

How and why did pitt
stay in power for so
long? essay sample



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William Pitt the Younger is generally regarded as a great Prime Minister lasting for 17 years. He could be seen as the dominant force in British politics at that time, a clear minded person and a good tidier upper. To stay in power for all that time is seen as an achievement but it was down to six key reasons.

When Pitt was appointed by King George III in 1783, despite the fact that Pitt had much less support than the Foxites or the Northites, he was in a weak position. He fell vastly short of a majority in the House of Commons. The opposition was convinced that they would be able to defeat the 'mince pie administration' by Christmas. However they could not. This was because of the King and the royal support. George III would do anything to prevent the Foxites or the Northites gaining power, this was because they wanted to limit the power of the king. George III had to call an election whenever the government kept losing bills.

However the King, when asked by Pitt if he would delay the election to persuade independent MP's and the public, didn't until Pitt was in a good position. This meant that George III was using his powers in an attempt to advantage Pitt and disadvantage Fox and North. But the King's support was just in his electoral management. The King also had great political influence due to the power of offering sinecures in return for support. Because of the King's support, the election result was a given. The Foxes were defeated, and Pitt triumphant with a majority of 31. Also during the future years, the King always had his royal support in the House of Lords support bills to make sure they passed this meant that Pitt had a comfortable majority all throughout his tenure. Therefore the King's support in election management,

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political influence and wanting Pitt to be PM was crucial in the longevity of the premiership.

The 1784 general election meant a comfortable majority for Pitt and a crushing defeat for the 'Whig' opposition. This crushing defeat means that from 1784 the opposition to Pitt is weak. Weak opposition meant that there was no credible alternative to Pitt's plans for this country. Also the Foxites' separate factions were squabbling between themselves which compared to Pitt's united approach to dealing with problems looked weak. Pitt's country above 'party' approach also looked good compared to the 'Whigs' disagreements between each other. Also, the opposition had links to the previous government that Pitt did not. This was damaging for the opposition because the public thought losing the American colonies was a dark chapter in the country's history and blamed Fox. Thirdly, the French Revolution was linked to Fox who supported it. But when it turned nasty, Fox lost a lot of popularity and credibility because they thought Britain was going to go that way if Fox was elected and the British electorate who were the classes that the revolution targeted were scared of that happening. These three reasons kept the opposition weak; factions arguing amongst themselves, connections to the previous government and the French revolution. A weak opposition guaranteed Pitt's longevity as long as it stayed weak.

As said before, the King wanted Pitt to be Prime Minister and in late-18th century politics this guaranteed Pitt's longevity. However, Pitt was an astute politician in his own right. His actions within the first three months in the face of undifferentiated opposition, was popular with the group of independent MP's because they were won over with his ability 'to command events, defy

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criticism and outwit his opponents.' His skill also to not pursue unpopular bills in the House of Commons when they were defeated was key also to his longevity. Erhman, a historian, said that defeats on key issues 'are significant not because they threatened his position but rather because they suggested how he might buttress his strengths.' In other words he had the skill to learn from his mistakes and realised what to sacrifice for political longevity.

However, there were other factors as well. Pitt's financial abilities also helped him to be popular with the electorate. He had shown his competency with finances while being Chancellor of the Exchequer. When Pitt entered office the national debt was £250 million pounds and the deficit was £10 million pounds. Exports had fallen by 12% due to the American War of Independence. When he left office, trade flourished, agriculture and industry had revolutionised. The debt and deficit had gone. He achieved this by raising revenues through indirect taxes such as window tax. He also introduced the first form of income tax. Also by cutting smuggling, using the Hovering Act and Commutation Act which made smuggling less profitable, he increased revenue from trade. These taxes hit the luxury goods only consumed by the rich elite. He cut spending by employing specialised people in areas of expertise, for example Charles Middleton on the Navy who cut spending in the Navy but increased ships produced.

Also the consolidation fund, which consolidates all revenue in the Chancellor of the Exchequer instead of going to separate departments, which cut inefficiency and further extended his powers because he was Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time. He, also, wanted to increase trade with India, <https://assignbuster.com/how-and-why-did-pitt-stay-in-power-for-so-long-essay-sample/>

Europe and the newly formed USA. With India, he realised a huge market was developing and wanted government to get a slice of it so he introduced the East India Act which gave government some control over trade there. In the USA, Pitt employed a protectionist policy protecting shipping and introducing the Navigation Act, which helped trade with USA. In Europe, he campaigned for free trade but only signed one treaty which was cancelled later during the French revolution. The measures that he introduced led to a national revival.

Imports and exports increased providing money to spend elsewhere, however it wasn't as great as it seemed. Some policies failed especially the luxury tax, it hurt industries relying on the luxuries selling and the rich avoided it. Also the climate would have improved without the changes because of the end of the war with America and the start of the Industrial Revolution. Even some of his ideas were not his own, they were copied and improved. But overall, Pitt's financial reforms were beneficial to the country and were a reason why he lasted so long because he became popular with the rich electorate and the increasingly influential merchant class. Along with the financial reforms, Pitt enacted wide-reaching administrative reforms.

He replaced sinecures, positions requiring little or no work but conferring huge profit or honour. He also replaced placemen which were government positions given for support, both these positions ran in the family passing from father to son. They were gotten rid of when the occupier died and made administration more efficient and cheaper. This was popular with the middle class and backbencher MPs or gentry who wanted powerful jobs but couldn't gain one because of these long-standing sinecures or placemen. However

these reforms were contradictory to the way Pitt guaranteed his political
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longevity in the 1784 general election using especially created sinecures in exchange for support. However these reforms are seen by historians as the essence of Pitt's reforms.

On the other hand not all of the reasons of his longevity were down to skill. He was very lucky. The fact that King George III didn't involving himself in matters that Pitt pursued unless absolutely necessary was lucky because it meant that he could get on without interference. Also the fact that the economy grew again, as explained below, and the industrial and agriculture revolution started just as Pitt came into power because the underlying and, initially, masked economic success from it meant that Pitt could claim it was due to his policies. The revolutionary events of 1790's were especially lucky for Pitt because it dominated political life and undermined Fox's credibility

In conclusion all of the reasons explained contributed to the longevity of Pitt's political career. Overall, the key reason that Pitt was dominant was because of the support of King George III, this is because George III had the power to remove Pitt at anytime, but he didn't until 1801. It is significant that when Pitt resigned it was the second time they had disagreed, on Catholic Emancipation. The relationship between them was crucial to Pitt's survival and George III powers, which would have been reduced without Pitt, had they not disagreed Pitt would certainly stayed for longer.