



IRANIANS' ATTITUDES TOWARD MEDIA: A 2021 SURVEY REPORT



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

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Survey summary

- The survey titled “Iranians’ attitudes toward media” was conducted from February 17 to 26, 2021. Over 27 thousand respondents were surveyed, around 90% of whom lived in Iran.
- This study’s findings reflect the views of literate Iranian residents aged above 19, who comprise 85% of Iran’s adult population. The results can be generalized to the target population with a 95% credibility level and credibility intervals of 5%. The survey aimed to measure and document the attitudes of Iranians toward media (risānah’hā), including their political orientations and electoral behavior, none of which can be openly discussed in Iran due to the current restrictions.
- The results show that 92% of the population use social media to access news and information about Iran and the world; 41% watch satellite television channels, 32% visit Internet websites, and 14% watch the news programs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) on a daily basis. On the other hand, 60% reported never watching the IRIB’s news broadcasting.
- Iran International and Manoto are the most popular television channels among Iranians with 33% and 30% daily viewership, respectively. They are followed by BBC Persian (17%), GEM TV (16.5%), the IRIB (16%), and Voice of America Persian (VOA) with 11% daily viewers.
- More than half of the population reported to trust the Iran International and Manoto television channels “a lot” and “to some extent”. Also, about 40% deem VOA and Radio Farda trustworthy. Roughly 27% trust BBC Persian and about 14% trust the IRIB, while 74% has no trust in the IRIB at all.
- Regarding different media’s political affiliation, approximately half of the population believe that Manoto, VOA, and Iran International are biased toward those who oppose the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other hand, 63% believe that the IRIB leans toward the conservative Principlists. Moreover, 30% consider BBC Persian biased toward the Reformists and 17% believe that it favors the Principlists, while 22% hold that it favors those who oppose the Islamic Republic.
- Films, television series, and sports programs are the most popular programs broadcast by the IRIB. Iran International’s most popular programs are “Cheshm Andaz” (meaning “outlook”) and “Titr-e Avval” (meaning “headline”); BBC Persian’s is “60 Daghighah” (meaning “sixty minutes”); VOA’s is “Safheye Akhar” (meaning “the final page”), and Manato’s most popular program is “Otagh-e Khabar” (meaning “newsroom”). Also popular among Iranians are documentaries aired on satellite channels.

- According to the survey, around 53% identify as regime change proponents, 26% seek structural transformations and a transition away from the Islamic Republic, while 13% support the principles of the Revolution and the Supreme Leader and 8% seek reforms within the framework of the Islamic Republic.
- Regarding the upcoming presidential election in June 2021, around 78% say they will not vote, 12% intend to vote, and 10% have not yet made a final decision.
- In contrast with official results, this survey's results suggest that the turnout in the 2020 parliamentary elections was about 26%.

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 “Iranians’ attitudes toward media” survey from February 17 to 26, 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). More than 27,000 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 12 questions about religiosity and politics as well as 8 general and demographic questions (sex, age group, level of education, 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 90% of the respondents reported that they live in Iran. Multiple verification methods showed that around 1%, either intentionally or unintentionally, reported 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. The sample characteristics can be found in the Appendix.

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 20,479 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.

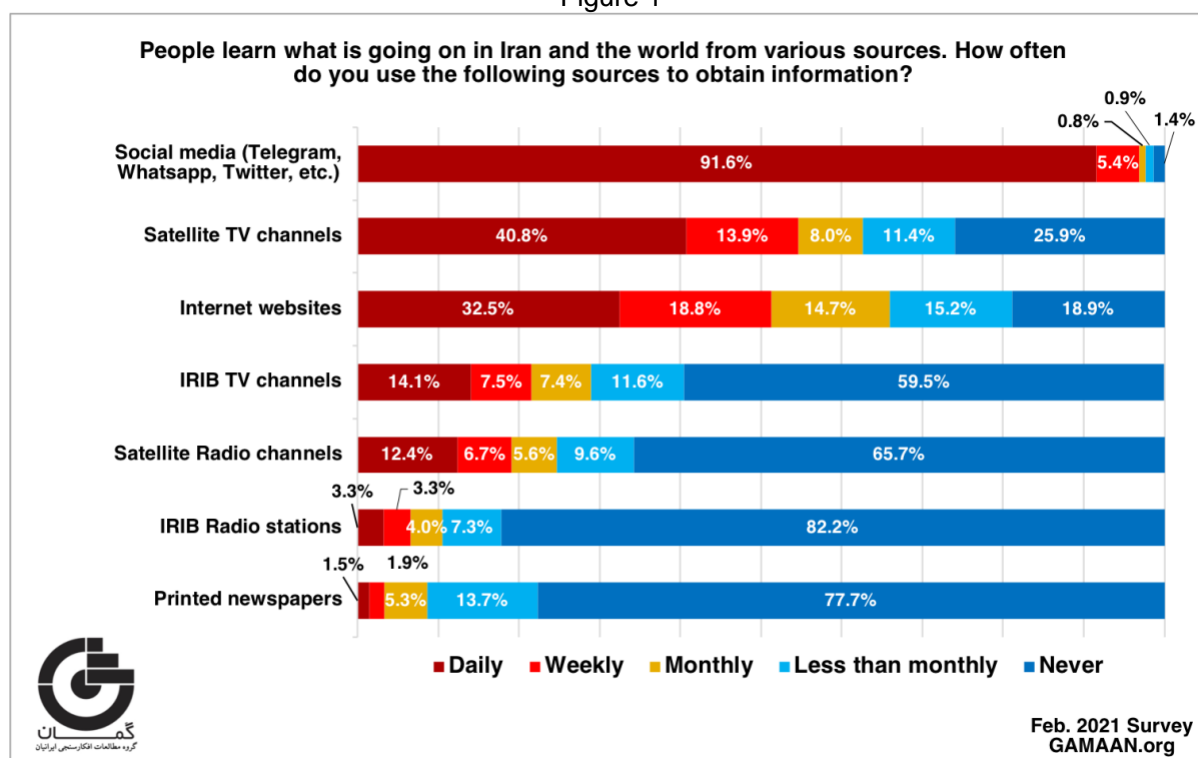
Section 2: Main findings

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. Accessing news and information

In this survey, respondents were asked which media they used for accessing news and information about Iran and the world. The results (Figure 1) show that 92% use social media, 41% watch satellite television channels, 32% visit Internet websites, and 14% watch the news programs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) on a daily basis. On the other hand, 60% reported never to watch the IRIB's news broadcasting. It was also found that around 78% of the population never read printed newspapers.

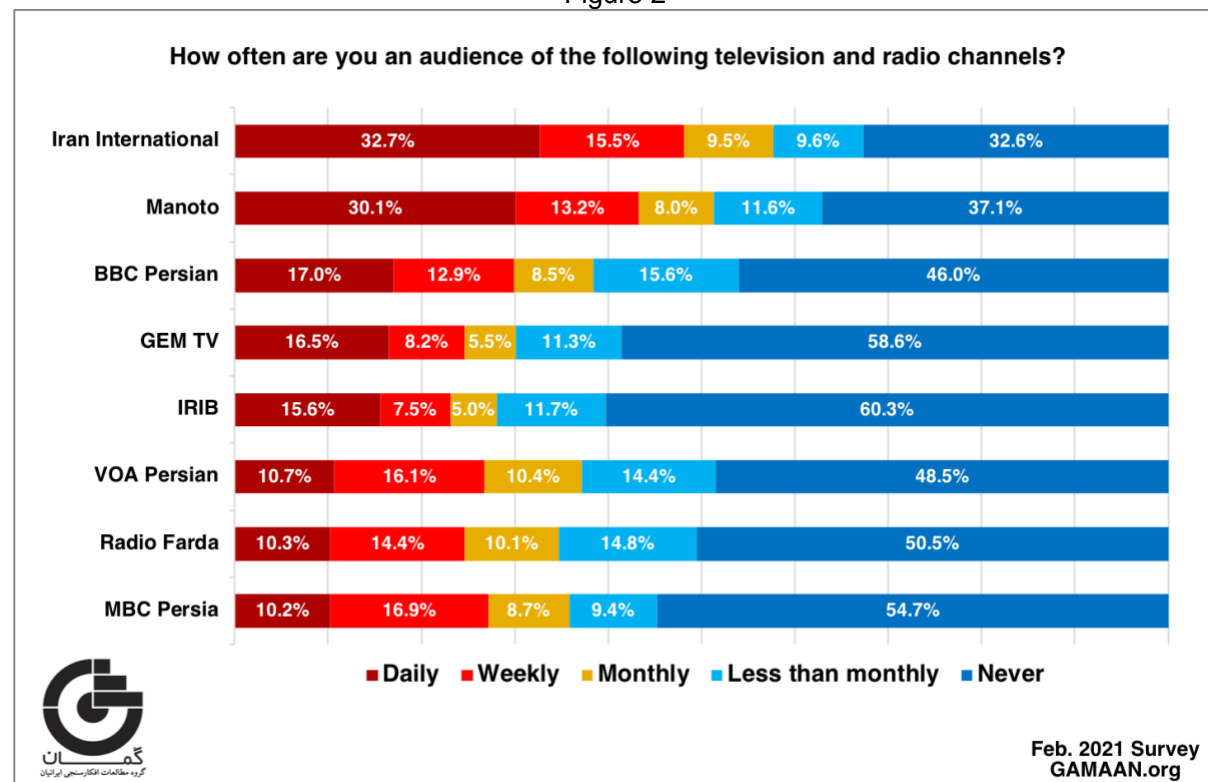
Figure 1



2.2. Popularity of television and radio channels

Another survey question dealt with the extent to which respondents watched and listened to the various television channels and radio stations. As shown in Figure 2, Iran International and Manoto are the most popular television channels among Iranians with 33% and 30% daily viewership, respectively. They are followed by BBC Persian (17%), GEM TV (16.5%), the IRIB (16%), and Voice of America Persian (VOA) (11%) and Radio Farda with an approximately 10% daily audience. MBC Persia and VOA have the highest weekly viewers. Of all respondents, 60% say they never consume content broadcast by the IRIB.

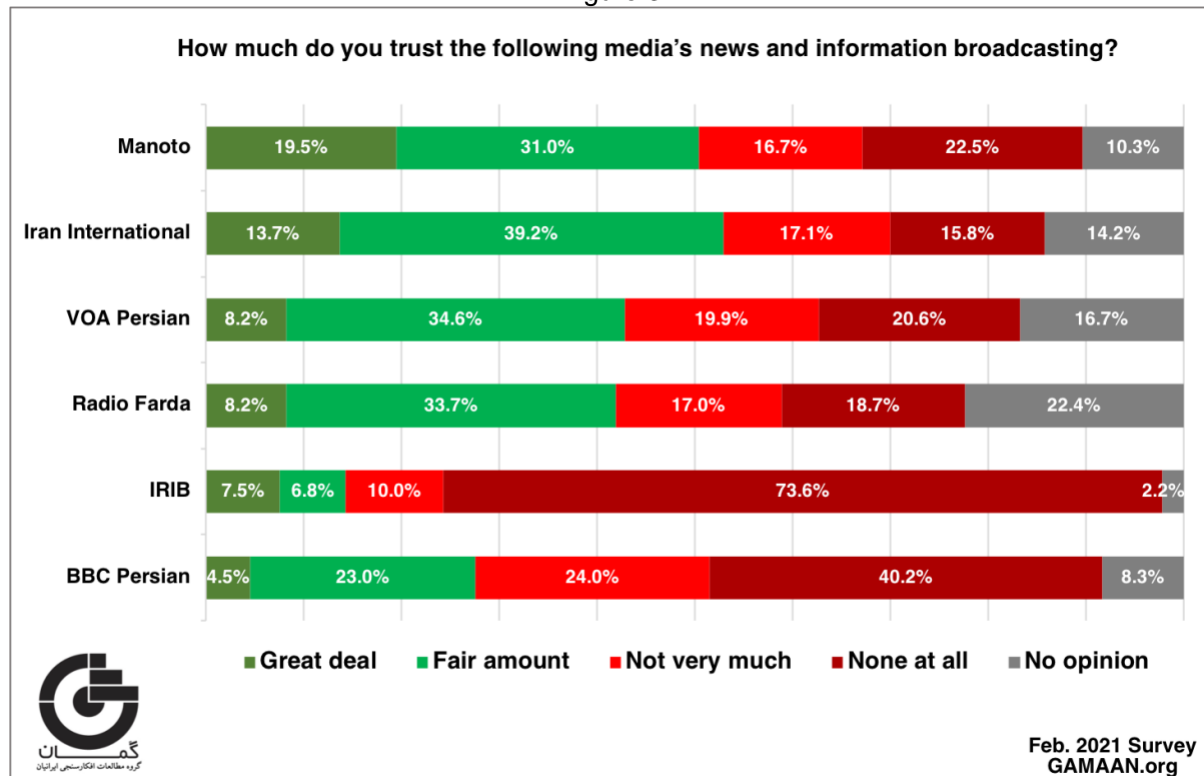
Figure 2



2.3. Public trust

Respondents were also asked about their trust in the news and information provided by various media. According to Figure 3, more than half of the population said they trust the Iran International and Manoto television channels “a lot” and “to some extent.” Also, about 40% deem VOA and Radio Farda trustworthy. On the other hand, roughly 27% trust BBC Persian and about 14% trust the IRIB, while 74% stated not to trust the IRIB at all.

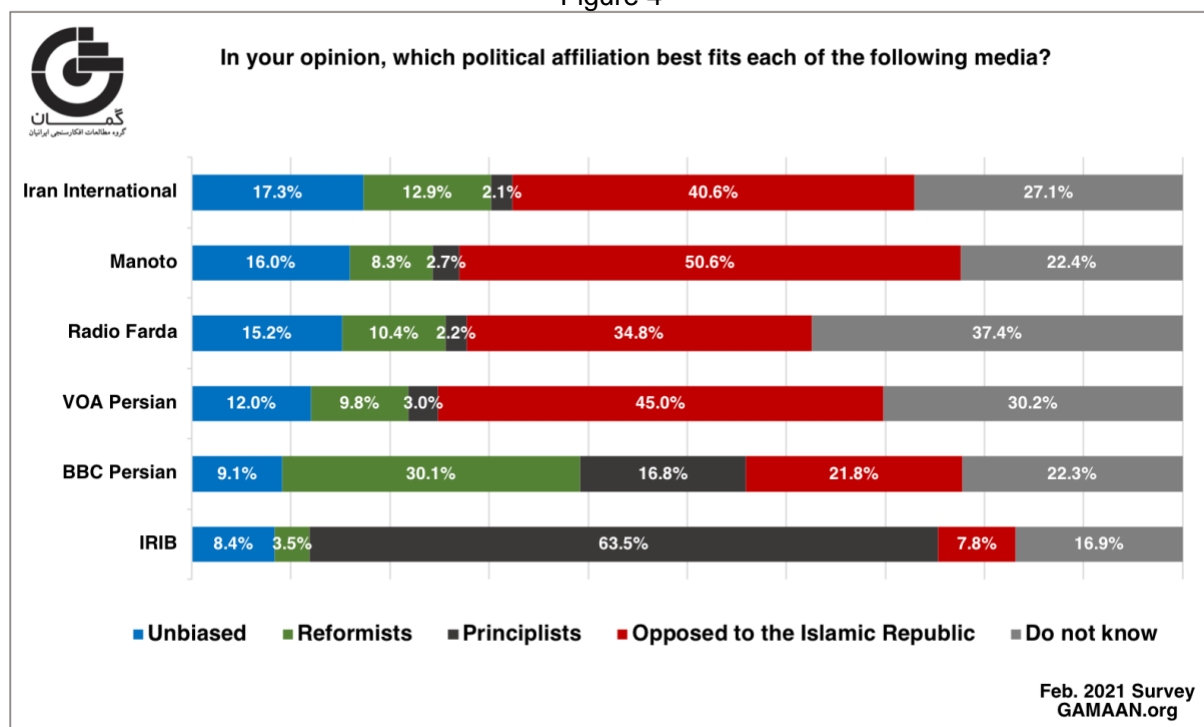
Figure 3



2.4. Perceived political affiliations

Figure 4 shows that approximately half of the population believe that Manoto, VOA, and Iran International are biased toward those who oppose the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other hand, 63% believe that the IRIB leans toward the conservative Principlists. Moreover, 30% consider BBC Persian biased toward the Reformists and 17% believe the channel to favor the Principlists, while 22% consider it to fit better with those who oppose the Islamic Republic.

Figure 4



2.5. Popularity of different television programs

The survey asked respondents about their most favorite television programs. Figure 5 shows that feature films, television series, and sports programs are the most popular programs broadcast by the IRIB.

Figure 5

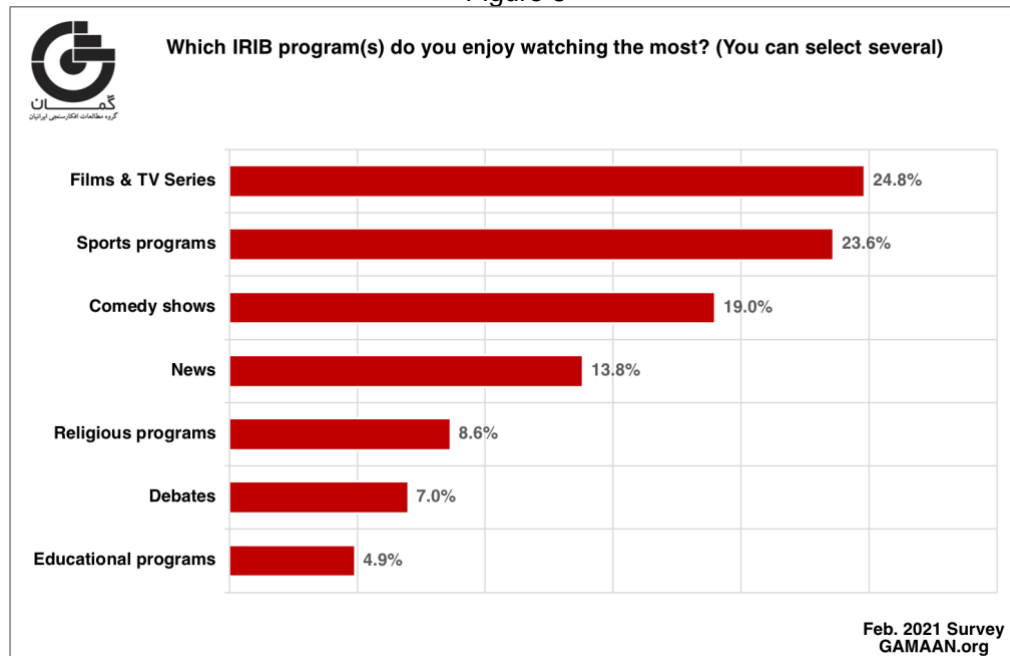


Figure 6 shows the popularity of several Iran International programs. “Cheshm Andaz” (meaning “outlook”) and “Titr-e Avval” (meaning “headline”) are the most popular programs of this television channel.

Figure 6

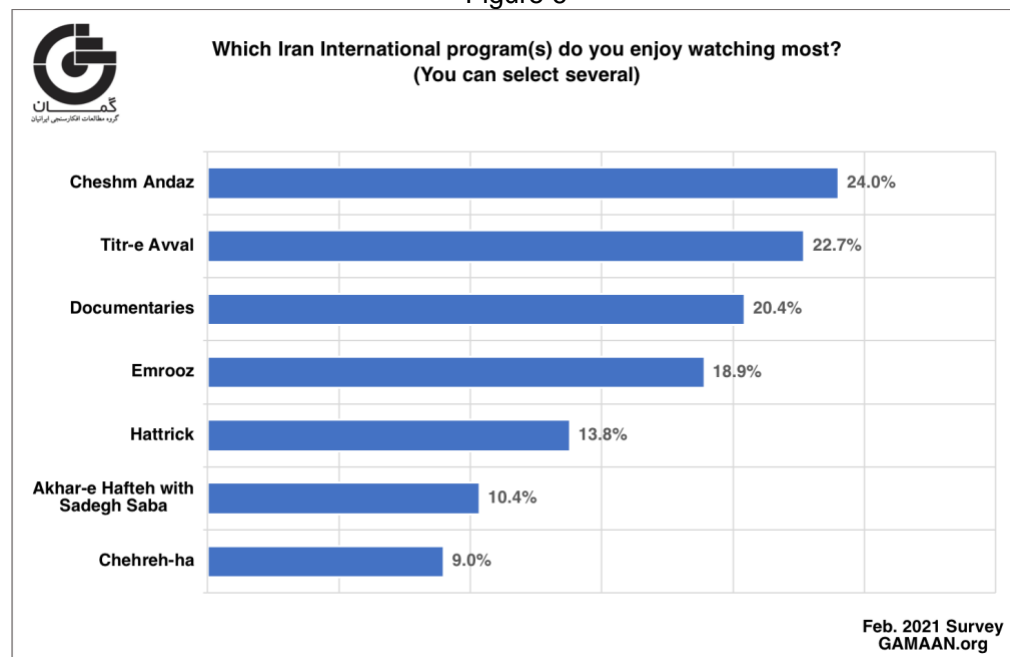


Figure 7 shows the popularity of several BBC Persian television programs. The most popular programs include the documentaries aired on this channel and the “60 Daghigheh” (meaning “sixty minutes”) program.

Figure 7

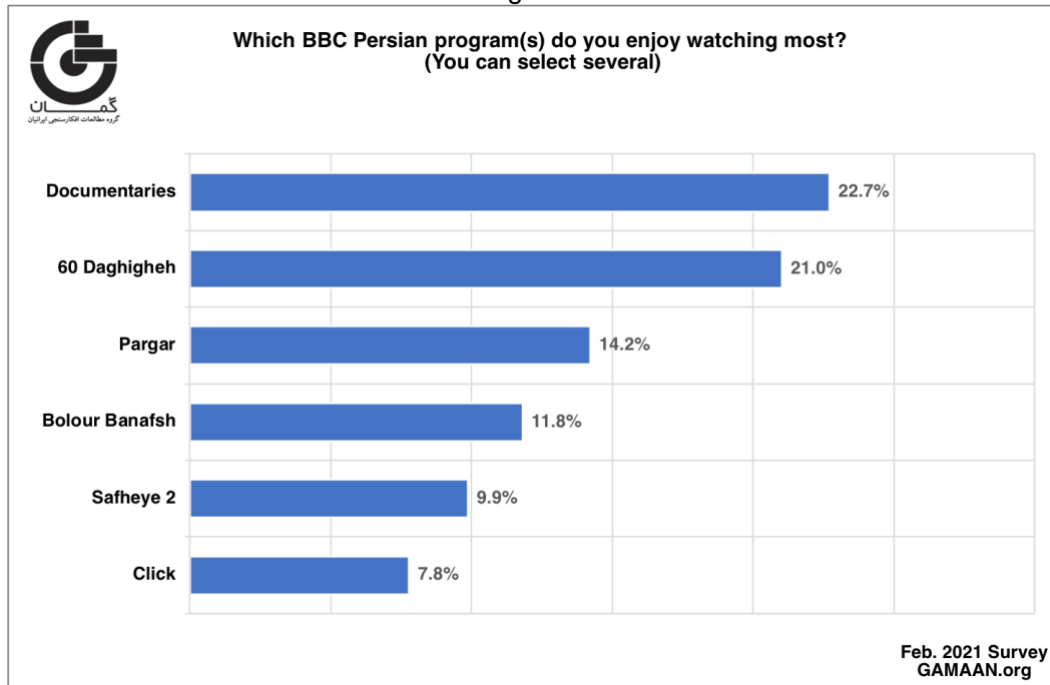


Figure 8 shows the popularity of several Voice of America Persian television programs. According to the results of this study, “Safheye Akhar” (meaning “the final page”) is VOA’s most popular program. It is also among the most popular programs overall.

Figure 8

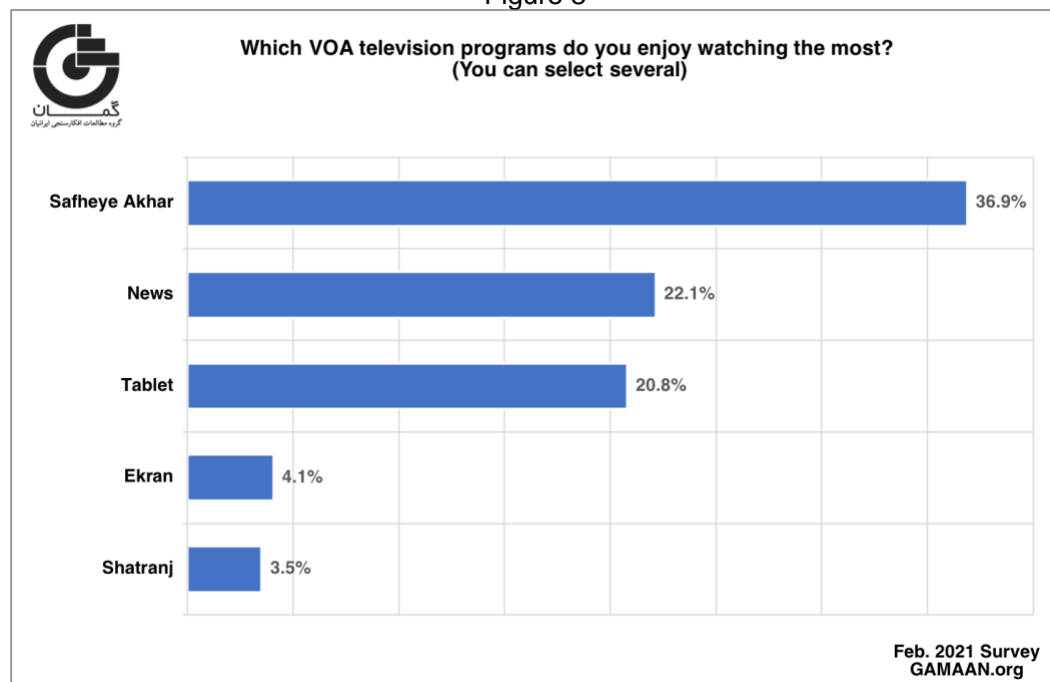
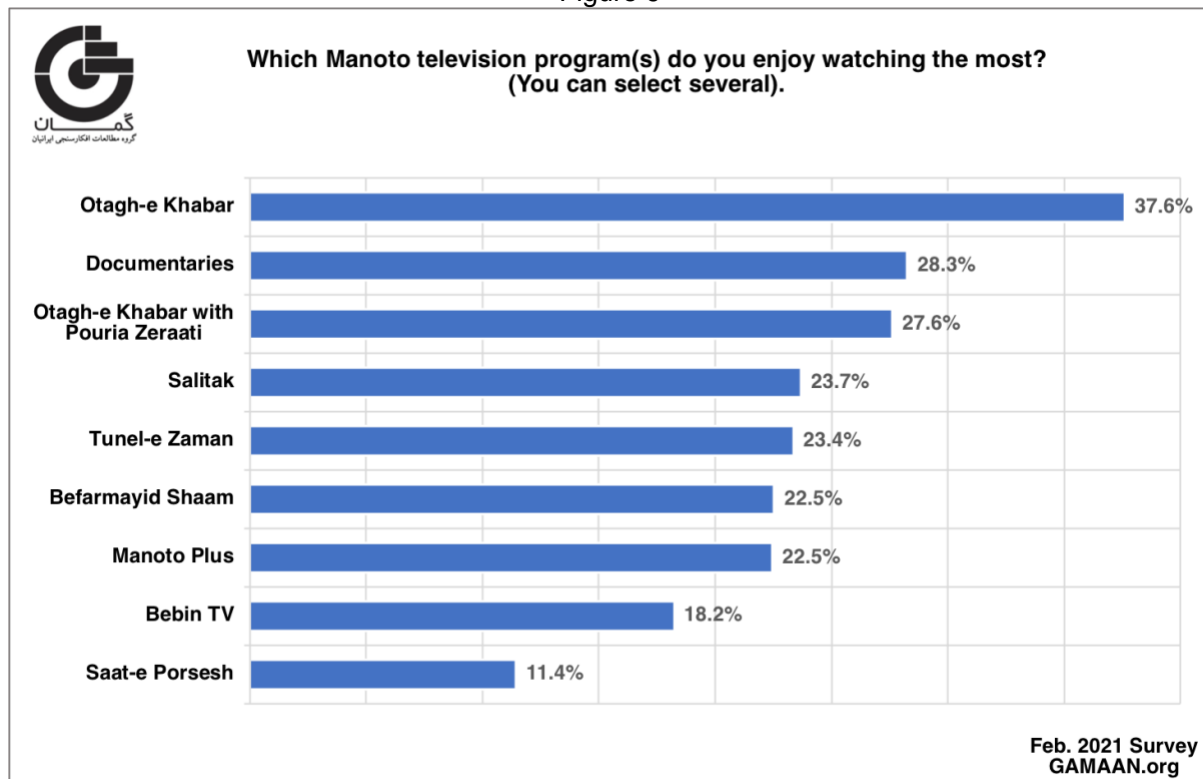


Figure 9 shows the popularity of several Manoto programs. “Otagh-e Khabar” (meaning “newsroom”) is the most popular, followed by the documentaries aired on this channel and “Otagh-e Khabar ba Pouria Zeraati” (meaning “newsroom with Pouria Zeraati”).

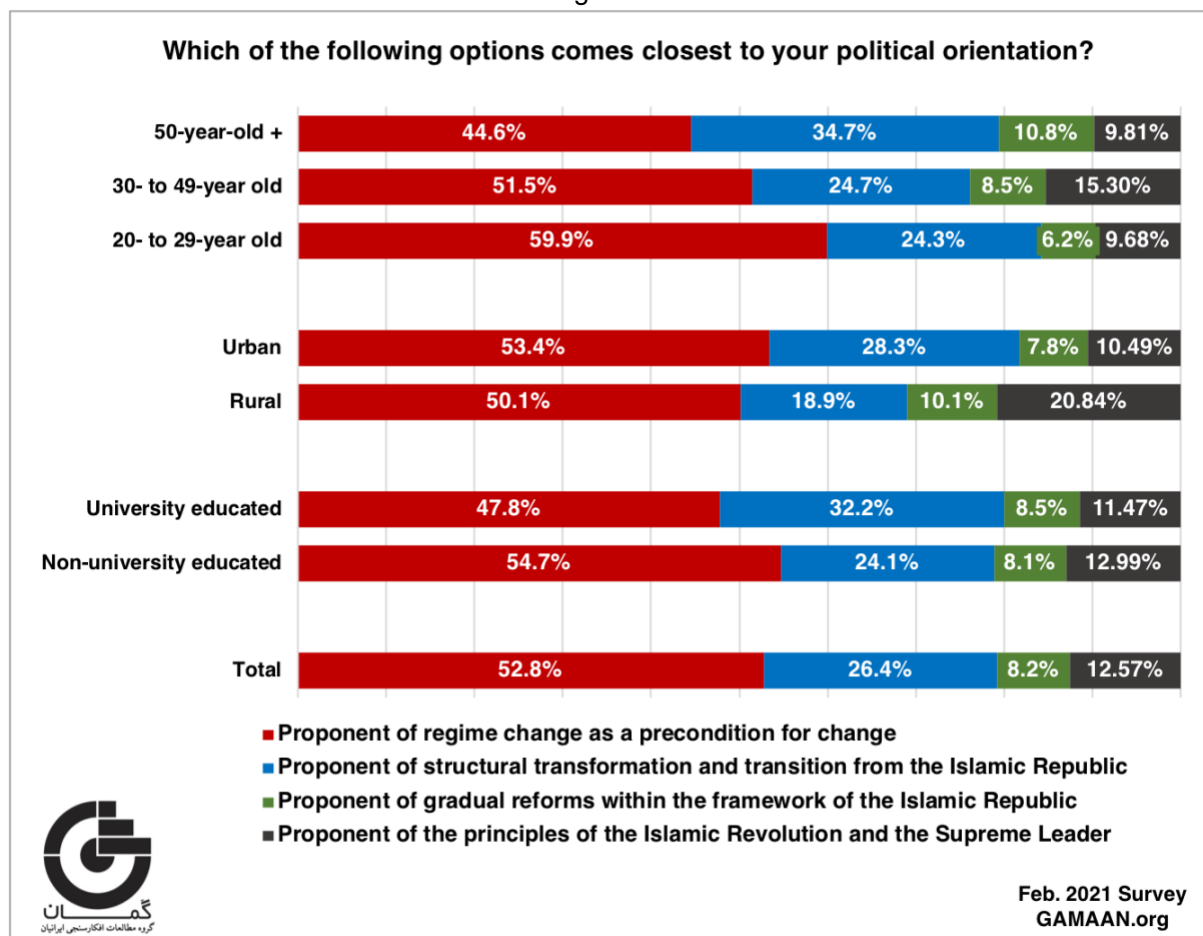
Figure 9



2.6. Political orientations

In addition to questions about attitudes toward media, this survey also asked about participants' political orientations. Around 53% identified as regime change proponents, 26% say they seek structural transformations and a transition away from the Islamic Republic, 13% support the principles of the Revolution and the Supreme Leader, and 8% seek reforms within the framework of the Islamic Republic. Figure 10 shows that regime change is more popular among younger age groups as well as those without university education.

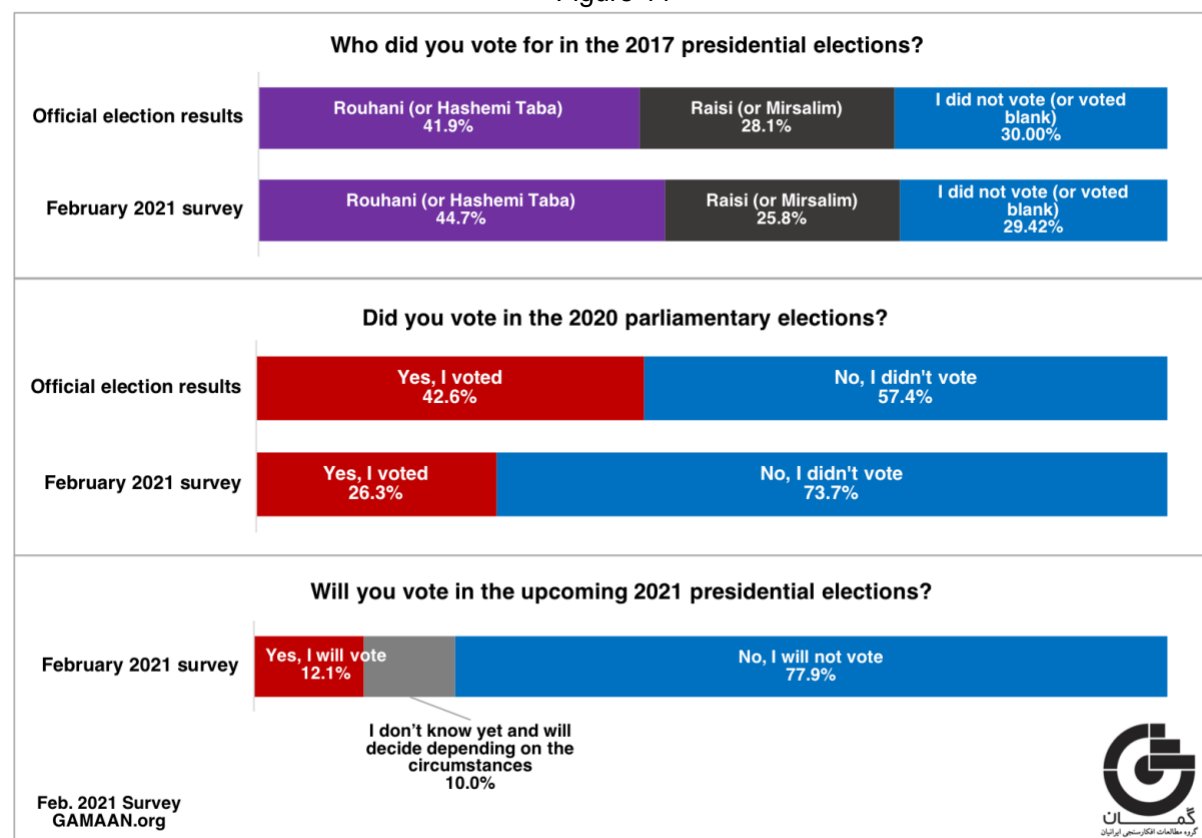
Figure 10



2.7. Electoral behavior

The survey also queried respondents' electoral behavior and their willingness to vote in the upcoming June 2021 presidential election in Iran. Around 78% say they will not vote, 12% intend to vote, and 10% are yet to decide. In contrast with official results, the results of this survey show that the turnout in the 2020 parliamentary elections was about 26%. Figure 11 compares the population's electoral behavior based on this survey's results and officially announced results.

Figure 11



According to the survey results, Iranians between 30 and 49 years old and those in rural areas are the most likely to vote (Figures 12 and 13).

Figure 12

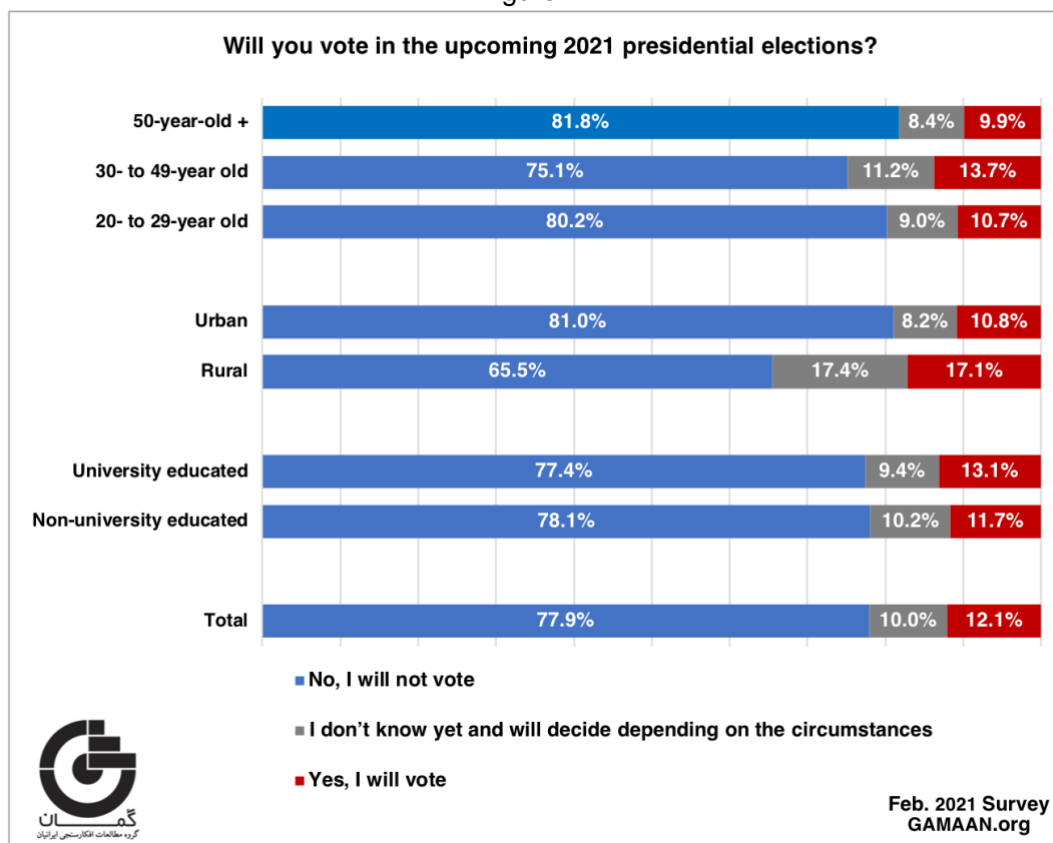
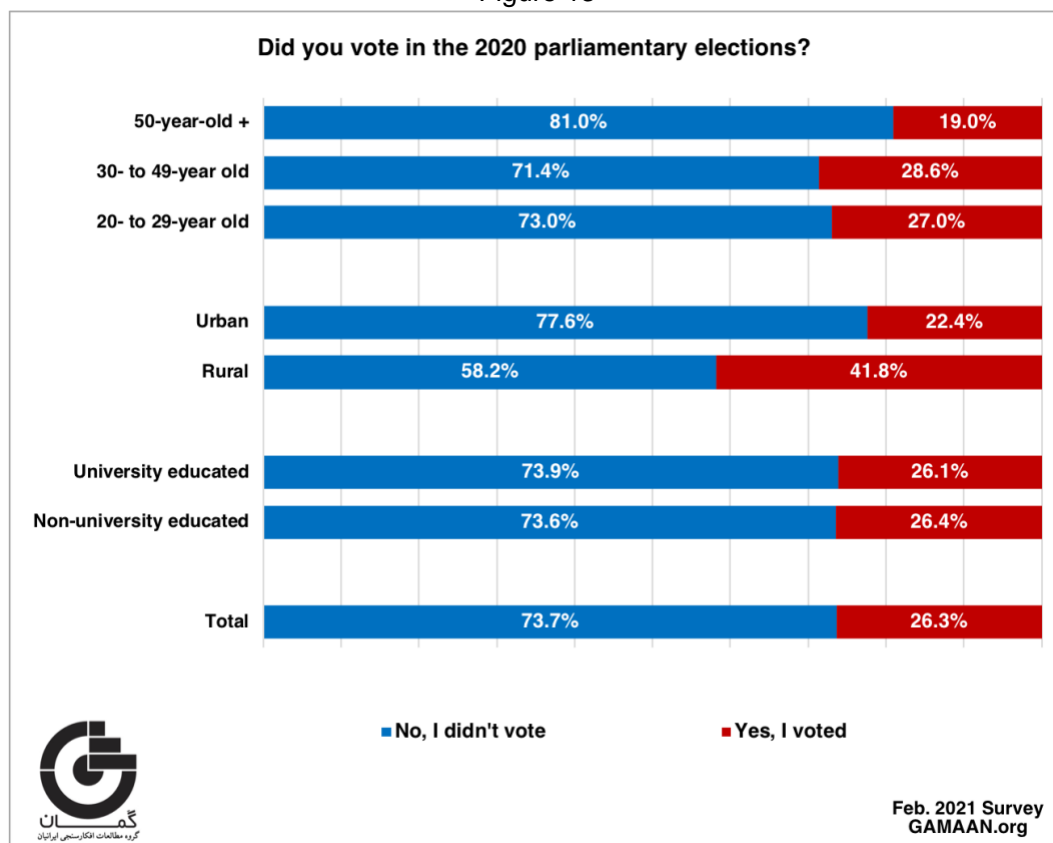


Figure 13



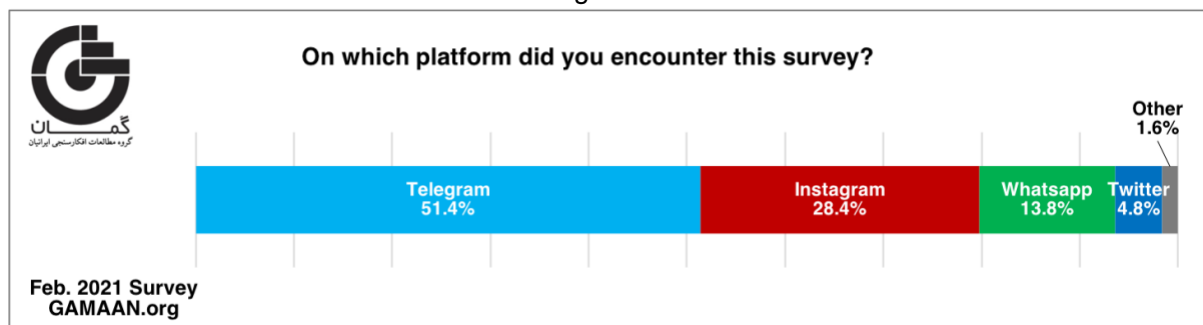
Appendix: Methodology

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 14 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 14



In response to one of the survey questions, about 16% 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

Two weighting methods, raking and cell weighting, were employed to generate a representative sample from the refined sample. As [a study conducted by the PEW Research Center](#) shows, these weighting methods are 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, level of education, province, urban/rural areas, and respondents' voting behavior in the 2017 presidential election. 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 – Fall 2020](#)), were used to extract the target population characteristics.

Having run the weighting computations **based on interlocking variables, an effective sample size of 1,043** was estimated. This sample size is more than appropriate, given 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*).

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	23.3%	47%	47%
Male	76.7%	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	20.4%	30.5%	30.1%
Between 30 and 49 years old	65.3%	50.9%	51.1%
At least 50 years old	14.3%	18.6%	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	2.7%	4.8%	4.8%
West Azerbaijan	2.0%	3.6%	3.6%
Ardabil	0.6%	1.5%	1.5%
Isfahan	6.5%	6.9%	6.9%
Alborz	4.7%	3.8%	3.8%
Ilam	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%
Bushehr	0.9%	1.5%	1.5%
Tehran	39.8%	19.1%	19.1%
Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari	0.6%	1.1%	1.1%
South Khorasan	0.6%	0.9%	0.9%
Razavi Khorasan	7.3%	7.8%	7.8%
North Khorasan	0.6%	0.9%	0.9%
Khuzestan	3.4%	5.4%	5.4%
Zanjan	0.8%	1.3%	1.3%
Semnan	0.7%	1.0%	1.0%
Sistan and Baluchistan	0.6%	2.1%	2.1%
Fars	4.7%	6.3%	6.3%
Ghazvin	1.2%	1.6%	1.6%
Qom	1.4%	1.6%	1.6%
Kurdistan	2.3%	1.8%	1.8%
Kerman	1.4%	3.6%	3.6%
Kermanshah	1.9%	2.4%	2.4%
Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad	0.6%	0.8%	0.8%
Golestan	1.0%	2.2%	2.2%
Gilan	3.5%	3.5%	3.5%
Lorestan	1.2%	2.0%	2.0%
Mazandaran	3.4%	4.5%	4.5%
Markazi	1.2%	1.8%	1.8%
Hormozgan	1.0%	2.0%	2.0%
Hamadan	1.4%	2.1%	2.1%
Yazd	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%

Table 4: Education Level Distribution

Level of education	Refined sample	Weighted sample	Population of literate individuals above 19 years old (from the 2016 Census)
High school diploma and lower degrees	14.4%	71.9%	72.3%
University education degree	85.6%	28.1%	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	3.8%	20.1%	21.2%
Urban Areas	96.2%	79.9%	78.8%

Apart from demographic variables, respondents' voting behavior in the 2017 Iranian presidential election was 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 **based on interlocking variables**, using [the results of an electoral survey](#) conducted a few days before the 2017 presidential election. Although a smaller number of Ebrahim Raisi voters participated in our survey, their number in the refined sample was still significantly high, facilitating generalizability to the target population through weighting.

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)	64.2%	44.7%	42.2%
Ebrahim Raisi (+ Mir-Salim)	3.2%	25.9%	28.8%
I did not vote (+ I cast a blank vote)	32.5%	29.4%	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. As reported in [A Selection of Labor Force Survey Results \(Fall 2020\)](#), the employment rates of illiterate people and the age group between 15 and 19 are lower

than that of the literate population. Taking this into account, 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 (Fall 2020)	Weighted sample – literate individuals above 19 years old	Workforce statistics – individuals above 15 years old (Fall 2020)	Weighted sample – literate individuals above 19 years old	Workforce statistics for individuals above 15 years old (Fall 2020)
Employed	43.2%	41.4%	42.4%	40.5%	46.6%	44.2%

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 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](#) almost equally includes 10% of the target population.

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)	13.7%	10%
Second decile (household monthly income between USD 380 and USD 499)	10.9%	10%
Third decile (household monthly income between USD 499 and USD 618)	11.1%	10%
Fourth decile (household monthly income between USD 618 and USD 736)	11.9%	10%
Fifth decile (household monthly income between USD 736 and USD 879)	7.2%	10%
Sixth decile (household monthly income between USD 879 and USD 1022)	9.6%	10%
Seventh decile (household monthly income between USD 1022 and USD 1211)	10.3%	10%
Eight, ninth, or tenth decile (household monthly income above USD 1211)	25.1%	30%

Reliability check using questions of the World Values Survey

In 2020, [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, is 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)	89.3%	9.1%	0.9%	0.4%	0.3%
Friends	WVS	28.6%	54.4%	11.2%	5.7%	0.0%
	GAMAAN (Weighted sample)	27.4%	57.9%	11.6%	2.4%	0.7%
Leisure time	WVS	40.2%	51.5%	5.7%	2.6%	0.0%
	GAMAAN (Weighted sample)	40.9%	44.5%	10.6%	2.3%	1.7%
Work	WVS	78.0%	18.6%	1.9%	1.3%	0.2%
	GAMAAN (Weighted sample)	79.1%	15.9%	2.5%	0.9%	1.5%
Religion	WVS	69.4%	22.8%	3.5%	4.2%	0.1%
	GAMAAN (Weighted sample)	22.7%	14.2%	15.7%	45.5%	2.0%

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 1,000 respondents was extracted from the refined sample of 20,479 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. 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 1%.

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 the aforementioned credibility intervals.

* * *

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. We are also open to cooperate with media research centers and academic institutions based on our Articles of Association.