

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

# THE WRONG PATH

In 2021, Canada scored a satisfaction rating of 7.2 out of 10. Now, it’s at a dismal 6.6, with young people feeling most dissatisfied

OPINION

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If the future belongs to those who give the next generation reason for hope, as asserted by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, we are on a path to failure.

Young people are dour about the future. Confidence in institutions is on the decline and a significant number believe Canada is on the wrong economic track.

For the past three years, Nanos has tracked satisfaction with Canada and confidence in institutions. In 2021, Canada scored a satisfaction rating of 7.2 out of 10. In 2022, this dropped to 6.8. Now, it is at a dismal 6.6.

People under the age of 35 have the most troubling view of the country: They rate Canada a 5.8 – the equivalent of a D letter grade. This demographic is usually the most optimistic in tone – they are embarking on their careers, have minimal debt and are usually healthy.

But not only is their overall view of the country dour, they are the least likely to see any of our institutions as contributing to making Canada a better country compared with respondents age 35 or older.

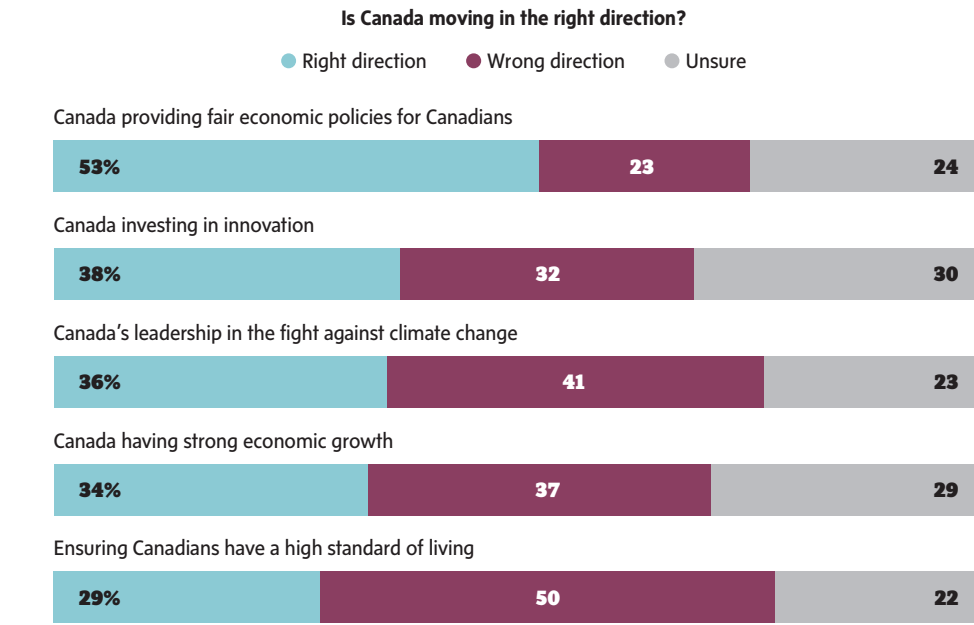
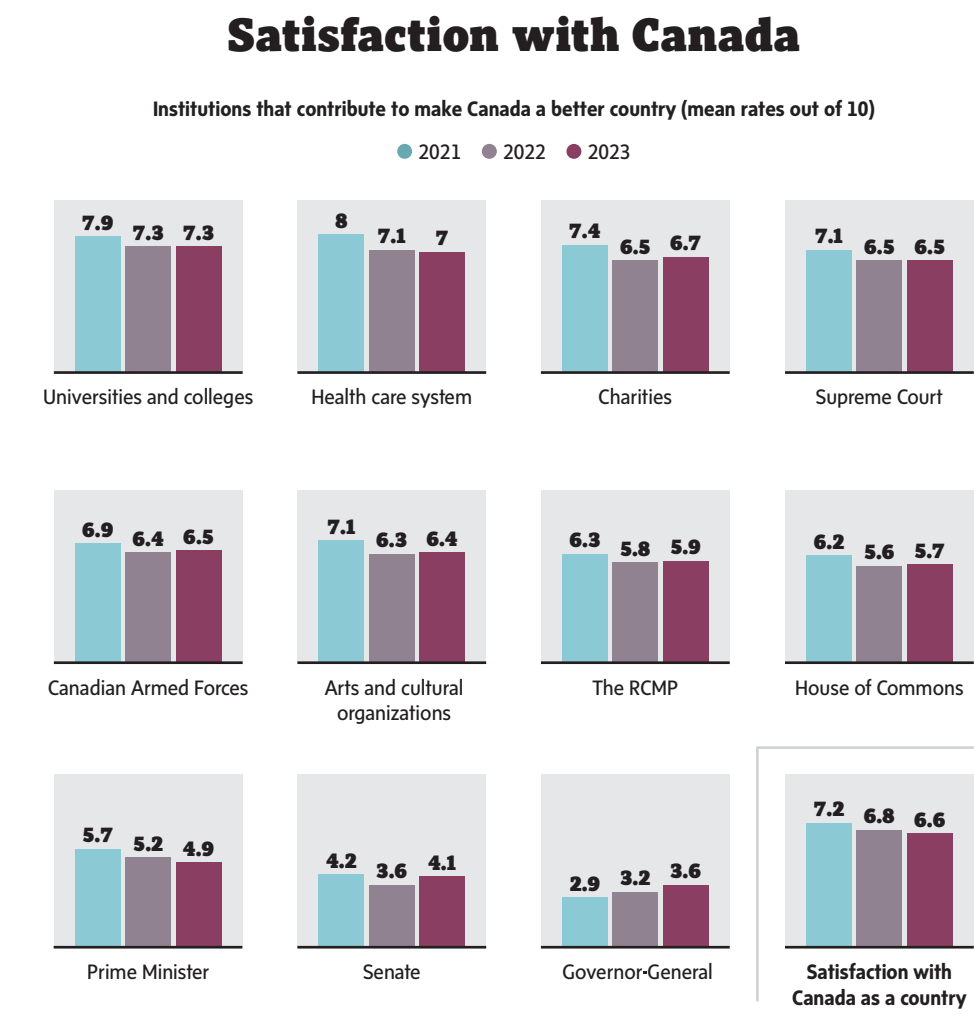
When it comes to institutions and whether they are contributing to making Canada a better country, 10 out of 11 registered declines.

The only institution that registered noticeable improvements since 2021 was the office of the Governor-General, but even those numbers were not strong over all. Institutions that garnered the most positive views were universities and colleges (7.3) and our health care system (7.0).

Meanwhile, according to research for the Coalition for a Better Future, results were equally bleak when people were asked whether Canada’s economy is moving in the right or wrong direction.

When asked if the country is heading in the right or wrong direction when it comes to making sure Canadians have a high standard of living, 50 per cent of respondents said wrong direction compared with 29 per cent who said right.

That sentiment was even more pessimistic among Canadians aged 18 to 34, with 58 per cent of them believing the country is headed in the wrong direc-



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

tion, compared with 44 per cent of people aged 55 and over.

When surveyed about strong economic growth, 37 per cent of people said the country is headed in the wrong direction – a number that rises to 47 per cent

when it comes to young Canadians.

Considering Ottawa’s focus on climate change, innovation and economic growth, the numbers speak to a malaise. There are no clearly positive views that we are

moving in the right direction on any of these measures.

Perceptions about Canada’s leadership in the fight against climate change are net negative (41 per cent wrong direction, 36 per cent right direction), while views

are only marginally positive when it comes to making investments in innovation to be competitive on the world stage (38 per cent right direction, 32 per cent wrong direction).

The most positive responses came when people were asked if Canada’s economic policies provide equal opportunities regardless of race, gender and other identities.

People were more than twice as likely to say we are moving in the right direction (53 per cent) compared with the wrong direction (23 per cent).

Over all, though, Canadians are increasingly less satisfied about the country and are fundamentally not positive about the country’s direction. Confidence in many of our institutions remains tepid. What is the path forward?

First, Canada needs a strong and clear prosperity narrative. In the past, parents could tell their kids what subjects to take in school to increase the likelihood of getting a job. Study software programming; learn a trade; pick up languages to participate in the global economy. Do those things and you have a chance to have the same or even a better standard of living than your parents.

But parents now face the spectre of a lower standard of living for their children. Housing is unaffordable, a job for life is a rarity and the world is more unstable now than it has been in more than a generation. Developing a prosperity narrative is the first step in creating hope.

Second, Canadians need to understand how they can participate in any future prosperity. When governments trumpet artificial intelligence, many Canadians may feel it is a threat, rather than an opportunity. Artificial intelligence is changing work, but how many jobs will it create?

Finally, it is clear that we need to start a national conversation around global competitiveness and how to create the type of society we want. This conversation must be driven by those young Canadians who are now the most cynical, anxious and pessimistic.

The collision of an aging population requiring increasing health care services that are to be paid for by younger working-aged people with potentially fewer job opportunities will fuel further dissatisfaction.

If you think things are bad now, we should brace ourselves for darker times – unless we mobilize around a common sense of purpose to create hope and economic opportunities all Canadians can enjoy.

## Ottawa is set to allow aid to reach Afghanistan. What took so long?

ALLAN ROCK  
WARDA SHAZADI MEIGHEN

OPINION

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For many Afghans, the past 18 months have been agonizing. On Aug. 15, 2021, Afghanistan’s capital was captured by the Taliban, after the withdrawal of U.S. troops. Harrowing images of desperate individuals clinging to airplanes remain vivid in our collective memories. Though the media spotlight has moved on, many of those who tried to flee remain trapped under the rule of a brutal and barbarous regime.

The Taliban has proven profoundly unfit to run a national government. It has banned women’s participation in schools and the work force, driven its population to the brink of starvation and refused to engage in good faith with the international community. As a result, the Afghan people face the very real risk of a humanitarian catastrophe with about two-thirds of the country’s population expected to

need humanitarian assistance in 2023. An estimated four million pregnant and lactating women and children are at risk of acute malnutrition this year.

Despite this dire picture, many Canadian non-governmental organizations have been unable to provide humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan without running the risk of criminal prosecution here at home. The difficulty arises because the Taliban is listed by our government as a terrorist organization. Section 83.03(b) of the Criminal Code makes it a criminal offence to directly or indirectly provide assistance to such a group. Understandably, Canadian organizations do not want to risk facing criminal prosecution. As a result, their humanitarian work in Afghanistan has ground to a halt.

Furthermore, the ban is absolute since Canada is one of the few donor countries that has not provided for reasonable exceptions to address urgent needs. For their parts, the United Nations Security Council, the United States, Britain, the European Union and Australia long ago concluded that there must be reasonable and narrow exemptions from their anti-terrorism financing laws.

Here in Canada, the interparty Special Committee on Afghanistan heard from many who implored the government to enact a legislative carve-out for humanitarian assistance in the current absolute ban.

As a stopgap, Canadian orga-

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nizations have been filtering assistance through international organizations, such as UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP). But that makeshift arrangement does not provide a long-term solution.

In short, the blanket prohibition in our Criminal Code against providing humanitarian assistance in countries such as Afghanistan where terrorist groups form the government has long needed to be modified. On March 9, the government acted to address this need by tabling in Parliament Bill C-41. If enacted, the legislation would amend the Criminal Code to permit the Minister of Public Safety to authorize eligible persons and entities to engage in certain humanitarian activities, such as providing aid for food, shelter and immigration services, including resettlement and safe passage. The provision would apply not just in Afghanistan but also in any country where a listed terrorist group is in charge.

These changes are essential. According to the WFP, millions of Afghans including “young children, families and communities ... stand at the precipice of inhumane hunger and destitution.” More than a year ago, the WFP reported that nine million Afghans were a “step away from famine,” while UNICEF estimated that one million children were “at risk of perishing this year from acute malnutrition.”

The proposed amendments strike a careful balance between

allowing Canadians to engage in legitimate humanitarian action on the one hand, and prohibiting activities that may indirectly benefit the Taliban on the other. Given the need for caution, the amendments include important safeguards: Those seeking to provide assistance will require authorization by the Minister of Public Safety, upon referral either by Global Affairs Canada or Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. And before granting such an authorization, the Minister of Public Safety must undertake a security review, an assessment of alternative means available to a grantee, and a cost-benefit analysis of the grant. Any such authorization can be revoked at any point and would be subject to periodic review and judicial oversight.

While some details will no doubt be refined after closer examination by committee, Bill C-41 is an important step in the right direction, adjusting Canada’s approach in such cases so that it finally matches what our key allies are doing. An amendment to the Criminal Code allowing for such humanitarian exceptions is long overdue. Canada can join its allies and allow aid to be responsibly provided without compromising our security interests.

The challenge now will be to adopt the amendments as quickly as possible, so that desperate Afghans can rapidly get the aid and immigration assistance they so urgently need.