

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد
بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم
از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

AP News

Afghan fraud panel rulings to unseat candidates

Afghan fraud panel official says rulings will affect up to 2 dozen, not hundreds of candidates

HEIDI VOGT

Nov 15, 2010 02:04 EST

The panel charged with investigating cheating and misconduct from Afghanistan's September parliamentary election expects to unseat a number of candidates who were declared winners in preliminary results but nowhere near the hundreds that some had predicted, officials said.

The panel — which could finish its rulings on these potential swing races as early as Monday — is the final arbiter on fraud in an election that has been mired in accusations of ballot-box stuffing, violence and voter intimidation.

The vote is being closely watched as a measure of whether the Afghan government has really committed to reform its corrupt bureaucracy following a fraud-marred presidential vote last year that sullied the reputation of President Hamid Karzai and prompted many of his international allies to threaten to withdraw troops and funding.

The country's Western backers — eager to show some success in Afghanistan — have repeatedly urged that the parliamentary vote should not be held to too high a standard, noting that elections are always messy in poor and conflict-ridden countries.

The reaction to decisions by the fraud panel will be a key indicator of whether the Afghan people are willing to accept the imperfect results as "good enough." If candidates or voters rise up in protest it could further undermine the already weak Karzai administration.

Somewhere between "a dozen or two dozen" candidates will likely see their fortunes reversed, said Johann Kriegler, a South African elections expert who is one of two international representatives on the five-member Electoral Complaints Commission.

"What we have done and what we are doing will have a significant effect on a lot of 'last winners' and 'first losers,'" Kriegler told The Associated Press late Sunday. He said the affected races were not centered in any one geographic area.

Despite a massive push for greater accountability and transparency in the voting process, parliamentary poll has been as contentious as the presidential vote in August 2009. Taliban insurgents attacked polling stations and fired rockets into cities on the day of the vote in many volatile provinces. And the fraud commission has received about 6,000 complaints of fraud or misconduct, about 2,200 of which it deemed significant enough to affect the outcome of a race.

About 2,500 candidates ran for the 249 parliamentary seats on Sept. 18. Many of those who did not prevail, and even some who did, have argued that the results are flawed because of widespread ballot fraud.

Since more than 400 candidates have been flagged by officials for potentially improper conduct, many Afghans may feel that the decisions have not gone far enough. The Electoral Complaints Commission needs substantial proof of misconduct to invalidate votes from a polling station or for a specific candidate.

The Afghan election-organizing body excluded 1.3 million ballots, nearly a quarter of the total, as illegitimate but this has raised new cries of injustice from candidates who say their communities' legitimate ballots were thrown out in the process.

In eastern Paktia province, a candidate who said he was unfairly kept from a seat he should have won, blocked a main highway for days. In nearby Nangarhar province, about 80 candidates have banded together calling themselves the "Union of Afghan Parliamentary Candidates" to organize protests calling the election "illegal" and demanding a re-vote.

Kriegler said that the fraud panel hopes to finish its rulings on priority complaints by the end of the day Monday, though he cautioned that there could be delays and said that it will take at least a few days for Afghan election officials to process the rulings before issuing final results. The Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha this week could further delay results — originally expected at the end of October.

Though there have been accusations of Afghan government officials pressuring election organizers to rig the votes for certain candidates, Kriegler said he has felt no such pressure on the fraud panel. The commission's spokesman, Ahmad Zia Rafat, also said that he has felt no pressure on the commission to return certain results. Rafat spoke on Afghan television late Sunday.