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InterMedia Research and Consulting Europe is an independent non-profit research centre. We provide insights-driven research in developing countries. Our mission is to deliver research and advice to foundations, bilateral and multilateral agencies and organisations committed to freedom of expression, the power of an informed citizenry, and the liberating potential of media and technology. We conduct applied research, technical training and knowledge-sharing workshops globally.

InterMedia Research and Consulting Europe also collaborates with affiliated InterMedia Group locations in Washington, DC and Nairobi, Kenya. You can find out more about InterMedia’s work on our corporate website http://www.intermedia.org and in our online knowledge centre for the international development community http://www.audiencescapes.org.

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Prior to joining InterMedia, she headed up the EchoSonar team at Echo Research in the U.K., focusing primarily on media content analysis for international clients. She also served as a Research Manager at the international media research institute Media Tenor in South Africa, where she advised clients on strategic reputation management and managed advanced media content analysis studies for international clients.

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If we are to chart a global future that is fair, equitable and responsive to the needs and expectations of citizens across the world, it is imperative that policy-makers and decision-makers listen to the opinions of young people in emerging economies with large youth populations.

Today, about 60% of the population in Less Developed Countries is under the age of 25, and the number of young people in those Less Developed Countries will increase by more than 60% over the next 40 years. In 2009, there were 1.2 billion adolescents aged 10–19 in the world, forming 18% of the world’s population. In 2050, sub-Saharan Africa is projected to have more adolescents than any other region, marginally surpassing the number in either of the Asian regions.

**Young Publics** is a research initiative that focuses exclusively on young people from 16 to 25 years of age. In addition to understanding their demographic profile and their traditional and social media use patterns and preferences, we are interested in what young people value most in life, their hopes and aspirations, their attitudes toward freedom of expression and human rights and their trust in various institutions.

Both of our organisations are aware of the challenges of conducting robust research in difficult environments, and the imperative to be transparent about the methods employed to deliver such work.¹

We hope that the knowledge and insights gleaned from the *Iran Young Publics study*, and future studies in the **Young Publics initiative**, will inform national and international policy and decision-making in a manner that responds to the needs and aspirations of young people, as diverse as those needs and aspirations might be.

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Dr Gerry Power  
COO, InterMedia Research and Consulting Europe

Mahmood Enayat  
Director, Small Media
Recent events in North Africa and the Middle East illustrate how youth play a key role in driving social, political and cultural progress. With the number of young people in the least developed countries forecast to increase by more than 60% in the next 40 years, deepening our understanding of young people’s thoughts, priorities, beliefs and behaviours is now more vital than ever.

Despite the rising numbers of youth worldwide and their growing influence in developing countries, there is a paucity of data available on young people living in many of these societies, particularly about their values, life priorities and social and political attitudes. Furthermore, little is known about their information needs: how and where they obtain, consume and share information on issues of interest to them and how they use traditional media and new technologies to stay informed about developments in their communities and beyond.

To address this gap and establish a better understanding of young people in these under-researched societies, InterMedia in 2012 launched a research initiative, entitled Young Publics.

The initiative is designed to achieve three specific objectives:

1. To understand how young people in under-researched societies think about themselves and their place in the world;
2. To establish the value priorities of young people in under-researched societies; and
3. To identify the information-gathering and media and technology habits of young people in under-researched societies.

The first study in this initiative was conducted in Iran in 2012, in collaboration with the BBC World Service, Deutsche Welle and euronews.

PHASE 2 of the Young Publics initiative, to launch in 2013, will include national studies with young people in Myanmar and Tunisia.

For further information about Young Publics PHASE 2 and potential participation in these studies, please contact Klara Debeljak, Associate Director at InterMedia at debeljakk@intermedia.org.
Ever since the emergence of the Green Movement in 2009, Iranian youth have been at the centre of international media attention. Young men and women, who alongside the Iranian opposition took to the streets in 2009, captivated Western audiences, and many saw the youth as those who would trigger the wave of political changes in Iran that many in the West have been awaiting for so long. While these predictions so far failed to materialise, the coverage of Iranian youth in Western media remained largely unchanged from 2009. Liberal, urban and educated young men and women with anti-establishment perspectives who formed the core of the Green Movement remain in the media spotlight, while other segments of Iranian youth are afforded little, if any, media attention. As a result, the portrayal of Iranian youth in the West today remains one-sided and does not reflect the diverse realities of young people’s lives in Iran.

The purpose of this report is to contribute to a deeper understanding of Iranian youth as a whole, rather than focus on one particular segment. Specifically, this report aims to address the following questions:

1) What are the key values that underlie the attitudes and behaviour of Iranian youth and how do these vary between different segments of the youth?

2) What do young men and women in Iran prioritise in their lives and what are their key concerns for the future?

3) How do Iranian youth perceive the current social and political situation in Iran? What are their views on protection of human rights, freedom of expression and their own political efficacy? Which state institution do they find most trustworthy and to what extent do they feel that Iran needs to change?

4) What are the media and communication preferences of young Iranians? What role do traditional media play in their information-gathering processes and how important are the internet, social media and mobile phones?

The answers to these questions in this report are based on a national survey with 1,002 young people between 16 and 25 years of age, living in Iran. The survey was conducted by telephone and was nationally representative. As such, it was designed to capture the views of all parts of Iranian youth – young men and women of different ages, with different levels of education, from all religious and socio-economic backgrounds, those living in urban and rural Iran, as well as those with different social and political convictions.

Some of the findings that emerged from this survey may be considered surprising by some, others echo the results of some of the previous surveys that assessed the perceptions and attitudes among the general population of Iran.

However, while it is important to understand the context of the previous research, in most cases the results of these studies are not directly comparable, because the profile of the sample and the timing of the research, as well as the wording of the questions, were different.

We hope that the insights shared in this report will help inform the strategies of the development community and policy-makers seeking to engage with young people in Iran. Furthermore, it is our hope that this study will help create a more complete picture of Iranian youth by contributing a chapter to the story of the next generation in Iran – a story which for now remains only half told.
UNDERSTANDING A DIVERSE GENERATION

This section discusses different segments of Iranian youth and outlines their underlying value priorities and beliefs.
Iranian youth are not a monolithic, but rather, a very diverse group within Iranian society. While they have much in common, young people in Iran also express a very broad spectrum of values and beliefs that influence all aspects of their lives – from how they think about themselves and their place in the world and how they act in it, through their opinions of the country, to how they use media and new technologies. This diversity is relevant and important to recognise for those interested in communicating or engaging with them – from local and national authorities, through businesses and the media, to the international development and policy community.

To better understand this diversity, distinct groups of Iranian youth were identified, on the basis of the personal values and beliefs they expressed in the survey. The goal of this approach was to divide young people into groups in such a way that those individuals within the same group have similar values to each other.

These groupings were defined using the following three dimensions:

1. First, the extent to which young people said they valued such ideals as conformity, tradition, benevolence, self-direction, stimulation and power;

2. Second, the factors that young people named as those that, in their view, lead to success in life (e.g. God/Allah, intelligence, money); and

3. Third, the extent to which young people who participated in the survey felt that Iran needed to adopt new ways of thinking to secure its future.

The analysis of these three dimensions revealed four distinct segments of Iranian youth, which we labelled: Non-Traditionalists, Mainstream, Conservatives and Ultra-Conservatives.

The key features of each segment, including their personal values and beliefs, their demographic characteristics and the overview of their social and political attitudes, are summarised in FIGURE 1.

While these four groups of Iranian youth clearly differ in many of the beliefs that underlie their attitudes and behaviour, the strong influence of family on their lives and the central role of religion are shared across the groups.

Key Finding 1

Young Iranians express a very broad spectrum of social and political perspectives and do not constitute one homogeneous group.
Figure 1  Profile of youth segments

Ultra-Conservatives
The most traditional, least educated and most likely to support status quo
Social and political attitudes
Strong trust in state institutions
Believe that human rights are protected in Iran

Conservatives
The second most traditional and conformist segment
Social and political attitudes
Strong trust in state institutions
Believe that human rights are protected in Iran

Mainstream
The “middle of the road” for personal values and beliefs
Social and political attitudes
Moderate trust in state institutions
Moderate perceptions of human rights in Iran

Non-Traditionalists
The best educated, most liberal and most open to change of all four segments
Social and political attitudes
Lowest trust in state institutions
Most concerned about the lack of protection of human rights in Iran

Personal Values

High level of conformity
98% Very high
98% Very high
98% Very high
75% Relatively high

Respect for tradition
86% Very high
82% Very high
80% Very high
34% Low

Share of young people who believe that the success in life primarily depends on:

Intelligence
94% 91% 81%

Skill
94% 86% 91%

Personal connections
4% 8% 9%

Hard work
80% 94% 79%

The will of God or Allah
95% 96% 96%

Having money
7% 88% 57%

NOTE: * Conformity is measured as % of those for whom respecting one's elders is very important
* Respect for tradition is measured as % of those for whom following religious customs is very important

Demographic characteristics

Live in urban areas
67% 24%

Have higher education
35% 41% 44%

Source: InterMedia survey of young people in Iran (n = 938, 16–25)

Source: Young Publics Research Paper Series | No.1 - Iran | May 2013
Family influences

In Iran, the family is considered the basis of the social structure and the dominant social institution. Families are involved in all aspects of young people’s lives, from guiding their education and career choices, to being involved in the selection of their life partner. Furthermore, family traditionally comes before the individual, and family ties take precedence over all other social relationships.

In the Young Publics study, the importance of family is demonstrated in multiple ways:

Reliance on family as a core information source
Family is recognised by Iranian youth not only as one of the main sources of news and information on current affairs, but also as one of those that can be considered most trustworthy (see FIGURE 2).

Family’s influence on political participation
Among all sources of influence, young people in Iran cite their family as those whose views and guidance have the strongest impact on their political participation (see FIGURE 2). Parental influence (of both the mother and the father) on political participation tends to be stronger among young women than among young men, and falls with age – that is, the older they get, the less likely they are to turn to their parents for counsel on this aspect of their lives.

Choice of life priorities
In the survey, more than a third of all young people in Iran selected family as one of their top two priorities in their life (see FIGURE 3). While the prioritisation of family tends to be slightly stronger among the more conservative youth, even the most liberal segment, the Non-Traditionalists, tends to rank family as one of the two most important life priorities.
The central role of religion

Key Finding 3

Religion plays a central role in the lives of young Iranians, reflected in the high proportion of youth who believe that following religious customs is important and identify religious figures as strong influences on different aspects of their lives.

Religion is the second factor that represents a major influence on how young Iranians across all four segments perceive themselves and the world and how they behave.

Some authors have argued that the influence of Islam in Iran has declined over the past three decades or have suggested that, while the majority of Iranians declare themselves Muslim, many of them are, in fact, non-practising Muslims who rarely attend religious services or pray.

For example, Roxanne Varzi in her book Warring Souls: Youth, Media and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran noted that 75% of the general public and 90% of schoolchildren in Iran do not pray. On the other hand, a national study, conducted among the general public in 2009, found that 47% of Iranians attend mosque on a weekly basis.

Even though the influence of Islam in Iran may have declined and the share of practising Muslims may be falling, the Young Publics study suggests that, at least for now, religion continues to play an important role in the lives of most young Iranians.

This is illustrated by the high share (93%) of those 16- to 25-year-olds who identify themselves as Muslim, and is also reflected in the vast majority of young people who consider following religious customs as very important and believe that the will of God or Allah plays a key role in determining their success in life. The latter is true for three out of four segments of Iranian youth – the Mainstream, Conservatives and Ultra-Conservatives, which together account for 82% of young people in Iran (see FIGURE 1).

Furthermore, these three segments of Iranian youth also tend to rely quite heavily on religious authorities for guidance on their personal political participation. Thus 39% of all Ultra-Conservatives, 36% of Conservatives and 29% of Mainstream say that religious leaders have a lot of influence over their participation in political events and activities.

The only group of Iranian youth that deviates from this pattern are the Non-Traditionalists. They tend to be less committed to following religious customs and consider their life success to be primarily dependent on personal connections and wealth, rather than on the will of God or Allah.

Given their more liberal inclinations, the Non-Traditionalists are also the group most likely to push the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and challenge the strict Islamic code. Many of these expressions of rebellion are subtle, and may be reflected in how young people dress, who they socialise with, what music they listen to and what movies they watch. For example, several media reported that many Iranian girls wear make-up and modern Western clothes or push their veils further back on their heads, showing some of their hair. Couples hold hands in public and young people listen to Western music and organise underground parties. All these practices violate strict Islamic code.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that these deviations from the social code are becoming more prevalent among youth in Iran. Nevertheless, these changes may not necessarily be interpreted as secularisation of young people in Iran (particularly when even among Non-Traditionalists 86% still consider themselves Muslim), but rather as attempts of youth to live more liberally, express themselves and gain more social freedom within the existing cultural structure.
LIFE PRIORITIES AND CONCERNS FOR THE FUTURE

This section provides an overview of the issues that young people in Iran prioritise in their lives and their key concerns for their own and their country’s future.
Livelihood issues

Key Finding 4
Concerns for one’s job, career prospects and general livelihood issues are key priorities for Iranian youth.

In many ways, life priorities of young people in Iran and their concerns about the future are not very different from those of their counterparts living in the West. All four segments of the Iranian youth are focused primarily on their education, concerned if they will be able to find a job after they finish school and be able to support their families. In other words, they are concentrated on the issues that affect them most acutely on a daily basis and are associated with their livelihoods – their education, their career and their financial future.

The importance of livelihood issues in their personal lives understandably increases further when young people leave school. For example, while ‘only’ 35% of young people between 16 and 18 cite career as one of their top two priorities in life, this share rises to 48% for 19-to 21-year-olds and grows further to 51% for those between 22 and 25.

Similarly, the oldest age group is much more likely to be aware of broader economic challenges that affect their livelihoods than their younger counterparts. Thus, 47% per cent of all 22- to 25-year-olds cite unemployment as one of the most urgent challenges for Iran in comparison with 38% of 19- to 21-year-olds and 31% of 16- to 18-year-olds.

Figure 3 Young people’s top life priorities

% who named this as one of their top two priorities in life

Source: InterMedia survey of young people in Iran, n=1,002 (16–25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Health</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Security</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other Issues</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: InterMedia survey of young people in Iran, n=1,002 (16–25)
Key Finding 5
Young men’s and young women’s life priorities diverge after high school: men become more focused on their career, women maintain their interest in education and focus more on family.

End of schooling represents a point in young people’s lives when the priorities of young men and young women diverge. After the age of 18, men become increasingly interested in pursuing their career, while women start focusing more on the family. Women also continue to maintain their interest in education a few years longer than their male peers, roughly until the age of 21, while men’s prioritisation of education falls after the age of 18.

This departure from shared life priorities in large part stems from strong gender roles rooted in the faith-based and cultural tradition in Iran as well as different lifestyles of men and women after high school. Many young Iranian men after high school choose to fulfil their military duty instead of (or before) attending university,11 while many young women, on the other hand, see education as a way to leave home, postpone marriage and generally gain greater freedom and independence.12

Youth’s life priorities also reflective of their country’s challenges

Young people’s main life priorities are also closely reflective of what youth perceive as the main challenges for their country as a whole, namely a high unemployment rate, rising inflation and economic issues in general.13

On the other hand, political issues that typically dominate the Western media coverage of Iran, such as the country’s nuclear capacity and capability or political stability, do not seem to be at the forefront of their minds. This is true even for the Non-Traditionals, who are generally the most disillusioned with the current situation in the country and most distrusting of Iran’s authorities.14

Figure 4 Most urgent challenges facing Iran

% who named this as one of the top two challenges facing Iran

- Unemployment 41%
- Economic issues in general 28%
- Inflation 19%
- Cost of living 8%
- Drug abuse 7%
- All other issues <5%

Source: InterMedia survey of young people in Iran, n=1,002 (16–25)
Leaving Iran

Key Finding 6
A third of Iranian youth report that, if given an opportunity, they would leave Iran.

These growing economic challenges are, however, driving many young Iranians to seek a better future abroad.15

In the Young Publics study, a third of all 16- to 25-year-olds said they would leave their country, if given the opportunity. This desire to leave is much stronger among the best-educated youth, indicating the continuation of the trend reported in the 2006 study by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which identified Iran as the country with the highest level of brain drain in the world.16

While for most young people the primary reasons for leaving Iran may be economic in nature, it is important to note that the survey data indicate that the desire to leave is also associated with mistrust of state institutions, and perceptions of human rights and freedom of expression. In other words, the less young people trust the state, and the more they feel that human rights and freedom of expression are threatened, the more likely they are to want to move abroad. The intention to leave Iran is strongest among the Non-Traditionalists, who express the most disillusionment with the current state of affairs in these areas, and weakest among the two most conservative segments.

Figure 5 If given an opportunity, would you leave Iran?

I would not leave Iran I would leave Iran

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would not leave Iran</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would leave Iran</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: InterMedia survey of young people in Iran, n=1,002 (16–25)

Figure 6 Share of young people that would leave Iran if given the opportunity

Share of young people that would leave Iran if given the opportunity

28% of Ultra-Conservatives 20% of Conservatives 34% of Mainstream 59% of Non-Traditionalists

Source: InterMedia survey of young people in Iran, n=938 (16–25)
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

This section focuses on young people’s perceptions and opinions on various social and political issues. It outlines their attitudes towards their political efficacy, human rights and freedom of expression and provides an overview of their trust in various state institutions and an insight into youth’s views on the need for Iran to change.
Human rights

Several international organisations have noted that the human rights situation in Iran has worsened under the administration of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and deteriorated further after the 2009 crackdown on anti-government protests. A 2011 report by the UN Special Rapporteur, for example, notes an alarming increase of executions, from below 100 in 2005, to 670 in 2011.17 Other organisations, such as Human Rights Watch, report an increase in government targeting of civil society activists, particularly rights activists, students and journalists.18

Irishan youth, on the other hand, seem to be divided on their opinions about this issue.

The frustration with the lack of protection of human rights appears to be primarily concentrated among the most liberal youth (Non-Traditionalists), with only about a quarter of them convinced that human rights in Iran are being adequately protected. Conversely, more than half of moderate youth belonging to the Mainstream segment and two-thirds of the Conservative and Ultra-Conservative youth express little concern over human rights violations (see FIGURE 7).

Furthermore, while these findings on the one hand indicate genuine differences in opinion, they may also be, partially, a product of a different understanding of the concept of human rights. Although in the survey all respondents were asked exactly the same question,19 the understanding of the notion of ‘human rights’ and what it entails may vary significantly between young people in different segments. These differences in understanding, if present, may be rooted in both their diverse educational background and different personal value priorities.

Key Finding 7

The majority of Iranian youth express confidence in the protection of human rights; only the most liberal youth are concerned that human rights are not adequately protected in Iran.

Several international organisations have noted that the human rights situation in Iran has worsened under the administration of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and deteriorated further after the 2009 crackdown on anti-government protests. A 2011 report by the UN Special Rapporteur, for example, notes an alarming increase of executions, from below 100 in 2005, to 670 in 2011.17 Other organisations, such as Human Rights Watch, report an increase in government targeting of civil society activists, particularly rights activists, students and journalists.18

Iranian youth, on the other hand, seem to be divided on their opinions about this issue.

*Please note: Other answer categories available to respondents to this question were “Neither agree nor disagree”, “Don’t know” and “Refused”. The share of all respondents who said “Don’t know” and “Refused” was 2.8%.
Freedom of expression

Key Finding 8
Almost a third of Iranian youth believe that their freedom of expression is constrained and feel unable to express their views openly in public.

Similar to human rights in general, the lack of freedom of expression in Iran has long been a concern for the international community. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press have declined particularly in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential election, resulting in Reporters Without Borders ranking Iran as one of the five least free countries in the world in their last three (2009, 2010 and 2011) editions of the Press Freedom Index. In early 2012, Amnesty International reported that Iran’s crackdown on freedom of expression escalated further in the run-up to the March 2012 parliamentary elections, noting a wave of arrests that targeted lawyers, students, journalists, political activists and their relatives, as well as religious and ethnic minorities, filmmakers, and people with international connections, particularly to media.

As with human rights overall, Iranian youth, however, have mixed views on the freedom of expression in their country.

First, the Young Publics study indicates that most young people clearly separate their private sphere from the public sphere when it comes to freedom of expression, with family environment, as well as close friendship circles, providing key outlets for expressing opinions.

Second, about a third of young Iranians (29% in total), on the other hand, feel that their ability to voice their views in public is constrained. This is particularly true for the Non-Traditionalist segment of the youth, almost half of whom feel unable to express their views openly in public (see FIGURE 8). This is not surprising, given that Non-Traditionalists are also those young Iranians who are most likely to hold and express views that challenge the positions of the current government. In this study, the high degree of discontent with the government among this group is illustrated in various ways, for example through a high level of distrust in state institutions, their strong belief that the government does not represent their interests, and their lack of confidence in their own political efficacy.

![Figure 8: Perception of freedom of expression in Iran](image-url)

% who agree/disagree with the statements

- I can express my opinions openly at home with my family
  - Ultra-Conservatives: 60%
  - Conservatives: 63%
  - Mainstream: 65%
  - Non-Traditionalists: 60%

- I can express my opinions openly with my friends
  - Ultra-Conservatives: 68%
  - Conservatives: 68%
  - Mainstream: 73%
  - Non-Traditionalists: 71%

- I can express my opinions openly in public places
  - Ultra-Conservatives: 22%
  - Conservatives: 26%
  - Mainstream: 36%
  - Non-Traditionalists: 26%

*Please note: Other answer categories available to respondents to this question were “Neither agree nor disagree”, “Don’t know” and “Refused”. The share of all respondents who said “Don’t know” was 0.4% and no respondents refused to answer.

Source: InterMedia survey of young people in Iran, n = 938 (16–25)
Many young Iranians who feel that their freedom of speech has been restricted have taken refuge in the online world. Despite growing online monitoring and censorship by the Iranian government, blogs and social media for now still afford their users greater anonymity and provide an outlet for youth to express themselves more freely than they may be able to in the ‘offline’ world.

As a result, the more young people feel that their freedom to express themselves freely has been limited, the more likely they are to be using the online channels to exercise this right. This may also be one of the reasons why Non-Traditionalists, who feel the most concerned about the lack of freedom of expression in Iran, emerge as the heaviest consumers of social media and blogs, as well as the internet in general.

Trust in the regime

The two most traditional segments of the youth identified in this study, the Ultra-Conservatives and the Conservatives, express a very high level of trust in all state institutions. This confidence is moderate among the Mainstream youth, and very low among the most liberal segment, the Non-Traditionalists (see FIGURE 9).

Nevertheless, even among the two most conservative segments, the support for the state is not uniform and many conservatives are, in fact, critical of the Iranian regime. One of the spaces where this criticism is most visible is the conservative blogosphere, where, for example, many conservative bloggers recently criticised the ruling elite for abusing their political power and silencing their opponents.24

Still, this overall high level of trust in the Iranian government found among Iranian youth may be considered surprising, particularly given the current state of the economy, which has worsened significantly under the current regime. However, a recent study by Ebrahim Mohseni from University of Maryland shows that the majority of the Iranian public does not believe that it is the regime that is to blame for the worsening economy, but attributes the blame to sanctions, as well as the Iranian opposition.25

Key Finding 9
State institutions enjoy a high level of trust among most young Iranians, except among the most liberal youth. The latter also feel the least represented by the current government and have little confidence in their own political efficacy.

In 2008, World Public Opinion conducted a survey of the Iranian general public, which showed solid support for their national government among the conservative and moderate elements of the general public, and a high level of scepticism about the government among the reformists.22 The 2009 follow-up survey revealed a similar picture, indicating that the government’s crackdown on the Green Movement in 2009 had done little to intimidate the regime’s opposition, with only minor changes in the share of those who consistently express negative views about their government.23

Despite the differences in the sample, timing and the wording of the questions, there is a notable consistency in the findings of both World Public Opinion surveys and the Young Publics study, with the attitude patterns among Iranian youth broadly mirroring those found among the general population in 2008 and 2009.
Figure 9  Trust in Iranian state institutions

% who trust the respective institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Ultra-Conservatives</th>
<th>Conservatives</th>
<th>Mainstream</th>
<th>Non-Traditionalists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National government</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courts and judges</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: InterMedia survey of young people in Iran, n=938 (16–25)

Trust in the Iranian government and other state institutions is also strongly associated with young people’s sense of political efficacy. The greater their confidence in the regime, the more likely they are to feel well represented by the government and believe that the youth are being involved in shaping the future of Iran (see FIGURE 10).

Figure 10  Political efficacy of the youth

% who agree/disagree with the statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Ultra-Conservatives</th>
<th>Conservatives</th>
<th>Mainstream</th>
<th>Non-Traditionalists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“My interests as a citizen are considered by the government”</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Iran involves young people in important decisions”</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Iran involves young people in important decisions”</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Iran involves young people in important decisions”</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please note: Other answer categories available to respondents to this question were “Neither agree nor disagree”, “Don’t know” and “Refused”. The share of all respondents who said “Don’t know” or refused to answer was below 3% at each of the two questions.

Source: InterMedia survey of young people in Iran, n=938 (16–25)
Regardless of who they believe is responsible for Iran’s current economic woes, Iran’s youth recognise that, in order to secure its future, their country needs to change.

Two-thirds of Non-Traditionalists and Conservatives and three-quarters of the Mainstream therefore concur that Iran needs to adopt new ways of thinking. Even among the Ultra-Conservatives, the most traditional and most conformist segment of the youth, more than a third support this view (see FIGURE 11).

However, the nature or the direction of this change the youth are calling for is not clear. The survey data suggest that overall, young people strive primarily for the changes that will help improve the Iranian economy, provide young people with better education, job and career opportunities and generally contribute to improved livelihoods.26 The changes of a purely political nature appear to be of less importance overall, although the Non-Traditionalists seem to be the most open to endorsing such change.

Finally, it is also not entirely clear who young people in Iran see as responsible for initiating such change. While many international experts note that any change in Iran needs to come from within,27 the findings indicate that only a minority of Iranian youth (42%) for now believes that the citizens are the ones who have the power to bring about such change.
Figure 12  Perceived ability to influence change

% who agree/disagree with the statement

When people get together and ask for change, the leaders in government listen

- 23% Agree
- 59% Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 51% Agree
- 19% Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 54% Agree
- 24% Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 39% Agree
- 27% Neither Agree nor Disagree

* Please note: Other answer categories available to respondents to this question were "Neither agree nor disagree", "Don't know" and "Refused"; 3% of all respondents said "Don't know" and 1.3% refused to answer.

Source: InterMedia survey of young people in Iran, n=1,002 (16–25)
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION HABITS

This section discusses the media consumption patterns of the Iranian youth and their trust in different traditional and new media platforms.
Media use patterns

Key Finding 11

Traditional media remain the main source of news and information for Iranian youth but internet, blogs and social media play an important role, particularly for the more liberal youth.

Iran is a ‘TV society’, characterised by almost universal household ownership of TV and weekly television viewing, lower radio consumption and growing use of new technologies – particularly among the youth. Television is also the main source of news and information, while radio and new media tend to be used primarily for music, socialising and entertainment purposes.

Similar to the social and political attitudes, the patterns of media use for news and information vary greatly between different segments of Iranian youth (FIGURE 13).

- First, young people belonging to the Non-Traditionalist segment are overall the heaviest media users, who regularly consume news and information content from both traditional media and new media.

- Second, the Non-Traditionalists are also the most reliant on new media, namely blogs, social media and the internet, for news and information. While this may partially be a reflection of a somewhat better home access to internet among this group, the data also suggest that their higher use of new media is primarily associated with their concerns about their inability to express themselves freely in the offline world.

- Third, the Mainstream and particularly the Conservative and Ultra-Conservative segments, on the other hand, rely more heavily on traditional media sources, particularly on domestic TV channels. Some experts note that Iran has an abundance of youth who are politically active in the blogosphere. However, the Young Publics study shows that, when it comes to the use of new media to seek news and information, their use among the conservative youth are not as widespread as it is among their more liberal counterparts.

Finally, it is also important to note that, despite the overall growing media use, word of mouth continues to play an important complementary role in youth’s information-gathering. About three-quarters of all Iranian youth still say they turn to friends and family for news and information on a weekly basis.

Figure 13  Weekly use of media for news and information

% who use the respective media weekly

Source: InterMedia survey of young people in Iran, n=938 (16–25)
Trust in media

Key Finding 12

Conservative and moderate youth put most trust in the national media, while the liberal youth expresses more confidence in the internet.

Patterns of trust in media among young Iranians generally follow the patterns of media usage.

Traditional media overall are perceived as considerably more trustworthy than new media sources. This is, in part, a reflection of the current differences in frequency of use and it can be expected that, as the use of new media grows, the gap in trustworthiness between internet, blogs and social media and traditional media may narrow as well.

In line with relatively strong trust in the state institutions, most Iranian youth also express a high level of confidence in information supplied by the state media, but are sceptical about the content provided by foreign sources.

The only segment of the youth that deviates from these two patterns are Non-Traditionalists, who place more trust in the internet than they do in traditional media, and express a similar confidence in international sources as in domestic media.

Figure 14 Trust in media sources

% who trust the respective media source

Source: InterMedia survey of young people in Iran, n=938 (16–25)
FINAL
CONSIDERATIONS
On the basis of these key insights from the Iran Young Publics study, the following considerations are proposed for policy-makers and members of the international community interested in engaging with youth in Iran:

Diverse perspectives
First, recognise that youth are more than just an age category. It is important to acknowledge that young people in Iran are not a monolithic group and instead embody a range of different perspectives and ideas, which manifest themselves in diverse ways. Communication efforts to engage Iranian youth will be most effective when they are customised to the specific interests and needs of different segments of the youth, rather than addressing young people as one homogeneous group.

Engagement strategies
Second, adopt engagement strategies that revolve around the issues and subjects that are of greatest importance to young people. In the case of Iran, for the majority of youth, these key subjects are jobs, career prospects and economic challenges, rather than political issues.

Role of institutional drivers
Third, understand the roles played by institutional drivers, such as family, faith and education, in young people’s lives. In Iran, family and faith remain key drivers of how most young people prioritise and evaluate life decisions and represent an important influence on their information-seeking behaviour and their participation in public affairs. The level of education, meanwhile, tends to be the key differentiator, strongly influencing the personal values that underlie young people’s attitudes and behaviour.

Cultural context
Fourth, ensure that that engagement strategies take into account the impact of cultural context on the understanding of certain social and political concepts, such as ‘human rights’ and ‘freedom of expression’. The understanding of these concepts in different societies may be strongly culturally and socially defined and therefore such understanding may vary considerably between different sub-groups of the country’s youth.

Freedom of expression and online media use
Fifth, optimise the use of online sources to help support freedom of expression. In Iran, greater access and use of online media is associated with a stronger perception of freedom of expression. Consider the value of providing greater access to digital platforms for young people, to strengthen their confidence in their ability to express their views.

Appetite for change
Finally, recognise that a strong appetite for change in Iran may not necessarily be driven primarily by the political challenges. While these may play a role, the drive for change of thinking may be more strongly motivated by the economic challenges – those that are ‘closer to home’ and most acutely affect young people on a daily basis – such as lack of jobs and a shortage of education or career opportunities.
METHODOLOGY
The Young Publics Iran study is based on a nationally representative survey, conducted with 1,002 young people aged 16 to 25 living in Iran. The sampling was informed by the 2006 Iran Census of Population.

The interviews were conducted via telephone, by KA Research. Conducted by native Farsi speakers, all the interviews took place between 15 March and 29 April 2012.

To ensure that we included young people who live in households with landline telephones as well as those who do not have a landline telephone in their home or prefer to use only mobile phones, a dual sampling frame of landline and mobile telephones was adopted for the study, with half of all respondents in the sample interviewed via landline and half via mobile telephone.

The respondents were selected at random. To ensure representativeness of the sample, only one person per household was interviewed.

The total survey response rate, i.e. the percentage of households sampled that yielded an interview, was 38%. It is important to note that response rates vary from country to country, between different demographic groups and between different types of surveys. Other recent telephone surveys conducted with the Iranian general public reported various response rates: a WorldPublicOpinion.org 2009 survey, a response rate of 34.8%; a Globescan’s 2009 survey, a response rate of 68%; a 2009 Terror Free Tomorrow survey, a 57.8% response rate32 and a 2009 RAND Corporation survey, a response rate of 65%.33

Before the fieldwork began, a total of 30 pilot interviews were conducted, to make sure that the questionnaire was of acceptable length and to ensure good questionnaire flow. All questions were tested for their cultural appropriateness and clarity, to ensure that they were easily understandable by respondents and sufficiently sensitive to the Iranian context.

In the final phase of the study, 5% of the telephone interviews were back-checked. An additional 15% of the interviews were verified by the interviewer’s supervisor who undertook both live listening and listening to voice records. The final data were also checked for consistency of responses throughout the survey, including within subgroups, and for the level of non-response to each question. It should be noted that respondents did have the option of declining to answer any of the questions. However, the share of those who declined to answer any of the questions – even those of a more sensitive nature – was very low (below 3%).

The final data set was weighted by urbanisation to achieve a representative urban/rural sample split. The margin of error for the survey was 3.1%.

Definition of personal values
The selection of personal values explored in this study was informed by Shalom H. Schwartz’s (1992) article Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries.34

In this study, the following values were explored: tradition, conformity, self-direction, stimulation, benevolence and power. These values were based on the following statements:

Tradition
• Following religious customs is very important to me

Conformity
• Respecting elders in the society is very important to me

Self-direction
• I prefer to be creative rather than practical
• I would rather work alone than with others
• It is important to make my own decisions in life, free from influence of others

Stimulation
• An exciting life is more important to me than living a secure life

Benevolence
• I think more about the happiness of others than my own

Power
• It is important to me that I am able to influence the opinions of other people
Endnotes
Iran has compulsory military service for men, starting at the age of 18. Students are exempt, if they are attending school.

For example, a 2011 study of the Prince’s Trust in the UK showed that the vast majority of British youth also considers finding a good job as a priority for the future, and considers their ability to earn enough to support their family as one of their main life goals (http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about_the_trust/what_we_do/research/broke_not_broken/download_the_report/report_page.aspx).

Iran has compulsory military service for men, starting at the age of 18. Students are exempt, if they are attending school.

These life choices, combined with limited economic opportunities for young people and other social changes in Iran over the past three decades, have resulted in two other phenomena. First, the gap between the numbers of male and female students at universities has steadily reduced and in 2001 women for the first time outnumbered men; they now account for more than 60% of all students in Iran. Second, the age of first marriage in Iran has been rapidly increasing. According to a recent study, the proportion of never married men aged 25–29 increased from 21% in 1986 to 36% in 2006, and among women in the same age bracket from 14% to 24%.

It is important to highlight here that these were spontaneous responses given by the respondents and that the young people who participated in the survey were not prompted with a limited list of possible answers. The survey respondents were asked “What do you think are the two most urgent challenges facing Iran today?” Both the first and the second mention were included in the results presented in this report.

The survey respondents were not asked to specify whether they would leave Iran temporarily or permanently.


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26 Some of the previous studies that focused on Iranian general public also suggested that Iranians seek change primarily in their economy, rather than regime change. See, for example, Democracy Digest (2012). Iran’s Green Movement – lying low or at a dead end? Available online: http://www.demdigest.net/blog/?s=Iran%E2%80%99s+Green+Movement.


28 Some 69% of Non-Traditionalists have access to internet either on their home computer or on their mobile phone, in comparison with 66% of Mainstream, 54% of Conservatives and 49% of Ultra-Conservatives.


30 It is important to emphasise that the survey respondents were asked to assess their use of these media for obtaining news and information, rather than how frequently they use them to share news and information with other people. The question was phrased as follows: “People get news and information about current events from many different sources. For each one of the sources I mention, please tell me how often if at all do you use that source to get news and information.”


