

# Public Opinion Towards Terrorist Organizations in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya

*A special focus on Dai'sh in Iraq*

Discussion hosted by Anthony H. Cordesman, Burke Chair in Strategy, CSIS,

featuring

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Prepared for March 4, 2015 Presentation at CSIS, Washington, D.C.

- Series of F2F nation wide polls conducted in Iraq since 2003.
- 3 F2F nation wide polls conducted in Libya (2012-2014)
- Two F2F nation wide polls conducted in each of Yemen and Syria (2013-2014)
- In depth interviews with opinion leaders from areas controlled by ISIL.

# Introduction

## Historical brief review

- **Modern militant Islamic movements** started in 1979 with Khomeini's revolution in Iran
- **Al Qa'ida** which established to fight Soviet Union in Afghanistan was very active in Iraq between 2004-2010
- **ISIL (Dai'sh)**
  - Appeared in Syria in 2013 as one of the main players there
  - Used by Asad to justify the suppression of the revolution, on one hand, and to gain international support on the other hand
  - The beginning of ISIL activities in Iraq was in Anbar after the ignorance of central government to demonstrator's demands

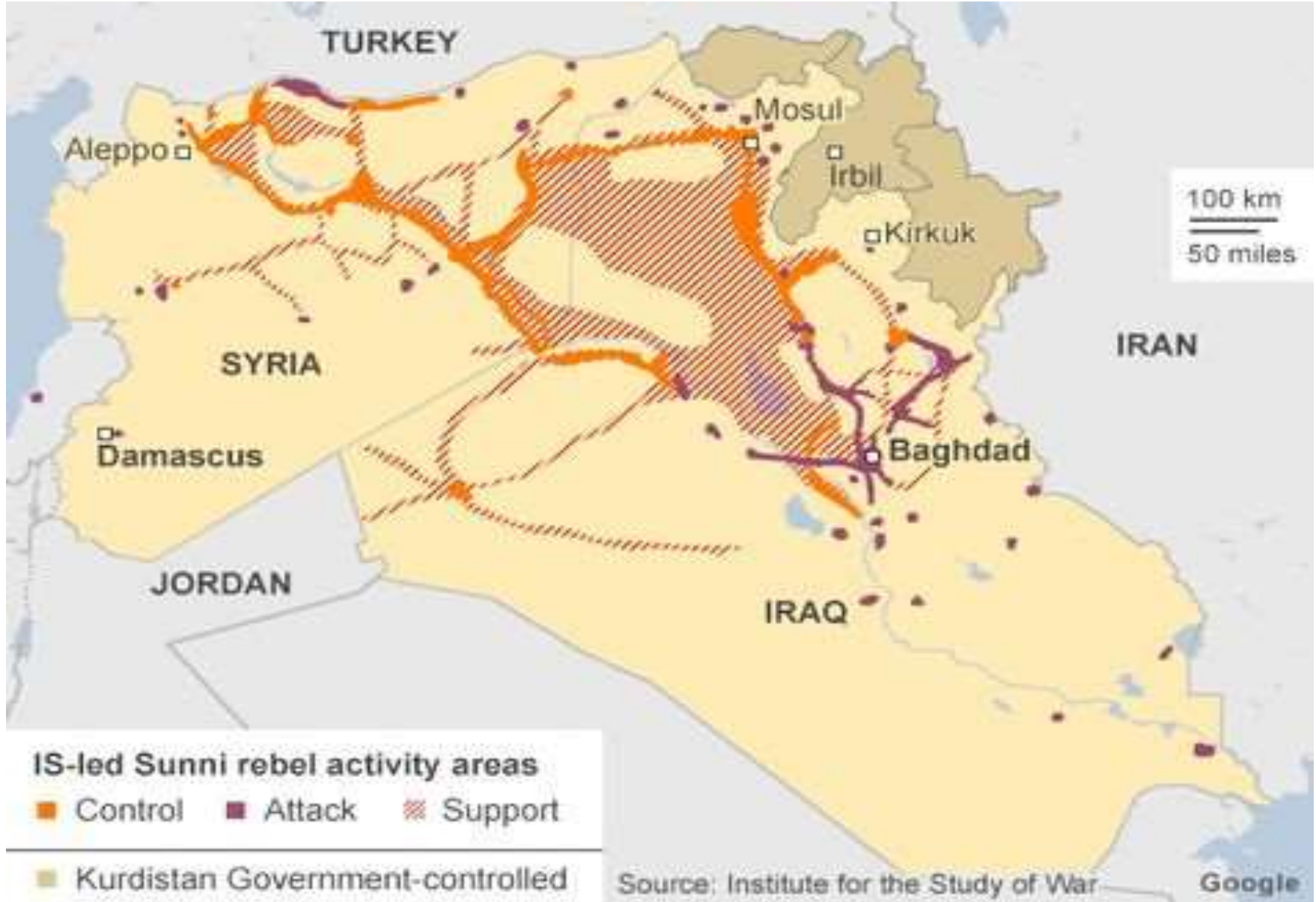
## What is Dai'sh?

- Dai'sh is the latest and most powerful incarnation of what began as an al-Qaida affiliate in Iraq following the 2003 US-led invasion.
- American forces spent years and enormous resources to bring the group largely to heel before US troops pulled out of the country in December of 2011.
- Since then, the region has been convulsed in political turmoil and sectarian hatred. The Islamic State has seized on those Sunni-Shiite tensions to help whip up its Sunni extremist followers.
- The group is led by an ambitious Iraqi militant known by his nom de guerre of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi
- On 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2014 Dai'sh took over Mosul and few days later it controlled nearly 40% of Iraq total area.

# Introduction

- The Syrian uprising, which began in 2011, opened the door to his greater ambitions. Al-Baghdadi dispatched militants to Syria to set up a group called the Nusra Front. Initially, more moderate Syrian rebels welcomed the group's experienced fighters. But the Islamic State alienated many rebels and Syrian civilians alike with its brutality and attempts to impose its strict interpretation of Islam.
- Eventually, the Islamic State's (Dai'sh) presence in Syria proved so destabilizing that it fell out with the Nusra Front. Their mutual patron at the time, al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri, formally disavowed the Islamic State.

# Where is Dai'sh?



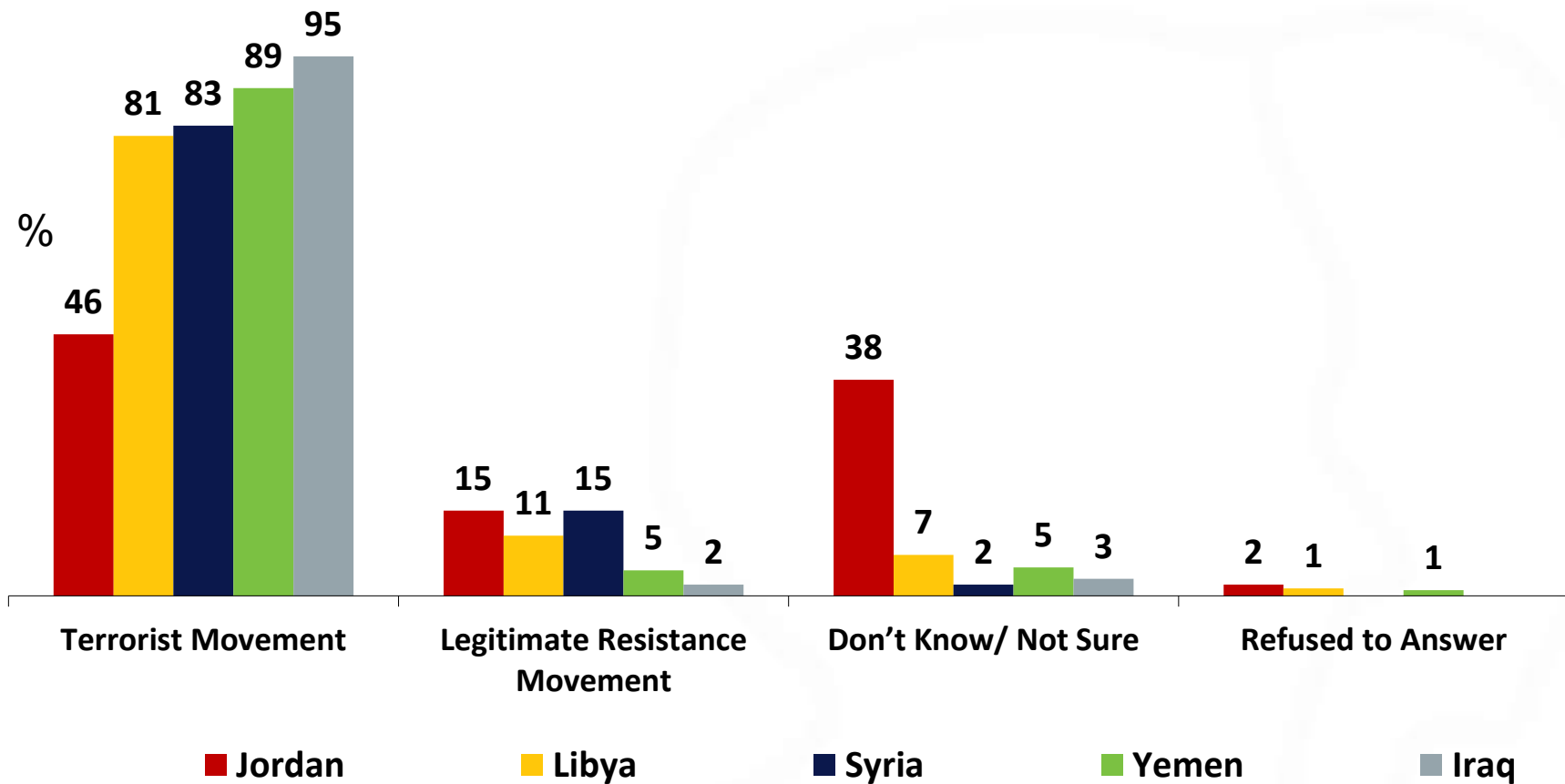
Like many, I have struggled to understand the precise factor that led to the dramatic rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) over the past ten months. Social science, like other sciences, often depends on trial and error. First, I thought religion must be a driving force of ISIL, after all, its leader has called for a new caliphate and professes to be the standard-bearer of a "pure" if extreme form of Islam. (Here I should note that I am myself a devout, practicing Muslim, and while my understanding of my own faith rejects this explanation out of hand, as an honest scientist, I am compelled to explore the possibility.) After careful examination of public attitudes in the areas where Da'ish (Arabic word for ISIL) has become dominant, I saw a clear contradiction in religious beliefs between Da'ish/ISIL and the population at large.

Polls show that in the areas where Dai'sh took control in Iraq or Syria, over 90% of people perceived religion as either important or very important in their life. Yet only 13% of the public in Syria support their goals and activities. While 97% of Sunni's in Iraq see Dai'sh as a terrorist organization.

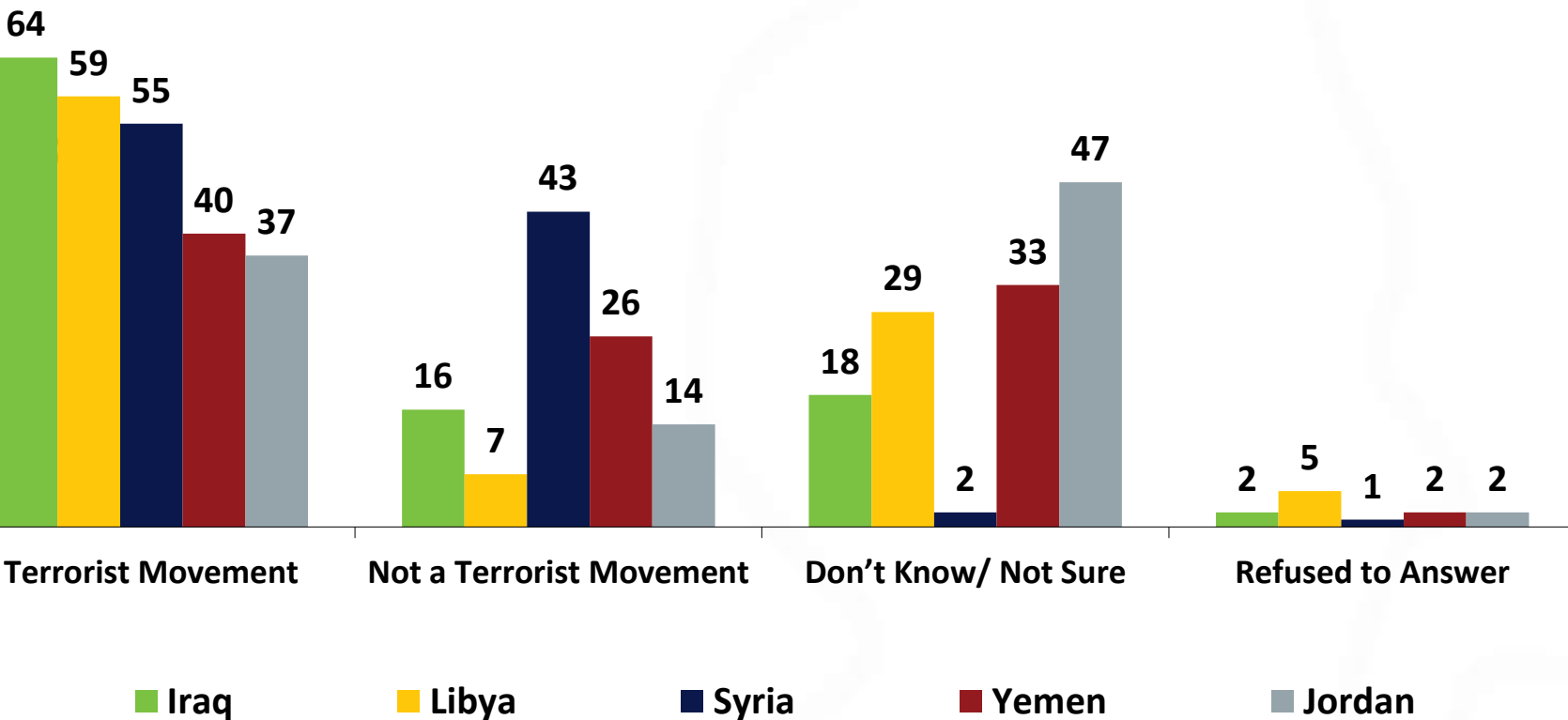
**BY AND LARGE, MUSLIMS DO NOT BELIEVE OR SUPPORT DAI'SH**



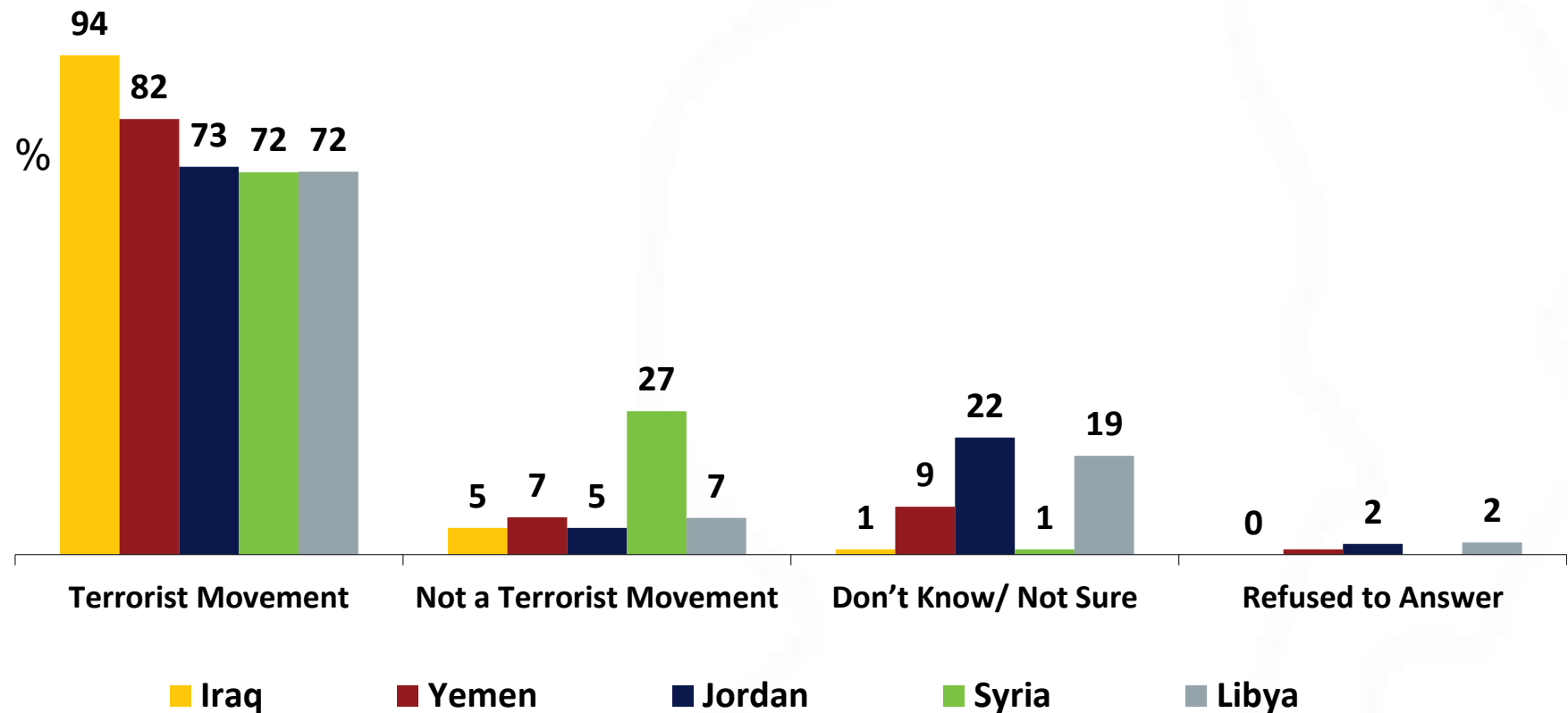
Some people describe the following movements as legitimate resistance while others describe them as terrorist. Do you think Al-Qaida is a legitimate resistance movement or a terrorist movement?



Some people describe the following movements as terrorist while others describe them as non terrorist.  
Do you think Nusra Front is a terrorist movement or non terrorist movement?

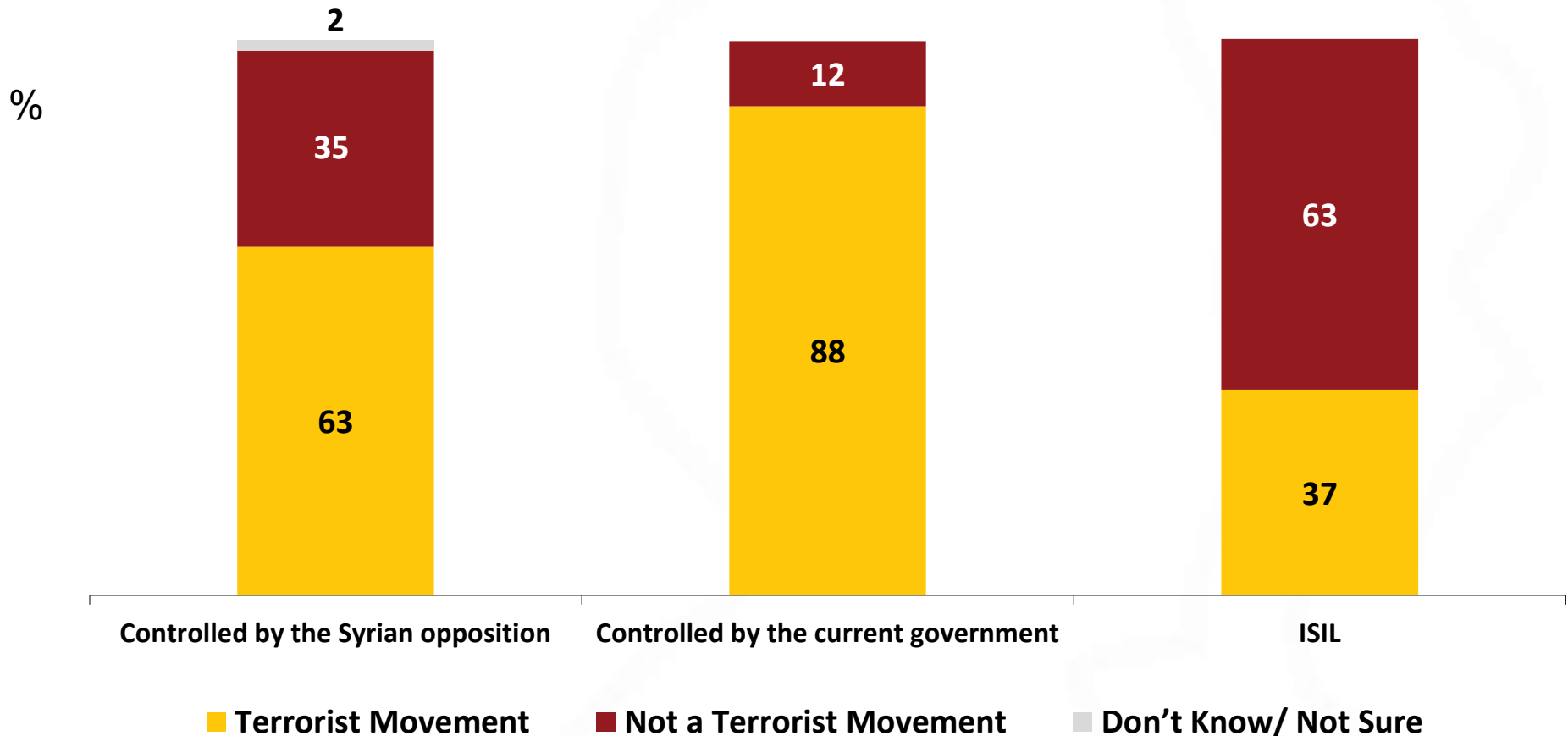


Some people describe the following movements as terrorist while others describe them as non terrorist. Do you think ISIL is a terrorist movement or non terrorist movement?



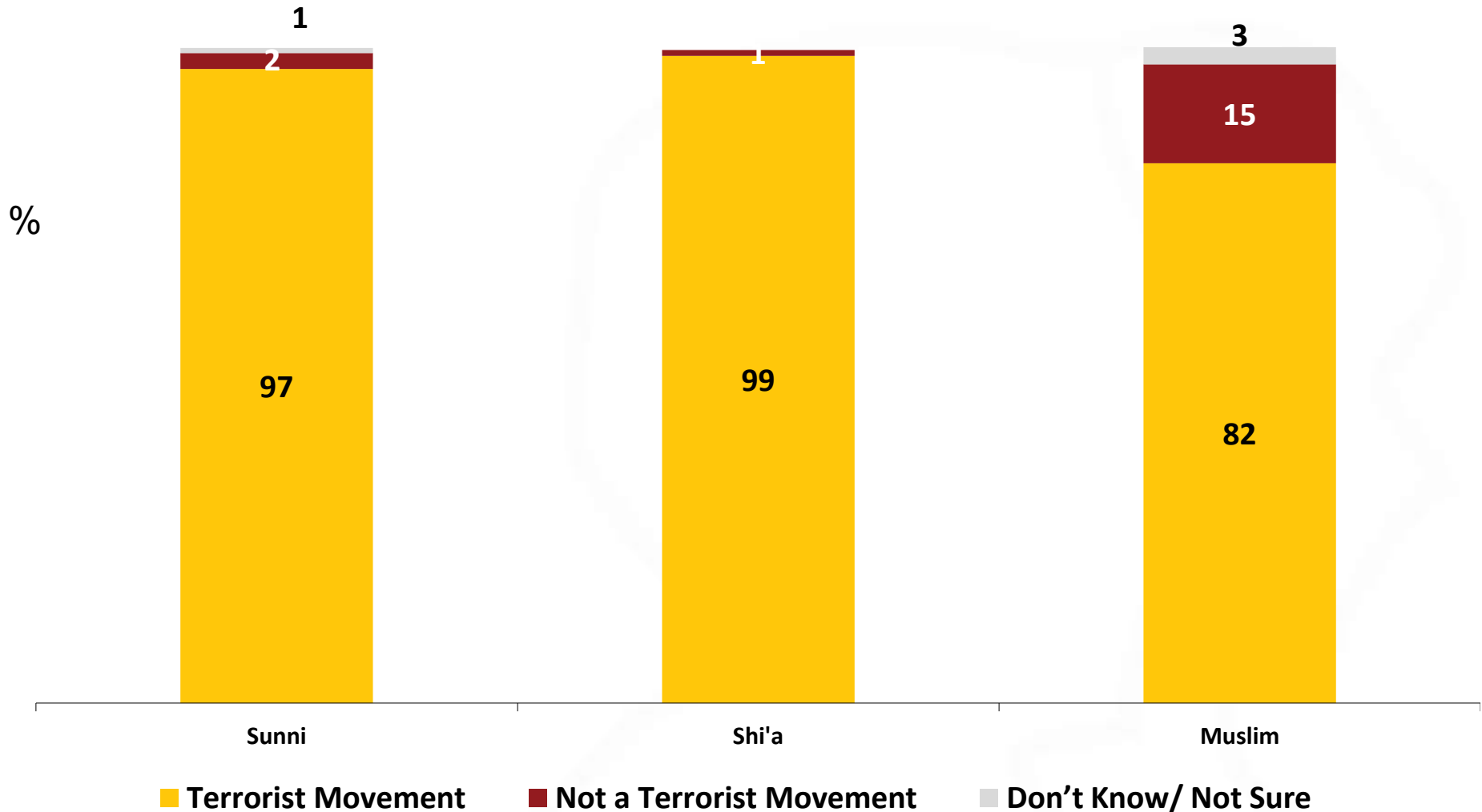
# ISIL Support by Territory in Syria

Some people describe the following movements as terrorist while others describe them as non terrorist. Do you think ISIL is a terrorist movement or non terrorist movement? By Territory Controlled in Syria

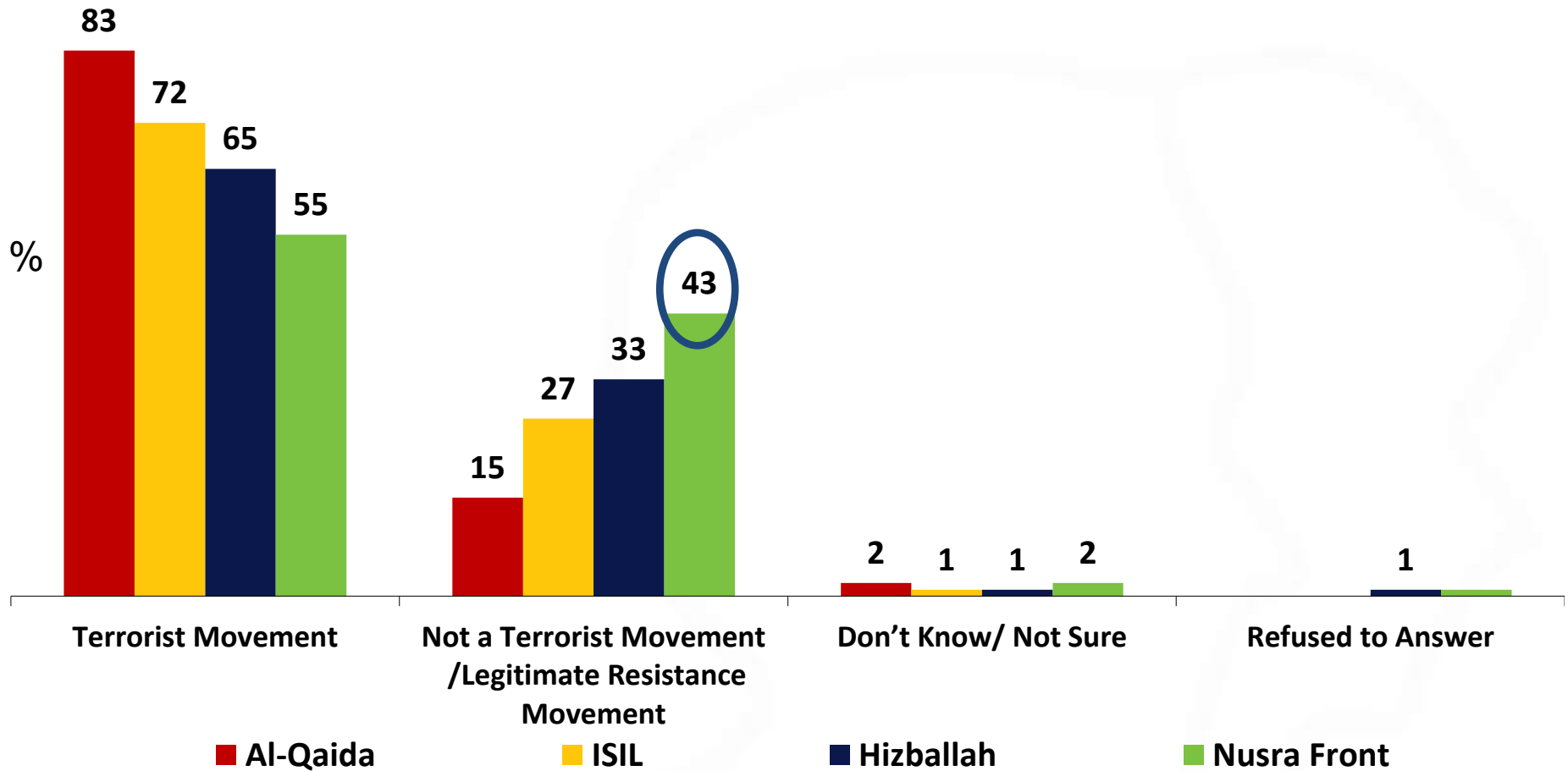


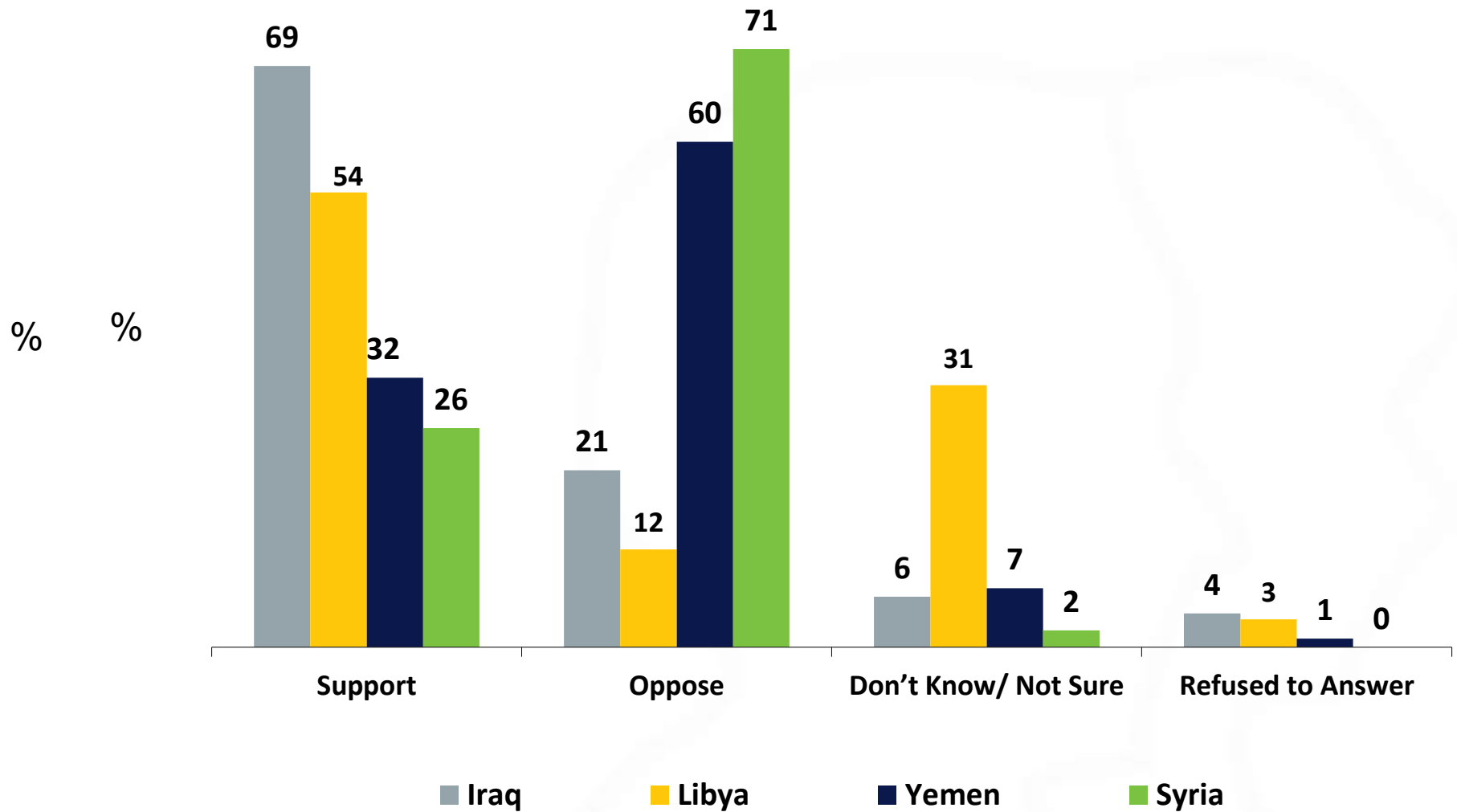
# ISIL Support by Religious Sect in Iraq

Some people describe the following movements as legitimate resistance while others describe them as terrorist. Do you think ISIL is a legitimate resistance movement or a terrorist movement? By Religion- Iraq

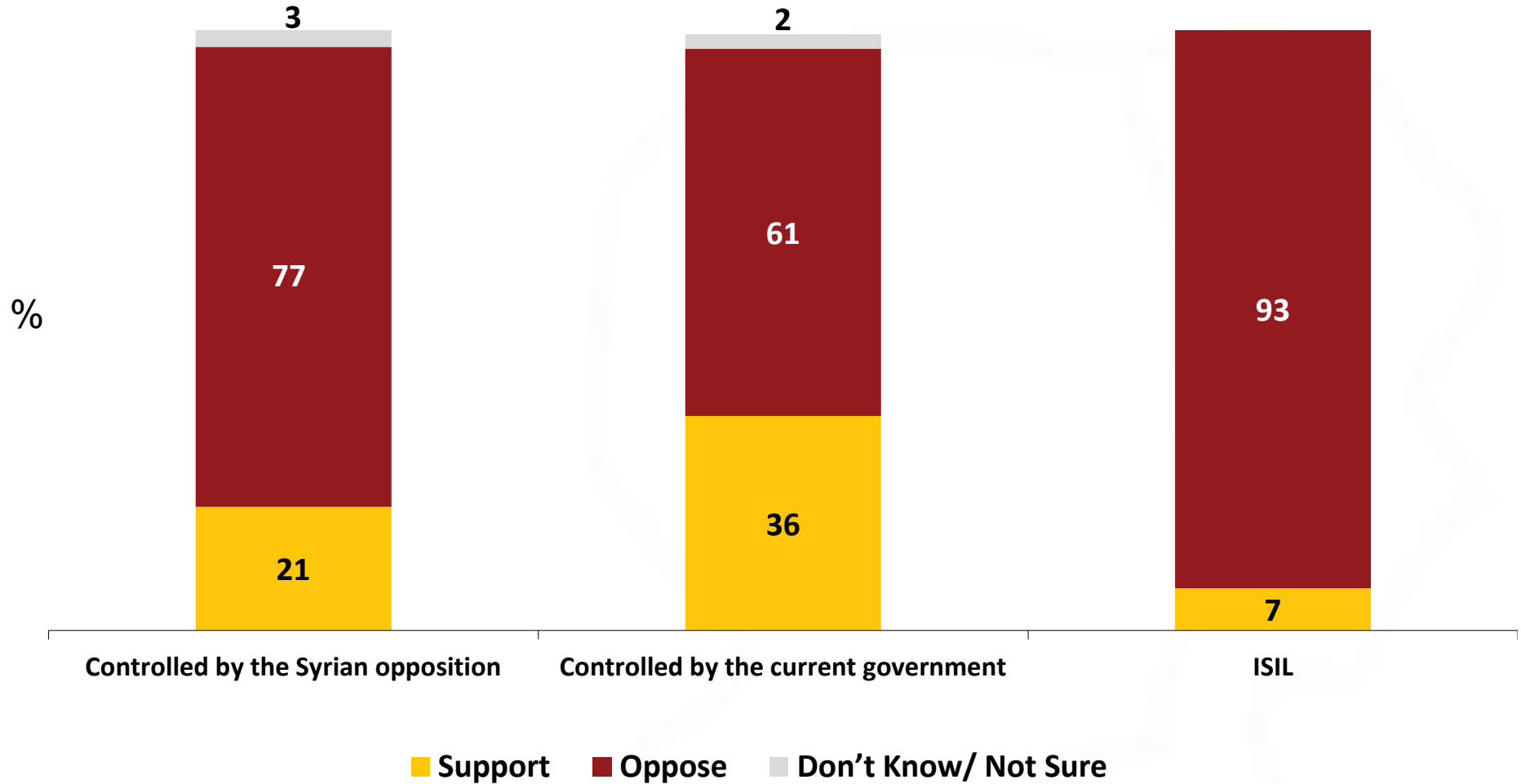


# Terrorist Movements vs. Legitimate Resistance Movement/Non Terrorist Movements - Syria



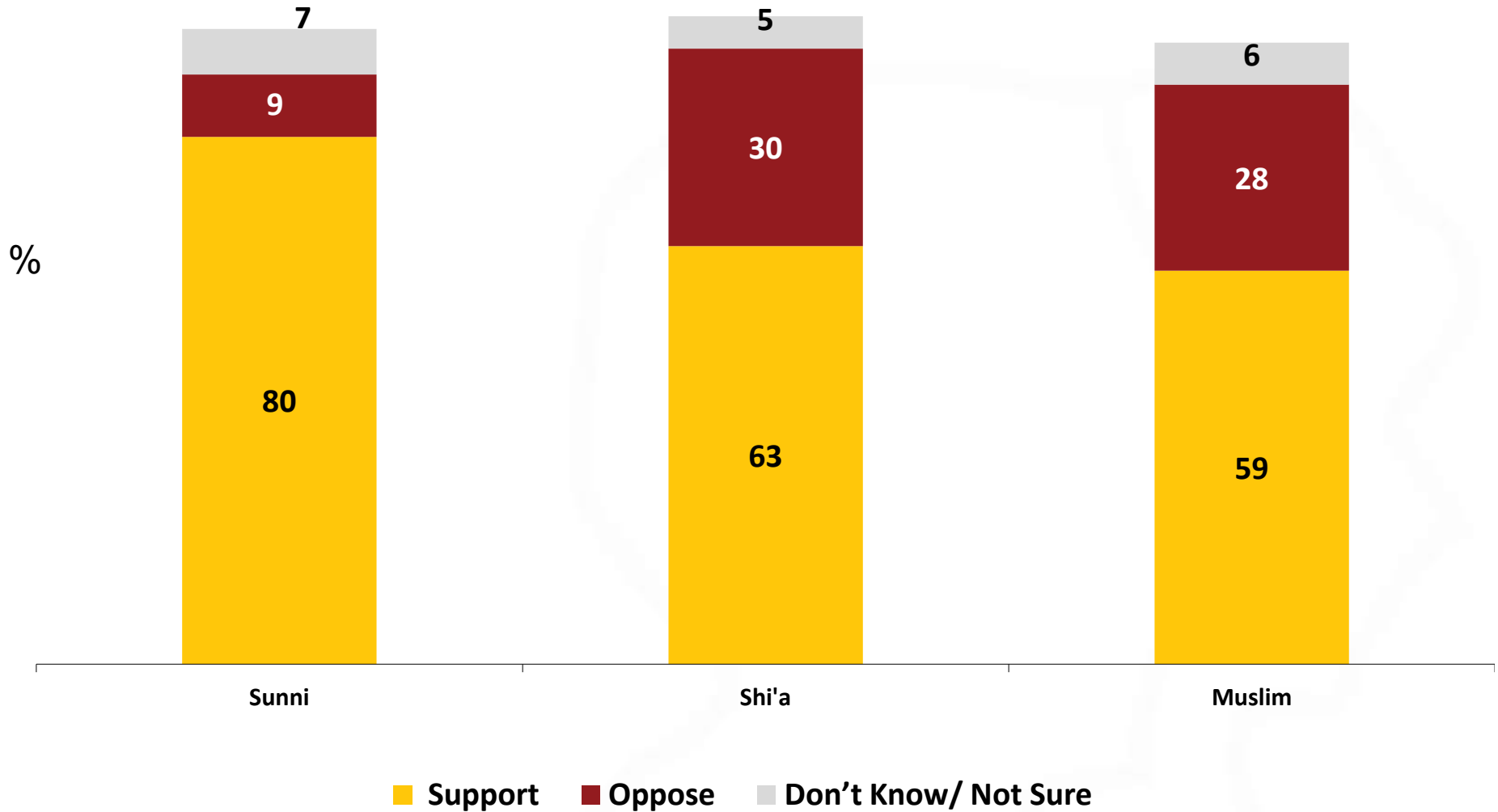


# Support/Opposition for international coalition against ISIL By Territory Controlled in Syria

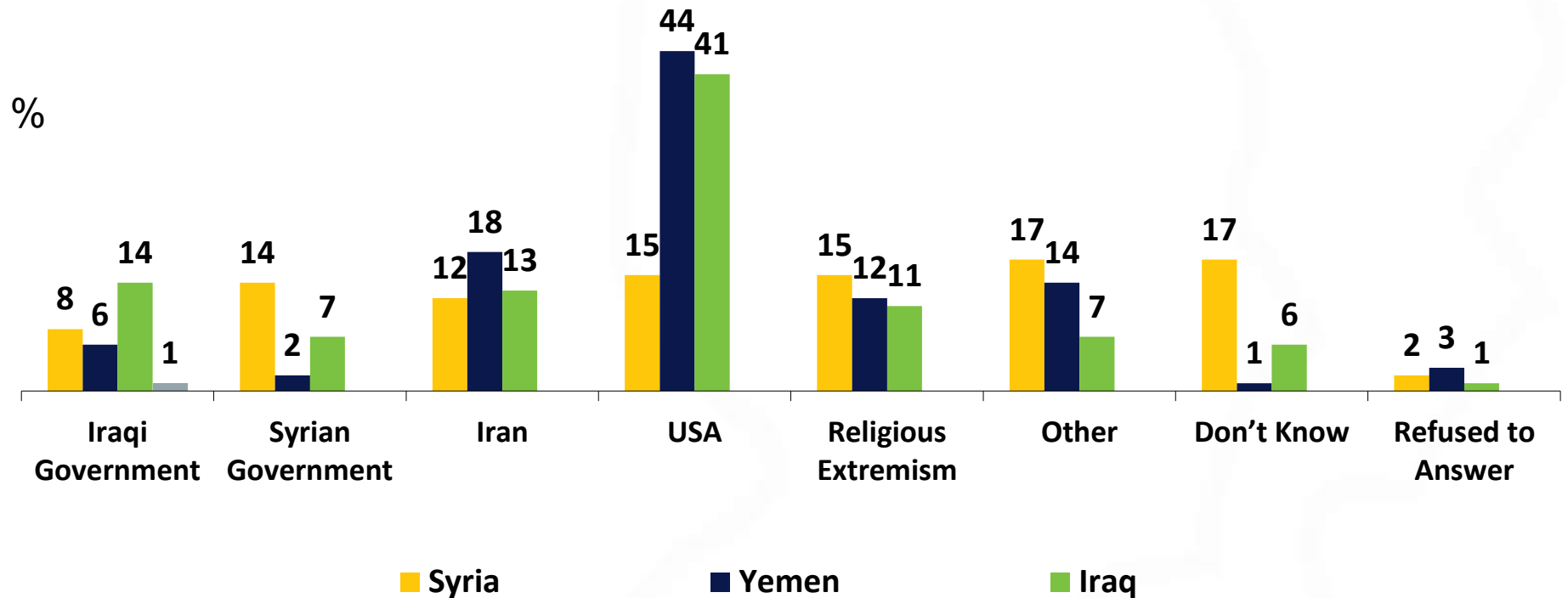




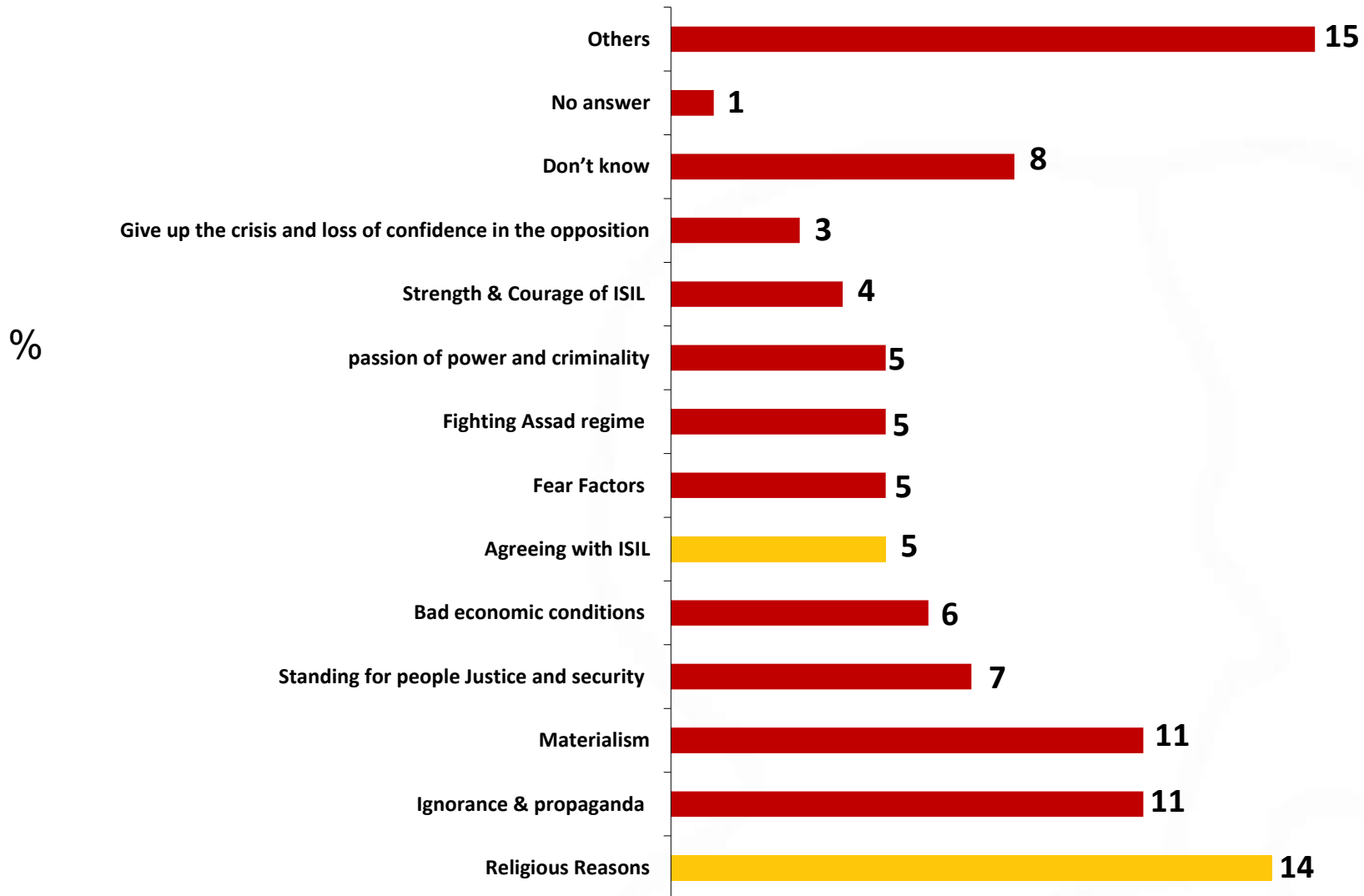
# Support/Opposition for international coalition against ISIL - By Religion and Religious Sect in Iraq



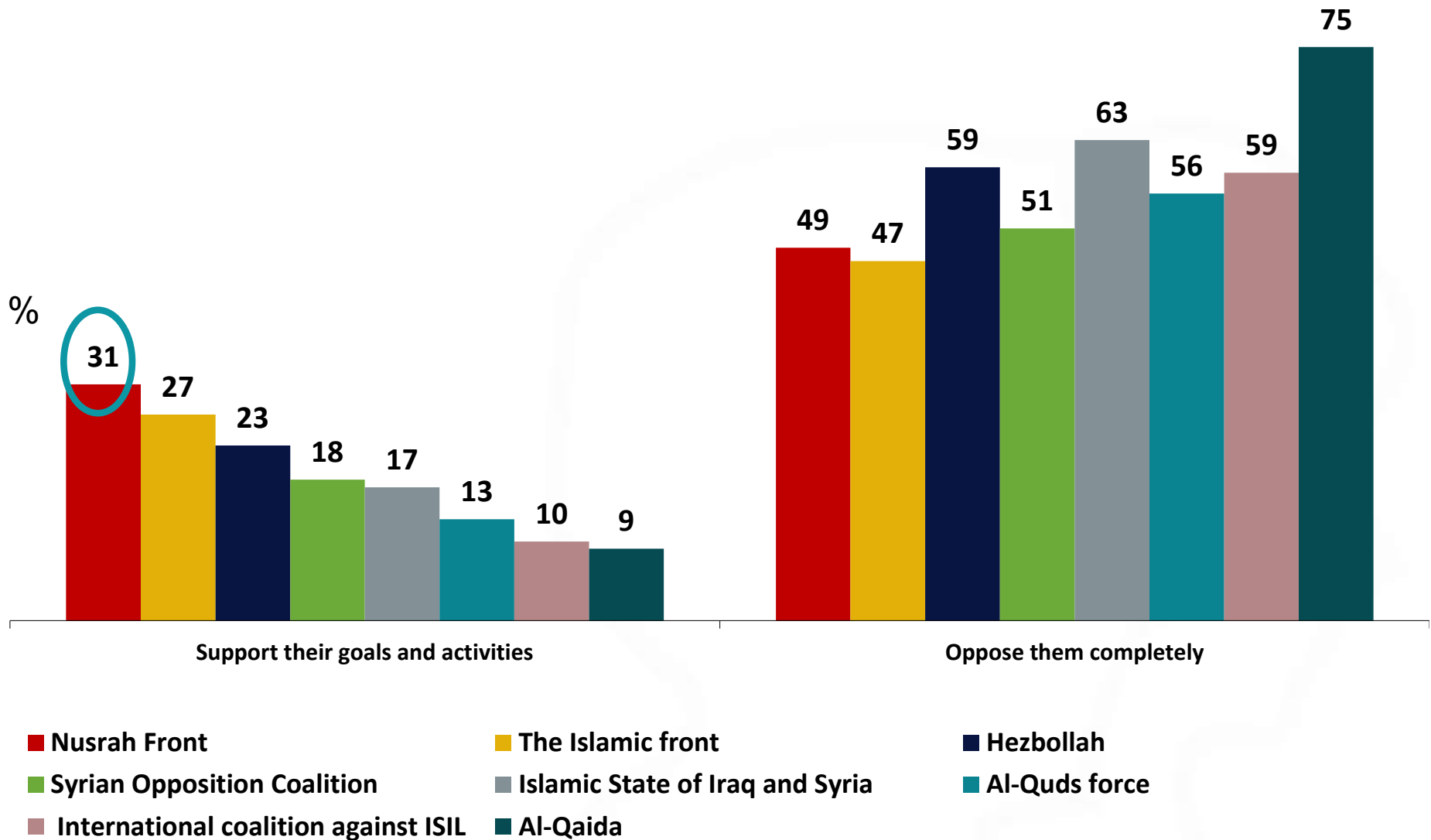
# Who do you think is mainly responsible for the emergence of ISIL?



# What are the top reasons that people might join or help ISIL? (SYRIA)



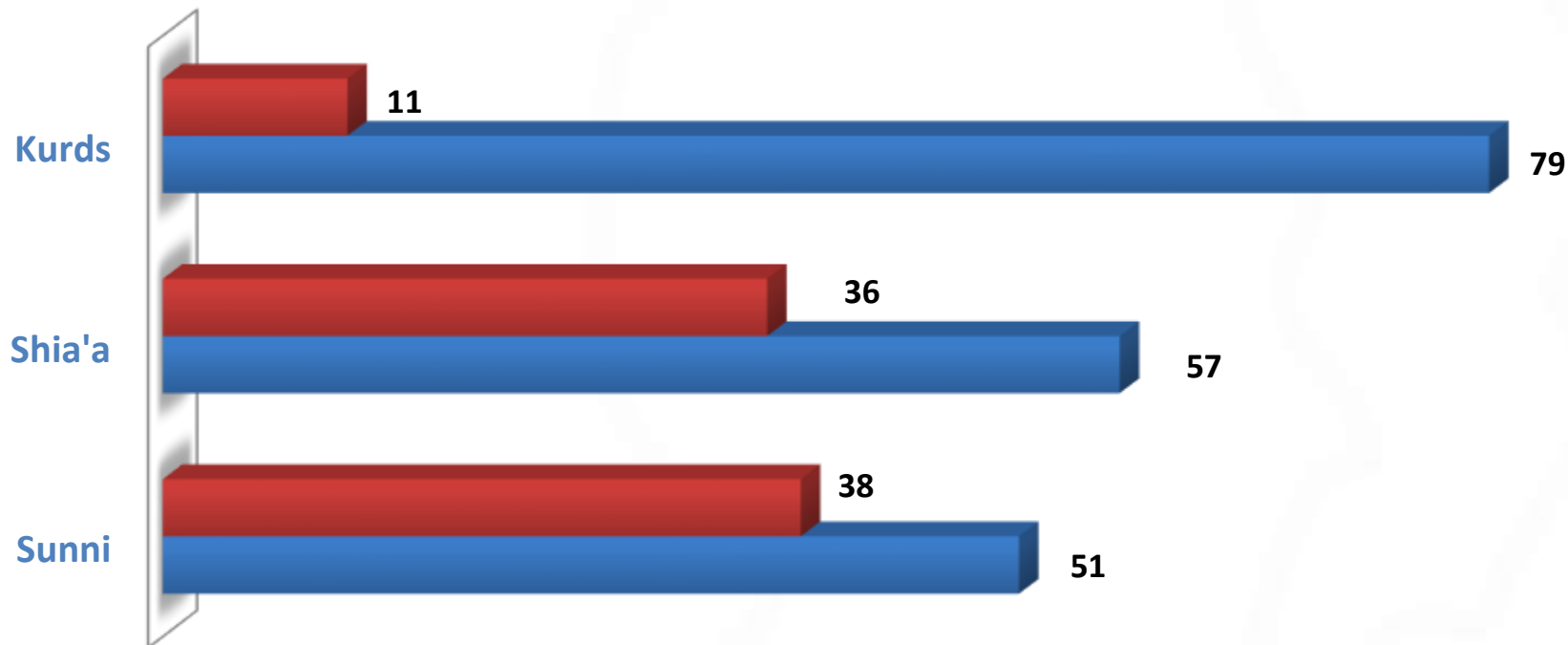
# Support their goals and activities vs. oppose them completely?



# **PART I: IDEOLOGICAL CONTRADICTION BETWEEN IRAQI SUNNIS AND ISIL**

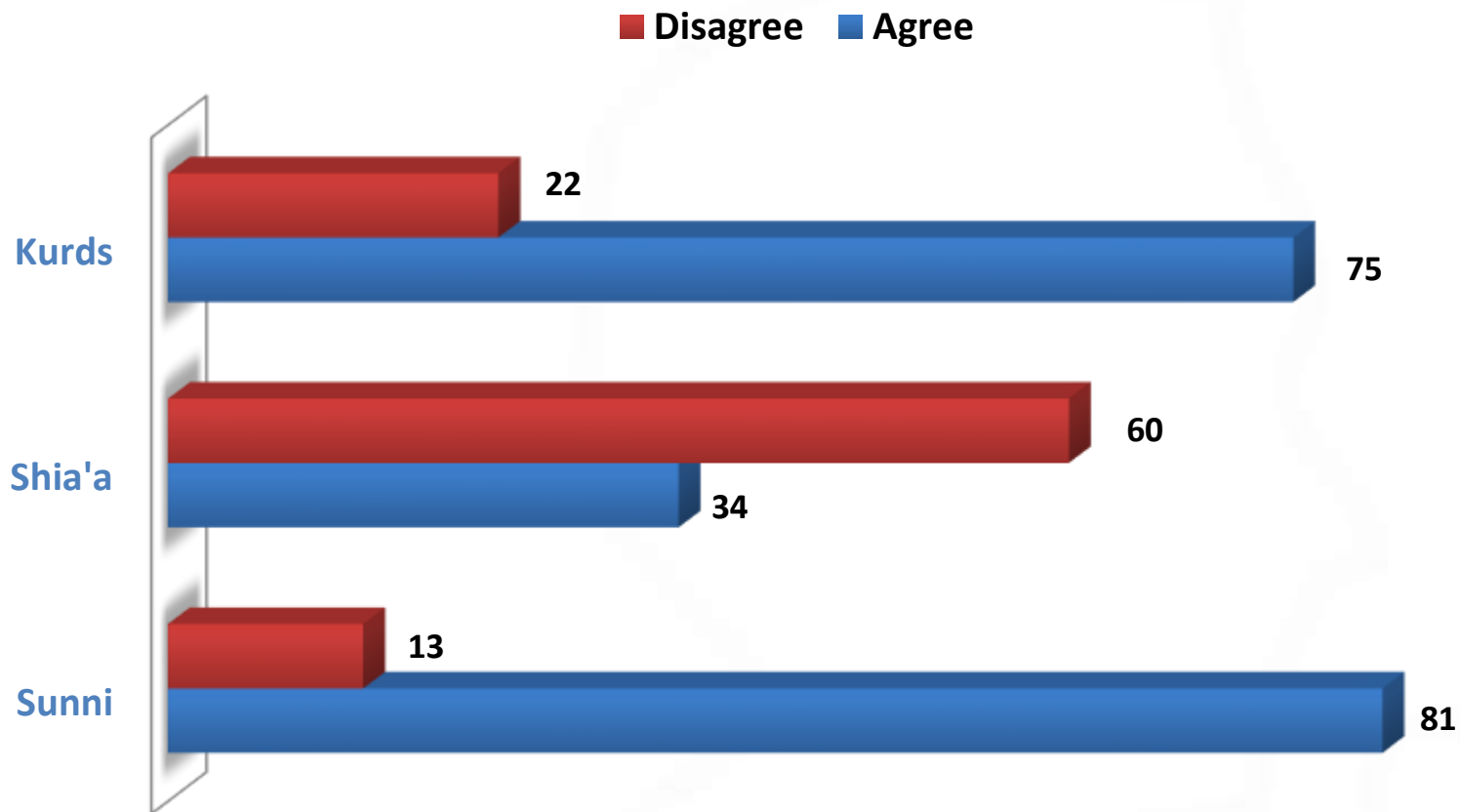
## The Government should implement only the laws derived from Sharia (Islamic Laws)

■ Agree ■ Do not agree



Nationwide poll July 2014

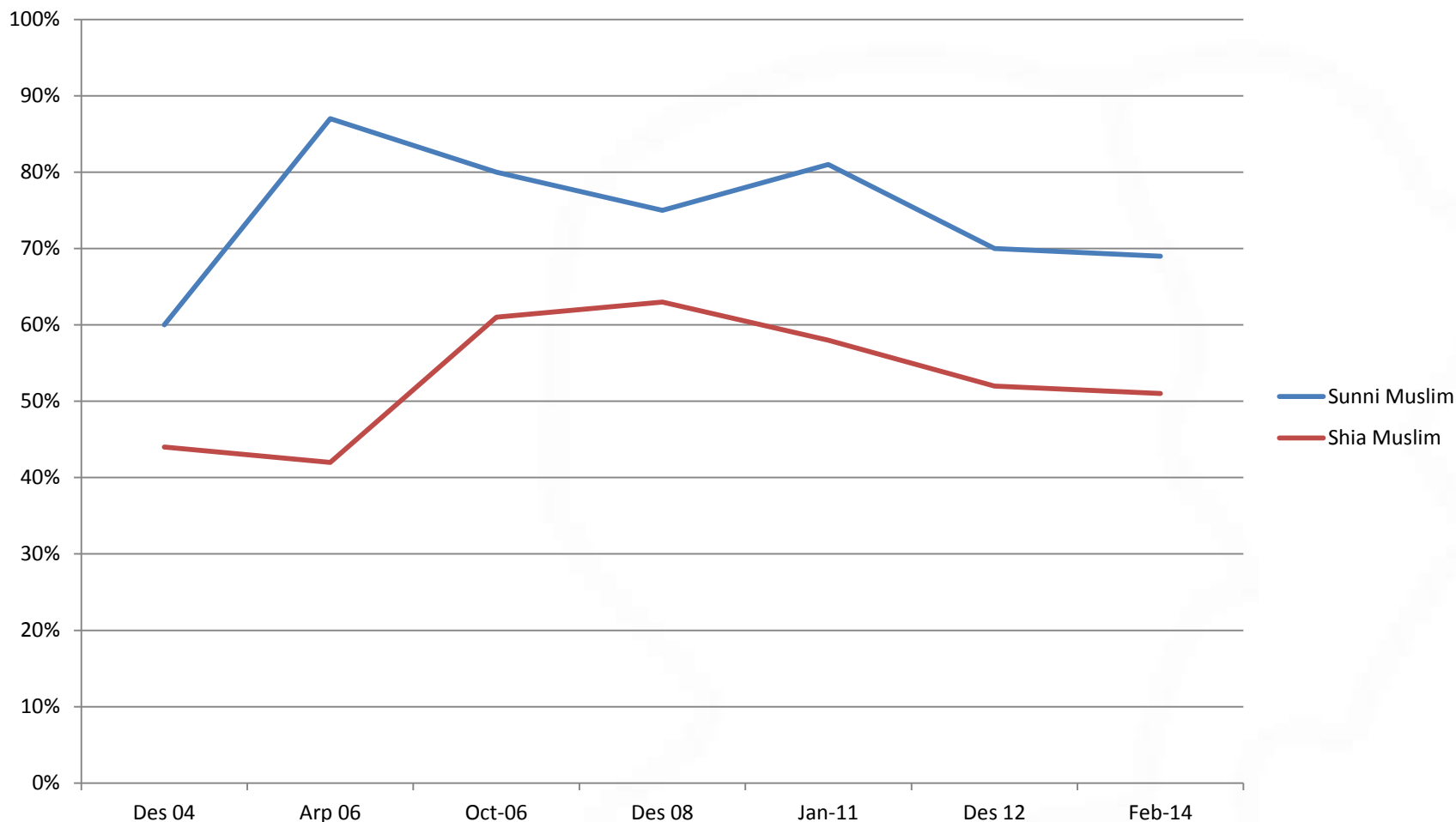
**Iraq would be a better place if religion & politics were separated**



Nationwide poll July 2014

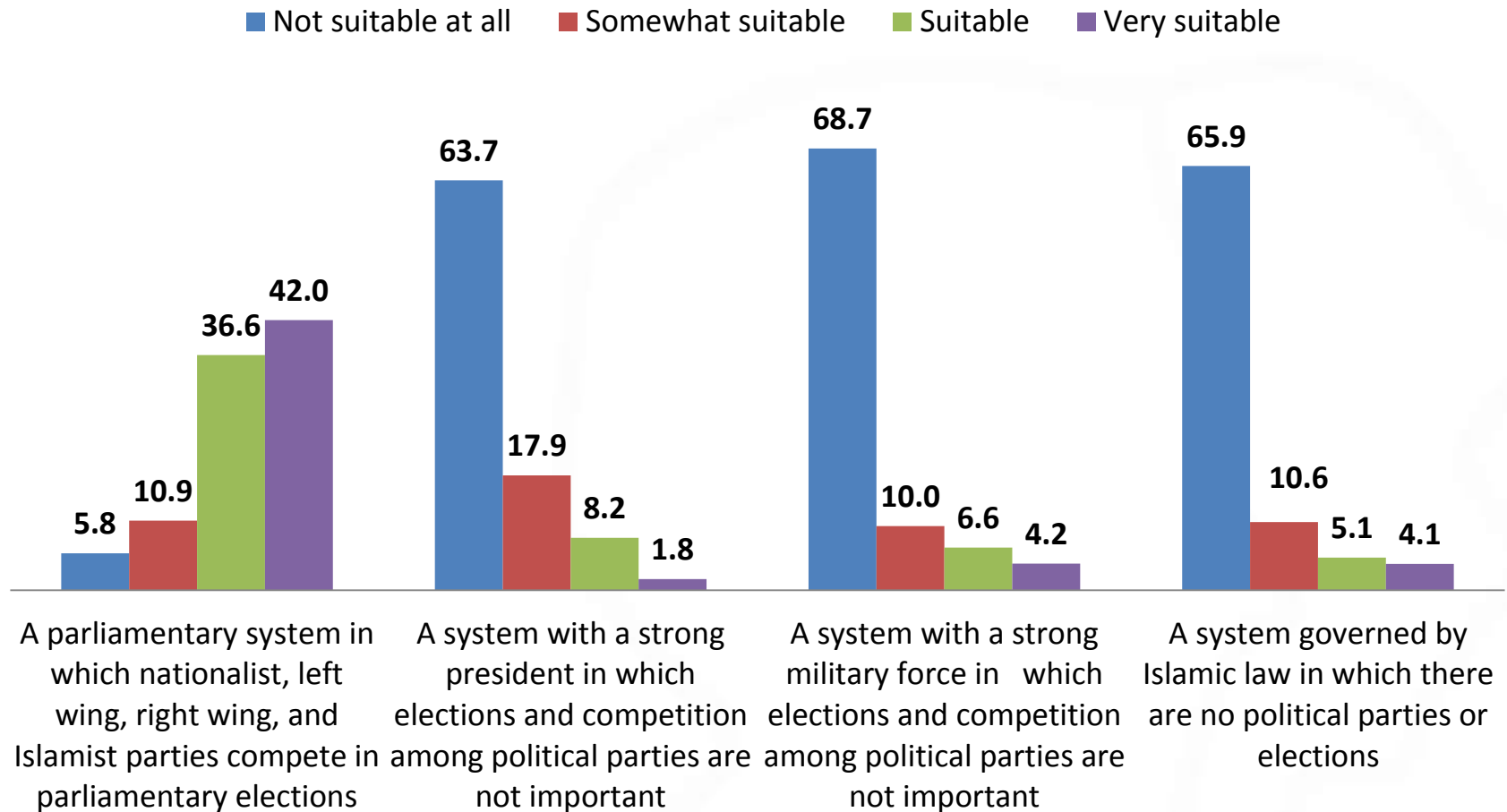
# Iraqis Support Secular Politics – Slide 3

**Percentage of Iraqi respondents who “agree” or “strongly agree” that Iraq would be better place if religion and politics were separate**

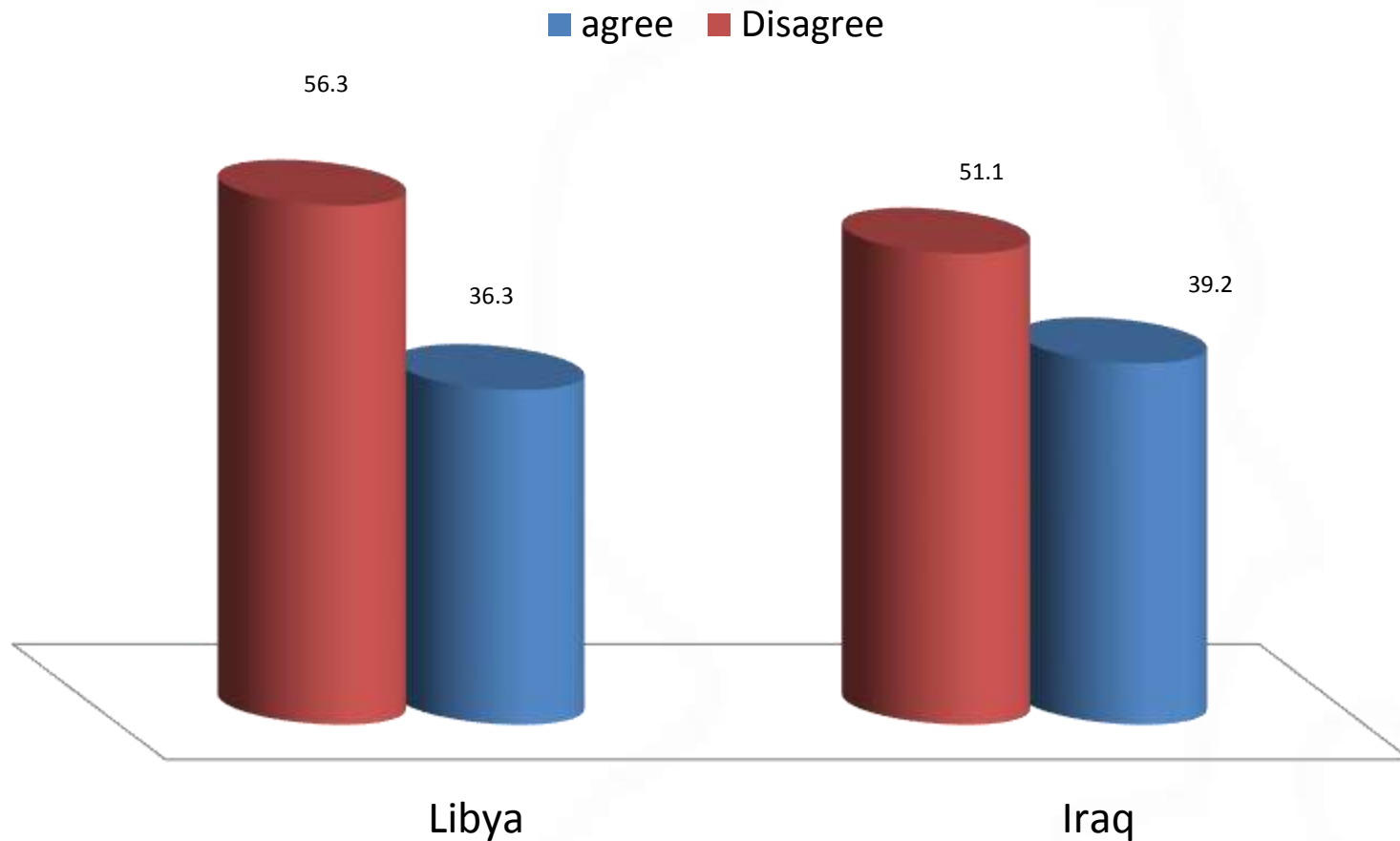




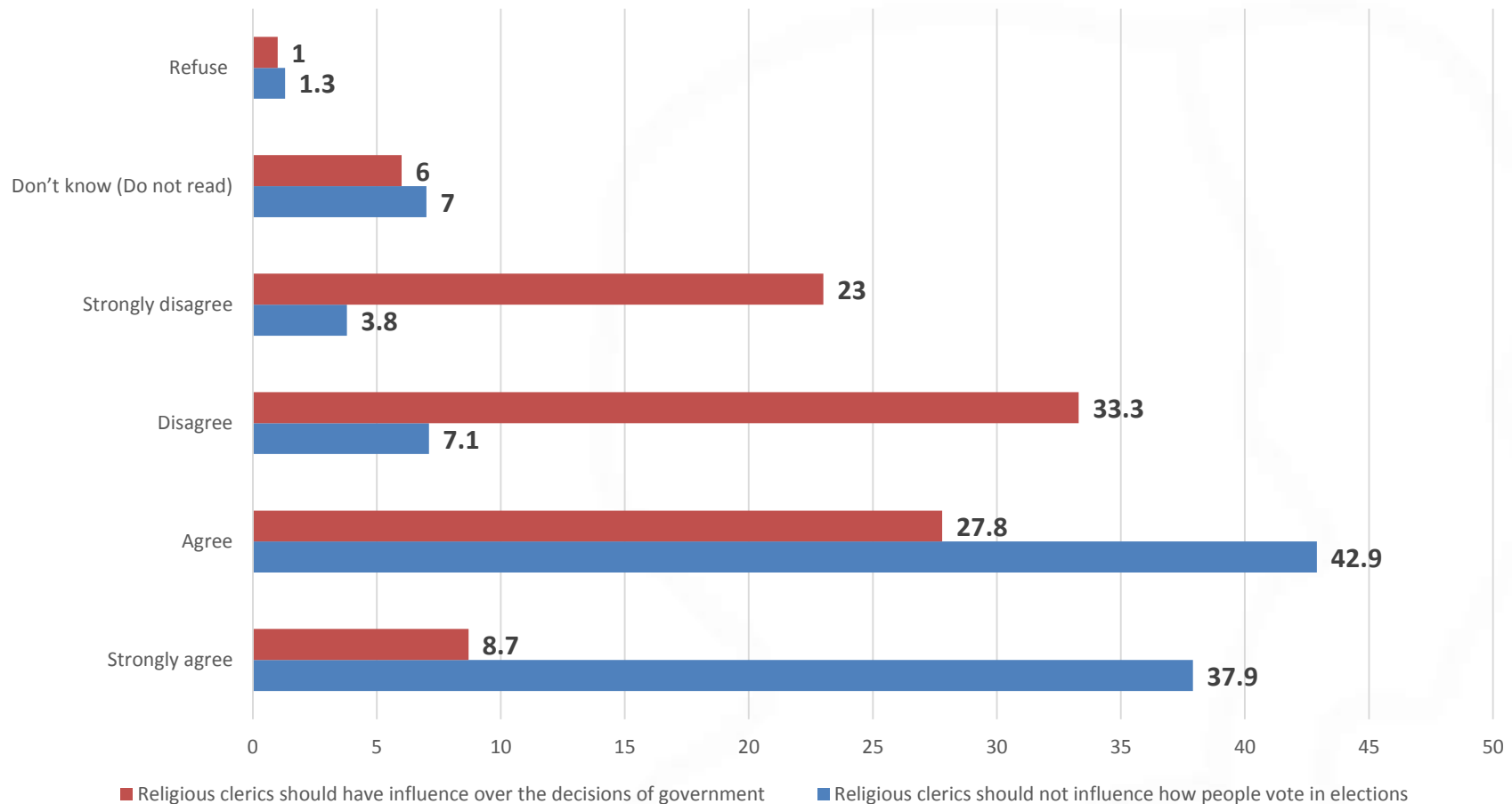
# What you think about each system of government for your country?



**Degree of agreement: Religious clerics should have influence over the decisions of government?**



## (Libya) How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?





# **PART II: POVERTY OR LACK OF SERVICES?**

### Is it Poverty or Lack of Services

- Second, I considered public demand for better services. After all, elsewhere in the region we have seen religious parties successfully providing the services the state fails to, and as a result growing in popularity. But again, there was a clear contradiction. In Iraq, there is not a substantial difference in the level of services provided between predominantly Shi'a and Sunni areas. BUT IS THERE A GAP IN ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY TODAY: STATE JOBS ARE MORE AVAILABLE TO IRAQI SHI'A.

# Unemployment Rate - IRAQ

Unemployment Rate by Governorate for the year 2008

Governorate	Grand Total			
	Total	Female	Male	
Nineveh	21.9	27.7	21.3	
Al-Anbar	13.8	11.7	14.4	
Salah Al-Deen	18.0	10.9	19.8	

Average

17.9

Babil	12.3	12.6	12.3	
Karbala	14.2	28.9	11.6	
Wasit	12.7	13.5	12.5	
Al-Najaf	14.5	22.8	13.2	
Al-Qadisiya	14.8	17.2	14.1	
Al-Muthanna	24.9	11.3	26.8	
Thi-Qar	30.8	46.9	28.2	
Missan	16.6	14.4	16.8	
Basrah	15.5	20.1	14.9	

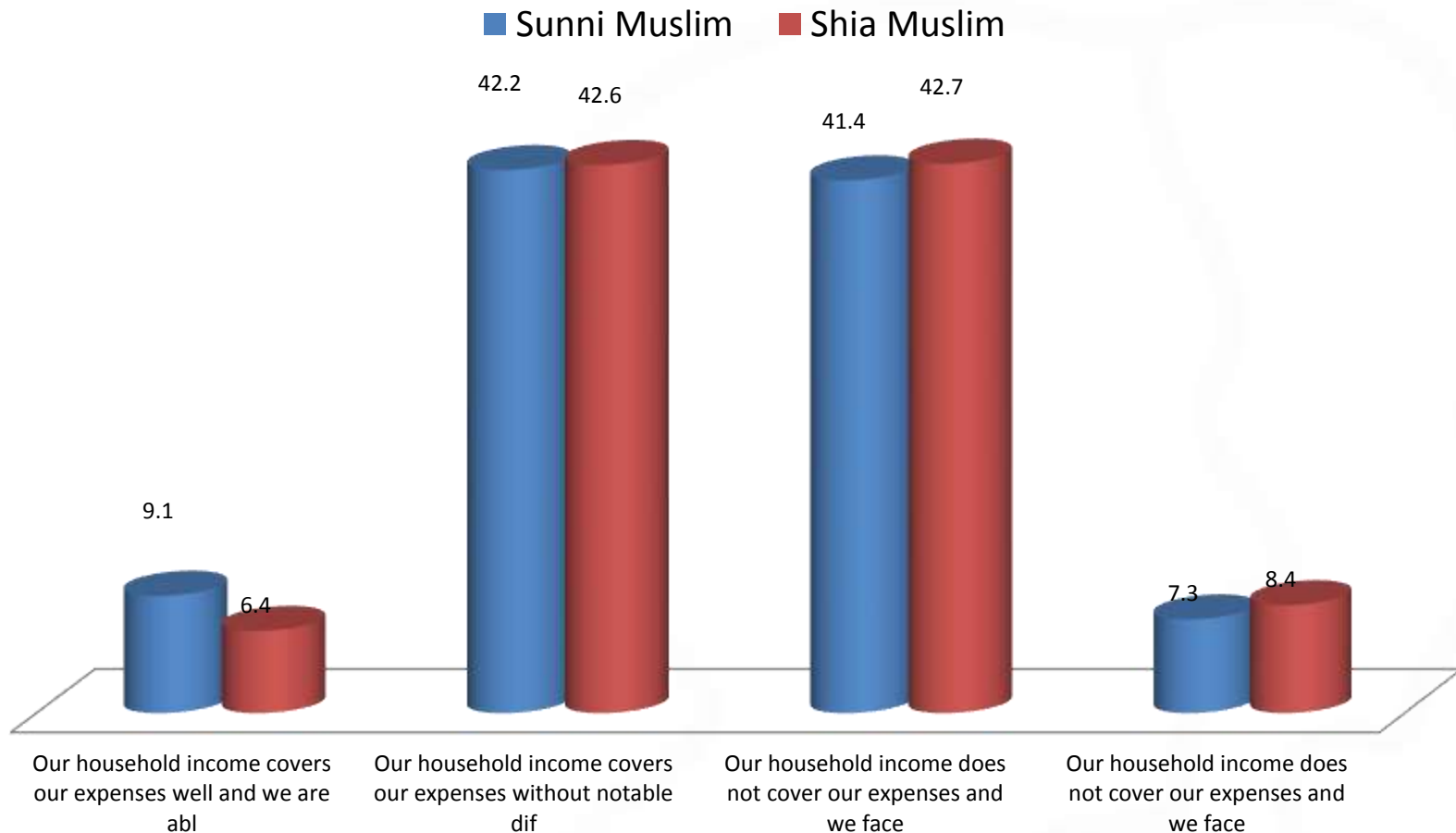
Average

17.4

Sunni provinces

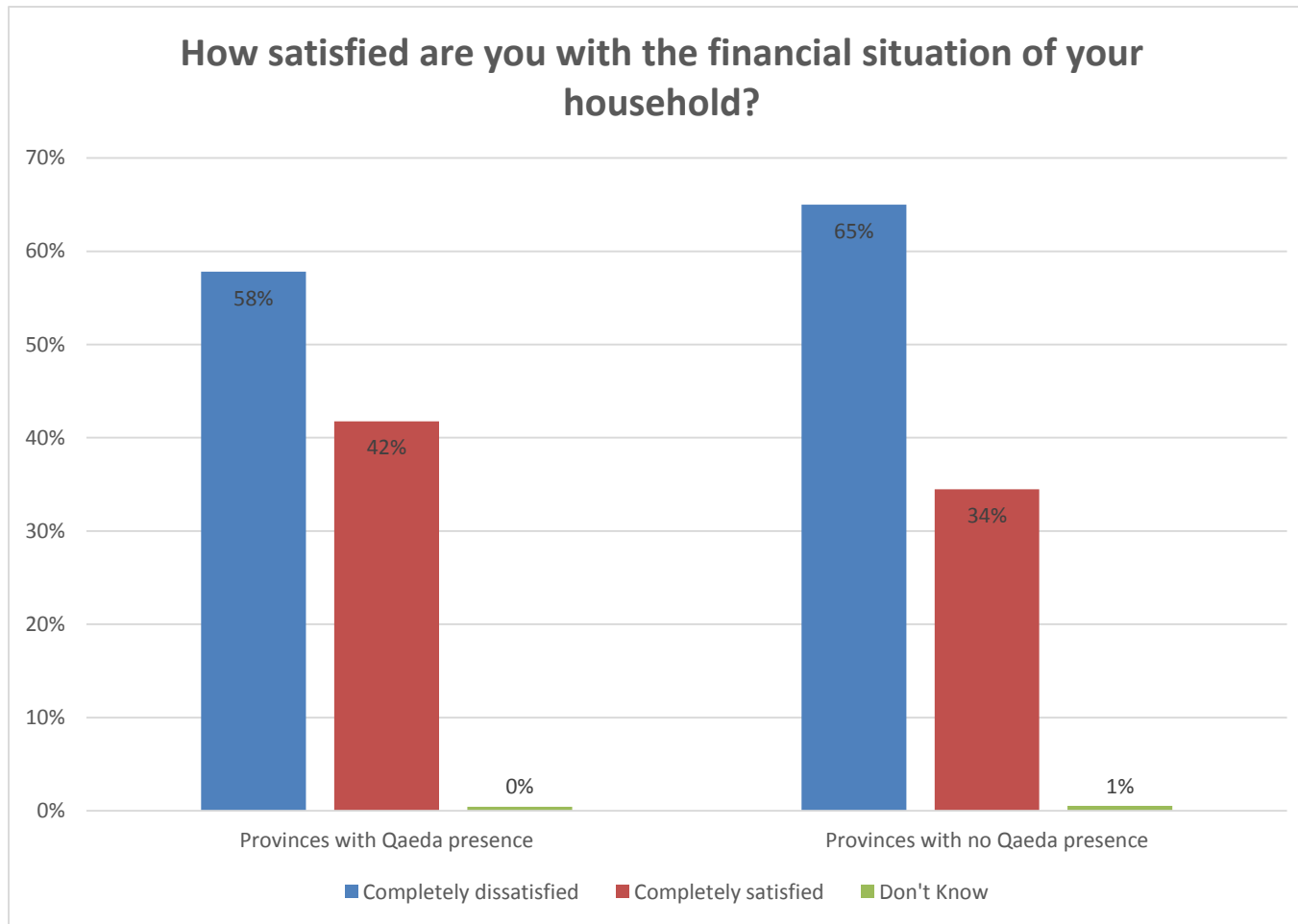
Shia provinces

## Statement comes closest to describing your household income

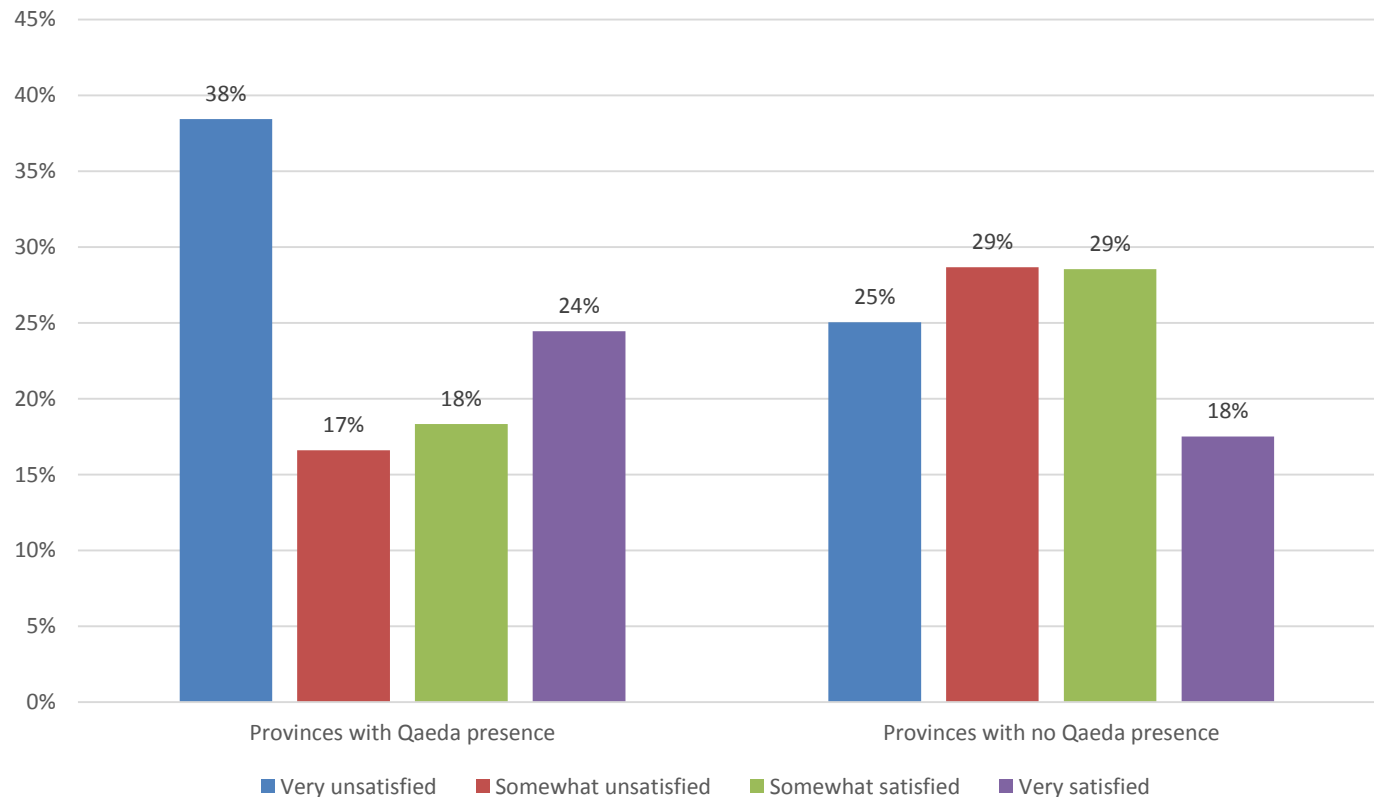




# YEMEN - Economic Satisfaction



## How satisfied or dissatisfied with your standard of living?



Moreover, in Libya, where ISIL has also grown tremendously in recent months, the impacted areas have enjoyed a relatively high level of development over the past five years, according to the UN Human Development Reports.

# Human Development Index (HDI)

## Libya vs. Syria

Human Development Index (HDI)								
Value								
1980	1990	2000	2005	2008	2010	2011	2012	2013

### HIGH HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

55	Libya	0.641	0.684	0.745	0.772	0.789	0.799	0.753	0.789	0.784
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### MEDIUM HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

118	Syrian Arab Republic	0.528	0.570	0.605	0.653	0.658	0.662	0.662	0.662	0.658
120	Iraq	0.500	0.508	0.606	0.621	0.632	0.638	0.639	0.641	0.642

# **PART III: POLITICAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS**

### 3. **Why** then did Dai'sh take over Sunni's areas?

#### Political and social factors

So, eliminating religion or unequal development as driving factors, I found in the research a third cluster of reasons that stand out as powerful motivators. In the areas where Da'ish/ISIL have surged, there exist wide feelings of injustice, deep resentments about basic inequality and a growing gap of trust between the governors and the governed.

**What this has led to in the areas where Da'ish/ISIL has strengthened its grip is a radicalism that is filling the gap left absence of national identity.**

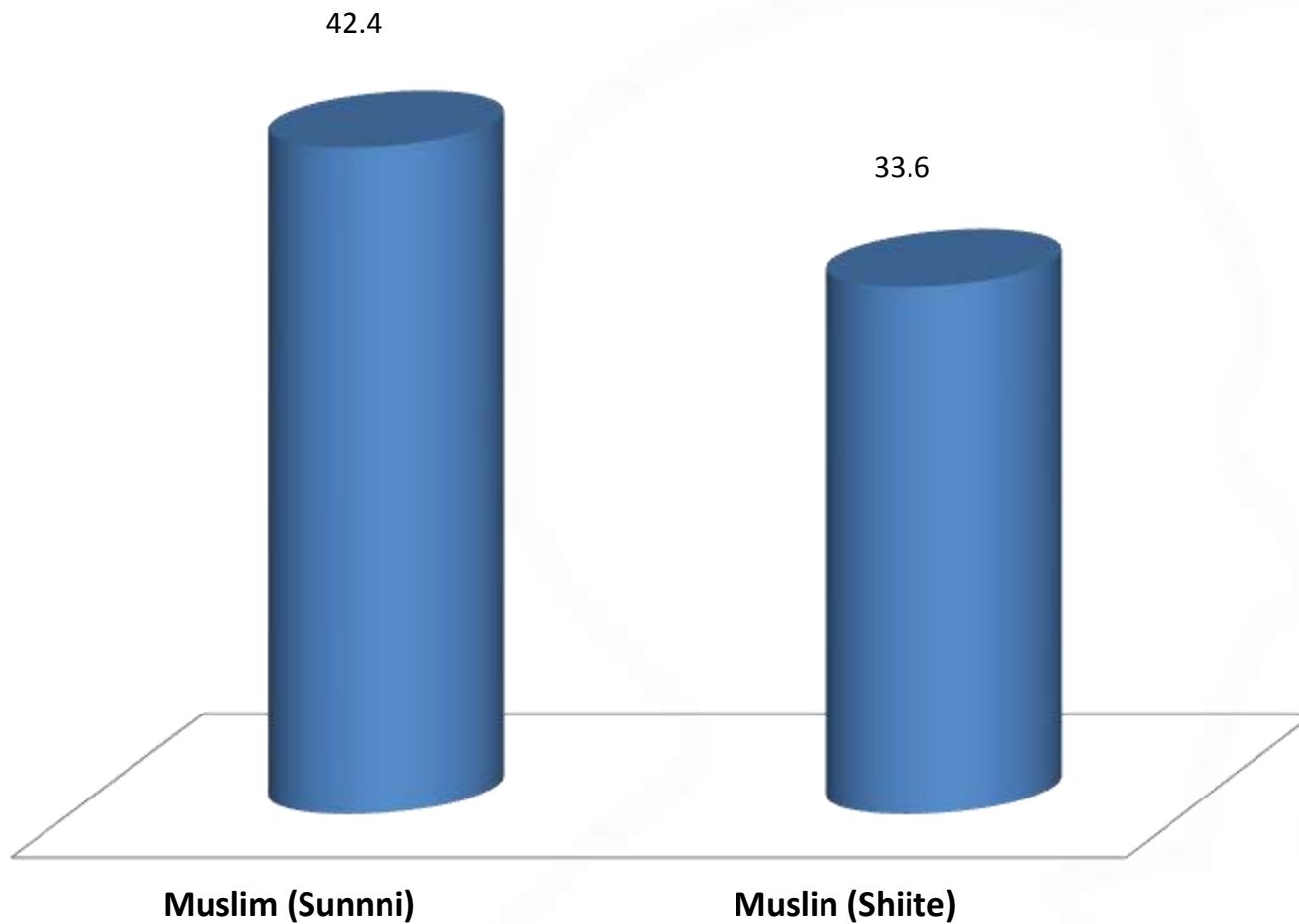
## Sunnis are discontent

Generally speaking, do you think that things in Iraq are going in the right direction, or do you think things are going in the wrong direction?

■ Right Direction ■ Wrong Direction



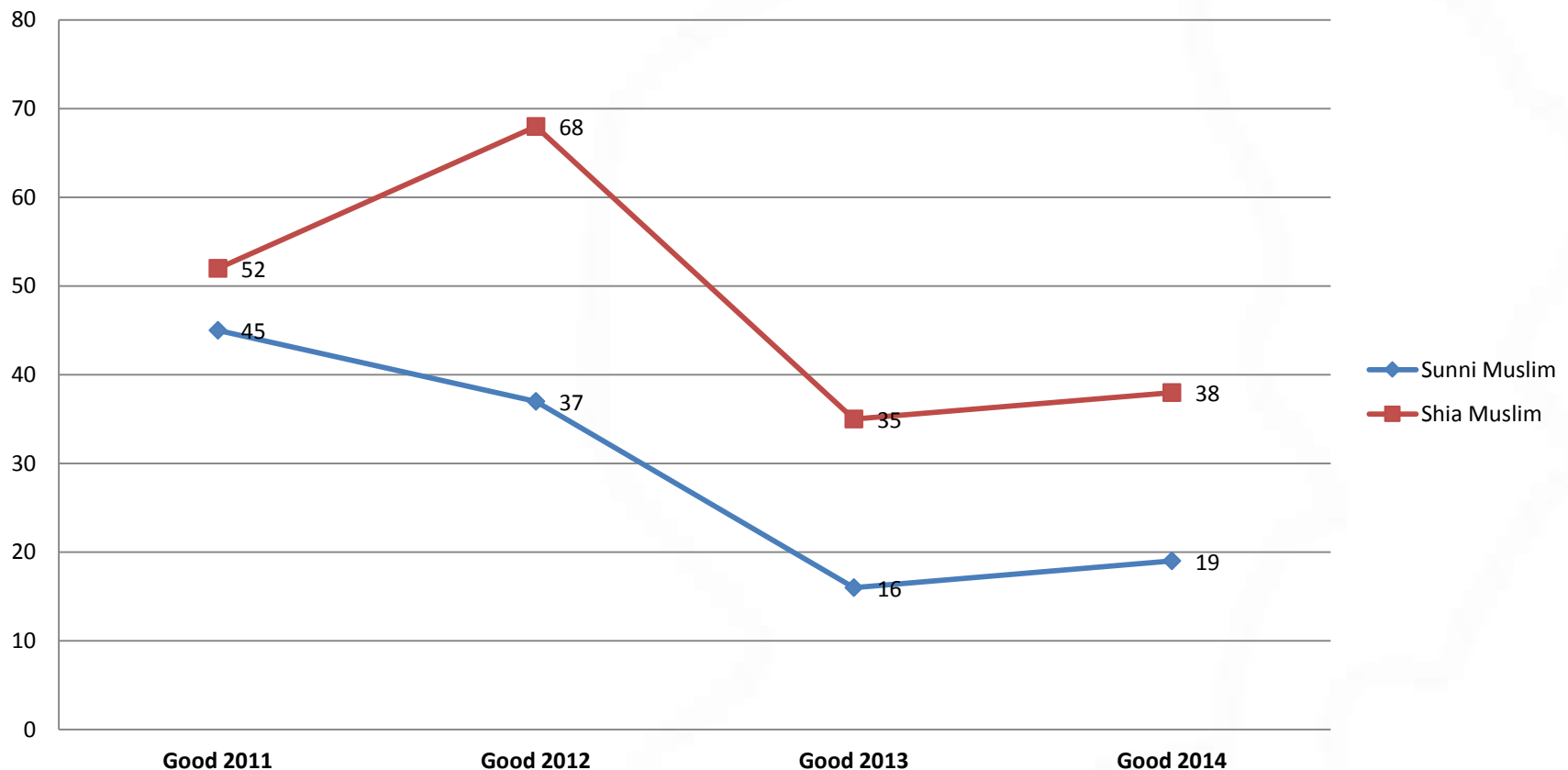
■ Unhappy



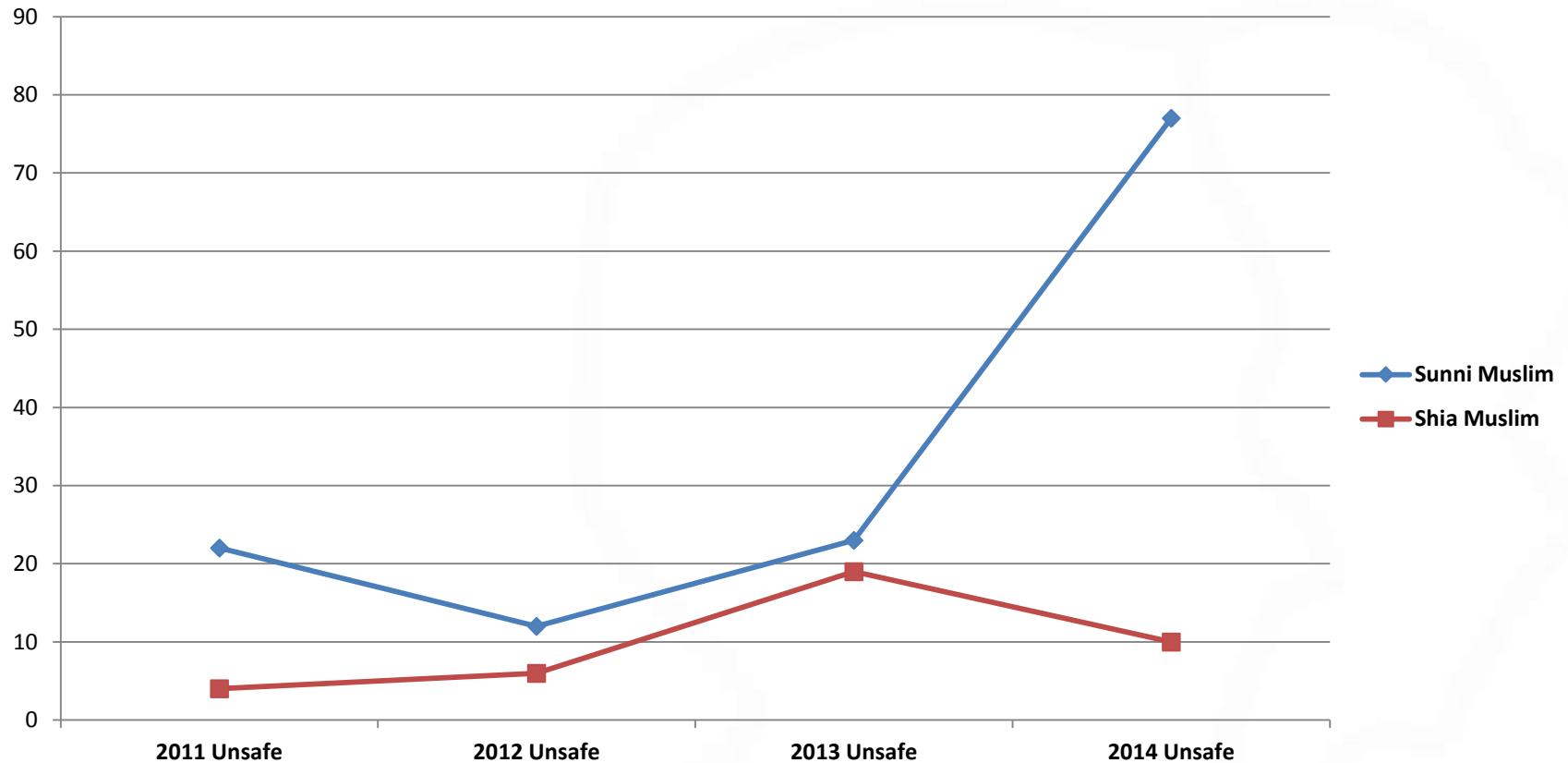


- More than 33% of Sunnis feel forced to live outside Iraq versus 20% of Shia and 14% of Kurd's who feel similarly.
- 23% of Sunnis feel that authoritarianism in Iraq is a real challenge versus 6% of Shia's and 10% of Sunni's who feel the same.
- **Xenophobia:** 76% of Sunnis now feel that most people are not trustworthy versus 65% of Shia's who feel the same.

## How would you describe the current security situation in Iraq today?



## How safe/unsafe do you feel in your neighborhood? Mosul and Salahdin



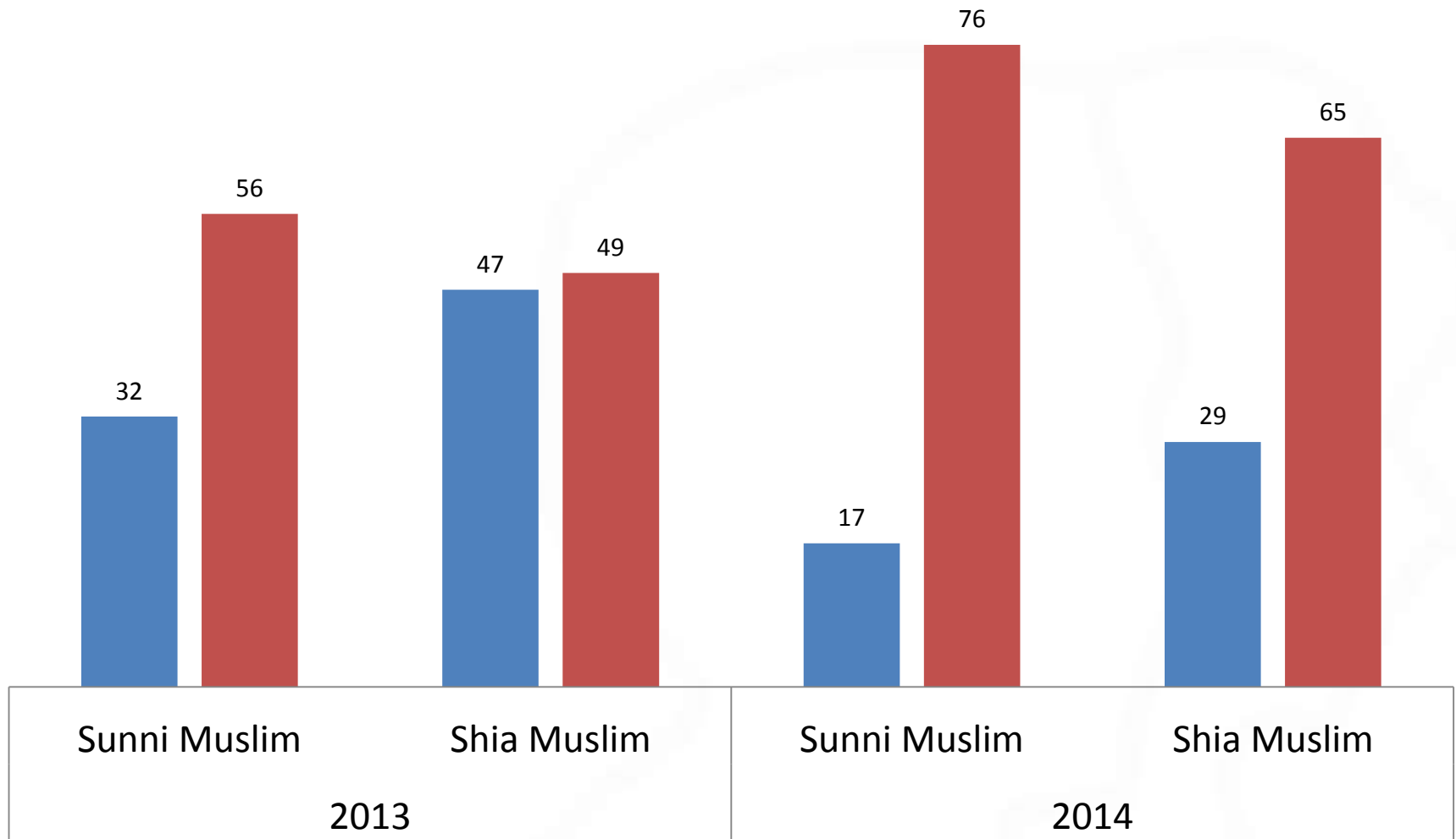
Nation wide survey June 2014

# Perceived Insecurity and Xenophobia

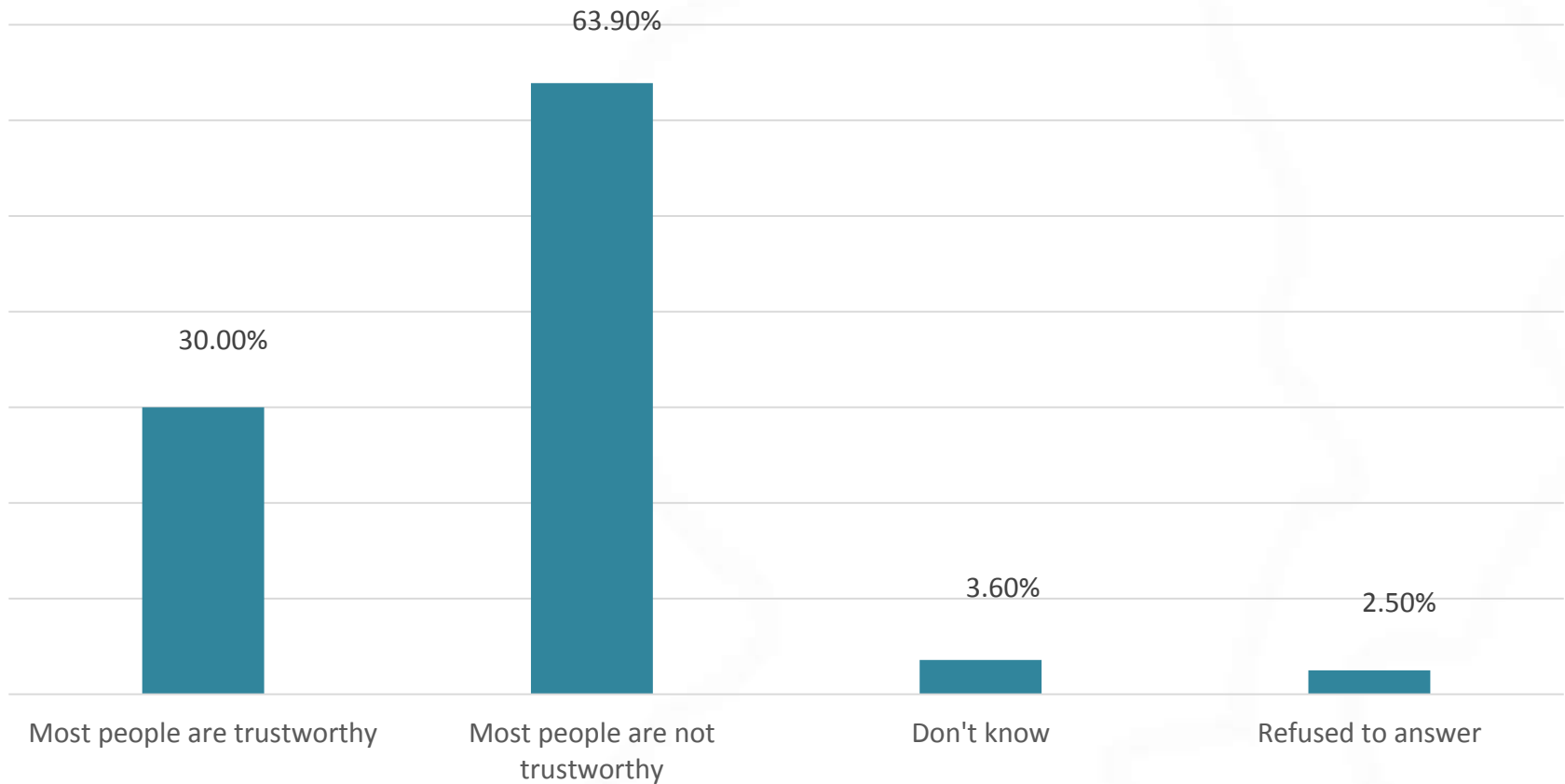
Generally speaking, do you think most people are trustworthy or not?

■ Most people are trustworthy

■ Most people are not trustworthy



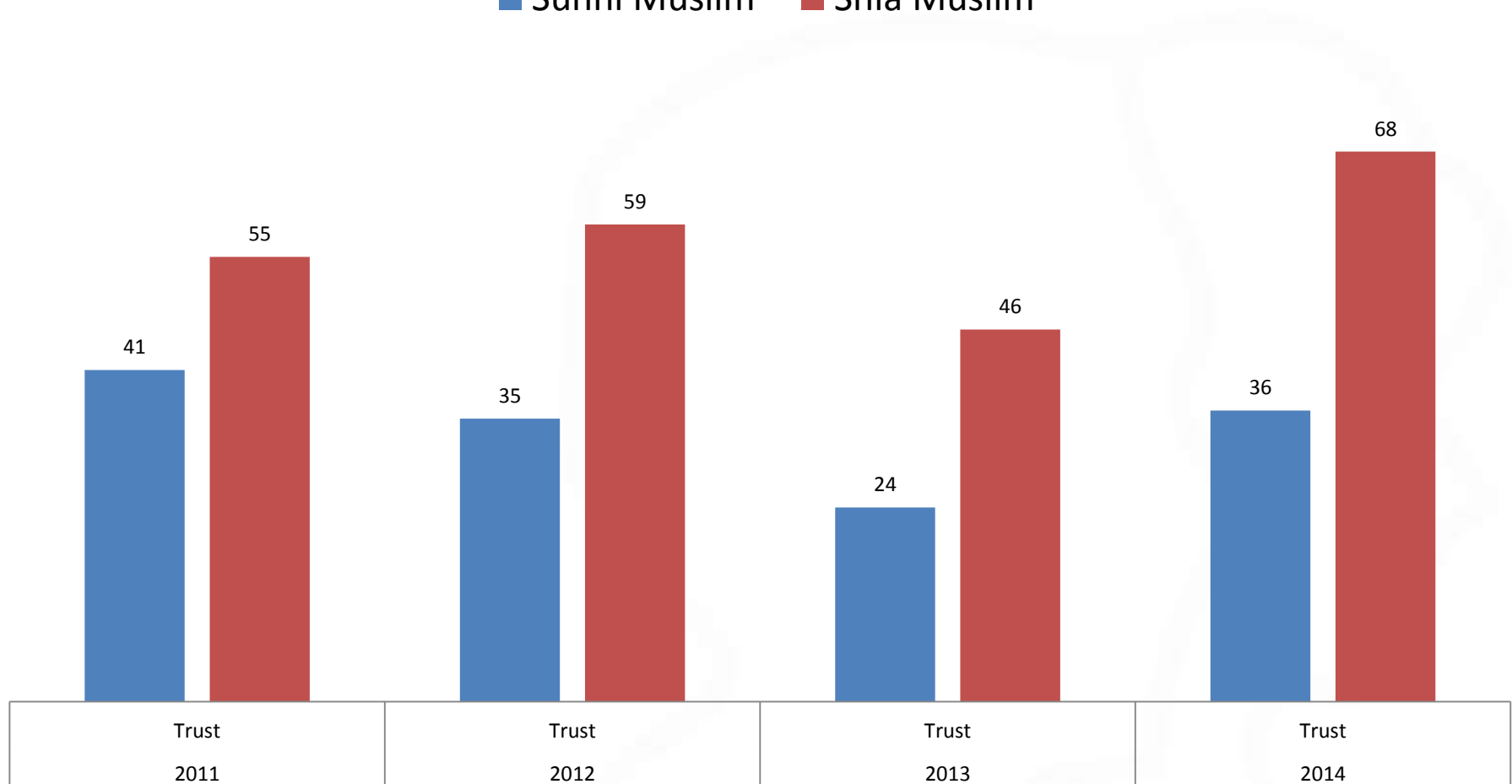
**Generally speaking, do you think most people are trustworthy or not?**

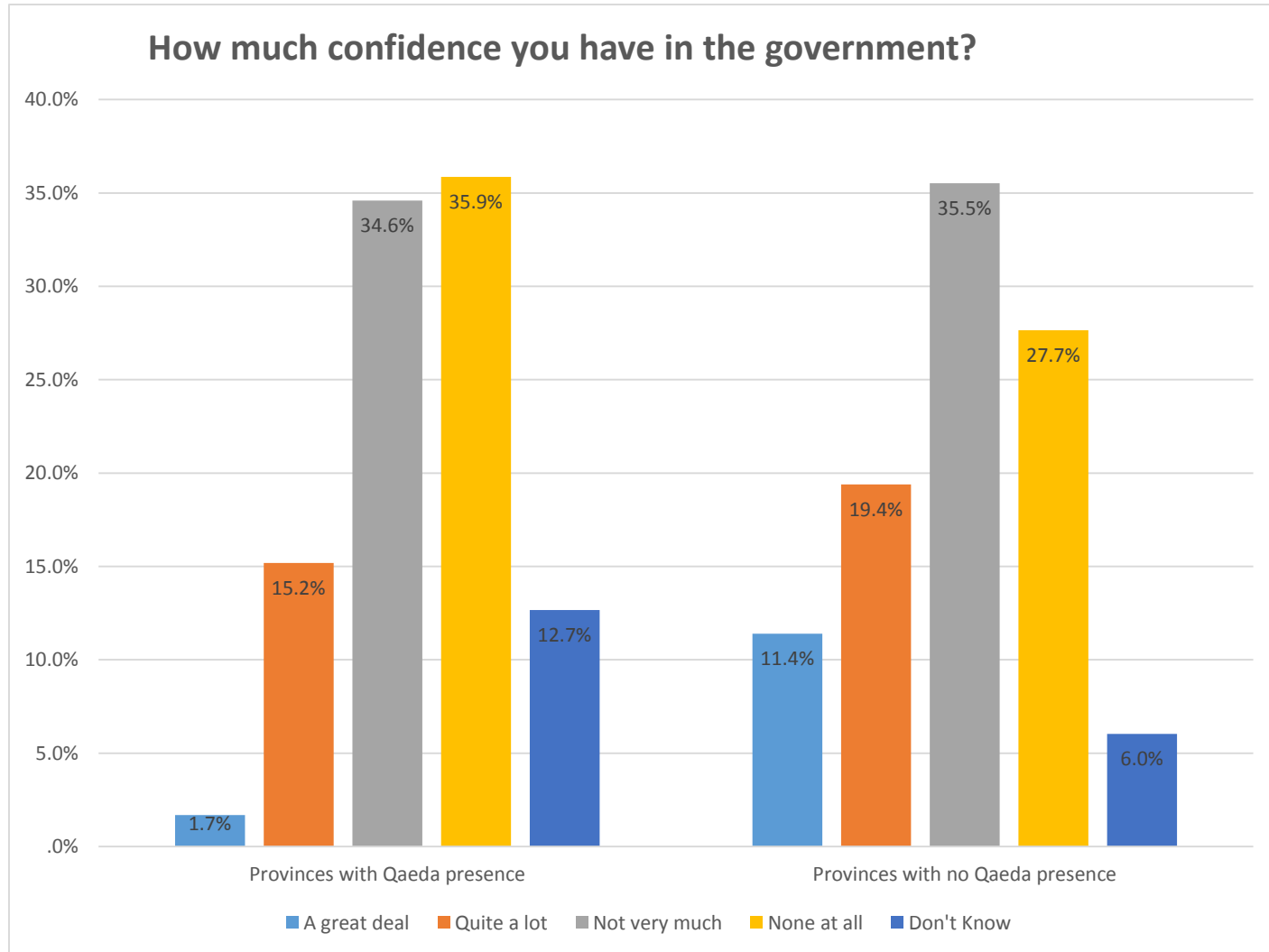


## C. Lack of trust (1)

How much confidence do you have in the following to improve the situation in Iraq?  
(Iraqi Government)

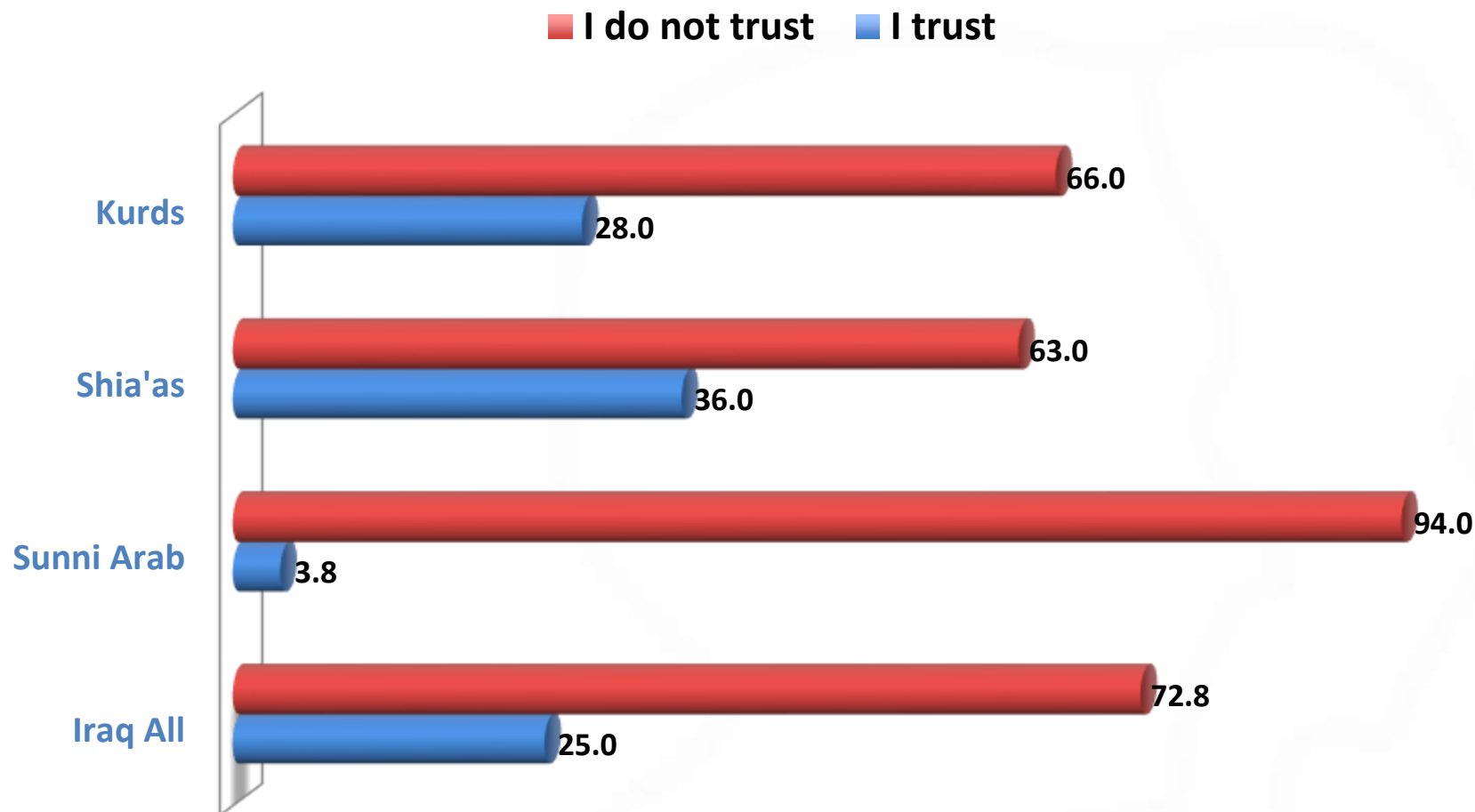
■ Sunni Muslim ■ Shia Muslim





# IRAQ – Confidence in Iraqi Parliament

## Trust in institutions: Council of Ministers (Iraqi Parliament)

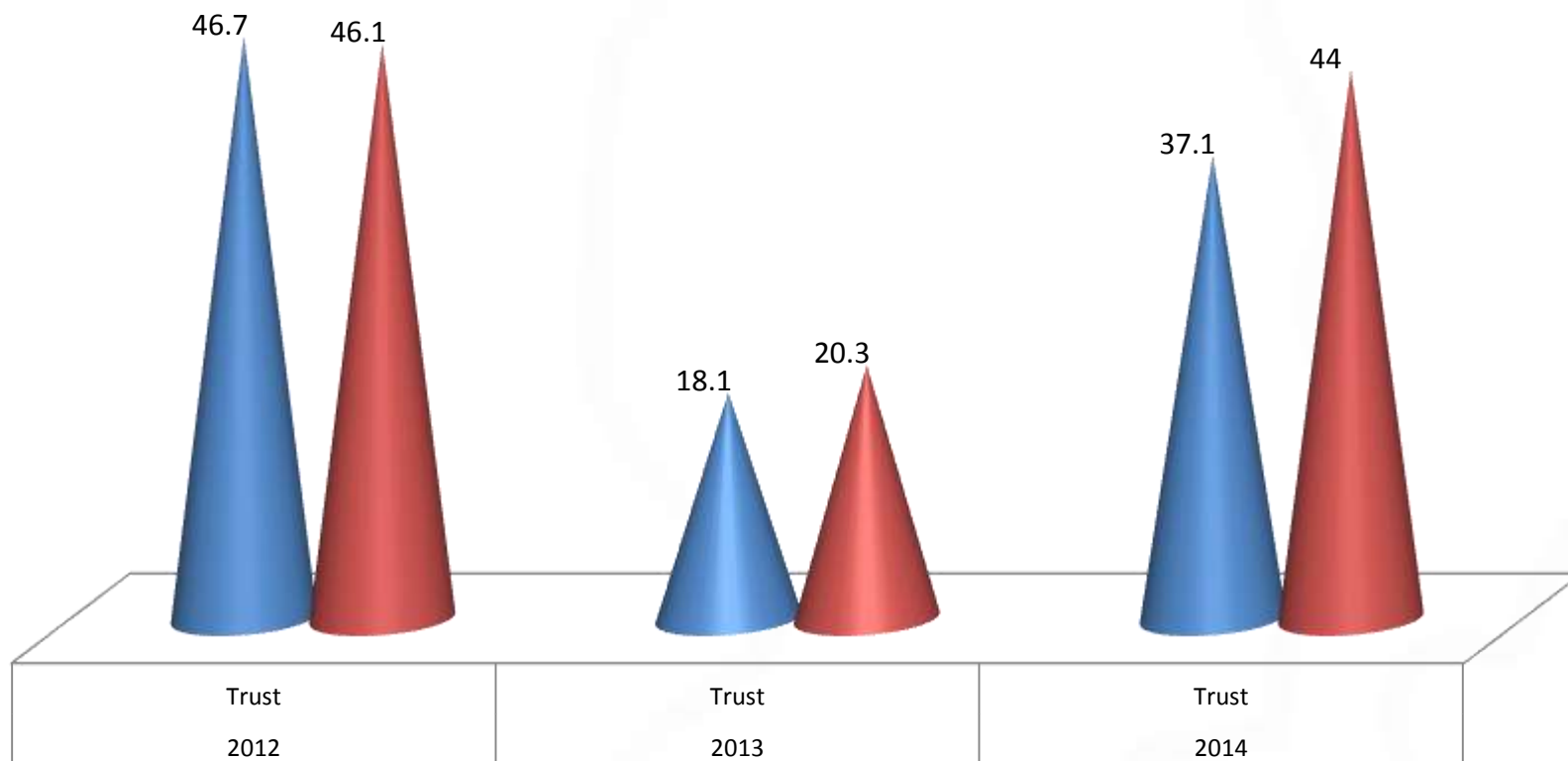




# IRAQ – Hope for improvement?

How much confidence do you have in the Parliament's ability to improve the situation in Iraq?

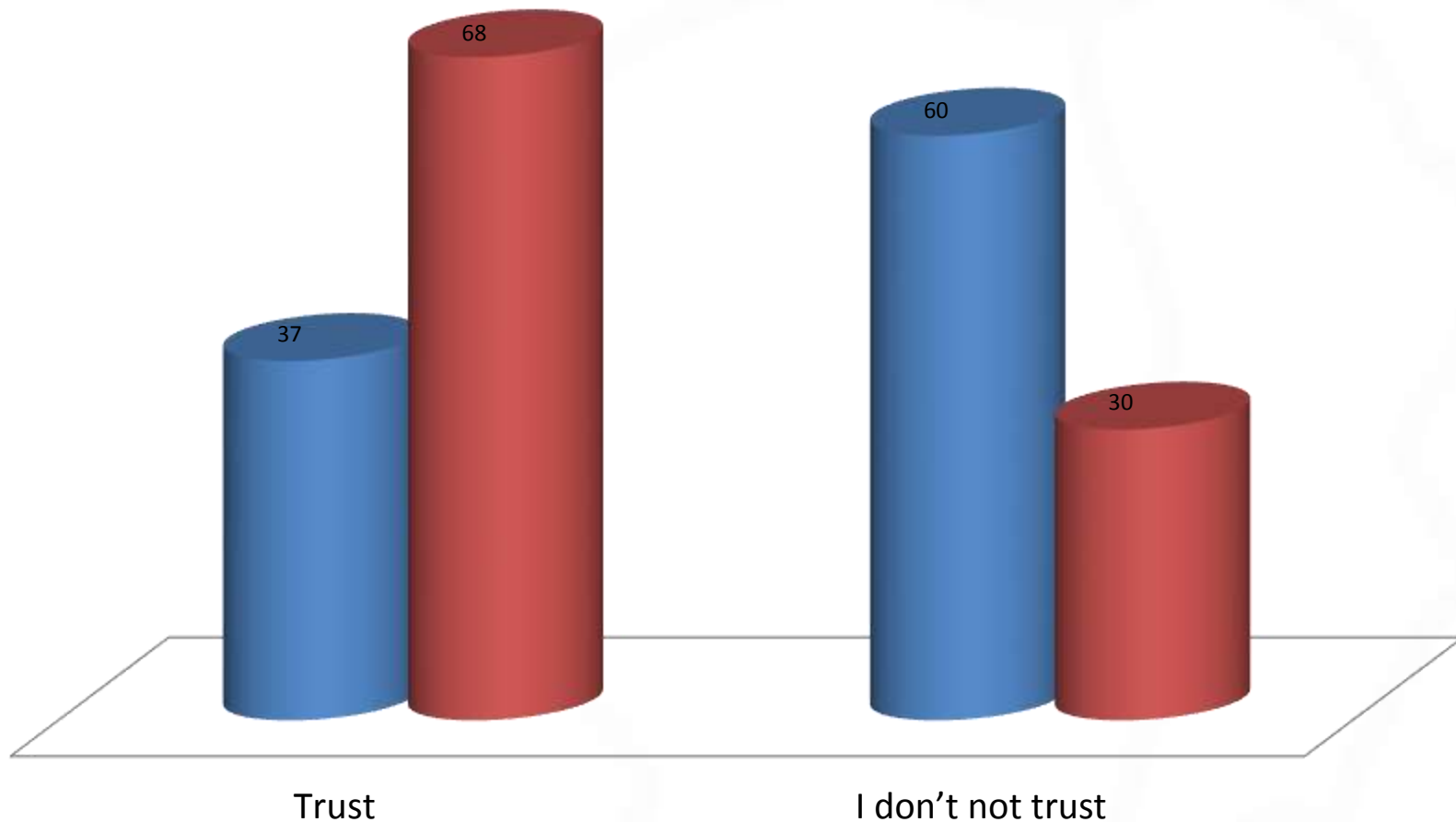
■ Sunni Muslim ■ Shia Muslim



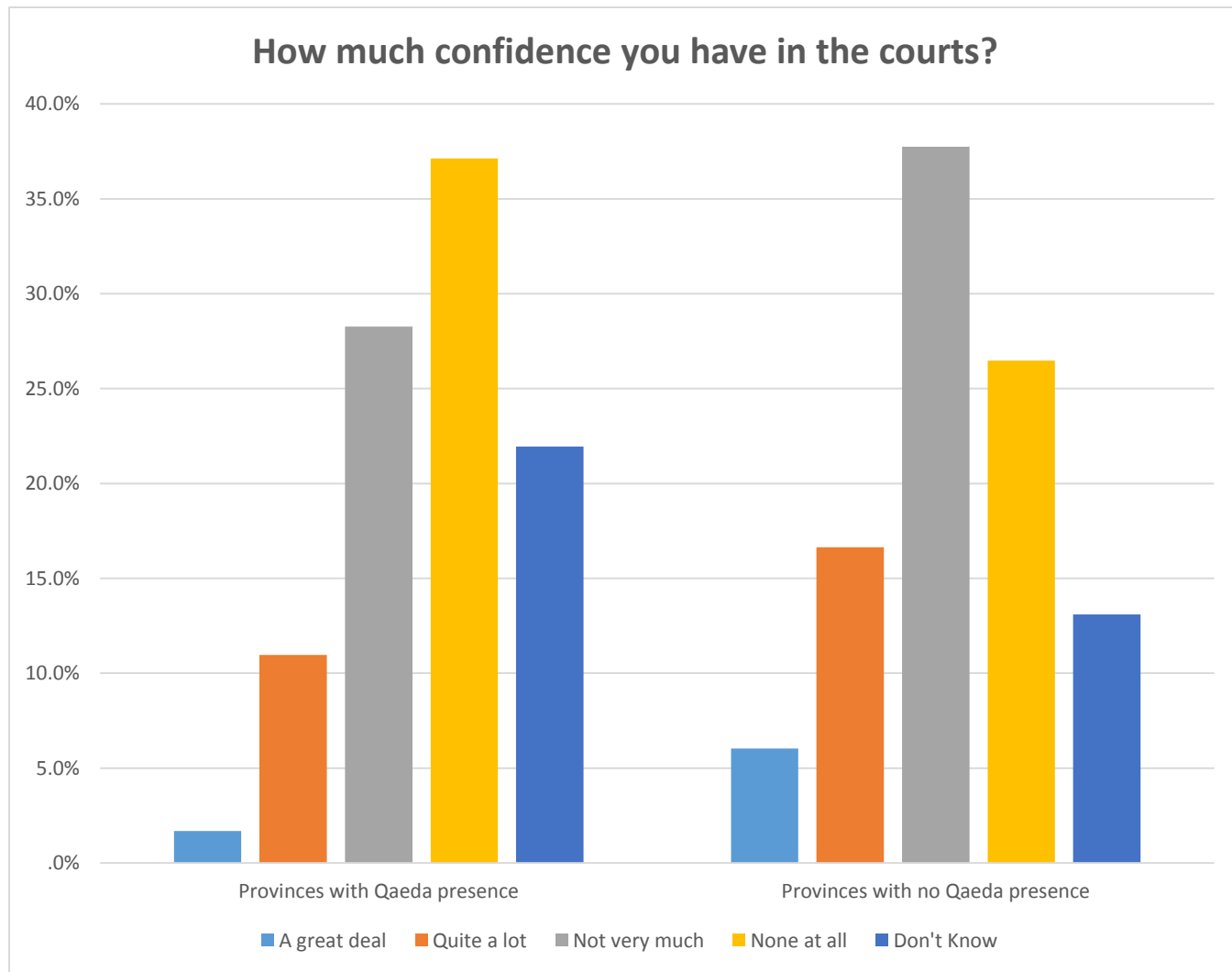
# Confidence in Judicial System?

Do you have confidence, or you do not trust the justice system?

■ Sunni Muslim ■ Shia Muslim

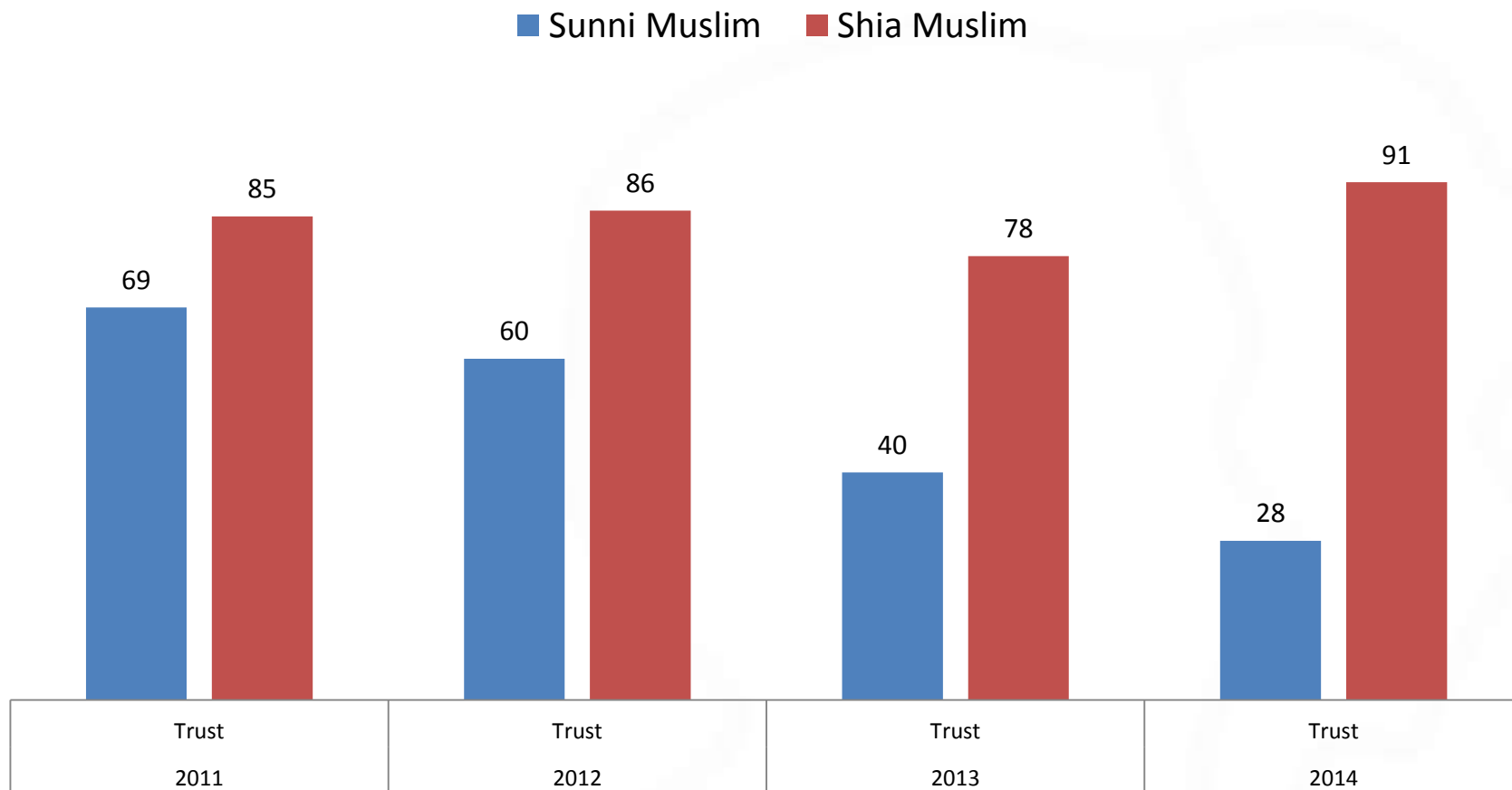


# YEMEN: Confidence in Courts?

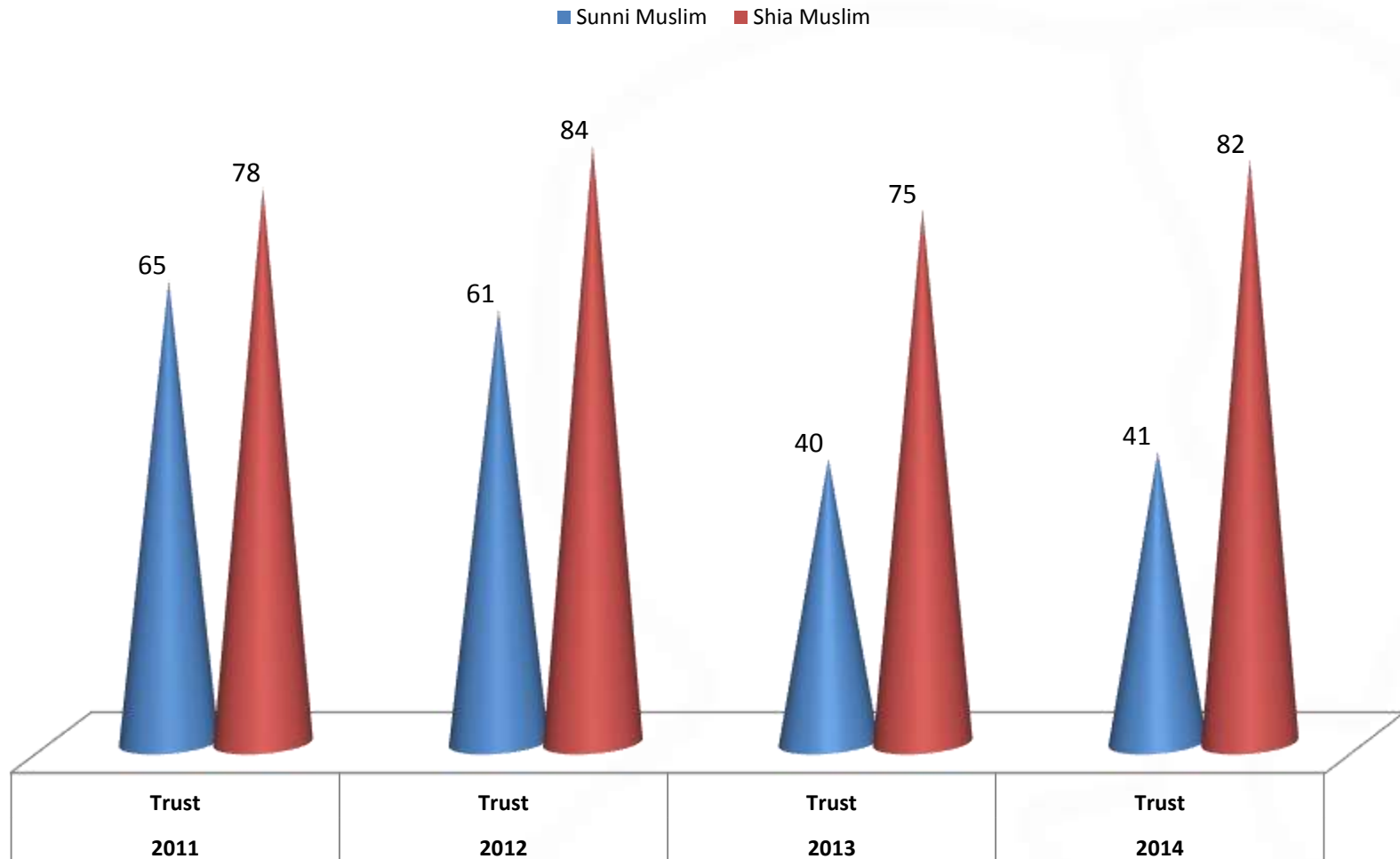


# IRAQ: Confidence in Iraqi Army?

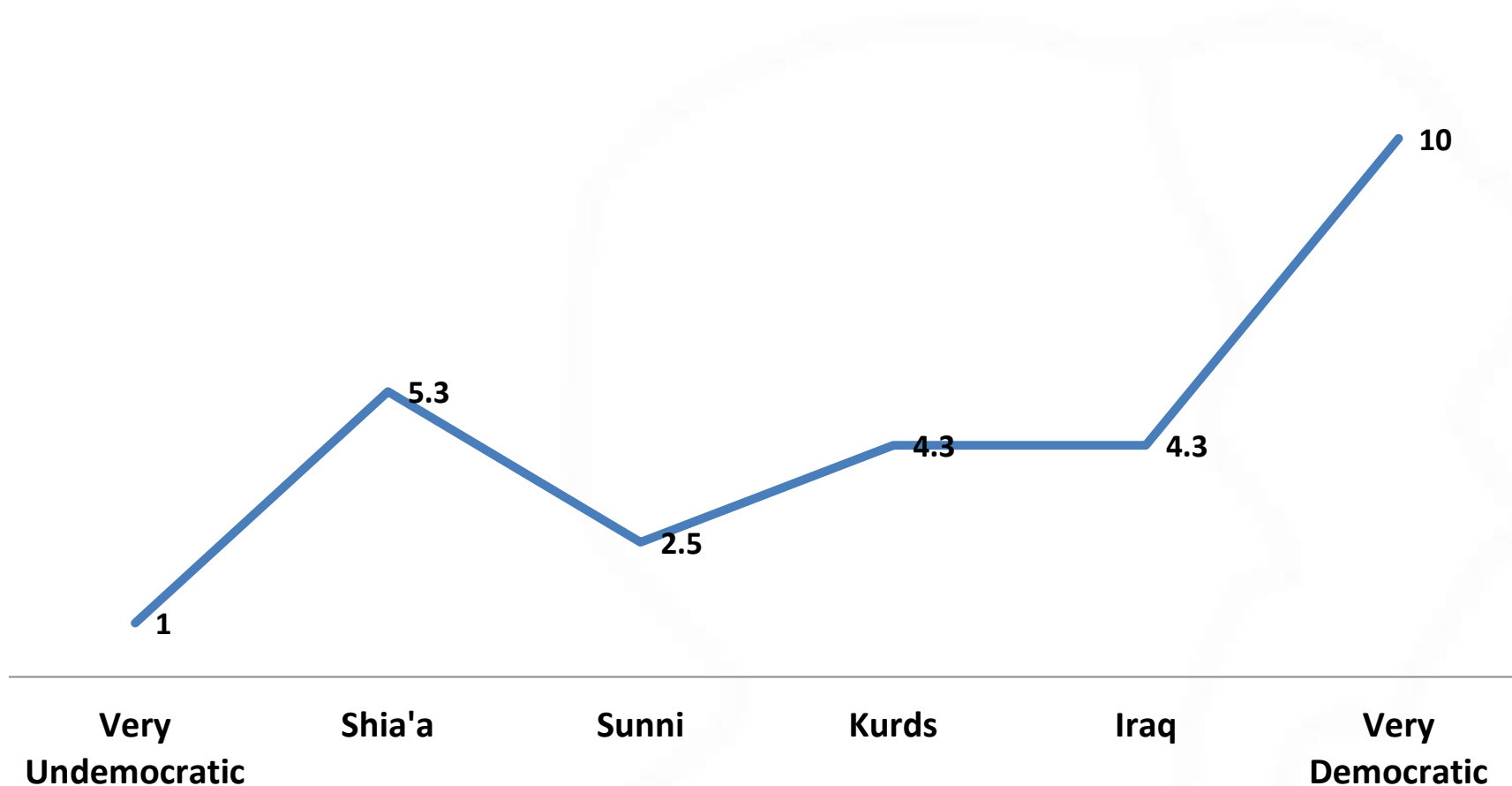
How much confidence do you have in the Iraqi Army to improve the situation in Iraq?



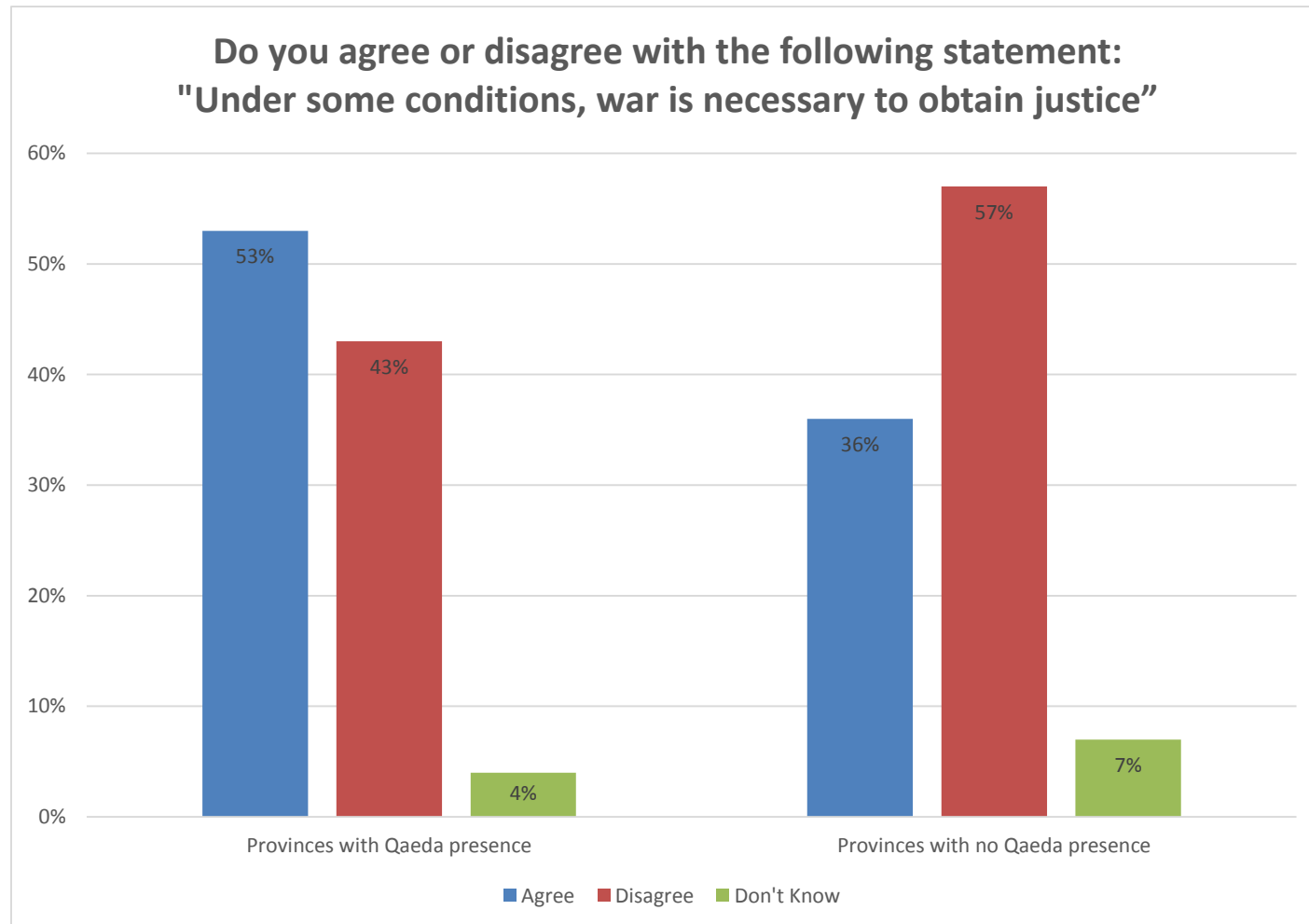
How much confidence do you have in the Iraqi Police to improve the situation in Iraq?



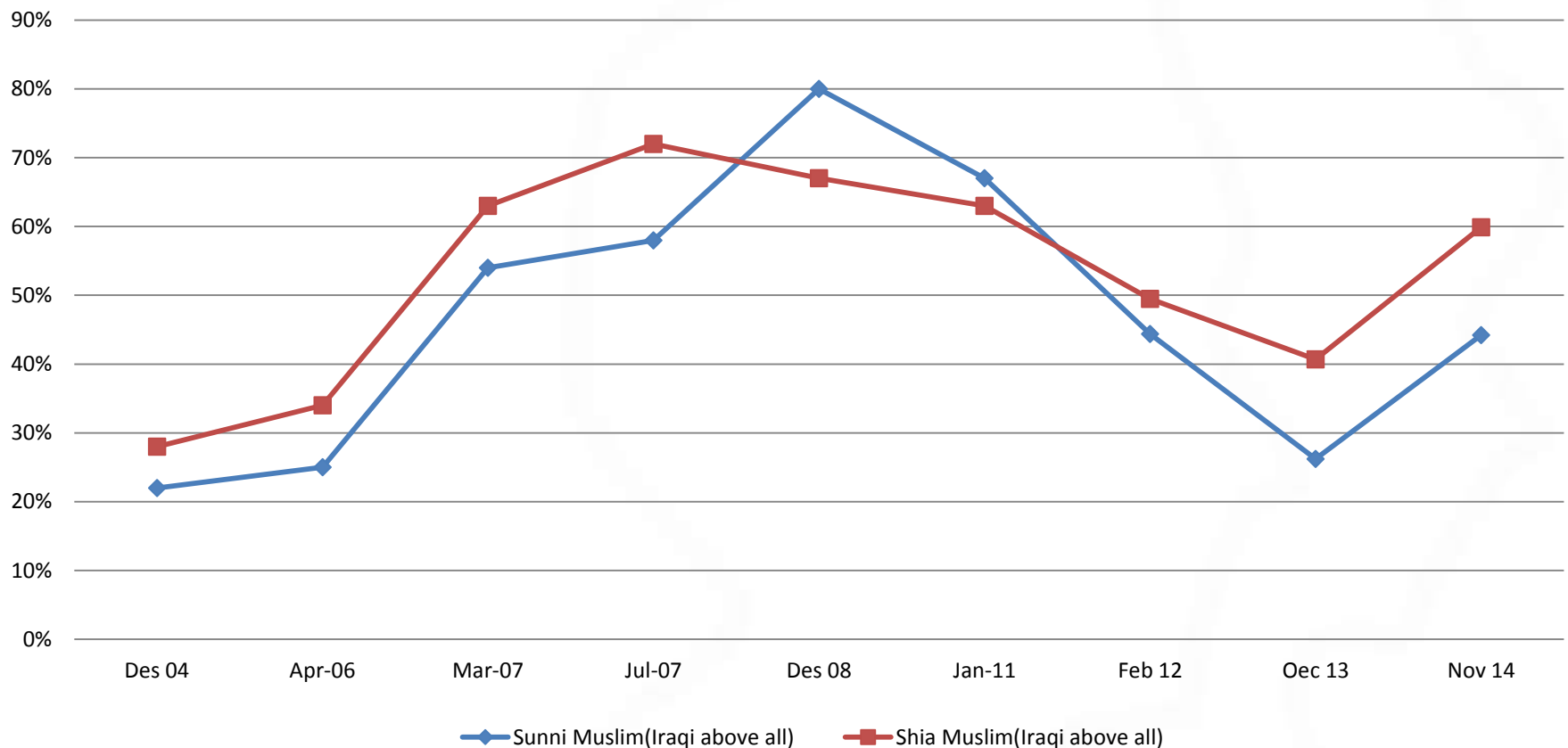
On a scale of 1-10, how democratic is your country?



# YEMEN: War as means for justice?



- Iraqi's defining selves as Iraqi above all?
- Sunni association with Iraq as the basis for their identity decreased sharply





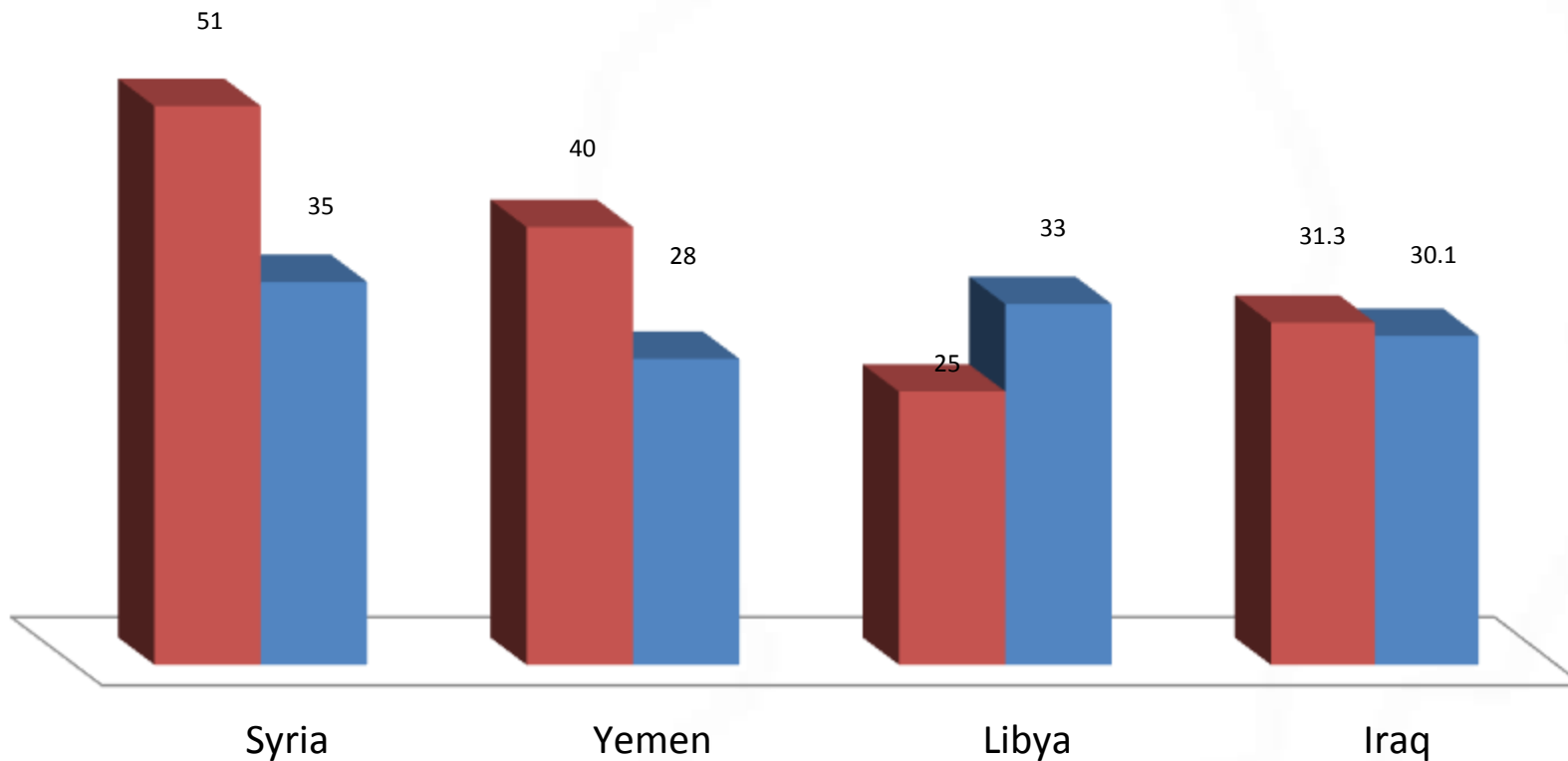
Sunnis' association with Iraq as the basis for their identity decreased sharply from 80% in 2008 to 60% in 2010 and it is now only 40%



# National vs. Religious association by country

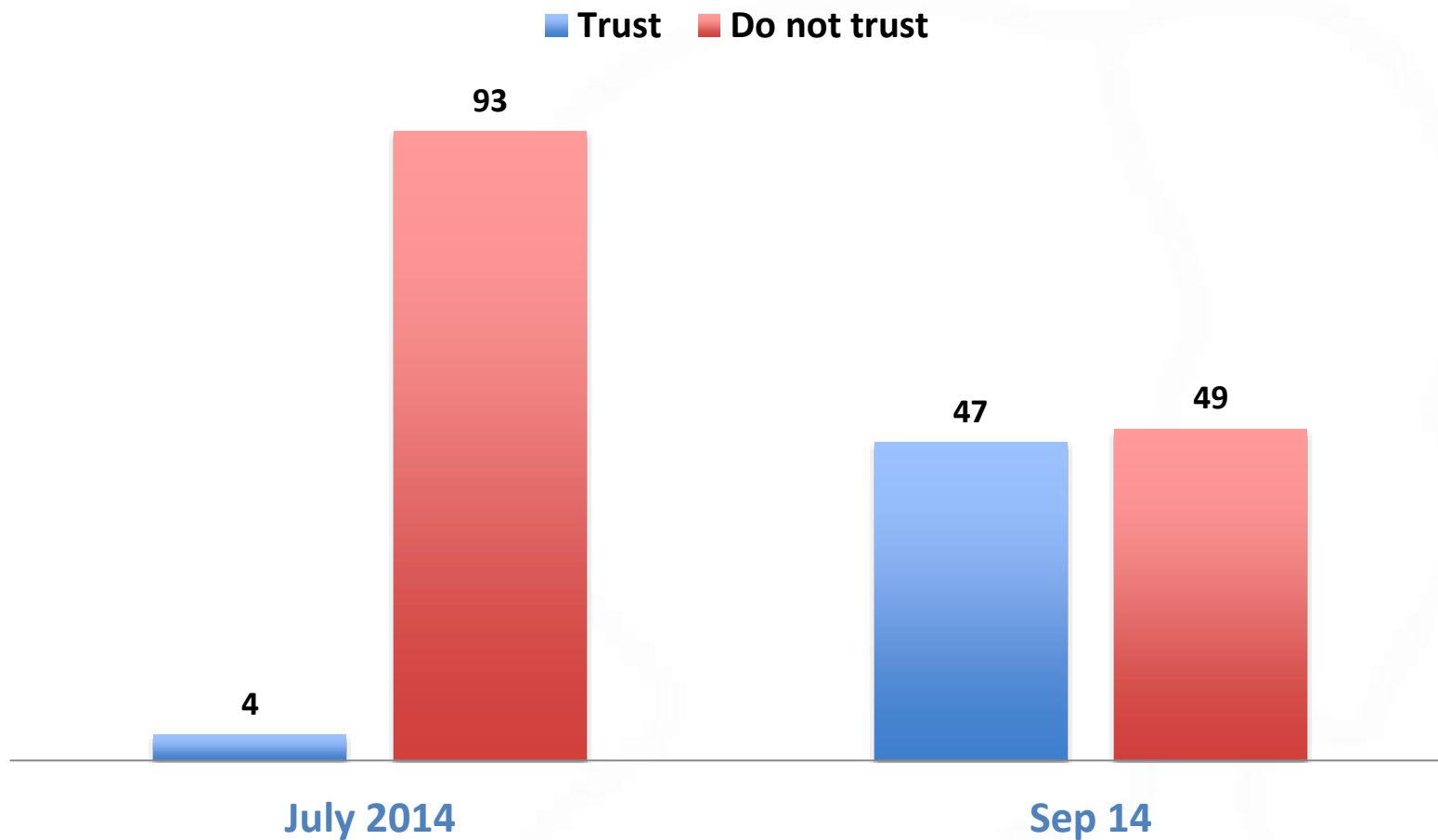
Most closely identify yourself?

■ Your country of origin ■ Muslim (Religion)



# **PART IV: BASIS FOR HOPE?**

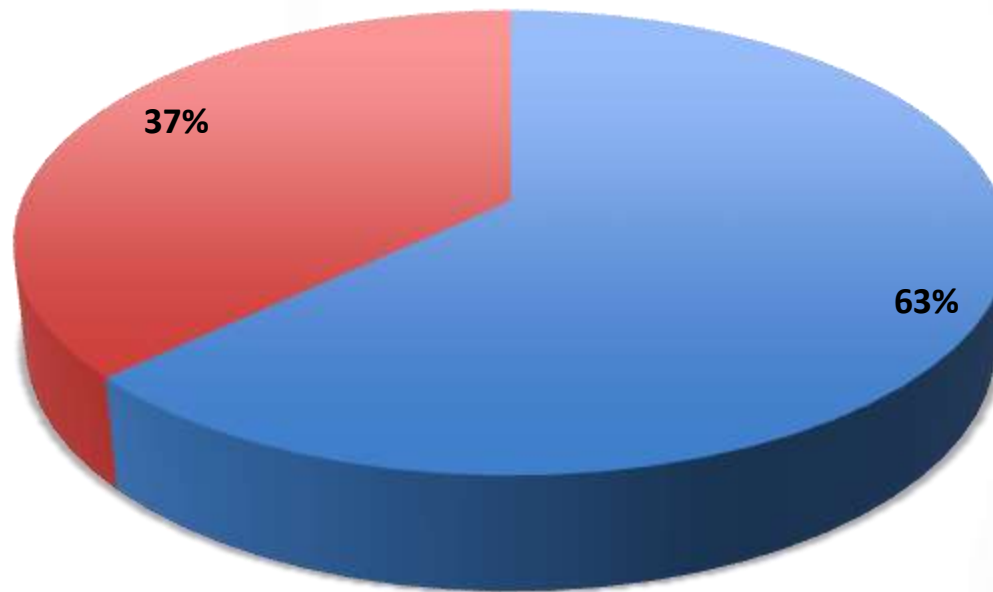
## Trust in government



# Support for fighting ISIL

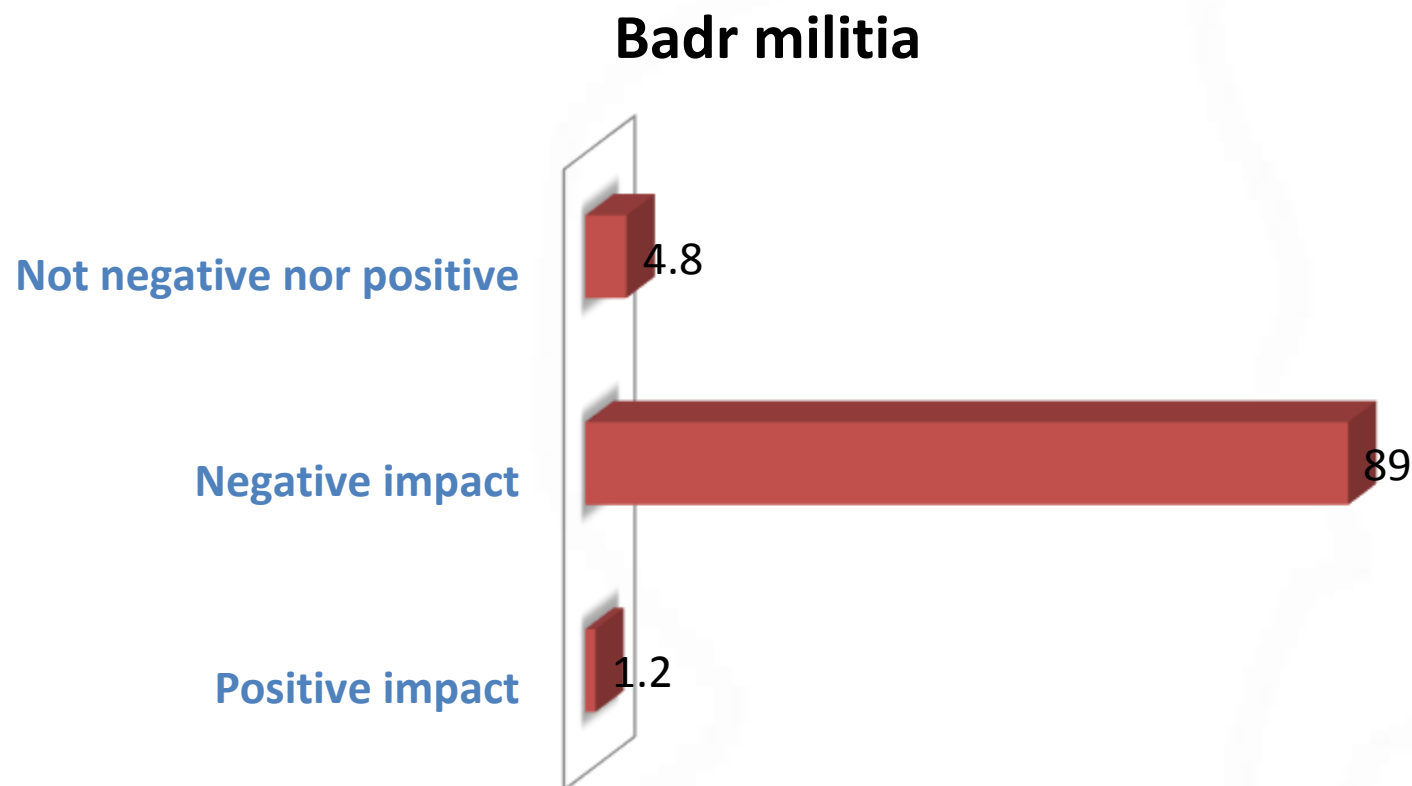
**There is an attempt now to compose new international alliance to fight ISIL, do you support this?**

■ Yes ■ No

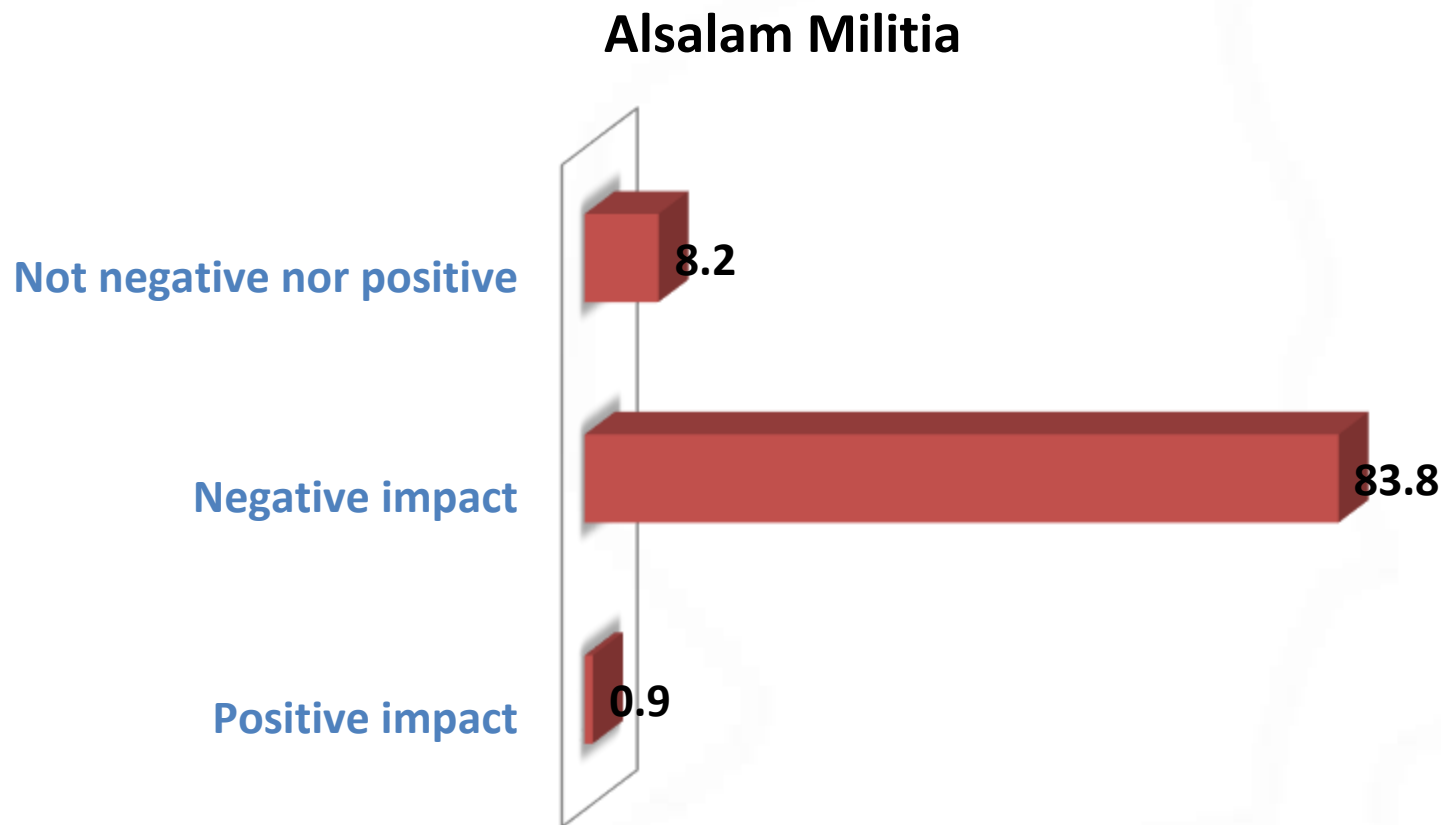


# **PART V: CAUTIONARY POINTS**

**In general do you think that the following has positive or negative influence on the internal issues of Iraq**

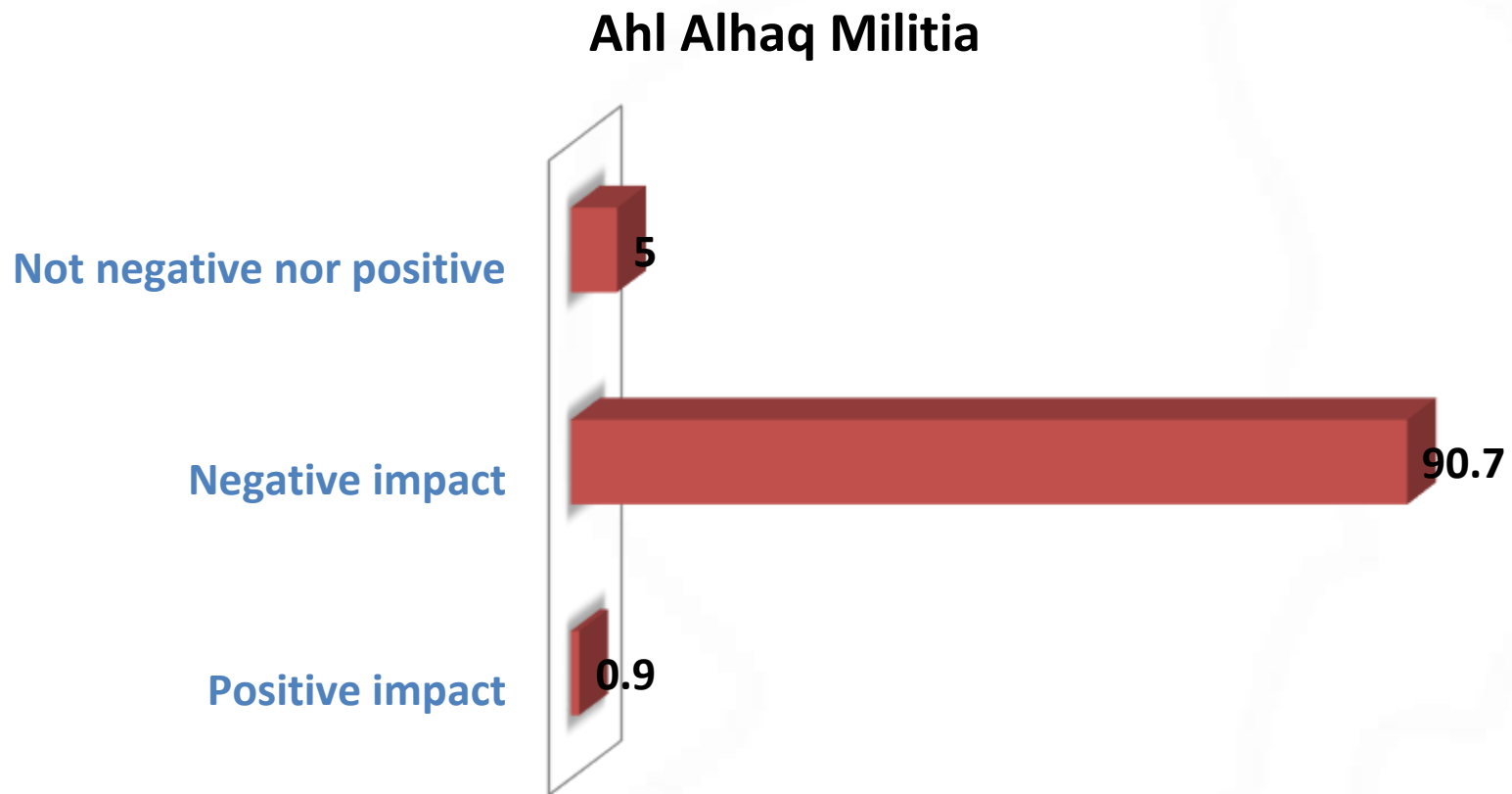


**In general do you think that the following has positive or negative influence on the internal issues of Iraq**





**In general do you think that the following has positive or negative influence on the internal issues of Iraq**



**These Shia's militias are currently :**

- 1. Over 100,000 fighters.**
- 2. Under direct leadership of Iran.**
- 3. Displaced, killed and prisoned hundreds of Sunni's families in the areas that Dai'sh had withdrawn from it. Sunni's politicians in Iraqi parliament suspended their membership due to the demographic changes imposed by these militias in many areas as they claim.**

- Though Da'ish/ISIL alternative cannot logically hold, what we need to direct our attention towards today is a way to address the real social and political needs of people in these areas that will further de-legitimize Da'ish/ISIL.
- Dai'sh raised up in Sunni's areas in Iraq and Syria as a result of deep and wide feelings of injustice, unfairness and lack of trust in governments. Without addressing and healing these feelings in the region, any military action will have a very limited results and may make things even worse.

- There are several rationales that ISIL is using to drive this recruitment:
  - First, there is the external threat of the Iraqi military and police forces of the Maliki government that were largely composed of Shi'a militias who broadly abused local populations over the last several years.
  - Second, there is a strong and growing hatred of Iran and its involvement in these areas ([Click Video](#))
  - Third, there is a new, combined threat posed by the United States acting in concert with Iran. This is being communicated as a "new crusade" of Christians against Muslims.

- Another basis of recruitment is theological, defense of Sunni values. Yet this is flawed on many levels. As indicated previously, Sunnis are, on the whole, significantly more secular than Shi'a. The destruction of mosques is one example of how ISIL are imposing their own version of religion that is not consistent with the practices and traditions of the region. More information about this needs to be disseminated.



© AP



هدم ضريح ومزار (أحمد الرفاعي) في ناحية | مدينة نينوى



تفخيخ ونسف معبد (حُسينية سعد بن عقيل) في مدي | مدينة نينوى



تفخيخ ونسف معبد (حُسينية جواد) في مدي | مدينة نينوى



- ISIL is anticipating airstrikes and aims to gain maximum advantage from these. Currently, ISIL is placing its flag on civilian centers to ensure maximum collateral damage from strikes, that will push public sentiment further to its side and generate even greater hatred of those behind the strikes.
- Airstrikes alone will be disastrous. A carefully-calibrated effort to win the hearts and mind of the people in this areas is critically important, yet there has been too little discussion of what this will involve. The fears of the people in these areas must be addressed and a better alternative to ISIL must be presented. There are a number of ways to communicate with people in these areas

Thank you





غزوة أسد الرحمن البيلوي... أبو عبد الرحمن

إعتقال المئات من قطعان الجيش الصفوي الفارين من المعارك بالزبي المدني





