



## AAN Election Blog No. 24: Stuffing and Counting in Paktia

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**A few days after the election, Paktia is in counting mode. Results from the districts trickle in and are collected and reconciled by the different candidates' campaigns. Also reports about a lot of irregularities are coming in, despite the low coverage of independent election observers.**

On the first two days after the election, Afghans in the Southeast were happy that it was over. Gardez was remarkably quiet. Shopping was going on on Friday for the start of Ramadan on Saturday. No one seemed to be afraid of Taleban attacks anymore. No one bothered to remove the election propaganda. One trishaw driver displayed posters of Karzai and Dr Abdullah next to each other, involuntarily echoing the discussions going on in Kabul about a possible second round or a 'government of national unity'.

Some offices of presidential candidates were open again on Saturday already. Dr Abdullah's local hub, however, was on Ramadan mode, with activists sleeping on tushaks in the corners everywhere. First results started to trickle in from election observers of the various candidates.

On Sunday, also Dr Abdullah's office was alert again. The head of the observers in the province, a former Sayyaf commander, and a younger activist were reconciling results from Gardez and the districts which were coming in over phone and were scribbled on sheets of paper. They even possessed three 'IEC result lists' with the final count of polling stations in one of the Paktia districts. My question whether they were supposed to have these lists was ignored. 'Most of them were taken by the Karzai guys', the younger chap flipped. (Habib Mangal's people also had some.) Most probably these were forms that originally were pinned outside the polling stations to inform the public and provide transparency about the results of



the counting. The campaign-wallahs just had taken them with them.

At the biggest polling site in Paktia, the Abdulhai Gardezi High School with its 15 male-only polling stations (the female ones were in the neighbouring girls' school), I was present myself during the count. Due to different approaches and speed of the count, I was able to see most of them with my own eyes. The others were provided by Afghan journalists and observers and double-checked with at least one of the campaigns.

Here are the results:

Polling Station 01/male:

Votes cast at closure: 483; Karzai: 325; Dr Abdullah: 62; Ashraf Ghani: 38; Bashardost: 34

Polling Station 02/male: 388; 266; 63; 38; 32

Polling Station 03/male (source Dr Abdullah campaign): No data; 250; 275; 17; 27

Polling Station 04/male: 259; 157; 35; 18; 24

Polling Station 05/male: 253; 152; 45; 18; 21

Polling Station 06/male: 326; 204; 63; 38; 34

Polling Station 07/male: no data; 155; 35; 23; 18

Polling Station 08/male: no data; 129; 59; no data; 19

Polling Station 09/male: 106; 48; 29; 4; 20

Polling Station 10/male: 120; 51; 34; 3; 18

Polling Station 11/male: 213; 127; 59; 0; 19

Polling Station 12/male: 193; 102; 45; 18; 21

Polling Station 13/male: 204; 149; 36; 17; 15

Polling Station 14/male: no data; 161 (or 127); 75; 14; 0

Polling Station 15/male: 380; 233; 47; 12; 18

Interestingly, in the districts the campaigns often collect only the votes their own candidate had won. Also, most are rough figures only, probably estimates. An old acquaintance within the Karzai campaign called me and shared results from the districts of Paktia. When he came to Gerda Tserai ('all votes for Karzai') and Waza Dzadran (the same), he had to laugh himself. Obviously, some of the information also does not match.

See comparative data here:

District Ahmadabad

Number of registered voters (source: IEC): 31,605

Votes cast (source: Karzai campaign): 12,000

Karzai votes (source: Karzai campaign): 7,300

Dr Abdullah votes (source: Dr Abdullah campaign): n.a.

District Ahmadkhel / Lajja Mangal (considered as separate by both campaigns)

Number of registered voters (source: IEC): 52,900

Votes cast (Ahmadkhel only, source: Karzai campaign): 28,800



Karzai votes (Ahmadkhel only, source: Karzai campaign): 25,000

Dr Abdullah votes (Ahmadkhel only, source: Dr Abdullah campaign): 2,500

Lajja Mangal only:

Number of registered voters (source: IEC): n.a.

Votes cast (source: Karzai campaign): 24,000

Karzai votes (source: Karzai campaign): 22,000

Dr Abdullah votes (source: Dr Abdullah campaign): 340

District Dand-e Pattan:

Number of registered voters (source: IEC): 28,700

Votes cast (source: Karzai campaign): 18,300

Karzai votes (source: Karzai campaign): 13,355

Dr Abdullah votes (source: Dr Abdullah campaign): 2,637

District Ddadzi Aryub

Number of registered voters (source: IEC): 79,340

Votes cast (source: Karzai campaign): 60,400

Karzai votes (source: Karzai campaign): 59,796

Dr Abdullah votes (source: Dr Abdullah campaign): 7,000

(Unofficial) District Gerda Tserai

Number of registered voters (source: IEC): n.a.

Votes cast (source: Karzai campaign): 15,000

Karzai votes (source: Karzai campaign): 15,000

Dr Abdullah votes (source: Dr Abdullah campaign): 600

District Janikhel

Number of registered voters (source: IEC): 29,310

Votes cast (source: Karzai campaign): 5,000

Karzai votes (source: Karzai campaign): 2,500

Dr Abdullah votes (source: Dr Abdullah campaign): 3,500

District Seyyed Karam

Number of registered voters (source: IEC): 65,120

Votes cast (source: Karzai campaign): n.a.

Karzai votes (source: Karzai campaign): n.a.

Dr Abdullah votes (source: Dr Abdullah campaign): n.a.

District Shwak

Number of registered voters (source: IEC): 6,300

Votes cast (source: Karzai campaign): 4,000

Karzai votes (source: Karzai campaign): 3,500

Dr Abdullah votes (source: Dr Abdullah campaign): n.a.



## District Tsamkanai

Number of registered voters (source: IEC): 38,760

Votes cast (source: Karzai campaign): 28,128

Karzai votes (source: Karzai campaign): 21,000

Dr Abdullah votes (source: Dr Abdullah campaign): 250 (not from all polling stations)

## District Waza Dzadran

Number of registered voters (source: IEC): 42,200

Votes cast (source: Karzai campaign): 6,150

Karzai votes (source: Karzai campaign): 6,150

Dr Abdullah votes (source: Dr Abdullah campaign): n.a.

## District Zurmat

Number of registered voters (source: IEC): 62,510

Votes cast (source: Karzai campaign): 1,900

Karzai votes (source: Karzai campaign): 1,600

Dr Abdullah votes (source: Dr Abdullah campaign): n.a.

The figures from Waza reflect that only five of the originally planned 19 polling centres were open. For the rest, no staff could be recruited. (It is a very poor and under-educated area.) With regard to the rest, MP Pacha Khan Dzadran had 'campaigned' for the president and delivered the CPSU-like result. Remarkably, he is a former almost deadly foe of Karzai who at one point even had outlawed him. But times change...

In Janikhel, due to heavy fighting all nine polling centres were closed after one hour. Already before, election materiel could only be delivered there by air. But still: according to the Karzai campaign, 5,000 people had voted in Janikhel and also Dr Abdullah's counted votes for their own candidate.

Almost the same situation in Zurmat, known as a centre of Taleban influence in Western Paktia: From the originally planned 43 polling centres only one was really open on E-Day. The others were effectively blocked by the Taleban who controlled access roads, stopped people moving on them and checked for inked fingers. Five or six other polling centres were reported to have been symbolically open but according to reports from eyewitnesses only the police that was sent there to defend the sites had cast their votes. Under these circumstances, even the reported number of votes cast seems a bit too high. But this could be explained by another report saying that a provincial council member has been stuffing Zurmat ballot boxes in his Gardez home.

And some ballot staffing seems to have happened in the one open polling station just before closure with the consent of IEC personnel present. 'Not more than 100 people went to vote. So, where do the other votes come from', an Afghan observer asked.

Janikhel and Zurmat are examples of what some observers called 'security for a day' that was – ostensibly – established in some areas to make sure that something like elections could be



held in those areas that were virtually out of government control. (This was possible because of the kind of control the Taliban exert in those areas. It is also not permanent, rather ambiguous, exerted by local unarmed sympathisers known to everyone – except the international forces, maybe -, by mullahs and their ability to threaten the people. There are no Taliban ‘garrisons’.)

Additionally, there were reports from various districts on ballot stuffing. Often, this was done at houses of local strongmen, tribal leaders or Provincial Council members or candidates. One example was the Hassankhel area of Ahmadkhel district. Only one polling centre was said to have opened there while 3 or 4 were officially reported as open. Two PC candidates shared the boxes made available by this and stuffed them in their own favour. They did the same with the boxes for the presidential vote. At this polling site, there was no voting till 11 am. Then an attack involving light arms fire happened – which the reporters thought was staged – because after they returned to the polling centre some ballot boxes were suddenly filled and the only ones present was the police. Since one of them is linked to Prof. Mujaddedi’s party, it can be assumed that the stuffing was done in favour of the incumbent. In Merazi village in another part of Ahmadkhel, another PC candidate had most ballot boxes delivered to his house for stuffing. There was no independent observation and the IEC staff said to be hired by and related to a local tribal elder who was complicit in the PC candidates’ machinations.

Ballot stuffing often seems to have happened in the night before election-day. Thus it was made sure that these boxes could be entered into the ‘normal’ vote processing. If delivered from the polling centres together with the legitimate ones, it would become very difficult to find and quarantine them - in particular when they are accompanied by the required documentation. But voters’ lists are easy to produce if you have voters’ cards (which are available in the market; in the real polling sites, just the numbers of voters’ cards were documented, not names) and forms of result lists which also shouldn’t be difficult to obtain.

Reports received on this came from three villages in Lajja Mangal, from Khujure area in Mirzaka (with 21 polling centres) and Janikhel, in the latter case in favour of Dr Abdullah, for a change. In Dand-e Pattan, reportedly voters’ cards of a tribe that had no candidate of its own for the provincial council were bought up and used for ballot stuffing.

In neighbouring Khost province, even a ghost polling centre reportedly had been set up to compensate for the otherwise lost votes of Qalandar district which is completely out of government control and whose district governor sits in Khost town and can’t go to the place he is appointed for. According to the report, the ghost site was located in a desert between Qalandar and Musakhel districts - a good place for ballot stuffing. Interestingly, behind this initiative was a local tribal elder who had been tasked with – and most likely paid for - setting up 2000-strong arbaki for the unsecure districts of Bak, Musakhel, Qalandar and Yaqubi to guarantee that some form of election would be held there anyway. This he did accordingly but – as the report goes on – he also sold the votes cast in the desert ghost site to the Abdullah campaign. If that’s true, he cashed in twice, from both camps.

Also from the better observed areas like Gardez centre, with its government-run girls’ school,



divergent data came out. EU observers there had counted 463 cast votes at the end of the day. Karzai's local representatives later told me that the president got 570 votes there and that this represented 90 per cent of the ballots casts. That would make 642 votes cast altogether – a difference of almost 40 per cent. According to the Karzai campaign, the president received 570 votes here (EU Observers: 360; Dr Abdullah 18; Ashraf Ghani 26; Bashardost 15).

Irregularities in the urban centres were more subtle (see Martine's AAN Election Blog No. 21). In Gardezi High School, young activists of the Karzai and Dr Abdullah campaigns – recognisable by their proudly displayed buttons of the candidates - were present all day lingering in the corridors and often next to the ballot boxes. In many cases, there were real commotions behind the blinds that were supposed to give secrecy to the individual voters – with two or three people at a time discussing whom to vote for and often shouting across the room. At the same time, campaign heavyweights – tribal elders, ulema – made their presence felt without directly interfering but at times playing an active role in silencing voters or candidate agents who believed that they had discovered multiple voting.

Women turn-out was extremely low in the whole region. Exceptions were Gardez centre (the girls' school) and the Hazara areas of Ghazni. 'We saw not a single woman', was what observers reported from many polling centres, including from Paktika province and sites at the periphery of Gardez. In Tandar village, with a small tent polling site, no women voted. 'This is not our tradition here', the young and otherwise modern looking polling staff said. 'Women are afraid from the Taleban threats and rockets fired in the morning', a school teacher said in Deh Bala at the other end of Gardez. 'Now, their husbands don't allow them to go and vote.' Also in Khost town, female participation was lower than male. Nevertheless, IEC staff from Dand-e Pattan (with its ballot-stuffing) and Camkanai reported that 'all women had voted'. Most likely this means that all voters' cards registered under women's names had been put in the boxes by men. (Even in Gardez centre, men tried to use their wives' cards.)

This level of participation is a striking contradiction to the data given by the IEC on the female voters' registration of late 2008 and early 2009. Taleban intimidation is not sufficient to explain this gap. This requires that those data are revised before the next elections.

The central problem during these elections in the Southeast was access and the subsequent lack of impartial, unpressurised observation and sometimes of observation at all. The EU Observer mission consisted of two teams of two, reduced by illness to three persons. Against some previous expectations, they were allowed to venture out to polling centres on E-Day but were confined (like I was) to Gardez centre and some peripheral polling sites. FEFA had 85 observers in Paktia, including 8 women. 51 of them went to three districts – Ahmadabad, Seyyed Karam and Tsamkanai. The rest stayed in Gardez. The AIHRC sent out 22 additional ones in the four South-eastern provinces who, in Paktia, went to Seyyed Karam and Ahmadabad districts as well as to Gardez. Not all female FEFA and AIHRC observers finally went to observe, some because there was only male personnel in the female sites they were supposed to observe – as in Seyyed Karam. Some Afghan and expat UNAMA staff also volunteered; one even went to Paktika (FEFA had four there). Candidates' agents - which were



observing but not from an impartial perspective - cannot be counted here as was done in some media reports. Paktika, Khost and Ghazni were much more under-observed.

This left eight districts – Ahmadkhel/Lajja Mangal, Dand-e Pattan, Gerda Tserai, Janikhel, Shwak, Waza D Zadran, D zadzi Aryub and Zurmat – unobserved. And even in the rest, by far not all polling sites were covered. This left large black holes open from which sometimes the highest turn-out was reported by IEC or government officials – while fighting, rocket attacks and other incidents were going on.

How, under these circumstances, a representative of the observer group of the US-based Democracy International Inc. speaking about all Afghanistan could come to the conclusion live on the BBC on 21 August that (quoted from memory) there were ‘irregularities but they did not influence the elections’ outcome’ is worrying.

One Afghan in town who had watched this and previous elections closely commented that Paktia had ‘the worst’ elections of the four provinces in the southeast.