

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

RECOGNIZING RACISM

A majority of Canadians, regardless of age, gender or region, believe that hateful and racist online content is a major problem in Canada, a new national survey shows

OPINION

Nik Nanos is the chief data scientist at Nanos Research, a global fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington and the official pollster for The Globe and Mail and CTV News.

The ugly truth is that the online world is both a valuable source of information and an enabler of hatred and racism. Do Canadians care?

A new national survey for the Canadian Race Relations Foundation sheds light on where Canadians stand today on the subject of online hatred. At the heart of the research findings is the view that a majority of Canadians (58 per cent), regardless of age, gender or region, believe that hateful and racist online content is a major problem in Canada, while only 11 per cent believe this is not a problem at all.

Action to address online hate is being taken by governments in some countries. Australia is initiating “anti-troll” legislation to make social-media platforms more responsible, and Germany is cracking down on online hate speech, threatening to fine companies as much as \$73-million if they do not remove “obviously illegal” content within 72 hours.

Canadians are also ready for action when it comes to fighting hatred, racism and discrimination. Almost four in five respondents (79 per cent) support introducing legislation to combat serious forms of harmful online content. Faced with the trade-off between fighting hate speech and limiting free speech, people are more than twice as likely to worry about the impact of hate speech and racism (56 per cent) than about governments and social-media companies limiting the rights of citizens to express themselves and protecting the privacy of users (21 per cent).

Social-media organizations are in the sights of Canadians who think they need to be more proactive and take on more responsibility for what is said on their platforms. About three in four Canadians (76 per cent) support making social-media platforms legally responsible for the removal of hateful and extremist content before it can do harm, and almost seven in 10 (68 per cent) support requiring social-media platforms to publicly provide data and information related to algorithms, content moderation and other information pertinent to preserving the safety of online spaces and preventing harm.

The twist is that the very same social-media platforms that enable racist content and violent action against racialized communities are also a weapon of transparency, capturing this undeniably unacceptable behaviour.

The appetite for action is more than just the regulation of social-media platforms. Three in four Canadians (75 per cent) support

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(score of 7-10 out of 10) strengthening the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code to more effectively combat online hate.

Research suggests that Canadians want concrete action offline as well.

Canadians are four times more likely to support the development of a Black Canadians Justice

Strategy to address anti-Black racism and discrimination in the criminal justice system (55 per cent) than oppose such a plan (12 per cent). Meanwhile, almost six in 10 (58 per cent) support the creation of an independent civilian oversight body of the RCMP.

Of note, having dedicated hate crime units in major cities is generally viewed positively. More than seven in 10 Canadians (72 per cent) support ensuring that all major cities have dedicated hate crime units within local police forces, with about one in 20 people opposing the creation of such units.

What does this all mean?

First, the appetite for action against hatred and racism is significant. Second, only about one in 10 Canadians don't see racism as any sort of problem and are reticent to see action.

The flip side is that, although not a consensus opinion, major swaths of the population see a problem and are supportive of concrete action in one form or another.

Third, social-media platforms with many inflammatory anonymous “voices” are seen as pulpits for racism, hatred and the incitement of violence. Canadians are very much ready to hold these organizations to account and to require action, even at the cost of some limitations on free speech. To paraphrase the old adage, the right to swing one's fist ends at another person's nose.

The big question may very well be: Is this too much of a larger, global problem to take on?

Perhaps.

Are the solutions that Canadians support perfect? No.

How much real impact will they have? It's uncertain.

The alternative – doing nothing – is not acceptable for a significant number of Canadians. Like many things in life, the first step is to recognize there is a problem.

The second step is to take responsibility, and the third step is to start a real dialogue on a path forward.

Canada is neither immune to online hatred nor exceptional in its existence.

We can, however, think about the country and the society we want to be and start that journey.

Nanos conducted an online representative survey of 2,018 Canadians, 18 years of age or older, between November 3rd to 8th, 2021. The research was commissioned by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation and was conducted by Nanos Research.

Hatred online: Where Canadians stand

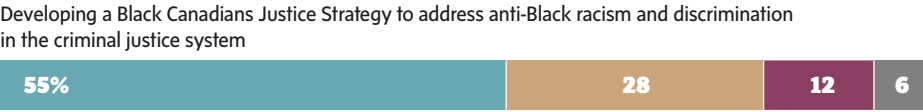
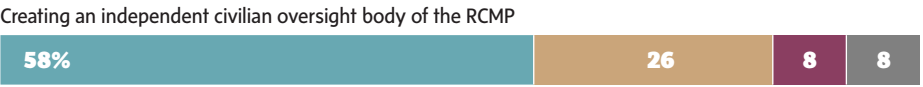
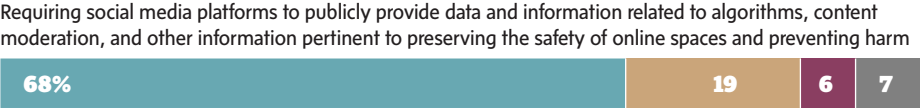
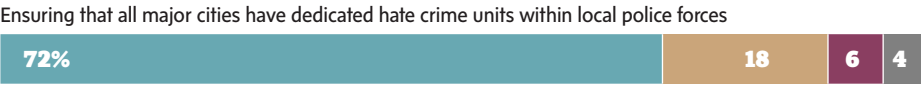
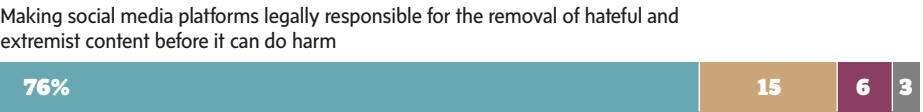
TAKING IT SERIOUSLY

How big of a problem do you think hateful and racist online content and behaviour is in Canada?



WHAT SOLUTIONS DO CANADIANS SUPPORT?

Support Neutral Oppose Unsure



Note: Numbers may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

MURAT YÜKSELİR / THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: NANOS RESEARCH

We helped free human-rights activist Narges Mohammadi from prison. She needs our help again.

MARYAM SHAFIPOUR

OPINION

Iranian human-rights activist who lives in Toronto. She was held in solitary confinement for 67 days during her imprisonment at Tehran's Evin Prison from 2013 to 2015.

I was only 21 years old when I was summoned for questioning by the Ministry of Intelligence of Iran.

I was terrified. Some of my fellow student activists had already been imprisoned, tortured and held in solitary confinement for peacefully protesting state tyranny.

Every day, we held a sit-in at Imam Khomeini International University, also known as the International University of Qazvin, calling for our friends' release. Every day, intelligence agents called, threatened and insulted some of us. One by one, we were summoned to court or suspended from university or both.

It was my turn. I was not prepared. I had no idea what to say. I had no idea how to defend myself.

A classmate had introduced me to Narges Mohammadi, a graduate from our university and vice-president of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre. I called her. She calmed me down over the phone and gave me the number of a lawyer. This

was the beginning of our friendship.

I was the only young woman among dozens of male activists summoned to the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Qazvin. “Do you want to be like Narges Mohammadi?” the court clerk asked sarcastically. My lips curled into a warm smile, and my eyes twinkled.

I was charged with “spreading propaganda against the system” and sentenced to a year in prison in 2009. I was sentenced again for similar charges in 2013 and spent a total of two years in prison.

But I did not want to tell you so much about that as my vivid memory of Narges in Evin Prison. One day there was a commotion in the corridor. The door to the women's ward opened, and I saw her familiar face.

Narges had been arrested at her house and brought to the prison. To this day I think of it as a kidnapping.

I looked into her eyes and realized she was terribly anxious. She was worried about her twins. They didn't have keys and might be left outside the door after school! Still, I couldn't hide my delight at seeing her. Dear Narges, you were here!

Narges Mohammadi is an Iranian journalist, renowned human-rights activist and women's rights defender. She has been arrested six times over three decades of peaceful activism and

To me, Narges represents humanity's glory in a beautiful soul. She is a ray of sunshine for a brighter future. Her power to keep up the fight has always astounded me.

sentenced to four long prison terms by the Islamic Revolutionary Court.

Right now, she is yet again in Evin Prison, in solitary confinement since her arrest last month after she attended an event marking the second anniversary of the 2019 Bloody November massacre in Iran.

She is subject to interrogation for new charges related to her campaign against solitary confinement and other activism and will later start serving a previous sentence of 30 months and 80 lashes for peaceful human-rights activities.

She was targeted for her criticism of laws against women. Her struggle against the Islamic regime's systematic oppression of women and ethnic and religious minorities. Her peaceful efforts to abolish the death penalty. Her peaceful efforts to raise awareness and change patriarchal culture and customs in Iran. Her efforts to abolish torture and solitary confinement. Advocating justice for those killed and injured in peaceful protests. Plus dozens of other initiatives.

To me, Narges represents humanity's glory in a beautiful soul. She is a ray of sunshine for a brighter future. Her power to keep up the fight has always astounded me. She is a sort of superwoman. Someone who has been tortured and oppressed for years. No one can recall anything bad about her. I wonder how

many people in the world are so brave, patient and loving. She adores people. All of humankind.

While Narges was imprisoned in 2015, her young children fled to France. They haven't hugged or even seen their mother in more than six years. Even after Narges was released from prison last year, the authorities barred her from leaving the country, even to see her children.

Narges stood up. She fought. She dedicated her love for her children to all people while carrying in her chest the great pain of being separated from her twins.

She wrote about the torture, long-term solitary confinement, cruel sentences, forced confessions and executions of innocent people.

She suffered neurological and muscular paralysis in 2009 in solitary confinement because of the torture and horrific, stressful situation she endured. She remains sentenced to 80 lashes.

She will try not to break. She is a human-rights fighter. What about the rest of us? How can we assist Narges in her struggle against oppression and darkness?

In 2016, I launched a #Free-Narges campaign, supported by several human-rights organizations, which helped secure her release in 2020. I need others to join me as I campaign to free Narges once more.