

Most Indians Believe Iran is Trying to Develop Nuclear Weapons

March 1, 2006

Think UN Should Try to Stop Nuclear Proliferation

Muslim and Hindu Indians Concur

A new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll in India finds that two out of three Indians believe that Iran is trying to develop nuclear weapons and most are concerned about this. Though India itself was the first new country to test a nuclear weapon in the period after the Non-Proliferation Treaty was established in 1968, a majority of Indians believe that the United Nations should try to prevent countries from acquiring nuclear weapons.

The poll comes at a time when Iran's nuclear intent is a top issue in the Indian Parliament and media, and there is intense debate about whether India should vote against Iran at a March 6 meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the world's nuclear watchdog. India's main opposition party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), warned Tuesday that the emergence of Iran as a nuclear power would be against India's interests, while the small Samajwadi (Socialist) Party threatened Wednesday to bring a no-confidence motion in Parliament if the Indian government votes against Iran next month.

The nationwide poll of 1,452 Indians was fielded Nov. 20-30, 2005, by the Indian polling organization C-Voter.

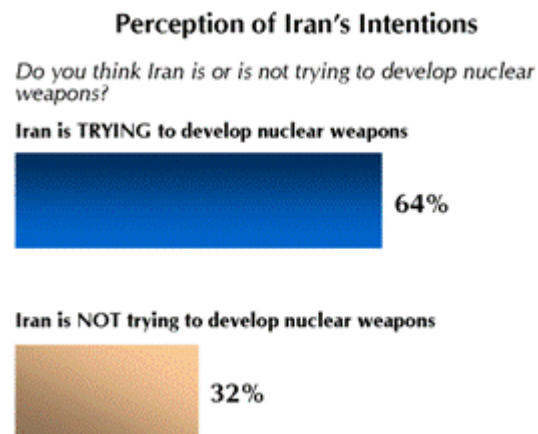
Asked, "Do you think Iran is or is not trying to develop nuclear weapons?" 64 percent said they thought Iran was doing so; 32 percent thought it was not. Those who are more educated, and presumably better informed, were more convinced, with 71 percent believing that Iran is developing nuclear weapons as compared to 57 percent among those with low levels of education.

A large majority (77%) said that if Iran were to develop nuclear weapons, they would feel some concern. Over a third (35%) said this would concern them "very much." Another 42 percent said they would feel a moderate level of concern. Less than a quarter (23%) said they would be "not at all concerned."

Steven Kull, director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), comments, "Though the Indian public supported the Indian government when it developed nuclear weapons in the 1990s, most Indians now endorse the idea that the international community should seek to prevent any further nuclear proliferation."

A clear majority of 58 percent said that as a general rule, the United Nations should actively work to discourage countries from acquiring nuclear weapons; 38 percent said the U.N. should not do this. This view was held by clear majorities at all levels of education and income.

Though Indians seem to be eyeing Iran with some suspicion, they do not appear to be taking a strongly negative view of Iran's role in the world and have a less negative view than most other countries.



In a recent poll for the BBC World Service conducted by GlobeScan together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes and also fielded by C-Voter, Indians were asked whether Iran is having a mostly positive or negative influence in the world. Responses were evenly divided between 25 percent saying mostly positive and 24 percent saying mostly negative, with a remarkably high 51 percent not answering either way. This was in contrast to the 31 other countries in the poll that had a predominantly negative view. In 24 countries, more had a negative than positive view and on average 47 percent had a negative view while just 18 percent had a positive view.

Views of Indian Muslims

India has the second-largest Muslim community in the world and one that is sometimes at odds with the dominant Hindu community. However, as Steven Kull comments, "Clearly Muslims in India, like Hindus, believe that Iran is trying to develop nuclear weapons, are concerned about it, and want to see the UN actively work to discourage proliferation in general."

Sixty-two percent of Indian Muslims believe Iran is developing nuclear weapons, as do 65 percent of Hindus. Concern about the possibility of Iraq acquiring nuclear weapons is higher among Hindus than Muslims, but only 29 percent of Muslims said they are not at all concerned. It should be noted that most Indian Muslims are Sunnis in contrast to Iranians, who are primarily Shia.

Muslims also seem to embrace the principle of using multilateral means for preventing nuclear proliferation. There was no difference between Muslims and Hindus—58 percent of Muslims embraced the idea that the United Nations should actively work to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, as did 57 percent of Hindus.

Support for UN Non-Proliferation Efforts

As a general rule, do you think the United Nations should or should not actively work to discourage countries from acquiring nuclear weapons?



WPO 11/05