VOTER TURNOUT

The number of voters who cast a ballot of Election Day is known as *voter turnout*, and may provide an indication of the level of voter engagement, the perception of legitimacy of the process, the quality of the candidates, the perception of security, or the organization of polling itself.

Calculating the proportion of voters who cast a ballot remains a challenge for electoral authorities in the absence of a voter register, a civil registry, or census statistics. In previous elections, voter turnout was calculated according to various means. After the 2005 Parliamentary and Provincial Council Elections, for example, the Joint Electoral Management Body, recognizing there was no reliable method for calculating turnout, estimated voter turnout at 51.5% based on the number of voters registration cards issued at the time.

By the 2009 Presidential and Provincial Council Elections, the number of voter registration cards issued in the three voter registration exercises (2003/4, 2005, and 2008/9) exceeded the estimated number of eligible voters and this ceased to be a realistic measure of how many voters could have cast a ballot on Election Day. Voter turnout, therefore, was based instead on the maximum number of voters the IEC prepared for, approximately 15.3 million voters. This number was calculated based on population figures provided by the Afghanistan Central Statistics Office and past turnout figures per district.

In 2010, voter turnout will be calculated using the same method. Two types of turnout are expected to be released by the IEC:

Provisional voter turnout. The IEC intends to announce provisional voter turnout figures on or just following Election Day, based on the number of voters the IEC planned to accommodate, approximately 11.4 million. Provisional turnout figures are provided by polling staff. It is important to remember, however, that constraints such as communications problems might prevent staff from reporting properly, and that number of polling stations able to accommodate voters is not yet final. For this reason, provisional turnout figures should not be understood as final.

Final voter turnout. In determining the final turnout it is necessary to know the maximum number of voters which could have voted, should they have chosen to, on Election Day. Turnout figures are expressed as a percentage of voters who could have voted and did. In calculating the final figure, the following two factors are taken into consideration

- **Polling stations that opened on Election Day.** The maximum number of voters the IEC could have accommodated is based upon the number of polling stations which actually opened on Election Day.
- **Polling station results excluded by either the ECC or IEC.** Excluded results forms and corresponding polling stations are removed from the number of voters the IEC could have accommodated.

Final voter turnout is based on the number of votes and polling stations recorded in the final certified results and cannot be confirmed until results are certified.