



# The Power Logics of Youth: A Case Study of Canadian Arab Youth

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## Abstract

Power logics are those principles underlying the pursuit of political and social influence. Many youth are politically purposeful and driven by the search for empowerment, and the desire to create impact and advance political and social gains through their activism. Since youth represent the new generation building movements, it is very important that social science research investigate the principles spurring their action. In this paper, we examine a specific youth demographic, Canadian Arab youth, and investigate the reasons, conditions, and principles of their involvement, and how big the gap is in better understanding them.

**Keywords:** Agency; Youth Studies; Civic Engagement; Political Participation; Citizenship; Arab Youth

## Introduction

In this paper, we argue that Canadian Arab youth<sup>1</sup> are politically purposeful and driven by the search for empowerment, and the desire to create impact, have influence, and advance political and social gains through their activism. Their citizenship-affirming behavior is rooted in their childhood and adolescent experiences where they learned from elders how to value community and collectivized action [1]. We argue that Canadian Arab youth are driven by several motivations, what we call 'power logics': the principles underlying their pursuit of political and social influence. Arab youth who pursue influence through specific systems of thought, reasoning, or principled action are expressing mature political functioning. When engaged in meaningful political action, when contributing to important conversations in the public sphere, and when participating in initiatives to create transformative change, they already wield power. Since they represent the new generation building movements who lead and will continue to lead into the future, it is very important that social science research investigate the principles spurring their action and their 'why' – the purpose-driven motivations of Canadian Arab youth activists – what they gain and lose through

participation, what motivates them and what fuels their sense of power and ownership over their lives and their work. Implicit in this study is the recognition that political subjectivities of youth are multi-faceted and sufficient in themselves in that they do not need to be compared to the subjectivities of people called adults to have meaning.

We argue that the civically engaged activities of Arab youth have political relevance, scope, and impact. Their impact is not explained by how their efforts are perceived and the degree to which they are acknowledged, instead it is measured by the specific activities in which they are partaking. Arab youth thus engage in activities whose implementation is often not only lacking support, but often blunted by a system that disregards and fears them. Thus, recognition for and the *outcomes* of their efforts in political and material terms are not measures of the extent of their political participation, their level of interest in getting involved, or their political and social insights, how much power they wield, nor what drives them. Like all youth, Arab youth, in fact, need to be asked what drives them. They have impact, even if they do not occupy the traditional sites of power because they make the traditional sites

<sup>1</sup>For our analysis, the 'youth' category are those cohorts ages 12-29 years of age. Our qualitative analysis in this paper examines the rationales of Canadian Arab youth ages 18-29 years.

of power take notice. What they do, especially when their action faces social and political indifference in their communities on one end of the support spectrum to outright and active denial of their mobilizations on the other end of the spectrum, is a measure of their political participation and a reference point for where their logics of power reside. What youth are doing is evidence of their political commitments and influence.

Here, we are investigating a specific youth demographic, Canadian Arab youth, and through nation-wide surveys asking why they get involved, what the conditions are for their action and affect, what they are responding to, what their principles for action are, and how big our gap is in better understanding them. Through this knowledge, we are better able to create the conditions for increased political participation and trust for traditionally marginalized groups such as Arab youth whose participation supports the maintenance of healthy democracies. This understanding is built, first, from understanding their motivations/ modus operandi, their why. Why do youth do what they do? What is the reasoning for, and where and for/in what do youth invest their power, energies, and efforts [2-4].

In this paper, we rely upon qualitative data gathered in a broad national survey conducted in 2016 to shed light on the power logics and civic engagement motivations of Canadian Arab Youth ages 18-29 years living in 12 Canadian cities (n = 867). The survey queried youth on a number of issues including their political interests, voting preferences, volunteer experiences, their media use, and their experiences on campus. Participants were not randomly selected, however despite not being representative, they are generalizable to the general Arab youth population in Canada because of the size of the sample, the range of Canadian provinces and locales represented by the responses and the method in which we gathered responses. For the survey, we sampled among Canadian Arab youth populations by having delegates walk around hang-outs popular for this youth demographic including: shisha bars, cafes, restaurants, Arab supermarkets, and universities frequented by Arab youth by wearing t-shirts that said, "Arab and under 29? Earn \$25". This action brought participants to our delegates to fill out the survey. As reimbursement for their time, youth participants were given a \$25 gift certificate. In order to avoid selection biases, we did not approach places of worship, instead we preferred to convenience sample from places that a wide variety of Arab youth would congregate or pass through. We gathered nearly 1000 surveys, of which 867 were viable responses for a population size of 523,235 Canadians of Arab ancestry at the time the fieldwork was conducted [5,6]. Factoring in that our goal was to speak with Arab youth, the representativeness of the sample size we attained was extremely high. The data for this paper is drawn from the short answer responses to some of the questions.

### Power Logics: The Ways that Youth Are Studied and Perceived

The concepts of power and youth are not widely seen as complementary. First, there is great disagreement in the youth political participation and civic engagement literature about how to classify, describe, or differentiate people who are perceived to be neither children nor adults. Researchers are asking why should youth be studied and what is important to them. 'Youth' has been described as a psychological developmental stage of people who have not yet reached the maturity of adults, but who nonetheless may bear some of the responsibilities of adults [7]. Within the course of development framework, young people pass through various thresholds in a cumulative process (a "step-by-step journey") to reach a new phase called 'adulthood' [8]. Other research asks what 'adulthood' means when young people are delayed passing into it, how youths' sense of uncertainty about the future influences their independent decision-making and work culture relations, and how to make sense of the longer periods of social dependence contemporary youth have on their families and communities [9]. Mixed in these changing dynamics is the perception among researchers of politics that young people are becoming increasingly detached from a sense of citizenship or citizen-based responsibility (or that their sense of citizenship is under-going significant transformations), the political sphere, and political institutions, and that their ways of learning and socializing will affect enormously future political ideas and practices [8].

One of the most significant issues facing youth is the pervasive focus on their deficits as politically-oriented actors in terms of values, principles, behaviors, priorities, and activities. It has been argued, for example, that youth do not place significant emphasis on the vote as a way to be politically participatory because they question the efficacy of voting for political change and often lacked trust in political representatives and political institutions (Dermody and Hanmer-Lloyd [10] for example look at how four different types of trust-distrust can predict voting behavior; Haid [11])<sup>2</sup>. As a consequence, their prioritization of other forms of political action is subject to intense public scrutiny. This scrutiny is partly related to a general devaluation of what young people think, say, and do because they are young people and their inconspicuousness is manufactured, but also due to widespread uncertainty about how to link non-vote-related politically participatory inputs with quantifiable democratic outputs such as the enhancement of democratic institutions. Hart and Gullen [3] rightly note that political activism is a set of overlapping activities; it is a social-psychological phenomena shaped by context and the idiosyncratic tendencies (or political subjectivities) of the youth themselves expressed through demonstrations, protests, and social organization (67). Activism, moreover, is a highly loaded

<sup>2</sup>Youth political mobilization during the 2020 American presidential election and the 2021 Georgia Senate run-offs pivotally shifted the outcomes of those elections with some early estimates suggesting that 17% of the total presidential vote share came from youth. During the American presidential election, the youth vote increased by 10% and Joseph Biden received 61% of the support from people ages 18-29 years. Youth were the most engaged in battleground states. In Michigan, for example, the youth vote tripled since 2016 [12].

concept that has no clear referent; each form of activism may be unique and incommensurate with other forms (73).

Voice has been theorized as the “expression [and] recognition by powerful others and inclusion of that voice in consequential decisions”, and “client power” has been defined as “holding accountable those institutions that provide services” [4]. We see ‘voice’ as expression regardless of how it is recognized. Youth learn in using their voices that cultures are organized around interdependencies, that when they speak, they are building a range of relationships, and “that their voice is part of a chorus of other voices and that their identity is part of a larger community with a history and traditions” (104). Youths’ theories about the system are refracted through the lenses of the various groups to which they belong, associate, and identify (105) and when youth feel like they have an important voice and are not heard through traditional channels [13], they will find alternative methods of broadcasting their views.

Immigrant youth or youth born to racialized parents who are immigrants face different deficit perceptions. They engage in many forms of civic participation and yet their activities are politicized. Questions persist about whether immigrants originating from non-democratic contexts have the capacity to exercise democratic capacities, or when their street protests in their home countries and in Canada are celebrated, it is asked why they do not vote with more frequency in Canada and/or join political parties. First, many people in non-democratic contexts are socialized to find the most accessible way to exert their power. In political systems that are closed, voting is neither free nor competitive, and where public discourse is impeded, sometimes the only avenue such people have to be democratic is to take their voices to mass protests [14].

Focusing on a life stage view of youth that is distinct from the adult stage, Kirpitchenko and Mansouri [15] argue that the identities of migrant youth are very fluid owing to the transitions they experience both in being youth progressing into adulthood and because of their very personal journey to adjust to life in a new country. Immigrant youths’ identity formation is particularly susceptible to the influences of their networks. When they arrive as immigrants in democratic societies, it takes time for them to acclimatize to the new opportunities available for exercising power. Researchers have found that immigrant activist mobilizations are more effective when launched by ethnic associations rather than national associations. Immigrant activists therefore mobilize differently if they are living in locales that have the power and infrastructure to support ethnic associations. This is especially the case when immigrant youth are allowed to speak their native tongue, develop civic knowledge and skill-sets surrounded by familiar interactions and supported by cultural interlocutors, exchange transnational and transcultural practices with others, and explore second generation biculturalism [7]. Immigrant activism facilitated through ethnic associations helps young people find their collective voice and speak collectively for the communities to which they associate and it allows them to

engage in the activities that promote social change on their terms, achieve a greater degree of integration which helps them to feel a greater sense of belonging, demand fairer working conditions, and utilize multicultural services (Ibid).

How the power logics of youth can be measured is a multidimensional question because political participation is a highly complex set of human activities shaped by multiple and incommensurate inputs, decisions, and forces. For example, one way to ascertain the viability or sustainability of political participatory behavior or political reasoning among people is to examine voice. How and in what ways do people, as citizens and non-citizens, exercise their voices in the public sphere? Sometimes the reception of the youth voice is actively undermined by governments, and as a consequence, political logics and principles drive youth resistance.

Another measure or determinant of participation is level of motivation. Motivated youth who inspire people into action and help to keep politicians accountable for their decisions enhance the qualities of citizenship, the degree of *communitas* and solidarity among, and mutual referentialism between people, and invigorate the capacities of denizens to vocalize their interests, concerns, and needs [16]. Wayne Clark [16] points out that political participation is disparate because forms of participatory action are not created or exercised equally across all sectors of society. Some political participation is motivated to challenge political elites and representatives, and hold them accountable, but some will not be oriented in that manner.

Over the past four decades, researchers have been increasingly interested in ways that individuals and groups shape the political sphere by expanding the corpus of political participatory activities beyond vote and elections-related action. For example, scholars frequently treat people’s engagement with the media: writing letters to the editor, authoring op-eds, inviting the media to community events, being interviewed by journalists seeking to know more about an issue, and active reading and engagement with textual material (either online or in print) as forms and measures of civic engagement and/or political participation. Such activities are seen to support a healthy democratic political system, civility, and an enriched public sphere that make societal engagement and dialogue possible. Tossutti [17] argues that mature and newly formed democracies are consolidated through associational action which includes forms of civic involvement and capacity-building in associations. Flanagan and Levine [18] contend that immigrant youth activism is a measure of their integration in society, and thus a barometer for the health of a democracy.

### Exploring What Motivates Youth to Be Civically Engaged

There is an emerging literature that examines youth political participatory motivation. Kirpitchenko and Mansouri [15] argue that young people’s attitudes, values, and perceptions drive

and shape, and also inhibit active participation. Studying youth participation biographies, Lüküslü and Walter [19] argue that in-depth analysis is required to better understand how individual youth integrate into formal political structures while being referred to as 'citizens in the making'. They note that young people actively construct their subjective identities and build their life stories through disparate forms of participation. Through qualitative engagement, researchers can learn how and why participation is subjectively relevant to youth, why youth identify with such forms of participation, and how youth invest themselves in activities that take place in public spaces (Ibid.)

Research indicates that youth are motivated to be civically engaged based on their personal values, their community concerns, their level of understanding and/or knowledge about an issue, the nature of the cause, the group of people involved, pursuit of career dividends from participation and professional development skills, personal development, self-esteem considerations, and their social, political, financial, and environmental concerns [7]. Kahne and Westheimer [13] summarize what we call the power logics of youth: excise responsibility to help others, commitment to community involvement, desire to work for justice, wanting to volunteer, having an interest in politics, and seeking civic and leadership efficacy. Martelli [8] notes that youth are moved by campaigns for ecological protection, human rights-oriented activism, protection of social and common goods, and political issues.

In their study, Ballard et al. [2] examined the motivations of American youth participating in political and non-political forms of volunteering and compared the civic motivations of racialized and immigrant youth in Asian and Latino communities. They argue that while contextual and structural predictors are very important to understand youth participation, the analysis of individual motivations sheds light on their personal concerns and interests and supports multi-dimensional explorations of youth experiences and perspectives. By investigating the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of youth, motivations that are driven by concerns for self ('make friends') and concerns for other ('we have a duty to do something about issues that matter to us'), civic opportunities can be better envisioned that excite and drive up youth participation.

Rather than being alienated and disengaged, we have found that Canadian Arab youth adhere to what Cancilini (2001) calls the "sociality" interpretations of citizenship. They challenge the governmentality technologies of the privatized state in order to reform it, and adopt liberal platitudes about citizenship where they re-imagine themselves in the Canadian public sphere, and inject themselves in that public sphere to support new social and political orders in order to support Canadian "communitarian self-making". Many youth build power logic frameworks and act in order to be included in the making of civic space, but they also seek to redefine what 'being included' means in concrete ways and

to ensure that 'being included' is on their terms (21, 154-155 cited in Maira and Soep, xxv).

The power to act and to speak emerges centrally and most forcefully from an individual's perceived capacity to belong and by the degree of that belonging in a society or group. Martelli [8] writes that young people currently approach citizenship in two sets of ways: first, through rights-claims demanding support, inclusion, and protection. They also approach citizenship by identifying with duties, specific values, and sociocultural norms, and through active and/or bottom-up (practice, action, choices, and identity mobilization) and passive and/or top-down (status-pursuing and promotion by affiliation) forms of citizenship or common purpose mobilization [8,21,22]. The meanings that they ascribe to citizenship in terms of rights and responsibilities, belonging, identity, solidarity, consensus, trust, social integration, and culture, as individual and collective experiences are back-dropped by the either alienating or supportive practices of institutions (Ibid: 425).

Researchers have found that Arab youth are subject to a complex array of social and political forces that cause them to question where their commitments lie and where they ought to lie. Tarawnah [22] and Dahdal [23] note that the identity formation of Arab youth is having less to do with their exposure to Arabic cultural content and more with the ways that Arab identities abroad navigate the optimisms, pessimisms, and uncertainties of home country political gains and losses. Arab youth must inquire into what it means to be Arab in the face of the coup stamping out fledgling democratic impulses in Egypt, the implosion of Syria, the rise and fall of Daesh (and the menacing potential of its comeback), rising sectarianism, and resilient authoritarianism, democracy-inhibiting rentiers systems, and highly corrupt political patronage networks. Such issues leave the maintenance of political, ideological, and cultural traditions and status quos in question. Khouri [24] notes, drawing on Van Essen [25], that immigration can cause a 'double mourning' in adolescents where there are two losses: the loss of the value system of the home country that is left behind and the loss of the childhood that is left behind. In Canada, we see not a 'double mourning' but rather an attempt among Arab youth to weave their various identities and their past and present together into a metissage Finn Melissa and Bessma Momani [26].

According to Wray-Lake et al. [27], Arab youth whose parents are better educated are exposed to more news information which helps them to better express their frustrations in Arabs being labelled and type-casted as 'enemies' of the State, but they also interpret personal experiences of discrimination through a political lens. In their study, much like young Black Americans, Arab American adolescents doubt the responsiveness of their government to people like them, and this feeling was pronounced among those who feel that negative stereotypes about Arabs unfairly marginalize them. Youth is a formative period for citizenship, they write, where the identity is rendered highly

salient, a period when “young people explore who they are, what groups they belong to, and how they and others like them fit into the social order;” and, in the process, form their individual identities and relationship to collective identities [28,29].

### The Power Logics of Canadian Arab Youth

The present study explores Canadian Arab youths’ motivation to be civically engaged by examining the logics of power they articulate. Many of these power logics relate to grand, highly existential motivations for Arab youth in a society often expressing ambivalence about its embracing of Arab identity. In Marzana et al.’s [7] study of immigrant youth in Italy, they found that the youth themselves do not differentiate involvement in ethnic associations with involvement in national associations. Their main priority is to do something good (be motivated by their values), disseminate information about Africa (build knowledge), interact with people from different origins (socialize), and express and explore the contours of being a self-realized person (for them, in doing what is needed to enhance their lives on their terms). We have found similar motivations among Canadian Arab youth for why they take action in civic engagement activities. In fact, regarding political *modus operandi*, we theorize that because Canadian Arab youth have a natural affinity for sociality and collective life, it is not a reductionism to argue that Arab youth grow up in family-centric and community-centric environments, they are well-suited for the public domain. Their political motivations arise from an ingrained comfort with sociality. The unanticipated and uncontrolled feedback that they receive from putting sound and logical ideas into social spaces means that their political reflections and actions are driven and sharpened considerably by input outside of themselves, from interaction, collaboration, and debate, and then become the basis for their political impact [1]. Their penchant for sociality and their political motivation become co-constituting.

### Have a Voice and Speak Up for Others

One of the key reasons that Canadian Arab youth get involved is to have a voice, speak for the downtrodden, and express their views and concerns for the communities to which they identify and belong. Being able to express their social and political ideas and be heard by others is core to their political activism. A female respondent to the study with family origins in Morocco says that her central motivations for acting politically include having her voice heard, and knowing that people in her community (especially the marginalized people she is fighting for) are backing her up and supporting her efforts. She seeks to use her “privileges to fight for the oppressed”. A Lebanese woman respondent says that she gets involved in volunteering and civic programs because she feels the “need to demand my rights and the rights of those that cannot fend for themselves” and that this work is about “giving a voice to the voiceless.” Sherrod, Torney-Purta, and Flanagan [29,30] note that “altruism cannot be the only motivation underlying political action. Politics also reflects working for one’s group interests and contesting for power. Whether the motivation is for contesting

power or acting on behalf of the common good, taking political action implies that an individual sees his or her life and goals connected with those of heterogeneous others” (8).

A Palestinian male respondent said that he votes because it gives him a voice on issues that matter to him and because voting inculcates in him a sense of belonging and community. Drawing upon a sense of the gravitas of being a citizen, a youth of Egyptian descent writes that he gets involved partly because politics is his field of study, but also because “I have a voice and it needs to be heard.” Another Egyptian male respondent argues that civic action has an impact not only on the collective or community, but also on oneself, writing that he gets involved “because I believe in change” stating that even if people are good, the change that they support can also make them better people. For one Algerian woman, her political engagement is driven by a sense of gratitude to be living in a country that gives her the right to free speech and freedom to act. She says that she believes in the power of the people. A woman with a multi-national Arab ancestry writes that she participates because she comes “from a country where women have some-to-no say” and that, as a racialized individual in Canada, she wants her voice and Arab women’s voices generally to be heard, and for Arab women’s concerns “to be considered and not overlooked”. A similar view was expressed by a woman from Sudan who said that she wants to have an impact on political processes and give a voice to Africans, Arabs, Muslims, and women. Many Arab youth express the idea that their presence and participation in social spaces is an effective way to counter racism and discrimination in Canadian society. The previously quoted woman writes that she gets involved in community events to counter racism, “I think by participating, engaging with others to raise awareness of the discrimination we are facing...can prevent certain situations.”

### Increase the Visibility of Arabs and Immigrants

Another prominent motivation of Canadian Arab youth is to increase the visibility of Arabs and to reclaim their Arab identity in the face of Islamophobia and xenophobia. Islamophobia and xenophobia in Canada are not brewing in the corners of society, but are very much a part of the fabric of Canadian society. Arab youth feel palpably the degree of social ambivalence many communities in the country hold towards Arab culture and identity and seek to rectify this ambivalence by having a civic presence. A woman writes that “as Arab Canadians, I think we need to be more visible and to prove that social issues matter”. Another woman respondent captures this view aptly when she writes that “as an Arab Canadian, I think we need to be more visible and to prove that social issues matter.” One Algerian man writes in French (translated) that he seeks to combat religious dogmas and anti-liberalism ideologists, and that he seeks to improve the place of French-speakers in Quebec, create social harmony, and support the integration of immigrants. A different Algerian man supports these views, saying that he wants to “move things forward in Quebec because this province remains, in my opinion, less open

than other Canadian provinces". An Algerian woman writes that she wants to be "able to decide the narrative of my identity...[to be] able to offer an honest perspective about Arabs and Muslims." Seeking to create the conditions for Arabs to have greater opportunities and enjoy greater acceptance are motivations that feature heavily in the written responses of the survey as well. A Tunisian woman effectively summarizes what Arab youth want from Canadian society: for Canada to be more 1) "Accepting [of] differences; accepting the other and respecting others' opinions and choices; 2) Giving of equal opportunities to immigrants: we have graduate diplomas, our competencies are ignored; it is sad to be put aside for having immigrated!"

### Keep the Government in Check and Shape the Direction of Policy

When Canadian Arab youth participate, it is very important to them that their efforts help to keep the government in check and shape the direction of public policies and practices that govern their own lives, their community, and Canadian society at large. One Tunisian man summed this view up when he writes, "I think it's important to be involved in the decision making processes especially when it comes to something as crucial as the governance of the country you live in." One female respondent in our study indicated that she contributed civically because she believed that her participation has a direct impact on how she will be treated in Canada. Another woman with ancestry in Palestine writes that she gets involved because of "politicians and parties can effect policies that can change the way we live [such as, for example, giving] funding to certain groups, etc."

Many Canadian Arab youth feel a strong connection to the Middle East as their ancestral homeland and are highly interested in changing how Canada engages this homeland. One of the women respondents says that it is very important to her to know "what politicians hold for my adoptive country, [at] both...federal and provincial levels." A Palestinian woman says that she wants to know why countries go to war, the major ideas that justify such action and what the "big plan" is. A Lebanese man writes that "In Canada, I feel that different political parties can change foreign policy, which is what I really care about". What politicians think and what they do matters because "Innocent people [are] dying because of these political issues." Addressing politicians, one Algerian man writes, "Maybe look for a way not to go to war on the one who has nothing to do [with an escalating conflict situation]."

The motivation therefore is to help shape social and political policy-making, so that, on the one hand, Canada is not creating policies that negatively affect Arabs abroad, but also, on the other hand, so that the Canadian government is creating laws and advancing political decisions that make it safe for Arabs in Canada. One woman takes the perspective of not only wanting to shape policy for current generations of Arabs, but for the future ones as well, cognizant that those future generations will include her own

children, saying that she gets involved because she wants excise "to know [that her] loved ones and [her] future family will be able to live in a comfortable, safe, and accepting world." Speaking about why he votes, one man writes that he is "motivated by the fact that these politicians can bring change to Canada and affect not only the current generation, but the future ones as well. I want to make Canada more diverse and remove laws and regulations that limit this. I am concerned about the environment and impacts that society faces due to government actions."

Canadian Arab youth want democratic governance and accountability. As one woman of Jordanian and Palestinian descent puts it, "We all deserve to implement our rights on those who govern us, as is it our responsibility to keep them in check and hold them responsible for their actions because they represent and work for the people." A Lebanese man is interested in how social change influences the "efficiency and feasibility of legislation." Another participant notes that they get involved because they want to know their rights as a Canadian and the services provided to their community by their Member of Parliament. A woman with ancestry in Tunisia defends the importance of the popular oversight: "I like knowing who and how I am represented politically. I like knowing how my tax money is used. I like keeping a close tab on my rights, liberties and the leadership in my country" and another woman writes that she contributes motivated "To fix the corruption I see within governments." A Syrian man notes that "Citizen participation is the basis of democracy and voting allows [me] to strengthen a political party which represents my interests best."

### Transform Society for the Better and Fulfil One's Obligation as a Citizen

Canadian Arab youth often grow up in very family-centered and community-centered social milieus. For some, this creates an imperative in their minds to contribute to the betterment of Arabs, but for many others, they feel a sense of responsibility to transform society itself for the better. One Lebanese man captures this sentiment when he writes that he is motivated to create "a safer and healthy environment for all Canadians, regardless of race, gender, or religion" and an Iraqi woman completes this picture when she writes: "Personally I am only locally engaged, my motivation stems from wanting to create a positive experience for all in Canada," while a youth from Morocco is driven by "The feeling of duty towards my community and the desire to put my energy at the service of people." An Iraqi woman drives home her belief that while imperfect, Canada gives her the freedom to create positive changes. One of the reasons that she gets involved is "To make a difference in our country, because I can. I have the power to be involved and the obligation as a citizen".

A woman of Syrian and Lebanese descent is motivated by human rights violations, "I think it's important to think as a global citizen and speak up or stand against what you see as wrong" and

another woman with the same ancestry writes that “Spreading awareness about important causes make a very big difference even if it changed one person.” Expressing and validating his own vision for Canada, a Libyan man writes that he wants to participate and be involved because he loves “this country” and because he realizes that “if my country of birth is not home to me, this is the only home I get. And it should be as great as I aspire it to be.” Speaking about the importance of supporting all people, especially those who are marginalized, a Palestinian woman writes that she is energized in her work to ensure “there is justice for all citizens and residents in Canada” and that she seeks to empower and provide equality “for people of color, particularly of color.”

The desire to improve society is expressed repeatedly by Canadian Arab youth and they adopt different ways to achieve those objectives. One Tunisian man truly summarizes many of the approaches taken by this demographic of youth including improving service delivery, helping to build infrastructures of compensation and responsibility, and collaborating with others in the management of organizations, and helping to ensure people are not victimized. He writes that he is “Working hard to improve the services offered to citizens, accelerate the procedures. Improving the staff of hospitals, increasing hourly wages and imposing more taxes on companies and less on people. Favoring the work of organization, participating in citizen congress to provide more information regarding laws and procedures to prevent [people] from being victims lacking information.”

### Take a Genuine Interest in Politics and Social Justice

Canadian Arab youth originate from many countries that lack social justice protections, the rule of law, and freedom from arbitrary arrest. They are cognizant that they have a social justice role to play and seek to exercise this capacity in Canada. One Syrian man captures this view succinctly when he writes, “I love what I do. I am able to make a difference through my identity and that pushes [me] to create safer spaces for others.” An Egyptian male respondent adds that he get civically involved “Because you do not have to be politicians to make change.” We found through our study of Canadian Arab youth that some of the most impassioned youth are those originating from Palestine. Since they or their family members experience or have experienced the brutality of the Israeli occupation of Palestine first hand, social justice is expressed as an issue that animates their very being. This view is captured by one Palestinian women respondent that she is motivated by her “interest in social justice. I feel as if living an oppressed/unjust childhood in Gaza, and coming to Canada sparked my interest in politics. My experiences really motivated me to pursue an interest in social justice and awareness, which led me to becoming politically engaged.”

### Promote Boycotts and Engage in Political Consumerism

The literature on youth political participation finds that political consumerism such as boycotting allows youth to bypass

governments and corporations in an attempt to change the unethical practices of governments and companies and increase corporate social responsibility [31]. Political consumerism has a long and widespread history among diaspora Arab communities. Palestinian youth, and those youth that support the Palestinian cause often invest themselves in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement which advocates for a complete capitalistic denunciation of the Israeli government through boycotts of Israeli products, divestment from Israel and an end to all aid including monetary aid, industrial and corporate contracts, and the purchase and/or giving of war munitions, and the application of sanctions on the Israeli economy in order to hold the state accountable for its war crimes and apartheid policies. In the Middle East, youth extend the BDS movement to American-made products because of American government support for the State of Israel [32]. Hart and Gullen [3] note that “disillusionment may be the emotional fuel for lines of action” (77). Disillusionment and channeled outrage are important drivers of Arab youth activists’ work to defend Palestinian rights.

There are many reasons that Canadian Arab youth support the BDS movement as social justice activism to support the human rights of Arabs and people of the Middle East, but centrally, the motivation is prompted by a sense of obligation that the free speech infrastructure and other civil liberties in Canada should be utilized to bring attention to the Israeli government’s violations of international law. In other words, they feel that they have an obligation to exercise their Canadian Charter rights to help change the Canadian policy narrative on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. While several students noted that they were involved in helping their students’ unions pass motions recognizing the BDS movement, and ensuring that pro-Palestinian speakers and events about Israeli apartheid were not being shut down, one youth of Jordanian descent described the importance of engaging the politicians in Canada:

We have a privilege here in Canada, and that is the ability to voice our concerns to our representatives in parliament. Through peaceful protests, and other forms of activism (e.g., boycotts of products, online and in-person activism and awareness programs, contacting political leaders/parties) we have the ability to have a government that represents the people. I take advantage of this freedom by voting, constantly learning about party platforms, and discussing political social and economic trends with family and friends. It’s complex, engaging, and a great way to learn more about our country and its role abroad, as well as to learn about the views of our colleagues and friends.

Canadian Arab youth build logics of power for social justice despite some very daunting challenges including having their pro-Palestine events shut down by administrators at their academic institutions, and facing a Canadian policy environment that continues to marginalize Palestinian voices and claims.

## Conclusion

Canadian Arab youth draw on several principles and social norms to build critical mass around and create influence on issues that matter to them. We call these principles their 'power logics': 1) Have a voice and speak up for others; 2) Increase the visibility of Arabs and immigrants; 3) Keep the government in check and shape the direction of policy; 4) Transform society for the better and fulfil one's obligation as a citizen; 5) Take a genuine interest in politics and social justice; and 6) Promote boycotts and engage in political consumerism. When Arab youth get involved, they are highly purposeful and are able to articulate why they get involved, how they hope to benefit from their activities, and what they often sacrifice in order to move principles into action. They use participation in public spaces as a place and a vehicle for representation, recognition, and visibility [8, 33-35].

Too often youth get associated with the general creep of political apathy that afflicts people in states of privilege and when society is not in crisis. As McIntosh and Youniss [1] note, politics frequently involves conflict with the interests and ideologies of other groups of citizens. Political engagement is voluntary. "People don't have to – and many don't want to – enter the rough and tumble of the public arena. In fact, rational choice theory proposes that in most cases, payoff is higher for non-participation than for participation...unless citizens find relevance in political engagement, they simply won't participate [...] An essential part of political engagement...involves learning to join into a collectivity of like-minded people who, together, generate sufficient resources to change people or practice" (27-28). It is therefore very interesting and inspiring to learn from speaking directly with Canadian Arab youth that they are motivated to participate politically by a wide variety of noble goals and we have found from other studies Finn Melissa, Kira Williams, and Bessma Momani [36] that when focused, they create real, tangible impact and are highly motivated by an inherent sociality that comes from originating from family and community focused cultures. We find that Canadian Arab youth are uniquely suited for political participation and civic engagement in public spaces. This argument is not reductionistic: some Arab youth may not incline to speak up, but the vast majority want to be heard on issues that matter to them and are working to ensure that Arabs are seen in the public sphere Finn Melissa and Bessma Momani [37].

We have argued in this paper that more equitable metrics of power would acknowledge youths' contributions rather than treating youth as if they are inconspicuous. Given their contributions, we have argued that this inconspicuousness is manufactured by actors who benefit from minimizing youths' voices and contributions through political and discursive spin and by upholding and continuously validating status quo social norms. The political subjectivities of youth involve leveraging skills, tools, technologies, ideas, and networks in order to contribute to transformative change, even in the face of actors, institutions,

policies, and discourses (and other structural forces) that seek to undermine or negate their power. Youth are politically oriented, not just socially or economically driven. More than seeking friendship networks, an education or a career in a stage between child and adult, youth are motivated to create impact in the political sphere for its own sake. They wield power logics not just for local interventions, but also nationally, globally, and transnationally-oriented interventions. There is much that researchers in this field have learned about youth, especially over the past four decades, but large gaps in knowledge and understanding persist and require considerable and sustained fieldwork-based research to close.

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