

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August of 2008, the Public Affairs of Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA) commissioned Zogby International to conduct a national public opinion survey of Iranian Americans to gather accurate and timely information about the demographics and views of the Iranian American community. The purpose of this unprecedented survey is to provide PAAIA with the knowledge required to more effectively represent the Iranian American community, and to further inform and educate the American public at large, as well as U.S. policy makers and opinion makers about Iranian Americans. The survey's margin of error is +/- 5%.

The results of this PAAIA/Zogby survey indicate that nearly all Iranian Americans are either citizens (81%) or permanent residents (15%) of the United States. While their ethnic heritage is important to the vast majority of Iranian Americans in defining their identity, they appear to be well-assimilated into American society, with only one in five indicating that they interact mostly with other Iranian Americans outside of work, and more than half indicating English as the language or one of two languages most often spoken at home.

The survey paints the picture of a diverse and relatively affluent Iranian American community. While two-fifths of Iranian Americans identify themselves as Muslims, almost an equal percentage appear not to practice any particular religion, and the balance are roughly equally divided among Christians, Jews, Bahais and Zoroastrians. Almost one in three Iranian American households have annual incomes of more than \$100K (compared to one in five for the overall U.S. population).

According to the survey results, four of every five Iranian American is registered to vote. Also, a relatively significant margin have in the past engaged in electoral activities other than voting, with about one in three having either met or communicated with public officials, or having donated money to a political candidate or campaign. About one half of Iranian Americans surveyed identified themselves as registered Democrats, in contrast to one in eight as Republicans and one in four as independents.

More than half of Iranian Americans cite domestic U.S. issues, including issues that are not unique to Iranian Americans, as the most important to them. In contrast, one quarter of Iranian Americans cite foreign policy issues involving U.S.-Iran relations and less than one in ten cite the internal affairs of Iran as being of greatest importance to them. On matters impacting Iranian Americans in the U.S., the two most important issues cited were facilitating greater understanding between the peoples of the United States and Iran (85%) and ensuring that the image of Iranian Americans in the U.S. accurately reflects their values and accomplishments (75%).

Nearly half of Iranian Americans surveyed have themselves experienced or personally know another Iranian American who has experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity or country of origin. The most common types of discrimination reported are airport security, social discrimination, employment or business discrimination, racial profiling and discrimination at the hands of immigration officials.

An overwhelming eighty-four percent of all Iranian Americans support the establishment of a U.S. interest section in Iran that would provide consular services and issue U.S. visas. The establishment of such an interest section would serve American citizens, including many Iranian Americans, traveling to Iran and would facilitate the travel of their relatives from Iran to the U.S., but would not amount to the establishment by the United States government of formal diplomatic relations with Iran.

Finally, the survey indicates that almost three-quarters of Iranian Americans believe the promotion of human rights and democracy in Iran is the most important issue relating to U.S.-Iran relations. About the same percentage, however, believe diplomacy is the foreign policy approach towards Iran that would be in the best interest of the United States.

II. REPORT AND SURVEY FINDINGS

PAAIA is a recently established national grassroots organization aspiring to build on the tremendous individual achievements of Iranian Americans across all walks of life in the United States to create a truly representative, nationally recognized voice to further empower Iranian Americans in the public arena, and to ensure that future generations maintain a deep-rooted sense of heritage, pride, and identity as Iranian Americans. To represent the community, however, requires that we move past personal opinions and establish the facts as to who Iranian Americans are, what issues are important to them and what their prevailing views are on those issues. To that end, as one of its very first undertakings, PAAIA commissioned Zogby International to conduct a nationwide public opinion survey of Iranian Americans, the results of which will provide us with the knowledge required to more effectively represent our community and to further inform and educate our fellow Americans, as well as U.S. policy makers and opinion makers, about the Iranian American community.

Since the year 2000, only a few other surveys and reports have been conducted in order to define the demographics and attitudes of the Iranian American community. In February 2004, the Iranian Studies Group at MIT released an overview of the socio-economic characteristics of the Iranian American community based on the 2000 U.S. Census, indicating that Iranian Americans are among the most highly educated ethnic groups in the United States, with an average per capita income that was fifty percent higher than that of the nation. Also in 2004, an on-line survey (The 2004 Iranian-American Survey) was sponsored by a number of Iranian American organizations and conducted by Bruce Bahmani and Mike Ghodoosian in Northern California, the results of which indicated that eighty-two percent (82%) of Iranian Americans were U.S. citizens, with sixty-eight percent (68%) voting in national elections and thirty percent (30%) making political contributions. Finally, in August 2007, Dr. Dariush Zahedi at the U.C. Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies conducted a survey of political attitudes and participation of Iranian Americans in California, indicating that thirty-one percent (31%) of California Iranian Americans had attended public meetings and thirty-five percent (35%) had personally contacted public officials.