

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

CONSERVATIVES IN CRISIS

Party members' rejection of a motion to recognize the reality of climate change may come back to haunt O'Toole, and the rest of the Tories, for a number of reasons

OPINION

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Politics today plays out like an episode of *Survivor*. Often, it's about casting a ballot against, rather than for, something or someone. Citizens vote parties off the island because of leadership or policy failures.

The federal Conservatives should take note.

In the past 40 years, there have been only two winning Conservative franchises: the Brian Mulroney and the Stephen Harper approaches to victory.

Mr. Mulroney presented an ambitious, big-tent vision for his party that included a coalition of progressives, social conservatives and supporters from across Canada. The successful Harper franchise, conversely, was built on the "base plus" model. Mr. Harper consolidated the party base of Westerners and social/fiscal conservatives, and then built out a coalition that included groups such as soccer moms and new Canadians. It was less about an ambitious, broad movement and more about the pragmatic building of blocks of voters into a winning coalition.

The selection of Erin O'Toole as Leader of the Conservative Party and the recent policy convention represented a collision of these two competing franchises. Is the Conservative Party under Mr. O'Toole a new big Conservative tent, or will it be a party focused on its base?

If one listened to Mr. O'Toole's address to his party and the country last month, one would have thought that he was focused on a bigger tent. He called for a new "grand Conservative coalition," that was serious about the environment and attracted support from across the country — ranging from small-business owners to union members.

His call to action was not fully derailed, but was hurt, by the defeat of a motion to add the words "we recognize that climate change is real" to the Conservative Party's policy. The repudiation of those seven words may come to haunt the party for a number of reasons.

First, the optics could not be worse for Mr. O'Toole. Because the defeat was portrayed as being delivered at the hands of members from Western Canada and the anti-abortion group Cam-

paign Life Coalition, the setback effectively delivers to the other major parties fodder for attack ads, and paints the Conservative Party as divided. For Mr. O'Toole to challenge Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the first step will be to remake party unity. Parties that are divided or that do not support their leader are rarely given a mandate to govern by voters.

The challenge facing Mr. O'Toole is that his parliamentary party — that is, his colleagues in his House of Commons caucus and his rank-and-file members — are more right-wing than average Canadian Conservative voters, and even further to the right than the pragmatic centrist citizens Mr. O'Toole needs to win for him to form a government.

Second, the defeated climate-change motion ensures the party will be a non-starter in Quebec and parts of British Columbia — two key constituencies needed for a Conservative majority. Mr.

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O'Toole might himself say all the right things, but the rejected motion may be a drag on his appeal.

Recognizing climate change is a very low bar for any mainstream political party. Adoption of the motion would have allowed the O'Toole Conservatives to still chart an environmental policy path different from the Liberals while making both himself and his party look more relevant. The research also suggests that once the COVID-19 pandemic is under control, issues such as the environment — which pre-pandemic was the top issue of concern — will regain importance.

To paraphrase Wayne Gretzky, Mr. O'Toole's strategy was to get the Conservatives, from a policy perspective, to skate to where the puck is going, not where it has been. Defeating the motion was an own goal.

Third, when one tracks over time the proportion of Canadians who would consider voting Conservative, it is clear that a major-

ity win would not be in the cards if an election were held today. Currently, about four in 10 Canadians (38 per cent) are open to voting Conservative, compared with more than one in two (52 per cent) who are open to voting Liberal. At 38 per cent, every Canadian thinking about supporting the Conservatives would have to vote for them if the party is to form a majority government. The current configuration of the Conservative tent is mathematically unable to produce a majority win, and Mr. O'Toole's efforts to build a new coalition show that he knows it.

Fourth, winning parties are driven by a discipline of power. Here, party members put unity and winning on a pedestal above dogmatic policy. The Liberal Party's coalition is a diverse amalgam of progressives, Blue Liberals who are fiscally minded and voters who have been disappointed with the Conservatives. They stay in the Liberal tent because they realize that it is better to be in power than to be out of power.

The rejection of the environmental motion suggests rank-and-file Conservatives believe a principled policy stand is more important than having a chance to govern.

The big question? What would they really prefer: an imperfect Conservative government led by Mr. O'Toole or a hostile Liberal government led by Mr. Trudeau?

Here is one other observation about campaigns: Ask yourself who the election is about and they will be the loser.

In 2004, it was about Stephen Harper and Canadians being uncomfortable about having a Conservative government. In 2006, it was about Paul Martin and the advertising and sponsorship controversy. In 2008, it was about Stéphane Dion's Green Shift. In 2011, it was about Michael Ignatieff as a person just visiting Canada. In 2015, it was about Mr. Harper leading a tired Conservative government. In 2019, it was about both Justin Trudeau and Andrew Scheer — which led to a tie in the popular vote.

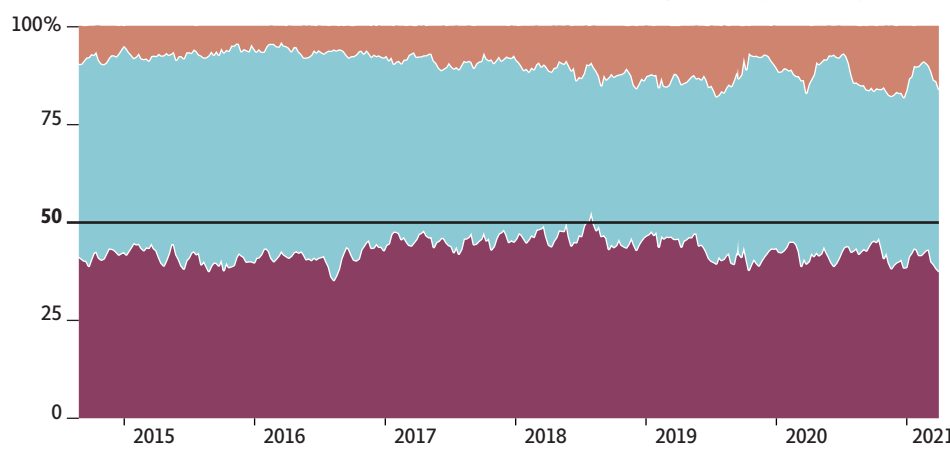
Erin O'Toole has to hope that the next election is not about him and his party's belief in climate change. That will likely be the Liberal game plan.

Whether it results in Mr. O'Toole being voted off the island remains to be seen.

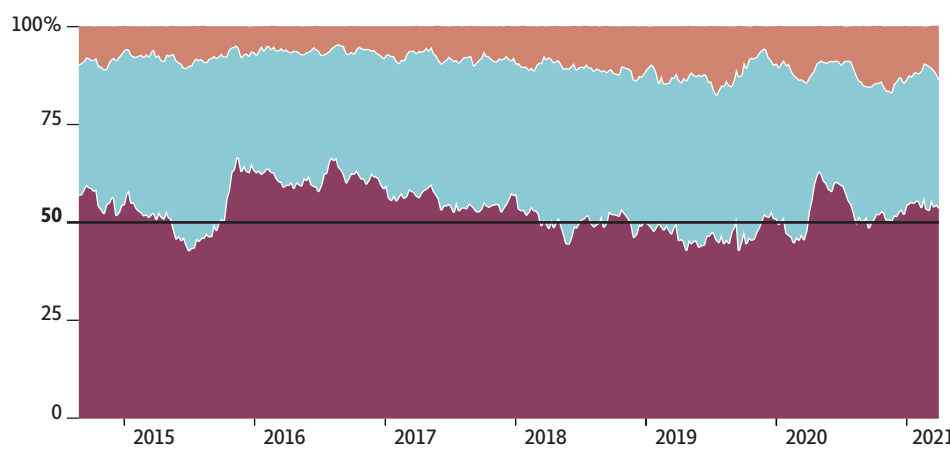
This column is based on longitudinal Nanos tracking of RDD (land- and cell-lines) random telephone interviews, ending April 2, 2021. The last wave of 1,107 Canadians is accurate 2.9 percentage points, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20.

MURAT YÜKSELIR / THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: NANOS RESEARCH

WOULD YOU VOTE CONSERVATIVE?



WOULD YOU VOTE LIBERAL?



Political parties are setting up female candidates to fail

DONNA DASKO

OPINION

Ontario senator, former pollster and co-founder of Equal Voice, an organization that promotes greater representation of women in politics.

As Canadians remain focused on day-to-day life in a pandemic, the nominations that will determine the face of Canada's next Parliament are proceeding under the public's radar. The federal parties like nominating under the radar. They work hard to keep it that way.

Federal political parties, using processes they set for themselves, are deciding today who will decide how Canada rebuilds after COVID-19. Can we be confident that women will reach parity with men in the next Parliament? Women now hold 30 per cent of seats in our House of Commons, giving Canada a ranking of 52nd in the world. We have a long way to go.

Our experience with COVID-19 adds urgency to increasing the representation of women, in all their diversity. Many of the challenges we face have their roots in long-standing family and work realities that are gendered and racialized.

Looming particularly large are the structural faults laid bare by this scourge, including women's labour-force participation, the need for accessible and affordable child care, reform of the care

sector, enhanced income security, overall preparedness and sustainability.

A rare plus of Canada's efforts to manage COVID-19 is that we have seen women successfully operate in top leadership positions: a federal finance minister, federal and provincial health ministers, heads of public-health agencies, medical professionals and experts. What explains the marked underrepresentation of women in the House of Commons?

We should make no mistake about the source of this country's electoral gender gap. We cannot blame women for not stepping forward, since there is no shortage of women wanting to run. In 2019, 736 women ran for office federally, enough to fill the House of Commons twice over.

And we cannot blame the voters either, since academic research and public opinion surveys have shown that Canadians are consistently as willing to vote for women as they are for men.

So "blaming the victim" and "electability" are off the table as explanations.

A key source of Canada's electoral gender gap is party gatekeeping. One of the few things federal political parties agree on is that they must be self-governing. In a perfect example of conflict of interest, their alignment on this issue has blocked any parliamentary action to reform nominations processes.

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House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, in a wide study of women's representation in electoral politics, tepidly "observed" (it did not "recommend") that it "encourages registered parties to set voluntary quotas for the percentage of female candidates they field in federal elections and to publicly report on their efforts to meet these quotas after every federal election."

Party processes are not easily

accessible by the public. Research suggests that the Liberals, NDP and Greens require a diversity search committee as part of candidate nominations; it appears that the Conservatives do not. There are no voluntary quotas, and there is no voluntary transparency on the recruitment and nomination of women, as the Commons committee "encouraged."

As a result of relentless scrutiny and advocacy by women over decades, national parties have slowly increased the number of women nominated.

The women who are nominated, however, are elected less than men. In 2019, 39.3 per cent of Liberal nominations went to women, but in the election, just 31.1 per cent of Liberal MPs elected were women. The Conservatives nominated 32 per cent women but only 18.2 per cent of Conservative MPs who won seats were women; the NDP nominated 48.5 per cent women and had 37.5 per cent elected; the Greens nominated 46.1 per cent women and had 66.7 per cent elected.

Professors Melanee Thomas and Marc André Bodet argue, using data from the 2004 to 2011 federal elections, that women are more likely to be nominated by a party in ridings that party cannot win. Women are disproportionately nominated in other party's strongholds, not those of their own party.

After the 2019 election, the CBC quoted Prof. Thomas, commenting on its report that for ev-

ery 100 women running, 16 won, while for every 100 men running, 29 won: "The issue is that parties consistently across the board keep nominating women in places where they can't win."

It is time to shed some light, indeed shine a spotlight, on nominations. Canadians have every reason to want better information, transparency and financial accountability through existing mechanisms under the Canada Elections Act and the Chief Electoral Officer.

Candidates should be required to disclose their sex/gender on their nomination paper. (Currently this is not mandatory, and this information is not included in the List of Confirmed Candidates published by Elections Canada.) Canada should adopt a definition of "stronghold riding," (for instance, ridings in which a party has won in two previous elections) and should report on results in stronghold ridings by sex/gender. We should also change our political financing rules to incentivize or sanction the parties to achieve gender equity.

Canadians have every reason to want their federal parties to eliminate the gender gap in nominations and results. Given the historic reluctance of the parties in the Commons to increase public scrutiny of their operations, these modest initiatives could be launched in the Senate, thereby giving Canadians a forum to study the proposals and express their views.