

Iranians Favor Diplomatic Relations With US But Have Little Trust in Obama

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[Full Report \(PDF\)](#)

[Questionnaire with Findings, Methodology \(PDF\)](#)



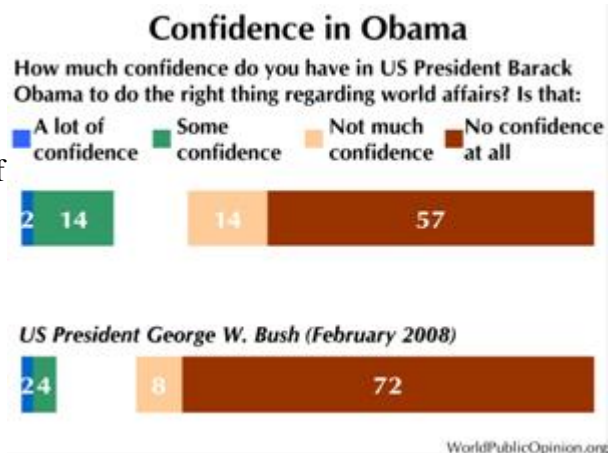
A new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of Iranians finds that six in 10 favor restoration of diplomatic relations between their country and the United States, a stance that is directly at odds with the position the Iranian government has held for three decades. A similar number favor direct talks.

However, Iranians do not appear to share the international infatuation with Barack Obama. Only 16 percent say that have confidence in him to do the right thing in world affairs. This is lower than any of the 20 countries polled by WPO on this question in the spring. Despite his recent speech in Cairo, where Obama stressed that he respects Islam, only a quarter of Iranians are convinced he does. And three in four (77%) continue to have an unfavorable view of the United States government.

"While the majority of Iranian people are ready to do business with Obama, they show little trust in him," says Steven Kull, director of WPO.

At the same time, there are some signs of softening. Trust in Obama is three times higher than the 6 percent of Iranians who expressed confidence in George W. Bush in a 2008 WPO poll. Unfavorable views of the United States government are down 8 points from the 85 percent unfavorable views in 2008 (WPO).

On Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the survey finds that eight in 10 Iranians say they consider him to be the country's legitimate president. Ahmedinejad, who will visit the



United States on Tuesday and address the UN General Assembly, was the focus of large-scale protests in Tehran after opposition supporters disputed the validity of his reelection in June.

WorldPublicOpinion.org (WPO) conducted the poll of 1,003 Iranians across Iran between Aug. 27 and Sept. 10, 2009. Interviewing was conducted by a professional survey organization located outside Iran which used native Farsi speakers who telephoned into Iran (8 in 10 Iranian households have a telephone line). The margin of error is 3.1 percent. WPO, a collaborative project involving research centers from around the world, is managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland.

The Iranian government has opposed restoration of full diplomatic relations with the United States since 1979, when the Islamic Revolution toppled the US-backed regime of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and ties were severed over Iran's takeover of the US Embassy in Tehran.

However, WPO finds 63 percent of Iranians polled say they favor restoration of diplomatic ties. Only 27 percent are opposed.

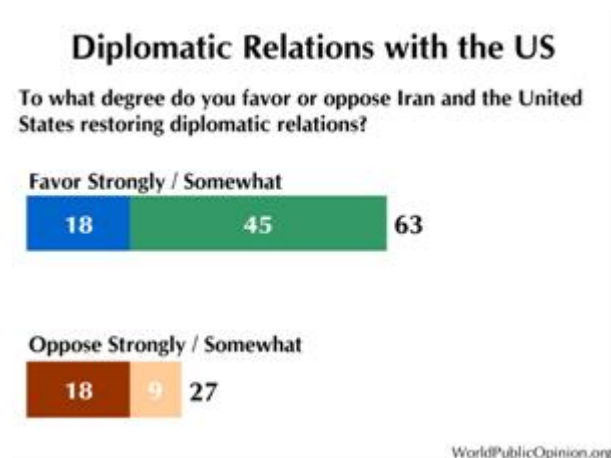
Asked if they favor or oppose full, unconditional negotiations between the governments of the two countries, 60 percent say they do. Thirty percent are opposed.

Obama is not viewed warmly by most Iranians, the poll indicates. Some 71 percent have little or no confidence that Obama will do the right thing regarding world affairs. Many also question his attitude toward Islam, with 59 percent saying he does not respect the religion and just 25 percent saying he does.

Iranians show high levels of mistrust in the United States. Eight in ten say the United States seeks to weaken and divide the Muslim world (unchanged from 2008). Three in four say the United States has the goal of imposing American culture on Muslim society.

But there are also some positive signs. While most Iranians continue to believe that it is not really a goal of the United States to bring about an independent Palestinian state, the number believing that it is a goal has doubled from 12 to 25 percent--suggesting that Obama's efforts to stop Israeli settlements may be having some impact.

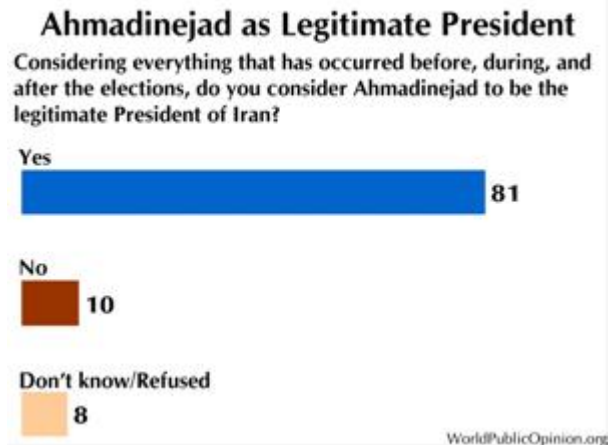
Also attitudes toward the American people are largely positive, with 51 percent of those polled expressing favorable feelings toward Americans (13 percent very favorable). Asked about the prospect of "Iran cooperating with the US to combat the Taliban



operating in Afghanistan near Iran's border," a substantial 43 percent favor doing so, while 41 percent are opposed.

While one in four (26%) Iranians say they support attacks on US troops in neighboring Afghanistan (26%) half (49%) are opposed (41% strongly)--perhaps due in part to past friction between Iran and the Taliban.

Most Iranians express acceptance of the outcome of the Presidential election. Eighty-one percent say they consider Ahmadinejad to be Iran's legitimate president, and 62 percent say they have a lot of confidence in the declared election results, while 21 percent say they have some confidence. Just 13 percent say they do not have much confidence or no confidence in the results. In general, eight in 10 (81%) say they are satisfied with the process by which authorities are elected, but only half that number (40%) say they are very satisfied.



Among the 87 percent of respondents who say they voted in the June presidential election, 55 percent say they voted for Ahmadinejad. Only 14 percent say they voted for Mir Hossein Mousavi, the leading opposition candidate, and 26 percent refused to answer. Asked how they would vote if the election were held again, overall 49 percent say they would vote for Ahmadinejad, 8 percent for Mousavi, 13 percent say they would not vote, and 26 percent would not answer.

"The extremely high number of people refusing to answer questions about their voting preference--something not found in response to any other questions--suggests that people have some discomfort with this topic," says WPO's Kull. "Thus these findings on voting preference are not a solid basis for estimating the actual vote."

Eight in 10 say Ahmadinejad is honest but slightly less than half - 48 percent -- say he is very honest. Asked about the institutions that make up the government of the Islamic republic, large majorities express at least some confidence in major institutions. The president is viewed most favorably, with 84 percent of respondents expressing a lot (64%) of or some (20%) confidence.

Overall most Iranians express support for their current system of government. Nine in ten say they are satisfied with Iran's system of government, though only 41 percent say they are very satisfied. Six in ten approve of the system by which a body of religious scholars has the capacity to overturn laws they deem contrary to the Koran, while one in four express opposition. A modest majority (55%) says that the way the Supreme Leader is

selected is consistent with the principles of democracy, though three-fifths say they are comfortable with the extent of his power.

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