

Iranian Public Opinion on the War in Ukraine and Nuclear Options

A public opinion interim report | August 2022



Nancy Gallagher, Ebrahim Mohseni & 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 <https://cisssm.umd.edu/>.

IranPoll

IranPoll® is an independent full-service opinion research company headquartered in Toronto, Canada, focusing exclusively on Iran. As a subdivision of [VoxNations](#), IranPoll conducts research on Iranian public opinion using various modes of data collection including telephone polling, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and online panel (B2B and 51k-member B2C). VoxNations operates multiple polling call centers with 130 calling stations and conducts over 170,000 interviews per year in Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Relying on scientific opinion research methods, IranPoll was able to provide the most accurate predictions of Iran's June 2021 and May 2017 presidential election, which was respectively published by [Newsweek](#) and [The Economist](#) before the initial official results were declared.

About CISSM's series of public opinion surveys in Iran

CISSM researchers have been conducting western-style public opinion polls in Iran since 2008. They began conducting semi-regular surveys on nuclear matters, regional security, domestic politics, economics and other topics in 2014, and have fielded 18 survey waves in Iran to date. Previous reports in this series, along with the questionnaires and related articles, can be found at: https://cisssm.umd.edu/research-impact/projects/security-cooperation-iran-challenges-and-opportunities#iran_surveys. This is the first Update issued in the series. We plan to release future updates when we have fresh data on a subset of time-sensitive issues that we want to release quickly, with more in-depth analysis of some topics to be included in the next full report we release.

Methodology

The study is based on a probability sample nationally representative telephone survey. The fieldwork for this survey was conducted in June and July 2022 (June 22 – July 3, 2022), among a representative sample of 1014 Iranians. Unless specified otherwise, the results are based on the full sample and the margin of error is +/- 3.1%.

The samples were RDD samples drawn from all landline telephones in Iran. The AAPOR2 contact rate of this survey was 84%, the cooperation rate was 74%, and the overall response rate was 59%. Further details about the data collection methodology is available here: <https://www.iranpoll.com/method>.

Acknowledgement

The completion of this study was supported partially by funds from [VoxNations Schelling Grant](#) in Support of *Primary Data Collection*.

Cover Image: Farhad Safari (Mehr News Agency)

Introduction

The Ebrahim Raisi administration has been in power in Iran for about a year. Because it was closer than President Rouhani had been to Iran's religious establishment, supporters expected that its policies would be marked by better coordination and more flexibility in making needed hard decisions. While a large majority of the public was eager to see the back of the outgoing Rouhani administration and was hopeful that his departure would bring about some positive change, many aspects of Iran's situation during the later Rouhani years are taking on a structural look—notably the still-unrestored Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), sweeping U.S. sanctions, and recurring bouts of inflation that now dovetail with rising inflation internationally.

The current survey is an update, rather than a comprehensive check on Iranian public attitudes. This interim report covers findings on two unfolding security challenges – Iran's nuclear program and the war in Ukraine – and their potential interconnections.

At the time of fielding, frustration with slow progress on JCPOA restoration was increasing discussion among some elites regarding whether Iran should seek security benefits from having nuclear weapons if it could not get economic benefits promised in return for actions to boost confidence that its nuclear program is purely peaceful. Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine in February, in violation not only of the U.N. Charter's rules regarding transborder aggression and territorial sovereignty, but also of the security assurances Russia gave Ukraine in 1994 when it relinquished the nuclear weapons it inherited from the break-up of the Soviet Union, has generated speculation that Iran and other countries who fear attack might decide that they need nuclear weapons to avoid a similar fate. Iran is also one of many non-Western countries finding that they can neither fully take a side nor remain completely neutral regarding this war. Iran's economic, military, and political ties with Russia have grown since President Trump withdrew from the JCPOA, reimposed sanctions on Iran, and threatened secondary sanctions against countries and companies who traded or invested in Iran. At the same time, many of Iran's current leaders remember being attacked by Iraq in the 1980s and wanting international support.

Key findings of this survey include the following:

–A large and stable majority of Iranians still rejects the idea of having nuclear weapons, despite lower knowledge of the fatwa declaring them to be un-Islamic and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty's prohibition. A large majority also say that if Iran chose this path, it would succeed.

–Slightly under half approve of the JCPOA; fewer than half now expect it will be restored. Large majorities say that Iran's economy would improve if the JCPOA is restored and stay roughly the same as it is now if that does not happen.

–Enthusiasm for economic self-sufficiency has cooled, while interest in trade has increased. For the first time, more Iranians want to strengthen relations with Europe than with Asia.

– A clear majority views Russia's attack on Ukraine as illegitimate aggression, not justifiable self-defense, but the public is divided about whether Iran should do more to oppose the war. A majority currently holds an unfavorable view of Russia -- a reversal since September 2021.

Summary of Findings

Attitudes toward Iran Developing Nuclear Weapons

A stable majority rejects the idea of Iran developing nuclear weapons, whether or not they are reminded that this is the government’s official position. This remains the case even though awareness of the fatwa against nuclear weapons, and of Iran’s membership in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), is not as widespread as in the past.

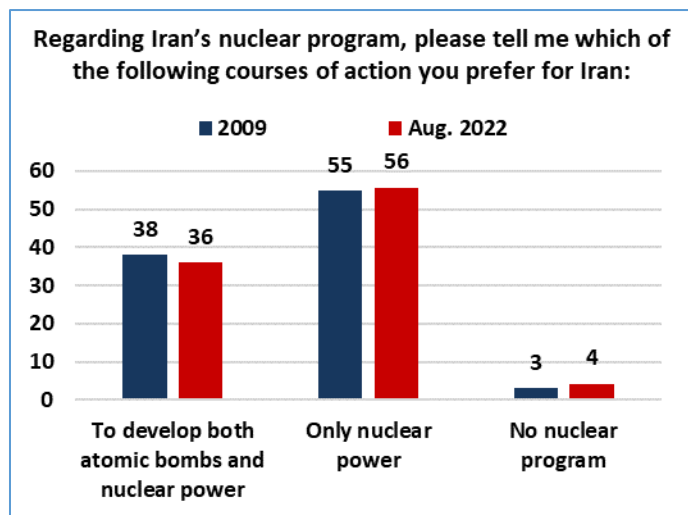
Only about a third of the public would like to see Iran develop nuclear weapons, largely for a deterrent effect. While nearly half think that if Iran decides to take this path, the United States and other countries would try, including through military action, to stop it, only about one in ten believe that such efforts would ultimately prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. About half think it would take a year or less for Iran to acquire nuclear weapons if it decides to do so.

Some influential Iranians have indicated that they now believe that if Iran cannot get the benefits it was promised for accepting special limits and inspections under the JCPOA, it should consider leaving the NPT. Some outspoken Iranian analysts have gone further, suggesting that Iran should leave the NPT and pursue nuclear weapons. This raises questions about whether the Iranian public has also become more supportive of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. To explore this, we repeated a question we last asked to Iranians in 2009, during Ahmadinejad’s presidency:

Regarding Iran’s nuclear program, please tell me which of the following courses of action you prefer for Iran: to develop both atomic bombs and nuclear power; to develop only nuclear power; or to have no nuclear programs?

A majority of 56% wanted nuclear power only; 36% wanted both atomic bombs and nuclear power; and only 4% wanted neither. This result is almost identical to 2009, when 55% wanted nuclear power only, 38% wanted both, and 3% wanted neither. This is true even though awareness of Iran’s membership in the Non-Proliferation Treaty has declined to 55% today, compared to 69% in 2006. Further, the sense that nuclear weapons are counter to Islamic teachings is also down: 55% today, compared to 66% as recently as 2019.

To measure what effect a reminder of Iran’s official position on nuclear matters might have, a different half-sample was asked a variation on this question, hearing this preface: “As you may know, Iran’s position is that it should be able to develop its nuclear program for purely civilian purposes and that Iran does not seek to produce atomic bombs.”



Hearing Iran's position did have a modest effect, in the 6-8 point range. In the group that got the reminder, 64% supported developing only nuclear power while 30% wanted both nuclear power and atomic bombs.

To see whether news about the war in Ukraine has affected attitudes about whether Iran should develop nuclear weapons, we checked whether those Iranians who had heard or read "a lot" or "somewhat" about the war in Ukraine had different views about what type of nuclear program Iran should have from those who said, "not a lot" or "not at all" (see below). We found a clear relationship that ran in the opposite direction from what some have predicted: the more closely a respondent is following the war, the less likely they are to say that Iran needs nuclear weapons. Only 28% of those who have heard or read a lot about the war in Ukraine favor an atomic bomb for Iran, compared with 33% of those who answered "somewhat," 36% who said, "not a lot," and 49% of those who replied, "not at all." Those Iranians who are oblivious to the war in Iran are the only group where a plurality (49%) favor having nuclear weapons, and they are also the only group where a sizeable number (9%) did not have an opinion or chose not to answer.

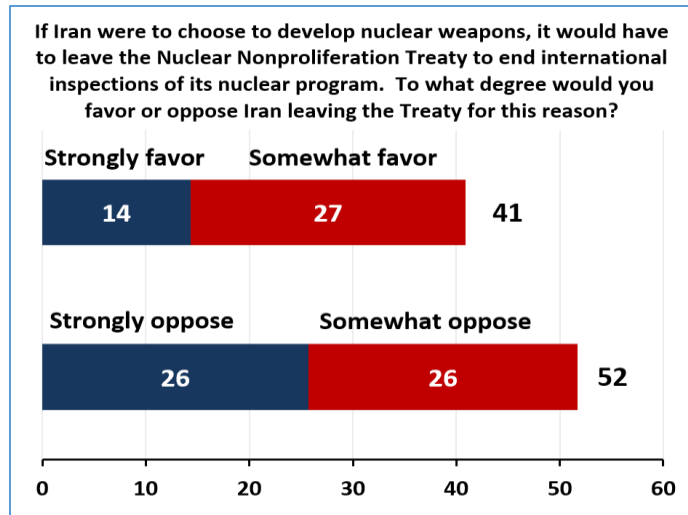
Iranian public opinion on the nuclear issue is neither fragile nor easily influenced. Its structure was clear twelve years ago and does not derive solely from knowledge of government policy, religious strictures, or legal norms. Providing cues about official policy makes only a six-point difference now, compared with an eighteen-point gap between the number who expressed support for nuclear weapons in the 2009 question without the policy preface and the 20% who responded that way when asked with the policy cue in 2008. This suggests that if Iranian government policy were to change absent a worsening of Iran's threat environment that warranted popular re-evaluation, the shift might face substantial public disapproval.

All respondents who wanted Iran to develop nuclear weapons (whether they had been reminded of the government's position or not) were asked to say in their own words why they took this position. A clear majority of this subgroup (56%) said that they wanted the deterrence value of nuclear weapons: i.e., to prevent other countries from attacking Iran (34%); because nuclear-armed countries are threatening Iran (14%); because nuclear weapons would increase Iran's security (5%), or because nuclear weapons might be needed in a future situation (3%).

A much smaller number (23%) of those who wanted nuclear weapons offered some version of a more basic national-power rationale: to show Iran's power (13%), to increase defense capabilities (7%), or to be less dependent on other powers (1%).

Eleven percent of those who wanted nuclear weapons asserted that other countries having such weapons was reason enough. Finally, 4% saw developing nuclear weapons as just another milestone in Iran's scientific development—a step that would make Iran more advanced.

All respondents were asked questions about the possible consequences of an Iranian decision to pursue nuclear weapons. First, they were reminded that “If Iran were to choose to develop nuclear weapons, it would have to leave the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty to end international inspections of its nuclear program.” They were then asked how much they would favor or oppose leaving the NPT for this reason. A 52% majority said they would oppose leaving the NPT (26% strongly), while 41% said they would favor leaving. Interestingly, only 14% strongly favored leaving, suggesting that some who support developing nuclear weapons have a weak sense of what this would entail internationally.



Next, respondents were told to “assume that Iran does withdraw from the NPT in order to develop nuclear weapons.” They were asked their best guess about how “the United States and some other countries” would react. They were offered three options—that these countries would:

- Take various military and non-military actions against Iran and ultimately prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons; or
 - Take various military and non-military actions against Iran, but not be able to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons;
- or that
- No country would take any serious military actions against Iran and Iran would be able to develop nuclear weapons.

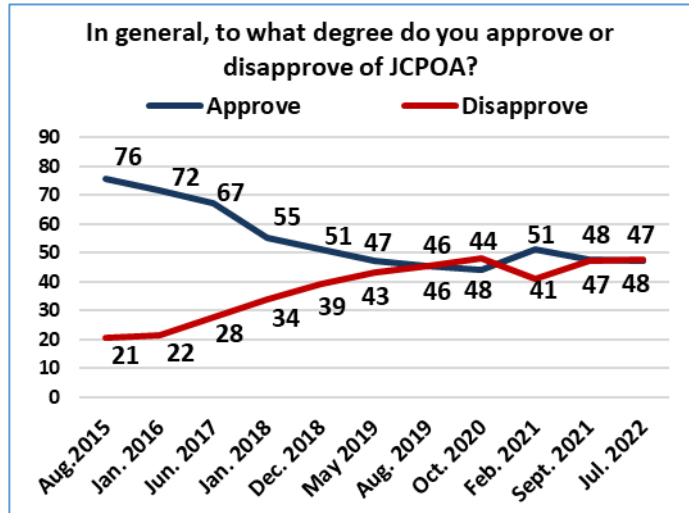
Only 13% predicted that Iran would ultimately be prevented from developing a nuclear weapon by other countries’ actions. The most common answer (45%) was that, while various military and other actions would be taken against Iran, Iran would succeed in its goal. Thirty-five percent thought that Iran would succeed without any country taking any serious military actions against it. In other words, fully 80% of respondents believed that, whether outside resistance was robust or not, Iran would develop nuclear weapons if it decided to do so.

When asked how long it would take for Iran to have nuclear weapons if it decided to get them, a quarter projected less than 6 months, and almost half (47%) thought it could be accomplished in one year or less. Thus, the number who thought Iran could obtain nuclear weapons in a year or less was more than 10 points greater than the number who actually wanted this choice. A lesser 30% thought it would either take longer than that (24% estimated one to three years, and 6% thought over three years) or that Iran would not succeed (7%). Those who say Iran should pursue nuclear weapons are only slightly more likely than those who say it should not to estimate

that this could be accomplished quickly. For example, 30% of those who favor Iranian nuclear weapons say that would take less than six months, compared with 23% of those who support a purely peaceful nuclear program.

Attitudes Toward the JCPOA

Slightly under half of Iranians approve of the JCPOA, unchanged since September 2021. Expectations that the JCPOA will be restored have dropped since then—now less than half think this likely. Almost two in three say that if the JCPOA were restored, the United States would not fulfill its obligations. Views of other P5+1 countries are less skeptical.

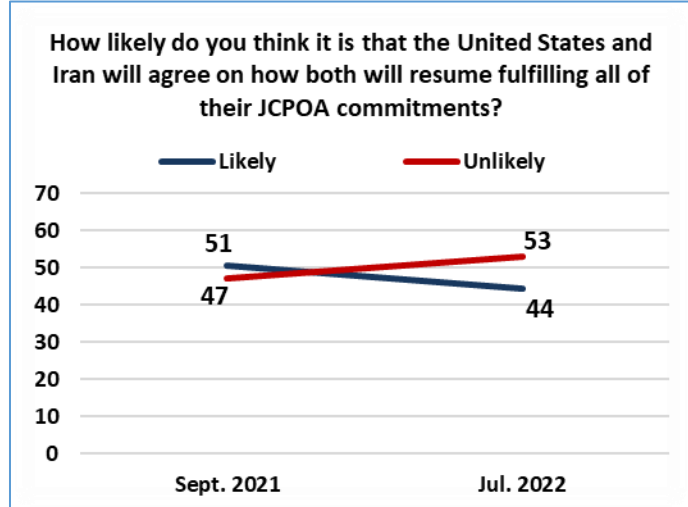


A modest majority continues to think that Iran should hold firm to its negotiating positions and see if Europeans can persuade the United States to be more flexible. Were the negotiations to fail, a majority would assign most of the blame to the P5+1 countries, but four in ten say they would assign a significant share of the blame to Iran as well.

While public expectations are low, a three-in-four consensus thinks that a successfully restored JCPOA would help Iran’s economy. Were the JCPOA to collapse and Iran continued to expand its civil nuclear program, three in five expect Iran’s economy and international trade would at least stay the same as they are now. Over four in ten are optimistic that relations with China would actually improve in this scenario.

Approval of the JCPOA remains a little below the halfway mark, with 47% approving and 48% disapproving—almost identical to last September (48% approving). In February 2021, after Biden’s inauguration, JCPOA approval was slightly higher at 51%. Before that, the last time approval was above half was December 2018 (51%). Overall, shifts in U.S. policy (real or apparent) over the last three years have done little to depress or stimulate public feeling about the JCPOA—nor has the election of a new Iranian president.

What has changed are expectations that the JCPOA will in fact be restored. Under half (44%) now think this will occur, compared to 51% in September 2021. In the current survey only 7% thought it *very* likely that “the United States and Iran will agree on how both will resume fulfilling all of their JCPOA commitments”; 23% said this was not at all likely.



Expectations that a restored JCPOA would be faithfully observed by the other parties are low, particularly for the United States. Sixty-five percent thought that “If the United States rejoins the JCPOA” it was unlikely “that the United States will live up to its obligations under the nuclear agreement.” While this result is unchanged from September 2021, those who think U.S. compliance is *very* unlikely have risen from 37 to 41%.

Attitudes toward “other P5+1 countries besides the U.S.” are more sanguine, though still below majority levels of trust. Nearly half (47%) thought it likely that these countries would fulfill their part of the bargain, virtually the same as in September 2021. These attitudes have recovered somewhat from the 2019 experience, when Iranians lost hope that continued European support for the JCPOA in the face of the US withdrawal would lead to economic benefits. (In 2019 only 30% thought other P5+1 countries would live up to their JCPOA obligations.) A modest majority continues to think that Iran should hold firm to its positions and see if the Europeans can persuade the United States to be more flexible. Respondents were given a reminder of the negotiation’s state of play and then offered three options, as follows:

As you may know, after the United States withdrew from the JCPOA and began reimposing sanctions on Iran, Iran started exceeding some JCPOA limits and reducing cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, the international organization that monitors Iran’s nuclear activities. For the last few months, negotiators have been working on a plan for the United States and Iran to both return to full compliance with the JCPOA. They have agreed on many points, but there are still some disagreements. Which view is closest to yours?

–Both sides, including Iran, should show flexibility and get the JCPOA restored soon.

–Iran should let the Europeans keep trying to get the United States to show flexibility, while holding firm to our own position.

–Iran’s new government should not try to have the JCPOA be restored.

A 53% majority opted for holding to Iran’s positions, while letting European countries attempt to deal with the United States. Only a quarter (25%) preferred that Iran and the United States both

show flexibility. There was scant support for walking away: just 15% said Raisi’s government should abandon the JCPOA. These results are virtually identical to those in September 2021.

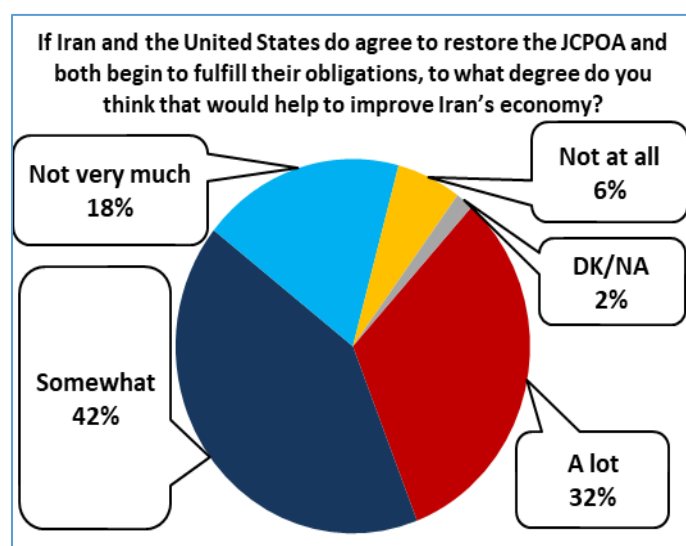
Confidence that other countries would fulfill their JCPOA commitments is highly correlated with support for reciprocal flexibility. A majority (58%) of those who have at least some confidence that the United States would honor its obligations want both sides to be more flexible. Nearly half of this group says that if the negotiations fail, they would blame Iran and the United States equally. Twice as many Iranians with high confidence in compliance by the other P5+1 countries want Iran to show flexibility as say it should stand firm (61% and 29%).

To assess potential political costs if JCPOA negotiations fail, we asked: “Based on what you know about the negotiations between Iran and P5+1 countries, if these negotiations were to fail to produce a final agreement would you only blame the P5+1, mostly blame the P5+1, mostly blame Iran, only blame Iran, or would you blame both sides equally?” Interestingly, the number who would assign much of the blame to Iran was four in ten (40%), with 30% blaming both sides equally, 7% mostly blaming Iran, and 3% blaming Iran exclusively. When we asked the same question in May 2015, only 22% said that if those negotiations failed, Iran would bear half or more of the blame. Even among the majority who would currently blame the P5+1 countries, just 13% would assign them sole blame while 42% would mostly blame them.

A separate half-sample was asked this question with one difference: instead of the P5+1 countries, they heard “the United States.” We wondered whether spotlighting the United States might reveal different attitudes, but it largely did not. Fifty-seven percent would assign most or all blame for failure to the United States (P5+1 countries: 55%). Twenty-one percent were ready to give the United States *all* the blame (P5+1 countries: 13%). Twenty-eight percent said they would blame the United States and Iran equally if negotiations failed (P5+1 countries: 30%), while 8% said they would mostly blame Iran and 3% would solely blame Iran.

Future Expectations With, or Without, a Restored JCPOA

Though Iranians are not holding their breath in expectation of a restored JCPOA, three in four do say that mutual compliance would improve Iran’s economy. Asked “If Iran and the United States do agree to restore the JCPOA and both begin to fulfill their obligations, to what degree do you think that would help to improve Iran’s economy?” 74% said it would help at least somewhat, and 32% said it would help a lot. Optimism has declined slightly since last September. Then, 80% thought a restored JCPOA would help—6 points more—and 35% thought it would help a lot—3 points more than hold this view now.

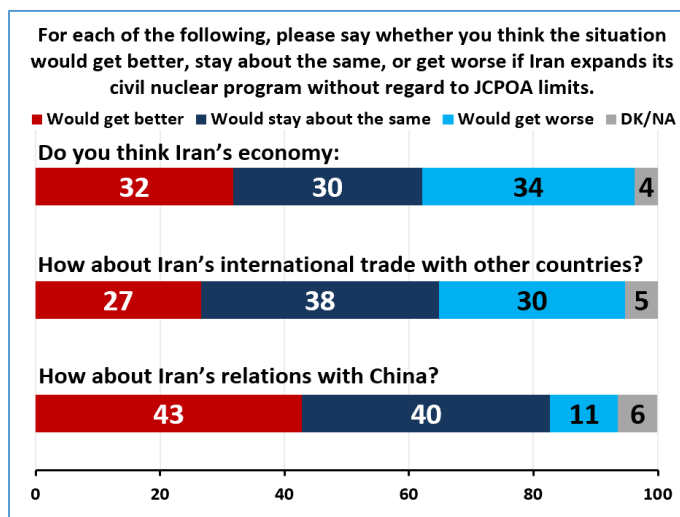


This, however, is not the outcome most Iranians are expecting. Fifty-three percent now consider JCPOA restoration unlikely (23% not at all likely), compared with 44% who think it likely (7% very likely). This represents a reversal from last September, when a plurality was optimistic about restoration (44% somewhat likely, and 6% very likely), while 47% were not.

To explore Iranians’ views about the future they are largely expecting—one without the JCPOA—we asked three questions about a scenario in which the JCPOA was gone and the Raisi administration pursued what the West views as high-risk behavior:

I would like you to think about what might happen if, for whatever reason, the JCPOA is not restored and the Raisi administration continues to expand Iran’s civil nuclear program. For each of the following, please say whether you think the situation would get better, stay about the same, or get worse if Iran expands its civil nuclear program without regard to JCPOA limits.

First, they were asked about Iran’s economy in this scenario. The most common answer (34%) was that the economy would get worse, while 32% thought it would get better and 30% thought it would stay the same. This may be slightly more pessimistic than in September 2021, but the differences are trivial (within the margin of error). Expectations for economic continuity if negotiations fail are reasonable given that assessments of Iran current economic situation have remained stable since October 2020, with 52% saying it’s very bad, 24% calling it somewhat bad, and 23% deeming it good or very good. Thus, for the time being, popular fear of economic decline if Raisi fails to restore the JCPOA does not seem to be a major domestic political problem.



Next respondents were asked about Iran’s trade with other countries. While a majority of Iranians (55%) still say it is better for Iran to strive to achieve economic self-sufficiency than to increase trade with other countries, that group has shrunk by ten points since September 2021, while the number favoring more trade has risen from 32% to 43%. Thirty-eight percent thought that Iran’s trade with other countries would stay about the same, while 27% thought it would get better; 30% thought trade would worsen without a restoration of the JCPOA. On this question as well, respondents were more sanguine than in September, when 35% thought trade would stay the same (3 points less), 22% thought it would improve (5 points less), and—notably—40% thought it would get worse (10 points more than currently). Recent efforts to expand trade with various non-Western countries may have contributed to this result.

Iranians do recognize the benefits of having good relations with both European and Asian countries, though. In May 2019, we started asking whether Iran should try more to strengthen its

diplomatic and trade relations with European countries such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, or with Asian countries like Russia, China, and India. Sentiment shifted steadily in favor of turning East, from 49% for Asia and 42% for Europe in May 2019 to 54% for Asia and 39% for Europe in September 2021. Now, support for re-engagement with Europe is up to 45%, while those prioritizing relations with Russia, China, and India have dropped to 42%.

Finally, respondents were asked how relations with China would fare in a world with no JCPOA and an expanding Iranian civil nuclear program. Here, there was a distinct current of optimism; the most common answer (43%) was that Iran-China relations would get better. Forty percent thought relations would stay about the same; only 11% thought they would worsen.

Attitudes Toward the War in Ukraine

Attention to the war in Ukraine is fairly high, with three in five Iranians saying they have heard or read a lot or somewhat about it. Only three in ten accept the view that Russia is conducting a military action as a form of self-defense; rather, a majority views Russia as violating the principle that no country should invade and occupy another, which they see as tied to Iran's own security.

At the same time, the public is divided as to whether Iran should avoid taking a position or should do more to oppose the war. A majority rejects the Russian argument that it intervened to protect Russian speakers from mass persecution. However, the Russian argument that Ukraine was about to join a military alliance against it—and also the canard about the United States supposedly developing banned chemical weapons in Ukrainian labs— both gain majority credence.

Fewer than one in ten blame Ukraine itself for the war. About three in ten blame Russia; a similar number blame the United States, Western countries, or Europe; and one in seven blame both sides. Asked whether in general they view Russia favorably or not, a majority is now unfavorable—a reversal since September 2021. Views of Ukraine are divided.

For Iranians, the war in Ukraine is neither lost in the torrent of concerns close to home, nor simply blocked out by state media. Sixty-one percent of Iran's public said they have heard or read "somewhat" (49%) or "a lot" (12%) about the war in Ukraine; 18% said "not much;" and 20% said "not at all." The four in five who said they had heard something about the war were then asked about their views and perceptions.

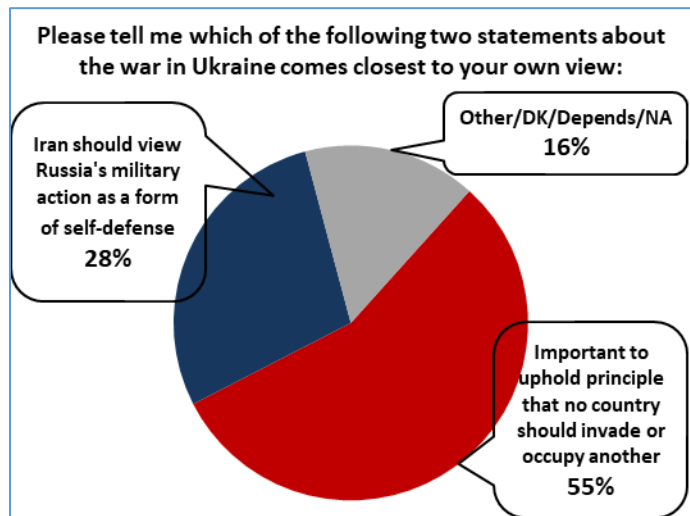
Respondents were asked which of two broad statements was closer to their view:

–It is extremely important for Iran's long- term security to uphold the principle that no country should invade and occupy another. This principle applies equally to any country, and Russia is no exception.

or

–The United States and NATO have been increasing their influence over Ukraine in ways that endanger Russia's security in the long run. Iran should view Russia's military action as a form of self-defense.

A clear majority (55%) chose the statement that Russia is violating the principle that no country should invade another; less than three in ten (28%) preferred the position that Russia had acted in legitimate self-defense. Notably, a fairly high 16% said “it depends” or declined to answer.



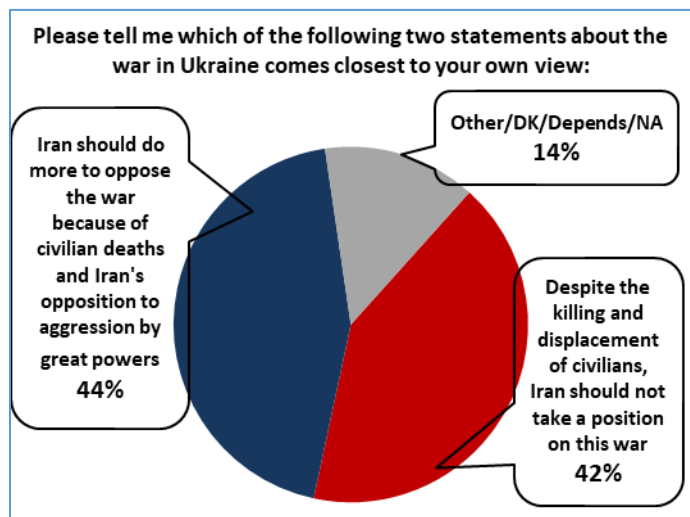
News source made a significant difference in attitudes here: 67% of those who get a lot of their news from satellite television channels said that the invasion was wrong on principle, compared with a smaller majority (53%) of those who get a lot of their news from domestic television stations. Those who relied heavily on state-run media were more likely than those who watched satellite news to say that the war was justified self-defense (39% versus 19%), but both those figures are relatively small.

The war may create cognitive dissonance for Iranians. The public is divided on whether Iran should avoid taking a position or do more to oppose the war. Again, respondents were offered two positions:

–It is unfortunately true that the war in Ukraine is killing many civilians and forcing others to leave their homes. But since Iran is not directly threatened and also since it is not clear who is to blame for the war, Iran should not take a position on this war.

–Iran should do more to oppose the war in Ukraine, not only because it is causing the death of many civilians and forcing many to leave their homes, but also because Iran has always opposed the aggression of great powers against smaller countries.

Here, about as many preferred neutrality (42%) as favored Iranian action to help the people of Ukraine and reinforce international norms (44%). This finding is noteworthy because the Iranian government has not officially taken sides, but U.S. officials believe it plans to provide drones for the Russian military.



To better understand how receptive or skeptical Iran’s public may be to propaganda efforts supporting Russia in the war, respondents were offered three common claims, as follows: “Now I am

going to read you some statements regarding the situation in Ukraine. As I read each statement please tell me if you think the statement is right or wrong? Definitely or probably?”

The statement evoking a responsibility to protect was rejected by the largest number:

–Russia had to invade to protect people of Russian heritage living in Ukraine from being hurt or killed by the Ukrainian government.

Only 27% thought this statement likely to be right (definitely right, 5%). Three in ten (58%) thought it was wrong and 24% said it was definitely wrong.

A piece of disinformation involving the United States did much better:

–The U.S. is assisting Ukraine in developing banned chemical and biological weapons in secret Ukrainian laboratories.

Fifty-five percent thought it likely to be right (definitely right, 20%), while only 28% thought it wrong (definitely, 10%).

The most widely believed statement went as follows:

–Russia had to attack Ukraine because it was about to join a military alliance against Russia.

Sixty-two percent thought this statement likely to be right (definitely, 25%) and only 23% thought it wrong (definitely, 8%).

Whereas the statement about chemical and biological weapons is 100% false, yet believed by a solid majority, this statement is worded ambiguously enough to leave some room for interpretation. NATO has promised to admit Ukraine at some point in the future, but it was clear before the invasion that this could not happen anytime soon. Ukrainian military ties to the United States and some other NATO members have been strengthening since Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea, but they fall far short of a formal alliance.

Attitudes toward these statements correlate strongly with the respondents’ source of news. While a majority (63%) of those who follow Iranian domestic TV “a lot” or “somewhat” to become informed about the war in Ukraine believe that “the U.S. is assisting Ukraine in developing banned chemical and biological weapons in secret Ukrainian laboratories,” only 43% of those who are not frequent followers of Iranian domestic TV believe this statement. Likewise, those who get their news about the war in Ukraine at least “somewhat” from Iranian domestic TV are substantially more likely than those who do not follow Iranian domestic TV to believe that “Russia had to attack Ukraine because it was about to join a military alliance against Russia” (70% vs 52%). The same pattern can be observed regarding the statement that “Russia had to invade to protect people of Russian heritage living in Ukraine from being hurt or killed by the Ukrainian government,” with 4 in 10 of those who use the Iranian domestic TV “a lot” and 27%

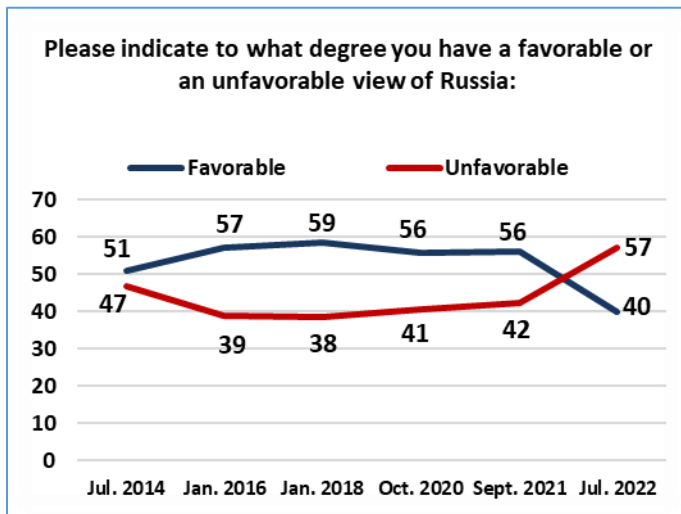
of those who “somewhat” use it to get their news on Ukraine, hold that opinion as compared to only 21% of those who do not use Iranian domestic TV to get news about the war in Ukraine.

Assigning Blame

To better understand the range of views among Iranians about the origins of the war in Ukraine, respondents were asked to reply in their own words to the question, “Who or what do you blame most for the start of the war in Ukraine?” There was no majority view; their answers were quite widely distributed.

Fewer than one in ten blamed Ukraine itself for the war: 6% named Ukraine and another 1%, President Zelensky. Three in ten (31%) blamed Russia, with 26% naming the country and another 5% naming President Putin. Slightly fewer, 27%, blamed the United States (21%), “Western countries” (3%), or NATO (3%), while an additional 2% blamed Europe without any sort of transatlantic mention. Beyond these, one in seven (15%) blamed both sides in some combination: thus 12% blamed both the United States and Russia and 3% blamed both Russia and Ukraine. Those who use Iranian domestic TV “a lot” to get their news about the war in Ukraine are significantly more likely than the population as a whole to blame the United States (38%), Western countries (6%), and NATO (3%) for the war.

Earlier in the survey, before any mention of the war, respondents were asked whether they had generally favorable or unfavorable views of Russia, Ukraine, and several other countries. Attitudes toward Russia have reversed since it invaded Ukraine. In September 2021, a majority had a favorable impression; now, a majority is unfavorable. Positive ratings of Russia have dropped 16 points, from 56% to 40%; unfavorable views have increased from 42% to 57%. Thirty-two percent currently hold a *very* unfavorable view—a number not seen since May 2015.



For the first time in this series of surveys, respondents were asked their impression of Ukraine. Attitudes were divided, with 45% favorable and 48% unfavorable. Substantially more had a very unfavorable view (23%) than had a very favorable view (10%).

Confidence in President Raisi

Public confidence in Raisi’s ability to accomplish many of his goals is eroding, most notably on curbing inflation and curbing corruption. At the same time, he has areas of strength

with the public, especially on whether he can improve Iran's relations with neighboring countries.

At the start of Raisi's term, our September 2021 survey launched a set of measures to track public confidence in the new president's capacity to achieve his stated goals. They included:

- to significantly lower inflation
- to significantly lower unemployment
- to root out corruption
- to increase Iran's trade with other countries
- to improve Iran's relations with neighboring countries
- to improve Iran's relations with the West

Respondents were asked:

Think about the next four years of Raisi's term. How confident are you that Raisi will be able to do each of the following things that I will read to you? For each one, please say whether you are very confident, somewhat confident, not very confident or not at all confident that he can do it.

While Raisi's term began with moderate to high public expectations, confidence that he will succeed has eroded. Between September and the current survey, confidence has fallen for five out of six areas—the exception being improvement of Iran's relations with neighboring countries. Those saying they are *very* confident did not exceed 23% for any objective. In September 2021, the greatest number expressing high confidence in an area was 34%.

Most strikingly, confidence that the new administration can tame inflation has dropped by 23 points (from 73 to 50%); now only half are at least somewhat confident this can happen. Confidence that Raisi can lower unemployment has dropped 12 points (from 67 to 55%), but remains at majority levels.

Before his election, Raisi's signature issue as head of the judiciary was to root out corruption. He put some prominent individuals behind bars who were thought to have a measure of impunity. This greatly enhanced his reputation. However, the presidency has not been good for this issue so far. Confidence that he can root out corruption has dropped 13 points (from 74 to 61%).

In the election Raisi pledged to increase Iran's international trade, partly within the region and partly with the East. The bloom is only slightly off the rose in this case. Confidence has dropped 8 points but is still high (from 75 to 67%).

As for improving relations with Western countries, public expectations were low to begin with, and so the modest drop in confidence of 5 points is not so meaningful (from 39 to 34%).

Finally, Raisi's efforts to improve relations with neighboring countries have been quite visible, and this remains a strong point with the public. Confidence is quite stable here (77 points in both September 2021 and the current survey).