

Iraq's Challenging Environment for Women

Report on Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and NDI Spring 2011 Public Opinion Research

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From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

Recent public opinion research¹ reveals a sense of improving conditions for women in Iraq, though obstacles still remain that hinder progress within society, the workplace, and politics. There is widespread approval – both among women and men – for the education of women and the right to use that education in highly-skilled professions. But opinions are less tolerant on other points, such as allowing women to work wherever they want. Iraqis point to societal norms and family influence as hindrances to women's advancement in the workplace and political world, but some also blame women themselves for an inability to make hard decisions.

Although there is near unanimous consent for the right of women to vote, there is less support for women to play a more active role in the public sector, either as members of parliament or government ministers. Even so, Iraqis strongly support the requirement that women hold 25 percent of the seats in parliament.

Not surprisingly, there is a real gender divide on the role of women in public life. A majority of women say they are *more* likely to vote for a candidate who is a woman, while a majority of men – particularly older men – say they are *less* likely to vote for a female candidate. The same pattern carries over to economic issues. A solid majority of men think that men should have a greater role than women in running government, businesses, and industries; but women are split on the issue.

Generally, there is uniformity across regions on whether women should be allowed to marry whomever they want. However, on issues related to clothing choices and where women can travel, there are some significant regional differences. The West and South regions tend to be more traditional on these two issues, with solid majorities thinking that women should not be allowed to wear what they want or travel wherever they want.

¹ Greenberg Quinlan Rosner conducted 10 focus groups with Iraqi adults from January 16-21, 2011 in five locations – Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Baghdad, Basra, and Anbar. Groups were homogenous with respect to age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and political leanings. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner followed this qualitative research with a quantitative survey based on 2,400 face-to-face interviews conducted between February 24 and March 23, 2011 in all 18 of Iraq's governorates. The total sample includes 500 interviews in each region (Baghdad, South, West, and North) as well as a 400-interview oversample in Kirkuk. In the nationwide survey data, these "over-samples" are weighted so that each region is proportional to its share of the overall population. **[Figure 1]**

Conditions for Women Generally Perceived as Improving

Iraqis generally believe conditions for women are improving. Overall, a 46 percent plurality thinks “conditions for women” are getting better rather than worse. **[Figure 2]** A Sunni woman from Baghdad says, “Before 2003, women had no role; now I say they have a role. The simplest example is that women are now employees and help the men. This is something good.”

The North has significantly more tolerant attitudes toward women, and there is a strong perception that conditions for women are getting better in the region (67 percent better vs. 18 percent worse). Meanwhile, in the West, a plurality of Iraqis see conditions worsening for women (36 percent better vs. 43 percent worse).

There are significant differences in opinion about the role of women in Iraq and the opportunities that should be afforded to them. However, Iraqis are united regarding the importance of education for women. A near-unanimous 93 percent think secondary education is very or somewhat important for women to receive, and 89 percent think the same about university education. **[Figure 3]** A woman from Erbil explains, “Education is necessary because it opens the mind, makes one aware and leads one to mix with people. If a woman or a girl does not interact in society she remains ignorant.” A Sunni woman from Baghdad adds, “Well, if an Iraqi woman has a degree, she will certainly benefit the country; but if she does not, she will stay at home.”

Because of the importance placed on the education of women, 92 percent believe women should be allowed to attend secondary school, and 90 percent support university education for women. **[Figure 4]**

Iraqis also believe that women should be able to use the tools they learn through higher education. A large majority (94 percent) thinks women should be allowed to enter highly-skilled professional roles, such as being doctors or lawyers, and 74 percent of them *strongly* believe so, showing the potential for growth of women’s attainment, especially in the private sector.

Significant Obstacles, Gender Divide Hinder Women’s Progress

Despite the general perception that conditions for women are improving, Iraqis perceive significant obstacles to women’s progress. There are also marked regional differences in these attitudes, with the North being more tolerant and the West being more traditional about the role women should play in different sectors.

For example, nationwide, most Iraqis (94 percent) believe that women should be allowed to work in highly-skilled professions. **[Figure 5]** Yet views in the North are even more tolerant, with 82 percent saying women should be able to work wherever they want. Conversely, in the West, 55 percent think women should *not* be allowed to work wherever they want. **[Figure 6]**

Impediments to women working outside the home are centered around societal beliefs. Most Iraqis (53 percent) think social norms are responsible for women not being able to work outside of the home, followed by religious beliefs and lack of family support (both 24 percent). **[Figure 7]**

The lack of family support is a notable topic in focus groups. A Kurdish woman from Erbil explains, “The main problem is society and customs. Women have to have confidence to stand

up to their families and their [social] environment.” In the West, where Iraqis are least likely to support a woman’s right to choose where to work, Iraqis are more likely to cite social norms, religious beliefs, and security concerns as the main reasons why women are not more involved outside the household – rather than support from the family or support from men – showing that these ideas might be more deeply engrained in the West and more rural areas.

Iraqis are open to women’s involvement in some aspects of public life. They almost universally accept that women should have the right to vote, and there is significant support for women to become members of parliament. **[Figure 8]** However, while a strong majority (70 percent) supports the idea of a woman becoming a cabinet minister, there continue to be major geographic differences in that support. In the North, people almost unanimously think that women should be allowed to be ministers (96 percent), but in the West, a bare majority (54 percent) believes it, including only 41 percent of men. **[Figure 9]**

Iraqis differ in their opinions on why women are limited in their political activities. Whereas a majority of Iraqis blame societal norms for why some women do not work outside the home, they tend to see political parties and the inability of women to make difficult decisions as the two main reasons why more women are not involved in politics. **[Figure 10]** A Sunni woman from Baghdad admits, “I say that women are too emotional in their decisions.”

More promising, a strong 74 percent majority supports the guarantee of 25 percent of parliamentary seats for women; nearly a third of all Iraqis, 31 percent, *strongly* support this legal provision. **[Figure 11]** However, even with more female members of parliament (MPs), Iraqis tend to think women will remain marginalized. A 48 percent plurality thinks that even with more women MPs, women will still not have a significant influence on political parties and politics. **[Figure 12]**

There are significant gender differences related to who can better represent women in politics. Almost half of women – 49 percent – believe that only women can sufficiently represent the interest of women in politics, while a plurality of men (42 percent) think that men can sufficiently represent women in politics. **[Figure 13]** A woman from Baghdad discussed why it is important to have more women involved in politics, “Men want things only for themselves, but women want things for the whole of society.”

Gender divides are also particularly strong when determining whether to support a female candidate. A majority of women say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who is a woman, while a majority of men – particularly older men – say they are *less* likely to vote for a female candidate. **[Figure 14]**

The Iraqi gender divide is also apparent on the issue of the role women should play in government and business. A majority of men (55 percent) think that men should have a greater role in running government, business, and industries. However, women are evenly split at 43 percent on whether women should have an equal role or men should have a greater role. **[Figure 15]**

Geographic and gender differences also appear in attitudes toward women and social issues. There is general uniformity across regions on whether women should be allowed to marry whomever they want, though the North continues to be more tolerant on this issue. **[Figure 16]** However, on issues related to what women are allowed to wear and where they can travel, there are some significant regional differences. The West and South tend to be more traditional

on these two issues, with solid majorities thinking that women should *not* be allowed to wear what they want or travel wherever they want. **[Figure 17]**

Men also tend to be more traditional on a range of social issues concerning women. For example, 69 percent of women say women should be allowed to marry whomever they want, whereas only 57 percent of men believe it. The difference is similar when it comes to whether women should be allowed to work wherever they want: 67 percent of women believe they should, but only 53 percent of men agree. Similar patterns hold for allowing women to travel where they want and wear whatever clothing they want – although fewer than half of women agree that women should be allowed to do either of those things, indicating a continuing traditionalism among women as well. **[Figure 18]**

There are notable differences in how people perceive the role of women based on urban and rural residency: on all social issues, urban areas are markedly more tolerant. **[Figure 19]** A Sunni woman notes this urban/rural difference, particularly related to the education of women: “There are people who don’t send their daughters to school, but it is only in rural areas. They let their sons go to school and tell their daughters that they will end up staying home doing housework.”

GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH

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Research Methodology

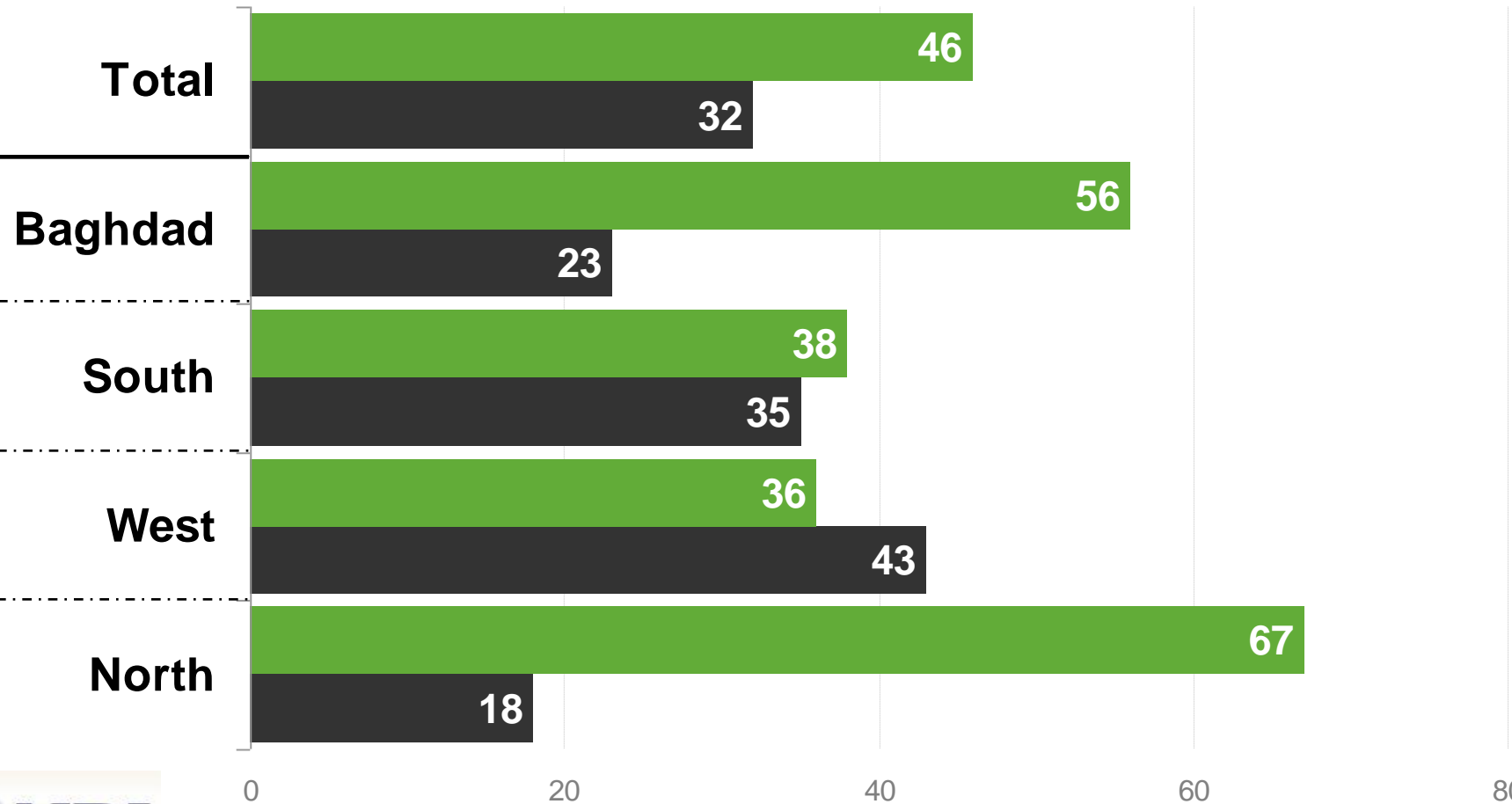
- **National survey: February 24 – March 23, 2011**
 - 2,400 face-to-face interviews (1,436 weighted) of adults 18 years old and over; distributed representatively by province; national margin of error (MoE) of +/- 2.0%
 - Oversample in Kirkuk: Feb 26 - March 15, 457 total interviews (45 weighted) (+/- 2.0% MoE)
 - Regional breakdowns
 - Baghdad: Feb. 24 - March 10, 500 interviews (351 weighted) (+/- 4.38% MoE)
 - West: Feb. 26 - March 11, 500 interviews (391 weighted) (+/-4.38% MoE)
 - South: Feb. 24 - 28 (except Thi-Qar, where interviews lasted until March 3), 500 interviews (499 weighted) (+/- 4.38% MoE)
 - North: March 5 - 23, 500 interviews (194 weighted) (+/- 4.38% MoE)

- **Focus groups: February 16 – 21, 2011**
 - 10 focus groups
 - Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Baghdad, Basra, and Anbar
 - Groups were homogenous based on ethnicity, religion, gender, age, education, and political leanings

Conditions for women perceived as improving

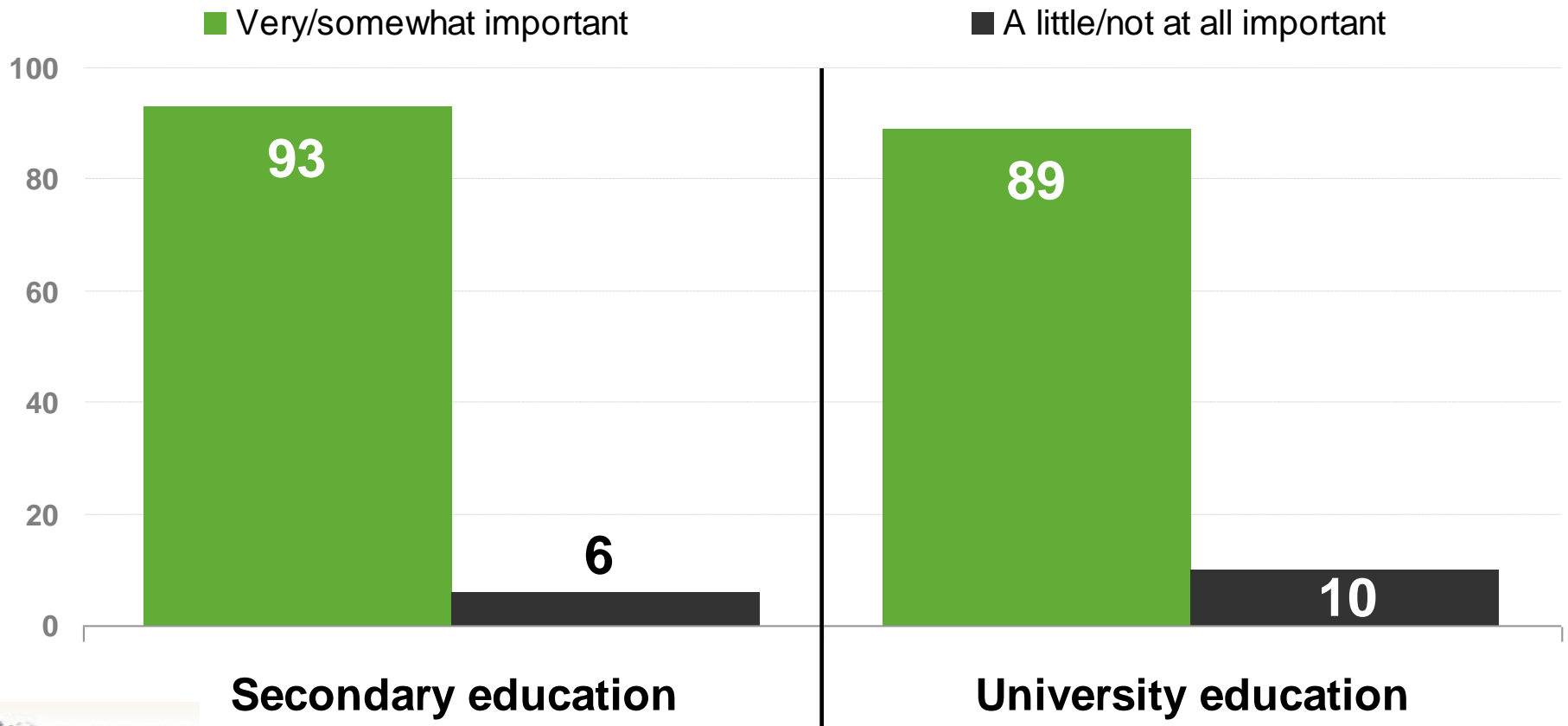
Please tell me if you think this issue is getting better or worse in Iraq: “**conditions for women**”

■ Getting worse ■ Getting better

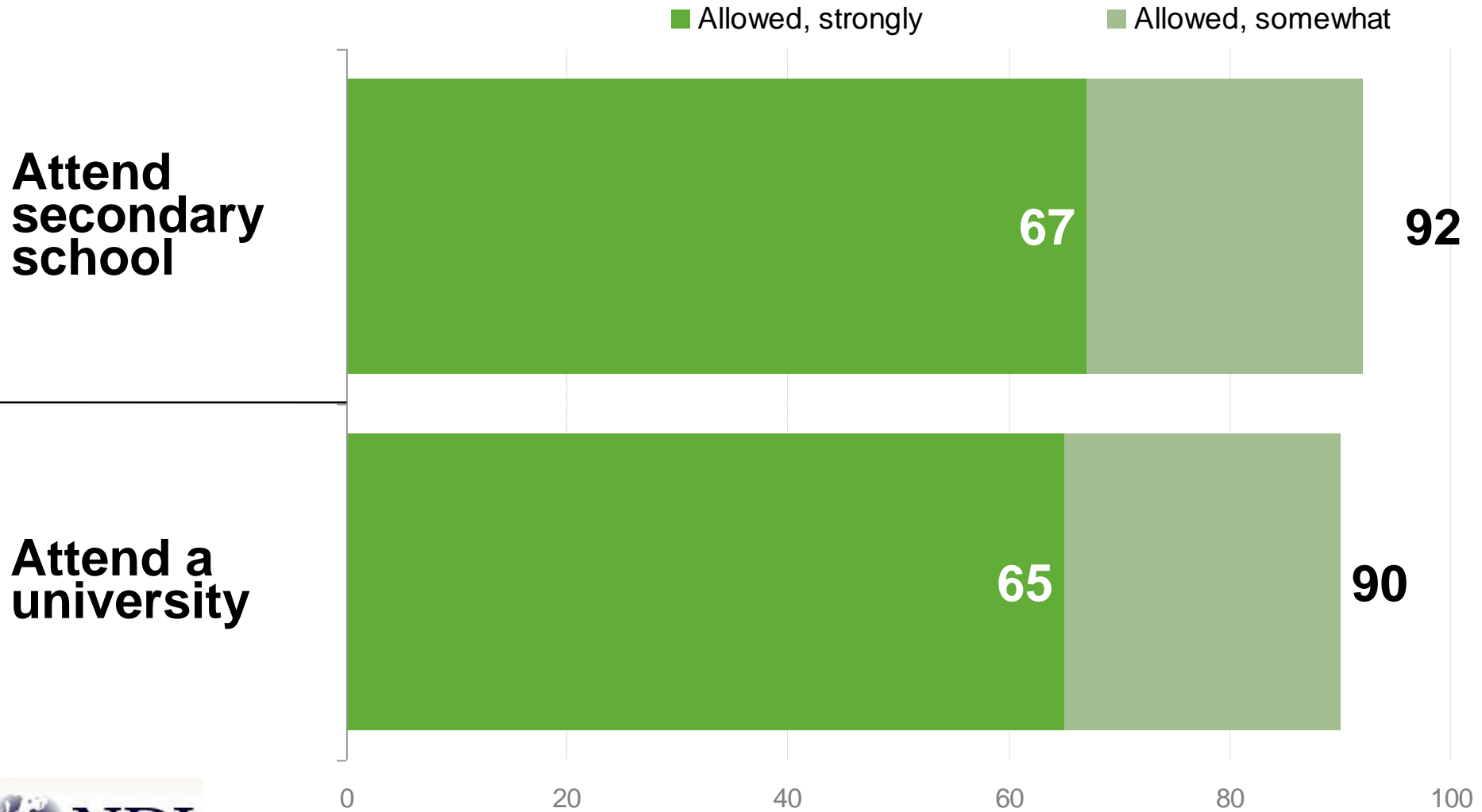


Strong majority see education as important for women

How important is it for girls and women in Iraq to receive a secondary/university education? Do you think a secondary/university education for girls and women is very important, somewhat important, a little important, or not at all important?

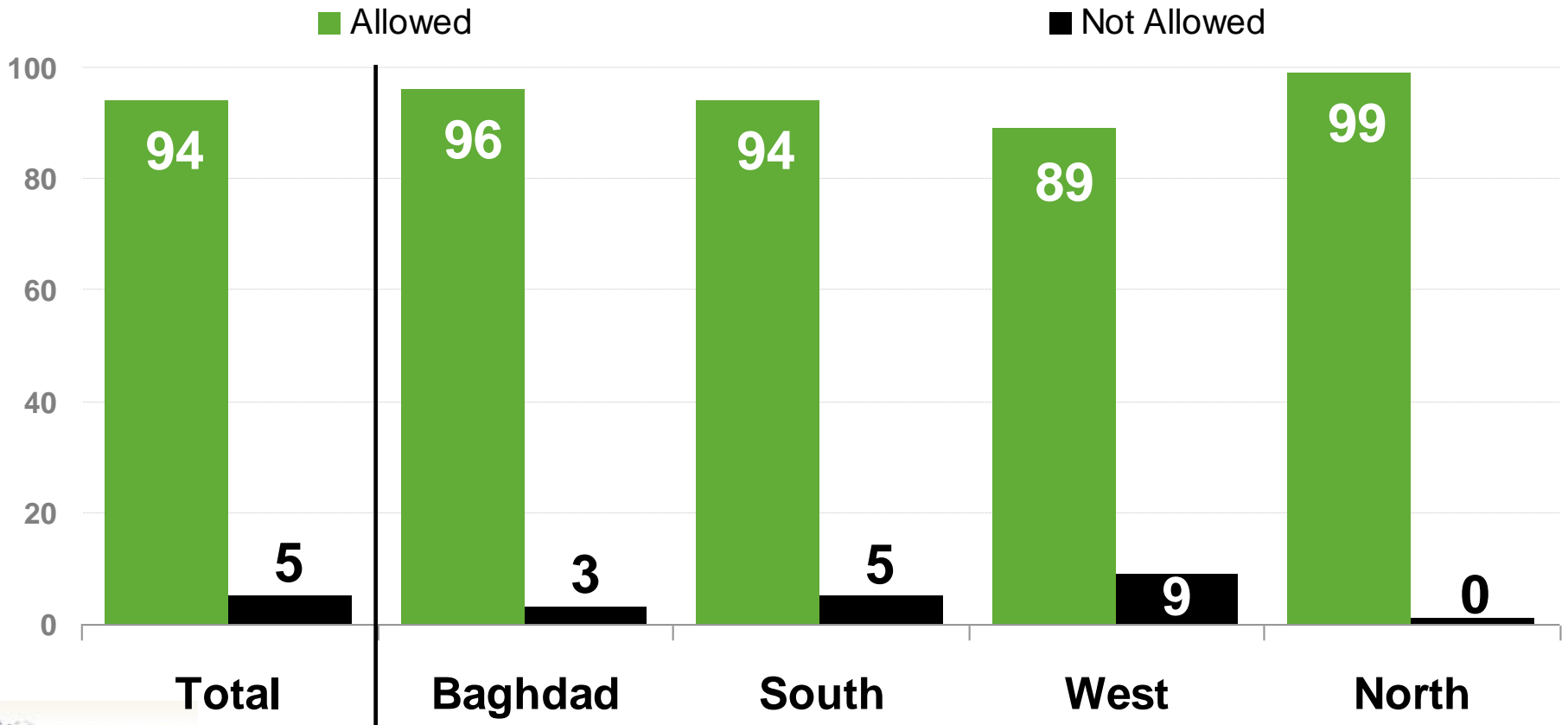


Most believe in higher education for women



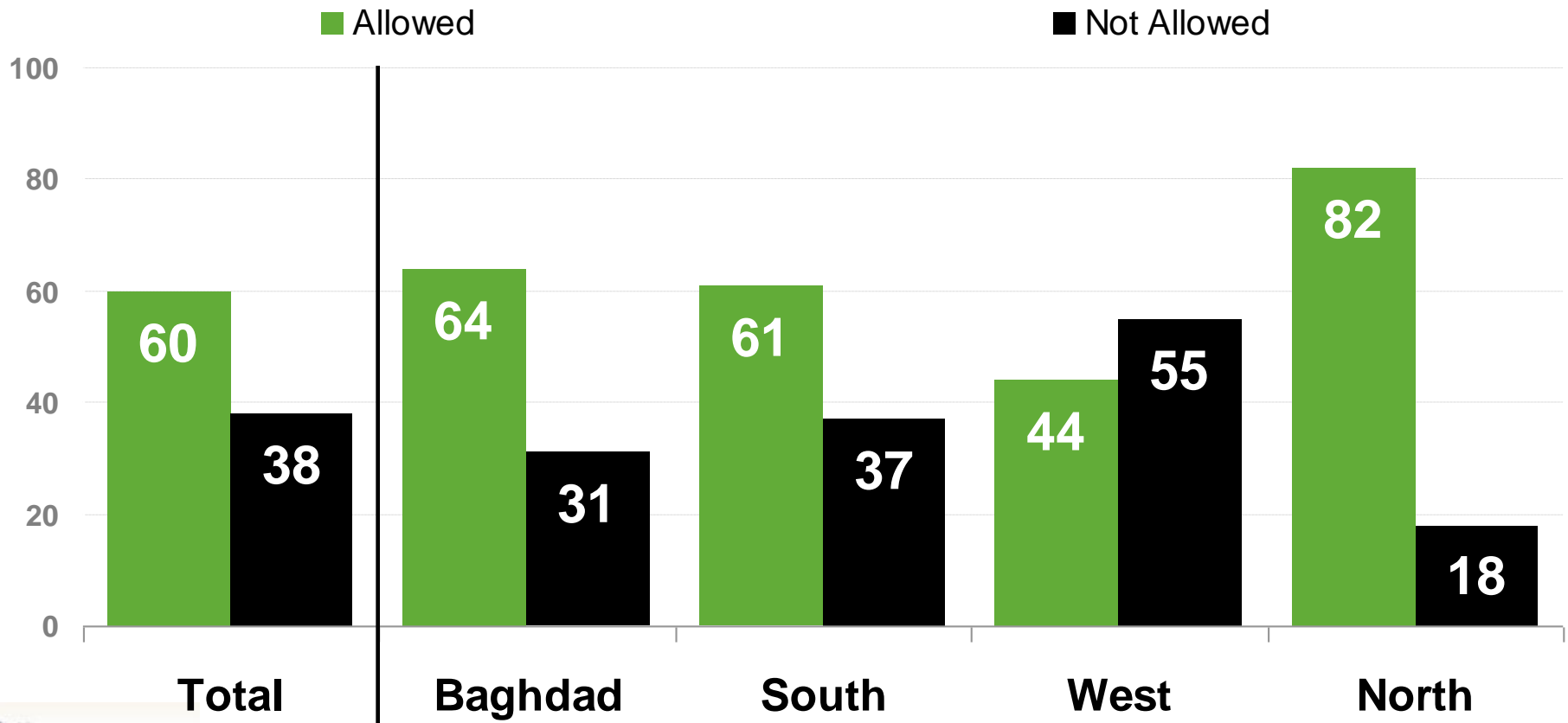
Near-unanimous support on women in highly skilled jobs

Now I want to ask you about the role of women in Iraq. For each item, please tell me if you think Iraqi women should or should not be allowed to do that particular item. (**Enter highly skilled professions, such as being a doctor or lawyer**)



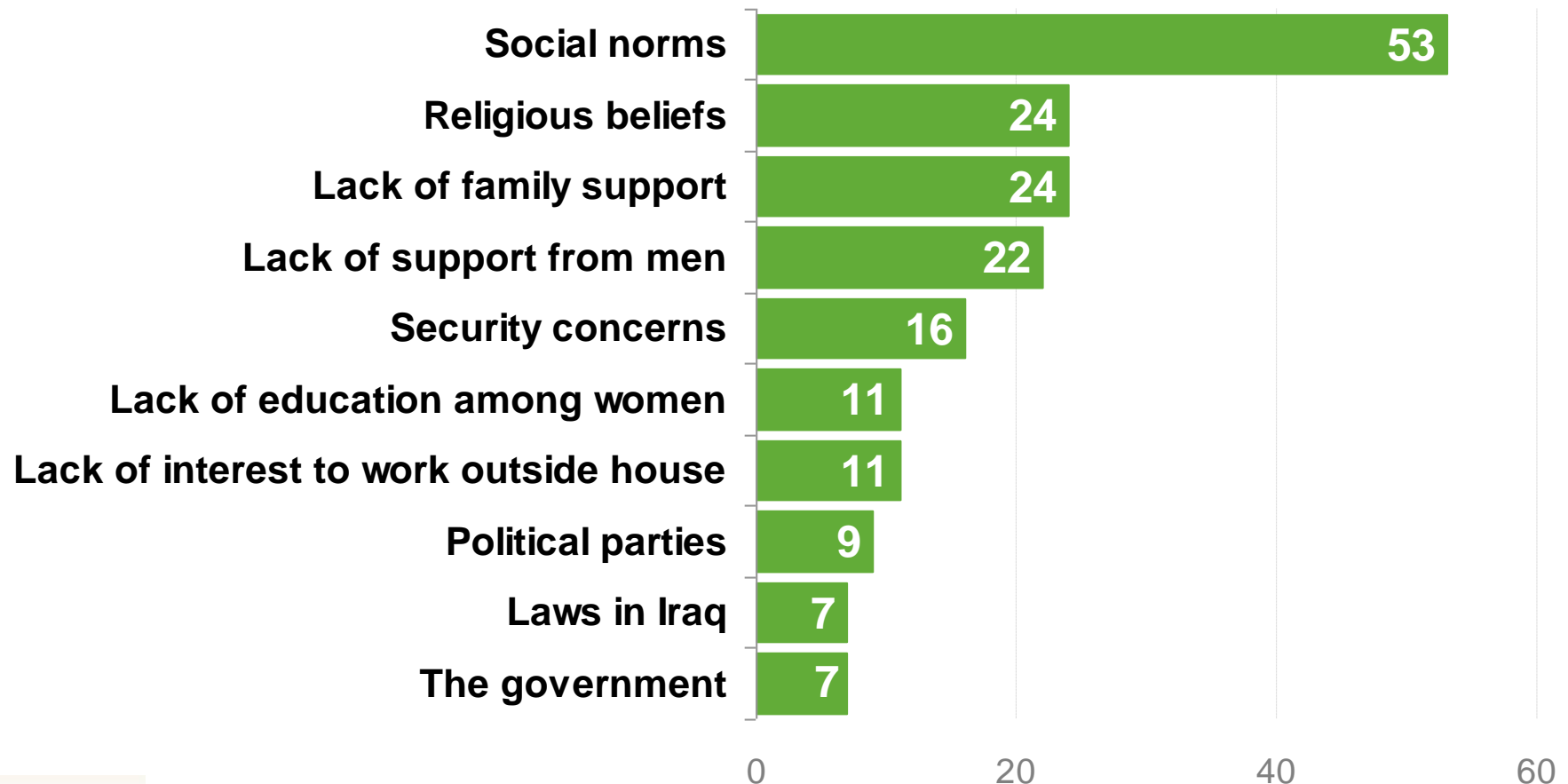
Strong majority sees education as important for women

Now I want to ask you about the role of women in Iraq. For each item, please tell me if you think Iraqi women should or should not be allowed to do that particular item. (**Work wherever they want**)

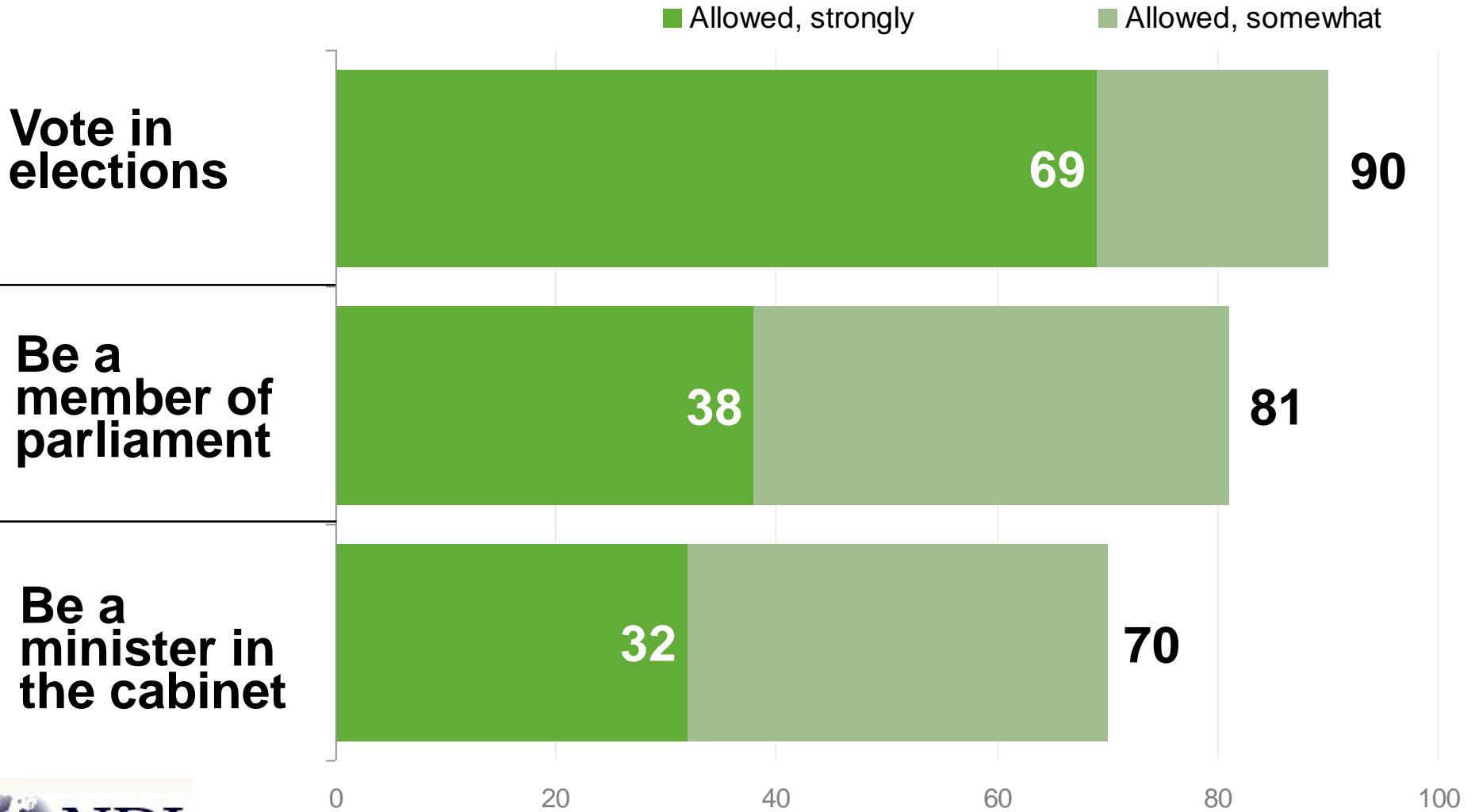


Most Iraqis think social norms hold women back from work

What do you think are the TWO main reasons why women are not more involved in work outside of the home?

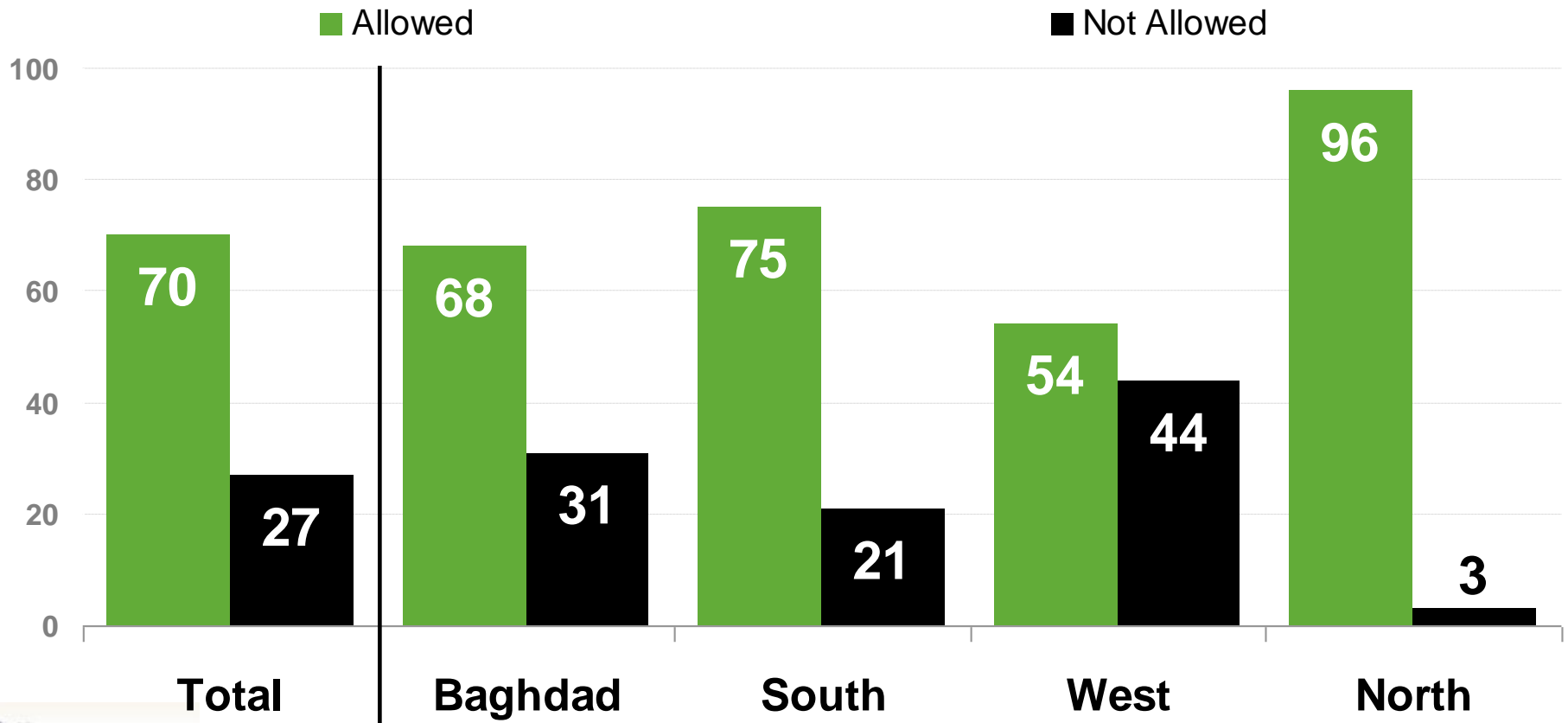


Acceptance of women in political roles



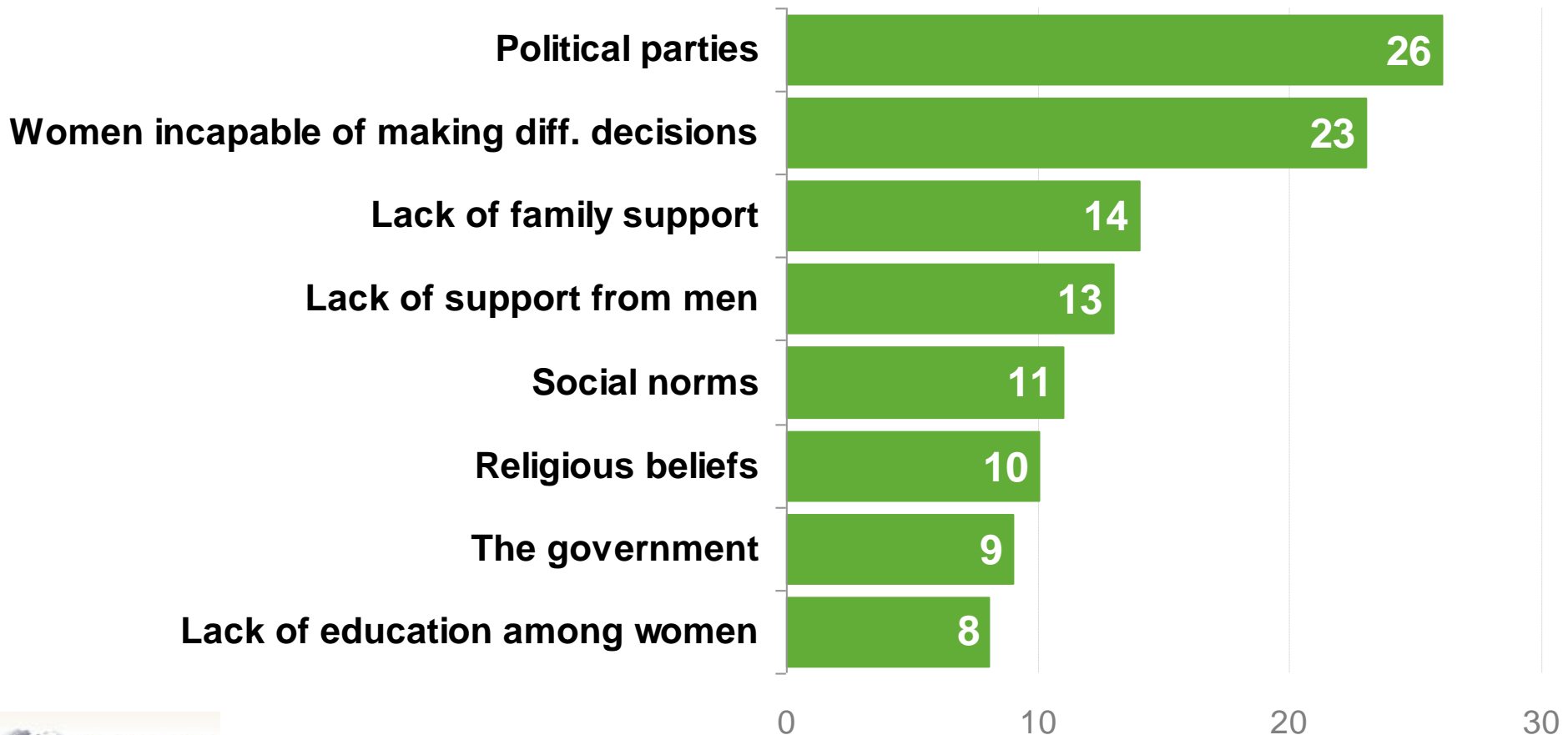
Support for women as ministers in the cabinet

Now I want to ask you about the role of women in Iraq. For each item, please tell me if you think Iraqi women should or should not be allowed to do that particular item. **(Be a minister in the cabinet)**



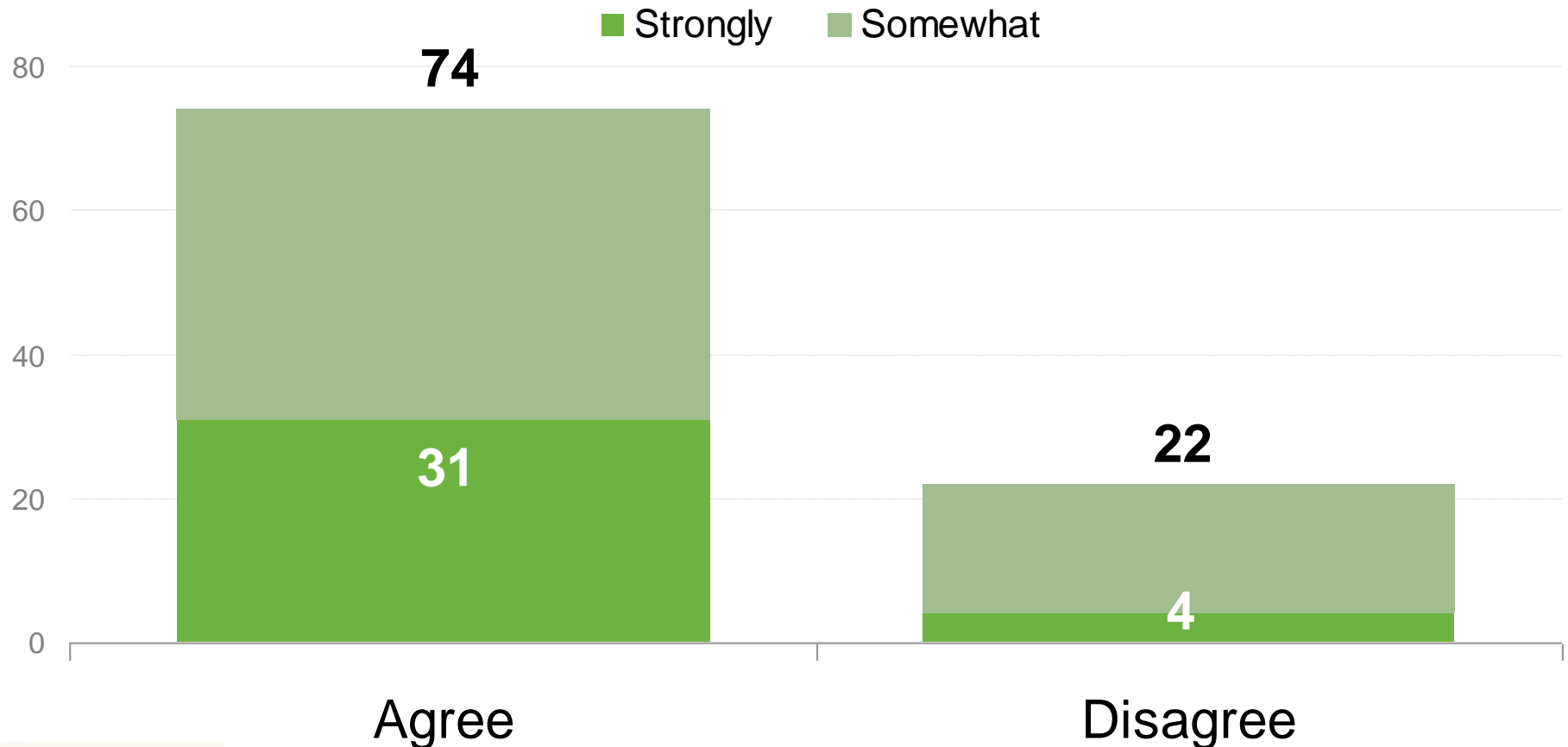
Parties and perceived lack of capability hinder women in politics

What do you think are the TWO main reasons why more women are not involved in politics and government?



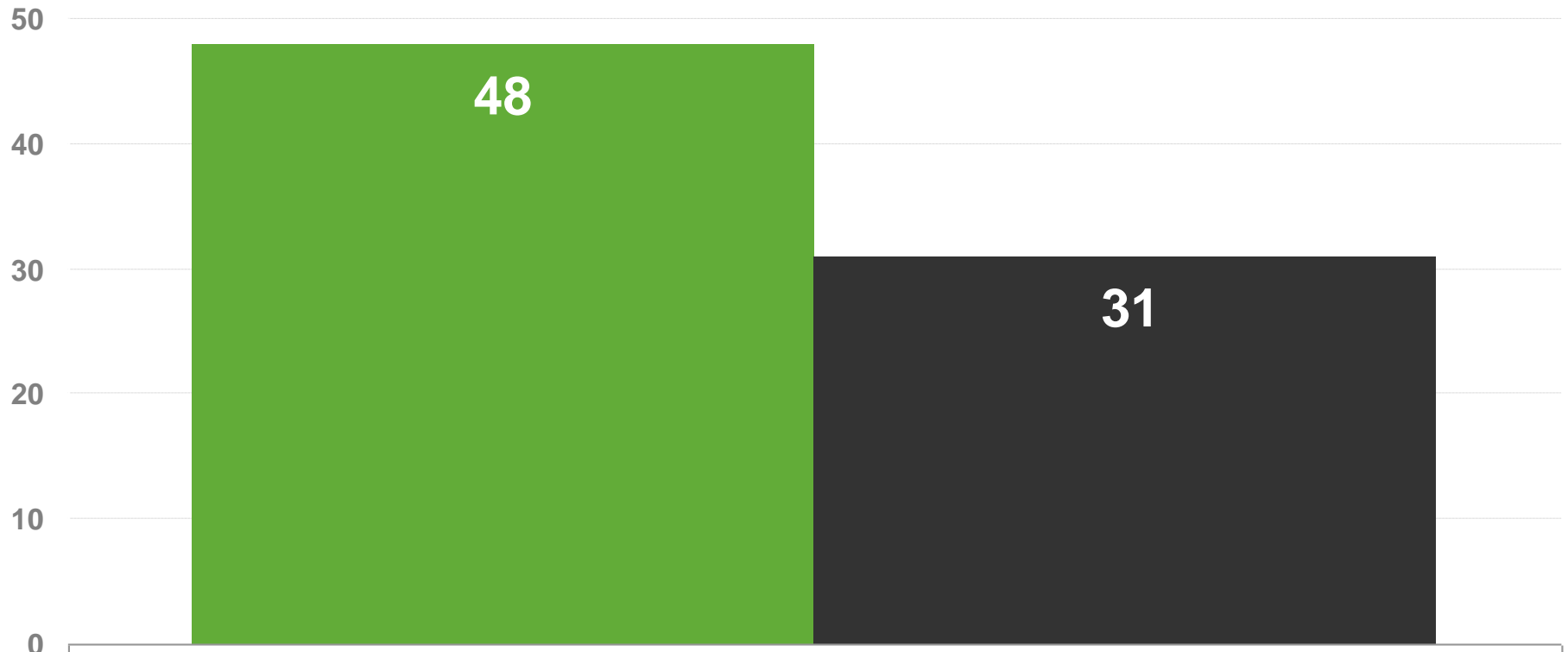
Most agree with 25 percent women MP mandate

As you may know, the Iraqi constitution mandates that 25 percent of the members of parliament be women. Do you agree or disagree with this mandate?



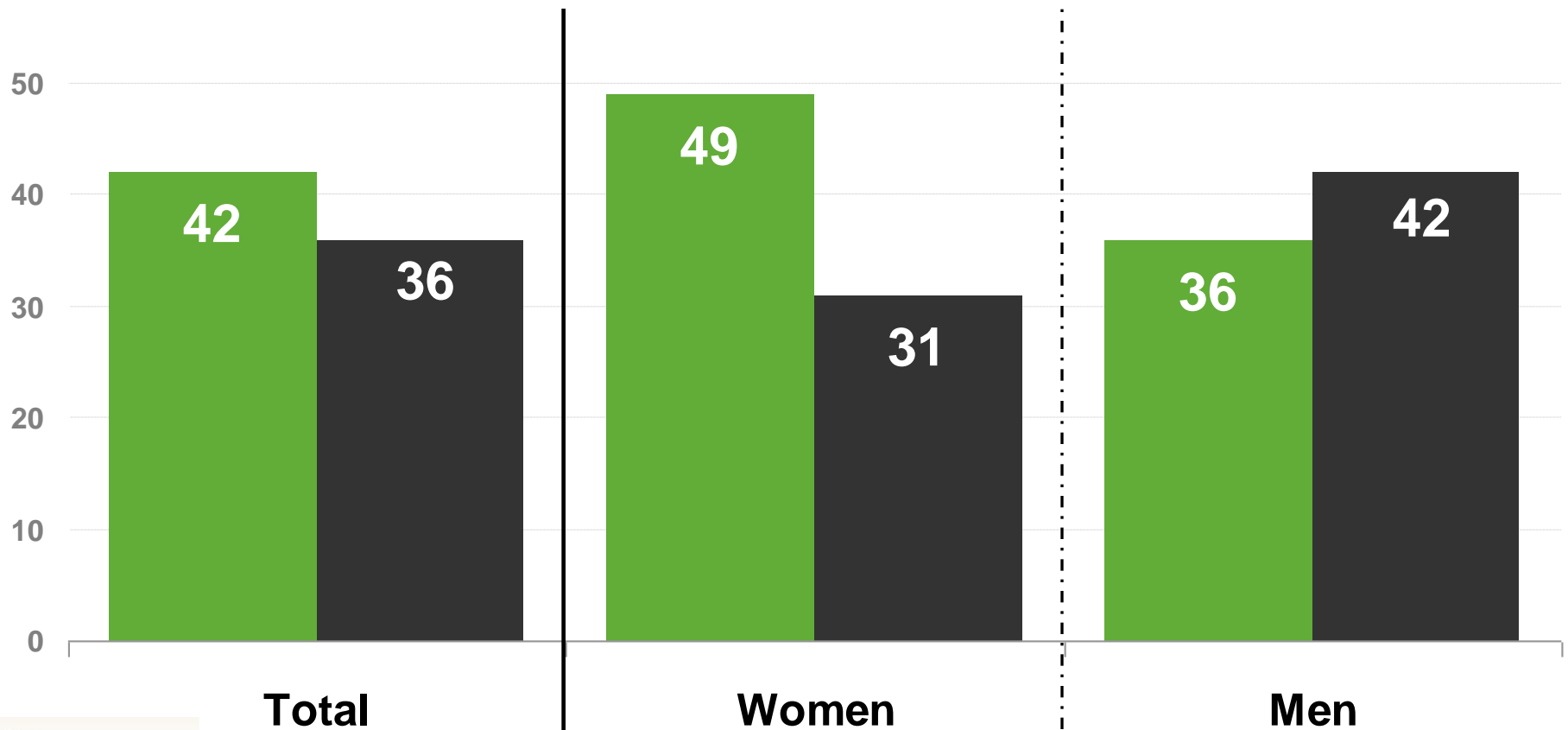
Even with more female MPs, women marginalized

- Even if there are many women in parliament, women will still not have a significant influence on political priorities and policies.
- The more women there are in parliament, the greater influence they will have on political priorities and policies.



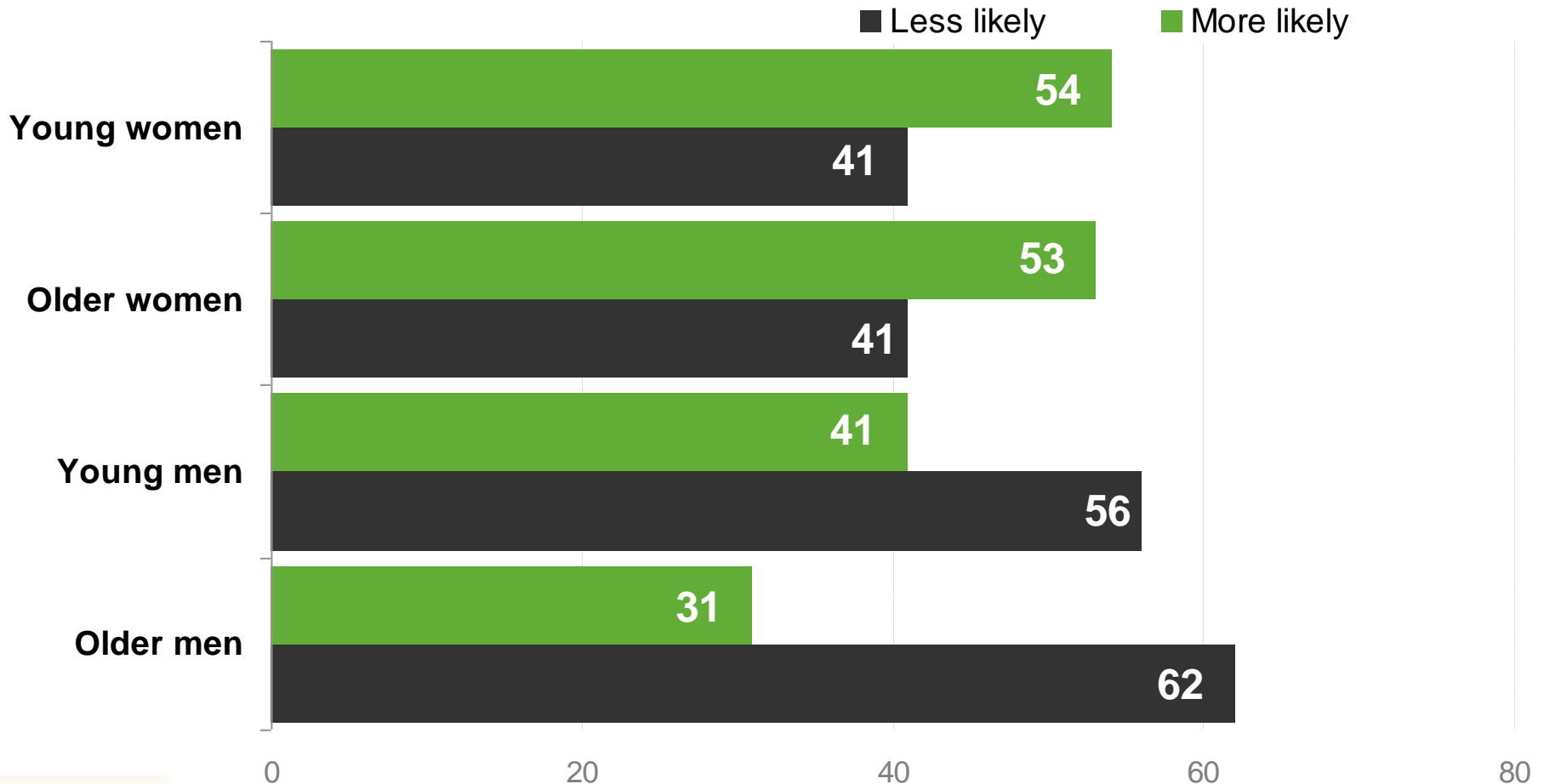
Gender discrepancy on who can represent women's interests

- Only women can sufficiently represent the interests of women in politics.
- Men can sufficiently represent the interests of women in politics.



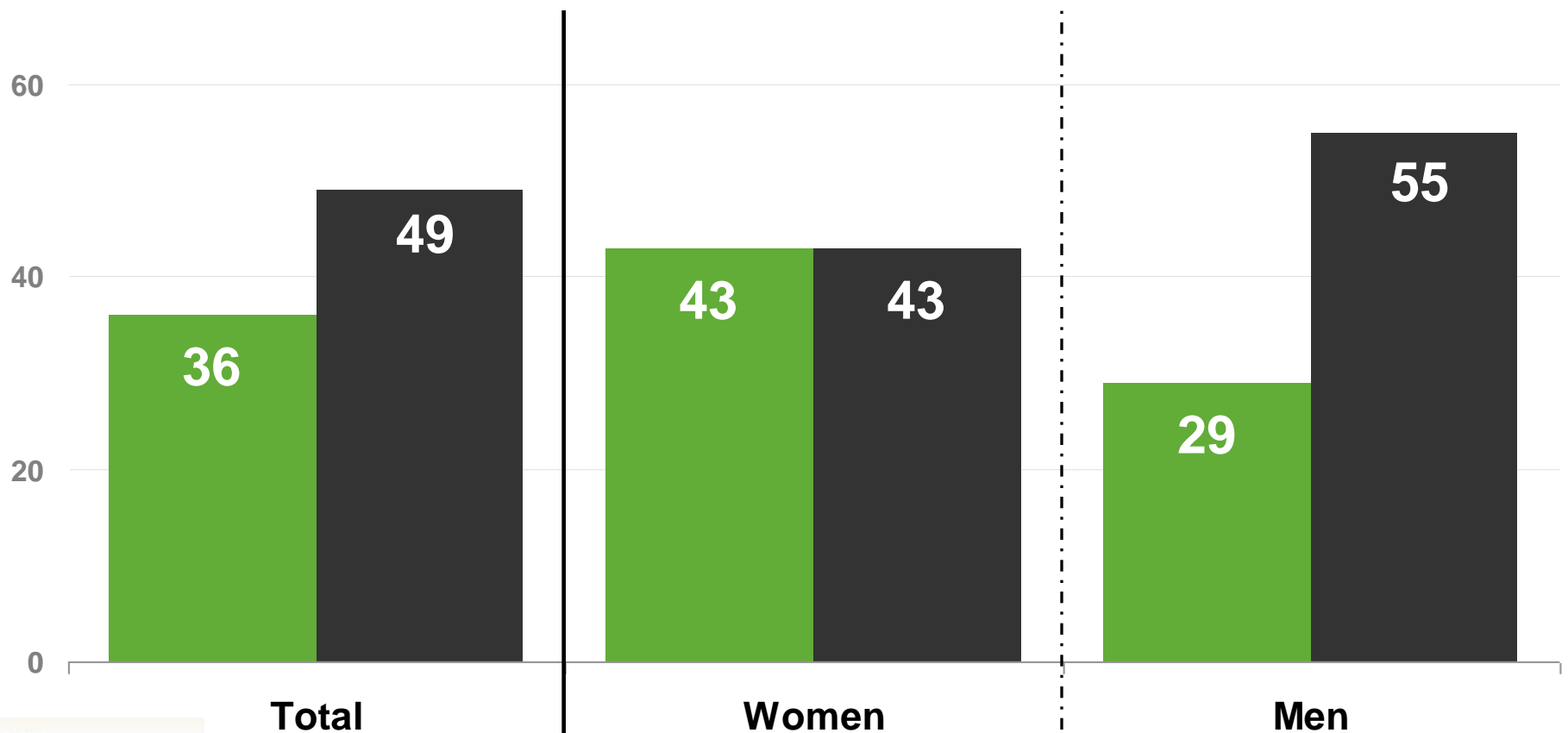
Women more likely to support a female candidate than men

Please tell me if this characteristic makes you more or less likely to support that kind of candidate: **“a woman”**



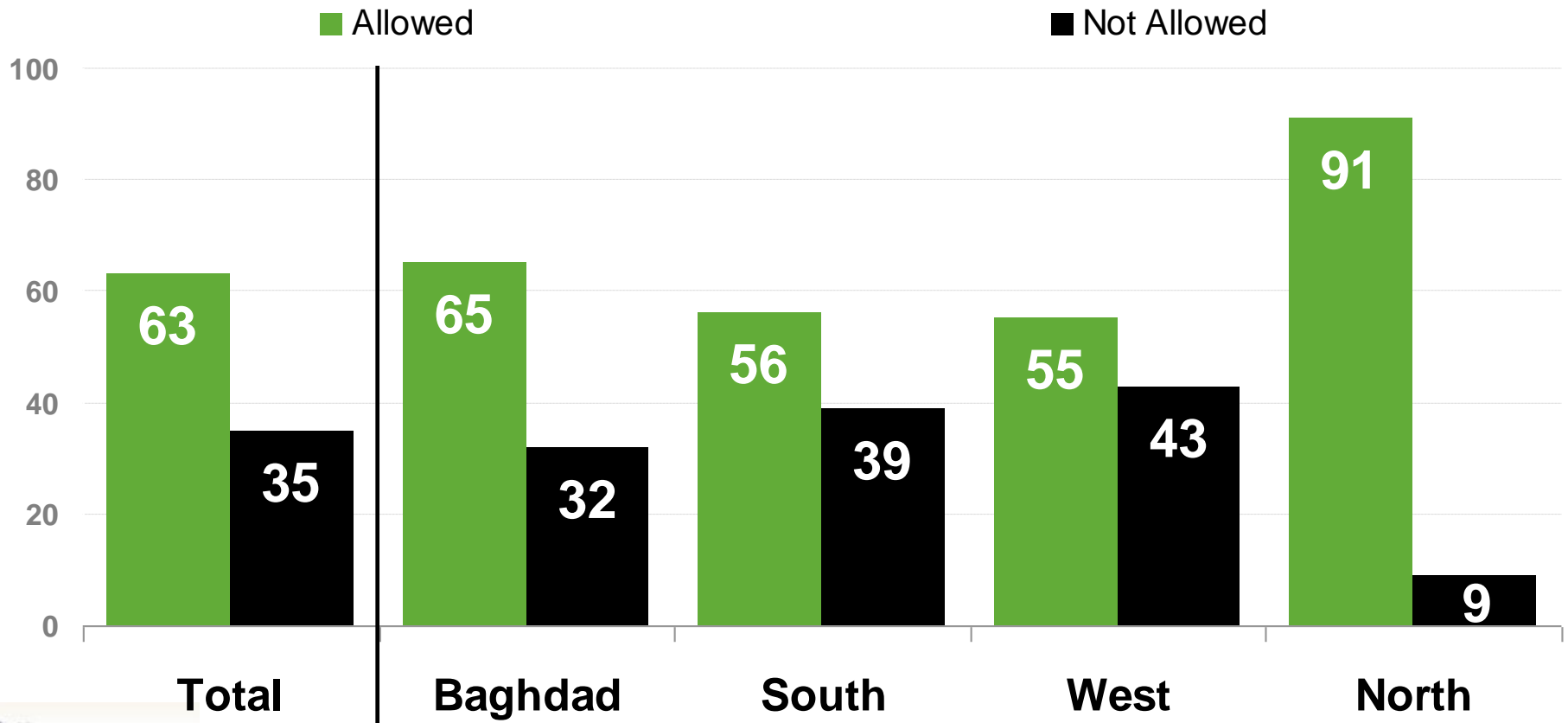
Gender difference in role of women in government and business

- Women and men should have an equal role in running the government/businesses and industry.
- Men should have a greater role in running the government/businesses and industry.



Uniformity for marrying whomever, North more open

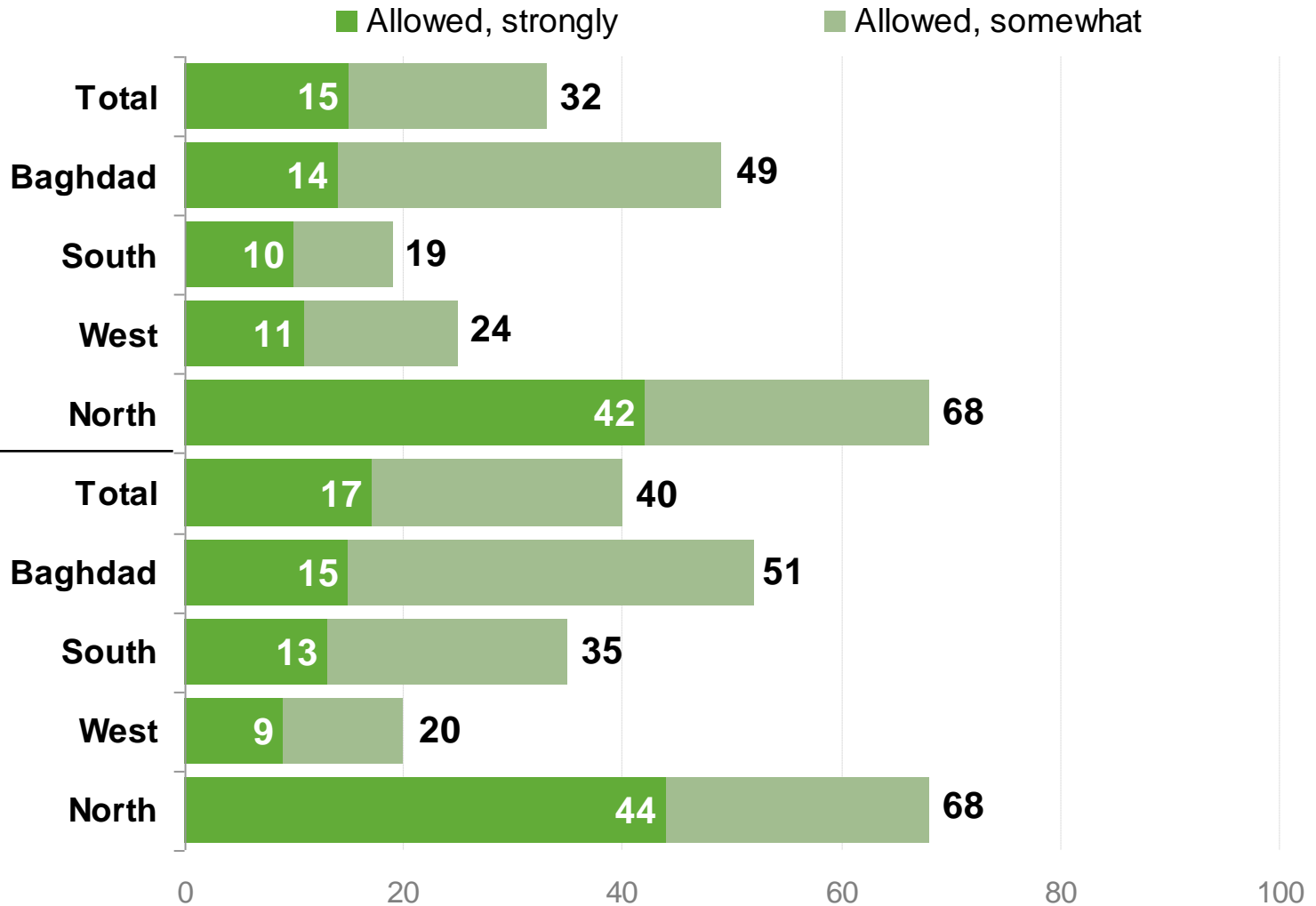
Now I want to ask you about the role of women in Iraq. For each item, please tell me if you think Iraqi women should or should not be allowed to do that particular item. (**Marry whomever they want**)



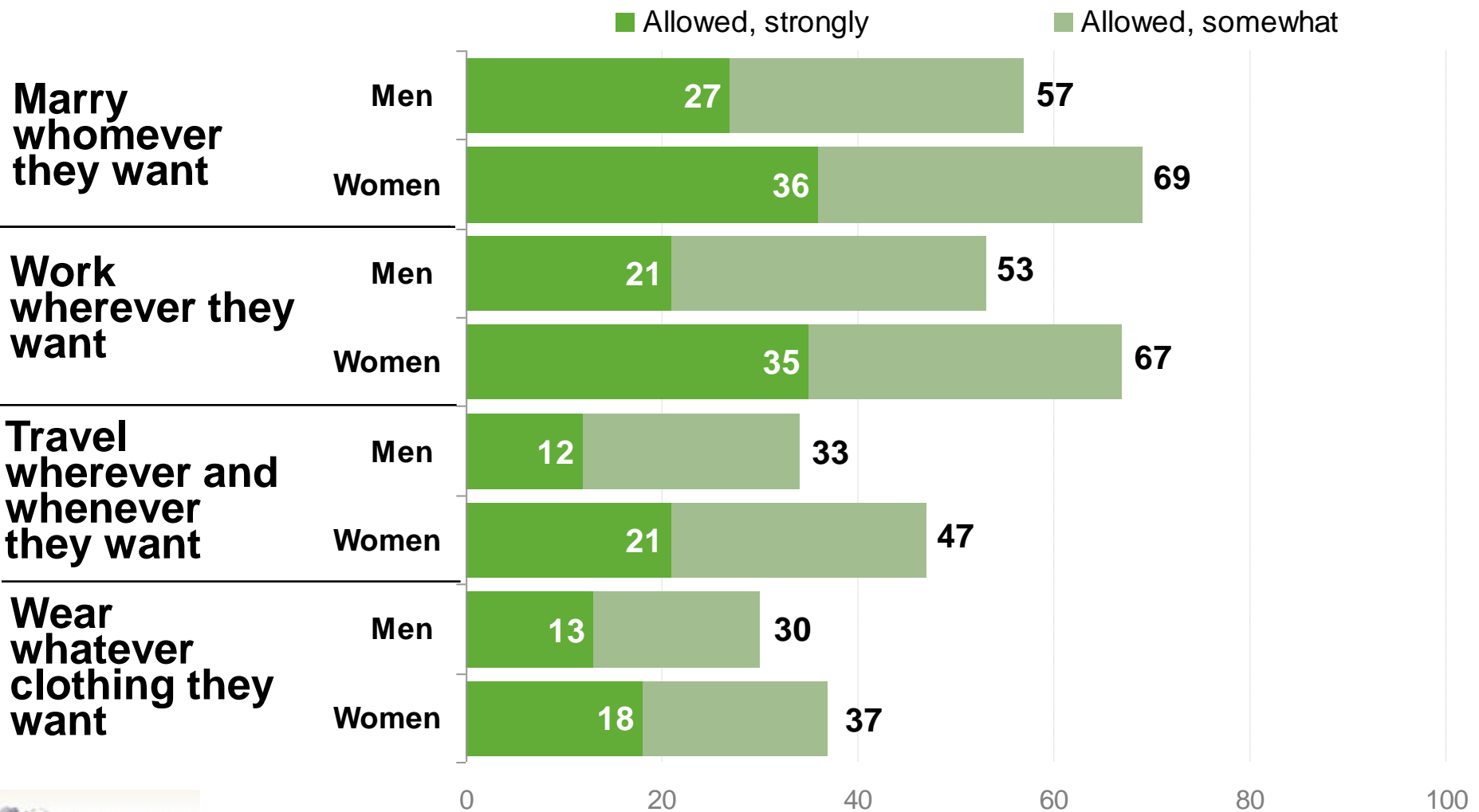
Regional differences for travel, clothing

Wear whatever clothing they want

Travel wherever and whenever they want



Gender divide on social issues



Urban areas more tolerant on social issues impacting women

Now I want to ask you about the role of women in Iraq. For each item, please tell me if you think Iraqi women should or should not be allowed to do that particular item.

