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» Trudeau project: Arab Canadian Youth: Pursuing Responsible Citizenship to Counter Disempowerment and Disengagement

Expertise:
#economic governance
#Middle East
#citizenship
#Canada
#youth

Project objectives: To better understand and document the experiences, stories, and practices of Arab-Canadian youth as regards involvement of the diaspora in transnationalism, political debates, and conflicts concerning their countries of origin, as well as their sense of belonging to and their social integration in Canada. This objective will be accomplished through workshops, focus groups, interviews, and surveys in seven cities across Canada. The project will also examine feelings of cohesion and division in Arab-Canadian communities, with a special emphasis on their transnational ties with their Arab countries of origin and their potential direct and indirect involvement in intraregional conflicts and civil wars

This project seeks to better understand and mitigate the disempowerment and disengagement experienced by Arab Canadian youth. Theirs is a particular kind of youth alienation often heightened by integration challenges in the context of transnationalism, securitization, and perceptions of radicalization. Regardless of their faith, Arab Canadian youth find greater challenges fully integrating into Canadian societies, where they are often disproportionately affected by law and discourses in media and the public sphere (See Hennebry and Momani, 2013). For the context of this project, it is not assumed that all Arabs are Muslims, nor that the Arab community is homogeneous. However, most Canadian Arabs are Muslim, and some of the same issues affecting this religious minority group in Canada will be applicable for this study. Nevertheless, the diversity among the Arab Canadian diaspora is recognized. In its efforts to understand the experiences of Arab youth and their susceptibility to social exclusion at a time when their region of ethnic origin is too often in the news headlines, the project will engage novel methods of data collection, community engagement, and youth dialogue across this youth community.

Youth are the future fabric of a resilient Canadian multicultural, pluralist, and open democratic society. The overall goal of the project is to understand and explore levels of social inclusion, belonging, political expression, and involvement among youth from Arab-origin countries across Canadian communities, within the context of globalization, hyper-connectivity, proliferation of diverse media sources, and growing transnationalism. Understanding how Arab youth perceive and pursue the rights and obligations of Canadian citizenship will provide a useful lens into this underexplored community at a time when Canadians of Arab origin are increasingly in the media limelight and under public scrutiny.

This project's core objective is to better understand and document the experiences, narratives, and practices of Arab Canadian youth with respect to diaspora engagement in transnationalism, political debates and conflicts in and about countries of origin, and sense of belonging and social integration in Canada. This will be achieved through workshops, focus groups, interviews, and surveys. The project will also investigate the sense of cohesion and division among Arab Canadian communities, with a particular emphasis on their transnational ties to Arab countries of origin and their potential (in)direct engagement with intraregional or civil conflict(s).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Canadian policymakers have long relied on multiculturalism policy and democratic pluralism as a means of promoting the integration of Canadians of diverse backgrounds and identities with conflicting political views. Yet concerns in the Arab community over ethnic segregation, "parallel lives," racial discrimination, social cohesion, oppositional views over Canadian foreign policy, and political exclusion and isolation continue to emerge in scholarly and public debates (Hennebry and Momani, 2013).

While maintaining transnational ties through international communication and travel can at times help ethnic communities to integrate into multicultural societies (Hennebry, 2013), the overall conditions of modernity and life in Western democracies—individualization and value relativism—can also prompt a difficult search for identity, meaning, and community for a number of individuals. Radicalization can occur as individuals seek to reconstruct a lost identity in a perceived hostile and confusing world (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). It is indeed this very identity as transnational citizens tied to countries undergoing political transformations that make these youth in particular subject to a radicalized media through a state-led security lens (Hennebry and Momani, 2013). Further, in the context of growing securitization policies and discourses, perceptions of radicalization can heighten fear and stigmatization directed at Arab Canadian youth, which can potentially lead to increased conflict(s) across communities, social exclusion, and vulnerability to hate crimes and speech.

With high connectivity and access to the internet--now the norm among many Canadian urban youth--the prospect of turning to the internet for information about politics and religion is relatively high. Facilitated by modern information communication technology, internationally dispersed populations from the same country of origin are able to communicate regularly, to find new avenues for economic activities, or to articulate common political interests (Cohen 1995; Vertovec 2009). With contemporary migration processes, ethnic communities can establish themselves in transnational spaces that cut across national boundaries, connecting with communities in both the country of settlement and the country of origin (and often with other members of the same ethnic or religious group or from the same country of origin who live elsewhere). Migrants and their offspring are in many cases not exclusively shaped by confrontation or negotiation with their country of settlement but are also informed by developments that affect or have emerged in the country of origin and the ethnic diaspora (Clifford 1994; Cohen 1995). Arab Canadian youth, for example, played an active role in participating in the Arab Spring, be it online or through direct political support for revolutionary movements that swept their countries of origin in 2011-1013 (Momani, 2015); moreover, many Syrian Canadians are in a state of great anxiety and sadness as they watch their country of origin in complete turmoil. In short, the politics and social issues in countries of origin have a direct and often significant impact on immigrant youth in Canada.

Transnational Arab Canadians have long been subject to heightened suspicion and selection, criminalization, and stigmatization due to their transnational practices and identities (Hennebry and Momani, 2013). Such narratives can be particularly detrimental to integration and sense of belonging among youth, potentially heightening youth vulnerability to radicalization, and can have lasting consequences for social cohesion. In order to foster productive strategies for change, research, policy, and community building, we must recognize the inherent transnationalism among the Arab Canadian youth of today and see it *not as a threat, but an asset*.

Shifting the thinking in this way can enable a greater understanding of transnational practices, a more nuanced understanding of what practices might put youth at risk of potential radicalization, and increased attention to how better to counter these practices using similar communication technologies. There are various tools and strategies known to mitigate the risks for youth as they seek to maintain their unique transnational identity while developing a sense of social cohesion within the Canadian communities they participate in. The tools include:

- promoting "counter-heroes" within the community who can serve as role models of success;
- redirecting passion for issues into productive activities such as building capacity to report abuse, discrimination, and hate crimes; learning how to effectively lobby government; contacting MPs, etc.;

- creating inspirational counter-narratives; and
- strengthening capacities to identify safe sources of online information.

An example of using these tools as countering efforts involves categorizing and understanding the online recruitment efforts of groups or individuals through information communication technology (e.g., through social media, mobile applications, etc.) who may espouse violent or radical views and then using these very technologies and modes of communication to reach youth with counter-messaging and alternative sources of information. Such an effort may assist in gaining better insights into the recruitment practices aimed at young Arab Canadians that lead to "home-grown extremists," who could pose a threat within Canada as Canadian involvement in the international coalition to fight ISIS grows (Public Safety, 2011), but it would also provide an important first step in developing the counter-messaging strategy needed to ameliorate this risk. Additionally, concerns over the flow of "foreign fighters" from Western countries, including Canada, to Syria and Iraq to join rebel organizations and ISIS to fight violent governments in Damascus and Baghdad, and to other places of civil conflict, is an example of how radical ideologies in the absence of counter-narratives can result in the recruitment of young people. This research will uncover the extent of exposure or susceptibility to such recruitment strategies among Arab Canadian youth; informed by the perspectives and insights of Arab youth themselves, the project will propose and create opportunities for counter-narratives, tools for interpreting messaging, and strategies for fostering "counter-heroes" among youth in Arab communities across Canada.

This project seeks to discover and document the experiences of young Arab Canadians, and it will do this through the development of diaspora dialogues, focus groups, and workshops aimed at attracting Arab Canadian youth and providing them with a forum in which to explore and take positive action with regard to their particular challenges within Canadian society. In short, this project will provide an *alternative method for dialogue* with and among members of the Arab Canadian community, enabling them to voice and address their political and social concerns in a manner that promotes youth engagement and fosters public discourse.

While the transformative events known as the 'Arab Spring' have produced significant change and political opportunity in the Arab world, they have also raised new concerns about feelings of disenfranchisement and greater critique of Canadian foreign policy as we re-embrace an authoritarian regime in Egypt, stand back as Syria and Libya disintegrates, and engage in a militarized war against ISIS. The "Bosnian effect," where Muslim youth may feel that Western countries are ignoring the plight of fellow Muslims, can lead to youth alienation. This is a growing risk in the Arab Canadian community. Among other things, the proposed project aims to dissect current perceptions among Arab Canadian youth about conflict(s) within Arab Canadian communities, which often react to home country and regional politics. A better understanding of these transformative regional politics and their impact on the practices of Arab Canadian youth is essential in order to fill this knowledge gap with evidence-based policy and practices, and to foster improved social inclusion and political engagement. Without aligning policies to these realities, we risk intergenerational and intercultural conflicts, heightened fear and securitization, and fractionalized ethno-cultural communities—conditions which create a recipe for youth disfranchisement and susceptibility to "self-radicalization" or exploitation. Perhaps most tragically, such conditions also result in a failure to realize youth potential and foster strong multiculturalism. This project, hence, will lay the groundwork for the development of better means and tools to integrate, empower, and involve Arab Canadian youth in a pluralist democratic society.

The project has relevance across a wide range of public policies that pertain to empowering youth in marginalized communities, providing safe spaces for youth to express political and social frustrations, and redirecting political energies into a positive means of engaging in a democratic pluralist society. More specifically, it will involve examining the following 6 **issues of concern**:

I. ***Interconnections and tensions within first and second generations*** (parental relations and conflicts). Do we see a different impact of Canadian securitized policies and discourses on Canadian-born youth than immigrants or refugees? Do political tensions, either abroad or within Canada, heighten or defuse with generations of Arab Canadian communities?

II.   ***Interrelations and levels of cohesion or divisions within the various Arab communities*** (e.g., among and within Syrian, Egyptian, Tunisian, Lebanese etc. communities). Given existing tensions and polarization of Syrian and Egyptian communities, for example, are these conflicts imported into Canada? Will potential radicalization of Syrian and Egyptian opposition groups abroad pose a risk to Arab Canadian youth?

III.   ***Connections between Arab Canadian diaspora with home regions, countries, and communities*** with respect to personal, political, and social realms (e.g., family ties, participation in political and social movements). Are youth engaged in these debates and conflicts, and if so, to what extent? How are Arab Canadian youth channeling their political energies to produce change abroad? Are these political engagements of positive activities, or is there a concern that connections could lead to exporting "foreign fighters"?

IV.   ***Connections and relations with Canadian society***. Are Arab Canadian youth susceptible to the 'Bosnian effect'? Do narratives of radical groups abroad resonate among Arab Canadian youth, and if so, how?

V.   ***Policy and government strategies' impacts on Arab Canadian youth***. How might Canadian foreign policy actions exacerbate the potential 'Bosnian effect' sentiments within the Arab Canadian community? How, for example, is Canadian military involvement in the coalition against ISIS perceived by Arab Canadian youth? How is the evaluation of foreign policy related to the perceived public perceptions of Canadian Arab youth?

VI.   ***Information communication technology connectivity, social media, and politics of Arab origin countries on Arab Canadian youth***. What are the kinds of information that Arab Canadian youth are exposed to? How do Arab Canadian youth decipher safe messaging? To what extent are Arab Canadian youth engaging in Middle East and North Africa politics, for example by sending money, reading news from the region, producing political material, etc.? Can these tools be redirected to creating counter-heroes (or mentoring), counter-narratives, and safe-messaging?

PROJECT TIMELINE AND METHODS
Year 1

Policy evaluation and analysis, with an eye to understanding the impact and perception of a range of relevant policy domains by Arab Canadian youth, including foreign policy (particularly with the Arab states), immigration and citizenship, public safety, border security, etc., in the context of the realities of growing violence in and beyond the Middle East. This will be conducted through a detailed literature review and by carrying out a SWOT Analysis of relevant policy developments (such as recent changes to the visa system, the refugee system, and the proposed biometric information of photo and fingerprints for travelers from certain countries). The ultimate goal of this analysis is to foster improved evidence-based responses to enhance Arab youth civic engagement.

Primary data gathering through a mixed methods approach including workshops, surveys[1], interviews, and focus groups with Arab youth and community representatives, including students and non-student youth.[2] Using local student groups to facilitate these data collection methods, a survey will be administered in 4 Canadian cities where there are large Arab youth populations, including: ***Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver***, and ***Edmonton*** (Year 2 [see below] will include mid-sized cities with high Arab populations). Further attention will be paid to representativeness across countries of origin, using quota sampling, a non-random sampling technique which will enable us to obtain sample strata which reflect the proportions of the largest countries of origin in our sample. Specific attention will be paid to ensure that the sample includes participants from the top countries of origin reflecting the proportion of the Arab

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[1] Names will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for seven years in a locked office. Only researchers associated with this project will have access.
[2] Where needed, the PI is able to communicate in English, French, and Arabic to provide full language coverage of those surveyed, interviewed, and contacted for the project.

population in Canada (e.g., Lebanon 18.4%; Morocco, 12.9%, Algeria, 11.6%; Egypt, 11.4%; Iraq, 11.3%, Saudi Arabia, 5.1%; Somalia, 5.1%, Syria, 5%, etc.).[3]
The data will be collected through a three-day workshop in each city:

Day one: Conduct a survey covering the breadth of the 6 issues of concern outlined above. A quota sampling design will be employed in order to ensure representativeness across the Arab Canadian youth population. It is aimed that 150 survey responses will be collected per city. Recruitment for in-depth semi-structured interviews will also be done during the workshop.

Days two and three: Conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews on these two areas with quota sample of young men and women, variety of source countries, and immigrant classes: (1) youth disenfranchisement, and (2) transnational engagement. Ten interviews will be conducted at each city.

Day three: Hold focus group sessions covering two particular issues: (1) interrelations between different groups within the Arab Canadian youth, and (2) potential youth disfranchisement involving root causes and manifestations, mechanisms and practices (including online), solutions and recommendations (from youth, about youth, to youth, to community and to government). Two focus group sessions will be held at each major city.

Dissemination and knowledge mobilization: A project website aimed at academic and policy groups linked to the International Migration Research Centre, where Dr. Momani is a research associate, and hosted at the Balsillie School of International Affairs will be created to collect all aspects and materials included with the project. The projected outputs will include academic publications, policy briefs, and project website development. Moreover, an online network will be cultivated and promoted via social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.). A public-facing online web portal will make available community-building materials such as videos, web resources, fact sheets, handouts, posters, and other resources. This public outreach effort is aimed connecting Arab Canadian youth and their communities with resources and information aimed at strengthening community, fostering social inclusion, and empowering youth in communities.

Year 2

Continued primary data gathering through workshops, surveys[4], interviews, and focus groups with Arab youth and community representatives, including students and non-student youth.[5] The same three-day workshop described above will be replicated in *Ottawa, Windsor*, and *London* ON, three cities with large Arab populations.

Continued dissemination and knowledge mobilization: An article will be developed for the Trudeau Foundation papers to reflect and analyze the survey findings of the project. Moreover, the project website will be updated with survey results, op-eds, and videos. Other social media outreach will also be developed.
Year 3

Policy conference to engage decision-makers will take place toward the goal of creating a stakeholder network of scholars, government, intergovernmental, and community representatives. Internationally recognized scholars working

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[3] Using Statistics Canada's National Household Survey (NHS) data from 2011, we collected estimates of the number of residents born in Arab countries for all 148 census metropolitan areas (CMAs) in the country - these include 82% of Canada's population. The total Arab-Canadian population is defined as residents living in a given CMA who were born in a country that is a member of the Arab League. Arab-Canadian population proportions were estimated using the total Arab-Canadian population divided by the total CMA population as recorded in the 2011 NHS, including non-citizens. Once aggregated, we were able to also estimate the top CMAs in absolute and relative terms for Arab-Canadian populations, as well as the top countries of origin for foreign-born Arab-Canadians. A noticeable gap in this methodology is that the NHS does not incorporate second generation Arab-Canadians, though we hypothesize that the CMAs with the largest incidences of Arab-Canadians will be highly correlated with the largest second generation populations.

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[5] Where needed the PI is able to communicate in English, French, and Arabic to provide full language coverage of those surveyed, interviewed, and contacted for the project.

on the engagement of Arab communities throughout the Western world will be invited to attend (pending additional external funding) or teleconference into a policy conference. Using comparative examples and research from countries like the United States, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, all of which also have large Arab youth populations and have varied experiences with social inclusion, will be a useful feedback into the larger research project and publication outcomes. Experts from outside of Canada can also better inform Canadian policy on potential challenges and opportunities with implemented policies.

This policy workshop would benefit from the work, input, and engagement of Trudeau Fellows, Scholars and Mentors in the Responsible Citizenship community. Through the exchange of the Trudeau community's own research, ideas and insights in the policy conference, research findings of this project will be greatly enhanced and enriched. Many notable Trudeau community members would be invited to attend the policy conference as panelists, participants, chairs, or discussants. Potential collaboration and possible engagement could be envisioned, for example, with Trudeau Fellows such as *Constance Backhouse* and *Isabella Bakker*, who could enlighten the project on how Arab communities' experiences compare with women's and racialized communities' own historical struggles with attaining legal justice in Canada and in the world. *John Borrows'*, *Clare Bradford*'s, and *Jason Edward Lewis*' work on indigenous communities and their experiences of marginalization and media (mis)representations is also relevant and could better inform Arab communities in their efforts to create alternate public narratives. *François Crépeau*'s, *Catherin Dauvergne*'s, and *Will Kymlicka*'s work on immigrant rights, border laws, and the securitization of immigration policy also directly pertains to this study of Arab Canadian communities, and their views on the implications for our multicultural society would be most welcome. Finally, *Simon Harel*'s and *Danielle Juteau*'s work on ethnic diversity in urban communities and interethnic relations could also greatly inform this project's concern with Arab communities in urban centres. Tapping into the wealth of knowledge and experience of Trudeau community members would provide an intellectual and contextual benefit to this project. Moreover, the frank and candid conversations that the Trudeau community continue to have amongst themselves in numerous Trudeau community forums would greatly enrich this project. Funds allocated to the policy conference will not cover the entire costs of this proposed policy conference, and so additional funds to host the policy conference will be raised from the Balsillie School of International Affairs, the International Migration and Research Centre at Wilfrid Laurier University, and the University of Waterloo.

Future Plans

The Trudeau Fellowship would provide the funding needed to carry out the primary data collection across the country. This would set the stage for a longer-term initiative that would take these findings and translate them into a broader public outreach initiative. In short, the Trudeau funding would be used to seed projects aimed at achieving the larger goal of the project: to facilitate positive change and more engaged Canadian citizenship among Arab Canadian youth and their communities. In the final year of the project, a SSHRC Connection Grant application will be submitted to take the research findings beyond the academic realm and into the broader stakeholder community. SSHRC support will be sought to:

1) Host a **Public Outreach Workshop** to share information and findings of the Trudeau project with a larger public and policy audience that includes groups such as the Canadian Arab Institute, the Mosaic Institute, Couchiching Institute on Public Affairs, National Council on Canada-Arab Relations, and the United Way as well as other think tanks and social welfare groups, business leaders, secondary school educators, university administrators, and the interested media.

2) **Build *Capacity*** by designing tools and materials, including community training resources, manuals, and fact sheets, aimed at countering Arab youth marginalization and disenfranchisement in an effort to mitigate putting youth at risk of adopting radical ideologies that can lead to violence.

3) **Promote *Ownership and Civic Engagement*** through diaspora dialogues, mentoring, and web portal design. These community engagement efforts will attempt to provide a positive public space for members of the Arab

Canadian diaspora by enabling them to share and discuss new ideas, visions, and goals for their specific communities.

EXPECTED RESULTS AND DELIVERABLES

Through its research component and early-stage knowledge transfer activities involving academics, policymakers, and community members, this project will serve as a catalyst for building sustained partnerships and maintaining a better understanding of groups and individuals within Canada seeking to utilize the transnational identity of Canadian Arab youth in a way that can enrich Canadian multiculturalism and diversity.

The expected deliverables include:

I. ***Database preparation***, involving primary data gathering through a mixed methods approach that includes surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups with Arab Canadian youth and community representatives. Primary data will be shared on a public and academic-hosted website to spur further research.

II. ***Academic and media publications***, including one academic book manuscript and at least two peer-reviewed articles in international and national academic journals, a magazine-length article aimed at publication in Walrus or Macleans, and op-ed articles in major Canadian newspapers.

III. ***Policy-relevant publications and briefs,*** to be published by relevant think tanks and institutes, which will also be suitable for dissemination to government departments. Such publications will also include fact sheets about groups of Arab Canadian youth; demographic summaries of source countries, immigration issues, languages spoken, religion, etc.; short statements on current political issues, conflicts, and key challenges; links to resources; recommendations aimed at federal policies and for law and border enforcement agencies, where tools like decision trees can be developed to assist in identification of the potential problems, improving intercultural understanding and communication, sensitization, awareness of hot button or hot issues (which will be updated online), and recommendations for decisions, and resources, etc.

IV. ***Online web portal*** aimed at connecting youth and the broader Arab communities with resources and information aimed at strengthening community, fostering social inclusion, and empowering youth.

PROJECT BUDGET

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	*Subtotal*	*Total*
Professional Development			*$42,007*		
Masters RA	$18,003	$12,002	$12,002	$0	*$42,007*
Travel & Subsistence			*$18,000*		
Research travel	$6,000	$6,000	$0	$0	*$12,000*
Conference travel	$0	$0	$3,000	$3,000	*$6,000*
Computers, Electronic Communication, and Supplies			*$1,000*		
Qualtrics Survey Software		$1,000			*$1,000*
Knowledge Dissemination			*$69,000*		
3-day workshops	$21,000	$28,000	$0	$0	*$49,000*
Policy workshop	$0	$0	$10,000	$0	*$10,000*
Website	$1,000	$500	$500	$500	*$2,500*
Manuscript preparation	$0	$0	$3,000	$4,500	*$7,500*
University Administration (15%)					*$19,501*
$50,000 award					*$50,000*
$25,000 TF participation allowance					*$25,000*
Total					*$224,508*

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