

April 5 Election: Series of Lessons Learned

1st Report

Early Ballot Shortfalls

A look at the premature ballot shortfalls at the polling stations; a hindrance to the exercise of political rights



Free & Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA)
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FEFA

Preface:

Voting is a fundamental right of every citizen. Citizens enjoy equal rights before the law; “one person one vote”. Article 5, paragraph 3 of the Election Law states that the Independent Election Commission has the responsibility to provide citizens access to the polling stations and bolster their participation in the process.

The Independent Election Commission established over 20,000 polling stations across the country with an aim to have extensive number of voters participate on April 5th presidential and provincial council elections. However, it was proven that the number of stations were not enough to allow all the voters to access the polling stations and cast their ballots on Election Day. In most populated areas, voters faced shortage of ballots in polling stations as a result of which they weren’t able to cast their votes. According to voting procedures, 600 ballot papers must be available in each polling station. The casting process of ballots shouldn’t take more than a minute therefore it is required 9 hours for the whole 600 papers to be used in a normal pace. Shortfall of ballots at polling stations in early hours of voting can be ambiguous in its own nature while it also requires a thorough evaluation of the measures taken by the IEC in this regard. As recommended by FEFA in its Election Day brief report released on April 9, 2014, it was expected that IEC would conduct a profound assessment on the issue, but so far such an assessment’s findings -- if took place—have not been made public. This brief report tends to analyze and evaluate the early shortfall of ballots in the first round based on FEFA’s findings of the Election Day.

Methodology:

FEFA’s verified findings of the quick reports received from the observers from across the country on Election Day form the groundwork for this brief analytical report. Observers’ checklists later certified information collected through quick forms. FEFA assigned its observers to observe the specifications in every polling station and ensure everything happening at the stations is based on the voting procedures of the IEC. Observers were also assigned to record the time when the polling stations were opened, the observers were allowed to enter and the time when the stations ran out of ballot papers on Election Day and send a quick report to the HQ. Findings on other irregularities were recorded in incident forms by the observers shared later with the HQ team. After receiving and verifying the findings, data were inserted into the database and later analyzed by the analysis team.

Purpose:

The main purpose of this report is to provide IEC with specific recommendations to bring about positive changes for better conduct of the second round runoff. FEFA, in order to cooperate with the commission in holding a more fair and credible

second round, will provide a series of analyses on major lessons learned that are considered significant to the process. The first issue that FEFA want to bring to the commission's attention is the early shortfall of ballots and its relation with the fraud. This brief paper also provides an evaluation of the IEC's decisions to address the issue for the runoff.

Running short on ballot papers within barely two hours of voting in number of polling stations was a serious concern observed by FEFA's observers. Ballot papers can run short in a normal process too as long as they withstand at least the first 5-6 hours of voting. But the issue of concern is a potential correlation between the premature ballot shortfalls and ballot stuffing in most of these polling stations. This issue could also be linked to those incidents where observers were denied entrance to number of polling stations in early hours of voting.

This initial report mainly focuses on premature ballot shortfalls and its relation with other irregularities and fraudulent acts occurred in the same polling stations.

FEFA's Findings:

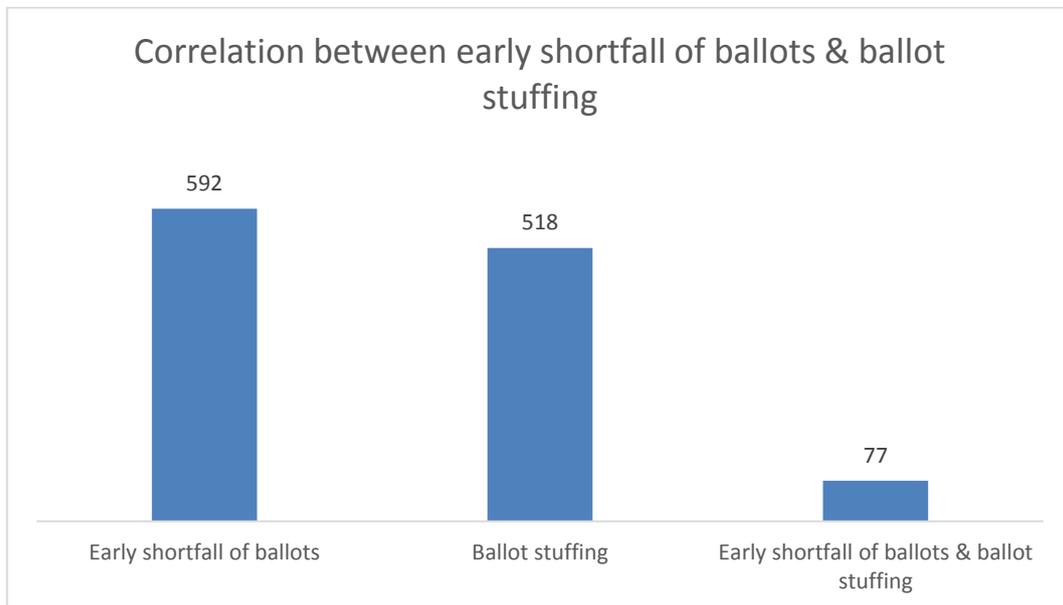
600 voters can normally vote in one polling station. According to the voting procedures, if the level of participation is high in a polling station, the officials of that polling center can share the issue with provincial Independent Election Commission in advance and ask for installation of extra stations in the polling center. FEFA's observation findings show that at least around 779 polling stations ran out of ballot papers sometime during the day, most of which were located in Kabul, Paktia, Herat, Baghlan, Kandahar, Ghor, Samangan, Bamyan, Ghazni, Badakhshan and Balkh. At the same time the IEC had also considered 548 precautionary stations across the country to be used as new stations in the centers where level of participation and potential ballot shortfall is high. Despite precautionary measures taken by the IEC, most of the participants were deprived of their right to cast votes due to the shortfall of ballots and lack of supplementary polling stations.

Premature ballot shortfalls, ballot stuffing and denied entry to polling stations

FEFA's observation findings indicate that at least 779 polling stations ran out of ballot papers on Election Day. Some polling stations ran short on ballot papers very early after opening, which can raise questions on the reasons for this early shortfall. Following a thorough study of the data of observation, FEFA was able to identify 592 stations that experienced early shortfall of ballots before noon. It was also noticed that in 298 of these stations where ballots were exhausted before noon, FEFA observers were denied entrance to the polling stations in early hours of voting. This happened at the same locations as major incidents of ballot stuffing were reported from 518 polling stations. After an accurate analysis and cross tabulation of data, 77 stations were identified where, FEFA's observers were denied access to the stations in first hours of the day, and ballot papers were run out earlier than the procedure suggest and boxes were stuffed. This number

constitutes 12% of the total number of polling stations that faced early shortfall of ballots based on FEFA findings.

Chart below indicates a correlation between the early shortfall of ballots and ballot stuffing in the same polling stations:



Running out of ballots in less than five hours of voting, can be considered unusual and a matter of concern. Some polling stations had consumed all 600 ballot papers in less than 4 hours. FEFA findings also show that in some polling stations ballot papers were exhausted within barely two hours of voting. To bypass some of the voting procedures at nonstandard polling stations could lead to situations where two voters cast ballots in one minute while having four voters voting at the same time in one minute is almost impossible. FEFA observers have also reported that the observers were not allowed to enter the polling stations within first hours of voting. While in these stations, ballot papers were also exhausted earlier than expected. According to observers' code of conduct, observers must assess the polling stations before they are opened to voters to ensure all the materials are in place and have not been used beforehand and the boxes are empty. Incidents of such have been reported mainly from Herat, Paktia, Baghlan, Kandahar, Khost, Badakhshan, Paktika, Ghazni, Parwan, Laghman and Wardak.

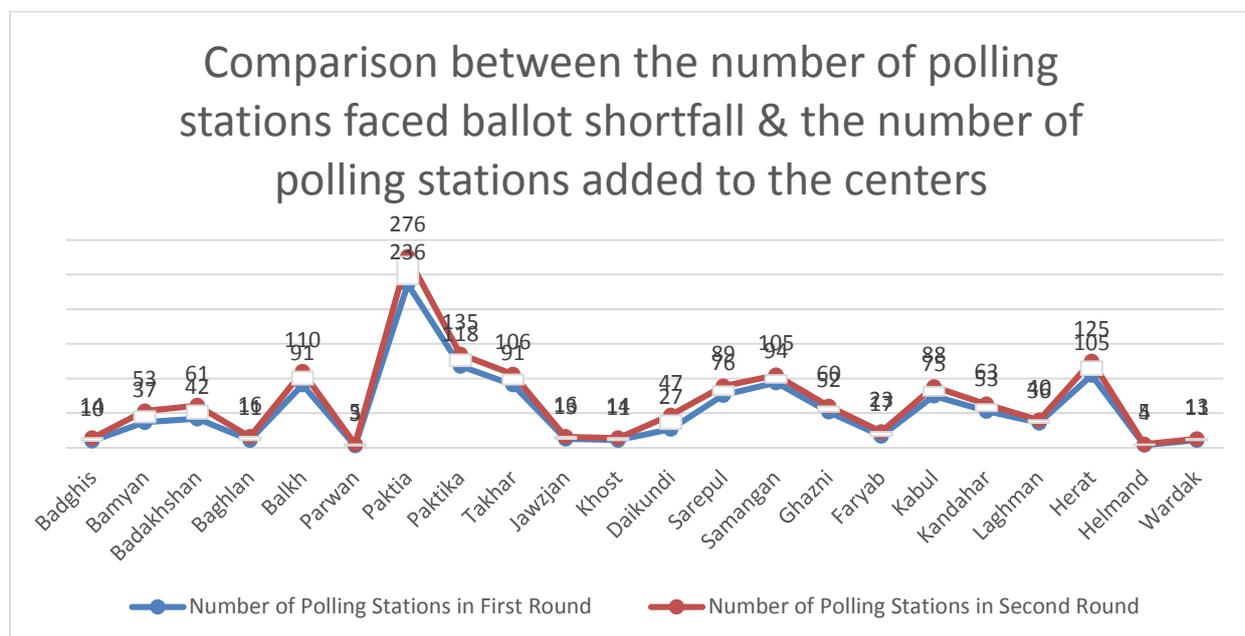
Ballot Shortfalls & the Measures Taken by Independent Elections Commission

To avoid the issue of early ballot shortfalls in the second round, IEC added 2518 extra polling stations around the country. In contrary to what was expected and recommended by FEFA, IEC have yet to provide a concrete explanation of whether the addition of new stations have occurred based on a systematic assessment or not. Although the stations newly added in the centers have somewhat meet the need of voters and correlates with the normal shortfall of ballot papers, as per FEFA's assessment there are still some new polling stations that have not been added based on an accurate assessment. FEFA's analyses of the recent list of

stations, its own observation data on premature ballot shortfall and its relation with fraud shows that at least 251 extra polling stations are being added to those questionable centers. As the earlier analysis indicated, reports of fraud such as ballot stuffing have been received from those stations where ballots were exhausted earlier than expected.

Should those early shortfall of ballots be a result of fraud, additional stations being placed in these centers would be simply an encouragement of fraudulent behaviors. Therefore, the allocation of new polling stations is still in need of a systematic assessment by the IEC and requires proper monitoring by the observers and candidates' agents.

The chart below indicates a comparison between the number of polling stations faced ballot shortfall before noon and the number of polling stations newly added to the same centers at provincial level.



Natural Shortfall of Ballots

FEFA findings show that in a normal voting process where the number of voters was high, ballot papers were used up within 5 hours after the opening. Based on the voting procedures, each voter needs one minute to cast his/her vote therefore, 600 ballot papers should take 9 hours to be casted. It means that if a station opens on time (7 o'clock) it should not run out of ballot paper until the closing time (4 o'clock).

According to FEFA's observation findings, potential reasons for ballot shortfalls in a normal base after 5 hours of voting can be: 1: unstandardized polling stations: some stations were located in smaller spaces while some others were stationed in larger areas such as mosques. Therefore, given the reason of different areas where the polling stations were located "one voter, one minute" does not sound

reasonable. 2: in most stations voting procedures were not observed properly i.e. based on voting procedures, the voter after going to the registration desk must have his/her documents checked followed by having his/her finger inked. The voter must wait for at least 30 seconds to have the ink dried before going behind the booth to cast vote. 3: in some cases the officials of the polling stations assessed the level of people participation & the number of ballot papers left and requested for extra ballots from the provincial commissions and 4: weather conditions on the Election Day cannot be ignored. Considering the heavy rainfalls and long lines of voters outside the stations urged officials to speed up their working process and therefore the polling stations ran out of ballots before the expected time.

Recommendations:

Ballot shortfalls whether normal or not, disenfranchised unknown number of people who were enthusiastically waiting for long hours to vote. If a polling station runs out of ballots naturally or if the ballots are misused for fraud, voters are the ones who will lose their legitimate right of voting. Therefore, FEFA offers the following recommendations to prevent the recurrence of such shortcomings in the run off:

1) Considering the lessons learned from first round of election, FEFA urges the Independent Election Commission to establish new, separate stations in the populated regions in run off.

1) Considering the shortage of polling stations in first round, the Independent Election Commission review the reason of shortage of polling stations and undertake the necessary measures to establish new stations to prevent shortage of polling station in run off.

- 1) Based on the lessons learned from the first round, FEFA urges the IEC to install new stations in the centers located in populated areas. The installation of new polling stations must be done after a thorough assessment and the reasons of the findings should be shared with the public.
- 2) In its preliminary observation report, FEFA urged the electoral commissions to establish a joint committee and review the early shortfall of ballots in polling stations and share the results of the assessment with the public. Hereby, once again FEFA asks the commissions to establish a joint committee and review this issue to prevent its recurrence in the second round.
- 3) Based on FEFA's findings the polling stations that ran out of ballot papers after at least five hours of voting, extra stations were installed later than expected. FEFA therefore asks IEC to set up precautionary polling stations on time in the centers where polling stations had fallen short of ballots.
- 4) FEFA appreciates the measures taken by the IEC in regard with the dismissal of 3000 of its staff who were involved in fraud and some had denied observers entry to the polling stations. And therefore urges the

commission to provide its staff with the necessary guidance and strict instruction so they shall not attempt to deny access to the observers in the polling stations on the Election Day.

- 5) As the IEC recently published the list of new polling centers, FEFA urges the commission to separately publish the complete list of polling centers that were closed on Election Day.