

## **Afghan Youth Debates: Plea to Back Second Round**

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Journalists and community elders in the Shakardara district of Kabul province have urged local students to back the second round of Afghanistan's presidential vote.

Mohammad Ehsan, deputy chairman of the district council, and Hafizullah Barakzai, chairman of the Afghan Independent Journalists' Association, both acknowledged serious flaws in the first round but insisted that voters should not be put off by that.

Addressing an IWPR debate, Ehsan praised the bravery of those who chose to ignore Taleban threats of violence and come to the polls on April 5.

He said he hoped Afghans would accept that continued questions about fraud were inevitable, and said they should recognise, too, that the success of the electoral process depended on them taking part.

"Fraud and interference by certain groups and individuals during the first round has undoubtedly put some people off voting," he told the audience. "People had particular expectations and unfortunately they were disappointed.

"However, despite the faults of the first round, I hope people will go to the ballot box on June 14 with the same enthusiasm."

The IWPR debate, held on May 15, focused on how residents of Shakardara district viewed the election process so far.

Barakzai admitted he feared a lower turnout in the second ballot but nevertheless stressed the need for voters to "fulfil their historic responsibility".

"In order to help prevent fraud, the public should help observe the process themselves," he said, adding that voters had a duty to look beyond ethnic rivalries and concentrate on supporting the candidate they believed best represented Afghanistan's interests.

Mohebullah Quraishi, an elder in Shakardara district, went on to question panellists about allegations that some staff at the Independent Election Commission (IEC), the body overseeing the vote, had been caught attempting to corrupt the process. He said rumours had surfaced regarding possible cases of bias and urged the commission to resolve this.

Barakzai responded by saying that he agreed that a large number of employees involved in the first round had been selected on the basis of their political leanings. He also claimed they lacked proper training.

"The commission must report these offenders to the Attorney General so that their behaviour will be seen as a lesson to others" he said. He added that he was confident the authorities would address the problem.

Wazir Gul Anis, the deputy district government head in Shakardara, added, "Despite all the problems of the first round, the people of Shakardara are ready to vote again.

"But I would ask that this time, the IEC takes the issue of transparency very seriously. They must respect our votes."

**Enayatullah Omari is a student at Kabul University and an IWPR trainee.**

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

**Topic:** [Elections](#)

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