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A FORCE OF NATURE

EMERGING CONDITIONS OF SOCIAL PROTEST

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Please note: The authors wish to make explicit this paper's speculative nature and provide a brief rationale for the approach. Today there is an urgent need for plausible scenario thinking that can inform policymaking, so that Canada and Canadians can be adequately prepared for whatever may come. Emerging patterns of socioeconomic, socio-political, and sociocultural change are evolving at a disorienting rate, making it essential to identify how Canadian citizen-consumers, governments, and the private sector can reasonably adapt to the twenty-first century's unprecedented challenges. These so-called "super-wicked" challenges include macroeconomic volatility and unparalleled changes in planetary-system behaviour.

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KEY POINTS

- The twenty-first century will be shaped by four patterns: volatility, uncertainty, complexity/chaos, and ambiguity (VUCA).

- VUCA's four characteristics underlie the current reordering of many aspects of human civilization, including our economic, financial, environmental, and ecological situation and the climate. VUCA characteristics also affect psychosocial, sociocultural, socio-political, and population-health spheres.

- Economic growth characterized the post-World War Two period in Canada. Today, economic growth has a lesser influence on Canadian identity and values. This ideological shift increases the difficulty of translating social protest into policy. The prominence of VUCA traits in current events acts as a stressor on social movements and on political and business leaders.

- Canadians may be overestimating the potential of democratic agency to drive political change. Consequently, we may expect a rise in apathy, a coarsening of the democratic franchise, and a subsequent deterioration of social and population-health outcomes.

- The factors that shaped Canadian identity and culture in the decades following World War Two are losing relevance for today's society. The socioeconomic and socio-political expectations established in the postwar context are not well adapted to a VUCA-influenced world. As a result, society may lack the ability to create a societal foundation for positive futures towards which Canadians aspire.

- There is a need to identify and evaluate how the democratic process can absorb new policy directions from outside the political consensus. Transitioning towards a resilient future for Canadians requires participation by governments, business, consumer brands, and citizen-consumers.

- Experts describe the current era as one of growing crises, emergencies, disasters, catastrophes, and collapses, including the sixth major extinction. Today's population does not have personal historical experience with such circumstances. For this reason, these descriptors

fail to galvanize the cohesive and widespread precautionary response that is merited.

- Canadians are and will be subject to rapidly shifting conditions that affect and are affected by multiple systems, including economic, financial, technological, environmental, and ecological systems and psychosocial, sociocultural, socio-political, and population-health issues. Climate change will impact them all.

- Diverse and complex shifts will have deep and powerful societal impacts that will include but will not be limited to economic position, youth engagement, the inadequacy of knowledge transfer, technology-mediated acceleration, population health, and extreme weather and climate change.

- Canada’s cultural order is changing dramatically. In response to these changes, we can expect citizens to significantly alter the ways in which they access and employ the socio-political and socio-cultural resources at their disposal.

- In light of changes to the cultural order and to citizens’ use of socio-political and socio-cultural resources, it is plausible that the emotional and passionate character of political protest will feature more prominently than rational aspects.

- There are four pillars of societal stability: citizen-consumers, governments, businesses, and consumer brands. Each must address VUCA challenges in ways appropriate to their strengths and societal role.

- The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation is well positioned to lead future scholarship on the multifactorial ramifications of large-scale changes. The authors recommend that the Foundation further explore the themes of this position paper, particularly in coming years. As this research is pursued, it is likely to yield practical outcomes that can benefit Canadians in the future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strategists in business, government, and the military see the twenty-first century as a VUCA century, that is, a century shaped by four patterns: volatility, uncertainty, complexity/chaos, and ambiguity. These characteristics underlie the reordering of economic, financial, environmental, ecological, and climate affairs of human civilization, as well as the psychosocial, sociocultural, socio-political, and population-health spheres. This means that social protest could be supercharged by major exogenous factors, could ebb and flow dramatically in potency, and could take on an increasingly emotional character over time. As post-war growth recedes as an emblem of Canadian identity and values, translating social protest into policy promises to become increasingly challenging, especially as the socioeconomic and psychosocial conditions under which protests occur become more and more unstable between now and 2030.

Of VUCA's four traits, ambiguity is dominant in today's population and is thus a stressor for social movements and political and business leaders. Minds paused by ambiguity typically desire a reassuring response to the question: Which way is the wind blowing and at what speed? In this regard, decision-makers in government and business face a conundrum. In prosperous times, such as the four decades immediately following the end of the Second World War, it could be that Canadians assumed the power of democratic agency because income growth and disposable income were broadly favourable to all political parties. Today, as Canada moves more deeply into the age of austerity, the opposite may hold true. Since exogenous circumstances are not as favourable as before, Canadians may be seriously underestimating the potential of democratic agency to effect political change, leading to a further deterioration of social and health outcomes, a rise in apathy, and a coarsening of the democratic franchise.

The factors that shaped Canadian identity and culture in the decades following World War Two are losing relevance for today's society. The socioeconomic and socio-political conditions that were established in that postwar context are not well adapted to a VUCA-influenced world. As a result, society may lack to the tools and foundation to establish a societal foundation for positive futures towards which Canadians aspire. Inevitably, the emerging forces of social protest – and the emotional character of such protest – will be affected by the twenty-first century's characteristics of volatility, uncertainty, complexity/chaos, and ambiguity. Ambiguity and the resultant paralysis are transformational challenges in the near term. Given portents of growing and accelerating instability, it may be in the best interests of citizen-consumers, governments, businesses, and brands to identify and evaluate how effectively the democratic process can absorb new policy directions from outside the political consensus, while transitioning to a semblance of a resilient future for Canadians.

As the twenty-first century unfolds, it may be increasingly difficult to warn Canadian citizens and organizations of danger. One explanation may be that the current language of risk does not resonate with its intended audiences because it does not accord with people's perceptions of plausible threat, now or in the past.

The words used by experts to describe our era – an era of growing crises, emergencies, disasters, catastrophes, and collapses, including the sixth extinction – do not readily align with historical experiences that could galvanize a cohesive and widespread precautionary response. A lack of resonant language that captures both the public interest and the interests of those who hold the levers of power may be indicative of the divisions that have been, and continue to be, sown as gaps in income and net worth continue to compress Canada's middle class.

Canadians are and will be subject to rapidly shifting conditions that affect, and are in turn affected by, multiple systems, including economic, financial, technological, environmental, and ecological systems, as well as psychosocial, sociocultural, socio-political, and population health issues. Climate change will impact all of these systems. As the twenty-first century unfolds from mid-2013, core areas to explore include the identity and affiliation of social protesters, the nature of social protest, and the stated and unstated reasons for which leaders in business and government are aware of Canadians' growing unease.

The shifting considerations in question are helping to cause diverse and complex shifts in areas of deep and powerful societal impact, including but not limited to:

- Economic position
- Youth engagement
- Gerontocracy
- The inadequacy of knowledge transfer
- Technology-mediated acceleration
- Population health
- Extreme weather and climate change

When evaluating how individual citizens might reorient their private sense of worry about converging stressors into a collective order of mobilization or more dramatically of protest, we must determine whether the standard conception of rational interest applies. Do individual agents rationally seek their own interests through cooperative behaviour? If deep dislocations to the existing cultural order are afoot, then we can expect equally profound changes in the ways that individual citizens draw on the socio-political and socio-cultural resources at their disposal. A loss of collective memory, a rise in volatile social and financial conditions, and a decline in the baseline assumptions of climatic normalcy suggest that individuals may lack even the most basic ability to discern their rational interests. Set against the question of what these dislocations mean for the character of political protest in the coming decades, it seems plausible to suggest that the rational character of protest will feature less significantly than

the emotional.

The authors propose that governments, businesses, consumer brands, and citizen-consumers – four pillars of societal stability – address the VUCA challenges in targeted ways. Governments should take a longer-term view about ways to signal impending socioeconomic change to citizens. They should evaluate how much information is too much – more specifically, how much information impinges on consumer confidence and undermines the public's faith in governments' ability to ensure order under converging stressors. They should navigate the complex socio-political dynamics that may emerge if increasingly uncertain constituents lean towards wanting peace and order over good government. They should evaluate the risks of moving towards a platform weighted towards jingoistic patriotism in order to hold the centre, they should consider how to hold multiple centres as pressures mount on society, and they should encourage Canadians to retain their core values of acceptance, dialogue, mutual respect, and respect for diversity.

Businesses should more granularly and deeply evaluate their social role as socioeconomic change continues to erode middle-income Canadians' purchasing power. Knowing that product innovation can encourage pro-social behaviour, they should innovate products, services, and solutions for times of increasing austerity, giving citizen-consumers reasons to come together and adapt to shifting socioeconomic and environmental conditions. Businesses should also explore ways to help customers and clients face the difficult times ahead through communications that emphasize resource-sharing. Furthermore, businesses should play an increasingly prominent role in helping Canadians address issues of hunger, poverty, and homelessness, as well as physical and mental health.

Consumer brands, likewise, should carefully evaluate how they communicate sociocultural values – particularly values surrounding social cohesion – remaining cognizant that many brands have higher trust ratings than do governments, given that citizen-consumers have enjoyed longer, more emotionally fulfilling relationships with these brands. In concert with governments, they should harness consumer-brand attributes to help steward population-health outcomes. They should also work independently within coalitions of corporate partners to meet social aims through brands, using brands as an element of trust building within and between generations.

Citizen-consumers have an opportunity to navigate the question of responsible citizenship as social divisions mount. They can encourage politicians to support initiatives that enable food and health systems to better adapt to change. They can engage in efforts to build community resilience by becoming involved in local food, agriculture, and food-security initiatives; by teaching children how environmental shifts are changing the Earth, and how to understand and cope with these shifts in the local environs; by developing sharing initiatives, especially relating to tools and equipment that can be shared and to practical skills that can be taught on a volunteer basis; by educating communities about practical lessons that can help to address climate shifts in the context of economic change; and by

understanding the public-health consequences of climate change and exploring small-scale, local initiatives that can provide a semblance of a response. Where possible, citizen-consumers can champion innovative products that allow them or their communities to access and conserve water and energy.

The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation is well placed to develop future scholarship on the multifactorial ramifications of mega-change, and would do well to explore these themes with a sense of urgency as threats to the public good mount under VUCA conditions.

INTRODUCTION

> *"The left has not been able to make a plausible case for an agenda other than a return to an unaffordable form of old-fashioned social democracy. This absence of a plausible progressive counternarrative is unhealthy, because competition is good for intellectual debate just as it is for economic activity. And serious intellectual debate is urgently needed, since the current form of globalized capitalism is eroding the middle-class social base on which liberal democracy rests."*

– *Francis Fukuyama*

Global civilization has, according to some experts, crossed decisively and irrevocably into a time of human-caused planetary change (Stromberg, 2013). We human beings are a "force of nature" with a projected ecological footprint significantly greater than Earth's capacity to meet future needs. From the rise in environmental and climate change-related impacts, such as catastrophic losses in bio-cultural and linguistic diversity, to the decline of macroeconomic flexibility and thus political autonomy, all of humanity is on a trajectory of mega-change virtually unprecedented in the historical record. Yet the well-founded concern about threats to liberal democracy and the eroding "middle-class social base" in Francis Fukuyama's essay in *Foreign Affairs* (Fukuyama, 2012) is weakened considerably by its neglect of environmental change and anthropogenic global warming as massive change drivers that must be factored into any calculation of risks to liberal democracy and societal stability.

It cannot be overemphasized that the trajectories of twenty-first century planetary change are occurring essentially in a non-linear and exponential fashion rather than in a linear and static one. This goes some distance towards explaining why strategic planners in businesses, governments, and militaries around the world have an abbreviation for four patterns that reflect this century's dynamics of change: volatility, uncertainty, complexity/chaos, and ambiguity – VUCA for short (Apollo Research Institute staff, 2012). These defining characteristics threaten to reshape human civilization, as they differ fundamentally from the twentieth century's post-war period, wherein conditions of stability, certainty, complexity, and clarity were dominant. They also differ from 11,300 years of climatic stability (Marcott et. al, 2013), also known as the Holocene epoch, which is undergoing massive destabilization and is, for all intents and purposes, over. This destabilization has ushered in the Anthropocene, the epoch of human-caused planetary change.

Planners ascribe twenty-first century "volatility" to strong fluctuations in macroeconomic conditions, financial markets, and commodity prices, and to extreme environmental pressures affecting nation states. "Uncertainty" refers to a state of affairs wherein decision-making is more unpredictable but is also possibly fraught with desperation for particular political or business outcomes. "Complexity/chaos" reflects the notion of tipping points, where a stable, yet

complex, state can flip into a new, possibly irreversible, chaotic state at an

unknown moment – the straw that breaks the camel's back. Finally, "ambiguity" refers to a state where the way forward is unknown, signposts are obscured by fog, and standing still does not seem to be an option. Together, volatility, uncertainty, complexity/chaos, and ambiguity make the twenty-first century akin to a blind date that one would do well to delete from the electronic calendar.

Admittedly, avoiding our date with destiny is not a viable option. Following the demise of the Berlin Wall, Canada's future became inextricably aligned with the forces of economic globalization. Tremendous momentum was added to VUCA as investment flowed to the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) and other emerging economies while growth slowed in the West. Today, as Canada transitions from four decades of post-war prosperity (1945 to the mid-1980s) and two decades of virtual (credit-enabled) prosperity (the late 1980s to the mid-2000s) to coming decades of rising socioeconomic inequity (present to 2030 and beyond), Canadians' expectations, if not their aspirations, for a recognizable, let alone sustainable, tomorrow are being undermined by a sea change in the conditions under which – and the rules by which – the world operates. For example, our developed nation and its provinces are increasingly concerned by financial markets' perceptions of creditworthiness, bringing a new calculus to social and health policy, especially as Moody's credit rating agency is considering whether to include indices of social cohesion into its calculations of sovereign debt ratings (Tett, 2010). The questions on decision-makers' minds are thus: Can we afford this? Can we even talk about this?

Among the VUCA traits, ambiguity is dominant among today's population and is thus a stressor on social movements and on political and business leaders. Minds paused by ambiguity typically desire a reassuring response to the questions: Which way is the wind blowing and at what speed? Nonetheless, decision-makers in government and business face a conundrum. In prosperous times, such as the four decades immediately following the end of the Second World War, it could be that Canadians assumed the power of democratic agency because circumstances of income growth and disposable income were broadly favourable to all political parties. Today, as Canada moves more deeply into the age of austerity, the opposite may hold true. Since exogenous circumstances are not as favourable as they once were, Canadians may in fact be overestimating the potential of democratic agency to affect political change. With low confidence in democratic agency comes a rise in apathy, a coarsening of the democratic franchise, and ultimately a deterioration of social and population-health outcomes.

This decline in democratic participation is gaining momentum. Governments and the private sector are analyzing citizen-consumers' political and consumer behaviour especially, as concern about Canadians' growing lack of financial flexibility looms over long-term economic prospects. As post-war growth recedes as a touchstone of Canadian identity and values, and as conditions under which protest occurs grow more austere, translating social protest into policy is likely to

become increasingly difficult. In aggregate, indebted citizen-consumers and

federal, provincial, and municipal governments will be increasingly constrained in their capacity to shape destinies of their own choosing. They will have fewer substantive economic and other policy levers to aid with changing course. The undercurrent of dissatisfaction permeating today's social protest movements is fundamentally about the desire to influence the emerging circumstances surrounding birth, life, and death in Canada, circumstances projected to become significantly less comfortable than those of the mid- to late twentieth century.

It appears that Canadians are facing a dangerous century of transition. Because the post-war socioeconomic fundamentals that shaped Canadian identity and culture are no longer viable, and immediate socioeconomic and socio-political conditions are maladaptive to a VUCA context, it may be effectively impossible to establish a societal foundation for the positive futures to which Canadians aspire. Inevitably, the emerging new forces of social protest – and the emotional character of such protest – will be affected by the twenty-first century's characteristics of volatility, uncertainty, complexity/chaos, and ambiguity. Ambiguity and resultant paralysis are the near-term transformational challenge. Given portents of growing and accelerating instability, it may be in the best interests of citizen-consumers, governments, businesses, and brands to identify and evaluate how effectively the democratic process can absorb new policy directions from outside the political consensus, while transitioning to a more resilient future for Canadians.

Distant early warning

Consider that as the twenty-first century unfolds, it may become increasingly difficult to warn Canadian citizens and organizations of danger. The current language of risk does not resonate with its intended audiences because it does not accord with people's perceptions of plausible threats, now or in the past. The words used by experts to describe our era – an era of growing crises, emergencies, disasters, catastrophes, and collapses, including the sixth extinction – do not readily align with historical experiences that could galvanize a cohesive and widespread precautionary response. A lack of resonant language that captures both the public interest and the interests of those who hold the levers of power may be indicative of the divisions that have been, and continue to be, sown as gaps in income and net worth continue to compress Canada's middle class.

If warnings are neither heard nor heeded, preparedness cannot be accomplished in proportion to risk or at an appropriate scale to the assessed threat. Hence, a lack of resonant language to describe today's risk trajectories may also reflect the inability of Canadians at a population scale to perceive risk, since chronic socioeconomic stressors impact cognitive capacity and the ability to interpret risk, mitigate risk, and adapt to risk. Added to this are the potentially negative cognitive implications of high-speed telecommunications, social media,

computers, and mobile devices, which may under certain conditions amplify social discord, discontent, and unrest more than they diffuse them. The attenuation of citizen-consumers' attention spans also bodes ill for the democratic franchise, as medium- to long-term societal risks must be addressed in the near term in order to protect future generations from undue harm.

Canada is entering a period of rapidly shifting, multifactorial conditions. Changes will affect economic, financial, technological, environmental, and ecological systems, as well as psychosocial, sociocultural, socio-political, and population-health issues. And all of these factors are affected by climate change. As the twenty-first century unfolds from mid-2013, core areas to explore include the nature of social protest, the identity and affiliation of social protesters, and the public and private concerns of business and governmental leaders in relation to Canadians' growing unease.

Economic position. Canada's middle class is receding like a glacier. There is a well-documented growth in disparity not just between the wealthy, the middle class, and the poor, but also between the hyper-wealthy and everyone else. Since the late 1990s, Western intelligence agencies have believed that the social unrest that could threaten political power at home would be instigated by middle managers versed in the ability of emerging social media technologies to bring debilitating protests to bear against governments. The flashpoint, it was assumed, would be increasing unemployment, rising food prices (Fraser and Rimas, 2012), and a growing instinct among the populace prosperity might transition to widespread poverty and inequity.

This is the evolving maelstrom into which the institutions of Western democracy are headed, and in which social unrest and political protests aiming to address social inequity through institutional reform are taking place. The Occupy protests, which occurred globally, and the Idle No More protests, which happened in Canada in late 2012 and 2013, are notable examples. However, it is worth carefully considering whether such protests will affect public policy and legislation in an increasingly unstable economy on a hotter planet. Specifically, could such protests influence policy and legislation to mitigate the impacts of the rising disparities between the higher income earners ("the one percent") and middle- and low-income earners ("the ninety-nine percent")?

Youth engagement. Concern is warranted over two trends: youth's disengagement from shared political endeavour and the broader nature of declining youth engagement with the dominant values, modes, culture, and practices of middle-class democracy. Youth are feeling particularly disenfranchised as youth unemployment exceeds the median rate for the population at large. Slow-to-retire boomers – their pensions already under demographic pressure – will remain longer in the workforce, helping sustain the fallacy that their labour reduces younger workers' opportunities. This is troubling because it heightens the prospect of intergenerational conflict that strains the

social solidarity necessary for social and political progress.

Canada's youth voter participation rates, a proxy for the more abstract concept of disenfranchisement, have been in decline since 1993, the last year that youth voter participation rates were essentially equal to voter participation rates among the broader population. Younger Canadians are increasingly mistrustful of authority (although they are not alone in this) and they spend more time embedded in online communities rather than real ones.

This "digital disengagement" (Herle, 2012) might be a difficult problem to address from a policy standpoint. But while none of these factors is, unto itself, a novel or wholly worrying trend, the combination of disengagement, declining macroeconomic prospects, rising environmental and climate-change related risks, and a latent mistrust of the demographic realities of a greying Canada, point to new pressures on Canadian middle-class value structures. The decline in youth political engagement means that young voters' typical policy preferences (anti-austerity, pro-climate) are more likely to be under-represented in party platforms and electoral results. Young voters are simply not voting in numbers significant enough to elect the parties whose policies they prefer. And youth participation continues to decline.

This is significant for a number of reasons. For one, it means that young voters are moving their policy-seeking behaviour from the "normal" realm of party politics into single-issue and potentially ill-focused forms of collective protest (a criticism made by some commentators during the Occupy movement's early days). For another, many younger citizens see voting as politically ineffectual – they see little benefit to engaging in the policy process internal to parties between elections. This reinforces the dislocation between the formal political processes that contribute to developing public policy and the informal experiences that give young people tacit knowledge of how socio-political compromise occurs.

But while young Canadians are facing pressures that push them out of the electoral realm, recent polling in Canada suggests that "the next Canada" is increasingly receptive to a more benign form of statism that rejects recent decades' policies to minimize state intervention and even increases in taxation (EKOS, 2013). So if "the next Canada" does not see its preferred policy choice in the electoral process, nor finds it within the parties they support, then even engaged youth may opt out of political participation. To understand the potential implications of this decline in engagement, one must imagine scenarios that could emerge after a generation of austerity, negative climate change effects, young people's socialization out of normal democratic party-politics, and youth's lack of exposure to the values that attend such institutions.

This is not to suggest that "youth" as a category of political participants are not already understood to be more prone to idealism, radicalism, or protest. But it sounds a note of caution: when youth are driven out of the voting booth by a lack of perceived options – and this amid pressing socioeconomic and climatic

conditions – then it seems prudent to think more carefully about whether these conditions are not just history repeating itself but are in fact the start of something much larger than currently foreseen.

The core question is why young Canadians continue to absent themselves from electoral participation and what this means for other forms of engagement. The process represents a kind of feedback loop. Young voters do not participate in democratic structures at normal levels and in traditional ways. This leads political parties, increasingly invested in new forms of micro-targeted politics-as-marketing, to continue to ignore young people's policy wishes. Instead, at the expense of younger cohorts, parties focus on the concerns of more stable and engaged voters in older demographics. If young people opt out of long-standing traditions of political dialogue and culture, as they age they face the possibility of never having been initiated into the "normal" practices of democratic citizenship. In effect, if young voters are not socialized into voting, they are unlikely to ever vote. And more broadly still, if individual citizens fail to see themselves as part of some kind of collective political endeavour, when we begin to consider these trends in the aggregate, it becomes much harder to ascertain what will replace the core notions of engagement, obligation, and collective action.

And if the steep decline in youth participation in the broader political culture is a real thing – currently there is a debate as to whether or not this is a terminal trend – then the policy remedies that a generation ago would have seemed reasonable will soon seem irretrievably mired in the failure of a generation to understand itself as possessing a set of common responsibilities under a nominal notion of a social contract. If social protest appears the only option and policy leaders' future remedies are literally incomprehensible – both morally and materially to a generation that no longer takes part – there is a possibility of a collapse into "demographic ghettoes." Should this occur, the policy levers of the central government would serve some segments of the population while leaving others out. This tension in democratic representation would further strain social cohesion through the complexity/chaos dimension.

Gerontocracy. The prospect of a divided electorate may matter the most. In the short term, at least, the hardening power of the "new gerontocracy" heralds a new orientation in politics and policymaking, further alienating youth who do not see their concerns represented in the current focus on healthcare spending and fiscal responsibility. This means that older Canadians, who have long tended to vote more conservatively, now appear much more likely to vote for the Conservative Party of Canada than any other party, whereas until 1993, they split their votes between the Liberal Party of Canada and Conservative Party of Canada. Because older Canadians are twice as likely as younger votes to vote, they are the focus of parties' efforts to win campaigns.

Trend lines are never immune to new conditions, but it would appear that the relationship between distinct age cohorts is a potential source of long-term socio-political dislocation for at least two reasons. First, young people's voting patterns continue to decline as they see their own distinct interests under-represented in

political and policy discourse. Taken out of context, this sounds like every young generation's lament, but it is a problem that is now increasingly augmented by the exigencies of electoral politics in Canada. The party system does not serve

the old and the young in the same ways. The trend has been an ever-diminished rate of electoral participation. Second, as youth absent themselves from the political arena, they turn to sub-political agency: localized, single-issue advocacy projects now enabled by broad digital connectivity. While a seemingly salutary development, this is at odds with older cohorts' continuing commitment to traditional forms of politics and constitutes the first wedge between these groups, particularly amplifying the divide when understood in light of the lack of a serious policy response to long-term climate change, infrastructure planning, austerity budgeting, and so on.

Inadequate knowledge transfer. A new era of disconcerting shifts would, by definition, be one in which the past 100 years of historical disruption and dislocation – surviving mass migration, world wars, genocide, and the like – would not serve as effective proxy for emerging conditions of birth, life, and death on a fast-changing Earth. This era would represent a future so utterly different from the past that adaptation would be suboptimal. It would also test citizens' abilities to draw lessons from historical experience that could assist with adaptation. Thus the Anthropocene epoch – from 2013 to 2050 and beyond – may one day be inscribed in human memory as one of disruption, dislocation, and human suffering on a scale that current language cannot properly evoke. Patterns of political and business language, it appears, may not be adequate to help audiences comprehend in a tangible sense what living through this time many mean for the human experience, for the human condition, and for Canadians of widely varying socioeconomic and sociocultural segmentation, demographic position, health status, and social and political affiliation.

Technologically mediated acceleration. Conventional wisdom states that the solution to time pressures and ever more distractedness is more information delivered more quickly to devices owned by citizen-consumers. The confluence of mobile technology and Big Data technologies is anticipated to be a boon to economic growth, increasing convenience and improving quality of life. Much depends, however, on how social processes evolve as more highly sophisticated technological capabilities flow into increasingly unequal societies. Much also depends on the extent to which granular citizen-consumer demographics are empowered by technology – or are driven by emotions transmitted through technology to instigate protest, rebellion, or grassroots activism. An additional consideration is the extent to which governments' technological prowess suppresses grassroots, technology-enabled protests that may not serve, or be seen to serve, the national interest.

Well-organized, technology-driven protest movements like Leadnow in Canada, GetUp.org in Australia, 38Degrees.org.uk in the UK – and Avaaz globally – have a potentially significant role to play in shifting the political consensus. Unlike the leaderless, bottom-up Occupy or Idle No More movements, these organizations

have sophisticated central leadership that provides citizens with strategic, impactful opportunities to influence the conversation. They are in the main led by

rational decision makers who run campaigns, act as media spokespeople, and use language that appeals to the emotions of their members, that is, those who write letters, share information on social media, attend protests, and meet with volunteers on the ground.

Population health. The deepened understanding of equity as a factor in population health outcomes (Marmot and Bell, 2012) has crystallized just as Canadian income distribution skews ever more towards the so-called "one percent" and "zero-point-one percent" of Canadians. Given this trend, and the fact that poverty and its ills have frequently provoked protest in the past, it is plausible that in coming years, an ever-growing proportion of protesters will suffer from poorer health and higher levels of chronic stress than the population as a whole. Not only that, but should health, education, and social service budgets be cut further, economically squeezed protesters will see their access to these services deteriorate just as they most need them, exacerbating the problem further. At the same time, chronic conditions such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes, depression, and anxiety are at record levels and constitute a massive strain on the health system's sustainability. Finally, as socioeconomic, environmental, and climatic conditions worsen, the incidence of chronic health conditions in the general population – and specifically among social protesters – is likely to grow. Thus, social protest dynamics may shift in alignment with evolving burdens of population disease.

A less equitable Canada could therefore cause protest to become less constructive and more divisive, making it far more challenging for potential allies in government, politics, and business to translate protesters' legitimate aspirations into pro-social policy.

Extreme weather and climate change. All weather is now influenced by climate change because the air surrounding our planet is moister and warmer than before (Trenberth, 2012). Arctic summer sea ice is shrinking much faster than predicted: the Arctic is expected to be ice-free for part of the summer within the next few years or perhaps a decade, rather than sometime between 2050 and 2100 as predicted by the 2007 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Meanwhile, predictions of the volatility of rising temperatures in the coming decades can be understood this way: in the contiguous United States, under present emissions trajectories, the ratio of record high maximum temperatures to record low minimum temperatures may increase from its current 2.3:1 to something in the order of 20:1 by 2050 and 50:1 by 2100 (Meehl et al., 2009). By way of comparison, the twentieth century began with a ratio of 1:1 – that is, one record high maximum temperature for every record low minimum temperature world. The explosive change in this ratio could well imply that in coming years, Canada will live through a lengthy period of economic volatility and extreme weather under broadly recessionary conditions. If so, a significant proportion of Canadians will be further squeezed by high unemployment and high

prices as well as by VUCA shifts in planetary system behaviour.

To put all of this into stark relief, until such time as…

i. the climate system achieves a new homeostasis (Hansen et. al., 2008),
ii. a new, stable shoreline is established, which would not occur “in any time frame that humanity can conceive” (Hansen, 2008), and
iii. society adjusts to circumstances imposed on it by increasingly scarce capital, constrained governments, and uncertain access to basic necessities, including food, medicine, and consumer packaged goods,

…citizen-consumers and decision makers alike may feel as if the laws of gravity have been suspended, as has any semblance of normality.

The character of protest

When considering how individual citizens might reorient their private sense of worry into a collective order of mobilization or protest, a series of considerations quickly emerge. First, we must determine whether the standard conception of rational interest applies. Do individual agents rationally seek their own interests through cooperative behaviour? If deep dislocations to the existing cultural order are afoot, then we can expect equally profound changes in how individual citizens draw on the socio-political and socio-cultural resources at their disposal. A loss of collective memory, a rise in volatile social and financial conditions, and a decline in the baseline assumptions of climatic normalcy suggest that individuals may lack even the most basic ability to discern their rational interests. Set against the question of what these dislocations mean for the character of political protest in the coming decades, it seems plausible to suggest that the rational character of protest will feature less significantly than the emotional and passionate.

Spanning a wide range of emotional responses – from feelings of solidarity and compassion to unthinking loyalty to ideas and symbols – group dynamics are better understood as emotional and passionate commitments rather than the dryly rational determination of one’s private self-interest. At the best of times, it is not clear how individuals translate their rational ideals into practical action. Certainly, agents under stress do not act deliberately (or deliberatively) or in accord with a priori principle. They act in alliance with their immediate fears, prejudices, and tribal affiliations – all the product of deeper psychological and psychosocial systems that emerge in periods of duress.

To think of political protest in emotional terms requires the differences between the emotional character of “protest” and political protest movements to be

carefully elaborated. This in turn requires a careful parsing of the negative emotions of mob justice and ugly nationalism versus the solidarity-based and empathetic core of cosmopolitan, fellow-feeling projects. Long-running debates attend the differences between the immediacy of emotional appeals and long-term affective commitments that keep principles alive for individuals when they are not active participants in the political realm. The study of group mobilization,

collective emotions, and their relationship to politics and policy remains hotly contested. The discussion here does not attempt to survey this literature except in the briefest of fashions and serves to highlight salient issues of interest in developing an account of what protest may look like under novel and complex conditions.

To accept the core premises outlined above – that large macro-economic, macro-political and macro-social change is underway – represents an acknowledgement that the uniquely emotional character of political protest is of central concern. If VUCA conditions help shape the manner in which protest will coalesce, the presumptive rationality of protest may well be overwhelmed by the conditions described above: the inability to discern one's interests under conditions of complexity, the dislocation from "normal" cultural cues, and by extension the wholesale dislocation of established bonds of common practice. Once the shared affiliations that comprise social relations come under pressure, the prospects for normal processes of collective action come under pressure as well.

The claim is treacherous to navigate. That emotions such as loyalty, group affiliation, and collective action matter for the formation and sustenance of political and social protest movements, is in the main well-established. These types of emotions are notably less transitory than the "hot" emotions of a mob seeking revenge, for example. A model of emotions as the central element of the formation and then the sustained power of social protest movements rests on a view of emotions as neither "raw feelings" that emerge from the inner wells of human psychophysiology nor strictly non-cognitive responses to external stimuli. Emotions that carry some degree of moral judgment (pride, shame, envy) are integral to broader, cognitive assessments of specific, empirical events. These judgments can ultimately lead to the political determination to act and even to collective movements that seek specific forms of political redress. It is this determination that marks their nature as intrinsically different from the unthinking pursuit of mob justice. That I or anyone in my situation might determine society's distribution of wealth to be unjust remains a dryly rational determination until the meaning of the injustice is understood as shameful or anger-inducing. That I feel this distribution to be an affront to basic equality or human dignity means that I may act with others who feel similarly to pursue collective protest or political remedy.

Many people disagree with this view of moral emotions – suggesting that the act of feeling and the act of judgment remain discrete processes and that emotions are only ever epiphenomenal to rational deliberation. Indeed, ample empirical evidence suggests that emotions play only a priming role and that true judgment is derived from the "causal-intentional psychology of the higher order brain" (Huebner, Dwyer, Hausner, 2009). On this account, the emotions are limited to motivating morally relevant actions –moral content is still determined by an independent scale, and is not somehow revealed by the emotion itself. Others suggest that we simply have not yet determined the "causal" path that emotions take, nor can we properly articulate the relationship between emotions, antecedent moral beliefs, and judgment/actions.

But if moral emotions can lead to collective political action, so too can negative emotional responses. Indeed the psychological literature has well-developed accounts of the capacity for emotions (most likely prevalent in social protest) to be transmitted as if by contagion between single agents until each one shares not only the same feeling but in some cases the same self-assessments of belonging to a collective group with specific (political) goals. More broadly, the psychological literature proposes an array of innate responses to various external conditions: we naturally draw in-group/out-group distinctions, for example. The capacity is obvious, then, for protest to turn ugly, or for protesters' sentiments to spread without any obvious mechanism. The point is to suggest that some of the baseline processes for social-protest formation are inevitably tied up in the seemingly private realm of emotions.

That a protest movement may coalesce around unfocused fears and worries or emerge from some generalized sense of discontent should be clear. Less obvious, perhaps, is the power of emotions to draw otherwise incompatible conceptions of self-interest under the same protest "umbrella" and for this to occur without any necessary or explicit elaboration of what in particular disparate participants actually seek through their collective behaviour. (The problem, of course, is that emotions that function in this sustained fashion – typically described as affective emotions – may lack the direction and focus necessary for policy accommodation and deliberation of the sort we now view as normal.)

A final determination about emotion's central role in protest concerns the relationship between private feelings and the socio-political standards that mark those feelings as legitimate. It should be clear that individuals are not able to discern whether a given state of affairs is shameful without some conception of what society generally understands as shame-worthy. Presumably, the same applies to judgments about equality and injustice. Nor can it be assumed that the anger and confusion of a protest movement can spread without reference to eliciting conditions. The Idle No More, Anonymous, and Occupy movements did not emerge, wholly formed, from nowhere. But putting aside the specific concern for the relationship between moral judgment and emotion, it is at least clear that

as one of the sources of protest politics, strong emotions – either positive or negative – lead us to some general conclusions about what role emotions might play under the pressing new conditions identified above. But as disparate socio-economic and demographic sub-groups interpret the core values of Canadian society increasingly differently, the normal assumptions of what counts as legitimate anger or pride come under pressure. The contest for political legitimacy becomes ever more muddled and contentious.

This fracturing of values has led to a secondary concern related to political communication – the now near-constant process that seeks to transform the individual citizen into a political consumer through micro-targeting tools. Although the numbers cannot be confirmed directly, the last decade of federal spending on public opinion research has declined by a factor of 15, the same order of increase as has been seen in communication budgets. The point is crude but obvious: the federal government sees less merit in consulting the public about its policy direction than in managing public expectations. More broadly, this is the culmination of a forty-year process of transforming political allegiance from the public good to a contest between political parties' polarized conceptions of that good. Taken together with the central presumption that politics will be an increasingly emotion-laden process, the shift away from policy and into the political "tribalism" of a polarized electorate is far more significant than at any point in the recent past. The result has been the transformation of political policy-making into something resembling a continuous appeal to a political "lifestyle" or "brand" that treats the citizen primarily as a passive consumer limited to selecting options rather than driving policy change. The same complaint is now heard internally in Canada's major political parties.

Policy development and debate is increasingly replaced by the very focused determination to win every last vote. This process forces each citizen to engage – if citizens are still willing – to develop party affiliations that are much more tribal and no longer cosmopolitan in scope. This kind of branding relies – subtly perhaps – on the ability to understand citizens as the consumers of politics. Thus macro conditions of austerity and uncertainty mean that policy options are more limited in scope. The claim here is that policy planning can rely on little from recent decades of economic progress that might serve as a future guide for dealing with, for example, severe climate change. In the same way, the kinds of dominant cultural narratives that inform public engagement with the policy process will, under VUCA conditions, become less relevant to engaging the public politically. The same historical patterns of public involvement – including protest movements – will lack historical touchstones as to what constitutes "normal" politics and so "the public" will draw on very different menus of resources and behaviours to elicit both personal and collective senses of safety and well-being.

Will protest movements be rooted in deep commitments to social equity? Will they emerge out of rational self-interest? At worst, conditions of volatility drive fear, a deeply personal – and emotional – motivation for action. Taken in combination with the lack of a common policy language that could inform the public of its collective interest qua common good, there is increasingly little to which policy leadership can appeal, except the character of the emotional attachment that might be induced.

As macro conditions worsen, the degree to which "pure" policy debate occurs will be more proscribed in scope. The narratives drawn upon to motivate and sustain collective action will be far more divisive and far less collectively oriented than in the past. The era of nation-building – the "Canadian century," in the parlance of a different time – will have been replaced by the increasingly discordant demands of smaller groups of protestors, driven by their own fears – and hopefully their more cosmopolitan sentiments – as conditions on the ground enter a period of upheaval.

Calming the storm

Broad macro forces will continue to pressurize Canadian society for the foreseeable future, and will do so in a volatile, uncertain, chaotic/complex, and ambiguous manner. The question is what can be done to calm the storm, so that a foundation, even if not widespread, can be laid for Canadians to be as mutually supportive as possible. Social stability will depend on various actors taking steps to spread messages of social cohesion amid conditions of increasing social distress. It will depend on innovation that meets Canadians' basic material needs during a fast-changing century that will upend expectations of normalcy.

Governments should take a longer-term view about ways to maintain social stability, while signalling impending socioeconomic change to citizens. Governments should communicate to the public in a way that does not impinge on consumer confidence or undermine the public's faith in governments' ability to ensure order under converging stressors. They must navigate the complex socio-political dynamics that may emerge if increasingly uncertain constituents lean towards wanting peace and order over good government. They should evaluate the risks of moving towards a platform weighted towards jingoistic patriotism to hold the centre, should consider how to hold multiple centres as pressures mount on society, and should encourage Canadians to hold onto their core values of tolerance, dialogue, mutual respect, and respect for diversity.

Businesses should more granularly and deeply evaluate their social role as socioeconomic change further weakens middle-income Canadians' purchasing power. Knowing that product innovation can encourage pro-social behaviour

while building new avenues for profit, they should innovate products, services, and solutions for times of increasing austerity, giving citizen-consumers reasons to come together and adapt to shifting socioeconomic and environmental conditions. Businesses should also explore how to help customers and clients face difficult times ahead through communications that emphasize resource

sharing. Furthermore, businesses should play an increasingly prominent role in helping Canadians address hunger, poverty, homelessness, and issues of physical and mental health.

Consumer brands, likewise, should carefully evaluate how they communicate sociocultural values – particularly values surrounding social cohesion – and attach them to brand-building efforts that drive market share. They must remain cognizant that many "heritage" brands have higher trust ratings than do governments, given citizen-consumers' positive and longstanding emotional associations with the brand experience. In concert with governments, they should harness consumer-brand attributes to help steward population-health outcomes. They should also work independently among coalitions of corporate partners to meet social aims through brands, using brands as an element of trust-building within and between generations. Brands should follow the lead of Keith Weed, chief marketing and communication officer of Unilever, who said in *Forbes* (Dan, 2012):

> "We look at the world through a lens, which we call VUCA, which stands for 'Volatile, Unstable, Complex, and Ambiguous.' So you can say, 'It's a very tough world,' or you can say, 'It's a world that's changing fast, and we can help consumers navigate through it.' Two-and-a-half billion more people will be added to the planet between now and 2050, of which 2 billion will be added in developing countries. The digital revolution, the shift in consumer spending, all this suggests that companies have to reinvent the way they do business."

In an interview in *The Globe and Mail* (Pitts, 2013), Paul Polman, the chief executive officer of Unilever, spoke to the most essential socio-political angle: "Capitalism is in crisis and increasingly social cohesion will be the biggest challenge."

Citizen-consumers should navigate the question of responsible citizenship as social divisions mount, altering post-war formulations of Canadian identity and potentially affecting inclusiveness, diversity, and other important values. Since strong trends are pushing people away from responsible citizenship, citizen-consumers should coordinate and launch projects that have value to communities and are non-partisan, scalable, and, where possible, enabled by

accessible open-source technology. They should encourage politicians to support initiatives that enable food and health systems to better adapt to change.

Citizen-consumers should engage in efforts to build community resilience by

- becoming involved in local food, agriculture, and food-security initiatives;
- teaching children how environmental shifts are changing the Earth and how to understand and cope with these shifts in the local environs;
- developing sharing initiatives, especially related to tools and equipment that can be shared as well as to practical skills that can be taught on a volunteer basis;
- educating communities about practical lessons that can help to address climate shifts in the context of economic change; and
- understanding the public-health consequences of accelerating climate change and exploring small-scale, local initiatives that can provide a semblance of a response to these changes.

If they are able to afford it, they should where practicable act as agile citizen-consumers who champion innovative products that enable individuals and communities to access and conserve water and energy.

These by no means represent an exhaustive list of the steps that could or should be undertaken to mitigate the societal pressures that will mount during the twenty-first century. Rather, the goal is to initiate a dialogue on societal resilience, climate adaptation, responsible governance and citizenship, business opportunity and adaptability, and corporate social responsibility in the VUCA era (Khanna, 2012).

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