

Iraqi Voter Engagement Initiative

Supporting Voters
to Promote Democracy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leading up to the 2021 Parliamentary elections in Iraq, the [Sustainability Office](#) of Dijlah Consulting Engineers conducted the Iraqi Voter Engagement Initiative (IVEI) with the following objectives:

- To inform Iraqi government and election officials about the level of knowledge that voters have regarding the election process and the current candidates;
- To create an online platform to house information about representatives in the Iraqi Parliament;
- To conceptualize a recurring youth engagement forum to support positive interactions with elected officials.

This Report provides background information on the current status of the IVEI, with a particular emphasis on the results of the voter survey. Three key findings from the survey show that the majority of survey participants do not know where to obtain information about the candidates for election, they do not know what to do if they encounter a problem while voting on election day, and they do not feel not feel that their vote will be accurately counted.

The data produced from this survey served as the basis for the following recommendations to improve voter engagement:

- Candidate experience, campaign platforms and plans for change in Iraq must be made available to Iraqi citizens in an easily accessible format;
- Voters must be provided with clear instructions on how to address any issues that may arise at their respective polling locations on election day;
- Information concerning the receipt and submission of absentee ballots must be issued to all registered voters, particularly those with disabilities, the elderly, or persons who may otherwise have difficulty travelling to their polling location.

INTRODUCTION

Voter engagement is a key element in improving citizen trust and participation in the electoral process. Given that Iraq has made great strides towards building a stronger democracy, the 2021 Parliamentary elections provided a prime opportunity to increase voter turnout in all 18 governorates. To achieve this goal, the Iraqi Voter Engagement Initiative (IVEI) was developed by Dijlah Consulting Engineers.

[Dijlah Consulting Engineers](#) (DIJLAH) has been headquartered in Baghdad since 1993 and specializes in architecture, engineering and construction supervision. In order to become more involved in Iraq's economic and development affairs, DIJLAH created a new Sustainability Office to implement projects related to economic reform, democracy-building, and sustainable development. The IVEI was launched in April 2021 under DIJLAH's Sustainability Office.

IRAQI VOTER ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

- A three-part initiative to better equip and engage Iraqi voters
- Provides candidates, agencies involved in Iraq's elections, and the voters with technical support
- Engages Iraqi voters, youth, and candidates in new, innovative ways

The IVEI consists of the following:

- Voter survey
- [Iraqi election website](#)
- Youth outreach program planning

IRAQI ELECTION WEBSITE

A website to house information on the current members of Parliament has been developed, and a prototype is available at this link: <https://www.iraqielection.org/>.

With this website, voters will be able to learn more about the their representatives in the Iraqi Parliament, their platforms, and their plans for change in Iraq. DIJLAH is in the process of partnering with other organizations to conduct data collection, vetting, and site maintenance to ensure that the site is regularly updated with accurate information.

YOUTH OUTREACH

DIJLAH is in the process of creating social media platforms and gaming/entertainment advertisements for youth and young adults to submit questions to election candidates. A regular Youth Forum is also being developed so that youth can hold question-and-answer sessions directly with the candidates and elected government officials on a regular basis.

VOTER SURVEY

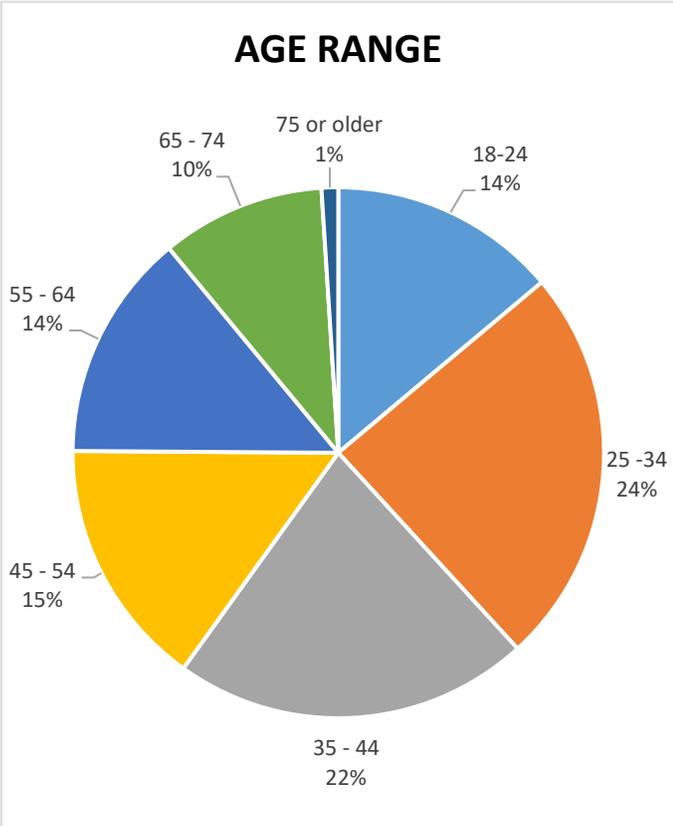
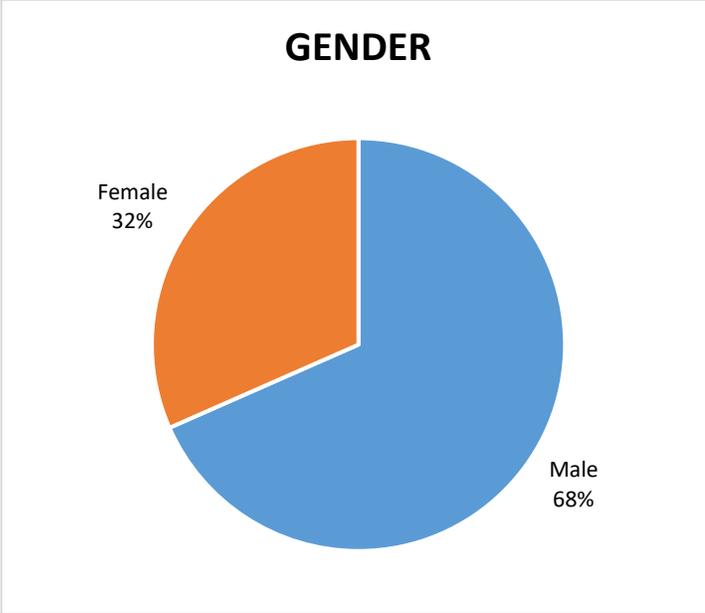
A rapid response quantitative survey was developed for Iraqi citizens who were eligible to vote in the October 2021 election. The survey was available online and in hard copy in [English](#) and [Arabic](#), and it was distributed throughout all 18 governorates in Iraq. The results provided insight into the level of knowledge that Iraqis have about the elections and the candidates.

As of October 27, 2021, 693 Iraqis participated in the survey. DIJLAH made extensive efforts to distribute the survey as widely as possible to include women, youth, and socially excluded groups.

The survey results are detailed below.

Voter Demographics

The majority of survey participants were male (474), and survey responses were obtained from 16 of Iraq’s 18 governorates. In-person interviews were conducted in Baghdad governorate, and the online survey was distributed to Iraqis of voting age in the 17 other governorates. Thirty-eight percent of the participants were under the age of 35.



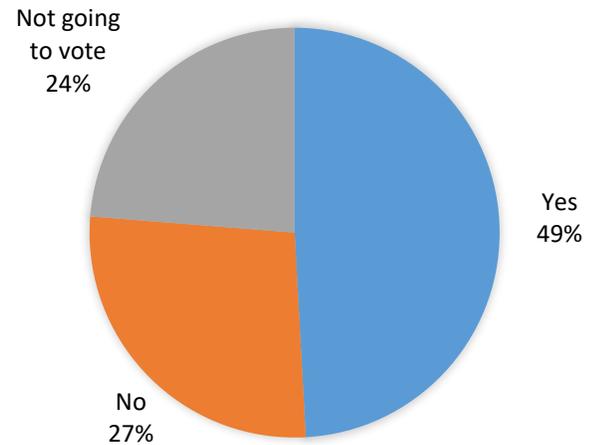
Knowledge of Candidates

These questions were designed to assess the participant's level of knowledge about the candidates they wished to vote for, as well as their awareness of their candidate's platform.

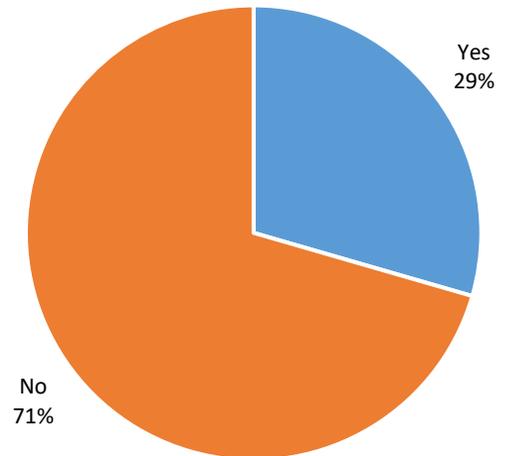
One hundred eighty-eight participants stated they did not know who they were going to vote for in the October elections, while 165 stated that they did not plan to vote (Figure 1).

In regards to the platforms of the Parliamentary candidates, 488 out of 693 of the participants stated that they do not know at least three things that their selected candidate would do if elected to office (Figure 2). This indicates that information about the candidates' backgrounds, platforms, and plans for change should be made available so that voters can make informed decisions on voting day.

**FIGURE 1:
CANDIDATE SELECTION**



CANDIDATE PLATFORM



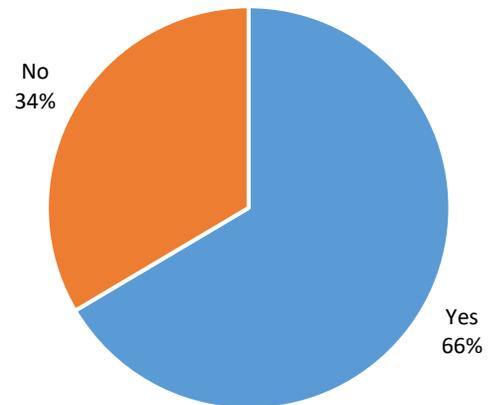
Access to Information

These questions were designed to assess the participant's ability to obtain information about the candidates who are up for election.

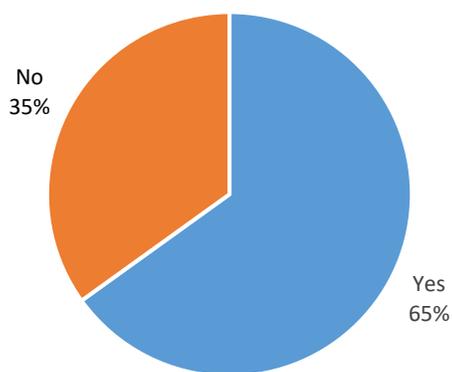
Over half of the participants (460) stated that they know where to obtain information about the candidates. (Figure 3).

However, 34% of participants (241) stated that it is not easy to obtain information about the candidates who were up for election (Figure 4). Where information is publicly available on the candidates, the internet was the main source that the participants used (Figure 5).

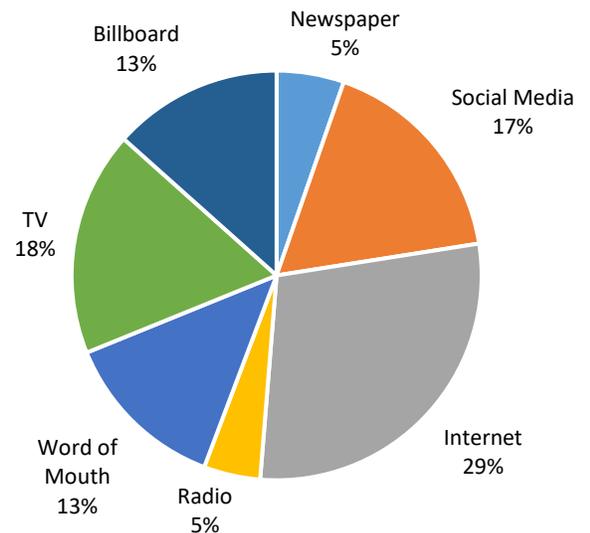
**FIGURE 3:
ACCESS TO INFORMATION**



**FIGURE 4:
ACCESSIBILITY OF
INFORMATION**



**FIGURE 5: LOCATION OF
INFORMATION**

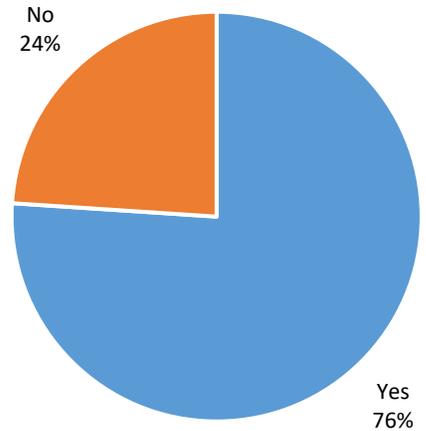


Election Day

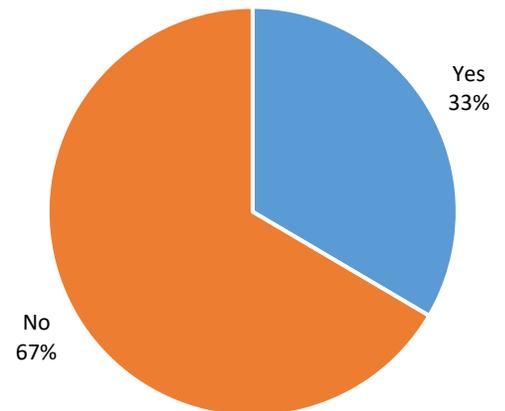
These questions were designed to assess the participant's knowledge of the logistical aspects of voting on election day.

The majority of participants knew when and where to vote (Figure 6); however, 461 participants stated that they do not know what to do if they encounter a problem while voting on election day (Figure 7). Information about poll functionality, ballots, and other voting day considerations should be made available to voters ahead of the October elections. In many countries, a national telephone hotline is available for anyone who encounters a problem on election day. In an effort to combat voter suppression and intimidation and other forms of disenfranchisement, resources must be readily available to voters at each polling location.

**FIGURE 6:
POLL LOCATION**



**FIGURE 7:
VOTING ISSUES**



Voting Procedures

These questions were designed to assess the participant's knowledge of the technical aspects of voting.

A vast majority of participants (553) did not know how to submit an absentee ballot (Figure 8). This is problematic particularly for voters who may not be able to physically travel to the polls on election day. Persons with disabilities, for example, should have the option to submit an absentee ballot if travelling to their polling location would be unduly burdensome for him or her. Overall, most of the participants indicated that they are familiar with how to properly fill out and submit a standard ballot (Figure 9).

FIGURE 8: ABSENTEE VOTING

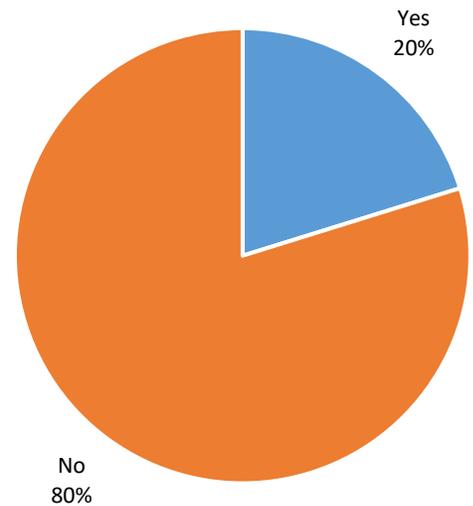
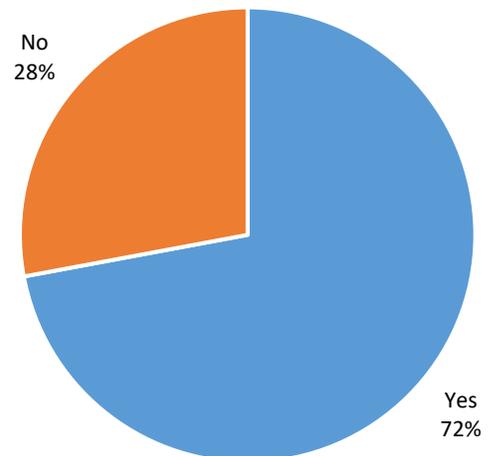


FIGURE 9: VOTING BALLOT



Voter Opinions

These questions were designed to assess the participant's subjective opinions regarding the accuracy, fairness and impact of elections in Iraq, as well as the external factors that may have impacted the participant's voting choices.

Of the 693 participants, 479 stated that they do not feel that their vote would be accurately counted (Figure 10). Similarly, 532 participants stated that they do not believe that elections in Iraq are free and fair (Figure 11).

FIGURE 10: VOTING ACCURACY

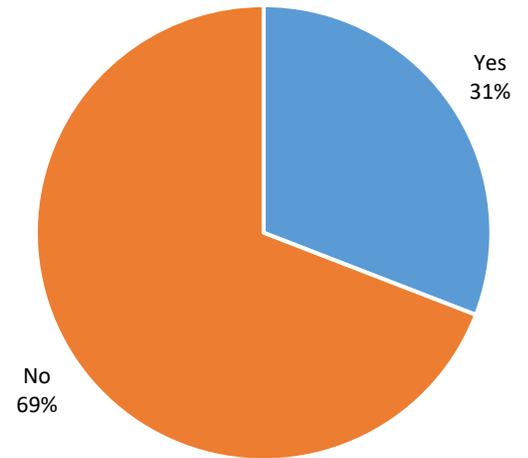
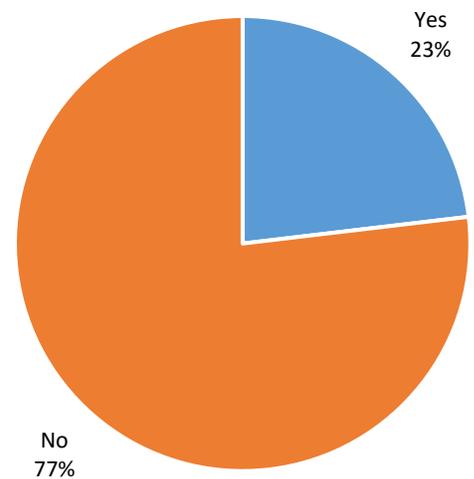


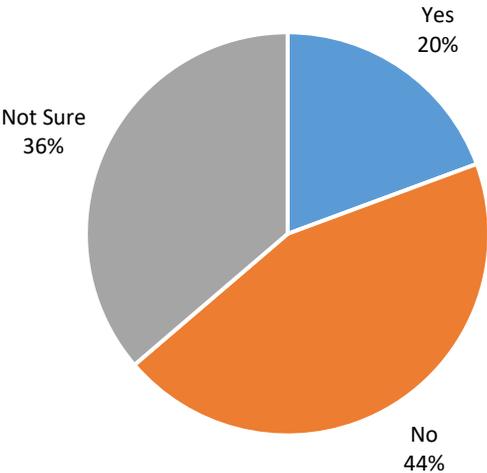
FIGURE 11: ELECTION FAIRNESS



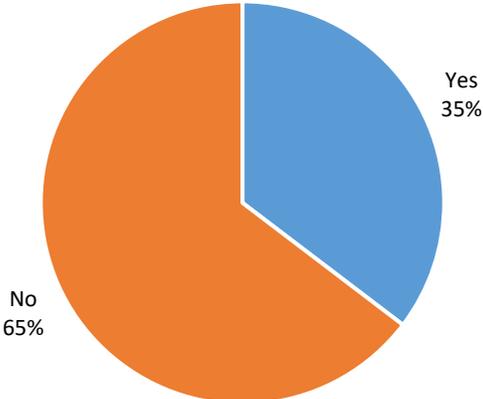
When asked if they believe that voting makes a difference in Iraqi society, 558 participants responded with either “no” or “not sure.” (Figure 12).

Over half (448) stated that they do not feel comfortable with other people knowing who they vote for (Figure 13), and 102 stated that they feel pressure from others in regards to who he or she should vote for (Figure 14).

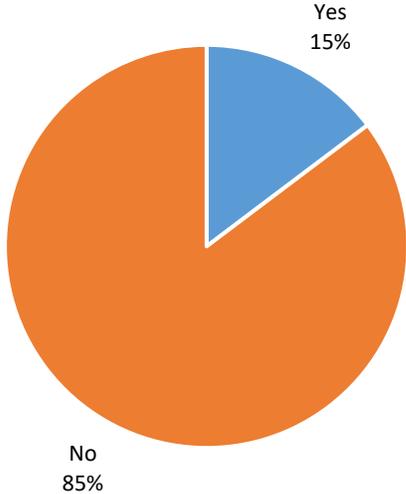
**FIGURE 12:
IMPACT OF VOTING**



**FIGURE 13:
LEVEL OF COMFORT**



**FIGURE 14:
EXTERNAL INFLUENCES**



CONCLUSION

As the election season may be forthcoming in the near future for Iraq, it is important to reflect on the lessons learned in previous election cycles and the ways in which voter trust can be improved and maintained. Going forward, direct input from voters with lived experience in Iraqi elections is valuable in terms of determining priorities and working towards systemic change.

Below are key recommendations based on the IVEI voter survey:

- Candidate experience, campaign platforms and plans for change in Iraq must be made available to Iraqi citizens in an easily accessible format;
- Voters must be provided with clear instructions on how to address any issues that may arise at their respective polling locations on election day;
- Information concerning the receipt and submission of absentee ballots must be issued to all registered voters, particularly those with disabilities, the elderly, or persons who may otherwise have difficulty physically going to their polling location;
- Exit polls should be made available at secure polling locations to afford voters an opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns about election day;
- National voting hotlines should be made available to provide voters with direct assistance if they encounter any issues when voting on election day;
- Information on the processes and systems in place to ensure accurate ballot counting should be shared with the public in order to build voter trust.