

Few would argue that trust is not on the decline in Canada.

CARDUS INSIGHTS



Ray Pennings
Executive Vice President

This quick-read newsletter curates resources of value regarding faith and public life targeted towards business and community leaders.

*If this newsletter was forwarded by a friend, why not [sign up yourself](#)?
If you would prefer not to receive these newsletters, feel free to [opt out](#).*

HERE'S MY TAKE

April 10, 2021

Few would argue that trust is not on the decline in Canada. The matter is under the spotlight in the context of COVID, lockdowns, and decisions as to how to respond coming from the full range of social institutions.

I've previously referenced [Edelman's Trust Barometer](#), a two decades-old annual measurement of trust in 28 countries. After documenting the continuing decline of trust in credibility across almost every institution, the 2021 Canadian Edelman report noted that business was the institution into which Canadians put the highest stock. That trust came with high expectations: 65 percent agreed that CEOs "should step in when government does not fix societal problems."

Nice sentiments but alas, I don't think business is up to the task. That's not a critique of business but a recognition that one institution isn't able to fix the problems of another. That doesn't mean our institutions are

silos and don't affect each other – they inevitably do. But impact ain't fixing and especially at a time when too many Canadians are looking to government to fix more than it is able to, it is worth reflecting on the boundaries and relationships between institutions.

Each institution has its own task. Government is about dispensing justice, treating people fairly and equally, and ensuring security. Business is about investing inputs to create greater outputs, stewarding the resources they are given into goods and services that have value for their customers. Media is about informing people as to what is happening, providing information with courage and not skewing it to deceptive outcomes. Faith institutions are about worship, truth, and service of others. Families are about love and fidelity.

Implicitly, we recognize that each social institution has its own leading functions or characteristics, which it must faithfully serve or express for it to maintain or regain its trust. So, when business is expected to “fix” government, or any other institution steps out of its lane to “fix” a different one, the result is rarely progress or an increase in trust. In fact, when institutions try to do what they are not equipped to do, the result is almost inevitably a decline of trust. Look at what we are experiencing in our present context. As governments take on more than they can deliver, trust in their expertise and office are falling. As a result, authorities are increasingly relying on coercion to see their orders followed.

A few under-appreciated principles merit reflection here.

First, we need to recognize that all institutions have both a private and public dimension. Marriage and family are one example. While they are certainly very personal institutions, they have significant public implications. They remain the primary context in which future citizens and taxpayers are born. Fertility rates are essential to any GDP and economic prosperity forecast. Religion is another example. Faith institutions contribute \$67.5 billion annually to Canada's GDP. Without that contribution, a full range of services we take for granted (especially counselling, education and social services) would look very different or disappear. So, every institution, has both a primary group of stakeholders and serves all of society. Through its behaviours it is either a net contributor or net drain on our collective trust accounts.

Second, while multiple institutions can deliver specific social goods in many cases, some are clearly inappropriate for the task. Sure, gangs can help teens develop a sense of teamwork or even street smarts that

could be very useful in the workplace in later life. But just because they can, doesn't mean they should. Most of us would prefer a society in which young people learned these skills through sports teams or community youth programs. A healthy society needs trust deposits from the full range of healthy institutions. No single institution, including government, can fill the gaps left by the failures of any other institution. And just because an alternative institution may fill a vacuum when one isn't doing its job well, that doesn't mean the result will be interchangeable.

Third, trust is not value-neutral. Our egalitarian age places great emphasis on overcoming historic prejudices, which is important. Every person, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other distinguishing aspect of their personhood, deserves respect based on the simple fact that they are a human being created with dignity. And those categories, which too often are used to divide people, should not become a shorthand for distinguishing those who are trustworthy from those who are not. But that doesn't mean that respect is a synonym for trust. Trust is earned and our trust for others is increased or decreased by our past experiences with them. Even as we correct for past misapplications of categories being unjustly used as proxies for trust, it is naïve to think that consequently trust is an egalitarian concept.

On the one hand, this is complicated theoretical stuff. But as businesses, churches, community groups, and society at large respond (with increasingly divergent rates of compliance) to orders in the name of public health, the front-line impact of trust will inevitably have long-term consequences.

Those of us in leadership, in whatever institution, need to be very aware of this. Each institution needs to apply the rules in the context of its own core mission, figuring out how to deliver on its task and function. We need to recognize that we are all contributing to the climate of trust that exists in our society. The impact of our decisions today aren't just about COVID and the next months. They also reflect on our character and brand. Don't be surprised if in a year or two from now, when (hopefully) the immediate decisions of a COVID context are just the subject of history books, these decisions leave a legacy for good or ill. Future polls measuring trust will reflect the effects of today's decisions at both the individual and institutional levels.

We can't fix what others are doing, but we are responsible for our own decisions and mistakes.

WHAT I'M READING

The New Economics 101



Greg Ip had an insightful piece in the *Wall Street Journal* on Wednesday in which he contrasts the basics of the “new economics” – relating to growth, inflation, debts, social programs, markets, and unemployment – with the previous “neoliberalist” or “Washington consensus.” He dubs it “Bidenomics,” although Ip points out how the new economic doctrines may actually have been seeded by the economic populism of President Trump.

Can Criminals Be Changed?



I found this first-person reflection from an ex-inmate regarding the public relations challenges of the parole system convicting. For those who believe in forgiveness and redemption, a justice system that provides for both is challenging. Forgiveness and redemption often take second billing when fear-driven public opinion overwhelmingly sees those in prison only in terms of their crimes.

Omnishambles



This week, Maclean's carried a feature which highlighted why the comparatively behind-the-times Canadian public health information system was a factor in our inability to secure COVID vaccines as quickly as some other countries. It turns out that Israel was able to exchange its data with Pfizer to get preferential treatment, providing its

state-of-the-art health data which effectively turned the country “into one giant clinical trial.” The prudence of this exchange is debatable; having the foresight to make this an available option is not.

Distinct Society



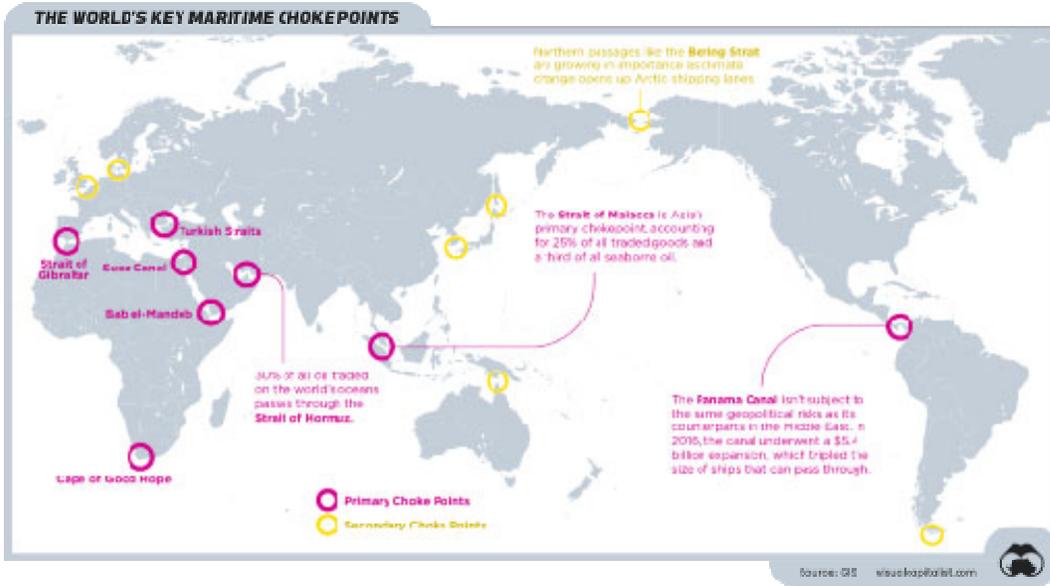
Sean Speer reports that Quebec Premier Francois Legault’s ongoing popularity in his province reflects a uniquely Quebecois sort of conservatism. Quebec’s conservatism expresses itself as a self-preserving nationalism that flows from being a minority population within the North American context. As a result, it manifests itself “in reduced immigration levels, restrictions on religious expression for government employees, and forthcoming legislation to further tighten language requirements.” Along with this comes “Quebec society’s impatience with ‘wokeism’” – an ideology characterized by extreme political correctness. It would seem that Quebec is more ready to resist the threats to free speech on campuses than even other conservative governments are in the rest of Canada.

Test Tube Growth



EDC Economist Peter Hall reflects on the tension between demographic decline (resulting in fewer workers, fewer consumers, and less demand) and the existence of significant available capital which, if invested in technology, might spur a new “industrial revolution.” Hall is bullish on the opportunities that technology brings. He even expects that technology will rescue us from the demographic wane.

MEANINGFUL METRICS

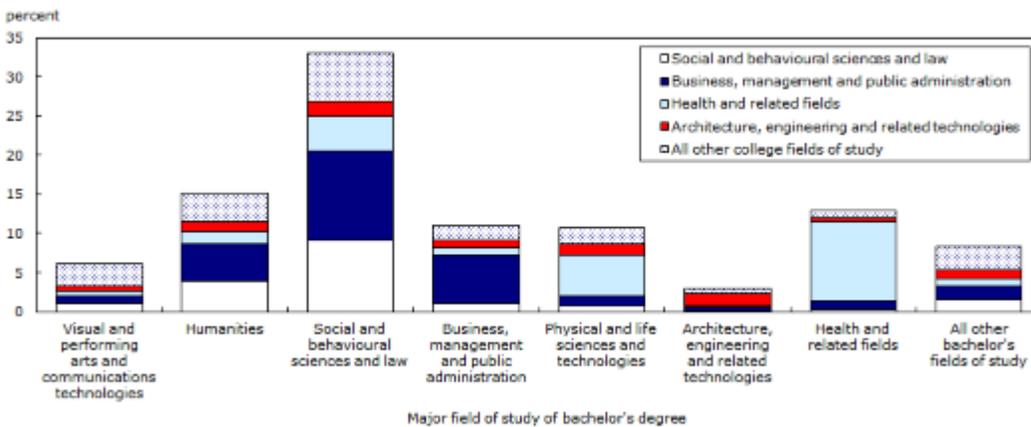


Bottled Up

In the fall-out of last week's blockage of the Suez Canal, I came across [this informative map](#) of the eight primary and seven secondary chokepoints for the transport of goods around the globe. The discussion is nuanced by regional geo-politics as well as the nature of the goods that are transported through each, but the map reinforces the significance of Middle East politics for the entire globe.

[VisualCapitalist.com 2021](https://www.visualcapitalist.com/2021/01/08/the-worlds-key-maritime-chokepoints/)

Chart 3
Distribution of recent college graduates with a prior bachelor's degree, by bachelor's degree and college credential major field of study,¹ 2010 to 2018



1. Major field of study uses the primary groupings of the Classification of Instructional Programs 2016.
Source: Statistics Canada, Education and Labour Market Longitudinal Platform, 2010 to 2018.

Diplomas and Degrees

Statistics Canada [reported this week](#) that 14 percent of recent Canadian college graduates had previously completed at least a Bachelor's degree at a university. Most of the college studies provided more specialized labour-market applications related to their previous field of study. As the above chart notes, the social and behavioural sciences, as well as law, are by far the most significant area where this is taking place although there is a fair spread among differing occupational areas.

[Statistics Canada, 2021](#)

TAKE IT TO-GO



Sticking It To 'Em

Fan is short for fanatic so occasionally this final paragraph includes less than carefully argued, data-backed reasoning. Being a good sport requires more than giving 110 percent at work, but also leaves room for

play.

So here's my confession. I am a life-long Toronto Maple Leafs fan. Yes, I know I was in diapers when they [last won the cup](#). In fact, there are a bunch of colleagues and friends who remind me of how many years it's been (as if I can't count) after every #TML loss.

But it's April 2021 and after Wednesday's 3-2 victory over the Montreal Canadiens, the Leafs are in first place in the NHL's North Division. The Habs' defeat is, of course, a two-fer as it covers both my favourite NHL team and my second favourite (which is whoever is playing the [bleu, blanc, et rouge](#), for those not familiar with the fact that [Toronto fans, by definition, dislike the Canadiens](#)).

I won't pad the stats nor plan the parade just yet. (It only would be cancelled by the next lockdown anyway, given the pattern of #TML fortune.) Still, I think it's worthwhile to assist Insights readers not as tuned in to hockey that joining the Leafs bandwagon this spring might be a real score.

#GOLEAFSGO

[Follow us on Twitter](#)

[Like us on Facebook](#)

[Forward to a Friend](#)

Our mailing address is:

Cardus
185 Young St
Hamilton, ON L8N1V9