

11 Sept 2010: 7 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 observation mission and analyzing the electoral process before, during and after election day. This mission involves more than 140 international analysts and Afghan observers throughout the country. For more information, visit NDI.org and AfghanistanElectionData.org.

Five parties register in time to appear on the *Wolesi Jirga* ballot Registration process limits party participation in 2010 elections

Most of Afghanistan's political parties were unable to register in time to get their names on the Sept. 18 election ballot as a result of requirements in a new election law passed in September 2009. Before the new law was passed, more than 100 parties had registered with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). But this year, only five political parties were able to register in time to be listed with their candidates.

After the period for candidate registration closed, the MoJ announced the registration of 16 additional parties - representing at least 40 candidates that had sought party affiliation on the ballot. Major parties such as *Jumbish Milli*, *Jamiat Islami*, *Hezb-e-Islami*, *Wahdat Islami Mardom*, and *Harakat Islami*, which are fielding more than 100 candidates, have not registered.

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Recent history of political parties

- 2005:** No political party name on the ballot
- 2006:** 86 parties registered and 26 parties had members elected to *Wolesi Jirga* or Provincial Council (PC), according to NDI count
- Aug 2009:** Over 20% of PC winners had party name on the ballot, despite only 12% of candidates running with party name
- Sept 2009:** New law requires political parties to register 10,000 members (up from 700 members) from at least 22 provinces
- 2010:** Ministry of Justice registered only five parties in time to have candidates listed on the ballot, allowing only 34 candidates (of 218 requests) to have party name on the ballot



Political strategy and posters

Popularity of posters

Signaling in posters

- Of the more than 140 candidates interviewed by NDI in the last three weeks, 96 percent report that they spend money on posters, the most common campaign expense.
- Nearly all posters have the candidate's photo, his or her ballot number and symbol, the candidate's name, and some brief slogan. Except for the slogan, these same items will appear on the ballot to aid illiterate voters.
- A common error on posters is misspelling the Dari word for "candidate." By accidentally dropping one letter, "candidate" becomes "crazy."

- The 2009 political party law prevented most parties from registering in time to use their party names on posters. As a result, candidates sometimes feature well-known party leaders - which is allowed - to help them identify with their parties.
- Posters are a vehicle for signaling party or ethnic affiliation that is largely absent from the ballot itself. Some candidates feature past leaders - such as Mazari for Hazaras or Masoud for Tajiks - to signal affiliation or loyalty with a particular group.
- Distinctive turbans are sometimes worn to connote a home province, such as Kandahar, Khost, and Paktika, or *pakuls* for those from northern provinces.
- Photos from *mujabdeen* fighting in the 1980s can be used to signal personal history.
- Most of the slogans talk about "serving the people," "no more lies," or "development and good economy." In Kabul, NDI observers noted that slogans mostly imply that candidates oppose the government, regardless of whether they are incumbents.
- In a number of cities, NDI observers have noticed posters splashed with red or black paint or defaced in what appears to be an organized protest against certain candidates.

Political party law (continued from p.1)

Old requirements called for the filing of signatures from 700 members. Under the new law, parties must file signatures from 10,000 members to be registered. In addition, the parties must have an advisory board whose members must come from at least 22 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. And before the registration is completed, the MoJ must receive approval from Afghanistan's security agencies.

In the past two weeks, NDI interviewed six major party leaders - from both registered and unregistered parties - about the effect of the new law. There was broad agreement that the registration process was non-transparent and open to manipulation.

They pointed out that the MoJ did not announce the first party registration until last February, seven months after the new law was passed. Four months later - just days before the close of candidate registration for the *Wolesi Jirga* ballot - four additional parties were registered, including one led by the second vice president.

The party leaders also noted that for the first several months after the law was passed, parties had to spend time identifying members and satisfying the registration requirements, rather than focusing on fielding candidates for *Wolesi Jirga* seats.

Spotlight: Free and Fair Election Foundation

The Free and Fair Election Foundation (FEFA) has deployed 400 long-term observers and will deploy over 6,500 additional election-day observers. Of this number, FEFA hopes to recruit and train 2,500 female observers. FEFA leadership and observers have received a number of threats, including some promising violence. Female provincial coordinators in Kapisa and Parwan have received direct death threats. A FEFA official reports that they have also received threats from Taliban, candidates and local IEC officials. FEFA observers in Kandahar, Zabul and parts of Nangarhar will not identify themselves as FEFA due to fears for their personal safety on and after election day.

While FEFA anticipates full deployment in secure provinces, coverage in insecure provinces will be limited. On election day, FEFA plans to gather information through checklists on which stations open and whether balloting complies with regulations. Three hundred FEFA observers will employ an SMS incident reporting system while phone call-based reporting will speed collation of checklist results.

FEFA is also conducting a campaign finance monitoring project in Kabul. The project investigates campaign costs, misuse of state resources, and bias on state TV. FEFA anticipates releasing this report during the official campaign silence period, which begins 48 hours prior to polls opening.

Regional Highlights from NDI's Observations in the Field

Bamiyan Province

Last week, the national IEC capped the number of the polling centers in Afghanistan at 5,897 after rejecting the Ministry of Defense's suggestion to open more. This week, IEC is now considering closing some stations where security or staff are lacking. The provincial Independent Election Commission (PIEC) in Bamiyan informed NDI observers that the IEC will remove 68 polling stations in the province.

At first, the provincial IEC had intended to close 83 polling stations. Candidates, political parties and civil society organizations contested this initial news. After meeting with stakeholders who argued that reducing the number of stations would disenfranchise voters, the provincial IEC reduced the number of planned closures to only 68 stations. Rather than security, PIEC reports using voter turnout in 2009 to determine which stations to eliminate in 2010.

While a member of the Provincial Electoral Complaints Commission (PECC) said it has not received any complaints, the office does not have a vehicle to reach remote districts for investigations. Party representatives also complained that potential voters were unable to register because the IEC did not deploy mobile voter registration teams throughout the province. Instead, it opened only one registration center in Bamiyan city, staffed by two teams.

Three main Hazara-based parties - *Hezb-e-Wabdat Milli*, *Hezb-e-Wabdat Islami*, and *Hezb-e-Wabdat Islami Mardom* - have a strong base in Bamiyan. These political parties play a key role in campaigns, facilitating meetings with influential leaders and providing materials.

Parwan Province

Parwan is ready to vote, the IEC's provincial election officer (PEO) told NDI this week. District Field Coordinators have been recruited; half are female and 10 percent are disabled. At the provincial office, 15 of the 18 staff are new hires. According to the PEO, new recruitment practices will substantially decrease the chances of fraud. Staff for polling centers and polling stations have been trained, and election materials are being stored in a secure warehouse in the capital, Charikar. Materials will be moved to district centers and polling centers the night before the election.

The PECC is fully staffed, but officials claim they need to hire more people to cope with the workload. As with the IEC, most staff are new hires. The office has adjudicated 14 of the 40 complaints that it has received to date. Complaints are focused on candidates receiving threats, candidates retaining government positions, and government resources being used to assist the campaign of a high profile candidate. The PECC has prioritized complaints in favor of threats and disputes between candidates.

FEFA has recruited and trained 288 observers in Parwan. Unlike Paktika province, where no women have been recruited as FEFA observers, 42 percent of recruits in Parwan are women. FEFA observers say long-running personal disputes between rival candidates have emerged during the campaign, increasing tension between candidates. Observers noted that people who have received hand-outs, such as rice and cooking oil, from candidates are enthusiastic about the election.

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.