OFFICE OF RESEARCH

OPINION ANALYSIS

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Iraqi Public Has Wide Ranging Preferences for a Future Political System

This Office of Research survey among urban residents of Baghdad, Fallujah, Ramadi, Basrah, Najaf, Suleymania and Erbil reveals a wide range of political aspirations. At the same time, the results show strong consensus on the importance of good governance and pluralism. The value Iraqis attach to these ideals provides guidance to emerging leaders as they seek to gain public acceptance, rebuild civic trust and establish and a new government.

Key Findings

- Iraqis in these seven cities divide on whether a democracy, an Islamic state or a mix of the two is best for Iraq's future. But regardless of their preferences for a political system, large majorities emphasize the importance of free and fair elections, the rule of law, the right to criticize the government and inclusiveness in politics.

- The main difference between those who support a democracy and those who support an Islamic state is their views on the appropriate role of religion in politics.

- Historical experience has sullied the image of political parties, especially outside of Northern Iraq where no more than one-third express confidence in parties. In addition, when asked to volunteer the name of a leader they trust most, two-thirds do not name anyone.

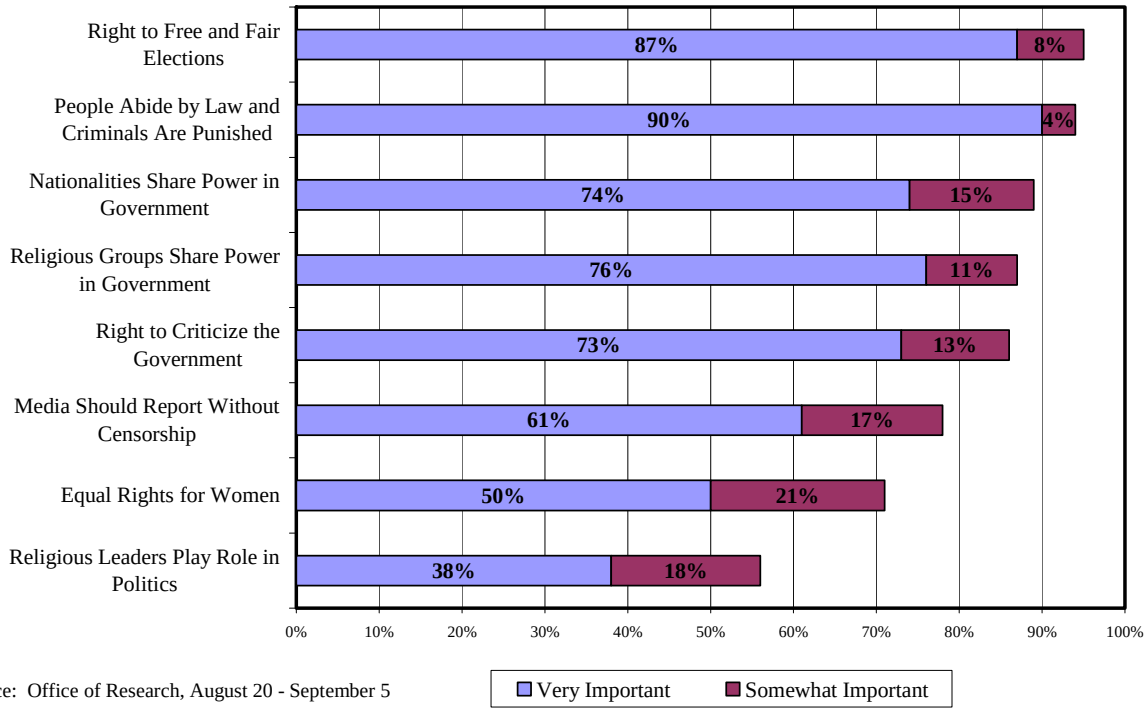
- In the new political environment, emerging leaders are still relatively unknown. Majorities have not heard enough to evaluate most members of the Governing Council, and religious leaders have better name recognition and ratings. But Iraqis place greater value on expertise and experience in staffing their government than they do on sectarian or ethnic interests.

This report is based on a total of 1444 interviews conducted in the urban areas of Baghdad, Fallujah, Ramadi, Basrah, Najaf, Suleymania, and Erbil between August 20 and September 5, 2003. The Office of Research commissioned ICRSS in Baghdad to carry out the fieldwork. Results from an Office of Research in-depth interview project are also incorporated in this analysis, as are findings from a Gallup poll in Baghdad (1,178 interviews, field dates August 18 - September 4, 2003) .

Strong Consensus on Value of Free Elections and Fair Representation

In all seven cities in the Office of Research poll, large majorities support what are generally considered to be democratic values. Nine in ten think it is very or somewhat important that people vote in free and fair elections (95%), that people abide by the law and criminals are punished (94%), that people can criticize the government (86%), and that major nationality (89%) and religious groups share power (87%). Majorities also value media that are independent of government censorship (78%) and rights for women that are equal to those of men (71%) [Figure 1]. There is very little, if any, variation among the cities on these components, and there are only minor differences between men and women in their attitudes toward gender equity.

Figure 1. Importance of Selected Political Values in Iraqi Society, Combined Responses for Baghdad, Ramadi, Falluja, Basrah, Najaf, Suleymania, and Erbil



Source: Office of Research, August 20 - September 5

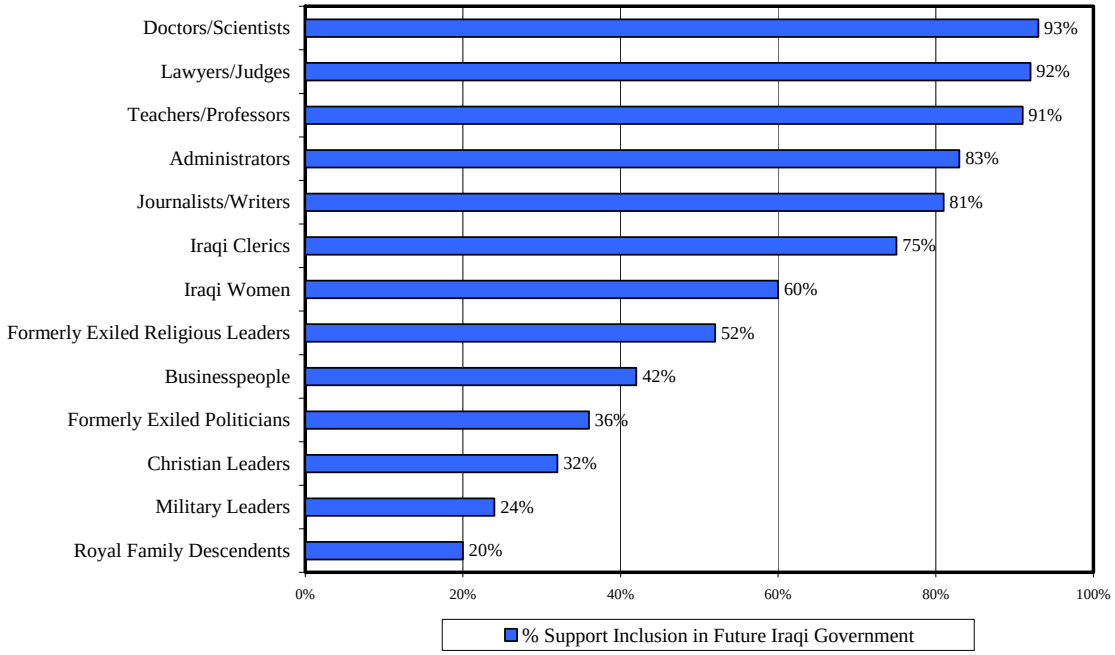
Some Groups More Welcomed Than Others

A smaller majority (56% overall) favor a role for religious leaders in politics, and these attitudes vary widely by region [Figure 1 above and Appendix, Figure 1]. Disapproval is highest among residents of the northern cities (34% Suleymania, 20% Erbil), while approval is highest in Najaf (78%). In a similar pattern, residents of Najaf are far more likely than others to support the inclusion of Iraqi clerics (95% vs. 75% overall) and formerly exiled religious leaders (87% vs. 52% overall) in a future Iraqi government [Appendix, Table 1 and Figure 2, next page].

There is some hesitance among Iraqis to include other groups in a government. Overall, no more than a third approve of including formerly exiled politicians (36%) and Christian leaders (32%), military leaders (24%) and descendents of the royal family (20%). There is muted approval for including formerly exiled clerics (52%), women (60%) and businesspeople (42%) [Figure 2, next page].

Residents in Sunni-dominated Fallujah and Ramadi stand out in their support for including military leaders and their opposition to formerly exiled politicians and formerly exiled clerics. Residents of Najaf are far more likely than others to support a role for women in politics [Appendix, Table 1].

Figure 2. Support for the Inclusion of Various Groups in Future Iraqi Government, Combined Responses for Baghdad, Ramadi, Fallujah, Basrah, Najaf, Suleymania, and Erbil



Source: Office of Research, August 20 - September 5

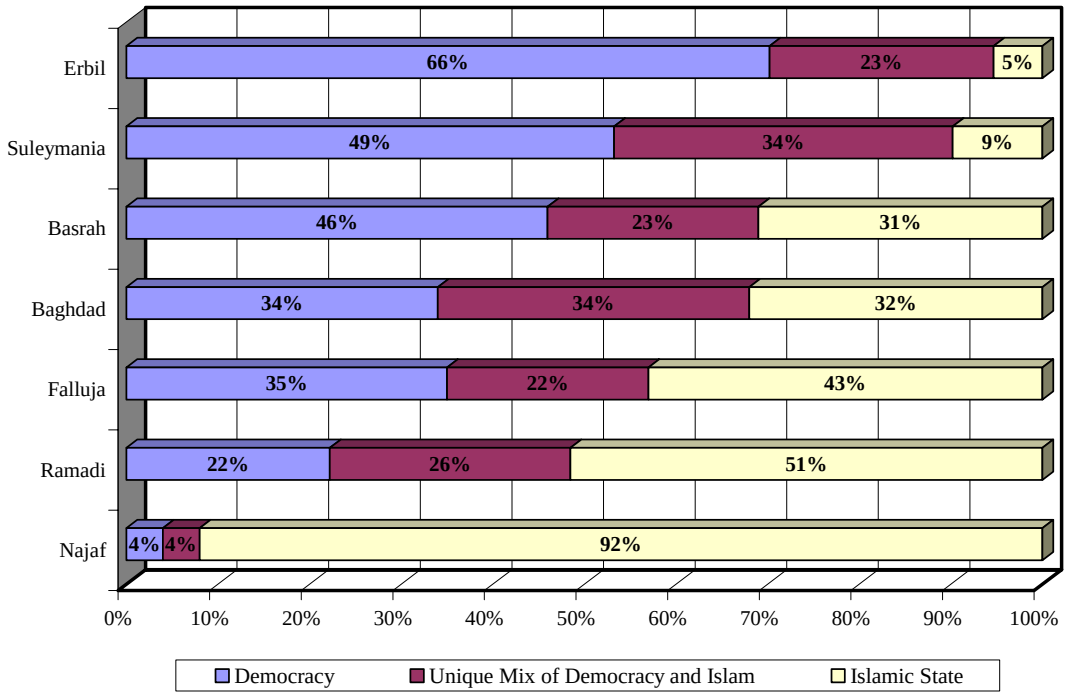
Wide Ranging Preferences for Future Political System

While there is widespread endorsement for the values of inclusiveness, rule of law and accountability, there is no public consensus on what type of political framework is best for Iraq. The public divides among those who support a democracy based on human rights, those who support an Islamic state based on Sharia law, and those who support a mix [Figure 3, next page]. Preferences tend to differ geographically:

- In Erbil and Suleymania, half to two-thirds prefer democracy.
- In Basra, a plurality prefers democracy.
- In Baghdad, the public is evenly divided.[1]
- A plurality in Fallujah and about half in Ramadi show support for an Islamic state.
- In Najaf, there is overwhelming support for an Islamic state.

[1] The Gallup survey in Baghdad finds a similar spread of opinion [Appendix, Table 2].

Figure 3. Preferred Political System for Iraq



Source: Office of Research, August 20 - September 5

Appropriate Role for Religion Differentiates Preferences

Data analysis shows that what differentiates Iraqis who support a democratic state from those favoring an Islamic state is whether they support a role for religious leaders in government. As Table 1 on the following page shows, just 35 percent of those Iraqis who prefer a democratic state endorse a role for religious leaders in politics compared to 75 percent among those who support an Islamic state.[2] However, those who favor an Islamic state are no less supportive of democratic values than those who prefer a democracy. This same pattern holds across all seven cities [figures not shown].

Taken together, the data suggest that Iraqi citizens have different ideas of what democratic and Islamic political systems mean on a functional level. They also show that support for the involvement of religious figures in government does not necessarily preclude support for leadership accountability and responsiveness to the Iraqi people through such mechanisms as elections and free speech.

[2] Those supporting an Islamic state are also more likely than others to identify themselves as Shia (versus Sunni or "just Muslim"), and to look toward Iran or conservative Sunni states as political models. When respondents were asked to select from a list the country they viewed as having the best political model for Iraq, about a third of those preferring an Islamic state chose Iran as a model and 16% selected Gulf states (i.e. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, or UAE) as models [Appendix, Figure 2].

Table 1. Support for Political System by Support for Various Political Values*

And support each below:	*Those who prefer a:*		
	A Democracy	**A Mix of Democracy and Islam**	**An Islamic State**
Religious Leaders Involved in Politics	**35%**	**58%**	**77%**
Free and Fair Elections	98	95	95
Law and Order	94	94	94
Criticize Government	86	86	87
Nationalities Share Power	92	89	87
Major Religious Sects Share Power	87	89	88
Source: Office of Research, August 20-September 5			

* Percentages reflect those viewing the political vales as "important" or "very important."

Parties Distrusted as Legacy of Past

The new Iraqi leadership will have to overcome disdain for political parties and politicians. About half in Erbil and Suleymania but no more than a third elsewhere express confidence in the political parties in Iraq today "to represent people like me" [Appendix, Figure 3]. In addition, when asked which leader in their country they trust most, two-thirds (64%) could not volunteer a single leader, and no one single leader was named by more than 12 percent [Appendix, Table 3].

Office of Research in-depth interviews underscore the poor image of politicians among average Iraqis, who tend to see them as self-serving. *"At first they call for home and freedom and after that they all become like Saddam,"* a 49-year old male from Kirkuk comments. A 30-year-old male from Baghdad has similar fears: *"I see that there are too many parties, and I fear that they might act against the people like the Ba'ath party."*

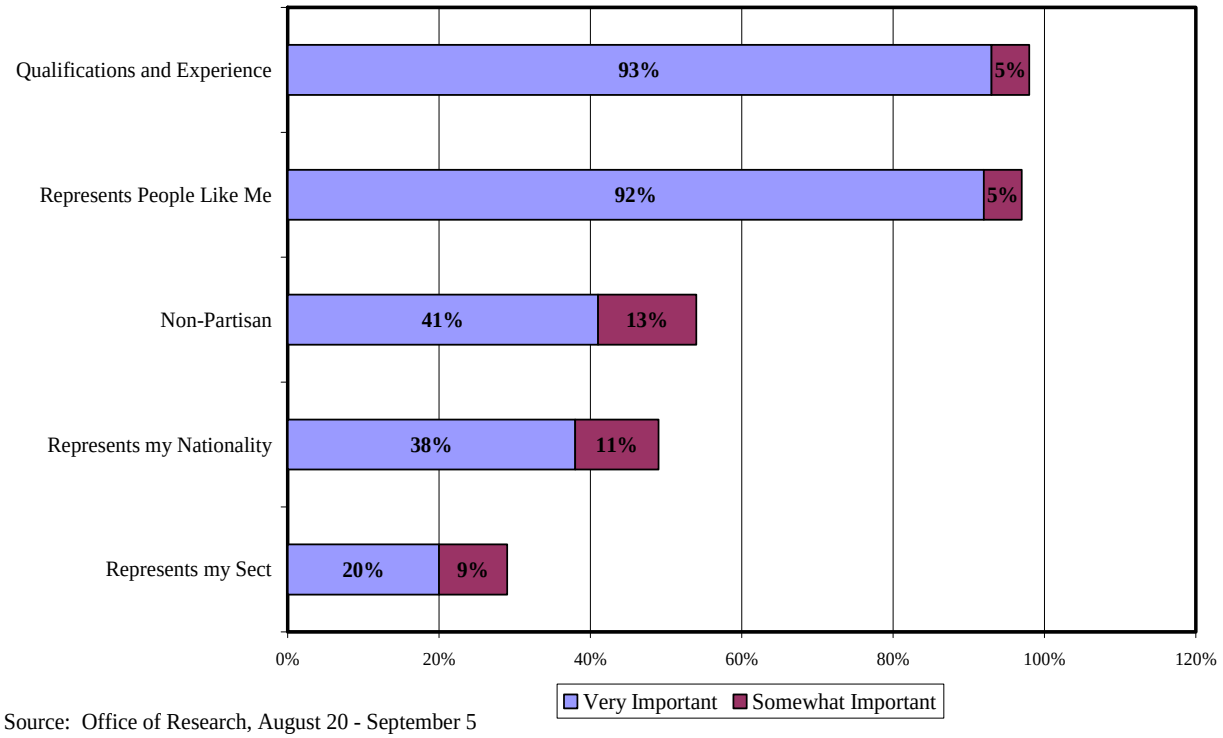
Iraqis Want Leaders with Expertise and Compassion, Sectarian Affiliation Less Important

The perceived inability of political parties to represent ordinary Iraqis is a major failing, since nine in ten Iraqis say that it is important for their leaders to "represent people like me" [Figure 4, next page]. While a large majority also says that qualifications and experience are important, the public places relatively lower value on nationality and sectarian interests.[3]

For the most part, average Iraqis seem careful not to draw attention to the Shia-Sunni power struggle that is often described in international media. Large majorities in every city endorse the representation of major religious groups in government [Appendix, Figure 6]. But perhaps as a signal that these tensions between Sunni and Shia lie under the surface, many Iraqis are uncomfortable identifying themselves as Sunni or Shia, preferring to describe themselves as "just Muslim" [Table 2, next page].

[3] Across all cities, no more than a third places a premium on a leader who "represents my sect." There is more variation among those who value a leader who "represents my nationality," with a higher percentage valuing nationality traits in Najaf (88%) – perhaps in reaction to the influence of foreign countries, such as Iran – and in Suleymania (59%) – probably a desire to express their Kurdish identity and autonomy [See Appendix, Figures 4 and 5].

Figure 4. Important Leadership Characteristics,
Combined Responses for Baghdad, Ramadi, Fallujah, Basrah, Najaf, Suleymania, and Erbil



Source: Office of Research, August 20 - September 5

Table 2. Sunni/Shia Affiliation by City*

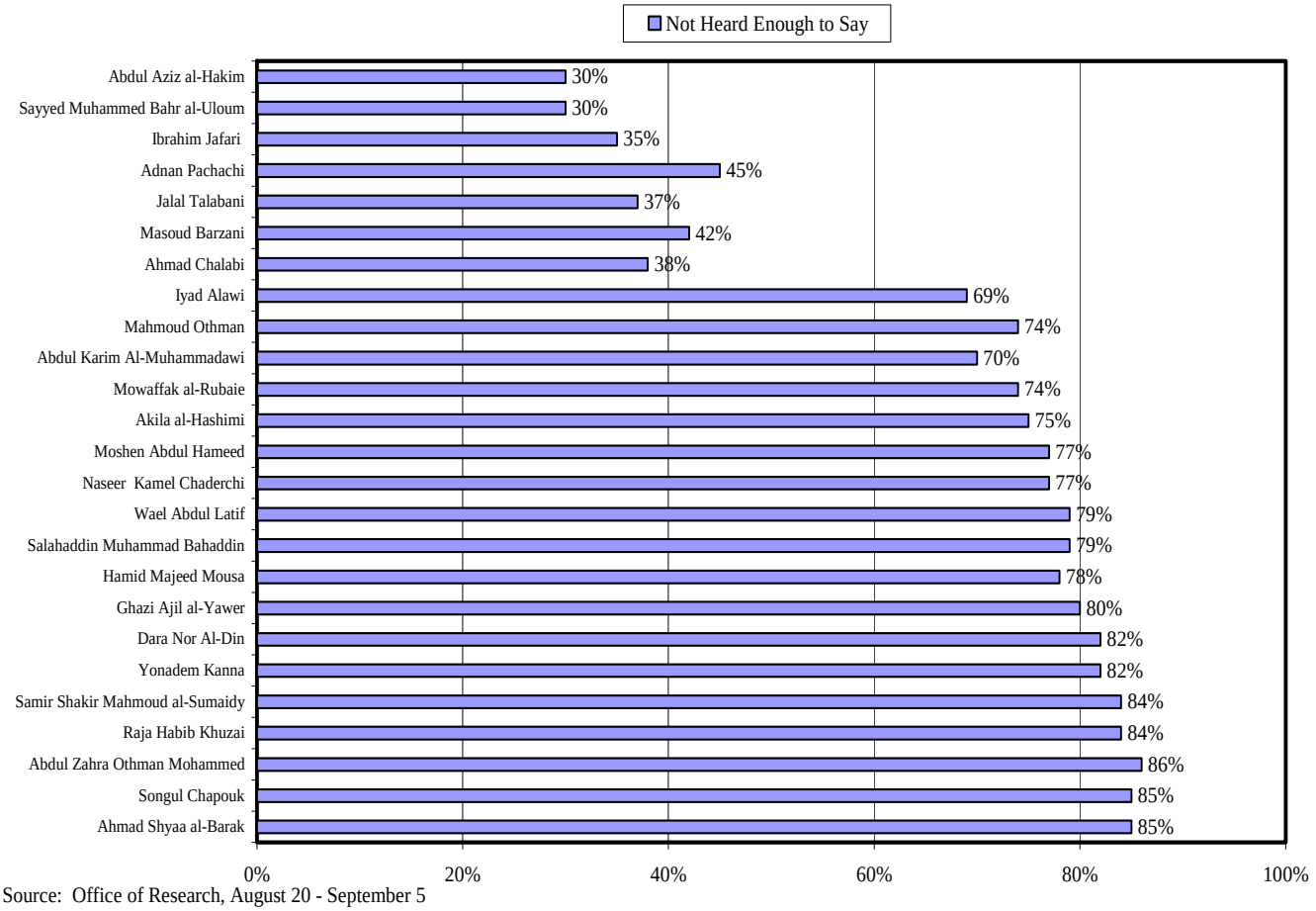
	Shia	Sunni	Just Muslim
Baghdad	32%	3%	62%
Basra	53	2	44
Najaf	87	0	13
Fallujah	0	33	65
Ramadi	0	9	89
Suleymania	1	44	51
Erbil	0	26	73

*Other religious categories are not included. The overall percentage of respondents identifying themselves as Christian was 1.5 percent.

New Leadership Not Yet Known to Public

In addition to suspicions of political parties and politicians, the transitional nature of the current Iraqi leadership and the overall political environment contributes to a general lack of awareness of emerging leaders. Between 69 and 85 percent in the Office of Research survey have not heard enough to voice an opinion on 18 of 25 Governing Council members [Figure 5, next page; interviews collected before death of Council member Akila al-Hashimi].

Figure 5. Awareness of Governing Council Members



Source: Office of Research, August 20 - September 5

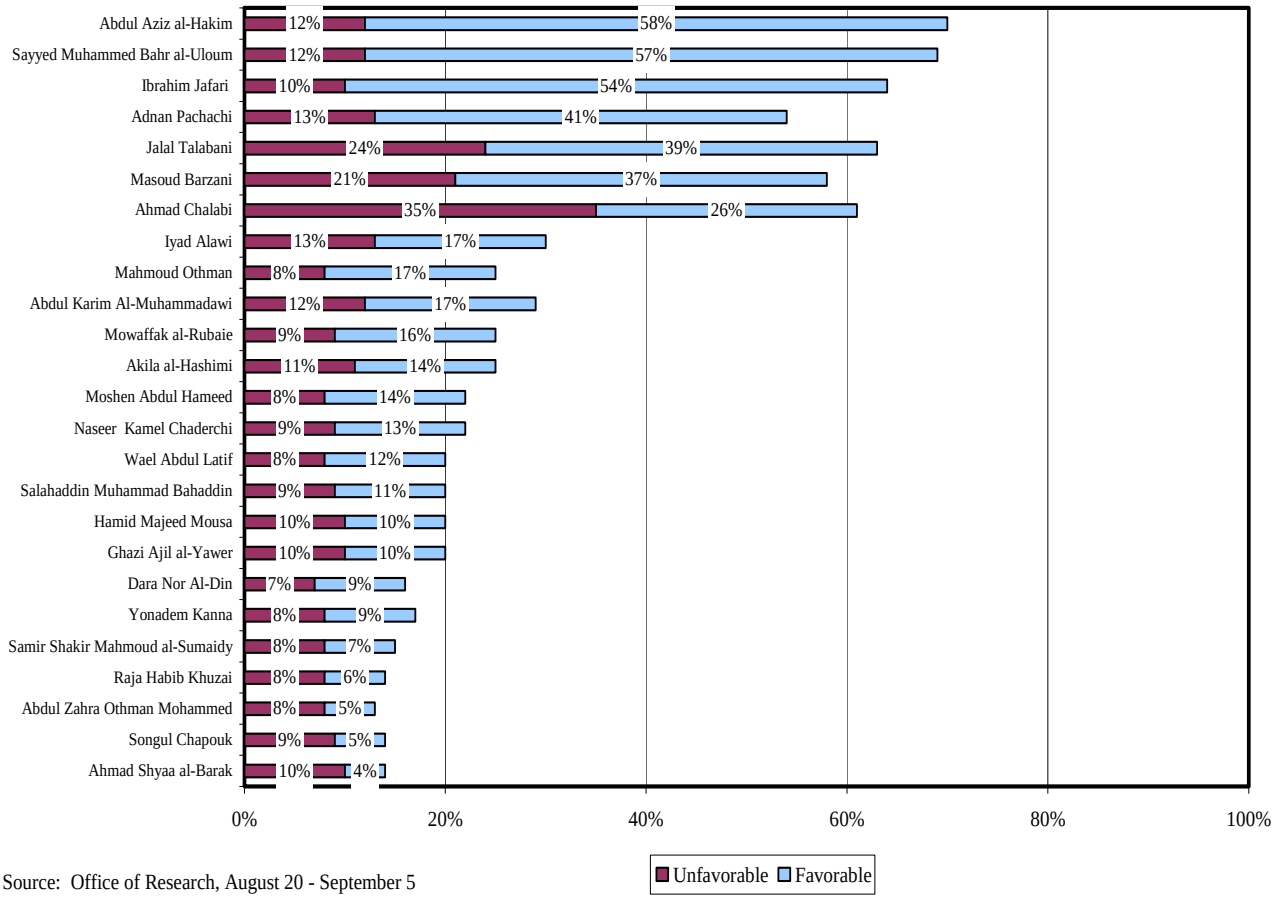
Results of in-depth interviews touch on Iraqis' unfamiliarity with new politicians, although some people interviewed say that over time parties may be able to gain public trust. In Karbala, a male age 21 asks: *"Who are they? Where did they come from? We know nothing about their past."* Another young man of 20 in Kirkuk observes: *"I don't know anything about these new parties because we were afraid toeven whisper… about any other parties except for the Ba'ath party…I think we need a lot of time to get used to so many parties."*

At present, among council members, Shia religious leaders who have returned from abroad tend to have better name recognition and favorability ratings than others. Just over half in the Office of Research survey give Abdul Aziz al-Hakim (58%), Sayyed Muhammed Bahr al-Uloum (57%), and Ibrahim Jafari (54%) a favorable rating [Figure 6, next page]. The ratings of these three figures, however, vary greatly by region, and are stronger in Najaf and Basrah, moderate in Baghdad, Erbil and Suleymania, and weaker in the Sunni-dominated areas of Ramadi and Fallujah.

In-depth interviews show that religious figures are appreciated in communities for being *"closer to the people"* and *"for looking after people's needs."* These interviews also attribute the appeal

of the religious figures to their dissident status under Saddam. Two men in their thirties from Basra comment: *"They were the most persecuted group during the ex-regime;" "The former regime's behavior against religious men makes them popular now."*

Figure 6. Popularity of Governing Council Members



Source: Office of Research, August 20 - September 5

Governing Council Considered a Positive Step, but Its Independence is Questioned

While the individual members have yet to make themselves known, Office of Research in-depth interviews show that many consider the establishment of the Iraqi Governing Council *"the beginning of a positive change," "a good step forward"* and *"ideal for these circumstances*. In addition, a Gallup survey in Baghdad (August 18-September 4) finds that six in ten residents of the capital have a favorable opinion of the Council (61% vs. 13% unfavorable; 27% don't know). But three-quarters think the policies of the Governing Council are "mostly determined by the coalition's own authorities" (versus 16% who say the IGC is "fairly independent").

In-depth interviews conducted in Samara were unusually negative toward the Governing Council; several participants questioned its independence. A 46 year-old Shia male states: *"The CPA brought those leaders and the Iraqi people did not choose them."* A female resident of

Samara, age 25 (Sunni) has the same complaint: *"The Iraqi people should choose their own leaders."* Another male, age 25 (Sunni) sums up: *"He who shakes hands with the Americans is not one of us."*

Many in-depth interviews also touched on the ethnic and religious composition of the council. For the most part, Iraqis seem to feel the makeup of the council is fair. A Sunni male, age 51, from Baghdad, gives his view: *"The representation of the Governing Council is good. Even if the Sunni are in the minority – it is fair."* While a Kurdish participant in Kirkuk is satisfied that the Kurds *"have a strong voice in the council;"* a fellow Kirkuk resident complains that *"there is only one representative for the Turkmeni and we are a great sect."* Another Sunni male, age 29, also from Kirkuk, has a big picture view: *"The Governing Council is a collection of Sunni and Shia – more Shia than Sunni, but the most important thing is that this is a new government and it will not be like the last one."*

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METHODOLOGY

Office of Research

Survey:

Face-to-face interviews were conducted among 1,444 Iraqi adults residing in the cities of Baghdad, Najaf, Basrah, Ramadi, Fallujah, Erbil and Suleymania. Interviews were carried out between August 20 and September 5. The overall response rate was 89 percent, ranging from 93% in Baghdad to 100% in Suleymania and Erbil. Eleven percent of those selected refused to participate in the study.

A multi-stage probability-based sample was drawn, utilizing residential listings from Iraq's 1997 Population and Housing Census. Census sub-districts were utilized as primary sampling units (PSUs), with 80 PSUs being selected using probability-proportional-to-size procedures. Due to the size of Baghdad, the city was stratified by neighborhood to ensure that all city areas were represented in the sample. Interviewers were given all address details for households at four sampling points within each PSU. Five interviews were conducted at each sampling point. Within each selected household, one respondent was randomly selected using the last birthday method.

The margin of error, assuming a 95% confidence level and the clustering effects of a multi-stage design, is approximately ± 3.4% for the overall sample. The margin of error varies across the samples of the individual cities as follows:

City	Sample Size	Margin of Error
Baghdad	680	± 4.9%
Basrah	235	± 8.5%
Najaf	193	± 9.7%
Ramadi	87	± 13.7%
Fallujah	49	± 17.7%
Erbil	100	± 13.7%
Suleymania	100	± 13.7%
Total	1444	± 3.4%

In-depth Interviews:

Approximately 260 in-depth interviews were carried out in the cities of Baghdad, Basra, Najaf, Karbala, Kirkuk and Samara from roughly August 25 to September 20. Questions asked respondents about their attitudes toward Iraq's image, CPA performance, the Governing Council, and Iraq's future political system. Respondents comprised a mix of men and women from various ages and with differing educational and religious backgrounds.

Gallup

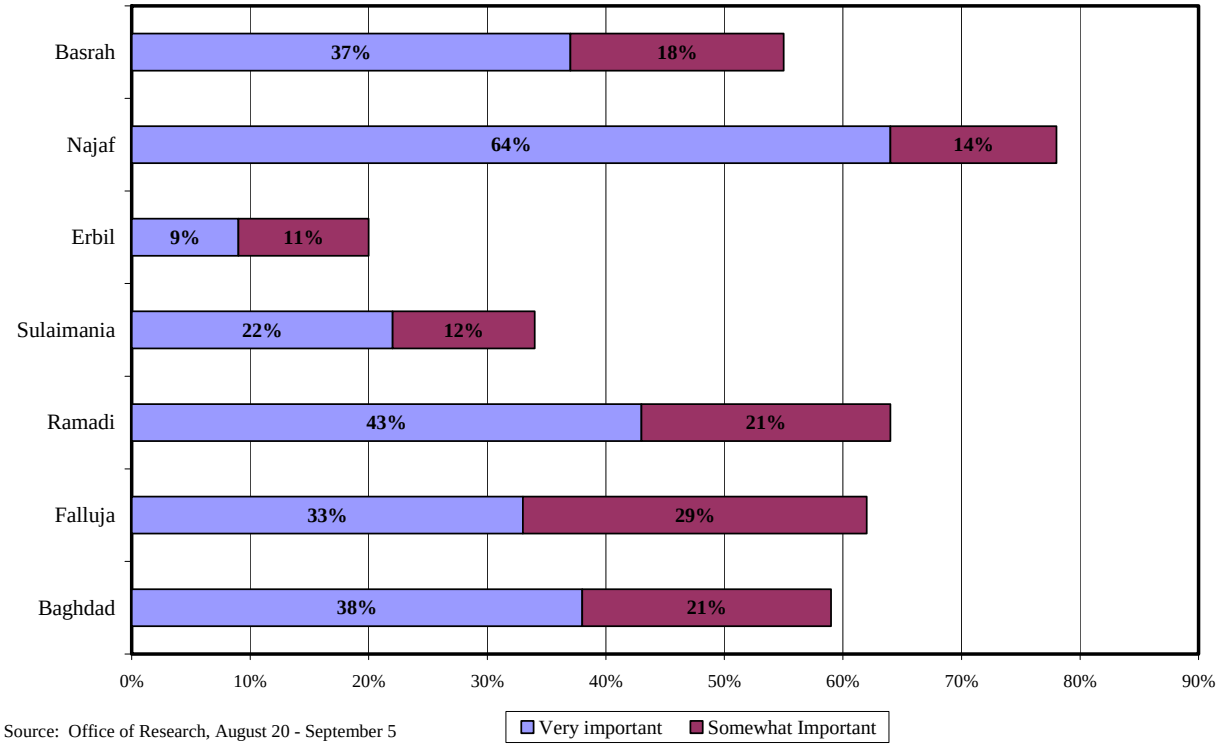
Face-to-face interviews were conducted among 1,178 adults who resided in urban areas within the governorate of Baghdad. Interviews were carried out between August 28 and September 4. The response rate was 97 percent; 3 percent of those selected refused to participate in the study.

A probability-based sample was drawn utilizing 1997 census data. Census districts were utilized as primary sampling units (PSUs). A total of 122 PSUs were chosen using probability-proportional-to-size methods. About 10 interviews, one per household, were conducted at each location. Interviewers were given all relevant address details for each PSU. Within each selected household, respondents were selected using the Kish method.

For the results based on this sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the margin of error is approximately ± 2.7%.

APPENDIX

Appendix Figure 1. Importance of Religious Leaders Playing Large Role in Politics



Source: Office of Research, August 20 - September 5

Appendix Table 1. Regional Variations in Support for the Inclusion of Various Groups in Future Iraqi Government (%)

	Baghdad	Basrah	Najaf	Fallujah	Ramadi	Suleymania	Erbil	Overall
Iraqi clerics	78%	72%	95%	82%	76%	54%	45%	75%
Christian religious leaders	39	40	23	12	22	17	20	32
Formerly Exiled Politicians	34	50	43	6	8	42	35	36
Formerly exiled religious leaders	53	60	87	16	12	36	28	52
Military officers	23	36	12	39	51	8	11	24
Descendents of the royal family	24	23	4	22	37	13	14	20
Women	62	58	72	35	43	59	54	60
Businesspeople	46	46	24	45	46	37	33	42
			14					
Sample Size	680	235	54	49	87	100	100	1444
Source: Office of Research, August 20 – September 5								

* Less than 1 percent.

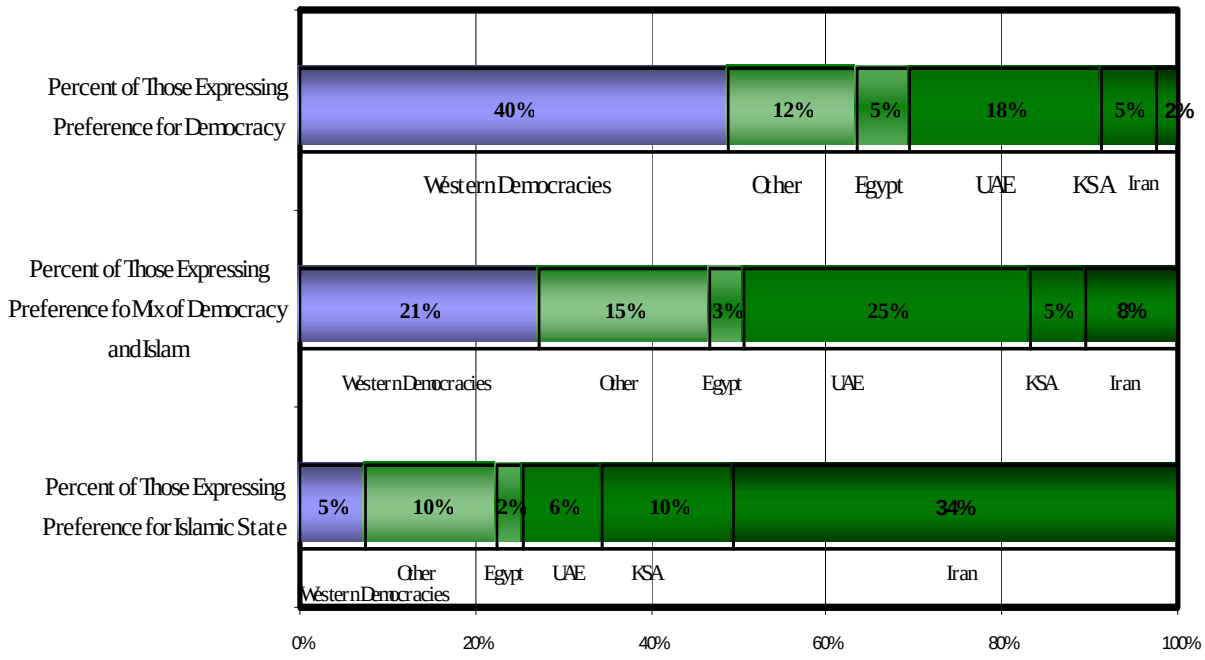
Appendix Table 2. Gallup Survey in Baghdad: Preferred and Expected Political Models

	Acceptable	Preferred	Likely
Multi-parliamentary democracy, such as in most European nations, the US, and some Asian countries	53%	39%	42%
An Islamic system, based on *Shura* (mutual consultation)	53	29	17
An Islamic theocracy in which religious leaders or mullahs have a strong influence, such as in Iran	23	10	7
A constitutional monarchy, such as the one which prevailed in Iraq before 1958	23	8	7
A conservative Islamic kingdom, such as that in Saudi Arabia	18	5	3
An Islamic democracy, such as that in Pakistan	11	2	2
Conservative Islamic theocracy, such as that which existed in the former Taliban regime in Afghanistan	4	*	*
Don't Know/No Response	1	6	22

~ Respondents were allowed multiple responses to express their opinion on each political system. Figures therefore do not add up to 100%.

* Figure is less than 1 percent.

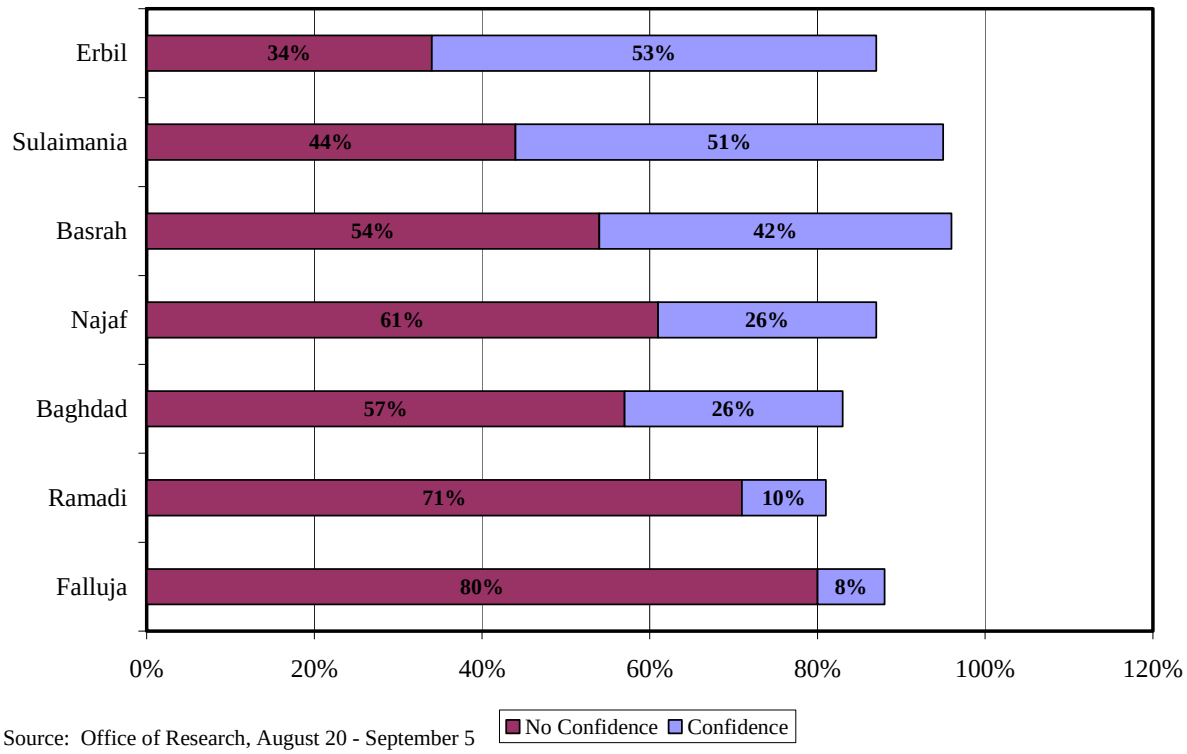
Appendix Figure 2. Preference for Political System by Country Model



NOTE: The "don't know" and "no answer" categories have been excluded from the chart for ease of read. Therefore the categories comprising each bar do not add up to 100 percent.

Appendix Figure 3. Confidence in Political Parties to Represent the Views of Iraqis

How much confidence do you have in political parties to represent Iraqis like you?

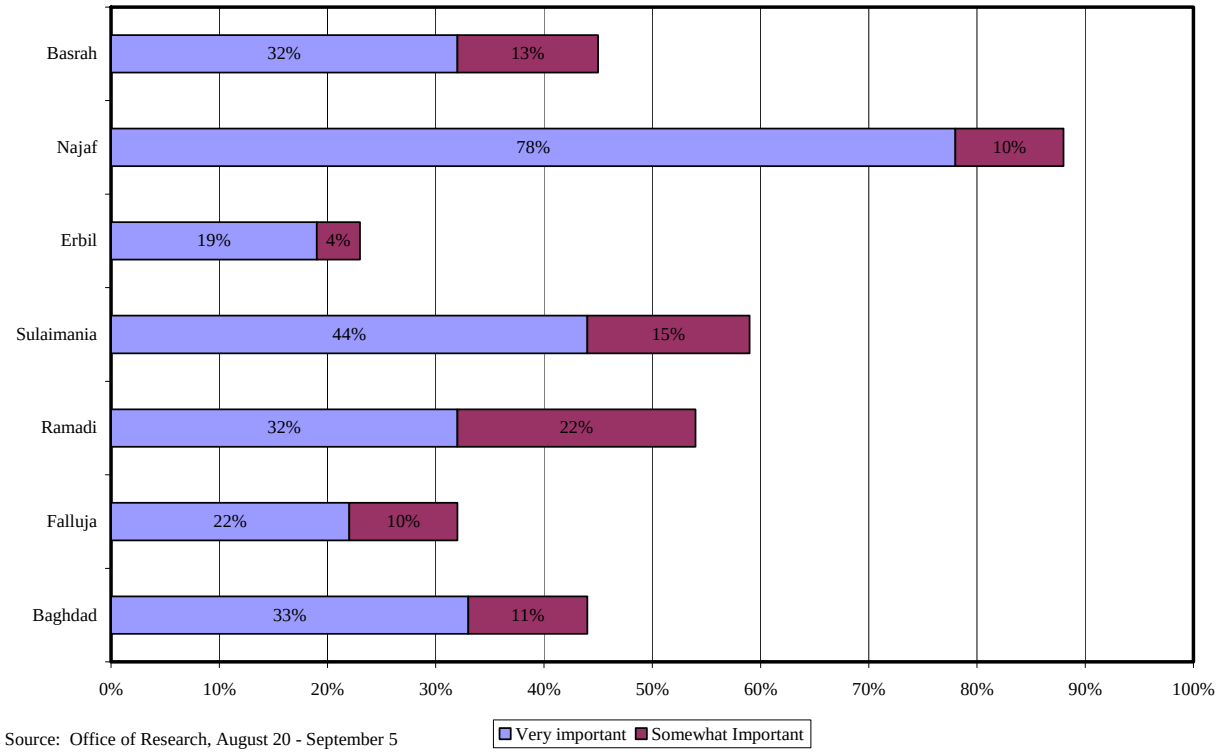


Source: Office of Research, August 20 - September 5

Appendix Table 3. Leader Trusted Most	Percentage
Ibrahim Jafari	12%
Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim	4
Jalal Talabani	4
Saddam Hussain	3
Masood Barzani	2
Adnan Pachachi	2
Moshen Abdul Hameed	1
Muktada Al-Sader	1
Sayyed Muhammed Bahr al-Uloum	1
Ahmad Chalabi	1
Al-Sharif Ali Bin al-Hussein	1
Abdul Karim Qasim	1
Other	4
Don't Know/No Response	**64**
Total	101*

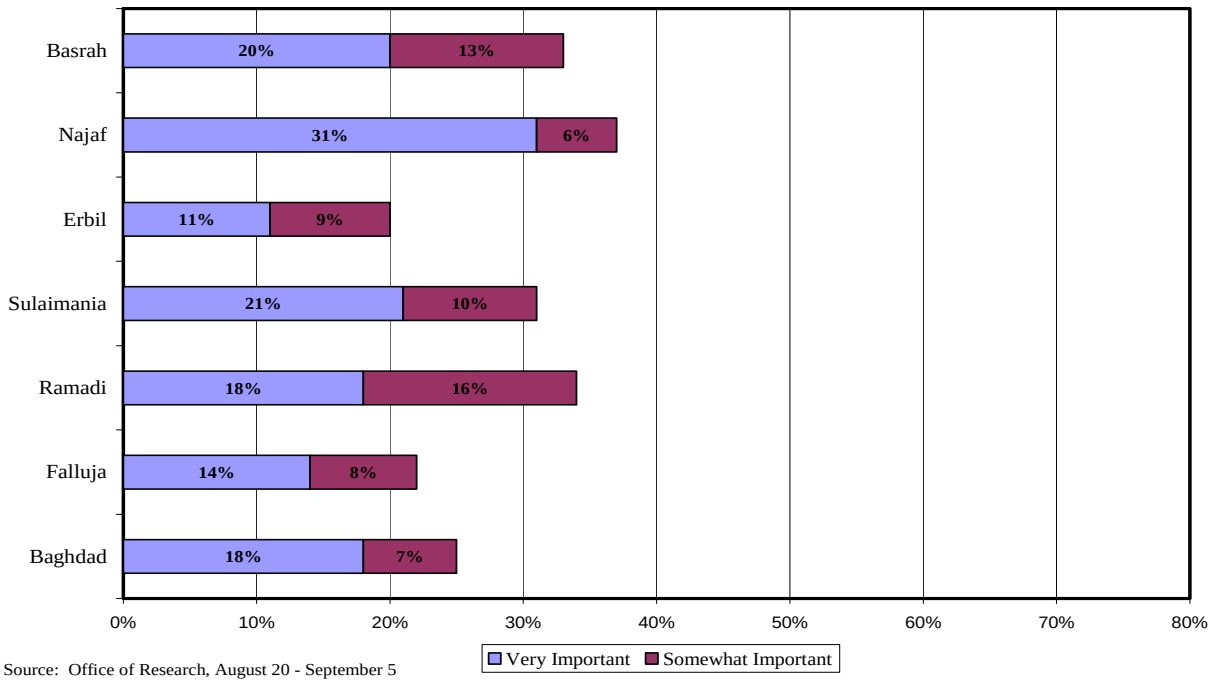
* Due to rounding, figure does not add to 100 percent.

Appendix Figure 4. Importance of Nationality as Leadership Characteristic



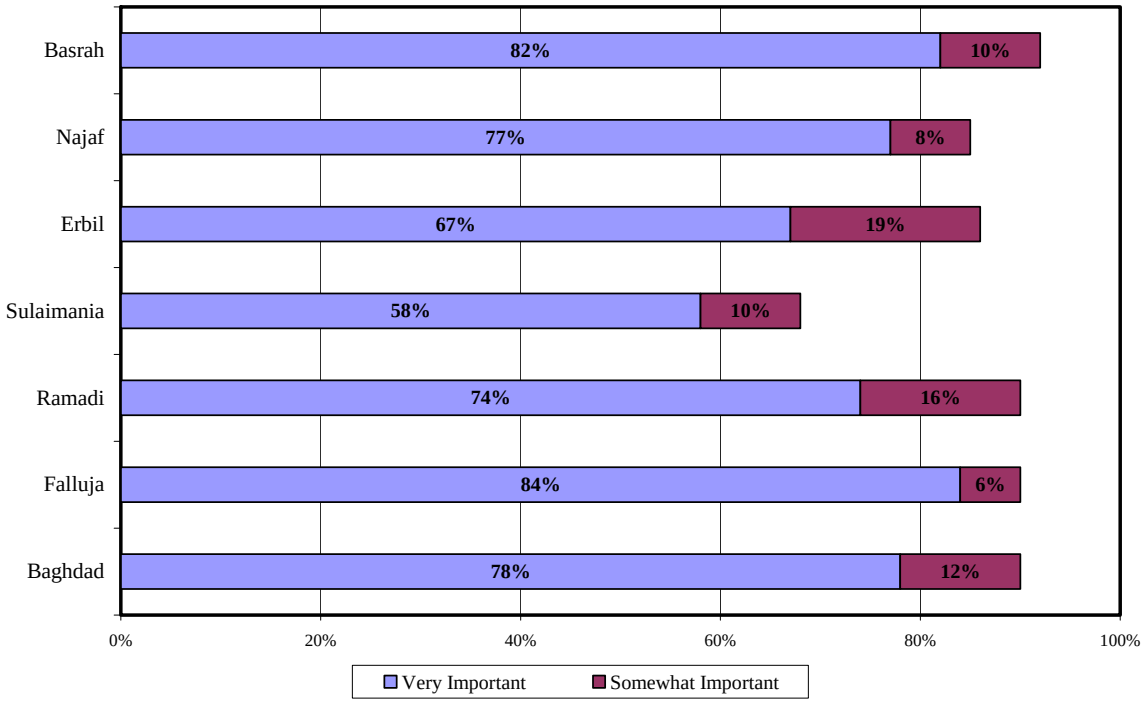
Source: Office of Research, August 20 - September 5

Appendix Figure 5. Importance of Sect as Leadership Characteristic



Source: Office of Research, August 20 - September 5

Appendix Figure 6. Importance of Major Religious Groups Sharing Power in Government



Source: Office of Research, August 20 - September 5