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Who will lead Afghanistan?

By [Frontline Bloggers](#) April 3, 2014 [0 Comments](#)

By Alex Glynn



'What next for Afghanistan?' asked a panel of experts at the Frontline Club on 2

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April, in an event in partnership with BBC World Service, that looked at the possible outcomes of the upcoming election.

There was a certain measured optimism in the response to this question from the panel and a general feeling that this election is one to get excited about. Chaired by BBC Broadcasting House's **Paddy O'Connell**, the panel of experts were grilled on the candidates, the election process, the possibility of a second round and the challenges ahead.

Straight off the plane from Afghanistan, Amnesty International's Afghan researcher, **Horia Mosadiq**, told the audience what the feeling on the ground about the election was:

"Despite a series of violent attacks by the Taliban and other insurgent groups, Afghans are looking forward to these elections," she said. "I spoke to many people from different places and they are saying, 'Nothing can hold us back from going [to vote]'."

Michael Semple, who is a visiting professor at the Centre for Conflict Transformation at Queen's University, Belfast, hoped the panel would clarify some of the main assumptions surrounding the election:

"The myths that the Americans pull all the strings, that there is a great power inside the palace that can manipulate the election and that the Taliban can determine the event, will all be shattered. A rather messy process of alliance building and a popular mobilisation is going to determine events."

The BBC World Service's **Emal Pasarly**, who edits the BBC Pashto-Persian

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Service, said that as an Afghan, he is very excited about this election because “people are thinking there is a new hope, a new person to guide us ahead”.

Former UN secretary general’s personal representative **Francesc Vendrell**, who has has worked in Afghanistan since 2000, pointed out what he thought were two key factors:

“Firstly, to what degree is this election credible, and the result acceptable, to most of the Afghans. And secondly, will these elections be accepted [by] about 150 key players in Afghanistan [on] whom it really depends if it is going to be a peaceful succession from President Karzai.”

Discussing the candidates, the whole panel agreed that there are only really three frontrunners: former finance minister Ashraf Ghani, Dr Abdullah Abdullah and Dr Zalmay Rassoul.

Describing the difference between this election and past elections, **Pasarly** said:

“Ashraf Ghani mentioned a lot of stuff you would hear in other parts of the world. He promised to create one million jobs, which is something unheard of in Afghan politics to hear someone come and talk about jobs.”

Semple said many supporters believe Ashraf Ghani can bring what he preached because he has track record of actually trying to do it in the cabinet already:

“People have focused over the last few years on all the things the Afghans didn’t do, but if you look [Ghani’s] track record from the early part of the process, it is delivering the first stages of state building. He

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has changed the currency, overturned the customs regime to regain control of revenues and he played a pivotal role pushing through the disbandment of the militias.”

O’Connell asked the panel what role the Taliban has in this election and if it is a fourth candidate in an empty chair. **Vendrell** replied, stating that he wasn’t surprised that the Taliban weren’t even bothering to be involved in the election, “I think their main wish is to disrupt elections”.

Semple added that:

“The Taliban have the capacity to inflict large-scale casualties . . . but I believe they are frightened to do so because they concluded that would be counter-productive.”

Mosadiq pointed out that a security concern still did exist for voters, but “the level of the killings are not the same level as 2009”.

“Despite the insecurities that still exist, what I was amazed at was the level courage that Afghan men and women were having that they still wanted to cast their vote,” she added.

Another major issue of the election is the prospect of election fraud. **Pasarly** pointed out that for this election the presence of social media and smart phones means that the people can hold the government more accountable than before.

“You will see from the first hour of the election, a lot of videos on Facebook and Twitter. These observers are more important and you will

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get a lot of the corruption and the fraud cases through there.”

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