



Electoral Choice in Britain, 2010: Emerging Evidence From the BES

**Harold Clarke
David Sanders
Marianne Stewart
Paul Whiteley**

June 25, 2010

©Copyright 2010: Harold Clarke, David Sanders, Marianne Stewart, and Paul Whiteley. No publication, reproduction, rebroadcast or other use of this presentation or any of its data displays is allowed without the express written permission of the authors.

Studying Electoral Choice in 2010: The British Election Study (BES)

- **Pre-Campaign (N = 1935) and Post-Election (N = 3000) In-Person Panel Survey with Self-Completion Mailback Questionnaire. Post-election survey and mailback questionnaire in field.**
- **Pre-Campaign (N=16816), Campaign (N = 14622) and Post-Election (N = 13356) Campaign Internet Panel Survey (CIPS) with 2005-2010 inter-election and CMS-2010 components.**
- **Monthly (April 2004 – present) Continuous Monitoring Surveys (CMS) with cumulative yearly panel components**
- **Comparative Study of Electoral Systems Post-Election Internet Survey (N = 927)**

Preliminary BES Findings

- This slide show presents preliminary BES findings *circa* June 11, 2010
- **Data** – 2010 BES CIPS and July 2007-March 2010 CMS Surveys
- BES data available **NOW** for download from BES 2009-10 website –
- <http://bes2009-10.org>

Explaining Electoral Choice: The Valence Politics Model

- **Major variables in valence politics model of electoral choice are:**
- **Leader Images – key heuristic**
- **Partisan attachments - key heuristic, dynamic properties**
- **Evaluations of parties' actual and anticipated performance on 'valence' issues - the economy, public service delivery, and national and personal security. These are issues where there is strong consensus on the ends of policy, and political debate concerns 'who' and 'how', not 'what'.**

Valence Politics Model Continued

- **As in earlier British elections, valence politics model provides key to understanding electoral choice in 2010**

References:

Clarke, Sanders, Stewart and Whitely, *Performance Politics and the British Voter*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Clarke, Sanders, Stewart and Whiteley, *Political Choice in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

See also Clarke, Kornberg and Scotto, *Making Political Choices: Canada and the United States*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

Emerging Facts about Electoral Choice in 2010

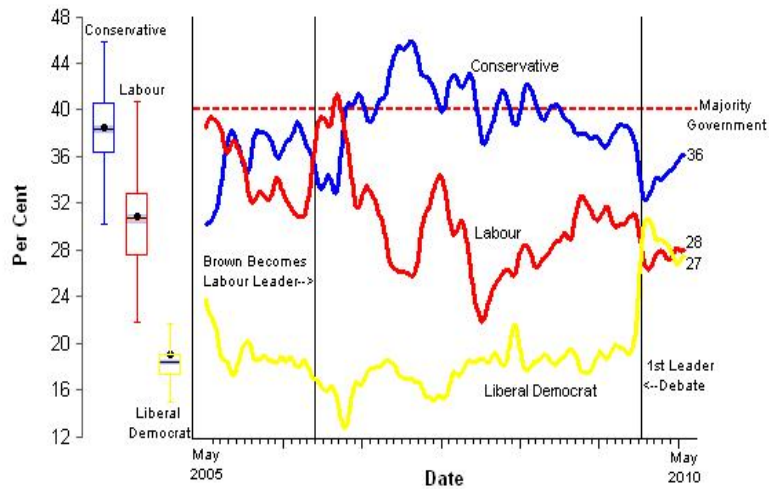
June 25th Version

More to Come!

Facts 1a – 1b

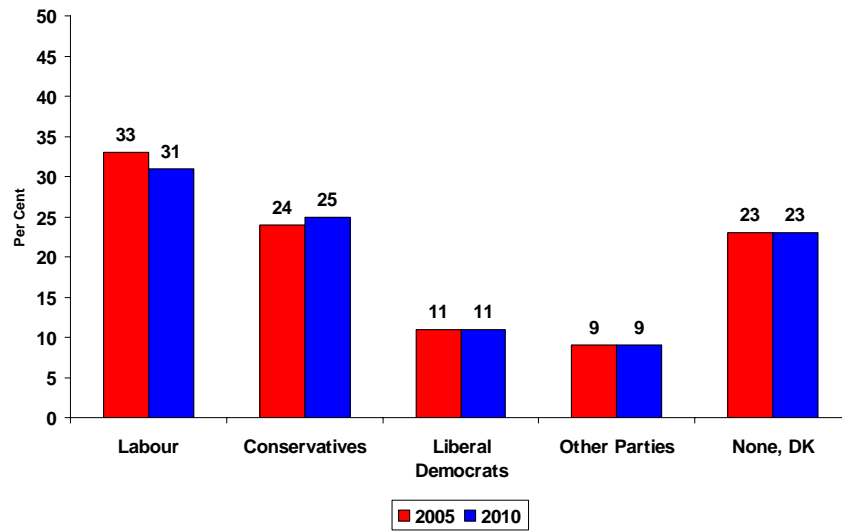
- **Labour vote intentions fell sharply after the 2005 election, and the party trailed the Conservatives by large margins throughout much of the 2005-2010 period.**
- ***However*, the Conservatives made virtually no net gains in party identification between 2005 and 2010. Going into the 2010 campaign Labour partisanship was off slightly, but the Conservatives were not beneficiaries.**

Trends in Vote Intentions, 607 Polls,
May 19, 2005 - May 5, 2010



Note: data smoothed with the Hodrick-Prescott filter.

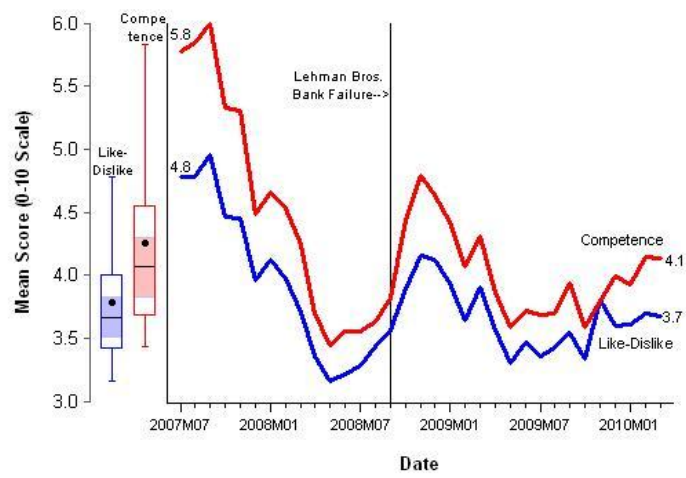
Party Identification, 2005 and 2010 CIPS Pre-Campaign Surveys



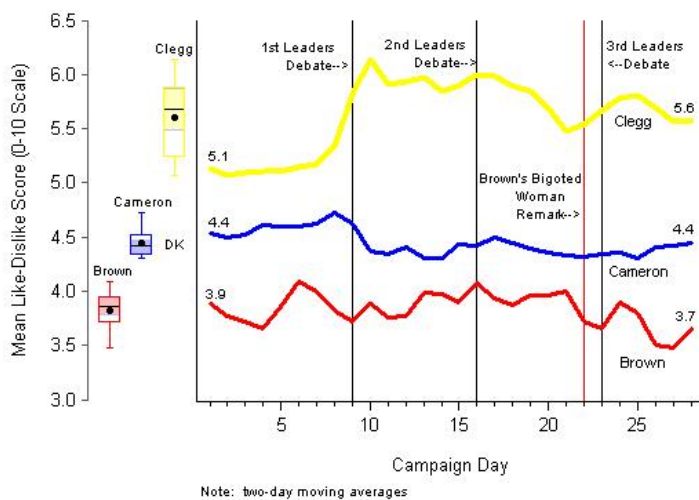
Facts 2a – 2e

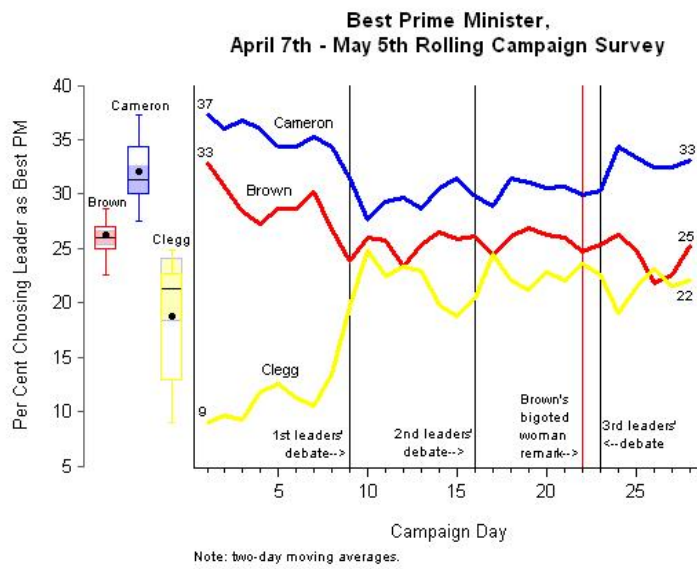
- **Gordon Brown** was *massively unpopular*. His numbers rival those of former Conservative leaders **Iain Duncan Smith & William Hague**.
- **Competence perceptions** could not save Brown – In fact, he was not seen as especially able.
- Brown's negatives continued to be strong throughout the election campaign.
- Brown was judged to have performed poorly in all three leader debates.
- Many voters already had judged that the Labour leader and his party had run an ineffective campaign before Brown's 'bigoted woman' remarks. Brown's highly publicised comments confirmed these judgments.

Gordon Brown's Image, July 2007 - March 2010
Monthly BES CMS Surveys

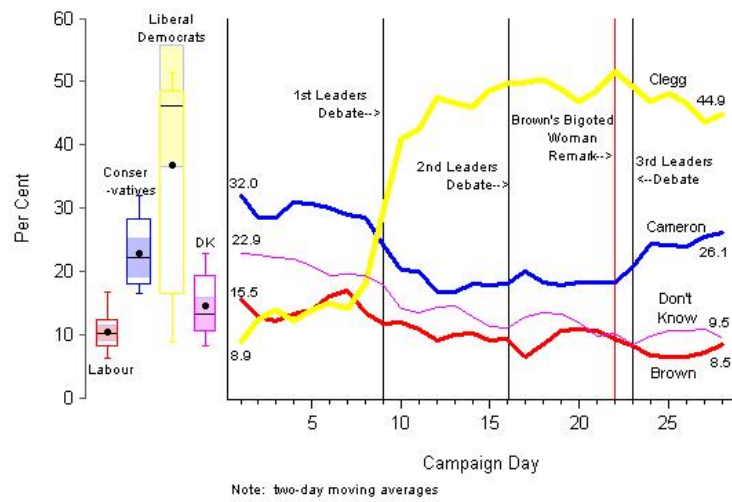


**Feelings About Party Leaders on 0-10 Like-Dislike Scale
April 7th - May 5th Rolling Campaign Survey**

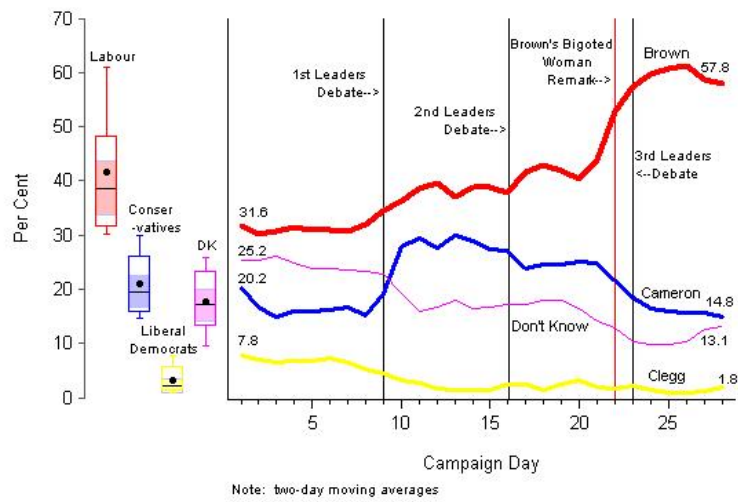




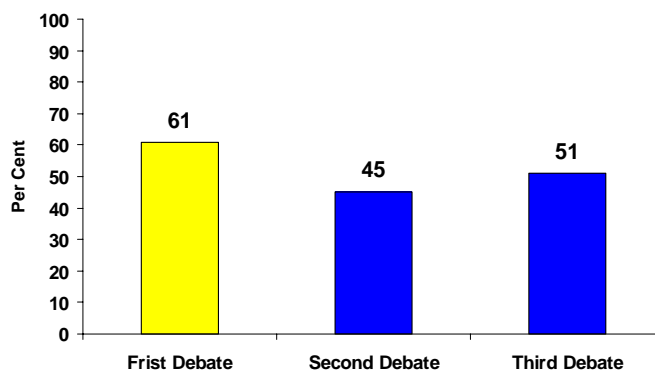
**Party Leader Conducting Best Election Campaign.
April 7th - May 5th Rolling Campaign Survey**



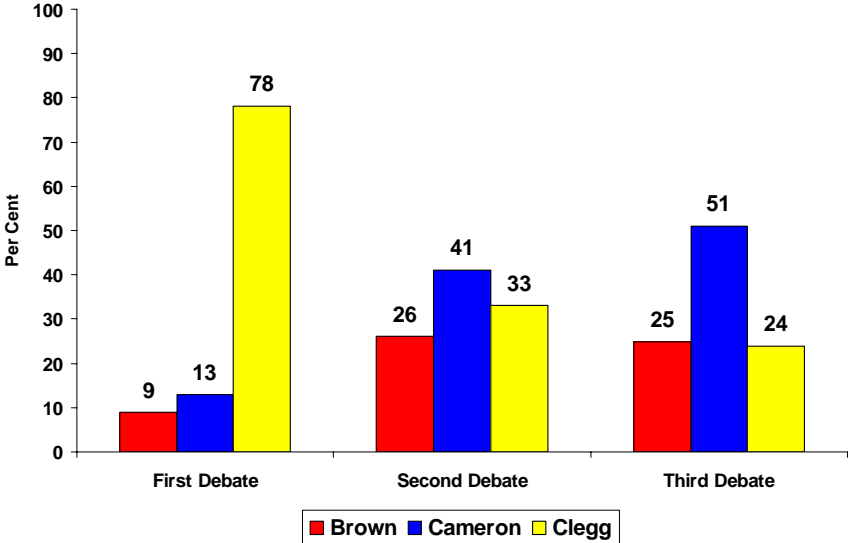
**Party Leader Conducting Worst Election Campaign,
April 7th - May 5th Rolling Campaign Survey**



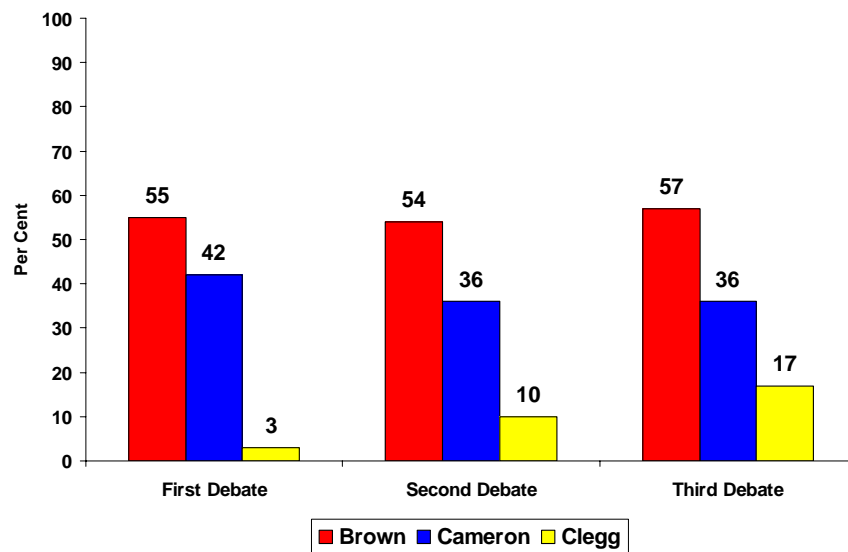
**Percentages of Rolling Campaign Survey Panelists
Seeing or Hearing Party Leaders Debates**



Who Did The Best Job in Party Leader Debates



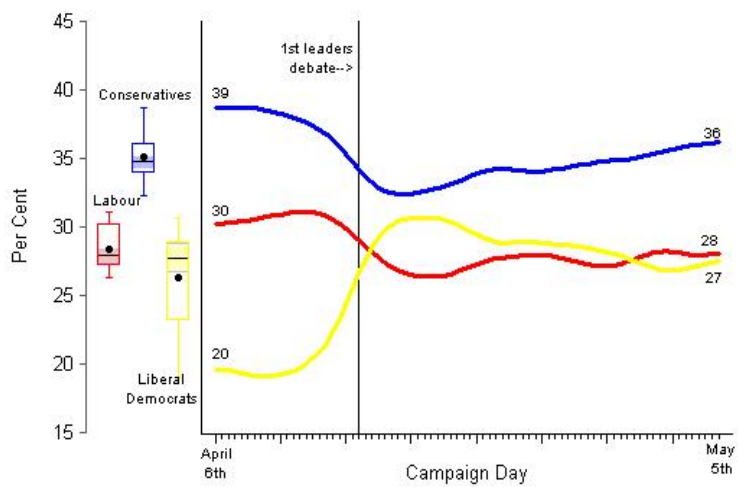
Who Did The Worst Job in Party Leader Debates



Facts 3a – 3c

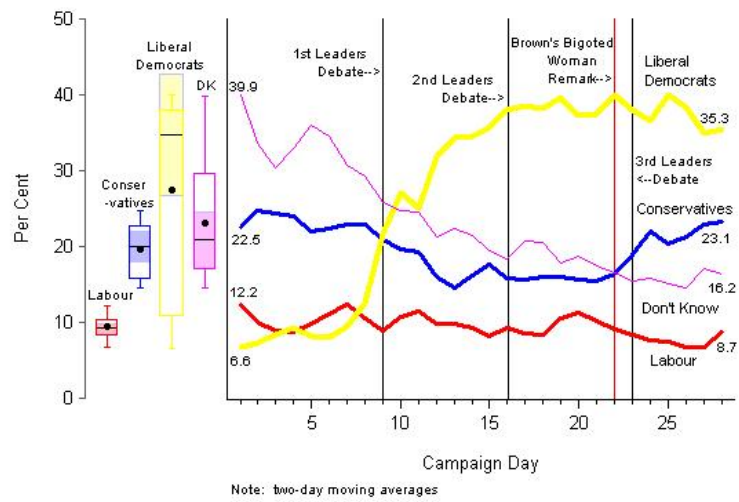
- **Labour trailed throughout the entire campaign and was *never* in position to form a majority government.**
- **As is well-known, the Liberal Democrats made a big move immediately after the first debate – because of the well-received performance by leader, Nick Clegg**
- **The Conservatives led throughout the campaign but, similar to 2005, finished behind where they had been at the outset.**

Vote Intentions During the 2010 British General Election Campaign, April 6th - May 5th, 77 Polls

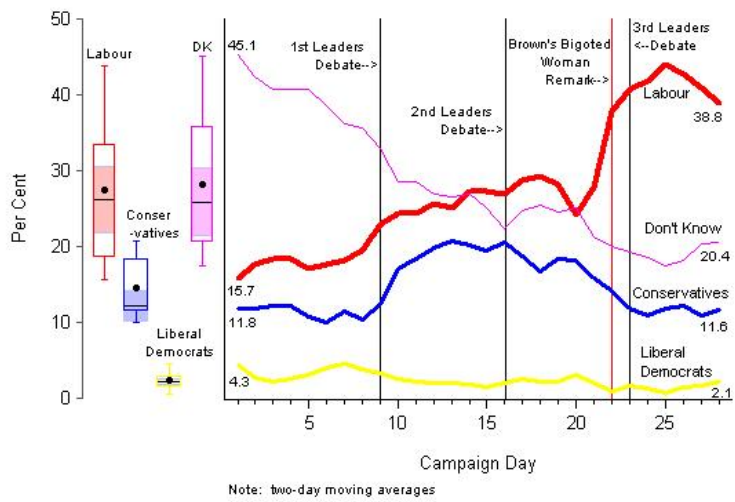


Note: data smoothed with the Hodrick-Prescott filter.

**Party Conducting Best Election Campaign.
April 7th - May 5th Rolling Campaign Survey**



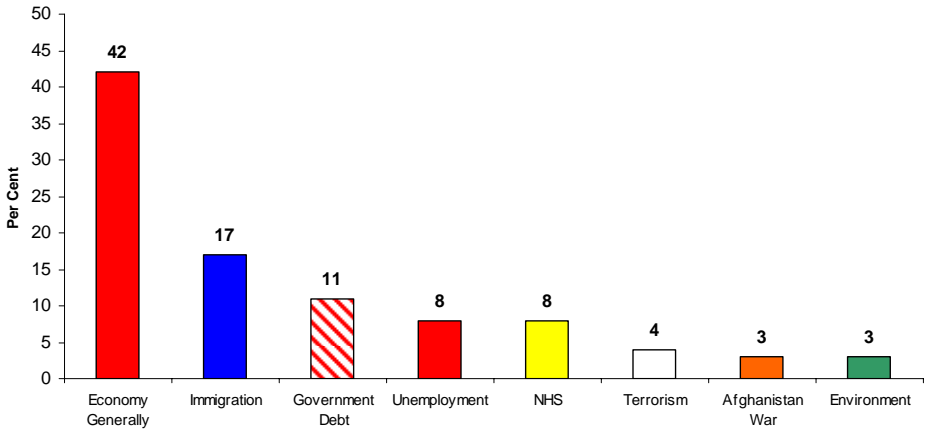
**Party Conducting Worst Election Campaign,
April 7th - May 5th Rolling Campaign Survey**



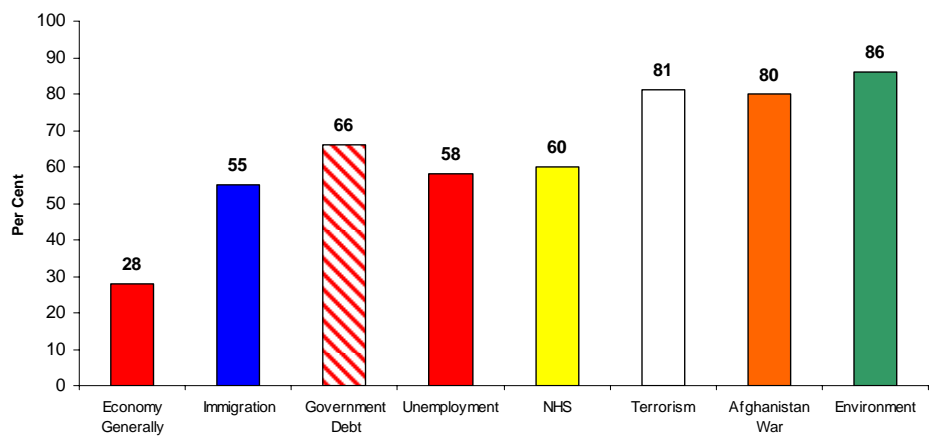
Facts 4a – 4e

- **It's the economy I** – Concern with the economy dominated the issue agenda. This should have been a major opening for the major opposition party – the Conservatives.
- **It's the economy II** - the Conservatives did not capitalize on the economy as well as they might have. Emphasizing austerity measures as the cure for Britain's economic woes failed to generate voter enthusiasm.
- **It's the economy III** – the Conservatives' emphasis on government debt did not resonate especially well. Only one in ten of the BES CIPS respondents ranked government debt as most important in a list of 8 issues and two-thirds did not rank government debt as one of their top 3 most important issues.
- Despite their **campaign surge**, the Liberal Democrats made virtually no headway as the party best on most important issue. Only 9% of the CIPS post-election respondents chose them as best.
- **Not Making a Case III** - no party had the **overall** pulling power on major issues that Labour enjoyed in 1997, 2001 and 2005. In the CIPS post-election survey only 25% chose Labour as best on most important issue and only 30% chose the Conservatives. The parties had big edges among various 'issue publics' but many of these groups were not particularly large (e.g., nearly 50% of the 3% ranking the environment most important of 8 issues voted Lib Dem).

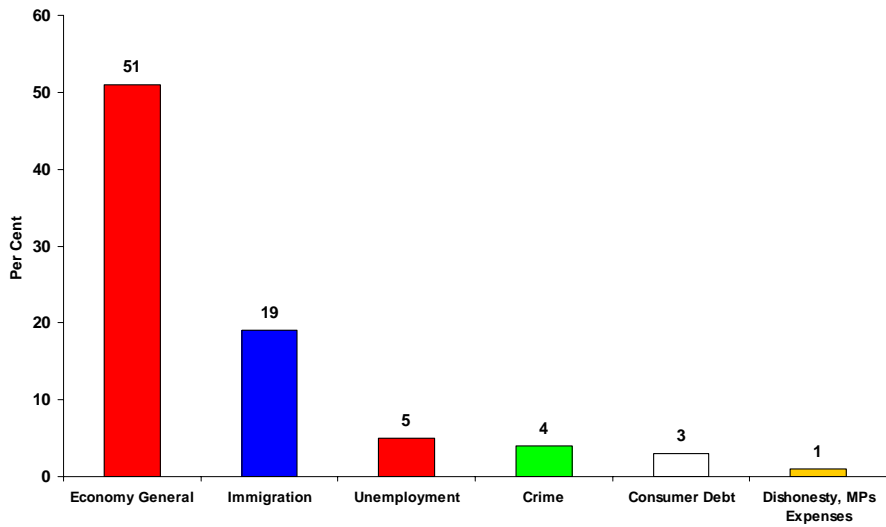
**Percentages of BES CIPS Respondents Ranking Various Issues
Most Important**



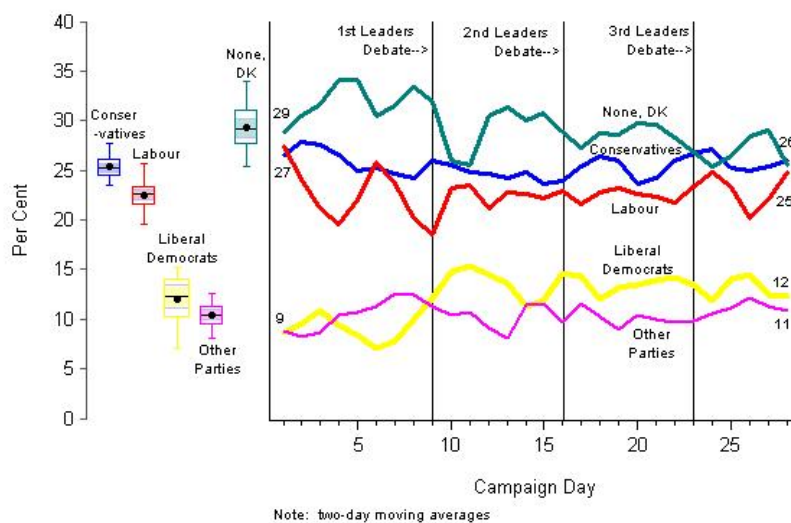
Percentages of BES CIPS Respondents **Not** Ranking Various Issues
Among Top Three Most Important



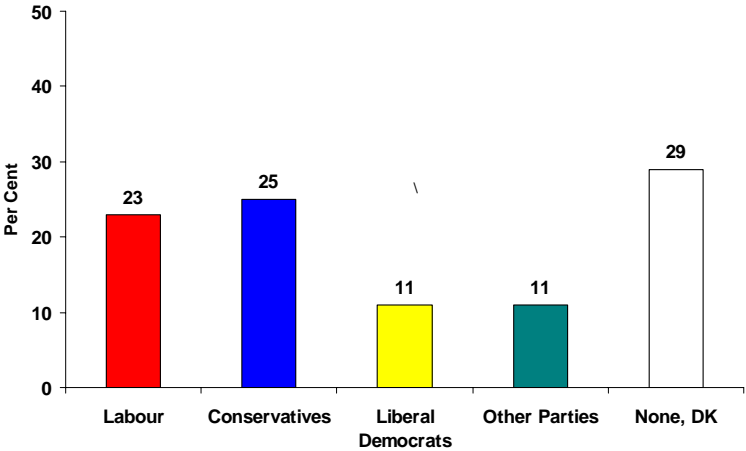
Most Important Issue Facing the Country, CIPS Campaign Period Survey



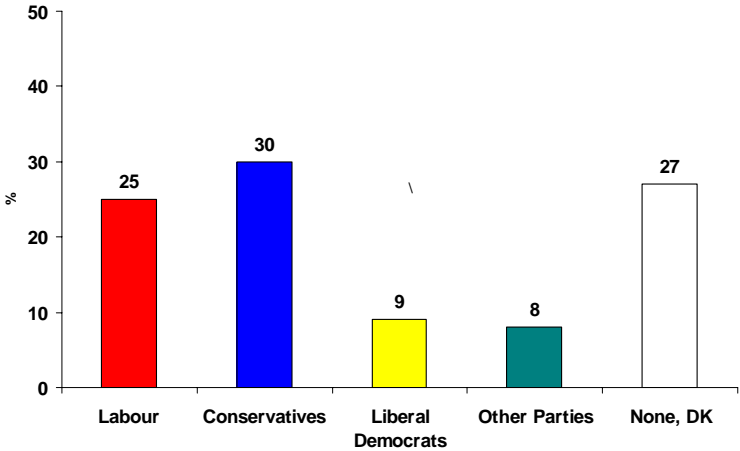
**Party Best on Most Important issue.
April 7th - May 5th Rolling Campaign Survey**



Party Best on Most Important Issue,
BES CIPS Campaign Period Survey



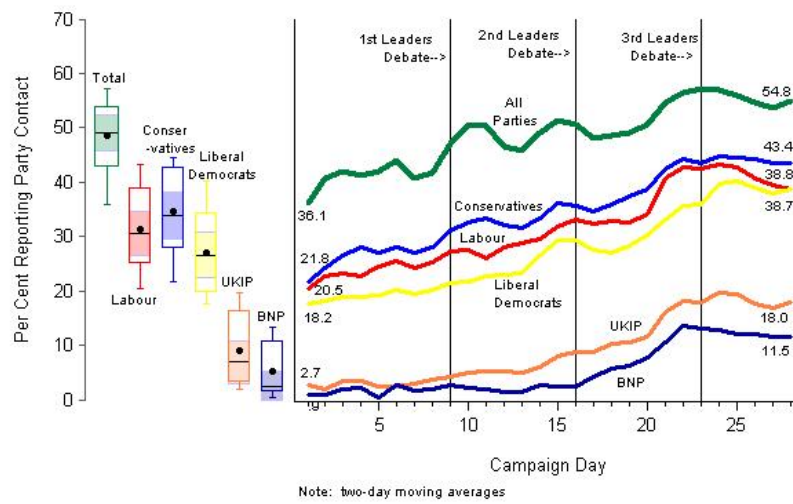
**Party Best on Most Important Issue,
BES CIPS Post-Election Survey**



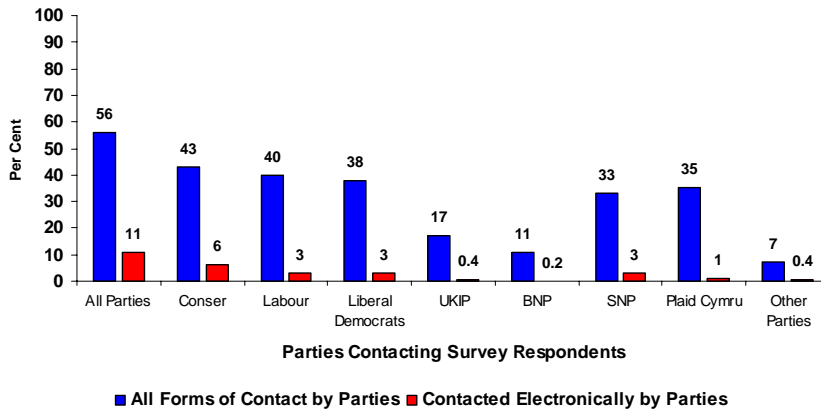
Facts 5a – 5c

- Parties' campaigns predictably increased in intensity as the election approached, but...
- **An iCampaign?** - Despite widespread speculation about a new era of *electronic campaigning*, relatively few BES respondents reported by contacted by any of the parties by email, twitter, facebook, or text message. The most frequent contact – by far – was the humble mail leaflet.

Percentages of Respondents Contacted by Political Parties During the Election Campaign, April 7th - May 5th Rolling Campaign Survey



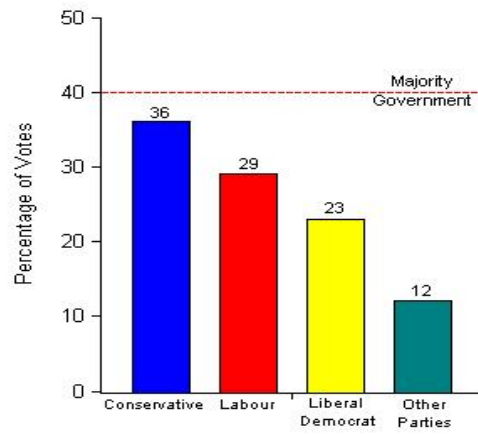
An Electronic Campaign Revolution? Percentages of BES CIPS Post-Election Respondents Contacted by Various Parties, SNP -Scotland Only, Plaid Cymru - Wales Only



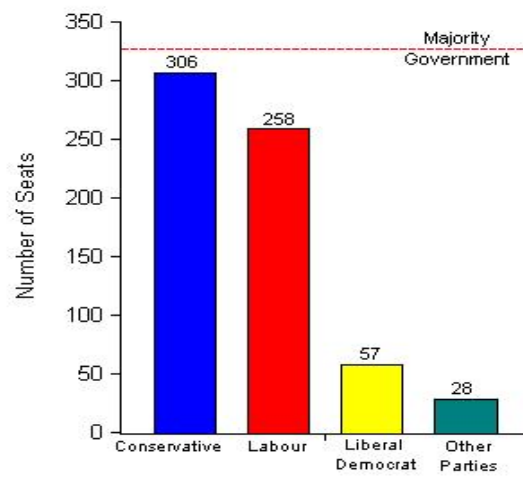
Summary and Conclusion

- No party had the three key 'fundamentals' of the valence politics model – partisanship, party best on most important issue, leader image – secured in 2010.
- Labour was in bad shape. Things had 'turned brown' for New Labour after 13 years in office, and the party's campaign was ineffective at best.
- The Conservative's negative campaign message of 'cuts, cuts, cuts!' was the antithesis of the optimistic 'hope, growth and opportunity!' message a right-of-centre party needs to attract votes in a world of valence politics.
- With weak fundamentals, ineffective campaigns and widespread voter disaffection with politics as usual, the two major parties were susceptible to a move by the Liberal Democrats. The leader debates provided the Liberal Democrats with the exactly the opportunity they needed.
- Despite their surge after the first debate, the Liberal Democrats had to rely heavily on Nick Clegg's popularity. Their partisan base remained small, and they had little pulling power on the economy, the issue that dominated the campaign.
- **Operating in a single-member plurality electoral system with a pro-Labour bias, the factors considered above predictably delivered a hung parliament.***
- * it could have been (just) otherwise if all UKIP and BNP voters had cast Conservative ballots. *Ceteris paribus*, such a 'unite the right' voting coalition would have delivered 329 seats to the Conservatives – enough to form a majority (not a working majority) government. Having all UKIP voters support the Conservatives would not have given them a majority.

**Vote Shares in the 2010
British General Election**



**Seats Won in the 2010
British General Election**



Contact the BES Team

- **Harold Clarke** clarke475@msn.com
- **David Sanders** sanders@essex.ac.uk
- **Marianne Stewart** mstewart@utdallas.edu
- **Paul Whiteley** whiteley@essex.ac.uk