Afghanistan: Election Fraud Claims in Ghazni

Author: Sayed Rahmatullah Alizada
Candidate denies assaulting election officers and stuffing ballot boxes.

Afghan electoral officials allege their staff were harassed and abused by a politician's supporters whom they accuse of trying to stuff ballot boxes in the parliamentary election.

Nazer Hussain Nabizada, public outreach officer for the Independent Election Commission, IEC, in the southern province of Ghazni said parliamentary candidate Sayed Mohammad Hasamuddin Gilani and his campaign staff attacked workers at one polling station because they refused to stuff ballot boxes with extra papers during the September 18 election.

"Eleven of our polling staff in Giro district were beaten by Hasamuddin Gilani, and two of them are still missing," Nabizada said. "When our field monitors refused to carry out fraud, the parliamentary candidate started to beat polling staff, and imprisoned them for hours in a room at the school, leaving them thirsty and hungry."

Abdul Malik, an IEC officer in Giro described how the assault happened after a local official tried offering polling station staff 100 US dollars each to fill ballot boxes with votes for Gilani.

"As a result of the beating of polling staff by Gilani's armed men, two of our officers were badly injured and another two are still missing," Abdul Malik said.

Gilani denied all allegations of wrongdoing, and told IWPR that the election process had been transparent, while declining to give further details.

IEC officials in Ghazni have reported the case to Afghanistan's Electoral Complaints Commision.

Security officials in Ghazni province said that the alleged incident had not been reported to them. Provincial police chief Zowar Zahid told IWPR that if election officers had been harassed, they should contact police headquarters and his men would investigate.

Ghazni province, some 145 kilometres south of Kabul, has become increasingly unsafe because of Taleban attacks.

The alleged assault reported by Nabizada and Abdul Malik raises questions about the returns from other polling stations in Giro district. Abdul Malik said that while ballot-box returns showed 10,000 votes for Gilani across the district as a whole, in reality turnout had been minimal because of security fears.

Local resident Haji Abdul Rahim agreed with Maliki's assessment, saying, "I'm from Giro district, and I swear to God that not a single person participated in the vote, because the Taleban carried out an ambush two kilometres from the district governor's office. I have no idea where large numbers of people would have come from to fill the ballot boxes."

Rahilah Sajadi, head of the Ghazni office of the Free and Fair Election Foundation for Afghanistan, said the organisation had sent observers to 175 polling stations in the province, but not to Giro because of the risk of Taleban attacks.

Following the election, ten parliamentary candidates standing in Ghazni province called a press conference to complain that the electoral process had not been transparent across much of the province.

Faizullah Faizan, a candidate from Andar district, said that while the conduct of the election had been transparent in Deh Yak, Khwaja Omari and Ghazni town, candidates had interfered in the process at polling stations in Jaghato, Malistan, and Nawur districts as well as in Giro.

"Even though nobody came to vote in Giro district, the ballot boxes were filled in favour of one candidate," Faizan said. "Instead of people casting their votes, candidates committed a crime by assaulting polling staff and filling the ballot boxes in their own favour."

Sayed Rahmatullah is an IWPR-trained journalist in Afghanistan.

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