

# Iranian Public Opinion, At the Start of the Biden Administration

A public opinion study | February 2021



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SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY  
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## Introduction

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

This report covers findings from two surveys fielded in September and early October 2020 and late January through early February 2021 to assess how Iranians were faring as the covid-19 pandemic intensified the challenges their country was already facing, what they thought about the parliamentary election in Iran and the presidential election in the United States, and how the inauguration of Joe Biden impacted their attitudes towards nuclear diplomacy and regional security.

Iran was one of the earliest countries to be hard-hit by the novel coronavirus, with the country's first cases confirmed on February 13, 2020, two days before the parliamentary election, senior officials among those soon infected, and high death rates reported. Western reporting depicted widespread government incompetence and cover-ups exacerbating the pandemic's toll. As in other countries, Iranian officials struggled to decide whether to close schools, curtail economic activities, and restrict religious observances in hopes of slowing the virus' spread, but cases and deaths remained high through 2020. When we fielded the first survey wave, the daily number of new confirmed covid-19 cases in Iran was starting to climb sharply again after having been relatively flat since May.

Some world leaders, including the U.N. Secretary General, called for an easing of sanctions on Iran as part of global efforts to fight the pandemic. The United States, which had withdrawn from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018, maintained that medicine, personal protective equipment, and other humanitarian supplies were exempt from the steadily increasing sanctions applied as part of its "maximum pressure" campaign. But, the United States' designation in September 2019 of the Central Bank of Iran as a terrorist organization made most foreign suppliers of humanitarian goods reluctant to sell to Iran. A decision in October 2020 to also designate the few Iranian banks that were not previously subject to secondary sanctions further impeded humanitarian trade, caused another sharp drop in the value of Iran's currency, and had other negative economic effects.

The Trump administration's stated objective was to keep imposing more sanctions until Iran acquiesced to a long list of U.S. demands articulated by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The original twelve points include the types of restrictions on Iran's nuclear program that the government rejected during previous negotiations and that the Iranian public has consistently opposed. It also included stopping development of nuclear-capable missiles and ending support for various groups throughout the Middle East.

Instead of achieving Iranian concessions on these issues, though, the United States found itself diplomatically isolated when it tried to stop the U.N. embargo on conventional arms sales to Iran from expiring in October 2020 as agreed in the JCPOA. The United States invoked the “snapback” provision of the JCPOA, which specified that if an agreed dispute resolution process failed to resolve concerns about compliance, any party to the agreement could call for the U.N. Security Council to re-impose U.N. sanctions lifted in conjunction with the JCPOA, which would happen automatically unless the five veto-wielding members agreed on some other course of action. The remaining parties to the JCPOA, however, insisted that the United States had relinquished the right to invoke the snapback provision when it withdrew from the JCPOA. Indonesia, the Security Council president at the time, declined to take up the U.S. request.

The Iranian public enthusiastically supported the JCPOA when it was first signed, partly due to unrealistic expectations about how much and how quickly economic benefits would materialize. After the International Atomic Energy Agency certified in January 2016 that Iran had met all of its nuclear obligations and implementation of sanctions relief began, foreign companies were slow to ramp up permissible trade with Iran or to make major investments there before they knew how the next U.S. president would view the JCPOA. Even after Trump was elected, Iranians hoped that the other P5+1 countries would engage economically despite U.S. pressure to isolate Iran, but fear of secondary sanctions deterred most foreign trade and investment.

After the Trump administration formally withdrew from the JCPOA, Iran remained in full compliance with its obligations for a year, in hopes this would incentivize the other P5+1 countries to do more to ensure that Iran received enough benefits to stay in the deal. The European parties discussed various mechanisms to increase trade without incurring secondary sanctions, but these efforts had little impact. After a year, Iran announced that it would progressively reduce compliance with some nuclear obligations unless other countries provided Iran with the economic benefits stipulated in the JCPOA. Iran exceeded caps on its uranium stockpile size in May 2019, enriched above the agreed level in July 2019, announced it would ignore centrifuge research and development limits in October 2019, and started enrichment at the Fordow underground facility in November 2019 – all steps that could be easily reversible if the United States returned to the JCPOA.

As the U.S. election season entered its final phase, the conservative majority elected in the 2020 parliamentary elections began considering legislation to mandate much more extensive Iranian nuclear activities if the United States and other P5+1 countries did not fully deliver on their JCPOA commitments by February 2021. At that point, China was negotiating a multi-year economic deal with Iran in defiance of Trump administration pressure, while other countries were waiting to see whether Trump would win re-election or be replaced by Joe Biden, who had campaigned on a promise to re-enter the nuclear deal, rejoin the Paris climate accord, resume supporting the World Health Organization, and reverse a number of other Trump actions. After it became clear to most observers that Biden had won the election, the Trump administration imposed a number of additional sanctions on Iran and took other steps to make it much more difficult for the U.S. to quickly re-enter the JCPOA than to re-enter the Paris climate accord. Other countries opposed to the JCPOA and groups opposed to the current Iranian government

also took provocative actions, including the November 2020 assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a scientist who had played an important role in Iran's nuclear program. During this time period, Iran also began to take steps mandated by the nuclear law.

Joe Biden's inauguration on January 20, 2021 represents another potential crossroads in the U.S. relationship with Iran, but the history of disappointment with the JCPOA tempers Iranian expectations. During the transition period, U.S. groups that support nuclear diplomacy with Iran and the other P5+1 countries expressed hope that the new Biden administration would move as quickly as possible on a range of issues related to US-Iran relations, including JCPOA re-entry, lifting the Trump administration's travel bans on Iranian diplomats and citizens from some Muslim majority countries, and facilitating Iranian access to covid-19 vaccines. Groups and countries opposed to the JCPOA argued that the sanctions put in place by the Trump administration provided bargaining leverage that the Biden administration should not relinquish without getting concessions that strengthened the nuclear deal and addressed other issues of concern.

By the time we fielded the second survey wave immediately after Biden's inauguration, Iranian uncertainty about how quickly and in what manner the new U.S. administration would re-engage had been stoked further by questions about whether its attention would be completely consumed by the pandemic raging in the United States and the domestic insurrection that had tried to stop Congress from certifying the election results on January 6, 2021. To see how Iranians were holding up under all this stress and uncertainty, we asked not only the economic questions we have used for years, but also some questions to assess subjective well-being that are widely used in other parts of the world, but rarely asked in Iran. The results reveal surprising resilience despite all the hardships the Iranian people have endured, along with a cautious willingness to give the United States and other world powers one more chance to show the people of Iran that reciprocal diplomacy and engagement with the West can yield mutual benefits.

## Methodology

The study is based on two probability sample nationally representative telephone surveys. The fieldwork for the first wave was conducted in October 2020 (Sept. 1 – Oct. 2, 2020) and the second wave in February 2021 (Jan. 26 – Feb. 6, 2021), among a representative sample of about 1000 Iranians per each wave. The margin of error for both surveys is about +/- 3.1%.

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. When a residence was reached, an adult was randomly selected from within that household using the random table technique. An initial attempt and three callbacks were made in an effort to complete an interview with the randomly selected respondents. All of the interviews were conducted using computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI). All interviews were monitored in real-time by call-center supervisors. Further details about the data collection methodology is available here: <https://www.iranpoll.com/method>.

The AAPOR2 contact rate of the October 2020 survey was 76%. The AAPOR2 cooperation rate of the survey was 81%. The overall response rate of the survey based on AAPOR2 was 60%.

The AAPOR2 contact rate of the February 2021 survey was 83%. The AAPOR2 cooperation rate of the survey was 82%. The overall response rate of the survey based on AAPOR2 was 64%.

For details on methods used to check the quality of the data, see the Appendix to this report.

Previous reports on Iranian public opinion done by CISSM in collaboration with IranPoll, along with the questionnaires and related articles, can be found at: [https://cisssm.umd.edu/research-impact/projects/security-cooperation-iran-challenges-and-opportunities#iran\\_surveys](https://cisssm.umd.edu/research-impact/projects/security-cooperation-iran-challenges-and-opportunities#iran_surveys)

## Summary of Findings

### State of the Economy (p. 11)

The majority's negative expectations about the economy appear to have bottomed out. Sixty-eight percent say it is "getting worse," but this is down four points from October 2020. A majority (53%) calls the economic situation "very bad" -- no more than four months ago. While 52% say their family's economic conditions have worsened in the last year, exactly as many said this in October 2019. Half report their family's consumption of red meat has decreased; the other half say it is unchanged. Only one in fifty households report buying foreign currency or gold coins, about a third of those who said so in 2019.

### Economic Orientation (p. 12)

Three in five Iranians would like to see their country trade with other countries that have been reliable in the past, while producing many key goods at home. This is also what a majority thinks is actually meant when leaders use the term "resistance economy." Only one in five seek complete self-sufficiency, and only one in five are attracted by trading with as many countries as possible.

### Impact of Covid-19 and Evaluation of Iran's Response (p. 13)

The pain caused by the pandemic has grown since October 2020. Four in five personally know someone who has gotten sick from covid-19 (up 20 points); half know someone who has died (up 12 points); a quarter have a household member who has lost employment (up 6 points). At the same time, though, Iranians have some pride in their collective response: three in four say the government has done a good job with the pandemic. Over four in five say they will probably take a vaccine once these are available.

### Impact of Sanctions (p. 15)

Nearly half say the U.S. sanctions have had a "great negative impact," and over four in five say the sanctions have had a negative impact "on the lives of ordinary people." These levels are almost unchanged from 2019. When asked whether foreign sanctions or domestic mismanagement and corruption have greater negative impact, only a third picked sanctions. When given the pandemic as a third choice, only a quarter picked sanctions as the worst factor. About two thirds experience that fewer foreign-made medical goods are available, and seven in ten assume the United States is seeking to prevent humanitarian-related products from reaching Iran. At the same time, a large majority believes that with a major effort, Iran could increase its international trade.

### Life Satisfaction (p. 17)

Despite the hardships of current life in Iran, when asked about their personal happiness, a majority reported experiencing enjoyment much of the day, but a majority also reported experiencing worry much of the day. When offered a 0-to-10 scale with the "worst possible life" at the bottom and the "best possible life" at the top, the average rating was 4.7. (This result is similar to Iran's score in the World Happiness Survey--4.6.) When asked where they thought they would be on this scale in five years, it was 5.7. A majority say they are better off than their

parents were at the same age, and half say when children today in Iran grow up, they will be better off than their parents.

### **Views of the United States and Steps to Improve Relations (p. 18)**

Seven in ten Iranians followed the U.S. election; nine in ten know Biden won. Iranians expect Biden's policies toward Iran to be somewhat less hostile; asked to put this on a 0-to-10 scale, 3 was the average response, compared to a 1 for Trump. Almost four in ten now believe the United States would fulfill its obligations were it to rejoin the JCPOA, up from three in ten in October 2020. Fewer than in October—now under half—think the U.S. is *definitely* seeking to prevent humanitarian-related products from reaching Iran. Very unfavorable views of the United States, while still quite high, have also declined slightly. Attitudes toward the American people are more mixed, with slightly more (49%) holding a negative view than a positive one (45%).

Asked to consider positive steps the Biden administration could take to improve US relations with Iran, four in five thought removal of the terrorist designation from Iran's central bank would be very meaningful. Seven in ten said condemning the scientist Mohsen Fakhrazadeh's assassination as against international law would be very meaningful. Two in three found a full U.S. return to JCPOA compliance very meaningful. These far outranked the other steps offered respondents.

### **Reviving the JCPOA (p. 21)**

For the first time since 2018, a majority again approves of the nuclear deal. About three in five say it is likely that the U.S. will return to the JCPOA. However, only about four in ten think that if the U.S. does return it will fulfill its obligations (up from three in ten in October 2020). Iranians also lack confidence in compliance by the other P5+1 countries.

Iranians are staunchly opposed to negotiating with the Biden administration before the U.S. returns to full compliance with the JCPOA. Sixty-nine percent objected to this possibility, while 28% thought that Iran should try to reach a new nuclear agreement with the United States. The sanctions currently in place appear to make those Iranians who blame them for Iran's bad economy somewhat more willing to support immediate negotiations, but a majority of that group still opposes new negotiations before the U.S. fulfills its JCPOA obligations.

About three quarters support the parliament's recent law that demands wider nuclear activities and reduced inspections unless the United States and other P5+1 countries take immediate steps in line with their JCPOA obligations. Those who approve of the JCPOA are less likely to support the nuclear law than those who disapprove of it, but 62% of strong JCPOA supporters still favor the law, presumably as a way to increase pressure for compliance by the United States and the other signatories.

As for the ongoing debate about who should return to compliance first, 88% of Iranians approve of a possible sequence in which the U.S. returns to full compliance before Iran reverses its nuclear steps that exceed JCPOA limits, while 65% oppose Iran once again fulfilling all its nuclear obligations before the U.S. returns to the agreement. Fifty-five percent approve of a simultaneous return to full compliance, while 51% oppose a step-by-step approach.



### **European Role in Reviving the JCPOA (p. 25)**

Iranians are divided over a proposal that European countries make “specific commitments to increase trade and investment” in return for Iran returning to full compliance with the JCPOA. However, as in 2019, over four in ten do not perceive any current European steps to actually protect their companies from U.S. sanctions for trading with Iran; only a quarter see European efforts as meaningful. Three in four believe fear of the United States is the primary reason why European companies are not trading with Iran.

### **Attitudes Toward Broader Negotiations (p. 26)**

The Biden administration has said that after the U.S. has rejoined the JCPOA it would pursue negotiations with Iran to strengthen the terms of that agreement and address other U.S. concerns. Iranians are taking a wait-and-see attitude toward broader negotiations: a majority would only agree to new negotiations after a few years of U.S. compliance with the JCPOA. There is currently strong opposition toward changing any of the JCPOA’s terms in follow-on negotiations, with 85% categorically rejecting a demand to end uranium enrichment and 72% opposed to making the JCPOA’s limits on Iran permanent.

Asked about negotiations over advanced conventional weaponry, respondents overwhelmingly rejected a demand to end ballistic missile testing by Iran. Two in three think their development acts as a deterrent against attack--more than in 2019. They were somewhat less negative toward limiting the range of ballistic missiles of all countries in the Middle East, with 57% opposed and 38% saying it could be acceptable depending on the circumstances. Half showed interest in a proposal that would limit advanced weaponry exports to all Middle Eastern countries.

### **Iran’s Regional Involvements and the IRGC (p. 29)**

A modest majority prefers that Iran deal with regional problems through diplomacy, rather than seeking to become the most powerful country in the region. Four in five want diplomatic discussions with other Middle Eastern countries to continue; a little under half support expanding them. As in past years, four in five want Iran to support policies in Iraq that equally benefit both Shiites and Sunnis. A little less than half want Iran to encourage a diplomatic resolution to the conflict in Yemen. Three in ten support Iran helping the Houthis defeat their opponents and a fifth say Iran should not get involved.

A very large majority views the Revolutionary Guard’s regional military activities favorably and three in five say Iran should increase its support of groups fighting terrorist groups like ISIS; both these majorities have grown since 2019. A majority thinks that even if Iran were to stop the Guard’s activities, this would only lead the United States to push for more concessions in other areas. Over three in five support IRGC playing a role in Iran’s economy.

In responding to military incidents, incursions into Iran’s waters or airspace, or to assassinations of major figures, substantial majorities support retaliation as a way to deter similar actions in the future. More than a third would prefer diplomatic and legal action to punish those who assassinate high-ranking Iranian figures to lethal revenge, though, because they believe that seeking revenge would not make such incidents less likely and would make Iran less safe.

### **Views of other Countries and Organizations (p. 33)**

Among the countries evaluated, currently Russia is the only country viewed favorably by a clear majority of Iranians. Roughly half are favorable toward China and Germany. Four in ten are favorable toward France; two in ten toward Britain. Majority negative feeling toward the United States is extremely high, but lower than in October 2020. Unfavorable attitudes toward Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are comparable to those toward the United States. On the United Nations, favorability has declined to four in ten. Two in three are favorable toward Hizbollah of Lebanon; half are favorable toward the Houthis of Yemen.

### **Shifting East (p. 35)**

A majority are aware of the negotiations between China and Iran on a large-scale cooperation agreement, and a clear majority think such a deal would probably be in Iran's interests. Asked whether Iran should try more to strengthen its relations with European countries or with Asian countries, half would put the emphasis on Asian countries; the numbers preferring a European emphasis have declined since 2019.

### **Favorability of Iranian Political Figures (p. 36)**

As the next Iranian presidential election approaches, the public's positive views of some political figures are trending upward. Foreign Minister Zarif is viewed favorably by three in five (up in the last four months). Ghalibaf, a past mayor of Tehran with a reputation as a pragmatic conservative and the current speaker of the Majlis, is viewed favorably by two in three (also up in the last four months). Raisi, the conservative head of the Judiciary who is seen as spearheading current anti-corruption campaigns that have led to the arrest and conviction of prominent Iranian figures including the brother of President Rouhani, has a stable three in four viewing him favorably. Rouhani, the current president who cannot run again, is viewed favorably by only about one-third of Iranians.

### **Iran's June 2021 Presidential Election (p. 38)**

A slight majority say they definitely will vote in the next Presidential election and a fifth say they might vote. Seven in ten see the country's economic conditions as the next president's most important challenge. Over three in five say the next president should be someone who is currently critical of President Rouhani's policies, and three in five think Iran's next president should mostly stand up for Iran's rights rather than focusing on negotiations.

### **Election of and Expectations from the 11<sup>th</sup> Majlis (p. 40)**

In February 2020 parliamentary elections were held, and slightly under half of eligible adults voted. A majority view economic issues as the most important for the Majlis to address, with the pandemic and sanctions named only by small minorities.

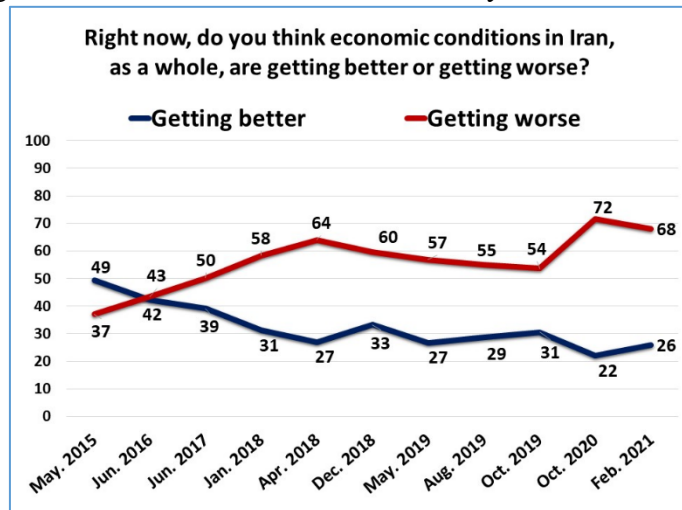
### **Media Consumption (p. 41)**

Three in four Iranians continue to follow the news through domestic TV, though there has been a slight decline. Almost two in three use social media for news, and the internet is now used for news by nearly seven in ten. About a quarter get their news through satellite TV channels. Newspapers' share has sharply declined in the last few years and they are now read by about one in five.

## State of the Economy

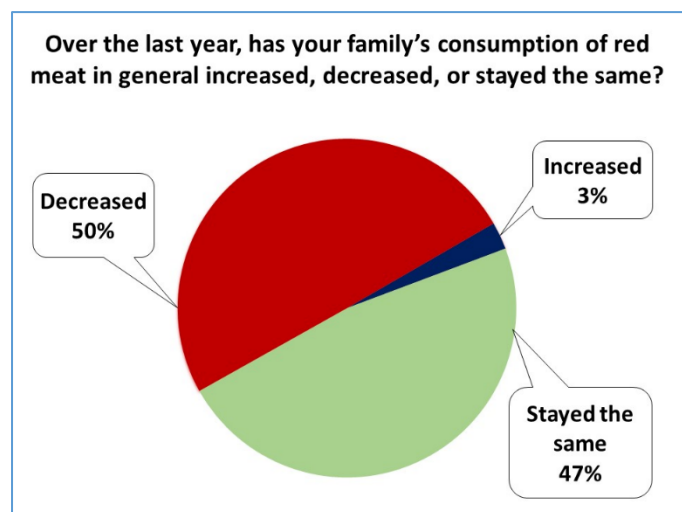
The majority's negative expectations about the economy appear to have bottomed out. Sixty-eight percent say it is "getting worse," but this is down four points from October 2020. A majority (53%) calls the economic situation "very bad" -- no more than four months ago. While 52% say their family's economic conditions have worsened in the last year, exactly as many said this in October 2019. Half report their family's consumption of red meat has decreased; the other half say it is unchanged. Only one in fifty households report buying foreign currency or gold coins, about a third of those who said so in 2019.

Despite the severe pressures on Iran's economy, there is little evidence in public attitudes that negative trends are accelerating. If anything, there is a sense of stasis. In February 2021, 68% said "economic conditions in Iran as a whole are getting worse," down four points from October 2020, while 26% said they are getting better (up 4 points). The majority saying "worse" is higher than before the pandemic (October 2019, 54%), but current opinions seem somewhat frozen. Those characterizing the general economic situation as "bad" remained at 74% between October and February, and those calling it "very bad" remained at 53%. Likewise, 24-25% called the situation "good" between October and February.



Respondents were asked about their own family's economic condition. As in the past, a majority said it has worsened: 52% currently, 52% in October 2019, and 57% in May 2019. Throughout this period a quarter have said their conditions have worsened "a lot." Well over a third have regularly answered that things are roughly the same for them (39%, 37%, and 36% respectively).

In line with media reports that more and more Iranians cannot afford meat, respondents were asked whether their family's red meat consumption has increased, decreased or stayed the same over the last year. Fifty percent said they were eating less red meat ("a lot" less, 23%), while 47% said their consumption was about the same. Virtually no one said they were eating more.



Interestingly, the purchase of gold coins or foreign currencies as a hedge against the fall of the Iranian rial is insignificant now compared to 2019. About one in fifty (2.4%) of respondents said

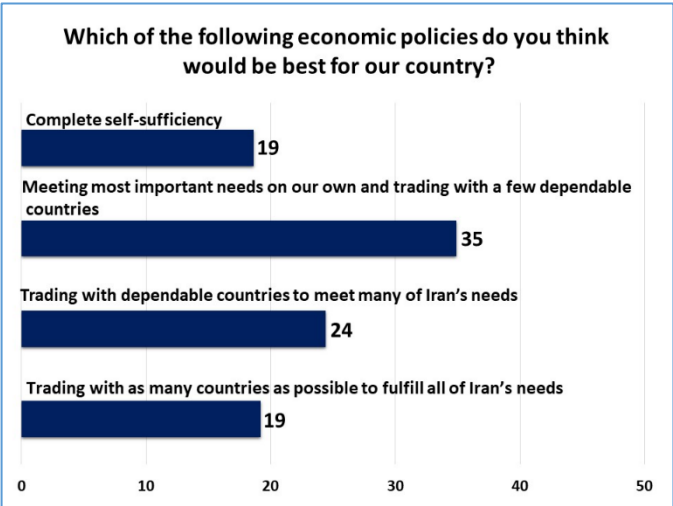
their households had made such purchases, compared to 8% when asked in May 2019. This is consistent with the partial taming of inflation seen during 2020.

### Economic Orientation

**Three in five Iranians would like to see their country trade with other countries that have been reliable in the past, while producing many key goods at home. This is also what a majority thinks is actually meant when leaders use the term “resistance economy.” Only one in five seek complete self-sufficiency, and only one in five are attracted by trading with as many countries as possible.**

As discussed below (sections 13, 14), most see the economy’s direction as the country’s most important issue, and are in broad agreement about the kind of economic path Iran should take. Most Iranians want to see a measure of national self-sufficiency combined with trading with countries that have little history of putting the brakes on their commercial relations with Iran.

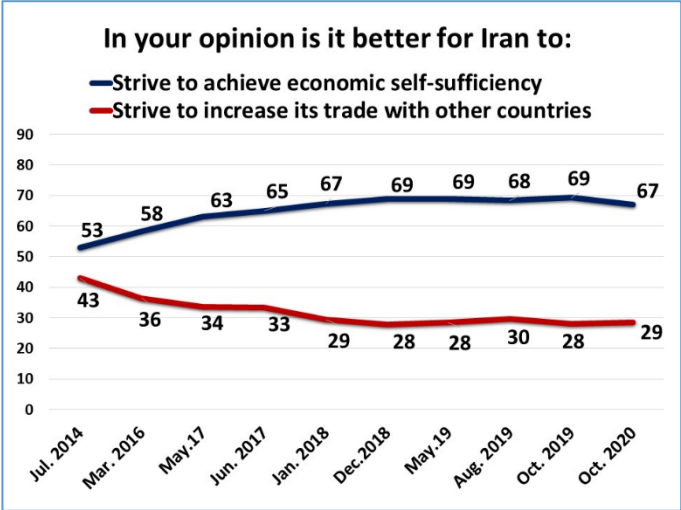
Respondents were asked “which of the following economic policies do you think would be best for our country?” They were given four options: 1) “Complete economic self-sufficiency”; 2), a modified version -- “Meeting our most important needs on our own and trading with a few dependable countries for other items”; 3), a more open policy that might create risks for Iran --“Trading with dependable countries to meet many of Iran’s needs”; and 4) a free-trade outlook – “Trading with as many countries as possible to fulfill all of Iran’s needs”. Fifty-nine percent preferred one of the options that involved trading with “dependable countries”: either a few of these (35%) or more (24%). Only 19% chose complete self-sufficiency, while the same number chose the free-trade orientation.



Much later in the survey, respondents were asked, “When Iran’s leaders talk about building a resistance economy, what do you think they mean?” Respondents were given options paralleling those in the prior question, and the distribution of answers was roughly similar. Forty-one percent thought leaders mean “being able to meet our most important needs on our own, and trading with a few dependable countries for other items” when they use the phrase “resistance economy.” Another 13% thought they mean “relying on trade and investment with dependable countries to meet most of Iran’s needs.” About a quarter (23%) thought “resistance economy” means autarky—“complete self-sufficiency, so Iran has no need for external trade”—and 18% thought it means “Trading with as many countries as possible to strengthen Iran’s economy.”

There was a clear tendency for respondents to think that their leaders’ conception of a resistance economy matched whatever economic path the respondent preferred. Fifty percent of those who favor complete self-sufficiency assume that constitutes a “resistance economy,” and sixty-six percent who prefer modified self-sufficiency assume that a “resistance economy” includes trading with a few dependable countries.” Perhaps more surprising is that 44% of those who like the free trade option believe this is what their leaders mean by “resistance economy.”

For many years this series has asked whether Iran should “strive to achieve economic self-sufficiency” or “strive to increase its trade with other countries.” Self-sufficiency always wins out: in February 2021, by 67% to 29%. The gap was narrowest when negotiations on the nuclear deal were beginning, in July 2014 (53% to 43%). Since then, it has always been wider than 10 points. The findings just discussed suggest, though, that the Iranian majority for self-sufficiency includes a significant number of people who also support trading with countries that have proven reliable over time.



## Impact of Covid-19 and Evaluation of Iran’s Response

**The pain caused by the pandemic has grown since October 2020. Four in five personally know someone who has gotten sick from covid-19 (up 20 points); half know someone who has died (up 12 points); a quarter have a household member who has lost employment (up 6 points). At the same time, though, Iranians have some pride in their collective response: three in four say the government has done a good job with the pandemic. Over four in five say they will probably take a vaccine once these are available.**

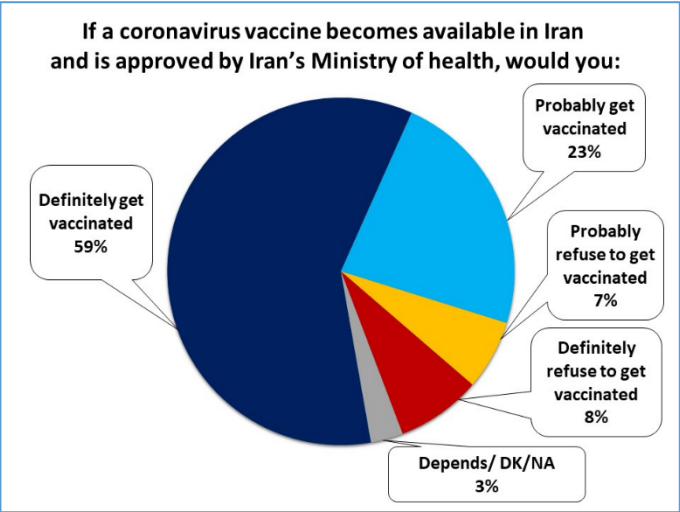
Seventy-nine percent of Iranians reported that they personally know someone “among...family, friends, and acquaintances” who has gotten sick from the coronavirus, up from 59% in October 2020. Those saying they do not know anyone who has gotten sick are down by half since October (from 41% to 21%).

Awareness of fatalities from the pandemic now touches half the population. Asked if they “personally know someone who has lost his or her life as a result,” 49% said yes, up from 37% last October. The economic effects are also more widespread: a quarter (25%) now have a member of their household who has lost their job because of the pandemic’s spread, up from 19% in October.

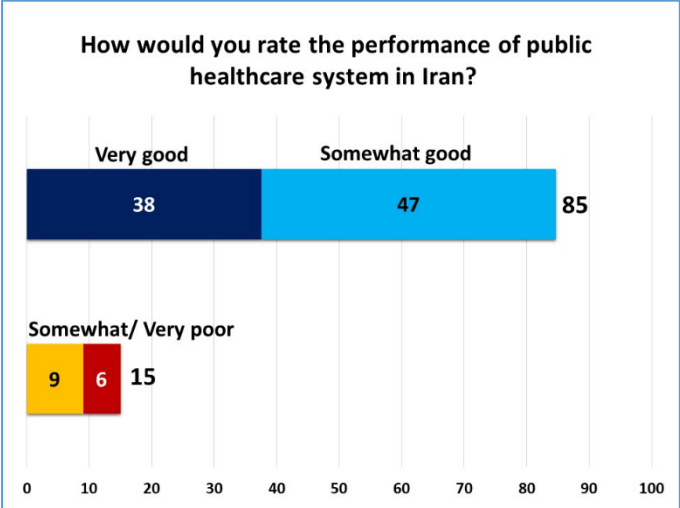
At the same time, most Iranians feel their collective response has been good. Given a question that was asked earlier by a Pew Global Attitudes survey—“In dealing with the coronavirus outbreak, do you think [this country] has done a very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, or very bad job?” 77% of Iranians say Iran has done a good job (very good, 28%). Only 23% say it has done a bad job (very bad, 11%). When compared to other countries asked this question by Pew in summer 2020, Iran’s response is closest to Italy’s 74% (18% very good, 56% good).

Despite Iran’s economic difficulties, 59% think “the government should do what it can to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, even if that would damage Iran’s economy”; 31% think the economy should come first. These attitudes are virtually unchanged from October 2020.

A very large majority is willing to take a vaccine approved by Iran’s Health Ministry. Asked explicitly about this (including the state approval), 59% said they would definitely, and 23% probably, get themselves vaccinated. (It is worth noting that those who say they may not get vaccinated are up slightly since October 2020, from 10 to 14%.)

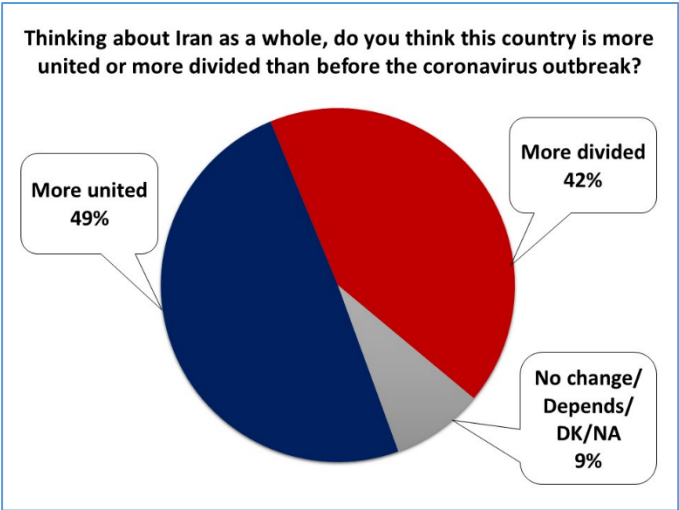


This majority openness to the vaccine may be related to the generally positive assessment of Iran’s public healthcare. In October respondents were asked to rate the performance of the public healthcare system: a strikingly high 85% called it very good (38%) or somewhat good (47%). Rural respondents viewed the system especially warmly, with 45% calling it “very good.” This may reflect past investments Iran has made in building out basic healthcare in more isolated areas.



On personal compliance with COVID-19 guidelines and about closing schools during the pandemic, responses in October were similar to attitudes in the United States. A clear majority of Iranians supports public health measures, but this is not unanimous. Thus, 91 percent said they “wear a mask over [their] mouth and nose” when going out in public, but only 57 percent said they “always” do so. Nearly two-thirds (67 percent) said schools should remain closed while 27 percent responded that they should be open for in-person classes.

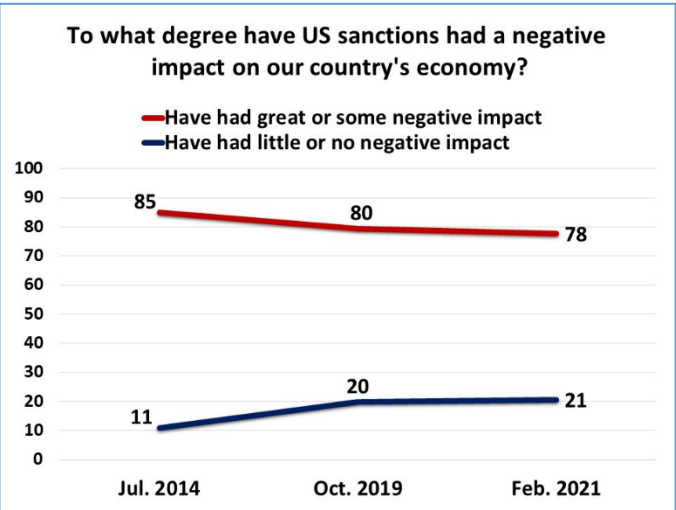
In another question asked earlier by Pew in other countries, Iranians were asked in February 2021: “Thinking about Iran as a whole, do you think this country is more united or more divided than before the coronavirus outbreak?” Iranians seemed somewhat divided by the question itself, with 49% saying they were now more united, 42% that they were now more divided, and 6% volunteering that things were the same or that “it depends”. Relative to other countries, Iranian responses were rather like those of Britain (46% more united, 46% more divided), Italy (45% more united, 54% more divided), or the Netherlands (44% more united, 53% more divided). (In the United States 77% said they were now more divided; in Canada 66% said they were now more united.)



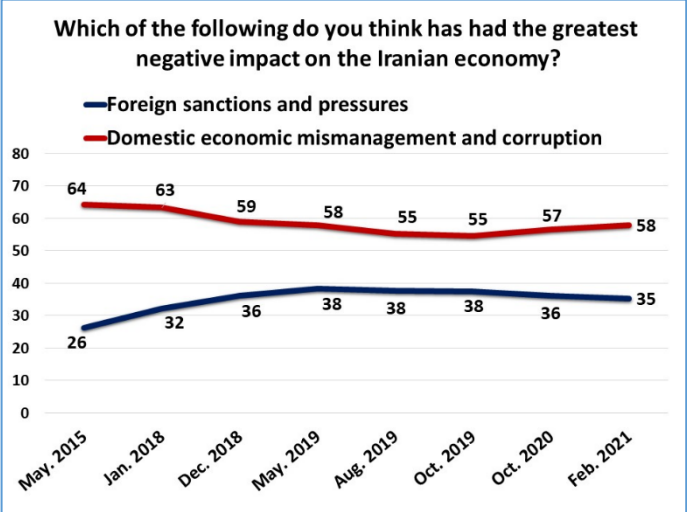
### Impact of Sanctions

Nearly half say the U.S. sanctions have had a “great negative impact,” and over four in five say the sanctions have had a negative impact “on the lives of ordinary people.” These levels are almost unchanged from 2019. When asked whether foreign sanctions or domestic mismanagement and corruption have greater negative impact, only a third picked sanctions. When given the pandemic as a third choice, only a quarter picked sanctions as the worst factor. About two thirds experience that fewer foreign-made medical goods are available, and seven in ten assume the United States is seeking to prevent humanitarian-related products from reaching Iran. At the same time, a large majority believes that with a major effort, Iran could increase its international trade.

In a question that first reminded respondents that the United States has re-imposed sanctions on Iran, they were asked to what degree the sanctions have had a negative impact on the country’s economy. Seventy-eight percent said the sanctions have had either a great impact (45%) or some impact (33%). This is almost unchanged from 2019 and seven points lower than the response in 2014, when negotiations on the nuclear deal started. When asked about sanctions’ impact “on the lives of ordinary people of our country,” a higher 86% said this was negative, and 60% called the impact great (up 3 points from 2019).



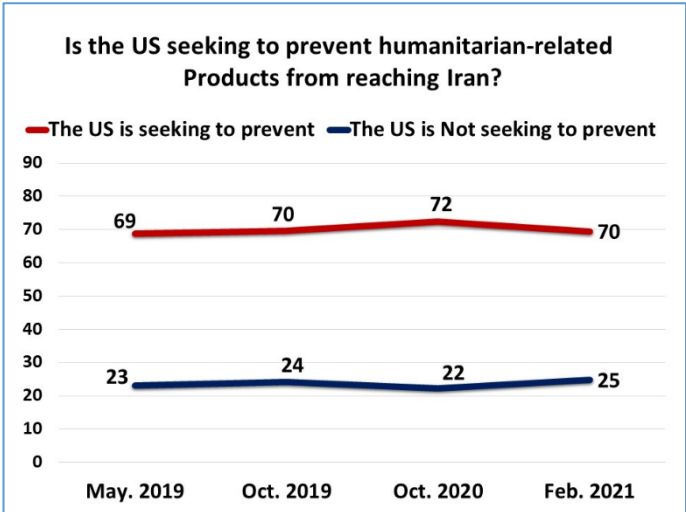
Although the severity of sanctions is acknowledged, Iranians focus more on domestic problems where the economy is concerned. Asked to assess whether “foreign sanctions and pressures” or “domestic mismanagement and corruption” has a greater negative effect on the economy, only about a third (35%) thought sanctions was the more important factor, while 58% assigned this to mismanagement and corruption. These responses have remained quite stable since late 2018.



This time, a different half-sample was offered the same question with a third option—“the coronavirus pandemic.” Mismanagement and corruption remained the majority choice (52%); sanctions came second with 25%; and the pandemic came third with 20%. The effect of offering a third choice was that while 6% were attracted away from the mismanagement and corruption option, 10% were attracted away from the sanctions option.

Iranians are quite aware of how U.S. secondary sanctions pose barriers to medical supplies and humanitarian-related goods. Asked to compare “the availability of most foreign-made medicine and medical equipment in Iran” with a year ago, 64% said it has decreased (a lot, 32%) and only 8% said it has increased.

Officially, U.S. policy does not hinder trade in medical or humanitarian-related products with Iran. The experience of the Iranian people, however, seem to suggest otherwise. Asked about this issue, the survey shows that the Iranian public believes that the United States is seeking to hinder trade in humanitarian-related products, though certainty about it has moderated a little since President Biden took office. Respondents were told that “Some say that by reimposing sanctions, the United States seeks to prevent all foreign goods from reaching Iran, including humanitarian-related products, such as medicines or spare parts needed for the safe operation of Iran’s civilian airplanes,” while “others say that the United States does not want to prevent humanitarian-related products from reaching Iran.” Seventy percent said that the United States is definitely (45%) or probably doing it (25%). The percentage saying “definitely” is down





7 points from October 2020, while those picking “probably” is up four points. A quarter (25%, up 3 points) now think the United States is not seeking to do this.

Just as Iranians tend to see domestic mismanagement as more problematic than foreign sanctions, they tend to think Iran could rebuild its international trade if it really focused on doing so. Respondents were asked, “Under current international circumstances, how likely do you think it is that Iran could actually increase its trade relations with other countries if it makes a major effort?” Seventy-one percent thought Iran could likely do this (very likely, 29%), very similar to what Iranians thought in 2019.

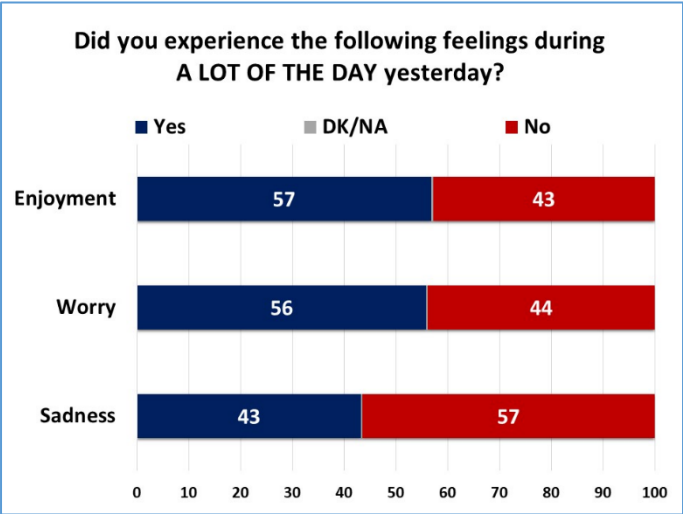
### Life Satisfaction

**Despite the hardships of current life in Iran, when asked about their personal happiness, a majority reported experiencing enjoyment much of the day, but a majority also reported experiencing worry much of the day. When offered a 0-to-10 scale with the “worst possible life” at the bottom and the “best possible life” at the top, the average rating was 4.7. (This result is similar to Iran’s score in the World Happiness Survey--4.6.) When asked where they thought they would be on this scale in five years, it was 5.7. A majority say they are better off than their parents were at the same age, and half say when children today in Iran grow up, they will be better off than their parents.**

Since the international media image of life in Iran is one of managing under intense pressure, it seemed relevant to ask about respondents’ personal states of mind. These are standard questions that have been widely asked internationally.

Respondents were asked about worry, enjoyment and sadness, and whether they experienced each one during “a lot of the day yesterday” (offering a simple yes or no). Fifty-six percent said they had experienced worry for a lot of the day; 57%, enjoyment, for a lot of the day; and 43%, sadness for a lot of the day.

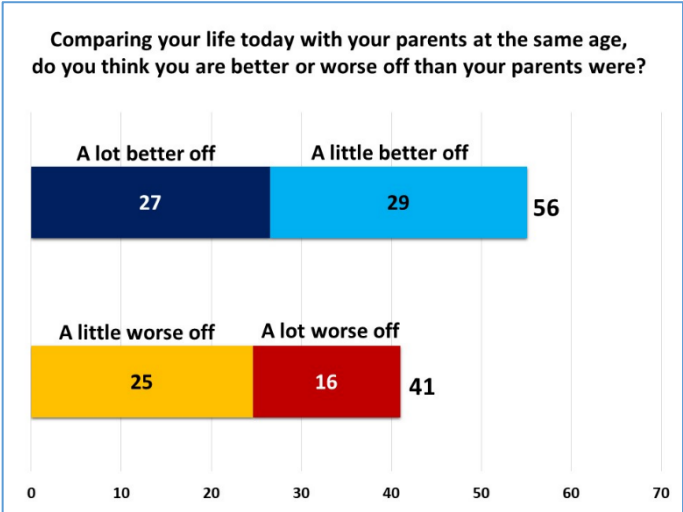
They were then told to “imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you,” and asked: “On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?” The average response was 4.7. Almost half (47%) chose a number from 4 to 6. Thirty percent chose a number from 0 to 3; 22% chose a number from 7 to 10.



These results are what might be expected from other international data on life satisfaction. In the World Happiness Report for 2020, based on 2017-19 data, Iran is ranked in 118<sup>th</sup> place out of 153 countries, with a score of 4.6. Interestingly, its neighbors on the scale are also some of its geographic neighbors: Armenia (116<sup>th</sup> place), Georgia (117), and Jordan (119). (For comparison, the highest score is Finland at 7.8; the United States is in 18<sup>th</sup> place, with a score of 6.9.)

Respondents were also asked, using the same 0-to-10 scale, “On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?” The average response was 5.7. Forty-six percent picked a number from 5 to 8; 27% picked a number from 0 to 5; and 22% picked 9 or 10.

A majority say they are better off than their parents were at the same age. Asked to make the comparison, 55% say they are better off (a lot, 27%), while 41% say they are worse off (a lot, 16%).



Asked about children today in Iran and what life will be like for them financially when they grow up, more thought they would be better off than their parents. Fifty percent said Iran’s children will grow up to be better off, while 40% said they will be worse off.

## Views of the United States and Steps to Improve Relations

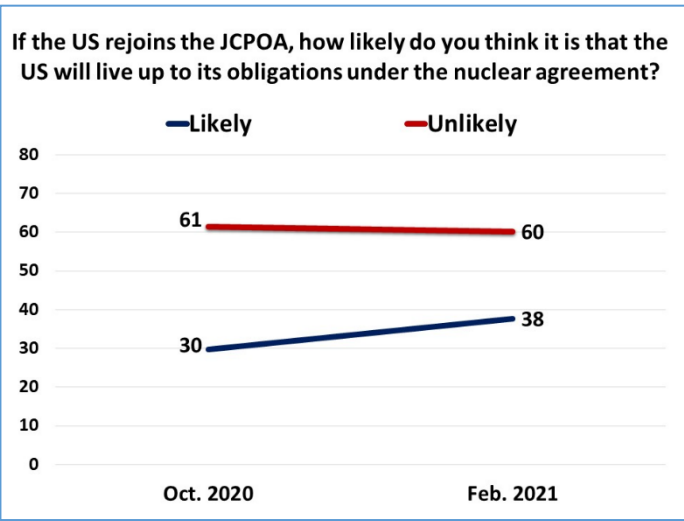
Seven in ten Iranians followed the U.S. election; nine in ten know Biden won. Iranians expect Biden's policies toward Iran to be somewhat less hostile; asked to put this on a 0-to-10 scale, 3 was the average response, compared to a 1 for Trump. Almost four in ten now believe the United States would fulfill its obligations were it to rejoin the JCPOA, up from three in ten in October 2020. Fewer than in October—now under half—think the U.S. is *definitely* seeking to prevent humanitarian-related products from reaching Iran. Very unfavorable views of the United States, while still quite high, have also declined slightly. Attitudes toward the American people are more mixed, with slightly more (49%) holding a negative view than a positive one (45%).

Asked to consider positive steps the Biden administration could take to improve US relations with Iran, four in five thought removal of the terrorist designation from Iran’s central bank would be very meaningful. Seven in ten said condemning the scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh’s assassination as against international law would be very meaningful. Two in three found a full U.S. return to JCPOA compliance very meaningful. These far outranked the other steps offered respondents.

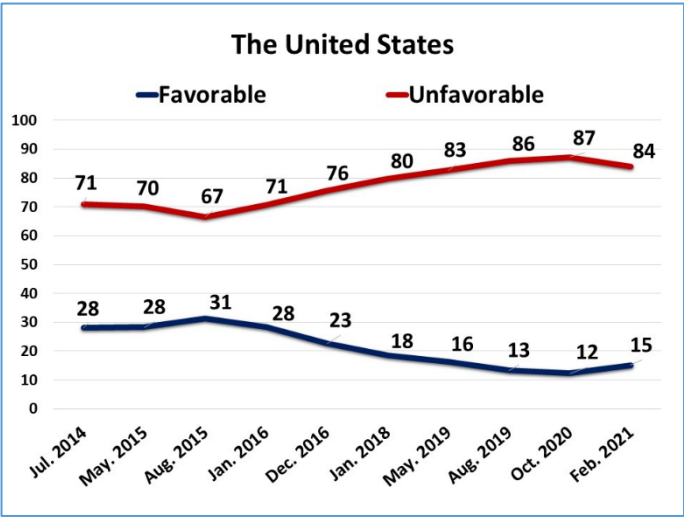
When respondents were asked how closely they had followed news about the U.S. presidential election, 71% said they had followed it at least somewhat, but just a quarter (26%) had followed it very closely. To test their attention another way, respondents were asked to give the winner’s name without prompting. Almost all (87%) could volunteer that Biden had won, and virtually no one made a mistake—fewer than 1% volunteered Trump’s name. Twelve percent said they did not know or declined to answer.

Iranians expect relations with the United States to be somewhat less hostile than they were under Trump, but this is a low baseline. Respondents were asked to rate Trump’s policies toward Iran on a 0-to-10 scale, with 0 meaning completely hostile, 5 meaning neither hostile nor friendly, and 10 meaning completely friendly. Seventy percent gave Trump’s policies a zero; the average was 1.13 (about the same as in January 2018). Respondents were then asked, “Now, how do you think Joe Biden’s policies toward Iran will be?” Only 29% gave a zero and the mean was 2.91. Interestingly, 28% gave a 5 (“neither hostile nor friendly”).

Confidence that the United States will fulfill its obligations if it rejoins the JCPOA has improved significantly in four months, without approaching majority levels. In February 2021, 38% thought it somewhat (33%) or very (5%) likely that the United States would comply, up 8 points since October, while 60% thought it was unlikely. Similarly, as discussed above in section 4, the number who think the United States is *definitely* seeking to prevent humanitarian-related products from reaching Iran is no longer a majority (45%) and has dropped seven points since October.



While a very large majority remains unfavorable toward the United States, those who are very unfavorable have diminished slightly since October 2020, to 73% (down four points). The numbers with very unfavorable views breached the 70% mark for the first time in May 2019 and have remained above that mark since.

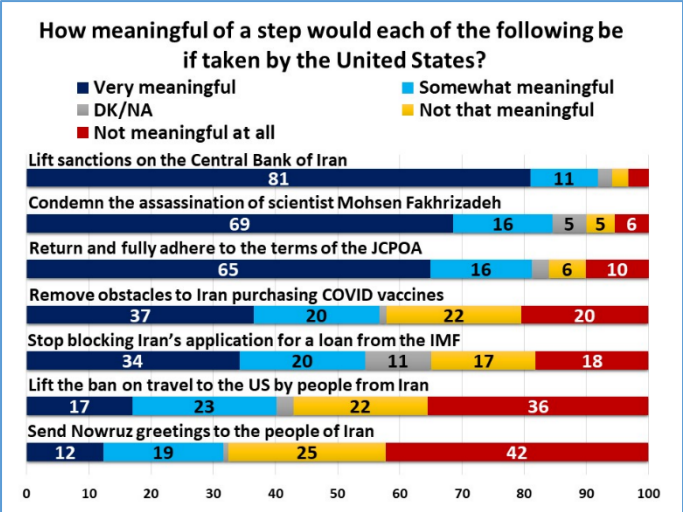


Iranians have always viewed the American people more favorably than the United States in general. After Biden’s inauguration, 45% had an at least somewhat favorable view, up four points

from 2018. Unfavorable views of the American people no longer constituted a majority (49%).

One way to improve US-Iranian relations would be to lift some of the measures taken against Iran that were hallmarks of Trump administration foreign policy, to see whether a confidence-building process could take hold. The survey offered several such steps and asked Iranians for each one whether they found it meaningful or not.

The step that received the strongest interest was “to lift sanctions on the Central Bank of Iran”; 81% called this very meaningful and another 11% somewhat meaningful. The second such step was a symbolic one: to “condemn the assassination of scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh as a violation of international law.” Sixty-nine percent called this very meaningful and another 16% somewhat meaningful. Ranking third for Iranians was for the United States to “return and fully adhere to the terms of the JCPOA.” Sixty-five percent called this very meaningful and another 16% somewhat meaningful. Ranking third for Iranians was for the United States to “return and fully adhere to the terms of the JCPOA.” Sixty-five percent saw this a very meaningful and another 16% as somewhat meaningful.



The other possible steps would be less politically costly for the Biden administration, and have less value as icebreakers. “Remov[ing] all obstacles to Iran purchasing vaccines against covid-19” was meaningful to 57% (very, 37%). To “stop blocking Iran’s application for a loan from the International Monetary Fund” was meaningful to 54% (very, 34%).

As this survey was being fielded, the Biden administration did “[lift] the ban on travel to the United States by people from Iran and some other Muslim countries.” This was meaningful to a lesser 40% (very, 17%), perhaps because relatively few respondents can imagine travelling to the United States anytime soon.

The occasional gesture of past U.S. presidents to “send Nowruz greetings to the people of Iran” may have been tainted by Trump’s messages sharply criticizing the leadership of Iran and saying the population deserved a “brighter, freer future.” Sending Nowruz greetings was meaningful to only 32% (12% very). More importantly, 68% did not find it meaningful, with a high 42% calling it not meaningful at all.

## Reviving the JCPOA

For the first time since 2018, a majority again approves of the nuclear deal. About three in five say it is likely that the U.S. will return to the JCPOA. However, only about four in ten think that if the U.S. does return it will fulfill its obligations (up from three in ten in October 2020). Iranians also lack confidence in compliance by the other P5+1 countries.

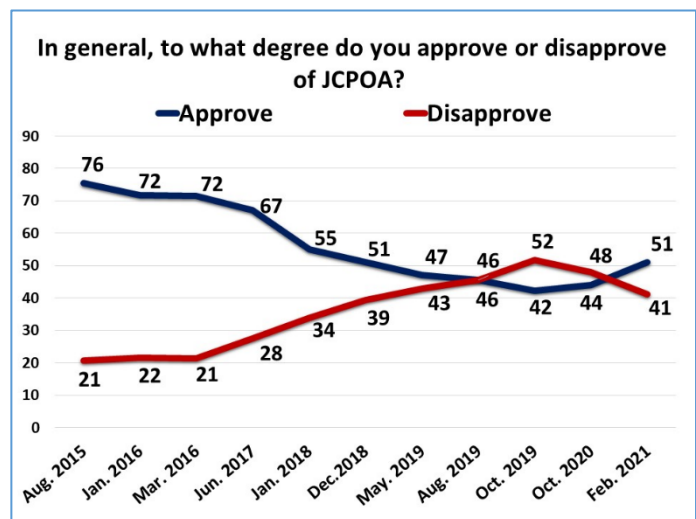
**Iranians are staunchly opposed to negotiating with the Biden administration before the U.S. returns to full compliance with the JCPOA. Sixty-nine percent objected to this possibility, while 28% thought that Iran should try to reach a new nuclear agreement with the United States. The sanctions currently in place appear to make those Iranians who blame them for Iran’s bad economy somewhat more willing to support immediate negotiations, but a majority of that group still opposes new negotiations before the U.S. fulfills its JCPOA obligations.**

**About three quarters support the parliament’s recent law that demands wider nuclear activities and reduced inspections unless the United States and other P5+1 countries take immediate steps in line with their JCPOA obligations. Those who approve of the JCPOA are less likely to support the nuclear law than those who disapprove of it, but 62% of strong JCPOA supporters still favor the law, presumably as a way to increase pressure for compliance by the United States and the other signatories.**

**As for the ongoing debate about who should return to compliance first, 88% of Iranians of approve of a possible sequence in which the U.S. returns to full compliance before Iran reverses its nuclear steps that exceed JCPOA limits, while 65% oppose Iran once again fulfilling all its nuclear obligations before the U.S. returns to the agreement. Fifty-five percent approve of a simultaneous return to full compliance, while 51% oppose a step-by-step approach.**

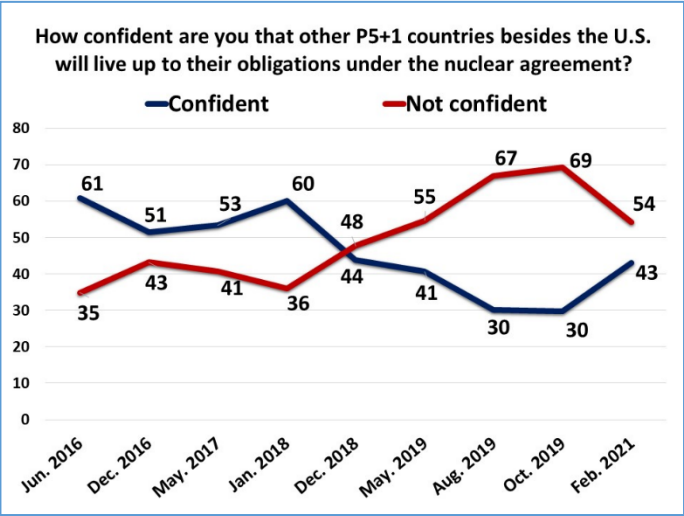
Gradually diminishing majorities of Iranians approved of the JCPOA from 2015 until May 2019, when support slipped into the forties, and remained there through October 2020 (44%). In February 2021, a bare majority of 51% again approved of the deal.

When asked “How likely do you think it is that the United States will return to the JCPOA under the presidency of Joe Biden?” 58% now think this at least somewhat likely, though only 9% think it very likely. This is a substantial increase from October 2020, when 45% said it was at least somewhat likely that the United States would return to the nuclear deal if Biden was elected. Forty percent now think a U.S. return to the JCPOA is unlikely (very, 21%), down from 45% (very, 26%).



Iranians have lower expectations about getting promised sanctions relief if the United States rejoins the JCPOA. In February 2021, 38% thought it likely that the United States will fulfill its obligations if it rejoins, up 8 points since October 2020, but still 20 points below the percentage who think the U.S. will return.

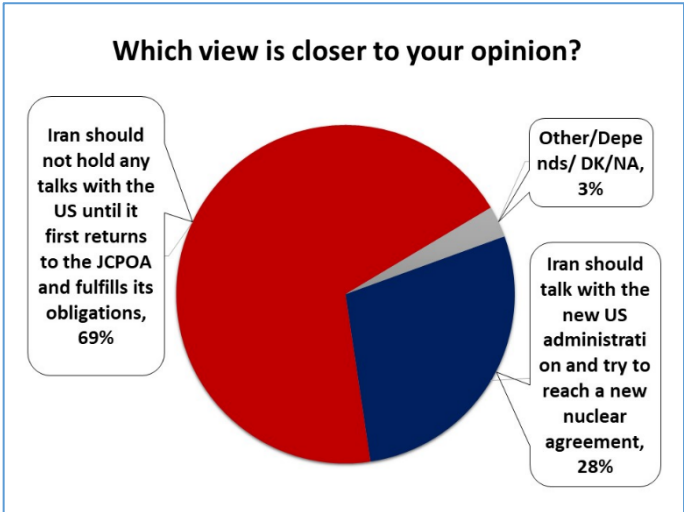
Confidence that the other parties to the JCPOA will live up to their obligations has risen, too, but not to majority levels. Forty-three percent expressed confidence that “other P5+1 countries besides the U.S.” would fulfill their obligations, up 13 points from October 2019. This positive movement still leaves majorities expecting that neither will keep their commitments (60% for the United States, 54% for the other P5+1 countries).



**Strong Opposition to New Negotiations Despite Sanctions Pressure**

To see how willing Iranians might be to think beyond the JCPOA at this point, respondents were told that “some say now that Joe Biden has become the US president, Iran should talk with the new US administration and try to reach a new nuclear agreement.” Others say, however, that Iran should not hold any talks until after the United States is back in the JCPOA and “fulfills all of its obligations.”

Posed in this binary fashion, about seven in ten (69%) thought Iran should not get involved in talks until the United States returns to the JCPOA and fulfills its obligations. Only 28% thought Iran should immediately pursue a new nuclear agreement in talks with the United States.



The sanctions imposed by the Trump administration appear to have little or no impact on Iranian’s willingness to negotiate new terms with the Biden administration before it fulfills the commitments the U.S. made in the original nuclear deal. Respondents who thought sanctions’ negative impact greater than that of mismanagement and corruption were just as likely to say Iran should not engage in new talks with the United States until it fulfills its JCPOA negotiations (69%) as were those who thought mismanagement’s impact was greater (68%). When half of respondents were given a third choice--the pandemic--the outcome was the same; those who chose sanctions as more negative than *either* mismanagement or the pandemic still said Iran should not enter new talks yet (68%).

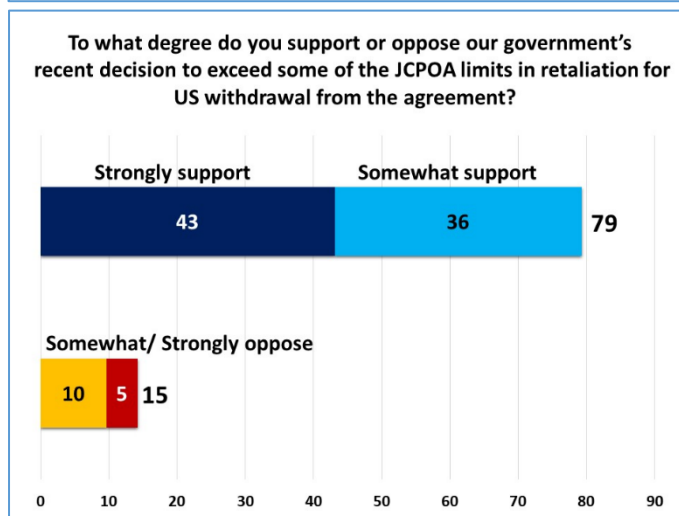
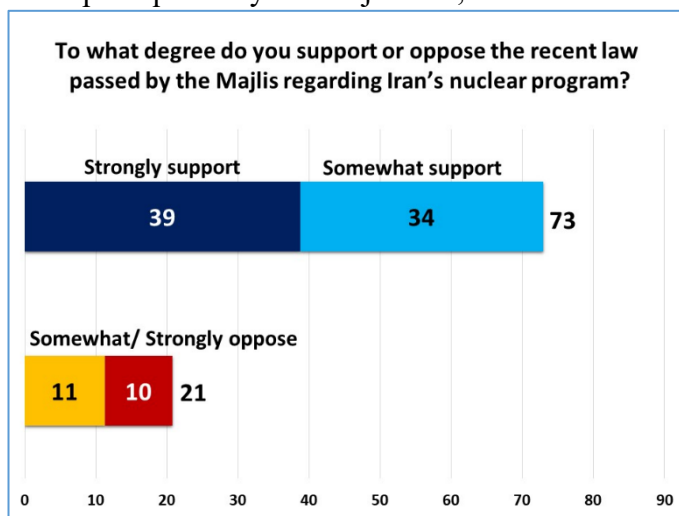
## Attitudes toward Majlis Law

The Rouhani administration responded to Trump’s maximum pressure campaign by gradually exceeding some of the limits Iran accepted under the JCPOA. When that did not change U.S. policy, Iran’s parliament passed a law mandating a greater expansion of Iran’s nuclear activities and a reduction in international inspections unless the P5+1 quickly meet their JCPOA obligations. This survey sought to test how Iranians would respond to a detailed description of the law and the counter-argument against it. Respondents heard the following:

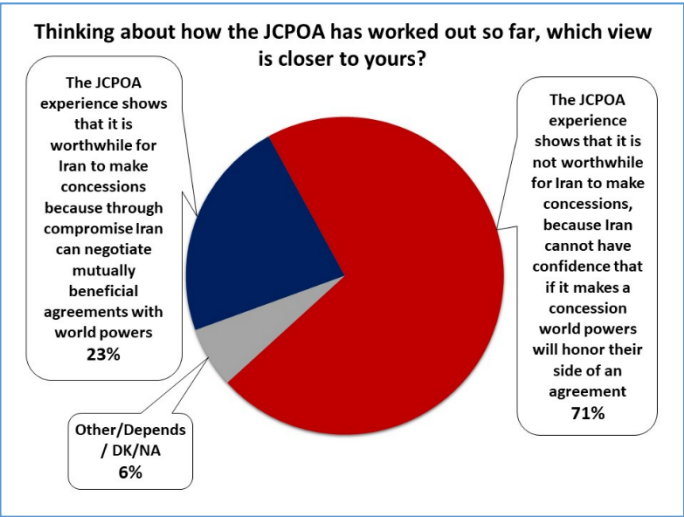
As you may know, in retaliation for U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal and reimposition of sanctions, our government exceeded some limits it had accepted under the JCPOA. The Majlis viewed the steps taken by the government as insufficient and recently passed a law demanding further expansion of Iran’s nuclear activities now. The law would also end more intrusive inspection of Iran’s nuclear facilities by international inspectors unless the United States and other P5+1 countries take major steps needed for Iran to fully benefit from the JCPOA within the next month. President Rouhani and the P5+1 countries say that if Iran takes the steps required by the Majlis law, it would be harder for the P5+1 to make the changes that the Majlis wants. With this in mind, to what degree do you support or oppose the recent law passed by the Majlis?

Even when reminded that Iran’s president thinks the law will actually impede change, it received broad support. Seventy-three percent said they supported the law (39% strongly), while 21% opposed it.

Similarly, support has held steady while Iran’s government (in the words of another question) “has exceeded some limits it accepted under the JCPOA and threatened to withdraw unless the other P5+1 countries do more to allow Iran to benefit from the agreement.” Though “the other P5+1 countries have responded that Iran’s recent actions make it more difficult for them to take the steps Iran is demanding,” Iranians’ support for the government’s position was 79% in October 2020, up seven points since August 2019.



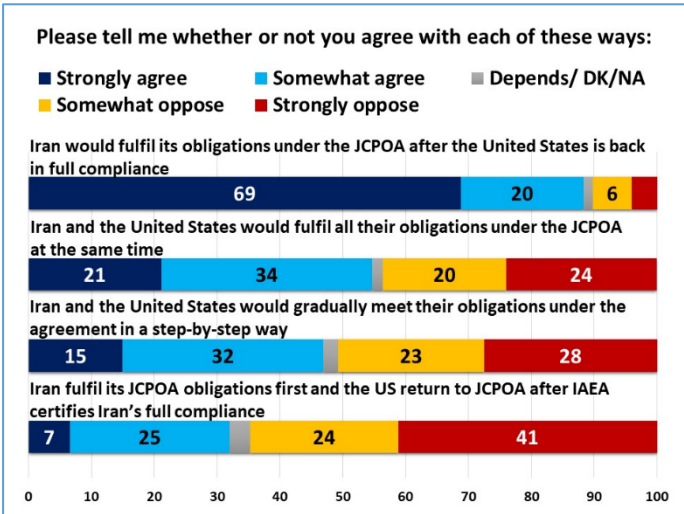
To understand this level of popular support for actions that move Iran away from its JCPOA obligations, it is helpful to recall what lesson Iranians have drawn from complying fully with their obligations while other signatories moved slowly on trade and investment with Iran until the United States withdrew and re-imposed sanctions. In October 2020, asked to choose between two views, 71% thought that “The JCPOA experience shows that it is not worthwhile for Iran to make concessions, because Iran cannot have confidence that if it makes a concession world powers will honor their side of an agreement.” Only 23% preferred the other choice, that “The JCPOA experience shows that it is worthwhile for Iran to make concessions because through compromise Iran can negotiate mutually beneficial agreements with world powers.”



Those Iranians who support the JCPOA are somewhat less likely to favor the new law than those who disapprove of the nuclear deal. For example, 86% of those who strongly disapprove of the JCPOA support Iran’s new nuclear law, compared with 62% of those who strongly approve of the JCPOA and 72% who somewhat approve of it. That suggests that many Iranians support the new law as a way to put pressure on the United States and the other signatories to fulfill their JCPOA obligations, not because they actually want Iran to expand its nuclear activities beyond JCPOA limits.

**Ways to Achieve a Mutual Return into Full Compliance**

Respondents were asked to consider several approaches for getting the United States and Iran back into full compliance with their JCPOA obligations. First they were reminded that “As you may know, both Iran and the Biden administration have said that they would completely fulfill their obligations under the JCPOA if the other party also complies fully with the terms of the JCPOA.” They then separately evaluated four different paths.



A formula widely discussed among American policymakers, by which “Iran would completely fulfill its obligations under the JCPOA first, and the United States would return to the agreement after the IAEA certifies that Iran is back in full compliance,” was rejected by 65% (41% strongly);



about a third (32%) agreed with it. Its mirror image, often discussed in Iran, is a formula by which “Iran would fulfil its obligations under the JCPOA after the United States is back in full compliance”. Understandably, this was extremely popular, with 88% agreeing (strongly, 69%).

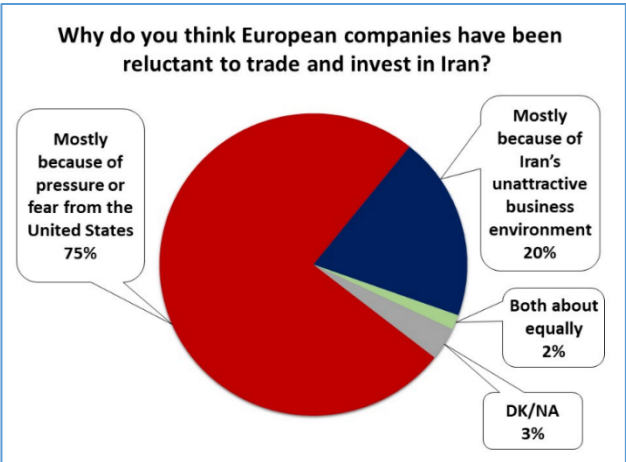
A clear majority of 55% would agree with a formula in which “Iran and the United States would fulfil all their obligations under the JCPOA at the same time” (21% strongly). Forty-four percent were opposed (24% strongly). Less than half were supportive of a more complex formula, in which “Iran and the United States would gradually meet their obligations under the agreement in a step-by-step way, such that Iran would take some steps in return for some steps taken by the United States until both countries fully meet the terms of the JCPOA.” Forty-seven percent agreed with this proposal (15% strongly), while 51% opposed it (28% strongly).

## European Role in Reviving the JCPOA

**Iranians are divided over a proposal that European countries make “specific commitments to increase trade and investment” in return for Iran returning to full compliance with the JCPOA. However, as in 2019, over four in ten do not perceive any current European steps to actually protect their companies from U.S. sanctions for trading with Iran; only a quarter see European efforts as meaningful. Three in four believe fear of the United States is the primary reason why European companies are not trading with Iran.**

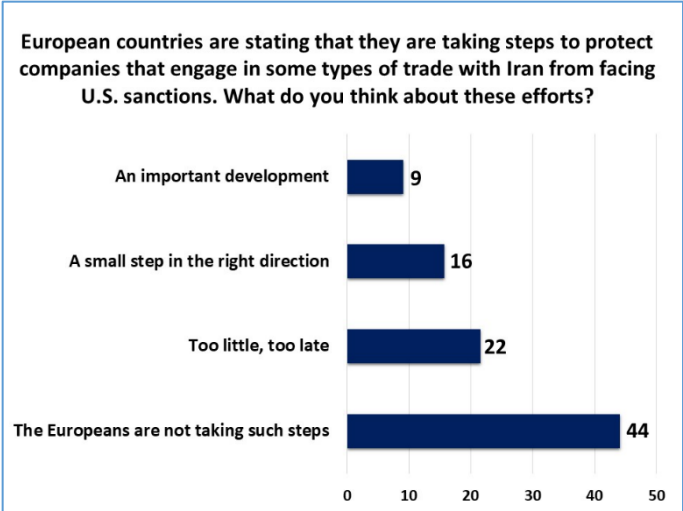
In both October 2020 and February 2021, Iranian respondents were asked about a proposal for a European initiative to trade sanctions relief for a return by Iran to full compliance with the JCPOA. Respondents were told:

The European countries that signed the JCPOA have argued that it will be easier for the new Biden administration to rejoin the agreement after Iran again fully complies with the terms of the JCPOA. If the European countries offered an agreement to make specific commitments to increase trade and investment with Iran in return for Iran to again fully comply with the terms of the JCPOA, would you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose such an agreement?



In February, this proposition got a divided response, with 47% supporting it (17% strongly) and 49% opposing it (28% strongly). These numbers show a small improvement from October, when there was a five-point gap between opponents and supporters. The hints of optimism around Biden’s arrival as U.S. president in themselves, though, do not appear to have tipped the scales of public opinion in favor of this European initiative.

This lukewarm support may be explained in part by the Iranian public’s perception that European countries did not do anything effectual to help Iran benefit from the nuclear deal after the Trump administration withdrew and threatened secondary sanctions against anyone who continued legitimate trade and investment with Iran. In February 2021 respondents were told that “European countries are stating that they are taking steps to protect companies that engage in some types of trade with Iran from facing U.S. sanctions” and asked what they thought about these efforts. Forty-four percent thought “the Europeans are not taking such steps,” while 22% thought this was “too little, too late”; 16% thought it was “a small step in the right direction” but only 9% thought it was “an important development.” There has been no meaningful change in responses since the question was first asked in 2019.



Three quarters of Iranians believe the European private sector has been focused on avoiding punishment from the United States. Respondents were reminded that “the amount of European trade and investment in Iran has been much lower than many Iranians expected after the JCPOA was signed” and asked why they thought this is. Seventy-five percent thought it was “mostly because of pressure or fear from the United States.” Only 20% said it was “mostly because of Iran’s unattractive business environment.” This is interesting, given that in other questions a majority says that domestic mismanagement is a more important factor than sanctions in Iran’s economic issues.

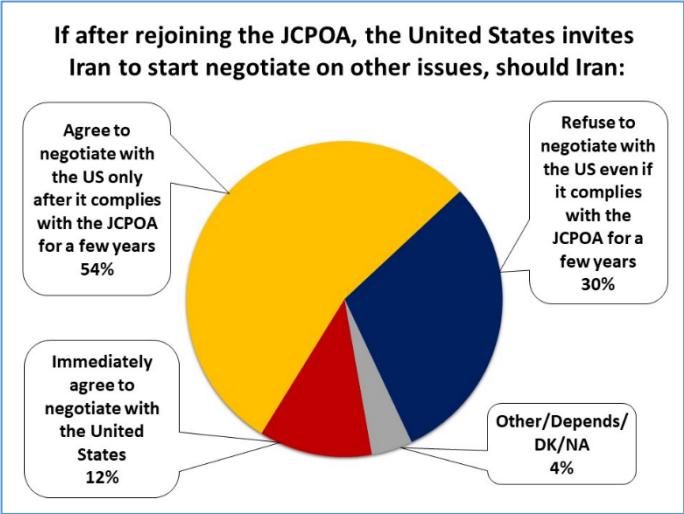
### Attitudes Toward Broader Negotiations

**The Biden administration has said that after the U.S. has rejoined the JCPOA it would pursue negotiations with Iran to strengthen the terms of that agreement and address other U.S. concerns. Iranians are taking a wait-and-see attitude toward broader negotiations: a majority would only agree to new negotiations after a few years of U.S. compliance with the JCPOA. There is currently strong opposition toward changing any of the JCPOA’s terms in follow-on negotiations, with 85% categorically rejecting a demand to end uranium enrichment and 72% opposed to making the JCPOA’s limits on Iran permanent.**

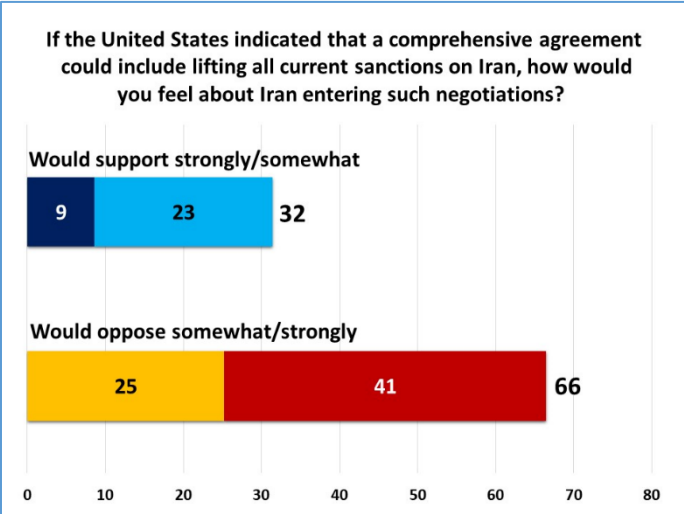
**Asked about negotiations over advanced conventional weaponry, respondents overwhelmingly rejected a demand to end ballistic missile testing by Iran. Two in three think their development acts as a deterrent against attack—more than in 2019. They were somewhat less negative toward limiting the range of ballistic missiles of all countries in the Middle East, with 57% opposed and 38% saying it could be acceptable depending on the circumstances. Half showed interest in a proposal that would limit advanced weaponry exports to all Middle Eastern countries.**

There is much discussion in Europe and the United States of creating a framework with Iran for much more expansive negotiations in which the nuclear issue would be only a part. This study examined Iranian attitudes to such a framework from several angles.

First, respondents were told that “If the United States returns to the JCPOA, and both the United States and Iran are fully complying with the JCPOA, the question will arise about whether they should begin negotiating about other issues over which there is a conflict between Iran and the United States.” Asked how Iran should respond “If at that point the United States invites Iran to start negotiate on other issues,” respondents were offered three options: immediately agree to negotiate; agree to negotiate only after a few years of U.S. compliance with the JCPOA’s terms; or refuse to negotiate even after a few years of compliance. A 54% majority preferred to wait and negotiate after a few years of U.S. compliance. Thirty percent would not negotiate even at that point; 12% were willing to negotiate immediately.



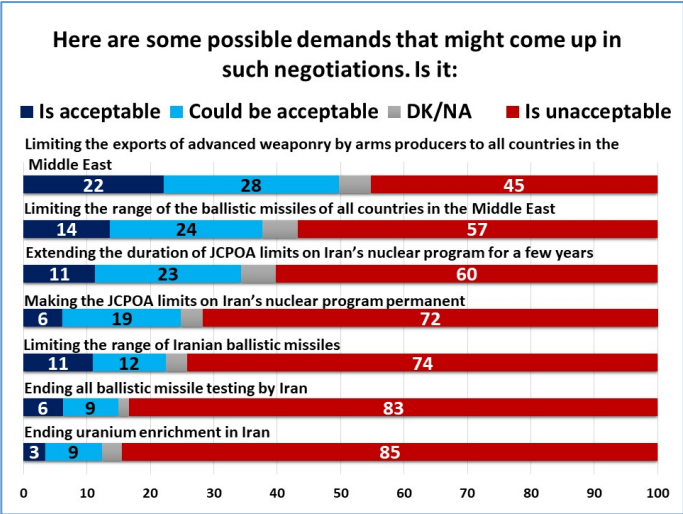
The survey then offered specific points that the new U.S. administration might bring up in follow-on negotiations: strengthening the nuclear deal, limiting Iran’s ballistic missiles development, and reducing Iran’s military activities in the Middle East. Respondents were asked how they would feel about entering such negotiations with the understanding that a comprehensive agreement could include lifting all current sanctions on Iran. Two-thirds currently say that they would oppose such negotiations (41%, strongly), while 31% would support them.



Respondents were then asked how they would feel if such negotiations involved all the P5+1 countries, because that was a more popular format in an October 2019 question about JCPOA follow-on negotiations (75% approval) than bilateral talks with the Trump administration (52% support). In February 2021, mentioning the other P5+1 countries did not increase support above 31%. Including some other Middle Eastern countries in addition to Iran for negotiations about regional issues did somewhat better, with 39% supporting and 55% opposing that format.

The survey sought to measure reactions to possible demands that could be made of Iran in future negotiations. Respondents were asked to say for each demand—which if agreed, would mean the “additional lifting of sanctions”—whether they thought it was acceptable, unacceptable, or could be acceptable depending on other terms of the agreement.

The survey asked about three ways in which some Americans and Europeans would like to strengthen the nuclear deal with Iran: extending the duration for a few years, making the JCPOA limits permanent, and ending uranium enrichment by Iran. In the current atmosphere of uncertainty about whether or not Iran will eventually get the benefits it was promised under the original nuclear deal, there is no appetite for additional nuclear concessions. A short extension was the least objectionable: 60% opposed and 34% said it could be acceptable, depending on the circumstances. Seventy-two percent said that making the JCPOA limits permanent was unacceptable, while 25% were somewhat open to that idea. Ending uranium enrichment in Iran was rejected by 85%, showing that this policy objective is even more unpopular than it was in October 2019 (75% rejection).



Ending ballistic missile testing by Iran was no more acceptable than ending uranium enrichment. Eighty-three percent categorically rejected this option, while only 13% said it could be acceptable.

Limiting the range of Iran’s ballistic missiles, an idea derived from leadership assertions that Iran has no need for, and no plans to, develop missiles with ranges longer than 2000 kilometers, was opposed by 74% and potentially acceptable by 22%.

This consensual negative reaction to restrictions that only affect Iran’s missile program can be understood through another question about how Iranians perceive missiles affecting their security. Respondents were asked:

Some say one of the reasons why no country has attacked Iran in the last thirty years is because Iran is deterring such attacks by developing advanced missiles. Others say that pressure of some countries on Iran’s missile program is increasing, and if Iran continues developing advanced missiles, it is likely that some countries like the US or Israel will attack Iran. Do you think that developing advanced missiles increases, decreases, or does not affect the likelihood that other countries will attack Iran?

A two-thirds majority believes that developing missiles deters against attack (66%, up 5 points since 2019). Only 12% think the program increases the likelihood of attack, while 19% think it does not affect that likelihood.

Iranians were somewhat more open to arms control that would constrain their regional rivals as well as Iran. A smaller majority (58%) remained opposed to limiting the range of ballistic

missiles if it applied to all countries of the Middle East, while 38% said they could support a multilateral limit, depending on the circumstances. The most acceptable proposal to Iran's public was "Limiting the exports of advanced weaponry by arms producers to all countries in the Middle East." A bare majority were open to this idea: it was acceptable to 22% and could be acceptable to another 28%. Only 45% were categorically opposed.

## **Iran's Regional Involvements and the IRGC**

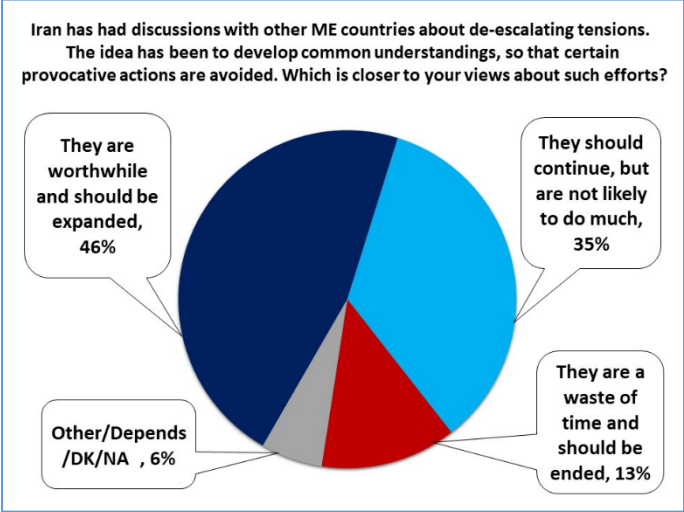
**A modest majority prefers that Iran deal with regional problems through diplomacy, rather than seeking to become the most powerful country in the region. Four in five want diplomatic discussions with other Middle Eastern countries to continue; a little under half support expanding them. As in past years, four in five want Iran to support policies in Iraq that equally benefit both Shiites and Sunnis. A little less than half want Iran to encourage a diplomatic resolution to the conflict in Yemen. Three in ten support Iran helping the Houthis defeat their opponents and a fifth say Iran should not get involved.**

**A very large majority views the Revolutionary Guard's regional military activities favorably and three in five say Iran should increase its support of groups fighting terrorist groups like ISIS; both these majorities have grown since 2019. A majority thinks that even if Iran were to stop the Guard's activities, this would only lead the United States to push for more concessions in other areas. Over three in five support IRGC playing a role in Iran's economy.**

**In responding to military incidents, incursions into Iran's waters or airspace, or to assassinations of major figures, substantial majorities support retaliation as a way to deter similar actions in the future. More than a third would prefer diplomatic and legal action to punish those who assassinate high-ranking Iranian figures to lethal revenge, though, because they believe that seeking revenge would not make such incidents less likely and would make Iran less safe.**

When Iranians are asked, "As a general rule, what do you think is the better approach for Iran to pursue in trying to solve the problems it is facing in the region: seeking to become the most powerful country in the region, or seeking to find mutually acceptable solutions with other countries through negotiations," slightly more choose the diplomatic path. In February 2021 52% preferred diplomacy over seeking regional hegemony (46%), and this margin of 6 points is higher than in 2018 (46% to 49%).

Respondents were told that “Iran has had diplomatic discussions with other Middle Eastern countries about de-escalating tensions in the region” and that “the idea has been to develop common understandings, so that certain provocative actions are avoided by all parties.” The initiative, which Iranians have dubbed as the “Hormuz Peace Initiative,” was first presented by Iran at the 74th United Nations General Assembly. Respondents were asked what they thought should be the future of these types of discussions. Eighty-one percent wanted them to continue, with 47% saying “they are worthwhile and should be expanded,” and another 35% that “they should continue, but are not likely to do much.” Only a small minority thought “they are a waste of time and should be ended” (13%).



Four in five want Iran to support policies in Iraq that equally benefit both Shiites and Sunnis. Eighty-one percent said this in February 2021 (3 points higher than in 2018), while only 13% thought Iran should use its influence for “policies that primarily benefit Shia leaders and citizens in Iraq.”

The Biden administration has taken steps as of this writing on the issue of Yemen that may prove important to Iranians: ceasing U.S. support to Saudi Arabian offensive operations in Yemen, suspending some weapons sales to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and lifting the terrorist designation on the Houthis.

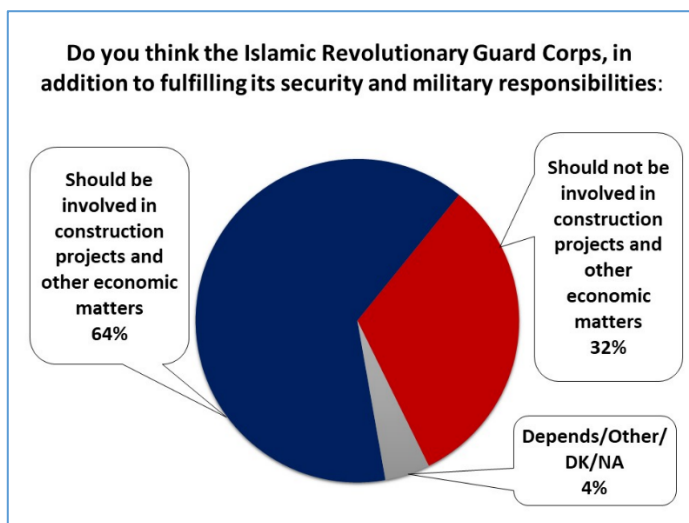
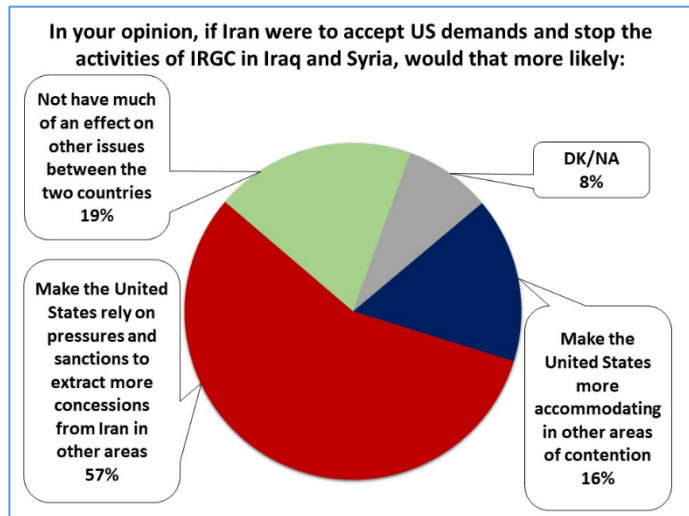
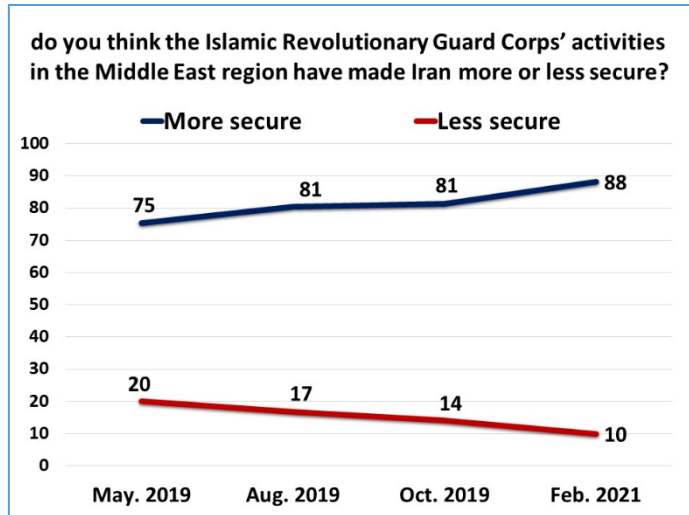
The survey did not ask a question about the United States and Yemen, but did ask Iranians what Iran should do there: help the Houthis defeat their opponents; use its influence to encourage a diplomatic solution; or not get involved in Yemen’s domestic conflict. Forty-four percent wanted Iran to encourage a diplomatic solution, 30% wanted Iran to aid a Houthi victory, and 20% said Iran should not get involved. Asked a similar question in January 2018, but only offered two choices, 47% said that Iran should help the Houthis defeat their opponents and 41% said it should stay out of Yemen’s domestic conflict.

## Role of the IRGC

Support for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps appears to have strengthened in recent years. A near-unanimous nine in ten (88%, up 7 points from 2019) thought that the IRGC’s activities in the Middle East have made Iran more secure; a 57% majority said “a lot more secure.” When asked whether “Iran should increase its support of groups fighting terrorist groups like ISIS, decrease it or maintain it at the current level,” 59% wanted to increase it (up 4 points from 2018), while 27% wanted to maintain it and 12% to decrease it.

In any case, there is little expectation that there is something to be gained from the United States by Iran withdrawing the IRGC. When asked what they thought would happen “if Iran were to accept US demands and stop the activities of IRGC in Iraq and Syria,” only 16% thought it likely that the United States would grow “more accommodating in other areas of contention.” Fifty-seven percent thought it would “make the United States rely on pressures and sanctions to extract more concessions from Iran in other areas,” and 19% thought it would “not have much of an effect on other issues.” It is worth noting, though, that the minority who think the United States would grow more accommodating is up five points since 2019, from 11 to 16%.

Some Iranians endorse the view that the IRGC should not have the economic role it does in Iran, but this is only about a third of Iranians (32%). The majority (64%) thought “the [IRGC], in addition to fulfilling its security and military



responsibilities, should be involved in construction projects and other economic matters,” and this view is unchanged since 2019.

While a majority of Iranians say they would support retaliatory responses to serious incidents, there is a significant minority that prefers restraint. This type of issue has been exacerbated by the recent assassinations of prominent Iranian figures. Respondents were reminded that “in the past year there has been more than one [such] assassination” and asked to choose between two statements:

--Whenever there is evidence of foreign activity in the death of an important Iranian citizen or official, Iran should seek revenge to make such incidents less likely in the future.

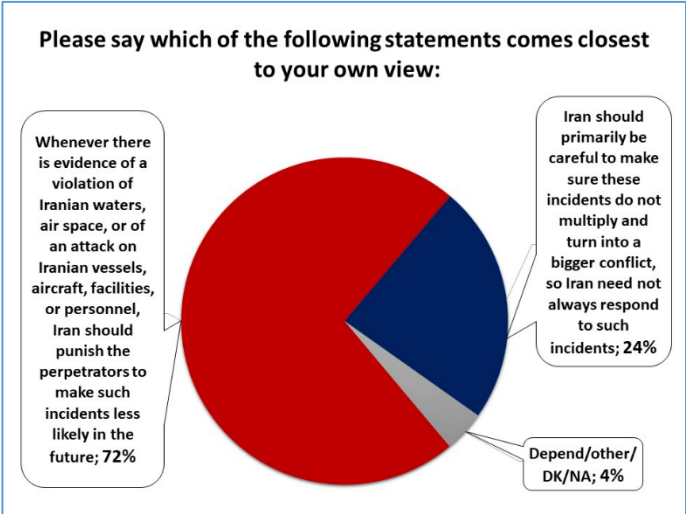
--Seeking revenge would not make such incidents less likely and will only make Iran less safe. Instead, Iran should take diplomatic and legal action to punish the perpetrator.

Sixty-one percent chose seeking revenge, while over a third (36%) preferred diplomatic and legal action. Given the 85% who say that U.S. condemnation of the Iranian nuclear scientist’s assassination would be a meaningful gesture, consistent international condemnation of any such state-sponsored extra-judicial killings of high-level foreign figures could help restore mutual respect for an important legal norm that a number of countries have been accused of violating in recent years.

In a different question on the same topic, respondents were reminded that “there have been numerous military incidents in past months involving Iran, Israel, the United States, and the Persian Gulf countries” and were asked to choose between two statements:

--Whenever there is evidence of a violation of Iranian waters, air space, or of an attack on Iranian vessels, aircraft, facilities, or personnel, Iran should punish the perpetrators to make such incidents less likely in the future.

--Iran should primarily be careful to make sure these incidents do not multiply and turn into a bigger conflict, so Iran need not always respond to such incidents.



Seventy-two percent supported the punishment approach, but this is down from 77% in 2019. Twenty-four percent supported restraint, up five points since 2019.



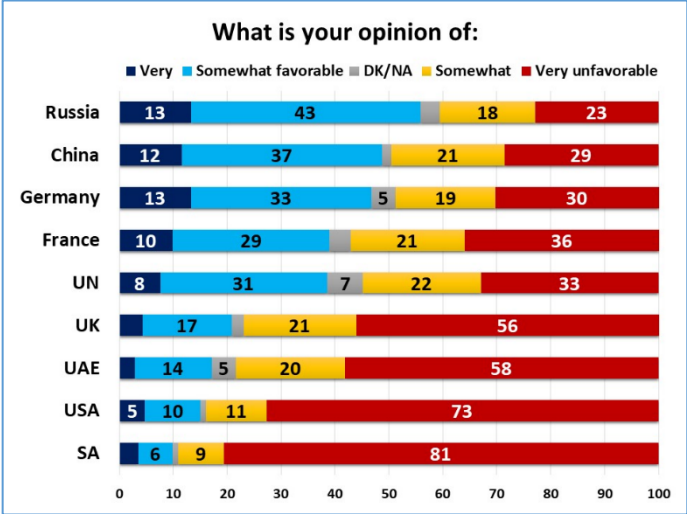
## Views of other Countries and Organizations

Among the countries evaluated, currently Russia is the only country viewed favorably by a clear majority of Iranians. Roughly half are favorable toward China and Germany. Four in ten are favorable toward France; two in ten toward Britain. Majority negative feeling toward the United States is extremely high, but lower than in October 2020. Unfavorable attitudes toward Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are comparable to those toward the United States. On the United Nations, favorability has declined to four in ten. Two in three are favorable toward Hizbollah of Lebanon; half are favorable toward the Houthis of Yemen.

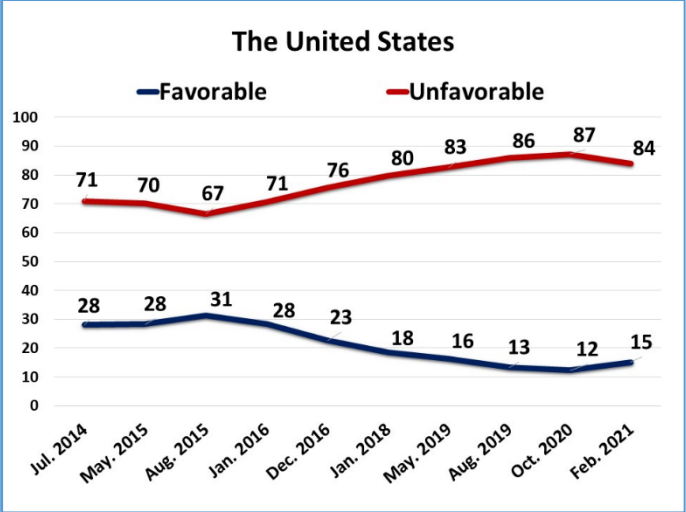
A clear majority has viewed Russia favorably since 2016, though fewer than 20% have been very favorable. Most recently, in October 2020 56% had a favorable view (13% very, down three points from 2019).

China was enjoying favorable views from a majority of Iranians until the impact of the pandemic. In October 2020 only 40% were favorable, with 57% unfavorable (37% very)—a quite unusual low level. The dip may be due in part to bad feeling related to the pandemic, which has been observed in polls of other countries’ citizens about China. By February 2021, though, China’s favorability had recovered to 49%.

Germany is seen more warmly than the other European countries tested, at 47% favorable. Views of Germany have declined from a high of 62% in January 2018, when Iranians saw the German refusal to follow Trump’s direction away from the JCPOA. After the United States did leave, Iranian hopes for European activity to maintain the JCPOA’s benefits were not fulfilled. Views of France are a similar story: today 39% are favorable (10% very), the lowest recorded since 2014. Back in January 2018, 56% were favorable toward France, and ratings have slid since.



The United Kingdom is a different case, because those very unfavorable toward it are a majority (56% in February 2021) and negative feelings toward Britain have generally been high in Iran, perhaps for historical reasons. Favorable views in February were 21%, down from 25% in 2019.



The United States, as discussed above, is viewed very negatively, with 84% unfavorable and 73% “very unfavorable.” Nonetheless, this is a four-point drop from the “very unfavorable” rating of four months earlier.

Unfavorable attitudes toward Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are comparable to those toward the United States. Nine in ten (89%) are unfavorable toward the KSA, with 81% very unfavorable. This is distinctly worse than back in 2015 when 72% were unfavorable. The United Arab Emirates is rated only a little better, with 78% unfavorable and 58% very unfavorable.

In October 2020 39% were favorable toward the United Nations (8% very), with 55% unfavorable (33% very). The recent trajectory of Iranian attitudes toward the U.N. is very like those toward Germany and France. Fifty-two percent were favorable toward the U.N. in January 2018, at a time when Iranians hoped for more international resistance to Trump’s rejection of the JCPOA; attitudes toward the U.N. have declined since then.

Finally, the survey asked about two important groups in the Middle East, Hizbollah of Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. Majorities remained positive toward Hizbollah at 68% in February 2021, with 34% very favorable. These levels have been stable since 2018, though they are lower than in January 2016 (74%).

Attitudes toward the Houthi have been quite stable since 2018, with half of Iranians viewing them favorably; in February 2021 this was 50% with 25% very favorable. Thirty-eight percent were unfavorable and 24% were very unfavorable.

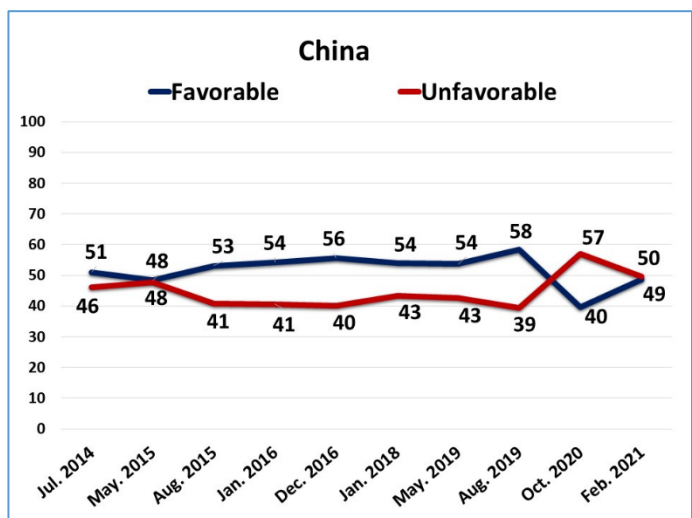
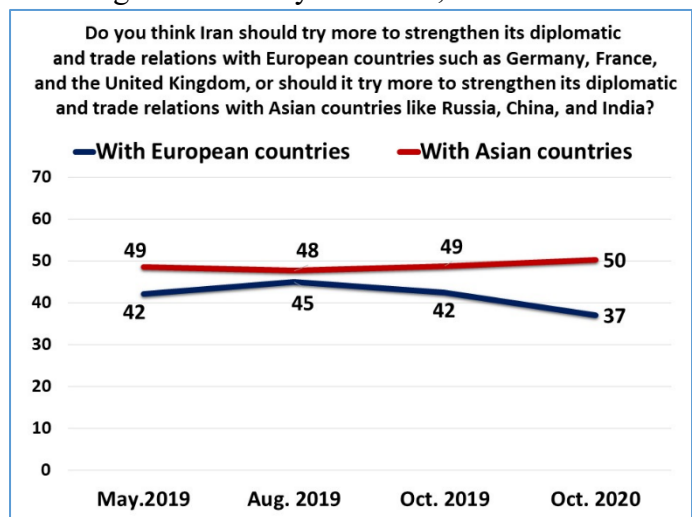
## Shifting East

A majority are aware of the negotiations between China and Iran on a large-scale cooperation agreement, and a clear majority think such a deal would probably be in Iran’s interests. Asked whether Iran should try more to strengthen its relations with European countries or with Asian countries, half would put the emphasis on Asian countries; the numbers preferring a European emphasis have declined since 2019.

The summer of 2020 saw active negotiations between Iran and China on an economic agreement that could extend for the next quarter-century. To ask Iranians about this, in October 2020 respondents were told that “Iran and China are currently working on a large-scale agreement for increasing the trade and other cooperation between the two countries over the next twenty-five years” and asked whether they had followed this issue in the news. Over half (57%) were aware of it. All respondents were then asked: “Based on everything you have heard or read about this agreement, do you think it would or would not be in Iran’s interests?” A 56% majority thought the agreement would be in Iran’s interests; 23% thought it definitely would be, and another 32% thought it probable. Only a quarter (24%) thought the agreement would not be in Iran’s interest; however, 20% did not know or said “it depends.”

The inclination to look east for Iran’s future relations appears to be strengthening, though it is not yet a majority view. Respondents were asked, “Do you think Iran should try more to strengthen its diplomatic and trade relations with European countries such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, or should it try more to strengthen its diplomatic and trade relations with Asian countries like Russia, China, and India?” In October 2020, 50% preferred Asian countries and 37% preferred European countries, down from 42% in 2019. However, the numbers of those preferring Asia have not risen; instead, those wanting both, neither or declining to answer have gone up (from 9% to 13%).

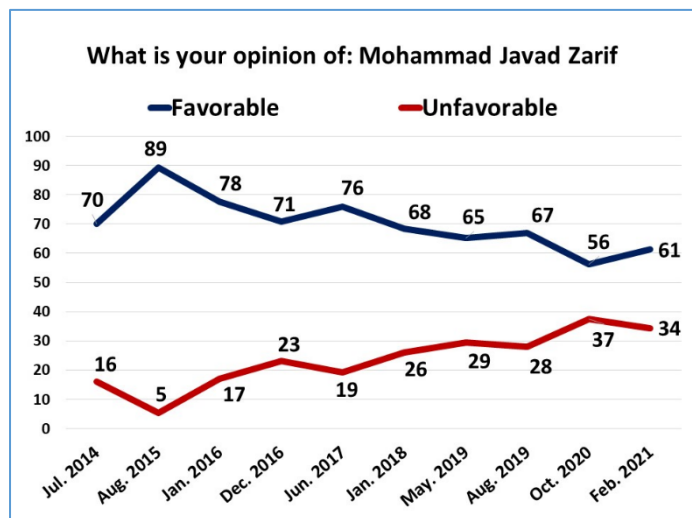
The diminishing interest in relations with Europe can also be seen in the lower favorable opinions of Germany, France and Britain, as discussed in the preceding section.



## Favorability of Iranian Political Figures

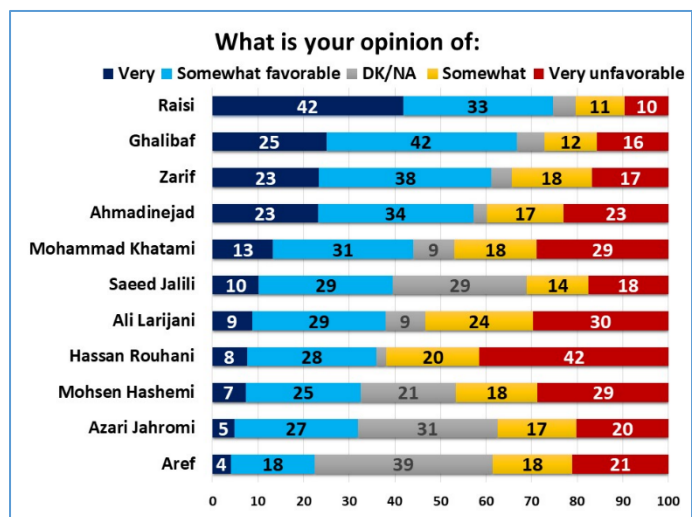
As the next Iranian presidential election approaches, the public’s positive views of some political figures are trending upward. Foreign Minister Zarif is viewed favorably by three in five (up in the last four months). Ghalibaf, a past mayor of Tehran with a reputation as a pragmatic conservative and the current speaker of the Majlis, is viewed favorably by two in three (also up in the last four months). Raisi, the conservative head of the Judiciary who is seen as spearheading current anti-corruption campaigns that have led to the arrest and conviction of prominent Iranian figures including the brother of President Rouhani, has a stable three in four viewing him favorably. Rouhani, the current president who cannot run again, is viewed favorably by only about one-third of Iranians.

Among key figures in the current administration of President Rouhani, Mohammad Zarif, the foreign minister, has the highest favorability ratings. In February 2021 61% viewed him favorably (23% very), up 5 points from October 2020. While his ratings were higher while the United States remained in the nuclear deal he negotiated, Zarif has been less scarred than his boss has from the many difficulties the Rouhani administration has faced.



President Rouhani’s favorability rating is now at 36% (8% very favorable), virtually the same as in October. His favorability ratings slipped below majority levels about the same time it became evident the United States was going to withdraw from the JCPOA, and may now have stabilized between 30 and 40%.

Seyyed Raisi, who ran against Rouhani in 2017 but did not win the election, is now head of the Judiciary. He is perhaps the best-known conservative figure, famous for his leadership of anti-corruption campaigns. His favorability ratings are quite high—75% (42% very), up 11 points compared to August 2019.



The past mayor of Tehran Mohammad Ghalibaf, who is now the speaker of the Majlis, ran briefly for president against Rouhani in 2017 before withdrawing in favor of Raisi. Two thirds (67%) see Ghalibaf favorably (25%, very), and his positive ratings have been quite stable over the last few years.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president who preceded Rouhani and may be considering another run, is less popular than the three figures just discussed at 57% (23% very favorable). The constitution bars a third consecutive term, but does not prohibit a two-term president from eventually running again. In 2017 his candidacy was barred by the Guardian Council.

Other prominent names are well behind these four figures in popularity. Seyyed Khatami is seen favorably by 44%; Saeed Jalili, by 40%; Ali Larijani, by 38%; Mohsen Rafsanjani, son of the late Ayatollah Rafsanjani, by 33%; the young communications minister Mohammad Jahromi, by 32%; and the reformist Mohammad Aref, by 22%. However, some of these figures currently have low recognition and thus room to grow. Aref is unknown to 35%; Jahromi, to 27%; Jalili, to 25%.

### **Favorable Characteristics in Iranian Politics**

After a respondent gave their opinion of Raisi, Ghalibaf, and Rouhani they were asked to give the main reason in their own words for their favorable or unfavorable opinion. The replies give some hints about each person's strong points, and also on what most Iranians are looking for in general in their leaders. All percentages are percentages of responses from the subgroup answering the question, not percentages of the full sample.

For Raisi, the main positive attributes named by the majority who hold a favorable opinion of him were his positive initiatives in the Judiciary (20%), his fight against corruption (18%), that he attends to people's problems (11%), and his seriousness and determination (7%). The main negative attributes from the minority with unfavorable views were incompetence and poor performance (15%), particularly in the Judiciary (9%), and perceived qualities such as hypocrisy, extremism and strictness (14% together).

For Ghalibaf, the main positive attributes from the favorable majority were his positive performance in the Tehran Municipality (12%) and in the Majlis (10%), plus his managerial capabilities (9%), his competence (6%), and that he cares and attends to people's problems (8%). The main negative attributes from the unfavorable minority were negative mirror images of the above, such as not taking any action for the people (11%), being economically corrupt (10%), not keeping promises (9%), and incompetence (7%). Thus Ghalibaf's critics appear to see deficiencies in the same areas where Ghalibaf's admirers see virtues.

For President Rouhani, the main positive attributes from the minority were that he tries to solve problems and serve the people (18%); that he is the president of our country (18%) and has given a good performance overall (9%); his efforts to reduce economic problems (7%) and to fight the coronavirus (7%). The main negative attributes from the majority were the country's bad economic situation (20%); his failure to keep promises (19%); incompetence and mismanagement (15%); and inflation and high prices (11%). Thus Rouhani's admirers essentially give him an A for effort, while his critics see him as responsible for the country's difficulties.

## Iran's June 2021 Presidential Election

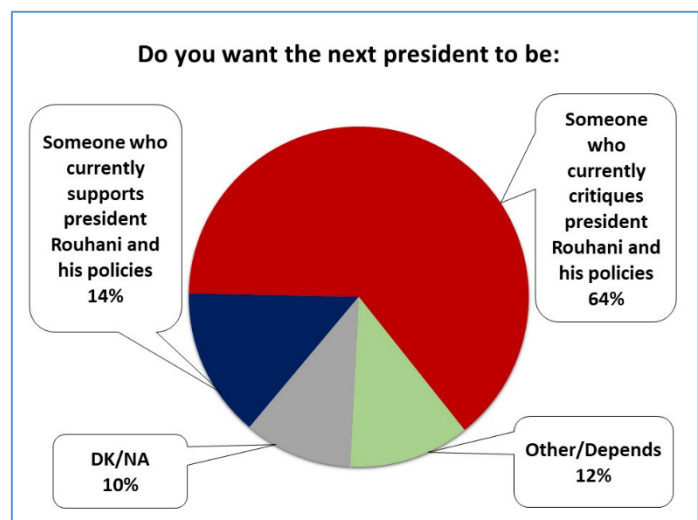
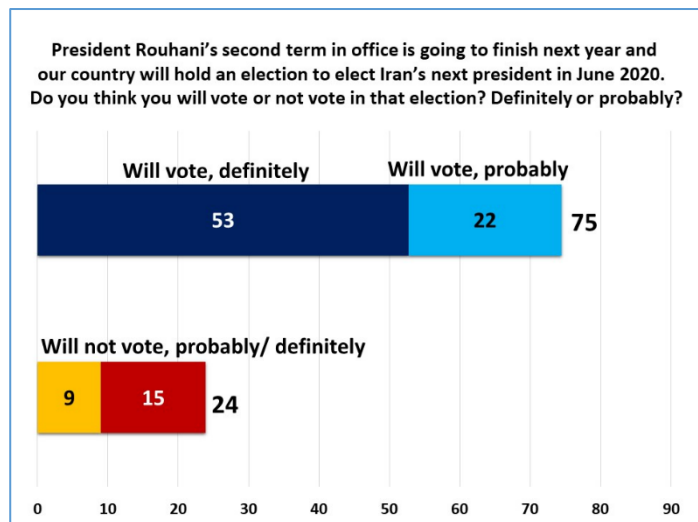
**A slight majority say they definitely will vote in the next Presidential election and a fifth say they might vote. Seven in ten see the country's economic conditions as the next president's most important challenge. Over three in five say the next president should be someone who is currently critical of President Rouhani's policies, and three in five think Iran's next president should mostly stand up for Iran's rights rather than focusing on negotiations.**

When reminded that Iran will hold an election for president in June 2021 and asked whether they will vote, a slight majority (53%) says they definitely will and another 22% say they probably will. (This question was asked in October 2020 with very similar results.)

Respondents were then asked to say in their own words, "What do you think is the single most important issue and challenge that our country faces that the next president should try to address?" Economic issues strongly predominated. Twenty-five percent named inflation and high prices; 20%, poverty and poor living conditions; 16%, unemployment; and 7% economic conditions in general. Only 5% named international sanctions; 4% named corruption.

Most people seem to want a significant change from Rouhani. Asked whether they wanted "the next president to be someone who currently supports President Rouhani and his policies, or someone who currently critiques" Rouhani, 64% wanted a Rouhani critic (up 3 points since October). Only 14% said they wanted one of Rouhani's current supporters—interestingly, this number is well below Rouhani's own favorable rating.

The idea of negotiating with the new U.S. president is not the Iranian public's starting point. Asked, "Considering the current changes in the world, including Joe Biden becoming the U.S. president, do you think Iran needs a president who will mostly focus on negotiating and finding common ground with other countries, or stand up for Iran's rights and refuse to compromise on

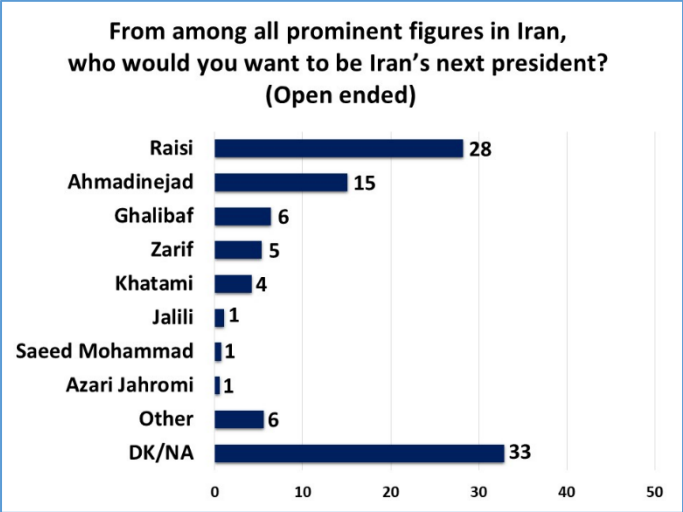


Iran’s rights?” three in five (60%) wanted someone who would stand up for Iran’s rights, while 35% wanted someone who would seek common ground with other countries.

A slight majority would prefer a younger, energetic president, but this may not be a priority. Given the choice between a next president who was “older and experienced” or one who was “younger and energetic,” 53% picked youth and energy while 40% picked age and experience; 6% said “it depends.”

Respondents were asked to volunteer a name “from among all prominent figures in Iran” whom they would want to be Iran’s next president. As this was open-ended, 33% did not come up with a name, but non-answers were down from 38% in October 2020, suggesting that interest in the presidential election is beginning to grow.

Twenty-eight percent named Raisi, who had by far the most spontaneous mentions. Fifteen percent named Ahmadinejad (up from 12% in October). Six percent named Ghalibaf and 5% named Zarif.



This kind of “straw poll” question should be treated with caution, both as to public views and as to the likely course of events. First, name recognition plays an outsized part in it. Second, because Iranian election campaigns have a formal beginning date, politicians mulling a candidacy have a reason to test the waters until the last possible day before deciding whether to run. Third, announced candidacies are reviewed by the Guardian Council and its decisions often change the lineup of candidates.

## Election of and Expectations from the 11<sup>th</sup> Majlis

**In February 2020 parliamentary elections were held, and slightly under half of eligible adults voted. A majority view economic issues as the most important for the Majlis to address, with the pandemic and sanctions named only by small minorities.**

Those who study election processes are often curious whether citizens who say they voted in an election really did vote. There is a factor of social desirability in voting—that is, it's to someone's credit that they took the time to vote, and generally there is no prestige attached to not voting. Thus, some may want to claim incorrectly that they did vote. In Iran's case, the government often asks the public for a high turnout. This could make people more reluctant to say they did not vote.

Surveys have a test that can be applied to solve this problem. In October 2020 the sample was divided into two halves, A and B. A was asked the following question:

I will now read you a list of activities. Please tell me how many of them you have done during the past year. Please do NOT tell me which ones you have and which ones you have not done. Just tell me how many of the following activities you have done during the past year.

SAMPLE A:

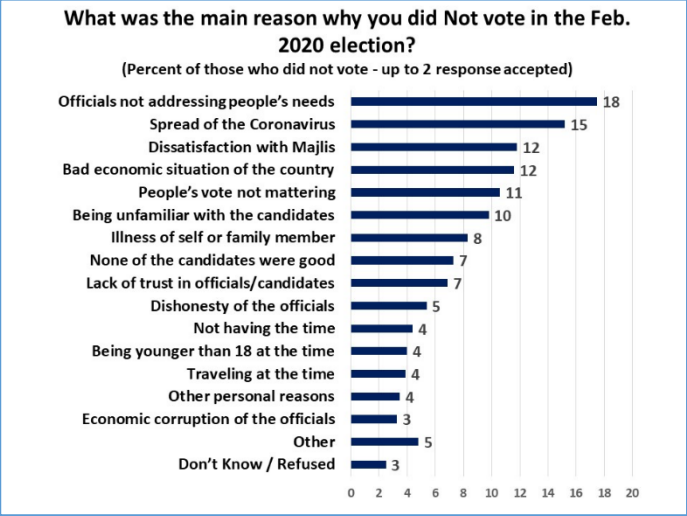
- Talking to family and friends about the situation of the country
- Watching IRIB News
- Writing a letter to President Rouhani
- Filing a lawsuit against an official in the Court

Sample B was asked the same question with one addition: “voting in the February 2020 parliamentary election.” Thus no respondent in the B sample ever reported explicitly that he or she did or did not vote. A percentage of voters in the sample is then calculated by a comparison between the two half-samples.

While the results of this experimental approach can never be as precise as a properly done official count, it is able to show if there is significant reluctance to report that one has *not* voted. This method found that 45% of the sample had voted. Elsewhere in the survey respondents were simply asked: “As you may know, some people voted in the Feb. 2020 election and others did not for a variety of reasons. How about you? Did you or did you not vote in the Feb. 2020 election?” Forty-seven percent said they voted while 52% said they did not, and so it appears that 2% of the sample claimed wrongly that they voted. The official figures reported by Iran's Interior Ministry gave a turnout of 42.57% of eligible voters—slightly lower than in this survey.



Respondents who explicitly reported they did not vote were asked to give their main reasons (up to two response) in their own words. One frequently repeated reason was to avoid exposure to the coronavirus (15%) or a family member’s illness (8%). More, however, complained about issues such as officials not addressing people’s needs (18%), dissatisfaction with the Majlis’ performance (12%), dissatisfaction with Iran’s economy (12%), thinking that people’s votes do not matter (11%), and believing officials to be untrustworthy, corrupt, and/or dishonest (15%).



Respondents were asked to say in their own words what they thought was “the most important challenge or issue that our country faces that the new Majlis should try to address.” Responses were consistent with those given later, in February, about the tasks that will face the next president (see preceding section). Economic problems—inflation, unemployment and poverty—were mentioned by 55%. Corruption or incompetence of officials were brought up by 17%. Sanctions (5%) and Iran’s relations with other countries (4%) were discussed by one in ten.

**Media Consumption**

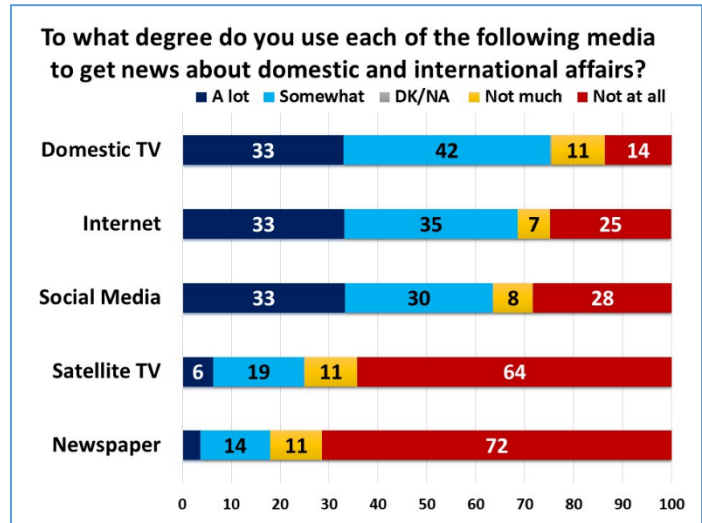
**Three in four Iranians continue to follow the news through domestic TV, though there has been a slight decline. Almost two in three use social media for news, and the internet is now used for news by nearly seven in ten. About a quarter get their news through satellite TV channels. Newspapers’ share has sharply declined in the last few years and they are now read by about one in five.**

In February 2020 respondents were asked, for a number of types of media, whether they used them a lot, somewhat, not much or not at all” to get news about domestic and international affairs.

Since 2019 the use of domestic television channels for news has been holding steady. Seventy-five percent say they use them a lot (33%) or somewhat 42%), essentially the same as 2019, though down 8 points from 2018.

Internet use as a news source has risen three points since 2019, from 66% to 69%, but those saying they do not use the internet for news at all is still a quarter (25%), as it was in 2019.

Social networking applications are used for news by over three in five Iranians (63%), and 33% use them a lot. However, it is interesting that there has been no growth in this audience since 2018. Twenty-eight percent said they do not use social media at all, up four points from 2018.



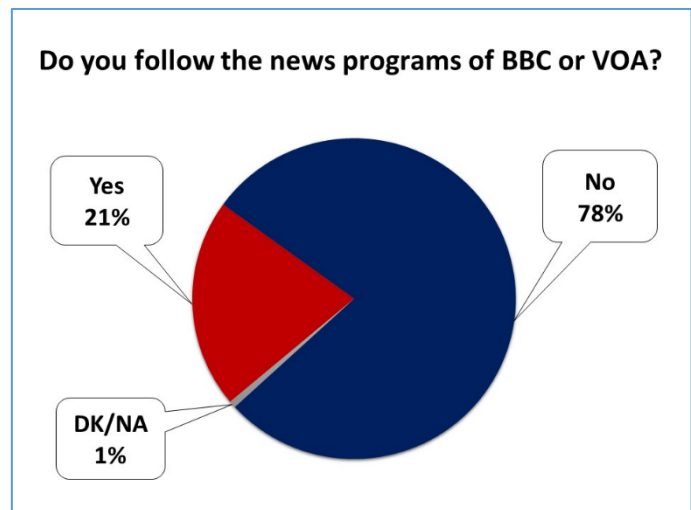
A quarter (25%) reported that they use satellite television channels to get their news, and this audience too has been quite stable since 2018.

The audience for newspapers has continued to diminish, as is the case in many other countries. Eighteen percent read them a lot (4%) or somewhat (14%); this is down nine points since 2018. Seventy-two percent said they do not read newspapers at all, up 6 points since 2019.

### ***BBC and Voice of America***

Since August 2015, this series of surveys has asked respondents “Do you follow the news programs of BBC or VOA?” A quarter of respondents had said “yes” through early 2016. Then a mild increase began in these programs’ audience, reaching 31% by June 2016.

Since that time, interest in BBC and VOA programs diminished, gradually falling 12 points to 19% in August 2019. Since then, though, the audience appears to have stabilized at a lower level. In February 21% said they followed these news services, essentially the same as in October 2019.



Our 2019 study suggested that the rise of social media may well have played some part in the BBC-VOA audience decline. It is interesting that now, as the social media audience appears to have stopped growing, so too the BBC-VOA audience appears to have stopped shrinking.

## Appendix: Methodology

This study is based on two probability sample nationally representative telephone surveys. The fieldwork for the first wave was conducted in October 2020 (Sept. 1 – Oct. 2, 2020) and the second wave in February 2021 (Jan. 26 – Feb. 6, 2021), among a representative sample of about 1000 Iranians per each wave. The margin of error for both surveys is about +/- 3.1%.

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.

A list of the surveys can be found here: [https://cisssm.umd.edu/research-impact/projects/security-cooperation-iran-challenges-and-opportunities#iran\\_surveys](https://cisssm.umd.edu/research-impact/projects/security-cooperation-iran-challenges-and-opportunities#iran_surveys)

Feb. 2021 survey	Census (% of Total Population)		Achieved Sample (% of Sample)		Difference	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Alborz	3.1	0.2	3.2	0.2	0.1	0.0
Ardabil	1.1	0.5	1.0	0.6	-0.1	0.1
Bushehr	1.0	0.4	1.1	0.4	0.1	0.0
Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari	0.8	0.4	0.8	0.4	0.0	0.0
East Azerbaijan	3.5	1.4	3.5	1.4	0.0	0.0
Fars	4.3	1.8	4.3	1.8	0.0	0.0
Gilan	2.0	1.2	2.2	1.2	0.2	0.0
Golestan	1.2	1.1	1.4	1.1	0.2	0.0
Hamedan	1.4	0.8	1.4	0.8	0.0	0.0
Hormozgan	1.2	1.0	1.2	1.0	0.0	0.0
Ilam	0.5	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.0	0.0
Isfahan	5.6	0.8	5.8	0.8	0.2	0.0
Kerman	2.3	1.6	2.4	1.6	0.1	0.0
Kermanshah	1.8	0.6	1.9	0.6	0.1	0.0
Khuzestan	4.4	1.4	4.4	1.4	0.0	0.0
Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	-0.1	0.0
Kurdistan	1.4	0.6	1.4	0.6	0.0	0.0
Lorestan	1.4	0.8	1.4	0.9	0.0	0.1
Markazi	1.4	0.4	1.4	0.4	0.0	0.0
Mazandaran	2.4	1.7	2.3	1.8	-0.1	0.1
North Khorasan	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.0	0.0
Qazvin	1.2	0.4	1.2	0.4	0.0	0.0
Qom	1.5	0.1	1.5	0.1	0.0	0.0
Razavi Khorasan	5.9	2.2	5.8	2.2	-0.1	0.0
Semnan	0.7	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.0	0.0
Sistan and Baluchestan	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.8	0.0	0.0
South Khorasan	0.6	0.4	0.6	0.4	0.0	0.0
Tehran	15.6	1.0	15.5	1.0	-0.1	0.0

West Azerbaijan	2.7	1.4	2.7	1.3	0.0	-0.1
Yazd	1.2	0.2	1.5	0.2	0.3	0.0
Zanjan	0.9	0.4	0.8	0.4	-0.1	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>74.0</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>74.1</b>	<b>25.9</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>-0.1</b>

When a residence was reached, an adult was randomly selected from within that household using the random table technique. An initial attempt and three callbacks were made in an effort to complete an interview with the randomly selected respondents. All of the interviews were conducted using computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI). All interviews were monitored in real-time by call-center supervisors.

The AAPOR2 contact rate of the October 2020 survey was 76%. The AAPOR2 cooperation rate of the survey was 81%. The overall response rate of the survey based on AAPOR2 was 60%. The AAPOR2 contact rate of the February 2021 survey was 83%. The AAPOR2 cooperation rate of the survey was 82%. The overall response rate of the survey based on AAPOR2 was 64%.

### Data Quality Controls:

The quality of the survey data collected by IranPoll was evaluated in several ways:

**First**, we compared the results of this survey with the most recent official census conducted by the Statistical Center of Iran in 2016. As the following tables illustrate some of the findings, in general there is close match between the figure of this survey and those published by the Statistical Center of Iran. The only statistically significant different between the sample and the census could be seen in 55+ age group, which can be attributed to the fact that the census data is now almost 5 years old. The minor discrepancy between

Sex:

Feb. 2021 survey	Sample	Census	Difference
Male	49.9	50.7	-0.8
Female	50.1	49.3	+0.8

Age:

Feb. 2021 survey	Sample	Census (% of 18+)	Difference
18 – 24	13.1	14.9	-1.8
25 – 44	63.8	66.3	-2.5
55 +	23.1	18.8	4.3

Ethnicity:

Feb. 2021 survey	Sample	CIA Factbook	Difference
Persian	47.8	61	-4.3
Mazani/Gilak/Shomali	8.9		
Turk/Azeri	21.8	18	3.8
Kurd	8.1	10	-1.9
Lur	8.8	6	2.8
Arab	1.1	2	-0.9
Baluch	0.7	2	-1.3
Other	2.8	1	1.8

**Second**, we compared the results of this survey with some of the figures that have been published by other credible sources. For example, there was a close match between percentage of respondents who say they follow the news programs of BBC Persian and the viewership estimates that have been provided by BBC Persian itself:

Follow BBC Persian Satellite TV News:

Feb. 2021 survey	Sample		BBC Persian's Own Estimates
	%	Approx. Population equivalent	
Yes	21.1	13.6 million	13 million
No	78.2		
DK/NA	0.7		

There was also a close match between the self-reported turnout in Iran's 2020 parliamentary election of the respondents and those released by Iran's Ministry of Interior. In this survey, as in most election related survey in other countries, we do see a slightly self-reported higher turnout than the actual outcome declared by Iran's ministry of Interior:

Voted in the 2020 parliamentary election:

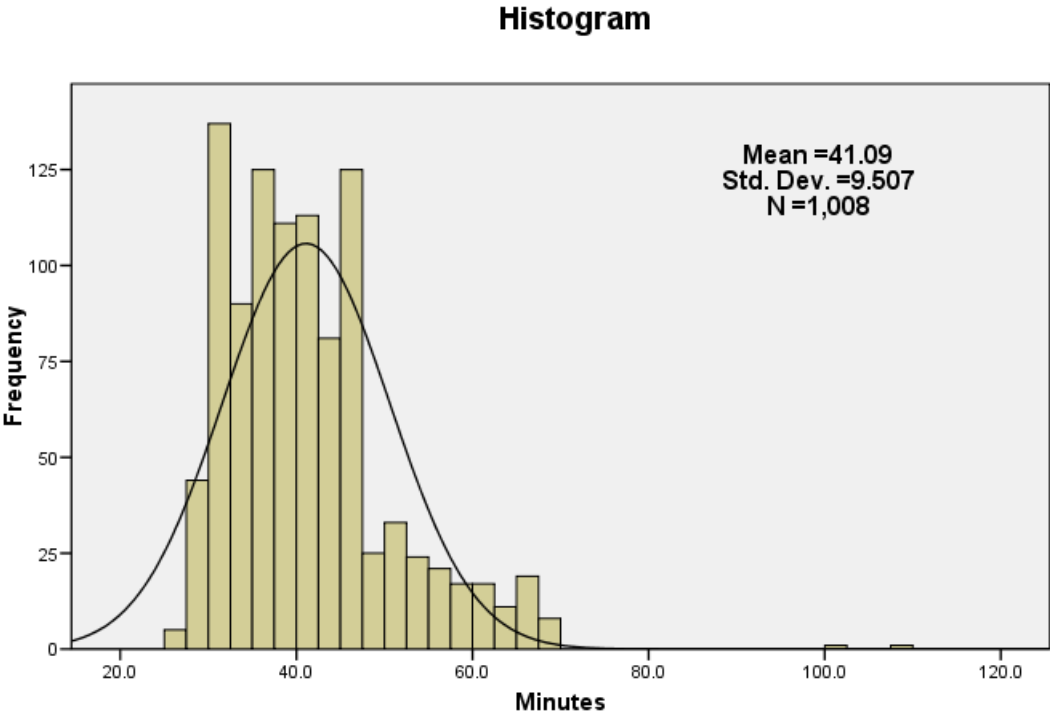
October 2020 survey	Sample		Official Results	Difference
	Item count technique	Direct question		
Yes	45.1%	47.3%	42.6%	2.5 – 4.7
No		51.6%		
Don't know / Refused		1.15		

**Next**, we checked for data falsification using Kuriakose & Robbins' "Percent Match" technique.<sup>1</sup> The technique is grounded in a tested assertion that in a 100+ variable survey of more than 100 respondents, fewer than 5% of the respondents should have provided identical answers on more than 85% of the questions. Please note that the Feb. 2021 survey included 110 variables and had 1008 respondents. The Percent Match technique produced a normal distribution, with zero interviews with a maximum percent match of 85%, and less than 1% of with a maximum percent match of over 75%. These results very strongly suggest that the likelihood of data falsification in this survey is statistically close to zero.

**Then**, in another attempt to check for falsification and other irregularities, we evaluated the interview length of each respondent and the time each respondent took to answer each question and compared it to the overall average interview length and the average time it took to answer each question. This exercise did not expose any particular irregularity. As expected, in the Feb. 2021 survey no interview took less than 25 minutes to complete, most interviews as well as individual questions took a similar time to complete, and longer interviews correlated with factors such as age, education, language barriers, and place of the residence of the respondents, such that respondents who were older, less educated, spoke a

<sup>1</sup>For more information regarding this method, see: [http://www.arabbarometer.org/sites/default/files/working\\_papers/Kuriakose%20Robbins%20-%20Detecting%20Near%20Duplicates.pdf](http://www.arabbarometer.org/sites/default/files/working_papers/Kuriakose%20Robbins%20-%20Detecting%20Near%20Duplicates.pdf)

language other than Farsi, and/or lived in rural areas took longer to answer each question and complete the survey than others:



**Also**, concerned with the possibility that respondents might have systematically held back their own true opinions and, instead, provided answers in line with positions articulated in Iranian State-owned news media, CISSM conducted an analysis to see what proportion of the sample systematically provided responses that were in line with the stated positions of the Iranian government. The analysis found that in the Feb. 2021 survey, only 2.4% of the respondents provided answers that are systematically and fully in line with stated positions of the Iranian government, and 97.6% of the respondents provided at least one response that is directly at odds with positions articulated in Iranian state-owned news media.

**Finally**, we employed the Item Count technique<sup>2</sup> to gauge to what degree social desirability or fear of possible repercussions for providing “wrong” answers, might be biasing the obtained responses. For this test, we selected voting in the parliamentary election as the issue since various studies have shown turnout questions to be prone to be influenced by social desirability<sup>3</sup>. To test this, we used the item count technique (as did Allyson L. Holbrook and Jon A. Krosnick in their 2010 study of the phenomenon<sup>4</sup>) and compared the results obtained through the item count technique to the results of direct question to that of the official declaration regarding the turnout in the Iran’s 2020 parliamentary elections:

<sup>2</sup> To learn more about the Item Count technique, read: Tourangeau, R. and Ting Yan. “Sensitive questions in surveys.” *Psychological bulletin* 133 5 (2007): 859-83.  
<sup>3</sup> Read for example: Karp, J., & Brockington, D. (2005). Social Desirability and Response Validity: A Comparative Analysis of Overreporting Voter Turnout in Five Countries. *The Journal of Politics*, 67(3), 825-840.  
<sup>4</sup> Allyson L. Holbrook, Jon A. Krosnick, Social desirability bias in voter turnout reports: Tests using the item count technique, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume 74, Issue 1, Spring 2010, Pages 37–67.

Oct. 2020 survey	Sample		Official Results	Difference
	Item count technique	Direct question		
Yes	45.1%	47.3%	42.6%	2.5 – 4.7
No		51.6%		
Don't know / Refused		1.15		

As expected and as can be seen above, the item count technique did produce an outcome that is closer to the officially declared turnout, than the direct question asking whether the respondent voted in the election. As can be seen, however, the difference between the direct question and the official results is quite small. While the item count technique does narrow the difference by 2 percentage points, the comparison of these results further diminishes our concern that our results may be significantly influenced by social desirability.