

# Iranian Attitudes in Advance of the Parliamentary Elections: Economics, Politics, and Foreign Affairs

A public opinion study | January 2016



Ebrahim Mohseni, Nancy Gallagher & Clay Ramsay



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY  
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL &  
SECURITY STUDIES AT MARYLAND

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## Introduction

On February 26, 2016, Iranians will vote to elect lawmakers to the Majlis and the Assembly of Experts. This election will be an opportunity for Iranians to show whether they approve of President Rouhani's approach to foreign affairs and his efforts to revitalize Iran's economy, or if they side with his critics. Polling a nationally representative sample of Iranians offers a way to understand how the country as a whole feels about Rouhani and his program, providing a baseline against which to evaluate the election results. It also sheds light on public attitudes that are likely to influence what Rouhani's priorities will be for the rest of his term, regardless of whether his supporters or critics prevail in the upcoming elections.

For Iran to start receiving sanctions relief before these important elections, Rouhani moved quickly so that the International Atomic Energy Agency could certify that Iran had implemented the constraints that it had agreed to impose on its nuclear program under the July 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). This milestone was reached on January 15, 2016, now known as Implementation Day.

The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM), in conjunction with the Program for Public Consultation (PPC) has been conducting a series of studies about Iranian and American public opinion to explore how public attitudes might be affecting the negotiation, ratification, and implementation of the JCPOA. This study repeats many of the questions asked in previous surveys of Iranian public opinion conducted with the University of Tehran Center for Public Opinion Research (UTCPOR) and Iranpoll.com, an independent Toronto-based polling company. The July 2014 study focused on what types of limitations and transparency measures the Iranian public might be willing to place on Iran's nuclear program in return for sanctions relief. The May 2015 study assessed Iranian public attitudes toward the framework for a deal that negotiators made public before they worked out the detailed provisions of the JCPOA. The September 2015 study explored what the Iranian public thought about the agreement reached on July 14 of that year, including how understanding of the terms and expectations regarding sanctions relief affected attitudes toward the JCPOA, the leaders who had negotiated it, and Rouhani's foreign policy of equitable cooperation with the West. These studies and the reports on U.S. attitudes towards the negotiations with Iran are available at: <http://www.cissm.umd.edu>.

This study repeats a number of the same questions asked before, revealing how public attitudes and expectations have changed as Iran carried out its own review and approval process, then started shipping most of its stockpile of low enriched uranium out of Iran, disabling the Arak reactor, and taking a number of other actions prior to getting any sanctions relief. Public support for the JCPOA, for Rouhani, and for moderate candidates in the upcoming election remain strong—albeit not as strong as before—even though more Iranian's know that the terms of the deal are not as favorable for Iran as they had previously believed. But there are also signs that Rouhani could become the victim of dashed expectations in the 2017 presidential election if he cannot translate sanctions relief into rapid economic improvements, especially reductions in unemployment.

This study also includes many new questions to explore how implementation of the deal, and simultaneous debates in the U.S. Congress about imposing new sanctions on Iran for other reasons, might be influencing Iranian attitudes about working with the United States on other

problems, like terrorism and civil violence in the Middle East. In addition to repeating a question asked previously about cooperating to help the government of Iraq counter ISIS, we probed extensively into Iranian attitudes towards ISIS and other non-state actors in the region, toward various forms of involvement by Iran and other countries in Syria, and toward current diplomatic efforts to end the civil war in Syria and concentrate international military action on defeating ISIS.

The data was collected from December 29, 2015 through January 15, 2016. During this period, a growing number of observers expected Implementation Day to happen soon, but there were still questions about when the IAEA would certify that Iran had fulfilled its commitments, and about whether the United States would impose new sanctions for Iran's ballistic missile activities. This was also shortly before new visa rules took effect in the United States that might discourage Europeans from visiting Iran after sanctions were lifted. The most noteworthy development during the data collection period that may have influenced Iranian attitudes about regional security issues was Saudi Arabia's beheading of a prominent Shia cleric on January 2.

This study was designed, managed, and analyzed by CISSM in conjunction with the Program for Public Consultation, both of which are at the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland. The data was collected by IranPoll.com working in conjunction with UTCPOR.

## **Methodology**

The survey was fielded by IranPoll.com between December 29, 2015 and January 15, 2016. The overall sample size is  $n=1,012$ , giving a sampling margin of error of  $\pm 3.2\%$ .

The sample was an RDD sample drawn from all landline telephones in Iran. The sample was 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.

All calls were made from within Iran. 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. The contact rate, defined as the proportion of respondents who were reached and ultimately agreed to be interviewed relative to the number of respondents attempted, was 73%. The completion rate was 82%.

All of the interviews were conducted using computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) in a centralized call center. All interviews were monitored in real-time by call-center supervisors and were recorded.

## **Summary of Findings**

### **1. Views of the Rouhani Administration (Page 9)**

President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif enjoy high levels of popular support in Iran. Nearly 8 in 10 Iranians say they have a favorable opinion of Rouhani and Zarif. Yet the intensity of their popularity has substantially eroded since August 2015. With Iran's parliamentary elections only about a month away, 6 in 10 Iranians continue to want Rouhani supporters to win, while a growing minority favors his critics. Though Rouhani receives high marks for improving Iran's security and deepening Iran's relations with European countries, views of the economy are mixed. An increasing majority of Iranians think that Rouhani has not been successful in reducing unemployment. Iranians are also substantially less optimistic about Iran's economy, with less than half now thinking that the economy is getting better.

### **2. Iran's February 2016 Parliamentary Elections (Page 12)**

Four in ten Iranians voice confidence that the upcoming Majlis (Iran's Parliament) elections will be very fair, and another four in ten assume it will be somewhat free and fair. Two thirds are highly confident they will vote in the upcoming elections for the Majlis and the Assembly of Experts. The most important issues Iranians want the new Majlis to tackle are unemployment and Iran's low performing economy.

### **3. Civil Liberties in Iran (Page 14)**

Two in three Iranians believe that it is important for President Rouhani to seek to increase civil liberties in Iran. However, only a small minority complains that Iranians have too little freedom. While only about a third thinks that civil liberties in Iran have increased during Rouhani's presidency, a plurality expects that civil liberties will increase at least somewhat over the next two years.

### **4. Approval for Nuclear Deal (Page 15)**

Seven in ten Iranians approve of the nuclear deal, though enthusiasm has waned somewhat. The deal garners support from majorities of those who favor Rouhani's critics in the Majlis election, as well as those who favor his supporters. Two thirds still think the Iranian leadership negotiated a good deal for Iran, though the number of those disagreeing has risen to one in five. The number who believes it was a win for Iran has also declined, while the number who believes it was a victory for both sides has risen and is now a majority.

### **5. Perceptions of the Nuclear Deal (Page 16)**

Substantial numbers of Iranians now have a more accurate picture of the deal than they did in August 2015. About half (up from a third) now realizes that Iran has accepted limits on its nuclear research. Almost half (up from a quarter) now knows that many US sanctions are not covered by the agreement and will continue. However, growing majorities continue to believe incorrectly that Iranian military sites cannot be inspected under any conditions. A majority also believes that the US has agreed to not impose new sanctions to replace the ones that were removed as part of the nuclear deal.

## **6. Expectations of Economic Benefits (Page 19)**

Three in five Iranians expect that the nuclear deal will eventually result in improvements in their own economic well-being. This sentiment is shared by a majority of those who support Rouhani's critics in the upcoming parliamentary elections. Majorities expect to see, within a year, better access to medical products from abroad, more foreign investment, and significant improvements in unemployment and the overall economy, though these majorities have declined from August 2015.

## **7. The Nuclear Deal's Effect on Iran's Foreign Relations (Page 21)**

A large majority of Iranians thinks that Iran's relations with European countries have already improved as a result of the nuclear deal, but only one in three thinks Iran's relations with the United States have improved.

## **8. Views of US Cooperation in the Nuclear Deal (Page 22)**

Six in ten Iranians are not confident that the US will live up to its obligations under the nuclear agreement and do not think the US will accept other countries cooperating with Iran's civilian nuclear sector, as provided for under the deal. Half assume the US will use pressure and sanctions to extract more concessions from Iran—up from only a quarter in August 2015.

## **9. Views of the Nuclear Program (Page 24)**

Just as in past years, four in five Iranians see the development of an Iranian nuclear program as very important, and three in four see this program as being for purely peaceful purposes. Four in five continue to favor the idea of a Middle East nuclear-free zone that would require all countries in the Middle East, including Israel, not to have nuclear weapons.

## **10. Iran's Involvement in Syria and Fighting ISIS (Page 25)**

Large majorities of Iranians approve of Iran being involved in Syria and strongly support countering ISIS, preserving Iran's influence in the region, and countering Saudi, American, and Israeli influence. Overwhelming majorities approve of Iran fighting ISIS directly. Large majorities also approve of Iran supporting Shiite and Kurdish groups fighting ISIS and providing support to Iranian allies in the region. Strengthening the Assad government gets more modest support and is seen as a secondary goal for Iran. Two in three Iranians approve of sending Iranian military personnel to help Assad fight against armed Syrian rebels, including ISIS.

## **11. Views of US Involvement in Syria (Page 28)**

A large majority of Iranians disapproves of US involvement in Syria. US involvement in Syria is widely perceived as being primarily motivated by a desire to topple the Assad government, to increase US influence and power in the region, to protect Israeli and Saudi interests, and to decrease Iran's influence and power in the region. Views are divided about whether the United States is seeking to protect Syrian civilians, to end the conflict, to prevent the conflict from spreading, or to fight ISIS. A modest majority says US efforts against ISIS are not at all sincere. A bare majority supports direct cooperation with the United States to counter ISIS in Iraq.

## **12. Views of Other Nations Involved in Syria (Page 29)**

Large majorities of Iranians approve of the involvement in Syria of Russia and Hezbollah, and seven in ten express confidence that Russia's efforts against ISIS are sincerely motivated. However, large majorities disapprove of the involvement in Syria of Turkey, France, and, especially, Saudi Arabia. Large majorities say that the Saudis' efforts against ISIS are insincere; views of the sincerity of the efforts by Turkey and France are less negative. A large majority has a negative view of Saudi efforts to create a coalition against terrorism, primarily because Saudi Arabia is seen as a supporter of ISIS.

## **13. International Collaboration on Syria and ISIS (Page 31)**

Despite their suspicions of other countries operating in the region, eight in ten Iranians approve of Iran participating in the international talks on the conflict in Syria. Of those who know about the Vienna agreement, seven in ten approve of it.

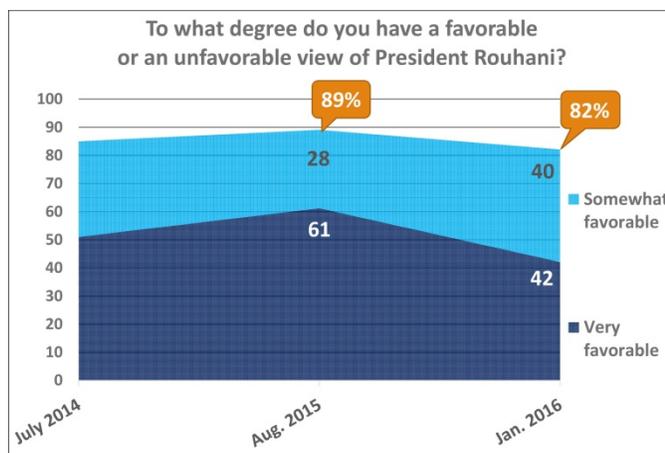
## **14. Views of Other Countries (Page 32)**

Iranians view their country's allies, notably Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Hezbollah, favorably, and view Saudi Arabia and Turkey increasingly unfavorably. Views of Russia and China are generally favorable and have improved considerably over time. Western countries, with the exception of Germany, are viewed unfavorably, with Britain and the US viewed negatively by large majorities in Iran. In contrast, a majority has a favorable opinion of the American people.

## 1. Views of the Rouhani Administration

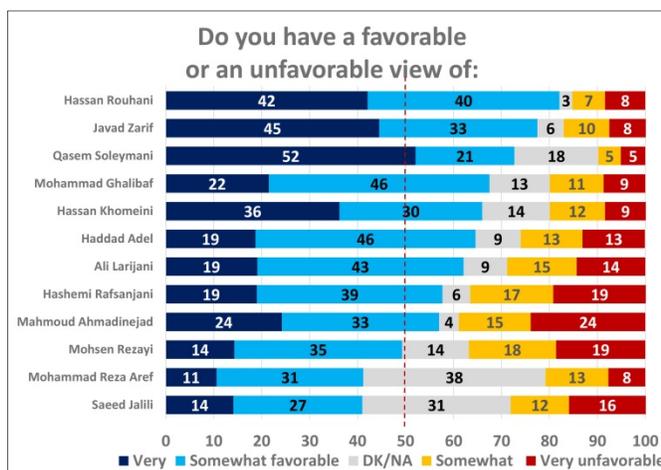
President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif enjoy high levels of popular support in Iran. Nearly 8 in 10 Iranians say they have a favorable opinion of Rouhani and Zarif. Yet the intensity of their popularity has substantially eroded since August 2015. With Iran’s parliamentary elections only about a month away, 6 in 10 Iranians continue to want Rouhani supporters to win, while a growing minority favors his critics. Though Rouhani receives high marks for improving Iran’s security and deepening Iran’s relations with European countries, views of the economy are mixed. An increasing majority of Iranians think that Rouhani has not been successful in reducing unemployment. Iranians are also substantially less optimistic about Iran’s economy, with less than half now thinking that the economy is getting better.

President Rouhani is viewed positively by a very large majority. Overall, his popularity exceeds that of twelve other political and military figures included in the study. Eighty-two percent of Iranians have a favorable opinion of Rouhani, with 42% saying they view him very favorably. The percentage of those who view him very favorably has declined from 61% in August 2015.



Rouhani’s foreign minister Javad Zarif is also popular, with 78% holding a favorable opinion of him (45%, very). The percentage of Iranians who view Zarif very favorably has declined from 56% in August 2015, as well. Major General Qasem Soleimani, who is most known in Iran for the role he plays in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, is also very popular, with 73% holding a favorable opinion of him (52%, very).

Among other political figures tested, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the mayor of Tehran, does well, with 68% holding a favorable opinion. Hassan Khomeini, the grandson of Ayatollah Khomeini is viewed favorably by two out of three (66%) Iranians. Former Presidents Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hashemi Rafsanjani continue to be among Iran’s most polarizing political figures. While 57% express positive feelings toward Ahmadinejad, 39% have unfavorable feelings about him. Likewise, while 58% view Rafsanjani favorably, 37% express negative feelings toward him. Saeed Jalili, Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator prior to

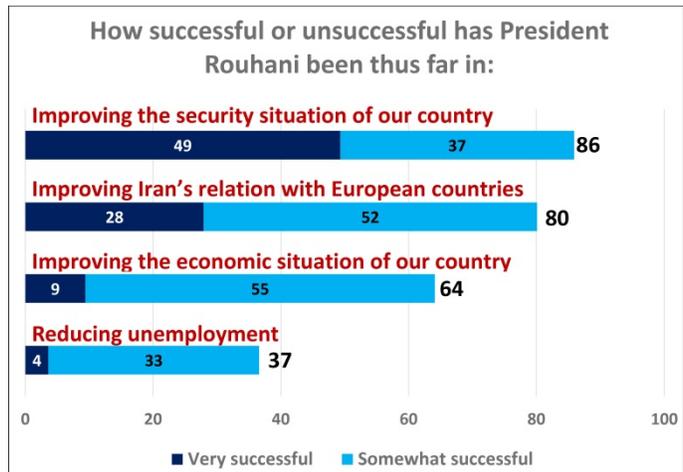


Zarif and one of the strongest critics of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), received a 41% favorable rating, with 28% viewing him unfavorably.

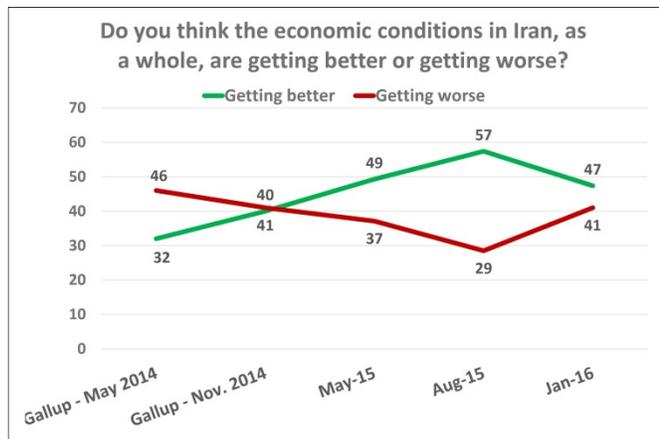
Current MP Gholam Ali Haddad Adel from Tehran and the spokesperson for Iran’s Principlist (conservative) camp is viewed very favorably by 19% and somewhat favorable by 46% percent. Mohammad Reza Aref, who was President Khatami’s vice president and is viewed as the head of Iran’s reformist camp, is viewed favorable by 42% and unfavorably by 21%. Among the twelve figures tested, Aref has the lowest name recognition, with 38% of Iranians saying that they do not recognize his name.

With Iran’s pivotal parliamentary elections less than a month away, Iranians prefer a strong result for President Rouhani’s supporters by a two-to-one margin. Fifty-nine percent say they would “prefer most of the Majlis to be composed of the supporters of President Rouhani,” compared to 25% who prefer it to be mostly composed of his critics.

While Rouhani receives high marks for improving Iran’s security and deepening Iran’s relations with European countries, views of his economic achievements are mixed. A very large majority (86%) believe that Rouhani has been very (49%) or somewhat successful in “improving the security situation” of Iran. A large majority (80%) also think that he has been successful in improving Iran’s relation with European countries (28%, very). A large majority (64%) also think that he has been successful in improving Iran’s relation with European countries (28%, very).



On the economy, six in ten (64%) say he has been at least somewhat successful in “improving the economic situation of our country,” though only 9% say he has been very successful; 32% regard him as unsuccessful. The proportion of Iranians who think Rouhani has been successful in improving Iran’s economy has decreased by 7 percentage points since May 2015. Iranians are most critical about Rouhani’s ability to create jobs and to reduce Iran’s unemployment rate. A solid majority (57%) think that Rouhani has been unsuccessful in reducing Iran’s unemployment (30%, very). Only 37% say he has been at least somewhat successful in creating jobs, with a mere 4% saying he has been very successful.



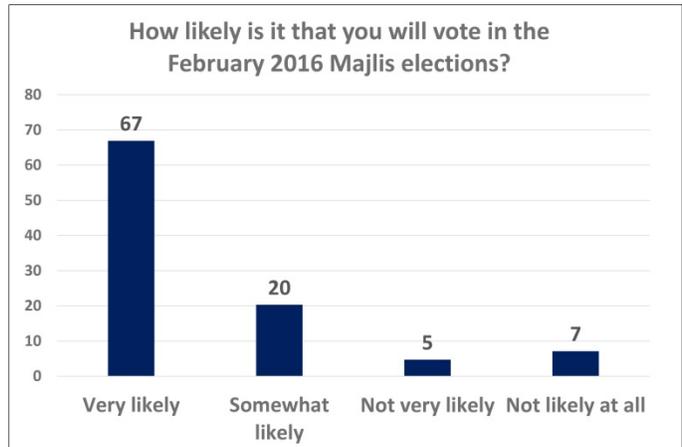
Iranians have become substantially less optimistic about Iran’s economy, with less than half (47%) now thinking that the economy is getting better, compared with 57% in August 2015. Today, 41% of

Iranians think the economy is getting worse, and 6% think that it is staying the same. Iranians are also divided on the general condition of the economy, with nearly half (49%) saying that the economic situation of the country is very (8%) or somewhat (41%) good, and the other half (49%) saying that it is somewhat (25%) or very (24%) bad.

## 2. Iran’s February 2016 Parliamentary Elections

**Four in ten Iranians voice confidence that the upcoming Majlis (Iran’s Parliament) elections will be very fair, and another four in ten assume it will be somewhat free and fair. Two thirds are highly confident they will vote in the upcoming elections for the Majlis and the Assembly of Experts. The most important issues Iranians want the new Majlis to tackle are unemployment and Iran’s low performing economy.**

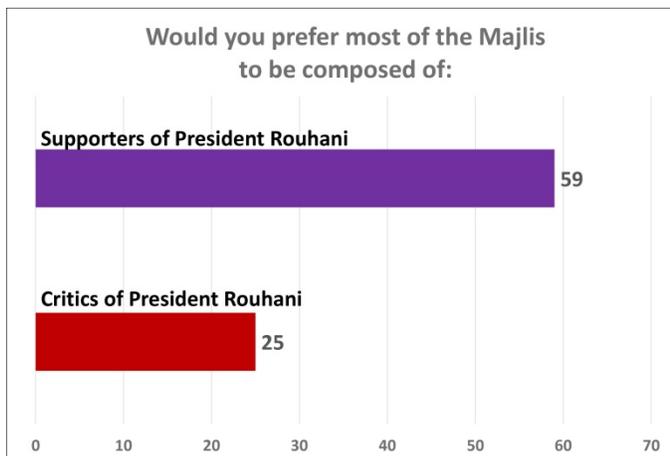
With Iran’s Majlis and Assembly of Experts elections less than a month away, Iranians are confident that the elections will be “free and fair.” Four in ten (41%) believe the upcoming elections will be very free and fair, and another 40% say they will be somewhat free and fair. Only a small minority (14%) voices concern that the upcoming elections will not be free and fair.



While most Iranians think that past Majlis elections have been at least somewhat free and fair, slightly more people think that the upcoming elections will be free and fair. When asked about past Majlis elections, 38% say that Iran’s previous Majlis elections have been very free and fair, and 41% say that they have been somewhat fair. Seventeen percent of Iranians say that past Majlis elections have not been free and fair.

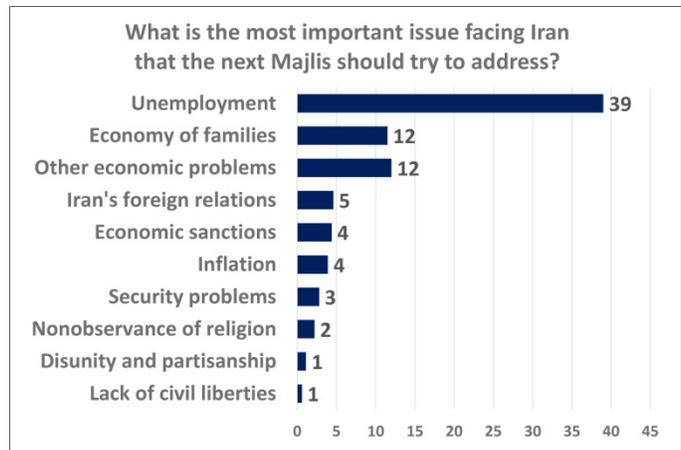
Nearly 9 in 10 Iranians say they will probably vote in the upcoming Majlis elections, with 67% saying it is very likely they will vote. Only 12% of Iranians say they are not likely to vote in the elections. Considering that the Assembly of Experts elections will be held on the same day as the Majlis elections, it is not surprising that a large majority of Iranians say they will be voting in that election as well. Seven in ten (69%) say it is very likely and another 17% say it is somewhat likely that they will vote in the coming Assembly of Experts elections.

Six in ten (59%) Iranians say they want the next Majlis to be primarily composed of supporters of President Rouhani. Only about a quarter (25%) want his critics to win, and about 16% were undecided at the time of the survey.



In an open-ended question, Iranians were asked to name the most important Iranian challenge or issue that the next Majlis should try to address. In response, 26% named unemployment in general, 13% named youth unemployment, 12% said the

economic problems of families, 4% identified inflation and the high costs of commodities, and 12% named various other economic problems. Fewer name issues relating to Iran’s place in the world. Five percent expressed concerns relating to Iran’s foreign relations, 4% identified economic sanctions as a problem, and 3% named security as a prime concern.

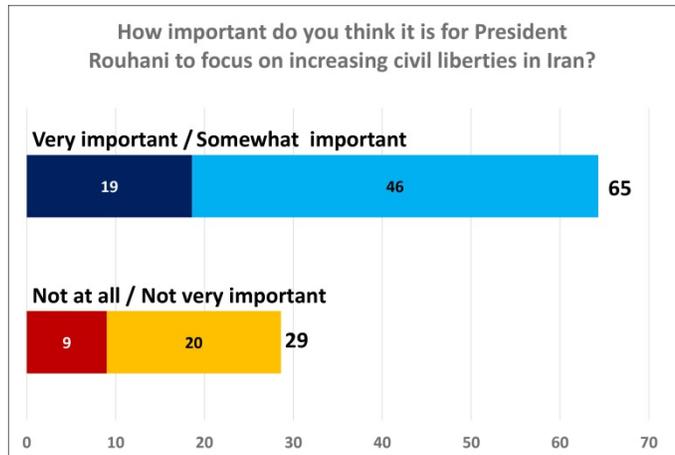


Much has been said about the importance of the Majlis and Assembly of Experts elections relative to one another. While Iranians are more likely to think that the upcoming Assembly of Experts election is more important than the Majlis election, the distinction is not strong. Four in ten (43%) think the Assembly of Experts election is more important for Iran, 31% think the Majlis election is more important, and another 20% think that they are equally important.

### 3. Civil Liberties in Iran

**Two in three Iranians believe that it is important for President Rouhani to seek to increase civil liberties in Iran. However, only a small minority complains that Iranians have too little freedom. While only about a third thinks that civil liberties in Iran have increased during Rouhani’s presidency, a plurality expects that civil liberties will increase at least somewhat over the next two years.**

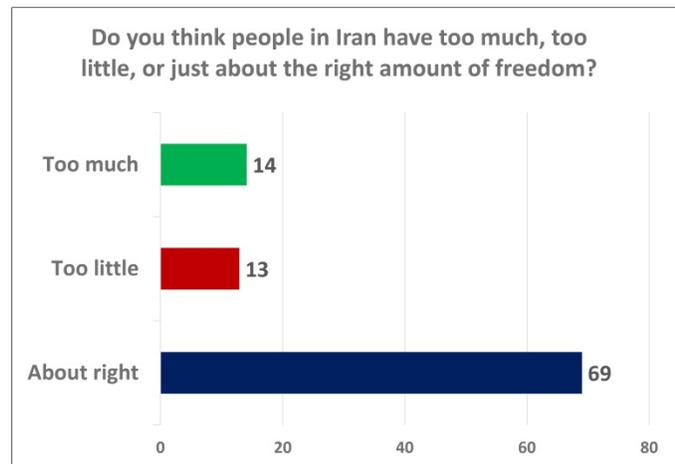
Iranians generally believe that President Rouhani should focus on increasing civil liberties in Iran. Two in three (64%) say it is very (18%) or somewhat (46%) important for Rouhani to focus on increasing civil liberties in Iran. Only 29% of Iranians think the opposite.



While a plurality (48%) says the status of civil liberties in Iran has not changed since Rouhani took office two years ago, 32% think that it has increased and only 6% think that it has deteriorated.

Nonetheless, four in ten (41%) believe that civil liberties in Iran will increase over the coming two years, and less than a tenth (8%) are of the opinion that they will decrease. Thirty-three percent believe that civil liberties will remain unchanged over the next two years.

In general, only a small minority of Iranians say that Iranians have too little freedom. A majority (69%) thinks that the amount of freedom Iranians enjoy is about right, and 14% think that Iranians enjoy too much freedom.

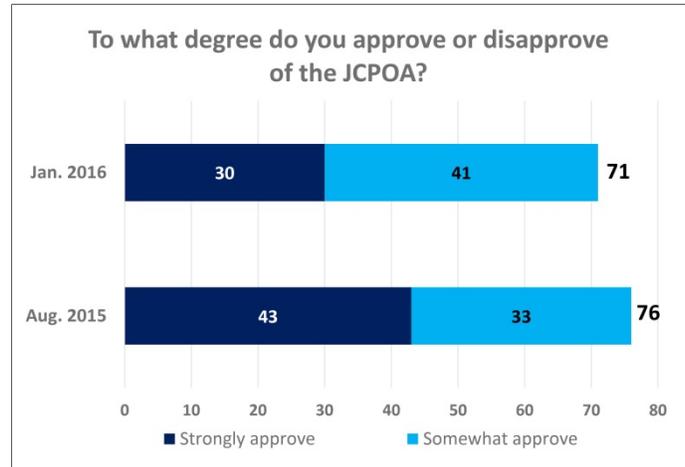


A strong majority (76%) continues to believe that Iranian policymakers should take religious teachings into account when they make decisions. A minority (22%) disagrees.

#### 4. Approval for Nuclear Deal

**Seven in ten Iranians approve of the nuclear deal, though enthusiasm has waned somewhat. The deal garners support from majorities of those who favor Rouhani’s critics in the Majlis election, as well as those who favor his supporters. Two thirds still think the Iranian leadership negotiated a good deal for Iran, though the number of those disagreeing has risen to one in five. The number who believes it was a win for Iran has also declined, while the number who believes it was a victory for both sides has risen and is now a majority.**

A strong majority of Iranians continues to support the nuclear agreement (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) that was reached between Iran and the P5+1 countries in July 2015. Seven in ten (72%) approve of the JCPOA (30%, strongly), and only 21% disapprove. The intensity of approval for the deal has declined since August 2015, when the deal was reached. While 43% *strongly* approved of the deal immediately after it was reached, today less than a third (30%) *strongly* approve of the JCPOA. Overall, 75% of Iranians approved of the deal in August 2015.



While those who want Rouhani’s allies to win in the upcoming Majlis elections approve of the deal more intensely than those who favor his critics, the deal garners support from a majority of both groups. Among those who prefer that Rouhani’s supporters win the Majlis elections, three in four (75%) either strongly (37%) or somewhat (38%) approve of the deal and 19% disapprove. On the other hand, among those who want Rouhani’s critics to win the Majlis election, 65% approve of the deal, 18% strongly.

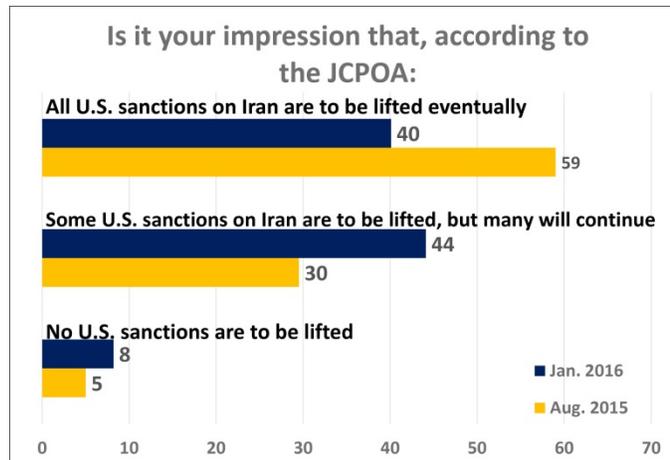
In general, when Iranians think about the nuclear agreement, a majority (67%) believes that their leadership negotiated a good deal for Iran, and less than a fifth (19%) thinks that the negotiated deal was not good for Iran. However, the proportion of Iranians who think that the deal was not good for Iran has risen 9 points since Gallup asked this question in September 2015.

A clear majority (54%) of Iranians now see the JCPOA as mutually beneficial for Iran and the P5+1, up from 43% in August 2015. While in August 2015, 37% of Iranians saw the deal as mostly a victory for Iran; today one in four (27%) regard it as such, and 14% see it as a defeat.

## 5. Perceptions of the Nuclear Deal

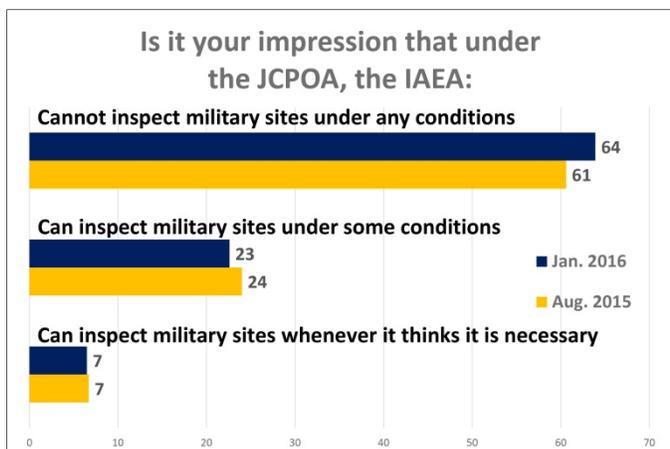
**Substantial numbers of Iranians now have a more accurate picture of the deal than they did in August 2015. About half (up from a third) now realizes that Iran has accepted limits on its nuclear research. Almost half (up from a quarter) now knows that many US sanctions are not covered by the agreement and will continue. However, growing majorities continue to believe incorrectly that Iranian military sites cannot be inspected under any conditions. A majority also believes that the US has agreed to not impose new sanctions to replace the ones that were removed as part of the nuclear deal.**

Some of the decline in intensity of approval for the JCPOA may be related to the fact that many Iranians now have a more accurate understanding of the deal's terms than in August 2015. Nearly half (49%, up from 33%) of Iranians now realizes that Iran has accepted limits on its nuclear research as part of the deal, while four in ten (41%) continue to incorrectly assume that Iran has *not* agreed to place some restraints on its nuclear research. Almost half (44%, up from 30%) now also knows that many US sanctions are not covered by the agreement and will continue, but 40% remain convinced that the JCPOA requires the US to eventually lift all of its sanctions on Iran. Strong majorities also believe that according to the deal all EU (62%) and UN sanctions (65%) on Iran are to be eventually lifted.



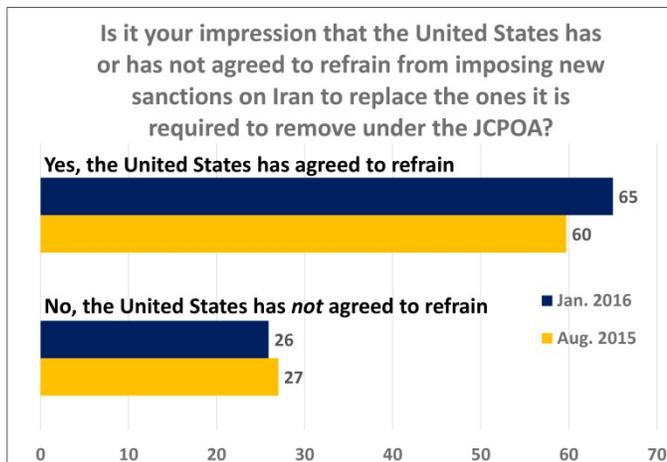
Although this survey was fielded shortly before Implementation Day, many Iranians remained unclear about the JCPOA's implementation sequence. A majority (52%) of Iranians believed that economic sanctions were being lifted at the same time as Iran was taking the steps it had agreed to under the deal, and 8% were of the opinion that the sanctions had been lifted immediately after the deal was reached in July 2015. Only one in three (32%) correctly believed that the sanctions would not be lifted until Iran verifiably completed most of its commitments under the deal—up from 16% in August 2015.

A growing majority (64%, up from 61%) continues to believe incorrectly that under the deal the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is not permitted to inspect Iranian military sites under any conditions. Less than a quarter (23%) correctly believes that the agreement allows the IAEA to perform inspections on military sites under certain



circumstances. Seven percent believe the agreement allows the IAEA to inspect military sites whenever it thinks it is necessary.

A growing majority (65%, up from 60%) of Iranians are also under the impression that the US has agreed to refrain from imposing new sanctions on Iran to replace the ones it is required to remove under the JCPOA. About a quarter (26%), however, thinks that the US has not made this commitment.



***Effect of Assumptions on Support for the Agreement.***

Iranians’ beliefs about the terms of the JCPOA are strongly predictive of their degree of support, or lack thereof, for the nuclear agreement. In general, those who have misperceptions about the agreement are substantially more likely to support it than those who appear to be more informed.

Those who at the time of the survey thought sanctions on Iran were lifted before or while Iran fulfilled its commitments were much more likely to support the deal than those who correctly believed that the sanctions wouldn’t be lifted until the IAEA verified that Iran had fulfilled most of its nuclear commitments. Eighty-four percent of those who think the sanctions were lifted before Iran took its steps, and 82% of those who think they were removed at the same time as Iran’s steps, supported the agreement; of those who knew that sanctions would not be lifted until after Iran took its steps, a smaller majority (57%) approved of the deal.

Likewise, support for the JCPOA is substantially higher among those who think that it calls for all U.S. sanctions on Iran to be eventually lifted. Ninety-three percent of those who believe this support the agreement, while a much smaller majority (64%) of those who know that some US sanctions unrelated to Iran’s nuclear program will remain in place approve of it.

Support for the nuclear deal is also strongly correlated with perceptions about whether Iran has agreed to restrain its nuclear research and development activities. Nine in ten (88%) of those who think that Iran has not agreed to limit its nuclear research approve of the agreement, while a smaller majority (61%) of those who correctly believe that Iran has accepted some constraints approve of the deal.

Perceptions of the IAEA’s inspection and access privileges under the terms of the agreement are most strongly predictive of support for the deal. Eighty-seven percent of those who think the IAEA cannot inspect military sites under any conditions, 49% of those who think (correctly) that the IAEA can perform limited inspections on military sites under specific conditions, and 23% of those who think the agreement allows the IAEA to inspect military sites whenever it thinks it is necessary approve of the nuclear agreement.

### ***Misperceptions Highest Among Rouhani Supporters***

Iranians who want Rouhani's supporters to win control of the Majlis have significantly higher misperceptions about the nuclear deal, compared to those who want Rouhani's critics to win:

- Of those who want Rouhani's supporters to win most of the Majlis seats, 69% believe incorrectly that sanctions on Iran were lifted before or at the same time as Iran was fulfilling most of its commitments under the deal; of those who want Rouhani's critics to win, 45% believe this.
- Of those who want Rouhani's supporters to win, half (48%) believe incorrectly that all US sanctions are to be lifted eventually as part of the deal; on the other side, 24% believe this.
- Of those who want Rouhani's supporters to win, two-thirds (67%) incorrectly believe that under the deal, the IAEA cannot inspect Iranian military sites, regardless of the circumstances; of those who want Rouhani's critics to win, a lesser 63% believe this.
- Of those who want Rouhani's supporters to win, two-thirds (69%) believe that the US has agreed not to impose new sanctions to replace the ones it is required to remove; of those who want Rouhani's critics to win, a lesser 59% believe this.

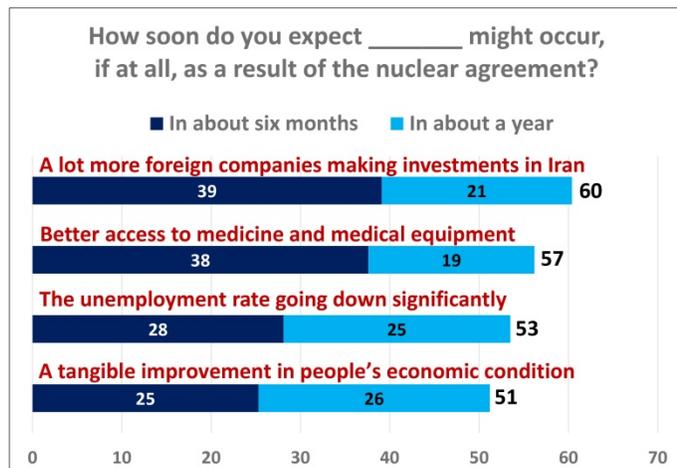
## 6. Expectations of Economic Benefits

**Three in five Iranians expect that the nuclear deal will eventually result in improvements in their own economic well-being. This sentiment is shared by a majority of those who support Rouhani’s critics in the upcoming parliamentary elections. Majorities expect to see, within a year, better access to medical products from abroad, more foreign investment, and significant improvements in unemployment and the overall economy, though these majorities have declined from August 2015.**

Iranians have high, and perhaps unrealistic, expectations about the positive effects of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). These expectations, however, have decreased since their apex immediately after the nuclear deal was announced. Iranians expect that the nuclear agreement will eventually improve their economic conditions. Three in five (61%) say that the JCPOA will ultimately result in improvements to their own economic conditions, while 28% disagree. This sentiment is shared by majorities of those who want Rouhani supporters to win in the upcoming Majlis elections and by those who want his critics to win. Two thirds (67%) of those who favor Rouhani’s supporters and 51% of those who favor his critics believe that the nuclear agreement will eventually improve their own economic well-being.

The survey asked respondents how long it would take to see certain changes in the country now that an agreement has been reached:

- A majority (56%) expects to see Iranians gaining greater access to foreign-made medicines and medical equipment in a year or less (down from 67% in August 2015). Twenty-four percent said two years or more.
- Six in ten (60%) expect to see “a lot more foreign companies making investments in Iran” in a year or less (down from 73% in August 2015). Twenty-one percent thought this would take two years or more.
- A majority (54%) expects to see “the unemployment rate going down significantly” in a year or less (down from 63% in August 2015). Twenty-six percent said this would take two years or more.
- A majority (53%) expects to see “significant improvement in the Iranian economy” in a year or less. Twenty-eight percent said this will take two years or more.



- Finally, 51% of Iranians expect to see “tangible improvement in people’s economic condition” in a year or less (down from 63% in August 2015). Thirty-one percent thought this would take two years or more.

As was the case in the past studies, President Rouhani’s supporters have significantly higher expectations about the nuclear deal compared to critics of the president. For instance, of those who want Rouhani’s allies to win most of the Majlis seats, six in ten (59%) expect to see “the unemployment rate going down significantly” within a year or less, while among Rouhani’s critics, 43% expect this.

## 7. The Nuclear Deal's Effect on Iran's Foreign Relations

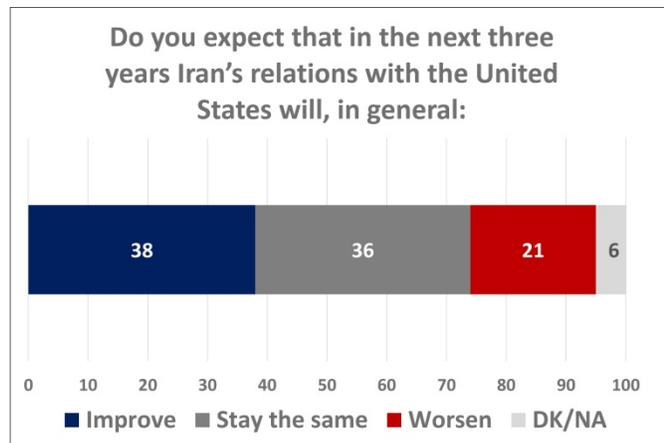
**A large majority of Iranians thinks that Iran's relations with European countries have already improved as a result of the nuclear deal, but only one in three thinks Iran's relations with the United States have improved.**

A large majority (66%) of Iranians thinks that as a result of the nuclear agreement Iran's relations with European countries have improved a lot (16%) or somewhat (50%). Another 11%, moreover, think that they have improved a little. On the other hand, 15% say that Iran's relations with European countries have not improved, and about 1% say that they have worsened.

In contrast, Iranians' views of the US have not gotten better. Only less than a third (30%) thinks Iran's relations with the US have improved since the signing of the nuclear agreement, and a majority (52%) thinks Iran's relations with the US have remained unchanged.

Interestingly, 14% of Iranians say that Iran's relations with the US have in fact worsened since the adoption of the nuclear deal.

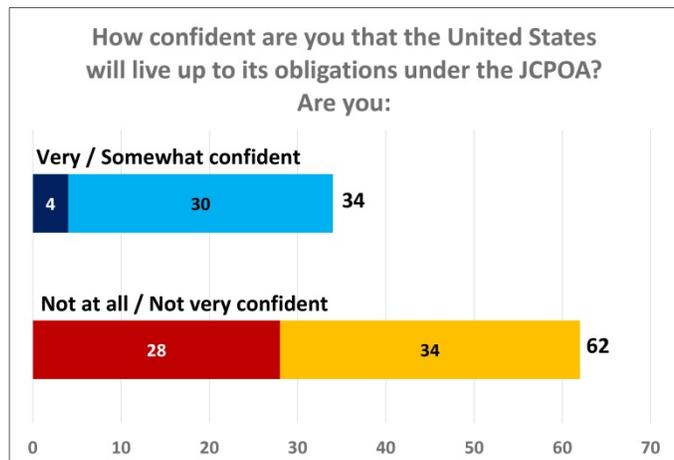
Iranians are divided about what the future holds for Iranian-US relations. While four in ten (38%) think that over the next three years Iran's relations with the US will improve, 36% think that they will stay the same, and 21% think that relations will worsen.



## 8. Views of US cooperation in the nuclear deal

**Six in ten Iranians are not confident that the US will live up to its obligations under the nuclear agreement and do not think the US will accept other countries cooperating with Iran’s civilian nuclear sector, as provided for under the deal. Half assume the US will use pressure and sanctions to extract more concessions from Iran—up from only a quarter in August 2015.**

Iranians are increasingly less confident that the US will live up to obligations under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Only about a third (34%) now expresses confidence that the US will live up to its obligations under the deal, down from 45% when Gallup asked the same question in September 2015. Today, a majority (62%) of Iranians say they are not confident that the United States will fulfill its obligations, with 34% saying that they are not confident at all.



Iranians’ beliefs have also shifted about how the US will react as other countries engage in nuclear cooperation with Iran to build new nuclear reactors and supply Iran with nuclear fuel. Respondents were asked:

As you may know according to the JCPOA other countries are permitted to cooperate with Iran on building new nuclear reactors and supplying Iran with nuclear fuel. In your opinion, is it more likely that the US will accept other countries cooperating with Iran in this way or that the US will try to impede such cooperation?

In response, a majority (59%) says the United States is more likely to be obstructive, and about a third (34%) thinks the United States would be more likely to accept other countries cooperating with Iran that way. In August 2015, only 47% of Iranians expected the US to impede nuclear cooperation with Iran.

A shift has also occurred in how Iranians think the US will behave now that Iran has made some significant concessions as part of the nuclear agreement. As in previous studies, Iranians were asked to consider how the US will respond now that Iran has conceded to some of its demands. The question read:

Now that Iran has agreed to limit its nuclear program and accept more intrusive inspections of its nuclear program in return for the lifting of sanctions, which do you think is more likely:

- The United States will be more willing to compromise with Iran in most other areas of contention,

- The United States will rely on pressure and sanctions to extract concessions from Iran in most other areas as well, or
- Iran's concession on the nuclear issue will not have much of an effect on most other issues between the two countries?

About half (50%) of respondents believe that the United States will use diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions to extract concessions from Iran outside the nuclear field. This is an increase of 23 points when compared to responses to a similar question asked in August 2015, immediately after the agreement was concluded. Another 28% say that Iran's concessions are more likely to lead the US to be more accommodating, compared to 30% in August 2015. And 15% think it will make no difference either way—down from 32% in August 2015.

This wariness could explain why Iranians believe it is better for Iran not to rush to fulfill its commitments under the JCPOA. The survey provided two arguments for the respondents to consider. It asked:

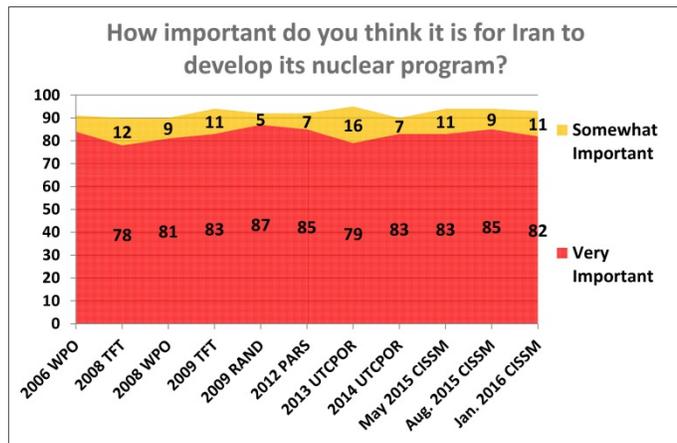
Some say that Iran should fulfill its commitments under the JCPOA as quickly as possible so that the sanctions on Iran will come off as soon as possible. Others argue that it would be better for Iran to undertake its commitments slowly until it has more confidence that the P5+1, including the United States, will live up to its end of the bargain as well. Which of these views is closer to your view?

In response, three in four (75%) Iranians say that Iran should fulfill its commitments more slowly, and only a fifth (20%) thinks Iran should fulfill its commitments as quickly as possible so that the sanctions will come off sooner.

## 9. Views of the nuclear program

**Just as in past years, four in five Iranians see the development of an Iranian nuclear program as very important, and three in four see this program as being for purely peaceful purposes. Four in five continue to favor the idea of a Middle East nuclear-free zone that would require all countries in the Middle East, including Israel, not to have nuclear weapons.**

Despite their strong endorsement of the nuclear agreement, Iranians continue to support Iran’s nuclear program. More than eight in ten (82%) believe it is very important for Iran to develop its nuclear program, and another 11% believe it is somewhat important. Similar questions have been asked since 2006 and have consistently shown very high support (about 8 in 10).



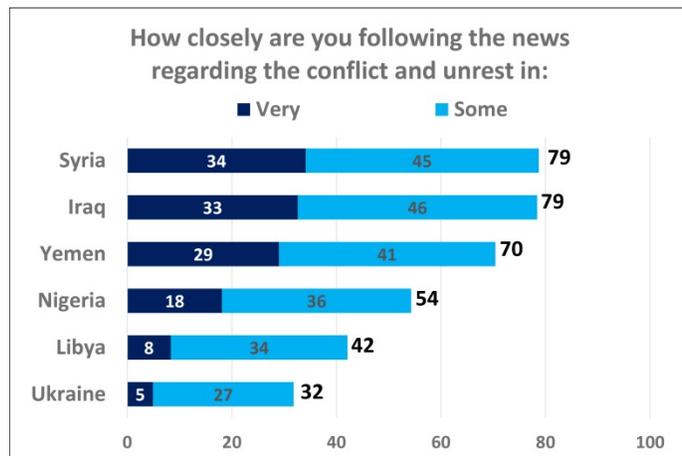
A large majority continues to see the program as driven purely by peaceful goals, and less than one in five sees it as being an effort to pursue nuclear weapons as well. Respondents were asked whether “Iran's objective for developing nuclear capabilities” is “for peaceful purposes such as energy and medical needs” or if Iran is “also seeking to attain the needed capabilities to be able to develop nuclear weapons?” Seventy-five percent say they think the program is purely for peaceful purposes; less than one in five (17%) thinks Iran is also seeking a weapons capability.

Support for the idea of a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East is high and on the upswing. Told that such a zone “would include both Islamic countries and Israel” and would require countries not to have nuclear weapons, 79% favor it (64% strongly) and 18% oppose it. This is up from nine years ago when 71% favored it (50% strongly, WorldPublicOpinion.org).

## 10. Iran’s Involvement in Syria and Fighting ISIS

**Large majorities of Iranians approve of Iran being involved in Syria and strongly support countering ISIS, preserving Iran’s influence in the region, and countering Saudi, American, and Israeli influence. Overwhelming majorities approve of Iran fighting ISIS directly. Large majorities also approve of Iran supporting Shiite and Kurdish groups fighting ISIS and providing support to Iranian allies in the region. Strengthening the Assad government gets more modest support and is seen as a secondary goal for Iran. Two in three Iranians approve of sending Iranian military personnel to help Assad fight against armed Syrian rebels, including ISIS.**

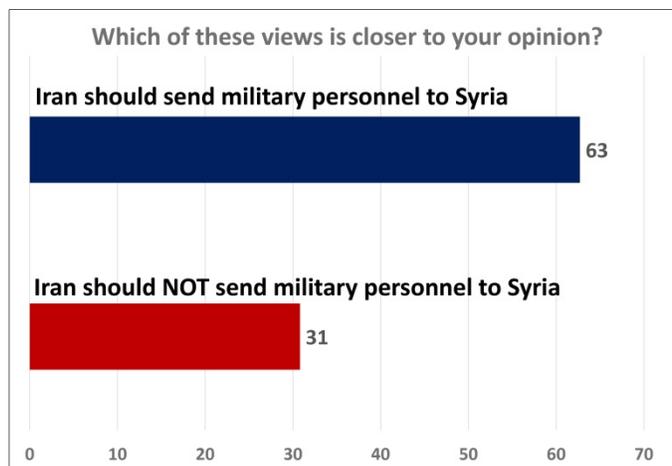
Iranians unanimously (98%) have a *very* unfavorable opinion of ISIS. Majorities of Iranians closely follow news regarding the conflicts in Syria (79%) and Iraq (79%). Besides the Iraq-Syria theater, news regarding the conflict in Palestine is followed at least somewhat closely by 77% Iranians, the Yemen conflict is followed by 70%, the conflict in Nigeria is followed by 54%, the conflict in Libya is followed by 42%, and the news regarding the conflict in Ukraine is followed closely by only 32% of Iranians.



Iranians overwhelmingly (80%) approve of the role their country is playing in Syria and only 13% mostly disapprove of Iran’s role. An even larger proportion (90%) think that Iran is sincere when it says it is fighting ISIS in Syria and Iraq (69%, very), and only 5% cast doubt about Iran’s sincerity.

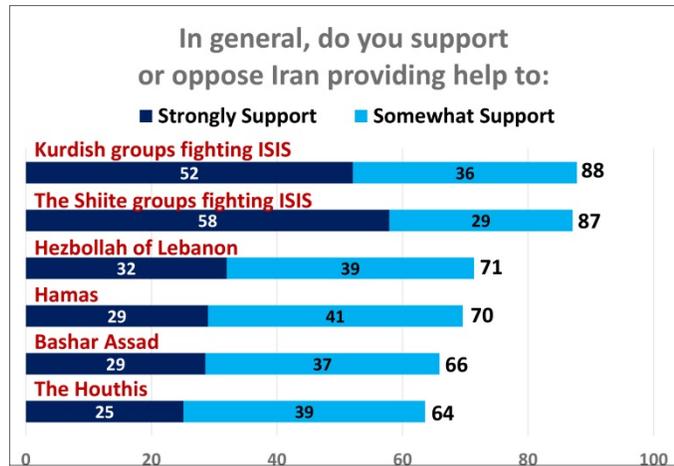
Respondents were asked to consider arguments for and against sending Iranian military personnel to Syria. The question asked:

Some say that Iran should send military personnel to Syria to help the government of Bashar Assad in its fight against armed Syrian rebels, including ISIS, so that these rebels would not be able to threaten Iran’s interests and security in the region. Others argue that Iran should not send military personnel to Syria because this would increase Iran’s enemies in the region and beyond. Which of these views is closer to your opinion?



In response, 63% of Iranians say that Iran should send military personnel to Syria, while 31% are opposed.

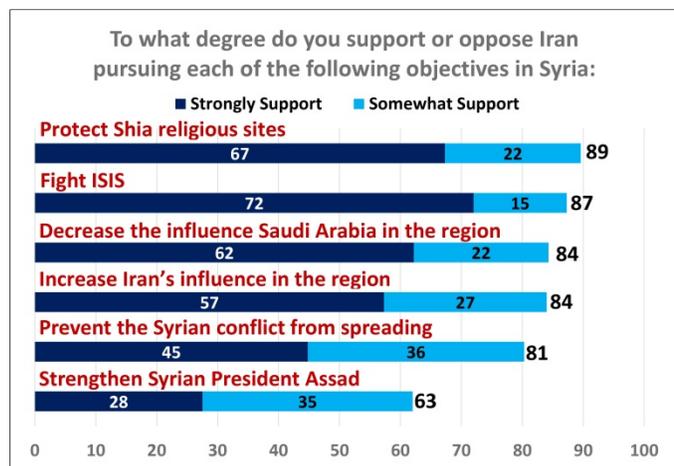
Iranians strongly support Iran helping its allies in the region, particularly those who are fighting ISIS. Nine in ten (88%) support Iran helping Iraqi Kurdish groups fighting ISIS (52%, strongly), 87% approve of Iran helping Shiite groups in Iraq fighting ISIS (58%, strongly), 71% support Iran helping Hezbollah of Lebanon (32%, strongly), and 66% endorse Iran helping the government of Bashar Assad (29%, strongly). A large majority (70%) also supports Iran helping the Palestinian Hamas (29%, strongly), and 64% approve of Iran helping the Houthis in Yemen (25%, strongly). Helping the government of Bashar Assad draws opposition from one in three (29%).



In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to identify what they thought were the main reasons behind Iran's involvement in Syria. The most frequently mentioned reasons were fighting ISIS (14%), preventing terrorist from nearing Iran's borders (13%), countering security threats against Iran (11%), protecting Shiite religious sites (10%), and protecting Syrian civilians (9%). In a separate question, respondents were given a list of possible objectives that Iran could pursue in Syria and asked whether or not they supported Iran pursuing each. Protecting Shiite religious sites is the most strongly supported objective, with nine in ten (89%) supporting it (67%, strongly), followed by the objective of Iran fighting ISIS, which is supported by 87% (72%, strongly).

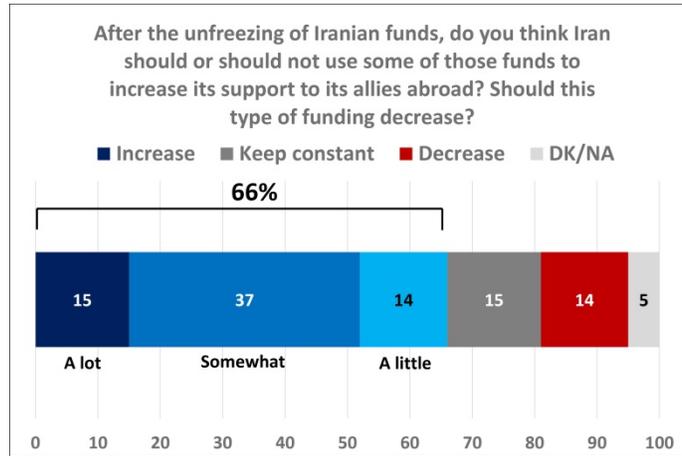
Majorities of Iranians support pursuing other objectives in Syria, as well, but less intensely:

- Decreasing Saudi influence in the region is supported by 84% and opposed by 11%;
- Increasing Iran's influence in the region is supported by 84% and opposed by 12%;
- Preventing the conflict in Syria from spreading to other countries is supported by 80% and opposed by 12%;
- Countering US and Israeli policies in the region is supported by 77% and opposed by 18%;



- Making sure that Iran continues to be able to provide support to Hezbollah is supported by 74% and opposed by 20%;
- Protecting Syrian civilians is supported by 69% and opposed by 24%; and
- Strengthening Syrian President Assad is supported by 62% and opposed by 28%.

While some have suggested that Iranians would want to spend the funds released with the end of sanctions only on domestic priorities, two-thirds (66%) say that Iran should use at least some of its freed-up funds to increase its support to its allies (presumably including groups like the Syrian government, Hezbollah, and Shiite militias in Iraq—all of which are fighting ISIS) by a lot (15%), somewhat (37%), or a little (14%). Only 15% say that Iran should not increase its support of its allies, and another 14% say that Iran should decrease its support of its allies abroad.



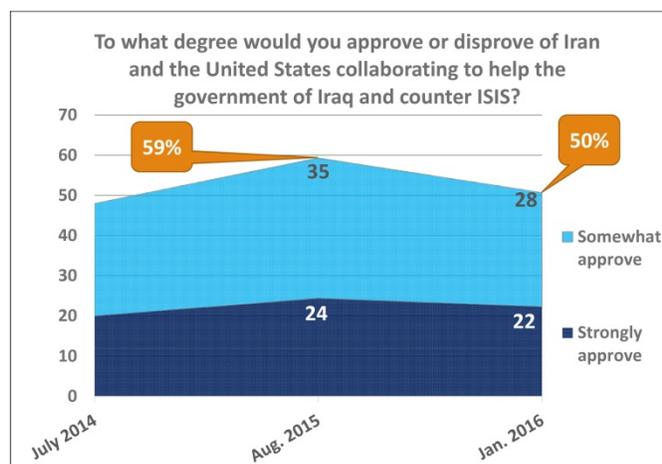
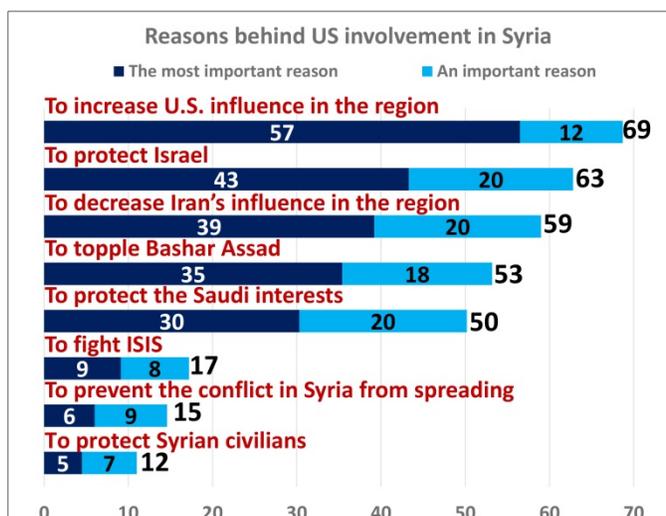
## 11. Views of US Involvement in Syria

**A large majority of Iranians disapproves of US involvement in Syria. US involvement in Syria is widely perceived as being primarily motivated by a desire to topple the Assad government, to increase US influence and power in the region, to protect Israeli and Saudi interests, and to decrease Iran’s influence and power in the region. Views are divided about whether the US is seeking to protect Syrian civilians, to end the conflict, to prevent the conflict from spreading, or to fight ISIS. A modest majority says US efforts against ISIS are not at all sincere. A bare majority supports direct cooperation with the US to counter ISIS in Iraq.**

Iranians overwhelmingly (74%) disapprove of US involvement in Syria, and a large majority (66%) sees US efforts against ISIS as insincere. Only 17% of Iranians mostly approve of US involvement in Syria, and one in four (26%) thinks that the US is sincere in countering ISIS.

The Iranian people’s disapproval of US involvement in Syria rests on a perception that the US is pursuing goals other than to degrade and defeat ISIS. Only 17% of Iranians think that US involvement in Syria is primarily motivated by the objective of defeating ISIS. Majorities of Iranians think that the main goals of US efforts in Syria are to increase US influence and power in the region (69%), to protect Israel (63%), to decrease Iran’s influence in the region (59%), to increase the US military presence in the region (55%), to topple Bashar Assad (53%), and to protect Saudi interests in the region (50%). Only small minorities think that US involvement in Syria is driven by a desire to prevent the Syrian conflict from spreading (15%), to end the conflict in Syria (14%), and to protect Syrian civilians (11%).

Despite their strong stance against ISIS, Iranians’ wary and negative attitudes toward US involvement in Syria might explain why they are divided on whether or not Iran and the United States should coordinate their efforts against ISIS. Only a bare majority (51%) of Iranians approve of cooperating with the US to help the government of Iraq and counter ISIS, down from 59 percent in August 2015; four in ten (43%) oppose cooperation.

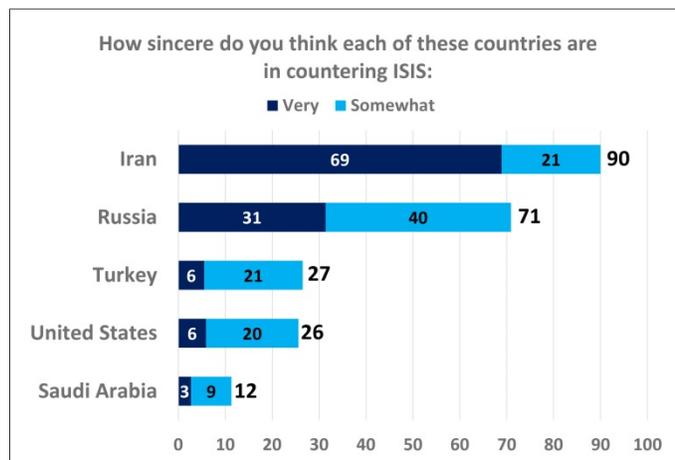


## 12. Views of Other Nations Involved in Syria

**Large majorities of Iranians approve of the involvement in Syria of Russia and Hezbollah, and seven in ten express confidence that Russia’s efforts against ISIS are sincerely motivated. However, large majorities disapprove of the involvement in Syria of Turkey, France, and, especially, Saudi Arabia. Large majorities say that the Saudis’ efforts against ISIS are insincere; views of the sincerity of the efforts by Turkey and France are less negative. A large majority has a negative view of Saudi efforts to create a coalition against terrorism, primarily because Saudi Arabia is seen as a supporter of ISIS.**

Large majorities of Iranians approve of Russia and Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria. Two-thirds (67%) mostly approve of Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria, while 22% disapprove. Sixty percent also approve of Russia’s involvements in Syria, while 28% disapprove. Iranians regard Russia’s efforts in Syria to be sincerely driven by a desire to counter ISIS. Seven in ten (71%) think that Russia is sincere in countering ISIS, and less than one-fifth (19%) thinks that it is insincere.

Iranians, however, hold very different views about other countries’ involvement in Syria and their sincerity in fighting ISIS. Large majorities disapprove of the involvement of Saudi Arabia (87%), Turkey (70%) and France (58%) in Syria. Large majorities also cast doubts about the sincerity of these countries in countering ISIS. Eight in ten (80%) say that Saudi Arabia is insincere in fighting ISIS, while 11% think that it is acting sincerely. Two-thirds (65%) think that Turkey is insincere in countering ISIS, while 26% think it is acting sincerely. As for France, about one half (50%) says that it is insincere in countering ISIS, while 37% say that it is acting sincerely.



Iranians’ negative attitudes toward Saudi Arabia’s involvement in Syria and their doubts about the kingdom’s sincerity in fighting ISIS have made Iranians suspicious about the Saudi-led coalition against terrorism. Respondents were asked:

As you may have heard, Saudi Arabia has announced a new coalition of 34 nations that Saudi Arabia says will fight against ISIS. Do you see the creation of this coalition as very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative, or very negative?

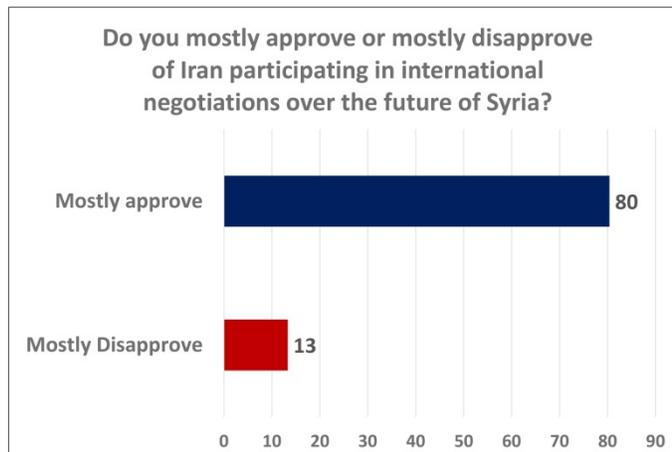
In response, seven in ten (71%) say they saw the creation of this coalition as something negative (56%, very negative), and less than a fifth regards it as something positive (17%). The most prevalent reason given by those who saw the creation of the Saudi-led coalition as something negative was that Saudi Arabia is the main supporter of ISIS (58%).

In general, however, Iranians approve of military attacks against ISIS. When asked, “Do you approve or disapprove of the military attacks being conducted by various countries against ISIS?” two-thirds (65%) say they approve (47%, strongly), and only 12% disapprove.

### 13. International Collaboration on Syria and ISIS

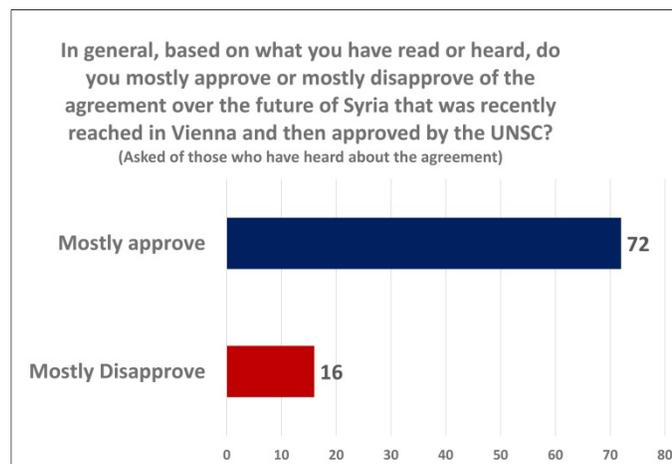
**Despite their suspicions of other countries operating in the region, eight in ten Iranians approve of Iran participating in the international talks on the conflict in Syria. Of those who know about the Vienna agreement, seven in ten approve of it.**

Despite their disapproval of other countries' involvement in Syria, Iranians overwhelmingly approve of Iran participating in international talks on the future of Syria. Eight in ten (80%) Iranians say they mostly approve of Iran participating in international negotiations over the future of Syria, and only 13% disapprove.



Fifty percent of Iranians have heard or read about the Vienna agreement over the future of Syria, which was approved by UN Security Council resolution 2254 on December 18, 2015. Fifteen percent say they have heard only a little about the agreement, and about a third (30%) say that they have not heard about the Vienna agreement. Of those who have heard at least a little about the agreement, seven in ten (72%) approve of the agreement, while 16% disapprove.

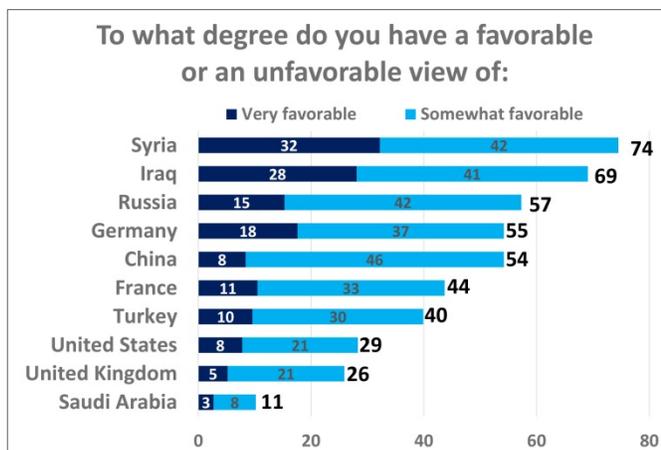
A large majority (79%) wants the international community to identify and punish those who have used chemical weapons in Syria. Only 14% think that the use of chemical weapons in Syria does not require any particular response from the international community. Iranians, however, are far more likely to blame armed rebels fighting against Assad than the Assad government for the chemical attacks. A majority (57%) thinks that the armed rebels fighting against the government of Bashar Assad have used chemical weapons in Syria, 3% think that Bashar Assad has used such weapons, and 17% say that both the government of Bashar Assad and the armed rebels have used chemical weapons in Syria.



## 14. Views of Other Countries

**Iranians view their country’s allies, notably Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Hezbollah, favorably, and view Saudi Arabia and Turkey increasingly unfavorably. Views of Russia and China are generally favorable and have improved considerably over time. Western countries, with the exception of Germany, are viewed unfavorably, with Britain and the US viewed negatively by large majorities in Iran. In contrast, a majority has a favorable opinion of the American people.**

Iranians hold quite positive views of Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Hezbollah. Three-quarters (75%) continue to view Syria favorably (32%, very favorably). Only 24% view it unfavorably (12%, very unfavorably). More than two-thirds (69%) have a favorable view of Iraq (28%, very). A third (30%) has an unfavorable view (16%, very unfavorable). Lebanon is viewed favorably by two-thirds (66%); about a third (30%) has an unfavorable view of Lebanon. Hezbollah of Lebanon, however, is viewed more favorably than Lebanon. Three in four (74%) have a favorable opinion of Hezbollah (34%, very favorably), and about a quarter (23%) views it unfavorably (16%, very unfavorably).



Attitudes toward Saudi Arabia have become increasingly negative. Eight in ten (79%) have *very* unfavorable opinions of Saudi Arabia (up from 59% in May 2015), and another 9% have somewhat unfavorable views. Only 10% say they have a favorable opinion of Saudi Arabia. Views of Turkey have also become more negative. Six in ten (58%) have an unfavorable opinion of Turkey (up from 52% in May 2015), while 40% have favorable views.

The two non-western P5+1 countries—Russia and China—are viewed favorably by growing majorities of Iranians. A majority (57%, up from 43% in May 2015) views Russia favorably, while 39% view it unfavorably. China is also viewed favorably by a majority (54%, up from 48% in May 2015), while 41% view it unfavorably.

Among the Western countries that were evaluated, Germany is seen most favorably, with 54% having favorable opinions and 40% having unfavorable opinions. A bare majority (51%) has unfavorable views of France, while 44% have favorable views. A large majority (70%) continues to have an unfavorable opinion of the United Kingdom. Only about a quarter (26%) has positive feelings.

## *Views of the United States*

The US, and the US government in particular, are viewed negatively by a large majority of Iranians. Seven in ten (71%) have an unfavorable opinion of the United States (54%, very unfavorable), and about a quarter (28%) has positive views. Views of the US government are even more negative. Nine in ten (88%) hold unfavorable attitudes toward the US government (74%, very unfavorable), and only about a tenth (10%) is positive. Attitudes toward the American people, however, do not follow the same trend. A majority (53%) of Iranians has positive feelings toward the American people, while 43% have unfavorable views.

