

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

# LOOKING BEYOND THE POLLS

Tory Leader Pierre Poilievre has a clear lead in public surveys. But that doesn't necessarily mean a guaranteed Conservative victory in the next federal election

OPINION

Nik Nanos is the chief data scientist at Nanos Research, research adjunct professor at the Norman Paterson School for International Affairs at Carleton University, 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.

Polling juggernaut. Those two words very aptly describe the Conservatives in the public opinion data. Since last August, the Pierre Poilievre-led party has enjoyed a consistent double-digit lead over Justin Trudeau's Liberals.

For some, the election outcome is a foregone conclusion and the Conservatives should be measuring the curtains in the Prime Minister's Office.

But digging into the numbers reveals some fundamental truths that should give pause to anyone hoping to predict the future with any sort of certainty.

The surface numbers on both ballot tracking and whom Canadians would prefer as prime minister markedly favour the Conservatives and Mr. Poilievre. In the Nanos tracking they lead in every region west of Quebec, and even in Quebec the party has support at levels in the 20s. The Conservatives lead among men and in every age demographic except for Canadians over 60. (Ballot support for the Liberals is mainly found in Quebec, Atlantic Canada and among senior citizens.)

When it comes to question of preferred prime minister, the responses generally track with the ballot numbers, with Mr. Poilievre maintaining a persistent double-digit advantage over Mr. Trudeau.

The numbers look extremely promising for the Conservatives and show an electorate bent on change.

The data lurking below the surface should give everyone pause.

Among the most striking recent data points has to do with the perceived credibility of the two front-runners. You would think that with a double-digit lead in the ballot and preferred prime minister tracking, Mr. Poilievre would tower over Mr. Trudeau on credibility.

Not so much. A Globe and Mail survey conducted by Nanos showed both leaders with failing credibility

scores (3.7 out of 10 for Mr. Trudeau and 3.9 for Mr. Poilievre). On the credibility front, neither have a clear advantage.

Every week Nanos asks Canadians whether the federal leaders possess the qualities of a good political leader. Forty-three per cent believe Mr. Trudeau has such qualities, 48 per cent say he does not, and 9 per cent are unsure. Forty-two per cent of Canadians believe Mr. Poilievre has the qualities of a good political leader, 44 per cent disagree and

You would think that with a double-digit lead in the ballot and preferred prime minister tracking, Pierre Poilievre would tower over Justin Trudeau on credibility. Not so much.

another 14 per cent are unsure. (As far as whether the other federal leaders possess the qualities of a good political leader, the Bloc Québécois's Yves-François Blanchet is at 46 per cent, the NDP's Jagmeet Singh is at 44 per cent, the Green Party's Elizabeth May is at 33 per cent, and People's Party of Canada's Maxime Bernier is at 13 per cent.)

The numbers beneath the ballot tracking are not much better for either of the main parties. Although the Conservatives enjoy a

comfortable advantage in vote intentions, their pool of accessible voters – that is, the proportion of Canadians who are open to voting Conservative – is not much larger (45 per cent) than the group of voters accessible to the Liberals (43 per cent).

There are several key take-aways.

First, neither Mr. Trudeau nor Mr. Poilievre is truly popular in the traditional sense. The reality is that the leader who is seen as being the least risky will likely prevail. Former prime minister Stephen Harper won three elections without a very warm embrace from voters, but because of a calculated judgment on election day that he was a comparatively better choice than Paul Martin, Stéphane Dion and Michael Ignatieff.

Second, both parties have a base of accessible voters that is comparable – roughly four in 10 voters. This is consistent with the historical average of Canadians open to voting Conservative but is lower than the Liberals' historical average. The big-tent party of the Liberals of the past is now smaller under Mr. Trudeau.

Third, the polling suggests that the Liberals' biggest challenge is not Mr. Poilievre or the Conservatives but fighting a general mood of it being time for a change. Mr. Poilievre has credibility numbers equally dismal as Mr. Trudeau. The Conservative Leader can coast to victory by avoiding mistakes and letting the Liberals defeat themselves. In this scenario the election is a referendum on Mr. Trudeau and the Liberals, with voters casting judgment on the Liberal record and the performance of the Liberal Leader.

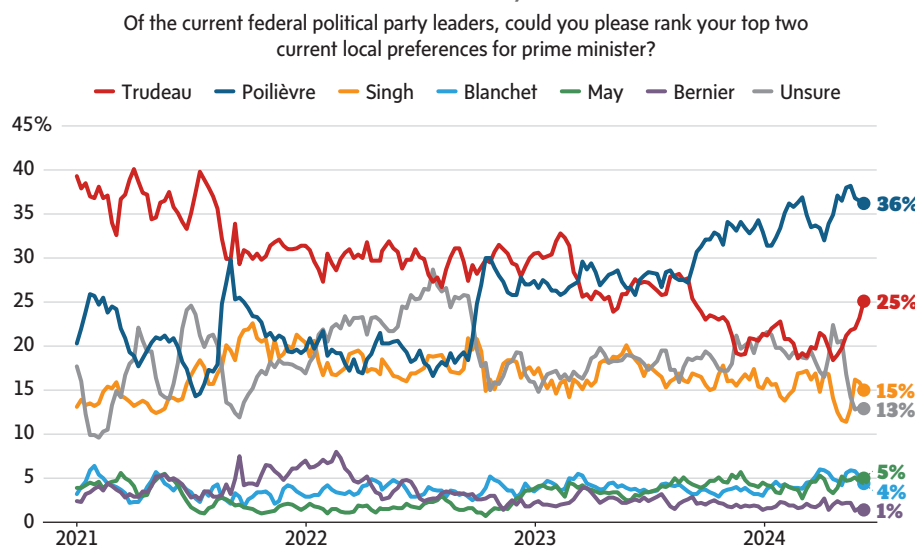
Finally, when people say the only poll that counts is the one on election day, they are correct. Polling in between elections helps us understand the mood and the possible dynamic of vote intentions. The Conservatives most definitely have the advantage today in the ballot numbers but that is in the context of an imaginary election with no immediate political consequence.

The one thing we do know is that the next election will be about change.

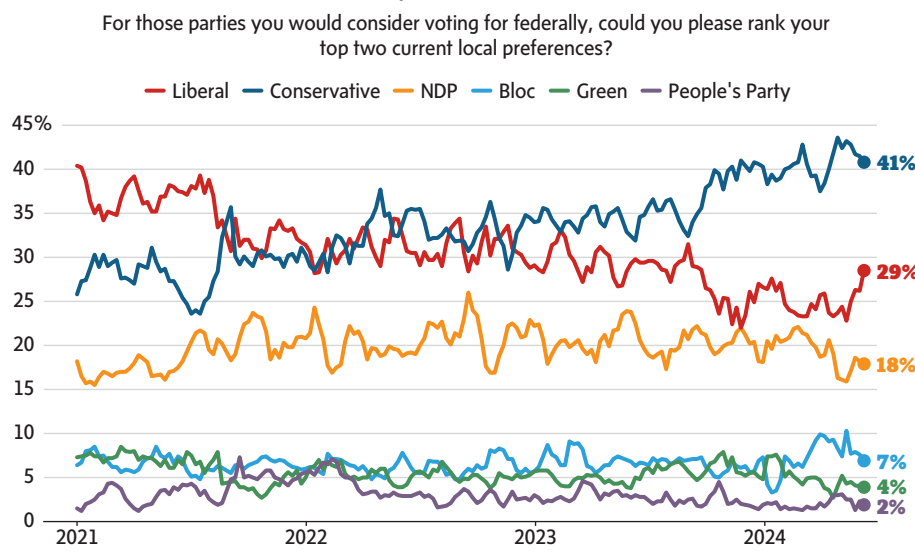
American baseball legend Yogi Berra said, "It ain't over till it's over." In politics, campaigns matter, and the winner of the federal election will be the leader who best captures the change that Canadians want.

## Follow the leaders

### PREFERRED PRIME MINISTER, WEEKLY TRACKING



### BALLOT, WEEKLY TRACKING



Note: Percentages reflect respondents' first-rank choices and may not add to 100 because of rounding.

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

# Gouzenko affair shares parallels with our current crisis

AMY KNIGHT

OPINION

Author of *How The Cold War Began: The Igor Gouzenko Affair and The Hunt For Soviet Spies* and, most recently, *The Kremlin's Noose: Putin's Bitter Feud With The Oligarch Who Made Him Ruler of Russia*

As the controversy over foreign interference in Canada's democratic processes continues to grip Ottawa, a look back at a similar episode in Canadian history may offer some useful perspective. It has been almost 80 years since cipher clerk Igor Gouzenko left the Soviet embassy in Ottawa with a sheaf of secret documents that revealed an extensive Soviet espionage operation in Canada, while also implicating a British scientist and a highly ranked official in the U.S. State Department in spying.

The revelations of Gouzenko, whose defection in September, 1945, was kept from the public for the next five months, gave rise to a flurry of high-level meetings with Canada's British and American counterparts. The alarm was understandable. The Soviets, no longer wartime comrades, were after atomic secrets so they could build their own bomb.

The fact that a member of Parliament, Fred Rose, was among the 20 Canadians who were suspected of spying for the Soviets made the case particularly disturbing for Ottawa. Rose, a known Communist activist, had broad contacts with Canadian civil servants, scientists and academics who were attracted to communism, and a few had helped military

intelligence officers at the Soviet embassy in their recruiting efforts.

Despite pressure from Washington and London to move forward with the case, prime minister Mackenzie King had grave reservations about exposing the spy scandal publicly and arresting the Canadians who were involved. He had pushed for a diplomatic solution and even apologized privately to the second secretary at the Russian embassy, Vitaly Pavlov – who in fact ran one of the spy rings – before the first Canadian suspects were detained on Feb. 15, 1946, and his public statement about the affair was issued.

Mackenzie King's concerns about offending the Soviets were of course laughable, especially since Moscow had been apprised of all the developments in the case through its mole in the British intelligence service, Kim Philby. But King's worry about the Canadian government being criticized for star-chamber methods in handling the detainees was justified. The rights of the 13 Canadians originally arrested for spying under the War Measures Act were egregiously violated. They were treated like dangerous criminals, rather than individuals who sympathized with the Soviet Union as a wartime ally and were drawn to communism in response to the rise of fascism in Europe. Held incommunicado in solitary confinement for weeks, they were interrogated by the RCMP with no access to lawyers.

The evidence against many of the suspects was flimsy at best. (Ten of the 20 Canadians ultimately rounded up were later acquitted in court.) Take, for example, Matt Nightingale, a young en-

The revelations of Soviet cipher clerk Igor Gouzenko, whose defection in September, 1945, was kept from the public for the next five months, gave rise to a flurry of high-level meetings with Canada's British and American counterparts. The alarm was understandable. The Soviets, no longer wartime comrades, were after atomic secrets so they could build their own bomb.

gineer who, while serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force during the war, had met a Soviet intelligence officer named Vasily Rogov at a communist study group. Nightingale's name was written on one of Rogov's notes – apparently, Rogov's wish list of possible recruits – stolen by Gouzenko. But there was no evidence whatsoever that he had given Rogov information. Yet Nightingale was committed for trial, only to be acquitted. Another person on Rogov's wish list was David Shugar, a talented government biochemist with communist leanings. It was not until Gouzenko admitted at Shugar's preliminary court hearing that the Soviets barely knew who Shugar was and received nothing from him that the charges against him were dropped. Nonetheless, Shugar, who went on a hunger strike while held captive by the RCMP, lost his job in the Canadian government because of the spy case and returned to his native Poland, where he achieved world renown as a professor of biophysics at the University of Warsaw. Three other spy suspects were also dismissed from the civil service despite acquittals.

Whatever knowledge the accused Canadians passed on to the Soviets, it was apparently of little value. According to an assessment by the National Research Council Canada in September, 1946: "There has never been at any time any information about the bomb in Canada, and no information could have possibly been obtained from this country." The only Soviet recruit in Canada who provided atomic information was British physicist Alan Nunn May, who, while working at the NRC in

Montreal, had given some results of his research on uranium to the Soviets. May was arrested in Britain in the spring of 1946 and sentenced to 10 years of hard labour.

To its credit, Canada never took the Soviet espionage scare to the extremes that occurred in the United States during the McCarthy era, when American spy suspects were slandered by politicians and the press without even getting their day in court. Canadian diplomat Herbert Norman also became a victim of Washington's spy hunters, despite RCMP assurances that he was a loyal civil servant. Norman ended up taking his own life in 1957.

Similar to the 1940s, Canada today is facing efforts by a Communist dictatorship, the People's Republic of China, to recruit Canadian citizens for its malign purposes. Whereas the Soviets sought out communist-leaning civil servants and scientists, the PRC's emissaries have focused on politically active Chinese Canadians. The danger of PRC interference in the Canadian political process must of course be addressed by firm measures. But hopefully, such measures will not harm fundamental legal rights as they did during the Gouzenko affair. It is worth recalling what prime minister King wrote in his diary in late February, 1946, after the Canadian press began to criticize the detentions of spy suspects by the RCMP: "I said at the beginning that unless this part was carefully handled we would create a worse situation than the one we were trying to remedy. People will not stand for individual liberty being curtailed. ... The whole proceedings are far too much like those of Russia itself."