

**POLITICALLY MOTIVATED VANDALISM, MASKED PROTESTERS,  
AND FREE SPEECH :  
THE MAJORITY OF CANADIANS FAVOR GREATER  
CURTAILMENT**

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# INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

On Friday November 22 an anti-NATO, pro-Palestinian protest in Montreal saw smoke bombs deployed, metal barriers were thrown into the street and windows smashed of nearby businesses and the convention centre where delegates were meeting for a NATO parliamentary assembly. About 800 people took part in protests from several groups and police estimate that some 20 to 40 people were allegedly responsible for the trouble. To date there have been three arrests by Montreal police. Organizers of the protest denounced the 'political' reaction as hijacking the underlying message of the demonstration.

At a protest in front of a Montreal university, Second Cup Franchisee Mai Abdulhadi performed the Nazi salute and was filmed chanting "the Final Solution is coming your way," a reference to the Holocaust. Second Cup rescinded the Franchisee agreement saying that there was zero tolerance for hate speech. Despite wearing a mask to conceal her identity, Ms. Abdulhadi was identified as the 'protester' in question.

In Montreal and elsewhere in Canada vandalism and hate speech are sometimes as legitimate means of political protest. That view however is not shared by the majority of Canadians as revealed in a survey conducted between November 22-24, 2024 for the Association for Canadian Studies by the firm Leger Marketing. The survey reveals that there are no circumstances under which Canadians believe that politically motivated vandalizing of public / commercial property is acceptable. Also, a clear majority of Canadians do not believe that people should be allowed to wear masks to hide their faces when protesting in public. Canadians aged 18 and 24 and students hold somewhat different views on these issues and express less opposition to politically motivated vandalism and mask bearing protesters

Other survey findings reveal that a majority of Canadians agree that hate speech should be a limit to free speech and that Holocaust denial should not be considered free speech.

The survey was conducted by Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies with 1539 respondents over the period November 22 to 24, 2024. A margin of error cannot be associated with a non-probability sample in a panel survey for comparison purposes. A probability sample of 1539 respondents would have a margin of error of  $\pm 2.5\%$ , 19 times out of 20.

AN IMPORTANT MAJORITY OF CANADIANS DISAGREE THAT UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES IS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED VANDALISM ACCEPTABLE; HOWEVER ONE IN THREE CANADIANS AGE 18-24 DO FEEL THAT IS ACCEPTABLE

| There are circumstances under which vandalizing public / commercial property to send a political message is acceptable | Total | Betw<br>een<br>18<br>and<br>24 | Betw<br>een<br>25<br>and<br>34 | Betw<br>een<br>35<br>and<br>44 | Betw<br>een<br>45<br>and<br>54 | Betw<br>een<br>55<br>and<br>64 | 65+ |
|--|-------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Yes</b>   | 14%   | 33%                            | 24%                            | 18%                            | 9%                             | 6%                             | 4%  |
| <b>No</b>  | 74%   | 45%                            | 57%                            | 71%                            | 79%                            | 84%                            | 90% |
| <b>I don't know</b>  | 12%   | 22%                            | 19%                            | 11%                            | 12%                            | 10%                            | 6%  |

OVER EIGHT IN TEN MONTREALERS DON'T BELIEVE THERE ARE ANY CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH POLITICALLY MOTIVATED VANDALISM IS ACCEPTABLE

| There are circumstances under which vandalizing public / commercial property to send a political message is acceptable | Toronto | Montreal | Vancouver |
|--|---------|----------|-----------|
| <b>Yes</b>   | 17%     | 12%      | 21%       |
| <b>No</b>  | 67%     | 81%      | 65%       |
| <b>I don't know</b>  | 16%     | 7%       | 14%       |

OVER ONE FOUR STUDENTS AGREE THAT THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH VANDALIZING PUBLIC / COMMERCIAL PROPERTY TO SEND A POLITICAL MESSAGE IS ACCEPTABLE ANOTHER ONE IN FOUR DON'T KNOW

|              | There are circumstances under which vandalizing public / commercial property to send a political message is acceptable |                   |                                |         |           |            |         |
|--------------|--|-------------------|--------------------------------|---------|-----------|------------|---------|
|              | Working full time  | Working part time | Self-employed / freelance work | Student | Homemaker | Unemployed | Retired |
| Yes          | 15.8%  | 19.3%             | 14.1%                          | 26.4%   | 10.8%     | 14.6%      | 5.2%    |
| No           | 72.6%  | 60.2%             | 75.6%                          | 49.5%   | 72.3%     | 78.7%      | 87.1%   |
| I don't know | 11.6%  | 20.5%             | 10.3%                          | 24.2%   | 16.9%     | 6.7%       | 7.7%    |
| Total        | 100.0%   | 100.0%            | 100.0%                         | 100.0%  | 100.0%    | 100.0%     | 100.0%  |

## A MAJORITY OF CANADIANS DO NOT BELIEVE THAT PEOPLE SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO WEAR MASKS TO HIDE THEIR FACES WHEN PROTESTING IN PUBLIC

| People should be allowed to wear masks to hide their faces when protesting in public. | Canada | Between 18 and 24 | Between 25 and 34 | Between 35 and 44 | Between 45 and 54 | Between 55 and 64 | 65+ |
|---|--------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----|
| <b>Yes</b>  | 23%    | 49%               | 39%               | 22%               | 20%               | 14%               | 10% |
| <b>No</b>   | 61%    | 29%               | 41%               | 60%               | 68%               | 68%               | 80% |
| <b>I don't know</b>   | 16%    | 22%               | 20%               | 18%               | 12%               | 17%               | 10% |

## MONTREALERS ARE MOST OPPOSED TO ALLOWING PROTESTERS TO WEAR MASKS TO HIDE THEIR FACES

| People should be allowed to wear masks to hide their faces when protesting in public. | Toronto | Montreal | Vancouver |
|---|---------|----------|-----------|
| <b>Yes</b>  | 28%     | 21%      | 21%       |
| <b>No</b>   | 50%     | 71%      | 62%       |
| <b>I don't know</b>   | 23%     | 8%       | 17%       |

# STUDENTS ARE BY FAR MOST LIKELY TO AGREE WITH PEOPLE BEING ALLOWED TO HIDE THEIR FACES WHEN PROTESTING IN PUBLIC

| People should be allowed to wear masks to hide their faces when protesting in public |                   |                                |         |           |            |         |                        |        |
|--|-------------------|--------------------------------|---------|-----------|------------|---------|------------------------|--------|
|  | Working full time | Self-employed / freelance work | Student | Homemaker | Unemployed | Retired | I prefer not to answer |        |
| Yes  | 26.3%             | 20.5%                          | 49.5%   | 21.9%     | 18.9%      | 9.7%    | 28.6%                  | 23.1%  |
| No   | 59.3%             | 55.1%                          | 23.1%   | 54.7%     | 65.6%      | 78.6%   | 50.0%                  | 61.3%  |
| I don't know   | 14.4%             | 24.4%                          | 27.5%   | 23.4%     | 15.6%      | 11.7%   | 21.4%                  | 15.7%  |
| Total  | 100.0%            | 100.0%                         | 100.0%  | 100.0%    | 100.0%     | 100.0%  | 100.0%                 | 100.0% |

# A MAJORITY OF CANADIANS DO NOT BELIEVE THAT FREE SPEECH SHOULD BE PROTECTED WHEN IT EXPRESSES OVERTLY RACIST VIEWS

| Free speech should be protected even when it expresses overtly racist views. - | Total | Between 18 and 24 | Between 25 and 34 | Between 35 and 44 | Between 45 and 54 | Between 55 and 64 | Between 65+ |
|--|-------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| <b>Yes</b>   | 29%   | 32%               | 32%               | 35%               | 30%               | 28%               | 23%         |
| <b>No</b>  | 53%   | 50%               | 46%               | 51%               | 53%               | 51%               | 63%         |
| <b>I don't know</b>  | 17%   | 18%               | 22%               | 13%               | 17%               | 21%               | 14%         |

ACROSS ALL PARTS OF CANADA MOST BELIEVE THAT FREE SPEECH SHOULD NOT BE PROTECTED WHEN IT EXPRESSES OVERTLY RACIST VIEWS; ONTARIANS ARE LESS CERTAIN THAN OTHERS

| Free speech should be protected even when it expresses overtly racist views | Total | Atl. | QC  | ON  | MB/S<br>K | AB  | BC  |
|---|-------|------|-----|-----|-----------|-----|-----|
| Yes   | 29%   | 30%  | 30% | 31% | 21%       | 25% | 32% |
| No  | 53%   | 50%  | 59% | 49% | 54%       | 57% | 55% |
| I don't know  | 17%   | 20%  | 11% | 21% | 26%       | 17% | 13% |

# TWO-THIRDS OF CANADIANS BELIEVE IN LIMITS TO FREE SPEECH WHEN IT TARGETS SPECIFIC GROUPS WITH HATE

| Free speech should be limited when it involves hate speech targeting specific groups. | Total | Between 18 and 24 | Between 25 and 34 | Between 35 and 44 | Between 45 and 54 | Between 55 and 64 | 65+ |
|---|-------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----|
| <b>Yes</b>  | 67%   | 60%               | 63%               | 63%               | 64%               | 65%               | 77% |
| <b>No</b>   | 19%   | 20%               | 21%               | 24%               | 23%               | 15%               | 14% |
| <b>I don't know</b>   | 15%   | 20%               | 16%               | 14%               | 13%               | 19%               | 9%  |

# THOSE WHO FAVOR MASK WEARING ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO BELIEVE THAT VANDALISM CAN BE JUSTIFIED FOR POLITICAL REASONS

|   |              | People should be allowed to wear masks to hide their faces when protesting in public. - |        |
|---|--------------|---|--------|
|   |              | Yes   | No     |
| There are circumstances under which vandalizing public / commercial property to send a political message is acceptable. | Yes          | 31.0%   | 7.7%   |
|   | No           | 57.2%   | 85.7%  |
|   | I don't know | 11.8%   | 6.6%   |
| Total   |              | 100.0%  | 100.0% |

# THOSE WHO FEEL VANDALISM CAN BE JUSTIFIED FOR POLITICAL REASONS ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO SUPPORT PROTECTIONS FOR EXPRESSING OVERTLY RACIST VIEWS

|  |              | There are circumstances under which vandalizing public / commercial property to send a political message is acceptable. - : |        |
|--|--------------|---|--------|
|  |              | Yes   | No     |
| Free speech should be protected even when it expresses overtly racist views. - | Yes          | 47.4%   | 26.8%  |
|  | No           | 39.8%   | 60.0%  |
|  | I don't know | 12.8%   | 13.1%  |
| Total  |              | 100.0%  | 100.0% |

NEARLY SIX IN TEN CANADIANS SAY HOLOCAUST DENIAL IS NOT FREE SPEECH THOUGH ONE IN FIVE SAY OTHERWISE AND ONE IN FOUR DON'T KNOW

| Denying the Holocaust should be considered free speech. - | Canada | Between 18 and 24 | Between 25 and 34 | Between 35 and 44 | Between 45 and 54 | Between 55 and 64 | 65+ |
|---|--------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----|
| Yes   | 17%    | 19%               | 24%               | 22%               | 18%               | 16%               | 9%  |
| No  | 58%    | 52%               | 45%               | 48%               | 57%               | 60%               | 73% |
| I don't know  | 25%    | 28%               | 30%               | 30%               | 25%               | 24%               | 18% |

# THERE IS LITTLE REGIONAL VARIATION IN OPINION AROUND WHETHER DENYING THE HOLOCAUST SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FREE SPEECH

| Denying the Holocaust should be considered free speech. - | Atl. | QC  | ON  | MB/SK | AB  | BC  |
|---|------|-----|-----|-------|-----|-----|
| Yes   | 15%  | 12% | 19% | 11%   | 25% | 21% |
| No  | 51%  | 62% | 54% | 62%   | 54% | 64% |
| I don't know  | 35%  | 26% | 28% | 27%   | 21% | 14% |

AMONGST THOSE WHO AGREE THAT PEOPLE SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO WEAR MASKS WHEN PROTESTING SOME ONE IN FOUR BELIEVE HOLOCAUST DENIAL SHOULD BE FREE SPEECH

|   |              | People should be allowed to wear masks to hide their faces when protesting in public. |        |
|---|--------------|---|--------|
|   |              | Yes   | No     |
| Denying the Holocaust should be considered free speech. - | Yes          | 26.5%   | 14.3%  |
|   | No           | 53.0%   | 64.4%  |
|   | I don't know | 20.6%   | 21.3%  |
| Total   |              | 100.0%  | 100.0% |

AMONGST THOSE WHO FEEL THAT THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH VANDALIZING PUBLIC PROPERTY IS JUSTIFIED SOME 30% BELIEVE HOLOCAUST DENIAL SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FREE SPEECH

|   |              | There are circumstances under which vandalizing public / commercial property to send a political message is acceptable. - |        |
|---|--------------|---|--------|
|   |              | Yes   | No     |
| Denying the Holocaust should be considered free speech. - | Yes          | 30%   | 15.5%  |
|   | No           | 53.8%   | 63.3%  |
|   | I don't know | 16.2%   | 21.2%  |
| Total   |              | 100.0%  | 100.0% |