

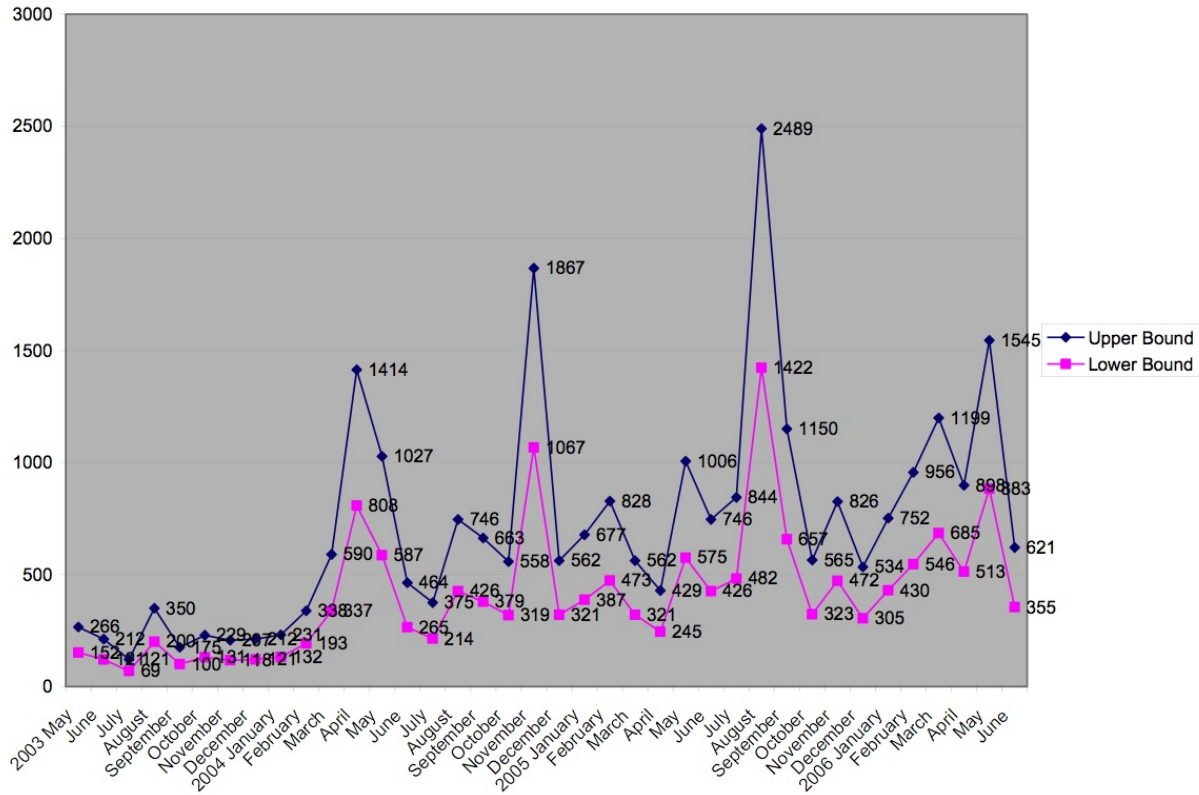


## The Stability of Iraq

Posted by [Stuart Staniford](#) on July 11, 2006 - 11:43am

Topic: [Policy/Politics](#)

Tags: [iraq](#), [oil prices](#), [peak oil](#) [list all tags]



*Iraqi civilians killed as a result of acts of war since May 1st, 2003. Source: [Brookings Institution](#). July data is incomplete.*

**[editor's note, by Prof. Goose]** please, do hit the reddit button above (the one just below the story furthest to the right) if you are so inclined.

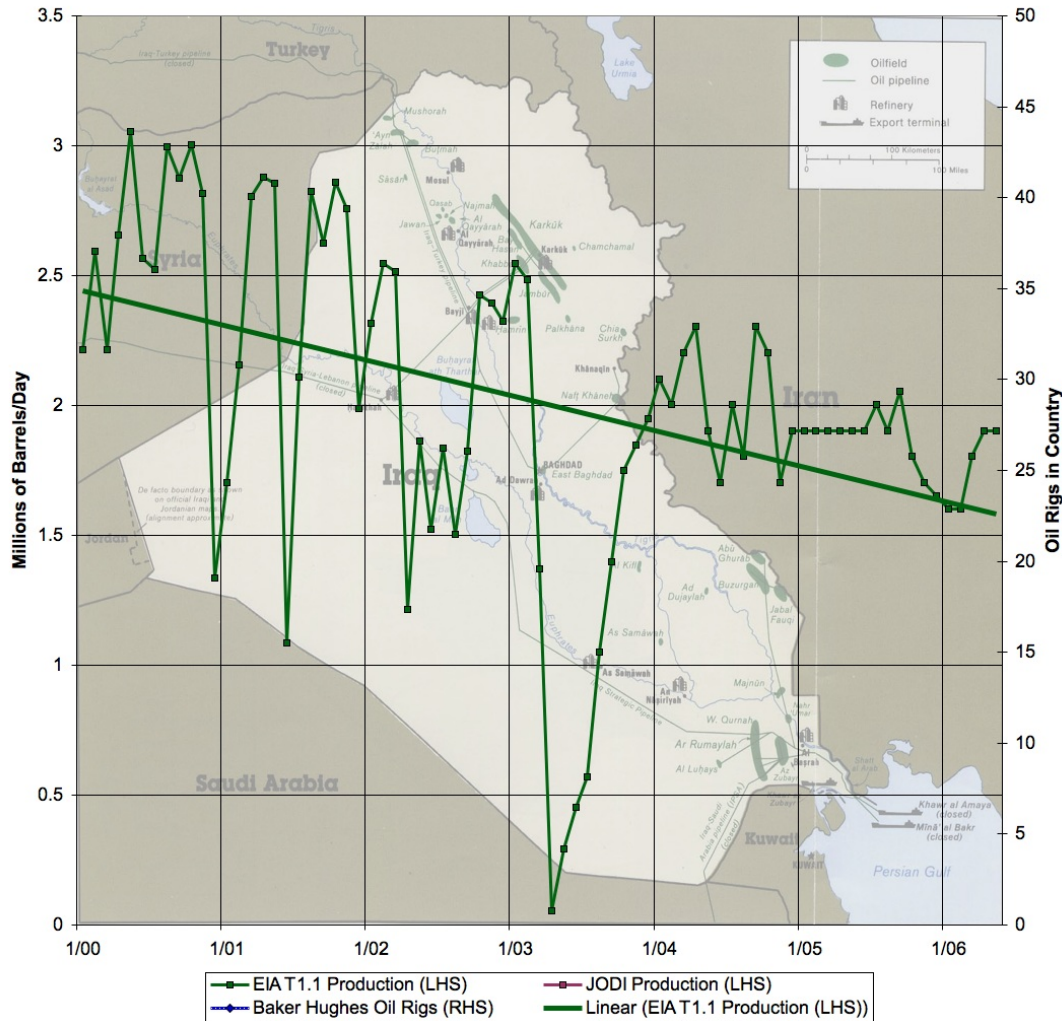
Courtesy of [The Carpetbagger](#), I came across this superb [Brookings Institution Report](#) on the situation in Iraq. This is my kind of report - almost solid graphs and tables. You can read it for an hour and have a far better idea of the situation than reading the newspaper for a year, and I highly recommend you do so.

**[editor's note, by Prof. Goose]** Stuart also asked me to slip [this article in from the NYT](#) about the recent instability through the war-torn country.

As we've [discussed before](#), there's almost certainly a lot of untapped oil reserves in Iraq, and whether they ever get produced or not is primarily controlled by whether the country stabilizes.

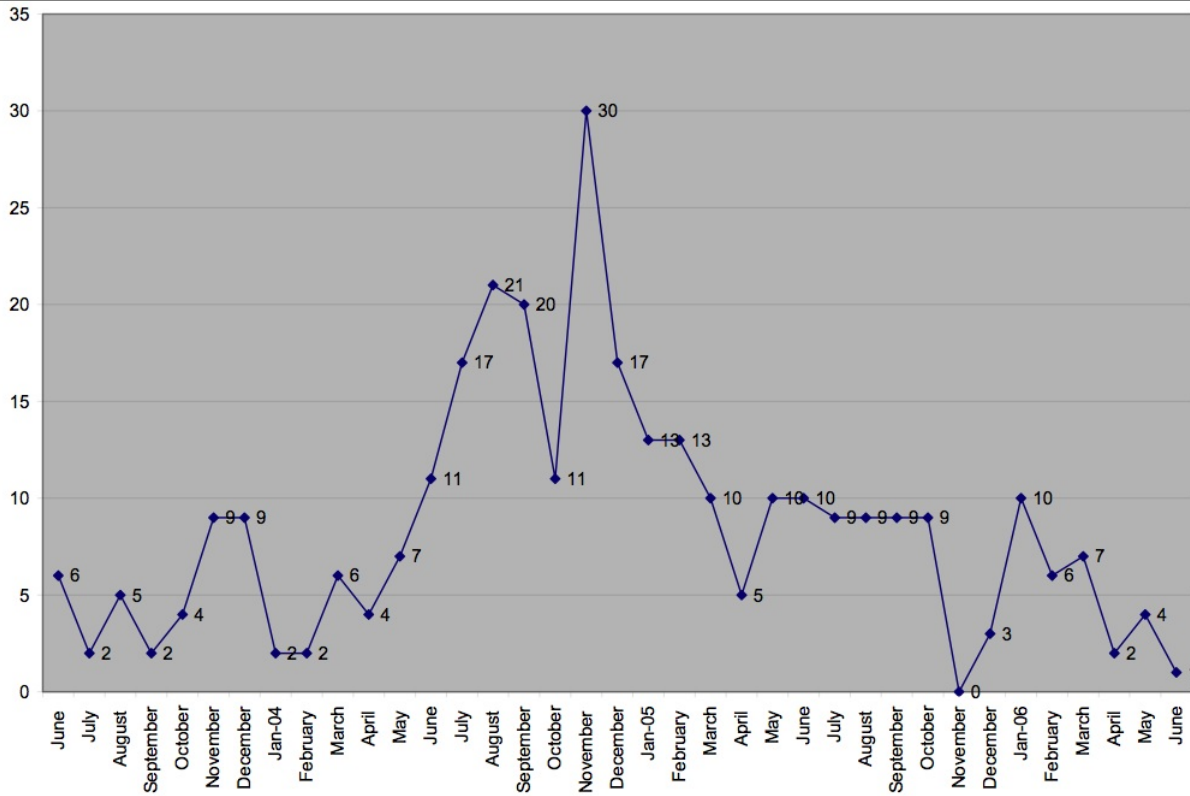
So, while I should stress that the human and political dimensions to the situation are very important, the main way it interacts with Oil Drum concerns is whether or not the energy can be counted on in the world's supply budget or not.

In short, is the overall trend of recent years in this next graph going to continue? Or is the improvement in the last few months the start of a real turnaround?



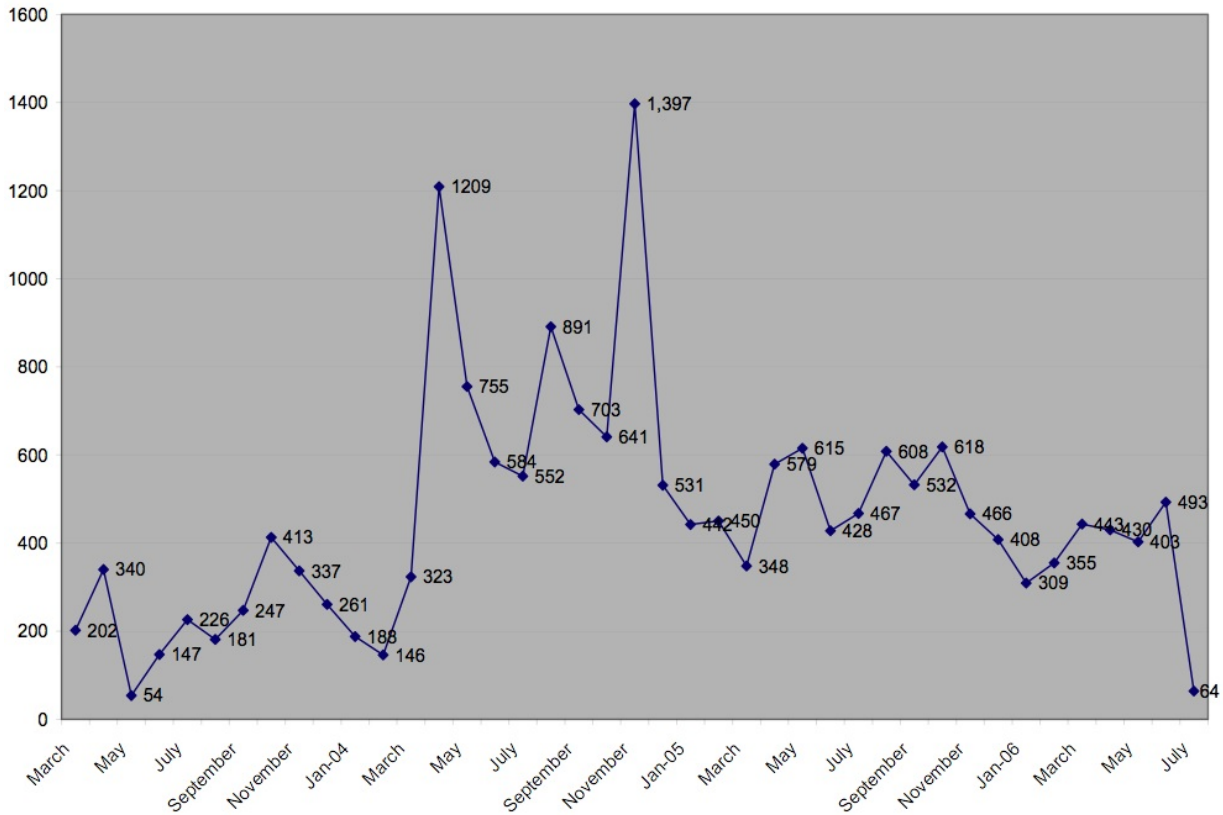
Average Iraqi daily oil + condensate production, by month, January 2000-April 2006. The US and allies invaded in March 2003. Click to enlarge. Source: [EIA International Petroleum Monthly Table 1.1a](#). Trend line is linear least squares fit to all the data.

Let's start with the good news. The likely cause of the improvement is that the number of attacks on oil and gas infrastructure has been dropping of late:



Number of attacks on Iraqi oil and gas infrastructure each month. June 2003 - June 2006, but last month is incomplete. Source: [Brookings Institution](http://www.brookings.edu)

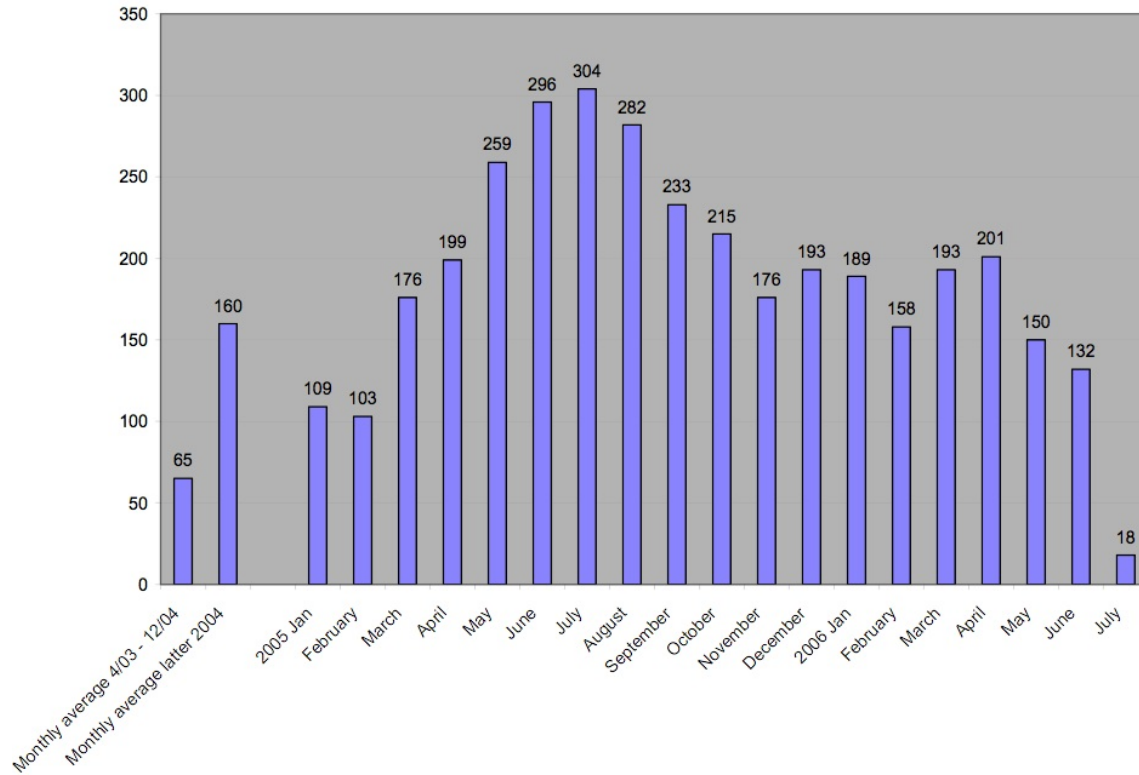
Other good news is that the number of US troops killed and wounded each month is also dropping, though very slowly.



*Number of US troops wounded in action each month, March 2003-July 2006. July 06 data is incomplete.*

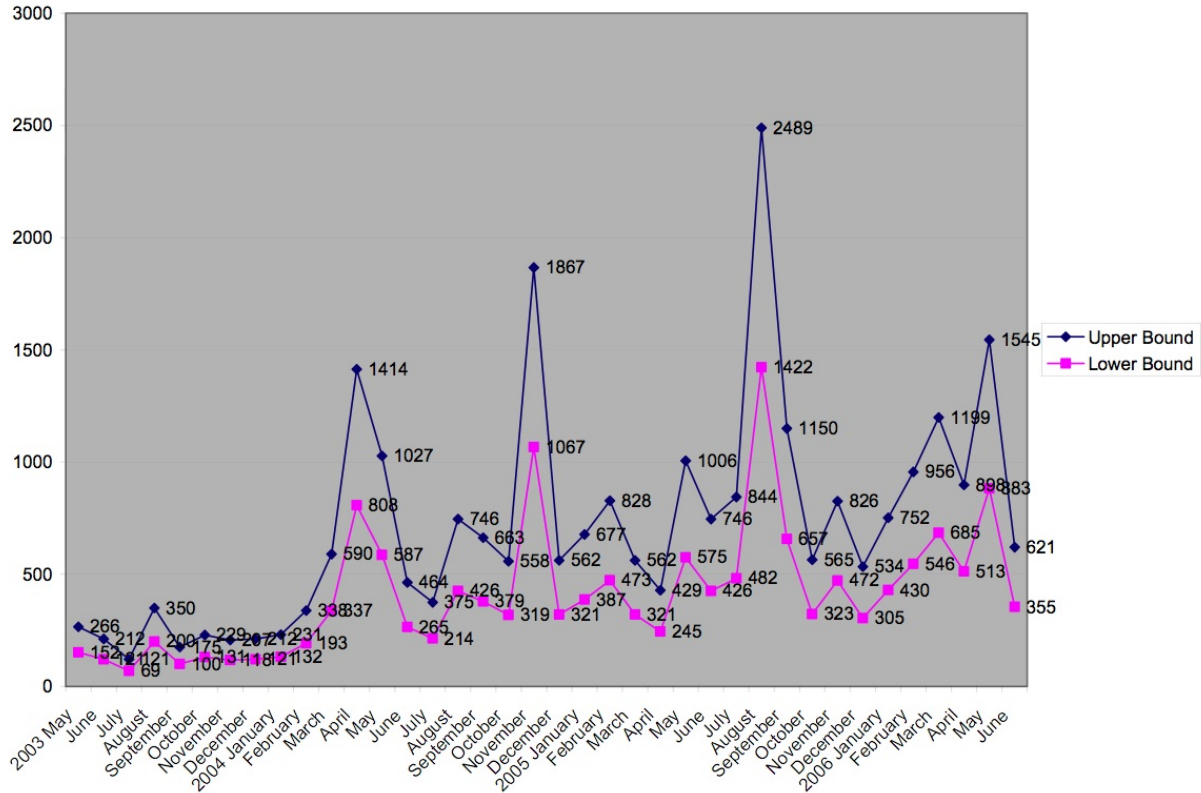
*Source: [Brookings Institution](#)*

Still, there's room to wonder if troop casualties are dropping because the insurgency is better controlled, or because we are giving up sizeable areas to effective insurgent control. The casualties in the Iraqi government forces are dropping also:



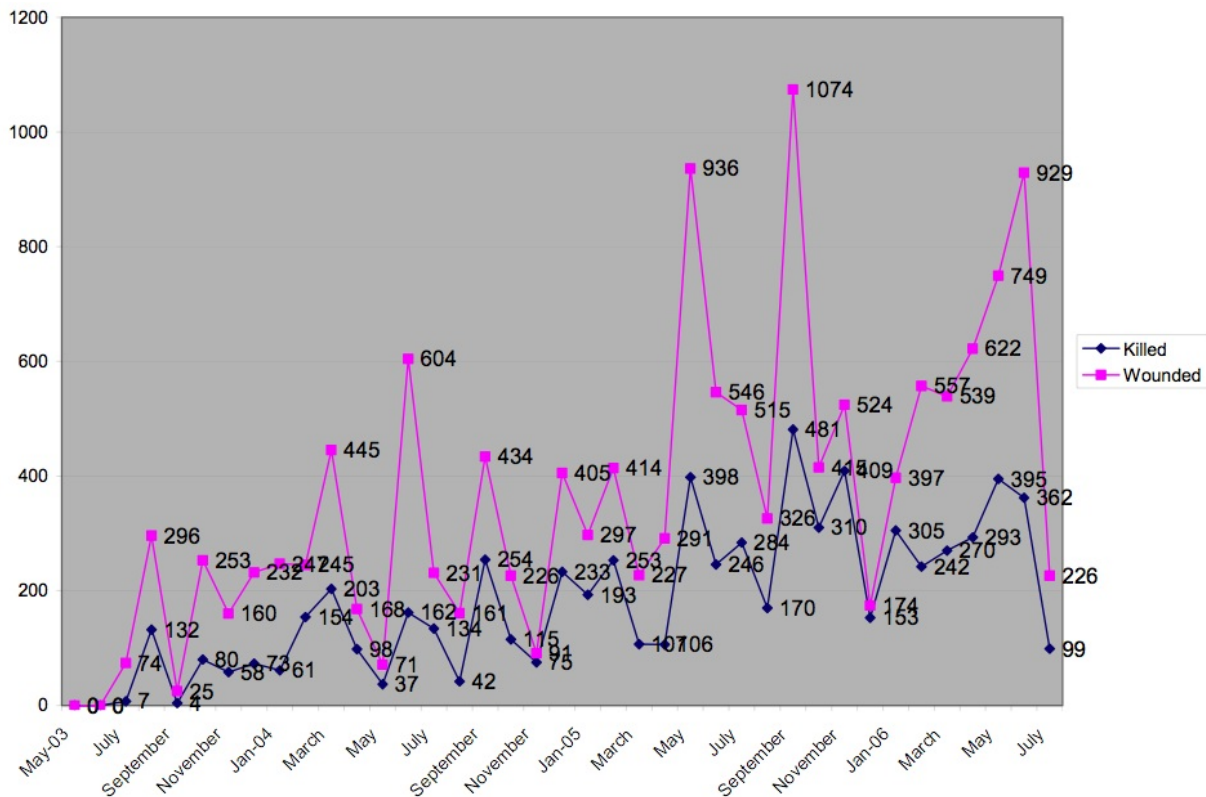
*Number of Iraqi military and police killed monthly, Jan 2005 to July 2006, with longer term averages from March 2003-December 2004. July 06 data is incomplete. Source: [Brookings Institution](#)*

However, it's hard to take these trends as cause for real optimism, as opposed to a signal that we are shifting from an insurgency against the US occupation to a civil war between the Sunni and the Shia. Certainly the civilian death toll is trending ever more tragic:



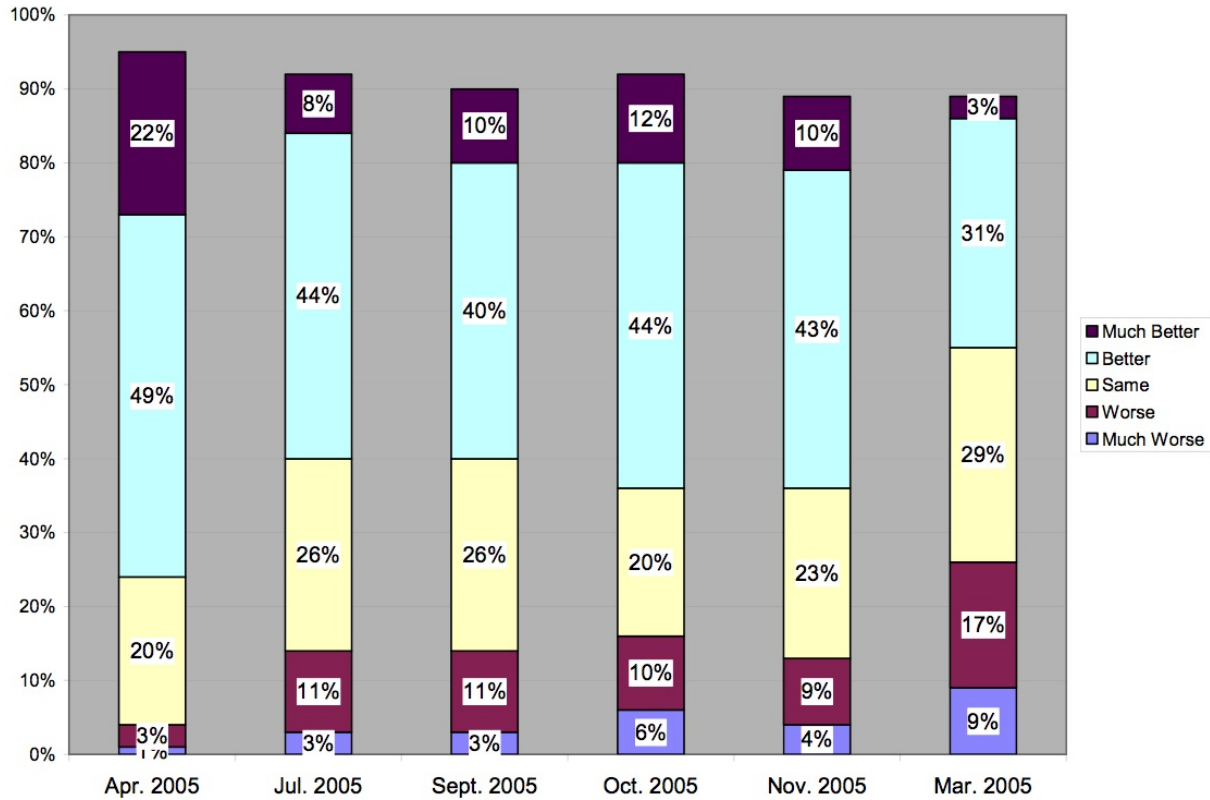
Iraqi civilians killed as a result of acts of war since May 1st, 2003. Source: [Brookings Institution](#). July data is incomplete.

The totals of people killed and wounded in multiple fatality bombings is really striking, and the trend here is terrible:



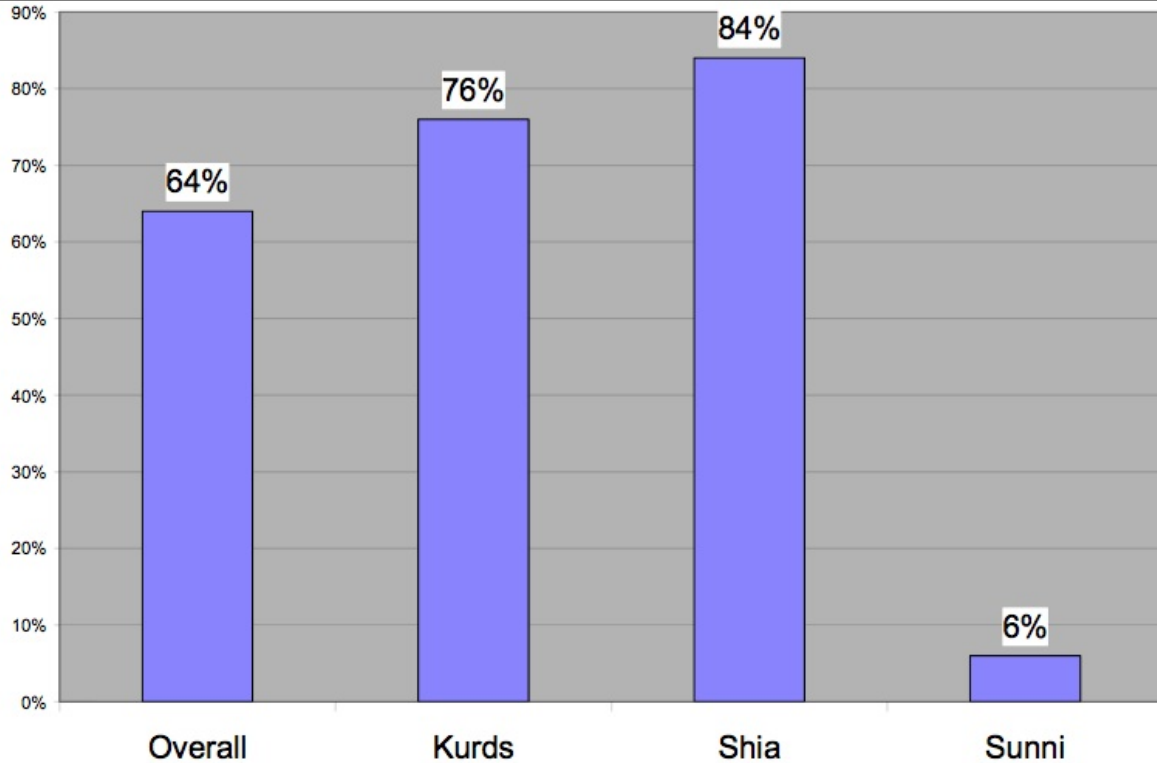
Monthly totals of people killed or wounded as a result of bombings with at least three fatalities (including IEDs/roadside bombs). Source: [Brookings Institution](#). July data is incomplete.

Iraqis are losing hope:



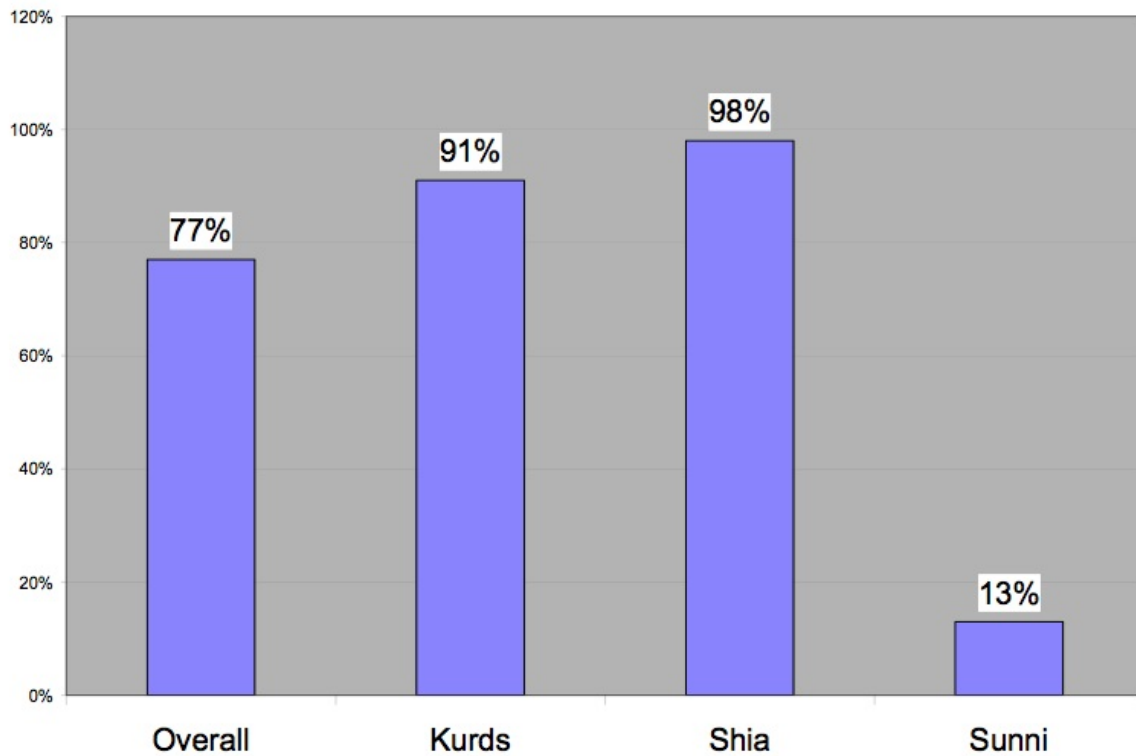
Answers to poll question "Thinking about the future, do you feel that things will be better, the same or worse in six months?". Source: [Brookings Institution](#).

But perhaps the most alarming thing is the extreme degrees of polarization that polling reveals. The next two charts come from data from a poll of Iraqis taken Jan 31st, 2006. The first question was "Do you think that Iraq today is generally headed in the right direction or wrong direction?". The chart shows "right direction".



Answers to poll question "Do you think that Iraq today is generally headed in the right direction or wrong direction?" by ethnic group. The chart shows the percentage who answered "right direction".

Has it all been worth while? Depends who you ask:



Answers to poll question "Thinking about any hardships you might have suffered since the US-Britain invasion, do you personally think that ousting Saddam Hussein was worth it or not?" by ethnic group. The chart shows the percentage who answered "worth it".

How are these groups ever going to agree on terms to stop fighting?

To put some color on the statistics, here's a quote from a [New York Times story](#) the other day:

Iraqi soldiers backed by American troops and military aircraft stormed a building in a Shiite slum here early today, killing or wounding between 30 and 40 gunmen and capturing a high-level Shiite militia commander who is accused of attacking Iraqi and American troops, the American military command said.

American and Iraqi authorities did not disclose the name of the captured man they said was a militia commander. But residents of the neighborhood said the building that came under attack was a base of operations for a man known as Abu Deraa, a top commander of the Mahdi Army, the restless and potent Shiite militia that answers to the Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr.

In a concurrent operation today, Iraqi police officers captured Adnan al-Unaybi, who, according to the American military command, is in charge of a wing of the Mahdi Army operating in Babil Province, south of Baghdad. A military news release said that he was accused of weapons smuggling, bankrolling terrorism, attacking American troops, inciting sectarian violence and "spying for two foreign governments."

and another incident recorded in the [The Independent](#)

Sunni fighters operating from an area called al-Muheet, a district of old brick factories now used for residential housing, have killed many Shia from nearby farming districts. "One of them was a man called Hussein who used to sell me melons," said a local informant. "They cut his head off." In the past few days three women were allegedly raped and killed.

This provoked a backlash in the heavily Shia al-Khadamiyah, the site of one of the holiest Shia shrines. Some 400 local people joined with the Mehdi Army yesterday to launch an attack on al-Muheet, starting a gun battle which lasted much of the day. The Shia claim that US troops intervened to stop them eliminating sectarian killers.

Can anyone see any way that this is not going to continue sliding into an ever more violent civil war?

Well, our sunny optimist friends over at the EIA are unconcerned, of course. They're [projecting 3.3 mbpd](#) of oil production by 2010. Given that the investments required to do that would need to be started right around now, it's extremely hard to see how that figure could be reached by then.



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