# YOUTH GRAVITY

# IMPACT THE OUTCOME
## RECLAIM COMMUNITY

# 2024
# YOUTH VOICE REPORT

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# LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Youth Gravity operates in Tkaronto, now known as Toronto, which is the unceded and unsurrendered territories of the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Haudenosaunee, and the Huron-Wendat peoples. These lands are covered under Treaty 13 and the Williams Treaties. This territory is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Anishinaabeg, Mississaugas, Haudenosaunee and allied nations to peaceably care for these lands.

Youth Gravity is composed of racialized, predominantly Muslim youth immigrants from underserved neighbourhoods in Toronto. We recognize that we are settlers and treaty people on this land. Our mission is to reflect on our role in perpetuating colonial violence while decolonizing the spaces we create to enact systemic changes. By amplifying the voices of racialized young people from Toronto's underserved neighbourhoods, we carry a commitment to anti-racism, decolonization, and meaningful allyship with Indigenous communities across Turtle Island.

# BRAVE SPACE

At Youth Gravity, we acknowledge that everyone comes from different backgrounds with unique lived experiences. We all have different perspectives on life, and therefore, we view the world differently. Brave Space refers to young people's courage to share their experiences despite knowing their experiences might not match anyone else's. There might be disagreements about beliefs. However, everyone's lived experiences and beliefs must always be respected. We celebrate the courage to share our lived experiences to better inform research, policies, and programming.

# ACKNOWLEDGING OUR COMMUNITY!

This report could not have been completed without the support of youth participants, both online and offline, The Youth Gravity Community Council, and our summer internship team. Their insights and dedication have been key in shaping this project, and we are deeply grateful for their contributions.

# THANK YOU TO OUR CO-EDITORS

**Yumna Moussa**          **Nicole Agyenim Boateng**

Yumna and Nicole, our wonderful undergraduate interns from the Child and Youth Care program at Toronto Metropolitan University, played key roles in writing, editing, and designing the Youth Voice Report 2024.

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# ABOUT YOUTH GRAVITY

**Youth Gravity (YG) is a grassroots organization aimed towards building a platform to support racialized immigrant youth with amplifying their voices and advocating for their communities.**

Youth Gravity serves racialized youth ages 14 to 29 years old from different walks of life, including those who self-identify as belonging to marginalized or racialized groups. Our mission is to ensure that the youth within our communities (different areas, ethno-cultural backgrounds, etc.) are empowered and that they have equal access to leadership, positive community engagement, and community development opportunities that reflect the needs of the local youth. We are dedicated towards building a safe space and empowering youth to have discussions around social polarization, hate, extremism, violence, and many other important issues.

Our vision is that one day, *all youth*, no matter of social status, race, gender, or religion will feel that they are capable of creating social change. Sometimes youth are not given the opportunity to explore their interests to find out what they are really passionate about. YG gives racialized youth the opportunities (volunteering, bringing in their own project ideas, etc.) to shape their communities the way they think they can contribute to.

# RESEARCH FOCUS

How do young people's lived experiences shape their understanding of social polarization, and what gaps and needs do they identify in research, programs, and policies for countering radicalization to violence?

# Session Topics

1. **Understanding Prejudice and White Supremacy**
2. **The Role of Media on Hate**
3. **Push and Pull Factors of Radicalization**
4. **Identity and Belonging: Anti-Muslim Hate**
5. **Intergenerational trauma**
6. **Gentrification and Community**

# Neighbourhoods

| Fall Series | Winter Series |
|---|---|
| → Thorncliffe Park<br>→ Rexdale<br>→ Scarborough Village<br>→ Kennedy Park | → Regent Park<br>→ Crescent Town<br>→ Lawrence Heights<br>→ Dixon |

| Metric | Regent Park | Thorncliffe Park | Rexdale | Scarborough Village | Kennedy Park | Crescent Town | Lawrence Heights | Dixon |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Crime Rate (per 1,000 residents) | 25 | 15 | 30 | 22 | 18 | 17 | 28 | 27 |
| % Immigrant Population | 70% | 80% | 65% | 60% | 55% | 75% | 60% | 65% |
| Median Income ($) | 30,000 | 35,000 | 32,000 | 33,000 | 34,000 | 36,000 | 28,000 | 30,000 |
| % Public Housing | 50% | 40% | 45% | 35% | 30% | 55% | 60% | 50% |

*Neighbourhood Profiles*, City of Toronto, 2021

**Table 1.1** This table provides a comparative analysis of the focused neighbourhoods of the IORC project. Regent Park, Thorncliffe Park, Rexdale, Scarborough Village, Kennedy Park, Crescent Town, Lawrence Heights, and Dixon feature major ethnic groups such as South Asians, East Africans, Chinese, Caribbean, and other communities. Many of these neighbourhoods have undergone or are undergoing redevelopment projects to improve housing and infrastructure. However, these changes often raise concerns about gentrification and displacement. Generally, these neighborhoods have a youthful demographic with larger family sizes than the city average. While historically associated with lower income levels and higher crime rates, efforts are ongoing to enhance employment opportunities and improve safety through community initiatives and increased social services.

# Executive Summary

Youth Gravity approached IORC as a community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) project to identify gaps in research, programming, and policies by centering youth perspectives on social polarization and countering radicalization to violence. Throughout the entire project, Youth Gravity engaged with 85 racialized immigrant youth between the ages of 14 and 25 from neighbourhoods recognized by the City of Toronto as 'Neighbourhood Improvement Areas' (2021) with disproportionate rates of low-income families, immigrant populations, and public housing (Table 1.1).

These neighbourhoods are deemed to have the most vulnerable populations prone to becoming radicalized to violence. These young people usually lack opportunities to voice their concerns and participate in decision-making spaces. The youth participants of IORC identified three key priority areas—'Systems of Hate, Oppression, and Isolation'—that impact their daily lived experiences. Each area was further developed based on participants' recommendations and their real-life experiences.

# 1.Systems Of Oppression

The first priority area that emerged across all sessions was the various oppression systems that disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Youth spoke about how schools, workplaces, and justice systems disenfranchise people of color. They voiced their concerns about a lack of representation and access to politics, leading to unresponsiveness of governing policies. This is demonstrated by a youth who stated,

*"My own interests or my morals are not reflected in Canadian legislation."*

They explained how racism and prejudice in schools and workplaces affect their mental health, as they grapple with finding a sense of belonging.
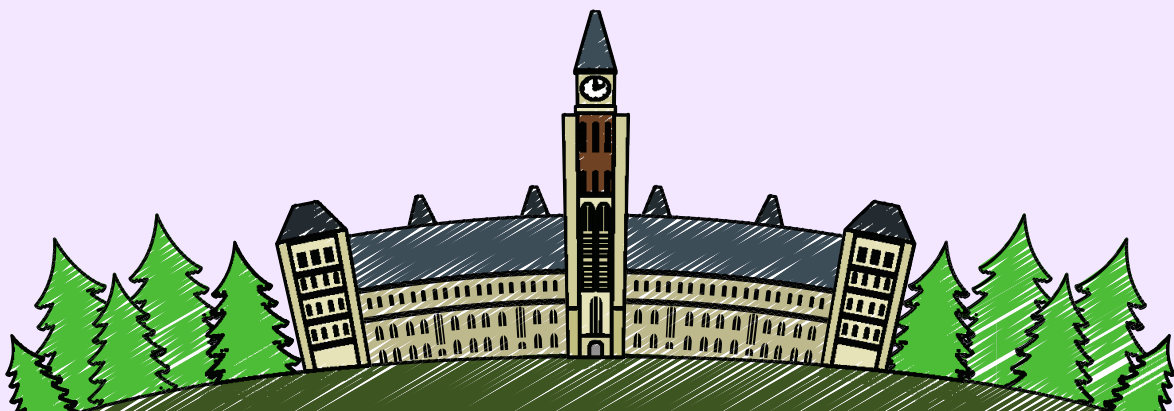
# Gaps In Educational Institutions

Youth participants spoke about the absence of recognition and the impact of colonial violence in Canadian history courses in high school. World history courses usually portray history from a white colonial perspective. One of the participants shared,

*"I think you should take…history teachers with a grain of salt because we live in a white society. History is not always necessarily true, because history is written by a white man".*

They feel that the education system alienates them and undermines the contributions of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color's history. In light of the recent Palestinian genocide, many young people mentioned feeling isolated, as teachers speak over them and try to disprove their beliefs. They don't feel safe in schools to share their frustration and anger.

# Education on Combating Hate and Countering Violent Extremism

As per the participants' suggestions, combating hate and countering violent radicalization should be actively introduced within the education system, starting young and presenting the information in developmentally appropriate ways. This would provide students with a foundation on understanding how to identify the process of violent radicalization, and interrupt the process before it begins.

# 2.Systems Of Hate

Throughout the series youth consistently repeated the impacts that institutions have in perpetuating systemic oppression of racialized communities. One participant stated,

*"White supremacy is embedded into the system that we go through every day… schooling, teaching style, all that."*

These systems consistently dismiss the unique experiences of marginalized communities by allowing hatred to go unchecked. This mimics policies and what happens in the media, where racialized experiences are scrutinized.

# Discriminatory Policies

Given that participants established that Canada's poor treatment of marginalized communities has led to social alienation, it is important to dismantle Anti-Muslim policies to establish inclusivity and combat Anti-Muslim hate. We are urging the government to repeal discriminatory policies such as Bill C-21, which infringe on the religious freedoms of Muslim communities in Quebec. Policies like these continue to perpetrate systematic oppression.

We are encouraging policy stakeholders and community members to formally adopt the term 'Islamophobia' to 'Anti-Muslim Hate' in the legislature. This recommendation aims to combat Anti-Muslim hate by naming it accurately and shifting the narrative from a 'fear' of Muslims to a 'hate' of Muslims. Correcting the term "Islamophobia '' provides a foundation for accurately addressing the discrimination that Muslim communities face.

# Digital Media Literacy

The youth have recognized the urgent need to modernize the education system by incorporating current digital literacy. They emphasize the necessity of media literacy campaigns to address disinformation, propaganda, and critical media analysis. This call for formally updating the digital media literacy curriculum stems from an analysis of the current Ontario Digital Media curriculum.

Given the rapid evolution of how youth receive news and information, it is imperative that the curriculum evolves accordingly. This will equip young people with the essential skills to critically analyze media, enabling them to identify disinformation, hate, and propaganda from the outset.

# 3.Systems of Isolation

The last priority area that youth brought forward was systems of isolation. These systems consist mainly of interpersonal relationships and community division, how certain dynamics within youths' homes and social circles lead to feelings of isolation. One of the participants shared,

*"I feel like I have to work so much harder because the world is harder."*

Young people feel enormous pressure to succeed in the current world, and immigration has impacted how parents interact with their children and form expectations.

# Community Mobilization

IORC allowed young people from underserved areas to specifically reflect on their experiences of growing up in these neighborhoods. Through sessions which focused on intergenerational trauma and gentrification, we had a glimpse of participants' home life and family dynamics. 48% of the young people emphasized how they are impacted by the intergenerational trauma they have been carrying. There is a lack of equitable mental health resources, leaving their needs unaddressed. The session on intergenerational trauma was the most impactful session, as the young people became vulnerable and shared their struggles with identity and how family dynamics impact their mental health. Many young people shared how they found the session to be a healing space.

These findings have inspired us to continue our work in countering radicalization to violence. We aim to expand the capacity of the IORC project and broaden our demographic and horizons. In the future, we aim to collaborate with other stakeholders and focus on building capacity within schools through various programming while remaining authentic to our original message of representation and amplifying marginalized and immigrant youth.

# Team Reflection

## Sal-Sabila - Executive Director

In 2020, Youth Gravity (YG) became one of the first youth-led initiatives to be funded by the Community Resilience Fund in countering radicalization to violence (CRV) to lead the Impact the Outcome (IO) project. In 2023, we received the Community Resilience Fund again to run Impact the Outcome: Reclaim Community (IORC).

IORC made us recognize the importance of holding intentional space for youth to express their beliefs and share lived experiences of racism and hate. This allowed opportunities for positive engagement in countering radicalization to violence. We aimed to acknowledge their experiences and provide them with tools to recognize their own experiences and advocate for themselves. When our focus shifted from countering violent extremism to prevention of violent extremism, our conversations changed from damage control to collective healing and addressing preventive measures.

The biggest difference between the last project and this project is that there is no pandemic. In 2020, we received IO funding two weeks before the lockdown. We had to shift all our activities to virtual platforms, adapt to the situation, and facilitate conversations based on current events. Conversely, the IORC project was run in person.

However, I found that young people are still not completely used to in-person sessions, so there was reluctance to commute and attend. To make it accessible, we offered both in-person and virtual sessions. We also divided the communities and created two series focused on four communities simultaneously. We ran 24 sessions in total, engaging with 85 youth directly. Our team also comprises youth who share similar experiences and identities with our participants.

Another difference between IO and IORC projects is that this time, we focused on the community, how youth define it, and how it impacts their understanding of social polarization and hate. This time, we added two new topics to our previous list: Intergenerational Trauma and Gentrification. Our peer-to-peer framework has allowed us to capture thoughts and conversations on how these topics relate to social polarization and hate.

A significant issue that has impacted our work is the Palestinian genocide. We started our project around the time of the October 7 attack. As we are going through a global crisis, young people are the most vulnerable as they cannot find a space to share their thoughts and lived experiences and their impact on them. They are also resorting to media and social media to feel represented; however, Canada's complacency in the genocide is making it difficult for them to feel seen, and instead, they feel alienated.

Moving forward, we want to keep holding space for youth to discuss intergenerational relationships at home and in the workplace. I hope to see more funding for grassroots organizations to keep working toward civic engagement among youth.

# Noor Saeid - Content Developer

I was familiar with Youth Gravity before I joined IORC. My first contact with Youth Gravity was in 2020 through the Community Circle Initiative. I valued how youth were prioritized—a true community-based approach. This project connected youth from across the city, providing opportunities to educate and learn from my peers without outside influence. It was an opportunity to lead from within, which I appreciated.

My expectation in joining this project was to foster discussions on various topics with youth. From this project, I have learned that nothing is more valuable than the honest opinions of youth when attempting to change their future. The community always holds the capabilities necessary to improve and lead; it's just a matter of providing them with the necessary tools. In this project, I learned much about myself, realizing my voice holds more value than I originally thought. Being in a leadership position allowed me to step into this role with newfound confidence.

I value Youth Gravity because I see myself reflected in the communities we engage in. I truly see myself in all participants. Every time a participant spoke about a teacher invalidating them, a hate crime experience, or the trials of the immigrant experience in Canada, I felt like I could match it with one of my own. It was validating to hear my own voice reverberated back to me.

A defining moment for me occurred during the first workshop. All the meetings and workshop curation culminated when I led the first session. I was extremely nervous. However, as the youth entered the space, ready to learn and engage, I was relieved and excited. I saw my own experiences reflected in each participant's comment or contribution. At the end of the first workshop, I felt incredibly inspired to continue and strive for even more in this project.

Throughout this series, I learned that the youth will show up. Often, in academia or research, youth are excluded in processes that ultimately affect them. There is a stigma in attitudes towards youth from marginalized communities. This project solidified my belief that youth will show up if the effort is made to include them. Youth only need the stage and will engage and contribute in every way possible. In future projects, it's necessary to count on the idea that youth want to participate actively in their future. Every effort should be made to include youth in decision-making processes.

# Elsa Ahmed - Marketing Director

I joined Youth Gravity to empower young people and engage in meaningful community work. The opportunity to collaborate with like-minded individuals and make a tangible difference was appealing. My expectations included gaining hands-on experience in community outreach and developing professional skills.

I learned the importance of active listening and understanding the needs of youth. This project revealed our community's diversity and potential. This project has shown me the value of teamwork and collaboration and has reinforced my belief in the power of collective effort to drive meaningful change.

As a woman of color, my lived experiences resonate deeply with those of the young participants. Growing up, I faced challenges related to identity, representation, and systemic barriers. By reflecting on my own journey, I connected with the stories of the youth, fostering mutual understanding and support. A defining moment was during our discussions on intergenerational trauma, where participants were comfortable enough to have deep and emotional discussions about their experiences. Witnessing their courage and hope for change within our own generation reaffirmed my belief in youth empowerment and community engagement.

I was pleasantly surprised by the participants' creativity and insights. Their innovative ideas and thoughtful perspectives exceeded my expectations and demonstrated the immense potential of young people when allowed to shine. I also learned about the power of community. Seeing participants come together to support one another, share their experiences, and collaborate on projects highlighted the strength and resilience within our community.

We hope to see greater youth participation in community decision-making and more youth-led initiatives. A future application could be a sustainable network of youth organizations. An ideal next step is developing a program for continuous learning and broader social change.

## Caitlin Arizala
## Community Engagement Director

I joined Youth Gravity to leverage my design and communication skills to support Toronto's grassroots youth-led organizations. As a young, disabled, racialized woman from Rexdale, I was drawn to Youth Gravity's mission to uplift racialized, underserved youth from underserved neighbourhoods. The opportunity to work alongside young leaders eager to drive systemic change made me feel both seen and empowered.

Throughout this project, I witnessed the incredible vibrancy and advocacy of young people's spirit. It was a privilege to hold space for their innovative ideas, but hearing their stories of oppression and disenfranchisement was profoundly impactful. A defining moment was bonding over shared experiences of racism in Ontario's education system, underscoring the pervasive nature of these issues. Hearing others' experiences unearthed my own repressed memories of migration, racism, sexism, and ableism. These narratives allowed me to reflect on the immense challenges young people navigate, from adolescence to migration and assimilation into Canadian education.

With these insights, I envision a future where policies, initiatives, and systems are racialized and youth-led. Through this report, I call on high-level decision-makers to listen to our lived experiences. I call for the implementation of multi-level policies that reflect the voices and lived experiences of racialized young people, ensuring equitable opportunities, a supportive environment, and reconciliation.

# Team Challenges

The IORC series was not without its challenges. In its preparation, some of the challenges that we faced included the lack of space for youth. Given our budget and space options, attempting to coordinate a space to accommodate 20-50 youth was challenging. In order to combat this, we eventually turned to a virtual approach where we held sessions via Zoom to ensure that we could engage with youth without being limited by the lack of space for young people. As the series began, we faced challenges in getting people to engage online and in person. The themes we cover in IORC can be sensitive topics. We found that youth were hesitant to speak up in the beginning; however, as the series progressed, engagement improved. We faced obstacles in participant retention, but most participants attended all 6 sessions for the fall and winter series. Lastly, we faced some difficulties in approaching the topic of the Palestinian genocide while attempting to ensure sensitivity and accuracy, and we struggled to find the right terms to address the ongoing genocide. As the session progressed, our discussion on the topic steadied, and we made every effort to accurately describe the genocide while educating participants on the topic.

# Series Schedule

## Fall Series

| Session Topic | In-Person Sessions | Virtual Sessions |
|---|---|---|
| Understanding Prejudice and White Supremacy | Thursday, November 9, 2023 | Saturday, November 11, 2023 |
| The Role of Media on Hate | Thursday, November 16, 2023 | Saturday, November 18, 2023 |
| Push and Pull Factors of Radicalization | Thursday, November 23, 2023 | Saturday, November 25, 2023 |
| Identity and Belonging: Anti-Muslim Hate | Thursday, November 30, 2023 | Saturday, December 2, 2023 |
| Intergenerational Trauma | Thursday, December 7, 2023 | Saturday, December 9, 2023 |
| Gentrification and Community | Thursday, December 14, 2023 | Saturday, December 16, 2023 |

## Winter Series

| Session Topic | In-Person Sessions | Virtual Sessions |
|---|---|---|
| Understanding Prejudice and White Supremacy | Saturday, February 3, 2024 | Thursday, February 1, 2024 |
| The Role of Media on Hate | Saturday, February 10, 2024 | Thursday, February 8, 2024 |
| Push and Pull Factors of Radicalization | Saturday, February 17, 2024 | Thursday, February 15, 2024 |
| Identity and Belonging: Anti-Muslim Hate | Saturday, February 24, 2024 | Thursday, February 22, 2024 |
| Intergenerational Trauma | Saturday, March 2, 2024 | Thursday, February 29, 2024 |
| Gentrification and Community | Saturday, March 9, 2024 | Thursday, March 7, 2024 |

# KEY PRIORITY AREAS

Youth identified several themes related to social polarization throughout the duration of this series; each theme tied back to priority areas, which we identified as systems of Hate, Oppression and Isolation.

1. **Systems of Oppression**
2. **Systems of Hate**
3. **Systems of Isolation**

# 1.Systems Of Oppression

Common themes identified by youth participants that lead to systems of oppression:

1. **Prejudice as one of the root causes of social polarization**
2. **Negative stereotypes incite hate and division, leading to mental health struggles**
3. **White supremacy is embedded within institutions, thus perpetuating systematic oppression**

## Prejudice as one of the root causes of social polarization

The youth repeatedly touched upon the micro and macro effects of prejudice. Youth identified prejudice as a preconceived viewpoint of individuals and groups, which can lead to negative interactions and adverse effects on an individual's mental health and mental well-being. As one youth said, *"I think the effects of prejudice or the forms that prejudice shows can have adverse effects on a person's mental health, a person's confidence, a person's esteem."*. It is evident that the youth identify the harms of prejudice as having an internal effect on individuals.



Image 1- Youth participating in one of the in person sessions

During this discussion, the youth connected the harms of prejudice to the use of stereotypes. They were able to identify how stereotypes are used both in their peer groups and in larger institutions as one youth comments, *"People might see Black people as being criminals."* The youth furthered that comment by indicating that this stereotype allows for mistreatment and oppression to occur toward Black individuals. Many youths identified that stereotype usage is always negative as it creates *"segregation of two different classes of individuals or groups and definitely one would be at an advantage and the second would be at a disadvantage."* It shows that the youth believe that stereotype usage is another form of prejudice and can be used to oppress certain groups, which heightens social polarization.

Through this dialogue, youth identified that prejudice is the stepping stone towards larger issues such as systemic discrimination but also that these prejudices tend to separate people into us vs them scenarios. This results in divides between young people, which furthers social polarization. As another youth states, *"Prejudice would actually give birth to apartheid. The moment you start seeing yourself like- no, the moment you start seeing flaws in other individuals, other people. That's the moment to start getting the sense of you being superior to them. You know, that's when you start getting the sense that they are inferior to you. So, I think, you know, prejudices birth apartheid."* From this, we gather that the youth can identify prejudice as an action of oppression which leads to social polarization and, ultimately, radicalized violence.

## Institutionalized white supremacy and its role in perpetuating systematic oppression

Participants identified that various institutions, such as the education system, justice system, and other institutions, had white supremacy embedded into their practices and policies. One participant shared, *"legacy of white supremacy and where people, for example, are unable to access quality healthcare, quality food, quality education because there are systems in place."* From their comments, we can gather that the youth identify a power imbalance within institutions related to their experiences, which can replicate a form of oppression. In particular, the youth discussed both their experiences of being immigrants or children within immigrant families and noticed the ways in which the embedding of white supremacy has impacted their migration. For example, one youth says,
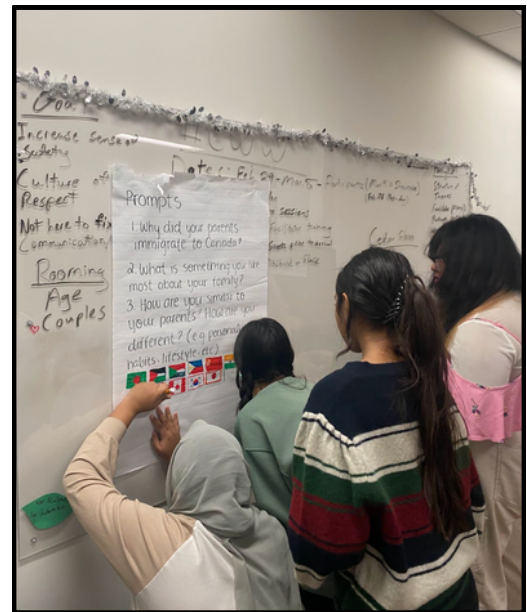


Image 2- Youth participating in the chart activity

*"It's always taught us as like Canada doing us a favor, Canada doing a favor to everyone because they're immigrants, because they're refugees, they're, because they're coming from our side of Canada."*. We suspect that the youth feel that their narratives as immigrants have primarily been told as them benefiting from Canada, which may not be the case and can cause harmful feelings towards immigrants who do not believe they are benefiting from their migration to Canada.

Youth expressed a desire to discuss current world issues such as the Palestinian genocide. This was a critical topic for the youth as it highlights all of the problems they identified with prejudice, stereotypes, and white supremacy. However, this desire was often ignored by institutions and resulted in the youth feeling as if their voice was suppressed. This experience was echoed by participants who shared:

*"And when all my professors are white women and I have spoken out like about things when we're talking about certain things like I try my best like to relate it to what's happening in Palestine and it's met with silence It's met with like, I just made it difficult for other people to be comfortable and talk like it's it's met with this silence, there's uncomfortable disapproval"*

As the session continued, the youth identified white supremacy is not limited to those who deem themselves as white supremacists, such as the KKK or Neo nazis but can be overt or covert actions that any individual or institution can perpetuate. Such as one youth who says, *"White supremacy is embedded into the system that we go through everyday institutions, schooling, teaching style, all that…things are normalized in our society and therefore we feel like we're not impacted by it personally, but we are also within the system".* We identify that the youth sense a normalization of white supremacy in their daily lives, which impacts their abilities to participate within these institutions fully.

## Risk of Misguided Focus on Radicalization

When the youth discussed radicalization, they identified that certain groups were targeted as more likely to radicalize. While the youth stated that *"radicalization can happen to any nationality"* and that *"nationality does not determine whether or not you are radicalized,"* they also identified that Canadian news outlets creating a focus on certain groups, such as one youth stating, *"if you look at the news regarding Palestine, it seems as if they favour one side."*

## Government's Role and Bias in Defining Radicalization

The youth pointed out that the government plays a crucial role in defining who is considered radicalized. Due to this, the youth strongly emphasize that biases influence this definition and often create fear. As one youth says, *"I think it also depends on what the government considers radicalization because this could be affected by the political leanings of the government, like they might say something is too radical when it's not."* It is evident that the youth are aware of these biases and how they may lead to stereotypical depictions of radicals and radicalism. For example, one youth highlights the United States No Fly List often contains people who are racialized or are Muslim. Another youth noted,



Image 3 - Youth participating in one of the in person sessions

*"The government can act on their own perceptions, which may not always be accurate, and this is where things get dicey."* This highlights the need for careful scrutiny of governmental policies and actions in the context of radicalization to ensure they are fair and unbiased. Another youth calls for equal representation to fight against biases in radicalization as they state,



*"When the political leadership is not represented by people like us, or people who represent our communities, there's a possibility that those policies might stand against us."* The youth highlight this discrepancy and advocate for unbiased government definitions and actions to fight radicalism that does not lean heavily on white supremacy or prejudice.

# 2.Systems Of Hate

Common themes identified by youth participants that lead to systems of hate:

1. **Spread of disinformation leading to increased progression of hatred and hate-motivated attacks in Canada**
2. **The role of media in furthering social polarization leading to isolation and radicalization**
3. **The negative mental health effects associated with the spread of false information**
4. **Lack of privacy & protection of free speech on social media**
5. **Inadequate political representation within Canadian politics leads to feelings of social isolation among racialized youth.**
6. **The rise in anti-Muslim hatred sentiment has been influence by disinformation and propaganda in the media.**
7. **The recent rise in anti-Muslim hatred has caused fear and mistrust between marginalized communities and the government of Canada.**

# The Role of Disinformation in Hate Propagation

In the second session of the IORC workshop, participants were presented with content focused on the role of Media on Hate. Participants initially were able to recognize the dangers of the spread of disinformation. One participant stated, *"Yeah, I'll say it can be used unfairly, you know, spreading disinformation, you know, spreading fake news to sites that are not valid … I say media can be used in a very harmful way."* Participants could recognize the efficiency of using media to propagate false information and the harmful implications of such actions.
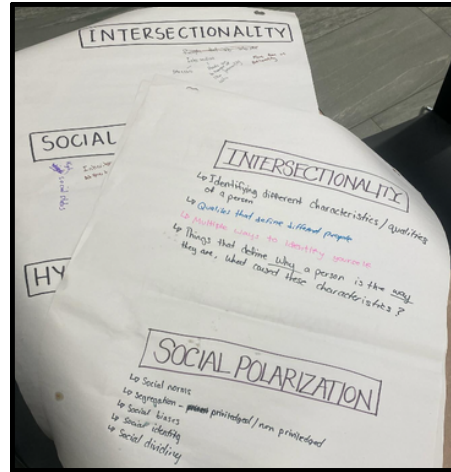

Image 4- Chart activity for in person sessions

## Media as a Tool for Social Polarization and Isolation

Disinformation in the media is rampant, considering the ability for the rapid dissemination of information that traditional forms of media provide, this can lead to the amplification of unverified information that exacerbates social tensions, consequently leading to isolation and social polarization, recognizable factors of the radicalization process. This process was highlighted within the workshops through case studies examining violent attacks towards Palestinian Americans following the beginning of the Palestinian Genocide. When surveyed, nearly half of the participants (44%) said that they trusted social media more than traditional forms of media. Thus, this indicates the increased preference among youth to refer to social media platforms for information on current events. When asked to defend their choice, youth stated they trusted first-person accounts that social media provided while also voicing bias and monopolization that occurs with more popular media houses, stating,

*"Misinformation will occur anywhere, but on social media, you can get a more diverse and broad range of viewpoints."*

## Media and Negative Health Impacts

The youth quickly voiced concern over the negative health impact associated with the rapid dissemination of disinformation in the media, both mentally and physically. Participants recalled how health trends that spread rapidly through WhatsApp and Facebook led to people adopting diet changes that were unverified and untested. Additionally, a main point of concern was around the negative mental health impacts of disinformation and how it could lead to foundations of prejudice and discrimination, especially when such information is uncritically consumed.

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Participants provided an example relating to vaccination, *"I think social media is unregulated. So, there is a huge possibility of fake news, fear Mongering about vaccines and people who got unreliable info."* Media plays a large role in the prevalence of hatred-inspired attacks posing a physical threat to minorities that are often the target of hate campaigns. This can lead to feelings of isolation, especially if such communities feel that there is bias or unfair reportage of their treatment in the media.

## Representation Fosters Engagement



Image 5 - Chart Activity for In person sessions

Our findings throughout this series indicate that participants feel more comfortable engaging in areas where they feel represented. One participant states that their choice of study is influenced by the diversity of an area, stating they like to study in areas where they see people who share similar identities to them. The implication of this finding is that in order to engage with youth, it is necessary to ensure that they feel represented. In this session, participants engaged in an activity where they completed a social identity wheel. They talked about their backgrounds and the parts of their identity that afford them privileges and disadvantages.

While doing so, participants recognized that those in positions of power often fit similar characteristics: White, Affluent and Male. Characteristics that they themselves could not identify with. This finding lends to the idea that while attempting to interact with youth in terms of academia, research or politics, it is necessary to invite those of diverse backgrounds to ensure that youth are able to relate and, therefore, engage.

Participants continued to highlight the need for representation within our Community Council sessions. One youth shared: *"I think maybe it would be like maybe sort of like a detrimental factor is not having POC teachers or guidance counselors. or maybe some sort of support factor that you feel like you can relate to, is kind of like an off putting factor."*

Having those in positions of authority and power who cannot relate to youth in their issues or concerns can lead to sentiments of social isolation and unresponsiveness. Participants stated that they associate power with fear, domination and control. If political representation is seen through this lens, it will seed sentiments of distrust in the government and lead to social polarization. Where youth stand at one end of the spectrum and those with power at the

other. This polarization will continue to be fed if youth do not feel as if their concerns are reverberating within the political sphere. This can be exemplified by the current attitude towards the Palestinian genocide. Nearly all of the youth expressed concern over the ongoing genocide and felt as if their political representation did not reflect their concern.

## Feeling Disconnected from Canadian Identity

When polled, participants stated that they have stronger ties to their ethnicity than their nationality. 88% of participants agreed with the aforementioned statement. Stating that they don't feel like 'true' Canadians. This finding is reflected in the fact that participants do not feel adequately represented by Canadian legislation, stating, *"My own interests or my morals are not reflected in Canadian legislation."* This sentiment leads us to the finding that a lack of representation has created an environment where youth feel disconnected from the Canadian identity. This and inadequate political representation can lead to isolation and social polarization.

## The Consequences Of Anti-Muslim Hate

In this session, anti-Muslim hate was discussed in detail, and participants voiced their worries over recent acts of violence toward Muslims, stating their concern for their own safety. One of the ways anti-Muslim hate is propagated is through the media. Given the recent rise in anti-Muslim hate, it is necessary to ensure the safety of Muslim youth by combating hate speech in the media. As well as combatting Anti-Muslim legislation such as Bill C-21 in Quebec. These policies have created policy-backed anti-Muslim hate, gorming grounds for the infringement of the liberties and religious freedoms of Muslim people, specifically painting a target and villainizing Muslim women


Image 6- Agree, Disagree activity

alongside Black and brown bodies. The presence of such policies combined with the history of anti-Muslim hate crimes in Canada has planted fear in Muslim communities, which is expressed plainly by participants. One participant stated, *"I became really fearful when my father went to the mosque or when my brother went to the mosque."*

When participants were asked if the Canadian government was doing enough to curb anti-Muslim hate, 71% of participants disagreed—stating that government officials were 'lukewarm' regarding diminishing anti-Muslim hate. Participants stated, *"There's barely any accountability in government… do things only for the sake of show. Showing up to mosques… just to give their empty words but really not any real work is done".* This sentiment was echoed by multiple participants who stated, *"They don't sponsor anti-Muslim hate, but they also don't have policies in place that securitize Muslims."*

# 3.Systems of Isolation

Common themes that were voiced by youth participants in relation to systems of isolation include:

1. **The immense pressure on youth to justify their parents' sacrifices leads to negative mental health outcomes**
2. **Parental expectations drive youth to pursue specific career paths at the cost of their personal interests.**
3. **Gender gaps in familial expectations & privileges lead to unequal treatment & opportunities.**
4. **Gentrification impacts access to affordable housing and community support systems, exacerbating social isolation.**
5. **Weakening community connections due to gentrification increases the vulnerability of youth to violent radicalization.**
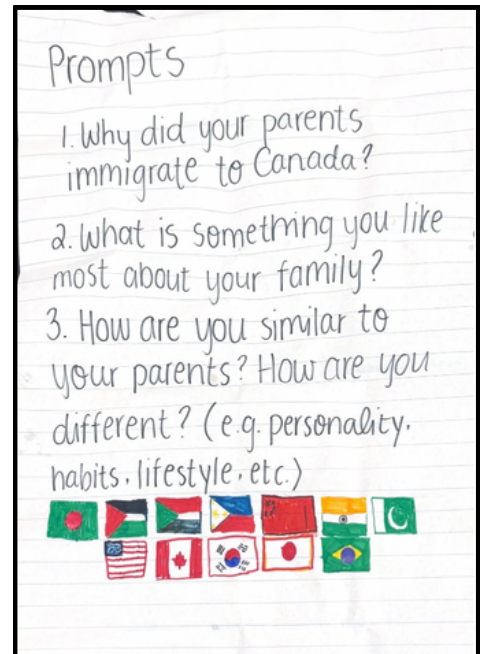


Image 7- Prompts for chart activity

## The Pressure to Succeed

Youth often feel immense pressure to be living proof that their parents' sacrifices were worthwhile. Many parents immigrated to provide their children with better educational and economic opportunities, leading to significant expectations. One participant expressed this sentiment, *"I'm scared that if I don't become an engineer or something like that, they'll be disappointed."*

This pressure can stem directly from parents, who may emphasize the importance of studying and attending school. Another participant noted, *"I'm literally wasting 12 years of my life on a career I don't want to do, just to support them. They want me to be financially reliable, so they'll be okay. That's why my dad buys me whatever I want."*

One young person echoed similar sentiments: *"It's like, I have to learn all of these new like responsibilities in terms of like paying bills, finances and like all of that, but then also a culture. And I feel like I have to, I'm catching up to something that I don't understand both in terms of what they look like."*

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Additionally, participants observed that their parents often compare their family's success to others, and they are concerned about how they are perceived regarding financial and educational achievements.

## Pressure on Eldest Siblings

The eldest siblings often bear the heaviest burden of succeeding following their parents' immigration to Canada. This pressure comes from direct expectations from their families and witnessing their parents' struggles firsthand. These siblings are also responsible for setting an example for their younger siblings. One participant shared, *"They just want something to be proud of… My parents never pressured me, but I knew I needed to do more. I feel like I have to work so much harder because the world is harder. That's why I stress about my brother; he needs to put in effort."*

Another participant highlighted the disparity in expectations, saying, *"I have to pursue a STEM degree, but my sister can choose any field she wants. I don't think it's for any specific reason, but I think it's because I'm the eldest sibling and take on more responsibility."*

Another participant's comment underscored this theme, *"My eldest sister is really hard on me. She says that I can take a gap year, but I need to do something significant for professors to see."*

## The Gender Gap

The female-identifying youth in the group discussed how they are treated differently compared to the men in their families. Many noted that their brothers receive more praise and can get away with much more. Strikingly, when asked if they believed the other group was privileged within the family because of their gender identity, all the woman-identifying youth agreed, while none of the men-identifying youth did.

Some men-identifying youth felt they were treated equally but acknowledged that family expectations and roles differ. They noted that men are expected to provide financially, secure high-paying jobs, and support their parents in old age and that these expectations come with their own pressures. Despite differing views, the cultural pressures were universally felt. This discrepancy was voiced by one young person who shared with us:

*"Well, okay. I'm the oldest of like, an immigrant household. And I'm like, the only girl, I feel like I have this family on my back. I don't know if I feel my age because sometimes being like the oldest, I have to like, put on like, responsibilities, like really big responsibilities from when I was a kid, because my parents couldn't do it."*
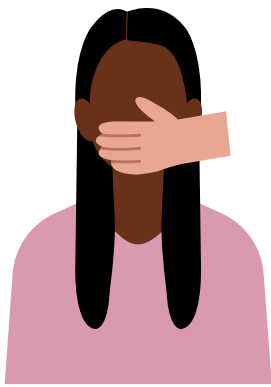
For example, one woman-identifying youth said, *"Immediately, my brother has more rights than me. He can stay out until 3 am; he can do no wrong. He is the pride and joy of the family. God forbid I go to college too, like him; he can do anything."*

Conversely, a man-identifying youth in the group stated,
*"I never saw it that way, that I have an advantage over my sister. In my personal opinion, both of us were treated equally; she had more freedom in her career. I don't think she has fewer privileges based on gender."*

Gentrification significantly impacts access to affordable housing, primarily targeting poorer communities, new immigrants, and people of colour. When individuals can no longer live in areas with a strong sense of community, they are separated from their culture and support networks. Gentrification, therefore, is not only a housing crisis but also a radicalization crisis as it further isolates youth from an understanding and supporting community. This disruption affects access to affordable childcare, often relying on community members, and diminishes essential social and emotional connections. These emotional and social connections are a massive protective factor for youth who face discrimination, anti-Muslim hate, or are at risk of radicalization.

## Government's Role and Bias in Defining Radicalization

The youth pointed out that the government plays a crucial role in defining who is considered radicalized. They emphasized that the government's biases can influence this determination, potentially leading to unfair treatment of certain groups, such as Muslims. As one participant noted, *"The government can act on their own perceptions, which may not always be accurate, and this is where things get dicey."* This highlights the need for careful scrutiny of governmental policies and actions in the context of radicalization to ensure they are fair and unbiased.

*"So when the political leadership is not represented by people like us or people who represent our communities, there's a possibility that those policies might stand against us."*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

# EDUCATION

## Recommendation: Revise the current K through 12 history curriculum to include the impacts of colonialism in Canada's history.

"World history" usually includes the history of Europe and white people. Many of the youth identified a gap in history classes in their elementary and secondary education, resulting in a lack of knowledge of the history and long-lasting effects of colonialism as it relates to Canada's history. It is crucial that the K through 12 history curriculum receives an update to reflect the current understanding of colonialism and the impacts it had on Canada's Indigenous communities.
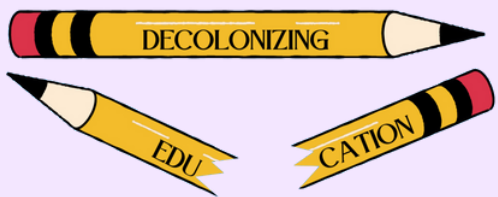
As One Youth states, *"It doesn't teach us the accurate representation of history. I have similar experiences as well in middle school…I don't even think we talked about colonization. We never called it colonization. It was more like they just came in and they just started civilization, I think. I think those were the kind of [the] words that were used to civilization, civilizing the indigenous communities."*

## Recommendation: Incorporate diverse histories in world history courses and ensure diverse support systems in schools

Participants noticed that world history education only included European or Western countries and cultures. World history education should encompass diverse perspectives to accurately represent all cultures and voices.

Youth also voiced the importance of having diverse support systems in school specifically ensuring there are racialized POC teachers and guidance counselors racialized youth can turn to to discuss hate and violent extremism. One young person stated:

*"But a majority of the of the teachers were white. And so even that support network was very limited in terms of like, who you feel like you can go to ask for that support. And so I think in like these cases, that could be like a factor that's maybe stopping some people from getting from like talking about their experiences or getting or reaching out for help in that case."*

Youth echoed this sentiment repeatedly expressing: *"We need to have more POC teachers and guidance and administrators in the school to support us. Not to support us, but be on the board too. Because it just needs to happen."*

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## Recommendation: Implement strict user guidelines about using AI to foment hate on social media.

Bill C-63 (2024), proposed by the Government of Canada on February 26, 2024 -the Online Harms Act, if passed, would be implemented to combat the use of AI in intimate content.. The bill requires social media services to make certain content inaccessible, including intimate content posted without consent, including sexualized deep fakes. The bill does not reference the use of AI in any other content save for nonconsensual sexual images. This is a limitation on the part of the bill; AI has been and can be used for propaganda and the spreading of disinformation in the media. One participant remarks, *"People can spread false information through social media news."* Therefore, this bill should be amended to include the full capacity of AI to foment hate.

## Recommendation: Need for policy change to combat hate speech in media

Participants were tasked with identifying hate content on social media in an activity called "Scroll and Stop," and it took only 47 seconds for participants to find inflammatory posts and comments on Instagram. As the youth mentioned, *"Social media is responsible for promoting these trends, which cause people to act violently."* This led us to recommend policy changes to combat hate speech in the media in order to create tangible consequences for those who intentionally create hate speech online. Bill C-63, if passed, would place the responsibility on social media platforms to limit hate speech while proposing amendments to existing statutes in the criminal code.
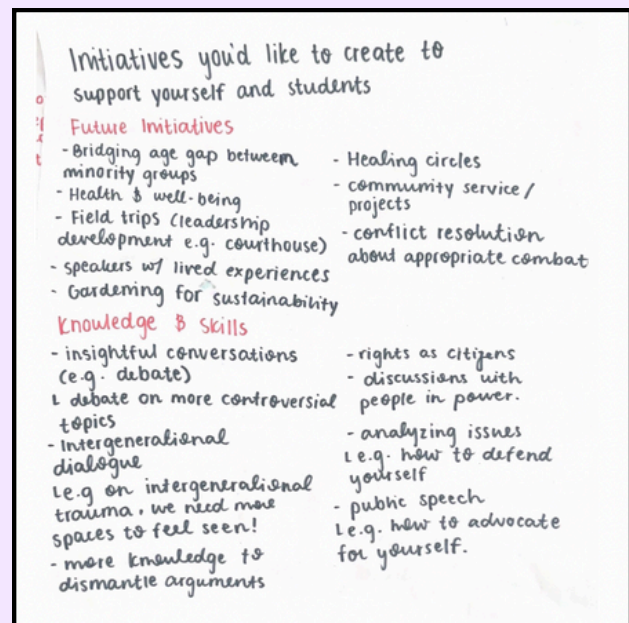
Image 9- Youth Recommendations for Initiatives

Additionally, the proposed bill included a new definition of hate speech. Despite the progress that has arisen with this bill, there are some limitations that the bill has not addressed. The bill focuses on hate speech; however, it does not address the issue of purposeful spread of disinformation. Throughout the IORC series, participants have addressed concern over disinformation - especially disinformation spread about the Palestinian Genocide.

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In response to this, Bill C-63 should include the purposeful spread of disinformation to foment hatred as a class of hate speech. Additionally, this bill could have harmful implications for Pro-Palestinian advocates, and all efforts should be made to ensure that this bill is not weaponized against protestors.

Moreover, the bill mentions children as a protected group in efforts to curb online harm. However, it is necessary to widen this category to include Youth aged 14-25. The IORC series worked with youth of this age range who are susceptible to online harm. It is important to highlight that youth aged 14-25 can be victimized by social media through bullying, harm or sexual exploitation; therefore, all efforts should be made to protect youth through this bill.

## Recommendation: Use media campaigns for advocacy and awareness toward reducing social polarization, hatred and radicalization. In addition, introduce media literacy campaigns about disinformation in schools/communities and how to critically analyze media.

From grades 1 to 8, the Ontario curriculum covers how to understand, interpret, and create media content and analyze media messages and their purposes. In secondary school, students further develop critical thinking skills to evaluate these messages. However, Participants believe this is insufficient. With the rise of social media, the curriculum has not kept pace. It still focuses on understanding newspapers and traditional advertisements, while students are now constantly bombarded with information from TikTok, Instagram, and other social media platforms. Youth today do not primarily receive information from traditional media outlets anymore.

There should be a greater emphasis on understanding algorithms and how biases can be reinforced based on a person's viewing history to reduce the risk of social polarization and radicalization. Students should be taught how to assess the truthfulness of the information they receive and understand the motivations behind spreading disinformation. As this one participant says, *"Instagram can choose or can have algorithms that show you what you want to see. Instagram will show you that because they want to show you they want to show you what you want to see. This also means that they control what you kind of see based on their algorithm"*

Additionally, with the rise of AI, it is crucial to emphasize distinguishing between real and artificially generated content. While this is a new challenge, it is rapidly becoming a significant issue for today's youth. This also presents an opportunity to tackle radicalization and social polarization through proactive measures. Since youth are receiving most of their information via social media, creating targeted media campaigns on these platforms could help mitigate our problems. By leveraging the same channels that spread disinformation, we can promote critical thinking, media literacy, and awareness among young people.

**Recommendation:** Push for transparency regarding social media shadow-banning practices and stricter rules against spreading propaganda

Participants remarked on their frustrations with social media platforms such as Instagram that often 'shadowbanned' or stopped users from posting about the ongoing genocide in Palestine. This one participant remarks, *"We wouldn't see things about Gaza because Instagram literally hides…"* Often, social media is the resort for social advocacy to report on their experiences, only to find that platforms restrict their accounts and limit their exposure. Social media pages must face accountability in these practices; therefore, we recommend reviewing and investigating their practices to ensure that free speech is not infringed upon.

Bill C-63 highlights the need for social media platforms to be proactive in limiting exposure to harmful content; however, there is the possibility for social media platforms to take advantage of this proposed bill and limit exposure to what they deem as 'hate speech.' There is a need for social media to be transparent with users on shadowbanning and online safety practices to ensure platforms do not take liberties with the proposed bill.

# POLICY DEVELOPMENT

**Recommendation:** Provide youth with avenues to access political representation through internship/mentorship programming

As previously mentioned, youth engage where they feel represented. In order to spur greater collaboration between marginalized communities and elected officials, there is a need to create pathways for youth to access the world of politics through internships and mentorships in order to overcome the systemic barriers that exist for racialized youth. As this youth highlights, *"So when the political leadership is not represented by people like us, or people who represent our communities, there's a possibility that those policies might stand against us."*

## Recommendation: Formally correct the term 'Islamophobia' to 'Anti-Muslim Hate' in the legislature

In order to combat Anti-Muslim Hate, it must be named accurately. When participants were presented with both terms and their definitions, they agreed that Anti-Muslim hate was a more accurate term when compared to 'Islamophobia'. As this youth says, *"This idea of having to call it a fear makes it almost seem like it's logical, like it's rational, like it's something that we can explain away with science... It's hatred towards Muslims. It's not a fear of Muslims."*

## Recommendation: Dismantle Anti-Muslim policies that infringe on religious freedoms

Participants expressed serious concern over Bill C-21. The notion that Muslim communities in Quebec are unable to express themselves religiously was incomprehensible. Participants noted this contradiction, *"There's a lot more religious restriction in countries that often want to preach religious freedoms."* Given that participants established that Canada's poor treatment of marginalized communities has led to a lack of Canadian sentiment, it is important to dismantle such policies to establish inclusivity in combating anti-Muslim hate.

BILL C-21

repeal Bill C-21!

correct Islamophobia to Anti-Muslim Hate!

representative leadership!

access to civic engagement opportunities!
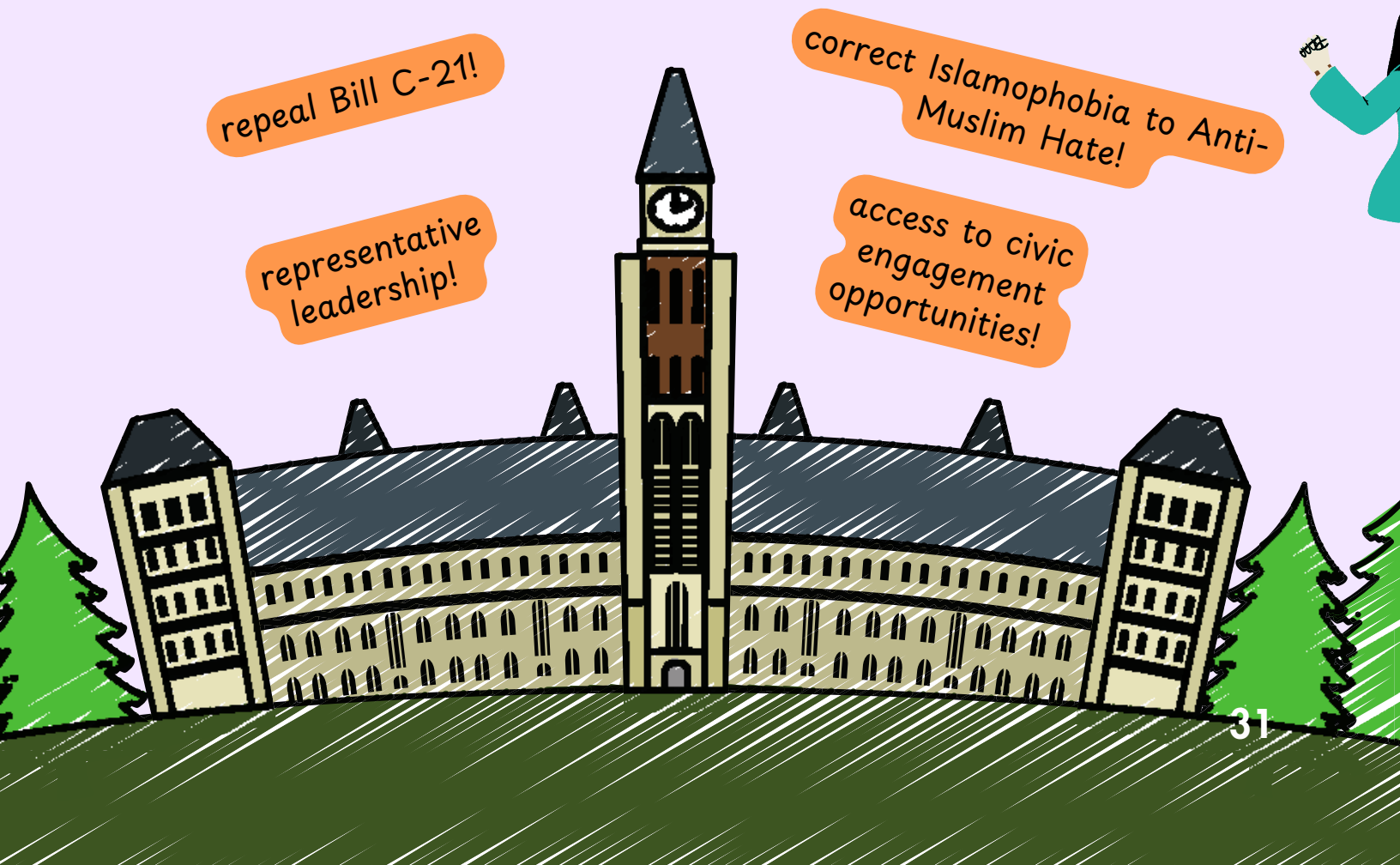
# YOUTH LEADERSHIP

**Recommendation:** More funding for grass-roots organizations to aid with advocating for youth in marginalized communities.

Youth expressed that they feel unrepresented in the political sphere. This youth states, *"My own interests or my morals are not reflected in Canadian legislation."* It is necessary to amplify programming that advocates for youth in marginalized communities to ensure that youth feel represented and are able to advocate for themselves in a society where they hold few privileges. This recommendation would curb the isolation of racialized youth and connect them with a larger network of community and resources.

# COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

**Recommendation:** Addressing Intergenerational Trauma through culturally-informed mental health resources

The group emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for open dialogue and understanding the unspoken pain within the community to overcome intergenerational traumas. As one participant comments, *"Having sensitive reactions, having reactions or giving big reactions to small triggers, a lot of times those are outcomes or causes of trauma, intergenerational trauma."*

This includes addressing the loss experienced through immigration, the following pressures, and the cultural differences between their heritage and Canadian society. Despite the community's great resilience, there is a need for gentleness and acknowledgment of historical pain. Fostering a supportive environment where these experiences can be shared and validated is crucial for healing and growth. These recommendations were solidified by youth who shared:

*"So building the capacity of the community. Also, I think, taking I don't know what what this looks like, in like a policy way, but maybe taking time to understand would be interesting. Through the entirety of the program and going to the workshops, like this series. I've learned how like hate evolves and hate is created. So how can we understand how hate is created? And where can we intervene from there?"*

# INTERGENERATIONAL PARTNERSHIP



100% of youth between 14-16 said they viewed Youth Gravity Facilitators as Adults



Where as all youth 17 or older said they viewed Youth Gravity Facilitators as peer leaders

When asked whether they perceived Youth Gravity team members as adults, responses varied by age group. Youth aged 14-16 tended to view these team members as adults, highlighting qualities such as:



*"I see you guys as leaders who've experienced similar things to what you're teaching us. So I feel like it's trustworthy and relevant information that you can relate to. It's not like someone who doesn't know what they're talking about; they have certain experiences. So just in my eyes, you seem like a leader to me, someone to look up to."*

These younger youth marked Youth Gravity members as adults based on their ability to collaborate, make decisions, delegate, communicate effectively, and respectfully handle conflict. They saw these attributes as indicators of maturity and leadership. What was gathered from the series is that young people perceive adults in various ways, influenced primarily by their age and life experiences. The commonality among their perceptions is less about chronological age and more about a stage of life characterized by maturity, flexibility, freedom, responsibilities such as bills and a full-time job, and a well-defined sense of identity and values. Adults are seen as individuals in positions of authority, yet, as one youth remarked, *"They used to be children, but no longer understand children."*

This perspective, instead of looking exclusively at chronological age, assisted us to bridge the gap between youth and adults and foster trust and comfort., Youth indicated that they find it easier to trust adults with a smaller generational gap, particularly those in their 20s and 30s. Trustworthy adults are described as open-minded, empathetic, kind, and patient, especially when addressing cultural differences.

For instance, one youth shared an experience during a school trip where finding halal food was challenging. The teacher reacted negatively, publicly shaming the student and suggesting she settle for convenience store snacks, making her feel undeserving of proper food. This highlights the critical need for adults to be understanding and supportive of diverse needs. This story was brought up as an example of adults they do not trust, and how they diminish their views either due to power and age, or race and religion. If the adult had implemented what the youth were seeking, emphatic, understanding and patience, then it could have been resolved instead of the youth being humiliated In Front of her class for simply wanting to have food she could eat.

The youth provided several suggestions for adults who wish to earn their trust:

What comes to mind when we think about "adults"? For example, what age? What do they look like? What do they sound like

Mature
stable
flexible
Mid 20s responsibilities 20s
Formal appearance authority
Phases of Life have a beard Stubborn
Former Children
Millennial
Mom Jeans
Different views and Opinions

What are some characteristics of a safe adult?

validation
Kindness flexible
responsible Respects youth
patient humility Empathy
aware open minded patience
helpful non judgemental
cautious
sense of humanity

By embodying these qualities, adults can build stronger, more trusting relationships with youth, creating an environment where young people feel understood, respected, and supported.

# PATIENCE & EMPATHY

Adults should be patient in understanding each person's unique experiences, bringing empathy and kindness to their interactions.

*"So taking the time to get to know us. You know, a lot of the times like scholars can come in with, like, their language and their, their own agendas. So actually relationship building with us long term would be super nice."*

# SELF-AWARENESS

Adults need to address their biases, traumatic histories, and privileges so to not project them onto the youth, but instead offer genuine support.

*"Also taking maybe a step back and focusing more on listening, as opposed to providing their own input about things. Really saying, oh, I want you to share as much as you can. I'm not here to say anything about it."*

# MUTUAL RESPECT

Show respect and treat youth with dignity, acknowledging their experiences and expertise rather than infantilizing them through coddling or dismissing

# CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Be willing to engage with social issues and differences, especially in confronting anti-Muslim hate and discrimination. One participant emphasized the need for someone

*"really have the capacity to hear everyone's experiences and, you know, be human enough to know that person is also human and relate to them on that level."*

# EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE
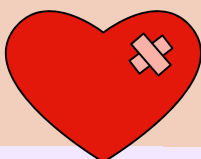
Be willing to sit with the anger and emotions of discrimination and current world events.

not believing **Blaming the victim**
**not helpful** undermining the
making the issue about themselves situation
lack of empathy **dismissive**
guilt tripping ignorance set in ways
bringing a third party victim blaming
lacking representation
brushing under the rug **normalizing**

Conversely, youth closer in age to the Youth Gravity team members found it harder to see them as adults. This perception was influenced by the shared life experiences and challenges they faced. For instance, with some Youth Gravity members in university and some youth applying to university, the similarity in their current life stages made them seem more like peer leaders rather than adults. Youth shared, *"But I see you guys, as leaders who've experienced the things that are similar things to what you guys are teaching us. So I feel like it's like trustworthy and like, relevant information today you can relate to."*

These insights underline the importance of relatability and shared experiences in shaping how young people perceive authority and leadership, emphasizing the nuanced ways in which age and experience intersect in the eyes of youth.

When discussing whether youth felt supported regarding the Palestinian genocide, they overwhelmingly reported a complete lack of support from the adults in their lives, with the exception of their parents. The youth expressed that it felt like "walking on eggshells," as even though they felt the weight of the genocide, speaking up about it often led to repercussions at school or feelings of being dismissed and invalidated.

Examples shared by the youth highlighted the dismissive attitudes they encountered. They noted instances where people refused to acknowledge the events as a genocide, instead getting bogged down in technicalities that minimized their experiences. For instance, a social justice teacher argued that since the killings were not exclusively targeting Palestinians, unlike the Holocaust, which targeted Jewish people, it was technically not a genocide. This reasoning dismissed the thousands of people killed and used semantics to deflect from the severity of the situation, making it seem like a "violence ratio" debate rather than a humanitarian crisis.

The youth also pointed out the racism implied by the stark contrast in how teachers addressed the Ukraine-Russia conflict versus the Palestinian situation. They felt that historical education in schools is heavily skewed towards a Western perspective, often ignoring or downplaying events that contradict this narrative.

To address these issues, the youth suggested the following steps:

## SUPPORT & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Schools should create spaces where students affected by the Palestinian genocide can speak about it and receive support. The genocide and its impact on Middle Eastern and Muslim students need to be acknowledged and addressed.
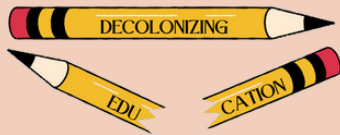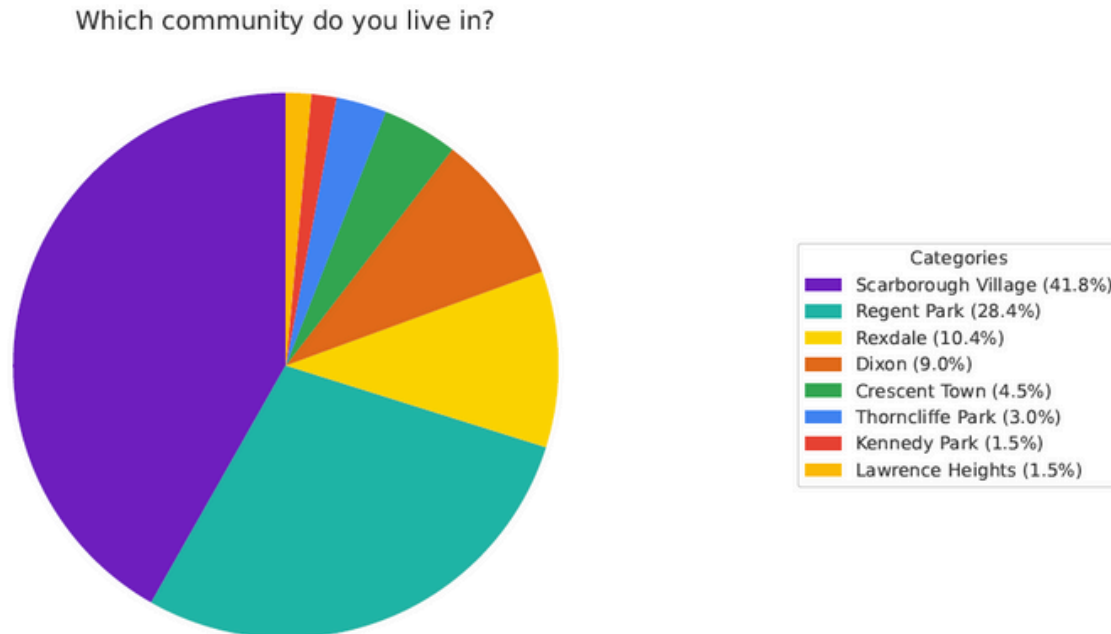
## INCLUSIVE HISTORY EDUCATION

DECOLONIZING EDU CATION

History should be taught from multiple perspectives, not just a Western European viewpoint. World history education should encompass diverse perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of global events. By implementing these suggestions, schools can better support youth experiencing the effects of the Palestinian genocide and foster a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of world history.

## What are some ways we can use to fight back against hate?

Communicate with each other

exposing to different

Gathering together cultures Avoid Stereotypes

Community workshops break down barriers

Peace Building building alliances

Restorative Justice resilience

Community Circles

# APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHICS

**Figure 1.1** Community breakdown of all participants.

Which community do you live in?



Categories
- Scarborough Village (41.8%)
- Regent Park (28.4%)
- Rexdale (10.4%)
- Dixon (9.0%)
- Crescent Town (4.5%)
- Thorncliffe Park (3.0%)
- Kennedy Park (1.5%)
- Lawrence Heights (1.5%)

**Figure 1.2** Participants' racial identity in both the fall and winter phases of the project. *= Racialized in this context meant anyone who could be perceived as being socially different from caucasian.

Racial Identities of Youth Participants



- Racialized (A person of colour)
- Black
- Indigenous
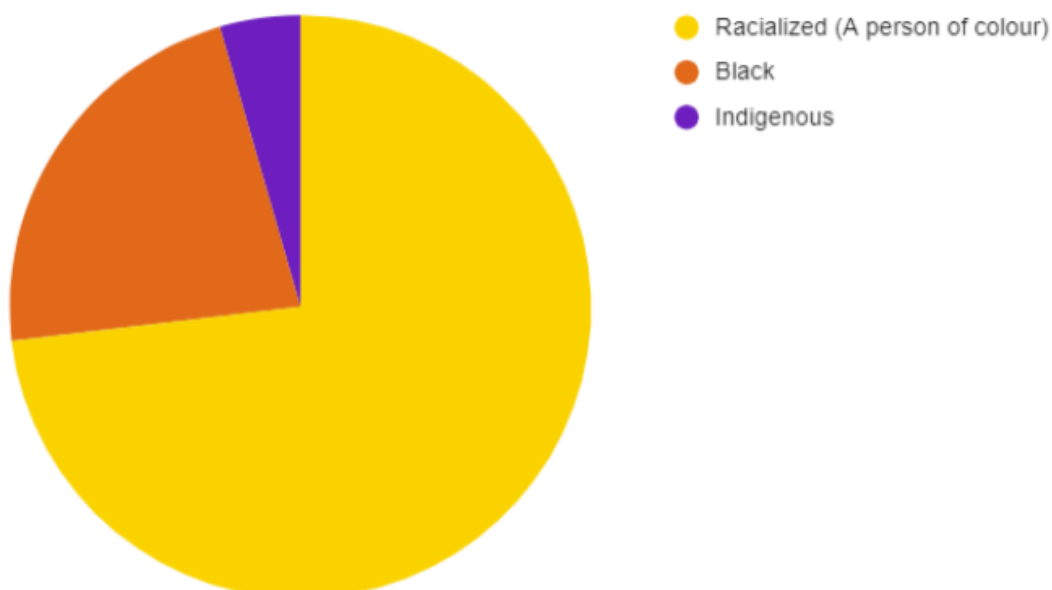
**Figure 1.3** Breakdown of gender orientation amongst our participants. Participants were asked to self-identify in the preregistration survey.



What is you gender identity?

Categories
- Female (58.2%)
- Male (38.8%)
- Transgender (3.0%)
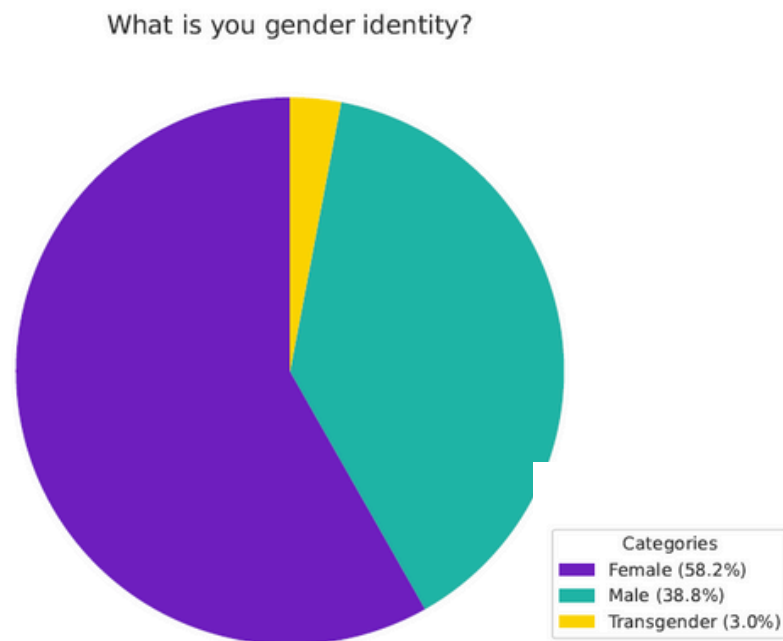
**Figure 1.4** breakdown of religious background for our participants.



Religious Beliefs

Buddhism
3.0%
Christianity
11.9%

Atheist
4.5%

Hinduism
6.0%

Islam
71.6%
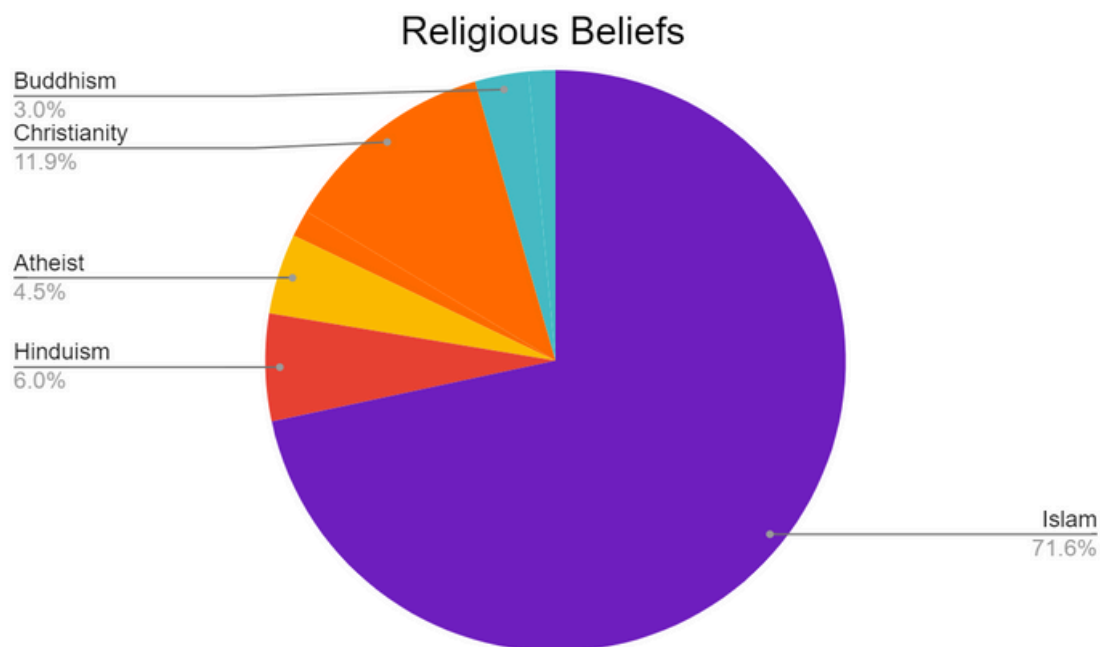
**Figure 1.5** Breakdown of those with parents born inside and outside Canada. This demonstrates that at least 88.1% of the participants are first or second-generation immigrants

## Were your parents born in Canada?

Yes
6.0%
One of them was
6.0%

No
88.1%
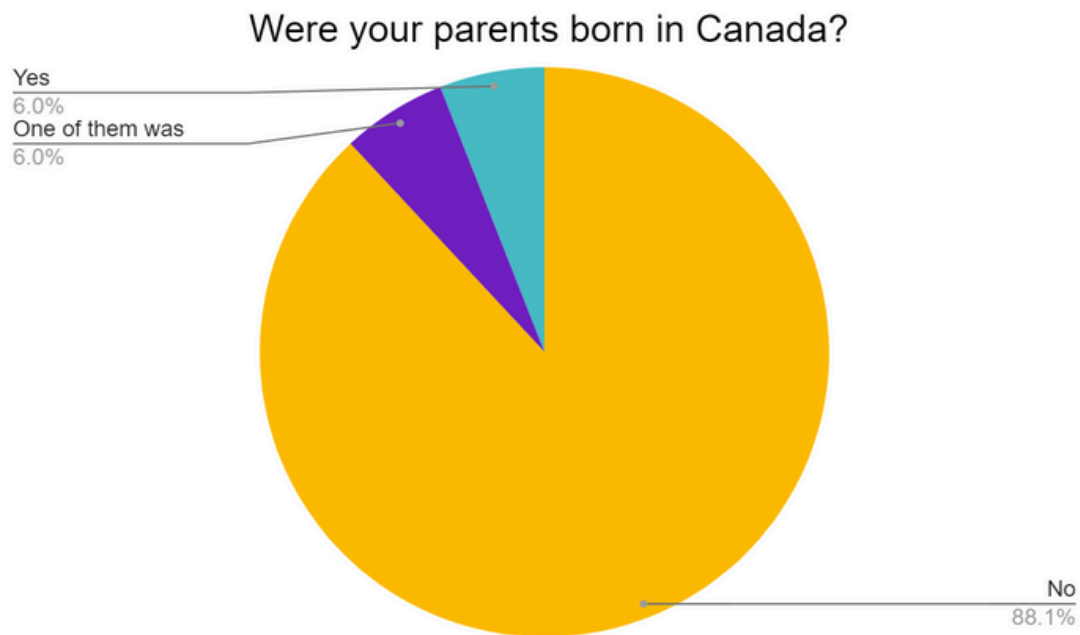
**Figure 1.6** breakdown of participants who were born inside or outside Canada.

## Were you born in Canada?

No
37.3%

Yes
62.7%

| Metric | Regent Park | Thorncliffe Park | Rexdale | Scarborough Village | Kennedy Park | Crescent Town | Lawrence Heights | Dixon |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Crime Rate (per 1,000 residents) | 25 | 15 | 30 | 22 | 18 | 17 | 28 | 27 |
| % Immigrant Population | 70% | 80% | 65% | 60% | 55% | 75% | 60% | 65% |
| Median Income ($) | 30,000 | 35,000 | 32,000 | 33,000 | 34,000 | 36,000 | 28,000 | 30,000 |
| % Public Housing | 50% | 40% | 45% | 35% | 30% | 55% | 60% | 50% |

*Neighbourhood Profiles*, City of Toronto, 2021

**Table 1.1** The chart provides a comparative analysis of focused neighbourhoods of the IORC project. Regent Park, Thorncliffe Park, Rexdale, Scarborough Village, Kennedy Park, Crescent Town, Lawrence Heights, and Dixon, feature major ethnic groups such as South Asians, East Africans, Chinese, Caribbean, and other communities. Many of these neighbourhoods have undergone or are undergoing redevelopment projects to improve housing and infrastructure. However, these changes often raise concerns about gentrification and displacement. Generally, these neighbourhoods have a youthful demographic with larger family sizes than the city average. While historically associated with lower income levels and higher crime rates, efforts are ongoing to enhance employment opportunities and improve safety through community initiatives and increased social services.

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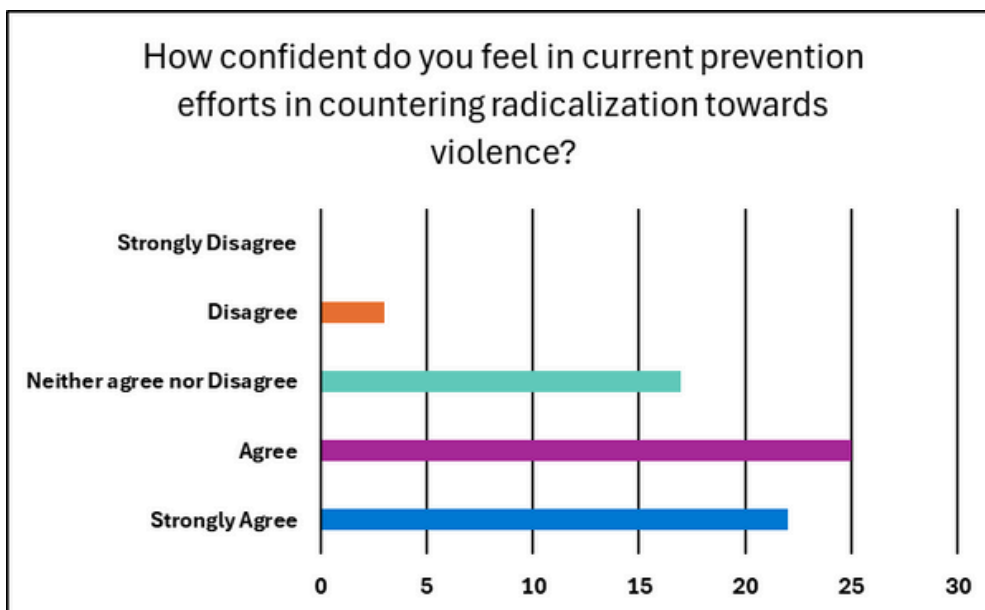
# APPENDIX B. FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION FORMS

**Figure 1** - Participant term knowledge understanding levels post-completion of sessions, rated on a scale from 1 (limited understanding) to 5 (complete understanding).
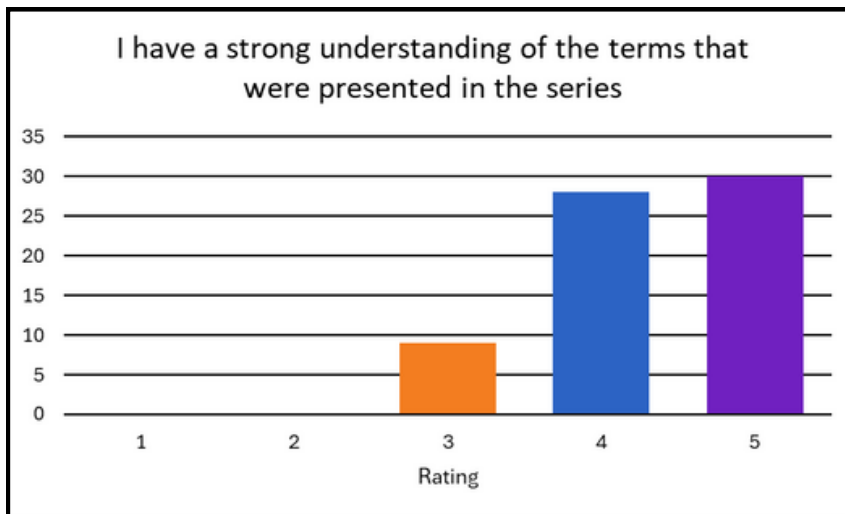


When the youth had completed the sessions, an overwhelming majority of youth either had a good understanding or a complete understanding of the term usage in the sessions. As one youth puts it " I was wearing foggy glasses, and these sessions cleared my glasses, gave me perspective and understanding"

**Figure 2 -** Participants self-measured confidence levels in their ability to take actions when countering radicalization to violence after participating in the series

**Figure 3** - Word cloud representing participants feelings about their experiences

**what would you like to share about your experience?**

informative
positive interesting grateful
passionate discussions
loved growth great experience
enjoyed important fun truly hope
fantastic similar best shared work safe space
amazing relevant topics community
helped educational people
good everyone wonderful engaging
grateful gained
knowledge understanding

**Figure 4** - Participants motivation for joining the series

**What motivated you to join our workshops?**

Interested curiosity perspective insight
Asian family
connecting life interested
Welcoming volunteer programs topics
help safe Community Discussions
encouraged muslim struggles Paralells experience
hours opinions
contribute Anti Muslim hate content
Food learn youth Love impacts racism
marginalized new
engaging justice issues Growth motivated Honorarium
different

Common reasons youth mentioned for joining included the desire to expand their knowledge, particularly about anti-Muslim hate and racism. One young person shared that they had experienced anti-Muslim hate and wanted to learn how to stand up to it. Youth desired to learn about topics affecting them, especially those not covered in school. They appreciated the discussions, noting that they could engage in relevant conversations in a safe space, finding knowledge, connection, and community. Many highlighted the community aspect, mentioning encouragement from friends and family to join and the opportunity to meet new people with similar life experiences.

*"As a Muslim and Asian, I face many difficulties adjusting to Canada. That motivated me. I wanted to learn about these topics as they are not usually discussed in most spaces. Additionally, I wanted to meet other people, learn from their experiences, and draw parallels with mine so that I could be part of the community being built here."*

Other common reasons included volunteering and the honorarium. Young people sought opportunities to fulfill their volunteer hours or earn money. The honorariums offered significantly boosted participation. The youth had access to a safe space where they were provided with good food and could gain volunteer hours or earn money through the honorarium. Regardless of the reasons, the youth were unanimously motivated to participate and continue their involvement.

**Figure. 5**- Analysis of participant preferences for session effectiveness. Participants were allowed to choose more than one for this question
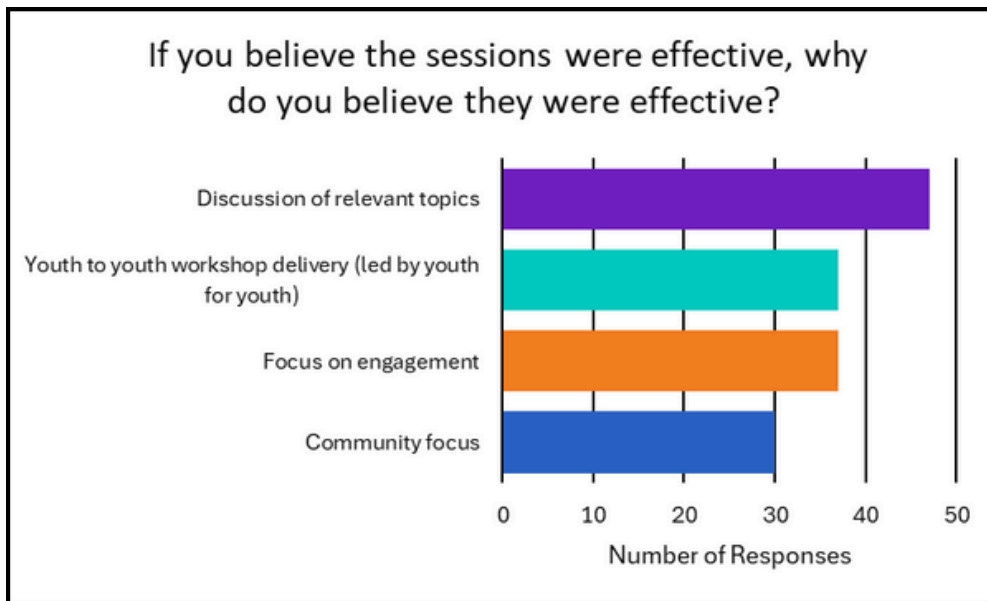


As youth participated in the series, they identified what made the sessions the most effective. Based on the evaluation survey, the youth identified that discussing relevant topics was the most effective part of the sessions, followed by focusing on engagement and youth-to-youth delivery. As one youth says, *"These sessions gave me a new perspective of my life and gave me a better understanding".*

**Figure. 6-** Participant awareness levels regarding methods combating radicalization to violence post-completion of sessions, rated on a scale from 1 (limited effectiveness) to 5 (very effective).
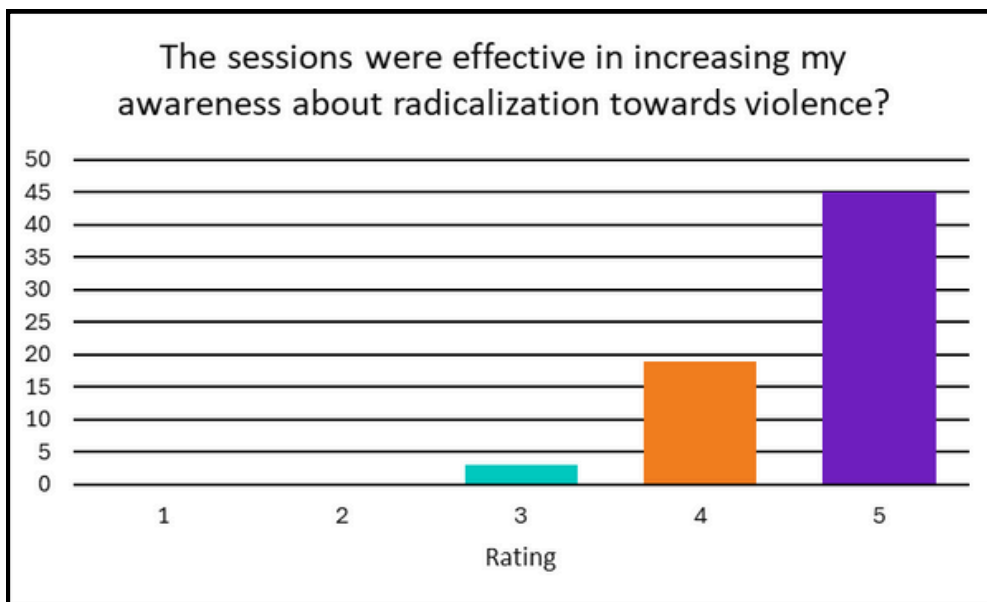


The youth, after participating in the sessions, felt more aware of radicalization towards violence. They were able to identify and possibly combat radicalization towards violence within themselves and amongst peer groups. One youth commented, *"I feel like the discussions we had on radicalization and the steps on what to do if you encounter someone/close friend with radicalized beliefs were very helpful. I've had ex-friends with, I think, radical beliefs and didn't know what to do but now I know what to do in the future."*

**Figure 7-** Participant takeaways from each session

As the youth wrapped up their participation, they identified the above six topics/themes as the most impactful takeaways from the sessions. As this youth describes, "*I already had a pretty good grasp on how messed up the experiences of the BIPOC were but I definitely learned about how persons of the community can be the victims and or the perpetrators of radicalization. I'm planning on using my knowledge to be more situationally aware and speak up when I can and when it's needed.*"



As a Canadian, I am immune to becoming radicalized



I feel anxious when my mom is in a bad mood



Schools should include countering radicalization to violence as a part of the curriculum



My family trusts me



As an immigrant, I'm struggling with intergenerational trauma



The government must do everything in their power to prevent radicalization
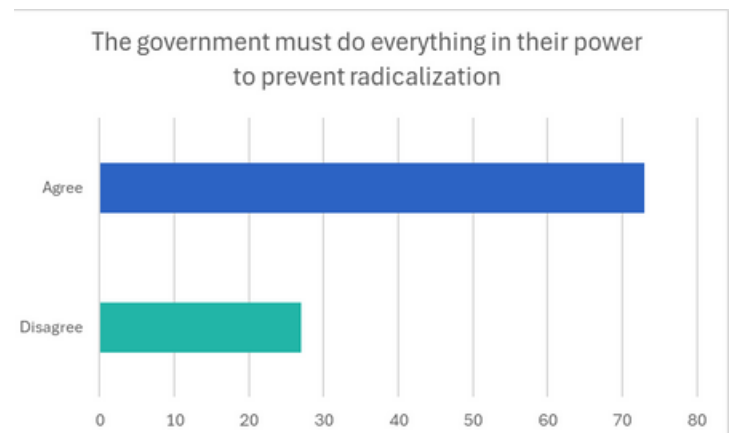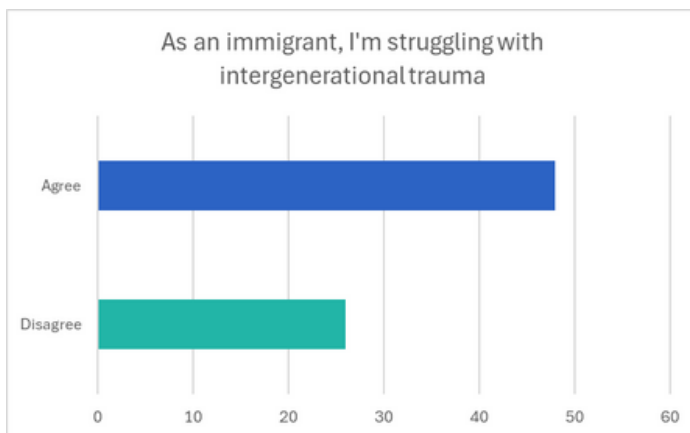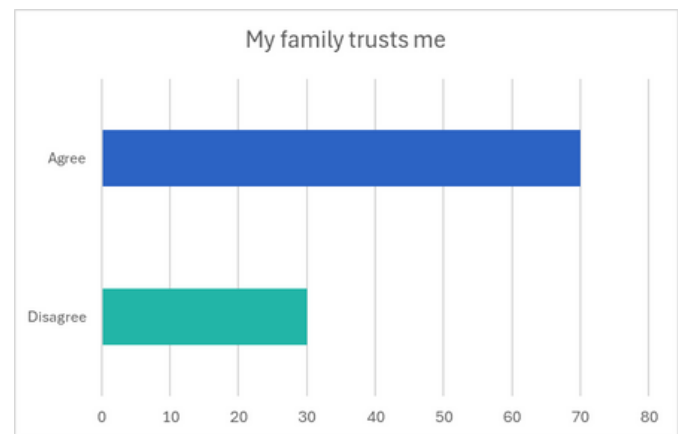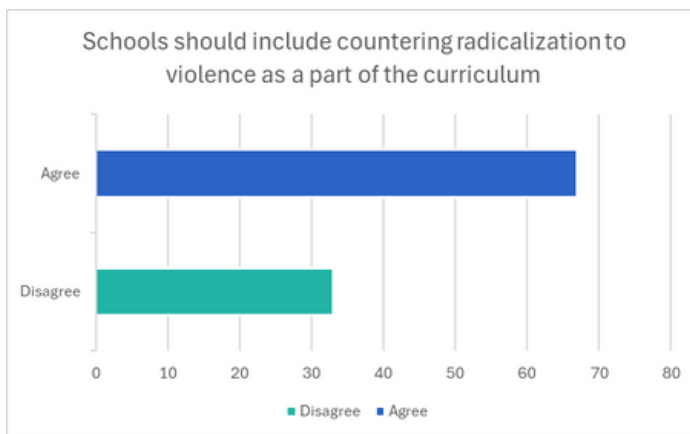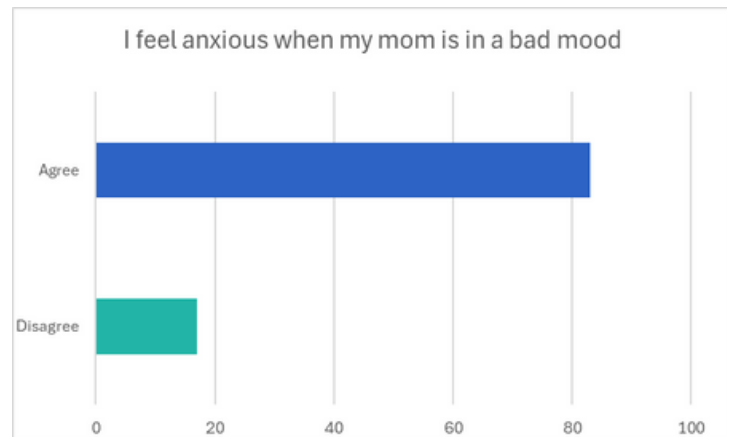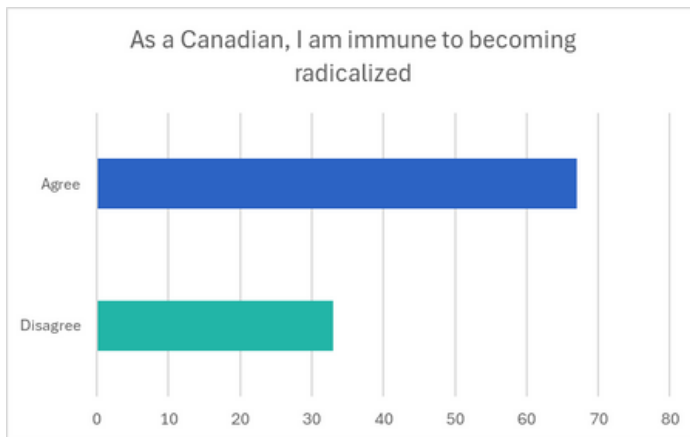
# APPENDIX C. OUTREACH MATERIALS

# TESTIMONIALS

The following are sentiments from participants of IORC 2023-2024.

"I learnt in 6 weeks what I didn't know for 23 years"

"I would say that youth gravity allowed me to be more self aware about many issues that marginalized communities face currently and also what stem it. In addition, I was able to connect with people with similar shared experience."

"I would like to say that I learnt a lot about many important topics and things that I didn't even know about. I'm especially glad to learn about radicalization because I never knew what the term meant before, but it is actually a very important topic."

"If I had to share something about my experience with Youth Gravity, I'd say it's been eye-opening. Learning with like-minded individuals who are passionate about educating themselves on racism and injustices has been empowering. It's amazing how much we can learn and grow when we come together with a shared purpose. I've gained so much knowledge and perspective through this experience, and it's made me even more motivated to make a positive impact in the world. Youth Gravity rocks.✊🏽"

"Participating in Youth Gravity has been transformative for me. The supportive community and engaging programs have not only broadened my skills but also provided a platform for personal growth. I am grateful for the positive impact it has had on my life."

# TESTIMONIALS

"Youth Gravity has helped me so much in broadening my understanding of topics no one seems to talk about. The conversations brought up will be something I'll reflect upon and hope to see a change in in the future."

"I thoroughly enjoyed Youth Gravity and think it's very important for younger generations struggling to find connection and support in a mainly digital world to go and find a safe space where they can talk about the struggles that plague their community."

"I thoroughly enjoyed attending and believe that it's very important in a digital world for younger generations to come together and speak on matters that concern their community."
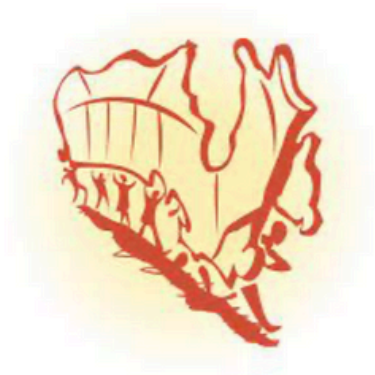
"Youth Gravity is more than a program; it's a catalyst for empowerment. The enriching experiences and mentorship have ignited my passion and equipped me with invaluable knowledge"

"The workshops were very well organized, and the facilitators were very knowledgeable. Overall, it was a wonderful learning experience and I think that there should be more workshops like this in the future!"

# SUPPORTERS