



The Empirical Research and Forecasting Institute

The political stance in Iran

28. February 2023

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Foreword

Reaching for the moon.

The Islamic Republic is the reincarnation of the medieval estate society. In the social order of the Middle Ages, people were assigned a fixed place in society. Estate societies were based on a holy order given by God. Most people were born into their estates and remained there throughout their lives.

The first estate included the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church, composed of monks, nuns, ordinary preachers, bishops, cardinals, and the pope. The second estate comprised the nobility, who were responsible for the country's administration and led the army during the war. The third estate comprised the most significant part of the population and consisted of peasants and farmers. They often owned no land but worked hard for their noble landlords. The peasants had only limited rights and were obligated to pay taxes.

The constitution of the Islamic Republic aims to establish the so-called Islamic estates. With the Supreme Leader and his clerical partners, the regime in Tehran controls Iran's natural resources. Ordinary people must follow the orders of the Waly-Faghih. A simple protest can result in death and severely punishment. In an estate society designed by Ayatollah Khomeini for four decades, the Islamic Republic has hindered political freedom and movement. The people of Iran could not practice democracy and led political debates to determine their social, political, and economic future.

While a brutal regime continues suppressing its people, the Ayatollahs in power try everything to shape the public mindset. Their followers must believe in the Islamic Republic's strengths and sovereignty inside Iran. Outside Iran, the regime claims it has legitimacy through elections. Both claims appear to be nothing more than twisted falsehoods.

The Islamic Republic has sought to attain these objectives in recent years by supplying incorrect election data and fabricating poll results. The so-called polling institutes abroad have consistently provided controversial and contradictory outlooks on political attitudes in Iran.

In light of these complexities, we conducted an in-depth study of the political situation in Iran using advanced analytical techniques. Our findings will shed light on and provide a reliable understanding of the current political landscape in Iran.

The moon is shining upon all of us. One must try to look for it.



Dr. Taghi Alereza
CEO and Co-founder
February 28, 2023

Report

Research Ethics Committee

The advent of the Internet has allowed researchers to conduct and publish online surveys. While we have witnessed a rapid rise in empirical research, we face shortcomings and even significant violations of ethical standards in these attempts.

For example, several groups have claimed to conduct online surveys in countries with repressive regimes. Using online surveys is tempting and easy. End users want to maintain their privacy and speak openly about their opinions, while telephone surveys can lead to misunderstandings and unwillingness to express concerns and criticisms freely.

We have recently recognized that survey groups for Iran have been using end-user tracking techniques by collecting IP addresses and browser cookies. While these techniques are standard practice in marketing and sales across the business world, in political science, especially when it comes to studies on repressive regimes, are problematic.

At erf.i, we have therefore decided to establish a Research Ethics Committee (REC), which assesses the scope of the technical survey implementation, privacy commitment, and non-partisan approach to the project and evaluates the ethical standards while conducting typically extensive quantitative studies on social-political issues by our researchers.

Furthermore, ERFI Ethics Committee's primary responsibility is to protect the subjects involved in the study and be concerned about the potential consequences for society and the world. Ethics committees are authorized to allow, refuse, alter, or stop studies that do not conform to the accepted standards. The ERFI Research Ethics Committee operates under the authority of the Empirical Research Forecasting Institute in exercising its commitment to conducting human research according to the utmost scientific and ethical standards.

This particular research was reviewed accordingly. We have not identified any conflict with our underlying rules and requirements regarding data protection, anti-discrimination, and equality.

Participants in our survey can be assured that their privacy will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Their identity cannot be ascertained. Our researchers were wholly impartial and conscientiously applied statistical techniques, as required. We did not collect more data than needed for our statistical assessment.



Dr. Hooshang Lahooti
Research Ethics Committee
February 28, 2023

Executive summary

Our second quantitative survey, conducted in February 2023, examined attitudes toward politics in Iran. Our central question for this study was: Who represents Iranians? To this end, we formed three groups, including political leaders and contemporary figures. Respondents expressed their desire for Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi and the return of the constitutional monarchy in Iran.

Individuals with detailed profiles as top athletes, civic activists, artists, and influencers who make their living doing opposition work appear more than 20 times online and on social media.

Our target audience was the people of Iran. Over nine thousand respondents visited our survey. After thoroughly reviewing users' characteristics and applying the virtual snowball effect, our sample was streamlined to 2,639 records.

Our survey is partially representative. We reached a 95 percent confidence level and about a 2 percent margin of error.

Furthermore, our findings suggest that Iran's protests have responded to the current political system and the 44-year-old revolutionary regime.

The soccer stars Ali Karimi, Ali Daie, and musician Shahin Najafi are seen as the most influential athletes and musicians representing their values.

Massih Alinejad is the most mentioned influencer and celebrity, followed by Poura Zeraait and Fardad Farahzad. This shows that Iranians are searching for role models they can admire and believe share their values.

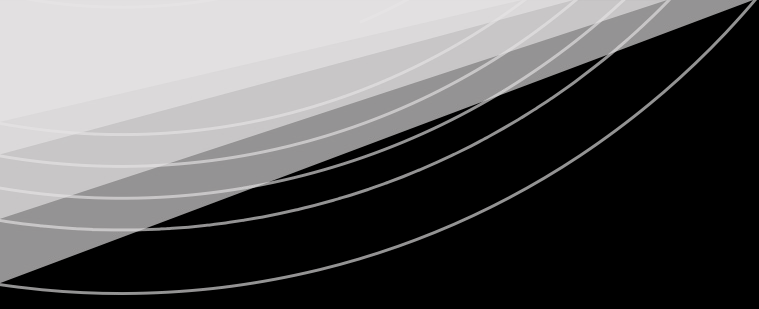
This desire for Pahlavi nostalgia is further reflected in the survey's findings that 79.9 percent of Iranians overwhelmingly favor Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi over the current political leaders.

This suggests that the Iranian people are looking for a change in leadership and are not satisfied with the current regime. With 495,000 loyal followers only, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is no longer the majoritarian leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

Overall, the survey showed that the Iranian people are looking for a new leader and direction for their country. Pahlavi nostalgia is a persistent trend among the Iranian population; they seek influential figures representing their value system, including freedom, patriotism, prosperity, human rights, and justice.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has long been a champion of religious priorities. The separation of ethnic groups, while a marginal factor, remains an essential part of the equation.

Iran is a multiethnic society, and a minority of Iranians believe in separating ethnic groups. Overall, there is a moderately positive correlation between the Islamic Republic's religious priorities and the separation of ethnic groups.



Insights

With only 495,000 loyal followers, Ayatollah Khamenei is NO LONGER the majority leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The Islamic Republic is a dictatorship of a 4.6% religious minority.

According to Article 5 of the 1979 Iranian Constitution, the supreme leader or religious leader is the highest state office in the Islamic Republic of Iran. He is elected for life by the Council of Experts. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has been the Supreme Leader since 1989.

According to Article 110 of the Iranian Constitution, a wide range of duties are incumbent upon the Revolutionary Leader, such as determining the general policies of the Islamic Republic, supervising the execution of the policies, issuing decrees for national referendums, adopting the supreme command over the armed forces or enforcing amnesty of sentences for convicts.

The tragic story of Mahsa Amini is known to almost all Iranians. She died in September 2022 at the hands of Iran's brutal morality police. The events leading up to her death sparked a revolutionary uproar in the country, and citizens took to the streets to protest the government's repressive control.

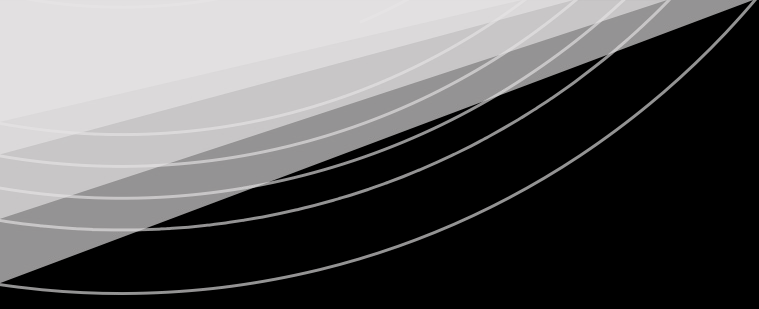
However, the regime responded to their calls for justice with even greater severity: Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei ordered a violent crackdown on the protests. This further aggravated the situation in Iran, and people became increasingly determined to resist the oppressive regime. Mahsa Amini's death symbolized the Iranian government's injustice and reminded us of the need for peaceful protests and revolutionary change. Her story was a powerful reminder that justice and freedom can still prevail even in the face of oppression.

In our previous survey in November 2022, Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi received an approval rating of about 1.8%. By February 2023, that approval rating had shrunk by 50% to 0.9%. Our poll shows that 4.6% of Iranians approve of the Islamic Republic. They support the hardliner and reformist camps. Our results suggest that today only 2 in 10 supporters of the Islamic Revolution back the Supreme Leader. The core consists of about 495,000 individuals. It is fair to conclude that Ayatollah Khamenei is no longer the majority leader of the Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei



60.4 % of Iranians support the return to a constitutional monarchy in Iran; 17.5 % are in favor of a democratic republic. 14.5 % are undecided.



Detailed findings

Breaking down the **value-creation opportunity**

Attitude toward the political system

It is no surprise to many that the Iranian people are yearning tensely for regime change. After all, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 was meant to bring freedom, yet here we are 40 years later, and most Iranians still want to live more freely in a secular state.

The numbers don't lie; only 1% of Iranians approve of the Islamic Republic as a political and government order. 4.6 percent of Iranians are supporters of either the hardliners or the reformists. This indicates that the majority of people who stand for the Islamic Revolution no longer support the current political system. We conclude that 99% of Iranians expect an extensive transition of the Islamic Republic. Some 73% seek regime change in Iran.

According to our analysis, an overwhelming 60.4% of Iranians support a return to a constitutional monarchy in Iran, while only 17.5% favor a democratic republic. The remaining 14.5% minority are still undecided.

Many Iranians reject the ideals of the 1979 revolution. It's almost as if they want to return to the time before the 1979-Revolution when the constitutional monarchy held sway.

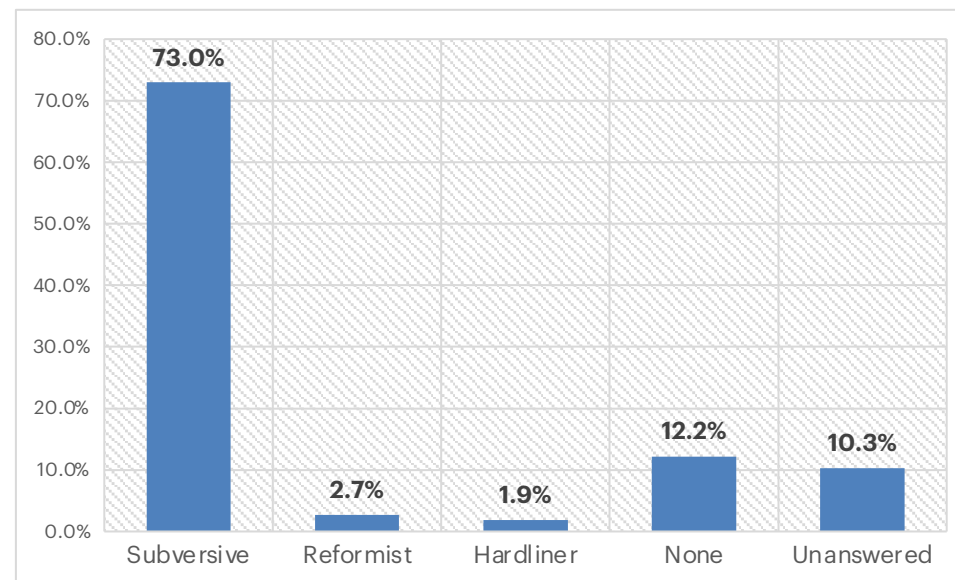
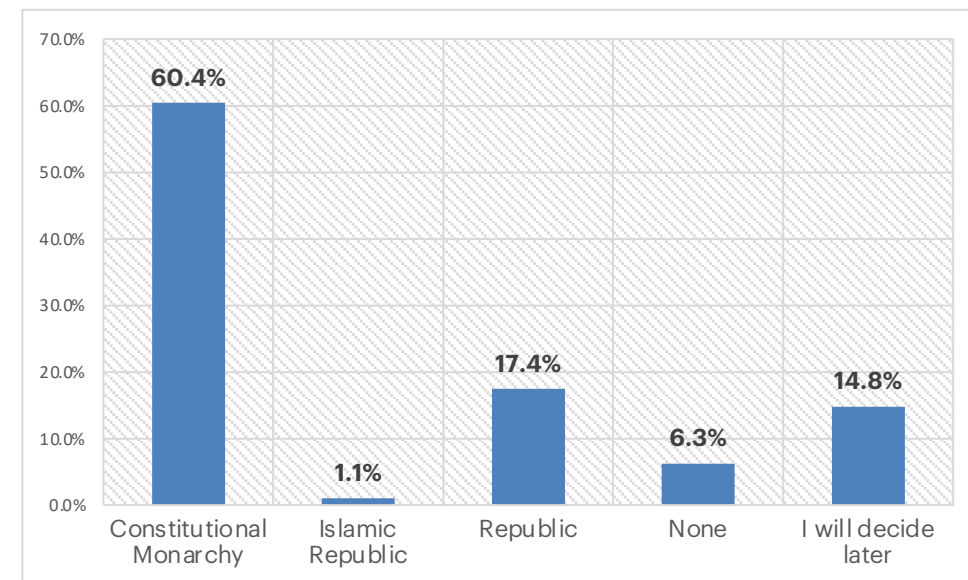


Figure 1: We asked, "What is your preference for the political system and how do you see yourself?"

1%

Approval rate for the Islamic Republic

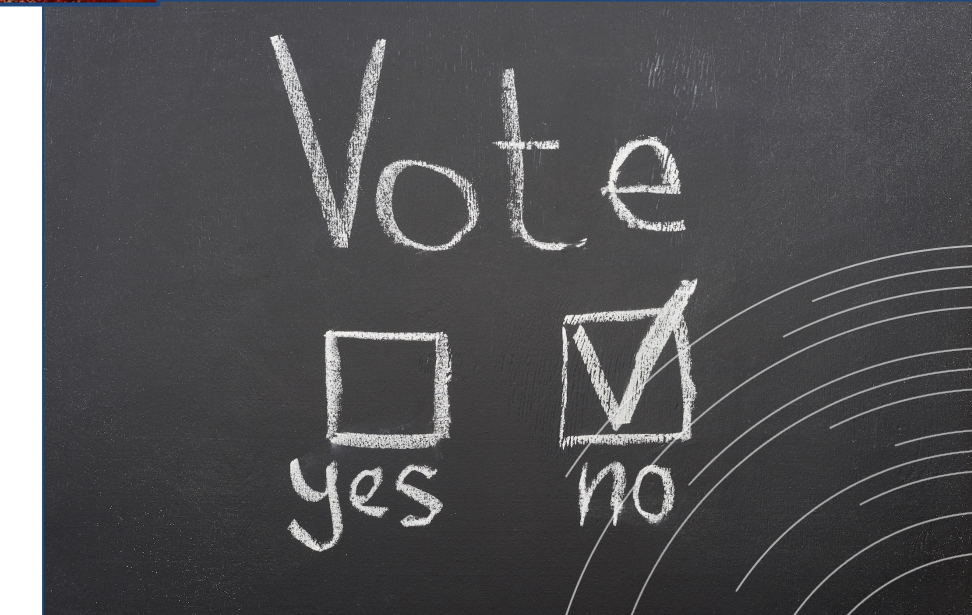


60.4%

Favour the return of constitutional monarchy

17.5%

Prefer a secular republican government



The assessment provides a clear indication that Iranian citizens are driven by a strong sense of freedom, patriotism, and human rights.

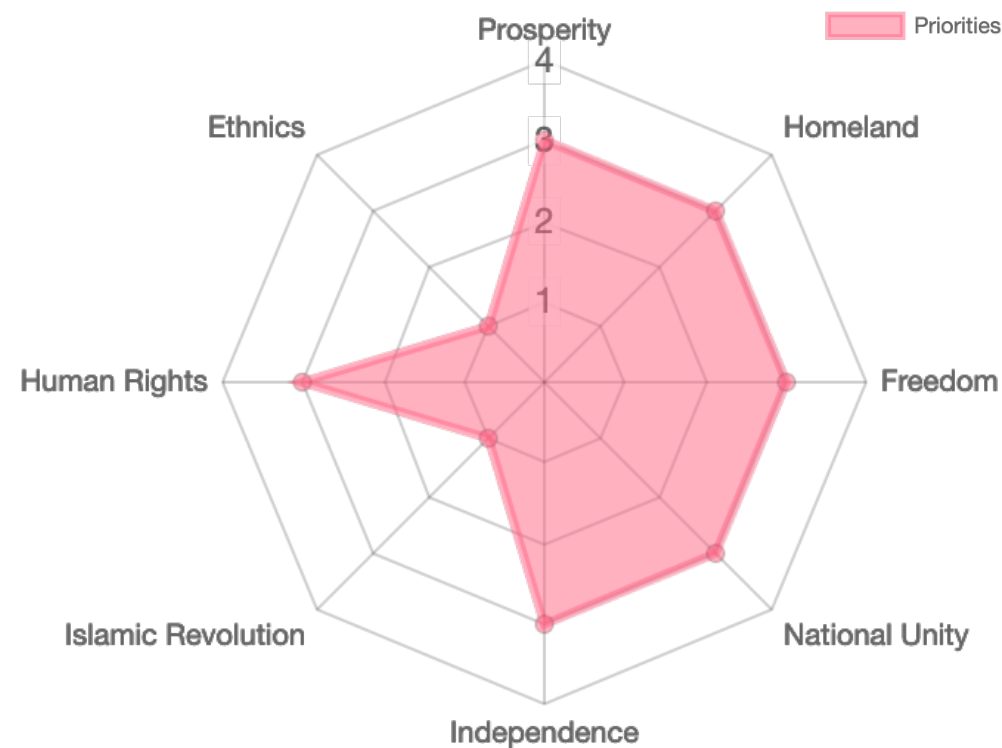


Figure 2: Priorities of the people of Iran

	Freedom	Homeland	Justice	Religion	Prosperity	Human Rights	Unity	Ethnicity	Autonomy	Islamic Revolution
Freedom	1	37%	39%	-11%	39%	46%	20%	4%	19%	-16%
Homeland	37%	1	41%	-5%	40%	38%	49%	1%	24%	-7%
Justice	39%	41%	1	6%	55%	56%	34%	12%	34%	2%
Religion	-11%	-5%	6%	1	2%	-3%	3%	18%	10%	40%
Prosperity	39%	40%	55%	2%	1	62%	46%	7%	32%	-5%
Human Rights	46%	38%	56%	-3%	62%	1	35%	7%	31%	-11%
Unity	20%	49%	34%	3%	46%	35%	1	4%	36%	1%
Ethnicity	4%	1%	12%	18%	7%	7%	4%	1	20%	16%
Autonomy	19%	24%	34%	10%	32%	31%	36%	20%	1	^^
Islamic Revolution	-16%	-7%	2%	40%	-5%	-11%	1%	16%	6%	1

Figure 3: Pearson’s Correlation analysis of the priorities of the Iranian people

As indicated earlier, the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini was a tipping point for public unrest starting in September 2022, as it highlighted the country's persistent corruption, repression, and injustice. Iranians seem motivated by the hope of Justice, Freedom, Homeland, and Human Rights.

Religion, the Islamic revolution, and the separation of ethnic groups are not critical factors in the value system of the Iranians, but rather the need for a prosperous and unified Iran where citizens can express their views without fear or persecution.

The people of Iran have shown remarkable resolve and determination, both in the face of authorities and media blackout and in the face of the powerful forces of repression. It is clear that the citizens will not rest until they have achieved their priorities. The Pearson correlation analysis was performed to identify the latent relationships among the variables determining the value system of the citizens in Iran. Our analysis reveals that the religious mindset negatively correlates with patriotism and freedom.

Accordingly, human rights positively correlated with freedom (46%), patriotism (38%), justice (56%), and prosperity (62%).

The results of the survey showed a strong correlation between human rights and freedom, patriotism, justice, and prosperity. It was particularly interesting to note that respondents who had a favorable attitude towards religion and the Islamic revolution demonstrated a higher correlation with ethnic separation, at 18% and 16% respectively.

This demonstrates the power of patriotism and freedom in unifying people from all walks of life, irrespective of religion or ethnicity. Furthermore, it suggests that the advancement of human rights is possible regardless of faith or culture.



Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi



Abdullah Mohtadi



Ayatollah Ali Khamenei



Mir Hossein Moussavi



President Ebrahim Raisi



Maryam Rajavi

More than two-thirds of those we surveyed indicated that Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, the most popular opposition leader.

Our survey uncovered that more than 79.7% of respondents view Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi as their preferred political representative, with 16.7% selecting none of the nominees, or preferring not to answer our question. Maryam Rajavi, the MEK leader, was chosen by only 2 participants.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi were chosen by about 1% of the participants. Similarly, the reformists with Mir-Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi, and Mostafa Tajzadeh were supported by 0.9% of our respondents. These results show a dramatic fall in the approvals of the IRI leaders compared to our survey conducted in November 2022.

The survey results indicate that Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi has a tacit mandate from the Iranian people to form a coalition of opposition leaders. This coalition could help future protests by providing media coverage, legal aid, international support, coordination of strikes, imposing national boycotts, and training on how to resist the regime's military forces.

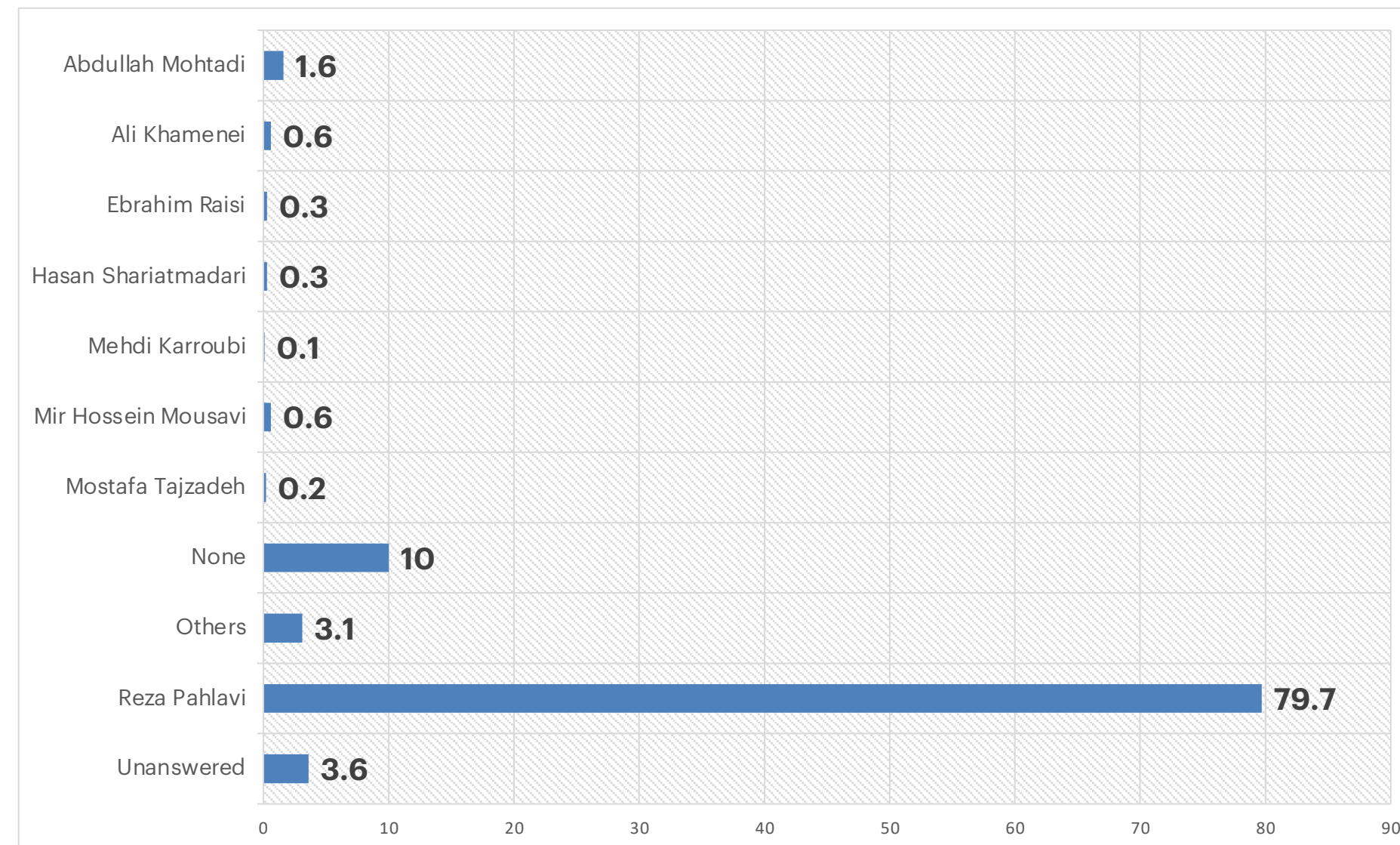


Figure 4: We asked, “Which political figure best represents your point of view?”

This group consists of individuals and candidates with a distinctive political profile, such as Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, President Ebrahim Raisi, or people from contemporary history from the opposition groups, such as Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi (son of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi), Mir Hossein Mousavi (former primary minister and President Ahmadinejad’s arch-rival), or Maryam Rajavi (leader of the MEK). They are either personalities with a historical profile or people who have been directly (or indirectly) involved in the government of the Islamic Republic since its inception in 1979.



Ali Karimi



Ali Daei



Shahin Najafi



Fatemeh Sepehri



Hamed Esmaelion



Nassrin Sotoudeh

Influencers with over 20 presences on social media and in Persian media abroad. These individuals make their living from income generated within the opposition industry.



1

1.929

Massih Alinejad



2

1.563

Pouria Zeraati



3

1.378

Fardad Farahzad

CATEGORY 3: INFLUENCERS WITH THE HIGHEST SCORES IN THE (SOCIAL) MEDIA AS OF 2/28/23

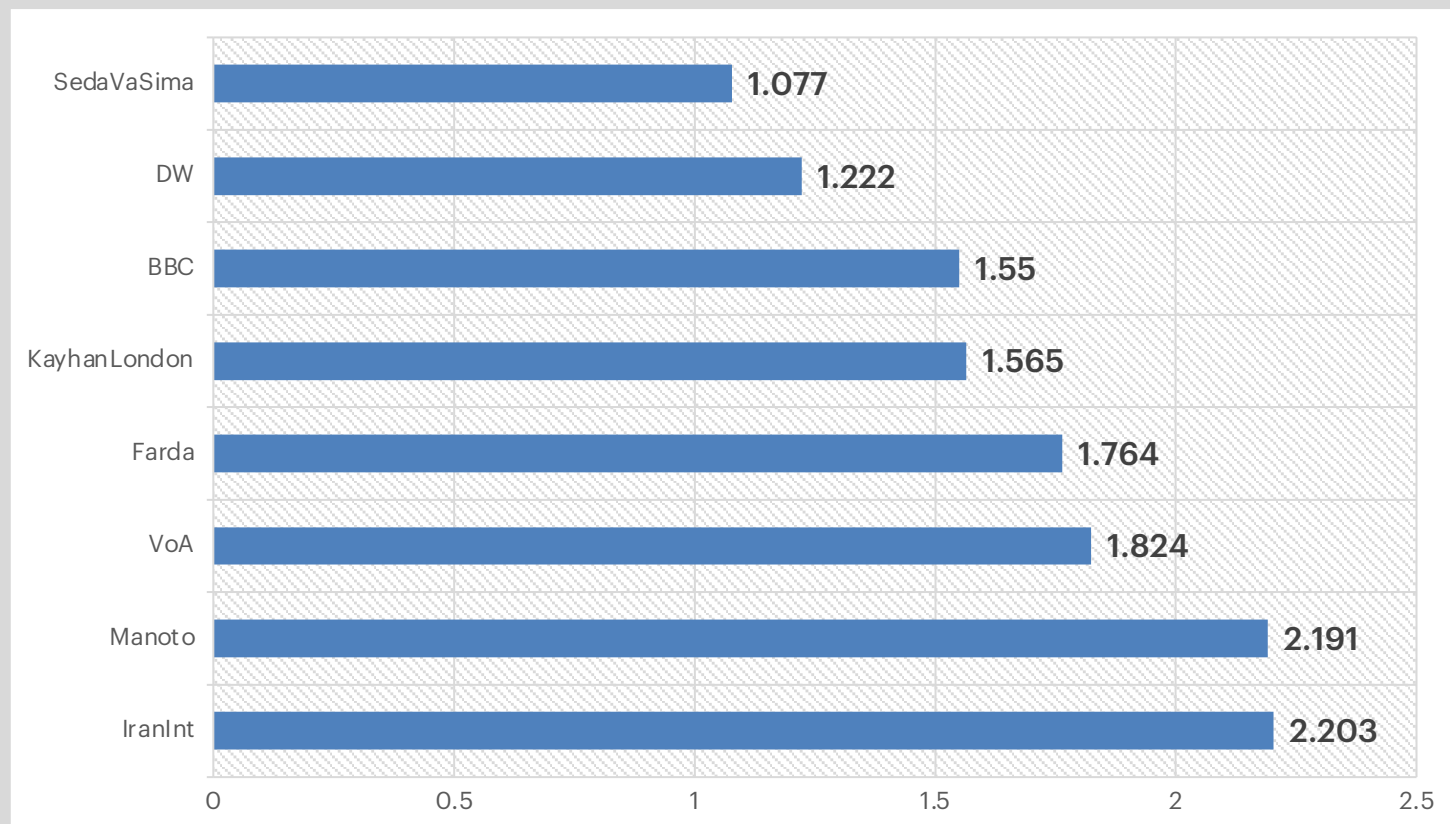


Figure 5: We asked, "Which new channels do you use regularly?"

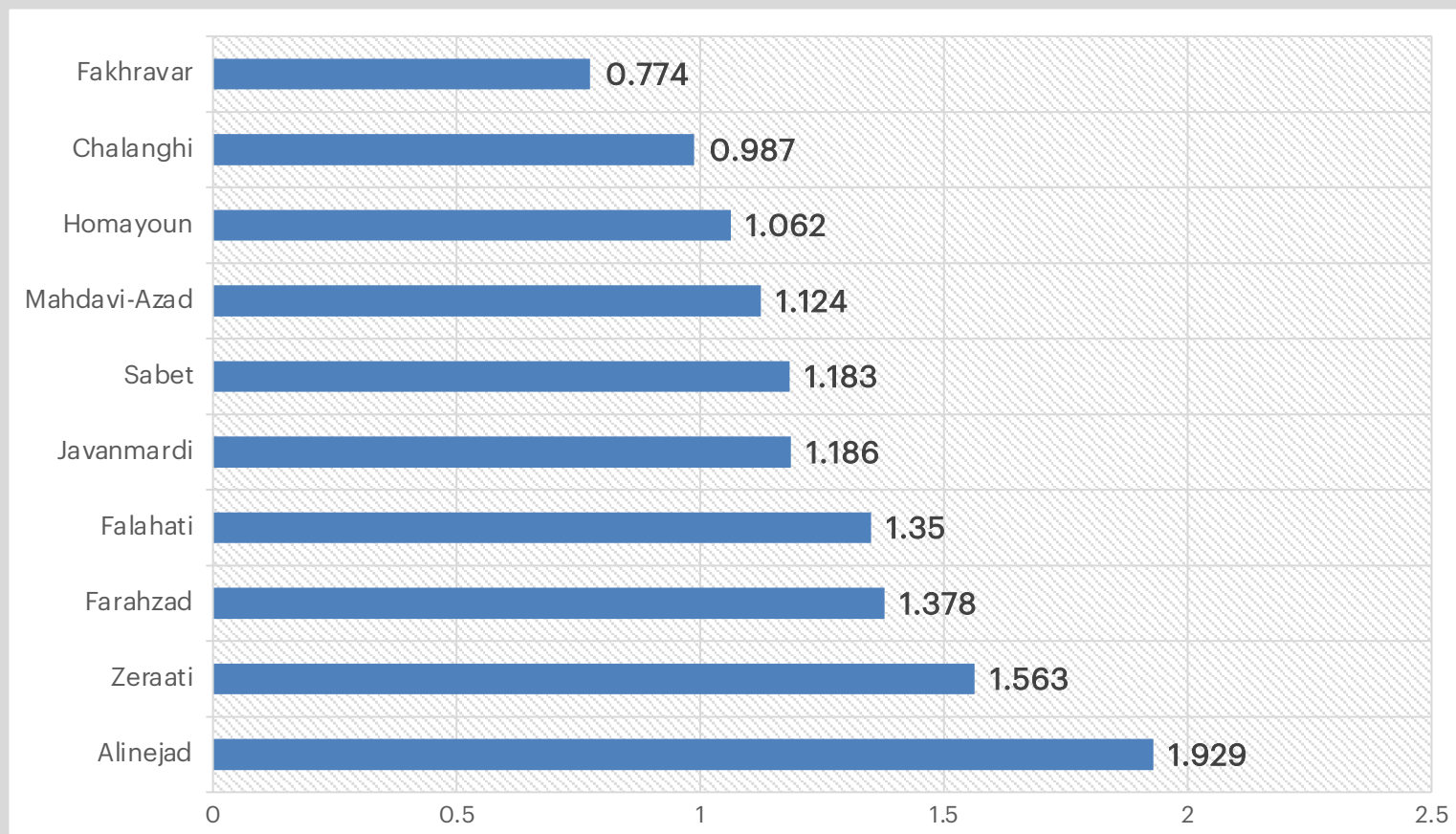


Figure 6: We asked, "Which influencers do you follow and how often?"

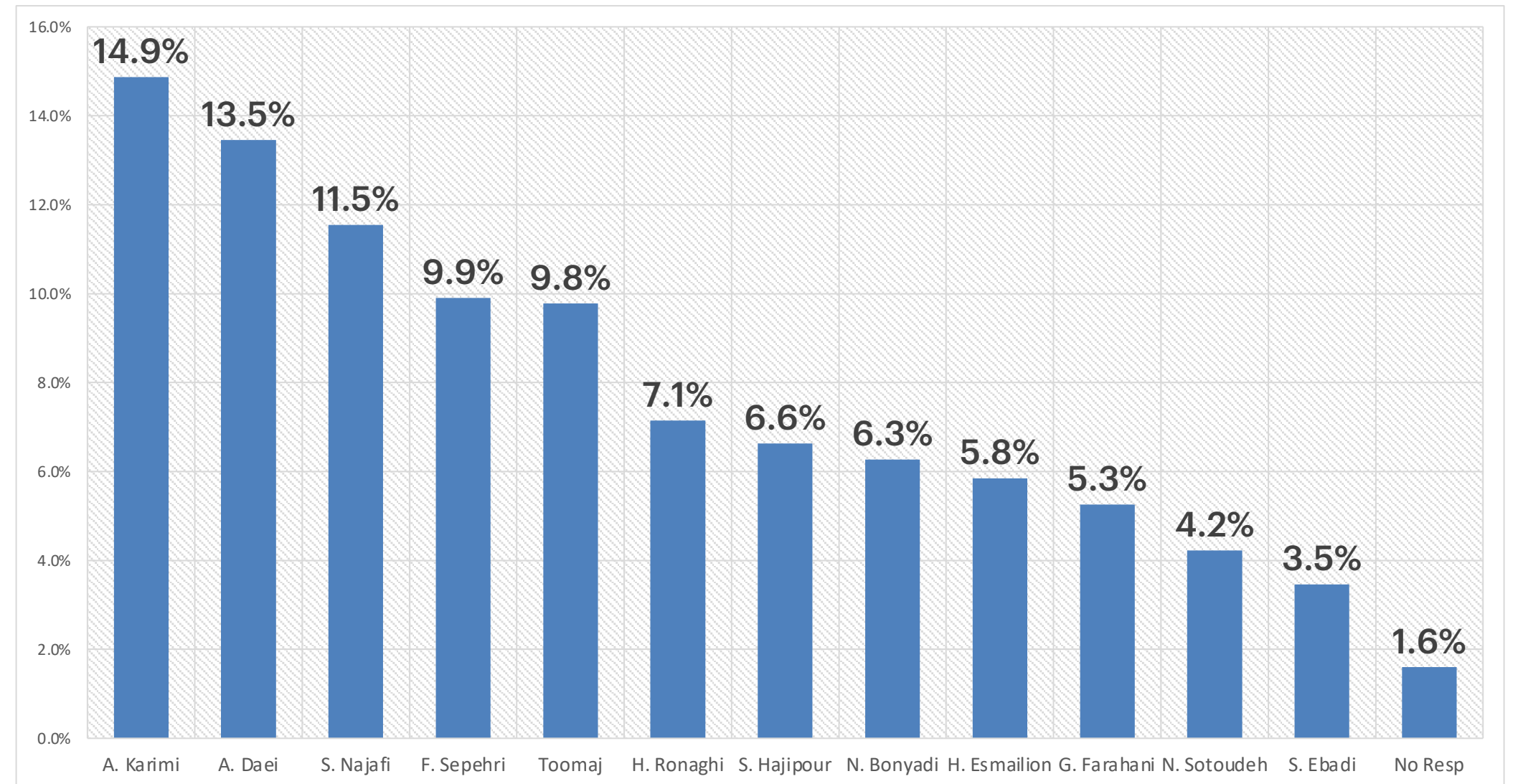


Figure 7: We asked, "Who best represents your values and desires?"

Celebrities in Iran have become increasingly influential in recent years. Masih Alinejad is one of the most famous Iranian celebrities who has used her social media presence to advocate for Iranian women's rights. Ali Karimi is a former Iranian football star who has enjoyed immense popularity for his exploits on the soccer field. Ali Daie is a sports icon famous for his civic engagement and genuine comments on recent developments in Iran. Nasrin Sotoudeh is an Iranian lawyer renowned for her work on human rights issues. All these individuals have used their fame and influence to bring attention to the cause of the Iranian people and their struggles. Social media has been an essential tool for these activists and celebrities, allowing them to reach out to millions and make their voices heard. It has also allowed them to connect with global audiences and build a global platform for their causes.

We asked:

What products and services from companies owned by or close to the regime would you want to boycott as consumer?

More than 40 percent suggested the national brands Mihan, followed by Kourosh, Eteka, Tepsi, Snap, and Rubika.

Background: In 2018, the US imposed sanctions on Iran's oil exportation, leading to a decline in the country's primary source of revenue. Today, the Islamic Republic is still profiting from its 84.5 million B2B and B2C customers. If people were to stop consuming products and services of companies associated with the regime, such as Eteka, it would cause a decrease in income from both their profits and the value-added tax. The regime and its supporters would experience an impactful blow if Iranians began to reject the brands connected to the Islamic Republic's supporters. Particularly, in 2020, e-commerce businesses could exceed USD 13 billion revenues in total.





Research questions, methodology, and literature review

Prior research

Recent polls related to Iran's current social-political developments have been designed and conducted by a few groups. Given the restrictions imposed by the Islamic Republic, these surveys were mainly conducted online with contradictory results.

Almost all prior surveys do not meet the basic requirements of scientific research. Few authors raked their samples and changed the underpinning data based on auxiliary variables with political weights in favor of the Islamic Republic, based on official data provided by the regime, such as participation rates in the presidential elections in 2020. The reports did not provide the essential measures for acceptable weightings, such as post-raking loadings or weighting effectiveness rates. Earlier papers also did not provide statistical measures on the quality of weights and any technical details on how these weights were achieved. These studies cannot be taken seriously, although they attracted media attention from both Persian-speaking and international media outlets. Perhaps they were made to feed the thirsty journalists in Diaspora and entertain their target audience, who lack clear views on the internal development of Iran.

It is important to remember that official data from the Iranian authorities can rarely pass forensic tests for data integrity, as demonstrated by prior research. Rokouma provided empirical evidence for data manipulation in the presidential elections in 2012 (1). For this reason, it is questionable that surveys and public polls can use auxiliary variables to weight survey results based on the political claims of the cleric regime in Tehran.

In 2021, Iran Poll [2] and the University of Maryland CISSM curiously ignored all discontent with the 2021 general elections, claiming that 72 percent of Iranians were well satisfied with the election of President Ebrahim Raisi [2]. The authors, Gallagher, Mohseni, and Ramsay, claimed that 76 percent were optimistic that Raisi would be able to resolve Iran's economic problems. Officially, Raisi garnered 48 percent of the electoral votes [3]. The same year, Reinhart and Loschky from Gallup claimed that 72 percent of Iranians approved Raisi's plans and actions as the newly elected president [4].

In March 2022, Ammar Malaki, an assistant professor at Tilburg University, released a report on Iran stating that 30.2 percent of Iranians had supported the Islamic Republic's flag [5]. In his previous and recent papers, he used auxiliary variables to conduct political weighting while violating the criteria for selecting comparable options in several questions, such as odd mixtures of politicians, civil rights activists, and artists [6].

Gamaan's 2023 survey results indicated moderate support for the Islamic Republic. Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi and President Ebrahim Raisi's rates remained unchanged at 30% and 17%, respectively. Gamaan's surveys are untrustworthy without reporting the raking load factors, the impact of weights on the original survey size, and the effect size.

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 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.

Sampling method (cont'd)

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.

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.

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.

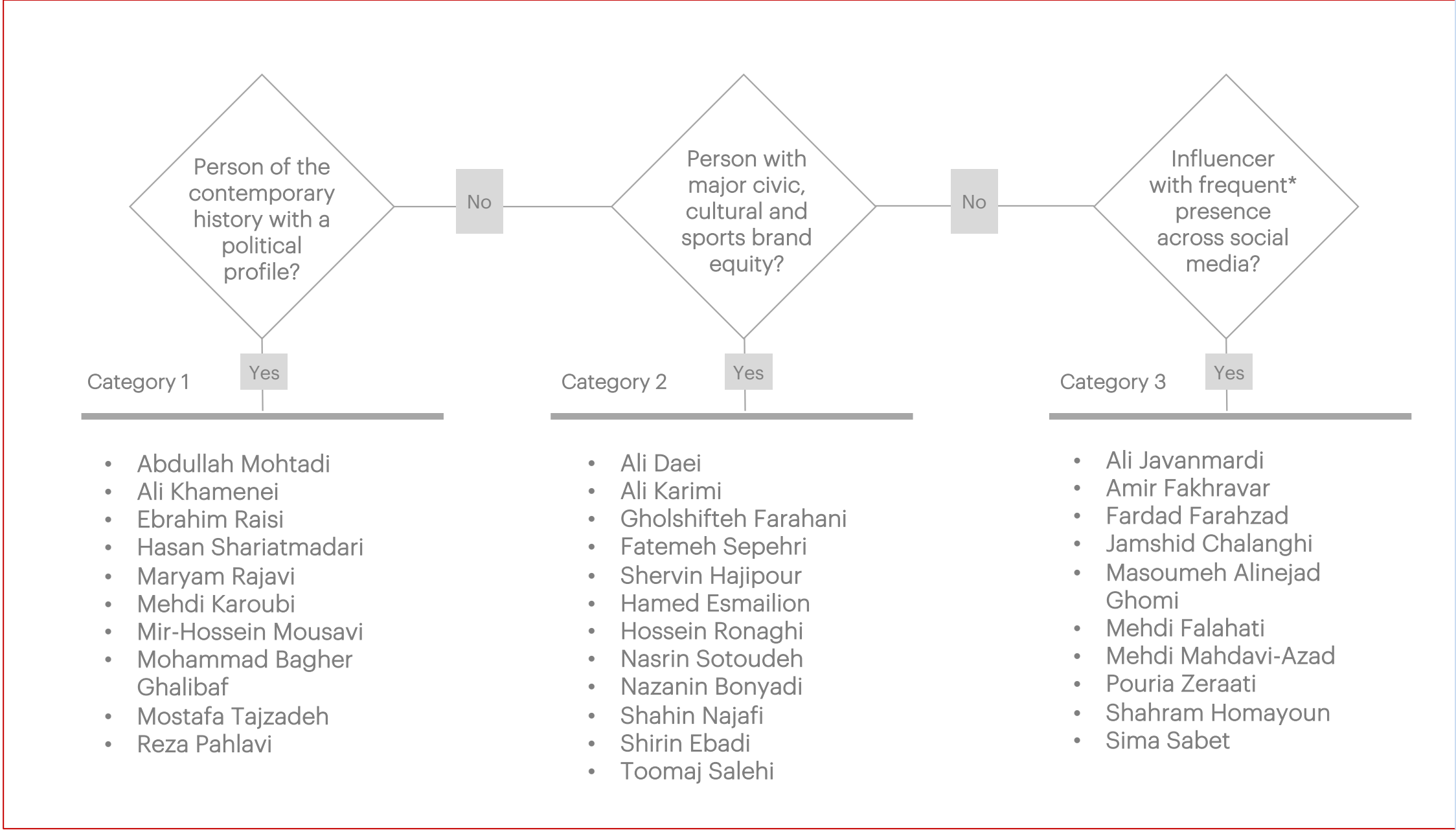
The vast majority of the participants in the survey, i.e., 64.7 percent, were between the ages of 31 and 50. About 78 percent of the respondents hold a university degree, significantly higher than the current average distribution in the Iranian population (46.2 percent). 96.7 percent of respondents reside in metropolitan areas.

Citizens in Iran were critically asked to complete 18 questions covering 52 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 "Stance to the politics in Iran" was conducted between February 10–15, 2023, to understand the opinion of Iranian adults aged 19 and above. In total, 9,000 respondents were given access to the survey, and 2,639 reliable cases could be identified; this constitutes 90% of the total adult population. We reached a 95% confidence level and 2% margin of error, respectively, making the survey results in highly reliable and representative of Iranian adults in general.

Due to the raking procedures, we accomplished 52.46 percent database effectiveness. Typically, weighted samples with a practical base smaller than 50 percent shall be rejected. The loads for all measures were in the range of 0.002 and 1.9522.

Comparability criteria for the selection of individuals



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