



Written by on August 21, 2009

## The Afghan Presidential Election, Part 3

Citizens of Afghanistan — and the rest of the world — awaited the results of the nation's presidential election the day after the August 20 voting. Early voting results were initially expected on August 22, but Daoud Ali Najafi, the chief electoral officer, said that results won't be made public until the 25th.

"My advice is that all the candidates should be patient and wait until the results go through the proper channels and results are announced," Najafi told reporters.

The Middle East-based Al Jazeera network, reported that both incumbent President Hamid Karzai, and his leading challenger, former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, both claimed on August 21 that unofficial counts by their observers indicated that they were in the lead. A poll conducted from July 16-26 by the International Republican Institute, gave Karzai a 20-point lead over Abdullah, showing 44 percent for the president and 26 percent for his top rival. However, if no candidate receives 50 percent of the vote, there must be a runoff, which, according to rules, should be held on October 1.

Al Jazeera quoted Zekria Barakzai, the nation's deputy head of the independent election commission, who said: "We cannot confirm any claims by campaigning managers. It's the job of the election commission to declare the results. They should be patient."

Abdullah told Al Jazeera that he was on track to win the vote, which proceeded despite numerous Taliban attacks.

"So far it is very good," he told the network. "Of course, we will let the election commission announce the results when they have all the results from the south ... but in the areas where the results are announced I am in the lead, no doubt."

An AP report in the *Washington Post* noted that Abdullah's campaign staff said it was investigating claims of fraud across southern provinces, which are Karzai's stronghold. would expect to do well.

"As far as my campaign is concerned, I am in the lead, and that's despite the rigging which has taken place in some parts of the country," Abdullah told AP. He claimed that government officials interfered with ballot boxes, and in some places blocked monitors from inspecting boxes or their contents.





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Abdullah said there "is a likelihood" that neither he nor Karzai received more than 50 percent of the vote, necessitating a run-off. But Karzai's campaign spokesman, Waheed Omar, contradicted that assessment, stating: "Our prediction is that the election will not go to the second round, Our initial information is that we will hopefully be able to win the elections in the first round."

Despite widespread fears that Taliban militants would use violence to disrupt the elections, AFP news reported that despite the deaths of 26 people in initial militant attacks, the voting proceeded relatively peacefully in most areas. The news bureau observed that 26 militant-related deaths was a fairly average daily toll in Afghanistan.

"If you look at the security incidents that took place, it was a normal day in Afghanistan," a Western official told AFP.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen called the election a "success" insofar as security was concerned and said it had been well run. NATO has 64,500 troops in Afghanistan.

The report quoted Haroun Mir, from Afghanistan's Centre for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS), who stated: "Despite the Taliban threats to disrupt the elections, the security forces were able to capture a lot of people, suicide bombers." Mir added: "The number of casualties were very low. This is a positive thing, that the Taliban were not able to achieve their goal."

Despite their current political rivalry, both President Karzai and former Foreign Minister Abdullah have past associations with the Northern Alliance that governed Afghanistan after the ouster of the Taliban in 2001. Shortly afterwards, a coalition of Afghan leaders who had been in exile during Taliban rule met in Bonn, Germany in December 2001 and adopted the Bonn Agreement, which led to the installation of Afghanistan's current president, Hamid Karzai, whose position was confirmed by a presidential election in 2004. Former members of the Northern Alliance held key positions under Karzai, most notably Vice President Mohammed Fahim, who also served as Defense Minister.

Also as a result of agreements reached at the Bonn conference, Abdullah was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Interim Administration and he was reconfirmed as Minister of Foreign Affairs following a Loya jirga ("grand assembly") held on the grounds of Kabul Polytechnic institute on June 11, 2002

Following the 2004 Afghan presidential elections, Abdullah was one of the few people who kept their position from the Transitional Government and was re-appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the new Karzai government.

The continual rivalry among Afghan politicians with backgrounds in the old Northern Alliance — a loose federation of warlords and thugs with close ties to Iran — ensures that no matter who wins this year's presidential election, the plight of the nation is unlikely to improve. And the U.S. role in the country is likely to remain increasingly pointless.

*Photo: AP Images*



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