



The Iraqi Public on the US Presence and the Future of Iraq

-A WorldPublicOpinion.org Poll-

Conducted by the
Program on International Policy Attitudes

Fielded by D3 Systems/KA Research

September 27, 2006



Program on International
Policy Attitudes (PIPA)

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Special thanks to Hesham Sallam of the World Security Institute for his assistance.

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The activities of WorldPublicOpinion.org are supported by grants from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Ford Foundation, the JEHT Foundation and the Circle Foundation.

INTRODUCTION

In January 2006 WorldPublicOpinion.org conducted a poll of Iraqis. Since then there have been numerous developments that raise questions about how the views of the Iraqi people may have shifted.

The center of violence in Iraq has shifted geographically into Baghdad, and socially into interethnic violence between Shias and Sunnis. Has this changed attitudes about the presence of US forces—especially among the Sunnis who may now feel more vulnerable?

Some Iraqi members of parliament have called for the US to give a timetable for the withdrawal of its forces. In the January poll, a majority of Iraqis wanted the US to set a timetable, but there was no majority sentiment for a quick withdrawal. What do the Iraqi people feel now, and does it vary by ethnic group?

Attacks on US troops have continued unabated. In January, nearly half of Iraqis approved of attacks on US-led forces—but the sense that American troops are now focused on reducing violence in Baghdad may have altered the equation.

Meanwhile, the argument among Iraq's political parties about how decentralized the country's future federal structure will be continues to simmer. Among Shia leaders there are deep divisions over whether or not to set up a largely autonomous region in the south. While Kurds in the north have considerable autonomy now, the size and independence of their future territory remains a subject for dispute. Sunni leaders tend to be hostile to federalism in general. In America, there has also been speculation in policy circles about whether a full partition of Iraq would be the best long-run solution. But it is unclear to what degree the centrifugal forces that are undoubtedly in play actually represent what ordinary Iraqis think.

The growth of militias, in many cases allied to political parties, has been a deeply troubling phenomenon. It is possible that this very growth in militia membership is a sign that Iraqis are turning to them increasingly to meet their need for security. However, since militia members certainly do not constitute a majority of all Iraqis, it is also possible that the apparent trend does not coincide with most people's desires.

In the US, there is a stormy political argument over whether the presence in Iraq of an al Qaeda group, active in atrocities against US troops, foreign civilians, and Iraqi civilians alike, means that battle lines are now clearly drawn in Iraq between those who stand with the US against al Qaeda and those who do the opposite. But little is known of how the mass of Iraqis view al Qaeda, or whether opponents of the US presence are also al Qaeda supporters.

In the context of these dynamics, WorldPublicOpinion.org has undertaken a second poll of the Iraqi people to determine their attitudes about these various developments occurring around them, and also to differentiate the views of the ethnic subgroups—Arab Sunnis, Shia and Kurds.

The poll was fielded by KA Research Limited/D3 Systems, Inc. Polling was conducted September 1-4 with a nationwide sample of 1,150, which included an oversample of Arab Sunnis. Respondents from all of Iraq's 18 governorates were interviewed for the sample.

Key findings are:

VIEWS OF THE US PRESENCE

1. Views of US-led Forces in Iraq

Seven in ten Iraqis want US-led forces to commit to withdraw within a year. An overwhelming majority believes that the US military presence in Iraq is provoking more conflict than it is preventing. More broadly, most feel the US is having a predominantly negative influence in Iraq and have little or no confidence in the US military. If the US made a commitment to withdraw, a majority believes that this would strengthen the Iraqi government. Majorities believe that the withdrawal of US troops would lead to a reduction in the amount of inter-ethnic violence and improvement in the day-to-day security of Iraqis. A modest majority, including a large majority of Shia, now believes that in the near future Iraqi security forces will be strong enough to deal with their security challenges without foreign forces. There is little interest in replacing US-led forces with an international peacekeeping force.....4

2. Attacks on US-led Forces

Support for attacks on US-led forces has grown to a majority position—now six in ten. Support appears to be related to widespread perception, held by all ethnic groups, that the US government plans to have permanent military bases in Iraq and would not withdraw its forces from Iraq even if the Iraqi government asked it to. If the US were to commit to withdraw, more than half of those who approve of attacks on US troops say that their support for attacks would diminish.8

3. Views of Al Qaeda

Growing approval for attacks on US-led forces has not been accompanied by any significant support for al Qaeda. Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden are rejected by overwhelming majorities of Shias and Kurds and large majorities of Sunnis.....10

4. Non-military Forms of US Involvement

Majorities still approve of the US training Iraqi security forces and helping with community development, though most of these feel the US is doing a poor job. However, a modest majority now disapproves of the US being involved in mediating between ethnic groups. Were the US to agree to a timetable for the withdrawal of its forces Iraqis say their support for nonmilitary forms of US involvement in Iraq would increase.....10

VIEWS OF THE SITUATION IN IRAQ

5. Support for Strong Central Government, Not Militias

Iraqis appear to agree on having a strong central government. Large majorities among all groups want the government to get rid of the militias. Majorities of all groups do not favor a movement toward a looser confederation and believe that five years from now Iraq will still be a single state. A large majority sees the current government as the legitimate representative of the Iraqi people.11

6. Confidence in Government and Security Forces

Overall, a large majority expresses confidence in the Maliki government, the Iraqi army, Iraqi interior ministry forces and the police. Sunnis have complex and seemingly conflicting attitudes about the government and its security institutions.....13

7. Mood of the Nation

The continuing strife and instability in Iraq has diminished optimism among the Iraqi people. While Shias and Kurds still say that the country is headed in the right direction, these majorities have diminished and the Sunnis continue to almost unanimously say it is going in the wrong direction. Overall, the belief that Iraq is headed in the wrong direction is at a high point and now a slight majority. Majorities of all groups do not think that the level of violence will diminish in the near future. The belief that ousting Saddam Hussein was worth the hardships entailed is down sharply, but very large majorities of Shia and Kurds continue to believe that it was worth it..... 14

8. Attacks on Iraqis

Attacks on government security forces and civilians continue to be rejected by very large majorities of all groups. There are differing perceptions of the source of such attacks. The majority of Sunnis think that attacks on Sunni civilians mainly come from other Iraqis, while Shias and Kurds believe they come from foreign fighters. A majority of all groups agree that attacks on Shias mostly come from foreign fighters. Majorities of all groups believe that the intent of violence against ethnic groups is to drive them from their neighborhoods, so that a militia can solidify its power. 15

9. Views of Shia Leaders

Prime Minister Maliki is viewed favorably by Kurds as well as Shias, but not at all by Sunnis. Grand Ayatollah Sistani and Muqtada al Sadr are quite divisive figures: overwhelmingly endorsed by Shias and overwhelmingly rejected by both Kurds and Sunnis. 16

10. Regional Actors: Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah

Shias have mildly positive views of Iran and its President, while Kurds and Sunnis have strongly negative views. Shias and Kurds have mostly negative views of Syria, while Sunnis are mildly positive. Shias have overwhelmingly positive views of Hezbollah, while Kurds and Sunnis have negative views. 17

FINDINGS

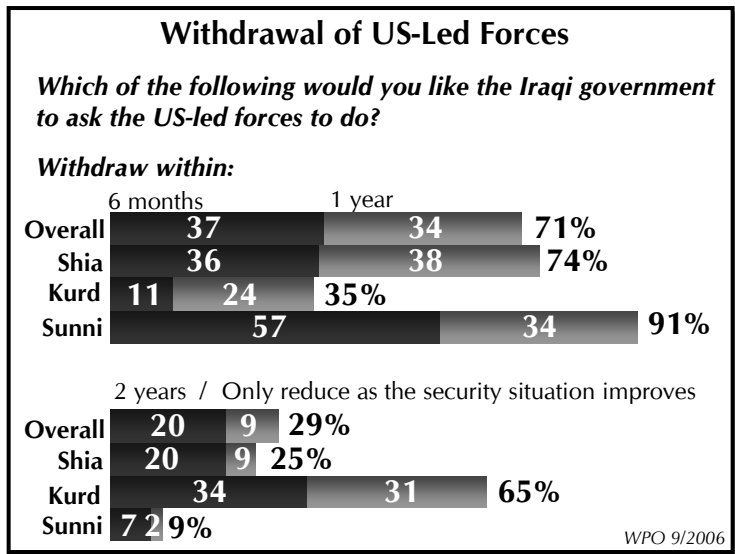
VIEWS OF THE US PRESENCE

1. Views of US-led Forces in Iraq

Seven in ten Iraqis want US-led forces to commit to withdraw within a year. An overwhelming majority believes that the US military presence in Iraq is provoking more conflict than it is preventing. More broadly, most feel the US is having a predominantly negative influence in Iraq and have little or no confidence in the US military. If the US made a commitment to withdraw, a majority believes that this would strengthen the Iraqi government. Majorities believe that the withdrawal of US troops would lead to a reduction in the amount of inter-ethnic violence and improvement in the day-to-day security of Iraqis. A modest majority, including a large majority of Shia, now believes that in the near future Iraqi security forces will be strong enough to deal with their security challenges without foreign forces. There is little interest in replacing US-led forces with an international peacekeeping force.

A large majority of Iraqis—71%—say they would like the Iraqi government to ask for US-led forces to be withdrawn from Iraq within a year or less. Given four options, 37 percent take the position that they would like US-led forces withdrawn “within six months,” while another 34 percent opt for “gradually withdraw[ing] US-led forces according to a one-year timeline.” Twenty percent favor a two-year timeline and just 9 percent favor “only reduc[ing] US-led forces as the security situation improves in Iraq.”

There are significant variations between groups in terms of the preferred period before US withdrawal, though no group favors an open-ended commitment. Fifty-seven percent of Sunnis favor withdrawal in six months, with another 34 percent favoring a year. Shias are more evenly divided between six months (36%) and a year (38%), and few favor two years (20%) or an open-ended commitment (5%). Only a third of Kurds favor withdrawal within a year or less, but two-thirds favor withdrawal within two years or less (11% six months, 24% one year, 34% two years). Thirty-one percent of Kurds favor an open-ended commitment.



As compared to January 2006 there has been, overall, a growing sense of urgency for withdrawal of US-led forces. In January respondents were only given three options—six months, two years, and an open-ended commitment. In September the one-year option was added, since it has been nearly a year since the last time they were asked. Interestingly the overall numbers follow a consistent pattern. While in January 70 percent favored withdrawal within two years (35% six months, 35% two years), now-- approximately a year later—71 percent favor withdrawal within a year (37% six

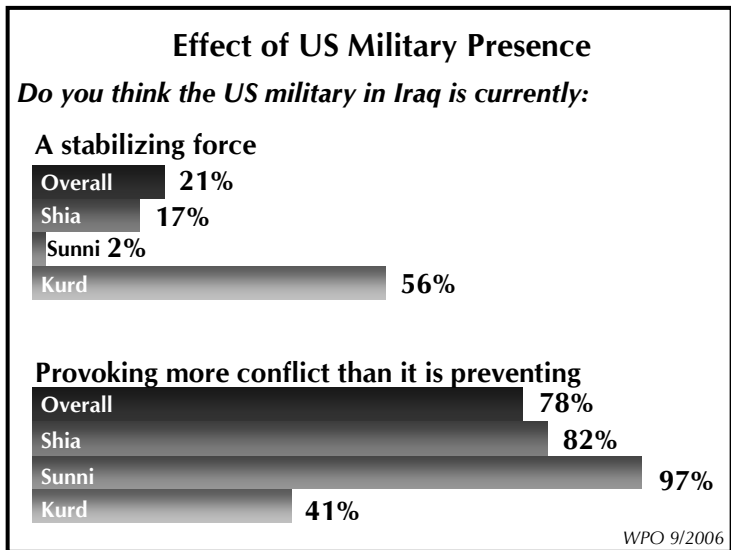
months, 34% one year). Support for an open-ended commitment has dropped from 29 percent to 9 percent.

Within ethnic groups there have been some shifts. Shias show a growing a sense of urgency, with the numbers calling for withdrawal in six months rising from 22 percent to 36 percent. On the other hand, the Sunnis' earlier overwhelming eagerness for withdrawal has moderated, with the percentage calling for withdrawal within six months dropping from 83 percent to 57 percent. Among those living in Baghdad support is even lower at 24 percent—however, it should be noted that the sample size for this subgroup is quite small and thus should be interpreted with caution. Still, 91 percent of Sunnis now say that they want the US to withdraw within a year, including 84 percent of those in Baghdad.

The Kurds have also shifted. In January a majority of 57 percent wanted US-led forces to only be reduced as the security situation improves. That view has dropped to 31 percent, and now a majority of 69 percent want a commitment to withdraw within two years or less.

US Presence Seen as Having a Net Negative Effect

Support for US withdrawal appears to be derived from a widespread perception that the presence of US-led forces is having a net negative effect on the situation in Iraq. Large numbers say that the US military presence is “provoking more conflict than it is preventing.” This view is held by 78 percent overall, and by 82 percent of Shias and a near-unanimous 97 percent of Sunnis. The Kurds diverge, with 56 percent taking the opposing view that the US military presence is “a stabilizing force.”



Among those who believe that US presence is provoking more conflict 82 percent favor withdrawal of US forces within a year. Among those who believe that it is a stabilizing force, just 33 percent favor withdrawal in this time frame.

More broadly, 79 percent of Iraqis say that the US is having a negative influence on the situation in Iraq, with just 14 percent saying that it is having a positive influence. Views are especially negative among the Sunnis (96% negative), and the Shias (87% negative). However, a plurality of Kurds (48%) say that the US is having a positive influence, while just 34 percent say it is having a negative influence.

Confidence in the US military is quite low. Eighty-four percent say they have little (22%) or no (62%) confidence in the US military. An extraordinary 98 percent of Sunnis take this view (no confidence 85%, a little 13%) as do 91 percent of Shias (no confidence 66%, a little 25%). However a majority of Kurds—55%—express confidence in the US military (some 37%, a lot 18%), while 45 percent do not express confidence (no confidence 17%, a little 28%).

Commitment to Withdraw Seen as Strengthening Government

While many commentators have expressed concern that the withdrawal of US forces would weaken or undermine the nascent Iraqi government, a modest majority of Iraqis believes that a commitment to withdraw would strengthen it. Asked “If the US made a commitment to withdraw from Iraq according to a timeline, do you think this would strengthen the Iraqi government, weaken it, or have no effect either way?” 53 percent said that it would strengthen the government, while just 24 percent said it would weaken the government. Twenty-three percent believed that it would have no effect either way.

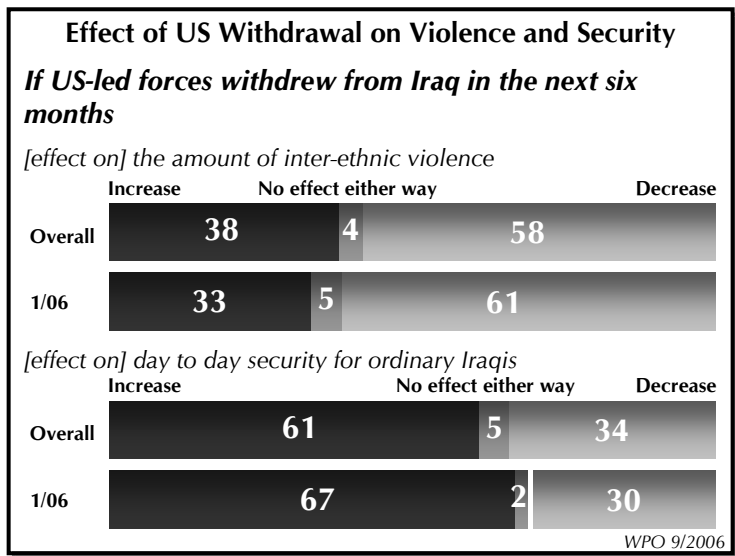
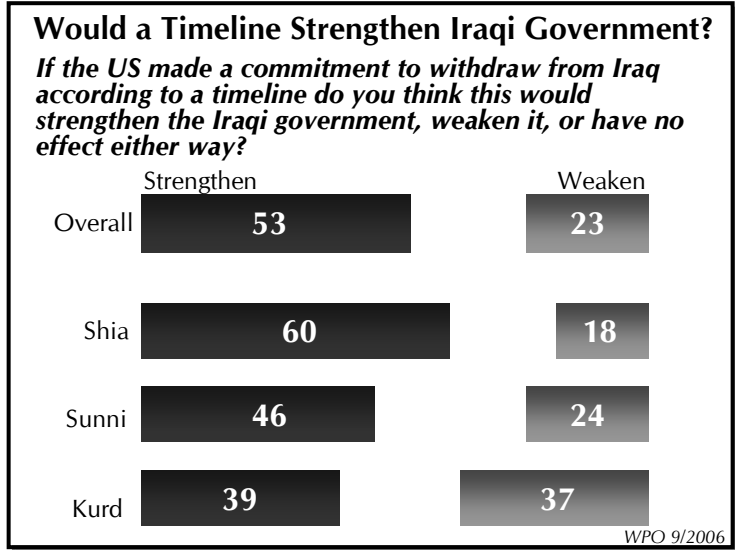
For all ethnic groups the belief that a commitment to withdraw would strengthen the government is the most common position, but it is more prevalent among the Shias (60%), than the Sunnis (46%) or Kurds (39%). The belief that it would weaken the government is held by just 18 percent of Shias, 24 percent of Sunnis and 37 percent of Kurds.

The belief that withdrawal would strengthen the government is correlated with support for withdrawal. Among those who believe that withdrawal would strengthen the government 78 percent favor withdrawal within a year, as compared to 56 percent among those who believe it would weaken the government.

While it is not surprising that Iraqis may have enough confidence in the government to reject the idea that a US commitment to withdraw militarily would weaken the government, it is not self-evident why the largest numbers would take the position that this would strengthen the government. It may be that the presence of US-led forces, because it is an ever-present reminder that the new Iraqi government does not exert full sovereignty, is perceived as undermining the government’s authority and legitimacy.

Belief US Withdrawal Will Lead to Reduced Violence

Iraqis tend to believe that if the US were to withdraw, this would reduce interethnic violence and increase day-to-day security for Iraqis. Asked what effect it would have “if US-led forces withdraw from Iraq in the next six months,” 58 percent overall say that violence would decrease (35% a lot, 23% a little). Majorities of Shias (57%) and Sunnis (72%) have this



view, though the Kurds are evenly divided.

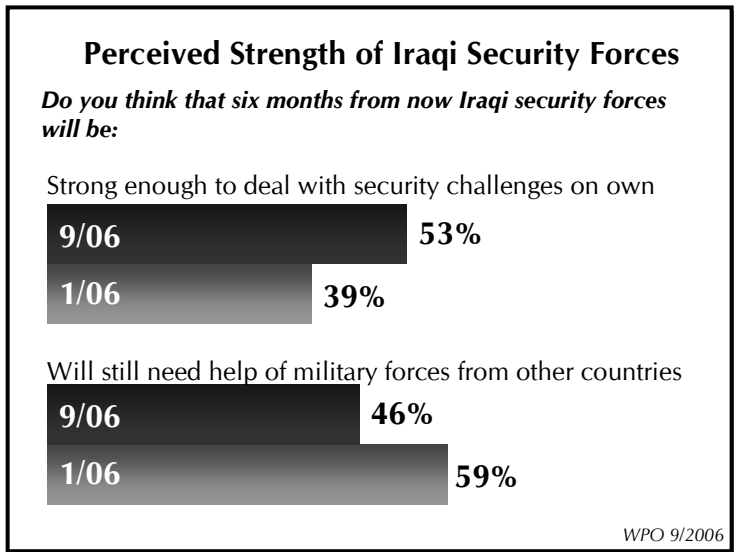
Similarly, 61 percent said that they think that if the US were to withdraw, “day-to-day security for ordinary Iraqis” would increase (a lot 23%, a little 38%). This was a view held by a large majority of Sunnis (78%), a substantial majority of Shias (57%) and even a plurality of Kurds (49% vs. 41% decrease).

While the overall percentages on these questions have not shifted substantially since January, there have been shifts within ethnic groups. Kurds’ belief that US withdrawal would lead to *increased* violence has dropped from 68 percent to 48 percent. More interestingly, Sunni and Shia confidence that violence would *decrease* has moderated, from 81 percent to 72 percent among the Sunnis and 64 percent to 57 percent among the Shias.

Growing Confidence in Iraqi Security Forces

Another factor that may be contributing to Iraqi’s readiness to have US-led forces leave is a growing confidence in Iraqi security forces. Asked to assess the readiness of Iraqi security forces to stand on their own in six months, 53 percent say that they “will be strong enough to deal with the security challenges Iraq will face” while 46 percent say they “will still need the help of military forces from other countries.”

When those who thought Iraqi security forces will still need the help of foreign forces six months were asked how much longer they thought this help would be needed, 9 percent (of the total sample) said one year, 21 percent two years and 16 percent three years. Thus 62 percent overall believe that Iraqi security forces will be able to stand on their own in one year.



This level of confidence is up from January, when only 39 percent thought Iraqi forces would be strong enough in six months and 59 percent said they would still need foreign help. This growth of confidence was foreshadowed by the optimism in January of an additional 21 percent saying they would be ready in one year and another 26 percent in two years.

The biggest part of this increase in confidence has come from Shias, 68 percent of whom now believe in the abilities of Iraqi forces—up from 45 percent in January. This view has grown among Kurds as well—up to 40 percent, from 22 percent in January, though 57 percent of Kurds still think foreign forces will be necessary. Sunnis, on the contrary, express declining confidence in Iraqi security forces. Confidence has dropped from 38 percent to 24 percent—reflecting perhaps their dissatisfaction with the ability of Iraqi security forces to protect them from attacks, or their perception of infiltration by militia groups.

A large majority expresses confidence in the Iraqi army. Sixty-four percent say they have some (40%) or a lot (24%) of confidence in the army. Interestingly, Kurds express the most confidence

with 79 percent saying they have some or a lot of confidence, followed by the Shias (65%). Even 46 percent of Sunnis express confidence, though more (54%) have little or no confidence.

Little Interest in Replacement By International Force

Among all ethnic groups there is little interest in the idea of replacing US-led forces with an international peacekeeping force, even if it is manned primarily by other Islamic countries. Respondents were asked what they would most favor over the next year and offered three options. Only 20 percent overall favored the idea of “replacing US-led forces with an international peacekeeping force mostly from Islamic countries,” with only slight variations between groups.

By far the most popular option—endorsed by 65%—was “withdrawing all foreign military forces from Iraq.” Three in four Shias and Sunnis endorsed this idea, but only one in four Kurds.

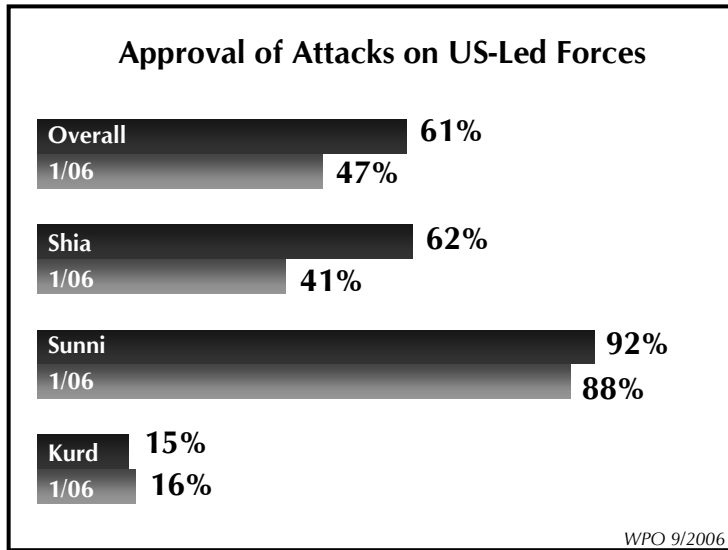
The option of “maintaining US-led forces in Iraq” was endorsed by a mere 14 percent, with Shia and Sunnis support being in single digits. However a plurality of Kurds (48%) favored it.

2. Attacks on US-led Forces

Support for attacks on US-led forces has grown to a majority position—now six in ten. Support appears to be related to widespread perception, held by all ethnic groups, that the US government plans to have permanent military bases in Iraq and would not withdraw its forces from Iraq even if the Iraqi government asked it to. If the US were to commit to withdraw, more than half of those who approve of attacks on US troops say that their support for attacks would diminish.

Support for attacks against US-led forces has increased sharply to 61 percent (27% strongly, 34% somewhat). This represents a 14-point increase from January 2006, when only 47 percent of Iraqis supported attacks.

This change is due primarily to a dramatic 21-point increase among Shias, whose approval of attacks has risen from 41 percent in January to 62 percent in September. A very large majority (86%) of Kurds disapprove of attacks (59% strongly), with only 15 percent supporting them. Kurdish disapproval is up slightly from January, when it was 81 percent, but approval of attacks has held constant. Similarly, Sunni support for attacks has remained relatively constant with 92 percent approving (up only slightly from 88% in January).



Though Sunnis still overwhelmingly approve of attacks, the intensity of their support has moderated somewhat. The percentage saying that they approve of attacks strongly has dropped from 77 percent

in January to 55 percent today. This may be related to the decline (mentioned above) in the size of the Sunni majority calling for withdrawal of US-led forces in six months.

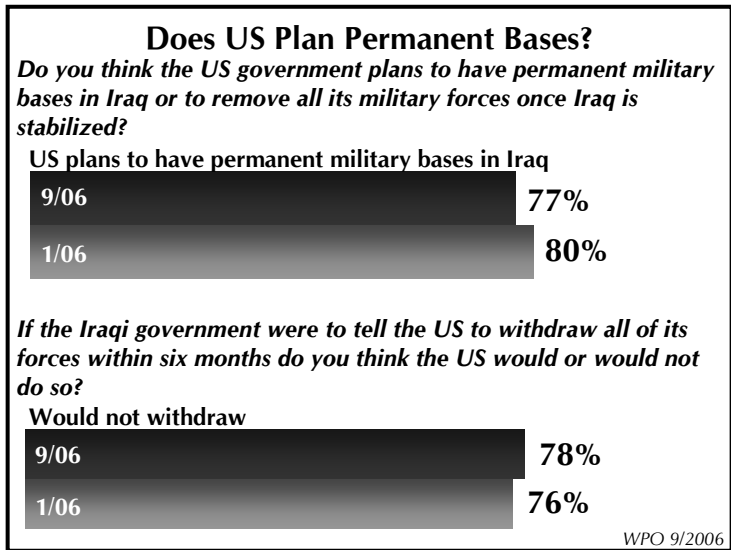
Belief that US Plans Permanent Bases in Iraq

Naturally the question arises: If only one in three Iraqis favors US withdrawal in the shortest possible time frame of six months, why then is support for attacks on US-led forces as high as 61 percent? Indeed, among those who approve of such attacks, only 50 percent favor withdrawal in six months—though another 37 percent favor it in a year.

It is always difficult to know why people have certain attitudes, but some findings are strongly suggestive. A large majority of Iraqis—and a majority in all ethnic groups-- believes that the US plans to maintain permanent military bases in Iraq and would not withdraw its forces if the Iraqi government asked it to. Among those who support attacks this belief is especially high, while those who do not support attacks mostly believe that it is not the case. This suggests that some Iraqis approve of such attacks, not because they are so eager for the US-led forces to get out immediately, but because they want to put pressure on the US to get out eventually.

Asked whether they think “the US government plans to have permanent military bases in Iraq or to remove all its military forces once Iraq is stabilized,” 77 percent of respondents say that the US plans to have permanent military bases. This view is held by a majority of Kurds (58%), as well as Shias (73%) and virtually all Sunnis (97%).

Perhaps more significant, approximately the same number—78%—believe that “If the new Iraqi government were to tell the US to withdraw all of its forces within six months,” the US would refuse to do so. Here again this view is held by a majority of all groups—64 percent of Kurds, 76 percent of Shias and 96 percent of Sunnis.



The belief that the US plans to have permanent bases in Iraq is highly correlated with support for attacks on US-led forces. Among those who believe this, 68 percent approve of attacks. Among those who believe that the US plans to withdraw once Iraq is stabilized, only 34 percent approve of attacks. Beliefs about whether the US would respond to an Iraqi government request to withdraw follow the same pattern.

There is also some evidence that if the US were to make a commitment to withdraw according to a timetable, support for attacks would diminish. The 61 percent who said they approved of attacks were asked: “If the US made a commitment to withdraw from Iraq according to a timetable, would you feel less supportive of attacks against US-led forces or would it make no difference?” Most of these—36% (of the full sample)—said that they would feel less supportive, while 23 percent said it would make no difference. Those saying they would feel less supportive included 43 percent of the Shias and 42 percent of the Sunnis.

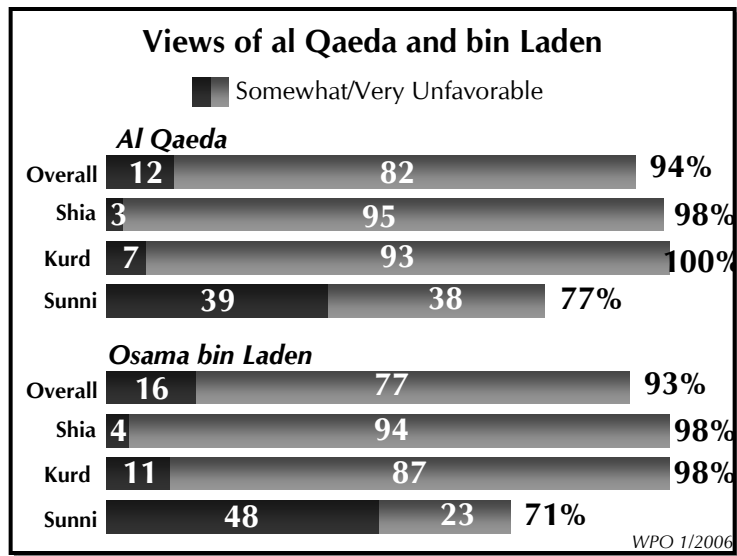
3. Views of Al Qaeda

Growing approval for attacks on US-led forces has not been accompanied by any significant support for al Qaeda. Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden are rejected by overwhelming majorities of Shias and Kurds and large majorities of Sunnis.

It may be easy to assume that as the Iraqi people become more supportive of attacks on US-led forces, they may grow warmer toward al Qaeda—the probable source of a significant number of attacks on US forces. However, this does not appear to be the case. Al Qaeda is exceedingly unpopular among the Iraqi people.

Overall 94 percent have an unfavorable view of al Qaeda, with 82 percent expressing a very unfavorable view. Of all organizations and individuals assessed in this poll, it received the most negative ratings. The Shias and Kurds show similarly intense levels of opposition, with 95 percent and 93 percent respectively saying they have very unfavorable views. The Sunnis are also quite negative, but with less intensity. Seventy-seven percent express an unfavorable view, but only 38 percent are very unfavorable. Twenty-three percent express a favorable view (5% very).

Views of Osama bin Laden are only slightly less negative. Overall 93 percent have an unfavorable view, with 77 percent very unfavorable. Very unfavorable views are expressed by 87 percent of Kurds and 94 percent of Shias. Here again, the Sunnis are negative, but less unequivocally—71 percent have an unfavorable view (23% very), and 29 percent a favorable view (3% very).



4. Non-military Forms of US Involvement

Majorities still approve of the US training Iraqi security forces and helping with community development, though most of these feel the US is doing a poor job. However, a modest majority now disapproves of the US being involved in mediating between ethnic groups. Were the US to agree to a timetable for the withdrawal of its forces Iraqis say their support for nonmilitary forms of US involvement in Iraq would increase.

Respondents were asked to assess non-military forms of US involvement in Iraq. Almost two-thirds (63%) continue to approve of the US training Iraqi security forces, though most of these (41% of the full sample) think the US is doing a poor job. Support is especially high among Shias (64%) and Kurds (93%) though only 19 percent of Shias say the US is doing a good job, as compared to 50 percent of Kurds. Sixty-four percent of Sunnis are opposed to the US being involved in this way.

Support has eroded somewhat from January, when 77 percent approved. The biggest change has come from Shias, whose support has dropped a sharp 25 points from 89 percent—perhaps part of a growing orientation to US disengagement. Interestingly, opposition among Sunnis has dropped 10

points from 74 percent—consistent with a general softening of intense opposition to all things American. The Kurds' strong support is unchanged.

A larger majority (68%) approves of the US "helping Iraqis organize their communities to address local needs such as building schools and health clinics." But here again most of these—41% (of the full sample)—believes that the US is doing a poor job. Here too support is strongest among Shias (71%) and Kurds (87%). Fifty-nine percent of Sunnis are opposed.

While overall changes in attitudes since January are not significant, there has been a 12 point drop in Shia approval (from 83% to 71%), and once again a sharp drop (21 points) in Sunni disapproval (from 80% to 59%). The Kurds' high approval has been unchanged.

A striking shift has occurred in regard to the US "helping to mediate between ethnic groups." While in January 65 percent approved of such US involvement, this has dropped sharply to 47 percent, with 52 percent disapproving. Furthermore, only 8 percent believe the US is doing a good job.

The biggest change occurred among Shias, with support dropping from 76 percent to 43 percent and opposition rising from 24 percent to 57 percent. But here again, Sunni opposition has softened from 81 percent to 70 percent. Kurdish support has been largely stable, now at 83 percent.

It appears that if the US were make a commitment to withdraw, support for nonmilitary forms of US involvement would increase. Those that expressed disapproval of any of the forms of nonmilitary involvement (65% of the sample) were asked, "If the US were to agree to a timetable for withdrawing its forces, would that make you more likely to approve of the US being involved in Iraq in these nonmilitary ways, or would it make no difference?" More than half of this group (37% of the full sample) said that it would make them more likely to approve of nonmilitary forms of US involvement, while 27 percent said it would make no difference.

Shias were especially responsive, with 45 percent saying that it would make them more supportive and 22 percent saying it would make no difference. Sunnis were more intransigent in their opposition, with 33 percent saying that it would make them more supportive and 50 percent saying that it would make not difference. Kurds were largely supportive in the first place.

VIEWS OF THE SITUATION IN IRAQ

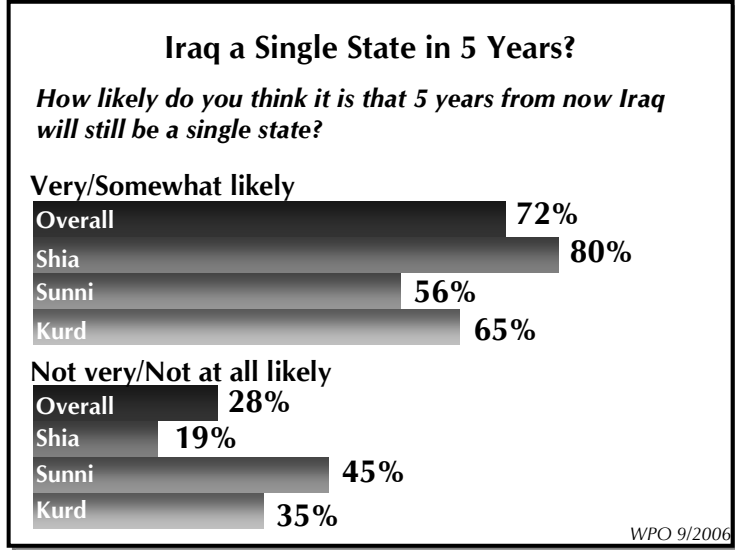
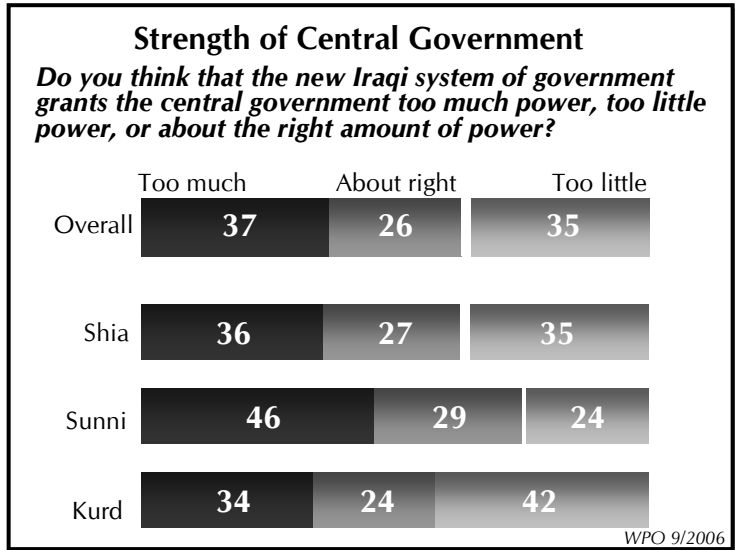
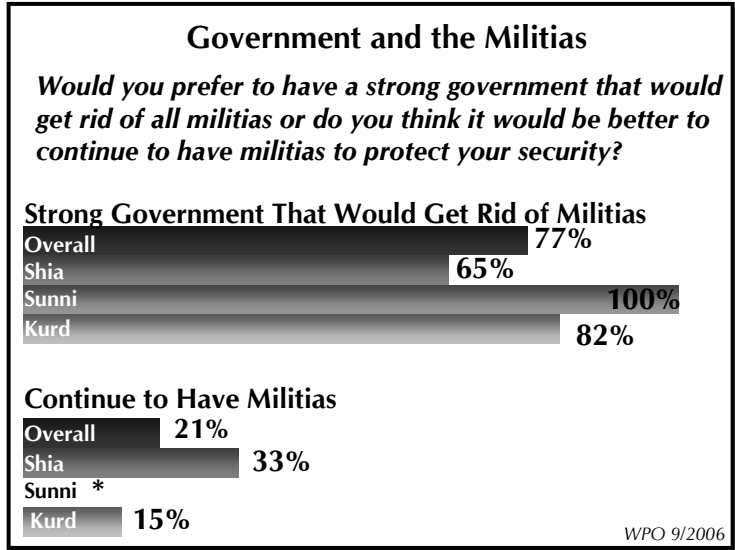
5. Support for Strong Central Government, Not Militias

Iraqis appear to agree on having a strong central government. Large majorities among all groups want the government to get rid of the militias. Majorities of all groups do not favor a movement toward a looser confederation and believe that five years from now Iraq will still be a single state. A large majority sees the current government as the legitimate representative of the Iraqi people.

Though Iraqis express widespread negativity about the US presence in Iraq, there are some encouraging signs for the future of the Iraqi government. Reports of conflict in Iraq may give the impression that the central government is so weak and unpopular that Iraq is on the verge of fragmenting into a very loose confederation if not complete partition, and that major sectors of the population are aligning themselves with militias out of a widespread lack of confidence in the central government. However, the findings of the poll suggest quite a different and more positive picture.

The militias appear to be quite unpopular and very large majorities of all groups favor a strong government that would get rid of the militias. Just 21 percent overall—and a minority of all groups—say that they think “it would be better to continue to have militias to protect [their] security.” Rather, 77 percent overall say that they would “prefer to have a strong government that would get rid of all militias.” This view is held by 82 percent of Kurds, 65 percent of Shias and an extraordinary 100 percent of Sunnis.

Iraqis appear to agree on having a strong central government rather than changing the present system in favor of a looser confederation. Asked whether “the new Iraqi system of government grants the central government too much power, too little power, or about the right amount of power,” only 37 percent overall say that it grants too much power. The group with the largest percentage holding this view is the Sunnis, but still this is a minority of 46 percent. Overall 61 percent say that the central government is granted too little power (35%) or about the right amount of power



(26%). Interestingly, it is the Kurds who have the highest percentage (42%) saying that the central government has too little power.

Iraqis also express confidence that Iraq will survive as a single state. Asked, “How likely do you think it is that five years from now Iraq will still be a single state?” 72 percent overall say that it is very (30%) or somewhat likely (42%), while just 28 percent say it is not very likely (24%) or not at all likely (4%). Majorities of all groups express this confidence, including 80 percent of Shias, 65 percent of Kurds, and 56 percent of Sunnis.

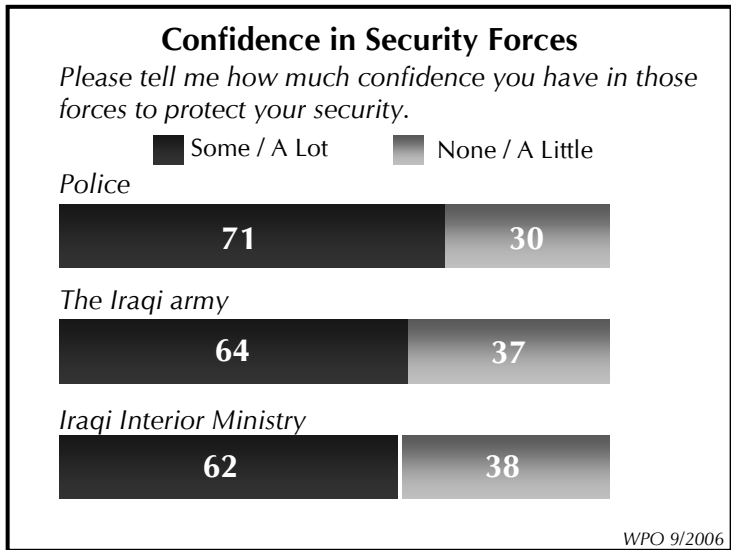
Most Iraqis (65%) see the current Iraqi government as “the legitimate representative of the Iraqi people.” However, while 82 percent of Shias and 76 percent of Kurds feel this way, 86 percent of Sunnis do not.

6. Confidence in Government and Security Forces

Overall, a large majority expresses confidence in the Maliki government, the Iraqi army, Iraqi interior ministry forces and the police. Sunnis have complex and seemingly conflicting attitudes about the government and its security institutions.

Despite Iraq’s troubles, a large majority expresses confidence in the government led by Prime Minister Nouri Maliki. Sixty-three percent say that “in its effort to deal with Iraq’s problems,” the government is doing a very good job (17%) or a somewhat good job (46%).

Large majorities also express confidence in Iraqi government forces’ ability to protect their security. As mentioned above, 64 percent say they have some (40%) or a lot (24%) of confidence in the Iraqi army. Though controversy has swirled around Interior Ministry forces, they fare only a little less well, with 62 percent expressing some (34%) or a lot (28%) of confidence. For the police, 71 percent express some (34%) or a lot (37%) of confidence.



Perhaps most significantly, when asked “Do you feel that if all militias were to disarm now, that you could or could not rely on the government alone to ensure security in your area?” a large 68 percent say they feel they could.

Complex Sunni Attitudes

While Shias and Kurds are similar in their confidence in Iraqi security forces and approval of the performance of the Maliki government, Sunnis express more complex attitudes. On one hand, a large 93 percent say that if all the militias were to disarm, they could rely on the government to ensure their security, and a striking 100 percent would “prefer to have a strong government that would get rid of all militias.”

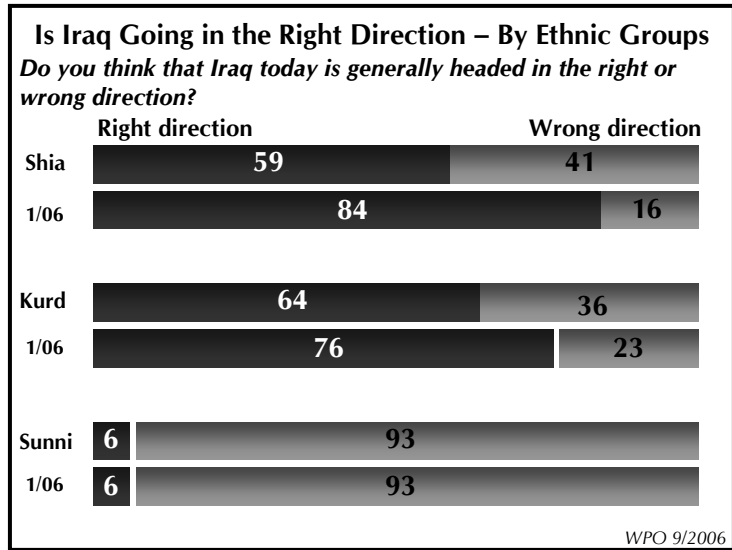
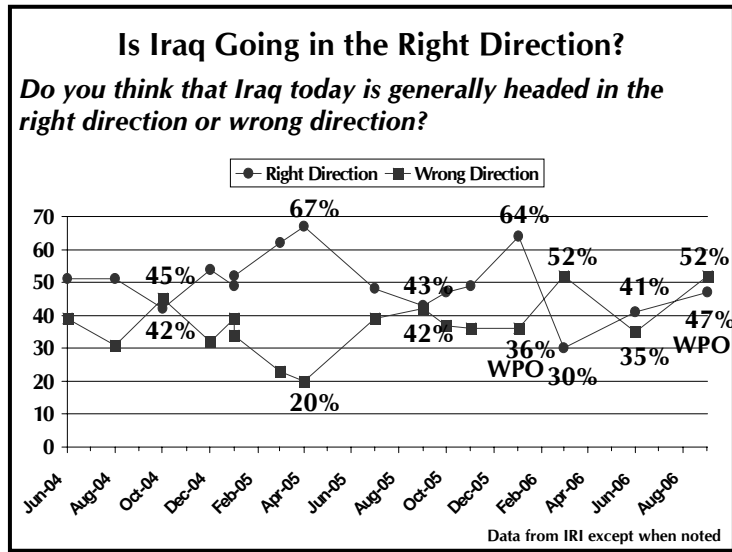
On the other hand, Sunnis express low confidence in the Iraqi government and its security institutions. Eighty-two percent say that the Maliki government is doing a bad job. Seventy-six percent say that they have no confidence at all in the Iraqi Interior Ministry forces (often reputed to be a Shia stronghold) and 77 percent express little or no confidence in the police to protect their security. The only institution that engenders a bit of confidence is the army (perhaps because it is under a Sunni defense minister), for which 46 percent of Sunnis say they have at least some confidence, though 54 percent say they have little or no confidence.

This seeming contradiction may be explained as follows. Sunnis support a strong central government in principle and would like to see the government get rid of the militias, most of which pose a threat to the Sunnis. At the same time, the dominance of Shias in the government, and especially its security institutions, do not engender full confidence in Sunnis that they will be protected and remind them of their continuing resentment that they were displaced as the dominant ethnic group.

7. Mood of the Nation

The continuing strife and instability in Iraq has diminished optimism among the Iraqi people. While Shias and Kurds still say that the country is headed in the right direction, these majorities have diminished and the Sunnis continue to almost unanimously say it is going in the wrong direction. Overall, the belief that Iraq is headed in the wrong direction is at a high point and now a slight majority. Majorities of all groups do not think that the level of violence will diminish in the near future. The belief that ousting Saddam Hussein was worth the hardships entailed is down sharply, but very large majorities of Shia and Kurds continue to believe that it was worth it.

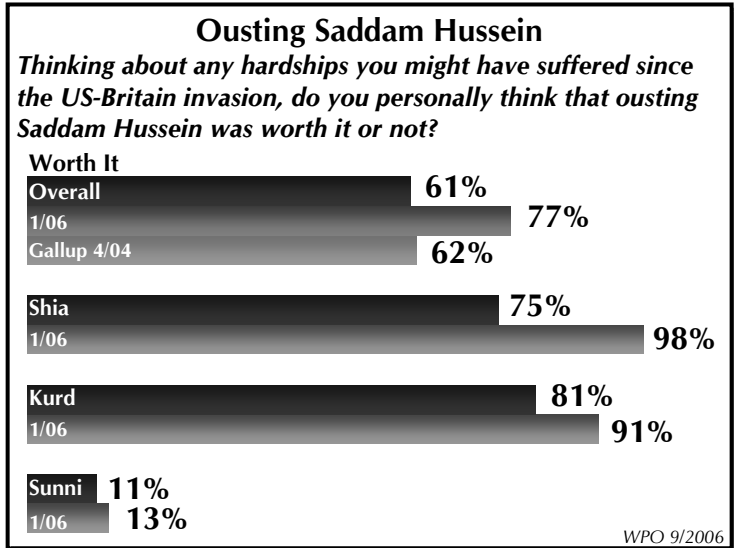
The conflict and instability in Iraq has taken its toll. A majority of Shias (59%) and Kurds (64%) continue to say that the country is going in the right direction, but these numbers are down sharply from January when 84 percent of Shias and 76 percent of Kurds expressed optimism. Combined with the unchanged 93 percent of Sunnis saying that the country is going in the wrong direction, a slight majority of Iraqis (52%) now say that the country is headed in the wrong direction—one of the highest recorded in a long series of polls asking this question.



Majorities of all ethnic groups believe that six months from now the level of violence will be the same or higher than it is today. Overall, 31 percent expect the violence to be about the same and 30 percent expect it to be higher; only 38 percent think it will go down. Sunnis are the most pessimistic, with only 23 percent believing that the violence will go down and 43 percent assuming that it will rise.

Ousting Saddam Hussein

A majority of Iraqis (61%) still believe that ousting Saddam Hussein was worth the hardships they might have suffered, however this is down sharply from the 77 percent who said this in January. Among Shias, the majority saying that was worth it has slipped from 98 percent to 75 percent, while among the Kurds it has dropped from 91 percent to 81 percent; the minorities saying it was not worth it has gone up to 23 percent among Shias and 18 percent among Kurds. The number of Sunnis saying it was not worth it has drifted upward from 83 percent to 89 percent, with only 11 percent saying that it was worth it.



However it should be noted that the current level of belief that Saddam’s ouster was worth the hardships is more consistent with previous findings by Gallup in 2004. The January 2006 finding of 77% may have been influenced by optimism over the election in December 2005.

8. Attacks on Iraqis

Attacks on government security forces and civilians continue to be rejected by very large majorities of all groups. There are differing perceptions of the source of such attacks. The majority of Sunnis think that attacks on Sunni civilians mainly come from other Iraqis, while Shias and Kurds believe they come from foreign fighters. A majority of all groups agree that attacks on Shias mostly come from foreign fighters. Majorities of all groups believe that the intent of violence against ethnic groups is to drive them from their neighborhoods, so that a militia can solidify its power.

Attacks on government security forces and civilians continue to be rejected by overwhelming majorities of all groups, just as they were in January. Ninety-six percent disapprove of attacks on Iraqi government security forces, and 68 percent disapprove strongly. One hundred percent disapprove of attacks on civilians (97% strongly).

Sunnis are a little less emphatic in their opposition to attacks on Iraqi security forces: while 86 percent disapprove, only 29 percent disapprove strongly. Fourteen percent approve somewhat of these attacks, but only 1 percent expresses strong approval. However, Sunnis are no different in their total opposition to attacks on civilians, with 99 percent disapproving (95% strongly).

There are substantial variations in the perceptions of who is perpetrating attacks on Iraqi civilians. Respondents were asked in two separate questions whether they thought attacks on Sunni civilians, and on Shia civilians, mainly come from foreign fighters or from other Iraqis.

When it came to attacks on Sunni civilians the majority of Sunnis (69%) thought the attacks mainly came from other Iraqis—presumably by Shia death squads. However the majority of Shias (63%) thought these attacks were primarily coming from foreign fighters, and a modest majority of Kurds (52%) agreed.

When it came to attacks on Shia civilians a majority of Shia (57%) thought that the attacks were primarily coming from foreign fighters. A large majority of Kurds (63%) and a modest majority of Sunnis (53%) agreed. This may be influenced by claims al Qaeda in Iraq has made about attacks on Shias.

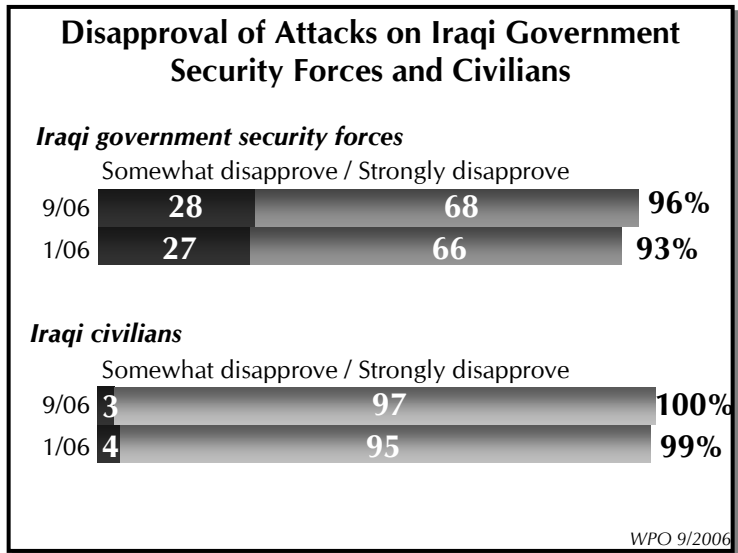
Majorities of all groups believe that the intent of violence against ethnic groups is to drive them from their neighborhoods, so that a militia can solidify its power. Overall, two-thirds (67%) ascribed “some” (39%) or “most” (28%) of the violence against ethnic groups to this purpose; 76 percent of Shias, 56 percent of Sunnis, and 52 percent of Kurds held this view.

9. Views of Shia Leaders

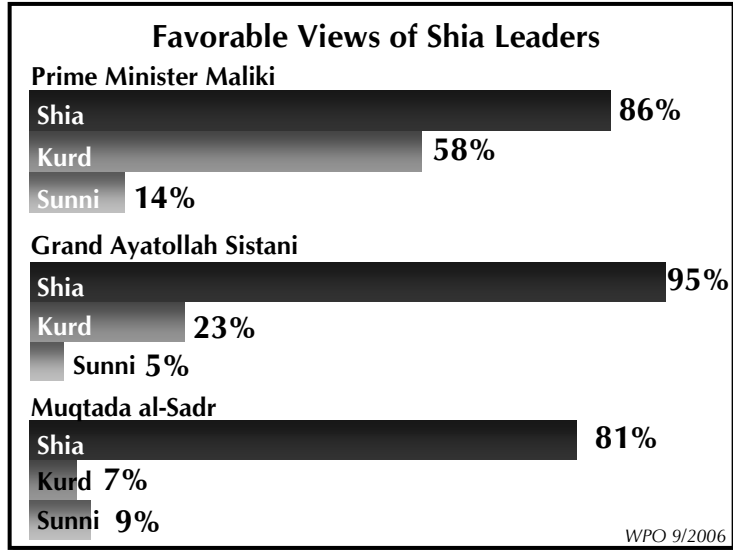
Prime Minister Maliki is viewed favorably by Kurds as well as Shias, but not at all by Sunnis. Grand Ayatollah Sistani and Muqtada al Sadr are quite divisive figures: overwhelmingly endorsed by Shias and overwhelmingly rejected by both Kurds and Sunnis.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is the only major Shia leader with appeal that reaches beyond his own ethnic group. Fifty-eight percent of Kurds view him favorably, as do 86 percent of Shias (45% very). However, an overwhelming 85 percent of Sunnis view him unfavorably (48% very).

Though Grand Ayatollah Sistani and Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr are quite at odds with each other on the direction of Iraq, they both get overwhelming support from Shias. Sistani is seen favorably by 95 percent of Shias (77% very), while Muqtada al-Sadr is viewed favorably by 81 percent (52% very).



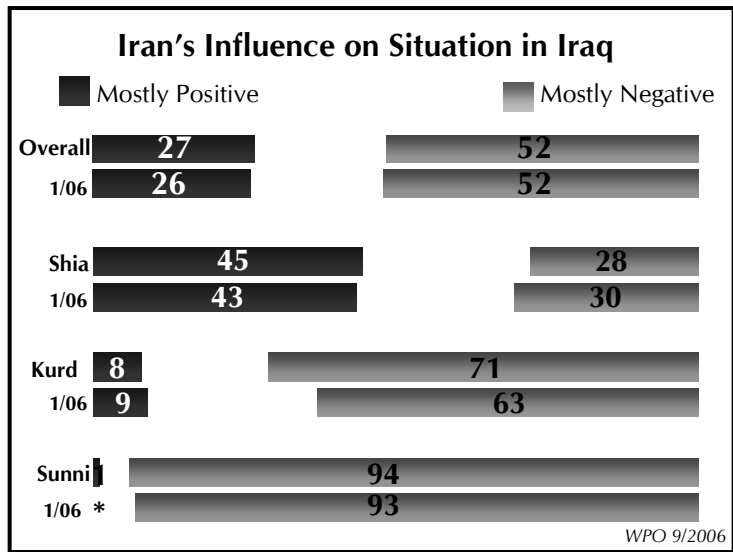
However, neither are viewed favorably by Kurds or Sunnis. Sistani is viewed unfavorably by 78 percent of Kurds (39% very) and 95 percent of Sunnis (50% very). Muqtada al-Sadr is viewed unfavorably by 94 percent of Kurds (75% very) and 91 percent of Sunnis (80% very).



10. Regional Actors: Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah

Shias have mildly positive views of Iran and its President, while Kurds and Sunnis have strongly negative views. Shias and Kurds have mostly negative views of Syria, while Sunnis are mildly positive. Shias have overwhelmingly positive views of Hezbollah, while Kurds and Sunnis have negative views.

Some observers fear that with the ascension of Shias to a dominant role in Iraq, there is potential for the formation of an alliance between Iraq and Shia-dominated Iran. This poll does not suggest any such proclivities in Iraqi public opinion, as Shias show only mildly positive attitudes toward Iran, while Kurds and Sunnis are quite negative. Asked whether Iran is having a mostly positive or negative influence on the situation in Iraq, just 45 percent of Shias say it is having a positive influence (negative 28%, neutral 27%), while Iran’s influence is viewed a mostly negative by large majorities of Kurds (71%) and Sunnis (94%).



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad does a bit better among Shias, with 64 percent having a very (28%) or somewhat (36%) favorable view. But Kurds have a largely unfavorable view (very 43%, somewhat 34%) and the Sunnis an exceedingly unfavorable view (very 80%, somewhat 17%).

While some have expressed fears of Syria being a link in an emerging Shia crescent (though very few Syrians are Shia), public opinion in Iraq would hardly be the cement. Most Shias (68%) think Syria is having a negative influence on Iraq’s situation, as do most Kurds (63%). Sunnis are only mildly positive, with 41 percent having a favorable view (17% negative, 43% neutral).

Hezbollah elicits highly polarized views. An overwhelming 91 percent of Shias have a very (50%) or somewhat favorable (41%) view of Hezbollah, while an equally large 93 percent of Kurds have a very (64%) or somewhat (29%) unfavorable view. Sunnis are also fairly negative, with 59 percent having a very (10%) or somewhat (49%) unfavorable view.

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