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**CRITICAL JUSTICE:
INTERROGATING
CANADIAN CRITICAL
MINERAL STRATEGIES
FOR A JUST ENERGY
TRANSITION**

Piper French Dr. Andréanne Doyon Dr. Jonathan Boron

Simon Fraser University

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**Critical Justice: Interrogating Canadian Critical Mineral Strategies for a
Just Energy Transition**

Prepared by Piper French, Dr. Andréanne Doyon, & Dr. Jonathan Boron

For the Smart Prosperity Institute

Introduction

An energy transition will be necessary to avoid the worst of climate change. To reduce greenhouse gas emissions from high-emitting, fossil fuel-based energy, countries must reduce and expand investment in low-carbon and renewable energy. This transition is underway. The International Energy Agency (IEA) states that “In 2024, 80% of the growth in global electricity generation was provided by renewable sources and nuclear power”¹. However, renewable energy technologies, such as solar panels and wind turbines, are more mineral-intensive than traditional energy sources, requiring critical minerals for their construction. The definition of what makes a mineral “critical” is different across countries and can change over time, but two common ways to assess criticality are through a mineral’s supply risk and economic importance²⁻⁴. Some of the critical minerals commonly required for renewable energy technologies include lithium, copper, cobalt, and nickel. Although, uses for critical minerals extend beyond renewable energy, as they are also essential for electric vehicle batteries, for modern technologies like smartphones, and for military purposes. Given the variety of uses for critical minerals, particularly their necessity for an energy transition, demand is expected to increase substantially in the coming decades. According to the IEA, meeting the Paris Agreement’s climate goals “would mean a quadrupling of mineral requirements for clean energy technologies by 2040”⁵.

The rush to secure these minerals is causing concern among Indigenous Peoples, as most critical mineral extractive projects occur on or near Indigenous Peoples’ territory globally⁶. Extractive projects are known to have negative social and environmental consequences, particularly for land-connected peoples⁷. For example, mining projects can perpetuate environmental injustices through the displacement of local communities, destruction of cultural heritage, and damage to community health from increased pollution⁸. Indigenous lands become ‘sacrifice zones’ in the name of the energy transition and economic growth. The increased pressure for nation-states to expand and fast-track critical mineral extraction is exacerbating this concern. In response to surging demand and global uncertainty in supply chains, countries are developing their own strategies for securing critical mineral sources, including expanding domestic extraction where geologically possible.

With an economy that remains reliant on primary resource production⁹, Canada is among the countries seeking to expand domestic production of critical minerals. The federal government and each province and territory, save for Yukon, Prince Edward Island, and Nunavut, have specific strategies that outline the objectives and priorities to secure or expand a domestic critical mineral supply. These strategies have identified opportunities

throughout the critical mineral supply chain, from enhancing geoscience and exploration to extraction and recycling. However, as a settler-colonial state, resource extraction in Canada occurs on Indigenous lands and usually results in dispossessing Indigenous Peoples of their territories and resources without consent¹⁰. Further, areas with high critical mineral potential, often in rural or remote locations, become sacrifice zones, such as the Ring of Fire in northern Ontario¹¹. According to McGregor¹⁰, these colonial processes are one of the primary forms of environmental injustice in Canada. Although Canada has incorporated UNDRIP into law, Indigenous Nations still do not have the power to prevent extractive projects by withholding consent¹⁰. A just energy transition in Canada will only be achieved if marginalized communities are included and respected in energy decisions on their territory¹².

In this report, we provide the results of a document analysis of Canadian critical mineral strategies. First, we summarize the results of a systematic literature review and analysis that was used to inform the creation of a policy analysis framework. Then, we present the framework and how it can be used. Afterwards, we share the results of the Canadian critical mineral strategy analysis, providing a summary of findings for each strategy and a table summarizing overall results across strategies. We conclude by providing recommendations for policymakers and questions that they can consider when making decisions in this space.

Literature Review

Methods

To understand how energy transitions impact Indigenous peoples, we conducted a systematic literature review of three literature bodies: just energy transitions, critical minerals, and Indigenous environmental justice. After searching article databases using relevant keywords to find literature across these three literature bodies, we compiled 223 articles for review. These articles were then further refined and coded in the qualitative analysis software NVivo to identify common themes within and across the literature bodies. Examples of themes, which became the codes, include “environmental justice”, “extraction”, and “self-determination”. Once the coding was complete, we conducted a thematic analysis, identifying what themes were prevalent across all literature bodies and where gaps existed.

Literature Analysis

Within the just energy transition literature, several scholars have identified that energy transitions can worsen social inequalities and environmental degradation^{13,14}.

Further, given that an energy transition must occur at a fast enough pace to address climate change, scholars are concerned that this will exacerbate environmental injustice¹⁵. These injustices can include the creation of sacrifice zones, job losses in certain industries, land loss, etc.^{16,17}. Therefore, energy justice is a vital component of a just energy transition. Although distributive, procedural, and recognition justice are the most utilized tenets to evaluate energy justice, with restorative and cosmopolitan justice being more recent additions^{18,19}, these tenets are primarily rooted within a Western worldview. A just energy transition does not necessarily incorporate Indigenous peoples' perspectives unless specific attention is given to Indigenous Knowledges and worldviews²⁰. Critical energy justice scholars encourage the incorporation of non-Western epistemologies into energy justice scholarship, reframing classic justice tenets from Indigenous perspective or proposing other tenets to evaluate energy justice^{21,22}. For example, epistemic justice recognizes that there are diverse ways of knowing and critiques the presumption that Western science is absolute^{23,24}. Therefore, to support a just future, energy transition literature must understand the multiplicity of understandings that exist regarding energy justice and a just energy transition.

Although the critical mineral literature body is clear that critical mineral demand is surging, some scholars are concerned that the literature does not challenge high demand projections, instead arguing that modelling high demand can drive extractive growth²⁵. Given the negative implications that extraction can have on nearby communities, some scholars argue that we should place more emphasis on demand reduction, rather than solely on meeting supply^{2,25}. Reducing the demand for new mining projects could help avoid the creation of new sacrifice zones, where injustices are perpetuated for the benefit of the global market²⁶. Further, the emphasis on fast-tracking mineral extraction by reducing regulatory processes attempts to attract new investment but can create frustration from Indigenous Nations whose concerns fail to outweigh the capitalist benefits²⁷. Additionally, fast-tracking exacerbates the concern that extraction is occurring without adequate consultation or incorporation of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) principles established by UNDRIP^{3,28}. While mining companies have pivoted to try and obtain social license to operate and assure affected communities that development will be responsible and sustainable³, some scholars remain sceptical of these initiatives. For example, Phadke²⁹ and Kramarz et al.³⁰ question who gets to define 'responsible' mining, and what it looks like throughout entire supply chains. Responsible mining also does not consider resource justice, which considers how much is being sourced and why²⁶. However, Indigenous Nations have diverse responses to resource development on their territory, with some Nations working with mining companies, signing agreements, or engaging in legal action³.

Given that Indigenous Nations' laws and Knowledges are land and place-based, Indigenous peoples usually experience the effects of environmental degradation first³¹. However, mainstream environmental justice frameworks do not adequately reflect Indigenous worldviews³². Therefore, distinct frameworks based on Indigenous Knowledge Systems should be developed³². While no one framework will be suitable to each Indigenous Nation, a commonality of Indigenous environmental justice is respect for the more-than-human world and achieving justice for all beings³³. Indigenous self-determination is another crucial component of Indigenous environmental justice³¹, emphasizing that Indigenous peoples need to be able to participate in and make decisions about energy and infrastructure on their territory now and into the future³⁴. This literature body also explains that environmental justice cannot be achieved without recognizing the ongoing effects of colonization³⁵. While some scholars see extractivism as an opportunity for Indigenous Nations to expand economic development³⁶, others argue that extractivism operationalizes the goals of settler-colonialism by increasing the theft of Indigenous lands and exacerbating historical injustices³⁷. Further, extractive activities are known to disproportionately affect Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people³⁸. Ultimately, if governments are serious about addressing climate change, then upholding Indigenous self-determination and consent is the fastest way³⁴.

Across the three literature bodies, the need to transition our energy system away from fossil fuels is uncontested. Although extraction of critical minerals is environmentally destructive, most of the literature also acknowledges that some amount of critical mineral extraction will be needed for a renewable energy transition^{39,40}. However, fast-tracking critical mineral projects can reproduce colonialism, with environmental injustices being the symptoms²⁷. Extractivism transforms the land into non-being, where land is subjected to monetary evaluation and resources require exploitation¹¹. Therefore, the perpetuation of extractivism becomes a barrier to achieving justice in an energy transition²⁶. Additionally, scholars across these literature bodies recognize that our current capitalist and colonial system is not the only worldview that exists⁴¹. Indigenous peoples propose alternative visions of the future, drawing on systems of living that have existed since time immemorial. For example, the Anishinabek practice of “mino-mnaamodzawin”, or “good life”, which requires maintaining reciprocal relationships with more-than-humans and confronting the colonial separation of humans and nature^{32,33,42}. There are lifeways that exist beyond extractivism, and a just energy transition will require respect for pluriversality and decoloniality^{11,41}.

Policy Document Analysis

Methods

To analyse how critical mineral strategies support a just energy transition, we developed the Justice in Energy Minerals Strategies (JEMS) framework (Table 1). The JEMS framework has twelve sub-concepts, directly stemming from the most relevant themes from the literature review. The sub-concepts were organized into four broader concepts, with three sub-concepts in each concept. Each sub-concept contains one or more indicators that are presented as open-ended questions to identify how policy documents consider the various literature review themes. These indicators help to identify nuances within policy documents and analyse how policy documents consider themes related to energy transitions, justice, and critical mineral development.

Using the JEMS framework, we conducted a document analysis of Canadian critical mineral strategies. We analysed 11 critical mineral strategies, one from the Federal government, 9 from provincial governments, and one from a territorial government. Jurisdictions without dedicated critical mineral strategies were excluded, including P.E.I., Nunavut, and Yukon. The strategies were analysed in NVivo, and coded with the JEMS framework's concepts, sub-concepts, and indicators. We provide narrative summaries of each strategy to examine the results of coding and explore what JEMS framework indicators were present or lacking from each document.

Table 1. Justice in Energy Mineral Strategies (JEMS) Framework

Concept	Definition	Sub-concept	Indicators
Narratives and Rationales	Logics underpinning critical mineral development.	Extraction	Is fast-tracking or streamlining mineral projects referenced?
			How are mining practices described, e.g., sustainable or responsible mining, ESG guidelines, etc.?
			What areas are targeted for extraction?
		Policy narratives	How are energy transitions referenced, e.g., is the energy transition rationalized through climate change or national interest/nation-building narratives?
			How are Indigenous peoples discussed, e.g., are specific communities referenced?
			Is Reconciliation mentioned? How?
			What other rationales are used for CM development?
		Economic narratives	What economic growth narratives are perpetuated?
			What alternative economic narratives are discussed? For example, is degrowth, post-growth, or circular economy mentioned?
			How is uncertainty recognized around CM demand projections? Is mineral recycling/reusing/recovery included to help meet demand?
			How does the policy describe job retention or creation? e.g., what types of jobs, where, and for who?
Process and Procedure	Relating to the way that mineral development decisions are made and how policies are created.	Strategy development	How was policy engagement conducted? Were Indigenous peoples engaged on the policy itself? What Nations or groups?
			Is the diversity of Indigenous communities' responses to extraction/CM development acknowledged? How are these differences addressed?
			How are territory and geography acknowledged, e.g., what placenames are used?
		Decision-making	How are decisions being made and by who?
			Are there references to treaties, self-government agreements, or self-determination? How are these concepts discussed or incorporated, e.g., through UNDRIP, Indigenous ownership, etc.?
		Consent	How is consent discussed? How is consent being obtained for extractive projects, e.g., is free, prior, and informed consent included?

Recognition	Acknowledgement of the effects of critical mineral development and the worldviews underpinning extraction.	Named harms	What harms from critical mineral extraction are acknowledged, e.g., harms to more-than-humans, historical harms related to mineral extraction, etc.
			Is colonialism mentioned?
		Consequences	Are disproportionate effects of critical mineral extraction recognized, e.g., does the policy recognize disproportionate effects on Indigenous peoples, women, children, and gender-diverse people?
			How are intergenerational impacts described?
		Responses	How are proposed harms of CM extraction addressed? What is the process for mitigation, restoration, offsetting, or compensation?
			How are project benefits distributed, e.g., through contracts or agreements?
Epistemic Transformation	Reflecting a shift away from colonial/settler-colonial logics towards pluriversality, decoloniality, and "a new epistemological culture" (Kelly et al., 2024, p. 793).	Relationships	How are relationships and responsibilities to more-than-humans described, e.g., more-than-humans recognized as having intrinsic value, or does the policy separate humans and nature?
			How is relationship building with Indigenous communities described, e.g., on whose basis are relationships formed, and do relationships extend beyond the life of extractive projects?
		Consideration of Worldviews	Is Indigenous Knowledge referenced? What ways does the policy describe using IK?
			How is Indigenous Knowledge defined? By whom?
		Justice	Is justice mentioned?
			Is decolonization mentioned?

Policy Results

Federal

*The Canadian Critical Mineral Strategy*⁴³ provides the most comprehensive discussion of critical mineral development out of Canada's jurisdictions. The strategy's first objective is to "support economic growth and competitiveness" (p. 16), which includes creating jobs, generating GDP growth, and building value throughout the supply chain. However, the strategy also aims to advance the circular economy, which includes improving recycling opportunities that "can relieve some pressure on primary supply" (p. 41). The Federal government intends to "expedite and facilitate strategic critical mineral projects" (p. 24) through actions such as reviewing the regulatory process, assisting proponents with navigating regulations, and aligning federal, provincial, and territorial regulatory and permitting processes. Another objective is to "advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples" (p. 17). Reconciliation is primarily considered through an economic lens, with benefits stemming from jobs, ownership of mining projects, and implementing the National Benefits Sharing Framework (p. 17). In addition to respecting treaty obligations, the federal government aims to "uphold the duty to consult, with the aim of securing the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples" (p. 29).

The strategy is clear that "actions under the Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy will comply with the Government of Canada's implementation of UNDA" (p. 30). Further, the strategy recognizes the "importance of environmental protection and stewardship in Indigenous communities and expects mining activities to include measures to avoid and mitigate negative environmental impacts" (p. 30). Getting closer to recognizing the rights of more-than-humans, the Federal strategy also states that environmental considerations will be balanced with "protecting Indigenous peoples' lands, water, wildlife, and resources" which help mitigate "cumulative effects within traditional territory" (p. 30). The strategy also presents a "nature forward approach", meaning that critical mineral development will incorporate practices to "prevent biodiversity loss, protect species at risk, and support nature protection" (p. 5). This includes incorporating Indigenous Knowledges into critical mineral development decisions and supporting Indigenous guardian programs (p. 16). The Federal strategy is the only strategy to incorporate justice to some degree, recognizing that there have been "serious concerns about community safety with respect to critical mineral development" (p. 28) and that the "Calls for Justice", from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, "highlight the need to ensure safety and equity for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people" (2022, p. 30). It is also the only strategy to mention the respect and advancement of the "self-determined priorities of communities" (p. 27).

Alberta

Alberta's critical mineral strategy, *Renewing Alberta's mineral future: A strategy to re-energize Alberta's minerals sector*⁴⁴ presents Alberta's plan to take advantage of rising global demand for critical minerals fuelled by the energy transition. A key aspect of the strategy is to "enhance the fiscal and regulatory environment" (p. 14). Arguing that clear and predictable regulatory systems are a marker of responsible resource development, Alberta plans to "cut red tape" (p. 7) by providing "a clear regulatory roadmap" to "reduce unnecessary regulatory burden" and "increase investor and public confidence" (p. 14). Details around what this means for Indigenous Nations is unclear, but Alberta does state that Indigenous communities "share an interest in the economic and social benefits arising from responsible mineral development" (p. 7). Further, Alberta describes the province's "untapped geological potential", identifying specific areas with immense potential, including the Athabasca Basin for uranium, and west-central Alberta for lithium (p. 9). The strategy briefly mentions recycling as an area for investment but does not provide details or action.

The strategy is somewhat vague about environmental harms occurring from mineral extraction, acknowledging that environmental impacts occur, but primarily describes their response to reduce environmental impacts. Primarily, Alberta plans to "update resource conservation regulations" (p. 16) by optimizing remediation and reclamation plans. Alberta does recognize the proximity of Indigenous communities to mineral deposits and the need to understand Indigenous concerns around "impacts to Treaty rights, harvesting activities and traditional uses" (p. 17). However, with no discussion on consent, justice, ongoing colonialism, or intergenerational impacts, Alberta aims to understand and address these concerns by advancing opportunities for Indigenous Peoples' "involvement" in mineral exploration and development and "job-creating investments" (p. 17). While Alberta describes other actions previously taken to ensure Indigenous Peoples are "active participants in Alberta's energy and mineral sectors", such as the "Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation", the "Indigenous Litigation Fund", and the "Employment Partnerships Program" (p. 8), no long-term commitments to relationship building with Indigenous Nations is presented in their Action Plan (p. 21-24), nor recognition of Indigenous Knowledges and laws.

British Columbia

Only four pages, *B.C.'s Critical Minerals Strategy: Unlocking a Generational Opportunity*⁴⁵ represents Phase 1 of the province's overall plan for critical mineral development. The strategy describes taking advantage of this generational opportunity by ensuring "efficient permit processing to bolster business certainty, reduce development

times and attract long-term investment” (p. 3). The strategy aims to encourage the streamlining of project permitting while also ensuring “responsible critical mineral development” (p. 3). Although the strategy does encourage economic growth, it also references investment in circular economy projects (p. 3). When it comes to Indigenous Peoples, the strategy’s first goal is to “expand First Nations partnerships, shared decision making and reconciliation” (p. 3). Additionally, it is one of two strategies that mentions the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and consent, specifically “negotiating consent-based decision-making agreements with First Nations” (p. 2). However, when it comes to action, the strategy broadly mentions engaging “with First Nations” and aligning “B.C.’s Strategy with the First Nations Energy and Mining Council’s First Nations Critical Mineral Strategy” (p. 3). However, the strategy does not acknowledge the negative environmental or social harms associated with extraction, and it does not discuss justice, colonialism, Indigenous Knowledges, or intergenerational effects. It remains to be seen whether these considerations will be included in later phases of B.C.’s strategy.

Manitoba

Manitoba’s critical mineral strategy, *Securing Our Critical Mineral Future: Responsible Mining, Opportunity Ready*⁴⁶, aims to “ensure Manitoba benefits from rapidly increasing global demand for critical minerals” (p. 21). Manitoba describes its land as “relatively under-explored and under-developed” with a “significant opportunity for future growth” (p. 4). The strategy’s first main goals are to “speed up project timelines” (p. 8) and “enhance our regulatory framework and ensure efficient and transparent permitting processes” (p. 9). Specific actions to achieve these goals include a “coordinated investment action strategy and dedicated, single window Critical Mineral Office” (p. 9) and “updated mineral exploration guidelines” (p. 10). Manitoba’s strategy argues that streamlining projects can occur alongside responsible mining, and that moving “toward responsible mineral development will be based on recognition of the Treaty relationship” guided by “Manitoba’s Path to Reconciliation Act” and “Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” (p. 14). The strategy describes Manitoba’s commitment to economic Reconciliation, with key actions ranging from fulfilling the “duty to consult” and ensuring “social license and respect for Treaties” (p. 15), to developing “a provincial revenue sharing model for mining in collaboration with Indigenous Nations” (p. 16). Manitoba’s strategy is also the only strategy to include a land acknowledgement. However, inclusion of consent or acknowledgement of colonialism, justice, or Indigenous Knowledges is absent. Further, Manitoba’s strategy does not explicitly discuss the negative environmental or social effects of extraction but does mention mitigating environmental impacts through early and ongoing consultation (p. 14).

New Brunswick

*New Brunswick's Comprehensive Minerals Strategy*⁴⁷ has four guiding principles: “clear and consistent permitting processes”, “advancing Indigenous participation”, “delivering community benefits”, and “upholding environmental stewardship” (p. 9). New Brunswick describes the need to attract investment by creating “regulatory and permitting systems that provide clear and transparent processes, reasonable timelines, and low uncertainty” (p. 22). The strategy provides several tangible ways to improve the regulatory system while maintaining responsible development, including the creation of “a roadmap that guides proponents through the regulatory process” (p. 23) and “a digital platform that gives both proponents and government a centralized, real-time view of all project-related information” (p. 25). When describing “meaningful Indigenous participation”, the strategy explains that participation “must extend beyond engagement to include economic involvement, knowledge-sharing, and tangible community benefits” (p. 27), suggesting that Indigenous Knowledges may be considered if provided. The tangible actions that the strategy provides to achieve this goal includes guidelines for proponents on expectations related to the duty to consult, ongoing opportunities for First Nations-New Brunswick leadership dialogue, and economic opportunities for First Nations (p. 28-29). Although New Brunswick’s strategy does not mention consent or justice, it does admit that there have been “negative impacts from past mining, such as abandoned sites” (p. 35). To mitigate harms and improve relationships, the province “will encourage local governments, provincial departments, and project proponents to consider preparing Indigenous communities and local community impact and benefit plans early in the development process” (p. 33). Given the geography of New Brunswick, the strategy explains that workers can reside in communities instead of relying on “fly-in/fly-out workforces” (p. 32), which helps to strengthen relationships with Indigenous partners.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador’s critical minerals strategy, *Our Critical Minerals Advantage: A Plan to Maximize the Value of Newfoundland and Labrador’s Critical Minerals Resources*⁴⁸, describes the province’s opportunity for growth in the mineral sector, as “large areas remain relatively under-explored” (p. 4). While the strategy describes that improvements to the regulatory process will be necessary to attract investment and support economic growth, it also states that these improvements “do not imply a less robust regulatory framework but instead create clearer pathways” (p. 28). One action to improve the regulatory process includes engagement “with Indigenous Governments and Organizations (...) to discuss opportunities for collaboration related to environmental, social and governance principles” (p. 28). This relationship will be “principle-based” and “characterized by mutual respect” (p. 10). Additionally, the strategy includes opportunities for marginalized communities’ involvement, particularly through jobs for Indigenous

Peoples, women, newcomers, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, etc. (p. 1). The strategy briefly mentions other supply chain opportunities that the province could participate in, including “the circular economy including reprocessing and recycling” (p. 20). However, there is no discussion of consent or justice, or inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges. Further, while the strategy mentions aligning development with ESG standards, there is no identification of environmental or social harms from critical mineral extraction, or acknowledgement of colonialism.

Northwest Territories

Northwest Territories’ critical mineral strategy, *Priorities for Critical Minerals in the NWT*⁴⁹, describes itself as an already established mining territory with “86% support amongst NWT citizens for the mining sector” (p. 16). NWT’s vision for mineral development is that it “respects Indigenous rights and land ownership, (...) strengthens Canada’s commitments to Indigenous reconciliation, implementing UNDRIP (...) and addressing climate change” (p. 17). Although NWT has less emphasis on permit streamlining than other jurisdictions, the strategy includes “enhancing NWT regulatory environment” but through “Mackenzie Valley Operational Dialogue” that aims to make regulatory improvements through dialogue “rather than solely through legislative amendments” (p. 20). This dialogue approach includes Indigenous Governments as partners (p. 20). Similarly to other strategies, NWT’s strategy includes the necessity of ESG considerations, but with an added ESG-I, for “Indigenous considerations” (p. 16). While the NWT’s strategy does perpetuate economic growth narratives, describing the need to “take advantage” of “the growing demand for a reliable supply of CM” (p. 12), it does not mention recycling or the circular economy as ways to meet demand.

Relationships between Indigenous Governments and the Government of NWT are founded through greater collaboration compared to other jurisdictions. For example, there was commitment to co-developing regulations for the new *Mineral Resources Act*, which “respect the jurisdictions and authorities of Indigenous governments” (p. 20), with “provisions for sharing benefits” (p. 15). In addition, the “Inuvialuit Regional Corporation and the Gwich’in Tribal Council have developed regional strategies” to “support mineral exploration and development specific to their regions” (p. 20). While there is greater evidence of collaboration, there is no recognition of the harms from extraction or colonialism, no mention of justice, and no clear incorporation of Indigenous Knowledges in the strategy itself. Additionally, there is no specific acknowledgement of the rights of more-than-humans, instead referring to the land’s “undeveloped and undiscovered potential” (p. 11).

Nova Scotia

Originally released in 2023, *Nova Scotia's Critical Minerals Strategy*⁵⁰ was re-released in 2025 to add four more critical minerals to its list and create an additional list of four strategic minerals. Outlined in the strategy, Nova Scotia "is committed to supporting an efficient regulatory framework" that "provides clear requirements and predictable timelines" to "attract investment and drive economic development" (p. 5). The actions to achieve this streamlining are vague and include "review processes used by other jurisdictions to achieve regulatory efficiencies" and "help proponents navigate the regulatory process" through "a critical minerals project facilitator" (p. 5). The strategy also provides no clear definition or requirements of a "responsible (...) supply of critical minerals" (p. 14) or "high ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) standards" (p. 9). Nova Scotia does mention a broad interest in expanding recycling opportunities and supporting research into the circular economy, while also emphasizing economic opportunities available with economic growth. Although, the strategy is clear that economic opportunities, particularly job creation, will be available for "racialized and marginalized groups" such as "Indigenous, African Nova Scotian and 2SLGTBQIA+ communities" (p. 7).

Given the context in Nova Scotia, the strategy specifically refers to the "Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia". In addition to committing to follow "legal requirements including the Crown's Duty to Consult" (p. 5), the strategy aims to "support capacity building and knowledge sharing", "facilitate the participation of the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia in mineral exploration and development" and "encourage Mi'kmaw collaboration and partnerships" (p. 6). However, the strategy does not mention justice, colonialism, intergenerational effects, or environmental and social harms from extraction.

Ontario

*Ontario's Critical Mineral Strategy: Unlocking potential to drive economic recovery and prosperity*⁵¹ is a five-year roadmap to "secure the province's position as a reliable global supplier of responsibly sourced critical minerals" (p. 8). However, tangible actions for how critical minerals will be sourced responsibly are unclear, with the strategy mostly emphasizing the importance of responsible and sustainable mining for business investment. Ontario's strategy also targets areas within the province for development, specifically identifying the Ring of Fire in Northern Ontario as being home to significant critical mineral deposits (p. 14). "Under-explored areas of Ontario" (p. 19) will also be targeted for geoscience, with the potential for partnership opportunities with Indigenous communities. Although the strategy will be "reviewed every 3 years to reflect the demands of new technologies, changing markets, and international investment priorities", it does not describe moving towards a circular economy to potentially reduce the amount of new

mining projects. Recycling is mentioned limitedly, focusing more on EV battery recycling (p. 26).

Ontario's strategy does mention Reconciliation, but from an economic perspective. The strategy describes how "collaborating on resource development projects can advance reconciliation" and how the province is "supporting actions to increase the capacity of Indigenous communities (...) to participate, and benefit from, resource development" (p. 36). Job creation is one way the strategy proposes to increase Indigenous opportunities in critical mineral development, including opportunities for other underrepresented groups, such as women (p. 43). Ontario measures success for their relationship with Indigenous partners through the "number of Resource Revenue Sharing agreements in place" and through increased opportunities for Indigenous participation (p. 39). However, the strategy does not consider justice, Indigenous Knowledges, or recognize the negative impacts of mining.

Québec

Québec's critical mineral strategy, *Propelling Québec's Mining Sector*⁵², is the second version of the province's strategy, with the first released in 2020. Fuelled by growing demand and desire for economic growth, a strong focus of the strategy is to accelerate projects by reducing "the administrative burden associated with mining projects" and accelerating "the environmental assessment procedure for projects" (p. 21). With an aim to "reduce red tape", the province plans to hasten departmental deadlines "to nine months, which is almost twice as fast as the current 13 to 18 months" (p. 21). One way to administer shorter timelines is to improve "governmental coordination of Indigenous consultations (...) to avoid multiplication" (p. 22). The strategy also describes the importance of the "active participation of Indigenous and local communities" (p. 45) and recognizes that First Nations and Inuit are "key partners in mining development" (p. 46). Although the strategy does not mention Reconciliation, it describes the economic opportunities for Indigenous communities from participating in the mining sector, acknowledging that Indigenous communities "are the ones directly affected by the development of mining" (p. 47). However, Québec's strategy does not discuss justice, consent, or Indigenous Knowledges.

Québec's strategy does emphasize the importance of "integrating the circular economy into CSM value chains" (p. 33) more than any other critical mineral strategy. Additionally, the strategy describes developing "the entire CSM value chain" (p. 13), including recycling. Although the strategy does mention there are environmental impacts of mining, it explains that early discussions with communities can help preserve "a quality

living environment for future generations” (p. 48). However, there is no recognition of relationships with more-than-humans.

Saskatchewan

The first half of *Securing the Future: Saskatchewan’s Critical Minerals Strategy*⁵³, describes the importance of critical minerals and outlines several specific goals for the province’s mineral development. These goals include “double the number of critical minerals being produced in Saskatchewan by 2030” (p. 10) and “establish Saskatchewan as a Rare Earth Element Hub” (p. 12). When describing the importance of enhancing the province’s regulatory system, the strategy mentions “cutting red tape” by undertaking “a review of environmental exploration permitting” (p. 21). The strategy states that this initiative will help increase “awareness within northern First Nations and Métis communities” about the mining industry and “support sustainable growth”, while helping to “inform and support Duty to Consult obligations” (p. 21). Beyond legal obligations, Saskatchewan aims to support economic Reconciliation and grow Indigenous participation, evidenced by their launch of the “Saskatchewan Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation (SIIFC) in 2022” (p. 20). However, there is no discussion of consent, justice, Indigenous Knowledges, or reference to UNDRIP. Further, there is no recognition of the harms critical mineral extraction can cause, the disproportionate effects that marginalized communities face, or colonialism. Additionally, the strategy does not describe recycling as an area for investment.

Table 2. High-level summary of document analysis findings across Canadian critical mineral strategies, based on the JEMS framework.

Concept	Sub-concept	Policy Document Analysis Summary
Narratives & Rationales	Extraction	> Each strategy indicates that streamlining regulations and permitting times will be required, but many strategies state that this can occur in tandem with responsible mining > Most strategies describe areas of land as “under-developed” or “under-explored”, particularly in remote regions
	Economic Narratives	> Economic growth is perpetuated in every strategy, supported by surging global demand for critical minerals > Many strategies include recycling/recovery as an important step in the value chain, with only some strategies describing a circular economy > Job creation overall but also for marginalized or underrepresented communities was a major justification for critical mineral development
	Policy Narratives	> Most strategies refer to Indigenous peoples broadly instead of specific communities

		> Reconciliation is primarily discussed through economic means, achieved by providing jobs, financial compensation, or collaborative opportunities for affected Indigenous communities
Process & Procedure	Strategy Development	> Several strategies include information on how engagement was conducted to create the strategy itself, although detail varies > Manitoba's strategy was the only to provide a land acknowledgement
	Decision-making	> While "partnership" language is used in each strategy when describing opportunities for Indigenous involvement, only a few strategies include "ownership" opportunities > Only the Federal strategy mentions Indigenous self-determination
	Consent	> Only British Columbia's and the Federal strategy mention "consent"
Recognition	Named Harms	> Few of the strategies describe the harm that can occur from critical mineral extraction > Colonialism is not mentioned in any strategy
	Consequences	> Some strategies mention the disproportionate effects of extraction on Indigenous peoples, women, or other marginalized communities
	Responses	> Varied responses to potential negative effects of critical mineral extraction, mostly focusing on recycling, improving mine remediation, adopting new technology, etc. > Several strategies refer to benefit or revenue sharing frameworks with Indigenous communities to distribute economic benefits better
Epistemic Transformation	Relationships	> "More-than-human" language is not used in any strategy, but four strategies do indicate a responsibility to protect the environment > Most strategies mention upholding the Duty to Consult and/or respecting Aboriginal rights or Treaty rights, while the Federal strategy includes the need to "go actively beyond this duty" (2022, p. 30)
	Consideration of Worldviews	> Three strategies (Federal, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia) refer to Indigenous Knowledges in some way
	Justice	> Justice is only mentioned in the Federal strategy, in the context of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and mentions a "just transition" (2022, p. 33) once

Conclusion & Recommendations

This study aimed to analyse how Canada's critical mineral strategies support a just energy transition. Through the systematic literature review, we pulled out key themes across literature bodies to help inform our analysis and framework development. By

developing the JEMS framework, we were able to determine what elements would be present in a strategy that supports, or hinders, a just energy future. Each strategy was analysed with the JEMS frameworks concepts, sub-concepts, and indicators, and we provided narrative summaries for all strategies, along with an overall summary table. Our analysis demonstrates the varied consideration of the framework's elements throughout the country. This analysis helps to fill current gaps in the literature, as Canada has not been a major focus for critical mineral analysis, despite claiming significant reserves of critical minerals on Indigenous territories. Our analysis of Canada's critical mineral strategies is done through a critical lens, and although we believe that the presence of some JEMS framework indicators would support a just transition, we did not expect to find evidence of all of them.

There were several instances where some strategies failed to incorporate indicators that are present in other strategies. For example, the Federal strategy names specific harms caused by mineral development, while most strategies, including Saskatchewan's and Ontario's, fail to mention negative effects at all. Further, the Federal strategy and British Columbia's strategy include consent language, while the other strategies shy away from this term. In addition, only the Federal strategy, New Brunswick's strategy, and Nova Scotia's strategy provide indication that Indigenous Knowledges will be incorporated into decision-making. The presence of harm recognition, consent, and Indigenous Knowledges, among other indicators, in some strategies indicates that Canada's jurisdictions are capable of these acknowledgements, and that it is not unrealistic to expect these indicators' inclusion. Although, we do recognize that there can be uncertainty around the implementation of strategies, such as gaps regarding what is included in strategic documents and what happens operationally. However, we believe that these indicators, in addition to others identified in the JEMS framework, should be present in strategies that support a just energy transition.

On the other hand, we recognize that some JEMS framework indicators were not likely to occur in any strategy. For example, we did not expect that a strategy would have mentioned "colonialism" or "decolonization" explicitly, given that the strategies are, on one hand, attempting to demonstrate the importance of continuing Canada's access to Indigenous territories. This colonial mentality is evident through many strategies' use of "underdeveloped" or "underexplored" language in reference to land and opportunities for mineral deposit discovery and development. By describing land as undeveloped, Indigenous presence and alternative uses and relationships to land are being erased, while resources are objectified. Additionally, even if strategies do not explicitly mention colonialism and its associated impacts, we do believe that strategies should consider Reconciliation more meaningfully. Three strategies (Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and

Labrador, and Québec) make no mention of Reconciliation and most other strategies only describe “economic” Reconciliation. Bringing an environmental justice lens to this analysis and centring the perspectives of Indigenous scholars allowed us to critically analyse the strategies.

Moving forward, we should expect more from these strategic documents, especially because some already provide deeper incorporation of the JEMS framework indicators. We suggest that policymakers utilize the JEMS framework to help critically assess critical mineral development, and to guide the development of future strategies. In addition, we have identified specific questions that can help guide policymakers to support a just energy transition through critical mineral or energy-transition related strategies. Our recommended considerations include:

- Does the strategy perpetuate colonial narratives, particularly through references to land?
- Are processes to reduce regulatory timelines clear and specific, or are they vague and leave room for uncertainty? Do they support respectful relationship building with Indigenous Nations?
- Is the definition of responsible or sustainable mining clear, and who is defining these concepts?
- Is Reconciliation described solely through economic terms, or is it one aspect of a larger approach to support Indigenous self-determination?
- Are status quo economic growth narratives perpetuated or is there recognition of alternative forms of economic development or incorporation of circular economy components?
- Does the strategy support consent-based decision making or does it rely on fulfilling legal obligations?
- Does the strategy acknowledge Indigenous territories or rights/obligations to land?
- Is there recognition of harms from extractive development, including both harms to the land itself and disproportionate effects, particularly on Indigenous women?
- Does the strategy consider longer-term, intergenerational impacts of development?
- Does the strategy avoid perpetuating environmental injustice by integrating several justice dimensions, such as distributive, procedural, recognition, intergenerational, and epistemic? Who decides whether the integration of these dimensions is satisfactory?

Although these guiding questions can support incremental change, we acknowledge that structural change cannot be achieved through strategic documents alone. The inclusion of the JEMS framework indicators in strategic documents may not

systematically change the outcomes of resource development in each jurisdiction, especially because these documents are not legally binding. However, inclusion of the more aspirational indicators could demonstrate a higher level of commitment to relationship building with Indigenous Nations beyond the status quo. For example, the fourth component of the JEMS framework, Epistemic Transformation, points to an alternative development path, one where pluralistic understandings of the world are accepted, and where Indigenous Knowledges are understood through the worldviews they emerge from. Even though strategic documents cannot solely achieve system transformation, strategies do help demonstrate commitment to certain development paths, and when developed with justice at the forefront, we are more likely to create a better future.

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