UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Politicization and Racialization: Iranian American Political Participation and Identity Formation

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction for the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Political Science

by

Archie Delshad

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Louis DeSipio, Chair
Professor Michael Tesler
Professor Rodolfo Torres

2019

DEDICATION

To my Ciasteczko,

for your unconditional love and support.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the incredible goodwill of the hundreds of people I interviewed and surveyed. I spent hours in strangers' homes, in front of grocery stores, ethnic landmarks, coffee shops, and restaurants speaking to hundreds of people who, despite their fears and worries about my motivations, graciously volunteered their time and their personal histories to someone they have never met. Without their contributions, the pages to follow would be blank.

I would also like to thank the undergraduate students who contributed to my data collection – I had an amazing group of students that volunteered their time to help me in passing out surveys to the Iranian American community.

I am forever indebted to my committee for their tremendous support, both personal and professional. Louis DeSipio, Michael Tesler, and Rudy Torres provided invaluable guidance, insight, and encouragement. Their perspicacity played a significant role in improving this project, but the shortcomings herein are solely my own. In addition to the members of my committee, Stan Bailey, Matthew Beckmann, Graeme Boushey, Naji Dahi, Russ Dalton, Raul Fernandez, Marek Kaminski, Chuck O'Connell, Davin Phoenix, and Judy Stepan-Norris afforded me the privilege of learning from inspirational, committed scholars. I appreciate all of you more than words can express.

My colleagues at UCI, thank you for your help with the program and/or the time spent procrastinating as well. Alfredo, Peter, Natalie, Maneesh, Marcos, Rodolfo, Dan, Dana, Nicole, Jason, Misty, Trevor, Tyson, Graham, John, Josh– you all impacted me in one way or another.

The administrative staff at UC Irvine facilitated my journey throughout the program. Claudia Cheffs, Andrew Hallak, Liz Nguyen, Shani Brasier, and John Sommerhauser – thank you for the incredible wealth of knowledge and assistance in navigating through the policies and procedures on campus.

I'd also like to say thank you to my friends and family for their camaraderie. Melika, Afsheen, Alex, Geoff, Elsa, Mike – you've been sources of inspiration, entertainment, and joy. Maria joon, thank you for teaching me how to read and write Farsi (I still have my workbook and all my stickers). Baba, maman, my amehs and amoos, thank you. Ameh Parvin, may you rest in peace. The world got a whole lot darker after your passing. Your support meant and continues to mean the world to me; you were someone I could always turn to during the tough times. The divide between our countries kept us apart, but I carry your spirit and sagacity with me always.

دل به دل راه داره

My Fullerton College family – you've all been amazing. I made the decision to pursue this career ten years ago and I'm so excited to join the Department of Political Science as the first new hire in nineteen years. To all of my students, thank you for energy and passion. You are sources of inspiration and I learn as much from you as you learn from me.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Archie A. Delshad

Current Positions & Research Interests

Assistant Professor of Political Science — **May 2019 - Present**
Fullerton College — Fullerton, CA

Research & Teaching Interests: American politics and government, Middle Eastern politics, racial and ethnic politics in the United States, economic democracy, political theory, political participation, mixed-methodological research, and police brutality

Education

PhD in Political Science — **September 2019**
Dissertation: *Politicization and Racialization: Iranian American Political Participation and Identity Formation* — Irvine, CA
University of California, Irvine
Committee: Louis DeSipio, Michael Tesler, and Rudy Torres

MA in Political Science — **June 2014**
Fields: American Government and Race & Ethnicity — Irvine, CA
University of California, Irvine

BA in Political Science (with Honors) and Sociology — **June 2012**
Summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa — Irvine, CA
University of California, Irvine

AA in Political Science (with Honors) — **May 2010**
Fullerton College — Fullerton, CA

Teaching Experience

Fullerton College

- *American Government* & *Government and Politics of the Middle East* — **Spring 2019**
- *American Government* (Two Sections) & *Political Theory* — **Fall 2018**
- *American Government* — **Summer 2018**
- *American Government* (Two Sections) — **Spring 2018**
- *American Government* (Two Sections) — **Fall 2017**
- *American Government* — **Summer 2017**
- *American Government* (Two Sections) — **Spring 2017**
- *American Government* — **Fall 2016**
- *American Government* — **Summer 2016**
- *American Government* — **Spring 2016**

Cal Poly Pomona

- *Introduction to American Government* (Three Sections)	**Spring 2019**
- *Introduction to American Government* (Three Sections)	**Fall 2018**
- *Introduction to American Government* (Two Sections)	**Spring 2018**
- *Introduction to American Government* (Three Sections)	**Winter 2018**
- *Introduction to American Government* (Three Sections)	**Fall 2017**

University of California, Irvine (Teaching Assistant Positions)

- *Introduction to Domestic Gangs,* Dr. Al Valdez	**Spring 2019**
- *Introduction to American Government (online)*, Dr. Louis DeSipio	**Summer 2018**
- *Introduction to Juvenile Gangs,* Dr. Al Valdez	**Spring 2018**
- *Transnational Gangs*, Dr. Al Valdez	**Winter 2018**
- *Introduction to Gangs*, Dr. Al Valdez	**Fall 2017**
- *Introduction to American Government (online)*, Dr. Louis DeSipio	**Summer 2017**
- *Transnational Gangs*, Dr. Al Valdez	**Winter 2017**
- *Understanding Violence*, Dr. Al Valdez	**Fall 2016**
- *Introduction to American Government (online)*, Dr. Louis DeSipio	**Summer 2016**
- *Transnational Gangs*; *Prison Gangs*, Dr. Al Valdez	**Winter 2016**
- *Introduction to Gangs*, Dr. Al Valdez	**Fall 2015**
- *Introduction to American Government (online)*, Dr. Louis DeSipio	**Summer 2015**
- *Introduction to Juvenile Gangs*, Dr. Al Valdez	**Spring 2015**
- *The American Presidency*, Dr. Matthew Beckmann	**Winter 2015**
- *Introduction to American Government*, Dr. Graeme Boushey	**Fall 2014**
- *Introduction to Race and Ethnicity (online),* Dr. Louis DeSipio	**Summer 2014**
- *Game Theory and Politics*, Dr. Marek Kaminski	**Spring 2014**
- *Voting & Political Manipulation*, Dr. Marek Kaminski	**Winter 2014**
- *Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality*, Dr. Charles O'Connell	**Fall 2013**
- *Introduction to Race and Ethnicity (online)*, Dr. Louis DeSipio	**Summer 2013**
- *Game Theory and Politics*, Dr. Marek Kaminski	**Winter 2013**
- *Introduction to Sociology*, Dr. Charles O'Connell	**Fall 2012**

Publications

Arora, Maneesh, Davin Phoenix, and **Archie Delshad**. 2018. "Framing Police and Protesters: Assessing Volume and Framing of News Coverage Post-Ferguson, and Corresponding Impacts on Legislative Activity." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* (forthcoming).

Archie Delshad with Rodolfo D. Torres. "From the Golden Door to the Dumping Ground: An Examination of the Reception of Mexican American and Iranian American Immigrants in the United States." In *Borders of Mass Destruction: Racialization, National Belonging and "the Refugee,"* eds. Christopher Kyriakides and Rodolfo D. Torres (forthcoming).

Conference Presentations

- "Police Autonomy or Police Accountability?"	**May 13, 2017**
Center for the Study of Democracy	Irvine, CA

- "Iranian American Political Assimilation" **October 12, 2016**
  York University Invited Speaker: Reception Contexts Toronto, ON

- "Union Effects on Political Participation" **April 1, 2015**
  Western Political Science Association Las Vegas, NV

- "Participation, Inequality and Political Support" **May 30, 2012**
  Center for the Study of Democracy Irvine, CA

Fellowships and Awards

- Associate Dean Fellowship **Fall 2018**
- School of Social Sciences Merit Fellowship **Spring 2017**
- School of Social Sciences Merit Fellowship **Spring 2016**
- Center for the Study of Democracy Research Assistantship **Summer 2014**
- Center for the Study of Democracy Research Assistantship **Summer 2013**
- Center for Ethics and Morality Internship (Declined) **Summer 2013**
- School of Social Sciences Merit Fellowship **Fall 2012**
- Special Funding Award from the Associate Dean **Fall 2012**
- University of California, Irvine Order of Merit **Spring 2012**

Affiliations

- American Political Science Association
- Center for the Study of Democracy, UC Irvine
- Political Science Graduate Student Association, UC Irvine
- Phi Beta Kappa
- Pi Omicron Chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha
- California Pi Chapter of Pi Gamma Mu
- Sigma Alpha Pi Chapter of the National Society of Leadership and Success

Languages

- English: native speaking, reading, and writing
- Farsi: native speaking; minimal reading and writing

Software and Technical Skills

Learning Management
- Blackboard
- Canvas (Online Teaching Certificate awarded 2018)
- Moodle

Software
- Microsoft Excel
- Microsoft OneNote
- Microsoft PowerPoint
- Microsoft Word
- ParScore

Data Analysis
- fs/QCA
- SPSS
- STATA

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Politicization and Racialization: Iranian American Political Participation and Identity Formation

By

Archie Delshad

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Irvine, 2019

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This dissertation provides an exploratory, descriptive, and empirical analysis of the case of Iranian Americans. I investigate the historical trajectory that has contributed to the largest Iranian American diaspora outside of Iran settling in the United States. I provide a primer on the case of Iranian Americans by examining the history of Iran, including the periods before and after Islam, the major cleavages of immigration, the Iranian Revolution and its aftermath, and a description of the ethnic and religious groups in Iran. I compiled two unique datasets in the process: the Iranian American Survey Project (IASP) and the Iranian American Interview Project (IAIP). The former contains 427 unique survey respondents and sought to understand the political participation of the Iranian American community specifically. The latter is composed of 50 unique interview participants and is more focused on the question of racial/ethnic identity. In Chapter Three, I discuss the relative lack of political participation amongst the Iranian American community. I argue this is due largely to the lack of democracy in Iran and a failure to assimilate into the political norms of the United States. In Chapter Four, I discuss the formation of identity and find a complicated process that I have modeled as blending and opting, in which Iranian

Americans are blended either in or out with whites and choose to opt in or out of their cultures. Since Iranian Americans belong to the category of honorary whites (Bonilla-Silva and Glover 2004), their ability to navigate the border of white and nonwhite depends largely on their desires to do so. Managing the duality of their ethnicity also hinges on how Iranian Americans are perceived and racialized by others. The results herein are not unique to Iranian Americans; I believe that the case of Iranian Americans is an important one for scholars of assimilation, political participation, and race and ethnicity.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE MAN IN THE GROCERY STORE AND THE WOMEN FROM AFGHANISTAN

I was eleven years old when I realized what my race was. To be clear, I always knew that something was *different* about me compared to my peers, but that difference was not fully revealed until after September 11, 2001. On that Tuesday morning, I rushed to get ready for school, got into my father's car, and turned on the radio. Only instead of music, the station's hosts were discussing hijackings of multiple aircrafts and attacks on US soil. When I arrived at school, we spent the entire schoolday watching the news, and I learned more about what happened – "Two airplanes have crashed into the World Trade Center, in an apparent terrorist attack on our country," – an excerpt from President Bush's speech in the immediate aftermath was replayed over and over. The networks reported on the events as they happened, and focus quickly shifted to who the perpetrators were.

Three days after 9/11, my father and I went to the grocery store to buy milk and cereal, groceries for the next day's breakfast. There was only one checkout line open and a man was unloading his groceries as we approached. Even now, almost twenty years later, I still remember everything about the man. The image on his shirt was a large American flag that covered most of his torso and yellow letters spelled out "Vietnam Veteran" on his baseball cap. While the man waited for the cashier to finish ringing up his purchases, my father and I approached the conveyor belt to set down our groceries when he noticed us. Without hesitating, he bellowed: "Get the fuck out of this country you stupid sand niggers!"

At first, I didn't understand exactly what the man had said – I was just an eleven year old kid hoping I would be able to convince my father to let me get a candy bar. "Sand nigger?" Never heard of one. I checked behind us to see who the man was yelling at, and by the time I

turned around, I realized his eyes were locked on us. "You damn Muslim terrorists go back to your country!"

My father, privy to acts of individual racism in his life, responded in kind: "Fuck to you, you son of the bitch! You go back to your country!" After more insults were exchanged between my father and the man, he collected his things and continued to insult us on his way out of the store. After he left, the cashier apologized to us, rang us up, and we left the store. On the car ride home, my father told me not to worry about the man. These things happen. It's part of being Iranian in America. It's just the way things are. As the comedian Hasan Minhaj puts it, "… you pay the American dream tax. You endure racism, and if it doesn't cost you your life, pay it."[1] we paid the American dream tax that day, but I've never been able to forget the man's face and I've never been able to forget how angry he was. At the time, I also didn't understand how the man knew we were Muslims, albeit we were Muslims in name only.

I most likely had heard the word "terrorist" before President Bush's address the morning of September 11th, but I had never thought about it in any meaningful sense. I spent the weekend thinking about the incident at the grocery store, asked my dad what the man meant when he called us "terrorists," and how the man knew we were Muslim. He explained to me that the man thought we looked like the people responsible for 9/11. That weekend I realized what was so clear to the man in the grocery store but had yet to reveal itself to me; sure, everyone looks different – but I looked *really different* from all of them. By the time Monday morning's class began, the only thing on my mind was what happened the Friday before; the words the man ran through my thoughts. When the bell rang and it was time for the Pledge of Allegiance, no one – and I mean no one – could have been more patriotic than I was. It was all I could do to try and blend in with my (mostly) American classmates. Don't mind me, I'm a proud American and I'm

[1] See Hasan Minhaj, *Homecoming King* (2017).

definitely not a terrorist. In the coming days, the American people learned that the United States was preparing to go to war with the people responsible for committing the terrorist attacks on 9/11: Afghanistan.

Afghanistan? I had never heard of it. I quickly learned that Afghanistan was a country that bordered Iran, the place of my parents' birth. Do people think I am one of *them*? The man surely did, so it was my goal to make sure people knew whose side I was on. One afternoon, during our class trip to the computer lab, and opportunity presented itself to ensure no one could ever confuse me with *them*. After I finished my work, I found myself with free time to play around on the computer. The lab at my elementary school was stocked with those Macintosh bubble computers popular in the 1990s, and all of them had a software program on them called "Kidpix Studio" – a rudimentary animator and drawing program. I seized this free time to copy an image of Afghanistan from a website online into the program and proceeded to animate bombs and flames all over the country. Proud of what I had accomplished, I called my friends over to see the masterpiece. The fires glistened and the bombs exploded as my friends looked and laughed. I felt a sense of relief knowing they wouldn't associate me with *them*. Patriotic Pledge, bomb the enemy; my prepubescent brain thought I'd done enough.

A few years later, I still worried about how people would perceive me. I continued my enthusiastic recitation of the Pledge every day and was careful not to speak Farsi around my friends or even invite people to my apartment too often. I didn't want to risk exposing people to the sights (and smells) of a Persian household. Our food looked and tasted different and I worried how people would perceive me if they thought I was *too* different. While working at my after-high-school job at a candy shop one day, I heard two women speaking a language that sounded an awful lot like my own. I approached the women and asked them for the name of the

language, and they told me they were speaking Dari. Nonplussed, I asked the two women if Dari was somehow related to Farsi. They explained to me that Dari *is* Farsi, just the Farsi that is spoken in their home country, Afghanistan. I thanked them and they went on their way. After I clocked out of my shift, I got in my car and started the drive home. As I replayed the day's events in my head, I recalled meeting the women and for some reason, my artistic endeavors all those years ago on KidPix popped into my head. "Wait a minute, didn't I bomb those people?" I thought. I had never met someone from Afghanistan (at least, not that I knew of) before that interaction, and the two women reminded me a lot of Iranians. They couldn't have been nicer. I spent the next few weeks thinking about how I had developed my own prejudices towards Afghans, largely because of my desire to avoid the negative consequences of racialization.

My opinions on my identity began to shift during this time. After a trip to Iran, I stopped seeing myself as *just another* American. After I returned to the United States, I conversed with family members in Iran regularly and began to develop a sense of pride concerning my heritage. I also felt a great sense of remorse for harboring negative opinions about Afghans, and vowed to never do anything of the sort again. As a personal reminder to the two Afghan women, I decided that I would no longer stand for the Pledge and/or national anthem. By this point in time, the war was ongoing and opinions started to shift. This period changed my racial/ethnic identity, but also forced me to question the United States' involvement in wars in the Middle East and resulted in changing my political identity. I became more interested in politics and eventually decided on a career path in the field, despite the protestations of my father that the only acceptable career was "doctor, lawyer, engineer, or computer science." These personal experiences not only activated my interest in politics, but also increased my readiness to identify myself as an Iranian and to do so proudly.

Navigating my dualistic identity and blending in to American society as a Middle Eastern American post 9/11 was a deliberative process full of individual negotiations. My personal experience illustrates the struggle of balancing two (often) competing national ties – one to the home country and one to the new country, the latter of which involves a complicated context of reception. Over the past century, the Middle East has come to be one of the most geopolitically important places in the world. Its vast resources and tumultuous civic society have produced millions of emigrants, many of which have settled here in the United States. These immigrants have experienced varying reception contexts throughout the last 100 years depending on the world events going on around them. Some have assimilated in hopes of blending in with white majorities, while others remain firmly committed to their racial/ethnic heritage.

In looking at the case of Iranian Americans, this dissertation examines the political avenues employed by Iranian Americans to communicate their desires to politicians, as well as the processes Iranian Americans use to cultivate their racial identities. This dissertation seeks to answer the following research questions:

1) What events caused first generation[2] Iranian Americans to immigrate to the United States? How can we understand the Iranian American immigrant experience?
2) How political are Iranian Americans? What parts of the political process do Iranian Americans use to communicate their desires to decision-makers?
3) How do Iranian Americans shape their identities, and to what extent are their identities shaped by others?

[2] There is significant ambiguity concerning the generational status of immigrants. For clarity, I use the United States Census Bureau's definition of generations." The first generation refers to those who are foreign born. The second generation refers to those with at least one foreign-born parent," (United States Census Bureau, 2016).

4) What does the Iranian American immigrant experience tell us about dualistic identity? Do Iranian Americans view themselves as more Iranian or more American?

Understanding how individuals negotiate their ethnic/racial and political identities is of particular importance to political scientists. The findings from this dissertation will complicate how we see race, racialization, political participation, politicization, and assimilation of immigrant groups.

Methodology and Datasets

In order to answer these questions, I created two original datasets (one quantitative and one qualitative). I also borrow from a second quantitative dataset, commissioned by the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA) and conducted by Zogby Research Services. The original datasets (IASP and IAIP) are both local to Orange County and Los Angeles County, while the Zogby study is a national survey of 402 randomly selected respondents.

Iranian American Survey Project

The quantitative dataset is titled the Iranian American Survey Project (IASP). The IASP was collected during 2015 and 2016 over the course of several months. I created the questionnaires based on 25 pilot interviews with friends and family conducted in an informal fashion. The pilot interviews had two main questions: what it means to be an Iranian American and what the participant thought about the (then-) current political environment. I was assisted by a group of undergraduate students who accompanied me in disseminating the surveys.

The research team recruited participants (N=427; 273 male, 139 female, 15 unspecified) ranging in age from 18 to 95 with a mean age of 43. Researchers were equipped with clipboards, pens, and both English (n=265) and Farsi (n=162) versions of the survey. Although most of the undergraduate students were not fluent in Farsi, the lead investigator accompanied the research team at all times and is fluent in the language. The principal investigator also set up a small table

with a banner that identified the team as researchers from the University of California, Irvine in both English and Farsi.

Collecting the surveys was a tedious process. Due to the events that unfolded in the Iranian Revolution and its aftermath, Iranian Americans are justifiably hesitant to divulge personal information to strangers. On many occasions, I was asked for more information regarding my project and often had to show potential participants my page on the UCI website before they were willing to complete the survey. Given that I became "a regular" at many of the locations I collected data, some other "regulars" would often interrupt their backgammon games and friendly commiserations to vouch for me.

Given the difficulties with collecting survey data from the Iranian American community, responses were collected over an eight-month period. Every researcher was instructed to ask every passerby if they identified as Iranian or Persian American, and then asked if they would be willing to take a short survey. Many respondents did not take the survey on the first approach, but given that our team collected data for several months, some did take the survey after multiple requests. Respondents were given unlimited time to complete the survey, but the average completion time was roughly ten minutes. Respondents were able to take the survey and return it at a later date, although in only three instances did someone take a survey and bring it back completed (many more did take the survey and not return it). Surveys were collected by a member of the research team and subsequently given to the principal investigator. All coding was handled by the principal investigator, including a round of reliability testing. Ten percent of the entire survey was coded twice in order to check for accuracy. Using a random number generator, the principal investigator generated a string of surveys to recode and no errors were found between the two surveys.

Iranian American Interview Project

In addition to the quantitative data collection, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 50 Iranian Americans.[3] The Iranian American Interview Project (IAIP) sample was accrued via snowball sampling.[4] Once the interview concluded, respondents were asked to identify additional Iranian Americans that would be interested in participating in an interview. Unlike the survey data, participants in the IAIP were much more willing to share their stories; I assume this is due to the fact that a trusted individual facilitated the introduction and vouched for my motives. All interviews were voice recorded with the exception of two (at the request of the participants), and transcribed at a later date. I used selective coding to identify the major themes related to my research questions, and was assisted by notes that I collected during each interview. Specifically, I looked for themes in the transcripts and my notes that discussed ideas around race, racialization, assimilation, politics, and political participation. I assigned each theme a color, and highlighted parts of the transcripts in that respective color for later interpretation. Nearly all interviews (n=43) took place in the participant's home, and the remaining interviews were conducted in a coffee shop or restaurant. Participants were interviewed individually with the goal of minimizing breaks.

Interviews began in an unstructured format, but I employed the questionnaire used in the IASP as a guide. I began each interview by asking the participant to tell me a little about themselves and whether they were born in the United States or if they were born abroad. If they did not volunteer their career during the introductory phase of their interview, I also asked them for this information. The shortest interview took approximately fifteen minutes, and the longest

[3] Although the excerpts I publish here have names, they are fictitious. I have picked a random Iranian first name and the name of a major Iranian city or province for the last name of the individual. It should not be assumed that an individual hails from a specific city or province, as each name was compiled using a random number generator.
[4] These interviews do not include the 25 interviews I completed in order to inform the IASP, but were collected after the survey data was compiled.

took over four hours.[5] With the exception of the four-hour interview, the rest were less than one hour (most hovered around thirty minutes). All participants were given the opportunity to discuss any topic they felt was important exhaustively. In doing so, I tried to leave room for participants to steer the conversation to try and uncover the "deep stories" they wanted to tell. Arlie Hochschild (2016) defines the deep story as the "story that *feels as if* it were true" (2016). This is the story that people share with one another, and it is the story that individuals cling onto despite what reality might suggest.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation has a twofold goal: (1) to understand Iranian American political participation and attitudes and (2) to understand Iranian American racial/ethnic identity. In Chapter Two, "From Persia to Iran to America: A Primer on Iranian Americans," I provide a descriptive account of the history of Iran and discuss relevant background information that is necessary to understand the Iranian immigrant reception context to the United States. This includes Iran before and after Islam, modern cleavages of immigration, the context of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and a description of the major Iranian religious and ethnic groups in the United States today.

In Chapter Three, "Iranian American Political Engagement," I explore Iranian American assimilation into the political system of the United States. I employ the use of the IASP and IAIP to categorize the avenues of political participation that Iranian Americans choose to engage with and explain the factors that contribute to their relative lack of political participation. I find that Iranian Americans have different norms for political participation depending on their level of assimilation and whether or not they categorize themselves as politically active.

[5] The four-hour interview was an outlier. This particular respondent was a leader of a prominent opposition party to the Iranian government and had unique insight into the organization's structure (and I was also persuaded to stay for dinner).

In Chapter Four, “Blending and Opting: Romanticizing the ‘Country That We Had’ and Developing Identity,” I assess how Iranian Americans shape their identities and how others, in turn, racialize them. Moreover, I uncover the “deep stories” (Hochschild, 2016) that Iranian Americans feel to be true about Iran, the context of their migrations, and their racial/ethnic identities. I find a strong sense of national pride amongst the first generation and indifference amongst the second. Additionally, I find that Iranian Americans identities are dependent on two processes I have labeled “blending” and “opting.”

In Chapter Five, “Conclusion: Bringing Iran to America,” I conclude the dissertation with a discussion of the results and provide a roadmap for future research, highlighting limitations of the present project. Although Iranian Americans have a complicated and unique history, I expect that the findings here may be of use to scholars of immigration, assimilation, race/ethnicity, and political participation. Understanding the complications of the Iranian American case will only broaden scholars’ conceptualizations of how people form their identities – both ethnic/racial and political.

Before moving onto Chapter Two, it is important to define the *Iranian* in *Iranian American* and how it relates to the *Persian* in *Persian American*. In the present study, I consider the two identical. Specifically, I use Iranian American to refer to those immigrants that were either born or whose parents were born in Iran. Many Iranians prefer the term *Persian* to *Iranian*, but in Farsi, one would simply state that they are "*Irāni*." However, there are a minority of Persians that hail from Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Syria that would prefer to be classified as Afghan, Armenian, Azeri, or Assyrian. All respondents were allowed to self-select their preferred racial/ethnic group in both of my datasets, so there may be some Afghan, Armenian, Azeri, or Assyrian respondents included in the data. As such, I take a generous view

and included those groups *if they self-selected* Iranian or Persian, but the conclusions drawn from this study may be less applicable to them. I do not expect this to be a major issue, as most Afghans, Armenians, Azeris, and Assyrians would select the most applicable ethnic/racial identity group (and their numbers are quite small).

CHAPTER TWO:

FROM PERSIA TO IRAN TO AMERICA: A PRIMER ON IRANIAN AMERICANS

In order to fully understand Iranian Americans, it is important to first understand the country of Iran, past and present. In Chapters Three and Four, I illustrate the importance of Iranian history to Iranian Americans, and this chapter seeks to highlight some of the important periods that help characterize the ethnic/racial and political identities of Iranian Americans. I begin by exploring the history of Iran, from the Achaemenid Empire to the modern Islamic Republic of Iran. Along the way, I discuss several important events in Persian/Iranian history: Through reading this chapter, the reader will develop a greater understanding of the Iranian American experience, reception contexts in the United States, and the complicated history of Iran and its people.

To Iranian Americans, Iran is both a mysterious and mythical place. The country today is marred by political conflict, oppression, and international discourse suggesting war is on the horizon. Despite these difficulties, Iranians look to their ancient histories and feel a great sense of pride. Every Iranian – regardless of their birth location – learns about the history of Iran and its predecessor, Persia. Situated on the eastern border of the Fertile Crescent, ancient Persians are one of the first societies in human civilization. Perhaps goaded on by Hegel's (2001) classification of the Achaemenids as the first historical peoples, contemporary Iranians relish the opportunity to *educate* those who are unaware of this fact. Regardless, ancient Persia itself did not become a political and social civilization until the reign of its first great king, Kourosh.

During his nearly 30 year reign, Kourosh, known in English as Cyrus the Great, established one of the largest empires in recorded history; by some accounts, it was also one of the greatest (Akram 2009). Cyrus cemented himself as a capable ruler and worked to garner the

respect of those he ruled, largely through his then-uncommon ruling practices. He created the "first proclamation of human rights in history," abolished slavery, and respected the religious customs of the people he conquered – all of which are anachronisms for his time (Xenophon 2006; Daryaee 2009). During Cyrus' time, most Persians followed the religious teachings of Zoroaster, and although it is not known if Cyrus considered himself a Zoroastrian, he was most likely influenced by the religion (Briant 2002). Nonetheless, Zoroastrianism remained the dominant religion in Iran until the seventh century AD.

Cyrus' viceroys, called Satraps, ruled across his vast empire. There is significant ambiguity concerning Cyrus' reign – some scholars suggest he was a fair and kind ruler, while others suggest he was authoritarian and oppressive. Both then and now, Jewish Iranians and non-Iranians hold Cyrus in great esteem, and he is the first person (and only non-Jew) to be called a messiah in the Bible. The ancient Greek historians Xenophon and Herodotus offer conflicting accounts of his reign, which has carried over into the modern-day (Briant 2002).

After Cyrus' death, the Achaemenid dynasty continued with his son, Cambyses II. Over the next two millennia, several additional Persian dynasties ruled in the Middle East: the Sasanians, the Safavids, the Afsharids, the Qajars, and the Pahlavis, amongst many other regional dynasties. Each dynasty contributed to the culture of modern Iran, but competition with other empires and constant warfare weakened Persian rule. Persian Empires reached high peaks and low valleys in competition with other empires, including Macedonian, Roman, Hun, Turk, Mongol, and Arab. During the reign of the Sasanians, the Persians notably fought the Byzantines for over 20 years (Howard-Johnston 2006). The Byzantine-Persian wars depleted Persian wealth and contributed to political and social unrest throughout the empire. By the time that Arab invaders arrived in Persia, the Persians armies were exhausted – both militarily and economically. In their attacks on

Mesopotamia in 633AD, the Arabs began to chip away at the Sasanian territory, which was not fully realized until Caliph Umar's invasion in 642 AD (Akram 2009). By 651 AD the Sasanian Empire fell; this marked the gradual end of Zoroastrianism in Persia as the forced conversions to Islam swept the country. Arabs burned Zoroastrian texts, executed priests, and attempted to suppress Persian identity through Arabization of the language and culture. Persians resisted; even today, there is still a minority movement in Iran that seeks to replace both Arabic loanwords to Farsi and the Arabic script in favor of a Manichaean, Pahlavi, or other abjad-based system of writing.

Although Iranian culture and language persevered the era of Arabization, Iran today has all but abandoned its Zoroastrian roots in favor of Islam. Shia Islam did not become the country's official religion until the Safavid dynasty declared it as such in 1501, possibly with the intention of bolstering support within the Persian-controlled territories and distancing Persians from non-Persians, who are primarily adherents to the more common Sunni sect of Islam (Boroujerdi 2017). Eventually, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and joint Soviet and British imperial efforts in Iran, the penultimate Persian dynasty was replaced with the final ruling family: the Pahlavis.

The Pahlavi dynasty was founded by Reza Khan in 1925, shortly after Ahmad Shah Qajar was stripped of his powers and exiled from the country (Abrahamian 1982; Abrahamian 2008). The new Shah almost immediately entered into an agreement with the Soviets that facilitated the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Gilan, ending the nascent Persian Soviet Socialist Republic and declared martial law. Reza Khan also began a massive modernization campaign throughout the country. His reforms included measures to bolster the Iranian ethnic identity (Persianization), Westernization, and economic liberalism. Some of his reforms were met with significant

opposition from the mostly religious, conservative masses in Iran, leading to social unrest and turmoil (Abrahamian 2008). He also banned the religious veil, the *chador*, which caused many conservative women to avoid going outside or attending social functions. In at least one case, a woman committed suicide rather than be seen without her veil (Abrahamian 2008).

Reza Shah's reign met its end when the Anglo-Soviet invasion of 1941 removed him from power. The British ambassador Reader Bullard remarked that the Shah was an "incorrigible" leader whose tyranny had cost him the support of his subjects (Bakhash 2015). The Soviets, British, and Americans all viewed Iran as a crucial geopolitical territory and profited from oil concessions made with Iranian leaders, so their forced abdication plan also sought a replacement for Reza Shah. The decision was made to replace Reza Shah with his son, Mohammad Reza Shah – the final monarch of the country.

Much like his father's early reign, Mohammad Reza Shah's met his first political challenge from the Iranian left as well. When the English and Soviets invaded to remove his father, they also released a group of political prisoners known as "The Fifty-Three." The Fifty-Three were arrested for their support of Marxist-Leninism, and imprisoned for their political efforts. Following their release, the group formed *Hezb-e Tudeh*, or the "Party of the Masses," which aimed to incorporate European-educated intellectuals and domestic political dissidents in Iran (Abrahamian 2008). Iraj Iskandari, a Tudeh Party leader, avoided many political and religious squabbles by focusing solely on class divisions.

The strategy was successful; the Tudeh Party formed alliances with other left-wing political parties and managed to win seats in the Iranian Parliament, the cabinet, and it drew massive crowds to its rallies (Abrahamian 2008). Tudeh influence grew throughout the early 1940s, but the effects of World War II oil demands and ethnic separatist movements destabilized its power.

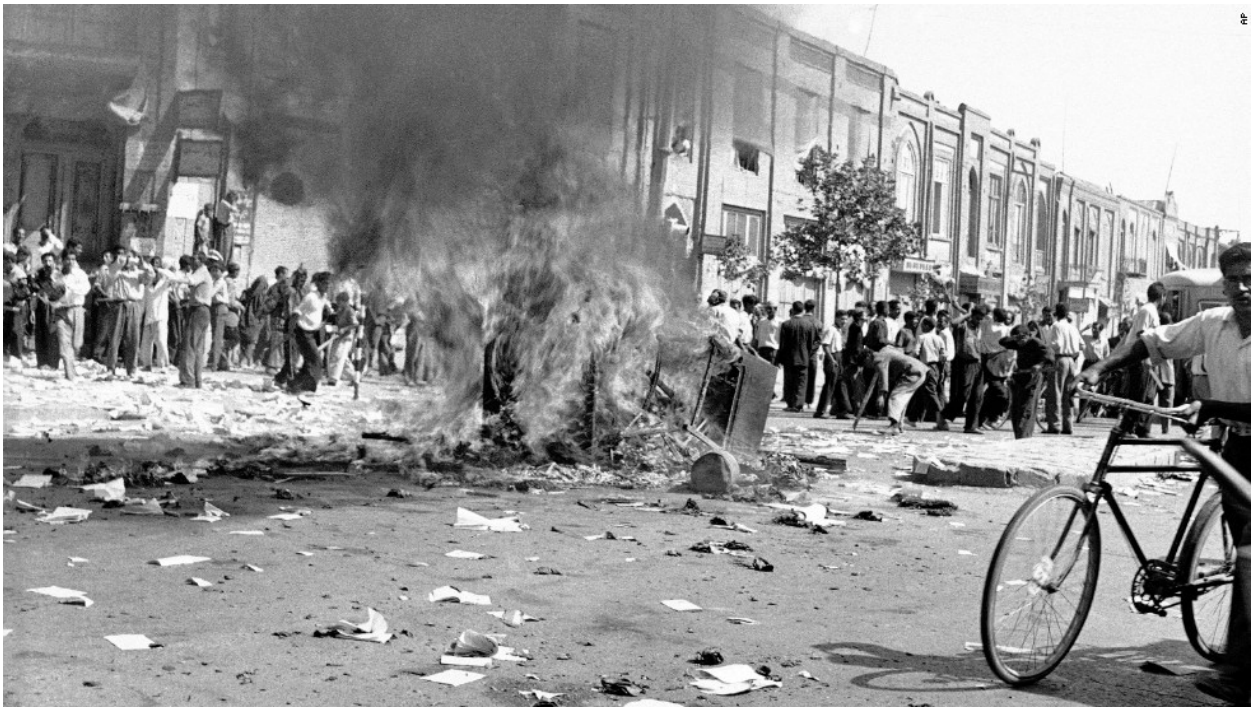
Weakened by demands made by the Soviet Union and the separatist movements the Soviets supported, the Shah was able to attack the Tudeh Party more directly. Iskandari was forced into exile and party membership dwindled. Its legacy, however, carried on – politicization of the intelligentsia was permanent. "The party introduced into Iran the notion of mass politics, mass participation, and mass organizations with party cells and branches, party conferences and congresses, and party newspapers, politburos, and central committees," (Abrahamian 2008).

These developments bolstered Iranian nationalism and began to drive a wedge between the Iranian left and the Soviet Union. By the late 1940s, Mohammad Mossadegh, an influential Iranian nationalist, formed the *Jeb'eh Melli*, or the National Front Party. His party took up the issue of oil nationalization as its primary objective. The party captured the support of the Iranian middle class and many Tudeh members switched their allegiances as well. By 1951, the Shah's grasp on political power was slipping – and a general strike organized by the Tudeh Party led to the Parliament of Iran voting Mossadegh as its Prime Minister due to popular demand. The Shah had no choice but to accept, and so began the short-lived process of oil nationalization (Abrahamian 2008).

Mossadegh's promises were bolstered by his actions. On May 1, 1952, he canceled the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's agreement with Iran and began the process to nationalize the oil industry. The British and Americans saw this as an unacceptable policy change, and began their machinations for another coup d'état – this time, to remove Mossadegh from power and to ensure only Mohammad Reza Shah had ruling authority. On August 19, 1953, the United Kingdom and the United States successfully executed CIA and MI-6 operations in Iran,[6] overthrew the democratically elected Prime Minister, and reinitiated a continued period of

[6] Known as Operation Boot and Operation Ajax in the United Kingdom and United States, respectively.

absolute monarchy under the Shah. Left-wing factions were targeted, and so began a period of intense political repression under the Shah. The 1953 coup in Iran is instrumental in its modern



A communist office and its supplies are burned in Tehran during the overthrow of Mossadegh.

history, and scholars disagree on the real reason for the coup. Gasiorowski (2000) argues:

> At first the US decided to stay out of the fray. It encouraged Britain to accept nationalisation, tried to broker a settlement of the dispute and dissuaded the British from invading Iran. It maintained this neutral position until the end of the Truman administration in January 1953, though by then many US officials thought Mossadeq's refusal to settle the oil dispute was creating political instability that put Iran "in real danger of falling behind the Iron Curtain" (page iii of the report). In November 1952, shortly after Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected president, British officials proposed to their US counterparts that the two countries jointly carry out a coup against Mossadeq.

Abrahamian (2013) disagrees and suggests the coup happened due to real material interests for the United States, "… as the repercussions that oil nationalization could have on such faraway places as Indonesia and South America, not to mention the rest of the Persian Gulf," most likely dictated their actions. Whatever the case may be, it is absolutely certain that the coup was viewed by most Iranians as imperialist aggression by the United States and further tainted the public

perception of the Shah domestically. His decision to accept assistance from Western powers was seen as loss of Iranian identity by the intelligentsia and religious clerics alike.

Part of the Shah's repression campaign was the establishment of his secret police forces, the *Sazeman-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar*, or the National Organization for Security and Intelligence (SAVAK) in 1957. In the immediate aftermath of the 1953 coup, Iranian General Teymur Bakhtiar was assisted by a U.S. Army colonel to create the predecessor to the organization. It went to work in its initial stages to destroy much of the leftist movement in Iran, specifically focusing on the Tudeh Party (Keddie and Gasiorowski 1990). With assistance from the Israeli MOSSAD and American CIA, the SAVAK became one of the primary institutions the Shah employed to imprison, torture, and execute the Shah's political opponents. Their reach was extensive – SAVAK also used their powers to prevent freedom of press, freedom of association, and freedom of speech. When the Shah grew suspicious of Bakhtiar in 1961 and dismissed him, the SAVAK even worked to successfully assassinate Bakhtiar almost a decade later in Iraq (Keddie and Gasiorowski 1990).

Jalal Al-e Ahmad, a former Tudeh Party member who left the party to pursue more literary interests, described the situation in Iran as a "plague from the West." Ahmad (1984) argues this "occidentosis" created a bifurcated global system:

> One pole is the Occident, by which I mean all of Europe, Soviet Russia, and North America, the developed and industrialized nations that can use machines to turn raw materials into more complex forms that can be marketed as goods. These raw materials are not only iron ore and oil, or gut, cotton, and gum tragacanth; they are also myths, dogmas, music, and the higher worlds. The other pole is Asia and Africa, or the backward, developing or nonindustrial nations that have been made into consumers of Western goods. However, the raw materials for these goods come from the developing nations: oil from the shores of the Gulf, hemp and spices from India, jazz from Africa, silk and opium from China, anthropology from Oceania, sociology from Africa. These last two come from Latin America as well: from the Aztec and Inca peoples, sacrificed by the onslaught of Christianity. Everything in the developing nations comes from somewhere else. And we – the

> Iranians – fall into the category of the backward and developing nations: we have more points in common with them than points of difference.

Influenced by Marx, Camus, and Fanon, Ahmad's work highlighted western encroachment on Iranian autonomy and a general Iranian sense of fear about western influence. The Shah's repression kept him in power in the unstable period following the coup; but it also sowed the seeds of hatred amongst his subjects. Although not all agreed with Ahmad's political positions, a quarter-century after the Western-backed coup, Iranians took to the streets to oust the Shah. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi fled Iran on January 16, 1979, much to the surprise of his allies abroad. Even throughout the budding protests in the late 1970s, the United States' Defense Intelligence Agency reported that the Shah "is expected to remain actively in power over the next ten years," (Bill, 1989). President Carter similarly remarked: "I fully expect the shah to maintain power in Iran, and for the present problems in Iran to be resolved. I think the predications of doom and disaster that come from some sources have certainly not been realized at all. The shah has our support and he also has our confidence." When the Shah fled, Carter was perplexed: "I think that the rapid change of affairs in Iran has not been predicated by anyone so far as I know," (Bill, 1989). Of course, Carter was mistaken and his own advisers had cautioned him about the impending overthrow (Abrahamian 1982; Bill 1989).

Despite the West's alleged surprise, many Iranians felt the Shah's overthrow meant the country's occidentosis problem had been cured. In its place, a wholly Iranian, non-Western-backed governing apparatus soon developed. Iranians rejoiced: "When the shah left Iran on January 16, 1979, and again in mid-February when the revolution became a reality, millions of Iranians took to the streets in an ecstasy of personal and political celebration that demonstrated the depths of their disaffection," (Bill 1989). Over the next few months, class- and religious-based rebellions spread throughout the entire country. The revolutionary powers were goaded on

by the masses for retribution against the Shah and former members of his regime and often took executions into their own hands (Bill 1989). When the new regime attempted to replace the public's vigilante executions with trials, the masses said no. In particular, "leaders of the military, the police, SAVAK, and the prison system, along with political thugs and torturers" were their primary targets, and the regime dispensed "justice" recklessly (Bill 1989). Additional targets included foreign diplomats, as evidenced by the overtaking of the American embassy in Tehran and the subsequent Iranian Hostage Crisis (Abrahamian 1982; Bill 1989).

The transition from monarchy to Islamic Republic was a chaotic one. Ayatollah Khomeini's supreme leadership went through several presidents and prime ministers throughout 1979 to 1981. First came the moderates, who were viewed by the masses as too "Western-struck" and swiftly removed from power (Bill 1989). One of the so-called moderate leaders, Sayid Abolhassan Banisadr, was perceived by Khomeini to have sympathy for a primary opposition group in Iran: the *Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran*, or simply the Mujahedin. Khomeini's parliament impeached Banisadr, who escaped to France along with the Mujahedin's leader, Masoud Rajavi. Banisadr is well-known for his allegations supporting the October Surprise conspiracy theory.[7] With his dismissal, the moderate era ended in Iran; those who remained in power were the extremists.

The Supreme Leader faced significant opposition from many of the same Iranians who opposed the Shah. Amongst the political left, the Tudeh Party had largely been neutralized; however, the Mujahedin had developed strong allies abroad and a political organization capable of fighting against the Islamic Republic. In one attack attributed to the Mujahedin, a student by the name of Mohammadreza Kolahi planted an explosive device at the Islamic Republic Party's

[7] The conspiracy theory argues that the release of the hostages was postponed until the outcome of the 1980 U.S. presidential election was determined. Allegedly, Reagan's staff negotiated a weapons exchange with the Iranian regime in exchange for the delay.

headquarters in Tehran. The attack was highly successful: 73 members of the Party were killed, including second-in-command Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti. The "Hafte tir"[8] bombing became an impetus for the Islamic Republic to increase its own repression against their many political opponents (Abrahamian 1989). Chief among the opponents were the former members of the Shah's government on the political right and many leftist groups that hated both the Shah's and the Islamic Republic's governments (e.g., the Mujahedin, the Fedayan, and the already weakened Tudeh Party.). Khomeini quite easily dismantled the opponents on the political right, for they had little political support amongst the masses. On the extreme political left, the challenge was similarly handled – the Fedayan crumbled due to its own internal divisions. As for the Tudeh Party, its remaining members' practical strategy led them to support Khomeini and won them several positions in the government.

A foreign problem also emerged for Khomeini's Islamic Republic in the 1980s: the Iran-Iraq War. The Ba'athist Party in Iraq, led by Saddam Hussein, viewed the tumultuous Iranian Revolution as an opportunity to spread its imperialist desires in the Middle East (Choucair-Vizoso 2017). Hussein feared that his minority Sunni-led government might face significant internal strife if the neighboring Shia-led government was successful, and he believed he could capitalize and annex parts of Iran into Iraq. Although accounts differ, the Arab and Persian world today believe the United States encouraged and "green lighted" the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980, with the assistance of many of the states in the Arabian Peninsula.[9] The war was a bloody and brutal one; between 250,000-500,000 Iraqis and over a million Iranians died in the combat. It was also a terrible miscalculation by Hussein – the Iranian opposition groups largely saw the

[8] Named after the date the bombing was carried out.
[9] Secretary of State Alexander Haig communicated as such to Ronald Reagan; allegedly, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, told Haig that President Carter had discussed the "green light" with King Khalid bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

invasion as a bigger problem than their domestic disagreements with the Islamic Republic. To this day, the Islamic Republic has continued to point to the war as a manifestation of American imperialism.[10]

As for the Mujahedin, they poised a much more difficult problem. They were organized, they were well-funded, and they had strong allies abroad – including in Iraq. With domestic troubles facing the Mujahedin, the organization fled to Paris and began its attacks from abroad, later relocating to Iraq in 1986. The Mujahedin continues to be one of the primary political opponents to the regime even today. The only remaining leftist party headquartered in Iran was the Tudeh Party. Believing their allegiance to Khomeini would protect them, most Tudeh members openly identified themselves as belonging to the organization, even those who had been given positions in the Islamic Republic's bureaucracy. Khomeini turned on the Tudeh Party in 1983 and began mass arrests and executions of its members, effectively eliminating the domestic left's capacity for resistance (Bill 1989).

But not all Iranians shared in the jubilation of the Revolution's triumph and the end of Iraq War in 1988; many feared the nascent Islamic Republic and its motivations. In the years leading to the Iranian Revolution and the years following Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power, hundreds of thousands of emigrants fled Iran, many of which immigrated to the United States. By and large, these immigrants prioritized returning to Iran more than assimilating in their new host country:

> **Ghazaleh Bushehr**: When I left Iran, I packed two suitcases for my children, one for my husband, and one for myself. My husband locked the door and we thought we would be back in a couple months when the Revolution failed. It's been 40 years and I miss my homeland and family more and more every day. We had everything in Iran. We had nightclubs, discos, the best cafes in the world. Our

[10] The Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Javad Zarif, tweeted support for this view, that the West (e.g., the United States) "supported & armed Saddam – even with chemical weapons" on June 29, 2019. The tweet is available online here: <https://twitter.com/JZarif/status/1144930858836602881>.

> country was more modern than even America. My heart burns for my children who don't understand what we gave up when Khomeini and his gang came to power in Iran. All of our freedoms disappeared over night and instead we got this madman who ruined the most beautiful place in the world.[11]

Such is a typical response from a first generation Iranian American immigrant. Nearly all first generation participants in my semi-structured interviews spoke openly about their desire to return to Iran, but an Iran of their memories – one in which the Shah was still in charge of the country. Most interviewees expressed strong political attitudes against the current Iranian Government, but also indicated an insufficient medium to communicate those attitudes politically. These Iranian Americans make up most of the participants in both the IASP and the IAIP, so the implications and conclusions from this dissertation should be understood within this context.

According to Amanat (1993), Iranians have a long history of migration dating back to the eighth century. With respect to the United States, however, Iranian immigration is a more recent phenomenon. Iranian immigration to the United States can be classified in primarily[12] two phases: the pre-revolutionary period and post-revolutionary period. The pre-revolutionary period lasted roughly thirty years, from about 1950 until the revolution. The overwhelming majority of immigrants in this period were temporary visitors, most of which pursued higher education in the United States (Bozorgmehr and Sabagh, 1998; Bozorgmehr and Meybodi, 2016). Visiting the United States (and other European states) prior to the Iranian Revolution, many of these immigrants overstayed visas or applied for asylum when the Revolution came to fruition.

The United States has become home to significantly more permanent Iranian residents in the post-revolutionary period, which has lasted from the Iranian Revolution to the modern day. According to the US Census American Community Survey (ACS), there were approximately

[11] From the Iranian American Interview Project.

[12] Rivetti (2013) classifies Iranian-American migration in three phases, with post-Green Movement migrants occupying a separate wave. I prefer a single cleavage at the Iranian Revolution, as Green emigrants share similar motivations for emigration as the second-phase.

121,000 Iranians in the United States in 1980, and approximately 452,000 in 2014. However, this number may be significantly understated according the U.S. Department of State, possibly due to the fact that Iranian Americans may identify themselves as white on official documents (McIntosh, 2004). Whatever the actual numbers may be, Iranian immigration to the United States is growing. The largest share (nearly half) of Iranian immigrants settled in California, while states like Washington and New York also have significantly large Iranian diasporas (Bozorgmehr and Meybodi, 2016). As I discuss in Chapter Three, many of these immigrants came from the secular upper classes in Iran and were stringent supporters of the Shah. Their goal is a more secular democracy or constitutional monarchy in Iran and the dismantling of the religious order.

Before moving onto the next chapter, it is an important final task to describe the different ethnic/religious groups in Iran. Bozorgmehr (1997) argues that in order to adequately understand the Iranian American immigrant experience in the United States, one must understand their "internal ethnicity." He argues that internal ethnicity addresses the commonplace shortcoming of treating an immigrant group as homogenous. These immigrant groups contain their own subgroups, which may experience different reception contexts in the United States, but also their treatment in their home countries may contribute to measurable attitude differences. "For these groups, pre-migration ethnicity often overrides national identities and forms the bases of ethnic identity and ethnicity in the receiving societies," (Bozorgmehr 1997). Ethnically, Iran is predominately Persian (61%), with significant minority populations of Azeris (16%), Kurds (10%), Lurs (6%), Baluch (2%), Arabs (2%), Turks (2%), and other smaller groups (e.g., Iranian Armenians and others). Religiously, the overwhelming majority of the country's inhabitants belong to Shia Islam (89%), and the remaining Iranian population identify as either Sunni (9%),

Jewish, Bahá'í, Zoroastrian, and Christian (2%). Historically, Iran was home to many more Jews and Bahá'ís, but the creation of the state of Israel (and the displacement of the native Palestinian communities) caused most Iranian Jews to leave the country. Similarly, Bahá'ís since the Iranian Revolution largely exist outside of Iran and those who remain face significant persecution for their religious affiliation (Boroujerdi 2017).

Iranian Jews are perhaps the oldest subgroup other than Persians. Their history in Iran dates back to at least Cyrus, who was responsible for granting the ancient Judeans passage to Judah after the fall of Babylon. Jewish treatment in Iran prior to the Islamic conquests was mixed; some monarchs treated them equally and others were more oppressive (Bozorgmehr 1997). After the conquests, Jewish positions in society improved due to Islam's requirement that the "dhimmis" – or "people of the book" – should be treated fairly. Jews paid separate taxes to Islamic rulers and were able to create their own businesses. After Shia Islam was established in the 1500s, the Jews were targeted as nonbelievers and relegated to a second-class of citizenship in Persia. After the 1906 Constitution and throughout the Pahlavi dynasty, Jews were again treated roughly equally. Today, Jews still have rights in Iran and are guaranteed placement into the Iranian Parliament (which is also extended to Zoroastrians and Christians); Iranian Jews are also the largest community of Jews outside of Israel in the Middle East – many Iranian Jews that remain claim that there is little to no discrimination of the subgroup (Hjelmgaard, 2018). As for Bahá'ís, they do not enjoy the same protected status as Jews in Iran, largely because of their religious beliefs regarding Islam and their political support for Israel. To Shias, Bahá'ís are considered "heretics" for their claims that their leader was the twelfth Imam (Bozorgmehr 1997).

What remains religiously is the majority-Muslim population. Muslims in Iran enjoy the highest status of the religious groups, particularly Shia Muslims. Among the religious subgroups

that immigrated to the United States, Muslims make up the largest majority. Like the other religious groups, the Muslim immigrants to the United States "… come from a highly selective social background, the middle and upper classes of Iranian society. These segments of the Muslim population were also the most secular…" (Bozorgmehr 1997). Iranian Muslims are most likely to have stronger nationalistic identities due to their preferential treatment in Iran.

Among the pre-migration ethnic subgroups, Persians are the largest and most organized. The smaller ethnic subgroups like Azeris and Iranian Armenians who immigrated to the United States form their own community groups, but none come close to the size and scope of Iranian American-specific groups. These voluntary organizations help Iranian Americans with representation, lobbying, and political participation. Finding individuals in the smaller communities may be difficult, and many may simply identify themselves as Persian/Iranian.

Now that we have a clearer picture of the history of Iranian state formation and a better understanding of the various groups, we can turn to the research questions listed in Chapter One. On the next page, I include a table of descriptive statistics that details the demographic characteristics of the group.[13] Unfortunately, the American Community Survey lacks information on religious affiliation for Iranian Americans, but luckily, the PAAIA survey conducted by Zogby and the IASP give us some relative breakdowns of religious identity. According to the PAAIA numbers, roughly 28% of Iranians identify as Muslim, 8% as Jewish, 7% as Christian, 5% as Bahá'í, 1% as Zoroastrian, and 31% as agnostic/atheist. In the IASP, 44.96% identify as Muslim, 2.34% identify as Jewish, 4.22% as Christian, 1.87% as Bahá'í, 7.96% as Zoroastrian, and 17.8% as agnostic/atheist.

[13] A critical note about the Iranian American population is in relation to its size. Although official ACS estimates place the number shy of 500,000, it is estimated elsewhere that there are around 500,000 Iranian Americans in Southern California alone (Aslan, 2015).

Descriptive Statistics of Iranian Americans

Total population:	N	476,967
Sex:		
Males:	%	51.8
Females:	%	48.2
Age:		
< 25	%	24.7
25-34	%	17.5
35-44	%	13.7
45-54	%	12.9
55-64	%	15.1
65+	%	16.3
Educational Attainment (25+)		
Less than high school diploma	%	4.8
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	%	13.7
Some college or associate's degree	%	17.2
Bachelor's degree	%	30.4
Graduate or professional degree	%	33.9
Place of Birth & Citizenship Status		
Foreign born; naturalized citizen	n	225,370
Foreign born; not a citizen	n	83,426
Native	n	168,171
Occupation		
Management, business, science, and arts	%	60.1
Service	%	10.5
Sales and office	%	20.4
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	%	2.8
Production, transportation, and material moving	%	6.2
Income		
Households	$	78,005
Families	$	97,046

Source: American Community Survey, 2017

A final critical point about the Iranian American reception context is the volatility. Throughout Iranian American migration history, their reception has depended largely on the events going on in the political world. During the pre-revolutionary migration period, Iranian Americans were largely treated as model migrants and were free from most forms of discrimination. As soon as the hostage crisis commenced, the reception context changed. No longer were Iranian Americans just students, but their presence in the United States was now politicized. Scholars of Iranian American studies note that the time period was particularly tense.

Anti-Iranian counter-protestor during the Washington D.C. Iranian demonstration against the Shah's visit to the United States[14]

Tehranian (2015) discusses one such instance of anti-Iranian sentiment that was on display for over thirty years: a barbecue joint that proudly posted an image of a lynched Iranian man

[14] The Shah's visit was highly politicized. Many Iranian visitors on student visas experienced significant backlash for their government's actions during the hostage crisis. For more, see: <https://timeline.com/1979-hostage-crisis-iranians-in-us-lived-in-fear-of-deportation-97c450f3b7b3>.

surrounding by a group of cowboys. The photograph was emblematic of many Americans' attitudes towards Iranians both during the hostage crisis and again after 9/11. PAAIA has documented Iranian Americans' experiences with racism, and over 56% of Iranian Americans

The barbecue joint's poster on display.

the organization surveyed in 2017 noted that they have personally experienced discrimination because of their race. The anti-Iranian sentiment went well beyond just protests; it permeated American culture as well. Television shows like *The Simpsons*, *24*, *The Blacklist*, and Hollywood films routinely degrade Iranians and contribute to greater discrimination and persisting negative

Image of Khomeini as depicted in *The Simpsons*

stereotypes. As a result of this discrimination, scholars argue that many Iranian Americans have distanced themselves from their national identities by labeling themselves differently (Khalili 1988) or by identifying with their religious or ethnic subgroups (Bozorgmehr 2000).

Despite these difficulties, Iranian Americans continue to perform well in various economic and social measures of success (e.g., income, educational attainment, and occupation). In the pages that follow, I work to characterize this unique immigrant experience to the United States in two empirical chapters – one quantitative and one qualitative. It is my hope that the implications and results from this dissertation will contribute to the literature on Iranian Americans, but also more broadly to the immigration, racialization, and political participation literatures. Through a focused lens on this unique group, scholars can better understand how discrimination impacts identity formation and how political norms developed in the home country impact political participation in the host country.

CHAPTER THREE:

IRANIAN AMERICAN POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

The present study seeks bring into the literature the views and experiences of a gravely understudied minority group whose unique immigrant experiences can help shed light on many topics of interest to political scientists. Iranian history is devoid of a sustained period of democracy. For most of its history, Iran has been governed through a monarchy; more recently, the shift has been made to Islamic Republic. These two governmental systems have not imbued the Iranian public with democratic norms, but in the United States, they do have access to democratic avenues of political participation. In this chapter, I explore the character of Iranian American political participation in their adopted homeland. Using a pilot study as a springboard, I designed and administered a survey questionnaire to examine how participatory Iranian Americans are and with which methods of political participation they choose to engage.

The roadmap to this paper is as follows: first, I present a review of the existing literature on Iranian Americans from several social science disciplines and I review the existing scholarship on political participation, which will be used as a marker for Iranian assimilation into the American political system. Second, I discuss the methodology of the survey project that followed the pilot interviews and the qualitative interviews that followed the survey. Third, I analyze the results of the interview and survey projects. Fourth and finally, I conclude with a discussion of the results and implications for further research.

In striving to meet the goal of understanding Iranian American political participation, I seek to answer the following research questions:

1) What does the existing scholarship suggest about Iranian American immigration, and under what context can we understand the Iranian American immigrant experience?

2) Given that political participation is an effective measure for assimilation into a new host society, how political are Iranian Americans, and with which methods of political participation do they typically engage?[15]

The findings from this project will help our understanding of race and ethnicity, political behavior, and the Iranian American immigrant experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to properly frame the literature on Iranian Americans, it is important to look to Gans' (1992) work on second generation immigrant trajectories, as well as Portes and Zhou's (1993) work on segmented assimilation theory. I focus on the latter for the bulk of the current project due to its applicability to Iranian Americans. Nonetheless, a brief digression into competing models is necessary to highlight the importance of Portes and Zhou's model. Straight-line theory, for instance, argues that acculturation occurs as a result of ethnic groups blending into the host country, much like melting pot theory (Sandberg, 1974). Scholars like Alba (2005) and Jimenez (2008) argue that ethnic identity is formed due to boundary making, and defining who is not a member of the group. This theory is bolstered by Wimmer's (2008) agency-rich approach to boundary making. Wimmer essentially argues that there are various strategies that ethnic groups can take when creating boundaries, like expanding existing boundaries, contraction of existing boundaries, boundary crossing, and boundary blurring.

Building on Gans' (1992) critiques of classical assimilation theory, Portes and Zhou (1993) develop the concept of "selective acculturation," which argues that complete assimilation is not necessary in order for immigrants to succeed in a new host country. Selective acculturation

[15] The primary forms of political participation studied in this piece are voting, contacting a politician, attending a demonstration, boycotting/buycotting, petitioning, and participating in political or civil organizations. This list stems from the existing literature, but respondents also were able to comment on other methods of participation they engage in.

argues that immigrants can succeed despite preserving their native country's culture and values. According to the authors, their framework helps fill the research gap in the immigration literature due to the majority of scholars focusing on the first generation almost exclusively after the 1965 Immigration Act. The authors argue that focusing on the first generation limits the generalizability of results. For instance, most scholars agree that first generation immigrants regularly accept "entry-level menial jobs," but their children would not accept the same fate. Moreover, they posit that contemporary events are overlooked by the limited existing research on the second generation. The theory of selective acculturation is the most applicable model for understanding the relative success of the Iranian American community. Selective acculturation allows for immigrant communities to maintain their distinct immigrant culture and success, whereas prior to the development of the theory, "assimilation depended largely on individual decisions to leave the immigrant culture behind and embrace American ways," (Portes and Zhou, 1993). One could argue that Wimmer's (2008) agency-rich approach offers useful analytical value, and I do not disagree, particularly when it comes to blurring boundaries. However, I have chosen to focus on selective acculturation due to the similarity between the two theories.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) further identify family structure, human capital, and incorporation into the host society as important factors for determining immigrant assimilation. They further distinguish between consonant, selective and dissonant acculturation. Consonant acculturation occurs when the first- and second generation assimilate at similar rates; selective acculturation occurs when the first- and second generation select particular values and cultural standards to assimilate into, but hold onto some native values as well; dissonant acculturation occurs when the first and second generation assimilate at different rates. Among these, only the third is associated with downward mobility.

In order to determine what type of acculturation Iranian Americans experience, it is important to look at two major factors. Firstly, we must look at the migration history of Iranian emigrants and the context of the Iranian Revolution, which created a unique American immigrant group. Secondly, we must examine the type of immigrants that came to the United States, with particular focus on the demographic.

A Summary of the Existing Scholarship on Iranian Americans

Amanat (1993) and Mostofi (2003) agree that Iranians who immigrated to (Southern) California can mostly be understood in the context of the Iranian Revolution. Most are from the "secular middle class," who opposed the installment of Ayatollah Khomeini and immigrated after the Iranian Revolution (Amanat 1993). Upon the Shah's return to Iran in 1953, he expanded military powers to quell the power of his opponents and dissenters (Kelly and Friedlander 1993; Burns 1996).[16] This repression led to a stark cleavage between the more religious sects of Iranians and the Shah, culminating in the overtaking of the United States Embassy in 1979. The act was symbolic of Iranians' displeasure with increasing Westernization in Iran. As suggested in the introduction, most Iranians that emigrated sought to return to Iran. It can be safely assumed that those that remained abroad did so because of a disagreement with the politics and structure of the Islamic Republic.

According to Bozorgmehr (1997), understanding ethnic identity pre-migration is crucial to understanding ethnic identity post-migration. Thus, in order to understand Iranian American immigrants, one must understand the historical circumstances that led to their immigration to the United States. As the Shah largely sought to Westernize, so did the emigrants that left the country. Most emigrants left due to political instability, taking limited possessions, viewing their

[16] Initially, the Shah faced the opposition of the leftist Tudeh party (which to some extent, supported Mosaddegh), and the later Marxist Fedaiyan, and the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI). I expect the overwhelming majority of Iranian Americans would disapprove of these groups.

departure as temporary (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, and Der-Martirosian 1993). The divide is important for explaining the context of more recent emigrants, and in particular, Iranian Americans that left Iran following the Green Movement in 2009 (Rivetti 2013). Perhaps the two largest enclaves of Iranian migrants exist along and around the surrounding areas of Westwood Boulevard in Los Angeles, California, (known as "Little Tehran") and the city of Irvine, California. The overwhelming majority of Iranian Americans settled in this region for two primary reasons. Firstly, the desire to return home is strong with the first generation Iranian American population. Given that this is not viewed as a possibility for the wealthy upper-class Iranian American community, the majority wanted a residential community that reminded them of the homeland. According to prominent Iranian American scholar Reza Aslan, "They settled in LA because so much of it reminds them of Iran – the landscape, the car culture, the mountains," (Amirani 2012). Secondly, Iranian Americans sought to maintain their existing level of success in their adopted homeland, and LA/OC are primarily wealthy communities with secondary schools that help facilitate maintained success for the children of the first generation.

Settling in LA/OC proved to be a sound investment for the Iranian American community. Iranian Americans perform well when it comes to education, most likely because of the emphasis placed on it by the first generation. They also tend to have high social and human capital. "They are one of the most highly educated immigrant groups in the United States, due to the settlement of pre-revolution foreign students and the post-revolution influx of elite exiles," (Bozorgmehr and Meybodi 2016). According to 2014 ACS one-year estimates, 66.3% of Iranian males and 54.2% of Iranian females hold a bachelor's degree or higher, while only 30.6% of Americans accomplish the same feat. Furthermore, Iranian American parents tend to take an active role in their children's education. Since the majority of first generation Iranian parents tend to have high

levels of educational attainment, most Iranian children internalize these values. Moreover, the high level of educational attainment coupled with high incomes allows Iranian parents the flexibility to provide resources and oversight in their children's lives (Shavarini 2004).

With regards to careers and income, Iranians that are not self-employed tend to work in three major fields: "managerial and professional, technical and administrative, and sales," (Bozorgmehr and Meybodi 2016). Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, and Der-Martirosian (1993) find that Iranian Americans living in Los Angeles are six times more likely than the native born to be self-employed and only one-in-ten hold "blue collar" jobs. With respect to the entire number of Iranians living in the United States, Iranians are twice as likely as the native born to be self-employed (Bozorgmehr and Meybodi 2016). Iranian American incomes also tend to be quite high in comparison to the native born and other immigrant groups. According to 2014 ACS one year estimates, mean earnings for Iranian American households is $105,571; for all households, it is $75,591.

What about the preservation of Iranian religious, martial, cultural, and linguistic practices? Although religiosity is important to Iranian Americans, it seems to be mainly in name only. Most Iranian Americans tend to identify as Muslim, but approximately 80% "never follow the Islamic practices of daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and so forth," (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, and Der-Martirosian 1993). Iranian Baha'is tend to be the most religious, but their numbers in the United States are quite small. Moreover, Iranians also practice high levels of endogamy, further increasing the ethnic cohesion of the group. For Iranian American women specifically, despite ethnic heterogeneity, data show that the group is quite homogenous – they represent the highly educated upper-middle class who oppose the current Iranian regime (Tohidi 1993). For Iranian American men, many still hold onto their traditional values, and expect to be

the sole breadwinner. Kelly (1993) notes that most Iranian Americans are either wealthy, or maintain an illusion of wealth in order to strengthen their family name. When women accumulate wealth, a respondent in a survey remarked: "… many men have to become the wives of their wives," (Tohidi 1993) which indicates feelings of threatened manhood. Most Iranian American households thus tend to be traditional. For young women especially, living in an Iranian American household while being a member of society at large necessitates maintaining a duality of ethnicity – they are expected to respect the traditional values of Iranian culture, but also need to blend into Western society (Hanassab 1993).

Among the second generation, ethnicity is more complex. Mahdi (1998) notes that first generation Iranian Americans consider themselves mostly Iranian, but their children's identity may be unique from their own. Most respondents to a survey of Iranian American youth preferred the identity "Iranian American" to "Iranian," and less preferred "American." Many of the respondents in the second generation suggested that being Iranian had much to do with Iranian *culture*, citing specific examples in art, language, and food (Mahdi 1998). Furthermore, the culture that second generation Iranian Americans refer to, "does not correspond to a concrete historical entity found in a specific time and place in Iranian history. It is imagined in the sense that it is selective, abstract, idealized, and partially reinvented," (Mahdi 1998) Thus, second generation Iranian Americans create their own unique culture as a means of blending into American society when necessary, but maintain a distinct "Iranianness" when necessary.

Ethnic Identity and its Formation

Cornell's (1996) typology of ethnic communities is of particular relevance to the study of Iranian Americans. He notes that there are four types of ethnic communities: communities of interest, institutional communities, communities of culture, and symbolic communities. A

community of interest is characterized as a group with members "united largely on the basis of a shared set of perceived interests…" that is not high on the institutional or cultural dimension. An institutional community is marked by members that participate in "a set of more or less exclusive institutions designed to solve particular life problems," whose members do not have shared interests or similar cultures. This type of community would most closely resemble some panethnic groups. The third type of community, a community of culture, is denoted by members who are more "closely and fundamentally linked by their joint participation in a moral community: in a common and distinct system of understandings and interpretations that constitute normative order and worldview and provide strategic and stylistic guides to action."

Cornell also makes reference to a fourth type of ethnic identity, borrowing from Gans (1979). Symbolic communities, according to Cornell, score low on all three of the previous communities, but instead share "an attachment to a particular set of identity symbols, derivative perhaps of historical events, of contemporary circumstances which sustain occasional intragroup interactions, or simply of assignment by nonmembers…" This type of group most closely resembles the Barthian (1969) conception of groups, in which members think of themselves as part of the ingroup mainly by focusing on the boundary (who is in the outgroup).

As noted in Mahdi (1998), there is partial support for the idea that Iranian American ethnic identity is largely symbolic, although the author refers to it as cultural. Symbolic ethnicity, according to Gans (1979), is "a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior." As far as the literature is concerned, first- and second generation Iranian Americans certainly are not constant acculturationists, and most likely do not fall into the dissonant acculturation group either. It would appear, thus, that Iranian Americans

fall into the category of selective acculturation – most Iranian Americans do hold onto some traditional values, but the parental push towards education and maintaining familial success also encourages adopting host country values as well. To test how effectively Iranian Americans are assimilating into American life, it is important to look at a practical measure that is associated with assimilating into the American culture: political participation.

Political Participation

Being involved in one's country is an important indicator of immigrant priorities. If immigrant communities still look to the homeland and try to emphasize changes there, this suggests that incorporation is not occurring. However, if the immigrant community takes an active role in their newly adopted home, this indicates that incorporation is occurring. For instance, Sears and Savalei (2006) predict that new immigrant groups will be increasingly likely to assimilate into American culture due to increased group consciousness. They challenge the "peoples of color" hypothesis (Sears, Citrin, Cheleden, and van Laar 1999) and posit a "black exceptionalism" framework in its place. The authors argue that due to the fact that foreign-born minority groups are more class and group conscious than U.S.-born minority groups, it is more likely that the foreign-born will assimilate into the political culture of the host country. I expect that Iranian Americans will benefit from the same advantages that Asian and Latino immigrants have over the black community: a less visible role in domestic affairs, (as is the case with some Latinos) indistinguishability from whites, an unwillingness to assume a pan-ethnic identity (e.g., choosing Persian instead of Middle Eastern, Mexican instead of Latino, etc.), and residential integration (Sears and Savalei 2006). Their results show that when it comes to recent Latino and Asian immigrants, their increased group consciousness over U.S.-born Latinos, U.S.-born Asians, and blacks leads to increased political policy preferences.

Banfield and Wilson (1963) argue that involvement in ethnic voluntary organizations will increase immigrant issue salience and in turn political participation. However, Iranian Americans are unlikely to participate in voluntary organizations and moreover, there is a lack of such groups. Thus, Wiley's (1967) counterargument that participation in ethnic voluntary organizations actually decreases the propensity to participate in host country politics due to increased insulation is most likely more applicable to the Iranian American case. When it comes to policy preferences, citizens and residents express their preferences to government through various methods. As suggested by Wiley, expressing political interests suggest involvement in the host community and a desire to either change or maintain the status quo. In this section, I discuss the literature on political participation and the possible methods an American resident can employ to communicate their interests to the government.

Over five decades of research has shown that the older potential participant, the more likely they are to actually engage in political activities (Glenn and Grimes 1968; Nie, Verba, and Kim 1974; Jennings 1979). Education has also been shown to be a positive predictor of political participation in the United States (Milbrath 1965; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Gagnon 2003; Mayer 2011), and in particular, a greater emphasis on *civic* education also increases political participation (Finkel 2002). This leads me to the first hypothesis (H_1): *older Iranian Americans will participate to a greater degree than younger Iranian Americans.*

Participating in politics requires resources, and with greater resources comes greater participation. Wealth, income, and occupational prestige have been shown to increase political participation broadly (Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Ansolabehere, De Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003; Bartels 2008). Others have shown that for voting specifically, the costs of participation decrease when individuals possess more resources.

Additionally, when the costs of *not* participating are high, people are more likely to cast a ballot (Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Le 2013). Thus, H_2: *Iranian Americans with higher incomes will be more likely to participate in politics.*

We know a great deal about racial and ethnic voting as well, specifically for blacks and Chicano/Latinos. A group of scholars have found that whites are more likely than other racial and ethnic groups to participate in politics, whether it is through electoral or non-electoral means (Tate 1991; Tate 1993; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Hutchings and Valentino 2004). For blacks, the concept of linked fate has also been shown to provide a positive predictor of voting behavior (Dawson 1994). The 2008 election (and by extension, the 2012 election as well) also demonstrated that minorities with higher levels of attachment (i.e., a black voter voting for a black candidate) are more likely to participate in electoral and non-electoral politics (Lopez and Taylor 2009). Others have also shown that in the context of electoral politics, when a co-ethnic runs for office, the effect is that fellow Latinos are more likely to participate in that election (Barreto 2012). Moreover, Latinos that live in majority-minority districts are more likely to vote compared to Latinos living in majority-majority districts (Barreto, Segura, and Woods 2004). H_3 would then suggest *Iranian-Americans will participate at a rate that is higher than Iranians who do not identify as American.*

For Iranians in Iran, participation in voluntary organizations was limited due to specific bans in place by the government, but many participated in strikes and demonstrations despite these organizational limitations (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, and Der-Martirosian 1993). According to Varzi (2011), this participation in demonstrations could be due to the nature of Islam itself. This could help explain limited participation by Iranian Americans in United States voluntary organizations, as well as the particular type of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work

to assist Iranian immigrants (Rivetti 2013). With regards to protest activity, though, the propensity to demonstrate among Iranians in Iran might be a feature of Islam itself. Influential Iranian writers like Jalal Al Ahmad argued that *garbzadegi,* roughly translated as "Occidentosis," has led to the demise of Iranian cultural identity. According to Al Ahmad (1962), imperialist proto-colonization was to be challenged through direct political action. Thus, the literature would lead us to conclude that (H_4) *Iranian Americans will have a lower level of participation in voluntary organizations compared to Iranians who do not classify themselves as American.* Additionally, (H_5) *we should expect that Iranians who do not classify themselves as American will be more likely to participate in demonstrations.*

METHODOLOGY

This project takes a multifaceted approach in seeking to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. As others[17] have noted, Iranian Americans are not an easy minority group to study – many Iranian Americans do not fill out surveys, nor do they respond to interview requests. It is argued that this is due to fears of persecution and the unique historical context of Iranian emigration out of Iran post-1979. As has been noted, political repression in Iran is an unfortunate byproduct of government and has been for decades. Given that ideological disagreement with the government often resulted in unfair prison sentences and oftentimes, capital punishment, Iranian American skepticism of researchers is a reasonable response.

As such, I employed a two-fold research strategy. The first involves a survey that was distributed to the Iranian American community in Los Angeles and Orange County. The second consists of tapping into my personal social network (albeit extended personal network) for a set of in depth, semi-structured interviews. The second study is motivated by a desire to delve into

[17] See Mostofi (2003), for example.

respondent's reasoning behind their level of political participation, but also provides additional foundational data for a future study. I discuss each strategy in detail below.

Survey (Study One)

Many researchers have tried to study Iranian Americans via survey methodology. Unfortunately, Iranian Americans are hard to find, and once identified, tend to ignore researchers. As Iranian comedian Maz Jobrani once noted, if told that information will be kept private and confidential, a typical Iranian American response would be, "Hmm. I don't know about that one."[18] Despite this difficulty, my research team successfully surpassed these barriers by developing familiarity and rapport with the community, and collected rich survey data over an eight-month period.[19] Those that chose to self-select may differ from those that did not, but many individuals that declined to take the survey initially did so at a future date.[20] Before beginning the Iranian American Survey Project, the lead investigator did a pilot study in which 25[21] respondents were interviewed in a semi-structured format. These respondents were asked what it means to be Iranian American and what they think of the current political environment. These interviews were used to inform the survey (but not included in any of the analyses or results herein).

As the lead investigator, I identified several locations (primarily international grocery stores) which Iranian Americans were likely to frequent. Most of these locations were in strip

[18] In conjunction with Iranican, a 501(c)3 working out of San Francisco, Jobrani made this comment in a public service announcement urging Iranian-Americans to identify as such on the 2010 census in order to gain recognized minority status that was played on various Iranian media outlets. It can be viewed in its entirety online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgoLjFJ0rVg>.

[19] An additional set of several hundred surveys were collected during a celebration of *Sizdah Bedar*, the last day of Persian New Year in 2016. However, significant homogeneity of the sample population and missing data tainted its efficacy and I have decided to exclude it from the analysis herein.

[20] Upon completion of his survey, one respondent remarked: "I thought you were from the Revolutionary Guard, but then I saw you here so long and see you are a student."

[21] Each of the 25 respondents were within the immediate social network of the principal investigator and not included in any of the results.

malls, allowing the team to benefit from lenient California laws concerning public spheres. Fortunately, the courts have ruled that strip malls are "the modern-day 'functional equivalent' of a traditional public gathering place, because they have 'common areas that would invite the public to meet, congregate, or engage in other activities typical of a public forum.'"[22] The research team recruited participants (N=427; 273 male, 139 female, 15 unspecified) ranging in age from 18 to 95 with a mean age of 43. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before administering the survey and participants were all uncompensated volunteers. Researchers were equipped with clipboards, pens, and both English (n=265) and Farsi (n=162) versions of the survey. Although not every researcher was fluent in Farsi, the lead investigator accompanied the research team at all times and is fluent. The principal investigator also set up a small table with a banner that identified the team as researchers from the University of California, Irvine in both English and Farsi.

Given the difficulties with collecting survey data from the Iranian American community, responses were collected over an eight-month period. Every researcher was instructed to ask every passerby if they identified as Iranian or Persian American, and then asked if they would be willing to take a short survey. Many respondents did not take the survey on the first approach, but given that our team collected data for several months, some did take the survey after multiple requests. One might assume that respondents could have taken the survey multiple times unknowingly, but the chance of this is quite small, given that the Iranian American community is not typically the subject of survey research and a respondent would most likely recall filling out the survey previously.

[22] The main restriction the California Constitution placed on the research team is specifically related to activities which interfere with "the primary commercial purpose of the mall." For more information, refer to the ACLU's website (https://www.aclunc.org/our-work/know-your-rights/free-speech-protests-demonstrations).

Respondents were given unlimited time to complete the survey, but the average completion time was roughly ten minutes. Respondents were able to take the survey and return it at a later date, although this only occurred in three instances. Surveys were collected by a member of the research team and subsequently given to the principal investigator. All coding was handled by the principal investigator, including a round of reliability testing. Ten percent of the entire survey was coded twice in order to check for accuracy. Using a random number generator, the principal investigator generated a string of surveys to recode. No errors were found.

In-Depth, Semi-Structured Interviews (Study Two)

In order to supplement the survey, 50 additional Iranian Americans living in the Southern California area were interviewed. The first round of participants were members of the principal investigator's extended social network, but had not been previously introduced to him. Before beginning the interview, informed consent was obtained from each participant. All participants were uncompensated volunteers and were allowed to stop the interview at any time. Once the interview concluded, respondents were also asked to identify additional Iranian Americans that would be receptive to inclusion in the sample. All interviews were fully recorded with the exception of two (at the request of the interviewees), and transcribed at a later date. Upon transcription, the audio files were erased and the SD card was destroyed in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants and to comply with Institutional Review Board digital records policies. Nearly all interviews (n=43) took place in the participant's home, and the remaining interviews were conducted in a distraction-free environment.

Interviews began in an unstructured format, but the interviewer employed the same questionnaire used in study one as a guide. The shortest interview took approximately fifteen

minutes, and the longest took over four hours.[23] With the exception of the four-hour interview, the rest were less than one hour and averaged around thirty minutes each. All participants were first asked whether or not they were born in the United States. If the respondent was born in the United States, they were asked to describe their upbringing. If not, the respondent was asked to describe their journey to the United States, in addition to their upbringing. All participants were given the opportunity to discuss any topic they felt was important exhaustively (and most picked a particular issue to discuss in depth). Interview questions focused on the participant's self-perception of their political participation. Immigrants from Iran were asked to discuss their participation in both Iran and the United States, as well the differences they felt in the United States.

RESULTS

Frequencies for all political participation measures are presented in Table 1. The majority of respondents to the survey indicated that they are not active in the political realm. However, a surprisingly high number of Iranian Americans did sign petitions and boycott/boycott products.

Table 1. Political Participation Frequencies

	R Vote	R Boycott	R Contact	R Demonstrate	R Petition	R Voluntary
Frequency	0.385 N = 413	0.3122 N = 410	0.241 N = 415	0.3391 N = 407	0.4352 N = 409	0.1259 N = 413

Source: Iranian American Survey Project

I present the logistic regression results in Table 2. For each predictor variable, I have included the coefficient on the first line, the odds ratio on the second line (in parentheses),[24] and the z-score on the third line (in brackets). Before moving onto the analysis of results, it is important to note that many of the results are not statistically significant. This is most likely due

[23] The four-hour interview was an outlier. This particular respondent was a leader of a prominent opposition party in Iran and had unique insight into the organization's structure.
[24] Although not conventional, odds ratios prove to be more easily interpretable than standard coefficients.

to the small sample size, and suggests that additional data are needed for a more conclusive answer to the research hypotheses. However, given the difficulty with collecting data on Iranian Americans, this project represents an important first step in studying Iranian Americans.

Table 2. Political Participation Logistic Regressions by Predictor Variables

	Vote	Boycott	Contact	Demonstration	Petition	Voluntary
Active	0.889***	1.549***	2.467***	1.978***	1.643***	2.008***
	(2.434)	(4.708)	(11.792)	(7.230)	(5.170)	(7.450)
	[3.200]	[5.87]	[8.29]	[7.33]	[5.72]	[5.96]
Age	0.041***	0.005	0.010	0.005	-0.011	0.000
	(1.041)	(1.005)	(1.010)	(1.005)	(0.990)	(1.000)
	[5.080]	[0.62]	[1.06]	[0.67]	[-1.39]	[0.00]
American	0.528*	-0.032	-0.545†	-0.476*	0.131	0.420
	(1.696)	(0.969)	(0.580)	(0.621)	(1.140)	(1.522)
	[2.160]	[-0.13]	[-1.84]	[-1.90]	[0.55]	[1.19]
Education	0.100	0.003	0.281*	0.0254	0.339**	0.014
	(1.105)	(1.003)	(1.325)	(1.026)	(1.402)	(1.015)
	[0.880]	[0.03]	[2.13]	[0.23]	[3.04]	[0.09]
English	1.109***	0.807**	0.556†	0.147	0.813**	0.334
	(3.033)	(2.241)	(1.743)	(1.158)	(2.255)	(1.396)
	[3.960]	[2.89]	[1.71]	[0.55]	[3.17]	[0.83]
Income	0.000***	0.000*	0.000**	0.000	0.000*	0.000*
	(1.000)	(1.000)	(1.000)	(1.000)	(1.000)	(1.000)
	[3.390]	[2.48]	[2.56]	[1.86]	[2.07]	[1.93]
Male	-0.332	-0.218	0.112	0.074	0.080	-0.583†
	(0.717)	(0.804)	(1.120)	(1.077)	(1.083)	(0.558)
	[-1.310]	[-0.86]	[0.37]	[0.29]	[0.33]	[-1.69]
Chi-Squared	102.9	63.54	106.93	68.74	88.93	50.88
P > Chi-Squared	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pseudo R-Squared	0.197	0.13	0.244	0.139	0.167	0.17
Observations	393	390	393	387	389	391

Data are from the Iranian American Survey Project, collected 2015-2016.

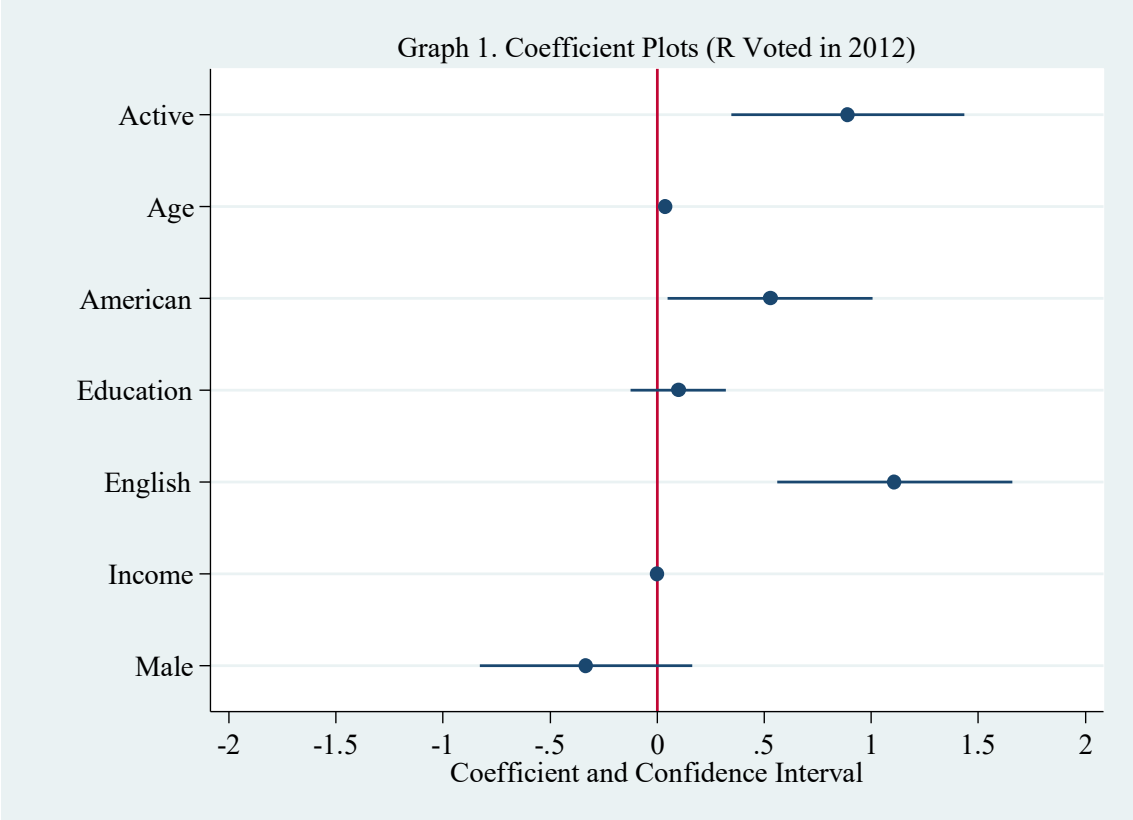
Key: coefficient, (odds ratio), [z-score]

† $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$

To eliminate redundancy, only the coefficient's significance is reported.

Voting

When it comes to voting, we can give credence to several of the hypotheses. There is support for H_1, which suggests that older Iranian Americans will participate to a greater degree than younger Iranian Americans. With voting, we expect that each one-year increase in age will lead to a four-percentage point increase in the odds that a person will vote. The second hypothesis suggests that Iranian Americans with higher incomes will participate in politics more than those will lower income. This proved to be the most frequently skipped question in the survey project. Results are significant for five out of six participation methods, but the variable shows no effect. Thus, H_2 cannot be supported by this study.[25] As seen in Graph 1, Iranians who

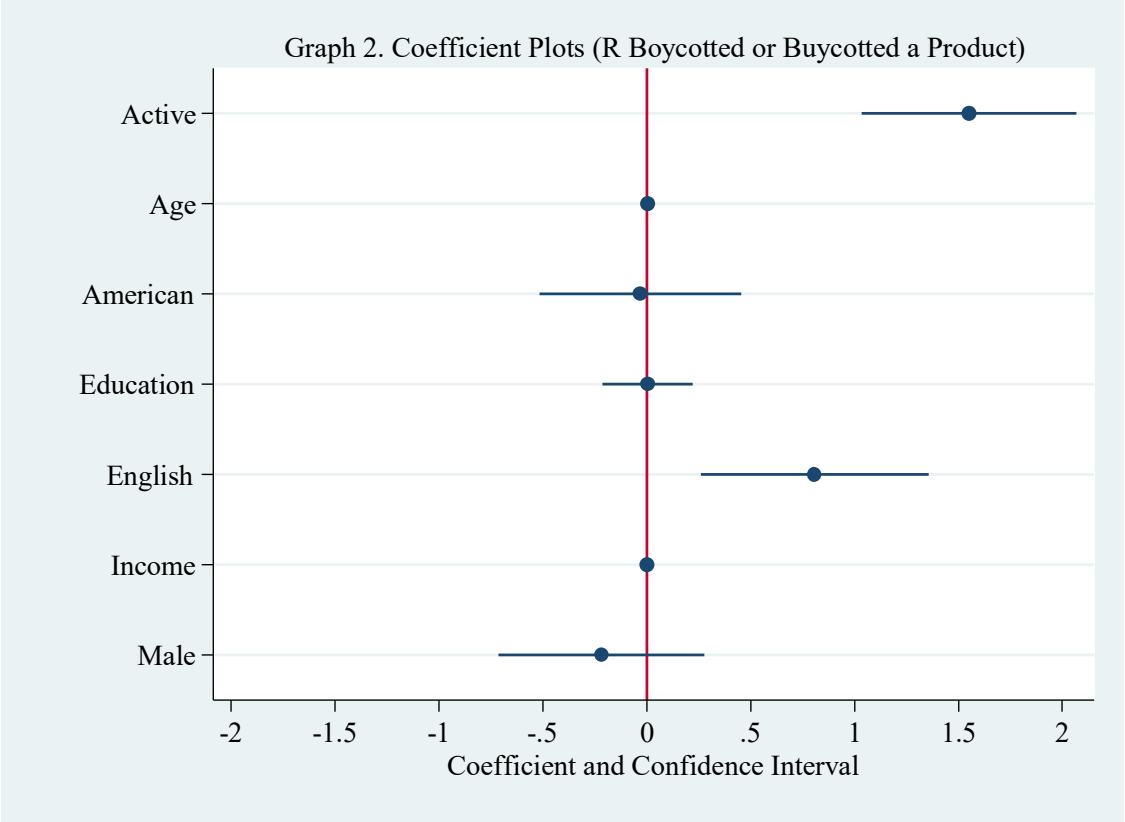


[25] See the conclusion for a detailed discussion of income and the Iranian-American community.

classify themselves as Iranian American or Persian American are significantly more likely to vote than Iranians who do not classify themselves as Iranian American, leading to support for the third hypothesis.

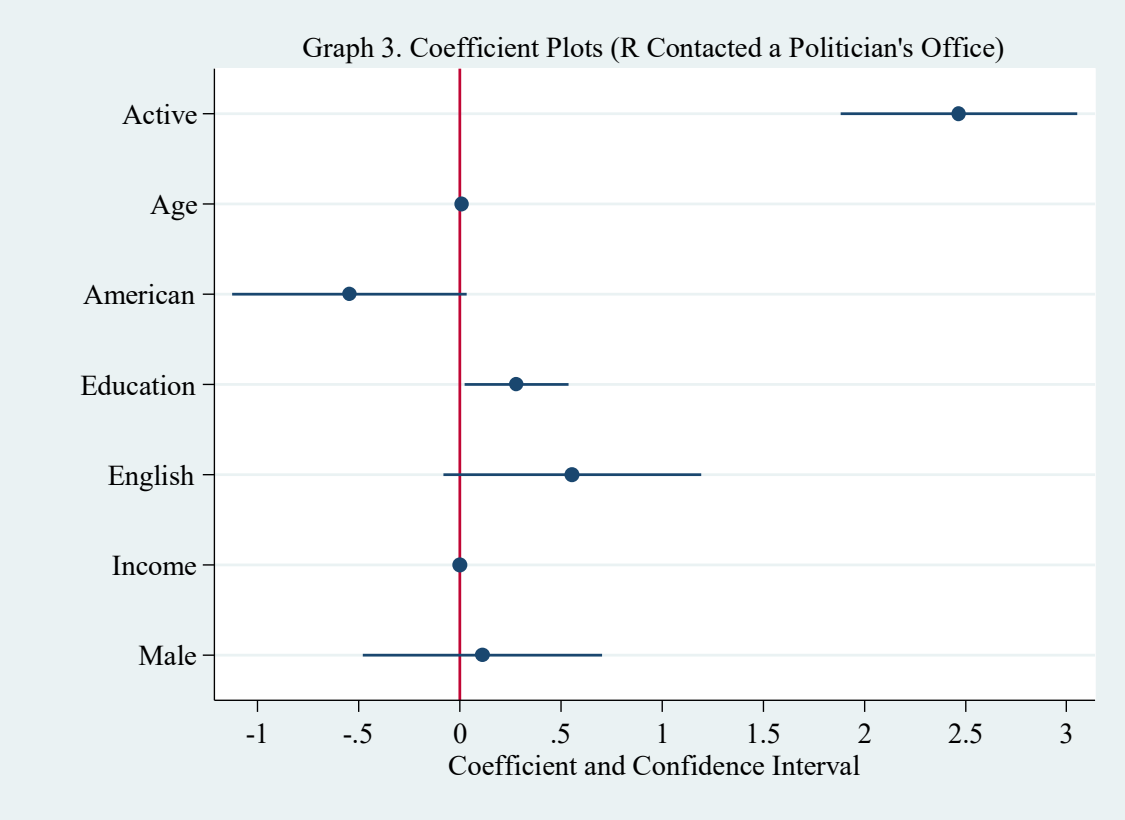
Boycotting & Buycotting

I find a minimal effect for boycotting/buycotting and age, suggesting a small level of support for the first hypothesis. And although there is virtually no effect regarding Iranians who classify themselves as American, Iranians that took the English version of the survey are significantly more likely to have boycotted or boycotted a product because of political reasons, indicating support for the third hypothesis. This suggests that language assimilation may play a role in how Iranian Americans engage with the political system.



Contacting a Politician's Office

Iranian Americans who classified themselves as politically active were over eleven times as likely to contact a politician's office compared to those who did not classify themselves as active. Although not statistically significant, older Iranian Americans were more likely to have contacted a politician's office compared to younger Iranian Americans, therefore supporting the first hypothesis. Interestingly, classifying oneself as American actually decreased the odds that one would contact a politician's office. Those who classified themselves as Iranian American or Persian American were 58% as likely as Iranians or Persians to have contacted a politician's office, discrediting the third hypothesis.

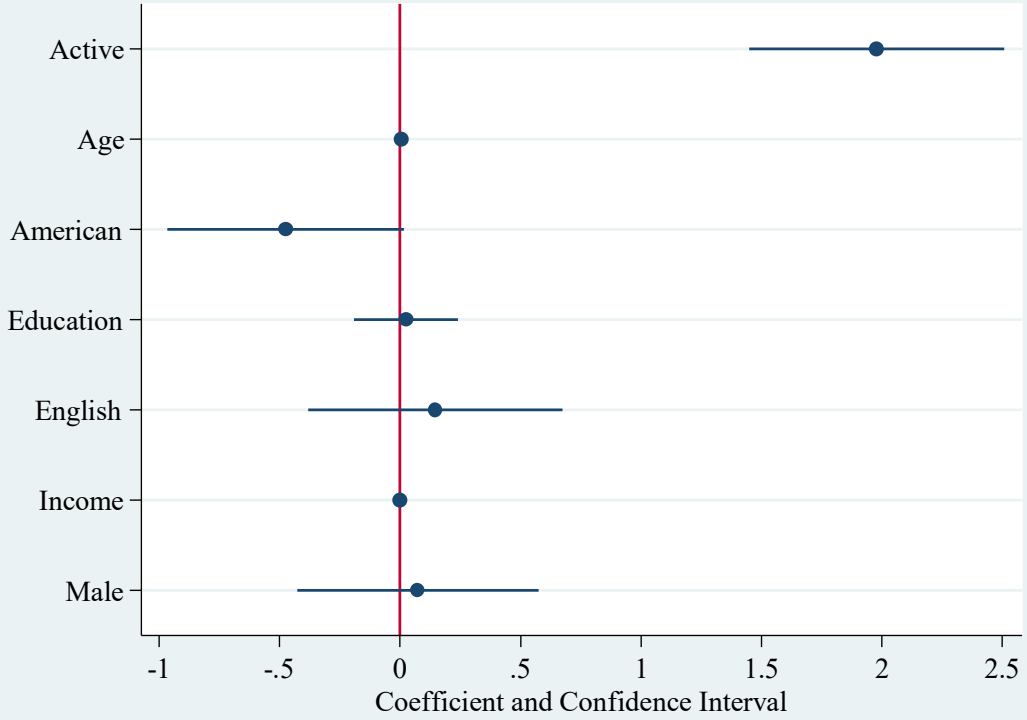


Participating in a Political Demonstration

There is no significant effect concerning age and propensity to have participated in a political demonstration according to the survey data. This could stem from the fact that older

Iranian Americans that immigrated to the United States may have participated in the political demonstrations in Iran, a nuance that was not addressed by the survey project. Perhaps the concept of internal ethnicity proposed by Bozorgmehr (1997) can help us make light of this fact. The interviews can provide some additional insight here, however. Fourteen Iranian Americans were interviewed that fall between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine. Nine of the respondents had participated in a political demonstration that took place in the United States, or roughly sixty-four percent. Out of the remaining thirty-six, seventeen had participated in a political demonstration in the United States, or roughly forty-seven percent. The youth were also much more likely to have attended a political demonstration within the last five years. This information, then, will lead us to oppose the first hypothesis (at least with respect to attending demonstrations).

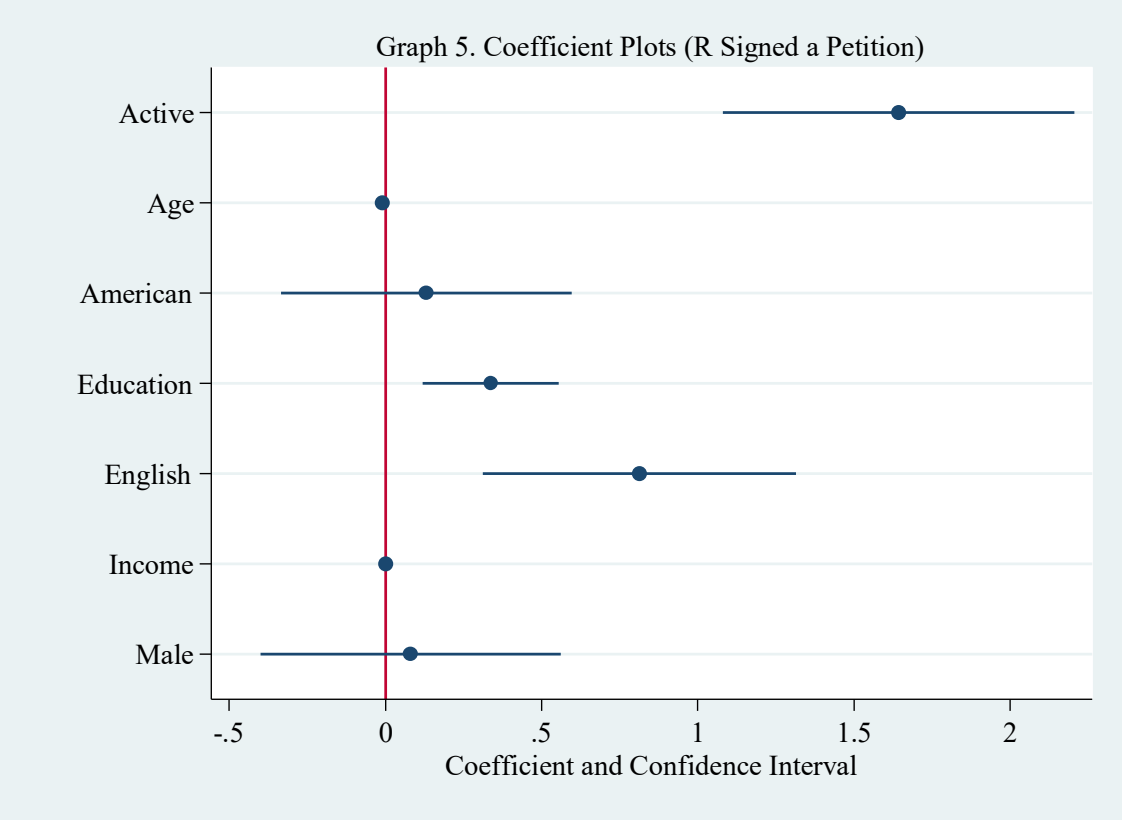
Graph 4. Coefficient Plots (R Attended a Political Demonstration)



Those that considered themselves American were less likely to have participated in a political demonstration compared to those that referred to themselves as only Iranian or Persian. If a respondent considered themselves American, they were only 62% as likely to have participated in a demonstration. This information contradicts the third hypothesis and supports the fifth hypothesis.

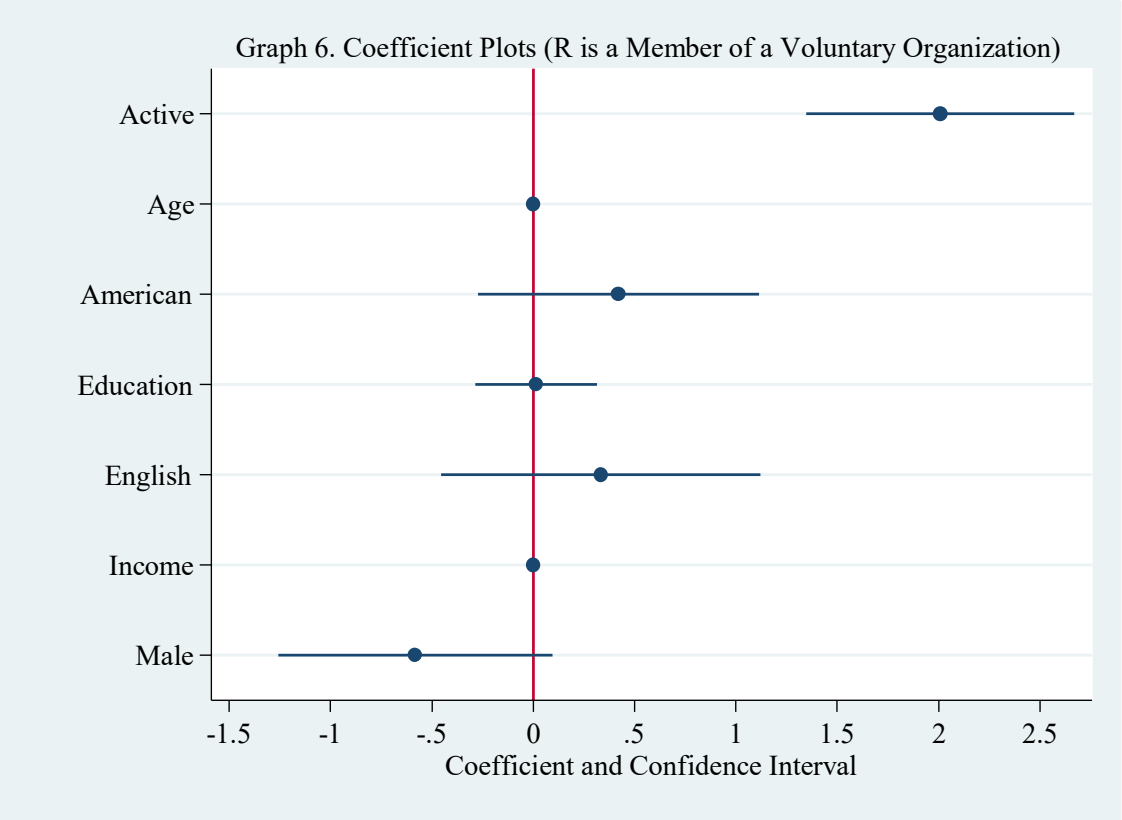
Signing a Petition

Age has a small negative effect on signing a petition. As age increases, Iranian Americans tend to be less likely to sign petitions. This leads us to oppose the first hypothesis. Iranian Americans are more likely, however, to sign a petition compared to non-Americans. Among those who preferred to take the survey in English were appreciably more likely to have signed a petition in comparison to Farsi-preference respondents. This leads to additional support for the third hypothesis.



Membership in Voluntary Groups

The survey suggests that participation in voluntary groups is not dependent on age. There is zero effect with respect to age and membership in voluntary groups. However, the type of membership varies. One interview respondent remarked, "My dad got me into [voluntary group] when I was 14. He was a member for many years. But he was mostly a sponsor of events and he attended conferences. [My brother] and I would get there early and setup the stage, work the console, fix the lighting, run the projector and computer, and then stay late to take down the stage." Although membership seems to be relatively constant, the youth might be more active than their older counterparts.



Membership in voluntary groups tends to be significantly female-dominated. Men are significantly less likely than women to be a member of a voluntary group, which was supported by both the survey and interview data. Out of the fourteen youth interviewees, only six were

members of a voluntary group, and five were female, all of which also identified themselves as American in addition to Iranian or Persian.[26] The survey data also support this contention; Iranian Americans were 150% as likely to belong to a voluntary group. This leads to support for the third hypothesis, while simultaneously disconfirming the fourth hypothesis.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Iranian Americans have not been a focus of race and ethnicity research, and this project aims to increase their attention within both the race and ethnicity literature, and the political science literature more broadly. Iranian Americans tend to be highly educated, self-employed, and many of those in the second generation have graduated from United States schools and are in the labor market. As Bozorgmehr (1998) has noted, Iranian Americans are "at risk" of assimilating into the more dominant United States culture, and this study seeks to see whether that has happened or is happening. Moreover, this study is one of the first to systematically study Iranian American political participation. The results have helped shed light on the Iranian American population, and answer important questions on Iranian American ethnic identity, participation in American society, and immigrant incorporation more broadly.

The results also raise questions on the efficacy of quantitative research with respect to Iranian Americans. As aforementioned, many respondents to the survey project initially rejected the idea of participation, but became more comfortable after repetitive interactions over a period of time. Many also rejected the commitment to anonymity that was explicitly stated in both the recruitment script and the official Institutional Review Board forms. Throughout the data collection process, it became evident that before interacting with the Iranian American population, a modicum of trust was necessary. As a result of this particularity, future research on

[26] It should be noted that the number of voluntary group members in the interview sample is most likely inflated due to the sampling method.

Iranian Americans should focus on more qualitative interview approaches in a similar vein to the second study presented here. Undeniably, this difficulty hinders the generalizability of the present study on the Iranian American population as a whole, and limits studying Iranian Americans as a whole.

Nonetheless, we can make several claims vis-à-vis the hypotheses. Age was correlated with increased political participation in four out of the six methods. Given these results, it logically follows that Iranian Americans would be skeptical in signing a petition, since documentation of personal information tended to make the population uneasy. And although the interview data would suggest that Iranian Americans tend to become less participatory as they age, I believe this is more associated with changing norms. Whereas the youth view political participation as donating their time, it appears that older Iranian Americans view participation more passively, choosing instead to donate money. All the information leads me to accept H_1.

With respect to H_2, we can neither accept nor reject the hypothesis, and future research needs to be conducted on the relationship between income and political participation in the Iranian American case. I expected this to be a difficult puzzle to piece together, but the extent to which Iranian Americans preferred to keep their personal income and wealth private surprised me. There was no single question that was more abrasive than questions concerning income and wealth in either the surveys or the interviews.

As for H_3, again the need for additional research is needed. Three measures indicate general support for the hypothesis, and three measures indicate opposition. Instead of conceptualizing the issue as more or less participation in relation to each other, it perhaps may be more beneficial to again focus on the idea of changing or different norms. Those who considered themselves American were significantly more likely to have voted in the previous election,

whereas those who did not were more likely to contact a politician or attend a demonstration (more costly methods of participation). Given that Americans tend to participate by voting more so than any other method of participation, this indicates that Iranians who consider themselves American are assimilating into the mainstream culture.

Participation in voluntary organizations leads to the same conclusion. Those who considered themselves American were much more likely to participate in a voluntary organization compared to Iranians that did not classify themselves as American. And while Iranian Americans were more likely to participate in voluntary organizations, they were less likely to participate in a political demonstration. This leads us to reject the fourth hypothesis and accept the fifth hypothesis.

I expect these results to be largely applicable to the Iranian American community living in similar megalopolises in the United States (Seattle, New York, etc.). However, Iranian Americans that have settled in more rural areas might have done so due to a desire to blend in. The results from the present study are likely less applicable to them, given that they likely do not have the same desire to replicate Iranian life in the United States, or the desire to return to the homeland.

In conclusion, Iranian Americans constitute a unique immigrant population. Unlike most other immigrant communities, Iranian Americans who immigrated to the United States pre-1979 and in the years that immediately followed did so with the intent to return to their homeland. Weathering the revolutionary storm turned into resettlement, but the desire to return is still strong with the first generation. Although Iranian Americans are assimilating into American culture, the duality of ethnicity is important with the community. This suggests support for the concept of segmented assimilation and selective acculturation posited by Portes and Zhou

(1993). It is true that Iranian Americans are not politically active, but in regards to their socioeconomic status, they have succeeded in blending into the dominant American culture. Further research should seek to parse the changing norms of political participation and ethnic identity formation of Iranian Americans. And in particular, looking at Iranian Americans who classify themselves as active suggest these norms are focused on more costly measures of political participation – boycotting, contacting politicians, attending demonstrations, and participating in voluntary organizations. Describing these norms will help understand the content and character of the Iranian emigrant, bolster the literature on race and ethnicity, and better help political scientists understand immigration and assimilation more broadly.

CHAPTER FOUR:

BLENDING AND OPTING: ROMANTICIZING THE "COUNTRY THAT WE HAD" AND DEVELOPING IDENTITY

"Flags are bits of colored cloth that governments use first to shrink-wrap people's minds & then as ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead."

- Arundhati Roy

As he sips his tea in front of a giant Iranian flag, Sohrab Ahvaz tells me what it was like before the revolution. "We were the most modern country in the world. Europeans came to Iran for their vacations and never wanted to leave. The only time Iranians left was in the summer when it was too hot… Now, not even one Iranian wants to be in Iran." Plastered along his dining room walls and sitting atop his tables are pictures of the old Iran and its king, Mohammad Reza Shah. Like many Iranian Americans, his story is one of loss, struggle, and reestablishment. Sohrab came to the United States in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, determined to avoid the political turmoil in Iran during the transition from absolute monarchy to Islamic republic. He was an influential businessperson in Iran and left in February of 1979, a few weeks after his beloved king fled the country due to the growing revolution. Throughout my data collection, I met hundreds of Iranians who shared Sohrab's desires for a return to the way things were; a return in which the calligraphic *Allah* on the Iranian flag was abandoned in favor of a return to the lion and sun – much like the one hanging above Sohrab's head. Many also share similar stories – how Iran was once "the greatest country in the world" and has deteriorated under a dictatorship.

For many Iranians, that is the simple truth – the revolution is the dividing line from good to bad. But for the millions that protested against the Shah and supported the Iranian Revolution and its aftermath, there is more to the story. "All of these people that say Iran was the best country before the revolution are wrong – we have always had problems," Mahtab Pakdasht tells

me in Farsi. A devout Iranian Muslim, Mahtab came to the United States to visit her children for the summer. “My kids all love America, but I could never live here. There is no culture in America. They always tell me that they want me to move here with them, but that is impossible for me. America also has its own problems, Iran has its own problems, everywhere has its own problems. The politics are not important for me.” Mahtab illustrates a second, more conservative religious sentiment shared by a different group of Iranians who disagree with Sohrab.

The conflicting narratives illustrated above highlight a cleavage in the Iranian community. The Shah remains a highly controversial figure both in and out of Iran; many who left around the time of the revolution still tend to support him (and have attempted to pass on that support to their children).[27] On the other hand, there is also a sizeable group of Iranian Americans who disagreed with the Shah’s authoritarian style of rule, particularly his secret police force, the SAVAK. The conflicting narratives illustrated above highlight a clear divide between Iranians. But when I ask them about race, the differences become more muddled. For Sohrab, race and ethnicity intertwine:

> **Sohrab Ahvaz**: Yes, I think there are major differences between people. For example, In Iran, the cultures are very different. Especially if you go to the northwest, you will see a lot of Kurds who are not really Iranian. In the southwest, there are a lot of Arabs who are very different, too – and those of us from Tehran really are different from the rest… Here it is even more obvious the differences because of the Asians and blacks and whites, it is very obvious there are different cultures.

Mahtab agrees:

> **Mahtab Pakdasht**: Of course the culture matters! That is the most important thing about Iranians. We have a very strong culture. But it is very important from city-to-city and not everyone in Iran has the same culture. For instance, there are those of us from Tehran and then there are others.

[27] Amongst those with an opinion in the Iranian American Survey Project data, 59.4% of respondents approved of the Shah, while 40.6% of respondents disapproved.

Clearly, the ethnic and racial differences blend together for both Sohrab and Mahtab, but they also imply a hierarchy in their comments. Both come from the capital city and both suggest that Tehran's culture is "different" from the rest. In this chapter, I thus use race in a similar fashion to Winant (2000): "a concept that signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies." I seek to understand how Iranian Americans construct their identities through uncovering their "deep stories" (Hochschild, 2016). Specifically, I tackle the following questions:

1) How do Iranian Americans shape their racial and ethnic identities and to what extent are they shaped by others' perceptions of their race?
2) What does the deep story reveal about Iranian American assimilation? Are Iranian Americans more Iranian or more American?

Understanding the barriers that Iranian Americans create and the barriers imposed on them by others will add to a rich academic scholarship on race and ethnicity, but also incorporate an additional case of an understudied group.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although once thought of as biological difference, the social construction of race has historically developed in the United States as a means of limiting access to the higher rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. Rather than think of race as just a modern concept, it is useful to understand it as a process over time. Miles (1984) argues that race functions through racialization, which facilitates exploitation based on phenotype. As "race relations" began to develop between people in the Americas, it "was structured by competition for land, introduction of private property, demand for labor, and the perceived obligation of conversion to Christianity," (Torres and Ngin 1997, p. 271). The racial hierarchy today is structured similarly;

it is loosely based on skin color, with a clear preference for whites and "honorary whites" over blacks and other persons with darker skin colors (Bonilla-Silva and Glover 2004). For honorary whites, the process of moving from outsider to insider is linear and generational. Whiteness as a category in the United States originally did not include many Eastern and Southern Europeans, but increasing group contact produced a more inclusive racial category – one in which no one questions the whiteness of Italian or Irish Americans (Cornell and Hartmann 1988; Ignatiev 1995; Jacobson 1998).

For Middle Eastern immigrants in the United States, honorary whiteness largely depends on assimilation, phenotype, and law (Alba 2005; Fourlas 2015; Tehranian 2015). Although legally classified as white, Iranian Americans and other Middle Easterners are racialized negatively in virtually every medium (Shaheen 2009). Although publically ascribed as Middle Eastern and therefore the other, Middle Easterners are legally understood to be white (Tehranian 2009). Fourlas (2015) suggests that this public versus private classification of Middle Easterners facilitate their "degradation, exploitation, domination, and destruction of the population." Moreover, since they are legally classified as white, remedial solutions are lacking (Tehranian 2009). This outcome of racialization is apparent in navigating ordinary life as a person from the Middle East; it can more innocuous as asking "where are you from?" to more pernicious and violent "as a glare and perhaps an utterance-gesture; being bullied and beaten at school or work; frequently as a groping at the airport… sometimes it tragically explodes as a neo-Nazi murdering innocents in Wisconsin," (Fourlas 2015). More recent events, like the Christchurch mosque shooting, illustrate the racialization of Middle Easterners has produced more racist, Islamophobic violence in the Trump era.

Another vein in the literature perhaps best illustrated by Fanon (1952, 1963) argues that race is best understood as a co-constituted variable along with class: "The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich…" (p.5). Marx's *Capital* agrees that race and class are intertwined with one another, with racism a function of class domination: "Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded." Tackling the problem of racism would thus require intergroup cooperation and color *bound* programs that directly remediate discrimination (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts 1978; Wilson 1996). Support for those programs would largely depend on belief in linked fate and social status; Michael Dawson's (1994) work on the "black utility heuristic" would suggest that those who believe their outcomes are tied to their race would be more supportive of those programs, but higher-income blacks were less likely than lower income blacks to support redistributive income policies. Similarly, Hajnal (2007) finds when blacks enter traditionally white spaces through social mobility, they are more likely to experience discrimination and thus support pro-black policies and become politically activated.

For immigrants more generally, there is still significant disagreement among scholars on how the contexts of reception can influence upward mobility or how upward mobility can influence their politics. Some argue that racialized nonwhites are at greater risk of downward mobility (Gans 1992; Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes, Fernández-Kelly, and Haller 2005). An established ethnic community can help promote success, as is the case in Russian Jewish immigrants, but in the case of racialized Latinos and blacks, the "extension of civil rights movement strategies and affirmative action policies… and the legacy of African American struggles" serve as a dependent variable (Kasinitz 2008). Jiménez and Horowitz (2013) find that third-plus generation Asian immigrants in Silicon Valley have surpassed whites in upward social

mobility due to nearly equal demographics and high-achievement norms. A corollary to that point is that whites in poor, black neighborhoods in cities like Atlanta and Detroit are viewed as failures by the black population therein (McDermott 2006; Hartigan 1999). Honorary whites thus may be more upwardly mobile depending on the geographic demographics to which they settle; for many immigrants, part of their upward mobility is dependent on proving their worth to the white category by subordinating blacks (Ignatiev 1995; Loewen 1971).

Bozorgmehr (1998) argues that many contemporary immigrant groups are blended into a supranational identity due to hailing from "established states with a well-defined sense of national pride." Many early theoretical and empirical studies[28] made the same misstep by ignored pre-migration ethnic identities and how they would influence post-migration ethnic identities. Lopez and Espiritu (1990) term this supranational identity as panethnicity, which Bozorgmehr (1990) rightly identifies as a component in understanding the Iranian American case, largely due to "conflict with the dominant populations" in the home country. In Khalili's (2017) expert analysis of Iranian Americans, she finds that "some accepted the white/Caucasian category, [and] others were reluctant or outright rejected this for themselves… others show a hint of desire to be part of this exclusive and elusive racial category." Khalili also argues that Iranians will employ "the Caucasian/Aryan narrative in their racial self-identification."

As Iranian Americans are one of the most ethnically diverse immigrant groups (Bozorgmehr, Sabagh, and Der-Martirosian 1993), I suspect that their ability to assimilate and experience upward mobility depends on two different processes I explain here: *blending* and *opting*. Blending is an involuntary process – it is what happens to you as an immigrant or oppressed person. Blending *in* happens when dominant groups (i.e., whites) see someone as an equal due to fairer skin and limited (perceived) cultural differences. Blending *out* occurs when

[28] See, for example, Thomas and Znaniecki 1927, Gordon 1964, or Duncan and Duncan 1968.

you look *different*. Largely determined by phenotype but also cultural differences, those who blend out are racialized as an inferior group. Opting is voluntary process – it is what you choose to do as an immigrant or oppressed person. One can opt *in* to cultural events, cuisines, music, language, etc.; or one can opt *out* and choose to eschew ties to their roots. I reason that an immigrant who wants to assimilate and experience upward mobility would need to blend in, or at least avoid blending out. As for opting, opting in to beneficial cultural and ethnic activities and experiences and opting out of those perceived as negative should serve as an essential component to upward mobility and assimilation.

METHODS

In this chapter, I employ the use of an original dataset I constructed called the Iranian American Interview Project (IAIP). The IAIP sample was accrued via snowball sampling.[29] Once the interview concluded, respondents were asked to identify additional Iranian Americans that would be interested in participating in an interview. Unlike the survey data, participants in the IAIP were much more willing to share their stories; I assume this is due to the fact that a trusted individual facilitated the introduction and vouched for my motives. All interviews were voice recorded with the exception of two (at the request of the participants), and transcribed at a later date. I used selective coding to identify the major themes related to my research questions, and was assisted by notes that I collected during each interview. Specifically, I looked for themes in the transcripts and my notes that discussed ideas around race, racialization, assimilation, politics, political participation, and upward mobility. I assigned each theme a color, and highlighted parts of the transcripts in that respective color for later interpretation. Nearly all interviews (n=43) took place in the participant's home, and the remaining interviews were conducted in a coffee

[29] These interviews do not include the 25 interviews I completed in order to inform the IASP, but were collected after the survey data was compiled. Participants belonged to my extended social network, but none were introduced to me prior to our first meeting.

shop or restaurant. Participants were interviewed individually with the goal of minimizing breaks.

Interviews began in an unstructured format, but I employed the questionnaire used in the IASP as a guide. I began each interview by asking the participant to tell me a little about themselves and whether they were born in the United States or abroad. If they did not volunteer their career during the introductory phase of their interview, I also asked them for this information. The shortest interview took approximately fifteen minutes, and the longest took over four hours.[30] With the exception of the four-hour interview, the rest were less than one hour (most hovered around thirty minutes). All participants were first asked whether or not they were born in the United States. All participants were given the opportunity to discuss any topic they felt was important exhaustively.

All interviewees were asked many of the same questions as those included in the Iranian American Survey Project, but I left room for them to steer the conversation to try and uncover the "deep stories" they wanted to tell. Arlie Hochschild (2016) defines the deep story as the "story that *feels as if* it were true" (2016). This is the story that people share with one another, and it is the story that individuals cling onto despite what reality might suggest. The interview process was truly overwhelming. Many of the participants shared terrifying stories of growing up during the Iranian Revolution, the hostage crisis, the Iran-Iraq War, etc. Some also shared deeply personal stories about imprisonment, cruel treatment, and loss of life. But what I also noticed was a romanticization of what the "old country" was, perhaps a function of opting *out* in order to avoid potentially negative racialization. I was also surprised by the level of prejudice on display towards others who are grouped into the MENA label, particularly Arabs.

[30] The four-hour interview was an outlier. This particular respondent was a leader of a prominent opposition party to the Iranian government and had unique insight into the organization's structure (and I was also persuaded to stay for dinner).

RESULTS

With regards to race, the majority of Iranian Americans prefer to label themselves as Iranian or Iranian American, but some also use the terms Persian or Persian American. The survey data collected for Chapter Three confirms this point, as 68.15% of respondents picked one of those two labels. Given the results from previous studies, I expected many of the participants to label themselves as white, but that was not the case. Although most participants recognized that their *legal* identity was white, they instead preferred associations with other Iranians. This was confirmed by the survey data, in which only 3.51% of respondents marked white. To most of the individuals interviewed, race did matter, insomuch as distancing from outgroups was important (both white and Arab). Many of the participants not only tried to distance from others, but also vocalized highly prejudiced attitudes, especially towards Arabs.

Jalal Borujerdi, a business owner born in the 1950s who immigrated to the United States before the revolution, illustrates this point. When asked about his race, Jalal said that he was Middle Eastern. Very few respondents identified Middle Eastern as their race, so I asked him to elaborate on why he prefers that label:

> **Interviewer**: You say that you are Middle Eastern? Do you say that to avoid using the term "Iranian" or is it for some other reason?
>
> **Jalal Borujerdi**: No, actually, I say Middle Eastern because that is most common. I get asked that question sometimes because of my accent, and Middle East is more common than Iranian. Sometimes people don't know of Iran, but they know of Middle East.
>
> **Interviewer**: Do you believe Iranians and all Middle Easterners are similar?
>
> **Jalal Borujerdi**: [laughs] No! We are very different from Arabs. You know what we call them? *Marmoolak-khor!*[31] Arabs live in the desert and that is all they can eat. Their civilization has always been behind Iran's. Iranian culture is very modern, if you go to Iran, even after the revolution, you will see how advanced

[31] A Farsi insult for Arabs, meaning "lizard-eaters."

> we are. Even the garbage collector can recite you Rumi or *Shahnameh*.[32] Actually a good point if you read the poem, Ferdowsi teaches how our culture was destroyed during Arab and Turk invasion, but poetry and language survived. Every word in *Shahnameh* is actual Farsi because Ferdowsi specifically did not use Arab words in the poem. That is also why we are Shia and other Arabs are Sunni. We have been persecuted by them since before even Mongol times.

When asked to elaborate, Jalal demonstrates the process of opting out as a means of distancing himself from Arabs, but he also clearly romanticizes Iranian culture and chooses to opt in to the perceived advantages he believes it has over Arab (or white) culture(s). Since his accent is still noticeable, opting out is a means of resisting blending out along with other Middle Easterners who may be racialized as others. When I prompted participants to discuss any similarities with Arabs, most chose to demean Arab culture and echoed a viewpoint that clearly placed Iranians above others. Khosrow Abadani, a landlord, echoed this prejudiced viewpoint of Arabs:

> **Interviewer**: Do you ever call yourself Middle Eastern instead of Iranian when someone asks you where you're from?
>
> **Khosrow Abadani**: No, I don't. I don't want to be together with Arabs. If someone asks me, I tell them I am Iranian and explain to them that Iranians are very different from Arabs. Arabs are much more fanatical and dirty people.

Among those who chose to share opinions on Arabs, the theme of difference was a strong measure of opting out. This viewpoint was nearly universally shared amongst other first generation immigrants who shared opinions on Arabs (although with less prejudiced language):

> **Mehran Najafabad**: Nobody in Iran says they are *khavar miyani*.[33] Everyone only will say they are from a city in Iran. They are from Tehran, Shiraz, Qom. I think we don't say *khavar miyani* because Arabs is very different from Iranians.
>
> **Bamshad Qarchak**: To tell you the truth, I don't think we are very similar with Arab people. It is mainly because of history between Arabs and Iran. Arabs forced Iran to become Muslim when the religion was *Zartoshti*.[34] Arabs invaded Persia

[32] *Shahnameh,* or *The Book of Kings*, is the national epic of Iran.
[33] "Middle Eastern" in Farsi.
[34] "Zoroastrian" in Farsi.

many times. Arabs are very violent. Arabs started Iraq War [with Iran]. Iran has a very peaceful history except the current government, but that is another story.

Siavash Kamalshahr: I don't have anything against anyone, but Middle East is not very specific. I don't like to be Middle East because then people think you are a Muslim and I am an atheist. If someone says Middle East you think Muslim right away or you think Arab. I am not Muslim or Arab, I am just human.

I found very little prejudice towards Arabs amongst the second generation. Ali Yousefabad, a college student born in the United States to parents born in Iran shares his opinion of his identity:

Interviewer: What do you think is your racial or ethnic identity?

Ali Yousefabad: My identity? Bro, you know what's cool about being Iranian is that we are everything. I was born here so I am American. But Iran is in Asia, so I am Asian. But it is also in the Middle East, so I am Middle Eastern. But we are white because applications put Middle Eastern next to white. That's one thing I love about being Persian. It's so unique but at the same time it's really similar. Like some of my friends at [school] are Arab and my girlfriend is Asian and we talked about how similar our families raised us. Their parents were as strict on them as mine are on me and she can't tell her parents we're together for the same reason I can't tell my parents [*laughs*]. The only difference is like language and food, and maybe that FOBs are more cliquey. But with school stuff – it's the EXACT same! My parents would never let me do anything until homework was done and if I didn't get straight As I would get in big trouble. Especially my mom. If I didn't get straight As then the *dampaie*[35] was off IMMEDIATELY [laughs].

Interviewer: [*laughs*] What if someone were to ask you where you from, how would you respond? Iranian, Persian, Middle Eastern, something else?

Ali Yousefabad: I guess I would just say Persian or something. I think it depends on who asks me more than anything else. Like if the person is like a classmate then I'll just say I'm from the United States but my parents are from Iran.

Interviewer: You also mentioned you have Arab and Asian friends. Are there any challenges to having such a diverse group of friends?

Ali Yousefabad: Not at all! I don't think that stuff really matters that much anymore.

[35] "Sandal" in Farsi.

Ali wasn't alone in his ideas on what it means to be Iranian. Other second generation immigrants had much more positive affect towards their American identities. Manizhe Behbahan illustrated difficulties she faces as an Iranian American who is proud of both of her nationalities and her religion:

> **Interviewer**: How important is being Iranian American to you?
>
> **Manizhe Behbahan**: Both are very important. You know [my family and I] came to this country when I was nine and I barely spoke English. It was also three years after 9/11 and it was so scary at first because I had trouble making American friends because of my hijab and my English. The only people I knew were family friends and my uncle who has lived here since before I was born. But after learning and going through citizenship and going to college it became easier. We have much more freedom here in America but I still love my culture [from Iran] and visit my family there as much as possible.
>
> **Interviewer**: Do you think being Muslim made it more difficult for you to make friends?
>
> **Manizhe Behbahan**: I don't want to say yes, but I don't want to say no. I think some people were scared because it was right after America invaded Iraq and that made living here scary. When I was younger I didn't want to wear my hijab because I didn't want people to think I was from Iraq or even from Afghanistan. But now I think it is okay especially because Obama is doing his best to improve our image.

With recent spikes in xenophobic violence, these respondents may have felt different about constructing these identities, but there was a general sense of optimism amongst the Iranian American population prior to the Trump Presidency. According to the IASP dataset, 71.19% of Iranian Americans approved of President Obama and only 13.82% disapproved; today, only 13% of Iranian Americans support President Trump and 78% oppose him.[36] I expect if I ran the same study today and recollected all of the data under the Trump Presidency, there would be vastly different attitudes towards racialization. A recent survey suggests an overwhelming majority of

[36] According to data collected by Zogby Research Services, in conjunction with the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans, 2017. The Zogby poll contains 400 Iranian Americans from the entire nation, while the IASP is local to Southern California.

Iranian Americans are worried about increased discrimination due to the rhetoric and policies of the Trump Presidency, with 82% of respondents being either very or somewhat concerned the group will be targeted in the future.

Some also shared worries about being perceived as an Iranian. Fereydoun Kermani, a "professional worker" shared his fears and reasons for opting out:

> **Fereydoun Kermani**: No, I don't face any discrimination, but it is not a very positive thing to be Iranian in America. We are part of that evil axis so it is not very good to be too much. You can try to educate people but they don't really listen.

Iranian Americans thus shape their identities by opting in and out when they deem it serves their interests, and trying to avoid blending out along with other Middle Easterners. What I heard most often was Iranian Americans defining themselves as Iranian, but there could also be an interviewer effect on display. Since I am Iranian myself, there was most likely less reluctance to opt in to the label. Running a similar study with a non-Iranian interviewer may produce different results, but that interviewer may run into problems due to skepticism like I experienced when collecting data for the IASP.

With respect to culture, most of the respondents chose to opt in. Many individuals spoke highly of Iranian American food, music, traditions, ability to speak the language, religion and opportunities available to them by group membership.

> **Asghar Arak**: It is important to carry on traditions from Iran here. My children don't know how beautiful our country was and what we left to come here. Iran was a very advanced society before the revolution.

> **Ali Yousefabad**: I like speaking Farsi with my Persian friends. It's cool that we can communicate and no one knows what we are saying around us. And I really love Persian food. There's a really big community of us around [campus], and there are so many restaurants around us. Sometimes it feels like you're in Little Iran.

> **Jalal Borujerdi**: I don't know what to say other than I am very proud to be Iranian. I wouldn't want to be somebody else.

I got the general sense that religion was important to Iranian Americans, but only insomuch as it serves as a cultural tie (again as a means of distancing from others who may be lumped into the Middle Eastern category). Comments like Jalal's "That is also why we are Shia and other Arabs are Sunni" illustrate this point. Other participants shared their ideas on religious

Some also discussed the difficulties faced by being Iranian American, especially those with ties to activist groups trying to change the political system in Iran. As part of research, I attended several events ran by these groups. Many spoke about wanting to bring liberal democracy to Iran. One participant shared deeply personal stories about their pasts and reasons for fleeing Iran during an interview after one such event:

> **Alborz Mohammadshahr**: I left Iran because of the revolution. Me and my brother were arrested June 20, 1981 because we participated in political demonstrations against Khomeini and I supported the president at the time, and we were sent to jail. I was released from prison in 1986 without any reason given, but my brother was still in and in 1988 he was killed by the regime. I don't know why I was released and why they kept him in prison but for the past 30 years he has been on my mind every day. We never received his bones, we never received a reason, we never received justice. The Iranian regime denies the murder to this day, but where is my brother if he was not killed?
>
> **Interviewer:** I'm so sorry to hear about your brother. I don't even know what to say.
>
> **Alborz Mohammadshahr**: What is there to say? It is important for you to hear because they are a brutal dictatorship. Please put this in your thesis that they are killing people for power. Tell people my brother was taken to Karaj and imprisoned in Rajaishahr and I was taken to Evin. The last time I saw my brother was at the demonstration in Tehran and the last thing I heard him say is "Don't worry, Alborz." I never heard his voice again, I never saw his face again. When I was released from prison, I left Iran almost immediately. My biggest regret is that I was not there with my mother after the mass killings in 1988. My mother would tell me that she spoke with him when I was in prison, but she never heard from him again after 1988.

Alborz went on to say that he was "an interested but not active member" in the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an organization that was created by members of the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI or Mujahedin) to serve as its diplomatic wing. The Mujahedin established itself as a political and militant organization in the 1960s, based on a combination of socialist and Islamic beliefs, although it transitioned away from socialism in the 1980s. Its headquarters was based in Tehran until the suppression that began after the revolution, and has moved between from France, Iraq, and Albania since 1981.

As part of my data collection, I was able to attend several events organized by the NCRI/PMOI, which has established a presence in the United States despite being labeled as a terrorist organization in 1997 and 2003, respectively. Both were removed from the list during the Obama Presidency. Although the vast majority of Iranian Americans dislike the organization (4.45% approve or strongly approve, 68.62% disapprove or strongly disapprove, and 24.82% did not know of the organization in the IASP), the active members convene at local and international events to share stories, pressure politicians, and advocate for change in Iran. Their reach extends to the city, state, and federal level, and the group routinely has keynote speeches delivered by prominent politicians. Perhaps most famously, Trump's National Security Adviser John Bolton remarked at an event: "And that's why – that's why before 2019, we here will celebrate in Tehran," suggesting that regime change is the only acceptable outcome to both the current administration and supporters of the group.

At one of the events I attended, many shared stories just like that of Alborz, and many suggested that their primary goal was to move back to a "free Iran." I had the opportunity to interview many others in the group but only chose to interview one additional participant due to the fact that their views are less representative of the majority of Iranian Americans in Southern

California. She explained how her identity is firmly Iranian, and that her goal is not to assimilate into the United States:

> **Mojdeh Nazarabad**: I would love to move back to Iran, but I fear that it is not possible. I moved here because of fear of persecution, if I were to ever go back, I am sure that I will be arrested immediately. The regime has spies everywhere. They only care about their own power and not the good of the Iranian people. I am proud of my heritage, but I am not proud of my country anymore.

Amongst the rest of the interviews, none had any positive opinions of the PMOI/NCRI, although most shared their desire for things to change with respect to the political system in Iran. The majority of other respondents simply dismissed them as radicals, and some had very strong opinions on the group's history. Majid Nishapour expressed that he dreamed about moving back, and when I mentioned he shared that opinion with people in the Mujahedin, he stated:

> **Majid Nishapour**: The Mujahedin is a bunch of crazy people who have done nothing but harm Iranians. They want to bring down the government, but only they want to be the people in charge themselves. During the Iran-Iraq War, those motherfuckers bombed Iran with Saddam. I would rather stay in America than live under those crazies.

Majid left Iran in 1987 and eventually was granted asylum after overstaying his visa. This exchange occurred after Majid stated that he hated the Mujahedin and I asked him what he thought about their goals for regime change. Although the stories shared during the events organized by the NCRI/Mujahedin and in the interviews were genuine and difficult to hear, Majid was completely opposed to any association with the group. Later in the interview, I asked him if he thought he would ever move back to Iran, but he expressed doubt:

> **Majid Nishapour**: If you asked me in 1979, I would have told you as soon as the revolution was over. Today, I have my family here, my practice is here, my parents have passed away. What is there for me in Iran but… there's nothing for me there. It was a beautiful place, but unfortunately it is not anymore. No one can bring back what Iran was.

Others shared similar sentiments about Iran and what it meant to them then and now:

> **Sohrab Ahvaz**: Iran is not *Iran* today. I still visit every few years, my brother is still there, but the country is not the same. The children have no futures. My brother is successful in Iran but if you do not have a good job you are nothing. You make do with the situation.
>
> **Behnoosh Jafariyeh**: If it wasn't for my kids, I would move [to Iran] tomorrow. There is something beautiful about living where you grow up, where you understand the language. But where I grew up is no longer there. The streets have new names and even the language is changed. The last time I went to Iran was the first time in 20 years and I barely could recognize it. It was a very emotional experience for me because my home was always in Iran, but now it is disappeared. The change is very sad for me because memories seem so far in the past now. And it was also sad realization that Iran is not my Iran and Iranians see me as an American but I see myself as an Iranian.

Amongst the youth, none expressed desires about wanting to move to Iran or shared many opinions about the history of the country. Instead, they expressed an indifference towards their assimilation, as if the process was not dependent on them:

> **Ali Yousefabad**: I just don't think [race] really matters that much anymore. Growing up I never really saw much racism and there were a lot of Persian kids in my school. My parents talked about how it was different right after 9/11 but I was a kid so that type of stuff just missed me.
>
> **Interviewer**: Would you say you feel more American than Iranian, then? Would you ever want to live in Iran?
>
> **Ali Yousefabad**: My parents always say I'm American and I could never live there. It's kinda boring and there really isn't much to do. I have family in Iran but it's too restricted there and everything is underground. Los Angeles is a really open multicultural community with so much going on so I much rather live here. But like I told you, there are things I really like about being Persian like the food and language and stuff.

Manizhe agreed with Ali's assessment of Iran:

> **Manizhe Behbahan**: Why would I ever move back to Iran [laughs]? I just got my citizenship here two years ago and I don't even want to go visit. Iran was a very difficult place to live and there is no opportunity there if you are a woman. Here there is much more freedom to be a woman. The college system is also very difficult in Iran but here it is much better education. There you have no choice in what you are going to do, but here it is free to choose. In Iran there is desperation everywhere but here there is a lot of opportunity.

Like Khalili (2017), I find that Iranian Americans dislike the Middle Eastern label, but my research indicates that Iranian Americans also do not identify with the white/Caucasian label. Although Iranians understand that they are "white because applications put Middle Eastern next to white," few respondents expressed much of an affinity for their Aryan heritage. Khalili argues that many Iranian Americans may be biased against using the Middle Eastern label due to stories shared by families against Arabs, and I find this to be true as well. With respect to belonging to the Middle Eastern label, there seems to be a generational cleavage as well as a cleavage depending on place of birth. First generation Iranian Americans universally shared their distaste for the label, largely because of fear of being associated with Arabs or Muslims. Amongst the handful of youth that I interviewed, those born in Iran did not express any dislike of Arabs, but they also did not volunteer much positive affect either.

What was most common amongst those alive prior to the revolution was a story of a country that once was, that perhaps never existed. Almost universally, this group communicated a deep sense of loss, partially of their identities and partially of their sense of self. Whether true or not, the Iran that exists in their memories represents an ideal society. Race, racialization, and assimilation paled in comparison to the fictionalized Iran of old. Amongst this group, the symbols, poetry, history, and stories of Iran of old are all that remains of the place they all loved. For this group, they are firmly Iranians, but not of the modern day.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Identifying oneself in the Iranian American community is a difficult process that largely seems to depend on managing the processes I introduced earlier: blending and opting. As defined earlier, blending is an involuntary process that happens to you. Iranian Americans included in this study identified worries associated with blending out, especially those who were concerned

about religious persecution (many of which also expressed negative opinions of Arabs). Opinions espoused here by the Iranian American community should also be understood within a particular context. Although many Iranians discussed their prejudiced opinions of Arabs, this could have been due to the fact that interviewer was also an Iranian. By no means does this serve as an apology for the opinions themselves; instead, the Iranian prejudice against Arabs should be understood as a willingness to convey these opinions to someone in an in-group. I have some anecdotal proof of this assertion, and in conversations with Arab Americans I have learned that Arabs have their own prejudices against Iranians stemming from the Islamic Conquests. "In general, *'Ajam* was a pejorative term, used by Arabs conscious of their political and social superiority in early Islam," (Bosworth 1984). Ajam as a pejorative is still used today to refer to someone who is unintelligible, or a non-Arabic speaker.

The fear of blending out is definitely a motivator for Iranian Americans. The manifestation of this fear is the process of opting in and out of the Iranian culture. In the interviews, it was apparent that Iranian Americans opted into the culture for its benefits, but also opted out in order to avoid blending out. Managing the duality of their racial/ethnic identity becomes a careful process for Iranian Americans. On the one hand, there was near-universal reverence for the culture; on the other, there were genuine fears about what their identities may mean to others.

Another component of the identity story important for first generation Iranians was also religious identity. I interviewed a small group of religious minorities (Jews and Zoroastrians), but the overwhelming majority of participants in both the IASP and IAIP were Muslims. Most participants were not strict practitioners of their respective religious, but instead saw their religious identities as part of their overall identity. Very few respondents discussed anything

about their religion beyond the label itself, and most viewed it as a cultural difference between Iranians, particularly those in the first generation. Iranian Americans appear to be loosely religious and instead see their religions as an important component of their social identities more than anything. Perhaps this is a feature of the internal ethnicity that Bozorgmehr (1997) discusses in his work, but I find a lack of importance about the various particularities of the religions themselves.

As mentioned earlier, results of this study may have been even more pronounced had the data been collected during the Trump Presidency, which has been emblematic of a disdain for nonwhite immigrants. Many of the participants in the IAIP did not communicate significant fears about their status during the data collection, and I believe this has to do with the Obama Administration's slight push towards normalization of relations with Iran with the nuclear deal. Of particular importance here was the National Iranian American Council, or NIAC, which was influential in organizing pro-deal Iranians and lobbying on behalf of the deal to the Administration. Most Iranian Americans did support the nuclear deal with Iran (81% of those with an opinion supported the deal[37]), but among those who did not, prominent groups include the Mujahedin and supporters of Farashgard. I've already discussed the Mujahedin at length, but Farashgard, or Iranian Revival, is a new political movement that is advocating regime change in Iran itself. I suspect members of these two groups and members of the National Council of Iran (the government-in-exile headed by the former Shah's oldest son) would be more supportive of sanctions and a more hawkish approach to the current Iranian regime.

I also expect these groups to be less likely to focus on discrimination and to be more attached to their Iranian identities. The focus of the groups is political change in Iran, and as I

[37] According to the IASP

have mentioned, many have expressed their desires to return to the Iran of the memories. Whether or not this is a possibility remains to be seen, but as of now, the regime has been able to withstand every foreign and domestic attack on its sovereignty.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION: BRINGING IRAN TO AMERICA

It is always dangerous for social scientists to make predictions, but I think it is safe to say that the country that once was will remain as just a memory for Iranian Americans. Despite hopes for political change, the regime's strength has been its endurance. Through its Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, the regime has cultivated a positive image of the regime for many who normally would not support the Islamic Republic's policy positions. This phenomenon has reminded me of a *New York Times* article written a few months after Khomeini's passing in 1989, in which an Iranian learns about his death: "A man explaining why he would send his son out of the country to escape Khomeini stops in midconversation when he hears a radio report… that the Imam is dead. 'This is terrible for my country,' he says." The contradictions evident in the Iranian population are evident. They want change, but they understand the difficulties that are associated with those changes.

As I write this conclusion, I am reminded of the man in the grocery store and my own experiences with racism. I am reminded of my life with a previous name – Arshia Tajarrodkhah. Under my birth name, I experienced a very different life from my current one. The first eight trips through airport security ended with a "random security check" – something I have never experienced as Archie Delshad. I am reminded of the Afghan women who contributed to my understanding of my own prejudices. I also look at the juxtaposition of hopefulness I found amongst the Iranian American community during my data collection in comparison to the data from the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans that was collected post-Trump and their finding that Iranian American fears of discrimination are on the rise. In a previous draft of this dissertation, I initially discussed my fears that Trump's current advisory staff would lead to war

with Iran. With the announcement that John Bolton has resigned as National Security Adviser, I feel relieved that his hawkish influence is now out of the White House. I'm also saddened that the bar has been set so low.

The politics of the current administration may change with Bolton's departure, but irreparable damage has already been done. I can point to a specific example of someone hurt by the family separation policies of the Trump Administration: my aunt's sister-in-law and her family. In 2016, they were awarded a diversity visa through the lottery program. Her and her three children were able to leave Iran and come to the United States to begin the transition while her husband stayed behind in order to finalize their affairs and manage their business. After Trump's executive order was issued – the one that barred travel from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen – her husband's lottery visa was revoked. For the past three years, those three children have not seen their father and their mother has assumed the role of both breadwinner and caregiver. This is just one example in a sea of examples on how Trump's politics have hurt people from the Middle East.

Iranian Americans clearly want political change to happen in Iran. They want more power over the governing apparatus. Some argue in favor of a constitutional monarchy; others argue in favor of a secular democracy. The expatriate community is also divided in how they want to see that change take place. Some groups, like the Mujahedin, would like that change to happen through maximum pressure on the current regime. This includes more sanctions, more hard-line approaches, and policies that could eventually lead to war. Others, like the National Iranian American Council, would advise in favor of diplomatic relations with the current regime. Neither seems like a good strategy given that either option leads to greater oppression of the Iranian people overall. If political change were to happen and Iranians were able to realize their

dream of repatriation in the Iran of their memories, that would only happen through a genuinely popular revolution.

Until something of the sort happens, if it ever does, Iranians in America are forced to bring Iran to America – something they have done since the largest diaspora was established in Los Angeles:

> Most of us came here as exiles or refugees fleeing religious or political persecution. We have spent the last three and a half decades with one foot in Iran and the other in the United States, living somewhat schizophrenic lives, like children of divorced parents who loathe each other…
>
> Take my aunt, an artist who barely escaped Iran with her life and now lives in Orange County. She is among an older generation of Iranian-Americans who tend to be politically conservative, not religious and a bit insulated.
>
> My aunt has been in the United States for nearly three decades yet barely speaks English. Why should she? She eats only in Persian restaurants, she shops only in Persian stores, she watches only Persian language television stations, of which there are now at least 30 broadcasting via satellite. As far as she's concerned, she may as well still be in Tehran (Aslan, 2015).

The aunt Aslan speaks of in the above excerpt is an aunt every second generation Iranian can point to (myself included). Bringing a bit of the culture from Iran to the United States is something that has been fostered by the first generation and it has developed a sense of fascination about the homeland for the second generation and beyond. But for many Iranian Americans, the current political situation is one of anguish and longing.

This dissertation has attempted to bring the case of Iranian Americans into the political science literature by examining their political participation and attitude formation. It has also sought to shed light on the way in which Iranian Americans formulate their dualistic racial/ethnic identities. In Chapter Two, I provided the context required to understand the case of Iranian Americans and described the Iranian American population, including the history of Iran before

and after Islam, the factors that contributed to the Iranian Revolution, cleavages of immigration, and the different ethnic and religious groups in Iran.

In Chapter Three, I explored Iranian American political participation and measured the different political avenues Iranian Americans use to engage in the political system. I created an original quantitative dataset, called the Iranian American Survey Project, which was used to analyze the research questions therein. I found a relative lack of political participation amongst the Iranian American community. I argue that this lack is due to different norms in the Iranian American community, stemming from the factors of their migration (e.g., revolution and a lack of democracy in Iran). I also discussed the difficulties I faced in creating the dataset due to legitimate fears the Iranian American community had about my motives.

In Chapter Four, I investigated the process that Iranian Americans use to create and manage their dualistic racial/ethnic identities. I created a second original dataset, this one a qualitative one, in which I interviewed 50 Iranian Americans through snowball sampling. I propose that Iranian Americans manage their identities due to two processes: blending and opting. Blending is the process by which Iranian Americans either *blend in* with whites and face relatively little barriers in their assimilation, or *blend out* and become negatively racialized as an "other." *Opting* depends on choice – Iranian Americans can either *opt in* to their cultural particularities or *opt out* in order to try and *blend in*. I found that Iranian Americans tended to opt out in order to avoid classification as Middle Eastern and then expressed their own racialized prejudices about Arab Americans.

Suggestions for Future Research

As with any project, the current one has its own limitations. Studying the case of Iranian Americans proved to be challenging, particularly from a quantitative standpoint. Many

individuals chose not to complete the survey mainly due to the section of questions that were political in nature. The future scholar of the Iranian American case should be aware of this difficulty. A possible solution to this issue is to coordinate with Iranian American organizations and increase public awareness that the investigators are indeed who they say they are. Participants were much more willing to share their stories in the IAIP, and I believe this is largely due to the fact that an introduction as facilitated by someone the person trusted. The organizations can serve in this capacity for a quantitative data collector.

Given the changing political climate, the future scholar should look to collect this data in the post-Trump era and compare their findings with the results from the present project. I would also be interested in learning about the Iranian American case when the third generation matures, as their assimilatory trajectory may be different from other groups. If the MENA category ever does reach the Census (which is not the case for 2020), and Iranian Americans were to be given minority status, a study on Iranian American discrimination could also be pertinent.

Finally, there are similar histories between Iranian Americans and Cuban Americans. A comparative study on the two populations would be informative, particularly to scholars of assimilation. Both groups come from a shared revolutionary background and may possess several similarities. For the time being, it is my hope that the implications here may serve as a springboard for future research.

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