Conservatives political dominance (1886–1905)

Conservatives rise: a new-look party, new electoral system, development of a professional party, contribution of Lord Salisbury

- A new-look party
  - Conservative Party repositioned itself
  - Attempted to broaden its appeal
  - Although its leadership remained predominantly aristocratic, it sought and gained greater support from the urban middle classes as well as appealing to the working class

- New electoral system
  - New electoral system came into operation after the 1884-5 Reform Acts were passed favoured the Conservatives
    - Therefore, Conservatives began to win seats in industrial towns
    - Conservatives secured a larger proportion of the working-class vote than the Liberals
  - Creation of single-member constituencies
    - Worked to the advantage of the Conservatives due to them smaller than multi-member constituencies

- Development of a professional party
  - Developed into a professional and national party machine
  - By 1900 Conservatives had 30 party agents in London while the Liberals had just 3

- Lord Salisbury
  - Ensured that the electoral reform package of 1884-5 favoured the Conservatives
  - Adapted to the new electoral system by repositioning the party, broadening its appeal and making it more professional
  - Forging an alliance with the Liberal Unionists
  - Ensuring that the Unionist alliance presented a united front
  - Appointing men who shared his outlook to key ministries

Liberals decline: electoral weaknesses, weak leadership, a ‘crisis of identity’

- Electoral weaknesses
  - Split in party in 1886 led to financial crisis which made it difficult for the party to field candidates
  - 1886 general election: Liberal Party handed 116 seats to the Conservatives