

High Hopes, Tempered Expectations

VIEWS FROM IRAN ON THE NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS

JUNE 2015



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN
FOR **HUMAN RIGHTS** IN **IRAN**

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www.iranhumanrights.org

About Us

The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights in Iran.

The Campaign investigates and documents rights violations occurring throughout Iran, relying on first-hand accounts to expose abuses that would otherwise go unreported. We bring these violations to the attention of the international community through news articles, briefings, in-depth reports, podcasts, and videos, and work to build support for human rights inside Iran as well. The Campaign engages in intensive outreach and international advocacy aimed at defending the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Iranian people and holding the Iranian government accountable to its human rights obligations.

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Key Findings

- Strong support for the nuclear negotiations and hope for an agreement was unanimous and unequivocal among all of the respondents, and was held regardless of the respondent's expectations regarding the actual benefits of an accord.
- All of the individuals interviewed felt sanctions and Iran's international isolation have profoundly hurt Iranian society, negatively affecting all spheres of economic, political, and cultural life, with especially dire consequences for the lower socioeconomic strata.
- All of the respondents felt failure of the negotiations would be catastrophic for Iranian society, leading to greater economic hardship, increased repression and further loss of political and cultural freedoms, the weakening of President Rouhani and moderate forces in Iran, and an increased chance of a military confrontation.
- Despite strong consensus on the above issues, the interviewees' views regarding the actual benefits of a successful agreement on the nation's economy, on civil and political rights in the country, and on cultural freedoms were remarkably divergent.
- Seventy-one percent of respondents expect economic benefits from an accord, typically citing increased investment and oil revenues, and gains to employment, manufacturing, and growth. However, one-fifth of those expecting economic gains believe these benefits could be lost to ordinary Iranians due to governmental mismanagement.
- Twenty-five percent of all respondents expect any economic benefits would reach only the upper levels of society and those connected to power, due to entrenched and rampant corruption and the administration's lack of authority to confront rival centers of power.
- Sixty-one percent of the respondents believe a deal would improve the chances of achieving political and cultural reforms, as the administration could now turn its attention to such issues and it would be significantly strengthened politically in its ability to enact change.
- Thirty-six percent expected no improvement in political or cultural freedoms. Some cited the Rouhani administration's lack of power and authority, especially vis-à-vis the legislative and judicial branches and Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. Others questioned Rouhani's willingness to push forward with reforms, noting his few efforts even in the spheres that are under the president's direct control.

Introduction

This study presents the views of a cross-section of Iranian civil society on the effects of the outcome of the nuclear negotiations on the people of Iran. These negotiations between the P5+1 countries and the Islamic Republic on the future of Iran's nuclear program, set to conclude June 30, 2015, will determine whether sanctions and the international isolation of Iran are maintained. Their success or failure, as this study shows, is of momentous importance to the Iranian citizenry.

After eight years of living under the Ahmadinejad administration, a period marked by economic mismanagement, rampant corruption, and repressive governance, and then enduring the toughest sanctions regime that the international community has imposed on a country to date, it is not surprising that the news of an interim nuclear agreement in April 2015 was greeted in Iran with cheering crowds pouring into the streets to celebrate.

Yet this is also a nation scarred by the preceding decade and disillusioned by two years of little change under a president who was elected on a platform of reform. As a result, the views of Iranian society—their hopes, expectations, and doubts regarding the actual effects of the outcome of the negotiations for ordinary Iranians—are quite nuanced and measured.

This study by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, in which a broad spectrum of members of Iranian civil society were questioned in depth on their perceptions of the negotiation's effects inside Iran, presents those views.

The study confirmed that Iranian civil society's support for the nuclear negotiations has remained unequivocal and unanimous since the Campaign's July 2014 [study](#) of society's views on the P5+1 talks. Indeed, the potential for a negotiated end to the conflict over Iran's nuclear program—and thus an aversion of war and an end to the country's international isolation—has brought a profound sense of collective hope to the nation.

The view that sanctions and international isolation have been profoundly destructive for Iran not only economically, but in virtually all other spheres of life—politically, socially, and culturally—was also unanimous among the interviewees.

All of the respondents were particularly emphatic that a failure to reach a negotiated settlement to the nuclear conflict—and thus a continuation of sanctions and Iran's international isolation—would be catastrophic for Iranian society. Debilitating economic deterioration, increased political and cultural repression, and potential for war were consistently cited as expected results of such an outcome.

Beyond that, however, there was noticeable uncertainty and divergent views regarding the effects of a negotiated settlement on Iran's economy, and on political and cultural freedoms in the country.

In contrast to the Campaign's July 2014 [study](#) which gauged support among civil society in Iran for the nuclear negotiations at that time, views have clearly undergone a subtle but perceptible

This is a nation scarred by the preceding decade and disillusioned by two years of little change under a president who was elected on a platform of reform.

shift. While there is remarkable consistency and consensus on the gains that need to be realized in a post-deal environment—economic revitalization, increased civil and political rights, greater social and cultural freedoms—there are increasingly divergent views and doubts regarding the likelihood of any of these changes actually happening.

Indeed, for many, there is a growing gulf between what they hope for and what they expect.

For some, this reflects growing concern over President Rouhani's two-year record in office, in which little changed in the lives of ordinary Iranians and hardliners successfully initiated crackdowns on press freedoms and Internet activities, imposed long prison sentences on peaceful activists, and passed legislation highly discriminatory toward women.

Some are content to wait, accepting the argument of “the nuclear file first,” and many still predict that if an accord is reached there will be significant gains to society with a newly empowered and energized Rouhani.

Yet even among this group, there are growing signs of impatience, and a sense that things have been “put on hold” for far too long. Many respondents stressed that if an accord is signed, the time will have come for Rouhani to bring his focus home and act.

There are growing signs of impatience, and a sense that things have been “put on hold” for far too long.

For others, there was a significant amount of skepticism regarding any benefits of a deal to society at large, and growing doubts that an end to sanctions will bring meaningful changes to people's daily lives. Respondents often questioned Rouhani's ability to act. They doubted the administration had the managerial competency to shepherd the country toward economic health. Even more frequently, they noted his lack of authority to confront the real centers of power, which have no such intention of allowing reforms.

Rampant corruption, an issue that has dominated social media discussions and the domestic press in Iran, was often mentioned in this regard, with respondents asserting that any economic gains would be captured by corrupt and opaque centers of state power.

Others questioned Rouhani's willingness to enact change, noting with dismay little action during the last two years even in areas under his direct authority.

Thus as much as the interviewees were unanimous in wanting deal, hoping for a deal, and knowing the myriad problems that should be addressed in a post-deal environment, they were notably divided on their expectations. Deep consensus on the outcome of failure in the negotiations was paired with little consensus on the outcome of success.

Nevertheless, side-by-side with such fears and doubts was palpable and residing hope. Many of the

respondents, even those most skeptical of a post-deal environment, spoke of this hope. Evident throughout these interviews is a nation longing for a relief from the threat of war, thirsty for re-engaging with the world, and eagerly anticipating the prospect of ending Iran's isolation, even without any other tangible benefits to daily lives and pocket books. This hope has seemed to bring the first cracks of light into a collective consciousness that has been remarkably black for years.

All of the respondents were emphatic that a failure to reach a negotiated settlement...would be catastrophic for Iranian society.

Methodology

In conducting the study, the Campaign interviewed 28 members of Iranian civil society, reflecting many different spheres. The sampling was comprised of political figures, including former members of the Iranian Parliament, journalists, academics, lawyers, economists, filmmakers, writers, publishers, actresses, playwrights, activists, and family members of political prisoners. These figures were chosen on the basis of their influential position in society and their broad engagement with Iranian society.

While the Campaign approached 44 individuals inside Iran to interview for this study, only 28 agreed to talk to us on the record, due to security concerns. Three of those agreed to participate only on condition of anonymity.

For many, there is a growing gulf between what they hope for [after an accord] and what they expect.

This was in marked contrast to the Campaign's study last year in which all of the individuals approached agreed to participate, and to be named, and it reflects a noticeable uptick in fears of harmful professional and/or personal repercussions among those who register dissenting views inside Iran.

All of the interviews were conducted in Persian, and took place during the period from May 13, 2015 to June 2, 2015.

The interviewees were all asked the same series of questions, and in the same order. These were:

1. If a nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1 countries is reached next month, what results would it have for Iranian society?
2. If these negotiations fail, how will that affect Iranian society?
3. How would your work be specifically affected by success in the negotiations? How would it be specifically affected by failure?
4. If the negotiations are successful and the sanctions are lifted, what issues should receive the

most attention by the Rouhani administration? Could you prioritize the issues?

5. How do you think Mr. Rouhani's administration can be motivated to pay more attention to the points you just raised?

Findings of the Study

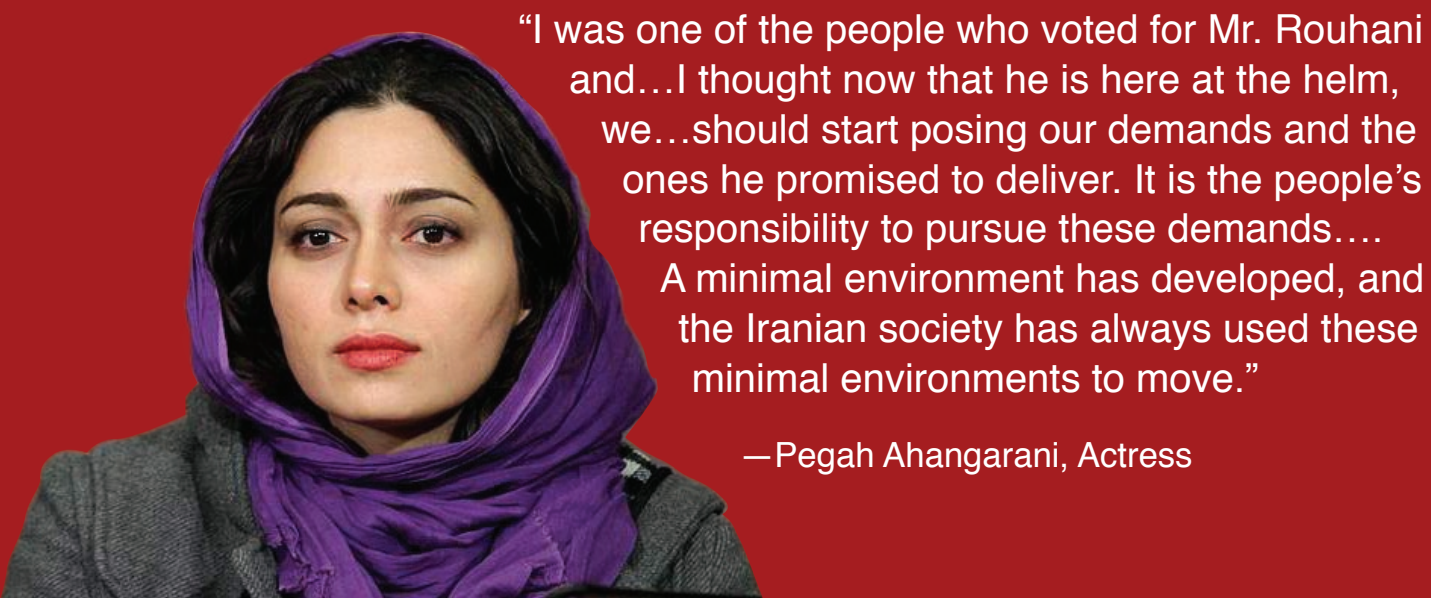
SUPPORT FOR THE NEGOTIATIONS REMAINS STEADFAST

Every single respondent in the study expressed unequivocal support for the negotiations, and a hope that they would result in a negotiated settlement over Iran's nuclear program. This support was independent of any views regarding the effects of those negotiations on any other aspect of Iranian life—the economy, political rights, or social and cultural freedoms. As summed up by these interviewees:

Every single respondent in the study expressed unequivocal support for the negotiations, and a hope that they would result in a negotiated settlement over Iran's nuclear program.

All people in different areas recognize the heavy shadow of the nuclear program on their advancement, welfare, and peace. I believe that society is wholeheartedly awaiting a deal's signature. People hope that when they wake up on the morning of July 1, they will hear that an agreement has been written.

—Nemat Ahmadi, Lawyer



"I was one of the people who voted for Mr. Rouhani and...I thought now that he is here at the helm, we...should start posing our demands and the ones he promised to deliver. It is the people's responsibility to pursue these demands....

A minimal environment has developed, and the Iranian society has always used these minimal environments to move."

—Pegah Ahangarani, Actress

At whatever level the agreement is reached, the Iranian people would benefit from it, just as the Iranian nation benefited from the negotiations [because] what was considered “the military option” was, at least for the time being, taken off the table.

—Issa Saharkhiz, Journalist and Former Political Prisoner

Evident throughout these interviews is a nation longing for a relief from the threat of war, thirsty for re-engaging with the world....

We hope an agreement is reached and that it is signed, so that our nation can take a breath after all this prolonged pressure.

—Shahla Lahiji, Publisher, Roshangaran and Women Studies Publishers

HOPE, OPTIMISM, AND LIFTING UP THE NATION'S COLLECTIVE SPIRIT

Such support—and hope—is not surprising. Over the past decade, many Iranians have experienced a collective state of despair and hopelessness in the face of debilitating sanctions, international isolation, and domestic repression, especially coming on the heels of eight years of the dysfunctional governance and economic mismanagement of the Ahmadinejad administration.

Rouhani's efforts to reach a negotiated solution to the conflict over Iran's nuclear program, thereby lifting the sanctions and ending Iran's international isolation, has created a palpable sense of hope that an agreement would at least offer a chance to end the country's downward spiral and provide potential for a brighter future.

“The highest cost imposed by the sanctions is paid by the people, particularly the low-income and vulnerable groups.”

—Fakhrossadat Mohtashamipour, Civil Activist, Wife of Political Prisoner Mostafa Tajzadeh



This hope was frequently expressed by the individuals interviewed in this study, even if laced with doubts, fears, and uncertainties regarding the extent to which their lives might actually change after an agreement.

If there is a resolution, our national pride will be boosted, and this would help us feel better, help us become more hopeful. A life with hope...is something we have not had for a long time.

—Lili Golestan, Writer and Publisher

[An agreement] will have its first impact on society's collective mental state. While many predict this might be short-lived...the psychological impact of this victory in the different sectors of the society will definitely not be short-lived. Such a positive impact can even move people to take action to improve their conditions.

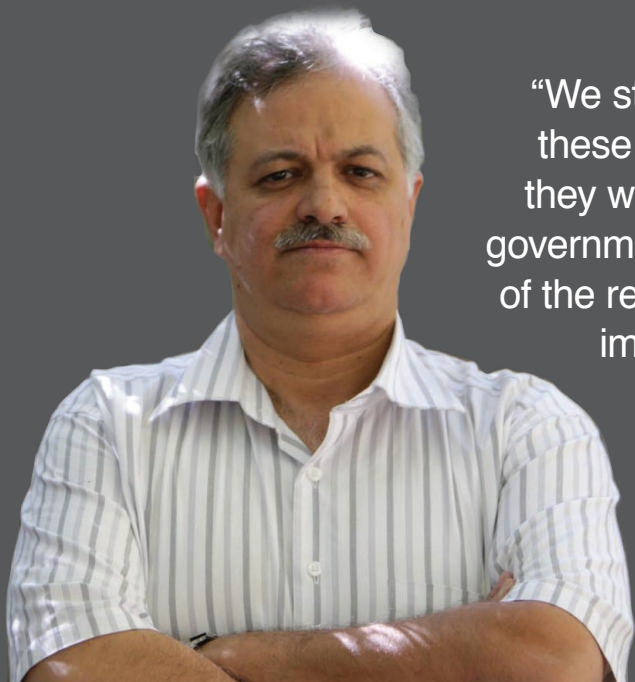
—A Journalist in Tehran and Former Political Prisoner

If this agreement is made, it will have a positive and serious impact on all of our lives. Although there are no guarantees, it could bring peace of mind, a better way of living, better thinking, and a better economic situation across all professions.

—Hamid Amjad, Playwright, Theater Director, and Publisher in Tehran

I hope the nuclear negotiations come to a [successful] conclusion because my society needs peace and welfare and this agreement can provide that peace and welfare.

—Aboutorab Khosravi, Novelist and Literature Teacher



“We still have some 2009 prisoners in jails. Many of these individuals’ sentences will be completed, and they will be released over the coming months...If the government can, it should explicitly ask for the release of the remaining prisoners. [Also], there is a clear and important issue, which is the issue of the house arrest of Mr. Mousavi, Mr. Karroubi, and Ms. Rahnavard.”

—Ahmad Shirzad, Physics Professor,
Former Member of the Parliament

If we reach an agreement, good opportunities in every area will definitely develop, and we can demand our rights as human beings. But if there is no resolution, I can't tell what may happen. At any rate, I am hopeful and I wish for an agreement.

—Mahmoud Dolatabadi, Author

THE DESTRUCTIVE IMPACT OF FAILED NEGOTIATIONS

The interviewees were unanimous that sanctions and Iran's international isolation had been profoundly destructive to Iranian society, causing severe economic hardship. Indeed, directly contradicting the frequent claims by many Iranian officials to the contrary, many respondents spoke bitterly of the economic costs experienced by ordinary Iranians under the sanctions regime.

The pain of these sanctions has affected the Iranian nation, and naturally, if an agreement is not reached, this pain would increase....Nuclear, medical, judicial, and economic issues may not be directly related to each other, but there is an indirect relationship among all of them.

—Farideh Gheirat, Lawyer

For a number of years, Iran's international isolation and all the excuses used for putting pressure on our country, particularly the sanctions, have destroyed the Iranian people's psychological security, and have left them preoccupied, and of course, many people have suffered direct or indirect loss.

—Fakhrossadat Mohtashamipour, Civil Activist, Wife of Political Prisoner

There was a unanimous and strongly held view by the respondents that a failure to reach a negotiated settlement to the conflict over Iran's nuclear program, and thus a continuation of sanctions and

"I expect the promises Hassan Rouhani made about the advancement of reforms in the Iranian society are carried out."

—Farideh Gheirat, Lawyer



isolation, would be catastrophic, across the board, for Iran.

[Failed negotiations] would cause terrible damage to the people and to social, cultural, political, and economic activities. The highest cost imposed by the sanctions is paid by the people, particularly the low-income and vulnerable groups.

—Fakhrossadat Mohtashamipour, Civil Activist, Wife of Political Prisoner

[An agreement] would have a fundamental psychological effect on the people, because people feel vested in this agreement. If the negotiations fail, it would be a very heavy outcome for the people.

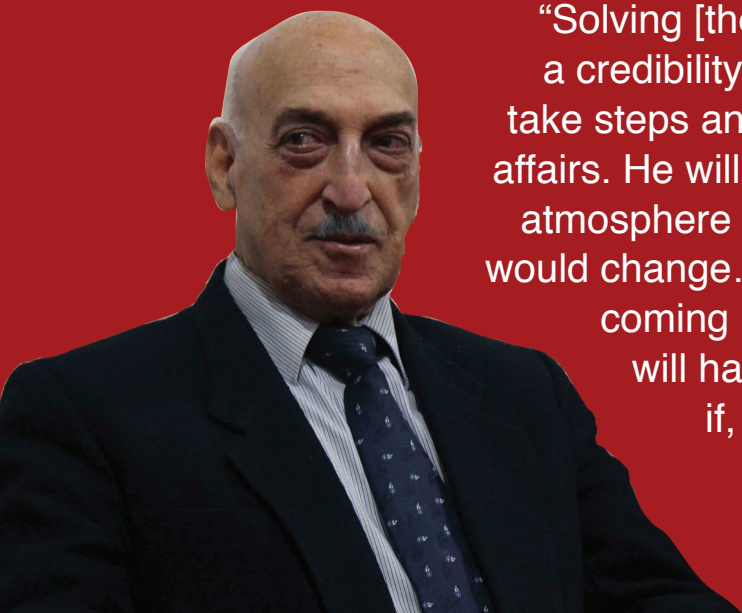
—Pegah Ahangarani, Actress

If the negotiations fail, there will be very, very worrisome consequences for Iran, not only in the area of the economy, but in political and possibly military arenas.

—Hermidas Bavand, Political Scientist and Spokesperson of National Front

Further deterioration of an already deeply dysfunctional economy (with particularly dire consequences for the lower classes and vulnerable groups in society), the complete discrediting and weakening of the Rouhani administration and moderate forces in Iran more broadly, concomitant strengthening of hardliners, increased repression and further restrictions in political rights and social and cultural freedoms, a marked increase in anti-Western sentiment in Iran and further deterioration in relations with the West, and, most disquieting for those interviewed, possible war, were repeatedly cited by the respondents as direct outcomes of a failure in the negotiations.

The existing situation would worsen. The value of the rial would fall further, and people's financial and economic problems would worsen. Considering the situation in the region, a war may



“Solving [the nuclear] issue will give [Rouhani] a credibility which will give him the freedom to take steps and act more powerfully on domestic affairs. He will face opposition, but ... the current atmosphere which is dominated by the radicals would change....Parliamentary elections are also coming up, and if [Rouhani] succeeds, this will have its own impact on the elections, if, God willing, it is a free election....”

—Hermidas Bavand,
University Professor

somehow be imposed on Iran.

— Ghasem Sholeh Sadi Lawyer, Former Member of Parliament, Former Political Prisoner

If this agreement is not reached, the situation will turn even worse than it is now. The sanctions would grow...and would constrict the economy further, then the unemployment rate would grow, and prices...would go through another sharp increase.

— Fariborz Raisdana, Economist, Former Political Prisoner

Social hopelessness would increase drastically. People would once again lose their motivation for reforms....The failure of the negotiations would equal the failure of moderates and the strengthening of the radical camp....The atmosphere for cultural activities and journalism would become tremendously more difficult....[A] continuation of sanctions would place the country in a defensive mode...[and] the domestic security organs would increasingly pressure the media and journalists in order to silence any voices of dissent.

—A Journalist in Tehran and Former Political Prisoner

The radical forces will become more belligerent against the Rouhani administration, and would attempt to destroy the administration during its remaining time, saying the cabinet's full energy was invested in the nuclear issue and nothing else was done in other areas.

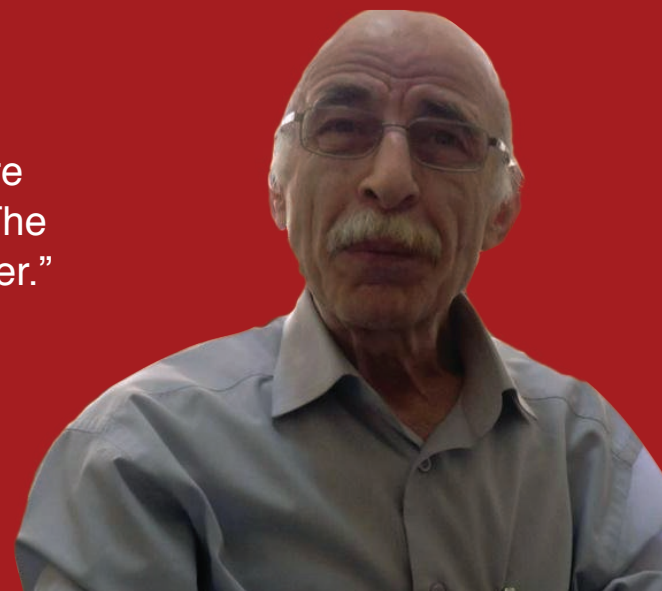
—Ahmad Shirzad, Physics Professor and Former Member of Parliament

[Failure to reach a deal will result in] an intensification of anti-West political tendencies in Iran [which] will help the overall anti-Western currents in the region, even if indirectly.

—A Civil Rights Lawyer in Tehran

“Prior to Mr. Rouhani’s election, we had four years of negative growth rate, where there was unfair distribution of wealth. The poor grew poorer and the rich grew richer.”

—Mehdi Taghavi, Economist



If, God forbid, this should happen, a war may get started.

—Massoud Shafiee, Lawyer

POST-DEAL EXPECTATIONS: HOPES AND SERIOUS CONCERNS


The respondents in this study overwhelmingly cited economic recovery and a loosening of restrictions on political, civil, social, and cultural freedoms as the domestic priorities for Iran following a nuclear deal. As former Member of Parliament Ahmad Shirzad put it in a remark that was echoed by many other interviewees, “Rouhani must bring his focus home and pay attention to domestic issues.”

For almost all of the interviewees, an agreement was considered a necessary even if not sufficient condition for addressing any of these priorities.

However, the interviewees were split regarding those who expected to actually see gains in the economy or in political and social rights in the country if a settlement is reached, and those who expressed skepticism that there would actually be any meaningful improvements in these areas in a post-deal environment.

Regarding economic benefits, 71 percent of respondents stated there would be tangible gains from an end to sanctions. However, 20 percent of these individuals felt these gains could be largely squandered due to continued economic mismanagement, or lost to the vast majority of Iranians as they would disproportionately—if not exclusively—benefit the upper strata of society and those connected to centers of power. Respondents frequently cited corruption and the opaque nature of political and economic decision-making in Iran in this context. As one respondent put it, “the poor would get poorer and the rich would get richer.”

A significant number, 25 percent of the respondents, asserted there would be no economic impact, and that in fact, there is a potential for a worsening of economic conditions post-deal. This was attributed

A portrait of Fariborz Raisdana, an economist, smiling and wearing a white shirt and a blue patterned tie. The background is a solid dark grey.

“I have no specific expectations of the Rouhani administration. I should add that the Rouhani government has been tested and [has failed because] it did not deliver on any of its promises.”

—Fariborz Raisdana, Economist

to a belief that the Rouhani government does not have the economic competence or managerial skills to institute a economic program that would translate the lifting of sanctions into meaningful economic improvements, or that the administration does not have the governing authority and thus ability to confront rival centers of power that have benefitted from the current economic structures.

With regards to civil, political, and cultural freedoms, 61 percent of the respondents believed that achieving a negotiated settlement to the nuclear conflict should facilitate progress toward greater rights and liberties. They noted that the nation's attention, previously monopolized by the negotiations, could now turn to critical domestic issues, among them, the state of basic freedoms in Iran.

However, 36 percent of the interviewees believed Rouhani did not have the ability to achieve progress in these areas or directly questioned Rouhani's willingness to push forward with meaningful changes in the state of basic rights and freedoms in Iran. They frequently noted his lack of authority over the legislative and judicial branches of government in Iran in this regard, as well as the ultimate authority of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. They also noted with palpable frustration his inaction in areas over the last two years in which he does have direct authority.

FOCUS ON ECONOMIC RECOVERY

In general, all interviewees agreed that the sanctions have caused tremendous erosion of the economic well-being of the population and that economic revitalization must be a top priority for Rouhani's government if a nuclear deal is reached.

The most tangible and immediate result [following an agreement] the people would feel would be the economic issue. Problems caused by the sanctions are palpable in every home right now.

—Ahmad Shirzad, University Professor and Former Member of Parliament

“I have no such notion that reaching a nuclear agreement would lead to our achievement of individual and social freedoms and social-economic welfare.... It is an excuse when [Rouhani] says ‘we are all tied up in the nuclear issue right now, and have postponed pursuit of human rights and individual and social rights to a later time.’”

—Reza Khandan, Novelist, Member of the Board of Directors of the Iranian Writers' Association



The lifting of sanctions will probably be a long process, but fixing and organizing the country's economy is the most important thing the government must do.

—Lawyer in Tehran

Economic priorities [include] employment, strengthening the rial, encouraging foreign investors with incentives, promotion of supportive policies for the private sector, and... welfare priorities [must include] policies to support youth, mothers, and women heads of households.

—A Journalist in Tehran and Former Political Prisoner

Seventy-one percent of respondents expect a deal to result in tangible economic gains, with remarks typically noting the benefits of an end to sanctions and an increase in oil revenue and investment, and the resulting gains to manufacturing, growth, and employment.

It's unlikely that the sanctions are lifted quickly, but the process for smoothing international relations would create these opportunities for the government, as well as the private sector.

—A Civil Rights Lawyer in Tehran

If the nuclear issue is eventually resolved, political and economic relations with the West will improve and...the people's conditions will improve, because a group of manufacturing units have reduced their production as a result of a weakened rial and their reliance on imported material and...have completely disappeared. Once these manufacturing units become active, they will employ a work force and the growth rate will increase....If relations with the West improve, oil sanctions will be lifted and our blocked funds will be released, and the economy would improve.

—Mehdi Taghavi, Economist



“We must first stabilize the economy through strengthening the private sector and reducing economic dependency on the government. The arts sector would also benefit from Iran's joining the world economies.”

—Shahram Mokri, Filmmaker

Some of the interviewees pointed out that a meaningful economic recovery can be achieved only if proper planning would ensure that economic problems such as unemployment and inflation are effectively tackled. Citing the existing dysfunctional economic infrastructure and decades of economic mismanagement, these interviewees were skeptical such planning would take place.

If the administration does not have a plan for after the nuclear agreement, we will face widespread public disappointment...the results of this are so destructive, they could cause a complete collapse of the economic system.

—Mohammad Aghazadeh, Journalist

I have no hope that this agreement is able to make a...difference in the Iranian economy. This is because the [benefits would not] flow into veins that could make the economy more nimble. [Instead], they would head towards activities that were not effective in [meeting] economic needs such as employment, [reducing] inflation, [or increasing] productivity.

—Fariborz Raisdana, Economist and Former Political Prisoner

Several interviewees expressed specific concern that domestic manufacturing, hard hit after years of sanctions, could be seriously jeopardized by the impact of large-scale imports following a deal.

There is a high rate of closures [of manufacturing workshops] and these units' owners have refused to continue production due to lack of capital. It is predicted that once the sanctions are lifted, more goods will be imported and manufacturing may not improve as a result.

—A Journalist in Tehran and Former Political Prisoner

If a [more] positive international environment is not tied to productive economic growth, we can

“The rift that grows slowly between the people and those who were elected if people feel what they wanted is not going to happen, even if the government improves the economy and makes a lot of money and gets the country out of a recession, would still leave that administration unable to reach its initial goals. These issues could face the administration with problems in a second term.”

—Reza Mirkarimi, Filmmaker



expect to see the remaining domestic production destroyed in favor of imports.

—Mohammad Aghazadeh, Journalist

Another frequently cited concern was that widespread and entrenched corruption would prove to be a serious block to broad economic gains. Many of the interviewees, echoing comments that have been extremely prevalent in the Iranian press and in social media networks in Iran, commented on endemic corruption in Iran among state institutions such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and other state and quasi-state organizations, and argued that any economic benefits in a post-deal environment, especially an increase in oil revenue, would likely be lost to corruption and captured exclusively by those who have access to power.

Because the economic structure is the same as it was, if resources are released, they will be utilized by economic groups and individuals who are powerful and [this] has nothing to do with development and productive growth.

—Fariborz Raisdana, Economist and Former Political Prisoner

The top priority should be to combat the looting centers, centers that impede a productive economy. In order to eliminate these centers, press freedom and an open political atmosphere are the main prerequisites. There is no other way.

—Mohammad Aghazadeh, Journalist

[Only] their [the State's] financial and economic situation would change [after an accord]. They live with oil money. The IRGC [Iran's Revolutionary Guards] and the Basij [the Guards' volunteer militia] operate with oil money.

—Jamal Mirsadeghi, Author



“Mr. Rouhani is not in control. He was elected to resolve the nuclear standstill. He has no authority of his own. Whatever he wants to implement, he would first have to seek permission from the Supreme Leader’s office. The expectations we have of Mr. Rouhani do not match his capabilities.”

—Mohammad Nourizad, Documentary Filmmaker and Political Activist

Related to the concern that economic benefits in a post-deal environment would be disproportionately captured by the wealthy and connected was a fear that income inequalities, which have increased tremendously in Iran during the past decade, would worsen after any lifting of the sanctions.

Prior to Mr. Rouhani's election, we had four years of negative growth rate, where there was unfair distribution of wealth. The poor grew poorer and the rich grew richer.

—Mehdi Taghavi, Economist

There will be some openings in economic and cultural areas, but such openings may not have a profound impact on the middle layers....The banks will be able to do their jobs, medicine sanctions will be lifted. This would be good, as many of our patients have problems obtaining their medication and medications are expensive. Even in the aviation industry things will be good, because many of our passenger airplanes have...no repair facilities... and we can't [get] spare parts. But the economic [benefits] would impact the higher income levels and we cannot expect that there would be some fantastic opening for the middle and lower levels.

—Abbas Ghaffari, Film Director

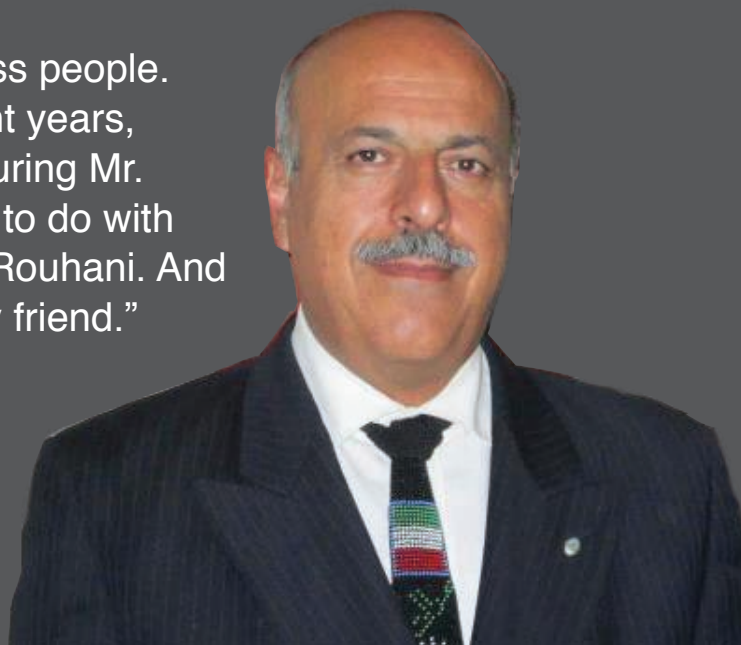
Awareness of the dangers of unrealistic expectations regarding the economic gains following an accord was also frequently noted by the interviewees. They cautioned that any benefits would be gradual, and that heady expectations risked disappointment.

If we reach an agreement, there will be a short-term psychological effect, and of course, not proportionate to the people's expectations.

—Mohammad Aghazadeh, Journalist

“[Rouhani] made promises to impress people. I was a university professor for eight years, and I was dismissed from my job during Mr. Rouhani's tenure. This has nothing to do with Ahmadinejad, it has to do with Mr. Rouhani. And I should add that Mr. Rouhani is my friend.”

—Ghasem Sholeh Sadi, Lawyer, Former Member of the Parliament and Civil Activist



Many officials have also stated that we must not expect that there would be a major drop in the value of the US dollar in Iran. This indicates that we cannot even be hopeful for an economic improvement over the immediate future.

—Abbas Ghaffari, Film Director

CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

The interviewees consistently expressed the view that expanding civil and political rights in the country was a priority that must be addressed in any post-deal environment.

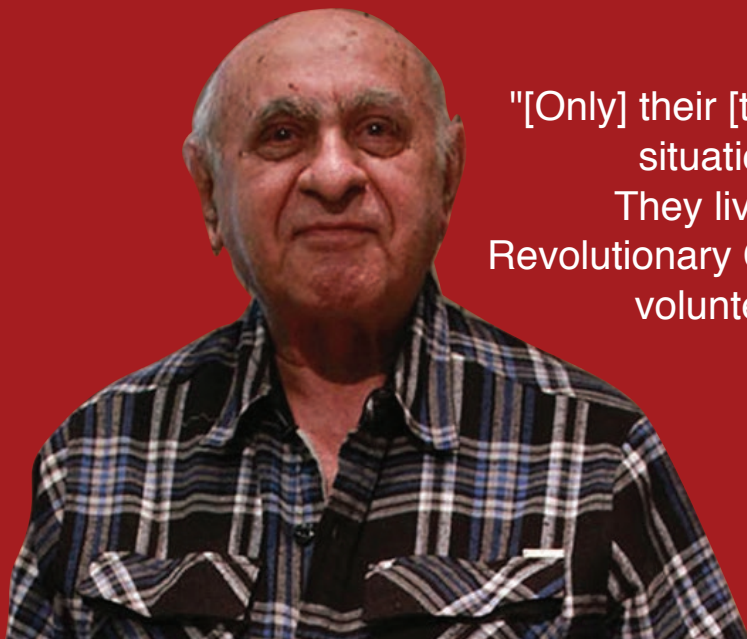
Issues most consistently tagged by the interviewees were freedom of the press and freedom of expression, including the right to peaceful dissent, and the large numbers of political prisoners still sitting in Iranian prisons, many of them dating back to the peaceful protests that followed the disputed 2009 presidential election in Iran.

The continued house arrests of the opposition Green Movement leaders, Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi, and Zahra Rahnava, were repeatedly mentioned as intolerable injustices that had already gone on far too long (over four years) and which must be addressed immediately.

After the topic of nuclear negotiations dims, [Rouhani] will have to focus on human rights and civil rights, which were parts of Mr. Rouhani's initial programs. This should include his allowing Iranian journalists to re-open the Iranian Journalists Association.... Cultural and political issues must be addressed side by side with economic issues.

—Issa Saharkhiz, Journalist and Former Political Prisoner

Following the nuclear and economic issues, the Rouhani administration will have to tackle the issue of political freedom. Political parties, universities, and the media will be serious demands



"[Only] their [the State's] financial and economic situation would change [after an accord]. They live with oil money. The IRGC [Iran's Revolutionary Guards] and the Basij [the Guards' volunteer militia] operate with oil money."

—Jamal Mirsadeghi, Author

Mr. Rouhani will have to face, and he will have to take visible steps and present them to public opinion....[Priorities must include] issuing licenses for different political parties, issuing licenses for new publications...[and] the serious pursuit of citizenship rights.

—A Journalist in Iran

The peace created in the international arena will also affect our domestic policies and deliver the campaign slogans the moderate presidential candidate offered and [for which he] was able to receive public support through the people's vote. These slogans included the promise for opening up the cultural and political atmosphere. Unfortunately, at this time the most problems are in these two areas.

—Fakhrossadat Mohtashamipour, Civil Activist, Wife of Political Prisoner

When the sanctions are lifted, economic freedom can lead to other types of freedom in the society....As a reformist, I expect the promises Hassan Rouhani made about the advancement of reforms in the Iranian society [to be] carried out. I would like to see Mr. Rouhani leaning towards the direction of what we call reformism for protecting public interests.

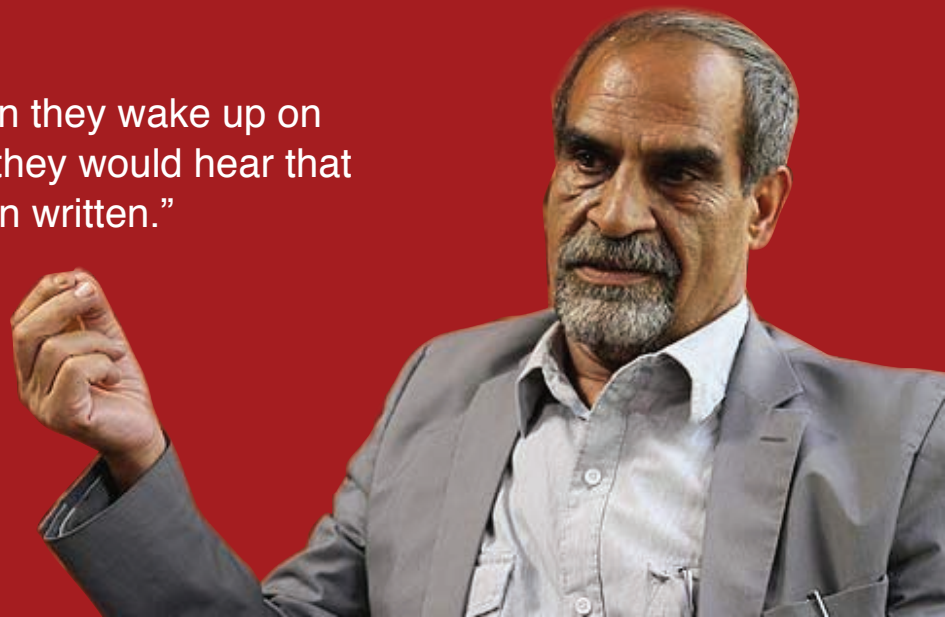
—Farideh Gheirat, Lawyer

The respondents often expressed the view that a deal would strengthen chances for improving civil and political liberties in the country. They felt these issues had been put on hold while the negotiations were underway, effectively stymying meaningful discussion of the state of rights and liberties in the country. The following quote was a typical remark in this regard.

[The human rights situation] is very important to our people...it is important for the nation's sense of cooperation and unity....We must return to an atmosphere of social participation. We must return to an atmosphere where people feel like they have a bigger part in running the state.

“People hope that when they wake up on the morning of July 2, they would hear that an agreement has been written.”

—Nemat Ahmadi,
Lawyer



Elections will have to become more meaningful processes, so that it is not felt that the results have been decided before. In the area of books, journalism, and academics, there are still a lot of feelings of insecurity. There are a lot of things that have all been on a waiting list in the hope that first the nuclear issue would be settled.

—Ahmad Shirzad, Physics Professor and Former Member of the Parliament

There were divisions between those who felt the delay of such reforms in the name of the nuclear priority was real and those who felt it was just an excuse. Moreover, even among those who accepted the validity of the argument that resolution of the nuclear file must precede all other issues, there was a palpable sense of growing impatience, and a sense that the time to act had come.

Nevertheless, similar to arguments regarding economic benefits of a deal, the interviewees argued that achieving a negotiated settlement to the nuclear conflict was a necessary even if not sufficient requirement for any progress toward greater rights and liberties.

If sanctions are lifted, Iran's relations with the world will expand, and in terms of human rights, Iran would remove the limitations imposed so far. As a defense lawyer for individuals who are pursued or imprisoned for political reasons, my work will be positively impacted....Solving the nuclear issue will impact Iran's political and social issues and society will enjoy more freedom as a result....Unlike those who believe that a decrease in foreign pressure would increase pressure inside the country, I don't believe this...if other issues are not created, solving the nuclear issue will impact Iran's political and social issues and the society will enjoy more freedom as a result.

—Mohammad Saleh Nikbakht, Lawyer

Mr. Rouhani has put all his focus on his foreign policy. I think after the agreement, he will definitely shift his focus to domestic issues. People will be able to pursue their demands and can ask Mr.



“We are a society that wants to live with the rest of the world. We want to be connected to the entire world. These conditions of isolation from the rest of the world are intolerable.”

—Aboutorab Khosravi,
Novelist and Literature Teacher

Rouhani to deliver on his campaign pledges, whether pertaining to social liberties, culture, arts, or civil organizations he was supposed to pursue.

—Pegah Ahangarani, Actress

If the sanctions are lifted....another impact... I believe would [be] a big opening in the human rights discourse, and we would no longer witness cases such as Jason Rezaian's or Atena [Faraghdani]'s. This would see an end to the "espionage" cases...the human rights issue, God willing, will find more flexibility after this agreement....if the nuclear issue is resolved, all the side issues will be influenced....

—Massoud Shafiee, Lawyer

When unemployment, inflation, and recession, each of which have their own related social maladies, are resolved, the improvement in economic and financial affairs and the creation of the requisite conditions for employment and the strengthening of the Iranian currency can have their own social impact, which...will also result in a positive political impact.

— Hermidas Bavand (University Professor)

However, other respondents expressed grave doubts that there would be substantive improvement in the state of civil and political rights in Iran even if an agreement is reached.

Some argued this was due to Rouhani's lack of authority and thus inability to move forward with political or cultural reforms and affect change in these areas, noting that the structure of the Iranian government gives the president no authority over the legislative or judicial branches, and that Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei was the real power holder in any event.

"... relinquishing the country's cultural management to Iranian artists and cultural figures were among [Rouhani's] campaign promises. I hope he has a chance to get close to this path....We need the cultural NGO's to grow in Iran. This can be the most important event of the end of Mr. Rouhani's first term...."

—Shadmehr Rastin, Filmmaker



[We need] policies to support the youth, mothers, women heads of household. Improving the political atmosphere through issuing licenses for different political parties, issuing licenses for new publications....[However], because the administration is not in charge of judicial and security organizations, the only way to reduce the country's security state would be to open up the political atmosphere.

—A Journalist in Tehran and Former Political Prisoner

Mr. Rouhani only said those things to appease [us], because [he] has no authority.... I have the same amount of power vis-à-vis the Judiciary as Mr. Rouhani does. I have the same authority vis-à-vis the Legislative Branch as Mr. Rouhani does. Mr. Rouhani cannot order the house arrest of Mr. Mousavi or political students or political prisoners to be lifted....There are things that are within Mr. Rouhani's power, but he approaches them cautiously. For example, the Iranian Journalists Association is within the authority of the Labor Ministry. It would take nothing for Labor Minister Ali Rabiee to announce today that elections for the Journalists Association would be held. But re-opening the Association's building is under the authority of the Judiciary, and as president, Mr. Rouhani is even afraid of walking by the Judiciary's building.

—Nemat Ahmadi, Lawyer

Mr. Rouhani is not in control. He was elected to resolve the nuclear standstill. He has no authority of his own. Whatever he wants to implement, he would first have to seek permission from the Supreme Leader's office. Therefore the expectations we have of Mr. Rouhani do not match his capabilities. For example, he promised to enable women's presence in political and economic arenas...as well the presence of the youth in academic, political, economic, and social areas, all of which has [come to] an absolute dead end, unless it has pertained to members of the ruling faction.

—Mohammad Nourizad, Documentary Filmmaker and Former Political Prisoner



“If we reach an agreement...we can demand our rights as human beings. But if there is no resolution, I can't tell what may happen. At any rate, I am hopeful and I wish for an agreement.”

—Mahmoud Dolatabadi, Author

I have no expectations of Mr. Rouhani's administration. His ability is what he has displayed so far. The Iranian system of governance does not offer much of a chance to the president. The power is concentrated in the hands of the Supreme Leader, and the three government branches must carry out their duties under the oversight of the Supreme Leader....Therefore the people's expectations of the Rouhani Administration must be proportionate to the authorities and capabilities of this administration.

—Ghasem Sholeh Sadi, Lawyer, Former Member of Parliament and Former Political Prisoner

Others doubted Rouhani's willingness. They argued Rouhani had no commitment to reform and no intention of moving forward, irrespective of his abilities or his authority within the structure of governance and power in the country. They noted Rouhani's lack of initiatives and tepid efforts in this regard during his two years in office in realms that are directly under his authority, specifically citing such areas as his authority over the Ministry of Science, which controls university appointments, and his authority in areas affecting publishing.

If this agreement is reached, I do not believe that the government would step in to expand human rights; for example, that it would allow associations to be active.... [A] government that considers censorship its main power tool and sees it as a part of its ideology, will continue it in any way it can. Following an agreement, some harmless and safe associations may be able to find some relative freedom. Those who are dependent on the government may be given some relative freedom, but the cost society would pay would be a serious halt to all organizations, associations, hopes, and individuals who pursue the real human rights....

—Fariborz Raisdana, Economist and Former Political Prisoner

An agreement can have some impact on the economy, but I don't believe it will make a big difference for the people....As a citizen, I would like to live in a free and safe environment.... Would that expectation be met? I don't think so....I have no such notion that reaching a nuclear

“We hope an agreement is reached and that it is signed, so that our nation can take a breath after all this prolonged pressure.”

—Shahla Lahiji, Translator and Publisher



agreement would lead to our achievement of individual and social freedoms and social-economic welfare....It is an excuse when [Rouhani] says “we are all tied up in the nuclear issue right now, and have postponed pursuit of human rights and individual and social rights to a later time.”

—Reza Khandan, Novelist, Member of the Board of Directors of the Iranian Writers' Association

Mr. Rouhani's view to political development is defined by the state. I don't think he believes in NGOs. Despite his being a lawyer, he does not believe in individual liberties as much as he should.

—Nemat Ahmadi, Lawyer

I have no specific expectations of the Rouhani administration. I should add that the Rouhani government has been tested and [has failed because] it did not deliver on any of its promises. Therefore, we cannot have any specific demands of such a government....It is our human demand that he should deliver on his responsibilities within the framework of the existing minimum laws.

—Fariborz Raisdana, Economist and Former Political Prisoner

[Rouhani] is incapable of interfering in judicial affairs. He cannot interfere in those military organizations, either...and he doesn't want to interfere in the Legislative branch. What is left for [him] to do? Therefore, our people must not act emotionally. They must know what the government can do, what boundaries its authorities have, and to adjust their expectations. [Rouhani] made promises to impress people. I was a university professor for eight years, and I was dismissed from my job during Mr. Rouhani's tenure. This has nothing to do with Ahmadinejad, it has to do with Mr. Rouhani. And I should add that Mr. Rouhani is my friend.

—Ghasem Sholeh Sadi, Lawyer, Former Member of Parliament and Former Political Prisoner



“[Rouhani] should act with more courage. First of all, he must put the law on top of his list, and to confront lawlessness. He must seek rights for all and end nepotism. I expect observation of the law.”

—Lili Golestan,
Writer and Publisher

A few of the respondents noted that the state of civil and political liberties might actually worsen after a nuclear agreement is reached. They argued that after a deal hardliners might push to re-assert their primacy in the domestic sphere.

Maybe after an agreement is made they might clamp down and make things stricter and harder. It may be possible that the atmosphere would become more restricted.

—Pegah Ahangarani, Actress

As you know, it is not easy to speak openly, but I have no extraordinary expectations. This is why I believe we will be witnessing certain events, but not to the degree people are hoping. Certainly in several areas, such as economic, social, and political issues, I logically expect some minimum movements. [Yet] it is also possible that the atmosphere may be even more restricted following a nuclear agreement.

—Kianoush Ayari, Filmmaker

RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

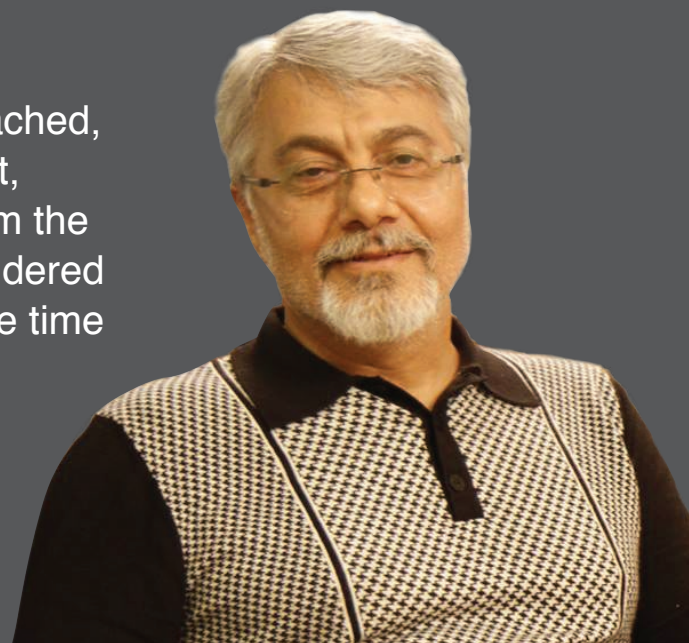
While many of the interviewees spoke in broad terms about the need for political and civil reforms, as mentioned above, the issue of the release of political prisoners—including an end to the house arrests of the opposition Green Movement leaders—was frequently cited as an urgent priority.

Rouhani had campaigned for the presidency in 2013 on a platform that included releasing political prisoners, and thus expectations on this issue were set by the incoming administration itself.

We still have some 2009 prisoners in jails. Many of these individuals' sentences will be completed, and they will be released over the coming months, and only a few will be left in prison. If the

“At whatever level the agreement is reached, the Iranian people would benefit from it, just as the Iranian nation benefited from the negotiations [because] what was considered “the military option” was, at least for the time being, taken off the table.”

—Issa Saharkhiz, Journalist and
Political Activist



government can, it should explicitly ask for the release of the remaining prisoners. [Also], there is a clear and important issue, which is the issue of the house arrest of Mr. Mousavi, Mr. Karroubi, and Ms. Rahnavard.

—Ahmad Shirzad, Physics Professor and Former Member of Parliament

In gatherings and assemblies on different occasions, or on the streets and through developments in the universities, we observe that wherever people find a chance to express their opinions, they emphasize their political demands, and at the center of them is the issue of lifting the house arrest [of the former presidential candidates].

—Issa Saharkhiz, Journalist and Former Political Prisoner

GROWING IMPATIENCE WITH THE ROUHANI ADMINISTRATION

While many of the individuals interviewed expressed at least some degree of acceptance of the oft-circulated argument that political and social reforms must wait for a settlement of the conflict over Iran's nuclear program, there was a palpable sense of dwindling patience with this line of reasoning.

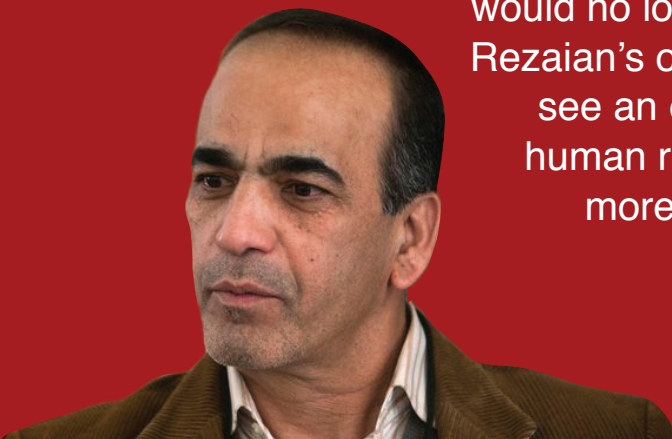
Indeed, the respondents' views in this study honed closely to a recent [poll](#) conducted in Iran that showed support for Rouhani has dropped from 58% this past winter to 48% at present, and that disapproval had inched up four points since February 2015 from 29% to 33%.

Whether lame or legitimate, I hope that after a nuclear agreement there are no more excuses after it, and that it would be possible to expect, to demand things.

— Hamid Amjad, Playwright, Theater Director, and Publisher in Tehran

“If the sanctions are lifted...I believe [there would be] a big opening in the human rights discourse, and we would no longer witness cases such as Jason Rezaian's or Atena [Faraghdani]'s. This would see an end to the “espionage” cases...the human rights issue, God willing, would find more flexibility after this agreement.... “

—Massoud Shafiee, Lawyer



During the two years the Rouhani government has been in power, its actions have not been proportional to the campaign promises.

—Mohammad Saleh Nikbakht, Lawyer

Mr. Rouhani's administration is not very [focused on] political [issues], and it is a lot softer than it should be. He should act with more courage. First of all, he must put the law on top of his list, and to confront lawlessness. He must seek rights for all and end nepotism. I expect observation of the law.

—Lili Golestan, Writer and Publisher

IMPACT ON DOMESTIC POLITICS

The interviewees frequently spoke to the transformative effect that success or failure in the negotiations would have on domestic politics in Iran.

Respondents saw a successful agreement, particularly one that was followed with tangible sanctions relief, as a potential game changer for Rouhani, vastly increasing his domestic strength politically. They felt an accord would significantly increase his ability to move forward more forcefully with civil and political reforms as the domestic credibility engendered from a successful accord would empower him to take on hardliners he has been unable or unwilling to confront.

Similarly, respondents believed such an accord would weaken hardline forces, who would be marginalized as the ones who did not deliver, and whose *raison d'être* (opposition to the West, especially the United States) would dissipate with the end of sanctions and Iran's international re-integration.

The respondents believed failure to reach an agreement would immeasurably weaken Rouhani, as well as moderate forces more broadly in Iran, and strengthen the hand of the hardliners.

“Although there are no guarantees, it [the agreement] could bring peace of mind, a better way of living, better thinking, and a better economic situation across all professions.”

—Hamid Amjad, Playwright, theater director, theater critic, lecturer, and publisher



For domestic policy, political development, and an opening of the social and cultural atmosphere, the administration has the requisite tools, but is not using these tools for fear of radical groups. Whatever policy is aimed at reforming the current conditions and which restricts the radical groups inside the country would be good. If the sanctions are lifted, the Rouhani administration will gain bargaining power inside the country.

—A Journalist in Tehran and Former Political Prisoner

An important issue that doesn't receive enough attention is the issue of the theoretic failure and isolation of extremists in Iranian society. In years past, the "Death to America" slogan and the unconditional disagreement to anything having to do with the U.S. has turned into a type of ideology in Iran, something that continues to date. Right now, if you tell some not to chant "Death to America," or to stop considering the U.S. "the Great Satan," there would be nothing left of their ideology. All their beliefs and ideas were entailed in opposing a foreign power, the U.S. Everything is interpreted through this...political work, economic work, even scientific work.

—Ahmad Shirzad, Physics Professor and Former Member of Parliament

[If an accord is reached], Rouhani will have a free hand to deliver on his campaign promises.... For example, he can work on his promises for the release of political prisoners, freedom of the press, and lifting the security state in the universities and similar issues. I don't want to say that he would immediately succeed in making these demands a reality, but he would be able to state his positions with a clearer voice and with more power. Solving this issue will give him a credibility which would in turn give him the freedom to take steps and act more powerfully on domestic affairs. He will face opposition, but the atmosphere will change and the current atmosphere which is dominated by the radicals would change.

—Hermidas Bavand, Political Scientist and Spokesperson of National Front

"After an accord, banks [will be] enabled to do their jobs, medicine sanctions will be lifted.... Even in the aviation industry things will be good.... But the economic [benefits] would impact the higher income levels and we cannot expect that there would be some fantastic opening in the middle and lower levels."

—Abbas Ghaffari, Film Director



PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN 2016

The interviewees frequently noted the great significance of the upcoming Parliamentary elections in February 2016, and the major effect a successful agreement would have in strengthening the reformist forces in those elections.

They felt that if moderates did well, a virtuous cycle would ensue in which the Rouhani administration and Parliament would be far more likely to be able to push through a more reformist agenda.

They also made reference to the imperative of fair and transparent elections, in order to avoid a repeat of the disastrous 2009 elections in Iran, when peaceful protests, violently put down by the government, swept the country in response to widely perceived vote rigging that resulted in the election of the hardline Ahmadinejad.

Over the next ten months and with the upcoming elections, if the agreement achieves maximum results, there is hope that people would move towards creating the same kind of change in the Parliament or even the Council of Experts as they brought to the government in 2013.

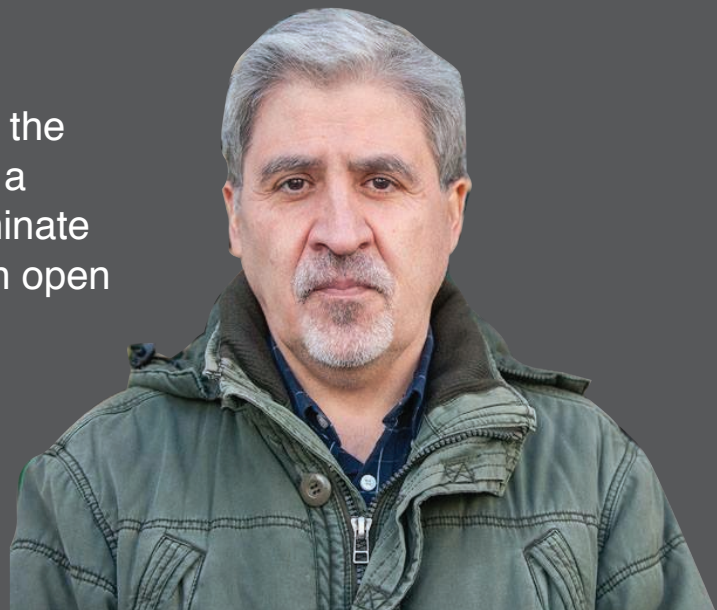
—Issa Saharkhiz, Journalist and Former Political Prisoner

I believe the Parliamentary elections to be very important. The Rouhani cabinet must focus all its might on this issue and on ensuring the health of the elections....Social pressure from the bottom to the top must also come to the administration's aid, in order to make the upcoming elections effective elections. To be sure, a change in the makeup of the Parliament can help to change Iran's domestic environment towards the issues pertaining to human rights and freedom of expression.

—Ahmad Shirzad, Physics Professor and Former Member of Parliament

“The top priority should be to combat the looting centers, centers that impede a productive economy. In order to eliminate these centers, press freedom and an open political atmosphere are the main prerequisites.”

—Mohammad Aghazadeh, Journalist



Parliamentary elections are also coming up, and if [Rouhani] succeeds, this will have its own impact on the elections, if, God willing, it is a free election...without a doubt, the atmosphere in the future will be in Rouhani's favor.

—Hermidas Bavand, Political Scientist and Spokesperson of National Front

It was repeatedly stressed, however, that failure to reach an accord would greatly strengthen hardliners' control of Parliament after the 2016 elections, with a concomitant obliteration of any hopes for civil or political reforms in the country.

THE IMPERATIVE OF A CULTURAL OPENING

In addition to improving the state of civil and political rights, a number of the respondents spoke passionately about the need for a cultural opening in the country. They spoke of the stifling of the arts—film, theatre, publishing—over the last decade, and the need for greater liberties and freedom of expression in these areas.

Some respondents believed such an opening would likely occur in the wake of a successful accord. Attention would be more focused on domestic affairs and Rouhani would be empowered to move forward in areas that he had been unwilling to tackle when all political capital had to be marshaled to reach a nuclear agreement.

Others were having none of it, expecting little change in a closed and repressive cultural environment even in a post-agreement context.

The cultural issue is the biggest problem of our society right now, and it seeps into our economy and other areas...the government is so focused on foreign policy that it has not been very successful in the cultural areas. If you have a dynamic culture in the society, you can be sure to



“As you know, it is not easy to speak openly, but I have no extraordinary expectations. This is why I believe we will be witnessing certain events, but not to the degree people are hoping. Certainly in several areas, such as economic, social, and political issues, I expect some minimum movements. [Yet] it is also possible that the atmosphere may be even more restricted following a nuclear agreement.”

—Kianoush Ayari, Filmmaker

have a dynamic economy, too.

—Abbas Ghaffari, Film Director

Civil rights, trusting the artists and cultural figures, and most importantly, relinquishing the country's cultural management to Iranian artists and cultural figures were among [Rouhani's] campaign promises. I hope he has a chance to get close to this path....We need cultural NGO's to grow in Iran. This can be the most important event of the end of Mr. Rouhani's first term. I believe it is even more important than establishing the House of Political Parties.

—Shadmehr Rastin, Filmmaker

They are not interested in culture at all. ...They want to continue their own regressive culture. ... They don't accept independent thinking at all. They want to continue their own way [and] strengthen their own rule. When Mr. Rouhani came, we voted for him. He came and spoke beautifully. As an author, I was told that my books would receive publication licenses, that they won't be censored. It was good for two to three months, but they couldn't even change the censorship. It went back to the way it was, the same intimidation and censorship and the same situation. No. They do not want change in any cultural area.

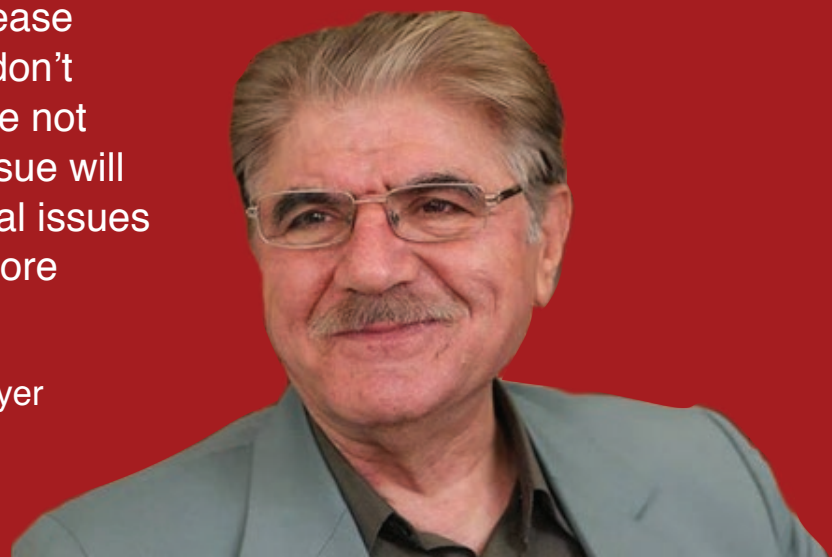
—Jamal Mirsadeghi, Author

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN IRAN AND NGOS

Many of the individuals interviewed spoke of the need to allow civil society to flourish and play its natural role in the country. They noted the huge electoral win of Rouhani in the presidential election of 2013 and the extent to which this reflected the hopes of much of Iranian society for a more inclusive and participatory environment in which there was dialogue and exchange between civil society and

“Unlike those who believe that a decrease in foreign pressure would increase pressure inside the country, I don't believe this...if other issues are not created, solving the nuclear issue will impact Iran's political and social issues and the society would enjoy more freedom as a result.”

—Mohammad Saleh Nikbakht, Lawyer



the Rouhani administration.

There was a frequently noted sense of hope that civil society, effectively eviscerated under the previous Ahmadinejad administration, could and should now play a vital role in addressing the nation's problems. Many spoke of the extent to which civil society, as a vital two-way conduit of information between society and the administration, could help Rouhani achieve the kind of reforms he had promised during his 2013 presidential election campaign.

I was one of the people who voted for Mr. Rouhani and after voting for him, I thought now that he is here at the helm, we should start moving forward. We should start posing our demands and the ones he promised to deliver. It is the people's responsibility to pursue these demands. A relatively small and open space has emerged and we cannot say that this administration is like the previous one....We must start working, instead of grumbling... "why didn't Mr. Rouhani do that thing he promised," we must continue to pursue our demands and start working. A minimal environment has developed, and the Iranian society has always used these minimal environments to move. Civil organizations have developed in this minimal environment. I think people should focus on this. They should start creating civil organizations. NGO's should start working. During Mr. Ahmadinejad's tenure all these things were destroyed, but I think they should start working again.

—Pegah Ahangarani, Actress

The role of public opinion, which would manifest itself through organizations such as the media, NGO's, and political parties, deserves attention. Civil organizations can play a pivotal role, if they have a podium. Social networks on the Internet play an important role in affecting decision-making through citizens' expressions of opinion. Surveys of public opinion can help the administration in determining its priorities and acting accordingly.

—Fakhrossadat Mohtashamipour, Civil Activist, Wife of Political Prisoner

[We need] a softer approach by the Ministry of Culture towards cultural and press-related issues and censorship, and NGO's.

—A Journalist in Tehran and Former Political Prisoner

All we can do is to write and to warn. There is no other way. The government is not unaware of these articles.

—Mohammad Aghazadeh, Journalist

EXPECTATIONS OF INCREASED INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES AND INTERACTIONS

One area in which optimism was frequently expressed by the interviewees was the extent to which a successful agreement would allow for an increase in vital international exchanges and interactions between Iran and the rest of the world.

Many spoke with dismay regarding the extent to which Iran's long international isolation had immeasurably harmed the professional, academic, scientific, commercial, and cultural spheres in the country, and they believed an agreement would trigger a tremendous increase in international exchanges and interactions, at great benefit to the Iranian people.

[If an accord is reached] we can have much more reputable conferences, and invite distinguished scientists from many different countries, not just from the U.S. We can send our university students abroad. We can procure our required tools and materials for research work in a better and easier way.

—Ahmad Shirzad, Physics Professor and Former Member of Parliament

Expanded and more open international relations may have an impact on the opening of the cultural atmosphere, regardless of whether or not there is public support. It has been said that alongside the talks about improving Iran's international relations, the topic of Iran's joining international copyright laws is under discussion.

—Hamid Amjad, Playwright, Theater Director, and Publisher in Tehran

[After an accord], our arts and culture could be promoted on an international scale. There should be particular emphasis on Iranian literature. Our contemporary books should be translated and our authors should be introduced to the world.

—Lili Golestan, Writer and Publisher

We are a society that wants to live with the rest of the world. We want to be connected to the entire world. These conditions of isolation from the rest of the world are intolerable.

— Aboutorab Khosravi, Novelist and Literature Teacher

We hope that once the sanctions are lifted and through Iran's contact with the rest of the world, we are able to work in a free artistic environment, and that we can change the viewpoints non-Iranians have about Iran.

—Shadmehr Rastin, Filmmaker

The fact that increased international interaction would expose society to voices other than the government's and the state-controlled media in Iran and thus facilitate the ability to counter the Iranian government's narrative of events—specifically the state's claims regarding its record on civil, political, and cultural rights and freedoms—was not lost on many of the respondents.

Conclusion

This study by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran has brought the voices of individuals representing various facets of Iranian civil society to the broader international community. These voices reflect great hopes juxtaposed with sober expectations. Unanimity on support for the negotiations and the unmitigated good an agreement would bring—the avoidance of war—was paired with highly divergent views on the effects of the negotiations on more specific aspects of political, economic, and cultural life in Iran. Hopes that their government will translate a nuclear accord into a better economic and political environment was often accompanied by doubts this will be so. Indeed, in contrast to the Campaign's previous study a year ago, there was a noticeable uptick in concerns that many of the hoped for benefits of an accord, needed as they are, would be lost to poor management or corruption.

The Iranian citizenry has endured sanctions, international isolation, economic distress, political repression, and a corrupt and arbitrary system...and yet has not relinquished its hopes, its patience, its willingness to continue to come out to vote for candidates promising change, or its commitment to peaceful, gradual change. It is incumbent upon the international community to reinforce these voices of reason, patience, and hope, by similarly supporting the peaceful resolution of conflict with the Islamic Republic—and by doing everything it can in a post-deal environment to stand by the people of Iran in their efforts to achieve the most basic rights and freedoms.

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

www.iranhumanrights.org

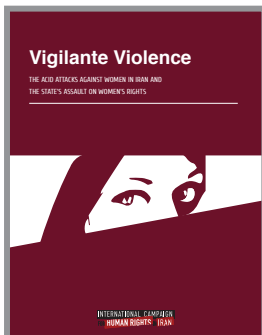
High Hopes, Tempered Expectations

VIEWS FROM IRAN ON THE NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS

This study by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran presents the views of prominent members of Iranian civil society on the effects of the outcome of the nuclear negotiations for the people of Iran. It shows that civil society in Iran remains steadfast and unequivocal in its support for the P5+1 nuclear negotiations. Its members hope for an agreement that will avert war and end years of sanctions and international isolation. Expectations of the benefits of an accord to Iran's economy and for political and cultural freedoms in the country, however, are more measured, reflecting uncertainties and even doubts regarding the Rouhani administration's ability—and willingness—to translate an accord and the lifting of sanctions into tangible gains for ordinary Iranians. Nevertheless, a palpable sense of hope runs throughout these interviews, demonstrating that Iranian civil society approaches Iran's re-engagement with the world with great enthusiasm.

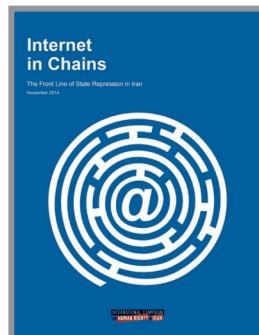
Recent reports

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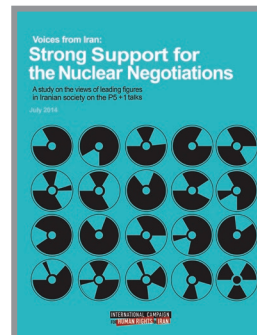
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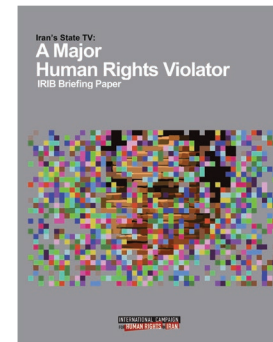
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