

Searching for the
New Liberalism

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Canada Unbound: Redefining Citizenship for a Borderless World

**By Alison Loat, Gord Moodie,
Robyn Tingley, Naheed Nenshi and
John McArthur**

Globalization.

Continental integration.

A borderless world.

Young Canadians have grown up with these concepts. We entered adulthood alongside glum predictions that our dollar, our economic sovereignty and even our country, may not be around by the time we retire. But we don't buy it.

Despite our traditional Canadian reticence to blow our own horns, we believe Canada has a lot to offer the world. When we think about our Canada and the world, it is not enough that our Minister of Foreign Affairs champions treaties on our behalf, that we send delegations to international summits, or that we supply military support in places of conflict. Although these are excellent, necessary and laudable goals, we can do more.

As a nation, we need to support our citizens, particularly our young people, in bringing the best of Canada to the world, and in investing in the networks that will link these experiences and people with Canada to bring the best of the world back home. We have the talent. We have the solutions. We need to reclaim our place.

This paper outlines the forces that have shaped the thinking of young Canadians (roughly 25 to 35 years old), and presents our plan on how we can better help Canadians to help the world. Our goal is the largest imaginable: Canada and Canadians solving the most difficult problems of the world. We must be bold enough to take up the challenge.

Defining a Generation: A Brief History

We are a group of individuals born during the 1970's all over this country. We share no common past other than belonging to the same time in our nation's history, and have come together to share ideas about a subject that matters deeply to us: Canada.

We represent just a small few of the hundreds of young Canadians we've shared ideas with over the past two years through our work with Canada25¹. Through the course of this work, we have learned much about the influences that have shaped the perspectives and concerns of young Canadians. More important, we have learned that young Canadians, far from being insecure about the role of Canada in the world, are proud of their national heritage, and are willing to champion and embrace their identity on a global stage. The challenge for us all is to make sure they have the venues and opportunities to do so, and the motivation and means to use experience gained abroad to contribute back home. Young Canadians want Canada to be more than a place, and citizenship to mean more than a passport. By embracing internationalism and responding to these desires, we can ensure Canada achieves its potential at home and in the world.

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As a small country next to the world's only superpower, Canada may always struggle to find its place. Recent history, which has defined the experience for many young Canadians, has been no exception. Domestically, the past 15 years have been punctuated for many by a general feeling of worry and uncertainty about the future of the country as a coherent, vigorous whole. National unity and constitutional concerns dominated for a time, followed by federal and provincial budgetary cutbacks. And while the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement and NAFTA ushered in waves of continental integration, our national conversations appeared increasingly regionalized, polarized between the West, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada.

¹ The authors of this paper came together as part of an experiment called Canada25, one predicated on the assumption that young Canadians wanted to become involved in public policy debates, but through an alternative vehicle to youth wings of political parties or student government. Two years later, this has undoubtedly proved true. The organization (www.canada25.com) has brought together hundreds of Canadians between the ages of 20 and 35 and living around the world, and has learned that young Canadians have a deep desire to think critically about, and engage in solving, important challenges for the future outside of their professional commitments. While this document represents the views of the authors only, not of Canada25, we would like to thank all members of the organization for their indirect help in making it possible.

Internationally, instability and turmoil also dominated with famines, floods and internecine conflicts. Although we were raised with the legacy of Canada's peacekeeping efforts, and took pride in the accolades of the United Nations Human Development Report, we have seen far too many other instances where Canada had an opportunity to lead internationally but appeared unwilling to chart a unique course.

At times, this failure to lead has put younger Canadians directly at odds with the actions of our politicians. Consider the environment as one example. We were the first generation to be raised Green. We reduce, reuse, recycle, and try to live our lives in a way that is environmentally friendly. Despite this, we have seen little political leadership on the environment, either in Canada or abroad, despite increasingly clear signs that things will start going downhill quickly. This inaction only produces further alienation and cynicism among young people about government – and promotes cynicism about the public sector as a place to make change. This is exactly the opposite of how we believe our feelings ought to be moving.

This phenomenon is not limited just to the environment. The technology frenzy of the later 1990s that shifted us from dark pessimism to dizzying optimism had an unexpected impact. Although it pulled us out of a period of recession and government cutbacks, it also made the private sector, at home and around the world, the most attractive career option for young Canadians looking to leave a mark. This feeling was even more pronounced as it coincided with a period when government was firing, not hiring. During these times, the sector that has defined what it is to be Canadian lacked the cachet it may have held for our parents and for other generations that came before them.

Despite this continued struggle for place, Canada is a more international population than ever, and this stretches further than simply immigration. Canadian cultural exports, from Margaret Atwood to Celine Dion to Atom Egoyan, are commanding international attention, and our academics are in leadership positions at some of the world's top universities and research facilities. Economics and culture are both more fluid than they used to be, and young people appear comfortable with that fluidity. The Internet and its incredible democratizing effect on information has given young Canadians a sense that the world is at their doorstep, either through direct travel or via electronic passageways.

The notion of moving thousands of miles nationally or internationally for a job opportunity is not a foreign concept, and, in fact, is often sought as an end to itself.

Despite this increased mobility, we still see a love of, and a passion for Canada, but less of a feeling that one must always live here to serve it. In some quarters, there may actually be a sense that one must leave, at least for a time, to really serve Canada well, and to properly bring new world experiences home. Terms like “brain drain” and “brain gain” don’t adequately describe this evolution, and miss out on the opportunities of international mobility. “Brain circulation” better underlies our wish to integrate varied lifestyles and familiarities into Canada’s daily social and economic experience, and to take these experiences and apply them to the most rigorous domestic and international challenges.

Re-visioning Canada in a Borderless World

The energy of young Canadians and their desire to contribute meaningfully to the public good has been one of the most uplifting discoveries in building Canada²⁵. We yearn for a Canada that truly “punches above its weight” in global economic and political affairs. That is the legacy of our history, yet we find our traditional relevance even in North America is diminishing. For a generation blessed with skills and mobility in a country rich in peace and prosperity, we see national complacency and deeply unexploited opportunity.

Before proceeding, it is worth asking why this matters. Why talk about Canada’s role in the world when pressing domestic issues demand attention?

First, since we carry neither colonial baggage nor the dominant superpower influence of the United States, we have tremendous potential to bring together unusual bedfellows and get things done. Canada has a history of playing honest broker between America and Europe, and our success at building a multicultural, pluralist society affords us a particular strength to influence global counterparts and mediate and lead in international affairs.

Second, the simple fact is that our global role matters to Canadians. Many Canadian corporations engage in significant business overseas, and individual Canadians work and invest all over the globe. And international activity is by no means confined to business. Canadians care about helping the poorest of the poor, about finding solutions to global health care crises, about peace. Although our federal government makes significant contributions in this realm, numerous others are engaged in similar issues through university research, non-governmental organizations and independent advocacy. We need to encourage these concerns, and make sure Canadians have the opportunity to be involved in them.

Finally, and most fundamentally, an internationally engaged population is a matter of enlightened self-interest. The amount of learning occurring around the globe on the same sorts of problems that are tackled at home offers an unparalleled opportunity to share knowledge and apply new insights to accelerate social progress. Major contemporary issues – poverty, the environment, health, illiteracy – can unfortunately be seen in any country in which one chooses to look for them, and increased global interdependence only serves to reinforce this point further. How much more vigorously could we solve domestic challenges with a real sense of how others abroad have approached similar issues? How much more strongly could we contribute internationally with success to speak of at home? To tackle such problems in the isolation of national confines just doesn't make any sense, and limits our ability to create and apply the best solutions.

Reasserting our Role

In reasserting our world role, we must not be blind to the forces that led to its decline. Historical notions of “Canada as Peacekeeper”, or “Canada as Health Care Leader” offer a base to work from, but carving out a role in the next century will involve much more than government choosing a cause or program on which to focus. The government is

one actor among many, uniquely positioned to invest in and catalyze the growth of the others.

In his 2002 Speech from the Throne, Prime Minister Jean Chretien promised a discussion with Canadians on their country's role in the world. While defence policy, military spending and border security are all important components to a successful assertion of Canada on the international stage, a true conception of Canada and the world involves a broad space for action and activity outside of government, and government policy that builds on our international population to ensure we exercise it to its full potential.

To do this, we need not only to enhance *Canada's* role in the world, but also to enhance *Canadians'* role in the world. The way that government works with individuals and groups – both within and outside our borders – is as important as the government's own behaviour in actively participating in global affairs. Globalization has closed the door to trying to assert a global role top-down through government decree; but it has opened the door to allowing an authentically Canadian presence to emerge by empowering citizens to achieve their goals on a world scale, and incorporating the experiences of Canadians living around the world in our domestic and international affairs.

If we do so, we have an opportunity to reassert our role in the world as an internationally recognized platform for tackling major problems and getting things done. Rather than conceptualizing of ourselves in the world solely by our military or foreign aid expenditure, we can do so in a way that takes the strengths and experience of our citizens to enhance our position and influence abroad, while at the same time, build on our domestic potential and capability.

Wither the “Brain Drain:” Citizenship without Walls

The term “knowledge economy” is thrown about with such frequency and panache that we risk it losing value in its ability to describe Canadian society. Yet regardless of titles, our successes increasingly depend on our ability to create and implement ideas.

Knowledge can be gained and ideas can be developed in many places, however, and the size of our country necessarily precludes the best of every field from existing in Canada. If we truly want to create a nation that is recognized as the best place to effectively tackle major contemporary domestic and global challenges, we need to build a thirst for this knowledge, an ability to seek it out on a global level, and the desire and mechanisms to bring it back home.

For this, we propose a three-part prescription. First, we need to build a culture in which the development of great ideas is second only to our ability to implement them. Second, we require real opportunities to expose our young people to the realities of other countries and cultures, and where possible, to offer those opportunities under the auspices of the Canadian flag. And finally, we need to find real ways to motivate those Canadians living abroad to bring their experiences to bear on issues of national concern, and play a supporting role to Canada in their countries of residence. While there are undoubtedly thousands of small initiatives that can help to build our platform, these three meaningful steps would certainly propel us in the right direction.

1. Inspiring Citizens to Think Big By Celebrating Innovation

The first step is to support a culture that *recognizes and celebrates ideas and innovation in all its forms*. To reach our potential both domestically and internationally, we need to test our ingenuity across all sectors of society: social innovation to build a fair and equitable society; economic innovation to foster investment; policy innovation to solve the challenges of our demographic profile; and cultural innovation to strengthen our national pride. To do so requires a culture where all Canadians feel empowered to constantly find new methods of addressing and improving upon the challenges they face in their particular sphere of life, whether that be scientific research, business, politics, community affairs of any other realm. In short, Canada must strive to be a community of creative thinkers, and one where we have a commitment to developing minds, not just skills.

Canada has a strong history of innovation in its public policy, its academic research and its private enterprise. In an economy where success depends so strongly on generating

ideas, the culture that enabled invention in the past is even more important to nurture today. Part of this involves making investments in universities, and in our researchers, so they continue to create internationally competitive and accessible educational opportunities for Canadians. This requires tactical investments, such as infrastructure funds, scholarship and granting programs⁴, and incentives to increase individual philanthropy to our institutions, as well as strong public leadership that conceptualizes health care and education as crucial investments in our economy and our society, and not as competing cost centres.

This could also involve exploiting opportunities for interdisciplinary education and learning by creating and entrenching links to ensure mobility and idea-sharing among our universities, public and private sectors to help create and nurture new ideas and help break down existing silos. Private sector companies, for example, could provide incentives for their employees to take positions in related government departments. Universities could more actively appoint non-academics to teaching or research positions for short or longer-term contracts. Additionally, a “Prime Minister’s Fellows’ Program” could be instituted to recognize 30 of Canada’s top innovators, providing them with opportunities to act as “innovation advisors” to the government for one year, and by doing so, providing a channel of new ideas into the highest level of public service. Such a program would, at low cost, invigorate the concept of working on issues in the public interest among those for whom a career in the civil service is not a current option. Such a broad commitment to innovation throughout all sectors of Canadian society is a necessary next step to our international leadership in the development of human capital⁵, and to the attainment of our vision.

2. Promoting Internationalism From an Early Age

The second stage is to *make international experiences an integral and realizable component of every education*. Canada should make it easier for students to build an

⁴ There is no shortage of options. Options could include increased funds to existing programs, grants for international exchange, or “Graduate Student Hiring Grants” that provide funds for young, up-and-coming professors to award fellowships to leading graduate students who may otherwise be unwilling to take a risk with a young professor, enabling our new academics to accelerate their careers, and in turn, the research opportunities they can offer.

international understanding through exchanges and the development of internship programs.

A very simple way to start down this path would be to vastly expand and promote international programs for young Canadians. Government can work toward this end by better facilitating affordable exchanges for students, particularly as international experience becomes recognized as important to success in the workplace and in life. Universities have already made great strides in offering exchange opportunities to students, and organizations such as the World University Service of Canada and the AFS International Canada have been facilitating hundreds of thousands of international exchanges for more than the past 50 years. In today's environment, however, international experience needs to be made a realistic option for all students, not just those with the resources to afford it. As a commitment to developing global leaders, the federal government could establish a fund to provide small grants of several thousand dollars to help offset the costs of studying abroad for those in financial need. To further endorse international awareness, government could also increase the amount available through student loan programs for young Canadians interested in pursuing international affairs or exchange.

Canada could also build international understanding by creating a national internship program that deploys our young people on international projects on a much larger and more accessible scale than exists today⁶. Given the significant evolution of foreign affairs from state-managed relations to one of increasing personal engagement, it's no longer enough to have our political delegations meet with the heads of state of countries in need of relief and support. If such a program were to be established, government could significantly enhance its contribution by mobilizing several thousand interested students, for example, and sponsoring them to travel abroad to provide aid and to share their skills for a period of several months.

⁵ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Canada's Growth Scorecard." A presentation by Hon. Donald Johnston, Secretary General, OECD, October 8, 2002.

⁶ The Government of Canada facilitates international internships and exchanges through several of its departments, either directly or through the funding of other agencies.

Promoting a society of internationalist Canadians has two main benefits. The first is that Canadians, with all their strengths, have a great deal to contribute to the world and its most pressing problems. These are problems that will only be solved through knowledge based on direct experience in and deep understanding of other parts of the world. For example, the Millennium Declaration⁷, adopted in September 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit, offer a rare framework in which Canada, as one of the world's most privileged countries, can play a leading role in prompting its citizens to take some responsibility for solving the problems of the world's most disadvantaged people. Central to such an era will be the engagement of young people in global development challenges, both as advocates of change and as problem-solvers in their own right. Canada needs to stimulate its own citizens to think of themselves as resources who can contribute to the achievement of the goals outlined in this declaration.

The second benefit is of more direct benefit to Canada itself. As international experience becomes more popular among young Canadians, and as an increasingly important quality among employers, it must become seen as an investment, something that is not only available and encouraged, but also something that is affordable and accessible for any Canadian who cares to pursue it.

3. Motivating Expatriates to Contribute Back and Strengthen our National Fabric

The third step is to *view our expatriates as an asset*. It is nothing short of incredible that Canadians have risen to be leaders in so many fields – from business, to medicine, to journalism, to academia – and in so many institutions around the world. Our need to tap into their experiences only becomes more significant in a world where the cost and ease of global travel and communications are increasing, and in a world where Canadians continue to seek international opportunity. We must redouble our efforts to build a network of Canadians abroad, and leverage this asset to enhance our world role, bringing their experiences to bear on our domestic challenges.

⁷ This landmark document for international cooperation in turn led to the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), clear targets for reducing poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women by 2015. Under the leadership of the Secretary General, the UN system is now working with members of civil society, academia, and public and private sectors around the world to mobilize support for these goals and to develop practical policy measures to achieve them. These goals are listed at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/index.html>

A practical example of how one country made this work comes from India, where expatriates have made invaluable economic, business and academic investments, advised on tough domestic policy challenges, and created opportunities for future generations of Indians. Indian citizens living in the United States are responsible for many of the investments behind the high-tech firms based in Bangalore and Hyderabad, and have also shared their international knowledge to advise their home government on a number of important issues, from developing venture capital laws to deregulating the country's telecommunications sectors. Furthermore, they have made generous donations to India's elite universities and have provided internship and exchange opportunities for Indian students looking to expand their perspectives and knowledge.

China and Taiwan, while certainly not perfectly analogous to the Canadian experience, are further examples. In China well over half of foreign direct investment in that country was made by Chinese expatriates in 1999, with Taiwanese returnees responsible for the development of tech companies that accounted for over 10% of Taiwan's GNP at the turn of the 21st century.⁸ If these links can be forged in a developing economy setting, they can definitely be forged for Canada.

Specifically, we could make similar efforts across a number of forums. Our embassies could make it a priority to provide outreach to Canadians living in countries where they are located, rather than focusing extensively on foreign companies or individuals wishing to relocate to or visit Canada. Government and business leaders should give serious consideration to building a Congress of Canadian World Leaders composed of expatriates in top positions abroad. This board could serve as a senior advisory body to Canadian governments and businesses to aid international outreach, provide direct input into policy, trade or investment strategies, and be the bridge between Canadians at home and abroad. Similarly, networks of expatriates could be developed around particular fields or industries, providing a ready base of international knowledge and contacts. Finally, universities should track graduate students who decide to study at international schools, and work with them to facilitate continuing study, collaborative research projects and exchange opportunities in the future. Extending the notion of citizenship in such ways

would strengthen our presence, and provide space and opportunity for broader participation in the development of Canada in the world.

Conclusion

These are only a few small steps for what is fundamentally a broad and bold vision for the future of Canada in the world, but they are small enough that we can start taking them now. In our increasingly competitive and changing world, time is not a luxury afforded to many, least of all to a country trying to reclaim its place as a global leader of peace, plurality and prosperity. When we look back over recent years, we can see clearly that the time for action is upon us. Amid our achievements, we have seen our influence diminish in North America, our UN ranking as the best place to live slip, a wait-and-see attitude toward environmental accords, and our role as international mediator challenged by Norway.

It is time to claim a new place for Canada. An international policy that involves all Canadians, living at home and abroad, speaks to our assets and aspirations. Although Canada's history in peacekeeping is inspiring, it doesn't suggest much of a role for civilians, and doesn't speak to the experience of many of our most successful citizens. Additionally, an international policy that identifies a clear link to a strengthened domestic space reminds us all of the importance and opportunity of international investment. Throughout all this, we should look to government as an eager partner for the energetic Canadians, for groups of Canadians, and for institutions seeking to make a difference; a partner that can set an example itself at the same time as bringing the ambitious dreams of others within reach, even when it may not play the central role. A partnership between Canada and its citizens – among the state, groups, and individuals of this nation – is the only way to apply our full complement of resources to positively impact world change.

Although Canadians are perennially humble and even insecure, we need to realize that every time a Canadian does something positive in the world, it is a victory for our

⁸ Devan, Janamitra and Parth S. Tewari, "Brains Abroad." McKinsey Quarterly, 2001, Number 4, pp. 51-60.

society. Our challenge is to help more Canadians do more good things and help them remain integrated into Canada while doing so. Canada must become more than a cocoon to be sloughed away before real achievement begins. By promoting innovation, embracing internationalism, and viewing expatriates as an asset, Canada can take the first steps to becoming a country that people thank first for helping them to achieve their dreams, and that draws strength from Canadians everywhere in reasserting a distinctive global role.
