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# ANALYSIS | Economy, not terrorism, remains Canadians' top vote driver

Polls suggest that while terrorism is on voters' minds, economy is still most important issue

By Éric Grenier, for CBC News Posted: Jan 21, 2015 5:00 AM ET | Last Updated: Jan 21, 2015 5:00 AM ET



French President François Hollande, right, talks to Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian next to Prime Minister Manuel Valls, as they leave a crisis meeting on Jan. 10 following the attacks in Paris. Hollande's approval ratings increased in the wake of the attacks and hostage-takings that left 20 people dead, including three gunmen. (Thierry Chesnot/Getty Images)

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About The Author

In the aftermath of the attacks in Paris, beleaguered French President François Hollande has experienced a significant boost in public support. But on this side of the Atlantic, concerns over national security and terrorism remain low on Canadians' priority list, according to polling data.

Recent polls in France have recorded historic gains for Hollande. One survey, [conducted by Ifop](#), showed Hollande's approval rating bounding from just 19 per cent in December to 40 per cent in the wake of the attacks. The pollster has not seen such an increase in popular support for any president since François Mitterand more than two decades ago.

Though admittedly smaller in scale, the attacks in Saint Jean-sur-Richelieu, Que., and Ottawa in October did not have the same degree of effect on Prime Minister Stephen Harper's approval ratings.

However, his numbers did improve.

The data is thin, but polls conducted after the attacks, in which two soldiers were killed in separate incidents, suggest a gain of about two to three points in Harper's approval ratings, while [Abacus Data](#) found

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Éric Grenier  
Polls

Éric Grenier is founder of ThreeHundredEight.com, a website dedicated to political polling in Canada and electoral forecasts. He has previously written for The Globe and Mail, Huffington Post Canada and The Hill Times, and has worked with Le Devoir and L'actualité during the most recent provincial and federal election campaigns in Quebec.

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- Abacus Data
- Nanos Research poll on vote influence
- Canadian Opinion Research Archive

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those holding a positive opinion of the prime minister increasing from 27 to 34 per cent.

It should be noted the polls in this comparison were not done immediately before or after the attacks. The increases in Harper's personal numbers could have been motivated by other factors.

## Terrorism a growing concern for Canadians

Nevertheless, it is clear that the attacks pushed the issues of national security and terrorism into the minds of Canadians, something the events in Paris may prolong.

A series of polls by [Abacus Data](#) show how the issue gained in importance in the past few months.

In March 2014, only four per cent of Canadians listed public safety and terrorism as one of their top three issues. That hardly budged over the next few months, registering at six per cent in August.

But as Canada's Armed Forces became committed to the war in Iraq against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the fall, the issue became one of the top three for 11 per cent of Canadians. That increased significantly to 18 per cent in the wake of the Oct. 22 Ottawa shooting, settling at 16 per cent in mid-December. Similar data is not yet available following the Paris attacks.

However, public safety and terrorism remains just one issue among many. At 16 per cent, public safety and terrorism were listed as a top three issue as often as the environment was. And it still trailed at some distance health care (54 per cent) and job creation (35 per cent), the importance of which was unchanged by the events of October.

## An election issue?

The Conservatives do have good reason to bank on the issue as one that plays in their favour. One in four Conservative supporters told Abacus it was one of their top three issues, compared to 17 per cent for supporters of the Liberal Party and just eight per cent of New Democrats.

Whether or not the issue will sustain even its current level of importance, however, is another question entirely.

After the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001, [EnviroNics](#) found that world conflict/war and terrorism/security were the most important issues facing Canadians for 28 per cent of respondents, cited more than anything else. Prior to the attacks, the issues registered less than one per cent.

But by the [second quarter of 2003](#), [EnviroNics](#) found this was the top issue for



Prime Minister Stephen Harper, front, NDP Leader Tom Mulcair, top left, and Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau leave the funeral of Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent, in Longueuil, Que., on Nov. 1. Vincent was one of two soldiers killed in a pair of attacks in October, which police said were carried out independently by radical converts to Islam. (Chris Wattie/Reuters)

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just 1.5 per cent of Canadians, with health care, the economy, and jobs back on top. The bombings in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005 had no discernible effect on what Canadians rated as their top issues of concern.

In the end, terrorism and security remains low on the list of priorities for Canadians when casting a ballot. A poll conducted by [Nanos Research](#) in November found that 72 per cent of Canadians, when given a choice between two options, said the "track record of the government on issues like the economy and jobs" would influence how they vote. Only 16 per cent said "foreign policy issues like fighting the war on terrorism" would be the deciding factor.

With the attacks having occurred so close to home, the effect on François Hollande's political standing in France is more acute and could have important consequences (a poll showed his Socialist Party making gains, rather than the anti-immigration National Front). But in Canada, the 2015 election seems likely to be decided on the issue that still ranks as Canadians' top concern: the economy.

**The most recent poll by Abacus Data** on leader impressions and top issues was conducted between Dec. 18 and 20 and interviewed 1,438 Canadians via an internet panel. As the poll was conducted online, a margin of error does not apply. The questions asked were as follows: "Do you have a positive or negative impression of the following people?" and "What are the top three most important issues facing Canada?" Respondents were then given a choice of 13 options.

**The poll by Nanos Research** was conducted between Nov. 15 and 18 and interviewed 1,000 Canadians via the telephone. A margin of error of +/- 3.1 per cent, 19 times out of 20, is associated with the sample. The question asked was as follows: "If a federal election were held today, which of the following would be more important in influencing your vote? The track record of the government on issues like the economy and jobs or the track record of the government on foreign policy issues like fighting the war on terrorism?"



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- Rod Hebner Guest

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### Budget delayed

Jan. 17, 2015 2:01 PM

This week on The House, declining oil prices have forced the government to delay the tabling of the next budget. Employment Minister Jason Kenney explains the government's reasoning. Then, the leader of the Official Opposition, Tom Mulcair, shares his thoughts about the state of the economy. Former Bank of Canada governor David Dodge also joins us with his assessment.

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- orange8 Guest

Well Mr Harper has broken the Canadian economy with his one trick pony....oil.

So what is plan B? .....scare us into voting for him by going around the world picking more fights?

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- JohnConrad Guest

Whether or not the government is elected, whether or not there is a majority or minority government, one thing is certain; all will for one reason or another eventually go.

It is fervently to be wished that when that time comes, they use their Aeroplan points to purchase one way tickets to some place far from Canada, never to be heard from again.

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- holyhannah Guest

Western governments created "terrorism". They fund it. They make it happen!

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- OPED01 Guest

@holyhannah

A bit strong. But one could make a case that they aid and abet it.They certainly created the word for use as fearmongering.....

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- dawwal Guest

@OPED01 The invasion of Iraq by Bush and Blair has killed or maimed hundreds of thousands of people. The cause of the major global problem seems clear.

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- ninamarie Guest

Wait for it. War. Eternal war brought to us by the morally bankrupt Conservative Party.

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- ninamarie Guest

And despite all that propaganda, too, Canadians are still concerned about Canada. But don't worry. The Conservatives have an answer. They will spend our money on more propaganda warning us what peril we are in. The danger we face in Canada is from the Conservative Party who want to reward the rich for being rich and punish Canadians for wanting to work and to eat.

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- yokelman Guest

When it comes to terrorism the Conservatives and the far right wingers need to take off those tinfoil hats.

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- CBC Censorship of Free Speech Guest

@yokelman

While very few people in the west are harmed by terrorism, and the risk is very low, the harm in other parts of the world is extreme. In Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Pakistan, and other countries extreme outrages such as mass kidnappings, beheadings, slavery, mass killings of hundreds bordering on genocide are becoming more common.

Should we look the other way when millions of innocent civilians are faced with such dangers, and look for "root causes"? Or should we help those innocent... » [more](#)

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- OPED01 Guest

@CBC Censorship of Free Speech

Well, there's the conundrum, isn't it? No one would disagree that one shouldn't "help" one's neighbours or help to protect innocents. It's just the way one goes about it best that's open to question...and then there's the matter of potentially criminalizing innocent people within the country by creating new legislation to ward off what you say is a low risk, where none is called for.

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- Neil Austen Guest

Iran has just slapped Harper around like a yappy dog. By refusing to cut back oil production in OPEC, Iran has essentially punched Canada in the gut. While Iran has no problem operating at oil prices below \$50 a barrel, debt-ridden Canada cannot. It now costs more to extract the oil from the tarsands than selling price. Modern warfare is not fought with ships, jets, or tanks. It's fought economically, and Harper has left Canada defenseless, armed only with costly dirty crude oil. Sure is smart... » [more](#)

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- OPED01 Guest

@Neil Austen

Canada relied heavily on crude oil long before the current government came into power.

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- Dumbdog Guest

@OPED01

And threw many more eggs into that basket after the Reformers ruthlessly seized power, while ignoring advisers.

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- yokelman Guest

By locally such beef, chickens and pork.

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- yokelman Guest

Interest rates should be at 1990 rates, the rates should have never gone down in the first place. No savings no need to keep money in the bank.

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- OPED01 Guest

@yokelman

How about 1980-81 rates when you could get 11%-13% on GICs?

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