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## OPINION

# Canadians Didn't Shift, Harper Did

Who gets credit for the Tories' revival? Keynes and Ignatieff.

By Kim Pollock, Today, TheTyee.ca



Polls show PM runs a nation of 'small-l liberals.'

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"Stephen Harper is our guy." -- right-wing Conservative commentator Garry Nichols

Harper has "learned that showing moderate, balanced, stable, competent government is good politics in this country. He benefits simply from being the prime minister and not doing anything else."

stupid." -- Pollster Allan Gregg, Harris-Decima

Just a year ago, Stephen Harper's minority government was near death, faced with the self-inflicted threat of being toppled by a united opposition after refusing to bring in a stimulus budget or deal with the economic crisis. Only help from the Governor-General could get him off the hook. Now the Conservative minority is on top, with no sign of a federal election.

While talk of a Harper majority is premature -- he's still stuck in the same old mid-30s of public opinion approval -- there's little doubt he's safe for the time being. But as the Canadian Press noted last month, that has more to do with Harper having moved into the centre than any warm embrace of him, his party or his right-wing agenda.

### Where Canadians sit on the political spectrum

Pollster Gregg, a one-time advisor to Brian Mulroney, reported recently on a telephone survey of the political values of more than 1,000 Canadians, concluding that nothing has changed: we're still "on balance, small-l liberals," he says. Asked to self-identify their position on the ideological spectrum, respondents proved mostly centre left. Only 17 per cent identified with the extreme left or right.

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Of these relative ideologues, 11 per cent said they were left; just six per cent said they were on the right. In total, 29 per cent placed themselves left of centre, 30 per cent said "perfectly in the centre"; only 21 per cent said they were right of centre. Gregg adds that a poll conducted during last year's U.S. election found 50 per cent of self-identified Canadian Conservatives supported Barack Obama.

And when asked to say whether they had become more or less right-wing, left-wing or stayed the same over the past decade? "The net result is zero," Gregg said, laughing.

### Harper, born-again Keynesian

So what explains Harper's recovery over the past year? First, although it took him awhile, he is now a born-again fiscal Keynesian, which means he recognizes the need for government spending to stimulate a slumping economy.

In January, 70 percent of respondents to a Nanos poll said stimulus was important (25.3 per cent) or very important (44.5 per cent). Only nine percent felt it was not important. Although Harper's budget delivered a relatively tepid stimulus compared to the Obama government, stimulus was clearly what we wanted. Canadians were appalled when Harper tried to ignore the recession and leave unemployed Canadians, homeowners and the poor to the whims of a broken free-market system.

### Iggy's muddled message

Harper's second break is Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff. He has done a dismal job, largely because he just can't get his story straight. First he threatened to bring Harper down. Then he saw the polls and backed off. He attacked Harper's budget for increasing the deficit. Now he says he's worried about jobs. He opposed the harmonized sales tax for B.C. and Ontario. Then Bay Street got to him.

While Canadians don't trust Harper, they increasingly don't like Ignatieff. And that means the Conservatives are safe for now.

It also spells opportunity for the NDP, which increasingly represents the only real, consistent opposition to Harper. 🐾

Kim Pollock is a United Steelworkers research representative, based in Burnaby.



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I think Harper's future will be decided in Alberta.

That Stelmach is losing LMAs to the Wilderose Alliance should give Harper a moment to pause.

I REALLY hope that the Wildrose Alliance is going to run in the next Federal Election, they could become AB version of the PQ and do to the Conservatives (again) what the PQ did to the Libs.

*Snowrunner*  
10 hours ago

### **Addendum**

The mistake people make is to think of Harper as a politician. He's not. He's someone who wants power, he does not care HOW he gets it, as long as it is him who holds it.

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He is a shrewd tactician, he has no mercy and he will do whatever keeps him in power. Iggy is simply no match. The guy is intelligent, he he has some good ideas (so did Dion) but neither of them is as cutthroat as Harper is.

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