

PRESS RELEASE - NEW AAN ELECTION REPORT 'Who Controls the Vote? Afghanistan's Evolving Elections'

**EMBARGOED UNTIL
SATURDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2010 17:30 (KABUL) / 14:00 (GMT) / 09:00 (EST)**

Although many internationals seem to believe that the upcoming parliamentary vote will be less controversial than last year's election, all indications are that it will be messy, fiercely contested and manipulated at all levels. New research by AAN, to be released tomorrow, provides the first in-depth analysis of the 2009 provincial council results and presents important clues on what the upcoming parliamentary vote on 18 September 2010 will look like.

The report starkly describes the chaos that ensued during the 2009 elections, brought about by an excess of millions of voter cards, the loss of control over where the ballot boxes went and the near secrecy over how many polling stations had opened. The loss of control and confusion provided huge opportunities for massive ballot-stuffing, tally fraud and – as described for the first time – manipulation of the final results at the tally centre in Kabul.

One of the most startling findings is that in the three most problematic provinces – Kandahar, Ghazni and Paktika – after a massive invalidation of polling stations, the number of votes went up rather than down (in Kandahar even by almost 20,000). Martine van Bijlert comments, "It's amazing that we all missed it. But the process had been so confused, there was so little information available. And it was Christmas. So everybody had just moved on."

A detailed study of the results shows that a large number of polling centres were added to the final count without further review: 51 in Kandahar, 44 in Ghazni and at least 30 in Paktika (out of a total of 250-350 polling centres), amounting to tens of thousands of extra votes. It however only led to minor changes in which candidates won. Van Bijlert: "It is strange that you can remove and add tens of thousands of votes and still arrive at largely the same results. It seems that the extra votes were mainly added to ensure that certain candidates kept their seats. It basically consolidated the outcome, by neutralising the invalidations."

In Jowzjan the research uncovered a last-minute reshuffle in the final vote count of four polling centres, expressly designed to change the list of winners. In Parwan the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) had already found that inflated totals had been posted on the internet for at least two contenders. This confirms what many candidates have long claimed: results can be manipulated during and after data entry, despite consistent claims to the contrary.

The findings of the report suggest that in the upcoming vote candidate networks will revert to the same bulk vote tactics they used in last year's elections. Van Bijlert: "There is no reason to believe there will be less fraud. Many candidates have concluded that you don't really stand a chance if you don't manipulate the process. And their backers know how to do it." The Independent Election Commission (IEC) has so far shown greater transparency and resolve than last year, most prominently regarding the drawing up of the final list of polling stations, but the real test will come when the procedures start breaking down again. Van Bijlert: "Greater transparency and control doesn't mean that there will be less fraud, it just means that it will be easier to track. The main question is what you do, once you know how

The logo for the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) is located in the top left corner. It features a stylized map of Afghanistan composed of white lines on a light green background. The map is surrounded by a pattern of light green hexagons of varying sizes, creating a textured, geometric effect.

Afghanistan Analysts Network

bad it is. In particular when acting according to the procedures might mean invalidating the votes of your friends and of some very powerful people.”

Not all will be bad: “There will also be some real voting, and there will be candidates who win based on their good reputation and the local support they have. But it will not take away the impression among voters that the elections have become a competition in who can best hijack the process.”

The report also illustrates how the observers and the media stopped paying attention too soon. The final contest – over who can control the release of quarantined boxes and the final data entry – takes place at the end. Van Bijlert: “The fraud on polling day, in a way, determines what kind of hand you have to play with. But it clearly doesn’t end there. If you want to know how the elections really went, you need to wait until the very last card is played.”

Martine van Bijlert is co-director of the Afghanistan Analysts Network and has been involved in Afghanistan since the early 1990s. She has spent over 11 years working in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan – as researcher, diplomat and aid worker – and has an extensive list of publications on Afghanistan. The September 18 vote is her fourth Afghan election.

The **Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN)** is a recently established, non-profit, independent policy research organization. It aims to bring together the knowledge and experience of a large number of experts to inform policy and increase the understanding of Afghan realities. For further information, please visit www.aan-afghanistan.org or email info@afghanistan-analysts.net.

For comments on this report please contact: Martine van Bijlert (martine@afghanistan-analysts.net or +93 799 313229).