

**Program for  
Public Consultation**



**ANWAR SADAT CHAIR  
FOR PEACE & DEVELOPMENT**

# Americans on the Iran Nuclear Issue

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Fieldwork by



## OVERVIEW

Iran has been engaged in tense negotiations with the United States and five other nations (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany), on a deal that would impose limits on Iran's nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of some of the international sanctions on Iran. Within the United States, and especially in Congress, there has been an intense debate about these negotiations, especially on the question of whether the US should accept a deal that would allow Iran a limited uranium enrichment program. A limited uranium enrichment program would allow Iran to provide fuel for its nuclear energy program, but it could also move Iran a step closer to being able to develop a nuclear weapon.

In this survey a representative sample of Americans were presented the two primary options that have dominated this debate:

- For the US to continue to pursue an agreement that would accept some enrichment by Iran, but with substantial limits that would preclude Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, and intrusive inspections to ensure those limits are met, in exchange for the lifting of some sanctions.
- For the US to not accept any Iranian enrichment. Instead, the US would continue trying to get other nations to impose new economic sanctions in an effort to persuade Iran to cease enrichment completely.

Respondents were first given a briefing on the broader issues surrounding Iran's nuclear program, presented the two primary options, and asked to evaluate strongly stated arguments for and against each one. The briefings and the arguments were vetted and refined with Congressional staffers from both parties and other experts. Finally respondents were asked to make their recommendation. The key finding was:

- **While majorities found arguments for both options at least somewhat convincing, when asked to make their final recommendation, a clear majority of 61% recommended making a deal with Iran that would include a limited enrichment capacity for Iran. This included 61% of Republicans, 66% of Democrats and 54% of independents. The alternative of increasing sanctions in an effort to get Iran to stop all uranium enrichment was endorsed by 36%.**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has become prominent in the debate surrounding Iran's nuclear program as he has strongly opposed a deal that allows Iran to enrich.

- **When presented the controversy surrounding Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech to Congress in opposition to making a deal on Iran's nuclear program, half of respondents thought that the speech was inappropriate, while just under half thought it was appropriate. Partisan differences were strong with two thirds of Democrats and fifty-five percent of Independents saying it was not appropriate and two thirds of Republicans saying it was appropriate. Half of Democrats and Independents thought that it is appropriate for members of Congress not to attend the speech, while only 29% of Republicans agreed.**

- **Views of Netanyahu have become more partisan since polling in November 2014. While in earlier polling more Democrats and independents had a favorable view than a negative view, now larger numbers have a negative view. Republicans continue to be predominantly positive.**

### *The Study*

The study was fielded February 19-25, 2015 with a sample of 710 American adults. The sample has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7%; with the design effect also taken into account, the margin of error is plus or minus 4.1%. Findings were weighted to census data. See page 7 for more details.

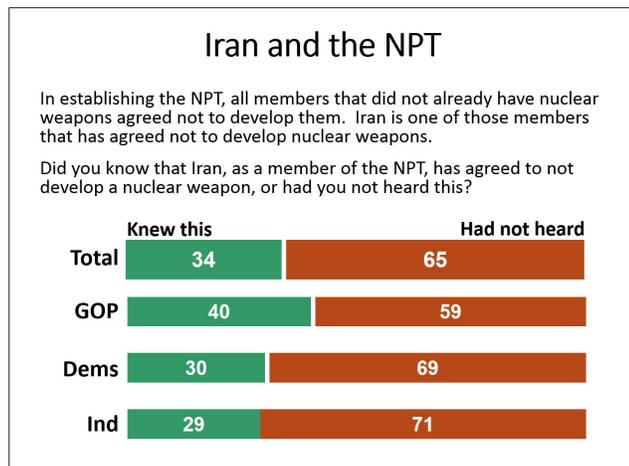
## FINDINGS

### Briefing

**Respondents were briefed about issues surrounding Iran’s uranium enrichment program and the current negotiations. Most respondents said they knew little about the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and only one in three said they knew that, as part of the NPT Iran had agreed to not develop nuclear weapons.**

Respondents were presented a briefing that:

- introduced respondents to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and Iran’s obligations under the Treaty to not pursue a nuclear weapon and to have their nuclear energy program transparent to the IAEA.
- told about the recent history of Iran’s nuclear program, the IAEA’s determination in 2002 that Iran had a secret enrichment program, and later the UN Security Council Resolutions calling for Iran to suspend enrichment and the imposition of sanctions when Iran did not comply
- reviewed the history of US sanctions on Iran
- summarized the current negotiations between Iran, the US, and P5 plus 1 countries (see page 7 for more details).



Most respondents were not well informed on these issues. After hearing about the Non-Proliferation Treaty a little over a quarter said they had heard some (18%) or a lot (5%) about the NPT, while most said

they had heard a little (31%) or nothing at all (46%). Partisan differences were minimal.

When informed that within the NPT “Iran is one of those members that has agreed not to develop nuclear weapons” a third (34%) said they knew this, while two thirds (65%) said they had not heard this. Republicans were the best informed on this (40%), while independents were the least (29%).

### Evaluation of Options Separately

**Respondents were presented the two major options for dealing with Iran’s nuclear program and evaluated a series of arguments for and against each option. All arguments were found at least somewhat convincing by substantial majorities, with neither option having a clear advantage at this stage. Asked to evaluate each option separately, majorities said that both options were at least tolerable, but the option of negotiating limits was found tolerable by a larger majority.**

Respondents were presented the two alternative policies between which they would ultimately decide as follows:

- Continue to pursue a long-term agreement that limits Iran’s enrichment of uranium: Iran would accept intrusive inspections of their program, while the US would accept Iran enriching to the low level necessary for nuclear energy, and would gradually ease some sanctions provided that Iran sticks to the agreement.
- Do not negotiate an agreement that includes Iran having limited enrichment, but rather impose new sanctions on other countries to get them to cut their economic relations with Iran to pressure Iran to agree to completely stop all uranium enrichment.

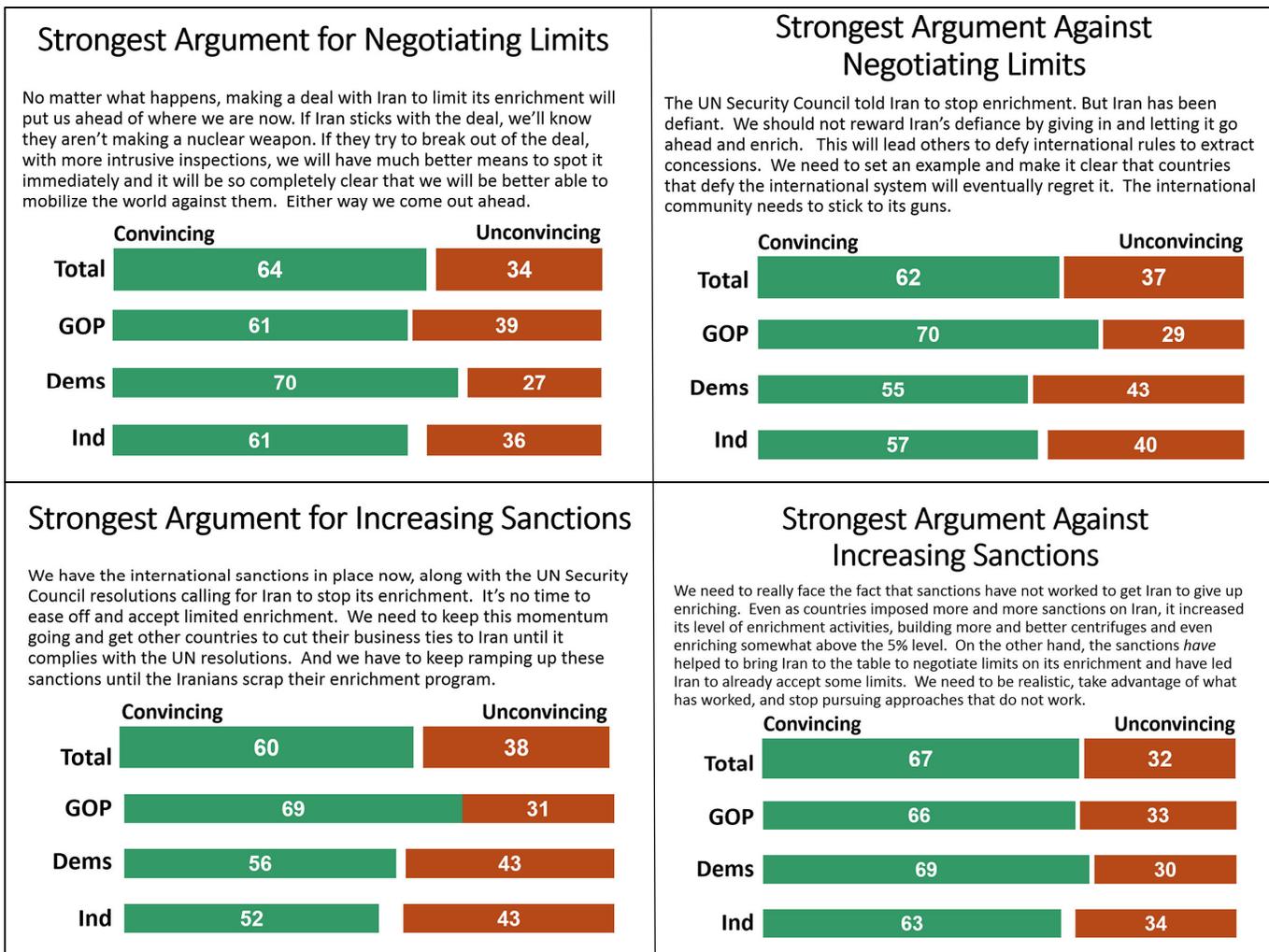
They were then presented and asked to evaluate three arguments for and three arguments against each of these options—a total of twelve arguments. The arguments were initially developed from an analysis of the policy discourse on the subject, with

special reference to speeches given on the Senate or House floor. They were vetted and refined in conversations with staffers (Republican and Democratic) of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Committee on Foreign Affairs as well as several outside experts.

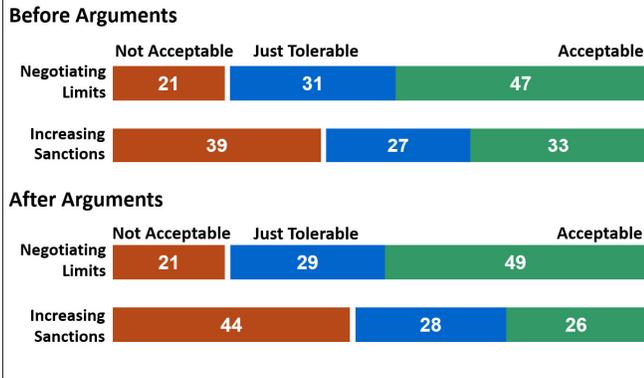
All arguments were found at least somewhat convincing by majorities, suggesting that respondents were genuinely deliberating on the issue rather than just responding from preformed opinions. Interestingly, on average, arguments against either policy option were found convincing by slightly larger majorities than were arguments that supported that option. This suggests that given a policy problem as difficult as that of Iran’s nuclear program, negative arguments seemed a little more salient than arguments that carried the burden of proposing a course of action.

Both before and after hearing the pro and con arguments, respondents were asked to evaluate each policy option separately in terms of how acceptable or tolerable it would find it if the US pursued that approach. Majorities said that both options were at least tolerable, but the option of negotiating limits was found tolerable by a larger majority.

Before hearing pro and con arguments, negotiating limited enrichment was found acceptable by about half and ‘just tolerable’ by another third, with those finding it acceptable rising several points after hearing the arguments. The option of increasing sanctions in hopes of stopping enrichment did not do as well: it was initially found acceptable by a third and ‘just tolerable’ by three in ten, with the number finding it acceptable dropping several points after the pro and con arguments.



## Evaluating Options Separately: Before and After Arguments



### Final Recommendation

Asked for their final recommendation, a majority of six in ten recommended making a deal that allows limited uranium enrichment rather than ramping up sanctions in an effort to get Iran to terminate all enrichment. Six in ten Republicans and two in three Democrats took this position, as well as a more modest majority of independents.

Finally, respondents were asked to make their recommendations about which policy to pursue. Both positions were re-presented to them in full and in exactly the same language as before.

Sixty-one percent recommended continuing to pursue a long-term agreement that limits Iran's enrichment of uranium. Substantially fewer—36%—chose the position of not negotiating such an agreement, but rather imposing new sanctions.

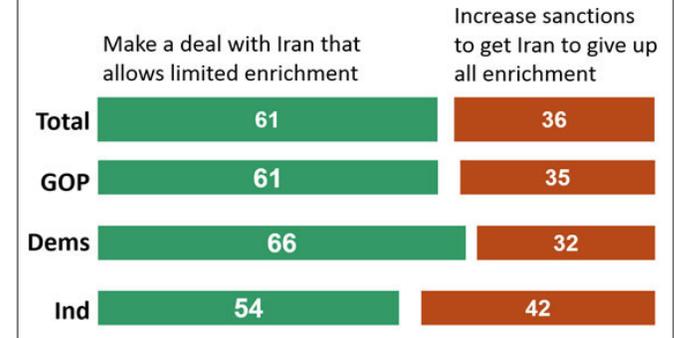
Majorities of Republicans, Democrats and independents all made this same judgment. Republicans chose continuing negotiations by 61 to 35%, while Democrats favored it by 66 to 32%. A relatively more modest majority of Independents favored a deal by 54 to 42%.

This response was essentially the same as when PPC took respondents through the exact same process and found 61% favored a deal and 35% favored pursuing sanctions. Partisan variations were not significantly different.

In the current survey, among the 9% of the sample who identified themselves as very sympathetic to the

Tea Party, a plurality of 46% favored pursuing a deal with 41% opposed. Those somewhat sympathetic to the Tea Party were no different from the sample as a whole.

## Final Recommendation on Iran's Nuclear Program



Among those who watch Fox News daily (13% of sample) views were divided, rising to 55% in favor of a deal for those who watch it 2-3 times a week. There was no significant effect for watching MSNBC.

The strongest effect was among those who watch a Christian news network at least 2-3 times a week or more. Among this group only 26% favored a deal while 58% favored pursuing sanctions.

Respondents were also asked what they thought the effect of making a deal would have on the fight against the Islamic State. A majority of 63% said it would make no difference, but more (23%) said it would help, than said it would hurt (13%). Partisan differences were insignificant.

### Netanyahu's Speech to Congress

**When presented the controversy surrounding Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech to Congress in opposition to making a deal on Iran's nuclear program, half of respondents thought that the speech was inappropriate, while just under half thought it was appropriate. Partisan differences were strong with two thirds of Democrats and fifty-five percent of Independents saying it was not appropriate and two thirds of Republicans saying it was appropriate.**

Respondents were asked about the issue Netanyahu's speech to Congress in a question that presented the

arguments on both sides (see box). Fifty-one percent thought giving such a speech would be inappropriate, while 48% thought it would be appropriate.

**Netanyahu Speech**

As you may know, there is substantial controversy over the fact that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is scheduled to speak in Congress on March 3 in opposition to the current deal being negotiated for Iran’s nuclear program. Netanyahu was invited to speak by House Speaker John Boehner, not the State Department.

Critics—including the White House, some Members of Congress, and some Israelis—say that it is inappropriate for a head of state to go around the normal diplomatic channels and try to exert political influence on the US when it is in the midst of sensitive negotiations with Iran.

Defenders—including Netanyahu, Boehner, some Members of Congress and some Israelis—say that the decision about Iran is so important that it is appropriate for Israel to have its voice heard before Congress, as the outcome effects Israel too.

Do you believe that it is appropriate or inappropriate for Netanyahu to give such a speech to Congress without a diplomatic invitation?

	Appropriate	Inappropriate
<b>All</b>	48	51
<b>GOP</b>	65	34
<b>Dems</b>	33	65
<b>Ind</b>	40	55

There were major partisan differences. Two thirds of Republicans (65%) thought giving the speech would be appropriate, while 65% of Democrats thought it would be inappropriate as did 55% of independents.

Respondents were then asked how they felt about members of Congress refusing to attend if Netanyahu’s speech as an expression of their disapproval. A clear majority (56%) thought it would be inappropriate to boycott the speech, while 41% thought this reaction would be appropriate.

Seventy percent of Republicans said it would be inappropriate. Among Democrats views were divided with 50% saying it would be appropriate and 47% saying it would be inappropriate. Independents were also divided (48% appropriate, 47% inappropriate).

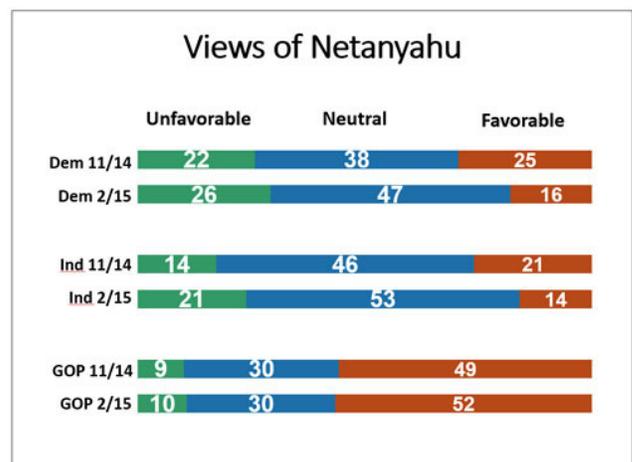
**Views of Netanyahu**

**Views of Netanyahu continue to be lukewarm, but have become more partisan since polling in November 2014. While in earlier polling more Democrats and independents had a favorable view than a negative view, now larger numbers have a negative view. Republicans continue to be predominantly positive.**

Respondents were asked to give their opinion of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 meaning very unfavorable and 10 very favorable. The mean response was a mild 5.5. Three in ten (30%) gave a favorable rating between 6 and 10, while somewhat fewer (18%) gave an unfavorable rating between 0 and 4. Forty-one percent gave the Prime Minister a neutral rating of 5.

Overall views were only slightly more negative from an earlier poll by the Sadat Chair in November 2014. In response to the same question views were 33% favorable, 37% neutral, and 15% unfavorable.

However this masks an increasingly partisan difference. Among Democrats in November slightly more had a favorable view (25%) than an unfavorable view (22%), while in the current poll the favorable views dropped 9 points to 16%, while unfavorable views rose to 26%. Similarly for independents favorable views dropped from 21% to 14% while unfavorable views rose from 14 to 21%. These were partly counterbalanced by Republican views growing slightly warmer, with favorable views rising from 49% to 52%.



## HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

### *Development of the Survey*

The briefing and arguments for this simulation were initially developed from an analysis of the policy discourse on options for reducing proliferation risks posed by Iran's nuclear program, with special reference to speeches given on the Senate or House floor. The briefing and arguments were then vetted and refined based on conversations with staffers (Republican and Democratic) of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, as well as several outside experts.

The briefing provided a brief background on the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the fact that Iran as a member of the NPT has agreed to not develop nuclear weapons. Other points covered include:

- Under the NPT, Iran can have a nuclear energy program, though not a nuclear weapons program.
- Iran is required as an NPT member to provide information to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and accept IAEA inspections, to assure that its program is only for peaceful purposes
- For nuclear energy purposes, enrichment of uranium to the 5 percent level is adequate; for use in a nuclear weapon, a 90% level is usually necessary
- In 2002 the IAEA determined that Iran had been building an enrichment facility without informing the agency, and had other activities that could be related to developing a nuclear weapon
- From 2003 to 2006, Iran suspended work towards enrichment and cooperated with the IAEA as part of an international effort to resolve the issue, but no final agreement resulted and Iran resumed enrichment
- The UN Security Council passed a resolution demanding that Iran suspend enrichment-related activities and imposing some economic sanctions
- The US had stopped virtually all its trade with Iran well before it imposed new sanctions

- The US' new and additional sanctions, related to Iran's nuclear program, are aimed at other countries' business with Iran and have reduced such business
- Iran, nonetheless, persisted in enriching uranium and substantially increased its capacity to do so
- The negotiations focus on creating a system for limiting Iran's enrichment, ensured by continued scrutiny to the low levels necessary for nuclear energy, which would be ensured through intrusive inspections
- Negotiations have made progress and Iran has cooperated in its short-term obligations, but a long-term agreement has not been reached

### *Sample and Fielding*

The sample was drawn from a larger standing panel called the KnowledgePanel that is managed by the research company GfK. Though these surveys take place online, this panel is not derived from an "opt-in" by which any online user can volunteer a respondent. Instead, panelists are recruited through a scientific process of selection using two methods: a random selection of residential addresses using the United States Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. Persons in selected households are then invited by telephone or by mail to participate in GfK's KnowledgePanel. Those who agree to participate but who do not have Internet access are provided a laptop computer and Internet service.

A representative sample is then chosen for a specific survey. Once that sample completes a survey, the demographic breakdown of the sample is compared to the US census. Any variations from the census are adjusted by weighting.

The study was fielded over February 19-25, 2015 with a sample of 710 American adults. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7%; with the design effect of 1.2365 also taken into account, the margin of error is plus or minus 4.1%. Findings were weighted to census data.



The **Program for Public Consultation (PPC)** seeks to improve democratic governance by helping governments consult their citizenry on the key public policy issues the government faces. Unlike standard polls, in public consultations respondents are presented information that helps simulate the issues and tradeoffs faced by policymakers. PPC has been established to develop the methods and theory of public consultation and to conduct public consultations. PPC is a joint program of the Center on Policy Attitudes and the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland.

The **Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development** at the University of Maryland aims to undertake a program of research on development and conflict resolution, especially in the Middle East, and to contribute the findings of this research to the policy-making process. The Chair benefits from its placement at the University of Maryland, College Park, which has the interdisciplinary resources necessary for the Chair's research program and which provides the Chair with a location close to the policy-making arena of Washington, DC. The Chair also benefits from being housed in the University's Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM), which has excellent resources including long-term research projects on issues that are relevant to the Sadat Chair's program. The Sadat Professor receives additional support from his academic home, the University's distinguished Department of Government and Politics. The goals of the Chair and of the professor who occupies it are three-fold: to further the dialogue for peace in the Middle East and throughout the world, especially negotiations in the Middle East; to bring the policy community of nearby Washington, DC in closer touch with the latest research findings; and, to maintain an active and rigorous research agenda. Professor Shibley Telhami is the inaugural holder of the Chair.

**GfK** is a major research company operating in more than 100 countries. This study was conducted using their KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population. Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. Persons in selected households are then invited by telephone or mail to participate in the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®. For those who agree to participate, but do not already have Internet access, GfK provides at no cost a laptop and ISP connection.