



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: BALLOT PAPERS AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

Prior to Afghanistan's 2014 elections, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) equipped every polling station in the country with 600 Presidential and Provincial Council ballots, respectively. On Election Day (5 April), an additional 548 polling stations, each with 600 ballot papers, were established, to accommodate voter demand.

What was the rationale for providing each polling station with 600 ballots per election?

Polling station ballot-allocation was calculated, based on a combination of data, including:

- The existing voter database;
- 2009 and 2010 voting patterns;
- District-level population estimates from the Central Statistics Office; and
- Historical patterns (including security indicators).

In addition, both experience from past elections (in 2004, 2005, 2009 and 2010) and simulation exercises conducted by the IEC indicates that the processing of 600 voters per station should require approximately 9 hours.

How did the IEC prepare for the possibility that additional voting materials could be required on Election Day?

To respond to population increases projected by the Central Statistics Office, and to accommodate more heavily populated areas (as indicated by voter turnout in 2010), the IEC increased the number of polling stations (over 2010 provisions) in the centers of Baghlan, Balkh, Bamyan, Herat, Nimroz, Samangan and Daikundi provinces.

In addition, as a general preparedness measure, the IEC ordered 10% more sensitive contingency materials (including ballot papers, ink and results forms) than were required, according to the centers it would open. Of this 10%, half was kept in Kabul, in case of an attack on a provincial office.

The other half was divided proportionately, by province, packed into individual ballot boxes as a complete "station," sealed, and stored at provincial warehouses. Additional polling station teams were hired and trained so that teams would be able to set up completely new polling stations in the centers that might require them.

How did the IEC respond to requests for more materials on Election Day?

The IEC released contingency materials, according to requests from its own polling staff, and reports indicate that problems were resolved in the majority of cases. Delays in the arrival of ballots to some polling stations may be attributed to strict fraud-mitigation measures, required for their release.

Why was there a greater demand for ballot papers in 2014 than in previous election years?

The need for additional ballot papers in 2014 may be attributed to a combination of several factors:

- Limited availability of information required to plan and allocate polling stations;
- Population shift from rural to urban areas;
- High voter turnouts – particularly in light of security conditions; and
- Ballot loss, destruction and/or stuffing in some of the affected centers.
- Some have also cited an emerging young voter population – particularly evident in urban centers.

How many extra ballots were used?

Nation-wide, the IEC released about half of its contingency materials. That is, an additional 548 contingency polling stations, comprising 328,800 ballots. This represents 2.44% of the total estimated voter population figure used in original planning for a maximum potential of 13,500,000 voters.

In what parts of Afghanistan were the most ballots used?

In 5 provinces (Baghlan, Balkh, Bamyan, Herat and Nimroz), all (100% of) contingency material was used. Other provinces, including Jawzjan and Samangan also used very high proportions.

The majority of requests for additional materials occurred in provincial capitals, including Kabul. At the same time, shortages did not occur in all polling centers. Some polling centers received very few voters while others were over-crowded – sometimes within a very short distance of each other.

How were contingency materials protected from misuse?

The IEC takes seriously its responsibility to accommodate the rights of all eligible Afghans to participate in elections, while also protecting their votes by mitigating potential fraud.

To reduce the potential for misuse of contingency materials, the IEC instituted several controls: any release of contingency materials required approval from the Head of the IEC Field Operations Department; no ballots could be shifted from one station to another; and each station and its respective material were tracked from Kabul with a unique barcode.

How can the IEC determine which contingency materials were used for voting and which were used for unlawful purposes?

Experience indicates that processing 600 voters should require about 9 hours. That some stations should do so in a much shorter space of time is, therefore, considered an irregularity.

As a means to protect the integrity of votes and produce the most accurate results, all voting irregularities are thoroughly investigated. To this end, results from polling stations that required contingency materials much sooner than projected, and from polling stations in which a significantly greater volume of material was required, will be closely examined.

Any ballots found to be fraudulent will be invalidated.