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Majority Of Iranian Public Approves Pursuing Agreement On Nuclear Program

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Majority Of Iranian Public Approves Pursuing Agreement On Nuclear Program However, Most Assume That U.S. Would Lift All Its Sanctions on Iran

PR Newswire

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COLLEGE PARK, Md., June 23, 2015 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- In a new survey of the Iranian public, a solid majority supports pursuing a deal on Iran's nuclear program. When presented a summary of key points on which negotiators for the P5+1 have already reached an understanding with Iran, a clear majority (57%) expressed support for a deal under which Iran, for a number of years, would limit its centrifuges and nuclear stockpile to the level needed for nuclear energy and accept more extensive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency in return for the P5+1 accepting Iran to enrich uranium, lifting of economic sanctions, and expanding nuclear cooperation with Iran. Only 15 percent were opposed; another 28 percent were equivocal or did not know.



Support for the deal may be complicated since attitudes about making a deal on the nuclear program are related to assumptions about whether all US sanctions would be lifted and how quickly Iranians would experience various benefits from sanctions relief. Currently 63 percent of Iranians assume that according to the understanding, all US sanctions on Iran are to be lifted eventually, not just those related to Iran's nuclear activities. Only 23 percent believe that some US sanctions would continue. Asked what Iran's position should be, 51 percent say that unless the US agrees to remove all of its sanctions, Iran should not agree to a deal, while 45 percent say Iran should be ready to make a deal that removes some US sanctions and all UN and EU sanctions. In this context, support for making a deal is substantially lower among those who believe that the terms of the understanding do not necessarily call for the US to remove all sanctions compared with those who believe that a final agreement would require complete sanctions removal (51% compared with 64%).

Iranians also express high expectations that a nuclear deal, with the removal of sanctions, would produce significant effects within a year. Majorities say they would expect to see better access to foreign medicines and medical equipment (61%); significantly more foreign investment (62%); and tangible improvement in living standards (55%), all within a year.

The telephone poll of 1,009 Iranians was conducted May 12-28, 2015, by the University of Tehran's Center for Public Opinion Research and IranPoll.com, an independent, Toronto-based polling organization, working in conjunction with the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland. The margin of error was +/- 3.2%.

Ebrahim Mohseni, a Senior Analyst at the University of Tehran Center for Public Opinion

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Research and a Research Associate at Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM), comments, "While there is majority support for continuing to pursue a deal, it is sustained in part by expectations that besides the UN and the EU, the US would also relinquish all its sanctions, that the positive effects of the deal would be felt in tangible ways fairly quickly, and that Iran would continue to develop its civilian nuclear program. President Rouhani may have difficulty selling a deal that would significantly deviate from these expectations."

Iranians have grown more optimistic about the prospects for a deal. Seven in ten presently believe it is very (22%) or somewhat (49%) likely that "the current talks... will eventually result in a deal that is agreeable to both sides," compared with fewer than five in ten who thought last July that President Rouhani would be "very successful" (18%) or "somewhat successful" (30%) in reaching an agreement with the P5+1. If a deal is reached, a large majority expects that the UN Security Council will lift sanctions in accordance with the deal (83%). A smaller majority (61%) expects that the United States will do so as well, even though 57 percent of Iranians say they distrust the P5+1 countries and 70 percent still have an unfavorable view of the United States.

Iranians think the Majlis, Iran's Parliament, should have a say on a nuclear deal. Three in four (77%) believe that Majlis should have a role in deciding whether or not Iran would accept a deal, and four in five (81%) say that the Majlis should be able to prevent a deal that it finds at odds with Iran's national interest.

Support for Iran's nuclear program continues to be very strong. Asked how important it is for Iran to develop its nuclear program, a near universal 95 percent said it is either very important (83%) or somewhat important (11%). This is essentially unchanged across various polls conducted in Iran since 2006.

This support for Iran's nuclear program appears to be driven by a combination of symbolic and economic considerations. While a large majority (83%) says that the nuclear program is important "because it shows that Iran will not surrender to Western governments and forego its rights," 58 percent says that a more important reason is "because it helps meet Iran's energy and medical needs."

Some Iranians—20 percent—believe that one of the reasons Iran has a nuclear program is because it wants to develop a nuclear weapon. Similarly, 22 percent believe that producing nuclear bombs is acceptable under Islam.

But an overwhelming majority—73%—says that Iran's nuclear program is purely for peaceful purposes, while 69 percent say that developing nuclear weapons would be contrary to the principles of Islam. Also, presented with "the idea of having a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East that would include both Islamic countries and Israel," an overwhelming majority (80%) favored it, with 62% favoring it "very much." Similarly, 81% said they favored "the goal of eventually eliminating all nuclear weapons, which is stated in the NPT"; 14% were opposed.

As Iran's Parliamentary elections near, Iran's President Rouhani is clearly one of the strongest political figures in Iran. He does not, however, enjoy enough support to guarantee that his allies would have a clear victory over his critics in the February 2016 parliamentary elections. Fifty percent say they would prefer to see Rouhani supporters win out over Rouhani critics, while 24 percent favor his critics and 26 percent are currently undecided.

Other poll numbers point to mixed feelings about Rouhani's presidency. Large majorities say he has been at least somewhat successful in improving the economic situation (71%), and improving Iran's relations with European countries (83%). But only 42 percent think he is succeeding in cutting unemployment.

Seventy percent see Rouhani as at least somewhat successful in reducing sanctions. This could decline if those sanctions that were temporarily lifted while nuclear negotiations were underway got reapplied because negotiators failed to reach a final agreement—or if Iranians do not gain significant economic and political benefits by implementing an accord. Still, three in four (74%) Iranians say that if the negotiations were to fail to produce a final agreement, they would only (25%) or mostly (49%) blame the P5+1 countries.

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