

## Mulroney? Chrétien? Harper? Trudeau? How Canadians compare recent federal governments

*Harper edges Trudeau on 'strong economic leadership,' but the PM leads on most other qualities*

**January 26, 2018** – As the House of Commons returns Monday for its first sitting of 2018, Canadians view the chamber's current Liberal majority more positively than its immediate predecessor on several key attributes of government, a new public opinion poll from the Angus Reid Institute finds.

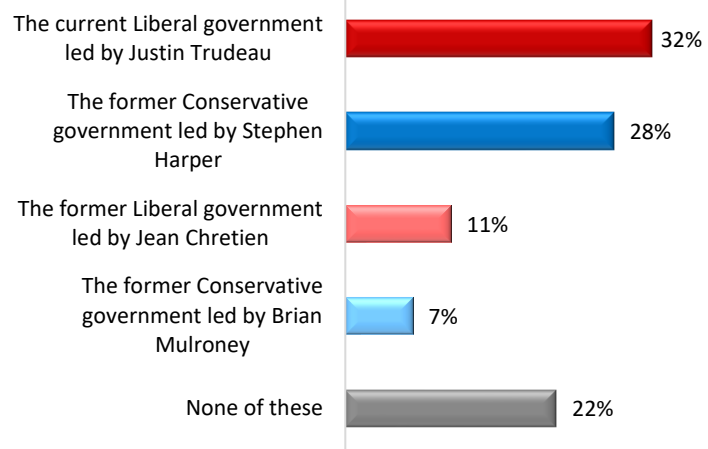
Of the last four majority Canadian federal governments – those of Prime Ministers Justin Trudeau, Stephen Harper, Jean Chrétien, and Brian Mulroney – Canadians say each of eight statements canvassed most describes either Trudeau's government or Harper's, with the current Liberal PM leading on improving Canada's global reputation, respecting diverse viewpoints, and improving standards of living for younger citizens. Harper leads on "strong economic leadership," however.

Crucially, large numbers of Canadians say none of the four governments listed fit the descriptions "honest and trustworthy," or "keeping its promises."

### More Key Findings:

- Overall, one-in-three Canadians (32%) say Trudeau's government has been the best for Canada of the four, while nearly as many (28%) choose Harper
- Half of Canadians (49%) say "none of these" governments could be described as "honest and trustworthy," and an even larger number (53%) say none of them could be described as "keeping promises"
- Political preferences drive opinion on these questions, with those who voted for Trudeau's Liberal Party in 2015 viewing his government (and Chrétien's) more favourably overall, while those who voted for Harper's Conservatives overwhelmingly prefer his government (and notably not Mulroney's – underscoring the difference between the current CPC and the now-defunct Progressive Conservatives)

### And thinking of these four recent Canadian governments, which one has been best for Canada overall?



### METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from January 24 – 25, 2018, among a representative randomized sample of 1,512 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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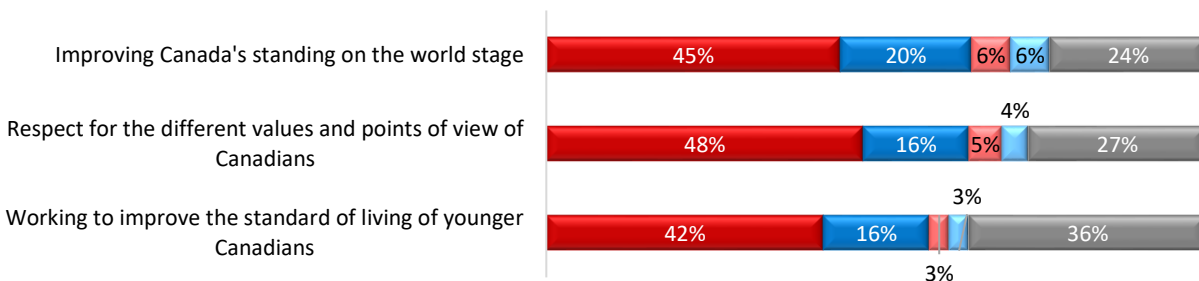
### **Part 1 – Where the Trudeau government stands**

The Angus Reid Institute compiled a list of phrases that might be used to describe a federal government, and then asked Canadians which of the last four major governments – including the current one – best fits each description.

Looking at the data, a pattern quickly emerges: the governments of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his immediate predecessor – former Prime Minister Stephen Harper – are much more likely to be named than those of former PMs Jean Chrétien and Brian Mulroney. This pattern is likely a product of the passage of time. Mulroney left office in 1993, and Chrétien in 2003 – 25 and 15 years ago, respectively. Many respondents to this poll were not yet adults when those two men ended their political careers, and may have hazy memories of their tenures in office.

There are three areas where Trudeau's government stands out strongly from the others: Improving Canada's standing on the world stage, respect for different values and points of view, and working to improve the standard of living for younger Canadians. More than four-in-ten Canadians say Trudeau's is the government best described by these sentiments, compared to fewer than half that many choosing any other government from the list:

**Here is a list of characteristics that could be used to describe governments. For each, please tell us which of these four government you feel MOST represents these characteristics.**



- The current Liberal government led by Justin Trudeau
- The former Conservative government led by Stephen Harper
- The former Liberal government led by Jean Chretien
- The former Conservative government led by Brian Mulroney
- None of these

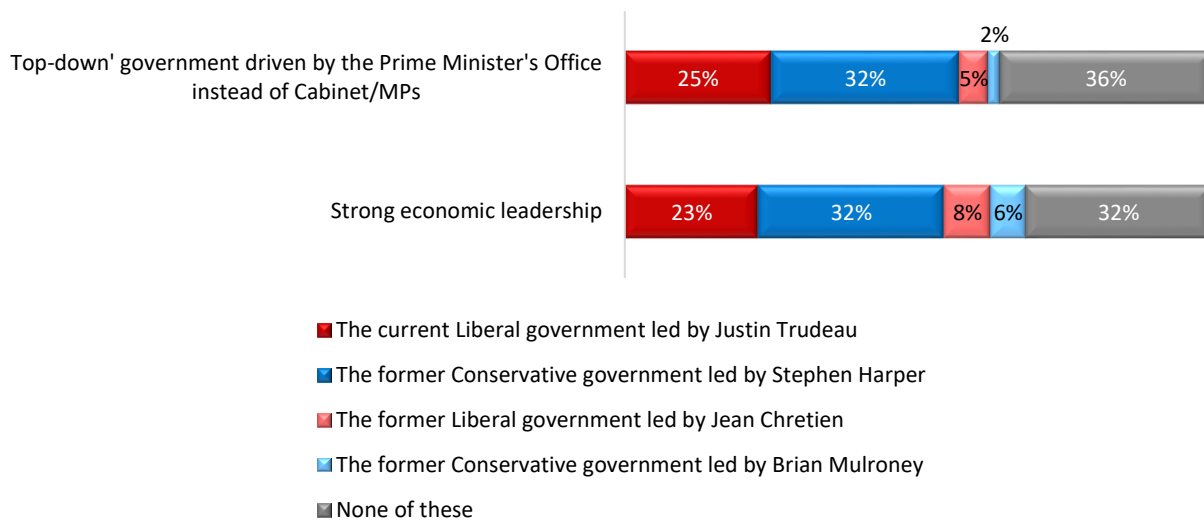
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As seen in the graph above, Trudeau's nearest competitor on these three statements is "none of these," followed by Harper.

Other measures are less favourable to the incumbent. Harper enjoys a substantial lead over Trudeau on the question of which government best fits the description "strong economic leadership," as seen in the graph that follows. That said, Harper also leads on the only negative statement in the bunch: "Top-down government driven by the Prime Minister's Office instead of Cabinet/MPs."

**Here is a list of characteristics that could be used to describe governments. For each, please tell us which of these four government you feel MOST represents these characteristics.**



Finally, three other statements prompt a different consensus. While Trudeau and Harper are still the leaders most widely seen as fitting these descriptions, they are noticeably outpaced by the number of Canadians saying none of the governments included in this survey match the phrase in question.

Perhaps tellingly, two of these statements – “honest and trustworthy,” and “keeping its promises” – concern governmental ethics and integrity, topics that [generated headlines](#) under all four of the governments included in this poll.

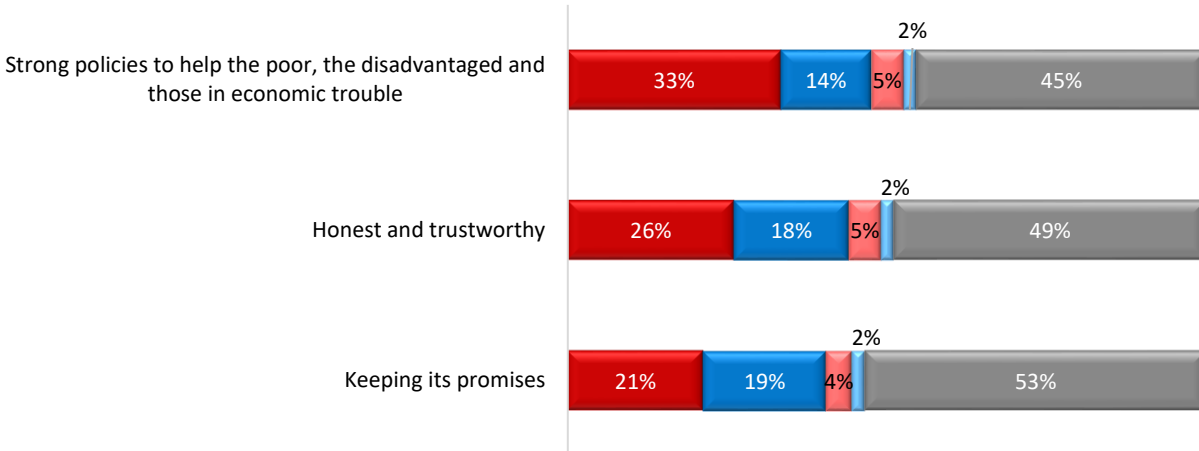
The third item – “strong policies to help the poor, the disadvantaged, and those in economic trouble” – likely reflects a sense that no Canadian government (or, at least, none of these recent ones) has adequately address the issue of poverty:

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Here is a list of characteristics that could be used to describe governments. For each, please tell us which of these four government you feel MOST represents these characteristics.



- The current Liberal government led by Justin Trudeau
- The former Conservative government led by Stephen Harper
- The former Liberal government led by Jean Chretien
- The former Conservative government led by Brian Mulroney
- None of these

### Flipping the question – Harper government still view negatively by many

While Justin Trudeau has an advantage on a number of these key initiatives of government, there's another side to this story. The results of this one are slightly less positive for the current majority in the House of Commons.

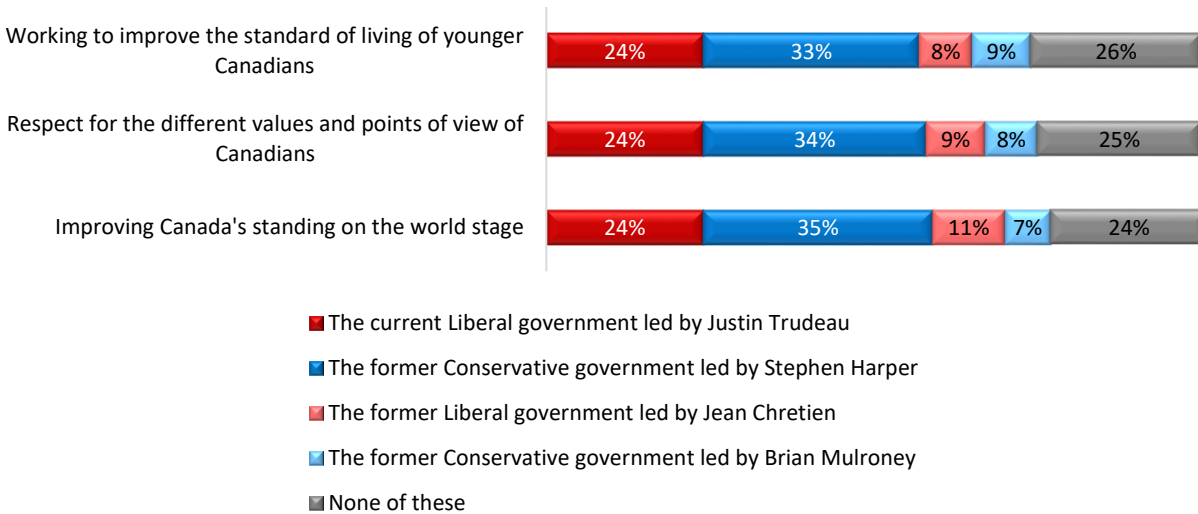
Flipping this same question and asking Canadians to assess the same four recent governments but this time telling us who they perceive *least represents* the following characteristics allows to see the true polarisation in Canada in 2018. On this method of questioning, the gap between the current Prime Minister and his predecessor shrinks substantially. On the three questions that Canadians most enthusiastically praise the Trudeau government, Harper is seen to be worst on each, by an average of a ten-point margin. On each, one-quarter of Canadians say Trudeau's government has been least effective, while one-third say this of Harper's Conservatives:

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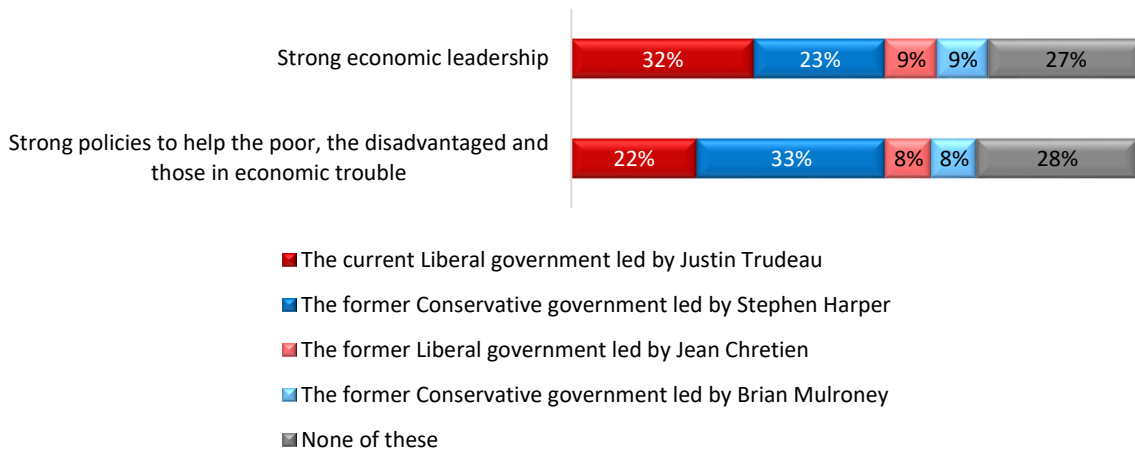
**Now, please tell us which of the four governments you feel least represents these same characteristics:**



On all three characteristics, roughly one-in-ten Canadians go further back, saying that either Jean Chrétien or Brian Mulroney had the government least able to make progress on each.

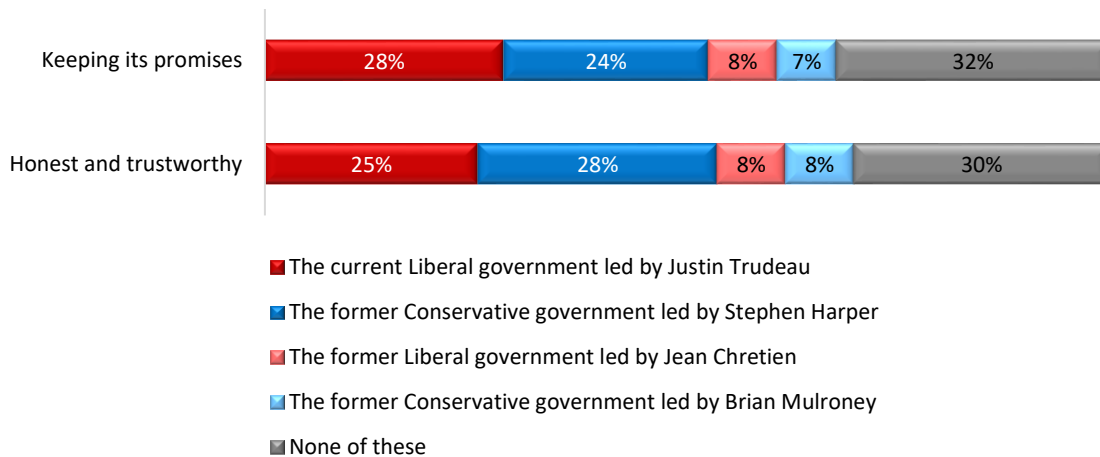
Stephen Harper's government shines most on economic leadership, regardless of the positive or negative framing. While one-in-four (23%) say his government did not exemplify this characteristic, a greater number, one-in-three (32%), claim this about the current government. When considering those most vulnerable however, the poor and disadvantaged, these numbers reverse. Harper is viewed most negatively in his government's record of improving the lives of lower-income Canadians:

**Now, please tell us which of the four governments you feel least represents these same characteristics:**



The final pairing of statements deals with honesty and the ability to keep promises. Approaching three-in-ten Canadians (28%) say that the Trudeau government performs worst on keeping its promises, a slightly higher proportion than those who choose the preceding Conservative's under Harper. Similar responses are noted on which government is least trustworthy:

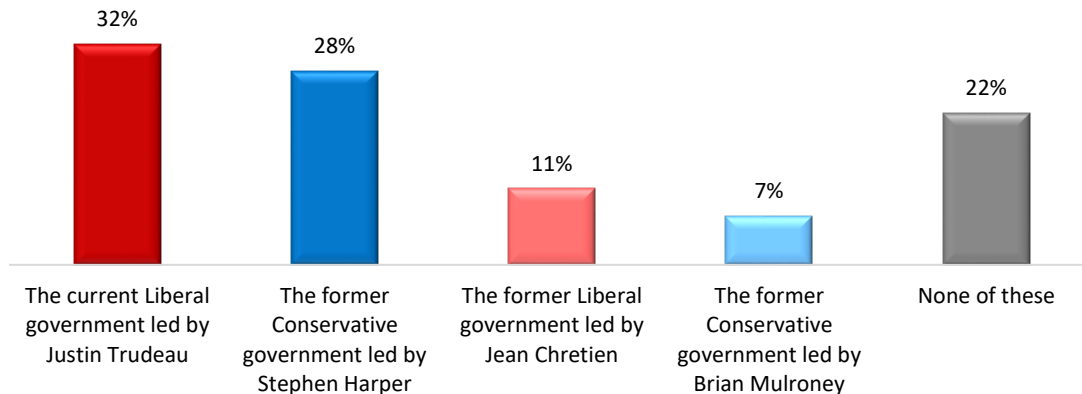
**Now, please tell us which of the four governments you feel least represents these same characteristics:**



**Part 3 – What’s driving these views?**

While Trudeau enjoys an advantage on nearly all of the descriptive phrases canvassed, his government is only marginally ahead of his predecessor’s when Canadians are asked which of the four has been best for Canada overall:

**And thinking of these four recent Canadian governments, which one has been best for Canada overall?**



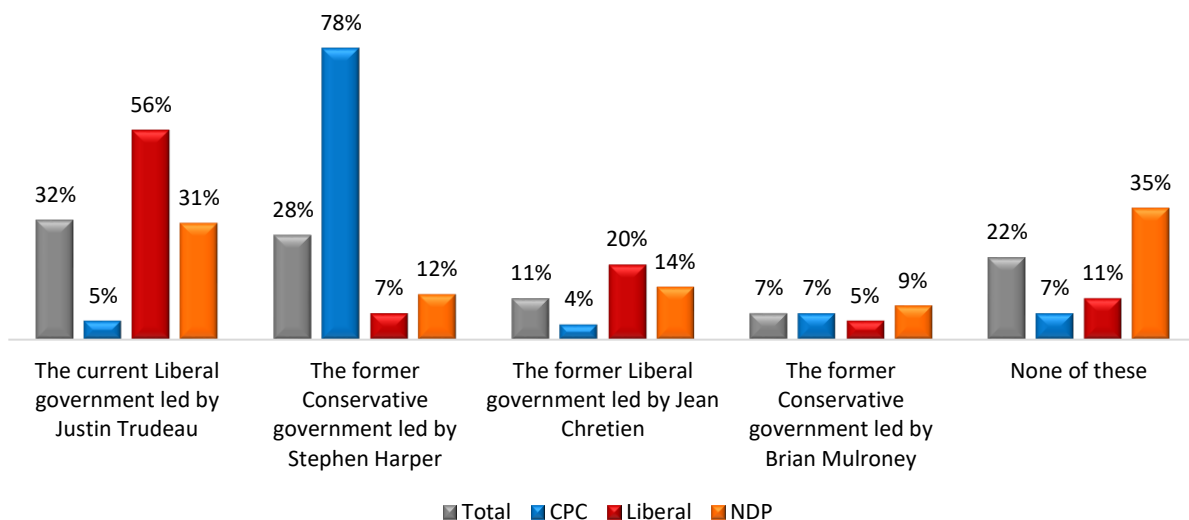
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Motivating these views – and indeed views on the specific statements about each government – are a few key demographic differences, most notably political preference.

Those who voted for Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party in 2015 overwhelmingly view the Harper government as the best of the bunch, while those who voted for Trudeau and the Liberal Party tend to see the current government most favourably – though a notable one-in-five (20%) are nostalgic for the Chrétien years, as seen in the following graph:

### And thinking of these four recent Canadian governments, which one has been best for Canada overall?

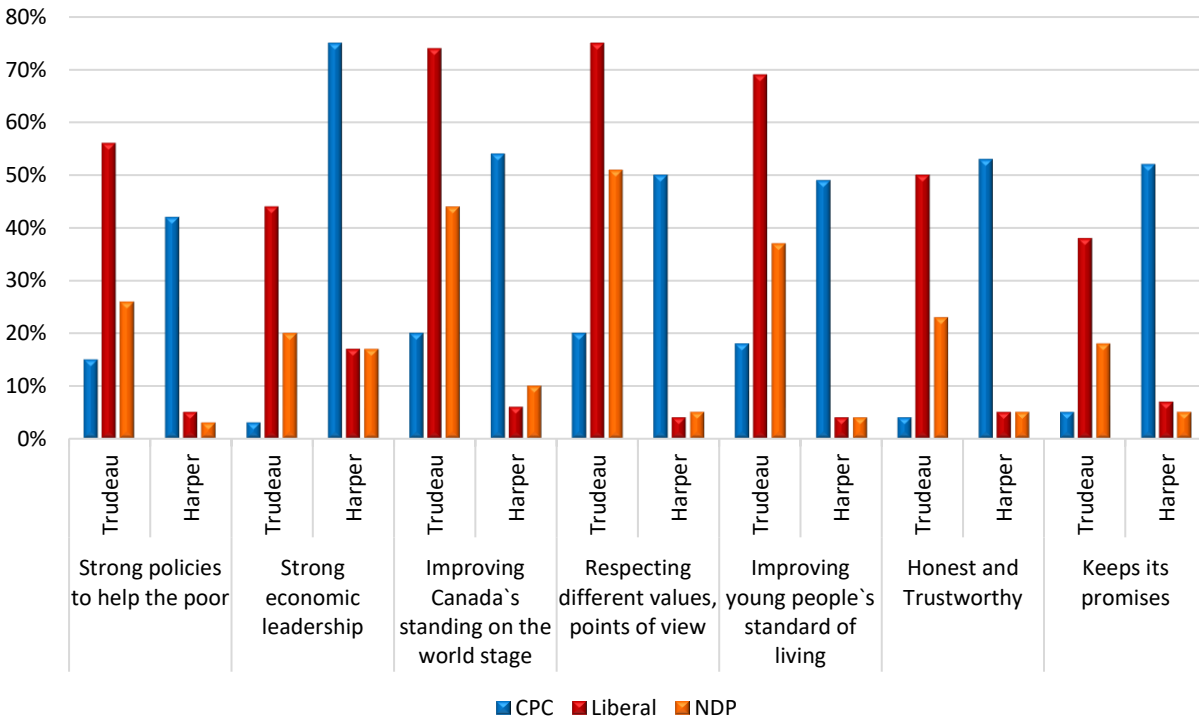


This political polarization underpins most of the responses to each of the individual characteristic assessments that Canadians offer. The graph below shows the response to which government *most* represents each characteristic, by federal vote last. On each, those who voted Liberal in 2015 say Trudeau is best, those who voted Conservative say their last Prime Minister was best. Tom Mulcair's past NDP supporters are more inclined to say Trudeau has the edge, though they're split on the quality of economic leadership offered by each:

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For each, please tell us which of these four governments you feel most represents these characteristics

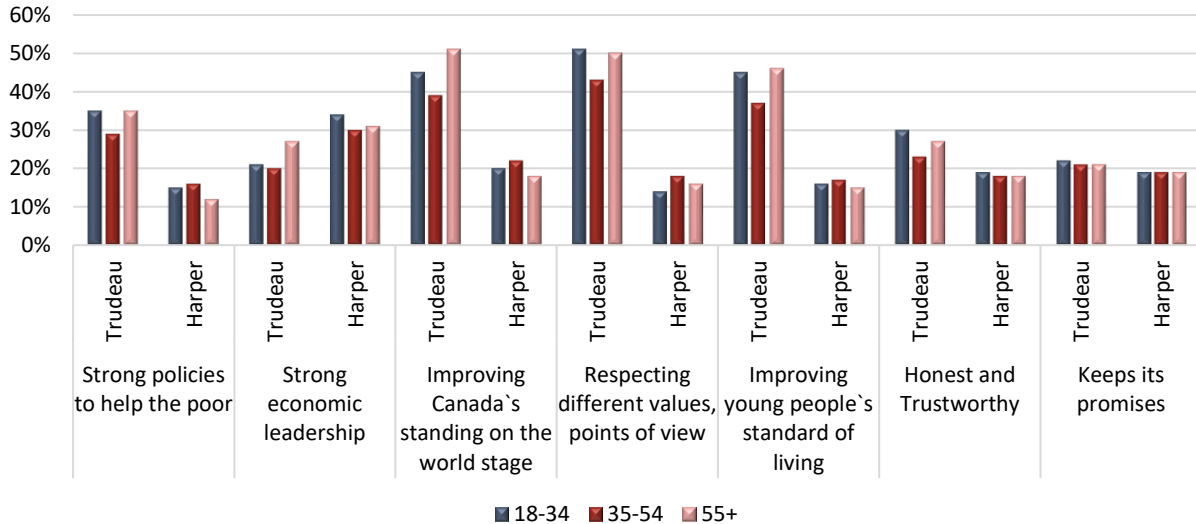


In asking Canadians to think back to the 1980s, it was assumed that younger Canadians would have stronger opinions about more recent governments, while older Canadians may have the opportunity to long for days past. That, however, does not appear to be the case.

Considering these four most recent majority governments, age plays a very small factor in public opinion. At most, Canadians over the age of 55 choose the Mulroney or Chrétien governments by three or four more percentage points over their younger peers. Each age group is close to unified by age in their assessment of the Trudeau and Harper government's, though Millennials are slightly more likely to say "none of these" governments most represent a given characteristic:



For each, please tell us which of these four governments you feel most represents these characteristics



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 foundation 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 detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).