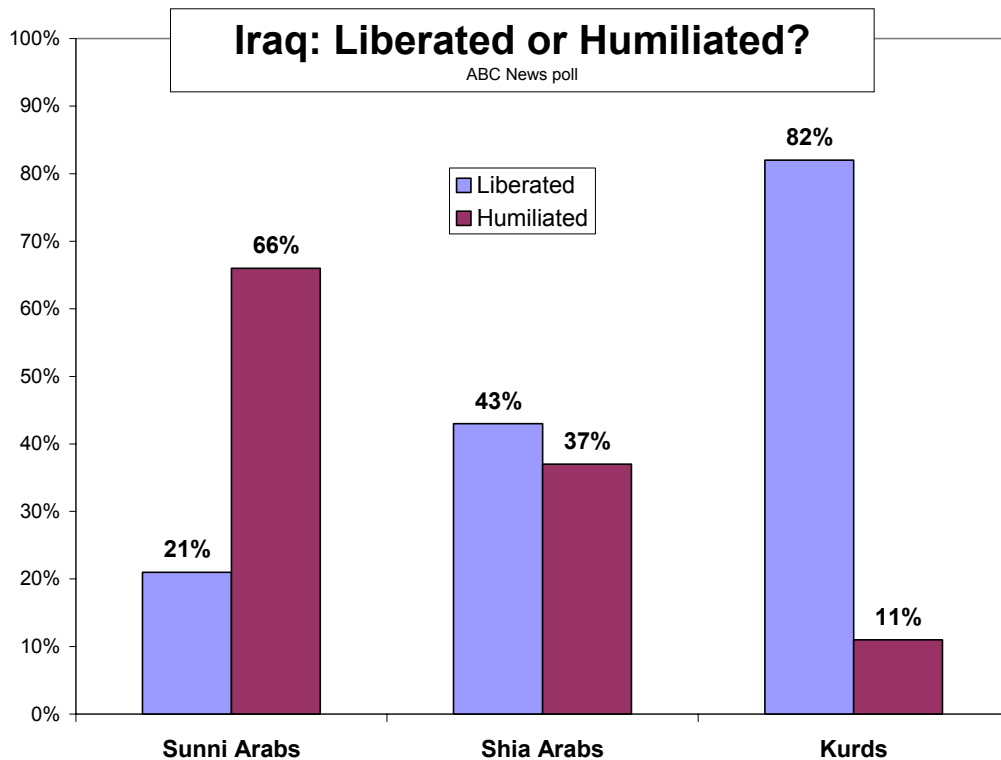


## Concern in Iraq Peaks Among its Sunni Arabs

To see the anger and humiliation in Iraq, look to its political losers, the Sunni Arabs. And to see the country's future, look again: There are some broad political gaps between this group and other Iraqis – differences that may need bridging for the country to heal.

An ABC News poll of Iraqis, the first media-sponsored national public opinion poll in the country, sheds light on some of the complicated strands of religious and ethnic views there. Most striking are comparisons of Sunni and Shia Arabs, the two main Islamic doctrines, and of ethnic Kurds in the country's north.

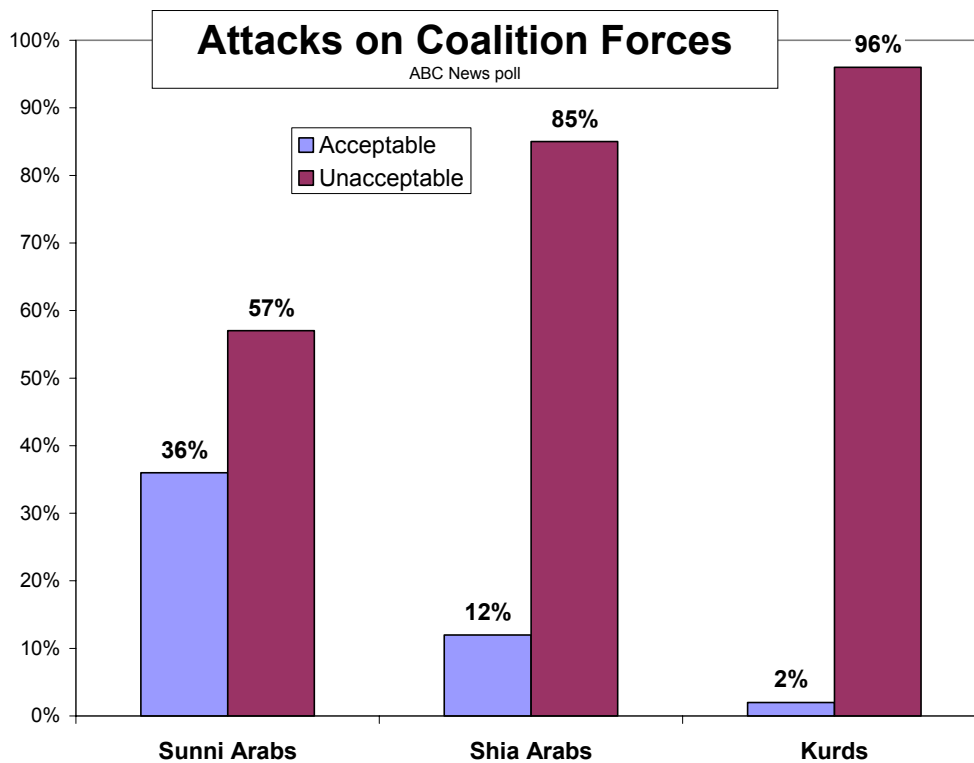
Iraq's Sunni Arabs, the favored group under the 24-year reign of Saddam Hussein, are far more hostile than other Iraqis to the U.S.-led coalition. Sixty-three percent of Sunni Arabs say it was wrong for the United States to invade, and 66 percent say the invasion humiliated Iraq more than liberated it. Fewer than four in 10 Shia Arabs say the same (as do a mere one in 10 of the broadly pro-coalition Kurds.)



	Sunni Arabs	Shia Arabs	Kurds
U.S.-led invasion:			
Right	24%	51	87
Wrong	63	35	9
Liberated Iraq	21	43	82
Humiliated Iraq	66	37	11

Similarly, 72 percent of Sunni Arabs oppose the presence of coalition forces in Iraq today, compared to 54 percent of Shia Arabs (and just 12 percent of Kurds). And most threateningly, 36 percent of Sunni Arabs say attacks against coalition forces are “acceptable” – triple the level among Shia Arabs. Also, 29 percent of Sunni Arabs say coalition forces should leave now, compared with 12 percent of Shia Arabs.

	Sunni Arabs	Shia Arabs	Kurds
Attacks on coalition forces:			
Acceptable	36%	12	2
Unacceptable	57	85	96
Coalition should leave now	29	12	2



These and other results make clear the need for distinctions when talking about Sunnis in Iraq. There are two very different groups within the Sunni population: on one hand, Sunni Arabs; on the other, members of the Kurdish minority, most of whom also are Sunnis, but

who hold dramatically different attitudes. Looking at Sunnis makes far more sense when Kurds are separated out.

This is the second of two analyses of data from the ABC News poll in Iraq, which was co-sponsored by the German network ARD, the BBC and NHK in Japan, with sampling and field work by Oxford Research International of Oxford, England. For the first ABC News analysis see <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>.

POLITICS – There also are differences between Sunni Arabs and Shia Arabs in some – but not all – of their domestic political views. How these shake out may prove central to Iraq’s future: accommodation among groups, or sectarian strife.

There are areas of agreement. Perhaps most basically, 85 percent of Sunni Arabs and 93 percent of Shia Arabs – very similar numbers – want to see Iraq remain a unified country with its central government in Baghdad. (Kurds are much less likely to agree, preferring a federated system of regional states – albeit not a breakup of the country.)

Another question about political structures asked for a preference among three choices: democracy, a single strong leader for life, or an Islamic state. Here there are differences between Sunni and Shia Arabs, but not vast ones – Sunni Arabs are 12 points more likely to favor a “strong leader for life,” and 11 points less likely to prefer an Islamic state. (The far bigger difference is among overwhelmingly pro-democratic Kurds.)

	Sunni Arabs	Shia Arabs	Kurds
Preferred political system:			
Democracy	35%	40	70
Strong leader for life	35	23	6
Islamic state	15	26	8

There are bigger differences, though, on some other questions. Asked what Iraq needs most in the next 12 months, “a single strong Iraqi leader” (not necessarily “for life”) is cited by 65 percent of Sunni Arabs, compared with 44 percent of Shia Arabs. Asked what’s needed most in the next five years, Sunni Arabs again are more likely to pick a single strong leader, in this case by 17 points.

“Religious leaders,” although more popular among Shia than among Sunni Arabs, runs a fairly distant third preference in both groups. Kurds favor a democracy.

	Sunni Arabs	Shia Arabs	Kurds
Iraq needs in 12 months:			
Single strong leader	65%	44	20
Iraqi democracy	14	24	60
Religious leaders	5	18	2
Iraq needs in five years:			
Single strong leader	49%	32	16
Iraqi democracy	31	39	67
Religious leaders	6	17	2

There also are some differences in confidence in domestic leaders and institutions. Most Shia Arabs, 52 percent, express confidence in “religious leaders” in Iraq; this falls to 34 percent among Sunni Arabs. (Also, Sunni Arabs are 13 points less likely to express confidence in the new Iraq army.)

And – potentially another factor in the political equation – 69 percent of Shia Arabs say voting is something they might do in the future, compared with 54 percent of Sunni Arabs.

PERSONAL – There are mostly smaller differences between these groups – more common ground – on some personal matters. Two-thirds of Sunni and Shia Arabs alike say their lives are going well. Half of Sunni Arabs and six in 10 Shia Arabs say life is better now than before the war. And six in 10 Sunni Arabs, and seven in 10 Shia Arabs, expect life to be better still a year from now. (On all these, Kurds are more positive.)

	Sunni Arabs	Shia Arabs	Kurds
Life these days:			
Good	66%	67	85
Bad	33	33	13
Life compared to a year ago:			
Better	50%	60	69
Worse	25	16	13
Expectations:			
Better	61%	72	83
Worse	12	4	2

Demographically, in terms of age, income and education, Sunni and Shia Arabs are quite similar.

SIZE OF GROUP – In this national poll, 40 percent of respondents identified themselves as Sunni Muslims, 33 percent as Shia Muslims and 22 percent as Muslims, with no doctrine specified. At first that might seem odd, because Iraq is widely regarded as a majority-Shia nation.

One very likely factor is those “unspecified” Muslims. Attitudinally they match up almost precisely with Shia Muslims. This suggests that many of them are Shiites who declined to specify their doctrine – sensible given their years of repression under Saddam.

Another issue is whether Kurds are or are not included in the count of Sunnis in Iraq; they are mostly Sunnis, but as shown, attitudinally very different. Kurds account for 17 percent of the Iraqi population. Sunni Arabs account for 27 percent.

There are a variety of population estimates in the public realm. Without specific source attribution, the “Information Please Almanac” reports that Iraq is 60-65 percent Shia and

32-37 percent Sunni. Somewhat differently, it's given as 52 percent Shia and 42 percent Sunni in the online atlas/encyclopedia Atlapedia. Another source, the Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, says Iraq's Shia Arabs account for 55 to 60 percent of its population; Sunni Arabs 15 to 20 percent, and Sunni Kurds 20 percent.

Data from this survey, if "unspecified" Muslims are added to the Shia count, are similar to the range in these estimates.

REGION – Another part of the puzzle is that these groups tend to be very concentrated regionally. In the south, only two percent of Iraqis identify themselves as Sunni. In the central region, only 10 percent identify themselves as Shiites; in Iraqi Kurdistan, only one percent as Shiites. Baghdad is more mixed.

Region:	Shia	Sunni	Muslim, unspecified
IKR	1	73	26
Central	10	67	18
Baghdad	37	36	18
South	69	2	29

There's even more concentration within provinces (this poll covered 16 of Iraq's 18 governorates). Some are predominantly Sunni – Anbar, Erbil, Dohuk, Diyala, Ninewa and Sulaymaniya. Others have virtually no Sunnis – single-digits in each of seven other governorates.

To examine the influence of region and religion, ABC News ran a statistical analysis called a regression, measuring the strength of each of those variables. In views of the invasion, both are independently significant in Iraqi attitudes. In another question, acceptability of attacks on coalition forces, region is not significant, while religion still is.

Fundamentally, while a variety of factors can influence attitudes, religious identification is a significant one in Iraq.

METHODOLOGY - This poll was conducted for ABC News, ARD, the BBC and NHK by Oxford Research International of Oxford, England. Interviews were conducted in person, in Arabic and Kurdish, among a random national sample of 2,737 Iraqis age 15 and up from Feb. 9-28, 2004. The results have a two-point error margin.

See initial analysis, full questionnaire and methodology at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet, <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934, or Lisa Finkel, (212) 456-6190.