

Measuring the Fiscal Performance of Canada's Premiers, 2022



by Jake Fuss and Conrad Eder

SUMMARY

- This report assesses the relative fiscal performance of Canadian premiers (eight current and three former) based on government spending, taxes, and debt and deficits up to fiscal year 2021/22.
- Overall, the premiers ranked (of 10) and scored (of 100), as follows:
 - 1st Blaine Higgs, NB (75.8)
 - 2nd Brian Pallister,* MB (63.8)
 - 3rd Doug Ford, ON (60.6)
 - 4th Stephen McNeil*/Iain Rankin,* NS (60.4)
 - 5th John Horgan, BC (56.1)
 - 6th Jason Kenney,* AB (53.0)
 - 7th Dennis King, PE (52.7)
 - 8th François Legault, QC (41.1)
 - 9th Scott Moe, SK (40.8)
 - 10th Andrew Furey, NL (40.0))
- Premier Higgs ranked highest on government spending (with a score of 98.9) ahead of McNeil/Rankin (89.1) and Pallister (86.6). Meanwhile, four premiers didn't score above 50: Horgan (48.0), King (43.3), Moe (4.9), and Legault (0.9).
- Premier Kenney led the pack by some margin on taxes (with a score of 82.3). The Atlantic Canadian premiers scored lowest on this measure: Higgs (7th), Furey (8th), King (9th), and McNeil/Rankin (10th).
- On debt and deficits, Premier Higgs ranked highest (scoring 100.0) just ahead of Premier King (90.8). Two premiers failed to score above 50: Furey (27.0), and Kenney (0.0).

* indicates former premier

Introduction

As government debt grows in many provinces due to persistent budget deficits (before, during, and after COVID), the necessity for prudent fiscal management should be top of mind for Canadians. Indeed, the future economic success of the provinces is linked to responsible fiscal management. Prudent fiscal policy entails governments prioritizing and restraining increases in government spending, being intentional about balancing budgets, and avoiding the imposition of a substantial tax burden that harms economic activity. Doing so lays the best foundation from which the economy can grow and prosper.

This study provides Canadians with important information upon which to judge the fiscal performance of their provincial political leaders. In this edition of *Measuring the Fiscal Performance of Canada's Premiers*, we present an objective, empirical analysis to assess the fiscal policies that each of Canada's premiers has pursued. Of note, the scores and rankings for each premier are relative measures of performance rather than absolute metrics. As such, this analysis compares the performance of each premier against their counterparts from coast to coast.

How performance is measured

This analysis measures the fiscal performance of Canada's premiers.¹ The relative performance

¹ The majority of tenures for some premiers took place during COVID. This report attempts to mitigate the impact of the difference among premier tenures by calculating most measures as annual averages rather than cumulative changes from a premier's starting date to 2021/22. Moreover, Blaine Higgs, the top performing premier in this study, served the majority of his tenure during COVID so the results do not necessarily show an advantage for premiers with tenures that started well before

Table 1: Period in Which the Premiers Are Evaluated

Prov.	Premier	Period evaluated
BC	John Horgan	2017/18 to 2021/22
AB	Jason Kenney*	2019/20 to 2021/22
SK	Scott Moe	2018/19 to 2021/22
MB	Brian Pallister*	2016/17 to 2021/22
ON	Doug Ford	2018/19 to 2021/22
QC	François Legault	2019/20 to 2021/22
NB	Blaine Higgs	2019/20 to 2021/22
NS	Stephen McNeil*/Iain Rankin*	2013/14 to 2021/22
PEI	Dennis King	2019/20 to 2021/22
NL	Andrew Furey	2020/21 to 2021/22

Notes:

(a) * indicates former premier (as of November 8, 2022).

(b) Brian Pallister is the former premier of Manitoba; he left office on September 1, 2021. His performance was evaluated instead of premiers Kelvin Goertzen or Heather Stefanson because he tabled the 2021 budget on April 7, 2021, before leaving office.

(c) Stephen McNeil and Iain Rankin are the former premiers of Nova Scotia; McNeil left office on February 23, 2021 and Iain Rankin temporarily served in office afterwards until August 31, 2021. The combined tenure of McNeil and Rankin was evaluated instead of current premier Tim Houston because he did not deliver the 2021 budget. Rankin's tenure was too short to evaluate on his own, so McNeil and Rankin were evaluated together.

(d) Blaine Higgs was elected premier of New Brunswick on November 9, 2018. He was not assigned responsibility for 2018/19 since he did not deliver the budget and was in office for less than half the fiscal year.

(e) François Legault was elected premier of Quebec on October 18, 2018. He was not assigned responsibility for 2018/19 since he did not deliver the budget and was in office for less than half the fiscal year.

(f) Scott Moe was elected premier of Saskatchewan on February 2, 2018. He was not assigned responsibility for 2017/18 since he did not deliver the budget and was in office for only two months in the fiscal year.

Sources: Websites of various provincial election bodies (see references).

of each premier is measured from the time they first held office until the last fiscal year for which historical data is available (2021/22).² Given the varied tenures of each premier, the period of time in which they are evaluated differs. Nova Scotia's former premiers Stephen McNeil and Iain Rankin were evaluated for the longest period (2013/14 to 2021/22), whereas Newfoundland & Labrador's premier, Andrew Furey, had the shortest evaluation period (2020/21 to 2021/22) (see table 1).³

Premiers received an overall score out of 100 and rank out of 10 based on their relative performance on three core components of fiscal policy: 1) government spending, 2) taxes, and 3) deficits and debt.⁴ Each component contains multiple measures; there are, in total, 14 of them. Each measure is scored on a scale from

COVID. However, it should be noted that the varying tenures of premiers is a limitation of the study. See Lammam et al. (2010) for more explanation about the limitations.

² Data for the 2022/23 fiscal year are available but they are based on government projections. Data prior to 2022/23 are from historical records.

³ The tenures of Stephen McNeil and Iain Rankin were assessed together for important reasons. Stephen McNeil served in office from October 22, 2013 to February 23, 2021. Iain Rankin only served in office from February 23, 2021 to August 31, 2021. Rankin was responsible for tabling the 2021 Budget, but grading only Rankin in this study would offer an incomplete and perhaps unfair measurement of Nova Scotia's fiscal performance since he was only in office for a few months during COVID. Current Premier Tim Houston did not deliver the 2021 Budget and did not serve in office long enough to be evaluated in 2021/22.

⁴ Lammam et al. (2010) provides a comprehensive review of the academic literature showing why each of these policy components are important for economic performance.

0 to 100; higher performing premiers receive higher scores and lower performing premiers receive lower scores.⁵ The scores for the measures are weighted equally within each component. In the calculation for the overall score, the three components are also equally weighted.

Overall results

Table 2 highlights the overall rank and score for each of the premiers in addition to a breakdown of the rankings and scores for each of the three components examined. Figure 1 presents the overall scores of each premier. New Brunswick premier Blaine Higgs ranked first overall with a score of 75.8 out of 100. Trailing behind him is a group of three premiers who scored in the low sixties. Comprising this group is Manitoba's former premier Brian Pallister (63.8),⁶ Ontario's Doug Ford (60.6), and finally the joint tenure of Nova Scotia's Stephen McNeil and Iain Rankin (60.4). Three other premiers exceeded the 50-point mark: British Columbia's premier John Horgan (56.1), Alberta's Jason Kenney (53.0), and Prince Edward Island's Dennis King (52.7).

The remaining three premiers all failed to score above 50. This includes Quebec's François Legault (41.1) and Saskatchewan's Scott Moe (40.3). Andrew Furey (40.0), the premier of Newfoundland & Labrador, ranks last overall with a score of 40.0.

⁵ Scores for every measure were calculated using a min-max formula. Please see Lammam et al., (2010): 48-52 for further details on the methodology.

⁶ Brian Pallister is the former premier of Manitoba; he left office on September 1, 2021. His performance was evaluated instead of premiers Kelvin Goertzen or Heather Stefanson because he tabled the 2021 budget on April 7, 2021, before leaving office.

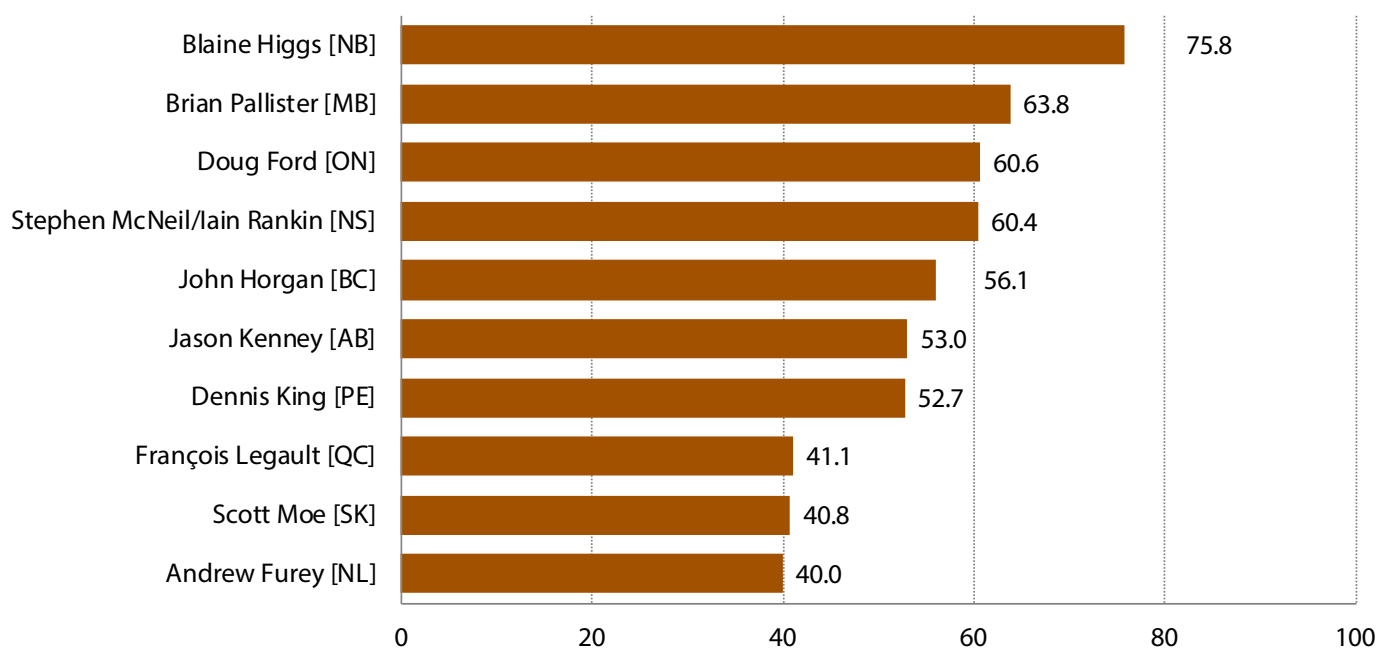
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Table 2: Overall Performance of Canada's Premiers, Scores (out of 100) and Ranks (out of 10)

Prov.	Premier	Overall		Government spending		Taxes		Deficits and debt	
		Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
NB	Blaine Higgs	75.8	1	98.9	1	28.6	7	100.0	1
MB	Brian Pallister	63.8	2	86.6	3	42.4	3	62.4	6
ON	Doug Ford	60.6	3	83.0	4	36.8	5	62.1	7
NS	Stephen McNeil/ Iain Rankin	60.4	4	89.1	2	23.0	10	69.3	5
BC	John Horgan	56.1	5	48.0	7	39.4	4	80.9	4
AB	Jason Kenney	53.0	6	76.8	5	82.3	1	0.0	10
PE	Dennis King	52.7	7	43.3	8	24.0	9	90.8	2
QC	François Legault	41.1	8	0.9	10	34.2	6	88.0	3
SK	Scott Moe	40.8	9	4.9	9	59.6	2	57.8	8
NL	Andrew Furey	40.0	10	64.9	6	27.9	8	27.0	9

Sources: Tables 3, 4, and 7; calculation by authors.

Figure 1: Overall Performance of Canada's Premiers



Source: Table 2.

Table 3: Government Spending, Scores (out of 100) and Ranks (out of 10)

Prov.	Premier	Government spending		Annual difference between program spending growth and economic growth (in percentage points)			Annual difference between program spending growth and inflation plus population growth (in percentage points)		
		Score	Rank	Difference	Score	Rank	Difference	Score	Rank
NB	Blaine Higgs	98.9	1	(0.4)	100.0	1	1.3	97.9	3
NS	Stephen McNeil/ Iain Rankin	89.1	2	0.2	89.7	2	1.8	88.5	5
MB	Brian Pallister	86.6	3	1.2	73.2	4	1.2	100.0	1
ON	Doug Ford	83.0	4	1.0	77.4	3	1.8	88.6	4
AB	Jason Kenney	76.8	5	2.3	55.0	7	1.2	98.7	2
NL	Andrew Furey	64.9	6	1.6	66.8	5	3.2	63.1	6
BC	John Horgan	48.0	7	2.1	58.5	6	4.7	37.5	7
PE	Dennis King	43.3	8	2.4	53.8	8	4.9	32.8	8
SK	Scott Moe	4.9	9	6.7	0.0	10	6.2	9.8	9
QC	François Legault	0.9	10	5.5	1.9	9	7.3	0.0	10

Notes:

(a) Program spending is defined as total spending minus debt charges (interest payments on debt).

(b) Government spending data for Quebec is adjusted for abatements.

(c) Since scores are based on data that contain several decimal places, premiers may receive slightly different scores even though their underlying data appears to be the same.

Sources: Canada, Department of Finance (2021); Provincial Budgets (2022); Provincial Public Accounts (2022); RBC (2022); Statistics Canada (2022a, 2022b, and 2022c); TD Economics (2022); calculations by authors.

Component 1: Government spending

The premiers are first evaluated on their relative performance on government spending. There are two measures included in this component. We measure the average annual difference between the growth in provincial government program spending and economic growth (nominal growth in provincial gross domestic product (GDP)) during the premier's time in office. Next, we measure the average annual difference between growth in program spending (total spending excluding interest costs) and

the combined rate of inflation and population growth in each province. If a premier increased program spending faster than economic growth or the combined rate of inflation plus population growth, then their relative score dropped.

Table 3 shows the rankings and scores for each premier for their performance on government spending. Blaine Higgs of New Brunswick ranked first with a score of 98.9. Higgs was the only Canadian premier to keep program spending growth below the rate of provincial economic growth (by 0.4 percentage points) and

had the third smallest gap between program spending growth and inflation plus population growth among his counterparts (1.3 percentage points). Nova Scotia's Stephen McNeil and Iain Rankin (89.1) followed Higgs. During their combined tenure in office, McNeil and Rankin held average growth in program spending roughly equivalent to provincial GDP growth (by 0.2 percentage points).

Trailing just behind Higgs and McNeil/Rankin is Brian Pallister, the former premier of Manitoba (86.6), and Ontario's Doug Ford (83.0). Pallister had the lowest annual difference between program spending growth and inflation plus population growth at 1.2 percentage points. The other premiers who scored over 50 were Jason Kenney of Alberta (76.8) and Andrew Furey of Newfoundland & Labrador (64.9).

Four premiers scored below 50. John Horgan of British Columbia scored 48.0 and ranked seventh, while Dennis King of Prince Edward Island scored 43.3 and ranked eighth. Meanwhile, both Scott Moe of Saskatchewan and François Legault of Quebec had the lowest scores of 4.9 and 0.9 respectively. During Legault's tenure, program spending has grown, on average, by 10.4 percent. This growth in program spending greatly exceeded the annual average rate of economic growth (4.9 percent) and inflation plus population growth (3.0 percent) in Quebec. See the appendix for further spending data on each premier.

Component 2: Taxes

The premiers are next measured on their relative performance on taxation. The taxes component consists of two sub-components. The first focuses on corporate income taxes (CIT) and uses two measures to evaluate performance: the province's current general corpo-

rate income tax rate⁷ and the average annual change in the general corporate income tax rate during the premier's time in office. The second tax sub-component focuses on personal income taxes (PIT) and consists of eight measures. These include the 2021 marginal tax rates on personal income and the average annual change in those rates during the premier's time in office at three income levels: \$50,000, \$75,000, and \$150,000.⁸ The personal income tax sub-components also include other measures such as the top marginal tax rate in effect in 2021 and the number of tax brackets in each province. Better performing premiers either maintained lower tax rates or reduced them relative to other provinces (or some combination of both). Premiers that preserved or implemented systems that have fewer tax brackets also scored better.

Table 4 summarizes the rankings and scores for each premier based on their performance on taxes.⁹ Premier Jason Kenney of Alberta achieved the highest score in this category at 82.3. Kenney scored high on the taxes component primarily because during his tenure the corporate income tax rate was reduced from 12 to 8 percent and Alberta's relatively low personal income tax rates were maintained. Pre-

⁷ Where the premier is no longer in power, this study uses the tax rate in effect when the premier(s) left office.

⁸ See Lammam et al. (2010) for an explanation of why these three income levels were selected. The income levels are in constant 2022 dollars (adjusted for inflation) to avoid the problem of threshold indexation causing perceived tax rate changes and to ensure longer term premiers are not disadvantaged compared to shorter term ones.

⁹ Recall that scores and rankings in this study are based on relative, not absolute, performance.

Table 4: Taxes, Scores (out of 100) and Ranks (out of 10)

Prov.	Premier	Taxes		Corporate income tax		Personal income tax	
		Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
AB	Jason Kenney	82.3	1	100.0	1	64.6	2
SK	Scott Moe	59.6	2	33.5	5	85.7	1
MB	Brian Pallister	42.4	3	39.5	4	45.2	4
BC	John Horgan	39.4	4	29.4	7	49.3	3
ON	Doug Ford	36.8	5	43.2	3	30.4	8
QC	François Legault	34.2	6	46.4	2	22.0	9
NB	Blaine Higgs	28.6	7	24.8	8	32.5	7
NL	Andrew Furey	27.9	8	17.4	9	38.4	5
PE	Dennis King	24.0	9	10.1	10	37.9	6
NS	Stephen McNeil/Iain Rankin	23.0	10	32.5	6	13.4	10

Sources: Tables 5, 6a and 6b; calculations by authors.

mier Kenney and Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe (59.6) were the only two premiers to score above 50.

While the rest of the premiers scored below 50, most tax rates remained unchanged during their tenures. Former Manitoba premier Brian Pallister ranked third despite a score of 42.4, which was higher than the subsequent three premiers who scored in the thirties: British Columbia's John Horgan (39.4), Ontario's Doug Ford (36.8), and Quebec's François Legault (34.2). The remaining four premiers only managed to score in the twenties. New Brunswick's Blaine Higgs (28.6) ranked seventh, Newfoundland & Labrador's Andrew Furey (27.9) ranked eighth, Prince Edward Island's Dennis King (24.0) came in ninth, and Nova Scotia's Stephen McNeil and Iain Rankin (23.0) finished tenth.

Corporate income tax

Table 5 provides the rankings and scores of all Canadian premiers based on the corporate income tax sub-components. On this sub-component Alberta premier Jason Kenney ranked 1st with a score of 100.0. This was well ahead of all other premiers as none, other than Kenney, managed a score above 50. Kenney's high ranking on corporate income taxes stems from his aforementioned reduction in the general CIT rate. François Legault ranked second with a score of 46.4, as Quebec has the second lowest CIT rate in the country (tied with Ontario) and Legault reduced the CIT rate from 11.7 to 11.5 percent during his tenure. Doug Ford ranked third with a score of 43.2. Ford is followed closely by Brian Pallister (39.5), Scott Moe (33.5), and Stephen McNeil/Iain Rankin (32.5). Rounding out the field is John Horgan (29.4)

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Table 5: Corporate Income Tax, Scores (out of 100) and Ranks (out of 10)

Prov.	Premier	Corporate income tax (1)		General corporate income tax rate (2)			Annual percentage change in the general corporate income tax rate (3)		
		Score	Rank	Rate (%)	Score	Rank	Change	Score	Rank
AB	Jason Kenney	100.0	1	8.0	100.0	1	(12.3)	100.0	1
QC	François Legault	46.4	2	11.5	66.2	2	(0.6)	26.6	3
ON	Doug Ford	43.2	3	11.5	66.2	2	0.0	20.2	4
MB	Brian Pallister	39.5	4	12.0	58.9	4	0.0	20.2	4
SK	Scott Moe	33.5	5	12.0	58.9	4	1.1	8.1	9
NS	Stephen McNeil/ Iain Rankin	32.5	6	14.0	29.3	7	(1.4)	35.6	2
BC	John Horgan	29.4	7	12.0	58.9	4	1.8	0.0	10
NB	Blaine Higgs	24.8	8	14.0	29.3	7	0.0	20.2	4
NL	Andrew Furey	17.4	9	15.0	14.6	9	0.0	20.2	4
PE	Dennis King	10.1	10	16.0	0.0	10	0.0	20.2	4

Notes:

(a) Column 1 is the average of the scores for Column 2, the general corporate income tax rate, and Column 3, the annual percentage change in the general corporate income tax rate.

(b) Corporate income tax rates are the rates currently in effect (based on the latest information available at the time of writing) or the rates in effect when the premier left office.

(c) Alberta's general corporate income tax rate decreased from 12 to 11 percent on July 1, 2019. The government decreased the tax rate to 10 percent on January 1, 2020 and then reduced it again to 8 percent on July 1, 2020.

(d) The Horgan government increased BC's corporate income tax rate from 11 to 12 percent on January 1, 2018.

(e) Quebec's general corporate income tax rate decreased from 11.7 to 11.6 percent in 2019, but then decreased further to 11.5 percent in 2020.

(f) Saskatchewan's general corporate income tax rate increased from 11.5 to 12 percent in 2018.

(g) The McNeil government reduced Nova Scotia's corporate income tax rate from 16 to 14 percent on April 1, 2020.

Sources: PWC (2022); Provincial Budgets (2022); calculations by authors.

in seventh place, Blaine Higgs (24.8) in eighth, Andrew Furey (17.4) in ninth, and Dennis King (10.1) as the lowest scoring premier in this category. While British Columbia has a comparably low CIT rate, John Horgan increased it from 11 to 12 percent during his tenure. Atlantic Canadian premiers scored low on corporate income taxes because they maintain the highest business taxes in the country.

Personal income tax

Tables 6a and 6b present the rankings and scores for the personal income tax performance of each premier. Scott Moe, premier of Saskatchewan, ranked first in this sub-category with a score of 85.7, well ahead of second place Jason Kenney (64.6) of Alberta, who was the only other premier to score above 50. Both leaders scored favourably in this category in part due to comparatively low marginal tax rates across income levels of \$50,000, \$75,000, and \$150,000. Premier Moe was further aided by his province's low number of income tax brackets (3) and most notably the fact that he was the only premier to cut personal income taxes across all income levels.

The other provincial leaders in western Canada scored highly on personal income taxes as well. Third place went to Premier Horgan of British Columbia (49.3) and fourth place to former Manitoban premier Brian Pallister (45.2). Ontario's Doug Ford (30.4) and Quebec's François Legault (22.0) ranked near the bottom among premiers on this sub-category, placing eighth and ninth respectively. Although Ford did not raise personal income tax rates, he did not index the top two tax brackets to match inflation. The result is that some taxpayers were pushed into a higher income tax bracket and paid a higher tax rate than they had in the past. This is evidenced by the increase in marginal

tax rates paid at \$150,000 of income. Ontario also has seven different income tax brackets, which ties the province with British Columbia for the most tax brackets, and has the second highest top marginal personal income tax rate in the country.¹⁰ Legault's poor performance is reflected by Quebec having some of the highest PIT rates relative to other provinces at all levels of income.¹¹

A score of 38.4 for Newfoundland & Labrador's Andrew Furey was good enough for fifth place, sixth place went to Prince Edward Island's Dennis King (37.9), and Blaine Higgs of New Brunswick ranked seventh with a score of 32.5. The former premiers of Nova Scotia, Stephen McNeil and Iain Rankin, placed last among premiers with a score of 13.4. Nova Scotia does not index its income tax brackets to match inflation. As a result, some taxpayers were pushed into a higher income tax bracket in 2021 as evidenced by the higher marginal tax rate faced by those at \$150,000 in income. In addition, Nova Scotia had the highest top marginal income tax rate in the country in 2021 and among the highest tax rates at \$50,000, \$75,000, and \$150,000 of income.

Component 3: Deficits and debt

The final measure for the relative performance of the premiers is based on deficits and debt. Premiers were evaluated on their use of defi-

¹⁰ There are seven income tax brackets in Ontario after including provincial surtaxes. John Horgan increased the number of income tax brackets from five to seven during his tenure in British Columbia.

¹¹ In Quebec, the top provincial statutory personal income tax rate is 25.75 percent, which kicks in at income over \$216,511. However, the top marginal rate after accounting for the federal abatement is 20.31 percent.

Table 6a: Personal Income Tax, Scores (out of 100) and Ranks (out of 10)

		Personal income tax		Marginal tax rate at \$50,000			Marginal tax rate at \$75,000			Marginal tax rate at \$150,000			Top marginal tax rate			Number of tax brackets		
Prov.	Premier	Score	Rank	Rate (%)	Score	Rank	Rate (%)	Score	Rank	Rate (%)	Score	Rank	Rate (%)	Score	Rank	No.	Score	Rank
SK	Scott Moe	85.7	1	12.50	49.9	4	12.50	53.7	4	14.50	81.7	2	14.50	100.0	1	3	100.0	1
AB	Jason Kenney	64.6	2	10.00	80.2	3	10.00	81.1	3	12.00	100.0	1	15.00	100.0	1	5	48.7	5
BC	John Horgan	49.3	3	7.70	100.0	1	7.70	100.0	1	14.70	79.4	3	20.50	8.4	8	7	0.0	9
MB	Brian Pallister	45.2	4	12.75	46.9	5	17.40	0.0	10	17.40	47.7	5	17.40	60.8	3	3	100.0	1
NL	Andrew Furey	38.4	5	14.50	25.7	7	14.50	31.8	5	17.30	48.8	4	18.30	45.6	4	5	48.7	5
PE	Dennis King	37.9	6	13.80	34.2	6	16.70	7.7	9	18.37	36.3	7	18.37	44.4	5	4	74.3	3
NB	Blaine Higgs	32.5	7	14.82	21.8	8	14.82	28.3	6	17.84	42.5	6	20.30	11.8	6	5	48.7	5
ON	Doug Ford	30.4	8	9.15	90.5	2	9.15	90.4	2	18.97	29.2	8	20.53	7.9	9	7	0.0	9
QC	François Legault	22.0	9	16.62	0.0	10	16.62	8.6	7	21.46	0.0	10	20.31	11.7	7	4	74.3	3
NS	Stephen McNeil/ Iain Rankin	13.4	10	14.95	20.2	9	16.67	8.0	8	21.00	5.4	9	21.00	0.0	10	5	48.7	5

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Table 6b: Personal income tax, Scores (out of 100) and Ranks (out of 10) – continued

Prov.	Premier	Annual change in the marginal tax rate at \$50,000			Annual change in the marginal tax rate at \$75,000			Annual change in the marginal tax rate at \$150,000		
		Percent	Score	Rank	Percent	Score	Rank	Percent	Score	Rank
SK	Scott Moe	-0.5	100.0	1	-0.5	100.0	1	-0.4	100.0	1
AB	Jason Kenney	0.0	25.1	2	0.0	0.0	2	0.0	81.5	2
BC	John Horgan	0.0	25.1	2	0.0	0.0	2	0.0	81.5	2
MB	Brian Pallister	0.0	25.1	2	0.0	0.0	2	0.0	81.5	2
NL	Andrew Furey	0.0	25.1	2	0.0	0.0	2	0.0	81.5	2
PE	Dennis King	0.0	25.1	2	0.0	0.0	2	0.0	81.5	2
NB	Blaine Higgs	0.0	25.1	2	0.0	0.0	2	0.0	81.5	2
ON	Doug Ford	0.0	25.1	2	0.0	0.0	2	2.2	0.0	9
QC	François Legault	0.1	0.0	10	0.0	0.0	2	0.0	81.5	2
NS	Stephen McNeil/Iain Rankin	0.0	25.1	2	0.0	0.0	2	2.2	0.0	9

Notes:

(a) Personal income tax rates are the rates in effect in 2021 or the rates in effect when the premier left office.

(b) The three income levels are in constant 2021 dollars (adjusted for inflation) to avoid the problem of threshold indexation causing perceived tax rate changes and to ensure longer term premiers are not disadvantaged compared to shorter term ones.

(c) Personal income tax rates include surtaxes where applicable. Quebec's tax rates are adjusted for the federal abatement. The number of tax brackets is after surtaxes are applied.

(d) Although the Ford government did not raise personal income tax rates, they did not index the top two tax brackets to match inflation. The result is that some taxpayers are pushed into a higher income tax bracket and pay a higher rate. This is evidenced by the increase in marginal tax rates paid at \$150,000 of income.

(e) In 2018, Saskatchewan reduced tax rates for all three personal income tax brackets. The first tax rate dropped from 10.8 to 10.5 percent, the second from 12.8 to 12.5 percent, and the final from 14.8 to 14.5 percent.

(f) Nova Scotia does not index its income tax brackets to match inflation. As a result, some taxpayers were pushed into a higher income tax bracket in 2021. This is evidenced by the higher marginal tax rate faced by those at \$150,000 in income.

(g) For 2021, Quebec's combined federal-provincial top marginal rate is 53.31 percent and will apply to income above \$216,511. At \$150,000, the combined federal-Quebec marginal rate is 49.97 percent. The rate presented for Quebec only shows the provincial portion after adjusting for the federal abatement.

(h) John Horgan increased the top marginal tax rate in BC from 16.8% to 20.5% in 2020

(i) Since scores are based on data that contain several decimal places, premiers may receive slightly different scores even though their underlying data appears to be the same.

Sources: PWC (2022); Provincial Budgets (2022); calculations by authors.

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Table 7: Deficits and Debt, Scores (out of 100) and Ranks (out of 10)

Prov.	Premier	Deficits and debt		Annual surplus (deficit) as a percentage of GDP			Annual percentage change in net debt as a share of GDP		
		Score	Rank	Percent	Score	Rank	Percent	Score	Rank
NB	Blaine Higgs	100.0	1	0.79	100.0	1	(6.2)	100.0	1
PE	Dennis King	90.8	2	(0.03)	98.9	2	(1.6)	82.8	3
QC	François Legault	88.0	3	(0.20)	92.2	4	(1.9)	83.9	2
BC	John Horgan	80.9	4	(0.18)	93.3	3	2.3	68.4	7
NS	Stephen McNeil/Iain Rankin	69.3	5	(1.14)	56.5	6	(1.4)	82.1	4
MB	Brian Pallister	62.4	6	(1.17)	55.5	7	2.0	69.3	6
ON	Doug Ford	62.1	7	(1.28)	51.3	8	1.1	72.9	5
SK	Scott Moe	57.8	8	(0.96)	63.3	5	6.6	52.2	9
NL	Andrew Furey	27.0	9	(2.90)	0.0	9	6.1	54.1	8
AB	Jason Kenney	0.0	10	(2.70)	0.0	9	33.5	0.0	10

Notes:

(a) Premiers that generated average surpluses were automatically assigned a score of 100.

(b) Since scores are based on data that contain several decimal places, premiers may receive slightly different scores even though their underlying data appears to be the same.

(c) If accounting changes were made to the underlying deficits and debt data, the authors used data that had been adjusted retroactively.

Sources: Canada, Department of Finance (2021); Provincial Budgets (2022); Provincial Public Accounts (2022); RBC (2022); Statistics Canada (2022b); TD Economics (2022); calculations by authors.

cit financing for government spending and whether they increased or reduced their province's debt burden. This component includes two measures that are calculated relative to the size of the provincial economy (GDP). Deficits and surpluses are shown by a metric tracking the average annual deficit or surplus as a percentage of GDP during the premier's time in office. Government debt is tracked based on the average annual percentage change in net debt as a share of GDP. Premiers that recorded deficits and increased government debt per-

formed poorly compared to those who balanced budgets and reduced provincial debt.

Table 7 summarizes each premier's performance on debt and deficits. New Brunswick premier Blaine Higgs ranked first among premiers on this component (with a perfect score of 100.0). Higgs was the only premier to generate an average annual operating surplus during his tenure. Net debt as a share of GDP also declined by 6.2 percent, on average, over his period in office—the most among all premiers.

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Dennis King of Prince Edward Island ranked second on debt and deficits (90.8), followed by François Legault of Quebec (88.0), and John Horgan of British Columbia (80.9). The tenures of five more premiers (McNeil/Rankin, Pallister, Ford, and Moe) received scores above 50, but all of them ran deficits, on average, and the latter

three premiers increased provincial debt relative to the size of their economies.

Only two premiers (Andrew Furey and Jason Kenney) failed to score above 50. Jason Kenney of Alberta placed last due to the size of the average annual deficit between 2019/20 and 2021/22 and an outsized increase in provincial

Appendix: Select Underlying Fiscal and Economic Data over the Period in Which Premiers Are Evaluated (Unless Otherwise Noted)

Prov.	Premier	Period evaluated	Average program spending growth (%)	Average GDP growth (%)	Average inflation plus population growth (%)	Net debt (assets) as % of GDP, year before period evaluated	Net debt (assets) as % of GDP, 2021/22
BC	John Horgan	2017/18 to 2021/22	8.3	6.2	3.6	14.4	15.8
AB	Jason Kenney	2019/20 to 2021/22	4.4	2.1	3.1	7.9	16.0
SK	Scott Moe	2018/19 to 2021/22	8.7	2.0	2.4	14.1	18.0
MB	Brian Pallister	2016/17 to 2021/22	4.2	3.0	3.1	33.2	37.3
ON	Doug Ford	2018/19 to 2021/22	5.2	4.2	3.4	39.3	40.7
QC	François Legault	2019/20 to 2021/22	10.4	4.9	3.0	42.0	39.4
NB	Blaine Higgs	2019/20 to 2021/22	4.0	4.4	2.7	37.6	30.8
NS	Stephen McNeil/Iain Rankin	2013/14 to 2021/22	3.9	3.7	2.1	36.8	32.1
PEI	Dennis King	2019/20 to 2021/22	9.4	7.0	4.4	30.4	28.9
NL	Andrew Furey	2020/21 to 2021/22	4.9	3.3	1.7	40.8	44.6

Sources: Canada, Department of Finance (2021); Provincial Budgets (2022); Provincial Public Accounts (2022); Statistics Canada (2022a, 2022b, and 2022c); calculations by authors.

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debt. While he did record a surplus in 2021/22, the scale of Alberta's deficits in 2019/20 and 2020/21 were substantial and net debt as a percentage of GDP climbed from 7.9 percent in 2018/19 (fiscal year before Kenney took office) to 16.0 percent in 2021/22.

Conclusion

Premiers across the country have an important role to play in ensuring the continuous improvement of Canadians' economic well-being. This report has compared the relative fiscal performance of Canada's premiers on categories including government spending, taxes, and debt and deficits. Blaine Higgs of New Brunswick, Brian Pallister of Manitoba, and Doug Ford of Ontario ranked as the top three premiers. In contrast, François Legault of Quebec, Scott Moe of Saskatchewan, and Andrew Furey of Newfoundland & Labrador were the bottom three. While premiers that fared well should be commended, all premiers have room for improvement and should look to restrain spending, balance their budgets, and establish a more competitive provincial tax system.

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