

Trudeaumania 2.0

Canada's Liberal Honeymoon Proves Substantive

- Meghan Rowley

Since winning the national elections last December, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made waves as the fresh new face of Canadian politics. At 44, the son of former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau bolstered Canada's international image and popularity, leading to a political honeymoon with the promise of reform and a charismatic young leader. The celebration is only heightened when juxtaposed with the near decade-long reign of Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper. However, this liberal wave, hailed as a potential second Trudeaumania (the term used to describe Pierre Trudeau's surge in popularity upon his election), proved to be more substantive than empty promises and charm from a relatively inexperienced politician. In his first 100 days in office, the Prime Minister made progress on the 214 promises made during the campaign cycle, demonstrating that Trudeau is an effective foil to his Conservative predecessor.

Although described as shocking, the Conservative Party's loss was ultimately not as unpredictable as marketed. While he weathered the global financial crisis and balanced the budget, Harper's economic policies were not enough to keep Canadians content. In fact, according to *The Atlantic*, before the election cycle, two thirds of voters' top priorities were to defeat Harper. Approaching a recession and facing nearly a decade of Conservative rule, constituents had begun to reconsider reelecting Harper for a fourth time.

There were many reasons for this backlash against Harper. First, there was a perceived lack of transparency within his administration. With enhanced security measures, cyber intelligence, and general inaccessibility, the former Prime Minister's policies generated a lack of trust in his administration and government as a whole. Furthermore, moderate tax cuts for the middle class did not significantly stimulate the economy or increase social mobility, leading voters to turn to a candidate who favors more spending. Harper's decision to ban the niqab, a full face veil which some Muslim women choose to wear, in the name of national security also proved controversial. He received criticism from Canadians who described the policies as culturally insensitive and a reversal of Canada's welcoming reputation. Finally,



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.
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there was Harper himself: his older, more critical, and constantly controlled demeanor made Trudeau's candor and relaxed nature look far more approachable in comparison.

Trudeau met these reservations among voters with a series of progressive campaign promises. Throughout the election cycle last fall, he emphasized positive politics, "beating fear with hope," and creating a government representative of today's multicultural Canada. More specific proposals included running an annual \$10 billion deficit to finance investments in improved infrastructure, withdrawing Canadian fighter jets from Syria in exchange for heightened humanitarian aid and training, as well as a pan-Canadian coalition to combat climate change. In addition, Trudeau promised to repair soured relations with the Obama administration, increase taxes on the wealthy, offer an economic stimulus, prioritize gender equality, and take in 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2015. All these promises led to a record number of seats swung in an election (34 to 144 of the 338 seats in the House of Commons), as Trudeau vaulted from 3rd to 1st place in the last days of the election campaign. But with the appeal of a movie star more than a head of state, and a political career that only began in 2008, it is only fair to question Trudeau's actual progress.

According to *TrudeauMetre.ca*, a nonpartisan website that tracks the progress of the Prime Minister's 214 proposals, Trudeau is on his way to making tangible change. So far, he delivered on at least thirteen promises, broke two, and started twenty-nine more. The most notable victories thus far are setting a date to pull the Canadian Air Force from combat in Syria, appointing a gender-equal cabinet, and raising income taxes on the rich to 33 percent while cutting middle income taxes from 22 to 20.5 percent, as well as creating multiple independent advisory bodies for branches of government, including the Senate. Broken promises include the proposed intake of 25,000 government-sponsored refugees by December 2015, which was reformed to 2,500 by the end of February, half of which will be privately sponsored. Furthermore, Trudeau acknowledged that balancing the budget by 2019 will prove difficult, with annual deficits likely to exceed \$10 billion.

However, with multiple projects under way, including a national inquiry into missing indigenous women, a reassessment of carbon emissions, and a strong showing at the UN climate summit, a \$60 billion investment in infrastructure, and the reopening of veteran's affairs offices across the country, it seems promising that Trudeau will be able to make good on a number of his promises. While it is still early and most projects are still to come, Trudeau effectively thwarted claims that he is all talk and no action. And if the current rate of progress continues, he may prove one of the most notable prime ministers in Canadian history. •