

# Executive Summary

From September 8–20, 2020, Zogby Research Services conducted a national telephone survey of 406 Iranian Americans on behalf of PAAIA. This year's survey results are presented below.

The upcoming U.S. elections loom large in the strands that emerge from the results this year. Iranian Americans, regardless of political party, have some shared concerns including increased discrimination and political concerns like the economy and jobs, foreign policy, health care, and national security. In addition, on a bipartisan basis, the Iranian American community wants the U.S. government to prioritize advancing democracy and human rights in Iran and believes that a grassroots democratic movement is the best way for Iran to move to a more democratic society. However, there are also stark divisions apparent between Democrats and independents, on the one hand, and Republicans, on the other, when it comes to issues like sanctions, deal-making with Iran, evaluations of the current administration's handling of the U.S.-Iran relationship, and additional priorities for the U.S.-Iran relationship beyond their shared top choice regarding the advancement of democracy.

A brief summary of the findings includes the following points:

- The Iranian American community maintains high levels of connection and high rates of communication with their family and friends in Iran. For the first time, in this year's survey we find that mobile communication applications and Internet telephone and video chat services are being more frequently utilized to maintain these connections than phone calls.
- Discrimination continues to be a major source of concern for Iranian Americans. Sixty percent (60%) of respondents report that either they or another Iranian American they know have faced discrimination because of their ethnicity or country of origin. And more than three-quarters (78%) are concerned about increased discrimination in the future because of the rhetoric and policies regarding immigrants, Muslims, and Iranians, and because of increased tension in the U.S.-Iran relationship.
- As the 2020 election approaches, Iranian American respondents say the most important issues they are considering as they determine their votes for president and members of Congress are the economy and jobs, and foreign policy, followed by health care, terrorism and national security, and education. If the election were held today, Iranian Americans would side with former Vice President Joe Biden over President Donald Trump by a margin of 56% to 31%, with independent Iranian Americans saying they prefer Biden 57% to 17%.
- When it comes to the main goals of Iranian American civic or advocacy organizations, respondents most frequently selected issues that involve U.S. domestic issues that affect the lives of Iranian Americans. The most important issues selected by the respondents include enhancing Iranian American participation in the U.S. political process and increasing the influence of Iranian Americans (42%), improving the image of Iranian Americans (36%), and protecting the civil rights of Iranian Americans (35%). Compared to last year, there is a significant decline in the percentage of respondents who expect that one of the main goals of an Iranian American civic organization is to influence U.S.-Iran policy (from 36% in 2019 to 24% in 2020).
- With respect to the current state of U.S.-Iran relations, there has been a slight uptick in the Iranian American community's positive ratings for President Trump's handling of the relationship – to 31% from 22% in 2019 and 2018 – though level is less than one-half of the positive ratings given to President Obama for his handling of U.S.-Iran relations in 2016 (71%).
- By far, the most important issue for respondents when it comes to U.S.-Iran relations is promotion of human rights and democracy in Iran. There is broad bipartisan agreement on this priority; however, beyond this issue we find divergent views among Democratic and Republican respondents. Democrats and independents are concerned with lifting the trade embargo and the negotiation of a new nuclear agreement, while Republicans prioritize promoting regime change and limiting Iran's role in supporting terrorist organizations and foreign military involvements.

- Similarly, there is bipartisan agreement among Iranian American respondents when identifying what they want the U.S. government to focus on in the U.S.-Iran relationship, namely, advancing democracy and promoting personal and civil rights, and allowing Americans to invest in Iran. Beyond that, Democratic respondents say the priority for the U.S. government should be enhancing and facilitating humanitarian trade with Iran, while Republican respondents desire a focus on tightening the economic sanctions.
- Asked about the outcome of sanctions on Iran, again we find a significant partisan divide, with Democrats saying sanctions are harmful to the Iranian people and counterproductive by increasing support for anti-American sentiment and Republicans saying the sanctions are producing the results the Trump administration is seeking.
- Overall, about one-half of Iranian American respondents regardless of party affiliation want a more comprehensive deal with Iran that addresses both the country's nuclear ambitions and its role in regional conflicts. Among Democrats, about four in 10 want to see a return to the JCPOA, while among Republicans about four in 10 want no deal with Iran.
- Iranian American respondents continue to believe that a grassroots democratic movement is the approach most likely to move Iran toward a more democratic society. About one-third in this year's survey prefer gradual reform through the current political structure.
- Asked their opinions regarding the U.S. government backing the MEK or Reza Pahlavi as the legitimate opposition force against the Islamic Republic of Iran, about three in 10 Iranian American respondents say they strongly support Pahlavi while just 8% say the same of the MEK. On the other hand, the U.S. backing the MEK is opposed by six in 10 respondents, and its potential backing of Pahlavi is opposed by one-third of the respondents.