



## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: BALLOT COUNTING AND TALLY**

### **What happens to election ballots after they are cast?**

Immediately after polling stations are closed at the end of polling, polling staff counts all of the ballots received in their respective stations. They then record the total number of ballots received in support of each candidate on official results forms. Polling results are displayed outside of their respective stations, where they may be seen by the public. Ultimately, the results of all polling stations are compiled at the National Tally Center, where they are recorded and used to determine nation-wide election winners.

### **How are results moved from polling stations and how can voters be confident that results remain secure and unchanged as they move from polling stations to the National Tally Center?**

A number of measures are in place, to protect the integrity of ballots at every stage of the counting and tally process, up until the final announcement by the Independent Election Commission (IEC).

As ballots are counted at the polling station, agents of several parties and candidates witness the process, to ensure impartiality as well as the accuracy of the count. Once results are verified, they are recorded on a results form, with three (exact) copies. Each of these is marked with a preprinted serial number and barcode that is the same as the ballot paper pack number. The Polling Station Chairman pastes security tape over the original and all three copies of the form, stamps and signs them, and has agents to do the same. One copy of results forms is displayed at the polling station. A second copy is entrusted with an agent, selected in a draw. A third copy is placed, with ballots, organized in bundles, into a ballot box. The box is then sealed and archived at the IEC Provincial Office.

The original results form is placed with the list of voters who participated, into an envelope marked with a preprinted serial number and barcode (which also matches the results forms and ballot paper pack number into an envelope) and sealed in the presence of the Polling Center Manager. The Polling Center Manager ensures that envelopes have been received from all polling stations, and seals all envelopes into a transparent tamper-evident bag. The tamper-evident bag is delivered to the IEC Provincial Office and dispatched to the National Tally Center in Kabul in a sealed blue box. Depending on logistical arrangements, movement of results to the National Tally Center should begin one day after Election Day and is expected to be complete no later than 8 days after Election Day.

Any potential attempts to manipulate results can be seen if any of the results forms do not match the original; if the number of results forms in a ballot box is not the same as the number of ballots inside it; if the results form sent to the National Tally Center does not match other copies; or if either the blue box or tamper-evident bag show signs of tampering.

### **What happens to ballots, once they are all received in Kabul?**

As results are received at the National Tally Center, the tally process begins. In the first stage, all boxes and bags are examined for any signs of tampering. Next, the serial number on results forms is checked, to ensure that it matches the respective polling station/polling center code and it has been recorded in a delivery database for ballot tracking. Provided there is no evidence of tampering and that results have



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come from their designated center, results are ready for recording and tallying. The results form is scanned, the original copy is archived in a secure area, and the copy proceeds to data entry.

Throughout the tally process, the National Tally Center premises is open to agents, observers and media, during operational hours. They may request clarification from the National Tally Center Management Team if any of the results announced do not match those collected by their representatives at polling stations.

### **How are results tallied and how can the public be confident that results are accurate?**

Data is entered in several stages, each providing a layer of personal accountability and an opportunity to detect and correct errors.

Data entry staff is responsible to enter the information contained in results forms into the National Tally Center database and is required to use their identification number and password, to ensure personal accountability. In order to counter the possibility of data entry errors, a “double-blind” data entry model is used. This means that results forms are randomly-distributed among data entry staff and each form is input twice – by two separate, staff members. Wherever there are differences between entries, the entry will be corrected, to match the data displayed on a scanned copy of the original results forms. Entry is then verified once again, comparing the data entered with the data on the results forms.

After the data from results forms is recorded, the National Tally Center Management Team ensures that results have passed through all stages of data entry and verification. In the case that any problem is detected, the Team will initiate an investigation. If there are no problems and results have passed through all required stages of entry and verification, the results forms are physically stored, with lists of voters and their original tamper-evident bags, and securely archived.

### **When will election winners be declared and why is there so much time between voting and announcement of results?**

Determining election winners requires some time, in order to identify and remove fraudulent ballots and to ensure the accuracy of results. In addition to movement of results from polling stations to the National Tally Center, they are checked for evidence of fraud, recorded in an electronic database, and revised to ensure that figures accurately reflect results as stated on results forms.

Figures are updated every day, as more and more results arrive to the National Tally Center. Once results from at least 5% of votes from 20 provinces are tallied, partial results are shared with the public. These figures do not indicate who has won the election. Rather, they allow the public to follow the process.

Once all results are recorded and tallied, the IEC announces preliminary election results. Preliminary results indicate which candidate has received the most ballots. However, preliminary results may still be affected by investigations conducted by the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC). Fraudulent ballots will not be counted and this may affect the final outcome.



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When the IECC has completed all investigations, it advises the IEC as to its decisions. Once preliminary results are adjusted to reflect IECC decisions, the IEC announces final election results.

### **What is the difference between polling station/center results, partial results, preliminary results and final results?**

*Polling station/center results* reflect the ballots cast in particular stations and centers.

*Partial results* indicate the results received at the National Tally Center and recorded in the electronic database. They are announced by the Commission from time to time during tallying results but are not yet certified. Because it takes time for all results to be received and recorded, partial results are released regularly, and are considered partial because they do not represent 100% of all polling station results approved by the IEC Board of Commissioners.

*Preliminary results* are figures which are announced and published by the Commission after the completion of tallying and before the adjudication of the complaints. These are not certified and remain subject to the resolution of complaints by the IECC. Once the IECC has adjudicated complaints and appeals, the results may be finally certified by the IEC Board of Commissioners. Preliminary Presidential results should be announced within 19 days after Election Day and preliminary Provincial Council results should be announced within 42 days after Election Day.

*Final results* are figures that are certified, announced, published and implemented by the IEC after being verified and decided upon by the Electoral Complaints Commission. Final Presidential Final Results should be announced no later than 39 days after Election Day, and Final Provincial Results should be announced no later than 63 days after Election Day.

### **Who makes the final decision on complaints?**

The IECC is responsible for receiving and investigating complaints related to the electoral process. After conducting a thorough investigation, the IECC submits its decisions to the IEC. The IEC must then amend results to reflect the decisions of the IECC.

### **Who is responsible for announcing the final result?**

The IEC is the sole authority, Constitutionally-mandated to administer and supervise elections; and legally-responsible to determine and announce election results. Results are received from the National Tally Center by the IEC Chief Electoral Officer and announced to the public by the IEC Board of Commissioners.