

# Iranian Public Attitudes Before & After Parliamentary Elections

A public opinion study | March 2016



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SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL &  
SECURITY STUDIES AT MARYLAND

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## Introduction

On February 26, 2016, Iran held its first parliamentary election since President Rouhani completed an agreement with the United States and other world powers for additional limitations and inspections of Iran's nuclear program in return for relief from nuclear-related sanctions. A total of 6,200 candidates competed for the 290 Majlis seats in 207 districts. 221 representatives were selected in the first round of voting; a second round will be held on April 29, 2016, to fill seats where no candidate received at least 25 percent of the vote in the first round.

This election is being seen as a referendum on Rouhani's presidency, the nuclear deal he negotiated, and his efforts to increase Iran's international political and economic engagement. The results of that referendum have been difficult to interpret, though, because leading figures across Iran's political spectrum have all declared victory. Foreign reporting on the election has also been confusing, though the dominant theme of Western reporting after the election was victory by the reformists.

In addition to asking who won the Majlis election and what that means for Rouhani's ability to advance his policy objectives before Iran's next presidential election in spring of 2017, many observers wonder how the vetting process used by Iran's Guardian Council affected the results of the election and voter satisfaction. Iran's Supreme Leader appoints half of the members of the Guardian Council, whose responsibilities include ensuring that candidates for the Majlis meet certain qualifications. Of the 12,000 people who originally registered to compete, the Guardian Council eventually decided that 6,200 met the minimum qualifications.

Instead of having a small number of long-standing political parties, Iran has a large number of political groups often organized around a prominent individual, that sometimes form loose alliances. While most of the candidates were not official members of any political party, as in previous parliamentary elections, many of them identified themselves with, and sought the endorsement and recognition of, various loose political coalitions or groups. Each political group then used its resources to campaign, primarily by communicating to voters which candidates the group was endorsing.

In voting districts where people vote to fill only one Majlis seat, candidates simply identified themselves as the endorsed candidate of a political group. In voting districts where people vote to fill two or more seats, a political group prepared a list of endorsed candidates and then communicated the list in that voting district. In this election, the two major political coalitions or groups that competed against each other were the more conservative Principlists, who have dominated the Majlis since 2004, and the more liberal Reformists, who are closely associated with former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami. Candidates who did not identify with any of the active political groups are referred to as independents.

President Rouhani, typically regarded as a Pragmatist or a Moderate rather than a Reformist, neither organized his own coalition of centrist groups nor campaigned against any of the more conservative candidates. Some candidates who identified themselves as Reformists, Principlists, or independents also indicated their support for President Rouhani, while others are known as his critics. Thus, assessing what the Majlis elections say about Iranian support for President Rouhani

and his policies is much more complicated than using the outcome of mid-term congressional elections in the United States as a referendum on the current President, his political party, and his policies.

This report is the latest in a series of in-depth studies about Iranian public opinion regarding the nuclear negotiations, political and economic conditions in Iran, security in the Middle East, and Iran's foreign relations that the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) has been conducting in conjunction with the Program for Public Consultation (PPC) and Iranpoll.com, an independent Toronto-based polling company. It builds on a January 2016 study conducted shortly before the International Atomic Energy Agency certified that Iran had fulfilled the nuclear commitments made in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and could start receiving sanctions relief. It includes some data collected in a second pre-election survey, as well as data from a survey done shortly after the first round of elections. CISSM's previous studies of Iranian public opinion, and related articles and studies of American public opinion towards the nuclear negotiations with Iran are available at: <http://www.cissm.umd.edu/projects/program-public-consultation>.

## **Methodology**

The study is based on two telephone polls, one conducted before and the other conducted after the parliamentary elections in Iran. The first poll was conducted February 15 – 24, 2016 among a representative sample of 1,016 Iranians, and the second poll was conducted March 3 – 13, 2016 among a representative sample of 1,005 Iranians. The margin of error for both polls is about +/- 3.2%.

The samples were RDD samples drawn from all landline telephones in Iran. 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.

All calls were made from Toronto, Canada. 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 for the pre-election poll, defined as the proportion of respondents who were reached and ultimately agreed to be interviewed relative to the number of respondents attempted, was 69%. The completion rate was 86%. The contact rate of the post-election poll was 73% and its completion rate was 84%.

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

## Summary of Findings

### **1. Views of the Conduct of the February 2016 Majlis Elections (page 8)**

Four in ten Iranians say the Majlis (Iran's Parliament) elections were very fair, and another four in ten think they were somewhat free and fair. Also, eight in ten say they were at least somewhat satisfied with the final makeup of the candidates for whom they could vote.

### **2. Views of the Outcome of the Majlis Elections: President Rouhani & his Critics (page 9)**

A large majority of Iranians say they voted for candidates who were supporters of President Hassan Rouhani. Rouhani still enjoys high levels of popular support in Iran. Nearly eight in ten Iranians continue to have a favorable opinion of Rouhani. Yet the percentage saying they have a very favorable opinion has consistently eroded since August 2015, soon after the nuclear deal was reached. Two thirds support greater economic engagement with the West—a Rouhani agenda. While views about the current economic situation have not improved, optimism has grown, with more than half now thinking that the economy is getting better.

### **3. Views of the Outcome of the Majlis Elections: Principlist, Reformist, and Independents (page 12)**

In terms of the preferred candidates' political orientation, roughly equal proportions say they voted for the Principlists, Reformists, and independents. While those who voted for Reformist candidates were more likely to say they voted for pro-Rouhani candidates, a majority in all three groups said they voted for pro-Rouhani candidates, suggesting that Rouhani's support is broad-based.

### **4. Priorities of the Next Majlis (page 16)**

The most important issues Iranians want the new Majlis to tackle are unemployment and Iran's low-performing economy. Majorities are optimistic that the new Majlis will move Iran in the right direction. Majorities also express confidence that the new Majlis will be successful in reducing Iran's unemployment, improving its relations with other countries, and improving its security.

### **5. Civil Liberties in Iran (page 18)**

Two in three Iranians believe that it is important for President Rouhani to seek to increase civil liberties in Iran, and seven in ten are hopeful that the next parliament will be successful in this. However, only one in eight complain that Iranians have too little freedom. Three in four continue to think that Iranian policymakers should take religious teachings into account when they make decisions.

### **6. Approval for the Nuclear Deal (page 19)**

Seven in ten Iranians approve of the nuclear deal Iran and the P5+1 countries reached in July 2015. However, the percentage saying they strongly favor the deal has declined substantially. Also, views of the deal have become more aligned with political attitudes: while a large majority of those who favored pro-Rouhani's candidates continue to favor the deal, among those who favored Rouhani's critics, support has declined so that views are now divided. Iranians are also becoming increasingly less confident that the United States will live up to its obligations under the nuclear deal. Despite their endorsement of the deal, four in five Iranians see the development of an Iranian nuclear program as very important.

## **7. Iran's Involvement in the Region (page 21)**

Majorities think Iran should increase the role it plays in the region, its support of groups fighting ISIS, and its support for the government of Bashar Assad. At the same time, eight in ten Iranians approve of Iran participating in the international talks on the conflict in Syria, and an overwhelming majority approve of Iran collaborating with other countries to end the conflict in Syria. Although as recently as last August, a clear majority approved of direct Iranian cooperation with the US to counter ISIS in Iraq, yet views are now divided.

## 1. Views of the Conduct of the February 2016 Majlis Elections

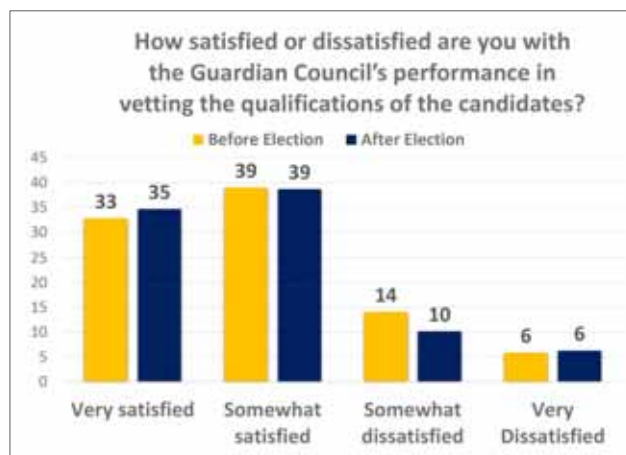
**Four in ten Iranians say the Majlis (Iran’s Parliament) elections were very fair, and another four in ten think they were somewhat free and fair. Also, eight in ten say they were at least somewhat satisfied with the final makeup of the candidates for whom they could vote.**

Views of the conduct of the Majlis elections are generally positive. Forty-four percent said the elections were very free and fair and another 39% that they were somewhat free and fair. Only 11% said the election was not free and fair.

The vetting of candidates by the Guardian Council, which eventually did not endorse the qualifications of about 45% of the 12,000 who had registered to run for office, does not appear to be foreground. Only 14% said they were unable to vote for a particular candidate they wanted because he or she had been disqualified by the Guardian Council, suggesting that most of the disqualified candidates were not very well known to the general public.

Thirty-one percent said they were very satisfied with the final range of candidates on whom they could vote, and another 48% said they were somewhat satisfied. Only 13% said they were not satisfied with the final makeup of the candidates for whom they could vote.

Also, 35% said they were very satisfied with the Guardian Council’s performance in vetting candidates, and another 39% said they were somewhat satisfied. Only 17% of the respondents said they were dissatisfied with the Guardian Council’s performance in vetting the candidates.



Looking at trend line data, interestingly, the expectations of how free and fair the elections would be did not decline after the vetting process. When the respondents were asked in January, before the vetting, “In general, how free and fair do you think this Majlis election will be?” 41% said “very free” and 40% said “somewhat” free and fair. Only 14% predicted that it would not be free and fair. In February—after the Guardian Council had disqualified 45% of the registered candidates—38% said the election was going to be very free and fair, and another 41% said it would be somewhat free and fair. Only 15% had said the election was not going to be free and fair.



## 2. Views of the Outcome of the Majlis Elections: President Rouhani & his Critics

**A large majority of Iranians say they voted for candidates who were supporters of President Hassan Rouhani. Rouhani still enjoys high levels of popular support in Iran. Nearly eight in ten Iranians continue to have a favorable opinion of Rouhani. Yet the percentage saying they have a very favorable opinion has consistently eroded since August 2015, soon after the nuclear deal was reached. Two thirds support greater economic engagement with the West—a Rouhani agenda. While views about the current economic situation have not improved, optimism has grown, with more than half now thinking that the economy is getting better.**

By a ratio of almost three to one, voters in the Majlis elections chose candidates who presented themselves as supporting President Rouhani. Sixty-three percent said that in the February 2016 elections they voted for Majlis candidates who support President Rouhani, while just 22% said they voted for his critics.

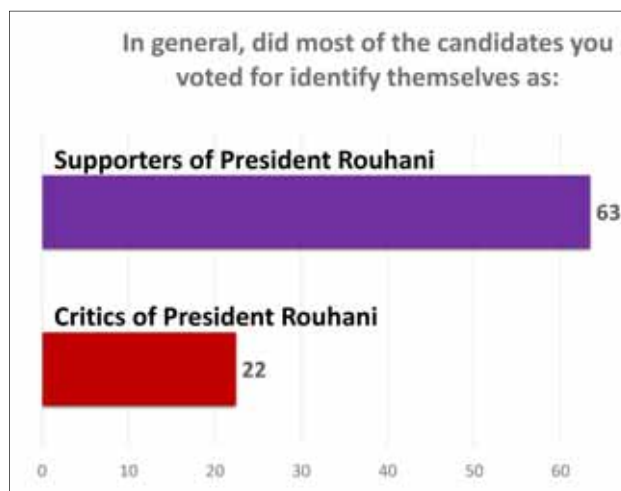
President Rouhani is viewed positively by a very large majority, and his popularity exceeds that of the five other major politicians included in this study. Eighty-four percent have a favorable opinion of Rouhani, with 40% saying they view him very favorably.

However, some erosion in his popularity is noticeable, since the percentage who view him very favorably has gone down by 21 points from a peak of 61% in August 2015.

When the voting respondents' views are examined, approval of the nuclear deal is the strongest predictor of voting for pro-Rouhani candidates. While 79% of those who strongly approve of the nuclear deal said they voted for pro-Rouhani candidates, only a quarter (25%) of those who strongly disapprove of the nuclear deal indicated they did so.

Views of the economic orientation Iran should pursue are also related with voting for pro-Rouhani candidates. While 70% of those who think Iran should increase its economic engagement with Western countries say they voted for pro-Rouhani supporters, only 49% of those who think Iran should decrease its engagement say they voted the same way.

Those who voted for pro-Rouhani candidates have many differences and some similarities to those who voted for his critics, as the table on the next page illustrates. The largest difference is that 8 in 10 pro-Rouhani voters approve of the nuclear deal, as compared to just 45% among those who voted for Rouhani's critics. Those who voted for pro-Rouhani candidates are more likely to think that the economy is getting better. Pro-Rouhani voters are significantly more likely to think that Iran should increase its economic engagement with Western countries. While majorities of pro-Rouhani voters and those who voted for Rouhani's critics believe Iran should increase its role in the region, less than half (49%) of pro-Rouhani voters think Iran should increase its support for Bashar Assad, as compared to a majority (67%) of those who voted for



Rouhani’s critics. Also, while a majority of pro-Rouhani voters approve of Iran and the United States collaborating on ISIS, a majority of those who voted for Rouhani’s critics oppose such collaborations.

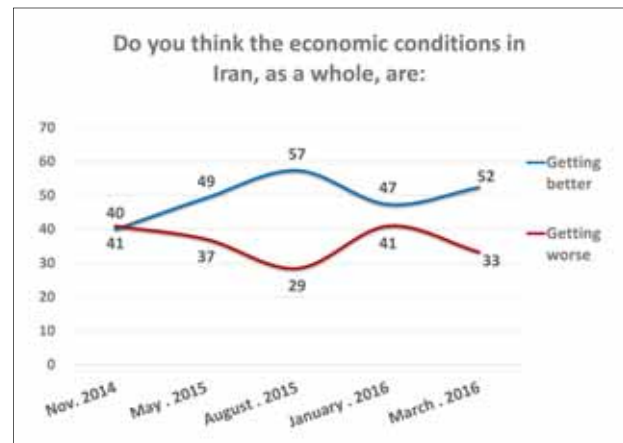
In the post-nuclear agreement environment, a large majority (64%) favors increasing economic engagement with Western countries—a direction advocated by Rouhani. Rouhani supporters are especially supportive of greater engagement (71%), though 54% of supporters of Rouhani’s critics also favor it. Nonetheless, when asked to prioritize, a majority (58%) continues to put a

	Pro-Rouhani Voters	Voters for Rouhani Critics	Didn't Vote
❖ The economy is:			
Getting Better	61%	45%	45%
Getting Worse	29%	45%	35%
❖ Iran should:			
Achieve self-sufficiency	55%	72%	56%
Increase its trade	43%	23%	37%
❖ Iran should ..... economic engagement with western countries.			
Increase	71%	54%	64%
Decrease	6%	11%	6%
❖ Iran should ..... the role it plays in the region.			
Increase	67%	76%	63%
Decrease	8%	5%	9%
❖ Iran should ..... support for the government of Bashar Assad.			
Increase	49%	67%	45%
Decrease	15%	9%	16%
❖ People in Iran have ..... freedom.			
Too much	14%	18%	18%
Too little	11%	10%	17%
About right amount of	73%	70%	59%
❖ Approval of the nuclear agreement (JCPOA):			
Approve	81%	45%	74%
Disapprove	16%	49%	16%
❖ Approval of Iran-US collaboration on ISIS:			
Approve	51%	35%	49%
Disapprove	46%	63%	46%
❖ Sex:			
Male	49%	56%	39%
Female	51%	44%	62%
❖ Age:			
Under 35	39%	49%	42%
35 – 55	39%	36%	34%
Over 55	21%	15%	24%
❖ Education:			
Less than HS Diploma	36%	29%	46%
HS Diploma	30%	32%	29%
Some College & Beyond	34%	40%	26%
❖ Place of Residence:			
Tehran	9%	11%	15%
Large Cities	17%	18%	23%
Small Cities & Rural	73%	71%	62%

higher priority on achieving economic self-sufficiency, including 55% of Rouhani supporters, than increasing trade with other countries, which is seen as a priority by 36% of respondents.

While Rouhani received high marks for improving Iran’s security and deepening Iran’s relations with European countries,<sup>1</sup> views of his economic achievements are mixed. Today, only 46% of Iranians say that the country’s economic situation is good (very good, 5%)—down from 54% in May 2015. A majority (52%) says that Iran’s economic situation is bad—a number that has inched up from 44% in May 2015 to 49% in January and February 2016.

While Iranians’ views of the current state of the economy are pessimistic, their optimism for the economy’s *future* is somewhat higher than it has been. Asked, “Right now, do you think the economic conditions in Iran as a whole are getting better or worse?” 52% said they are improving, and 33% said they are getting worse. Responses to this question have been on a roller coaster since Gallup asked it in November 2014. At that time, responses were divided; in CISSM’s May 2015 poll, a plurality (49%) was optimistic; in August 2015, a majority (57%) was optimistic; in January 2016, this was down 10 points to 47%; and currently it is a slim majority. Perhaps this volatility is due partly to the ups and downs of agreeing to, and implementing, the nuclear deal.



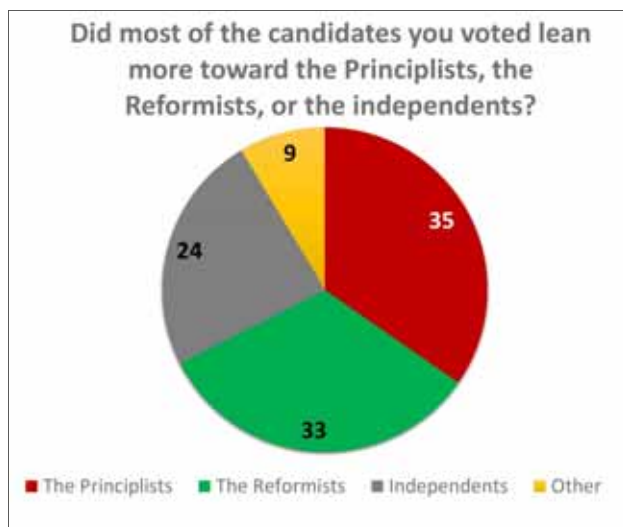
<sup>1</sup> See the Jan. 2016 study: “Iranian Attitudes in Advance of the Parliamentary Elections: Economics, Politics and Foreign Affairs,” <http://www.ciissm.umd.edu/sites/default/files/Iranian%20Attitudes%20in%20Advance%20of%20the%20Parliamentary%20Elections%20-%202016%20-%20FINAL%20-%20sm.pdf>

### 3. Views of the Outcome of the Majlis Elections: Principlist, Reformist, and Independents

**In terms of the preferred candidates' political orientation, roughly equal proportions say they voted for the Principlists, Reformists, and independents. While those who voted for Reformist candidates were more likely to say they voted for pro-Rouhani candidates, a majority in all three groups said they voted for pro-Rouhani candidates, suggesting that Rouhani's support is broad-based.**

While the electorate was clearly favorable to Rouhani, based on voters' reported intentions, no political group dominates the parliament. Only 33% of those who voted said they voted for Reformist candidates, while 35% said they voted for the conservative Principlist candidates, and 24% for independent candidates.

Rouhani appears to have substantial support in all these political groups. While a very large majority (81%) of those who voted for Reformist candidates also said they voted for pro-Rouhani candidates, this was also true of a majority of those who voted for independent candidates (61%), and half (50%) of those who voted for Principlist candidates.



Those who voted for Reformist candidates have many differences and some similarities to those who voted for the Principlists, as the table on the next page illustrates. Those who voted for Reformist candidates are more likely to think that the economy is getting better. While majorities of Principlist and independent voters think Iran should strive to achieve economic self-sufficiency, Reformist voters are divided on the issue. Reformist voters are significantly more likely to think that Iran should increase its economic engagement with Western countries than Principlist or independent voters.

#### Background on Feb. 2016 Majlis Elections

In the February 2016 Majlis elections, a total of 6,200 candidates whose qualifications were approved by the Guardian Council competed for 290 seats. While most of the candidates were not official members of any political party, as in previous parliamentary elections, many of them identified themselves with, and sought the endorsement and recognition of, various loose political coalitions or groups. Each political group then used its resources to campaign, primarily by communicating to the voters who were the candidates the group was endorsing.

In voting districts where people vote to fill only one Majlis seat, candidates simply identified themselves as the endorsed candidate of a political group. In voting districts where people vote to fill two or more seats, a political group prepared a list of endorsed candidates and then communicated the list in that voting district. In this election, the two major political coalitions or groups that competed against each other were the more conservative Principlists, who have dominated the Majlis since 2004, and the more liberal Reformists, who are closely associated with former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami. Candidates who did not identify with any of the active political groups are referred to as independents.

		Principlist Voters	Indep. Voters	Reformist Voters	Pro-Rouhani Voters	Rouhani Critics Voters	Didn't Vote
❖	The economy is:						
	Getting Better	53%	53%	59%	61%	45%	45%
	Getting Worse	35%	34%	31%	29%	45%	35%
❖	Iran should:						
	Achieve self-sufficiency	69%	60%	48%	55%	72%	56%
	Increase its trade	27%	35%	49%	43%	23%	37%
❖	Iran should ..... economic engagement with western countries.						
	Increase	58%	65%	74%	71%	54%	64%
	Decrease	11%	5%	3%	6%	11%	6%
❖	Iran should ..... the role it plays in the region.						
	Increase	76%	66%	64%	67%	76%	63%
	Decrease	4%	7%	9%	8%	5%	9%
❖	Iran should ..... support for the government of Bashar Assad.						
	Increase	66%	56%	44%	49%	67%	45%
	Decrease	10%	10%	18%	15%	9%	16%
❖	People in Iran have ..... freedom.						
	Too much	19%	15%	11%	14%	18%	18%
	Too little	6%	10%	15%	11%	10%	17%
	About right amount of	73%	73%	71%	73%	70%	59%
❖	Approval of the nuclear agreement (JCPOA):						
	Approve	62%	71%	81%	81%	45%	74%
	Disapprove	33%	26%	12%	16%	49%	16%
❖	Approval of Iran-US collaboration on ISIS:						
	Approve	38%	49%	54%	51%	35%	49%
	Disapprove	59%	47%	43%	46%	63%	46%
❖	Sex:						
	Male	60%	52%	47%	49%	56%	39%
	Female	40%	49%	53%	51%	44%	62%
❖	Age:						
	Under 35	41%	41%	46%	39%	49%	42%
	35 – 55	38%	39%	36%	39%	36%	34%
	Over 55	22%	19%	17%	21%	15%	24%
❖	Education:						
	Less than HS Diploma	35%	41%	28%	36%	29%	46%
	HS Diploma	32%	24%	30%	30%	32%	29%
	Some College & Beyond	33%	36%	42%	34%	40%	26%
❖	Place of Residence:						
	Tehran	11%	5%	9%	9%	11%	15%
	Large Cities	19%	14%	18%	17%	18%	23%
	Small Cities & Rural	71%	82%	73%	73%	71%	62%

Less than half of Reformist voters, compared to majorities of independent and Principlist voters, think Iran should increase its support for Syrian President Bashar Assad—though majorities of all three support Iran increasing its role in the region. Majorities of Reformist, Principlist, and

independent voters approve of the nuclear deal, though Reformist voters approve of the deal the most. Also, while a majority of Reformist voters approve of Iran and the United States collaborating to combat ISIS, independent voters are divided on the issue, and Principlist voters disapprove of such collaborations.

To get a better understanding of how respondents looked at the political orientation of candidates for whom they had voted, respondents were asked to select from a list of prominent Iranian politicians the one they thought their selected candidates were closest to. In response, a plurality (39%) said they had voted for candidates who were closest to current centrist president Rouhani; 16% said their selected candidates were closest to former reformist president Khatami; 13% selected Haddad Adel, the figurehead of the conservative coalition; 9% chose Ali Larijani, the moderate conservative speaker of the current Majlis; and 4% selected Saeed Jalili, an ultra-conservative who was Iran's chief nuclear negotiator during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency. (The rest did not select any of the five.)

As mentioned earlier, Rouhani is considerably more popular (with an 84% favorable rating) than other noted politicians who played roles in the February 2016 election for the Majlis. Respondents were asked how they viewed five other political figures: Hashemi Rafsanjani, Larijani, Haddad Adel, Mohammad Reza Aref, and Ali Motahari. The five are presented in the order of their popularity:

- Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a former Iranian president and the current chair of Iran's Expediency Council, is regarded as a pragmatist and does quite well, with 69% of Iranians holding a favorable opinion of him (26%, very favorable).
- Ali Larijani is a moderate Principlist and the current Speaker of the Majlis; he was reelected in February. He is viewed favorably by 63% (20%, very favorable).
- Gholam Ali Haddad Adel of Tehran was the spokesperson for the Principlist (conservative) group during the election. Though he was a sitting member of the Majlis, he lost his seat in the February election. He is viewed favorably by 62% (21%, very favorable).
- Ali Motahari is a moderate conservative MP who presented himself on the Reformist list in the February election. He is viewed favorably by 55% (21%, very favorable).
- Mohammad Reza Aref, who was former President Khatami's vice president and was the spokesperson during the election for the Reformist group, is viewed favorably by 48% (15% very; total favorable up from 42% in January).

During the first round of elections, no single political group won a majority of seats in the new Majlis, which explains there is no consensus on which political group "won the most seats." Respondents were asked their perceptions: "As far as you know, the candidates associated with which of the following political groups won the most seats in the Majlis election?" Twenty-five percent said the Principlists, 25% said the Reformists, 26% said the supporters of Rouhani, and 9% said the independents.

### *Views of Iranian Officials in General*

Iranians have mixed views about the importance of public opinion to Iranian policymakers. A plurality (48%) believes that most Iranian officials do not care about what ordinary people think, while four in ten (40%) think that most Iranian officials do care about public opinion.

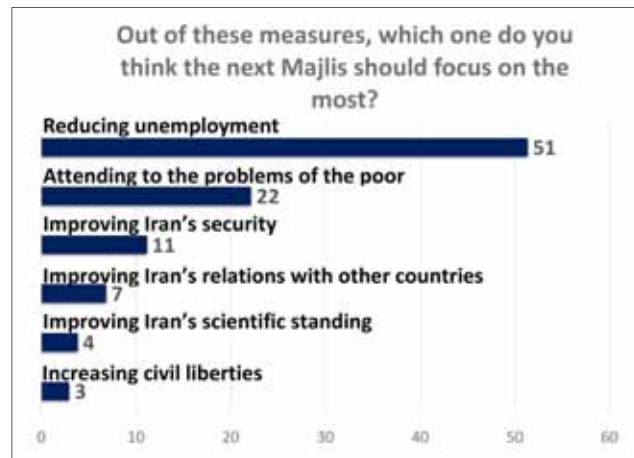
Relative to other countries where this question was asked by PEW in 2014, Iranians are significantly more likely to say their officials care about what people like them think. For comparison, in the spring of 2014, only 34% of Malaysians, 27% of Kenyans, 26% of Turks, 21% of Indians, 20% of South Africans, 20% of Americans, 17% of Egyptians, 8% of Peruvians, 8% of Brazilians, and 7% of Russians said they think most of their officials care about what ordinary people think.

Asked in an open-ended question which current or past official they thought cared most about what ordinary people think, 20% said Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, 12% named President Rouhani, 12% said Ahmadinejad, 8% named previous reformist president Khatami, 8% said Rafsanjani, 15% named various other figures, and 25% could not identify any particular Iranian official that fit the criterion.

#### 4. Priorities of the Next Majlis

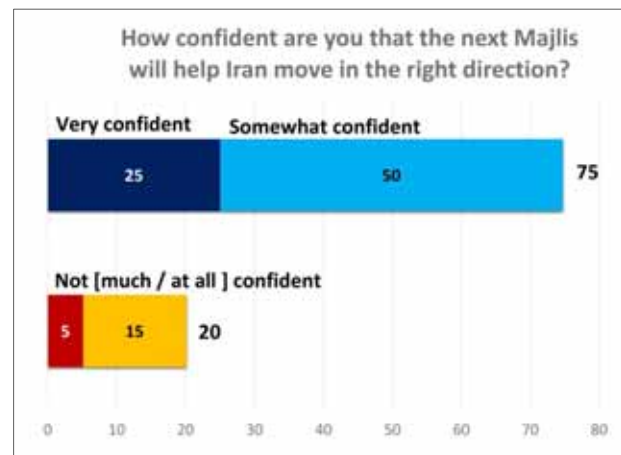
The most important issues Iranians want the new Majlis to tackle are unemployment and Iran’s low-performing economy. Majorities are optimistic that the new Majlis will move Iran in the right direction. Majorities also express confidence that the new Majlis will be successful in reducing Iran’s unemployment, improving its relations with other countries, and improving its security.

Both before and after the Majlis election, a majority of Iranians said that the next Majlis should focus on creating jobs. When respondents were asked after the election to select one out of six measures that the next Majlis should focus on, 51% selected “reducing unemployment,” and 22% chose “attending to the problems of the poor.” A lesser 11% said “improving Iran’s security,” 7% chose “improving Iran’s relations with other countries,” 4% said “improving Iran’s scientific standing,” and 3% selected “increasing civil liberties” as the single most important measure for the next Majlis to focus on. When the same question was asked about a week prior to the election, the results were consistent with the post-election replies.<sup>2</sup>



In a similar open-ended question asked about a week before the election in February 2016, respondents were asked to name “the most important challenge or issue that... the next Majlis should try to address,” 54% named issues relating to unemployment, up from 39% in January, and 26% named various other issues relating to Iran’s economy.

Iranians are optimistic that the next Majlis will move Iran in the right direction, and this extends to respondents of every political leaning. Three in four (75%) expressed confidence that the next Majlis will move Iran in the right direction, including 81% of those who voted for Principlist candidates, 77% of those who voted for Reformist candidates, 77% of those who voted for independent candidates, and 67% of those who did not vote in the February 2016 Majlis elections. Only one in five indicated that they are not very



<sup>2</sup> Fifty-three percent chose “reducing unemployment,” 18% selected “attending to the problems of the poor,” 11% chose “improving Iran’s security,” 9% said “improving Iran’s relations with other countries,” 5% said “improving Iran’s scientific standing,” and 2% selected “increasing civil liberties” as the issue the next Majlis should focus on the most.



(15%) or not at all confident (5%) that the next Majlis will help move Iran in the right direction.

Iranians are also optimistic that the next Majlis will succeed in addressing the challenges facing Iran. Seventy-one percent think that the next Majlis will be successful in reducing Iran's unemployment rate (28%, very successful), and only 23% disagree. Also, 85% think that the next Majlis will be very (35%) or somewhat (50%) successful in improving Iran's relations with other countries, and only 7% say that it will not be successful. When it comes to Iran's security, a majority (54%) think that the next Majlis will be very successful, and another 35% think it will be somewhat successful in improving Iran's security; 6% disagree. Further, seven in ten (72%) think the next Majlis will be very (28%) or somewhat (44%) successful in increasing civil liberties in Iran, and 13% think that it will be unsuccessful.

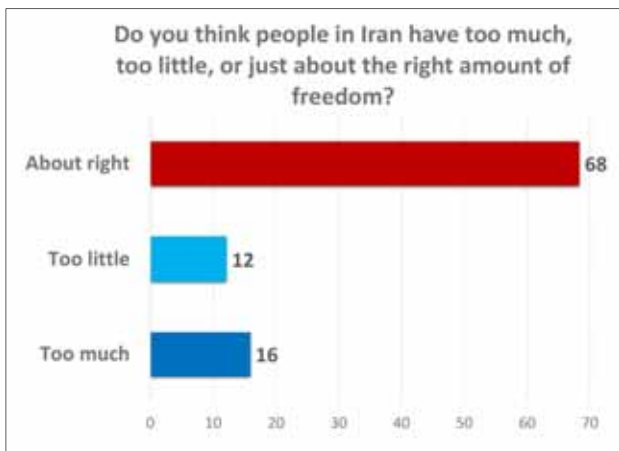
## 5. Civil Liberties in Iran

**Two in three Iranians believe that it is important for President Rouhani to seek to increase civil liberties in Iran, and seven in ten are hopeful that the next parliament will be successful in this. However, only one in eight complain that Iranians have too little freedom. Three in four continue to think that Iranian policymakers should take religious teachings into account when they make decisions.**

Iranians think that it is important for President Rouhani to focus on increasing civil liberties in Iran. When asked in January 2016 “how important do you think it is for President Rouhani to focus on increasing civil liberties in Iran?” 64% said it was very (18%) or somewhat (46%) important, and less than a third thought that it was not very (20%) or not at all important (9%) for Rouhani to focus on civil liberties.

Iranians have expectations that the next Majlis will show some success in increasing civil liberties in Iran. Seven in ten (72%) think the next Majlis will be very (28%) or somewhat (44%) successful in increasing civil liberties; only 13% said it will not be successful (not at all, 4%).

Yet (as in January 2016) only a small minority says that Iranians have too little freedom in Iran. Answering a question about the level of freedom in Iran, a large majority (68%) of Iranians said that people in Iran have “just about the right amount” of freedom, while 12% thought they have too little freedom, and 16% thought they have too much.

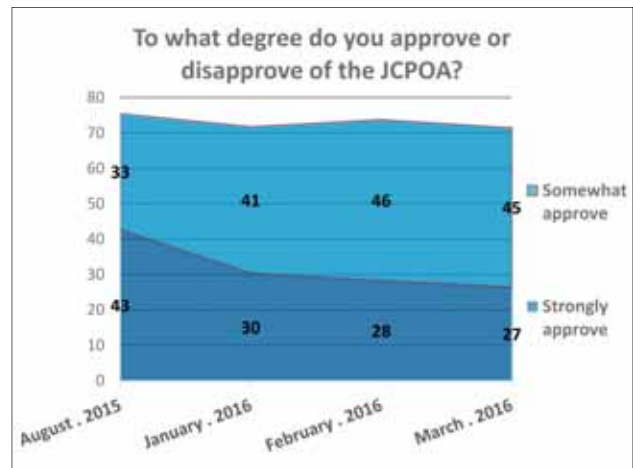


Three in four (76%) consistently say that Iranian policymakers should take religious teachings into account when making decisions; there has been almost no variation in this view over the last two years. Four in ten (42%) think that when making decisions, Iranian policy makers should take religious teachings into account “a lot,” and another 34% say that they should do so “somewhat.” Only one in five (20%) think that policymakers should not take religious teachings into account “much” (14%) or “at all” (6%).

## 6. Approval for the Nuclear Deal

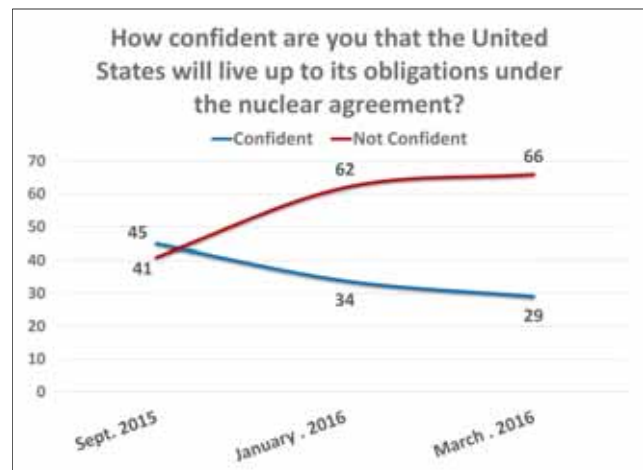
**Seven in ten Iranians approve of the nuclear deal Iran and the P5+1 countries reached in July 2015. However, the percentage saying they strongly favor the deal has declined substantially. Also, views of the deal have become more aligned with political attitudes: while a large majority of those who favored pro-Rouhani’s candidates continue to favor the deal, among those who favored Rouhani’s critics, support has declined so that views are now divided. Iranians are also becoming increasingly less confident that the United States will live up to its obligations under the nuclear deal. Despite their endorsement of the deal, four in five Iranians see the development of an Iranian nuclear program as very important.**

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%) approved of the JCPOA, and only 21% disapproved. While this is down only slightly from the 75% of Iranians that approved of the deal in August 2015, the percentage saying that they approve strongly is now just 27%, down sharply from August when 43% felt this way.



In general, views of the deal have become more aligned with political attitudes. While those who voted for pro-Rouhani candidates in the Majlis elections strongly approve of the deal, it no longer garners support from those who voted for Rouhani’s critics. In January 2016, three in four (75%) of those who preferred that Rouhani’s supporters win the Majlis elections and 65% of those who wanted Rouhani’s critics to win the Majlis election, approved of the deal. Today, however, 81% of who voted for pro-Rouhani candidates and 45% of those who voted for Rouhani’s critics approve of the deal. About half (49%) of those who favored Rouhani’s critics in the election now disapprove of the nuclear deal, up from 31% in January.

Iranians are increasingly less confident that the United States will live up to obligations under the JCPOA. Less than a third (29%) now express confidence that the US will live up to its obligations under the deal, down from 34% in January and 45% when Gallup asked the same question in September 2015. In the current study, a majority (66%) said they are not confident that the United States will fulfill its obligations, with 37% saying that they are not confident at all.



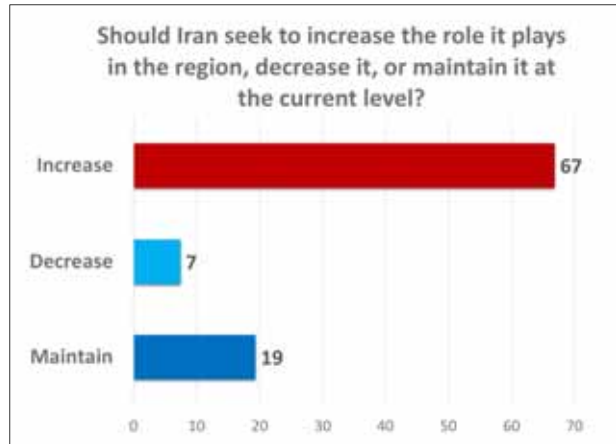
Asked what they are most eager to see happen now that nuclear sanctions on Iran have been lifted, a clear majority (54%) said they want to see “Iran using its unfrozen funds to create jobs,” 16% said they are eager to see “Iranian companies selling their products abroad,” 15% said “more foreign companies investing in Iran,” 9% want to see “Iran being able to import specialized products like airplane parts and industrial machinery,” while only 3% said they are eager to see “Iranian people gaining a greater access to Western consumer products.”

This support for the nuclear deal should not be interpreted as a lack of support for Iran’s nuclear program. In January 2016, eight in ten (82%) said it is very important for Iran to develop its nuclear program, and another 11% said it is somewhat important. Similar questions have been asked since 2006 and have shown consistently high support (about 8 in 10).

## 7. Iran’s Involvement in the Region

**Majorities think Iran should increase the role it plays in the region, its support of groups fighting ISIS, and its support for the government of Bashar Assad. At the same time, eight in ten Iranians approve of Iran participating in the international talks on the conflict in Syria, and an overwhelming majority approve of Iran collaborating with other countries to end the conflict in Syria. Although as recently as last August, a clear majority approved of direct Iranian cooperation with the US to counter ISIS in Iraq, yet views are now divided.**

Large majorities of Iranians think Iran should play a strong role in the region. Two in three (67%) think that Iran should “seek to increase the role it plays in the region” and only 7% think Iran should decrease it. One in five think (19%) that Iran should maintain its current role. This is consistent with CISSM’s recent finding in January that four in five (80%) approved of the role Iran is playing in Syria.



A majority (63%) also think Iran should increase its support of the groups fighting ISIS. Only 13% said that Iran should decrease its support, while 20% thinks Iran should maintain its current level of support for groups fighting ISIS.

Iranians’ willingness to increase support for Bashar Assad is less pronounced. A bare majority (51%) think Iran should increase its support for Assad’s government, and 24% think support should stay at the current level. However, only 14% said that Iran should decrease its support.

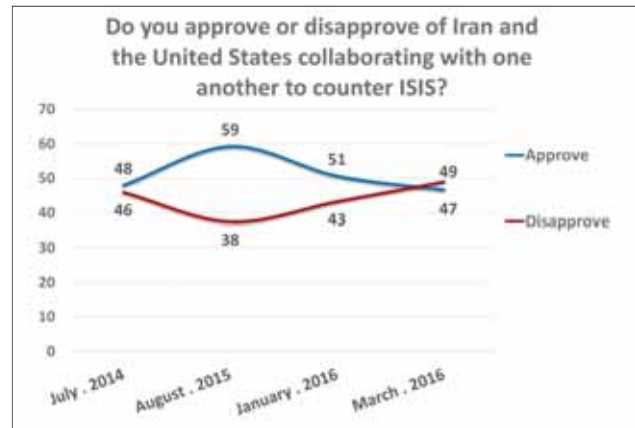
These findings are broadly consistent with a previous poll question that offered arguments for and against sending Iranian military personnel to Syria. In January respondents were asked:

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% said that Iran should send military personnel to Syria, while 31% were opposed.

Despite their doubts about the motives of other countries operating in the region, there is broad consensus in favor of Iran being part of diplomatic efforts to end the Syrian conflict. Eight in ten (82%) continue to approve of Iran participating in the international talks on the conflict in Syria, with only 14% opposed. Also, an overwhelming majority (87%) approved of Iran collaborating with other countries to end the conflict in Syria, while less than a tenth (9%) disapproved.

On collaborating with the United States against ISIS, however, support is weakening. As recently as last August, a clear majority (59%) approved of “Iran and the US collaborating with one another to help the government of Iraq and counter ISIS,” yet views are now divided. Forty-seven percent approve of such cooperation, while 49% disapprove (32%, strongly).



To better understand the views of those Iranians who support Iranian-US cooperation against ISIS, we analyzed related characteristics or attitudes:

- Younger Iranians are more likely than older ones to approve of Iran-US cooperation to counter ISIS. A majority (52%) of those under the age of 25 as compared to 40% of those over the age of 55 approved of cooperating.
- Educational level is also meaningful. While a majority (53%) of those with a college degree approved of cooperating, only 42% of those without a high school diploma did.
- Iranians’ level of confidence in the United States fulfilling its obligations under the nuclear deal is a very strong predictor. While seven in ten (72%) of those who said they are very confident that the United States will fulfill its obligations under the nuclear deal approved of Iran-US cooperation against ISIS, only 17% of those who said they are not at all confident that the United States would live up to its obligations endorsed such cooperation.
- Support for aiding Assad’s government is negatively correlated with support for Iran-US cooperation on ISIS. Sixty-four percent of those who think Iran should decrease its support of Assad approved of Iran and the United States cooperating against ISIS, while this is the case for only 36% of those who think Iran should increase its support for Assad.
- Those who want Iran to play a more assertive role in the region are also less likely to want to work with the United States. Of those who think Iran should decrease its role in the region, 55% approved of cooperating with the US against ISIS—but a lesser 43% of those who said Iran should increase its role agreed with this idea. Likewise, of those who wanted to decrease Iran’s support of groups fighting ISIS, 56% approved of cooperating with the US, but of those who wanted to increase this support, a lesser 42% approved of it.
- Whether respondents preferred to vote for a Reformist, an independent, or a Principlist makes some difference, but less than might be assumed. While a majority of those voting for Reformists (54%) approve of cooperating with the US against ISIS, so did 49% of voters for independents and 38% of those who voted for Principlists.