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THE RIGHT PATH

*How Conservatives Can
Unite, Inspire and Take
Canada Forward*

TASHA KHEIRIDDIN
FOREWORD BY LISA MACCORMACK RAITT

MEDIA PACKAGE

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Right Path offers a roadmap to the Conservative Party of Canada to win the next election, and the elections beyond that. It traces the twin arcs of populism and conservatism in Canadian politics and analyzes their appeal in 2022 to three key sets of voters: New Canadians, urban and suburban voters, and Millennials and Gen Z. Based on research, data, and interviews, it prescribes how the Party can get these voters onside and build a big tent that both respects its principles and address today's issues including immigration, inflation, housing, the gig economy, woke culture, the environment, energy policy, reconciliation, and more. The Right Path concludes with a bold vision for Canada that can change the conversation from one of pandemic strife and anger to a positive, forward looking, patriotic plan for the future, to chart the right path and inspire, unite and take Canada forward.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tasha Kheiriddin is a public affairs consultant, political commentator, writer and speaker based in Toronto. She is a principal with Navigator Ltd., a lecturer at the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University, and a national political columnist with Postmedia. Named one of Canada's "Top 100 Most Powerful Women" for her two decades in media and communications, Tasha has also

been recognized by the Canadian Bar Association with the Justicia Award for Journalism and the Montreal Economic Institute's Economic Education prize. In her career, she hosted the daily radio program The Tasha Kheiriddin Show on Global News Radio in Toronto, National Affairs on CTV NewsChannel. She served as a member of the editorial board at the National Post and a political analyst for Radio Canada.



FOREWORD BY: LISA MACCORMACK RAITT

The Conservative Party of Canada has always been referred to as the “Big Tent” party: a gathering of people who share the same values of smaller government, lower taxes, and greater freedom while maintaining self-identified characteristics. I was raised Catholic on Canada’s East Coast, studied law in Ontario, and stayed there to raise my family in the suburbs around Toronto. I am pro-choice, socially liberal, and worry greatly about environmentally sustainable long-term economic growth. My closest friend in the party was raised Mennonite in the Prairies, is pro-life, socially conservative, and worries about oil and gas workers being displaced in the move to a “Just Transition.” We both passionately support our party and each other.

As I look to the United States, I often wonder if my best friend and I would find ourselves diverging in the polarization so apparent in American society. On paper, she and I would seem to line up in opposing camps, but here in Canada we have a home where we can find more similarities than differences, and over the past fifteen years, we have remained close friends. I have often assured myself that we are different here in Canada and that polarization will not take hold here...

“I have been around Conservative politics all my life. In the 1980s, I formed two back-to-back majority governments with a diverse, progressive Conservative coalition representing all parts of the country. We made tough decisions grounded in evidence-based public policy on the economy, the environment, human rights, and the implementation of the GST. We made Canada competitive and set up the opportunity to balance the budget. Right now, our country needs a strong Conservative leader who can rebuild such a coalition and take Tasha Kheirridin’s astute analysis of new voter trends to reach those constituencies to win the next general election.”

- Brian Mulroney, eighteenth Prime Minister of Canada

“Starting with a frank, honest, and articulate review of where Canadian conservatism is today and how it got there, Tasha Kheirridin quickly pivots and outlines a compelling opportunity for the future built on a foundation of hope, growth, and opportunity. This is a refreshing and uplifting work from a leading conservative thinker and down-in-the-trenches activist who sees the bigger picture and knows what it takes to get things done.”

- Rick Peterson, founder of Peterson Capital

“In this era of political division—between the Left and the Right, between the woke and the ‘deplorables’—long-time Conservative Party activist Tasha Kheirridin courageously wades into the fray, offering a common-sense solution for the future political success of a revitalized Conservative Party of Canada. For those looking for a political home, this is a must-read.”

- Janet Ecker, former member of the Ontario legislature

“A very astute observation of the evolution of the conservative cause in Canada by an ardent, committed Conservative.”

- Gerry St. Germain, former Senator and Member of Parliament

“Tasha Kheirridin has been involved in the conservative movement for over thirty years. Her unique perspective on what it will take to win over cities and towns that were once bedrocks for Conservatives is a must-read for every Conservative activist and anyone who cares about Canada having a strong democracy.”

- Walied Soliman, lawyer and philanthropist

“The Right Path is a compelling read, carefully constructed by Tasha Kheirridin. Her ability to analyze the political landscape and story-tell is unique. She asks the existential question: What is conservatism? By the end of the book, you’ll have the answer—and it may be different than you expected. If you’re a politico, this is a must-read.”

- Vonny Sweetland, writer and political organizer

Q&A WITH TASHA KHEIRIDDIN

WHY DID YOU WRITE THE RIGHT PATH?

I wrote *The Right Path* because I care deeply about the Conservative party and about Canadian democracy. After the CPC lost the 2021 election, I started writing *The Right Path*, as well as exploring the possibility of running for Parliament. But no one could have foreseen the events of 2022: the Convoy, the resignation of Erin O'Toole, and the leadership. Needless to say, the book has evolved to address them.

HOW HAVE YOU BALANCED YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE LEADERSHIP RACE WITH THIS BOOK? IS IT BIASED?

From a time perspective, it has been incredibly challenging. I say in the acknowledgements that I missed four months of my daughter's life, and that's basically true. My involvement in the campaign was helpful in that it re-immersed me in partisan politics, reconnecting me not just with the players but with the nature of politics: the loyalties, the passions, the tactics, the strategies. The book is not partial to one campaign, however. I made a point of speaking with people on all sides. The message is not about who should lead the party, but about how the party should lead the country. What it will take to win the next election and the ones beyond that.

WHY HAVE THE CONSERVATIVES FAILED TO WIN THE LAST THREE ELECTIONS?

They failed for different reasons each time, but ultimately for the same reason: a lack of trust. The lesson in all this is that you have to be authentic. You cannot become leader saying one thing and then become Prime Minister saying another. If you do, you will lose the trust of both the party and the voters.

AND YET, THE CONSERVATIVES WON MORE OF THE POPULAR VOTE BOTH IN 2019 AND 2021. SO CLEARLY THEIR BASE IS STILL WITH THEM?

The problem is not keeping the base, it's growing the base. And growing it where the Tories need to win seats: in eastern, suburban and urban Canada, among New Canadians and young people. In fact, if the Tories do not expand into those markets they will not survive as a party. Period. In twenty years, maybe even ten, they will no longer be a factor in federal politics. And Canadian democracy will be much poorer for it.

YOU IDENTIFY THREE KEY GROUPS TO EXPAND THE TORY BASE: NEW CANADIANS, URBAN / SUBURBAN VOTERS, AND MILLENIALS AND GEN Z. WHY? WHAT IS THE SECRET TO WINNING OVER THESE GROUPS?

You have to read chapters seven through ten of the book 😊 But seriously, it's about numbers.

- Currently, just over one in five Canadians was born somewhere else; by 2036, that number is predicted to rise to three in ten. Most of them settle in urban and suburban areas.
- In the 166 ridings made up by the country's three biggest cities, the Liberals won eighty-six. The Conservatives won just eight. The Liberals won all twenty-five of the most urban ridings in Canada and 109 of the top 150 most urban ridings, while the Conservatives won just twenty-three of those urban ridings.
- Millennials now outnumber baby boomers, comprising 33.2 % of the working age population. As for Gen Z, they are projected to outnumber baby boomers by 2032 and millennials by 2045.

These groups are the future. The Conservatives need to make their party relevant to them. They need to show them how conservative policies will solve their problems. Ultimately, all those groups have the same problem: building a better life for themselves and their children. They all want the same thing: opportunity. That is the key word. Not freedom, not removing gatekeepers, or elites, or messaging that divides, but a message that unites people.

For New Canadians, the conservative trifecta of faith, family and free enterprise are key. For urbanites, and suburbanites, the conservatives have to offer economic opportunity. The chance to buy a house, and live and work in their community, and not have to leave. For young people, it's about listening to them and understanding them. Millennials and Gen Z are not monolithic. There is an excellent study by Deloitte that breaks these generations down into cohorts, some of which are very accessible to the Conservatives, which I discuss.

YOU TALK A LOT ABOUT OPPORTUNITY – YOU SAY THAT IS THE WORD CONSERVATIVES SHOULD CAMPAIGN ON, INSTEAD OF FREEDOM. WHY?

Opportunity is positive. It is universal. It unites. It uplifts. And it is not tarnished. Freedom used to be such a word, but not anymore. The Convoy killed it. I talked with many of the voters the Tories need to win over, the immigrants, urbanites, and blue Liberal switch voters, and they now associate freedom with the Convoy, with America, with Donald Trump, with anger and racism. Some young people do respond positively to the word, no question, but when you crunch the numbers there are not enough of those voters to counterbalance the other ones that you lose.

YOU IDENTIFY THREE GROUPS OF VOTERS: THE CONVOY CONSERVATIVES, THE CLUB CONSERVATIVES, AND THE COMMON SENSE CANADIANS. WHAT ARE THEY AND WHY DID YOU MAKE THESE DISTINCTIONS?

They represent the current divisions within the Conservative Party and the broader electorate it seeks to engage. They are divided by geography, generation and employment. Convoy Conservatives, as the name suggests, support the aims of the Freedom Convoy. They don't trust the government and are angry at Trudeau; they feel he and other elites aren't listening to them. They are more likely to be populist in outlook than conservative; many have never previously been politically engaged.

Club Conservatives are the type of conservative you would find at Toronto's famous Albany Club. They are the "laptop class" who got to work from home during the pandemic, and who in many cases are better off than they were two years ago. They don't like Trudeau either, not because he limited their freedom, but because he is fiscally irresponsible, and has diminished Canada's global stature as a sound investment destination and defender of democracy. They prize law and order and while they support freedom of speech, most don't approve of the Convoy.

The Common Sense Canadians are those in the middle; they don't identify with the Convoy crowd, but neither are they members of the Club. They are pragmatic middle-class voters who have been the backbone of electoral victory for both Tories and Liberals for the past century. They get angry at governments that screw up, but they are not angry at elites per se. That's because for the most part, they are socially and economically aspirational: if you asked them, they would likely prefer their children join a club than a convoy when they grow up.

WHY DO YOU SAY THESE DIVISIONS ARE HARDER TO HEAL THAN PREVIOUS SPLITS IN THE PARTY?

Unlike previous divisions of social, fiscal, red tory, blue tory, and libertarian, these new ones are more dangerous because they are class divisions. They are harder to heal because the implication is that one group is keeping the other down, even within their own party. This is the kind of thing that led to the creation of the Reform party, a sense of alienation. If you want to keep them all in the same tent, you have to find common ground, something else for them to rally around and forget their differences.

WHAT COULD THAT "SOMETHING" BE?

In the book, I talk to people about what could do this. Peter Mackay and John Baird both discuss their views on the need to compromise to create that big tent. Gerry St Germain talks about the role of First Nations. Mac Van Wielingen talks about reconciling energy and environmental policy. Eric Duhaime discusses the role of Quebec. In Chapter Ten, I outline a vision of Canada as a global energy superpower, harnessing the power not just of ethical fossil fuels but critical minerals, to power the world for the next generation. It combines national pride with economic reconciliation for indigenous peoples with real opportunity for all workers in Canada to participate in.

HOW HAS POPULISM PLAYED OUT IN CANADIAN HISTORY, SPECIFICALLY WITH REGARD TO CONSERVATIVE POLITICS?

Populism has been a force in Canada since the Progressive movement in the early 1900's. Canada has had several populist parties on the federal scene, both left and right: the Progressives, the CCF, Social Credit and their French version, the Creditistes, and Reform. The Progressive Conservatives won a massive majority government under a populist leader, John Diefenbaker, in 1958. Populist movements have generally come from the West, on both the left and the right. Apart from Diefenbaker, however, they have always made life easier for the Liberals. They have consistently split the Conservative vote and allowed prolonged periods of Liberal rule.

WHAT CAUSES POPULISM?

Populism isn't fueled by inequality, or racism, or immigration, as is commonly believed. It's fueled by lack of social mobility, or even just by perceived lack of mobility. It takes root when people feel that they do all the right things – get that education, get that job, work hard, save – and they still can't get ahead. They get frustrated and look for someone to blame. Throughout history, that someone has been the rich, the aristocracy, the Jews, and so on. Today it's the gatekeepers; the mythical people who are supposedly standing in the way of people's dreams. The reality is that removing gatekeepers doesn't work; there are always others coming up. We should empower people to unlock the gates, not toss people out.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH POPULISM THEN?

You don't give in to it, but you don't disparage it. People are hurting, and you need to address that. You offer policies that promote equality of opportunity, not equality of result, which is what the current government is offering. Trudeau has been trying to level the playing field by redistributing money from one group to another, but that never works, because it treats society like a zero-sum game, with winners and losers. Today people think that "elites" have a better chance to get ahead because of their social position, and members of interest groups have a better shot because of woke identity politics. Creating real equality of opportunity depends to an extent on state involvement, but not in the form of wealth transfers. The state needs to ensure that people get good health care and education, and maintain law and order to ensure that everyone operates within the same rules, that they have the best chance at competing fairly.

YOU SAY THAT TRUDEAU'S TRUE LEGACY WAS TO PAVE THE WAY FOR POPULISM. HOW DID HE DO THAT EXACTLY?

Trudeau is Canada's Obama. Sounds strange I know, because they come from totally different backgrounds, but they both had the same effect on their country. They furthered the cause of woke politics and provoked a backlash from the far right and right-wing populists. In Canada, Trudeau's moralizing on issues of feminism and racism angered many people; they also felt he was a hypocrite because of blackface and his ethical scandals. He also demonized the oil sector and alienated the west, much as his father did with his National Energy Program in the 1970's. Worse though, the research I found shows that his policies actually impoverished the middle class.

CAN POPULISM AND CONSERVATISM COEXIST WITHIN THE PARTY?

It depends. I believe you can address the issues that matter to both groups, but at the end of the day, it's the Conservative party. It is rooted in conservative principles, history and tradition. You can't just use it as a vehicle for populist concerns, you can't just adopt populist slogans and forget about party branding, and you can't demonize one group at the expense of the other. Monte Solberg has some good advice on this, about the importance of listening, about ensuring people are heard. It doesn't mean you just do what they say, but you treat them with respect. That cuts both ways – you don't disrespect the elites either. There's a difference between demagoguery and leadership.

YOU SAY CANADIAN CONSERVATISM IS DIFFERENT FROM THE AMERICAN VERSION – HOW?

It boils down to history. Unlike the United States, Canada was built by two founding peoples, in addition to the First Nations who were already living here. Navigating that linguistic and cultural duality took a lot of energy, a lot of compromises, a lot of negotiating. National unity has always been the preeminent job in Canadian politics, and ideological development took a back seat. So Canadian conservatism has been less strident, more progressive, and more pragmatic than the American version. If the Canadian conservative movement goes populist we will bring Trump-style elements north of the border. In an era of social media, of increased cultural integration, that could be the death knell for the Canadian nature of our politics.

IN YOUR CONCLUSION YOU SAY THERE ARE TWO POSSIBLE OUTCOMES TO THIS LEADERSHIP RACE: EITHER THE PARTY GOES DOWN THE ROAD OF POPULISM OR THE CENTRE RIGHT, AND EITHER STAYS UNITED OR SPLITS. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS MOST LIKELY? YOU TALK ABOUT A "LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE" PARTY, WHAT IS THAT ABOUT?

I think the best outcome from an electoral perspective would be for the Conservative party to choose the centre-right path. The Liberal-NDP deal has opened a huge window of opportunity to get blue-liberal voters into our tent. If the party chooses a populist path, that opportunity will be lost. It's also clear that some people will have trouble working with each other; Patrick Brown has already said he will not run under Pierre Poilievre if he wins. Eastern Conservatives may chafe under the domination of the party by Western populists, seeing in this the ultimate "takeover" by Reform, an issue that still lingers from the merger in 2003.

Quebec MPs may also want out, as they may see a western populist party as unwinnable in their province. There is a possibility that if that happens, some centre-right conservatives will form a new party, together with blue Liberals; I posit that it could be like the party that founded Canada, Macdonald's Liberal-Conservative party. It was like the Progressive Conservative Party in its day. But the danger is that you split the vote and the Liberals win. So it's not my preferred option.

YOU ARE PART OF A LEADERSHIP TEAM, AND SOME HAVE ACCUSED YOU OF USING THE CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP RACE FOR THE PURPOSES OF SELLING YOUR BOOK. WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE?

This is not about the team I'm on, or "the Conservative leadership". This is about leadership, period. Thought leadership, moral leadership, political leadership. It's about where is Canada going and what are the Conservatives contributing to that. In Canada the path to power does not run through populism. History teaches us that. Centre right parties are the ones that formed the big tent. This leadership race has turned into a battle between populism and conservatism for the soul of the party. I hope to help people analyze the situation and make an informed choice, whatever that choice may be.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS LEADERSHIP? WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN?

We still have two months to go. I don't think it's a done deal. A lot will happen between now and September 10, including more debates, persuasion by the candidates, and conversations between members. This is a good thing. The party's at a watershed. Speaking as a member of Mr. Charest's team, of course I want him to win, because I believe he has what it takes to unify the party and the country and win the next election. And know we have a path to victory, no matter what the other camps may say. But my goal here is to help members make an informed choice when they mark their ballot, and help whoever wins to heal the party and take it forward. If The Right Path does that, I would be very happy.

NATIONAL BOOK TOUR DATES

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TORONTO | **JULY 27TH**

OTTAWA / MONTRÉAL | **LATE JULY**

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