

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

LOSING FAITH

A new survey on the state of the country suggests that, over all, people aren’t satisfied with Canada and its most vital institutions

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.

Canadians are in an ugly mood. Many of us are divided on the path forward. The collateral damage is to the fabric of the country – witness the protests that have taken over Ottawa these past two weeks.

A new survey by Nanos on the state of the country suggests that, over all, people score their satisfaction with Canada as a country at a paltry 6.8 on a 10-point scale – down from 7.2 in 2021.

The most damning score is from young people, who rate their satisfaction with Canada as a country at 6.2 out of 10. We know from our research that, before the pandemic, a spirit of declinism was already out there. A majority believe that future generations will have a lower standard of living. Add pandemic fatigue and the spectre of inflation and it is a one-two gut punch for younger folks.

Surveys also show that, as one grinds through the pandemic, the state of our mental health is worsening. People are also fundamentally worried about the increasing cost of food and housing.

And Canadians are losing faith in the country’s institutions. Between 2021 and 2022, 10 of the 11 institutions that Nanos surveyed Canadians about saw their numbers drop.

The top contributors to improving our country include our universities and colleges (7.3 out of 10) and the health care system (7.1) followed by the Supreme Court (6.5), charities (6.5), the Canadian Armed Forces (6.4) and arts and cultural organizations (6.3).

The basement is occupied by our political institutions ranging from the House of Commons (5.6), the prime minister (5.2), the Senate (3.6) and the Governor-General (3.2). (One should note that the Governor-General is the only one that improved over the past year – increasing from 2.9 to 3.2, but still rates the lowest over all. This suggests that the experience with the previous GG continues to cast a negative shadow on the institution.)

What is the path forward to

improve that overall score on Canada?

Manage your weaknesses. Lead with your strengths.

It is clear that many feel that our democratic institutions are failing at delivering solutions that make our country a better place. We should not be surprised. We have on the one hand a federal Liberal government driven by a very activist progressive agenda focused on correcting the injustices of the past. On the other hand, we have a Conservative Party that looked to protect its right flank by engaging with the

trucking protest movement.

The reality is that both governing parties have abandoned many Canadians. One is veering to the left fighting injustice, and another may veer to the right to fight for greater individual freedom. Neither are focused on what most Canadians care about – jobs and prosperity.

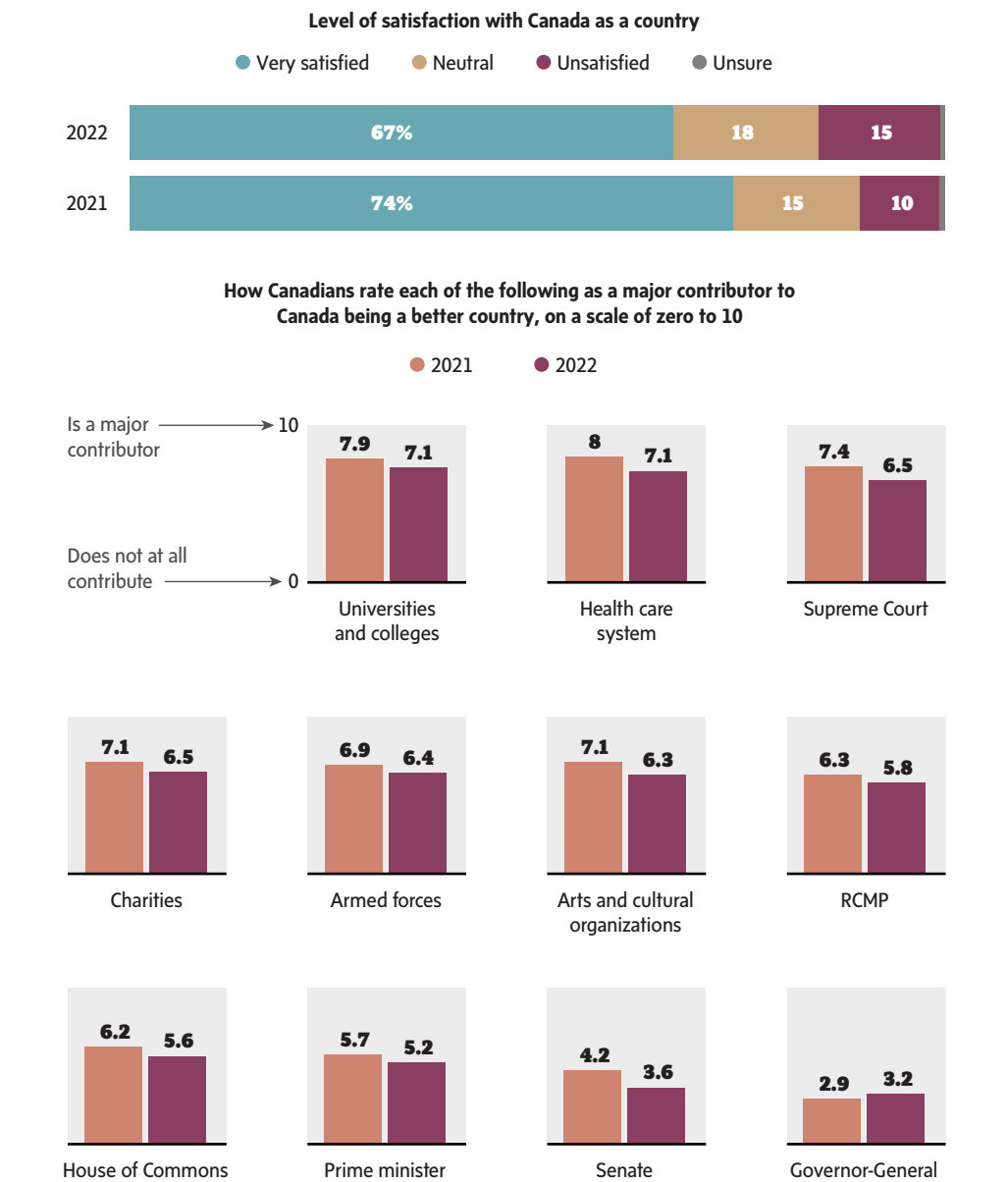
Our political discourse has lowered itself to a regular baseline of name calling and sloganeering. These have always existed and will continue to exist but the public good is a casualty in today’s discourse. No one should

be surprised that Canadians rate their democratic institutions poorly and do not see them as moving our country forward in a positive fashion.

Fighting injustice and advocating for greater individual freedom does not address the fundamental problem that many Canadians are struggling to pay their bills and have little hope for a better future.

This disconnect further fuels the atmosphere of declinism propelled by both the pandemic and fear of the rising cost of living.

Satisfaction with Canada



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

When money smells: The temptation of the dollar in the academy

IAN BURUMA NEW YORK

OPINION

Author, most recently, of *The Churchill Complex: The Curse of Being Special, From Winston and FDR to Trump and Brexit*

In recent years, the Vrije Universiteit (Free University) Amsterdam has conducted research on human rights in China. As part of this work, carried out by the university’s Cross Cultural Human Rights Centre (CCHRC), researchers travelled to Xinjiang province, notorious for the Chinese authorities’ mass incarceration of more than one million Uyghurs and members of other largely Muslim minorities. The CCHRC published the results of its investigations in a newsletter, financed through the Southwest University of Political Science and Law in Chongqing.

It was a little strange, but hardly surprising, to learn from one of the Dutch researchers that he saw nothing untoward in Xinjiang. The region was “just lovely,” Peter Peverelli said – “lovely people, breathtaking nature, great food. And no forced labour, no genocide, or whatever other lies the Western media might come up with.”

The Vrije Universiteit had to admit that something was not quite right. It now says it will not accept further Chinese funding for the centre and will return the money it received last year.

The CCHRC website was taken offline, leaving behind only a terse statement: “Human rights are pre-eminently the area where

inclusiveness and diversity are important.”

That is one way of putting it. The Nazis were not very keen on inclusivity or diversity, either. But it is an unusual way to describe the Chinese government’s systematic persecution of an ethnic and religious minority.

This is not to say that people like Dr. Peverelli, who deny that such abuses are taking place, are necessarily corrupt. They may well think that whatever the Chinese government claims is true. Why, therefore, should they refuse to take Chinese money to confirm what they already believe about human rights in Xinjiang? The same thing might apply to some Western supporters of Russian President Vladimir Putin who receive Russian money and subsequently express their disgust with NATO.

Research can be expensive. Universities are often strapped for cash. And many countries, including China, are more than happy to help researchers portray them in a good light. The question is whether universities, or media outlets, should ever accept money from governments or other institutions that have a political interest in the returns on their generosity.

For example, the British magazine Encounter got into trouble in 1967 when revelations of the CIA’s indirect sponsorship of the publication led to the resignation of its co-founder, Stephen Spender. In the 1980s, when Japan’s increasing economic power was spooking many in the West, U.S. universities that accepted Japanese corporate money were much criticized, even when they claimed there were no strings at-

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tached. At the same time, some critics of Japanese corporate power were being sponsored by European or American institutions.

There is nothing necessarily wrong with official or unofficial subsidies. But when there is a problem, it is usually for one of two reasons: reputational embellishment or political influence-peddling.

In the mid-1990s, Oxford University was riled by the “Flick affair.” Gert-Rudolf Flick, the perfectly respectable grandson of a prominent German industrialist, offered to sponsor a Flick Chair in European Thought. After a lot of hand-wringing, the university turned down the money because the Flick company had profited from concentration-camp slave labour during the Second World War, and Mr. Flick’s grandfather, Friedrich, had been convicted of war crimes.

One may well ask whether Oxford’s decision to institute a Rupert Murdoch Chair of Language and Communication was any

better; Mr. Murdoch is not a war criminal, but he is still a highly controversial media and political player. Then there is the case of Japan’s Ryoichi Sasakawa, whose Sasakawa Peace Foundation doles out large sums to many institutions, including Yale University. Mr. Sasakawa was a gangster and a self-described fascist (and a suspected war criminal), but he is no longer a political player because he died in 1995.

Still, taking cash from someone seeking to buff their tainted reputation, though sleazy, is less dangerous to the intellectual integrity of universities or media than political propaganda. And this is where things get tricky.

Some governments are more respectable than others. French, German or even (still) American democracy is preferable to the authoritarianism of Mr. Putin or Chinese President Xi Jinping. Clearly, the United States uses its “soft power” to further its own interests, too. But one difference is that, unlike in a dictatorship, propaganda is still a dirty word in a liberal democracy. It is a little easier to preserve a degree of independence in the context of American soft power (as was true of Encounter, which was an excellent magazine).

But maintaining even some independence is not always simple. U.S. universities have received financing not only from Japanese companies, but also from the Japanese government, especially for Japan studies. On this, the distinguished MIT political scientist Richard J. Samuels has said: “Once you have an endowment, it’s arm’s length and the role of the donor ceases with the delivery of the gift.”

A key aspect of the declinist phenomenon is the uncertainty with the future. How can governments increase our satisfaction with Canada?

First, parties would be politically rewarded if they just moved nearer the centre. We are a country built on pragmatic reconciliation.

Investing in our education and health care systems could also be the best antidote to negativism.

We need to ensure that our colleges and universities can deliver on their mission to be places of knowledge that prepare students for the future. A strong, accessible postsecondary educational experience can help Canada be better prepared for the future with a better skilled and internationally competitive work force.

The key is to ensure that these places of knowledge do not lower themselves to the same political standard of name calling and sloganeering that has eroded confidence in our democratic institutions. If they do – expect the ratings for our colleges and universities to drop as they will be seen as just another battleground, not focused on the public good.

Having a strong health care system could be the second pillar to fighting declinism.

A universally accessible health care system is one of the hallmarks that make many Canadians proud. Could it be improved? Yes. Even with Canada’s imperfect health care system, Canadians do not have to worry about putting their financial well-being at risk to pay for health care.

A focus on health care and education is neither sensational nor politically sexy. But it could help create a greater sense of economic and health security.

The idea of Canada as a project driven by the ideas of peace, order and good government, is on the ropes.

Right now, there’s no peace. Order is being challenged. And many Canadians are questioning the goodness of our government. For the good of the country, we must do better.

Source: Nanos Research, RDD dual frame hybrid telephone and online random survey of 1,049 Canadian adults, completed between January 21-23, 2022. The research on institutions is accurate 3.0 percentage points plus or minus, 19 times out of 20. More details on methodology at www.nanos.co