

Why were the conservatives more successful than the liberals essay



The Conservatives managed to maintain a period of dominance from the middle of the 19th Century to the late 20th Century for many reasons. The electoral system favoured them, meaning that they did not even have to get more than 50% of the vote to win the election. They were very organised, and had strong leaders who knew how to appeal to a wide sector of the electorate, and could adapt to suit the needs of the country.

This factor was helped by the weakness of the opposition - the Liberals and Labour, who had no one strong leader and were wracked by divisions. The electoral system in Britain favoured the Conservatives, helping them to dominate. The 'first-past-the-post' system, whereby whoever polls the highest number of votes in a constituency becomes its MP, meant that the Conservatives did not even need to win the majority of the votes cast. The 1918 Representation of the People Act preserved 'plural voting', allowing owners of business premises outside their constituency could vote twice, and graduates could also vote for University seats - both categories were likely to be Tory.

The legislation also redistributed the seats to Conservative advantage; several safe seats in the Home Counties were subdivided to form a larger number of safe seats. Also, the Act gave the vote to many women above the age of 30, of whom those interested enough in politics to vote and organise support would most likely have been upper class, and therefore Conservative voters. The 1922 Anglo-Irish treaty also helped the Conservatives, as Irish Nationalist MPs, who had traditionally supported the Liberals, sat in their own parliament in Dublin, leaving only MPs from Ulster, who were staunch Conservative supporters. The Conservative's party organisation also helped

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them to maintain power. The Conservative Party machine had the job of capturing the votes of the traditional upper class British, from who it drew funding, the lower middle classes, who provided most of its constituency workers, and around a third of the working class, needed for electoral success. The wealth of supporters allowed for the use of the media to publicise themselves, using things like posters and organised speakers.

This was especially important, as the opposition did not have anything like this set up. The Conservative Party Machine employed more part time workers than the other parties combined; the Conservative Central Office had six men and a few female clerks in 1911, but by the 1929 election, the total number employed was 296. The Junior Imperial League was set up in 1906, and by 1930 there were branches operating in 473 out of 507 constituencies. As a bonus, the press, owned by prominent Tories, gave consistent support, especially at election time. The solid organisational foundation of the Party helped to maintain support, and the problem of disorganisation after WW2 was quickly addressed, allowing them to rebuild. Any defeats the Conservatives suffered were not crushing as a result, and they were able to recover.

The weakness of the opposition was another important factor in the Conservatives maintaining support. The Liberals were divided on how to appeal to the electorate, with 4 possible methods; Gladstone's response, which failed to generate mass support and provoked irreconcilable differences over Home Rule for Ireland; Joseph Chamberlain and the Radical Alternative, whose radical policies made him enemies, and he also resigned over Home Rule; the Liberal Imperialists, who advocated Imperialism, which <https://assignbuster.com/why-were-the-conservatives-more-successful-than-the-liberals-essay/>

was discredited during the Boer War. Only New Liberalism had some success, winning the 1905 general election. The split between Asquith and Lloyd George in 1916 was something the Party never recovered from.

When they put themselves forward as the party of economic radicalism in 1929, the results turned out to be very disappointing, their seats only growing to a total of 59. The Liberals also supported council-housing, but the Conservative desire for a property owning democracy was far more popular. People liked the idea of self-help. Labour was also very unlikely to overthrow the Conservatives; they were a new party, and its organisation was no where near as well-funded or efficient as the Conservatives'.

It was also associated with only the working class, and revolutionary communism after the Cold War, which there was a fear of. In this way, they could not present any real opposition to the Conservatives, until 1929 when it became the largest party in the commons. However, in 1931, Labour's leaders and best known personalities resigned to form a coalition , and its majority fell dramatically. Conservative unity ensured strength within the Party. The Liberals and Labour were both split for part of the interwar period, but the Conservatives' only split was short and minor.

In August 1914, the Conservatives under Bonar Law agreed to support the Liberals, to help the war effort. In 1915, the Liberal government was rocked by scandals, mainly that the war was not going as planned. Bonar Law threatened Asquith that he would withdraw support if a coalition government was not agreed to. The coalition government formed was particularly strong, winning votes by using the popularity of Lloyd George, as ' the man who won

the war'. The atmosphere of crisis created by the war helped them to win the election by a huge majority. Strong leaders were essential in helping the Conservatives maintain support; Disraeli and Thatcher were the most important.

They were also able to take advantage of new technology quickly, such as TV and radio, as Lord Hailsham, Party Chairman from 1957-1959 showed, by using modern advertising methods well. The idea of consensus politics was upheld, with the maintenance of high employment, a mixed economy and the welfare state. These were popular schemes for obvious reasons, and meant that opposition was difficult. That they accepted the welfare state shows that the Conservatives were able to adapt to the times.

Thatcher in particular advocated these ideas, wanting to return to individualism, patriotism, easy credit, intervention and destroy the trade unions. Disraeli was another strong leader; from 1872, he realised he needed to appeal to a wider section of the electorate. He advocated imperialism, as it appealed to everyone. He also passed social reforms in the 1870s, appealing to all classes, showing that he could adapt to changing circumstances. Although the Conservatives were the dominating party during the middle of the 19th Century to the late 20th Century, it could be argued that to some extent they did not completely maintain power. The Liberals defeated them in 1905, by convincing the public that Conservatives meant high prices.

The people also wanted domestic reform, which the Conservatives apparently could not deliver. Doubts also began to rise that empire was not

the way forward, after the Boer War. By 1900, the twenty years of Conservative domination had begun to crumble. To conclude, the Conservatives were the dominating Party because the electoral system favoured them, allowing them to keep the majority of seats. An important reason was the weakness of the opposition, which meant that no party could be any real rival to them.

Their strong leadership and party organisation were also very important factors, helping to compound the support of a wide sector of society. The unity within the party was also important, but perhaps to a lesser extent.