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POLITIQUES

THE MOOD

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DU

CANADA



THE MOOD OF CANADA: A COUNTRY MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Nik Nanos



In our inaugural year-end poll, *The Mood of Canada*, Nik Nanos took the temperature of Canadians at the end of 2007, and found them in a very good mood. Two-thirds of Canadians believe the country is moving in the right direction. Canadians think they're better off financially than they were a year ago. They're confident about the country's economic prospects going forward into 2008 and believe Canada's reputation around the world is improving. Finally, they give the Harper government good marks on its performance. Here's Nik on the numbers, and what they mean.

Pour notre tout premier sondage annuel sur « L'humeur du Canada », Nik Nanos a pris le pouls de nos compatriotes à la fin 2007 et conclut qu'ils sont d'excellente humeur. Les deux tiers des Canadiens interrogés estiment ainsi que le pays s'oriente dans la bonne direction. Ils jugent leur situation financière meilleure que l'an dernier et se disent confiants quant aux perspectives économiques du Canada pour 2008. Ils croient en outre que la réputation du Canada à l'échelle internationale s'améliore. Ils attribuent enfin une bonne note à la performance du gouvernement Harper. Voici le détail des résultats et le sens à leur donner selon Nik Nanos.

Canadians are in a remarkably optimistic mood — two Canadians in three believe the country is moving in the right direction.

The first annual Nanos Poll, *The Mood of Canada*, shows 65.8 percent of Canadians believe the country is heading in the right direction, while only 20.2 percent believe Canada is moving in the wrong direction, and 14 percent didn't know.

The survey will be published annually in the year-end double issue of *Policy Options*. The poll of 1,004 Canadians, conducted November 6 to 8, is accurate to within a margin of 3.1 percent, 19 times out of 20.

As this poll is the first in an annual series, there are as yet no comparative data. But this is precisely our objective — to establish a comparative database on the mood of the nation. Over time, we'll not only take the temperature of the country as it is at the time, but we'll be able to look back and compare it with *The Mood of Canada* at the end of 2007. It's an exciting long-term project, and Nanos Research is delighted to undertake it exclusively for *Policy Options*.

While there are no comparative data in this first poll, there is no doubt that the country is in a very good

mood. In all regions of the country, and among all ages and both genders, Canadians believe the country is moving in the right direction (question 3).

The only regional variation is in Atlantic Canada, where only 56.3 percent agree the country is moving in the right direction — compared with 65.8 percent nationally — but that merely reflects historical concerns about economic disparities in the region, as well as some current political issues with Ottawa, notably over equalization and the Atlantic Accord. But in Quebec, 67.8 percent of respondents agreed the country was heading in the right direction, as did 65.1 percent in Ontario and 67.8 percent in the West.

Among demographic groups, young Canadians in the 18-to-29 age group were the most optimistic about the country's direction, at 70.5 percent, while Canadians in the 40-to-49 demographic were comparatively the least optimistic — but even there, 62.4 percent agreed the country was moving in the right direction.

While, again, there is as yet no comparative database, the question of whether the country is moving in the right direction is one of the core measurements for any government. Governments that do poorly on this

measure do so at their peril. The fact that two Canadians out of three think Canada is moving in the right direction is very good news for the Harper government.

It also places in context many of the more complex issues, such as Afghanistan and climate change, which are very divisive in the country. But even with all that, Canadians overall clearly think the country is moving in the right direction. We shouldn't confuse the daily chatter of the political class and the noise of talk radio with the overall feelings of Canadians on the direction in which the country is moving.

When we asked Canadians whether they were better or worse off in their personal finances than they were a year ago (question 1), by 2-to-1 margin they said they were better off. In our poll, 29.4 percent said they were better off, while only 15.7 percent said they were worse off. And 52.1 percent said there had been no change.

Looking forward from the end of 2007 to the beginning of 2008, when we asked Canadians whether the economy would become stronger or weaker in the next year (question 2), there was a striking degree of optimism. By a margin of 2 to 1, Canadians think the economy will get stronger. Half of all Canadians, 49.3 percent, think the economy will get stronger over the next year, while only 19.8 percent believe it will get weaker. One Canadian in four, 24.9 percent, thinks there will be no change. On a regional basis, optimism was strongest in the Atlantic, where 55.0 percent think the economy will improve, and this in the region with historically the weakest economy and highest unemployment in the country.

This is an important baseline question as well — most Canadians look at political issues and ask them-

selves, What does it mean to me? This pocketbook measurement is a good indicator of voters' mood. They're saying 2007 has been a good year, and going forward into 2008, they're very bullish about the economy getting stronger in the next year.

The optimism of younger Canadians is very striking, and in contrast with the relative pessimism of Canadians in the 60-plus demographic. In the 18-to-29 age group, fully 35.8 percent say they're better off than a year ago, as against only 17.7 percent of Canadians in the 60-plus group. Of course, this is the age group that took the biggest hit on retirement incomes and plans the Harper government's reversal of tax rulings on companies converting to income trusts. This is a very important group of voters — especially to the Conservatives — precisely because of their high turnout at elections. This is a demo-

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graphic for the Conservatives to keep a watchful eye on.

Canadians are also relatively positive when assessing relations between their federal and provincial governments, as well as in their sense of Canada's role in the world.

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "not improved" and 5 is "improved," only 13.5 percent said federal-provincial relations had definitely not improved (question 4) and 19.5 percent rated the federal-provincial file only a 2 on the scale of 5. But 43.2 percent saw moderate improvement, at 3 on a scale of 5, while 11.9 percent saw it as a 4 on a scale of 5, and 4.4 percent said definitely improved, at 5 on a scale of 5.

Nowhere is the federal-provincial file more sensitive than in

Quebec, where conduct of the relationship is an important test of governments in both Ottawa and Quebec City. Both the Harper and Charest governments should be pleased by these numbers.

Only 7.5 percent of Quebecers thought federal-provincial relations had not improved at all, while 22.9 percent rated them only 2 on a scale of 5. But 42.7 percent saw moderate improvement, at 3 out of 5, while 16.5 percent saw improvement as 4 out of 5, and 2.4 percent saw it as 5 out of 5.

The highest "not improved" score regionally was 25.4 percent in the Atlantic, reflecting disagreements between Ottawa, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia over the offshore and equalization. The incendiary rhetoric of Newfoundland Premier Danny Williams on this issue, openly calling for the defeat of Prime Minister Harper, may have inflamed public opinion in the

region. Federal-provincial disagreement over the Atlantic Accord is definitely a sensitive issue in the region.

Overall, Canadians are in a show-me mood on federal-provincial relations, but the upside for both federal and provincial governments is that 43.2 percent of respondents chose 3 out of 5, reflecting modest improvement. In other words, more than four voters out of 10 are up for grabs.

Quebecers are clearly giving Stephen Harper credit for delivering on the promise of "open federalism" in his Quebec City speech of December 19, 2005. Quebecers are likely crediting Harper with keeping

QUESTION 1. THINKING OF YOUR PERSONAL FINANCES, ARE YOU BETTER OFF, WORSE OFF, OR HAS THERE BEEN NO CHANGE OVER THE PAST YEAR?

		Total	Better off	Worse off	There has been no change	Unsure
		Responses	%	%	%	%
Aggregate	Canada 2007 ¹	1,004	29.4	15.7	52.1	2.9
Region	Atlantic	103	24.2	12.7	59.9	3.2
	Quebec	250	26.4	12.9	59.1	1.5
	Ontario	301	26.2	18.7	51.9	3.3
	West	351	35.6	16.0	45.0	3.4
Gender	Male	489	33.5	14.0	50.0	2.5
	Female	516	25.4	17.3	54.0	3.3
Age	18 to 29	197	35.8	11.6	50.9	1.7
	30 to 39	193	34.9	10.2	52.4	2.4
	40 to 49	217	32.1	19.9	44.3	3.6
	50 to 59	173	27.4	19.7	51.4	1.4
	60 plus	225	17.7	16.9	60.8	4.6
Home	Own	734	28.3	16.3	52.5	2.9
	Rent	270	32.2	14.1	51.0	2.7

Source: Nanos Research, www.nanosresearch.com

¹ 1,004 Canadians, ± 3.1% 19 times out of 20, November 6 to November 8, 2007.

QUESTION 2. THINKING OF THE UPCOMING YEAR, DO YOU THINK THE CANADIAN ECONOMY WILL BECOME STRONGER, WEAKER, OR WILL THERE BE NO CHANGE?

		Total	Stronger	Weaker	There will be no change	Don't know
		Responses	%	%	%	%
Aggregate	Canada 2007 ¹	1,004	49.3	19.8	24.9	6.1
Region	Atlantic	103	55.0	13.9	26.4	4.8
	Quebec	250	38.4	20.8	35.6	5.2
	Ontario	301	53.3	21.9	20.3	4.5
	West	351	51.9	19.0	20.6	8.5
Gender	Male	489	49.0	23.3	23.0	4.8
	Female	516	49.5	16.5	26.7	7.3
Age	18 to 29	197	54.3	20.8	19.7	5.2
	30 to 39	193	50.6	14.5	28.3	6.6
	40 to 49	217	45.7	24.0	26.2	4.1
	50 to 59	173	48.6	23.1	23.6	4.8
	60 plus	225	47.7	16.9	26.2	9.3
Home	Own	734	47.1	21.3	25.7	5.9
	Rent	270	55.2	15.8	22.6	6.5

Source: Nanos Research, www.nanosresearch.com

¹ 1,004 Canadians, ± 3.1% 19 times out of 20, November 6 to November 8, 2007.

QUESTION 3. WOULD YOU SAY THAT CANADA AS A COUNTRY IS MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION OR THE WRONG DIRECTION?

		Total	Right direction	Wrong direction	Don't know
		Responses	%	%	%
Aggregate	Canada 2007 ¹	1,004	65.8	20.2	14.0
Region	Atlantic	103	56.3	20.9	22.8
	Quebec	250	67.8	21.6	10.6
	Ontario	301	65.1	22.2	12.7
	West	351	67.8	17.3	15.0
Gender	Male	489	68.6	18.8	12.6
	Female	516	63.1	21.5	15.4
Age	18 to 29	197	70.5	17.3	12.1
	30 to 39	193	63.3	21.7	15.1
	40 to 49	217	62.4	20.8	16.7
	50 to 59	173	63.0	27.4	9.6
	60 plus	225	69.2	15.2	15.6
Home	Own	734	65.5	19.7	14.8
	Rent	270	66.6	21.5	11.9

Source: Nanos Research, www.nanosresearch.com

¹ 1,004 Canadians, ± 3.1% 19 times out of 20, November 6 to November 8, 2007.

QUESTION 4. ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5, WHERE 1 IS NOT IMPROVED, AND 5 IS IMPROVED, HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR?

		Total	Not improved	2	3	4	Improved	Don't know
		Responses	%	%	%	%	%	%
Aggregate	Canada 2007 ¹	1,004	13.5	19.5	43.2	11.9	4.4	7.5
Region	Atlantic	103	25.4	26.0	28.9	10.8	3.0	6.0
	Quebec	250	7.5	22.9	42.7	16.5	2.4	8.0
	Ontario	301	14.0	15.1	43.4	7.7	5.1	14.8
	West	351	13.9	18.9	47.6	12.4	5.7	1.5
Gender	Male	489	14.7	19.1	39.9	14.9	5.5	5.8
	Female	516	12.3	19.8	46.3	9.0	3.4	9.2
Age	18 to 29	197	5.2	17.9	45.1	12.7	6.4	12.7
	30 to 39	193	16.3	20.5	43.4	11.4	1.8	6.6
	40 to 49	217	17.2	24.4	37.1	10.9	4.1	6.3
	50 to 59	173	16.8	17.8	47.1	7.7	4.8	5.8
	60 plus	225	12.2	16.5	44.3	15.6	5.1	6.3
Home	Own	734	15.0	19.3	42.6	12.0	4.2	6.9
	Rent	270	9.3	20.0	44.8	11.6	5.0	9.3

Source: Nanos Research, www.nanosresearch.com

¹ 1,004 Canadians, ± 3.1% 19 times out of 20, November 6 to November 8, 2007.

QUESTION 5. ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5, WHERE 1 IS NOT IMPROVED AND 5 IS IMPROVED, HOW WOULD YOU RATE CANADA'S REPUTATION AROUND THE WORLD OVER THE PAST YEAR?

		Total	Not improved	2	3	4	Improved	Don't know
		Responses	%	%	%	%	%	%
Aggregate	Canada 2007 ¹	1,004	7.6	11.2	30.8	33.2	15.1	2.0
Region	Atlantic	103	10.1	11.3	31.9	31.2	15.6	.0
	Quebec	250	6.0	12.9	35.6	36.0	9.6	.0
	Ontario	301	8.0	9.9	28.2	32.2	16.2	5.5
	West	351	7.7	11.1	29.2	32.8	18.1	1.1
Gender	Male	489	8.0	10.7	29.6	33.5	15.9	2.3
	Female	516	7.2	11.6	31.9	33.0	14.4	1.8
Age	18 to 29	197	7.5	10.4	24.9	35.3	17.9	4.0
	30 to 39	193	7.2	15.7	33.1	31.3	11.4	1.2
	40 to 49	217	7.2	8.1	33.0	38.0	12.2	1.4
	50 to 59	173	8.7	13.9	33.2	26.4	15.9	1.9
	60 plus	225	7.6	8.9	30.0	33.8	18.1	1.7
Home	Own	734	7.0	11.4	32.5	32.4	14.7	2.0
	Rent	270	9.2	10.7	26.0	35.5	16.5	2.2

Source: Nanos Research, www.nanosresearch.com

¹ 1,004 Canadians, ± 3.1% 19 times out of 20, November 6 to November 8, 2007.

QUESTION 6. WOULD YOU RATE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LED BY CONSERVATIVE PRIME MINISTER STEPHEN HARPER AS VERY GOOD, GOOD, AVERAGE, POOR OR VERY POOR?

		Total	Very good	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor	Unsure
		Responses	%	%	%	%	%	%
Aggregate	Canada 2007 ¹	1,004	10.1	29.4	38.1	9.0	9.4	4.1
Region	Atlantic	103	4.3	24.7	46.6	8.7	13.0	2.8
	Quebec	250	8.0	41.1	34.1	9.9	4.7	2.1
	Ontario	301	6.5	30.5	36.7	10.9	11.0	4.4
	West	351	16.4	21.4	39.7	6.7	10.3	5.6
Gender	Male	489	12.2	30.5	36.4	7.5	9.9	3.5
	Female	516	8.1	28.3	39.7	10.4	8.8	4.7
Age	18 to 29	197	11.0	25.4	41.6	8.1	8.1	5.8
	30 to 39	193	9.0	26.5	39.8	12.0	7.2	5.4
	40 to 49	217	8.6	33.5	38.0	6.8	10.0	3.2
	50 to 59	173	7.7	28.4	38.0	11.5	11.5	2.9
	60 plus	225	13.5	32.1	33.8	7.2	10.1	3.4
Home	Own	734	10.0	31.1	38.2	8.3	8.7	3.7
	Rent	270	10.3	24.7	37.8	10.9	11.1	5.2

Source: Nanos Research, www.nanosresearch.com

¹ 1,004 Canadians, ± 3.1% 19 times out of 20, November 6th to November 8th, 2007.

his promise to settle the fiscal imbalance between Ottawa and the provinces, with the November 2006 parliamentary resolution recognizing Quebecers as a “nation within a united Canada” as a bonus.

Canadians clearly think that, partly because of the Afghan mission, Canada is playing a larger role on the world stage. While Canadians in Ontario and the West are marginally more likely to think Canada’s reputation is improving, the improvement cores are also relatively strong in Quebec.

Western Canadians are also well disposed to Prime Minister Harper’s vision of classical federalism, respecting the constitutional division of powers between Ottawa and the provinces. That being said, there is still much work to be done to show progress on this file. The Prime Minister has indicated his desire for a First Ministers’ Conference on the economy early in the new year, and that will be an important test of federal-provincial relations.

We asked Canadians how they felt about Canada’s role in the world. Again on a scale of 1 (not improved) to 5 (improved), we asked them to rate Canada’s reputation around the world over the last year (question 5). Twice as many Canadians think the country’s reputation has improved as think it has not improved. Only 7.6 percent said not improved (1 on the scale), while just 11.2 percent placed it at 2 on a scale of 5. In other words, fewer than one Canadian in five sees little or no improvement. But 30.8 percent saw modest improvement, at, 3 on a scale of 5, while 33.2 percent saw real improvement and 15.1 percent saw absolute improvement. In other words, half the country thinks Canada’s global reputation has improved in the last year.

And this is in spite of, and perhaps because of, Canada’s mission of Afghanistan. In spite of its controversial nature, especially in Quebec,

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tation is improving, the improvement cores are also relatively strong in Quebec.

Finally, we asked Canadians for a report card on the Harper government, rating it from very good to very poor (question 6). The Prime Minister and his government get very high marks from Canadians. The Harper government gets a very good rating from 10.1 percent of the voters, and a good one from 29.4 percent. Another 38.1 percent give the government an average report card, while only 9 percent give it poor performance marks, and 9.4 percent rate it as very poor. In other

Fully four Canadians in 10 give the government good marks, more than twice as many as give it bad marks. Harper’s performance numbers are strongest of all in Quebec, where 8 percent rate his performance as very good, and 41.1 percent give him good marks. Stated another way, half of Quebecers give the Prime Minister a strong passing grade.

words, fully four Canadians in 10 give the government good marks, more than twice as many as give it bad marks. Harper’s performance numbers are strongest of all in Quebec, where 8 percent rate his performance as very good, and 41.1 percent give him good marks. Stated another way, half of Quebecers give the Prime Minister a strong passing grade.

Those are very good attitudinal numbers for the Prime Minister in

Quebec, where he clearly needs more seats to graduate from minority to majority status at the next election.

Taken together with the sense among Canadians that the country is moving in the right direction, along with Canadians seeing themselves as better off than a year ago and optimistic about the economy in 2008, these are positive signs for the Prime Minister to take into what could well be an election year.

However, there is a continuing caution in the voting intention numbers, as measured in other Nanos polls, as well as in those by other public opinion research firms, in that the Conservatives continue to knock on the door of a majority but seem unable to cross the threshold. They continue to hit a glass ceiling, suffering from a gender gap with women voters, while the Liberals benefit from the resilience of their party brand, especially in Ontario. These are strong reasons for Harper to approach any election scenario with caution.

But overall, as a Liberal campaign slogan once said, the land is strong. The mood of Canada is very good.

Contributing Writer Nik Nanos is president and CEO of Nanos Research (formerly SES Research), the Ottawa public opinion and research firm that conducts the Nanos Poll. The Mood of Canada is the first in an annual year-end series of polls that will be conducted exclusively for Policy Options. nnanos@sesresearch.com