



CONTACT:

Alex Wooley, Director of Communications
InterMedia Survey Institute
202.434.9332
wooleva@intermedia.org
www.intermedia.org

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New survey finds Iranians support their country's nuclear program

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A majority of Iranians support their country's quest for nuclear weapons technology, according to the results of a random telephone survey released today by InterMedia, the Washington, D.C.-based media and public attitudes research institute. Fifty-five (55) percent of the 2,001 Iranians questioned support the country's development of nuclear weapons technology, according to InterMedia, which commissioned the survey, with 46 percent of the respondents strongly supporting the nuclear program.

“Despite the U.S. perception that a nuclear Iran is a threat to American and global interests, Iranians themselves are motivated to support this program for various reasons,” said Dr. Haleh Vaziri, InterMedia's Regional Research Manager for the Middle East and North Africa. “Some of these reasons are national and regional in scope: nuclear weapons are seen as potential symbols of national pride. They would also affirm what many in Iran believe, that the country deserves a place as a recognized regional power. Finally, some think the country needs a nuclear arsenal for deterrence in what is a dangerous neighborhood.”

The InterMedia survey covered a range of current media and political issues. Fifty-three percent of those surveyed believe the country is currently heading in the right direction, and 44 percent saying that an Islamic republic based on the clergy's guardianship is the best model for the country's future--- disappointing numbers for advocates of reform in Iran. “People may have lost hope in the reformists—at least for now,” Vaziri said. Iran will hold presidential elections June 17.

At the same time, the numbers may not tell the whole story: “We found there was a greater reluctance on the part of respondents to speak out this year, as perhaps there was more fear of reprisal,” said Vaziri. “We had higher refusal rates to the survey and believe the chance of respondent bias is high when Iranians when asked over the phone about their domestic political options.” Telephone penetration throughout Iran is roughly 85 percent, but is higher in major cities than in rural areas, where it drops to about 60 percent.

The survey, conducted from April 25 to May 9, also found increasing anti-U.S. and anti-EU sentiments. “There is good will towards the American people and an appreciation of American ideals, but Iranians may be growing wary of increased U.S. influence in the region, including U.S.

protests about the Iranian nuclear technology program,” said Vaziri. Forty-four percent of those surveyed were ‘very unfavorably’ inclined towards the United States and a further 4 percent were ‘somewhat’ unfavorably inclined. Only 19 percent of respondents held positive views. A similarly large proportion of respondents (40 percent) view Iraq, the country’s historic adversary, unfavorably. By contrast, Iranians view Saudi Arabia (45 percent) and Syria (47 percent) in a much more positive light.

The survey found Iranians overwhelmingly prefer to get their news from local TV. Surprisingly however, radio was not the second most popular medium, as it is in many developing countries. Instead, in Iran, newspapers prove to be slightly more popular than radio. “Newspapers play an important role in Iranian society,” said Vaziri. “Although Iran’s judiciary persists in cracking down against editors and journalists, newspapers still tend to be a forum for more diverse viewpoints. They are often more vocal, bolder and more partisan than domestic television and radio in their coverage, and represent the full political spectrum, from reformist to conservative.”

Based in Washington, D.C., and London, U.K., InterMedia supports the international media and development community by providing research, evaluation, regional expertise and consulting services that help clients turn public attitudes, opinions and behaviors into market intelligence and strategic communications solutions in transitional and developing societies worldwide.

Survey note: The survey of 2,001 adults 15 and older took place between 25 April and 9 May, 2005. Range of error with a 95 percent confidence interval is +/- 2.19 percent.

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For further details, or to arrange an interview with Dr. Vaziri, contact Alex Wooley, InterMedia’s director of communications and development, at 202-434-9332, or at wooleya@intermedia.org.