

IRAQI VOICES

Perspectives on Sectarianism and Governance

**Findings from Focus Groups with Iraqi Men and Women
(Conducted October and November, 2006)**

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Preface

In 2005, as political parties proliferated, violence persisted, a constitution was drafted and Iraqis voted in three elections, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) conducted several rounds of focus group research to help guide its involvement in Iraq. The autumn of 2005 was a particularly intense time: the constitution was ratified in October and elections for a permanent government were held in December, offering hope for a new beginning after decades of dictatorship and years of war. However, the February 2006 bombing of the Askaryia Mosque in Samara accelerated and intensified the cycle of sectarian strife, and the ensuing year has been dominated by a new level of violence that has come to define life in Iraq, at least for now. NDI undertook this series of focus groups in order to better understand the outlook and attitudes of ordinary Iraqis toward the events they are witnessing and the prospect that politics may yet prevail.

Twenty-four focus groups were conducted between October and November, 2006 with a representative selection of citizens in nine provinces of Iraq (Basrah, Baghdad, Erbil, Anbar, Babil, Kirkuk, Mosul, Najaf, and Suleymaniyah). In total, 18 sessions were conducted in urban settings and six in rural areas. The purpose of this report is to summarize and convey the main findings of the research in an objective and organized manner in order to maximize the impact of ordinary Iraqi voices on NDI programming and on the debates surrounding their country's future.

Method. Focus groups are semi-structured group interviews that proceed according to a research design that includes careful recruitment of participants and a pre-set discussion guide. Focus group research is a qualitative method used to explore ideas and attitudes, and help us to understand language, motivation and values. Unlike polling, a quantitative method in which a representative sample of a population enables data to be projected to the entire population, focus group participants are not statistically representative of the larger population. Groups are usually recruited to be as homogeneous as possible for two reasons: to clarify the views held by a particular sub-group of the population and to enhance the comfort level of participants, so they feel they are among peers and that everyone can express an opinion. These focus groups were stratified according to gender, ethnicity and sect.

About the Research. Conditions in Iraq make it difficult to conduct opinion research of any type. The violence does not allow for on-site management and observation of focus group sessions throughout the country by NDI staff and consultants, so we rely heavily on our regional partner to implement the research design under our direction, and help us understand the nuances of the findings to the greatest degree possible. Our distance from the actual discussions constrains our ability to interpret certain findings and has inevitable implications for the final product. To avoid the distortions that can come from reporting on themes and comments that emerge in one group, when reporting on sensitive or potentially controversial findings, we typically look for evidence in multiple groups. General terms such as "Iraqis," "citizens," "Sunnis," "Shia," etc. as well as references to what "most" of a particular subgroup think or say are used in this report as a convenience to represent the attitudes of the participants in our research, and not necessarily everyone in their demographic grouping.

Every phase of the project was a team effort. As in 2005, we partnered with KA Research Ltd. to recruit, moderate, transcribe, and translate the sessions. Beginning in 2003, KA established local facilities and cultivated indigenous moderators and interviewers, usually professionals in academia and psychology. Without this infrastructure and the collaborative working relationship we have developed, this research would not have been possible. KA's senior staff contributed greatly to our understanding of the results, and to this report.

David Dougherty, an opinion research consultant, oversaw the design of the research framework and discussion guide, the supervision of our regional partner, and the drafting of the report. NDI Senior Program Assistant Megan Doherty kept the process organized and moving forward and contributed greatly to the writing and editing of the report. NDI's political party team in Baghdad, led until recently by Julie Hughes, conceived of and took the lead in implementing the research. Julie's commitment to listening to Iraqis as well as talking to them is responsible for the creation of an ongoing research program and ensures that results are brought to bear where they matter most – on the ground in Iraq. That determination inspires NDI's effort to work with Iraqi democrats in their country in which Andi Parhamovich, a member of NDI Iraq's field staff, and three of our security personnel lost their lives on January 17, 2007. We acknowledge their loss with great sadness.

Executive Summary

Life in Iraq

1. The view that the country is in terrible and worsening shape is virtually universal. What typically distinguishes one group from another is the tenor of the commentary and the assignment of blame. The few non-Kurdish Iraqis, mostly conservative Shia, who claim that the country is moving in the right direction, express their satisfaction in terms of ideological and intangible developments such as democracy and freedom of religion, instead of concrete improvements to their daily lives.

2. Only among Kurds are there positive words for the current direction and future prospects for progress and peace; however, it is clear that these comments apply to the predominantly-Kurdish north, not to Iraq itself.

Public Figures

3. Support for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is tempered among secular and, to some extent, moderate Shia by suspicions of his methods and motives. Some of the more conservative Shia also express doubts about al-Maliki's sincerity and steadfastness; however, most articulate ardent support, asserting the Prime Minister is trying to improve Iraq, but that he inherited an impossible situation and his efforts are obstructed by interference and resistance from his enemies inside and outside of government. Kurdish views of the Prime Minister are based on their ethnic interests and seem almost divorced from the prospects of the country at large. Sunni participants have little regard for al-Maliki or his policies.

4. Kurds discuss Iraqi President Jalal Talabani in affectionate terms; for the lack of tangible accomplishments they blame "terrorism" or "the situation." Arab Sunnis and Shia view him as an ethnic leader, committed to the interests of Kurds and the establishment of a Kurdish state.

5. Support for Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shiite cleric and militia leader, appears almost as a litmus test among Shia participants, dividing supportive conservatives and ambivalent moderates to the point of having to recess more than one focus group session to allow tempers to cool. Moderate and secular Iraqis criticize al-Sadr mostly for his connection to militia violence, seeing him as either unwilling or unable to control the Mahdi Army. Al-Sadr's centrality is evidenced by the fact that even some Arab Sunnis salute his resistance to the occupation, even as they make it clear that they regard him as a source and symbol of all that is bad in Iraq today.

6. As Iraqi society becomes ever more polarized and violent, the credible, nonsectarian former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi appeals not only to secular participants but also to some moderate Sunnis and Shia who refer to his brief tenure in office as if it were "the good old days" in comparison to current conditions. Discussion of Allawi fails to generate the same visceral, emotional reactions provoked by al-Sadr and to a lesser extent, al-Maliki. Allawi's Baathist history, American connections, approval of the

attacks on Fallujah and Najaf, and frequent absence from Iraq give every group more than one reason to distrust him.

7. Vice-President Tariq Al-Hashemi is largely unknown and undefined among most groups. Many members of his own Sunni base lack enough information about al-Hashemi to pass judgment, while others suspect him for his deal-making on the constitution and other political matters, claiming he is only interested in gaining power.

Government & Governance

8. Attitudes toward the current government, and its future prospects, track closely with attitudes toward the Prime Minister himself. Shia are divided: most acknowledge that the government has been unable to deal with the deteriorating security conditions, and the more secular Shia criticize the al-Maliki government's sectarian nature. While defenders offer numerous explanations for the government's failures, full-throated support and specific claims of progress are rare.

9. Even those Sunnis who are not severely critical of the government as discriminatory, corrupt, and complicit in the militia violence, fault the government for its inability or unwillingness to address the declining security situation. There is a strong undercurrent of suspicion that the government supports the operation of Shia 'death squads' and is complicit in forced migration, as part of a wider conspiracy to impose federalism on the country.

10. As to whether this is truly a government of national unity, the best that can be said is that it is representative and elected. Virtually no one argues that the government's policies are sound and broad-based or that it looks after the interests of all Iraqis in an evenhanded way.

11. A question comparing the three successive governments that have held power since 2004 was answered as if it were "Which government was best for you and the interests of your ethnic group or sect?" Arab Sunnis either claim that there is no meaningful distinction among the governments or that the Ayad Allawi government was preferable for its nonsectarian conduct and relative success in the security sector. Kurds are somewhat more likely to support the al-Maliki government as they play a role in the governing coalition and see merit in the national unification project, but many see no difference – often perceiving their regional government as more relevant to their daily lives and affairs. Conservative Shia generally defend the current government, while the more moderate, and certainly the secular are critical for generally the same reasons as their Sunni counterparts.

12. Shia and Kurds are more likely than Sunnis to view the Council of Representatives (CoR) positively; however, their praise is usually related to what the body represents— a democratic institution of which they are in charge – rather than what it is able to accomplish. Among Sunni participants, the CoR, is often seen as an illegitimate body in which they, as Sunnis, are inadequately represented and unfairly treated by the majority.

13. Within all major groups we find a common element of democratic politics: suspicion and criticism of elected officials. Positive feelings toward the Parliament do not preclude criticism of its members for looking out for themselves rather than the public good, spending time outside the country rather than working to make it safe for everyone and bickering over petty matters rather than brokering policies to address public concerns.

14. The notion that regional councils are better suited to service delivery at the local level than the national government and its ministries enjoys both intuitive appeal and public support. Most respondents say that regional councils are more effective because they are more connected and responsive to the people in their localities.

Political Parties

15. Party membership tends to define public officials more than their title or position; consequently, Iraqis assume that parties hold considerable sway over policy and direction, and that public decisions are inherently political and, hence, suspect. It is therefore clear, given the horrendous conditions on the ground that parties are seen as prolonging problems instead of working toward solutions.

16. There is an increasing tendency across the political spectrum to see parties as playing a critical, consistently negative role in the security situation. The prevalence of party-affiliated militias lead many focus group participants to say that parties are contributing to the violence rather than working to diffuse tensions or promote peace.

Sectarianism

17. Iraqis recognize sectarianism as the biggest factor undermining the stability of their state. Almost all of the participants argue that people who are using religion in politics are not honest politicians but rather corrupt opportunists who are in a deliberate search for political power. In keeping with the atomization of Iraqi society and attitudes along ethnic and religious lines, Iraqis who see too much intrusion of religion on public affairs are usually referring to the “others” and those who think more religion would tame the inclination toward violence almost always mean their own religion. Women’s lives in particular are affected by the pervasion of religion throughout Iraqi society, as women are increasingly pressured to conform to conservative dress codes and lifestyles.

18. The essentially religious nature of Iraqi society is reflected in a belief, observed across sects, that religious leaders can and should *diffuse* sectarian tensions, promote peace and cooperation. Sunni, Shia, and even secular Iraqis all recognize the influence and importance of religious figures, stressing the desire to see this influence exerted for the national good.

19. The absence of effective government and political authority pushes many otherwise moderate Iraqis toward religion. In an environment of crisis and deprivation, Iraqis increasingly gravitate towards religious-affiliated organizations and parties, as they remain among the only entities that are able to provide security and services. Other secular Iraqis frequently incline toward religion for fear of being targeted by extremist militias.

Principal Findings

Life in Iraq

One year after the passage of a constitution and the election of a permanent government, Iraqi focus group participants exude frustration regarding their living conditions and the state of affairs in their country that borders at times on despair. Measured expressions of hope and optimism found in earlier research have largely been replaced by words of disillusionment and suspicion. The needs and concerns of the Iraqi people have not changed -- they are as pronounced as ever and worsening over time.

The view that the country is in terrible and worsening shape is virtually universal. What typically distinguishes one group from another is the tenor of the commentary and the assignment of blame. The few non-Kurdish Iraqis, mostly conservative Shia, who claim that the country is moving in the right direction, express their satisfaction in terms of ideological and intangible developments such as democracy and freedom of religion, instead of concrete improvements to their daily lives. Most of them mention the lack of security and services, unemployment and sectarian violence - which many say borders on and is likely to become a full civil war - as the defining characteristics of Iraq today.

Discussions with Iraqi Sunnis reveal an intense and unabated pessimism. When it comes to lay the responsibility on someone's shoulders, the options are infinite: the government, Shia religious men, the occupation, and neighboring countries are all seen as culpable for the adverse conditions. Some Sunnis blame all Iraqis who failed to stand up to the invasion and occupation.

"I find Iraq now in its worst situation and things are moving continuously in the wrong direction." (Sunni Man, 48, Fallujah)

"People are responsible because from the beginning they had left their guns and didn't fight the occupation." (Sunni Woman, 31, Ramadi)

"It is not only the government that is responsible to the people, but also the people are responsible for the deteriorating situation. They must support the government for it to achieve its tasks successfully." (Sunni Woman, 40, Mosul)

"Everything is moving in the wrong direction because of many reasons like the deterioration of the security situation, domination of sectarianism and the intervention of neighboring countries especially Iran which has a greater role than the occupation itself and its aims are mean and aggressive towards Sunnis." (Sunni Woman, 24, Fallujah)

"I believe that the occupation and its supporters are responsible for this, but I think that religious men are more responsible than the occupation." (Sunni Woman, 40, Baghdad)

"We are just going to funerals to fulfill duties and the black signboards which are filling the streets and on those signboards are the names of the young martyrs." (Sunni Man, 30, Baghdad)

Shia and Kurds seem able to look back to the oppression and discrimination they suffered under Saddam's regime and take comfort in the fact that those days are over. For the undeniably dire state of affairs in the country, Kurds tend to blame either the current government or remnants of the Baath Party.

"The government now is much better than before because the Baathist government was practicing killing violence and dictatorship on people. Now many people think that the current chaos is the price of liberty, everyday many people are killed, and now after four years everything is deteriorating more and more." (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 26, Suleymaniyah)

"I find things are going in the right direction especially, because we have got rid of an oppressive dictator regime." (Sunni Kurdish Man, 44, Suleymaniyah)

"I believe that Iraq is moving in the right direction and these problems will be solved, the most important thing is that we got rid of the previous dictator regime, which was a harsh regime that had oppressed us for 35 year, and the current problems are resulted from the new experience for Iraqis as well as the intervention of neighboring countries. When we have a strong government, able to deal with these problems, we will live peacefully." (Sunni Kurdish Man, 30, Suleymaniyah)

"I believe that everything is moving in the wrong direction in Iraq because of terrorism and Baathists, remnants of the previous regime are responsible for the deteriorated situation." (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 30, Erbil)

"I believe that things are going in the wrong direction, each day the situation becomes worse, there are no security or stability, and there is lack of the basic life needs and rights, and the government is responsible for this situation." (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 25, Kirkuk)

Only among Kurds are there positive words for the current direction and future prospects for progress and peace. However, the most notable aspect of Kurdish commentary is the deepening disconnect between Kurds and the rest of Iraq. It becomes clear that their optimism is connected to the relative stability of conditions in the north and their separation from the chaos of central and southern Iraq. Many Kurds directly state that they think of themselves as being in a different situation than the rest of the country.

"Iraq is moving in the wrong direction because of the lack of security and the spread of terrorism to include all groups and ethnics but here in Kurdistan things are different as security is prevalent." (Sunni Kurdish Man, 30, Suleymaniyah)

"Religion is affecting politics in the southern part of Iraq and this effect is too much, but this is not happening in Kurdistan." (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 35, Erbil)

"We have a sectarian civil war especially in the Southern part of the country. Here in Kurdistan we don't find any of this because we have an experience of 16 years in democracy and freedom." (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 24, Suleymaniyah)

“Sectarianism is not present in Kurdistan, but it is strongly present in the Iraqi Council of Representatives. I believe that sectarianism is the reason behind the problems of Iraq including killing Kurds in the central part of the country, and the sectarian war between Shia and Sunnis.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 32, Erbil)

While Shia participants evince a wider range of perspectives on life in Iraq, few make convincingly positive statements regarding the general situation in the country. The Shia who express optimism point to local reconstruction projects and the demise of the oppressive Hussein regime as reasons for having a hopeful outlook. The fact that Nouri Al-Maliki, a man who was in exile during that dark period, is now the Prime Minister of Iraq makes some participants satisfied enough that they seem able to accept the current chaos as a tolerable price to pay on the way to freedom and political power; however, most Shia couch broadly positive assessments in terms of ideas such as democracy, representative government, and freedom of religion, rather than elusive improvements in day to day life.

“Things move in a right direction, everything is improving because of the domination of democracy and freedom as well as an elected government.” (Shia Woman, 23, Najaf)

“Things are moving in the right direction and our hard days are the cost for getting rid of Saddam's regime.” (Shia Man, 24, Baghdad)

“Things are neither very good nor very bad, for example reconstruction, services such as paving roads are going in the right direction. The security condition in the country is going in the wrong direction.” (Shia Man, 19, Hillah)

“We know the constitution that will be applied soon... We hope for federalism to be implemented, because this will defeat the terrorism. People will enjoy their resources and we should always remember that we got rid of Saddam's regime and we, as Shia, should not spoil this good thing and by the will of God our enemies will not be able to defeat us.” (Shia Man, 21, Baghdad)

“Yes, the only thing is the freedom of expressing opinions especially through out elections.” (Shia Woman, 21, Najaf)

However, the chronic violence and deprivation that characterize Iraq today are the overwhelming reality for Shia participants, and bitterness and frustration are evident in their comments.

“The negative things are many and first of all; the lack of security which is a problem that cannot be solved and we feel that we will die soon. We can not depend on anyone in solving this problem.” (Shia Woman, 25, Baghdad)

“Things are going in a wrong direction because of the security deterioration and the high number of terrorist in different forms, as well as the sectarian migration, lack of services and stealing and robbery.” (Shia Man, 35, Baghdad)

“First, there is no security and members of the government are not cooperating with each other.” (Shia Woman, 25, Najaf)

“The occupation is responsible and we found that it creates excuses to attack our city and other cities in Baghdad and destroying everything good in them.” (Shia Man, 46, Baghdad)

“Things are going in the wrong direction as the country is losing track day by day in all aspects like security, economics, social life, unemployment, spreading corruption and ignorance like the weak technology and teaching. The responsible for that is the government.” (Shia Man, 25, Hillah)

“The government is working for good things but there are many negative things and many political parties and groups don’t like to improve the country, so that everything is dark.” (Shia Man, 25, Basrah)

It is interesting to note that a number of focus group participants, both Sunni and Shia, volunteer comments on technological growth as a positive recent development in Iraq. However, as the exchanges below from Ramadi and Baghdad illustrate, for Sunnis, technological advances are merely new instruments of persecution.

“The only positive thing is the technological development with the introduction of mobile phones and satellite receivers.” (Sunni Woman, 42, Ramadi)

“But this technology is being used against us.” (Sunni Woman, 43, Ramadi)

“There were positive things like the modern technology which entered the country like mobile, internet and satellite.” (Sunni Man, 33, Baghdad)

“But these aren't blessing as you think but it is wrath. As the mobile became a means of spy, the internet corrupted our youth as they didn't use it correctly, the satellite corrupted manners.” (Sunni Man, 44, Baghdad)

While Shia participants are generally more enthusiastic about the technological developments in Iraq, most still assert these advances are undermined or nullified by security conditions.

“There are some positive aspects like introduction of the internet and satellite channels, and improvement in living standard of some families. But all of these do not worth killing or torture of one person. If they give us everything in the western countries for killing us and force us to migrate, we will not accept; there are many internet cafés which were exploded and many satellite channels which are prevented from working.” (Shia Woman, 19, Baghdad)

“Now we have freedom of expressing opinions and there are many newspapers and satellite channels that inform people about what is going on around the world. The satellite receivers are available for most Iraqi families, but there are some negativities represented by the presence of militias that are limiting the development of the country.” (Shia Man, 31, Najaf)

Public Figures

In keeping with the increased polarization of Iraqi society, opinions of public figures and institutions break down along troublingly predictable ethnic and sectarian lines. Iraqis seem unable or unwilling to view leaders from different groups as credible or legitimate authorities; frequently, reactions are laced with hostility. Consequently, meaningful discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of public figures tends to be an intramural exercise.

Support for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is tempered among secular and, to some extent, moderate Shia by suspicion of his methods and motives. Some of the more conservative Shia also express doubts about al-Maliki's sincerity and steadfastness, but many articulate ardent support, saying that he is trying to improve Iraq, but that he inherited an impossible situation and has been unable to achieve progress because of interference and resistance from his enemies inside and outside of government.

"I have a positive point of view in concern with Mr. Nouri al-Maliki because he is a brave man in dealing with many problems in Basrah and Diwaniyah and Samawa." (Shia Man, 21, Baghdad, Shia)

"Mr. Nouri al-Maliki is working hard but the heritage is problematic as he came and received the power which was full of problems. He has a good personality." (Shia Man, 25, Hillah)

"Nouri al-Maliki is positive, he works hard, but al-Jaffari government's weakness is still there influencing his government now. We hope that he would help the country to be in harmony." (Shia Man, 22, Hillah)

"Nouri al-Maliki is positive from all the aspects....Because he helps people through providing security, reconstruction and providing people protection through the Iraqi police." (Shia Woman, 42, Hillah)

"Nouri al-Maliki is positive and works correctly in the lines of democracy. He tries to unify Iraqis and stop killing Iraqis but he had taken the responsibility of the country in a difficult situation." (Shia Woman, 29, Najaf)

"Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is positive because the activity of his government and his management for the daily things. But he didn't reach the required level." (Shia Woman, 23, Baghdad)

"The American aggression exaggerates those problems, and would not let those people to get benefit of oil resources after Americans planned for long years to steal oil and other raw materials." (Shia Woman, 31, Basrah)

Moderate and secular Shia participants are more likely to criticize al-Maliki than their conservative counterparts. They claim that the Prime Minister has fallen short in dealing

with the problems of the country, failing to provide essential services and establish security. They also criticize his close ties to religious figures.

“Nouri al-Maliki is an educated politician but he lacks needed experience and intelligence, the current period requires more than his capabilities.” (Shia Man, 26, Basrah)

“Al-Maliki is a person wishing to do something but his relation with a party of a religious outlook prevents him from doing anything useful for Iraqis. So I have a negative view about him.” (Shia Woman, 24, Baghdad)

“Nouri al-Maliki talks a lot without doing anything even when the city of al-Sadr had attacked he didn't do anything other than speeches.” (Shia Man, 40, Baghdad)

“I have a negative opinion in concern with al-Maliki. ...Because since he became the prime minister everything had fallen apart, the economy and security became worse than before. I wonder how he can talk about achievements.” (Shia Woman, 19, Baghdad)

“Nouri al-Maliki is negative. ...Negative because he didn't do anything since he became Prime Minister while the situation is deteriorating Security is absent in this country, and Baghdad had become a host for terrorists and no one can get it right.” (Shia Woman, 21, Najaf)

As could be expected, Sunni participants are hostile to the Prime Minister. They accuse him of being an agent for the US and Iran and for committing murder against Sunni citizens.

“There are many groups of people trying to destroy [Iraq] and change its identity; killing hundreds of thousands of its people through national and sectarian operations. All of this is related to al-Maliki and his sectarian religious men.” (Shia Woman, 19, Fallujah)

“Al-Maliki is a real negative man; and we didn't see from his government any thing but murder, emigration, supporting the militias and sectarianism. He always says he will end the militias and on the other hand we see him supporting them to do their crimes in Baghdad during the security plan.” (Shia Man, 31, Baghdad)

“I have a very negative opinion about al-Maliki because he is an agent for Iran and the occupation and now he is supporting death teams and militias that commit crimes against Sunnis in particular.” (Shia Man, 48, Fallujah)

Kurdish views of the Prime Minister are based on their ethnic interests and seem almost divorced from the prospects of the country at large.

“Nouri al-Maliki: he has a bad personality, as he didn't give Kurdish people their rights completely”. (Sunni Kurdish Man, 19, Erbil)

Kurds discuss Iraqi President Jalal Talabani in affectionate terms; for the lack of tangible accomplishments they blame “terrorism” or “the situation.”

“Jalal Talabani is a good figure and deserves to be a president because of his long history of struggle.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 30, Suleymaniyah)

“Jalal al-Talabani is a positive politician, he played a major role in Kurdistan and he is standing behind the development of Kurdistan so that this is a good proof for his suitability.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 22, Kirkuk)

“Jalal Talabani [is] one of the good and struggling figures and he defended Kurds very strongly and deserves his position because of his history of struggle.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 30, Suleymaniyah)

“Jalal Talabani is somewhat good and terrorism didn't allow him to achieve ambitions and demands of Iraqis.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 30, Erbil)

Arab Sunnis and Shia view him as an ethnic leader, committed to the interests of Kurds and the establishment of a Kurdish state.

“I swear that is true as he didn't talk seriously at all about Iraq as if he is a guest. Did you forget that Talabani and his groups brought Americans to the north of Iraq and helped them to invade Iraq and smooth their way.” (Sunni Man, 30, Baghdad)

“He always makes jokes and laughs whenever he appears on TV or makes an interview. He aims to reach Iraqis' hearts with his sense of humor not with his achievements so that he should work as a clown in a circus because he is suitable for this job.” (Sunni Woman, 33, Ramadi)

“His presence is worthless and he seeks the interests of Kurds only.” (Shia Woman, 18, Najaf)

“Jalal Talabani talks about democracy, Iraq's union, keeping on Iraq without division but he is asking for federalism and establishing a large province in northern region, he is seeking for Kirkuk which is full of oil.” (Shia Woman, 40, Basrah)

“Jalal al-Talabani; we didn't find him do anything for us but he did many things for Kurds.” (Shia Man, 43, Baghdad)

Support for Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shiite cleric and militia leader, appears almost as a litmus test among Shia participants, dividing supportive conservatives and ambivalent moderates to the point of having to recess more than one focus group session so tempers could cool. Supporters say al-Sadr provides leadership and protection, rare commodities in Iraq; nevertheless, many of these same supporters believe he should remain a religious leader and abstain from politics.

Among other moderate and many conservative Shia participants, Sadr engenders feelings of affection and loyalty for his patriotism and piety. To many of them, Sadr is a hero, both for his honorable stand against the occupation and for protecting their rights.

“Muqtada al-Sadr is protecting us from all the destroyers, sneakers and sectarians as he leads militias and protects us from all our enemies.” (Shia Woman, 33, Basrah)

“Muqtada al-Sadr, I think without him and al-Mahdi Army terrorist would reach the South and kill all Shia people. Today he is the only one that can face terrorism.” (Shia Man, 55, Najaf)

“Muqtada al-Sadr is a real leader believing in Iraq. He knows the sufferings of Shia and his family had given many martyrs for the sake of Iraq.” (Shia Man, 29, Baghdad)

“Muqtada al-Sadr is positive, he is a religious man, and he seek to stop bloodshed and seeking for security and stability. He also tries to uniting Sunni and Shia as he doesn't differentiate between them.” (Shia Woman, 38, Hillah)

“Because of his position against Americans; and because he helps needy people like those who were forced to move out from their regions. He is dominant in Baghdad, and he is defending Shia in spite of the absence of police and army in some places like in Adhamiya, Hurrah, al-Sadr city as well as in other places.” (Shia Man, 31, Najaf)

Moderate and secular Iraqis criticize al-Sadr mostly for his connection to militia violence, seeing him as either unwilling or unable to control the Mahdi Army.

“Muqtada al-Sadr is negative, he is a mini picture of Saddam Hussein. He doesn't have positive sides and his negative actions are forming al-Mahdi army while the country was developing as they stole and robbed the people's money.” (Shia Man, 21, Hillah)

“He is a religious man from a deep rooted family having deep bonds with Iraq and presented many sacrifices for this country. But his intervention in political affairs is a negative thing And the worst thing was to form al-Mahdi army because Imam Mahdi himself can not accept this.” (Shia Woman, 29, Baghdad)

There is regional variety in attitudes toward al-Sadr, based mostly on what role the Mahdi Army plays locally. For example, some in Basrah laud al-Sadr for his leadership of the militia that they perceive as the protectors of the Iraqi Shia.

“Muqtada al-Sadr is a national brave leader; he didn't leave Iraq and he was oppressed and tortured with his family in Saddam's hand and his father was killed also. He is now working on Iraqi union.” (Shia Woman, 37, Basrah)

“Muqtada al-Sadr is protecting us from all the destroyers, sneakers and sectarians as he leads militias and protects us from all our enemies.” (Shia Woman, 33, Basrah)

Shia participants from Baghdad represent a more tolerant, although still mixed, picture of him. In Sadr City, they express gratitude for Muqtada Al Sadr's protection, specifically from

the US occupation. Elsewhere in Baghdad, Shia decry al Sadr for the militia violence plaguing their city. It is interesting to note that even some of his supporters in Sadr City say that he should abstain from politics.

“Muqtada al-Sadr is a religious man opposing the occupation but I wish if he keep away from politics.” (Shia Man, 33, Baghdad)

“Muqtada al-Sadr: He is a great leader from a deep rooted family that is known with its sacrifices for Iraq and he is forcefully opposing the occupation.” (Shia Man, 38, Baghdad)

“Many of the members of al-Mahdi army don’t deserve to bear this name; and I saw their harmful actions against innocent people.” (Shia Woman, 28, Baghdad)

“In concern with Muqtada al-Sadr, I disagree with everyone here and I want to talk about his crucial mistake in establishing al-Mahdi army, arming it and engaging it within the Iraqi police and army. All of our problems are caused by this issue, so that, I have a negative view about him and if anyone other than you hearing what I am saying now I would be kidnapped or killed.” (Shia Woman, 24, Baghdad)

Al-Sadr manages to get the approval of a few Sunni participants as a symbol of resistance against US occupation.

“Muqtada al-Sadr is only a man of religion and calls for the expelling occupiers from the country.” (Sunni Woman, 38, Mosul)

As Iraqi society becomes ever more polarized and violent, the credible, nonsectarian former Prime Minister, Ayad Allawi appeals not only to secular participants but also to some moderate Sunnis and Shia who discuss his brief tenure in office as if it were “the good old days” in comparison to current conditions. However, discussion of Allawi fails to generate the same visceral, emotional reactions provoked by al-Sadr and to a lesser extent, al-Maliki.

“I think that Ayad Allawi is a practical secular person and if he has the chance to work he would do a lot of things.” (Shia Woman, 27, Baghdad)

“Ayad Allawi is positive figure and seeks to reconstruct the country.” (Shia Woman, 50, Hillah)

“He is a secular man who doesn’t care for sectarianism and he is not related to a certain group. He is a highly experienced politician and knows how to manage the interest of himself and for people as well. We should say that the period of his government was much better than these dark days.” (Sunni Woman, 35, Ramadi)

“Ayad Allawi is a positive politician because during the period of his government the security situation was better than now.” (Sunni Woman, 19, Kirkuk)

“After Allawi's period, they made fuel crisis and they raised its prices therefore the oil and gas queues became longer and longer.” (Sunni Man, 42, Baghdad)

“I think that he has the keys to the current crisis, we hear the street want Allawi to save the country of the tragedy situation, especially that he resisted the militia during his time and nothing of what happens today happened in his period although he did not establish his government as he wanted.” (Sunni Man, 31, Baghdad)

“The role of Ayad Allawi as the first Prime Minister was somewhat good and he separated religion and party from the important issues of the country.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 24, Suleymaniyah)

“Ayad Allawi is positive, but he didn't take his chance to show people his positive aspects. I believe that he is the suitable man for this stage in the history of Iraq as he can unify Iraqis as he is not sectarian.” (Shia Woman, 25, Najaf)

Allawi's Baathist history, American connections, approval of the attacks on Fallujah and Najaf, and prolonged absences from the country give Iraqis of various backgrounds and affiliations more than one reason to distrust him and view him as an opportunist looking for political power with the support of US administration. Consequently, it is unclear whether Allawi could leverage his attributes to generate durable political support.

“People of Fallujah have a very negative opinion about Ayad Allawi and I am one of them because of his criminal actions against people of Fallujah in cooperation with the occupation.” (Sunni Woman, 29, Fallujah)

“Ayad Allawi is a killer that doesn't care for Iraqis at all. The most important thing for him is to satisfy the occupation and he is politically fruitless.” (Sunni Woman, 22, Fallujah)

“Ayad Allawi, he is a brave man who fought militias strongly and he warned about their dominance but the events of Fallujah are regarded as black point in his history which can not be forgotten easily.” (Sunni Man, 36, Fallujah)

“Ayad Allawi is a secular, non sectarian figure and his position is very obvious but we didn't like his attempts to make an agreement with al-Baath party and bringing its members back to the government and to political field forgetting their crimes against Iraqis.” (Shia Man, 31, Najaf)

“Ayad Allawi is negative because he supports Baathists as he is one of them.” (Shia Woman, 28, Baghdad)

“Ayad Allawi is negative because he follows the occupation [and] because what he has done to Najaf.” (Shia Woman, 22, Housewife, Baghdad)

“[Ayad Allawi] He is against Shia and authority, and what he faced in Najaf when they hit him is the evidence of Shia hatred to him.” (Shia Woman, 42, Baghdad)

“About Ayad Allawi, although he is a Shia secular politician I regard him a loser because of his complete dependence on the occupation.” (Shia Woman, 29, Baghdad)

“He is a former member in Al-Bath party and he wants to bring Baathists back to the government. He doesn’t attend the sessions of the parliament and he is always outside the country and he doesn’t recognize or respect the constitution.” (Shia Woman, 29, Najaf)

Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi is largely unknown and undefined among most groups. Many members of his own Sunni base lack enough information about al-Hashemi to pass judgment, while others suspect him for his deal-making on the constitution and other political matters, claiming he is only interested in gaining power.

“Tariq al-Hashemi, may be because he is new on the political arena, and because he is unknown so, he doesn’t have any role.” (Sunni Woman, 19, Kirkuk)

“Tariq al-Hashemi is the vice-president, the Islamic party’s head and I don’t know anything about him.” (Shia Man, 22, Hillah)

“Tariq al-Hashemi; we don’t know much about him and he participated in the political process in the last elections but he didn’t have a chance to work. Iraqis didn’t know the Vice President’s personality yet as he didn’t have any rule.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 32, Kirkuk)

“Tariq al-Hashemi is just a name. I heard about him but not see any action from him for the sake of Iraqi people. Information about him is not available because he didn’t present his services as an Iraqi in the authority to reduce suffering of people.” (Sunni Man, 23, Mosul)

Some participants find al-Hashemi dependable and committed.

“Tariq al-Hashemi is a dependable man and he will not leave Sunnis and you will see this soon.” (Sunni Woman, 24, Fallujah)

“Tariq al-Hashemi is one of the peaceful persons and he moves in the right direction and its positions are obvious so that 3 of his brothers have been killed because of his principle positions.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 35, Suleymaniyah)

“He is a mature political figure and he had lost many of his relatives for the sake of Iraq, if there were 10 persons like him in the government we would be in a very good situation.” (Sunni Man, 42, Fallujah)

However, this positive commentary is offset by criticism of al-Hashemi as self-serving, power-hungry, and unscrupulous. Many secular Sunni discussants seemed to believe that in compromising on the constitution, the leaders of the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) betrayed their principles and their sect for political power or money, and could no longer be trusted.

“Al-Hashemi, unfortunately, he joined the camp against Sunnis and honest Iraqis.” (Sunni Woman, 45, Baghdad)

“His people didn't make any benefits from him because his position made him blind so his real nature has been revealed.” (Sunni Woman, 31, Ramadi)

“In concern with Tariq al-Hashemi, I think that he had lost a lot of things through out giving up his slogans after taking up his position.” (Sunni Man, 30, Fallujah)

“We thought he could save the country but would he leave the high position and the huge sum of money for people? I don't think so.” (Sunni Man, 25, Baghdad)

Shia are harshly negative toward al-Hashemi, connecting him to the general rise of sectarianism and the attendant assassinations, kidnappings and forced relocation of families.

“Tariq al-Hashemi is a useless sectarian figure, even Sunnis don't like him.” (Shia Man, 26, Basrah)

“Tariq al-Hashemi always calls for killing Shia, he supports terror, sectarians and the base and he finances them with money and weapons.” (Shia Woman, 42, Basrah)

“Tariq al-Hashemi is one of those people who intruded sectarianism, killing and migration in our society.” (Shia Man, 40, Baghdad)

“Tariq al-Hashemi is negative, he is a sectarian man, and tries to kill Shia of Iraq.” (Shia Man, 19, Hillah)

Government & Governance

Views of the current government and its future prospects track closely with attitudes toward the general direction of the country and the Prime Minister himself. Shia are divided: most acknowledge that the government has been unable to deal with the deteriorating security conditions, and the more secular Shia also criticize the al-Maliki administration's sectarian nature. While defenders have numerous explanations for the government's failures, full-throated support and specific claims of progress are rare.

Some participants - mostly conservative Shia and some Kurds - express a general optimism about the future; they believe that Nouri al-Maliki has the required abilities to lead Iraq, and his security initiative and national reconciliation plans are bold moves which Iraq needs in the present situation.

“The current government could achieve success if the action presented by al-Maliki succeeded about the national peacemaking.... Yes, as he did real things like meeting tribes' heads in al-Anbar province and visiting some neighboring countries to support this peacemaking” (Shia Woman, 33, Basrah)

“I think that the government is serious in taking responsibilities so that it can achieve some of its commitments and providing security for people even in less than 6 months or 1 year.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 30, Suleymaniyah)

“How could they achieve peace while other nationalities are fighting each other to get the oil and other raw materials? Kirkuk has all those resources but Arab and Turkmen refuse, there is kidnapping and killing among nationalities so when would they form the government which would end these struggles and greediness.” (Shia Woman, 42, Basrah)

Secular participants provide the highest level of dissatisfaction among the Shia groups. They emphasize the lack of security and services, and the level of sectarianism dominating the government.

“I have a negative opinion because of the security chaos and the lack of hope in the future of Iraqis. I can say frankly that everyone had lost the confidence in this government and there are obvious accusations saying that it stands behind the killing and forceful migration operations.” (Shia Man, 23, Baghdad)

“The government is weak; there aren't any successful future plans, the current plans are like playing games and 100% contradictory. When they take two contradictory decisions at the same time, the minister is Shia and the managers are Sunni and this leads to disagreements.” (Shia Man, 21, Hillah)

“Because there is nothing positive in the life of Iraqis who are always thinking about whether they will be killed or kidnapped by a militia, or thinking about the time of the civil war.” (Shia Woman, 28, Baghdad)

Several Shia residents of Baghdad observe with concern the phenomenon of forced migration affecting them and their neighbors.

“Before I come to this session; I saw many families in my neighborhood leaving their houses fearing from being forced to change location and they were living in their houses since about twenty years or more.” (Shia Man, 38, Baghdad)

“The current government is practicing killing and forceful migration according to sects.” (Shia Man, 28, Baghdad)

“Even without any threats people leave their places to live in other places, to avoid being killed or to be shot at. When militias are asking anyone to leave his/her house; they bring somebody from the opposite sect to live in this house.” (Shia Woman, 25, Baghdad)

Even those Sunnis who are not severely critical of the government as discriminatory, corrupt, and complicit in the militia violence, fault the administration for its inability or unwillingness to address the deteriorating security situation. There is a strong undercurrent of suspicion that the al-Maliki government is encouraging forced migration and Shia ‘death squads’, in a wider conspiracy to impose federalism on the country.

“I of course hate the government because of the cheating and mockery. Then because of the government struggle to carry out federalism and division.” (Sunni Man, 34, Baghdad)

“My opinion about the current government is negative because of the deterioration of security situation which costs Iraq and the spreading the fear of a civil war in Iraq.” (Sunni Man, 34, Baghdad)

“Nothing can be achieved during the period of 6 months or one year because the occupation and its assistants don’t like to solve the problem of Iraq because they want to divide and rob it. The plan of al-Maliki is a way for surrendering Baghdad once again after the occupation in order to limit the activities of the real resistance and preventing it from doing anything” (Sunni Woman, 26, Fallujah)

“The period of 6 months or one year is not enough because of the increased size and danger of militias and sectarianism, and the disputes between our rulers for positions are many, and I think that the initiative of al-Maliki had brought killing and migration of people from their houses and infringe their dignity and freedom.” (Sunni Man, 40, Fallujah)

Whereas references to forced migration, either militia-orchestrated or state-sponsored, were virtually absent from focus groups conducted in 2005, the term is now a ubiquitous element of the Sunni litany of grievances.

“There is a campaign of migration, Sunnis become excluded from Shia regions and in the opposite Shia become excluded from Sunni regions.” (Sunni Man, 34, Fallujah)

“[Muqtada al-Sadr] had asked his devil followers to burn out mosques of Sunnis after the explosion in Samarra. Also he asks his followers now to kill Sunnis according to their sectarian identities and force them to emigration then, he follows the instructions of his masters in Iran.” (Sunni Woman, 30, Baghdad)

“I think that each Iraqi house has tested the effect of the sectarian militias killing raping stealing and forcing people to migrate, kidnapping persons then killing and corrupting their bodies which are new strategies invented by the current politicians who are guided by religious men hiding themselves in Najaf, Karbala and Iran.” (Sunni Woman, 45, Baghdad)

“During the event of al-Hurria Adnan Al-Dulaymi made many claims for the government to stop sectarian killing and migrating operations but he had not gain any response and no one supported him so sectarian killing continued till now and no one can stop it.” (Sunni Woman, 33, Baghdad)

As to whether this is truly a government of national unity, the best that can be said is that it is representative and elected. Virtually no one argues that the government’s policies are sound and broad-based or that it looks after the interests of all Iraqis in an evenhanded way. While some Sunnis seem to believe that the government could perform better if it wanted to, many others seem resigned to the idea that even if the government wanted to improve conditions for Iraqis it would be unable.

“The government is representing all of Iraqis' sects but it can not work with the presence of the occupation and it is not completely free. So I regard it as a government of national union but it can not do anything because of the presence of the occupation.” (Shia Man, 48, Najaf)

“I have a positive opinion because it is a government rising from the public itself. It is a government of a national union because it represents all of the sects of the Iraqi community.” (Shia Man, 20, Baghdad)

“My opinion is negative because the deteriorated security situation is apparent for everyone and it became a disaster, they show that it is a government of a national unity but in fact it is not, it is a government of a national disputes and this is not a secret.” (Shia Man, 28, Baghdad)

“I have a negative opinion because of its inability to deal with issues in a capable way for stabilizing the security situation and presenting services. This is not a government of national union because of the deep struggle between all of the political groups that are from time to time threatening us with withdrawal from the political process.” (Shia Man, 30, Baghdad)

“There is no agreement or cooperation between ministers and officials also between the main political groups in the government so that it is not a government of national union.” (Shia Woman, 18, Najaf)

“The government is not able to do a lot; especially concerning the security situation, solving the economic problems of individuals, solving the problem of unemployment. People are highly disturbed by this government, and it is not regarded as a government of national union and it didn't anything for people.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 26, Suleymaniyah)

“It can not be regarded as a government of national union because it is implementing Iranian interests and plans of the occupation and all of these are for the sake of its own interests.” (Sunni Man, 48, Fallujah)

A comparison of the three successive governments that have held power since 2004 under the leadership of Ayad Allawi, Ibrahim Jaffari, and Nouri al-Maliki respectively, was answered as if the question were “Which government was best for you and the interests of your ethnic group or sect?”

Arab Sunnis either claim that there is no meaningful distinction among the governments, indicating that they represent varying degrees of failure, or that the Ayad Allawi government was preferable for its nonsectarian conduct and relative success in the security sector. Their comments suggest that there is very little room for accommodation within the current administration.

“The most important thing related to Allawi is fighting and limiting militias and fighting sectarianism and its men, also there are differences concerning presented services including water supply and electricity.” (Sunni Man, 36, Fallujah)

“Yes, there are differences associated with security, services, women's rights, sectarianism, militias and migration which is the characteristic feature of al-Maliki's government, to a lesser degree the government of al-Jaffari, while the government of Allawi is opposing militias, sectarianism, racism, migration, killings and refuse to follow the instructions of religious men.” (Sunni Woman, 43, Baghdad)

“Yes, there are differences between the current and previous governments. I think that the government of Allawi was good as security and stability was present, but then terrorism had increased with explosions, bombed cars, racial and sectarian discrimination as well as the insurgent militias. We hadn't faced such conditions in Iraq.” (Sunni Woman, 21, Kirkuk)

As conditions degenerate, some Sunnis seem to express nostalgia for “better times” under Ayad Allawi, something they might not be feeling under better circumstances.

“We hope to return to Allawi's days as it was so good.” (Sunni Man, 42, Baghdad)

“We are dreaming of the days of Allawi, we weren't satisfied about him and we wanted him to do more but after trying others we knew that he was the best.” (Sunni Woman, 35, Ramadi)

“During the period of Allawi there was no sectarian migration or killing whole families.” (Sunni Man, 36, Fallujah)

The fact that Allawi defines himself as a secular politician definitely contributes to that general feeling.

“Days of Allawi were better and more active because he was clever and wise. He reached an agreement with everyone because he is secular and not sectarian. People were satisfied with him but Iran didn't like this, so they decided to remove him because he doesn't serve their plans in Iraq.” (Sunni Woman, 45, Ramadi)

“Despite he is Shia and I am Sunni he is acceptable by many groups of the resistance, Baathists, seculars, nationalist and militants. We believe that he is able to solve the situation and we hear that many Iraqis want him to come back to office.” (Sunni, 26, Fallujah)

“I think that Ayad Allawi is a practical secular person and if he has the chance to work he would do a lot of things.” (Shia Woman, 27, Baghdad)

“[The current government] depends on sectarianism and supporting the sectarian militias and intrudes of religious leaders in all situations while Allawi government prevented all that.” (Sunni Man, 39, Baghdad)

“The government of Allawi is the best because it was a real government of national union. At that time we didn't hear anything about things that are currently happening such as sectarian killings.” (Shia Man, 19, Basrah)

Kurds are somewhat more likely to support the al-Maliki administration as they play a role in the government and see merit in the national unification project, but many see no difference – often perceiving their regional councils as more relevant to their daily lives and affairs – while others view the Allawi government as the best of the three.

“I find that the government of al-Maliki is better than others because it had started with the project of national agreement to save the country from disasters; also it has started its project to disengage militias.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 35, Suleymaniyah)

“I don’t find any differences between the governments of Allawi and al-Jaffari. The current government is the best and the most active among all governments because it tries to improve the situation and to be better.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 24, Suleymaniyah)

“There is no difference as the same parties are there.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 32, Kirkuk)

“I don’t find any difference between the alternative governments after the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein...Because terrorism is continuous during these three periods and it had not ended till now.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 41, Suleymaniyah)

“There are differences between the current government and the previous governments. We can say that the government of Allawi was the best; as there was some degree of security but now there is no security at all. This is because the widely spread administrative corruption and the emergence of militias. The government of Allawi was more active than those of al-Jaffari and al-Maliki.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 25, Kirkuk)

Conservative Shia generally defend the current government, often in blatantly religious terms, while the more moderate, and certainly the secular, criticize it for the same reasons as their Sunni counterparts.

“The distinguishing feature of this government is its 4 years period and it is elected by the Iraqi people. The government of Allawi was appointed by the occupation so it was lacking legitimacy, while the government of al-Jaffari had a very short period that is not enough for developing police and army... In general the current government is better than others.” (Shia Man, 31, Najaf)

“I find that those of al-Jaffari and al-Maliki are the best because they are from the Shia coalition.” (Shia Man, 28, Basrah)

“Of course there are positive and negative differences between the three governments but the best one is the government of al-Maliki which is supported and blessed by the religious reference authorities in Najaf and all world countries had recognized this government, is not that enough?” (Shia Man, 25, Basrah)

“The current government is better than others; as it is trying hard to provide security and safety in a better way than before. I believe that terrorism had been grown because of the previous governments.” (Shia Man, 51, Najaf)

Shia groups in Baghdad represent a special case as the abysmal security situation seems to overcome sympathy towards a party sharing their values. Conservative participants, especially women, are more likely than their counterparts in other areas to be critical of the Maliki administration and compare the Allawi government favorably.

“If we observe the security situation and we make a comparison with the governments of Allawi and Jaffari; we would wish for these days to return back. Now killings have become a random thing and even people in their houses feel threatened. People are expecting to be killed or kidnapped at any time; services had reached their lowest levels during the period of al-Maliki government.” (Shia Woman, 28, Baghdad)

“Also the previous governments were very active in comparison with the government of al-Maliki, and I believe that if he has any sense of responsibility he would resign from his position.” (Shia Man, 33, Baghdad)

“Yes there is a difference like lack of security and increase in unemployment which is the product of the present government, the present government is less active.” (Shia Woman, 28, Baghdad)

“Yes sure there are differences; I mean there is no improvement towards better. There is killing and chaos; we lost our husbands and children. Others are graduated from schools but they do not have work.” (Shia Woman, 22, Baghdad)

“Surely Allawi’s government was better than this government, there were reconstruction and work. So; the present government is less effective than the previous governments.” (Shia Woman, 24, Baghdad)

Shia and Kurds are more likely than Sunnis to view the Council of Representatives (CoR) positively; however, their praise is usually related to what the body represents— a democratic institution of which they are in charge – rather than what it is able to accomplish. Among Sunni participants, the CoR, is often seen as an illegitimate body, in which they as Sunnis, are inadequately represented and unfairly treated by the majority.

The CoR members received widespread criticism for allowing the internal disputes and power struggles to obstruct the Council’s work.

“Parliament’s work is negative; the reason is that the political units are not agreed among each other.” (Sunni Turcoman Man, 31, Kirkuk)

“The parliament is very negative, it didn’t achieve anything for Iraqis and chaos is dominating the hall of the council whenever there is a decision to be made.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 30, Suleymaniyah)

“Negative, where are they? You find them fighting for those who control them; without controlling the situation in Iraq.” (Shia Woman, 27, Baghdad)

“Because there are disagreements and parliament blocks which give their opinions according to the sectarian and ethnic divides like Sunni and Shia. The members should firstly attack those disagreements and riots inside the parliament.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 29, Erbil)

“It is negative because its members don’t agree with each other and there is obvious sectarian spirit inside it that affects all of its decisions. Shia and Sunnis can not agree with each other in implementing democracy and constitution.” (Shia Woman, 29, Najaf)

“As far as I know the Council of Representatives is the highest authority in other countries; and does a lot of things. However; we didn’t find any authority, opinion or solutions from our council while things are being deteriorated seriously. Where is their conscience?” (Shia Woman, 29, Baghdad)

Praise from Shia and Kurdish participants is usually related to what the body represents— a democratic institution which they were denied for generations and of which they are in charge – rather than what it is able to accomplish.

“This is the best Council of Representatives I had seen in my life; all its members are equal and no one is superior to others.” (Shia Man, 28, Basrah)

“It is the first time for us to have a democratically elected parliament including multi groups and ethnics without being limited with a single group or party which is a good thing” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 44, Suleymaniyah)

“Iraq is passing through a critical period and we are not used to democracy during our discussions, but in the Council of Representatives there are no accusations but there are discussions. On the opposite it practices democracy with its lowest levels and it is a real representative of people.” (Shia Man, 24, Baghdad)

“[The government] provide Iraqi people services, but the parliament’s role is conveying people’s voices to the government.” (Shia Woman, 50, Hillah)

Most Sunni participants are bitterly critical of the CoR, seeing it as an illegitimate body, in which they are underrepresented and marginalized.

“I think that the work of the Council is negative because for example there is no one to represent people of Mosul. No one even represents the Sunni’s and they are marginalized.” (Sunni Woman, 45, Mosul)

“Certainly it is a negative council because it had not been elected correctly and honestly.” (Sunni Woman, 42, Ramadi)

“This council do not represent the whole Iraqi people but of the Shia and Kurds. The evidence of that is when anything concerning those two groups comes up, the COR can not discuss anything because it simply does only what is ordered by occupation in all matters.” (Sunni, 37, Baghdad)

“So the Council of Representatives is regarded as the highest authority in the country but it is not interested in the interests of people and doesn’t deal with the sectarian killing and migration operations being committed by militias against people.” (Sunni Man, 26, Teacher)

“Always they declare silly things as their priorities and leaving important things associated with people at the end of the list.” (Sunni Woman, 33, Ramadi)

Others talk about the Council in the same terms as the broader government, an institution engaged in systematic, deliberate efforts to destroy Sunnis and realize “evil” plans such as dividing Iraq along ethnic lines.

“It is only concerned with its internal affairs and it is used for ratifying the actions of militias that are supported by the occupation, America and Iran. This is an obvious plan against Sunnis, and this council has no role to do anything for Iraq.” (Sunni Woman, 45, Mosul)

“This council has no role other than ratifying projects of dividing Iraq like the constitution, federalism and caring for the interests of the occupation, Iran, Kurd and creating conspiracies against the few patriotic members of the council.” (Sunni Woman, 25, Fallujah)

“Their first priority is the bad project of federalism and the division of Iraq.” (Sunni Woman, Ramadi)

“Now there is not a relation between people and the council as it is only concerned with its internal system and establishing federalism.” (Sunni Woman, Fallujah)

Within all major groups we find a common element of democratic politics: suspicion and criticism of elected officials. Positive feelings toward the Parliament do not preclude criticism of its members for looking out for themselves rather than the public good, spending time outside the country rather than working to make it safe for everyone and bickering over petty matters instead of brokering policies to address public concerns

“The Council of Representatives doesn’t know anything about this because its members are living inside the Green Zone and having their high payments, oil shares and commercial contracts while Iraqis are suffering their hard life.” (Shia Woman, 24, Baghdad)

“Parliament role is so negative, as we don’t know anything about the ministries formed by the parliament except playing by people’s fortunes and stealing their wealth.” (Shia Woman, 37, Basrah)

“Council of Representatives has a negative role; its members didn’t do anything for people. They meet without doing anything and Council of Representatives should work for people because it is elected by them.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 21, Suleymaniya)

“This council is representing a negative picture of democracy and it didn’t do anything positive and it doesn’t deserve to be talked about.” (Sunni Woman, 45, Ramadi)

“It is a negative council because it leaves the important issues associated with the destiny of Iraqis and seeks the comfort of its members. Each day the gap between the council and citizens becomes larger which proves the failure of it.” (Shia Man, 43, Baghdad)

“Meanwhile, the council of representatives is leaving all of these problems and deciding loans for its members from the ministry of finance leaving people suffering from the hard life.” (Shia Woman, 27, Baghdad)

“I find that the parliament is very negative because it possesses imported parties and groups from outside the country which can create a serious weak point inside the Iraqi society.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 33, Suleymaniya)

“The condition is so bad, they take holidays for a month for traveling outside Iraq. They care for their personal issues like their salaries in their meetings; there are many disagreements between them that obstruct their work. The parliament priorities should be agreeing among them and making peace, punishing the corrupt figures out of the parliament.” (Shia Man, 21, Hillah)

“They are agreed on one opinion, they just care about their benefits.” (Shia Man, 22, Hillah)

“Its members are thinking only about themselves without paying attention to people. Its priority is to stop dealing with their own benefits while they have to represent their voters who had paid a lot for bringing them to this situation.” (Shia Man, 51, Najaf)

The notion that regional councils are better suited than the national government and its ministries to service delivery at the local level holds both intuitive appeal and public support. Most respondents say that regional councils are more effective because they are more connected and responsive to the people in their localities.

“The Regional Councils' role is very important and active in presenting services and what Iraqi street seeks for. I mean services, security and fighting the unemployment, the administrative corruption and keeping citizens' rights. The political parties have to support the regional councils and work together side by side to get positive results.” (Sunni Man, 36, Kirkuk)

“Presenting services is the responsibility of the provinces' councils firstly and by the help of the ministries.” (Shia Woman, 37, Basrah)

“The regional councils are responsible as they are in touch with people. The parties should help each other to work better.” (Shia Man, 21, Hillah)

“I think that the Governing Councils have the greatest responsibility in this concern; because they are closer to citizens than anyone else. So they have to bring everything on the agenda of the Council of Representatives and the Council of Ministries to get the rights of people in their governorates.” (Shia Man, 38, Najaf)

This is especially true among Kurds, who view their regional parliament as the true governing body in Kurdistan.

“In Kurdistan the responsibility should be taken by the parliament while in the Southern Region of Iraq Councils of Governorate are responsible while political parties have no role at all.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 24, Suleymaniyah)

“The parliament in Kurdistan is positive because it is the real representative of people and there is a direct bond between it and people. It deals with people's concerns directly like deciding projects of services and providing security and stability.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 49, Erbil)

Political Parties

Party membership tends to define public officials more than their title or position; consequently, Iraqis assume that parties have a lot to say about policy and direction, and that public decisions are inherently political and hence, suspect. It is therefore clear, given the horrendous conditions on the ground that parties are seen as prolonging problems instead of working toward solutions.

“The parliament’s head belongs to specific party, and he can’t do anything which his party refuses so they always postpone.” (Shia Woman, 37, Basrah)

“In Iraq I think that parties are dominating everything so their effect is greater during this period.” (Sunni Woman, 33, Baghdad)

“There is no party that helps Iraq, all parties are serving themselves and their own agenda is more important than everything” (Sunni Turcoman Man, 31, Kirkuk)

“We have a problem represented by the unity of the government with parties. As we know parties work for their own interests not for the general interests.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 24, Suleymaniyah)

“No, every party seeks its own interest or future goals. They could not serve all Iraqi people. I don't think that there is a party which helps in serving Iraq, that they hold the party interest is over everything” (Sunni Man, 29, Mosul)

“They are disputing and competing with each other for political office and personal benefits. Parties had been dominating everything in Iraq and they are hurting people.” (Shia Man, 40, Najaf)

“Political parties that are present now on political arena had participated in the security tensions and lack of stability.” (Sunni Woman, 29, Fallujah)

“Their role is restricted to spreading sectarianism, fighting and spreading Militias.” (Sunni Man, 30, Baghdad)

“I believe that they are behind the fear and instability without any exceptions because all of them had caused destruction and chaos.” (Shia Woman, 25, Baghdad)

As we have seen in previous focus group research, many Iraqis connect the sheer number of parties to the ills plaguing their society.

“The high number of parties leads Iraq to be divided. Even the current civil war is related to political parties, and the multiplicity of parties at this period is not helping Iraq.” (Shia Woman, 21, Najaf)

“The high number of parties and opinions can lead to disputes and it is not beneficial for the country at this time.” (Shia Man, 31, Najaf)

“The political parties are fragmented, non-unified because they worked for their interests only. We were rejoiced at the beginning when we were first introduced to multi-party system, but what happened is that it is getting extreme now. We see that in each province there are over 70 parties.” (Sunni Woman, 39, Mosul)

There is an increasing tendency across the political spectrum to see parties as playing a negative, yet critical role in the security situation. The prevalence of party-affiliated militias leads many focus group participants to say that parties are contributing to the violence rather than working to diffuse tensions or promote peace.

“[Political parties] are supposed to establish stability and safety but unfortunately, Iraqi parties have hostility against Iraqis. One of them is killing people while others are stealing resources and the third is making explosions and so on. As long as these parties are present in the Iraqi field there will be no safety or stability.” (Shia Woman, 19, Baghdad)

“The leaders of the militias related to parties participating in the government are the most dangerous and need serious attention by the elected government to protect the Iraqi internal front and without it we can not face the danger of the civil war.” (Sunni Man, 35, Ramadi, Sunni)

“Most of the parties has militias who aim to ruin Iraq.” (Sunni Man, 29, Mosul)

When Kurds salute their own parties, they are referring to the relatively placid situation in the north, while claiming that most of the parties in the Iraqi political arena are making things only worse. Kurdish participants, as we have seen before, make exceptions for their own.

“Each party is working for its own interests so there is no party helping for establishing security and stability, but there are some parties in the North that had helped Kurdistan to be stable.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 25, Kirkuk)

“There are Iraqi parties which help the government achieving security, like all Kurdistan parties in Iraq and their role is unique and approved by all in this field.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 29, Erbil)

“Kurdish parties in general are helping for achieving the stability of the country because they work for the benefits of the people of Kurdistan including Kurds, Christians and Turcoman.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 24, Suleymaniyah)

“We can divide parties into two groups; some of them are very good and able to improve the situation while others are not. Kurdish parties are helpful for the stability of the situation and they are establishing security and providing services. There are many parties in the Southern Part of Iraq which are not helpful for stabilizing the security situation of the country.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 21, Suleymaniyah)

There are rare cases in which speakers admit that all sides – including their own -- have to answer for the behavior of their parties and party-affiliated militias.

“Political parties are standing behind emergence of terrorism in Iraq and this is not a secret. I don’t like to talk in this manner but we are enforced to say this. We find Sunnis having their own militias working secretly, and Shia have larger militias working publicly. Kurdish parties have their own militias and each one of these parties regarding others as atheists and revenge from them, while innocent citizens are always the victims.” (Shia Man, 30, Baghdad)

“I believe that the current Iraqi parties are the cause behind the security deterioration. Most of them had participated in evoking the sectarian issue and the issue of militias by supporting them.” (Shia Woman, 23, Baghdad)

Generally speaking, polarization is the order of the day as Sunni and Shia discussants usually blame each other’s parties for violence and instability, and secular Iraqis denounce religious parties for both causing and sustaining the violence.

“The parties, are working hard under leading Mr. Al-Maliki to succeed his present tasks in protecting Iraqis souls, make Iraq more stable. But there are parties and Islamic organizations who are working for obstructing the current efforts for providing stability.... There are Sunni Islamic parties that are refusing the national peacemaking and federalism.” (Shia Woman, 49, Basrah)

“Unfortunately, I think that the Shia party supported by Kurds with the help of some Sunnis like Tariq Al-Hashemi became able to dominate the Sunni parties.” (Sunni Woman, 33, Baghdad)

“Current parties and especially Shia parties are responsible for the current destruction, forced migration and raping people because they are from Iran and they are completely loyal to Iran.” (Sunni Woman, 28, Fallujah)

“Because all of the parties in the political arena are covering themselves with a religious cover to affect people and achieve their destructive programs in Iraq.” (Sunni Woman, 37, Baghdad)

“All parties but mostly religious parties that had caused sectarian and ideological disputes harmful for Iraq.” (Shia Woman, 28, Najaf)

Sectarianism

Iraqis recognize sectarianism as the biggest factor undermining the stability of their state. Regardless of background, most Iraqis directly connect sectarian conflict to the obstruction of political progress, economic development, and security.

“The factor of sectarianism in Iraq is deeply effective and its effect is not confined to the government and its institutions; but unfortunately it became incorporated inside the society and had entered inside houses.” (Shia Woman, 29, Baghdad)

“It is the reason behind the disintegration of the Iraqi society...” (Shia Woman, 18, Najaf)

“All of the problems of Iraq are related to sectarianism and racism and Iraqis become interested with killing and terrorist affairs more than their interest in development and catching up with other countries.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 33, Suleymaniya)

“Sectarianism element is great; the result of sectarianism was murder; homeless people from all sects.” (Shia Man, 21, Hillah)

“The sectarianism is a big factor in all current problems in Iraq. The reason is the religious parties and armed militias that use sectarianism and its effect in the daily politics, spreading the turmoil and fear among people.” (Sunni Man, 21, Mosul)

“Religion is affecting politics too much, and there are some groups of parties relying on religion and they forgot politics. So religion is dominating politics. This leads to sectarianism that can provoke to a civil war.” (Sunni Woman, 21, Kirkuk)

Women’s rights, in particular, are increasingly affected by the pervasiveness of religion in daily life. Fears are particularly pronounced in urban Baghdad, by both Sunni and Shia women.

“Women are living in a disaster as their freedom had been deprived whether in the house, street or in colleges. They fear from being kidnapped in the streets and they fear from being widowed if they are married. Even in schools, colleges and institutes they feel uncomfortable because of the wide spread of militias who enforce them to wear religious clothes.” (Shia Woman, 25, Baghdad)

“It is the worst period because women are just like other groups of the society that had been completely degraded, but if we want to talk about the situation of women in particular I will tell you that everything became a barrier for women because they are unable to move or express their feelings freely.” (Sunni Woman, 30, Baghdad)

“How can I feel secure when men can not? In Iraq women are living their worst life periods in their lives.” (Shia Woman, 29, Baghdad)

Almost all of the participants argue that people who are using religion in politics are not honest politicians but rather corrupt people who are in a deliberate search for political power by manipulating the feelings of the masses.

“And I think that people who mix religion with politics are dishonest and they use religion as a legal cover to apply the ordered agenda and goals.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 31, Kirkuk)

“Those who are making religion involved in general issues are not honest, and religious men should be kept away from politics.” (Sunni Turcoman Woman, 23, Kirkuk)

“Those who are using religion in general affairs are not honest and use religion for their political purposes that they could not achieve by themselves.” (Sunni Man, 32, Fallujah)

“Those who intrude religion inside general affairs are not honest and use religion for their own political interests because of their political incapability.” (Shia Man, 35, Baghdad)

“Most of them are not honest and use it for their own political, personal and financial interests.” (Shia Woman, 21, Najaf)

“Some of our problems are related to the citizens themselves, because they have a limited level of knowledge and they can be easily manipulated by religious men or politicians who are wearing religious covers.” (Shia Woman, 24, Baghdad)

Again we see that participants from the North seem to isolate themselves from the rest of the country in many concerns. Some of them speak as if the effect of religion and the problems it causes belongs to some other country.

“Yes, the intervention of religion in politics is too much; and it is the reason behind all the problems in the Southern Part of Iraq. For example; the civil sectarian wars between Sunnis and Shia, but we don’t find this amount of intervention in Kurdistan.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 24, Suleymaniyah)

“Religion is highly affecting politics and this effect is too much, but in Kurdistan religion is not intervening in politics.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 32, Erbil)

“I believe that religion is affecting politics in the southern part of Iraq, and this effect is too much. But in Kurdistan there is no effect because we should separate between religion and politics.” (Sunni Kurdish Woman, 38, Erbil)

In keeping with the atomization of Iraqi society and attitudes along ethnic and religious lines, Iraqis who see too much intrusion of religion on public affairs are usually referring to the “others” and those who think more religion would tame the inclination toward violence almost always mean their own religion. Sunni participants frequently refer to Shia religious figures and political parties when they mention the effect of religion on politics. They sometimes explicitly state that Shia religious men and their followers are at the core of religious tensions in Iraq. This is followed by the suggestion that Iran is behind the scene, as they see Shia politicians as affiliates of that country.

“The effect of religion on politics is too much and negative, so no politician dares to do anything without having the permission of the religious leaders. Religious men know well that they had led Iraq to this situation.” (Sunni Woman, 42, Baghdad)

“Unfortunately they are mixing religion with politics and government these days therefore the government committed a grave mistake. They should separate them.” (Sunni Man, 35, Baghdad)

“I think that there is an effect, and let us be frank and I say that Sunni religious men have no militias and they reject killing and sectarianism while for Shia there is encouragement of violence and there are orders for killing and forced migration of people and practicing sectarianism, which is not a secret and it has become obvious publicly.” (Sunni Woman, 35, Ramadi)

“The sectarian factor is important and negatively affecting us. It is the reason behind the problems of Iraq, those who are using religion inside general affairs are not honest and use religion for their political purposes and they are not related to Iraq because they belong to out of the country, in Iran.” (Sunni Arab, 36, Fallujah)

“Mainly the government causes Sectarianism because they imported it from outside Iraq to divide it into pieces. Occupation forces are working their best to keep this dilemma going on. We are one nation and have no serious problems amongst us.” (Sunni Woman, 40, Mosul)

Shia participants are considerably more likely than Sunnis to welcome religion as an important factor affecting politics. Many think that religious influence is the right way to guarantee the proper functioning of state and social affairs.

“Religion attacks corruption, prevents bribes, fights them, and brings evil people to their knees.” (Shia Woman, 33, Basrah)

“Because political leaders are governing the country and the role of religion is very important. It is affecting the course of political process in Iraq and I find this as a healthy situation.” (Shia Man, 26, Basrah)

“I believe that this effect is suitable as we can not separate religion from politics and laws should be legislated according to Islamic laws.” (Shia Woman, 29, Najaf)

“It is proper, it is necessary to mix religion with politics.” (Shia Woman, 42, Hillah)

“Yes it influences, this is a positive picture and it is a proper influence.” (Shia Man, 19, Hillah)

There are some Iraqis who assert sectarianism is exaggerated, or that its effect is positive rather than negative; these claimants are mostly conservative Shia, arguably those who reap the benefits of sectarian favoritism.

“I think that the sectarian factor is present but its role is positive and we can not say that sectarianism is responsible for the problems of Iraq.” (Shia Man, 25, Baghdad)

“I believe that the issue of sectarianism is not very important and it is highly exaggerated by media and some political figures. I think that sectarianism is not responsible for our current situation and problems but the enemies are saying that to evoke problems and disputes.” (Shia Man, 20, Baghdad)

However, while most Iraqis uniformly condemn sectarianism, many do so in explicitly sectarian terms.

“This is a bad thing if it happens, but Shia parties are away from such dirty doings which might be used by terrorists and their parties.” (Shia Man, 26, Basrah)

“Sectarianism is getting harsh... and I call the parties and Shia blocks to stop such work.” (Sunni Kurdish Man, 23, Erbil)

“The religious and political policies should be united, and not separated from each other; Shia parties didn't use religion for political purposes.” (Shia Man, 26, Basrah)

“The parties are sectarian and some Ministries which are under Shia coalition only, sectarianism rule is great in Iraq's problems and mixing religion with politics has malicious goals and they are using political speech for their political goals.” (Sunni Man, 30, Baghdad)

The essentially religious nature of Iraqi society is reflected in a belief, seen across sects, that religion and religious leaders can and should *diffuse* sectarian tensions, **promote peace and cooperation**. Sunni, Shia, and even secular Iraqis all recognize the influence and importance of religious figures, stressing the desire to see this influence exerted for the national good.

“[Religious leaders should be] avoiding political issues and condemning sectarian disputes wherever they are, supporting politicians, avoiding all suspects of their impartiality and advising people and telling them about the prohibition of killing and migration of others and they should destroy sectarianism which is the reason behind all of the problems of Iraq.” (Sunni Man, 36, Fallujah)

“The right role is to confirm the Islamic brotherhood, prevent sectarianism and deny all the names of Sunni and Shia confirming that we are all Muslims following the prophet and his house.” (Sunni Man, 34, Baghdad)

“Their position should be built on instructing and advising people; calling for agreement and brotherhood between all groups and citizens, not to call for killing somebody during the speech of Friday's prayers.” (Shia Woman, 27, Baghdad)

“We realize that one of reasons behind the security deterioration in Iraq is the publicity of wrong religious concepts which are not related to Islam. It is necessary for religious scientists

to be the first line of defense against these concepts and warning people from being drawn in these mistakes.” (Sunni Woman, 29, Fallujah)

“Yes, we can find that all of the politicians return back to the religious references when they can not reach to an agreement...the role of religious references is very important and obvious, for example, after the explosion of the Asdari in Samara; a great problem was about to happen. But the intervention of religious men was very important to end that crisis and many other examples.” (Shia Man, 21, Baghdad)

“Sectarianism influences especially the Iraqi street. In spite of the fact that Shia sect is the larger in Iraq and seeks to solve all the problems, this is not religion's job to fix general issues with religion. Religion's duty is union and coalition not creating factions, it is found for uniting people if they are credible.” (Shia Woman, 38, Hillah)

“We prefer a large influence of religion in order to feel that we are in an Islamic country that respects the values and principals of Islam. Islam urges tolerance and the rejection of sectarianism and violence.” (Sunni Woman, 40, Mosul)

The absence of effective government and political authority pushes many otherwise moderate Iraqis toward religion. In an environment of crisis and deprivation, Iraqis increasingly gravitate towards religious-affiliated organizations and parties, as they remain among the only entities that are able to provide security and services. Other secular Iraqis sometimes incline toward religion for fear of being targeted by extremist militias.

Within certain Shia focus group sessions, the tension between conservative and more moderate and secular participants is more pronounced than ever, illustrated by the following exchange from a focus group session in Baghdad.

“So, I will talk frankly but I want others to forgive me, Muslim Scholar Council, the Highest Council of Islamic Revolution, Said Muqtada and Said Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim all of them had brought sufferings to the Iraqi people.” (Shia Man, 28, Baghdad)

“I insist that political parties are helping Iraq to be more stable and secured and I don't like to answer what other participant had mentioned about our icons. I am sorry for him especially because he is Shia, but I want to say that without those persons he would not be able to speak freely like this, and I want to tell him to appreciate our leaderships and to be proud of them.” (Shia Man, 25, Baghdad)

“I can not present my opinion because I am afraid of the other participant accusing me for being a secular person.” (Shia Man, 22, Baghdad)

“Certainly, sectarianism has an effective role in destroying the Iraqi society. Because people are afraid from the other sect, they had returned back to their sects and became introvert to protect themselves from others.” (Shia Man, 31, Najaf)

Conclusion

The findings of these latest Iraqi focus groups are most illuminating when examined in comparison to the results of similar research conducted throughout 2005. Public attitudes, the political situation, and Iraqi society itself have changed in certain ways and calcified in others.

- **There is a perceptible shift in both the tone and content of participant responses, which have grown progressively more bitter and fraught.** The unprompted use of loaded terms such as civil war and forced migration; references to federalism (a necessary step to some, an evil plot to others); the specter of the February, 2006 bombing of the Askariya Mosque in Samara, a singularly provocative and defining moment; and increasingly harrowing and graphic descriptions of torture and violence permeate the transcripts.
- **These focus group findings evince no mindset of collective national purpose, much less ownership of or investment in public institutions.** Opinions of public figures break down along troublingly predictable lines. To a greater degree than ever, Iraqis think about themselves, their conditions and their institutions not as citizens of the same troubled land but as members of their particular ethnic or religious subgroup.
- **One year after the ratification of a constitution, its purpose and promise have not been fulfilled.** In 2005 a constitution was viewed as a top priority, a precondition for stability and integral to solving other problems. However, in the current atmosphere there is little to suggest that the constitution is relevant or that it will be looked to as an organizing principle for the Iraqi polity.
- **Having been deprived of essential rights and services for so long, Iraqis have little appetite for a discussion of institutional roles and responsibilities.** In 2005 we suggested that Iraq's constituent groups might increasingly look toward ethnic and sectarian organizations for protection and results if official and political structures were not able to provide them. These findings leave little doubt that this inclination asserted itself in the ensuing year.
- **Views on the role of religion in government are connected not to what is best for Iraq, but to what is best for the respondent and his or her group.** A tendency toward Shia majoritarianism and concomitant apprehension on the part of the Sunni minority, general disagreement between conservative and more secular respondents, and tensions within the Shia sect over the degree of religious control are all evident.
- **Political parties in Iraq are far more likely to be viewed as protectors and providers for their specific sect than as legitimate democratic political entities.** In this regard, they are contributing to the problem instead of the solution.

While public institutions and figures lack both credibility and capacity, political and religious leaders still exert influence, and could conceivably bring their diverse constituencies toward a common political process of sorts. To even begin such a movement would require colossal and simultaneous investments of determination, statesmanship, and trust – three commodities that are often rare in emerging democracies, but especially so in Iraq where time is limited.

APPENDIX 1

Demographic Composition of the Focus Groups

R4 Group 01: Moderate/Conservative Sunni Males in Suleymaniyah - Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Religiosity |
|-------|--------|-----|------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Part1 | Male | 30 | Bachelor | Employee | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Moderate |
| Part2 | Male | 44 | Bachelor | Employee | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Conservative |
| Part3 | Male | 30 | Secondary School | Free Lance | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Conservative |
| Part4 | Male | 35 | Secondary School | Employee | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Moderate |
| Part5 | Male | 30 | Primary School | Free Lance | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Conservative |
| Part6 | Male | 33 | Technical School | Free Lance | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Moderate |
| Part7 | Male | 30 | Primary School | Semi-Skilled Worker | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Conservative |
| Part8 | Male | 41 | Secondary School | Free Lance | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Moderate |

R4 Group 02: Secular Sunni Females in Suleymaniyah - Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Religiosity |
|-------|--------|-----|------------------|--------------|--------------|-------|-----------|-------------|
| Part1 | Female | 24 | Primary School | Housewife | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part2 | Female | 24 | Primary School | Marketer | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part3 | Female | 24 | B.A | Free working | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part4 | Female | 26 | Secondary School | Free working | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part5 | Female | 21 | Secondary School | Student | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part6 | Female | 29 | Secondary School | Employee | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part7 | Female | 24 | Primary School | Employee | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part8 | Female | 26 | B.A | Teacher | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |

R4 Group 03: 18-29 Secular Sunni Males in Erbil - Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Religiosity |
|-------|--------|-----|------------------|---------------|--------|-------|-----------|-------------|
| Part1 | Male | 25 | High School | Free working | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part2 | Male | 24 | Institute | Grocer | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part3 | Male | 23 | Bachelor | Free working | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part4 | Male | 29 | Primary School | Unemployed | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part5 | Male | 19 | Secondary School | Unemployed | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part6 | Male | 28 | Primary School | Daily Laborer | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part7 | Male | 26 | High School | Civil Servant | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part8 | Male | 27 | High School | Grocer | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |

R4 Group04: 30+ Moderate/Conservative Sunni Males in Kirkuk

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|-------|--------|-----|------------------|------------------|--------------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Part1 | Male | 50 | Secondary School | Freelance Worker | Suleymaniyah | Sunni | Kurdish | Conservative |
| Part2 | Male | 31 | Secondary School | Freelance Worker | Kirkuk | Sunni | Kurdish | Conservative |
| Part3 | Male | 32 | Institute | Freelance Worker | Kirkuk | Sunni | Kurdish | Moderate |
| Part4 | Male | 31 | Institute | Teacher | Kirkuk | Sunni | Turcoman | Conservative |
| Part5 | Male | 33 | Bachelor | Teacher | Kirkuk | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part6 | Male | 35 | Secondary School | Freelance Worker | Kirkuk | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part7 | Male | 31 | Secondary School | Freelance Worker | Kirkuk | Sunni | Turcoman | Moderate |
| Part8 | Male | 36 | Secondary School | Freelance Worker | Kirkuk | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |

R4 Group05: 18-29 Secular Sunni Females in Kirkuk – Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|-------|--------|-----|------------------|------------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Part1 | Female | 22 | Bachelor | Student | Kirkuk | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part2 | Female | 19 | Secondary School | Student | Kirkuk | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part3 | Female | 25 | Primary School | Housewife | Kirkuk | Sunni | Kurdish | Secular |
| Part4 | Female | 21 | Technical School | Student | Kirkuk | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part5 | Female | 25 | Primary School | Housewife | Kirkuk | Sunni | Turcoman | Secular |
| Part6 | Female | 24 | Technical School | Employee | Kirkuk | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part7 | Female | 23 | Secondary School | Employee | Kirkuk | Sunni | Turcoman | Secular |
| Part8 | Female | 21 | Secondary School | Housewife | Kirkuk | Sunni | Arab | Secular |

R4 Group06: 18-29 Secular Sunni Males in Mosul – Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|-------|--------|-----|------------------|---------------------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Part1 | Male | 23 | Secondary School | Free working | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part2 | Male | 28 | Secondary School | Government Employee | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part3 | Male | 29 | Secondary School | Unemployed | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part4 | Male | 27 | Primary School | Unemployed | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part5 | Male | 25 | Secondary School | Free working | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part6 | Male | 21 | Primary School | Unemployed | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part7 | Male | 19 | Technical School | Free working | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part8 | Male | 29 | Secondary School | Unemployed | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Secular |

R4 Group07: 30+ Conservative/Moderate Sunni Females in Mosul – Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|-------|--------|-----|------------------|------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Part1 | Female | 35 | High School | Unemployed | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part2 | Female | 38 | Technical School | Employee | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part3 | Female | 56 | Illiterate | Housewife | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part4 | Female | 46 | Primary School | Housewife | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part5 | Female | 47 | Secondary School | Housewife | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part6 | Female | 39 | Bachelor | Employee | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part7 | Female | 40 | Secondary School | Teacher | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part8 | Female | 45 | Bachelor | Housewife | Mosul | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |

R4 Group08: 18-29 Conservative/Moderate Sunni Females in Fallujah–Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|-------|--------|-----|----------------|------------|----------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Part1 | Female | 24 | Secondary | Teacher | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part2 | Female | 28 | Primary School | Housewife | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part3 | Female | 22 | Primary School | Housewife | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part4 | Female | 26 | Institute | Teacher | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part5 | Female | 29 | Bachelor | Employee | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part6 | Female | 19 | Secondary | Student | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part7 | Female | 25 | Secondary | Housewife | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part8 | Female | 29 | Secondary | Housewife | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |

R4 Group09: 30+ Secular Sunni Males in Ramadi – Urban (Not Included)

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|------------------|------------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Part1 | Male | 32 | Bachelor | Employee | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part2 | Male | 35 | Secondary School | Free Lance | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part3 | Male | 33 | Secondary School | Employer | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part4 | Male | 31 | Secondary School | Free Lance | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part5 | Male | 38 | Secondary School | Free Lance | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part6 | Male | 40 | Secondary School | Driver | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part7 | Male | 42 | Secondary School | Free Lance | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part8 | Male | 30 | Bachelor | Employee | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Secular |

R4 Group10: 30+ Conservative/Moderate Sunni Males in Baghdad – Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|---------------------|--------------|---------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Part1 | Male | 32 | Bachelor | Employee | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part2 | Male | 44 | Technical Institute | Employee | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part3 | Male | 34 | Primary School | Free working | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part4 | Male | 42 | Primary School | Free working | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part5 | Male | 30 | Secondary School | Employee | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part6 | Male | 33 | Secondary School | Free working | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part7 | Male | 40 | Secondary School | Artisan | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part8 | Male | 35 | Secondary School | Free working | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |

R4 Group11: 18-29 Secular Shia Females in Bagdad-Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|------------------|------------|---------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Part1 | Female | 25 | Institute | Employee | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part2 | Female | 19 | Secondary School | Student | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part3 | Female | 29 | Secondary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part4 | Female | 27 | Bachelor | Employee | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part5 | Female | 23 | Primary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part6 | Female | 21 | Secondary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part7 | Female | 28 | Secondary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part8 | Female | 24 | Primary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |

R4 Group12: 18-29 Conservative/Moderate Shia Males in Baghdad – Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|------------------|---------------------|---------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Part1 | Male | 28 | BA in Accounting | Bank Employee | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part2 | Male | 20 | Secondary School | Freelance Worker | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part3 | Male | 23 | Secondary School | Skilled Worker | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part4 | Male | 21 | Secondary School | Employee | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part5 | Male | 24 | Secondary School | Unskilled Worker | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part6 | Male | 25 | Primary School | Owner of Small Bus. | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part7 | Male | 29 | Read and Write | Semi-Skilled Worker | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part8 | Male | 22 | Institute | Government Employee | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Moderate |

R4 Group13: 30+ Secular Sunni Females in Baghdad – Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|------------------|------------|---------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Part1 | Female | 45 | Primary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part2 | Female | 35 | Secondary School | Teacher | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part3 | Female | 40 | Secondary School | Teacher | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part4 | Female | 33 | Secondary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part5 | Female | 30 | Institute | Employee | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part6 | Female | 31 | Secondary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part7 | Female | 37 | Bachelor | Employee | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part8 | Female | 43 | Primary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |

R4 Group14: 30+ Secular Sunni Males in Baghdad- Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|------------------|--------------|---------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Part1 | Male | 30 | Bachelor | Employee | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part2 | Male | 37 | Secondary School | Free working | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part3 | Male | 44 | Secondary School | Free working | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part4 | Male | 35 | Bachelor | Employee | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part5 | Male | 34 | Primary School | Grocer | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part6 | Male | 40 | Primary School | Tradesman | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part7 | Male | 31 | Secondary School | Free working | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part8 | Male | 39 | Secondary School | Free working | Baghdad | Sunni | Arab | Secular |

R4 Group15: 18-29 Secular Shia Males in Hillah–Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|------------------|-------------------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Part1 | Male | 20 | Bachelor | Student | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part2 | Male | 19 | Secondary School | Student | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part3 | Male | 19 | Primary School | Night Guard | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part4 | Male | 21 | Secondary School | Student | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part5 | Male | 25 | Secondary School | Free Lance Worker | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part6 | Male | 21 | Secondary School | Unemployed | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part7 | Male | 21 | Secondary School | Student | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part8 | Male | 22 | Primary School | Unemployed | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Secular |

R4 Group16: 30+ Conservative/Moderate Shia Females in Hillah – Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|------------------|------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Part1 | Female | 36 | Secondary School | Housewife | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part2 | Female | 33 | Secondary School | Housewife | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part3 | Female | 38 | Secondary School | Employee | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part4 | Female | 45 | Secondary School | Employee | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part5 | Female | 30 | Institute | Teacher | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part6 | Female | 42 | Primary School | Housewife | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part7 | Female | 38 | Bachelor | Teacher | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part8 | Female | 50 | Primary School | Housewife | Hillah | Shia | Arab | Conservative |

R4 Group17: 18-29 Secular Shia Females in Najaf-Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|------------------|------------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Part1 | Female | 29 | Primary School | Housewife | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part2 | Female | 24 | Primary School | Housewife | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part3 | Female | 26 | Primary School | Housewife | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part4 | Female | 25 | Bachelor | Employee | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part5 | Female | 18 | Secondary School | Student | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part6 | Female | 21 | Secondary School | Student | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part7 | Female | 28 | Read and Write | Housewife | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part8 | Female | 23 | Institute | Teacher | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Secular |

R4 Group18: 30+ Conservative/ Moderate Shia Females in Basrah – Urban

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|------------------|------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Part1 | Female | 35 | Bachelor | Employee | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part2 | Female | 37 | Technical School | Teacher | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part3 | Female | 31 | Secondary School | Housewife | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part4 | Female | 42 | Secondary School | Housewife | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part5 | Female | 49 | Primary School | Housewife | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part6 | Female | 41 | Secondary School | Housewife | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part7 | Female | 33 | Primary School | Housewife | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part8 | Female | 40 | Secondary School | Teacher | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Moderate |

R4 Group19: 30+ Conservative/Moderate Sunni Females in Erbil-Rural

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|------------------|-------------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Part1 | Female | 32 | Secondary School | Housewife | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Conservative |
| Part2 | Female | 30 | Secondary School | Working Freelance | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Conservative |
| Part3 | Female | 34 | Secondary School | Housewife | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Conservative |
| Part4 | Female | 38 | Secondary School | Working Freelance | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Conservative |
| Part5 | Female | 50 | Secondary School | Housewife | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Conservative |
| Part6 | Female | 35 | Secondary School | Housewife | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Moderate |
| Part7 | Female | 36 | Institute | NGO Employee | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Moderate |
| Part8 | Female | 49 | Secondary School | Housewife | Erbil | Sunni | Kurdish | Conservative |

R4 Group20: 30+ Secular Sunni Males in Fallujah – Rural

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|--------|-----|------------------|--------------|----------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Part1 | Male | 35 | Secondary School | Free working | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part2 | Male | 40 | Primary School | Artisan | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part3 | Male | 34 | Primary School | Grocer | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part4 | Male | 36 | Institute | Employee | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part5 | Male | 30 | Bachelor | Employee | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part6 | Male | 48 | Secondary School | Retired | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part7 | Male | 37 | Secondary School | Free working | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Secular |
| Part8 | Male | 32 | Secondary School | Grocer | Fallujah | Sunni | Arab | Secular |

R4 Group21: 30+ Conservative/Moderate Sunni Females in Ramadi– Rural

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|-------|--------|-----|------------------|------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Part1 | Female | 43 | Primary School | Housewife | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part2 | Female | 33 | Primary School | Housewife | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part3 | Female | 36 | Bachelor | Teacher | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part4 | Female | 45 | Bachelor | Teacher | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part5 | Female | 31 | Secondary School | Housewife | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |
| Part6 | Female | 35 | Secondary School | Housewife | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part7 | Female | 32 | Secondary School | Employee | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Moderate |
| Part8 | Female | 42 | Secondary School | Housewife | Ramadi | Sunni | Arab | Conservative |

R4 Group22: 18-29 Conservative/Moderate Shia Females in Baghdad-Rural

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|-------|--------|-----|------------------|------------|---------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Part1 | Female | 25 | Institute | Teacher | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part2 | Female | 24 | Secondary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part3 | Female | 20 | Secondary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part4 | Female | 28 | Secondary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part5 | Female | 23 | Secondary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part6 | Female | 22 | Secondary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part7 | Female | 27 | Bachelor | Teacher | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part8 | Female | 29 | Secondary School | Housewife | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Conservative |

R4 Group23: 30+ Conservative/Moderate Shia Males in Najaf – Rural

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|-------|--------|-----|------------------|---------------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------------|
| Part1 | Male | 40 | Secondary School | Employee | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part2 | Male | 48 | Secondary School | Gardener | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part3 | Male | 55 | Read Write | Gardener | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part4 | Male | 51 | Primary School | Owner of Small Bus. | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part5 | Male | 51 | Primary School | Skilled Worker | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Moderate |
| Part6 | Male | 38 | Institute | Banker | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part7 | Male | 31 | Secondary School | Gardener | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Conservative |
| Part8 | Male | 31 | Bachelor | Engineer | Najaf | Shia | Arab | Conservative |

R4 Group24: 18-29 Secular Shia Males in Basrah–Rural

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|-------|--------|-----|------------------|---------------------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Part1 | Male | 29 | Bachelor | Employee | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part2 | Male | 22 | Secondary School | Free Lance Worker | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part3 | Male | 19 | Secondary School | Student | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part4 | Male | 20 | Secondary School | Student | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part5 | Male | 26 | Secondary School | Small Business Own. | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part6 | Male | 25 | Secondary School | Free lance Worker | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part7 | Male | 26 | Secondary School | Grocer | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part8 | Male | 28 | Institute | Employee | Basrah | Shia | Arab | Secular |

R4 Group25: 30 Secular Shia Males in Baghdad–Urban (Additional Session)

| ID | Gender | Age | Education | Occupation | Origin | Sect. | Ethnicity | Ethnicity |
|--------------|---------------|------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|
| Part1 | Male | 33 | Institute | Employee | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part2 | Male | 35 | Secondary School | Free working | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part3 | Male | 38 | Primary School | Free working | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part4 | Male | 30 | Institute | Employee | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part5 | Male | 33 | Secondary School | Employee | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part6 | Male | 40 | Primary School | Grocer | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part7 | Male | 43 | Secondary School | Grocer | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |
| Part8 | Male | 46 | Primary School | Taxi Driver | Baghdad | Shia | Arab | Secular |

APPENDIX 2 MODERATOR GUIDE

I. Introduction (10 min)

AIM: To familiarize respondents to the focus groups studies, to ensure confidentiality, to warm up respondents before asking the main questions.

Welcoming remarks; introduction of moderator and participants

Explanation of the Focus Group Method

General overview of topic & purpose of study

Complete the short demographic questionnaire now or at end of interview

Begin Discussion Here:

II. Direction of Country (15 min)

At the beginning of our discussion, I want to know your opinion about the general situation in Iraq.

- How do you see Iraq today? Are the things going mostly in the right direction or mostly in the wrong direction? [*Moderator: Try to encourage participants to talk about both negative and positive sides*]
 - Probe: What are the things going in the right direction?
 - Probe: Why? Who is responsible?
 - Probe: What are the things going in the wrong direction?
 - Probe: Why? Who is responsible?
- Do you have a favorable or unfavorable view of the following figures:
 - Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki
 - Jalal Talabani (President and leader of PUK)
 - Muqtada Al-Sadr
 - Ayad Allawi (Leader of Iraqi National Accord)
 - Tariq Al-Hashemi (Deputy President and leader of IIP)
 - Probe: Why?

III. Public Attitudes Toward Government and Governance (20 min)

- What do you think of the new government?
 - Probe: Why do you feel that way?
 - Probe: Do consider this a true government of national unity?
 - § Show of hands
 - § Probe: Why or why not?
- Do you see real differences between this government and the previous governments of Allawi and Al-Jaffari?
 - Probe: What are some of those differences?
 - Probe: Is this government more effective or less effective than the previous governments?
- Regardless of how you feel about the current government, do you think it can make real progress on key issues of security, services and economics in the next 6 months or the next year?
 - Reaction to recent security initiatives by Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki

IV. Parliament: Roles & Effectiveness (10 min)

- There are many branches of government including the ministries, the Prime Minister, and the Council of Representatives. Focusing specifically on the Council of Representatives, do you see them positively or negatively?
 - Probe: Why?
- What should the Council of Representatives' role and priorities be?

V. Political Parties (10 min)

- Generally speaking, do you think political parties are helping the process of making Iraq more stable and peaceful?
 - Probe: Why / Why not?
 - Probe: Which ones are helpful? Which ones are not helpful?

VI. Institutional Roles & Responsibilities (15 min)

- What unit of government has the greatest responsibility to deal with:
 - Service delivery
 - Jobs
 - Security
 - Protecting rights of all Iraqis

- Is it the job of the Council of Representatives? The Ministries? Provincial or regional governments?
- What role should political parties play in dealing with these issues?

VII. Sectarianism (20 min)

- Thinking about the relationship between religion and politics, do you think religion currently influences politics in Iraq? Is that influence too much, just enough, or too little?
- What do you think is the right role of religion in relation to government?
- When you think about the institutions – government, parties, parliament - that we have been discussing here today, how big of a factor is sectarianism?
 - Probe: What impact does sectarianism have on the problems facing Iraq?
 - Probe: In your view, are those who bring religion into public affairs genuine, or are they manipulating religious messages for their own political purposes?

APPENDIX 3

David M. Dougherty

David Dougherty is an independent consultant to several organizations, including the National Democratic Institute. Over the last 15 years he has managed major political campaigns, served as a strategist for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and advised a variety of association and non-profit clients on research-based targeting and message development. An experienced opinion researcher, David previously served as Senior Vice-President at Global Strategy Group in Washington, D.C. As a trainer, country program director and consultant for NDI, he has designed and implemented training programs and opinion research projects in Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and, since 2005, Iraq. Besides his work for clients at home and abroad, David has taught numerous classes and workshops and offered commentary and analysis for a variety of media outlets. He holds a Master's Degree in Public Opinion Research from the University of Connecticut.