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PREFACE

Over the past year, PPGAR has published seven monthly editions, each featuring short analytical pieces. However, over time, it became clear there was a growing appetite within the Munk community for work expanding beyond brevity and for a platform that would allow students to showcase essays with deeper analysis. This volume is a response to this interest - a special collection of long-form essays that reflects the depth of engagement within the Munk School.

This inaugural volume would not have been possible without the collective effort and commitment of the Munk School community. We begin by acknowledging the students whose work fills these pages. Their passion for public policy and global affairs, and their dedication to the work, made this publication possible. We are equally grateful to our editors, whose careful reading, thoughtful feedback, and unwavering commitment elevated each piece. Despite the many academic and professional pressures, they approached this work with rigour and care. Lastly, we are grateful for the mutual support, flexibility, and respect within PPGAR's leadership team that made this process possible.

Volume I represents both a culmination of the commitment shown by MPP and MGA students over the past year and a new beginning. It brings together essays that push beyond immediacy and into expansive engagement with policy and global affairs. We hope this collection marks the first of many such volumes to come, and that it continues to grow alongside the community that inspired it.

~ *Nasreen Basheer, Cathlyn Lombe Ngonge, Krithik Sivabalan, & Erin Stratchan*

PPGAR Editors-in-Chief



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THE PARADOX OF EDUCATION FOR BLACK YOUTH: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SYSTEMIC FAILURE IN SCHOOLS AND SOCIETY



BY KIKÈ IRIS ADOUTAN
EDITED BY NASREEN BASHEER

The Paradox of Education for Black Youth: A Critical Analysis of Systemic Failure in Schools and Society

Introduction

In Canada, education is widely framed as a gateway to opportunity, stability, and upward mobility. This belief carries particular significance for communities that have historically faced systemic barriers to opportunity. This is reflected in Census data showing that Black parents consistently report high educational aspirations for their children, often exceeding those of other demographic groups. Despite strong aspirations and active support from their communities, education systems can function as sites where racial inequities are reproduced. Instead of opening doors, schools often become spaces of exclusion, criminalization, and disillusionment.

People of African descent were excluded from full citizenship and social participation in Canada until as late as 1967, when the last formal racial exclusions in immigration law were removed. The legacy of this exclusion continues to shape how Black youth experience education today. Even those who pursue higher education often face persistent barriers that limit their academic success and social mobility. Additionally, the overrepresentation of Black individuals in the criminal justice system, where Black people made up 9% of the federal offender population in 2020-21, despite representing only 4% of the general population, demands a closer examination of how schools and prisons are connected through systemic discrimination.

This paper hypothesizes that the paradox of education for Black youth in Canada lies in the gap between aspiration and outcome. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Conflict Theory, it explores how educational institutions, rather than correcting historical injustices, often maintain racial hierarchies.

This argument is developed through three key areas: (1) the systemic barriers and academic streaming that shape Black students' experiences in education, (2) the role of zero-tolerance policies and school surveillance in pushing students toward the criminal justice system, and (3) the structural inequalities that persist after graduation, limiting the economic and social mobility of Black youth.

From a CRT perspective, racism is embedded within the supposedly neutral policies and practices of schools and the justice system. It challenges dominant narratives of meritocracy and exposes how colorblind approaches mask the realities of systemic discrimination. Conflict Theory adds to this analysis by showing how dominant groups use institutions to protect their interests and reinforce inequality. These frameworks help explain how Black youth remain systematically blocked from their desired futures.

While this paper focuses on Canada as its primary case, the U.S. serves as a critical comparative example. The parallels in both countries reveal how shared ideologies, such as colour blindness and meritocracy, enable systemic inequalities to persist across borders. In this paper, "special education" refers to formal learning supports designed to meet the needs of students, while recognizing that, in practice, these systems have at times contributed to the disproportionate placement of marginalized students in segregated or lower-expectation pathways. Similarly, "colour blindness" is understood as an ideological framework that ignores race in principle while allowing racial inequalities to persist in practice.

Structural Racism in the Education System

The paradox of education for Black youth in Canada can be seen primarily through the history of the education system. This section explores how systemic racism, academic streaming, and zero-tolerance disciplinary practices have systematically undermined the educational aspirations of Black youth in Canada and the U.S.

Black students have been streamed into lower-level classes and discouraged from academic pathways far more than their white counterparts. In Ontario, during the 1970s, Black families envisioned education as a tool to allow them to escape the barriers of racism and discrimination in North American society. If accessible and effective, education would allow Black individuals to defy and lessen the burden of racism on their socio-economic statuses, opening doors to a fulfilling and safer environment. These aspirations were remarkably higher than their counterparts: Black students and those of Caribbean descent were the only two groups that rated education as very important, yet 35% of students in special education were Black, while 19% were Caribbean, representing the largest representation within these classes in 1982. Despite the value placed on education by these families and communities, Black students experienced high dropout rates in the 1990s. This trend continues even today, as recent Canadian research shows that Black students continue to experience lower on-time high school graduation rates than their White peers, while Black families, including single-parent, nuclear, extended, and fictive kinship structures, have continued to view education as a vital foundation for success.

A 1988 report by the Toronto Board of Education Consultative Committee on the education of Black students in Toronto schools confirmed how discrimination caused their poorer level of educational performance. The social construction around Black students' academic incompetence was a barrier to the achievement of their educational goals. They were not flourishing in school, as they were placed in special education and vocational tracks, more so than other students.

In Toronto, teachers often guided Black youth towards non-academic courses and "dead-end" jobs, while counsellors tended to portray negativity. Racism was also a part of other aspects of education, including course content, classroom atmosphere, and disciplinary action. For example, Black students reported that the curriculum did not reflect their experiences, noting that they could complete their schooling without encountering works by Black authors or meaningful representation of their communities, which contributed to their marginalization. Overall, the education system contributed to a decrease in self-esteem among Black youth and an inclination to believe that their opportunities are limited.

Schools continued failing to meet Black students' educational and schooling needs by the end of the first decade of the 21st century. As low academic achievements, dropouts, and/or stopouts continued, Ontario's Safe Schools Act (Bill 81, 2000) exacerbated these conditions. The Act's promotion of "zero tolerance", a rigid disciplinary approach that relies on predetermined consequences with little room for context or restorative approaches, led Black students to face high rates of suspension and expulsion. In 2006, the media reported how a public middle school with a large number of Black students delivered 81 suspensions over only six months, while another public middle school handed out 95. In the United States, Black students continue to experience disproportionately high rates of exclusionary discipline, with racial disparities in suspensions persisting over time and Black students consistently suspended at higher rates than their White peers. Therefore, zero-tolerance policies, often framed through a colorblind lens, undermine the academic achievement and long-term educational persistence of Black students.

The Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) data shows that, while Black students of all backgrounds and generations have lower levels of educational attainment than their white and other racialized counterparts, third-generation students have the weakest educational record on every metric. This raises questions not only about the Canadian education system, but also about generational trauma. From a CRT perspective, these disparities are not the result of individual failure but reflect institutional

practices that systematically devalue Black students' abilities while presenting themselves as neutral.

It is important to recognize certain alternate explanations. For instance, it can be argued that the persistent underachievement and placement of Black students in non-academic streams stem from socioeconomic conditions, family dynamics, or lack of motivation. Additionally, critics may point to the absence of consistent national data disaggregated by race, which makes it difficult to quantify the impact of these practices across Canada fully. However, this framing risks individualizing what is, in fact, a systemic issue. The repetition of streaming, exclusionary discipline, and academic marginalization across different periods and communities suggests that these are not isolated incidents. A CRT perspective reveals how seemingly neutral institutional practices, such as those within the justice system, can reinforce racial hierarchies and disproportionately harm Black communities. Without confronting the structural nature of these patterns, we risk misdiagnosing the problem and reinforcing the very inequality this paper seeks to critique.

While education is often framed as a pathway to opportunity, these patterns of streaming and exclusion do not operate in isolation. Instead, they intersect with disciplinary practices that increasingly position Black students within systems of surveillance and punishment, revealing how educational institutions can function as entry points into the criminal justice system.

Criminalization and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The paradox of education for Black youth is further illuminated by its connection to the criminal justice system. Both the education and criminal justice systems are structured around colorblind ideologies, which paint these systems as equal, undermining the underlying realities of systemic inequalities. This section examines how zero-tolerance policies, increased surveillance, and racialized disciplinary practices disproportionately lead Black youth from schools into the criminal justice system.

Black youth are disproportionately affected by zero-tolerance policies, increased surveillance, and punitive discipline, which increases their likelihood of entering the justice system. The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the pathway of students from their schools into the juvenile and adult criminal justice system, driven by zero-tolerance policies. In the U.S., the impact of punitive school discipline is illustrated by data from 2015, which showed that approximately 48,000 youth were confined in residential placement facilities on any given day. While the U.S. provides a more extensively documented case of the school-to-prison pipeline, scholars have shown that similar patterns of racialized surveillance and criminalization exist in Canada, even if they are less explicitly recognized due to the country's multicultural self-image. The disproportionate incarceration of youth of color in the U.S., driven by zero-tolerance policies in public schools, therefore provides a cautionary example for Canada, which has similar disciplinary practices and surveillance measures.

Furthermore, Lightfoot (2021) highlights the disproportionate impact of "law and order" approaches on Black and Brown students in the U.S., noting how they disrupt academic progress and increase contact with the criminal justice system. However, this issue is not far removed from Canadian realities; Maynard (2017), for instance, explains how Black students face harsher discipline, increased surveillance, and a greater likelihood of school-based policing, which contributes to dropout rates and criminalization. Likewise, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2003) raised concerns about the impact of zero-tolerance policies on racialized students, noting that these practices produce long-term negative consequences beyond the classroom. These findings show that punitive educational frameworks disproportionately affect Black youth across both national contexts.

Widespread belief in the fairness and neutrality of the justice system allows many, particularly those not directly impacted, to overlook its racial biases. This colorblind perception obscures how systemic discrimination operates, making it harder to recognize or address the disproportionate criminalization of Black communities. A Toronto-based study found that Black high school students are racially profiled during stops and searches, while Black street youth are not.

The results suggest that among high school students with similar types of behaviour and comparable levels of delinquency, Black youth are stopped and searched more often than white youth. Conflict theory best explains the disproportionate police attention received by Black high school students. The disproportionate police attention toward Black students reflects how institutional power is exercised to control marginalized groups, even when differences in behaviour are accounted for. This points to clear evidence of racial bias, with policing patterns illustrating how the school context plays a unique role in reinforcing racialized surveillance. It highlights how racism operates at the intersection of education and criminal justice, where Black youth are more likely to be perceived as threats and subject to institutional scrutiny. The study's findings reinforce concerns about how disciplinary and policing practices within schools contribute to systemic discrimination and unequal life chances.

While the evidence strongly supports the role of systemic bias in pushing Black youth from schools into the criminal justice system, some limitations of the inferences made in this section must be acknowledged. In Canada, comprehensive national data on school discipline and racialized student experiences are limited, often restricted to localized studies. This fragmentation makes it challenging to assess the full scope of the school-to-prison pipeline across provinces. Additionally, not all punitive interactions lead to formal justice involvement, meaning that some harms, such as surveillance or informal exclusion, may go undocumented.

Post-Education Disillusionment

The consequences of educational exclusion and criminalization extend beyond schooling, shaping long-term economic outcomes. The paradox of education for Black youth becomes most visible after academic success. This section will examine how systemic exclusion persists, highlighting the disillusionment Black youth face in the labour market and how education alone is not enough to overcome structural racism.

Black youth in Canada face systemic challenges that hinder their transition from education to stable employment. Educational attainment among Black youth lags behind national averages. According to Statistics Canada (2023),

while 94% of Black youth aged 15 to 25 aspire to obtain a bachelor's degree or higher, only 60% believe they will achieve this goal, compared to 79% of non-Black youth. This gap between aspiration and expectation highlights the systemic obstacles that weaken educational outcomes. Even among those who attain higher education, Black individuals often face underemployment and lower earnings. Second-generation Black workers have one of the lowest representations in high-skill occupations among visible minority groups in Canada. Moreover, statistics reveal that Black youth aged 15 to 24 experience significantly higher unemployment rates compared to their non-Black peers. For instance, in January 2025, the unemployment rate for Black youth stood at 18.6%, while it was 10.8% for non-racialized, non-Indigenous youth. These facts suggest that educational achievements do not necessarily translate into equitable employment opportunities for Black Canadians.

Carl James (2021) emphasizes that even academically motivated and middle-class Black youth are often discouraged by structural barriers that prevent upward mobility. These include hiring practices shaped by unspoken expectations of "cultural fit," which can leave Black professionals marginalized within predominantly white institutions. From a Conflict Theory perspective, disparities in employment outcomes and underrepresentation in high-skill occupations reflect how dominant groups shape economic systems and institutional structures to preserve access to opportunity while limiting upward mobility for marginalized populations. Meanwhile, CRT highlights how seemingly neutral hiring processes reproduce racial inequality by devaluing Black potential and professional identity. What seems to be meritocratic is, therefore, often deeply racialized.

It is important to approach this analysis with nuance, as much of the available data, particularly in Canada, is concentrated in urban centers like Toronto and may not fully represent the national experience of Black youth across regions. Additionally, while theories like CRT and Conflict Theory help expose structural forces, they may not fully account for the diverse ways Black students resist and navigate these barriers.

Many Black youth achieve success despite these challenges, often through community support, advocacy, or systemic disruption. These exceptions highlight the urgency of policy responses that move beyond individual success stories and address the root causes of racialized exclusion.

Final Policy Recommendations

The analysis presented in this paper points toward several policy implications for Canada's Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC), particularly in addressing the structural roots of educational inequality. The proposals in this section are designed to disrupt the paradox of education for Black youth. Rather than focusing on individual-level solutions, these policy directions emphasize the need to address structural inequalities embedded within educational and economic institutions.

First, it is crucial to mandate disaggregated race-based data collection. As Owusu-Bempah and Wortley (2014) argue, "Lack of readily available criminal justice data disaggregated by race makes it difficult for researchers to examine the nature of these racial differences [...] We are unable to determine the extent to which higher rates of discrimination [...] contribute to the apparent overrepresentation." Without this data, the government cannot track or address racial disparities in education or justice. This points to the need for consistent race-based data collection and reporting across provinces to enable evidence-driven policy making.

Second, there is a need for institutionalized healing-informed and anti-racist school policies. These include emotional counselling and mental health support, recess and decompression breaks, school-wide anti-racism and implicit bias training, and student inclusion in designing disciplinary policies. Such policies encourage schools to create environments rooted in accountability, reintegration, and community building.

Third, developing mentorship programs for Black students could be beneficial. Evidence suggests that supportive faculty-student relationships have a transformative impact on Black students' experiences in post-secondary education. Their relationships with faculty is a crucial factor in Black students' experience at Canadian post-secondary institutions, with Black faculty often seen as "othermothers" uniquely equipped to offer encouragement and guidance. This underscores the importance of funding formalized and culturally responsive mentorship programs at both the secondary and post-secondary levels.

Finally, the finding that Black youth face significant employment disparities even with post-secondary credentials highlights the need for stronger coordination between education and employment systems to support equitable labour market outcomes. This includes expanding employment equity legislation, partnering with public and private employers for targeted internships and job placements, as well as educating employers on culturally biased notions.

These policy directions align with Critical Race Theory by recognizing that race-neutral approaches are insufficient to address structurally embedded inequalities. Similarly, from a Conflict Theory perspective, they challenge the distribution of institutional power that sustains disparities in both education and labour market outcomes.

Conclusion

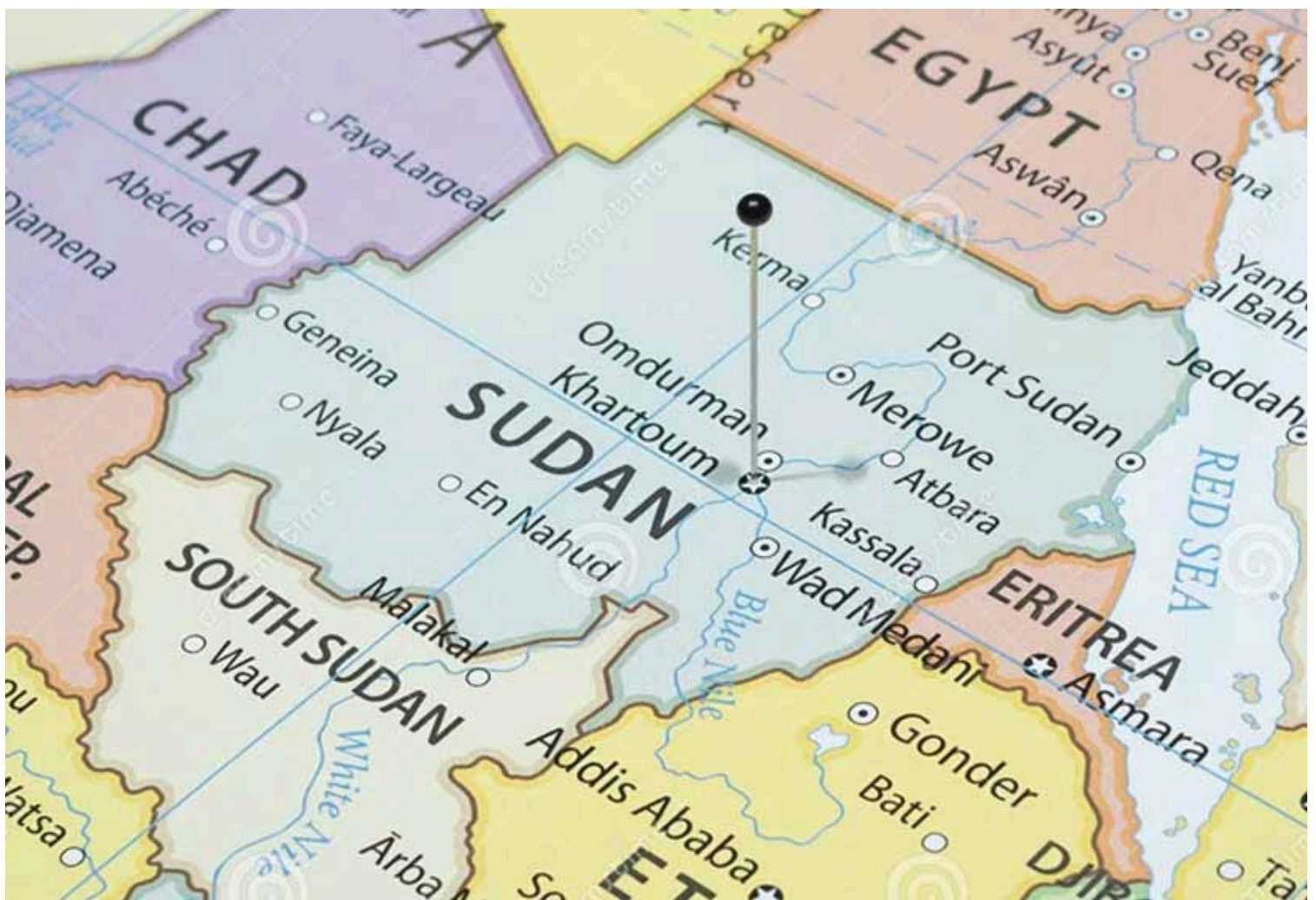
The promise of education as a path to equity has shaped the aspirations of Black youth and their communities in Canada. Yet education systems have too often failed to deliver on that promise. This failure is evident in three key areas: (1) the structural barriers and academic streaming that shape Black students' experiences in both secondary and postsecondary education, (2) the criminalizing impact of zero-tolerance policies and school-based surveillance that link education to the justice system, and (3) the systemic barriers to employment and social mobility that persist even after academic success. Critical Race Theory and Conflict Theory reveal how these injustices are embedded in institutional structures that maintain racial and class hierarchies. While some Black youth succeed despite these barriers, their resilience should not excuse the persistence of inequity. Future research should explore the regional differences in Black students' educational outcomes across provinces, the long-term impacts of postsecondary disillusionment, and how anti-Black racism intersects with other forms of marginalization, such as gender, disability, or immigration status. Structural transformation is necessary to meaningfully address the paradox of education for Black youth.



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FORUM SHOPPING IN SUDAN'S PEACE NEGOTIATIONS: A BARRIER TO PEACE



BY DIANE GORUN

EDITED BY KRITHIK SIVABALAN

Forum Shopping in Sudan's Peace Negotiations: A Barrier to Peace

Sudan's peace negotiations continue to fail in part due to forum shopping by armed groups and mediators across multiple, uncoordinated mediation tracks. In turn, this fragmentation has helped prolong a civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that has created one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with thousands killed and roughly 12 million people displaced since April 15, 2023 (Engaye & Mahdi 2025). The IRC states that there are 30.4 million people in humanitarian need, as mass atrocities have been documented in Darfur, and civilians continue to face targeted attacks, sexual violence, and forced displacement (International Rescue Committee 2025). Essential state services have also collapsed across much of the country, deepening the political and economic fragmentation that the conflict has accelerated (United Nations Development Programme 2025).

Against this backdrop, the failure of repeated peace negotiation attempts has become a central barrier to peace. Sudan entered the current war with a long record of partial and externally driven peace processes that left underlying governance disputes unresolved. The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, for example, ended the war between the central government based in the north, and the southern separatist movement, but excluded major peripheral regions such as Darfur and South Kordofan from the political settlement (Rolandsen 2011). Similarly, following the 2019 coup that overthrew the decades-long regime of Omar al-Bashir, the transitional government was surrounded by competing international and regional initiatives during the negotiation of the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement, a settlement between several rebel groups meant to address



long-running conflicts in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile, creating what is described as a “competitive marketplace of transition management.” (PeaceRep 2023). These patterns of fragmentation explain the current conflict landscape and have created the conditions in which forum shopping thrives. The result is a peace process repeatedly derailed by competing mediation efforts, making it essential to understand how power-driven behaviours enable forum shopping and ultimately block progress toward peace.

This paper explores how psychological effects of power such as overconfidence, reduced perspective-taking, and higher risk tolerance explain why the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and external actors repeatedly pursue strategies that stall talks rather than advance them. These dynamics widen bargaining space for armed groups and weaken international leverage. This paper recommends four measures to limit fragmentation: establishing a Joint Mediation Coordination Framework with a clear division of labour; incorporating structured perspective-taking requirements into negotiation procedures; creating joint monitoring and public reporting to reinforce accountability; and institutionalizing learning through a small coordination task force. Together, these steps are designed to reduce unilateral action, close gaps between mediation efforts, and make forum shopping less effective.

Background on Sudan's Conflict and Fragmented Mediation

Sudan's current war between the SAF and the RSF is rooted in a longer trajectory of fragmented governance, militarized power-sharing, and incomplete political settlements (PeaceRep 2023). The conflict reflects the collapse of Sudan's post-2019 transition, which itself was shaped by earlier peace agreements that failed to resolve core questions of state authority, center-periphery relations, and the role of armed actors in political life (PeaceRep 2023). For example, the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which formally ended the North-South civil war and led to South Sudan's independence in 2011 (Rolandsen 2011). However, in practice it functioned as a partial settlement that prioritized elite power-sharing between Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement while leaving conflicts in regions such as Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile unresolved (Rolandsen 2011). Rather than dismantling Sudan's militarized political economy, the agreement preserved a system in which armed actors retained significant autonomy and leverage over the state. This pattern of negotiated but incomplete settlements contributed to the persistence of parallel security structures and localized conflicts across the country.

This trajectory is rooted in Sudan's post-colonial state formation, which was defined by tensions between political movements in the north and south and competing visions of state authority (Rolandsen 2011). These divisions gave rise to a civil war that spanned more than two decades, entrenching patterns of militarization and regional marginalization. At the same time, sub-conflicts such as the Darfur insurgency reflected similar grievances against the central government, rooted in exclusion and uneven distribution of power and resources (Rolandsen 2011). Under Omar al-Bashir, these dynamics were reinforced through an authoritarian and repressive regime that relied on coercion and militia-based governance. This repressive political order ultimately contributed to the 2019 uprising and mass protests that led to his removal and the subsequent post-Bashir transition.

The removal of Omar al-Bashir created an opportunity for democratic reform, but the transitional arrangement institutionalized a fragile power-sharing agreement between civilian actors and military elites, including both the SAF and RSF (PeaceRep 2023). The RSF, originally rooted in Janjaweed militias mobilized during the Darfur conflict, had by this point been formalized into a powerful paramilitary force under Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), operating alongside but not fully integrated into the national army (United Nations Development Programme 2025). The coexistence of these parallel forces created a structurally unstable security sector, where questions of integration, command, and political authority remained unresolved (United Nations Development Programme 2025). Following this, the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement (JPA), negotiated between the transitional government and various armed groups, aimed to address some of Sudan's peripheral conflicts (PeaceRep 2023). However, like the CPA, it reproduced patterns of fragmented inclusion and elite bargaining. While it expanded participation to some rebel movements, it did not fundamentally resolve tensions between central and regional actors, nor did it clarify the future relationship between the SAF and RSF (PeaceRep 2023). Instead, it added further layers to an already complex political landscape, incorporating additional armed actors into a transitional framework without establishing a unified security structure or coherent governance model.

The breakdown of the transition in October 2021, when military leaders staged a coup against the civilian government, marked a critical turning point (United Nations Development Programme 2025). The military framed the coup as a response to political instability, but it also reflected efforts to retain control and block reforms that threatened their authority. It consolidated power in the hands of the SAF and RSF while deepening mistrust between them, particularly over the issue of security sector reform and the integration of the RSF into the national army (United Nations Development Programme 2025).

Disagreements over timelines, command structures, and political control ultimately escalated into open conflict on April 15, 2023 (Engaye & Mahdi 2025). Seen in this broader context, the current war is not simply a breakdown of negotiations between two actors, but the outcome of a longer pattern of incomplete settlements and institutional fragmentation (PeaceRep 2023). Sudan has repeatedly experienced peace processes that prioritize short-term stability over structural reform, leaving underlying conflicts unresolved and creating space for armed actors to retain leverage. This legacy is critical to understanding the present mediation landscape. The proliferation of competing negotiation forums since 2023 does not represent a new phenomenon, but rather an intensification of earlier patterns in which multiple external and domestic actors shape parallel political processes (Engaye & Mahdi 2025).

Amidst this historical landscape, forum shopping has become a large issue throughout Sudan's peace negotiation process. Forum shopping occurs when conflict parties exploit the presence of multiple, uncoordinated mediation tracks to seek more favourable terms, delay commitments, or shape the negotiation agenda (Terry 2022). Between 2023 and 2025, Sudan's warring parties could choose among at least five active mediation tracks, each backed by different coalitions with distinct political incentives (Engaye & Mahdi 2025). These included the Saudi-US-led Jeddah Process, the IGAD Quartet initiative, the African Union Peace and Security Council's efforts, Egypt's Cairo Initiative, the recently formed U.S.-U.K.-Saudi Arabia-UAE Quad coordination mechanism, and the now-collapsed UN-AU-IGAD Trilateral Mechanism. The growth of these forums has produced public fatigue and inconsistent engagement by the warring parties, who routinely enter and exit talks depending on political advantage. As a result, Sudanese elites have become highly skilled in political arbitrage, learning to navigate and manipulate external forums for strategic gain (Mahdi 2024). For instance, the SAF rejected the IGAD Summit on the grounds of alleged bias by Kenyan President William Ruto, yet readily endorsed Egypt's Cairo initiative framed as a

"neighbouring countries" process, largely because Egypt imposed fewer costs and offered a more favourable political environment for the SAF (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2023, 6). This environment illustrates how forum shopping undermines any leverage mediators might possess, turning negotiations into instruments of strategic delay rather than vehicles for conflict resolution.

Primary actors	Initiative	Date established
African Union	African Union Expanded Mechanism	May 2023
United States & Saudi Arabia	Jeddah Process	May 2023
Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan	IGAD Quartet on Sudan	June 2023
African Union	AU High-Level Panel	February 2024
African Union	PSC Ad-hoc Committee	June 2024
Egypt	International conference	July 2024
Saudi Arabia & Switzerland	Ceasefire talks	August 2024

Source: Mahdi, Maram. "Sudanese are losing hope with each new peace initiative" Institute for Security Studies. (August 6, 2024)

Furthermore, each mediation track offers distinct incentives that encourage selective participation. SAF has generally favored the Cairo and AU-linked platforms, where it perceives stronger alignment with Egyptian and African positions (Chughtai & Murphy 2023). RSF, by contrast, has often engaged more thoroughly with the Jeddah Process, where Gulf states play a central role, reflecting the group's longstanding political and financial ties to the Gulf region (Mahdi 2024). Meanwhile, civilian parties face inconsistent inclusion across tracks, leading many to shift toward forums such as IGAD or AU initiatives where broader political participation is more likely (PeaceRep 2023). These differing alignments mean that each forum generates its own incentive structure, making strategic switching rational for armed and political actors. This incentive environment reinforces forum shopping as a consistent negotiation strategy. When armed groups believe that continuing military operations may strengthen their bargaining position, fragmented mediation allows them to delay, stall, or pivot to a more favourable forum without immediate cost. Competition among mediation groups through forum-shopping has contributed to the prolongation of violence by weakening coordinated pressure for compromise.

These dynamics are difficult to correct because they are rooted in both structural fragmentation and the strategic incentives created by competing mediation tracks. Regionally, rivalries among Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gulf states, and IGAD members prevent the emergence of a unified mediation framework and instead sustain overlapping initiatives that pull the parties in different directions.

At the same time, armed actors understand that fragmented mediation reduces coordinated international pressure and widens their bargaining space, making it strategically rational to move between forums in search of better terms or more favourable mediators. As a result, forum shopping has become embedded in Sudan's peace negotiation process and has been a significant contributor to peace failures.

Psychological Drivers of Forum Shopping In Sudan's Peace Process

Sudan's peace process is marked by two reinforcing problems: (1) armed groups participate in forum shopping; (2) regional and international actors continue to create new independent mediation initiatives even when previous ones have failed. Traditional explanations such as divergent geopolitical interests, institutional competition, or shifting conflict dynamics capture part of the story. However, they do not fully explain why actors persist in strategies that repeatedly produce stalemates. The psychological understanding of power allows us to better analyze these patterns as research shows that when actors hold or perceive power, they become more confident in their ability to shape outcomes, less responsive to external constraints, and more willing to take risks (Galinsky et al. 2006; Fast et al. 2009; Magee et al. 2007).

SAF and RSF

The SAF and RSF both hold real leverage as they control territory, command military forces, and receive external backing. This objective power creates subjective effects that influence negotiation behavior and decision making. Fast et al. states that powerful actors tend to overestimate their control over outcomes and remain optimistic about their strategies even when evidence suggests they are unlikely to succeed (Fast et al. 2009). Applied to Sudan, this helps explain why both the SAF and RSF repeatedly assume that alternative negotiation forums will produce better terms. When talks in one forum impose constraints or move in an unfavourable direction, each side treats exit and re-entry into a new forum as a viable strategy, even when past examples show that such moves rarely generate substantive gains. For example, when SAF

abandoned the IGAD track on claims of bias and shifted to Egypt's Cairo Initiative in hopes of securing more favourable terms, the move produced no ceasefire, no political concessions, and no improvement in SAF's negotiating position, underscoring that forum switching has failed to deliver substantive gains. In this way, forum shopping is not simply a tactical choice; it is reinforced by the psychological effects of power that encourage overconfidence in one's preferred pathways.

Power also reduces perspective-taking, which weakens negotiation responsiveness. Galinsky et al. find that individuals who perceive themselves as powerful devote less attention to others' views, anticipate opposition less accurately, and respond more rigidly in bargaining contexts (Galinsky et al. 2006). This reflects the behaviour of both the SAF and RSF, as they routinely dismiss proposals not because of their substantive demands but because of who issues them, or because the forum is associated with a rival actor. For example, SAF suspended contact with the IGAD mediation group after accusing the Kenyan-led process of lacking neutrality when IGAD invited RSF commander Hemedti to a summit (Reuters 2024). A similar pattern of selective engagement is evident in the SAF's refusal to participate in subsequent Geneva-based negotiations, despite their connection to earlier mediation efforts, while the RSF continued to engage in parallel discussions (Elmedni 2024). This divergence illustrates how both actors treat negotiation forums as conditional arenas of participation, entering or withdrawing based on perceived advantage rather than commitment to a unified process, reinforcing expectations that more favourable terms can be secured elsewhere. Civilian priorities, humanitarian concerns, and calls for inclusive dialogue are consistently sidelined because neither side feels compelled to adjust to perspectives outside its own. The result is a pattern of selective engagement as both groups participate only in forums where they believe they can dominate agenda setting, and they disengage when constraints emerge. Competing forums allow each actor to choose the setting where they feel most in control rather than the one most conducive to compromise.

Another effect of power is increased risk acceptance. Magee et al. state that actors who perceive themselves as powerful exhibit heightened feelings of control, reduced sensitivity to potential losses, and a greater focus on maximising gains (Magee et al. 2007). As a result, they become more willing to tolerate uncertainty, escalate conflict, or delay agreements in the expectation that better outcomes will eventually materialise (Magee et al. 2007). This dynamic is visible in Sudan, where both SAF and RSF continue to pursue military gains while selectively engaging diplomatic tracks. The SAF assumes that conflict momentum will eventually strengthen its negotiating position, while the RSF relies on external relationships and military advances to offset political pressure. In both cases, fragmented mediation lowers the cost of delay because when one forum stalls, another remains available. This makes waiting, shifting venues, or rejecting compromise psychologically and strategically attractive. In effect, the presence of multiple mediation tracks reinforces the belief that neither side needs to commit until conditions are more favourable. Power-linked risk tolerance, therefore, sustains the cycle of stalled negotiations.

External Parties: Regional Organizations and States

The same psychological mechanism helps explain why external parties continue to create and defend competing mediation processes. Regional organizations and external powers hold significant diplomatic capacity and status within Sudan. As Fast et al. state, powerful actors become more action-oriented and more convinced that their preferred approaches will succeed, which also reduces responsiveness to negative feedback (Fast et al. 2009). For example, the AU launched an Expanded Mechanism soon after prior efforts failed; IGAD introduced a Quartet following an earlier stalemate; Egypt convened its own conference; and Saudi Arabia and the United States repeatedly revived the Jeddah talks after breakdowns. From a strategic standpoint, some degree of competition reflects geopolitical interests. But the persistence of duplicative and often incompatible initiatives is better explained by power-linked overconfidence, as each actor believes its framework, sequencing, and diplomatic style can unlock progress, even

when similar formats have previously failed. This does not require assuming that states have emotional attachments to specific forums; it simply reflects how power shapes institutional behaviour.

Reduced perspective-taking also contributes to coordination failures among mediators. According to Galinsky et al., powerful actors are less attentive to competing viewpoints and underestimate the constraints faced by others (Galinsky et al. 2006). This tendency helps explain why mediators often fail to coordinate agendas, as rival mediation initiatives frequently proceed with little reference to one another, not only because of strategic competition but because each actor expects that others will adjust to its preferred approach. In this sense, fragmentation is not merely the outcome of clashing interests; it is also a behavioural pattern consistent with how power affects collaborative decision-making.

Taken together, these power mechanisms, overconfidence, reduced perspective-taking, and increased risk tolerance, provide a clearer explanation for why forum shopping persists in Sudan's peace negotiations. Recognizing how power influences behaviour clarifies why forum shopping persists and points toward solutions focused on reducing unilateral control, increasing shared ownership of mediation, and creating structures that counteract the cognitive effects of power for all actors involved.

Recommendations

Sudan's mediation landscape is characterized by three reinforcing failures: fragmented and uncoordinated negotiation tracks, strategic forum shopping by armed actors, and weak mechanisms of accountability across mediation initiatives. Rather than increasing opportunities for peace, the proliferation of competing forums has lowered the costs of disengagement, allowing actors to delay, reposition, and avoid compromise without consequence. As long as these structural and behavioural dynamics persist, mediation efforts will continue to operate as parallel processes rather than a cumulative pathway toward resolution. Addressing these challenges, therefore, requires not only greater coordination among mediators, but also institutional mechanisms that limit selective engagement and reduce the incentives for forum shopping.

1. Establish a joint mediation platform: A central challenge identified in both research and practice is the persistence of uncoordinated initiatives led by actors who believe their preferred format will succeed independently. To counter this, regional and international mediators should formalize a Joint Mediation Coordination Framework that acts as a unified entry point for SAF and RAF participation in negotiations. This body would include the Quad, the AU, IGAD, the UN, the Arab League, and key external states. Its purpose is not to replace existing forums but to integrate them through shared goal-setting, agreed sequencing, and a clear division of labour based on comparative advantage. For example, a Joint Mediation Coordination Framework could assign the AU and IGAD primary responsibility for political transition, drawing on their regional legitimacy and governance mandates; the UN could lead on humanitarian access, protection of civilians, and technical support for constitutional and transitional justice processes, reflecting its comparative strengths in these areas; while the Arab League, Quad and key neighbouring and Gulf states could focus on managing regional spillovers, refugees, and providing economic guarantees and reconstruction commitments (Engaye & Mahdi 2025). Anchoring this structure in humanitarian goals such as civilian protection, aid corridors, and localized ceasefires also creates a shared, low-controversy entry point that reduces rivalry among mediators and addresses criticisms that coordination is unrealistic in a crowded geopolitical field. This recommendation is rooted in the belief that incoherence between external mediators is a political choice, not a structural inevitability.

The Joint Mediation Platform would meet regularly and require that any new proposal, ceasefire outline, or negotiation agenda be reviewed and jointly endorsed before it is announced. By requiring mediators to negotiate among themselves before approaching the conflict parties, the framework makes unilateral optimism and overconfidence more difficult and encourages actors to take each other's constraints seriously. Coordination is most effective when responsibilities are allocated intentionally rather than assumed, and this kind of structured platform provides the mechanism to do so

2. Structured perspective-taking requirements in mediation: To counter the reduced perspective-taking that often accompanies power, mediation procedures should require actors to consistently acknowledge and respond to opposing constraints. Before each negotiation round within the Joint Mediation Platform, mediators should circulate a brief summarizing the stated boundaries and priorities of all parties. At the start of each session, SAF, RSF, and mediators should restate the other side's position before presenting their own. A technical facilitator should intervene when parties ignore, distort, or fail to address the perspectives of others. These procedures interrupt the tendency of powerful actors to anchor on their own preferences, reduce selective engagement, and limit misalignment across negotiation forums.

3. Joint monitoring and public accountability for mediation progress: To reduce overconfidence among states and strengthen coordination, mediation efforts should be subject to unified monitoring and public reporting. A quarterly "Sudan Mediation Report," produced by neutral bodies such as the UN or AU Commission, should assess progress, duplication, and gaps across all initiatives and be publicly released. All mediators would be required to explain how their activities align with the agreed framework. This external scrutiny disrupts optimistic self-assessment, imposes reputational costs on redundant initiatives, and incentivizes states to prioritize coordinated mediation over independent campaigns. To reinforce this mechanism, a coordinated communications strategy should amplify these assessments and build public pressure for genuine cooperation. Civil society groups, Sudanese community organizations abroad, humanitarian agencies, and media outlets could share the findings through clear visual summaries, short digital dashboards, and periodic coordination updates. Presenting mediation progress in accessible terms, especially those tied to civilian protection and humanitarian needs, would make it easier for the public and international partners to track whether mediators are following through. This visibility raises the reputational costs of running duplicative or uncoordinated initiatives and makes it harder for states to ignore agreed coordination commitments.

4. Institutionalize lessons from previous multilateral mechanisms. Mediators should institutionalize learning from earlier coordination efforts, particularly the Trilateral Mechanism, by establishing a small task force responsible for documenting best practices, identifying duplication, and recommending adjustments to sequencing and roles. This creates a feedback loop that reduces the tendency of powerful actors to persist with ineffective strategies (Fast et al. 2009).

Taken together, these recommendations offer practical ways to limit the unilateral actions and coordination failures that have stalled Sudan's peace efforts. By creating a joint mediation platform, building structured perspective-taking into negotiation procedures, improving public monitoring, and institutionalizing learning, they reduce the incentives for forum shopping and make it harder for actors to exploit competing tracks. While no framework can eliminate the conflict's underlying politics, a more coherent and transparent mediation system gives regional and international actors a better chance of managing negotiations and limiting strategic delay.



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POLITICS OF PIETY: HOW TURKEY'S FAR-RIGHT REGIME INSTRUMENTALIZES ISLAM WITHIN AN ASSERTIVELY SECULAR STATE



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Politics of Piety: How Turkey's Far-Right Regime Instrumentalizes Islam within an Assertively Secular State



Introduction

In May 2023, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared victory in a tense Turkish election, securing 52% of the runoff vote and 5 more years as the President of Turkey (Poyrazlar, 2023). In his victory speech, Erdoğan taunted his political rivals and targeted Turkey's LGBT+ community (Poyrazlar, 2023), continuing a pattern of populist rhetoric, authoritarian posturing, and nativist sentiments that epitomized Erdoğan's previous term in office. Indeed, Turkey stands as a compelling case of far-right governance on the European periphery. Under Erdoğan's rule, Turkey's regime has adopted increasingly authoritarian tendencies, including unfair elections and gerrymandering, disinformation campaigns (Yılmaz, 2023), and unchecked power in the executive branch (Elçi, 2024, p. 302). Beyond Turkey falling to an "unfree" score of 33/100 according to Freedom House in 2025, Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) remains "one of the longest ruling among contemporary populist radical right parties" (Balta, 2023, p. 1).

The AKP largely employs an Islamist ideology as part of its own identity as a party. Much of Erdoğan and the AKP's discourse involves Islamic unity, independence from Western forces, and portraying the Turkish Sunni Muslim population as "the morally righteous people" (Yılmaz, 2023). At first glance, it would be fair to deduce that religion is, by many accounts, seamlessly blended into the political sphere.

Yet paradoxically, Turkey has historically been deeply engaged in ensuring its status as an assertively secular state. Its legislation and judiciary are officially secular, and, as for the state's attitudes toward religions, it "officially favours none" (Kuru, 2007, p. 570). Enshrining secularism into its constitution, the Turkish government has historically limited religion's presence in the public sphere. Even after constitutional amendments in 2017, Turkey's constitution still clearly states that it "is a democratic, secular, and social state governed by the rule of law", with an office of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) that is intended to operate "in accordance with the principles of secularism" (Constitute Project, 2017). This raises the central research question of this paper: What role does religion play for the populist radical right, and how does the case of Turkey's AKP illustrate a distinct and electorally successful blend of religious and far-right ideology despite the state's assertive secularism?

This paper explores the complex relationship between religion, state, and the far right through the case of Turkey. It argues that the Turkish model of assertive secularism inadvertently created the conditions for the AKP to instrumentalize Islam for populist, nativist, and authoritarian goals. With centralized state control over religion and the secularism embedded in both state institutions and national identity, the AKP was able to appropriate secular structures and manipulate secularist discourse, enabling its consolidation as an Islamist, far-right governing party.

This paper employs a qualitative and conceptual methodological approach, drawing primarily on secondary literature in its analysis. It will first provide a conceptual framework that will define key terms, highlight scholarly debates, and ground the argument with a theoretical foundation. It will then give a brief background on Turkey's contemporary history and political system before moving into its analysis section.

Conceptual Framework: The Far Right, Secularism, and the Politics of Religion

Far-Right Ideology

While the far-right movement comprises a host of varying goals and beliefs, far-right ideology can usually be characterized by three core features: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde, 2019). As a “combination of nationalism and xenophobia”, nativism contends that states should harbour only the “native” people, with non-native peoples or ideas viewed as a threat to the homogeneity and cohesion of “the nation-state” (Mudde, 2019). With the ultimate goal of creating an ethnocracy, populist radical right groups often push for those with different beliefs to assimilate into the “monoculture”, even going as far as declaring that certain non-native peoples are “incompatible with their nation” (Mudde, 2019). Authoritarianism, in the context of the far right, pertains to the belief in maintaining law and order (Mudde, 2019). Perceived “problems” in society are seen as being curbed through punishment, and education is used to teach “moral” values (Mudde, 2019). Populism, as Mudde (2019) describes, is an idea that divides society into “pure” people and “corrupt” elites, with the central claim that such political elites work together to restrict the power of the people. Together, these ideological features underpin far-right discourse, rhetoric, and policies.

Secularism

The issue of religion’s separation from the state has been addressed in the constitutions of several notable countries. However, the manner in which secularism is defined and conducted often varies from state to state. The United States, for example, officially favours no religion, although the state’s role in enforcing secularism is more passive in nature (Kuru, 2007). Indeed, its pledge of allegiance mentions that it is “one nation under god”, and its currency includes the phrase “in god we trust” (Kuru, 2007). This sharply contrasts with the Turkish approach to secularism, which more closely resembles the French system of *laïcité*. This model aims to adopt restrictive policies toward religion, with the state playing “an assertive role as the agent of a social engineering project that confines religion to the private domain” (Kuru, 2007, p. 571).

Secularism in Turkey has been conducted in this manner since the country was founded in 1923, and has experienced varying degrees of success and contention. The Turkish state controls religious affairs through the Diyanet, a state institution with the constitutional authority “to manage religious affairs and educate the public about Islam” (Tombuş and Aygenç, 2017, p. 75).

The Politics of Religion

Despite secularism playing a key role in the politics of many countries, the relationship between religion and state often remains dynamic. For one, assertive secularism presents authoritarian-leaning states and regimes with the opportunity to instrumentalize and manipulate religion in ways that serve their interests. This is a common phenomenon in Central Asia, in which authoritarian regimes use post-Soviet secular institutions to endorse Islam, strengthening both national identity and political legitimacy (Omelicheva, 2016). Utilizing religion as an “[instrument] of social control and regulation” (Omelicheva, 2016, p. 144), Islam has often been used to legitimize state repression, mobilize public support, and negate political opposition. Omelicheva (2016) also argues that Islam itself is particularly prone to state manipulation compared to other religions. With no universally recognized leadership or hierarchy, states can more easily claim to “represent” all Muslims and control religious narratives (Omelicheva, 2016).

This reflects a broader trend of religion playing a more prominent role in contemporary global politics. Fox (2014) argues that religion is playing a resurgent role in politics, indicating that between 1990 and 2008, there was a macro-level increase in both religious discrimination and religious support. Challenging theories that discuss the long-term decline of religion in public life, Fox’s (2014) religious resurgence theory contends that secularism is not an inevitable process but an ideology. He claims that “religion and secularism are inevitably political competitors... [and] every country is essentially a battleground between the supporters of secular and religious ideologies” (Fox, 2014, pp. 21-22).

Together, these perspectives highlight the varying and often complex interactions between religion and far-right authoritarian politics. In the Turkish context, this scholarship will serve as the foundation for recognizing how the secular state enabled the AKP to instrumentalize Islam for populist, authoritarian, and nativist purposes.

Politics, Power, and Religion in Contemporary Turkey

Gaining sovereignty in 1923, the Republic of Türkiye was founded by Kemal Atatürk, who served as the country's first president until he died in 1938 (Itzkowitz, 2025). As part of his statebuilding efforts, Atatürk introduced the model of "Kemalist Secularism", which, like *laïcité* in France, called for religious activities, facilities, and rights to be brought under state authority (Tomboş and Aygenç, 2017). This approach to secularism was motivated by the belief that religion was "a political threat to the new regime and Islam, in particular, as a cause of social, cultural, political and economic decline" (Tomboş and Aygenç, 2017, p. 72). Despite this, Kemalists also acknowledged the religious nature of Turkey's population. They did not intend to eliminate Islam; rather, the adoption of secular institutions was believed to provide the state with an opportunity to "challenge the rising authority of the Islamic clergy" (Kaya et al., 2019, p. 362). Kemalist Secularism also sought to import Western values into Turkish society, as Atatürk viewed them as part and parcel of creating a "modernized" state (Tomboş and Aygenç, 2017).

Much of the Turkish state is still structured based on Atatürk's secularist framework. For one, Kemalism led to the adoption of secular education, the replacement of Sharia law, and the imposition of the Latin alphabet in lieu of the Arabic script (Tomboş and Aygenç, 2017). The Diyanet is the central institution through which the state can endorse "an 'enlightened' version of Islam in society" (Tomboş and Aygenç, 2017, p. 73). It manages thousands of mosques, trains imams, and oversees religious education, among other responsibilities (Global Influence Operations Report). The armed forces and the education system are also key state institutions that have historically controlled state narratives of Islam (Tomboş and Aygenç, 2017). However, the effectiveness of secularism in Turkey has been a highly contentious sociopolitical issue for decades. Numerous Islamist-leaning political parties have gained political traction throughout Turkey's history, although many faced challenges either through constitutional court bans or systematic "Kemalist crackdowns" from the 1970s to the 1990s (Bashirov and Lancaster, 2018). Indeed, the polarization between secular and Islamist ideologies in Turkey fully reflects Fox's (2014) understanding that "religion and secularism are inevitably political competitors".

Founded in 2001 and coming to power the following year, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) also has Islamist roots, gaining popularity by originally claiming to be "a liberal alternative" to Kemalist Secularism (Tomboş and Aygenç, 2017, p. 70). Led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the first few years of the AKP's rule were defined by heavy restrictions from the Turkish judiciary, courts, and armed forces, each of which was skeptical of the party's Islamist character (Bashirov and Lancaster, 2018). However, by 2007, the AKP began to fill secular institutions with party loyalists and, at times, jailed members of these institutions (Bashirov and Lancaster, 2018, p. 1216). By 2010, a referendum led to several constitutional changes, including reduced military power, executive control of the constitutional court, and weakened constraints to the AKP's power (Bashirov and Lancaster, 2018, p. 1216). Following an attempted military coup in 2016, a government-declared state of emergency led to the sidelining of parliament, restrictions on political rights, and the granting of unchecked executive power for the AKP (Gokmenoglu, 2020). Since then, Erdoğan has also gained "complete control" over the party (Bashirov and Lancaster, 2018, p. 1210), signalling the AKP's radicalization and the state's dramatic democratic backsliding. Today, Turkey's government is generally understood to be a right-wing, de facto populist-authoritarian regime (Aydin-Düzgit et al., 2023), taking advantage of Kemalist secular structures "to subject society to its own dictate of Islamization" (Tomboş and Aygenç, 2017, p. 78).



Islam and Nativism: Establishing the “Authentic” People

While Kemalist Secularism was resolute in its mission to control and restrict Islam, the subsequent institutions created to achieve this goal were prone to exploitation. For example, the Diyanet is already directly involved with the management of the roughly 85,000 mosques in Turkey, also delivering sermons and employing all imams (Özgenç, 2016). For the AKP, these “secular” systems were instrumentalized in a broad reform of Turkey’s religion-state relationship, dramatically increasing both the Diyanet’s budget and personnel between 2002-2015 (Tombuş and Aygenç, 2017, p. 79). By doing so, the AKP manipulated the system such that only Sunni Muslims could benefit from it, and repressive practices against other belief systems could continue (Tombuş and Aygenç, 2017). This use of the Diyanet was central to consolidating Erdoğan’s view that “Sunni Islam [is] the religion of the nation” (Tombuş and Aygenç, 2017, p. 79), amplifying the AKP’s broader nativist ambitions by institutionalizing a monocultural narrative. Indeed, embedding this idea at the state level is integral to the success of the AKP’s following nativist strategies:

The Construction of Sunni Muslim Identity as “Nationally Authentic”

Throughout the AKP’s rule, Erdoğan has been steadfast in the ambition of “using religious elements and symbols to construct and re-imagine the people” (Balta, 2023, p. 7). In this context, religious institutions have acted as “building blocks of this new authentic regime” (Balta, 2023, p. 8). For example, the AKP has invested heavily in endorsing religious education to cultivate a “pious generation”, introducing thousands of new state-run religious schools such that they now “dominate public education” (Balta, 2023, p. 8). There has also been a systematic effort to make Islamic symbols visible in public settings, cancel art shows for “contravening social morals”, restrict the sale of alcohol, and politicize female reproductive procedures (Balta, 2023, p. 9). By doing so, the AKP portrays Sunni Muslims not only as the “nationally authentic” people in an alleged monocultural, homogenous nation, but as the “morally” correct people compared to the unprincipled “others”.

Processes of “Othering”

In party rhetoric, especially during campaigns, Erdoğan often condemns the opposition and uses language such as “traitors”, “terrorists”, or “fake Muslims” (Yilmaz, 2023). This strategy reinforces a pattern of instilling a fear of “the other” into Turkey’s Sunni Muslim population, framing Muslims “as the only authentic citizens of Turkey... [and the] AKP as their sole representative” (Balta, 2023, p. 6). These processes also encompass the AKP’s treatment of ethnic minorities. Despite Kurds making up 20% of Turkey’s population, the AKP government has adopted an “exclusionary and denialist tone” towards advancing Kurdish cultural policies since 2015 (Daoud, 2023, p. 204).

Importantly, the Diyanet is also directly utilized to “other” perceived enemies (Yilmaz and Albayrak, 2022) under the justification of “religious guidance”. Under the control of the AKP, the Diyanet has advocated for “traditional” patriarchal gender roles, claiming that morally authentic male citizens are masculine protectors of their family, and authentic women are subordinate to men in the household (Adak, 2021). In turn, the AKP has portrayed Turkey’s LGBT+ community “as perverts, foreign agents, and a dire threat to the society” (Gumuscu, 2024, p. 387). This was made clear through a statement from AKP Presidential Communication Director Fehrettin Altun, who stated that LGBT+ activists were “a rabid minority who veil their perversion behind the cloak of freedoms and human rights” (Gumuscu, 2024, p. 387).

Cultivating a Civilizational Narrative

The AKP has incorporated civilizational discourse as part of its nativist rhetoric, often portraying Turkey as a Muslim state “freed from the contaminating effects... of Westernization” (Çinar, 2018, p. 176). The party utilizes “anti-Western conspiratorial rhetoric” to justify its ideologies (Yilmaz and Albayrak, 2022, p. 279), with Western values viewed as the antithesis of what Turkish society ought to be. In practice, Western journalism, Human Rights NGOs, ideas, and activists in Turkey are viewed as being “foreign” by the regime, and thus a threat to Turkey’s unique culture and sovereignty (Balta, 2023, p. 10). Even Turkish citizens deemed to have connections to Western culture, through their occupation or opinions, can be labelled as a “domestic alien” (Balta, 2023, p. 10).

Islam and Authoritarianism: Legitimizing “Law and Order”

With Islam effectively under state control in Turkey, its use under the AKP can also legitimize authoritarian governance and right-wing “law and order” policies rather than simply providing guidance. As Omelicheva (2016) highlights, this is part of a broader phenomenon of Islam’s instrumentalization in secular authoritarian states. In Central Asia, for example, where many states are assertively secular and operating under authoritarian regimes, “Islam has been nationalized and used by the state authorities for legitimizing their repressive policies” (Omelicheva, 2016, p. 147). It is also common for secular political figures to view Islam as a powerful tool to justify criticism of political opposition and consolidation of illiberal power (Omelicheva, 2016, p. 147). All things considered, Turkey replicates this model fairly well. Inheriting the centralized control of Islam granted to them by secular institutions, the AKP has systematically “weaponized religious authority to delegitimize opposition, consolidate its power, and deepen societal polarization” (Yilmaz, 2024, p. 13).

For one, in the context of Mudde’s (2017) typology of far-right ideology, Islamized authoritarianism is often manifested in Turkey by the “extensive regulation” of public life, restricting and punishing those engaging in (secular) “evils and wrongs” (Gumuscu, 2024, p. 385). Such sweeping curtailments can only be achieved through appropriating centralized state mechanisms ironically designed to assert Kemalist Secularism. As a result, the risks to living a secular lifestyle have increased dramatically under the AKP, with restrictions being adopted under the state-sponsored narrative of preventing actions that “harm society’s moral and religious values and sanctity of the family” (Gumuscu, 2024, p. 386). This includes state interventions in censoring alleged “inappropriate” TV content, as well as sanctioning or sometimes even imprisoning music artists for overly progressive statements or “secular” posturing (Gumuscu, 2024, p. 386). Moreover, beyond vehemently condemning the LGBT+ community through state rhetoric, the AKP has allied with fringe parties which advocate to “ban LGBTQ groups,

criminalize adultery, restrict women’s rights and pursue gender segregation” (Gumuscu, 2024, p. 387). In October 2025, this issue essentially reached its crux, with a government proposal being introduced that would punish LGBT+ people with criminal charges (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

The exploitation of Islam through the Diyanet also extends to enable Turkey’s electoral authoritarianism. In the last 10 years, for example, the Diyanet has been integral in disseminating rhetoric aimed to “dehumanize, delegitimize, and demonize” any political opposition or critics that threaten the AKP’s authority (Yilmaz, 2024, p. 7). During the 2013 “Gezi Park Protests”, a demonstration to criticize the AKP’s lack of political transparency, protestors were labelled as “looters”, “anarchists”, and “unbelievers” by Erdoğan (Yilmaz, 2024, p. 7). This was followed by a statement issued by the Diyanet, which implied that Turkish society was divided into two groups: one composed of “wisdom” and “virtue”, and the other a “fanciful” group who consistently “[step] over the limits” (Yilmaz, 2024, p. 7). Ultimately, this religious discourse fed the state narrative that protestors were inherently violent, and that force was required to remove them and regain social order (Yilmaz, 2024).

To maintain political power and punish opposition, Erdoğan and the AKP also employ mechanisms from a number of different secular state-run religious institutions. For one, the Union of European Turkish Democrats (UID) plays a transnational authoritarian role for the AKP. Specifically targeting Turkey’s diaspora community in Europe, the UID suppresses opposition voices through covert surveillance, monitors dissent and carefully cultivates narratives that secure votes from abroad (Yilmaz and Kenes, 2025, p. 183). With its extensive network of Mosques both in Turkey and across the world, the Diyanet can also serve as the primary channel through which the AKP manages to control the Turkish population internationally. In fact, it too has been “implicated in espionage and surveillance activities” aimed at restraining anti-AKP rivals (Yilmaz and Kenes, 2025, p. 189). This further substantiates the role of the Diyanet in supporting the AKP’s Islamist agenda and consolidating political power (Yilmaz and Albayrak, 2022), acting as an effective legitimizing force precisely because it originated as a Kemalist mechanism for secular control and suppression.

Islam and Populism: The Pure Muslim People vs. The Corrupt Secular Elite

Arguably the most identifiable component of Erdoğan's regime, populism is often the primary method by which the AKP's base has been mobilized. Indeed, Erdoğan is deeply engaged in portraying Turkish political elites as corrupt and untrustworthy while equally tapping into the grievances of the "pure" Turkish people (Yilmaz, 2023). Yet, this form of populism also adopts a very distinctive Islamized form, only achievable through the appropriation of secularism itself. Beyond the country having assertively secular institutions, secularism remains an ideology embedded in Turkish society. Imposed assertively by Atatürk's regime to aid in Turkey's statebuilding efforts, secularism is a key school of thought central to the country's growing ideological polarization. This cleavage between secular and religio-conservative advocates is a highly contentious issue in domestic politics (Balta, 2023). In fact, Fox's (2014) argument that countries are inherently "[battlegrounds] between the supporters of secular and religious ideologies" fits the Turkish case perfectly. This has also been dubbed the "Turkish Kulturkampf": a polarizing divide within Turkey separating the population into "sharply differing lifestyles, values, attitudes, and political behaviour" (Balta, 2023, p. 4). Predictably, this secular-religious polarization offers the perfect foundation for the AKP to adopt an Islamic populist narrative.

Placing this cleavage directly atop the populist model, Erdoğan portrays the "corrupt elite" as comprising secular, western-influenced, and "immoral" political figures who rule over the pious, morally authentic people (Yilmaz, 2023). The AKP claims that the "real" Muslim nation is the victim of a "modernizing onslaught" of Western secular forces (Oztürk, 2023, p. 335), and that they are the only true protectors of the Muslim people. By propagating the narrative of secularism's civilizational threat to the pure and pious Turkish people, the AKP can connect with its base on a spiritual level. Exploiting the grievances created by the state's imposed "secularizing project", Islam is blended with populism to induce a distinctly emotionally resonant form of political support for Erdoğan, galvanizing his supporters and contributing to his consolidation of power.

This form of populism is especially salient during election campaigns, where it facilitates the demonization and marginalization of the political opposition (Yilmaz, 2023). Erdoğan often portrays opposition members as identifying with the "White Turks", a section of the secular elite who live in upper-class neighbourhoods and have moral codes different from the "ordinary citizen" (Gurpinar, 2023, p. 46). According to AKP rhetoric, this "deviant" group secured domination and hegemony over the authentic Turkish people (Known as the "Black Turks") (Gurpinar, 2023, p. 46). This is despite Erdoğan, as well as other AKP elites, having lifestyles similar to the "White Turk" group, while simultaneously claiming to be "Black Turks" (Yilmaz, 2023). Ultimately, this has led to immense electoral dominance for the party (Balta, 2023, p. 1). Furthermore, this secular-religious form of populism has enabled the proliferation of anti-Western conspiracy theories (Yilmaz, 2023). By circulating disinformation through his carefully crafted charismatic image, Erdoğan incites fear among the AKP's base, thereby contributing to the party's electoral success. Again, this not only evidences the symbiotic relationship between religion and populism in Turkey, but also demonstrates that populism as a far-right political strategy proliferated due to the cultural divisions created by the Kemalist secular project.



Conclusion

Following the imposition of assertive secularism as part of Turkey's nation-building project during the Atatürk years, this secular model is now empowering the very religious forces that it sought to curtail. Religious institutions, such as the Diyanet, offered the AKP the centralized state authority to propagate far-right religious narratives, thereby institutionalizing Islamic nativism and justifying state repression. Furthermore, the eventual societal cleavages produced through applying secularism to a deeply religious nation allowed a deeply emotional and spiritual form of populism to flourish under the AKP. Religion is thereby instrumentalized in Turkey to facilitate all three core features of populist radical right ideology, serving as a powerful tool for the AKP to continue their status as one of the longest ruling contemporary far-right parties in the world. Thus, Turkey remains a fascinating case of far-right politics outside of Europe, fitting into traditional right-wing ideological frameworks while standing alone as a distinct Islamized blend of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism.

The implications of the relationship between religion, state, and the populist radical right in the case of Turkey are threefold. First, this relationship between secularism, religion, and repression is not a phenomenon limited only to Turkey. As was discussed, several other countries in Asia instrumentalize religion to serve authoritarian and sometimes nativist goals. Second, the populist radical right is becoming more institutionalized and prevalent in states worldwide. With nativist, authoritarian, and populist ideology now part of mainstream discourse in many political contexts, the use of religion to consolidate these ideas may also proliferate. The case of Turkey may also show that secular institutions within other countries may be prone to inadvertently strengthening religious authoritarian movements rather than constraining them. Third, Erdoğan and the AKP's victory in the most recent 2023 Turkish elections suggests that moving forward, Islam will continue to play an increasingly prevalent and crucial role in Turkey's far-right democratic backsliding. While Turkey's future remains unclear, the ability to galvanize support through right-wing Islamism suggests that Recep Erdoğan and his AKP party have the political tools at their disposal to push Turkey further towards a path to autocracy.



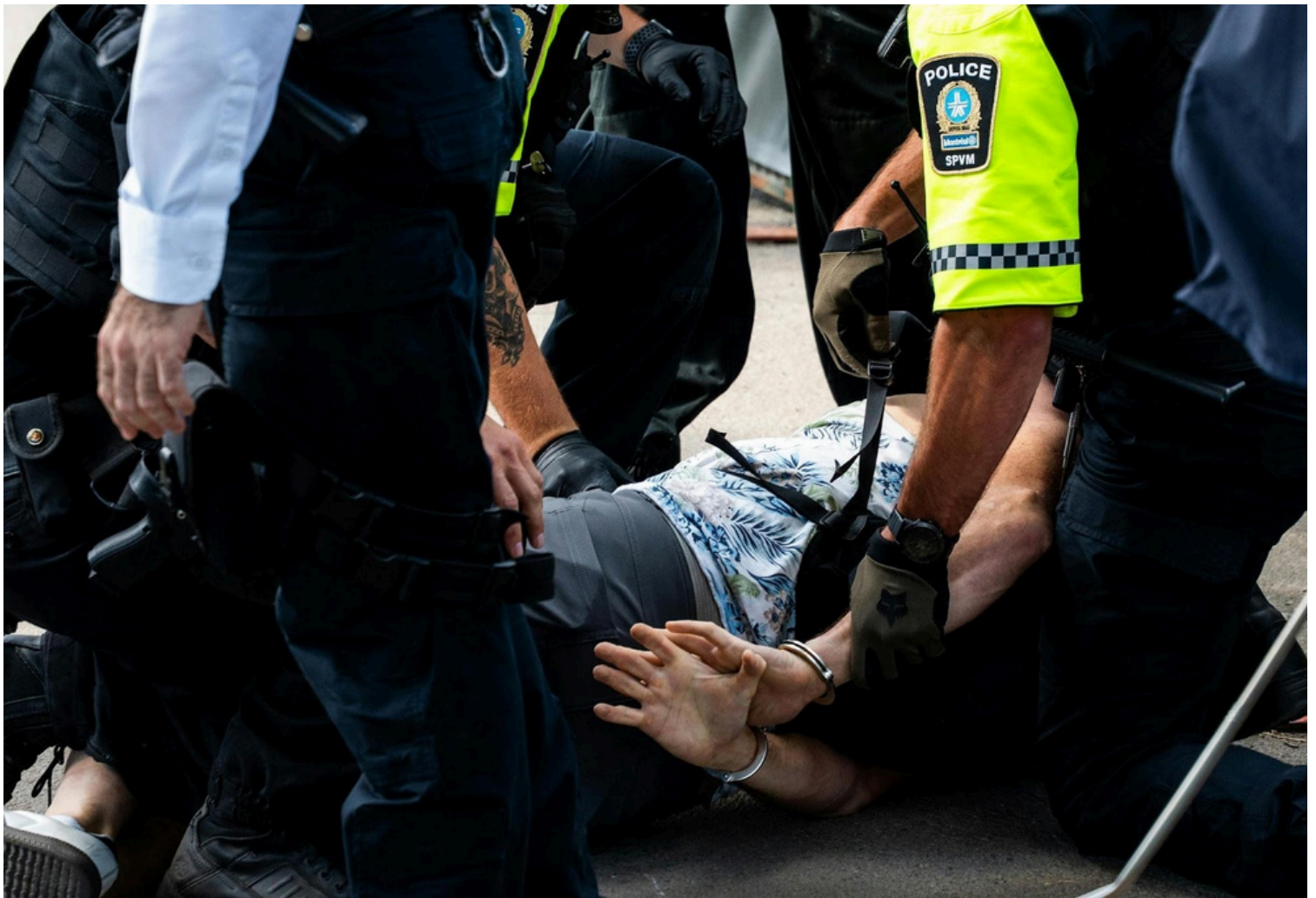
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LEGITIMIZING DISCRIMINATION: THE ANTI-TERRORISM ACT'S IMPACT ON RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES



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Legitimizing Discrimination: The Anti-Terrorism Act's Impact on Racialized Communities

I. Introduction

In 2002, Maher Arar, a Syrian-Canadian engineer, was detained at a U.S. airport and labelled a suspected terrorist based on information provided by Canadian authorities. He was subsequently rendered to Syria, where he was imprisoned and tortured for nearly a year. A later Canadian inquiry found that Arar had no ties to terrorism and that government actions had contributed to his ordeal (Amnesty International 2017). His case remains one of the most prominent examples of how post-9/11 national security frameworks can produce devastating consequences when suspicion is shaped by flawed intelligence and racialized assumptions.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, reshaped global security priorities, prompting Canada to enact Bill C-36, the Anti-Terrorism Act (Government of Canada 2017). This policy aimed to prevent terrorists from entering Canada, identify and punish those involved, and allow police to investigate national security issues (Daniels et al. 2002, 4). However, this national policy had a particularly negative consequence that threatened the civil liberties of Canadian citizens: the racial and religious profiling of Muslim and Arab citizens. This was demonstrated through surveillance and preventive arrests within policing practices, legitimizing the unfair treatment of targeted groups, and fostering long-term mistrust between Muslim-Canadian communities and law enforcement. The enforcement of Bill C-36 raised critical concerns about the balance between security and profiling in the post-9/11 era.

Given this, I aim to explore the following research question: How has the implementation of the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) influenced racial and ethnic profiling by law enforcement agencies, and what are the implications of discriminatory policing practices in Canada towards Muslim communities? Through this piece, I will introduce and provide an overview of the legislation and analyze the racial and ethnic profiling within law enforcement practices perpetrated by this bill, to show how policing practices are directly impacted.



Additionally, I will look at the broader implications of discriminatory policing practices on Muslim communities and potential policy recommendations. Overall, I argue that the implementation of Bill C-36 has led to an increase in racial and ethnic profiling by law enforcement, particularly affecting Muslim communities, with broader implications on civil rights, community relations, and overall police discretion.

II. Overview of the Anti-Terrorism Act (Bill C-36)

Bill C-36 was enacted on October 15th, 2001, following Resolution 1373 from the United Nations, which required all UN states to help prevent and suppress terrorist acts actively, following 9/11. The legal framework of the bill firstly lays out a vague definition of "terrorist activity" as "an act or omission undertaken, inside or outside Canada, for a political, religious or ideological purpose that is intended to intimidate the public with respect to its security" (Government of Canada 2017).

The Anti-Terrorism Act, utilizing a broad definition of terrorist activity, introduced several key measures to combat terrorism in Canada. It established a process for designating groups as terrorist entities and granted power to the authorities to prevent attacks through investigative hearings and conditions-based recognizance—a tool designed to assist law enforcement in disrupting terrorist activities (Crutcher & Budak 2005, 1).

The Act also created new offences, such as funding, facilitating, instructing, and concealing terrorism-related activities. It also strengthened hate crime and propaganda laws, expanded electronic surveillance powers, and permitted the interception of foreign communications (Crutcher & Budak 2005, 1).

Under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), local police are granted new powers, including wiretaps, investigative hearings, and arrests based on suspicion of terrorism-related activities (Daniels et al. 2002, 270). This expanded role adopts a preventive focus, enabling police to intervene before terrorist acts occur, including detaining individuals based on reasonable suspicion (Daniels et al. 2002, 273). However, this shift raises significant concerns about oversight. The ATA lacks a formal mandate for integration between police forces and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), highlighting issues of accountability and the risk of excessive power being concentrated in local law enforcement's hands for national security purposes. While this broader scope aligns with CSIS's goal of avoiding the "unintended narrowing" of terrorism's definition or law enforcement authority (Government of Canada 2017), it raises a critical question: does this expanded mandate, intended to prevent terrorism, contribute to disproportionate targeting through police discretion?

Since its enactment, the Anti-Terrorism Act has been supplemented by additional measures that have expanded the powers of law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Bill C-51 amended the Criminal Code to create an offence for advocating or promoting terrorism in general and allowed for the removal of online terrorist propaganda. The Security of Canada Information Sharing Act (SCISA) enabled 17 federal departments and agencies to share information on activities that could threaten national security. The Secure Air Travel Act established the legal framework for the "No Fly List" to prevent potential terrorists from travelling by air. CSIS's mandate was also broadened to allow "threat disruption," enabling the agency to intervene in suspected threats rather than solely collect intelligence. Preventive detention powers were expanded by lowering thresholds for imposing recognizances with conditions on individuals suspected of planning terrorist acts (Parliament of Canada 2015). Collectively, these reforms have increased police and intelligence discretion, raising concerns about oversight and civil liberties.

This evolution of the ATA sets the stage for understanding how discretionary powers under the Act have intersected with racial profiling, particularly within Muslim and Arab communities.

III. Racial Profiling Embedded in the Anti-Terrorism Act

John Boccabella critiques Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act for its broad definition of terrorism and its expansive investigative powers, which foster discriminatory profiling practices. He highlights that the definition of "terrorist activity" is so wide-ranging that it could include acts of civil disobedience that are not inherently terrorist in nature. This broad scope allows more individuals to fall under the Act's investigative powers, which Boccabella (2003, 19) argues disproportionately subjects individuals to law enforcement scrutiny despite not being involved in terrorist activity.

Law enforcement's role under the ATA is central to Canada's response to terrorism. Introduced in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the Act emphasizes disruption of terrorist activities, empowering local police to employ tools like condition-based recognizance through wire-tapping and ground investigations. However, these tools often lead to racial profiling, with Muslim and Arab communities disproportionately targeted for the discretionary assumption of being linked with terrorism. Although racial profiling is not explicitly endorsed in the legislation, it occurs through discretionary practices, many of which are undocumented and based on subjective decision-making (Bahdi 2003, 297).

Therefore, the ATA's effectiveness is criticized for being both overinclusive and underinclusive. It casts a wide net that ensnares innocent individuals, particularly based on racial or ethnic stereotypes of terrorism, while potentially overlooking threats from individuals who do not fit these profiles, specifically the growth of right-wing or homegrown terrorist activity (Bahdi 2003, 308). This imbalance reflects a prioritization of counterterrorism policing over the protection of civil liberties, raising concerns about the Act's broader implications for justice and equity when its target becomes racially exclusive.

IV. Racial and Ethnic Profiling in Law Enforcement Post-Bill C-36

Statistics and Reporting

Concrete data on police discrimination is difficult to obtain due to the reliance on officer discretion and the lack of reporting or documentation of many incidents. However, there is indisputable evidence that the police, under the scope of the Anti-Terrorism Act, have engaged in discriminatory practices. A survey conducted by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) on racial profiling in Ontario highlights how the ATA has enabled systemic discrimination against Muslim communities through enhanced surveillance and investigative powers. Statistically, the OHRC survey found that a third of Muslim respondents had experienced racial profiling at least once in the past year (OHRC 2017). Qualitative testimonies further illustrate this bias, such as a White Muslim woman recounting frequent police visits to her mosque. At this mosque, routine activities, like property maintenance or children's festivals, were disproportionately scrutinized due to baseless complaints and unwarranted police attention. These incidents exemplify a pattern of targeting Muslim spaces, reflecting systemic biases in law enforcement practices, making their places of worship overly surveilled (OHRC 2017).

Additionally, a study conducted with the Ottawa Police highlights how traffic stops disproportionately targeted Middle Eastern individuals between 2013 and 2015 (Foster et al. 2016). During this period, Middle Easterners were stopped 10,066 times, with "suspicious activities" frequently cited as justification. Although they comprised only 4% of Ottawa's population, they accounted for approximately 12.3% of all stops recorded over the two-year study. This means they were stopped at a rate 3.3 times higher than their share of the population would predict. This disproportionality reflects broader patterns in policing, where discretionary practices are shaped by racial and cultural stereotypes rather than being proportional to population distribution (Foster et al. 2016, 3-4). These practices align with patterns exacerbated by the post-9/11 Anti-Terrorism Act, which expanded police powers to include surveillance and increased collaboration with national security agencies, through their groundwork in conducting investigations. Although intended to enhance national security, these measures have disproportionately targeted Muslims and Arabs,

reinforcing stereotypes that associate these groups with terrorism. These tools of surveillance and stops further institutionalize such biases of "suspicious activities", embedding discriminatory practices into the fabric of law enforcement and deepening the marginalization of communities.

Police Training and Its Impact on Muslim Communities

Through an analysis of police training post-9/11 and implementation of the ATA, there is substantial evidence that a police culture has emerged on the frontlines that negatively impacts the civil liberties of Muslim Canadians, as seen through the previous statistics. Fahad Ahmad and Jeffrey Monaghan examine Canada's Counter-Terrorism Information Officer (CTIO) program and its role in shaping a culture of high policing among frontline workers. Through an ethnographic study of a CTIO training workshop, they explore how participants—including police—are socialized into counterterrorism practices traditionally confined to national security agencies (Ahmad & Monaghan 2022). This socialization promotes racialized surveillance and embeds systemic assumptions of Muslims and Arabs into frontline police.

Although the training sessions generally cover a range of extremist threats, the examples and case studies predominantly focus on "Islamic terrorism," such as discussions of "Salafi-Jihadist" groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS (Ahmad & Monaghan 2022, 256). While intended to identify "high-risk" groups, these examples overwhelmingly equate terrorism with Islam, inadvertently connecting Islamic theology with extremism. This framing reinforces stereotypes that Muslims are prone to radicalization and positions Muslim communities as inherently suspicious. Within the scope of the ATA, these practices deeply influence police actions. Officers are trained to rely on vague behavioural indicators, such as isolation, changes in behaviour, or expressions of anger, that are presented as signs of potential radicalization. This reliance on subjective judgments, referred to as "spidey senses," encourages officers to act based on intuition rather than concrete evidence, risks normalizing racial profiling, as officers frequently default to racial or cultural biases when interpreting these abstract indicators (Ahmad & Monaghan 2022, 256).

The connection to the ATA becomes clear in how CTIO training operationalizes its preemptive effort within everyday policing. By lowering the evidentiary threshold for intervention by basing it on these behavioural and physical indicators, the ATA empowers law enforcement to act on suspicion alone, embedding discriminatory practices into the routines of frontline officers. This erodes the legitimacy of police work, as officers increasingly rely on racialized assumptions rather than acts of crime.

A second example of police training and counter-terrorism practices that have contributed to discriminatory outcomes for Muslims is Public Safety Canada's 2013 Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Resilience Against Terrorism. While terrorism in Canada is not confined to any single group, the strategy predominantly frames the threat around Islamist extremism, with the Minister of Public Safety's Foreword referencing only 9/11 and the Air India bombing. When defining "the terrorist threat," the document explicitly states that "violent Islamist extremism is the leading threat to Canada's national security" (Public Safety Canada 2013, 5-6). Although the strategy acknowledges other threats, such as domestic or issue-based extremists, these receive comparatively minimal attention.

The Prevent and Detect components direct attention to individuals who may be motivated by extremist ideologies, emphasizing "homegrown Sunni Islamist extremists" and groups that have "identified Canada as a legitimate target" (Public Safety Canada 2013, 6). This focus shapes police training, intelligence operations, and community engagement in ways that culturally code Muslim communities as potential threats. As a result, discretionary policing, investigative practices, and outreach programs disproportionately involve Muslim individuals and organizations, reinforcing systemic discrimination even under stated principles of human rights, proportionality, and the rule of law (Public Safety Canada 2013, 3-6). Examples include training materials that identify signs of radicalization in ways associated with Muslim practices, and outreach initiatives that focus on Muslim neighbourhoods as part of preventive surveillance, as they target specifically "Islamist extremists" (Public Safety Canada 2013, 16).

Good Racial Profiling

Finally, this analysis benefits from delving into the mindset and justifications of law enforcement, tying statistical evidence and training practices to the broader narrative of how officers rationalize their actions within frontline investigative work. Colleen Margaret Clarke, in her paper examining the police response to the ATA, investigates the behaviour of police officers and their interactions with civilians. Her findings reveal that post-9/11, police practices across Canada intensified scrutiny of individuals of Middle Eastern descent. For instance, a police chief explicitly stated that Middle Eastern individuals were more likely to be stopped and questioned at borders compared to white Anglo-Saxon individuals. This was justified as a "security measure" rather than a personal bias, framed as an example of "good racial profiling" (Clarke 2006, 117). This logic positions racial profiling as a pragmatic investigative tactic, based on the assumption that members of specific ethnic groups are more likely to engage in terrorist activity.

However, Clarke's analysis also demonstrates how media perceptions influence and reinforce these biases in the police. One officer, for example, justified racial profiling by pointing to public expectations shaped by the media, stating, "he believes people expect the police to use racial profiling or whatever means necessary when their safety is the issue" (Clarke 2006, 119). These perceptions create a feedback loop where racial profiling becomes normalized under the discretionary powers granted by the ATA, fostering the belief among officers that such practices are both expected and necessary. This normalization of profiling has profound implications for civil liberties, as it entrenches discriminatory practices within the policing culture, eroding trust between law enforcement and racialized communities.



Two cases illustrate the harmful consequences of these practices and how police justify them under the guise of “security measures” enabled by the ATA. In November 2014, Aicha Essalam, a Muslim woman visiting Montreal from Morocco, was forcibly made to remove her hijab and robe during a police search. This occurred as police surrounded her car while attempting to arrest her son for missing a court appearance. Essalam was handcuffed, accused of carrying a weapon, and strip-searched on the street, but no incriminating evidence was found (Mignacca 2019). The Quebec Human Rights Commission later deemed this incident prejudiced, underscoring how Arabs and Muslims are often unjustly associated with terrorism, despite no evidence of wrongdoing or grounds for a search. This case highlights how racial profiling under the ATA’s expansive powers leads to the violation of fundamental rights, such as freedom of religion and protection from unwarranted searches.

Another example involves the frequent targeting of Muslim travellers at airports and land borders. Police and border officers disproportionately stop individuals with Muslim-sounding names or those wearing traditional attire for secondary screenings. These screenings often include invasive questioning about religion or citizenship, even when there is no evidence warranting such actions (Nagra & Maurutto 2016, 177). An example of this is longer detentions for individuals with names that sound Muslim, such as Mohammed, which have fostered fear and hostility toward law enforcement (Nagra & Maurutto 2016, 175). When challenged, officers frequently dismiss these actions as “random checks,” but travellers and scholars alike interpret them as thinly veiled justifications for discriminatory practices (Nagra & Maurutto 2016, 177). Importantly, the structure of “random” screening means that Canadian authorities do not collect or release disaggregated data by race or religion, making it difficult to verify bias empirically. However, survey evidence points to consistent patterns of disproportionate scrutiny: 60% of Muslim respondents reported being unfairly targeted at the border, and 90% believed that racial profiling was taking place (Nagra & Maurutto 2016, 173).

These examples reveal how profiling is legitimized through vague justifications, allowing law enforcement to avoid accountability while disproportionately targeting Muslims. By framing racial profiling as “good policing,” officers internalize discriminatory practices as legitimate tools for national security. This mindset shifts the focus from evidence-based investigation to profiling based on ethnicity, religion, and perceived cultural markers. The discretionary powers granted by the ATA reduce transparency and oversight, enabling officers to rationalize intrusive actions without sufficient evidence, as seen by the examples above. Consequently, this diminishes public trust in law enforcement and undermines the legitimacy of policing institutions.

V. Implications of Discriminatory Policing Practices on Muslims

Though it is important to examine the role of police, it is equally crucial to analyze the impact these police practices have on the civilians harmed. A survey assessing Canadians’ awareness and perceptions of the ATA revealed that most respondents were not familiar with the Act itself, reflecting a general lack of public awareness about the legislation (Crutcher & Budak 2005, 12). Despite this, there is widespread recognition of post-9/11 security measures, such as stricter airport protocols, and a general belief in the necessity of the ATA to combat terrorism and maintain safety in Canadian society (Crutcher & Budak 2005, 13). However, the same survey found concerns about racial profiling among those impacted by the ATA – Muslims and Arabs.

In a study with the Community Resilience Fund of Public Safety Canada, Muslim men reported being subjected to extensive surveillance and pre-emptive policing based on racialized assumptions about terrorism. Many expressed fears that Canada was approaching a police state, where associating with individuals or groups perceived as suspicious could invite police scrutiny in their lives (Akseer 2016, 48). This constant surveillance created a pervasive fear of being watched, restricting their participation in public and community. Police officers were frequently present in mosques and community organizations, reinforcing a sense of alienation and fostering a belief that their existence was inherently suspect (Akseer 2016, 70).

These interviews further reveal how these experiences led to a diminished sense of citizenship and belonging. Many Muslim Canadians contrasted this with life “back home,” where their religion or skin colour did not automatically make them targets of police presence (Akseer 2016, 72).

The psychological toll of such surveillance extends beyond public life into private spaces, where individuals feel compelled to self-regulate their behaviour to avoid suspicion. Muslim Canadians have been forced to manage their identities, adopting behaviours that appear less threatening to law enforcement. This often includes removing visible markers of Muslim identity, such as hijabs, niqabs, and beards, especially in public spaces or at borders (Nagra & Maurutto 2016, 184). Such self-regulation reflects an attempt to align with culturally valued norms of Western society while distancing themselves from visible symbols of Islam (Nagra & Maurutto 2016, 185). These adjustments not only underscore the fear of police and state surveillance but also reveal the extent to which the ATA has alienated Muslim Canadians, pushing them to compromise their identity for safety.

The implications of the ATA extend beyond Muslim communities, signalling a broader erosion of civil liberties in the name of national security. While the general public may support the ATA due to a perceived necessity to combat terrorism, widespread unawareness of its discriminatory impacts allows such policies to persist. This disconnect underscores how the voices of marginalized groups are often excluded from policymaking, perpetuating systemic inequities in whose rights and freedoms are prioritized. Moreover, the ATA’s reliance on racial profiling exacerbates existing biases and entrenches systemic racism, positioning police as enforcers of state-sanctioned discrimination rather than protectors of civil liberties. In this context, the ATA contradicts Canada’s multicultural identity, raising critical questions about whether its policies truly reflect a commitment to diversity and inclusion.

VI. Policy Reform

Lessons from Other Jurisdictions

Some scholars, such as David Jenkins, argue that Canada’s Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) is not inherently negative, particularly when compared to counter-terrorism legislation in the United Kingdom and the United States.

In the United Kingdom, laws such as the Terrorism Act 2000 and its successor amendments granted significantly expanded powers to detain terrorism suspects (UK Government 2000). For example, proposals to extend pre-charge detention from 14 to 90 days sparked intense debate and civil liberties concerns. Suspects could be held far longer than for other serious crimes, raising fears of unjust detention and contributing to the erosion of public trust in law enforcement, particularly among British Muslim communities. Human rights organizations argued that such measures undermined fundamental rights and could feed resentment that hindered cooperation with security forces (Human Rights Watch 2024).

In the United States, the USA PATRIOT Act (formally, the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001) significantly broadened federal surveillance and intelligence powers (Department of Justice 2001). The law expanded government authority to conduct warrantless electronic surveillance, share intelligence across agencies, and obtain private records without traditional judicial oversight. These provisions triggered widespread criticism from civil liberties advocates, who argued that they eroded Fourth Amendment protections and other constitutional rights, prompting legal challenges and public backlash over privacy and due process (ACLU 2024).

In comparison, Canada’s ATA is more restrained. Jenkins notes that it attempts to balance national security with civil liberties, proposing safeguards such as sunset clauses on preventive arrest provisions to limit potential overreach (Jenkins 2003, 424-429). A sunset clause is a legal mechanism that automatically terminates or scales back a specific provision after a set period or once certain conditions are met. He also emphasizes the potential value of a shared legal framework with allied nations like the U.K. and the U.S., which could strengthen international cooperation while upholding democratic values.

Proposed Amendments to the Canadian Anti-Terrorism Act

While the arguments validating the need for the ATA are substantiated, the ATA has proven inadequate in fully protecting the civil liberties of all Canadian citizens. Therefore, amendments to the ATA could help mitigate its negative implications. In his article for the Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, Muhammad Masum Billah examines the impact of police discretionary powers on Muslims in Canada, leading to targeted stops, searches, and detentions. He argues for a “rebuttable presumption of profiling,” requiring police to prove that race or religion did not influence their decisions (Billah 2016, 336). This proposed measure could work in conjunction with the ATA, ensuring that members of law enforcement accused of profiling must demonstrate in court that race, religion, or ethnicity were not factors in their discretionary decisions (Billah 2016, 341). While this is a reactionary clause and does not eliminate racial profiling, it could help reduce the misuse of police discretionary powers through oversight, without undermining the Act’s necessity.

In addition to Billah’s potential policy proposal, there should be amendments to the policy’s overall structure where the definition of terrorism is reviewed to minimize its overinclusive nature. From its current definition, it should be narrowed down to explicitly refer to acts that are directly intended to cause harm to civilians or infrastructure with the intent to coerce or intimidate a population or government. This would reduce the risk of the law being applied to activities such as peaceful protests, advocacy, or minor criminal infractions that do not pose a legitimate threat to public safety. By refining the scope of what constitutes terrorism, the Anti-Terrorism Act can better align with the intended goals of the policy.

Considering the direct contact that the police have with the community, the policy should also be amended to specify and formalize their role in fostering trust and collaboration with diverse communities. Specifically, this could involve implementing mandatory cultural competency training programs for law enforcement officers to reduce biases and improve their understanding of the communities they serve. Additionally, establishing community oversight boards that include members from a range of cultural and religious backgrounds would allow for greater accountability and transparency in police operations under the ATA.

Overall, the ATA should incorporate provisions to enhance data collection and reporting on the use of discretionary powers by law enforcement, particularly as they relate to racialized communities. Detailed records of stops, searches, and detentions, along with demographic information, should be collected and reviewed periodically by an independent oversight body so that statistics like those shown here accurately depict the impact of racial profiling on Muslim and Arab communities.

VII. Conclusion

The implementation of Canada’s Anti-Terrorism Act has had profound and far-reaching consequences, especially for Muslim communities, as it has exacerbated racial and religious profiling. Originally designed to enhance national security in response to global terrorist threats, the ATA has raised serious concerns about the erosion of civil liberties, particularly for marginalized groups. The Act’s broad and vague definition of “terrorist activity,” combined with expanded powers granted to law enforcement, has disproportionately targeted Muslim and Arab communities, deepening the divide between these groups and law enforcement. This issue is compounded by police training and discretionary powers that perpetuate racialized assumptions, facilitating discriminatory practices in everyday investigations. The role of local police in interacting with citizens is a critical, yet often overlooked, aspect of the ATA, as it is through their discretionary authority that Muslim Canadians are disproportionately targeted.



Although some argue that the ATA is necessary for national security and democratic values, its impact on civil liberties cannot be ignored. The profiling practices resulting from the ATA not only undermine the trust of Muslim Canadians in the justice and legal system but also contradict the ATA's commitment to making Canada safe. Therefore, while the ATA plays a crucial role in addressing national security threats, it is imperative to amend the Act to mitigate its negative effects. Reforms are essential to restore the balance between protecting national security and safeguarding the civil rights of all Canadian citizens. Specifically, refining the definition of "terrorist activity" to ensure it targets only actual threats and implementing safeguards, such as cultural competency training for law enforcement and independent oversight of police discretionary powers, would help minimize racial and religious profiling. These changes are crucial to ensure that police powers through the Anti-Terrorism Act do not further erode trust between Muslim Canadians and broader society, ultimately ensuring a more just and equitable approach to combatting terrorism.



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THE SEXUAL VILLAIN: THE SOCIO-POLITICAL TRANSITION OF ORIENTALISM TO ISLAMOPHOBIA



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The Sexual Villain: The Socio-Political Transition of Orientalism to Islamophobia

The Arab world, or more generally the Middle East, has been an interest of Western Euro-Christian scholarship for centuries. Presently equated to Middle Eastern studies, Orientalism, a term popularized by Edward Said, has a long and detailed history of othering Arabs and Muslims from the Western world through the use of a Eurocentric perspective (Samiei, 2010; 1145). Orientalism, according to Said, was used as a tool to promote and legitimize Western superiority, dominance, and imperialism by creating an ideological dichotomy between the West and the Arab world/Middle East. Said's history of Orientalism takes into account every interaction between the West and the Middle East from the late 18th century invasion of Egypt by French General Napoleon Bonaparte up until the emergence of US power after World War II (Samiei, 2010; 1145-46). Orientalism is foundational when discussing post-colonial studies of the Middle East. However, while Orientalism remains applicable today, events since the late 20th century have drastically shifted the positionalities of the West vis-à-vis the Middle East and vice versa. Specifically, to the West, the Middle East has become synonymous with Muslims and racialized through direct associations with the attackers of 9/11, amongst other events. This connection of a specific characterization of Muslims to the Middle East has, thus, shifted the discussion of the Middle East to one of Islam, where Western discourse of Muslims consists of deplorable stereotypes. Therefore, this paper argues that while Orientalism is still applicable to contemporary discussions of Arab-West dualism, it has also transitioned into Islamophobia and racism in the 21st century through Western conflation of Islam with the Middle East and the redirecting of Orientalist associations from Arabs to Muslims. Both these terms possess many similarities in their basic makeup. However, Islamophobia takes on an active mobility against the Muslim/Arab, using an extreme form of Orientalist tropes that were not originally a part of Orientalism.

Orientalism and the Beginning of the 'Other'

According to Said, Orientalism categorizes the Arab as the other, in which this longstanding historical Western misrepresentation sees Arabs as barbaric and backwards compared to the "civilized" West (Edwards, 2021; 24). These misrepresentations are reflected in Western art, literature, public discourse, and political commentary, which aid in shaping the way the West views the "Orient." This juxtaposition of the West and the East promotes a Western domination of authority over the "Orient" through acts of colonialism, especially when Western academia had been validated as unquestionably factual, allowing for a further legitimization of Western superiority and colonialism.

Damir Skenderovic and Christina Spati, in their article "From Orientalism to Islamophobia: Reflections, Confirmations, and Reservations," validate this description of Orientalism by stating that Said not only depicts Orientalism as a seldom interrogated hegemonic discourse but "an epistemological status equal to that of historical chronology or geographical location" (Skenderovic and Spati, 2019; 132). This quote means that the categorization of the Middle East as the "barbaric Orient" and the West as civilized is seen as codified knowledge, equivalent to historical and geographical facts rather than assumptions or opinions. These assertions are ultimately disguised as truthful knowledge of the Middle East and its residents, allowing for both Western and white superiority to justify their colonization. Even if the discourse of the "Orient" seemed to be depicted as admirable, it is still deeply intertwined with imperialist incentives and modes of thinking (Kalmar, 2019; 182). Therefore, the orientalist depiction of the Middle East by the West is not only a colonialist tool but a racist one, as it seems to benefit the interests of white Western legal, cultural, and socio-political institutions over those of the Middle East (Edwards, 2021, 25). The West versus the East narrative of Orientalism not only barbarizes the "Orient" through Western interpretations of regional practices but also racializes the "Orient" through Eurocentric stereotypes of Arab women and men.

Orientalist techniques tend to depict the “Orient” in a negative light. An example of this can be seen in the depiction of an Arab man as barbaric. However, as previously stated, the “Orient” is also depicted in an admirable way. An example of this admirable or romanticized orientalist tropes is the representation of women in a harem. Harems were domestic spaces in a house reserved for Muslim women, both married and unmarried. It is well known as a space where concubines were also housed. This specific fact is important as there were many artistic descriptions of an odalisque or Turkish chambermaid that depicted nude, beautiful, “white” women who were the embodiment of all male sexual desires (Skrenderovic and Spati, 2019; 132). The fetishization of the Odalisque is reflective of white supremacist ideals of beauty as the Odalisque was almost always depicted as white and naked. These white supremacist and Eurocentric ideals of beauty show the racialization within Orientalism, in which, whether the woman was white or not, her white skin is what is deemed as beautiful over any other exoticized feature. However, the Odalisque was also depicted as oppressed by their “captor,” the Middle Eastern man, in the harem who needed a Westerner to save her.

This depiction shows a darker side to the orientalist trope. This is significant because it reveals how orientalism does not merely represent the “Orient”, it also actively constructs it in ways that justify Western dominance. In this way, the sexualization and oppression of the Odalisque are not neutral artistic choices but ideological tools that reinforce Western superiority. This is reflected through a Western man’s sexual desire for a subservient woman, where the Odalisque’s skin color could also possibly represent the reflection of European men’s desire to oppress even European women. Furthermore, it highlights this romanticization of being the savior rather than the oppressor. This becomes particularly important in the transition to Islamophobia, where these same representations are no longer passive but are mobilized to justify political intervention and control over Muslim-majority populations. These two sides of Orientalism still exist presently. However, they have been transformed into one that has accommodated contemporary identities, in which generalized stereotypes of Islam currently frame, it as inherently oppressive to the veiled woman,

allowing for the goals of unveiling her to be the desire of the Western world. This transformation is specifically more focused on countries associated with Islam rather than the generalized Middle East, although the West continues to shape the two.

Islamophobia and its Contemporary Use

A more recent concept that has been discussed socially, politically, and academically is the term Islamophobia. In essence, Islamophobia is the “calcified denigration, at all levels and in all institutions and modes of thought, of Muslim men, women, and their communities” (Edwards, 2021; 3). It includes any thoughts, actions, and practices that are deemed as anti-Muslim or allow for an irrational fear and hatred of Muslims. Unlike Orientalism’s history of dealing with objects and subjects of the past, Islamophobia focuses on present-day discussions and issues (Skrenderovic and Spati, 2019; 134). The discussion and portrayal of Muslims and the Middle East in general by the West was reintroduced into mainstream discourse specifically after 9/11, where three airplanes, hijacked by Islamic extremists, struck the Twin Towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington D.C, resulting in over 2000 casualties. The consequence of a few Islamic extremists resulted in contemporary Western scholarship debunking the majority of Muslim voices and portraying them as anti-democratic, oppressive, and terroristic unless proven otherwise (el-Aswad, 2013; 41). Those who contest Islamophobia state that the term suppresses “rational, legitimate and necessary acknowledgment of the dangers within the Islamic World” (Edwards, 2021; 22). The othering taking place within Islamophobic discourse is not fetishization or an overzealous fascination, but rather framing Muslims and Muslim-like people as the enemy. It is important to highlight that Muslim-like people are included in the othering of Muslims as the racialization of Islam by the West has placed dark, Middle Eastern features and loose, modest garments as the stereotypical phenotype of what a Muslim looks like. It places racist markers of skin colour, ethnicity, and nationality as racialized signifiers of a specific faith, that faith being Islam. Owing to this racialized othering of Muslims, scholars such as Ivan Kalmar describe Islamophobia as the twenty-first century’s way of representing Orientalism (Kalmar, 2019; 182).

Unlike Orientalism's relatively admirable portrayal, Islamophobic rhetoric always depicts the Muslim in a negative light. Veiled Muslim women specifically have been a target of this negative Islamophobic portrayal. For example, now-former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has made quite inflammatory remarks about veiled Muslim women, calling them "bank robbers" and "letter boxes" when they wear the face-covering garment, the niqab (Sa'di, 2020;2508). These remarks show the power dynamics of Islamophobia, similar to Orientalism, where Boris Johnson, as a white man in a position of power, is able to insult Muslim women in the name of 'liberating' them from their 'oppressive' religion and culture (Abu-Lughod, 2013; 34).

Similarly, former First Lady Laura Bush, wife to former President George W. Bush, made remarks about Muslim women during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. For context, the invasion of Afghanistan was one of the many efforts of President Bush's 'War on Terror' in the Middle East after the tragedies of 9/11. Her remarks called for the "liberation of women" (Sa'di, 2020; 2508) from 'Islamic' terrorist regimes, stating that "Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment . . . The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (Bush, 2001). Her statement directly connects to the age-old orientalist assumption of the Muslim woman being oppressed by the barbaric Muslim man and needing to be saved by the white man. Furthermore, her remarks negated the original oppression the women in Afghanistan faced, such as malnutrition, illness, and poverty, and focused on what the West would deem as oppression, which includes not being able to listen to music (Abu-Lughod, 2013; 32). This negation creates a divide between what is deemed civilized and uncivilized terrorist oppression. Terrorists is substituted for barbaric when discussing the Muslim man. It associates the liberation of women directly with the allying of white military power, which results in the justification of military intervention.

Remarks made by Western figures in power, such as Laura Bush and Boris Johnson, allow for a more modernized version of Orientalism that specifically targets followers of religion, that version being Islamophobia. This demonstrates how Islamophobia transforms Orientalist representations into political justification. As previously discussed, while Orientalism depicted Muslim women as oppressed, Islamophobia mobilizes this image to legitimize military intervention, framing war as a form of liberation. Thus, the transition from Orientalism to Islamophobia marks a shift from representation to action, where stereotypes are no longer descriptive markers of a culture by the West but are used to justify real-world policy decisions.

The Transition from Orientalism to Islamophobia

Islamophobia should not be understood as separate from Classical Orientalism, but rather as a contemporary transformation in which earlier techniques of depicting Arab/Muslim representation are restructured into active tools for political control. Both have roots in post-colonial studies, where Islamophobia is a result of post-colonialism's views of the Muslim, and Orientalism has its roots in colonialist views of the Arab. Within its post-colonial roots, they are both embedded in the racialization of the other, that being the Arab/Muslim. In Ahmad Sa'di's article, "Orientalism in a Globalised World: Said in the Twenty-First Century," Sa'di argues that inequalities due to assumptions regarding religion, race, and ethnicity in the West are a direct result of colonialism (Sa'di, 2020; 2507). Both Orientalism and Islamophobia are based on Western religious, racial, and ethnic assumptions made through colonial biases that have navigated into the present. These assumptions result in a term Sa'di calls "Western modernism," in which colonialism has allowed for the dominated people's experiences and truths to be invalidated and replaced by a Western version of their history (Sa'di, 2020; 2507). This idea can be seen within the orientalist artistic portrayal of the Odalisque, but also in contemporary right-wing governments and their immigration policies for Arab and Muslim refugees escaping war in their home countries. Many right-wing governments dictate that they exclude Muslim and Arab refugees because they do not share the same, mainly religious, values. In order for these governments to be comfortable, they have to be around those who share a similar religion, often Christianity within the West,

resulting in the maintenance of a cohesive national identity (Sa'di, 2020; 2511). The reasoning for this excuse is based on Western versions of history that invalidate Muslim voices, ultimately leading to the othering of the Muslim in both oppressive orientalist and fearful Islamophobic techniques. Both Orientalism and Islamophobia deal with the othering of the non-Christian non-Western "other" that is deeply influenced by geopolitical interests of the West (Skenderovic, Spati, 2019; 137). These geopolitical interests forcefully prescribe the West as culturally superior to the oriental other, where the Muslim/Arab is racially categorized as irrational, rigid, and mystical due to their religion, unlike the presumed knowledge and science-based "rational" West. This shows how Orientalism and Islamophobia rely on a constructed or made knowledge to justify unequal power around the world, which reinforces Western dominance through the act of depicting Western cultural, political, and institutional means as superior.

The transition from Orientalism to Islamophobia occurs through a shift in both how it functions and the emphasis of its function. While Orientalism constructed the "Orient" as an inferior but distant other, Islamophobia repositions the Muslim as an immediate threat. As a result, the focus shifts from representation and domination to fear, securitization, and exclusion, especially in areas such as immigration and counterterrorism. Racialization is prevalent within both Islamophobia and Orientalism. However, Orientalism differs in how racialized the Arab is compared to Islamophobia's racialization of the Muslim. This means that Orientalism depicts the Arab other as "white but not quite" (Kalmar, 2019; 183). The racialization of the other in classical orientalism is deeply hidden within stereotypical depictions of the Arab or Middle Easterner mentioned above, such as clothing, barbarity, and a fetish-like admiration, yet still depicting the Arab as mostly white. However, what can be seen in modern Islamophobia is the racist truth in Orientalism's fundamental makeup, as Western portrayals of the Muslim "other" categorize the Muslim as not white at all. Rather, Western depiction of stereotypical Muslims would classify them as "brown," relating to the phenotypical description of skin colour such as "white" and "black" (Kalmar, 2019; 191).

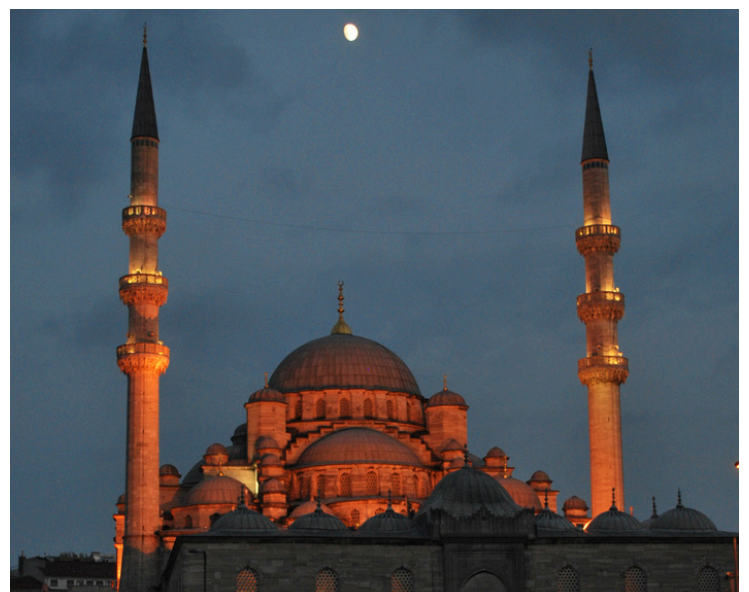
It almost exclusively includes physical characteristics of Arabs, Middle Easterners, and South Asians that are associated with specifically Western-chosen exclusionary socio-cultural practices that all feed into the stereotype of what Western scholarship and the general public would deem as the Muslim. The physical characterization of the Muslim other in Islamophobia is specifically based on terrorists who have committed violent attacks, specifically on the West, not taking into account that most terrorist attacks take place in the Middle East. This racialization of the Muslim/Arab other has transitioned from categorizing the other as barbaric and uncivilized in Orientalism into the religiously crazed terrorist in Islamophobia. The issue with this racialized transition into Islamophobia is that the fight against Islamic extremism tends to be viewed as a fight against the Middle East and Islam as a whole (el-Aswad, 2013; 42). While the racialization depicted in both Orientalism and Islamophobia still portrays a fetishization and hyper fixation on the other, Islamophobia has an extra element to its racialization, where it incites fear.

As previously mentioned, Islamophobia means a fear or hatred because of the fear of Muslims. The inclusion of fear of the Muslim "other" in Islamophobia is a transition away from the hyper-fixated fetishization seen in Orientalism. What takes place within Islamophobia is an othering of the Muslims through immigration and terrorism rather than religion and sexualization (Kalmar, 2019; 194). This transition is important because it also marks the transition from colonial to post-colonial. This means that within a colonial context, the goal of the West was to dominate different races and territories, establishing its rule over the colonized (Sa'di, 2020; 2505). This domination was done through othering those being subjugated and eliminating them if they did not comply. In Orientalism's case, the West was the dominant power against the uncivilized Middle Eastern Arab. However, post-colonialism, specifically in the case of Islamophobia, post-9/11, the fear switched places, where the "other" was feared by the West rather than the West scaring the Arab/Muslim other.

These instances of Western fear of Muslims are reflected in the previously mentioned Euro-American right-wing migration policies and exclusionary practices. An example of this is former UK Prime Minister David Cameron stating that he wanted to drain “the swamps of Muslim extremism” (Wintour, 2013). This type of rhetoric has shaped discourse on refugees in which the goal of immigration is to limit a country’s intake of migrants (Edwards, 2021; 80). What needs to be taken into account is the fact that many of the current-day migrants are coming from Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East as a result of Western intervention in their home countries. The Western intervention is a result of fear-driven Islamophobic discourse that is based on the actions of a few Islamic extremists. The consequence of these interventions results in the loss of Muslim lives and homes in the Middle East. The rejection of Muslim refugees at Western borders because of the fear of Muslims bringing their “terroristic” behaviours, while Western states maintain their military interventions in these countries, results in the othering of the Muslim, where they are incompatible with the West. Furthermore, unlike Orientalism, the use of Islamophobia places the other in a stagnant place where they have no place of being. What can be seen is the orientalist aspect of othering the Arab. However, the added aspect is the othering of Muslims, where it denigrates them and excludes them from both their home and their supposed saviour because of fear, unlike Orientalism, where they were still seen as relatively compatible and non-threatening (Kalmar, 2019; 194). The example of how refugees from the Middle East are depicted demonstrates how Islamophobia extends beyond general discussion and affects policy, where fear-based representations of Muslims directly shape exclusionary immigration practices and reinforce the perception that Muslim populations are incompatible with Western society.

The transition of Orientalism to Islamophobia can be clearly seen in the West’s hyper fixation on the oppressed Muslim woman. The transition does not negate the ever-existing orientalist tropes as they persist in contemporary Islamophobia. However, orientalist tropes have transformed into a component of Islamophobia rather than an entirely separate entity. For example, as mentioned before,

the Oriental woman was painted as a sexualized and oppressed object needing to be saved by the Western man. Her oppression was a consequence of an “uncivilized society,” that being the Middle Eastern society (Skenderovic, and Spati, 2019; 138). This view is still valid within the Islamophobic rhetoric’s portrayal of Muslim women. However, the bigger picture of Islamophobia’s transition from Orientalism pushes for the political mobilization of liberating Muslim women from their oppressors rather than remaining as the distant other (Skenderovic and Spati, 2019; 137). Islamophobia actively perceives the veils of Muslim women as an oppressive tool where the Western saviour would actively unveil her, while Orientalism imagines the unveiling of the Arab/Muslim woman through their sexualized depiction. Furthermore, because of the depiction of the veiling of Muslim women, it prescribes Islam as a sexist religion that only benefits men (Skenderovic and Spati, 2019; 138). This transition from the distant other to an active pursuit of unveiling is one of the main signifiers of a transition from Orientalism to its modern-day form, Islamophobia, where the West would save the Muslim woman, ultimately aiding in the neo-colonial empire of the West, seen with their military involvement in a post-colonial world. The maintenance of both othering the Arab and saving the oppressed woman in Orientalism still exists in contemporary Islamophobia. However, these classical tropes in Orientalism are used to push the fear of Muslims as oppressive and enemies of Western democracy. Thus, the racialization of Islam, along with the basic orientalist tropes of depicting the oppressed and barbaric, birthed Islamophobia.



Conclusion

Islamophobia and Orientalism's basic characteristics are almost the same. They both racialize the Arab/Muslim and designate them as the other. They portray the Muslim woman as an oppressed subject to the barbaric Muslim man. Both these terms seem to dictate the Middle Eastern other as uncivilized and the West as the educated, civilized saviours of democracy or society. Furthermore, they hyper-fixate on the Muslim woman's body, wanting to remove her clothes in some way. However, Islamophobia is an adapted, transformed, twenty-first century version of Orientalism that aims to for physical involvement in the othered Middle East to "save" Muslim women. Westerners viewing the Middle East through an orientalist lens observed the Middle Easterners from a distance, portraying them as almost white, where they live out their oriental fantasies. Islamophobia, on the other hand, takes Orientalist tropes and villainizes the Muslim, both through racialization and generalized stereotypes. It is important to note that these stereotypes are a direct result of post-9/11 Islamic extremist attacks. However, rather than singling out the bad actors, Islamophobia takes a page out of Orientalism's book and generalizes Islam. Orientalism, as discussed, is a reflection of Western yearnings in terms of a deep desire to oppress hypersexualized Muslim women and possibly become the barbaric Arab man to save or capture her. Could Islamophobia possibly follow the same structure in which Western actions against what they deem as Islam be a reflective behaviour of them becoming what they hate the most?



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ANALYZING THE POLICY LANDSCAPE: ACCESS TO MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING (MAID) ACROSS CANADA'S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM



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Analyzing the Policy Landscape: Access to Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) Across Canada's Healthcare System

Introduction

Since its legalization under Bill C-14 in 2016, Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) has remained one of Canada's most complex public health policies (Justice Canada 2024). In 2023, over 19,000 MAiD requests were recorded, with a 15.8% increase in provisions from 2022, emphasizing the growing need for equitable access (Canada 2024a). MAiD involves a healthcare provider administering or prescribing a substance to intentionally end a patient's life at their voluntary request (Library of Parliament 2024). Despite its intent to respect patient autonomy, the policy remains controversial due to access restrictions and eligibility criteria, reflecting tensions between end-of-life care, sanctity of life, and individual rights (Brown et al. 2020; Knox and Wagg 2023a; Library of Parliament 2024).

The objective of this analysis is to examine how institutional structures, stakeholder interests, and ideologies shape MAiD access across Canada. It argues that the interaction between these factors has led to restrictive implementation, limiting patient autonomy and resulting in unequal access to care. Using the 3I framework, it explores how interests, ideas, and institutions interact to influence MAiD policy outcomes (Gauvin 2014). Institutions such as federalism, provincial health systems, and faith-based hospital governance define boundaries of service delivery (Gauvin 2014, 1-4). Interests reflect the goals of actors such as the Catholic Healthcare Alliance of Canada (CHAC), Catholic hospitals, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), and political parties (Gauvin 2014, 1-4). Ideological beliefs shape the moral and ethical framing of MAiD within Canadian health policy (Gauvin 2014, 1-4).

Implementing the 3I Framework

Institutions at Play In Access to MAiD Services

In Canada, the institutions involved in access to MAiD include the federalist system, legislative frameworks, health governance structures, ethics agreements, and patient rights. Due to the federalist structure, MAiD is federally legislated but provincially delivered, making its implementation complex (Canada 2024b). Through the 2015 case *Carter v Canada*, the Supreme Court legalized MAiD when it recognized that the criminalization of assisted dying violated the right to "liberty of the person" by preventing the decision-making autonomy of the person (Justice Canada 2018, 382). To reflect this decision, the federal government passed Bill C-14, indicating that if eligible, an adult may voluntarily request MAiD if they have an irremediable medical condition (Shaw et al. 2018, 396). Recently, Bill C-7 has removed the requirement that natural death be reasonably foreseeable (Justice Canada 2024). Since legalization, Health Canada has been in charge of monitoring and reporting MAiD cases using the regulations amending the "Regulations for the Monitoring of Medical Assistance in Dying" regulatory framework (Justice Canada 2024).

Furthermore, MAiD policies have been developed by provinces and territories, which have the autonomy to create additional standards regarding service delivery and enforcement, as long as it does not permit actions prohibited under the Criminal Code (Justice Canada 2024). Variation among provinces based on how their governance systems support the implementation of MAiD has resulted in unequal access across the nation. For example, the provincial health departments of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Quebec have enforced regulations that all publicly funded healthcare institutions must provide access to MAiD services such as education, assessments, and procedures (Close et al. 2023, 2). However, healthcare governance structures in British Columbia (BC) have opposing regulations. The BC government requires healthcare institutions that are 50% or more publicly funded to allow MAiD, while also allowing faith-based publicly funded healthcare institutions the option to prohibit MAiD, despite the province having one of the highest rates of MAiD provisions (Close et al. 2023, 2; Canada 2024b).

This is regulated under a “Master Agreement” signed between the provincial government and the Denominational Health Care Facilities Association (Close et al. 2023, 2).

Additionally, the governance structure of Catholic healthcare institutions has rules allowing them to restrict MAiD service delivery through internal policies and ethics boards. Catholic hospitals often have long-standing boards and ethical directives with strong provincial relationships, enabling this restriction at their discretion, even if they are the only hospital in a region (Knox and Wagg 2023b, 2305). This governance structure stems from the “Catholic Health Ethics Guide,” developed in accordance with Catholic principles, where MAiD is considered an intrinsically immoral action (CHAC 2012, 118). This demonstrates the governance inconsistencies between federal legislation and provincial or territorial implementation. This kind of institutional autonomy undermines Health Canada’s federal regulatory body, which is set up to oversee MAiD services, resulting in unequal access to MAiD.

These institutional arrangements do not operate in isolation but are reinforced by both stakeholder interests and ideological positions. For example, the ability of Catholic hospitals to restrict MAiD access is not only a function of governance structures, but also reflects the alignment between institutional authority and religious ideologies, as well as the political willingness of provinces to accommodate these interests.

The Interests of Key Actors in MAiD

The interests involved are largely faith-based, professional, and politically driven. The CHAC unifies 129 healthcare organizations with a Catholic identity (CHAC 2025). Their interests are to align Catholic hospitals’ practice with the Catholic Church’s values to preserve its institutional consciousness and religious identity. As a result, they aim to restrict Catholic hospitals’ participation in MAiD so they can preserve their values regarding the dignity of life (CHAC 2025; Knox and Wagg 2023b). This has influenced the prioritization of end-of-life palliative care in Catholic healthcare institutions. MAiD patients themselves bear the costs of this, as restrictions have enabled “MAiD deserts,” where providers are scarce when Catholic hospitals dominate a

geographical region, resulting in patients facing unsafe transfers out of the hospital to access MAiD (Close et al. 2023, 22). Thus, the CHAC’s desire to restrict access to MAiD adds unnecessary burdens for patients in need of this care

Moreover, the CMA plays a central role in MAiD access as it represents physicians involved in providing or supporting this service. Its main interests are protecting physicians’ autonomy, respecting patient choice, and ensuring MAiD services align with ethical standards and clinical realities (CMA 2017, 2-7; Canada 2025). The CMA thus aims to support MAiD as a legal service by having resources and guidelines for care, while defending physicians’ right to abstain from providing that care, given that patients receive an effective referral (CMA 2017, 1-7; Dying with Dignity 2022). This approach often benefits physicians, who gain legal and ethical protection, while patients, especially those in rural areas with mainly faith-based hospitals, can face the costs of delayed physician referrals that limit access. These delays affect patients near the end of life, who have a time-sensitive need for providers, while the broader medical community faces little direct consequence. In response, advocacy groups like Dying With Dignity Canada have pushed for stricter referral requirements and accountability measures among objecting practitioners (Dying with Dignity 2022).

Finally, political parties play a central role in shaping access to MAiD. They aim to balance legal obligations under the Criminal Code with public values and moral considerations. The Liberal Party seeks to expand access to MAiD while maintaining public trust through strong safeguards (Parliament 2025). The Conservative Party focuses on stricter limits and protecting doctors’ right to refuse, reflecting faith-based and ethical concerns (Dying with Dignity 2025; KCMCanada 2025). The NDP aims to ensure fair and consistent access, particularly in areas where many hospitals or regions limit services (NDP 2020; KCMCanada 2025). Overall, these political interests directly influence provincial policy decisions by determining who benefits from improving access. Patients and advocates like CMA gain greater autonomy, equitable access, and reduced barriers under Liberal and NDP policies, while Catholic institutions and conservative groups benefit from restrictions.

These interests are closely tied to both institutional structures and ideological frameworks. For instance, the CHAC's ability to influence MAiD access is enabled by institutional agreements with provinces, while its stance is rooted in religious ideology. Similarly, the CMA's position reflects a balance between professional norms and broader societal debates around autonomy and harm, demonstrating how interests both shape and are shaped by institutions and ideas.

Ideologies Shaping MAiD Access and Policy

In terms of ideas, literature emphasizes two dominant perspectives on access to MAiD. The first frames MAiD as an extension of Charter rights and individual autonomy, asserting that competent adults have the right to choose how and when to end their suffering (Knox and Wagg 2023b). From this view, equitable access to MAiD is a matter of human dignity and compassion, and the state has an obligation to facilitate this choice through accessible and non-discriminatory services. The second perspective is morally and religiously focused, emphasizing the sanctity of human life and the protection of vulnerable people, considering MAiD as morally wrong (Knox and Wagg 2023b). These ideologies stem from the interests of the stakeholders previously discussed, highlighting the conflicts between autonomy and protection.

Historically, Catholic healthcare institutions have been central to this ideological divide. Catholic hospitals have provided values-based care since 1639, long before the 1984 Canada Health Act, and continue to permit 'unnatural deaths' (Humbert 2023; Knox and Wagg 2023b). Guided by the "Catholic Health Ethics Guide," these institutions view MAiD as an intrinsically immoral action (CHAC 2012, 118). Through these ideological foundations, Catholic hospitals have a strong legacy with provincial governments and the public, likely influencing their ability to restrict MAiD access on institutional grounds. Due to the strong tie that Catholic hospitals have with protecting those most vulnerable, restricted access, slow referrals, and unsafe transfers persist.

The CMA also fuels the ideological tension between physicians' conscience and respecting patient autonomy through its guiding principles. Although it believes that physicians have moral freedom to decline participation, it also upholds patients' right to care (Knox and Wagg 2023b, 10). Although personally opposed, a 2018 qualitative study shows that many physicians have prioritized patient needs over their beliefs, reflecting a professional commitment to compassion (Kelsall 2018). This has influenced provincial policies that allow institutional objections and use "effective referral" systems, requiring physicians to refer patients to willing providers (Dying with Dignity 2022). However, advocacy groups like Dying With Dignity argue these systems still cause harmful delays and unsafe transfers, also contradicting the CMA's ethical duty to prevent harm (Knox and Wagg 2023b, 7; Kelsall 2018).

Political ideologies also shape MAiD policy outcomes. The Liberal Party's emphasis on individual autonomy and compassion aligns with expanding access (Parliament 2019). Conservatives' ethical caution and prioritization of providers' conscience rights reinforce restrictive measures (Parliament 2019). The NDP frames MAiD as an equity and human rights issue, advocating for consistent universal access (NDP 2020). These ideological positions have directly impacted provincial-level decisions. For example, Alberta's recent increased investment in palliative care reflects the Conservatives' caution, and BC's integration of MAiD care spaces to faith-based hospitals demonstrates a balance between equitable access despite institutional restrictions (AHS 2024; Gilbert and Downie 2024). Ultimately, these ideologies demonstrate how societal values, institutional legacies, and moral worldviews drive inconsistent policy choices, leaving the tension between compassion and protection unresolved. However, with 84% of Canadians expressing support for MAiD, public sentiments increasingly challenge restrictive approaches and pressure policymakers to expand equitable access (IPSOS 2023).

Ultimately, these ideologies do not operate independently but are embedded within institutional structures and mobilized by key actors. The persistence of access barriers demonstrates how ideas, interests, and institutions reinforce one another, contributing to inconsistent policy implementation across Canada.

Restricted Access to MAiD and Implications on Equity-Deserving Groups

Barriers to accessing MAiD are shaped by long-standing power structures in Canada's healthcare system (Townsend et al. 2020, 8). Using an intersectional feminist lens, Sikka (2021) highlights how existing inequalities in healthcare have created distrust among religious, ethnic, and racialized groups, often making them hesitant to consider MAiD (Sikka 2021, 4-27). When they do seek it, they can face language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and limited awareness about the process, which further restricts equitable access (Sikka 2021, 13,17). An institutionalized implicit bias also exists where racialized patients are treated with less respect, feeling unheard and undervalued (Sikka 2021, 10-13). In Canada's federalist structure, the issue of access becomes more complex because provinces often give significant autonomy to Catholic healthcare institutions to impose their moral frameworks on physicians' approach to patient care.

The power held by Catholic healthcare institutions reinforces how systemic oppression operates in MAiD access. Although Catholic hospitals have historically contributed to the development of publicly funded healthcare, their continued authority is maintained through "Master Agreements" that allow them to refuse MAiD despite receiving public funding (Close et al. 2023, 2, 22). This gives Catholic institutions significant control over access and places religious values above patient choice. In an increasingly diverse country, this power structure privileges one faith-based ideology while limiting care for those with different beliefs, many of whom may be racialized or immigrant patients. The distressing patient transfers from Catholic hospitals to external sites can also be seen as a tangible form of oppression, where non-Catholics receive a lack of care compared to Catholic individuals. This problem has created unnecessary fear when accessing care, not knowing if one's opposing beliefs will result in reduced care (Knox and Wagg 2023a, 1154-1162). These power imbalances between patient and institutional autonomy demonstrate the ongoing prioritization of certain beliefs over safe and accessible MAiD services that exacerbate systemic oppression in Canada.

Major Policy Changes in MAiD Services

Following MAiD's legalization in 2016 through Bill C-14, the policy landscape has undergone major changes. Firstly, in 2021, Bill C-7 was passed, which expanded eligibility criteria to include individuals whose natural death was not 'reasonably foreseeable,' responding to court rulings that deemed the original end-of-life requirement unconstitutional (Justice Canada 2024). This reflected ideological and policy shifts. MAiD was reframed not simply as an end-of-life option but as a reflection of personal autonomy and relief from intolerable suffering. Its impacts reflected improvements in patients' rights; however, it also raises concerns about protecting vulnerable populations. Ultimately, this decision highlights how the government has redefined moral and medical boundaries surrounding the diversity of individuals' needs regarding suffering.

A The second federal change, Bill C-39 in 2023 and Bill C-62 in 2024, delayed MAiD eligibility for people whose sole condition is mental illness, extending the exclusion until 2027 (Justice Canada 2024). These extensions reflect a universal concern for readiness and well-planned safeguards when addressing inconsistent mental health services, practitioner training, and distinguishing suicidal intent from MAiD requests. The policy implications highlight the difficulty policymakers have in balancing provincial regulations and compassion for suffering (Justice Canada 2024). These legislative shifts reflect an evolving understanding of suffering, capacity, and autonomy in Canadian health policy.

Contentious Issues and Debates Surrounding MAiD

Unsafe patient transfers and the eligibility of individuals with mental illness remain two of the most debated issues around MAiD. In 2023, 2,906 individuals requested MAiD, but died before receiving it (Canada 2024a). The case of Samantha O'Neill, who was forced to transfer from BC's St. Paul Hospital due to its MAiD ban and passed away en route, sparked public outrage (DeRosa 2023b). In response, Dying With Dignity and other advocates launched a court case to prevent forced transfers and require all public hospitals to allow MAiD (Dying with Dignity 2024). Provincial and territorial policy changes followed as BC's Health Minister introduced a plan to connect St Paul's Hospital to an external centre MAiD facility (Gilbert and Downie 2024; Peters 2024).

Despite this change, critics argue that this is not a long-term solution to unsafe transfers, and some Catholic institutions still defend their right to uphold religious values in their hospitals (Gilbert and Downie 2024). This demonstrates how political actors have navigated competing interests between patient access and institutional rights (Gilbert and Downie 2024).

Beyond religious objections, another important counterargument concerns the adequacy of safeguards and the potential vulnerability of certain populations. Critics argue that expanding access without sufficient mental health supports or assessment capacity may risk normalizing MAiD as a substitute for inadequate care. This perspective highlights the importance of ensuring that MAiD policy is implemented alongside a strong healthcare infrastructure, rather than as a replacement for it. Similar debates have emerged in other areas of healthcare, such as access to abortion services and obstetrician-gynecologist care, where legal rights do not always translate into equitable access due to provider refusal and geographic disparities. This comparison reinforces the importance of addressing both legal frameworks and service delivery mechanisms when evaluating patient access.

Moreover, the delayed expansion of MAiD eligibility to include individuals with the sole condition of mental illness until 2027 reflects the ongoing debate about whether adequate safeguards, assessment criteria, and mental health supports exist to ensure safe and ethical implementation. While this expansion would increase MAiD access to a broader number of individuals, the federal government has been cautious, emphasizing the need to balance patient autonomy with administrative readiness (Justice Canada 2024). The CMA has stated that physicians are divided, with some in support of expansion, but only when consistent safeguards and training for assessors have been vetted (CMA 2017, 1-7). Faith-based organizations have remained strong in their opposition to expansion, arguing this undermines the sanctity of life and risks predisposing individuals to suicide (CCCB 2023). These differing perspectives have contributed to the decision of the federal government to delay its implementation

Policy Implications and Future Direction

While this analysis highlights the structural barriers shaping MAiD access, it also points to potential policy solutions. First, improving coordination between federal and provincial governments through clearer national standards could reduce service delivery inconsistencies. Second, addressing institutional barriers, such as those created by faith-based hospitals, through policy reform or service integration models could help minimize forced transfers to ultimately reach a long-term goal of mandating MAiD across Canada, similar to Quebec's current approach. Finally, expanding culturally competent care and outreach efforts may improve access for equity-deserving groups who face additional systemic barriers. These approaches reflect the need to address not only institutional constraints, but also the underlying ideas and interests that sustain them. Without such reforms, existing inequities in access to MAiD are likely to persist.



Conclusion

Through the 3I framework, the interconnectedness of institutions, interests, and ideologies reveals how each reinforces the others, fueling tensions surrounding access to MAiD in Canada. This analysis finds that governance structures within the federalist system and Catholic institutions are central drivers of access barriers. These restrictions often result from limited practitioner participation and narrow eligibility criteria, contributing to systemic inequities and reinforcing implicit biases. Overall, this paper finds that unequal access to MAiD services has serious implications for public health, particularly in advancing equitable and patient-centred care. To strengthen Canada's MAiD framework, policymakers must address institutional constraints and embed equity as a core principle of end-of-life policy.



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NON-CONSENSUAL DEEPFAKE PORNOGRAPHY IN CANADA: PROTECTING PRIVACY, DIGNITY AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS IN THE AGE OF SYNTHETIC MEDIA



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Non-Consensual Deepfake Pornography In Canada: Protecting Privacy, Dignity and Fundamental Rights in the Age of Synthetic Media



Introduction

The rapid expansion of AI tools capable of generating hyper-realistic synthetic images has created a significant gap in Canada's legal framework, where existing laws were not designed to address fabricated sexual content that depicts events that never occurred. As a result, victims are left without clear legal protection, while perpetrators exploit anonymity and technological accessibility. Without immediate action, the proliferation of generative AI tools risks normalizing and scaling image-based sexual abuse at a pace that outstrips current legal and regulatory responses. The rapid expansion of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has enabled the creation of hyper-realistic "deepfake" content, allowing individuals' face, voice, or body to be digitally manipulated and inserted into fabricated media. While deepfake technology has legitimate applications in creative industries, education, accessibility, and digital innovation, its most widespread and harmful use is its threats to privacy and autonomy.

Purpose

This policy brief aims to provide the Government of Canada with an evidence-based analysis of non-consensual deepfake pornography (NCDP), a growing form of image-based sexual abuse enabled by artificial intelligence. The brief outlines the magnitude of the issue, assesses current Canadian legal and regulatory frameworks, identifies critical policy gaps, and proposes legislative and administrative solutions to protect Canadians' privacy, dignity and equality rights. While the Criminal Code prohibits the non-consensual distribution of intimate images (s162.1) and child sexual abuse material (s.163.1), these provisions were drafted before deepfakes emerged. They do not explicitly cover synthetic or manipulated depictions that portray sexual acts that never occurred. This legislative ambiguity leaves victims without clear protection and hampers police and prosecutors.

The issue is urgent, as Diab (2025) observes, since the non-consensual distribution of deepfake pornography is currently under-regulated under Canadian law and presents unique challenges that the existing provisions of the Criminal Code were not designed to address. Victims, overwhelmingly women and girls, suffer severe reputational, psychological and economic harms, while perpetrators exploit anonymity and technological sophistication to evade accountability.

Stakeholders include victims seeking justice and removal mechanisms; law-enforcement agencies struggling with evidentiary and jurisdictional barriers; digital platforms whose algorithms amplify synthetic sexual material; and policymakers charged with balancing freedom of expression with protection from image-based sexual abuse.

2. Background/Context

2.1 The Emergence of Deepfake Technology

Deepfakes are generated using machine-learning models such as generative adversarial networks (GANs), which create hyper-realistic synthetic images or videos based on large training datasets. The technology can replicate voices, facial expressions, and movements with near-perfect realism. As Kusche (2024) explains, “the regulation explicitly confirms that the regulated AI systems render this future even in legal respects inherently more uncertain than it was before”. This uncertainty underscores the difficulty of distinguishing between authentic and synthetic media in emerging deepfake harms.

While AI offers numerous beneficial applications, the creation of non-consensual sexualised deepfake material overwhelmingly targets women and girls. Since 2018, an estimated 90-95% of all detected deepfake videos online have consisted of non-consensual pornography, with women representing 99% of identified victims. Between 2019 and 2023 alone, the volume of deepfake content increased by over 550%, with synthetic pornography remaining the dominant form of abuse.

These harms are facilitated by both mainstream AI image-generation tools (e.g., Midjourney, OpenAI image models, and Google Gemini) and third-party platforms that specialize in producing or distributing non-consensual deepfake content, increasing both accessibility and scale.

2.2 The Canadian Legal Landscape

Canada currently relies on two primary criminal provisions to address image-based sexual abuse: section 162.1 (publication of an intimate image without consent) and section 163.1 (child sexual abuse material) of the Criminal Code. Section 163.1 clearly applies to deepfakes depicting minors, as it prohibits “any visual representation...made by electronic or mechanical means” of a person or depicted as under 18 engaged in sexual activity. Canadian courts have affirmed that synthetic images of minors fall within this scope.

However, section 162.1 is more ambiguous. It criminalizes the non-consensual distribution of an “intimate image” defined as a “visual recording of a person,” language that may not encompass synthetic depictions. At the provincial level, British Columbia’s Intimate Images Protection Act (2023) and Manitoba’s 2024 amendments explicitly extend to “altered or fabricated” images, providing civil remedies such as injunctions and takedown orders. Other provinces rely on older privacy torts that may not capture synthetic content, resulting in a patchwork of protection. Recent legal developments further highlight these limitations. In Nova Scotia, a case involving the creation and distribution of non-consensual deepfake intimate images revealed that existing legal provisions did not clearly apply to synthetic content, exposing gaps in enforcement and leaving victims without adequate recourse. This case underscores the inability of current legislation to keep pace with emerging AI-enabled harms. These gaps demonstrate the need for federal action. Provincial frameworks remain fragmented and primarily civil in nature, while digital platforms and AI technologies operate across jurisdictions. As a result, only federal criminal law reform and national regulatory standards can provide consistent and enforceable protection across Canada. Recent federal developments also signal growing recognition of this issue. Bill C-16, currently under consideration in Parliament, proposes amendments to address harms associated with non-consensual intimate images, including emerging forms of synthetic content. While this represents an important step, it does not yet fully resolve the broader regulatory and enforcement challenges posed by deepfake technologies.

2.3 Comparative European Developments

The EU’s Artificial Intelligence Act (2024) classifies deepfakes as “limited-risk” AI systems, primarily subject to transparency obligations, specifically, disclosure that content has been artificially generated. Article 50(4) mandates that AI-generated media be labelled as such, though critics argue this approach prioritizes audience deception over victim protection. The Directive on Combating Violence Against Women (2024) takes a stronger stance by defining the non-consensual distribution of manipulated sexual content as a criminal offence, recognizing the disproportionate harm it inflicts on women. Scholars such as Romero Moreno argue that deepfake pornography constitutes a violation of women’s sexual autonomy and dignity, aligning it more with sexual violence than with issues of privacy alone.

2.4 Human Rights and Fundamental Rights Dimensions

Jones warns that many AI tools embed and amplify bias and discrimination, erode privacy, and diminish individual autonomy, potentially exacerbating inequality. Hildebrandt adds that the proliferation of AI technologies threatens fundamental aspects of human agency and accountability. Kusche interprets this through the lens of risk theory, suggesting that the EU's risk-based approach to AI regulation relies on fundamental rights both as values to uphold and as criteria for assessing risk. From this perspective, in the Canadian context, the issue of non-consensual deepfake pornography extends beyond criminal law into the domain of fundamental rights, including equality (Charter s. 15), privacy (s. 8), and personal security (s. 7). According to Pham and Davies, inadequate or overly technocratic regulation of AI, which includes deepfakes, risks eroding public trust in the reliability of information and the integrity of democratic engagement.

2.5 Policy Problem Definition

While certain elements of synthetic sexual content are covered by existing laws, Canada currently lacks a dedicated federal offence regulatory scheme specifically targeting adult deepfake pornography. Enforcement bodies encounter difficulties tracing offenders who operate behind anonymous profiles and international platforms. Victims are often left to navigate a fragmented, expensive, and opaque legal system to seek content removal. This policy brief asserts that a significant gap persists in Canadian criminal law regarding adult deepfake pornography and advocates for legislative reform to address modern technological threats while upholding dignity and personal autonomy. Together, recent court cases and emerging legislative efforts illustrate a critical policy gap: existing laws are already failing to address deepfake harms effectively, while proposed reforms remain incomplete. Without comprehensive federal intervention, victims will continue to face fragmented, inconsistent, and inadequate protection.

3. Policy Options

3.1 Option 1: Amend the Criminal Code

One policy approach is to revise section 162.1 of the Criminal Code to explicitly include synthetic or AI-generated depictions under the definition of "intimate image". This would close the legislative gap identified by Diab, who contends that without specific legal wording, victims of deepfake pornography may lack adequate criminal recourse. A model for such reform can be found in British Columbia's Intimate Images Protection Act, which includes "altered or fabricated representations" of identifiable individuals.

In the short term, this amendment would enhance clarity for prosecutors and boost victims' confidence in the justice system. Over the long term, it could lay the legal foundation for tackling other AI-related harms such as identity fraud. However, risks include the possibility of overly broad applications that might infringe on freedom of expression, and challenges for law enforcement in managing AI-related evidence. These risks can be mitigated through narrowly defined statutory language, clear intent requirements, and explicit exemptions for legitimate uses such as satire, journalism, or artistic expression.

3.2 Option 2: Establish a Federal Takedown

A second option involves the creation of a federal civil remedy system, including takedown and compensation mechanisms. Drawing on Pham and Davies analysis of fragmented AI governance, the widespread persistence of deepfake material necessitates a fast, centralized process that transcends provincial jurisdictions. Short-term benefits would include faster content removal and immediate relief for victims. Long-term advantages include improved consistency across provinces and reduced burdens on criminal courts. However, establishing such a body would require significant financial investment and close federal-provincial collaboration to ensure due process.

While this approach is relatively novel in the Canadian context, similar mechanisms have been explored in international digital safety and AI governance frameworks, reflecting a broader shift toward faster, victim-centered remedies.

3.3. Option 3: Mandate Platform Accountability Under Online Harms Legislation

A third policy option would be to establish a national framework addressing deepfake pornography through specific digital safety regulations. Such a framework could require online platforms to identify, label, and remove synthetic sexual material shared without consent. It would create clear expectations for technology companies to monitor and mitigate risks associated with manipulated sexual content. Possible measures might include automated detection tools, watermarking systems, and accessible reporting and support services for victims. Although this measure may raise concerns about privacy and freedom of expression, they can be balanced through transparent oversight, proportional safeguards, and consistent federal standards. For the purpose of this policy, “platforms” include social media companies (e.g., Meta, TikTok), AI developers (e.g., OpenAI, Midjourney, Google Gemini), and digital hosting services that enable the distribution or generation of synthetic content.

4. Recommendation Timeline

4.1 Legislative Reform: Criminal Code Amendment

Canada should amend section 162.1 of the Criminal Code to explicitly criminalise the non-consensual creation, distribution, and possession of synthetic or AI-generated sexualized images of identifiable individuals. The amendment should expand the definition of “intimate image” to include “digitally altered or fabricated visual representations,” treat harm to dignity and psychological well-being as aggravating factors during sentencing and extend jurisdiction to include offences facilitated by platforms or servers located outside of Canada. Clear statutory language of this nature is crucial to ensure that victims are protected from emerging technology-enabled harms.

4.2 Regulatory Framework: Federal Civil Remedies and Takedown Authority

Parliament should create a federal civil tribunal with authority to issue expedited takedown orders and award compensation to victims. This tribunal should be able to mandate the immediate removal of harmful content, instruct platforms to preserve relevant evidence for potential criminal investigations, and grant statutory damages as well as rehabilitation support.

A centralized, rapid-response mechanism reflects the growing consensus on the need for timely and effective mitigation of AI-driven harm. Implementation should involve coordination between the Department of Justice, Canadian Heritage, and a designated regulatory authority (such as the CRTC or a new digital safety body) to ensure effective enforcement and oversight.

4.3 Platform Accountability: Duties of Care and Transparency

The government should impose a statutory duty of care on large digital platforms. This duty should include deploying reasonable AI technologies to detect and watermark synthetic sexual material, offering accessible reporting tools with responses within 24 hours, and publishing routine transparency reports that outline detection rates, takedown actions, appeals, and cooperation with law enforcement. As Romeo Moreno argues, effective platform governance is a fundamental human rights obligation, not just a procedural requirement.

The European Union’s Artificial Intelligence Act offers a useful model, wherein AI systems are subject to transparency requirement, including clear disclosure that content has been artificially generated. Canada should adopt a similar approach by requiring developers of artificial intelligence systems, particularly those capable of producing sexualized or manipulated images, to complete Fundamental Rights Impact Assessments (FRIAs) before releasing their technology. A FRIA is a structured process used to identify how a system might affect people’s rights, such as privacy, equality, and dignity, and how to implement strategies that prevent or reduce harm. Given that deepfake non-consensual pornography disproportionately impacts women, implementing such assessments would help safeguard autonomy and uphold human dignity.

4.5 Public Education and Victim Support

The federal government should launch a nationwide education initiative to equip Canadians with the tools to recognize, report, and critically assess deepfakes. This should be accompanied by sustained investments in mental health care and legal support services for affected individuals. Given AI’s potential to intensify structural inequality, all interventions must be inclusive, trauma-informed, and co-developed with communities that face the highest risks.

5. Conclusion

Deepfake pornography stands as one of the most technologically complex and deeply gendered abuses of generative AI. Although Canada has made strides in addressing imagebased sexual abuse, its legal framework does not yet fully accommodate the unique challenges posed by synthetic content. Victims remain exposed to sustained violations of their privacy, dignity, and equality.

Recent cases and emerging legislation demonstrate both the urgency of the issue and the current inadequacy of existing protections. Without comprehensive federal action, harms will continue to scale alongside technological advancements. Transparency measures alone are inadequate. A comprehensive strategy is needed, one that includes criminal law reform, civil takedown mechanisms, platform regulation, and AI governance rooted in fundamental rights. These changes will better protect Canadians from digital sexual violence while safeguarding democratic values. Law must evolve to restrain technological power if democratic society is to endure in the age of algorithms. Canada must act swiftly to close its legal gaps and establish itself as a global leader in ethical AI regulation.



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SCREEN TIME USAGE IN CANADIAN YOUTH



BY ABDUR (MANI) REHMAN
EDITED BY VIC PASSALENT & SOFIA MELLICOVSKY

Screen Time Usage in Canadian Youth

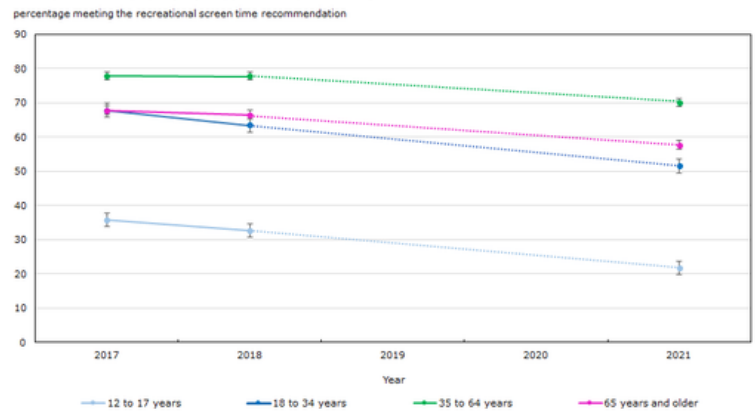
Introduction

Average daily recreational screen time among Canadian youth has risen sharply over the past decade, with fewer than 29.1% of youth meeting the Canadian Pediatric Society's guideline of ≤ 2 hours per day. It is quickly becoming a widely acknowledged public health concern for parents, educators, and policymakers. Using concepts from behavioural science, specifically loss aversion, the endowment effect, reference-point sensitivity, status quo bias, and cumulative prospect theory, this policy memo explains why adolescents struggle to regulate screen use and highlights why existing policy tools fail to diagnose and regulate this issue effectively.

To help reduce youth screen time, this memo recommends implementing default youth-protection modes on digital platforms, enforcing strict limits on addictive design features with full algorithmic transparency, and adopting a national digital well-being framework for evidence-based intervention. In Canada, the Canadian Pediatric Society recommends limiting recreational screen time to less than two hours per day for school-aged children and adolescents. However, Statistics Canada reports a significant decline in compliance among youth meeting this recommendation, falling from 40.7% in 2018 to 29.1% in 2021. A Canadian study of 26,986 children and youth found that those meeting the screen time recommendation of ≤ 2 hours/day were more likely to report positive mental health indicators (high happiness, life satisfaction) and less likely to report mental ill-health (stress, anxiety, depression), with strong associations among female youth and clear relationships showing worsening mental health outcomes as screen time increased.

Existing public health research shows that excessive screen use has been linked to a range of adverse health, social, and academic outcomes for children. These include lower standardized test scores, increased mental ill health (anxiety, depression, and aggression), poor sleep quality, a higher risk of obesity, and increased potential exposure to harmful online spaces.

Chart 1
Prevalence in meeting the recreational screen time recommendation among youth and adults, 2017, 2018, and 2021, by age group, Canada, excluding territories

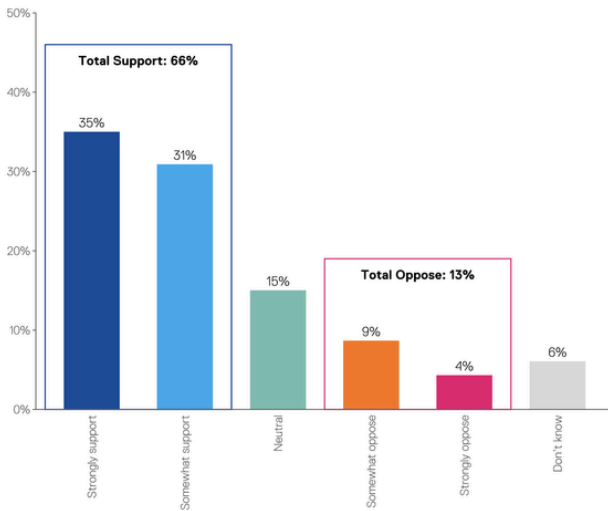


Notes: Data for all 10 provinces were not available in 2019 and 2020; therefore, these years are not presented. A dashed line has been used to indicate the gap in years.
Source: Canadian Community Health Survey, 2017, 2018, and 2021.

Globally, policy approaches to this problem vary widely. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that since 2016, the American Academy of Pediatrics has rescinded their screen time guidelines and now emphasizes family-based regulation. Some jurisdictions, such as Toyoko, Japan, have experimented with municipal smartphone limits. Australia, on the other hand, is the first country to adopt a comprehensive age restriction. They have implemented the social media ban on 10 December 2025, restricting all users under 16 from holding accounts on major platforms. Questions of implementation and the effectiveness of this policy are still being closely observed. According to a survey on digital policies conducted by The Dais, 66% of respondents would support a similar restriction on social media use for children under 16 in Canada (see fig.).

Despite these trends, policy responses in Canada have remained limited. All 10 provinces in Canada passed regulations limiting personal device use in classrooms starting in 2024. Still, many of these policies came without clear guidance on enforcement or any mechanism to measure effectiveness. The federal government introduced the Online Harms Act (Bill C-63) in 2024 to address part of the problem and create a regulatory framework requiring digital platforms to mitigate risks related to child sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, hate speech, and other online harms.

The Act would have established a Digital Safety Commission with enforcement powers. Unfortunately, the bill died on the order paper when the federal election was called and has not been properly revisited since.



Question: Recently the Australian government announced a ban on social media use for teens up to the age of 16. Would you support or oppose the Canadian federal government banning social media use for teens under the age of 16?

Literature Review of the Behavioural Mechanisms Driving Screen Time Use

To strengthen policy interventions on screen use, this memo will turn to lessons from behavioural science.

Loss Aversion and the Pain of Reducing Screentime

Loss aversion describes the tendency for losses to loom larger than equivalent gains. As Levy summarizes, individuals “overvalue losses relative to comparable gains.” In practical terms, asking youth to reduce screen time feels like taking something away, rather than providing a benefit. Comparable benefits (or even better ones) to their learning, future productivity, safety, or physical and mental well-being are not enough to drive a change. Behavioral research shows people tend to reject these kinds of changes because the psychological pain of losing something exceeds the pleasure of gaining something else. When adolescents are accustomed to hours of digital engagement, reductions, such as shifting from 4 hours of screen time to 3 or a comprehensive social media ban, are experienced as steep psychological losses.

Digital platforms also amplify this effect of loss aversion. Through likes, streaks, notifications, and personalized feeds, platforms create artificial “possessions” in users’ minds. Reducing screen time, therefore, triggers anticipated losses of social connection, long-standing achievement, and tailored entertainment, all of which are disproportionately overvalued in young minds.

Endowment Effect and Platform Dependency

To further explain this behaviour, we can look to the endowment effect, which occurs when individuals value what they already possess more than what they do not. Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler show that the “disutility of giving up an object is greater than the utility associated with acquiring it.” When applied to youth digital behaviour, this often leads to strong identity-based ties to online profiles, communities, and personalized algorithmic environments. These digital “possessions” produce instant endowment effects, making it far harder to disengage and even brief disconnections feel costly.

As a useful thought experiment, we can imagine a situation in which youth didn’t already have these digital environments and were given a choice to gain access to them. If they were fully aware of what they were giving up for these digital environments, it wouldn’t be hard to imagine fewer of them choosing high screen use, even if they were aware of what it offers them. This analysis is further supported by a higher prevalence of social media account deactivation and deletion in young adults, many of whom didn’t grow up as digital natives and are more aware of the cost of higher screen time use.

Reference-Point Sensitivity and Shifting Norms

The above thought experiment also highlights a central insight of prospect theory: people evaluate outcomes relative to a reference point, rather than in absolute terms. Levy notes that individuals’ preferences depend on perceived gains or losses from their current state, and that changes in frame can reverse preferences entirely.

For youth, the reference point for daily screen time has shifted dramatically upward due to pandemic effects, the social norm of wider adoption, and algorithms designed to maximize engagement.

Reducing usage is not a movement toward a better ideal but a movement away from the reference point, which is perceived as a loss. Cumulative prospect theory further strengthens this analysis. Tversky & Kahneman show that decision weights depend on cumulative probabilities and that individuals overweight high-probability routine behaviors. This makes it feel disproportionately difficult to deviate from habitual choices. This explains why adolescents struggle to adopt new screen habits, even when they are aware of risks. Habits become internal reference points, and shifting them triggers immediate psychological resistance.

Status Quo Bias and Policy Inaction

Policy inaction on this issue can be explained by another closely related component of loss aversion, namely the status quo bias. The status quo bias posits that people generally prefer to maintain their current state even when superior alternatives exist. Kahneman et al. show that individuals stay at the status quo because “the disadvantages of leaving it loom larger than the advantages.” This bias has broad implications for the subject of screen use. Policy makers default to minimal interventions because changing regulations risks political criticism, technological misalignment, or enforcement burdens. Hence, their intervention focuses on educator enforcement, relying on teachers to cultivate digital literacy. Burdened educators lacking guidance and support say parents need to do more to set limits and supervise technology use outside of school. Parents, on the other hand, fear relational losses through conflict and worry about alienating their children from their peers by placing restrictions. And children growing up native to the digital space remain helpless in finding strategies out of it.

Behind the surge in children's screen time lies not a lack of tech literacy, parental discipline, educator enforcement, or adolescent willpower, but a business model designed to keep young people hooked. Every notification, scroll, click, and hover generates throngs of data that help refine algorithms to keep users engaged just a little longer. In October 2021, The Wall Street Journal published a series of investigations that proved executives at Meta knew the harms of their platforms and their impact on its users. Corporations spend billions to develop and deploy these algorithms that capture attention on their platform. They spend millions more to

lobby and influence to keep their algorithms opaque and unregulated. The digital dopamine from resulting online interactions keeps young minds in a state of infinite scroll. The problem is so pervasive that, since March 2024, a group of Ontario school boards has an ongoing lawsuit against tech giants Meta, Snapchat, and TikTok, alleging that the platforms are negligently designed for compulsive use and have rewired the way children think, behave, and learn. In the U.S., **Meta has already been found culpable** of harming developing children with an addictive product. As Levy notes, reference-point bias, of which status quo bias is a subset, stabilizes systems unless a compelling justification shifts the perceived baseline.

“In many ways, tech companies are like miners, drilling their way for a limited resource — our attention. The critical question then is: Should tech companies be allowed to “extract” our children’s attention, too? Is this a loss we can afford?”

Probability Weighting and Algorithmic Manipulation

Finally, to understand how algorithms work to keep young people's attention, we turn again to Tversky and Kahneman's cumulative prospect theory, which argues that individuals overweight small probabilities and underweight large ones in systematic ways. For adolescents using social media, the tiny probability of receiving a rewarding notification (a like, message, or comment) is overweighted, leading to increased dependence. The large probability of cumulative mental, physical, and academic harms is underweighted because the risks feel abstract, distant, and probabilistic. Digital platforms exploit this by spreading variable rewards irregularly, ensuring youth repeatedly overweight the possibility of positive interaction.

Expecting adolescents to resist digital addiction engineered by billion-dollar companies is like asking them to resist candy in a free-for-all candy store. In many ways, tech companies are like miners, drilling their way for a limited resource – our attention. The critical question then is: Should tech companies be allowed to “extract” our children’s attention, too? Is this a loss we can afford?

“Canada has regulated harmful industries in the past. Smoking, gambling, and alcohol all have regulations limiting proliferation and advertisement to minors. Even oil companies are pressured to invest in clean energy to protect our collective future against climate change. Tech should be no different.”

Policy Recommendations

Every generation faces its defining public health challenge. Canada has regulated harmful industries in the past. Smoking, gambling, and alcohol all have regulations limiting proliferation and advertisement to minors. Even oil companies are pressured to invest in clean energy to protect our collective future against climate change. Tech should be no different.

Based on the arguments above, grounded in behavioural science, this policy memo proposes the following recommendations to regulate screen time use for Canadian youth.

A Federal Act Requiring Default Youth Protection Models on Digital Platforms

Default options are powerful because individuals tend to stick with them due to loss aversion and status quo bias. If adolescents must actively opt into unlimited use rather than opt out, the reference point shifts toward lower screen time. The proposed act would require all social media platforms used in Canada to implement automatic youth-protection settings for users under the age of 16. Default options could include no notifications during school hours, automatic daily screen time caps that can only be modified with parental authorization, stronger content moderation, and nighttime device downtime presets. Digital platforms can also make deviations from defaults difficult by requiring multiple confirmation steps.

Implementation of this recommendation should be led by Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED) Canada and be supported by Public Safety Canada and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner (OPC). A renewed Digital Safety Commission (DSC) should also be established to

regulate age-assurance standards and monitor compliance. In legislative terms, this could be enacted as a mandate for operating social media platforms in Canada. It is important to note that in enacting this mandate, there is a need for early and frequent consultation with social media platforms to ensure that they intend to be compliant with such a policy change. This will help prevent a situation like the [Online News Act \(Bill C-18\)](#), where Meta removed all news content from its platforms in Canada in response to being asked to compensate Canadian news organizations for their content. A phased rollout would move digital platforms from voluntary adoption to mandatory defaults for users under 16.

This policy implementation shifts the status quo from unrestricted access to restricted access, reducing the overall perceived loss of disconnecting.

A Federal Act Regulating Addictive Design Features and Requiring Algorithmic Transparency

Loss aversion and the endowment effect are amplified by digital platform design features that create artificial digital possessions and exploit uneven probability weighting. Policy in this file should seek to restrict or prohibit algorithmic features that reward compulsive engagement for minors. These features can include streaks, infinite-scroll feeds, and notifications that appear at unpredictable times. In addition, this policy should require platforms to provide extensive public documentation of algorithms, allow external audits to assess the platform's impacts on youth well-being, and require mandatory data-sharing for independent research on health outcomes.

The Justice Minister and the Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation should co-develop these regulations, enforced once again through the DSC. Platforms should complete annual Algorithmic Impact Assessments, undergo independent audits, and provide secure data access to a new National Transparency Lab established under the National Research Council (NRC). A tiered rollout and financial penalties would ensure compliance and prioritize oversight of large platforms.

This recommendation directly aims to reduce the engineered losses that youth fear when logging off, weakening the associated endowment effects.

Federal-Provincial Collaboration to Establish a National Digital Well-Being Framework

Reference points are socially constructed. By making screen-time norms visible and providing institutional accountability, healthier norms can emerge. Federal-provincial collaboration is needed on a Digital Well-Being Framework that standardizes school-district-level screen-time dashboards. This framework will enable public self-reporting of youth screen-time trends and associated measures of well-being. This will also serve as an evaluation metric for current provincial school-level device restriction policies. As part of this initiative, governments can also expand funding for digital literacy curriculum and evidence-based parent education.

The Public Health Agency of Canada should lead the development of the framework with input from provincial educational ministries and support from Statistics Canada and the Canadian Institute for Health Information. Implementation should standardize screen-time metrics, create a national reporting portal, and fund school boards to adopt monitoring tools and digital literacy programs. The Annual evaluations through the Council of Ministers of Education could track progress and guide improvements. Enacting this recommendation will have two major benefits: 1) It will help make the problem of screen time use a measurable one with evidence to back up future policy directions; and 2) It will effectively inform and help change attitudes around screen time use in Canada.

By incrementally redefining norms, this framework will help shift the reference point for Canadian youth, reducing the psychological loss currently associated with building healthier habits.

Conclusion

Rising youth screen time is not simply a regulatory issue but also a behavioural one. Inaction in this very significant policy file is not something that Canada can afford because of the devastating effects that it can have on the physical and mental well-being of the next generation. Behavioural science, when applied to screen time use, helps explain why youth overuse digital platforms and why current policy measures fail. Effective regulation must therefore reshape the choice architecture surrounding youth digital engagement. Defaults must favour well-being, platforms must be transparent and less addictive, and educational institutions must establish new norms for healthy screen use.

Incorporating behavioural insights into policy enables Canada to protect the long-term well-being and productivity of our youth effectively – arguably the most pressing policy issue of the digital age.

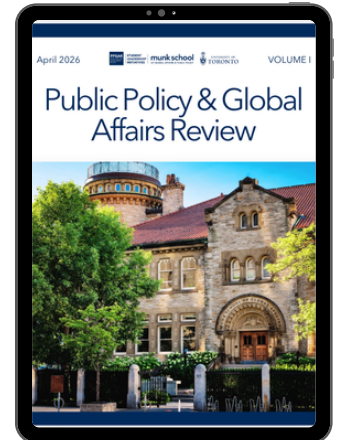


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