

How the West Won: The Economics Forces Behind the Political Ascent of the Conservative  
Party

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For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the Liberal Party of Canada dominated the federal political landscape. With Liberals holding onto power due to regional support in Quebec, Ontario and the Maritimes. Though the Conservatives were periodically elected to a majority government, their support was often fleeting. Borden's tenure was undermined by his support for conscription during the First World War.<sup>1</sup> While Diefenbaker and Mulroney rode a wave of popular support into office during the 1958 and 1984 elections respectively, their regional support eventually collapsed, leading to the return of the Liberals.<sup>2</sup> Yet with the election of Stephen Harper's Conservative government in 2006, there appears to be a shift in Canadian politics. Rather than the support quickly collapsing, the Tories increased their share of vote in subsequent elections, culminating in a majority government in the 2011 election. This paper will argue there is an ongoing economic and political shift in Canada towards western provinces. This has been partially driven in by demand for resources from the US, China and India. Although by far Canada's largest trading partner remains the United States, trade is growing with Asia. In the 20th century Ontario and Quebec were the hub of Canada's economic growth; it is now being replaced by Alberta and British Columbia. The enlargement of the Canadian Parliament provides more seats to Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia and will also potentially favour the Conservatives. In the long-term, this will represent a shift away from a centralized public policy approach to Canadian political and economic problems in favour of more market friendly strategies, such as personal tax incentives and downloading programs on provincial governments. This paper will conclude that, in part, pressure from the global economy will lead the Conservatives to become Canada's new "natural governing party." Already the Conservatives have moved Canada towards more stringent penalties in criminal justice and greater support for Israel. A prolonged tenure of the Conservative government will substantially alter Canada's economic, social and foreign policy.

Further reinforcing this shift is a fragmented parliamentary opposition: the long-governing Liberals have been reduced to third-party status, and the NDP faces significant difficulties in forming a governing coalition. Moreover, the Conservatives have a substantial advantage in fundraising compared to the Federal Parties.<sup>3</sup> Although these domestic political factors are an important facet in strengthening the Conservative's hold on power, there is already a substantial literature on the topic.<sup>4</sup> My central focus will be on the systemic changes in the global economy and its effects on Canada's regional economic and demographic growth. I will provide an overview of recent developments in the international economic system. There will be a substantial examination of how these changes are altering the Canadian economic and demographic landscape. I will evaluate where population growth is occurring and show that it favours the Conservatives. The paper concludes by offering several tentative consequences of a protracted dominance of the Conservative Party on government policy.

### **The Globalization of the International Economy and Canada**

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Bliss. *Right honourable men : the descent of Canadian politics from Macdonald to Chrétien*. Toronto : HarperPerennial Canada, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Adrian Humphries. "Conservatives Win Fundraising Race". National Post. November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005: Electronically Published: <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/03/25/conservatives-win-fundraising-race/>

<sup>4</sup> Michael D. Behiels " Stephen Harper's Rise to Power: Will His "New" Conservative Party Become Canada's "Natural Governing Party" of the Twenty-First Century?" *American Review of Canadian Studies*. Vol 1: 10. (2010).

Structural explanations are not uncommon in political science. From realism in International Relations (IR) to Marxist and Critical accounts in International Political Economy (IPE), there are a wide array of approaches that emphasize the structure of the international system –whether the distribution of military or economic resources - to explain outcomes.<sup>5</sup> Yet there tends to be greater emphasis on domestic political factors in the literature when evaluating the success or failure of political parties. Generally there are three types of arguments in the Canadian political science literature to explain the success of the Conservatives. These approaches are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive of all the literature, but often scholars and journalists will use some combination of the three in their assessment. The first is the elite/leadership-centric approach. Generally speaking, these approaches focus on the actions of the leaders and the role of elites. There has been a great deal written on the personal characteristics of Stephen Harper and his political acuity,<sup>6</sup> or the personal failings of his opponents, such as Paul Martin,<sup>7</sup> Stephane Dion, and Michael Ignatieff.<sup>8</sup> Often they attribute the success of a party to the ability or inability to appeal to the public.

Tied to this narrative is the regional-bridge approach. This body of literature often argues the success of a political party is due to an alliance between disparate provinces.<sup>9</sup> This approach is often used in some combination with the elite/leadership approach. It attributes the success of certain politicians with their ability to unite regions of Canada into voting bloc. The Liberals in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century often built a bridge between English and French Canada to form government, often at the exclusion of the West.<sup>10</sup> Andrew Coyne summarized this approach in his analysis of the 2011 election:

It means the West, having spent most of the last 53 years in opposition, is now firmly installed in power. And it now has Ontario as its partner. This is the new axis of Canadian politics: the West begins at the Ottawa River.<sup>11</sup>

For this approach leadership does matter, but what is emphasized is the capacity of elites to bring together regions in an electoral alliance. The failure of politicians or political parties is attributed to their inability to bridge the regional divide. Hence the loss of the Liberals in the 2011 election was not exclusively due to Ignatieff, but a failure of the Liberal Party to forge an alliance between different geographical voting groups in Canada.<sup>12</sup> As John Ibbitson argues the 2011 election brought about the end of the so called “Laurentian Consensus” between elites centered

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<sup>5</sup> Bob Plamondon ; *Full circle : death and resurrection in Canadian conservative politics*. Key Porter Books, Toronto. 2006.

<sup>5</sup> The Economist “Mr Dithers” and <sup>5</sup> Craig Parsons *How To Map Arguments in Political Science*. Oxford University Press; London 2007

<sup>6</sup> Bob Plamondon ; *Full circle : death and resurrection in Canadian conservative politics*. Key Porter Books, Toronto. 2006.

<sup>7</sup> The Economist “Mr Dithers” and his distracting “fiscal cafeteria” February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Published Electronically . <http://www.economist.com/node/3669408>

<sup>8</sup> Peter C Newman. *When the God's Changed: The Death of Liberal Canada*. Random House, Toronto: 2012.

<sup>9</sup> John Duffy. *Fights of our Lives*. Harper Collins, Toronto: 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Coyne. “A New Power Couple” MacCleans. May6th 2011. Electronically Published: <http://www2.macleans.ca/2011/05/06/a-new-power-couple/>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

on Toronto and Montreal.<sup>13</sup> Often this approach categorizes the electorate in terms of cities or provinces, such as the “905”, Quebec, the West and the Maritimes.

The final typology is the rational choice/public opinion approach. This approach is commonly used in political science to explain voting behavior.<sup>14</sup> An assumption is that voters or voting blocs make decisions to maximize their returns. Though voters generally seek some sort of economic gain by voting for a party, they may vote due to social issues or other forms of social identification. Politicians are successful when they cater to the demands of the electorate and a specific voting base. Voters are rational and motivated through incentives which can be quantified and analyzed.<sup>15</sup> While scholars tend to use a combination of these approaches, all of these assume that the success of political parties depend upon factors internal to Canada. They tend to downplay or ignore structural forces that may be shaping the Canadian political landscape. Though the structural analysis I will offer does not ignore domestic factors, it seeks to situate Canada in a global context to understand the interplay between systematic factors – such as the international economy - and domestic politics.

### **The Changing Face of Canada**

There have been dramatic changes in the global economy in the past 30 years. The fall of Communism, the opening of China and the market reforms in India have reshaped the entire international economic system. There have been nearly a billion people added to the international labour force, which, along with cheap transportation, the spread of free trade agreements and technological developments, has largely undercut manufacturing in Canada.<sup>16</sup> With its peak after the Second World War, Canadian manufacturing centres in Ontario and Quebec have had a slow but steady decline as a percentage of GDP.<sup>17</sup> Most of this growth took place in central Ontario around Toronto, the so-called “Golden Horseshoe”.<sup>18</sup> However, particularly since the 1980s manufacturing has moved to cheaper labour markets in China and Mexico. While Toronto and the GTA continue to show economic growth, a great deal of this is driven by the financial services industry; manufacturing in Windsor, Oshawa and Hamilton have been on the decline.<sup>19</sup> This downturn in manufacturing has had an impact on Ontario’s overall projected economic growth in the wake of the 2008 recession. Economist Don Drummond projected a long-term

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<sup>13</sup> John Ibbitson. “The death of the Laurentian consensus and what it says about Canada.” *The Globe and Mail*. December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Electronically Published: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/the-death-of-the-laurentian-consensus-and-what-it-says-about-canada/article4403773/>

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Rubenson, André Blais, Patrick Fournier, Elisabeth Gidengil and Neil Nevitte. “Does Low Turnout Matter? Evidence from the 2000 Canadian Election,” *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 26 (September 2007). 587.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Statistics Canada. “Manufacturing’s share of gross domestic product, 1900 to 2005.” Statistics Canada. 2012 11F0027M, no. 57: Electronically Published: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11f0027m/2009057/ct029-eng.htm>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Preston Manning. “There’s Still Gold In Them Thar Horseshoes” *The Globe and Mail*. February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Electronically Published: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/commentary/theres-still-gold-in-them-thar-golden-horseshoe-hills/article714210/>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

growth rate of 2 percent, hardly a robust rate given the population of Ontario.<sup>20</sup> The growth in jobs in Ontario is no longer centered on manufacturing, but rather the service sector.

Longer-term trends in the international economy have hollowed out the manufacturing industry, which has fallen from to just 11.8 per cent of total employment in 2012 from 23.2 per cent in 1976.<sup>21</sup> While cheaper manufacturing from lower-wage countries is one reason for this decline a contributing factor is also the decrease in demand from the United States. Since the year 2000, the Canadian dollar has risen against the United States, maintaining near parity for the better part of the 2000s.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the higher dollar has hurt Ontario's manufacturing sector which benefited from a lower dollar in the 1990s when America was experiencing an economic boom. The 2008 recession further accelerated the decline of Ontario's manufacturing sector. It further lowered demand from the American market, leading to the bankruptcy of GM and the closing of other manufacturing industries.<sup>23</sup> However, the ongoing recession's effect on Central Ontario's industrial base is not an isolated incident. The Great Recession expedited a pre-existing pathology in the Canadian economy – the relative economic decline of Ontario as the productive hub of confederation.

Despite this relatively economic low growth rate in the past several years, Ontario's population continues to increase largely due to the influx of immigrants into the GTA. Since the 1970s, Ontario has grown from 8 to 13 million people, and the province is projected to grow to 18 million by 2036.<sup>24</sup> Ontario will remain the largest province in Canada for the foreseeable future. Currently, it has the most seats in the federal parliament with 103. The region that is growing the fastest in Ontario is the GTA, in places like Brampton, Whitby, Milton, and Vaughan.<sup>25</sup> As the GTA grows in population, there are considerable political consequences. The GTA is politically contested between the Liberals and the Conservatives. It is a fertile ground for the Tories to build political support. Unlike downtown Toronto which tends to vote for the Liberals or the NDP, the Conservatives are competitive in the 905 –the outer area around Toronto. Moreover, the Tories have made inroads with immigrant communities, which along with vote-splitting led the Conservatives to sweep the area in the 2011 federal election.<sup>26</sup> What we can infer from the most recent election is not that the Conservatives will definitely win these seats again, but that they will potentially vote Conservative in the future. Ontario will continue to be important in federal elections, and contested by the Conservative Party.

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<sup>20</sup> Tivia Grant. "Economic Growth will not save Ontario". The Globe and Mail. February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Electronically Published: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/economy/economic-growth-will-not-save-ontario-drummond-report/article547062/>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> The Canadian Press. "Manufacturing to blame for Ontario's shrinking status as economic engine." Canadian Manufacturing. November 29, 2012 Electronically Published: <http://www.canadianmanufacturing.com/fabrication/news/manufacturing-to-blame-for-ontarios-shrinking-status-as-economic-engine-86098>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Katie Daubs. "Census 2011: Milton fastest growing community, growth outpaces some infrastructure like hospitals and schools." The Toronto Star. February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Electronically Published: [http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2012/02/08/census\\_2011\\_milton\\_fastest\\_growing\\_community\\_growth\\_outpaces\\_some\\_infrastructure\\_like\\_hospitals\\_and\\_schools.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2012/02/08/census_2011_milton_fastest_growing_community_growth_outpaces_some_infrastructure_like_hospitals_and_schools.html)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

The situation in Quebec is far different. Its economy is growing at a much slower rate than Ontario. In 2012 its economy grew at a rate of 0.8 percent compared to Ontario's 2.1 percent.<sup>27</sup> It is projected Quebec will have an anaemic growth rate through to 2014 – far below the economic recovery of the rest of the country.<sup>28</sup> Quebec also has the highest personal and public debt levels in confederation. Its public debt is 61.7% of gross domestic product, compared to a debt ratio of 37.2% in Ontario and 19% in British Columbia.<sup>29</sup> This is also having an impact on Quebec's population growth. Quebec's population is growing slower than the rest of the country, due mainly to an ageing population, poor economic prospects, and restrictions on the intake of immigrants.<sup>30</sup> This declining share of Canada's population will have an impact on Quebec's representation on Ottawa. In the House of Commons, the proportion of Quebec seats has been shrinking with the province's population share for decades. In 1867, Quebec held 35.9 per cent of the country's ridings. It had 28.6 per cent in 1947; 24.3 per cent in 2011; and in 2015, when the next representation formula is introduced, the province will hold 23.1 per cent.<sup>31</sup>

Quebec's political landscape at the provincial and federal level is also unstable. Up until the 1984 election, Quebec almost without exception supported the Liberal Party of Canada. In the post-Charter patriation period, Quebecers quickly abandoned the Liberals in favour of the Progressive Conservatives during the Mulroney years. And in the aftermath of the collapse of the Mulroney coalition, the Bloc Quebecois dominated after the 1993 election with some support for federalist parties around Montreal and Quebec City. However, in 2011, the Bloc was decimated as Quebecers elected 59 members of the New Democratic Party (NDP). Quebec voters tend to vote en masse for a political party, but just as quickly abandon that party for an alternative. Most recently this occurred provincially during the sudden rise and equally sudden collapse in support of Mario Dumont's ADQ in the 2007 election. With the death of Jack Layton in the summer of 2011 and the subsequent election of Thomas Mulcair as new leader of the NDP, it appears as though the NDP is trying to solidify its presence and electoral base.

Popular support for the Conservatives collapsed in the province in 2011 election due to the surge in support for the NDP, yet the Tories ended up forming a majority government without the support of Quebecers. The Conservatives only have five seats in the entire province, providing the Harper government with minimal representation from Quebec.<sup>32</sup> Several lessons from this election should not be ignored. First, it was the first time in Canadian history a party formed a majority government – especially a Conservative government - without significant

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Ferley et al. "Provincial Outlook, December 2012." Royal Bank of Canada Economics Research. 2012. Electronically Published: <http://www.rbc.com/economics/market/pdf/provfcst.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Nicolas Van Praet "Economists warn Quebec needs to act on debt quicker" *The National Post*. November 11<sup>th</sup> 2011. Electronically Published:

<http://business.financialpost.com/2011/11/24/economists-warn-quebec-needs-to-act-on-debt-quicker/>

<sup>30</sup> Sylvain Laurendeau. "Sectoral Outlook 2012-2014 - Quebec Region". Service Canada. 2012. Electronically Published:

[http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/qc/sectoral\\_outlook/so\\_RegionQuebecPart1.shtml](http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/qc/sectoral_outlook/so_RegionQuebecPart1.shtml)

<sup>31</sup> The Canadian Press. "Quebec Census Population Numbers Show Continuing Demographic Decline." *The Huffington Post Canada*. April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Published Electronically:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/04/04/quebec-population-census-canada\\_n\\_1401693.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2012/04/04/quebec-population-census-canada_n_1401693.html)

<sup>32</sup> National Post Staff. "Ten lessons to learn from the 2011 election". *The National Post*. May 3<sup>th</sup> 2011. Published Electronically:

<http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/05/03/ten-lessons-to-learn-from-the-2011-election/>

representation from Quebec. Previous Conservatives have usually been able to build an electoral bridge into Quebec, even for a short period of time. In 2011, this was not the case. Second, rather than being the exception, as Quebec's relative population declines, it is possible that federal governments could form without significant representation in Quebec. The Conservatives won the rest of Canada by a much larger margin of support than in Quebec.<sup>33</sup> As Parliament expands to reflect the new population demographics, there will be more competitive seats outside of Quebec. Finally, the 2011 showed, yet again, that the voters of Quebec aren't solidly behind one particular party. The NDP made significant inroads in the election, but prior to it, only had one representative from the province. If the Liberals under Justin Trudeau translate his popularity into votes, there could be a revival of Liberal fortunes. Alternatively, the Bloc could make a comeback in the next election. Unlike the rest of Canada which conforms to more or less conventional voting patterns based on geography and demographics, it's very difficult to predict where Quebec voters may go in the next election.

The region of Canada that has benefited from the increase in demand for resources has been western Canada. The price of oil has been rising steadily since the year 2000, due in part to the increase in demand from the US and China.<sup>34</sup> Even after demand collapsed after the 2008 recession, the price of oil quickly rebounded close to pre-recession levels.<sup>35</sup> Alberta currently has the third largest oil reserves in the world, and, despite the recent economic issues facing developed countries, it continues to be a major exporter of oil.<sup>36</sup> Although oil consumption has increased slowly in the past 20 years from the United States from 15 million/barrels per day (bbl/d) in the 1990s to 18.5 million bbl/d in 2012, the dramatic spike in demand has come from East Asia.<sup>37</sup> In particular, China is now the second largest consumer of oil behind the United States. It used to consume only 2m bbl/d in 1990 to 9 million bbl/d in 2012.<sup>38</sup> The dramatic increase has been driving up the price of oil, providing substantial economic growth or producers. With energy making up 27% of Alberta's GDP, it is driving the prosperity of the province, which has grown on average by 3.5% per year in the past 20 years.<sup>39</sup> Even though prices may dip due to a recession, the trajectory of global demands favours the continued development of Alberta's oil sands. With China and the rest of South East Asia projected to continue to grow in the next few decades –and the demand for oil to increase – Alberta will likely continue to experience high levels of economic growth.

Similarly, increased trade with China and East Asia fuelled economic development in British Columbia. The province has a substantial resource and mining industry as well as a retail, information technology sector and construction industry and is projected to grow at 2.4% over the next 5 years.<sup>40</sup> Yet again, the global economy is behind much of this development, with

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> National Resources Canada. "Overview." National Resources Canada. 2010:  
<http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/energy/publications/sources/crude/issues-prices/1484>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Energy Alberta. "Facts and Statistics." The Government of Alberta. Publish Electronically:  
<http://www.energy.alberta.ca/oilsands/791.asp>

<sup>37</sup> US Energy Information Administration. Country Briefs.  
<http://www.eia.gov/countries/index.cfm?view=consumption>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Energy Alberta.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Chu. Outlook 2013: B.C. economic growth forecast to outpace national average. Business Vancouver

China increasing its demand for lumber, metals and other natural resources.<sup>41</sup> Though the United States remains a major market to BC, it's also strengthening ties to China as that market continues to develop. Vancouver has access to the Pacific, which will increase the province's economic prospects as that part of the world continues to develop.

Unsurprisingly, this prosperity over a protracted period of time has fuelled a population boom in Alberta and British Columbia. Alberta has grown to nearly 3.5 million people in 2012 from 2.5 million in 1990.<sup>42</sup> While still small compared to some of the larger provinces, Alberta has 28 seats out of a 308 seats parliament, which is projected to increase by 6 seats in the next election.<sup>43</sup> Though Alberta only makes up approximately 10% of the seats in Ottawa, it is important to note that, with the exception of a few seats in Edmonton, the province solidly supports the Conservatives at the federal level. Similarly, the growth in BC has outpaced the national average with cities like Surrey, Port Moody, Kelowna and Langford growing faster than Edmonton.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, these cities have had a long history of supporting the Conservative Party of Canada. As BC's population develops, it will likely strengthen the presence of the Conservatives in the province. So British Columbia is outpacing the rest of the country in terms of economic development and population growth, which will further give it more influence over policy in Ottawa.

### **Canadian Political Power – Go West!**

The West of Canada has been a long-time stronghold of the Conservative Party. Most of the seats in Alberta, the interior of British Columbia and Saskatchewan have voted for the Conservatives since the party united in 2004. Along with rural ridings in Ontario and the East Coast, the Conservatives have a base of support of around 25-30% of the electorate which guarantees them nearly 100 seats. As the West has prospered, it has attracted more people and thus more political influence in Ottawa. As Parliament expands to 338 seats, it will benefit mainly BC, Alberta and Ontario, mostly in seats that are competitive for the Conservatives. As the 2011 election has shown, it is possible to form a majority government without a strong presence in Quebec, as long as the Conservatives can dominate western Canada and rural and suburban Ontario. Of course, in the 2011 election the opposition divided the centre-left vote in many ridings that were unlikely to vote Conservative, such as in downtown Toronto. But with an unclear governing alternative to the Conservatives, it is possible that the opposition will remain fragmented, further bolstering the chances of the Tories. Certainly this does not guarantee the Conservatives a majority, but these factors make them strong contenders to form in the least minority governments.

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<http://www.biv.com/article/20130101/BIV0102/301019965/-1/BIV/outlook-2013-bc-economic-growth-forecast-to-outpace-national>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> StatisticsCanada. Population, urban and rural, by province and territory.

Alberta.: 2009. Published Electronically: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo62j-eng.htm>

<sup>43</sup> Elections Canada. Federal Representation 2001. Elections Canada. Ottawa Published Electronically:

[http://www.elections.ca/scripts/fedrep/federal\\_e/red/appendices\\_e.htm](http://www.elections.ca/scripts/fedrep/federal_e/red/appendices_e.htm)

<sup>44</sup> CBC news. "B.C. population outpaces national growth rate" CBC News Website. February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Published Electronically:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2012/02/08/bc-census-growth.html>



Political success creates its own feedback loops. As the Conservatives become more entrenched in Ottawa they have used the government to strengthen their electoral fortunes. They have become more open towards immigrant communities – a sizable demographic in the fastest growing parts of the country, particularly in the GTA. The Conservatives have done considerable outreach to immigrant communities, as well as offering public money for skill-upgrading for new Canadians.<sup>45</sup> By using public policy to cater to new Canadians, the Conservatives have slowly started to win ridings that have a sizable portion of immigrant communities. Although there is an undercurrent of anti-immigrant sentiment within the rural base of the Conservative Party, policy-wise the Tories have been trying to gain the support of this constituency. In 2011, the Conservatives won ridings in the GTA that have traditionally voted Liberal. If this is not an aberration, but an indication of a new base of support, particularly with around 300 000 new Canadians each year, the Tories could have a new potential bloc of voters.

Also the Tories have changed the rules for party financing, in which they have a considerable advantage compared to other parties. After gaining a majority government in 2011, the Conservatives have introduced legislation to eliminate the per-vote subsidy to political parties. This leaves parties entirely reliant upon a public base of support to finance political activities. With its populist base, the Conservatives have a resounding fundraising advantage over the other political parties. The Conservatives raised \$22.7 million in 2011, while the Liberals and NDP raised \$10 million and \$7.4 million, respectively.<sup>46</sup> Of course some of this success can be attributed to the Conservatives being the party in government, but much of it can be attributed to their much larger donor base of 110,267 Canadians, compared to 49,650 for the Liberals and 37,778 for the NDP.<sup>47</sup> Not only do the Conservatives have an advantage raising money, but they have a two-to-one advantage over the Liberals in solid base of donor support. Since Justin Trudeau has been elected as leader, the Liberals have been able to raise nearly a million dollars, and they have broadened their donor base.<sup>48</sup> However, the Liberals still have considerable ground to make up to match the Conservatives, and with their third-party status, they have much more parliamentary barriers to forming government.

Moreover, the history of in-fighting among Conservatives over keeping Quebec nationalists as part of caucus seems to have abated. Due to the discussed changing population growth, the party no longer requires keeping Quebec soft nationalists as part of a coalition along with Western Conservatives. A strong showing of the Tories in the West, Ontario and a patchwork of other provinces is enough to form government. Although since the 2011 election, there has been disagreement within the Conservative caucus over private members bills on abortion and other social issues, there no longer is a threat of a Quebec wing fragmenting due to policy differences. Even the NDP has had difficulty keeping its Quebec caucus in line with its

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<sup>45</sup> Friesen, Joe, Steven Chase and Ian Bailey. "Conservatives Stick to Plan of Courting Immigrants " In *The Globe and Mail*. Published electronically April 06. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/conservatives-stick-to-plan-of-courting-immigrants/article575531/>.

<sup>46</sup> Vongdoungchan, Bea. "Liberals out-Fundraise New Democrats in 2011: Elections Canada Financial Reports." *The Hill Times*. Published electronically October 1st, 2012. [http://www.hilltimes.com/news/news/2012/10/01/liberals-out-fundraise-ndp-in-2011-elections-canada-reports/32287?page\\_requested=1](http://www.hilltimes.com/news/news/2012/10/01/liberals-out-fundraise-ndp-in-2011-elections-canada-reports/32287?page_requested=1).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Canadian Press. "Federal Liberals See Fundraising Surge since Trudeau Took Over " *The Globe and Mail*, 2013.

leader Thomas Mulcair balancing its new-found support in Quebec with its base in urban centres and the west. Though as the Senate expense scandal has shown, support for the Conservatives can still be affected by events beyond their control, the Ontario-plus-West regional alliance promises to be far less prone to fragmentation than previous Conservative governments.

The other parties have also contributed in their part to the success of the Conservatives. Vote-splitting in Ontario between the NDP and Liberals helped the Tories gain a majority in 2011. The traditional alternative, the Liberal Party, is now in third place and even though it has elected a new leader, it still must overcome a third place position and a lack of a regional base of support in order to gain enough seats to seriously contend for government. Moreover as of yet, it is unclear whether the NDP will be the alternative to the Conservatives, or if Canada will return to a Tories/Grit party system after the next election. Although there have been several members in both the Liberal Party and NDP to propose some form of alliance to deny the Conservatives another majority, as of yet, there has not been any discussion of any political agreement. Also, short of consistent Conservative majorities threatening one party with oblivion, a coalition remains unlikely. The NDP and Liberals have distinct philosophies and voter bases, with the socialist NDP as a coalition of workers, intellectuals, farmers, and now Quebec nationalists.<sup>49</sup> While the Liberal Party has historically been a brokerage party, its support has come from Quebec, parts of Ontario, the East Coast and its funding has come largely from Corporate Canada.<sup>50</sup> Even when the Progressive Conservatives and Reform Party split the centre-right vote in the early 1990s, it took three elections with consecutive Liberal majority governments to begin the process of uniting. Alternatively, the Liberals and the NDP have completely distinct histories and political philosophies which could not easily be ignored to form a single party

### Conclusions

So, for the foreseeable future, the Conservatives seem to be the only party that has the broad support to form government, barring the opposition uniting or forming some type of electoral alliance. Structural forces like the international economy play a role in determining the rise of Western Canada as a major economic and political centre in Canadian politics. The economic growth in the West and suburban Ontario has led to a substantial population boom in these areas. Money often brings with it political clout and more supporters translates into more seats in parliament. Although Alberta remains a relatively small part of confederation, its economic strength cannot be ignored and it is a hub of the Conservative Party. Ontario is still important, but its manufacturing sector continues to suffer decline in the face of foreign competition and weakening US demand. Moreover, Ontario has moved towards a financial and services based economy, centred around the 905 area outside Toronto. This region is competitive for the Conservatives. Moreover, Quebec is projected to shrink in both its economy and population, and it can no longer be considered a strong base for any federal party. Though the NDP won a resounding victory in the province in 2011, Quebec at both the federal and provincial levels has proven to defy electoral expectations. While the international economy may

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<sup>49</sup> Norman Penner. *From Protest to Power: Social Democracy in Canada 1900-Present*. James Lorimer & Company, 1992.

<sup>50</sup> Clarkson, Stephen. *The Big Red Machine : How the Liberal Party Dominates Canadian Politics*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005.

not be the sole cause of the rise of the Conservatives since 2004, it does contribute to their success.

Structural changes may create the conditions for political power shifting to the west, but contingent domestic factors have contributed to the support of the Conservatives. First, the collapse of the Mulroney coalition and the rise of Reform Party formed a basis of broader based populist party –one with a larger donor and support base than the Liberals and the NDP. This became important when party financing rules changed in the early 2000s and will likely reshape Canadian politics once the per-vote subsidy is phased out entirely. Secondly, there is no clear alternative to the Conservative Party. Support for the Liberal Party has collapsed – and it no longer has a base in Ontario, Quebec or in major cities to rely upon for support. Though the NDP may be dominant in Quebec for the time being, this support is by no means assured in the next election. Finally, the Conservatives have used government to amplify their chances through the expansion of parliament the elimination of the per-vote subsidy. So while the Conservatives are not guaranteed a majority government, both the structural and domestic factors now favour the Tories. If these trends continue, it will likely lead the Conservatives to becoming the natural governing party in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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