

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

# CANADIANS ARE FEELING PRETTY GOOD. WILL THE OPTIMISM SURVIVE 2026?

Even with an improved mood about the direction the country is headed, federal ballot tracking by Nanos suggests a horse race between the Liberals and the Conservatives

OPINION

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With the Justin Trudeau era behind them, Canadians feel better today than they have in quite a while. Should Prime Minister Mark Carney and the Liberals feel good? Possibly. Should they feel confident? Nope.

Looking at the mood of Canadians, ballot trends and events south of the border, brace yourself: 2026 may feature an early federal election.

Views on the country are decidedly more upbeat now than at the tail end of the Trudeau government. The data suggest we can call this a Carney honeymoon. The big question is whether the optimism will survive 2026. For the past 10 years, Nanos has conducted the Mood of Canada national survey. So how do Canadians feel about the country under Mr. Carney compared to his predecessors, Mr. Trudeau and Stephen Harper?

Mr. Carney's most positive comparative score is on the federal-provincial front. The proportion of Canadians who feel the relationship between the federal and provincial governments over the past year has improved hit a 19-year high, with people more than twice as likely to say it has improved/somewhat improved (30 per cent improved, 33 per cent somewhat improved) compared to it having not improved (12 per cent) or somewhat not improved (1 per cent). This is the highest positive score on the state of federal-provincial relations since Nanos started tracking this in 2007. In comparison, while 53 per cent of respondents gave some sort of positive score on this front, the best result for Mr. Harper between 2007 and 2014 was 21 per cent. On federal-provincial relations, Mr. Carney rates as twice as good as Mr. Harper and better than Mr. Trudeau's best years.

We also asked about Canada's reputation around the world. When Mr. Trudeau was still prime minister, only one in 10 Canadians scored our reputation as improving (4 per cent improved, 6 per cent somewhat improved). Scores have improved from 10 per cent to 36 per cent, asserting that things are getting better. Mr. Carney's score on international relations is higher than at any time during the Harper government.

Asked about the performance of the federal government, Mr. Carney received the second-highest score in 19 years of tracking, with more than one in two Cana-

dians scoring the federal government as very good (24 per cent) or somewhat good (29 per cent). The only higher score was in 2015 immediately following the election of Mr. Trudeau. Impressions of the federal government are higher under Mr. Carney than in any year under Mr. Harper.

A key measure is how people feel about the direction of the country. The score has noticeably improved over the past year under Mr. Carney (53 per cent say we are headed in the right direction), compared to Mr. Trudeau's last year, when 23 per cent thought the country was headed in the right direction. Mr. Trudeau's "right direction" number in December, 2024, just before his resignation, was a 19-year low for any prime minister. Mr. Harper wins on the "right track" perceptions with scores in 2007, 2009

and 2011 that were higher than any other prime minister in the Nanos tracking. One key trend over time is that Canadians tend to feel good about election outcomes and their country until prime ministers start governing. The highest "right direction" scores consistently follow elections.

For Mr. Carney and the Liberals, if the 19-year trend holds, the chances of positive perceptions weakening are high. Year one was about being different than Justin Trudeau. Year two will be about defending the record. The more there is to defend, the more difficult the political management. Although the "right direction" scores for Canada under Mr. Carney are better than the last four years of Mr. Trudeau, the sense of the future seems foggy under Mr. Carney than under Mr. Har-

per. For Mr. Harper, an important part of his vision was energy within a stable North American trade pact. Mr. Carney can talk about Canada being an energy superpower like Mr. Harper did, but the continental situation is uncertain under U.S. President Donald Trump.

Even with Canadians feeling better about the federation and our international reputation, the federal ballot tracking by Nanos suggests a horse race between the Liberals and the Conservatives. The good news for the Liberals is that Mr. Carney is currently a runaway choice over Pierre Poilievre according to the preferred prime minister tracking. Think of ballot support for the Liberals being driven by Mr. Carney and the ballot support for the Conservatives being driven by an appetite for change.

Still, setting aside the political theatre of floor-crossing in the House of Commons, which is favouring the Liberals, Mr. Carney's grip on the House is tenuous. That brings us to why we may see a federal election in 2026.

Mr. Carney may see the political bandwidth needed to stay alive in the House of Commons as a distraction from the need to build economic resilience. Every prime minister wants a strong mandate to govern as they see fit. The uncertainty of Canada's trade relationship with the U.S. likely heightens the appetite for a strong parliamentary mandate.

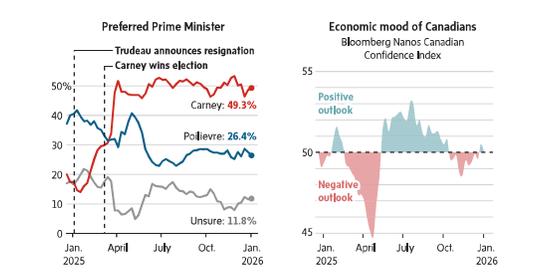
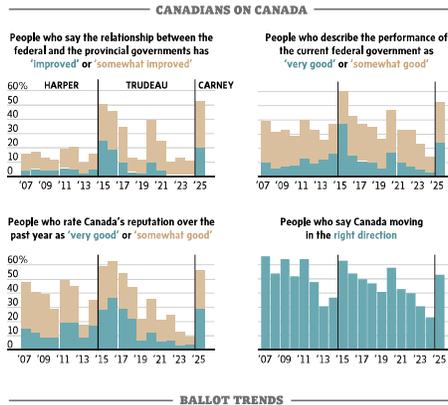
Consumer confidence remains tepidly neutral as Canadians wait and see what will happen in the trade negotiations. Expect the economic holding pattern to continue in 2026 until there is more certainty.

Mr. Trump may want to keep the trade negotiations up in the air so that going into this year's midterm elections, he can position himself as a fighter for American jobs. Canada may very well be a casualty of American politics. After the midterms, Mr. Trump will have more latitude to bring some sort of agreement forward on trade with Canada and Mexico.

Mr. Carney might want to head to the polls before he's forced to defend a less-favourable trade agreement. The Liberal Party's reversal of fortunes in 2025 was about what Canadians believed could better manage the Canada-U.S. relationship. If the free-trade negotiations don't go Mr. Carney's way, the Liberals are at risk.

So how could 2026 unfold? The Canadian economy will sputter along. Mr. Trump will look to squeeze Canada as part of a midterm election strategy and Mr. Carney may believe it is more advantageous to head to the polls before a trade deal is struck. The real question is whether Mr. Carney can keep Canadians feeling good about the direction of the country.

## The national mood



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

## Calgary's water-use restrictions are a symptom of a bigger problem

JEN GERSON  
CALGARY

OPINION

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As a Calgarian of many years' residence, I have one question to lay before the universe: What terrible water spirits hath my city offended?

More than a decade ago, a deluge took out half the downtown; a year-and-a-half ago, a catastrophic water main break forced us all into major restrictions for weeks. And now, whatever culture on the same line, except in the middle of winter.

I'm seriously starting to consider the possibility that we must impose mandatory worship of the Bow and Elbow Rivers in order to propitiate the watery gods of old. Let's make an annual festival of it, and send a bouquet of flowers down the river in order to make peace with whatever forces must be avenged. This plan cannot be any less effective than the state-of-the-art fibre optic acoustic monitoring system

that was supposed to sound a little alarm before it spewed enough water onto the roadway to necessitate the rescue of 13 people from stranded cars — and plunged the whole city into yet another season of cabin rules for the toilet.

Short showers. Full laundry loads. Another excuse to put off cleaning our children and our homes is yet again before us as Calgary's emergency water supplies continue to waver amid questionable compliance. At least this time we won't have to watch our gardens die.

I don't mean to complain. The restrictions themselves are not worse than listening to one of our politicians talk about the latest infrastructure collapse. If this example is anything like the main break that occurred in 2024, my social-media feeds will remain absolutely divided.

On one side, angry conservatives who refuse to comply with government mandates of any kind, and will treat any request to reduce water usage as the latest World Economic Forum conspiracy to starve us of modern comforts in order to implement radical depopulation and Agenda 21. Remember COVID-19 and

resist the authority!

Facing off against that collection of unresolved brain worms, we have the city's ordinarily beleaguered progressives who would chide us for our lack of civic co-operation while reminding us all to be grateful for the sheer privilege of having any clean water at all. Just think of the poor women living in countless third-world nations who must schlep all their clean water across their very own backs for countless kilometres. (And that's to say nothing of the boil-water advisories that still exist in Canadian Indigenous communities.)

And I guess that's technically correct. It's just a particularly one deaf admonishment in an era in which moving clean water into my home has long been considered one of the most basic minimum requirements of modern civilization, and even some ancient ones. This line asks us all to be grateful for almost-first-world living conditions while paying first-world property taxes.

It also comes off just a little like deflection for an incredible failure; a lowering of the bar to a height that really isn't acceptable. All the more galling is that

this is the same crowd that tends to balk at any assertion that "Canada is broken." Which, as we all know is a claim that is made by only the most terrible Conservative partisans — and any Calgarian who is so unreasonably entitled as to want to flush the toilet after only peeing.

Anyway, before anyone in the rest of the country snickers too loudly, it should be noted that Calgary is hardly the only municipality to have cut corners on water pipes in recent decades.

The entire country is facing an infrastructure deficit of roughly \$270-billion — and that's just the cost of keeping our existing kit afloat, to say nothing of expansion or growth in line with population. That deficit is gradually becoming ever more apparent in the general rundown look of much of the nation. We're getting grubby around the edges, and it's starting to show.

As we're seeing in Calgary, this is more than merely an aesthetic problem. The basic conditions of our quality of life can no longer be taken for granted.

Add that infrastructure deficit to all of the other files we've let slide in recent decades; files ranging from defence spending,

regulatory capture and declining productivity, to slow-motion declines in the quality of our social safety net.

If there's anything that I'd add to that list, it's that these are the outcomes of a long-term leadership deficit; of a complacent country that has been able to get away with weak leaders who prioritize short-term electoral gains and symbolic gestures over malingering roads and pipes that work well.

If there's one bright side in Calgary's water supply, it's that, at least on this front, we see some signs of improvement. The city's very recently elected mayor, Jeremy Farkas, is performing admirably in updating legislation regularly about the state of the repair, and calling his own city's administration to task for its failures. He's given the impression of a leader who is active and engaged in both recognizing a problem, and in solving it. If we avoid any of the idiotic acrimony that assailed the city the last time this happened, I'll lay the credit on him for that.

And that may be about as good as any other offering to the angry water gods of the Alberta plains.