

Emergencies Act Review: Canadians divided whether 'Freedom Convoy' could have been dispersed without it

Nearly half say use of Act was necessary (46%), but others preferred alternative paths to resolution

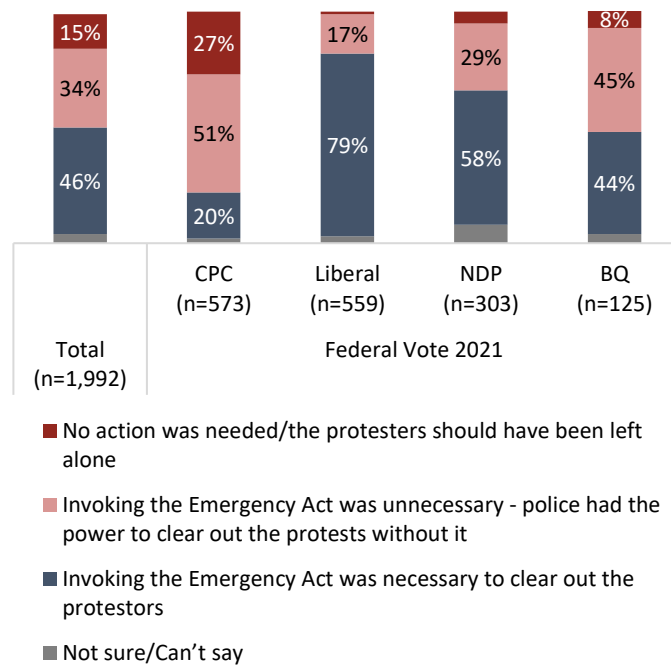
May 12, 2022 – Prime Minister Justin Trudeau waited until the [final day](#) legally allowable before launching a compulsory review of the federal government's invocation of the Emergencies Act in March. The Act was triggered by the government and approved by Parliament after members of the so-called Freedom Convoy blocked streets with vehicles and occupied downtown Ottawa in opposition to vaccine mandates and pandemic-related restrictions.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds that Canadians remain unsure whether this was the best path to resolution in breaking up the protests that besieged Ottawa.

The largest group – close to half (46%) – say that this was necessary to give police the tools and resources to quell protests. Four-in-five (79%) past Liberal voters and three-in-five (58%) past New Democrats bolster the ranks of those in support of using the Act. That said, more than one-in-three (34%) Canadians and half of past CPC voters (51%) disagree, and feel it was unnecessary and police already had the powers they needed to complete the job.

A considerable group – 15 per cent – say that they don't think any action was necessary by any level of government or policing, and that protests should have been allowed to continue unbothered.

In retrospect, based on what you've seen, read or heard, which of the following is closest to your view to invoke the Emergency Act for the first time ever?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 4 - 6, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 1,992 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

As the [Public Order Emergency Commission](#) continues its investigation into the decisions that were made and how the Act was used, Canadians are deeply divided about the future of this never-before-used lever of Parliament. An equal number say that the use of this mechanism was a good example of how it should be done for other governments to follow (45%) or that it sets a bad precedent for future governments and may lead to abuse (44%). This, too, is subject to stark political divides.

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More Key Findings:

- Residents in Ontario (50%), B.C. (49%), and Atlantic Canada (49%) are most likely to say that invoking the Emergencies Act was necessary. Those in Alberta (21%) and Saskatchewan (23%) are most likely to say that no action was necessary, and protests should have been allowed to continue.
- Men are much more concerned about the precedent that invocation sets and the potential of abuse by future governments. Slightly more than half (53%) of men say this is a concern, compared to 34 per cent of women. Half of women (52%) say this was a good example of how the Act can be effectively used, compared to 38 per cent of men.
- On a key faceoff question, younger people (18-34) are more likely to say that the right to protest outweighs the economic disruption it may cause (60% to 40%). Those 35-54 years of age are divided close to evenly, while those 55 years of age and older lean heavily toward protecting economic interests even if it means limiting protests at times (71% to 29%).

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

INDEX

- **Nearly half say Emergencies Act was necessary; past CPC voters most likely to disagree**
- **Canadians split on whether invocation was good use of Emergencies Act or bad precedent**
- **The right to protest or protect economic interests?**

Nearly half say Emergencies Act was necessary; past CPC voters most likely to disagree

The Emergencies Act was enacted in 1988 as a replacement for the controversial War Measures Act, which was used by the federal government three times in its history: during the First World War, the Second World War and the [1970 October Crisis](#). It was the latter use which was most controversial. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau invoked the Act to give police additional powers to stop militant Quebec separatists after a series of kidnappings. It was the only time the Act was put in place during a time of peace, and critics worried invoking the Act was a direct threat to Canadians' civil liberties.

The Emergencies Act was meant to be [much more transparent](#) than the War Measures Act it replaced, adding [checks and balances against potential abuses of power](#). With the new legislation, within 60 days of the expiration of the public emergency, the government must convene a public inquiry. Then, 360 days after the end of the emergency, the government must table a report to Parliament.

Thirty-four years after it was enacted, the Emergencies Act was invoked by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, son of Pierre, in response to the convoy protest in February. At the time, Trudeau said the Act

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was necessary because of the [“serious challenges to law enforcement’s ability to effectively enforce the law.”](#)

Three months later, and with [a public inquiry](#) under way, approaching half (46%) of Canadians believe invoking the Emergencies Act was necessary. One-third (34%) disagree, believing that the police had the power to clear out protesters without it. A further 15 per cent believe the protesters should have been left alone.

There is a significant partisan divide on whether the Act needed to be invoked. Half (51%) of past Conservative voters believe it was not necessary to resolve the convoy protests. Four-in-five (79%) past Liberal and three-in-five (58%) past NDP voters believe it was needed to give police the powers to end the protests. Those who voted for the Bloc in last fall’s election are more split:

In retrospect, based on what you’ve seen, read or heard, which of the following is closest to your view to invoke the Emergencies Act for the first time ever ...					
	Total (n=1,992)	2021 Federal Vote			
		CPC (n=573)	Liberal (n=559)	NDP (n=303)	BQ (n=125)
Invoking the Emergencies Act was necessary	46%	20%	79%	58%	44%
Invoking the Emergencies Act was unnecessary	34%	51%	17%	29%	45%
No action was needed	15%	27%	1%	5%	8%
Not sure/Can’t say	4%	2%	3%	8%	4%

Half of Ontarians, whose province was subjected to the Ottawa occupation as well as a disruptive border protest which blocked [the Ambassador Bridge](#), believe invoking the Emergencies Act was necessary, the most of any region in the country. Belief that the Emergencies Act was needed to end the protests is the plurality view in all other regions except in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Those two provinces are the home of the highest belief that the protesters should have been left alone:

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In retrospect, based on what you've seen, read or heard, which of the following is closest to your view to invoke the Emergencies Act for the first time ever ...								
	Total (n=1,992)	Region						
		BC (n=254)	AB (n=198)	SK (n=117)	MB (n=125)	ON (n=705)	QC (n=443)	ATL (n=150)
Invoking the Emergencies Act was necessary	46%	49%	37%	31%	46%	50%	45%	49%
Invoking the Emergencies Act was unnecessary	34%	36%	38%	43%	29%	31%	34%	35%
No action was needed	15%	11%	21%	23%	18%	16%	13%	12%
Not sure/ Can't say	4%	4%	4%	3%	7%	3%	8%	3%

Older Canadians are more likely than younger ones to believe the Emergencies Act was needed for the convoy protests, and much less likely to believe no action was needed. Men under the age of 55 are more likely than other demographics to say the protesters should have been left alone:

In retrospect, based on what you've seen, read or heard, which of the following is closest to your view to invoke the Emergencies Act for the first time ever ...							
	Total (n=1,992)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=280)	35-54 (n=328)	55+ (n=367)	18-34 (n=272)	35-54 (n=339)	55+ (n=405)
Invoking the Emergencies Act was necessary	46%	37%	37%	48%	42%	48%	61%
Invoking the Emergencies Act was unnecessary	34%	35%	40%	42%	32%	26%	28%
No action was needed	15%	25%	21%	9%	17%	17%	7%
Not sure/ Can't say	4%	3%	2%	1%	9%	9%	4%

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Canadians split on whether invocation was good use of Emergencies Act or bad precedent

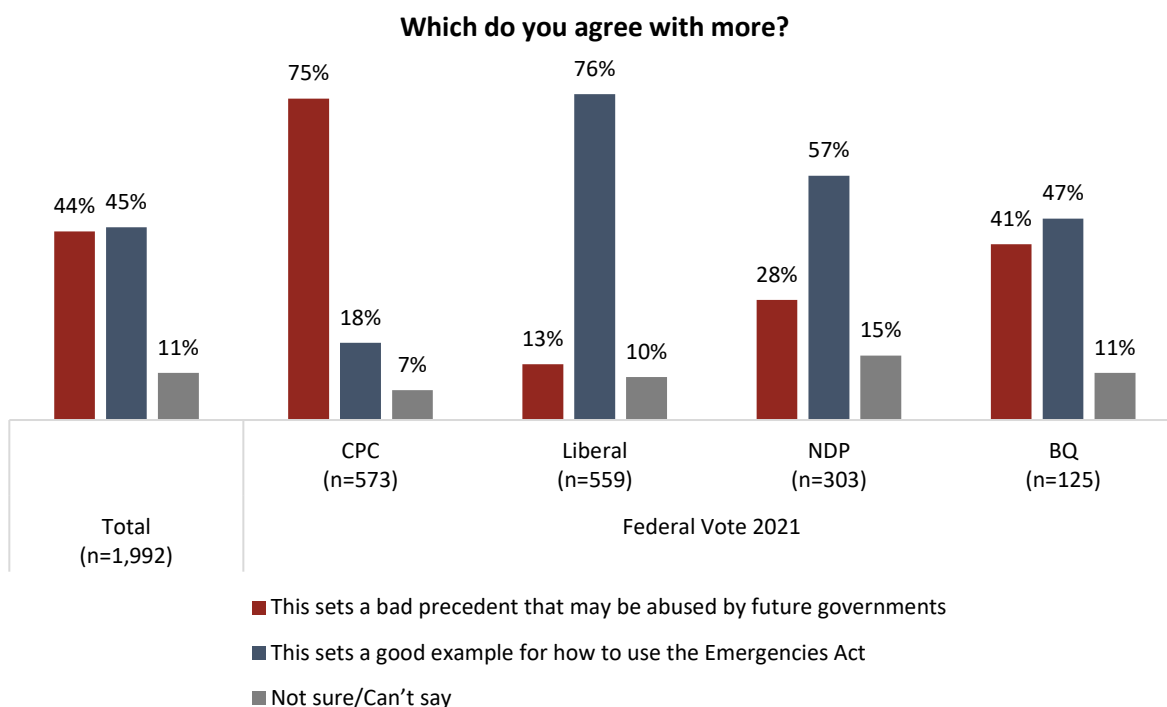
The decision to use the Emergencies Act was fraught with political considerations. Ottawa Chief of Police Peter Sloly resigned after heavy criticism for his handling of the early days of the protests. Conservative and Liberal members of parliament hurled accusations across the aisle for aligning too closely or not closely enough with protestors and their concerns. Trudeau accused Conservatives of standing with [“people who wave swastikas”](#).

Indeed, the debate over standing with or against the convoy continues to be a topic of discussion, even now, as CPC leadership contender Jean Charest stated that fellow contender Pierre Poilievre should be [“disqualified”](#) from running due to his support for the [“illegal blockade”](#).

Necessary or not, the precedent for use of the Emergencies Act has been set. Critics, including [the B.C. Civil Liberties Association](#), worried the government would invoke the Act in the future against other protest movements.

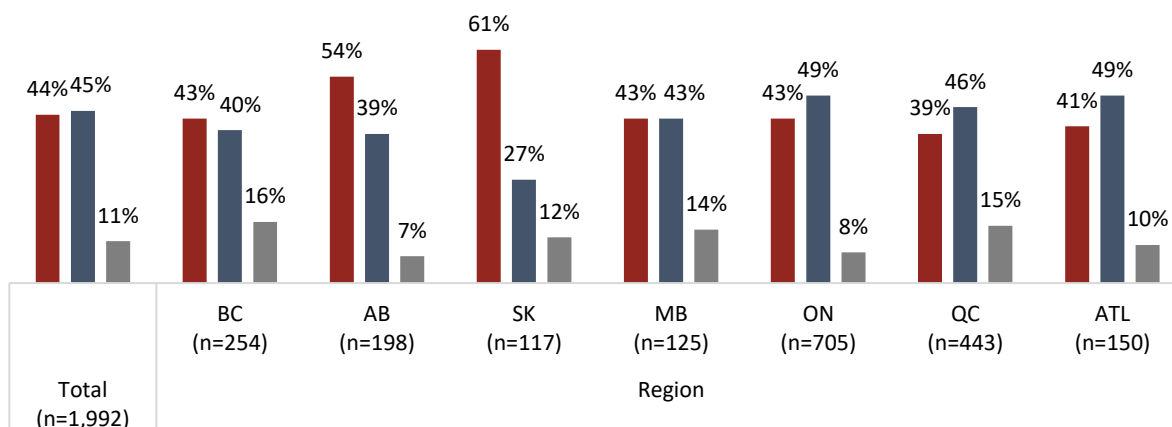
Canadians are split: as many (45%) believe stopping the convoy protest was a good use of the Act as who believe (44%) that Trudeau’s use sets a bad precedent.

Past Liberal and CPC voters are likely to find themselves on opposite sides of this matter. Three-quarters (75%) of those who voted for the Conservatives in the fall say it sets a bad precedent; an equal proportion (76%) of past Liberal voters say instead it was a good example of how to use the Act. Past NDP voters are more likely than past Liberal ones to say Trudeau set a bad precedent, but still three-in-five (57%) believe it was a fine instance to invoke the Emergencies Act:



Regionally, Canadians are mostly split on whether using the Act to stop the convoy protest was bad precedent or a good example, with two exceptions: a majority in Alberta (54%) and Saskatchewan (61%) believe Trudeau's bad use of the Act will enable abuse by future governments.

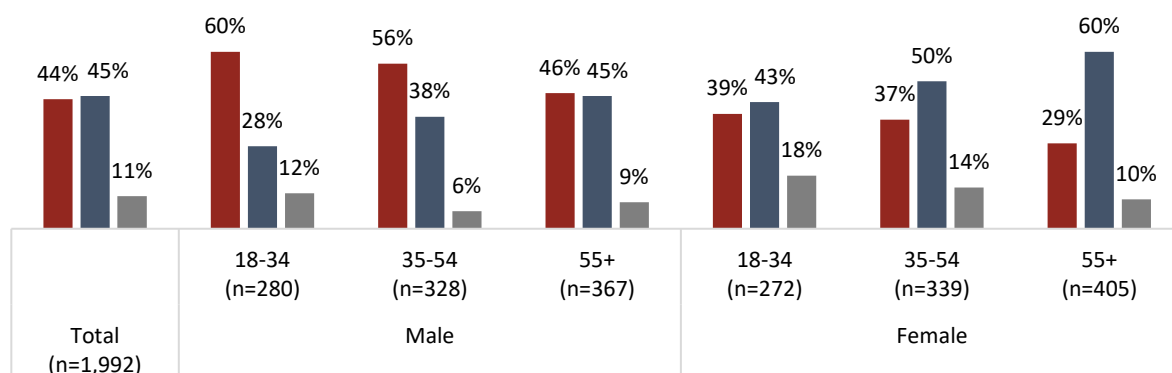
Which do you agree with more?



- This sets a bad precedent that may be abused by future governments
- This sets a good example for how to use the Emergencies Act
- Not sure/Can't say

Men aged 18- to 34-years-old and women over the age of 54 hold strong opposite opinions on the matter. Three-in-five young men believe Trudeau's use of the Act set a bad precedent; an equal number of women aged 55-years-old and older say the opposite:

Which do you agree with more?



- This sets a bad precedent that may be abused by future governments
- This sets a good example for how to use the Emergencies Act
- Not sure/Can't say

The right to protest or protect economic interests?

In recent years, Canadian governments have taken increased action to halt protests which interrupt economic activity. In Alberta, the government passed in 2020 the controversial [Critical Infrastructure](#)

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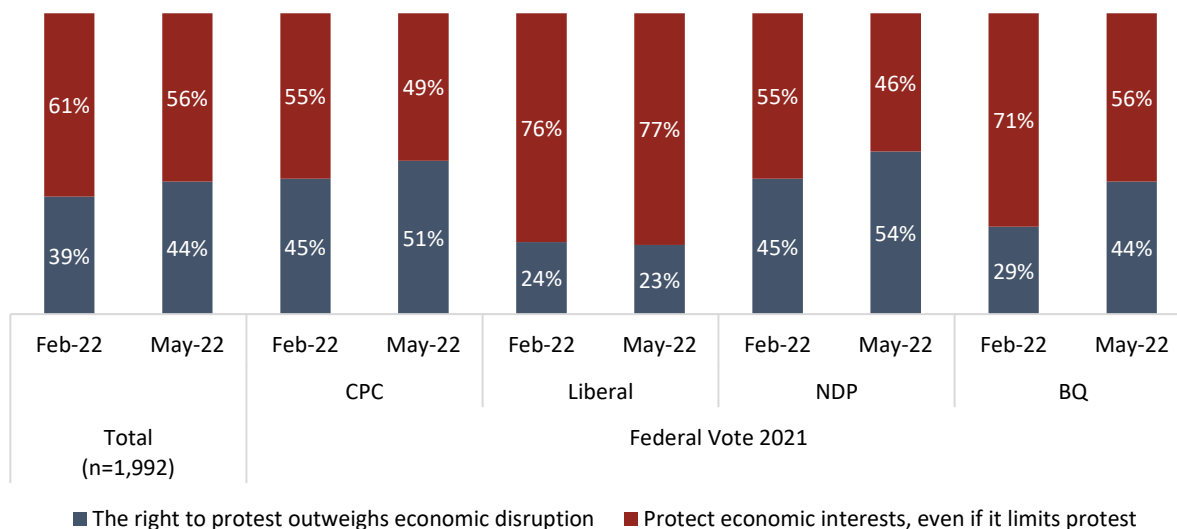
Defence Act in response to Indigenous-led blockades in protest of the Coastal Gaslink Pipeline. The Act prohibits obstruction of essential infrastructure including highways, railways, oil sands sites, and mines. Notably, it was not invoked to halt the Coutts, Alta. border blockade during the convoy protests.

When Trudeau invoked the Emergencies Act in February, he cited “protecting people’s jobs” as one of the reasons for doing so. At the time it was invoked, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said the border blockade at Windsor had disrupted \$390 million of daily trade.

In the heat of the protests in February, three-in-five (61%) Canadians believed economic interests should be protected even if it meant limiting protest. Two-in-five (39%) said instead the right to protest outweighs the cost of any economic disruption. Three months later, the majority who believe economic interests should be protected has shrunk to 56 per cent.

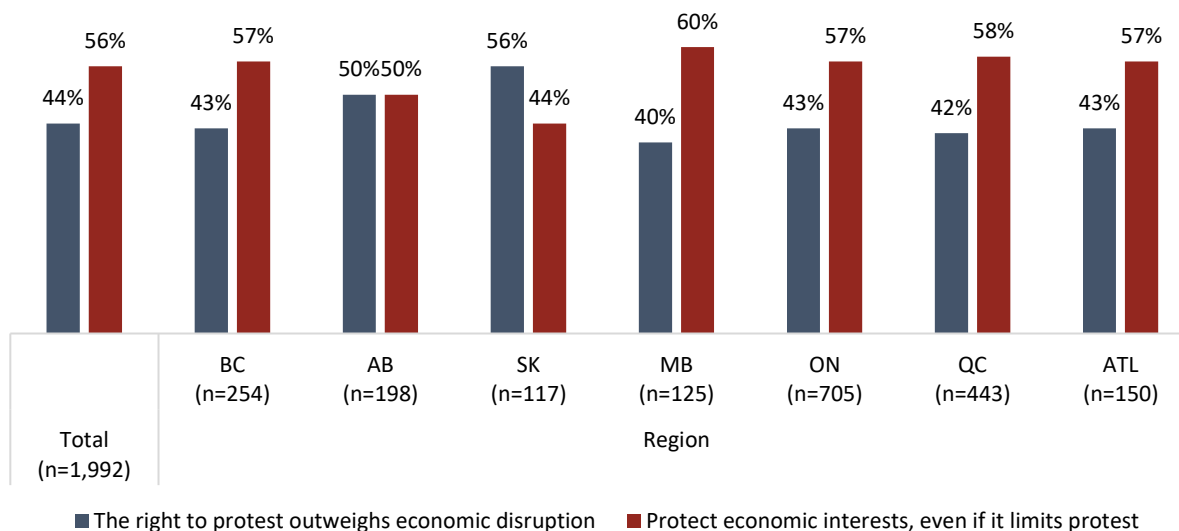
There has been notable movement among partisans on this matter. Past CPC and NDP voters are now more likely to support the other side of the argument than they were in February. The proportion of past Liberal voters who believe economic interests trump the right to protest has held at more than three-quarters. Meanwhile, 56 per cent of past Bloc voters say economic interests should be protected even at the cost of protest movements, a decline from the seven-in-ten (71%) who said so in February:

Which is closer to your point of view?



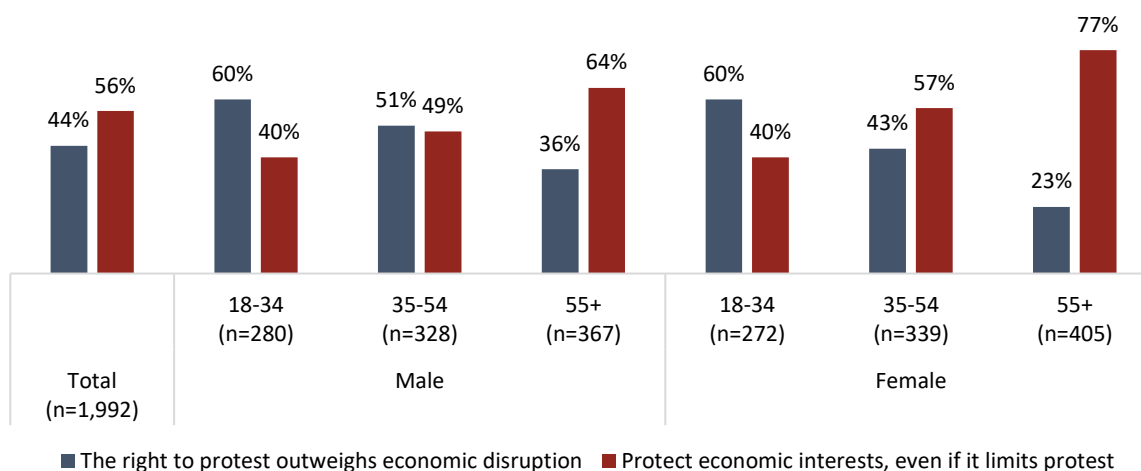
Albertans are split on the “protest versus economic” debate. A majority of Saskatchewanians (56%) say the right to protest should be the paramount concern. Elsewhere in the country, majorities believe economic interests are more important than the right to protest:

Which is closer to your point of view?



Three-in-five 18- to 34-year-olds believe the right to protest is more important than any economic disruption caused by it. Those older than 54-years-old are much more likely to hold the opposite view:

Which is closer to your point of view?



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).