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Narendra Modi



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The NR Experiment



The challenge for Canada's Trudeau: substance over style

Reuters Jan 28, 2015, 12.18PM IST

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OTTAWA: Justin Trudeau, the man with the best shot at replacing Stephen Harper as Canada's prime minister, will spend this year's election campaign trying to convince voters that he is more than just a pretty face.



(Trudeau, 43, a relative...)

Trudeau, 43, a relative political novice, took over Canada's storied but struggling Liberal Party in 2013 and quickly hauled it into first place in polls, largely on the basis of his personal appeal.

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The telegenic son of former Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau draws large crowds and has elicited comparisons to the Kennedy dynasty and the Obama campaigns. But critics point out Trudeau, a teacher and snowboard instructor before turning politician, lacks experience and specific policy platforms.

"I'm not the least bit apologetic about the fact that I was a teacher, which for some reason people attack me on," Trudeau told Reuters. "I'm highlighting the fact that we need a fresh set of ideas."

The question constantly surrounding Trudeau is whether he is up to running Canada, where media regularly refer to his looks and hair. "Hair apparent" is a frequent pun.

Sensitive to criticism of being light on policy, Trudeau said he had "put out an awful lot of policy ideas," citing investing in infrastructure and education, increasing trade and attracting global investment. As for a detailed policy framework, he said one would be unveiled "in an election campaign when we have a much clearer idea of what kind of fiscal framework we're actually in."

"HOPE AND HARD WORK"

Like Kennedy scions, Trudeau's success is partly due to his surname.

He was born to great publicity on Christmas Day 1971 and stayed in the limelight until his father left office in 1984. He returned to prominence with a moving eulogy at his father's 2000 funeral. On the wall of his

office hangs a famous 1973 picture of his father carrying the toddler Justin under his arm.

"Dealing with being my father's son isn't something that I suddenly had to get my mind around as I showed up in this place as an MP (member of Parliament)... it's been something that's been with me all my life," he said.

"It's what I put out there that actually matters."

His slogan "Hope and Hard Work" echoes Barack Obama's successful "Hope and Change," and Trudeau admires how, in his view, Obama transformed grassroots democracy.

"Everywhere I've been across the country I've seen a desire for change, a hopefulness that we're going to be able to move beyond the aggressive negative partisanship that defines Ottawa," he said, pledging not to "throw mud."

Still, Trudeau said he would not hesitate to draw contrasts with Harper. At a campaign-style rally on Monday, he spent almost half of his speech attacking the prime minister and his team.

More gregarious than Harper and [New Democratic Party](#) opposition leader Thomas Mulcair, he revels in the endless stream of people who want selfies with him.

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"We haven't seen a Canadian celebrity politician of this magnitude in quite a long time," said pollster Nik Nanos as Canada gears up for an Oct. 19 election. "It's a challenge for Stephen Harper."

Critics say Trudeau's comments and headline-grabbing events, such as challenging a Conservative senator to a televised boxing match and winning in 2012, lack gravitas. After Canada joined the coalition against Islamic State, he said humanitarian aid was better than "trying to whip out our (fighter jets) and show how big they are."

"Being prime minister is not an entry-level job," NDP leader Mulcair has said. The NDP is the official opposition party in Parliament but trails the Conservatives and Liberals in the polls.

In the aftermath of his father's death, Trudeau wrote in a newspaper that he was passionate about politics but admitted: "I don't read the newspapers. I don't watch the news. I figure, if something important happens, someone will tell me."

Now he is within striking distance of 24 Sussex Drive, the prime minister's residence where he grew up. To get there, he will have to defeat Harper, a wily veteran who has been Conservative Prime Minister since 2006.

Although rivals might be tempted to batter Trudeau, pollster Nanos said they will have to be careful about how far they go.

"A certain demographic, those that are especially likely to vote, still remember him as a little kid at 24 Sussex, it's hard to attack a little kid."

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