

Youth of Today for the Youth of Tomorrow:

*Accountability, Participation, and Transparency in Canadian Foreign
Policy*

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1. Our Covenant

Power, conflict, cooperation, and corruption shape the fundamental issues of International Relations. As students, as young people, as witnesses of history, we occupy a dual position: inheritors of a fractured system and architects of the next. At the University of Western Ontario, International Relations is a marriage of History and Political Science, disciplines that demand we not only learn how to analyze a world in motion, but also question the very framework through which we do so.

We are tired of institutions paralyzed by geopolitical interests.

We are saddened by the cynicism that defines our generation's relationship with politics. We are angered by an international order that cannot evolve — one that prioritizes self-preservation over justice, and control over cooperation.

Democratic apathy is not an option. In this project, we reconceptualize political shocks—periods of disillusionment and disruption within a volatile landscape of structural change that reorders international politics and the frameworks of political understanding—into opportunities for democratic and institutional renewal. To do so, we must become the champions of our values, culture, and collective imagination: we must see ourselves as agents responsible for the prosperity and continuity of future generations.

Our generation is a complex mosaic of experiences, opinions and beliefs; nonetheless, we all recognize that our shared values of transparency, accountability, and participation must become the political compass by which we resist and rebuild. They guide how we respond to crises that test the limits of our humanity: from humanitarian disasters, to technological manipulation and control, to climate cataclysms. And so we demand more from our institutions, from our government, from ourselves. We demand acknowledgment, accountability, and action.

We, as a generation, have assumed a consciousness that crosses borders. We are defined by the shocks that surround us, unbound by the traditional borders of the nation-state. The left and the right have forged an ideological coalition in the distrust of present institutions.

We are witnesses to economic stagnation, ecological collapse, digital turbulence, and their human cost. We declare that the current geopolitical and institutional order has failed our present and will fail our future. Our political consciousness, shaped by information and systemic dissatisfaction, demands immediate and fundamental restructuring in Canada's domestic and foreign policies.

We reject systems that prioritize short-term gains and symbolic gestures over collective well-being.

We reject democracies that speak with the tongue of freedom while normalizing corruption, repression, and inequality.

We reject the politics of delay and interest that treat climate breakdown as a debate rather than a catastrophe.

Guided by the Haudenosaunee Seven Generation Principle (SGP), we commit to creating political, social, and economic change that will sustain a life of prosperity and dignity for the generations to come. The SGP affirms that every decision made today must be judged by its impact over the next 175 years, compelling us to act not for immediate reward but for the long-term continuity of justice and humanity. To live by this principle is to understand stewardship as the foundation of power and democracy as a collective struggle towards shared ideals. Both require equality, participation, and the courage to imagine otherwise.

We are devoted to ensuring that youth are not treated as mere symbols of potential but are recognized as partners in power, co-authors of a new world order that prioritizes moral accountability and reciprocity.

We are the children of shocks and the elders of tomorrow, but we do not seek to create chaos, nor nostalgia for a world that never was; we desire to become good ancestors, to root our politics in wisdom, humility, love, bravery, and truth.

2. Generation Z Protest

2.1 Our Positionality

We are a group of Gen Z students currently pursuing International Relations at the University of Western Ontario. We have been radicalized by a world where human rights are selectively upheld, where digital systems operate without transparency and where climate policy consistently defers responsibility onto future generations. These realities are not isolated domestic issues; they are symptoms of a global order that prioritizes strategic interests over our well being. Consequently, we feel the need to create an action plan that confronts the foreign policy structures enabling exploitation, instability and the erosion of our agency. We refuse to fail the next generation.

Imperialism solidified the great powers, and while their influence remains strong, their respect for human beings who carry their futures is weak.¹ The model of constructive engagement that defines liberal internationalism allows superpowers to flout morality while allying themselves with states that routinely violate human rights.² In this context, we aim to articulate a vision that is rooted in transparency, collective responsibility, and reorienting Canadian policy toward the protection of people rather than the preservation of power. Our positionality is determined by conditions that define Generation Z more broadly. Gen Z is a historically situated cohort whose political identity has been formed by lived experience of political, economic and social crises. Gen Z currently represents and is defined as youth. We recognize that our youthful designation will not last forever. Youth is a shared temporary life stage that transcends time itself. While Gen Z is the youth of today, we happily acknowledge that we will not be the youth of tomorrow, and therefore hope that our activism will outlast us.

Generation Z is not a monolith. The intersecting dimensions of class, gender, race, sexuality, and experience shape how generations see and engage with the world. First name

¹Imperialism: a policy of extending a country's power and influence through diplomacy or military force.

²Liberal internationalism: Liberal internationalism is a foreign policy doctrine advocating for an international order based on cooperation, open markets, and liberal democratic values. It believes that countries can achieve mutual benefits through international institutions, trade, and collective security, moving beyond a state of pure power competition.

Mannheim, a Hungarian sociologist, has studied how historical and social contexts shape thought. He argued that a generation is not defined by birth years alone but by a shared orientation toward formative historical shocks that imprint enduring patterns of meaning and collective identity.³ For Gen Z, these formative conditions include, but are not limited to: the post-2008 economic precarity, housing insecurity, the climate crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not the first time in history with an unstable political climate. However, with the rise of digital networks allowing for faster networks and bigger reach, information hits us faster than we can process. Shocks become routine. Shocks get attention. Algorithms listen. Maximizing shocks is maximizing engagement. Promoting news stories that favor sensational content maximizes clicks and emotional reactions. According to Mannheim, these events and circumstances have generated recurring generational narratives: commitments to intergenerational fairness, the self-identification of Gen Z as “generation rent,” and the pursuit of climate justice.⁴ Economic position, gender, and regional variation all mediate how members of Gen Z interpret these experiences, producing distinct “generational units” rather than a homogeneous bloc.

Our position is inspired by and affirmed by the Seven Generations Principle (SGP). SGP is a Haudenosaunee philosophy which emphasizes the impact our decisions will have for seven generations to come. The Seven Generations Principle resonated with us as individuals and a group of International Relations students. We do not intend to appropriate Indigenous knowledge and philosophies. We are educating ourselves and reflecting on our positionality, and our project does advocate for structural change informed by Indigenous knowledge; but we did not engage with and collaborate with the communities themselves, a core tenet of allied scholarship.⁵ Therefore, we cannot, and will not, claim this project is a form of allied scholarship. Instead, this project recognizes the Seven Generations Principle as a valuable philosophy and a guiding reminder of our long-term responsibilities when crafting policies. By engaging with the SGP critically and respectfully, we aim to frame our analysis around the intergenerational impact of activism

³ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge, 2003), 318.

⁴ Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 322.

⁵ Marie-Ève Caron, “The First National Indigenous Broadcaster in the World,” APTN, November 25, 2025, <https://www.aptn.ca/features/how-to-be-an-effective-ally-to-indigenous-communities-guidelines-for-allyship/>.

and consider how these implications can inform outcomes far into the future. We wish to enjoy the inheritance of different types of revolutionary thought and to take inspiration from their work to create something new.

2.2 Context

Youth activism is frequently discussed in public discourse; however, this visibility often masks a deeper pattern of tokenization. Formal institutions or governments invoke ‘youth voices’ as a symbolic gesture without granting them any meaningful influence over decisions. Youth tokenization reduces the genuine activism and social movements led by Gen Z to a buzzword, something that is useful for diversity optics, but sidelines the structural demands that youth are seeking. As a result, the appearance of valuing youth opinions substitutes for actual inclusion in decision-making, reinforcing a disconnect between young people and the institutions that claim to support them.

The perceived disconnect between older generations in power and Gen Z is often misinterpreted as a sign of youth apathy— young people are either unaware or uninterested in politics and political change. On the contrary, youth are passionate and do engage on many fronts. This perceived gap reflects a real disconnect with formal politics and the institutions of decision-making. Young people consistently express declining trust in traditional political institutions; according to UNICEF’s 2024 report on “Youth, Protests and the Polycrisis”, only 57% of youth aged 18-35 prefer democracy over other forms of government, compared to 71% of adults.⁶ This gap showcases a generational divide and frustration with governments’ inability to respond to urgent issues such as human rights violations, economic insecurity, and climate change. Driven by digital mobilization, this erosion of trust does not produce apathy, but instead generates new forms of informal participation: encampment, marches, and digital mobilization. Youth, then, become increasingly dedicated to achieving results through forms of protests that aim to create

⁶ Camila Teixeira, rep., *Youth, Protests and the Polycrisis: Exploring How Youth Protests Can Help to Build Public Support for Change*, March 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/7761/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-Youth-Protests-and-the-Polycrisis-%20report.pdf>, 8.

institutional change from the bottom up. This activism demonstrates a deep political commitment, challenging the notion of disengagement to reveal an evolving landscape and youth-led participation.

2.3 How Gen Z Engages

Political engagement among Gen Z is characterized less by traditional party structures than by the tools and fast pace of online platforms. Gen Z is socialized, educated, and immersed in the online world. This manifests in environments of short-form video, instant messaging, and creator-driven media. Many Gen Z activists are consequently attracted to networked, leader light mobilization that blends memes, petitions, crowdfunding, and live-streamed protest with conventional tactics like strikes and electoral pushes.⁷ This style of organizing model enables rapid coordination under repressive or resource-constrained conditions.⁸

One of the greatest factors that informs Gen Z's urgency to revolt is climate anxiety. Climate anxiety, which affects a majority of 16-to-25-year-olds globally, intensifies the urgency of this activism and influences both issue salience and vote choice.⁹ With the environmental climate worsening because of the lack of accountability of large corporations, Gen Z is starting to think that staying silent will only lead to things getting worse and that collaborative participation is needed in order to change this dynamic. Yet, Gen Z's participation is not limited to moments of mass protest. Many adopt sustained, low risk forms of engagement like volunteering, digital campaigning, and information sharing, practices that link micro-actions to broader social change.¹⁰ Earlier generations also used protest to express discontent. Gen Z's innovation lies in the integration of online and offline

⁷ Roberta Katz et al., *Gen Z, Explained*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226814988.001.0001>, 8.

⁸ Robin Boyle, "'The Times They Are a Changin': Generational Comparisons of the Civil Rights Movement with the Current-Day Climate Movement," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5313390>, 216.

⁹ Caroline Hickman et al., "Climate Anxiety in Children and Young People and Their Beliefs about Government Responses to Climate Change: A Global Survey," *The Lancet Planetary Health* 5, no. 12 (December 2021), [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196\(21\)00278-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2542-5196(21)00278-3), e865.

¹⁰ Fernando Adolfo Mora, "Emergent Digital Activism: The Generational/Technological Connection," *The Journal of Community Informatics* 10, no. 1 (December 6, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.15353/joci.v10i1.2676>, 70.

activism and in framing political participation as an ethical and everyday responsibility rather than an exceptional act.¹¹ This mindset is hopeful that a collective effort could lead to substantial change.

Gen Z experiences intergenerational conflict as a distributive struggle over who bears social and environmental costs. Many young people perceive governance as a gerontocracy or even an oligarchy. Older, wealthier electorates and policymakers entrench fiscal and ecological burdens that must be shouldered by the current working class population and future generations.¹² Post-2008 austerity was defined by a sense of unfairness in the working class and intensified by issues of housing affordability, student debt, and climate policy. Gen Z were children, but we saw the impact of gerontocracy on youth. The government's failure to address these issues has led to Gen Z's identification as the "generation rent" — Gen Z will be renting for much longer due to high housing costs, high interest rates, and economic instability.¹³ Consequently, youth discourse increasingly calls for embedding intergenerational equity into fiscal and regulatory systems linking climate action and economic reform as dual imperatives. According to a research study focusing on Gen Z youth in Western Europe, some Gen Z cohorts seek institutional reform through conventional civic participation, whereas others adopt innovative, network-native forms of contention designed to circumvent elite gatekeeping and accelerate change.¹⁴ This dualism between reformist and radical impulses captures the broader Gen Z sentiment: inherited systems are structurally tilted against the current youth's futures.

¹¹Katz et al., *Gen Z, Explained*. 120.

¹² Klaus Hurrelmann and Erik Albrecht, *Gen Z: Between Climate Crisis and Coronavirus Pandemic* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021), 45.

¹³ Hurrelmann and Albrecht, *Gen Z*, 29.

¹⁴ Xavier Romero-Vidal and David Talukder, "From Boomers to Zoomers: Generational Shifts in Drivers of Satisfaction with Democracy in Western Europe," *Democratization* 32, no. 6 (March 24, 2025): 1541–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2025.2476180>, 1542.

2.4 Youth Engagement through Protest

2.4.1 How Movements Have Lost Power

Gen Z is hardly the first generation to revolt; every era has produced its own youth driven countercultures. We resist treating Gen Z as an exceptional case and instead seek to understand how youth-led movements succeed, how they falter, and how their radical energy can be co-opted or neutralized. To explore this, we turn to the Hippie movement of the 1960s and 1970s as a comparative case as it demonstrates how counterculture can be absorbed, diluted and ultimately neutralized. We analyze this history through Slavoj Žižek's framework, which offers a contemporary Marxist lens for examining why movements that begin with radical promise often fail to sustain its transformative power. This approach will help us identify the structural and ideological pitfalls that have undermined past movements; more importantly, it will clarify how our project aims to avoid such a trajectory.

The Hippie movement was a broad countercultural phenomenon that peaked from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s.¹⁵ No single, agreed-upon definition exists for "Hippie" and the term itself was co-opted by outsiders. What unified participants was less a strict political program and more a shared orientation: anti-consumerism, anti-war values, communal living, and a desire for world peace. Mainstream media, thus continued to celebrate the aesthetics, embodied by music, fashion and hedonism, while ignoring radical political demands.

Žižek argues that neoliberal capitalism in the 1970s and 1980s appropriated the counter culture and views the anti-hierarchical ideals as part of a new "libertarian" capitalist ethos.¹⁶ What survived from the counterculture, then, was the sanitized version of its values which Žižek describes as "tolerant hedonism".¹⁷ This shift replaced collective struggle with individual self-expression. It turned sexual liberation into a depoliticized lifestyle choice, and initiated the rise of a new form of authority centered around a

¹⁵ Chris Goto-Jones, "Zombie Apocalypse as Mindfulness Manifesto (after Žižek)," *Postmodern Culture* 24, no. 1 (September 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1353/pmc.2013.0062>, 12-13.

¹⁶ Goto-Jones, "Zombie Apocalypse as Mindfulness Manifesto (after Žižek)," 12.

¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 112.

“permissive master” whose power is strengthened by its invisibility— when authority feels invisible, people do not need to resist it. This dynamic is visible in the arc of the Hippie movement: rather than being repressed, it was commodified, and its symbols and aesthetics were repackaged into marketable products that neutralized its political force. This is clearly shown in how corporations assessed the political climate and language of the time and appropriated it to sell real estate, consumer goods, and cultural products. Žižek reinforces this analysis by explaining that the counterculture believed it was escaping the system when in reality the system had already anticipated this escape by commodifying it and selling it back to them.¹⁸ Inevitably, the same hippies who denounced the government and criticized corporate power eventually abandoned the movement and later became the very officials and executives they once opposed.¹⁹

We see this same pattern echoed today as corporations rush to market “ethical products”, rebranding themselves to match a new moral demand. This sells young people a new comforting fantasy: that buying the right products is enough to fix structural crises as “caring individuals” will resolve these grand issues on their own. This illusion quickly collapses through class consciousness. We cast ourselves in the role of sports fans shouting at a television, convinced that our reactions will change an outcome we do not control. In the same way, it became almost acceptable to identify as a “hippie” or a “progressive” without actually committing to the hard political work those labels demand. As a result, by the time the Iraq War began in 2003, a conflict that mirrored the stakes and controversies of the Vietnam war, responsibility had already been displaced onto individuals, rather than directed toward the institutions and leaders who held actual power. Movements becoming overshadowed by corporate and governmental interests. As we understand the mechanisms that relegate protests into performative acts, we need to remind ourselves and the societies around us, to move beyond battles of eloquence and performative activism to ensure the prosperity and efficacy of our revolutions. Our liberation should not be watered down to a poetic ideal printed on T-shirts that will be sold to the masses for economic gain. It remains essential to not aestheticise our liberation.

¹⁸ Goto-Jones, “Zombie Apocalypse as Mindfulness Manifesto (after Žižek),” 12.

¹⁹ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 123.

2.4.2 Digital Civic Participation

The rise of digital technologies, like social media platforms, content sharing tools, and media communication, have shifted dynamics associated with civic and political participation. The digital sphere is a new arena for political expression and mobilization, which enables participatory politics and peer-based interactive exchanges to exist in a political context less constrained by institutional gatekeepers.

Since Gen Z are early adopters of digital technologies, youth activism has been digitized. Gen Z uses media to educate, collaborate, agitate, create content, and organize around civic issues.²⁰ The growing accessibility of technology has resulted in easier access to information, a greater capacity to create and disseminate communications, and the possibility to organize internationally. This shift changes the cultural context of participation. Individuals who once fell outside traditional political institutions now have a greater voice and capacity to influence public agendas through dialogue, circulation, and mobilization.

Digital technology has introduced some fundamental changes by expanding activist practices beyond traditional forms of civic and political life. Historically, youth have stood at the center of anti-institutional movements: from anti-war and civil rights protests in the 1960s to contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter and the Climate Strikes.²¹ So, while youth passion over these core issues have always persisted, they now exist in a different context. Digital media, in this sense, does not simply enhance youth activism, but transforms the dynamics of participatory politics itself.

The need to avoid performative activism persists. It is important to acknowledge that activism has always involved elements of performance: marches, protests, and sit-ins are all designed to maximize the visibility of grievances. The digital era has changed the scale and speed of this visibility, enabling youth to circulate information and organize at an

²⁰ Joseph Kahne, Ellen Middaugh, and Danielle Allen, "Youth, New Media, and the Rise of Participatory Politics," *Youth and Participatory Politics Research Network* 1 (March 2014): 3–20, https://doi.org/http://ypp.dmlcentral.net/sites/default/files/publications/YPP_WorkinPapers_Paper01.pdf, 8.

²¹ Alcinda Manuel Honwana, "Youth Struggles: From the Arab Spring to Black Lives Matter & Beyond," *African Studies Review* 62, no. 1 (March 2019): 8–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2018.144>, 10.

unprecedented rate. This has lowered the barriers to participation, but it has increased the threshold of performative activism. Posting slogans or hashtags has replaced sustained political engagement and visibility became an end in itself rather than a means to act.

This raises a critical question: is performativity always bad? Is it enough? Visibility can introduce people to issues they later engage with more deeply, just as demonstrations historically functioned as both informative and mobilizing acts. The challenge, then, is distinguishing performances that advance change from those that offer the illusion of progress while leaving underlying structures untouched. The global response to the murder of George Floyd in 2020 showcases this tension: widespread outrage was followed by a flood of corporate statements and public pledges that rarely translated into lasting systemic reform.²² Performative activism allows systems and institutions to symbolically acknowledge dissent without altering its foundations.

Nonetheless, recognizing this dynamic can allow activists to repurpose performativity as a tool for sustained agitation rather than viewing it as a trap. For example, in Los Angeles, collectives like No Kings have used digital aesthetics to merge art, identity, and activism, to reimagine what political performance can mean and achieve. Effective youth activism must treat visibility as a strategic tool that leverages platforms to build networks. Allow the performance of activism to act as a spark to educate, agitate, and crucially organize the masses to translate performance into real change.

2.4.3 Protest

Encampments

Youth activism unfolds across both digital and physical arenas. Digital platforms have been groundbreaking in enabling Gen Z to organize rapidly, share information, and amplify marginalized voices, making global solidarity possible in real time. Yet this does not

²² Arielle Baskin-Sommers et al., “Adolescent Civic Engagement: Lessons from Black Lives Matter,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 41 (October 4, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2109860118>, 8.

diminish the importance of physical forms of protest, which remain central to how youth express dissent and build collective power to continue to protest.

Encampments have re-emerged as one of the most significant and sustained forms of youth protest in the 21st century, particularly in response to the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict. Political scientists Frenzel, Feigenbaum and McCurdy define encampments as physically manifested protests that serve as powerful focal points for a movement's organization and symbolism.²³ What began on 17 April 2024 at Columbia University in response to the Israel-Palestine conflict quickly escalated into long-term encampments at universities across North America, Europe, and Australia. Academic spaces were transformed into arenas of moral and political confrontation where students demanded institutional accountability and divestment from corporations complicit in or committing the genocide.²⁴ University campuses are centers of social movements, serving as places of academic discourse and advocacy for global injustices. As student populations grow and awareness of endowment fund investments increases, Canadian campuses have equally become battlegrounds for free speech and political action.

The protests have elicited varied responses from university administrators, yet their reach has been extensive across Canada — from Dalhousie University to the University of British Columbia.²⁵ The main goal of these encampments has been to pressure institutions to take tangible, ethical, and financial stances regarding the war in Gaza. For many students, this meant demanding transparency and accountability. At Western University specifically, the student-led Western Divestment Coalition maintained a 60-day encampment calling on the institution to divest from military contractors and companies that students argued were implicated in the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.²⁶

²³ Fabian Frenzel, Anna Feigenbaum, and Patrick McCurdy, "Protest Camps: An Emerging Field of Social Movement Research," *The Sociological Review* 62, no. 3 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12111>, 466.

²⁴ Susan Eriksson and Alexis Buettgen, *Young People in Times of Crises: Global Revelations and Social Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2025), 160.

²⁵ Hannah Liddle, "Timeline: Protest Encampments," *University Affairs*, 2024, <https://universityaffairs.ca/features/timeline-encampments/>.

²⁶ Finn Toporowski, "How Western Spent \$1.7M Responding to Summer Encampment and Related Protests," *The Western Gazette*, March 31, 2025, https://westerngazette.ca/news/how-western-spent-1-7m-responding-to-summer-encampment-and-related-protests/article_4fcf2ab9-55b4-4f7c-b9f6-3e6e18386bc3.html.

Today, encampments resonate more than ever as they intertwine digital activism's logic of continuous engagement with the physicality often required to incite change. Just as online solidarity requires constant visibility to stay afloat in the vast ecosystem of the internet, physical encampments demand sustained presence and support. This presence, for example, was maintained through various avenues of engagement across campuses, with the University of Toronto hosting speakers such as Canadian author, social activist, and former editor-in-chief of the University of Toronto newspaper *The Varsity*, Naomi Klein. These acts of continuous engagement demonstrate how Gen Z has reshaped physical protests to extend beyond resistance; encampments have become spaces of active pedagogy where students and surrounding communities can learn, unlearn, and reimagine global responsibility. The hybrid nature of these encampments, expressed through both their physical occupation and their digital amplification, illustrates the necessity of a symbiotic relationship between online and offline activism. Youth movements use digital networks to mobilize support, counter misinformation, and archive their real-time actions, ensuring that even when the tents are dismantled, the ethos of the protest itself does not cease. This analysis signals a generational shift in how legitimacy and political participation can be and are expressed.

However, while transformative, the encampments echo historical sacrifices of protesting. The administrative crackdowns, media misrepresentations, and threats of disciplinary action expose the unique tension that rises when protest confronts institutional power. For instance, after one month of occupation, protesters occupying McGill's James Administration building were met with tear gas and pepper spray to eradicate them like pests— highlighting the physical dangers of protests.²⁷ Reactions like this showcase a distinct dimension of physical protest omnipresent across eras: a collective acceptance of the possibility of bodily risks in the name of moral engagement and of underscoring the gravity of the cause. This act of defiance and response highlights a defining feature of the Gen Z protest: a willingness to confront and endure institutional resistance as a part of the political message itself. Such a response raises an important

²⁷ Liddle, "Timeline: Protest encampments."

question: why are institutions that claim to uphold free speech and critical inquiry responding with such rigidity?

Western's \$1.7 million and the University of Toronto's \$4.1 million in unbudgeted funds in response to the 2024 summer encampments speak to the material stakes and political challenges these encampments pose to institutions. At the University of Toronto, the \$4.1 million was used to hire lawyers to secure an injunction permitting the university to remove the encampment and to pay for increased security.²⁸ Additionally, repairs made up \$3.8 million of the sum and the remaining \$300,000 was the revenue that the university didn't receive, either from parking at King's College Circle Garage or cancelled events.²⁹ At Western, documents obtained by *The Gazette* through a freedom of information request show that 96 per cent of the total — \$1,736,548 — was spent on security.³⁰ This included \$920,006 paid to Corporate Investigation Services and \$709,406 to Alpha Security Services.³¹ Another \$20,017 went to the London Police Service and \$10,359 to Western Special Constable Service, both police services for "hire-on officers."³² Such expenditures reveal that these encampments are a real challenge to institutional authority, finances, and reputation. Moreover, these responses illuminate a shift in protest engagement, where visibility, persistence, and moral commitment have become central to legitimacy.

In response, many student protesters have explained that, in certain situations, they felt compelled to arm themselves while occupying encampments. The controversy here centers on whether such actions can ever be justified given the specific conditions of these demonstrations, especially when some institutions ensured that facilities such as bathrooms remained open and accessible. Regardless of one's stance on students arming themselves, it is important to acknowledge the long history of policing and the persistent mistrust toward institutions meant to ensure public safety. Policing has always had a violent history and its legacy of physical intimidation continues to shape public perceptions. Not just in Canada in the United States, but worldwide. Especially given how

²⁸ Jessie Schwalb, "U of T Spent \$4.1 Million on the Encampment," *The Varsity*, October 20, 2024, <https://thevarsity.ca/2024/10/20/u-of-t-spent-4-1-million-on-the-encampment/#:~:text=Encampment%20and%20%244.1%20million&text=Direct%20costs%20such%20as%20hiring,%243.8%20million%20of%20the%20sum.>

²⁹ Schwalb, "U of T Spent \$4.1 Million on the Encampment."

³⁰ Toporowski, "How Western Spent \$1.7M Responding to Summer Encampment and Related Protests."

³¹ Toporowski, "How Western Spent \$1.7M Responding to Summer Encampment and Related Protests."

³² Toporowski, "How Western Spent \$1.7M Responding to Summer Encampment and Related Protests."

historically, some of the first formal government-sponsored law enforcement organizations in the United States were slave patrols.³³ This dynamic deepens when people are given few legitimate avenues for redress and directly reflects the material conditions in which individuals are forced to navigate safety, vulnerability and institutional authority.

In academic literature, protest encampments have been emphasized due to their dual role as both tactical occupation and symbolic performances of political engagement. Scholars argue that encampments function as a distinctive form of spatial politics, a “convergence space” where diverse people and ideas can come together and generate transformative encounters.³⁴ This understanding underscores that encampments are not only about achieving immediate political objectives but also about creating spaces for learning, dialogue, and community formation in which political engagement can occur. For Gen Z activists, this aligns with broader trends in youth engagement, where protest is not only a demand for policy change but also a practice of participatory, ethical witnessing and collective world building.

Beyond material support, encampments also facilitate autonomy and self-organization. Frenzel, Feigenbaum, and McCurdy argue that these encampments reflect broader debates in social movement scholarship on biopolitics.³⁵ Unlike institutional settings, protest camps allow participants to collectively practice autonomy, where political significance lies less in the immediate economic impact and more in the creation of a “climate of autonomy, disobedience, and resistance.”³⁶ Encampments thus exemplify a form of youth protest that is at once tactical, symbolic, and experientially transformative, highlighting Gen Z’s commitment to sustained engagement, and the creation of participatory political spaces.

In engaging with the youth encampments seen today, social science researchers Becquet and Linares, note that engagement today appears to be more fluid, less definitive, and less ‘politicized’, reflecting profound social transformations.³⁷ Unlike the more rigid or

³³ Paul Boxer et al., “Addressing the Inappropriate Use of Force by Police in the United States and beyond: A Behavioral and Social Science Perspective,” *Aggressive Behavior* 47, no. 5 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21970>, 503.

³⁴ Frenzel, Feigenbaum, and McCurdy, “Protest Camps: An Emerging Field of Social Movement Research,” 466.

³⁵ Frenzel, Feigenbaum, and McCurdy, “Protest Camps: An Emerging Field of Social Movement Research,” 466.

³⁶ Frenzel, Feigenbaum, and McCurdy, “Protest Camps: An Emerging Field of Social Movement Research,” 466.

³⁷ Eriksson and Buettgen, *Young People in Times of Crises: Global Revelations and Social Change*, 164.

ideologically defined movements of the past, current encampments emphasize responsive and context specific participation rather than formalized political identity. This fluidity aligns with a generational shift toward ethical and moral engagement over traditional party politics. Indeed these activists are on the front line, and unprotected by institutions. As Ion explains, “to commit oneself is then to answer for oneself and not to merge into a collective identifiable with a cause.”³⁸ As such, encampments and participation embrace the risk and responsibilities of protest on a personal level, rather than relying on institutions or grand movements to legitimize an individual's actions. Protest, therefore, becomes an ethical practice rather than a purely strategic action, where the act of being present and sustaining engagement becomes an end in itself.

Ultimately, the Israel-Palestine encampments demonstrate how Gen Z has redefined protest as both a practice of endurance and a claim to space. By refusing to disperse, student protesters articulate a message that extends beyond policy in that visibility, persistence, and community are forms of political participation and engagement in themselves.

Street

While encampments offer a sustained, place-based form of resistance, youth activism also unfolds through more mobile and immediate expressions such as street protests or marches. Street protests have become one of the most visible and influential ways for young people to engage in the political, economic, and cultural debates of the twenty-first century. From global climate strikes to democracy movements in Africa and Asia, youth is increasingly choosing the street as their main channel of engagement to showcase unity and claim agency in a world that often marginalizes them. Understanding why they protest, and why they do so through direct public mobilization, is essential to designing effective tools for youth engagement and political inclusion.

In many regions, protests also stem from structural precarity. Alcinda Honwana, an anthropologist and professor with a focus on youth, protests, and social movements,

³⁸ Eriksson and Buettgen, *Young People in Times of Crises: Global Revelations and Social Change*, 164.

describes this condition as “waithood”: a prolonged state in which young people are unable to access full adulthood due to unemployment, inequality, and political marginalization. Across Africa, Latin America, and Europe, these pressures have motivated youth to move from inertia into action, using protests as a direct response to systematic stagnation.³⁹

Street demonstrations remain the most immediate and accessible form of political expression for young people. Public space offers what formal arenas do not: visibility, solidarity, and collective power.⁴⁰ The UNICEF study notes that youth favour informal engagement precisely because it bypasses bureaucratic and generational barriers. The act of occupying space— physically standing together— transforms frustration into shared civic energy. Urban settings, then, play a crucial role. The city provides the terrain where citizens can confront power directly and articulate collective demands. During the 19-day protest in Kathmandu, Nepal, the street became a democratic arena that transcended institutional limits and symbolized a reclaiming of public voice.⁴¹ For Gen Z, the street is also intertwined with digital space. Mobilization happens simultaneously online and offline, hashtags lead to marches, and marches feed back into online discourse. This hybrid structure lowers the cost of participation, fosters inclusivity, and enables transnational coordination.

Empirical evidence shows that youth-led street protests are more likely to produce visible outcomes than other forms of engagement. UNICEF finds that protests with significant youth participation tend to be larger, more innovative, and more inclusive, which increases their public and political impact. They often set new agendas or force decision-makers to respond, even when they do not lead to immediate legislative change. Emily Rainsford and Clare Saunders’ study on climate activism confirms this dynamic. The “Global Climate Strikes,” inspired by Greta Thunberg, mobilized unprecedented numbers of young people because they provided accessible, emotionally resonant forms of action. These youth-led events reduced the structural barriers that often limit participation—school schedules, costs, or lack of political experience—and created

³⁹ Honwana, “Youth Struggles: From the Arab Spring to Black Lives Matter & Beyond,” 18.

⁴⁰ Paul Routledge, “Nineteen Days in April: Urban Protest and Democracy in Nepal,” *Urban Studies* 47, no. 6 (May 2010): 1279–99, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098009360221>, 1289.

⁴¹ Routledge, “Nineteen Days in April: Urban Protest and Democracy in Nepal,” 1289.

emotional momentum through shared anger and urgency.⁴² While such protests rarely produce immediate systemic reform, they shape long-term political culture. They redefine legitimacy, normalize youth leadership, and pressure institutions to adapt. Ken Roberts's research on youth mobilizations across the twentieth century shows that such movements often mark the emergence of new political generations: cohorts that carry the values of protest into governance and civil society over decades.⁴³

Street protests generate both opportunities and risks. They amplify youth voices, inspire solidarity, and bring urgency to public discourse. However, they also expose young people to surveillance, criminalization, and political backlash. UNICEF warns that even peaceful youth demonstrations face higher rates of pre-emptive repression than adult protests, as states often interpret youth mobilization as instability rather than participation. Despite these challenges, the cumulative effects of youth protest are largely positive. They increase public awareness, accelerate media attention, and push institutions to reconsider long-term priorities. Most importantly, they expand the definition of citizenship, showing that young people's role in democracy extends beyond voting cycles and into everyday acts of accountability and care.

2.4.4 Youth Leadership

Complementing physical forms of protest and demonstration, leadership in youth activism extends beyond organizing events or managing campaigns; leadership itself can function as a mode of protest. For Gen Z, assuming leadership roles is not only about guiding a movement but also about challenging existing power structures, asserting moral authority, and shaping the rules of engagement. Whether working with formal institutions, such as student governments, NGOs, or policy advisory bodies, or through decentralized, grassroots initiatives, youth leaders leverage organizational mechanisms to amplify their

⁴² Emily Rainsford and Clare Saunders, "Young Climate Protesters' Mobilization Availability: Climate Marches and School Strikes Compared," *Frontiers in Political Science* 3 (August 18, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.713340>, 2.

⁴³ Ken Roberts, "Youth Mobilisations and Political Generations: Young Activists in Political Change Movements during and since the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Youth Studies* 18, no. 8 (March 13, 2015): 950–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2015.1020937>, 960.

voices and exert pressure for change. The duality of working both within and outside established structures reflects a generation that understands engagement not solely as participation, but as ethical and strategic practice, one in which leadership and protest are fundamentally intertwined.

Autumn Peltier and Greta Thunberg exemplify how leadership can itself be a form of protest by demonstrating that a public voice can transform into a political act. Peltier, an Anishninaabe water activist from Canada, has used her position as Chief Water Commissioner in her community and her platform at the United Nations, to challenge governmental inaction on water rights and environmental protections for Indigenous communities.⁴⁴ By speaking on international stages, Peltier's leadership becomes inseparable from protest. Her authority derives from moral legitimacy and the urgency of the issues she represents, rather than from formal political office and policy processes that can often lead to inconclusive results. Her engagement, then, proves that leadership can be transformed into a sustained and visible critique of the systems that neglect us.

Similarly, Greta Thunberg's leadership in the climate movement illustrates how protest and institutional engagement can merge. Through her school strike campaigns and public speeches, Thunberg has mobilized millions of young people worldwide, pressuring governments and global institutions to take action on climate change.⁴⁵ Her leadership style, characterized by moral authority and use of digital media, demonstrates that taking a leading role in organizing youth action can itself be a political statement. Even when engaging with official bodies like the United Nations or European Parliament, she has continued to engage in the organization of more traditional forms of protest like the Fridays for Future Campaign, in which she mobilized youth to participate in coordinated strikes, marches, and political demonstrations.⁴⁶ This dual approach is significant as it illustrates how Gen Z leaders choose to bridge formal and informal channels of influence, where

⁴⁴ Vins and Vins, "Youth Climate Activist Autumn Peltier Continues Outreach Work amidst School Strikes," Project Censored - Promoting Critical Media Literacy, May 22, 2023, https://www.projectcensored.org/youth-climate-activist-autumn-peltier-continues-outreach-work-amidst-school-strikes/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22684187681&gbraid=0AAAAADpdF9VP9zyt1VAF47QRPQ-CWEjK5&gclid=Cj0KCQjwsPzHBhDCARIsALiWNG0gG5TaOhZSBdHprPf7nTmRr142Lohqa5gMyDbvuCijD8I8QVzZVlcaAjHJEALw_wcB.

⁴⁵ Greta Thunberg | Gaza, Flotilla, age, education, Climate Change, & Activism | Britannica, accessed November 30, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Greta-Thunberg>.

⁴⁶ Greta Thunberg | Gaza, Flotilla, age, education, Climate Change, & Activism, Britannica.

meaningful political engagement does not require abandoning institutional spaces or grassroots action. Furthermore, Thunberg ensures that her leadership remains accountable to the movement itself by reinforcing the idea that authority in youth activism is grounded in ethical legitimacy and collective participation rather than just in traditional positions of power. In this way, her work has demonstrated that leadership can be a tool of both systemic influence and a form of ongoing protest. Beyond her climate activism, Thunberg has widened the scope of her leadership by drawing parallels between institutional apathy towards climate change and global human rights violations, including those in the Israel-Palestine context. She has lent her voice, visibility, and physical participation to the freedom flotilla, challenged blockades, and put herself at personal risk to draw attention to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.⁴⁷ These actions demonstrate that her leadership is not limited to institutional channels or single causes, but rather that it is an ongoing act of protest and moral authority. By leveraging both her visibility in formal arenas and her capacity to organize decentralized, transnational protests, Thunberg represents youth leadership in its ability to merge ethical voice with strategic engagement, thus highlighting how leadership itself can become a sustained form of protest and political influence.

According to Shah and Khan, youth activists successfully act as “change agents” by advocating for policy adjustments, raising public awareness, and posing difficult questions about rooted cultural norms and traditions.⁴⁸ In their advocacy, youth leaders extend their influence beyond organizing events or mobilizing peers; they actively shape the social, political, and cultural conditions in which change becomes possible. This multi-dimensional engagement highlights that effective leadership today is rooted in accountability, visibility, and ethical responsibility. These are the very principles that are meant to guide and sustain policy changes towards a more youth embedded framework.

Gen Z leaders are also paving the way for a new type of leadership. In what Murphy describes as “eco-celebrity”, Thunberg’s stardom is “tied directly to her role in starting

⁴⁷ Lorenzo Tondo, “Israel Accused of Detaining Greta Thunberg in Infested Cell and Making Her Hold Flags,” *The Guardian*, October 4, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/oct/04/greta-thunberg-israel-gaza-sweden>.

⁴⁸ Majid Ali Shah and Zainullah Khan, “The Role of Youth Activism in Facilitating Social Change: A Catalyst for Transformation in the Contemporary Era,” *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 4, no. 4 (December 30, 2023): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.55737/qjssh.575688089>, 1.

Skolstrejk for Kimatet,” with her profile being “remarkably resistant to co-optation.”⁴⁹ Her activism, and on a greater scale Gen Z’s activism, illustrates how visibility, amplified by media itself can be a form of political leverage. Thunberg’s resistance to co-optation shows that ethical and principled leadership can maintain integrity even under global scrutiny, offering a model for how young activists can leverage fame without diluting their cause. In effect, her leadership has become a form of protest where her presence challenges established norms and has become a symbol of collective action.

2.4.5 Mechanisms to Lead

For Gen Z, leadership is not separate from activism, rather it is a mode of ethical engagement and political pressure. Claiming authority in public discourse amplifies marginalized voices and demands accountability from institutions. Youth leaders like Peltier and Thunberg are crucial examples of cases where visibility, moral conviction, and organizational skill can be turned into forms of protest that reshape political participation and redefine what it means to lead.

Recognizing youth leadership as a central form of protest invites a closer look at the mechanisms that enable young people to organize and influence change. Youth leadership in Canada is supported through a multi-layered system of governmental, civil society, and non-profit initiatives that foster civic engagement, advocacy, and policy participation. Ensuring functioning and effective leadership mechanisms for youth is essential because it allows engagement to move beyond tokenism and symbolism, and toward genuine participation and structural influence. When youth are equipped with institutional access, mentorship, and decision-making power, contributions evolve from momentary activism into sustained reform. These mechanisms legitimize youth voices within governance, foster accountability, innovation, and long-term democratic resilience. In an era where institutional trust is eroding and crises demand adaptive leadership, these frameworks cultivate the skills, confidence, and networks necessary for youth to act as credible agents

⁴⁹ Patrick D. Murphy, “Speaking for the Youth, Speaking for the Planet: Greta Thunberg and the Representational Politics of Eco-Celebrity,” *Popular Communication* 19, no. 3 (April 16, 2021): 193–206, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2021.1913493>, 193.

of change. They bridge the gap between activism and policymaking, turning moral urgency into sustained civic power and ensuring that generational insight becomes a cornerstone of democratic resilience.

Civil society organizational models and non-governmental initiatives provide additional scaffolding for youth leadership by equipping young people with the skills and platforms to engage in both domestic and global decision-making. [Plan International Canada's Youth Hub](#) is a leading example of this ecosystem. The Hub's programs engage youth aged 10–24 in leadership and advocacy training, preparing them to participate in global policy spaces such as the G7, G20, and United Nations assemblies.⁵⁰ Within this framework, the Plan International Youth Council functions as an advisory and ambassadorial body with ten young advocates collaborating directly with organizational leaders to influence strategies, campaigns, and representational work. The Eureka Fellowship, a partnership between Plan International and AstraZeneca Canada, further expands this landscape by identifying and amplifying the voices of outstanding youth leaders.⁵¹ It provides mentorship, visibility, and professional development opportunities, demonstrating how corporate and non-profit collaboration can scale youth impact in health, sustainability, and innovation sectors. Complementing this governmental framework, the [National Youth Action and Advisory Committee](#), led by Amnesty International Canada, channels youth leadership into the field of human rights. The committee mobilizes young activists to shape national campaigns, provide strategic advice, and represent Canada in international forums such as the UN High-Level Political Forum.⁵² This model emphasizes advocacy and global solidarity, bridging local activism with international policy dialogues.

Beyond the national civil society landscape, youth activism also extends to the international arena, where global institutions and cross-border movements create additional avenues for collective action. Programs such as the [Kectil Leadership Program](#) and the [Commonwealth Alliance for Quality Youth Leadership](#) exemplify how international

⁵⁰ "Youth Opportunities for Advocacy in Canada," Plan International Canada, accessed November 25, 2025, <https://plancanada.ca/en-ca/get-involved/youth-opportunities>.

⁵¹ Eureka fellowship, accessed November 30, 2025, <https://www.astrazeneca.ca/en/sustainability/eureka-fellowship.html>.

⁵² "Youth Programs," Amnesty International Canada, September 25, 2025, <https://amnesty.ca/what-you-can-do/youth-programs/#nyaac>.

initiatives can cultivate leadership capacity, particularly in developing and Commonwealth countries. The Kectil Program, which focuses on youth from the Global South, employs a three-stage model combining an online leadership curriculum, an annual leadership conference in Atlanta, and a sustained alumni network.⁵³ This structure emphasizes mentorship, digital accessibility, and transnational community-building. Similarly, the Commonwealth Alliance for Quality Youth Leadership, coordinated by the Commonwealth Secretariat, advances leadership through non-formal education, volunteerism, and soft-skill development, reframing leadership as a civic responsibility rather than an elite privilege.⁵⁴ The United Nations also plays a significant role. The [Major Group for Children and Youth \(MGCY\)](#), a UN General Assembly-mandated, self-organised mechanism, acts as a formal bridge between young people and UN processes, ensuring youth participation in the design, implementation, monitoring, and review of sustainable development policy at all levels.⁵⁵ Similarly, the [UN Youth 2030 Strategy](#), launched in 2018, serves as the first system-wide framework dedicated to strengthening youth engagement across peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development.⁵⁶ It positions youth not as passive beneficiaries but as agents of change whose perspectives must shape and inform the 2030 Agenda. Another global model is the [Global Youth Mobilization "Big Six" youth-organizations](#), a coalition of major international youth organizations that combine non-formal education, volunteerism and global networks to advance youth agency at scale. The Big Six—including World Organization of the Scout Movement, YMCA, YWCA, WAGGGS, IFRC and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award—offer one of the most extensive transnational infrastructures for youth leadership development, spanning continents and social contexts.⁵⁷

These global patterns of youth activism have clear parallels in Canada as young Canadians seek channels to engage with governments and shape decision-making. The

⁵³ "Developing Countries Youth Leadership," The Kectil Program, accessed November 25, 2025, <https://kectil.com/>.

⁵⁴ "Commonwealth Alliance for Quality Youth Leadership," Commonwealth, accessed November 25, 2025, <https://thecommonwealth.org/alliance-quality-youth-leadership>.

⁵⁵ "Major Group for Children and Youth," Major Group for Children and Youth, accessed November 25, 2025, <https://www.unmgcy.org/>.

⁵⁶ "About Youth2030, the UN Youth Strategy | Youth Office," United Nations, accessed November 25, 2025, <https://www.un.org/youthaffairs/en/youth2030/about>

⁵⁷ "The Big Six," Global Youth Mobilization, March 27, 2025, <https://globalyouthmobilization.org/about-the-big-six-youth-organisations/>.

[Youth Secretariat](#), established in 2016, serves as the federal government's primary mechanism for integrating youth perspectives into policy-making. Its mission is to "work to facilitate youth engagement, help amplify youth voices to affect positive change, and ensure youth perspectives are taken into consideration in government policy and decisions."⁵⁸ Operating as an information and resource hub, the Secretariat adopts a whole-of-government approach towards youth issues, and claims that it aims to support other federal departments by ensuring that ministries consider issues relevant to youth when designing policies and programs.⁵⁹ In addition, the Secretariat coordinates the State of the Youth reports, promoting research and practices for youth engagement across the government.⁶⁰ It also serves as the secretariat for the Prime Minister's Youth Council, the government's more direct channel for youth political engagement, meeting several times a year to deliberate on deferral policy topics like climate action, reconciliation, housing affordability, and equity.⁶¹ Established under Prime Minister Trudeau, the PYMC enables a diverse group of Canadians aged 16–24 to provide non-partisan advice directly to the Prime Minister and federal departments on issues relevant to them, and all Canadians.⁶² The Council typically includes 10-20 members with recruitment occurring through open national calls managed by the Youth Secretariat. This model institutionalizes youth voice at the highest level of governance, ensuring that young people influence decisions on key issues. The Secretariat also drives national engagement initiatives, including consultations, roundtables, and digital dialogues that extend participation beyond the Council's membership. By partnering with organizations such as the Canada Service Corps, the Secretariat amplifies youth contributions to community development and civic innovation. Together, these structures are meant to transform youth from passive recipients of policy into active co-creators of public solutions.

Across these models, effective youth leadership mechanisms share several defining characteristics. They provide real institutional access to decision-makers, build capacity through mentorship, and foster transnational networks that situate local leadership within

⁵⁸ "About the Youth Secretariat," Canada.ca, March 17, 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/youth/about.html>.

⁵⁹ "About the Youth Secretariat."

⁶⁰ "About the Youth Secretariat."

⁶¹ "Report of the Prime Minister's Youth Council, Government of Canada," Canada.ca, October 7, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/prime-ministers-youth-council/about/report.html#a1>.

⁶² "Report of the Prime Minister's Youth Council, Government of Canada."

global frameworks, validating diverse perspectives and shared challenges. These models rely on partnership ecosystems between governments, NGOs, and private organizations to expand opportunities and scale impact. Together, these mechanisms demonstrate that meaningful youth leadership can be deliberately cultivated through structures that balance empowerment with accountability. However, these systems risk becoming ineffective when participation is treated as a formality rather than an efficient avenue for influence—when youth councils are underfunded, advisory roles lack real decision-making power, or institutional hierarchies dilute youth input into mere consultation. Strengthening these frameworks in Canada requires bridging institutional and grassroots initiatives so that the moral urgency of youth activism translates into enduring civic power and policy reform.

2.5 Why Youth Act and Engage

These forms of participation demonstrate that youth are not disconnected from politics but instead have developed adaptive and often innovative avenues for engagement. But, this activism does not emerge in a vacuum, it is propelled by moral and political catalysts. The following section explores why young people mobilize so intensely, focusing on three cases where injustice, repression, and global threat have transformed youth into central political actors. Understanding *why* young people mobilize is crucial for challenging the narrative of political disengagement and reveals the moral, social, and political forces that drive their activism.

2.5.1 The Institutional Enabling of the Israel/Palestine Conflict

Youth activism and resistance surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict in Canada reflect a broader struggle against institutional complicity in entrenched systems of power. For many Canadian students, challenging their universities' investments linked to Israel's occupation has forced a reckoning with deeper institutional realities—namely, how universities' financial priorities often serve investor interests rather than students' well-being. The violence Canadian students denounce abroad is inseparable from the

colonial foundations that continue to shape life for Indigenous communities at home. When universities claim political neutrality while investing in industries undeniably tied to surveillance, militarization, or displacement, they reproduce the same underlying logic of control that governs both Turtle Island and Palestine. Student resistance, then, is not solely a rejection of authority, it is an attempt to hold institutions to the standards they allegedly uphold. By exposing the gap between an institution's stated commitments and its financial or political practices, students force universities and other entities to confront the contradictions between their public values and their private interests.

Scholars Abu-Zahra, Carlson, and Coburn argue that Canada's self-image as a defender of human rights collapses when set against its ongoing protection of Israel from accountability for war crimes and genocide.⁶³ Universities reflect this same contradiction. Built on Indigenous land, they remain structurally tied to extractive and military industries. Abu-Zahra and her co-authors point out that the University of Ottawa and other Canadian institutions invest in companies such as CAE, Bombardier, and MDA, which are firms whose technologies directly support occupation and militarized control.⁶⁴ Recognizing these ties, students have demanded divestment from "all corporations involved in the genocide in Palestine".⁶⁵ The Race Equity Caucus's *Surveilled & Silenced* report highlights York University as another example of these contradictions. The report exposes a deep gap between the administration's public commitments to decolonization, equity, diversity, and inclusion (DEDI) and its material complicity in the ongoing genocide of Palestinians.⁶⁶ Faculty, students, and staff have expressed a growing frustration caused by the university's deliberate avoidance in acknowledging the "violent aggression and humanitarian catastrophe faced by Palestinians."⁶⁷ This reveals how institutional silence becomes both a political weapon and stance and situates these events in a broader crisis of academic and

⁶³ Nadia Abu-Zahra, John Carlson, and Veldon Coburn, "From Turtle Island to Palestine: Settler-Colonial Canada, Genocide, and Indigenous Foreign Policy," *Third World Quarterly*, 2025, 1–32, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1080/01436597.2025.2551140>, 1.

⁶⁴ Abu-Zahra, Carlson, and Coburn, "From Turtle Island to Palestine: Settler-Colonial Canada, Genocide, and Indigenous Foreign Policy," 1.

⁶⁵ Abu-Zahra, Carlson, and Coburn, "From Turtle Island to Palestine: Settler-Colonial Canada, Genocide, and Indigenous Foreign Policy," 6.

⁶⁶ rep., *Surveilled & Silenced: A Report on Palestine Solidarity at York University* (Toronto, ON: York University. Race Equity Committee, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.27080728.v3>, 6.

⁶⁷ Race Equity Caucus, *Surveilled & Silenced: A Report on Palestine Solidarity at York University*, 6.

democratic freedom. The Race Equity Caucus argues that Palestine solidarity on campus represents the university at its best: a space where people and students can engage critically and courageously with issues of global political significance.⁶⁸

Together, these case studies reject the notion that reconciliation at home can coexist with interest driven oppression abroad. By connecting Indigenous and Palestinian struggles, youth are reframing campus activism as a challenge to interconnected systems of dispossession and rooting their resistance in shared histories of displacement and collective survival. Rather than being divisive, these protests have reignited academic discourse with moral clarity, empathy, and critical debate. They have also revealed the depth of community feeling around the conflict, affirming that “the pain and anger experienced by members of our community due to what is happening in Gaza and Israel are real,” and defending the right of students and faculty to respond through peaceful protest.⁶⁹ Therefore, Palestinian solidarity on campus is more than a protest, it is a reclamation of what university should be. In insisting on open dialogue and ethical accountability, students and faculty confront institutions that too often default to neutrality at the expense of justice. This also serves as a reminder that academic freedom matters only when it is exercised in moments of moral consequence.

It is important to note that beneath this structural critique is a deeply personal plea for belonging. Toronto Metropolitan University Masters student Laura Ashfield’s *Diasporic Identity and Political Action* captures how Palestinian-Canadian students experience activism as both moral duty and self-definition.⁷⁰ For many, Palestine is not a theoretical debate, but is instead an inseparable part of their own sense of justice and identity. Ashfield’s interviews show that activism is driven by the duty to “stand up for the oppressed,” to counter ignorance, and to embody the justice their institutions fail to uphold.⁷¹ Identities of oppressor or oppressed exist in a binary, meaning that refusing to fight for the oppressed directly implies complicity with the oppressor. Drawing on Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells’s idea of “resistance identity”, Ashfield explains how students

⁶⁸ Race Equity Caucus, *Surveilled & Silenced: A Report on Palestine Solidarity at York University*, 9.

⁶⁹ Race Equity Caucus, *Surveilled & Silenced: A Report on Palestine Solidarity at York University*, 9.

⁷⁰ Laura Ashfield, *Diasporic Identity and Political Action: Palestinian Student Activism on Ontario University Campuses*, May 23, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.32920/ryerson.14652297>, 48.

⁷¹ Ashfield, *Diasporic Identity and Political Action: Palestinian Student Activism on Ontario University Campuses*, 6.

create collective meaning by standing against dominant power structures.⁷² As Ashfield writes, participation “reinforces their Palestinian identity” and makes activism and identity mutually constitutive.⁷³

Youth resistance in the Israel-Palestine context operates as a decolonial process where education must be accountable to justice. By exposing institutional hypocrisy, confronting financial complicity, and connecting global injustice to local responsibility, young activists redefine what universities are meant to do. Their encampments and teach-ins turn campuses into spaces of collective re-education, where learning is inseparable from liberation. Their demands are not simply for divestment, but for the integrity of university institutions to live up to the values they claim to teach.

2.5.2 Nepal and Myanmar’s Uprisings Against the Control of Information

The perceived overreach of government and the tightening control over information, particularly on social media, act as key drivers of Gen Z mobilization. In Nepal, recent youth-led protests erupted after the government imposed an unpopular ban on twenty-six social media platforms. Young people immediately interpreted this as an attempt to stifle free speech.⁷⁴ Although the ban was quickly reversed, it sparked a broader uprising against decades of corruption and nepotism. Protestors denounced the widening economic disparity between the children of the working-class and the children of political elites — youth born into the working class endure 20% unemployment while ‘Nepo Kids’ of elites flaunt their privilege on social media.⁷⁵

The movement’s momentum rapidly escalated into major political upheaval, culminating in the resignation of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli and the toppling of the ruling government. Despite the heavy toll of the upheaval, which left fifty people dead and

⁷² Ashfield, *Diasporic Identity and Political Action: Palestinian Student Activism on Ontario University Campuses*, 6.

⁷³ Ashfield, *Diasporic Identity and Political Action: Palestinian Student Activism on Ontario University Campuses*, 4.

⁷⁴ Salimah Shivji, “TikTok, Discord and Reddit: How a Gen Z Revolution Upended Nepal’s Government,” *CBC*, September 24, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/nepal-youth-protests-social-media-1.7642523>.

⁷⁵ Shivji, “TikTok, Discord and Reddit: How a Gen Z Revolution Upended Nepal’s Government.”

over 1,000 injured, the young activists demonstrated remarkable organizational capacity by using platforms such as Discord to coordinate an online vote that appointed former chief of justice Sushila Karki as the new interim prime minister.⁷⁶ The 73-year-old Karki is not a youth but represents the potential for renewed intergenerational trust. Karki is admired and respected for her independence, integrity and anti-corruption stance, making her the symbol of the accountability young people demanded.⁷⁷

Similarly, in Myanmar, the military banned Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in an attempt to halt anti-coup mobilization. The military claimed these platforms were used to "cause misunderstanding among the public."⁷⁸ This ban triggered a new wave of youth mobilization. Users quickly pivoted to VPNs to evade restrictions, prompting the military to escalate digital repression through a near total internet shutdown that reduced connectivity to just 16% of ordinary levels and banned VPN use entirely. Despite the severe crackdown, public anger and outrage intensified. Demonstrations continued through adapted strategies, including symbolic acts and civil disobedience, as citizens found different ways to ensure their voices were heard.⁷⁹ Ultimately, this resistance reflects Gen Z's deep devotion to digital tools as their primary means of communication, information, and connection, motivating them to defend the platforms as arenas of political participation.

2.5.3 Moral Urgency as Generational Legitimacy in Youth Climate Activism

Moral urgency in the face of political shocks and climate crises emerges when the gap between consequence and responsibility collapses. As long as disasters are imagined as

⁷⁶ Sarah Shamim, "Nepali PM Oli Resigns amid Protests: Why Are 'Nepo Kids' Angering Youth?," *Aljazeera*, September 9, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/9/nepali-pm-oli-resigns-amid-protests-why-are-nepo-kids-angering-youth>.

⁷⁷ Ritesh Panthe, "Nepal's Gen Z Movement Crowns Former Chief Justice Sushila Karki as Interim Leader," *The Diplomat*, September 13, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/09/nepals-gen-z-movement-crowns-former-chief-justice-sushila-karki-as-interim-leader/>.

⁷⁸ "Myanmar Coup: Internet Shutdown as Crowds Protest against Military," *BBC News*, February 6, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55960284>.

⁷⁹ BBC News, "Myanmar Coup: Internet Shutdown as Crowds Protest against Military."

distant possibilities, complacency becomes a predictable response: action is deferred, and guilt can be momentarily placated. When the consequences of environmental degradation materialize in the forms of floods, fires, and displacement, the illusion of distance and security dissolves. The ethical deferral that once justified inaction becomes impossible, and response shifts from voluntary engagement to a moral and political obligation. Moral urgency, thus, is born not only from witnessing harm, but from recognizing that inaction constitutes a form of complicity and that neutrality sustains ongoing destruction.

In climate politics, moral urgency highlights the argument that the preservation of life, justice, and dignity can no longer be postponed to the next election, negotiation, or generation. The climate crisis represents a structural failure of short-term politics and youth activists claim legitimacy not solely on behalf of their own generation but also on behalf of those yet to come. By invoking intergenerational justice in their advocacy, youth refuse the prospect of inheriting an unsustainable system and redefine what democratic institutions must safeguard: not only representation, but the continuity of life itself. Although youth climate activism is far from monolithic, its defining feature is the framing of political inaction not as a technocratic misstep but as a violation of intergenerational ethics.⁸⁰ In doing so, it transforms the climate crisis from an environmental challenge into a political injustice that demands systematic change.⁸¹

This critique rests on the recognition that existing governance structures fail to reconcile short-term economic interests with long-term ecological sustainability. Youth activists denounce systems that privilege economic growth over planetary viability and identify contemporary consumerism as symptomatic of deeper structural pathologies.⁸² Their demands call for an ethical reorientation: from individualistic pursuit of profit toward a relational ethic grounded in generational and multispecies responsibility.

⁸⁰ Lindsay P. Galway and Ellen Field, "Climate Emotions and Anxiety among Young People in Canada: A National Survey and Call to Action," *The Journal of Climate Change and Health* 9 (January 2023): 100204, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joclim.2023.100204>, 2.

⁸¹ Louise Knops, "Stuck between the Modern and the Terrestrial: The Indignation of the Youth for Climate Movement," *Political Research Exchange* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736x.2020.1868946>, 15.

⁸² Eleni Theodorou, Spyros Spyrou, and Georgina Christou, "The Future Is Now from before: Youth Climate Activism and Intergenerational Justice," *Journal of Childhood Studies*, January 26, 2023, 59–72, <https://doi.org/10.18357/jcs202320466>, 68.

It is impossible to deny the growing disconnect between international institutions and the societies they claim to represent. Institutional inaction is often experienced by young people as abandonment, turning neglect into a form of political violence. Empirical studies across Canada reveal widespread youth experiences of fear, sadness, and powerlessness, with many reporting deep anxiety about the future.⁸³ Yet these emotional responses do not produce withdrawal; instead, they are converted into political energy. Feelings of betrayal toward political leaders and institutions become catalysts for mobilization.⁸⁴ Movements such as Fridays for Future channel this anxiety into a form of political legitimacy,⁸⁵ reframing the temporal dimensions of the crisis by collapsing the divide between future threats and present responsibilities.⁸⁶ This reframing transforms the generational divide into a moral conflict between those most affected and those most responsible.

By positioning themselves as “custodians of sustainable futures”, young activists assert their right to participate in shaping policy not as deferred beneficiaries but as present stakeholders.⁸⁷ On this moral basis, youth movements demand transformative, systematic change, arguing that only structural political and economic change can properly address this existential crisis.⁸⁸ This requires confronting entrenched systems of oppression, including capitalism, colonialism, extractivism, patriarchy, and racism, that underpin ecological breakdown.⁸⁹

⁸³ Galway & Field, “Climate Emotions and Anxiety among Young People in Canada: A National Survey and Call to Action,” 4.

⁸⁴ Knops, “Stuck between the Modern and the Terrestrial: The Indignation of the Youth for Climate Movement,” 100.

⁸⁵ Jennifer A. Hockey, “When Private Meets Public: Young People and Political Consumerism in the Name of Environmental Activism,” *Journal of Youth Studies*, July 7, 2024, 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2024.2370275>, 7.

⁸⁶ Theodorou, et al., “The Future Is Now from before: Youth Climate Activism and Intergenerational Justice,” 66.

⁸⁷ Theodorou, et al., “The Future Is Now from before: Youth Climate Activism and Intergenerational Justice,” 66.

⁸⁸ Heejin Han and Sang Wuk Ahn, “Youth Mobilization to Stop Global Climate Change: Narratives and Impact,” *Sustainability* 12, no. 10 (May 18, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12104127>, 13.

⁸⁹ Knops, “Stuck between the Modern and the Terrestrial: The Indignation of the Youth for Climate Movement,” 100–101.

2.5.4 The Radicalization of Youth

Gen Z has redefined radicalization—in its call to action and in its use of physical disobedience and force. Radicalization is defined as the process by which an individual or group adopts increasingly extreme social, political, or religious views that reject the status quo. It is both a psychological and socio-political phenomenon.⁹⁰ Often characterized by irrationality, it is now the rational response to systemic exclusion and unmet needs for meaning, identity, and power as alternative avenues of agency often deemed ‘radical’. The attention economy governs the digital realm and in turn avenues to expression. Peer-to-peer reinforcement within online echo chambers has twin functions— as a rallying point of individual experience becoming collective reality, or a redefinition of reality where misinformation, outrage, and performative extremity circulate freely. Shock becomes currency. The ideological divide between right wing and left wing beliefs deepen, but they coalesce in the distrust of democratic institutions and the erosion of legitimacy of political authority.

From a psychological standpoint, radicalization represents a subjective judgment— an evaluation of which norms are worth defending and which must be rejected.⁹¹ What one group labels “radical,” another may view as simply moral or sensible, depending on the pre-existing societal norms in question. Research under the viral #WhatRadicalizedYou hashtag on TikTok underscores this point: users frequently cite moments such as *watching Obama’s inauguration, receiving free school lunches, believing that housing is a human right, seeing people die in Gaza, or valuing education* as their “radicalizing” experiences. These responses reveal a profound irony— beliefs grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such as the right to dignity, housing, and education, are now framed as “radically left” within federal political contexts. In this way, the assertion of universal rights becomes a rejection of systems that treat them as conditional, reflecting what might be called moral engagement, rather than disengagement.

⁹⁰ Randy Borum, “Psychological Vulnerabilities and Propensities for Involvement in Violent Extremism - Borum - 2014 - Behavioral Sciences & The Law - Wiley Online Library,” University of South Protest, 2011, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/bsl.2110>, 287.

⁹¹ Arie W. Kruglanski et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism,” *Political Psychology* 35, no. S1 (January 22, 2014): 69–93, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12163>, 69.

Moral disengagement is the necessary condition for violent extremism to persist. Gen Z radicalism, however, remains the process of developing extremist beliefs, beyond the realm of the sensible. But because of its moral engagement it resists the delegitimization, and criminalization of radical ideas.⁹² Moral disengagement is mandatory in violent extremism. However, when what *is* radical becomes what is sensible, it requires a new definition and implies a different psychological process of radicalization. Violent extremism, or terrorism, is dependent on moral disengagement—it rationalizes violence by denying responsibility or dehumanizing victims. In the development of the moral self, individuals adopt standards of right and wrong which serve as guides and deterrents for conduct. However, in a pervasive moral paradox, people behave harmfully and still sustain a positive self regard by dehumanizing or eliminating the visibility of groups to which we cause harm. The recent trends of globalization, marketization, and financialization has made moral disengagement a profitable norm. Industries profit off of cheap labour, investments in weapons production turn a profit, and moral disengagement is rewarded financially by the current system. In other words moral disengagement is systemic and becoming radical means becoming morally engaged.

Systemic grievances lie at the core of contemporary youth radicalization: rising economic insecurity, youth unemployment, and unresponsive elites who appear insulated from the crises shaping younger generations' realities.⁹³ The sense of intergenerational injustice— embodied in ecological collapse and climate anxiety— further compounds the psychological conditions under which radicalization flourishes. For Gen Z, growing up amid existential uncertainty has blurred the line between activism and survival, making the demand for structural change a moral imperative rather than a political option. In this context, radicalization cannot be separated from the psychology of meaning: first, a motivational component, a quest for personal significance, second, an ideological

⁹² "Five-Eyes Insights – Young People and Violent Extremism: A Call for Collective Action," Royal Canadian Mounted Police, December 16, 2024, <https://rcmp.ca/en/corporate-information/publications-and-manuals/five-eyes-insights-young-people-and-violent-extremism-call-collective-action>.

⁹³ Bart Schuurman and Max Taylor, "Reconsidering Radicalization: Fanaticism and the Link Between Ideas and Violence," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no. 1 (2018): 3–22, <https://doi.org/http://www.jstor.org/stable/26343743>, 3.

component in the adoption of far-reaching beliefs, and third, a social component that reinforces those beliefs through networks and shared narratives.

Gen Z's radicalization flourishes in the digital space. Algorithms function like currents, governing what is seen, what is heard, and by who based on the biases users bring into the digital space and amplifying them. This results in a stark ideological divide between the right and the left. On the right, radicalization flows from the perceived loss of privilege which feels like true marginalization.⁹⁴ It represents the disenfranchised or the 'silent majority' who yearn for a mythic past in which their privilege is returned to them.⁹⁵ This forges a false solidarity with billionaires, and the scapegoating of the 'other'—immigrants, women, people of colour, and marginalized groups who threaten right wing experience of 'oppression'.⁹⁶ Right wing radicalization or 'red-pilling' is grounded in masculine ideals of strength, force, and order.⁹⁷ Human experience becomes a difference of opinion and experience, each competing for legitimacy in the attention economy in online echo chambers. Right wing radicalization demands the dehumanization of the other in order to sustain the appearance of moral clarity.⁹⁸ By contrast, the 'radical' left demands a recognition of the other as human. It reflects a push toward a progressive future, driven by the democratization of information, the freedom of media, and the ever expanding list of witnesses to crimes against humanity. Moral disengagement is rejected in favor of a global hyper awareness replacing it with a sense of moral urgency. This dual trajectory highlights how the same structural and psychological conditions can produce divergent expressions of radicalization, depending on which myths or moral visions individuals attach to their discontent.

Symbols play a central role in this process. The adoption of the "One Piece" pirate flag in protests across Indonesia, Nepal, and Madagascar functions as a visual metaphor for

⁹⁴ Jason Stanley and Bill Hathey, *How Fascism Works* (United States: Loudly, 2024), 74.

⁹⁵ Stanley and Hathey, *How Fascism Works*, 74.

⁹⁶ Tara Sheppard-Luangkhot, thesis, *Formers' Understandings of Why They Engaged with and Disengaged from Violent Social Movements in Settler-Colonial North America and Europe* (University of Manitoba, 2025), 19.

⁹⁷ Matteo Botto and Lucas Gottzén, "Swallowing and Spitting out the Red Pill: Young Men, Vulnerability, and Radicalization Pathways in the Manosphere," *Journal of Gender Studies* 33, no. 5 (September 23, 2023): 596–608, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2023.2260318>, 598.

⁹⁸ Mattias Wahlström, Anton Törnberg, and Hans Ekbrand, "Dynamics of Violent and Dehumanizing Rhetoric in Far-Right Social Media," *New Media & Society* 23, no. 11 (August 30, 2020): 3290–3311, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820952795>, 3290, 3291.

rejecting traditional authority and signaling a generational desire for radical change. These symbols blur the boundary between fiction and reality, transforming cultural icons into tools of political communication.⁹⁹ Yet where Gen Z diverges most sharply from traditional notions of radicalization is in its commitment to moral engagement. Gen Z's activism, anchored in the pursuit of equality, dignity, and agency, is fundamentally incompatible with moral disengagement or the agentic personality.

Ultimately, radicalization should not be understood solely as a descent into extremism but as a mirror reflecting the moral and structural failures of existing systems. Generation Z's access to media, information, and news creates an acute awareness of what is wrong, and who it harms— everyone. When governments or institutions respond to youth radicalization with repression, surveillance, or dismissal, they risk exacerbating alienation and accelerating the erosion of democratic trust. But when they recognize it as a symptom of systemic inequity and intergenerational neglect, radicalization can become a catalyst for democratic renewal. For Gen Z, to be “radicalized” is often to insist on the universality of rights that were promised but never realized— a reminder that rejecting the status quo is not always a threat to democracy, but sometimes its only hope for survival.

2.6 Response to Engagement in Canada

The Government of Canada has implemented a “whole-of-government” approach focused on improving outcomes and increasing youth involvement in federal decision-making. The government's intention/goal is to acknowledge and spread awareness on the challenges young people are facing, and transform youth from observers into contributors. The Youth Secretariat, the Prime Minister's Youth Council, Canada's State of the Youth Reports, and Canada's overarching Youth Policy aim to incorporate the voices of Canada's youth into the decision making process. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms is constrained by structural limits, and lacks a formal response to encampments, protests, and engagement beyond its own institution.

⁹⁹ Joshua Marvine, “I Pledge Allegiance: Language, Information, and How the American Far-Right Forms Its Identity” (thesis, University of Arkansas, 2023), 59.

In Canada's settler colonial context, colonialism, capitalism and violence are intertwined. This perpetuates climate injustice, human rights violations and poor digital governance. While youth are increasingly aware of these issues, their capacity for transformative action is often stifled.¹⁰⁰ Although institutions like the Youth Secretariat and Prime Minister's Youth Council acknowledge youth concerns, the bodies lack the legislative authority and direct decision making power needed to translate awareness into concrete actions and results. The role of the Youth Secretariat is primarily facilitative. It ensures that youth perspectives are considered within the policy making processes rather than embedded. Similarly, the PMYC reports to the Prime Minister and Cabinet provides recommendations that lack statutory force. The PMYC's most recent report from 2019 demonstrates that while the PMYC has served as a symbolic vessel for amplifying youth voices, it lacks direct legislative results, such as passing of bills/laws into effect.¹⁰¹ However, its main legislative-related success, the creation of the Youth Council with Justin Trudeau, is notable, as it serves as Canada's leading policy mechanism relating to Youth Engagement. The PMYC played a primary role in 2018 in supporting the development of the Youth Policy for Canada, by identifying topics, themes, and guidelines for future discussion of the policy.¹⁰²

The launch of Canada's Youth Policy (2019) attempted to formalize youth engagement as a federal priority. It was developed after consultation with over 5,000 youth participants, consideration of 10,000 individual responses, and 68 submissions from youth-led organizations and discussions across the country.¹⁰³ The process was an attempt to translate youth perspectives into long-term policy. The policy identifies six main areas of focus: Leadership and Impact, Health and Wellness, Innovation and Skills, Employment, Truth and Reconciliation, and Environment and Climate Action.¹⁰⁴ It operates within a "whole-of government strategy" that encourages all federal departments to integrate youth

¹⁰⁰ Onyx Sloan Morgan et al., "Youth and Climate Justice: Representations of Young People in Action for Sustainable Futures," *The Geographical Journal* 190, no. 1 (September 30, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12547>, 1.

¹⁰¹ "Report of the Prime Minister's Youth Council."

¹⁰² "Report of the Prime Minister's Youth Council."

¹⁰³ "Canada's Youth Policy," Canada.ca, April 15, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/youth/programs/policy.html>.

¹⁰⁴ "Canada's Youth Policy."

perspectives into their program and policy design.¹⁰⁵ Aligned with both the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the policy importantly affirms the need for culturally sensitive and responsive engagement with Indigenous youth.¹⁰⁶ To ensure accountability, it mandates periodic reporting periods for consultation and feedback on the state of youth in Canada to ensure policy remains responsive to evolving realities and priorities of the demographic.¹⁰⁷

The First State of Youth Report in 2021 was informed by consultations with roughly 1,000 young people across Canada and organized around the same six priority areas established by the Youth Policy.¹⁰⁸ The report documented a significant decline in youth well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting reduced life satisfaction, educational disruption, job losses and widespread mental health challenges.¹⁰⁹ In consideration of these realities, the report further emphasized the promotion of Indigenous data sovereignty (i.e., data collected by communities) to more accurately represent the diversity of Indigenous youth experiences.¹¹⁰ More broadly, the state of youth report positioned youth voices as an integral component of evidence-based policymaking, aiming to transform consultation into institutional responsiveness and embed youth perspectives within the long-term architecture of federal governance.¹¹¹

The second iteration of the State of Youth Report, currently in development, builds on the 2021 framework to more adequately reflect post-pandemic realities.¹¹² Drawing on feedback collected from youth (aged 16 to 29) between late 2024 and into early 2025, the forthcoming report aims to address newly emergent challenges that have since been identified by respondents.¹¹³ The report is expected to place particular emphasis on issues of economic uncertainty, climate urgency, reconciliation, and equity to represent the

¹⁰⁵ "Canada's Youth Policy."

¹⁰⁶ "Canada's Youth Policy."

¹⁰⁷ "Canada's Youth Policy."

¹⁰⁸ "Canada's First State of Youth Report: For Youth, with Youth, by Youth," Canada.ca, August 11, 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/state-youth/report.html#a6>.

¹⁰⁹ "Canada's first State of youth report: for youth, with youth, by youth."

¹¹⁰ "Canada's first State of youth report: for youth, with youth, by youth."

¹¹¹ "Canada's first State of youth report: for youth, with youth, by youth."

¹¹² "Share Your Thoughts: Youth Engagement on the Second State of Youth Report," Youth engagement on the second State of Youth Report - Canada.ca, March 19, 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/youth/youth-engagement.html>.

¹¹³ "Share your thoughts: Youth engagement on the second State of Youth Report."

evolving concerns of young Canadians across diverse social and regional contexts.¹¹⁴ Essentially its design will maintain the six original policy priority areas, intending to refine and contextualize these pillars based on the lived experiences and policy recommendations of youth participants. Scheduled for release in 2025, the Second State of Youth Report is positioned as a key instrument for both informing future federal youth programming as well as better aligning government actions with the realities and expectations of younger generations.

The Government of Canada's response to the 2021 State of the Youth report shows an attempt to translate real youth concerns into policy action. In 2024, the government created a National Youth Mental Health fund to expand access to counseling and therapy services, as well as a Canadian Dental Care Plan to improve youth and family health.¹¹⁵ It committed \$1 billion over 5 years to develop a National School Food Program, mitigating rising food insecurity. Environmental concerns were addressed through a broad deferral investment in over \$160 billion towards clean energy initiatives and infrastructure development.¹¹⁶ In terms of employment, funding was directed to the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy, which helps young people, particularly those from marginalized groups, overcome barriers to meaningful work experience.¹¹⁷ The government's response acknowledges youth's declining trust in democratic institutions, government disconnect, and skepticism that they lack the youth's interests.¹¹⁸ Further, it notices the growing emphasis on youth's concerns with social justice and the rights of marginalized communities, and increased climate anxiety.¹¹⁹ However, aside from shedding light onto the statistics, the government's acknowledgement lacks concrete solutions. It emphasises that these issues require attention: "rebuilding trust requires meaningful engagement with young people and ensuring that their voices are heard and valued in decision-making processes."¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ "Share your thoughts: Youth engagement on the second State of Youth Report."

¹¹⁵ "First State of Youth Report: What Youth Told Us in 2021 and How We Are Responding," Canada.ca, November 25, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/state-youth/government-actions.html#a1>.

¹¹⁶ "First State of Youth Report: What youth told us in 2021 and how we are responding."

¹¹⁷ "First State of Youth Report: What youth told us in 2021 and how we are responding."

¹¹⁸ "First State of Youth Report: What youth told us in 2021 and how we are responding."

¹¹⁹ "First State of Youth Report: What youth told us in 2021 and how we are responding."

¹²⁰ "First State of Youth Report: What youth told us in 2021 and how we are responding."

The Government of Canada's approach to youth engagement indicates their intent to present youth with extensive opportunities to act as political contributors, specifically in terms of spreading awareness of concerns, visibility and consultation. The State of the Youth's reporting cycle, every four years, contrasts with the immediacy of Gen Z's digital and protest-based activism. This projects a view that institutional engagement opportunities for youth are too slow or symbolic to match the urgency of their protests.

3. A Government Guideline

3.1 Introduction

Canadian policy can no longer afford short-term thinking. This youth-designed guideline ensures that domestic and foreign policy decisions are guided by long-term responsibility rather than reactive crisis management. In an era shaped by climate shocks, global pandemics, digital insecurity, and geopolitical volatility, it is imperative for the Canadian government to consciously shape the social, ecological, technological, and economic conditions that future generations will inherit. A diplomatic stance taken abroad can reverberate through social movements at home; a carbon policy enacted today can restructure ecosystems and markets for decades. These realities have shaped the political consciousness of Generation Z, instilling a recognition that governance is no longer confined to national borders but interwoven with global shocks and intergenerational consequences.

Current Canadian foreign policy reflects both ambition and ambivalence. The legislative process has room for youth in its proposal stage and committee stage and it is formally guided by Global Affairs Canada's commitment to advancing "a stable, rules-based international order" through diplomacy, trade, and development assistance.¹²¹ Yet, we have observed a recurring pattern of Canadian foreign policy decisions being characterized by

¹²¹ Global Affairs Canada, "Global Affairs Canada's 2024–25 Departmental Plan at a Glance," GAC, September 12, 2025, <https://international.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/corporate/reports/departmental-plan/global-affairs-2024-2025-departmental-plan-at-glance>.

symbolic commitments to multilateralism that lack a consistent strategic framework.¹²² As a result, policy often oscillates between moral aspiration and pragmatic restraint, frequently privileging short-term political optics over long-term responsibility.¹²³

The Youth of Today for the Youth of Tomorrow project has implemented this guideline to lay out a new practice for the architects of Canadian foreign policy: it embeds the core principles of intergenerational responsibility, participation, accountability, and transparency into the earliest stages of policy-making.

3.1.1 Foundational Principles: Intergenerational, Participation, Accountability, and Transparency

Grounded in the Haudenosaunee Seven Generation Principle (SGP), this framework requires that decisions be evaluated according to their long-term social, ecological, and moral impacts. The SGP holds particular importance for Generation Z as it is not only a philosophical touchstone, but a lived political ethic that shapes how we act, outlining the futures we have been taught to protect and the histories we have been taught to acknowledge. Applying the SGP to Canadian foreign policy reframes diplomacy as an exercise in stewardship rather than short-term interest calculation. Participation ensures that those who will inherit the consequences of foreign-policy decisions are active contributors, directly involved in shaping and informing policy, rather than passive observers. Despite being recognized as stakeholders, youth remain largely excluded from policy creation. We argue that youth perspectives matter because foreign policy directly shapes the conditions of their futures, and their lived experience of political, environmental, digital, and economic shocks provides insights that strengthen the relevance, foresight, and legitimacy of Canadian policy. Structured participation mechanisms are therefore essential as they account for overlooked risks, reveal emerging needs, and counter the distance many young people feel from opaque policy processes.

¹²² Denis Stairs, "Myths, Morals, and Reality in Canadian Foreign Policy," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 58, no. 2 (June 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070200305800201>, 253.

¹²³ Dani Belo, "Middle Power Foreign Policy in an Era of Gray Zone Conflict: Addressing the Challenges for Canada," *Canada and International Affairs*, 2022, 277–96, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04368-0_13, 286.

Accountability is vital for restoring legitimacy in a political landscape marked by disinformation, public distrust, and institutional fatigue.¹²⁴ Canada's commitments to human rights, sustainability, and youth inclusion cannot be symbolic; they require structures of implementation, regular review, and co-production with affected communities. Because policy failures accumulate across generations, producing environmental degradation, technological inequality, and eroded civic trust, accountability must anchor government action to measurable responsibility.

Transparency is the foundation for democratic consent and good governance.¹²⁵ Without clarity about how decisions are made, who shapes them, and what risks they entail, youth encounter a political system that feels distant and exclusionary. Transparency combats learned helplessness and gerontocratic drift by making long-horizon thinking visible through open data, accessible reporting, and clear communication of trade-offs. Without transparency, participation risks to be perceived as symbolic and accountability becomes unenforceable.

Taken together, these pillars constitute a cultural and political intervention. They envision Canadian foreign policy as shared stewardship, one designed to understand global engagement not as an expression of middle-power identity but as a responsibility to future generations and the planet.

The guideline that follows is therefore more than an evaluative tool. It is an ethical framework for reorienting Canadian policy toward foresight, justice, and intergenerational responsibility. It invites Canada to move towards a proactive policy culture that cultivates stability, trust, and long-term global leadership.

3.1.2 Applying the Framework in Practice

To demonstrate how this framework functions in practice, we applied the guideline across the three domains where Canadian foreign policy carries the most far-reaching intergenerational consequences: human rights, environmental action, and digital

¹²⁴ Blerina Gjerazi, "From Openness to Accountability: Transparency in EU Institutional Communication," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research and Development* 12, no. 1 (March 25, 2025): 128, <https://doi.org/10.56345/ijrdv12n117>, 128.

¹²⁵ Gjerazi, "From Openness to Accountability," 128.

governance. These areas form the backbone of the guideline because they represent the sites where today's decisions create the most significant, enduring and formative moral and practical impacts on youth.

Human rights shape Canada's global credibility, yet a persistent gap remains between commitment and implementation. Ensuring participation and accountability in this domain is essential to prevent rights language from becoming solely symbolic.

Environmental policies determine the long term stability of ecosystems, economics and global governance. Intergenerational responsibility, then, becomes an indispensable evaluative lens to ensure the well being and security of current and future polities.

Digital governance greatly influences the identity, labour, security and political life of youth, and yet, they remain largely unrepresented in its design. Embedding transparency and participation becomes crucial for safeguarding future autonomy and democratic agency.

3.2 How to Use the Guideline¹²⁶

This guideline is designed to help policymakers to assess the quality, inclusivity, and long-term vision of Global Affairs Canada's (GAC) policy-making process through the lens of the Seven Generations Principle and youth-informed engagement. Using the red/yellow/green assessment system, it provides a clear and structured method, enabling teams to quickly identify areas of strength, monitor progress, and flag areas for improvement. This approach promotes transparency, accountability, and ongoing dialogue in the development and refinement of GAC policies.

Section	Purpose and How to Use It
Criteria	Outlines the specific principle or engagement dimension.
Proof	To be completed by the individual or group evaluating the policy. Must reference specific examples from within the policy that meets the criteria (e.g., quotes, specific policy clauses, etc.)

¹²⁶ For a complete blank checklist, please refer to the NextGen website.

Potential References to Aid in Assessment	Lists relevant frameworks, toolkits, and guidelines that can inform or benchmark the assessment and align evaluations with recognized international and domestic standards.
Red/Yellow/Green	Reflects the level of progress or implementation for each criterion. Red: Criterion not met; engagement or consideration is absent from the policy. Yellow: Criterion partially met; evidence present but incomplete or inconsistent. Green: Criterion fully met; strong consistent evidence of integration and practice.
Rationale	The justification of why the criteria was graded as red/yellow/green.

3.3 Policy Analysis

3.3.1 Human Rights: [Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy](#)

For this analysis, we will focus on Global Affairs Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). FIAP is a formal government policy that explicitly centers human rights, gender equality, and the empowerment of marginalized populations in Canada's international assistance programs.

Seven Generations and Youth Engagement Policy Guideline					
#	Criteria	Potential References to Aid in Assessment	Proof	R / Y / G	Rationale
Seven Generations Principles (SGP)					
1.	Policies must consider the well-being, rights, and responsibilities of individuals extending seven				

	generations into the future.				
	1a. The policy includes a documented assessment of long-term social, cultural, and environmental impacts.	UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape Achieving Intergenerational Trust for Sustainability	Executive Summary and Action Area 4 (Environment & Climate Action)		FIAP ties its goals to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement, acknowledging intergenerational obligations (“to preserve the achievements of previous generations and build on them”).
	1b. The policy has implemented formal memory and knowledge transfer mechanisms for potential future use.	BC Knowledge Transfer Guide	Message from the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie		The policy emphasizes ongoing monitoring, research, and data collection but does not set up formal institutional knowledge-transfer protocols for future policy cycles.
2.	The policy planning process reflects reciprocity and responsibility to the land, community, and future generations.				
	2a. The policy ensures accountability to affected communities across generations.	Centering Community Self-Assessment Tool ILC Toolkit #7: Inclusive Decision Making	Message from the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie		FIAP commits to “evidence-based and accountable” implementation and gender-based analysis plus partner consultation in 65 countries during policy design.
	2b. The policy incorporates land-based initiatives through partnerships with Indigenous communities.	Civic-Indigenous Placekeeping and Partnership Building Toolkit Governance Toolkit: A Guide to Nation Building			The policy recognizes intersectional inequalities, but Indigenous and land-based Canadian partnerships are not directly addressed.
	2c. The policy provides explicit guidance for balancing the needs of people, communities, and ecosystems.	Basics of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act Indigenous Seven Generation Principle; Canadian	Action Area 4		The policy addresses the link between environmental and social needs, highlighting women’s leadership in climate decision-making.

		Net-Zero Accountability Act.			
3.	The policy promotes renewal, cultural continuity, and knowledge-sharing across generations.				
	3a. The policy supports at least one regenerative or restorative initiative relevant to its area.	Regeneration Checklist Intergenerational Evaluation Toolkit	Action Area 4		This policy supports renewable energy, climate mitigation, and adaptation programs, which are all restorative by design.
	3b. The policy includes intergenerational engagement opportunities throughout its creation and implementation.	Connecting Generations - A Toolkit Considerations to the Introduction of Intergenerational Practice to Australian Policy			The policy does not include specific intergenerational forums or youth-elder dialogue structures.
	3c. The policy establishes a cyclical evaluation process where the evaluation is considered and feedback is integrated in the next iteration of the policy.	Implementation Toolkit for the OECD Recommendation on Public Policy Evaluation The Federal Evaluation Toolkit	Message from the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie		The policy commits to monitoring and “closely tracking our progress,” implying feedback but without explicit periodicity.
Participation					
4.	The policy identifies youth as rights-holders in project analysis.				
	4a. The policy recognizes youth mobilizations on key issues and uses them to guide outreach, consultation, and creation of the policy.	Checklist for Meaningful Youth Engagement Hart’s Ladder			Youth mobilization efforts are not acknowledged or discussed more broadly.
	4b. The policy names specific youth or youth organizations as partners or	Youth Engagement Toolkit: Evaluation Tool			Implementation relies on local women’s organizations (Action Area 1) and does not name

	intermediaries in policy creation.	On Equal Terms - NDC Checklist Youth 2030			specific youth or youth organizations as partners or intermediaries.
	4c. The policy establishes formal collaboration mechanisms with student-led advocacy groups at postsecondary institutions.	Saitsa Advocacy Mechanism OUSA Policies	A Focus on Innovation, Research and Results		GAC commits to innovative funding partnership and collaboration with Canadian universities.
5.	The policy embeds youth consultation into the planning and design stages.				
	5a. The policy ensures youth representatives hold decision-making or advisory roles in policy steering committees or review boards.	Prime Minister's Youth Council: Members in Action	Canada as a Feminist Donor		The policy requires active and meaningful participation from women and girls but does not provide clear roles for decision-making.
	5b. The policy organizes cross-regional youth roundtables to prioritize participation from youth across Canada.	UN Youth Delegate Programme Reimagine Playbook			The policy acknowledges youth as participants in the policy but there are no specific participatory opportunities to engage.
	5c. The policy includes marginalized and underrepresented youth voices in all consultation and advisory structures.	Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People	Executive Summary		The policy makes commitments to protecting and promoting the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups in equal decision making processes but the policy does not explicitly discuss youth consultation or advisory structures within its design process.
6.	The policy supports youth ownership and co-creation opportunities.				
	6a. The policy includes at minimum one youth co-creation process during drafting or revision.	Engaged and Heard: Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement			The policy was drafted internally after public consultations (Message from the Minister of International Development

					and La Francophonie)
	6b. The policy maintains a standing youth partnership mechanism throughout its lifecycle.	Meaningfully Engaging with Youth: Guidance and Training for UN Staff			The policy does not establish a dedicated institutional mechanism in place for continued partnership.
	6c. The policy demonstrates a structured mechanism to financially support youth-led organizations or initiatives.	Youth 2030: Phase 2	Engaging Civil Society		The policy provides robust structured financial support for organizations aimed at supporting women and girls.
Accountability					
7.	The policy provides accessible platforms for criticism and continuous improvement.				
	7a. The policy provides mechanisms for youth and affected groups to voice concerns with decisions made at any stage.	World Bank Accountability Mechanism Youth-inclusive governance indicators			There is mention of ongoing consultations (Engaging Civil Society) but no formal platform for complaints or criticism, none of which are specific to youth.
	7b. The policy conducts participatory audits that integrate complaint analysis, co-created corrective actions, and formal mechanisms to amend or revise the policy in response to findings.	The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) Forging the Path to Responsible Conduct			The policy commits to making “course corrections as appropriate” (A Focus on Innovation, Research and Results), but does not formally commit to a mechanism for amendment or revision suggestions.
8.	The policy is guided by research-based action plans.				
	8a. The policy establishes measurable benchmarks to ensure long-term goals are achieved.	Elements of Climate Accountability Frameworks and Best Practices In Their Implementation	Canada as a Feminist Donor Canada’s Feminist Approach to International Assistance		The policy has explicitly set measurable benchmarks including financial targets, targeted spending, geographic targets. The policy is committed to using indicators to track progress.
	8b. The policy	Open	Executive		The policy focuses on

	identifies potential contingencies and provides justification or resolutions.	Government Partnership National Handbook	Summary A Focus On Innovation, Research and Results		external contingencies to development and stability but does not address possible contingencies with the policy own provisions. The policy outlines integrated and adaptable responses.
	8c. The policy sets goals informed by both research and youth priorities.	A New Canadian Climate Accountability Act	A Focus On Innovation, Research and Results		The policy is evidence-based and commits to investing in policy research, better data collection and evaluation but not specified to youth priorities.
9.	The policy integrates independent and third-party oversight.				
	9a. The policy is monitored by an independent body composed of youth.	Climate Accountability Toolkit			The policy only commits Canada to engaging with Canadians and stakeholders through the implementation stage(Message from the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie), but is not explicit about youth monitoring opportunities.
	9b. The policy regularly produces reports from independent bodies in clear, accessible language.	Transparency by Default	More Responsive and Accountable Assistance Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security		GAC has committed to reporting to Parliament and to Canadians via the annual report on <i>Official Development Assistance Accountability Act</i> and through the <i>Departmental Results Report</i> , which will be delivered in a more streamlined, accessible format, with improved indicators. The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security commits to Annual public reports.
	9c. The policy empowers	OECD: Learning and	Action area 1 (core): Gender		The policy strongly supports civil society's role

	independent bodies to recommend amendments based on their review.	Accountability Structure	equality and the empowerment of women and girls		in advocacy but does not grant these bodies formal or empowered authority to recommend amendments.
Transparency					
10.	The policy ensures disclosure of decision-making processes.				
	10a. The policy provides a public-facing explanation of policy steps, including youth participation in committee and proposal stages.	Government of Canada Directive on Open Government (2014) ; OECD Open Government Review	More Responsive and Accountable Assistance		Policy information is to continuously be accessible to the public as Global Affairs Canada will continue to publish international assistance program information.
	10b. The policy publishes youth engagement outcomes.	Canada's 2016 International Assistance Review ; Treasury Board Secretariat guidelines for public reporting .			FIAP documentation does not include any publication of youth engagement outcomes or evidence showing youth input influenced revisions. Consultations were broad but not youth-specific.
	10c. The policy discloses external influences, including partnerships, private sector actors, NGOs, or international bodies.	OECD Integrity Framework ; GAC partnership transparency requirements .	Message from the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie		The policy acknowledges partnerships with civil society and multilateral organizations but does not disclose private-sector, NGO, or institutional influence in shaping FIAP.
11.	The policy communicates in an accessible, youth-friendly ¹²⁷ manner.				
	11a. The policy provides plain-language summaries for all major policies, outlining potential consequences.	Canadian Plain Language Guidelines ; UNESCO digital literacy guidelines .	FIAP is published with standard GAC website format, with no simplified version available.		FIAP's full text is available to the public online, but there is no youth-friendly or plain-language version summarizing its commitments.
	11b. The policy maintains open-data	Open Data Canada ; UN Youth	More Responsive		Global Affairs Canada shares financial and

¹²⁷ Youth-friendly refers to language that is plain and lacks the jargon that many policies tend to use, implying that a layperson would understand the policy without needing further research.

	dashboards with youth-relevant indicators (e.g., digital access, human rights issues, environment, and community).	2030 reporting guidelines.	and Accountable Assistance		program data via the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), but there is no youth-specific funding information.
	11c. The policy actively addresses misinformation and acknowledges any possible unmet targets.	Auditor General of Canada reporting practices ; UN SDG Voluntary National Review templates.			FIAP lacks a direct communication plan to reach youth audiences.
12.	The policy ensures long-term reporting and intergenerational transparency.				
	12a. The policy includes long-term impact statements projecting environmental, social, and digital consequences across multiple decades.	Indigenous Seven Generation Principle ; Canadian Net-Zero Accountability Act.	Message from the Minister of Foreign Affairs		FIAP mentions “to preserve the achievements of previous generations and build on them.” The policy aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Paris Agreement, but does not explicitly reference multi-generational forecasts.
	12b. The policy provides transparent data retention and governance protocols through disclosing how data is stored, for how long, by whom, and under what sovereignty rules.	OPC Youth Privacy Guidelines ; OCAP principles for Indigenous data sovereignty.	More Responsive and Accountable Assistance		Provides ongoing transparency through the ODA Accountability Act and annual reporting but lacks clarity on how data is stored, retained, or governed.
	12c. The policy produces annual public progress reports tied to youth-defined metrics	UNICEF Youth Participation Framework ; OECD Youth Governance Framework.	More Responsive and Accountable Assistance		FIAP ensures annual Parliamentary and departmental reporting with measurable gender indicators; however, no youth-reviewed reports are included.

The Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) reflects Global Affairs Canada's commitment to center gender equality and human rights in its international work. It sets measurable goals, commits to transparency, and aligns with global frameworks like the UN 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. These are meaningful strengths and show an intention to promote equality and accountability on the world stage.

At the same time, this review shows some clear gaps. FIAP does not include structured ways for youth or Indigenous communities to play an active role in shaping or reviewing policy. There are no youth-specific indicators, no long-term knowledge-transfer plans, and limited attention to how future generations will inherit or sustain these commitments. The policy speaks strongly about inclusion, but it excludes youth voices who are mobilizing across the nation on issues regarding human rights.

The Seven Generations and Youth Engagement Policy Guideline is essential to the future of Global Affairs Canada policymaking. Youth perspectives do not simply add another stakeholder voice; they shift how issues surrounding policy are understood and how solutions are built. Young people are often the ones who live longest with the consequences of today's decisions, and they bring a future-oriented urgency that can help expose where short-term goals undermine long-term well-being. This guide offers a way to transform good intentions into tangible and lasting systems of accountability and inclusive participation. Urging policymakers to look generations ahead and to meaningfully engage with youth voices at every stage creates a framework for policies to evolve and endure the challenges of global affairs. In summary, this guide displays how policy does not just concern what we achieve today, rather it is about building trust and responsibility for both present and future generations.

3.3.2 Environment: [Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act](#)

Canada's 'Net-Zero Emissions by 2050' commitment is a long-term climate policy framework in which the federal government pledges that the country will achieve net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by the year 2050. "Net-zero" means that any remaining emissions would be balanced by carbon removals (e.g., nature-based solutions, carbon

capture, etc.). This commitment came into force through the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act, which was passed by Parliament in June 2021.

Seven Generations and Youth Engagement Policy Guideline					
#	Criteria	Potential References to Aid in Assessment	Proof	R / Y / G	Rationale
Seven Generations Principles (SGP)					
1.	Policies must consider the well-being, rights, and responsibilities of individuals extending seven generations into the future.				
	1a. The policy includes a documented assessment of long-term social, cultural, and environmental impacts.	UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape Achieving Intergenerational Trust for Sustainability	Section 20		The policy requires the Advisory Body (AB) to take into account social, cultural, Indigenous and technological factors in their advice report. The advice given by the AB does not need to be obligatorily implemented and does not function as an assessment of the plans that will actually be executed to meet the goal.
	1b. The policy has implemented formal memory and knowledge transfer mechanisms for potential future use.	BC Knowledge Transfer Guide	Section 14, Section 15, Sections 17, Section 18, Section 19, and Section 27.1		The Act Mandates: progress reports, assessment reports, public tabling of plans and reports, and a five-year review of the Act itself. While the Act provides some continuity in monitoring policy changes and updating its goals, it does not set up formal institutional knowledge-transfer protocols for future policy cycles.

2.	The policy planning process reflects reciprocity and responsibility to the land, community, and future generations.				
	2a. The policy ensures accountability to affected communities across generations.	Centering Community Self-Assessment Tool ILC Toolkit #7: Inclusive Decision Making			The Act requires consultation with provinces, Indigenous peoples, experts, and “interested persons” when setting targets or plans (Section 13). But no section establishes accountability to communities or across generations. Moreover, there are no enforcements or consequences if targets are missed.
	2b. The policy incorporates land-based initiatives through partnerships with Indigenous communities.	Civic-Indigenous Placekeeping and Partnership Building Toolkit Governance Toolkit: A Guide to Nation Building	Sections 8, 13(1)(d) and Section 13(1)		The Act states that Indigenous knowledge must be taken into account when setting targets and plans and it also requires the Minister to provide Indigenous peoples an opportunity to make submissions. While there is partial alignment, there is no specific mention of land-based initiatives, co-governance, or Indigenous-led implementation.
	2c. The policy provides explicit guidance for balancing the needs of people, communities, and ecosystems.	Basics of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act Indigenous Seven Generation Principle; Canadian Net-Zero Accountability Act.	Section 9(1) and Section 9(1)(i)		Emissions Reduction Plans must include “key measures” and a “summary of sectors” involved and plans must also describe cooperative measures with provinces, territories, and Indigenous governing bodies. Further, the Advisory Body must consider scientific, economic, social, and technological factors. Although the Act considers multiple domains it provides no explicit balancing guidelines, no decision-making criteria,

					and no prioritization structure.
3.	The policy promotes renewal, cultural continuity, and knowledge-sharing across generations.				
	3a. The policy supports at least one regenerative or restorative initiative relevant to its area.	Regeneration Checklist Intergenerational Evaluation Toolkit			<p>The Act that focuses exclusively on emissions reduction targets (Sections 6–7) is a mitigation framework not a regeneration framework.</p> <p>There is no mention of restorative ecology, restoration funding, ecosystem recovery, or regenerative climate action.</p>
	3b. The policy includes intergenerational engagement opportunities throughout its creation and implementation.	Connecting Generations - A Toolkit Considerations to the Introduction of Intergenerational Practice to Australian Policy			<p>The Act provides general consultation opportunities, Engagement is limited to: provinces, Indigenous peoples, experts, and “interested persons” (Section 13). No mechanisms ensure participation from younger generations, future generations, or multigenerational groups in either design or implementation.</p>
	3c. The policy establishes a cyclical evaluation process where the evaluation is considered and feedback is integrated in the next iteration of the policy.	Implementation Toolkit for the OECD Recommendation on Public Policy Evaluation The Federal Evaluation Toolkit	(Section 9) (Section 14) (Section 15) (Section 27.1) (Sections 17–19)		<p>There is a well defined cyclical evaluation process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emissions Reduction Plans for each milestone year - Progress Reports at least 2 years before each milestone - Assessment Reports after each milestone year - Five-year review of the Act itself - All plans and reports must be tabled publicly
Participation					
4.	The policy identifies youth as rights-holders in project analysis.				
	4a. The policy	Checklist for			In Public Participation

	recognizes youth mobilizations on key issues and uses them to guide outreach, consultation, and creation of the policy.	Meaningful Youth Engagement Hart's Ladder			(Section 13) there is no mention of recognizing or implementing youth's perspective.
	4b. The policy names specific youth or youth organizations as partners or intermediaries in policy creation.	Youth Engagement Toolkit: Evaluation Tool On Equal Terms - NDC Checklist Youth 2030			Section 13 outlines required consultation partners, but Youth organizations are not mentioned. The Net-Zero Advisory Body (Section 20) does not require any youth members.
	4c. The policy establishes formal collaboration mechanisms with student-led advocacy groups at postsecondary institutions.	Saitsa Advocacy Mechanism OUSA Policies			Consultation mechanisms (Section 13) are general and not tied to academic institutions. More specifically, there are no references to student-led advocacy groups based collaboration partners.
5.	The policy embeds youth consultation into the planning and design stages.				
	5a. The policy ensures youth representatives hold decision-making or advisory roles in policy steering committees or review boards.	Prime Minister's Youth Council: Members in Action			The Act establishes an independent Net-Zero Advisory Body (Section 20) but it does not require youth members or representatives.
	5b. The policy organizes cross-regional youth roundtables to prioritize participation from youth across Canada.	UN Youth Delegate Programme Reimagine Playbook			Consultation mechanisms (Section 13) does not contain youth-specific consultation structure, neither cross-regional or roundtable-based.
	5c. The policy includes marginalized and underrepresented youth voices in all consultation and advisory structures.	Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People			The Act has no provisions identifying: youth, marginalized youth or underrepresented communities.
6.	The policy supports youth ownership and co-creation opportunities.				

	6a. The policy includes at minimum one youth co-creation process during drafting or revision.	Engaged and Heard: Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement			Consultation mechanisms (Section 13) provides no co-creation opportunities for youth and no requirement that youth participate in shaping, drafting, or revising any part of the policy.
	6b. The policy maintains a standing youth partnership mechanism throughout its lifecycle.	Meaningfully Engaging with Youth: Guidance and Training for UN Staff			Consultation mechanisms (Section 13) does not mention permanent, recurring, or legally required youth partnership structure tied to planning, reporting, consultation, or oversight.
	6c. The policy demonstrates a structured mechanism to financially support youth-led organizations or initiatives.	Youth 2030: Phase 2			The Act is a procedural and reporting framework, not a funding instrument and therefore contains no funding provisions for any group, including youth.
Accountability					
7.	The policy provides accessible platforms for criticism and continuous improvement.				
	7a. The policy provides mechanisms for youth and affected groups to voice concerns with decisions made at any stage.	World Bank Accountability Mechanism Youth-inclusive governance indicators			Section 13, which addresses public participation, does not establish a mechanism for voters to directly voice dissatisfaction, and instead relies on government and Minister approved experts to provide feedback.
	7b. The policy conducts participatory audits that integrate complaint analysis, co-created corrective actions, and formal mechanisms to amend or revise the policy in response to findings.	The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) Forging the Path to Responsible Conduct	Section 6		Incorporates submissions by advisory bodies, provincial governments, experts and indigenous peoples into settings and amendments.
8.	The policy is guided by research-based action plans.				

	8a. The policy establishes measurable benchmarks to ensure long-term goals are achieved.	Elements of Climate Accountability Frameworks and Best Practices In Their Implementation	Section 7 (1)- Targets-milestone years		Sets a national greenhouse gas emissions target for each milestone year with a view to achieving the target set out
	8b. The policy identifies potential contingencies and provides justification or resolutions.	Open Government Partnership National Handbook	Section 2- Content of report (b.2)		Establishes that if emissions target will not be met, additional measures to ensure greater likelihood of meeting targets.
	8c. The policy sets goals informed by both research and youth priorities.	A New Canadian Climate Accountability Act	Targets and Plans: Section 8 - Setting emissions target		Incorporates scientific research, international commitments, indigenous knowledge, and submissions provided by the advisory body, but does not mention issues or research based on youth priorities.
9.	The policy integrates independent and third-party oversight.				
	9a. The policy is monitored by an independent body composed of youth.	Climate Accountability Toolkit			The advisory body is composed of experts, lacking youth representation.
	9b. The policy regularly produces reports from independent bodies in clear, accessible language.	Transparency by Default	Report 6 - Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act		A report from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada provides a clear and accessible critique of the current performance of emission reduction goals.
	9c. The policy empowers independent bodies to recommend amendments based on their review.	OECD: Learning and Accountability Structure	Compete and Succeed in a Net Zero Future Report 6- Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act		Both reports have provided suggestions for amendments based on independent research.
Transparency					

10.	The policy ensures disclosure of decision-making processes.				
	10a. The policy provides a public-facing explanation of policy steps, including youth participation in committee and proposal stages.	Government of Canada Directive on Open Government (2014) ; OECD Open Government Review			Policy does not make any mention of youth participation in committee and proposal stages.
	10b. The policy publishes youth engagement outcomes.	Canada's 2016 International Assistance Review ; Treasury Board Secretariat guidelines for public reporting .	Compete and Succeed in a Net Zero Future		Advisory body report suggests more engagement with youth through workshops but does not publish outcomes.
	10c. The policy discloses external influences, including partnerships, private sector actors, NGOs, or international bodies.	OECD Integrity Framework ; GAC partnership transparency requirements .			No external influences are disclosed within the policy.
11.	The policy communicates in an accessible, youth-friendly manner.				
	11a. The policy provides plain-language summaries for all major policies, outlining potential consequences.	Canadian Plain Language Guidelines ; UNESCO digital literacy guidelines .	Canada's 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan		The plan is written with plain language, but does not mention potential consequences.
	11b. The policy maintains open-data dashboards with youth-relevant indicators (e.g., digital access, human rights issues, environment, and community).	Open Data Canada ; UN Youth 2030 reporting guidelines .	Canada's 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan		Publishes biennial reports on progress of policy, but does not cover digital access, or human rights issues, while briefly mentioning community and environment.
	11c. The policy actively addresses misinformation and acknowledges any possible unmet targets.	Auditor General of Canada reporting practices ; UN SDG Voluntary National Review	Canada's 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan Report 6-		Does not address misinformation, but addresses unmet targets in the Independent Auditor's report.

		templates.	Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act		
12.	The policy ensures long-term reporting and intergenerational transparency.				
	12a. The policy includes long-term impact statements projecting environmental, social, and digital consequences across multiple decades.	Indigenous Seven Generation Principle; Canadian Net-Zero Accountability Act.	Canada's 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan: Chapter 5		Addresses impact of policy on financial sector and environmental changes but does not address social and digital consequences.
	12b. The policy provides transparent data retention and governance protocols through disclosing how data is stored, for how long, by whom, and under what sovereignty rules.	OPC Youth Privacy Guidelines; OCAP principles for Indigenous data sovereignty.			Does not disclose information regarding data retention and storage within policy.
	12c. The policy produces annual public progress reports tied to youth-defined metrics	UNICEF Youth Participation Framework; OECD Youth Governance Framework.			Provides a report biennially, without the inclusion of youth defined metrics, such as input, participation or research.

The Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act effectively recognizes the importance of participation, accountability, and transparency. Its implementation of an advisory body and public participation efforts discussed within the policy meet much of the checklist's criteria. However, it lacks youth and Indigenous peoples representation and inclusion. Opportunities to involve these groups include the implementation of the Seven Generations Principle, and the inclusion of the Prime Minister's Youth Council ensure the standards of multi-generational engagement are being met.

Red criterion within the evaluation stems from the lack of youth initiatives within the development, implementation and amending of the act. The youth are largely absent

from the policy beyond their potential for future engagement opportunities, as discussed in the advisory body's report. By integrating youth as an aspect of the advisory body, as well as a fundamental stakeholder within the approach, the Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act would be much more efficient in its goal to create sustainable and equitable change to Canada's climate policy.

The act could also benefit to improve its transparency when discussing the data used to both make its benchmarks and list its accomplishments. To meet the standards required by this criteria, more informative and encompassing recognition of long term consequences, disclosure of data retention and storage, and open data dashboards are necessary.

3.3.3 Digital: [Policy Statement on Foreign Investment Review in the Interactive Digital Media Sector](#)

This policy clarifies how the Investment Canada Act will be enforced to address national security risks emerging in the digital sphere. It establishes a more robust framework for protecting the digital environment by targeting foreign state-sponsored or state-influenced actors who may leverage investments in the interactive digital media (IDM) sector as vectors for disinformation and manipulation.

The policy pursues four core objectives: First, protecting national security from foreign influence operations conducted through digital media; Second, preserving Canadian cultural sovereignty by ensuring that Canadian creators and narratives remain prominent in a landscape increasingly dominated by foreign platforms; Third, strengthening transparency and accountability in digital ownership and data governance; and Fourth, safeguarding democratic processes by reducing risks associated with disinformation, algorithmic manipulation, and covert state interference.

Seven Generations and Youth Engagement Policy Guideline					
#	Criteria	Potential References to Aid in Assessment	Proof	R / Y /	Rationale

				G	
Seven Generations Principles (SGP)					
1.	Policies must consider the well-being, rights, and responsibilities of individuals extending seven generations into the future.				
	1a. The policy includes a documented assessment of long-term social, cultural, and environmental impacts.	UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape Achieving Intergenerational Trust for Sustainability	Overview of act: Monitoring and Enforcement		The policy frames IDM as strategic infrastructure affecting identity & cohesion . The policy also recognizes long-term social/cultural stakes but lacks a structured, documented multi-decade impact assessment.
	1b. The policy has implemented formal memory and knowledge transfer mechanisms for potential future use.	BC Knowledge Transfer Guide			No provisions for archiving, cultural continuity, or institutional memory for future generations. No explicit memory or knowledge-transfer mechanisms in the policy text.
2.	The policy planning process reflects reciprocity and responsibility to the land, community, and future generations.				
	2a. The policy ensures accountability to affected communities across generations.	Centering Community Self-Assessment Tool ILC Toolkit #7: Inclusive Decision Making	Bill C-34, An Act to Amend the Investment Canada Act		Joint reviews by ISED, GAC, Public Safety indicate cross-agency accountability, but community/intergenerational accountability is not specified outside of acknowledging strong institutional review; weak mechanisms ensure accountability <i>to communities across generations</i> .
	2b. The policy incorporates land-based initiatives through partnerships with Indigenous communities.	Civic-Indigenous Placekeeping and Partnership Building Toolkit Governance Toolkit: A Guide to Nation			Cultural sovereignty is named, but concrete Indigenous partnership or land-based measures are absent. Policy addresses cultural sovereignty but does not describe Indigenous partnership

		Building			processes or land-based initiatives.
	2c. The policy provides explicit guidance for balancing the needs of people, communities, and ecosystems.	Basics of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act Indigenous Seven Generation Principle; Canadian Net-Zero Accountability Act.	Net Benefit Reviews		Policy recognizes cultural/social tradeoffs but offers limited operational guidance to balance people/community/ecosystem needs. The policy mentions cultural protection and national interest but lacks explicit ecosystem or community-balancing guidance.
3.	The policy promotes renewal, cultural continuity, and knowledge-sharing across generations.				
	3a. The policy supports at least one regenerative or restorative initiative relevant to its area.	Regeneration Checklist Intergenerational Evaluation Toolkit			No explicit commitment to regenerative/restorative initiatives in the IDM investment-review policy. No restorative/regenerative programs or funding streams in the policy text.
	3b. The policy includes intergenerational engagement opportunities throughout its creation and implementation.	Connecting Generations - A Toolkit Considerations to the Introduction of Intergenerational Practice to Australian Policy			Lacks structured, ongoing intergenerational engagement. No described intergenerational engagement mechanisms (youth/elders dialogues, long-term forums).
	3c. The policy establishes a cyclical evaluation process where the evaluation is considered and feedback is integrated in the next iteration of the policy.	Implementation Toolkit for the OECD Recommendation on Public Policy Evaluation The Federal Evaluation Toolkit	National Security Review		There are review mechanisms, but they are security- and investment-focused rather than cyclical, community-informed policy updates. The policy sets review processes for investments, but no cyclical evaluation tied to iterative policy revision with community feedback.
Participation					

4.	The policy identifies youth as rights-holders in project analysis.				
	4a. The policy recognizes youth mobilizations on key issues and uses them to guide outreach, consultation, and creation of the policy.	Checklist for Meaningful Youth Engagement Hart's Ladder			Policy recognizes public discourse & democratic participation but does not mention youth mobilizations or targeted youth outreach.
	4b. The policy names specific youth or youth organizations as partners or intermediaries in policy creation.	Youth Engagement Toolkit: Evaluation Tool On Equal Terms - NDC Checklist Youth 2030			No youth organizations named; interagency partners limited to federal departments and security partners.
	4c. The policy establishes formal collaboration mechanisms with student-led advocacy groups at postsecondary institutions.	Saitsa Advocacy Mechanism OUSA Policies			No mechanisms to engage student advocacy or campus groups are described. No mention of postsecondary student groups or formal collaboration mechanisms.
5.	The policy embeds youth consultation into the planning and design stages.				
	5a. The policy ensures youth representatives hold decision-making or advisory roles in policy steering committees or review boards.	Prime Minister's Youth Council: Members in Action			Cross-departmental governance exists but with no youth representation. Policy establishes joint departmental review teams (ISED, GAC, Public Safety) but not youth advisory seats.
	5b. The policy organizes cross-regional youth roundtables to prioritize participation from youth across Canada.	UN Youth Delegate Programme Reimagine Playbook			No structural provision for geographically representative youth engagement. Policy does not include consultation logistics or regional youth roundtables.
	5c. The policy includes marginalized and underrepresented	Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better			No specified measures to ensure marginalized youth inclusion. Policy affirms

	youth voices in all consultation and advisory structures.	Opportunities for Young People			cultural sovereignty but lacks inclusion plans for marginalized youth (Indigenous, racialized, disabled).
6.	The policy supports youth ownership and co-creation opportunities.				
	6a. The policy includes at minimum one youth co-creation process during drafting or revision.	Engaged and Heard: Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement			Policy was drafted as an interdepartmental security/culture document; youth co-creation absent. No co-creation processes with youth described in the drafting or review stages.
	6b. The policy maintains a standing youth partnership mechanism throughout its lifecycle.	Meaningfully Engaging with Youth: Guidance and Training for UN Staff			No institutionalized youth partnership for ongoing engagement. No standing youth partnership mechanism identified.
	6c. The policy demonstrates a structured mechanism to financially support youth-led organizations or initiatives.	Youth 2030: Phase 2			No budgetary or funding commitments to support youth-led initiatives included. No funding or youth-support mechanism described.
Accountability					
7.	The policy provides accessible platforms for criticism and continuous improvement.				
	7a. The policy provides mechanisms for youth and affected groups to voice concerns with decisions made at any stage.	World Bank Accountability Mechanism Youth-inclusive governance indicators	Policy Developments in 2023-24		The policy includes review triggers and disclosure requirements but no formal public complaint or youth grievance pathway. Investment review has procedural routes, but no explicit, accessible complaint mechanism for youth or communities.
	7b. The policy conducts participatory audits that integrate complaint analysis, co-created corrective	The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) Forging the Path			No participatory audit commitments or co-created corrective-action processes. Policy does not commit to participatory/community

	actions, and formal mechanisms to amend or revise the policy in response to findings.	to Responsible Conduct			audits; reviews are expert/security driven.
8.	The policy is guided by research-based action plans.				
	8a. The policy establishes measurable benchmarks to ensure long-term goals are achieved.	Elements of Climate Accountability Frameworks and Best Practices In Their Implementation	Appendix		<p>The policy defines evaluation criteria for investments (data access, content influence) but lacks time-bound, youth-specific benchmarks.</p> <p>Strong evaluation criteria exist for national security/cultural impact, but not explicit measurable long-term youth metrics.</p>
	8b. The policy identifies potential contingencies and provides justification or resolutions.	Open Government Partnership National Handbook	Overview of the Act		<p>The policy clearly anticipates contingencies tied to national security and ownership disclosure and establishes interagency review.</p> <p>The policy lists review triggers and cross-departmental response capacity (security partners).</p>
	8c. The policy sets goals informed by both research and youth priorities.	A New Canadian Climate Accountability Act	Conclusion		<p>The policy is shaped by research and security considerations but lacks input from youth in setting its goals.</p> <p>While attentive to security and cultural risks, the policy does not reflect youth-driven priorities.</p>
9.	The policy integrates independent and third-party oversight.				
	9a. The policy is monitored by an independent body composed of youth.	Climate Accountability Toolkit			No third-party youth monitors included. No independent youth monitoring body referenced.
	9b. The policy	Transparency by	Enhancing		The policy requires

	regularly produces reports from independent bodies in clear, accessible language.	Default	Transparency by Disclosing		disclosure of ownership and review outcomes but does not mandate independent youth-oriented reporting. Some reporting/disclosure expected; accessibility and independent third-party reporting are not explicitly required.
	9c. The policy empowers independent bodies to recommend amendments based on their review.	OECD: Learning and Accountability Structure	National Security Reviews		The policy gives review powers to departments and security partners but not to independent/community bodies for amendment recommendations. Centralized amendment authority exists; independent bodies are not explicitly empowered to recommend changes.
Transparency					
10.	The policy ensures disclosure of decision-making processes.				
	10a. The policy provides a public-facing explanation of policy steps, including youth participation in committee and proposal stages.	Government of Canada Directive on Open Government (2014) ; OECD Open Government Review	National Security Reviews		The policy publicly explains investment review steps and evaluation criteria, but youth participation stages are not explained (because they are not included). Strong on process transparency for investors and national interest; silent on youth participation transparency.
	10b. The policy publishes youth engagement outcomes.	Canada's 2016 International Assistance Review ; Treasury Board Secretariat guidelines for public reporting .			No mechanism/content to publish youth engagement outcomes because youth engagement is not built into the policy. No youth engagement outcomes are published (no youth engagement).

	10c. The policy discloses external influences, including partnerships, private sector actors, NGOs, or international bodies.	OECD Integrity Framework ; GAC partnership transparency requirements .	National Security Reviews		<p>The policy mandates ownership transparency and disclosure of state-influence ties; addresses external partners.</p> <p>The policy establishes firm requirements surrounding investor and ownership influences.</p>
11.	The policy communicates in an accessible, youth-friendly manner.				
	11a. The policy provides plain-language summaries for all major policies, outlining potential consequences.	Canadian Plain Language Guidelines ; UNESCO digital literacy guidelines .	National Security Reviews		<p>Policy text is formal and sectoral; no youth-friendly plain-language summary specified.</p> <p>The policy is transparent in technical terms but lacks youth-friendly summaries.</p>
	11b. The policy maintains open-data dashboards with youth-relevant indicators (e.g., digital access, human rights issues, environment, and community).	Open Data Canada ; UN Youth 2030 reporting guidelines .			No dashboard commitment or youth-specific public indicators present. No open-data youth indicators or dashboards in the policy.
	11c. The policy actively addresses misinformation and acknowledges any possible unmet targets.	Auditor General of Canada reporting practices ; UN SDG Voluntary National Review templates .	Message from the Director of Investments to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry		<p>The policy explicitly aims to safeguard democracy from disinformation and manipulation but offers limited operational anti-misinformation mechanisms or public remediation plans.</p> <p>The policy identifies misinformation risk and sets review criteria Operational public-facing misinformation strategies and transparency on unmet targets are limited.</p>
12.	The policy ensures long-term reporting and intergenerational transparency.				
	12a. The policy	Indigenous Seven	Investment		The policy acknowledges

	includes long-term impact statements projecting environmental, social, and digital consequences across multiple decades.	Generation Principle; Canadian Net-Zero Accountability Act.	activity in 2023-24		cultural sovereignty and long-term stakes, yet it does not include explicit projections for multi-decade impacts. While the policy considers long-term consequences, it stops short of publishing detailed long-range impact projections.
	12b. The policy provides transparent data retention and governance protocols through disclosing how data is stored, for how long, by whom, and under what sovereignty rules.	OPC Youth Privacy Guidelines; OCAP principles for Indigenous data sovereignty.	Conclusion		The policy explicitly considers data access/control in evaluation criteria but does not publish standard retention/governance protocols. Data access and control is assessed in reviews, but standardized retention and disclosure protocols are not mandated publicly.
	12c. The policy produces annual public progress reports tied to youth-defined metrics	UNICEF Youth Participation Framework; OECD Youth Governance Framework.			The policy mandates review outcomes and investor disclosure, but no annual youth-metric reporting obligation.

ISED's 2024 policy update performs poorly when evaluated against the Seven Generations & Youth Engagement Checklist. Although it establishes stronger review measures for foreign investment in the interactive digital media (IDM) sector—including video games, apps, VR/AR platforms, and digital storytelling tools—it overlooks the need for meaningful youth participation in digital governance. The policy correctly identifies digital media as critical infrastructure affecting security, social cohesion, and democratic engagement; yet without youth involvement, it risks reinforcing a generational gap in decision-making power.

While the policy performs well on transparency and national-security accountability, it lacks intergenerational safeguards. To better align with youth-engagement principles, the

federal government would need to: (1) embed youth advisory roles; (2) provide youth-accessible reporting; (3) include long-term impact planning; and (4) enable participatory audits and youth governance mechanisms. In sum, the policy advances national security objectives but falls short of recognizing youth as essential stakeholders in Canada's digital future.

4. Empowering Youth Political Engagement in a New Era



4.1 Introduction

Youth voices must be heard, and that requires intentional spaces where young people can speak, engage, and influence decision-making. While our government guideline offers a framework for incorporating youth perspectives into policy, there is still a gap in

accessible, youth-friendly avenues for participation. NextGen, our digital platform for youth engagement, fills that gap by empowering young people to share their views, collaborate on issues that matter, and contribute to meaningful, productive change.

4.2 Rationale

Together, youth protest, digital mobilization, and experiences of institutional suppression demonstrate that Gen Z is politically engaged and responding with urgency to the stakes they face. Yet there remains a lack of clear and accessible pathways for translating this urgency into informed and sustained participation. Young people deserve distinct policy pathways, being that they are not merely future stakeholders or ‘leaders of tomorrow,’ but current rights-holders whose political agency carries immediate significance. Their limited influence is a product of structural barriers, including complex information environments, algorithmic suppression and limited inclusion in institutional decision-making, constraining meaningful engagement. Our platform directly intervenes in these barriers, shifting youth from symbolic inclusion towards substantive, material participation. It is from this gap that our platform emerges.

The following section outlines our mission, goals, and design of our proposed youth-targeted platform, as an extension of our analysis that aims to amplify youth voices and translate Gen Z’s preferred forms of engagement into concrete pathways for long-term policy change.

Our mission is to empower young people to think critically, organize effectively, and engage meaningfully with the world around them. We believe that informed action, whether through protest, volunteering, or policy engagement, is the foundation of lasting change. The core goal of our website is to help youth navigate the complex landscape of activism, information, and civic participation. In an era of misinformation and digital noise, we want to cultivate a space that not only informs but transforms; one where learning, reflection, and action are connected.

Our platform features three main sections: *Information on Organizing*, *Staying Informed Politically*, and *Government Involvement and Engagement*. Through interactive tools, accessible resources, and community-based features, our platform intentionally

bridges informal and formal forms of political engagement. It offers practical guidance on organizing safely, connects users with local non-profits and volunteer opportunities, provides educational resources on critical thinking and media literacy, and simplifies access to Canada's democratic processes, from voting, to contacting elected representatives, to shaping youth policy agendas.

We chose the digital format of a website because it meets youth where they are: online, mobile, and engaged through dynamic media. Our design encourages exploration, connection, and empowerment, allowing young people to move from passive online consumption to active participation; users can be engaged not just as consumers of content but as creators of change. Ultimately, this project envisions a generation that is critically aware, civically engaged, and collectively driven toward social justice. We see this platform not as a one-time initiative but as the foundation of an ongoing digital movement that grows alongside youth as they shape the political future.

We see this work as the foundation for a real, functioning online platform. Following the completion of the project as a research-driven proposal, we intend to collaborate with cross-disciplinary institutions at Western University to transform our proposal into a working website with the long-term aim of further embedding its core features into a mobile app. Relevant units at Western could help support domain hosting, graphic design, accessibility, and other complex technological aspects that fall beyond our technical area of expertise as International Relations students.

4.3 Relation to Shocks

Youth today respond to international political shocks with energy, urgency and creativity, whether through protests, online campaigns, or grassroots activism. These moments, from global climate strikes to Gaza solidarity actions, show how quickly young people tend to engage when the stakes are high. Our platform meets them where they are by providing the resources, guidance, and opportunities to engage with these global events in the ways that make sense to them, while also carrying this engagement beyond the immediate crisis. From government-focused advocacy and policy engagement to community organizing and digital action, we offer young people multiple pathways to turn

awareness of international shocks into meaningful impact. By supporting informed, flexible, and confident participation, we help youth channel their energy into actions that matter both locally and globally.

4.4 Values Statement

We believe in creating a space where informed youth can turn engagement into impact. As a nonpartisan platform, we uphold these core operational principles:

Accessibility

We commit to accessibility by designing a platform that intentionally aims to reduce structural barriers young people encounter in civic participation. This includes using clear, explaining language, creating an intuitive and mobile-first interface, and offering multimedia educational tools that support diverse learning needs and digital skill levels. Considering that youth today engage with politics and community through digital environments more so than ever, our choice of a website and future app serves as an accessibility commitment in itself, meeting young people in the online space where they already communicate, learn and mobilize.

Transparency

We commit to transparency by making the platform's operations, information sources, and content guidelines fully visible and consistently noted to users. This means clearly identifying where information is sourced, how new and policy updates are selected, how moderation decisions are made, and how personal data is stored. Our emphasis on transparency aims to counter the distrust in institutions and cultivate a political space grounded in clarity, accountability and informed decision-making.

Participation

We commit to ensuring safe participation by providing educational, not prescriptive, guidance on protest, rights and civic involvement, supported by legal disclaimers and harm-reduction goals. Our platform prioritizes users' safety by outlining information (not legal advice) of boundaries, permissible expression, and offering contextual information to guide informed choices about political engagement. In a landscape marked by uneven

policing, and heightened digital surveillance, emphasizing safety is essential for enabling youth to engage.

Critical Inquiry

We commit to fostering critical inquiry through participation by embedding tools that help young people analyze information, learn to identify bias, and recognize the power dynamics that shape political narratives and information structures. Through media literacy modules, comparative headline tools, bias spotting activities, and interactive power-mapping features our platform encourages users to move beyond passive consumption. We position critical inquiry as a core political skill, necessary for navigating contemporary information ecosystems.

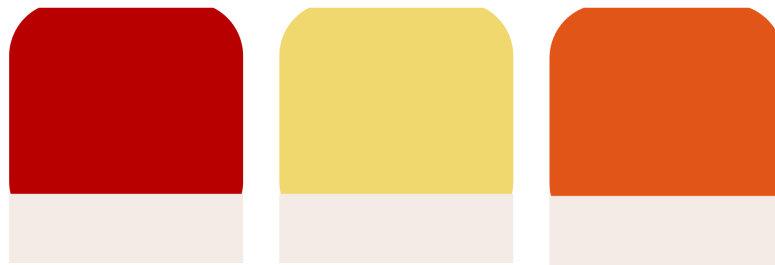
Taken together, these commitments form the ethical and functional backbone of our platform. We want to foster a space where youth voices are respected, political learning is collaborative, and diverse perspectives can coexist without polarization. Helping young people explore their communities and democracy with confidence and purpose, this is a space where curiosity becomes agency.

4.5 Logo and Theme



Our logo features the Ouroboros, the ancient symbol of a serpent consuming its own tail. Traditionally representing destruction, rebirth, and continuity, it captures the constant motion of political life: cycles of crisis, reform, and renewal. For us, the Ouroboros points directly to the problem we aim to confront, a political system that repeatedly circles back on itself, producing endless reforms that often reproduce the very inequalities they claim to address.

At the same time, our Ouroboros symbolizes how we choose to respond to this cycle. It represents a state of perpetual change, where progress and setbacks can coexist, and where political engagement is cumulative rather than fleeting. Lasting transformation depends on passing knowledge, skills, and tools from one generation to the next, so that moments of crisis become opportunities for informed, meaningful action rather than panic. In this way, the loop becomes more than repetition. It becomes a cycle that evolves rather than stagnates, if we choose to use it that way.



Red (hex#: bd0000)

We have chosen the colour red because it represents strength, courage, and urgency. For our platform, the color captures the strength involved in speaking up, organizing, and entering political spaces that often feel closed off to young people. Historically, red has been used to symbolize resistance and collective power, a color to symbolize mobilization and solidarity in public spaces.

Yellow (hex#: f1d971)

Yellow represents happiness, joy, and optimism, making it an ideal choice for our platform focused on youth engagement. This vibrant color embodies youthful energy and creativity, inspiring intellectual curiosity and a sense of adventure. It symbolizes hope and positivity, encouraging young individuals to embrace new experiences and ideas.

Orange (hex#: e35619)

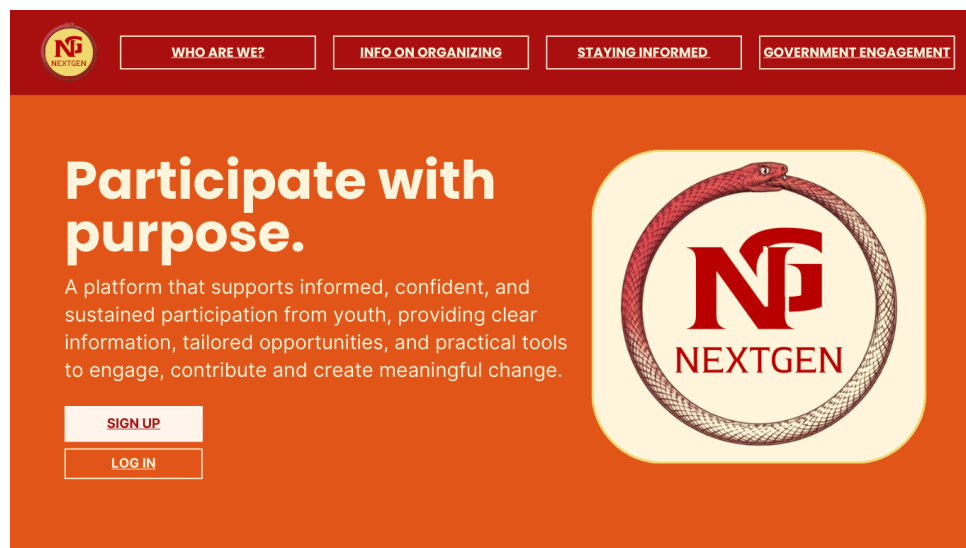
We have chosen the colour orange to reflect our commitment to the Seven Generations Principle, which guided the development of this project. In the Canadian context, orange carries a powerful meaning: it symbolizes honouring Indigenous children,

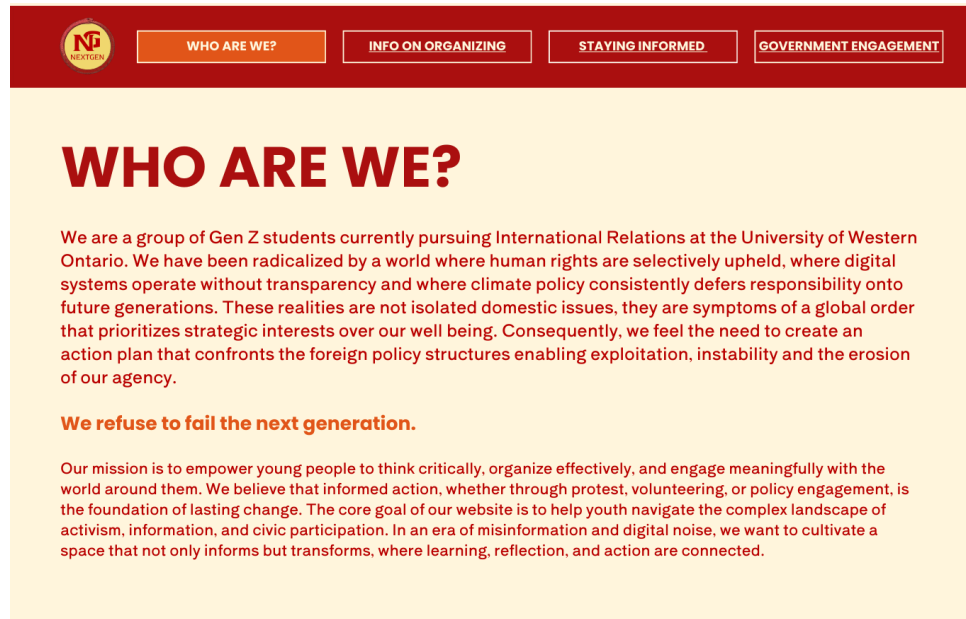
intergenerational responsibility, and a collective commitment to truth, memory, and change. By integrating this colour into the app's visual identity, we aim to signal that our project is rooted in long-term thinking, community care, and accountability to future generations. Orange serves not just as an aesthetic choice, but as a reminder that meaningful changemaking must be guided by respect, responsibility, and the lessons we inherit from those who came before us, with accountability for those who will come after.

4.6 NextGen: Platform Proposal

Website Preview: <https://nextgenn.my.canva.site/uwo-ir>

Please note, the current preview is intended only as an aesthetic and structural guideline for how the website will look and function. It offers a visual sense of the layout, style, and user flow, but it is not a complete product and does not include all planned features, content, or interactive elements. Its purpose is to illustrate the concept and direction of the project, while the full version will expand on this foundation with full functionality and a comprehensive set of tools for users.





4.6.1 Terms and conditions

A full disclaimer, including terms, conditions, and standard liability language, will appear as a site-wide pop-up before users enter the website or open the app. This disclaimer is designed to legally protect us (the creators of the platform) by clearly outlining the source and purpose of any information posted. Most importantly, it emphasizes that the platform does not provide legal advice, nor should any content be interpreted as recommendations for handling legal situations.

It will include the following:

1. Educational Purpose Only

NextGen provides general information for learning and civic awareness. Nothing on the NextGen site is legal advice, professional guidance, or a recommendation to take any specific political or legal action. Users are responsible for how they interpret and use the information.

2. No Legal Advice

Information related to protesting, legal rights, or government processes is not legal advice. Users should always seek help from a licensed lawyer for legal questions

3. No Safety Guarantees or Outcome Guarantees

4. Information on protest safety, volunteering, contacting public officials, media literacy, and civic participation does not guarantee any outcome, result, or level of safety. Users assume all risks when engaging in any activity discussed on the NextGen site.

5. Nonpartisanship

NextGen does not endorse political parties, candidates, advocacy groups, or positions. Examples and case studies are for education only.

6. Accuracy and Updates

Information may not always be complete, accurate, or current. Users should verify important information with official or primary sources.

7. External Links

The NextGen site may link to third-party websites, organizations, or legal guides. These links are for convenience only. We do not control or endorse third-party content and are not responsible for their accuracy, safety, or policies.

8. Privacy and Data

NextGen may collect limited non-sensitive information (such as quiz answers or postal codes for MP lookup). We do not sell or share personal information. Because this is a student project, NextGen is not used for commercial data collection.

9. Age Disclaimer

The NextGen site is intended for youth education. Users under age 13 should only use the NextGen site with a parent, guardian, or educator.

10. Limitation of Liability

To the fullest extent allowed by Ontario law, the creators of NextGen are not liable

for any direct or indirect damages, losses, or harms arising from use of the NextGen site reliance on its information, or participation in activities discussed on NextGen

11. Modifications to Terms

We may change these Terms & Conditions to reflect updates to the project. When terms change, we will update the “Last updated” date and present the revised Terms through a new clickwrap prompt. Continued use of the NextGen site after accepting the updated Terms means you agree to them. Users will always be given the chance to review updated Terms before accepting.

4.6.2 NextGen Section 1: "Information on Organizing"

This section of the website will serve as a comprehensive guide for youth on how to organize effectively and safely outside of formal political channels. It will include practical information on how to protest safely, understand and exercise their rights, find local protests and events, connect with not-for-profit organizations and volunteer opportunities, and learn effective strategies for consumer activism such as boycotting. By providing empowering resources and clear guidance, this section aims to help young people mobilize their communities, advocate for change, and do so in a manner that prioritizes safety, respect, and impact. Ultimately, it will foster youth-led movements that are informed, responsible, and successful in creating positive social change.

Feature	Application	Purpose
How to Protest Safely	Individual page with links and drop downs to resources on how to protest safely from the point of view as protestors. ¹²⁸	The purpose is to provide resources to prevent protestors from getting injured, or risk any

¹²⁸ GSA Network. Protest Toolkit Curriculum. Accessed November 25, 2025.

<https://gsanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Protest-Toolkit-Curriculum-5.pdf>.

; Human Rights Campaign. “Tips for Preparedness, Peaceful Protesting, and Safety.” HRC. Accessed November 25, 2025. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/tips-for-preparedness-peaceful-protesting-and-safety>; Center for Applied Nonviolence. “Nonviolent Demonstration Safety & Training.” Center for Applied Nonviolence. Accessed November 25, 2025.

<https://nonviolencetoolkit.com/nonviolence-toolkit-methods-tactics-nonviolent-demonstration-safety-training>.

		other harms to themselves.
Know Your Rights ¹²⁹	<p>FAQs drop down with common questions (e.g are encampments legal?)</p> <p>Links to The Canadian Constitution not-for-profit comprehensive guide on protesting safely and legally in Canada.¹³⁰</p>	A guide on knowing your rights while protesting helps young people engage in activism safely and confidently by giving them the legal knowledge they often aren't taught in school. It empowers them to stand up for what they believe in while protecting themselves and others from unnecessary risks.
Volunteer Match Tool	A short, interactive quiz identifies each user's interests, skills, and preferred causes. Based on the results, the platform recommends personalized volunteer opportunities and organizations that align with their passions.	To provide meaningful avenues for changemaking beyond protest by connecting youth with aligned organizations, enabling hands-on community involvement, confidence-building, and a sense of local and global belonging.
Non-Profit Map	An interactive map that displays local non-profits and community organizations. Each listing includes key details such as mission statements, focus areas, and contact information.	Helps users discover and connect with groups making a difference in their area.
Volunteer Listings	A curated and regularly updated list of volunteer job postings showcases available opportunities nearby, from one-time events to ongoing commitments. Users can filter by interest, location, or time commitment and apply directly through the website.	By putting all the volunteer information in one place, this tool makes opportunities easy to find, compare, and access, removing the barriers that often stop young people from getting involved. It simplifies the process, making community engagement more approachable

¹²⁹ wsteam, "Almost Half of Canadian Children Don't Know They Have Rights," Children First Canada, November 20, 2020, <https://childrenfirstcanada.org/press-releases/almost-half-of-canadian-children-dont-know-they-have-rights/>. Study showing that 44% of kids are not aware they have rights and 73% don't know what to do if their rights are violated


¹³⁰ Canadian Constitution Foundation, "Know Your Rights: A Guide to Protest in Canada," accessed November 20, 2025, <https://theccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/CCF-Guide-to-Protest-in-Canada-2025-1.pdf>.

Legal Help	Duty Counsel contact info by province and nearest duty counsel office interactive map. ¹³¹	Navigating legal systems can be intimidating, especially for young people who are newly involved in activism or community work. This feature ensures that legal protection is never out of reach.
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4.6.2.1 NextGen Section 1: "Information on Organizing" Images



¹³¹ Legal Aid Ontario, "What Are Duty Counsel?," Legal Aid Ontario, n.d., <https://www.legalaid.on.ca/faq/what-are-duty-counsel/>.



[Volunteer Listings](#)
[Volunteer Match Tool](#)
[Non-Profit Map](#)

Match Quiz

Your name

Email address

What type of role would you be interested in?

☐ Event Support

☐ Admin Assistance

☐ Outreach


Do you have any relevant skills or experience?

How far are you willing to travel (KM)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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[Sign up](#)

Your name won't be shared. Never submit passwords.





[Back](#)

Know Your RIGHTS

→

FAQs

Do I need a permit to protest? ▼

Are encampments illegal? ▼

Can I film or livestream a protest? ▼



[Questions?](#)

[Contact Us](#)

4.6.3 NextGen Section 2: "Staying Informed Politically"

The features below are part of our platform, aimed towards connecting generations and informing users. Outcomes include teaching users to navigate the internet responsibly, connect on issues they're passionate about, facilitate community involvement, and build the critical thinking skills needed to engage with ideas. To ensure a safe and trustworthy environment, the platform will also incorporate anti-misinformation safeguards such as fact-checking partnerships, academic source linking, and greater algorithmic transparency, helping users distinguish credible information from misleading content.

Feature	Application	Purpose
Weekly Global and Canadian Affairs (news) Brief	A short, weekly blog-style post summarizing key stories, and political updates from Canada and around the world.	Increases awareness of current political issues and global news in a manageable format.
"Compare the Headlines" Tool	For major/mass mediatized events, users see 2-4 headlines from different outlets side-by-side with a brief note on tone, framing or wordchoice.	Teach users to spot media framing and political bias by comparing reporting.
"The Middle Ground" Explainers	Short, neutral summaries to map out the main positions on a subject/debate (e.g., climate policy, tuition, foreign policy), showing a spectrum of viewpoints and who holds them.	Reduce polarization by showing that most issues have more than two sides and helping youth understand disagreement without forcing them to pick one.
Bias and Media Literacy Explainers	Users learn about algorithms, framing, and ownership. ¹³² Teaches spotting fake news, propaganda, bots, and echo chambers using simple examples.	Helps youth understand how digital platforms shape what they see online and builds resilience against misinformation and manipulative content.
Human Rights Hub (Articles 19–21)	An interactive page that breaks down the rights to expression, assembly, and political participation with youth-friendly summaries, short scenarios, and links to Canadian resources.	Connect youth identity to political rights and responsibilities, reinforcing political participation as a right.

¹³² Ruppert, Evelyn, Engin Isin, and Didier Bigo. Data Politics. Routledge, 2019.

Activism Case Library	Short case profiles highlight real youth-led, youth-centred or other activism (in Canada and globally), explaining what happened, what tactics were used, and what impact it had.	Show how youth can and have influenced political systems in practice.
Issue-Based Community Groups	Users identify, and select issues that matter to them (e.g. climate, housing, gender justice, human rights) and are shown curated resources, events, recommended organizations and connected with other users in discussion boards (optional); link-out to existing forums/Discords.	Helps youth build a sense of political identity and community around shared issues (regardless of age) on intergenerational issues. (Can also operate without internal discussion boards, suggesting existing forums instead)
Petition and Campaign Integration	A page that aggregates links to verified petitions, campaigns, and advocacy actions from recognized platforms (e.g. House of Commons e-petitions, major NGOs).	Provide direct pathways to participate in ongoing campaigns without the technical or legal burden of hosting petitions directly.
Skills-Building Modules	Designed to build youth political empowerment by strengthening the core skills that allow young people to think critically, understand power, and participate meaningfully in civic life; combining text, simple quizzes, and reflection questions. Each module addresses a different dimension of political capacity: cognitive, emotional, social, and structural	Builds core political skills, critical thinking, recognizing power dynamics, and understanding meaningful versus symbolic participation, in a realistic, lightweight format.
<i>Module 1: Critical Thinking</i>	<p><i>Activities on evaluating sources and bias:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Bias Spotting Game: Users are shown two short social media posts with subtle framing differences; they choose which one is biased and why.</i> - <i>Source Ranking Drag-and-Drop: Users are shown two short social media posts with subtle framing differences; they choose which one is biased and why.</i> 	<i>Strengthen cognitive political skills and support critical thinking development and bias evaluation.</i>

<p><i>Module 2: Empowerment Dimensions</i></p>	<p><i>Activity: Card-based module where each card represents a dimension.</i></p> <p><u><i>Example cards:</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Safe Spaces: "What does a safe political space look like?" + short scenario where users choose how to respond.</i> - <i>Shared Power: A card comparing "Consultation" vs "Co-creation" vs "Tokenism."</i> <p><i>Interactive Element: Flip cards → the front shows the concept; the back shows real examples and a quick reflective question.</i></p>	<p><i>Teach emotional and social dimensions of empowerment and help users identify safe spaces, distinguish tokenism from genuine power-sharing, and reflect on political experiences.</i></p>
<p><i>Module 3: Power, Agency, Dialogue, Justice</i></p>	<p><i>Activities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Visual Maps of Power: Flowcharts showing how decisions are made (school board, city council, parliament).</i> - <i>Empowerment vs Tokenism Quiz: "Is this youth council example empowerment or tokenism?"</i> - <i>Dialogue Practice: A mini-simulator where users choose dialogue strategies (active listening, reframing, identifying shared interests).</i> - <i>Justice Scenarios: Users choose actions in a school or community scenario and see outcomes.</i> 	<p><i>To build structural and relational skills for understanding political institutions, recognizing power dynamics, practicing democratic dialogue, and seeing how youth can influence policy processes.</i></p>
<p>Digital Literacy Online Program</p>	<p>Downloadable slides, handouts, and a simple facilitator guide that youth can use if they want to run a basic digital literacy session for parents, teachers, or community members. No scheduling or matching is run through the platform.</p>	<p>Offers an optional tool for youth who want to share their skills beyond the screen, while keeping the implementation realistic for a small-scale platform.</p>
<p>News Outlet Program</p>	<p>A page listing youth-friendly news, podcast, and explainer sites (e.g. CBC youth pages, explainer-style outlets).</p>	<p>Keeps users connected to broader media ecosystems without promising formal partnerships or real-time feeds that are beyond the platform's capacity.</p>

Visuals of What Power Is, and Who Has It?	Visual diagrams show who makes decisions in settings youth recognize (schools, city councils, federal government, etc.)	Makes abstract power structures visible and ties everyday experiences to formal political institutions.
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4.6.3.1 NextGen Section 2: "Staying Informed Politically" Images

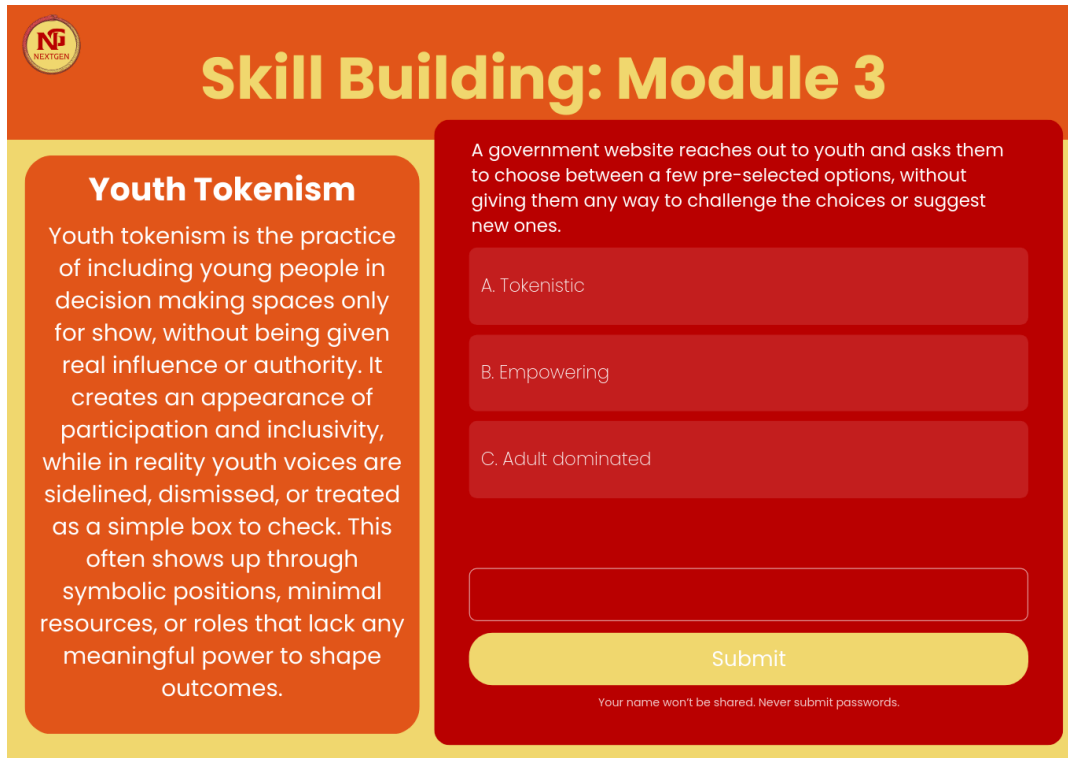
STAYING INFORMED POLITICIALLY

"We can no longer let the people in power decide what is politically possible. We can no longer let the people in power decide what hope is. Hope is not passive. Hope is not blah, blah, blah. Hope is telling the truth. Hope is taking action. And hope always comes from the people"
Greta Thunberg

LEARN	EXPLORE ISSUES	SKILL-BUILDING
Weekly News Briefs	Petition and Campaign Integration	Module 1: Critical Thinking
"Compare the Headlines" Tool	Issue-Based Community Groups	Module 2: Empowerment
The Middle Ground	Activism Cases	Module 3: Power, Agency, Dialogue...
Bias and Media Literacy Explainers		
Human Rights Hub		
Book Recommendations		

Weekly News Briefs

Past News	Financial News	Canadian News	Global News
KNOWLEDGE HUB	Human Rights	United States News	Local News



NG NEXTGEN

Skill Building: Module 3

Youth Tokenism

Youth tokenism is the practice of including young people in decision making spaces only for show, without being given real influence or authority. It creates an appearance of participation and inclusivity, while in reality youth voices are sidelined, dismissed, or treated as a simple box to check. This often shows up through symbolic positions, minimal resources, or roles that lack any meaningful power to shape outcomes.

A government website reaches out to youth and asks them to choose between a few pre-selected options, without giving them any way to challenge the choices or suggest new ones.

☐ A. Tokenistic

☐ B. Empowering

☐ C. Adult dominated

Submit

Your name won't be shared. Never submit passwords.

4.6.4 NextGen Section 3: "Government Involvement and Engagement"

This section of the app will focus on bridging informal forms of youth political engagement with formal participation in Canada's democratic institutions and youth-opinion centered efforts. While many young people express political interest and active participation, through online activism, social media and community organizing, fewer know how to translate that energy into tangible political influence. This section aims to help and encourage youth to move from awareness to impact by giving them more clear and accessible tools to connect with decision-makers, participate in elections, and engage directly with policy processes; especially on global issues such as climate diplomacy, human rights, international development, and reconciliation in foreign policy. The 'Government Involvement and Engagement' section will include a set of integrated features that make participation with Canada's political system more transparent, interactive and approachable, user-friendly for younger users.

Feature	Application	Purpose
MP Lookup Tool	Postal-code search generates MP name, contact info, party affiliation, websites, etc. ¹³³	Makes contacting elected officials simple, accessible and less intimidating to lower the barrier to direct engagement.
Government Contact Integration	Links to GAC social media, email portals, and public inquiry lines. ¹³⁴	Broadens access beyond MPs to the federal executive branch and introduces youth to foreign policy channels.
Message Templates	Pre-built, customizable messages for common issues (climate action, humanitarian aid, Indigenous reconciliation, housing) that can be copied into an email or public inquiry - made for simple adjustment/customization.	Lowers barriers to political communication and advocacy and teaches youth how to effectively format, articulate and frame concerns at a more formal level.
Policy Tracker Feed	Condensed updates on debates, votes, committee activity, policy developments and other youth-relevant updates (e.g. climate, rights, foreign policy).	Helps youth stay informed without navigating complex government sites and encourages ongoing engagement with real policy processes.
How-To: Participate in Democratic Processes	Links to Voter Information Service, Elections Canada, Voter Registration, Students and young electors information, and how to work a federal election. ^{135,136}	Removes confusion around the voting process, encourages turnout and informed participation, promotes civic skill-building through paid roles and hands-on election experience.
First-Timer Voter Checklist	A clear, step-by-step voting guide, outlining what to bring, how to register, what to expect, confirming your riding etc. ¹³⁷	Builds confidence for new voters and reduces anxiety about electoral participation - fears of doing it 'wrong.'

¹³³ House of Commons of Canada, "Find Members of Parliament – Members of Parliament," accessed November 19, 2025, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/members/en>

¹³⁴ Global Affairs Canada, "Contact," accessed November 19, 2025, <https://international.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/corporate/contact>

¹³⁵ Elections Canada, "Student," accessed November 19, 2025, <https://www.elections.ca/content2.aspx?section=stu&lang=e#b2c0>

¹³⁶ Elections Canada, "Find your electoral district," accessed November 19, 2025, <https://www.elections.ca/scripts/vis/FindED?L=e&PAGEID=20>

¹³⁷ Elections Canada, "Register to vote," accessed November 19, 2025, <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=vot&dir=reg&document=index&lang=e>

E-Petition Builder	Guides users through structuring, drafting, gathering initial support, securing necessary sponsors, and formally submitting petitions (built-in feature) ¹³⁸	Makes formal participation accessible to digital activists and creates greater access to a mechanism of policy influence.
Youth Opportunities in the Government Spotlight	Highlights micro-grants, youth councils, consultations, internship or volunteer opportunities. ^{139,140} Filter opportunities by theme and receive notifications when new application cycles open, positions are available or youth-outreach/feedback is open.	Connects youth to institutional pathways of influence and ensures they do not miss time-sensitive opportunities for formal engagement.
Global Engagement Portal	Connects users to UN youth programs, GAC consultations, diplomacy networks.	Situate youth's civic participation within broader global conversations and understand the link between Canada's domestic policy and its international commitments.
How Policy Works Diagram	A short, interactive diagram that illustrates the policy cycle from grassroots movements to parliamentary debates, can link to existing movements that have become policy in the past.	Demystifies government operations and entry points into policy creation.
"A Government Guideline" Policy checklist	An explanation and a blank copy of the checklist we developed for government policy will be provided so that users can easily apply it as an evaluation tool. The explanation outlines how each section of the checklist works, why it matters, and how it aligns with youth-centered policy principles.	Gives users a clear, structured framework they can use to assess any policy, helping them identify strengths, gaps, and areas where youth perspectives may be missing or overlooked.

¹³⁸ House of Commons of Canada, "Petitions," accessed November 19, 2025, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/petitions/en/home/index>

¹³⁹ Government of Canada, "Canada Service Corps Micro-grants," last modified October 22, 2025, accessed November 19, 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/youth/canada-service-corps/grants.html>

¹⁴⁰ Government of Canada, "Become a member – Prime Minister's Youth Council," last modified July 25, 2025, accessed November 19, 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/prime-ministers-youth-council/become-member.html>

4.6.4.1 NextGen Section 3: "Government Involvement and Engagement" Images




The screenshot shows the 'MESSAGE TEMPLATES' section of the NextGen website. The header includes the NextGen logo and the title 'MESSAGE TEMPLATES'. Below the title, there is a paragraph explaining the purpose of the templates. To the right, there is a call-to-action button. Below the text, there is a table with three columns: 'Issue', 'Description and resources', and 'Points of contact'.

We offer a set of action templates built around the issues that matter most to youth today. As youth priorities shift, the templates will be updated to reflect emerging concerns.

Contact us if there is a specific issue you want to see a template for!


Issue	Description and resources	Points of contact
Climate Change Policy		
Human Rights Based Investment		
Education Funding		
Rental Unit Laws		



POLICY EVALUATION CHECKLIST

The NextGen team created a checklist to help policymakers evaluate the quality, inclusivity, and long-term vision of their policies through the lens of the Seven Generations Principle and youth-informed engagement. We are making this tool available so users can also use it to evaluate policies, using the checklist as a practical framework for pinpointing strengths, gaps, and places where youth perspectives may be absent or undervalued.

Click to Download →



5. Conclusion

Canada's foreign policy landscape is shifting rapidly, and the state can no longer afford to exclude those who will inherit its long-term consequences. As global shocks intensify, whether climate-drive, geopolitical, digital, or humanitarian, the political behaviors of young people have become a central indicator as to where policy must adapt. Youth engagement is not a social trend; it is a structural reality that reflects shifting norms of participation, communication, and legitimacy. Canada's credibility in a volatile international environment depends on embedding these shifts directly into its foreign-policy foundation.

Globally, states are adapting how they govern in response to public pressure, rapid information flows, and a generational demand for openness. Canada faces these same pressures at home. Young people are organizing faster than institutions can respond, mobilizing across borders and using digital tools to challenge policy processes that remain

slow, opaque, and largely insulated from broader public input. Taken together, these forms of political expression point to a deeper intergenerational disconnect in how policy problems are understood and addressed. Rebuilding that dialogue is essential. The question is no longer whether youth engagement matters, but whether Canada is prepared to treat it as a permanent and indispensable facet of policymaking.

Adapting to this new landscape requires more than symbolic outreach; it demands mechanisms that bring youth into the earliest stages of policy development. This is where accountability, transparency, and participation must converge. Meeting youth where they are—in community spaces, digital networks, and transnational activist movements—strengthens the legitimacy of Canada’s foreign policy and aligns it with emerging global realities. Youth offer insights shaped by lived experiences such as climate instability, digital vulnerability, economic uncertainty, and globalized solidarity movements. Overlooking these perspectives limits Canada’s ability to plan ahead at a moment when forward-looking governance is essential.

Ultimately, the future of Canadian foreign policy depends on its willingness to evolve. The global environment is moving toward greater complexity, faster information cycles, and rising expectations for ethical governance. Youth are already responding to this reality through activism, digital organizing, and community leadership. The task now is for Canada to align its policy with the political conditions that already define the Gen Z generation. By institutionalizing youth participation, embedding intergenerational accountability, and strengthening transparency at every stage of policymaking, Canada can build a foreign policy that is forward-looking, morally responsible, and resilient. Doing so will not only enhance Canada’s international standing but ensure its global actions reflect the values and futures of the generations who will live with their consequences.

In an era defined by uncertainty, long-term thinking is no longer optional. For Canada, integrating youth into the foundation of foreign policy is not symbolic, it is necessary.

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