

2012 Public Opinion Survey

of

The National Iranian American (NIAC) & Trita Parsi



Conducted by Pro Democracy Movement of Iran (PDMI)

PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT OF IRAN (PDMI)

WWW.PDMI.ORG

2012

NIAC OPINION SURVEY

OPINION SURVEY OF THE NATIONAL IRANIAN AMERICAN
COUNCIL (NIAC) AND ITS PRESIDENT TRITA PARSI



FINAL VERSION

PREPARED

BY

DR. ARASH IRANDOOST,

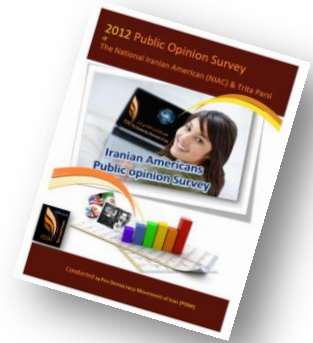
PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT OF IRAN (PDMI)

WWW.PDMI.ORG

JANUARY 2012

NIAC OPINION SURVEY

OPINION SURVEY OF NIAC & TRITA PARSİ



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2011, the Pro-Democracy Movement of Iran (PDMI) conducted an online survey in order to assess Iranians, Iranian Americans, and Americans attitudes toward NIAC and its president Trita Parsi. It is widely known among the Iranian and Iranian American community that NIAC and its president have been advocating for favorable policies toward the Islamic Republic. This survey was conducted to scientifically and accurately document such prevailing attitudes. It is hoped that this survey will contribute, in a small measure, to increased knowledge among the Iranian-American community on one of the many lobby organizations that on the surface claim to represent the Iranian American community, but in reality they are hard at work to shape the U.S. policy toward the Islamic Republic.

This survey was published in preliminary form in July of 2011 with over 1,800 respondents. Due to overwhelming response and interest, they survey remained online through January 2011 to reach the goal of 2,500 participants. The results of the 2012 PDMI survey indicate that ninety five percent (95%) of respondents expressed NIAC did not represent their interests, that NIAC was a lobbyist for the Islamic Republic, and that NIAC has defrauded the federal government and only 4% believed that NIAC was a human rights organization. A large majority of respondents wanted NIAC to disclose its financial documents, membership list and numbers, and be held accountable for its actions.

Trita Parsi, himself, has contributed greatly to the ill feeling and erosion of NIAC's credibility amongst the Iranian-American community by his belligerent, inconsistent and inaccurate statements. Furthermore, NIAC's internal memos showed that it employed a policy of "cease and desist" against any of its opponents to intimidate them into silence. The extent of negative opinion toward NIAC might also be related to the lack of transparency, prevalent double speak and

GENERAL FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

- 95% of respondents expressed NIAC did not represent their interests
- 95% of respondents believed NIAC was a lobbyist for the Islamic Republic
- 95% of respondents believed that NIAC had defrauded the federal government
- 95% of respondents believed that NIAC had lied to members of Congress about its membership numbers
- 87% of respondents were familiar with Bob Ney and his conviction
- 83% of respondents said that they were never asked for their opinion by NIAC
- 4% of respondents believed that NIAC was a human rights organization
- A large majority of respondents wanted NIAC to disclose its financial documents, membership list and numbers, and be held accountable for its actions

continuous “shifting of gears” by Trita Parsi, inconsistencies in NIAC’s words and actions, lack of regard for Iranian opinions, NIAC’s denial of its relationship with top level Iranian government and business officials. Click [here](#) for the complete Survey.

KEY FINDINGS

The Pro-Democracy Movement of Iran (PDMI) conducted an on-line¹ bilingual (Farsi-English) survey of Iranians, Iranian- Americans and Americans in order to gauge attitudes towards NIAC and its president Trita Parsi. Respondents constituted a representative sample of 2507 individuals age 18 and older who had access to the Internet. The survey’s key findings are that:

- A majority of respondents had known NIAC for 1 to 5 years
- 95% of respondents expressed NIAC did not represent their interests
- 95% of respondents believed NIAC was a lobbyist for the Islamic Republic
- 90% of respondents were aware of the defamation lawsuit against Hassan Dai
- 78% had read NIAC’s internal documents revealed as a result of the lawsuit
- 95% of respondents believed that NIAC has defrauded the federal government
- 95% of respondents believed that NIAC had lied to members of Congress about its membership numbers
- 87% of respondents were familiar with Bob Ney and his conviction
- 83% of respondents knew that Trita worked for Bob Ney
- 68% of respondents knew about Roy Coffee and David DiStefano
- 70% of respondents knew that NIAC worked with Roy Coffee to establish a lobby organization
- 83% of respondents said that they were never asked for their opinion by NIAC
- 4% of respondents believed that NIAC was a human rights organization and 96% believed that NIAC worked as a Lobby for the Islamic Republic
- A large majority of respondents wanted NIAC to disclose its financial documents, membership list and numbers, and be held accountable for its actions

Such extent of negative attitude toward NIAC and its president is in some measure due NIAC’s filing of lawsuit and release of its internal memos and documents as a result of defamation lawsuit brought against Hassan Dai. NIAC’s [internal memos](#) have given a lot of credibility to the claim that NIAC is acting as a lobby for the Islamic Republic. Two other publications have greatly damaged NIAC’s credibility amongst the Iranian-American community: one is a paper published the Center for Security Policy authored by [Clare M. Lopez](#) in 2009 named [“Rise of the Iran Lobby”](#). Another damaging article was published in the [Washington Times](#) alleging that NIAC and Trita Parsi has operated as an undeclared lobby and may be guilty of violating tax laws, (a separate Swedish bank account presumably to hide income), the Foreign Agent Registration Act and lobbying disclosure laws.

Trita Parsi, himself, has contributed greatly to the ill feeling and erosion of NIAC's credibility amongst the Iranian-American community by his belligerent, inconsistent and inaccurate statements. Furthermore, NIAC’s internal memos showed that it employed a policy of “cease and desist” against any of its opponents to intimidate them into silence. The extent of negative opinion toward NIAC might also be related to the lack of transparency, prevalent double speak and continuous “shifting of gears” by Trita Parsi, inconsistencies in NIAC’s words and actions, lack of regard for Iranian opinions, NIAC’s denial of its relationship with top level Iranian government and business officials.

INTRODUCTION

A Comprehensive survey of the Iranian-American community regarding Trita Parsi and the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) has not been conducted to date. This survey was designed to obtain information on the opinions and attitudes of Iranians, Iranian- Americans and Americans toward NIAC and its President, Trita Parsi. The aggregated opinions demonstrate its versatility. The primary objective behind conducting this on-line survey was to assess Mr. Trita Parsi's false and dubious claims that his organization, the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), is the largestⁱⁱ Iranian-American organization representing the Iranian-American's interests in the United States. This survey attempted to collect data, produce facts, and provide a more accurate and realist picture of the Iranian-American community's attitude toward Mr. Trita Parsi and the NIAC organization.

This survey was designed to be in electronic format, was posted on the Internetⁱⁱⁱ and was publicized via email, Iranian television, social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook encouraging a wide spectrum of the Iranian community to participate to reach and obtain a broad sample. The link to survey was shared with NIAC and other pro-regime organizations and lobbyists for their participation and was posted on various websites, blogs and social media outlets to reach a larger audience and gain a diversity of perspectives.

Many survey methods were available. Other Iranian organizations such as the Public Affairs alliance of Iranian American ([PAAIA](#)) have used [Telephone Surveys](#) as a method of choice. Considering the criminal nature of the regime and past history of assassinations of Iranians who have spoken out against the regime, Telephone Surveys have certain important disadvantages such as no absolute assurance of confidentiality, potential for interviewer bias and distribution bias. It was decided that the survey would be public and online to allow for absolute anonymity, no interviewer bias and wider participation.

Surveys of Iranians and Iranian-Americans conducted to influence US policy in the past are typically commissioned by pro regime organizations and as such are not reliable, very biased and often lack fidelity. In addition to deliberate selection of survey participants and providing a "[purchased Iranian surname lists](#)" such organizations deliberately limit the [participation](#) to select known groups and individuals known to favor the regime.

In reality, having families and friends in Iran, Iranians, living inside and outside of Iran, do not feel comfortable and safe to openly and honestly share their views with strangers, when Telephone, Face to Face, Mail or Focus Group and person to person are employed for the fear of reprisals. Naturally, even if they agree to participate, their answers would be in support of regime's policies. [Phone surveys](#) often taken by NIAC and other pro-regime entities^{iv} such as PAIAA^v do not truly reflect the prevailing opinions of the Iranians inside and outside of Iran.

These are the final results of the survey, which ended in January 2012. A total of 2,507 persons participated in the survey. The survey participants were asked to answer 16 questions:

- Questions 1 and 2 dealt with participant demographic data.
- Question 3 asked participants how long they have known NIAC and Trita Parsi.
- Questions 4, 5, 14 and 15 asked whether the participants thought "NIAC" was a lobby organization.
- Questions 6 and 7 dealt with Mr. Hassan Dai who is the subject of a defamation lawsuit by NIAC for having accused NIAC of acting as a lobbyist for the Islamic Republic of Iran. NIAC's internal documents and memos have surfaced as a result of the lawsuit.
- Questions 8 thru 13 surveyed participants' opinion of NIAC's activities.
- Question 16 asked the participants as to how they would like NIAC to conduct itself if in fact it is to represent the Iranian-American community.

The findings outlined in this report are intended first and foremost for the Iranian-American community, US policy makers, research organizations and those interested in Iranian affairs. We hope that this survey is

considered as another source of information and reference when and with whom policy makers are discussing US foreign policy toward Iran.

This survey was conducted by [Dr. Arash Irandoost](#) the founder of [Pro-Democracy Movement of Iran](#). Dr. Irandoost is an educator, researcher, journalist, human rights advocate and political analyst. This report is part of the PDMI technical report series. PDMI technical reports may include research findings on a specific topics, present discussions of the methodology employed in research; provide literature reviews, survey instruments, resource for practitioners and research professionals, and supporting documentation; or deliver preliminary findings. PDMI reports undergo rigorous peer review to ensure that they meet high standards for research quality and objectivity.

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**Please note that a preliminary version of this survey was released in July 2011 with 1,859 respondents. It was decided to keep the survey open for even wider participation and launching of our new website (www.pdmi.org), the survey remained online for another 5 month to reach a target goal of 2500.*

BACKGROUND

In a seeming synchrony to influence the U.S. administration's policy towards the Islamic Republic of Iran and spearheaded by a *de facto* partnership between the National Iranian-American Council (NIAC), CASMII, NIPOC, IABA, PAAIA, AIFC, AIC and many other Iranian Studies Centers, Islamic Studies Centers, anti-war, faith-based organizations are serving as mouthpieces and propaganda tools for the Islamic Republic. This pro-regime and lobby network includes well-known American diplomats, congressional representatives, figures from academia and the think-tank world^{vi}.

Aware that Americans value data and public opinion and realizing its power, IRI apologists cunningly and deceptively have utilized fabricated surveys as a tool to sway American policy in a certain direction regarding Iran. Such dishonest surveys are conducted in private, a very short time span and are intentionally small in participation size. They are designed to impart and imply a desired answer. They often lack quality standards and fidelity. They are conducted mostly in secret and often not publicized. They are biased and are administered to only a certain select people to get a certain desired response. They normally ask for an answer on only one dimension. Such survey questions do not usually evoke the truth and are intentionally crafted to solicit and accommodate a certain answer. In general they are not reliable and are valueless, as they do not accurately reflect the views and opinions of the majority of the Iranians.

Additionally, in a country such as Iran, where the regime uses surveillance technologies to monitor telecommunications and the Internet, respondents are concerned about their safety and consequences of answering a question in a particular manner, there is a strong possibility that the answer will not be truthful.

This survey documents the opinions of 2,507 Iranians, Iranian-Americans and Americans concerning NIAC and Trita Parsi. For over a decade, Trita Parsi and NIAC have been advocating for policies favorable to the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) without calling itself as "a lobby organization" for the IRI.

Iran is a country of strategic importance for the United States. In order to gauge Iranian attitudes on NIAC, PDMI conducted this online survey. NIAC, "falsely" claims to be the largest Iranian-American organization in the United States representing Iranian-American interests. The survey delved into public opinion on a defamation lawsuit brought against Mr. Hassan Dai, NIAC's relationship with Bob Ney, a convicted former Congressman, Roy Coffee and David DiStefano, NIAC's roles as a human rights organization, NIAC's claim to represent Iranian Americans, and NIAC's refusal to disclose its membership list and financial statements.

The survey revealed that respondents comprised all age groups who were familiar with NIAC and Mr. Trita Parsi for a period of 1 to 10 years. The largest participants included the 18-35 age-group. A large majority expressed that they had known NIAC for 1 to 5 years. Survey respondents, overwhelmingly, expressed that NIAC and its president, Mr. Trita Parsi did not represent Iranian-American interests. A similar majority viewed NIAC as a lobby organization for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Survey participants were very aware of the defamation lawsuit brought against Mr. [Hassan Dai](#), a prominent journalist and political analyst. Most were familiar with NIAC's internal documents revealed as a result of the lawsuit. A total of 2,354 (94%) of respondents believed that NIAC has defrauded federal funds and had [lied](#) to members of Congress and the Iranian-American community about its [membership](#) numbers.

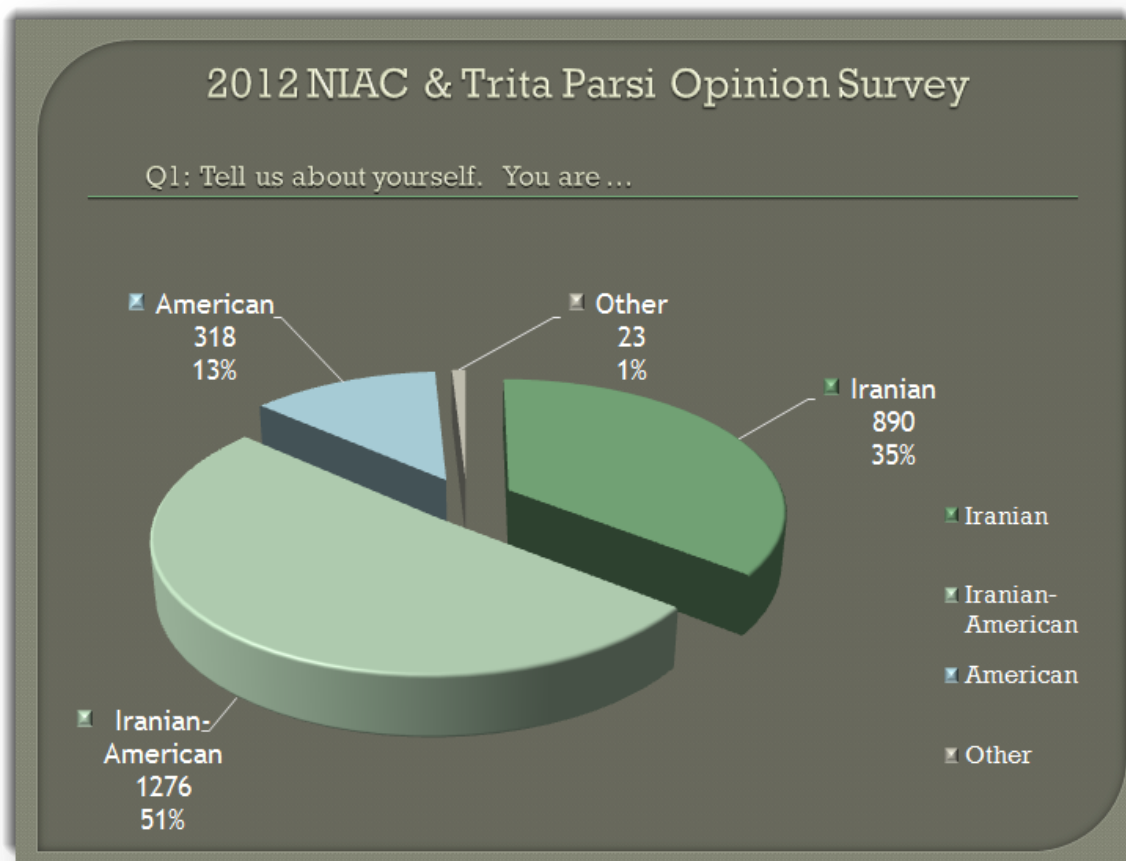
Participants expressed concern about NIAC's direct involvement with convicted felon and former Congressman from Ohio, [Bob Ney](#) and [Roy Coffee and David DiStefano](#)^{vii}. Despite NIAC's claim of various surveys conducted of Iranian-Americans, 83% said that they were never asked by NIAC to participate. Survey respondents overwhelmingly asked NIAC to be more transparent about its activities and disclose its financial statements and make public its membership list. They also expressed that NIAC should be held accountable to Iranian-Americans and its President, Trita Parsi, should be departed.

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AN OPINION SURVEY OF NIAC AND ITS PRESIDENT TRITA PARSI

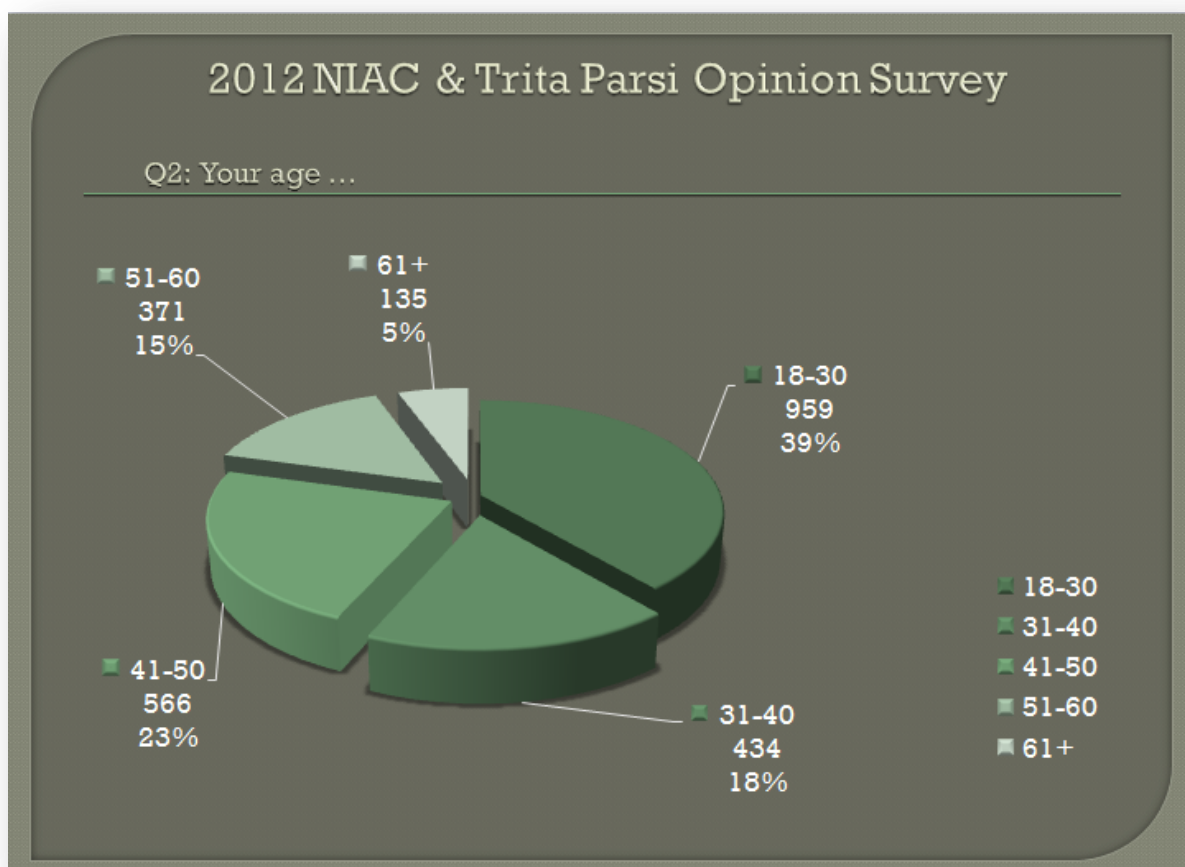
QUESTION 1: TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF, YOU ARE AN ...



A total of 2,507 participants responded to question number 1, which asked the participants to identify their ethnicity.

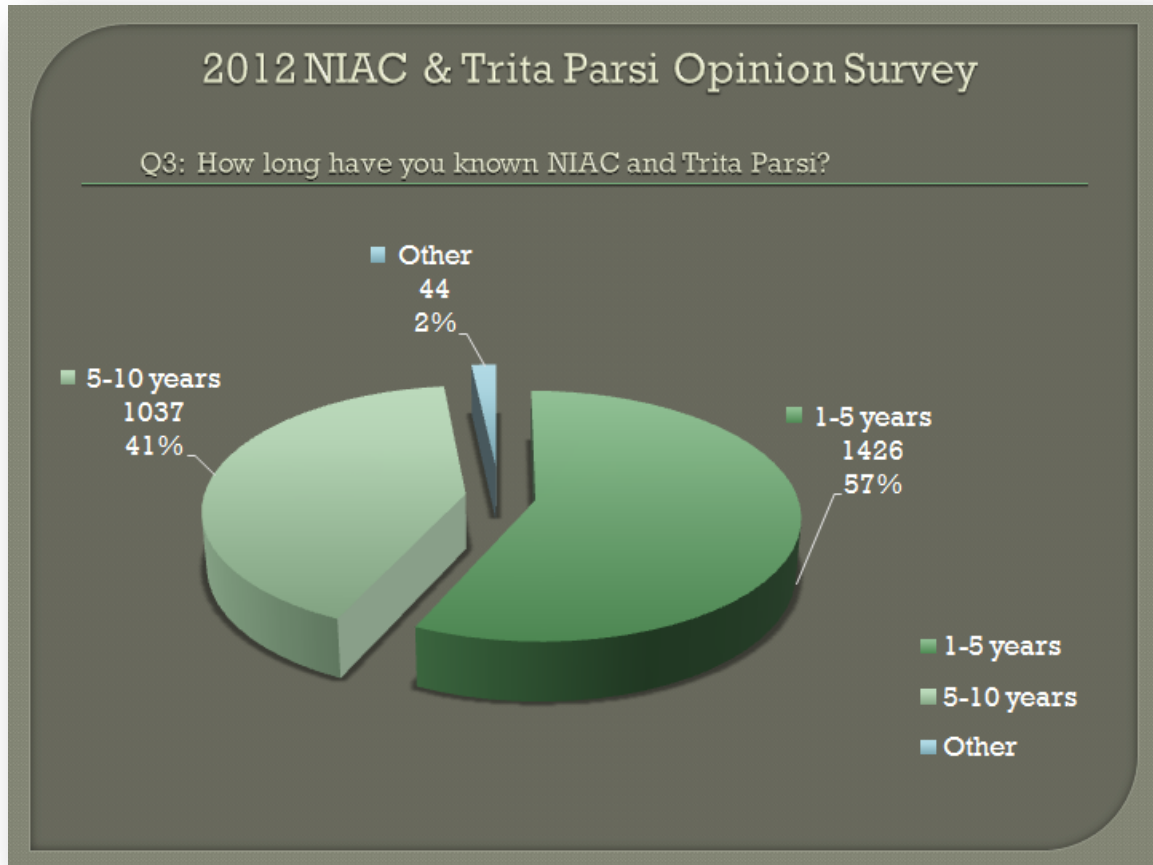
Fifty-one percent (51%) of the participants were Iranian-Americans. 35% of the respondents were Iranians (non-US citizens) who live outside of Iran. 13% identified themselves as Americans familiar with and interested in Iran affairs.

QUESTION 2: YOUR AGE ...



The largest group of respondents (39%) also constituted the youngest^{viii} between the ages of 18-30. The smallest group (5%) was the 61 and up age bracket and perhaps not the regular users of the Internet. About 18% were between the ages 31-40 and 15% were between the ages of 51-60.

QUESTION 3: HOW LONG HAVE YOU KNOWN NIAC AND TRITA PARSI?



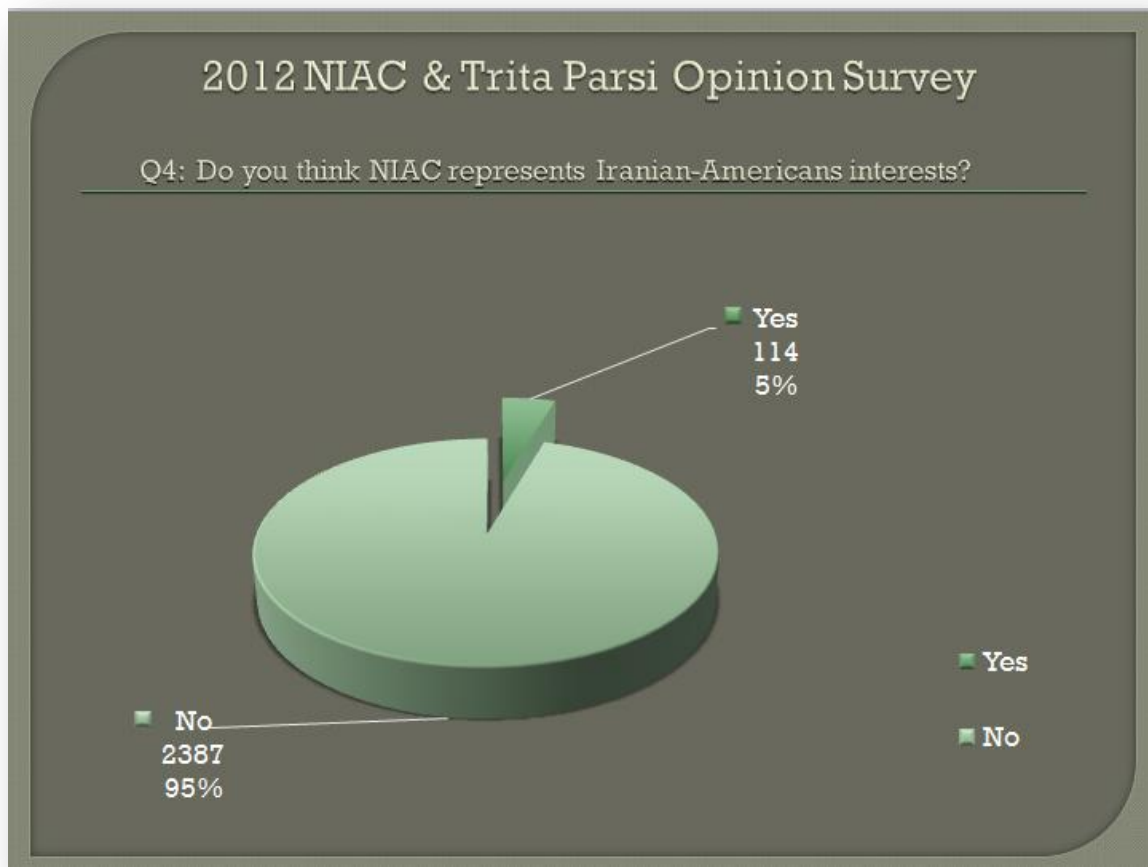
When asked how long the respondents knew Trita Parsi and NIAC, 57% expressed that they had known NIAC for 1 to 5 years.

Data Interpretation: NIAC was [officially established](#) in early 2002^{ix}. Trita Parsi had a difficult time of recruiting members for NIAC. For the first 3 years it attracted less than 2,000 members.

It is safe to say that many Iranian were not familiar with NIAC when it first started, only 41% said that they have known NIAC for 5 to 10 years. Fifty seven percent (57%) of participants said that they have known NIAC for 1 to 5 years.

This is in part to NIAC's controversial positions: Such as stopping American funding to Iranian resistance groups^x. NIAC's filing of a defamation lawsuit against Mr. Hassan Dai has played a large part in Iranian-American's negative attitude toward NIAC. Hassan Dai is a well-known journalist and political analyst and actively discusses Trita and his involvement with the Islamic Republic by writing articles, television appearances, interviews and speeches.

QUESTION 4: DO YOU THINK NIAC REPRESENTS IRANIAN-AMERICAN INTERESTS?



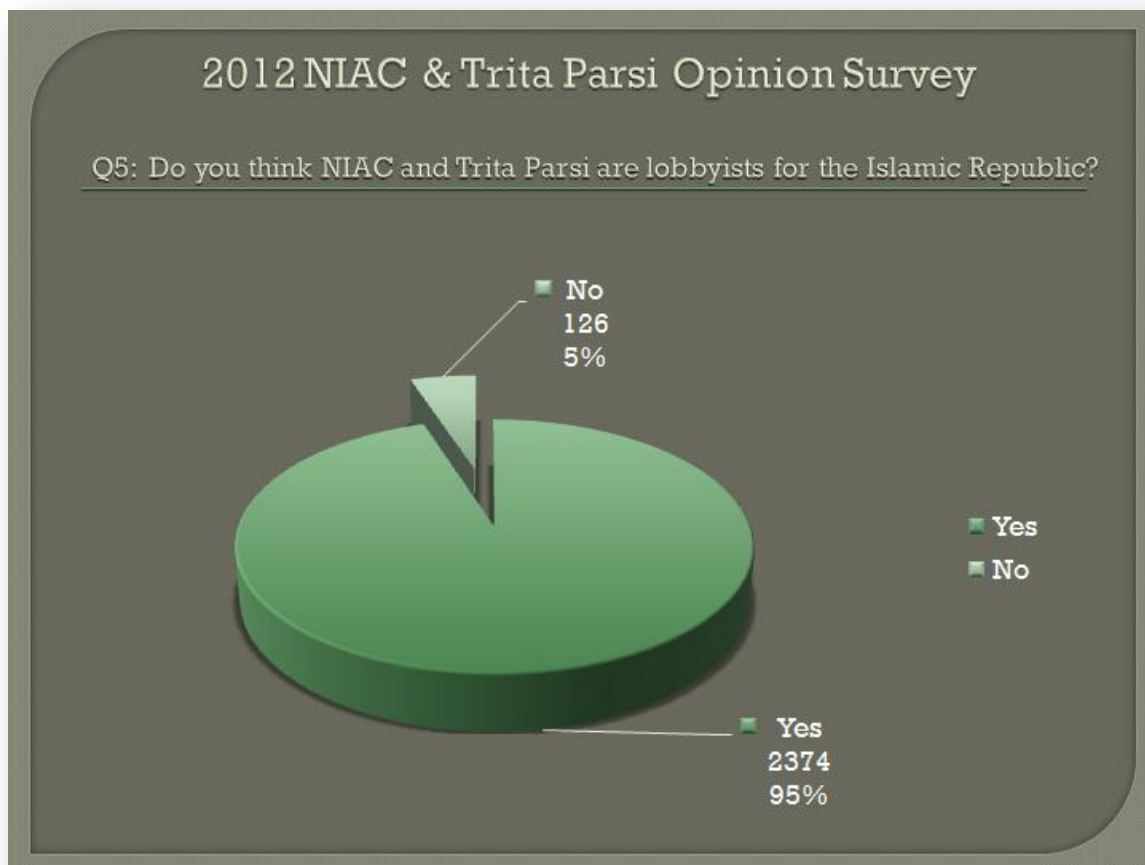
An overwhelming majority of Iranians, (95%) of the respondents expressed that NIAC or Trita Parsi does not represent their views.



Data Interpretation: Question number 4 is perhaps the most critical question in dealing with NIAC. Trita Parsi regularly purports himself as the representative of the Iranian-American community^{xi}. Many politicians and reputable organizations interested in Iranian affairs erroneously think NIAC represents Iranian-Americans.

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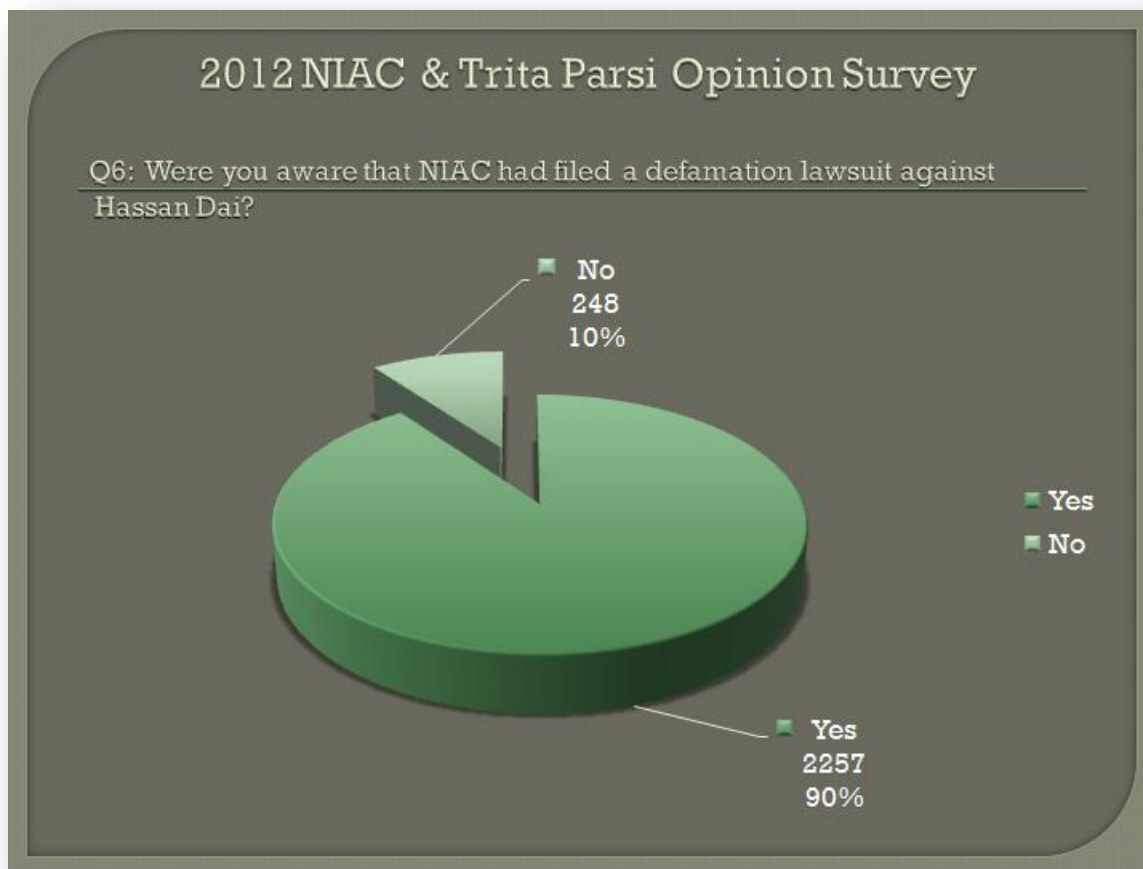
QUESTION 5: DO YOU THINK THAT NIAC IS A LOBBYIST FOR THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC?



Consistent with the previous question, 95% of survey respondents have expressed that NIAC serves as a lobbyist for the Islamic Republic and [advocates for policies favorable](#) to Islamic Republic^{xiii}.

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QUESTION 6: WERE YOU AWARE THAT NIAC HAD FILED DEFAMATION LAWSUIT AGAINST MR. HASSAN DAI?

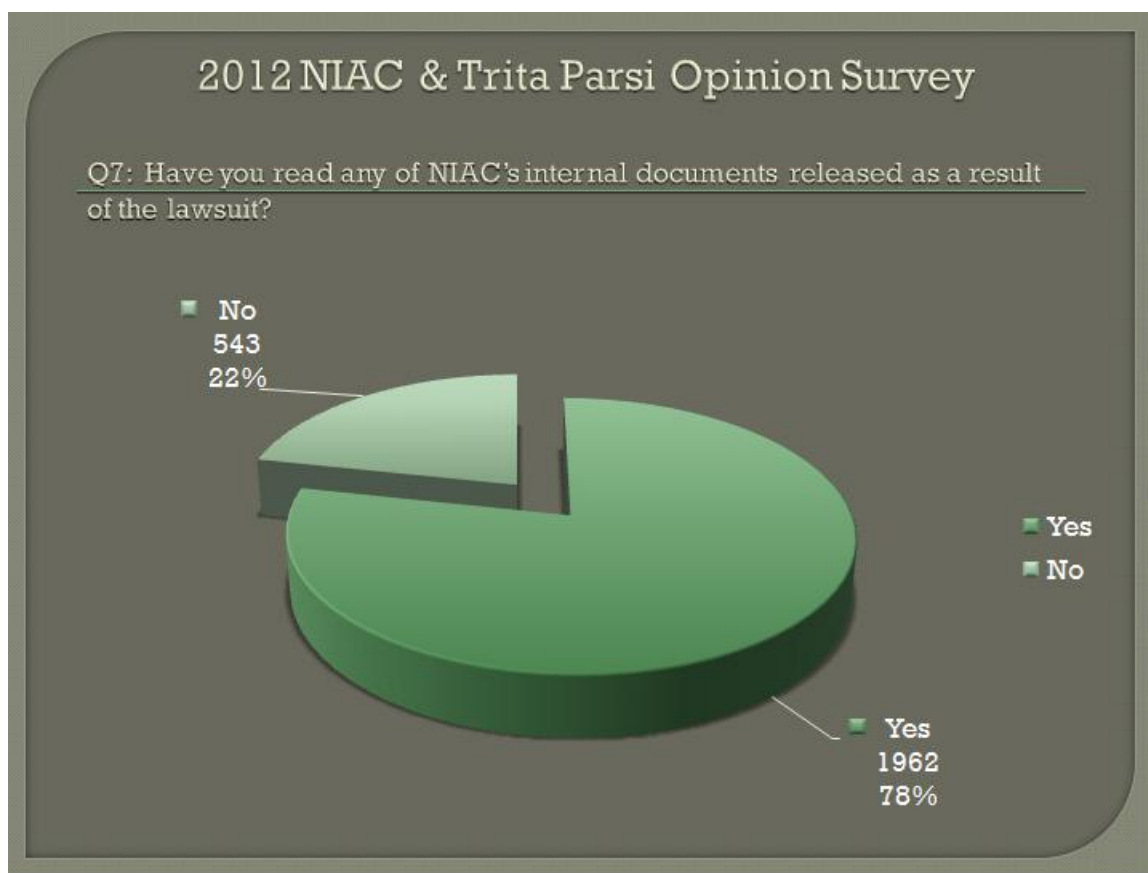


90% of respondents knew about Trita Parsi filing a lawsuit against Mr. Hassan Dai.

Data Interpretation: NIAC’s internal memos show that Trita Parsi employed a policy of “[cease and desist](#)^{xiii}” to silence its opposition and Hassan Dai was used and sued primarily because of his prominent position within the Iranian-American community in order to “teach a lesson” and intimidate other Iranians who might have entertained the idea of criticizing and exposing Trita Parsi.

AN OPINION SURVEY OF NIAC AND ITS PRESIDENT TRITA PARSI

QUESTION 7: HAVE YOU READ ANY OF NIAC'S INTERNAL DOCUMENTS RELEASED AS A RESULT OF THE LAWSUIT?



78% of the survey respondents have examined NIAC's internal memos which show NIAC's relationship with high ranking Islamic Republic officials. 22% of survey respondents expressed that they have not read NIAC's internal memos.



Even though NIAC's internal memos are available for public viewing on various social media outlets, 22% of survey participants expressed that they have not read NIAC's internal memos obtained as a result of the lawsuit brought against Hassan Dai over the past three years. This is perhaps due to fact that NIAC's internal memos are written in English and perhaps some Iranians do not possess a comfortable mastery of the English language.

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QUESTION 8: IF YOU ANSWERED YES, DO YOU BELIEVE THAT NIAC DEFRAUDED FEDERAL FUNDS?

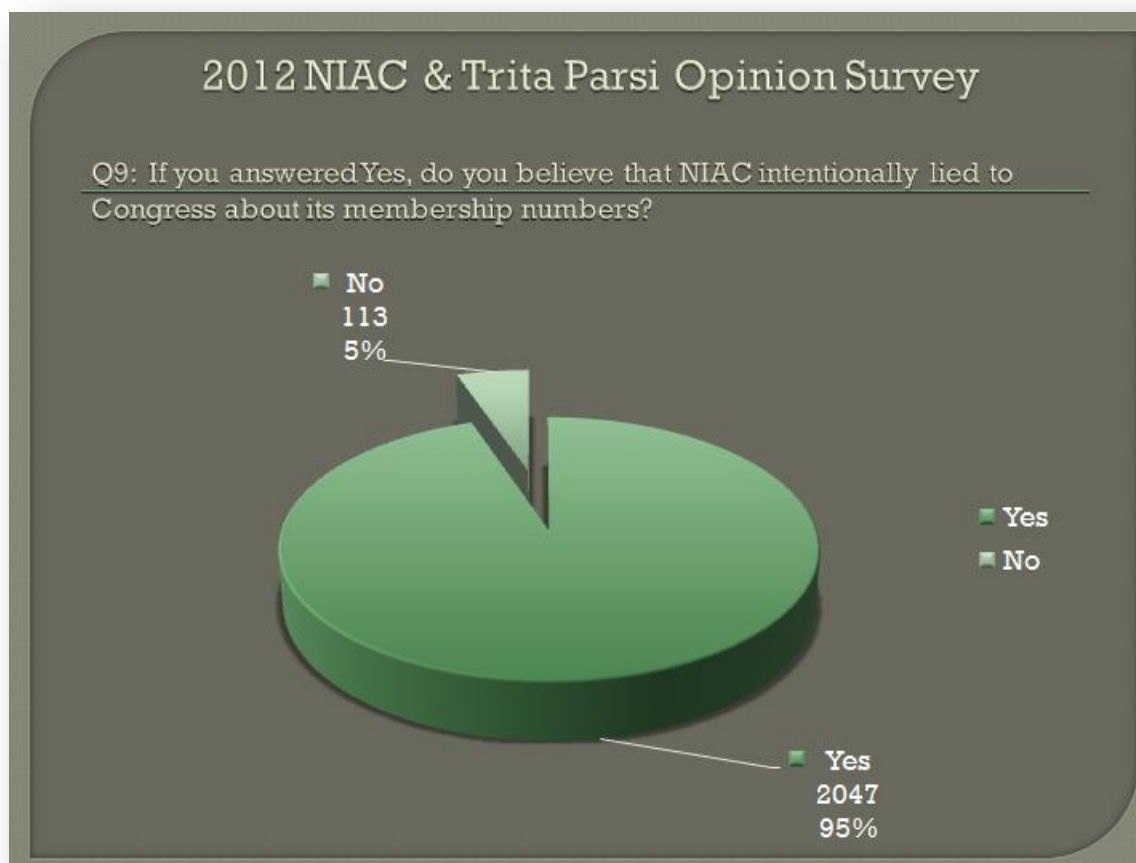


95% of respondents believed that NIAC has defrauded the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), congressionally-appropriated grant funds.

After examining NIAC's internal memos, PDMI reported NIAC to various government authorities including the office of Inspector General, Attorney General and several other politicians. NIAC seeks funding from various foundations and private groups. However NIAC obtained over [\\$220,000](#) from the congressionally appropriated National Endowment for Democracy (NED) fund. Senator Jon Kyl has asked for investigation of NIAC. Examination of NIAC's internal memos indicate that it knowingly defrauded and in some other cases attempted to defraud federal funds. Investigation of NIAC is currently under review by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL).

AN OPINION SURVEY OF NIAC AND ITS PRESIDENT TRITA PARSI

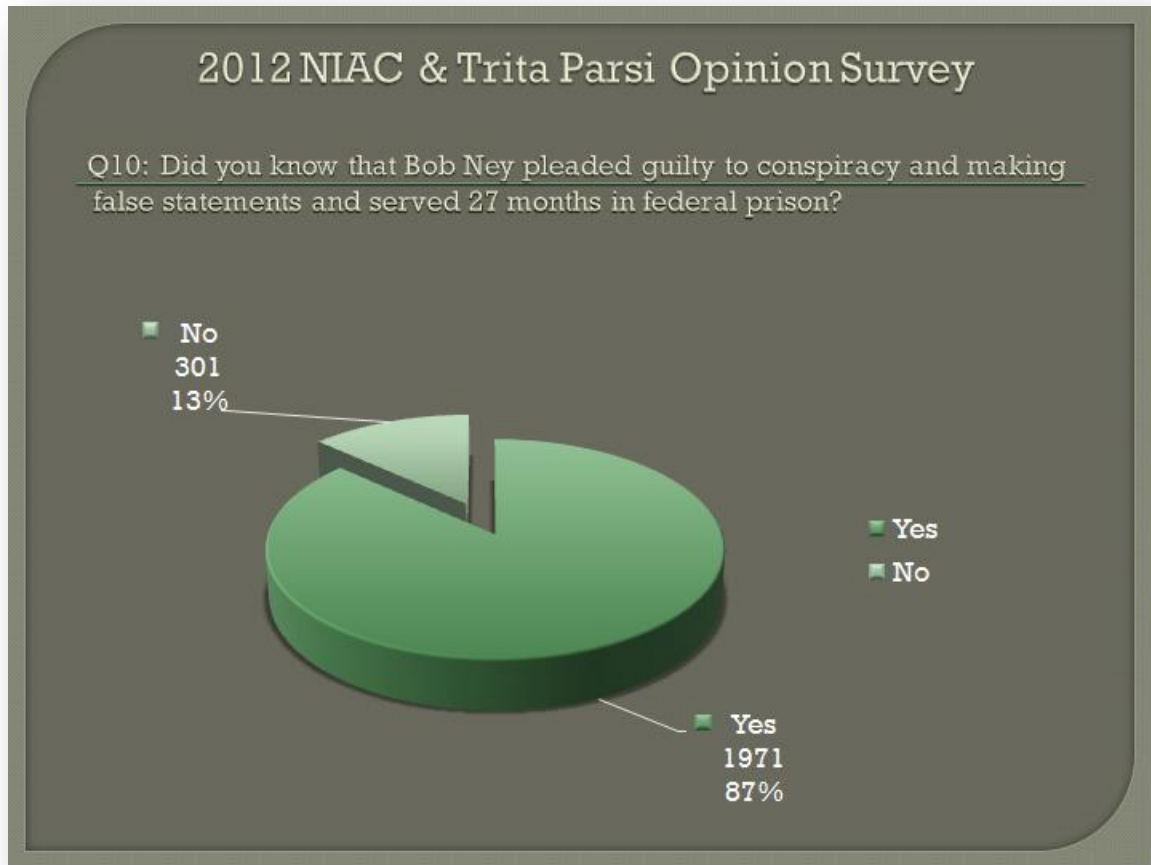
QUESTION 9: IF YOU ANSWERED YES, DO YOU BELIEVE THAT NIAC INTENTIONALLY LIED TO CONGRESS ABOUT ITS MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS?



95% of respondents believed that NIAC intentionally lied to Congress about its membership numbers.

Notes: NIAC's internal memos show that after three years of active recruitment, NIAC was not able to recruit more than [1,700 members](#). It was decided at a NIAC board meeting that NIAC should [lie about its membership](#) numbers to make itself look bigger and more important than what it really was. To this date the exact number of active and paying NIAC membership is not known, despite NIAC being a non-profit and tax exempt organization subject to the Freedom of Information and open records act. After a decade of active fundraising, outreach, Trita Parsi in his interviews mentions 3,000 members, even that number is perceived to be highly exaggerated. NIAC might have even lost its membership after publication of its internal memos and that showed involvement with IRI. The Washington Times writes that NIAC might have [skirted lobby rules](#) and might be in violation Foreign Agent Registration Act.

QUESTION 10: DID YOU KNOW THAT BOB NEY PLEADED GUILTY TO CONSPIRACY CHRGES AND MAKING FALSE STATEMENTS AND SERVED 27 MONTHS IN FEDERAL PRISON?

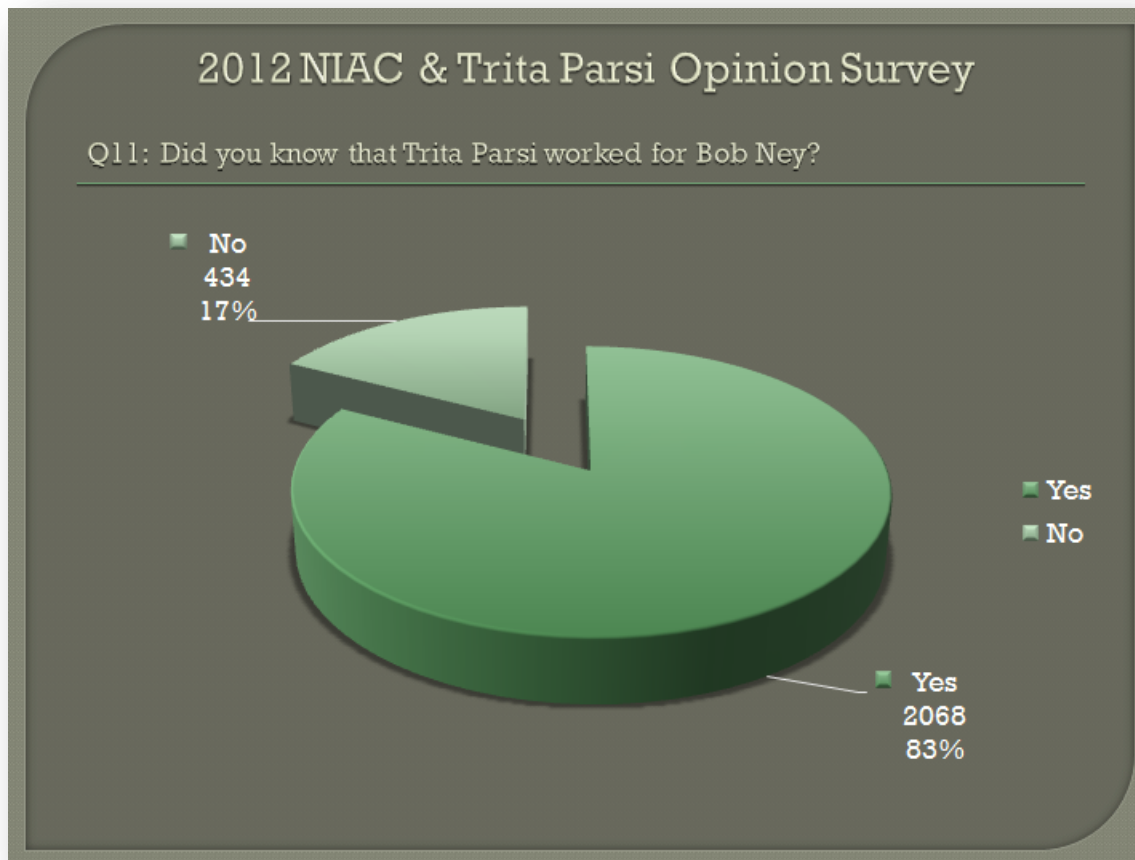


87% of respondent knew about Bob Ney and his involvement with IRI and NIAC.



Trita was the Chief Staff at Bob Ney's Congressional office. When asked, Trita refuses to answer and does not elaborate on his relationship with the convicted former Congressman Bob Ney and tries to down play his relationship with him. [Bob Ney](#)^{xiv} was arrested in a conspiracy attempt to get around Iran sanctions and smuggle aircraft parts to Iran. Trita continues to engage and persuade US policy makers to ease sanctions on Iran. Trita's sponsors on sanctions are large American [corporations](#) and wealthy Iranians and Iranian-Americans and government officials attempting to establish trade ties with Iran.

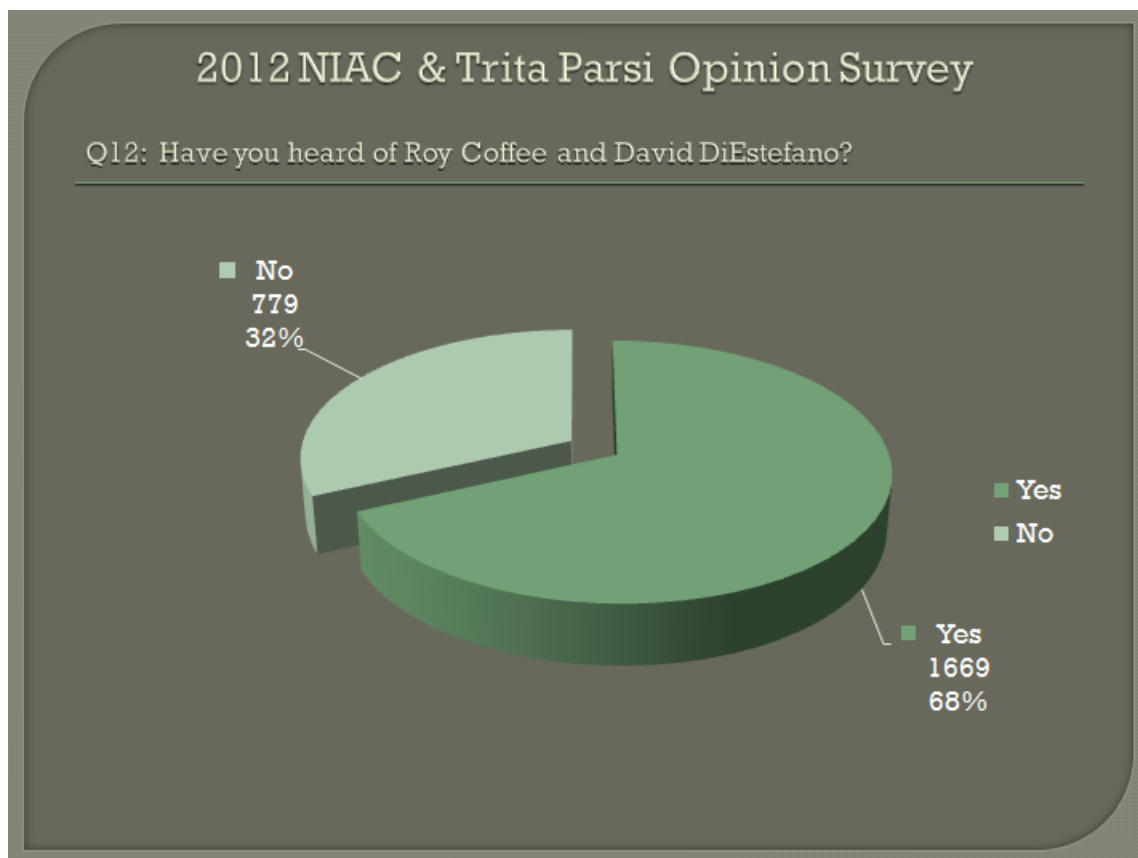
QUESTION 11: DID YOU KNOW THAT TRITA PARSI WORKED FOR BOB NEY?



When asked if survey respondents were aware that [Trita worked for Bob Ney](#), 83% of respondents said: Yes.

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QUESTION 12: HAVE YOU HEARD OF ROY COFFEE AND DAVID DiSTEFANO?

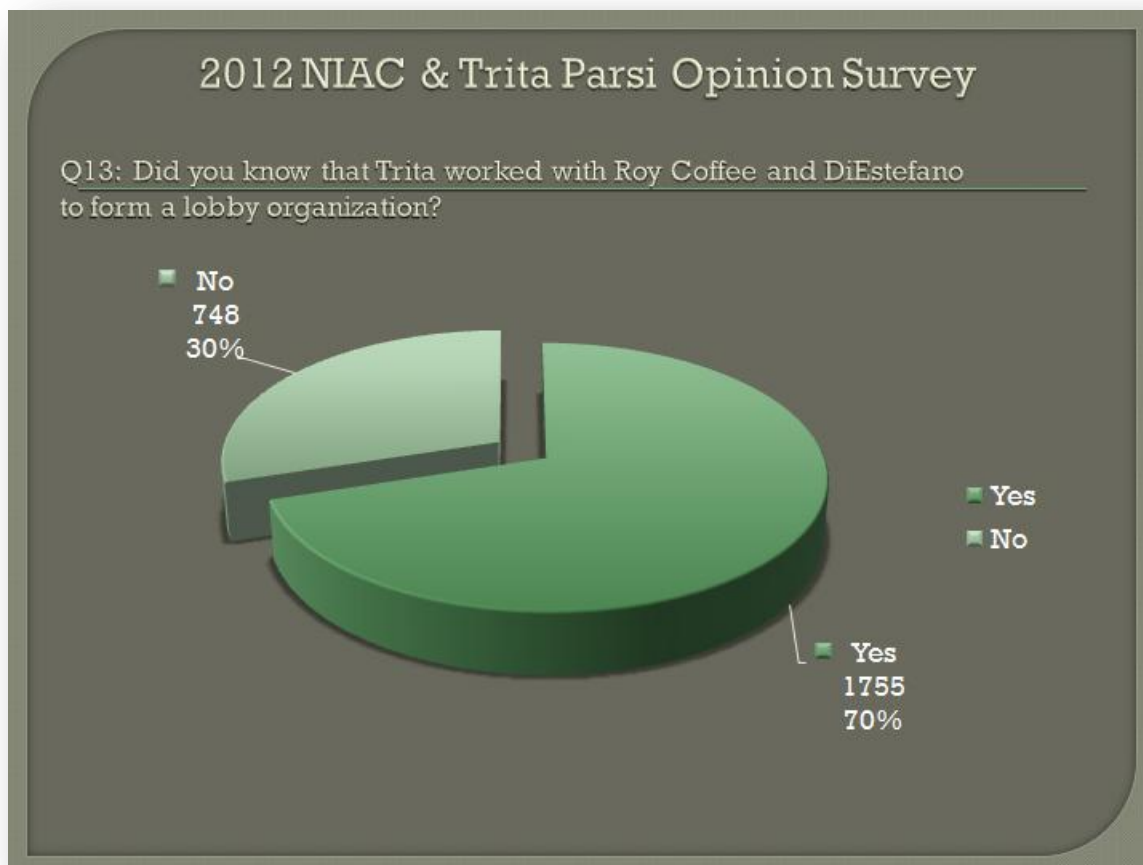


When asked if participants were familiar with Roy Coffee and David DiStefano^{xv}, 68% of survey respondents said: Yes.

Notes: Even though Trita Parsi ^{xvi}has said that “NIAC is not a human rights organization it does not have the expertise”, NIAC continues to [use human rights as a cover](#) for its lobby activity and claims that it is an advocate for human rights. Despite blatant human rights violations as reported by the Amnesty International and other reputable organizations, NIAC downplays crimes committed by the regime. NIAC recommended to President Obama to remain silent on Neda Agha Soltan’s shooting by a regime’s thug and has not publicly condemned the Kahrizak prison rapes committed by Hezbollah and IRI officials during the 2009 uprising. At one point Trita Parsi claimed that human rights are improving in Iran.

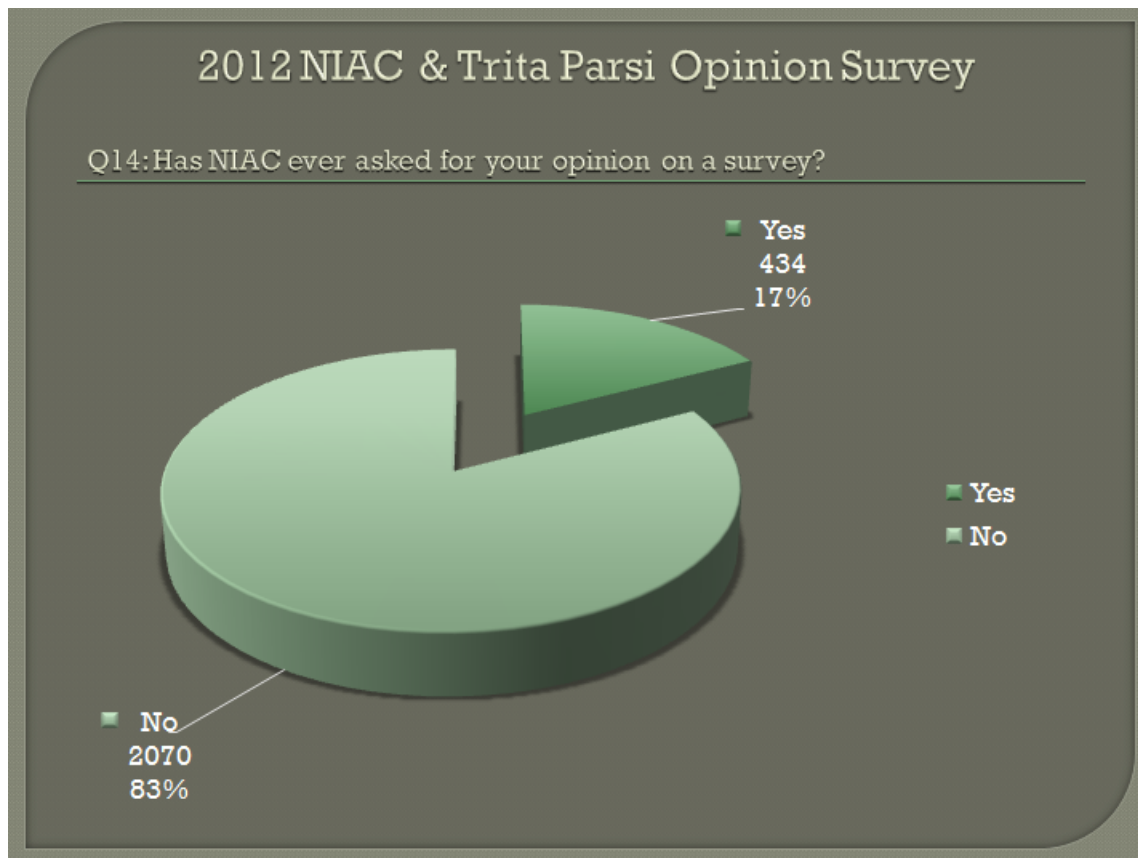
AN OPINION SURVEY OF NIAC AND ITS PRESIDENT TRITA PARSI

QUESTION 13: DID YOU KNOW THAT NIAC WORKED WITH ROY COFFEE AND DiSTEFANO TO FORM A LOBBY ORGANIZATION?



70% of respondents were aware that Trita worked^{xvii} with [Roy Coffee and David DiStefano](#) to [establish a lobby organization](#), initially named NAIA^{xviii}.

QUESTION 14: HAS NIAC EVER ASKED FOR YOUR OPINION ON A SURVEY?



83% of respondents said that NIAC has never asked them for their opinions.

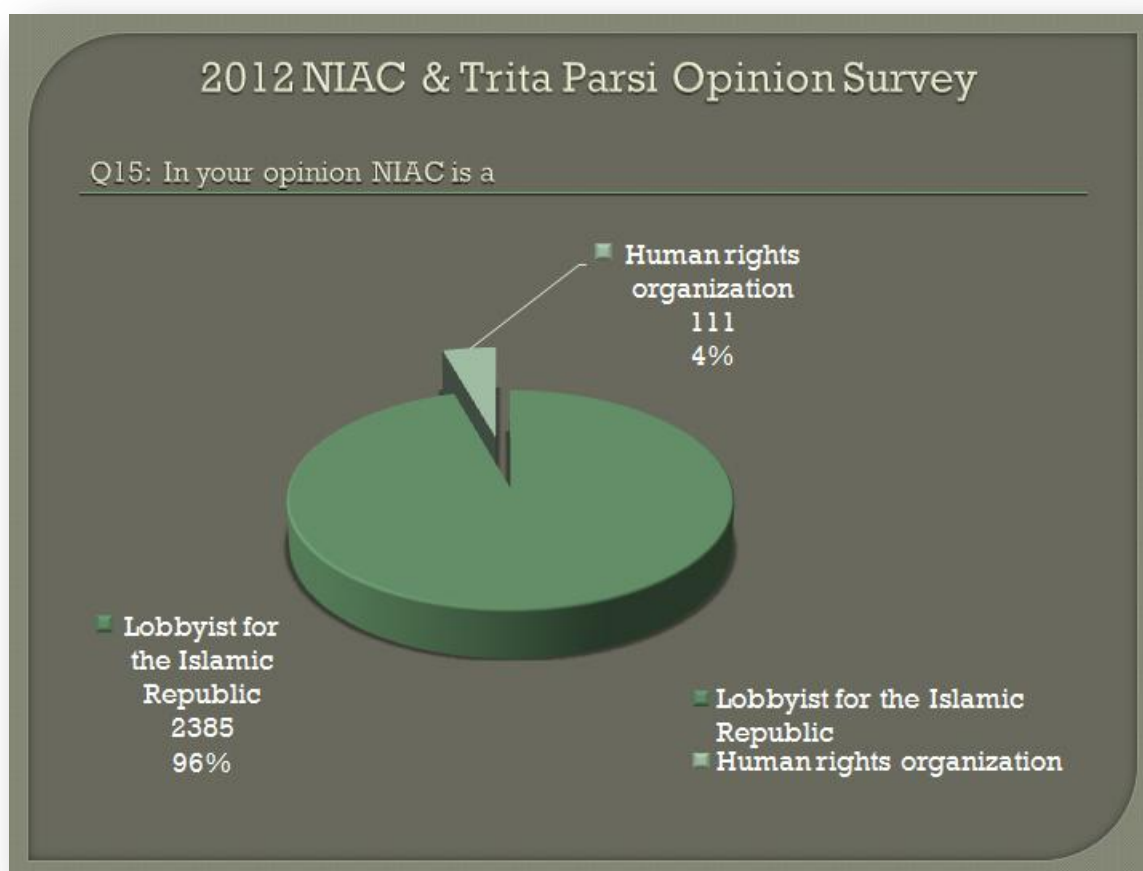


NIAC has conducted, indirectly commissioned, or helped conduct a number of surveys since its inception. Despite its claim of 3,000-43,000 members, [less than 500](#) of its members take part in NIAC own surveys.

The current survey is perhaps the largest participation of its kind. PDMI plans to reach more participants and aim to keep the survey open and publicly available.

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QUESTION 15: IN YOUR OPINION NIAC IS A ...



96% of survey participants believe that NIAC is a lobby organization and only 4% think that NIAC is a human rights organization.

This is in keeping with Trita Parsi statement [that NIAC is not a human rights organization](#): and NIAC's [real agenda](#):

TO: ROY COFFEE / DAVE DI STEFANO

BY: TRITA PARSI, TRITA.PARSI@MAIL.HOUSE.GOV

SUBJECT: TOWARDS THE CREATION OF AN IRANIAN-AMERICAN LOBBY

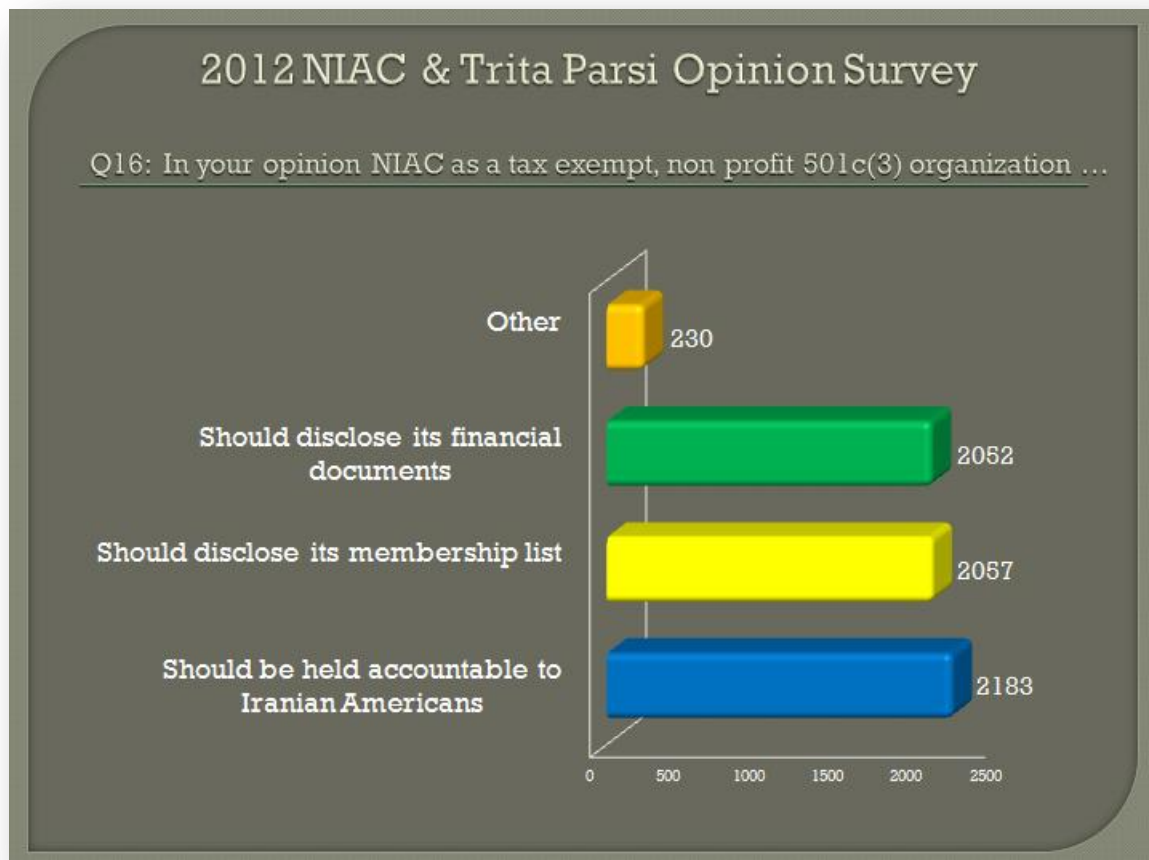
DATE: [REDACTED]

SUMMARY

This memo presents a preliminary strategy towards the creation of an Iranian-American lobby. It first explains the necessity of promoting a mature political culture within the Iranian-American community in order for successful **grassroots lobbying** to be able to take place. It highlights a few strategy issues that the proposed lobby should take into consideration: a strategic partnership with the National Iranian American Council (www.niacouncil.org), **initial focus on non-controversial** issues such as visas and discrimination, the importance of a "human element" in the lobby campaigns, and targeting of positive-image business with a strategic interest in Iran for financial support. The memo proceeds to describe the potential competition the lobby may face. It also presents a list of potential Board members from the academic and business communities. The memo concludes with a discussion regarding the lobby's staffing needs, **with Trita Parsi as the proposed Executive Director of the organization.**

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QUESTION 16: IN YOUR OPINION, NIAC AS A TAX EXEMPT, NON PROFIT 501 (C) 3 ORGANIZATION ...



Question 16 attempted to seek input from survey participants as to how they expect NIAC to adhere to laws governing non-profit, tax exempt organizations. The participants were asked to choose any or all four responses.

- 87% stated that NIAC should be held accountable to Iranian Americans.
- 82% stated that NIAC should disclose its membership list.
- 87% noted that NIAC should disclose its financial statements.
- .09% of respondents add their own comments. Many of the comments showed anger toward NIAC and referred to its president as the “traitor” that must be tried for treason, or “that is why I left NIA”, many stated “Deport Trita Parsi”, “NIAC does not represent us.” and Trita is an IRI agent.”

AN OPINION SURVEY OF NIAC AND ITS PRESIDENT TRITA PARSİ

SUMMARY

The Pro-Democracy Movement of Iran (PDMI) conducted an on-line^{xix} bilingual (Farsi-English) survey of Iranians, Iranian- Americans and Americans in order to gauge attitudes towards NIAC and its president Trita Parsi. Respondents constituted a representative sample of 2,507 individuals age 18 and older who had access to the Internet. The respondents participated over a three months period. PDMI intends to keep the survey open and online to allow for as much participation as possible. The survey's goal was to gauge Iranians and Americans attitude toward NIAC and Trita Parsi who have claimed to be the largest Iranian-American organization in the United States representing Iranian-American interests. The survey demonstrated that Iranians were overwhelmingly unified about their attitude toward NIAC and its president Trita Parsi. The survey's key findings are that:

- A majority of respondents had known NIAC for 1 to 5 years
- 95% of respondents expressed NIAC did not represent their interests
- 95% of respondents believed NIAC was a lobbyist for the Islamic Republic
- 90% of respondents were aware of the defamation lawsuit against Hassan Dai
- 78% had read NIAC's internal documents revealed as a result of the lawsuit
- 95% of respondents believed that NIAD has defrauded the federal government
- 95% of respondents believed that NIAC had lied to members of Congress about its membership numbers
- 87% of respondents were familiar with Bob Ney and his conviction
- 83% of respondents knew that Trita worked for Bob Ney
- 68% of respondents knew about Roy Coffee and David DiStefano
- 70% of respondents knew that NIAC worked with Roy Coffee to establish a lobby organization
- 83% of respondents said that they were never asked for their opinion by NIAC
- 4% of respondents believed that NIAC was a human rights organization and 96% believed that NIAC worked as a Lobby for the Islamic Republic
- A large majority of respondents wanted NIAC to disclose its financial documents, membership list and numbers, and be held accountable for its actions

Such extent of negative attitude toward NIAC and its president is in some measure due NIAC's filing of lawsuit and release of its internal memos and documents as a result of defamation lawsuit brought against Hassan Dai. NIAC's [internal memos](#) have given a lot of credibility to Mr. Dai's claim that NIAC is acting as a lobby for the Islamic Republic. In addition, two other publications have damaged NIAC's credibility amongst the Iranian-American community: one is a paper published the Center for Security Policy authored by [Clare M. Lopez](#) in 2009 named "[Rise of the Iran Lobby](#)". Ms. Lopez is the Vice President of the Intelligence Summit and a professor at the Center for Counter intelligence and Security Studies. Another damaging article was published in the [Washington Times](#) alleging that NIAC and Trita Parsi has operated as an undeclared lobby and may be guilty of violating tax laws, the Foreign Agent Registration Act and lobbying disclosure laws.

Trita Parsi, himself, has contributed greatly to the ill feeling and erosion of NIAC's credibility amongst the Iranian-American community by his actions, inconsistent and inaccurate statements. Furthermore, NIAC's internal memos showed that it employed a policy of "cease and desist" against any of its opponents to intimidate them into silence. NIAC's policy of intimidation might have had negative effect on the Iranians living in the United States and enjoying the freedoms afforded to them under our Constitution. Freedoms they have never been afforded under very restrictive conditions they were subjected to by the Islamic Republic.

The extent of negative opinion toward NIAC might also be related to the lack of transparency, prevalent double speak and continuous "shifting of gears" by Trita Parsi, inconsistencies in NIAC's actions, lack of regard for Iranian opinions, Trita Parsi unwillingness to appear on public debates to answer critical and important questions, NIAC's frequent contact with high ranking Iranian officials, NIAC's denial of its relationship with top level Iranian government and business officials, and NIAC's inability to be in touch with the Iranian community.

Mr. Trita Parsi left Iran when he was four years old. Mr. Parsi does not possess a proficient command of the Persian language and does not have a deep understanding of Iranian culture and politics. Mr. Parsi's lip-service to human rights might have also contributed to Iranian communities' negative attitude towards NIAC.

Mr. Trita Parsi is normally [shunned](#) by the Iranian-Americans. The majority of Iranian-Americans were forced to flee the repressive regime in Iran and live in exile after the revolution of 1979. Except for a few very wealthy businessmen with connections to the Islamic regime who are anxious to restore economic and trade relations between Iran and the United States, the majority of Iranians are opposed to any favorable policies towards the Islamic Republic and any appeasement of the regime.

As documented by Rand-[What Do Iranians Think?](#), a majority of respondents expressing an opinion opposed the reestablishment of ties with the United States. Iranians with higher incomes and those with greater social means tended to be more favorably inclined^{xx}.

With inflation rate at over 30% annually and persistent high unemployment, the majority of Iranians live in dire economic conditions and are opposed to establishment of ties with the United States, believing that friendly relations between the US and IRI, will not improve their living and social conditions but it might ensure regime's survival and further embolden the regime to reign terror on ordinary Iranians.

Most of NIAC's sponsors are [big corporations](#), inside and outside Iran. NIAC and NIPOC's joint recent U.S. Iran Sanctions event held on April 22, 2011 was sponsored by 4 major corporations who are in the business of selling oil and gas, military, nuclear, sensitive technologies, telecommunication devices and chemicals.



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REFERENCES

ⁱⁱ Source NIAC Website and niacINSight: Since its inception in 2002, NIAC has grown to become the largest grassroots Iranian-American organization in the United States. NIAC's influence transcends the beltway to affect Iranian Americans all over the US... NIAC was first formed to enhance Iranian-American participation in American civic life. This original model has been wildly successful. Iranian Americans of all political convictions have used the knowledge and skills they obtained through NIAC and other Iranian-American organizations to meet with their lawmakers, send letters to decision makers, communicate with the media, volunteer with different organizations, and become involved in local politics...The success of its membership has allowed NIAC to influence policies in favor of Iranian-American interests, and to provide a voice for Iranian Americans on matters of importance to them, such as their cultural heritage. Source: niacINSight, [NIAC launches new logo, amended mission statement to reflect growth](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Online survey format was chosen intentionally since many Iranians feels that their responses might be monitored by government by survey administrators and Iranian officials.

^{iv} [Polling Iranian Public Opinion: An Unprecedented Nationwide Survey of Iran](#) conducted by [Abbas Abdi](#). Mr. Abdi is an unrepentant reform movement leader who helped plan and stage the takeover of the United States Embassy and seizure of 52 Americans. In a 1997 meeting in Paris with one of the American hostages, Barry Rosen, he rationalized how the events that occurred were meant to occur and that, in the end, proved a positive influence on the world. He and Mr. Rosen, he said, were effectively pawns in a war between countries and systems, and therefore holding Mr. Rosen prisoner was never "personal."

^v Zogby International was commissioned by PAAIA to conduct a telephone survey of Iranian American adults. The [survey](#) was conducted between August 24th and September 8th, 2009 based on successful interviews in English with a representative sample of 402 Iranian American respondents. Each respondent answered approximately 35 questions. The respondents were randomly drawn from **purchased Iranian surname lists**.

^{vi} For more information see Clare M. Lopez, [Rise of The Iran Lobby](#), [www.iranian.com](#), and Daniel M. Zucker, [Iran's Foreign Agents of Disinformation](#).

^{vii} Dallas Morning News: [Lobbyists bring unwanted attention to law firm](#): Lobbyists are hired for their connections. But as Washington sorts through a growing lobbying scandal, the past connections of two lobbyists hired last fall by Locke Liddell & Sapp (A law firm headed by Harriet Miers-George Bush's Nominee to the Supreme Court) are bringing unwanted attention to the powerful Dallas law firm. The two men, Roy Coffee and David DiStefano, have been connected to a foreign company's attempt to work around U.S. sanctions against Iran and sell airplane parts to that nation – an attempt that centered on U.S. Rep. Bob Ney, an Ohio Republican accused in lobbyist Jack Abramoff's recent plea agreement of accepting bribes. The two lobbyists were hired in 2003 by a pair of businessmen with résumés out of a James Bond movie. One, a Syrian gambler nicknamed "The Fat Man," made his fortune in Middle East arms deals. The other, a felon, was banned from East Coast racetracks in the 1980s for his connections to organized crime and has a Tennessee rap sheet for trying to defraud Elvis Presley.

PDMI: Mr. Coffee was deputy campaign manager for George W. Bush's first run for governor in 1994. After the election, he was Texas' director of state-federal relations until 1998. He then joined the Washington lobbying firm O'Connor & Hannan. He was known for close connections to the Bush family. In 2000, the Capitol Hill newspaper Roll Call said some lobbyists called him "Bush's 'eyes and ears' on K

Street." According to his personal finance disclosure filing, Mr. Ney returned to London sometime later in 2003 and gambled at the Ambassador's Club, a private casino at which Mr. Al-Zayat was a member. He reported winning \$34,000. Mr. Walsh, his spokesman, has said that Mr. Ney won that sum by playing two hands of a three-card game of chance, with an initial bet of \$100.

^{viii} Iran is a young country and active participation of 18-30 age groups perhaps reflects such demographic trends that are active in politics and use the Internet regularly. More than two-thirds of the population is under the age of 30, one quarter being 15 years of age or younger. The literacy rate was 80% in 2007. Iran is ethnically and linguistically diverse, with some cities, such as [Tehran](#), bringing various ethnic groups together. Source: Wikipedia, [Demographics of Iran](#)

^{ix} As quoted by NIAC on its website: "The National Iranian American Council is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the interests of the Iranian-American community. We accomplish our mission by supplying the resources, knowledge and tools to enable greater civic participation by Iranian Americans and informed decision making by lawmakers.

Since its inception in 2002, NIAC has effectively represented Iranian Americans on Capitol Hill, giving the Iranian-American community a powerful voice. NIAC has a presence on both coasts and in the American heartland. Members of Congress are now counting on hearing from NIAC and benefiting from the perspective of Iranian Americans.

NIAC is a grassroots organization supported by the Iranian-American community and prominent American foundations. NIAC does not receive funds from the Iranian government nor the United States government."

^x According to the documents, George Soros's Open Society Policy Center pays the annual salary of the NIAC staffer who heads the Campaign for a New Policy on Iran, according to an email among NIAC officials. And the minutes of a series of meetings including NIAC and other coalition members offer a glimpse of the strategy and tactics involved in the push for a rapprochement with the Islamic Republic, from an attempt to undermine the appointment of Dennis Ross as Iran envoy to a planned "Send Hillary to Iran" campaign.

The minutes include almost no mention of a human rights agenda inside Iran, which has more recently been on NIAC's agenda. Participants in the discussions include NIAC as well as the liberal Jewish group J Street, anti-war groups like Peace Action and the American Friends Service Committee, and the business lobby that opposes Iran sanctions, USA*Engage.

The first minutes, from last November 12, laid out an agenda for the group, which "advocates a diplomatic resolution to the conflict between the US and Iran, opposes military action against Iran, and agrees that sanctions are no substitute for diplomatic engagement."

The minutes from the following month add the goal of stopping American funding to Iranian resistance groups by "end[ing] the 'Democracy Fund' as we know it." The Atlantic: NIAC: [End the Iran Democracy Fund](#)

^{xi} NIAC founds its legitimacy on its claim to speak for Iranian-Americans. This claim is demonstrably false. Less than 500 NIAC members are active enough and care to answer a questionnaire, but its stated views diverge radically from the poll-measured views of Iranian-Americans as a group.

Zogby just released a poll of Iranian-American opinion commissioned by another Iranian-American group. You can read it [here](#).

While NIAC is consistent with Iranian-American views in opposing military action against Iran, it diverges radically from its supposed constituents in every other way. What leaps out from the survey data is a

community that is largely politically quiescent and generally accepting that the U.S. government should make Iran policy with U.S. interests uppermost in mind. That said:

- 59% of Iranian-Americans think that the top priority for any Iranian-American organization should be the promotion of democracy and human rights in Iran. NIAC has opposed all efforts to promote democracy – including seeking to defund democracy advocacy – and is a late comer to the human rights cause.
- Only 17% of Iranian-Americans thought an Iranian-American group should attempt to influence U.S. foreign policy toward Iran – NIAC’s stated purpose.
- Only 23% of Iranian-Americans agree with NIAC in wishing to see the establishment of diplomatic relations with the current regime. Only 18% wish to see economic sanctions removed, another NIAC priority. Fully 42% of Iranian-Americans favor a policy of regime change in Iran – which NIAC opposes.

Source: FrumForum: [NIAC] [Speaking for Iran, Not Iranian-Americans](#)

^{xii} Senator Jon Kyl (R-Arizona) [pressed for NIAC inquiry](#) by writing a letter to Attorney General Eric Holder following the Washington Times piece raising questions about its lobby status. Senator Mark Kirk on November 2009 [referred](#) to NIAC a [“regime sympathizer.”](#)

^{xiii} Keep in mind, this is an organization that claims on its tax forms that it DOES NOT engage in lobbying. Moreover, all of the group’s efforts seem focused on preventing additional sanctions, eliminating U.S. democracy funding initiatives, and destroying the Voice of America’s Persian service and Radio Farda. The regime couldn’t come up with a better set of priorities for NIAC, which may explain why so many people are wondering on behalf of whom NIAC is working.

Source: Michael Goldfarb, The Weekly Standard, The Iran Lobby’s War on Vice of America

^{xiv} Ohio Rep. Bob Ney personally lobbied the then Secretary of State Colin Powell to relax U.S. sanctions on Iran. A convicted airplane broker who had just taken the congressman and a top aide on an expense-paid trip to London. Ney’s lawyer confirmed to NEWSWEEK that federal prosecutors have subpoenaed records on Ney’s February 2003 trip paid for by Nigel Winfield, a thrice-convicted felon who ran a company in Cyprus called FN Aviation. Winfield was seeking to sell U.S.-made airplane spare parts to the Iranian government—a deal that would have needed special permits because of U.S. sanctions against Tehran.

^{xv} Dallas Morning News: [Lobbyists bring unwanted attention to law firm](#): ...The two men, Roy Coffee and David DiStefano, have been connected to a foreign company’s attempt to work around U.S. sanctions against Iran and sell airplane parts to that nation – an attempt that centered on U.S. Rep. Bob Ney, an Ohio Republican accused in lobbyist Jack Abramoff’s recent plea agreement of accepting bribes. The two lobbyists were hired in 2003 by a pair of businessmen with résumés out of a James Bond movie. One, a Syrian gambler nicknamed “The Fat Man,” made his fortune in Middle East arms deals. The other, a felon, was banned from East Coast racetracks in the 1980s for his connections to organized crime and has a Tennessee rap sheet for trying to defraud Elvis Presley.

^{xvi} Hassan Dai in [The Strange New friend of Iranian demonstrators](#) writes:

For the past twelve years, Trita Parsi has unremittingly lobbied the U.S. Congress to lift pressure off the Iranian regime. A short while ago, he [advised](#) the U.S. government to share the Middle East with the ruling mullahs. Now, supported by some influential circles in the U.S. and benefiting from [his new PR agency](#), Parsi strives to [present himself](#) as a voice for the Iranian people and the green movement. Amazingly, just a

few months ago, Parsi predicted the premature death of the Iranian uprising. In an article titled "[The End of the Beginning](#)," he wrote:

Iran's popular uprising, which began after the June 12 election, may be heading for a premature ending. In many ways, the Ahmadinejad government has succeeded in transforming what was a mass movement into dispersed pockets of unrest. Whatever is now left of this mass movement is now leaderless, unorganized -- and under the risk of being hijacked by groups outside Iran in pursuit of their own political agendas.

Credibility: Parsi's new facade is primarily rooted in self-interested calculations. He is seriously discredited among Iranians, who know him as a lobbyist for the Iranian regime. Mohsen Makhmalbaf, who [has served informally](#) as a Western-based spokesman for Iranian opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi, [recently told the Washington Times](#): "I think Trita Parsi does not belong to the Green Movement. I feel his lobbying has secretly been more for the Islamic Republic."

During the discovery process, some of Parsi's communications were released and proved to be highly compromising to him. According to [Washington Times](#), "Law enforcement experts who reviewed some of the documents, say e-mails between Mr. Parsi and Iran's ambassador to the United Nations at the time, Javad Zarif -- and an internal review of the Lobbying Disclosure Act -- offer evidence that the group has operated as an undeclared lobby and may be guilty of violating tax laws, the Foreign Agents Registration Act and lobbying disclosure laws."

The content of these documents was serious enough that Senator John Kyl [officially wrote](#) to the U.S. Attorney General and pressed for an inquiry into Parsi's lobby. The reaction in the Iranian community has been outrage toward Parsi's activities in favor of the Iranian regime.

Parsi and human rights violations in Iran: Parsi's newfound passion for human rights in Iran is in sharp contrast to his deplorable record. He started his political career in 1997, when he founded a lobby organization called "Iranians for International Cooperation," or IIC. In 2002, he founded his current lobby organization, NIAC. From 1997 to 2007, there was not a single statement by Parsi or his organizations condemning the human rights violations in Iran. In fact when human rights activists in 2000 protested the appearance of and a speech by the Iranian ambassador, Parsi [lashed out](#) at the protesters for not being civilized!

In an interesting document posted on their website, NIAC listed their entire statements about human rights violations in Iran. It is titled "[NIAC Articles on Human Rights in Iran](#)." Not a single statement before May 2007, when Parsi's lobby in favor of the Iranian regime was exposed and he was publicly denounced by the Iranian community. It is therefore logical to conclude that his 2007 sympathy for the human rights in Iran was designed to repair his disgraceful image.

Parsi's effort to humanize his lobby is part of a calculated strategy that he has meticulously applied for the past several years. In a [secret document](#) written in 2002 and sent to a Washington lobbyist, Parsi explained the need to give a human face to their lobby:

Although the mission of the proposed lobby should be to improve relations between the US and Iran and open up opportunities for trade, the initial targets should be less controversial issues such as visas and racial profiling/discrimination ...

For more than a decade, Trita Parsi has worked hard to remove sanctions against the Iranian regime. He has professed continuously that the Iranian regime (regardless of who is in power) is stable, and hence warrants a friendly policy from the West. He developed close relations with Ahmadinejad's ambassador in the U.N. and [reported to him](#) the pulse of the U.S.'s political circles. He [collaborated and coordinated with companies inside Iran](#) who stand to benefit significantly from the lifting of sanctions. He [lied about the](#)

[number of NIAC members](#) to garner false credibility in Washington towards advancing his cause. And now, he has reinvented himself as a pro-human rights activist who advocates "smart sanctions" against Iran. Should we believe that this sudden transformation is sincere, or is it a cunning but desperate attempt to gain lost credibility?

^{xvii} While [Common Cause quietly reported](#) in December of 2004 that Diebold --- the [much-beleaguered-of-late](#) American Voting Machine company --- paid as much as \$275,000 to Abramoff's firm, Greenberg Traurig for lobbying work, [The BRAD BLOG](#) has now found additional details that begin to shed new light on Ney's personal connections to Diebold lobbyists. Such personal connections include those with Ney's former chief of staff turned lobbyist, David DiStefano, who has been working on behalf of Diebold, Inc. and at least one other Voting Machine Company as a registered lobbyist in the House going back to at least 2001. One of DiStefano's [online bios](#) crow's about his having "an insider's edge to hard-to-reach political officials." That "insider's edge" has proven to have been a very worthwhile investment for the Voting Machine Companies who'd purchased access into Ney's political office. [Congressional lobbying records](#) reveal that Diebold, Inc. has paid at least \$180,000 to DiStefano and eventually his partner, Roy C. Coffee, to lobby for the "Help America Vote Act" and other "Election Reform Issues" in Congress since 2003. Another Electronic Voting Machine Company, AccuPoll, Inc., also paid DiStefano some \$70,000 to lobby for HAVA on their behalf in 2002, although that relationship was apparently terminated once the legislation was passed by Congress. In turn, Ney's former employee DiStefano and Coffee themselves have given nearly \$20,000 to Bob Ney's campaigns dating back to 2002.

The connections of DiStefano and Coffee don't stop at Congress, however. Both lobbyists now work out of the new Washington office of the Texas-based law firm of Lock, Liddell & Sapp LLP --- the firm of *George W. Bush's White House Counsel Harriet Miers*. And Coffee, himself, had previously worked as a senior aide to then-Governor Bush back in Texas.

In addition to lobbying in favor of Electronic Voting, DiStefano and Coffee were also paid thousands to lobby Ney on behalf of an obscure firm by the name of FN Aviation, which later became known as FAZ Aviation. FN/FAZ Aviation, the [Columbus Dispatch reported](#) last December, paid for Ney's 2003 trip to England. On that trip, Ney met at a casino with FN Aviation's director, Nigel Winfield, a three-time convicted felon, and Fouad al-Zayat, the Syrian-born head of FN Aviation. Zayat, [as reported by NBC News](#), is known as "one of London's biggest gamblers."
[The Soon-to-be-Indicted Rep. Bob Ney of Ohio's Connection To Electoral Fraud](#)

^{xviii} An expert from a memo from Trita Parsi to Roy Coffee and Dave Di Stefano titled: [Toward the Creation of an Iranian Lobby](#)

Trita Parsi writes: This memo presents a preliminary strategy towards the creation of an Iranian-American lobby. It first explains the necessity of promoting a mature political culture within the Iranian-American community in order for successful grassroots lobbying to be able to take place. It highlights a few strategy issues that the proposed lobby should take into consideration: a strategic partnership with the National Iranian American Council, initial focus on non-controversial issues such as visas and discrimination, the importance of a "human element" in the lobby campaigns, and targeting of positive-image business with a strategic interest in Iran for financial support.

^{xx} Source: RAND-[What Do Iranians Think?](#)-The survey revealed that respondents were deeply divided on issues that define Iranian politics, including the state of the economy, the nuclear program, and U.S.-Iranian relations. Nevertheless, a majority of those expressing an opinion opposed the reestablishment of U.S.-Iranian ties, and there was also significant support for development of nuclear weapons. In addition, negative attitudes toward the Iranian economy were less prevalent than expected, and many respondents did not consider sanctions to have had a significant negative impact on Iran's economy. The survey also suggested that Iranians with higher incomes, higher levels of education, and access to multiple sources of information may be more supportive of Iranian policies that are more favorable to U.S. interests. U.S.

policies meant to shape Iranian behavior may be more effective if they focus on this particular sector of the Iranian population.