



Transition towards freedom:

Perspectives of Iran

A quantitative survey with over 25,569 participants in August 2023

Foreword

As repression and economic turmoil grip Iran, a critical question emerges – how close is the Islamic Republic to collapse? This report aims to empirically gauge the readiness of the public on the transition in Iran.

This report analyzes data from a survey of over 25,000 Iranians in August 2023 regarding attitudes on the Islamic Republic. Our analysis quantifies growing discontent among Iranians toward the current regime. The findings suggest the clerical establishment is on fragile footing, with prospects for transition inching closer. However, the complexity of perspectives underscores need for nuance in policy debates on Iran's future.

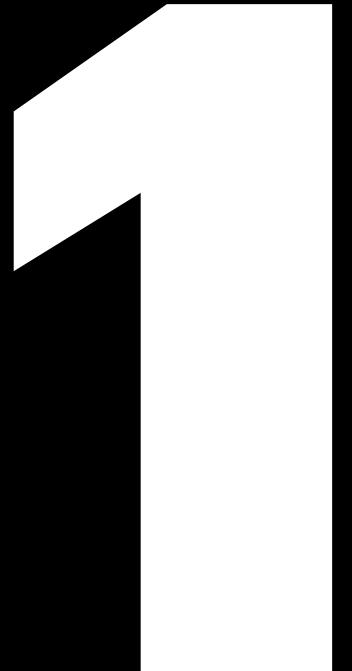
With discontent simmering beneath the surface, Iran approaches its most pivotal crossroads since 1979 as the next generation demands a new social-political contract.

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink, reading "Taghi Alereza". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Taghi" and last name "Alereza" clearly distinguishable.

Taghi Alereza PhD
CEO and Co-founder
September 13, 2023

Civil Disobedience

About 46% of the Iranian population is prepared to take a stand against the clerical leadership and put an end to the existing Islamic Republic.



Leadership

Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have the most influence, respectively increasing and decreasing protest willingness.

2

Social Media

No social media influencers significantly impact public willingness to protest individually, but some like Amir Taheri have a unifying effect.

3

Media

State-run media like IRIB and BBC discourage protests against the regime, while outlets like Kayhan London and Manoto TV encourage it.

4

Separatism

Separatism sentiment is low among Iranians. State-owned media outlets, however, seem to promote the sense of autonomy.

5

Iran Transition Score – ITS

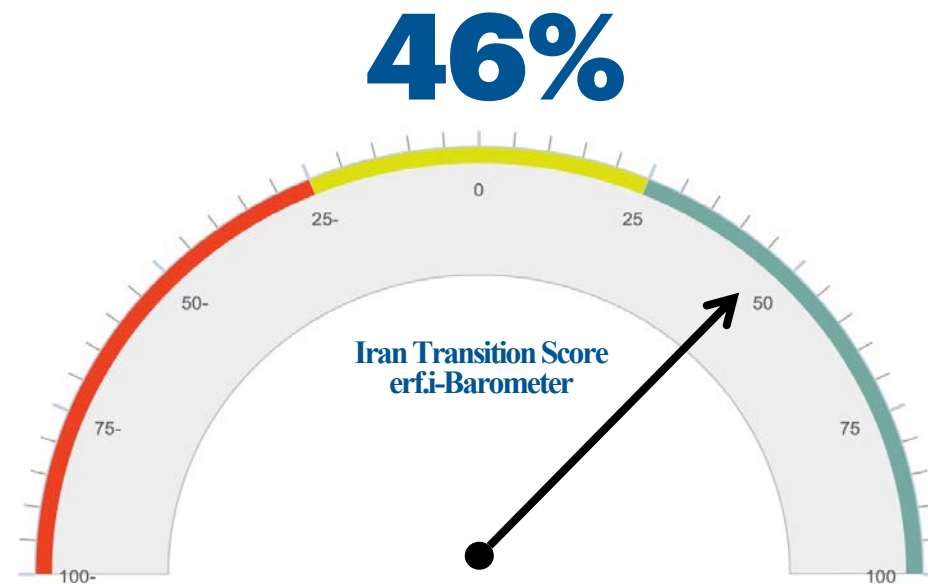
Attitudes Toward Protests and Strikes Against the Islamic Republic

Iran Transition Score is a key metric introduced in the report to quantify Iranian public sentiment towards the Islamic Republic. It measures willingness to participate in protests and strikes against the regime on a 0–10 scale. The higher the ITS, the more willing the public is to resist the Islamic Republic. An ITS above zero indicates greater openness to protest on balance.

In the report, the ITS for Iranians stands at 45.8%, signifying substantial appetite for protest against the regime.

We surveyed a substantial sample of 3,569 individuals in Iran to gauge their attitudes towards future protests and strikes against the Islamic Republic. Our findings reveal a diverse range of perspectives within the sample. A majority, constituting 63.9%, are fervent 'Promoters,'

expressing strong support with a rating of 10 on the scale. A notable 18.1% fall into the 'Passives' category, indicating moderate support with ratings between 1 and 7. Meanwhile, 18.0% are 'Detractors,' signalling a low likelihood of support or participation.



The image shows the national flag of Iran, which consists of three horizontal stripes of green, white, and red. The flag is waving in the wind against a clear blue sky. A red biohazard symbol is superimposed on the white stripe. The text "The regime is under existential threat imposed by the young generation." is written in a dark blue serif font across the middle of the image.

The regime is under existential threat imposed by the young generation.

Iran Transition Barometer

The leadership of Iran's
revolution hinges on
Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi
(unifier) and Ayatollah Ali
Khamenei (divider).

Raisi and Ghalibaf show statistically significant, but negligible, negative impact on the ITS. The MEK and reformists do not influence the score at all.

Beta*: +2.520

t: +14.609



Beta: +1.227

t: +5.495

NONE

Beta: -5.385

t: -13.842



Prince Reza Pahlavi wields the **most significant influence on the rising public's willingness to support the upcoming protests and strikes (unifier)**, increasing the likelihood of public unrest against the Islamic Republic. In stark contrast, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei exerts a **negative impact, diminishing the prospects of public support for such movements (divider)**. These findings underscore the pivotal role that leadership plays in shaping the future public unrests.

The 'None' category introduces a unique and revealing dimension. It highlights the intricate political sentiments within Iran's constrained political landscape, where the dearth of viable alternatives amplifies support for actions aimed at driving change. This phenomenon illuminates the vacuum of political leadership in Iran, where the regime's stringent restrictions on political movements have stifled the emergence of alternatives.

The ITS is a barometer, showing that the Islamic Republic faces inherent challenges when it comes to influencing the growing popularity of the crown prince Reza Pahlavi. This is in part because he embodies a 2500-year-old monarchy—a legacy deeply rooted in history. This heritage of time, representing a significant part of Iran's historical narrative, contributes to his enduring appeal and influence.

*) Beta (often denoted as β): Represents the slope of the regression line, indicating the change in the dependent variable for a one-unit change in the independent variable. The beta (or slope) in regression quantifies the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. It tells how much the dependent variable will change for each unit change in the independent variable. A negative beta is a sign of a reverse effect. The larger the beta, the stronger the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

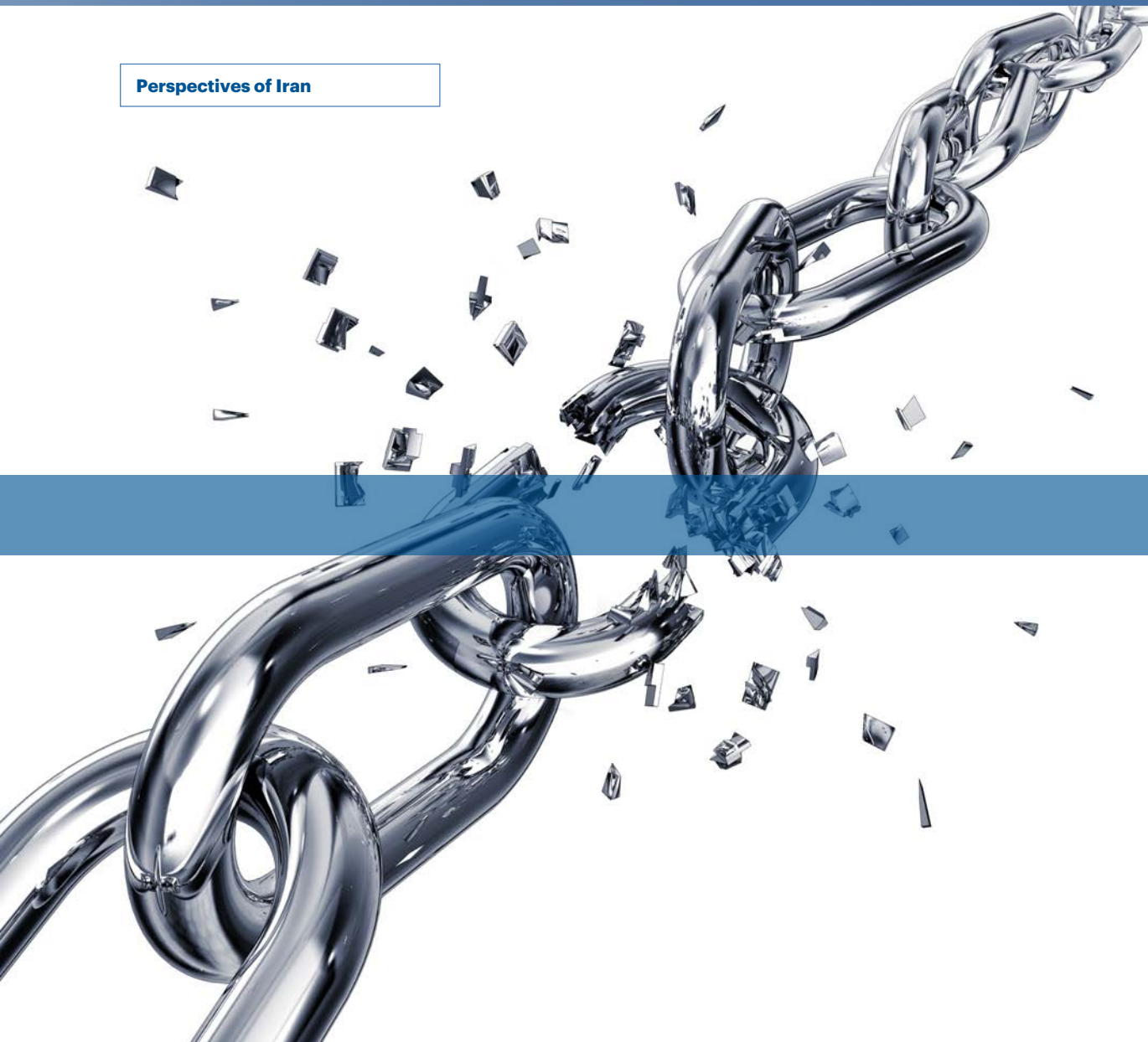
The analysis specifically looked at how support for Ayatollah Ali Khamenei versus former Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi affect attitudes towards resisting the regime. The statistical results reveal that Ayatollah Khamenei has an outsized influence on protest willingness compared to Prince Reza Pahlavi. This suggests that Ali Khamenei exercises control over attitudes and behaviors related to dissent against the regime he presides over.

Several factors likely contribute to his power in suppressing protest movements.

Khamenei has extensive resources and capital at his disposal, as well as command of the security forces and media propaganda machines. This enables imposing fear, censoring information, and severely punishing dissidents.

In contrast, Prince Reza Pahlavi has far less resources and public reach. So, while greater support for him is associated with higher tendency to protest, his impact seems to be smaller. Politically with 1% followship only, Ali Khamenei would not survive a single day without his monstrous IRGC and propaganda machine.

**The most important priorities in Iran are:
Welfare, Security, Homeland, Unity, and Freedom**



At minimum, over 3.3m Iranians in urban areas would be willing to take to the streets advocating for freedom.

The longing for freedom in Iran has the **largest and most significant influence on the ITS**, which will highly likely lead to upcoming public unrests. This is where the Islamic Republic remains inelastic. Freedom in the Islamic Republic has been an oxymoron for years.

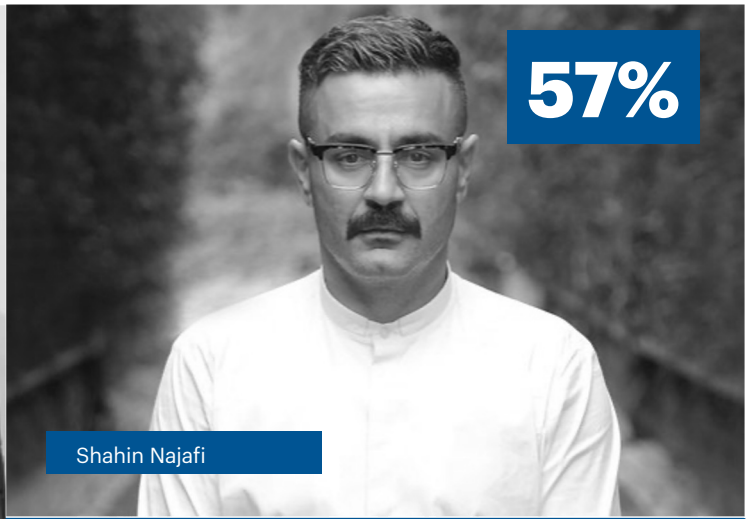
Each percentage from 1-100% represents individual metrics for influencers based on their civic engagement and brand equity as of 8/28/23. These percentages do not aggregate to a collective total.



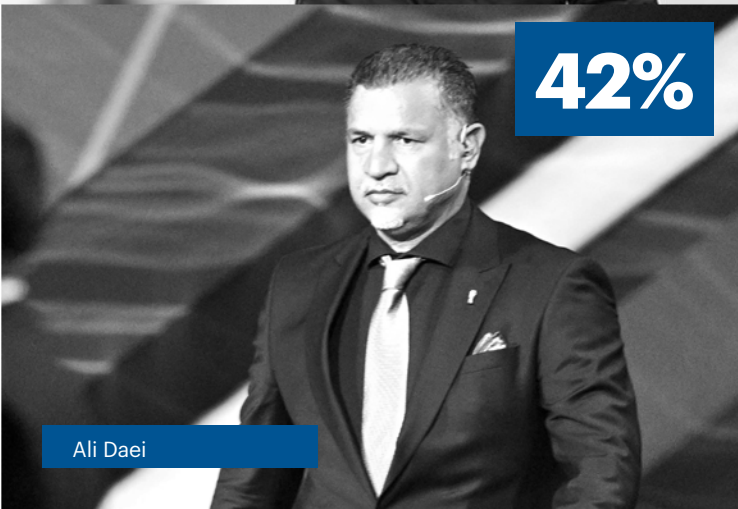
Ali Karimi



Fatemeh Sepehri



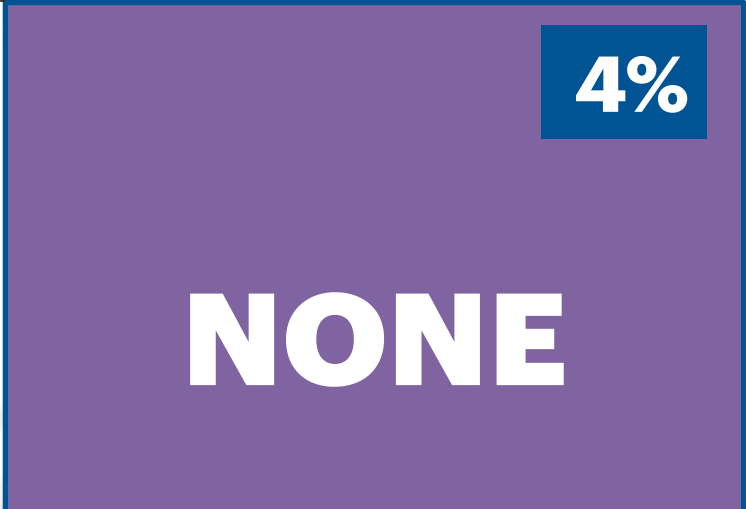
Shahin Najafi



Ali Daei



Tomaj Salehi



Shahin Najafi and Tomaj Salehi have the most significant positive associations with the public willingness to resist.

Further research could explore:

- Are there specific topics or messages promoted by Shahin Najafi, Tomaj Salehi, and Ali Karimi that resonate more with the public, leading to their significant positive influence on willingness to resist?
- What factors contribute to the negative associations between Ali Daei with willingness to resist? Are there specific actions or statements that lead to reduced support for protests and strikes?

Table: Impact of prominent activists on the ITS

Predictor	Mean	Variance	Beta	Significance	VIF
Shahin Najafi	0.570	0.250	0.130	0.000	1.303
Tomaj Salehi	0.270	0.200	0.107	0.000	1.562
Ali Karimi	0.660	0.220	0.068	0.000	1.502
Fatemeh Sepehri	0.580	0.240	0.052	0.004	1.298
Hamed Esmaeilion	0.040	0.030	0.027	0.132	1.312
Shirin Ebadi	0.040	0.030	0.017	0.394	1.529
Hossein Ronaghi	0.110	0.100	0.009	0.631	1.444
Nazanin Boniadi	0.060	0.060	-0.003	0.858	1.401
Narges Mohammadi	0.060	0.050	-0.027	0.197	1.788
Nasrin Sotoudeh	0.050	0.050	-0.032	0.145	1.910
Golshifteh Farahani	0.060	0.060	-0.033	0.073	1.379
Shervin Haji-Pour	0.180	0.150	-0.034	0.081	1.487
Ali Daei	0.420	0.240	-0.090	0.000	1.328
None	0.050	0.050	-0.189	0.000	1.185

Note: Influential impact on public support for protests and strikes is evident through slope or beta values of the regression analysis, with Shahin Najafi and Tomaj Salehi showing significant positive associations, while Ali Daei exhibit notable negative influences. "None" signifies the portion of the population that is not influenced by any prominent figures and may have alternative viewpoints shaping their political and social stance. Understanding the characteristics of this group can provide valuable insights into the complexity of public sentiment.



Amir Taheri

The Most Popular Activist



Amir Abbas Fakhraei

The Most Polarizing Activist

Amir Taheri and Masih Alinejad seem to be the most popular and unpopular activists in diaspora.

Amir Abbas Fakhravar has the maximum polarizing effect on the audience, with an average score of 1.9 and the highest standard deviation of 1.296. The analysis suggests that the responses to Amir Abbas Fakhravar's content vary widely, with some individuals strongly supporting him and others having a more negative view toward him and his claims. According to our analysis, Fakhravar should focus on bridging the polarization to harness his potential and expand his influence more effectively.

Based on the provided data, **Masoumeh (Masih) Alinejad-Ghomikolayi** is least popular among the journalists or social media activists listed. Her mean score of 1.36 shows the lowest level of positive sentiment or support compared to the other individuals in the dataset. Alinejad, with the lowest standard deviation of 0.689, tends to evoke consistent however unpopular responses.

On the other hand, **Amir Taheri**, despite having the highest mean score of 2.71, does not seem to polarize the audience, as indicated by a low standard deviation of 0.89. This suggests a more consistent and less variable response toward Taheri, with a generally positive sentiment.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Name	Mean	Std. Deviation
Amir TAHERI	2.716	0.89
Mehdi MAHDAVI AZAD	2.203	1.209
Mehdi FALAHATI	2.080	1.1
Amir Abbas FAKHRAAVAR	1.900	1.296
Pouria ZARAATI	1.778	0.943
Fardad FARAHZAD	1.751	1.074
Sima SHAHRAKI (Sabet)	1.730	1.093
Ali JAVANMARDI	1.618	1.116
Masoumeh ALINEJAD	1.364	0.689

In summary, these statistics provide insights into the mean scores and variability associated with each individual or entity, offering a snapshot of how their scores are distributed across a dataset. The differences in mean scores and standard deviations reflect variations in responses or evaluations for each of these entities.

Massoumeh Alinejad

1.36

We observe a concerning volatility in the popularity of activists in diaspora. In our survey in early 2023, Masih Alinejad ranked one among all influencers. In August 2023, however, she is identified as the most unpopular journalist in diaspora. Why?

In a striking turn of events, Masih Alinejad, once hailed as a prominent figure among diaspora journalists and activists on Instagram in early 2023, has seemingly fallen from grace, emerging as the most unpopular individual in this sphere by August 2023. To understand this perplexing shift, we delve into the statistics gleaned from Alinejad's Instagram account, which serve as a stark reflection of this dramatic decline.

Alinejad's Instagram profile reveals an impressive 18.1k uploads and a substantial 8.7 million followers. However, the most alarming aspect is their engagement rates, which have dwindled to a disheartening 0.00%, along with an average user activity of a mere 0.03%. This statistic signifies a glaring disconnect between the content Alinejad shares and the preferences of her audience. The abysmally low average user activity further underscores the lack of interaction and involvement among Alinejad's followers.

Several factors could potentially explain this decline in popularity. One plausible scenario is a change in the quality and relevance of Alinejad's content. Her recent posts may no longer align with the evolving interests and concerns of their audience, leading to a gradual disengagement. We know that for example, women in Iran have now apply public protests against compulsory hijab – a topic that was traditionally linked to Masih Alinejad.

Alternatively, a shift in political stance may have alienated her core followers, causing a significant loss of support and trust. Her recent engagement with *Manshoor* has triggered large scale attacks from her opponents.

In the ever-evolving landscape of social media, competition is fierce, with new voices and influencers continually emerging. If Alinejad did not adapt to these changing dynamics or if she began addressing issues more effectively, this could have played a pivotal role in eroding her once-strong e-standing.

In conclusion, Alinejad's Instagram statistics unequivocally highlight the dramatic decline in her popularity among diaspora journalists and activists. This is consistent with our findings. While these numbers provide a snapshot of the situation, the underlying causes are likely multifaceted and may involve issues related to content quality, relevance, messaging, political landscape, and competition. Addressing these concerns will be imperative if Alinejad aims to reclaim her popular status and reconnect with her audience.

With 18.1K uploads and 8.7 million followers, Alinejad presents a strong base on Instagram, which is the most used social media platform in Iran. However, Alinejad's engagement rate is at 0.00% with an average user activity of merely 0.03%.

Peer A has made 610 uploaded and had accumulated 14.7 million followers on Instagram. Their engagement rate stands at 0.11%, and they have an average user activity of 7.12%. Peer B has 824 uploads and 3.9 million followers, with an engagement rate of 0.12% and a notable average user activity of 7.96%. With just 122 uploads, Peer C has amassed an impressive 12.2 million followers, showcasing an engagement rate of 1.92% and full user activity at 100.00%.

We compared Alinejad with three anonymous influencers—referred to as Peers A B, and C. Alinejad stands out with an impressive 18.1K uploads, yet her engagement rate and user activity remain exceptionally low, prompting the trends identified in our survey.

Table: Anonymized Social Media Influencers. Source: <https://toolzu.com>

Measure	Alinejad	Peer A	Peer B	Peer C
Uploads	18,100	824	122	610
Followers (million)	8,700,000	3,900,000	12,200,000	14,700,000
Engagement Rate (%)	0.00%	0.12%	1.92%	0.11%
Average User Activity (%)	0.03%	7.96%	100%	7.12%

Conversely, Person B excels with a smaller upload count but boasts a remarkably high engagement rate and 100% user activity. Peers A and C maintain moderate yet consistent statistics, reflecting a stable posting rhythm and satisfactory engagement.

The metrics categorized into columns are:

- Uploads – Total number of content uploads
- Followers – Total number of followers
- Engagement Rate – Percentage of followers engaging with content
- Average User Activity – Average activity per user

Note: Anonymizing Alinejad's peers is essential to ensure that discussions are not influenced by personal biases. Anonymity allows us to focus on the statistics and trends without distraction, fostering a more objective and unbiased assessment.

Pouria Zeraati

None of the social media influencers have a significant individual influence on the ITS. However, they show both unifying and dividing influence on the public mindset. Although the effect is marginal, but, unexpected trends shall merit the attention of the audience

The regression model has a low R-squared value ($R^2 = 0.027$), indicating that the predictors (Pouria Zeraati, Amir Taheri, and Ali Javanmardi) in the model collectively account for just 2.7% of the variance in the dependent variable. This suggests that the model does not provide a strong or meaningful explanation for the variation observed in the dependent variable.

Taheri has a positive and unifying effect on ITS or the willingness of people to support protests and strikes against the Islamic Republic. On the other hand, Pouria Zeraati and Ali Javanmardi have negative influences. Amir Taheri's influence appears to foster unity and support, while Pouria Zeraati's influence may have a divisive, dividing effect or is associated with decreased support for such activities.



It's worth noting that Pouria Zaraati's TV broadcasts and social media accounts often feature cases of death, injuries, and imprisoned protesters. This coverage may expose individuals to the risks and consequences associated with participating in protests and strikes, potentially leading some to reconsider their support or participation. This is consistent with our observations of the content provided by his employer, Iran International.

The results indicate Kayhan London and Manoto TV provide viewpoints that align with greater anti-regime resistance. However, state-run outlets like IRIB and BBC appear influential in discouraging protest movements.

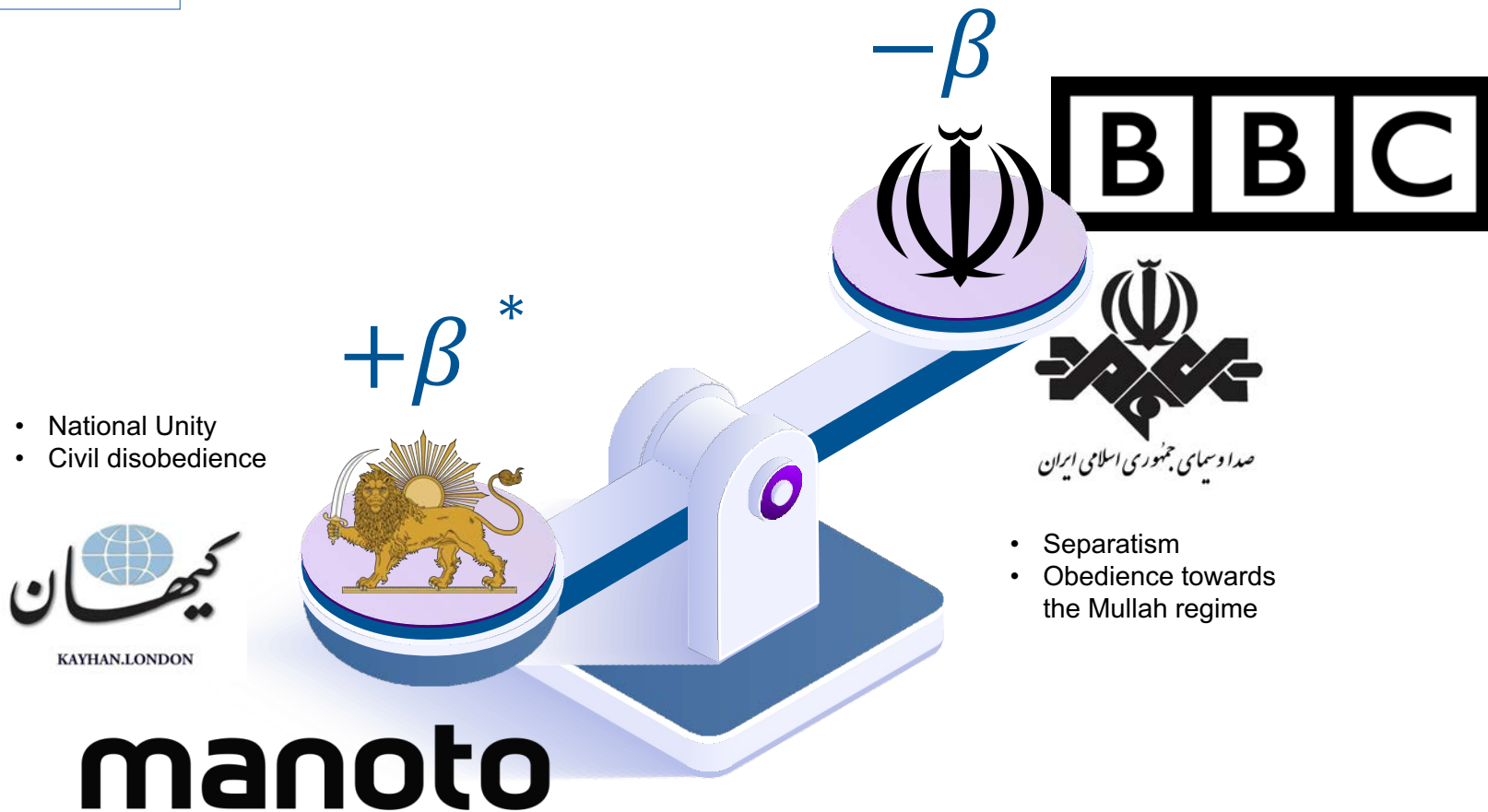
Further research could explore:

- Interactions between outlets – do certain combinations have synergistic effects?
- Media diet patterns – are those exposed to multiple regime-critical outlets more influenced?
- Demographic differences – do ages, genders, or locations respond differently?

- The media outlet with the highest mean rating is Kayhan London (2.25), indicating it has the strongest association with willingness to resist the regime.
- IRIB has the lowest mean (1.13), suggesting it has little influence on motivating resistance. IRIB has by far the largest beta (-0.275) and is highly statistically significant, meaning it is strongly linked to reduced willingness to resist.
- BBC and Iran International have negative beta coefficients, implying they may actually discourage resisting the regime, controlling for other outlets.
- Kayhan London and Manoto TV are the only outlets with statistically significant positive relationships to willingness to resist at the $p < 0.01$ level.
- The VIFs show limited multicollinearity concerns, with values under 1.5. This suggests the outlets have independent relationships to the outcome.

Table: Impact of media outs on the ITS

Media Outlet	Mean	Variance	Beta	Significance	VIF
Voice of America	1.710	0.460	0.057	0.003	1.448
BBC Farsi	1.350	0.370	-0.085	0.000	1.488
Manoto TV	2.180	0.450	0.076	0.000	1.108
IRIB	1.130	0.220	-0.275	0.000	1.095
Kayhan London	2.250	0.850	0.083	0.000	1.274



*) **Beta (often denoted as β)**: Represents the slope of the regression line, indicating the change in the dependent variable for a one-unit change in the independent variable. The beta (or slope) in regression quantifies the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. It tells how much the dependent variable will change for each unit change in the independent variable. A negative beta is a sign of a reverse effect. The larger the beta, the stronger the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

Autonomy sentiment reflects the desire for self-governance or increased self-rule among different ethnic groups within the nation. Separatism is a priority for a very small group of Iranians.

We investigated how prominent media outlets, including Voice of America, BBC, Manoto, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, Iran International, Deutsche Welle, Radio Farda, and Kayhan London, influence the sentiment of autonomy among different ethnic communities in Iran. Our analysis reveals that media outlets can indeed influence autonomy sentiment, with Manoto and Kayhan London showing notable negative associations with autonomy sentiment. This suggests that the content and narratives presented by these outlets may contribute to reduced support for autonomy.

In a multi-ethnic country, media outlets play a crucial role in shaping public opinions and perceptions, especially regarding autonomy. Their ability to reach diverse audiences and convey specific messages can impact the dynamics of regional and ethnic identities. Understanding the influence of media on autonomy sentiment is crucial for policymakers and stakeholders in multi-ethnic countries. It highlights the need for media outlets to engage responsibly in promoting diverse voices and narratives that respect the autonomy aspirations of different ethnic communities.

These findings emphasize the importance of media diversity, responsible journalism, and inclusive narratives to foster harmony and respect for ethnic identities in multi-ethnic nations.

Table: Impact of media outs on the ITS

Coefficients ^a							
Factors	Beta	Std. Error	Std. Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Manoto	-0.119	0.034	-0.060	-3.480	0.000	0.902	1.108
Kayhan London	-0.087	0.027	-0.061	-3.259	0.001	0.785	1.274
BBC	-0.016	0.044	-0.007	-0.367	0.714	0.672	1.488
Voice of America	0.005	0.039	0.003	0.130	0.897	0.69	1.448
Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting	0.074	0.049	0.026	1.505	0.132	0.914	1.095
Radio Farda	0.118	0.037	0.063	3.223	0.001	0.7	1.428
Deutsche Welle	0.118	0.024	0.095	4.927	0.000	0.731	1.369
Iran International	0.148	0.036	0.081	4.164	0.000	0.709	1.410
a. Dependent Variable:	Autonomy						



Methodology

Sampling method

Our sample was collected randomly through social media and the internet. We applied the Exponential Non-Discriminative Snowball Sampling Technique, which allows researchers to contact people who are prevented by security measures and imposed barriers by the government from participating in surveys conducted by foreign institutions. Researchers usually use this method when the study sample is difficult to identify and reach. The use of quantitative has been combined with an online questionnaire for empirical research in the behavioral sciences (Baker, 1999). Coleman (1958-1959) and Goodman (1961) introduced non-probability sampling techniques to study the structure of social networks.

How does it work? After approaching the first person, the researcher asks them to help find other people with similar characteristics who are of interest. The snowball sampling process is identical to asking individuals to name the following respondents. This is called a "chain of recommendation," through which a random sample is drawn. Each participant has an equal chance of taking part in the survey.

This approach was necessary because the researcher's main concern was to gain access to Iran's hard-to-reach and hidden population - the silent majority of opponents of the clerical rulers. Participation in the study had to be done under the utmost security. Iran's "Article 16" of the Political Parties Law explicitly prohibits dialogue with international scientific communities, especially regarding empirical studies on future elections and the political landscape.

In 2019, Reporters Without Borders ranked Iran 170th out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index; the Islamic Republic is by far one of the most repressive regimes in the world, relentlessly controlling the flow of information and content. In contrast, the researcher has no preferences and does not want to control the data collection processes. This is necessary to avoid biased responses. During the virtual sampling, the dataset grew in several waves.

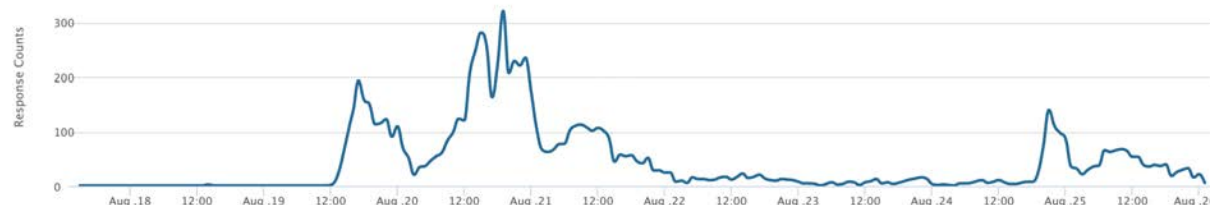
The auxiliary variables are carefully selected for such adjustments so that the weighted data sets represent the inference population as accurately as possible (Brick & Kalton, 1996). The original sample comprises 33.2 percent female, 64.7 percent male, and 2.1 percent without responses.

Citizens in Iran were critically asked to complete 31 questions covering 94 variables. All questions were extensively pilot-tested before the project commenced. The questions sought to measure the rationale of individuals engaged against the regime, the tendency of future movements, the reasons for ordinary citizens' support of the widespread protests, and the public approval of the Islamic government. The survey was conducted between August 19–25, 2023, to understand the opinion of Iranian adults aged 19 and above. In total, 25,569 respondents with 8,624 complete submissions, and 5,965 reliable cases could be identified. We exceeded a 95% confidence level and 3% margin of error.

To ensure that the social structures of the target population in Iran were represented, weights for post-stratification or non-response were applied. In particular, we operationalized the iterative proportional fitting technique. We estimated the target weights based on previous research from the National Census and Survey (2016) and Tehran University (2020). The auxiliary variables used in this research are age, gender, place of residence, and education level. Adjusting the weights in questionnaires is a common method in conducting surveys to reduce the effects of non-response and non-coverage. Sample weighting is a technique that allows the researcher to develop the most accurate estimate of reality that can be represented in a population. We do avoid political weights in raking.

Due to the raking procedures, we accomplished over 50 percent effect base. Typically, weighted samples with a practical base less than 50 percent shall be rejected. The loads for all measures were in the range of 0.046 and 1.855. Age, education, residential region, social stance, and gender were used to weight the survey. The data can be altered to more precisely reflect the demographic composition of the population by using weights. This enabled us to draw findings and make assumptions based on weighted data that is typical of the Iranian population. The weighted proportions give a more accurate foundation for interpreting survey results and drawing conclusions about 'demographic groups' attitudes, habits, or opinions in Iran. The announcement reached several independent social media channels, including interactive audiovisuals, clips, and high-quality posters. Three clips were re-distributed and amplified across several unknown, and popular social media channels by different non-political communities with over 250 thousand followers—the subsequent application of specific hashtags allowed for a thorough measurement of the use of marketing materials. The customized questionnaire was able to reach users from Iran randomly.

According to a recent report by Hootsuite in January 2019, 89 percent of Iranians are regular users of the Worldwide Web. With 153 percent mobile phone ownership and 57 percent active social media users, Iran is one of the most connected countries with access to online resources in the Middle East. We used an SSL-encrypted online platform for empirical research. Since the immediate collection of data in such a short period was necessary (normally, Iranian intelligence agencies can interdict a survey platform within 12-24 hours), the authors decided to use an online survey tool. Alternative avenues were difficult to pursue as the regime does not tolerate research into socio-economic or political trends.



This report is available online at <https://erf.institute/iranrends>.

We used IBM SPSS®, Programming Language Python, DeepL®, and R® for reporting purposes.

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