

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, for the first time, accurate and timely information about the demographics and views of the Iranian American community. The purpose of the 2008 survey was 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.

Following the historic events that unfolded in Iran in the aftermath of the disputed June 12th presidential election, PAAIA again commissioned Zogby International to conduct a follow-up national survey of Iranian Americans to gauge how their perceptions and views may have shifted as a result of these events. This 2009 survey specifically explores the attitudes and views of Iranian Americans on issues such as recent developments in Iran, U.S.-Iran relations, the Obama Administration's response to recent developments in Iran, and the role, if any, that the Iranian Diaspora and Iranian American community or civic organizations could or should play with respect to developments in Iran. This survey's margin of error is +/- 5%.

The most important findings of this 2009 public opinion survey of Iranian Americans are summarized below.

I. Ties between Iranian Americans and Iran remain strong.

- Over the past year, the importance of ethnic heritage to Iranian Americans has remained unchanged, with eighty-five percent (85%) believing their heritage is either very important or somewhat important.
- More than six in ten Iranian Americans have immediate family members in Iran, and almost three in ten communicate with their family or friends in Iran at least several times a week. An additional four in ten communicate with their family or friends in Iran at least several times a month. The foregoing indicates an unusually close relationship between Iranian Americans and the people of Iran.

II. Iranian Americans closely followed post-election events in Iran, feel the presidential election was not free and fair, generally approve of the Obama Administration's handling of the crisis, and favor negotiations and peaceful change within Iran.

- Since 2008 there has been a slight uptick in the percentage of Iranian Americans who say they follow the news from Iran closely (85%, up from 78%). More specifically, eighty-six percent (86%) followed news about the recent presidential election closely, including fifty-nine percent (59%) who followed it very closely.

- Eighty-seven percent (87%) of respondents do not believe the Iranian presidential election was free and fair.
- Half of all Iranian Americans surveyed (50%) believe the Obama Administration was right to ‘keep the American government from meddling in the Iranian election or interfering with the election protestors.’ In contrast, one-third (35%) believe the Obama administration should have been more actively involved, providing greater support to the protestors.
- Only five percent (5%) of Iranian Americans favor U.S. military action against Iran, while fifty percent (50%) support diplomatic negotiations. This is an indication that most Iranian Americans still support a peaceful approach in U.S. policy toward Iran. Forty-two percent (42%) of Iranian Americans also believe promotion of regime change would be in the best interests of the United States.

III. Recent events in Iran appear to have changed, at least for the time being, the prevailing focus of the Iranian American community and attitudes toward the type of civic organizations they may join and support.

- The recent electoral crisis in Iran appears to have brought about a considerable shift in the issues that Iranian Americans identify as their most important concerns. In 2008, a majority of Iranian Americans (54%) cited a range of domestic U.S. issues as being most important to them. In our 2009 survey, however, fifty-three percent (53%) of respondents cited either foreign policy issues involving U.S.-Iran relations (33%) or the internal affairs of Iran (20%) as being their most important concerns. In contrast, thirty-eight percent (38%) of respondents in 2009 cited either domestic issues that are not unique to the Iranian American community such as health care and education (22%) or domestic Iranian American issues such as civil rights (16%), as being most important to them.
- As a result of this changed focus, when asked to name what they expect the two main goals of an Iranian American organization should be, a majority (59%) view ‘promoting democracy and human rights in Iran’ as the most important goal. Other goals, like improving the image of Iranian Americans (34%) and working within the community to increase their political influence (24%) and preserve their culture (22%), rank next in order. There is less support for influencing U.S. policy toward Iran (17%).
- When presented with three distinct types of Iranian American community or civic organizations, each with different goals, the type of organization eliciting the highest interest (about one in three) was one whose major objective is ‘the promotion of human rights and democracy in Iran’. That said, about one in four Iranian Americans also indicated that they would join or support Iranian American organizations focused on either ‘domestic issue of Iranian Americans in the U.S.,’ or on ‘advocating U.S. foreign policy on Iran.’