

## **Afghan Youth Debates: Helmand Declares It's Ready for Second Round**

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Officials in the southern Afghan province of Helmand insist they are fully prepared to conduct a second round of voting in the presidential election.

Shafiollah Safi, regional spokesman for the Independent Election Commission (IEC), said his office was "95 per cent" ready to coordinate a run-off between the two leading contenders, Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai.

Although final results from the April 5 presidential election have not yet been released, preliminary data indicate that a second round will be needed.

Speaking at an IWPR debate held at Helmand's university on May 11, he called on students to repeat the success of the preliminary round by voting in large numbers once again.

Turnout during the initial vote exceeded all expectations. Some seven million Afghans queued for hours to cast their ballot as a growing sense of national pride and purpose swept the country.

Ahmad Shah Pasun, a reporter for the local Bost Radio station told the event, "It will be to our advantage to go to a second round, because it's important for us to have strong government.

"We should never suggest that the elections shouldn't go to a run-off. It is part of the process. and part of the solution."

The IWPR debate took place in Lashkar Gah before an audience of some 100 local undergraduates. The guest speakers included Safi as well as Abdul Satar Storay, deputy head of a local civil society association, and Abdul Manaf Fardin, a psychology lecturer at the university.

Addressing the students, Fardin said the success of the election process so far had shown the world that Afghanistan had matured politically, and that its people were ready to embrace a more open, accountable system of government.

He praised the Afghan security forces for their work in countering the ongoing insurgent threat, arguing that their handling of the April 5 elections proved beyond doubt that the country was capable of managing its own security independent of international assistance.

Later in the debate, Fardin warned students of the dangers of a second round. He acknowledged that a further vote would cost more money, and warned against a potential split among the electorate due to the ethnic constituencies of the two candidates. Abdullah is widely seen as carrying support from predominantly Tajik and Hazara areas as he is originally from Panjshir, a Tajik stronghold. Ghani is seen as the preferred choice among many Pashtuns.

"A second round will bring three crucial difficulties - economic costs, security guarantees and the potential for discrimination along ethnic lines," Fardin said.

**Mohammad Wali Zirak is a university student in Helmand and an IWPR trainee.**

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**Location:** [Afghanistan](#)

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