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IRI Iraq Index: October 2010 Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion

Personal Sentiments

The International Republican Institute (IRI) surveys conducted in [December 2009](#) and [June 2010](#) demonstrated mixed feeling regarding Iraq's future. The most recent survey conducted in October 2010, during the long period of political stalemate, continued that trend.

On a personal level, the October 2010 poll shows that when asked, "Thinking ahead to next year, do you expect your household financial situation to get better, worse or stay the same?" 50 percent responded positively (38 percent somewhat better and 12 percent much better). This marks a 13-point drop from 63 percent the previous June (55 percent somewhat better and eight percent much better).

When asked retrospectively, "Has the situation regarding wages and salaries gotten better, gotten worse or stayed the same over the last year?" 32 percent responded favorably (26 percent somewhat better and six percent much better), while 44 percent responded same. Only 18 percent responded negatively (eight percent somewhat worse and 10 percent much worse).

National Sentiments

There is a clearer consensus on a sense of national (as opposed to personal) dissatisfaction. When asked in October 2010, "In your opinion, would you say things in Iraq are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction?" 57 percent of respondents answered that Iraq is moving in the wrong direction. Although this is statistically equivalent to the figure from the June 2010 poll, it is still 14 points higher than in the December 2009 survey. Furthermore, there has been a steady decline in respondents who believe Iraq is moving in the right direction: from 51 percent in December 2009, to 41 percent in June 2010, to 35 percent in October 2010.

In particular, when asked in each of the three surveys, "Not personally, but in terms of Iraq, what in your opinion is the single biggest problem facing Iraq as a whole?" security is ranked first in December 2009 at 43 percent and in October 2010 at 36 percent. June 2010 could be read as an outlier: security came in second at 24 percent while basic services were the primary concern for 66 percent of respondents, during a summer when Iraq was ravaged by high heat and inadequate

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electrical grids. Basic services, in the winter of 2009 and the fall of 2010, otherwise remain in a steady second place at 23 percent and 25 percent, respectively.

Yet over the same period, perceptions of a decline in Iraq's security situation have generally stabilized. When asked over the three surveys, "Over the last year, would you say that security in Iraq has gotten better or gotten worse?" 81 percent in December 2009, 73 percent in June 2010, and 65 percent in October 2010 said better. Conversely, over the same three surveys, a mere 18 percent, 23 percent, and most recently 20 percent said worse.

The Iraqi National Army receives a strong 77 percent approval rating, followed by the Iraqi National Police with 73 percent, and the Iraqi National Government with 58 percent. Shia Arabs voice the highest approval ratings of these government entities, closely followed by Sunni Arabs and then distantly trailed by the Kurds. For example, 88 percent of Shia Arabs support the Iraqi National Army, compared to 75 percent of Sunni Arabs but only 43 percent of the Kurds.

Regional and Sectarian Differences

The most significant differences by region are in satisfaction with basic services (electricity, water and sewage), with those in the Kurdistan region polling far more favorably than the rest of the country. Otherwise, a majority throughout Iraq maintain that unemployment and government corruption are either somewhat worse or much worse than in the previous year. A majority across the country also see no change in wages and salaries.

In addition, the only area that clearly approves of its provincial council is the Kurdistan region, at a 69 percent approval rating (37 percent somewhat approve, 32 percent strongly approve). Elsewhere, the disputed territories are evenly split in their assessments, while a slim majority in the northern triangle and southern belt disapprove of their provincial councils. Baghdad (62 percent) and Basrah (81 percent) solidly disapprove.

There is a wide consensus in all of Iraq's regions on bellwether questions such as, "In your opinion, would you say things in Iraq are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction?" the Kurdistan region (63 percent), disputed territories (59 percent), northern triangle (58 percent), Baghdad (62 percent) and Basrah (65 percent) responded in the wrong direction. Those in the Kurdistan region in the north are essentially polling even with Basrah in the south. The southern belt is the only outlier, with only 47 percent responding negatively.

These views are also roughly consistent along sectarian and ethnic lines. In October 2010, 68 percent of Sunni Arabs, 52 percent of Shia Arabs and 56 percent of Kurds all responded negatively. The proportion of Sunni Arabs who responded that things in Iraq are going in the right direction dropped three points from June to October; among Shia Arabs, that figure dropped 19 points, and among Kurds 11 points.

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March 2010 Elections and the New Parliament

There are almost no differences at all among the three major communities in assessing last spring's elections and anticipating the new parliament's performance. Around two-thirds in each group say the March 2010 elections were free and fair. Moreover, nearly the same high proportion of each group (57 percent) voice confidence that the new parliament will work well for the benefit of all the Iraqi people.

Looming Decisions

The character of the Iraq's government, whether federally or centrally administered, secular or religious, remains a highly divisive issue. Majorities in most provinces – but not in the Kurdistan region – desire a strong central government, and believe that oil revenues should go to the central government, not to the provinces.

Overall, 44 percent of Iraqis say that Iraqi politics should be based on religion (20 percent somewhat, 24 percent very much), as opposed to 50 percent who say it should be secular (21 percent somewhat, 29 percent very much). However, this issue, too, does not break down evenly by region. Fifty-nine percent in the southern belt and 79 percent in the Kurdish region want Iraqi politics to be based on religion. Basrah is evenly split, 47 percent to 48 percent. In striking contrast, 66 percent in the disputed territories, 67 percent in the northern triangle, and 70 percent in Baghdad all want Iraqi politics to be based on secularism. IRI focus groups conducted after the October poll suggest a correlation between favoring a secular government and experience with sectarian violence: very high numbers of Kurds favor a moderate form of religion in government, but have also been spared the sectarian violence experienced elsewhere in Iraq.

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