

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

FOOD PRICE NUMBERS ARE UNAPPETIZING

Survey suggests the majority of Canadians are buying less expensive items, with younger people most likely to feel the pressure

OPINION

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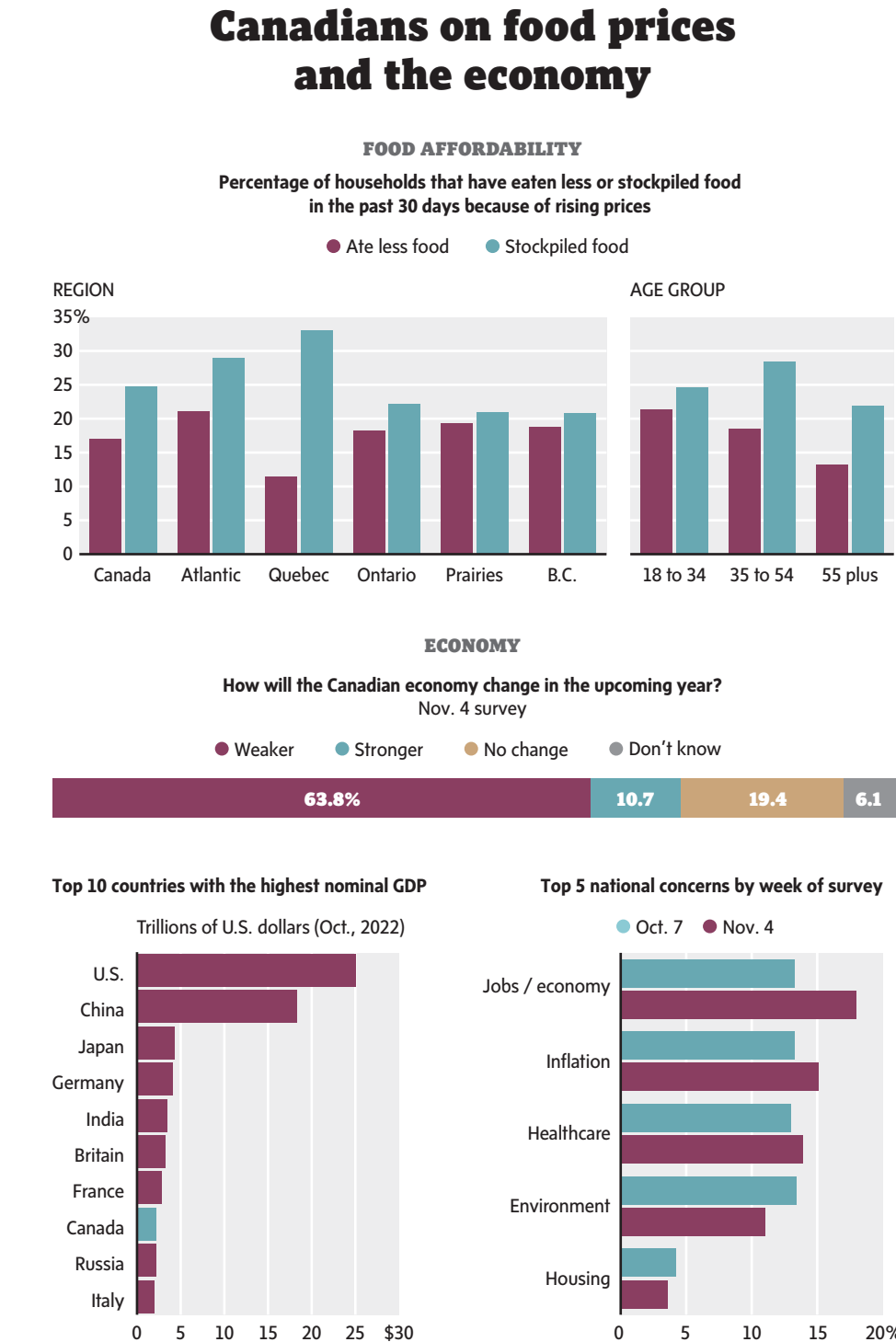
Canadians have been left bruised by a pandemic that has disrupted their lives. Now some are having difficulty putting food on the table.

Food affordability is on the political menu and the numbers are unappetizing. A new survey for CTV News suggests that six in 10 Canadians (61 per cent) report buying less expensive food, 25 per cent are stockpiling food and 17 per cent report eating less because of the price of food. What is behind the numbers is even less appetizing. Younger people are most likely to feel the pressure. Only 20 per cent of those between the ages of 18 to 34 report nothing has changed compared with 37 per cent of individuals over 55 years of age. Quebecers are most likely to report stockpiling food, while women are more likely than men to say they are buying less expensive food.

The level of changes in behaviour are very much income-based, with the less financially fortunate struggling the most. Of households with an income of \$100,000 or more, about 10 per cent reported eating less food. For those with a household income of less than \$60,000, more than 30 per cent reported eating less.

Canadians self-reporting as disabled were more likely to report eating less (27 per cent), compared with those without a disability (16 per cent). Racialized individuals also had a higher likelihood of reporting eating less because of the price of food, but the percentages were within the margin of error compared with non-racialized Canadians.

This is unpalatable for a nation that claims to be among the best places in the world to live. Even with our small population compared with other major economies, Canada is a Group of Seven member country and has the 10th-largest nominal GDP, according to the International Monetary Fund. We have a social safety net of programs to help those less fortunate and we generally pride ourselves on being a great place to live. When people struggle to pay for food, elected officials and pol-



MURAT YÜKSELİR / THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: NANOS RESEARCH; INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

icy makers should take notice.

At the outset of the pandemic, Canadians hoarded things such as yeast, flour and toilet paper. Today the question isn't whether we can get what we want, it's whether we can afford what we want.

As incredible as it sounds, the pandemic, which coincided with

a period of major disruption and risk, may turn out to be considered "the good old days." Major government stimulus, and with direct support, heralded a period during which many Canadians reported that their personal finances were better off than before the pandemic. Now, concerns about

issues such as jobs, the economy and inflation are on the rise nationwide.

Anxiety about putting food on the table should concern our political leaders, because voters will be looking to dole out punishment.

At the top of the list may be

food retailers. It doesn't help when companies such as Loblaw's show their profits jumping significantly. Canadians expect rising costs to be passed on to the consumer – but not an extra markup tagged onto food prices. Food retailers perceived as profiteering on the backs of their customers for essentials like food may end up paying a price. The sector is still dealing with the fallout from a bread price-fixing scandal in 2019, with lawsuits going before the courts.

Where consumer anger leads, expect politicians to follow. For both the Liberals and the Conservatives, a consumer agenda scrutinizing the price of food falls well within their wheelhouse. For the Liberals, it fits within their progressive agenda of helping those at risk. For the Conservatives, it falls within their populist vision of fighting for the average Canadian against big business interests.

Imagine waking up every day and thinking that you and your family might have to eat less. This is not a normal situation for a country as rich as Canada and it sows the seeds of discontent.

Perhaps relatedly, at a time when some people are struggling to pay for groceries and most are bracing for a recession, Canadians rate the health of our democracy a D-plus. A new survey for The Globe and Mail shows that people score the health of our democracy a 5.7 out of 10.

With a D-plus student, we would be looking to have an immediate intervention to avoid a possible failure. Those who give the health of our democracy failing marks put the blame clearly on the current government (20 per cent), worry about freedoms/rights being threatened (19 per cent) and believe we need electoral reform (12 per cent). Canadians who believe our democracy is healthy assert things are fine (27 per cent), elections are well-run (16 per cent) and see the rise of right-wing beliefs as a positive (11 per cent).

There is no easy solution to our current situation.

We need our leaders to focus on making sure that, as a country, we create an economic environment where people can pay their bills, afford groceries and put a roof over their head. Failure on those fronts, and Canadians will be looking for politicians to pay the price.

We must remember hockey belongs to those who play it

KEN DRYDEN

OPINION

Author and former NHL goaltender who served as an MP from 2004 until 2011, and as a cabinet minister. His latest book is *The Series: What I Remember, What It Felt Like, What It Feels Like Now*.

Dear members of Hockey Canada, You're going to be doing something very important in the next few weeks. You'll be setting a new direction for hockey in Canada.

You know how important that is. You've likely been involved in hockey almost all your life. When you were five years old and playing on the street with the kids in the neighbourhood. Your first sweater. Your first team. The NHL players and teams you lived and died with. Your first NHL game. All the moments with your teammates: the big wins, big losses, big hopes. Great friendships. The things you learned about sportsmanship and teamwork, the feelings that are still deep inside you. Even when you didn't make it to the top, still you kept playing.

Then, to your surprise, as a coach or parent, or just as someone around the game, you discovered the satisfaction of seeing others play, learning, loving what they're doing. And now, having done all this, you're a member of Hockey Canada. Those in your town or city, province or territory trust you, they have put in your hands not just the well-being of the game, but of their kids. Hundreds of thousands of them, across the country, boys and girls, women and men, able-bodied and not. Like you, like me, whether Sidney Crosby, Marie-Philip Poulin, Sarah Fillier, Connor McDavid or that five-year-old



Kids play pond hockey with a tennis ball on Settle Lake in Dartmouth, N.S. SANDOR FIZLI/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

kid – all of them *players*.

Most Canadians don't even know what you do. They know the name "Hockey Canada" from the Olympics, World Championships and World Juniors. They assume you have something to do with "the state of the game" in this country – how we're doing, not just in gold medals won but in the way we play, in the health and safety of the game. In who plays. And, in a game we created, in a time when difference is everywhere and hockey offers common ground for so many, how

important it is that no matter the obstacles – age, gender, ethnicity, cost, geographic location, even skill – everybody who wants to play has the chance to play. Canadians want to know that somebody is looking out for this game. Your name is "Hockey Canada." It must be you.

You know what happened when the scandals hit involving the World Junior players, and what you as Hockey Canada did and didn't do. How everybody turned on you. How stunned you seemed. The criticism was unre-

lenting, and it came from everywhere, as if you were somehow this lightning rod for everything that was wrong with the game. The public, governments, the media, corporate sponsors, everybody piling on. How unfair that seemed to you. And the more you reacted this way, the more you got hammered. You seemed never to get it.

I hope you get it now. It's crucial that you do. You are important in your community. Our Olympic, national and junior teams are a big deal, and an even

bigger deal are the vast majority of players who will never wear a sweater with the name "Canada" on it. You're important because hockey matters a lot to a lot of people. Because it is part of our history, part of our pleasure, part of our pride. Part of us. So when something big goes wrong, it matters to us. Really matters. You *have* to remember that.

You have a big job ahead of you. You have many corporate and administrative responsibilities, but first of all, most of all, it is your responsibility to see that hockey, in Canada, is healthy and strong, in every way. And in a few weeks it is your duty to choose the best people to ensure that this happens. Not just those who knock on your door, the *best* people, seek them out, go after them. The public, government, media, corporate community – everyone – is watching. And as you're doing this, keep this in mind, too:

Hockey doesn't belong to you. It doesn't belong to the Minister of Sport, or the Government of Canada. It doesn't belong to the NHL, IIHF, the junior leagues, minor hockey associations, their administrators, officials or coaches. Hockey belongs to those who play it. To *everyone* who plays it. We hear often now people in hockey talk about hockey as "our game." I think it's their way of trying to sound inclusive, as if they're being generous and thoughtful in sharing it with others. But hockey isn't theirs to share. It's hockey that's being shared with them. With all of us. In these next few weeks, you need to remember this and to remember it all the weeks after. Choose as your new Hockey Canada board, your new chair, CEO and executive, people who know this, believe this, never forget this and embody this.

Good luck.