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DATA DIVE **WITH** NIK NANOS

THE ONLY CERTAINTY IS UNCERTAINTY

Having spent the past two years dealing with the pandemic, Canadians are now faced with new stresses such as rising costs of living, higher interest rates and global unpredictability

OPINION

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The pandemic, the rising cost of living and the war in Ukraine together point to the new reality: a corrosive environment that frays nerves and heightens worry.

The usual default for most Canadians is to focus further on our governments and how they might negatively affect our day-to-day lives. If one were to summarize 35 years of collective polling wisdom, it's that voters simply want elected officials to "not mess things up."

Citizens are pragmatic. They want to mind their own business, work hard and plan for the future.

Uncertainty is unwelcome. Right now, this uncertainty is being caused by factors mostly outside the control of elected officials.

The pandemic has been a torturous experience for people. They have been isolated, locked up and cut off from family and friends. It has threatened mental and physical health. The polling trend line of concern about the pandemic has crested and fallen several times.

If the past four weeks were about providing a glimmer of hope to Canadians, as provincial governments relaxed mask and physical-distancing requirements, we now have to worry about rising case counts once again.

As if that weren't enough, Canadians are also grappling with the rising cost of living and higher interest rates – putting their financial well-being at risk.

According to a recent survey for Bloomberg News by Nanos, about one-half of Canadians say they have had to cancel a major purchase (8 per cent), can't afford to pay for basic necessities (21 per cent) or have dealt with both (20 per cent).

The kicker is that if you happen to be under 35 years of age, you are much more likely to feel the inflation squeeze. If you are retired and on a fixed income, you are much less likely to report a negative impact of inflation.

The pandemic and the rising cost of living have turned traditional sentiment, driven by demographics, on its head. In the past, younger Canadians were more likely to be optimistic about the future. Fast forward to today and they are more likely to be facing mental-health problems and uncertainty about paying bills. People are five times more likely to believe that the next generation will have a lower rather than a higher standard of living. Only 12 per cent believe the next generation will have the same standard of living – the lowest score on record in 10 years of tracking.

The war in Ukraine, and the global unpredictability it has created, is the third uncertainty. For those old enough to remember the Cold War, this is reminiscent of a bygone era where the nuclear threat of mutually assured destruction was part of the backdrop of everyday life. Now, not only is there economic and health uncertainty at home, there is also uncertainty abroad as both national security pacts and trade agreements fall under the stress of a hot war in Central Europe.

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Canadians are both spectators and participants. Spectators in the sense that the conflict is far away. Participants in the sense that Canada has more than 1.3 million citizens of Ukrainian descent – the third-largest group of Ukrainians outside Ukraine and Russia.

Research on the war suggests there is a generosity of spirit among Canadians: A significant proportion of people (85 per cent) are ready to welcome 70,000 or more refugees fleeing the Russian invasion. Likewise, more than eight out of 10 Canadians support (58 per cent) or somewhat support (27 per cent) bearing the costs to airlift Ukrainians to safety and slap further economic sanctions on Russia.

However, when asked about providing direct military support as part of a NATO fighting force, there is less consensus. Canadians are almost evenly split when it comes to sending troops to Ukraine, with about just as many favouring escalation (21 per cent support and another 26 per cent somewhat support the idea) as opposing it (32 per cent oppose and another 13 per cent somewhat oppose).

However, if Russia were to expand the war, the appetite for military action from Canada increases notably. Two out of three Canadians (41 per cent support and another 25 per cent somewhat support) back going to war with Russia as part of a NATO force if Russia were to invade yet another country.

The key takeaway is that Canadians very much support humanitarian action and strong economic sanctions but are divided on the prospect of Canadian troops facing the Russians except in the case of an escalation of the war outside Ukraine.

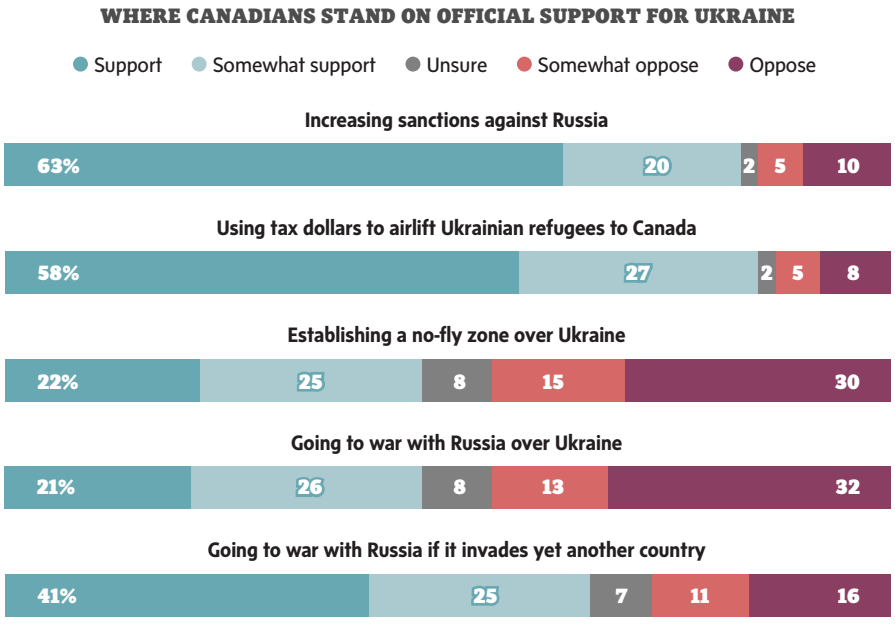
Our world today is one where uncertainty is piled on top of uncertainty.

Having spent the past two years dealing with the pandemic, Canadians are now having to deal with new stresses – financial and foreign.

Since early 2020, Canadians have grappled with the roller coaster of the pandemic only to emerge in a world where the cost of living is rising and the global order may be fundamentally reshaped.

We may very well be in a world where the only certainty is uncertainty.

Canadians on the war in Ukraine and the cost of living



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

Source: Data in the submission is based on an RDD dual frame (land- and cell-lines) hybrid telephone and online random surveys of 1,000 Canadians, 18 years of age or older conducted by Nanos Research. The margin of error for this survey is ±3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Full methodologies can be found at www.nanos.co.

How to build a case to prove war crimes in Ukraine

MARK KERSTEN

OPINION

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With every passing day, fresh allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity and even genocide in Ukraine emerge. A small battalion of organizations, international courts and states have responded by investigating atrocities in the hope that evidence can be marshalled and perpetrators held to account. But what does it take to investigate an international crime?

Investigations into international crimes are immensely difficult, especially when there is a continuing conflict. It is fairly easy to point to the bombing of a theatre sheltering children in Mariupol, or a massacre in a town such as Bucha, and determine that an atrocity has been perpetrated. Digital evidence collected and authenticated by an unprecedented number of investigation outfits have helped to expose these crimes.

But investigations such as that being conducted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) with the help of states such as Canada aren't only seeking to establish what happened; they are trying to find out who is most responsible.

Identifying those criminally liable for war crimes requires what investigators call "linkage evidence" – information that connects an act of atrocity to specific perpetrators. Investigators work backward by stitching together a chain of evidence. But they are not looking to prosecute foot soldiers – the Russian officers shelling Ukrainian towns from tanks or jetfighters. They are trying to pin responsibility on more senior military and political figures. The hope of many is that the chain reaches the Kremlin and President Vladimir Putin himself.

Investigators will have to build a matrix of evidence that connects atrocities, perpetrators and a structure of authority all the way up to Moscow. Doing so would illustrate a conspiracy among the Kremlin's ringleaders to commit international crimes. But that won't be easy. Neither Mr. Putin nor those in his inner circle have stepped foot in Ukraine during the war.

So how can investigators build a case against the Russian President and his coterie in Moscow?

A couple of strategies could be in play. In villages and towns attacked by Russian forces, there are invariably abandoned tanks and other military hardware. Their contents could yield important evidence. Every cellphone, computer or manual left behind can help investigators build a case that reaches further up the echelons of power.

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There have also been widespread reports of hundreds of Russian officers being detained as prisoners of war (POWs). Some are turning against Mr. Putin's war. While investigators need to be sensitive, these POWs could be interviewed and provide evidence against those giving them orders. This is particularly true if senior-level figures are among the prisoners.

The ICC and states might likewise start with prosecuting low- or mid-ranking perpetrators and use those trials to build cases against senior figures. They offer those perpetrators plea deals in exchange for their co-operation and testimony in cases involving Russian military and political leaders. All of this could eventually lead to prosecutions of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Genocide is much trickier.

It is important to stress that crimes against humanity, which are easier to investigate and prove in a court of law, are no less grave than genocide. While genocide is often presented as "the crime of all crimes," there is no hierarchy under international law that puts it on top. Crimes against humanity are seen as so outrageous that, as their name suggests, they are not only crimes against their victims, but against all of humanity.

Still, some commentators and even world leaders have suggested that Russia's actions in Ukraine now constitute genocide. Genocide need not require six million people to be exterminated, as in case of the Holocaust, or 800,000 people to be butchered, as what happened in Rwanda. The key to any determination of genocide is not the scale of the atrocities but the intent of perpetrators to destroy a group in whole or in part. In other words, Russian forces would have to specifically intend that their actions contributed to the annihilation of Ukrainian people as such.

Finding evidence of intent is difficult. Cases such as the Holocaust and Rwanda were somewhat straightforward, as both the Nazis and the Hutus were blatant about their genocidal intentions. In Ukraine, some rhetoric, including Mr. Putin's belief that the country is a historical fiction and Moscow's ominous mission of "de-Nazification," might be used as signals of genocidal intent. But as it stands, there is no smoking gun, no evidence that it is the identity of Ukrainians that is animating the violence against them.

Investigators won't pigeonhole themselves into attempting to find evidence of genocide. They will undertake the painstaking task of following the evidence and seeing where it leads. What many want to know is: Will it work? Will Mr. Putin ever face justice?

The honest answer is that we don't know. But something important is happening. It used to be that the international community would wait for a court to be created before investigations into atrocities commenced. The order is now flipped: We collect and preserve evidence whether a tribunal is able to use it or not.

When it comes to evidence collection, time is of the essence. When it comes to Mr. Putin, time is running out.