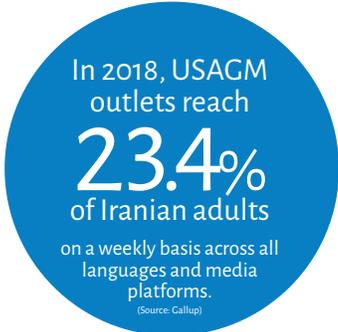




IRAN

The Iranian media market is characterized by complete government control and unremitting denouncement towards foreign media outlets, especially international Persian-language broadcasters. Authorities continue to take aggressive measures to block such TV and radio content, including jamming AM/MW and shortwave radio and satellite TV signals and permanently blocking international Persian-language websites.



2015-2018
USAGM EXPERIENCED

57%

GROWTH IN
AUDIENCE REACH

Meanwhile, Iranians use of the internet for news has exploded in the past two years. Mobile phone ownership is reaching complete saturation and over half of Iranians report owning a smartphone. More than two-thirds of Iranians use the internet on a weekly basis. Additionally, as high-speed internet has expanded, Iranians have shifted toward higher bandwidth activities such as audio and video consumption and away from text-based activities such as email and blogs.

Facebook is the preferred platform in Iran for sharing and consuming news online. The third most popular platform is Telegram, an encrypted online instant messaging service. It is a popular source for news among Iranians seeking to avoid government censorship. In April 2018, the Iranian government blocked access to Telegram, just as it had previously banned Facebook and Twitter use in 2009. Yet, Iranians continue to access these platforms via a variety of anti-censorship technologies.

U.S. GLOBAL MEDIA—SERVING A VITAL ROLE IN IRAN

Despite this difficult operating environment, the USAGM networks of Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) continue to serve a vital role in Iran, enabling the free flow of information and ideas and providing platforms for debate not tolerated in the local media, all while supporting Iranians’ struggle for modernity and openness.

USERS, ESPECIALLY
MULTI-PLATFORM
USERS, TRUST USAGM
NETWORKS.

SOLID MAJORITIES OF
RADIO FARDA AND
VOA TV USERS TRUST
EACH NETWORK AT
LEAST SOMEWHAT

76.8%

FOR RADIO FARDA AND

67.0%

FOR SEDAYEH AMERICA

USAGM's primary objective is to provide accurate news and information that increases Iranian audience's understanding of current events, and helps them form opinions on the policy decisions being made at home and abroad that affect their lives. Additionally, USAGM aims to encourage young people to find their voice, and supports citizen journalism to increase audience participation and strengthen civil society. To successfully accomplish this, USAGM networks provide unique, exclusive content on science, technology, medicine, and the environment – topics research shows young Iranians find interesting – in order to broaden their knowledge.

Due to these restrictive jamming of its broadcasts and censorship of its digital content, USAGM networks must use multiple avenues to reach the Iranian population, including leveraging new platforms and technology. USAGM funds internet circumvention tools that enable online users to get around government censors and reach USAGM-produced news and information. For example, Psiphon, a platform supported by USAGM's Office of Internet Freedom, is the go-to application for Iranians aiming to circumvent restrictions to Western news and digital platforms inside of Iran.

VOA

VOA's Persian Service targets urban youth who are politically savvy and active online, as well as working to fight misperceptions and stereotypes about the United States.

VOA Persian reaches Iranians with six hours of original television programming each day, combined with a variety of news talk, analysis, interviews, and cultural programming to fill its 24/7 satellite stream. The Service also broadcasts one hour of news programming each day via streaming direct-to-home satellite. In addition to its website, it maintains robust and active Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, Instagram, and YouTube profiles, as well as a mobile app available for Android and iPhone.

RFE/RL

RFE/RL's Radio Farda targets urban, educated 20-40 year-old Iranians and aims to help them better understand Iran and the region in order to build a better life, strengthen civil society, and support of social and political freedoms. Through its 24/7 programming mix of news, features, documentaries, and music, Farda informs audiences about events inside and outside of Iran and engages listeners, viewers, and readers in discussion about the best path for the development of Iran in the future.

Farda's website has the largest online audience of any Persian-language international media. An average of 25 million Iranians listen to its livestream radio programs and podcasts every month. Farda's digital team engages with younger audiences via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, and mobile apps.

Across all platforms, Farda engages with a loyal, growing audience that includes civil society leaders, labor activists, and other opinion leaders aspiring to have full social and political freedoms and a fair chance to improve their economic conditions.

VOA 365

USAGM is shaking up its primetime television line-up and social and digital content with the upcoming debut of VOA 365, a 24/7 Farsi-language global network led by VOA in collaboration with RFE/RL targeted at audiences inside Iran and the global Iranian diaspora. With a fresh look and in-language programming will speak to Iran's young, diverse audience. "We are making efforts to keep pace with the media markets in Iran. The target is a younger audience and we are evolving with the times," explains VOA Persian Service Director Setareh Derakhshesh. In addition to transmitting live, unfiltered news conferences and hearings from Washington, VOA 365 will expand the coverage of news from across the world. It is also commissioning new programming produced for this audience, including an entertainment program based in Los Angeles focused on the Iranian diaspora and a weekly, fast-paced look at the newest developments in science, technology, and medicine. VOA 365 plans to develop a Nowruz special programming event out of L.A. that will celebrate the Iranian New Year. New high-quality acquisitions from top American producers round out the programming schedule.

IMPACT

In 2017, USAGM outlets reached 14.3 million unique Iranians on a weekly basis, or nearly a quarter (23.4 percent) of Iranian adults, across all platforms. This growing audience has the capacity to influence the trajectory of Iranian domestic politics.

Users on multiple platforms trust USAGM networks, with 83.8 percent and 75.6 percent likely to trust Radio Farda and VOA Persian, respectively. These audiences are likely to continue to use and recommend the networks, and agree that content helps them form opinions on important issues.

USAGM research shows growing dissatisfaction with a lack of individual freedoms afforded to Iranians. VOA Persian and Radio Farda audience members are much more likely to say that the country is headed in the wrong direction, and more likely to be dissatisfied with their freedom to choose what to do in their lives.

IRANIANS TURN TO USAGM DURING PROTESTS

In December 2017, a small group of young, working class Iranians began to voice their frustration with the country's economy. Within days, protests calling for economic and political change spread to more than 90 cities and towns across the country.

Iranians turned to VOA Persian and Radio Farda for trusted news during that uncertain time. VOA Persian, curated social media posts from citizen journalism to show the scale and impact of the protests and create a clear, complete picture of what was happening. The network expanded its live TV coverage to Iran to provide wall-to-wall footage of the protests with perspectives, reaction, and explanation of U.S. policies. VOA interviewed U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley, and numerous regional experts from think tanks, academia, and media. VOA's Central News worked with the Persian Service to turn their English-language coverage into material for use among the entire network and ran a live blog as events unfolded.

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During the Iranian protests in early January 2018, USAGM added over 75,000 new users in 3 days. The websites of VOA Persian and RFE/RL Radio Farda delivered a total of over 1.1 million page views per day to Psiphon users throughout the protests.

Radio Farda added five hours of news coverage every day to its 24/7 radio program mix, offering comprehensive coverage of breaking developments across the country and interviews with political and economic experts both inside and outside Iran. Iranians in more than 23 cities across the country took great risks to send user-generated video clips of the protests directly to Radio Farda and engaged in interviews with journalists via both social platforms and telephone. In some cases, their testimonies served to undermine government narratives.

VOA Persian's website hit a new record with more than 800,000 visits per day during the first weekend of citizen protests. In the week that followed, content consumption surged tremendously with a 254 and 428 percent increase in article and video views, respectively. Radio Farda's website recorded more than 5.2 million visits during the peak of the protests and its Facebook page saw a 243 percent increase in video views compared to the previous week.

