



FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS: AGENTS, OBSERVERS AND MEDIA AT THE NATIONAL TALLY CENTER

Observation reinforces transparency and accountability of the electoral process, and thereby enhances public confidence in the electoral process. Accredited candidate agents, national and international election observers seek to ensure that the entire electoral process is conducted in accordance with Afghan law, election regulations and international commitments undertaken by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Media promotes and reinforces transparency, by raising the visibility of tally procedures and helping the public to better understand the electoral process.

What happens at the National Tally Center (NTC)?

As results are received at the National Tally Center (NTC) in Kabul, the tally process begins. In the first stage, all tamper-evident bags (TEBs) are examined for any signs of tampering and their serial number is checked against provincial database. If the serial number matches, the TEB is cut open. 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 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.

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 NTC 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 NTC 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.

What are the entitlements of agents, observers and media; and how does the Independent Election Commission (IEC) facilitate them to carry out their responsibilities?

Agents and Observers

Provided that their actions do not disrupt the electoral process, accredited agents and observers are entitled to observe all stages of the electoral process, including the tally of election results at the NTC.

Throughout the tally process, the NTC premises is open to agents and observers during all operational hours (8:00 – 22:00).

In order to allow the utmost transparency throughout the Presidential Election run-off, the IEC has implemented a number of measures, intended to improve the access of agents and observers to information:

- Each day, the NTC is opened and closed in the presence of agents and observers, and IEC External Relations staff is available, from open until closing time, to facilitate their entry and movement.
- Understanding that they are not to interfere with the tally process, observers may move freely throughout the NTC, observe any stage of the tally process. For their added convenience, a large screen displays the status of polling station results forms, as they pass through the various stages of processing.
- One agent of each candidate may be present at intake, and at each step of the tally process. Agents of both candidates are normally present, in rotation, to ensure consistent monitoring on behalf of both parties. Agents may speak to relevant staff, and view results as they are being entered into the national database.
- In accord with IEC Decision 19-1393, a copy of every results form has been provided to agents of both candidates. If the results forms scanned and shared with the public on the IEC website do not match those provided to the agents of either candidate, the NTC Management Team will be obliged to provide clarification.

Media

According to the Code of Conduct for the Media, accredited media institutions may be present at all stages of the electoral process. Media visits to the IEC will be facilitated by IEC External Relations staff three times, daily (once in the morning, once in mid-afternoon, and once in the early evening), upon request and according to demand. Media may bring cameras and video equipment into the NTC.

What restrictions apply to agents, observers or media entering the NTC?

As Afghanistan's sole authority responsible for planning and implementing all elections, the IEC is committed to protecting the integrity of the electoral process. All restrictions to those entering the NTC are imposed with a view to ensure that election results reflect the will of the Afghan people, as expressed on the ballots they have cast.

All accredited candidate agents, national and international observers and media, in possession of an NTC-accreditation badge, may enter into the NTC. They are required to:

- Ensure that their accreditation badge is easily visible.
- Respect the Election Law, all other relevant laws, procedures and official IEC Decisions;
- Conduct themselves according to the relevant codes of conduct;
- Be accompanied by IEC External Relations staff members, who will assist them to prevent congestion, disarray or impediment to the tally process;
- Respect the sovereignty of the IEC as the sole electoral authority responsible for declaring election results;
- Share any complaints or observation of irregularities through official means, and not publicly or via the media;
- Refrain from making judgments or repeating results or figures, issued by non-official sources;

- Refrain from creating, repeating or contribution to rumors; and
- Avoid the use of words or statements that are divisive, discriminatory or that contribute to racial, tribal, regional, sectarian, sexual or religious tensions.

Agents and Observers

Agents and Observers may enter the NTC at any time, during operational hours. Although they may keep their mobile telephones with them, agents and observers must respect the secrecy of election results and the sensitivity of the tally process. They are therefore requested to refrain from using cameras, recording devices or the Internet.

Media

In order to ensure that sensitive data remains uncompromised, media may be required to photograph or film from specific vantage points and should avoid focus on any information or tally data. Similarly, they should respect Afghan culture and the safety of election staff, and avoid photos or film in which individuals may be identified.

In accord with the Media Code of Conduct, media should respect the roles and decisions of the IEC and IECC, as well as the Media Commission; and should prepare all reports with impartiality.

Additional Information Resources

National Tally Center Operations Procedures:

http://www.iec.org.af/pdf/legalframework/2013-procedures/procedure_ntc_eng.pdf

Code of Conduct for Candidates:

http://www.iec.org.af/pdf/code_of_conduct/2014/code_of_conduct_for_candidates_eng.pdf

Code of Conduct for Observers:

http://www.iec.org.af/pdf/code_of_conduct/english/observers_code_of_conduct.pdf

Code of Conduct for Media:

http://www.iec.org.af/pdf/code_of_conduct/english/media_code_of_conduct.pdf