

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

A VULNERABLE SPOT

Canadians are showing their dissatisfaction with the Trudeau Liberals after seven years in power, but there’s bad news for Poilievre and the Conservatives, too

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.

It might have felt like the first “normal” holiday season in several years, gathering with friends and family without any restrictions, but the mood of Canadians is not very festive. The news is neither good for Justin Trudeau’s Liberals nor Pierre Poilievre’s Conservatives.

Every December for the past 16 years, Nanos has conducted an annual tracking survey. For the most recent survey, when asked about the direction of the country, 43 per cent believe we are going in the wrong direction, while 40 per cent say Canada is headed in the right direction.

Although the numbers this year are three points apart and just within the margin of error for the survey (3.1 percentage points, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20), they are notable. There are only two occasions in the past 16 years when “wrong” track was numerically higher than “right” – 2013 and 2014, the last two years of Stephen Harper’s Conservative government.

Middle-aged Canadians, a key battleground for all the parties, are the generation most likely to be negative about the direction the country is going (48 per cent wrong, 39 per cent right). Of note, while people in the Prairies were the most negative (59 per cent wrong, 31 per cent right), individuals in Quebec were the most positive (46 per cent right, 34 per cent wrong).

When asked about the performance of the governing party, Canadians were more likely to rate the performance of the federal Liberal government negatively. About four in 10 gave a rating of very poor (28 per cent) or somewhat poor (13 per cent), while one in three gave a positive rating of very good (7 per cent) or somewhat good (26 per cent). The rest said their performance was average.

The outright very poor score of 28 per cent is numerically the third-highest negative score on record since 2007 for any federal government, with the two other more negative scores being the two precursor years to the fall of the Harper government.

Those living west of Ontario were more likely to give a very poor score than those living in Ontario, Quebec or Atlantic Canada. Men and middle-aged people were the two demographic groups who handed out the highest very poor performance scores. Interestingly, like the

right/wrong direction tracking, Quebecers were comparatively more likely to have a positive view of performance compared with any other region of the country.

Looking at the numbers, it’s clear the Trudeau Liberals are in similar territory to the Harper Conservatives before their defeat.

Things are not much better when Canadians were asked about the federation. One per cent of Canadians believe the relationship between the federal and provincial governments has improved while another 9 per cent believe it has somewhat improved. People are six times more likely to say that things are worse than better (39 per cent

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That said, in the past 16 years, federal-provincial relations have only been viewed as net positive on four occasions – between 2015 and 2017, with the election of the new Trudeau government, and in 2020 during the pandemic response. At no time during the Harper administration were federal-provincial relations seen as improving.

Relations within the federation are mixed and mired. Mixed from the perspective of the number of provinces with conflicting and competing interests on everything from energy policy to the environment, mired in seemingly perpetual squabbling over big funding asks on issues such

as public health care.

When asked about our reputation and place in the world, Canadians are almost two times more likely to believe it is not getting better (not improved: 30 per cent, somewhat not improved: 16 per cent) compared with improving (improved: 7 per cent, somewhat improved: 18 per cent). This means that three of the four worst years on record are under the current Liberal government (2019, 2021, 2022), with 2013 under the Harper government being the worst single-year score.

All the underlying indicators in the mood of Canadians point to Liberal vulnerability and, in a number of instances, vulnerability reminiscent of the Harper government in the close of its mandate.

At the close of 2022, ballot tracking by Nanos suggests that the Conservatives stand at 34-per-cent support, followed by the Liberals at 29 per cent and the NDP at 22 per cent. About just as many people would consider voting Liberal (45 per cent) as consider voting Conservative (42 per cent).

Historically the Liberals have had a larger pool of accessible voters – that is, people who are open to voting Liberal. Yet that advantage over the Conservatives has disappeared.

The political calculus becomes even more problematic with NDP support in the twenties. With the Liberals under 30 and the NDP over 20, the Liberals get squeezed by vote splitting, creating opportunities for both the Conservatives and the NDP. The split of Liberal-NDP progressive voters is the dream scenario for Mr. Poilievre, creating similar winning conditions that propelled Stephen Harper into power.

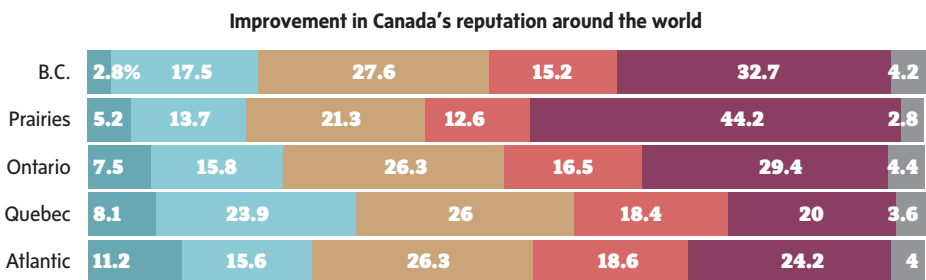
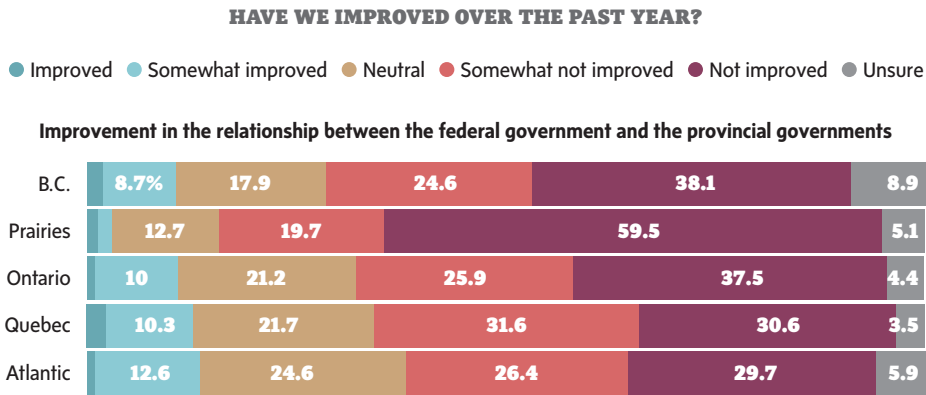
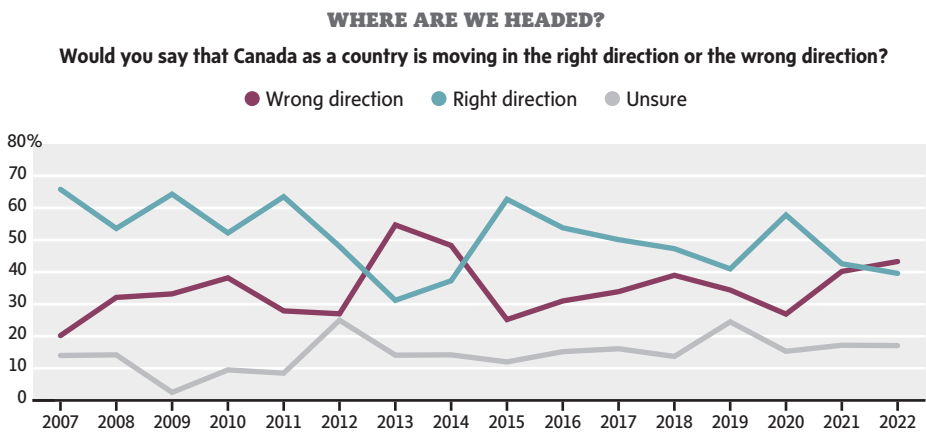
However, when people are asked whom they would prefer as prime minister, Mr. Poilievre trails Mr. Trudeau by four points. So, while the Conservative Party is ahead of the Liberals by five points, this lead does not currently extend to its leader.

The Conservative advantage is likely more attributable to the vulnerability of a government that has been in power since 2015. Every government has a best-before date.

Trends can continue to build on themselves, or not. Nothing in politics is etched in stone. What we do know is that the Liberals must reverse the trend to maintain their political fortunes and the Conservatives need to build up Mr. Poilievre as a prime minister-in-waiting to strengthen their position.

Those will be key in order to win the hearts and minds of a grumpy electorate. In any case, 2023 will be a pivotal year for the Liberals and Conservatives.

Canadians on Canada



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

As a refugee, I will always live between worlds – but I’m planting my flag in Canada

HASSAN AL KONTAR

OPINION

Author of *Man at the Airport*, which chronicles his time as a Syrian refugee and his seven months living in Kuala Lumpur International Airport. He became a permanent resident of Canada in 2018, and now lives in Vancouver.

Perhaps life is mocking me again, or perhaps it is fate; most likely, it’s just a coincidence. But the only apple tree I’ve come across so far in my time in British Columbia is the one in my backyard.

Every morning, when I wake up and start making Turkish coffee and listening to music by the singer Fairuz – the same way I’d start my days back home – I look through my small kitchen window and there it is: an untidy tangle of branches with a few leaves and some fallen apples at its base.

Without requiring much care or attention, my apple tree stands alone in my yard, quietly

and peacefully belonging to the ground.

I came from a place where there were so many trees like this. My birth city of Al-Sweida, in Syria, is known as the city of apples and grapes. But while there is only one apple tree here, it brings me some joy to know that the same moon shines over the trees here and there – that we’re still under the same sky, the same air, the same sun. When I use the same eyes that I once used to look upon the Al-Sweida apple trees to gaze upon the one in my backyard, it feels like I can do the impossible, and be in Canada and in Syria at the same time.

I think about those trees, and that seemingly contradictory sense of being two things at once, when I think about Jan. 11 – the day I will swear an oath to officially become a Canadian citizen.

“You should be happy,” my friend told me at one point. “This will be the most important day of your life. You have waited so long to officially become a Canadian. Congratulations, you are one of us now. Oh – and don’t forget to buy a flag.”

Perhaps she is right. But if that was the case, what was I when I shovelled snow from my driveway for the first time, when I first tried skiing, maple syrup and poutine, and when I first noticed I was saying sorry and thank you countless times for no obvious reason? Was I not Canadian when I woke up at 5 a.m. to support Canada’s national men’s soccer team at the World Cup?

Yes, Jan. 11 will be important – it will make me Canadian. But it will also only make me *more* Canadian. Because for me, I was Canadian on the day an immigration officer from Canada visited me at the detention centre in Malaysia, and on the day my plane touched down at Vancouver International Airport. I was Canadian when I spent my first true winter up north, and when I joined the Canadian Red Cross, driving all across British Columbia to try to repay the society that once helped me.

Jan. 11 will be a beginning of a new life; it will also be a celebration of what I’ve already felt for more than four years. It will make me a Canadian, and it also will

not. Both things can be true.

We refugees have two homes. There’s the home we gain at birth, the one we love and miss; it’s the one that holds our childhood memories, our families, our schools, our first crushes – and we want to see it safe, happy and prosperous. The second is the one that we choose, and chooses us: the home that is ours in the present and the future, the one that gave us the chance to find dignity, voice and value as individuals, the one that showed us hope when it welcomed us with open arms. I am so lucky that my second home is Canada. No one chooses to be a refugee, but I know that all refugees would choose to be Canadian if they could. Both things can be true.

For some, the Canadian flag is a symbol – one that allows people to travel without being questioned at airports, for instance. For others, it represents a better future for their children; it represents free education, universal health care or government support; it represents rights and obligations under a democracy.

There is, of course, no such

thing as a perfect country. There are always struggles, difficulties and challenges; there are ups and downs, pros and cons, to my life here. Despite that, I am sure that the story I am going to tell my children one day is this: Once upon a time, there was a man with no hope, stuck in limbo. He was alone, cold, desperate, hopeless, powerless and voiceless – a man who stopped dreaming of a better life. Then, there was a country called Canada, and a people called Canadians. There was a red-and-white flag with a maple leaf on it. That made all the difference for this hopeless man.

Perhaps newcomers are destined to live between two worlds, and to wrestle with two different cultures. But perhaps our original home is not as far away as we think. Perhaps it lives within us, unified with our souls, staying where we stay while also coming with us when we leave. Perhaps our homes are wherever we’ve been, and where we are.

One thing, at least, is for sure: I don’t need a flag for Jan. 11, but I am definitely going to buy a big one. Both things can be true.