

# The Diaspora Variable

How Iranian-American Voters Could Decide the 2026 House Majority

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## Executive Summary

California's Proposition 50 has redrawn the congressional map in favor of Democrats. But a variable that no redistricting model anticipated — the Iranian-American diaspora, radicalized by the January 2026 massacres — has the numerical strength to override the new maps in at least two House districts, and potentially influence two more, in races that will help determine majority control.

This analysis examines four congressional districts where the concentration of Iranian-American eligible voters is large enough relative to the 2024 margin of victory to plausibly affect outcomes — decisively in two, and meaningfully in two others. The core finding: if this community is mobilized around U.S. foreign policy toward the Iranian regime, its concentration in specific competitive districts could influence whether Republicans hold the House.

That mobilization is not guaranteed. It is contingent on a single variable: whether the Trump Administration follows through on its January 2026 promises to stand with the Iranian people, or pivots toward a nuclear deal with the regime responsible for the killing of tens of thousands of protesters.

## 1. The Redistricting Problem: Proposition 50

On November 4, 2025, California voters approved Proposition 50 by a 64%-36% margin, authorizing the state legislature to replace the independent Citizens Redistricting Commission maps with new, legislatively drawn congressional districts for the 2026, 2028, and 2030 elections.

<sup>[1]</sup> The Supreme Court declined to hear the Republican challenge. The new maps are the law.

The political impact is significant. According to Sabato's Crystal Ball at the University of Virginia's Center for Politics, the analysis most widely cited by both parties, the new map gives Democrats "a chance to win up to five additional seats," with three being "fairly easy pickups" and two more as toss-ups.<sup>[2]</sup>

In the districts relevant to this analysis:

- **CA-13 (Central Valley):** The new lines move this seat approximately six points to the left at the presidential level. Under the old map, it was a pure toss-up. Under Prop 50, it leans Democratic.<sup>[2]</sup>
- **CA-45 (Orange County):** Harris's margin in this district increases from 1.5 to approximately 4 points under the new lines. Already a Democratic pickup in 2024, the new map further insulates the incumbent.<sup>[2]</sup>
- **CA-47 (Irvine/Tustin/Aliso Viejo):** The new Prop 50 lines removed Newport Beach and added Tustin and Aliso Viejo, significantly reshaping the district. Sabato's Crystal Ball moved it from Leans Democratic to Safe Democratic.<sup>[2]</sup>

The bottom line: to hold these seats, Republican candidates must outperform the generic ballot by 3-5 points. That margin is historically difficult to achieve without a specific, highly motivated crossover demographic.

## 2. The Geopolitical Catalyst: January 2026

The variable that no redistricting model could predict is the crisis in Iran.

### The Uprising and the Massacres

Beginning in late December 2025, nationwide protests erupted across Iran, initially sparked by the collapse of the rial and record inflation.<sup>[3]</sup> Within days, the economic protests evolved into a full-scale political uprising calling for the end of the Islamic Republic, spreading to all 31 provinces.

On January 8-9, 2026, the regime launched an unprecedented crackdown. The scale of violence has few modern parallels:

- **President Trump** (February 20 press briefing, reiterated at the State of the Union on February 24): "They've killed at least, it looks like 32,000 protesters."<sup>[8][9]</sup>
- **Iran International**, citing leaked IRGC intelligence reports: More than 36,500 killed.<sup>[6]</sup>
- **Time Magazine**, citing two senior Health Ministry officials: Over 30,000 killed.<sup>[5]</sup>
- **UN Special Rapporteur on Iran** (January 22): Estimated civilian deaths may surpass 20,000.

<sup>[3]</sup>

- **Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA):** Over 7,015 deaths documented, with nearly 12,000 additional cases under investigation and more than 50,000 arrests.<sup>[4]</sup>
- **Amnesty International:** Documented security forces firing from rooftops and footbridges, with at least 205 body bags visible at one overflow morgue near Tehran.<sup>[7]</sup>
- **Iranian government figures:** 3,117 killed (announced January 21), including approximately 500 security personnel.<sup>[3]</sup>

The exact toll remains difficult to verify. The regime imposed a near-total internet and telecommunications blackout on January 8; a brief partial restoration on January 18 was quickly suspended again, and the blackout was not formally relaxed until January 28. Since then, internet access has remained severely restricted — throttled, intermittently cut, and timed to coincide with protest hours — with the IRGC announcing in February plans to permanently block foreign social media platforms. What is beyond dispute: this is the deadliest mass killing of civilians in Iran's modern history and among the largest protest crackdowns anywhere in a generation.

## The Diaspora Reaction

The Iranian-American community — estimated at over 1 million people in the U.S., with roughly half in California<sup>[10]</sup> — has mobilized at a scale not seen since 1979. Solidarity rallies have been held in over 20 U.S. cities. On February 14, a global day of action drew approximately 350,000 in Los Angeles, 350,000 in Toronto, 250,000 in Munich, 50,000 in London, and 45,000 in Vancouver.<sup>[11]</sup> Major earlier rallies took place in San Francisco,<sup>[12]</sup> downtown Los Angeles,<sup>[13]</sup> and outside the Iranian UN ambassador's residence in New York.<sup>[14]</sup>

Inside Iran, the movement has not died. Beginning February 22 — coinciding with the traditional 40-day mourning period — university students in Tehran, Mashhad, and other cities resumed protests, clashing with pro-regime Basij forces on campuses. By February 26, anti-regime protests had swept through Iranian universities for a fifth consecutive day, with students boycotting classes and transforming campuses into central hubs of resistance. Teachers and schools in cities near Tehran went on strike to protest the killing of at least 230 children and teenagers.<sup>[15]</sup>

The dominant demand across all protests, domestic and diaspora: regime change — not reform, not diplomacy.

### 3. The Trump Variable

#### The Promise

Polling consistently shows that U.S.-Iran relations are the top issue for Iranian-American voters. A 2024 national survey by the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA) found that 55% of respondents cited it as the most important issue, ahead of inflation (40%) and the economy (39%). Eighty-eight percent expressed support for the Woman, Life, Freedom movement.<sup>[16]</sup> A 2023 Lake Research Partners poll of Iranian-American registered voters in California found overwhelming support for promoting regime change and human rights in Iran.<sup>[17]</sup>

President Trump inserted himself directly into this dynamic with two statements the diaspora treats as binding commitments:

*"If Iran shoots and violently kills peaceful protesters, which is their custom, the United States of America will come to their rescue. We are locked and loaded and ready to go."*  
— President Trump, Truth Social, January 2, 2026<sup>[18]</sup>

*"Iranian Patriots, KEEP PROTESTING — TAKE OVER YOUR INSTITUTIONS!!! Save the names of the killers and abusers. They will pay a big price. I have cancelled all meetings with Iranian Officials until the senseless killing of protesters STOPS. HELP IS ON ITS WAY."*  
— President Trump, Truth Social, January 13, 2026<sup>[19]</sup>

For the Iranian-American diaspora, these were not abstract policy pronouncements. They were received as personal promises — by a community that had family members on the streets being shot.

#### The Pivot

Despite the January 13 pledge to cancel "all meetings with Iranian Officials," the Administration initiated nuclear negotiations with the regime less than four weeks later:

- **February 6 — Oman (Round 1):** Indirect talks mediated by Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi. U.S. delegation led by Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner. Afterward, Trump told reporters: "Iran looks like it wants to make a deal very badly."<sup>[20]</sup> No evident progress. Iran's objective, per analysts: forestall a U.S. attack.<sup>[21]</sup>

- **February 17 — Geneva (Round 2):** Araghchi claimed the sides agreed on "guiding principles" for a deal. A U.S. official told Axios the talks "made progress" but "there are still a lot of details to discuss." Significant gaps remain on core issues, including the scope of enrichment limits and whether missiles or regional proxy networks are included. U.S. officials told Axios they are "not optimistic" about closing the gaps.<sup>[22]</sup>
- **February 26 — Geneva (Round 3):** The longest and most substantive round yet. Iran presented a draft proposal offering to reduce its uranium stockpile to low enrichment levels under IAEA supervision. Oman's foreign minister announced that the two sides had identified "the main elements of a potential agreement" and would move to technical-level discussions in Vienna at IAEA headquarters next week.<sup>[23]</sup> Araghchi called it the "most intense" round so far, claiming "good progress" while acknowledging that "there are still disagreements."<sup>[38]</sup> A senior U.S. official described the talks as "positive."<sup>[39]</sup> The U.S. imposed new sanctions on Iranian oil shipments on the eve of the talks<sup>[40]</sup> and continued to mass military forces in the region. Secretary Rubio stated beforehand that Iran's refusal to discuss its ballistic missile program remained a "significant stumbling block."<sup>[41]</sup> Core gaps remain: the scope of enrichment limits, whether the deal is time-limited or permanent, and the exclusion of missiles and regional proxies from the framework.

Notably, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has stated publicly that the talks revolve solely around Iran's nuclear program, with no discussion of the regime's domestic repression or human rights.<sup>[20]</sup> The talks are moving toward a deal framework that would preserve the regime — exactly the outcome the diaspora fears most.

## The Military Backdrop

Simultaneous with negotiations, the Administration has deployed the largest U.S. military buildup in the Middle East since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Two carrier strike groups — the USS Abraham Lincoln and the USS Gerald R. Ford — along with 14 surface warships, THAAD and Patriot missile defense systems, and multiple fighter squadrons are positioned within striking distance of Iranian territory.<sup>[24]</sup> On February 20, Trump said he was "considering a limited military strike" on Iran and gave the regime a roughly two-week deadline to reach a deal.<sup>[25]</sup>

At the State of the Union on February 24, Trump stated: "My preference is to solve this problem through diplomacy. But one thing is certain: I will never allow the world's number one sponsor of terror to have a nuclear weapon."<sup>[9]</sup>

## What This Means Electorally

For the diaspora, the ambiguity is hardening into betrayal. The community watched Trump promise "rescue" in January, then open nuclear talks with the regime in February — talks that explicitly exclude the massacres. After Round 3 in Geneva, the trajectory is clear: technical teams are heading to Vienna, the outlines of a deal are taking shape, and Iran's domestic repression is nowhere on the agenda. The reaction was captured by Time Magazine's headline: "'He Doesn't Care About Us': Iranian Protesters Say They Were Betrayed By Trump."<sup>[26]</sup>

If the Administration's posture — whether through intensified sanctions, diplomatic isolation, or explicit support for regime change — demonstrates that Trump kept his January promise, the diaspora will be mobilized and politically engaged through November.

If the Administration reaches a nuclear deal that preserves the regime, this community will disengage. No amount of campaign outreach will substitute for the policy signal.

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## 4. District-Level Analysis

The following analysis examines four congressional districts where the concentration of Iranian-American voters is large enough relative to the 2024 margin of victory to be electorally significant. In two districts (CA-45 and CA-13), the estimated voter bloc exceeds the margin by a factor of 12–17x. In a third (CA-47), it exceeds the margin by 2–3x but faces a steeper partisan climb. In the fourth (NY-3), the bloc roughly equals the margin. The voter estimates are derived from Census ancestry data (American Community Survey), the Lake Research Partners California voter file (60,819 registered voters flagged as Persian statewide)<sup>[17]</sup>, and community population studies cited below.

These are estimates, not precise counts. Actual impact will depend on registration rates, turnout, and the magnitude of any partisan swing.

### CA-45: Orange County / Cerritos

Metric	Value
New Rating (Prop 50 lines)	Lean Democrat

Metric	Value
2024 Margin	<b>653 votes</b> (D. Tran +0.2%) <sup>[27]</sup>
Est. Iranian-American Eligible Voters	<b>~8,000–10,000</b> <sup>[17]</sup>
Ratio: Voter Bloc to Margin	<b>~12–15x</b>

Democrat Derek Tran defeated Republican Michelle Steel by 158,264 to 157,611 — a certified margin of 653 votes, one of the narrowest in modern congressional history. Even under the more favorable Prop 50 lines, this district remains highly competitive. The Iranian-American voter bloc is estimated at more than 12 times the 2024 margin. A meaningful shift of even 5-10 points within this community alone could determine the outcome.

### CA-13: Central Valley / Turlock

Metric	Value
New Rating (Prop 50 lines)	Lean Democrat
2024 Margin	<b>187 votes</b> (A. Gray +0.0%) <sup>[28]</sup>
Est. Iranian/Assyrian Eligible Voters (Turlock area)	<b>~3,200</b> <sup>[29]</sup>
Ratio: Voter Bloc to Margin	<b>~17x</b>

This was the tightest congressional race in the nation in 2024. Turlock is home to a significant Assyrian and Iranian immigrant community, many of whom are religiously conservative Christians acutely sensitive to the persecution of their co-religionists in Iran. This voter bloc is approximately 17 times larger than the 2024 margin. It is the single most efficient mobilization target in the country for a campaign centered on Iran policy.

## CA-47: Irvine / Tustin / Aliso Viejo

Metric	Value
New Rating (Prop 50 lines)	Safe Democrat
2024 Margin	~ <b>10,000 votes</b> (D. Min +2.8%) <sup>[30]</sup>
Est. Iranian-American Eligible Voters	~ <b>22,000–28,000</b> <sup>[31][32]</sup>
Ratio: Voter Bloc to Margin	~ <b>2–3x</b>

This is the hardest case. The new Prop 50 lines removed Newport Beach from CA-47 and added Tustin and Aliso Viejo, pushing the district further left — Sabato's Crystal Ball rates it Safe Democratic (estimated D+5%). A standard Republican campaign cannot close this gap. However, Irvine and surrounding Orange County communities are home to one of the largest concentrations of Iranian-Americans in the United States — approximately 3.56% of Irvine's population is of Iranian ancestry, according to Census data.<sup>[33]</sup> The estimated 22,000-28,000 eligible voters represent the only demographic variable with the theoretical scale to bridge a 10,000-vote gap. This would require not just turnout but a significant defection of Iranian-American Democrats — a scenario that becomes plausible only if the election becomes a referendum on the Administration's Iran policy.

## NY-3: Great Neck / Long Island

Metric	Value
New Rating	Lean Democrat
2024 Margin	<b>12,958 votes</b> (T. Suozzi +3.6%) <sup>[34]</sup>
Est. Persian-Jewish Eligible Voters	~ <b>11,000–14,000</b> <sup>[35][36][37]</sup>
Ratio: Voter Bloc to Margin	~ <b>0.8–1.1x</b>

This is the most marginal case in the analysis. Tom Suozzi is a strong incumbent who has won this district multiple times, and the certified margin of 12,958 votes means the Persian-Jewish voter bloc roughly equals — rather than exceeds — the margin. However, Great Neck — particularly Kings Point — has the highest concentration of Iranian-Americans of any community in the United States, at nearly 30% of the village population.

An important nuance: this community is almost exclusively comprised of Mashhadi Jews — Persian Jews who fled systemic persecution in Iran.<sup>[10]</sup> Unlike the more secular, demographically diverse Iranian exile communities in Southern California, the Great Neck community is deeply insular, and its voting patterns are heavily influenced by a candidate's posture toward Israel as much as toward the Iranian regime. This complicates a simple assumption that Iran policy alone drives this bloc's behavior. A hawkish Republican posture that explicitly links Israel's security to the liberation of Iran could resonate strongly — but a campaign framed narrowly around regime change without the Israel nexus would likely underperform with this community.

Even so, the district warrants inclusion: a competitive race in NY-3 forces Democrats to invest significant defensive resources in a district they would otherwise consider safe — resources diverted from offense elsewhere.

## 5. Conclusion

The data supports three conclusions:

**First, the math is real.** In CA-45 and CA-13, the Iranian-American voter bloc exceeds the 2024 margin by a factor of 12–17x. These are not speculative numbers requiring unlikely turnout scenarios. Even a modest mobilization or partisan swing within this community changes the outcome. In CA-47, the math is harder but still within range given the size of the diaspora population.

**Second, mobilization is contingent on policy.** Every available data point — polling, rally attendance, media coverage, community statements — indicates that this community's political engagement is a direct function of the Administration's posture toward the Iranian regime. The January "locked and loaded" posture energized the diaspora. Three rounds of nuclear talks with the regime — talks that explicitly exclude the massacres — risk deflating it. The community views negotiation with a government that killed tens of thousands of their countrymen as a betrayal.

**Third, the window is narrowing.** The midterm election cycle is underway. Candidates are filing, campaigns are staffing, and early money is being committed. The next round of nuclear talks takes place Thursday in Geneva. If those talks produce a framework deal that preserves the

regime, the mobilization window closes. If the Administration signals clearly — through action, not words — that it stands with the Iranian people, the electoral math in these districts shifts in the Republicans' favor.

The President told the nation last night that 32,000 Iranians were killed by their own government. He told the protesters in January that help was on the way. Whether that promise is kept will determine not only the fate of those protesters, but could meaningfully influence the fight for the House majority.

This is not an ideological argument. It is an arithmetic one.

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*Independent analysis by an Iranian-American data professional. All data sourced and verifiable.*