

# **The Findings of a Survey on Political Attitudes of Iranians**

by  
**GAMAAN**  
(The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN)

Gamaan.org



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## Summary of the Survey

- More than 19,000 individuals participated in this survey. This survey reveals the political attitudes of 72% of Iranians, those who did not vote for Ebrahim Raisi in Iran's 2017 presidential election. The survey tries to systematically measure and capture some of the political attitudes that Iranians cannot freely express in Iran.
- At least 70% of Iranians would vote "NO" to Islamic Republic if a free referendum were to be held today.
- On the question of which political orientation they most identify with, 37.8% said they would want the regime to be toppled (Overthrowers), 30.6% stated they would seek radical changes (Transformists) while only 3.6% identified as Reformists who emphasize on preserving the current Islamic Republic regime.
- On the question of which political system is most appropriate for Iran, 42% of Iranians would favour a secular republic whereas 15% were proponents of constitutional monarchy.
- At least 25% of Iranians would favour the establishment of a federal system for the future of Iran, while 33% said that they do not have enough information to state an opinion on whether a unitary or federal form of state would be better.
- Amongst 17 figures renowned for political or civil rights activity, Reza Pahlavi enjoys the highest popularity with 37.9%. He is followed by Nasrin Sotoudeh with 8.1%, whereas Mir Hossein Moussavi obtains 4.6% popularity.
- Although almost 38% of Iranians would give a chance to Reza Pahlavi, only 15% of Iranians would favour a constitutional monarchy. It could be deduced that support for Reza Pahlavi does not necessarily translate for support for monarchy.
- 43% of those who voted for Rouhani in 2017 presidential election would consider themselves as Overthrowers (seeking regime change); 50% of them are Transformists (seeking radical changes and a free referendum). Only 7% of them identified as Reformists (i.e., preserving the Islamic Republic). Based on these findings it is important to realize that voting for Rouhani cannot necessarily be translated to a Yes vote to Islamic Republic regime.
- On the question of (symbolic) political parties in a free election, a monarchist party would garner 20.1% of the votes. A social democratic party would receive 16.3% whereas Jebheh Mellî (The National Front) would get 8.3% of the votes. It seems that no single party or political ideology enjoys the majority amongst Iranians.

# **Part One:**

## **Characteristics of the Sample and the Research Methodology**

### **1-1 Characteristics of the survey and raw statistical sample**

- The survey of “Political Attitudes of Iranians” has been conducted online by GAMAAN (The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN) for a period of a week from April 24<sup>th</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup> of 2018, using “SurveyMonkey” which is a secure and reliable platform for conducting online surveys. For this survey the “Virtual Snowball Sampling” was picked as the sampling method on social networks (Telegram, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook), and 19,386 individuals participated. The survey was conducted before the nationwide filtering of Telegram in Iran; therefore, the government-imposed filter did not have any effect on the results.
- According to the top manager of Telegram, [around 40 million Iranians use Telegram](#) within the country. More than [41 million have access to mobile Internet](#) and close to [57 million have access to the Internet](#). In other words, a huge part of the Iranian population can be reached using different online means.
- The survey includes 21 questions. The last 7 questions were general questions (Region, Age, Education, Economic status, Gender and Marital status)
- In average, it took 5 minutes to answer all the questions.
- All participants were completely anonymous which helped them to express their beliefs/preferences securely and without fears.
- 88% of participants picked Iran as their country of residence. Using the validity checks (through checking the IP location of the respondents), we found that about 6% of the respondents might provide a false location which cannot affect the overall results.
- Each participant could only participate once from each computer or mobile device. Our analyses show that less than 2% of participants seem to have participated in the survey more than once. However, given the large sample size, this figure has a negligible impact on the overall results.
- Participants from inside Iran were from all 31 provinces while overseas participants lived in 69 different countries.

### **1-2 Preparation process of the final statistical sample**

- Among all the questions, one question was designed to filter out all random answers as well as bot activities. In addition, any conflicting answer resulted in the

elimination of the participant (like those who claimed they had not yet reached the voting age in 2013, but that they had voted in 2009).

- The main goal of this survey was to identify the 'non-conservative' or 'non-fundamentalist' political attitudes of the Iranian population, i.e. the segment of the Iranian society that neither votes for conservative candidates, or nor participates in the elections at all. As a matter of fact, until now, the political attitudes of the aforementioned segment of the Iranian society, which constitutes more than 70% of the population, has been largely understudied and unaccounted for. The initial assumption was that this survey would be less likely to reach supporters of the conservatives, or even if they were to see the survey, they would most probably not take part in it. Nevertheless, the survey and the questions were designed without any biases and were aimed to be inclusive of all political inclinations, including conservatives.
- The initial assumption with regards to the targeted population is confirmed by the data obtained in the outcome of the survey. The answer to the first question (who did you vote for in the 2017 presidential election?) shows that about 2% of the participants voted for Ebrahim Raisi, while on the basis of the "official results" of the election, about 28% of the votes were for Raisi. The results of the second question (Who did you vote for in the 2013 presidential election?) also indicate that about 4% of the respondents voted for conservative candidates (Jalili, Velayati, Ghalibaf, and Rezaei), while the "official results" of the election show that the combined vote share of the four candidates in the election was 32%. These results confirm our initial hypothesis that conservatives (including some who voted for the conservatives due to economic motivations) did not participate in this survey. Accordingly, we withdrew sample data representing those who voted for Ebrahim Raisi in the 2017 presidential election, because of the low participation rate of the conservative social base in this survey. This approach is in line with the survey's main purpose, which is to analyze the weight of different political orientations amongst "non-conservative" citizens. The report's target population, therefore, is the 72% of the Iranian population who did not vote for Raisi in the 2017 presidential election.
- After some refinements, the final sample size for the respondents inside the country is 15,972. Also, the sample size used for the participants living abroad is 2,267.
- In this report, wherever the term "statistical sample" is used, it means the refined sample and not the "raw sample" of the survey.

In general, the statistical sample of online surveys is usually not completely consistent with the characteristics of the target population. Therefore, to have a representative sample, a weighting method is used to balance the statistical sample and to match it with the main characteristics of the target population. In Appendix 1, the method of weighting, the demographic characteristics of the statistical sample, the characteristics of the target population, and the methodological challenges of the survey are discussed.

## Part Two: Main Findings of the Survey

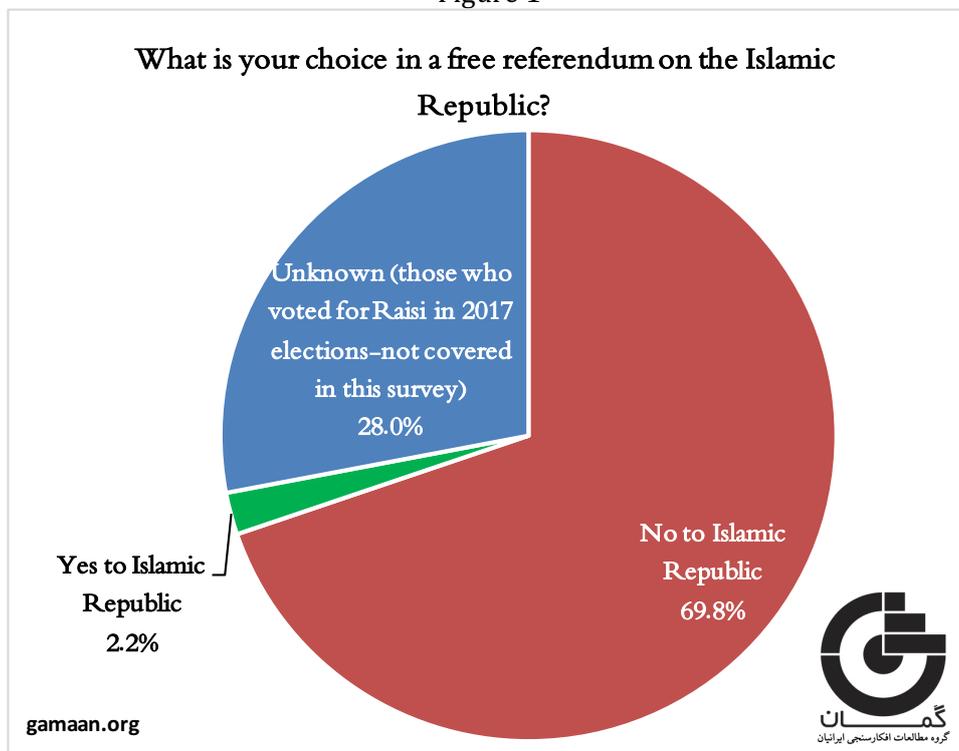
In this report all the charts and findings are based on the “weighted samples” from inside the country. These findings represent the attitudes of 72% of the population and do not count the views and positions of the other 28% (i.e. those who voted for Raisi in 2017’s Election). Accordingly, in the figures we use the term “unknown” regarding the attitudes of this 28%. To compare the differences between Iranian attitudes inside and outside the country, the unweighted sample is used for overseas participants (since we have no demographical data of the Iranians living abroad).

### 2-1 In a free referendum, at least 70% of Iranians would say “No” to the “Islamic Republic”.

Chart No.1 shows the answer to the question of “Yes or No” to the Islamic Republic regime for the population inside Iran. Keeping in mind that from [previous analysis](#) we know that some of Raisi’s supporters are “economic voters” and do not truly belong to the “Conservative” social base, we can conclude that in a free referendum “at least” 70% of Iranians inside the country would say NO to the Islamic Republic.

It should also be mentioned that the proportion of Iranians outside the country who say “No” to the Islamic Republic is 1.8% more than the respondents from inside Iran.

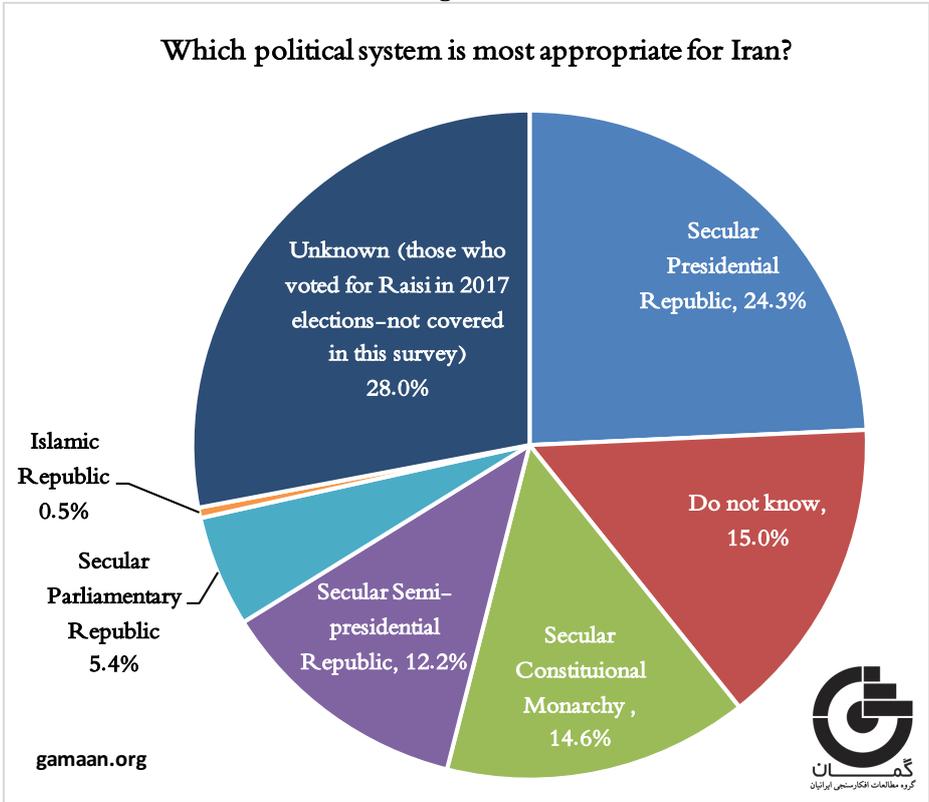
Figure 1



**2-2 A Secular Republic has the most popularity as a desirable political system for a free Iran**

Figure 2 shows the popularity of different political systems among Iranians. The most popular system is a “Secular Presidential Republic” with a 24.3% approval rating, and least popular is a “Secular Parliamentary Republic” with 5.4% of votes (not considering the Islamic Republic, which is the least accepted system of governance among these 72% of the population). The popularity of a “Secular Constitutional Monarchy” is 15%. It is worth mentioning that 15% of the participants voted for none of them as they did not have enough knowledge on the matter. Also, the attitudes of a large segment of the society (28%) remain unknown and therefore their opinions are not accounted for. In general, the results of the survey show that a secular republic is more popular than a constitutional monarchy.

Figure 2

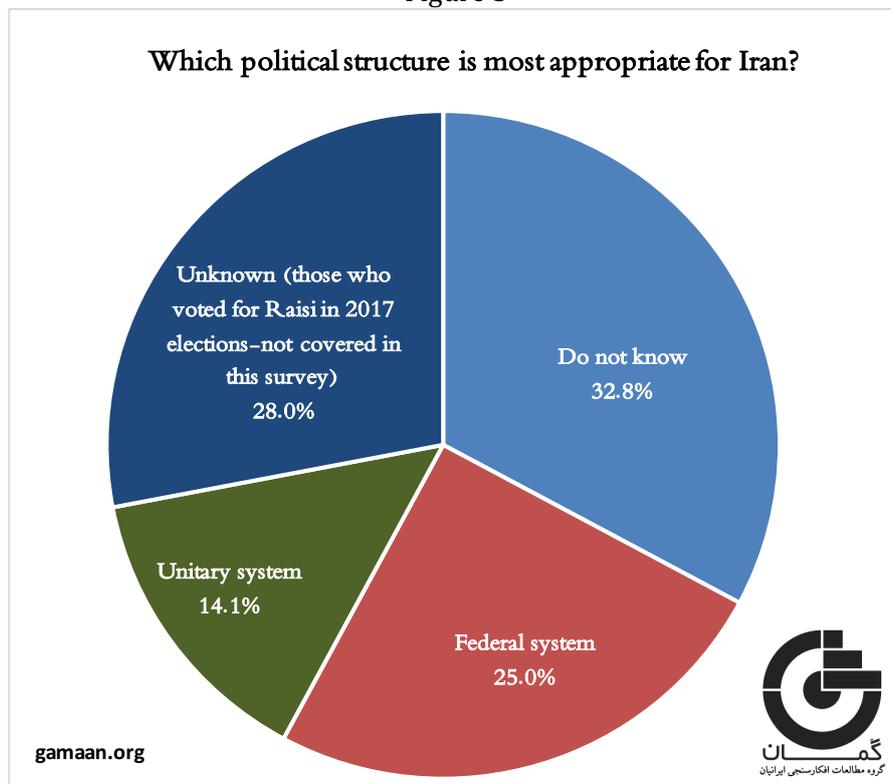


When asked about the most desirable political system, the answers from Iranians outside the country were almost identical to opinions of people inside the country with a variance of less than 1%, except for the choices of a “Secular Parliamentary Republic” and “Not having enough knowledge”. The interesting finding is that people outside the country favour “Secular Parliamentary Republic” 10% more than those inside the country. Also, the number of those who chose “Not having enough knowledge” outside the country was 10% less than those inside the country. This difference is foreseeable considering that most Iranians outside the country live in democratic countries and have been exposed to greater political knowledge while enjoying free access to information.

### 2-3 Desirable political structure: Federal or Unitary?

Figure 3 shows the opinion of participants on the most desirable political structure for the future of Iran. As seen, around 33% of the participants did not answer this question due to their lack of knowledge on the topic. On the other hand, a Federal Political System is popular amongst at least a quarter (25%) of the Iranian society. When it comes to comparing the views of Iranians living inside the country versus those residing abroad, the insiders, 24% more than the outsiders, reported that they do not have enough information to answer this question. The result shows that this topic requires more debates in the public sphere.

Figure 3

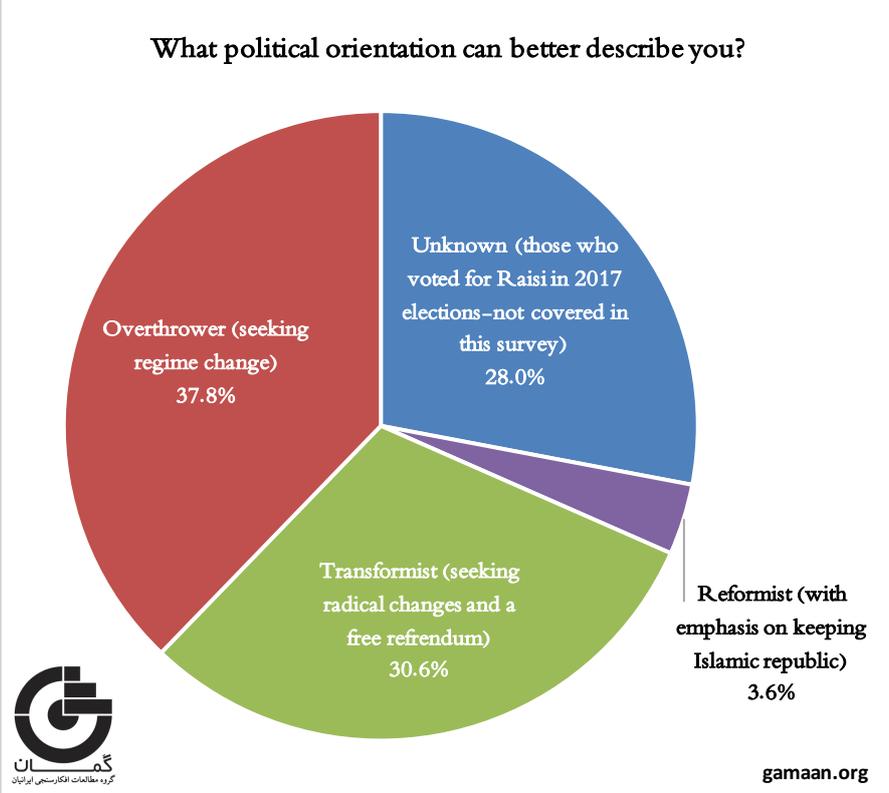


### 2-4 Iranian political orientations: Overthrowers and Transformists constitute the majority of the society.

Figure 4 shows the different political orientations of people in Iran (with definitions explained in parentheses). About 38% of Iranians consider themselves “Overthrowers” and around 31% “Transformists”. Overthrowers are those who seek a secular democracy and believe that the prerequisite for any change in Iran is the overthrow of the current Islamic Republic regime. Transformists also seek a secular democracy through fundamental and constitutional changes; however, unlike the Overthrowers, they struggle for each and every civil rights in parallel to their struggle for structural changes. They believe in a peaceful transition and that people should mobilise to impose a free referendum on the current regime.

The point worth considering is that a small portion of the population, about 3.6%, consider themselves “Reformists”. I.e., they are for gradual reforms while preserving the Islamic Republic as a regime”. Based on this explanation, even though Reformists seek gradual changes, they insist on preserving the Islamic regime. In reality, the results show that less than 4% of the country is in favour of so-called Reformists. It seems that most of the people who previously voted for Reformists in elections now consider themselves Transformists rather than Reformists, because unlike the so-called “Reformists”, they are not concerned about keeping the current Islamic Republic system intact. This finding is consistent with the results obtained in the referendum question (Figure 1) and shows that the majority of voters who vote for “Reformists” are not supporters of the Islamic Republic regime.

Figure 4



In Iranian politics after the revolution, two political attitudes 1) Conservatives (Pro-Regime Fundamentalists) and 2) Reformists (so-called Moderates), have dominated the political sphere in the past decades. However, observations in the recent years show that the majority of people in Iran do not consider themselves as belonging to either faction. [Previous studies](#) on the results of the recent elections in Iran showed that in addition to Conservatives and so-called Reformists, two other political orientations can be recognized: “Transformists” and “Overthrowers”.

To the best of our knowledge, there has been no independent study that quantifies the popularity of the Reformists, Transformists and Overthrowers in the Iranian society. The results of elections in Iran under the Islamic Republic regime cannot be used to distinguish among these three factions. In fact, the existing elections can only gauge the popularity of Conservatives, while being unable to account for the weight of the

mentioned three political factions. Since in such elections some Transformists and even Overthrowers would vote for Reformist candidates as a tactical vote to choose the “lesser evil”, as a popular Iranian adage goes, some might be tempted to assert that any vote cast for so-called Reformist/Moderate candidates shows the actual extent of their popularity in the Iranian society. This survey has shed light on this ambiguity and rejects the facile association that any vote cast for Reformists is in fact in favour of Reformists.

Comparing Iranians who live inside and outside the country, we discovered that contrary to the common misperception, Iranians who live inside the country are 2% more likely to approve overthrowing the regime. Moreover, the Reformists are 1.5% less popular and Transformists are 3.5% more popular among Iranians who live abroad than those living inside the country.

**2-5 Popularity of political figures: Who would Reformists, Transformists and Overthrowers vote for in a free election?**

In this survey, we provided a list of prominent political and civil figures representing different political factions. The participants were asked to pick their first and second choices in a free election. Needless to say, the list does not include all the potential choices for various political tastes of the Iranian population. This being said, we have included “the other” option (open answer) to compensate for that.

In the list, we included those individuals who are (relatively) popular and are aged below 80. The list includes figures from all four major political orientations (Conservatives, Reformists, Transformists, and Overthrowers), and holding secular and non-secular views. Moreover, they also represent left and right economic orientations, and belong to different ethnic groups in Iran.

Figure 5

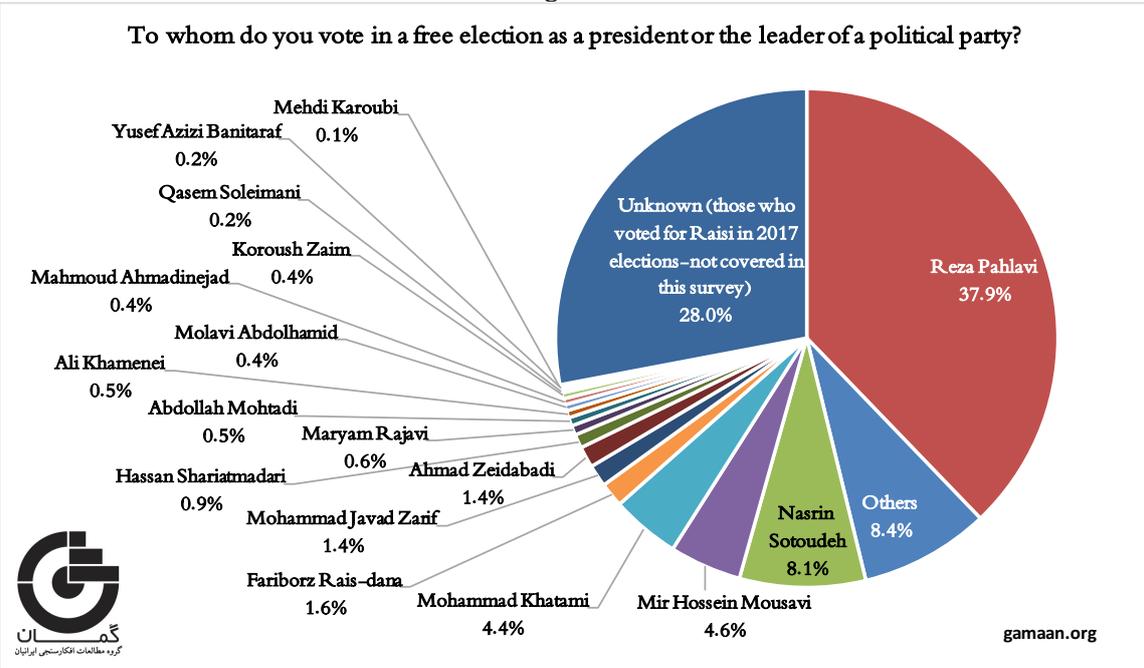


Figure 5 shows the popularity of the individuals in the list as the “first choice”. Reza Pahlavi is the most popular person with 37.9% of the vote. He is followed by Nasrin

Sotoudeh with 8.1%, Mirhossein Mousavi with 4.6%, Mohammad Khatami with 4.4% and Fariborz Raisdana, Mohammad-Javad Zarif and Ahmad Zeidabadi with approximately 1.5% each.

Since the sample does not include the electoral base of the Conservatives, the political figures close to this faction (e.g. Ali Khamenei and Ghasem Soleimani) have received a very low support. However, this does not mean that this political faction has negligible social base in the Iranian society. [Previous estimates](#) show that they represent approximately 20% of the Iranian society.

Comparing the responses of those Iranians who reside inside the country to those living abroad, we can see that Reza Pahlavi is 15% more popular amongst those who are living inside the country. On the other hand, Nassrin Sotoudeh (9%) and Ahmad Zeidabadi (3%) more popular amongst Iranians living abroad. As for other political/civil figures, the difference is less than 1%.

It should be noted that among the figures provided by the respondents as part of the “other choice”, those with a minimum of 20 votes are (in the order of vote share): Abolhassan Banisadr, Sadegh Zibakalam, Mohammad Nourizad, Mohammad Hosseini (the host of a TV show called Restart), Mostafa Tajzadeh, Masih Alinejad, Shirin Ebadi, Ghassem Sholesadi, Bahram Moshiri and Heshmat Tabarzadi.

To identify which of these individuals have common electoral bases, we looked at the second choices. Table 1 shows second choices corresponding to every first choice.

Table 1

<b>First choices</b>	<b>Second choices (in order of vote share)</b>	
Reza Pahlavi	Nasrin Sotoudeh	MirHossein Mousavi
Nasrin Sotoudeh	Reza Pahlavi	Ahmad Zeidabadi
MirHossein Mousavi	Mohammad Khatami	Reza Pahlavi
Mohammad Khatami	MirHossein Mousavi	Mohammad Javad Zarif
Fariborz Raisdana	Nasrin Sotoudeh	Ahmad Zeidabadi
Mohammad Javad Zarif	Mohammad Khatami	MirHossein Mousavi
Ahmas Zeidabadi	Nasrin Sotoudeh	Fariborz Raisdana
Hassan Shariatmadari	Nasrin Sotoudeh	Reza Pahlavi
Maryam Rajavi	Nasrin Sotoudeh	Fariborz Raisdana
Abdollah Mohtadi	Nasrin Sotoudeh	Reza Pahlavi
Ali Khamenei	Qasem Soleimani	Mohammad Khatami
Molavi Abdolhamid	MirHossein Mousavi	Reza Pahlavi
Mahmood Ahmadinejad	Reza Pahlavi	Qasem Soleimani
Koroush Zaim	Fariborz Raisdana	MirHossein Mousavi
Qasem Soleimani	Mohammad Khatami	Mohammad Javad Zarif
Yusef Azizi Banitaraf	Reza Pahlavi	Molavi Abdolhamid
Mehdi Karoubi	MirHossein Mousavi	Nasrin Sotoudeh

Figure 6 shows the political orientations of those who voted for the eight most popular individuals. It shows that 68% of those who chose Reza Pahlavi as their first choice consider themselves as Overthrower while 31% are Transformists. 54% of those who chose Nasrin Sotoudeh consider themselves to be Transformist and 45% of them are Overthrowers. Only 1% of their supporters consider themselves Reformist. Mohammad Khatami, Mohammad-Javad Zarif and Mirhossein Mousavi are the most popular candidates among those who identified themselves as Reformist. Nonetheless, most of those whose first choice was one of these three individuals have considered themselves to be Transformist.

Figure 6

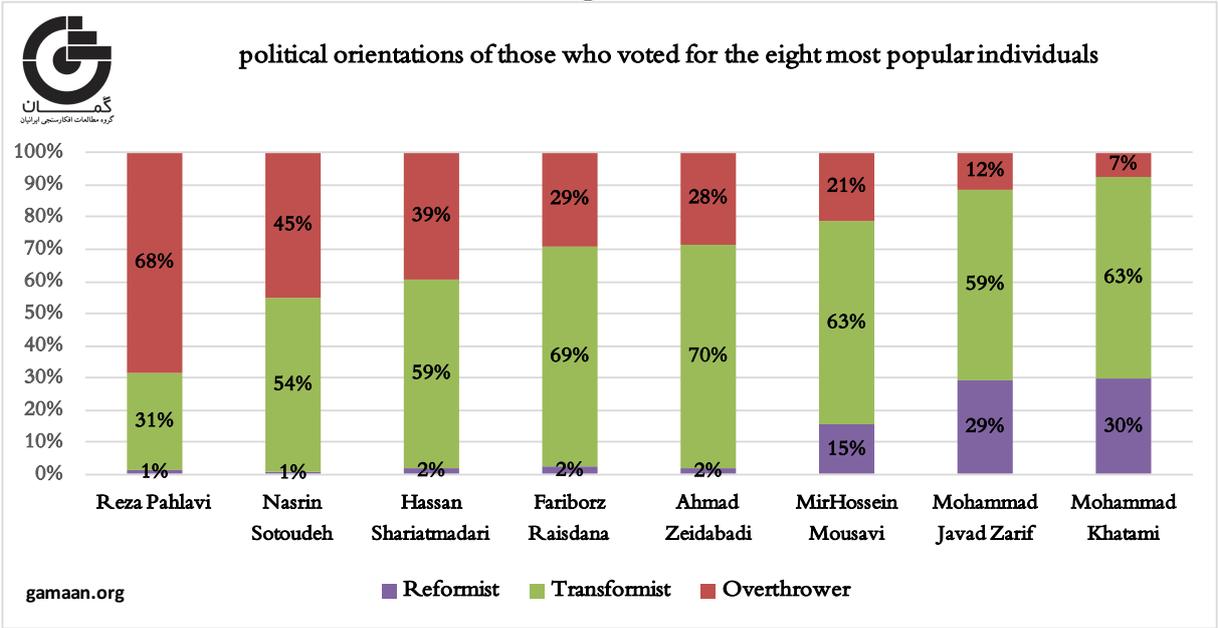
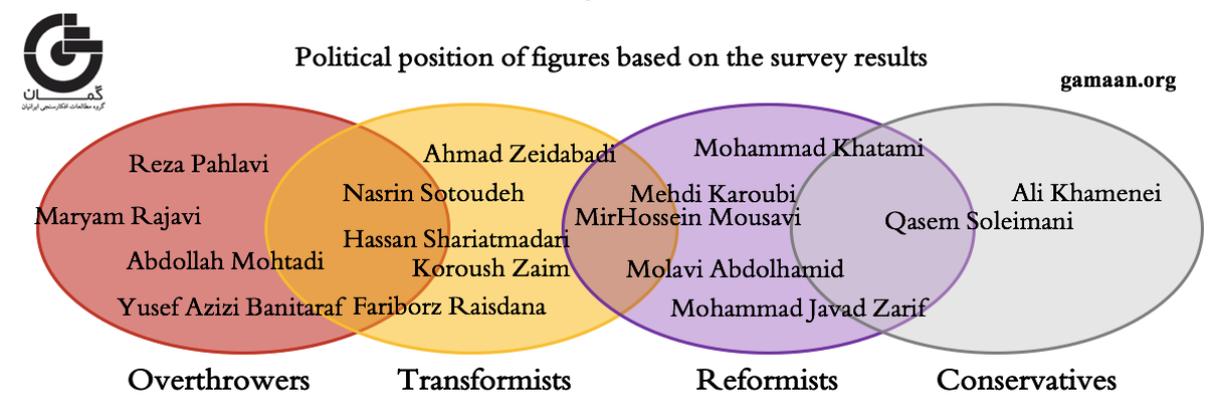


Figure 7 summarizes the above-mentioned analysis and other findings from the survey. The figure shows the common electoral base among political figures. The commonalities between political factions explain why some individuals have a considerable number of votes in two or even three different political vote bases (see Figure 6). It should be noted that the positions of political figures on Figure 7 merely reflect the results of the survey and the choices of the respondents. These individuals may identify with different political factions from those presented in the figure.

Figure 7



Using Figure 7 and taking into account the observed commonality of the electoral bases of the political figures (Table 1), we can add the total percentage of votes for individuals within each orientation, plus one-third of the "Other Option", as an estimation of the possible vote share for a single candidate for each of the three orientations of Reformists, Transformists and Overthrowers.

Using the results of Figure 5, it is estimated that the single candidate for the Reformist faction has about 14% of the vote base. Meanwhile, the single candidate for the Transformist faction has about 15% of votes whereas the single candidate for the Overthrowers accounts for about 40% of the vote base. With regard to the fact that only 3.6% of the population considered their political orientation as Reformist (Figure 4), it seems that about 10% of those who vote for Reformist candidates consider themselves Transformist.

**2-6 What are the political orientations of those who voted for Rouhani in 2017?**

Figure 8 shows the political orientations of those who voted for Rouhani in 2017. Interestingly, about 43% of these voters consider themselves Overthrowers, and only 7% of them see themselves as Reformists.

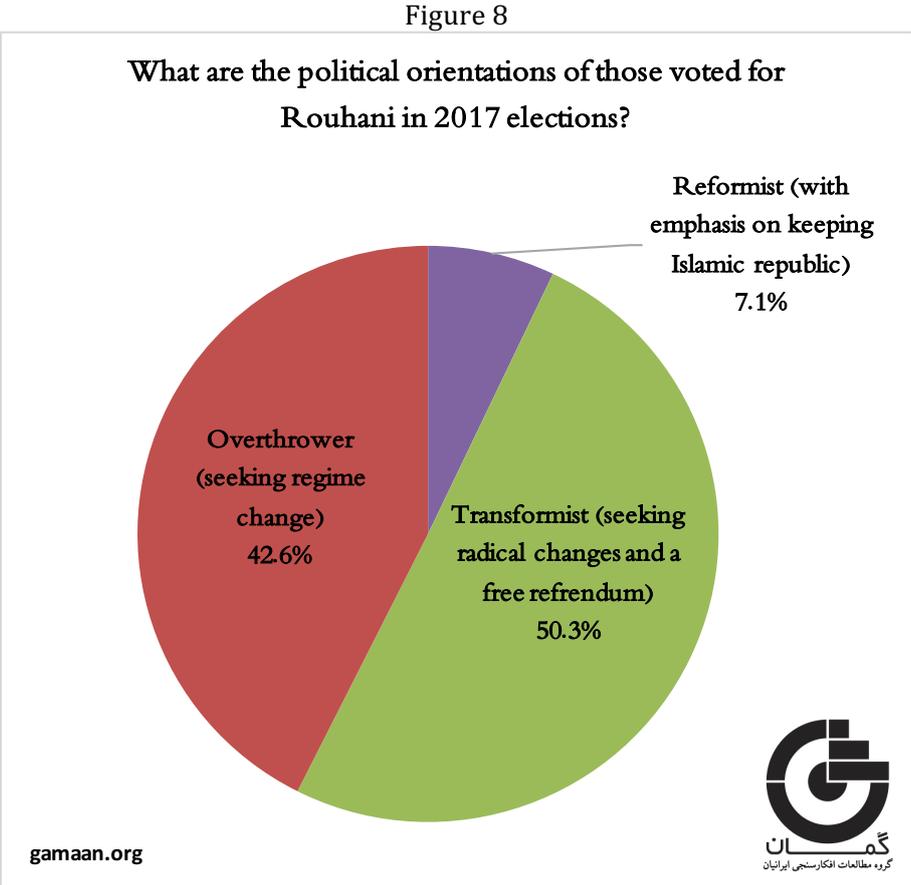
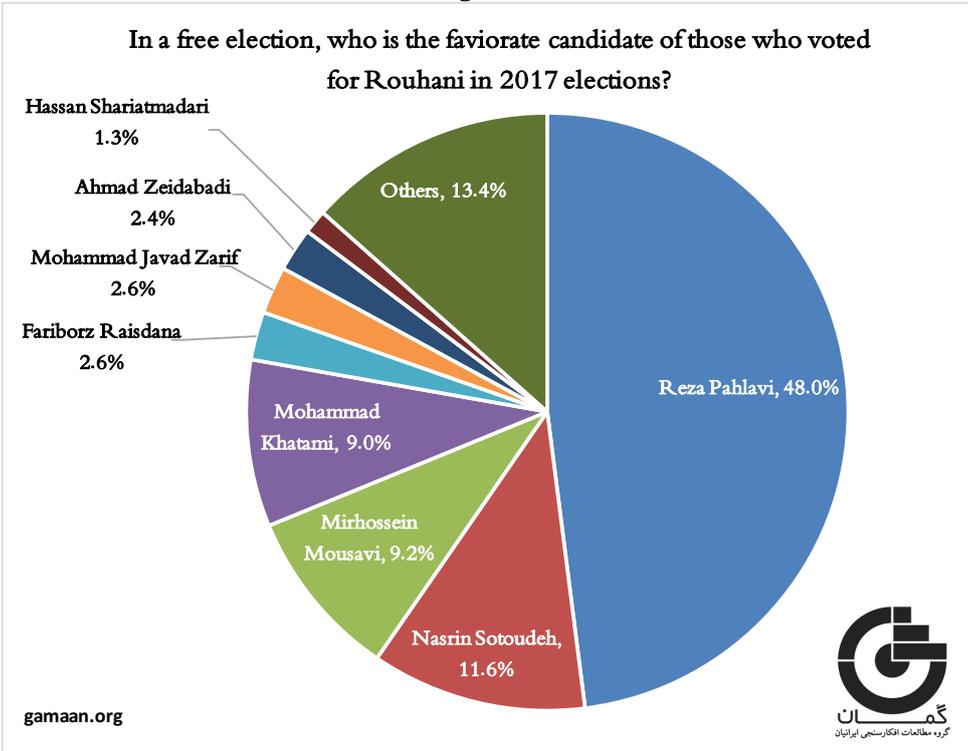


Figure 9 shows the choices of those who voted for Rouhani if the election were to be free and they had more choices than just Reformists. About 21% of those who voted for Rouhani would vote for candidates from the Reformist faction (Mohammad Khatami, Mirhossein Mousavi and Mohammad-Javad Zarif) in a free election. Considering the fact that according to the official results, 42% of those who were eligible to vote voted for Rouhani in the 2017 presidential election, we can conclude that approximately 9% of the

population belonged to the Reformist camp and the rest of those who voted for Rouhani tactically voted for “the lesser of two evils”, as the adage goes.

Figure 9

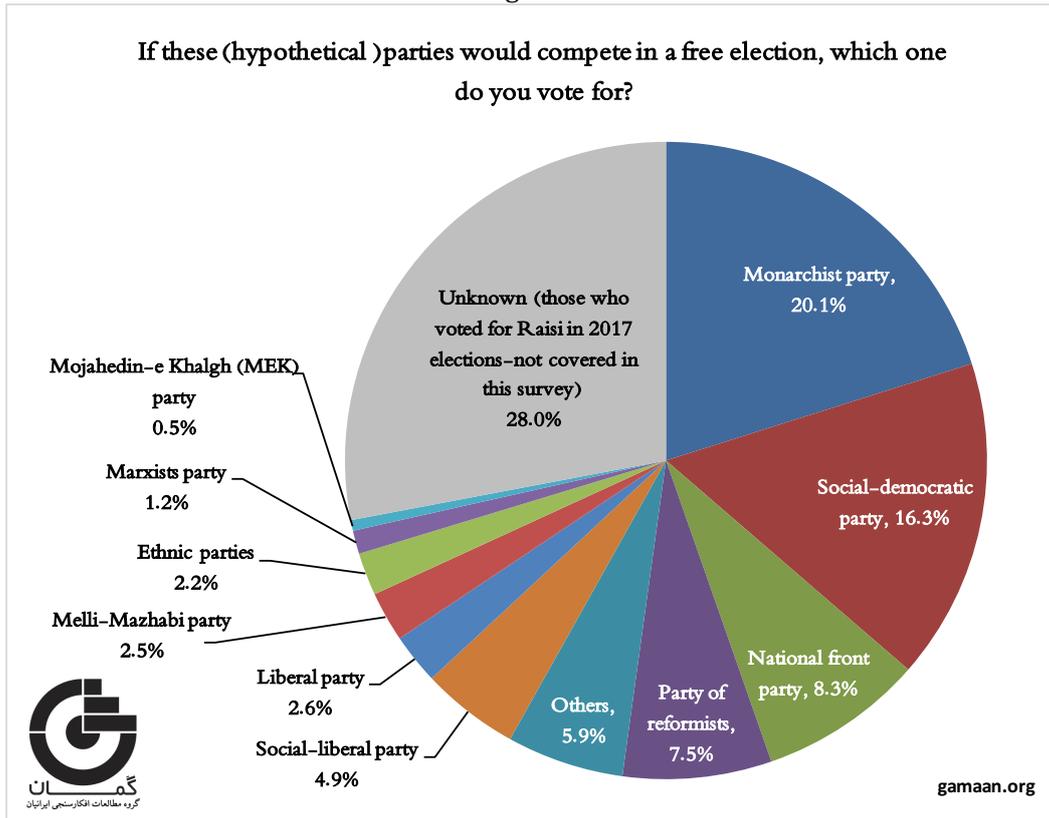


**2-7 Which political parties and ideologies are favoured in the Iranian society?**

In this survey the participants were asked which party they would vote for in a free election. The participants were provided with a (symbolic) list of political parties with different political ideologies. Figure 10 shows the popularity of each of these parties in society. As can be seen, the constitutional monarchist party garners 20% of the votes. This is followed by the Social-Democratic party with 16.3%, National Front (Jebhe-Melli) party with 8.3%, and the Reformist party with 7.5%. The figure shows that the Iranian society is pluralistic and no political party or ideology has the support of the absolute majority.

Comparing the attitudes of Iranians living inside and outside the country about the preferred political parties sheds light on some interesting facts. The Constitutional monarchist party and the Reformist party have respectively 10% and 6% less support among Iranians living abroad. On the other hand, Social-Democratic party and Social-Liberal party have respectively 12% and 8% more support among Iranians who live abroad.

Figure 10



\* \* \*

The team of Gamaan expresses their gratitude to all Iranians who trusted them and expressed their views and attitudes in this survey. We hope that in the future we can still be trusted by the Iranian people to express their real views on different areas and issues.

Gamaan also welcomes all comments, criticisms, questions and suggestions on this survey and its findings. The raw data of the survey will be accessible to researchers and international academic institutions under specific legal conditions, after removal of the personal information of participants (i.e. IP addresses).

Finally, we would like to sincerely thank those volunteers who help us in translating and editing the English version of this report.

# Appendix 1

## Demographic characteristics of the survey sample and balancing the sample with the target population

To turn the sample of this survey into a representative sample, we have used a well-known weighting method called 'Raking' (Also called 'raking ratio estimation'). A recent work published by "[Pew Research Centre](#)" has shown that by taking into account some proper variables, this method is one of the most efficient and trustable methods of sample balancing. It should be noted that according to the work of Pew Centre, online surveys, due to structural reasons, have an error rate of 6% at least, demanding caution when it comes to their generalizability.

To create a representative sample (from respondents living inside the country), the statistical sample of the survey was weighted to adjust for disparities in distribution of gender, age, educational level, and provincial population. The results of the official population census of 2016 and the labour market census of 2015 have been used to extract the demographic characteristics of the country.

Figure 11 compares the distribution of gender in the statistical sample with the results of the 2016 census.

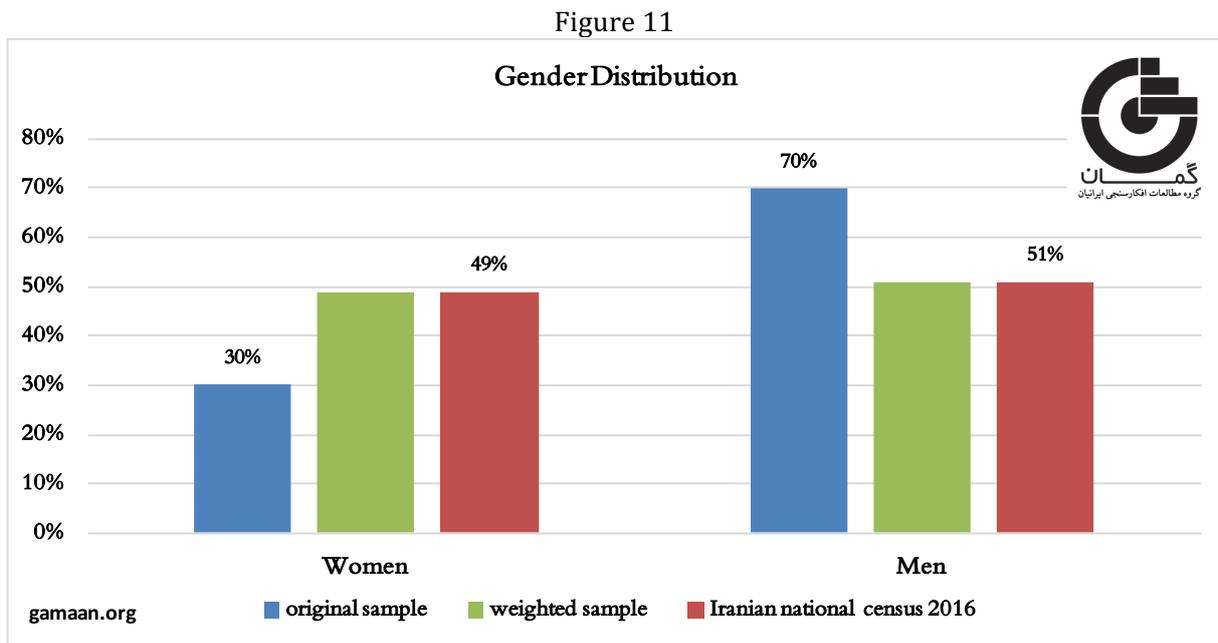


Figure 12 shows the age distribution of the statistical sample versus the age distribution according to the 2016 census. As expected, people older than 60 are under-represented in the sample of the survey, but other age groups closely match those of the census.

Figure 12

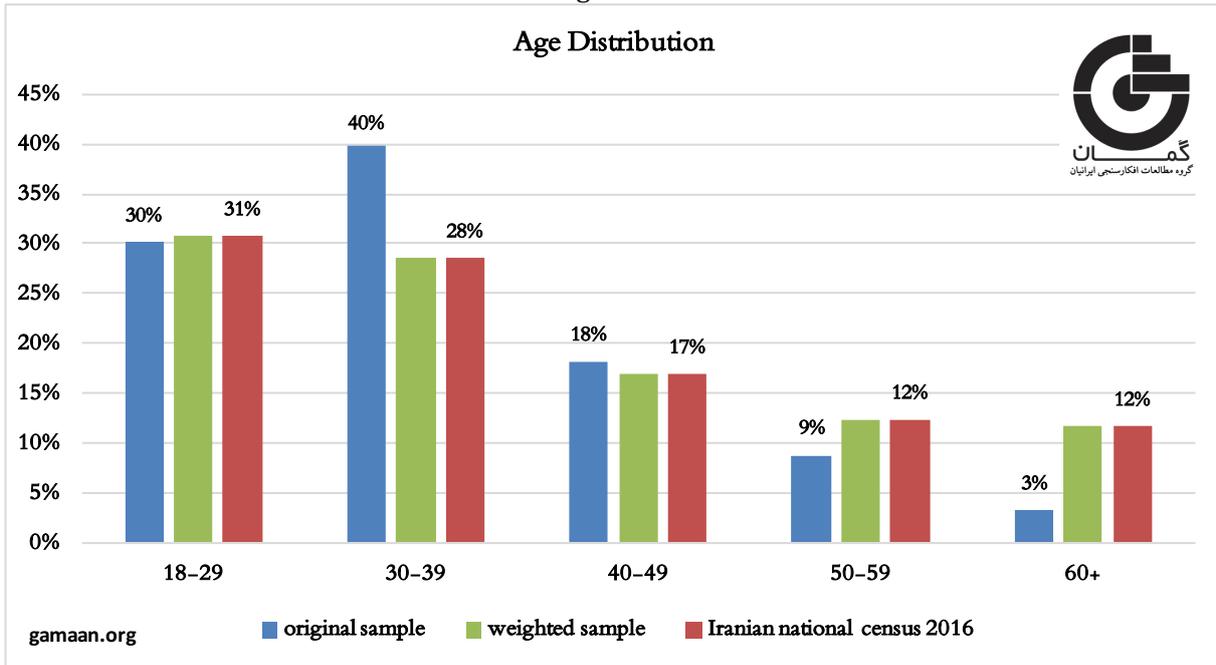


Figure 13 shows the regional distribution of the survey sample versus the target population of each province. As can be seen, all provinces are represented in the survey. As the target population of this survey is 72% of the Iranian population who are at or older than 18 years of age, and did not vote for Raisi in the 2017 presidential election, the target population in each province is calculated as the number of individuals who are eligible to vote, minus those who voted for Raisi in that province.

Figure 13

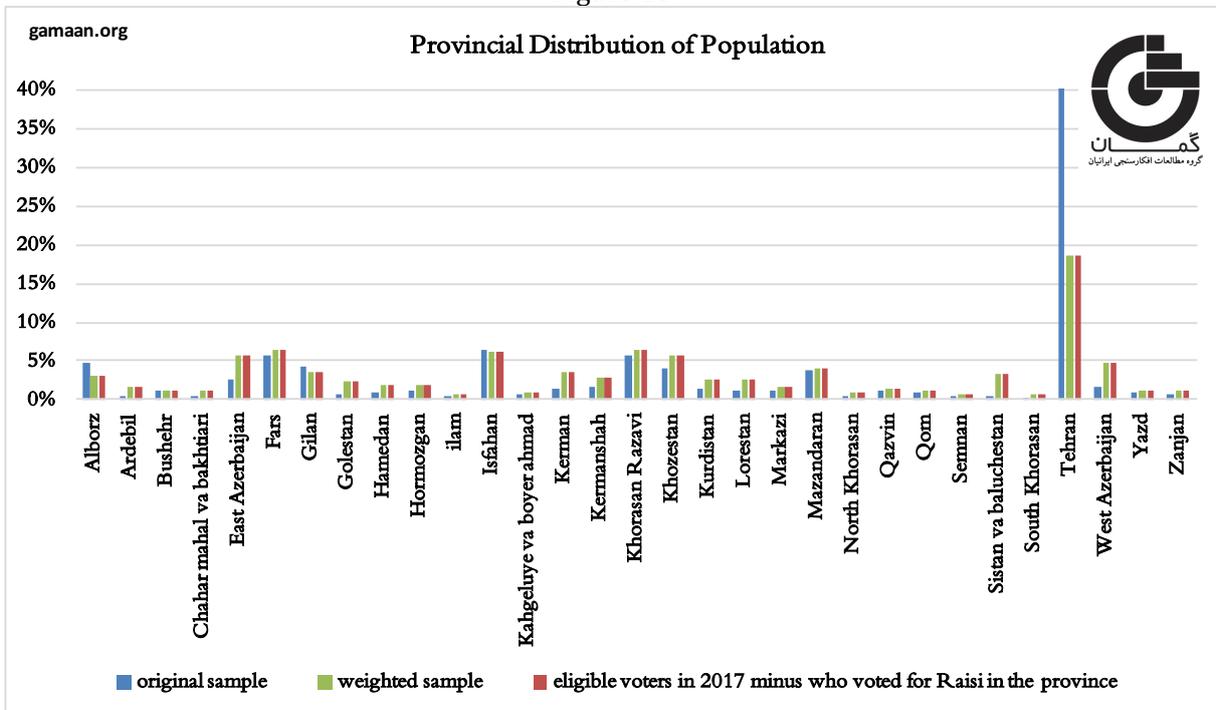


Figure 14 shows the education level distribution of the sample versus the target population. As expected, people with higher education are over-represented in the survey sample and demographically it is less consistent with the target population. Nevertheless, thanks to the large size sample, the sample population consists of people with all possible education levels (primary school, high school diploma, associate degree, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, and PhD).

Figure 14

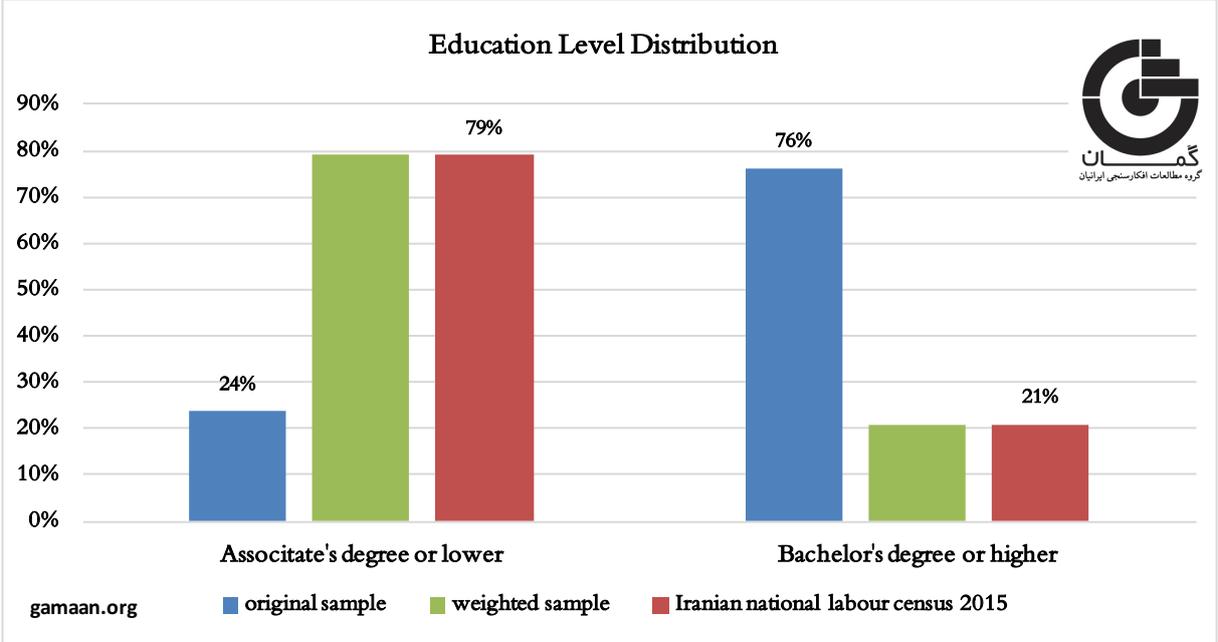
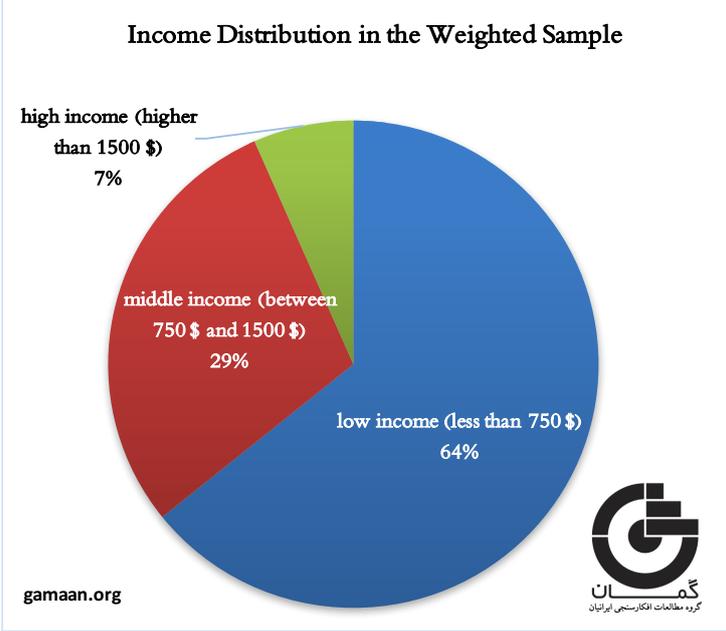


Figure 15 shows the economic classes of the survey participants. About 64% of the weighted sample belong to a low-income group, while 7% are from a high-income group. Considering the official statistics released by the “Statistical Center of Iran” on the household income decile distributions, there is an acceptable match between the economic status of the weighted sample and that of the Iranian society in general.

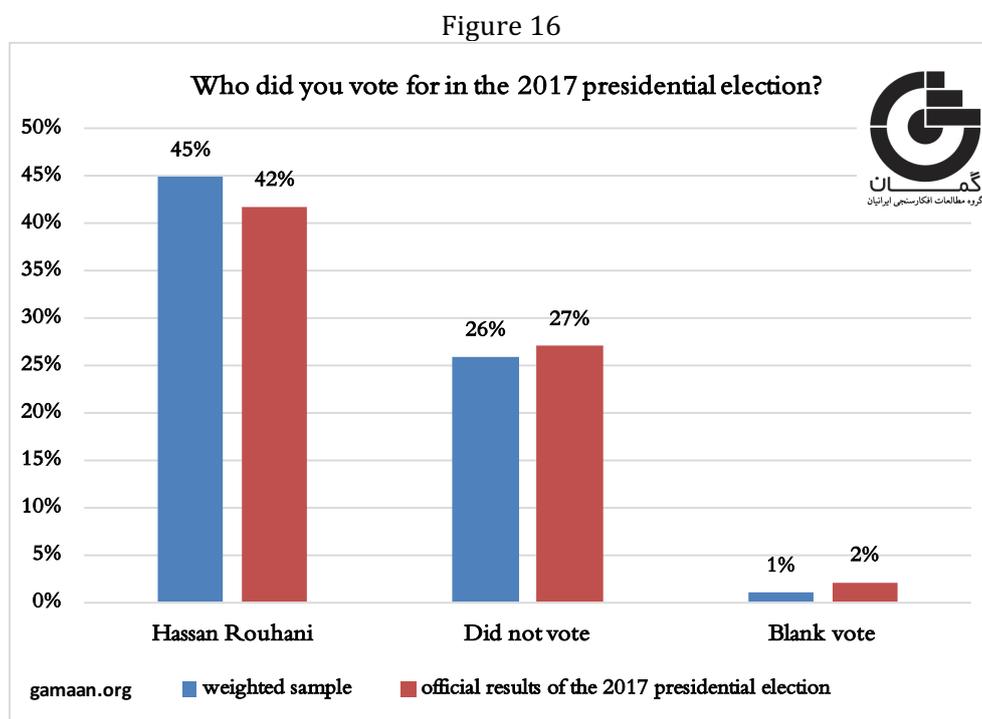
Figure 15



## Validation of the weighted sample

One of the methods by which the reliability of the statistical sample and its generalizability can be assessed is the extent to which the results of the survey are matched with the external evidence (external validity). By analysing the answer to the first question of the survey (Who did you vote for in the 2017 election?), one notices how the findings of the weighted sample are matched to the official results of the election.

Figure 16 compares the “official results” of the presidential Elections of 2017 with the results of the weighted sample. It can be seen that the difference between the votes of Rouhani on the basis of the weighted sample and the official election results is only about 3%. This difference is about 1% for those who have not voted or have voted blank. This comparison shows that a weighted sample is very well matched to the target population.



With regard to what is said in this appendix, it seems that the weighted sample considered in this report can adequately represent 72% of the Iranian society; thus, the findings of this report can be (with scientific considerations) generalized to this large part of the Iranian society.

## Methodological challenges of the survey

This survey and its analyses display the same methodological shortcomings which are inherent to every online survey sampling. One of these shortcomings arises from the so-called Network Effect, that is the survey would mostly reach the network of its organizers. To overcome this challenge, we have tried to share the survey amongst individuals and groups belonging to all three political orientations (i.e. Reformists, Transformists, and Overthrowers). Moreover, using the Virtual Snowball Sampling technique, and sharing the survey on different social networking platforms (i.e. Telegram, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook), we tried to increase the number of respondents to overcome the biases caused by the Network Effect.

The fact that the findings from the sample match the official results of the 2017 presidential election in Iran shows that these efforts have managed to mitigate the Network Effect, although we do not claim that we could fully overcome to this challenge. Repeating such polls in future studies and using a more inclusive sample population can help to overcome such challenges.