

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

ENVIRONMENT VS. ECONOMY

Squaring the circle between the economic stress of Canadians and dealing with climate change will be no easy feat. Yet that will be what people want to hear about from our political leaders

OPINION

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Prepare for a raucous fall political session in Ottawa. It will be the battle of big issues and of large political personalities. The issues fight will be real and of substance, with implications for Canada's future. The personality battle will be an entertaining distraction for hyper-partisans.

On the issue front, we now have a collision of two major policy risks, namely climate change and the economy. Think of two casualties entering a political emergency room. The triage conundrum is to decide who gets priority and treated first: dealing with climate change or economic issues?

Nanos issue tracking shows a toss-up between climate change, inflation and worries about jobs/the economy (14 per cent each) for the top of the list of national issues of concern.

In Canada, this has been the summer of wildfires, which not only negatively affect the environment, but affect gross domestic product and contribute to inflation. A CTV/Nanos survey showed that Canadians are twice as likely to think that severe-weather events such as the number of wildfires are a result of climate change (64 per cent) compared with natural variations of the weather (28 per cent). Regardless of one's view on the cause, one can't deny that this is a problem that affects the quality of life of many people as they deal with fire, smoke and evacuation – on top of the negative economic repercussions.

More than eight in 10 Canadians support (59 per cent) or somewhat support (26 per cent) the creation of a national wildfire department, but only half support (22 per cent) or somewhat support (31 per cent) increasing taxes to pay for this department.

This is akin to your house being on fire but not being as hot on paying the fire department to put it out.

How can this be? Well, if you

are struggling to pay for housing and groceries, fires might not be the most pressing issue.

Concerns about inflation and jobs/the economy are at about 14 per cent each. Worries about housing are at 10 per cent, followed by debt/deficit (3 per cent) and high taxes (2 per cent). Together, meat-and-potatoes issues are the primary concern for more than four in 10 people, compared with the environment (14 per cent) or health care (11

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per cent).

Squaring the circle between the economic stress of Canadians and dealing with climate change will be no easy feat. Yet that will be what people want to hear about from our political leaders: Immediate action to deal with the short-term pressure on household finances and setting the groundwork for dealing with the weather changes everyone is experiencing more frequently.

In the Nanos preferred prime

minister tracking, it is a dead heat between Justin Trudeau and Pierre Poilievre. What's clear is that many Canadians likely feel that they are faced with two imperfect choices. On the one hand, Mr. Trudeau has led his government since 2015 and may be hitting a best-before date with voters. On the other hand, Mr. Poilievre has tapped into anxiety and anger but has not yet articulated solutions. People will expect answers from both on the economic and environmental challenges we face.

The brand strengths of the parties are completely different. The Liberals are traditionally stronger than the Conservatives on the environment, while the Conservatives are stronger on economic matters. The next election will likely boil down to voters choosing the risk they are willing to live with – is it the risk of a government that is not strong on the economy or a government that might not be aggressive in fighting climate change?

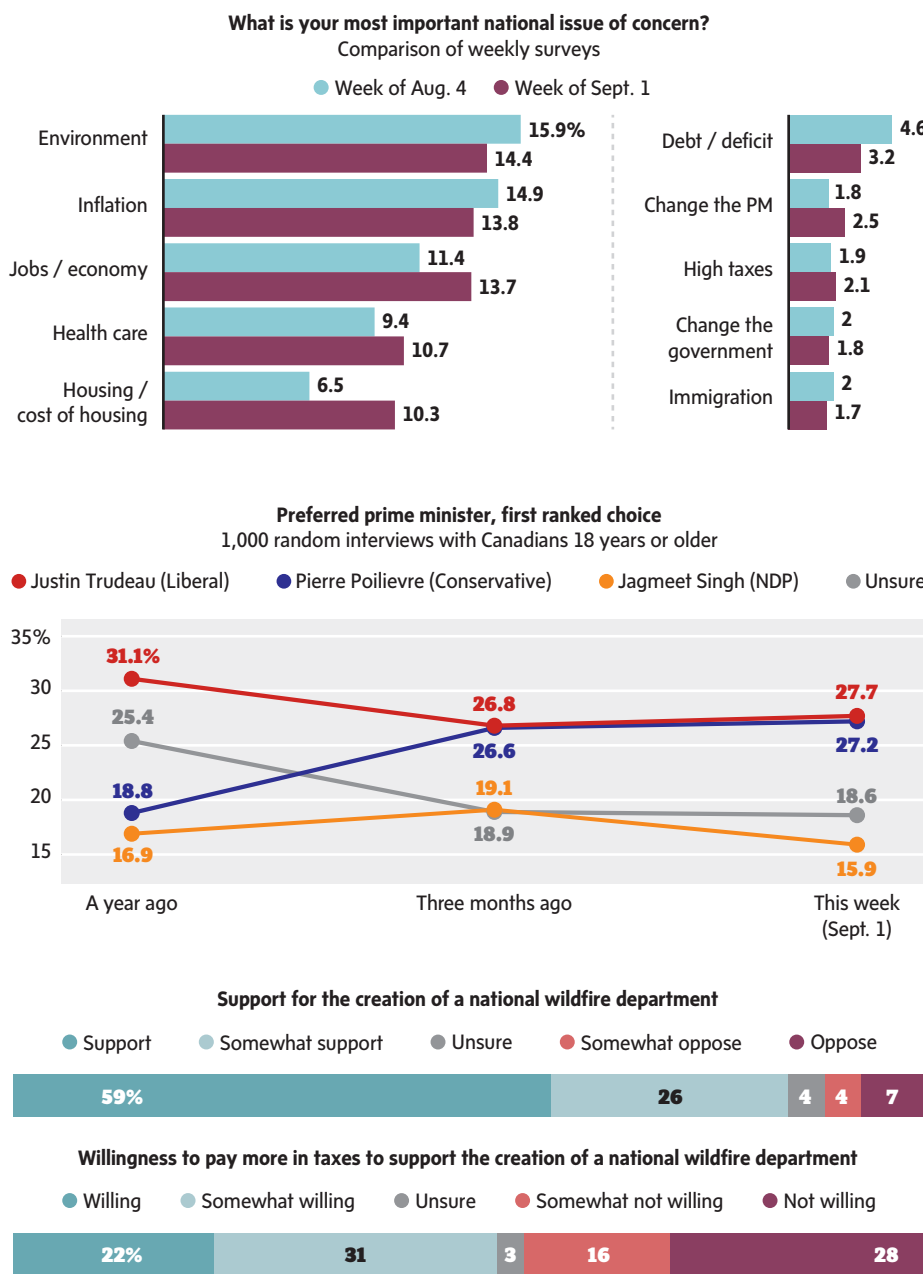
The next election is also shaping up to be one of a progressive (Mr. Trudeau) facing off against an anti-establishment choice (Mr. Poilievre). The problem is that this battle will focus on whom to blame, instead of a solution. While Canada is literally on fire and our economy tepid while people struggle to pay for housing, our leaders are focused on smear tactics designed to fire up their base. Mr. Trudeau is playing the card as the protector of diversity and equality, while Mr. Poilievre declares that Canada is broken and that the first step in fixing it is to boot the Liberals out of power.

The reality is that Canadians want to hear about solutions and understand the personal and financial trade-offs of policy choices. Politicians who ignore this reality will do so at their electoral peril. We must move beyond the phony war of incessant virtue signalling.

All of our political parties will need to advance solutions that deal with the twin challenges of the economy and the environment – and unpack their true costs – so that people can judge for themselves the best path forward.

We need a serious national discussion about not only the environment, but also creating an environment that enables people to pay their bills.

Fired up



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

Peter C. Newman embodied his era of Canadian journalism

KENNETH WHYTE

OPINION

Publisher of Sutherland House Books. He was editor of Saturday Night, founding editor of the National Post, and publisher and editor-in-chief of Maclean's from 2005 to 2013.

I've tried to explain to younger journalists that Peter C. Newman was a big deal back in the day but it's difficult, in large part because the print-media environment that he dominated for decades no longer exists.

Newspapers mattered then in a way they can't today. People now have myriad sources for news. When Newman was at the peak of his powers, in the 1960s and 1970s, newspapers carried almost the whole of the conversation, locally and nationally. It's not too much of a stretch to say that if something wasn't reported on newsprint, it didn't happen, or, at least, no one knew or cared about it.

And Peter C. Newman, as the most successful syndicated columnist in the country, was in virtually every Canadian newspaper. He had easily the biggest audience and the grandest profile of any journalist in the land, and what he had to say about national politics and business affairs – the two subjects that preoccupied him – hugely mattered. If he said an issue was important, it was important. There's never been a single journalist influential enough to make or break political careers, but Newman came closest.

That influence was rooted not only in the scale of his audience but also in his proximity to the people running Ottawa and our business world at the time – something else that's difficult to explain to people who only know the current environment. Politicians and business leaders then needed the likes of Newman in order to address a mass audience; there was no going straight to the people through YouTube. They needed Newman, and he exploited their need by wedging himself deep inside their world.

It was unusual behaviour, even at the time. Journalists tend to be outsiders, observing and commenting on events of the day and holding to account people in positions of authority. Newman liked to work both sides of the street, operating as an insider on behalf of his readers. Educated at Upper Canada College and groomed at the blue-chip Financial Post, he was comfortable in corridors of power and adept at courting and earning the trust of those he encountered there.

It wasn't always clear in his columns where his loyalties lay, whether he was representing the people or the insiders. And his loyalties shifted over time, especially with regard to prime ministers. From John Diefenbaker through Pierre Trudeau to Brian Mulroney and Jean Chrétien, Newman would lionize them on their way up and eviscerate them on their way down. It always made for entertaining reading. He kept things vivid and relatable, focusing on the mannerisms and personalities of the people he covered as much as what they had to say. His one mantra was

“never be boring.”

His column alone would have been sufficient to make Newman one of the two or three most important journalists of his time, but he was also an editor, first at the Toronto Star when it was easily the largest-circulation newspaper in the country, and later at Maclean's, the largest-circulation current-affairs magazine. There were many editors in his time who led important publications, but precious few had the opportunity to lead more than one, and Newman was the only editor ever to edit both the leading newspaper and the leading magazine in Canada.

There are different kinds of editors. Some are deeply involved in assembling and leadership of their staffs, the shaping of content to issue; others are more concerned with the voice of the publication, establishing and articulating policies and priorities. Newman was more of the latter variety – his own column was always the most important thing in his pages. His editorships substantially amplified his authority and influence.

That said, he executed what was likely the most important transformation of any magazine in Canadian history. Maclean's was a tired monthly publication when he assumed its editorship in 1971. Newman leaned on his contacts in the Liberal government in Ottawa to use the tax code to effectively clear the competitive landscape of Canadian editions of foreign publications. The newsweekly Time decimated its Canadian edition in 1976, and two years later Newman relaunched Maclean's as a news-

weekly, hiring a much larger staff, opening international bureaus and giving the magazine a new lease on life.

On top of all this came the books, more than 30 of them. His first hit was *Renegade in Power: The Diefenbaker Years*, a publishing phenomenon upon its release in 1963. It sold 30,000 copies in its first 10 weeks (it is exceedingly rare for a political book, or any non-fiction book, to sell 30,000 copies over its lifetime today). To be frank, it was a hatchet job. Newman served up, in unexpurgated form, the vicious chatter of establishment conservatives such as Dalton Camp who couldn't abide a coarse Westerner at the helm of their party. The book was unprecedented in that it attacked Diefenbaker in a deeply personal manner, which to that time had been an approach reserved for subjects who had drawn their last breaths.

A number of successful political books followed, but in the 1970s, under the influence of his second wife, the fine journalist Christina McCall, Newman changed course. He began to document the membership and rites of the higher ranks of a social order few Canadians knew existed. *The Canadian Establishment* was a garrulous romp through the clubs and boardrooms of the nation's commercial elite. It was followed by a second volume covering individuals and institutions overlooked in the first, and then a third on the Bronfman family, described by Newman as “the Rothschilds of the New World,” and then a fourth on the most dynamic young businessman of the day titled *The Establishment Man*:

Conrad Black, A Portrait of Power. Closely edited by McCall, these were Newman's most searching and best-written books.

In the early 1980s, Newman took a stunning \$500,000 advance from Penguin to produce a multivolume history of the Hudson's Bay Company. That a thorough-going Canadian nationalist would abandon his domestic publisher, McClelland & Stewart, to sign on with a multinational was unexpected, but \$500,000 was an unprecedented sum in Canadian publishing at the time. The series leaves something to be desired as history, but it is highly readable, as are almost all of Newman's books, and they were wildly popular, allowing him to earn out his fabulous advance.

The books continued to roll out, one every year or two, through the 1990s and into the aughts. His biggest late-career success was his 2004 autobiography, *Here Be Dragons: Telling Tales of People, Passion and Power*. The book clocks in at an indulgent 700 pages, but it seldom lags.

As the leading columnist, the leading editor and the leading non-fiction author in the country for several decades, it legitimately can be said that Peter C. Newman was Canadian journalism in his day. There is much more to be related about his public persona and personal life – I would be remiss not to mention that I remain grateful for his support and guidance early in my own career – but he was mostly about the work. He was devoted to his craft and he took great pride in his accomplishments, and it is for these qualities that he would most want to be remembered.