

# Iranian Public Opinion, One Year after the Nuclear Deal

A public opinion study | July 2016



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CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL &  
SECURITY STUDIES AT MARYLAND

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Cover Image: UNESCO

## Introduction

On July 14, 2015, the United States, Iran, and five other world powers announced that they had agreed on a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to resolve international concerns about Iran's nuclear program. In return for Iran strengthening its commitments never to pursue nuclear weapons, sharply limiting its dual-use capabilities, and allowing greater international scrutiny of its nuclear program, the United Nations Security Council, the European Union, and the United States agreed to lift nuclear-related sanctions on Iran.

Both the nuclear deal and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani were immensely popular in Iran right after the JCPOA was announced, in part because the public thought that the terms were more generous toward Iran than they actually were, and because people had high expectations about economic and political benefits. Reactions in the United States were much more mixed. A smaller majority of the American public supported the deal, but critics in Congress came close to blocking its implementation because they worried about what Iran would do if it received a windfall from sanctions relief and hoped that tightening sanctions further could convince Iran to give up all dual-use nuclear capabilities.

It's appropriate to assess how Iranian public opinion has changed in the year since the deal was signed and the six months since sanctions relief began to be implemented, given that U.S. and European leaders frequently assert that Rouhani was elected with a mandate to improve Iran's economy by using nuclear diplomacy to get sanctions relief. Comparing shifts in Iranian public opinion over time also offers a way to test some of the predictions made by congressional critics, including that there would be a crack-down on human rights in Iran to appease the opponents of increased engagement with the West, or that giving the Iranian public only a small taste of the economic and political benefits that could flow from becoming a "normal" country would increase pressure for more sweeping changes to Iran's domestic and foreign policies.

This survey of Iranian public opinion is the sixth in a series conducted during and after the negotiations that produced the JCPOA by the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland in collaboration with the Program on Public Consultation and Iranpoll.com. Some of the same questions have been asked consistently since July 2014, when negotiations had been underway for many months, but the two sides remained far apart on some important issues. Some were reworded to reflect important contextual changes, such as public understanding about the main elements of the JCPOA and the Iranian parliamentary elections earlier this year. Some new questions have been added to find out what the Iranian public thinks about issues that have become particularly salient in recent months, such as the extent to which those who have not yet seen any economic benefits from the JCPOA hold Rouhani responsible or blame factors beyond his control. The previous reports in this series, a set of assessments about American attitudes towards nuclear diplomacy with Iran, and a collection of related articles are available at: <http://www.cissm.umd.edu/projects/security-cooperation-iran-challenges-and-opportunities>.

## **Methodology**

The study is based on a telephone poll conducted between June 17 and 27, 2016 among a representative sample of 1,007 Iranians. The margin of error is about +/- 3.2%.

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

When a residence was reached, an adult was randomly selected from within that household using the random table technique.

An initial attempt and three callbacks were made in an effort to complete an interview with the randomly selected respondents. The contact rate, defined as the proportion of random respondents who were reached and ultimately agreed to be interviewed relative to the number of respondents attempted, was 73%. The completion rate was 83%.

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



## Summary of Findings

### VIEWS OF THE NUCLEAR DEAL

#### **1. Declining Enthusiasm for Nuclear Deal (Page 8)**

While the nuclear deal is still supported by a majority, since a year ago this number has diminished, with the number approving strongly dropping by half. A contributing factor may be that, contrary to expectations, a large majority does not perceive improvements in economic conditions as a result of the nuclear deal. Continuing majority support for the deal is buoyed by some optimism that the deal will improve people's living conditions eventually.

Declining approval of the deal may also be related to increasing awareness of the concessions that Iran made as part of the deal. This may yet worsen, as a majority continues to believe incorrectly that the deal does not allow inspection of military sites under any conditions.

The salience of the nuclear deal is linked to persisting, overwhelming support for Iran's nuclear program, coupled with the belief that developing nuclear weapons is contrary to Islam, and that the Middle East should be free of nuclear weapons.

#### **2. US Seen as not Fulfilling Commitments Under Nuclear Deal (Page 14)**

In general, a growing majority of Iranians are not confident that the US will live up to its obligations under the nuclear agreement. Large majorities believe that, while the United States has lifted the sanctions it agreed to lift in the JCPOA, it is finding other ways to keep the negative effects of those sanctions and, contrary to the terms of the agreement, is trying to prevent other countries from normalizing their trade and economic relations with Iran. Three in four believe that the United States is also trying to impede legitimate nuclear cooperation between Iran and other countries. Two thirds say Iran's relations with the United States have not improved as a result of the nuclear deal.

#### **3. Other P5+1 Countries Viewed More Favorably Re: Nuclear Deal (Page 16)**

Six in ten believe that other P5+1 countries, in contrast to the US, will fulfill their obligations under the nuclear deal. Also in contrast to the US, a large majority thinks Iran's relations with European countries have already improved as a result of the nuclear deal—though this has slipped lately.

### ROUHANI AND THE 2017 ELECTION

#### **4. Ahmadinejad Gaining on Rouhani (Page 17)**

While Rouhani is still favored for the 2017 presidential election, his support has dropped below half. Former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in particular has made gains, narrowing the gap with Rouhani to eight points. Large majorities still say they have a favorable view of Rouhani and approve of his efforts to improve security and international relations. But his performance on the economy gets mixed marks, with six in ten saying the economy is bad and eight in ten saying it is not improving. Three in four say he has been unsuccessful in reducing unemployment.

### **5. Support for Rouhani Increasing Civil Liberties in Iran (Page 22)**

Two in three Iranians believe that it is important for President Rouhani to seek to increase civil liberties in Iran. However, only a small minority complains that Iranians have too little freedom. While only about a third thinks that civil liberties in Iran have increased during Rouhani's presidency, a majority voice optimism that civil liberties will increase in the coming two years.

## **SYRIA AND ISIS**

### **6. Support Declining for Cooperation with US but Not International Community on ISIS (Page 23)**

While at the time of the nuclear deal six in ten favored cooperation with the United States against ISIS in Iraq, now a majority is opposed. But eight in ten Iranians still approve of Iran participating in the international negotiations over the future of Syria. Two in three also think Iran should use its influence with key players in Syria to help secure a lasting ceasefire between Assad and the Syrian opposition not affiliated with terrorist groups.

### **7. Support for Increasing Iran's Role in the Region and Against ISIS (Page 24)**

Large majorities think Iran should increase the role it plays in the region and augment its support for groups that are fighting ISIS, which is viewed negatively by a near unanimous majority. Two thirds support sending Iranian military personnel to Syria. However, only half approve of stepping up support for the Assad government. Eight in ten approve of Iran collaborating with Russia to help the government of Bashar Assad counter ISIS.

## **VIEWS OF US AND OTHER NATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS**

### **8. Views of the United States Remain Negative (Page 26)**

Views of the United States, especially the US government, continue to be quite negative, and less than a third expect the relationship between Iran and the United States to improve over the next three years. Majorities continue to support a variety of people-to-people exchanges and confidence-building measures, but these numbers are declining. A bare majority continues to have a positive view of the American people.

### **9. Views of Other Countries and Organizations (Page 27)**

Iranians view their country's allies, notably Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Hezbollah, favorably, while already negative views of Saudi Arabia and Turkey have worsened. Views of Russia and China are generally favorable.

Western countries, with the exception of Germany, are viewed unfavorably, with Britain and the US viewed negatively by large majorities in Iran. Nonetheless, a majority thinks that it is better for Iran to increase its economic engagement with Western countries. A majority thinks that it possible for Islam and the West to find common ground.

**10. Source of News and Information (Page 29)**

Iranians obtain their news and information from a variety of sources. Two in three Iranians watch domestic television channels every day to become informed about the news. An increasing proportion of Iran's population goes regularly to the internet for news. About a third of Iranians continue to follow the news programs of VOA and BBC.

## 1. Declining Enthusiasm for Nuclear Deal

While the nuclear deal is still supported by a majority, since a year ago this number has diminished, with the number approving strongly dropping by half. A contributing factor may be that, contrary to expectations, a large majority does not perceive improvements in economic conditions as a result of the nuclear deal. Continuing majority support for the deal is buoyed by some optimism that the deal will improve people's living conditions eventually.

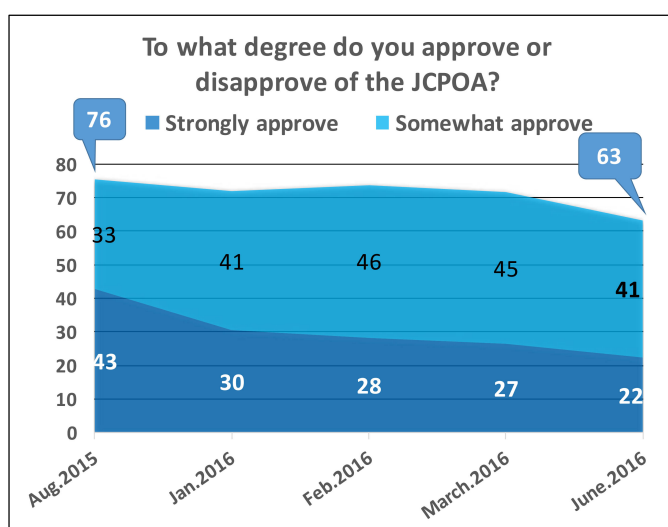
Declining approval of the deal may also be related to increasing awareness of the concessions that Iran made as part of the deal. This may yet worsen, as a majority continues to believe incorrectly that the deal does not allow inspection of military sites under any conditions.

The salience of the nuclear deal is linked to persisting, overwhelming support for Iran's nuclear program, coupled with the belief that developing nuclear weapons is contrary to Islam, and that the Middle East should be free of nuclear weapons.

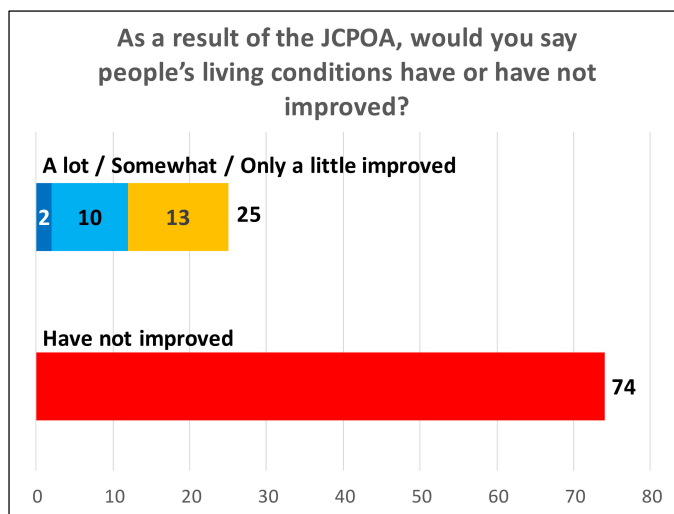
When the JCPOA deal was reached last year, 43% approved of it strongly and another 33% somewhat approved of it—a total of 76%. This total has dropped to 63%, with those approving it strongly dropping by half to 22%. Disapproval of the deal has increased by 4 points and now stands at 25%.

A factor contributing to this decline may be that improvements in economic conditions as a result of the deal have fallen far short of expectations. A year ago, when the nuclear deal was signed, 63 percent of Iranians said they expected tangible improvements in people's living conditions within a year. Today, however, three in four (74%) Iranians say that people's living conditions have not improved as result of the nuclear deal, and 13% say these have improved only a little. Only 12% say Iranian people's living conditions have improved a lot (2%) or somewhat (10%) as a result of the nuclear agreement.

Consistent with these perceptions, only 13% think that the economic situation of Iran has improved since last year. About half (49%) think the economic situation of Iran has remained unchanged, and 34% think that it has become worse since last year—more than the number who think it has improved.



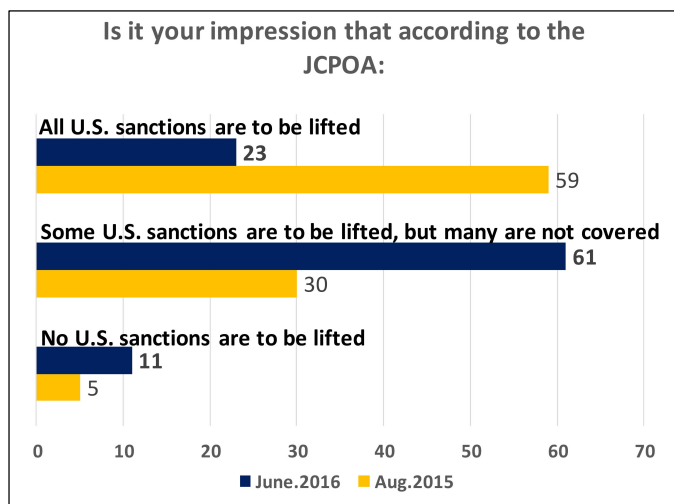
The declining approval of the deal may also be rooted in Iranian people's perceptions regarding the concessions Iran made and the benefits it was promised during the negotiations. In contrast to perceptions last year, Iranians now think that the P5+1 made fewer concessions than Iran did. While last year two-thirds (65%) believed the P5+1 made many or some important concessions to Iran, today only 29% believe that, and a majority (57%, up from 27% in August 2015) now believe the P5+1 made only a few (45%) or no (12%) important concessions to Iran.



In contrast, 51% (up from 40% in August 2015) believe that Iran made many (19%) or some (32%) important concessions to the P5+1. Those who say Iran made few or no important concessions have declined from 49% in August 2015 to only a third (33%) today.

This might be a reason that the percent saying that Iran negotiated a good deal has declined from 68% last September to 62% today, with the number saying that it made a bad deal jumping from 10% to 27%.

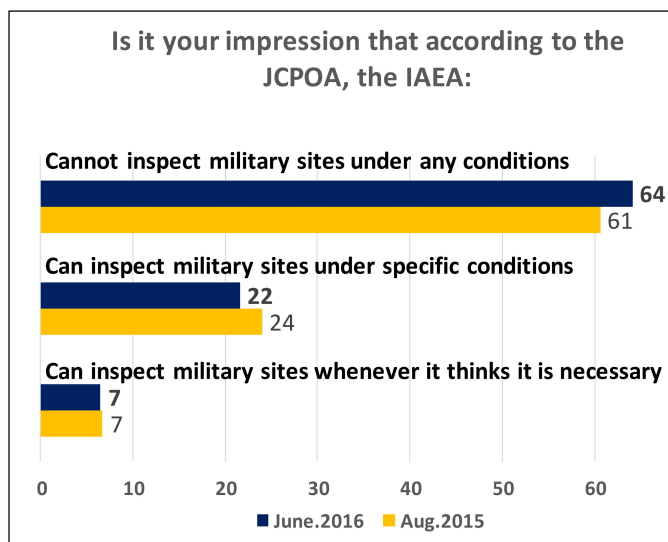
Some of the decline in approval for the JCPOA may be related to the fact that many Iranians now have a more accurate understanding of the deal's terms than a year ago. Six in ten (up from 33% in August 2015) now realize that Iran has accepted limits on its nuclear research as part of the deal, while only 31% continue to incorrectly assume that Iran has not agreed to place some restraints on its nuclear research. A majority (61%, up from 30% in August 2015) now knows that many US sanctions are not covered by the agreement and will continue; only 23% remain convinced that the JCPOA requires the US to eventually lift all of its sanctions on Iran. Strong majorities also believe that according to the deal, all EU (62%) and UN sanctions (61%) on Iran are to be lifted eventually.



A growing majority (64%, up from 61% in August 2015) believes incorrectly that under the deal the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is not permitted to inspect Iranian military sites under any conditions. Less than a quarter (22%) correctly believe the agreement allows the

IAEA to perform inspections on military sites under certain special circumstances. (Seven percent believe that the IAEA can inspect military sites whenever it thinks it is necessary.)

A majority (57%) think that the US has agreed to refrain from imposing new sanctions on Iran to replace those it is required to remove under the JCPOA, while 29% think that the US has not made this commitment. Perceptions of this aspect of the deal are very predictive of Iranians' support for the JCPOA (discussed immediately below).



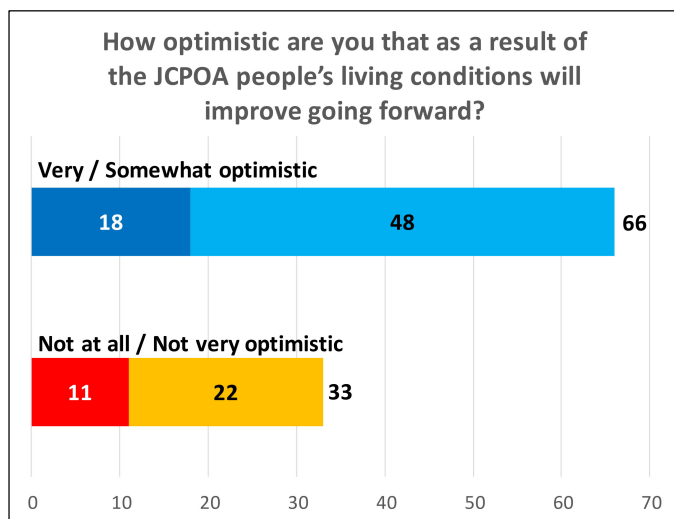
### ***Effect of Assumptions on Support for the Agreement***

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

- While 74% of those who think the United States has agreed to refrain from imposing new sanctions approve of the deal, only 43% of those who believe the United States has not made such a commitment approve of it.
- Perceptions of the IAEA's inspection and access privileges under the terms of the agreement are also strongly predictive of support for the deal—varying by over 30 points. While 72% of those who think (mistakenly) that the IAEA cannot inspect military sites under any conditions support the deal, only 49% of those who know the IAEA can perform limited inspections on military sites under specific conditions support the deal.
- Support for the JCPOA is nine points higher among those who think it calls for all U.S. sanctions on Iran to be eventually lifted. Seventy-four percent of those who believe this support the agreement, while a smaller majority (65%) of those who know that some US sanctions unrelated to Iran's nuclear program will remain in place approve of it.
- Support for the nuclear deal is also strongly correlated with perceptions about whether Iran has agreed to restrain its nuclear research. Seven in ten (71%) of those who think that Iran has *not* agreed to limit its nuclear research approve of the agreement, while a smaller majority (60%) of those who correctly believe that Iran has accepted some constraints approve of the deal—an 11-point difference.

### ***Expectation of Economic Benefits***

Despite an erosion, continuing majority support for the deal seems buoyed by some optimism that the deal will ultimately improve people's living conditions. While an overwhelming majority (74%) of Iranians says the living conditions of Iranians have not yet improved at all as a result of the deal, two-thirds (66%) indicate that they are very (18%) or somewhat (48%) optimistic that the JCPOA will eventually result in improvements in people's living conditions. About a third (33%), however, say that they are not optimistic.



Iranians continue to have some expectations about the positive effects of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). These expectations, however, have decreased substantially since their apex immediately after the nuclear deal was announced. The survey named several possible changes that may occur as a result of the deal and then asked the respondents to say whether those changes have already happened, will happen at some point, or will never happen:

- A plurality (42%) expects to see Iranians gaining greater access to foreign-made medicines and medical equipment in a year or less (down from 48% in January 2016). Twenty-six percent said two years or more and 12% said never. Only 8% said that this has already happened.
- A plurality (42%) expect to see “a lot more foreign companies making investments in Iran” in a year or less (down from 55% in January 2016). Twenty-six percent thought this would take two years or more, and 12% said the JCPOA will never result in such an outcome. Only 6% thought a lot more foreign companies are already making investments in Iran.
- About four in ten (38%) expect to see “the unemployment rate going down significantly” in a year or less (down from 50% in January 2016). Twenty-eight percent said this would take two years or more, and 19% said the JCPOA will never result in this. Only 4% thought the unemployment rate has already gone down significantly as a result of the JCPOA.
- A third (33%) now expect to see “significant improvement in the Iranian economy” as a result of the JCPOA within a year or less, down from a half (49%) in January 2016. Thirty-nine percent said that this will take two or more years, and 16% think the JCPOA will never lead to such an improvement. Only 5% think such an improvement has already happened as a result of the JCPOA.

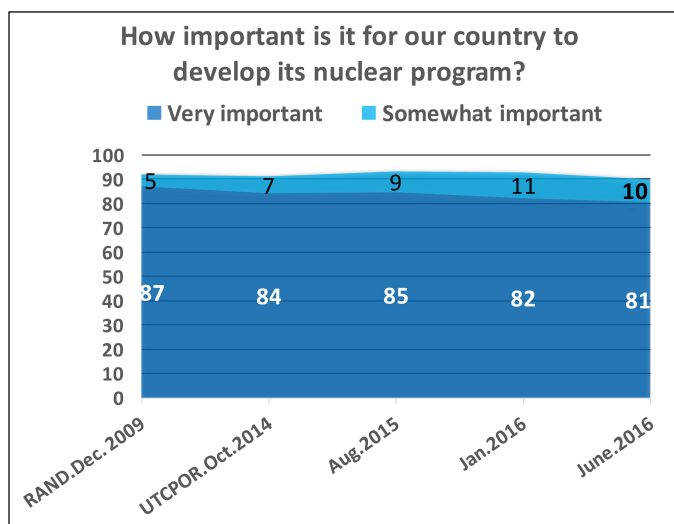


- Finally, while a year ago 63 percent of Iranians said they expected tangible improvements in people's living conditions within a year, only 3% think that this has happened. A little more than a third (37%) think such an improvement in people's economic condition will take a year or less to happen (down from 47% in January 2016). Thirty-seven percent are now of the opinion that it will take two or more years for the JCPOA to positively affect the economic conditions of Iranians, and 15% think such an improvement will never happen.

Consequently, today fewer people see the deal as a victory for Iran, but apparently many of those people have concluded that it is still an agreement that is good for both parties. While in August 2015, 37% of Iranians saw the deal as mostly a victory for Iran; today one in five (22%) regard it as such, and 19% see it as a defeat. But a clear majority (55%) of Iranians see the JCPOA as mutually beneficial for Iran and the P5+1, up from 43% in August 2015.

### ***Views of the Nuclear Program***

The salience of the nuclear deal is in part due to the significance of Iran's nuclear program to the Iranian people. Along with their endorsement of the nuclear agreement, Iranians continue to support Iran's nuclear program. More than eight in ten (81%) believe it is very important for Iran to develop its nuclear program, and another 10% believe it is somewhat important. Similar questions have been asked since 2006 and have consistently shown very high support (about 8 in 10).



A large majority of Iranians express opposition to nuclear weapons in various ways. Three in four (75%) say they support the idea of a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East when told that such a zone would require Islamic countries in the Middle East, as well as Israel, not to have nuclear weapons. Only 19% oppose it. This question has also been asked since 2006, and its results have roughly remained the same.

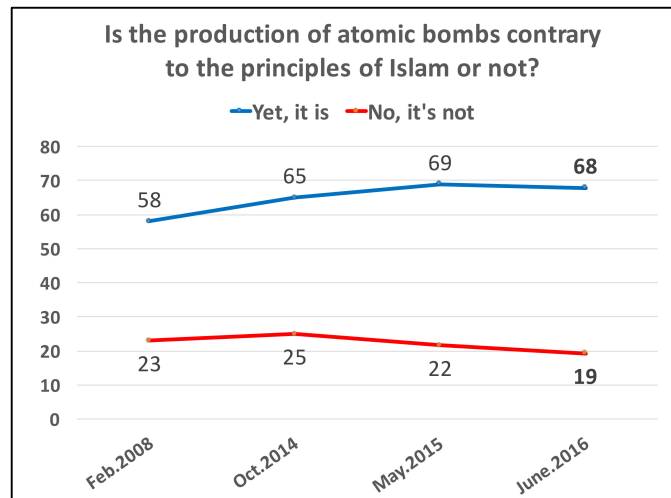
Two thirds of the Iranian public (68%) also believes that producing nuclear weapons is contrary to the principles of Islam. When asked, "As far as you know, is the production of atomic bombs contrary to the principles of Islam or not?" 68% said, "Yes, it is contrary to Islam." About one in five (19%) said, "No, Islam has not banned it."

Another variation of the same question gets the same kind of response. Asked whether according to Islam it is acceptable or unacceptable to develop nuclear weapons, 71% said it is unacceptable (acceptable, 15%).

This and similar questions have been asked in Iran since 2008. Large majorities have consistently said that production of nuclear weapons is contrary to Islam. In 2008, the majority

was 58%; in October 2014, it was 65%; and in May 2015, it was 69%. Since October 2014, those saying Islam has not banned the production of nuclear weapons has been declining, moving from 25% to 19%.

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



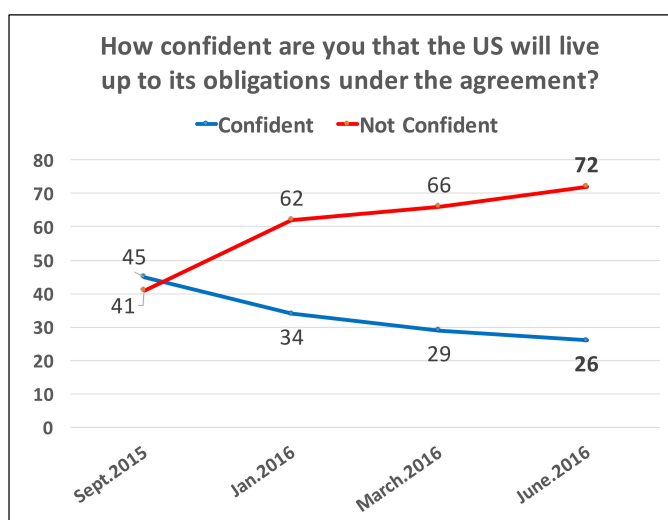
## 2. US Seen as not Fulfilling Commitments Under Nuclear Deal

**In general, a growing majority of Iranians are not confident that the US will live up to its obligations under the nuclear agreement. Large majorities believe that, while the United States has lifted the sanctions it agreed to lift in the JCPOA, it is finding other ways to keep the negative effects of those sanctions and, contrary to the terms of the agreement, is trying to prevent other countries from normalizing their trade and economic relations with Iran. Three in four believe that the United States is also trying to impede legitimate nuclear cooperation between Iran and other countries. Two thirds say Iran's relations with the United States have not improved as a result of the nuclear deal.**

An increasing majority of Iranians say they are not confident that the United States will live up to its obligations under the nuclear deal. Only a quarter (26%, down from 45% in Sept. 2015) say they are very (3%) or somewhat (23%) confident that the United States will live up to its obligations, and a large majority (72%, up from 41% in Sept. 2015) say they are not very (30%) or not at all (42%) confident.

This lack of confidence may be rooted in the perception that the United States is actively preventing other countries from normalizing their trade and economic relations with Iran. When asked whether or not the US is allowing other countries to normalize their trade and economic relations with Iran, three in four (75%) say that as far as they know, the United States is preventing other countries from normalizing their economic and trade relations with Iran. Only one in five (20%) think the United States is permitting other countries to do this.

Iranians also believe that contrary to the terms of the JCPOA, the United States is not allowing other countries to engage with Iran in the field of peaceful nuclear technology. A large majority (73%) thinks that the United States, contrary to its commitment under the deal, is trying to prevent other countries from cooperating with Iran on building new



### Article 32 of JCPOA

EU and E3+3 countries and international participants will engage in joint projects with Iran, including through IAEA technical cooperation projects, in the field of peaceful nuclear technology, including nuclear power plants, research reactors, fuel fabrication, agreed joint advanced R&D such as fusion, establishment of a state-of-the-art regional nuclear medical center, personnel training, nuclear safety and security, and environmental protection...

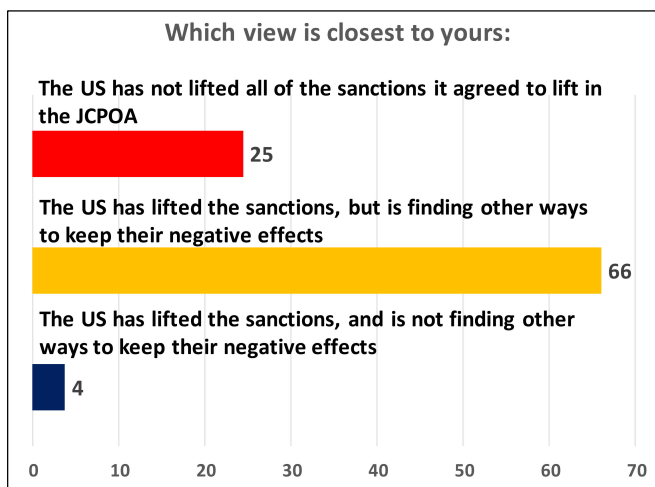
nuclear reactors and supplying Iran with nuclear fuel. Only 18% say the United States is allowing other countries to engage with Iran in this field.

When asked more generally about how the United States has performed relative to the sanctions it agreed to lift under the JCPOA, two in three (66%) say that while the US has lifted the sanctions it agreed to lift, it is finding other ways to keep the negative effects of those sanctions in place. Another quarter (25%) believe that the US has not yet lifted all the sanctions it agreed to lift. Only 4% believe that the US has both lifted the sanctions it agreed to lift in the JCPOA, and is refraining from doing anything that would keep in place the negative effects of those sanctions.

It is not, therefore, surprising that two in three (66%) think that Iran's relations with the United States have either not improved (56%) or worsened (10%) since the JCPOA was reached last year. Just 29% say they have improved.

### Article 29 of JCPOA

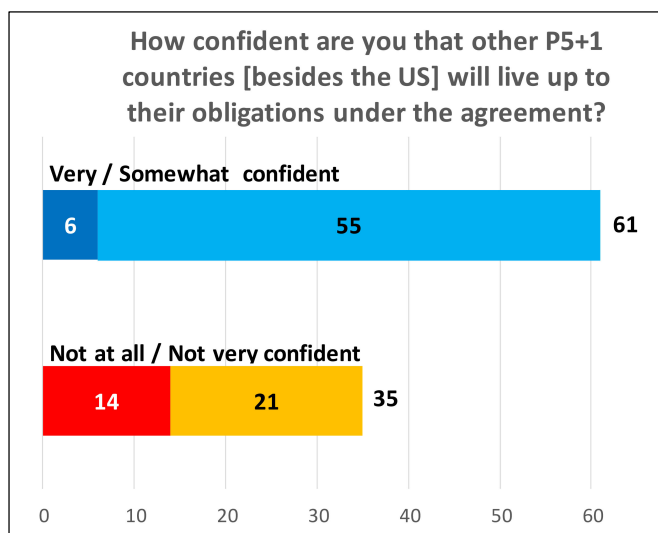
The EU and its Member States and the United States, consistent with their respective laws, will refrain from any policy specifically intended to directly and adversely affect the normalization of trade and economic relations with Iran inconsistent with their commitments not to undermine the successful implementation of this JCPOA.



### 3. Other P5+1 Countries Viewed More Favorably Re: Nuclear Deal

**Six in ten believe that other P5+1 countries, in contrast to the US, will fulfill their obligations under the nuclear deal. Also in contrast to the US, a large majority thinks Iran’s relations with European countries have already improved as a result of the nuclear deal—though this has slipped lately.**

Contrary to views of the US commitment to the JCPOA, Iranians believe other P5+1 countries (United Kingdom, France, Germany, China, and Russia) will fulfill their obligations under the deal. Asked “how confident are you that other P5+1 countries [i.e., all except the US] will live up to their obligations toward the nuclear agreement?” six in ten (61%) said they are either very (6%) or somewhat (55%) confident that they will, while a third (35%) said they are not confident. This is in stark contrast with attitudes toward the United States. As indicated in the previous section, only a quarter (26%) say they are at least somewhat confident, while 72% say they are not confident that the US will live up to its obligations under the deal.



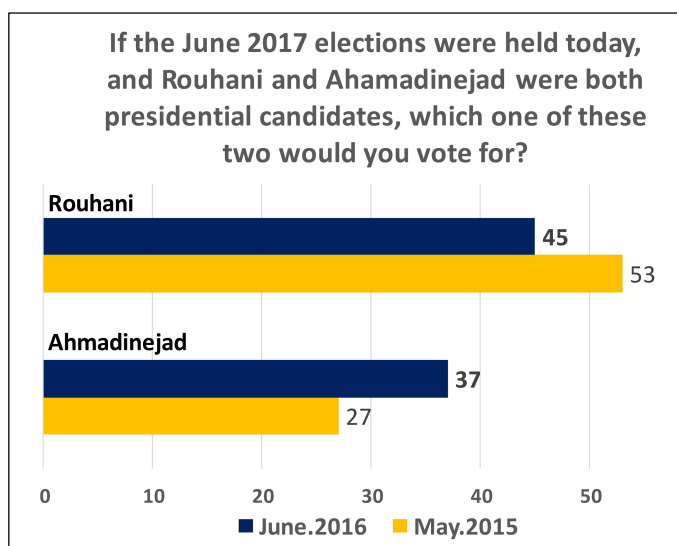
Most Iranians also believe that as a result of the nuclear agreement, Iran’s relations with European countries have generally improved. Seven in ten (69%) say Iran’s relations with European countries have improved—a lot (9%), somewhat (48%), or at least a little (12%)—as a result of the nuclear deal. A quarter (26%, up from 15% in January 2016) say that they have not improved.

In contrast, when the same question is asked about the United States, two-thirds (66%) say the nuclear deal has either not improved (56%) or worsened (10%) Iran’s relations with the United States. Only three in ten (29%) say Iran’s relations with the United States have improved as a result of the nuclear agreement.

#### 4. Ahmadinejad Gaining on Rouhani

**While Rouhani is still favored for the 2017 presidential election, his support has dropped below half. Former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in particular has made gains, narrowing the gap with Rouhani to eight points. Large majorities still say they have a favorable view of Rouhani and approve of his efforts to improve security and international relations. But his performance on the economy gets mixed marks, with six in ten saying the economy is bad and eight in ten saying it is not improving. Three in four say he has been unsuccessful in reducing unemployment.**

With Iran's June 2017 presidential elections fast approaching, President Rouhani is still favored by a plurality. Yet, Rouhani's potential opponents are becoming stronger, and the gap between him and his opponents is getting narrower. Former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in particular has been gaining on Rouhani, narrowing the gap between himself and Rouhani to only 8 points. This may be linked to people's perceptions regarding Rouhani's performance as a president, which now show some distinct weaknesses (discussed below in this section).



Last year, when Iranians were asked whom they would vote for if Rouhani and Ahmadinejad were competing against each other, Rouhani did better by two to one (53% to 27%). Since then, however, Ahmadinejad has been gaining on Rouhani, narrowing the gap by 19 points. Today the gap is only 8 points, with 45% of likely voters saying they would vote for Rouhani and 37% saying that they would vote for Ahmadinejad.

When evaluated against Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Rouhani's main opponent in Iran's 2013 presidential elections, Rouhani does better, with 53% saying that they would vote for him and 30% saying that they would vote for Ghalibaf.

Interestingly, when people were asked whom they would vote for in 2017 if all three—Rouhani, Ghalibaf, and Ahmadinejad—were the candidates, the combined votes for Ghalibaf (15%) and Ahmadinejad (31%) surpassed the votes of Rouhani (41%) by five points. If this situation actually came to pass, it would require a second round of voting.

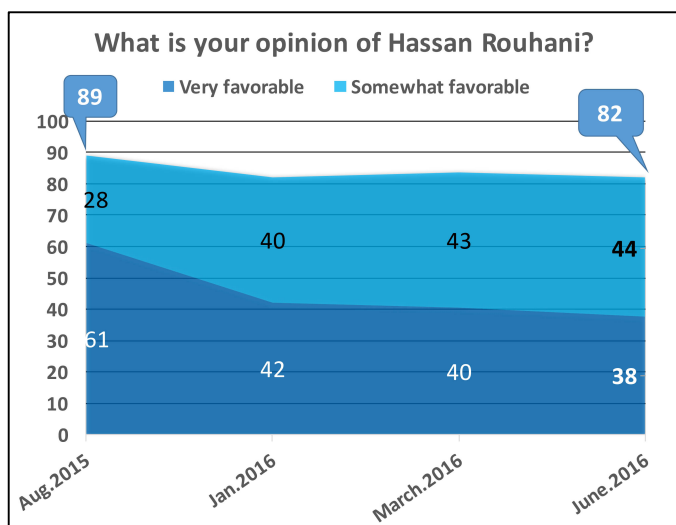
Two in three (66%) Iranians say they are very likely, and another 15% say they are somewhat likely, to vote in Iran's June 2017 presidential elections.

## Approval Ratings

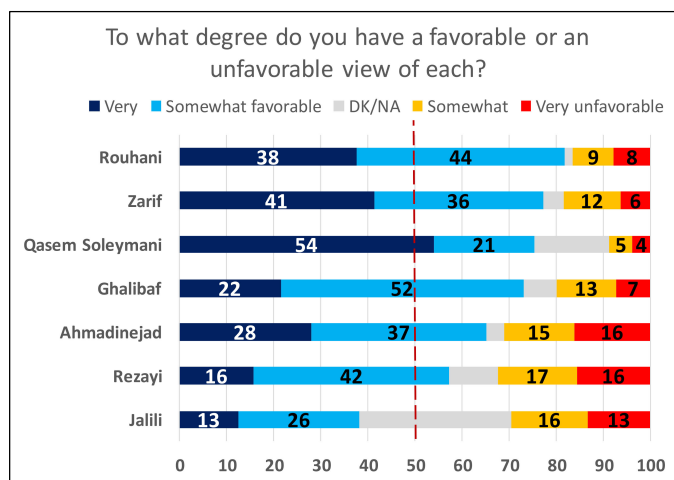
Though approval of Rouhani is high, there are important negative trends. While immediately after the signing of the nuclear deal 61 percent said they had a *very* favorable opinion of Rouhani, today only 38 percent express such feelings. However, his overall approval rating is still quite high at 82%, down from 89% a year ago.

Rouhani's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif faces a similar situation. Through he is still popular, the number of Iranians giving him a very favorable rating has dropped from 56% a year ago to 41% today. His overall approval rating has dropped from 86% to 77%.

In contrast, favorability ratings of most of Rouhani's potential opponents in Iran's June 2017 presidential elections have been improving:



- Former president Ahmadinejad, who is viewed as Rouhani's main contender if his qualifications are approved by the Guardian Council, is now viewed favorably by two-thirds (65%) of Iranians, up from 57% in January 2016.
- Favorable attitudes toward the current mayor of Tehran, Ghalibaf, who is regarded to be a moderate conservative, are up by 6 points since January 2016 and stand at 74%.
- Mohsen Rezayi, former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and another opponent of Rouhani during the 2013 presidential elections, is viewed favorably by 58%, up from 49% in January 2016.
- Saeed Jalili, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator prior to Zarif and the most outspoken critic of the nuclear agreement, is the only critic of Rouhani whose favorability rating has not significantly improved since January. Currently, 39% say they have a favorable opinion of him, and 29% say their views are unfavorable. More than a quarter (28%) say they do not know who he is.





Those who endorsed Rouhani during the 2013 elections get mixed ratings:

- Views of the former reformist president Seyyed Mohammad Khatami are divided. About half (48%) view him favorably, while half (again 48%) have an unfavorable opinion.
- MP Mohammad Reza Aref, who was Khatami's vice president and did quite well as a reformist in Iran's February 2016 parliamentary elections, is viewed favorably by 50% and unfavorably by 20%. A quarter (24%) say they do not recognize his name.
- Views of former pragmatist president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani have improved slightly since January 2016, and today two-thirds (65%) say that have a favorable opinion of him.
- MP Ali Motahari, another pragmatist who was on the list of candidates endorsed by Rouhani for Iran's February 2016 parliamentary elections and who himself endorsed Rouhani during the 2013 presidential elections, is viewed positively by 54% and unfavorably by 17%. A quarter (25%) say they do not recognize his name.

The survey evaluated the favorability of other prominent Iranian figures as well:

- Major General Qasem Soleimani, who is most known in Iran for the role he plays in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, is very popular, with 75% holding a favorable opinion of him (54%, very).
- Ali Larijani, a moderate conservative who was able to defeat Aref to become the Speaker of the Majlis (Iran's parliament), is viewed favorably by 70% (up from 62% in January 2016).
- Seyyed Hassan Khomeini, the grandson of Ayatollah Khomeini, is viewed favorably by two out of three (68%) Iranians. One in five (19%) have an unfavorable opinion of him.
- Former MP Ahmad Tavakoli, a moderate conservative from Tehran who lost his seat in the Majlis to reformists, is positively viewed by 35% and is viewed unfavorably by 22%. Four in ten (39%) say they do not know of him.

### ***Rouhani's Job Performance***

An increasing majority thinks Iran's economy is bad and has not improved since last year. Six in ten (59%) say the general economic situation of Iran is either very (29%) or somewhat (30%) bad. Only 4% think Iran's economy is very good, and another 36% say it is somewhat good. As compared to May 2015, the proportion thinking Iran's economy is bad has increased by 15 points.

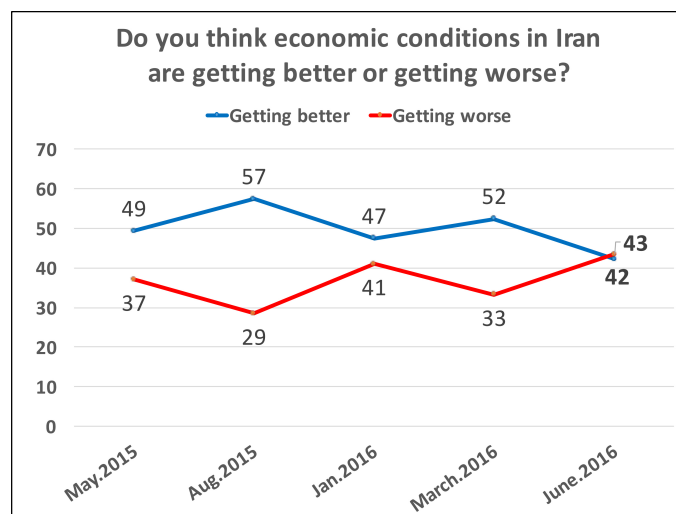
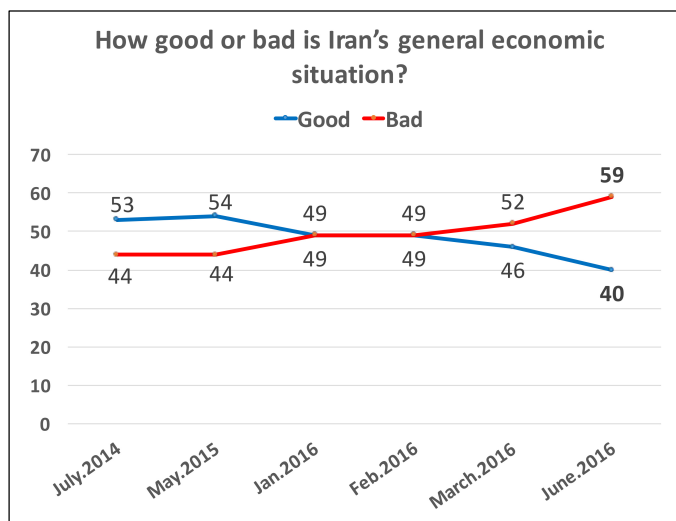
When Iranians evaluate Iran's current economic situation and compare it to last year when the nuclear deal was reached, 49% say the economic situation of the country has not changed, and another 34% say that it has gotten worse. Only 13% say that Iran's economy has improved since last year.

Iranians have also become substantially less optimistic about the future state of Iran's economy. Only 42% now think that Iran's economy is getting better (down from 57% in August 2015), and 43% think it is getting worse (up from 29% in August 2015). Nine percent say it is staying the same.

It is important to note, however, that while Iranians are becoming more critical of the state of the economy, not all put the blame on Rouhani. In fact, of those who think Iran's economy has not or is not improving, 45% say the lack of improvement is mostly due to circumstances that are beyond Rouhani's control, 27% say it is mostly due to Rouhani's economic mismanagement, and 15% say both equally.

Even so, when asked to grade Rouhani's performance on the economy, he gets mixed marks. A majority (59%, down from 71% in May 2015) say that he has been at least somewhat successful in improving Iran's economic situation, while 42% disagree. Rouhani, however, has increasingly been seen as unsuccessful in reducing Iran's unemployment. Three in four (73%, up from 53% in May 2015) say Rouhani has been very (38%) or somewhat (35%) unsuccessful in reducing Iran's unemployment rate.

Rouhani gets good marks on a number of international issues. An increasing and overwhelming majority (90%, up from 86% in May 2015) thinks he has been very (50%) or somewhat (40%)



successful in improving Iran's security. A majority (77%, down from 82% in May 2015) say Rouhani has been at least somewhat successful in improving Iran's relations with European countries. And a majority (59%) think he has been at least somewhat successful in reducing sanctions against Iran, though the prevalence of this perception has dropped 11 points since May 2015. Four in ten (39%, up from 25% in May 2016) now disagree and think Rouhani has not been successful in reducing the sanctions.

## 5. Support for Rouhani Increasing Civil Liberties in Iran

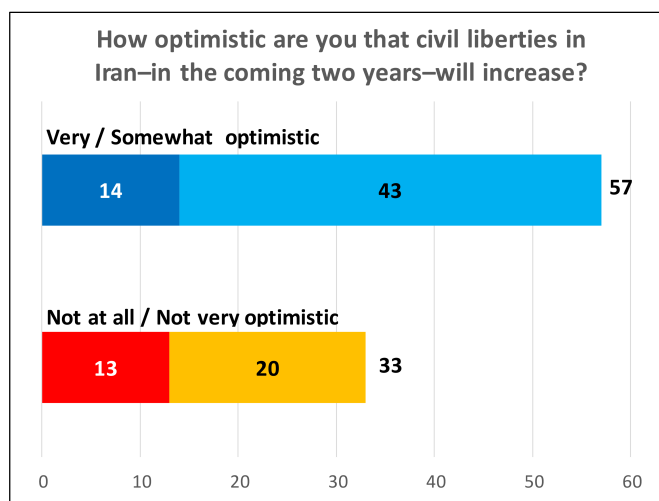
**Two in three Iranians believe that it is important for President Rouhani to seek to increase civil liberties in Iran. However, only a small minority complains that Iranians have too little freedom. While only about a third thinks that civil liberties in Iran have increased during Rouhani's presidency, a majority voice optimism that civil liberties will increase in the coming two years.**

Iranians generally believe that President Rouhani should focus on increasing civil liberties in Iran. Two in three (66%) say it is very (21%) or somewhat (45%) important for Rouhani to focus on increasing civil liberties in Iran. Only 27% of Iranians think the opposite.

While a majority (52%) says the status of civil liberties in Iran has not changed since two years ago, more think it has improved (32%) than think that it has deteriorated (7%). In general, a large majority (72%) thinks that Rouhani has been at least somewhat successful in increasing civil liberties in Iran. This may be because he is perceived as making meaningful efforts that many are optimistic will eventually result in meaningful improvements.

A clear majority (57%) of Iranians voice optimism that civil liberties in Iran will increase in the coming two years, while a third say they are not optimistic about such a development.

In general, however, only a small minority of Iranians complain that Iranians have too little freedom. Two in three (67%) say that Iranians have the right amount of freedom, and 16% think that Iranians enjoy too much freedom. Only 15% say Iranians have too little freedom.

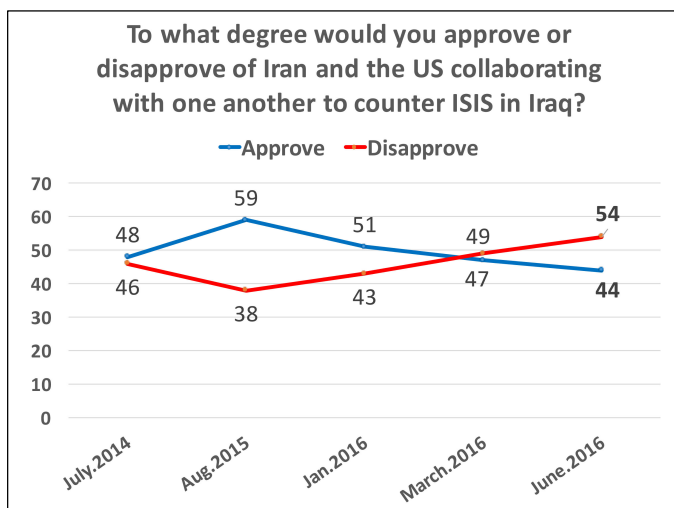


## 6. Support Declining for Cooperation With US but Not International Community on ISIS

**While at the time of the nuclear deal six in ten favored cooperation with the United States against ISIS in Iraq, now a majority is opposed. But eight in ten Iranians still approve of Iran participating in the international negotiations over the future of Syria. Two in three also think Iran should use its influence with key players in Syria to help secure a lasting ceasefire between Assad and the Syrian opposition not affiliated with terrorist groups.**

For the first time since the summer of 2014, a majority (54%) of Iranians say they would strongly (34%) or somewhat (20%) disapprove of Iran and the United States collaborating in their efforts against ISIS in Iraq.

In August 2015, six in ten (59%) approved of such cooperation between Iran and the US, right after the nuclear deal was reached. Support for such cooperation has steadily declined such that in January 2016 only a bare majority (51%) said they would endorse it. Three months later, in March 2016, support had dropped further to 47%. Today, only 44% say they would approve Iran and the United States collaborating with one another to help the government of Iraq counter ISIS. The current study, though, is the first to find a *majority* opposed to collaboration over ISIS. Declining support for such cooperation is clearly not due to any softening of Iranians' views on ISIS (see section 7 below).



Support for collaborating with the United States against ISIS is strongly correlated with perceptions of US adherence to the provisions of the nuclear deal. While an overwhelming majority (88%) of those who are *very confident* that the United States will live up to its commitments under the JCPOA approve of cooperation against ISIS in Iraq, only a tenth (11%) of those who say they are *not at all confident* express support for this cooperation.

A very large majority continues to support Iran working with others to counter ISIS. Eight in ten (81%) Iranians continue to say they mostly approve of Iran participating in international negotiations over the future of Syria, and only 11% disapprove.

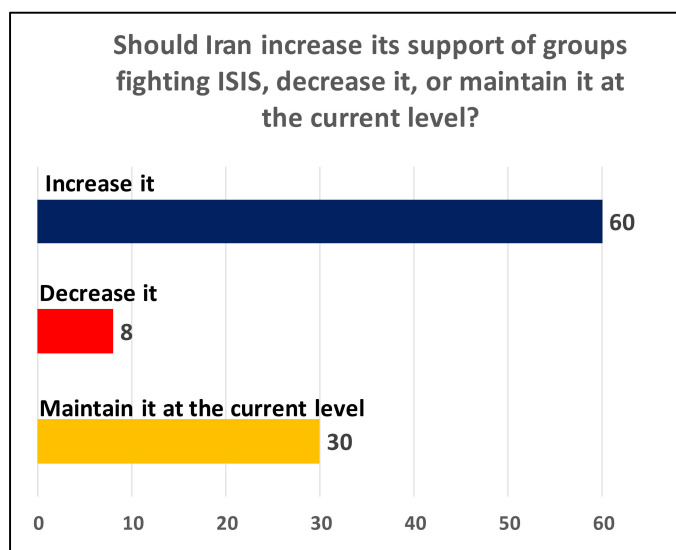
Moreover, when asked if “Iran should or should not try to use its influence with key players in Syria to help secure a lasting ceasefire between the government of Bashar Assad and members of the Syrian opposition that are not affiliated with terrorist groups like ISIS,” two in three (63%) said Iran should and only 17% said that it should not (another 11% volunteered the response that such opposition groups do not exist in Syria).

## 7. Support for Increasing Iran's Role in the Region and Against ISIS

**Large majorities think Iran should increase the role it plays in the region and augment its support for groups that are fighting ISIS, which is viewed negatively by a near unanimous majority. Two thirds support sending Iranian military personnel to Syria. However, only half approve of stepping up support for the Assad government. Eight in ten approve of Iran collaborating with Russia to help the government of Bashar Assad counter ISIS.**

Large majorities think Iran should play a strong role in the region. Two in three (68%) continue to think that Iran should “seek to increase the role it plays in the region,” and only 7% think Iran should decrease it. One in five (20%) think that Iran should maintain its current role. This is consistent with CISSM’s finding in January 2015 that four in five (80%) approved of the role Iran is playing in Syria.

A majority (60%) also thinks Iran should increase its support of the groups fighting ISIS. Only 8% said that Iran should decrease its support, while 30% think Iran should maintain its current level of support for groups fighting ISIS.



Close to all Iranians in the sample—98%—express a *very* unfavorable opinion of ISIS. Majorities continue to closely follow news regarding the conflicts in Syria (75%) and Iraq (75%). Besides the Iraq-Syria theater, news regarding the conflict in Palestine is followed at least somewhat closely by 75%; the Yemen conflict, by 59%; the conflict in Nigeria, by 40%; and the conflict in Libya, by 38%. News on the conflict in Ukraine is followed closely by only 27%.

Two in three (64%) Iranians support Iran sending military personnel to Syria to help the government of Bashar Assad. Only a quarter (26%) oppose. This is very consistent with a previous poll question that offered arguments for and against sending Iranian military personnel to Syria. In January 2016, respondents were asked:

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

In response to that question, 63% said that Iran should send military personnel to Syria, while 31% were opposed.

However, Iranians' willingness to increase support for Bashar Assad is less pronounced. A plurality (50%) thinks Iran should increase its support for Assad's government, and 31% think support should stay at the current level. Only 11% said that Iran should decrease its support.

In contrast to current misgivings about Iran and the United States collaborating in their efforts against ISIS in Iraq, an overwhelming majority (84%) approve of Iran and Russia collaborating with one another to help the government of Bashar Assad counter ISIS (44%, strongly). Only 12% oppose such cooperation.



## 8. Views of the United States Remain Negative

**Views of the United States, especially the US government, continue to be quite negative, and less than a third expect the relationship between Iran and the United States to improve over the next three years. Majorities continue to support a variety of people-to-people exchanges and confidence-building measures, but these numbers are declining. A bare majority continues to have a positive view of the American people.**

The United States, and the US government in particular, continue to be viewed negatively by a large majority of Iranians. Seven in ten (73%, up from 67% in August 2015) have an unfavorable opinion of the United States (59%, very), and about a quarter (27%) have positive views. Views of the US government are even more negative. Nine in ten (87%) hold unfavorable attitudes toward the US government (73%, very unfavorable), and only about a tenth (11%) is positive, essentially unchanged since a year ago.

Iranians have grown more pessimistic about the future of Iran-US relations. While a third think that over the next three years Iran's relations with the United States will improve (31%, down from 38% in January 2016), almost half (46%) think they will stay the same, and 19% think that relations will worsen.

Despite their negative attitudes toward the United States, most Iranians in general support their country and the US engaging in various confidence-building measures, but this support is also declining. The most popular measures are those with the strongest people-to-people aspects, notably "to have more Americans and Iranians visit each other's countries as tourists" (80% support) and "to provide more access for each other's journalists" (74% support, down from 81% in July 2014). Similarly, 68% (down from 74% in July 2014) support having "greater cultural, education and sporting exchanges," and 68% support greater trade. Lastly, 62% (down from 67% in July 2014) support the governments of Iran and the United States having "direct talks on issues of mutual concern." Opposition to any of these proposals does not rise above 34%.

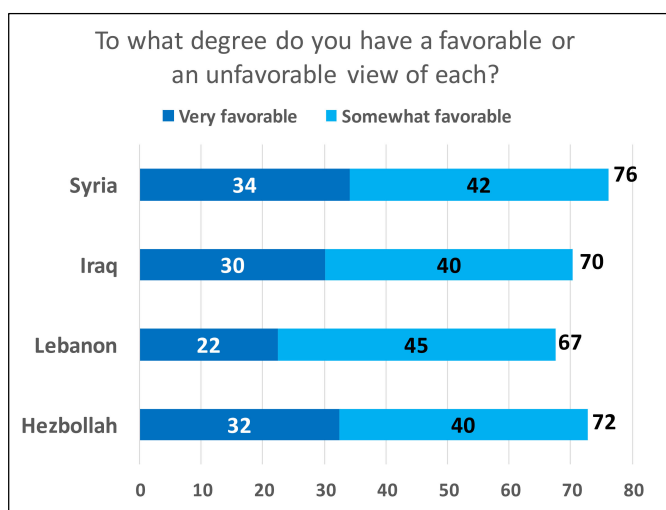
The widespread support for people-to-people steps to improve relations is partly reflected in Iranians' attitudes toward the American people, which are warmer than views of the country or its government. A majority (51%) has positive feelings toward the American people, while 46% have unfavorable views.

## 9. Views of Other Countries and Organizations

**Iranians view their country's allies, notably Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Hezbollah, favorably, while already negative views of Saudi Arabia and Turkey have worsened. Views of Russia and China are generally favorable.**

**Western countries, with the exception of Germany, are viewed unfavorably, with Britain and the US viewed negatively by large majorities in Iran. Nonetheless, a majority thinks that it is better for Iran to increase its economic engagement with Western countries. A majority thinks that it possible for Islam and the West to find common ground.**

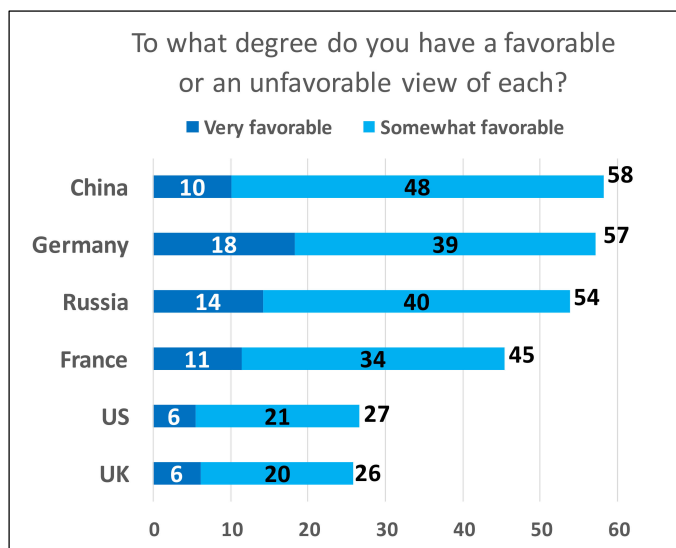
Iranians continue to hold quite positive views of Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Hezbollah. Three-quarters (76%) continue to view Syria favorably (34% very favorably). Only 22% view it unfavorably (10%, very unfavorably). More than two thirds (70%) have a favorable view of Iraq (30%, very). A third (29%) has an unfavorable view (17%, very unfavorable). Lebanon is viewed favorably by two-thirds (67%); about a third (30%) has an unfavorable view of Lebanon. Hezbollah in Lebanon, however, is viewed more favorably than Lebanon itself. Three in four (72%) have a favorable opinion of Hezbollah (32%, very favorably), and about a quarter (23%) views it unfavorably (16%, very unfavorably).



Attitudes toward Saudi Arabia have become increasingly negative. Eight in ten (81%) have very unfavorable opinions of Saudi Arabia (up from 59% in May 2015), and another 9% have somewhat unfavorable views. Only 9% say they have a favorable opinion of Saudi Arabia. Views of Turkey have also become more negative. Six in ten (59%) have an unfavorable opinion of Turkey (up from 52% in May 2015), while 40% have favorable views.

The two non-western P5+1 countries—Russia and China—are viewed favorably by majorities of Iranians. A majority (58%, up from 45% in August 2015) views China favorably, while 39% view it unfavorably. Russia is also viewed favorably by a majority (54%), while 43% view it unfavorably.

Among the Western countries that were evaluated, Germany fares best, with 57% having a favorable opinion and 40% having an unfavorable opinion. A majority (52%) has unfavorable views of France, while 45% have favorable views. A large majority (72%) continues to have an unfavorable opinion of the United Kingdom; only about a quarter (26%) have positive feelings. This is similar to the attitudes toward the United States, with 73% saying that they have an unfavorable opinion of the United States (59% very unfavorable).



Iranians seem closely divided – or, perhaps, of two minds – about the United Nations. About half (48%) are unfavorable toward the United Nations, while 47% say they have favorable views toward it.

Despite their generally negative attitudes toward Western countries, a large majority (61%) thinks Iran should increase its economic engagement with them, while only 9 percent think this should decrease (keep current level: 19%).

Furthermore, as a broader principle, a clear majority thinks that it is possible for Islam to find common ground with the West. Respondents were offered a choice between two positions about the relations between Islamic civilization and Western civilization:

- *Islamic and Western religious and social traditions are incompatible with each other and conflict between the two is inevitable; or*
- *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.*

When asked which position was closer to their own, a 59% majority chose the second position, that it is possible to find common ground. Less than a third (30%) chose the position that conflict is inevitable. This result is similar to the response in December 2006, when this exact question wording was originally asked to an Iranian sample. At that time 54% said it was possible to find common ground, while 24% said conflict was inevitable. Responses to this question have been largely stable over a decade's time.

## 10. Source of News and Information

**Iranians obtain their news and information from a variety of sources. Two in three Iranians watch domestic television channels every day to become informed about the news. An increasing proportion of Iran's population goes regularly to the internet for news. About a third of Iranians continue to follow the news programs of VOA and BBC.**

Iranians get their news from a variety of sources. A large majority (65%, down from 71% in May 2015) say they watch domestic television channels every day to become informed about the news, and another 23% say they do so at least once a week. Only 5% say that they never watch domestic television channels.

Use of the internet for news has been on a rapid rise. A quarter (25%, up from 17% in May 2015) say they use the internet every day, 17% say they use it at least once a week, and 12% say they use it less frequently to become informed about the news. Only 45% (down from 56% in May 2015) say they never use the internet for news.

Satellite television, which allows Iranians to access news produced by sources outside of Iran, is viewed at least once a week by about a third (28%) for news. Another 6% say they watch satellite television less frequently. Two in three (66%), however, say they never watch satellite television channels to become informed about the news. A third (31%) continue to say they follow the news programs of BBC Farsi and VOA, but a majority (69%) says they do not follow those news programs.