IRANIANS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ELECTIONS: A 2021 SURVEY REPORT

The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN (GAMAAN)

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June 2021, The Netherlands

This study was conducted independently and funded by voluntary public donations. We express our sincere gratitude to Dr. Pooyan Tamimi Arab for his contribution, and to all the volunteers who assisted us in one way or another.

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Survey summary

- The survey titled “Election Survey” was conducted from May 27 to June 3, 2021. Around **80 thousand** respondents participated in the study. The final sample used in this report consisted of 68,271 Iranians living inside Iran. This study’s findings reflect the **views of literate Iranian residents aged above 19, who comprise 85% of the eligible voters in Iran**. The results can be generalized to the target population with a 95% credibility level and credibility intervals of 5%.
- The results show that around 75% of the population will not vote in the upcoming presidential election, which is held on June 18, 2021, while 18% say they will certainly vote, and 6% haven’t decided on their participation. Moreover, the willingness to vote in the City and Village Council elections resembles that of the presidential election.
- While around 71% of the non-voters reported “the unfree and ineffective nature of elections in the Islamic Republic” as their reason for abstention, 7% reported the Guardian Council’s “disqualification of my preferred candidate” as their reason. About 2% declared that they will not vote due to the COVID-19 pandemic and “the health risk of standing in the voting queue”.
- 15% of all eligible voters will vote for Ebrahim Raisi, 2% for Saeed Jalili, and less than 1% for any of the other candidates. Roughly 4% of the population haven’t decided, while about 2% declared to cast a blank vote.
- Of those who intend to vote, 59% reported to vote for Ebrahim Raisi, 8% for Saeed Jalili, 3% for Abdolnaser Hemmati, 2.5% for Mohsen Rezaee, and less than 1% for Mehralizadeh, Ghazizadeh Hashemi, and Zakani. About 16% of those who intend to vote haven’t decided on their preferred candidate, while 9% say they will cast a blank vote.
- In response to a question about an imagined, completely free election, the most popular candidates were Reza Pahlavi (29%), Ebrahim Raisi (15%), Nasrin Sotoudeh (11.5%), Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (10%), Narges Mohammadi (8%), Mohammad Nourizad and Masih Alinejad (both 7%), and Mohammad Khatami, Esmail Bakhshi, and Mir-Hossein Mousavi with around 4% of the votes. Among the proposed political figures in the survey, Hassan Rouhani was the least popular.
- When asked about the most suitable type of government for Iran, 31% opted for a secular republic, 16% a secular constitutional monarchy, and 22% preferred an Islamic Republic as the best political system for Iran. About 31% reported to be inadequately informed for answering this question.
- Among the Iranian respondents who live outside Iran (over 6 thousand people), about 54% voted in the 2017 presidential election, but only 4% declared to vote in the upcoming election.

Section 1: Sampling methods and sample characteristics

1.1. Survey and raw sample characteristics

- The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran (GAMAAN) conducted the "Election Survey" survey from May 27 to June 3, 2021. This survey was conducted online using a specialized and secure platform.
- The sampling method was multiple chain-referral sampling through social media (Telegram, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter). Around 80,000 respondents living inside and outside Iran participated in the study (see the Appendix for more methodological information).
- According to Iran's official statistics published in August 2020, more than 80 million people use the Internet, among whom 77 million are mobile Internet subscribers. On the other hand, as reported by the Iranian Students Polling Agency (ISPA) in February 2021, roughly 74% of Iranians over 18 use at least one social media platform. It is therefore possible to reach a substantial percentage of Iranians through the Internet and ask about their views.
- The survey comprised 13 questions about religiosity and politics as well as 8 general and demographic questions (sex, age group, education level, province, urban/rural region, employment status, household income level, and voting behavior).
- Respondents took part in the survey anonymously, feeling safer to express their real opinions than in telephone surveys or surveys conducted at respondents' residence.
- Approximately 92% of the respondents reported that they live in Iran. Multiple verification methods showed that around 1%, either intentionally or unintentionally, gave false information about being inside or outside Iran.
- Iranians living inside Iran who responded to the survey were from all provinces, all socioeconomic strata, and from both urban and rural areas (see the Appendix for sample characteristics).

1.2. Preparing the refined sample

- One survey question was designed to detect random responses and bot submissions. The forms with a wrong response to this question and forms with contradictory answers were excluded from the sample (for example, those who declared that they had not reached voting age in the 2017 presidential election but also chose their age as over 30, or those who declared that they live in Iran in one question but selected outside Iran in another question).

- Having taken into account the standard age groups as outlined in the 2016 Census report, the refined sample included only respondents above 19 years old who lived in Iran.
- The **refined sample size for respondents inside Iran was 68,271 respondents**. All results in this report are extracted from this refined sample.
- The target population consisted of literate Iranian residents above 19 years old (who were capable of using the Internet and reading the survey questions). As reported by the 2016 National Population and Housing Census, around 47 million Iranians are literate and above 19 years old. This accounts for 85% of the adult population of Iran.
- In this report, the term “sample” refers exclusively to the refined sample, not the original raw sample. The term “population” refers only to the “target population,” not the overall population of Iran.
- Samples obtained from online surveys generally do not properly overlap with the target population’s characteristics. Weighting is used to obtain a representative sample. This technique balances the sample in accordance with characteristics of the target population in question. The results were also verified through the sample matching method. The Appendix discusses the employed sample balancing, weighting methods, and reliability checks as well as the characteristics of the sample demography and the target population.

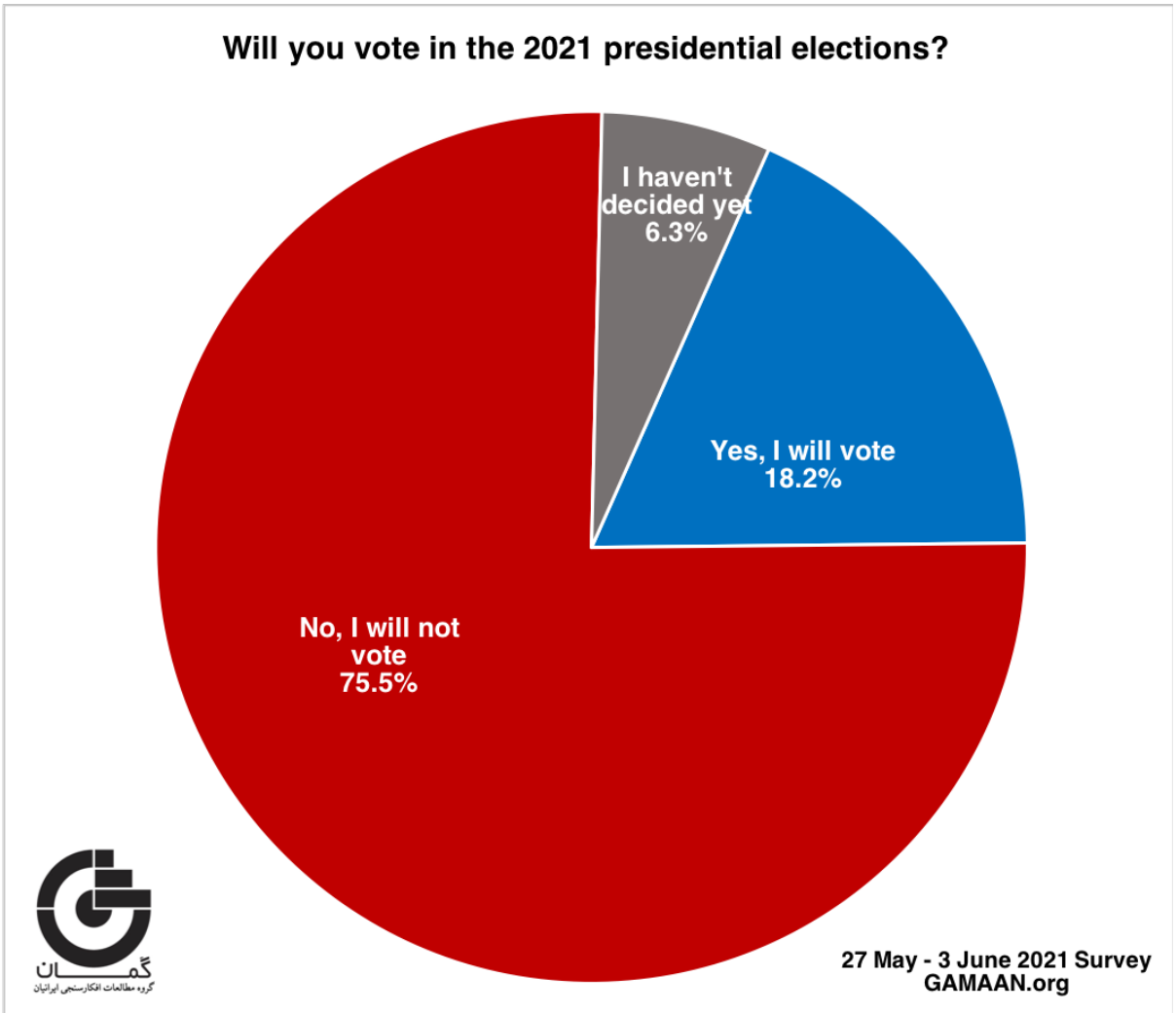
Section 2: Main findings

All results and tables presented here are based on the “weighted sample” extracted from respondents inside Iran. The findings can be generalized to the whole population of literate Iranian residents above 19 years old, who account for 85% of the total adult population of Iran, with the respective credibility intervals and credibility level of 5% and 95% (which indicate this survey to be a non-probability survey and replace the *margin of error* and the *confidence level*).

2.1. Willingness to vote in the 2021 elections

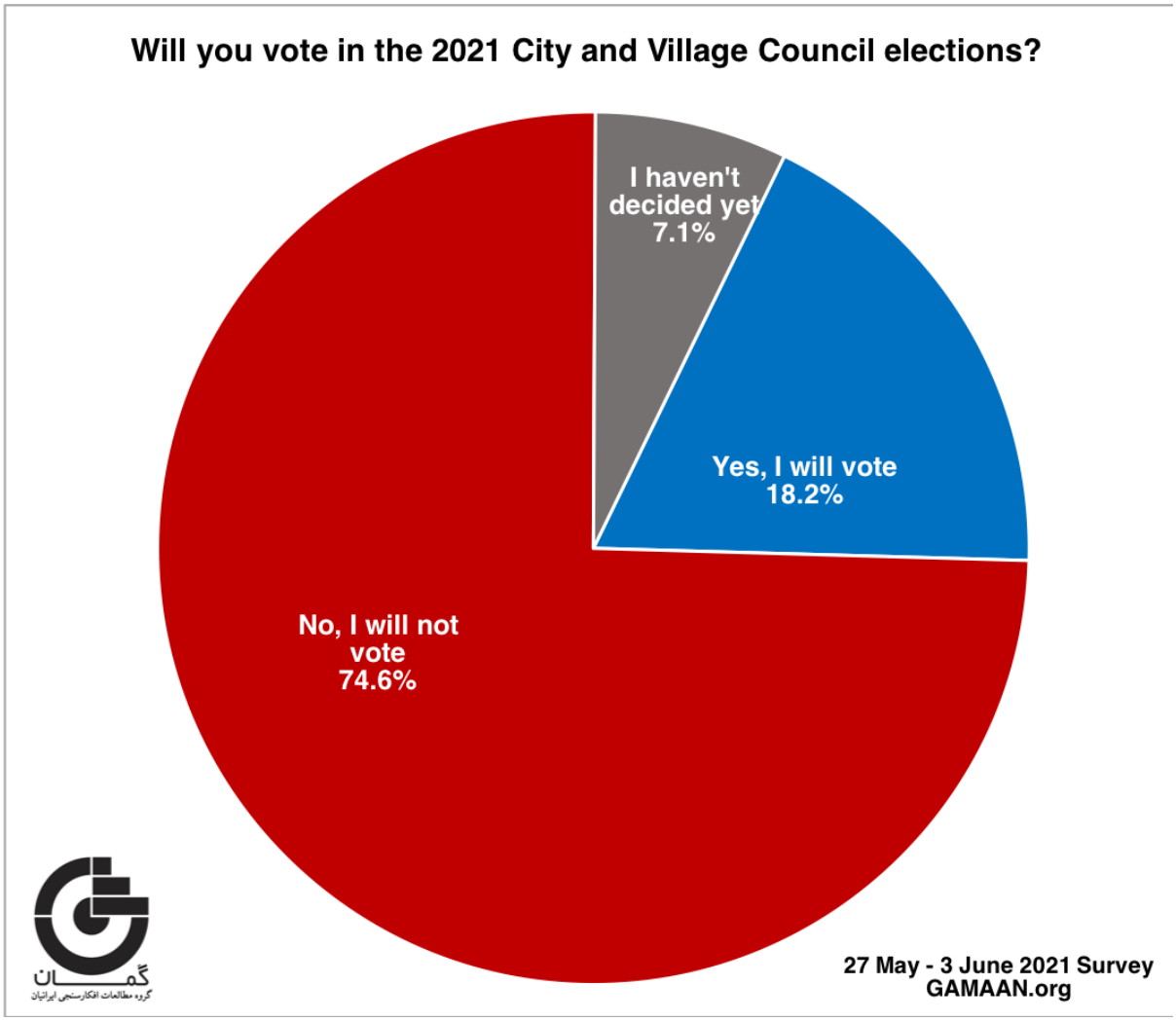
According to this study’s results, around 75% of the population will not vote in the upcoming presidential election (June 2021), while 18% will certainly vote, and 6% haven’t decided yet (Figure 1).

Figure 1



Moreover, the willingness to vote in the City and Village Council elections resembles that of the presidential election (Figure 2).

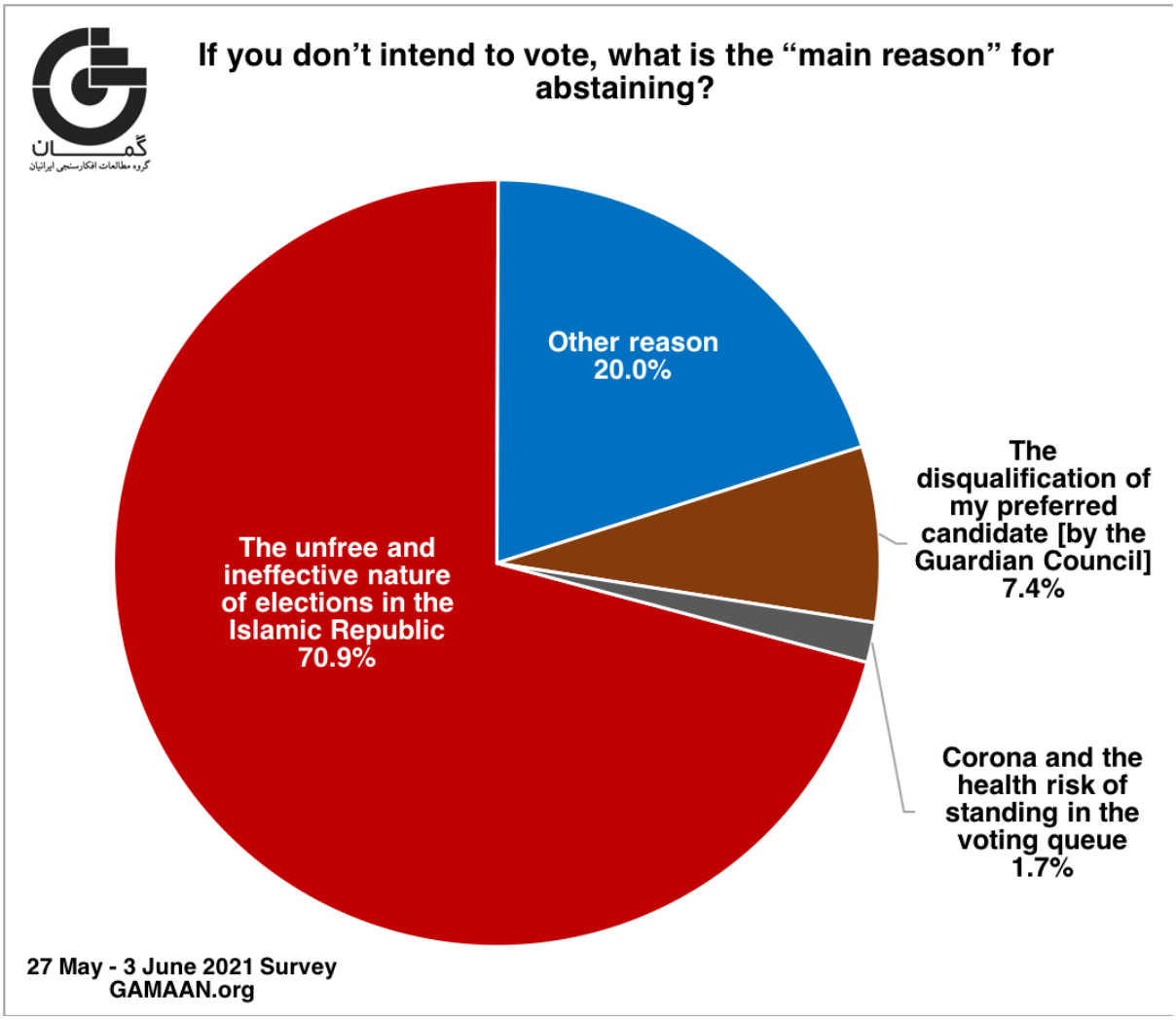
Figure 2



2.2. Reasons for abstention

Respondents were also asked about their reason for abstention. Figure 3 shows that 71% of the non-voters chose “the unfree and ineffective nature of elections in the Islamic Republic” as their “main reason” for boycotting the election, while 7% gave as reason the Guardian Council’s “disqualification of my favorite candidate”. About 2% declared not to vote due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the “health risk of standing in the voting queue”. Also, 20% chose “other reason” for their abstention.

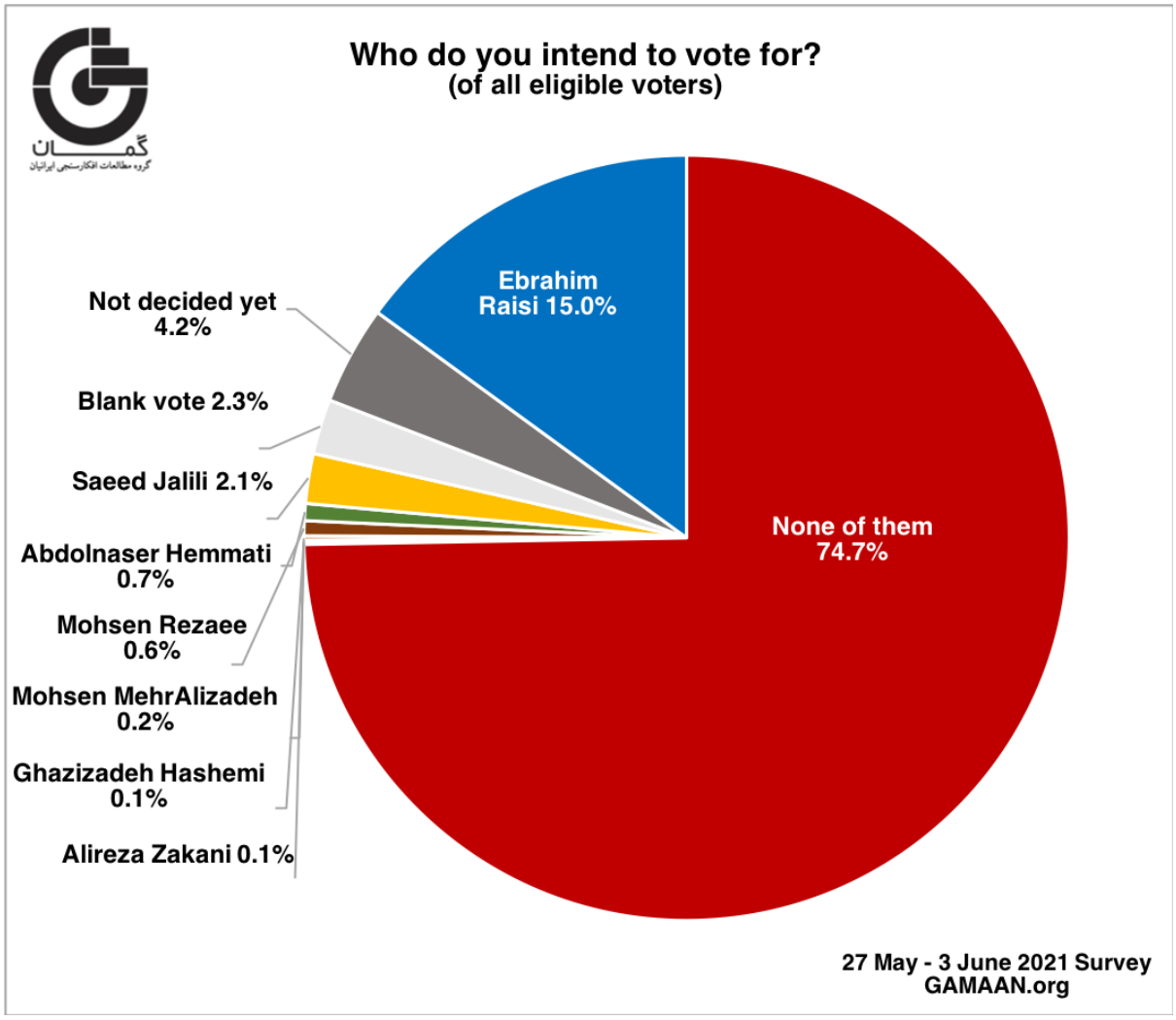
Figure 3



2.3. Most popular candidate in the presidential election

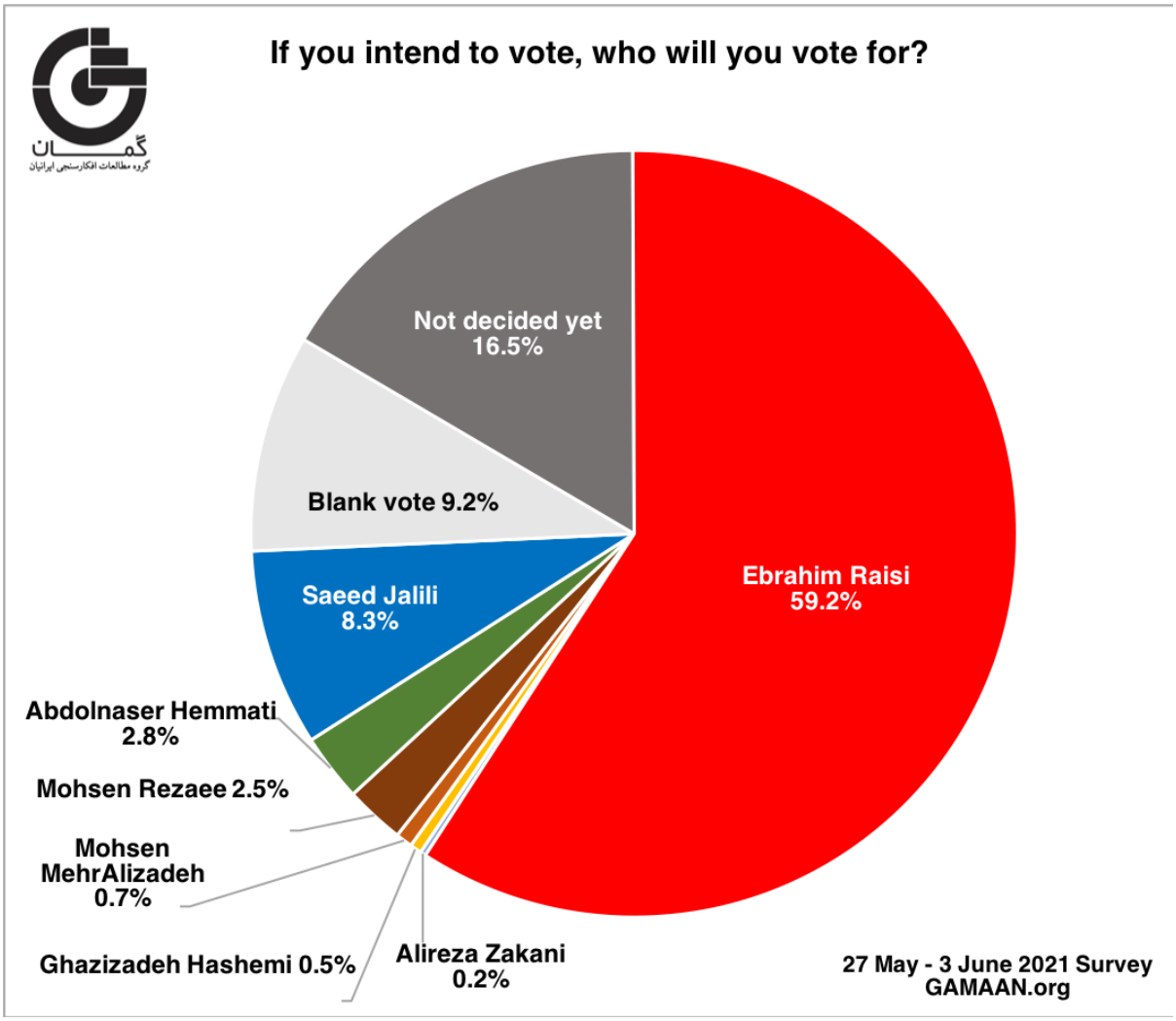
About 15% say they will vote for Ebrahim Raisi, 2% for Saeed Jalili, and less than 1% for any of the other candidates. Roughly 4% of the population haven't made a decision regarding voting, while about 2% declared to cast a blank vote. Around 75% declared not to vote for any of the candidates (Figure 4).

Figure 4



Of those who decided to vote, around 59% say they will vote for Ebrahim Raisi, 8% for Saeed Jalili, 3% for Abdolnaser Hemmati, 2.5% for Mohsen Rezaee, and less than 1% for Mehralizadeh, Ghazizadeh Hashemi, and Zakani (Figure 5). About 16% of these likely voters haven't decided on a candidate, while 9% say they will cast a blank vote.

Figure 5



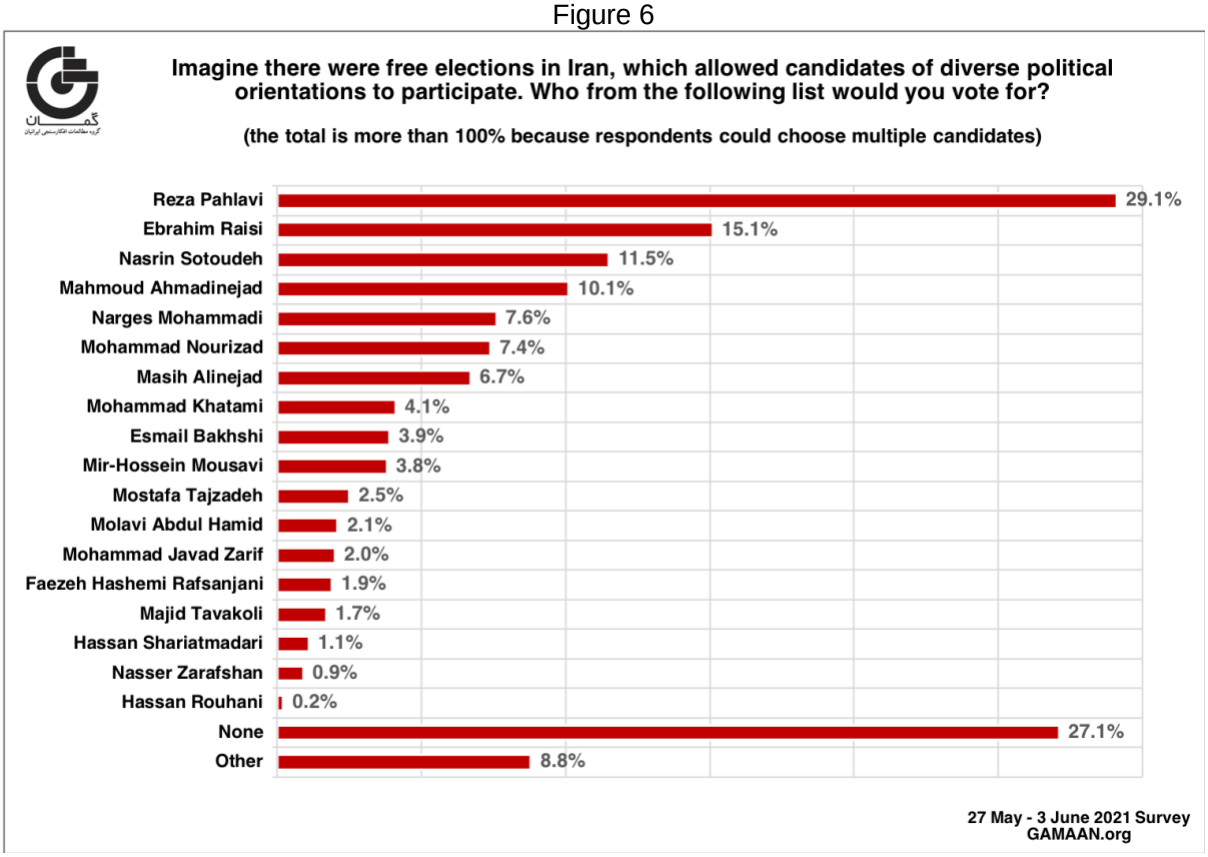
2.4. Popularity of candidates in a free election

Respondents were asked to imagine who they would vote for, if a completely free election were to be held in which representatives of diverse political orientations could participate. Respondents could choose from a list of political and social figures and had the option to write any other name that was not included in the list. It was possible to select multiple preferred candidates.

Figure 6 shows that the most popular persons were Reza Pahlavi (29%), Ebrahim Raisi (15%), Nasrin Sotoudeh (11.5%), Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (10%), Narges Mohammadi (8%), Mohammad Nourizad and Masih Alinejad (both 7%), and Mohammad Khatami, Esmail Bakhshi, and Mir-Hossein Mousavi (each 4%).

With 0.2% of the votes, Hassan Rouhani was the least popular candidate from this list.

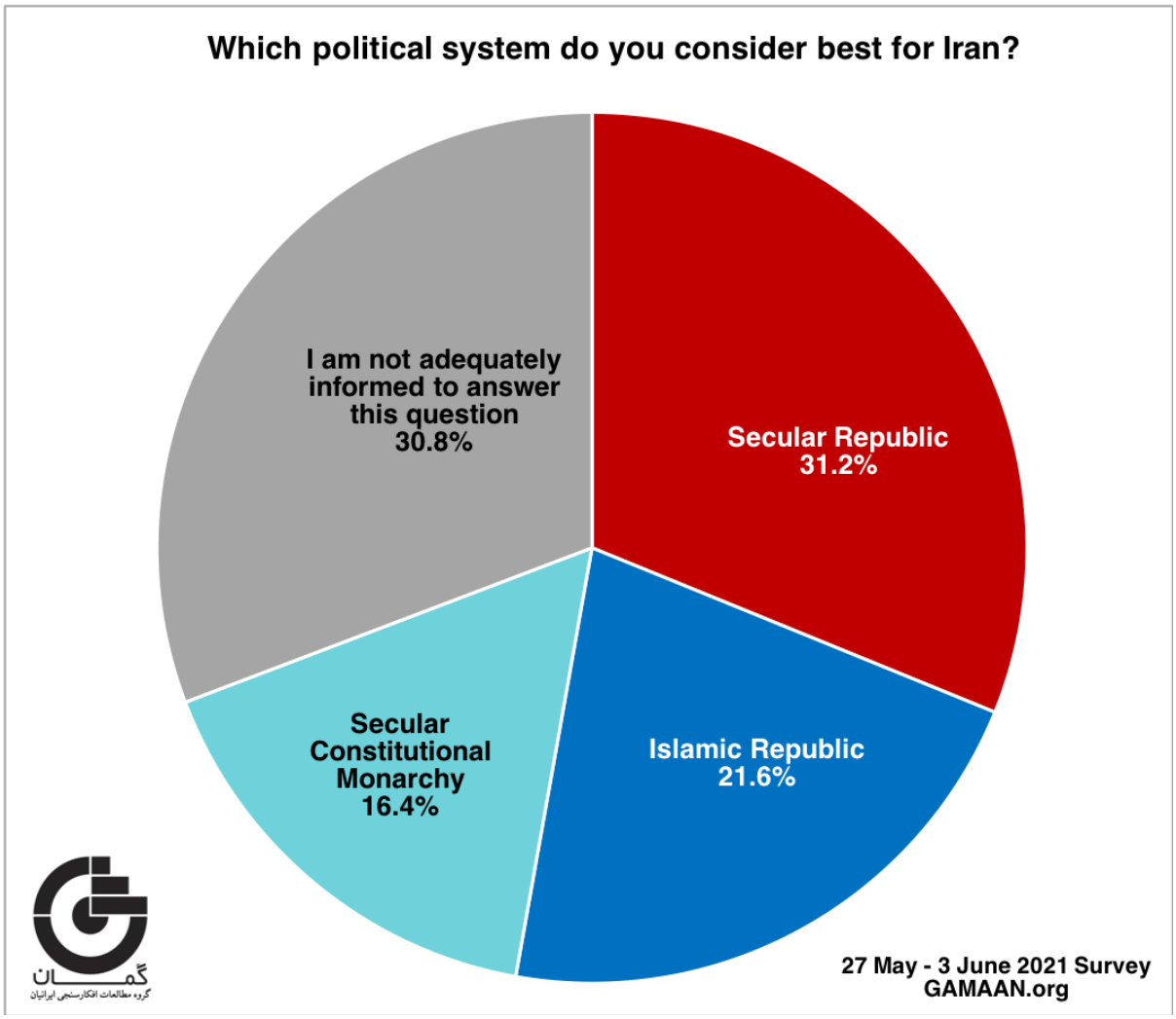
Figure 6



2.5. Preferred political system

Respondents were also asked which political system they consider the most suitable for Iran.
About 31% opted for a secular republic, 16% for a secular constitutional monarchy, and 22% considered an Islamic Republic as the best political system for Iran. Moreover, around 31% reported being inadequately informed for answering this question.

Figure 7

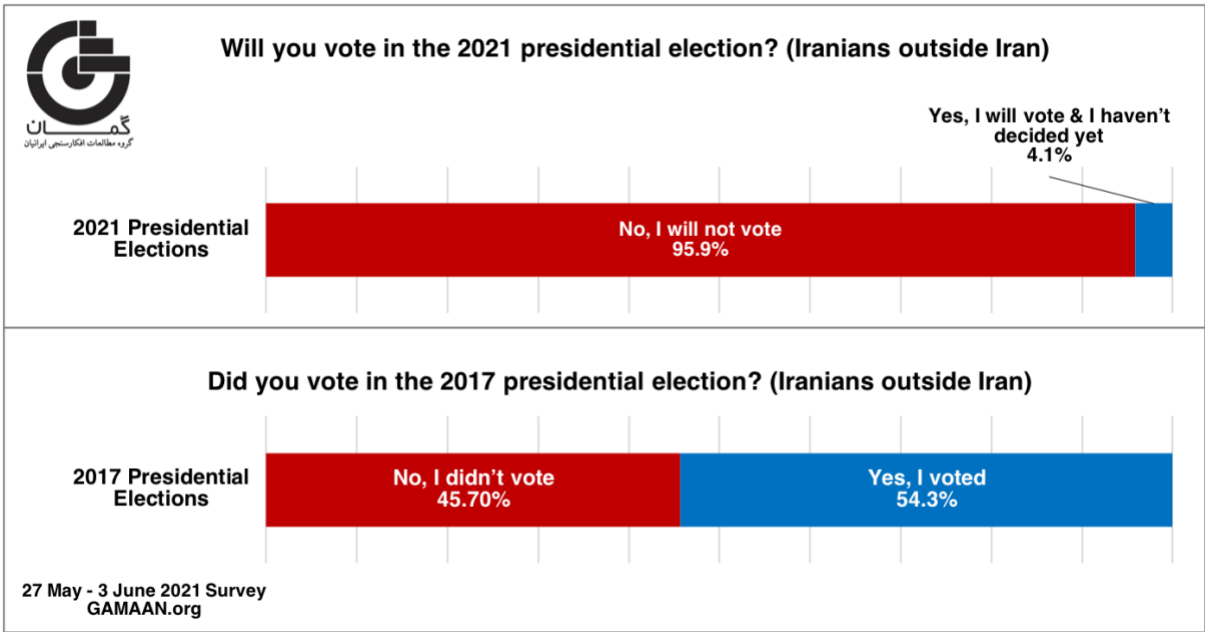


2.6. Attitudes of Iranians outside Iran toward the election

Apart from the respondents inside Iran, 6,346 respondents living outside Iran, from 86 countries around the world, participated in the survey.

Figure 8 shows their willingness to vote in the 2021 presidential election, compared to the voter turnout of this population for the 2017 election. Of the Iranian respondents who live outside Iran, 54% voted in the 2017 presidential election, but only 4% declared to vote in the upcoming election.

Figure 8



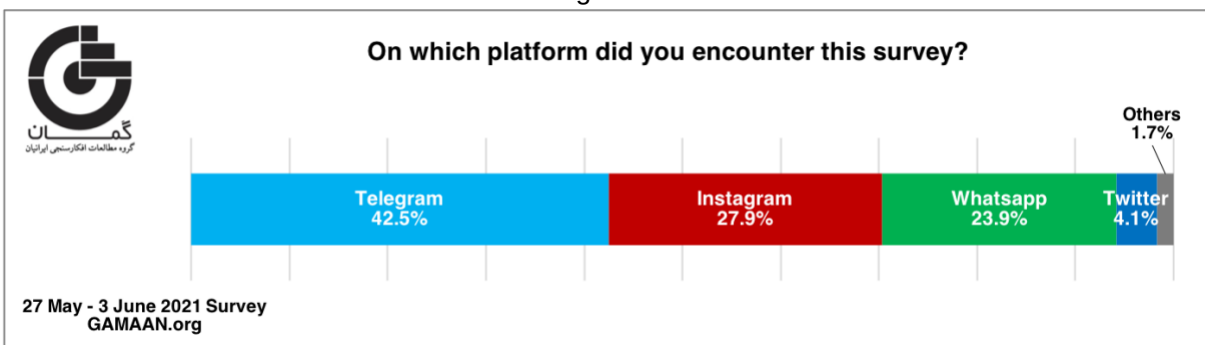
Appendix: Methodology

Sampling method

This study aimed to measure and document attitudes and opinions in a closed society, which cannot be obtained using conventional methods. Studies employing opt-in online surveys face methodical challenges that are inherent to online sampling methods, which are nevertheless becoming the norm. These shortcomings include the so-called network effect, which means that the survey is more likely to reach respondents who hold beliefs similar to those held by the organizers, as well as self-selection, which means that those with a special interest in the survey topic are more likely to participate.

To reduce these effects, the survey was spread through individuals as well as social-media groups, channels, and pages representing radically diverse social layers of society and political perspectives (Figure 9 shows on which social-media platform respondents encountered the survey). Using multiple chain-referral sampling to reach a diverse audience, the survey was shared with and by online pages and channels belonging to specific groups, such as minorities' and pro-regime groups' networks, as well as a mass audience consuming social, political, and entertainment contents. The targeted Instagram pages and Telegram channels ranged between 10 and 100 thousand followers, while those with a general audience ranged up to 1 or several million followers. These measures also increased the sample size, further minimizing bias.

Figure 9



In response to one of the survey questions, about 11% said they participated in GAMAAN's previous surveys. This is a promising indication that the survey circulation strategy among diverse groups has reached individuals outside GAMAAN researchers' social circles.

Balancing and weighting methods

The weighting method, raking, was employed to generate a representative sample from the refined sample. As a study conducted by the PEW Research Center shows, this weighting method is among the most effective and reliable for samples derived from online surveys. As suggested by PEW, a variable reflecting respondents' political orientation was introduced in the survey and used for weighting. This decreases the sampling bias while increasing generalizability. Sample balancing and weighting were carried out in cooperation with and using the tools of the Dutch company, Spinnaker Research.

To obtain a representative sample, the refined sample drawn from respondents living inside Iran was weighted based on sex, age group, education level, province, urban/rural areas, and respondents' voting behavior and political orientation. The data from the Islamic Republic of Iran's reports, Selected Findings of the 2016 National Population and Housing Census and A Selection of Labor Force Survey Results – Winter 2020, were used to extract the target population characteristics. The World Value Survey's 2020 results were used for the Principlists' social base.

Having run the weighting computations based on the mentioned variables**, a very large effective sample size of 9,890** was estimated.

Weighting results

The target population of this survey is literate Iranian residents above 19 years old. As the data from the 2016 National Population and Housing Census shows, this population accounts for 47 million Iranians, who comprise 85% of the adult population of Iran.

Tables 1 to 6 compare the demographic variables of the refined sample and the target population. The demographic characteristics of the weighted sample are consistent with those of the target population.

Table 1: Sex Distribution

Sex	Refined sample	Weighted sample	Population of literate individuals above 19 years old (from the 2016 Census)
Female	22%	47%	47%
Male	78%	53%	53%

Table 2: Age Group Distribution

Age groups	Refined sample	Weighted sample	Population of literate individuals above 19 years old (from the 2016 Census)
Between 20 and 29 years old	17.5%	30.1%	30.1%
Between 30 and 49 years old	66.4%	51.1%	51.1%
At least 50 years old	16.2%	18.8%	18.8%

Table 3: Province Distribution

Province of Residence	Refined sample	Weighted sample	Population of literate individuals above 19 years old (from the 2016 Census)
East Azerbaijan	3.0%	4.8%	4.8%
West Azerbaijan	1.6%	3.6%	3.6%
Ardabil	0.8%	1.5%	1.5%
Isfahan	6.8%	6.9%	6.9%
Alborz	4.7%	3.8%	3.8%
Ilam	0.8%	0.7%	0.7%
Bushehr	1.0%	1.5%	1.5%
Tehran	38.9%	19.1%	19.1%
Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari	0.7%	1.1%	1.1%
South Khorasan	0.7%	0.9%	0.9%
Razavi Khorasan	7.1%	7.8%	7.8%
North Khorasan	0.7%	0.9%	0.9%
Khuzestan	4.0%	5.4%	5.4%
Zanjan	0.9%	1.3%	1.3%
Semnan	0.8%	1.0%	1.0%
Sistan and Baluchistan	0.8%	2.1%	2.1%
Fars	5.5%	6.3%	6.3%
Ghazvin	1.2%	1.6%	1.6%
Qom	1.7%	1.6%	1.6%
Kurdistan	1.2%	1.8%	1.8%
Kerman	1.5%	3.6%	3.6%
Kermanshah	1.6%	2.4%	2.4%
Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%
Golestan	1.0%	2.2%	2.2%
Gilan	2.8%	3.5%	3.5%
Lorestan	1.4%	2.0%	2.0%
Mazandaran	3.1%	4.5%	4.5%
Markazi	1.3%	1.8%	1.8%
Hormozgan	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%
Hamadan	1.3%	2.1%	2.1%
Yazd	1.3%	1.4%	1.4%

Table 4: Education Level Distribution

Education level	Refined sample	Weighted sample	Population of literate individuals above 19 years old (from the 2016 Census)
High school diploma and lower education	15.4%	72.3%	72.3%
University degree	84.6%	27.7%	27.7%

Table 5: Urban/Rural Distribution

Region	Refined sample	Weighted sample	Population of literate individuals above 19 years old (from the 2016 Census)
Rural Areas	4.1%	21.2%	21.2%
Urban Areas	95.9%	78.8%	78.8%

Apart from demographic variables, the Principlists' social base according to WVS and respondents' voting behavior in the 2017 Iranian presidential election were also used for sample weighting (considering that this election's results were not controversial and the reliability of the final, formally declared numbers). The computations were run using the results of an electoral survey conducted a few days before the 2017 presidential election.

Table 6: Political Voting Behavior Distribution

Voted for candidate in the 2017 presidential election	Refined sample	Weighted sample	Official results of the 2017 presidential election
Hassan Rouhani (+ Hashemitaba)	61.2%	42.2%	42.2%
Ebrahim Raisi (+ Mir-Salim)	12.9%	28.8%	28.8%
I did not vote (+ I cast a blank vote)	25.9%	29.0%	29.0%

Reliability checks

One of the methods for examining the reliability and generalizability of a weighted sample is to compare the results from the weighted sample against external evidence. Table 7 compares the status of economic activity (percentage of employed individuals) in the weighted sample with that of the target population on both urban and rural levels. While the weighted sample includes only literate individuals above 19 years old, the statistic of those formally employed reflects both literate and illiterate individuals above 15. Table 7 shows that the employment rate of the weighted sample is consistent with that of the target population.

Table 7: Comparison of Employment Rate Distribution with External Evidence

Employment status	Whole country		Urban areas		Rural areas	
	Weighted sample – literate Individuals above 19 years old	Workforce statistics – individuals above 15 years old (Winter 2020)	Weighted sample – literate individuals above 19 years old	Workforce statistics – individuals above 15 years old (Winter 2020)	Weighted sample – literate individuals above 19 years old	Workforce statistics for individuals above 15 years old (Winter 2020)
Employed	40.7%	40.9%	40.3%	40.1%	42.1%	43.5%

The respondents were also surveyed with respect to their household income. This facilitates a comparison between the respondents' economic situation and that of the target population. Table 8 shows the household income distribution of the weighted sample. By definition, ten percent of the Iranian households belong to each income decile. As shown in Table 8, the household income distribution of the weighted sample highly overlaps with that of the target population. Each income decile of the target population is covered by the weighted sample.

Table 8: Household Income Distribution of the Weighted Sample (based on the official exchange rate)

Income level of different deciles according to the Statistical Center of Iran	Weighted sample	Distribution of wealth in the society
First decile (household monthly income below USD 380)	13.8%	10%
Second decile (household monthly income between USD 380 and USD 499)	9.0%	10%
Third decile (household monthly income between USD 499 and USD 618)	7.4%	10%
Fourth decile (household monthly income between USD 618 and USD 736)	9.7%	10%
Fifth decile (household monthly income between USD 736 and USD 879)	8.5%	10%
Sixth decile (household monthly income between USD 879 and USD 1022)	9.7%	10%
Seventh decile (household monthly income between USD 1022 and USD 1211)	13.6%	10%
Eight, ninth, or tenth decile (household monthly income above USD 1211)	28.4%	30%

Reliability check using questions of the World Values Survey

In 2020, the World Values Survey (WVS), which is an international research program, released a new survey of Iran which had been conducted through on-site interviews. Several WVS questions were incorporated in this 2021 survey by GAMAAN. The aim was to evaluate the measurement method and weighted sample validity by comparing the results from both (probability and non-probability, on-site and online) surveys. Both "non-sensitive" and "sensitive" questions were asked to test the hypothesis that there should be a discrepancy with the latter and an overlap with the former.

As shown in Table 9, a comparison of both surveys shows the difference between responses to non-sensitive questions (such as the importance of family, friends, entertainment, and occupation) to be less than 5%, while, given the current political

and social situations in Iran, the responses to a sensitive question, in this case about religion, are significantly different. This comparison shows the validity of GAMAAN's weighted sample. It also confirms the hypothesis that measuring people's real opinions regarding sensitive questions using conventional polling methods (such as telephone or in-person interviewing) faces serious challenges in closed societies like Iran.

Table 9: Comparison of WVS and GAMAAN survey results

For each of the following aspects, indicate how important it is in your life.		Very important	Rather important	Not very important	Not at all important	Do not Know
Family	WVS	93.9%	5.2%	0.8%	0.1%	0.0%
	GAMAAN (Weighted sample)	92.5%	5.6%	0.7%	0.7%	0.4%
Friends	WVS	28.6%	54.4%	11.2%	5.7%	0.0%
	GAMAAN (Weighted sample)	30.0%	57.2%	9.3%	2.5%	0.9%
Leisure time	WVS	40.2%	51.5%	5.7%	2.6%	0.0%
	GAMAAN (Weighted sample)	48.9%	42.6%	5.8%	1.4%	1.3%
Work	WVS	78.0%	18.6%	1.9%	1.3%	0.2%
	GAMAAN (Weighted sample)	84.8%	12.5%	1.3%	0.5%	0.8%
Religion	WVS	69.4%	22.8%	3.5%	4.2%	0.1%
	GAMAAN (Weighted sample)	33.2%	17.5%	14.6%	32.2%	2.5%

Replicating results using the sample matching method

To estimate the reliability of the results drawn from the weighted sample, **computations were run once again using the matching method**, and the results were compared against the original results. First, a random sample including 1,500 respondents was extracted from the refined sample of 68,271 respondents. This sample was extracted so that it complied with the six demographic and political variables of the target population – namely sex, age group, education level, province, urban or rural region, and voting behavior and the Principlists' social base. Having carried out a comparative analysis, the results obtained from this new sample were consistent with those obtained from the weighted sample, with a relative difference of about 3%.

On balance, the weighted sample adequately represents the target population (literate individuals above 19 years old) and the results obtained can be generalized to a substantial majority of the Iranian population (that is, 85% of the adult population) with a 95% credibility level and credibility intervals of 5%.

* * *

We at the non-profit research foundation GAMAAN would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of those who took their time to contribute to this survey.

GAMAAN commits itself to ethical guidelines with regard to protecting respondents' submitted data. We are professionally committed to sparing no effort in collecting the opinions and attitudes of Iranians from all levels of society and all walks of life.

GAMAAN strives to employ scientific methods in extracting representative samples. We pledge to be transparent to the public and in explaining probable error levels.

Our team gladly receives any comments, suggestions, and criticisms at info@gamaan.org.