

# UNDRIP In Action or Inaction?



## A Comparative Study of Indigenous Education Across Canada



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### What is UNDRIP?

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is a non-binding human rights instrument that sets standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous peoples. It affirms rights to self-determination, cultural education, language revitalization, etc. Canada passed its UNDRIP Act in 2021, committing to align laws with the Declaration. Its implementation remains contested and complex.

### Background & Objectives

Education in Canada has long been used as a method of assimilation of Indigenous knowledge, through residential schools & the oppressive nature of Eurocentric curricula. The result is cultural and language erasure. This project examines how UNDRIP has been implemented across Canada, and whether it has supported Indigenous-led education initiatives, in order to assess its ability to move beyond symbolic commitments toward real decolonization and the practical challenge of self-determination.

### Research Questions

What role does UNDRIP have on Indigenous-led Education initiatives in Canada? How does the domestic role of international agreements depend on their incorporation into law?

### Methodology

This study uses a mixed-methods approach:

- Extensive key word search across platforms
- Stringent inclusion & exclusion criteria
- Reviewed gov. documents, legal texts, media releases, webpages and more to build a qualitative dataset of 13 descriptive tables & typologies
- Converted the qualitative data into numerical values and conducted graphical analysis

### The Declaration

All peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind. Respect for indigenous knowledge and practices contributes to sustainable development and management of the environment. Families and communities retain responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children.

#### Article 13:

- Indigenous Peoples have the right to revitalize and develop their languages, oral traditions, philosophies and literatures
- States shall take effective measures to ensure this is protected

#### Article 14:

- Right to establish and control educational systems
  - Providing education in their own languages
  - In a manner appropriate to cultural methods of teaching and learning
- Education free from discrimination
- States shall take effective measures to achieve this

#### Article 15:

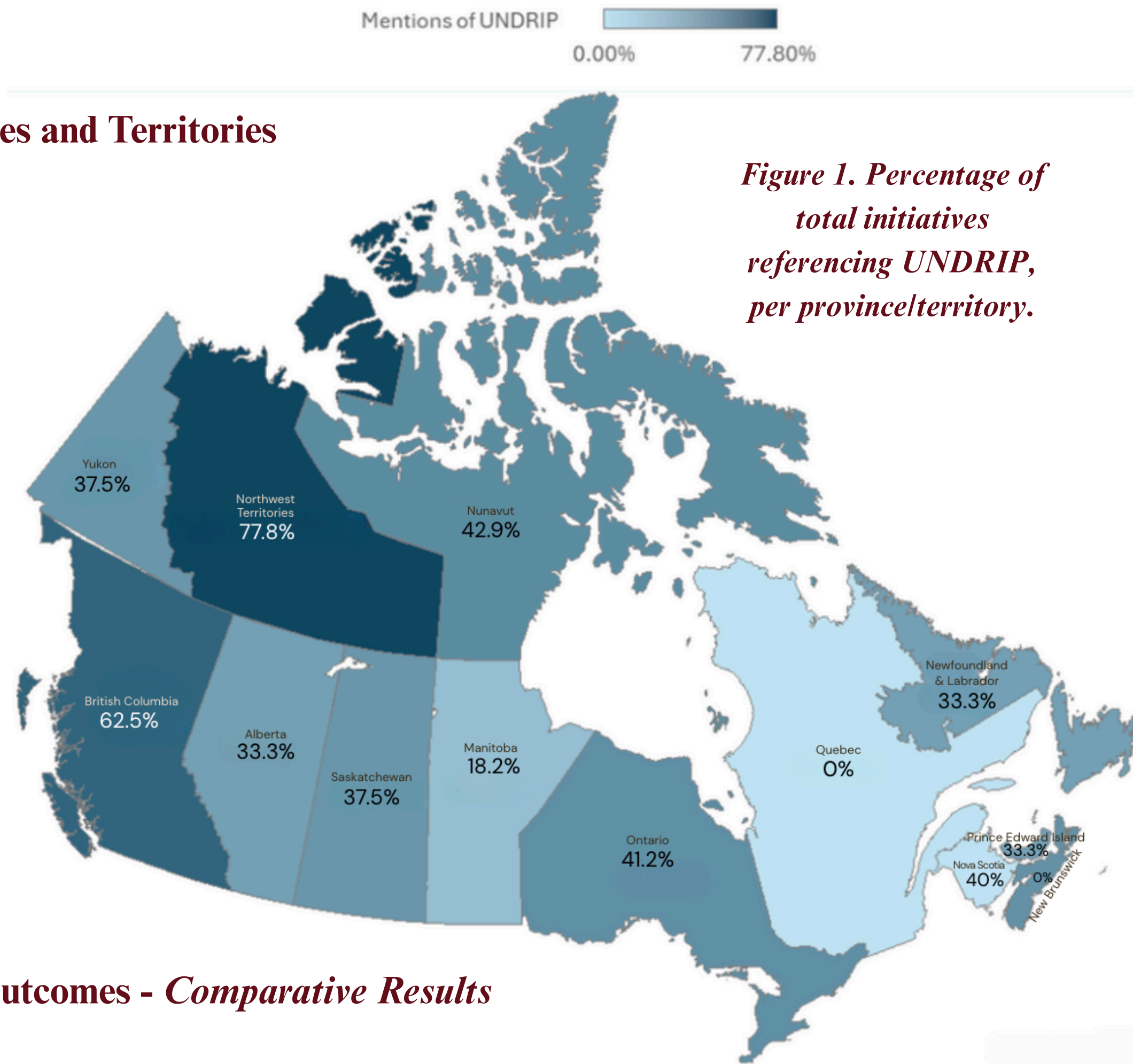
- The dignity and diversity of [Indigenous] cultures, traditions and histories must be reflected in public education

## Analysis & Results

### 1 UNDRIP Across Provinces and Territories

This map reveals the percentage of education initiatives in each province or territory that are explicitly supported by UNDRIP, where darker shades correspond to a higher percentage. It highlights the uneven adoption of UNDRIP across Canada.

Northwest Territories surpasses all jurisdictions in commitment to UNDRIP, at 77.8% of initiatives, followed by British Columbia at 62.5%, making these the only in which over 50% of initiatives connect to UNDRIP.



### 2 UNDRIP Adoption vs. Outcomes - Comparative Results

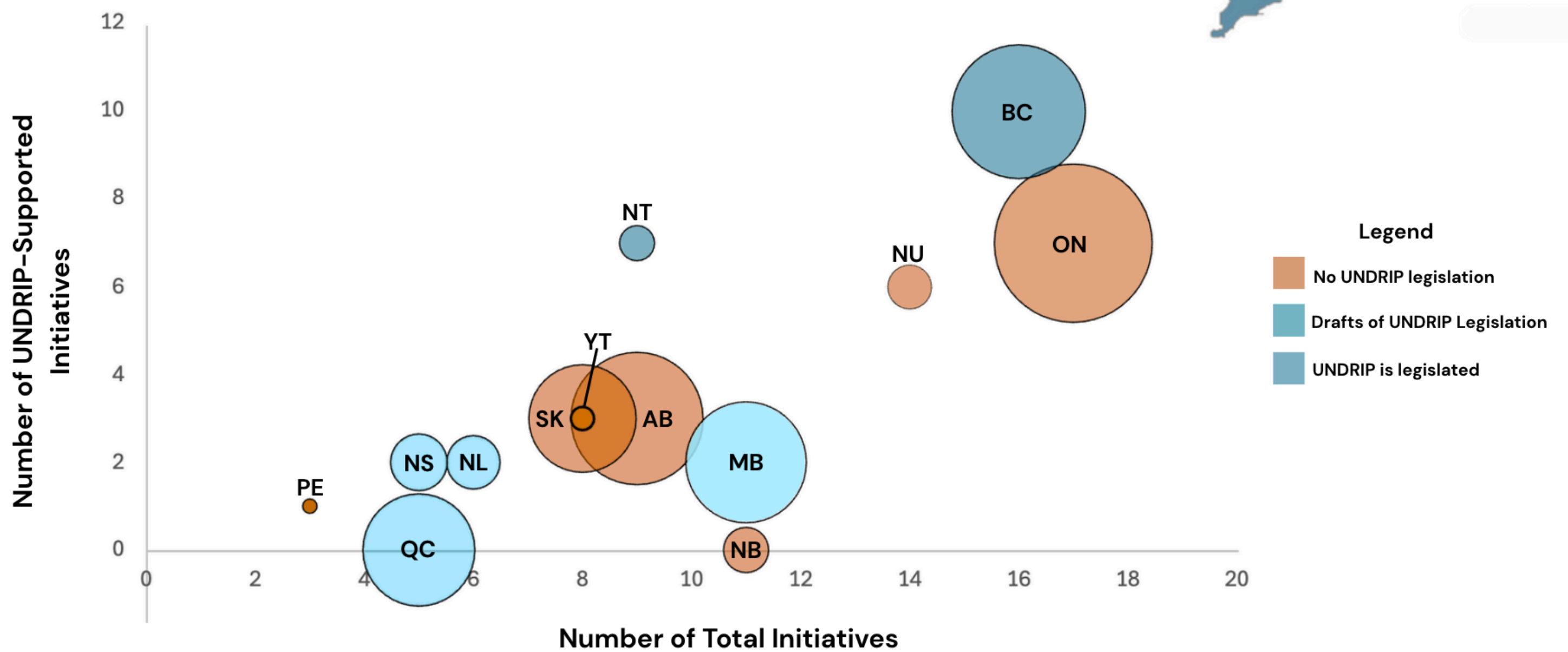


Figure 2. 4-Factor Master Comparison of Initiatives

This multidimensional graph illustrates the relationship between Indigenous education initiatives and UNDRIP adoption across Canada. Bubble size corresponds to Indigenous population to add demographic context (according to the latest 2021 Census by Statistics Canada). Colour indicates the legal status of UNDRIP and international alpha codes are used for place names.

British Columbia has fewer initiatives than Ontario and a smaller population, yet has more successfully integrated UNDRIP. Initiatives in BC are more robust, government-supported, and explicitly tied to UNDRIP due to its 'green' status as one of the few provinces where the Declaration has been legislated. Northwest Territories stands out for the same reason - despite its small population, it shows levels of UNDRIP alignment comparable to the largest. Most jurisdictions fall into a cluster - having both few total initiatives and few with respect to UNDRIP, regardless of their population size. Smaller areas with clear legislation outperform larger provinces that lack it.

*It is only through the decolonization of our minds and hearts, that we can develop the political clarity to reject the colonial discourse that creates a false dichotomy between Western and Indigenous Knowledge.*

### 3 Key Findings

- Provinces that have legislated UNDRIP show stronger initiatives, accountability & explicit alignment with education initiatives. Legal implementation is key to translating UNDRIP principles into actionable educational change.
- Successful initiatives that predate UNDRIP prove that treaties and other binding agreements have had a deeper, lasting impact. UNDRIP is just one tool among many to support but not replace existing Indigenous-led frameworks and agreements.
- Initiatives across Canada have been driven primarily by the advocacy and leadership of Indigenous peoples, regardless of UNDRIP. It provides support and legitimacy, but Peoples remain the central agents shaping their educational futures.

#### Key References:

- Government of Canada. "Backgrounder: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act." Government of Canada, December 10, 2021. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/about-apropos.html>
- Battiste, Marie. Decolonizing Education Nourishing the Learning Spirit. Vancouver Ubc Press, 2013.
- United Nations. "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," September 13, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2011.0040>

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scan me for the complete report, data tables, and contact info!

