

4 Sept 2010: 14 days to E-Day

Afghanistan *Wolesi Jirga* Elections, 18 Sept 2010

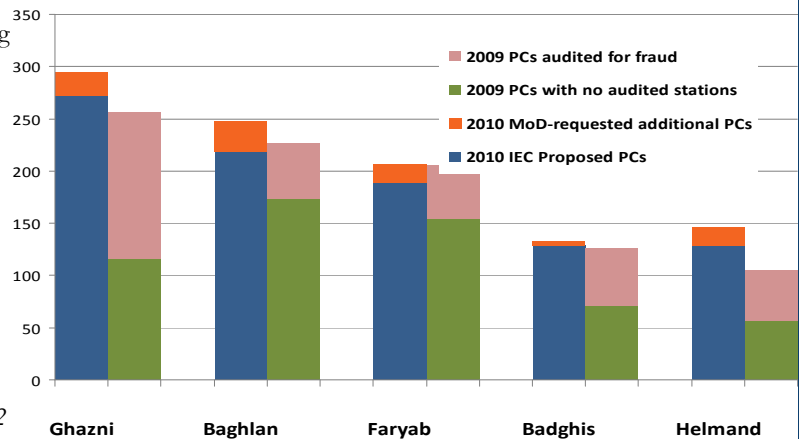
For the 2010 Afghan *Wolesi Jirga* elections, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) is conducting an electoral observation mission and analyzing the electoral process before, during and after election day. This mission involves more than 140 international and Afghan observers throughout the country. For more information, visit NDI.org and AfghanistanElectionData.org.

Polling stations: how many and where? Security and politics create ongoing debate on where Afghans vote

On Aug.18, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) posted the final list of polling centers (PCs) for the 2010 *Wolesi Jirga* elections comprising 5,897 PCs with 18,762 polling stations (PSs). To generate this list, Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF), in cooperation with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), led an initial threat assessment to determine locations secure enough for voting.

On Sept. 1, the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) conducted a press conference — without consulting the IEC — and declared that an additional 91 PCs should be opened in five provinces (see graph for the increase in polling centers based on MoD's plan). MoD also stated that additional polling centers could be announced. IEC officials have expressed deep concern that the ANSF will not be able to secure *Continued on p.2*

Analysis of Polling Centers in 2009 and 2010
for Provinces included in MoD Request



How is the IEC trying to stop fraud in 2010?

Before Election Day

- ✓ Ballots printed out of country with anti-counterfeit reproduction measures
- ✓ Individual ballots and ballot packs have unique serial numbers; to track the delivery of materials, ballot packs and tamper-evident-bags are bar-coded
- ✓ IEC polling center list finalized and approved one month prior to election, aiming to reduce the number of stations in insecure locations where fraud and misconduct are more likely
- ✓ IEC re-assigned Provincial Election Officers (PEOs) to distance them from power and patronage networks and increase their independence
- ✓ ~6,000 IEC staff from the 2009 election are blacklisted, many for fraud
- ✓ Initial selection of district election staff conducted through impartial software rating of candidate qualifications
- ✓ District field coordinator interviews observed by U.N. and civic groups

During Election Day

- ✓ Each polling station will have only 600 ballots and no extra ballots will be available at the polling center level
- ✓ A call center and an electronic database will track the polling centers that open on election day, preventing the later addition of results from stations that never opened
- ✓ Ink for each voter's finger contains the highest concentration of silver nitrate (25%) safe for use on human skin
- ✓ Votes are recorded in both numbers and words on the results form, and a tamper-evident tape is applied on all four copies of the result sheets, making it more difficult to alter result sheets after the count
- ✓ Forms from each polling center are included in one tamper-evident bag. Provincial election staff record the content of the tamper-evident bags using an online application, which enables the tally center staff to observe if the content changes before reaching the IEC national tally center

After Election Day

- ✓ The tally process is divided into seven steps to provide stricter control and staff accountability. Several software applications are used to ensure that data entry is correct and to detect unusual patterns
- ✓ Suspicious or incomplete shipment of results from provincial offices, or tamper-evident bags containing forms filled incorrectly, are quarantined for further investigation prior to entry into the database
- ✓ IEC maintains photos of the district field coordinators and voter educators along with their contracts for easier identification by the police or judiciary, should an investigation be warranted for electoral violations
- ✓ The national tally center in Kabul will be open to observers and media to watch the data entry process and results tabulation
- ✓ IEC will refer cases of election violations to the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) for further investigation and invalidation of fraudulent results, if necessary

Spotlight: *Kuchi* candidates for *Wolesi Jirga*

Although Afghanistan has 34 provinces, there are 35 parliamentary districts – one nationwide district is designated for the *Kuchis*, nomads who traditionally travel around the country changing locations with the seasons. For the 2010 elections, 52 *Kuchi* candidates – 10 female and 42 male – are running for the 10 *Wolesi Jirga* seats reserved for *Kuchis* (three of these seats are reserved for women). In 2005, more than 200,000 *Kuchis* cast votes at specially designated *Kuchi* polling stations. *Kuchi* candidates compete in one single nationwide electorate, and there are more than 900 *Kuchi* polling stations spread across 31 provinces.

Over the past three weeks, NDI spoke with a majority of the *Kuchi* candidates – eight women and 22 men. These contestants, particularly women, expressed frustration with their inability to access provinces where they have potential supporters. Most *Kuchi* candidates are basing their campaigns in Kabul province, where over 160 planned *Kuchi* polling stations are located – the largest concentration in the country. Few *Kuchi* candidates blamed poor security for limiting their campaign activities, but many complained that powerful tribal leaders support specific candidates and block the campaigns of others. The *Kuchi* candidates appear confident in their ability to fund their campaigns, either through personal fundraising or donations from tribal leaders.

Polling Stations (continued from p.1)

... any additional stations. In 2009, the ANSF were unable to provide sufficient personnel to secure the originally planned set of polling stations. According to IEC officials, adding polling centers creates unnecessary strain at a time when election officials are struggling to recruit, train and deploy enough polling staff. Unlike last year, when the number of polling centers remained unclear until days before the election, this year's IEC announced the final PC list one month before the election, allowing logistics and security plans to be implemented.

Since the IEC announcement of the PC list, some *Wolesi Jirga* candidates have challenged the placement of polling centers. Several Hazara politicians argued that centers will not be opened in certain secure areas to prevent Hazaras from voting. IEC Chairman Fazel Ahmed Manawi has stated that the centers in secure locations that will not open this year had very few votes last year. In the south and east, candidates and local media argued that polling station closures will reduce voter turnout.

All IEC commissioners approved the final PC list. President Karzai has summoned the IEC leadership to the presidential palace on Sept. 4 to discuss the polling center list. Observers anticipate that MoD's plan to open 91 additional polling centers will be the primary topic of discussion at that meeting.

Regional Highlights from NDI's Observations in the Field

Central Region

With more than 650 candidates, Kabul province has more than one-fifth of the candidates running in Afghanistan. These candidates range from national figures to intellectuals and representatives of smaller segments of the community, some of whom have relocated from less secure provinces or for economic or political opportunity. In Kabul province, the ballot will run 14 pages long, presenting a major challenge to voters selecting a candidate.

Candidates have expressed that although Kabul province has the largest seat allocation in *Wolesi Jirga* seats (33), they consider very few seats as genuinely contested. One candidate described to the Afghanistan Analysts Network, "there are six million voters across Kabul and 636 candidates. Twenty of these candidates are popular persons who will win. Nine out of the remaining 14 seats will go to women. That means that 607 candidates will be competing for five seats, which of course will be very hard to win, and I am not one of those five candidates."

Candidates and domestic observers report that security in Kabul allows for campaigning across much of the city and should permit full election day observation. In rural areas of Kabul province, concerns exist about the low density of election observers and the influence of tribal elders over election administrators.

Interviews in Kabul revealed the importance of these elections for the future credibility of democratic processes in Afghanistan. Observers noted that more than 100,000 ballots were invalidated for suspected fraud last year in Kabul province alone.

Northern Region

The north, until recently, was considered the country's most stable region. Currently however, deteriorating security in this area has prevented campaigning and voter education programs in certain districts. A candidate from Kunduz was kidnapped three weeks ago by an insurgent group in Baghlan, and to date, his whereabouts remain unknown. Two district election staff from Baghlan were abducted by insurgents and released in exchange for ransom (\$2,000 each) as well as pledges to resign. While the Taliban established a presence in provinces such as Kunduz and Baghlan in recent years, other insurgent groups are increasingly active in other parts of the region. In Balkh, one notable candidate said newly formed groups calling themselves Taliban are in fact "bandits."

According to the governor of Balkh, Hezb-i-Islami – Gulbuddin (HiG) is the most significant insurgent group in the northern region and is working to shape the electoral process. He claims that the group's candidates are free to carry out campaign activities in areas where other candidates fear to go. Two candidates in Balkh – a former *mujaheddin* commander and a former head of the provincial council – also pointed to increased HiG activity.

In addition to the security situation, there are challenges to the credibility of election administration in some parts of the region. Some candidates claim that the IEC's recruitment process was flawed and that some district field coordinators have ties to candidates. In Kunduz, all ECC staff members except one are Pashtun, leading Tajik and Uzbek candidates to suspect possible bias.

NDI, which has worked in Afghanistan since 2002, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. For the 2010 elections, NDI conducted seminars for over 1,700 candidates, organized training for political parties and more than 240 women candidates, and provided technical assistance to the Free and Fair Elections Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA), the country's largest domestic election monitoring organization. Currently, NDI is developing the capacity of candidate agents nationwide to report on election-day activities.