

## **Saleh re-elected Yemen president with 77 per cent vote**

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**Reuters** - 24 September, 2006

Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh was re-elected with 77.2 percent of the vote, state-run television and election officials said on Saturday, after Wednesday's election which opponents say was rigged.

The final count showed Saleh's main opponent Faisal al-Shamlan, a former oil minister, received 21.8 percent of a total 6 million votes cast.

The television said turnout was 65 percent of the 9.3 million registered voters in the polls, held also to elect municipal councils.

Head of the election commission, Khaled al-Sharif, confirmed the results in a news conference in Yemen's capital after a statement was read on state television.

Saleh's supporters took to the streets in many towns, firing into the air to celebrate his victory.

There was no immediate sign of public protest from the opposition. However, opposition spokesman Ali al-Sarari told Reuters: "We believe the results were forged and we do not recognise them."

Yemen's opposition accused authorities on Friday of rigging the presidential election and threatened to launch street protests.

Opposition politicians accused the government of seizing polling stations, evicting candidates' representatives, stealing ballot boxes and committing irregularities in vote-counting for local councils.

Saleh faced four other candidates, including Shamlan, who was nominated by a coalition of opposition parties. His win, according to Yemeni law, will allow him to rule for another seven years.

Saleh, a military officer who has ruled Yemen since its unification in 1990, enjoys near-absolute power. He won the first direct election in 1999, which the opposition boycotted.

Yemen is the ancestral home of al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and has cracked down on militants. It cooperated closely with Washington after the Sept. 11 attacks and al Qaeda attacks at home, including the bombing of a U.S. warship in 2000.