

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October of 2011, the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA) commissioned Zogby Research Services (formally known as Zogby International) to conduct its third national public opinion survey of Iranian Americans to gather accurate attitudinal and demographic information about the Iranian American community. The 2011 survey follows similar surveys commissioned by PAAIA and conducted by Zogby Research Services in 2008 and 2009. The surveys are an integral component of better understanding the Iranian American community and having its voice heard through the availability of on-going accurate scientific data.

### PAAIA 2011 SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

The results of the 2011 PAAIA survey indicate that over the past three years, the importance of ethnic heritage to Iranian Americans remains unchanged, with **eighty-three percent (83%)** believing that their heritage is either very important or somewhat important to them. Iranian Americans continue to retain close ties to family and friends in Iran, although percentages of respondents who say they have family in Iran has dropped off somewhat. Still **six in ten** Iranian Americans indicate that they communicate with their family and friends in Iran at least several times a month.

Most Iranian Americans (**43%**) believe that internal developments in Iran and the state of U.S.-Iran relations are at the core of their issues as Iranian Americans. These issues correlate and are at the heart of domestic issues involving Iranian Americans in the United States (e.g., civil rights, discrimination, etc.).

Iranian Americans want the Iranian regime to change. For the above mentioned self-interested reason, **two-thirds** of Iranian Americans believe that Iran should be a secular democracy. In contrast, only **six percent (6%)** believe that any form of an “Islamic Republic” would work well in Iran. The survey indicates that from among a list of six issues relating to U.S.-Iran relations, by far the greatest number of Iranian Americans (**63%**) cite the promotion of human rights and democracy as the most important, followed by **thirty percent (30%)** who cite the promotion of regime change.

However, though Iranian Americans want to see a democratic Iran that respects

#### General Impressions from the Survey

Most Iranian Americans believe that Iran’s political situation and the state of U.S. – Iran relations is at the core of their issues as Iranian Americans (e.g. image, civil rights, sanctions, etc.)



Most Iranian Americans believe, for the above-mentioned self-interested reasons as well as from an aspirational and patriotic point of view, that Iran should be a secular democracy where human rights are respected.



Iranian Americans differ about how the foregoing aspirations can be achieved. However, they believe that what has been done to date (by the various administrations) has not worked.



Iranian Americans would like to see activities and movement towards a free and democratic Iran.



Although their favorable attitude towards President Obama’s policy towards Iran has declined, Iranian Americans are mostly inclined to vote for Obama in the 2012 presidential election.



human rights, they differ on how the foregoing aspirations can be achieved. **Thirty eight percent (38%)** believe that diplomatic negotiations or establishing diplomatic relations (each received 19%) are the best foreign policy approaches vis-à-vis Iran that would also be in the best interests of the United States. In contrast, **thirty-two percent (32%)** of Iranian Americans believe that the promotion of regime change would be in the best interest of the United States. Only **three percent (3%)** of Iranian Americans favor a military option against Iran.

A large majority of **seventy-three percent (73%)** of Iranian Americans strongly support or somewhat support the establishment of a U.S. interest section in Iran that would provide consular services and issue U.S. visas. This is in keeping with the 2008 survey results, in relation to the fact that **sixty-one percent (61%)** of Iranian Americans have traveled to Iran at least once since moving to the United States, and the continued close ties they maintain with family and friends living in Iran.

A significant portion (**44%**) of Iranian Americans cite restrictions on transferring money between Iran and the U.S as having a somewhat burdensome or a very burdensome impact on their ability to support their families. A similar percentage, **forty-seven percent (47%)**, view U.S. sanctions as not very burdensome or not at all burdensome on them or their family. This, however, does not discount the difficulties that the former group encounters on a daily basis as a result of the sanctions.

A majority (**56%**) of Iranian Americans now disapprove of President Obama's handling of relations with Iran, while **thirty-two percent (32%)** approve of how the President addresses this issue. These numbers have flipped since 2009 when a majority of Iranian Americans viewed President Obama's handling of relations with Iran favorably. Although their favorable attitude towards the Obama Administration's policy towards Iran has declined, **fifty-five percent (55%)** of Iranian Americans indicate that they would vote for President Obama if the 2012 election were held today.

When asked if they would support or oppose the delisting of the Mujahadeen-e Khalq (MEK) from the State Department's list of foreign Terrorist Organizations, a plurality of Iranian Americans (**45%**) cite that they are somewhat opposed or strongly opposed, while **twenty-two percent (22%)** indicate that they strongly support or somewhat support, and **one-third** were unsure.

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## IN SUMMARY

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These survey results can be viewed from a diversity of viewpoints. Clearly, Iranian Americans continue to regard their culture and heritage as an important component of their day to day life and their overall identity within the United States. Their desire and ability to maintain close contact with their families and friends in Iran is a clear testament to this strong affinity. Though they continue to be active and productive participants in the social and civic life within the United States, Iranian Americans' desire for a different regime in Iran, one that respects human rights and democracy, is clearly manifested in the survey. Although the predominant majority of Iranian Americans are strongly opposed to military action against Iran, Iranian Americans differ in their views between diplomacy and regime change as the best course of action for the U.S. to take towards Iran. While support for both tightening or removing economic sanctions against Iran as policy options receive little support, a significant number of Iranian Americans find the restrictions imposed by the sanctions as burdensome on them and their families.

