

DATA DIVE WITH NIK NANOS

FOOD PRICE NUMBERS ARE UNAPPETIZING

Survey suggests the majority of Canadians are buying less expensive items, with younger people most likely to feel the pressure

OPINION

Nik Nanos is the chief data scientist at Nanos Research, 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.

Canadians have been left bruised by a pandemic that has disrupted their lives. Now some are having difficulty putting food on the table.

Food affordability is on the political menu and the numbers are unappetizing. A new survey for CTV News suggests that six in 10 Canadians (61 per cent) report buying less expensive food, 25 per cent are stockpiling food and 17 per cent report eating less because of the price of food. What is behind the numbers is even less appetizing. Younger people are most likely to feel the pressure. Only 20 per cent of those between the ages of 18 to 34 report nothing has changed compared with 37 per cent of individuals over 55 years of age. Quebecers are most likely to report stockpiling food, while women are more likely than men to say they are buying less expensive food.

The level of changes in behaviour are very much inequitable, with the less financially fortunate struggling the most. Of households with an income of \$100,000 or more, about 10 per cent reported eating less food. For those with a household income of less than \$60,000, more than 30 per cent reported eating less.

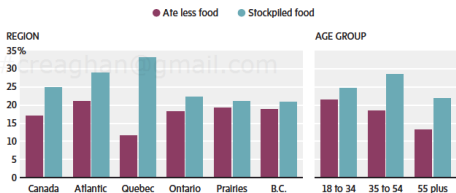
Canadians self-reporting as disabled were more likely to report eating less (27 per cent), compared with those without a disability (16 per cent). Racialized individuals also had a higher likelihood of reporting eating less because of the price of food, but the percentages were within the margin of error compared with non-racialized Canadians.

This is unpalatable for a nation that claims to be among the best places in the world to live. Even with our small population compared with other major economies, Canada is a Group of Seven member country and has the 10th-largest nominal GDP, according to the International Monetary Fund. We have a social safety system of programs to help those less fortunate and we generally pride ourselves on being a great place to live. When people struggle to pay for food, elected officials and poli-

Canadians on food prices and the economy

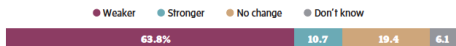
FOOD AFFORDABILITY

Percentage of households that have eaten less or stockpiled food in the past 30 days because of rising prices

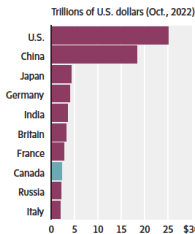


ECONOMY

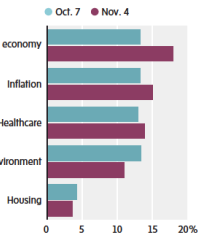
How will the Canadian economy change in the upcoming year? Nov. 4 survey



Top 10 countries with the highest nominal GDP



Top 5 national concerns by week of survey



MURAT YÜKSELIR / THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: NANOS RESEARCH; INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

icy makers should take notice.

At the outset of the pandemic, Canadians hoarded things such as yeast, flour and toilet paper. Today the question isn't whether we can get what we want, it's whether we can afford what we want.

As incredible as it sounds, the pandemic, which coincided with

a period of major disruption and risk, may turn out to be considered "the good old days." Major government stimulus, and with direct support, heralded a period during which many Canadians reported that their personal finances were better off than before the pandemic. Now, concerns about

issues such as jobs, the economy and inflation are on the rise nationwide.

Anxiety about putting food on the table should concern our political leaders, because voters will be looking to dole out punishment.

At the top of the list may be

food retailers. It doesn't help when companies such as Loblaw show their profits jumping significantly. Canadians expect rising costs to be passed on to the consumer - but not an extra markup tagged onto food prices. Food retailers perceived as profiteering on the backs of their customers for essentials like food may end up paying a price. The sector is still dealing with the fallout from a bread price-fixing scandal in 2019, with lawsuits going before the courts.

Where consumer anger leads, expect politicians to follow. For both the Liberals and the Conservatives, a consumer agenda scrutinizing the price of food falls well within their wheelhouse. For the Liberals, it fits within their progressive agenda of helping those at risk. For the Conservatives, it falls within their populist vision of fighting for the average Canadian against big business interests.

Imagine waking up every day and thinking that you and your family might have to eat less. This is not a normal situation for a country as rich as Canada and it sows the seeds of discontent.

Perhaps relatedly, at a time when some people are struggling to pay for groceries and most are bracing for a recession, Canadians rate the health of our democracy a D-plus. A new survey for The Globe and Mail shows that people score the health of our democracy a 57 out of 100.

With a D-plus student, we would be looking to have an immediate intervention to avoid a possible failure. Those who give the health of our democracy failing marks put the blame clearly on the current government (20 per cent), worry about freedoms/rights being threatened (19 per cent) and believe we need electoral reform (12 per cent). Canadians who believe our democracy is healthy assert things are fine (27 per cent), elections are well-run (16 per cent) and see the rise of right-wing beliefs as a positive (11 per cent).

There is no easy solution to our current situation.

We need our leaders to focus on making sure that, as a country, we create an economic environment where people can pay their bills, afford groceries and put a roof over their head. Failure on those fronts, and Canadians will be looking for politicians to pay the price.