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Al Jazeera

## Afghan poll candidates disqualified

11/21/2010

Afghan election authorities have disqualified almost one in 10 of the politicians who won seats in the September's parliamentary poll for fraud.

Twenty-one winners were stripped of their seats on Sunday in the latest twist in an electoral process that has been plagued by allegations of corruption.

"Due to irregularities, usage of fake votes and the influence of provincial officials, which created electoral fraud, we decided to disqualify votes in their favour," Ahmad Zia Rafat of the Electoral Complaints Commission told a news conference in the Afghan capital.

The disqualified politicians included a cousin of Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president, and seven were sitting members of parliament. The rejected candidates will not be able to appeal, Rafat added.

The final results have not been released more than two months after the poll, because of the sheer number of complaints to investigate, but the disqualification could pave the way for the process to reach a conclusion.

Scores of candidates have alleged that election officials took part in bribery and vote-rigging, and some have called for a new poll. The Independent Election Commission (IEC), which administered the vote, threw out as invalid almost a quarter of the 5.6 million votes cast as a result of concerns over their veracity.

The IEC is itself being investigated by the attorney general's office over allegations of election fraud.

### **Tainted process**

Al Jazeera's Sue Turton, reporting from Kabul, said that the whole election process had been tainted by allegations of corruption.

"You look at the evidence that has come out over the last two months," she said. "We've had 1.3 million votes that were disqualified already. We've had over 4000 complaints sent to the Election Complaints Commission to investigate. And then the actual process of investigation of those complaints has now been questioned... We can say that this election will go down in history as being marred with fraud and political interference."

Unsuccessful candidates have warned that if the new parliament does not offer proper representation for the country's different ethnicities, it could create resentment that will fuel instability in the country.

"The mafia has taken over parliament, the ethnic representation of this country is completely demolished," Dawood Sultanzoy, an outspoken current member of parliament, said.

He said many of his votes were unfairly disqualified and he did not expect to hold his seat. "[This] can send hundreds of thousands of people into the arms of the insurgency," he added.