

AN INITIATIVE OF



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

ATARUD TRAINING &  
**RESEARCH**  
**ORGANIZATION**  
FOR DEVELOPMENT



# KABUL VOTERS PERCEPTION SURVEY: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION 2018

OCTOBER 2018



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This work would not have been possible without the support of 23 male and female surveyors who, despite all challenges, voluntarily collected the data during the two days of election in Kabul. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to them. Also, we would like to thank both PRSO and Atarud team for their administrative and technical support at different stages of this study.

## BACKGROUND

Afghanistan's long-awaited parliamentary election was held on Saturday October 20, 2018 and at some polling centers on Sunday. This was the third parliamentary elections, originally scheduled for 2014, since the country's new constitution in 2004. It was delayed due to several reasons including unresolved disagreements about the election reform, potential fraud, and security situation.

Afghanistan's parliament comprises of two houses; the upper house or Meshrano Jirga that serves, primarily, as an advisory unit but also possess some veto powers and the lower house or Wolesi Jirga that have the authorization to pass legislation. It has 250 seats, distributed among 34 province based on proportional representation. One seat is reserved for Hindus and Sikhs and the other 10 are reserved for nomadic communities. Furthermore, 68 seats are allocated for female representatives, equally distributed among 34 provinces of Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup>

In this round of election, there were 2,565 candidates overall, 417 of which were women. The election, after a 3-year delay, took place, nonetheless, with numerous issues including a series of bomb blasts, technical and administrative<sup>2</sup> chaos with biometric scanners, mixed-up voter registration papers, and late opening of polling stations.

The election, on the contrary, can also be viewed as an achievement. For example, an unprecedented large voter turnout was observed across Afghanistan despite the numerous threats and violence by ISIS and Taliban that left more than 100 civilian casualties.<sup>3</sup>

This election, also, introduced a new practice. Biometric devices, for the first time ever in Afghanistan, were utilized in the process. While this new technology aims to enhance election transparency including the election process and results, the viewpoint of voters in this new practice has not been clearly understood.

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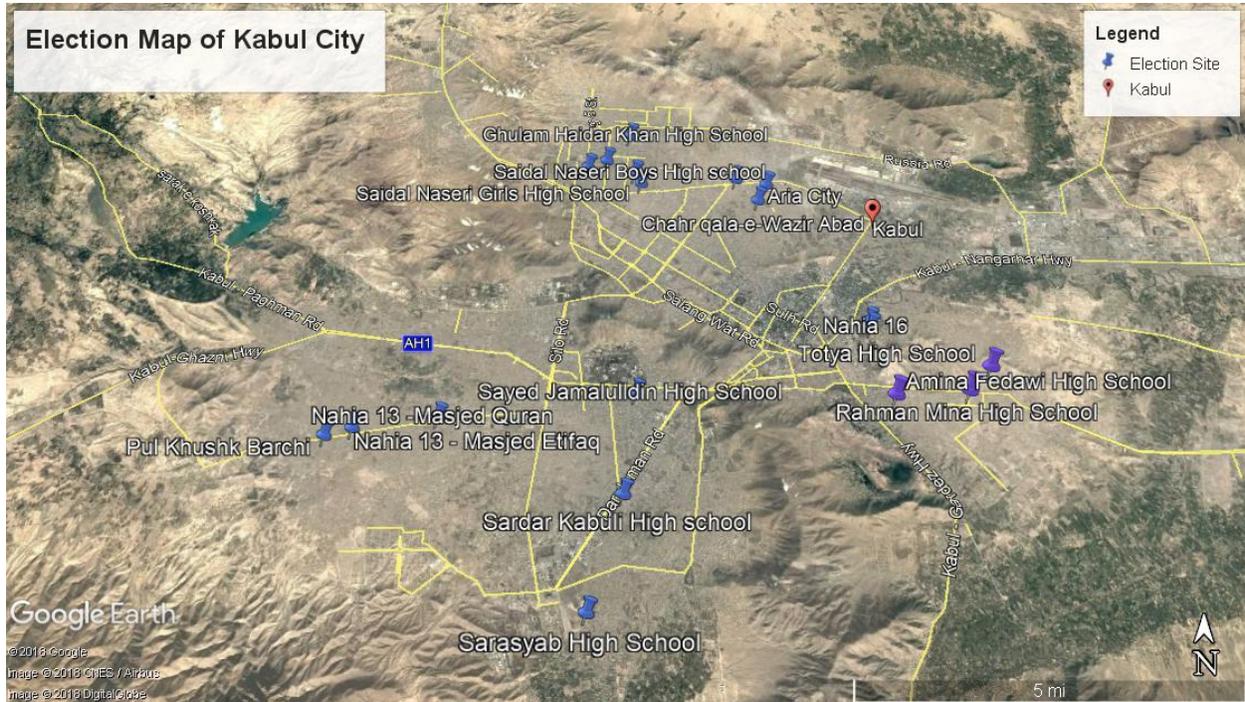
<sup>1</sup> Aljazeera.com. (2018). *Understanding Afghanistan's elections 2018*. [online] Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2018/10/understanding-afghanistan-elections-2018-181019150908439.html> [Accessed 24 Oct. 2018].

<sup>2</sup> Bjelica, J. (2018). *Election Day Two: A triumph of administrative chaos | Afghanistan Analysts Network*. [online] Afghanistan-analysts.org. Available at: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/election-day-two-a-triumph-of-administrative-chaos/> [Accessed 24 Oct. 2018].

<sup>3</sup> The National. (2018). *Afghan elections 2018: Voters go to the polls amid Taliban threats - live blog*. [online] Available at: <https://www.thenational.ae/world/afghan-elections-2018-voters-go-to-the-polls-amid-taliban-threats-live-blog-1.782375> [Accessed 24 Oct. 2018].

## METHODOLOGY

Porsesh Research and Studies Organization (PRSO) in partnership with Atarud Training and Research Organization for Development dispatched a team of 23 field surveyors on the election days (October 20 and 21) to different zones of Kabul city to gather voters' perception toward vital aspects of the election process including level of voters trust on the bio-metric system. We divided Kabul city into different zones and random polling stations were selected from these zones.



Similarly, there were a team of field supervisors, dispatched across the sampled areas to oversee the entire data collection process also gaining the geo point of polling stations where the data for this survey come from.

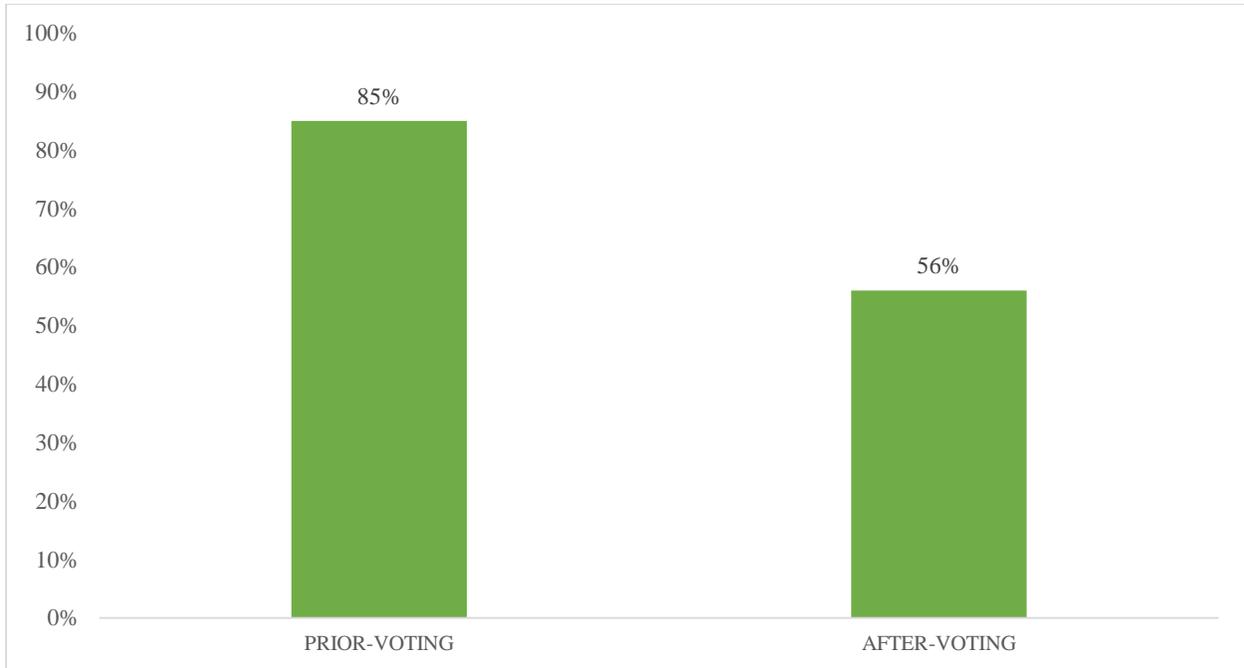
## SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Overall, 200 voters were surveyed across Kabul city. The respondents included 100 males and 100 females and consisted of individuals from diverse social groups and ethnicities.

## PERCEPTIONS TOWARD BIOMETRIC SYSTEM

Survey respondents were asked, both before and after casting their vote, to express their opinion on whether they think the boimetric system helps increase election transparency. The survey findings indicate that the respondents, after observing how the biometric system worked, expressed less confidence on whether it promotes transparency.

More concretely, some 84.7% of the respondents prior to voting said that the biometric system helps increase election transparency. However, the same respondents were more hesitant (56.2%), after voting and observing the biometric machines, to say it helps improve transparency (figure 1).



**Figure 1: q1.** *Do you think the biometric system can help with a transparent election results?*  
**q4.** *After using the biometric system, do you think it can help with a transparent election results?*

The same viewpoint has been supported by pollsters including Yusuf Rasheed, the executive director of Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan,<sup>4</sup> while the Independent Election Commission (IEC), has constantly emphasized on the functionality of the device in boosting transparency, deterring and mitigating fraud, as well as gaining public confidence in the electoral process.<sup>5</sup>

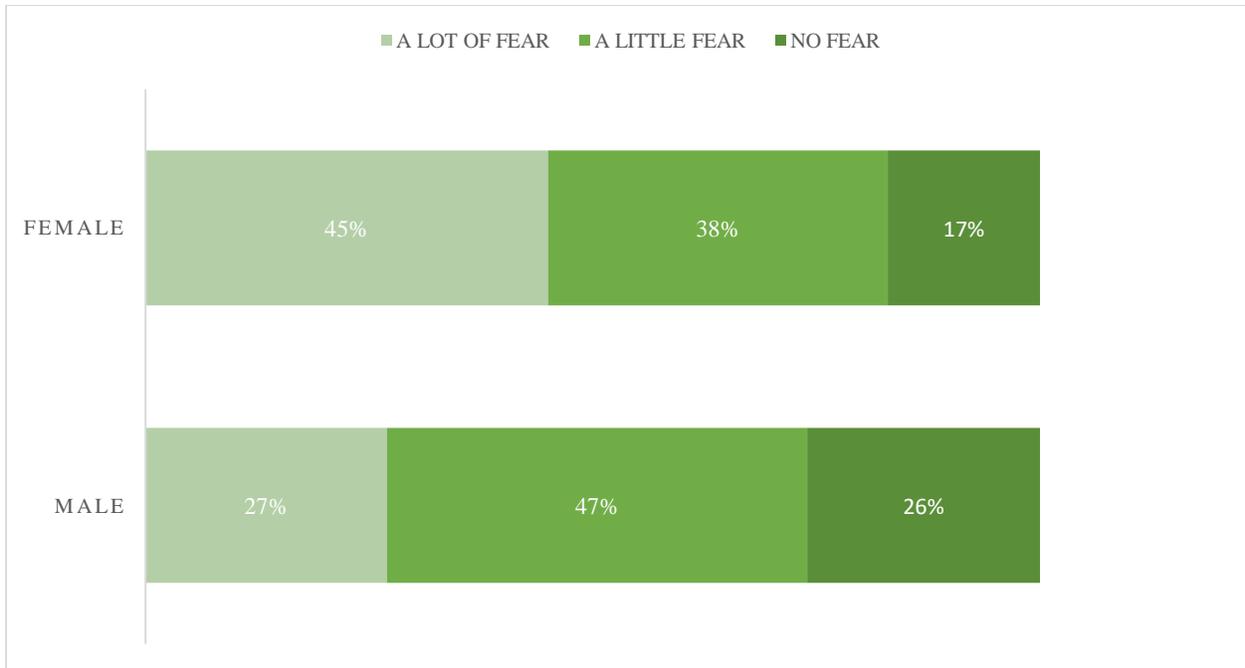
## POLLING CENTERS SECURITY AS A CONCERN

As security has been a major concern for Afghans during previous elections, this survey asked respondents to rate the degree they fear for the security of the polling centers. The survey indicates

<sup>4</sup> TOLONews. (2018). *Parties Claim Elections Were 'Riddled With Fraud'* | TOLONews. [online] Available at: <https://www.tolonews.com/elections-2018/parties%2%A0claim-elections-were-%E2%80%98riddled-fraud%E2%80%99> [Accessed 24 Oct. 2018].

<sup>5</sup> Adili, A. (2018). *Afghanistan Elections Conundrum (21): Biometric verification likely to spawn host of new problems* | Afghanistan Analysts Network. [online] Afghanistan-analysts.org. Available at: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistan-elections-conundrum-21-biometric-testing-likely-to-spawn-host-of-new-problems/> [Accessed 24 Oct. 2018].

that one-third (33.3%) of respondents expressed a lot of fear, 43.9% a little fear, and 22.7% no fear for security of polling centers. Looking at the gender differences, female were more likely to report fear compared to male respondents. For example, 45.1% of female respondents reported a lot of fear compared to 26.8% of male respondents (figure 2).



**Figure 2: q2.** *How much do you fear for security of the voting center?*

Kabul witnessed several attacks on the first day of the election. Overall, ten “small” explosions were reported by 12:30pm and one rocket attack, which occurred in the Gulayi neighborhood of Khairkhana in Kabul’s north. The first explosions occurred in the south-eastern area of Arzan Qemat (PD 12) in front of a high school polling center and in Bibi Sara high school polling center (PD 15). Similarly, two mines exploded outside Zabihullah Esmati school in Rahman Mena in southeastern Kabul (PD 8). The center was temporarily evacuated. An explosion in Qala-ye Shahda (PD 6), in front of the Ahmadi mosque also caused the evacuation and closure off a polling center.<sup>6</sup>

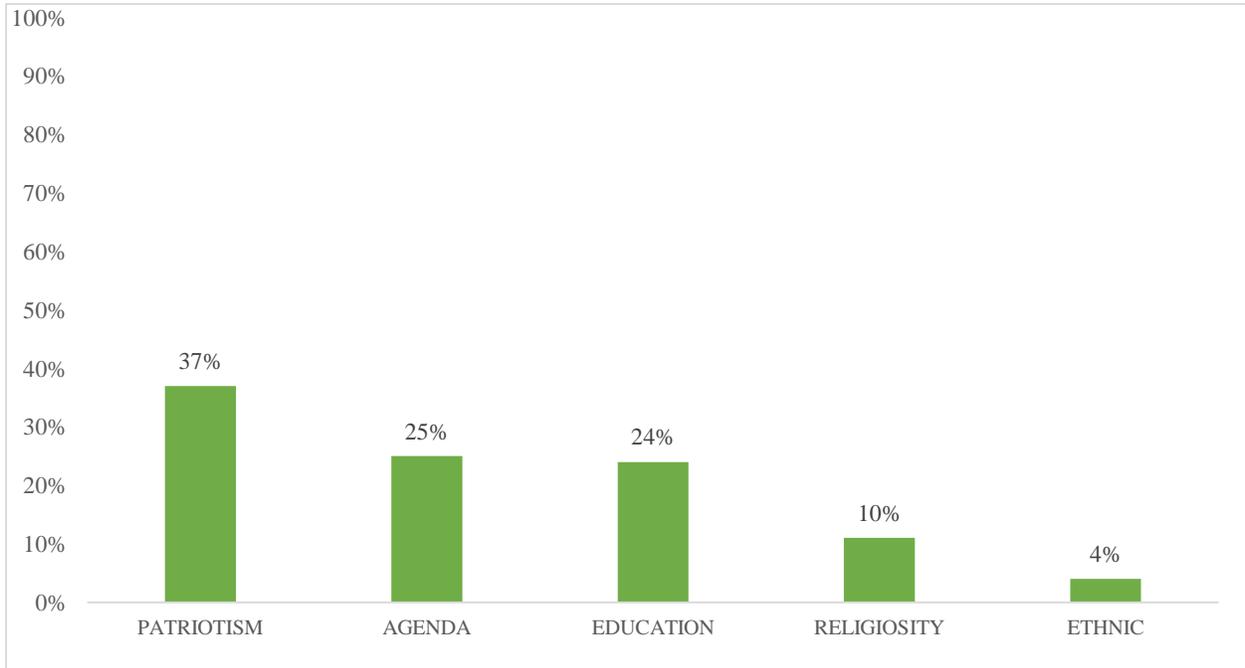
### OPINIONS TOWARDS CANDIDATES CHARACTERISTICS

In addition to assessing voters’ viewpoints on the security of polling centers, the survey asked respondents what characteristics of candidates are important to them. The survey data findings

<sup>6</sup> Bokhari, S. (2018). *Election Day One: A rural-urban divide emerging – Afghan Studies Center*. [online] Afghanstudiescenter.org. Available at: <http://afghanstudiescenter.org/2018/10/20/election-day-one-a-rural-urban-divide-emerging/> [Accessed 24 Oct. 2018].

revealed, 36.9% of respondents rated patriotism, followed by having a clear agenda (24.7%), education (23.7%), religiosity (10.6%), and candidate's ethnicity (4.0%).

### IMPORTANCE OF CANDIDATES CHARACTERISTICS

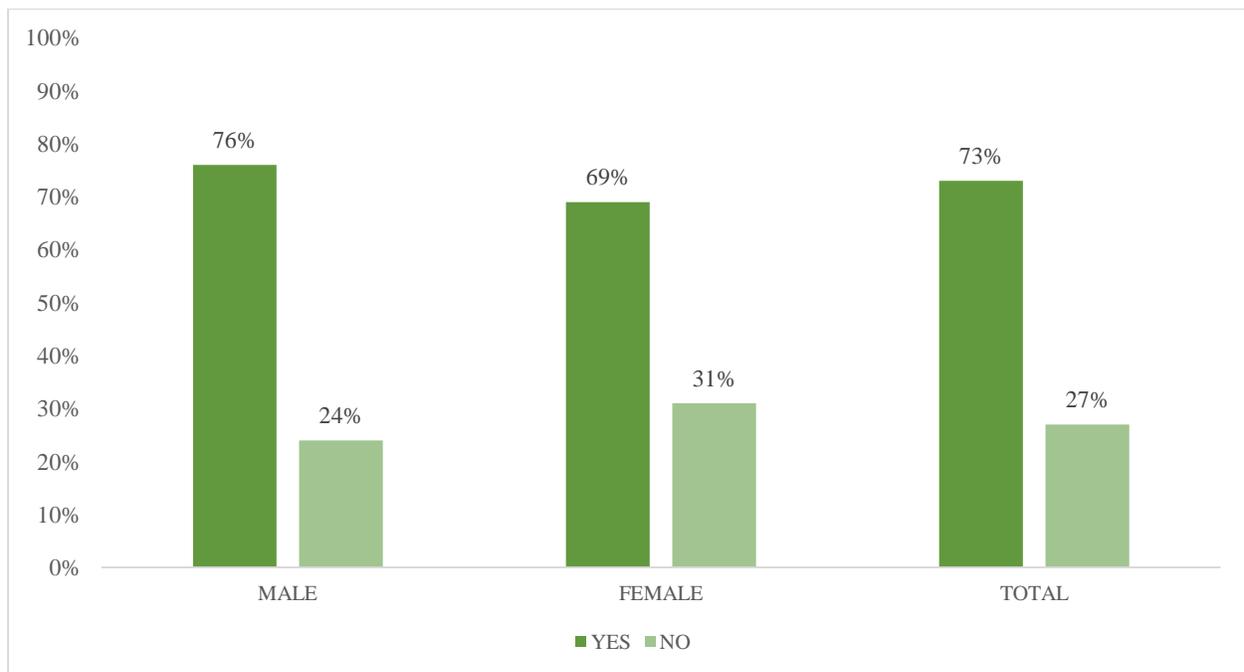


**Figure 3: q3.** *In your opinion, which characteristic of a candidate is the most important? Patriotism, education, religiosity, ethnic, agenda.*

### OPINIONS TOWARDS ELECTION FRAUD

The survey also asked respondents whether election fraud is a big concern for them. The findings show that an overwhelming majority (73.3%) of respondents said yes, fraud is a big concern for them. By gender, men (75.6%) were more likely to express concern over election frauds compared to women (69.1%) (figure. 4).

## PERCEPTION OF ELECTION FRAUDS AS A CONCERN, BY GENDER



**Figure 4: q6.** *Are you concerned about fraud in the election?*

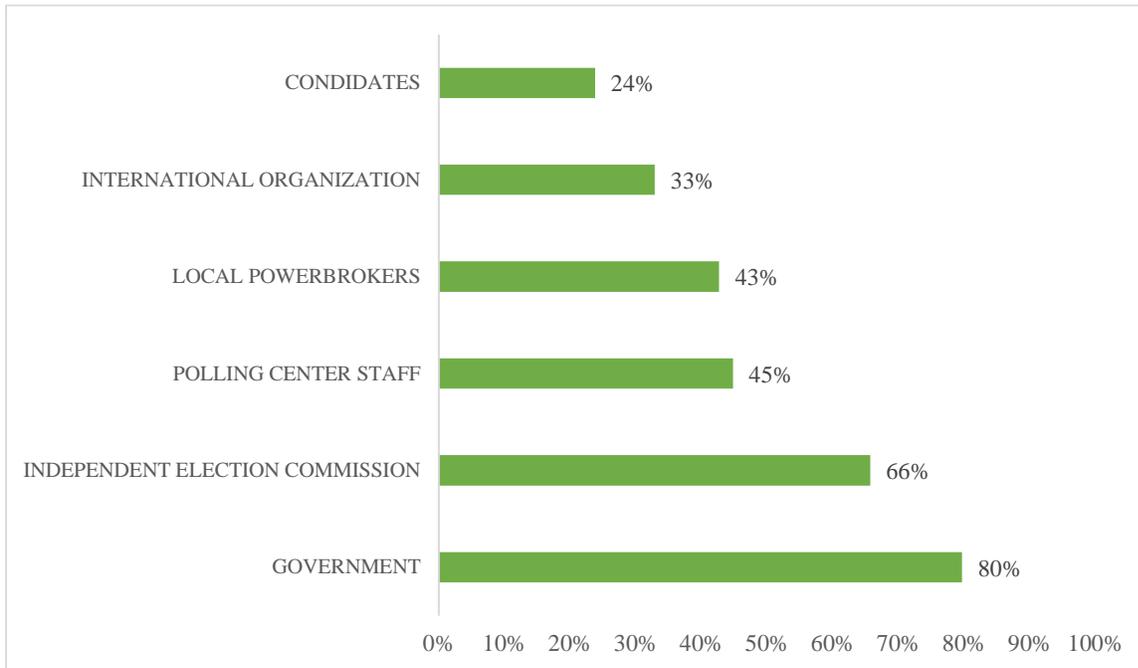
The respondents who expressed concern about election fraud were also asked who, in their opinion, were more likely to commit election fraud. The data shows respondents expressed concerns about fraud by the government (79.7%), followed by fraud by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) (65.7%), polling center staff (44.8%), local powerbroker (42.7%), international organizations (32.9%), and the candidates (23.8%) (figure 5).

People displayed anxiety about election fraud before the commencement of the election process, particularly after the controversy over the stamping of copies of ID cards by the Independent Election Commission (IEC), ironically, promising greater transparency in election results.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> TOLONews. (2018). *Fear of Election Fraud Grows Among The Public* | TOLONews. [online] Available at: <https://www.tolonews.com/elections-2018/fear-election-fraud-grows-among-public> [Accessed 26 Oct. 2018].

## FRAUDS RESPONDENTS CONCERN ABOUT



**Figure 5: Q7.** *Whose fraud do you concern about? By, a) government, b) international organization, c) local powerbrokers, d) Independent Election Commission (IEC), e) polling center staff, and f) candidates.*

To assess voters' viewpoints on election staff, the survey asked respondents whether the election staff encouraged them to vote for a specific candidate. The survey data shows that more than 1 in 10 (11.1%) respondents reported that yes, the election staff guided them to vote for their preferred candidate. Looking at the gender differences, male respondents were more likely (12.6%) to indicate that election staff interfered in their decision on who to vote for than female respondents (8.5%).

### CONCLUSION:

The survey findings show that respondents expressed less confidence in the biometric system after using the biometrics devices. Before voting, the majority (84.7%) of respondents believed that the biometric system can help improve election transparency, while a significantly less proportion of respondents (56.2%) held the same viewpoint after having voted using the biometric machines.

The findings also indicate that the majority of voters, despite security fears and threats, appeared on Kabul streets to cast their vote in support of democracy.

Similarly, when the respondents were asked about the characteristics of the candidates, some 36.9% of respondents rated patriotism, followed by having agenda (24.7%), education (23.7%), religiosity (10.6%), and candidate's ethnicity (4.0%) as important factors.

Finally, over two-thirds (73.3%) of respondents expressed fraud as a big concern in the parliamentary election. An overwhelming majority (79.7%) were concerned about fraud by the government, followed by Independent Election Commission (IEC) (65.7%), polling center staff (44.8%), local powerbroker (42.7%), international organizations (32.9%), and finally candidates (23.8%).

The findings of this study can help the IEC, and the Afghanistan government, gain a deeper understanding of voters' perception and concerns in a step toward enhancing people's trust in the democratic process. Future studies can amplify this attempt across all provinces of Afghanistan to further our knowledge of voters' perception.