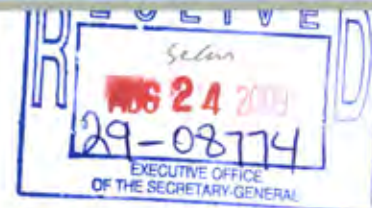


ACTION  
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Afghanistan



## Note to the Secretary-General

### Election Day in Afghanistan


24/08/09

1. This note provides a preliminary assessment on elections in Afghanistan and on how certain aspects of polling day may impact their acceptability and credibility.
2. **Security:** Some 110 security incidents took place on 20 August, varying in intensity and significance, and affecting mainly areas in the South, South East, and East. In view of the security situation in certain provinces, monitoring and observation by internationals of polling centres (PCs) was affected (e.g. the EU election observation mission called off visits to PCs in the North Eastern province of Kunduz and the Southern provinces of Kandahar, Helmand and Uruzgan). Initial reports indicate that 26 people, including 11 electoral officers, were killed in elections-related incidents (in comparison, 32 people were killed in the 2004 Presidential elections). *The spectacular attacks on Election Day that the Taliban had announced did not take place, but their threats may have had an impact on the elections, as illustrated by the reported low turnout in traditionally insecure areas.*
3. **Polling centers:** Polling centers (PCs) were generally open from 7.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. The afternoon's decision of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to extend the polling to 5.00 p.m. was only sporadically implemented. According to the IEC, of the planned 6,519 PCs, almost 95 percent opened. UNAMA is receiving different assessments from the South and South East, and is verifying the exact figures to the extent possible. *Closed PCs could be a problematic issue, especially if the number is higher in the South (where President Karzai has his constituency base): the population there may feel disenfranchised or, if high numbers of votes in these areas for President Karzai are reported, his contenders could claim that there was widespread fraud.*
4. **Turnout:** Given the absence of a single voter registry, turnout cannot be accurately measured. The IEC estimated turnout to be between 40 to 50 percent, roughly the same as for the 2005 Parliamentary polls, but lower than for the 2004 Presidential elections, with varying rates across the provinces. In particular, turnout of female voters appears to have been low. UNAMA reports that voter turnout may have been especially low in several of the Eastern, South East, and Southern provinces. *Turnout may become a divisive factor if it is significantly higher in the Northern and Western provinces (where Dr. Abdullah has support) than in the South, and/or if President Karzai votes in the South appear disproportionate to the perceived turnout.*
5. **Irregularities/fraud:** Cases of irregularities reported by party agents and others include ballot stuffing, proxy/multiple voting, pressure from campaigners, and malfunctioning ink (to mark the fingers of those who cast their vote). In particular, supporters of various candidates have started speculating on widespread fraud in the Southern provinces. Reportedly, in several instances, electoral staff took action to address irregularities. It is for the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) to receive and adjudicate on complaints. *The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Kai Eide, noted that 'anecdotes do not amount to statistics', but assesses that the issue of fraud is not of concern in itself. Rather, if these elections are won by a narrow margin, arguments of widespread fraud may be used to question politically the results.*

6. Statements and messaging: President Karzai in a press conference hailed the election as a success and stated that he would not comment on complaints until the voting result is announced. Similarly, Dr. Abdullah expressed appreciation for the Afghans' participation and said fraud allegations would be investigated by the ECC. While statements by the candidates themselves were thus generally balanced, the campaign offices of both President Karzai and Dr. Abdullah claimed outright victory and released partial, unofficial, count information to support their claims. UNAMA's public position (supported by others in the international community) is that only the IEC can announce results and that all concerned should refrain from speculations.

7. With information on turnout, number of open PCs, and levels of fraud still uncertain, and with the counting ongoing, it is too early to assess how the situation will develop. Risk of instability caused by candidates and their supporters remains a possibility. *As the situation and the likely winner, or the need for a second round, become clearer, there is an important role to play for SRS Eide, in concert with other members of the international community, in fostering agreements between the major contenders and consensus building around the results of these elections. In the interim, it is important that there be unity of messaging on the fact that the only body authorized to deliberate on results is the IEC, following the completion of the complaints process by the ECC.*

8. Next steps: I will update you on how the situation evolves in the coming days and throughout the next steps of the electoral process. Counting of ballots took place in individual polling stations, at the closing of PCs. It is foreseen that first partial Presidential election results will be published on 25 August with preliminary uncertified results to be announced between 3 and 7 September, and final certified results announced between 17 and 21 September after adjudication of all complaints by the ECC.

  
Alain Le Roy  
24 August 2009

cc: Mr. Pascoe  
Mr. Starr  
Ms. Clark