NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

AFGHANISTAN ELECTIONS UPDATE

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13 Sept 2010: 5 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.

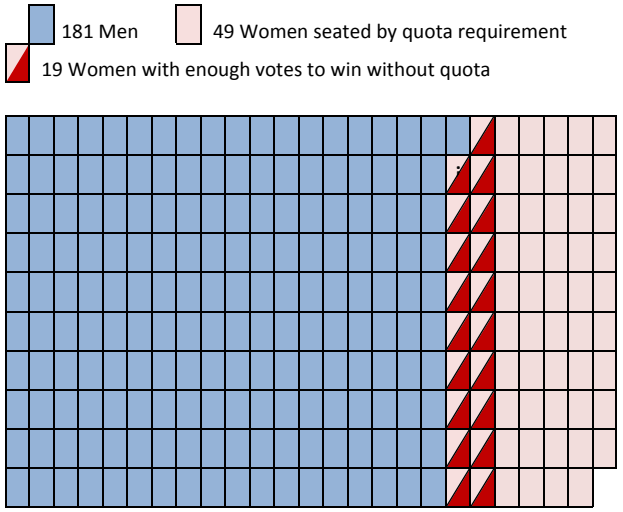
Female candidates face challenges despite reserved seats

AfghanistanElectionData.org, a project of NDI, has been updated with information on the 2004 and 2005 elections, making it a one-stop shop for data on the past six years of voting in Afghanistan.

While female representation is guaranteed in the *Wolesi Jirga*, women still face significant challenges running for office. Afghanistan's Constitution sets aside 68 seats, just over a quarter of the total, for women, which gives Afghanistan a higher percentage of women in its lower house of parliament than over 100 other countries. Nonetheless, women face a difficult path in campaigning for office. About one third of female candidates interviewed have reported facing interference, intimidation or violence - from both male and female opponents - during the campaign, based on interviews with over 80 female candidates conducted by NDI in the past three weeks. Incidents range from verbal abuse and alleged tearing of campaign posters to physical violence, including from members of their families.

Article 83 of the Afghan Constitution states that "on average, at least two females shall be elected members of the *Wolesi Jirga* from each province." In carrying out this requirement in 2005, the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) chose to allocate the seats differently among the country's 34 provinces. In a province as large as Kabul, nine out of 33 seats were reserved for women; in 19 of the smallest provinces, one out of two seats *Continued on p.2*

Women's Representation in the 2005 *Wolesi Jirga*



Incumbents

By the Numbers

Of 249 members of the Wolesi Jirga, 194 MPs, 78%, are seeking re-election. In the 2009 provincial council (PC) elections, 69% of PC members sought re-election.

In six provinces - Sar-i-Pul, Kapisa, Bamiyan, Daykundi, Zabul, and Nimroz - all of the MPs are running for re-election. In Helmand, only three of eight incumbents are candidates, the country's lowest percentage.

Only four provinces have at least two seats left open by retiring MPs, creating a challenging environment for more than 2,300 non-incumbents running for office.

In 20 provinces, all female MPs are seeking re-election, making it difficult for non-incumbent women. Only 11 provinces have a female seat without an incumbent running.

NDI analysis indicates more than a quarter of MPs seeking re-election affiliate with political parties, while less than one in 10 new candidates are formally linked to parties.

Challenges of Incumbency

In the 2009 provincial council races, only 41% of incumbents seeking re-election won.

After five years in office, many MPs report that they are unable to fulfill voters' expectations - particularly for provision of services. Without tangible benefits to show their communities, some incumbent MPs struggle to persuade voters to re-elect them.

MPs are elected to serve the entire province rather than specific districts, but many MPs were elected in 2005 due to support from a specific geographic base. According to the Afghanistan Research Evaluation Unit (AREU), incumbents elected with votes mainly from rural communities face serious challenges this year from candidates accusing them of abandoning their rural supporters.

Candidates, observers and voters interviewed by NDI believe that incumbents have easier access to security and state resources, creating a negative impression.

Advantages of Incumbency

Despite popular belief that citizens are dissatisfied with the Afghan government, incumbent MPs are typically perceived as the strongest candidates in most of the provinces visited by NDI observers. MPs that NDI interviewed also expressed confidence in their own re-election.

Some MPs have been able to use access to state resources to deliver tangible results for their communities. According to AREU research, those MPs who are perceived to have brought concrete benefits like schools and roads have received praise from those likely to vote.

As members of the Wolesi Jirga, incumbents can receive security protection, which makes campaigning easier in less secure areas. Non-incumbents can only receive security from the government on a case-by-case basis determined by the Ministry of Interior.

Female candidates *(continued from p. 1)*

was reserved.

Even if a woman wins enough votes to earn her seat outright - without any help from the quota system - she is still allocated a reserved seat. Thus, for women to win more than 68 seats, they would need to win more seats outright in one or more provinces than the amount allocated by the quota. Some women's advocates argue that, in the social and political context of Afghanistan, this system makes it unlikely that women will win more than 68 of the 249. In 2005, no province elected more women for the *Wolesi Jirga* than its reserved number of female seats. While guaranteeing female representation, the female quota system effectively creates a separate race for women candidates competing for the reserved seats.

Most females candidates focus on winning votes from both genders, according to candidates interviewed by NDI. One candidate said she focuses on male voters because some women are illiterate and guided by men. Cooperation with male candidates also occurs in some cases: a female Kuchi candidate reported sharing an office with a male Kuchi candidate in Paktia.

Female candidates being encouraged to run by male family members or tribal elders is not unusual, and many female candidates reported receiving financial support from their family for campaign activities.

Spotlight: Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)

AIHRC has assigned 180 staff nationwide to observe the pre-election period. Observation began during the registration period and will continue through the campaign. Although AIHRC and the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA) are collaborating in information gathering, AIHRC has not determined if it will deploy election-day observers due to security and financial considerations. If it does, they will not examine the count or complaints processes.

AIHRC observation is broadly focused on political rights rather than elections administration, with particular emphasis on 1) freedom of speech 2) freedom of assembly 3) freedom of movement and 4) freedom of association enjoyed in a non-discriminatory, unbiased and non-threatening environment.

In an interview with NDI, AIHRC leadership said poor security had limited freedom to assemble, and intimidation from "influentials" had curtailed women's participation. They expressed concern about the potential for suspiciously high turnout among women and high numbers of complaints from dissatisfied candidates after the election. Also, AIHRC leadership worried that electoral fraud this year could be more sophisticated than last year.

Regional Highlights from NDI's Observations in the Field

Nangarhar Province

Candidates and election officials in Nangarhar are still reacting to the IEC's announcement on Sept. 7 that it would eliminate 81 of the 458 polling centers (comprising 291 out of 1225 stations) in the province based on security concerns, according to the provincial election officer (PEO). The IEC's decision affects 14 of the province's 22 districts, but Shirzad (32 eliminated out of 39 stations), Hesarak (41 out of 51 stations), and Khogyani (51 out of 63 stations) are most heavily impacted.

In mid-August, an ISAF official in Nangarhar told NDI that it would provide security for convoys transporting ballots to polling centers in areas prone to violence, but a UNDP election official in Kabul has reported that ISAF will no longer do so. Last year, the provincial police chief said that he did not have enough officers to provide security for elections in Nangarhar. This year, some of the eliminated polling centers are close to others that will open – in some cases in the same village – allowing the ANP to concentrate its stretched resources on a limited number of locations.

Candidates in Nangarhar said they were worried that some voters may be disenfranchised by the reduced number of polling centers. They have asked the IEC to provide extra ballots to centers that will be open to accommodate voters coming from areas without polling centers. NDI analysis shows that if there is the same turnout – excluding votes removed from fraud audits – in Shirzad, Hesarak, and Khogyani as occurred in the 2009 election, there will be more than 1,000 voters per remaining polling station.

Southeast Region

Despite new anti-fraud measures, many stakeholders in the region expect irregularities to match or exceed those documented last year. In a series of interviews with NDI, candidates, journalists, civil society groups and even election officials expressed skepticism about the IEC's impartiality in Paktia, Paktika and Khost. The three provinces account for more than 3000 out of the approximately 6000 staff blacklisted nationwide following last year's election. This year, the IEC has already fired more than 20 of almost 300 district election staff in the region for having links with candidates.

The national chairman of the IEC said he would launch an investigation into allegations from two members of the Khost provincial council (PC) leveled at the Khost provincial election officer (PEO). According to media reports, the two PC members held a press conference and accused the PEO of "moral and administrative corruption," alleging that he abused his authority over staff. The PEO denied the accusations, claiming the PC members are launching a smear campaign after the IEC rejected council recommendations for recruiting staff. The PEO also claimed the PC members had family links with certain *Wolesi Jirga* candidates.

Security concerns add to the risk of fraud. In late July, a bomb blast killed a Khost candidate campaigning at a mosque. Last week, in Paktia, unknown gunmen shot at a candidate, resulting in no casualties. Also in Paktia, night letters have appeared warning against participating in elections and threatening to burn shops that display candidate posters.

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.