

Relative Stability in Iraq Despite Unrest

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

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From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

Despite economic challenges and civil unrest, the creation of a new government leaves Iraq with a relatively stable overall mood. Beneath the surface, there is an important and positive shift, as existential concerns over security give way to more normal material worries, such as those concerning jobs, basic services, and corruption. Although there is not the kind of broad-based demand for regime change that marked the “Arab Spring” countries, there is growing frustration among key groups, such as the Sunnis¹ and younger and poorer Iraqis, and a strong call for a more responsive government.

As Iraq moves forward with a new government and citizens demand more from their leaders, these complex currents are highlighted by focus groups and a nationwide survey² of 2,400 Iraqi adults conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner for the National Democratic Institute.

[Figure 1]

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and NDI's research also included a specific focus on sectarian issues and views towards the role of women in Iraq. We describe these findings in upcoming reports.

Relative Stability Despite Turbulence

Iraq's overall mood during this period remains relatively stable. Although a 49 percent plurality see the country heading in the wrong direction, a 5-point increase since our first survey in November 2010, 42 percent still think the country is moving in the right direction, which is relatively high by international standards. **[Figure 2]**

To the extent that there is an increase in pessimism, it is largely driven by attitudes in the South (which sees a 20-point decrease in the share saying that Iraq is moving in the right direction) and Western regions. **[Figure 3]** The predominately Sunni West maintains a very pessimistic attitude about the direction of the country, largely driven by a feeling of disenfranchisement, particularly given the formation of Iraq's new government. Although there is only a 7-point

¹ Throughout the memo, the reference to Sunnis is to non-Kurd Sunnis.

² 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 “oversamples” are weighted so that each region is weighted proportionally to its share of overall population.

increase in the share who see the country going in the wrong direction among Western Iraqis, there is a threefold increase in those saying the country is *strongly* heading in the wrong direction (17 percent in November 2010 to 43 percent now). **[Figure 4]**

Similarly, a significant majority of Sunnis (71 percent) think Iraq is heading in the wrong direction. **[Figure 5]** The formation of Iraq's new government has left many Sunnis feeling abandoned and unlikely to receive the benefits of this government. "When the State was Sunni, it did not discriminate between Sunni, Shia, Sabian, and Christian. Now we have a Shia government. Why does it discriminate?" asks one Sunni woman in Anbar.

Although our research does not show the same demand for sweeping changes of the "Arab Spring" revolutions, there is nonetheless a worrying level of disaffection among the young and poor – the same groups that fueled those revolutions. Younger Iraqis (those under 35 years old) are more dissatisfied than the overall population. **[Figure 6]** And there has been a sharp drop in feelings among less affluent Iraqis that the country is heading in the right direction, down 18 points. **[Figure 7]**

Gradual Shift from Security Concerns to Material Worries

While the overall mood is relatively stable, there is an encouraging shift in attitudes just beneath the surface. As the public senses that security is improving, its worries shift to important, but less existential concerns, such as those regarding jobs, basic services, and corruption. A strong 62 percent majority now thinks security is getting better. **[Figure 8]** The share who list security as one of their top two national concerns is down 20 points to only 16 percent.

As security concerns ease, however, Iraqis are increasingly focused on and unhappy with more material issues, especially the state of the economy. A 56 percent majority now think the Iraqi economy is weak – up 18 points since last fall. And only 38 percent think their personal financial situation will improve over the next year, a 10-point drop since last fall. **[Figure 9]**

Although there are some glimmers of improvement on the economic front – majorities see improvement on job opportunities (52 percent) and cost of living (50 percent) – there is a general sense that the economy is Iraq's new battlefield. Nearly two-thirds of Iraqis name job opportunities as one of their top two concerns, up from 54 percent last November, and the share who cite basic services is up 18 points, to 47 percent. **[Figure 10]**

There is also sharp and persistent anger about corruption. A 58 percent majority see corruption as getting worse in Iraq. "[Corruption] has become a normal and routine thing," complains one Shia man in Basra. Issues with corruption are even more acute in the North where 60 percent say it is getting worse. **[Figure 11]**

Concerns over jobs and unemployment are prevalent throughout Iraq, but there is some distinction across regions, particularly with basic services. In the South, Iraqis are increasingly worried about access to basic services like water and electricity. This concern has jumped 33 points since November 2010 to 76 percent and is the top concern in the region.

Iraqis' perceptions about job opportunities show a sharp class divide. A 56 percent majority of more affluent Iraqis (those earning more than 300,000 dinars per month) see job opportunities improving, an 18-point increase since November. **[Figure 12]** By contrast, there is an 11-point

increase in the share of less affluent Iraqis (those who earn less than 300,000 dinars per month) who see job opportunities as generally getting worse.

Employment and economic concerns among the poor lead to questions about the government's priorities. A Sunni woman in Baghdad says: "The hungry poor cannot find something to eat and they [the government] are not concerned. [The government] eats and lives well."

Such material concerns repeatedly boiled over during the first part of 2011 – from the 17 February protests that grew violent in Kurdistan, to near-daily rallies in Baghdad during this period. Yet Iraqis' protests have been of a different character from the "Arab Spring" uprisings. There is a sense Iraqis are not calling so much for a different *type* of government, but rather a *better, more responsive* government. Across all regions, majorities of Iraqis believe that democracy improves the quality of life, showing that Iraqis have not lost faith in democracy. **[Figure 13]** Thus, it is really the character and quality of Iraq's democracy that is in question. Iraqis are split at this point over whether they consider their country to be "a real democracy." **[Figure 14]**

Political Landscape Also Relatively Stable, for Now

Although Iraq remains rife with a range of heated tensions, there is relative stability in the images of political parties and leaders (especially those outside of Kurdistan), which is another key difference between Iraq and the "Arab Spring" countries.

Despite sharp concerns about unemployment, corruption, and basic services, most Iraqis have not turned away from the national political parties or leaders. In fact, nearly all political parties have seen their favorability rating increase since last November. **[Figure 15]** Most national political leaders' ratings remain relatively stable as well. **[Figure 16]** Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's rating sees a drop, which is largely driven by attitudes in the South. At a time when the South's concern over basic services has dramatically increased, Maliki's favorable rating drops 23 points, and his job approval drops 21 points in the region. **[Figures 17 and 18]**

While Maliki and his Da'wa party see their ratings slip, other political leaders and parties make gains. The most notable gains are with Muqtada al-Sadr whose favorable ratings have increased by 7 points since November, more than any other political leader. This rise follows his return to Iraq and decision to join the new government; it reflects the sense that he is more focused on the concerns of average Iraqis, more so than the typical political leader. As one Shia man from Baghdad explains, "[The Sadr Trend's] role could be positive... I believe that the Sadr Trend is always in agreement with public opinion, always." Sadr has been able to reach out and tap into the discussed discontent among many key groups:

- Among poorer Iraqis (those earning less than 400,000 dinars per month), Sadr's favorable rating increases 5 points to 52 percent favorable; he is the only political leader with a majority favorable rating among less affluent Iraqis. At the same time, Maliki's favorable rating falls a full 15 points among this group. **[Figure 19]**
- Among men under 35 years old, Sadr's rating increases by 19 points, up to a majority (54 percent) giving him a favorable rating. Again, Maliki's favorability also falls 6 points among this group. **[Figure 20]**

Other than Sadr, Osama al-Nujaifi sees some improvement among the Iraqi public in his new role as Speaker of the Council of Representatives. A 48 percent plurality of Iraqis approve of

the job he is doing as speaker. Unlike many leaders who Iraqis largely see as self-interested, many see al-Nujaifi as different. “Nujaifi has a positive role,” says one Shia man in Baghdad. “He is what I call the right man in the right place. He controlled the Council of Representatives through his strong personality. I like him.”

As concern over jobs and basic services has increased, perceptions toward provincial governments have deteriorated. Looking outside of Kurdistan, majorities disapprove of the job of their provincial governments. **[Figure 21]** In the West, 59 percent disapprove of their provincial government, up 13 points since November. In the South, where lack of services has jumped as a top concern, two-thirds disapprove of the job performance of their provincial governments, up from only 44 percent last fall.

Within Kurdistan, Kurdish party leaders enjoy much higher favorability ratings than their national counterparts. **[Figure 22]** As protestors took to the streets in Sulaymaniyah and other cities, and smaller parties began more forcefully opposing the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), its image has begun to slightly erode in the eyes of Northern residents. Approval of the KRG falls 16 points (and disapproval is up 17 points); nonetheless the KRG still enjoys a significantly high job approval rating of 69 percent. **[Figure 23]**

The events in the North may be a harbinger for things to come in the rest of Iraq – Kurds have seen security concerns wane and have become more focused on services and economic opportunities. Yet as they sense their government not responding to these concerns – largely due to perceived self-interest and corruption – they start to demand more of their leaders.

GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH

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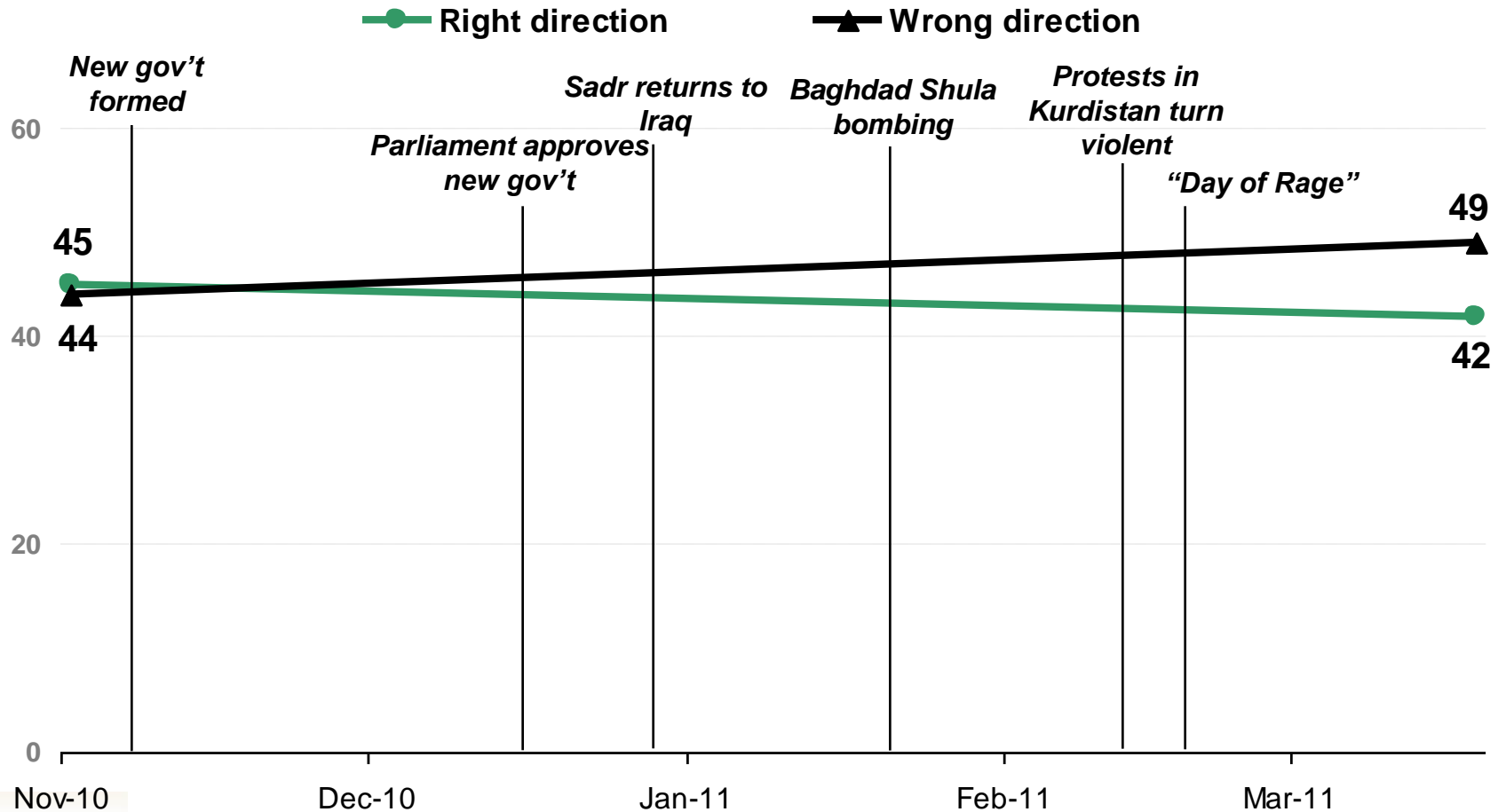
Research Methodology

- **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

Country mood remains relatively stable

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

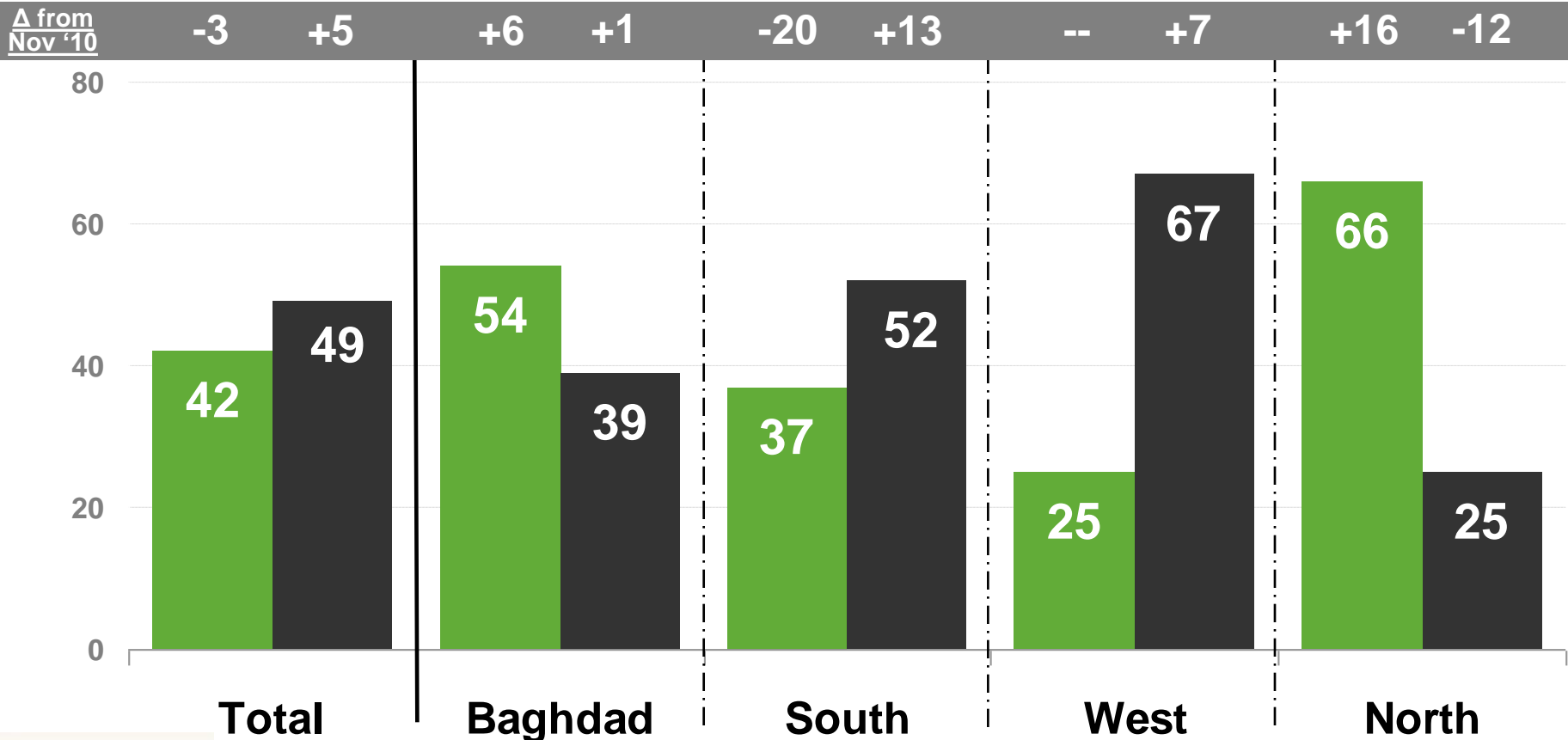


Increased pessimism largely driven by the South, West regions

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

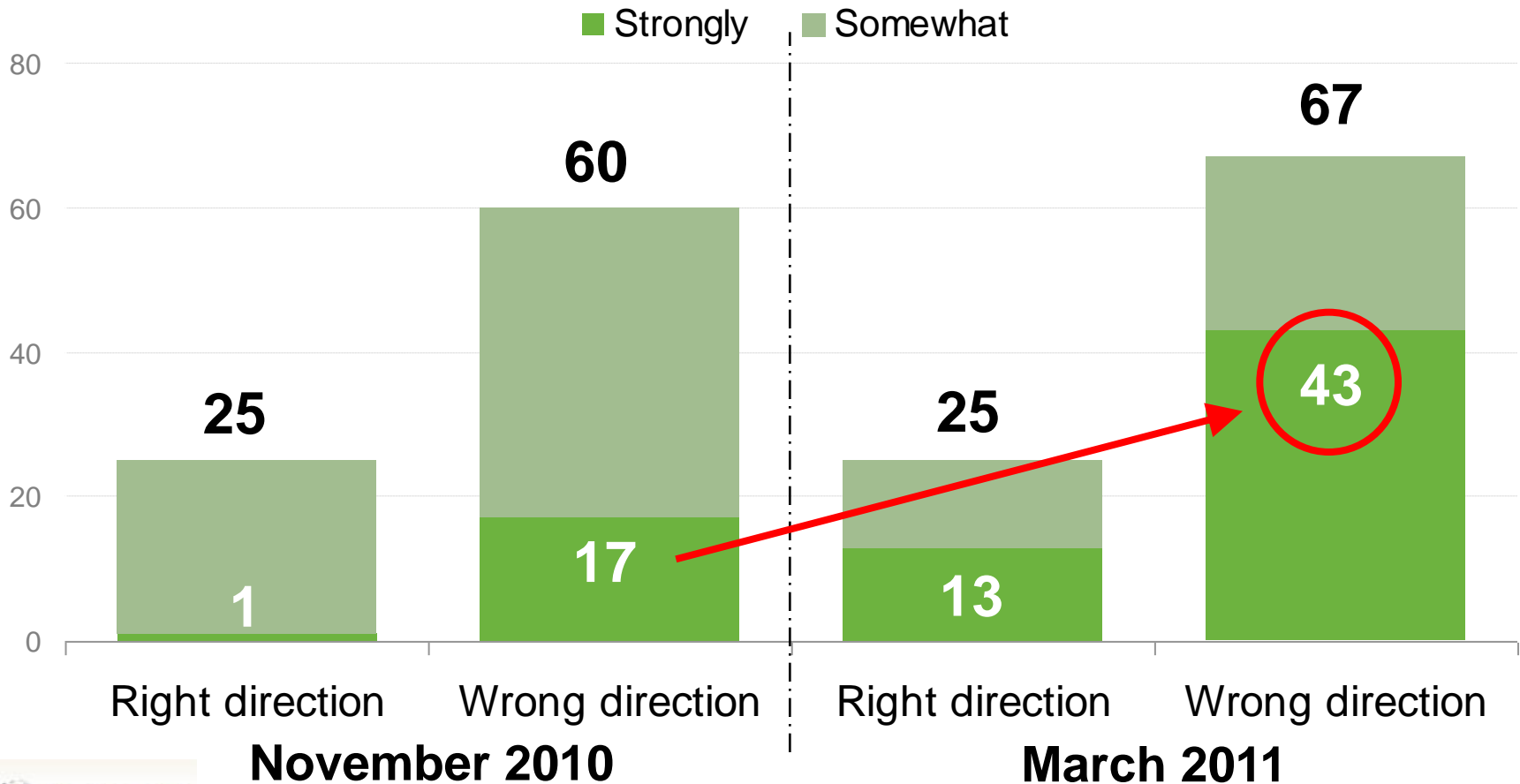
■ Right

■ Wrong



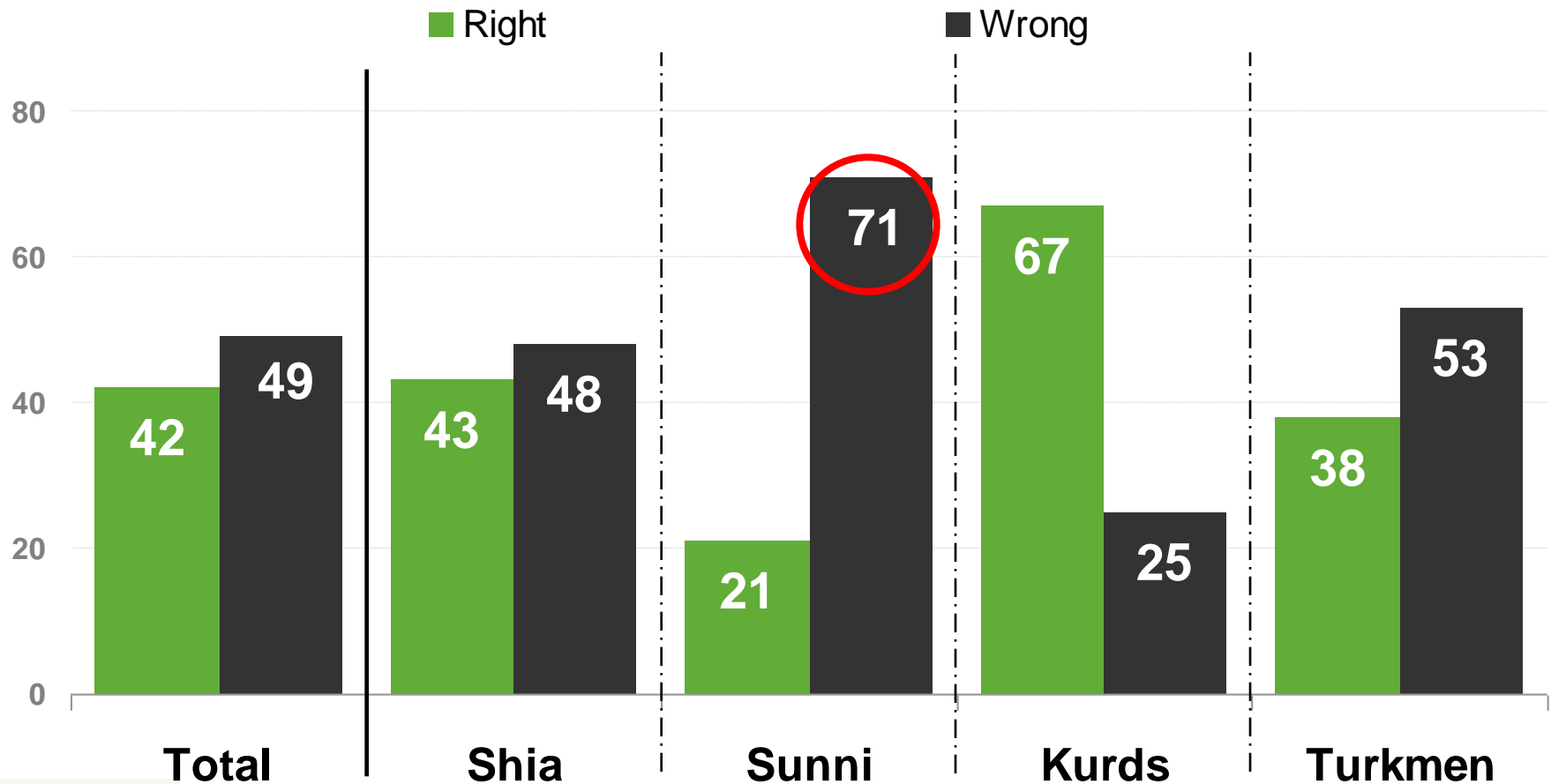
Negative country mood intensifies in the West region

Generally speaking, do you think that things in Iraq are going in the right direction, or do you feel things are going in the wrong direction? (**West Region only**)



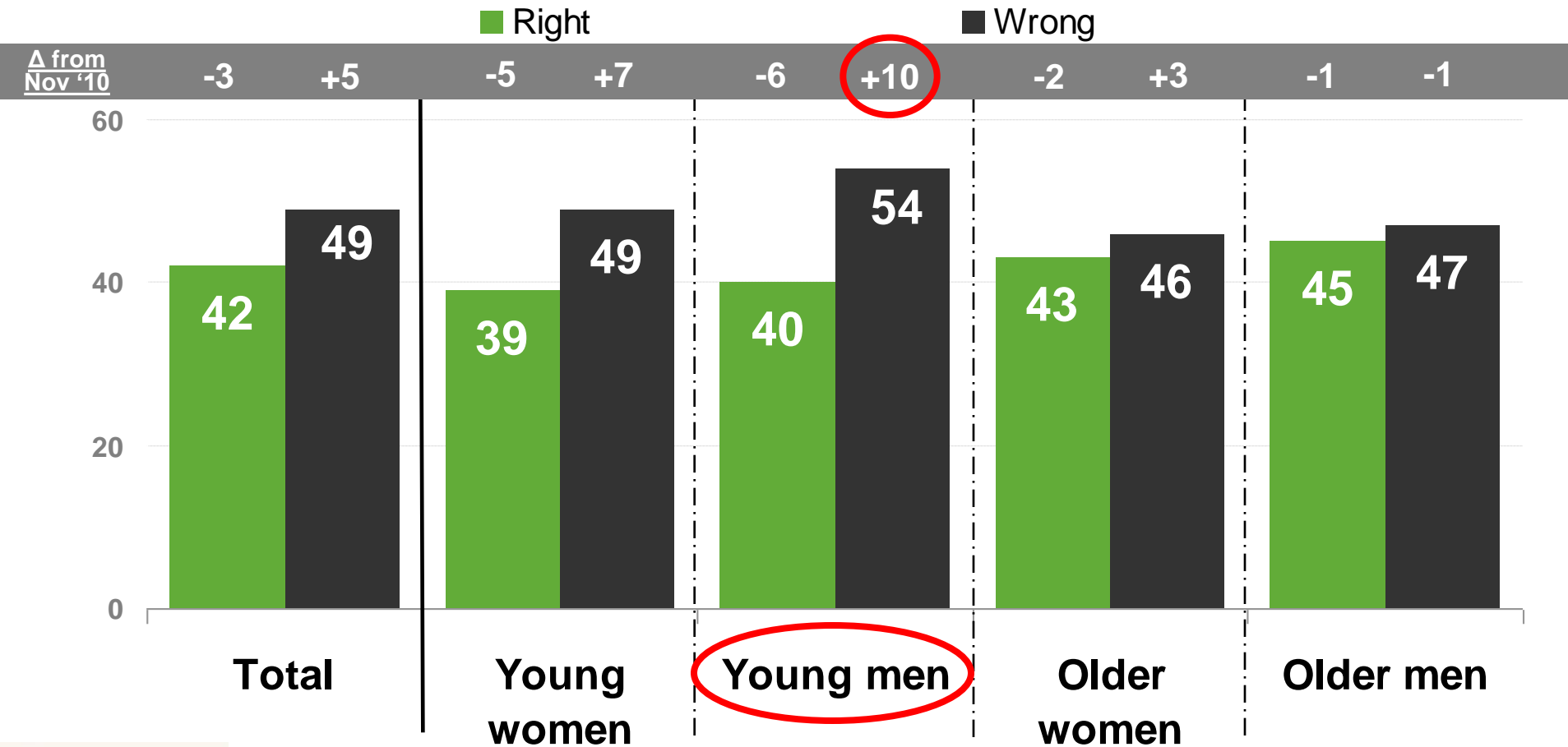
Sunnis continue to be most pessimistic

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



Increased pessimism largely driven by younger Iraqis

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



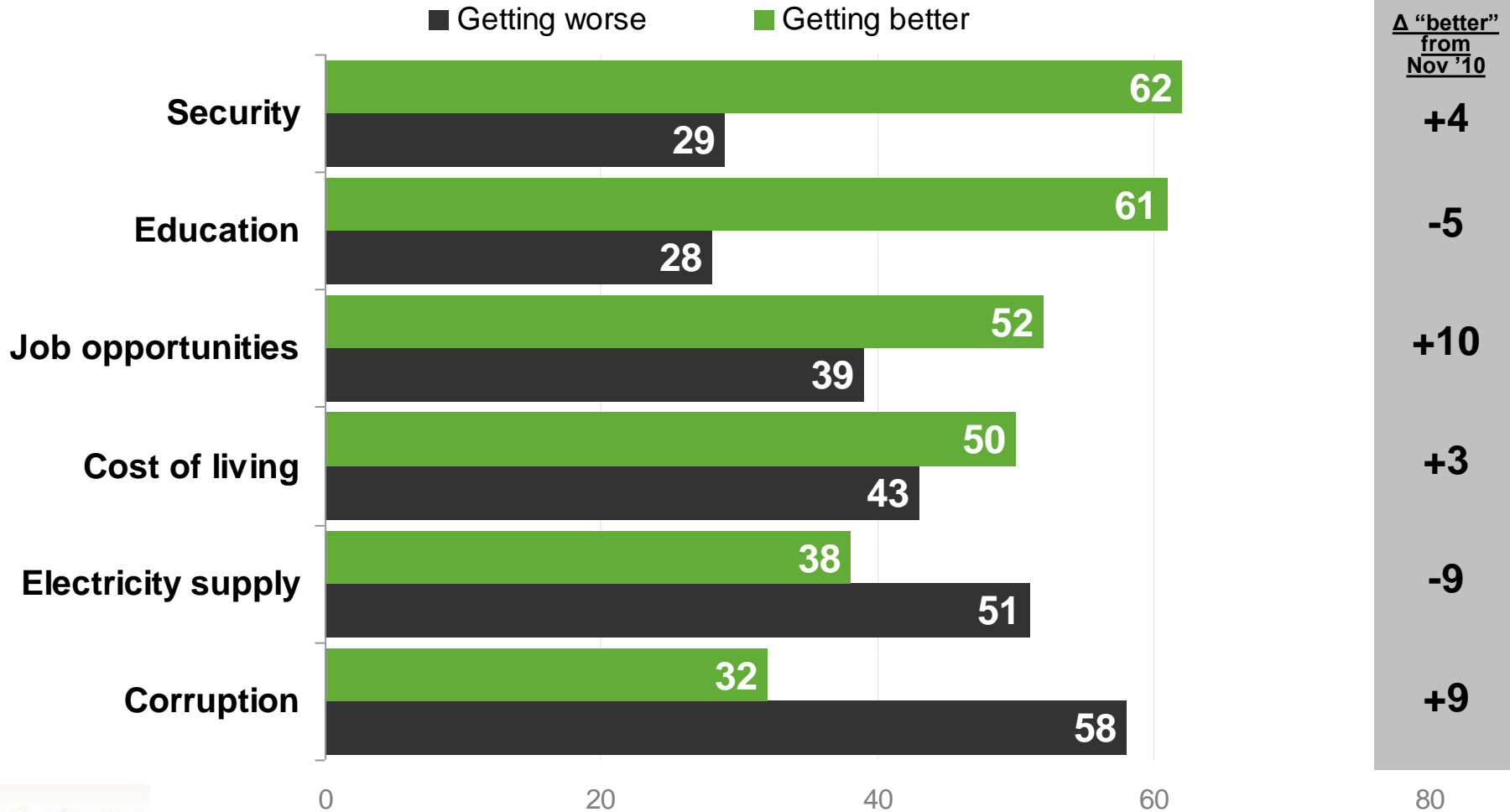
Significant increase in wrong direction among the poor

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



Perceptions of security strongest area of improvement

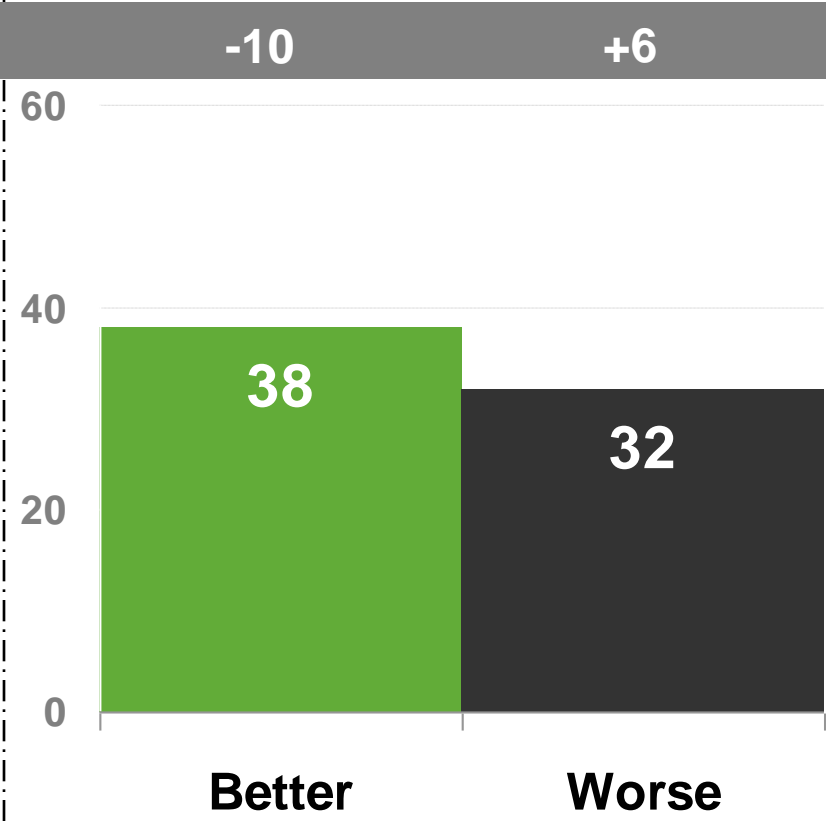
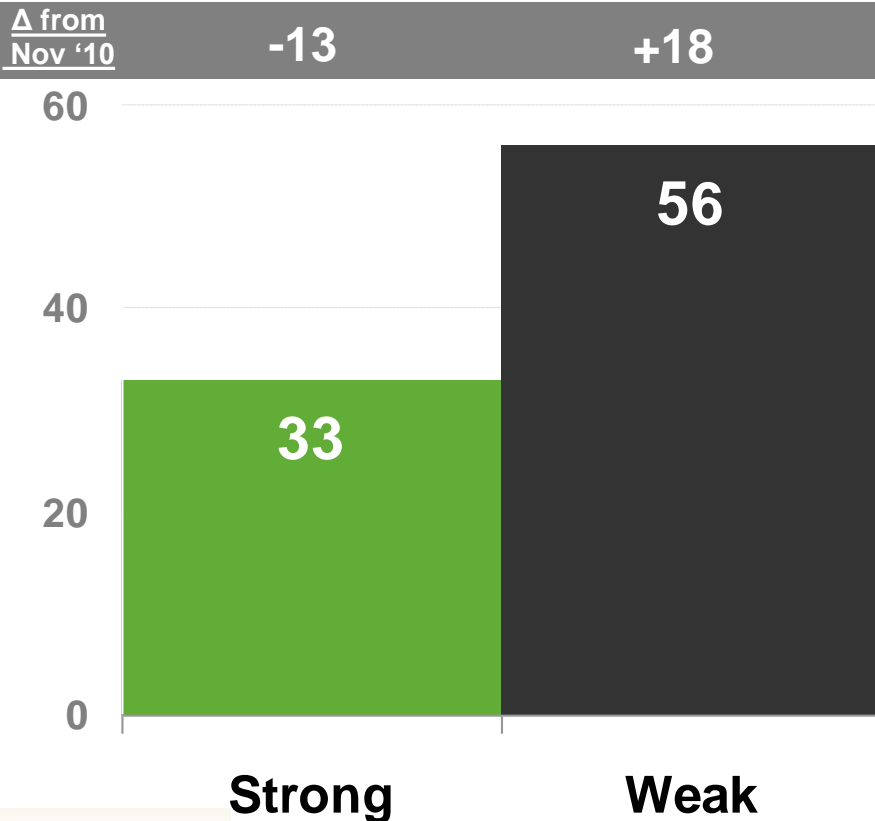
Now I will read you a list of issues. Please tell me if you think this issue is getting better or worse in Iraq.



Most see Iraq's economy as weak, slightly better personal situation

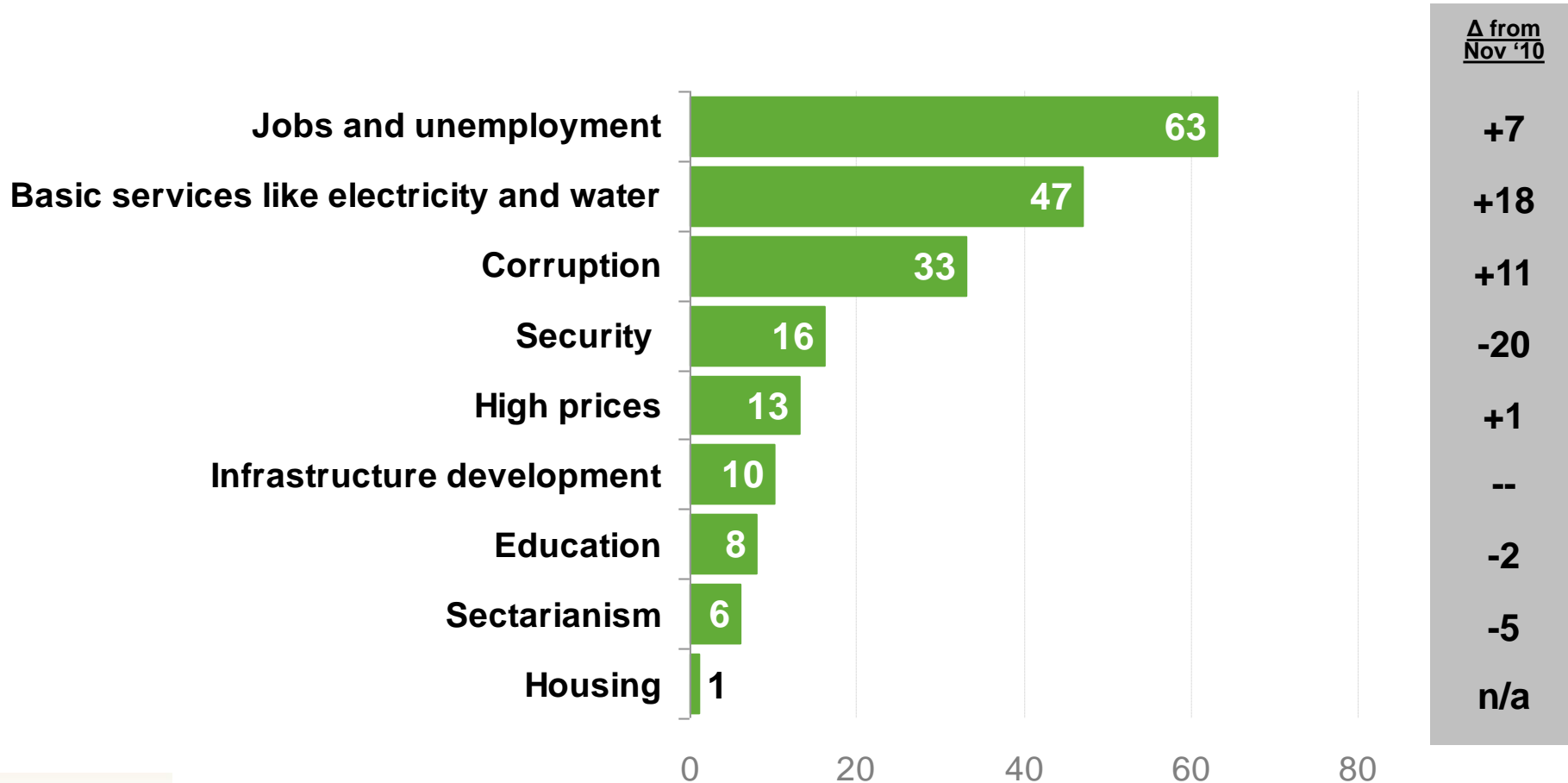
Now I want to ask you about the economy. Would you say **Iraq's economy** right now is strong or weak?

How do you think **the financial position of your own household** will change over the next 12 months - do you think it will get worse, or do you think it will get better?



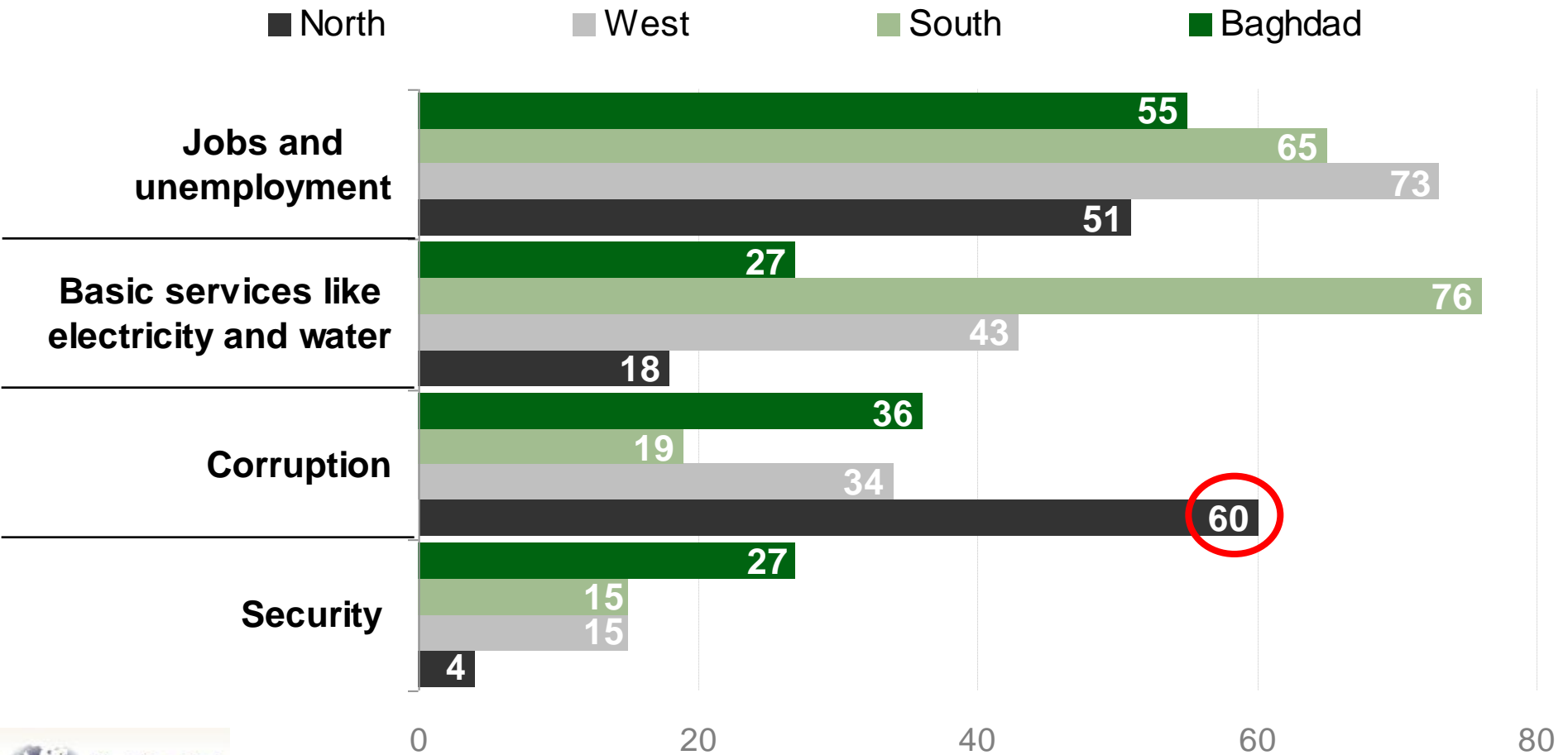
Increasing concerns about jobs and services

Now, I am going to read you a list of concerns that some people may have. Please tell me which TWO of these are the most important for the government to address.



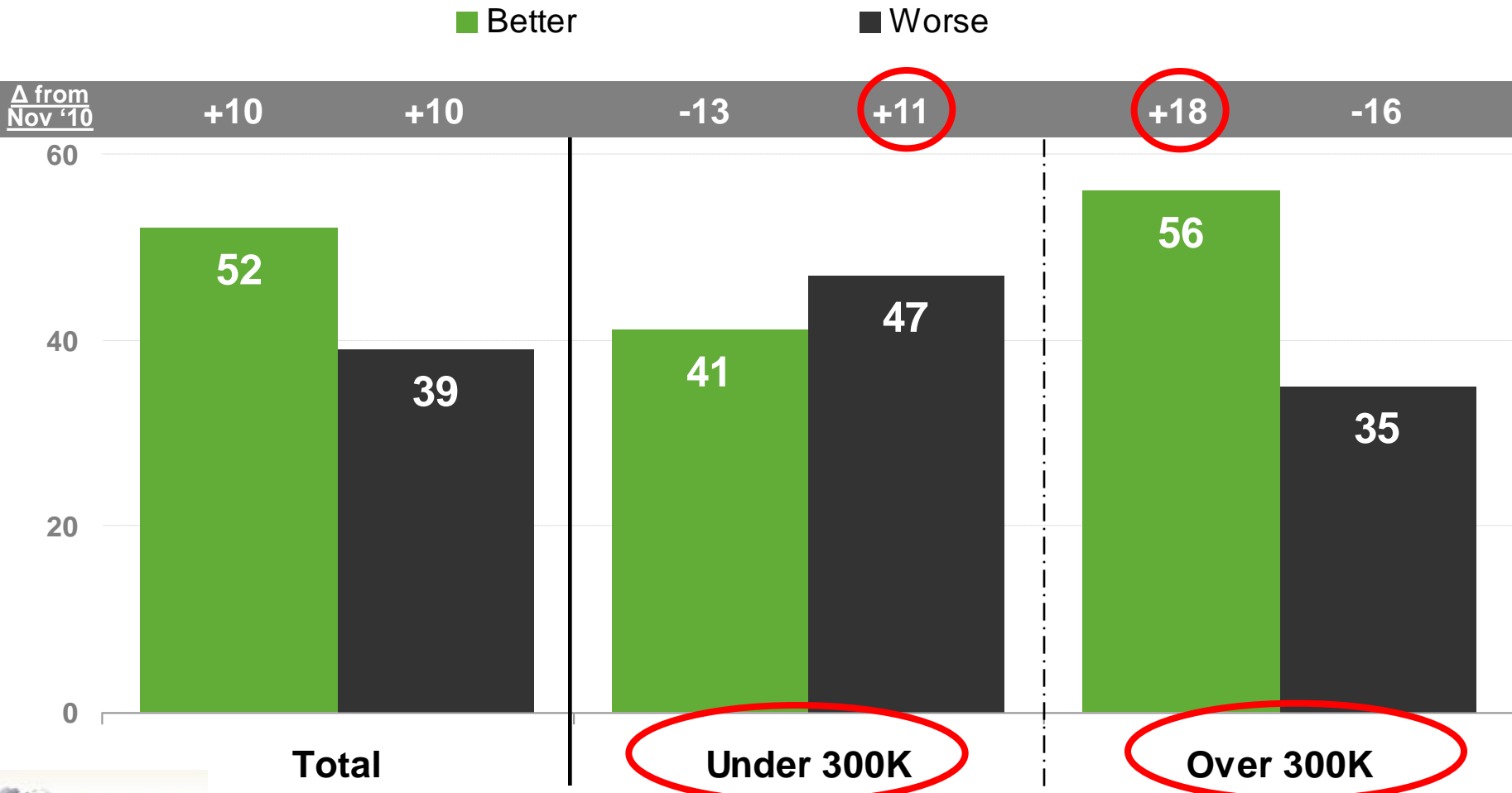
Persistent anger about corruption

Now, I am going to read you a list of concerns that some people may have. Please tell me which TWO of these are the most important for the government to address.



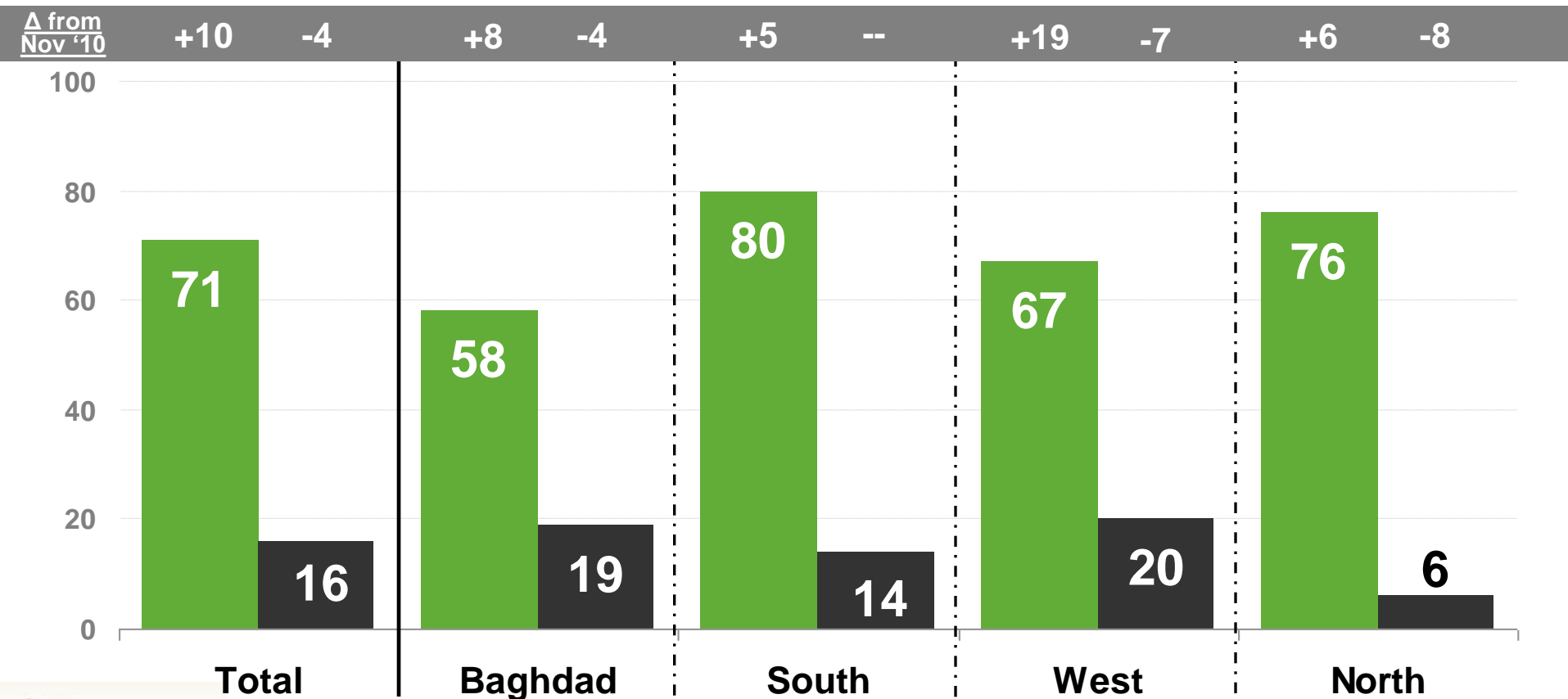
Perceptions of job opportunities worse among poorer Iraqis

Please tell me if you think **job opportunities** are getting better or worse in Iraq.



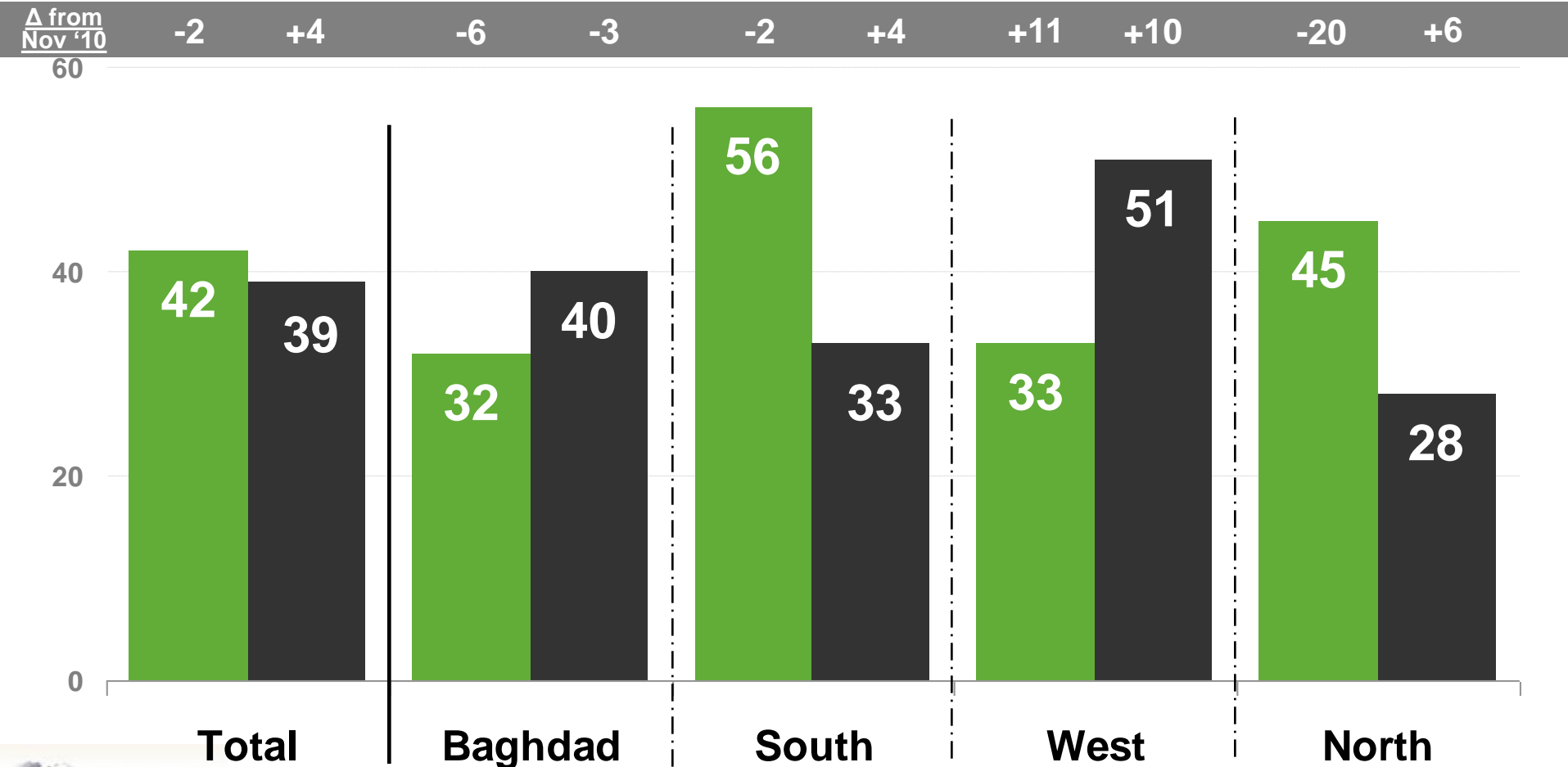
Increase in perception that democracy improves quality of life

- Making Iraq more democratic will likely improve services and our quality of life.
- Making Iraq more democratic would likely make services worse and hurt our quality of life.



Iraqis split on whether Iraq is a real democracy

■ Iraq today is a real democracy. ■ Iraq today is not a real democracy.

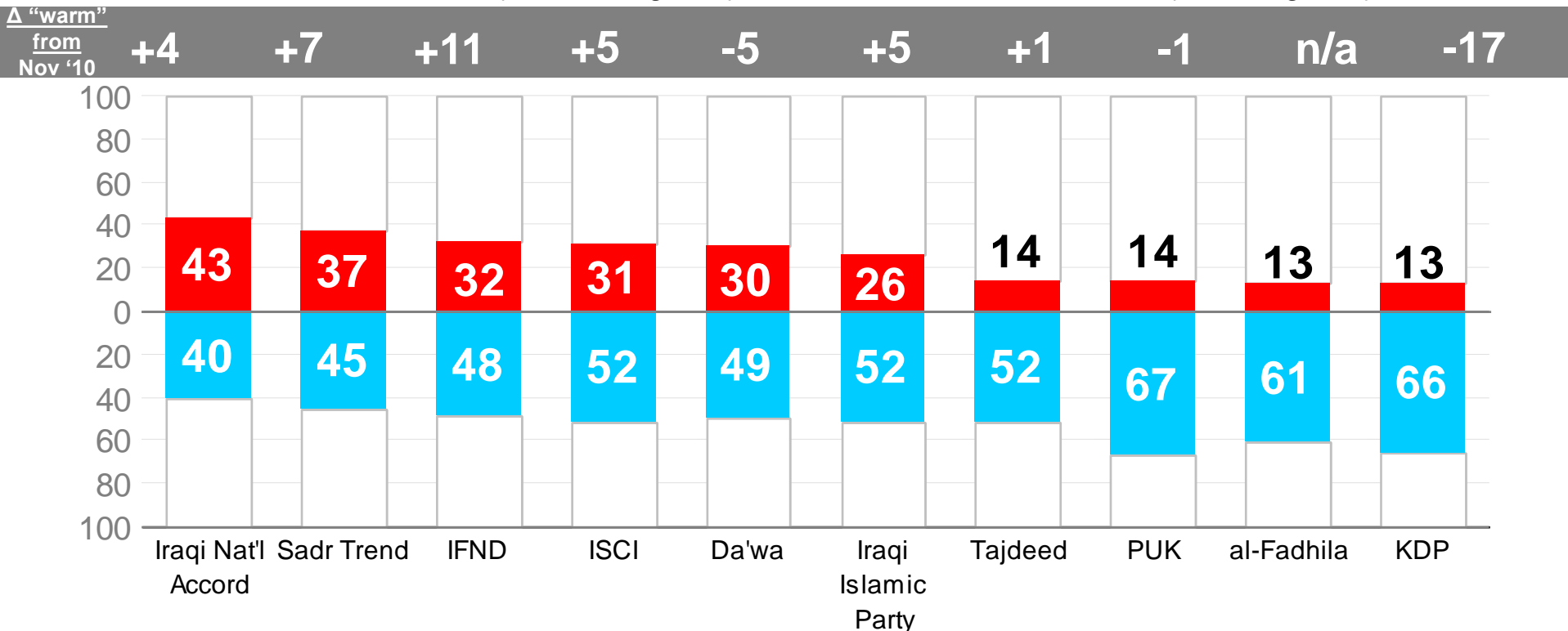


Political parties show improved favorability

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people, organizations, and things, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold.

■ % Warm, favorable (51-100 degrees)

■ % Cool, unfavorable (0-49 degrees)

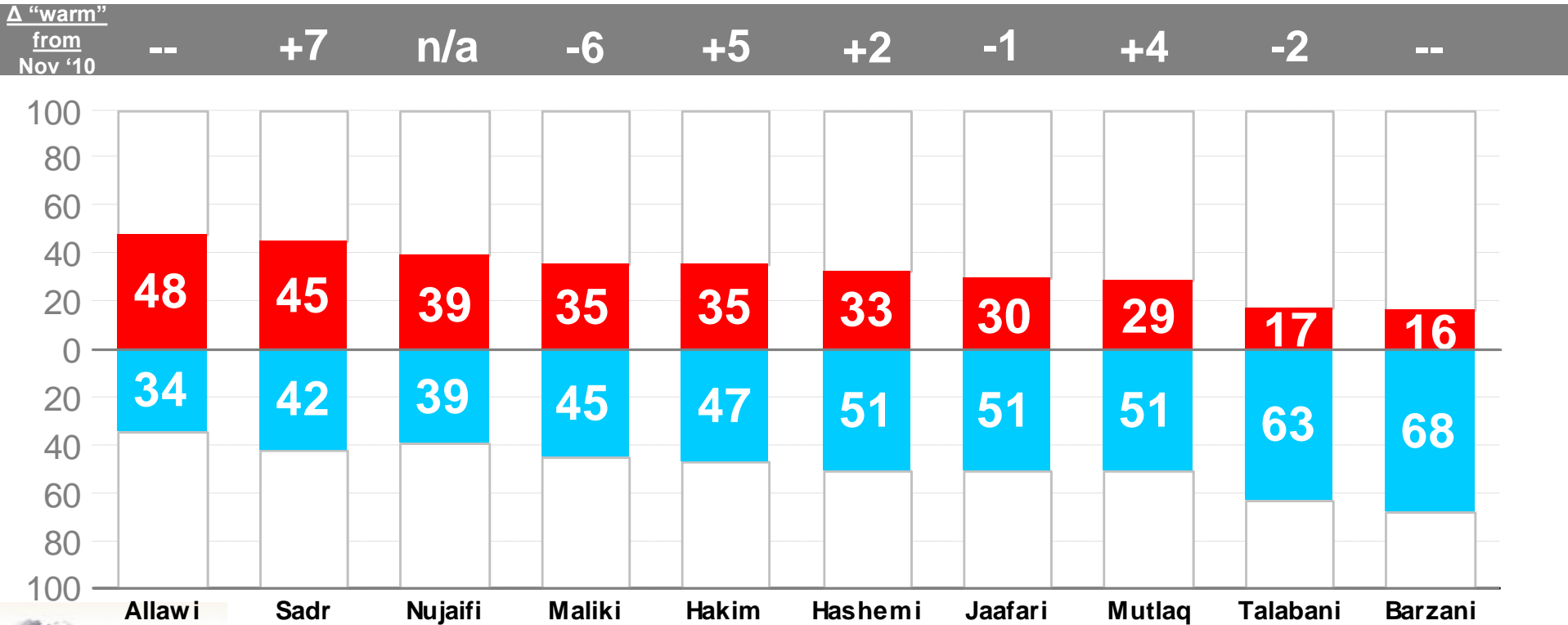


Most national leaders' favorability stable or improved

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people, organizations, and things, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold.

■ % Warm, favorable (51-100 degrees)

■ % Cool, unfavorable (0-49 degrees)

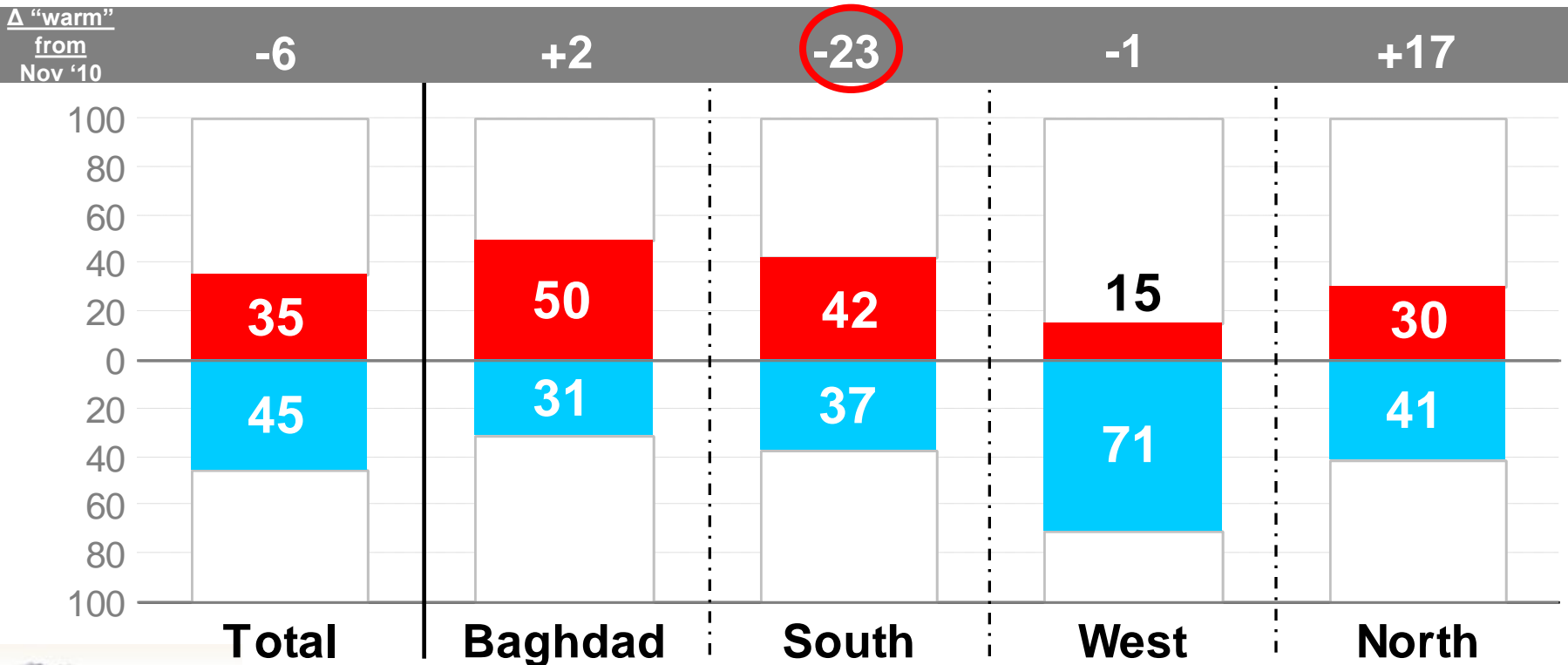


Maliki favorability significantly drops in South

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people, organizations, and things, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold: **Nouri al-Maliki**

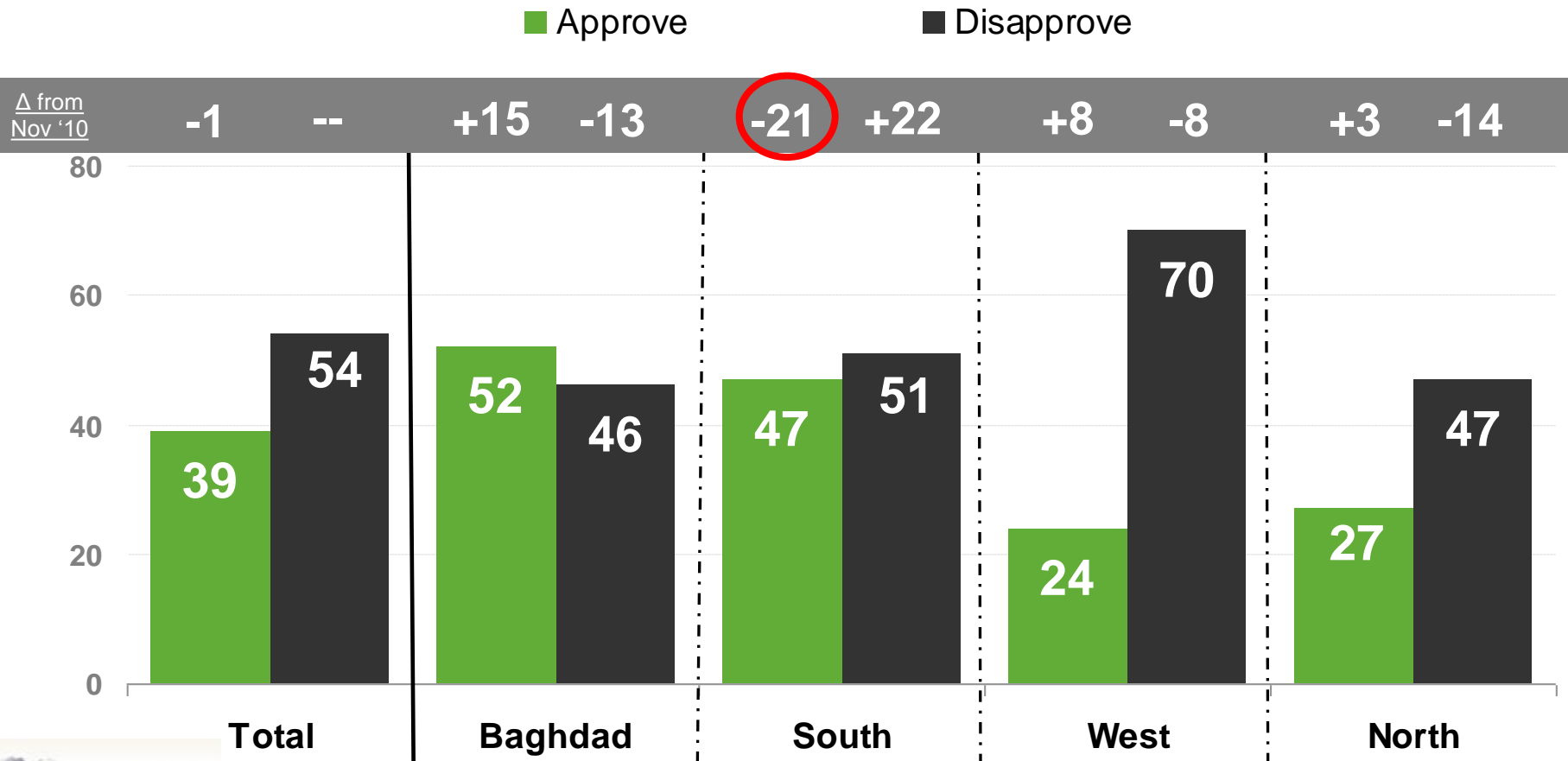
■ % Warm, favorable (51-100 degrees)

■ % Cool, unfavorable (0-49 degrees)



Maliki's national approval stable, jumps in Baghdad, falls in South

Generally speaking, do you approve or disapprove of the job Nouri al-Maliki is doing / did as prime minister?

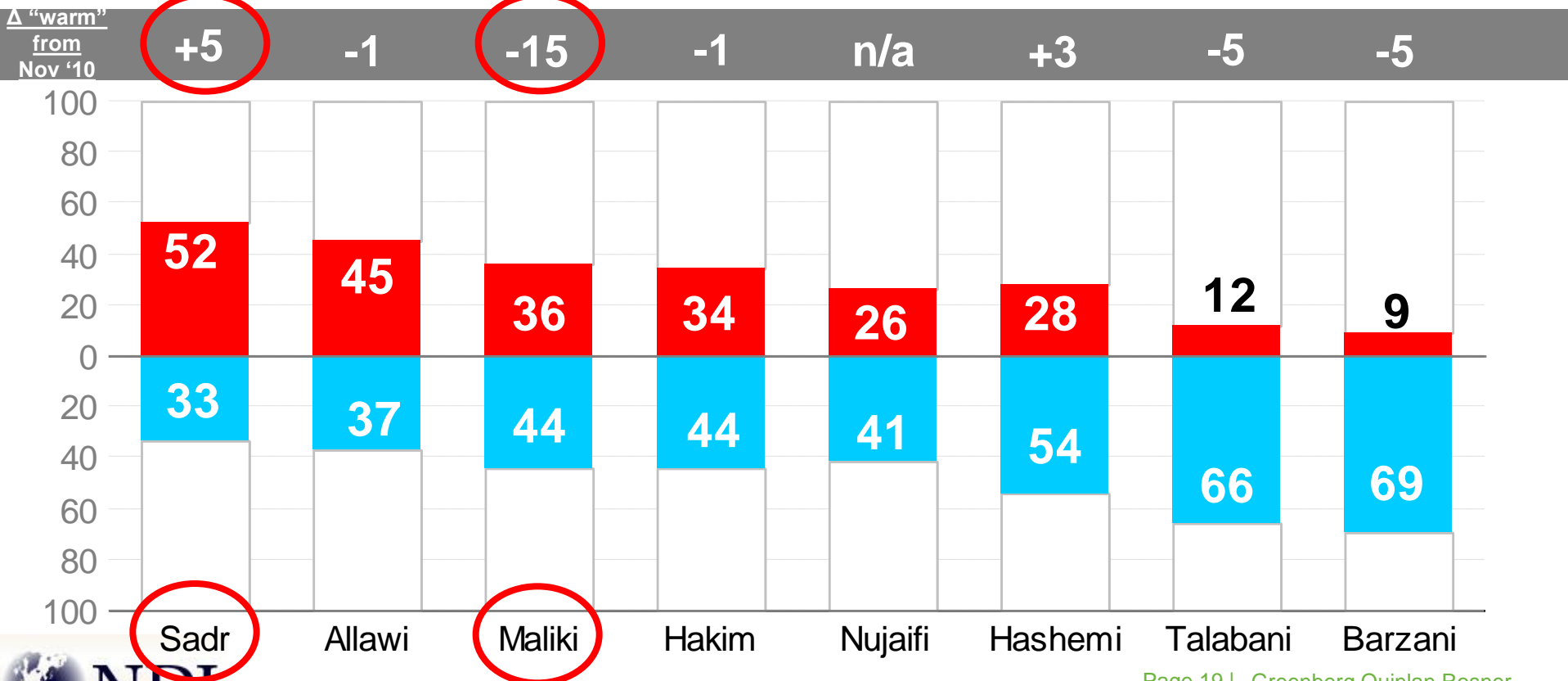


Sadr favorability improves among less affluent Iraqis

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people, organizations, and things, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold. (Under 400K only)

■ % Warm, favorable (51-100 degrees)

■ % Cool, unfavorable (0-49 degrees)

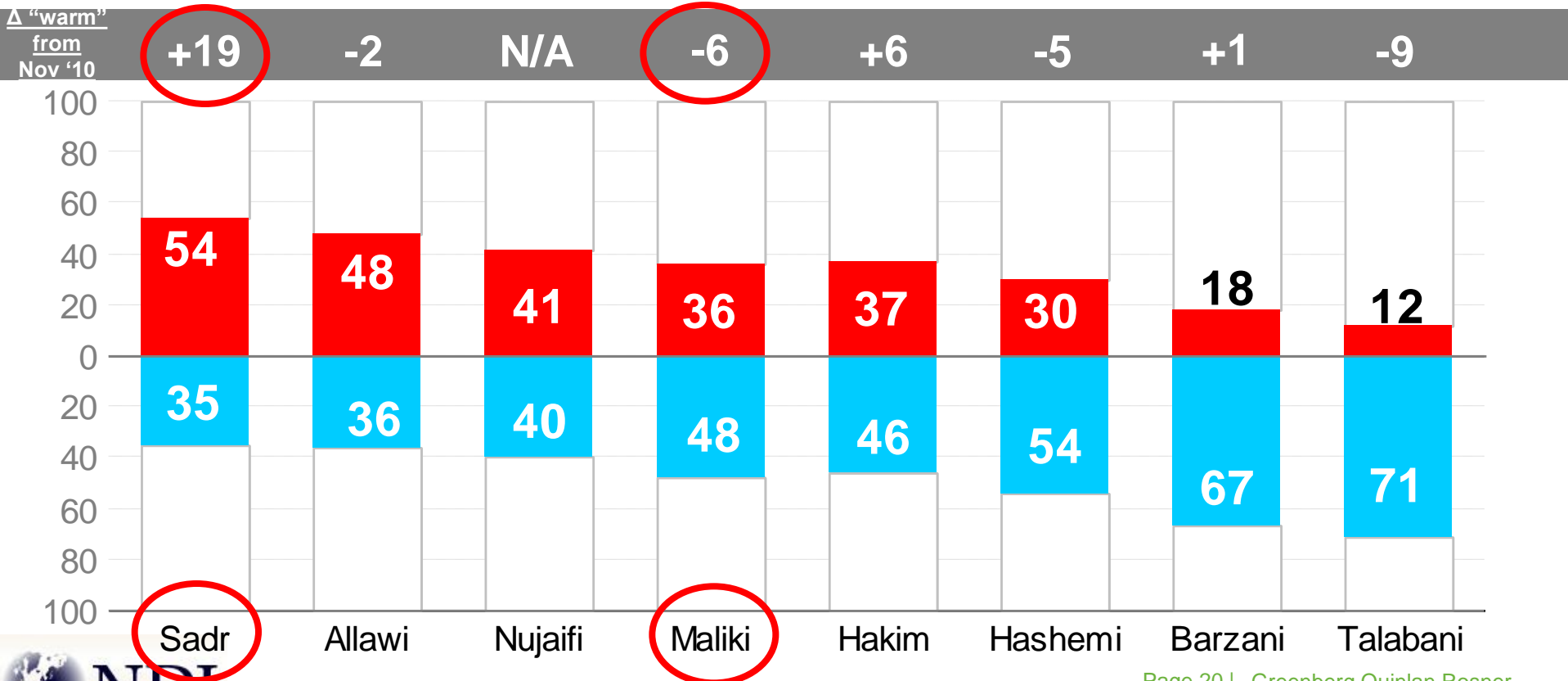


Sadr favorability dramatically improves among young men

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people, organizations, and things, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold. (Young men only)

■ % Warm, favorable (51-100 degrees)

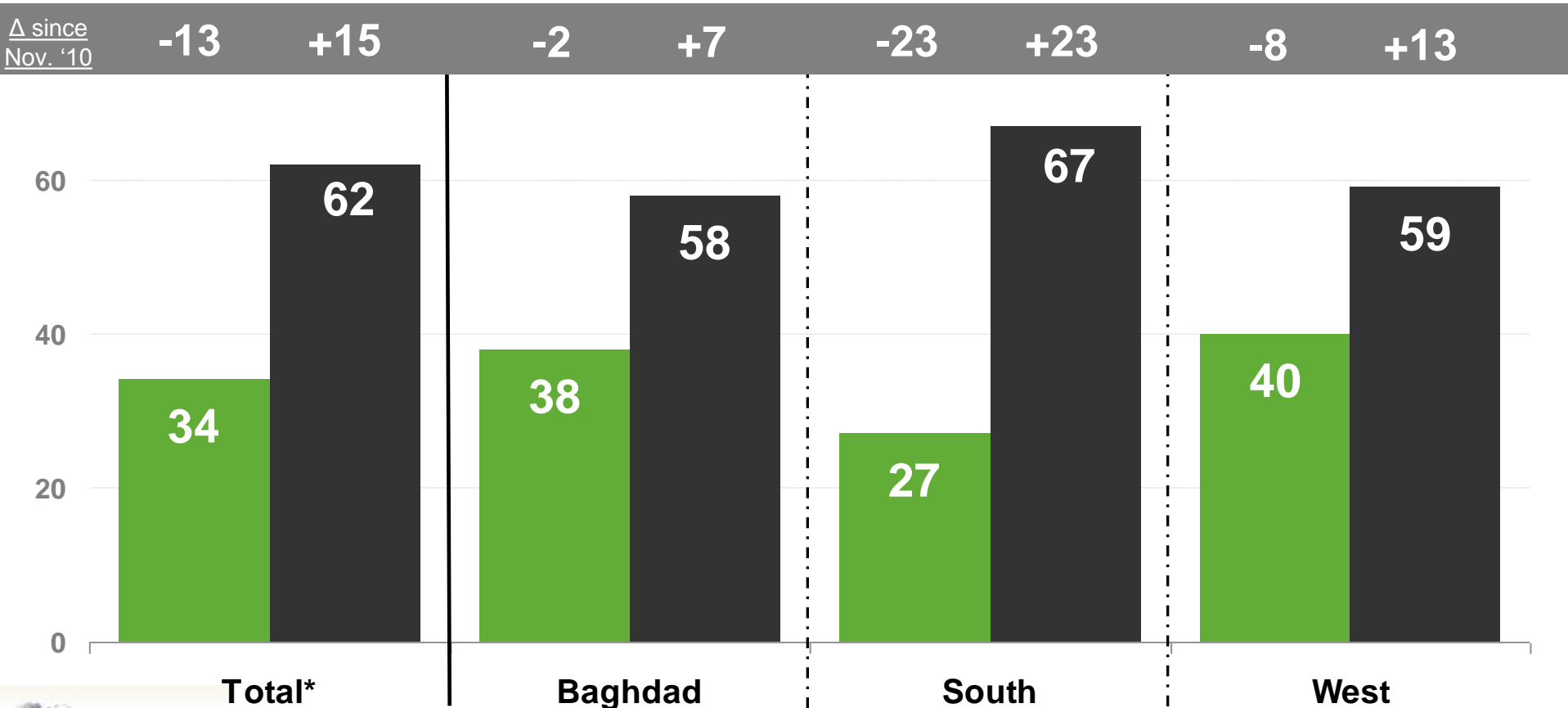
■ % Cool, unfavorable (0-49 degrees)



Drop in approval of provincial government

Generally speaking, do you approve or disapprove of the job being done by your provincial government?
 (*Not asked in Kurdistan)

■ Approve ■ Disapprove

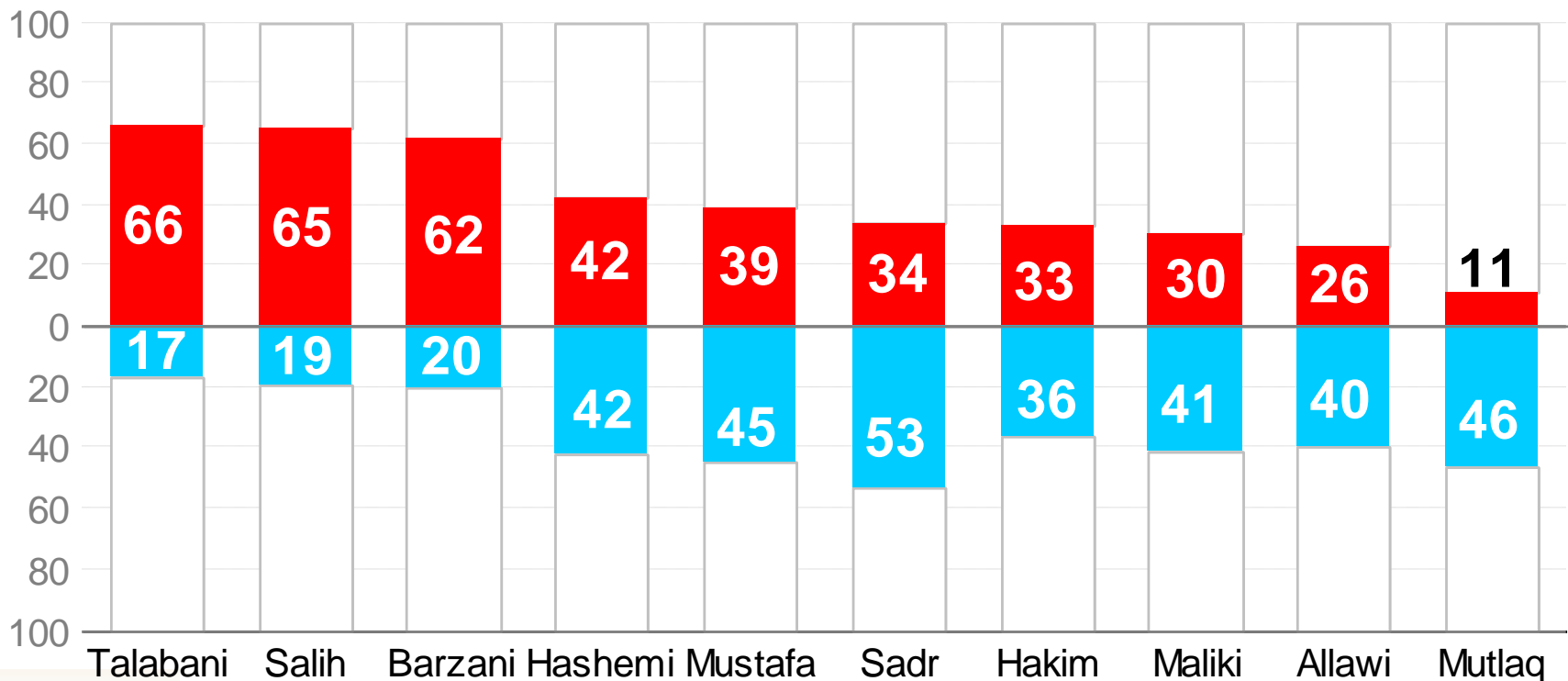


Kurdish leaders more popular than Arab leaders in Kurdistan

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people, organizations, and things, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold. **(Kurdistan only)**

■ % Warm, favorable (51-100 degrees)

■ % Cool, unfavorable (0-49 degrees)



KRG approval drops, but remains high

Generally speaking, do you approve or disapprove of the job being done by the Kurdistan Regional Government, or the KRG? (Kurdistan only)

