

Iranians and Americans Believe Islam and West Can Find Common Ground

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Despite Mutual Antagonism, Half of Iranians and Most Americans Favor Direct US-Iran Talks, More Exchanges

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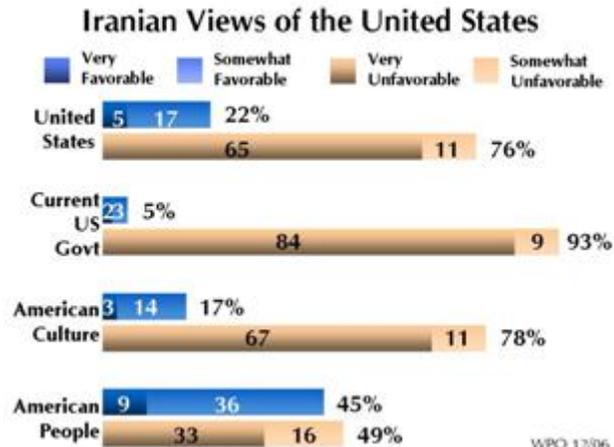
Concurrent polls of the United States and Iran reveal deep antagonism between the two publics: Iranians and Americans have largely negative views of the other's government, current president, people and culture.

But the polls also show that both Iranians and Americans support international law and institutions and share the conviction that the divide between their two countries and cultures can be bridged. Both favor a stronger United Nations, approve of taking specific steps to improve bilateral relations and believe that--despite their differences--Western and Islamic nations can find common ground.

Similar majorities of Americans and Iranians agree with the statement, "Most people in the West and the Islamic world have similar needs and wants, so it is possible to find common ground." About a third of Americans and only a quarter of Iranians choose the counter-argument that "Islamic and Western religious and social traditions are incompatible with each other."

WorldPublicOpinion.org, in partnership with Search for Common Ground, designed the parallel studies. Both polls used probability-based national samples of 1,000 respondents or more. The U.S. poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks during late November and early December 2006. The Iranian poll, which included 134 questions, was executed by an independent Iranian agency that interviewed respondents face-to-face from late October through December.

Views of Each Other

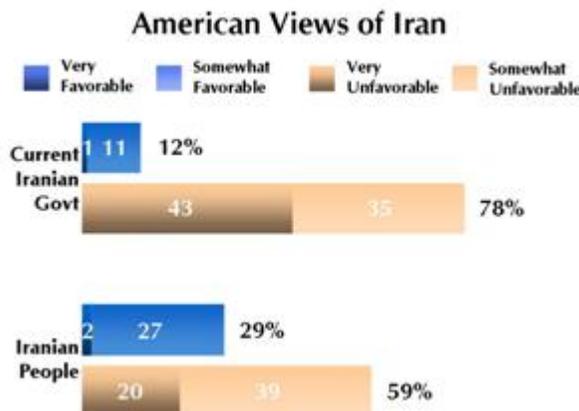


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Most Iranians have negative attitudes toward the United States. Seventy-six percent say their opinion of the United States is unfavorable (65 percent very) and only 22 percent say it is favorable (5% very). Views of the current U.S. government are even worse: 93 percent unfavorable (84% very). This is about equal to the 92 percent of Iranians who hold an unfavorable opinion of President Bush (86% very).

Iranians' negative views of the United States extend to American culture (at least in general terms). More than three in four Iranians (78%) express an unfavorable opinion of American culture, including 67 percent who say very unfavorable. They are more divided in their attitudes toward the American people, however. Forty-nine percent look unfavorably on Americans (33% very) while 45 percent look favorably (9% very).

Most Americans, in turn, have negative feelings toward Iran. When asked about Iran's



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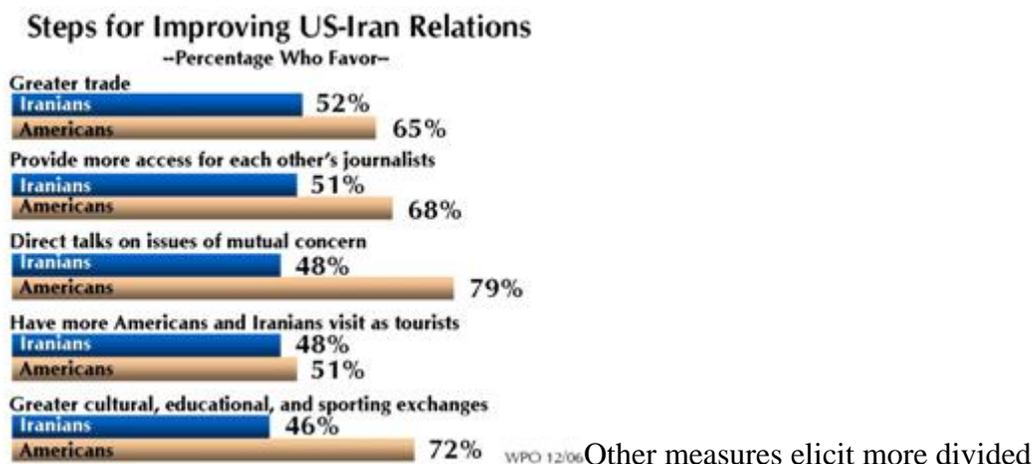
influence in the world, four in five Americans (80%) say it is mainly negative and only one in ten (10%) say mainly positive. Seventy-eight percent say they have an unfavorable view of the Iranian government, including 43 percent very unfavorable.

Americans are more likely than Iranians to have a negative view of the other country's people. Fifty-nine percent say they view the Iranian people unfavorably (20% very), while only 29 percent have a favorable opinion.

Improving Bilateral Relations

Despite their mutually negative views of each other, Iranians and Americans tend to look positively on a series of measures aimed at strengthening U.S.-Iranian relations. Strong majorities of Americans support nearly all of the proposed steps while more modest majorities or pluralities of Iranians do.

Presented a list of possible steps for strengthening relations, Iranians tend to be most supportive (and least opposed) to improving trade relations. Fifty-two percent favor greater trade with the United States and only 26 percent are opposed. Nearly as many (51%) favor granting more access to journalists from both countries, though a large minority (39%) is opposed.



Other measures elicit more divided responses. While 48 percent of Iranians support direct talks between the two governments on issues of mutual concern, 42 percent do not. Having greater cultural, educational, and sporting exchanges between the two countries garners good support (46%) and relatively little opposition (31%). Having more "Americans and Iranians visit each other's countries as tourists" is seen as worthwhile by a plurality (48%) and opposed by nearly as many (44%).

After evaluating each approach separately, respondents were asked which was best. Iranians reach no consensus on this. Twenty percent prefer greater cultural, educational, and sporting exchanges; 20 percent direct talks on issues of mutual concern; 19 percent greater trade; 15 percent providing more access to journalists; and, 13 percent allowing more Americans and Iranians visit each other's country as tourists.

Americans are more supportive of such measures. Four out of five (79%) favor direct talks between the two governments, while only 14 percent are opposed. Sixty-five percent favor expansion of bilateral trade relations (27% oppose). Three in four (72%) strongly support measures to enhance cultural, educational, and sporting exchanges between the two countries (21% oppose) and 68% would like to see more access provided to each other's journalists (24% oppose).

Americans are less enthusiastic about the idea of having more Americans and Iranian visit each other's country as tourists: only a bare majority (51%) view such an increase as favorable while 41 percent are opposed. This was the least favored option among both publics.

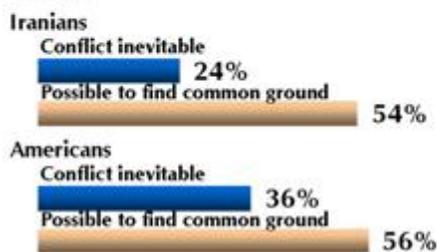
When asked to pick which step they think is the best, Americans, unlike Iranians, reach a clear consensus. Sixty-four percent choose direct talks between the two governments as the single best idea. "To have greater cultural, educational, and sporting exchanges," selected by 16 percent of Americans, is the second most favored step,

Clash of Civilizations?

Although Iranians and Americans show substantial concern about the conflict between Islamic and Western cultures, majorities in both countries reject the idea that it is inevitable. Majorities in both also support having the United Nations play a strong role in the world and both tend to view globalization as positive.

Relations Between West and Muslim World

Which position is closer to yours: a) Islamic and Western religious and social traditions are incompatible with each other; or b) Most people in the West and the Islamic world have similar needs and wants, so it is possible to find common ground.



WPO 12/06 The parallel polls offered respondents

two arguments: "Islamic and Western religious and social traditions are incompatible with each other;" and, "Most people in the West and the Islamic world have similar needs and wants, so it is possible to find common ground." The idea that there is common ground between Islam and the West is more popular among both publics: 56 percent of Americans and 54 percent of Iranians. Only 36 percent of Americans and 24 percent of Iranians believe the two cultures are incompatible.

Nonetheless, both publics are concerned that conflict between Islamic and Western countries could threaten their country. Asked to assess the threat posed by this conflict, eight in ten Iranians (80%) rate it as important including 63 percent who rate it as "critical." An even larger nine in ten Americans (90%) say such a conflict represents an important threat (52 percent critical).

A majority of Iranians and Americans have a positive view of the United Nations. Despite recent clashes between the Iranian government and the U.N. Security Council over Iran's nuclear program, the Iranian public tends to view the United Nations positively. Asked whether the United Nations is "having a mainly positive or mainly

negative influence in the world," 58 percent of Iranians say "mainly positive" and only 24 percent say mainly negative. American views of the United Nations are even more favorable: 64 percent of call its influence in the world "mainly positive."

Similarly, both publics think it would be mainly positive for the United Nations to play a significantly more powerful role in world affairs (Iranians 70%, Americans 66%), agree that the use of military force is more legitimate when the U.N. approves it (Iranians 69%, Americans 72%), and believe that the U.N. should have the right to authorize military intervention to prevent severe human rights violations, such as genocide (Iranians 69%, Americans 83% from a July 2006 poll by the [Chicago Council on Global Affairs](#)).

Majorities of Iranians not only believe that globalization is mostly good for Iran (63%) but also that global companies are mostly positive (58%). They are a bit more positive about these issues than Americans, 60 percent of whom see globalization as mostly good and 49 percent of whom see global companies as mainly positive (July 2006 Chicago Council poll).

Iranians, however, are more negative than Americans when it comes to cultural globalization. Asked whether "having movies, TV and music from different parts of the world available in Iran" is good or bad, the Iranian public is divided. Fifty percent say good (14% very good) and 48 percent say bad (19% very bad). Americans are overwhelmingly positive (87% good, 41% very good) about such foreign cultural products.