

Emergencies Act: Ahead of report release, half say Freedom Convoy protests were a threat to national security

Half say invoking the act was needed, others preferred alternate paths to resolution

February 2, 2023 – As Justice Paul Rouleau puts the final touches on his report on the inquiry into the Liberal government's use of the Emergencies Act early last year, Canadians continue to have their own debate on the topic.

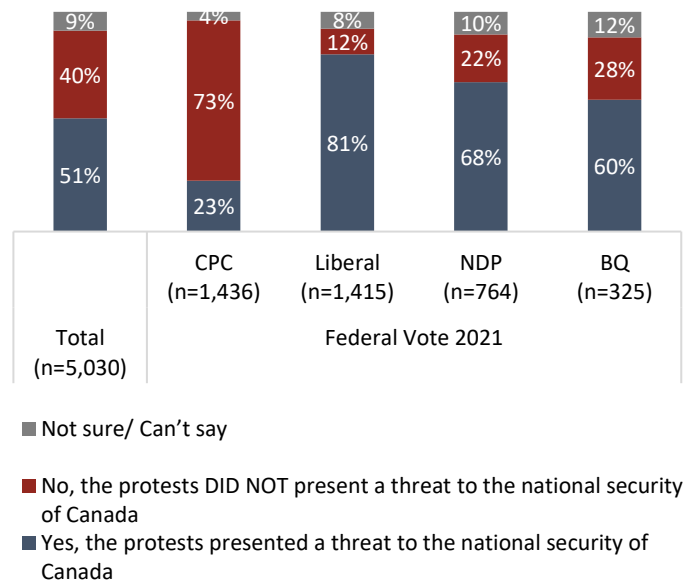
A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians divided about one of the core issues concerning the Emergencies Act – whether the protests which it was invoked to clear met the definition of a threat to the security of Canada.

Half (51%) say they believe that this threshold was met, including four-in-five past Liberal voters (81%) and two-thirds of past NDP voters (68%). Conversely, two-in-five (40%) disagree, led by three-quarters of those who supported the Conservative Party in 2021 (73%). Majorities in Alberta and Saskatchewan believe the threshold was not met, while majorities in every other region of the country disagree, and feel the protests presented a real national security threat.

That same division is noted on the government's decision to invoke the Emergencies Act. Half feel that this was ultimately the right call to bring about a resolution to the protests and occupations. That said, one-quarter (27%) feel other means of resolution should have been pursued, and 15 per cent say nothing needed to be done at the time.

Rouleau [will reportedly](#) present his final report to cabinet on Feb. 6. Then cabinet will have [until Feb. 20](#) to release the findings of the report.

Do you think the convoy protest was a “threat to the security of Canada” by this definition?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Nov. 28 to Dec. 3, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 5,030 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 +/- 1 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.

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More Key Findings:

- Public opinion has moved in favour of the decision to invoke the Emergencies Act. The percentage of Canadians saying it was the right call increased four points between May and December, while the percentage saying it was unnecessary dropped by seven.
- Men between the ages of 35 and 54 are the only age and gender grouping to say at a majority level (56%) that the protests were not a threat to national security. Women over the age of 54 are most likely to say that they indeed were (63%).

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.

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Part One: Was it a threat to national security? Half say yes

The [six-week long inquiry](#) into the federal government's use of the Emergencies Act featured testimony from 77 witnesses and approaching 7,000 documents for examination, including emails, texts, cabinet documents, transcripts and witness statements.

At issue for much of the inquiry was whether the Freedom Convoy protest arose to a "threat to the security of Canada," one of the thresholds laid out in the Emergencies Act to invoke it. The definition of what is a threat to the security of Canada is from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) Act, which defines it as "[espionage or sabotage of Canada's interests, foreign influence, acts of serious violence against people or property with political, religious or ideological objectives, or the violent overthrow of the Canadian government.](#)" The inquiry heard both that the CSIS threat definition was "[not relevant](#)" to the act, this from two former CSIS directors, and that CSIS itself told the government that the Freedom Convoy [did not pose a national security threat](#) before the act was invoked. Jody Thomas, security and intelligence adviser to the prime minister, [told the inquiry](#) she believed CSIS's definition was too narrow and that it should change.

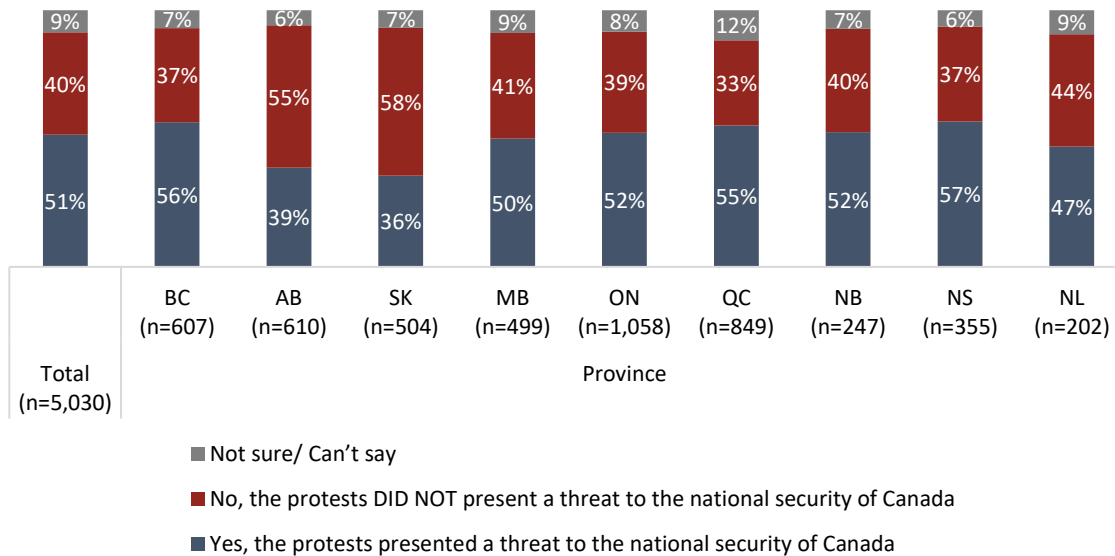
Half (51%) of Canadians believe the Freedom Convoy protesters presented a threat to the national security of Canada. Two-in-five (40%) disagree, including majorities in Alberta (55%) and Saskatchewan (58%). Notably, the [RCMP believe](#) protesters who were blocking the U.S.-Canada border in Coutts, Alta., had assembled weapons to use against the police.

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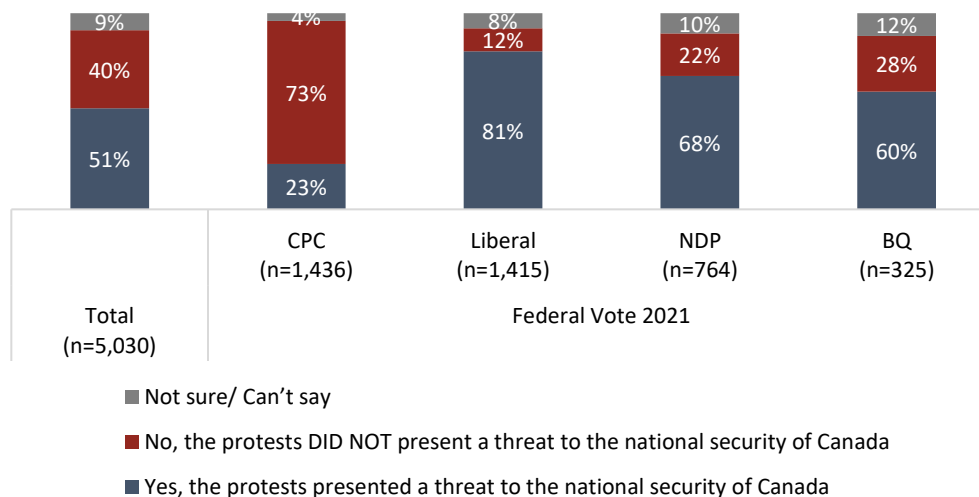
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Do you think the convoy protest was a “threat to the security of Canada” by this definition?



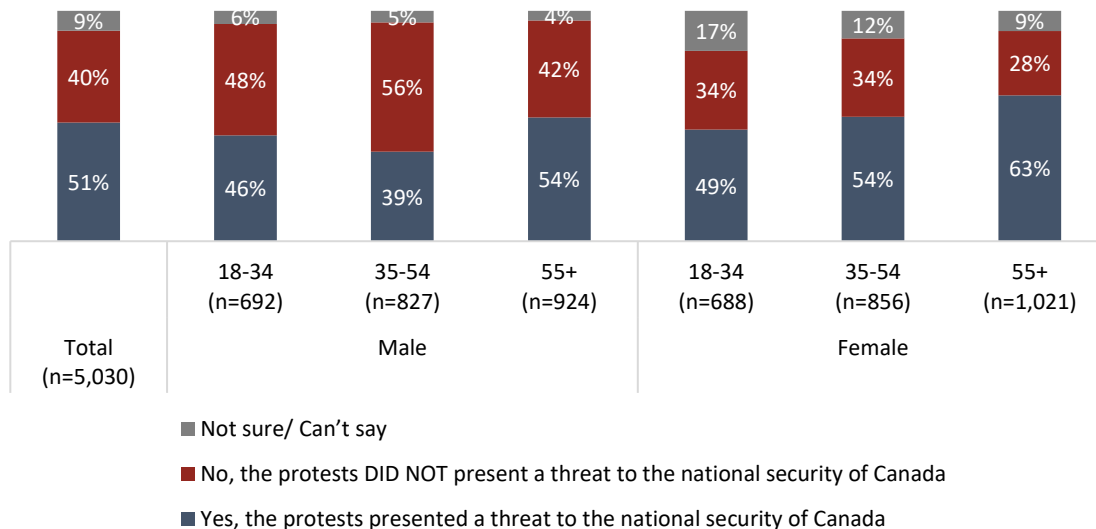
Four-in-five (81%) past Liberal voters and two-thirds (68%) of those who voted NDP in 2021 believe the convoy protest met the definition of national security threat as laid out in the Emergencies Act. Three-quarters (73%) of past CPC voters disagree. CPC leader Pierre Poilievre said in October the Emergencies Act was unnecessary. During the inquiry, he said his support for the “peaceful and law-abiding” Freedom Convoy protesters had not changed.

Do you think the convoy protest was a “threat to the security of Canada” by this definition?



Men are more likely to believe the convoy protest did not present a threat to the national security of Canada than women. This belief is strongest among men aged 35 to 54, the only demographic to say the protests were not a security threat at a majority level:

Do you think the convoy protest was a “threat to the security of Canada” by this definition?



Part Two: Plurality still believe act was necessary to clear protesters

The inquiry into the use of the Emergencies Act spanned six weeks from Oct. 13 to Dec. 2. Half (53%) of Canadians say they were having discussions with family about the inquiry at the time, including one-in-five (19%) who say they were following it very closely. The other half (47%) were paying less attention, though only one-in-ten (9%) say they weren't following it at all. Older Canadians and men were more likely to be engaged with the inquiry (see detailed tables).

Along the Angus Reid Institute's Engagement Index, the Emergencies Act inquiry garnered an average level of attention from Canadians. With a score of 50, the inquiry captured the close attention of fewer Canadians than the WE Charity Scandal in 2020 (66) and the SNC-Lavalin affair in 2019 (67):

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Scores on Angus Reid Institute Engagement Index



50 = generating an average level of engagement

The inquiry heard contradictory testimony as to whether the police needed the powers granted by the Emergencies Act to clear the protests. Ottawa police superintendent Robert Bernier, the commander who was responsible for the police operation that cleared the protests from downtown Ottawa, told the inquiry repeatedly that the additional powers were not necessary. A lawyer for the government challenged that assertion, pointing to documents that showed the Ontario Provincial Police needed the powers to procure the tow trucks necessary to clear the protesters.

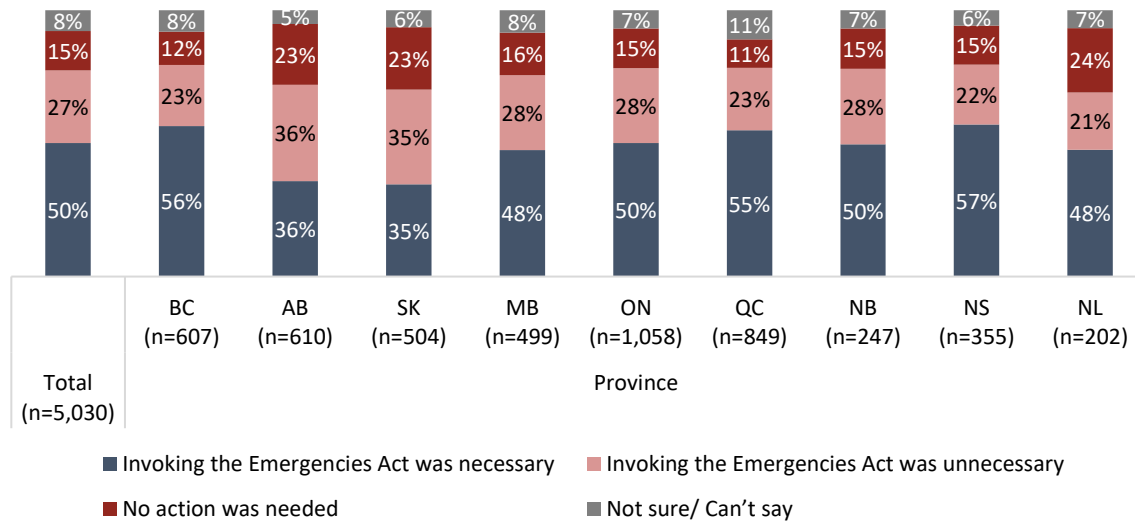
Half of Canadians (50%) believe the police needed the powers granted by the Emergencies Act to remove the Freedom Convoy protesters. One-quarter (27%) believe the act was unnecessary because police already had the ability to clear the protesters without it. One-in-six (15%) believe no action was necessary at all and the protesters should have been left alone.

In the two provinces perhaps most effected by the protests – Ontario and Alberta – there are divergent opinions. Half in Ontario (50%) say the Emergencies Act was required for the police to clear protesters. In Alberta, as many say that (36%) as say the act was not required (36%). In fact, in Alberta (23%), Saskatchewan (23%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (24%), approaching one-quarter believe no action was necessary to remove the protesters at all:

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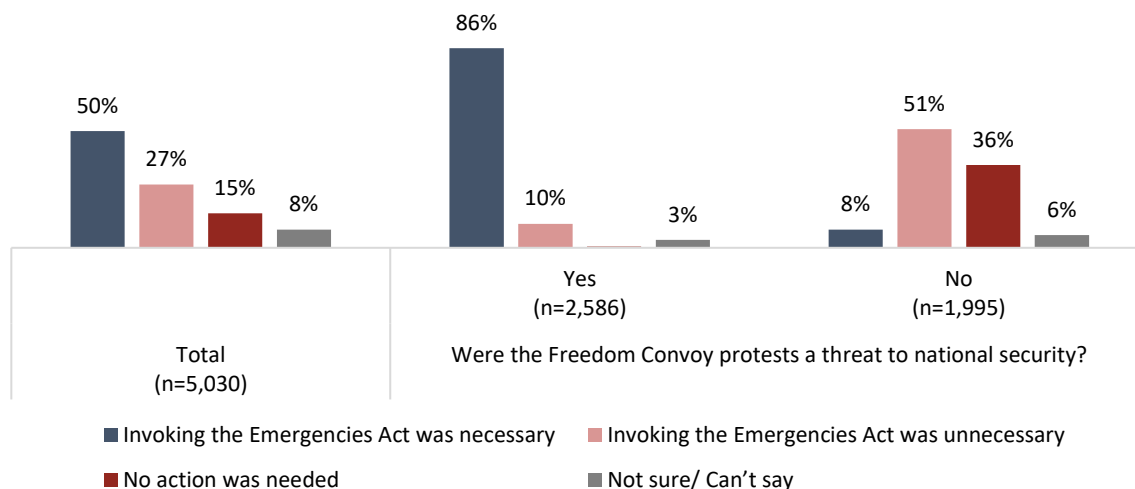
Based on what you've seen, read or heard, which of the following is closest to your view of the decision to invoke the Emergencies Act?



More than four-in-five (86%) of those who believe the Freedom Convoy protests amounted to a threat to national security believe invoking the Emergencies Act was necessary. A handful in that group (10%) disagree.

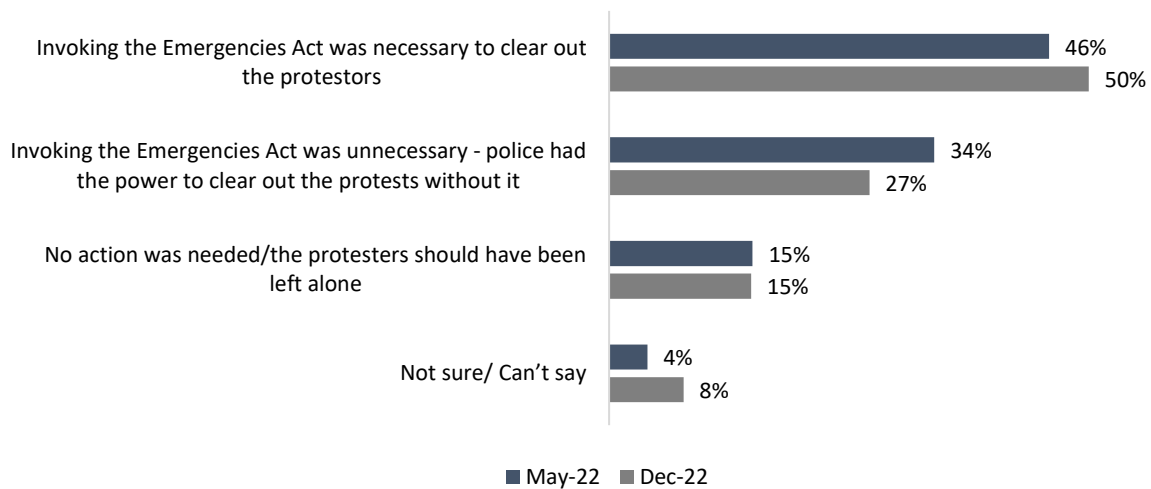
For those who do not believe the protests were a threat to the national security of Canada, half (51%) say invoking the act was unnecessary. One-third (36%) go further, and say no action was needed at all and the protesters should have been left alone.

Based on what you've seen, read or heard, which of the following is closest to your view of the decision to invoke the Emergencies Act?



The Angus Reid Institute first asked this question in May of last year. Since then, and following the inquiry, slightly more Canadians believe the act was necessary (46% to 50%) and notably fewer believe it was unnecessary (34% to 27%):

Based on what you've seen, read or heard, which of the following is closest to your view of the decision to invoke the Emergencies Act?



More movement in the opinions of past Liberal, NDP voters than CPC

This drop in the number of Canadians who believe the Emergencies Act was unnecessary is most evident among past Liberal and NDP voters. The proportion of those partisans who believe invoking the act was unnecessary has dropped six and seven points respectively. There has also been a decline – a smaller one of four points – in this sentiment among past Conservative party voters:

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Based on what you've seen, read or heard, which of the following is closest to your view of the decision to invoke the Emergencies Act?
(Change since May 2022 noted)

	Total (n=5,030)	2021 Federal Vote		
		CPC (n=1,436)	Liberal (n=1,415)	NDP (n=764)
Invoking the Emergencies Act was necessary	50% (+4)	21% (+1)	81% (+2)	65% (+7)
Invoking the Emergencies Act was unnecessary	27% (-7)	47% (-4)	11% (-6)	22% (-7)
No action was needed	15% (-)	28% (+1)	2% (+1)	5% (-)
Not sure/ Can't say	8% (+4)	3% (+1)	6% (+3)	9% (+1)

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

For detailed results by whether respondents believe the protests amounted to a threat to the national security of Canada, [click here](#).

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