

NEWS

Polls show Carney's riding a wave of support buoyed by global pressures, but Canadians also nervous about life at home

The Liberals' popularity tends to go up when people focus on Canada-U.S. relations, but the party loses points when affordability becomes the central issue, says pollster Greg Lyle.

BY JUSTIN S. CAMPBELL

Prime Minister Mark Carney continues to be seen as the leader to guide Canada through uncertain times, according to the most recent surveys, but one pollster warns that Liberal support could wane if people's attention continues to shift to more domestic concerns.

Support for the Liberals from decided voters jumped four points to 44 per cent as compared to 37 per cent for the Conservatives in an Innovative Research Group poll published on Feb. 23. A previous poll covering the last two weeks of January saw the Liberals at 40 per cent, while the Tories were at 38 per cent.

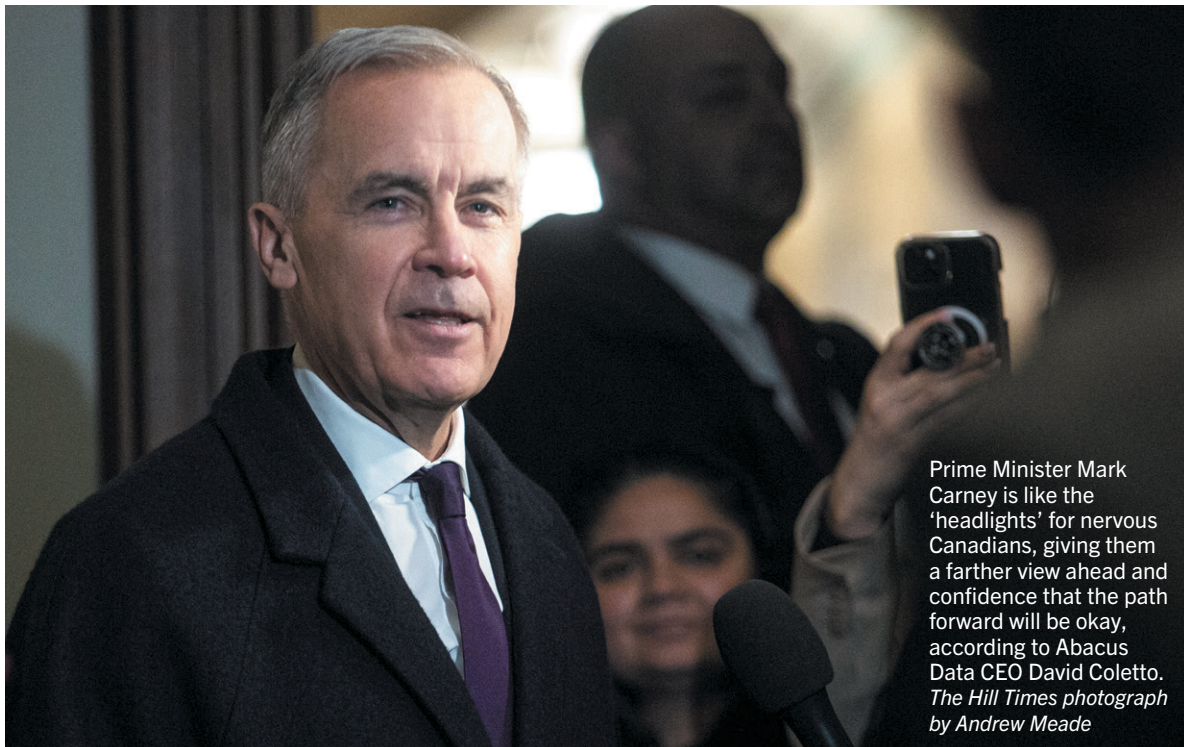
Greg Lyle, president of Innovative Research Group, said that while the Liberals managed to increase their support, they did so at the expense of those who were previously NDP voters or uncommitted voters. The Conservatives' support remained steady.

Lyle noted that his company's most recent survey questioned participants a few weeks following Carney's (Nepean, Ont.) speech in Davos, Switzerland, on Jan. 20. The speech motivated the public to focus on Canada-United States relations, and specifically the relationship with U.S. President Donald Trump.

"Whenever you're focused on the Trump issue, the Liberals go up. But over time, if nothing big happens on the Trump issue, then the underlying concerns about affordability start pushing back up, and then the Liberals go down again," Lyle said.

The prime minister's weakness—speaking to the domestic affordability issue—is an area where Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Battle River—Crowfoot, Alta.) excels, according to the pollster.

Poilievre's preference for sticking with domestic issues—



Prime Minister Mark Carney is like the 'headlights' for nervous Canadians, giving them a farther view ahead and confidence that the path forward will be okay, according to Abacus Data CEO David Coletto. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*



Innovative Research Group president Greg Lyle says the recent boost in support for the Liberals is due to a gain in NDP and non-committed voters. *Photograph courtesy of Greg Lyle*

affordability, crime, and past references to Canada being "broken"—that animate his base and receive attention from a younger demographic has kept the Conservatives' support steady, but has not been advantageous enough to put them over the Liberals, according to Lyle.

Adding similar perspectives to the view that many Canadians are nervous about affordability and their living situation are polls from Ekos and Abacus Data.

An Ekos Research Associates survey published Jan. 30 listed health care (for 88 per cent of respondents), jobs (80 per cent), and affordable housing



Ekos president Frank Graves says Canadians under the age of 35 are concerned about housing affordability and their level of income. *Photograph courtesy of Frank Graves*

(78 per cent) as their top three high priorities.

Those who are under the age of 35 "can't get a house. They're not making more money than their parents, and they think their kids are going to do even worse. The outlook for 25 years in the future is just as dark. Those are pretty significant fault lines," said Frank Graves, president of Ekos.

Abacus Data's Feb. 20 report says that Canadians "are living on financial alert" as Trump's tariffs continue to fuel what it calls the "precarity mindset." Approximately four-fifths (81 per cent) of Canadians somewhat or strongly agree they feel a need to be on



Nanos Research founder Nik Nanos says Canadians will feel more certain once a trade agreement with the U.S. is reached if they feel the deal is fair. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

guard financially because another hit—such as price changes due to tariffs—could come at any time.

The poll also states that 21 per cent of Canadians want stable and predictable prices to restore a sense of certainty in their lives, followed by 17 per cent of respondents saying certainty is more likely if they know that the government has a plan to protect jobs and lower its reliance on the U.S.

"People delay big decisions when [they're] unclear about the future—like putting off a big move, retirement, starting a family, buying a house, buying a car ... you will be more defensive in your consumer choices," said

Abacus CEO David Coletto, adding that Canadians are instead choosing to spend their money on experiences, such as travel.

Still, both Graves and Coletto say that Canadians are putting their trust in Carney to lead them through this uncertainty.

The Ekos survey from Jan. 30 shows that Carney's approval rose to a whopping 61 per cent from 58 per cent, while Poilievre's support dipped to 28 per cent. If an election were held today, the survey showed that the Liberals would win a clear majority.

"Carney is doing very well," said Graves. "[It's] not so much that he's everybody's answer for everything, but he's everybody's best answer from the options that were available. And he hasn't seemed to let most Canadians down yet. I'm not saying he will, but this is beyond the honeymoon [phase]. This is a year out, almost."

"I think people feel that they can't see that far ahead of them," Coletto said. "And when you're driving at night ... you have both hands on the wheel, you're less willing to take risks. You're not looking for disruption. You're looking for clarity."

Coletto described Carney as the "headlights" for people, giving them a farther view ahead and confidence that the path forward will be okay.

But Canadians are also concerned about national security.

In a Feb. 20 poll, Nanos Research found that 55 per cent think the U.S. poses the greatest security threat to Canada as compared to just 15 per cent for China.

Another Nanos poll, published on Feb. 23, highlighted that 21 per cent of adult Canadians feel an American invasion of this country is likely compared to 50 per cent who feel the opposite.

"I think for average Canadians, they see certain things that maybe, at one point, might [have been] outside of the realm of possibility in the old world are now within the realm of possibility," said Nanos founder Nik Nanos, referring to examples such as Trump's actions in Venezuela and Iran, and his rhetoric about acquiring Greenland.

The future will bring clarity, Nanos said, and a good trade deal with the U.S. will ease tensions.

"A year from now, we'll be past the American midterms. We'll probably have a greater sense of where we are in a trade agreement. If we actually have a trade agreement that Canadians feel is fair, even though Donald Trump might be president, that's a game changer, because all of the tension is centred on the trade agreement and the tariffs."

A Nanos poll on Feb. 22 said that 81 per cent of Canadians believe the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement has been beneficial for this country's economy.

"In an ironic way, we should be thanking Donald Trump for helping educate Canadians," Nanos said.

"It's like 'Free Trade 101' in the last year, where Canadians are now more focused on free trade. ... Canadians understand the importance of trade with the United States, but also free trade, period."

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