



**2009 National Public Opinion Survey of Iranian Americans**

Commissioned by:

**Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA)**

**&**

Conducted by:

**Zogby International**

November 2009

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## **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 12<sup>th</sup> 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.’

## **II. REPORT AND SURVEY FINDINGS**

Publicly launched in April of 2008, PAAIA is a national grassroots organization aspiring to build on the tremendous individual achievements of Iranian Americans across all walks of life in the United States to create a truly representative, nationally recognized voice to further empower Iranian Americans in the public arena. Since inception, PAAIA has attracted a membership base of well over 2,000 individuals from across the United States. To truly represent the community, however, requires us to move past personal opinions and establish the facts as to who Iranian Americans are, what issues are important to them and what their prevailing views are on those issues.

To that end, as one of its very first undertakings, in August of 2008 PAAIA commissioned Zogby International to conduct a nationwide, scientific, public opinion survey of Iranian Americans. To our knowledge, this was the first ever national survey of its kind that was specifically focused on Iranian Americans, shedding much needed light on the demographics and attitudes of our community. The results of the 2008 Survey of Iranian Americans were made available to Iranian Americans and the general public, and every member of the United States Congress received a copy of the survey report. We are convinced that the publication of the 2008 Survey of Iranian Americans has greatly facilitated a better understanding of Iranian Americans within our own community, as well as among the American public at large and U.S. policymakers and opinion makers.

Following the historic events that unfolded in Iran in the aftermath of the disputed June 12<sup>th</sup> presidential election, PAAIA once 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. More specifically, this survey 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.

### **Key Findings**

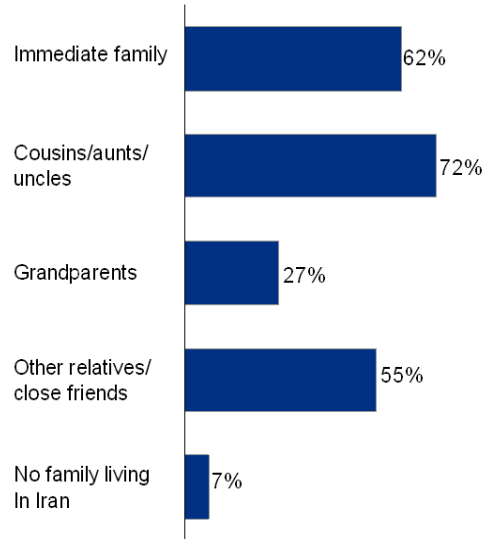
The key findings of PAAIA's 2009 public opinion survey of Iranian Americans are as follows:

- *Link to/interaction with Iran.* A large percentage of those surveyed (62%) have immediate family members living in Iran. Furthermore, seventy-two percent (72%) have aunts, uncles and/or cousins living in Iran, twenty-seven percent (27%) have grandparents living there, and fifty-five percent (55%) have close friends or other relatives who live there. Only seven percent (7%) of Iranian Americans surveyed have no family living in Iran.

According to the 2009 survey results, Iranian Americans are in relatively frequent communications with friends and family in Iran. More specifically, six percent (6%)

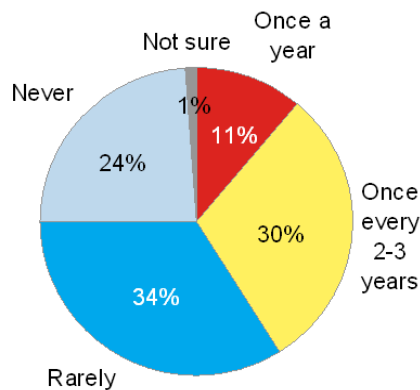
of the respondents communicate with friends and family in Iran daily, twenty-three percent (23%) communicate several times per week, and thirty-nine percent (39%) several times per month. In contrast, twenty-one percent (21%) of Iranian Americans communicate with Iran only several times a year, and a small minority (10%) do not communicate regularly with Iran.

Chart 1 – Family Links to Iran



- *Travel Patterns to Iran.* Over half of those surveyed indicated that they either never (24%) or rarely (34%) travel to Iran. On the other hand, thirty percent (30%) of Iranian Americans travel to Iran once every 2-3 years, and eleven percent (11%) once a year or more.

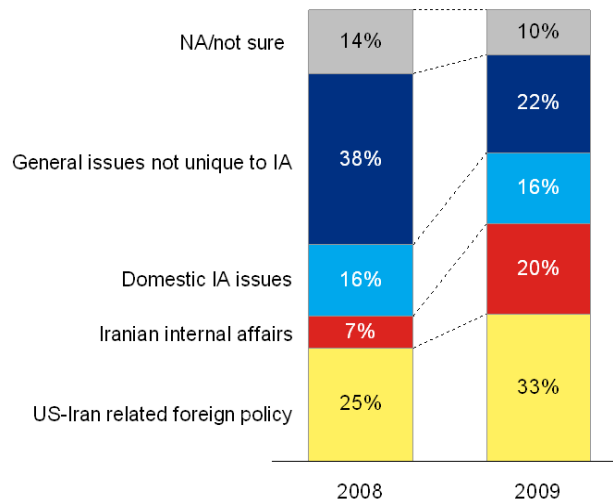
Chart 2 – Frequency of Travel to Iran



- *Issues of Importance.* In comparison to the results of the 2008 survey, foreign policy issues involving U.S.-Iran relations and the internal affairs of Iran have significantly

risen in importance to Iranian Americans. More specifically, twenty percent (20%) of the 2009 respondents stated that Iranian internal affairs were the most important issue to them as compared to only seven percent (7%) in 2008. Similarly, thirty-three percent (33%) of respondents indicated that U.S.-Iran foreign policy issues were the most important to them, compared to twenty-five percent (25%) in 2008. In this year's survey, twenty-two percent (22%) of respondents cite issues that are not unique to the Iranian American community (i.e., health care, education) as being most important, while sixteen percent (16%) cite domestic Iranian American issues (i.e., civil rights) as most important to them.

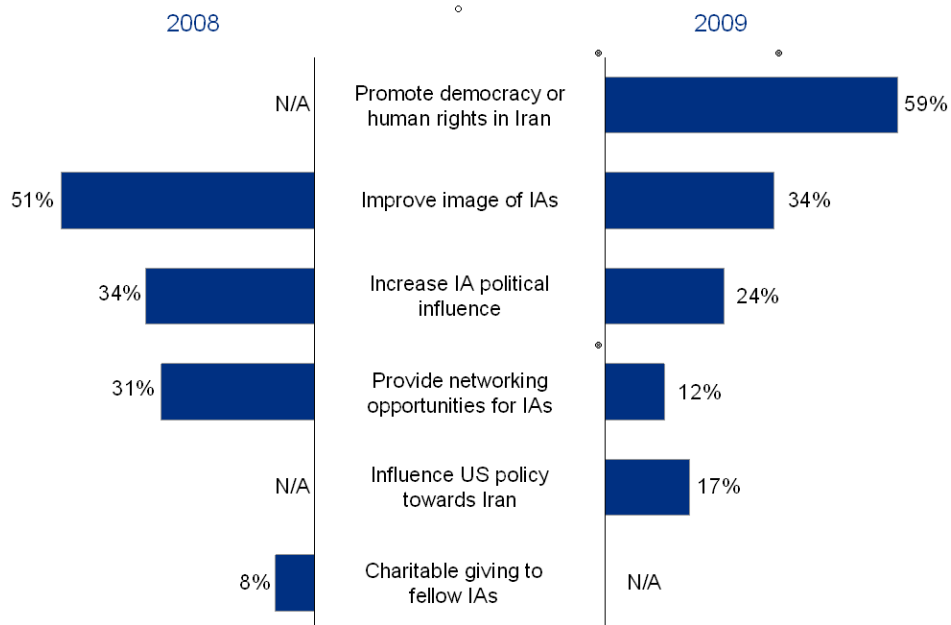
Chart 3 – Most Important Issues to IA Community



- What should be the Major Goals of an IA Civic Organization*<sup>1</sup>? When asked to name the two main goals expected of an Iranian American community or civic organization, a smaller percentage of respondents than in 2008 cited improving the image of Iranian Americans (34% as opposed to 51% in 2008), increasing the political influence of Iranian Americans in the U.S. (24% as opposed to 34% in 2008), or providing networking opportunities for Iranian Americans (12% as opposed to 31% in 2008). On the other hand, a majority (59%) of Iranian Americans surveyed in 2009 indicated that the promotion of democracy and human rights in Iran should be a major goal of an Iranian American civic organization, while only seventeen percent (17%) expect such an organization to aim to influence U.S. foreign policy towards Iran. The latter two options were not available to respondents as part of the 2008 survey.

<sup>1</sup> The results presented in this section are in response to a question asking what the respondent expects to be the *two* main goals of an Iranian American civic organization, and as such add up to more than 100%.

Chart 4 – What should be the Major Goals of an IA Organization?

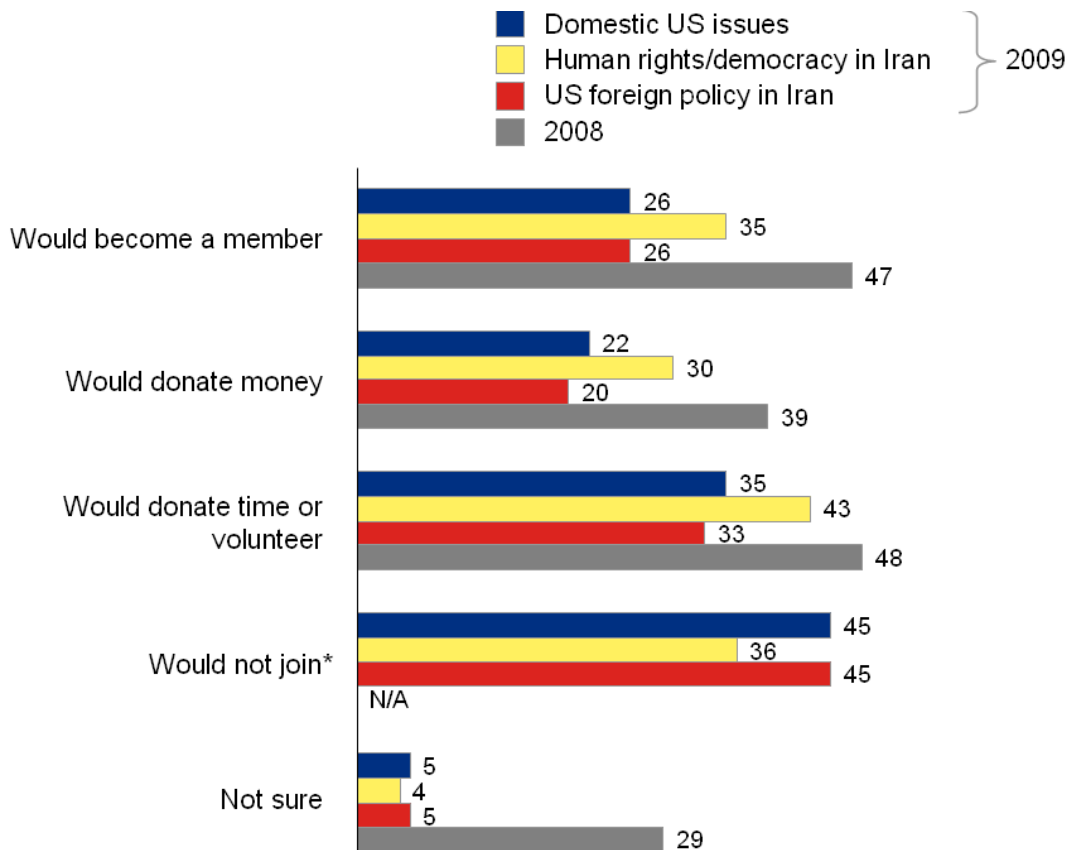


- Level of Involvement Depending on Focus of IA Organization.* The 2009 survey allowed respondents to indicate whether and the extent to which they would become involved with an Iranian American organization that primarily focuses on domestic U.S. issues of importance to Iranian Americans, U.S.-Iran foreign policy issues or the promotion of human rights and democracy in Iran. In the aftermath of events in Iran following the disputed June 12<sup>th</sup> presidential election, approximately one-third more Iranian Americans surveyed in 2009 indicated that they would become involved (join/donate money/donate time) with organizations focusing on the promotion of democracy and human rights in Iran than they would if such an organization was instead focused on either domestic U.S. issues or U.S.-Iran foreign policy issues.

From among respondents who indicated that they would not join an Iranian American organization focusing on the promotion of democracy and human rights in Iran, the reasons cited included having family living in Iran (36%), traveling to Iran (19%), believing that Iranians living outside Iran have no effective role to play regarding developments there (31%), and developments in Iran not being important to them (17%).



Chart 5 – Level of Involvement Depending on IA Organization’s Focus<sup>2</sup>

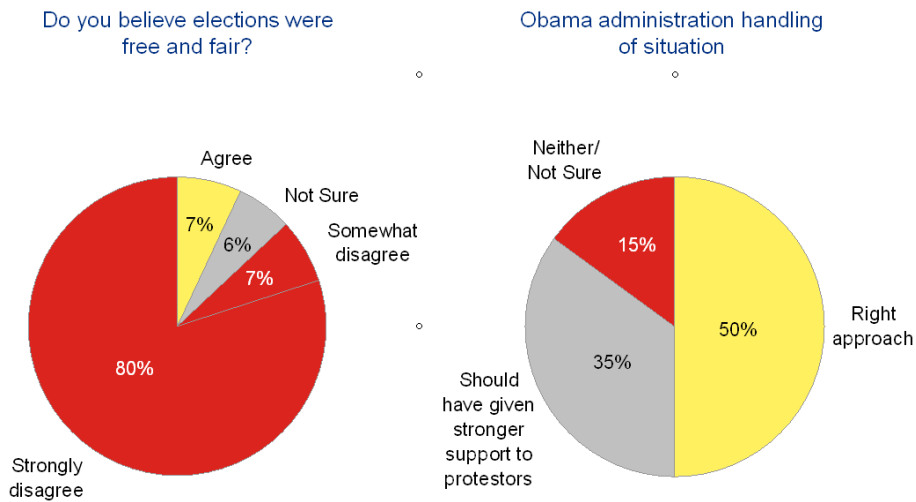


- Views on Iran Election and the Obama Administration’s Response.* An overwhelming majority (80%) of Iranian Americans surveyed strongly believe that the June 12<sup>th</sup> presidential election in Iran was not free and fair. In contrast, only seven percent (7%) of respondents believe the election was free and fair, and only six percent (6%) were unsure.

When asked for their opinion of the Obama Administration’s reaction to the outcome of the June election in Iran and ensuing events, half of the respondents (50%) indicated that the administration had in their view adopted the right approach. In contrast, thirty-five percent (35%) of those surveyed suggested that the Obama Administration should have been more actively engaged and should have provided stronger support to the election protestors.

<sup>2</sup> In 2008, respondents were generally asked “how involved would you be in an Iranian American community or civic organization if one were created.”

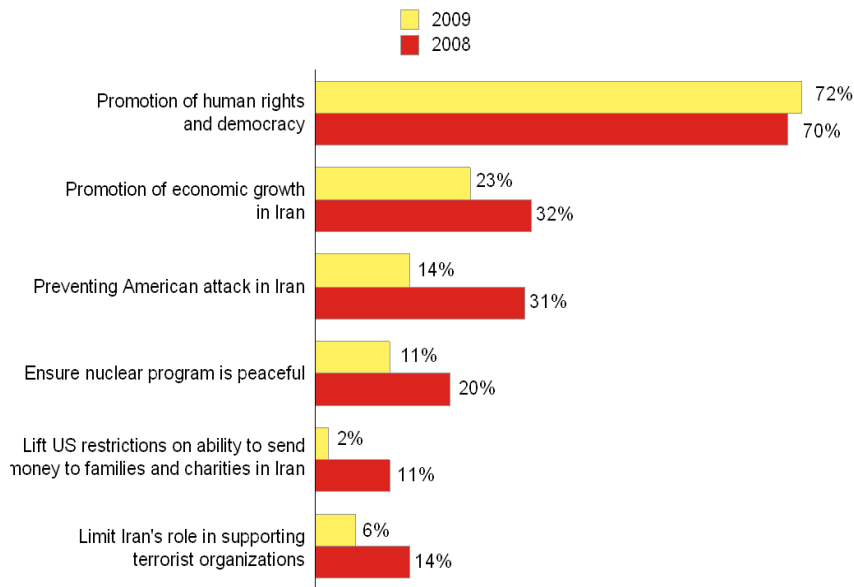
Chart 6 – Views on Iran Election and Obama Administration’s Response



- Most Important Issues Relating to U.S.-Iran Relations***<sup>3</sup>. As in the 2008 survey, when asked to name the two most important issues relating to U.S.-Iran relations, a significant majority of about seventy percent (70%) of Iranian Americans surveyed cited the promotion of democracy and human rights in Iran as most important. Interestingly, other issues, such as promotion of economic growth in Iran, preventing an American military attack on Iran, ensuring that Iran’s nuclear program is peaceful, lifting U.S. sanctions on Iran and limiting Iran’s role in supporting terrorist organizations, all received slightly fewer votes in 2009 than they had in 2008. According to the 2009 survey results, the second most important issue relating to U.S.-Iran relations from the perspective of Iranian Americans was promoting regime change, with thirty-three percent (33%) of the respondents citing it as important (this was not one of the available options in the 2008 survey).

<sup>3</sup> The results presented in this section are in response to a question asking the respondents to choose their top *two* choices, and as such add up to more than 100%.

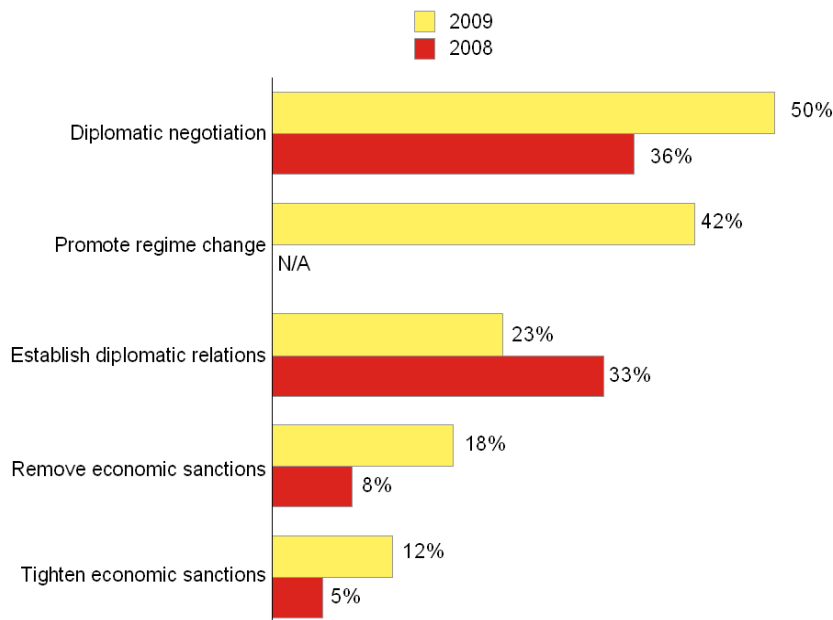
Chart 7 – Most Important Issues Relating to U.S.-Iran Relations



- U.S. Policy Towards Iran*<sup>4</sup>. Iranian Americans surveyed appear to be almost equally divided on the question of what U.S. policy towards Iran would best serve American interests, with fifty percent (50%) of respondents citing diplomatic negotiation – by comparison, only thirty-six percent (36%) of those surveyed in 2008 cited this option - and forty-two percent (42%) citing promotion of regime change (this was not one of the available options in the 2008 survey). The number of respondents citing the establishment of diplomatic relations with Iran as being in the best interests of the U.S. significantly dropped from thirty-three percent (33%) in 2008 to twenty-three percent (23%) in 2009. Finally, of those responding to the 2009 survey, eighteen percent (18%) believe removing economic sanctions would best serve U.S. interests, whereas a slightly smaller twelve percent (12%) would favor tightening economic sanctions. An equally small number of respondents (7% in 2008 and 5% in 2009) believe U.S. military action would be in the best interests of the United States.

<sup>4</sup> The results presented in this section are in response to a question asking the respondents to choose their top *two* choices, and as such add up to more than 100%.

Chart 8 – What Action would be in the Best Interest of the U.S.?



- *Role of Iranian Diaspora and IA Organizations Re Political Developments in Iran.* When asked about the role, if any, of the Iranian Diaspora and Iranian American organizations with respect to political developments in Iran, fifty-five percent (55%) of the respondents suggested that they should support the democratic aspirations of the people of Iran, fifty percent (50%) indicated that they should actively support the democratic movement in Iran, forty-five percent (45%) supported high quality media broadcasting to Iran, and thirty-five percent (35%) suggested that they should advocate with respect to U.S. foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran. In contrast, only eleven percent (11%) of Iranian Americans surveyed believe Iranians living outside Iran have no effective role to play with respect to political developments there.

## Characteristics of Respondents

Sample Characteristics	Frequency	Valid Percent*
Sample Size	401	100
East	65	16
South	126	31
Central/Great Lakes	83	21
West	128	32
Democrat	212	54
Republican	36	9
Independent	110	28
18-29	43	11
30-49	133	34
50-64	159	41
65+	54	14
18-24	20	5
25-34	41	11
35-54	203	52
55-69	91	23
70+	34	9
Muslim	171	43
Christian	30	8
Zoroastrian	14	4
Baha'i	32	8
Jewish	27	7
Other	110	28
Male	207	52
Female	195	49
< \$25,000	50	14
\$25-35K	37	11
\$35-50K	45	13
\$50-75K	74	21
\$75-100K	50	14
\$100K+	98	28

\* Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent and might not total 100.

## Methodology

Zogby International was commissioned by PAAIA to conduct a telephone survey of Iranian American adults. The survey was conducted between August 24<sup>th</sup> and September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009 based on successful interviews in English with a representative sample of 402 Iranian American respondents. Each respondent answered approximately 35 questions. The respondents were randomly drawn from purchased Iranian surname lists. All of the respondents were above the age of eighteen, fifty-two percent (52%) of whom were male and forty-nine percent (49%) were female.

Zogby International surveys employ sampling strategies in which selection probabilities are proportional to population size within area codes and exchanges. Up to ten calls are made to reach a sampled phone number. Cooperation rates are calculated using one of the methodologies that are approved by the American Association for Public Opinion Research<sup>5</sup>, and are comparable to other professional public-opinion surveys conducted using similar sampling strategies<sup>6</sup>. *The margin of error for the results of this survey is +/- 5 percentage points*, which is an acceptable margin of error for a survey of this type. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

**Zogby International** is a pre-eminent polling firm that has been tracking public opinion throughout the world since 1984, and has a particular expertise in polling ethnic communities in the United States. For more information about Zogby International, you can visit its website at [www.zogby.com](http://www.zogby.com).

**Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA)** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nonsectarian, independent organization that represents the domestic interests of the Iranian American community before U.S. policymakers, opinion makers and the American public at large. PAAIA seeks to achieve its mission by focusing on three major areas of activities: Community Building, Image Building, and Influence Building. For more information about PAAIA, you can visit our website at [www.paaia.org](http://www.paaia.org).

For more information about or questions regarding this survey and its content, please contact PAAIA at [survey@paaia.org](mailto:survey@paaia.org) or at 202-828-8370. For more information about and questions regarding the methodology for conducting this survey, please contact Stephanie DeVries at Zogby International at [steph@zogby.com](mailto:steph@zogby.com) or 315-624-0200, x-273.

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<sup>5</sup> See COOP4 (p.38) in *Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates of Surveys*. The American Association for Public Opinion Research (2000).

<sup>6</sup> *Cooperation Tracking Study: April 2003 Update*, Jane M. Sheppard and Shelly Haas. The Council for Marketing & Opinion Research (CMOR). Cincinnati, Ohio (2003).

### III. QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESULTS

1. Which of the following issues is most important to you?

	2008	2009
Domestic issues involving Iranian-Americans (e.g., civil rights/discrimination, etc . . . )	16	16
Foreign policy issues involving U.S.-Iran relations	25	33
Internal Affairs of Iran (Iranian government, Iranian society, etc . . . )	7	20
Issues that affect my life, family and community and are not unique to Iranian-Americans	38	22
None of the above	7	6
Not sure	7	4

\* Respondents were asked to choose only one

2. What would you expect to be the two main goals of an Iranian-American community or civic organization?

	2008	2009
Improve the image of Iranian-Americans	51	34
Educate Iranian-Americans about the U.S. political process and increase the political influence of the Iranian-American community	34	24
Preserve and promote the culture and heritage of the Iranian-American community	38	22
Provide business and social networking opportunities to Iranian-Americans	31	12
Influence U.S. Policy toward Iran	**	17
Promote democracy and human rights in Iran	**	59
Charitable giving to benefit fellow Iranian Americans	8	**
Not Sure		4

\* Respondents were asked to choose only two

\*\* Not asked

3. Do any of the following family members still live in Iran for at least three months each year?

	2008**	2009
Immediate Family	59	62
Grandparents	21	27
Cousins/Aunts/Uncles	74	72
Close Friends or other relatives	62	55
Other Relatives	***	43
I have no family living in Iran	9	7
Not Sure	1	--

\* Respondents were asked to choose all that apply

\*\* In 2008 we asked about 'at least a significant portion of each year'

\*\*\* Not Asked

4. How often do you travel to Iran?

	2008	2009
Once a year or more	7	11
Once every 2-3 years	29	30
I rarely travel to Iran	32	34
I've never been back to Iran	28	**
I've never been to Iran	4	24
Not Sure	<1	1

\*\* Not Asked

5. How frequently do you communicate with your family in Iran—daily, several times per week, several times per month, several times per year or not at all?

Daily	6
Several times per week	23
Several times per month	39
Several times per year	21
I do not communicate regularly with my family in Iran	10
Not sure	1



6. Which of the following do you use to communicate with your family and friends in Iran?

Email	40
Regular Mail	7
Telephone	88
Skype	4
Twitter	2
Facebook	12
Other social networking sites (Myspace, etc . . .)	3
I do not communicate regularly with my family in Iran	7
Not sure	1

\* Respondents were asked to choose all that apply

7. How involved would you be in an Iranian-American community or civic organization that is focused on domestic issues of Iranian-Americans in the United States?

	2008**	2009
I would become a member	47	26
I would donate money	39	22
I would donate time or volunteer	48	35
I would be willing to help recruit others to join	35	22
I would not want to be involved	***	45
Not Sure	29	5

\* Respondents were asked to choose all that apply

\*\* In 2008 respondents were asked “How involved would you be in an Iranian-American community or civic group if one were created?”

\*\*\* Not Asked

8. How important is your ethnic heritage in defining your identity – very important, somewhat important, or not important?

	2008	2009
Very Important	56	55
Somewhat Important	30	30
Not Very Important	13	13
Not Sure	1	2

9. How closely do you follow news from Iran—very closely, somewhat closely, not very closely or not at all closely?

	2008	2009
Very closely	41	50
Somewhat closely	37	35
Not very closely	16	10
Not at all closely	6	5
Not Sure	1	--

10. How closely do you follow news about the recent presidential election in Iran and its aftermath—very closely, somewhat closely, not very closely or not at all closely?

Very closely	59
Somewhat closely	27
Not very closely	7
Not at all closely	7
Not Sure	1

11. How would you rate President Obama’s handling of the Iranian election – excellent, good, fair or poor?

Excellent	26
Good	26
Fair	18
Poor	21
Not Sure	9

12. Which of the following two statements best describes your opinion of the Obama administration's handling of the Iranian election?

**Statement A:** *The Obama Administration should have been more actively engaged in the Iranian election and should have given stronger support to the election protestors.*

**Statement B:** *The Obama Administration was right to keep the American government from meddling in the Iranian election or interfering with the election protestors.*

Statement A	35
Statement B	50
Neither	11
Not Sure	4

13. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement – *I believe the Iranian election was free and fair.*

Strongly Agree	3
Somewhat Agree	4
Somewhat Disagree	7
Strongly Disagree	80
Not Sure	6

14. Of the following issues relating to U.S.-Iran relations, which two are most important to you?

	2008	2009
Promotion of human rights and democracy in Iran	70	72
Promotion of economic growth in Iran	32	23
Ensuring Iran's nuclear program is for peaceful purposes	20	11
Lifting U.S. restrictions on ability of individuals to send money to families and charities in Iran	11	7
Limiting Iran's role in supporting terrorist organizations	14	6
Preventing an American military strike against Iran	31	14
Promoting regime change	**	33
None of the above	3	3
Not Sure	2	2

\* Respondents were asked to choose top two choices

\*\* Not asked

15. Which of the following U.S. actions towards Iran do you believe would be in the best interest of the United States?

	2008**	2009
Military Action	7	5
Diplomatic Negotiations	36	50
Remove economic sanctions	8	18
Tighten economic sanctions	5	12
Establish diplomatic relations	33	23
Promote Regime Change	***	42
None of the Above	7	4
Not Sure	5	3

\* Respondents were asked to choose top two choices

\*\* Respondents were asked 'Which of the following U.S. actions relating to Iran will be in the best interests of the United States?'

\*\*\* Not asked

16. What should be the role of the Iranian Diaspora and Iranian-American organizations with respect to political developments in Iran?

Expressions of support for the democratic aspirations of the people of Iran	55
Active support for the democratic movement in Iran	50
Support high quality independent media broadcasting to Iran	45
Advocate with respect to U.S. foreign policy with Iran	35
Establish an opposition movement outside Iran with the goal of bringing about political change in Iran	31
None of the above – Iranians living outside Iran have no effective role to play	11
Not Sure	13

\* Respondents were asked to choose all that apply

17. How involved would you be in an Iranian-American community or civic organization whose major objective is the promotion of human rights and democracy in Iran?

18. How involved would you be in an Iranian-American community or civic organization whose major objective is advocating on matters of U.S. foreign policy toward Iran?

Major Objective	2008**	Focused on Domestic U.S. Issues	Promotion of Human Rights & Dem in Iran	Advocating on U.S. Foreign Policy on Iran
I would become a member	47	26	35	26
I would donate money	39	22	30	20
I would donate time or volunteer	48	35	43	33
I would be willing to help recruit others to join	35	22	27	19
I would not want to be involved	***	45	36	45
Not Sure	29	5	4	7

\* Respondents were asked to choose all that apply

\*\* In 2008 respondents were asked “How involved would you be in an Iranian-American community or civic group if one were created?”

\*\*\* Not Asked

**19. (ASKED ONLY OF THOSE WHO RESPONDED ‘I WOULD NOT WANT TO BE INVOLVED’ TO THE PREVIOUS QUESTION)** For which of the following reasons would you not want to be involved in an Iranian-American organization whose major objective is the promotion of democracy and human rights in Iran or advocating on matters of U.S. foreign policy toward Iran?

I have family in Iran	36
I travel to Iran	19
Iranians living outside Iran have no effective role to play regarding developments in Iran	31
They are not important issues to me	17
Other	17
Not Sure	11

*\* Respondents were asked to choose all that apply*

**20. When did your family move to the United States**

Since 2000	12
1990-2000	15
1981-1990	22
1978-1980	19
Before 1978	30
Not Sure	1

*\* 2008 Numbers (since 2000, 12%; 1990-2000, 17%; 1979-1990, 25%; Before 1979, 45%)*