

The Harper legacy: Canadians praise cuts to GST, balanced budgets, condemn environmental record

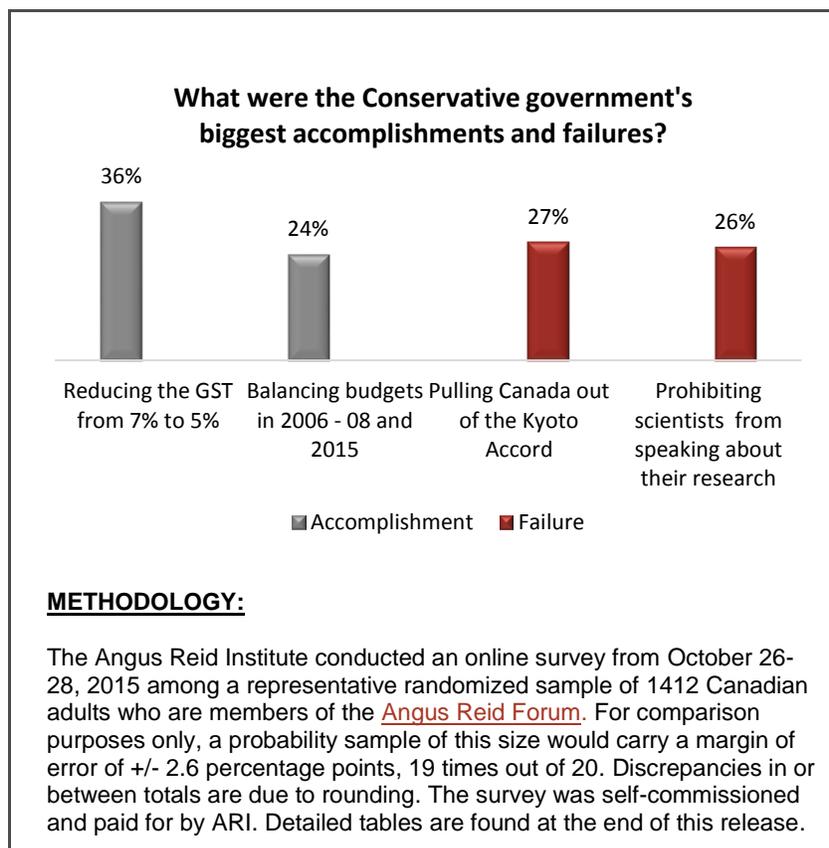
Canadians split over whether outgoing PM solved or worsened country's biggest problems

October 30, 2015 – As outgoing Prime Minister Stephen Harper quietly prepares for his departure as Canada's head of government, Canadian views of his accomplishments, failures and ultimate legacy largely mirror the sentiment that saw him and the Conservative Party turfed from office nearly two weeks ago.

The latest public opinion polling data from the Angus Reid Institute shows judgements over his policies and governing style between 2006 and Oct. 19 generally cut across party lines, with a still-significant Conservative base unsurprisingly most inclined to take a rosier look back at the Harper-era than those who sought change on election night.

Key Findings:

- Canadians say the Conservatives' two biggest accomplishments were reducing the Goods and Services Tax (GST) from seven to five per cent – the choice of one-third (36%) of respondents – and balanced budgets between 2006-2008 and 2015. One quarter (24%) chose this
- The outgoing government's two greatest failures? Canadians say it was pulling out of the Kyoto Accord (27%) and muzzling government scientists (26%)



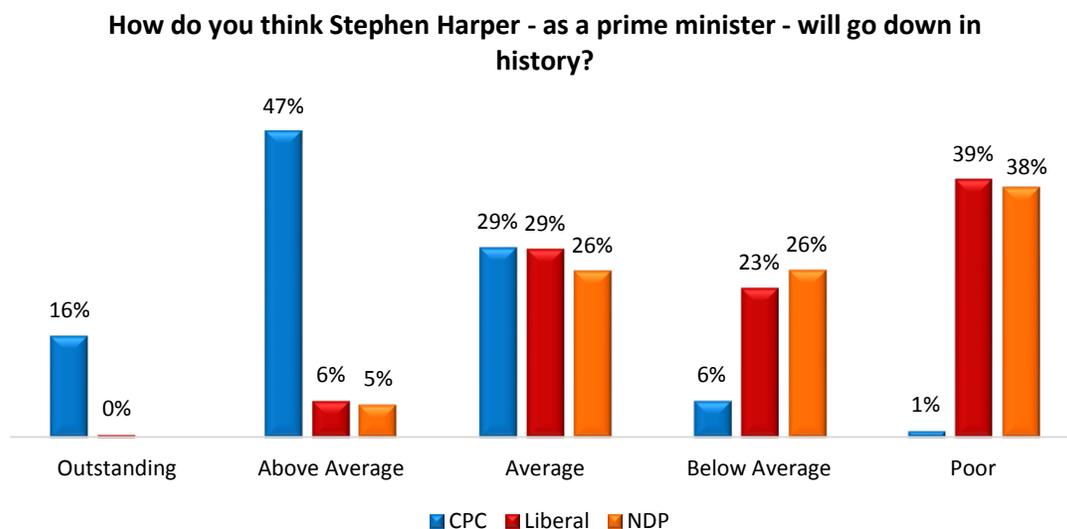
Overall assessments of the outgoing PM:

How will Harper go down in history?

The passage of time will almost certainly have some bearing on how the Harper years are judged in the long run. Today, on the question of how he'll go down in history, Canada's 22nd prime minister evokes ambivalence among his own support base, and disdain among those who didn't want him back.

Indeed, there is no majority view on this question: just under one-third say history will judge him as an "average" PM (29%). About as many say he'll be remembered for "poor" performance (25%). Equal numbers (18% each) say history will peg him as either below average or below average, while a small fraction – just five per cent – say he'll be looked back on as an "outstanding" leader.

What's notable about these findings is the arguably milquetoast view of those who voted for the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) earlier this month. Indeed, they are warmest in their views on how history will judge Harper and his government. But even then, nearly one-third themselves say he'll be seen as an "average" PM, fewer than half say "above average" (47%), and just one-in-six say "outstanding", as seen in the following graph:



As might be expected, Harper is most positively assessed in his native Alberta: 40 per cent there say he will be remembered as an "above average" or "outstanding" PM (see detailed tables [here](#)).

What was his impact on the country's biggest problems?

Canadians are similarly divided on another broad question about Harper's time in office, namely: What was his impact on the country's biggest problems?

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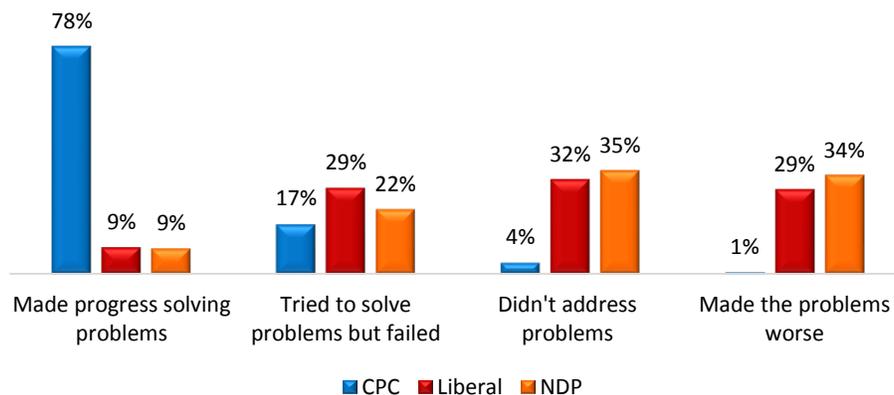
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On this question, respondents are almost evenly split:

- 28% say he made progress solving Canada's biggest problems
- 26% say he tried to solve Canada's biggest problems but failed
- 25% say he didn't address the country's most pressing concerns at all (this is the most prevalent view among past Liberal and NDP voters)
- 21% say he made Canada's problems worse

Again, sentiment by party support is telling. Nearly four-in-five CPC voters feel Harper was a problem solver (78%), more than eight times the number of LPC and NDP voters who say the same (9% each). By contrast, the most prevalent view of those who voted for the LPC or New Democrats on Oct. 19 is that Harper simply didn't address the issues that needed attention, as seen in the graph below:

**Think about the biggest problems facing Canada today.
What do you think Stephen Harper's impact was on those
problems?**



The Conservative record: Accomplishments and failures

In order to gauge opinion on these questions, The Angus Reid Institute presented respondents with a list of actions taken by the Harper government between 2006 and 2015, asking them to choose the two that were the government's biggest accomplishments and the two that were its biggest failures, or, to provide their own. A detailed list may be found [here](#).

As mentioned earlier in this report, the Harper era's most notable accomplishments include:

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- Reducing the GST from 7 per cent to 5 per cent: one-in-three (36%) choose this
- Balancing budgets in 2006 – 08 and 2015: One-quarter (24%) say the Harper era earns distinction for these actions
- Notably, tied for second-most prevalent choice was “none of these” (24%)
- Among smaller subsets of Canadians, other accomplishments included:
 - Establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and apologizing to First Nations for the residential schools policy: (13%)
 - Negotiating trade deals with Europe (CETA) and the Asia-Pacific region (TPP): 12%
 - Moving to exert Canadian power in the Arctic (9%)

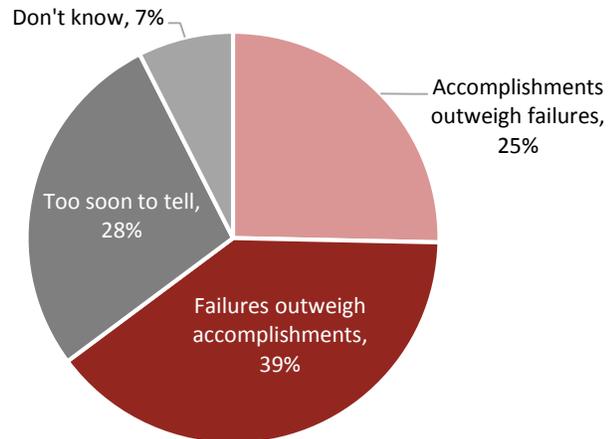
On the opposite end of the spectrum, the most notable failures are seen by Canadians as follows:

- Pulling Canada out of the Kyoto Accord on climate change (27%)
- Prohibiting scientists receiving government funding from speaking publicly about their work (26%)
- Passing Bill C-51 (20%)
- Among smaller subsets of Canadians, other failures included:
 - Canada’s military combat missions against ISIS (16%) and in Afghanistan (14%)
 - Lowering corporate tax rates (13%)

Will the accomplishments be outweighed by the failures? Or vice versa?

It bears underscoring once more that the passage of time is almost certain to shift some opinions regarding the ultimate verdict on Stephen Harper’s time in the Prime Minister’s Office. At present, with objects in the rear-view mirror closer than farther away, a plurality of Canadians say any damage done by this prime minister will outweigh the good, as seen in the following graph:

Do you think the accomplishments of the Conservative Government will outweigh its failures?



Here again, voting preference has a significant impact on opinion. Fully three-quarters (75%) of those who cast a ballot for the Conservatives on Oct. 19 say the accomplishments will outweigh the failures – a margin of ten-to-one over past Liberal voters who say the same (7%), and nearly 20-to-one over past NDP voters (4%). By contrast, those who voted New Democrat or LPC are twenty times more likely to express the opposing view (61% each say the failures will outweigh the accomplishments, compared to just 3% of CPC voters).

Such polarity may not be surprising given the scant amount of time that's passed. That said – it indicates that right-of-centre voters in this country appear prepared – for the time being – to stand by Conservative policies (if not as much by the leader) and defend a nascent legacy.

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

For comprehensive tables showing results by region, age, gender, 2015 vote, and other demographics, [click here](#).