

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

SOCIAL STUDIES

Support for action among Canadians co-exists with skepticism about the implementation of restrictions or a complete social-media ban for children

OPINION

Nik Nanos is the chief data scientist at Nanos Research, an executive fellow at the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy and is the official pollster for The Globe and Mail and CTV News.

Seventeen billion dollars – that's the settlement of a major lawsuit in the United States that accused Meta of harming children's mental health and using addictive features. That settlement speaks to one key reality: people are no longer debating whether social media poses risks for children. They are debating whether governments and platforms can design restrictions that reduce harms without creating new ones.

The US\$17-billion settlement is likely just the harbinger of a broader discussion on the future of social media and its potential harm to individuals and society more broadly.

A new study by Nanos Research suggests that Canadians are hitting a tipping point on youth social-media regulation. Three in four Canadians say Canada should definitely (51 per cent) or maybe (26 per cent) consider restricting or banning social-media use for those under the age of 16. Only one in five say Canada should definitely not (10 per cent) or probably not (11 per cent) consider a restriction or ban. Surprisingly, two out of three young Canadians between 18 and 34 years of age say the government should definitely (47 per cent) or maybe (20 per cent) consider a ban or restriction.

Sentiment in Canada about social media is not driven by worries about distractions or screen time, it's about online sexual exploitation/grooming (52 per cent of Canadians are concerned) or cyberbullying/harassment (45 per cent of Canadians are concerned). These surpass worries about the impact of social media on mental health issues like anxiety and depression (39 per cent concerned). In a parallel study conducted by the National Opinion Research Centre (NORC) at the University of Chicago, a similar majority of Americans thought the U.S. should definitely (40 per cent) or maybe (33 per cent) consider a ban or restriction.

While Americans are more likely to be worried about mental health and online sexual exploitation than Canadians (65 per cent of Americans are concerned), Canadians are comparatively more likely to be concerned about addictive or manipulative platform design (38 per cent wor-

ry in Canada, 20 per cent in the U.S.) or exposure to harmful ideological content (37 per cent vs. 18 per cent). Also, Canadians are more likely to be worried about kids being exposed to hateful, racist or violent content compared with Americans. Asked about the pressures of body image content, Americans were more likely to be concerned (30 per cent) than Canadians (16 per cent).

Awareness of the issue of social-media harm was higher in Canada than the U.S. at the time of the studies. About eight in 10 Can-

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adians say they have heard a lot (35 per cent) or some (47 per cent) about it, compared with one in two Americans (10 per cent heard a lot, 43 per cent heard some). Readers should note that both studies were conducted before the Meta settlement.

Still, even though the majority are worried, Canadians clearly see downsides to restricting or banning social-media use for children or teens. At the top of the list of possible downsides is the view that kids will turn to less trustworthy or harder to monitor websites

and apps (31 per cent very concerned, 44 per cent somewhat concerned). Likewise, a majority of adult Canadians believe it will be difficult to enforce restrictions fairly or consistently (29 per cent very concerned, 42 per cent somewhat concerned). Respondents are much less worried about the impact social-media restrictions or a ban would have on the ability of young people to interact with peers, digital literacy, isolation or the ability to access to supportive online communities.

On the implications of a ban or restrictions, Canadians are pretty well split on the difficulty for parents and caregivers to monitor online behaviour: 17 per cent are very concerned, 34 per cent somewhat concerned, 28 per cent not too concerned and 14 per cent not at all concerned. Other concerns mentioned by Canadians included the loss of privacy from age verification and the ability of children and teens to easily work around or evade possible restrictions.

The key takeaway is that support for action co-exists with skepticism about the implementation of restrictions or a complete social-media ban for children and teens.

The debate may very well be shifting from whether to act to how to act. Canadians have effectively reclassified social media as a child and teen safety issue rather than a technology or rights issue. Canadians are moving in a direction where the benefits of social media are no longer enough to ignore the potential harms to kids. The research suggests that Canadians are unconvinced social media is indispensable to healthy youth development.

The irony is that this may be a policy area where Canadians are both pro-regulation and anti-bureaucracy. On the one hand they are worried and want action. On the other hand they are skeptical about the government machinery to deal with online harms.

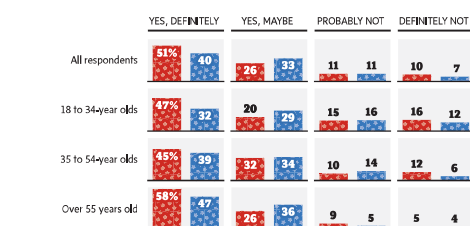
The Meta settlement may ultimately be remembered not because of its size, but because it marks a turning point. Perhaps Canadians are reaching the same conclusions they came to on things like seatbelts and smoking. The debate is shifting from "if" people should be protected to "how" the protection should be implemented.

The next question may be whether adults also need protection from social media.

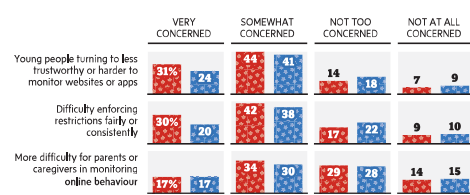
The real test is whether governments, parents and technology companies can protect a generation from social media's harms without creating a new generation of unintended consequences.

Canadians and Americans on kids and social media

SHOULD SOCIAL MEDIA BE RESTRICTED FOR CHILDREN UNDER 16?

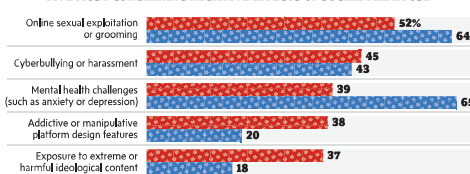


CONCERN ABOUT POTENTIAL DOWNSIDES



Note: Totals do not add up to 100% because 'not sure' and 'skipped' answers have been omitted.

FIVE MOST CONCERNING NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE*



*Ordered by top concerns of Canadians.

Note: Totals do not add up to 100% because respondents were asked to select up to three answers each.

MURAT YÜKSEL / THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: NANOS RESEARCH, IPSOS

Catholicism faces a new crisis in America

MICHAEL W. HIGGINS

OPINION

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Every day, sentient Canadians react to what is going on south of the border with a mix of befuddlement, rage and corrosive worry.

With the erosion of values, civility, historical insight and philosophical wisdom, we are dangerously adrift, subject to endless cheap gibes by boorish incompetents, polished scoundrels and bullish clowns. We understand viscerally what many – if not most – Americans continue to experience with a numbing dread: the dying of their culture.

The poison of mockery and the torrent of vituperation that engulf us hourly are only too reminiscent of those policies deployed by the dictators of the 1930s: the dehumanization of the other, the crack-down on immigrants both undocumented and documented, the reduction of political discourse to negative soundbites, the concentrated alignment of interests in an ideological elite that delights in trivializing the suffering of others and that dreams of territorial expansion or hegemony.

And during this tumultuous time – also coincident with the

250th anniversary of the founding of the United States – we have a concatenation of circumstances that lead to something the founders would certainly never have anticipated: the ascendancy of Catholicism as the country's premier religion.

At its birth, America, as much the product of Protestantism as the Enlightenment, had little tolerance for popery. Catholics were a desperate minority in the Thirteen Colonies and with the exception of Maryland – founded by the Catholic Cecil Calvert, Baron Baltimore – they had very little sure footing in a political environment that distrusted the old continent and the old faith.

For centuries Catholics remained a minority voice in the country's affairs, persecuted by the Ku Klux Klan, maligned by the political powers and excluded from centres of influence. But they flourished in their own way by establishing an unparalleled system of institutions – parochial schools, universities, hospitals, churches with specific attention paid to the many ethnicities from traditional Catholic countries – and by aligning with the political players, Democrats mostly, who recognized their growing demographic.

From 1960 on, following the election of the country's first Catholic President, John F. Kennedy, Catholics were infused with a new confidence and in the subsequent decades moved from marginal to core status in the political make-up of the country.

And so, in this semiquincentennial year and midway through the second Trump administration, we find Catholicism at the apex of the nation's governance apparatus: Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, six of the nine supreme court justices, including Chief Justice John Roberts, one third of the Trump cabinet and around 40 per cent of the state governors. It is a denomination that is now the largest in the country, with the second-largest composed of self-identified ex-Catholics. From being a faith communion whose political loyalties were suspect, a residue of European hegemony ill-suited to the new world with its pioneer spirit and republican convictions, it has now ascended the ladder and arrived.

But arrived where? Enter Constantine the Great. It strikes me that something can be learned by looking at Donald Trump through a Constantinian lens, although at first glance they are so dissimilar as to defy comparison.

Constantine was a 4th-century emperor at a time when the Roman Empire was involved in some very heavy shape-shifting exercises. Mr. Trump is emperor-like and also involved in some political rearranging but shorn of strategy and vision. Constantine was a great military figure in fact, and Mr. Trump a great military figure in his mind only.

But there is one area in which their political behaviour bears

comparison. Constantine formally recognized Christianity on legal grounds, discontinued state persecution of Christians and presided over a process that culminated in the church being recognized, if not *de jure* certainly *de facto*, as the religion of the empire. Theologians and historians debate the motivations and political and ecclesiastical stratagems involved, but all concede that the Constantinian embrace of Christianity has had lasting repercussions.

Certainly, the convergence of empire and church allowed both to survive in a dark time of dissolution. The legitimization of the church as a player in the imperium and the institutionalizing of its message of salvation guaranteed centuries of mutually enriching accommodation.

But there is a price to the Constantinian pact: the subjection of the church's prophetic and rebellious genius to the enticing assurances of power.

And so now that Catholicism enjoys hitherto unimaginable influence in the corridors of American power, having through its clerical and lay leadership found its way to accommodate Trumpism, it must now face a new crisis: the survival of its credibility.

As American Catholic professors of philosophy David Albertson and Jason Blakely recently – and scorchingly – observed: “Catholic bishops, institutes, journals, and influencers have learned to quietly accept the excesses of the MAGA movement

because they detect in it a sympathetic tone, a recognizable and consoling mood and posture. Trump may attack democracy, harm the global poor, and steal from the Treasury, but at least he is antiwoke.”

The Faustian bargain Mr. Trump negotiated with several Catholic leaders with the revocation of Roe v. Wade, and the stacking of the judiciary with conservative Catholics, has long since frayed.

A rising number of Catholics have come to realize that there is something more threatening than wokeism, and it is called tyranny. The cost of a Constantinian concordat is nothing short of losing your soul.

There is an alternative voice to the MAGA Catholics: the moral and prophetic witness of Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day celebrated by Pope Francis in his address to Congress on Sept. 24, 2015.

And picking up on his predecessor's pastoral priorities, Leo XIV, the American pope, highlighted the singular courage of Ms. Day, the radical Catholic anarchist and pacifist, when he noted last year that she “understood that for too many, the [American] dream was a nightmare, and that as a Christian she had to get involved with workers, with migrants, with those discarded by an economy that kills.”

MAGA Catholics need to heed their Chicago-born pope and forsake the new triumphalism of Mr. Trump's U.S. Catholicism.