

2 Sept 2010: 16 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](http://NDI.org) and [AfghanistanElectionData.org](http://AfghanistanElectionData.org).

## Another Afghan election: what has changed? Perspective from five years ago and last year

September 18  
2005

August 20  
2009

September 18  
2010

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First election for all 249 seats in lower house of parliament (<i>Wolesi Jirga</i>) and provincial councils in all 34 provinces</li> <li>• First parliamentary elections with universal franchise held in Afghanistan</li> <li>• Managed by Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) Secretariat, with 541 international staff overseeing election activities and about 180,000 Afghan election staff across Afghanistan in a joint UN-Afghan mission</li> <li>• Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) structure established</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second presidential election and provincial council election in all 34 provinces</li> <li>• Independent Election Commission (IEC) appointed by President Karzai, without approval of commissioners by parliament</li> <li>• Fewer than 150 international staff assist IEC in administering elections</li> <li>• As in 2005, ECC still composed of three internationals appointed by the Special Rep. of the UN Secretary General in Afghanistan and two Afghans appointed by Supreme Court and Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second election for all 249 seats in the <i>Wolesi Jirga</i></li> <li>• New IEC chair and chief electoral officer appointed without parliamentary approval</li> <li>• New electoral law passed by presidential decree despite opposition by <i>Wolesi Jirga</i></li> <li>• ECC commissioners - three Afghans and two internationals - appointed by new presidential decree, opposed by <i>Wolesi Jirga</i></li> <li>• ~6000 polling staff from 2009 election blacklisted, many for fraud, from working on 2010 election</li> </ul> |
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## Focus on 2010 *Wolesi Jirga* elections:

### Security Situation

NDI observers in 2009 reported that “the deteriorating security environment forced candidates, campaigners, electoral staff, and voters to limit their mobility,” and noted that insecurity stemmed largely from targeting by armed opposition groups. This year, NDI observers report increased insecurity due to incidents between candidates and between tribal or ethnic factions, while anti-government forces remain a concern.

In 2009, the lack of female polling station body searchers became a critical issue for both security and female turnout. Prior to election day, 14,703 female searcher positions (out of 61,759) had to be filled with male staff. This year, recruitment of female searchers remains unresolved, and threatens to increase the risk for voters and staff at polling stations, particularly women.

### Political Situation

NDI observers in 2005 characterized campaigning for parliament and provincial council as “energetic.” In 2009, NDI noted that campaigning was constrained by insecurity, although rallies were still held, mainly by presidential candidates. This year, NDI observers describe the election as less vigorous than previous contests. Recent visits to Nangarhar and Herat found campaigns were mostly being conducted with small dinners, door-to-door outreach and posters, with fewer major rallies than last year.

The revised political party law marginalizes parties. The Ministry of Justice registered only five parties to appear on the 2010 ballot (compared to an estimated 108 parties in the lead up to the 2009 polls). Only 34 candidates (of over 2,500) will have a party name on the ballot.

### Women’s Rights Situation

There are approximately 400 women running for the *Wolesi Jirga* in 2010 compared to 344 in 2005, with a sufficient number of candidates from each province and among *Kuchis* (nomads) to meet the minimum quota of 68 seats (or 25 percent) representation for women in the lower house of parliament.

Unfortunately, as in previous elections, female candidates face serious challenges campaigning in public. Based on interviews with female candidates and campaign officials, many female candidates running in insecure provinces live in Kabul and make occasional trips to their provinces. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has yet to provide special protection to female candidates, nor have female polling station body searchers for election day been recruited.

(See *female searchers* on p.2)

## Female Polling Station Searchers: Last Year's Challenges Remain

In the 2009 election, the Ministry of Interior was unable to recruit enough female body searchers for polling stations, and approximately 25 percent of the female searcher positions were filled by men. After the election, NDI recommended that hiring female polling staff and searchers was “critical in protecting the right of women to participate in the electoral process.” The Institute also noted that civil society networks of women who could recruit poll workers believed that they were included too late in the process. This year could see a repeat of those problems unless the Afghan government becomes involved.

After a dispute between the IEC and Ministry of Interior over which Afghan government agency should take responsibility for female searchers this year, the Ministry of Interior and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) signed a directive instructing provincial governors, possibly in partnership with civic groups, to initiate the recruitment and selection of female searchers on Aug. 25. International donors are holding back funding of this project until the national actors produce a plan on how the female searcher program should be implemented. On Sept. 2, the IDLG is scheduled to present this plan to donors, who will then determine funding.

## Regional Highlights from NDI's Observations in the Field

### Western Region

Candidates in Herat emphasize the importance of tribal and religious leaders' support to their campaigns. Strong dependence on local leaders has led to accusations of improper influence being exerted on behalf of specific candidates. For example, according to local ECC officials, complaints have been filed against a candidate related to the city administration for abusing state resources to gain support and against another candidate for using a local utility company to provide electricity to those who support him.

Candidates across the Western region reported being unable to campaign outside of provincial capitals, and the recent assassination of a candidate and five campaign workers outside Herat confirms concerns. Leaders in Herat demonstrated interest in having a stronger presence by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for the election, particularly in rural areas.

In Farah, the provincial election officer (PEO) resigned and is now a candidate in the same province. The PEO brought in from Badghis to replace him has also resigned, asserting that he was threatened by the former PEO (and current candidate). Allegedly, the threat came after he refused to hire district election field coordinators recommended by the former PEO. Local stakeholders suspect that the current acting PEO, who was the assistant to the prior PEO, has hired personnel based on the latter's recommendations.

### Eastern Region

Campaigning is much more subdued than in 2009, even in Jalalabad, the largest city in eastern Afghanistan and the capital of Nangarhar province. Although there are more posters in Jalalabad city than last year, there were only a few rallies held before the start of Ramadan. Security remains a top concern for candidates and voters.

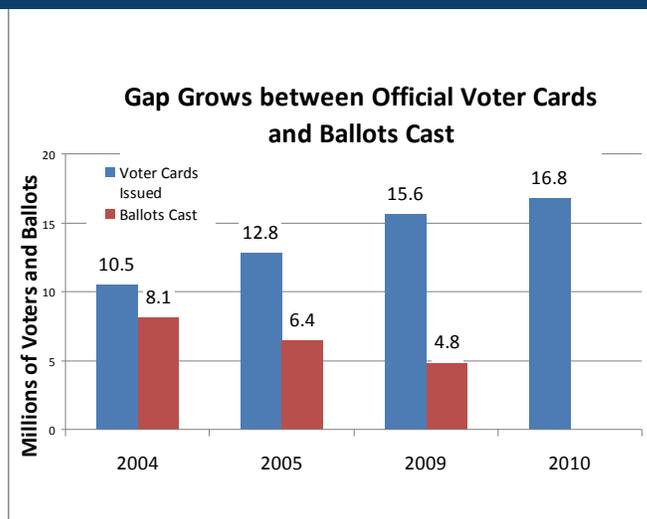
A new PEO has improved organization in Nangarhar, removed a significant number of problematic staff, and recruited on schedule all 190 required district field coordinators (DFCs), including 38 women, on schedule. All DFCs were required to swear on the Qur'an in an effort to reduce fraud, which was particularly rampant last year. The former PEO is in jail for allegedly accepting tens of thousands of dollars in candidate bribes in 2009. Despite administrative improvements, security concerns may prevent polling in as many as five of Nangarhar's 22 districts, and it is possible that over 100 of approximately 500 polling centers in Nangarhar, Nuristan, Kunar and Laghman may not open due to security problems.

In Nuristan, where the PEO recently resigned, local officials allege that over 25,000 duplicate voter cards exist; fewer than 12,000 valid votes were cast in the province last year. In Nuristan and Kunar, local militia may serve as security for polling again in 2010. After the 2009 elections, NDI recommended against the use of militia.

## Spotlight: Voter Registration and Voter Lists

The UN spent over \$100 million (including \$65 million from the U.S.) to improve voter registration in 2009, but election officials told NDI that some candidates paid women in particular to obtain multiple voting cards because no photo is required for the female card. Also, on July 22, the AIHRC reported, “in some southeastern provinces, such as Paktia and Khost, candidates are buying voter cards for 200 to 500 Pakistani rupees (\$2.31 to \$5.77). The voter cards are printed in Dera Ismail Khan district of Pakistan, and could be used widely on election day.”

The lack of a voter registry worsens the problem of duplicate cards. In 2005, the JEMB reported, “the absence of a reliable voter registry and the resulting absence of an exact voter list for each polling station was one of the most significant weaknesses of the electoral process, seriously affecting the accuracy of logistical planning and the election administration's ability to protect against electoral fraud.” As in all past elections, no voter registry will be present at the polling stations.



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 trainings 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.