significance of the Study

This study makes a significant contribution to both academic literature and policy development by bridging theoretical insights with practical implications for institutional inclusion. Theoretically, it is part of the growing body of literature concerning the representative management as its structures are combined with the empiric studies conducted in Pakistan which is frequently underrepresented in literature. The present paper transcends that of surveying minority versus majority using a comparative viewpoint under the umbrella of the minority cohort. Nevertheless, it addresses inequalities within the minority group as such in comparison to the line of recruitment.

The research evidence was used at the policy level and informed changes in civil service in order to have equity as well as institutional inclusion. Pakistan owes historical injustice the assistance of quota-based representation as far as it is concerned. Hence, the need to evaluate how these mechanisms have shifted away being simply adaptations of compliance to instruments of structural change arises. The research drives the need to restructure inequality by addressing how informal practices and elite circulation streamline the effects of the quota policy extrapolate the policy beyond recruitment and to areas of mentoring, transparent promotion tracks, and culture alteration of the organization. This work is eventually going to guide policymakers towards formulating more effective inclusion policies that are not merely focused on access but, empowerment.

Theoretical Framework

Inclusion of marginalized communities in state institutions is often conceived in terms that emphasize models focusing on representation, structural access, and institutional change. By synthesizing four theoretical frames that are mutually relevant, Representative Bureaucracy

Evaluating the Empowerment of Religious Minorities through Quota-Based Inclusion in Pakistan Theory, the Institutional Disempowerment Model, the policy logic of Affirmative Action, and the Revolving Door Phenomenon the four frames incorporated in the study measure the effectiveness and constraints of quota-based Saudi involvements into the Pakistani civil service.

Representative Bureaucracy Theory

The theory of Representative Bureaucracy specifically as applied in the domain of public administration presents the baseline of evaluation of the existence and impact of the marginalized communities within the bureaucratic organizations. The theory differentiates between passive representation, the simple fact of the minority groups existing in an organization in terms of demographics, and active one, which means that a group of people guard and influence policies based on the interests of represented children and dependants (Gisselquist et al., 2024; Bhul, 2023).

The introduction of a quota of five percent to hire religious minorities in the hiring of civil servants in Pakistan could be seen to have been in a bid to institutionalize passive representation. Nevertheless, how intensively these officers can be empowered to become active representatives has hardly been viewed. Passive representation does not develop into active representation when the minority officers are not allowed to take up high-impact assignments, training as well as leadership are denied to the minorities, and the minorities are confined to low-grade jobs. This detachment of numerical inclusion from policy impact is one of the major focus issues of the current study.

Also, this theory accentuates that the ability of marginalized people to act is not just conditional upon the existence of deprived members, but on the organizational conditions that either facilitate or suppress the latter (Licsandru et al., 2025). By also doing so, from an

imaginative standpoint, Representative Bureaucracy Theory entices that what lies behind institutional culture, power distribution, and gatekeeping systems within bureaucratic systems should be leveraged, which this study does through the application of other theoretical forms.

Institutional Disempowerment Model

Although the Representative Bureaucracy Theory demands the conditions of structure to permit the active representation, Institutional Disempowerment Model (Hayat, 2024; Khan and Shaikh, 2023) offers the conceptual sense of how bureaucracies can reproduce marginality despite the fact inclusion mechanisms such as quotas exist on paper. The model addresses three tiers of exclusion: procedural (rules and practices that seem to treat minorities neutrally), relational (lack of mentorship, exclusion from decisions), and symbolic (stigmatizing of people entering quota).

These mechanisms are variously exhibited within the Pakistani federal civil service. Minority officers have been known to complain that they are often not considered for leadership training programs or sent to high-profile bodies. On a procedural level, they can be denied promotion opportunities in the name of performance appraisal and on relation level they are not present within the informal circles that empower movement in the bureaucratic ranks (Hina & Ain, 2023).

Dis empowerment Model can thus be utilized as a diagnostic tool used to understand the quantitative measure of delayed mobility, and the qualitative accounts of institutional neglect and marginalization that have been compiled in this paper. It allows going beyond mere performance metrics and explores how bureaucratic culture can, in itself, become a means of exclusion.

Affirmative Action Policy Logic

When reasoned numbers concentrate on one aspect to rectify the historic imbalance between efforts to indulge the neglected groups, the systemic equilibrium is reached, Affirmative Action (AA) is used to assume deliberate measures to restore the history inequalities by encouraging the causes of historical gap to be considered. In comparison to equal opportunity models, which presuppose that the playing field is equal in perish, AA considers the structural imbalances and tries to mitigate them through the equal opportunity mechanisms including quotas (Schotte et al., 2023).

The minority quota in hiring in civil service, in Pakistan, is such an intervention. Nonetheless, the Affirmative Action policies can be said -what many people assume -as purely access-level redress with no proper mechanisms imposed to back fairness in the post-entry phase. In the absence of slowly establish institutional follow-through (mentorship, bias-free appraisal systems, diversity-sensitive career planning, etc.), affirmative action may unwillingly lead to symbolically and not substantially empowering individuals (Gisselquist et al., 2024).

This criticism is in tandem with the issues confusing the current study as it poses the query whether the Pakistani quota system has managed to realize the innermost purposes of Affirmative Action or has been a compliance gadget of numerical depiction.

Revolving Door Phenomenon

The Phenomenon of the Revolving Door is usually used to refer to the movement of the elites between the offices of authority both in government and the business sector. Its application, in a bureaucratic setting, explains the manner in which elite reproduction takes place within the state, particularly in instances where the highest ranks of bureaucracies are

continuously filled by the representatives of dominant ethno-religious and class backgrounds in general (Bandiera et al., 2021; Mumtaz and Nakray, 2025).

This fact acts as an additional inhibitor to the vertical promotions of minority officers due to the limited access to strategic departments, policy-making units, and leadership opportunities. Political elites ensure that power is concentrated among a small number of individuals. Even when quota entrants are formally made part of the system, the revolving door will still keep the power to an elite few. This academic understanding is most relevant in helping to explain the differences between stratified using quotas and open and merit minority roles in office along with the lack of minority religious groups in Grade 20 and higher positions.

Literature Review

Quota-Based Inclusion and Religious Minorities in Pakistan

In Pakistan, the historical underrepresentation of religious minorities, who are mainly Christians and Hindus among others, in the state employment took place. Thus the idea of 5 percent minority quota was introduced to the civil service. Although there is a legal provision of non-discrimination as stipulated in Article 25 and 27 of the constitution, the constitutional obligation of non-discrimination is practically implemented through the policy directive of the Establishment Division. Nevertheless, practical data can indicate that the process of implementation is uneven and, in most cases, not thorough.

According to Hina and Ain (2023), quota policies will not be effective due to structural deficiencies, which include the absence of outreach, weak enforcement, and institutional resistance. Officers from minority groups are frequently reassigned to non-policy areas, such as health and education divisions. They are well represented in the lower ranks of high-grade

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cadres, like the Pakistan Administrative Service, or the Federal Board of Revenue. This clustering is not out of line with the analysis that quotas, although they create entry points, do not always lead to mobility or influence (Hayat, 2024).

Moreover, discrimination goes beyond the hiring practice and continues within the career development. The qualitative analysis of the Greenfield of decision-making in the Pakistani health sector, by Khan and Shaikh (2023), shows that informal networks, perspectives of loyalty, and unobservable rules will influence progress. Similar findings are echoed by Mumtaz and Nakray (2025), who demonstrate that ideal-type bureaucratic regimes in South Asia tend to alienate minority groups and have institutional cultures that prioritize conformity over merit or inclusion.

Affirmative Action and Symbolic Inclusion

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Structural Barriers and Bureaucratic Cultures

The bureaucratic institutions are usually conceived in the form of rational systems based on the rules. Recent studies, however, challenge this conception by emphasizing the informal, relational, and symbolic aspects of life in a bureau. The findings of the ethnographic research of civil servants in Pakistan as noted by Hayat (2024) has shed light on the so-called ethical labor within institutions to survive in settings where institutions have deliberately excluded them. Officers who are religious minorities and are oftentimes characterized by social cultural difference have felt a sense of conditional belonging that hinders their availability to the promotion aspect and challenging assignments that accompany high stakes.

Likewise, via a field experiment on bureaucrats, Bandiera et al. (2021) prove the ease at which authority distribution in organizations promotes those who are socially embedded, which in turn indirectly discriminates against employees recruited in their organization via formal

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inclusion policies such as quotas. These results confirm the model of institutional disempowerment, indicating that both formal and informal norms execute exclusion.

The elite circulation phenomenon or what is also referred to as revolving door is a further acquisition of powers among dominant ethno-religious groups. According to Mumtaz and Nakray (25), in Pakistan, government appointments continue to be too hindered by entrenched actors so that an outsider, including minorities, can become influential in government. The ceiling still exists even in cases where entry is made under the affirmative action.

Comparative and Regional Perspectives

Comparisons within a region shed more light on how complicated quota-based inclusion is. In their list of affirmative action policies in the world, Gisselquist et al. (2024) point out that those nations that set up affirmative action without as systemic reform almost always settle on numeric diversity that is unempowering to marginalized actors. As is the case with Scheduled Castes and Tribes in India, with reservations where people are passive-represented, such policies have had an incredibly difficult time being translated into policy impact owing to social stigma and elite opposition (Schotte et al., 2023).

The article of Bhul (2023) on the civil service in Nepal also portrays that quotas need to be a subset of institutional agenda. His results indicate that until changes in staffing, training, promotion, and organizational cultures can be combined with affirmative action, it may serve to instill a second-class bureaucratization of contributors to the quota.

These comparative values are important to explain the policy environment of Pakistan. They show that the quota method needs to be judged on more than just access. Still, on the path

of progress, minority officers are being promoted and involved, and their influence on governance outcomes is being considered.

Literature Gaps

Irrespective of increased scholarly interest in religious minorities rights and inclusion in Pakistan, several gaps emerge. To start with, much of the current literature is concentrated on the legal guarantees or policy announcements. At the same time, little is done to understand the reality that faces minority officers in the federal civil service. Research is inclined to focus on access, and they do not investigate the possibility of the inclusion leading to a career mobility, empowerment, or influence in bureaucratic hierarchies (Hina and Ain, 2023; Mumtaz and Nakray, 2025).

Second, empirical research which does exist is likely to assume that minorities are a homogenous population and neglects diversity within the minority, especially between those who may be recruited due to the quota systems and those who could have been hired based on open systems of merit. This overlooks one considered direction of an inquiry that minorities themselves also visibly perceive institutional disempowerment through quota-based inclusion.

Third, conceptual integration is technical whereby theories of public administration (e.g., representative bureaucracy) do not encompass the experience of the civil servants with the minority religious background. Very little research is comparative or intersectional in nature, and it measures the long-term career implications of quota officers. Lastly, the literature on this topic rarely uses a mixed format of studies, which could be used to offer a wide and deep perspective on how the inclusion and exclusion works.

This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to assess whether Pakistan's minority quota in civil service translates into substantive empowerment or remains a symbolic mechanism. Both the gaps in the literature and the multidimensionality of the research questions are reflected in the design used because existing literature leans towards either abstract legal principles, or some qualitative mosaic narratives. The research aims to identify quantitative and qualitative differences as well as the institutional processes that determine the lived life of religious minority officers.

Methodology

The research design is a sequential explanation mixed method design to establish how the minority quota in the civil service can contribute to substantive empowerment of the minorities in Pakistan or it is only an impressive facade. The chosen design illustrates the multidimensionality of the research questions and gaps of the existing literature, which consists primarily of literature online descriptions of either abstract legal principles or qualitative descriptions of the facts. By combining the quantitative and qualitative data, the research project seeks to discover both the differences that can be verified quantitatively and the processes which transpire in institutions to fashion the lived-in experience of religious minority officers.

Research Design

The study employed a two-stage mixed method research design. An extensive quantitative survey was conducted in order to collect the trends of inclusion, mobility, and empowerment. This was supplemented by a specific sample of qualitative interviews on a purposively divided sample used in order to expound and support the quantitative findings. This

framework facilitates cross-method and theoretical agreement with other frameworks like Representative Bureaucracy Theory and Institutional Disempowerment Model.

Sequential explanatory design was especially suitable in examining variability among a marginalized group in the case under consideration, the religious minorities in Pakistan through examining the differences between the cases recruited through 5% quota with those recruited through open merit. The design separated the impact of the route of entry and considered other critical variables such as type of department, grade level and length of service.

Population and Sampling

This research will focus on the religious minority officers working in the federal bureaucracy at BPS-17 and above in Pakistan. Official records of the Establishment Division have shown that about 1,200 officers of the minority communities have joined by use of the reserved quota since its formalization with another 600-700 joining by open competition.

Quantitative Phase Sampling

Stratified purposive sampling was used to select a sample of 120 officers, taking into consideration that sample consisted of both streams, recruitment through quotas and open merit, a variety of departments (administrative, technical, regulatory) and geographic regions. This was attempted by incorporating officers of several ministries and service groups.

Qualitative Phase Sampling

Out of the respondents surveyed, a semi-structured interview sample size was chosen of 15 officers based on maximum variation sampling in order to include diversity in gender, religious beliefs (Christian, Hindu, etc.), type of cadre, and tenure. This made it possible to

understand the relationship between institutional cultures and religious identity and history of recruitment more nuanced.

Data Collection Instruments

The study has adopted the combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve the research objectives to capture the empowerment dimensions of the religious minority officers in the bureaucracy of Pakistan. The quantitative phase used a structured questionnaire that was sub-divided into five major sections. The initial segment included demographic features like age, religion, sex, department, cadres, and years of recruitment. The second section focused on information on career mobility measures such as how many promotions they have had, their grade, availability of professional training and posting to positions of policy interest. The third question assessed institutional inclusion which was evaluated in terms of access to mentorships, fairness in performance appraisal and by participating in departmental decision making. The fourth section evaluated perceived discrimination based on religion, recruitment channel (quota and open merit), and socio-cultural background. Finally, the fifth section was dealing with the perception of empowerment by self-reported messengers which included the perceived efficacy, institutional voice and perceived confidence in career progression. Everything was organized on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strong disagree to strong agree. This instrument was pilot-tested to five officers to ascertain the instrument to be clear and relevant to the study and coherent internally.

In the qualitative stage, a semi-structured interview schedule was prepared to further explore how civil servants who belong to religious minorities live. Themes of the interview were current centered around anecdotes of initial recruiting and early careers, perceived imbalance between officers recruited through both quota and open-merit, and the larger institutional culture

with a narrower spotlight on flows of NYC informal networks of gatekeeping. Furthermore, the interviews explored personal ambitions, felt chances of being empowered, obstacles to rising the corporate ladder, and suggestions to policy and institutional changes. They were strictly audio-taped after consent and then transcribed word-to-transcript and later analyzed all interviews in either English or Urdu, depending upon the choice of the participant.

Data Analysis

The data from 120 completed surveys were considered quantitative and analyzed using SPSS and Stata software. The descriptive statistics was used to describe the major patterns in career mobility and institutional inclusion. The independent t-tests and chi-square tests were used to compare the differences between officers recruited using quotas and those recruited based on open merit. The comparison aimed at establishing substantial differences between the two groups. In their attempt to identify the predictors of empowerment in minority officers, multiple regression analyses were performed with an empowerment index, based on a variety of Likert-scale questions, on perceived efficacy, institutional voice, and advancement confidence, being the dependent variable. The most important independent variable was the type of recruitment (quota and merit), while the control variables included education, department type, tenure, and region. Moderation and Mediation analytic tests were conducted to further examine whether the relationship between access to mentorship and department type or recruitment mode impacted the results of empowerment.

During the qualitative stage, all the okay transcripts of interviews were imported into the NVivo software, to be coded and analyzed using the thematic coding method. The thematic analysis was driven by an inductive approach that followed a six-step method advocated by

Braun and Clarke familiarization of data, generation of preliminary codes, theme search, theme review, definition and naming of themes, and final write up. It was with this that common themes came out in the accounts of the participants such as symbolic and substantive inclusion, the presence of informal gatekeeping structures, encountering of religious prejudice and microaggressions, institutional silence on the issue of minority groups, and the engagement of personal response of resiliency. These themes further clarified the outcomes derived through quantitative research because they provided the information that has been made contextually richer in terms of what exactly the religious minority officers go through in the civil service of Pakistan.

Results

This section will provide empirical findings of both the quantitative questionnaire and the qualitative interviews carried out to analyse the empowerment of the religious minorities in the Pakistani civil services which recruitment depends on affirmative action quotas. The analysis examines the effects of recruitment type, access to mentorship, departmental culture, perceived discrimination and other institutional factors that determine perceived empowerment and career mobility of the officers. To determine significant trends and predictors, the descriptive statistics were used, as well as Independent samples t-tests and multiple linear regression models to analyze quantitative data. Interpretation interprets themes of interviews and qualitative inferences can supply the information including thematic insight which may offer contextual details about the institutional processes and lived experiences. The list of these methods produces an advanced picture of the symbolic and material authority of quota-based officers. It shows the systemic determinants that continue to mediate the ways in which they are integrated into state bureaucracies.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix

	Empowerment Score	Promotion Rate	Mentorship Access	Policy Role Posting	Discrimination Score
Empowerment Score	1.00				
Promotion Rate	0.63	1.00			
Mentorship Access	0.58	0.60	1.00		
Policy Role Posting	0.55	0.59	0.62	1.00	
Discrimination Score	-0.47	-0.42	-0.44	-0.39	1.00

Empowerment Score is positively correlated with Promotion Rate, Mentorship Access, and Policy Role Posting, and negatively correlated with Discrimination Score.

Table 2: Independent T-Test Results – Quota vs Open-Merit Officers

Variable	Quota Officers Mean	Open-Merit Officers Mean	t-statistic	p-value
Empowerment Score	2.43	3.82	-10.177	0.000
Promotion Rate (%)	28.5	47.2	-12.871	0.000
Mentorship Access (%)	34.1	68.9	-15.103	0.000
Policy Role Postings (%)	21.7	56.3	-12.673	0.000
Discrimination Reports (%)	73.4	29.6	9.352	0.000

There are statistically significant differences between the performance of open-merit officers and quota-based officers in terms of empowerment, promotion, access to mentorship, and policy assignment, all of which are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). It is such that in contrast to quota officers who report much better experiences of discrimination in contrast to other groups, structural and cultural disadvantages are present despite being lawfully included. These findings support the argument that the quota-based inclusion is not necessarily translated into the substantive empowerment in an empirical way.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Results – Predictors of Empowerment Score

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	1.821	0.234	–	7.781	0.000
Recruitment Type (1 = Quota, 0 = Open Merit)	-0.872	0.111	-0.501	-7.856	0.000
Mentorship Access Score	0.318	0.079	0.312	4.025	0.000
Training Received (0 = No, 1 = Yes)	0.263	0.101	0.144	2.603	0.010
Department Type (1 = Elite, 0 = Other)	0.206	0.093	0.121	2.215	0.029
Years of Service	0.047	0.016	0.174	2.938	0.004
Perceived Discrimination Score	-0.291	0.073	-0.268	-3.986	0.000

The regression model explains 61.3 percent of the variance in the scores of empowerment ($R^2 = 0.613$) of empowerment implying high explanatory power. Recruitment type was

considered to be the most important negative predictor (-0.501), which implies that quota officers remain less empowered despite the adjustment of other predictors. The predicted positive contributors to empowerment were mentorship access, training, department type, and years of service whereas perceived discrimination was found to be a significant negative contributor. These findings substantiate the fact that so-called quota-based inclusion should be backed by institutional mentorship and anti-discrimination on the way to their substantive empowerment.

Qualitative analysis

Table 4: Sample Codes Generated from Interview Transcripts

Participant Quote	Initial Code
“My first posting was in a remote office where I had no say in decisions.”	Symbolic Inclusion
“Even after ten years, I have never been sent to a policymaking position.”	Exclusion from Policy Roles
“Open-merit officers have a network. We are left to navigate alone.”	Informal Gatekeeping
“I keep my religious identity hidden at work.”	Identity Concealment
“There is always an assumption that we got in because of sympathy, not merit.”	Stigma of Affirmative Action
“I find strength in knowing my work matters to my community.”	Resilience and Purpose

“Promotion decisions are made in closed rooms. We are not even considered.”	Lack of Transparency
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Table 5: Key Themes Identified Through Thematic Analysis

Theme	Description
Symbolic vs. Substantive Inclusion	Officers experience inclusion in form but not in function, often sidelined in real decision-making processes.
Informal Gatekeeping	Networks and favoritism limit access to promotions and influence, especially for quota officers.
Religious Bias and Microaggressions	Subtle exclusion, stereotyping, and lack of acceptance contribute to a hostile work culture.
Institutional Silence	There is little institutional acknowledgment of the discrimination faced by minority officers.
Strategies of Resilience	Despite barriers, officers develop internal coping strategies and professional purpose to remain committed.

Interpretation of the interviews based on thematic analysis shows that the officials in quota-based officers do not, in fact, behave as empowered members of the civil service, despite the record indicating otherwise. Informal schemes of gatekeeping persist through the denial of expressive positions and access, voided by mentoring efforts, as well as the active marginalization they endure. To minimize the stigma, hundreds of respondents kept the details confidential to emphasize the use of religious biases and Microaggressions in bureaucratic culture. Moreover, institutional silence, which stemmed from the lack of recognition or reaction

to these difficulties, created an atmosphere that further reinforced a sense of disadvantage.

However, other officers were incredibly resilient in their need to feel a sense of duty and belonging to their community. These results highlight the beneficial role of structural changes that go beyond quota control, such as inclusive leadership, clear career advancement, and special support.

Discussion

This study suggests that there is a wide linearity on discrepancy between affirmative action as an official tool of inclusion and empowered life experiences of the biggest sub-group of religious minority officers in the Pakistani civil service. Although the recruitment quota is a structural way into a service of solidarity, it is not the mechanism of substantive empowerment. Quantitative analysis revealed that officers recruited by quota had lower regular empowerment, were inequitably represented in policymaking segments, and had reduced opportunities for mentorship and institutional support. The qualitative evidence also supported these trends, with officers explaining a culture of bureaucracy characterised by inconvenient gatekeeping, bureaucratic carnival and religious microaggressions. The difference between official policy and real-life performance highlights that even the current paradigm of affirmative action is not sufficient to provide equitable rewards.

The statistics align with the previous literature on the boundaries of affirmative action, not accompanied by a change in the institutions. Research papers including Bhul (2023) and Gisselquist et al. (2024) have emphasized the danger of using quotas as an objective, as opposed to guidance towards the same. In the present case, when the minority quota established the structural entry point, the lack of mentorship, transparency, and inclusionary practices still

relegated those needing recruitment under the diversity scheme. The regression analysis proved that the type of recruitment was a significant negative predictor of empowerment, even when accounting for the level of education, tenure, and operating department. That means that the stigmatization and institutional pressure of quota officers will not vanish at the time of their access to high rank because it would affect their career ladder and certainty of their career ascendancy.

This interpretation was supported by the qualitative evidence. Some of the experiences shared are the fact that they are out of informal networks, they are sidelined when it comes to promotions and are not encouraged to raise their voice about their dissatisfaction (the respondents). A phenomenon of concealing the religious identity and internalizing stigmas on recruitment in quota based factor was also interesting. These experiences are all alongside the idea of symbolic inclusion in which officers are technically in the institution but they lack full scope of participation, influence and recognition. The fact that such tendencies persisted to date, even with constitutional and bureaucratic efforts to combat inequality, suggests that some more serious institutional solutions are necessary.

It is worth noting that the knowledge of the study also illustrates where institutional action can be enabled to produce a specified change. Recipients of mentorship, supervisors who supported, and professional growth scored police officers on empowerment much higher. It means that organizational culture and leadership practices can shape the structure of all things in the limits of affirmative action. Also, it is so because the fact of the resilience and the professional dedication that the minority officers have come up with will be seen in the qualitative themes, and is indicative that there exists a strong foundation upon which it becomes possible to build inclusive policies.

Overall, the results suggest a dire necessity for a paradigm shift in the operation of affirmative action in the Pakistani civil services. Policymakers and institutional heads should not understand quotas as the final solution but appreciate the role of follow-through mechanisms. These are mentorship schemes, open channels of promotion, diversity-sensitive management, and the enhancement of minority representation among decision-making posts. Without these kinds of systematic assistance affirmative action could easily turn into a mechanism of token representation and not empowerment. This paper is among the growing number of studies that support institutional inclusivity beyond recruitment and emphasize internal change.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at discussing and investigating the notion of whether including the officers of religious minorities in the military service in Pakistan through quota results in substantive inclusion and thus allows the minority representatives to be empowered. Using a mixed-methods strategy, the minority quota has been found to provide access to the public sector workforce, but it does not guarantee equal mobility or other career, institutional, and psychological empowerment. The officers in quotas were found to have lesser promotion and lesser access to mentorship as well as being more exposed to discrimination. It has been analyzed that affirmative action should not be limited to the recruitment policy, but should be part of a larger institutional commitment to inclusion. Global empowerment depends not only on a person joining the system but also on how the system treats, supports, and exalts the individuals it includes. The policy to reduce the chances of internalization of the structural and cultural boundaries faced by the quota officers after the recruitment process is therefore not adequate since it may be seen as the opposite of marginalization once the concept of representation is

implemented. Thus, affirmative action should not necessarily continue as a numerical tool but should create a framework that will truly set institutional change in motion.

Limitations

- The study was limited to a sample of 120 officers, which may not capture the full diversity of experiences across all provinces or departments.
- Social desirability bias may have influenced participants' responses, especially in interviews where sensitive issues like discrimination were discussed.
- The cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inference or the tracking of long-term career outcomes.
- Due to access constraints, perspectives from higher-level policy makers or quota policy designers were not included in the study.

Recommendations

- Establish structured mentorship and leadership development programs specifically for quota-recruited officers to support professional growth and inclusion.
- Implement institutional diversity audits and accountability mechanisms to monitor discrimination and unequal treatment within departments.
- Integrate inclusive leadership and bias awareness training into civil service training modules for supervisors and senior officers.
- Encourage participatory reform processes that include minority officers in the evaluation and redesign of quota-based inclusion policies.

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