



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: AUDIT OF 2014 RUN-OFF ELECTION RESULTS

Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) is currently conducting an audit of all ballots cast in the 2014 Presidential Election run-off. A total of 22,828 ballot boxes from all polling stations across the nation have been returned to the IEC headquarters in Kabul, where every ballot cast is subject to audit and, if necessary, recount.

What is an audit?

Audits are a means of examining documents and ballot boxes to determine if official procedures and processes have been correctly implemented. This enables the IEC to identify evidence of any errors or tampering, which may have affected election results.

Who is conducting the audit?

Audits are conducted by the IEC, under United Nations (UN) supervision, with the participation of agents of both candidates, and in the presence of national and international observers and representatives of the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC).

What is the main objective of this audit?

This rigorous, large-scale audit will better position the IEC to distinguish valid from invalid votes and produce results that most accurately represent the will of Afghan voters.

How is this audit different than those conducted in the past?

As in previous cases, the audit is consistent with the Afghan Constitution, national laws, regulations and procedures. However, because of its scale and depth; because it has the support of both candidates; and because it is being held according to international best practices; this audit is a way to build national confidence in the electoral process and to support a peaceful transfer of national leadership.

How are audits being implemented?

Every Audit Team comprises 2 IEC staff, who cooperate in auditing ballot boxes and their contents, one at a time. Each Audit Team is very closely watched as it examines election materials, according to a set of 16 questions on a standardized checklist form. The team records its findings, as it answers each of the questions on the form.

In the presence of one agent of each candidate, national and international observers, and a representative of the IECC, the Audit Team Leader reads each checklist question aloud, as his or her Assistant demonstrates that the materials being examined meet a particular criterion (or do not). Either candidate agent or observers may request that the Audit Team explain its actions or decisions, at any point during the process.

Audit findings are officially documented in a standardized checklist form, entered into a database, and presented to IEC Commissioners for review and final decisions.

Only IEC Commissioners may decide which votes are valid or invalid.

What is the role of the UN in the audit process?

At the request of both Presidential candidates, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai as well as Afghan authorities, the UN is responsible to coordinate international supervision of the audit; and plays an advisory role, throughout the duration of the process.

As the audit is being conducted, in the case that one or both candidate agents object to the decision of the Audit Team, a UN Audit Advisor will be requested to provide comments or to make a recommendation. The comments provided by UN Advisors must be recorded on the checklist form. UN recommendations must be accepted as final, and the audit must continue without further delay.

On what does the UN or IEC base its recommendations?

UN Advisors apply the same checklist, used by IEC Audit Teams and base their decisions on the specific criteria, to which the UN has contributed and to which both Presidential candidates have agreed. In addition, they ensure that audits are carried out, impartially and according to best international practices.

What happens in the case that a candidate agent disagrees with the recommendation of a UN Audit Advisor?

The recommendation of a UN Advisor is final. It must be recorded on the audit checklist form; and the Audit Team must proceed, accordingly. However, if a candidate agent feels it is necessary, the Audit Team may record his or her concerns on the checklist form.

The recommendation of a UN Audit Advisor is not equivalent to a final decision. Although the UN recommendation is final and official, audit results will be reviewed by IEC Commissioners – in the presence of the United Nations, agents of both candidates, and national and international observers – and they are responsible to make decisions on audit findings.

How much time is required to audit each ballot box?

The amount of time required to complete an audit depends on the information revealed as materials are examined. As Audit Teams consider the questions on the checklist form, they may discover discrepancies or indicators that require closer examination. Similarly, candidate agents and/or observers may raise questions or request clarification. The duration of an audit therefore varies. Some audits are completed very quickly while others are more time-consuming.

What does it mean when a ballot box is subject to “special scrutiny”?

According to item 16 on the audit checklist form, some ballot boxes require particular attention from candidate agents and observers. These ballot boxes are fully audited – according to the same procedures applied in standard circumstances. Regardless of audit findings, however, ballot boxes requiring “special scrutiny” will invariably be subject to recount as well.

For this purpose, a special section has been created in the back of every audit warehouse, separating boxes and audit teams from the main audit area. The IEC, UN staff and candidate agents have assigned their most experienced staff to work in this special audit section.

How does the IEC determine which ballot boxes should be subject to special scrutiny?

Each candidate has identified polling station provided the IEC with a list of 3,000 polling stations; and ballot boxes from these polling stations will be subject to special scrutiny.

What measures are in place to protect election materials and ensure the integrity of the audit of ballot boxes requiring special scrutiny?

With the exception of observers, entry to the special audit area is strictly controlled by IEC Security, according to a list of specifically-assigned individuals (IEC and UN staff, candidate agents). There is a limit of one Candidate Supervisor, per five audit tables; and one Candidate Coordinator in each special audit section. All officials working or special audit areas are required to sign entry form.

Every effort is made to maintain a balance of boxes designated by each candidate.

When will the audit be finished?

Audits are being conducted simultaneously at several audit sites by multiple Audit Teams, working in two shifts from 7am to 1pm, and 2pm – 8pm, daily. Having commenced the exercise with just 30 IEC Audit Teams, there are now more than 120 teams, working simultaneously and this number continues to grow. Additional United Nations election experts and observers have also been recruited and brought into the country, in order to accelerate the process.

What happens after an audit is conducted?

Based on audit findings, IEC Commissioners will decide whether certain ballot boxes should be validated, invalidated or partially invalidated (following recount). According to the Law on Structure, Duties and Authorities of the IEC and the IECC (Article 12), these audit decisions are to be made in meetings, open to agents, observers and media. Audit decisions are then implemented at the National Tally Center.

After results are tallied, the IECC will complete its adjudication of complaints and, once it has received the recommendation from the IECC, the IEC will announce final election results.

On what do IEC Commissioners base their decisions?

In making their decisions, IEC Commissioners are guided by IEC Decision 33-1393, which describes the cases in which ballots should be disqualified. The checklist form, completed by Audit Teams, indicates whether the contents of a ballot box is valid, invalid or partially invalid (following recount). The checklist form also provides a space in which additional comments can be provided – including comments received from candidate agents, citing unusual circumstances or drawing attention to irregularities warranting special attention. After having reviewed all audit findings, as recorded on the checklist, IEC Commissioners make their decisions.

How do IEC Commissioners ensure that their decisions are consistent?

The IEC has custom-designed and –developed software, specifically to ensure that the decisions of IEC Commissioners are consistent and impartial. This software captures objective data recorded in each

checklist form (mainly in the form of numbers and questions that may only be answered with “yes” or “no”). This consolidated data indicates which ballot boxes are valid, which are invalid, and which are only partially invalid (following recount) according to IEC Decision 33-1393. IEC Commissioners are obliged to adhere to these criteria.

What if candidates or their agents do not agree with the decisions of the Commission?

According to the Afghan Electoral Law, either candidate or any of their agents may lodge an official complaint to the IECC within 24 hours of Commissioners having published their decisions. The IECC is required to address that complaint within 48 hours of receipt.

How will the audit affect election results?

Only ballots declared valid by IEC Commissioners will be included in the final tally of Presidential Election results. This could mean that final figures are different than those previously announced; and will also ensure that results more accurately reflect the choices of Afghan voters.

What measures have been taken to protect election materials during transport to the IEC and while they await audit?

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) provided security as election materials were delivered to the IEC by road; and materials requiring air transport were delivered on ISAF and UN flights. Regardless whether materials are transported by road or by air, IEC staff retained custody of the materials at all times; and each and every convoy and aircraft was accompanied by one agent of each candidate and one IEC custodian.

IEC Security controls access to the audit locations and warehouses where ballots are stored. Access is only authorized to individuals possessing a valid IEC accreditation badge or valid IEC photo identification.

At the end of the day, audit locations and warehouses storing ballots are cleared, secured and sealed by a joint team consisting of IEC Security, IEC Audit Manager and candidate agents (in the presence of observers). Seal numbers are recorded and verified jointly by IEC Security, the IEC Audit Manager and Candidate Agents (in the presence of observers). Each morning, audit locations and warehouses are opened and unsealed by a team of IEC Security, the IEC Audit Manager and candidate agents (in the presence of observers). ISAF monitors the security of the Warehouses every night, and will continue to do so until the audit is complete.