

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

# SEEKING NEW ALLIES IN A BIPOLAR WORLD

Caught between two superpowers, Canadians say they are ready to increase defence spending and build stronger ties elsewhere, even while facing hardships at home

OPINION

Nik Nanos is the chief data scientist at Nanos Research, research adjunct professor at the Norman Paterson School for International Affairs at Carleton University, a global fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, the chair of Atlantik-Bruecke Canada and the official pollster for The Globe and Mail and CTV News.

Donald Trump, China and the war in Ukraine are a trinity of forces shaping how Canadians feel about their place in the world. Our political leaders should take notice because the views of Canadians signal the scope of public policy licence.

If we don't like a foreign country, policy licence is limited. When we discover new allies, it is a green light from Canadians to engage.

Until the defeat of former U.S. president Trump, the situation was one in which Canada was jammed between two economic, political and military superpowers – the U.S. and China. Under Mr. Trump, Canada was caught in the crossfire of domestic American politics on issues such as free trade. Our relationship with China was also strained because of the detention of a Huawei executive and the jailing of the two Michaels, Spavor and Kovrig – Canadian citizens in China who were in the wrong place at the wrong time. The war in Ukraine has further kindled a rethink of our commitments to allies and our security needs in an increasingly volatile world.

New data from a Nanos tracking survey suggest a shifting public opinion environment.

When Mr. Trump was in power, Canadian views of the U.S. as a stable partner that provided a positive relationship were not strong. Back in 2019, people identified Europe (48 per cent) rather than the United States (34 per cent) as the partner they were most comfortable with. With Mr. Trump's exit, the U.S. has regained the top position as the most positive partner (67 per cent), with the Europeans second at 24 per cent. There's little doubt that his political return would sink the views of Canadians on the binational relationship.

Meanwhile, what was already a strained relationship with China in 2019 has soured even more. Back in 2019, 56 per cent of Canadians had a negative or somewhat negative view of China. That negativity has jumped to 73 per cent in 2023. A dismal 3 per cent

have a positive view of China and another 8 per cent a somewhat positive view. The research suggests that there is not much policy licence for a very friendly relationship with China. Considering the importance of trade and foreign investment to our economy, giving a thumbs down to one of two economic superpowers is significant.

New economic and political powers are on the minds of Canadians. When asked about which countries would make for positive partners, Britain tops the list, but what is interesting is that Germany is second with numbers

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similar to the United States. About eight in 10 Canadians see Germany as a positive (45 per cent) or somewhat positive partner (35 per cent), outscoring France, Mexico and China. Currently, there is significant latitude for more friendly relations with Germany. The most recent visits of the Chancellor and German President suggest that they see a stronger partnership with Canada as an opportunity to navigate in a world between the two big superpowers.

At the same time, positive views about the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have

intensified steadily since 2019. Back in 2019, three of four Canadians had a positive (30 per cent) or somewhat positive (47 per cent) opinion of NATO. The outright positive impression of NATO has now increased from 30 per cent to 40 per cent in 2023 with overall positive scores cutting across all regions, genders and age groups.

Interestingly, while Canadians are worried about paying for housing and food, they also are open to our country increasing defence spending. A CTV News survey by Nanos suggests that almost two in three (64 per cent) are good with an increase in defence spending to hit our 2-per cent NATO target. According to the World Bank, the last time Canada met NATO defence spending commitments was in 1990 under a Progressive Conservative government led by Brian Mulroney. The kicker is that about seven in 10 Canadians are concerned (29 per cent) or somewhat concerned (40 per cent) that our current operational capabilities are a source of tension with our NATO allies.

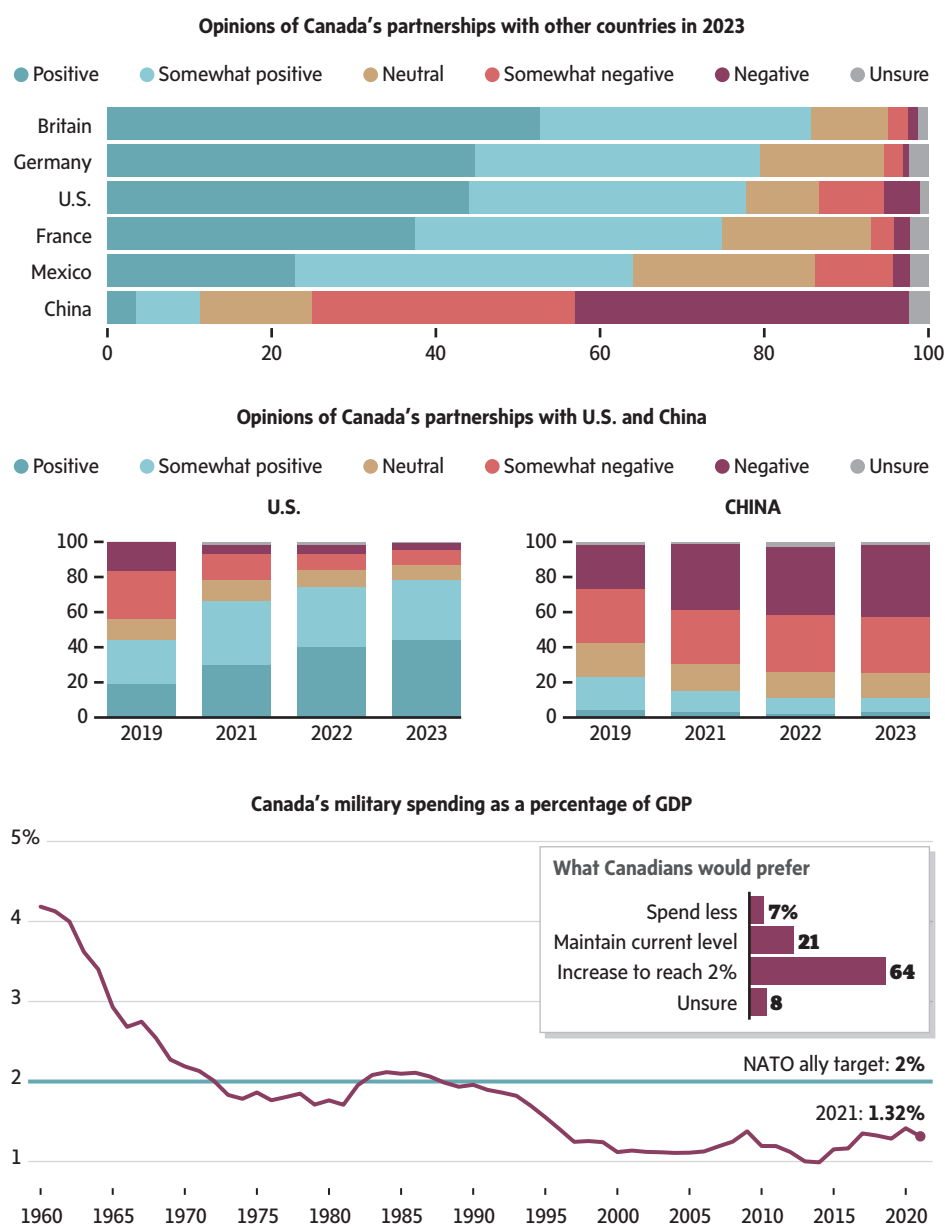
In the old days, the debate was about guns and butter. Do we invest in defence or social programs? The research suggests that there is licence to spend more on defence and work harder to meet our security obligations to allies.

Social programs will always win out over defence spending in a head-to-head choice. After all, what's the point of defence spending if Canadians feel personally defeated at home as they struggle to pay the bills?

The war in Ukraine has put a spotlight not only on our ambitions to help Ukrainians fight the Russian invaders but also on the limitations of our current defence capabilities. In a world where we are caught between superpowers, meeting our security commitments through NATO is a way for Canada to build stronger bridges with allies such as Britain, Germany and France. Collectively, stronger ties with those three countries add Canada to the club of like-minded nations looking to navigate a path between the United States and China.

Bipolar can refer to two poles simultaneously, but also a situation of extreme swings in behaviour. That pretty well sums up the world these days. Caught in a bipolar world, Canadians are ready to step up with our defence spending and to build stronger ties outside of the two superpowers – even in the face of personal hardship at home.

## Canadians on partner nations and military spending



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

# Francophone minorities should worry about the Liberals' language plans

JEFFERY VACANTE

OPINION

Assistant professor of history at the University of Western Ontario. He is the author of *National Manhood and the Creation of Modern Quebec*.

The federal government says it has a solution for the decline of French in Canada. On Monday, Bill C-13, an act to amend the Official Languages Act, passed the House of Commons with support from all parties, and the legislation is now headed to the Senate. This followed an April announcement by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, along with Minister of Official Languages Ginette Petitpas Taylor, on the Action Plan for Official Languages, a five-year funding program intended to strengthen French-speaking communities across Canada. The government hailed the plan as a historic financial commitment for the protection of the French language in Canada.

The measures have been embraced by the Quebec government, as well as by French-language minority groups across the country. However, before they celebrate, French-language groups outside Quebec should stop to ponder the long-term consequences of these measures.

The English-speaking community in Quebec has already raised

concerns about the ways the bill would limit access to English services in the province. A major point of contention has been the explicit references in the bill to Quebec's Charter of the French Language, which was recently amended – with the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause – by Bill 96. The fact that Bill C-13 effectively endorses the use of the notwithstanding clause, and the fact that it defers to the Charter of the French Language in Quebec – which does not guarantee access to services in English – means that the English-speaking community in Quebec has every reason to be concerned.

There has been less talk of the harm that Bill C-13 would have on French-speaking communities outside Quebec. But these communities should be concerned, because with this newly amended Official Languages Act, the federal government is effectively walking away from the idea that Canada is a bilingual country and embracing the idea that it is an English-speaking country that has a French-speaking region in Quebec and a smattering of French-speaking communities outside that province. By weakening the legal protections for bilingualism across the country – and embracing a regional and asymmetric approach to bilingualism – the new Official Languages Act will in effect make linguistic minorities in Canada subject to the whims

of whatever government happens to be in power. Moreover, if the federal government will no longer defend the principle of equality, then there will be little reason for provincial governments to do so either. What this will mean is that a provincial government in an English-speaking province – let's say Ontario – could limit the rights of its francophone minorities to access services in their own lan-

guage on the grounds that Quebec – and even the federal government – does little to protect access to English-language services there. Once governments outside Quebec come to embrace this regional approach to bilingualism, it will not be long before they begin to wonder why they are providing French-language services at all.

An illustration of how the language issue will play out in a Canada reshaped by Bill C-13 could be found in Pierre Poilievre's recent promise to eliminate funding for the CBC – by which he meant funding for the English-language CBC. Mr. Poilievre was quick to clarify that he had never intended to suggest that he would cut funding to the French-language service Radio-Canada, which he claimed served an important role for francophones. But in making this distinction, Mr. Poilievre has essentially committed to diverting public money extracted from one part of the country – let's say Alberta – to fund the cultural production of another part of the country – let's say Quebec.

The federal government will find itself navigating similar traps as a result of Bill C-13. Since it will no longer approach English- and French-speaking citizens on equal terms, the government will determine its relationship with – and support for – linguistic groups according to the perceived threats that these groups face.

And so, if a minority French-speaking community in Canada is deemed to be threatened, it can expect more federal support. On the other hand, if the majority French-speaking community in Quebec is itself deemed to be threatened by virtue of the fact that it constitutes a minority in Canada, it can expect more federal support, as well.

Any protests by English-speaking Quebecers, on the other hand, will be understood through the lens of the precariousness of the French language in Canada and thus be ignored.

And any gains that French-speaking communities outside Quebec might achieve as a result of Bill C-13 will be precarious because they will have been achieved under an amended Official Languages Act that will produce a Quebec that is more French and a rest of Canada that is more English.

When that day arrives – and when the funding announced in the Action Plan dries up – perhaps all those francophone groups outside Quebec that have embraced Bill C-13 will have second thoughts about the enthusiasm they had shown for this bill.

After all, those who sacrifice the rights of a minority group in one part of the country in order to advance their own rights in another part of the country will one day wake up to find that their own rights are just as expendable.