

POST COMMENT

EDITORIAL

STATE OF THE NATION

Carney slow walks new pipeline

Liberals can't help getting in the way

This week's announcement by Prime Minister Mark Carney and Alberta Premier Danielle Smith that a new pipeline to the West Coast, now called Pacific Link, has been designated as a national interest project is good news for Canadians and the energy industry that powers their economy.

But any celebration must be tempered by the fact that despite clear and growing demand for Alberta oil, Canada has become such an unattractive place to invest that a pipeline can only be built with the full backing of the federal government.

True to form, Carney stood in front of a crowd of oil workers in Fort McMurray, Alta., on Thursday and said many of the right things. "Oil demand will continue to be significant for decades to come," he admitted. "The question is: who will emerge as the world's trusted suppliers?"

His answer: "It must be Canada" — a country he referred to as a burgeoning "global energy superpower." But is this really how an energy superpower would act?

Thursday also marked the one-year anniversary of Smith's announcement that she was seeking a new pipeline. That was followed by a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed between the federal and provincial governments on Nov. 27, 2025. On March 6, they announced an "agreement-in-principle to accelerate the construction of major projects in Alberta," including pipelines.

That was followed by an "Implementation Agreement" on the MOU, which provided further details about what both parties would need to do to see the project through. And on July 2, the pipeline was referred to the Major Projects Office (MPO).

That's at least five joint announcements in less than a year on the same pipeline, and that's before a single environmental review has been conducted. If Canadians think that's moving relatively fast, it's only because the bar has been set so low and they've been conditioned to believe that development happens at a snail's pace.

Faced with an Iranian-blockaded Strait of Hormuz, the United Arab Emirates announced the construction of a new pipeline in May that it expects to be operational by next year — basically the amount of time it took us to decide whether a pipeline is actually something a would-be energy superpower might need.

Perhaps it's not fair to compare Canada to a dictatorship, but even this country used to build pipelines at record speed. The United States issued orders for the 2,500-kilometre wartime CANOL pipeline from Alaska to the Northwest Territories on April 30, 1942. Canada approved the plans eight days later and it was built in just two years.

A mere 38 days after the Pipe Lines Act became law, the newly established regulator approved a portion of what is now Enbridge Line 1 from Edmonton to Regina. The full 1,600-kilometre line to Wisconsin was built in 150 days. And 11 months after the Trans Mountain Pipeline Company was created, the 1,150-kilometre Trans Mountain pipeline was given the go-ahead. It was completed eight months later.

Pacific Link now has a national interest designation, but as Carney said on Thursday, "Today is just the start, it's the real start of the process." The pipeline still has to be approved by the MPO. Environmental assessments need to be completed. More First Nations must be consulted. Conditions will have to be finalized and then met. Shovels will not be in the ground until Sept. 1, 2027 — at the earliest.

The Liberals have made some efforts to expedite the process, including Bill C-39, which is currently being debated in the House. But as the Post's Jamie Sarkonak argued earlier this week, the proposed legislation is mostly window dressing.

The bill is intended to streamline approvals and provide a greater degree of certainty for developers by designating one federal authority to oversee the process and ensure that numerous assessments can take place concurrently. But much of that enhanced co-ordination appears to be optional for the Canadian Energy Regulator, which is responsible for pipelines.

The bill aspires to get pipelines approved within 365 days, but gives considerable leeway to the government in how it calculates that timeline, and includes options to extend it for additional Indigenous consultations.

And herein lies the problem with getting anything done in this country: no matter what gets proposed, some provinces, Indigenous groups or special interests will inevitably try to stand in the way.

Carney attempted to present a unified front this week, when he appeared alongside First Nations leaders and oil executives and held up his friendly relationship with Smith as an example of "co-operative federalism."

But the prime minister has so far failed to convince private investors that Canada is an any-less-risky place to do business than before. The new pipeline will be owned by the Canadian and Alberta governments, with at least a 10 per cent stake going to Indigenous communities. Pembina Pipeline and Trans Mountain Corporation have been brought on as partners, but it should escape no one's notice that one of those is a Crown corporation.

Canada desperately needs new pipeline capacity, so we're glad this project is one step closer to being realized, but Canadians should not fool themselves into thinking that Carney is fulfilling his promise to build "at speeds we haven't seen in generations," or enticing investors to come back to the Alberta oilpatch.

National Post View



TIM KROCHAK / POSTMEDIA NEWS FILES

Having moved away from the woker elements of Justin Trudeau's agenda and nudged his party towards the centre on issues like immigration, Prime Minister Mark Carney has reassured moderate voters and even impressed some Conservatives, Lord Ashcroft writes.

Canada's leaders have work to do

LORD ASHCROFT

And so it came to pass that after years of liberal overreach, identity politics, open borders and international timidity, a non-politician was swept to power promising to make his country great again, restore its global prestige and put the economy first.

Yes, Mark Carney and Donald Trump have more in common than either of them would thank you for pointing out. The relationship between their two nations will dominate Canada's domestic political landscape long after the present incumbent of the White House has left the scene.

The Trump tariffs and his talk of making Canada the 51st state didn't just help to swing the 2025 election; they continue to shape Canadian politics. Many see Carney almost as a wartime leader, his economic credentials making him the man for the times. His calm authority serves as its own kind of charisma, and there is wide support for the way he handles his American adversary.

More broadly, having moved away from the woker elements of Trudeau's agenda and nudged his party towards the centre on issues like immigration, Carney has reassured moderate voters and even impressed some Conservatives. They like his plans to boost Canada's economic resilience and energy independence — something they think is long overdue — and to seek wider trading partnerships (even if some quietly wonder how close they really want to get to the People's Republic of China). Overall, Canadians say the country is on the wrong track by a margin of just seven points — positively jaunty numbers compared to their equivalents in Europe and the U.S.

The Liberal coalition has fault lines, however. Carney was helped into office by tactical left-wing voters who lent him their support not just to keep Trump at bay but to prevent a Conservative victory. In my research, these voters tended to give the government the benefit of the doubt, at least for now. But many are uncomfortable with the direction of travel. Their concerns focus on the otherwise popular West Coast oil pipeline, which, they fear, signals a dilution of commitments on the environment and First Nations. These trans-

actional voters are clear that they have made a compromise: their calculation could alter if they believe the centrist tilt goes too far, political circumstances change or the NDP (to which many retain an allegiance despite lending the Liberals their support last year) shows new signs of becoming a credible national force.

Among voters generally, while Carney and the Liberals enjoy healthy leads on handling tariff negotiations and U.S. relations, things are much more competitive when it comes to bread-and-butter questions like the economy, housing and the cost of living. Carney is currently ahead when we ask people which leader best "understands the lives of people like me," but fewer than one third of voters think this is actually true of him. If living standards continue to stagnate, it's easy to see how an air of calm authority could, over time, turn into one of aloof technocracy.

The Trump tariffs and his talk of making Canada the 51st state didn't just help to swing the 2025 election; they continue to shape Canadian politics.

The Conservatives should be the main beneficiaries of any such shifts, but they have work to do if they are to capitalize. At their best, they are still associated with business, fiscal responsibility, law and order, lower taxes and immigration control. Their most important negative is one of permission rather than persuasion: they are too closely identified with U.S.-style politics. Asked to expand on this in my focus groups, voters talked about an aggressive campaigning style, a taste for culture war issues, or a general MAGA vibe.

Whether this impression is fair or groundless, it exists (when I asked my 10,000 poll respondents to tap in the word or phrase they most associated with the Conservatives, they were as likely to write "Trump" as "Pierre") and it could hardly be more damag-

ing. Four years ago, my polling found that only a quarter of Canadians saw the U.S. as a threat. Today, only a quarter see their southern neighbour as an ally. Canadians are more likely to have an unfavourable view of Trump than of Vladimir Putin, and they think it's more important to stand up to Washington than Beijing. Though Trump will be gone in fewer than 850 days, voters overwhelmingly think the U.S. relationship will matter at least as much in the next Canadian federal election as it does now. "Trump winning a second term proves we can't trust them," one Ontario voter told us. "Even if Pete Buttigieg or Kamala Harris is president in 2028, what's going to stop President JD Vance doing the exact same thing in 2032?" In Canada, each party's approach to the question will be a crucial test of its values, priorities and fitness for government.

Pierre Poilievre's leadership has also been questioned. It is true that he polls less favourably than his party, and a substantial chunk of voters say they would be more likely to consider the Conservatives if someone else were in charge. But when we suggested alternative prominent party figures to our poll respondents, the potential losses outweighed the theoretical gains. Combined with the impression of division and general disruption that a leadership contest so often entails, the advantages of a switch are at best uncertain.

By the time of the next election, the Conservatives will need to do more than channel people's frustrations; they will need to have answers and a plan — something that many thought was missing last time round. They should not campaign as a scrappy insurgency but an alternative government with a tough but constructive approach to the U.S. and imaginative ideas on day-to-day issues and challenges like AI (the third biggest threat facing the country in the eyes of young voters). There is only so much an opposition can do to prise apart the government's voting coalition and change the political weather. But they must be ready when it happens.

Special to National Post

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47%

say Canada is heading in the wrong direction

Exclusive poll reveals an anxious populace, *A8*
The lessons for Poilievre, *A9*
Plus, pollster Lord Ashcroft weighs in, *A10*

45%

feel worse off than they did a year ago

CANADA NO. 10 FOR GLOBAL SMARTS; U.S. NO. 18. *A2*

NATIONAL POST

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RIGHT TO THE POINT

Is this Quebec's future?

The man who once called politicians' referendum obsession 'psychological harassment' has changed his tune, and could severely alter Canada. *A3, A4*

Parti Québécois
Leader
Paul St-Pierre
Plamondon

EVAN BUHLER / POSTMEDIA NEWS

COMMENT

Separatism poses 'significant risk' for Alberta

STEPHEN HARPER

As a former prime minister of Canada, staying silent on the upcoming referendum on Alberta secession is not an option. But I wish it were. I love my country, and I love my province. I do not wish to pit one against the other. I believe that is how most Albertans feel.

Despite the efforts of a few on each side, opinion here is not polarized. Whether they vote for or against the referendum, most Albertans neither wish to separate nor are happy with their place in the country. Albertans are naturally inclined to love Canada and have made disproportionate contributions to every facet of national life. They do, however, wonder why Canada periodically seems to not love them.

It has not always been like this. Indeed, as late as 2015, support for secession in Alberta was a big fat zero per cent. This was an important achievement of the government I led, but it was not Herculean. It simply required addressing the issues that Albertans wanted addressed.

For example, Western farmers were given the right to market their own grain — something Ottawa had denied them for seven decades. We also ceased treating Alberta gun owners like criminals, and, instead, treated criminals like criminals.

We also addressed more systemic issues, at least those we could without opening the Constitution. We did not end equalization but, as the Alberta government requested, we removed the equalization component from other health and social transfers. More can be done on the equalization front.

We appointed the senators that Albertans had elected. We also increased Alberta's representation in the Commons to reflect its population. This was not perfect rep-by-pop, but the differences were because of protections for the smaller provinces, not Ontario and Quebec.

See HARPER on A2

INSIDE

After a long legal ordeal, Steven Galloway gets an overdue, and profuse, apology. *Sarkonak, A11*

Canada has a wealth of fiction writers. Is our literary culture holding them back? *Weekend Post, FP15-18*

WORLD



ERIK MARMOR / GETTY IMAGES

'He's stabbing the pilot. Come help.' How the drama on board Flight 1073 unfolded, and 182 lives were saved. *A16*

FP

Trade war redraws once-near-invisible border between N.B., Maine. *FP1*

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“Closer to home, when people think about their own lives and careers and prospects, things feel somewhat less gloomy and more within their power to determine. — Lord Ashcroft Polls, U.K.-based pollster

STATE OF THE NATION

‘ON THE WRONG TRACK’

Poll finds Canadians are feeling sour, and yet less pessimistic than other nations

SHARON KIRKEY

Canadians are feeling relatively “jaunty” in the face of a trade war with a country they now view as an adversary and no friend, even while saying they feel worse off than they did a year ago, according to a new poll of more than 10,000 Canadian adults.

Most believe Prime Minister Mark Carney and his Liberal government are best suited to handle trade negotiations and American designs on Canada, and most voters overall feel the Liberals are making headway and “doing some good things” — or they’re at least giving them the benefit of the doubt that they will.

But while Carney is polling stronger than his party, which isn’t the case for Pierre Poilievre, the high cost of living and other bread-and-butter issues were ranked as more personally pressing than the trade war.

According to the poll, Carney leads on attributes like “understands the lives of people like me,” though only 32 per cent thought this was true of him, according to U.K.-based pollster, Lord Ashcroft Polls.

“If living standards continue to stagnate, it’s easy to see how an air of calm authority could, over time, turn into aloof technocracy,” Lord Michael Ashcroft, a British businessman, philanthropist and former deputy chair of the British Conservative party, wrote in a commentary for National Post.

While the poll found 47 per cent of Canadians think the country is heading in the wrong direction compared to 40 per cent who believe Canada is on the proper path, the numbers are notably less pessimistic than in other western nations, Ashcroft wrote.

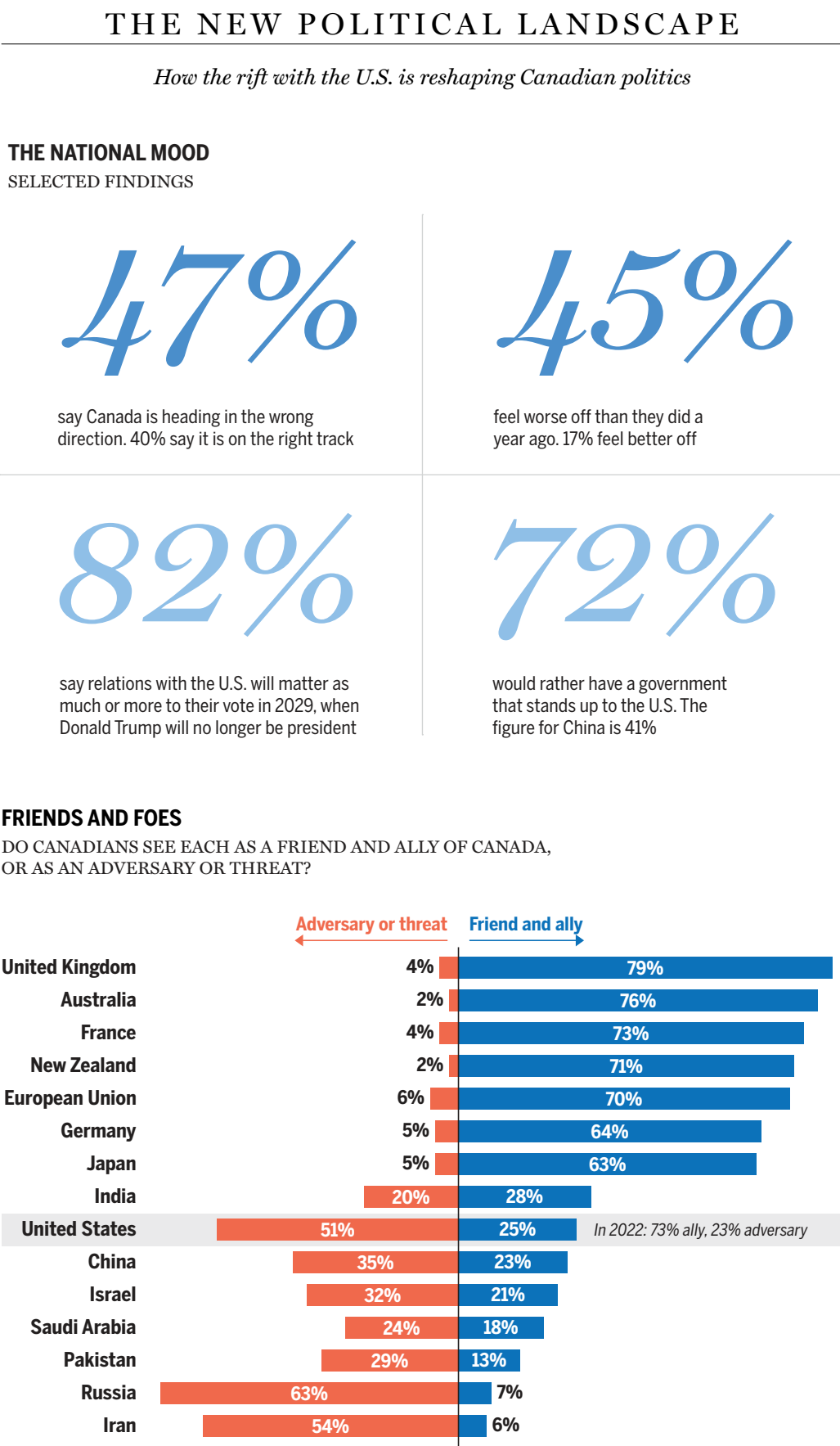
“Overall, Canadians say the country is on the wrong track by a margin of just seven points — positively jaunty numbers compared to their equivalents in Europe and the U.S.”

Recent U.S. polls put the “wrong direction” camp ahead by 20 to 30 points, with a similar picture in Britain.

U.S. President Donald Trump’s tariffs and bombastic rhetoric “didn’t just help to swing the 2025 election; they continue to shape Canadian politics” Ashcroft wrote. “Many see Carney almost as a wartime leader, his economic credentials making him the man for the times.”

In all, 10,098 adults in Canada were surveyed online between July 31 and Aug. 17. A poll sample of this size has a margin of error of plus or minus one percentage point.

In addition, 16 focus groups involving 128 participants — equal numbers of men and women drawn from a range of backgrounds — were held in four locations in B.C., Alberta,



“(Incumbent governments have successfully framed) national elections as referendums on President Trump’s trade policies and portraying the centre-right party as a proxy for the Americans. — *Lord Ashcroft Polls*

STATE OF THE NATION



Tory Leader Pierre Poilievre greets supporters at an Aug. 21 event in Cambridge, Ont. A poll found “potential but currently unlikely Conservative voters” pegged not liking Poilievre as the top reason they were put off from voting Conservative.

PETER J. THOMPSON / NATIONAL POST

KEY FINDINGS OF THE POLL

An ambitious new poll by British-based Ashcroft Polls surveyed 10,098 Canadian adults on a wide range of topics. Here are the key findings.

Threats to Canada:

After a trade war with the Americans (47 per cent), the most serious threat to Canadians as a whole was the risk of a new economic and financial crisis (38 per cent) followed by immigration (32 per cent). Climate change was fourth overall, followed by loss of jobs to robotics, AI and machine learning.

Allies or adversaries?

The U.K, Australia and France were more likely to be seen as allies of Canada, while Russia, Iran and the U.S. were the most likely to be seen as an adversary or threat.

In 2022, 73 per cent of Canadians saw the U.S. as an ally. Today, only 25 per cent do.

The U.S. vs. China: Who should Canada stand up to?

When asked if they had to choose, 72 per cent of Canadians as a whole said they’d prefer a government that stands up to the United States versus 28 per cent who said the government should seek accommodations with the U.S.

By comparison, 59 per cent of Canadians would prefer to seek co-operation with China rather than stand up to Beijing (41 per cent).

Trump will still be a threat even after he’s no longer in the White House:

Most Canadians feel the same tensions with the U.S. will exist even after Donald Trump is no longer president by the time of the next federal election in 2029: 40 per cent said managing the Canada-U.S. relationship will be as important as it is now, with a further 42 per cent saying it will be even more important.

The party and their leader’s approval ratings:

Canadians are more likely to have a net positive view of Mark Carney than of the Liberal party: 60 per cent had a positive view of Carney, compared to 55 per cent who had a positive view of the Liberals.

The reverse was true for Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, who scored a lower positive score (43 per cent) than his party (49 per cent).

Who would you never vote for?

A slightly higher proportion of voters said they would never vote for the Conservatives (27 per cent) than said the same for the Liberals (24 per cent) or NDP (22 per cent).

What are the most important issues facing Canada today?

The cost of living was chosen by 60 per cent of respondents as the most important issue facing Canada today, followed by health care, the economy and jobs, housing and trade and tariffs with the U.S.

Source: Ashcroft Polls interviewed 10,098 Canadian adults online between July 31 and Aug. 17. A poll sample of this size has a margin of error of plus or minus one percentage point.

National Post

National Post

Conservative quandary

LEADER POILIEVRE’S POPULARITY WITH CANADIANS LAGS BEHIND HIS PARTY, POLL FINDS, BUT VOTERS SEE FEW VIABLE OPTIONS ON THE HORIZON

CHRISTOPHER NARDI

OTTAWA • The Conservative Party of Canada is more popular with Canadian voters than party head Pierre Poilievre, according to a new poll that suggests one-third of potential Tory supporters don’t do so simply because they don’t like the leader.

But the poll from U.K.-based firm Lord Ashcroft Polls also suggests that swapping Poilievre for another leader is far from a panacea for Conservative woes.

That’s because while certain groups of voters say they would more likely vote for the Conservatives under an unnamed different leader, the change would also correlate with losses among the current Tory base, the poll finds.

“Switching leadership would bring its own risks,” reads the report. “Changing leader could ... mean alienating core supporters while at best standing still among softer voters and potential converts. The costs are therefore clearer than the uncertain reward.”

The poll surveyed a representative sample of 10,098 Canadians online between July 31 and Aug. 17 and hosted 16 focus groups held in B.C., Alberta, Quebec and Ontario.

Notably, 47 per cent of respondents thought Canada is headed in the wrong direction, compared to 40 per cent who said the country is on the right track.

And yet, the poll found that Prime Minister and Liberal Leader Mark Carney was the only leader of a major federal political party whose personal popularity exceeded that of his party.

That poses a particular challenge for Poilievre because the federal landscape suggests an election would be a two-way battle between Liberals and Conservatives while Avi Lewis’s NDP

looks to re-emerge from the ashes of the devastating 2025 vote.

“The PM was also a less polarizing figure than his opponent. While Poilievre is rated –64% by Liberal voters, Carney is only rated –33% among Conservatives,” Lord Ashcroft Polls found.

According to the poll, 60 per cent of respondents had a positive impression of Carney while 55 per cent said the same of the Liberal party. For Poilievre, 43 per cent of those surveyed viewed him positively (compared to 50 per cent negatively), six points below the Conservative party as a whole (49 per cent).

Changing leader could ... mean alienating core supporters while at best standing still among softer voters and potential converts. The costs are therefore clearer than the uncertain reward.

But the report notes the effect is even more pronounced among crucial voter groups for Conservatives.

During polling, “potential but currently unlikely Conservative voters” pegged not liking Poilievre (34 per cent) and the party feeling too close to U.S.-style politics (29 per cent) as the two top reasons they were put off from voting Tory.

More than half (53 per cent) of an-

other key group, “persuadable Liberals” (recent Liberal voters who identified the Tories as their “clear second choice”), told Lord Ashcroft they were more likely to vote Conservative under a different leader than Poilievre.

That group is most likely to peg U.S. trade as one of three top issues facing Canada today, an issue poll respondents largely said they trust Carney to deal with better than Poilievre.

When combined with the fact that Conservatives’ current popularity challenges with the electorate are also tied to perception of it being “too American,” the prospect of another election centred around U.S. President Donald Trump could be terrible for Tories, according to the report.

“In Australia as well as Canada, incumbent governments pulled off upset victories by framing their national elections as referendums on President Trump’s trade policies and portraying the centre-right party as a proxy for the Americans,” reads the report.

“Allowing the Liberals to repeat the trick would give them the opportunity to galvanize the Carney coalition and leave the Conservatives trapped at their previous ceiling, inviting the same result.”

But there are chinks in Carney’s seemingly impenetrable polling armour too, the report notes. Respondents offered “mixed feelings” about Carney’s dealing with Trump, and fewer than half of respondents said the Carney government is “making progress and doing some good things.”

Furthermore, 45 per cent of respondents said they felt worse off compared to one year ago, whereas only 17 per cent said they were doing better.