

## Bridging deep divides: Diaspora activism in Canada's Chinese and Iranian communities

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### Abstract

This paper examines the impact and manifestations of political tensions between Canada and select countries of origin such as Iran and China, on the sizeable and economically well integrated diaspora communities from these countries in Canada. The mostly first generation immigrants from these countries are making major contributions to Canada's economic and social wellbeing and its cultural dynamism, while also exerting a sizeable political and economic influence “back home.” These two communities were chosen since, more so than most others in Canada, the Chinese and Iranian diaspora find their state of “in-betweenness” difficult to manage as political relations between Canada and these two countries are not friendly, and their future is uncertain. Judging by credible polls, both Iran and China, and especially their governments, rank low on popularity measures in the Canadian public's eyes, even though some of their most talented and well-to-do citizens continue to immigrate to Canada and have managed to integrate deeply into Canada's economy and institutions in the span of one or two generations.

### Biography

Alidad Mafinezam is a scholar of public policy and urban planning focused on institutional effectiveness and the impact of immigrant communities from Asia on North American democracies, especially the U.S. and Canada. He has served as a founder and co-founder of numerous civic and multicultural organizations in Canada and the U.S., including the West Asia Council, the Mosaic Institute, the American-Iranian Council, the Iranian-Americans' Contributions Project and the Iranian-Canadian Congress. Alidad has published essays on Canadian multiculturalism, U.S. think tanks, as well as West Asia policies of North American and European countries. His writing and civic work has been published in and covered by Reuters, the *Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Al Jazeera English*, *Literary Review of Canada*, as well as numerous Persian-language media. Mafinezam has lectured in Canada, the U.S., Europe, China and Iran. He has also worked on international confidence building and urban collaboration strategies at the Center for Urban Policy Research in New Brunswick, NJ, and the Center for Applied Studies in International Negotiations in Geneva. His unpublished doctoral dissertation, *For Inquiry and Reform: Think Tanks of the Progressive Era*, examines the roots of policy research in a U.S. context, and has been quoted extensively in North America, Europe and Asia. During the presidency of Barack Obama, Mafinezam helped organize numerous events featuring Iranian-American community leaders at the White House. He holds a PhD in Planning and Public Policy from Rutgers

University in New Jersey. Fluent in Persian, he has a working knowledge of French and Turkish and basic knowledge of Arabic.