

The Raisi Period: Iranian Public Attitudes on Domestic Issues

A public opinion study | June 2024



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The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) at the University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy conducts research, education, and outreach about how powerful trends associated with globalization are affecting international security. It focuses on strategies to increase international cooperation, especially where powerful technologies—with both beneficial and dangerous uses—are becoming widely available to states and non-state actors. To learn more about CISSM, visit www.cissm.umd.edu.

Methodology: The authors of this report are solely responsible for survey design and analysis. The report is based on two probability-sample nationally representative telephone surveys. The fieldwork for the first survey was fielded by IranPoll® in early 2023 (February 11 – March 9, 2023), among a representative sample of 1,011 Iranians. The fieldwork for the second survey was fielded by IranPoll® a year later, (March 8-18, 2024), among a representative sample of 1,009 Iranians. Both surveys’ margin of error is +/-3.1%.

The samples were RDD samples drawn from all landline telephones in Iran. In the March 2023 wave, mobile phone numbers were also called in a ratio that yielded 25% of the final sample. The samples were stratified first by Iranian provinces and then in accordance to settlement size and type. All 31 Iranian provinces were represented in proportions similar to their actual populations, as were rural and urban areas. 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 randomly selected respondents. All of the interviews were conducted using computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI). All interviews were monitored in real-time by call-center supervisors. Further details about the data collection methodology is available here: <https://www.iranpoll.com/method>.

For the March 2023 survey, the AAPOR1 contact rate of the survey was 81%, the cooperation rate was 57%, and the overall response rate AAPOR1 was 46%. For the March 2024 survey, the AAPOR1 contact rate was 77%, the cooperation rate was 67%, and the overall response rate was 52%.

The analyses provided in the report are based on the unweighted samples and, unless specified otherwise, the results are based on the full sample for the date under consideration at that point in the text.

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Previous CISSM reports on Iranian public opinion, questionnaires and related articles, are at: https://cissm.umd.edu/researchimpact/projects/security-cooperation-iran-challenges-and-opportunities#iran_surveys

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Introduction

The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) has been conducting in-depth surveys of Iranian public opinion on nuclear issues, regional security, economics, domestic politics, and other topics since the summer of 2014. Each survey includes a combination of trend-line questions, some going as far back as 2006, and new questions written to assess and inform current policy debates.

We most recently published a full report near the start of President Ebrahim Raisi's administration in September 2021. In July 2022 we released a less comprehensive update covering new data we had collected on two unfolding security challenges – Iran's nuclear program and the war in Ukraine – and their potential interconnections. Soon thereafter, protests arose across Iran partly in response to the death in police custody of Mahsa Ahmini, a young Kurdish woman arrested for improper dress, and partly due to other sources of popular discontent. Given this highly charged context, we postponed fielding a new survey until late winter 2023 and took more time to analyze the findings than we typically do before releasing a report. By the time that analysis was finished in late 2023, we felt it was important to have fresh data on the trendline questions and to write new questions about unfolding events, such as the war in Gaza that started in October of that year. We fielded that survey in March 2024, shortly after Iran's most recent parliamentary election and before President Raisi died in a helicopter crash in May. Confronted with the need to collect yet another wave of new data to capture the presidential election, we decided to divide all of our survey results since September 2021 into two reports. The first of these focuses on domestic issues during the Raisi administration. The second encompasses public attitudes toward domestic and foreign policy issues facing President Masoud Pezeshkian during his early months in office. In addition to data from March 2023 and March 2024 not included in the first report, the second report also has findings from a survey fielded in September 2024.

"The Raisi Period: Iranian Public Attitudes on Domestic Issues" covers some of the findings from our March 2023 and March 2024 survey waves. Results of questions asked in 2024 are described in the present tense to provide a snapshot of the public mood in the months before President Raisi's death. Findings from questions asked in the first wave but not the second are in the past tense to capture attitudes in the middle of the Raisi administration when the massive protests were waning.

Comparing the new data to findings from the survey fielded at the beginning of the Raisi administration shows more continuity than change, despite the major protests during the middle of the Raisi period. Economic views were very negative when Hassan Rouhani left office, due to the covid-19 pandemic and the reimposition of sanctions after the United States withdrew from the nuclear deal reached with Iran and five other countries in 2015. In September 2021, about two-thirds of Iranians expressed confidence that the new president could improve the economy in various ways, while three-quarters expressed overall confidence that Raisi would fulfil his campaign promises. We found no significant improvement in economic attitudes during Raisi's time in office, faltering assessments of democracy in Iran, and growing opposition to strict social policies, such as enforcement of the hijab mandate and limits on social media. Raisi's popularity and confidence in his leadership declined during his term from their post-inauguration highs.

What stands out most from our questions about the protests is that different segments of Iranian society had divergent views of the main motivation driving social unrest in 2023, while there is greater consensus a year later. In 2023, we asked respondents to say in their own words what the protests were about. A small plurality of 37% said they were about economic issues, while 29% saw demands for greater freedom. More Iranians (14%) thought the protestors had emotional or anarchic motivations than said they sought a change in Iran's system of government (9%). We found stark, and somewhat surprising gender differences in these perceptions. In 2024, we asked respondents a broader closed-option question about the main motivation for the many protests that had occurred over the past decade. Two-thirds said they were to demand that officials pay greater attention to people's problems, while slightly more than 10% chose to change Iran's system of government, and slightly less than 10% said to demand greater freedoms. Contrary to perceptions that the major 2022-23 protests were qualitatively different from previous rounds of social unrest, answers on this question are close to those we got in 2021.

It is worth recalling that the 2022-23 protests had different aspects in different parts of Iran. Issues of women's rights, plus basic challenges to the political system, were prominent in Tehran and some other cities, while in some regions the concerns of ethnic minorities or ongoing labor struggles were equally or more prominent. Since our surveys are random samples of the entire nation, it is understandable that views of the protests' meanings were not very uniform.

This report includes deeper analysis on topics of particular importance. We are frequently asked whether Iranians feel free to answer our questions honestly, so we asked this directly and tested for it indirectly. A third say Iranians are comfortable voicing political opinions, 23% said they were afraid to do so, and 40% said they were somewhere in between. We then tested for variance in responses when we asked several sensitive political questions directly and also included them in a list experiment, which by design provides respondents with complete anonymity. The differences were surprisingly small. For example, asked directly, 13% of Iranians say they expect fundamental political change in the next 10 years and 15% say that they agree with protestors' demands for fundamental political change. When we included an item about fundamental political change in a list experiment, our analysis indicated that 17% think that is true.

We found that asking whether Iranians feel comfortable voicing political opinions tells us more about the person answering the question than it does about how fearful Iranians actually are. To learn more about opposition attitudes in Iran, we analyzed numerous explanations for attitudinal differences in the 2023 data, including gender, age, income, education, and cell phone versus landline uses. However, none of these demographic variables showed sharp differences across a range of politically sensitive questions. The best predictor of opposition attitudes turned out to be the belief that other Iranians are afraid to voice their political opinions. The 24% who expressed this belief gave responses that were from 25 to 43 points different from those of the full sample on 24 questions in our survey, including never denying access to social networks, following VOA and BBC, lacking confidence in Raisi and other politicians, and wanting to emigrate. They were also much more negative about treatment of women and economic conditions, four times more likely to say they had engaged in protests, and much more sympathetic to the protestors' demands.

Another methodological experiment involved collecting a quarter of our 2023 sample from cell phone users rather than landline users to see whether landline-only samples were likely to have biased results. Contrary to the common belief that respondents reached via cell phone are qualitatively different from those reached by landline, we found only two significant differences in any of the attitudinal and demographic questions asked. This gave us confidence to go back to landline-only samples for the 2024 surveys.

Summary of Findings

1. Information Access and Habits (p. 10)

A large majority say they follow the news. Attention to news increased from 2018 to 2023, then returned to the earlier level in March 2024. Domestic television channels remain Iranians' most frequent source of news, followed closely by social networks. Fewer now say they use social networks "a lot," but overall participation appears stable. Opposition to government controls on social media has significantly intensified. The audience for VOA and BBC remains at about one in five adults.

2. Iran's Economic Situation (p. 11)

A majority view Iran's economic situation as very bad, and a larger majority say it is getting worse. Asked to name the country's single most important problem, half mention some aspect of the economy, plus another one in ten who mention the sanctions. A majority continues to see domestic mismanagement and corruption as a stronger factor than the sanctions. Four in five think that US sanctions have had a negative impact on the economy, and even more think the sanctions have hurt ordinary people. About four in ten respondents reported they had a job, either full or part-time. A majority report their family's consumption of red meat has diminished over the last twelve months.

3. Subjective Well-Being, Discontent, and Desire to Emigrate (p. 13)

A majority describe their household's situation in March 2024 as difficult or very hard. Four in ten say they can get by; only one in twenty feel they are doing better than that.

In 2023, over half said they experienced a lot of both worry and enjoyment during a lot of the previous day, while slightly over a third said they felt a lot of sadness. These levels were no different than in 2021. A modest majority thought that they were better off than their parents had been at the same age. Asked whether today's children, when they grow up, will be better off financially than their parents, a plurality thought that they will.

In 2023 almost a quarter said that, given the opportunity, they would like to emigrate (one third among those under 25). Two thirds of those who said so cited economic reasons.

4. Women's Situation (p. 15)

A clear majority thinks that women who do not wear the hijab should not be confronted. This includes many who think that it would be better if women observed the Hijab in public but should not be confronted if they do not, as well as those who think women should have liberty in

what they wear. Almost two thirds reject a recent practice of police treating a lack of hijab observance as a traffic violation.

In 2023 a majority said that the Guidance Patrol should cease operations; three in five thought that, at the least, it should correct its methods. A clear majority thought that most who were arrested in peaceful protests where slogans were chanted against the hijab should be released. A modest majority of women thought that women in Iran are treated with respect and dignity, but over four in ten disagreed. Among men, six in ten thought this, but over a third disagreed. Asked whether they personally were “treated with respect all day” yesterday, nine in ten of both women and men said yes.

Most Iranians were still unfamiliar in 2023 with the long-delayed Majlis bill regarding violence against women. Of those who had heard something about it, four fifths supported passage—basically the same as in 2021.

5. Views of Democracy and Politicians (p. 18)

Three in five Iranians call it absolutely important to live in a country that is governed democratically. Asked how democratically governed Iran is, with “10” as the highest score, the mean rank is in the middle—5.4—slightly down from 2023. Only a third believe that people in Iran feel comfortable voicing their political opinions, but only a quarter say people are afraid—the rest think people are somewhere in between. About three in four expect Iran’s constitution and political system to be about the same in ten years. Although the minority that disagrees grew from 2021 to 2023, it has not grown further in the last twelve months. One in six agree with some protesters’ calls for the Islamic Republic to be replaced with another form of government. Up to one in five expect the system will undergo significant changes within ten years. If only one thing could change about Iran, a slight majority would pick greater economic prosperity over other values.

Among politicians, the late President Raisi’s favorability rating had declined from mid-2022 on, but three fifths still viewed him favorably two months before his death, with a quarter viewing him very favorably. Ghalibaf, the speaker in Parliament, also has declining popularity—now a slim majority views him favorably. Zarif, the past foreign minister, is at the same slight-majority level.

Two months before his death, majorities still have confidence in Raisi’s ability to fulfill various campaign promises by the end of his term, but overall confidence and confidence regarding specific campaign promises is much lower than when he took office.

6. Attitudes toward Protests (p. 23)

Asked in 2024 to think in general about waves of demonstrations over the past ten years, two thirds say their main objective was to demand that officials pay greater attention to people’s problems, while one in five think their main objective was either to demand greater freedoms, or

to bring about change in Iran's system of government. Nearly three in five think the demonstrations have been increasing in frequency—more than thought so in 2021. While only a third think this trend will continue over the next five years, this is up from one quarter in 2021.

Asked why they think most protests over time have been contained, a majority points to the issue of popular support, saying either that there was not enough, or that most Iranians actually opposed the protests. About one in six say that government violence quelled the protests; only one in 20, that the government satisfied protesters' demands.

Asked how they felt about various complaints and demands voiced by protestors, public agreement has increased for three of them since 2023. Three in five now think the government should not be strict in enforcing Islamic laws (distinctly up from 2018). An overwhelming majority think the government should do more to control food prices, and three quarters say the government is not doing enough to help the poor. Support for demands that the government should fight corruption has been consistently near-unanimous since 2018. The percentage endorsing complaints about government interference in people's personal lives increased from 2018 to 2023, then stabilized. Support for fundamental regime change has remained steady, around 16% since 2018.

In 2023, asked in different modes whether they had participated in the protests or not, fewer than one in 20 said yes (this would indicate a pool of around 3 million adults). About one in six said they admired those who had participated.

In spring 2023, the public had no shared image of what the protests were about. Asked to reply in their own words, over a third said the protests were about economic grievances. About three in ten said the protests were about women's freedoms or wider freedoms in general. One in ten said the protesters sought a change in Iran's system of government. The remainder mostly gave critical characterizations. Half rejected claims that the protests were inspired from abroad, but the rest gave this some degree of credence.

In spring 2023, a majority perceived that the protests were on the whole more violent than they were peaceful. Majorities thought that most peaceful protesters who were arrested should be released. For those who used violence against property or police, or who armed themselves and blockaded roads, substantial majorities supported prosecution and punishments.

7. The March 2024 Parliamentary Election (p. 31)

A majority did not vote in the first round of the election for the Majlis, while a little over four in ten did. The most frequent reason for not voting, given by almost half of non-voters, was a general distrust of the candidates and officialdom more broadly. Another fifth of non-voters say they did not vote because the Majlis cannot fix the economy.

Among those who voted, just under half think the candidates they voted for generally identified as supporters of President Raisi, whatever their political tendency. Over four in ten think their candidates were running as independents, substantially more than principalists or reformists.

A quarter find it hard to locate the candidates they supported on the political spectrum. In the public as a whole, about one in ten could name a person they had wanted to vote for whose candidacy had been rejected by the Guardian Council.

A majority have some confidence that the next Majlis can help Iran move in the right direction; over four in ten do not. A modest majority believe that government officials do not care what people like themselves think. As in the past, three quarters feel that policymakers should take religious teachings into account when they make decisions. About half think some or more policymakers do this; over a third say only a few do so.

The four in ten who did vote were more likely to be older compared to non-voters. Voters are more inclined to feel that officials care what ordinary people think, and that ordinary people feel comfortable in Iran voicing their opinions. They are also more likely to perceive protests as simply a regular recurrence, while non-voters see them as a rising curve.

8. ATTITUDINAL GROUP: Those who Believe Other Iranians are Afraid to Voice Their Political Opinions (p. 35)

In 2023 a quarter of Iranians perceived people in their country as afraid to voice their political opinions. This perception was the most powerful indicator of opposition attitudes—more so than age or media preferences (though these were significant), and far more so than other factors tested. This subgroup was more negative about specific politicians; more likely to say they would leave Iran permanently, given the opportunity; more likely to say women are not treated with respect in Iran; and more likely to view the 2022-23 protests as mostly peaceful.

Methodological Note (p. 40)

1. Information Access and Habits

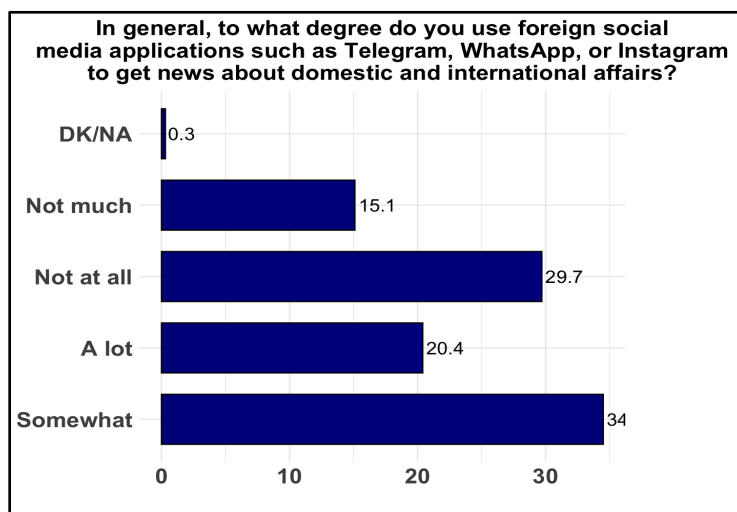
A large majority say they follow the news. Attention to news increased from 2018 to 2023, then returned to the earlier level in March 2024. Domestic television channels remain Iranians’ most frequent source of news, followed closely by social networks. Fewer now say they use social networks “a lot,” but overall participation appears stable. Opposition to government controls on social media has significantly intensified. The audience for VOA and BBC remains at about one in five adults.

The media landscape is important in shaping Iranians’ opinions, so it is relevant to start there. Iranians’ media habits differentiate what they are aware of. There are areas of overlap, though, such that Iranians do not fall into sharply separated camps based on their media use.

Twenty percent in 2024 say that they follow the news “a lot,” and another 51% do somewhat. This is down from March 2023 (25% and 54% respectively), suggesting that around ten percent have ‘tuned out’ relative to attention levels in the aftermath of the country-wide protests that broke out in fall 2022 after the death of Mahsa Amini, involving women’s issues, and in some areas labor and minority issues as well. When respondents were asked about following domestic news in January 2018, 19% said they followed it a lot and 51% somewhat. This indicates that the public’s appetite for news was elevated in 2023, then returned to its prior level.

A majority (55%) use social networking applications (like Telegram, Whatsapp, Instagram and the domestic Baleh, Rubika and Ita) as news sources, with 35% using them “somewhat” and 20% “a lot.” This is down from 60% in 2023, and from levels in the 63-66% range from 2018 to 2021.

In March 2024, 63% strongly oppose continuation of limits and filters imposed on social messaging apps, up from 60% the previous year. In March 2023, 41% said that the government should never close down Internet social media networks, up from 33% in September 2021.



Social media has not significantly reduced the audience for domestic television channels in recent years. In the 2023 poll, three in four (74%) watched state television to get news. This level had been stable since 2021 (“a lot,” 29%, “somewhat,” 45%), albeit lower than 2018 (“a lot,” 36%, “somewhat,” 47%). Consequently, government-controlled channels continue to remain among the news sources that Iranians use.

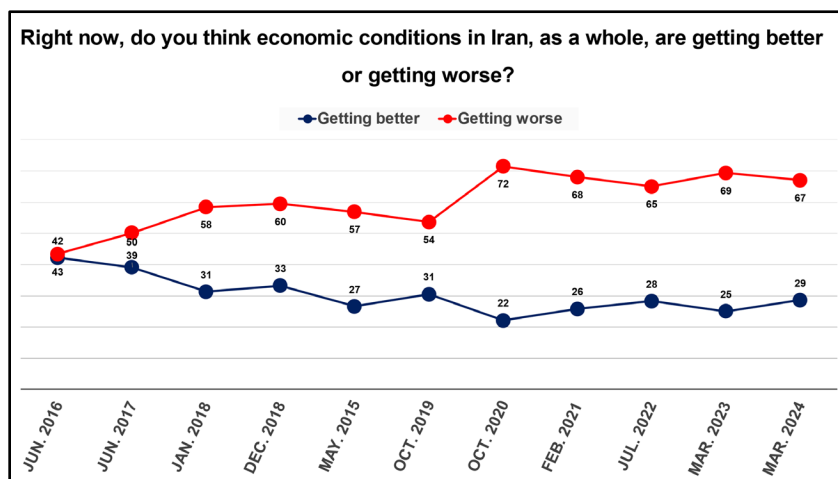
Use of satellite television channels was limited in 2023 to about a quarter of the public (6% “a lot,” 21% “somewhat”). This has been stable since 2018. A similar share use BBC or Voice of America (currently 20%; this has been very stable since 2021 (there are no differences by age).

Women and men have slightly different patterns in consuming information. In 2023, 24% of women said they watched domestic television “a lot,” compared to 34% of men. Women also watched satellite channels slightly less. Men and women were about the same on social media use –58% of men and 62% of women used these a lot or somewhat. For BBC or Voice of America, 17% of women followed these news sources compared to 26% of men.

2. Iran’s Economic Situation

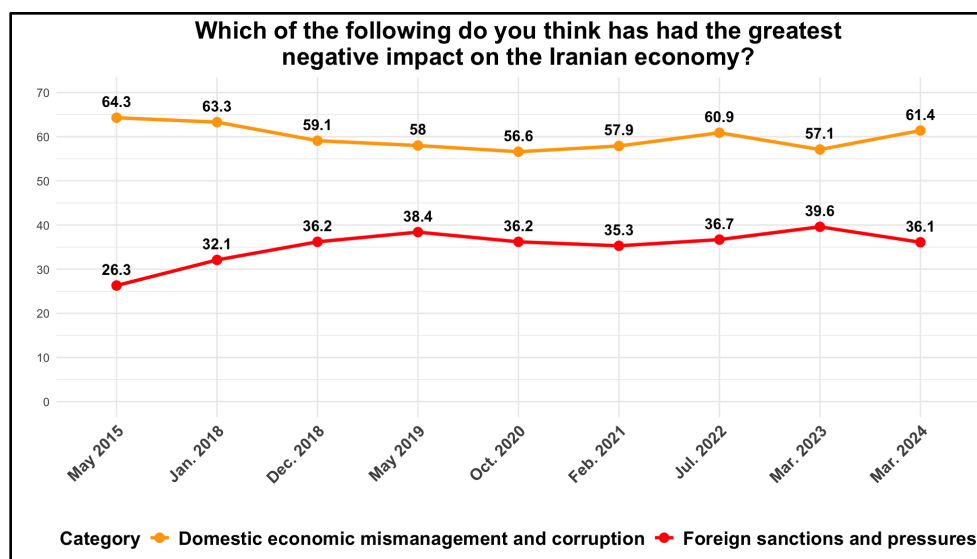
A majority view Iran’s economic situation as very bad, and a larger majority say it is getting worse. Asked to name the country’s single most important problem, half mention some aspect of the economy, plus another one in ten who mention the sanctions. A majority continues to see domestic mismanagement and corruption as a stronger factor than the sanctions. Four in five think that US sanctions have had a negative impact on the economy, and even more think the sanctions have hurt ordinary people. About four in ten respondents reported they had a job, either full or part-time. A majority report their family’s consumption of red meat has diminished over the last twelve months.

Asked “how good or bad is our country’s economic situation?” seven in ten (70%, down from 73% in 2023) call it bad, and a majority (52%) call it very bad. These proportions have been quite stable since 2020, as are the numbers saying the economy is getting worse—currently 67%. A quarter (27%) see improvement, and have since 2020. In 2023, those over 55 were, comparatively, more sanguine about Iran’s economy. Forty percent of this group thought the economy was improving, compared with 16-19% of those under 45.



Respondents were asked to say in their own words: “What do you think is the single most important problem or challenge that Iran currently faces?” Half (50%) offer some type of economic issue, even with sanctions left out of the tally. If sanctions (11%) are included, then 61% give some kind of economic reply, including inflation (23%), poor living conditions and poverty (10%), unemployment (7%), housing problems (2%), and others. These responses are very similar to 2023, with no factor mentioned growing or decreasing beyond 2-3 points.

Mismanagement and corruption are also an important theme, named in various ways by 26% (up 3 points from 2023). Ranking a distant third (11%) are sanctions. Even if sanctions are added to all mentions of foreign pressure or persuasion (sanctions 11%, Iran's foreign relations 0.3%, influence of foreign media 0.3%) they make up only 12% of answers (down from 14% in 2023). Protests, injustices, discrimination, or general dissatisfaction are referred to by 4% – about the same as in 2023.

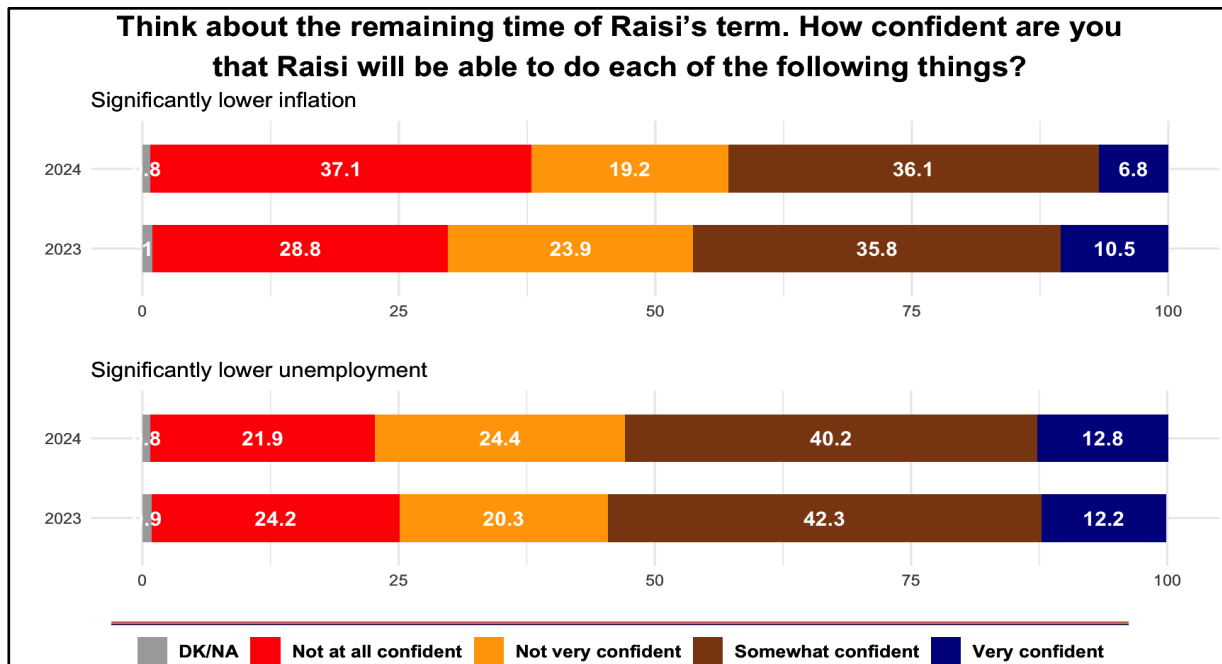


Consistent with these results, in a separate question an increasing majority (61%, up 4 points) see domestic mismanagement and corruption as a more potent factor than sanctions (36%) in the economy's problems. This question, asked since 2015, has always shown sanctions as the less important factor, but in 2023 a high of 40% named sanctions. Interestingly, in 2023 only those with low incomes had a majority (52%) seeing sanctions as more important. All those with more income (4 million tomans monthly household income and higher) saw sanctions as secondary to domestic mismanagement (35-37%).

In 2024, only four in ten (39%) of respondents say they are employed –25% full-time and 15% part time. In 2023, 39% also reported employment, but there may have been a slight shift since toward full-time (up 3 points). In 2023, far more men were employed than women: 59% of men had jobs, though just 36% of them were working full time. Among women, only 20% had any type of job (full-time, 9%). A majority of women (53%) described themselves as housewives. Similar numbers of men and women (14-15%) described themselves as not employed.

A 55% majority reported in 2023 that their household was eating less red meat than the year before (27% “decreased a lot”). Only 42% said their consumption was about the same, down from 47% in 2021.

Two months before the late President Raisi's death in May 2024, over four in ten (43%) had some confidence that he could significantly reduce inflation and unemployment, but less than one in ten felt very confident. Forty-three percent thought he could reduce inflation –down from 46% in 2023 and 73% after he was elected. Fifty-three percent hoped he could lower unemployment.



3. Subjective Well-Being, Discontent, and Desire to Emigrate

A majority describe their household's situation in March 2024 as difficult or very hard. Four in ten say they can get by; only one in twenty feel they are doing better than that.

In 2023, over half said they experienced a lot of both worry and enjoyment during a lot of the previous day, while slightly over a third said they felt a lot of sadness. These levels were no different than in 2021. A modest majority thought that they were better off than their parents had been at the same age. Asked whether today's children, when they grow up, will be better off financially than their parents, a plurality thought that they will.

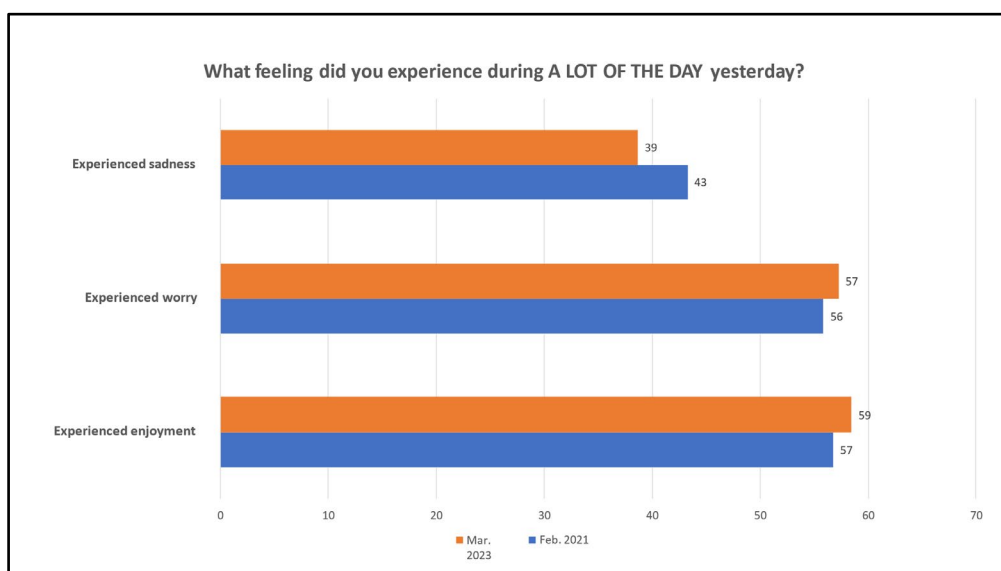
In 2023 almost a quarter said that, given the opportunity, they would like to emigrate (one third among those under 25). Two thirds of those who said so cited economic reasons.

Respondents were asked to rate subjectively "the economic and financial situation of your household" and given five descriptions to choose from. Two described prosperity: "We live comfortably and can buy most of the things we want," or "We do not face any particular economic or financial problems." The middle option described an adequate situation, but with uncertainty for the future: "We just get by with our current financial situation." The last two described deprivation experiences: "Life is difficult with our current financial situation," or "Life is very hard with our current financial situation."

Only 5% choose either of the prosperous descriptions ("We live comfortably...", 2%). Four in ten (39%) choose adequacy, the middle option. A 55% majority choose one of the deprivation experiences: "Life is difficult...", 30%, or "Life is very hard...", 25%. (It should be recalled that these are subjective ratings; they are unlikely to always align clearly with other demographic questions, such as income.) This question was also asked in 2023 and shows remarkably stable responses, suggesting stagnation in the economy for consumers and workers. Despite the many

collective troubles Iranians experienced during the covid pandemic and into 2023, there were few indications that how people felt had changed significantly since then.

Our February 2021 survey asked for the first time a number of questions about well-being that have long been asked internationally. The 2023 wave of this survey repeated some of them. Asked “Did you experience the following feelings during a lot of the day yesterday?” 58% said they had experienced enjoyment, while 41% said they hadn’t. A similar level (57%) said they had experienced worry, while 42% said they had not. Both of these results were not statistically different from those of 2021. Asked about sadness, 39% said they had experienced sadness during a lot of the day, while 60% said they had not. This finding was slightly more upbeat than 2021, when 43% said they had experienced sadness and 57% said they had not, though the difference was small.

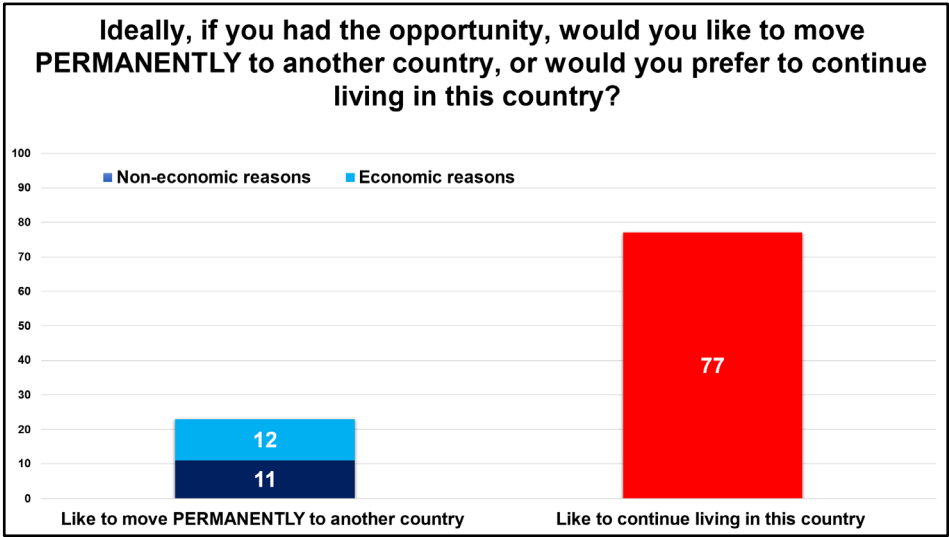


The 2023 survey also posed broad questions about relative well-being. It asked, “Comparing your life today with your parents at the same age, do you think you are better or worse off than your parents were?” Fifty-five percent thought they were better off, while 43% thought they were worse off. Again, these assessments were no different from those of 2021.

Respondents were also asked to think about the long-term future: “When children today in Iran grow up, do you think they will be better off or worse off financially than their parents?” Forty-seven percent thought they would be better off, and 42% worse off—just a five-point difference. Answers to this question were almost identical in January 2018 (49% better off; 43% worse off).

In 2023, almost a quarter (23%) said that ideally, given the opportunity, they would like to emigrate (“move permanently to another country”). Among those under 25, one third said they would like to do so: 34% said this, compared to 29% of those 25 to 44 and 10-22% of those older. Seventy-seven percent of respondents wanted to continue living in Iran, even if the opportunity arose to leave.

While having 23% of the population wanting to emigrate can be seen as high given Iran’s educational levels and its national ambitions, that finding is comparable to the rest of its region. Gallup polled 122 countries with this question in 2021 and found for the Middle East and North Africa as a whole that 27% wanted to emigrate—up from 19% in 2011. (For further comparison, among citizens of European Union countries 17% wanted to move permanently, and in North America excluding Mexico, it was 15%.)



Respondents who said they would like to leave were asked to give their main reason for this in their own words. Almost half of this group (47%) mentioned Iran’s bad economic condition. Another 21% gave economic answers that were more personal (to have better living conditions, 15%; the difficulty of finding a good job in Iran, 6%). Thirteen percent gave explicitly political reasons (to have greater freedom, 8%; having negative views toward the Islamic Republic, 5%). The remainder cited broad personal goals (for my children to have a better future, 9%; to attain a better education, 2%; to have greater security, 2%).

4. Women’s Situation

A clear majority thinks that women who do not wear the hijab should not be confronted. This includes many who think that it would be better if women observed the Hijab in public but should not be confronted if they do not, as well as those who think women should have liberty in what they wear. Almost two thirds reject a recent practice of police treating a lack of hijab observance as a traffic violation.

In 2023 a majority said that the Guidance Patrol should cease operations; three in five thought that, at the least, it should correct its methods. A clear majority thought that most who were arrested in peaceful protests where slogans were chanted against the hijab should be released.

A modest majority of women thought that women in Iran are treated with respect and dignity, but over four in ten disagreed. Among men, six in ten thought this, but over a

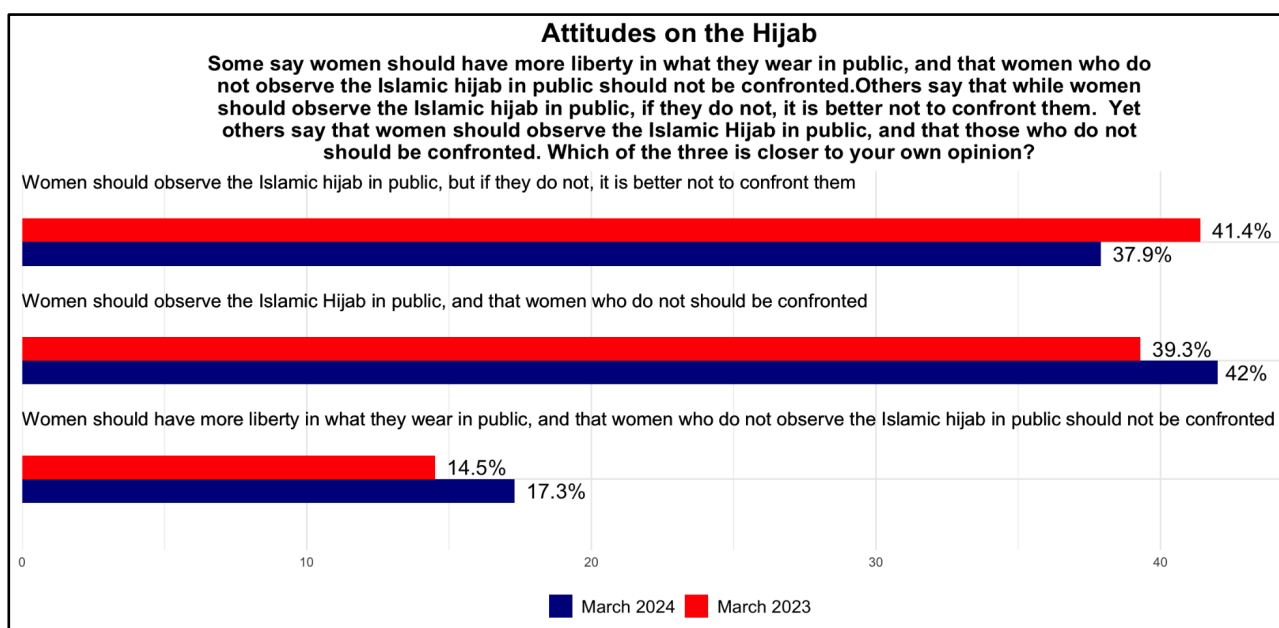
third disagreed. Asked whether they personally were “treated with respect all day” yesterday, nine in ten of both women and men said yes.

Most Iranians were still unfamiliar in 2023 with the long-delayed Majlis bill regarding violence against women. Of those who had heard something about it, four fifths supported passage—basically the same as in 2021.

In an effort to understand all shades of opinion on the sensitive issue of wearing the hijab, three options were offered to respondents—as follows:

Some say women should have more liberty in what they wear in public, and that women who do not observe the Islamic hijab in public should not be confronted. Others say that while women should observe the Islamic hijab in public, if they do not, it is better not to confront them. Yet others say that women should observe the Islamic Hijab in public, and that those who do not should be confronted. Which of the three is closer to your own opinion?

A clear majority thinks that women who do not wear the hijab should not be confronted. While only 17% say “women should have more liberty in what they wear in public,” 38% say that though women should observe the hijab in public, if they do not, it is better not to confront them. This means that a 55% majority does not favor the type of enforcement practice that set off the sequence of events leading to demands for greater freedom for women in fall 2022 protests. At the same time, 42% – four in ten – do support confronting women not observing the hijab. There were no significant gender differences.



These views have become a little more polarized over the past year. In 2023, 41% opted for the middle option – women should observe the hijab, but it is better not to confront those who do

not. This stance has since declined three points, while the two other options each increased three points.

Almost two thirds reject a recent practice of police treating a lack of hijab observance as a traffic violation. Respondents were asked:

As you may know, currently in some cities, if the police notice that the driver or the occupants of a car are not observing hijab inside the car, the car could be impounded and the driver could be issued a fine. To what degree do you support or oppose this policing practice?

Sixty-four percent oppose this practice and only 25% support it. This is 17 points less than those who said, in the question discussed above, that they supported confronting women over hijab.

A majority thought in 2023 that the Guidance Patrol should cease operations; three in five thought that, at the least, it should correct its methods. On the Guidance Patrol (often translated as “morality police” in Western news accounts), respondents were asked:

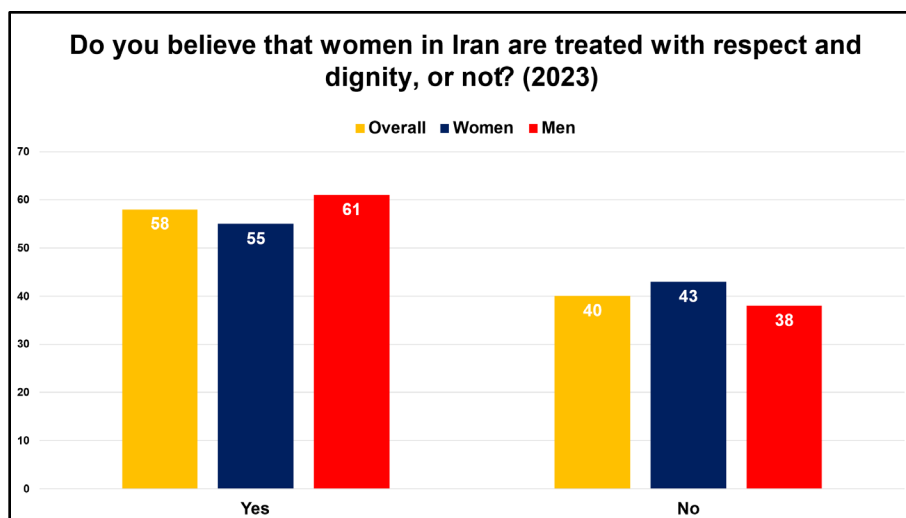
As you may know, before the recent protests began, some opposed the way the Guidance Patrols were doing their work, while others supported it. Now that the country is relatively calm, do you think it would be best for the Guidance Patrol to continue its operations as before or do you think it would be best if the Guidance Patrol ended its operations?

A slim majority, 52%, replied that these operations should simply end. Another 12% gave various replies. Nine percent said (in their own words) that the Guidance Patrol should correct its methods, and another 4% volunteered other answers. Only a third (32%) said the Patrol should continue as before.

In 2023 a clear majority thought that most who were arrested in peaceful protests where slogans were chanted against the hijab should be released. Asked whether and to what degree such protesters should be punished, 57% said most should be released; 29% said most should be prosecuted but not punished harshly; and only 8% said they should be punished harshly. Therefore, 37% did support some level of prosecution—a level of support for strictness similar to that found in the questions just discussed. Here, men were more lenient than women; 60% of men and 54% of women said most peaceful protestors against mandatory hijab wearing should be released.

Broad Attitudes on Gender

In 2023 a majority, but not a large one, believed that women in Iran were treated with respect and dignity. Fifty-eight percent said yes, and forty percent said no to this question, which is also asked internationally by Gallup. Majorities of both men and women said that “Women in Iran are treated with respect and dignity,” but the women’s majority was smaller—56% versus 61% among men.



To compare with the United States, in 2011 seven in ten Americans thought women were treated with respect—79% of men, 71% of women, but by 2018 far more women than men had rethought this (70% of men, 48% of women).¹

Age was an important factor in perceptions of whether women are respected. A majority of those under 25 disagreed: 57% of them said women are not treated with respect in Iran, while only 40% thought they were. Those between 25 and 44 (the largest age group) resembled the full sample. Those 45 to 54 were more likely to perceive respectfulness (61%), while two thirds of those 55 and older perceived it (67%).

When asked to think about their own immediate experience as an individual—not about the society at large—responses were more positive. Ninety percent said that when they thought back to yesterday—their activities and the people they were with—they had been treated with respect all day (there were no differences between men and women).

Although the 2022 protests highlighted women’s issues, most Iranians were still unfamiliar in 2023 with the long-delayed Majlis bill regarding violence against women. Among those who had heard something about it, four fifths supported passage—basically the same as in 2021. Only 21% said they had heard a great deal or some about it, and of that group, 79% supported it.

5. Views of Democracy and Politicians

Three in five Iranians call it absolutely important to live in a country that is governed democratically. Asked how democratically governed Iran is, with “10” as the highest score, the mean rank is in the middle—5.4—slightly down from 2023. Only a third believe that people in Iran feel comfortable voicing their political opinions, but only a quarter say people are afraid—the rest think people are somewhere in between. About three in four expect Iran’s constitution and political system to remain the same in ten years. Although

¹ See Gallup at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/247211/respect-women-hit-new-low-midterms.aspx>

the minority that disagrees grew from 2021 to 2023, it has not risen further in the last twelve months. One in six agree with some protesters' calls for the Islamic Republic to be replaced with another form of government. Up to one in five expect the system will undergo significant changes within ten years. If only one thing could change about Iran, a slight majority would pick greater economic prosperity over other values.

Among politicians, the late President Raisi's favorability rating declined from mid-2022 on, but three fifths still view him favorably two months before his death, with a quarter viewing him very favorably. Ghalibaf, the speaker in Parliament, also has declining popularity—now a slim majority views him favorably. Zarif, the past foreign minister, is at the same slight-majority level.

Two months before his death, majorities still have confidence in Raisi's ability to fulfill various campaign promises by the end of his term, but overall confidence and confidence regarding specific campaign promises is much lower than when he took office.

This study included a question asked in 2020 by the World Values Survey, offering a 1-to-10 scale and asking, "How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?" Sixty-one percent give this a 10, meaning it is "absolutely important." The mean response is 8.75 (2023: 8.67). Only 10% give a response of 5 or lower. This is similar to WVS' 2020 result: 63% said 10, the mean was 8.81, and only 10% gave a response of 5 or lower.

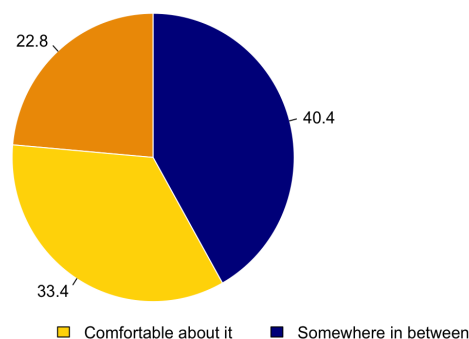
Respondents were then asked to evaluate Iran— "And how democratically is this country being governed today?" In 2024, only 13% give a 10, meaning Iran is completely democratic, down five points from 2023. The mean response is 5.45 (2023: 5.82). Almost half – 47% – give a response of 5 or lower, and 14% give a 1.

While overall, this is a slightly lower evaluation than in 2023, it is more meaningful to compare with the evaluation that the Iranian public made in the 2020 WVS poll. At that time 23% gave a 10, the mean response was 6.49, and 37% gave a response of 5 or lower. There has been distinct deterioration in Iranians' assessment over a four-year period.

Only a third believe that people in Iran feel fully comfortable voicing their political opinions.

Respondents were asked: "How do you think people in our country feel about voicing their political opinions? Do you think that generally, they feel afraid about it, comfortable about it, or somewhere in between?" Thirty-three percent say Iranians feel comfortable about this, while 23%

How do you think people in our country feel about voicing their political opinions?



said they are afraid to do so. Forty percent say people are “somewhere in between.” Another way to read this finding is as overlapping majorities: while 74% believe Iranians are not highly afraid, 63% believe Iranians are less than fully comfortable in voicing their opinions. This finding is unchanged since 2023.

In 2023, those over 55 were different from all those younger in their assessment. A higher 42% of the oldest group thought Iranians are comfortable and only 12% thought they are afraid (half as many as in the full sample). The same number (40%) thought they were in between.

Analysis of this question’s implications in the context of the 2022-23 protests, is in section 8.

Level of Support for Fundamental Change

One in six agree with some protesters’ calls for the Islamic Republic to be replaced with another form of government. Up to one in six, depending on how they are asked, expect the system will undergo significant changes within ten years. Respondents were first asked:

Some say in the next 10 years, Iran’s constitution and system of government will probably significantly change, while others think in the next 10 years Iran’s constitution and system of government will probably be similar to how things are today. What do you think?

Thirteen percent say they expect significant change, while three in four (75%) expect things to be similar to today. Twelve percent declined to answer—somewhat higher than for most questions on the survey. (There is no statistical difference from 2023 on this question.)

Because this question can be viewed as politically sensitive, it was also asked differently, through a list experiment. In this mode, the sample is divided in two. Both halves are read a list of statements and asked what *number* of them they believe, as follows:

Now I will read to you some statements that some people believe and others do not. After I finish reading all of them, please tell me, how many of them do you believe? Please just tell me how many of them you believe, and not which ones.

One half’s list includes the politically sensitive statement; the other’s list does not. By comparing the distribution of numbers cited by respondents, one can calculate the percentage of people who believe the politically sensitive statement without them having to say so.

Asked this way, 17% indicate that they think “Iran’s constitution and system of government will significantly change in less than ten years,” 4 points higher than when asked directly. This demonstrates that there is some slight ‘fear factor’ in responding to questions about fundamental political change.

When the same experiment was conducted in 2023, 22% indicated that they thought “Iran’s constitution and system of government will significantly change in less than ten years.” That was 7 points higher than the percentage that answered affirmatively to the direct question then (14%).

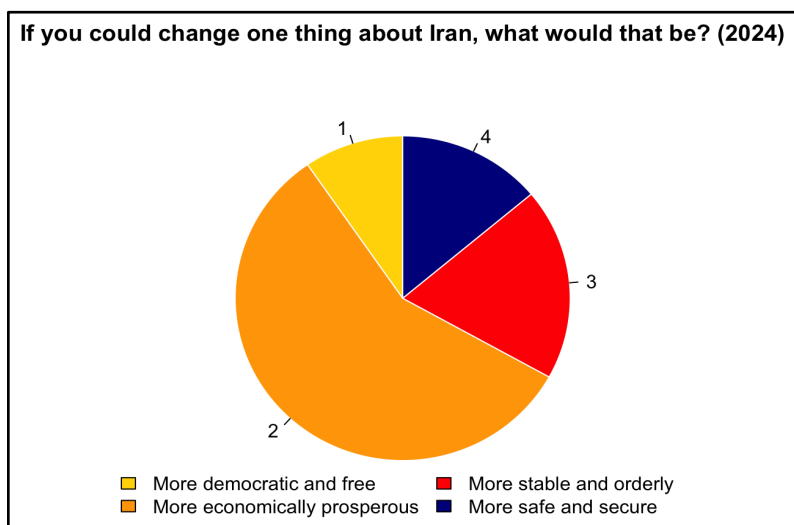
In a third way of phrasing this basic question, at a different point in the 2023 and 2024 interviews, respondents were offered various complaints and demands made by protestors and asked to what extent they agreed with each one. When asked in 2024 about the demand “that the Islamic Republic should be replaced with another form of government,” 15% say they agree (7% strongly), while 80% disagree (62% strongly, up from 57% in 2023).

All these measures fall into a band between 14% and 22%, suggesting the current audience for the idea of fundamental change in the system is around one fifth of the population.

This does not mean that the remaining four fifths have no appetite for change at all. Respondents were asked, “If you could change one thing about Iran, what would that be?” They were offered four choices, for Iran to become:

- More democratic and free
- More economically prosperous
- More stable and orderly
- More safe and secure

In 2024 a majority (56%) prefers “more economically prosperous,” up 3 points from 2023. None of the other options get wide interest. “More stable and orderly” is picked by 19%; “more safe and secure” by 14%; and “more democratic and free” by 9%. Thus, while the desire for more democratization is not as widely shared a top priority as some imagine, there is also no majority for a ‘law and order’ direction; those two options add up to only a third of the population (33%).



Favorability of Political Figures

We asked respondents about eight political figures during the two waves. In a departure from previous survey waves, none of the political figures was viewed at least somewhat favorably by over two thirds of the sample.

The favorability of the late **President Raisi**, stood at 59% in March 2024 (very, 25%). This represents a decline from 78% when he took office in September 2021 (very, 45%) to 73% in July 2022 (very, 34%) and 65% in March 2023 (very, 28%).

In March 2024, the favorability of **Mohammad Ghalibaf**, speaker of Parliament, stood at 52% (very, 13%). This is down from 68% in September 2021 (very, 22%), at the beginning of President Raisi’s term.

Mohammad Zarif, who served as President Rouhani’s foreign minister and negotiated the 2015 nuclear deal with the United States and five other world powers (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA), is seen favorably by 51% (very, 16%), while 42% see him unfavorably.

Forty-six percent are favorable toward past Iranian president **Seyyed Mohammad Khatami**, regarded as a reformist (very, 13%). **Ali Motahari**, the son of one the architects of the Islamic Republic and a “conservative reformist” who was not able to secure a parliamentary seat in the 2024 Majlis elections, is seen favorably by 40% and unfavorably by 38%.

Mohammad Bagher Nobakht, who took multiple roles in President Rouhani’s administration, has a very low favorability rating (27%), but only 50% view him unfavorably because a quarter of Iranians are unaware of him.

The longstanding political figure **Ali Larijani**, who was speaker of Parliament for twelve years, is the least popular of the figures asked about in March 2024. Sixty-one percent view him unfavorably (very, 38%); only 32% take a favorable view.

Two other political figures were presented only in the 2023 wave. **At that time, ex-president Ahmadinejad** was viewed favorably by 55% (very, 21%) – a level that is about the same as in February 2021, in the waning days of the Rouhani administration.

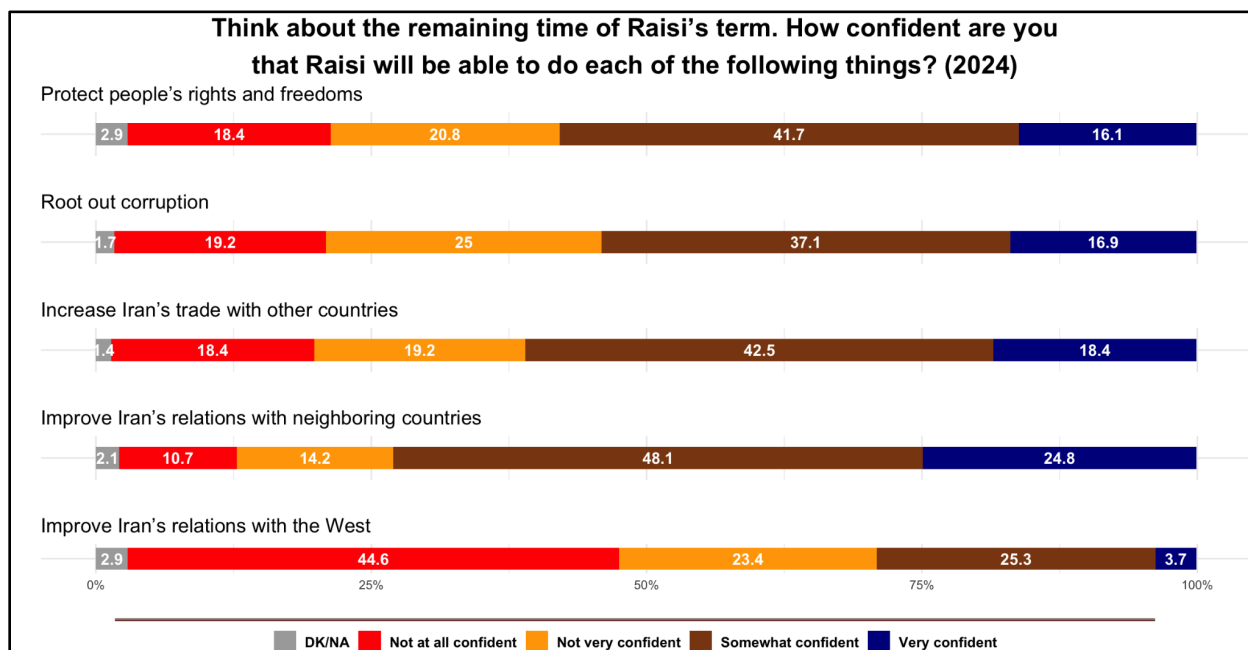
Ali Shamkhani, at the time of fielding (February-March 2023), was still the chair of the Supreme National Security Council, having been appointed by the previous president Rouhani. The public had a net unfavorable view of Shamkhani in March 2023: 42% saw him unfavorably (very, 22%), while 37% regarded him favorably (11% very). Twenty percent said they were unaware of him. Shamkhani stepped down in May 2023.

Confidence in the Raisi Administration

As discussed above, most Iranians put a high value on living in a country that is governed democratically, while giving a middling rating to how their country is currently governed and having mixed views of Raisi himself. As of March 2024, confidence in Raisi’s ability to accomplish various objectives was significantly lower compared with when he took office. Over four in ten (43%) had some confidence that he could significantly reduce inflation and unemployment, but less than one in ten felt very confident. Forty-three percent thought he could reduce inflation –down from 46% in 2023 and 73% after he was elected. Fifty-three percent hoped he could lower unemployment.

Asked how confident they were that Raisi would “protect people’s rights and freedoms,” 57% said they were at least somewhat confident (very, 16%). This is down five points from 2023. A majority (54%) had confidence in the Raisi administration’s ability to “root out corruption” (very confident, 17%). There has been a 20-point drop in confidence on this since September 2021. However, in a separate question three fifths thought his administration was trying a lot (27%) or somewhat (33%) to fight economic corruption.

Sixty-one percent thought that Raisi would be able to increase trade with other countries, and 73% had confidence he would improve Iran’s relations with neighboring countries, but only three in ten (29%) thought he could improve relations with the West.



Overall, 52% of Iranians express some degree of confidence in Raisi’s ability to fulfill his promises in the time remaining for his term, down from 75% in September 2021. The number saying they were very confident dropped 19 points from then (35 to 16), while the number saying they were not at all confident rose 17 points (from 10 to 27).

6. Attitudes toward Protests

The 2024 wave asked respondents to think about the major round of protests that began in fall 2022 in retrospect, while the 2023 wave—conducted when the protests had just passed their peak—asked about them in more depth and then-current detail. This section begins with 2024 attitudes and then turns to additional questions asked only in 2023.

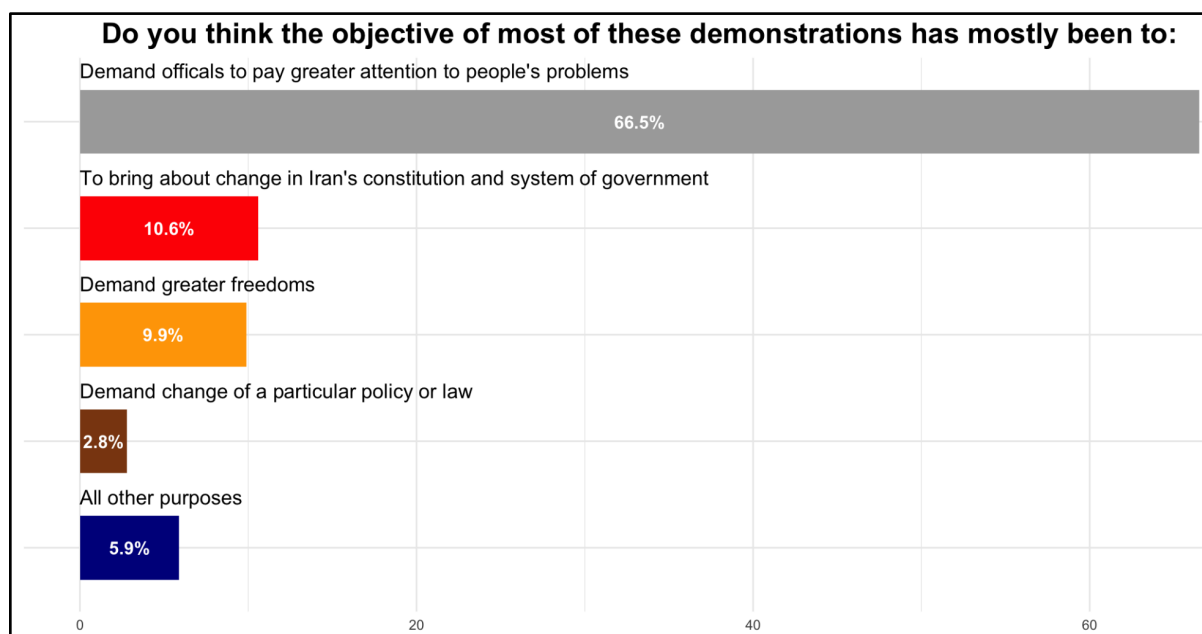
Asked in 2024 to think in general about waves of demonstrations over the past ten years, two thirds say their main objective was to demand that officials pay greater attention to people’s problems, while one in five think their main objective was either to demand greater freedoms, or to bring about change in Iran’s system of government. Nearly three in five think the demonstrations have been increasing in frequency—more than thought so in 2021. While only a third think this trend will continue over the next five years, this is up from one quarter in 2021.

Asked why they think most protests over time have been contained, a majority points to the issue of popular support, saying either that there was not enough, or that most Iranians actually opposed the protests. About one in six say that government violence quelled the protests; only one in 20, that the government satisfied protesters’ demands.

Asked how they felt about various complaints and demands voiced by protestors, public agreement has increased for three of them since 2023. Three in five now think the government should not be strict in enforcing Islamic laws (up distinctly from 2018). An overwhelming majority think the government should do more to control food prices, and three quarters say the government is not doing enough to help the poor. Support for demands that the government should fight corruption has been consistently near-unanimous since 2018. The percentage endorsing complaints about government interference in people’s personal lives increased from 2018 to 2023, then stabilized. Support for fundamental regime change has remained steady, around 16% since 2018.

One year after the demonstrations of 2022-2023 began to subside, respondents were asked a broad question about protests:

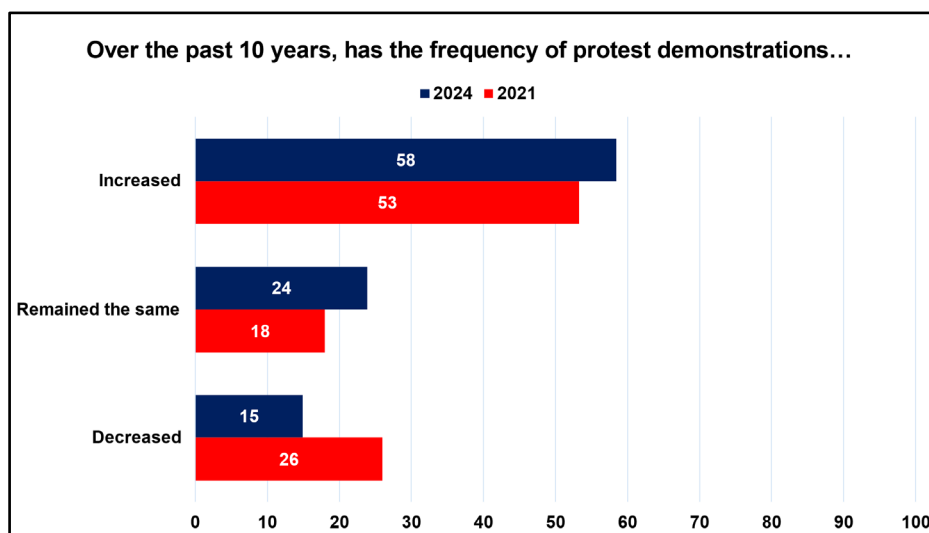
As you may know, during the past 10 years, many protest demonstrations have taken place across Iran. Do you think the objective of most of these demonstrations has mostly been to demand change of a particular policy or law; demand officials pay greater attention to people’s problems; demand greater freedoms; demand replacement of a particular official; to bring about change in Iran’s constitution and system of government; or something else?



Two thirds (67%) see officials paying greater attention to people’s problems as the prime objective of protest demonstrations—virtually the same as when this question was asked in 2021. Eleven percent say the objective is to bring about change in the system of government. No other objective is named by more than 10% (change of policy, 4%; greater freedoms, 10%; replace an official, 3%). Thus, only a fifth (21%) name either a change in the system or greater freedoms—the two goals most related to the Western image of what the most recent large-scale wave of protests were about.

This question was last asked in 2021—that is, before the most recent wave of demonstrations, but after a large one in late 2019-early 2020. 2024 replies were virtually the same as in 2021. This suggests a stable structure of public attitudes about the periodic waves of protests—while at the same time, attitudes toward government policies have evolved, as noted below in this section.

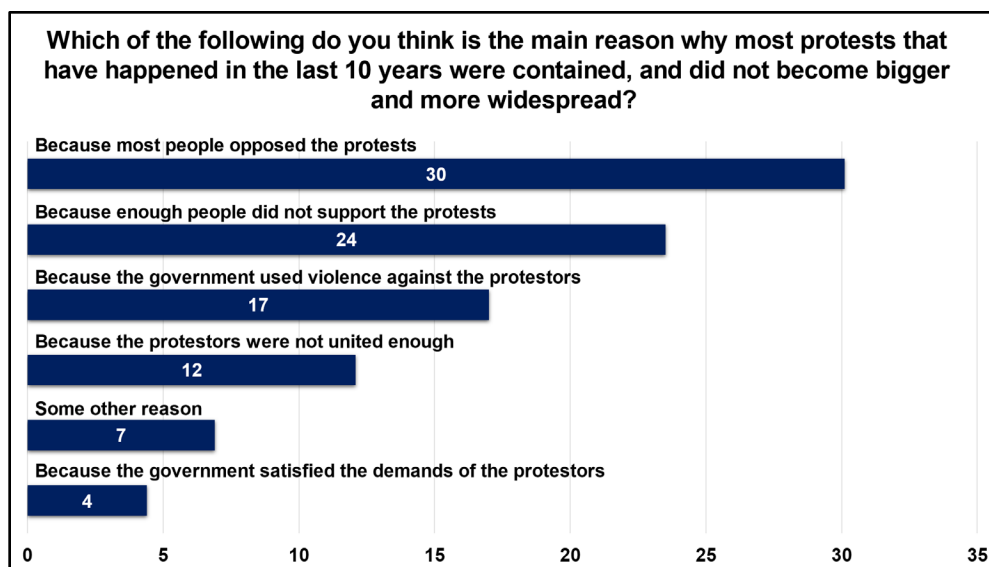
Respondents were asked to think about “protest demonstrations over the last ten years” and whether these seemed to them to be increasing or decreasing in frequency. Fifty-eight percent feel protests have been increasing (a lot, 22%) – up five points since 2021. Fifteen percent feel they have been decreasing—down 11 points—while a quarter (25%) feel they are roughly the same. While only a third (32%) think this trend will continue over the next five years, this is up from 25% in 2021. In 2021 a 53% majority believed that protests would decrease; in 2024 this is down to 36%. Again, a quarter believe protests will stay roughly the same as in the past.



To better understand the public’s perception of the social place of protests, respondents were asked to analyze their outcomes, as follows: “Which of the following do you think is the main reason why most protests that have happened in the last ten years were contained, and did not become bigger and more widespread?” They were then asked to choose among five possible explanations, offered in a randomized order, because:

- Enough people did not support the protests
- The government satisfied the demands of the protesters
- The government used violence against the protesters
- The protesters were not united enough
- Most people opposed the protests
- Some other reason

A majority (54%) points to the issue of popular support, saying either that there was not enough support (24%), or that most Iranians actually opposed the protests (30%). Another 12% say the protesters were not united enough. About one in six (17%) say that government violence quelled the protests; only one in 20 (4%) say that the protests did not grow because the government satisfied protesters’ demands.



Attitudes toward Protestors' Demands and Complaints

Since almost no one in Iran seems to credit the government with containing the protests by making concessions to satisfy the protestors' demands, it is relevant to look at how the public views these demands and complaints.

In 2024, as in 2023, respondents heard a series of these and were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each. Public agreement has increased for three of them in recent years. Three in five now think the government should not be strict in enforcing Islamic laws (61%, up 8 points since 2023 and 25 points since 2018). An overwhelming majority (95%) think the government should do more to keep food prices from increasing, and those who strongly agree are up 7 points since this was last asked in 2018. Finally, three quarters say the government is not doing enough to help the poor (75%, up 5 points since 2023, and comparable to support in 2018).

One perennial protest topic has received consistently strong support. In 2024, an overwhelming majority (93%) agreed that "the government should do more to fight financial and bureaucratic corruption" – statistically unchanged from 2018 and 2023.

One new complaint offered in 2024 – that there should be no restrictions on people's internet access – was endorsed by three quarters of respondents (strongly agree, 48%).

Complaints that question Iran's foreign and defense policies get a more mixed response. Forty-four percent agree that "the government should spend less money in places like Syria and Iraq," but 54% disagree. Only a quarter (25%) think "the military should spend much less money on developing missiles," while 71% disagree (45% strongly). Both topics received similar levels of support in 2018.

Most are not moved by the complaint that "the government interferes too much in people's personal lives." While 34% agree, 63% do not. The level of support was comparable in 2023, but lower in 2018 (26%).

The idea that “the Islamic Republic should be replaced with another form of government” engages only 15%, about the same as in 2023; 80% disagree (62% strongly). A similar demand posed in 2018, that “Iran’s political system needs to undergo fundamental change” got a similar response (16% agreement).

In 2023, asked in different modes whether they had participated in the protests or not, fewer than one in 20 said yes (this would indicate a pool of around 3 million adults). About one in six said they admired those who had participated.

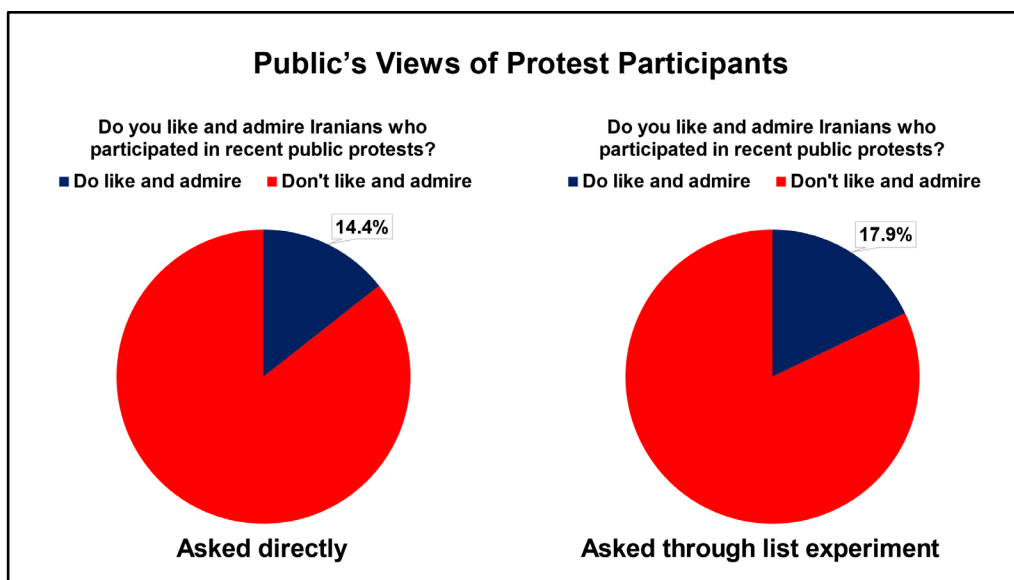
Respondents were asked about protest participation in two ways, directly and through a list experiment. First, asked: “During the past four months, have you ever gone to the streets to participate in protest gatherings?” 1.3% said yes and 98.3% said no. Asked in a different part of the survey through a list experiment (explained above in section 4), a higher 4.4% of the sample indicated they had participated—three percentage points higher than when asked directly.

Though this percentage may seem low, intuitively speaking, it indicates a pool of around three million people. The current total population of Iran is approximately 88 million, of which about 76% are 18 and older, the age of respondents in this study. About 67 million Iranians are 18 and older, and 4.4% of this group is approximately three million.²



A larger number, about one in six, indicated they admired those who had participated in the protests. Again, this was asked both directly and through a list experiment. Asked directly “Do you generally admire or do not admire those who have participated in recent public protests?” 14% said yes and 78% said no; 7% did not give an answer. Asked through a list experiment, a somewhat higher 18% said they did admire the participants—approaching a fifth of Iranians.

² For current population estimates, see <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iran/#people-and-society>

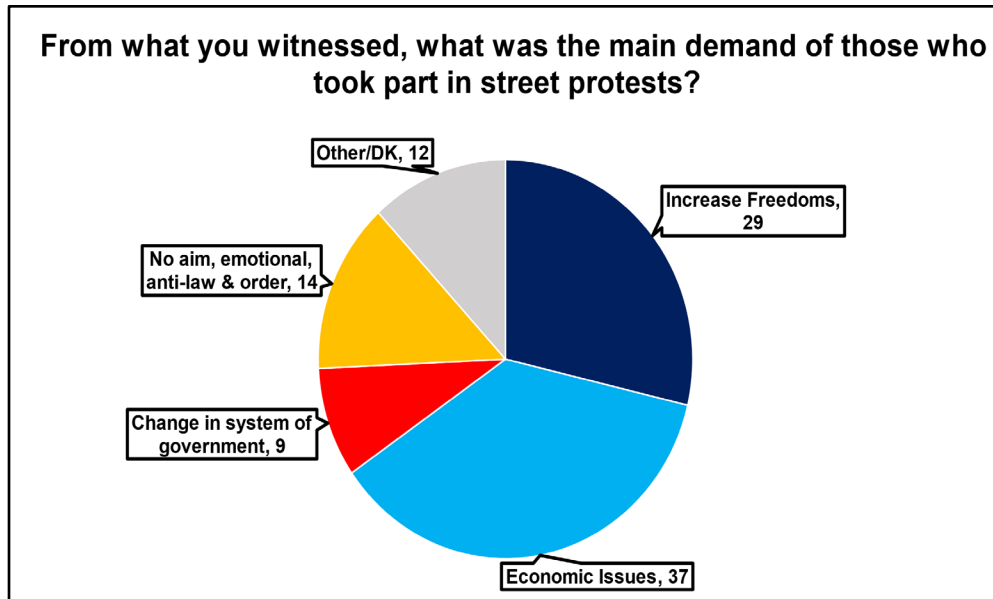


In spring 2023, the public had no shared image of what the protests were about. Asked to reply in their own words, over a third said the protests were about economic grievances. About three in ten said the protests were about women’s freedoms or wider freedoms in general. One in ten said the protesters sought a change in Iran’s system of government. The remainder mostly gave critical characterizations. Half rejected claims that the protests were inspired from abroad, but the rest gave this some degree of credence.

In spring 2023, we asked about the primary motivation of the most recent wave of protests, not about the main objective of various protests over the past decade. Asked, “From what you witnessed, what was the main demand or objective of those who took part in street protest gatherings during the past four months?” Thirty-seven percent gave an economic response: reducing economic problems (22%), lowering inflation (12%), and creating more jobs (4%).

About three in ten (29%) said the protests were about women’s freedoms or wider freedoms in general. Thirteen percent said the protests were for increased liberty in how women decide to dress, and 13% referred to increased freedoms more generally; another 3% focused on greater freedom of speech. Additionally, 9% referred to a change in Iran’s system of government (this includes respondents who took this in either a positive or a negative sense).

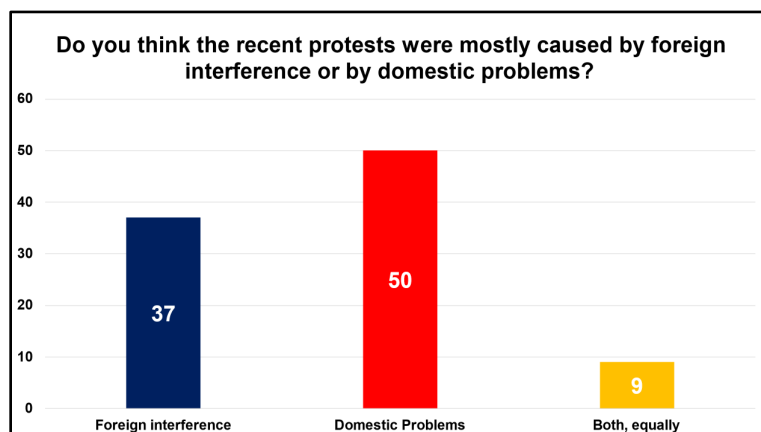
Finally, 13% gave critical characterizations, such as “they aimed to diminish stability, law and/or order in Iran” (11%) or “mostly emotional with no aim” (3%). Another 4% gave different answers and 8% said they didn’t know.



There are stark gender differences in some of the characterization categories. Men were much more likely than women to say the recent protests were about reducing economic problems (63.5% versus 36.5%), but not significantly more likely to mention job creation or inflation reduction. Women were substantially more likely than men to say that the main demand was increased liberty in how women dress (72% versus 28%), increased freedom of speech (68% versus 32%), and increased freedom more generally (59% versus 41%). Men were more likely to say that the primary objective was to change Iran’s system of government (67% versus 33%), but they were also more inclined to say that the protests were mostly just emotional (61.5% versus 38.5%).

It should be recalled that while protests focused on the hijab were going on, there were overlapping protests from ethnic minorities in some regions. Labor unrest (already in place before the hijab protests) was also continuing. Hence it would be natural that nationally, respondents would have a variegated picture.

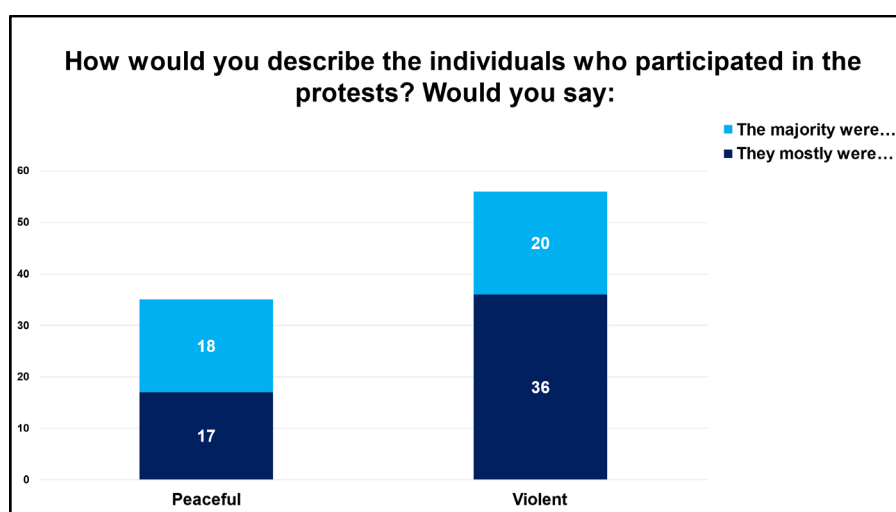
At the time of the protests, the government made a major point of saying that they were inspired from abroad. In the survey, half of respondents rejected this idea (“mostly because of domestic problems,” 50%), but the rest gave it some degree of credence. Thirty-seven percent said the protests “were mostly because of foreign interference,” and 9% volunteered that it was both equally.



In spring 2023, a majority perceived that the protests were on the whole more violent than they were peaceful. Majorities thought that most peaceful protesters who were arrested should be released. For those who used violence against property or police, or who armed themselves and blockaded roads, substantial majorities supported prosecution and punishments.

Respondents were asked, “How would you describe the individuals who participated in the protests? Would you say they were mostly peaceful; only a few were violent? Or, the majority were peaceful, but some were violent? Or, the majority were violent, but some were peaceful? Or, that they were mostly violent; only some were peaceful?”

The perception of a majority (56%) was that the protests were on the whole more violent than they were peaceful. Thirty-six percent perceived those who participated as “mostly violent” and another 20% perceived the majority as violent. About a third (35%) perceived them as “mostly peaceful” (17%) or as peaceful in the majority.



Iranians make clear distinctions among types of protest activity and are more tolerant of some than of others. Respondents were asked:

As you know, a number of people have been arrested during the protests by the police and the judiciary is thinking about how to deal with those who have been arrested. I will now read you some categories of people who have been arrested. As I read each, please say whether in general you think most of them should be released, most of them should be prosecuted, but not punished harshly, or most should be prosecuted and punished harshly if found guilty.

As discussed above, a clear majority thought that most who were arrested in peaceful protests where slogans were chanted against the hijab should be released. Fifty-seven percent said most should be released; 29% said most should be prosecuted but not punished harshly; and only 8% said they should be punished harshly.

Acceptance was slightly greater for “peaceful protesters who were chanting slogans against government policies”: 63% thought most should be released, 28% did not want harsh punishments, and only 3% did. These results were statistically the same as in 2018.

Protest activities that included violence faced punitive attitudes from a majority. Sixty-one percent thought “protesters who attacked the police” should be punished harshly (not harshly, 27%; released, 5%). Attitudes in 2018 were very similar.

Two thirds (66%) wanted to harshly punish “protesters who damaged public property” (not harshly, 25%; released, 3%). This was more punitive than in 2018, when 60% wanted to see harsh punishments.

Finally, “protesters with weapons who blocked roads” were the category who received the least tolerance, with 71% wanting to see harsh punishments (20% not harshly, 3% released).

While the 2022 protests were in full swing, Iran’s World Cup soccer team lost and was eliminated from competition. According to some news reports (CNN for example), “Iran’s World Cup defeat to the United States was met by cheers and celebrations in Tehran and other Iranian cities on Tuesday evening, as protesters hailed the country’s exit from the tournament as a blow to the ruling regime.”³ It seemed of interest to test how widespread this attitude was. Respondents were asked, “As you may know, Iran’s national soccer team lost to the US national soccer team during the recent world cup. Did you become upset or happy that Iran’s national soccer team lost?” Six percent said they were happy about it (very, 3%), while 87% said they were upset (very, 64%).

7. The March 2024 Parliamentary Election

A majority did not vote in the first round of the election for the Majlis, while a little over four in ten did. The most frequent reason for not voting, given by almost half of non-voters, was a general distrust of the candidates and officialdom more broadly. Another fifth of non-voters say they did not vote because the Majlis cannot fix the economy. Among those who voted, just under half think the candidates they voted for generally identified as supporters of President Raisi, whatever their political tendency. Over four in ten think their candidates were running as independents, substantially more than principalists or reformists. A quarter find it hard to locate the candidates they supported on the political spectrum. In the public as a whole, about one in ten could name a person they had wanted to vote for whose candidacy had been rejected by the Guardian Council.

A majority have some confidence that the next Majlis can help Iran move in the right direction; over four in ten do not. A modest majority believe that government officials do not care what people like themselves think. As in the past, three quarters feel that

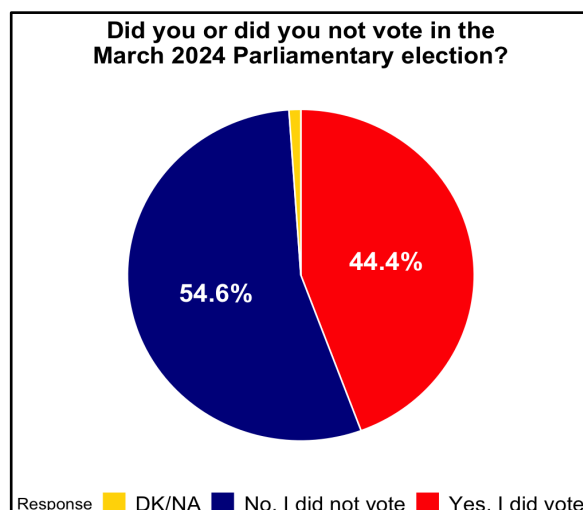
³ CNN, Nov. 30, 2022: <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/30/middleeast/iran-protests-world-cup-defeat-celebrations-intl/index.html>

policymakers should take religious teachings into account when they make decisions. About half think some or more policymakers do this; over a third say only a few do so.

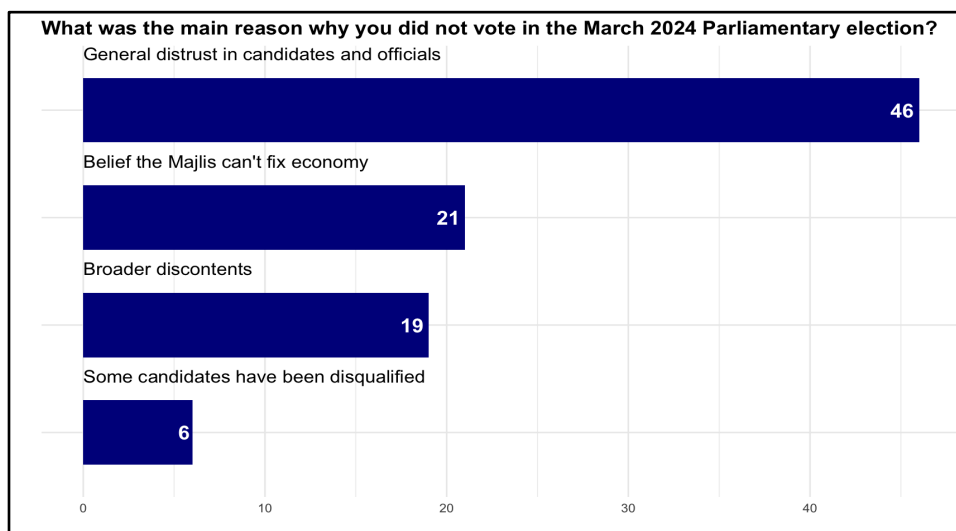
The four in ten who did vote were more likely to be older compared to non-voters. Voters are more inclined to feel that officials care what ordinary people think, and that ordinary people feel comfortable in Iran voicing their opinions. They are also more likely to perceive protests as simply a regular recurrence, while non-voters see them as a rising curve.

The March 2024 survey was just after the first round of the parliamentary election and was completed before a second round was held in some districts. Respondents were asked: “As you may know, some people voted in the March 2024 parliamentary election and others did not for a variety of reasons. How about you? Did you or did you not vote in the March 2024 parliamentary election?”

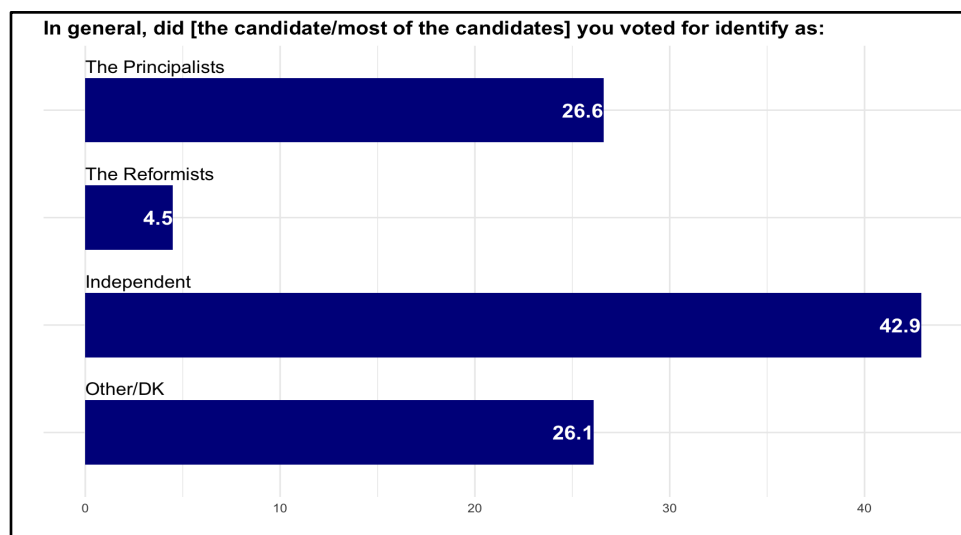
Over four in ten—44.4%—said that they voted, while 54.6% self-reported that they did not (1.1% did not say). This self-reported turnout percentage is a little higher than the official figure of 40.64%. In Iran and many other countries, it is normal for surveys to find some overreporting of having voted, as voting is typically seen as a socially desirable trait.



All who said they did not vote were asked their main reason for not voting. Almost half of non-voters (46%) express a general distrust of the candidates and of officials. The next most frequent reason (21%) is the belief that the Majlis cannot fix the economy. Another fifth (19%) express broader discontent (elections don’t change anything, 14%; the outcome is predetermined, 3%; opposed to the Islamic Republic in general, 2%). Six percent cite the fact that some candidates had been disqualified.



Those who said they had voted were asked to characterize the candidates they had voted for: were they supporters or not of President Raisi, and were they principlists, reformists, or independents? A bit under half of voters (47%) say their chosen candidates are Raisi supporters, while 29% say their chosen candidates are Raisi critics. Fully 18% give some third description, and another 6% are unsure. As political groupings are somewhat fluid in Iran, it is understandable that a quarter (26%) cannot name their chosen candidates' tendency. By far the most common answer is that the voter's choices are independent (43%). Next come principlists (26%), followed by reformists (5%). Twenty-six percent either give some other answer or say they didn't know (15%). Thus only 31% perceive themselves as voting for candidates who fit easily somewhere in the principalist-versus-reformist way of framing Iranian political discourse.



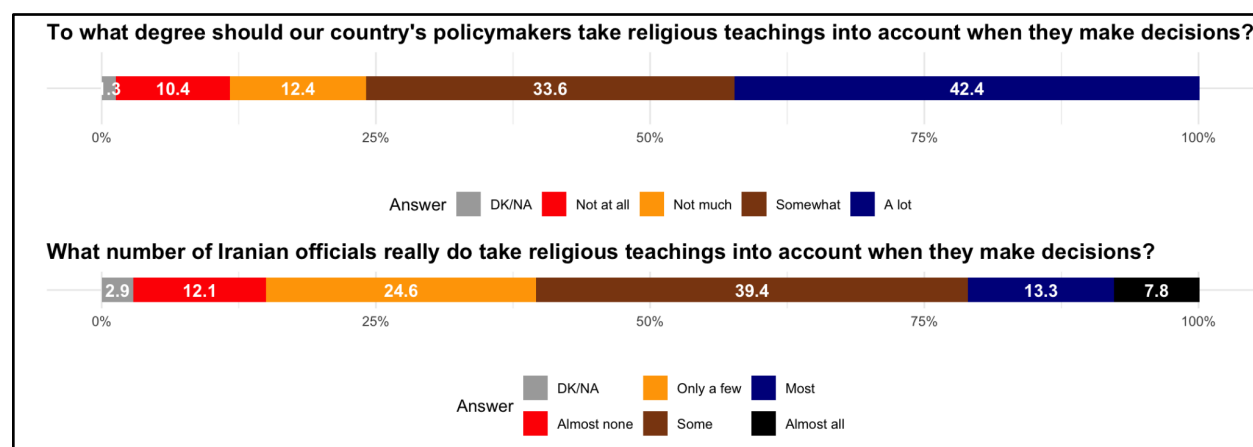
When asked about the Guardian Council's withholding of endorsements for candidates, only 11% say they know of and could name a person they had wanted to vote for who had registered their candidacy but was not permitted to run. This is similar to the 14% level found in 2016 after that parliamentary election, when the turnout was far higher—21 points above the rate in 2024.

General Attitudes Toward Officials

Fifty-five percent express some confidence that the new Majlis “will help Iran move in the right direction,” while 44% do not. After the Majlis election of 2016, 75% expressed some confidence; this 20 point drop over eight years mirrors the drop in voter turnout. Asked whether they believed that “most government officials care what people like me think,” 54% say no, while 36% say yes. In 2016, the negative view was not held by a majority (48% no, 40% yes).

Since 2014 these surveys have asked Iranians, “In your opinion, to what degree should our country's policy makers take religious teachings into account when they make decisions?” Responses have been remarkably stable. In 2024, 42% say this should happen “a lot,” 34% that it should happen “somewhat,” 12% “not much,” and 10% “not at all.” Those saying “a lot” have always been in a 42-47% range.

In 2024 we asked for the first time, “In your opinion, what number of Iranian officials really do take religious teachings into account when they make decisions—almost all, most, some, only a few or almost none?” The most common answer was “some” (39%), the middle position. Another 21% think the number is more than that (most 13%, almost all 8%). A larger 37% are more critical (only a few 25%, almost none 12%). One can read this as two majorities: the “glass-half-full” majority of 60% who think some or more officials take religious teachings into account, and the “glass-half-empty” majority of 76% who think that *only* some officials do this. Interestingly, only 3% chose not to answer this speculative, and presumably sensitive, question.

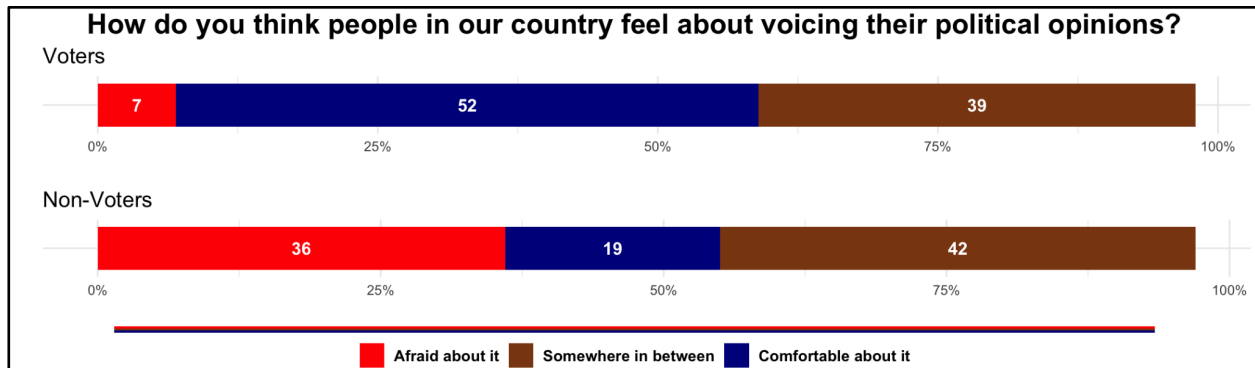


Attitudes of Voters and Non-Voters

Given the discontent voiced by non-voters, we investigated how different those who voted in March 2024 were from those who did not. One possibility was that the restrictions put by the Guardian Council on the range of candidates who could run would narrow the electorate and make it less fully representative. Another possibility was that those with relatively higher incomes would have more leisure and greater political engagement, and that this would be the more significant factor in who came out to vote. A third possibility was that older Iranians are more likely to vote than younger ones.

Age is a better predictor of voting participation than class is. When viewed by income, there seems to be no class divide between voters and non-voters. Both include the same proportions of poor, middling and better-off household incomes. Iranians become progressively more likely to vote as they get older. Only 28% of Iranians under 25 years old said they voted, while 34% of those in the 25–34-year-old cohort did so. Participation rates jump up to 48% for those in the 35–44 and 45–54-year-old ranges, while 54% of those 55 and older said they voted.

Voters are more likely to believe that Iranians are comfortable voicing their opinions. Fifty-two percent of voters believe this, while only 19% of non-voters do. Only 7% of voters believe Iranians are afraid to voice their opinions, but 36% of non-voters do. (The third option was that Iranians are “somewhere in between”; four in ten of both voters and non-voters said this is the case—39% and 42%.)



Voters and non-voters have sharply different political attitudes. Voters are more sanguine than non-voters about the political system overall. They are more likely (66%) to feel that government officials care what “people like me think.” Only 12% of non-voters feel this way.

Asked whether protests and demonstrations have increased over the last ten years, 53% of voters think they have not—that they have stayed the same, or even decreased. Fully 70% of non-voters think protests have increased, indicating two different images of political reality.

Asked whether officials should take religious teachings into account when they make decisions, voters are almost unanimous: 93% of them think that they should (“a lot,” 63%). Non-voters are 29 points lower (62%; “a lot,” 26%). On a related issue, 66% of voters think that women who are not wearing correct hijab should be confronted, while only a quarter (23%) of non-voters agree. In this case, those who voted are not aligned with the sample as a whole; overall, 55% think women should *not* be confronted.

8. ATTITUDINAL GROUP: Those who Believe Other Iranians are Afraid to Voice Their Political Opinions

In 2023 a quarter of Iranians perceived people in their country as afraid to voice their political opinions. This perception was the most powerful indicator of opposition attitudes—more so than age or media preferences (though these were significant), and far more so than other factors tested. This subgroup was more negative about specific politicians; more likely to say they would leave Iran permanently, given the opportunity; more likely to say women are not treated with respect in Iran; and more likely to view the 2022-23 protests as mostly peaceful.

In seeking to understand in depth opposition attitudes in Iran, we analyzed a number of explanations for attitudinal differences in the 2023 data. Neither gender, age, income, education, nor cell phone versus landline usage showed sharp and widespread differences on a scale that would suggest it was a crucial factor.

Of these demographic variables, **age** came closest to this criterion, but most respondents from youth into middle age gave similar responses. Those 55 and over, were more definitely supportive of Iran's existing system than *all* those younger. The very young (18-24) did not stand out to the degree that we expected and is often assumed.

Similarly, **media preferences** in news sources leaned in the expected direction—that is, respondents' more frequent use of social networks, or of media originating outside Iran, was correlated with oppositional attitudes.

While it would be natural to assume that those respondents reached by cell phone may hold different attitudes from those reached by landline, our analysis found no evidence for this. All attitudinal and demographic questions were checked. One of the two instances to show statistical significance was whether the Islamic Republic should be replaced with another form of government. The difference was only between those who held their views "somewhat" (with landline respondents slightly more likely to agree than cell phone respondents). When the "very" and "somewhat" responses are collapsed, there is no significant difference. While in past decades cell phone usage may have been far more common in younger cohorts, cell phones are ubiquitous in contemporary Iran. Since many households are multi-generational, younger and older respondents are all accessible by landline as well. [Please see the methodological note at the end of this report for a fuller discussion.]

The most powerful indicator of opposition attitudes came in a question, reported above in section 5, about **perceptions of others' willingness to voice *their* political opinions**. Asked "How do you think people in our country feel about voicing their political opinions? Do you think that generally, they feel afraid about it, comfortable about it, or somewhere in between?" 34% said Iranians felt comfortable about this, while 24% said they are afraid to do so. Forty percent said people are "somewhere in between."

The group of 24% who think that generally other Iranians feel afraid to voice their political opinions were not using the question to indirectly indicate that *they* were afraid. Quite the opposite: their own answers to many questions contradicted official views. Rather, this subgroup believes that a great many Iranians privately think what they themselves think but are afraid to express their true opinions. Thus, this subgroup believes that they speak for a substantial, but currently silent, majority of all Iranians.

We will discuss this subgroup in comparison to the *whole* sample, instead of in comparison to the other three quarters—i.e., those who think Iranians are either comfortable expressing their opinions or are somewhere in between. To compare to the remaining sample would be the normal procedure, and typically the best one. However, we will use the full-sample comparison as the most conservative way to report the effects of this particular indicator. For 24 questions in

our survey, responses of the subgroup who say most Iranians are afraid to voice their true opinions are between 25 and 43 points different when compared to the *full* sample, and would be much higher if compared to the *remainder* of the sample. Comparison to the full sample also allows us to note those questions where the majority within the subgroup does in fact align with the majority in the general public.

Media Use

While far from everyone in Iran who gets their news from *social networks*, *satellite channels*, *BBC* or *VOA* think that others fear to express their opinions, those who *do* think this are more likely to use these four media sources. They are 39 points more likely to say that social networks should never be closed down (80 to 41 for the full sample), and 24 points more likely to follow satellite TV channels (51 to 27). They are also twice as likely to follow BBC and/or VOA (43 to 22). While 56% of this group follow domestic TV a lot or somewhat, this is 19 points below the full sample.

Attitudes toward Politicians

Those who think other Iranians are afraid to voice their opinions are extraordinarily negative toward President Raisi, and this is one of the group's most significant characteristics. This group is 43 points less likely than the full sample to have confidence that Raisi will keep his promises (18 to 61). They are 41 points less confident that Raisi "will be able to protect people's rights and freedoms" (21 to 62). While a third (33%) of the full sample were unfavorable toward Raisi, among this group it was 73%—40 points more. This subgroup was also 35 points less confident that Raisi could make gains against inflation (not confident, 88 to 53); 37 points less confident that he could significantly lower unemployment (not confident, 82 to 45); 33 points less confident that he could improve relations with neighboring countries (not confident, 57 to 23); 36 points less confident that he could root out corruption (not confident, 75 to 38); and 34 points less confident that he could increase trade with other countries (not confident, 72 to 39).

While this group's criticism toward politicians is focused on Raisi, they are also more negative about other politicians than the full sample is. Ghalibaf, the speaker of the Majlis, is viewed unfavorably by a majority of this group, 35 points more than the full sample (unfavorable, 58 to 23). For two politicians whose favorability ratings are below 50% with the public—Larijani and Shamkhani—with the group that sees other Iranians as afraid, they score even lower (18 and 21 points less, respectively).

Reported Desire to Emigrate

One of the biggest differences between the quarter who think other Iranians fear to express their true opinions and the full sample concerns desire to emigrate. Asked whether they would like to leave Iran permanently given the opportunity, this group was 40 points higher than the full sample in saying yes (63 to 23). This means that those who are in this attitudinal group *and* say

they would like to emigrate are about 15% of the full sample, and about two thirds of all those who say they would like to emigrate. However, the sub-sample size is too small to draw any firm conclusions.

Views on Women's Situation in Iran

Those who think other Iranians are afraid to voice their opinions were 31 points more likely than the full sample to say that women are not treated with respect in Iran (71 to 40). They were also 34 points more likely to say that the operations of the Guidance Patrol or “morality police” should be simply ended (86 to 52; note that this is a majority position in Iran). They were 24 points more likely to say that women should not be confronted over the hijab (80 to 57; this too is a majority position).

Views on the Economy

Those who think other Iranians are afraid to voice their opinions were 22 points more likely to say the economy is bad (95 to 73; this is a majority position). They were 21 points more likely to blame domestic mismanagement and corruption over foreign sanctions (78 to 57; this is a majority position). Asked whether the children of today would be better or worse off than their parents, they were 23 points more likely to say “worse off” (65 to 42), and 18 points more likely to say that they themselves are now worse off than their parents were (61 to 43).

This subgroup's response to demographic questions about employment and income do not suggest that they are objectively worse off. Forty-seven percent of the subgroup were working full- or part-time, compared to 40% of the full sample. Thirty-seven percent of the subgroup reported a monthly household income of 8 million tomans or higher, compared to 34% for the full sample. Thirty-two percent were in a household that lives in a rented dwelling, rather than owning it, compared to 30% of the full sample. However, when offered subjective descriptions of their household's financial situation to choose from, 64% of those who think other Iranians are afraid to voice their opinions said “life is difficult” or “life is very hard” – 9 points more than the full sample.

When asked directly, 4% of those who think other Iranians are afraid to voice their opinions said they had demonstrated in the streets in the last six months, compared to 1% for the full sample. Those who see other Iranians as fearing to voice their opinion were 35 points more likely to think the protests had been mostly peaceful (70 to 35). They saw the protests as stemming from domestic causes, not foreign interference—32 points higher than the full sample (82 to 50).

Asked about various complaints aired by the protesters, this subgroup was 28 points more likely to agree *strongly* that “the government is not doing enough to help the poor” (70 to 42); 27 points more likely to agree that “the government should not be strict in enforcing Islamic laws” (80 to 53—this is a majority position); and 27 points more likely to agree that “the Islamic Republic

should be replaced with another form of government” (43 to 16). They were a 19 points more likely to agree that “the government interferes too much in people’s personal lives” (51 to 32).

Those in this subgroup were more likely to say, in response to a direct question, that they admired the protesters, though this was not a majority of this group. The subgroup was 24 points more likely to express admiration (38 to 14).

Methodological Note

In the March 2023 wave, mobile phone numbers were called in a ratio that yielded 25% of the final sample. Respondents reached through landline and mobile phones were compared to assess possible differences in demographic and attitudinal variables. The broad hypothesis tested was a commonly held idea that mobile phone users are younger, more likely to be critical of the government, and more negative about Iran's economy than landline users. All variables were cross-tabulated and checked for differences that might conceivably yield significance; a smaller set were subjected to chi-square tests for statistical significance.

Possible differences checked included the following, among many others:

- Age of respondent
- Favorable/unfavorable toward President Raisi
- Admire/do not admire the protesters [of fall 2022-winter 2023]
- Economy getting better/getting worse
- Perception: other Iranians feel comfortable to voice opinions/do not feel comfortable/are in between
- Desire or not to move permanently to another country
- Should Iran strive for self-sufficiency/strive to increase its trade

The analyses yielded only two significant differences at or near the .05 level. Both involved questions with a four-point scale and the difference related only to intensity ("very", "somewhat") of a given view. One asked whether the Islamic Republic should be replaced with another form of government. A statistically significant association ($p = 0.002$) was found with landline respondents slightly more likely to agree than cell phone respondents. However, the difference was only between those who held their views "somewhat," and when the "very" and "somewhat" responses are collapsed, there is no significant difference.

The second question asked whether or not the long-term economic agreement between Iran and China was in Iran's interests (four-point scale). The statistical evidence of an association between landline/mobile usage and opinions on the agreement showed a near-significant association with phone type ($p = 0.068$). A significant p-value for the linear relationship ($p = 0.016$) suggests there may be a linear trend in how the two groups (landline and mobile users) perceive the agreement with mobile users seeming slightly more skeptical than landline users. However, the overall differences are not large enough to be conclusive.

What are possible reasons for this absence of observed effects? One testable hypothesis would be that mobile phone users and landline users now overlap extensively, and that effects that might have been observable a decade ago have now been blurred. Mobile phones' diffusion has

increased a great deal over time in Iran. Yet, multigenerational households remain common there, such that persons of all ages may be likely to share a landline.