

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

# POLITICAL CASUALTIES

The Ottawa protests are over, but research shows many things took a hit, including the Prime Minister’s brand, our relationship with the U.S., and perceptions of the media

**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 self-described “freedom convoy” that held Ottawa hostage for three weeks is no more, but the list of political casualties continues to mount.

If the protesters had Justin Trudeau in their sights, the reality is that the first political victim was Erin O’Toole, the former leader of the Conservative Party of Canada. His position on the convoy protest was not friendly enough for some members of his caucus, so he was unceremoniously turfed. Coincidentally, the week they got rid of Mr. O’Toole, the Conservative numbers were looking good – marginally ahead of the Liberals but, more importantly, the improved support for the New Democrats was creating the vote-splitting environment that hurts the Liberals.

While protesters failed to remove Mr. Trudeau from power, research suggests that his brand has taken a hit. There has been no political dividend for the Prime Minister when it comes to the trucker-convoy protest, according to research by Nanos for The Globe and Mail.

One would think that when two-thirds of Canadians are good with the government’s introduction of the Emergencies Act (46 per cent support, 17 per cent somewhat support), and with the freezing of bank accounts of protest organizers (53 per cent support, 12 per cent somewhat support), that there might be some sort of political bounce for the Prime Minister. But in reality, Canadians were twice as likely to say that Mr. Trudeau’s handling of the protest worsened (47 per cent) rather than improved (20 per cent) their impression of him as Prime Minister.

No one expected Mr. Trudeau to agree with the protesters. However, his opening gambit of diminishing the views of the truckers, even if they represent a minority of Canadians, did not bode well for a timely settlement of the protest. The demeanour and tone of the Prime Minister throughout the protest undermined the positive impact of the government’s actions.

The truckers’ protest itself was another casualty. According to a Nanos survey for CTV News, people were more likely to believe

the protest was not effective (51 per cent) or somewhat not effective (15 per cent) at getting governments to reconsider various COVID-19 restrictions.

We should be more worried about the longer-term casualties.

At the top of the list is the Canada-U.S. trade relationship. Closing the Ambassador Bridge border crossing in Windsor and Detroit was a fundamental mistake on the part of the protesters. It’s unlikely that many Canadians would care about the inconvenience of a protest in the national capital. Disrupting the rela-

The border blockade could not have come at a worse time, as Americans become more inward looking and focused on their supply-chain resilience.

tionship with our most important trading partner is another story.

The border blockade could not have come at a worse time, as Americans become more inward looking and focused on their supply-chain resilience. The blocking of the bridge that carries about \$400-million a day in goods certainly caught the attention of Americans – Democratic Congresswoman Debbie Dingell of Michigan warned that if the closings continued for “an extended period of time, it is going to make all of us use this as further evi-

dence that we shouldn’t be reliant on another country.” One shouldn’t be surprised that some of the loudest cheers during this year’s State of the Union address were when Joe Biden said, “Instead of relying on foreign supply chains, let’s make it in America.” The blockade of the Ambassador Bridge is political ammunition for those in the Biden administration who fervently support a Buy American policy.

Setting aside how successful or unsuccessful the convoy protest ultimately was, it will spawn copycat demonstrations. (Indeed, similar demonstrations are already being organized in the United States.) When asked about the possibility of similar protests, only one in five Canadians thought they would be unlikely (7 per cent) or somewhat unlikely (12 per cent) in the future, with more than three in four Canadians saying that these actions will continue as a new form of political protest in Canada.

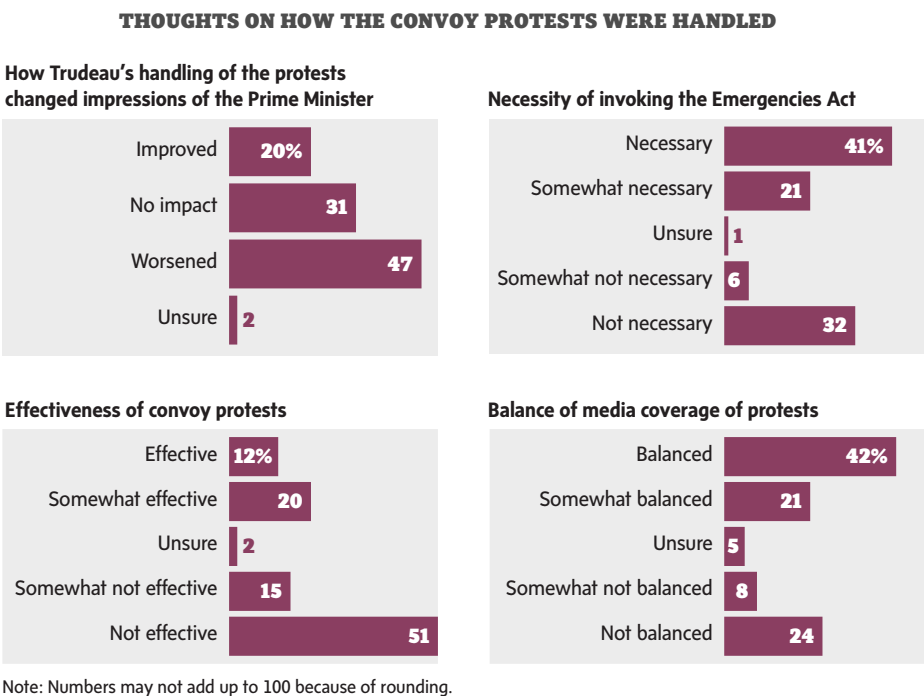
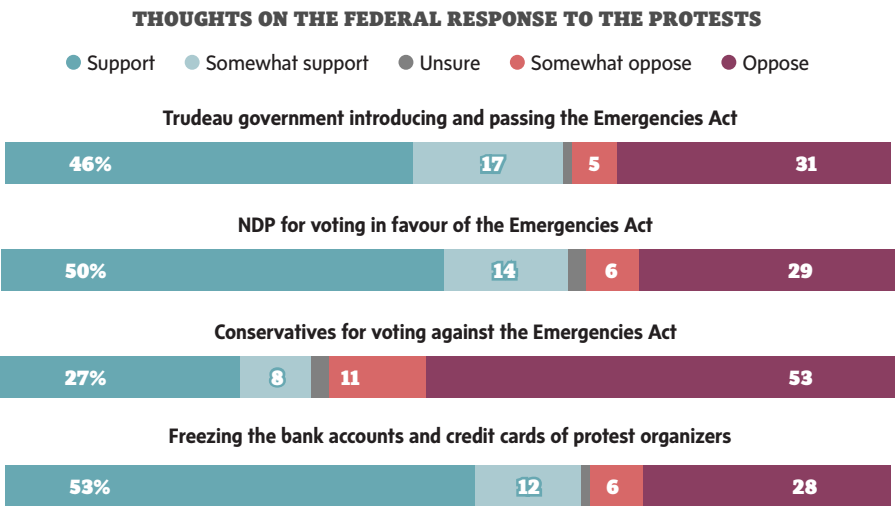
Finally, when surveyed about the media coverage, about four in 10 Canadians (42 per cent) thought the coverage was balanced, while another 21 per cent thought it was somewhat balanced. Sounds like a decent score, right? Unfortunately, about one-third of Canadians thought the coverage was not balanced (24 per cent) or somewhat not balanced (8 per cent). The kicker here is that the proportion of Canadians who had a dim view of the coverage is high among people under the age of 35 (44 per cent not balanced or somewhat not balanced) compared with Canadians older than 55 (23 per cent not balanced or somewhat not balanced).

So let me list the casualties thus far: Erin O’Toole; Justin Trudeau; the protesters; our relationship with the United States; the media.

Brace yourself for more political casualties as the investigation proceeds into the police response and what intelligence agencies knew, or did not know. I’m confident the list will only grow longer.

Source: Research was conducted for The Globe and Mail and CTV News by Nanos Research by means of a RDD dual frame hybrid telephone and online random survey conducted on Feb. 23 and 24. The research of 1,032 respondents is accurate 3.1 percentage points plus or minus, 19 times out of 20. More methodological details and the reports are at [www.nanos.co](http://www.nanos.co).

## Canadians on the Emergencies Act



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

# Climate action needs a reboot

**KAI CHAN**

**OPINION**

Professor and Canada Research Chair at the Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability at the University of British Columbia. He is co-founder of CoSphere, a community of small-planet heroes.

Heat domes, forest fires, continent-wide smoke and flooding: these extreme events are exactly what climate scientists have been warning us about for decades. They are symptoms of a society overshooting its capacity – March 13 marks the day that Canadians and Americans will have already used up their share of the planet’s resources for 2022.

Usually, the conclusion is that we each need to do more to reduce our environmental footprints. That narrative is a distraction from what’s really needed: an unprecedented collaboration that revamps laws, politics and economies to change the systems we live in for good.

If you’ve heard about the need for broader and deeper “system change,” chances are it wasn’t from science, but advocacy. “Change the system, not the climate!” goes the protest poster. You might wonder if that’s really needed. Doesn’t climate science suggest that countries just need to be more aggressive with their emissions targets? And that we all need to switch to electric cars, eat plant-based diets, take public

transit and fly less?

No: The science is clear on the need for system change, which goes well beyond national targets and individual choices. Especially if we want not just a livable climate, but also sufficient food, clean water, shared resources and vibrant biodiversity. We need to address the problem at its root: the ideas, institutions and practices that make polluting lifestyles the norm, such as consumer culture and infinite economic growth.

The need for system change was demonstrated by a 2019 inter-governmental report called the IPBES Global Assessment, which found that up to a million species are at risk of extinction. In the chapter I led, we reviewed all available studies that modelled and analyzed optimistic scenarios of the future and found several key systemic changes. Scenarios without these changes in global social, political and economic systems failed – too little food, fresh water, energy, resources or nature.

In the words of the Global Assessment, what is required is “transformative change”: “A fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals, and values.” By negotiating those words and the surrounding text, 132 countries agreed that transformative change was necessary for a sustainable future. So, it’s troubling that these countries have done precious little to that end.

You may have absorbed the

We’ve been expecting individuals to somehow live sustainably within deeply unsustainable systems. It’s too hard, too time-consuming, too disempowering.

with these little impossibilities, there’s no time for anything else. The rest throw up their hands, thinking, “That’s too much!”

System change provides a different answer: It doesn’t stem from purely private action. Transformation happens when enough of us take aim at particular changes, and at the social norms that reinforce those systems.

This means pushing politicians to change specific laws and policies, such as environmental human rights and fossil-fuel subsidies, through petitions and protests. We do need to model lifestyles consistent with values we state, but the key here isn’t perfection. Rather, it’s to have a solid foundation to spark social change by signalling our position on others’ actions in relation to substantial issues.

Rather than act individually, we must be bold, strategic and co-ordinated. The eco/climate movement hasn’t yet seen this combination, although most pieces are there. The climate protests haven’t yet converged on shared demands. Countless NGOs are doing great work, but from the outside the sum seems chaotic. At global scales, systems are so complex and intertwined that well-meaning efforts can backfire without co-ordination through constant engagement with science.

Science needs to play a central role – not just documenting the decline, but steering the solution. Viewed through this lens, including social science, many disparate parts could transform into one

compelling whole. Key threads such as overconsumption can be identified as central to the fabric, so they can receive the attention they deserve from us all. Thus, small-scale efforts can swell to upend longstanding but problematic notions, like our unhealthy collective obsession with luxury, thereby shifting our future path on this planet.

With social norms, the tables of power turn toward the next generation. As one of several changes we might need, can you imagine a world where lives of luxury and leisure are not sought and celebrated, but spurned? I’m guessing that youth activists can – and they can make it happen. They see society’s trajectory for what it is, and it’s not a future they want or accept. And whereas young people may have little power now by votes or dollars, they have immense influence over what’s acceptable or cool.

But turning intention into system change requires a centre for connection, where those who are concerned can find hope and community while co-ordinating for meaningful action. A place to turn for help and resources about what to aim for and how to achieve it. And a coalition committed to a shared vision of a better future.

Regardless of where we organize, we need to act differently, not to strive for individual perfection. What we really need is the heroics to change systems that drive the ecological and inequity crises so we can all protect the planet – together.