

# Iranian Public Opinion after the Protests

A public opinion study | July 2018



Ebrahim Mohseni, Nancy Gallagher & Clay Ramsay



SCHOOL OF  
PUBLIC POLICY

CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL &  
SECURITY STUDIES AT MARYLAND

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

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

### **IranPoll**

IranPoll is an independent full-service opinion research and consultancy company headquartered in Toronto, Canada, focusing exclusively on Iran. A division of People Analytics Inc., IranPoll relies on its vast survey capacity to conduct and collect polling data from Iran using various modes of data collection, including a national probability sample omnibus telephone (CATI) survey that it runs every month. Building on the in-depth local knowledge of its team of experts, IranPoll solely relies on methods that could be objectively verified and independently replicated. Complementing its extensive field capacity, IranPoll is the developer of VoxIran.com, which is to date the single most comprehensive databank of Iranian opinion polls containing more than 3,000 diverse questions on 280 topics and subtopics from more than 180 probability sample surveys conducted from 2006 to 2017 in Iran. Through its exclusive access to VoxIran, IranPoll provides its clients with evidence-based consultancy on issues relating to Iran and the Iranian people.

Cover Image: [iranfocus.com](http://iranfocus.com)

## Introduction

The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) has been conducting in-depth surveys of Iranian public opinion since the summer of 2014. When this research started, nuclear negotiations between Iran, the United States, and five other powers had reached an intensive stage. The prospects for a diplomatic resolution to international concerns about Iran's nuclear program were uncertain, but they looked better than they had at any point since 2002. That was when information about Iran secretly building dual-use nuclear facilities became public and when the George W. Bush administration was preparing for war with Iraq based, in part, on suspicions that it was once again pursuing weapons of mass destruction. If negotiators for the P5+1 countries and Iran could reach agreement on terms acceptable to the lawmakers and citizens of each country—that would be fully implemented by all sides—then a major nonproliferation objective could be achieved. This would be a powerful demonstration for the entire world that cooperation could be more effective, at lower cost, than confrontation for resolving major security problems.

We wanted to know what the Iranian people hoped to achieve through diplomacy and what they were willing to give in return. We also wanted to track how they felt about the results of the negotiations, and how that affected domestic politics in Iran and popular support for cooperation or confrontation on other international security issues. A small amount of nuclear-related public opinion polling had been done in Iran previously, including by some members of CISSM's research team. But nobody had done systematic surveys with a broad enough set of trend-line questions and new questions tailored to evolving circumstances to be able to shed much light on these topics.

What has happened since we started this project has made the core questions motivating our research even more important. Agreement was reached on a nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in July 2015. Its terms were at the outer limits of what our research had indicated would be acceptable in Iran. Nevertheless, both the JCPOA and the political leaders responsible for it—President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Zarif—were extremely popular. Enthusiasm for the deal cooled a little as people gained a better understanding of the terms. Yet, hopes for improved political relations and economic benefits were still high in January 2016, when the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) certified that Iran had fulfilled its nuclear-related obligations and it began to receive relief from nuclear sanctions imposed by the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations.

The results of Iran's parliamentary elections in February 2016 were a resounding public endorsement of Rouhani, the nuclear deal, and efforts to increase Iran's political and economic engagement with the rest of the world. Because sanctions relief had just begun, the Iranian people were not yet seeing any economic benefits. They hoped that Rouhani, backed by a supportive parliament, could move quickly to get results from the JCPOA that reduced unemployment and addressed other concerns of average Iranians.

Much has changed since then, most notably in the U.S. government's stance on the nuclear deal, its attitude toward Iran, and its position on multilateral cooperation in many fields. When Donald

Trump won the 2016 presidential election, the Iranian people expected his administration to be somewhat more hostile toward Iran than the Obama administration had been, but they re-elected Rouhani the following summer in the hope that he could keep working with all the signatories to the JCPOA to spur trade and investment and improve the Iranian economy. It was not clear, though, how Rouhani could address Trump's main criticisms of the deal because our research showed that few Iranians supported changes to the JCPOA, or additional constraints on Iran's missile testing and regional activities.

Most of the new data in this report is from a CISSM survey fielded in mid-January 2018 in the midst of two major developments. In October 2017, Trump told the U.S. Congress that he was no longer willing to certify that continued participation in the JCPOA was in U.S. national interest, even though most of his top security advisors concurred with the IAEA's findings that Iran was still fulfilling its nuclear obligations. This led to intensive negotiations between the United States and the European signatories to the JCPOA (Britain, France, Germany, and the European Union) to see whether Trump's objections could be addressed in some way that did not violate Western commitments. Iranpoll re-asked a number of trend-line questions from the CISSM surveys in mid-April, and agreed to let us include its data in this report. Diplomatic efforts to keep the United States in the JCPOA ended on May 8, 2018, when Trump announced that the United States was withdrawing from the JCPOA, reinstating all U.S. nuclear-related sanctions on Iran, and imposing secondary sanctions on any country that continued to buy Iranian oil, invest in Iran, or conduct other economic transactions.

The other major development was the protests in Iran that peaked in intensity around the beginning of 2018. If even a small percentage of the population in a country of eighty million people are unhappy enough about something to take to the streets, the results can be quite dramatic. As the protests were growing in size and spreading across Iran, though, there were conflicting narratives in the West regarding what motivated the protestors, how much public support they had, and whether the Iranian government's response would be seen as appropriate by the population at large, or as overly repressive, resulting in broader opposition. There were also heated debates about how increasing U.S. pressure on Iran would affect the trajectory and results of the protests. Would political statements and steps to reimpose economic sanctions intensify public pressure for more dramatic diplomatic concessions and changes to the Iranian political system? Or, would they cause more Iranians to blame the United States rather than their own government for their economic woes, to favor policies of self-sufficiency over economic engagement, and to doubt that diplomacy could produce mutually beneficial solutions to important problems? This study addresses these questions.

Previous reports on Iranian public opinion done by CISSM in collaboration with the Program on Public Consultation and Iranpoll, along with the questionnaires and related articles, can be found at: <http://www.cissm.umd.edu/projects/security-cooperation-iran-challenges-and-opportunities>.

## **Methodology**

The study is based on a telephone poll (CATI) conducted between January 16 and 24, 2018 among a representative sample of 1,002 Iranians. The poll was conducted by IranPoll, an independent Toronto-based polling firm. The margin of error is +/- 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. The AAPOR2 contact rate of the survey was 76%. The AAPOR2 cooperation rate of the survey was 79%. The overall response rate of the survey based on AAPOR2 was 58%.

More details on the survey methodology and techniques used to evaluate the quality of the data are in the Appendix.

## Summary of Findings

### **1. More Iranians See Economy as Bad and Getting Worse [Page 9]**

Growing majorities say Iran's economic situation is bad and getting worse. Less than a fifth now say the economic condition of their family has improved over the last four years. Most say economic mismanagement and corruption are having a greater negative impact than sanctions. Unemployment remains the top concern of the Iranian people. They are divided on whether the next generation will be better off financially than their parents are today.

### **2. Approval of Nuclear Deal Drops as Disappointment with its Benefits Rises [Page 10]**

Enthusiasm for the JCPOA has dropped significantly. Slightly more than half approve of the agreement, while a third oppose it. Two years into the implementation of the deal, majorities believe Iran has not received most of the promised benefits and that people's living conditions have not been improved by the nuclear deal. An overwhelming majority says the deal did not improve Iran's relations with the United States, but are more positive about its effect on relations with Europe.

As Rouhani's administration steps up its efforts to defend the deal against its domestic opponents, public misperceptions about the terms of the deal have undergone a revival. Clear majorities incorrectly believe that per the agreement, all U.S. sanctions on Iran must eventually be lifted, and that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is not allowed to inspect Iranian military sites under any circumstances. Most Iranians still believe that it is important for Iran to develop its nuclear program, although the percentage that is very supportive has decreased slightly since the JCPOA was signed.

### **3. Increasing Majority Supports Retaliation if U.S. Abrogates JCPOA [Page 14]**

Attitudes about how Iran should respond if the United States violates the JCPOA have hardened. A growing majority says that were the United States to abrogate the deal, Iran should retaliate by restarting the aspects of its nuclear program it has agreed to suspend under the JCPOA rather than taking the matter to the UN. A modest majority says Iran should withdraw if the United States withdraws, even if other P5+1 countries remain committed to the deal. Most Iranians, however, would support their government if it decides that remaining in the deal is in Iran's best interest.

### **4. Staunch Resistance to Renegotiating the Nuclear Deal with Trump [Page 15]**

Large majorities say that Iran should refuse to increase the duration of the special nuclear limits it accepted under the JCPOA or to stop developing more advanced missiles, even if the United States threatens to re-impose sanctions lifted under the JCPOA or offers to lift more sanctions.

### **5. Majority Rejects Halting Development of Missiles [Page 17]**

An overwhelming majority thinks it is important for Iran to develop missiles, primarily to defend Iran, deter attacks, and increase Iran's security. Large majorities say Iran should continue testing ballistic missiles despite U.S. demands for Iran to halt such tests.

### **6. Views of P5+1 Countries [Page 18]**

Iranians' views of all the P5+1 countries besides the United States have improved, and a clear

majority expresses confidence that these countries will uphold their end of the JCPOA. Majorities now regard Russia, China, Germany, and even France favorably, but retain negative views of the United States and Britain. For the first time, a majority now says they have an unfavorable view of the American people as well as of their government. A majority believes that Iranian relations with European countries have improved due to the deal; almost no one says that about the United States. Far from showing implacable hostility toward the West, a majority continues to think it is possible for the Islamic world and the West to find common ground, though the number who say conflict between the two is inevitable has increased.

### **7. Majority Sees No Value in Negotiations; Support for Self-Sufficiency Grows [Page 21]**

Two in three say the JCPOA experience shows that it is not worthwhile to make concessions as part of international negotiations, because Iran cannot have confidence that world powers would honor their sides of an agreement. Accordingly, an increasing majority thinks Iran should strive to achieve economic self-sufficiency rather than focus on increasing its trade with other countries. Willingness to compromise and make reciprocal concessions is higher among those who think the nuclear deal has improved the living conditions of ordinary Iranians, as well as those who voice confidence that the United States will abide by its side of the agreement.

### **8. Strong Sympathy with Complaints about Economic Policies and Corruption [Page 22]**

During late December 2017 and early January 2018, large street protests took place across Iran. These protests were organized by different groups of people for varying reasons. To see what proportion of the Iranian population sympathizes with each type of protest, this study asked respondents to indicate the degree to which they sympathized with each of the complaints voiced. Large majorities say they sympathize with complaints voiced by some protestors that the government should do more to keep food and gasoline prices from rising; not cut cash subsidies; and compensate people who lost money when some financial institutions in Iran collapsed. They also agree that the government is not doing enough to help the poor and farmers who are suffering as a result of the drought. Iranians are also almost unanimous in their demand that more should be done to fight financial and bureaucratic corruption in Iran.

### **9. Majorities Disagree with Protestors who Critiqued Iran's Domestic Political System and Foreign Operations [Page 24]**

Three in four disagree that Iran's political system needs to undergo fundamental change. Two in three also disagree with the view that the government interferes too much in people's personal lives; indeed, six in ten reject the idea that the government should not strictly enforce Islamic laws. As in the past, about three in four believe that when making decisions, Iranian policymakers should take religious teachings into account. Clear majorities also reject other complaints voiced by some protestors—that the military should spend much less on developing missiles, and that Iran's current level of involvement in Iraq and Syria is not in Iran's national interests. U.S. expressions of support for protests were generally regarded as irrelevant or unhelpful.

### **10. Majority Approves of Police Handling of the Protests [Page 27]**

Two in three approve of how the police handled the protests and say they used an appropriate amount of force. Views about how arrested protestors should be treated depend on how they acted. Almost two in three think that protestors who were arrested while peacefully voicing their

complaints against government policies should be released. A smaller majority wants protestors who accidentally injured bystanders to be prosecuted, but not punished harshly. Most Iranians want the judiciary to prosecute protestors who chanted slogans against Islam or Iran's system of government, but only a minority demand harsh punishment. About six in ten want the judiciary to prosecute and harshly punish those who are found guilty of attacking the police, damaging public property, or burning Iran's flag.

### **11. Media Consumption Habits [Page 29]**

Majorities follow news regarding domestic and international affairs. Domestic television, followed by social networking apps, such as Telegram, and the internet are the media used by a majority of Iranians to become informed about the news. The numbers of people relying on VOA and BBC news programs have declined significantly since the rise of social media in Iran.

### **12. A Range of Views on Regional Issues [Page 30]**

About half of Iranians say their government should try to find mutually acceptable solutions to regional problems, and the other half say that Iran should seek to become the most powerful country in the region. A large majority says Iran should either increase or maintain its current level of support for groups fighting terrorist groups like ISIS. Most Iranians want Iran to use its influence in Iraq to support policies that benefit both Shiites and Sunnis, rather than policies that primarily benefit Shiites. Now that Iran and Russia have declared victory over ISIS in Syria, almost as many Iranians want to end or reduce assistance to President Bashar Assad as want to continue it until his government regains full control over all Syrian territory. An overwhelming majority reject the idea that Assad should not be allowed to remain as Syria's president and say the Syrian people should decide whether he remains in office.

### **13. General Soleimani's Popularity Soars, while Rouhani and Zarif Slip [Page 32]**

General Qasem Soleimani's popularity is at an all-time high, with two in three saying that they hold a *very favorable* opinion of him. He is followed in popularity by the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, whose favorability rating has decreased slightly since June 2017. President Rouhani's popularity has dropped sharply since his victory in the May 2017 presidential elections. Opinions of Ebrahim Raisi, Rouhani's conservative opponent in the election, have held steady. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's former president, remains the most polarizing figure among Iranian politicians.

### **14. Majority Sees Climate Change as a Very Serious Problem [Page 33]**

Iranians almost unanimously see global climate change as a serious issue and a majority says these changes are harming people around the world today. Two in three say they are very concerned that climate change will affect them personally. A large majority wants the government to do more to protect the environment, even if the economy suffers as a result. Two in three say they approve of Iran taking steps to significantly reduce its air pollution over the next 15 years, even if it leads to higher prices and unemployment rates in the short-term.

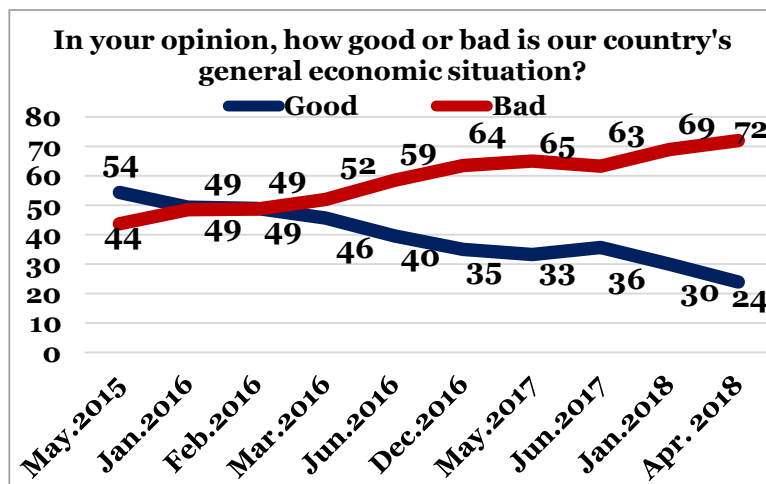


## 1. More Iranians See Economy as Bad and Getting Worse

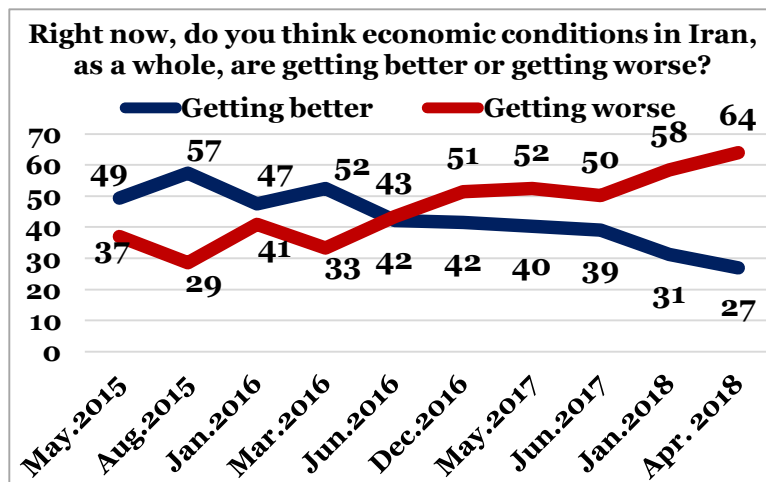
**Growing majorities say Iran’s economic situation is bad and getting worse. Less than a fifth say the economic condition of their family has improved over the last four years. Most say economic mismanagement and corruption are having a greater negative impact than sanctions. Unemployment remains the top concern of the Iranian people. They are divided on whether the next generation will be better off financially than their parents are today.**

When asked to identify in their own words the “single most important problem or challenge that Iran currently faces,” more than four in five—86%—gave an answer about Iran’s economy. Forty percent named unemployment, and another 9% youth unemployment. Thirteen percent mentioned inflation and the high cost of living. Nine percent said low incomes or poverty. Six percent referred to financial corruption and embezzlements. And another 11% spoke more generally of mismanagement of the country’s affairs (6%) or its bad economic condition (5%).

The public’s assessment of Iran’s economy has steadily grown more negative over the last two and a half years. In January 2018, seven in ten (69%) saw the economy as bad, and four in ten (41%) as very bad; only 30% rated it positively. When IranPoll re-asked the question three months later, 72% saw the economy as bad and 24% as good. This is in marked contrast to May 2015, when the nuclear negotiations were entering their last phase: At that time a modest majority of 54% were positive about the economy, perhaps taking a glass-half-full view of its prospects (somewhat good, 43%).



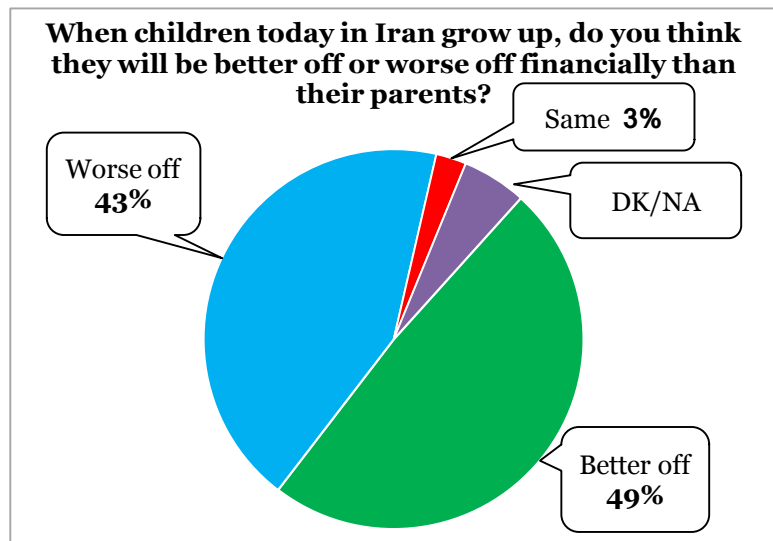
For the first time in recent years, when asked whether the economy is improving or worsening, a substantial majority (58%) said the economy is getting worse; only 31% said it is getting better. Since December 2016, approximately half have said the economy is worsening. The proportion of pessimists had nearly reached three out of five Iranians by January 2018. It had surpassed two out of three by April 2018, when IranPoll asked the same question again.



In January 2018, less than a fifth (only 17%) said that their family’s economic condition had improved over the last four years—a 6-point drop since May 2017. Those saying their family’s conditions have deteriorated have held steady at 41%, but the number saying they are treading water has risen. Those saying their family’s condition “has remained unchanged” was 41%, up from 36%.

Iranians were more likely to blame their own leaders than foreign pressures for the economic problems in Iran. Asked which has the greatest negative impact on the Iranian economy, 63% picked “domestic economic mismanagement and corruption” over “foreign sanctions and pressures” (32%). The percentage blaming domestic factors was statistically unchanged since May 2015, when this question was last asked. The percentage blaming foreign sanctions and pressures had risen from 26% to 32%, while “don’t know” responses declined. These shifts are noteworthy because many sanctions had been officially lifted in January 2016 after Iran had fulfilled the nuclear commitments it made in the JCPOA. As we will see below, a large majority of Iranians say that they have yet to see any benefits from sanctions relief and hold the United States responsible. Although pressure from outside seemed more salient to Iranians in January 2018 than it did in May 2015—when negotiations were culminating toward the nuclear deal—it was still overshadowed for most by internal issues. The U.S. decision to leave the JCPOA and reimpose sanctions on Iran may well have helped Iran’s leaders shift the locus of blame towards external factors.

Despite current economic frustrations, when asked to think longer term, about half summon some optimism. Asked “When children today in Iran grow up, do you think they will be better off or worse off financially than their parents?” 49% thought the children would be better off, while 43% said “worse off.”

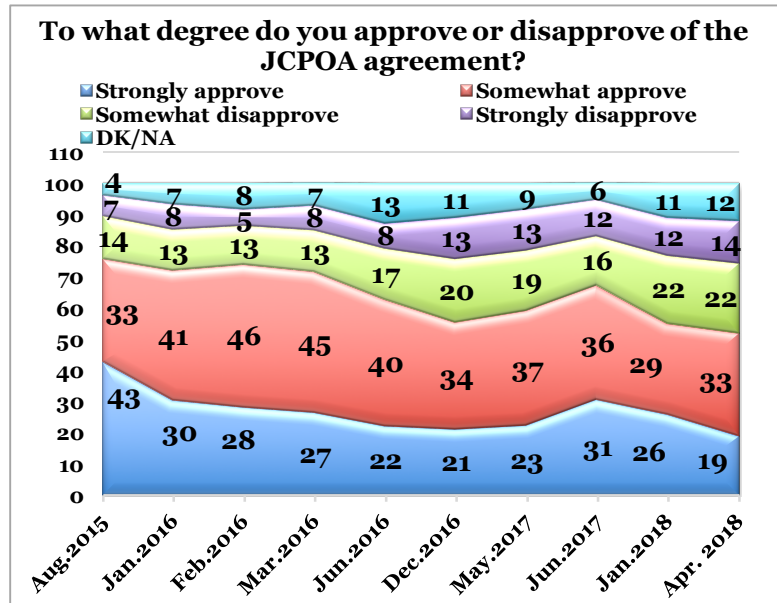


## 2. Approval of Nuclear Deal Drops as Disappointment with its Benefits Rises

Enthusiasm for the JCPOA has dropped significantly. Slightly more than half approve of the agreement, while a third oppose it. Two years into the implementation of the deal, majorities believe that Iran has not received most of the promised benefits and that people’s living conditions have not been improved by the nuclear deal. An overwhelming majority says the deal did not improve Iran’s relations with the United States, but are more positive about its effect on relations with Europe.

As Rouhani’s administration stepped up its efforts to defend the deal against its critics, public misperceptions about its terms underwent a revival. As was the case when Rouhani was trying to get the JCPOA through Iran’s domestic approval process, clear majorities once again incorrectly believed that per the agreement, all U.S. sanctions on Iran must eventually be lifted, and that the IAEA is not allowed to inspect Iranian military sites under any circumstances.

The public’s support for the nuclear agreement declined again shortly after Rouhani’s re-election in May 2017. It had dropped to a modest majority (55%) by January 2018, and only 26% still approved strongly. Levels of approval have been this low only once before, in December 2016. At all other times this question was asked (including at the time of Rouhani’s reelection) support was three in five or more. Thirty-four percent disapproved of the deal in January 2018, and those saying “don’t know” had gone back up to 11%—suggesting growing uncertainty about the value of the deal. When IranPoll re-asked this question in April 2018, it found further slippage: 52% approval—19% strongly.

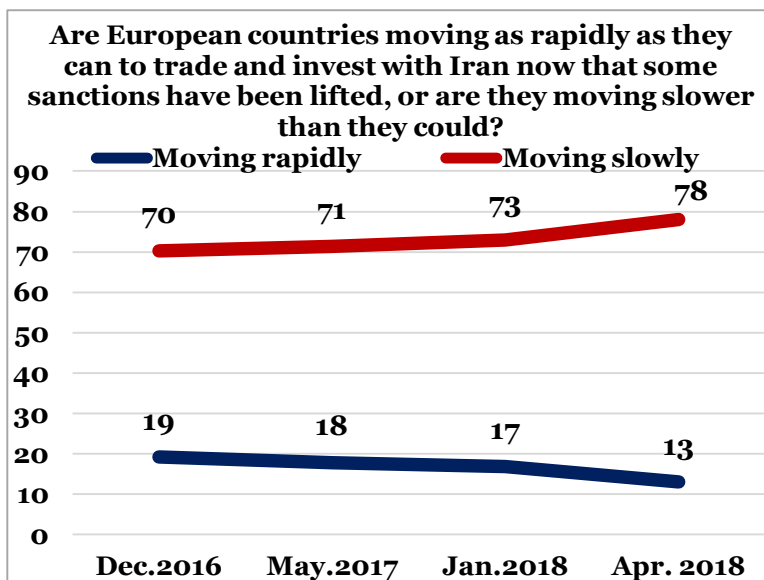


The consensus view among Iranians is that the JCPOA has brought no benefits to the population at large. Three in four (75%) said “people’s living conditions have not improved” as a result of the JCPOA. This assessment has not changed significantly since June 2016. When asked about this in more detail, fully half (53%) said Iran simply “has not received most of the promised benefits.” Among the remainder, one in five (19%) indicated that “Iran has received most of the promised benefits, but they are making life better only for Iranians with special connections.” About one in ten (12%) responded that Iran had received most of the benefits, but they are being spent abroad—“they are mostly being used to pay for the costs of Iran’s military and foreign allies.” (This view is not growing; since December 2016 it has dropped three points.) A miniscule 6% believed that Iran is receiving the benefits and “they are making life better for average Iranians.”

On relations with the United States, a majority has said for some time that the JCPOA has brought no improvements, but the size of this majority took a sudden leap—from 57% in May 2017 to 83% in January 2018. Only 6% said there has been any improvement in relations—down from 26% in May 2017. A year ago, there was a current of opinion that included one in four Iranians who saw at least some progress in Iran-U.S. relations; that group is now well below one in ten.

Many more Iranians say that the JCPOA has improved relations with European countries, although enthusiasm has slipped some there, too. From the start to the end of 2016, the size of the majority who indicated the JCPOA had brought better relations declined from 66% to 54%. Opinion was divided for the first time in January 2018—45% to 45%. (Interestingly, though, favorability ratings on specific European countries have not suffered, and some have risen—see section 6 below.)

The percentage of Iranians who say that European countries “are moving slower than they could” to trade and invest with Iran crept up from 70% in December 2016 to 73% in January 2018 and 78% when re-asked by IranPoll in April. Most of those who thought so in January (83%) explained it as a result of pressures from the United States rather than Iran’s own weak business environment (13%). A majority (58%) answered that their government was trying to make Iran’s business environment more appealing to foreign businesses and investors, and an even larger majority (87%) supported the government taking such actions.



### *Return of Misperceptions about JCPOA*

As Rouhani’s administration stepped up its efforts to defend the deal against critics, public misperceptions about the terms of the deal underwent a revival. This may have been due in part to the public hearing the administration’s arguments that while the deal’s terms were excellent for Iran, the United States had not fulfilled its end of the bargain and had blocked economic follow-through from other Western countries. In the current study, 63% said that they believed all U.S. sanctions were to be lifted under the deal, while only 24% knew correctly that “some U.S. sanctions on Iran are to be lifted, but many U.S. sanctions are not covered by the agreement and will continue” (6% thought no U.S. sanctions were to be lifted). These proportions are strikingly similar to those in 2015. In January 2016, shortly before sanctions relief took effect, four in ten had an accurate understanding of the deal’s terms about that topic, but misunderstandings have reverted to earlier levels.

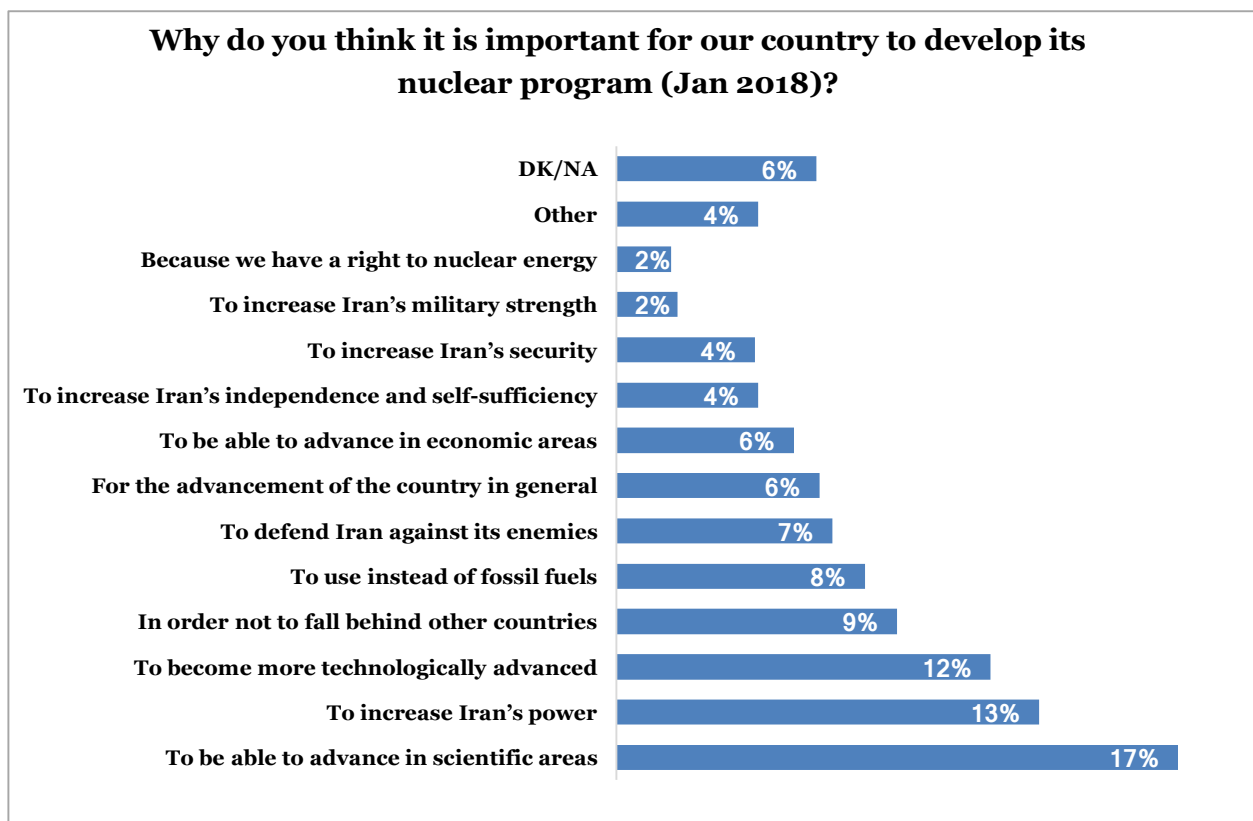
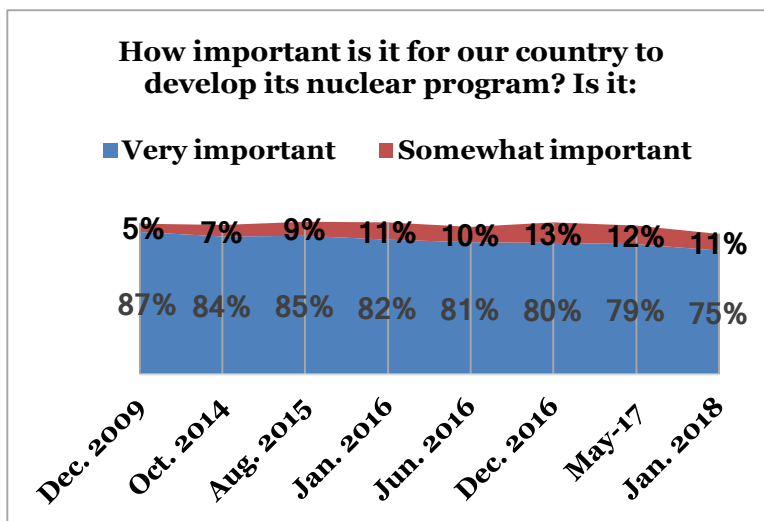
A different majority misperception has been quite stable: the belief that under no conditions can the IAEA inspect an Iranian military site. Only 23% said correctly that the IAEA “can perform limited inspections on military sites under specific conditions,” while a 63% majority still thought it cannot do so under any conditions.

### Value Placed on Nuclear Program by Public

As in the past, a very large majority regards Iran’s nuclear program as important for the country. Three in four (75%) said it is very important for Iran to develop its nuclear program, a ten-point drop since the JCPOA was signed. Another 11% called it somewhat important; only 10% thought it unimportant.

The 86% who viewed the nuclear program as important were asked to explain why in their own words. A little under half (47%) cited

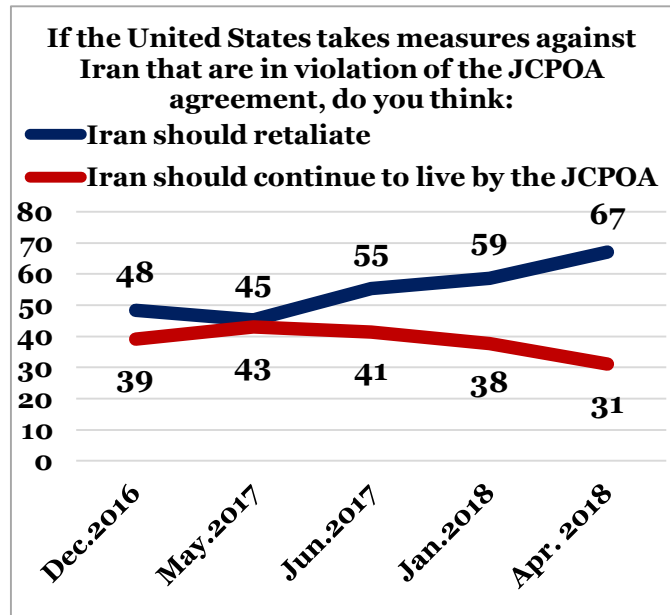
scientific and technological reasons (29%), or said the nuclear program could help Iran’s economic development (18%). Another 30% gave reasons related to Iran’s security, military strength, and self-sufficiency. Fifteen percent answered more generally that Iran needed a nuclear program to be an advanced country.



### 3. Increasing Majority Supports Retaliation if U.S. Abrogates JCPOA

Attitudes about how Iran should respond if the United States violates the JCPOA have hardened. A growing majority say that were the United States to abrogate the deal, Iran should retaliate by restarting the aspects of its nuclear program it agreed to suspend under the JCPOA rather than taking the matter to the UN. A modest majority say Iran should withdraw if the United States withdraws, even if other P5+1 countries remain committed to the deal. Most Iranians, however, would support their government if it decides that remaining in the deal is in Iran’s best interest.

Six in ten (59%) said that if the United States “takes measures against Iran that are in violation of the JCPOA agreement,” Iran should restart aspects of its nuclear program that it agreed to suspend. When re-asked by IranPoll in April, this majority had risen to 67%. This view was up from 55% in June 2017 and 48% in December 2016. Only four in ten said in January that Iran should continue to abide by the agreement while taking the issue to the UN. That number had been in the 38% to 43% range since we first asked the question. When re-asked by IranPoll in April, though, it had dropped significantly to 31%. Those who didn’t know or proffered their own response were 12% to 13% of the sample earlier. This total dropped sharply to 3%-4% after May 2017, which suggests a hardening of views on the question.



Presented with a scenario in which the United States withdraws from the JCPOA, more than half thought Iran should leave the agreement, too. Respondents were offered the following:

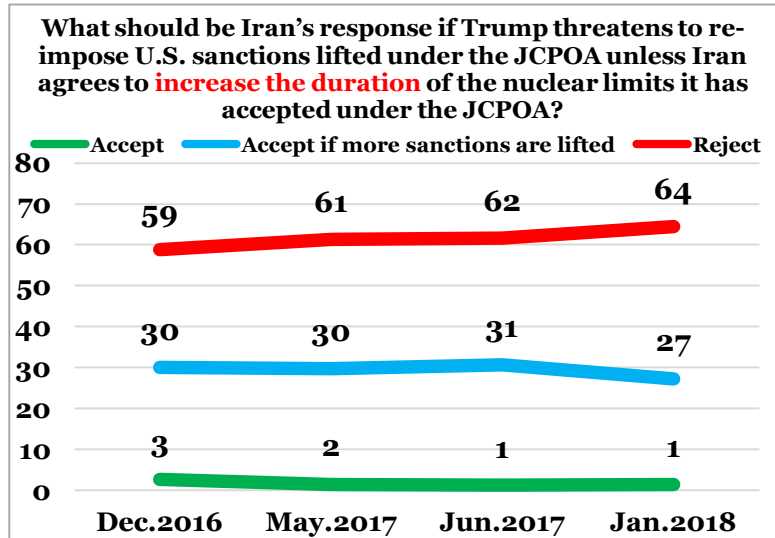
If the United States decides to withdraw from the JCPOA agreement and reimpose sanctions on Iran, but other P5+1 countries remain committed to the agreement and do not reimpose sanctions, what do you think Iran should do?

In this context, 53% thought Iran should withdraw, while 39% thought it should stay committed. When the next question asked those who wanted to withdraw how they would feel if the Iranian “government were to decide to remain committed to the JCPOA so long as the other P5+1 countries fulfill their commitment,” a 56% majority said they would support such a government decision, though only 20% said they would support it strongly. Forty-four percent said they would be opposed (22% strongly).

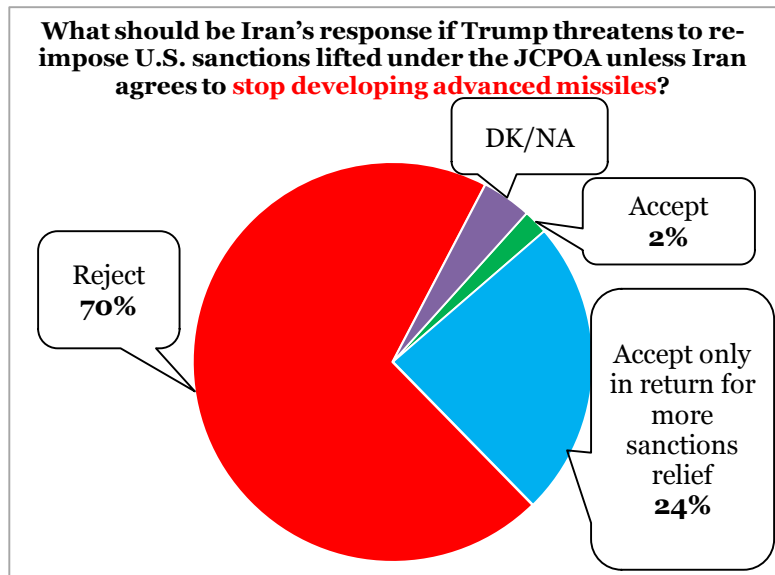
## 4. Staunch Resistance to Renegotiating the Nuclear Deal with Trump

**Large majorities say Iran should refuse to lengthen the special nuclear limits it accepted under the JCPOA or stop developing more advanced missiles, even if the United States threatens to re-impose sanctions lifted under the JCPOA or offers to lift more sanctions.**

Asked what Iran’s response should be “if Trump threatens to re-impose U.S. sanctions lifted under the JCPOA unless Iran agrees to increase the duration of the nuclear limits it has accepted,” 64% said Iran should not agree to increase these limits “under any circumstances.” Twenty-seven percent wanted the bargaining option, in which Iran might increase these limits as part of a deal that would include the lifting of more U.S. sanctions.



A larger majority of seven in ten (70%) is similarly unwilling to try a bargain in which Iran’s ballistic missile development would stop in exchange for more US sanctions being lifted. “If Trump threatens to re-impose US sanctions lifted under the JCPOA unless Iran agrees to stop developing advanced missiles,” 70% said Iran should not accept his demand. Twenty-four percent wanted the bargaining option. In both questions, only 1% to 2% wanted Iran to accept the hypothetical demand from Trump.



### *Are Any Iranian Subgroups Open to Renegotiating the Deal?*

While overall majorities of respondents were clearly unfavorable to renegotiating elements of the JCPOA, now that the Trump administration has withdrawn from the deal, the question arises whether some subgroup of Iranians feels differently and would be open to a new negotiation. To consider this possibility, we examined the level of support for re-negotiation just among those respondents who seemed most favorable toward Trump and most critical of their own regime and its actions that Trump wants to stop.

First, **the views of the 13% of respondents who rated President Trump’s policies toward Iran as “neither hostile nor friendly” (11%) or “friendly” (2%)** were examined:

- On increasing the duration of the nuclear limits Iran accepted in the deal, 53% of this subgroup was willing to negotiate, but only as part of a deal in which the U.S. would lift more sanctions on Iran. Four in ten (39%) of the subgroup was unwilling to renegotiate.
- On stopping development of advanced missiles, this subgroup was divided, with 45% willing to bargain in exchange for the U.S. lifting more sanctions, and 45% thinking Iran should simply not agree to stop development.

Seeking a more sympathetic subgroup, **the views of the 16% who said they agreed that “Iran’s political system needs to undergo fundamental change”** were tested:

- On increasing the duration of the nuclear limits Iran accepted in the deal, 51% of this subgroup was unwilling to renegotiate, while 39% thought this might be done as part of a deal in which the U.S. would lift more sanctions.
- On stopping development of advanced missiles, 52% of this subgroup thought Iran should continue development in any case, while 40% was willing to bargain in exchange for more sanctions being lifted.

Finally we examined **the views of the 26% that agreed with the proposition that “the military should spend much less money on developing missiles”**:

- On increasing the duration of the nuclear limits Iran accepted in the deal, 53% of this subgroup was unwilling to renegotiate, while 39% thought this might be done as part of a deal in which the U.S. would lift more sanctions.
- On stopping development of advanced missiles, 55% of this subgroup said Iran should simply continue development if President Trump threatens to reimpose sanctions. Thirty-six percent were willing to bargain if the U.S. would lift more sanctions than those lifted under the nuclear deal.

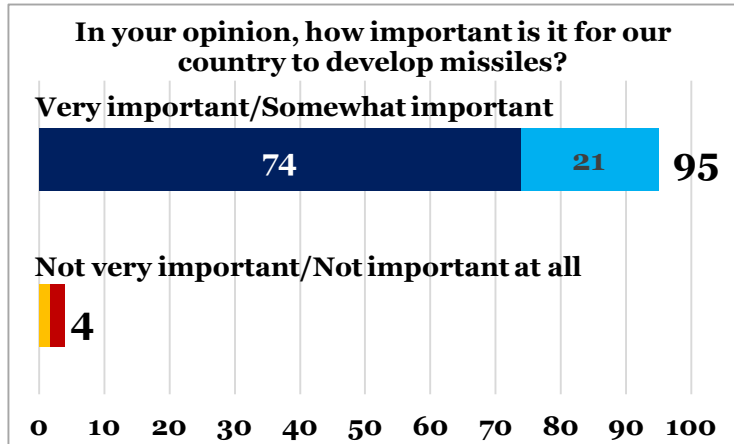
In short, it would be difficult to find a sympathetic minority of Iranians who would be supportive of the type of renegotiation being posed by Trump administration policy.



## 5. Majority Rejects Halting Development of Missiles

An overwhelming majority thinks it is important for Iran to develop missiles, primarily to defend Iran, deter attacks, and increase Iran’s security. Large majorities say Iran should continue testing ballistic missiles despite U.S. demands for Iran to halt such tests.

Asked “How important is it for your country to develop missiles?” 74% called it very important; another 21% said it was somewhat important. Only 4% said it was not very important or not important at all.



Those who called missile development important were asked why they thought so. A 58% majority gave a defense-oriented answer, implying that they thought an attack on Iran is a real possibility. Within this majority, 33% of the full sample said the program was important to defend Iran against its enemies; 16%, to deter others from attacking Iran; and another 10%, to defend Iran in case of a

Why is it important to develop ...	Nuclear Program	Missiles
To be able to advance in scientific areas	17.4%	
To increase Iran’s power	13.1	3.9
To become more technologically advanced	11.6	
In order not to fall behind other countries	8.7	3.2
To use instead of fossil fuels	7.7	
Because we have a right to nuclear energy	1.7	
For the advancement of the country in general	6.3	
To be able to advance in economic areas	5.5	
To increase Iran’s independence and self-sufficiency	4.4	
To maintain/increase Iran’s security	4.3	14.8%
To defend Iran	6.7	42.4
To increase Iran’s military strength	1.9	8.4
To deter others from attacking Iran		16.3
To counter threats from US/Israel		6.9
Other	5.1	.4
DK/NA	6.2	3.6

war. Beyond this group, another 7% named the United States or Israel as a source of threats that had to be countered.

Thus, while the overall level of Iranian public support for missile development is comparable to the strong support for Iran’s nuclear program, the reasons are quite different.

Four in ten (39%) said Iran should try to accommodate international concerns about the nature of Iran’s ballistic missile program in some way. Offered three alternative courses of action, a clear majority (57%) said “Iran should continue testing ballistic missiles and insist this issue is not negotiable.” Twenty-nine percent said Iran should continue testing, but offer to negotiate “on ways Iran could create confidence that the missiles are not produced to carry nuclear weapons.” Another 11% thought Iran should stop testing until such confidence is in place. These results are essentially unchanged from June 2017.

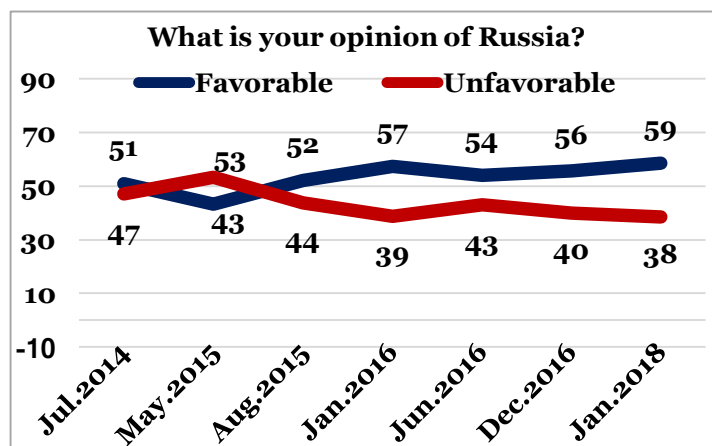
## 6. Views of P5+1 Countries

**Iranians’ views of all the P5+1 countries besides the United States have improved, and a clear majority expresses confidence that these countries will uphold their end of the JCPOA. Majorities now regard Russia, China, Germany, and even France favorably, but retain negative views of the United States and Britain. For the first time, a majority now says they have an unfavorable view of the American people as well as of their government. A majority believes that Iranian relations with European countries have improved due to the deal; almost no one says that about the United States. Far from showing implacable hostility toward the West, a majority continues to think it is possible for the Islamic world and the West to find common ground, though the number who say conflict between the two is inevitable has increased.**

The majorities viewing Russia and China favorably have remained stable since December 2016, while positive views of all the other P5+1 countries except the United States have grown notably. This is even true for Britain, which has been viewed negatively by most Iranians for many years. A modest majority is favorable toward the United Nations—and this also is unusual. Views of the United States have declined from an already low level.

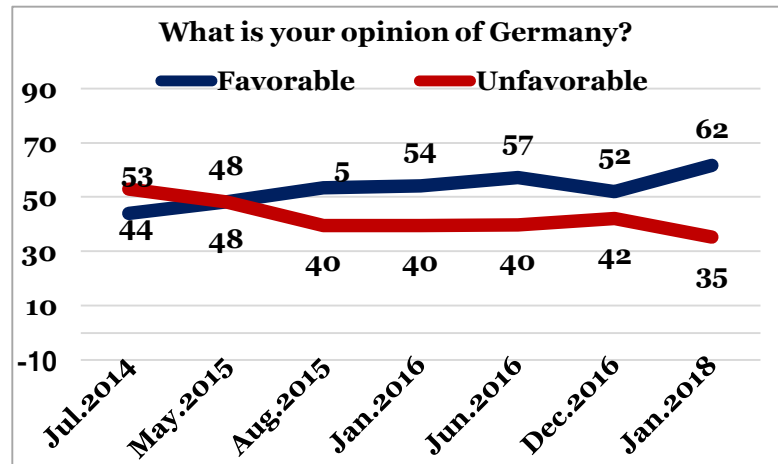
*Russia.* Three in five (59%) had a favorable view of Russia, up from 56% in December 2016—however, only a modest 19% viewed Russia *very* favorably. Slimmer majorities have been favorable toward Russia since mid-2015. Russia was viewed negatively by thirty-eight percent (very unfavorable, 23%).

*China.* China was viewed favorably by fifty-four percent (15%, very). Modest



majorities have tended to see China favorably since mid-2014. However, the 43% minority that is negative toward China includes 29% with a very unfavorable view.

*Germany.* Germany was viewed positively by over three in five (62%; 23%, very). This attitude has continued its ascent since mid-2014. Strikingly, positive views are up 10 points compared to December 2016. About a third (35%) were unfavorable toward Germany.



*France.* Those with favorable views of France grew to a clear majority for the first time since at least 2014. Fifty-six percent were favorable—up a startling 15 points compared to December 2016. Forty-one percent viewed France negatively, but only 21% were *very* unfavorable—

another striking change, since this group has regularly stayed in the 29%-35% range.

*Britain.* The thaw noted above toward European countries has extended even to Britain, albeit this is still a minority position. Thirty percent viewed Britain favorably, up 7 points since December 2016. More tellingly, only 44% expressed a *very* unfavorable view, a low for the last four years.

*United Nations.* Views of the UN are in harmony with the warming trend noted above; a modest majority (52%) has a favorable view of the UN, something uncommon in past polling. Negative views of the UN were at 43% (23% very unfavorable).

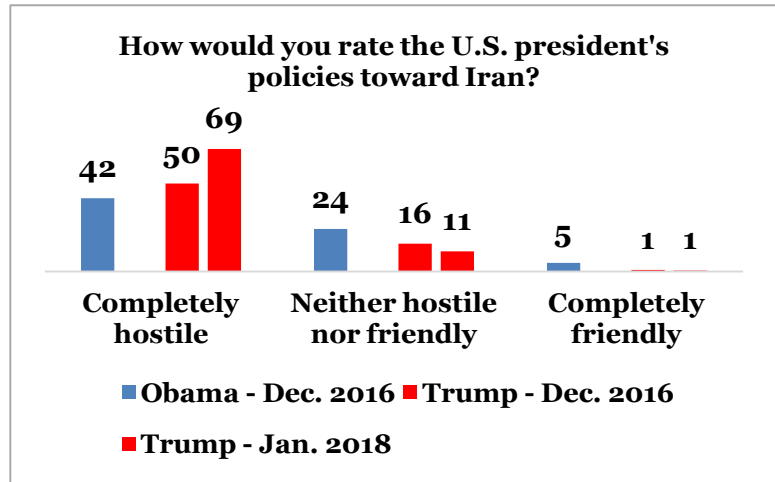
These shifts toward a more positive view of countries like Britain and France that Iranians often view unfavorably may be partly due to the fact that these countries were clearly trying to protect the JCPOA in January 2018. Trump was simultaneously signaling that the United States would withdraw unless the European countries pressured Iran into extending the duration of the nuclear deal, stopping ballistic missile development, and changing regional behavior.

*United States.* Favorable views of the United States have fallen to 18%—down from 23% in December 2016 and 31% in August 2015. While *very* unfavorable views toward the US have

long been in the majority, they have now risen to two thirds (67%). For the first time ever, a majority of Iranians said they have an unfavorable view of the American people. Fifty-five percent were unfavorable (36% very), up 9 points from June 2016. Customarily, Iranian majorities have expressed negative views of the United States and the U.S. government, but viewed the American people more positively. This pattern has now broken.

When asked to rate “the U.S. president’s policies toward Iran” on a 0-to-10 scale, with 0 meaning completely hostile and 10 meaning completely friendly, the mean score was 1.1, with 69% giving a zero.

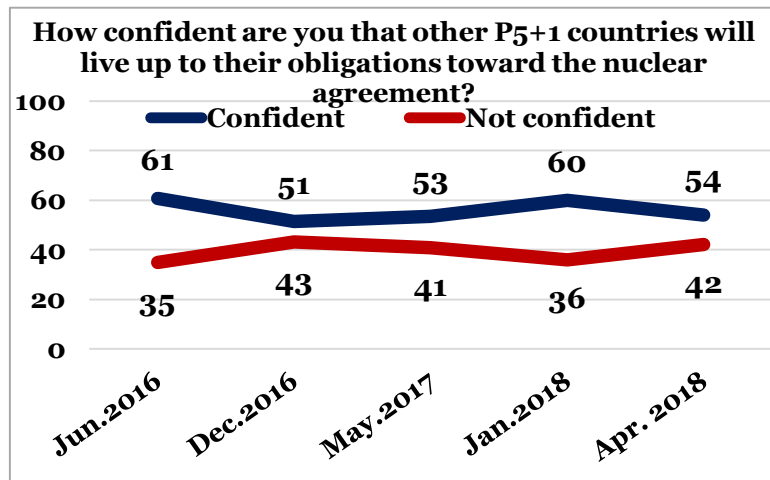
*P5+1 Countries and the Nuclear Deal*



Iranians are almost unanimous in saying that general relations with the United States have not improved as a result of the nuclear deal. Eighty-three percent said Iran-U.S. relations have not improved (up from 57% in May 2017), and another 8% volunteered that relations have worsened. For European countries, though, 56% felt there has been some improvement, while 35% disagreed. Still, those saying Iran-European relations have not improved have grown 20 points since January 2016.

There was a corresponding contrast in Iranians’ confidence that the United States would fulfill its side of the deal, and their confidence in the other P5+1 countries. Eighty-six percent were not very confident (23%) or not at all confident (64%) in January “that the United States will live up to its obligations toward the nuclear agreement.” Not surprisingly, confidence continued to decline as it looked increasingly likely that the Trump administration would withdraw from the JCPOA and re-impose nuclear sanctions on Iran. When re-asked by IranPoll in April, 92% expressed low confidence.

In sharp contrast, 60% were at least somewhat confident in January 2018 that the other P5+1 countries would keep their commitments; 36% were not confident (not at all, 13%). These attitudes have remained fairly stable since June 2016. When IranPoll re-asked the question in April, it found 54% confident, a dip from January 2018 to a level similar to May 2017.



## 7. Majority Sees No Value in Negotiations; Support for Self-Sufficiency Grows

**Two in three say the JCPOA experience shows that it is not worthwhile for Iran to make concessions as part of international negotiations, because Iran cannot have confidence that world powers would honor their side of an agreement. Accordingly, an increasing majority thinks Iran should strive to achieve economic self-sufficiency rather than focus on increasing its trade with other countries. Willingness to compromise and make reciprocal concessions is higher among those who think the nuclear deal has improved the living conditions of ordinary Iranians, as well as those who voice confidence that the United States will abide by its side of the agreement.**

Disappointing results from the JCPOA and a lack of confidence in the United States' willingness to fulfill its end of that bargain have led two out of three Iranians to conclude that they should not expect much from future negotiations. Respondents were asked to think "about how the JCPOA has worked out so far" and to choose between two statements:

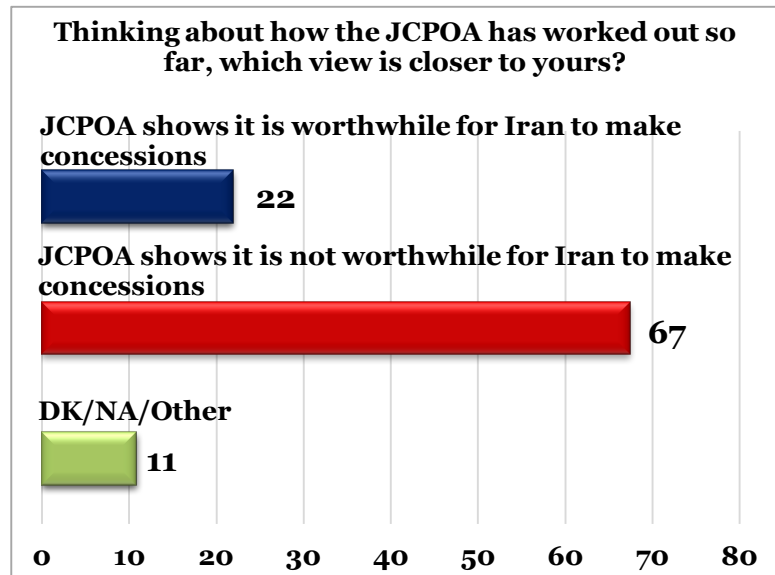
The JCPOA experience shows that it is worthwhile for Iran to make concessions because through compromise Iran can negotiate mutually beneficial agreements with world powers.

or

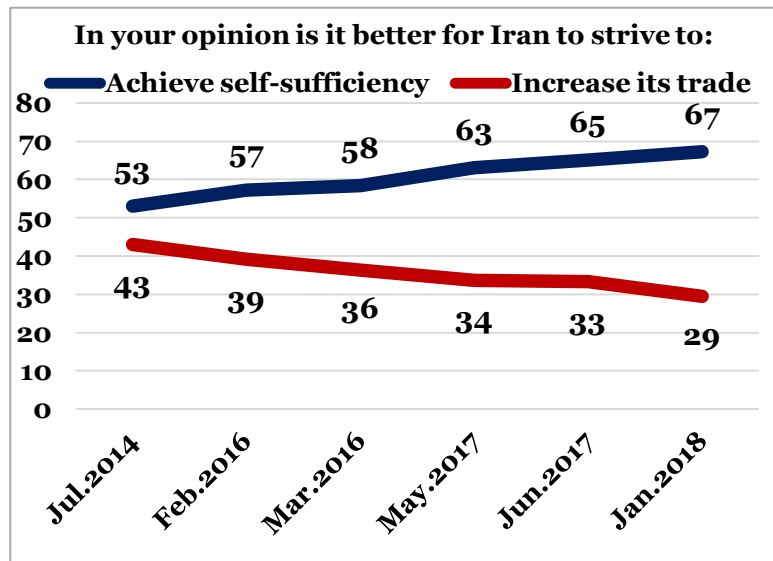
The JCPOA experience shows that it is not worthwhile for Iran to make concessions, because Iran cannot have confidence that if it makes a concession world powers will honor their side of an agreement.

A clear two thirds (67%) chose the second statement, while about a fifth (22%) chose the first. Eleven percent declined to answer, suggesting they were unwilling to make a judgment with the fate of the JCPOA still unknown.

Accordingly, an increasing majority thinks Iran should strive to achieve economic self-sufficiency rather than focus on increasing its trade with other countries. Asked to assume "our country could only adopt one of these policies," two thirds (67%) chose striving for self-sufficiency, and one in three (29%) chose striving for increased trade. While the idea of self-sufficiency has been endorsed by a majority in this question since July 2014, this majority has grown by 14 points.



Willingness to compromise and make reciprocal concessions is higher among those who think the nuclear deal has improved the living conditions of ordinary Iranians, as well as those who voice confidence that the United States will abide by its side of the agreement. Those thinking conditions have improved a lot were 21 points more likely than those thinking they have “not improved at all” to believe that if Iran makes concessions, negotiating partners will reciprocate. Similarly, those very



confident in U.S. commitments under the agreement were 21 points more likely than those with no confidence at all to say concessions can be worthwhile. And strikingly, those very confident in the U.S. commitment were 39 points more likely than those with no confidence to prefer greater international trade over greater self-sufficiency.

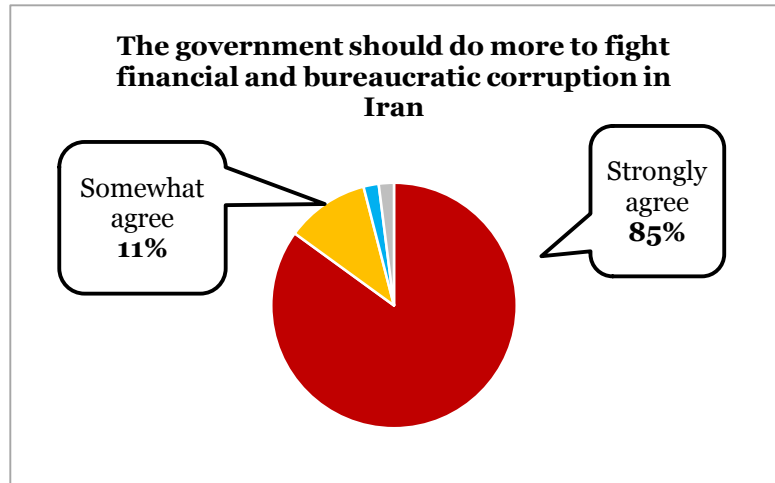
Far from showing implacable hostility toward the West, a majority continues to think it is possible for the Islamic world and the West to find common ground, though the number of those who say conflict between the two is inevitable has increased. Given a choice between two statements, 58% chose: “Most people in the West and the Islamic world have similar needs and wants, so it is possible to find common ground for peaceful coexistence.” About a third (35%) instead chose: “Islamic and Western religious and social traditions are incompatible with each other and conflict between the two is inevitable”—a response that is up 7 points compared to December 2016.

## 8. Strong Sympathy with Complaints about Economic Policies and Corruption

During late December 2017 and early January 2018, large street protests took place across Iran. These protests were organized by different groups of people for varying reasons. To see what proportion of the Iranian population sympathizes with each type of protest, this study asked respondents to indicate the degree to which they sympathized with each of the complaints voiced. Large majorities say they sympathize with complaints voiced by some protestors that the government should do more to keep food and gasoline prices from rising; not cut cash subsidies; and compensate people who lost money when financial institutions in Iran collapsed. They also agree that the government is not doing enough to help the poor, and farmers who are suffering as a result of the drought. Iranians are almost unanimous in their demand that more should be done to fight financial and bureaucratic corruption in Iran.

*Anti-corruption complaints*

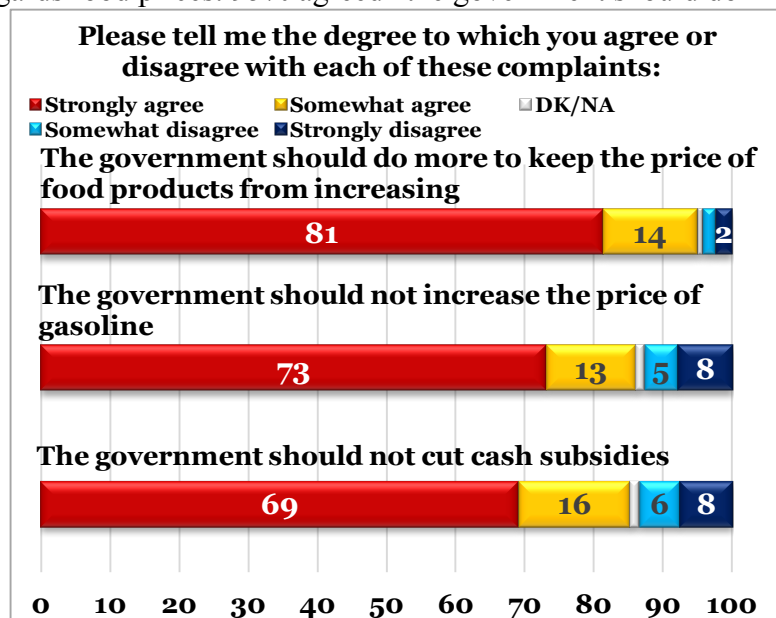
The public’s view that “financial and bureaucratic corruption” should be fought more vigorously by the government is practically unanimous, and on a level of intensity with the attitude toward food prices described below. Ninety-six percent (85%, strongly) agreed that the government should do more to fight corruption.



The breadth of support for this complaint is not surprising, since leading political figures frequently accuse their political opponents of corruption. Respondents to this survey who said they voted for President Rouhani in the 2017 election were only slightly less likely to express strong agreement with the anti-corruption message (84%) compared to those who voted for his main rival, Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi (87%). A survey shortly after the election found that nineteen percent of Raisi voters cited his honesty and ability to fight corruption as their main reason for backing him, while Rouhani voters emphasized his foreign policy and economic efforts.

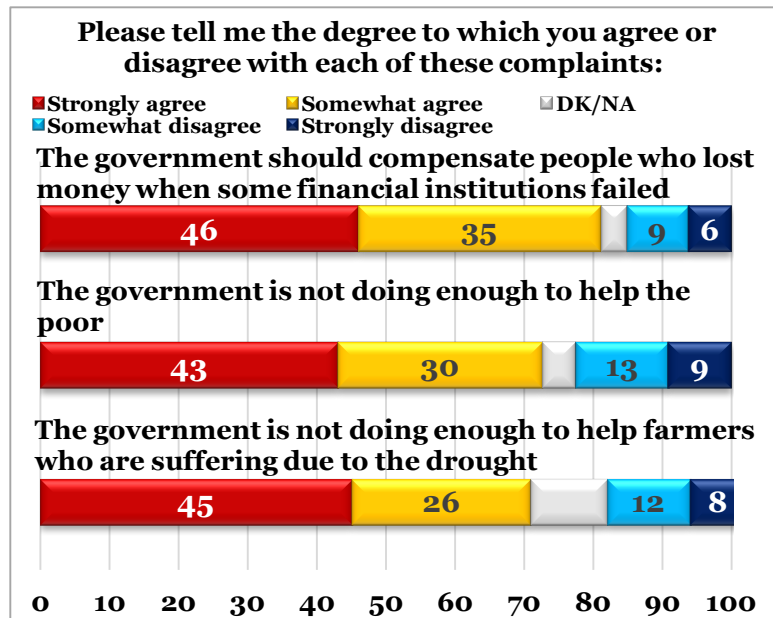
*Economic complaints*

Very large majorities say they agree with multiple economic complaints that were voiced during the protests. The widest consensus regards food prices: 95% agreed “the government should do more to keep the price of food products from increasing,” with four in five (81%) agreeing strongly. Next came the price of gasoline, long-subsidized in Iran: 86% agreed that the government should not increase the price (73% strongly). Attitudes toward direct cash subsidies to people with poor or modest incomes—originally introduced under Ahmadinejad to substitute for some price controls—are similar: 85% agreed that cash subsidies should not be cut (69% strongly).



A second set of economic complaints are also endorsed by large majorities, but less forcefully. Four in five (81%) agree that “the government should compensate people who lost money when some financial institutions failed,” though less than half (46%) feel this strongly.

More generally, almost three in four agree that “the government is not doing enough” to help either the poor (73%; 43%, strongly) or “farmers who are suffering due to the drought” (70%; 45%, strongly).



The small group of Iranians who think that their country’s economic situation is very good differ from those who say it is very bad regarding their level of sympathy with some economic complaints, but not others. For example, 64% of the economic optimists strongly agree that the government should do more to fight corruption, while 93% of the pessimists hold that view. Likewise, only 28% of the former sympathize with calls for the government to do more for the poor, while 61% of the latter endorse that position. By contrast, the gap on gas prices is much smaller, with 72% of the economic optimists and 77% of the pessimists saying that the government should not raise them.

## 9. Majorities Disagree with Protestors Who Critiqued Iran’s Domestic Political System and Foreign Operations

**Three in four disagree that Iran’s political system needs to undergo fundamental change. Two in three also disagree with the view that the government interferes too much in people’s personal lives; indeed, six in ten reject the idea that the government should not strictly enforce Islamic laws. As in the past, about three in four believe that when making decisions, Iranian policymakers should take religious teachings into account. Clear majorities also reject other complaints voiced by some protestors—that the military should spend much less on developing missiles, and that Iran’s current level of involvement in Iraq and Syria is not in Iran’s national interests. U.S. expressions of support for protests were generally regarded as irrelevant or unhelpful.**

Respondents were offered several of the political complaints raised by some of the protestors, along with the economically focused complaints listed above. In contrast with the resonance the public feels with protestors’ economic complaints, the political complaints voiced by some of the protestors got no majority endorsements. The one that did best concerned Iran’s spending in Syria and Iraq.



*Political System and Governance*

Asked whether they agree with the complaint that “Iran’s political system needs to undergo fundamental change,” over three in four disagreed (77%) with a majority doing so strongly (54%).

Regardless of how we subdivided the data, the percentage of respondents who *strongly* agreed with calls for fundamental political change never rose above 10%. It was 4 percent among those who voted in the last election and 8% among those who did not vote.

Those who voted for Rouhani were slightly more likely to agree with the need for change (5%, very; 14%, somewhat) compared with those who supported Raisi (2%, very; 10%, somewhat). Presumably, though, most Rouhani voters want to see different types of political changes than most Raisi voters do.

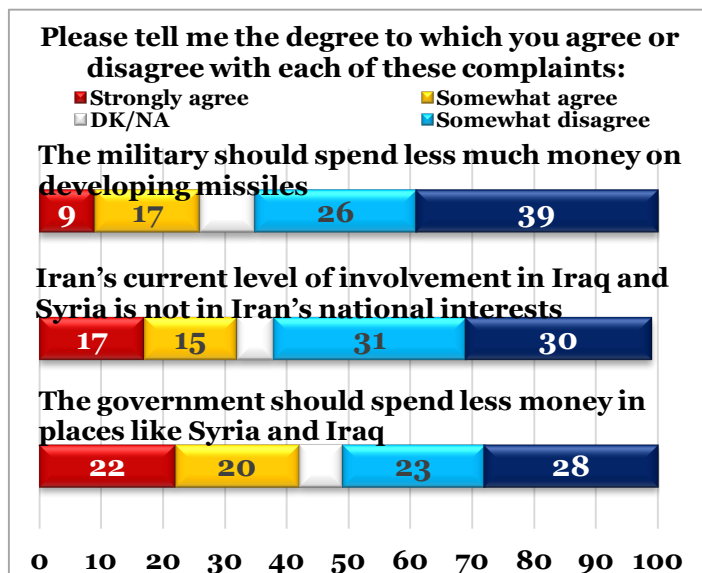
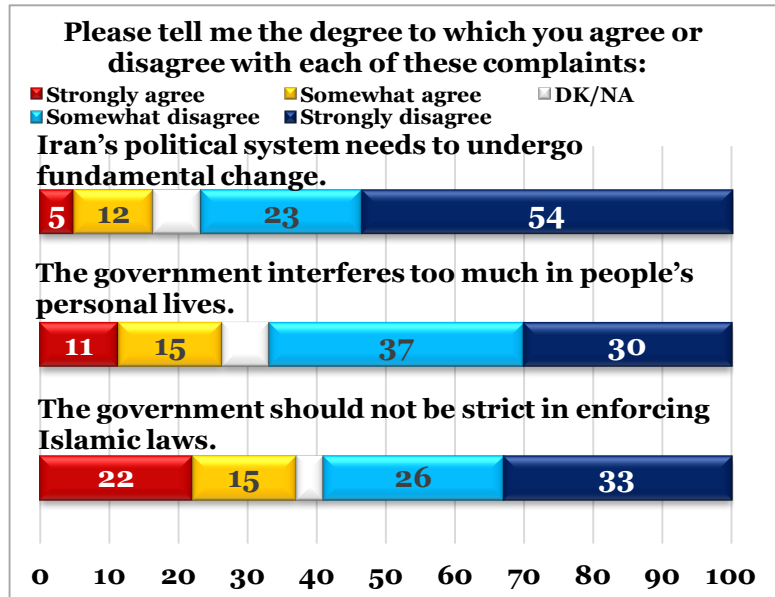
A substantial, if lesser, majority (67%) did not agree that “the government interferes too much in people’s personal lives” (30%, strongly), and 59% did not accept the idea that “the government should not be strict in enforcing Islamic laws” (33%, strongly). A desire for the government to be less strict in enforcing Islamic laws was the protest complaint that got substantially more support from Iranians under 30 (42%, agreeing; 27%, strongly) than from the population as a whole. Men were slightly more likely than women to agree with both of these complaints.

As has been the case for many years, a substantial majority believes that policymakers “should take religious teachings into account,” at least somewhat, when they make decisions (77%; 47%, “a lot”).

*Military Activity: Missiles, Iraq and Syria*

Some protestors raised issues about Iran’s development of ballistic missiles and its involvement in the region, saying that these were resources that could be spent on domestic problems.

In the survey, about two in three (65%) disagreed that “the military should spend much less money on developing missiles” (39%, strongly), while 26% agreed. Attitudes were more mixed on the



proposition that “the government should spend less money in places like Syria and Iraq”; only a bare majority (51%) disagreed, while 42% agreed (22%, strongly). However, when asked whether Iran’s level of involvement in Syria and Iraq was in the country’s national interests, three in five (61%) disagreed, while a third (33%) agreed.

Those who think that the country’s economic conditions are very good were consistently less likely to agree with protestors’ criticisms of Iran’s military activity than were those who think it is very bad. Only 8% of the optimists strongly agreed with calls to spend less money in Syria, compared with a third of the pessimists. None of the optimists strongly agreed that Iran’s current level of involvement in Syria was not in its national interest, compared with 29% of the pessimists. The gap between these two groups was much smaller on funding for missile development, with 4% of optimists compared with 11% of pessimists strongly agreeing that the military should spend less.

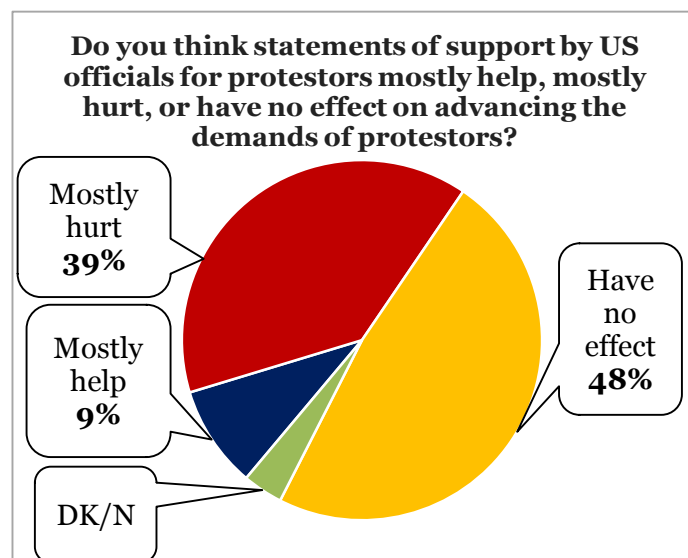
Political preferences have some effect on attitudes about military activities, but the differences are not huge. On funding for Syria, 47% of Rouhani voters expressed sympathy with the complaint compared with 26% of Raisi voters. On involvement in Syria, 36% of Rouhani voters agreed with the complaint, while 20% of Raisi voters did. And 30% of Rouhani voters backed calls to reduce spending on missile development, while only 15% of Raisi voters did.

Iranians under 30 years old were slightly less likely than the population as a whole to strongly agree that the government was spending too much in Syria (18%) and on missile development (5%). Iranians who listened to foreign news, on the other hand, were much more likely to strongly agree with complaints about funding for and involvement in Syria (36% and 32%, respectively) than those who did not listen to BBC or VOA (17% and 12%, respectively). The gap between these two groups on funding for missile development was much smaller) 13% and 8%, respectively.

*Attitudes toward U.S. expressions of support*

President Trump and other American officials expressed support for the Iranian protests in terms suggesting that the people of Iran were deeply unhappy with their political system and their leaders’ military activities, rather than primarily concerned about economic issues.

When respondents were directly asked about Trump’s support, many seemed to regard it as irrelevant. Reminded that “a number of U.S. officials, including President Donald Trump, expressed their support for the protestors,” respondents were asked whether these



statements “mostly help, mostly hurt, or have no effect on advancing the demands of protestors.” Almost half (48%) said the statements had no effect. Four in ten (39%) thought such support hurt the protestors; only 9% thought they helped. Respondents who listened to foreign news broadcasts were less likely than those who did not to view Trump’s remarks as helpful (5.3% vs. 10.4%).

This result is similar to Iranians’ views of outside interventions on human rights issues. In June 2017 respondents were asked about the effects of human rights sanctions imposed by the U.S. and European countries. A bare majority (52%) said such sanctions had no effect on human rights in Iran, while 36% felt they had done more to hurt the human rights situation.

## **10. Majority Approves of Police Handling of the Protests**

**Two in three approve of how the police handled the protests and say they used an appropriate amount of force. Views about how arrested protestors should be treated depend on how they acted. Almost two in three think that protestors who were arrested while peacefully voicing their complaints against government policies should be released. A smaller majority wants protestors who accidentally injured bystanders to be prosecuted, but not punished harshly. Most Iranians want the judiciary to prosecute protestors who chanted slogans against Islam or Iran’s system of government, but only a minority demand harsh punishment. About six in ten want the judiciary to prosecute and harshly punish those who are found guilty of attacking the police, damaging public property, or burning Iran’s flag.**

This study asked how Iranians viewed the police and courts’ reaction to the wave of protests. About two thirds (66%) thought that, overall, the police handled the protests at least somewhat well (very well, 35%). About a quarter (24%) said the police performed badly (very badly, 12%). More strikingly, 64% thought the police used an appropriate amount of force, while the remainder was divided almost evenly between those who thought there had been too much force (14%) or too little (11%).

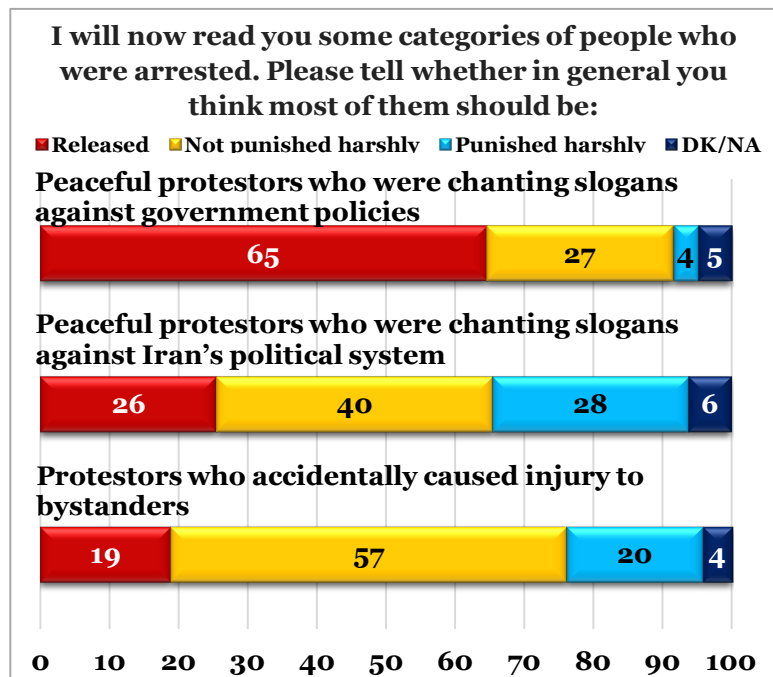
Respondents were also asked about the judiciary and how judges should treat protestors who were arrested for infractions. They were first told:

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

The public made distinctions among the varied forms of protest that were seen during this period. A two-thirds majority—65%—wanted those demonstrating peacefully by “chanting slogans against government policies” to be released; this probably including the bulk of those who participated. Another 27% said they should not be punished harshly, and only 4% said they should receive harsh punishment if found guilty.

Another category seen as deserving leniency were “protestors who accidentally caused injury to bystanders.” A 57% majority said most should be prosecuted but not punished harshly, and another 19% said they should be released. A fifth (20%) said they should be punished harshly.

Peaceful demonstrators chanting “slogans against Iran’s political system” (not just government policies) were also viewed fairly tolerantly by most Iranians. Four in ten (40%) thought most should be prosecuted but not punished harshly, while another 26% said they should be released. Over a quarter (28%), however, said they should be punished harshly. Attitudes were similar toward “peaceful protestors chanting slogans against Islam or religious laws.” Four in ten (42%) also thought they should be prosecuted but not harshly punished, and another fifth (20%) thought they should be released. About a third (32%) preferred harsh punishment.



Majorities supported harsh punishments for protestors who engaged in three types of activities: Those who “damaged public property” deserved harsh punishment in the eyes of three out of five (60%), and another third (34%) thought they should at least be prosecuted. Only 3% thought they should be released. “Protestors who attacked the police” got a similar reaction: 64% of Iranians wanted harsh punishment, 26% at least prosecutions (should release, 6%). Protestors who burned Iran’s flag (specifically described to respondents as “the flag of the Islamic Republic”) were also viewed without sympathy, with 63% asking for harsh punishment and another 30% for prosecutions with lesser penalties (should release, 4%).

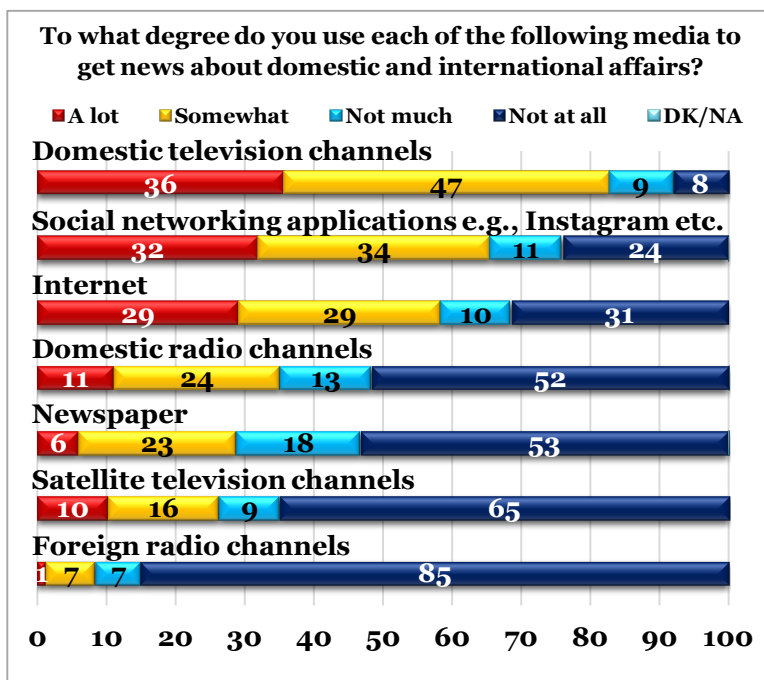
Respondents’ general attitude toward political violence was made clear by a separate question that asked whether they agreed with the complaint that “the government should be more forceful to stop rioters who use violence or damage property.” Sixty-three percent agreed strongly and another 22% agreed somewhat.

## 11. Media Consumption Habits

**Majorities follow news regarding domestic and international affairs. Domestic television, followed by social networking apps, such as Telegram, and the internet are the media used by a majority of Iranians to become informed about the news. The numbers of people relying on VOA and BBC news programs have declined significantly since the rise of social media in Iran.**

While majorities of Iranians follow both domestic and international affairs, the majority following domestic affairs is larger—as is true in many other countries. When asked how much they follow news regarding domestic affairs, seven in ten (70%) said they follow this news at least somewhat; a fifth (19%) said they follow it a lot. Fifty-five percent said they followed news on international affairs, with 12% saying they follow it a lot.

Respondents were asked about how much they used seven different varieties of news media. The two most widespread news sources were domestic Iranian TV (36%, a lot; 47%, somewhat) and “social networking applications like Telegram and Instagram” (32%, a lot; 34%, somewhat). The internet in general came next, with 29% using it a lot and 29% somewhat. While a quarter (26%) said they used satellite television channels at least somewhat, foreign radio channels have a smaller following (8%, at least somewhat).



Comparing these responses to those gathered in May 2015 when we asked similar questions about different types of media sources demonstrates a clear shift in media consumption habits. Internet use is now much more widespread than it was in 2015, when only 34% said they used it to become informed about the news at least once a week. Domestic and satellite television consumption have declined. In 2015, 71% said they watched domestic television daily and another 20 percent at least once a week, while 17% watched satellite television daily and 10% once a week.

Since August 2015, we’ve asked respondents whether they follow the news programs of BBC or the Voice of America. Between 25% and 32% of respondents have consistently answered yes, but the number of viewers has dipped recently. In the current survey, 23% said they followed BBC or VOA, down 8 points from June 2016.

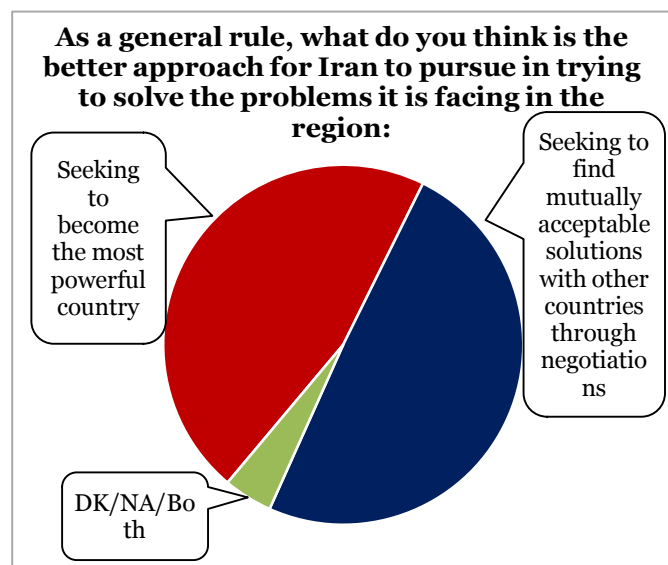
While respondents who reported they followed news programs on the BBC or Voice of America were, as expected, more critical of government positions than those who did not follow these programs, these two groups' views were not polarized. The majority view in one group was not opposed to the majority view in the other group. Rather, the differences between them tended to remain within a 15-to-20-point range. Here are characteristic examples:

- Forty-four percent of those who follow BBC/VOA believed “Iran’s current level of involvement in Iraq and Syria is not in Iran’s national interests,” compared to 29% of those who do not.
- Forty-seven percent of those following BBC/VOA agreed that “the government should spend less money in places like Syria and Iraq,” compared to 40% of those who do not.
- About half (49%) who follow BBC/VOA thought “the government should not be strict in enforcing Islamic laws,” compared to 33% among those who do not.
- Over a third (36%) of those who follow BBC/VOA thought “the government interferes too much in people’s personal lives,” compared to 24% of those who do not.

## 12. A Range of Views on Regional Issues

**About half of Iranians say their government should try to find mutually acceptable solutions to regional problems, and the other half say that Iran should seek to become the most powerful country in the region. A large majority says Iran should either increase or maintain its current level of support for groups fighting terrorist groups like ISIS. Most Iranians want Iran to use its influence in Iraq to support policies that benefit both Shiites and Sunnis, rather than policies that primarily benefit Shiites. Now that Iran and Russia have declared victory over ISIS in Syria, almost as many Iranians want to end or reduce assistance to President Bashar Assad as want to continue it until his government regains full control over all Syrian territory. An overwhelming majority reject the idea that Assad should not be allowed to remain as Syria’s president and say the Syrian people should decide whether he remains in office.**

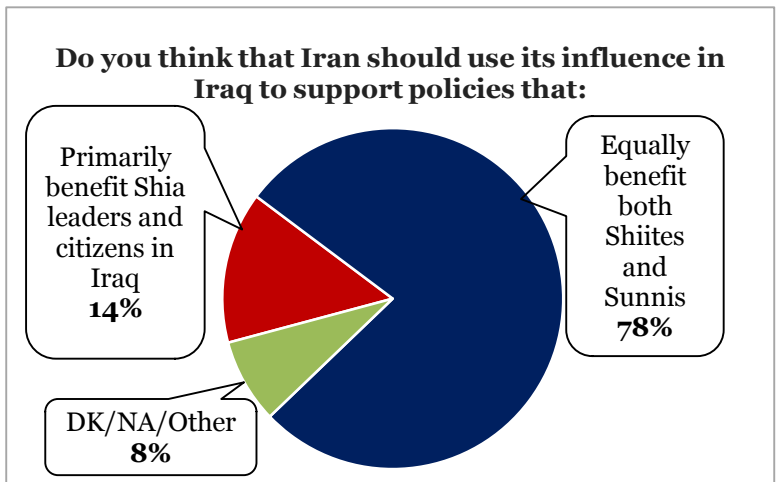
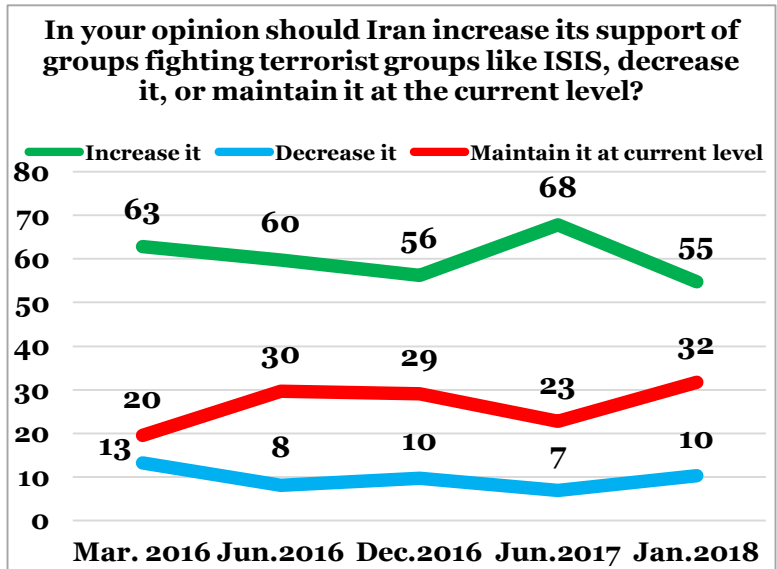
When asked what they think is a better approach to regional problems as a general rule, about half (49%) preferred “seeking to find mutually acceptable solutions with other countries through negotiations,” while 46% preferred “seeking to become the most powerful country in the region.” There is also division among respondents regarding Iran’s future military efforts in parts of the Middle East.



*ISIS.* The principle of combating ISIS evokes a large consensus. Almost all (87%) thought that Iran should either increase its support of groups fighting terrorist groups like ISIS (55%) or maintain it at the current level (32%). Only 10% thought the time has come to decrease this support.

*Iraq.* There is a similarly large consensus about whether Iran should use its influence in Iraq to “primarily benefit [Iraq’s] Shia leaders and citizens.” Over three in four (78%) rejected this approach, saying instead that Iran should “support policies that equally benefit both Shiites and Sunnis.” Only 14% wanted to give Iraqi Shia preferential treatment.

*Syria.* In November 2017, both Iran and Russia declared that the campaign in Syria to defeat ISIS had succeeded. Respondents were reminded of this and asked whether Iran should now end its military assistance to the government of Bashar Assad, reduce such assistance, or “continue [it] until Assad’s government gains full control over all Syrian territories.” Half (49%), but not a majority, wanted to continue aiding Assad’s government until full control is attained. Three in ten (30%) wanted to reduce assistance; 15% wanted to end it.



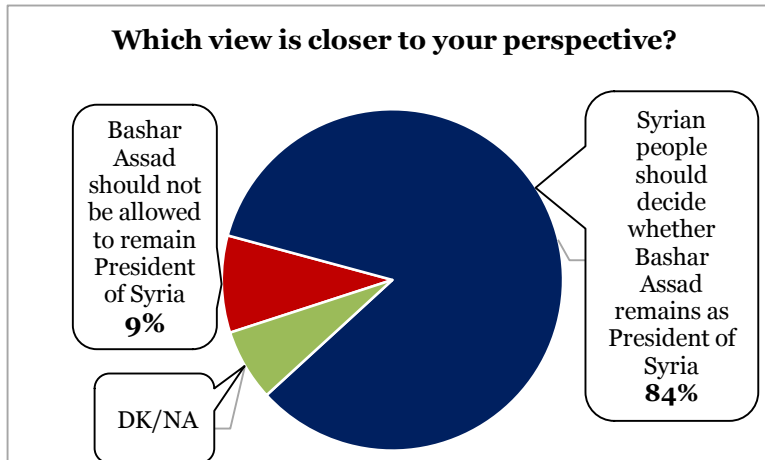
Respondents were offered two arguments about whether Assad should remain president of Syria:

Some people say that going forward, Bashar Assad should not be allowed to remain President of Syria because he is an incompetent leader who used excessive force against Syrian civilians and let ISIS gain control of territory. Others say that Bashar Assad did what was necessary to keep Syria together and whether he remains the president of Syria should be decided by the Syrian people.

Between these two arguments, more than four in five chose the second: 84% said the Syrian people should decide whether Assad should remain president, while 9% said this should not be allowed.

*Yemen.* There is not currently majority support for fuller Iranian involvement in Yemen. Iran’s official position is that it supports the Houthi opposition politically, but not in any other way. When

respondents were asked whether “Iran should help the Houthis defeat their opponents,” a little under half (47%) thought that it should, while 41% said “Iran should not get involved in Yemen’s domestic conflict.” Twelve percent did not select either alternative.



There is not a clear Iranian majority expressing favorable feelings toward the Houthis. Half (50%) said they were favorable toward them (very, 27%), while 38% were unfavorable (very, 23%). As with the question on what Iran should do in Yemen, 12% did not answer.

*Hezbollah of Lebanon.* Hezbollah, which is generally seen favorably by the Iranian public, showed a slight decline in popularity in this survey. Sixty-five percent said they had a favorable view of Hezbollah (35%, very). This is down from 73 percent in June 2016, though the number who are very favorable has remained stable.

### 13. General Soleimani’s Popularity Soars, while Rouhani and Zarif Slip

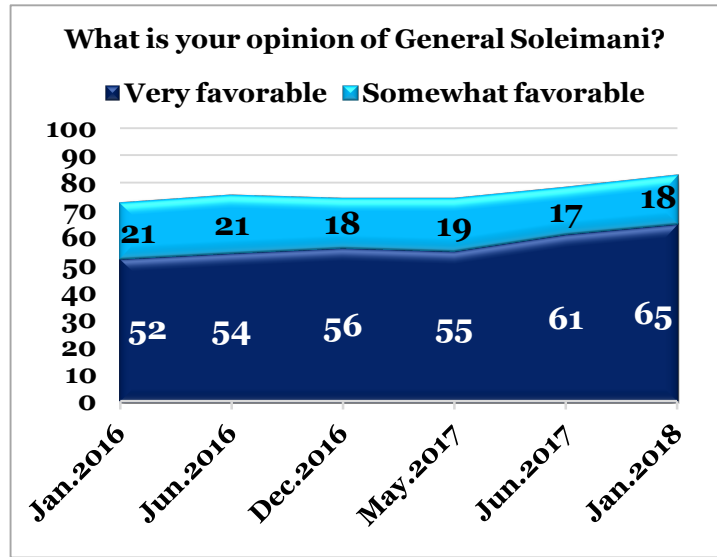
**General Qasem Soleimani’s popularity is at an all-time high, with two in three saying that they hold a *very favorable* opinion of him. He is followed in popularity by the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, whose favorability rating has decreased slightly since June 2017. President Rouhani’s popularity has dropped sharply since his victory in the May 2017 presidential elections. Opinions of Ebrahim Raisi, Rouhani’s conservative opponent in the election, have held steady. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran’s former president, remains the most polarizing figure among Iranian politicians.**

General Soleimani’s profile has risen, especially on the heels of his November 2017 announcement of ISIS’ defeat, after the group lost its last urban stronghold in eastern Syria. Eighty-three percent viewed him favorably—nearly two thirds (65%), very favorably. His favorability ratings have risen from 74% in May 2017 and 78% in June 2017.

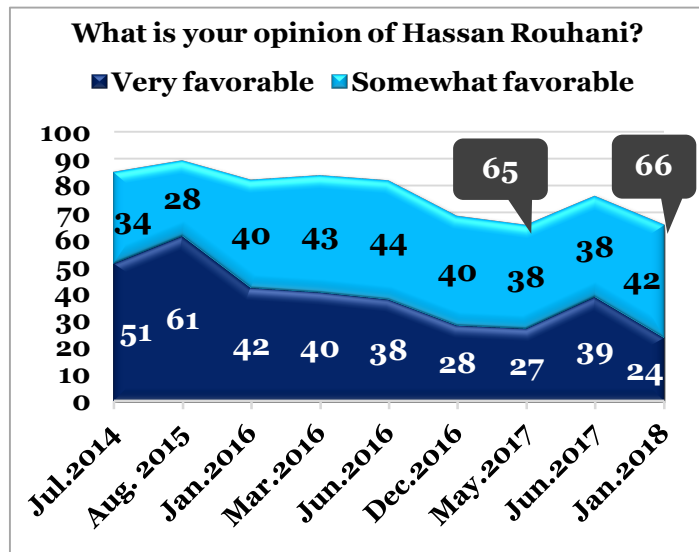
The second most popular figure named in the survey is Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, viewed favorably by two thirds (68%; 36%, very). This represents an 8-point decline from June 2017, but is very similar to his popularity in December 2016.



President Rouhani’s popularity has dropped sharply since his victory in last year’s presidential election. Two thirds (66%) viewed him favorably in January, but only 24% were very favorable. While down 10 points from June 2017, this is similar to results during the hotly contested election, when his favorability rating was 65%, with 27% very favorable. From January 2016 to January 2018 Rouhani’s rating fell 16 points (“very favorable,” down 18 points). (IranPoll asked this question again in April and found a further drop, to 59% favorable.)



Opinions of Ebrahim Raisi, Rouhani’s conservative opponent in the elections, have remained roughly constant. A 54% majority is favorable toward him (very, 19%), similar to his 57% rating in June 2017.



Opinions of ex-president Ahmadinejad are notably polarized. In general, Iranian respondents tend not to give sharply negative ratings to politicians, but 48% viewed Ahmadinejad unfavorably and 47% favorably—his lowest numbers since July 2014.

## 14. Majority Sees Climate Change as a Very Serious Problem

**Iranians almost unanimously see global climate change as a serious issue and a majority says these changes are harming people around the world today. Two in three say they are very concerned that climate change will affect them personally. A large majority wants the government to do more to protect the environment, even if the economy suffers as a result. Two in three say they approve of Iran taking steps to significantly reduce its air pollution over the next 15 years, even if it leads to higher prices and unemployment rates in the short term.**

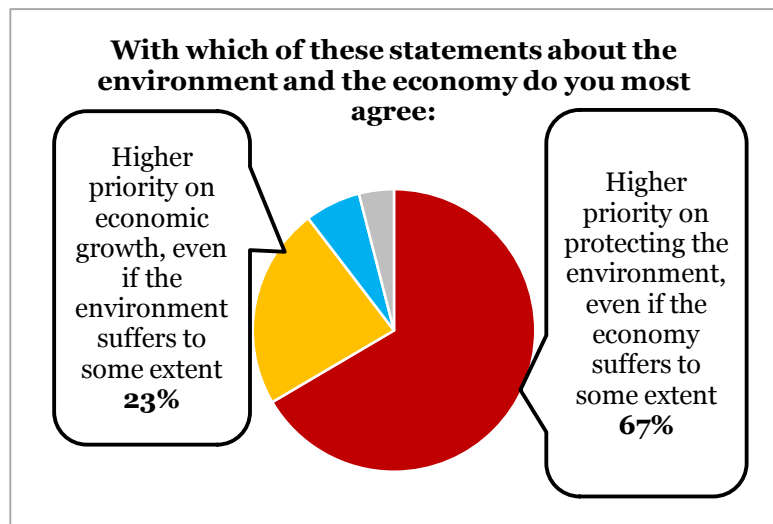
This study asked questions about climate change that have been asked in many other countries. When asked how serious a problem global climate change is, three quarters (73%) said it was

very serious and another 21% said it was somewhat serious. Viewed in comparison to Pew Research Center’s international polling, Iran was similar to India and much of Latin America in its level of concern, and slightly stronger than Western Europe and Canada.<sup>1</sup> The median of Pew’s 40 countries was 54%.

Three in five Iranians (59%) think climate change “is harming people around the world now.” Another third (34%) think this will occur “in the next few years.” Only 4% think it is less urgent. Again, comparing to Pew data, this is similar to France (59%, harming now), Spain (61%, now), and Canada (56%, now), but lower than Japan (71%, now) or Brazil (90%, now). The median of Pew’s 40 countries was 51%.

Almost two thirds of Iranians are very concerned that they will be personally harmed by climate change in their lifetimes, and another 28% are somewhat concerned. Pew data suggests Iranian attitudes are most similar to India (69%, very concerned), Vietnam (60%), Kenya (61%), and Nigeria (63%). These responses are all in sharp contrast with North American and European attitudes. The median of Pew’s 40 countries was 40% very concerned.

Offered two statements, two thirds (67%) of Iranians said that the government should “put a higher priority on protecting the environment, even if the economy suffers to some extent,” while only 23% chose “put a higher priority on economic growth, even if the environment suffers to some extent.” For comparison, a 2014 CBS/New York Times study asked Americans the same question and 58% said the emphasis should go to the environment while 37% wanted it on the economy.



Iranian respondents were asked about the Paris agreement on climate change, which is not a familiar topic in Iran. Told that “Iran and most other countries around the world made an agreement to cut their air pollution in order to reduce climate change,” only 24% said they had heard of the agreement before (75%, no). The phrase “air pollution” was used to designate the types of changes that Iran has agreed to in order to achieve a cleaner energy profile. This is language that most Iranians know and understand to include some economic costs. Respondents were then asked about Iran’s contribution, offered in Paris, in terms that clarified that these commitments carry economic risks for Iran:

As part of this agreement, Iran has promised to significantly reduce its air pollution over the next 15 years if it gets some financial assistance to develop cleaner technology. These steps, however, have costs and may increase the price of some products and raise unemployment in the short-term. Some people approve of Iran

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/11/05/1-concern-about-climate-change-and-its-consequences/>

taking these steps because it will lead to better air quality in Iran and will reduce global climate change. Other people say that Iran should not have made this commitment because efforts to reduce air pollution will hurt Iran's economy and only the wealthier countries who have caused most of the climate change should be required to take such steps. To what degree do you approve or disapprove of Iran taking these steps?

Almost two thirds (64%) approved, (22%, strongly), while 30% did not (10%, strongly).

## Appendix: Detailed Methodology

This study is based on a telephone poll (CATI) conducted between January 16 and 24, 2018 among a representative sample of 1,002 Iranians. The margin of error is +/- 3.1%.

All interviews were administered in Farsi. When the respondent could not answer in Farsi, an interviewer fluent in the respondent's language was used. In those cases, while the interviews were administered in Farsi, the interviewees were able to respond back in their local language. The interview was ended in the very rare cases where the respondent could not understand Farsi. All interviews were monitored in real-time by call-center supervisors.

RDD samples drawn from all landline telephones in Iran were stratified first by Iranian provinces and then according to settlement size and type. All 31 Iranian provinces were represented in proportions similar to their actual populations, as were rural and urban areas.

Province	Census (% of Population)		Achieved Sample (% of Sample)		Difference	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
East Azerbaijan	3.5	1.4	3.5	1.4	0.0	0.0
West Azerbaijan	2.7	1.4	2.5	1.2	-0.2	-0.2
Ardabil	1.1	0.5	1.1	0.5	0.0	0.0
Esfahan	5.6	0.8	5.8	0.8	0.1	0.0
Alborz	3.1	0.2	3.2	0.2	0.0	-0.1
Ilam	0.5	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.0	0.0
Bushehr	1.0	0.4	1.3	0.4	0.3	0.0
Tehran	15.6	1.0	15.4	1.0	-0.2	0.0
Chahar Mahal va Bakhtiari	0.8	0.4	0.7	0.5	-0.1	0.1
South Khorasan	0.6	0.4	0.6	0.3	0.0	-0.1
Razavi Khorasan	5.9	2.2	5.8	2.2	-0.1	0.0
North Khorasan	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.0	0.0
Khuzestan	4.4	1.4	4.6	1.3	0.1	-0.1
Zanjan	0.9	0.4	0.8	0.4	-0.1	0.0
Semnan	0.7	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.0	0.0
Sistan va Baluchestan	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.4	0.0	-0.4
Fars	4.3	1.8	4.3	1.8	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
Kordestan	1.4	0.6	1.4	1.2	0.0	0.6
Kerman	2.3	1.6	2.3	2.0	0.0	0.4
Kermanshah	1.8	0.6	1.9	0.0	0.1	-0.6
Kohgiluyeh va Bowyer Ahmad	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.0	0.0
Golestan	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.0	0.1	-0.1

Gilan	2.0	1.2	2.3	1.1	0.3	-0.1
Lorestan	1.4	0.8	1.4	0.9	0.0	0.1
Mazandaran	2.4	1.7	2.4	2.0	0.0	0.3
Markazi	1.4	0.4	1.3	0.3	-0.1	-0.1
Hormozgan	1.2	1.0	1.2	1.0	0.0	0.0
Hamadan	1.4	0.8	1.4	0.8	0.0	0.0
Yazd	1.2	0.2	1.3	0.2	0.1	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>74.0</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>74.4</b>	<b>25.6</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>-0.3</b>

When a household was reached, an adult was selected using the random table technique. An initial attempt and three callbacks were made in an effort to complete an interview with the selected respondent. The AAPOR2 contact rate of the survey was 76%. The AAPOR2 cooperation rate of was 79%. The overall response rate based on AAPOR2 was 58%.

Using AAPOR's Ninth Edition of Standard Definitions<sup>2</sup>, the outcome rates of the survey were:

Description	Frequency
I=Complete Interviews (1.1)	1002
P=Partial Interviews (1.2)	342
R=Refusal and break off (2.1)	320
NC=Non-Contact (2.2)	361
O=Other (2.0, 2.3)	39
UH=Unknown Household (3.1)	217
UO=Unknown other (3.2-3.9)	41
Not eligible (Category 4)	904
e: (Proportion of eligible units among all units in the sample for which a definitive determination of status was obtained)	0.695

Response Rate	
<b>Response Rate 1</b>	
$I/(I+P) + (R+NC+O) + (UH+UO)$	0.432
<b>Response Rate 2</b>	
$(I+P)/(I+P) + (R+NC+O) + (UH+UO)$	0.579
<b>Response Rate 3</b>	
$I/((I+P) + (R+NC+O) + e(UH+UO))$	0.447
<b>Response Rate 4</b>	
$(I+P)/((I+P) + (R+NC+O) + e(UH+UO))$	0.599

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.aapor.org/AAPOR\\_Main/media/publications/Standard-Definitions20169theditionfinal.pdf](http://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/publications/Standard-Definitions20169theditionfinal.pdf)

<b>Cooperation Rate</b>	
<b>Cooperation Rate 1</b>	
$I/(I+P)+R+O$	0.588
<b>Cooperation Rate 2</b>	
$(I+P)/((I+P)+R+O)$	0.789
<b>Cooperation Rate 3</b>	
$I/((I+P)+R)$	0.602
<b>Cooperation Rate 4</b>	
$(I+P)/((I+P)+R)$	0.808

<b>Refusal Rate</b>	
<b>Refusal Rate 1</b>	
$R/((I+P)+(R+NC+O) + UH + UO)$	0.138
<b>Refusal Rate 2</b>	
$R/((I+P)+(R+NC+O) + e(UH + UO))$	0.143
<b>Refusal Rate 3</b>	
$R/((I+P)+(R+NC+O))$	0.155

<b>Contact Rate</b>	
<b>Contact Rate 1</b>	
$(I+P)+R+O / (I+P)+R+O+NC+ (UH + UO)$	0.733
<b>Contact Rate 2</b>	
$(I+P)+R+O / (I+P)+R+O+NC + e(UH+UO)$	0.759
<b>Contact Rate 3</b>	
$(I+P)+R+O / (I+P)+R+O+NC$	0.825

### Data Quality Controls

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

**Comparison with official data:** In general, there is a close match between the figures of this survey and the most recent official census conducted by the Statistical Center of Iran in 2016.

Sex:

	Sample	Census	Difference
Male	50.5	50.7	-0.2
Female	49.5	49.3	+0.2

Age:

	Sample	Census (% of 18+)	Difference
18 – 24	16.2	14.9	+1.3
25 – 34	25.7	29.2	-3.5
35 – 44	26.5	21.9	+4.6
45 – 54	16.8	15.2	+1.6
55 – 64	9.0	10.3	-1.3
65+	5.8	8.5	-2.7

Ethnicity:

	Sample	CIA Factbook	Difference
Persian	49	61	-4
Mazani/Gilak/Shomali	8		
Turk/Azeri	21	18	3
Kurd	9	10	-1
Lur	7	6	1
Arab	1	2	-1
Baluch	2	2	0
Other	3	1	2

**Comparison with other credible sources:** There was a close match between percentage of respondents who say they follow the news programs of BBC Persian and the viewership estimates provided by BBC Persian itself:

Follow BBC Persian Satellite TV News:

	Sample	%	Approx. Population equivalent	BBC Persian's Own Estimates
Yes		22.5	12.4 million	12 million
No		77.5		

There was a close match between the self-reported vote and turnout in Iran's 2017 presidential 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 the tendency for the survey results to show a higher turnout and lower vote for the losing candidate than the actual outcome:

Voted in the 2017 presidential election:

	Sample	Official Results	Difference
Yes	76.7	73.3	+3.4
No	22.9	26.7	-3.4
Don't know / Refused	.4		

Who did you vote for in the 2017 presidential election?

	Sample	Official Results	Difference
Rouhani	56.6	57.1	-0.5
Raisi	27.0	38.3	-11.3
Mirsalim	1.7	1.2	+0.5
Hashemitaba	.9	.5	+0.4
Don't know / Refused / Other	13.8	2.9	+10.9

**Percent Match Technique for data falsification detection:** Kuriakose & Robbins' "Percent Match" technique is grounded in a tested assertion that in a 100+ variable survey of more than 100 respondents, fewer than 5% of respondents should provide identical answers on more than 85% of the questions.<sup>3</sup> Our survey included 109 variables and had 1,002 respondents.

The following result was obtained when the Percent Match technique was applied:

Percent Match	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
42.0%	1	0.1%
43.8%	1	0.1%
44.6%	3	0.3%
45.5%	1	0.1%
46.4%	5	0.5%
47.3%	3	0.3%
48.2%	14	1.4%
49.1%	12	1.2%
50.0%	12	1.2%
50.9%	16	1.6%
51.8%	29	2.9%

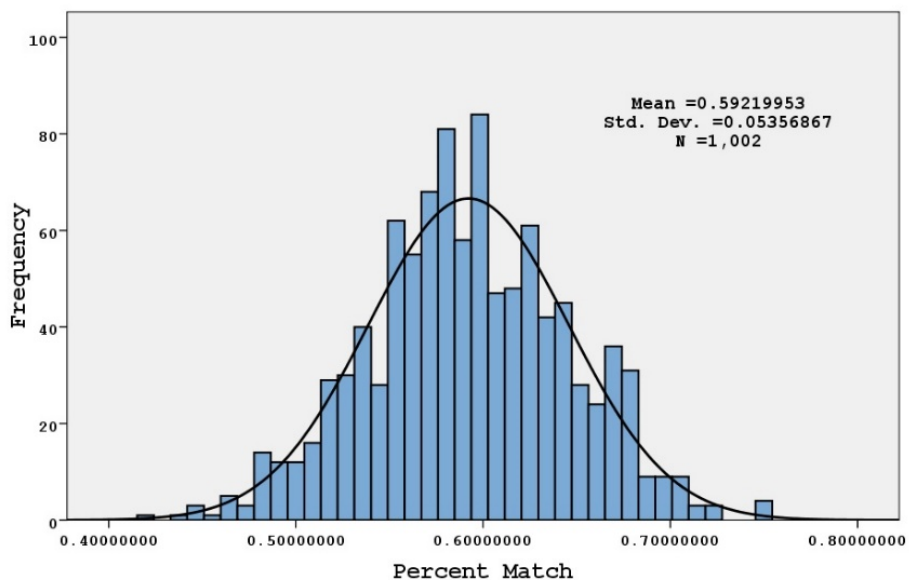
<sup>3</sup>For more information regarding the method, see:

[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)



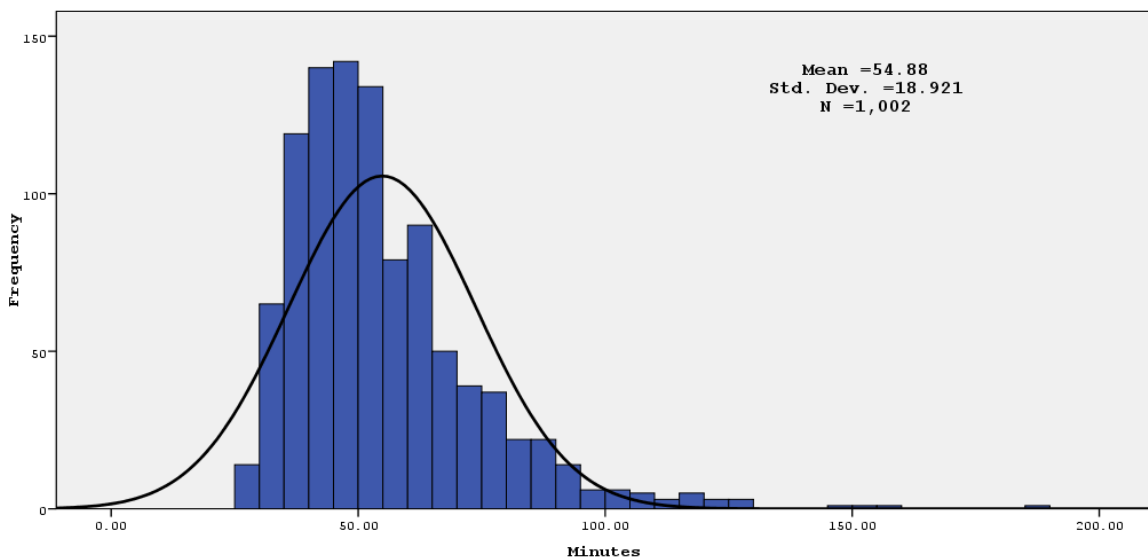
52.7%	30	3.0%
53.6%	40	4.0%
54.5%	28	2.8%
55.4%	62	6.2%
56.3%	55	5.5%
57.1%	68	6.8%
58.0%	81	8.1%
58.9%	58	5.8%
59.8%	84	8.4%
60.7%	47	4.7%
61.6%	48	4.8%
62.5%	61	6.1%
63.4%	42	4.2%
64.3%	45	4.5%
65.2%	28	2.8%
66.1%	24	2.4%
67.0%	36	3.6%
67.9%	31	3.1%
68.8%	9	0.9%
69.6%	9	0.9%
70.5%	9	0.9%
71.4%	3	0.3%
72.3%	3	0.3%
75.0%	4	0.4%
Total	1002	

The Percent Match technique showed no evidence of data fabrication in this survey. The outcome was a normal distribution. There were zero interviews with a maximum percent match of 85%, and only 4 interviews (0.5%) with a maximum percent match of 75%.



**Interview length analysis:** In another attempt to check for falsification and other irregularities, we compared the length of each interview and the time each respondent took to answer each question and compared it to the average interview length and question answer time. We were looking for patterns and anomalies that might indicate respondents were giving rapid rote answers or struggling to understand the questions. This exercise did not expose any particular irregularity.

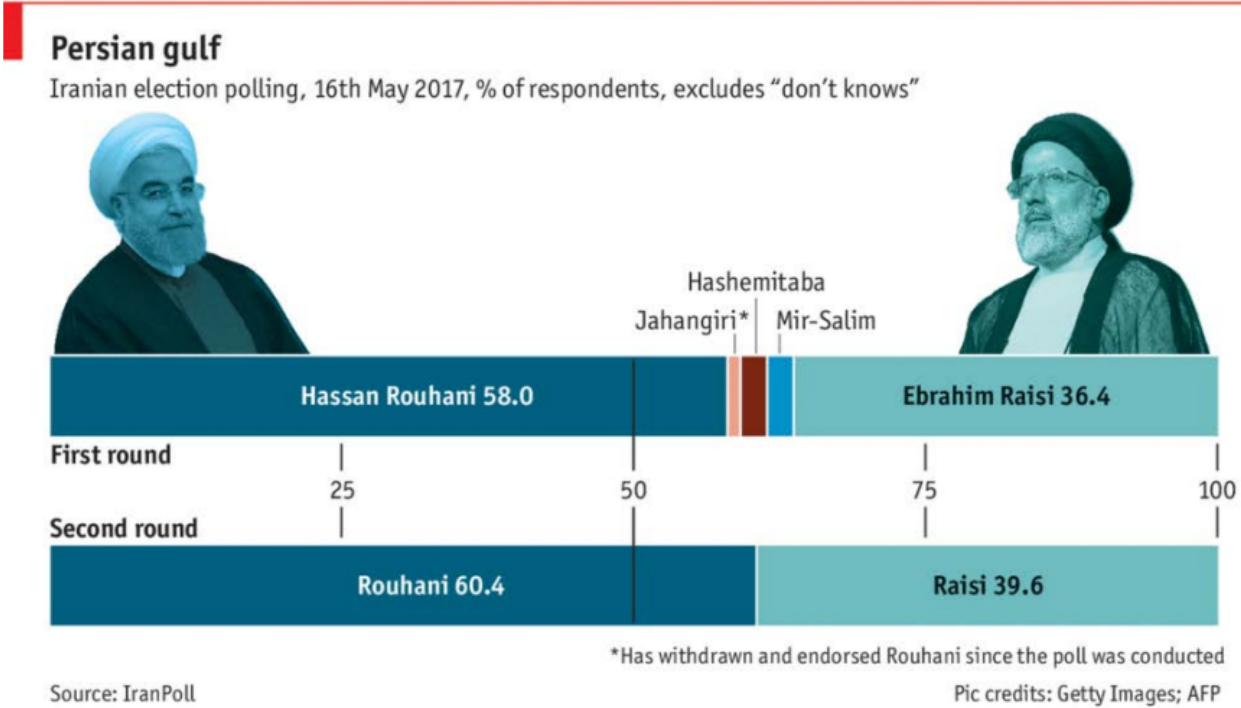
As expected, no interview took less than 25 minutes to complete. Most respondents answered individual questions and completed the full survey in about the average length of time. Longer interviews correlated with factors such as age, education, language barriers, and place of residence of the respondents, such that respondents who were older, less educated, spoke a language other than Farsi at home, and/or lived in rural areas took longer to answer each question and complete the survey than others:



**Sensitive Question Analysis.** To assess the likelihood that respondents held back their own true opinions and, instead, provided answers in line with positions articulated in Iranian state-owned news media, CISSM assessed what proportion of the sample consistently provided responses to politically sensitive questions that were in line with the stated positions of the Iranian government. Only 1.9% of the respondents provided answers that are systematically and fully in line with stated positions of the Iranian government. Almost everyone (98.1%) gave at least one response that is directly at odds with positions articulated in Iranian state-owned news media.

**Predictive power of polls from Iran:** Scientific polls have proven to have a high predictive power in Iran. Just as an example, IranPoll, the independent Toronto-based polling company that collected data for this survey, was able to predict the outcome of Iran's 2017 presidential election

in an interview with the Economist<sup>4</sup> three days before the election. IranPoll's projection was less than 2 percentage points away from the declared official outcome:



Economist.com

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2017/05/19/what-to-expect-in-irans-presidential-election-today>