

Iranian attitudes on nuclear negotiations

A public opinion study | September 2014



Ebrahim Mohseni, Nancy Gallagher & Clay Ramsay



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL &
SECURITY STUDIES AT MARYLAND

University of Tehran Center for Public Opinion Research (UTCPOR)

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The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM)

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The Program for Public Consultation

The Program for Public Consultation (PPC) seeks to improve democratic governance by helping governments consult their citizenry on the key public policy issues the government faces. Unlike standard polls, in public consultations respondents are presented information that helps simulate the issues and tradeoffs faced by policymakers. PPC has been established to develop the methods and theory of public consultation and to conduct public consultations. PPC is a joint program of the Center on Policy Attitudes and the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland.

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Summary of Findings

Iran's Nuclear Program (Page 7) - A near-unanimous majority of Iranians say that it is necessary for Iran to have a nuclear energy program. Seven in ten say that the Iranian government's purpose in expanding its nuclear capabilities is for peaceful nuclear energy, while one in five say it is also for developing nuclear weapons.

Iran and Nuclear Weapons (Page 8) - Six in ten are aware that as part of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran has committed to not develop nuclear weapons. Seven in ten are aware that the Supreme Leader has issued a fatwa declaring nuclear weapons as contrary to Islam, and the idea of government being guided by religious principles continues to get overwhelming support. An overwhelming majority supports creating a Middle East nuclear free zone that includes Islamic countries and Israel, and three quarters support the goal of the NPT to eliminate all nuclear weapons.

Sanctions on Iran (Page 10) - The sanctions on Iran are overwhelmingly perceived as having a negative impact on the country's economy and on the lives of ordinary people. Equally large majorities expect that sanctions will increase further if Iran continues to enrich uranium and are pessimistic about getting sanctions reduced even if Iran agrees to tight restrictions on its nuclear program. At the same time, Iranians do not express desperate feelings about the economy. A slight majority rates the Iranian the economy as at least fairly good and only four in ten say it has gotten worse over the last year. In regard to their own economic conditions, a majority see them as fairly good and only one in four say they have gotten worse over the last year. Also, a modest majority puts a higher priority on achieving self-sufficiency than seeking greater trade.

The Nuclear Negotiations (Page 12) - Iranians show a readiness to support their government making a deal on Iran's nuclear program that includes some key steps sought by P5+1 countries, while also being strongly opposed to some of the limitations that the United States has been seeking.

- Asked about specific provisions, solid majorities indicate a readiness to consider, as part of a larger deal, Iran providing reassurances never to produce nuclear weapons, accepting more intrusive international inspections to assure Iranian compliance with the NPT, and limiting the level of uranium enrichment to the 5% level, for an agreed upon period of time as part of the comprehensive agreement currently being negotiated between Iran and P5+1 countries.
- On the other hand, a large majority rejects as unacceptable dismantling half of Iran's existing centrifuges or imposing limits on nuclear research activities.
- On other issues, views are more mixed. A slight plurality is open to limits on Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium as a confidence building measure for an agreed period of time, views are divided on a freeze on the number of centrifuges, and a slight plurality opposes committing to not improving the quality of centrifuges for the duration of the agreement.

Iranians are divided about the likelihood of success in the negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. A large majority say they would not fault Iranian officials if the talks fail to achieve an agreement.

Mistrust and Doubts about Whether Sanctions Would Be Removed (Page 15) - Iranians express high levels of mistrust in the P5+1 countries. More germane, Iranians express high levels of doubt that the United States would remove sanctions, even if Iran were to meet U.S. demands in regard to its nuclear program. Three quarters say that the United States would find some other reason to impose sanctions. This view is related to the perception—held by three in four—that the United States' main reason for sanctioning Iran is not concern about nuclear weapons but some other motive. Asked what these other motives might be, the most common responses are that the United States seeks to dominate Iran or block its development. Feelings of mistrust and doubts are highly correlated with resistance to agreeing to confidence building measures in the nuclear negotiations.

Relations with U.S. (Page 17) - Views of the United States, especially the U.S. government, continue to be quite negative. These appear to be related to past and present U.S. policies toward Iran much more than to cultural and religious differences. Nonetheless, large majorities favor making efforts to mitigate the conflicts between Iran and the United States and support a variety of confidence building measures. A slight plurality has a positive view of the American people and people-to-people confidence building measures are viewed even more positively. A majority thinks that it possible for Islam and the West to find common ground.

Views of President Rouhani (Page 20) - President Rouhani receives very positive ratings. His foreign minister Zarif also gets positive ratings, suggesting support for Iran's foreign policy under President Rouhani. Large majorities see Rouhani as having improved the economy. They express optimism that he can further improve the economy, Iran's internal security situation, and civil liberties. Views are divided on his ability to reach an agreement on the nuclear issue and reduce sanctions. Support for government being guided by religious principles continues to get overwhelming support.

Iraq (Page 21) - In the current conflict between Iraq and ISIS, a substantial majority favors Iran providing support to the Iraqi government. Nonetheless, views are divided about whether Iran should cooperate with the United States to help counter ISIS. Asked about the primary cause of the current instability, more blame the U.S. and Western powers than factors internal to Iraq.

Syria (Page 22) - A large majority has a favorable view of Syria, and a majority approves of providing support to the Syrian government. A slight majority blames the U.S. or Western powers for the current unrest there and only a small number blamed factors internal to Syria.

Views of Other Countries (Page 23) - While views of Iran's Muslim neighbors, Iraq and Syria, are quite favorable, views of Turkey are more modestly favorable. Views of China and Russia lean to the favorable. Western countries are viewed unfavorably, with Britain and the U.S. viewed unfavorably by large majorities, and lesser majorities being negative toward Germany and France.

Introduction

Officials from China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (the so-called P5+1) have been negotiating intensively with Iranian diplomats about Iran's nuclear program since Iranian President Hassan Rouhani took office in August 2013. If they can reach agreement by the self-imposed November 24, 2014 deadline, they will have achieved a feat that has eluded the international community for more than a decade.

The fundamental questions being discussed in the negotiations involve what steps Iran would be willing to take, in return for removal of unilateral and multilateral sanctions imposed on Iran, in order to ensure that its "nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful." As a non-nuclear weapon state signatory to the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran is legally committed to not develop nuclear weapons. The NPT imposes no limits on non-nuclear weapons (NNWS) states' civilian nuclear programs, as long as they have International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards to confirm that they are not using them to acquire weapons. Because the IAEA has stated that Iran has not always provided timely and complete information as part of its safeguards agreement, the United Nations Security Council has passed a series of resolutions calling on Iran to suspend enrichment-related activities until confidence in the purely peaceful nature of its nuclear program can be restored. Iran insists that the IAEA and UNSC have acted under Western pressure and that its nuclear program has always been purely peaceful and in compliance with the NPT. Iran also says that as a NNWS signatory to the NPT, it has a legal right to have a full fuel-cycle nuclear program. It believes its continued rejection of U.N. Security Council demands is necessary, because the West wants to unjustifiably stop it from doing things that every NNWS is free to do.

In November 2013, negotiators for the P5+1 and Iran reached agreement on the elements of a comprehensive solution, as well as first steps both sides would take while trying to work out the details of a final agreement. Among other things, as part of the interim accord, Iran agreed to temporarily limit some of its enrichment activities and give the IAEA more access. In return, the P5+1 agreed to make available certain frozen Iranian assets, to suspend some sanctions, and not to impose new nuclear-related sanctions.

On July 22, shortly before the initial six-month deadline set by the interim agreement, the two sides remained far apart on some important issues. But leaders from the seven participating states announced that the first-step measures were working well and that negotiators had made enough progress to warrant extending negotiations until November 24, 2014. Both the Obama and the Rouhani governments seem to be genuinely interested in reaching an agreement, but it is unclear whether both sides are willing and able to make the necessary compromises. Although officials remain tight-lipped about specific positions, major unresolved questions appear to include the size and capabilities of Iran's enrichment plants, the pace and scope of the removal of imposed sanctions, the activities of Iran's nuclear research program, the ability of Iran to stockpile certain types of nuclear materials, and the duration of the accord.

To better understand the domestic political environments that constrain how much negotiating room key players have, the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) conducted studies of American and Iranian public opinion on the nuclear negotiations. Its study

of American public opinion, “Americans on Negotiations with Iran,” was conducted in collaboration with the Program for Public Consultation and was released in July 2014. It is available at www.cisssm.umd.edu. This study of Iranian public opinion was conducted in collaboration with the University of Tehran Center for Public Opinion Research (UTCPOR). The Program for Public Consultation played a central role in the analysis of the data and the writing of the report. In addition to illuminating the specific views and preferences of Iranian citizens regarding the ongoing nuclear negotiations, this study also explores a broad range of Iranian political preferences and attitudes that shape the context in which the nuclear negotiations are occurring.

Methodology

This study was designed, managed, and analyzed jointly by UTCPOR and CISSM. UTCPOR was responsible for fielding the survey in Iran using computer-assisted-telephone interviewing (CATI). Multiple experiments have shown that landline telephone and face-to-face interviews produce similar findings in Iran. According to the Statistical Center of Iran, the household penetration of telephone landlines in Iran is 85.5% for urban and 65.2% for rural areas.

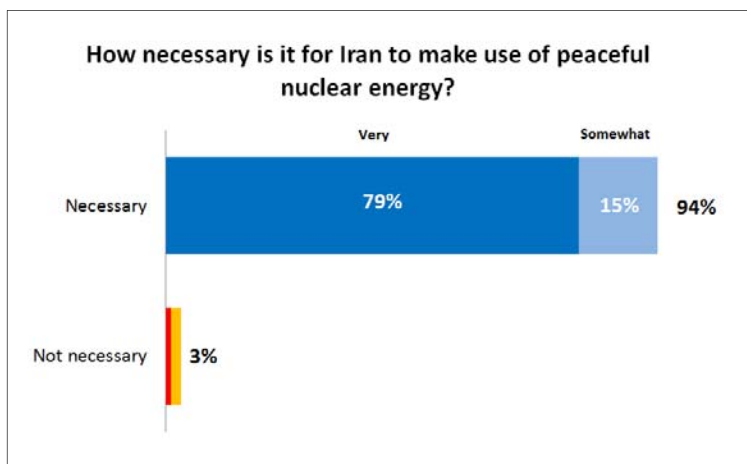
This study’s interviews were conducted from July 11, 2014 to July 17, 2014 among a nationally representative probability sample of 1,037 Iranian adults aged 18 and older. The margin of error for a sample of this size is no larger than +/- 3.1 percentage points. The sample was stratified first by Iranian provinces and then in accordance to settlement size and type, using area codes and telephone exchanges for landline telephones in Iran. Random Digit Dialing (RDD) was used to reach random households. When a residence was reached, an adult was randomly selected from within that household using the random table technique. An initial attempt and three callbacks were made in an effort to complete an interview with the selected respondents. A total of 1,037 interviews were completed. The contact rate, defined as the proportion of respondents who were reached and ultimately agreed to be interviewed relative to the number of respondents attempted, was 79%. The completion rate was 84%.

All 31 Iranian provinces were represented in the completed sample in proportions similar to their actual populations, as were rural and urban areas. Population and demographic variables for stratification were based upon the most recent census data collected by the Statistical Center of Iran in 2011.

Iran's Nuclear Program

A near-unanimous majority of Iranians say that it is necessary for Iran to have a nuclear energy program. Seven in ten say that the Iranian government's purpose in expanding its nuclear capabilities is for peaceful nuclear energy, while one in five say it is also for developing nuclear weapons.

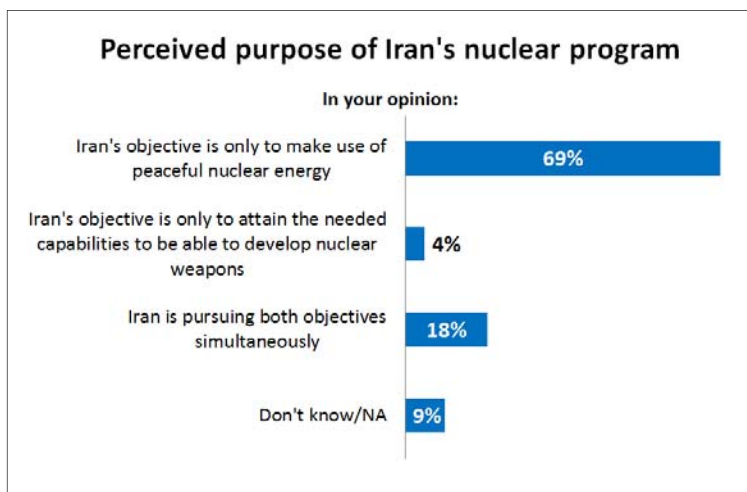
The Iranian public overwhelmingly supports Iran's nuclear energy program. A near-unanimous majority (94%) say that having a nuclear energy program is necessary, and four in five (79%) call it very necessary.



In regard to the purpose of the program, seven in ten (69%) believe that Iran's sole objective is to use peaceful nuclear energy.

Less than a fifth (18%) thinks that Iran is also pursuing the capabilities needed to develop nuclear weapons alongside its energy program. An additional 4% think the capabilities for weapons are Iran's sole objective, making less than a quarter of Iranians who do not think the program is strictly peaceful.

Even among those that think Iran is pursuing weapons capabilities, most in this group say that a nuclear program for energy purposes is a necessity.



A majority is aware of the U.S. intelligence community's view that no decision has been made by Iranian leaders to develop nuclear weapons. To probe for such awareness, respondents were asked:

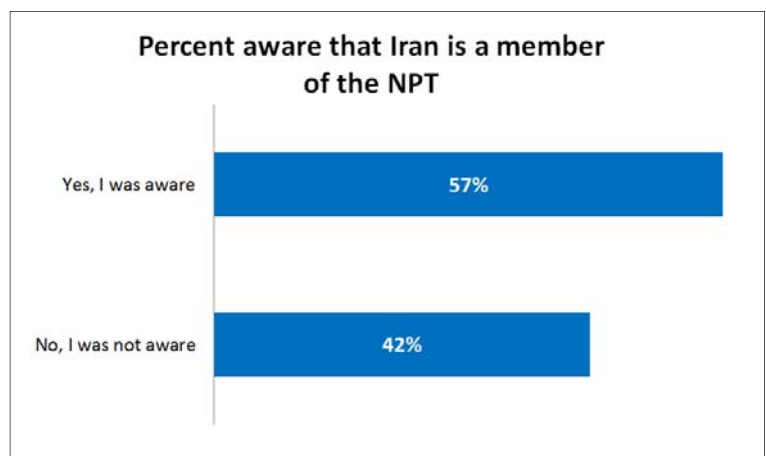
As you may know, the U.S. intelligence establishment has officially reported its conclusions regarding Iran's nuclear program on multiple occasions. As far as you know, according to U.S. intelligence reports since December 2007, does U.S. intelligence think that Iran has decided to develop nuclear weapons, or does it think Iran has not yet made such a decision?

A majority (53%) say, consistent with publicly available information, that the assessment of U.S. intelligence is that Iran has not made a decision to develop a nuclear weapon. A third (32%) believes it to be the U.S. intelligence community's view that Iran has decided to do this.

Iran and Nuclear Weapons

Six in ten are aware that as part of the NPT, Iran has committed to not develop nuclear weapons. Seven in ten are aware that the Supreme Leader has issued a fatwa declaring nuclear weapons as contrary to Islam, and the idea of government being guided by religious principles continues to get overwhelming support. An overwhelming majority supports creating a Middle East nuclear-free zone that includes Islamic countries and Israel, and three quarters support the goal of the NPT to eliminate all nuclear weapons.

A majority of Iranians have some awareness of the 1970 NPT and of Iran's existing commitments within it. Asked how much they have heard about the NPT, 62% say "a lot" or "some." This is in contrast to only 26% of Americans who said that they have heard "a lot" or "some" about the NPT in the recent CISSM-PPC poll.



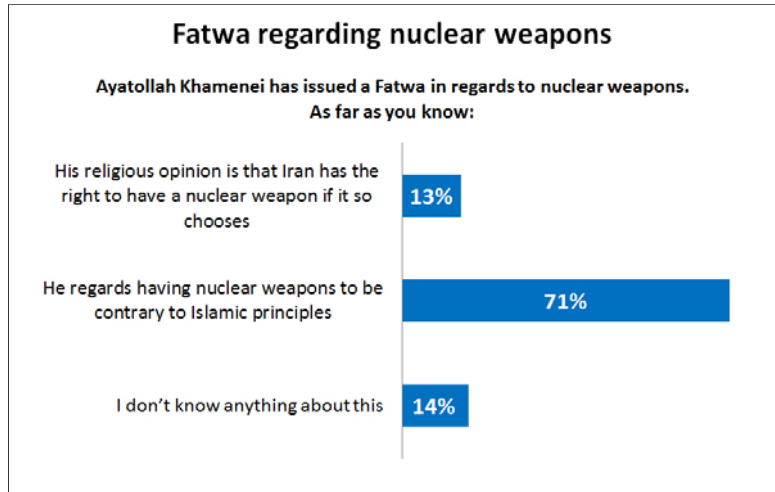
Iranians were also asked, "As you may know, Iran is a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, or NPT, and has accordingly agreed not to develop nuclear weapons and to only make use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Were you aware that Iran is a member of this treaty or not?" A clear majority of 57% say they were aware of this, with 42% saying they were not. When the recent CISSM-PPC study asked this same question of Americans, only a third (34%) knew that Iran is a NNWS party to the NPT, while 66 percent were unaware of that.

Iranians' knowledge of their country's commitment within the NPT rises sharply with education. Among those with little or no education (elementary school or less), 45% are aware of this commitment; among those with a bachelor's degree or higher, 78% are aware.

Interestingly, Iranians are more likely to be familiar with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's religious fatwa on nuclear weapons than with the NPT's legal restrictions on Iran's nuclear program. Respondents were asked:

As you may know, Ayatollah Khamenei, the Leader of the Revolution, has issued a fatwa in regards to nuclear weapons. As far as you know, according to his religious opinion does Iran have the right to have a nuclear weapon if it chooses to have one, or is he of the opinion that having nuclear weapons is contrary to Islamic principles?

Seven in ten (71%) know that the fatwa says nuclear weapons are contrary to Islam; only 13% believe that it declares that Iran has a right to nuclear weapons. It is important to note that four in five Iranians think that such religious teachings should be taken into account by policymakers when making decisions (44%, a lot and 36% somewhat), while 19% disagreed.



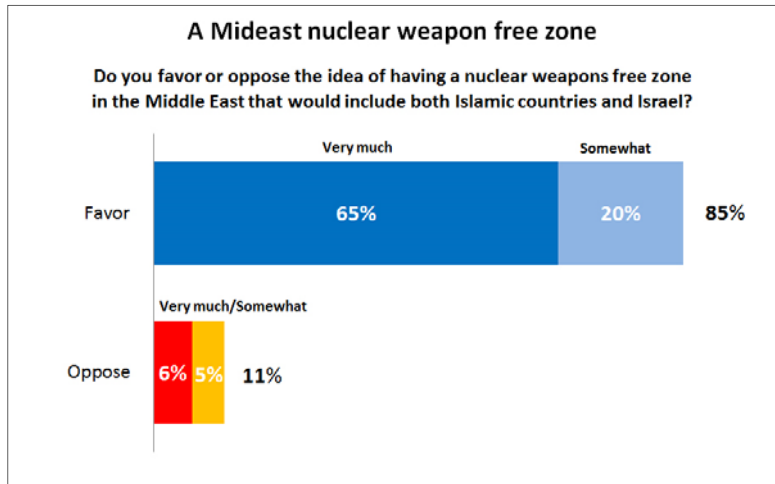
In a February 2008 poll, Iranians were asked for their view of the Islamic morality of nuclear weapons, without mentioning the Fatwa. A majority of 58% said then that they thought “producing nuclear weapons is against the principles of Islam.”

Views on Eliminating Nuclear Weapons

The Iranian public is very supportive of ideas for eliminating nuclear weapons, both in the Middle East and globally.

Presented “the idea of having a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East that would include both Islamic countries and Israel, requiring countries not to have nuclear weapons,” an overwhelming majority (85%) favor it, with 65% favoring it “very much.” When an almost identical question was asked to Iranians in December 2006, 71% were in favor (50% strongly).

There is similar majority support for the goal, central to the design of the NPT, of eventually eliminating nuclear weapons—and this support has been stable for a decade. In the current survey, 74% say they favor “the goal of eventually eliminating all nuclear weapons, which is stated in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT”; 21% are opposed. In 2008, 72% supported the goal, and in 2006, 68% did.



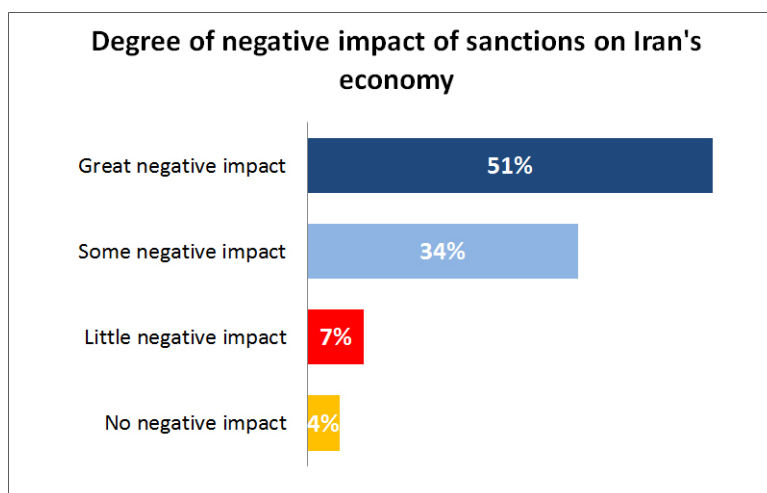
Sanctions on Iran

The sanctions on Iran are overwhelmingly perceived as having a negative impact on the country's economy and on the lives of ordinary people. Equally large majorities expect that sanctions will increase further if Iran continues to enrich uranium and are pessimistic about getting sanctions reduced. At the same time, Iranians do not express desperate feelings about the economy. A slight majority rates the Iranian economy as at least fairly good, and only four in ten say it has gotten worse over the last year. In regard to their own economic conditions, a majority see them as fairly good, and only one in four say they have gotten worse over the last year. Also, a modest majority puts a higher priority on achieving self-sufficiency than seeking greater trade.

A major point of debate within U.S. policy circles concerns how the economic sanctions related to Iran's nuclear activities have affected the Iranian population. The current poll provides an unusually deep look at how the Iranian public experiences and views these sanctions.

Well over four in five Iranians (85%) perceive the sanctions as hindering the country's economy. Half (51%) say they have had "great negative impact," while another 34% say they have had some negative impact.

Even more—a near-unanimous 91%—say the sanctions have "had a negative impact on the lives of ordinary people of our country," with 61% saying this negative impact has been "great."



Seven in ten Iranians perceive the sanctions as aimed at themselves, not only at their leaders. Asked "in your opinion, has placing pressure on the lives of ordinary Iranians been or not been an objective of these sanctions?" 71% say this "has certainly been" an objective, with an additional 17% calling this probable.

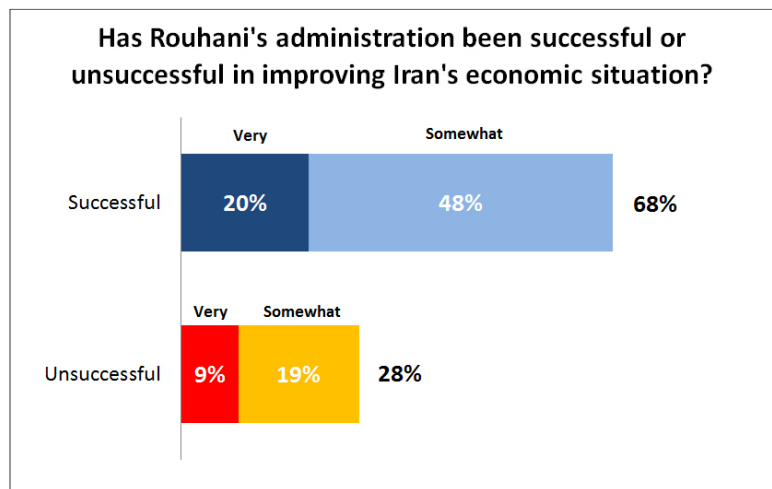
Perhaps most significant, Iranians assume that the sanctions are likely to worsen. Asked their expectation if enrichment continues, 85% view it as very likely (38%) or somewhat likely (47%) that sanctions will be increased.

Even though a plurality expresses some optimism that Rouhani may get a nuclear deal, 51% say they do not think that he will succeed in getting sanctions reduced. As is discussed below, large majorities say that even if Iran were to make major concessions, the sanctions are unlikely to be lifted.

At the same time, though, Iranians do not express desperate feelings about the economy. A slight majority of 53% call Iran’s economy at least somewhat good, while 44% call it bad (very, 20%). Only four in ten (38%) say the economy has gotten worse over the last year. Thirty-five percent say the economy has not changed, while 26% say it is better.

When Iranians consider their own families’ economic situations, more give it a positive than a negative rating. Fifty-seven percent call their family’s situation at least somewhat good (very good, 7%), while 43% call it somewhat bad (30%) or very bad (13%). And a majority (56%) says their family’s situation is unchanged since last year. One in four (26%) say their situation had worsened, while only 18 percent say it has gotten better despite the limited sanctions relief provided by the interim agreement.

In line with this very tentative, positive outlook, most (68%) are willing to give President Rouhani’s administration some credit on the economic front. Forty-eight percent say the administration has been somewhat successful, and 20% very successful, “in improving the economic situation of Iran.” Twenty-eight percent feel the administration has not been successful (very unsuccessful, 9%).



Sanctions are germane to the possibility of building and maintaining economic links with other countries. The United States has allowed almost no economic engagement with Iran for many years, so the potential for increased sanctions would not further decrease economic links with the United States but with other countries that the United States may press to curtail trade with Iran. Yet, Iranians do not place a high priority on seeking greater trade. Respondents were asked to assume “that our country could only adopt one [of the following economic] policies”: to “strive to achieve economic self-sufficiency,” or to “strive to increase mutual economic trade with other countries.” A 53% majority chooses self-sufficiency, while 43% choose seeking an increase in international trade.

To the extent that Iranians view their economy negatively, they do not emphasize sanctions as the main factor. The 44% who rated Iran’s current economy negatively were asked an open-ended question, inviting them to say in their own words what they blamed most for this state of affairs. These Iranians generally evoke domestic, not international causes. Three quarters (74% of this group) mentions poor exploitation of domestic opportunities, inflation, economic mismanagement, and similar factors; only 9% of those complaining about the economy mention sanctions.

The Nuclear Negotiations

Iranians show a readiness to support their government making a deal on Iran's nuclear program that includes some key steps sought by P5+1 countries, while also being strongly opposed to some of the limitations that the United States has been seeking.

- **Asked about specific provisions, solid majorities indicate a readiness to consider, as part of a larger deal, Iran providing reassurances never to produce nuclear weapons, accepting more intrusive international inspections to assure Iranian compliance with the NPT, and limiting the level of uranium enrichment to the 5% level, for an agreed upon period of time as part of a comprehensive agreement.**
- **On the other hand, a large majority rejects as unacceptable dismantling half of Iran's existing centrifuges or imposing limits on nuclear research activities.**
- **On other issues, views are more mixed. A slight plurality is open to limits on Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium as a confidence building measure for an agreed period of time, views are divided on a freeze on the number of centrifuges, and a slight plurality opposes committing to not improving the quality of centrifuges for the duration of the agreement.**

Iranians are divided about the likelihood of success in the negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. A large majority say they would not fault Iranian officials if the talks fail to achieve an agreement.

Respondents were asked a series of questions about possible terms of the comprehensive agreement currently being negotiated between Iran and P5+1 countries. Nine different provisions were presented—each posing a possible confidence building measure for Iran to take. For each one, respondents were asked to rate whether it was:

- acceptable;
- unacceptable; or
- could be acceptable depending on the other conditions of the agreement.

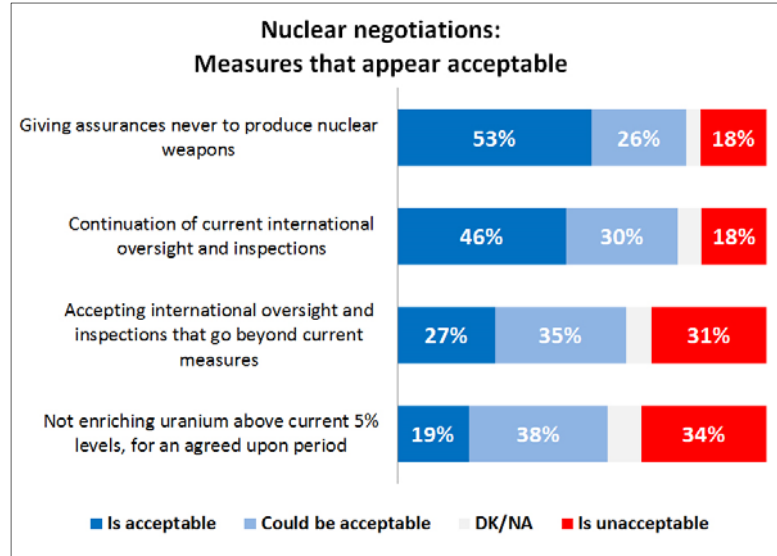
Although this series of questions was quite detailed, most respondents were able to answer them—those declining to answer numbered between 4% and 11%.

Solid majorities indicate a readiness to consider, as part of a larger deal, three of the nine proposed provisions:

- giving assurances never to produce nuclear weapons;
- accepting a limit on uranium enrichment to the 5% level for an agreed upon period of time; and
- increased levels of international oversight and inspection for the durations of the agreement.

Seventy-nine percent are willing to consider the primary point of “giving assurances never to produce nuclear weapons,” with a 53% majority simply calling it acceptable and another 26% saying it could be acceptable, depending on the circumstances. Only 18% find this unacceptable.

A 57% majority is willing to consider “forgoing enriching uranium above current levels, which is currently 5 percent” for the duration of the agreement. Nineteen percent find this acceptable and another 38% say it could be acceptable depending on the circumstances. A third (34%) finds it unacceptable.

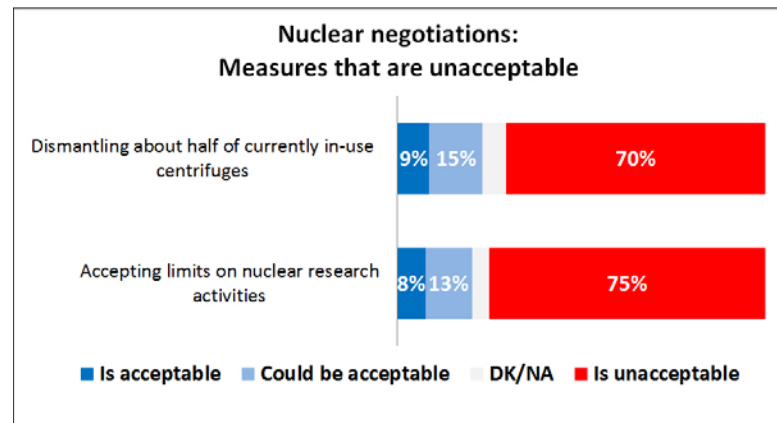


On international inspections, three quarters (76%) are willing to consider the “continuation of oversight and inspections to the degree that is currently being undertaken by international inspectors” (i.e., the level of inspections now ongoing under the interim plan of action) for the duration of the agreement. Forty-six percent finds this acceptable and another 30% say it could be acceptable depending on the circumstances. In another question, three in five (62%) are willing to consider “oversight...to go beyond what is currently being undertaken”—i.e., a more rigorous inspection regime than the interim plan provides for the duration of the comprehensive agreement. Twenty-seven percent find it acceptable and another 35% say it could be, depending on the circumstances.

On the other hand, a large majority rejects as unacceptable:

- dismantling half of existing centrifuges; and
- imposing limits on nuclear research activities.

Seven in ten (70%) call unacceptable a provision for “dismantling about half of the machinery and centrifuges that are currently being used for enrichment.” Only a quarter (24%) is open to the idea, with 15% saying it depends on the circumstances, and 9% calling it acceptable.



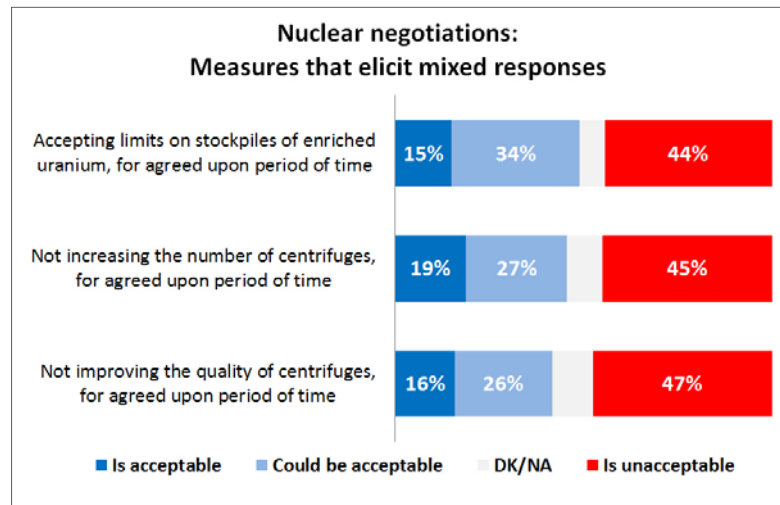
An even higher 75% finds unacceptable “accepting limits on Iran’s nuclear research activities.” Just a fifth (21%) is open to the idea, with 13% saying it depends on the circumstances and 8% finding it acceptable.

On other issues, views are more mixed:

- A slight plurality is open to considering limits on Iran’s stockpile of enriched uranium as a confidence building measure for an agreed period of time
- Views are divided on considering a freeze on the number of centrifuges for the duration of the agreement.
- A slight plurality opposes considering committing to not improving the quality of centrifuges for the duration of the agreement.

When asked about “accepting limits on the stockpile of Iran’s enriched uranium,” about half—49%—are at least open to the possibility for the duration of the agreement. Thirty-four percent say it could be acceptable depending on the circumstances, and another 15% find it acceptable. Forty-four percent, though, find stockpile limits unacceptable.

While 46% at least consider the idea of a freeze that would bar increases in the number of centrifuges (acceptable to 19%) for the duration of the agreement, about as many (45%) say the idea is unacceptable.



On the question of not improving centrifuge quality for the duration of the agreement, a plurality of 47% finds this idea unacceptable. Forty-two percent either accept it depending on the circumstances (26%) or find it acceptable (16%).

Iranians’ expectations for the outcome of negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program are quite muted. About half (48%) think that President Rouhani will be successful in “reaching an agreement with P5+1 countries regarding Iran’s nuclear issue” (30% somewhat, 18% very successful). Slightly fewer—43%—predict that Rouhani will be either somewhat unsuccessful (29%) or very unsuccessful (14%).

This raises the question of how Iranians will react if negotiations fail. When asked to what degree they would fault their own country’s officials in such an event, 60% said either “not much” (18%) or “not at all” (42%).

Two other questions asked respondents to evaluate complex scenarios for the nuclear negotiations. These did not elicit a majority response, and many appear to have found them difficult, as almost a fifth declined to answer.

In one case, respondents were asked to choose between Iran continuing “its nuclear enrichment within the framework of the NPT and without any particular limitations, even if it would lead to greater pressures being applied against our country” versus accepting “the limitations proposed by the P5+1 countries, in order to bring about a reduction in foreign sanctions and pressures.”

There was no majority response to this question. Yet, a plurality (45%) say it would be better for Iran to continue its nuclear enrichment and 35% say it would be better to accept the limitations proposed by the P5+1 countries; while a notably high 19% say “don’t know” or decline to answer.

The second of these two questions asked respondents whether they would favor a deal according to which, for a period of 10 years, Iran would reduce its enrichment activities and agree to extensive inspections, in return for a the lifting of the sanctions.

Responses to this formulation were more positive, perhaps because it was framed as part of a negotiated, mutually agreed-upon deal that has time limitations and details of what Iran would get in return. Just under half (49%) say they would favor such a deal (15% strongly), while 35% are opposed (24% strongly). Again, 17% say “don’t know” or decline to answer—suggesting that they may have wanted more detailed information to make a decision about an issue of this complexity.

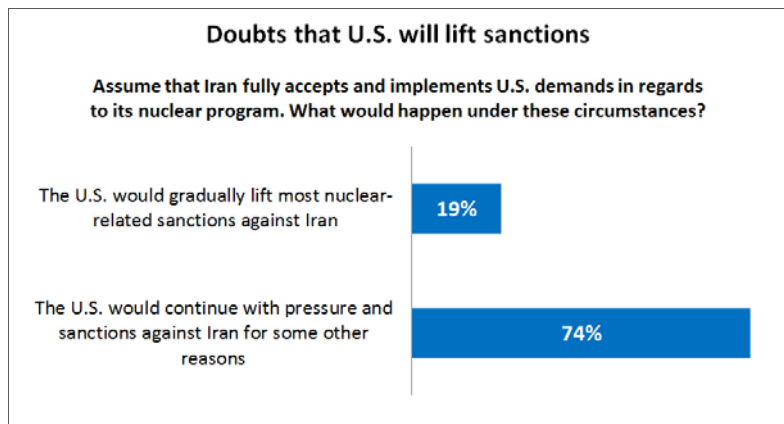
Mistrust and Doubts About Whether Sanctions Would Be Removed

Iranians generally express high levels of mistrust in the P5+1 countries. More germane, Iranians express high levels of doubt that the United States would remove sanctions, even if Iran were to meet U.S. demands in regard to its nuclear program. Three quarters say that the United States would find some other reason to impose sanctions. This view is related to the perception—held by three in four—that the main reason for the United States sanctioning Iran is not concern about nuclear weapons but some other motive. Asked what these other motives might be, Iranians most commonly respond that the United States seeks to dominate Iran or block its development. These feelings of mistrust and doubts are highly correlated with resistance to agreeing to confidence building measures in the nuclear negotiations.

Three in five Iranians feel little confidence in the P5+1 countries as a group. Only a third (34%) expresses any trust in the P5+1 countries (very much, 6%), while 62% express some distrust of them (very much, 30%).

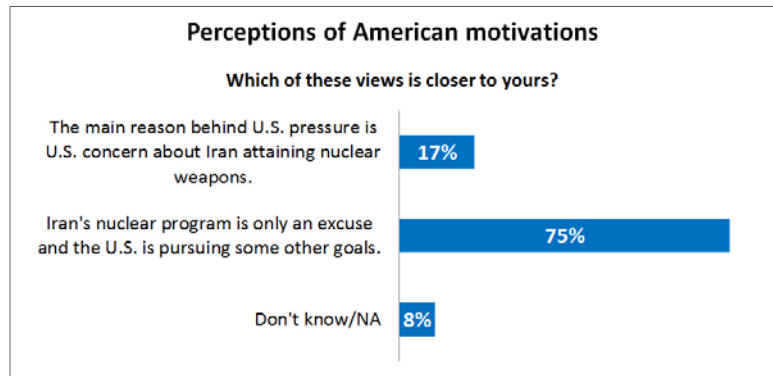
More specifically, many Iranians doubt that even full acceptance of U.S. demands regarding Iran’s nuclear program would really bring sanctions relief. This was evident in the responses to numerous questions that probed what level of trust Iranians feel in the negotiations process.

In one such question, respondents were told to “assume that Iran would fully accept and implement U.S. demands in regards to its nuclear program.” They were then asked whether they thought the U.S. would “gradually lift most nuclear-related sanctions against Iran,” or whether the U.S. would “continue the sanctions and the pressures...for some other reasons and excuses?” In response, three quarters say the U.S. would continue these sanctions for other reasons; just 19% thought the U.S. would gradually lift most of them. Only 7% did not answer, which is a low level of non-response for such a speculative question.



The mistrust and low expectations may be related to the perception—held by three in four—that the main reason for the United States to sanction Iran is not concern about proliferation, but some other motive. When asked which of two views is closer to their picture of U.S. concerns, three quarters (75%) choose the view that for the United States “Iran’s nuclear program is only an excuse.” Only 17% think “the main reason behind U.S. sanctions and pressures...is U.S. concerns about Iran attaining nuclear weapons.”

The 75% who think the main American motive is not Iran’s potential ability to develop nuclear weapons were then asked an open-ended question: “In your belief, what is the main goal the United States is pursuing?” Respondents could answer in their own words, however they wished. The most common responses were that the U.S. seeks to dominate Iran or block its development (amounting to 53% of replies). Another 11% think that the United States is trying to change Iran’s domestic political order.



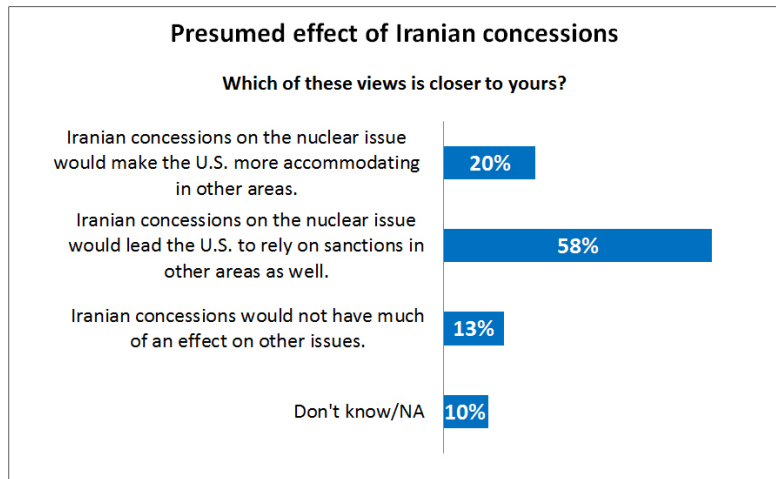
At a different point in the survey, respondents were asked about overall Iran-U.S. relations, and whether nuclear concessions by Iran might lead to U.S. accommodations in another area:

As you may know, Iran has many problems and differences with the United States, including with respect to the nuclear issue. In your opinion, if Iran were to provide

concessions on the nuclear issue in return for the reduction and the lifting of the sanctions:

- Is that more likely to make the United States more accommodating in other areas of contention?
- More likely to make the United States rely on pressures and sanctions to extract concessions from Iran in other areas as well?
- Or is it your opinion that Iran’s concession on the nuclear issue would not have much of an effect on other issues between the two countries?

A clear majority of 58% thinks that concessions in the nuclear area would make the U.S. more likely to rely on sanctions to get more Iranian concessions elsewhere. Only one in five (20%) think the U.S. would become more accommodating in other areas; 13% think it would not have much of an effect.



These feelings of mistrust and doubt are highly correlated with reluctance to agreeing to

confidence building measures in the nuclear negotiations. Just as an example, half (50%) of those who expressed mistrust say it is unacceptable to accept limits on Iran’s enriched uranium stockpile, while 36% of those expressing some trust felt this way. Also, fifty-three percent of those who expressed mistrust finds it unacceptable to stop improving the quality of centrifuges, while 40% of those expressing some trust feel this way. Interestingly, though, this tendency does not appear in the primary question of giving assurance never to produce nuclear weapons. Even a clear majority (58%) of those expressing mistrust consider this acceptable.

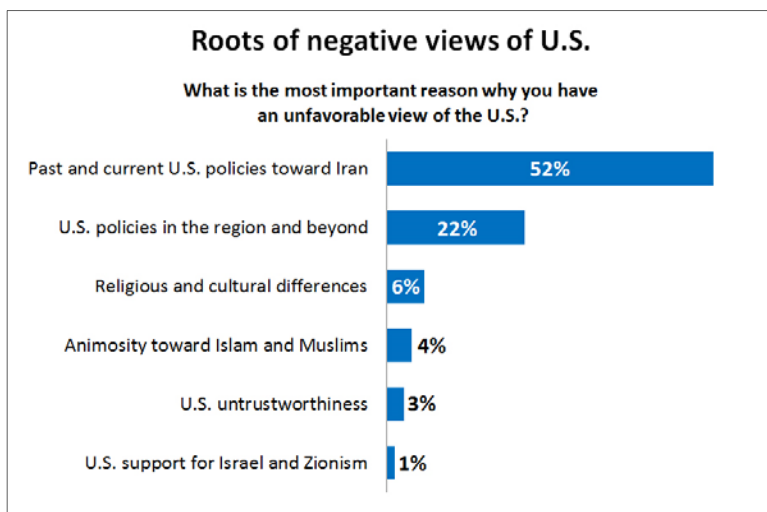
Relations with the United States

Views of the United States, especially the U.S. government, continue to be quite negative. These appear to be related to past and present U.S. policies toward Iran much more than cultural and religious differences. Nonetheless, large majorities favor making efforts to mitigate conflicts between Iran and the United States and support a variety of confidence building measures. A slight plurality has a positive view of the American people, and people-to-people confidence building measures are viewed even more positively. A majority thinks that it is possible for Islam and the West to find common ground.

Views of the United States in general remain negative, with seven in ten (71%) seeing it unfavorably and a majority (58%) very unfavorably. Only about a quarter (28%) views the U.S. favorably (very, 9%). In a poll of Iranians conducted by Gallup in 2002, 68% viewed the United State unfavorably (54% very). Also, a poll conducted by International Peace Institute (IPI) in 2010, revealed that 87% of Iranians viewed the United States unfavorably (72% very).

Even more negative are views of the U.S. government, which 84% of Iranians view unfavorably (70% very). This is up from 77% in a WorldPublicOpinion.org poll taken in 2009.

Those viewing the United States negatively were asked to give their most important reason in their own words. Of this group, most refer to present and past U.S. foreign policies toward Iran (52%) or other countries (22%); only 11% cite a religious or anti-Zionist reason.



Earlier periods of antagonism between the United States and the Islamic Republic remain lively in Iranians’ collective memory.

Respondents were asked whether, during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88, the United States provided support to Iraq, to Iran, or to neither one. Eighty-two percent correctly reply that the United States supported Iraq.

Respondents were asked about the shooting down in 1988 of an Iranian commercial airliner by a U.S. Navy guided missile cruiser; the United States says the plane was shot in the mistaken belief that it was a military aircraft. Given four options, a 60% majority says that “America definitely downed the airliner knowingly and intentionally,” with another 16% thinking this was probably the case. Only 14% put some credence in the U.S. account of events.

Iranians’ negativity toward U.S. policy extends to a widespread belief that the United States played an important role in Israel’s development of nuclear weapons. According to researchers Avner Cohen and William Burr, top officials in the Departments of Defense and State wanted the United States to try to stop Israel from making nuclear weapons with French aid, but President Nixon secretly told the Israeli leader that the United States would tacitly recognize the undeclared reality of Israeli nuclear weapons so long as Israel did not publicly acknowledge it.¹ Given four options, four in ten (40%) say it is their opinion that the United States provided nuclear weapons to Israel. Another third (33%) thinks the United States provided the needed know-how. Fourteen percent say the United States provided only political support, while 4% say “the U.S. did not play much of a role.”

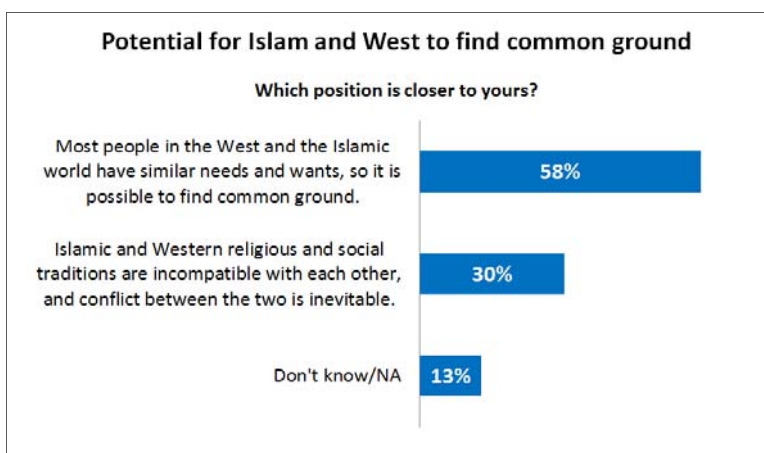
¹ Avner Cohen and William Burr, “Don’t Like that Israel has the Bomb? Blame Nixon,” *Foreign Policy* (September 12, 2014).

Support for Mitigating Tensions

Despite this strong background of distrust, majorities are interested in trying to mitigate the tensions between United States and Iran. Sixty-nine percent say they are of the opinion “that Iran and the United States should strive to mitigate the conflict and the differences between the two countries” (a lot 38%, somewhat 31%).

Offered a range of potential confidence-building measures, majorities support them all. The most popular are those with the strongest people-to-people aspects, notably “to provide more access for each other’s journalists” (81% support) and “to have more Americans and Iranians visit each other’s countries as tourists” (80% support). Similarly, 75% support having “greater cultural, education and sporting exchanges,” and 69% support greater trade. Lastly, two thirds (66%) support measures “for the governments to have direct talks on issues of mutual concern.” Opposition to any of these proposals does not rise above 28%.

The widespread support for people-to-people steps to improve relations is partly reflected in Iranians’ attitudes toward the American people, which are warmer than views of the country or its government. Fifty percent have a favorable attitude toward the American people (12% very, 38% somewhat) while 45% have an unfavorable attitude (16% somewhat, 29% very).



Furthermore, as a broader principle, a clear majority thinks that it is possible for Islam to find common ground with the West. Respondents were offered a choice between two positions about the relations between Islamic civilization and Western civilization:

- Islamic and Western religious and social traditions are incompatible with each other and conflict between the two is inevitable; or
- Most people in the West and the Islamic world have similar needs and wants, so it is possible to find common ground.

Respondents were asked which position was closer to their own. A 58% majority choose the second position, that it is possible to find common ground. Less than a third (30%) choose the position that conflict is inevitable. This result is similar to the response in December 2006, when this exact question wording was originally asked to an Iranian sample. At that time 54% said it was possible to find common ground, while 24% said conflict was inevitable. Iranians are somewhat more likely than Americans to think that people in the West and the Islamic world can find common ground. When asked the same question a few weeks earlier, 52% of Americans

though that it was possible to find common ground while 46% thought that conflict between the two traditions is inevitable.

Views of President Rouhani

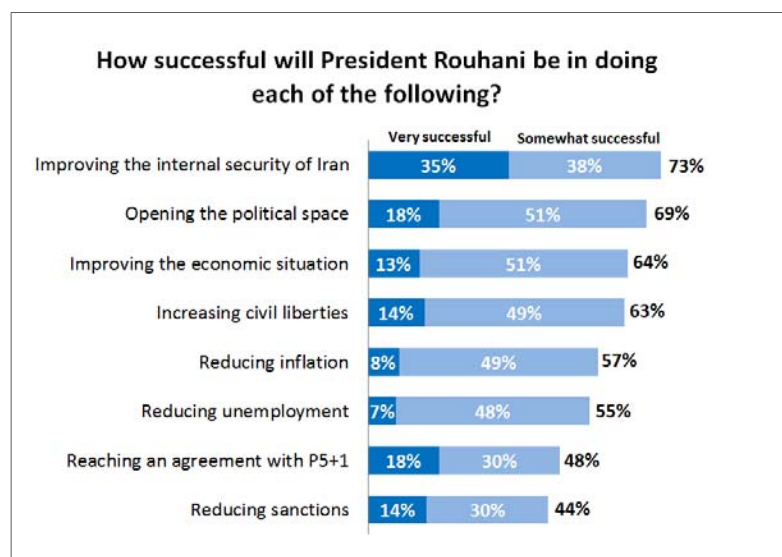
President Rouhani receives very positive ratings. His foreign minister Zarif also gets positive ratings, suggesting support for Iran’s foreign policy under President Rouhani. Large majorities see Rouhani as having improved the economy. They express optimism that he can further improve the economy, Iran’s internal security situation, and civil liberties. Views are divided on his ability to reach an agreement on the nuclear issue and reduce sanctions. Support for government being guided by religious principles continues to get overwhelming support.

President Rouhani is viewed positively by a very large majority. His political credit with the public exceeds that of six other political figures who were also tested. The second most popular among the seven asked about is Mohammad Javad Zarif, Rouhani’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, suggesting support for Iran’s foreign policy under President Rouhani. Interestingly, the third most popular is ex-president Ahmadinejad.

Eighty-five percent of Iranians have a favorable opinion of President Rouhani, with 51% saying they view him very favorably. His foreign affairs minister Javad Zarif is also popular, with 70% holding a favorable opinion of him (40%, very).

Among political figures who have opposed or competed with Rouhani, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf—who came in second in the 2013 election for president and is the mayor of Tehran—does well, with 64% holding a favorable opinion. Ali Akbar Velayati, the foreign policy advisor to Supreme Leader Khamenei who placed fifth in the 2013 election, is viewed favorably by a slight majority (52%), while 27% have an unfavorable view of him. Saeed Jalili, the conservative who placed third in the 2013 election, gets a 44% favorable rating, with 29% viewing him unfavorably. Mohsen Rezayi, another conservative politician who ran fourth in the 2013 election, garners 44% favorable opinions, while 33% were unfavorable.

At the time of the survey, President Rouhani had been in office for about one year. A notably high 68% say he has been successful “in improving the economic situation of our country” during that year. Sixty-four percent think Rouhani will be successful in continuing this



improvement, while only 34% think he will be unsuccessful.

Asked in more detail, 55% think Rouhani will be successful in reducing unemployment (unsuccessful, 38%). A similar 57% think he would succeed in bringing down inflation; 40% think this will be unsuccessful.

In other policy areas, seven in ten (73%) think Rouhani will succeed in “improving the security situation of our country” (very successful, 35%). In internal affairs, 69% think he will succeed in “opening the political space in our country,” and 63% think he will succeed in “increasing civil liberties.”

This strong optimism about the new president does not extend to matters related to the nuclear issue. As mentioned above, about half (48%) thinks Rouhani will succeed in “reaching an agreement with P5+1 countries regarding our country’s nuclear issue,” (43% disagree) and a similar 45% expect success in “reducing sanctions,” while a majority (51%) disagree.

Support for government being guided by religious principles continues to be a point of consensus in the Iranian public, with 80% saying this should happen “a lot” (44%) or “somewhat” (36%). Among Rouhani supporters, support for this principle is just as high.

Iraq

In the context of the current conflict between Iraq and ISIS, a substantial majority favors Iran providing support to the Iraqi government. Nonetheless, views are divided about whether Iran should cooperate with the United States to help counter ISIS. Asked about the primary cause of the current instability, more blame the United States and Western powers than factors internal to Iraq.

The great majority of Iranians have some information about the current turmoil in Iraq. Asked how much they have heard about this unrest, 83% say they have heard at least some, and a third (32%) say they have heard a lot. Only 17% have not heard much (9%) or nothing at all (8%). (The 8% who has heard nothing at all were excluded from further questions on Iraq, but the percentages reported below are of the whole sample.)

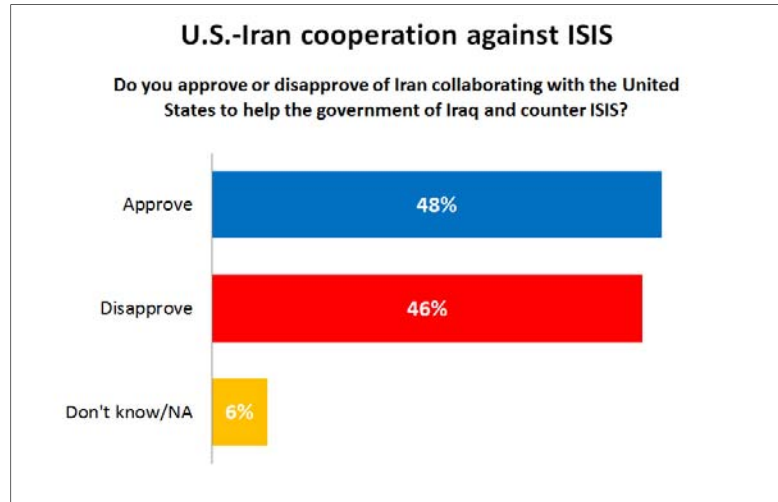
A large majority thinks their government should lend its support to the government of Iraq. Offered the choice of supporting Iraq’s government, staying “completely neutral,” or supporting groups that opposed the government, 64% want Iran to support Iraq’s government, while about a quarter (23%) want a neutral stance (support opposing groups, 1%). This is consistent with the majority’s positive view of Iraq. Sixty-three percent has a favorable opinion of Iraq (30% very favorable); about a third (36%) has an unfavorable opinion (very, 21%).

The rise of ISIS has led to much discussion in the United States as to whether the United States and Iran should coordinate their help to the Iraqi government. Iranian respondents were asked to think about this prospect in the following question:

As you may know, ISIS has brought under its control large sections of Iraq's territory. Iran and the United States have both declared that they will support the legitimate government of Iraq in order to preserve Iraq's territorial integrity and counter ISIS. To what degree would you approve or disapprove Iran and the United States collaborating with one another to help the legitimate government of Iraq and counter ISIS?

The response is closely divided. Forty-eight percent approve of collaborating with the United States (20% strongly), but 46% disapprove (27% strongly).

It is interesting to compare this with a February 2008 question, asked while U.S. troops were still present in force in Iraq. At that time 69% approved of “having talks with the U.S. on trying to stabilize the situation in Iraq,” while 21% disapproved.



It is also noteworthy that when the American public was asked a similar question, six in ten (62%) favored U.S.-Iran cooperation in Iraq, while only a third (35%) opposed it.

There is no majority view among Iranians as to the primary cause for Iraq’s current distress, but more blame U.S. or Western powers than factors internal to Iraq. Asked in an open-ended question, “Who or what do you think is most to blame for the current unrest,” 45% blame the U.S., Israel, or Western powers generally, 17% blame causes internal to Iraq, 15% blame ISIS and hostile Baathist groups, and 6% blame Arab countries and foreign intervention into Iraq.

Syria

A large majority of the Iranian public has a favorable view of Syria, and a majority approves of providing support to the Syrian government. A slight majority blames the U.S. or Western powers for the current unrest there and only a small number blamed factors internal to Syria.

Three in four Iranians (75%) have a favorable view of Syria, with a third (32%) saying “very favorable.” The great majority has some familiarity with recent Syrian events. Asked “How much have you heard about the unrest in Syria?” 84% say they have heard some (50%) or a lot (34%). (Those who had heard nothing at all—8%—were excluded from further questions on Syria, but the percentages reported below are of the whole sample.)

A majority approves of providing support to the Syrian government. Offered three choices, 57% think Iran should “support the Syrian government.” About a quarter (27%) think Iran should “stay completely neutral” (support opposing groups, 2%).

Asked “Who or what do you think is most to blame for the current unrest,” 62% blame U.S., Israel, or Western powers generally, while 19% blame internal causes such as Assad’s government (9%), internecine or religious conflicts (5%), or extremist groups including ISIS (5%). Another 4% blame Arab countries.

Views of Other Countries

While views of Iran’s Muslim neighbors, Iraq and Syria, are quite favorable, views of Turkey are more modestly favorable. Views of China and Russia lean to the favorable. Western countries are viewed unfavorably, with Britain and the U.S. viewed unfavorably by large majorities, and lesser majorities being negative toward Germany and France.

Iranians hold quite positive views of Syria and Iraq. Three quarters (75%) view Syria favorably (32% very favorably). Only 23% view it unfavorably (11% very unfavorably).

Almost two thirds (63%) have a favorable view of Iraq (30% very). A third (36%) disagree, and 21% have a very unfavorable view.

A less robust majority is positive toward Turkey. Fifty-six percent has a favorable view of Turkey, and only 13% views it very favorably. Forty-two percent see Turkey unfavorably (24% very).

Among the non-Muslim countries, China and Russia get the most positive reception. A slim majority of 51% has a favorable view of China (13% very); however, 46% disagree (25% very unfavorable). Ratings for Russia are similar, with 51% favorable (14% very) and 47% unfavorable (26% very).

Germany gets the best score among Western countries. While a 53% majority view Germany unfavorably (28% very), a notable 44% are positive (13% very). France gets a distinctly worse reception, as three in five (59%) hold an unfavorable view (33% very) and only 37% are positive toward it (7% very).

As discussed above, seven in ten has an unfavorable view of the United States (71%), with 58% very unfavorable. About a quarter (28%) are positive (9% very). Interestingly, negativity toward the U.S. is slightly outdistanced by negativity toward Britain, the most prominent imperial power in Iranians’ historical memory. Seventy-four percent has an unfavorable view of the UK (52% very), and 24% a favorable view (6% very).

To view the full survey questionnaire, visit www.cissm.umd.edu.