

Stephen Harper's India Policy: The Role and Influence of the Indo-Canadian Diaspora



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Abstract

Ethnic interest organizations have not been considered a salience influence on foreign policy. Traditionally, democratic theory suggests foreign policy should be determined by the will of the general population, rather than the limited and segregated interests of minority groups. Specifically in Canadian foreign policy, ethnic groups have also had limited access to decision-makers because of increased centralization of Canadian foreign policy. In contrast, the literature on Canada-India relations suggests there is an important foreign policy impact by the large, economically progressive Indo-Canadian Diaspora which has actively attempted to improve relations between these states. This dissertation addresses this obvious contrast, showing how the community has overcome the challenges traditionally associated with ethnic groups and foreign policy. Centrally, the research finds that Indo-Canadians have been active and successful foreign policy participants, influencing implementation, perceptions-editing and direct foreign policy between the two countries. This is determined by two characteristics: first, the Harper government's decision to actively improve economic relations with New Delhi has opened important access points for the Indo-Canadian community. Given their intimate knowledge of India's business and economic environment, the Diaspora has been involved in various overseas missions, consultations and networking between the Canadian government and various stakeholders. Second, ethnic group influence is determined by the community's internal organization, including the composition of their membership, financial resources and political strategies. With these characteristics, the dissertation assesses three interest organizations: the Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce (ICCC), the Canada-India Business Council (C-IBC) and the Canada-India Foundation (CIF). By conducting a within-case analysis, it finds that each organization has a niche role within Canada-India relations – in Diaspora representation (ICCC), business and trade relations (C-IBC) and policy-related advocacy (CIF). Centrally, this dissertation speaks to the evolving relations between the state and society in Canadian foreign policy. It offers a challenge to earlier work in this field, resulting in theoretical, methodological and policy-oriented advancement of a nascent body of literature, suggesting avenues for further investigation.

URI

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