

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

# THE TRUE NORTH POLARIZED AND ANGRY

More than three in 10 Canadians say they like nothing about either the Liberal or Tory leaders – that should be a wakeup call

OPINION

Nik Nanos is the chief data scientist at Nanos Research, a global fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington and the official pollster for The Globe and Mail and CTV News.

Who do you dislike least? That sums up our current political environment.

Canada was once heralded as an outlier in a world gripped by controversial politicians such as former U.S. president Donald Trump, Brexititeer Nigel Farage and France's Marine Le Pen. Back in 2015, the election of Justin Trudeau and his "sunny ways" government set the country apart on the international stage.

Fast forward to 2022 and we have fully joined the club of angry, polarized countries.

In a new national survey for The Globe and Mail, Canadians are clearly grumpy about the two main contenders for prime minister. The fact that more than three in 10 say they like nothing about either the Liberal or Conservative leaders should serve as a wakeup call.

The Nanos survey allowed Canadians to say whatever they wanted in terms of their positive and negative perceptions of Mr. Trudeau and the newly elected Tory Leader Pierre Poilievre.

When asked what positive things came to mind when thinking of Mr. Trudeau, the top responses included nothing (31 per cent), that he did a good job during the pandemic (12 per cent), his social policies (12 per cent), his representation of Canada internationally (8 per cent), his hair/looks (7 per cent), the views that he cares about Canada (6 per cent) and that he is doing a good job (5 per cent). When asked about the negative things associated with Mr. Trudeau, 16 per cent said "too much spending."

Meanwhile, more than four in 10 (41 per cent) said there was nothing they liked about Mr. Poilievre. On the other hand, 6 per cent said he's someone who works for and stands up for Canadians, 6 per cent thought he was a good speaker and 5 per cent called him bright or intelligent. As far as negatives, 22 per cent called him "too right wing."

In a head-to-head match-up against Mr. Poilievre, Mr. Trudeau comes out on top as preferred prime minister (46 per cent compared with 30 per cent for Mr. Poilievre) – largely as a coalescing choice for progressive voters. But when stacked up with all the federal party leaders it is very narrow race between the two.

In a recent survey for Bloom-

berg News, although the two are tied on managing the economy, Mr. Poilievre outscores Mr. Trudeau as to whom people would trust to control the rising cost of living. Considering the rising cost of living is a top issue of concern for Canadians, Liberals should not take those positive Poilievre numbers lightly.

The Tories become more competitive the longer the Liberals are in power as government fatigue creeps in. Right now, the

overall Liberal Party brand is weaker, having been thumped in provincial elections in Ontario and Quebec, dropping to the mid-teens of provincial support.

The past winning formula of blue Liberals and progressive Conservatives vying for the mushy middle to win a majority government is, to paraphrase the Monty Python parrot sketch "no more; it has ceased to be."

Polarization has always been a part of the political landscape.

With Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Poilievre leading their parties, it has come into sharper focus. After all, the last two national elections had outcomes gripped in indecision. The party with the greatest number of seats lost the national popular vote. With winning a parliamentary majority out of reach, the parties reverted to narrowcasting to small pockets of voters and demonizing most Canadians who disagreed with them.

Pandemic politics had one party dismissing anyone who questioned strict lockdowns (the Liberals) and another party implying that Canada was no longer a land with freedoms (the Conservatives). The reality is that both parties went too far in their messaging and sought to polarize voters and fire up their core supporters.

While leaders and their parties look to score political points, Canadians remain worried about the future.

Asked which words they would use to describe the federal government in Ottawa (not the Liberals specifically, but the government in general), the top two feelings are pessimism (31 per cent) and anger (23 per cent), followed by satisfaction (17 per cent) and disinterest (13 per cent) and optimism (12 per cent). People in the Prairies are the angriest (36 per cent), but there is an underlying tone of negativity across the country.

A paltry 11 per cent of people believe the next generation will have a higher standard of living, while 62 per cent of Canadians say they'll face a lower standard of living. In the short term, according to weekly tracking by Nanos for Bloomberg News, Canadians are four times more likely to think the economy will get weaker rather than stronger in the next six months.

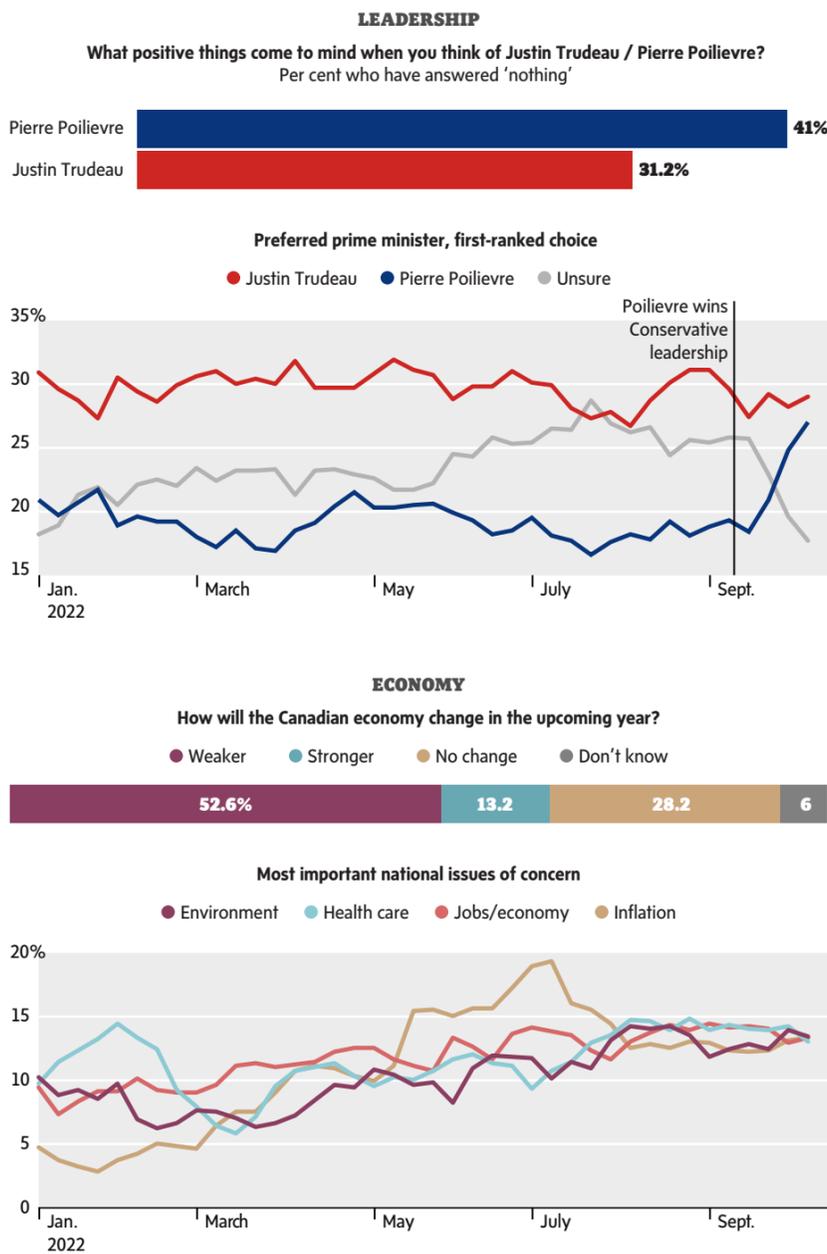
It's like everything is going wrong. People are concerned about the environment in the wake of the devastating storm in Atlantic Canada, the economy with a possible global recession, inflation with the rising cost of food and energy, and health care as hospitals and emergency rooms buckle under stress.

While this is happening, the strategy of the Liberals and Conservatives looks the same – both have a tepid interest in appealing to a majority of voters but have a burning desire to divide, cajole and fire up their ideological bases.

This polarization, once it grips countries, leads to gridlock, division and an overall decay in the confidence of our democratic institutions. When voters can't pay the bills and politicians fail to focus on solutions, the social contract which makes for a healthy society is damaged. The promise of democracy is to create a stable, safe and respectful space for people to live. It is the hope, not the guarantee, that future generations have a chance to improve their quality of life.

Today's political climate means voters are forced to choose who they dislike least, not who can build a better country and a brighter future.

## Canadians on leadership and the economy



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

SECRET CANADA

## Ottawa should establish a declassification process for historical documents

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OPINION

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The Information Commissioner of Canada has sounded the alarm: The Access to Information Act is in crisis.

Various government departments have been flooded with requests by Canadians citing their right to information – with most met by significant delays. The Commissioner's Office received a record number of complaints last year. The Globe and Mail has launched an investigation, and the House of Commons standing committee on access to information, privacy and ethics has said

that it has the problem in its sights.

Yet, while much attention is being directed at the lack of transparency surrounding current government records, another one of the act's major failings is that it makes no allowance for historical research. It does not recognize that most decades-old documents, once deservedly kept secret, can be released without doing any harm at all to the government or to Canadians.

Historical records, and the accounts that are written based on them, are a vital way for Canadians to understand their world as it exists now. But these important parts of Canada's past are being kept hidden by an act of Parliament so restrictive that researchers cannot do their legitimate work. The Access to Information Act needs to be reformed.

Our allies offer a way forward, particularly our major partners in the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network. They see the value in sharing parts of their intelligence agencies' history with their citizens. The websites of the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency in the United States contain millions of declassified documents and histories detailing analyses, policies and operations. Researchers can easily download the records of the Security Service, or MI5, from the National Archives of the United Kingdom.

But our allies' approach to documents goes well beyond declassification. In Britain, MI5, MI6

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(the Secret Intelligence Service), GCHQ (the signals intelligence agency) and the Joint Intelligence Committee have all authorized books, written by professional historians, to detail their past. The Australians, for their part, have sponsored major histories of their foreign and domestic intelligence organizations.

In Canada, the situation is exactly the opposite. The vast majority of the country's national security and intelligence historical records, and many of the records related to foreign and defence policy, are inaccessible. Canada has no workable system to declassify documents that are no longer sensitive.

Instead, all records related to Canada's national security and intelligence are doomed to stay secret unless a researcher laboriously requests specific documents under the Access to Information Act. Even then, such requests are treated as slowly and meticulously as those pertaining to today's secret documents – as if files more than half a century old might reveal something about the Canadian government's policies and actions in 2022.

The result is an embarrassing and wasteful system in which the federal government frequently makes confusing and contradictory decisions about the information it chooses to release.

Too often, Access to Information Act requests for historical records are neglected because of limited resources in the bureaucracy, leading to long delays or no disclosure at all, and a costly follow-up investigation by the Information Commissioner's office. Everyone loses in this battle: the government, the requester and all Canadians.

Ottawa should establish a declassification framework, separate from the overtaxed Access to Information Act, that would pro-

actively and consistently identify which types of historical documents can reasonably be made available to the public. This is not difficult: We can borrow ideas directly from our closest allies, which offer clear and public explanations about what information will be released and when.

Such an organized approach to declassification would be much less expensive to operate than the current access regime, and it would also lighten the bureaucracy's request burden. But perhaps more crucially, reforms to disclose more information about Canada's national security and intelligence history will help Canadians better understand the threats that have faced their country and how the government seeks to protect us.

Declassification is an opportunity to strengthen our national security institutions and to build Canadians' trust in them. It is also an opportunity to open up critical chapters of Canada's history.

Help us investigate Canada's broken freedom-of-information regimes. We're looking to speak with people who use and interact with the system at all levels of government. Are you a current or former FOI analyst? A public servant? A citizen, academic, researcher or advocate who has filed requests? Are you a current or former appeals adjudicator? A lawyer with experience in this area of law? We want to talk to you. You can get in touch with us at [secretcanada@globeandmail.com](mailto:secretcanada@globeandmail.com).