

The Rise and Fall of the Liberals' Political Fortunes Over Recent Decades

By Conrad Black

For the first time since the last days of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's tenure over 40 years ago, there was widespread curiosity in Canada—until this Monday—about whether the incumbent prime minister would retire voluntarily or otherwise, or lead his party into another general election later this year.



Although the electoral arithmetic and the country have changed, leading figures in the federal Liberal Party still seem to be influenced by the electoral arithmetic that prevailed from the rise of [Wilfrid Laurier](#) to be prime minister in 1896, to the election of [Brian Mulroney](#) to that office in 1984. The Liberals governed in Ottawa for 66 of those 88 years, three quarters of that time, and were the most

successful national political party in the democratic world.

The principal reason for this was the Liberals' opposition to conscription for overseas service in the world wars, while managing [Canada's participation](#) in World War II so effectively that Canada was the fourth-largest contributor to Allied victory in the war (after only the Big Three—USA, USSR, UK), and because the party alternated French and English leaders. This enabled it to claim in Quebec to be the party that made Confederation work for Quebec, and outside Quebec to be the party that could keep Quebec happy in Confederation. As people tend to believe what they want to believe, many prominent Liberals still complacently think of themselves as the natural party of government.

This was by no means a fraud. Of those 66 years in office, 39 were under French-Canadian prime ministers (Laurier 1896–1911, Louis St. Laurent 1948–1957, and Pierre Trudeau 1968–1979, 1980–1984), and for an additional 18 years, [Mackenzie King](#)—Canada's longest-serving prime minister—effectively had as co-prime minister for French Canada, Ernest Lapointe (1924–1930, 1935–1941) and St. Laurent (1942–1948).

Brian Mulroney shattered that uneven electoral balance, and although his party fragmented under him, when it was reassembled by Stephen Harper, the Conservatives and the separatist Bloc Québécois garnered enough support in Quebec to ensure that the Liberals no longer had a stranglehold on Quebec and their claim to being the party of national unity was accordingly devalued. This was a claim that was further weakened by the near-defeat of the Chrétien government in the second [Quebec independence referendum](#) in 1995.

Since the merging of the Progressive Conservatives and Reform Parties in 2004, the electoral equation has been that of an effective two-party state instead of the 1 1/2 party state that had prevailed between 1896 and 1984 and 1992 and 2004. Since 1984, the Conservatives have governed federally for 18

years and the Liberals for 23 years, and all indications are that the Conservatives will be re-elected with a solid majority in October of this year at the latest.

In these circumstances, after the colossal fiasco of trying to [replace Chrystia Freeland](#) with Mark Carney, it was unlikely that Justin Trudeau would wish to face the electors again, even if his restless caucus had allowed it. His father retired voluntarily in 1984 to allow John Turner, who had had significant policy differences with him, to take the bullet from the voters a few months later. Brian Mulroney did approximately the same thing in 1993, and although he discreetly favoured Jean Charest to succeed him, Kim Campbell became prime minister and led the old Progressive Conservative Party almost to annihilation.

Up until this week, the Liberal prime minister who succeeded Campbell, Jean Chrétien, was the only elected prime minister deposed from that office by his own party, and his successor, Paul Martin, was also unable to avoid the defeat the voters had in mind for Chrétien: Stephen Harper took office at the head of a united Conservative Party. Justin Trudeau now joins Chrétien as an elected prime minister forced from office by his own party. Ms. Freeland deserves credit for not allowing Trudeau to lay all the blame for the government's economic policy failures on her, but she should not imagine that she is now an acceptable replacement.

A stark historic contrast is Brian Mulroney, who had a solid record of achievement as prime minister, but after eight years, for various reasons, was not popular in the country, although he did not suffer the wobbling of a single caucus member, because he treated his MPs so attentively and retained their unconditional loyalty. This was in sharp distinction to Justin and Pierre Trudeau, Jean Chrétien, John Diefenbaker—and even Lester Pearson and Stephen Harper, both of whom faced some rumblings of mutiny below decks.

With this background, the only conceivable explanation for Justin Trudeau seeking re-election would have been if he'd had an inflexible confidence in his ability to win—implying a complete departure from his senses—or had succumbed to a political death-wish. The record of his government, as has been amply reported (including by me), essentially consists of a dangerous decline in international capital flows and of Canada's comparative economic growth and per capita net income, a horrifying accretion of debt, an absurd fixation on climate change flimflam including a war on our oil and gas industry, an unjustly demeaning humbling of Canada before the world on indigenous matters, a fatuous preoccupation with gender issues, and toleration of an outrageous [assault on the English language](#) in Quebec.

The departure of the most famous Canadian, Jordan Peterson, to the United States, hounded by politically correct cancellation, is sadly indicative of Canada's decline in recent years.

There is indisputable evidence from public opinion trends within Canada and elections elsewhere, that the Western world has tired of the woke, ultra-green, diversity-equity-inclusion agenda. The outright bunk about the influence of fossil fuels upon the world's temperature has imposed intolerable costs on consumers, and fundamentally fair-minded populations of civilized countries can only tolerate a limited amount of unjust moral self-flagellation. Even the most pious and self-critical person can only spend a certain amount of time heaping abuse upon himself in the confessional before reawakening a sense of self-worth.

Trudeau appears to be trying to bring in former Bank of Canada and Bank of England governor Mark Carney as his replacement, but Ms. Freeland has thrown a wrench into that plan.

With his resignation announcement, Justin Trudeau took to the lifeboats while there's still a place for him in one. Joe

Clark retains his record as the only person in history ever to have defeated a Trudeau, and Canada has taken an important step in retrieving its status throughout its national history until a decade ago as a successful country.

First published in the [Epoch Times](#)