



PAAIA

Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans

SURVEY OF IRANIAN AMERICANS

2016

Executive Summary

With the long-negotiated nuclear agreement between the P5+1 and Iran finalized, adopted, and then implemented in January 2016, PAAIA asked Zogby Research Services to examine the attitudes of Iranian Americans with respect to U.S.-Iranian relations, the newly implemented agreement, and the experience of the Iranian American community.

From February 10–16, 2016, Zogby Research Services polled 400 Iranian Americans.

What we find is an Iranian American community that continues to maintain close ties with Iran, through regular communications with family and friends (64% do so at least several times a month) and closely following news from Iran (69%), as well as occasional travel by more than one-third of respondents. A majority of Iranian Americans personally identify based on their country of origin, while only 10% identify themselves by religion. Only about one-third say religion is important in their lives.

Respondents are concerned, however, that these ties to Iran and their identification as Iranian Americans may lead to problems. About one-half (47%) say they are concerned that travel to Iran will lead to closer scrutiny by U.S. law enforcement, and one-half (48%) note that they or someone they know have experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity or country of origin. Further, they are concerned about more discrimination in the future because of the rhetoric used by some presidential candidates regarding immigrants, Muslims, and Iranians (68%). Of those who expressed an opinion (87%), effectively all Iranian American respondents say that there is no support for extremist groups or ideologies in their community. One in ten respondents say they are not sure.

Like many of their American compatriots, the most important issue for Iranian Americans in determining their votes in federal elections is the economy and jobs (59%). Foreign policy (33%) and terrorism and national security (22%) are also important issues for these voters, as are education (21%) and the honesty of the candidates (20%).

More than seven in 10 respondents rate Barack Obama's presidency (75%) and Obama's handling of U.S.-Iranian relations (71%) as either excellent or good.

Considering the ongoing presidential nominating contests, when asked who they would support in the Republican primary or caucus in their state, respondents are very divided, with only John Kasich getting a double digit response (13%). Those who would vote on the Democratic side lean toward Bernie Sanders in the primary and caucus process, with 43% saying they would vote for Sanders versus 34% who would support Hillary Clinton.

With respect to the P5+1-Iranian nuclear agreement, or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the level of support among Iranian Americans is strong and stable (65% in 2016, 64% in 2015). A majority of respondents say they expect the agreement to have positive impacts on improving Iran's relations with the United States and the West (77%), improving the personal and civil rights of Iranian citizens (68%), expanding economic opportunities for the Iranian people (65%), and improving Iran's relations with its regional neighbors (55%).

Going beyond the nuclear deal, Iranian Americans say the top priorities for the U.S. government in Iran should be advancing democracy and promoting personal and civil

rights (56%) and allowing Americans to invest in Iran to improve the economy and create employment opportunities (52%). When asked about their concerns as Iranian Americans, they identify the promotion of human rights and democracy in Iran as most important to them personally (68%).

Analysis

I. Connections and Communications with Iran

Do you have family in Iran?			
	2016	2015	2012
Yes	84	84	84
No	15	15	16
Not sure	1	1	-

As in previous surveys, 84% of respondents say they have family in Iran.

How frequently do you communicate with your family or friends in Iran?				
	2016	2015	2011	2009
Daily	6	7	5	6
Several times per week	26	21	24	23
Several times per month	32	32	33	39
Several times per year	17	19	22	21
Less frequently*	12	16	15	10
Not at all*	9	5	2	1

Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.
** In the 2009, 2011, and 2015 surveys, these options were "rarely" and "never."*

Among those who have family in Iran, communication between Iranian Americans and their family and friends in Iran is frequent, with numbers that match those in previous surveys. About one-third (32%) are in contact at least several times per week, including 6% who are in contact daily. An additional one-third (32%) communicate several times per month, and 17% say they are in contact several times each year. Twelve percent (12%) say they rarely communicate with family and friends in Iran, and only 9% say they never do.

How often do you travel to Iran?				
	2016	2015	2011	2009
Once a year or more often	9	9	9	11
Once every 2 or 3 years	30	29	23	30
I rarely travel to Iran	29	25	29	34
I've never been back to Iran since I left	22	25	30	N/A
I've never been to Iran	10	12	8	24

Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Travel to Iran by survey respondents is generally infrequent, with just 9% saying they travel to Iran at least once a year and 30% saying they go once every two or three years. Another 29% rarely travel to Iran. One-third of respondents in the current survey have either never been back to Iran (22%) or never been there (10%). These responses closely track those of respondents in previous surveys.

How concerned are you that by traveling to Iran you will be subjected to closer scrutiny by U.S. law enforcement?

	2016
Concerned	47
Not concerned	36
I do not travel to Iran	17

Concerned is the aggregation of responses of "very concerned" and "somewhat concerned." Not concerned is the aggregation of the responses "not too concerned" and "not concerned at all." Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Almost half of the respondents (47%) say they are concerned that travel to Iran will lead to increased scrutiny by U.S. law enforcement, with 29% saying they are very concerned about this increase in law enforcement scrutiny. About one-third (36%) are not concerned about this issue. Finally, 17% say they do not travel to Iran.

How closely do you follow news from Iran?

	2016
Very closely	31
Somewhat closely	38
Not very closely	19
Not at all closely	12

Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding and because responses of "not sure" are not included.

More than two-thirds of Iranian American respondents (69%) say they closely follow news from Iran, while 31% do not.

II. Iranian American Experience

How do you identify yourself? (Choose all that apply)	
	2016
By my country of origin (e.g., Iranian American)	59
By my ethnicity (e.g., Persian American)	32
By my religion (Muslim American, Jewish American, etc.)	10
None of the above	17

Almost six in 10 respondents say they identify as “Iranian American,” with an additional one-third (32%) saying they identify as “Persian American.” Just 10% of respondents identify primarily by their religion, and 17% do not identify themselves by country of origin, ethnicity, or religion.

How important is religion in your life?	
	2016
Very important	17
Somewhat important	18
Not too important	13
Not important at all	50
<i>Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding and because responses of “not sure” are not included.</i>	

About one-third of Iranian American respondents (34%) say religion is important in their lives, while 63% say it is not important, including half of all respondents (50%) who say it is “not important at all.”

Among Muslims, opinion is split on this question, with 50% saying religion is important while 47% say it is not important. There are significant differences among other respondents; those who are Baha’i, atheist, and Zoroastrian are more likely to say religion is *important* (73% as a group), while those who say they are “other,” Jews, Christians, and agnostics are most likely to say religion is *not important* (85% as a group).

Have you or another Iranian American you know personally experienced discrimination in the past because of your or their ethnicity or country of origin?			
	2016	2015	2012
Yes	48	43	40
No	49	54	58
Not sure	3	3	3
<i>Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.</i>			

When asked if they or another Iranian American they know have experienced discrimination in the past because of ethnicity or country of origin, respondents are split, with 48% saying yes and 49% saying no. Looking at the results for this question from 2012 and 2015,

it appears personal experiences of discrimination may be trending up slightly (from 40% in 2012, to 43% in 2015, to 48% in the current survey).

Younger respondents, those 49 and under, are more likely to say they have experienced discrimination or known someone who has (58%) than those ages 50 and over (42%). Those with family in Iran are also more likely to have experienced discrimination than those with no family there (51% vs. 31%).

Are you concerned that rhetoric used by some presidential candidates against immigrants, Muslims, and Iranians will lead to increased discrimination against Iranian Americans in the future?				
	2016	2015*	2013*	2012*
Yes	68	39	49	55
No	28	53	42	39
Not sure	3	9	10	7
<i>Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.</i>				
<i>* In 2012 and 2013 we asked: Are you concerned that U.S. hostilities with Iran have the potential for increasing discrimination against Iranian Americans? In 2015 the question was worded slightly differently and more generally: Are you concerned that there may be increased discrimination against Iranian Americans in the future?</i>				

After several years of decline, this year we find a significant jump in concern among Iranian Americans about increased discrimination in the future. In the current survey, respondents were asked specifically if the “rhetoric used by some presidential candidates against immigrants, Muslims, and Iranians” was concerning. More than two-thirds (68%) say they are concerned about future discrimination.

Concern is highest among those who have family in Iran (73% vs. those who do not: 40%), those with college degrees (72% vs. those without degrees: 49%), and those who have incomes above \$100K (75% vs. incomes below \$50K: 65%).

In 2012 and 2013, about half of the respondents were concerned about this possibility (2013: 49% and 2012: 55%), and in 2015 39% express this concern. (It is worth noting, however, that the wording of the question has varied and that may explain the difference.)

In your opinion, is there support for ISIS or other religious extremist groups or ideologies in the Iranian American community?	
	2016
There is a great deal of support	0
There is some support	2
There is very little support	2
There is no support at all	85
Not sure	10
<i>Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.</i>	

Overwhelmingly, Iranian Americans say there is “no support at all” for ISIS or other religious extremist groups and ideologies in their community (85%). One in 10 respondents say they are not sure.

III. Iranian Americans and the 2016 Elections

When you vote in federal elections for president or Congress, which of the following issues do you consider most important in determining your vote? (Choose two.)	
	2016
Terrorism and national security	22
The economy and jobs	59
Taxes	6
Education	21
Health care	14
Foreign policy (like the U.S.- Iran relationship)	33
Civil liberties	5
Women's rights	3
The political party of the candidate	3
The honesty of the candidate	20
Not sure	8

Among Iranian American respondents, the most important issues for determining their votes in federal elections are: the economy and jobs (59%) and foreign policy (33%), followed by terrorism and national security (22%), education (21%), the honesty of the candidate (20%), and health care (14%). Fewer than one in 10 respondents say taxes, civil liberties, women's rights, and the political party of the candidate are important issues for their voting decisions.

For whom would you vote if your state Republican primary or caucus for President was held today and the candidates were . . .	
	2016
Jeb Bush	5
Ted Cruz	5
Marco Rubio	5
John Kasich	13
Ben Carson	1
Donald Trump	9
Someone else	28
Not sure/Will not vote	35
<i>Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.</i>	

When asked for whom they would vote for president in their state's Republican primary or caucus if held today, Iranian American respondents are quite divided, with John Kasich the only candidate getting double digit support (13%). More than one-third of respondents say they will not vote in the Republican primary or caucus, and more than one-quarter say they will vote for someone else.

For whom would you vote if your state Democratic primary or caucus for President was held today and the candidates were...

	2016
Bernie Sanders	43
Hillary Clinton	34
Someone else	11
Not sure/Will not vote	12
<i>Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.</i>	

When asked for whom they would vote for president in their state's Democratic primary or caucus if held today, 43% of Iranian American respondents say they would vote for Bernie Sanders and 34% choose Hillary Clinton. Among Democrats, the split is even (46% each), while Independents are more than twice as likely to select Sanders (48% vs. 22%). Not surprisingly, younger respondents are more likely to choose Sanders (18–29: 70% vs. 14% for Clinton, 30–49: 47% vs. 33% for Clinton), while older voters lean toward Clinton (65+: 42% vs. 29% for Sanders). And women are basically split (Sanders: 39% vs. Clinton: 40%), while men lean toward Sanders (46% vs. 31% for Clinton).

IV. U.S.-Iran Relations

Do you approve or disapprove of the P5+1 agreement also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran designed to place limits on Iran's nuclear program?		
	2016	2015*
Strongly approve	38	46
Somewhat approve	27	18
Approve	65	64
Somewhat disapprove	6	5
Strongly disapprove	10	15
Disapprove	17	20
Not sure/Not enough information	18	16
<i>* In 2015, respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the P5+1 framework agreement with Iran designed to place limits on Iran's nuclear program?</i>		

Opinion in the current survey regarding the P5+1 agreement with Iran (or JCPOA) mirrors last year's responses, with almost two-thirds of Iranian American respondents (65%) approving of the agreement, while 17% disapprove of the agreement. A significant number of respondents (18%) are not sure.

Approval rates are highest among those who make more than \$100K (77%), Christians and agnostics (80%), Democrats (71%), and those ages 30–49 (71%).

What impact do you believe the Iran nuclear agreement (JCPOA) will have on the following issues?			
		2016	2015*
Expanding economic opportunities for the Iranian people	A positive impact	65	75
	A negative impact	9	7
	No impact, at all	16	12
	Not sure	10	6
Improving Iran's relations with the United States and West	A positive impact	77	80
	A negative impact	7	6
	No impact, at all	11	10
	Not sure	5	4
Improving Iran's relations with regional neighbors	A positive impact	55	58
	A negative impact	18	14
	No impact, at all	19	18
	Not sure	8	10
Improving personal/civil rights for Iranian citizens	A positive impact	68	66
	A negative impact	7	7
	No impact, at all	19	19
	Not sure	6	8
<i>Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.</i>			
<i>* In 2015 we asked the question: If an agreement is reached between the P5+1 and Iran to limit Iran's nuclear program, what impact will it have on the following issues?</i>			

Iranian Americans were asked to consider the impact of the Iran nuclear agreement on a number of issues. More than three-quarters of respondents (77%) say that the agreement will have a positive impact on “improving Iran’s relations with the United States and the West.” About two-thirds also view positive impacts on “improving personal/civil rights for Iranian citizens” (68%) and “expanding economic opportunities for the Iranian people” (65%). A majority (55%) say Iran’s relations with regional neighbors will be positively impacted by the agreement.

Fewer than one in 10 respondents see negative impacts on any of these issues with the exception of improving of Iran’s regional relationships, which 18% say could be impacted negatively.

Almost one in five respondents say there will be no impact at all on improvement of Iranian citizens’ rights (19%) and improvement of Iran’s regional relationships (19%).

These responses are very similar to the responses to last year’s survey. In only one case do we find any significant difference from the 2015 survey; the percentage of respondents who see the agreement having a positive impact on economic opportunities fell 10 points (from 75% in 2015 to 65% in 2016).

Those with family in Iran, the highest incomes, those who emigrated before 1990, and in some cases those with college degrees tend to be more likely to think the agreement will have positive impacts.

How do you rate...?		
	2016	
	the presidency of Barack Obama	President Obama's handling of U.S.-Iran relations
Excellent	46	41
Good	29	30
+	75	71
Fair	11	13
Poor	12	15
-	23	28
Not sure	2	1

Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Overall, three-quarters of the respondents rate President Obama’s presidency as either excellent (46%) or good (29%), while 23% rate his presidency as either fair or poor.

When asked specifically about Obama’s handling of U.S.-Iran relations, opinion is basically stable with 71% viewing it positively (excellent: 41%, good: 30%) and 28% viewing it negatively (fair: 13%, poor: 15%).

These numbers are similar to last year when we asked about the president’s effectiveness with respect to the U.S.-Iran negotiations. Almost eight in 10 (79%) said the president was effective in these negotiations and just 17% said he was ineffective.

Moving beyond the Iran nuclear deal, what should the top two priorities be for the U.S. government in dealing with Iran?

	2016
Allowing Americans to invest in Iran to improve the economy and create employment opportunities	52
Advancing democracy and promoting personal and civil rights	56
Seek new areas of cooperation with the Iranian government	7
Enhance people to people ties through cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges	34
Give greater support to our allies in the Middle East to counter Iran’s regional ambitions	5
Support Iranian opposition groups and figures	8
Tighten economic sanctions against the Iranian government	11
Not sure	18

According to Iranian American respondents, the top two priorities for the U.S. government in dealing with Iran, moving beyond the Iran nuclear deal should be “advancing democracy and promoting personal and civil rights” (56%) and “allowing Americans to invest in Iran to improve the economy and create employment opportunities” (52%). One-third of respondents (34%) also identify “enhancing people to people ties through cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges” as a priority.

Less frequently cited priorities include “tightening economic sanctions against the Iranian government” (11%), “supporting Iranian opposition groups and figures” (8%), “seeking new areas of cooperation with the Iranian government” (7%), and “giving greater support to our allies in the Middle East to counter Iran’s regional ambitions” (5%).

Of the following list of issues affecting Iranian Americans, which two are most important to you personally? (Choose two.)

	2016
Promotion of human rights and democracy in Iran	68
Lifting U.S. trade embargo to support economic growth in Iran	36
Successful implementation of the Iran nuclear agreement between P5+1 and Iran	21
Limiting Iran’s role in supporting terrorist organizations or foreign military involvement	9
Keeping sanctions in place or tightening sanctions against the government in Iran	17
Promoting regime change in Iran	22
Not sure	17

Respondents were presented with a list of issues affecting Iranian Americans and asked to select the two which are most personally important to them. By far, the most frequently selected issue is “the promotion of human rights and democracy in Iran,” which more than two-thirds of respondents (68%) say is most important. The second place choice is “lifting the U.S. trade embargo to support economic growth in Iran,” which 36% of respondents identify as an important issue. About one in five respondents say “promoting regime change” (22%) and “successful implementation of the Iran nuclear agreement”

(21%) are the most important issues for them. Keeping or tightening sanctions is viewed as important by 17% of Iranian American respondents, while 9% choose “limiting Iran’s role in supporting terrorist organizations or foreign military involvement” as an important issue to them.

There are only small variations among demographic groups with respect to the issues that are most important to them personally. Worthy of note: Those with family in Iran are twice as likely as those without family there to be concerned with the lifting of the U.S. trade embargo (39% vs. 19%). And those with higher incomes (over \$100K) are also more concerned about the embargo (44% vs. 24% of those with incomes less than \$50K) and successful implementation of the nuclear agreement (28% vs. 15%), but less concerned about regime change than those with lower incomes (17% vs. 35% of those with less than \$50K).

Demographics and Methodology

Demographics

18–29	10%
30–49	29%
50–64	43%
65+	14%
Male	63%
Female	37%
Income <\$50K	27%
Income \$50K–\$100K	28%
Income >\$100K	38%
Democrat	52%
Republican	8%
Independent/Minor Party	33%
No Party	6%
Registered voters	87%
Not registered voters	13%

Methodology

Zogby Research Services (ZRS) was commissioned by PAAIA to conduct, in partnership with Zogby Analytics, a live operator telephone survey of 400 Iranian American adults. Samples are randomly drawn from purchased telephone Iranian surname lists. Up to four calls are made to reach a sampled phone number, respondents that were not available but qualified to respond were allowed to set appointments to be recalled within the time frame of the fieldwork. Weighted variables may include age, race, gender, region, party, education, and religion. Based on a confidence interval of 95%, the margin of error for 400 is +/- 5.0 percentage points. This means that all other things being equal, the identical survey repeated will have results within the margin of error 95 times out of 100.

Subsets of the data have a larger margin of error than the whole data set. As a rule we do not rely on the validity of very small subsets of the data especially sets smaller than 50-75 respondents. At that subset we can make estimations based on the data, but in these cases the data is more qualitative than quantitative. Additional factors can create error, such as question wording and question order.

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