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AFGHANISTAN ELECTION LAYS GROUNDWORK FOR HISTORIC TRANSFER OF POWER, NDI MISSION FINDS

KABUL - Setting the stage for the historic transfer of power from one democratically elected government to the next, Afghans came out in large numbers June 14 to participate in the nation's first presidential runoff election. As in the first round voting on April 5, voters defied attempts by extremist groups to disrupt the voting, [according to a preliminary statement by the National Democratic Institute \(NDI\)](#).

NDI fielded 100 Afghan staff observers who visited 312 polling stations in 26 provinces. As in previous elections, security constraints prevented observation in all parts of the country.

The NDI observers found that polling throughout the country was largely calm and orderly. Domestic election monitors and candidate agents were present at most polling stations visited. The vast majority of polling stations opened on time and were properly equipped. NDI said that more than 90 percent of the polling stations its observers visited were set up correctly, election materials were kept secure and ballot boxes were clearly visible.

NDI observers witnessed some violations of the election laws and regulations, such as campaigning within polling station areas and the deployment of police within polling stations. But the Institute said the problems it observed did not appear to be widespread or systematic.

NDI noted that Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) implemented several reforms after the elections in April, including the addition of more than 2,000 new polling stations to help ensure access to the polls; excluding all first round IEC staff who had been implicated in acts of fraud or whose performance was sub-standard; and increasing transparency by explicitly permitting cameras and recording devices within the polling stations as long as they did not interfere with the voting process.

NDI said that certain IEC reforms were controversial. Some of the criteria used for selecting the location of the new polling sites were unclear since they also included areas that did not experience ballot shortages in the first round. This fueled questions among civil society groups on whether the placement of the sites was influenced by political bias.

On June 14, election authorities received 275 complaints, most relating to a shortage of ballot papers, low quality of ink used to mark voters' fingers, lack of neutrality of IEC personnel and interference of influential individuals in polling stations. More than 300 additional complaints were filed the day after polling. Voters and candidates have until the end of June 16 – 48 hours after polling day – to register complaints on election day violations. Preliminary results of the runoff are expected to be announced on July 2, and final results on July 22.

NDI noted that allegations of fraud and irregularities, as well as IEC partisanship, have emerged from civil society groups and the campaigns of both candidates, former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah and former finance minister Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai.

NDI said that candidate teams and observer groups should closely follow the tallying of votes and processing of complaints in the weeks ahead to ensure the integrity of the election. “An electoral process that has the public’s confidence greatly increases the prospects that the losing candidate will accept the result of the polls,” the Institute said.

"The next government of Afghanistan will face enormous economic, political and security challenges," NDI said. "Steps have already been taken by the President's office and the presidential campaigns to facilitate the transfer of power. The international community should support these efforts, as needed, so that the new government can assume responsibility for all aspects of government as rapidly as possible."

The NDI mission was informed by a [pre-election assessment](#) the Institute conducted in December 2013 and [observation of the April elections](#). Other NDI programs include assistance to five Afghan election monitoring organizations that mobilized thousands of citizen monitors from across Afghanistan for the runoff.

Information and data maps on the April elections and all other Afghan elections since 2004 are available on NDI's Afghanistan data website, afghanistanelectiondata.org.

NDI's election observation was funded by a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

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