

Executive Summary

From August 27 to September 11, 2018, Zogby Research Services (ZRS) conducted a national telephone survey of Iranian Americans for PAAIA. Overall, 400 randomly selected respondents were interviewed. The results presented here, which are compared when possible to the results of previous surveys, highlight many of the same strands of opinion we have found in previous surveys over the last decade. In addition, we also find some significant divergence of opinion within the Iranian American community that reflect the larger divisions in our society, particularly based on age and political party affiliation.

1. The connections between Iranian Americans and Iran are deep, with 90% of respondents reporting they have family in Iran.
2. While we still find significant travel being reported by Iranian Americans to Iran (about one-quarter say they visit at least every 2-3 years) and family members from Iran visiting the United States (37% say their Iranian family members visit the United States at least every 2-3 years), the percentage of Iranian Americans traveling to Iran has declined by 13 points since 2015-2016. There remains strong opposition to the Trump administration's 'travel ban' (77%).
3. Discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity continues to be a significant concern for Iranian Americans, with more than half of respondents saying they have personally experienced discrimination. The most frequently reported types of such discrimination continue to be in social circumstances (now at 72%, up 14 points since 2008) and by airlines or airport security (62%). There are also significant increases in reports of employment and business discrimination (now at 52%) and by immigration officials (now at 47%).

Concern about increasing discrimination remains very high: almost eight in 10 respondents express concern that the rhetoric and policies regarding immigrants, Muslims, and Iranians will feed into discrimination in the future.

4. While half of the respondents feel more secure about international travel because of airport security, almost as many (43%) are concerned about the potential for discrimination and civil rights violations by TSA and customs officers.
5. The two primary ways that Iranian Americans say they identify themselves are by country of origin (i.e., Iranian) and by ethnicity (i.e., Persian).
6. About half of respondents are disappointed by the exclusion of the MENA category from the 2020 Census, but more than two-thirds are comfortable with a new question on the Census about citizenship and naturalization status.
7. Despite a small uptick in positive ratings of Trump's presidency and his handling of U.S.-Iran relations, about three-quarters of respondents still rate both negatively.
8. With respect to the U.S. withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal, 70% disagree with this decision, and the majority say that it is unlikely to be effective in getting broader concessions from Iran, increases the likelihood of a military strike against Iran, and is more likely to increase support for hardliners' anti-American sentiment in Iran.
9. Beyond the nuclear deal, important U.S.-Iran relations issues for Iranian Americans include promotion of human rights and democracy and lifting the U.S. trade embargo. Promoting regime change is also of growing importance to the community, particularly among Republican respondents.
10. The community's priorities for the U.S. government in dealing with Iran continue to be advancing democracy and promoting personal and civil rights, allowing Americans to invest in Iran, and enhancing ties through cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges.
11. By an 8:1 margin, respondents oppose the U.S. backing the MEK as a legitimate opposition force in Iran, while by a 2:1 margin they support the U.S. backing exiled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi as the opposition. Significant percentages of respondents say they do not have enough information to have an opinion about whether the

U.S. should back the MEK (44%) or Pahlavi (23%)

12. More than two-thirds of Iranian Americans believe that a parliamentary democracy/republic is the type of government that would work best in Iran. One-half believe that a grassroots democratic movement is the best approach to move Iran toward a more democratic society, while only a combined 15% think that economic sanctions or covert/military action would move the country in this direction. When asked which Iranian leader is most likely to move Iran toward a more democratic society, 35% chose exiled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi and 19% chose Iranian human rights lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, the only two leaders to achieve double digits.