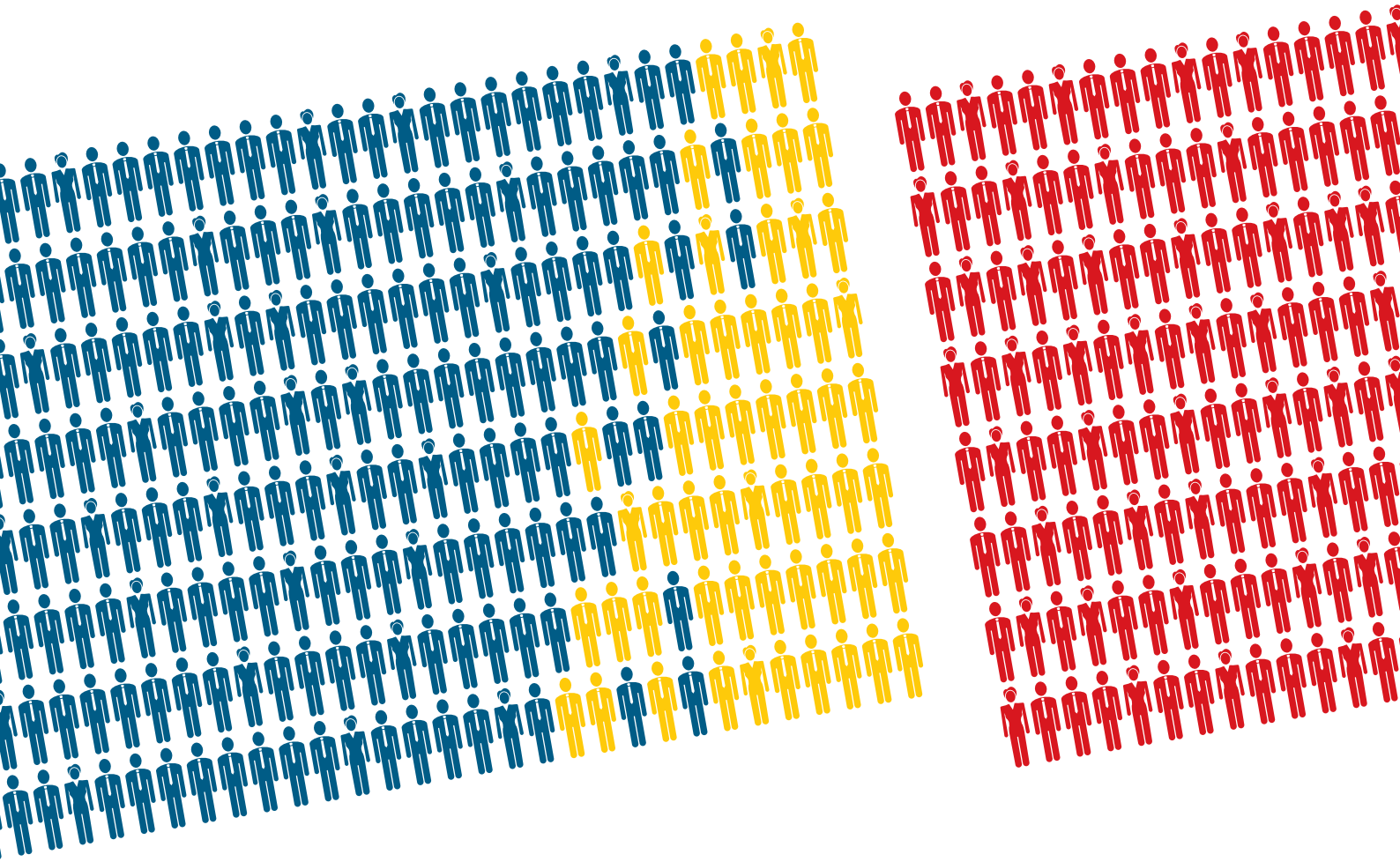
INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT

UEA
University of East Anglia

# The Coalition
## Voters, Parties and Institutions



# Welcome to this interactive pdf version of The Coalition: Voters, Parties and Institutions

**Please note that in order to view this pdf as intended and to take full advantage of the interactive functions, we strongly recommend you open this document in Adobe Acrobat.**

Adobe Acrobat Reader is free to download and you can do so from the Adobe website (click to open webpage).

## Navigation

- Each page includes a navigation bar with buttons to view the previous and next pages, along with a button to return to the contents page at any time
- You can click on any of the titles on the contents page to take you directly to each article

## Figures

- To examine any of the figures in more detail, you can click on the ⊕ button beside each figure to open a magnified view. You can also click on the diagram itself. To return to the full page view, click on the ⊖ button

## Weblinks and email addresses

- All web links and email addresses are live links - you can click on them to open a website or new email

# The Coalition: Voters, Parties and Institutions

Edited by: Hussein Kassim University of East Anglia
Charles Clarke University of East Anglia
Catherine Haddon Institute for Government

< > contents

Published 2012

Commissioned by
School of Political, Social and International Studies
University of East Anglia
Norwich

Design by Woolf Designs (www.woolfdesigns.co.uk)

< > contents

# The Coalition: Voters, Parties and Institutions

## Introduction

The formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democratic administration in May 2010 was a major political event. It not only brought an end to thirteen years of Labour government, but marked a significant departure from standard practice in a political system that has since 1945 been synonymous with single-party government.

The articles that follow are based on the presentations made by the authors at a conference on 29-30 June 2011 organized by the School of Political, Social and International Studies at the University of East Anglia in partnership with the Institute for Government, which very kindly hosted the event at its comfortable premises at 2 Carlton Gardens, and the Mile End Group at Queen Mary, University of London.

The two days offered a rare opportunity for politicians, journalists, and academics to discuss and debate some of the questions posed by the coalition. Among the themes addressed were: the lessons, if any, that can be drawn from the experiences in the UK of pre-1945 coalitions, the Lib-Lab pact of 1977-78, and devolved or sub-national government; how the coalition in the UK compares in its formation and dynamics with coalition government elsewhere in Europe, and whether the UK experience is captured by academic theories of coalition formation; the impact of the coalition on the machinery of government, and on parliamentary procedures, processes and norms; how the coalition is viewed by the grassroots in all three of the main parties; and attitudes towards the coalition in the media and the public.

In his opening paper, Bob Worcester discusses public opinion and support for the parties in the run up to the election on 6 May 2010. Andrew Adonis then offers his own reflections on the scenarios that confronted the parties the following day. Thomas Otte examines historical precedents for the coalition, and Bernard Donoughue reflects on his experience as a political adviser during the Lib-Lab pact. Experience of coalition government within the UK, but outside Westminster, is discussed by Jack McConnell, who reflects on leading two coalitions as First Minister in Scotland, and Chris Game, who offers an overview of coalitions of varying complexion in English local government in recent years. Chris Hanretty considers what some of the different theories of coalition predict for the future of the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition. Robert Hazell and Ben Yong discuss how the coalition works in Whitehall, while Philip Cowley and Mark Stuart look at the two parties at Westminster. How the coalition is seen by ordinary party members is considered by Iain Dale (Conservatives) and David Hall-Matthews (Lib Dems), while Nick Pearce discusses how the prospects of coalition were viewed within Labour. Finally, Adam Boulton, David Cowling, and Nick Anstead examine media coverage of voter intentions, the election campaign, and the possibility, and later the actuality of, coalition government. Arguing that the 2010 election was a watershed, Boulton highlights the advantages of the broadcast over the written media, Cowling tracks public opinion from the run-up to the elections to the coalition's first anniversary, while Anstead considers media attitudes towards the coalition as a departure from the norm of single-party government.

We are very grateful to the authors for their contributions. We should also like to thank Alex Allan (Cabinet Office), Vernon Bogdanor (Oxford University), Jon Davis (Mile End Institute, Queen Mary, University of London), Stephen Greasley (University of East Anglia), Peter Hennessy (Queen Mary, University of London), Charlie Jeffery (Edinburgh University), Jeffrey A. Karp (Exeter University), Charles Lees (Bath University), Iain McLean (Oxford University), Akash Paun (Institute for Government), Emily Robinson (Nottingham University), Nick Robinson (BBC), Peter Riddell (Institute for Government), and John Street (University of East Anglia), who participated in the conference as presenters, commentators or chairs. (A number have kindly made their presentations available at www.uea.ac.uk/psi/events/the-coalition-at-one). A special debt of gratitude is owed to the Director of the Institute for Government for his generous hospitality, and to Kerry Burkett, the IfG's tireless events manager. We also gratefully acknowledge the contributions made by Emily Robinson, Chris Hanretty and Stephen Greasley to planning the programme. From UEA, Vanessa Buth helped administer the event with her usual skill, efficiency and friendliness, Henry Allen provided vital assistance before, during and after, and Nick Wright helped prepare the papers for publication. We offer our sincere thanks to all three.

**Hussein Kassim, University of East Anglia**
**Charles Clarke, University of East Anglia**
**Catherine Haddon, Institute for Government**

## Contributors

**Lord Adonis** Labour Party politician, Director of the Institute for Government, 2010-11, and Secretary of State for Transport 2009-2010

**Dr Nick Anstead** Lecturer in Media and Communications, Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics

**Mr Adam Boulton** Political Editor, Sky News and author of 'Hung Together: The 2010 Election and the Coalition Government'

**Professor Philip Cowley** Professor of Parliamentary Government, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham

**Mr David Cowling** Editor, BBC Political Research

**Mr Iain Dale** Presenter on LBC Radio, publisher of Total Politics Magazine and blogger, *Iain Dale's Diary*

**Lord Donoughue** Senior Policy Advisor to Prime Ministers Harold Wilson and James Callaghan and author of 'Downing Street Diary'

**Mr Chris Game** Visiting Lecturer, Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham

**Dr David Hall-Matthews**, Senior Lecturer, School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds and Chair of the Social Liberal Forum

**Dr Chris Hanretty** Lecturer in Politics, School of Political, Social and International Studies, UEA

**Professor Robert Hazell** Professor of British Politics and Government, Director of the Constitution Unit, UCL

**Lord McConnell** Labour politician and First Minister of Scotland, 2001-2007

**Dr Thomas G. Otte** Senior Lecturer, School of History, UEA

**Mr Nick Pearce** Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research, Head of the Downing Street Policy Unit, 2007-10

**Dr Mark Stuart** Research Fellow, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham

**Sir Robert Worcester** Founder of MORI, Chancellor of the University of Kent , and co-author of 'Explaining Cameron's Coalition'

**Dr Ben Yong** Research Associate, Constitution Unit, UCL

## Contents

# Explaining Cameron's Coalition: How it came about – an analysis of the 2010 British Election

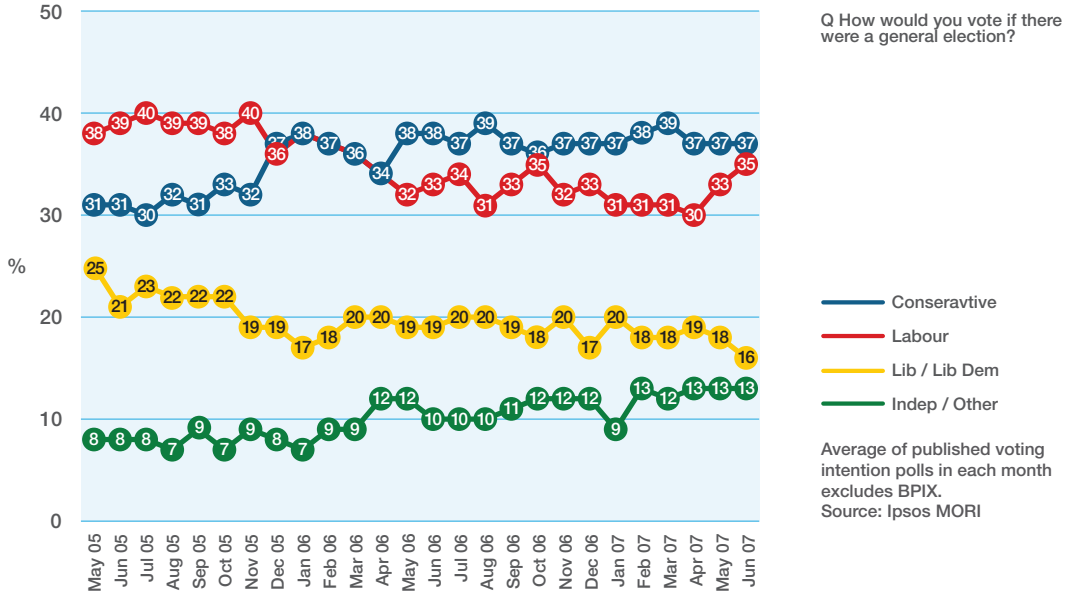
**Bob Worcester** (rmworcester@yahoo.com)

There is the long campaign, and there is the election period itself. Many elections are won, and even more lost, in the long campaign. This was true of the British General Election of May 2010. It was lost by Labour in 2007, just two years after its remarkable third victory under the leadership of Tony Blair, who led his party to a 179 seat landslide in 1997 with New Labour. In 2001, he repeated his landslide, with his majority falling to 167, Labour's second landslide. After eight years in office the Blair Government won the 2005 election with a solid 66 majority. A few, however, came down to the wire. This was true in 1964 and 1970, in February 1974 and again in 1992. And in 2010 under Gordon Brown.

In the three Blair elections, despite continuing demographic changes, Labour enjoyed a lead in the House of Commons which pretty well guaranteed the party could command a healthy majority on both its programmes and budgets. Despite having an awkward squad of between 20 and 30 who could be counted on to cause trouble, the Labour Government was in no danger of defeat, certainly not in key votes generally, never mind on a vote of confidence which could bring down the Government. However, by December 2005 Labour had lost its lead in the polls.

There was no leadership election when Tony Blair announced in May 2007 that he would step down at the end of the following month. Gordon Brown, despite rumours of potential contenders and widespread grumbles from his doubters, was elected unopposed to succeed him.

## Figure 1: It was as much Tony Blair as Gordon Brown that lost it for Labour



This may have suited Brown and his supporters at the time, but it proved to be a strategic mistake, as a significant slice of the electorate, including some Labour Party loyalists, were voting him in through gritted teeth.

Yet there were signals from our polls that the public believed Brown would be an acceptable Prime Minister. Certainly he was, then, admired for his performance as Chancellor. When asked in an Ipsos MORI poll in September 2006 "In general would you describe each of the following politicians as trustworthy or not?" just 29% (vs. 60% 'not') said they believed Tony Blair was trustworthy, while 42% said they thought Gordon Brown trustworthy (39% 'not') . Effectively, 17 more people in 100 trusted Brown than Blair in 2006.

Very likely this was principally the Iraq War, about which Blair was seen as having been duplicitous over the question of weapons of mass destruction. In the same month as his announcement, May 2007, just 14% of the public said they supported the war while 83% were opposed, down from 32% support in April 2005 in the midst of the General Election, when 61% opposed it, a swing against supporting the war of 20%, 20 people in 100 having changed their view over the two year period. Brown by contrast, although a part of the inner circle which made the decision to go to war, never really 'carried the can'.

When a new leader takes office, one metric we closely examine is leader satisfaction, whether in office or in opposition. Obviously a new leader is thought by many of those asked in early measures 'too soon to tell' when the standard monthly questions are asked, now for more than thirty years: satisfaction with the way the government is running the country, and satisfaction with the way each of the three main party leaders are doing their jobs.

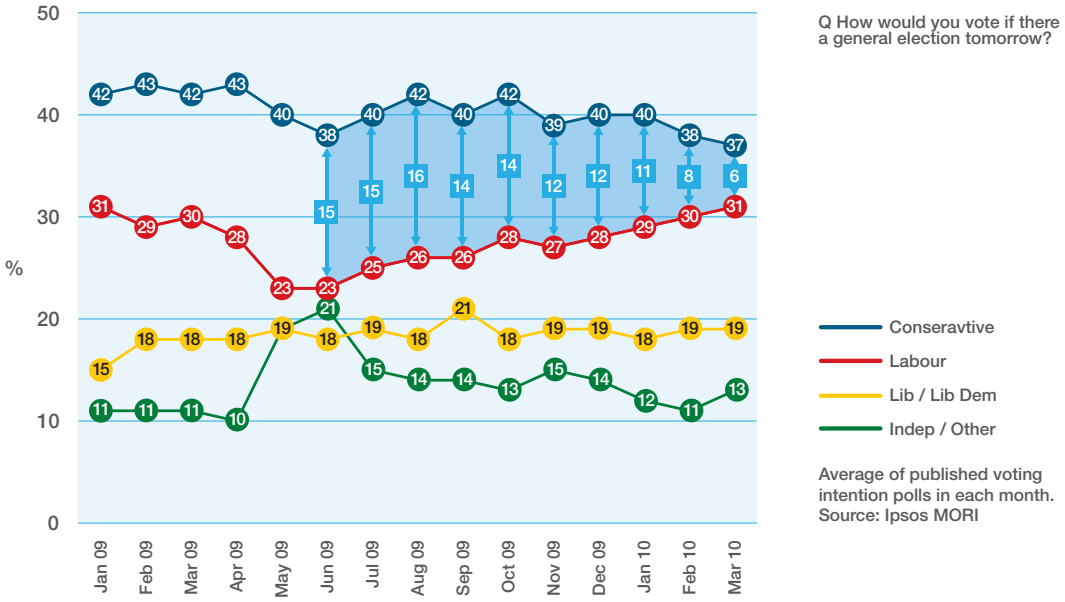
The first few months' figures have proven to be a remarkable forecast of how the new leader will fare in the longer run. The 'don't knows' will be sizable in the first month, so it is the second, third, and by about the fourth month that we can usually tell, even forecast, how they will end up. If the new leader starts grabbing support as the 'too soon to tell' respondents make up their minds - as Blair's satisfaction figures did in 1995/6 - they generally go on to win; if they 'flat line', as did William Hague, or worse, decline, as did Iain Duncan Smith and Ming Campbell, and indeed, Gordon Brown, they're likely set to fail.

Moving on, it was clear that the country was beginning to feel 'it's time for a change'. The economy was overwhelmingly thought to be the most important issue facing the country, and as the end of the five-year term came closer, the lead, or gap, closed between the Conservatives and Labour, while the Liberal Democrats flat-lined at 18%. While it would appear from the figures on the graph that the Tories remained well in the lead, because of the alignment of constituencies they required a lead of c. 11%/12% to have a comfortable majority; at least 8% to be the narrowest of winners of the 326 seats they needed for an overall majority; the Tories needed around 4% to even be the largest party in a hung parliament.

The election result, a seven-point lead, gave the Conservatives 306 seats to Labour's 258, thus giving the Tories a comfortable plurality which put them in the position to choose to lead a coalition into government or to govern on its own. This meant they were always conscious that they were in jeopardy if all other parties joined together to vote them out of office on a vote of confidence, thus precipitating a general election.

For nearly 40 years, the 'Political Triangle' 'trade off' models' analyses have guided political parties, and my own psephology, of how people in the aggregate determine which party they will

## Figure 2: The Tories were far enough ahead to win in 2009 but they could not find a way to seal the deal and slipped back **before** the debates

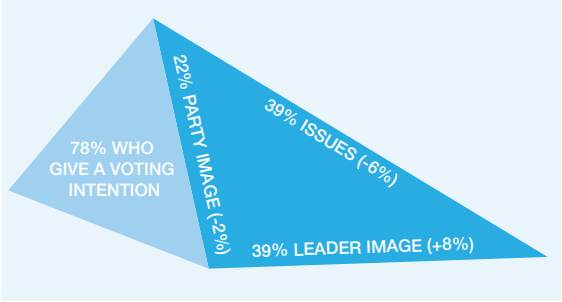



vote for in a general election. This measures the degree to which party policy, party image and the leaders' images influence party support and in elections, voting behaviour. Our books in the 'Explaining' series (Explaining Labour's Landslide, 1999; Explaining Labour's Second Landslide, 2001; Explaining Labour's Landslip, 2005),[1] and the most recent, Explaining Cameron's Coalition, 2011,[2] as well as my original descriptive history of the Political Triangle© (Worcester, British Public Opinion: A Guide to the History and Methodology of Political Opinion Polling, 1991),[3] go into this in detail, its derivation, development over time, and how it has helped us understand the dynamics of electoral behaviour in British elections.

In the graphs overleaf, the figures for 2010, two months before the election was called, show how potential voters then balanced their voting decisions, while the line graph tracks this over time, going back to the 1987 election, showing how the seven-point swing reducing the 'power' of party policy as the prime determinant, raising the leader image to parity, for the first time, in 2008. This significant shift occurred on Brown's watch, and was the public's reaction to having new leadership of all three parties, an economic crisis where leadership was vital, the tarnishing of the Blair image and hope for a fresh start, the public revulsion at the MPs' expenses scandal, Britain's involvement in not just one but two wars in the Middle East, and not least, the experiences of first 9/11 and then 7/7, when first Britain's principal ally, the United States, and then Britain itself, was under attack by an enemy which showed they could strike at any time, on targets of their choosing. It was a time for leadership, not just party loyalty.

There are four key reasons that issues don't 'bite' in terms of their importance in helping people to determine their vote. These are often overlooked by politicians (and many pollsters) who have not thought through the minds of the voters thinking about the election coming up while having a meal, watching the television or reading their newspaper, on the internet or otherwise faced with a general election.

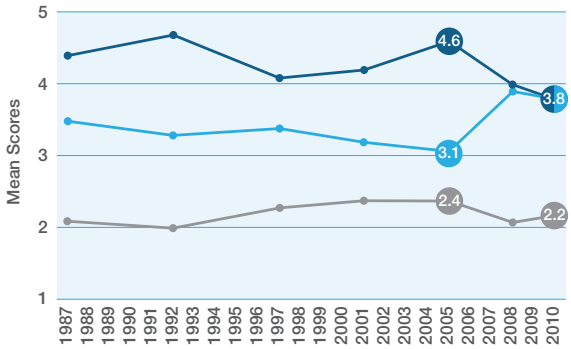
## Figure 3: The Political Triangle 2010 General Election




Q " I want you to think about what it is that most attracted you to the ... party. Some people are attracted mainly by the policies of the party, some by the leaders of the party and some because they identify with the party as a whole. If you had a total of ten points to allocate according to how important each of these was to you, how many points would you allocate to the leaders of the party you intend voting for, how many to it's policies, and how many to the part as a whole?"

Base: 1,210 British adults 18+, 19-22 February 2010
Source: Ipsos MORI / Observer

## Figure 4: Leaders were as important as policies in how people voted




Base: All giving a voting intention c.700 British adults each month (1,210 2.10)

Source: Ipsos MORI

Q " I want you to think about what it is that most attracted you to the ... party. Some people are attracted mainly by the policies of the party, some by the leaders of the party and some because they identify with the party as a whole. If you had a total of ten points to allocate according to how important each of these was to you, how many points would you allocate to the leaders of the party you intend voting for, how many to it's policies, and how many to the part as a whole?"

Many, historically about four in ten, are not much interested in politics anyway, and certainly don't read party manifestos, watch party election broadcasts or access party websites.

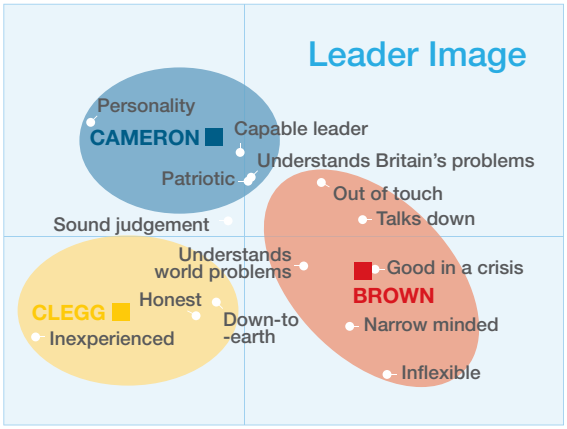
The first reason of the four is that the issue must be salient to them or they won't give much thought to the party's policy anyway. If you are retired, live in a nice middle-class suburb, have a car and don't mind the cost of petrol and haven't been on a bus or tube in years, a party's policy on public transport will be unlikely to cause you to shift your vote from the party you voted for last time, if you can remember which party it was, or even if you voted or not. Second, you have to differentiate between the policies of party A and party B to see if it is important to you, which you think would be the best policy among all the other factors you might take into account in deciding for whom to vote. Third, you have to consider if the party with the best policy, on an issue of importance to you, has the power, and can, if in government, deliver on their promises.

Fourth, if it has the will to do so, in the light of all the other issues they as government ministers and advisors have to grapple with.

So we come to the factors we call 'image'. A bad word, we know. Image conveys many things: demographics of the local candidate, age, gender, race, etc., personal appearance – baldness doesn't help, nor does a weak voice or demeanour. Studies have shown that in most American elections, the taller candidate for President wins. There is no question that these are taken into account when local constituencies choose their candidates, and when parties choose their leaders.

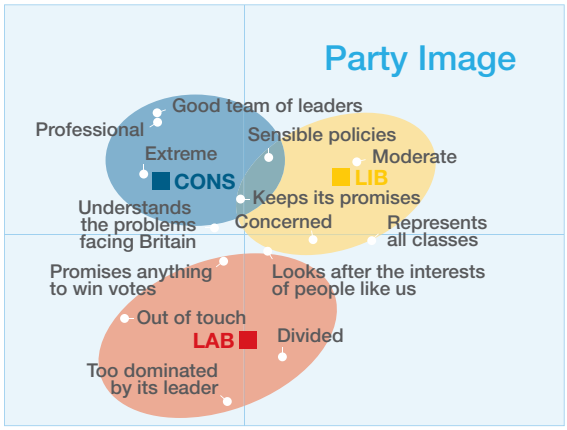
But that's not what we are taking into account when we stress the importance of leader 'image' and party 'image'. Using focus groups and our own political nous, we derived the characteristics people use, both positive and negative, to determine what is important to them, both positive and negative. And as with most things, these have differing degrees of importance from individual to individual, but it is voters in the aggregate we are interested in.

## Figure 5: Even after the election, Clegg had little 'image'




Base: 975 British adults 18+, 13-18 May 2010
Source: Ipsos MORI

## Figure 6: LibDem Party image looked great




Base: 975 British adults 18+, 13-18 May 2010
Source: Ipsos MORI

## Leader image

Image attributes, derived mainly from focus groups and quantitative testing, are used to enable respondents to choose from a list of both positives and negatives which they perceive characterises each party leader (or brand, company, charity, country, etc.). The answers are then fed into a multi-variate analysis programme called 'correspondence analysis' which is used to form a 'perceptual map' which at a glance describes each leader in contrast with the other two. For instance, Gordon Brown is thought of 'inflexible', and Nick Clegg 'inexperienced' not only as a characteristic of him, but as far away from Brown and Cameron, as it can be.

Brown was principally thought by the public the week after the 2010 election to be 'inflexible', 'narrow minded', someone who 'talks down to people' and is 'out of touch', but also thought to be 'good in a crisis' and 'understands world problems'. He also shared with Cameron and somewhat with Clegg the positive attribute of having 'sound judgment'. Cameron's strengths post election were that he 'has a lot of personality' and was a 'capable leader', also, sharing with Brown having an 'understanding of Britain's problems', something that by contrast Nick Clegg lacked in the public's mind. Clegg's image was that of the new boy on the block and of being 'inexperienced', but was also thought 'honest' and 'down to earth'.

## Party image

The contrasting images of the three parties can be read in the same way. There is no meaning to the 'walls' of the boxes, and they can be turned, flopped or switched. In the case of the Tories, the attributes are all positive, other than being seen as 'extreme', while in the case of Labour, all negative except that Labour and the Liberal Democrats share 'looks after people like us' which is a good attribute to have.

But these are not the only tools which can be used to get insight into how the leaders and parties are regarded, and another battery of questions which has proven valuable in the past for understanding the mood of the nation towards parties and leaders is a seldom used battery of questions asking respondents to choose between four permutations of 'likeability'. As the year of the election began, January 2010, we used this battery of options to see what the balance of 'likeability' was, and how it had changed from 2007, in advance of the handover from Blair to Brown.

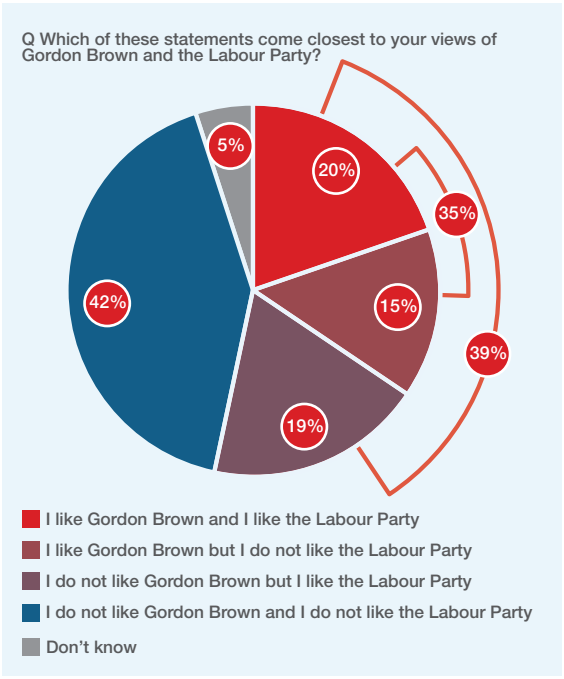
In January 2007 we compared Blair, then Prime Minister, to Brown, his obvious successor in No. 10. At that time they were statistically tied, equally liked and equally disliked, and as would be expected, the Labour Party wasn't different when asked about in this context. As 'leader' Blair scored 34% liked, 55% disliked, with Brown's comparable figures at 36% liked, 51% disliked. Cameron, as a new boy on the block, had a higher 'don't know' response, with one person in five saying effectively 'too soon to tell'/'don't know', whereas Brown's DK score was 15% and Blair's 11%. When the leader 'likeability' net scores were computed, they were instructive: Blair stood at -21, Brown at -13, and Cameron, the 'winner', at -8.

The net party 'likeability' scores however reversed the comparison, with Labour at -9 but the Tories at a dismal -22 – t. The 'Nasty' party, to use the word chosen a few years before by Theresa May to indicate the problem her party had. Fast forward then three years to the eve of the end of the Parliament and the inevitable impending general election: in January 2010, three months before the announcement of the election date, the positions are also reversed in another way, with Labour now on the -18 and the Tories improved somewhat to -13.

Finally, what had happened to Brown/Cameron by 2010? For Brown, a positive 35 and, negative 61, making a net -26 for Brown; for Cameron a positive 45 and a negative 46, making for Cameron a net -1. Cameron went, going into his first election with comparatively strong positions both for himself as leader and for his party – 25 points better than Brown as leader, and 5 points better for the Tories.

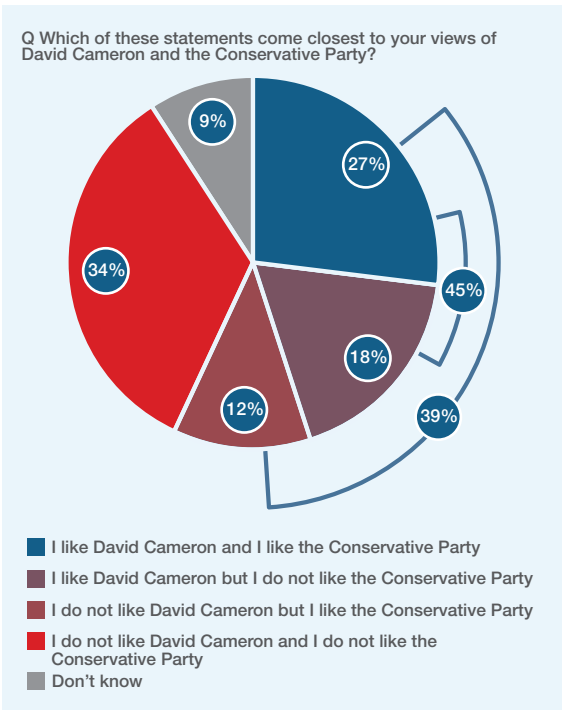
By January 2010, therefore, he held holding a winning hand.

## Figure 7: Gordon Brown and the Labour Party




Base: 1,001 British adults 18+, 26-28 January 2010
Source: Ipsos MORI

## Figure 8: David Cameron and the Conservative Party




Base: 1,001 British adults 18+, 26-28 January 2010
Source: Ipsos MORI

There were two trends working against Labour, 'the party of the working class', and which is largely funded by the trade unions. These were the continuing rise of the middle class, and the propensity for older people to favour the Tories while young people favoured Labour. In the run-up to the 2010 election I spoke often about 'grey power' being worth four times as much as the youth vote, as there are twice as many of them, and they are twice as likely to vote. Also, class as an electoral factor has shifted dramatically over the past three decades. When Labour last lost, in 1992, three-quarters of its vote came from working-class voters. This time round, more middle class people voted Labour than working class people did.

## In summary

1. It was as much Tony Blair as Gordon Brown who lost it for Labour.
2. Brown's 2010 approval ratings were similar to Blair's in 2005, when Blair won.
3. Brown retained some positive attributes against Cameron – but crucially not "likeability".
4. The Tories were far enough ahead to win in 2009, but they could not find a way to seal the deal and slipped back before the debates.
5. The economy was the dominant issue of this election – but no party was trusted on it, so no party had a vote winner.
6. The leaders more than the policies mattered in this election – and the public had decided this before the debates.
7. The public found this to be one of the most interesting elections.
8. The debates made for an exciting few weeks, but made no real difference in the end.
9. Many more people took their time to finally decide how to vote.
10. More than a quarter (28%) didn't decide how to vote until the final week; 14% in the last 24 hours.
11. The polls were right (again); not only did nearly all the polls throughout the election suggest the inevitability of a hung parliament, but the Exit Poll once again proved to be spot on.
12. Traditional demographic differences (gender, age and class) are becoming less useful in explaining who people will vote for...
13. …But where you live makes a huge difference.
14. Voting is still aligned with newspaper readership – Sun readers swung the most heavily towards the Tories in 2010.
15. Turnout was low again: this time it helped the Conservatives.
16. Middle class voters will be crucial in future elections – including for Labour.
17. The 'gender gap' is now solidly reversed, with more women voting for Labour than men.
18. The coalition was, given the result, inevitable, which Cameron exploited to the full in his surprising 'offer they couldn't refuse'.
19. The LibDems are the second party in a Conservative-led coalition; the future is problematic for them at the next election.
20. And Cameron has Clegg in a death hug.

1. Worcester, R. and Mortimore, R. (1999). Explaining Labour's Landslide. London: Politico's; Worcester, R. and Mortimore, R. (2001). Explaining Labour's Second Landslide. London: Politico's; Worcester, R., Mortimore, R., and Baines, P., Explaining Labour's Landslip, 2005, London, Politico's.
2. Worcester, R., Mortimore, R., Baines, P., and Gill, M. (2011). Explaining Cameron's Coalition. London: Biteback.
3. Worcester, R. (1991). British Public Opinion: A Guide to the History and Methodology of Political Opinion Polling. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

# Reflections on the formation of the Coalition Government

**Andrew Adonis**

Most of the story of what happened during May 2010 has come out now, one way or another. I want to offer you, therefore, eight reflections on the process by which this coalition was formed, looking at it particularly from the Labour side. In brief, these are as follows:

1. A hung parliament was the most obvious result
2. No detailed preparations had been made by any of the parties for this
3. There is no constitutional doctrine saying that the party holding the balance of power should negotiate with the largest party first
4. David Cameron decided as soon as the results were in that he wanted a Coalition with the Lib Dems rather than an early second election
5. Labour was ambivalent about whether they wanted to stay in power
6. There was only one option under which a non-Tory government was possible but this would have required the Lib Dems to declare from the start that they would not join a Conservative-led Coalition
7. The numbers were there for a non-Tory government
8. Having a longer time period to negotiate would have made no difference

## 1. A hung parliament was the most obvious result

This point leads straight on from Bob Worcester's excellent presentation. Though he is absolutely right that, if you look at the polls, a hung parliament should have been staring everyone in the face, almost everyone engaged at the time was convinced there would not be a hung parliament. Only a few people realised this was likely, but then only in the final few days before the election. In other words, politicians largely ignored the polls.

## 2. No detailed preparations by the parties for a hung parliament

This was particularly true for two main parties. The Lib Dems had prepared for potential coalition negotiations, but – and perhaps surprisingly – there was no training conducted by the Lib Dems to prepare them for governing – for example, by the Institute for Government – and they only had limited conversations with Permanent Secretaries (as this might have appeared hubristic!). In general, everyone was terribly prepared for negotiating the Coalition.

## 3. There is no constitutional doctrine saying that the party holding the balance of power should negotiate with the largest party first

There is no such constitutional doctrine. Indeed, there is no constitutional doctrine that you have to negotiate with anyone. You could simply stand aside completely. The historical precedents support this. There have been 3

hung parliaments since 1918. In February 1974, the Liberals negotiated with the Tories (the second largest party) before allowing Labour to form a minority government. In 1929, Lloyd George put Labour, the largest party, in minority government without any negotiation. In 1924, Asquith also put Labour in minority government without any negotiation, although Labour was well, well short of being the largest party.

In May 2010 it seems clear that Nick Clegg – before the election – had already decided to back the Conservatives in a hung parliament, hence his decision to negotiate with them first and his propounding of a new constitutional doctrine that he should do so purely because of their stronger mandate. The key question, therefore, is why? There are suggestions as to how we answer that. For example, there is the view that Clegg is essentially on the right of politics, he is just not "insane" on Europe. At the same time, it seems that he accepted the Tories' basic economic policy. There was no attempt after the election to negotiate on George Osborne's strategy.

### 4. Cameron knew he wanted a Coalition with the Lib Dems rather than an early second election

This makes sense particularly if we recognise that an early second election might not have been good for the Conservatives, particularly as Labour would have been campaigning under a new, fresh leader.

### 5. Labour was ambivalent about staying in power

The default position which unfortunately so many Labour politicians tend to is that it is much purer to be out of office than to be in, particularly when you have to start doing deals. At the same time, it is also true to say that by May 2010, many of those in government were tired. It is very, very tiring being in government for 12 years. There were a lot of my colleagues who were not just physically exhausted, but intellectually exhausted and exhausted at exercising power. I would not underestimate this as a factor. Thus, when you have on the one side a Conservative party who is desperate to get into power and on the other a Labour party that is ambivalent about staying in power, it really is no surprise that power veered towards the Tories.

Indeed, one of the things that struck me was actually how relaxed many of my colleagues were about giving up office. They were much more relaxed than I was. There were some of us who were absolutely driven until the end, both with things we were doing ourselves but also with a profound sense of the importance of continuing in office. Perhaps it is partly because I am an historian, but I have a very strong sense that once you are out of office, you are out and history takes a different turn. History is taking a different turn now. Let's be clear: May 2011 was a big and profound historical turning point. I think that when you are in government, the importance of this does not strike you.

### 6. A non-Tory government was possible – but would have required the Lib Dems to rule out joining a Conservative-led administration from the start

A non-Tory government was possible but only if the Lib Dems had declared at the outset that they would not join a Conservative-led Coalition. This was something that Nick Clegg was not prepared to do, reflecting the ideological decision that he had already made about joining a Tory-led coalition government. This point leads on to reflection number 7:

### 7. The numbers were there for a non-Tory government

The numbers were as follows. Together, Labour and the Lib Dems were 315, and the Conservatives were 307; so Labour plus the Lib Dems easily out-vote the Conservatives. The question then is what happens with the other parties on the motion of confidence in the Budget and confidence motions thereafter, and indeed how they would generally vote.

The two nationalist parties had made it clear immediately that they would not support the Conservatives. This was not simply a tactical statement. Both Scottish and Welsh nationalist parties would have been dead in their respective electorates if they had been seen to be putting in a Conservative government, particularly the SNP who had the memory of having essentially put the Conservatives in in 1978/9. They made it very clear to us privately they were not just saying that they would support Labour and the Lib Dems – they would support us in fact. They would have voted with us in a confidence motion because they could not afford to be seen to be on the other side.

Indeed, the SNP would have had such a massive interest in keeping Labour in until at least May 2011. If they had been seen to be putting Labour out, or causing an early election which would probably have coincided with the Scottish elections – which is the last thing they would have wanted – then they would have paid a huge price for that electorally. What would have happened after this May, once they had been re-elected, would have been much more problematic.

The remainder of the balance is held by one Green who would not support a Tory-led government, and the Northern Irish parties who were largely, but for very different reasons, anti-Conservative. The SDLP of course were natural allies of the Labour Party, while there was one Alliance MP who was going to go against the Conservatives too. Then there was the Unionist MP Sylvia Hermon, who the Tories had been trying to destroy politically in the previous 2 years and so had no love for them whatsoever. And finally there was Peter Robinson and the DUP.

There was no love lost whatsoever between Peter Robinson and the DUP on the one hand, and the Conservatives on the other. In the two years before the election, the Conservatives had been organising in Northern Ireland against him, and part of Cameron's strategy before the election was to put together a block of Unionists in Northern Ireland who would support the Conservatives in the new parliament. So, on the Queen's Speech Peter Robinson and his party would either have abstained, or would have voted with Labour and against a Tory amendment to a Labour Queen's Speech.

By our calculations, therefore, it is entirely feasible that the majority on a Queen's Speech for a Labour-Lib Dem government would have been between 20 and 30, and could have been over 30 if the DUP had actually voted against the Conservatives. This would have been more than sufficient for a Labour government to start, and there would have been the same vote on a Budget. After that progress would have depended upon how well the government was getting along and working together, etc. I think with the best will in the world that it is very unlikely that a government on the numbers I outlined above would have lasted much more than year.

### 8. Having a longer time period to negotiate would have made no difference

Finally, I believe that having a longer time period to negotiate would have made no difference to the ultimate outcome. This is based on the 3 key decisions that were made which ultimately determined the outcome. The first was the decision of the Lib Dems to go with the Conservatives. The second was the Conservatives' decision to go with the Lib Dems. The third was sense within Labour that their time in government was finished.

# Coalition Government in British politics: Some historical reflections

**Thomas G. Otte**

All too frequently, Benjamin Disraeli's assertion 'that England does not love coalitions' has offered convenient refuge for political commentators.[1] Dizzy's dictum lies, like some adamantine primordial beast, buried in the subsoil of Britain's political culture, occasionally to emerge to lend the appearance of ancient wisdom and authenticity to their pronouncements.

Yet, coalitions are neither unheard of in the broader sweep of British history, nor are they just a shade too improper, as is often implied. Ever since a fully functioning parliamentary system emerged following the Triennial Act of 1694, coalitions have been a frequent feature of British politics. And most of them were in office for long spells at a time. The 'Broad Bottom' governments, the mixed ministries of the 1740s, were as much an aspect of Hanoverian politics as the Whig monopoly on office and patronage; and the same applies to the idea of a 'Ministry of All the Talents'. Even in more recent times, coalitions of varying types predominated until 1945. The notion, then, that coalitions are alien to British politics is difficult to sustain; it merely reveals the myopia of a commentariat that considers 1945 ancient history.

## Problems of coalition government

All coalitions in British politics were similar in that they faced similar problems at their formation. But all of them succeeded or failed in their own separate ways. There is no iron law of coalition politics. Even so, the strong elements of continuity that underpin British politics make it possible to analyse the problems of coalition government across a broader span of time, and to draw general conclusions.

British political leaders and their parties formed coalitions for a variety of different reasons. Some, like Lord Liverpool in 1821, wanted to consolidate and broaden their own diminishing power basis. Others hoped for a share of power and patronage, as the Radical Whig Charles James Fox did when he joined the Tory Lord North in that 'infamous' coalition of 1782. Some politicians saw in a coalition a means of shifting the burden of responsibility for unpopular measures, as Conservative calculations in 1931 demonstrate – a striking parallel with the events of May 2010. Others sought in a coalition shelter from the vociferous critics in their own ranks, as Asquith and Bonar Law did in 1915. And sometimes, cooperation below the level of a formal coalition, as with the 'Lib-Lab' pacts after 1910 or between 1977 and 1978, were deemed preferable to the alternative of a government formed by a third party.

The presence of an acute national crisis, whether war-related, financial or constitutional, has always provided political leaders with a powerful political narrative to justify the formation of a coalition. Gladstone's invocation in 1852 of a 'great and palpable emergency of State' – the fiscal mess left behind by Lord Derby's Tories – is the classic example.[2] The Cameron-Clegg coalition's conjuring up of the spectre of Greek-style financial and political chaos, indeed, followed in the footsteps of the 'Grand Old Man'.

Forming a coalition is a more complex task than forming a single-party government, even if few past leaders had to resort to such clandestine measures to avoid the glare of the media as the leaders of all three parties in May 2010.[3]

This is no mechanical exercise purely on the basis of the diktat of parliamentary arithmetic. Putting together a viable government of two or more parties frequently involves finding space for senior political figures, without whose support the coalition enterprise might well falter. The cases of former Whig Prime Minister Lord John Russell in 1852, the Liberal Unionist Joseph Chamberlain in 1895, David Lloyd George in 1916 or, indeed, Winston Churchill in 1940 illustrate the need to bind such people into a coalition. Vince Cable's position in his party made his inclusion in the government imperative in May 2010, though his position was soon diminished after he so very publicly failed to distinguish between the 'nuclear' and the 'self-destruct' button in his injudicious anti-Murdoch boast at the end of 2010.

The cases of Russell and Chamberlain also show how, ultimately, it may prove impossible to keep such figures within the fold. In both cases the coalition came to an end, abruptly with Russell in 1855, and painfully protracted over two years with Chamberlain. The case of Lloyd George in 1916, by contrast, suggests that saving the coalition may come at the price of elevating such a dominating figure to the premiership. Conversely, the Newcastle-Pitt coalition broke up in 1761 precisely because of the strains between its two leading men.

Forming a coalition also means distributing ministerial positions between parties and people who had previously opposed each other; and this may often be an affront to the ambitions and sensibilities of one's own supporters, as the dismay among the Tory rank-and-file in 1895 or in 1915, and again in 2010 highlights. If a minority is indispensable, it will secure key positions and a disproportionate degree of power and influence. And, again, this may store up trouble for the future.[4]

As with war, entering coalitions is easier than finding the exit in time. Yet, the history of coalitions suggests that joining a multi-party administration is a step that few politicians have taken lightly. There must always be misgivings. Will a share of power bring its own rewards beyond the use of ministerial cars and the other trappings of government office? Or will the hard grind of office blur the party's identity and programmatic profile? As William, Duke of Cumberland observed in 1762: 'Coalition is the favourite word … , but when pressed, it is always dribbled down: no more than a share of the odium and hardly any power to serve the country.'[5]

Will the party be tarnished by its association with unpopular measures, perhaps previously opposed by one's own party? Might the party split as a result? Should the coalition programme, therefore, be based on the lowest common denominator? As one radical Whig complained of the Peelite-Whig combination in the early 1850s: 'A policy so general as to please all parties must be so vague as to secure none. […] [W]e are ready to embrace any change or submit to any operation…, only to give us a lease on these seats' – a nightmare not unfamiliar to many Liberal Democrats today.[6] Then there are the practical problems of managing the new combination of political forces in Parliament. Can the whips work together to enforce discipline across the coalition parties, or should they work separately to the same end? History does not suggest clear answers. But it does suggest that all coalitions had to face them at one stage or another, and that their fate largely depended on their ability to answer them.

## Management and merger

Most coalitions were strictly temporary arrangements, designed to manoeuvre the country or the parties in power through a difficult and challenging situation. Coalitions that lasted longer usually led to the fusion of the parties. The fate of the Grenvillite Whigs in the 1820s or the Peelites in the 1850s, of the anti-Home Rule Liberals around 1900 or the small fry

in the National Government between 1931 and 1945 serves as a useful reminder of this. In 1852, Gladstone, then still a Peelite Tory, had advocated 'a mixed Government', comprising 'the most temperate portions of the Conservative [i.e. Peelite] and Liberal parties.' Four years later, he noted that '[t]he interval between the parties has, by the practical solution of so many congested questions, been very greatly narrowed.'[7] And as an even more astute observer, Lady Bracknell, reminded Jack Worthing when he confessed to Liberal Unionist leanings: 'Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in the evening at any rate.' No wonder Nick Clegg has been so reluctant to accept the Prime Minister's dinner invitations – even if, as we are told, they disagree on so little else in private! No wonder also that the spectre of 'coupons' began to haunt the smaller of the two coalition parties soon after May 2010 – a spectre that is not likely to be banished for as long as the coalition lasts.[8]

The success or failure of past coalitions was often conditioned by their objectives. The exigencies of an emergency tended to lend greater stability to them, and to define their duration. Conversely, when coalitions attained their stated objective but remained in office, centrifugal forces frequently gained momentum, as happened to the Aberdeen administration after Gladstone's 1853 budget.

Managing and holding together a coalition requires a range of different skills. Of course, political parties themselves are a form of miniature coalitions between different groups and wings. But they have their own historically grown methods and traditions of moderating between the different factions. Coalitions between parties, by contrast, have to develop such conciliation strategies from scratch, and in public.

Lord Salisbury, one of the cleverest (and perhaps nastiest) of Conservative leaders, understood this. An accomplished coalition politician, he heaped flattery on his anti-Gladstonian Liberal Unionist partners on an industrial scale. For Salisbury this was not just a question of public rhetoric or tactical necessity but part of his carefully calibrated statecraft. It entailed incorporating progressive, non-Tory items in the government's legislative programme. And it worked. Before too long, Salisbury had netted the renegade Liberals, thus laying the foundations of the Conservatives' political dominance in the twentieth century.

With the current coalition, a policy-coordinating committee structure seems to be in place. And yet, in the case of the government's most notable retreats (forestry sell-off, NHS reforms, sentencing policy) or its strategic defence review, the policies had all been signed off by cabinet committees. And in each case there was no clear strategic guidance or Downing Street oversight.[9] Following the AV referendum, moreover, there has been a discernible trend for one coalition party to over-compensate for the perceived gains by the other party. A structure in itself, then, is not the answer to the problem of managing a coalition.

Salisbury furnishes a good example of smart coalition management at the top. Coalition government, however, requires management at different levels, at the level of the Cabinet, that of the parliamentary parties, and, finally, that of the activists in the constituencies. On all these levels, calculations of political balance will arise. Since the primary aim of any government is its stability and survival, there will always be the temptation to kick contentious issues into the long grass, only to become more difficult in later years. The suppressed tensions between the free-trading instincts of the Lloyd George Liberals and the protectionist proclivities of their Tory coalition partners after 1920 are a reminder of this. The 2010 coalition government's postponing of a decision on the replacement of Trident or its shelving of promised plans to renegotiate the UK's relations with the European Union may well prove to be such cases.[10]

Calculations of short-term versus longer-term costs and benefits are an integral part of all political decision-making. When the balance between costs and benefits is unevenly distributed between coalition partners, however, friction will inevitably arise. In the case of the Lloyd George coalition, as many cherished Liberal reform and welfare schemes fell under the notorious 'Geddes Axe' after 1920/21, the Liberal element of the administration began to crumble, though ultimately it was a revolt by Tory backbenchers that brought it down. In the later summer of 2011, such a question of balance arose in consequence of David Cameron's plans for a redistribution of constituencies.[11]

## To end or not to end a coalition

When coalition leaders were insufficiently attuned to each other's political needs, as was the case over the 1902 Education Bill, the resulting internal conflict left plenty of explosive matter in its wake; and the subsequent attempts to remedy the situation still broke up the coalition.

Personalities matter in order to create trust. For a coalition to succeed there needs to be a sound working relationship between its leading members, based on mutual trust. The close political partnership, at least initially, between Balfour and Chamberlain or between Lloyd George and Bonar Law are instructive historical examples.

It has been argued that coalitions rot from the bottom up. This is not entirely accurate. Grenville's 'Ministry of All the Talents' of 1806-7, for instance, shows what might befall a coalition that is bound together by mutual suspicions. Aberdeen's fraught and complex relations with Lord John Russell underline that personal relationships at the top make and break coalitions.

Frequently, the gravitational pull of office helped to cement a coalition, as the growing Peelite-Whig affinities in the middle of the 1850s demonstrate. Governmental responsibility and extreme external pressure then fused coalition partners together. But such external events often also had the potential of prising coalitions apart. Europe's descent into the Crimean War, for instance, laid bare profound foreign policy divisions between Peelites and Whigs, onto which Russell's grievances were easily grafted. Under the weight of such strains, the coalition could simply not survive. The Chanak crisis in 1922 was the last straw for most Conservative backbenchers, weary of their party's association with that 'dynamic force' Lloyd George. Time will tell whether the diplomatic aftermath of Britain's military intervention in Libya or the financial and political crisis of the Eurozone will have such a corrosive effect on the Cameron-Clegg coalition.

In general, the greater the distance from the Cabinet, the less the constraints of coalition government will be appreciated, and the more perceived party advantage will weigh with parliamentarians at Westminster and party activists in the country. The mounting disquiet among Conservative backbenchers and constituency chairmen after 1920 was, perhaps, an extreme case of this tendency, but it is nevertheless suggestive of the dangers inherent in all coalitions. It also explains David Cameron's ultimately abortive attempt to draw the teeth of the '1922 Committee' of Conservative backbenchers in May 2010.[12] His eventual retreat has left him exposed to pressure from disgruntled Conservatives, hence his noticeably more traditional Tory rhetoric in the aftermath of the riots in English cities in the summer of 2011 and on European issues as the Euro-crisis unfolded.

As with all decisions, politicians are well advised to consider their likely final steps before they take the first. Yet, history would suggest that, in peace-time, it is far easier to form a coalition in a moment of crisis than to slip out of it with the dignity and the standing of one's party still intact. The prospect of the next general election will soon begin to concentrate minds. Ministerial

colleagues, for now partners in the joint exercise of power, are also likely opponents at the hustings. As the private discussions of the Tory party fixers Leo Amery and Sir George Younger between 1920 and 1922 testify, the question of how and when to terminate a coalition will occupy politicians' minds sooner rather than later. And this involves also the question of how most convincingly to claim exclusive credit for the government's achievements while associating the coalition partner with all its unpopular decisions and failures.

Britain's past experience with coalitions underlines the extent to which strains within coalition parties and between them tended to grow the longer the coalition lasted. But when the moment arrived to terminate it, the political landscape had changed profoundly, and it was impossible to return to positions held prior to the formation of the coalition. Being part of a coalition, indeed, changes the internal dynamics within the party, and it changes the party's image with the electorate. After the fall of their respective coalitions, Joseph Chamberlain and Lloyd George found themselves in the political wilderness, the way back to office barred forever. Twenty-first century Liberal Democrat leaders may well be on their way to making that same experience.

## Any lessons?

It would be rash to predict what the future may hold for this coalition or for coalition government in general. 'Events, dear boy, events' will always confound the calculations of politicians and the predictions of commentators. Historians are rightly reluctant to extrapolate predictions of the future from the past. And yet, history can offer a clearer perspective on current problems. At the time of writing, with the 2011 party conference season about to commence, it would be tempting to accentuate signs of stress and dissension. Political observers should resist that temptation and concentrate on the broader lessons and warnings that Britain's history of coalition government holds for the three party leaders:

**David Cameron**: Your offer of a full coalition was a courageous gamble, one that is likely to change British politics. Although your programme lacks coherence and strategic clarity, and although you are prone to retreating, you are doing alright. Follow Salisbury in managing your coalition. Remember that the spirit of the coalition agreement is more important than its letter. Beware of that trap into which Balfour fell when he developed a blind spot for his partner's sensibilities. Difficulties in your other coalition, that with your own right-wingers, are inevitable.[13] Their power is purely negative, however, and can be contained. Besides, they have nowhere else to go. Your prize: ultimate fusion with the bulk of the Lib Dems and restored Conservative political hegemony for a generation.

**Nick Clegg**: You urgently need an exit strategy. Merely claiming to civilise the 'nasty party' will not suffice. Remember what befell Lord Sidmouth's Tories in 1806-7. Conversely, crowing over every concession wrested from the Tories, or meeting every Conservative proposal with an instantaneous barrage of indignant ripostes will not advance either the work of the coalition or the interests of your party. Synthetic rows and talk of inevitable divorce are no substitute for a cogent strategy.[14] Moreover, having subscribed to the coalition's central narrative, you have relinquished the initiative to your partners and shifted your party's position in the political landscape. Crafting a 'coalition 2.0' strategy for the second half of this parliament is thus well-nigh impossible. Your best bet of survival and office is by staying with the Tories, even if there is a Conservative majority in 2015. Apply now for membership of the Carlton Club. Liberal Democrats who want to keep their party separate had better leave now.

**Ed Miliband**: You have scored some successes, most notably in your bold response to the phone-hacking scandal in mid-2011. But these were tactical. You have tackled neither the central narrative of the coalition, nor the strategic vacuum at its heart, the result of an uneasy balance between disgruntled Tories, panicky Liberals pining for their lost political innocence and some of the grandees on the Tory left. The AV referendum has shown that assumption of a dormant progressive majority needs recalibrating; so stop chasing after disenfranchised Liberals. Britain's political landscape is shifting, but you seem content to pay for a ring-side seat. You should not. You must occupy the centre. Remember what happened to the Whigs after 1821, to the Tories after 1852, and to Gladstone's Liberals after 1886 – they were condemned to long spells of opposition.

As the record of the past makes plain, the challenges of coalition government are not new to British politics. But they are nevertheless formidable. There is no guarantee that the leaders of today will heed the warnings of the past. As historians should need no reminding, only time will tell.

---

1. Parliamentary Debates (16 Dec. 1852), vol. cxxxiii, col.1692. What follows is based on T.G. Otte and Jeremy Black (eds.), Coalition Government in British Politics: From Glorious Revolution to Cameron-Clegg (London, Social Affairs Unit, 2010).
2. Memo. Gladstone, 18 Dec. 1852, Gladstone MSS, BL, Add. MSS. 44778.
3. A. Seldon and G. Lodge, Brown at 10 (London, Biteback, 2010), 449-63; D. Laws, 22 Days in May: The Birth of the Lib Dem-Conservative Coalition (London, Biteback, 2010), 75-124; R. Wilson, Five Days to Power: The Journey to Coalition Britain (London, Biteback, 2010), passim.
4. 'We've been Lib-Conned: MPs fall out of love with the new politics', *The Times*, 22 May 2010; G. Parker, 'Coalition partners move to reassure parties', Financial Times, 26 July 2010; 'Boris puts coalition in a spin with Kosovo jibe', *The Times* (20 Oct. 2010).
5. Cumberland to Newcastle, 17 Oct. 1762, Newcastle MSS, British Library, Add. MSS. 32943.
6. Horsman commonplace book, n.d. [c. 1852], Horsman MSS, Buckinghamshire County Record Office, Aylesbury, D/RA/A/3E/22, fos. 4 and 26 v.
7. Quotes from memo. Gladstone, 18 Dec. 1852, Gladstone MSS, BL, Add. MSS. 44778; and anon. [W.E. Gladstone], 'The Decline in Efficiency of Parliament', Quarterly Review xciv, 562 (Sept. 1856), as quoted in H.C.G. Matthew, Gladstone, 1809-1898 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), 105.
8. Quotes from memo. Gladstone, 18 Dec. 1852, Gladstone MSS, BL, Add. MSS. 44778; and anon. [W.E. Gladstone], 'The Decline in Efficiency of Parliament', Quarterly Review xciv, 562 (Sept. 1856), as quoted in H.C.G. Matthew, Gladstone, 1809-1898 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), 105.
9. For the argument for such an electoral pact, largely addressed at Tory coalition-sceptics, see N. Boles, Which Way's Up? The Future of Coalition Government and How to Get There (London, Biteback, 2010); also R. Sylvester, 'From rose garden romance to secret love', *The Times*, 31 May 2011.
10. G. Parker, 'Cameron starts to feel the heat', *Financial Times*, 9 June 2011, and E. Rigby, 'Cameron seeks strength in retreat', ibid., 22 June 2011.
11. P. Stephens, 'How the carriers sank a defence strategy', *Financial Times*, 19 Oct. 2010; 'Cuts Condemned as "unworthy" by those who risk lives for Queen and country', *The Times*, 20 Oct. 2010.
12. K. Stacey, 'Tory MPs angered at proposals to abolish constituencies', *Financial Times*, 14 Sept. 2011.
13. J. Pickard, 'Cameron tries to "neuter" the 1922 committee', *Financial Times*, 20 May 2010.
14. F. Nelson, 'The coalition's split all Tory versus Tory', *The Times*, 1 Oct. 2010
15. G. Parker, 'Clegg savours success on NHS reform', *Financial Times*, 13 June 2011; R. Watson, 'Lib Dem crowing over concessions will not be forgotten, Tories warn', *The Times*, 14 June 2011; S. Coates, 'We are tainted by Tories and divorce is inevitable, says party president', ibid., 19 Sept. 2011.

# The Lib-Lab Pact: March 1977-July 1978

**Bernard Donoughue**

The Lib-Lab Pact of March 1977 did not, as with the current Lib-Con Coalition, originate with a hung election. It arose in mid parliamentary term, primarily because the Labour Government of Jim Callaghan could no longer construct a parliamentary majority for its legislation or survival.

Labour had been losing by-elections and suffering defections across the floor in the House of Commons. Its party strength was down to 310. Left-wing backbenchers were revolting and Labour had been nearly defeated in recent major votes on Scottish devolution and on its tough public expenditure proposals. It was therefore on the brink of being a minority government.

In this fragile situation, on Friday 18 March 1977, Margaret Thatcher, leader of the Conservative Opposition, put down a motion of no confidence to be taken the following Wednesday, 23 March. On the arithmetic as it then was, Labour would lose and the Conservatives would form a government underpinned by the radical right-wing intentions of its uncompromising leader.

The prospect of this focused the minds of both Liberal and Labour leaders. For each it was quite the wrong time to face the electorate. On all polling forecasts, both parties would have done badly. Yet better times seemed to lie ahead if only Labour could hold on. For Labour, there lay the prospects of economic recovery once the economic benefits expected following the 1976 IMF settlement bore fruit, and especially once North Sea oil started to flow. For the Liberals, meanwhile, there was the prospect of being able to see through Labour's proposals for Scottish devolution.

In particular, the Liberal leaders – the dour David Steel from Scotland and flamboyant John Pardoe from the West Country – were each more sympathetic to Labour than the Tories. Steel told Wilson's press secretary that he would have entered politics as a Labour man but for the fact that he "would lose in my part of Scotland". Pardoe was a natural social radical and in his part of Cornwall the Conservatives were the historic enemy. Moreover, it was part of the personal political strategy and long-term ambition of both Steel and Pardoe (as the former states in his memoirs) "to secure realignment [of the Liberal-Labour Left in British politics] by co-operating with the Government". They particularly disliked Margaret Thatcher, and in this sense have very little in common with Nick Clegg and David Laws, who often seem virtually indistinguishable from Cameron's Conservatives. Rather, Clegg perhaps has more in common with the then Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe in his 1974 talks with Edward Heath who was, Pardoe once said to me, mainly concerned "to get his feet under the Cabinet table".

The Pact was hammered out in frantic talks through Liberal and Labour intermediaries over the weekend of 19-20 March, with Cledwyn Hughes, Michael Foot, Bill Rodgers and Tom McNally as Labour's main negotiators (interestingly, the latter two now represent the Lib Dems in the House of Lords); and in direct talks between the party leaders in Number 10 on Monday and Tuesday 21-22 March, which stretched into the early hours of Wednesday 23rd. The Ulster Unionists – with whom Callaghan had a curious affinity, they being straight, tough and conservative like him – also took part in the early talks, bargaining their

abstentions for the possibility of more seats for them in Northern Ireland via a Speaker's Conference. At the same time, Merlyn Rees was talking with Gerry Fitt, leader of the mercurial SDLP. Agreement was finally reached with the Liberals at 1.20am on the Wednesday morning, with the Unionist leader James Molynieux having already confirmed his agreement by letter on the Tuesday.

The Labour Cabinet met at noon on the Wednesday. There were four initial opponents of the Pact – Benn, Shore, Orne and Millan. Callaghan offered to accept their resignations from the Cabinet and they immediately caved in, so the deal was done unanimously. This was one of many occasions when Benn postured in opposition to please his left-wing supporters but always declined to sacrifice his Cabinet position once Callaghan put the squeeze on him. But that afternoon in the Commons, I personally overheard Benn instructing Ian Mikardo to organise a revolt of the left. Consequently, 48 left-wing backbenchers signed a motion stating they were not bound by the Pact. Benn briefed the press that he was (as ever) "on the brink of resignation", but he never went over that brink, despite our many efforts in Number 10 to push him over. In fact, some on the hard Left, including Eric Heffer, Norman Atkinson, Judith Hart and even Audrey Wise, supported the Pact, no doubt putting their sometimes tiny electoral majorities ahead of their Marxist principles.

The crucial vote on the no confidence motion on 23rd March was defeated by 24. Without the support of the Liberals and the Ulster Unionist abstentions it would have been lost, and Margaret Thatcher would have taken office two years earlier than she actually did.

The details of the Pact were published in a Joint Statement by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Liberal party on that Wednesday. There were five main points:

1. A 'Joint Consultative Committee' would be established, to be chaired by Michael Foot. This might be compared with the present Coalition's Joint Cabinet Committee. It would examine Government policies and proposals prior to them being put to the Commons and would examine alternative Liberal policy proposals.
2. The Labour Government was not committed to accepting any particular Liberal proposals, nor the Liberals committed to supporting any particular Government policies.
3. Regular meetings would take place between Callaghan and Steel and between Dennis Healey, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and John Pardoe.
4. It was agreed that there would be direct European elections during that Parliament. The Liberals would support proportional representation but the Government would support a free vote on this. It was agreed there would be progress on devolution, with a free vote on proportional representation, and progress on a Homeless Persons Housing Bill.
5. The Pact would last for the duration of that Parliamentary session, and would be reconsidered at the end of it.

James Callaghan made a formal statement to the Labour Party about the Pact. He stressed, as his memoirs make clear, that it made few concessions to or compromises with the Liberals and that the agreement was in no sense a Coalition and involved the abandonment of not one Labour election pledge. Labour was not committed to accepting

the views or policies of the Liberals – simply to consult and consider their views 'sympathetically' (p. 458). He explained that "our arrangement to consult with the Liberals before we brought legislation forward would enable us to calculate in advance what the prospects would be and give us a stable platform on which to build".

The major differences from the present Coalition are clear. It was a Pact, not a Coalition, with no Liberal members in the Labour Cabinet. Labour consulted with the Liberals and considered their views sympathetically, but there were no detailed policy agreements or concessions as in 2010 – except on Scottish Devolution and the European Elections, on which many Labour MPs agreed with the Liberals anyway. There were no arrangements for joint Whitehall or departmental committees, as under the present Coalition Agreement. The Lib-Lab pact was not a joining of near equal politicians as in 2010, with Cameron and Clegg seemingly of similar age and little political experience, both equally well-fed, privileged public school boys. In 1977, Callaghan was a big political beast and a dominant and popular national leader, having already served 9 years in Cabinet and 30 years in the Commons. By comparison, David Steel was a political dwarf, though already widely admired. However, in 1977 the Liberals were negotiating with only 11 seats whereas Clegg led five times as many MPs in 2010.

The political experience of the Pact was not all plain sailing, with occasional turbulence and regular Liberal dissatisfaction – which is not surprising since they clearly benefitted less from it than did Labour. In 1977, the Liberals wanted to oppose Dennis Healey's hikes in petrol tax, but Callaghan warned that this would end the Pact and so the Liberals merely abstained. The following year, Pardoe pressed for tax cuts in the budget but was refused. His relations with Healey deteriorated badly as a consequence, though there was a concession to him on profit-sharing incentive schemes. That year the Liberals also saw through devolution for Scotland, but were defeated on free votes over proportional representation in the Scottish and European elections. In more general terms, Steel and Pardoe did not get the party realignment on the centre left which was their broader ambition.

Labour secured much more than the Liberals from the Pact, getting a crucial stability for its parliamentary majority while conceding virtually nothing. Callaghan was so grateful that he proposed to give Steel a seat in his Cabinet in 1978 should the latter be ejected as his party's leader. Not surprisingly, the Liberals then were not as unpopular with their Labour allies as the Lib Dems are today with many of their Conservative partners, especially on their right wing. This is presumably because the 1977 Pact was much looser and involved fewer concessions and compromises on policy than the Conservatives conceded in 2010.

The 1977 Pact came to an amicable end in the summer of 1978. The dissolution began with direct talks between Callaghan and Steel on 20 March that year. At that point, Callaghan was quite unclear – as indeed he was until virtually the last moment – about his election intentions. He told Steel that if there were to be an election in October, then the Liberals must disengage in July in order to fight the election as a separate party, which had always been their objective. If, however, it was then clear that there would be no election, he wanted the Liberals at least to commit themselves to support Labour's next Queen's Speech in November.

The two leaders met again on 24 May and agreed to announce the next day that the Pact would end in July in order to fight the expected October elections independently. Interestingly the Lib Dems then won the Edge Hill by-election with a swing of 32% – though it is not clear whether this public approval resulted from them having made the Pact or from their having now ended it.

On 7 March 1979, with the Labour Government in its final throes following the Winter of Discontent, both Steel and Pardoe came to my house in Kentish Town for a private dinner. They insisted that they had ended the Pact only because they had assumed that Callaghan would certainly call an election in October 1978 (a view I had shared from inside Number 10). Had they known that Callaghan would in fact soldier on in office, they would have sought to continue the Pact, despite reservations from within their own party. Faced by the imminent vote of confidence which brought down the Callaghan Government, they said they would vote against Labour because the Liberals needed the election to occur before the trial for murder of their former leader, Jeremy Thorpe, and before the European elections due on 7 June 1979. So they, though admiring him greatly and disliking Thatcher, helped to bring down Callaghan, who lost the no confidence challenge by just one vote. In the May General Election, the Liberals secured only 14% of the vote – far less than in 1974 – and won 11 seats.

In conclusion, it is clear that the 1977-8 Lib-Lab Pact occurred in much different political circumstances and involved strikingly different political actors from the Lib-Dem/Conservative Coalition of May 2010. The Pact was much looser and more flexible than the present Coalition, with far fewer specific commitments, concessions and compromises. It achieved what Labour wanted – i.e. a stable Commons majority for the Government. The Liberals received far less – probably less than they deserved – whereas today, many would argue that the opposite is the case. Perhaps as a consequence, the Pact created less hostility to the Liberals among the other two parties than seems to be the case with the Liberal Democrats, in Westminster at least, at present.

The 1977 Pact, despite its loose nature, was significant and in the national interest in the sense that it restored some stability to Westminster politics. It gave Labour a chance to see through its policies and ensured that when the Conservatives finally returned to power in 1979, they were better prepared for office, with a Prime Minister with more experience and probably with a more secure majority than she might have won in the earlier uncertain days of Spring 1977.

Should Cameron and Clegg in 2010 have executed a looser Pact, as in 1977? That would certainly have political conveniences as well as drawbacks. For the Lib Dems it might allow them to preserve more party distinctiveness and so have a better chance of avoiding the possibility of massacre at the next General Election. For the Conservatives, they might have to make fewer policy concessions and so have less discontent on their right wing. But the major differences of circumstances between 1977 and 2010 mean that it is surely fruitless to argue from comparisons between the two events. What we do know is that each arrangement left the bigger governing party with the initiative. David Cameron, like James Callaghan over 40 years ago, will build his own future or dig his own political grave.

# Coalition Government in Scotland

**Jack McConnell**

Partly based on my own experience but also a little bit on my reading of some of the individuals involved, I have to say that nothing that happened in the May 2010 UK general election and subsequently surprised me at all. In fact, based on what appeared to be the impending result, during the election campaign I predicted that not only would David Cameron opt for a Coalition but also, and this is not having even met him, I was convinced that Nick Clegg would accept the offer and that they would go on to put together quite a stable Coalition.

It seemed to me that there was enough convergence between enough members of the two parties in Parliament for this to happen. The situation and the conditions facing the country were serious enough for it to merit an attempt, and I thought the Labour Party was in enough of a mess to make it attractive to both of them to do. I was not surprised, therefore, when Cameron made his "big, bold offer". As a potential Prime Minister, I thought it was the right thing for him to do.

Moreover, I was not remotely surprised that they were able to put an agreement together so quickly over the weekend. This was partly because Jim Wallace, who had been my Liberal Democrat deputy for four of the years that I was First Minister in Scotland, was involved behind the scenes in the negotiations. He is now in the House of Lords, and has therefore gone from being Deputy First Minister in a Labour-Lib Dem Coalition in Scotland to becoming a minister in a Conservative-Lib Dem Coalition in Westminster (something that would perhaps make for an interesting study in political movement for a biography someday). The point is, though, that when I saw he was involved, and given the role he had played in Scotland in bringing together two very different Coalitions, I was quite confident that negotiations were going somewhere that weekend last May.

These observations draw on my personal experience of Coalition government in Scotland. There were two Coalitions in Scotland, the first of which had three First Ministers, and the second just one. They were very distinct and very different, the first between 1999 and 2003 and the second between 2003 and 2007. I would like to talk about both briefly and highlight a few lessons that I think might be useful from a practical point of view.

Taking the 1999-2003 coalition first, this was what I would describe as an "Add-on Coalition". It started with the Labour programme which had been the Scottish Office programme in the UK Government from 1997 to 1999. The Labour Manifesto in 1999 for the first Scottish elections was largely a continuation of what we had been doing at Westminster through the Scottish Office as it then was in Scotland. Donald Dewar was initially the Secretary of State for Scotland before going on to become the First Minister. There was, therefore, clear continuity there, but not a majority for Labour. This was always going to be the case, of course. Unlike Westminster, the Scottish Parliament has to vote for the First Minister. This is a key difference which creates a relationship between the parties that is a little different, and changes both how we secure a majority in this new Parliament, and the potential for minority leadership.

When I was elected Scottish Labour Party Leader in November 2001, before becoming First Minister I had to gain the active support of the Liberal Democrats to win the vote when Parliament conducted its selection. To gain that support, I had to agree that initially I would commit to build upon and not tear up the 1999

Coalition Agreement. Although I was able to launch some new initiatives between 2001 and 2003, stability was a more important factor.

The 2003-2007 Parliament again resulted in a Labour-Lib Dem coalition, with the arithmetic split 67-62 between government and opposition. We did not lose a government vote in four years which was quite remarkable in the circumstances, particularly as both parties suffered dips in their support as a consequence of the rise of the SNP which was starting to happen during this time. This Coalition saw through an incredible legislative programme focused on the modernisation of criminal justice. At the same time, we saw economic growth go from a situation where it had essentially been flat-lining in 2002 to one where it had reached the UK level by 2007. Through a really concerted effort on the part of our administration, we were extremely proud at having caught up with the rest of the UK. For me, this highlights the real strength of this Coalition which was its clear sense of purpose at the centre, on economic recovery, and the firm belief that we could make a real difference on that. I would accept that we may have appeared a little dull to some by the end, and while this may have contributed to the election defeat in May 2007, we could at least point to a real record of achievement.

So, there are a number of lessons I would draw from these experiences. Most importantly, I would say that the individuals who sit at the centre are absolutely key to the success of any coalition. As leading members of a coalition, if you trust each other you can make compromises and not really be affected by what Tony Blair would have called the "tittle-tattle of politics". I do not, for example, believe that David Cameron will be particularly bothered by some of the tittle-tattle around about things like the NHS reforms over the last month or so. He and Nick Clegg have held the Coalition together well after the first big electoral test, which was one that really did not go well for the Liberal Democrats. They have held it together pretty securely, really, for the last several weeks. I think that they will be very pleased with themselves come the summer break that they have managed to achieve that. They are compromising on issues that they were almost certainly going to have to compromise on anyway, and there is still at the core of this government the sense of purpose that I believe is essential if it is to be successful. In this case, it is the requirement to bring down the fiscal deficit. These, I would argue, are the crucial factors for success: trust between the individuals, and that central sense of purpose that drives the coalition towards a goal over a period of time.

This leads me to believe that this particular coalition will last four to five years, barring a really, really serious event or change in personality – indeed, I think that it is more than 95% certain that this will be the case. I argue this because, along with trust and a central sense of purpose, the Coalition also has the third vital ingredient for success, which is that it has put in place private, behind-the-scenes mechanisms for holding the members of the two parties and ministers together through disputes, discussions and disagreements.

To illustrate the impact of this, I would like to finish with one final anecdote. I attended a conference recently where I met a fairly sparky and relatively new backbench Lib Dem MP and an equally sparky and new backbench Conservative MP, both of whom I would describe as probably quite ambitious, both for their own parties as well as for ministerial office. At this particular event, and in front of an international audience, they both stated, unprovoked, that the level of discussion and, if not comradeship then certainly friendship that was being developed between the mainstream backbenchers of both parties was more remarkable than the friendship between David Cameron and Nick Clegg. More importantly, they felt that people outside the parties did not understand this, and this was why the government was going to last five years. The fact that both of them were absolutely certain that the Coalition would last five years was, to my mind, very telling indeed. As the longest serving Coalition Government leader around in the UK today, I suspect they may be right.

# Coalitions in UK local government: What Westminster does today, local government did yesterday

**Chris Game**

## Declining two-party hegemony – not in local government

It has become almost a platitude amongst political scientists, and indeed electoral reformers: the declining two-party hegemony in British politics. The statistics and assertions are familiar. A third of General Election votes in 2010 went to parties other than Conservative and Labour – the highest proportion since 1922. 13% of MPs represent third or minor parties, despite a discriminatingly non-proportional electoral system. Single-party majority government, we are advised, is set to become the exception, rather than the rule. As so often, though, in the local government world things are different – very different. As shown in Figure 1, today's nearly 74% of GB councillors representing one of the two main parties – 46% Conservative, 28% Labour – is at the highest level for over 20 years, and currently rising.

This two-party dominance is reflected in the statistics for councils' political control. Figure 2 shows that the two main parties control proportionately more councils – 71% in GB, 79% in England – than for over 30 years.

Some of these gains have been straight from the Liberal Democrats and Independents, but the much bigger change in recent years has been the steady reduction in the number of hung councils – those under arithmetical No Overall Control (NOC), with no single party holding more than 50% of the seats – from over a third of GB councils (147) in 2005 to well under a quarter (95). Furthermore, those GB

Figure 1: Party affiliation of GB councillors since 1973 (%)

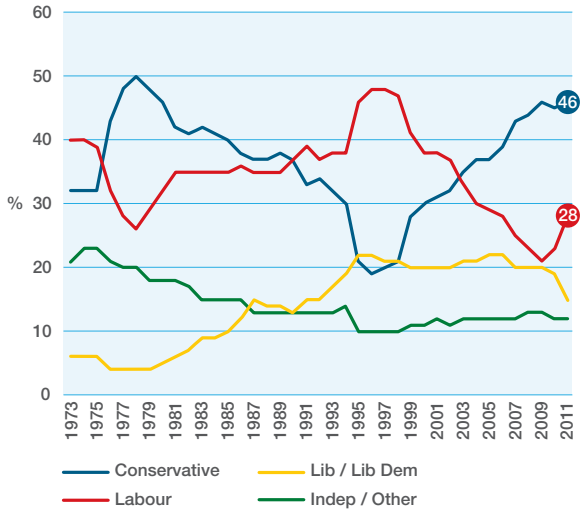
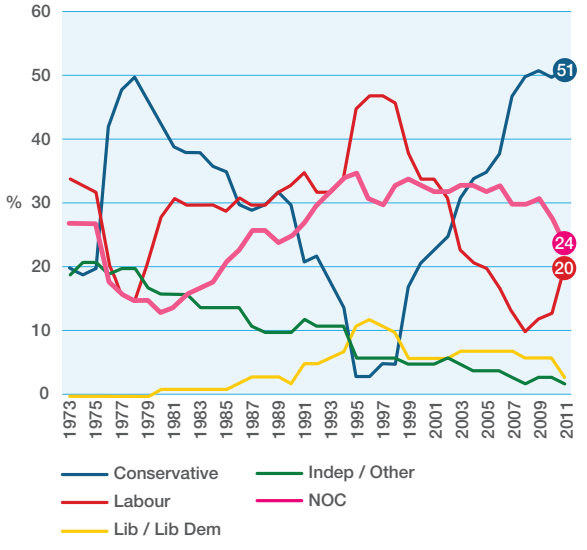
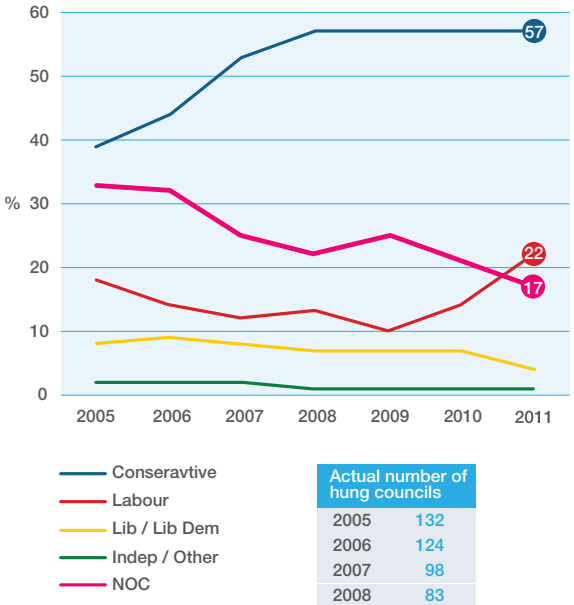



Figure 2: Political control of GB councils, 1973-2011



figures incorporate the big increase in hung councils – from 14 to 27 – that followed Scotland's 2007 switch to the Single Transferable Vote (STV) in local elections, which means that, as shown in Figure 3, the fall in the numbers of English hung councils has been sharper still. By August 2011, their number was down to just 57.

## Figure 3: Political control of English councils, 2005-11




| Actual number of hung councils | |
|---|---|
| 2005 | 132 |
| 2006 | 124 |
| 2007 | 98 |
| 2008 | 83 |
| 2009 | 95 |
| 2010 | 73 |
| 2011 | 57 |

## Hung councils – falling numbers, changing form

For most of the past quarter-century, as shown in Figure 2, the proportion of hung councils has hovered at between 25 and 35%, or about 130 to 170 GB councils.

They became the perennial presence in our local government landscape, a feature of numerical stability around which the major parties' shares of councils soared and plummeted, the Liberal Democrats peaked and plateaued, and 'Independents and others' fell away, gradually but seemingly inexorably. For a couple of years (2002-04), NOC was statistically the most prevalent form of 'political control', which is interesting, at the very least, given an electoral system geared locally, as nationally, to turning minority votes into majority administrations.

Two things have changed, though, in recent years. First, as already noted, the numbers of NOC councils have fallen significantly: in England from 132 in 2005 to 57, and in Great Britain from 152 to 95, despite the doubling in Scotland following the 2007 switch to STV. At the same time, it seems that, at least in England, the form of hung council government has also changed significantly. As shown in Figure 4, there has been a move away from what are nowadays regularly termed coalitions, but used in local government to be known generically as 'power-sharing arrangements', and towards more single-party minority administrations. In other words, just as MPs – and the national media – are struggling to get to grips with a form of government that many local authorities have been familiar with for years, local government itself is moving in the opposite direction.

## Figure 4: Forms of hung council government, 2011

| | Coalition | Single-party minority control | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Total | Cons | Lab | LD | Indep | Green |
| Counties (27) | 1 | 0 | | | | | |
| Unitaries (56) | 3 | 10 | 3 | 3 | 3 | | 1 |
| London boroughs (32) | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | | |
| Metropolitan boroughs (36) | 3 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 1 | | |
| Districts (201) | 11 | 22 | 12 | 7 | 2 | 1 | |
| England (352) | 19 | 38 | 16 | 14 | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| Scotland (32) | 20 | 6 | 1 | 2 | | SNP3 | |
| Wales (22) | 10 | 2 | | 2 | | | |
| Total (GB) | 49 | 46 | 17 | 18 | 6 | 1 | 4 |

In England, certainly, local coalitions have in the past few years become distinctly unfashionable. Comparisons with Scotland here need to be treated with caution, because, while UK ministers a decade ago were attempting to straitjacket all but the smallest English and Welsh authorities into one of three executive-based models of political management, the Scottish Executive explicitly encouraged – and achieved – a 'rich diversity' of models. Most authorities retained their committee systems – some modestly streamlined, more apparently not – and even those that moved to some form of executive did so with executives proportionately much larger than their English equivalents, and often cross-partisan. In a Scottish hung council, therefore, the party make-up of an executive/cabinet, even where one exists, may not be as firm a guide as in England to the council's actual political control and form of political management. At what point, for example, does a conditional voting agreement, plus a few committee posts with enhanced 'senior councillor' salaries, become a coalitional arrangement? It should be noted, then, that the Scottish numbers in Figure 4 are derived from the descriptions of councils' political control posted by COSLA (The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities), according to which there were in August 2011 more coalitions (or power-sharing partnerships) among Scotland's 32 authorities than among England's 352.

## The full circle

The implication of these figures is that English local government has, in its approach to the political management of hung councils, come full circle. In the 1980s and early 1990s, single-party minority administrations were by far the most common form of control, for several reasons. Committee-based decision-making meant there was less emphasis on forming an administration (indeed, 'no administration' was a feasible option), less influence in being a portfolio holder, and, particularly for a council becoming hung for the first time, less incentive to consider forming alliances with your longstanding political opponents. These were ideological times, and all parties shared an instinctive suspicion of cross-party co-operation, but Labour's opposition was both most vehement and official. National guidelines to local Labour parties were emphatic: no chair-sharing, pacts or formal arrangements with any other party to control the council. And, parenthetically, especially not with the SDP/Liberal Alliance (1981-88), theoretically perhaps their closest allies, but whose Social Democratic leaders were forever Labour 'traitors'.

Confirming these circumstances and attitudes, the authors of the principal study at the time, Steve Leach and John Stewart, found that single-party minority administrations outnumbered all three other forms – formal policy-based coalitions, chair-sharing agreements, and 'no administration' or rotating chair arrangements – more than twice over.[1] The preference for going it alone was shared by all parties.

From the mid-1990s, though, and particularly after 1997, the Labour/Liberal Democrat 'Agreement' at Westminster – a joint approach to constitutional reform, including the appointment of Lib Dems to a cabinet committee – both signalled and reflected that times were changing. Locally, as nationally, there developed a much wider degree of co-operation between the two parties than had previously existed, and a greater readiness generally among councillors to explore different forms of power-sharing arrangements. The Labour Party, in the face of strong local pressure, relaxed first the interpretation of its guidelines and later the guidelines themselves, leading to a considerable number of what were in effect Labour/Lib Dem coalitions. The outcome was that, by the time the committee system gave way to executive-based decision-making following the Local Government Act 2000, two- or multi-party power-shares comfortably outnumbered single-party minority administrations by probably at least three to two.

## Local coalitions today – a delayed impact of executive local government?

The arrival of cabinets and executives might have been expected to redress this balance almost immediately, with portfolio holders now having not just the status of committee chairs, but individual and collective decision-making authority and increasingly enhanced Special Responsibility Allowances. But it appeared not to, and it is only relatively recently that, in England, single-party minorities have come to dominate. As Figure 4 shows, these currently number 38, while, even applying a generous interpretation and including 'Alternative Arrangements' authorities like Babergh, there are only 19 power-sharing partnerships or coalitions. They include, as shown in Figure 5 (page 33), an impressive range of permutations, but, although the national Conservative/Liberal Democrat template is the most frequently represented, it accounts for just five: Birmingham, Derby, Redbridge, Chorley, and Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Both Figures 5 and 6 (page 34) are set out as they are, with accompanying party arithmetic, mainly in the hope that this additional information may be of interest to readers; not to suggest that there are any significant or consistent relationships between this arithmetic and the resulting form of administration. There was a time when coalition theorists, learning of the increasing numbers of hung councils in the UK, anticipated that this new cache of data might help them investigate all kinds of more and less feasible hypotheses. In particular, they asked if the primary objective of negotiating politicians was really to put together, as game theory suggested, the smallest minimal winning coalition, thereby maximising their party's voting weight relative to that of their coalition partners. It took some time, but the answer proved to be: no. Or, to quote Wikipedia's pleasingly succinct summary of the subject: 'the assumption that governments will form on the base of minimal winning coalitions, has a poor empirical foundation in Western European multi-party systems' – and that goes for local as well as national governments.

It was the policy-blindness of this kind of proposition that perhaps most irritated practising politicians, as well as many political scientists. The left-right ideological dimension may be simplistic and flawed, but to ignore altogether the idea that coalition formation might have at least something to do with the compatibility of the political views of potential partners seemed demeaning, as well as misguided. The outcome has been that most of those who have studied the formation and operation of hung councils have seen their findings as illustrating the great and continuing diversity of our local government, rather than its conformity to any mathematical patterns or formulae. A local authority's political culture, history of political control, degree of party politicisation, nature of inter-party and inter-personal relations, and numerous other factors are as likely to provide the key to understanding its chosen form of hung council administration as its party arithmetic. The arithmetic is obviously not irrelevant, and certainly not uninteresting, but it is only the starting point.

One immediate arithmetical observation from Figure 5 that is of some interest is that, in nearly a third of these coalition-run authorities (6 of the 19), the party with currently the largest number of council seats is not part of the coalition. It may be that in some instances the explanation lies in that adverb 'currently'. Some of these coalitions were initially formed several years ago, when their councils' arithmetic was rather different, and it might be argued that today's arithmetic would produce a different outcome. Perhaps – although the arithmetic of the council with which I personally am most familiar, Birmingham, after seven years of Conservative/Liberal Democratic control, happens to be back almost exactly where it

started in 2004: Conservatives 39, Labour 53, Lib Dems 28. It is possible that the various party leaderships would behave in different ways today, but they would not be prompted to simply by the figures. Which, of course, raises the tantalising question: what might be the outcome at Westminster if the next General Election produces proportionally a near-identical result to that in 2010? Tantalising, but unfortunately I am already touching my word limit, so, here at least, it will have to remain rhetorical.

1. Leach S, and J. Stewart (1993), "The Politics of Hung Authorities", Public Administration, volume 71, issue 3, pp. 455-466. (DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9299.1993.tb00985.x)

## Figure 5: The 19 English local 'coalitions', July 2011

| Coalition | No. | Council | Party make-up of council | | | | Largest party% Y/N involved in the coalition | | Comment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | C | L | LD | Oth | | | |
| Cons/LD | 5 | Birmingham (MB) | 39 | 55 | 24 | 2 | 46 | N | Lab now largest party, but 2004 'Progressive Partnership' continues |
| | | Derby (U) | 15 | 22 | 12 | 2 | 43 | N | Lab now largest party, 2010 anti-Lab agreement continues |
| | | Redbridge (LB) | 29 | 26 | 7 | 1 | 46 | Y | LDs lose seats, 2010, but join previous Cons minority in anti-Lab coalition |
| | | Chorley (DC) | 23 | 20 | 2 | 2 | 49 | Y | Cons lose majority control, 2011, and recruit LDs |
| | | Newcastle-u -Lyme (DC) | 20 | 25 | 12 | 4 | 42 | N | Lab, now largest party, was 'open to offers', but C/LD coalition continues |
| Cons/ Ind | 4 | Cornwall (U) | 47 | 1 | 40 | 35 | 38 (30 Ind) | Y | Coalition formed 2009 when county became unitary |
| | | Eden (DC) | 16 | 0 | 9 | 13 | 42 | Y | Now leader/exec system; pre-2009, unique Joint Leader '4th Option' |
| | | Mole Valley (DC) | 17 | 0 | 18 | 6 | 44 | N | LDs largest party, but previous Cons minority prefer coalition with Indep |
| | | Staffs Moorlands (DC) | 23 | 7 | 4 | 19 | 41 (11 Ind) | Y | Cons lose seats, 2011, but Cons/Ind Alliance continues |
| Lab/ Green | 1 | Lancaster (DC) | 15 | 24 | 0 | 20 | 40 (8 Grn) | Y | LDs lose all seats, 2011; L/G 'joint arrangement' replaces all-party cabinet |
| Lab/Ind | 1 | Stockton-on -Tees (U) | 12 | 27 | 4 | 13 | 48 (4 IBIS) | Y | Lab just short of majority; L/IBIS coalition replaces 'rainbow coalition' |
| Lab/LD | 1 | Calderdale (MB) | 21 | 13 | 13 | 4 | 41 | N | Continuation of coalition that displaced Cons minority in 2010 |
| LD/Ind | 1 | North Devon (DC) | 18 | 0 | 14 | 10 | 42 | N | Indeps gain seats, overthrow Cons majority, join with LD |
| Cons/ Lab/Ind | 1 | Cumbria (CC) | 39 | 24 | 15 | 6 | 46 | Y | Lab lose minority control in 2009 and join in Cons/ Indep coalition |
| Cons/ Ind/LD | 1 | Scarborough (DC) | 25 | 6 | 3 | 16 | 50 | Y | Minor seat changes, 2007 anti-Lab coalition continues |
| Lab/LD/ Cons | 2 | Sefton (MB) | 14 | 28 | 23 | 1 | 42 | Y | LDs lose seats, 2011, 25-yr all-party coalition continues |
| | | Broxtowe (DC) | 18 | 17 | 9 | 0 | 41 | Y | Lab now lead party in L/LD coalition, offer Cons non-portfolio seats in cabinet |
| LD/Lab /Ind | 1 | Colchester (DC) | 24 | 7 | 26 | 3 | 43 | Y | No seats change hands, 2008 anti-Cons coalition continues |
| Con/LD/ Ind/Lab | 1 | Babergh (DC) | 18 | 3 | 12 | 10 | 42 | Y | No executive, but all political groups represented on Strategy Committee |

Note: IBIS = Ingleby Barwick Independent Society, one of three such Associations/Societies currently represented on Stockton-on-Tees Council.

## Figure 6: The 38 English 'minority control' administrations, July 2011

| Party in MC | Council | Party make-up of council | | | | Total | MC party % of total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | C | L | LD | Other | | |
| Lib Dem | Bath & N E Somerset (U) | 29 | 5 | 29 | 2 | 65 | 45 |
| Green | Brighton & Hove (U) | 18 | 13 | 0 | 23 Gr | 54 | 43 |
| Lib Dem | Bristol (U) | 14 | 21 | 32 | 2 | 70 | 46 |
| Conservative | Milton Keynes (U) | 21 | 9 | 18 | 3 | 51 | 41 |
| Labour | North East Lincolnshire (U) | 14 | 19 | 9 | 0 | 42 | 45 |
| Lib Dem | Northumberland (U) | 17 | 17 | 25 | 8 | 67 | 37 |
| Conservative | Poole (U) | 21 | 0 | 18 | 3 | 42 | 50 |
| Labour | Reading (U) | 16 | 22 | 5 | 3 | 46 | 48 |
| Conservative | South Gloucestershire (U) | 34 | 15 | 21 | 0 | 70 | 49 |
| Labour | Thurrock (U) | 22 | 24 | 0 | 3 | 49 | 49 |
| Labour | Merton (LB) | 27 | 28 | 2 | 3 | 60 | 47 |
| Labour | Bradford (MB) | 28 | 44 | 11 | 7 | 90 | 49 |
| Labour | Kirklees (MB) | 22 | 27 | 14 | 6 | 69 | 39 |
| Lib Dem | Stockport (MB) | 11 | 18 | 30 | 4 | 63 | 48 |
| Conservative | Walsall (MB) | 28 | 26 | 5 | 1 | 60 | 47 |
| Labour | Wirral (MB) | 27 | 30 | 9 | 0 | 66 | 45 |
| Labour | Allerdale (DC) | 12 | 28 | 0 | 16 | 56 | 50 |
| Lib Dem | Burnley (DC) | 5 | 18 | 21 | 1 | 45 | 47 |
| Labour | Cannock Chase (DC) | 13 | 17 | 11 | 0 | 41 | 41 |
| Conservative | Carlisle (DC) | 22* | 24 | 4 | 2 | 52 | 42 |
| Conservative | East Lindsey (DC) | 30 | 10 | 2 | 18 | 60 | 50 |
| Conservative | Forest of Dean (DC) | 19 | 17 | 1 | 11 | 48 | 40 |
| Labour | Exeter (DC) | 11 | 19 | 9 | 1 | 40 | 48 |
| Labour | High Peak (DC) | 15 | 21 | 3 | 4 | 43 | 49 |
| Conservative | Newark & Sherwood (DC) | 22 | 15 | 3 | 6 | 46 | 48 |
| Labour | Norwich (DC) | 2 | 18 | 4 | 15 | 39 | 46 |
| Labour | Nuneaton & Bedworth (DC) | 14 | 16 | 0 | 3 | 34 | 47 |
| Conservative | Pendle (DC) | 18 | 16 | 12 | 3 | 49 | 37 |
| Lib Dem | Purbeck (DC) | 12 | 0 | 10 | 2 | 24 | 50 |
| Independent | Richmondshire (DC) | 14 | 0 | 4 | 16 | 34 | 47 |
| Labour | Rossendale (DC) | 16 | 17 | 2 | 1 | 36 | 47 |
| Conservative | St Albans (DC) | 29 | 3 | 24 | 2 | 58 | 50 |
| Conservative | Taunton Deane (DC) | 28 | 3 | 23 | 2 | 56 | 50 |
| Conservative | Thanet (DC) | 27 | 26 | 0 | 3 | 56 | 48 |
| Conservative | Torridge (DC) | 18 | 1 | 16 | 11 | 36 | 50 |
| Conservative | Waveney (DC) | 23 | 23 | 0 | 2 | 48 | 48 |
| Conservative | Weymouth & Portland (DC) | 16 | 7 | 10 | 3 | 36 | 44 |
| Conservative | Winchester (DC) | 27 | 1 | 27 | 2 | 57 | 47 |

Note: * = second largest party, with informal support of Liberal Democrats

# The Coalition Government: How likely was it? How long will it last?[1]

**Chris Hanretty**

As the other contributors to this volume have so ably demonstrated, coalition governments are relatively rare at Westminster. Britain is anomalous in this respect. Most governments in parliamentary democracies are coalition governments: around two-thirds, by one count.

Because coalition governments are so relatively common, political scientists have spent considerable time and effort explaining coalitions. We know about the distribution of the benefits of coalition (ministerial office): parties get ministries in broad proportion to their share of seats in the governing coalition, irrespective of the salience of each portfolio. We know about the distribution of costs of coalition, in terms of the average deterioration in parties' vote-shares as they stay in potentially loveless coalitions. Given information on parties' positions in a range of dimensions, we can even make attempts at predicting which parties will get which ministries and how parties will keep tabs on each other.

Much of this effort has been distilled into formal and statistical models. These models have mostly been used to test claims about the impact of certain factors. Here, I use off-the-shelf models to make one retro-diction and one prediction about the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. My retro-diction is this: the current government was always the government most likely to form given the results of the 2010 election; an alternative 'rainbow' coalition would have been wildly improbably. My prediction is this: the current government can expect to last just over four years, but has only a one in three chance of going the full five years of the Parliament. These odds have improved since the passage of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act.

These claims are intended to be provocative, but are based on firmly established research. They are what one would expect if Britain were just another European parliamentary democracy - which of course it is.

## Predicting who got in

There are lots of possible governments out there. Indeed, the number of possible governments grows exponentially with the number of parties represented in parliament: there are 1023 different combinations of the ten parties represented in parliament.

We can predict which of these possible governments will become an actual government by considering certain characteristics of these possible governments. Broadly, a government is more likely to form if it has a majority; is not oversized; and if the parties involved are adjacent to each other along some dimension of policy.

The first of these characteristics is uncontroversial. Majority governments are more likely to form, other things being equal. Whilst minority governments do form, this is often because there is no coherent majority alternative. The second of these characteristics requires explanation. Political scientists describe a coalition as oversized if it contains parties which are not numerically necessary for that coalition to have a majority. In Australia, the first Howard government (1996-1998), a coalition between the Liberal Party and the National Party, was oversized. Oversized coalitions are less likely to form because it involves splitting the cake into more (hence smaller) slices.

The third of these characteristics is also intuitive. Consider a Conservative-Labour `national unity' government. This government is unlikely because there is clear blue water between the parties on the left-right dimension. Rather, there is clear yellow water between the parties, because the Liberal Democrats are positioned in between Labour and Conservative, making them non-adjacent. If a coalition is composed of parties which are adjacent on some dimension - typically but not necessarily the left-right dimension - then we describe it as connected, and believe it to be more likely to form.

The current coalition fares well on this analysis. It has all three desirable characteristics: it commands a majority, it is not oversized (it would cease to have a majority if either party left), and it is connected. This does not mean, however, that we should immediately plump for this coalition as the most likely to form. Consider the rainbow coalition composed of Labour, Liberal Democrats, one (but not both) nationalist party and the Greens. This grouping commands a majority – under the assumption that Sinn Féin MPs do not take up their seats, only 323 seats are required for a majority, and this coalition has 324; is not over-sized; and, though there may be disagreement about the relative placement of the SNP and Plaid Cymru, is connected, cutting a broad centre-left swathe across the political map. In other words, we cannot, on the basis of these simple characteristics, identify a single most probable outcome.

In order to identify a single most probable outcome, and to be more specific about the degree of probability of these different outcomes, we must resort to a relatively complicated statistical model. The model I use is called a Conditional Logit Model. It is used to predict discrete outcomes on the basis of certain variables. In market research, it is often used to predict product choice on the basis of a select number of variables. These might include product price, product placement, visual appeal, and so on. Here, we are predicting coalition formation on the basis of all of the characteristics mentioned above, plus a number of other variables which are hard to reduce to rules:

- the ideological range of the putative coalition
- the ideological range of the putative opposition
- the number of parties in the coalition
- whether or not the coalition has the largest party
- whether or not the coalition has the median party on the left-right dimension

This model - which is taken from a well-respected article in the literature on coalition formation - was trained, or estimated, on a large number of coalition outcomes across parliamentary democracies. The resulting model was thus used to generate predictions about the likelihood of different coalitions forming given the results of the 2010 election. The model predictions were as follows:

- the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition was always the most likely option, with a two in five chance of forming
- a Conservative-Labour grand coalition was the next most likely outcome, with a seven in forty chance of forming
- a Conservative minority government had a one in ten chance of forming
- the probability of a non-Conservative government including Labour and the Liberal Democrats was extremely low, at around three in one hundred

Because of the large number of possible outcomes, a large number of low probability outcomes complete the list.

These results are helpful because they suggest that what seemed improbable or unusual at 8am on the morning after the election ought, in retrospect, to have been seen as a more likely outcome. They are also helpful because they suggest that those who were still talking of a rainbow coalition on the weekend after the election were most probably not displaying their normal levels of perspicacity.

## Predicting how long it will last

Once the coalition formed, a key issue arose surrounding its durability. Might not the coalition be a marriage of convenience, with a quickie divorce to follow once - happy was the hope - Cameron and Osborne had ridden out the economic storm? This suspicion was likely instrumental in the passage of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act.

The passage of the Act is important - not least because only a minority of post-war governments have ever lasted the maximum possible parliamentary term. Using a standard definition of cabinet termination,[2] where a new government starts with a new election, or with a change in prime minister, or with a change in the party composition of the government, there have been twenty-three post-war governments in the UK, with an average duration of 1015 days, or 1060 days if one excludes the very short government led by Anthony Eden prior to the 1955 election. Of these twenty-three governments, just five - Attlee, Douglas-Home, Major I, Major II, and Brown - have ended because parliament needed to be dissolved. Just over half - twelve - have ended because of elections called when Parliament was dissolved early. Two - Thatcher III and Blair III - have ended because of struggles within the governing party.

Predicting the duration of cabinets is another classic topic in the study of coalitions and of cabinets more generally. Many of the factors which explain why a given coalition is likely to form also explain how long it will last once it does form. Like the study of coalition formation, these factors can be encapsulated in a statistical model. Here, I use a Weibull Survival Model. These models have many applications - from estimating the failure time of jet engines or industrial parts, to the survival of post-operative patients. Here, we are interested in the probability of the coalition surviving past a certain date.

The model I use includes a variety of variables which have been selected from a much larger bank of variables. That is, it is a best available theoretically justified model we have - though I have debauched the model somewhat by adding in a (theoretically-unmotivated) dummy variable to capture the country-specific effect of the UK.

The model includes seventeen different variables:

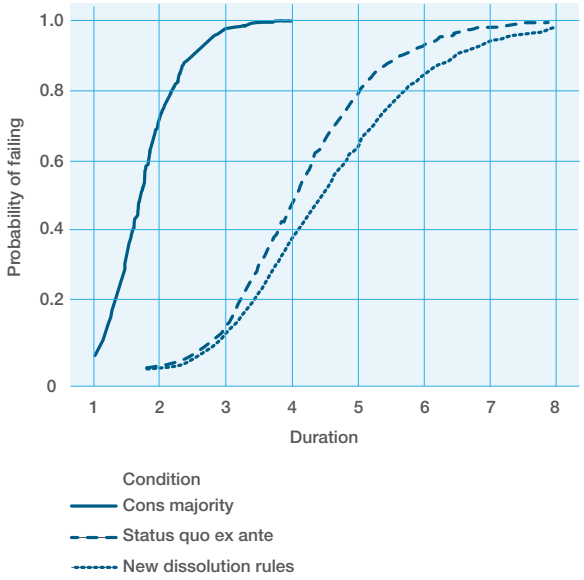
- five variables connected to the status and composition of the government: whether or not the government has a majority; whether or not the government is a coalition; whether or not the government coalition is minimal winning; whether or not the government is connected; whether or not the government coalition includes the party with the largest bargaining power[3]
- seven variables connected to the institutional rules of the polity: whether investiture votes are required; the degree of opposition influence; whether cabinet decisions require unanimity; whether the prime minister can dissolve parliament; whether the parliament is bicameral or not; whether the system is semi-presidential or not; and the maximum possible duration of a government
- three variables relating to the party system: the effective number of parliamentary parties; whether or not the government is conservative or not; the `effective number of issue dimensions'
- a dummy variable for the UK

By setting different values for these variables, we can estimate the predicted life-span of different cabinets:

- A Conservative minority government, with the prime minister retaining the power to dissolve Parliament
- A Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, with the prime minister retaining the power to dissolve Parliament (the status quo ex ante)
- A Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, with no prime ministerial power to dissolve Parliament

The figure shows the percentage probability of government failure for a given length in office for these three different scenarios.

## Figure: Predicted probability of failure




As can be seen from the figure, a Conservative minority government is the most brittle. Such a government is almost certain to last a full year, should it wish it; but the odds of it lasting much longer than that decrease rapidly, and we would probably to expect it to fall after a year and eight months, or some time in winter 2011/2012.

The two coalition scenarios are more durable - although not as durable as the coalition parties might hope. We would expect a coalition government with the old rules on dissolution to fall after almost four years exactly - or some time in May 2014. Yet the new rules on dissolution would mean a government which was only likely to last four of five months longer, collapsing in the autumn of 2014. Admittedly, the new rules on dissolution do increase the odds of the coalition lasting a full five years. Under the old rules, the probability of a full term coalition is low, at around 20%. Under the proposed rules, the probability of a full term coalition is still low, but is now much better at almost one in three.

1. An extended version with full details on the models used can be found at http://chrishanretty.co.uk/blog/index.php/2011/06/23/coalition-has-one-in-three-chance-of-going-the-distance/.
2. Strom, K., Müller, W., and Bergman, T. (2010). Cabinets and Coalition Bargaining: The Democractic Life Cycle in Western Europe. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3. As calculated using the Banzhaf index of voting power. The party with the largest bargaining power is often though not always the party with the largest number of seats.

# Inside story: How the Coalition really works

**Robert Hazell** and **Ben Yong**

This article reports some initial findings from the Constitution Unit's latest project, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, which is looking at how the UK's new coalition government works. With the support of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and the Cabinet Secretary, we have interviewed over 100 ministers, their advisers, civil servants, and parliamentarians to find out how coalition government works from the inside.

We address four main questions:

- Who won the coalition negotiations?
- How does the coalition work at the centre of Whitehall?
- How does the coalition work in Whitehall departments?
- How can the two parties in coalition demonstrate their distinct identities?

## Who won and who lost in the coalition negotiations?

Coalition negotiations are about the division of office, and of policy. During the five days in May 2010 the Conservative and Liberal Democrat negotiators focused first on policy. Only when the coalition agreement was concluded did David Cameron and Nick Clegg discuss the division of jobs.

In terms of policy, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats contributed equally to the initial coalition agreement, but the Conservatives were preponderant in the more detailed Programme for Government. Constitution Unit analysis has shown that 70% of the coalition agreement derived from Conservative commitments, and 63% from the Liberal Democrats (with 40% coming from both). But the Programme for Government was 75% Conservative and only 43% Liberal Democrat.

The Liberal Democrats also did well in the division of ministerial posts (see Figure 1), gaining 22% of the seats in Cabinet, and 19% of other frontbench positions, while their proportionate share of coalition MPs was 16%. But by going for breadth over depth, seeking to place a Liberal Democrat minister in almost every Whitehall department, the Lib Dems may have spread themselves too thinly. Their objective was to influence every aspect of government policy. They may have achieved this, but it is very difficult to demonstrate to the public. The problem of distinctiveness, especially for the junior coalition partner, is a theme running throughout this article.

## The Coalition at the centre in Whitehall

The first year of the new government was remarkably successful in terms of how coalition relations were managed (see Figure 2). Both parties worked really hard to ensure the coalition works, especially at the centre. David Cameron and Nick Clegg set the tone for those around them. They and their advisers quickly built up high levels of trust and close working relationships, in marked contrast to the distrust and infighting which disfigured the Blair/Brown years.

### The formal machinery: revival of Cabinet government, but little use of Coalition Committees

The coalition had expected to make use of the formal Cabinet machinery to discuss coalition issues and resolve coalition disputes. Cabinet and its committees have been greatly revived, with strong Liberal Democrat representation on every committee. But most of the differences resolved in Cabinet committees are interdepartmental issues, not differences between the coalition parties.

Two committees were created specifically to manage coalition issues. The first is the Coalition Committee, intended to be the final arbiter of any coalition dispute. Co-chaired by the Prime Minister and the Deputy PM, it has equal representation from both parties. In practice the Coalition Committee has met only twice, early on, to establish ground rules about coalition management. It has not met since because there have been no formal coalition disputes. Coalition issues are resolved in informal meetings, not in Cabinet or its committees.

The second coalition committee is the smaller Coalition Operations and Strategic Planning Group chaired by Oliver Letwin and Danny Alexander. It was intended to be the engine room of the coalition, meeting weekly. But it too has hardly met. Letwin and Alexander's informal bilateral meetings have supplanted the need for meetings of COSPG.

**The informal machinery, in half a dozen different informal forums**

In practice, almost all coalition brokerage takes place outside formal machinery. Any coalition issues should have been spotted well before they reach Cabinet Committee level. Our interviews show that coalition issues are resolved in half a dozen different forums, which are set out below in order of importance.

- Prime Minister/Deputy Prime Minister bilaterals

This is where all the big coalition issues get decided. The meetings take place once a week, on Monday mornings, with a preparatory chiefs of staff meeting on Thursday or Friday. Cabinet colleagues and officials can ask for items to go on the agenda to get resolved at this level.

- The Quad: PM/DPM plus the Chancellor and Chief Secretary to the Treasury

The Quad of David Cameron, Nick Clegg, George Osborne and Danny Alexander is the main forum for resolving any coalition issues which have spending implications. It first came into being for the comprehensive spending review, in the summer and autumn of 2010, supplanting the role of the Coalition Committee.

- Oliver Letwin/Danny Alexander

The next level is Oliver Letwin, Minister of State in the Cabinet Office, and Danny Alexander, now Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Letwin was the Conservatives' director of policy and in charge of writing the Conservative manifesto. Alexander was his opposite number in the Lib Dems: the man in charge of writing the Liberal Democrat manifesto, and Nick Clegg's Chief of Staff. Both men command a high degree of trust from their respective masters, and their frequent meetings are a crucial part of the coalition's negotiating machinery.

- Ed Llewellyn/Jonny Oates; and Jeremy Heywood/Chris Wormald

The next levels are two pairs of people working for the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister: their top advisers, and top officials. The top advisers are the PM and DPM's respective Chiefs of Staff, Ed Llewellyn and Jonny Oates. They talk to each other several times a day, resolving coalition issues on party political matters such as speeches, or administrative matters such as special advisers. Working very closely with them are Jeremy Heywood and Chris Wormald, the two senior officials supporting Cameron and Clegg. Heywood is the Permanent Secretary in No 10, and Wormald became Clegg's top official in October 2010.

## The coalition in Whitehall departments

Our interviews in departments suggest that the coalition has made limited difference to the daily workings of Whitehall. There have been very few cases where Ministers in departments have divided on party lines. Indeed across whole swathes of policy the coalition partners have discovered little difference in their policy responses when confronted with the hard

choices of government. Serious disagreements are as often between ministers of the same party, in classic interdepartmental disputes (e.g. Ken Clarke vs Theresa May on justice versus security; Vince Cable vs Chris Huhne on business resistance to climate change policies).

Three Whitehall departments are headed by Liberal Democrat Cabinet ministers (Business, Innovation and Skills; Energy and Climate Change; and the Scotland Office), with a fourth Lib Dem Cabinet minister as Chief Secretary to the Treasury. The more normal pattern is for a Conservative Secretary of State to be paired with a Liberal Democrat junior minister. Ten Whitehall departments have Lib Dem junior ministers, but their role remains problematic. The Lib Dem junior minister is meant to have a watching brief over all departmental business to ensure that policy is 'coalitionised' on behalf of the junior coalition partner. In practice many Lib Dem junior ministers struggle to perform this role, because of insufficient support. Their private office is much smaller than that serving a Secretary of State, and they lack special advisers of their own. Various ad hoc solutions have been tried, with some calling on their parliamentary researcher, and a couple of departments have given them an additional policy adviser from the civil service.

Whether a Liberal Democrat junior minister can exercise this watchdog function depends primarily on the attitude taken by the Secretary of State. Success stories include Michael Gove working with Sarah Teather in the Department for Education, and Andrew Lansley working with Paul Burstow in the Department of Health. At the other end of the scale, the most problematic department in coalition terms is the Home Office, where the Lib Dem Parliamentary Under-Secretary Lynne Featherstone is marginalised by Theresa May. If the Secretary of State does not wish to involve a junior minister, the coalition agreement cannot make it happen.

The coalition gap is filled by Nick Clegg's office at the centre, which has to intervene a lot in Home Office business. The same happens with those five departments (DEFRA, DCMS, DfID, NIO, WO) where there is no Lib Dem minister at all. Clegg's staff report few problems with DfID, NIO or WO, because in these subject areas there are no real policy differences between the coalition partners. In DCMS and in DEFRA the Lib Dems' parliamentary party committees also play a role in monitoring. Don Foster MP, co-chair of the party's policy committee, is in and out of DCMS several times a week, and his contribution is welcomed by the Secretary of State. In relation to DEFRA Andrew George MP plays a similar but lesser role.

## Expressing greater party distinctiveness

The coalition's big achievement in the first year was to establish a government which is remarkably harmonious, effective and decisive. Cabinet government has been restored, and across Whitehall policy has been 'coalitionised'. That has not prevented political misjudgements, with university tuition fees, the NHS reforms and the sell off of forests being prime examples. But these were the product of excessive haste in the government's first year, and the lack of external consultation. Despite stronger internal checks and balances, coalition governments still make mistakes, like other governments.

For the Liberal Democrats the top priority in the first year was to show that coalition government works. Going forward, the challenge will be to demonstrate their party's distinctiveness. Their policies and their influence are eclipsed by the actions of the larger party; it is difficult to demonstrate influence when this consists of stopping the Conservatives from doing something worse. A final problem is that the very informality of the coalition's decision making procedures means that they are seldom able explicitly to demonstrate what their impact has been.

The Liberal Democrats know that they must distinguish themselves more sharply in future, but they will find it very difficult to do so. First, it requires a volte face in terms of their behaviour: having been civilised coalition partners, they must reinvent themselves as much more assertive, and occasionally downright nasty. Second, if they manage to transform themselves into Mr Nasty, they run the risk that coalition government will then be seen as quarrelsome and divisive, putting at risk all the unifying achievements of Year One. Third, their loss of state funding has drastically cut their capacity to broadcast their distinctiveness to the outside world. The government press machine cannot help, since it can only issue government press statements about unified government policy.

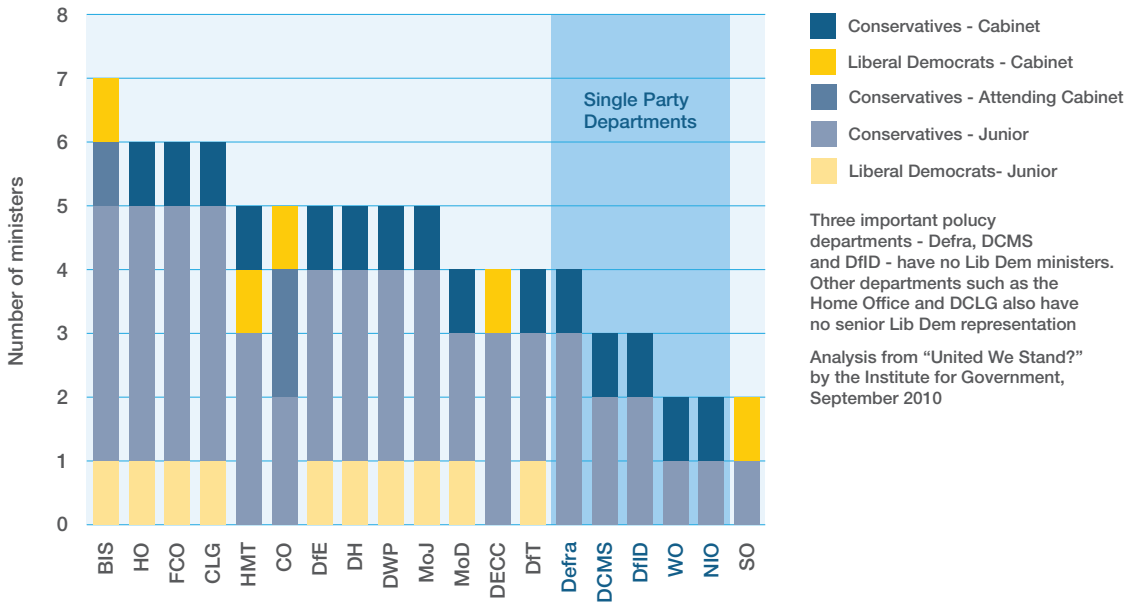
Fourth, and most fundamentally, their problems are compounded by the initial decision of the Liberal Democrat leadership to go for breadth of ministerial representation rather than depth. This breadth of representation makes it much harder for the Lib Dems to point to big policy areas where they have made a difference, because they are broadly but thinly spread. They may indeed have achieved hundreds of small wins, but most of them are doomed to remain invisible to the outside world.

The Conservatives also face the issue of distinctiveness, but to a much lesser extent. They do not face the problem of being subsumed by a larger body, but rather the problem of the sharp boundaries of their core identity being blurred, their policies being 'watered down', and accusations of the tail wagging the dog. That is certainly the perception of many Conservative parliamentarians, and of Conservative cheerleaders in the right wing press and blogosphere.

If the Lib Dems are to distinguish themselves more effectively, they must go back to the division of office, and the division of policy. Division of policy could take place through a formal review of the coalition agreement, to develop a revised programme for government ('Coalition 2.0') for the second half of the Parliament. Those plans now seem to be in abeyance. It would run completely counter to the Lib Dems' attempts to distinguish themselves, if they were seen to be getting even more firmly into bed with the Conservatives. So the development of separate Liberal Democrat policy is likely to take place in their new party parliamentary committees, feeding into the party's federal policy committee.

Revisiting the division of office cannot happen until the next ministerial reshuffle. Here Nick Clegg's room for manoeuvre seems limited, because one third of Lib Dem MPs are already in the government. Most observers say that (with one or two exceptions) none of the remaining Lib Dem backbenchers would make good ministers. But there are two respects in which he could strike out in a different direction. One would be to look to the bigger pool of talent in the House of Lords, where the Lib Dems have 90 peers. They include plenty of senior figures with leadership experience, quite capable of holding their own with a Conservative Secretary of State. The other would be to revisit the issue of breadth versus depth. If the Liberal Democrats want to make a difference which is visible to the electorate, they may need to think about concentrating their ministerial effort in a few key departments or policy areas, rather than dispersing themselves widely across Whitehall.

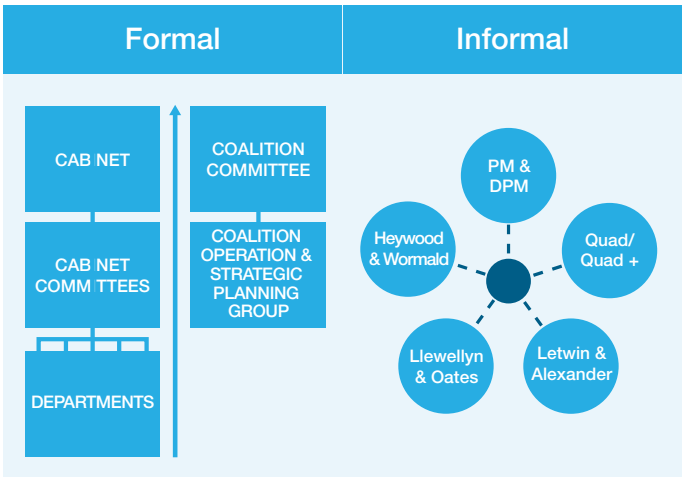
## Figure 1: Party share of ministerial office




Three important polucy departments - Defra, DCMS and DfID - have no Lib Dem ministers. Other departments such as the Home Office and DCLG also have no senior Lib Dem representation

Analysis from "United We Stand?" by the Institute for Government, September 2010

## Figure 2: The Coalition at the centre in Whitehall - formal and informal machinery




1. This article was first published in the Political Studies Association magazine, Political Insight, volume 2, issue 2, September 2011, pp. 4-6: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pins.2011.2.issue-2/issuetoc

# The Coalition's wobbly wings: Backbench dissent in the Commons since May 2010

**Philip Cowley** and **Mark Stuart**

From the start of the new Parliament on 18 May 2010 through to the summer recess in 2011, there were some 331 divisions (votes) in the House of Commons. Of these, there were rebellions by Coalition MPs in 147 divisions. That is a rate of rebellion of 45%, simply without parallel in the post-war era.

## The size of backbench rebellion

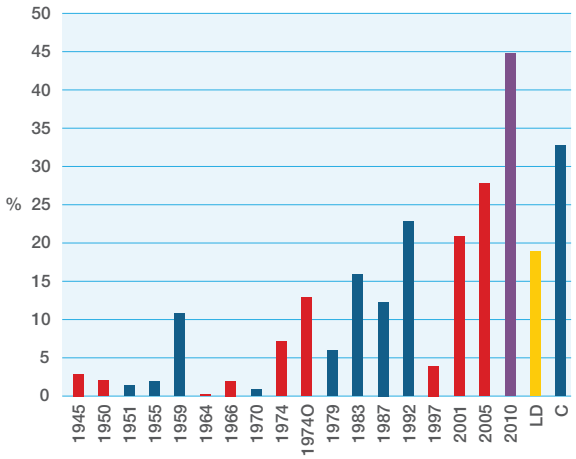
In the first four parliaments after the end of the Second World War (those of 1945, 1950, 1951 and 1955), the rate of rebellion by government MPs never rose above one backbench revolt every ten divisions (indeed, the majority of sessions between 1945 and 1959 saw a rate of below one in twenty). That remained largely true in the next three Parliaments – those of 1959, 1964 and 1966 – although there were five sessions in which the percentage of divisions witnessing dissent by government MPs rose marginally above 10%. Backbench rebellion then increased noticeably during the Premiership of Edward Heath, with a government rebellion in almost one in five of the divisions between 1970 and 1974, and increased yet further during the Labour governments of 1974 to 1979 (to 21% overall, but reaching 30% and 36% in the final two sessions of the Parliament). Backbench dissent fell back somewhat during the Thatcher and Major years – although never to pre-1970 levels – and then slowly began to pick up again during the post-1997 Labour governments, rising from a rebellion in 8% of divisions (1997-2001) to 21% (2001-5) to a post-war peak of 28% (2005-10).

The current rate of 45% in the 2010 Parliament is therefore extremely atypical, with the parliament on course to be a record breaker. Whilst individual issues can often generate particularly high levels of dissent over a short time period, what will concern the government whips is that dissent by Coalition MPs has now been running at this high rate for almost the entire parliament; indeed between September 2010 and February 2011, the rate of dissent consistently exceeded 50%.

This, of course, is the figure for the coalition as a whole, and it could be argued that it is unfair to compare data for dissent from two parties with historic data from individual parties. However, even if we break down the overall figure of 45% into its component parts, it remains high. Conservative MPs have broken ranks in 33% of whipped votes; Lib Dem MPs have done so in 19%. (These two figures sum to more than 45%, because of some votes in which both parties have seen dissent, something considered further below).

Even these separate figures are very high by comparison with the historic dissent profile of government backbenchers. The Conservative rebellion rate of 33%, for example, is higher than the rate of rebellion by government MPs in all but four of the post-war sessions. Even the Lib Dem rate of 19% is higher than that seen by government MPs in the majority of post-war sessions. (It is also noticeably higher than the rate of rebellion seen by Lib Dems in any session for which we have data, going back to 1992-93 when the rate of rebellion was at 9%).

## Figure 1: % of divisions to see rebellion by government backbenchers, first sessions, 1945-2010




But perhaps the most striking difference, and in some ways the most revealing, is to compare rebellious behaviour in this session with behaviour in other first sessions. First sessions usually see relatively little dissent. It is in the first session that the government's authority is usually greatest. The discipline of the election campaign is still strong; and the fact that the government is implementing its manifesto is usually enough to prevent many MPs, even those who may disagree with the policies, from dissenting. There are also usually many new MPs, normally much less willing to defy the whips. The first session, then, is usually the calm before the storm.

Figure 1 (above) gives the percentage rate of rebellion in every first session since the war, and the contrast is obvious. The rebellion rate for coalition MPs collectively is way above all other first sessions. The contrast becomes even clearer when you compare current behavior to the first sessions of parliaments following a change in government. Between 1945 and 1997, the six sessions immediately after a change in government saw rates of rebellion between zero (1964) and 6% (1979). The current rate of rebellion is therefore more than seven times what had until now been the post-war peak. Even the figures for the Conservatives and Lib Dems separately are more than five and three times the post-war peak respectively.

In part, the explanation for these high levels of dissent is that the coalition's MPs occupy a broader ideological range than single-party governments (even the broad churches that are British political parties are not quite as broad as the range between the left of the Liberal Democrats and the right of the Conservatives). Yet it is also that many of the rhetorical weapons that would normally be deployed during the early stages of a parliament are currently absent. It is, for example, no use telling would-be rebels that they need to buckle down and support legislation because it was in the party's manifesto – because in many cases the coalition are doing things that were not in a party's manifesto (sometimes indeed introducing measures that are the opposite of manifesto pledges). In many cases it is the would-be rebels who are able to claim the legitimacy of the manifesto. Nor is it any good, for example, telling Conservative MPs that they need to buckle down and support the Prime Minister who won them the election – because the Prime Minister did not win the election. Indeed, some Conservative MPs think that he lost them the election, and do not see that they owe him much loyalty as a result.

Added to that is what we call the 'Norman Baker factor'. This is the disgruntlement felt by Conservative MPs who served their party loyally during Opposition and had expected a position in government, only then to discover that not only were they not going to get any such post, but they were going to lose out to a Lib Dem instead. After the 2010 election, 24 Conservative MPs who had served in junior Opposition posts lost out on promotion because of the need to shoehorn Lib Dem MPs into Government jobs. Eleven missed out altogether; and of these eight have voted against the Government already. (The remaining thirteen were given the consolation prize of the lowest possible job on the ministerial ladder – that of parliamentary

private secretary. How long they will tolerate being a glorified bag carrier is a moot point). To see Norman Baker – not a Lib Dem minister thought of highly amongst Conservatives – getting into a ministerial car does not help bind the ranks together.

## The rebels

A total of 116 Coalition MPs have voted against their whip thus far. Most (just under three-quarters) of these are Conservatives, but this is not surprising, given that there have been more Conservative rebellions and there are anyway more Conservative MPs. Perhaps more worrying for the Conservative whips is that Conservatives also account for all of the most rebellious MPs. The ten most rebellious coalition MPs are listed below – along with the number of times they have voted against the whip. Lib Dems are conspicuous by their absence. The most rebellious Lib Dem MP thus far is Mike Hancock, who sits just outside the top ten, but there is only one other Lib Dem apart from Hancock in the top 20. The rates of rebellion represented in Table 1 are very high in relative terms: Philip Hollobone has been rebelling at a rate of roughly one rebellion in every four votes. This is a much higher rate than, say, Jeremy Corbyn or Dennis Skinner, during the Blair or Brown premierships, and represents a serious fracture from the party leadership.

### Table 1: The most rebellious Coalition MPs

| Name | Dissenting votes |
|---|---|
| Philip Hollobone | 74 |
| David Nuttall | 54 |
| Philip Davies | 47 |
| Peter Bone | 40 |
| Richard Shepherd | 35 |
| Christopher Chope | 35 |
| William Cash | 35 |
| Andrew Turner | 34 |
| Bernard Jenkin | 28 |
| Julian Lewis | 24 |

Most of the names listed in Table 1 could have been predicted before the 2010 election; most have 'form' and were well known in the Whips' Office even before the Conservatives entered government. Yet what will also concern the government whips is the behaviour of their newer MPs. One of the most striking features of the House of Commons after the 2010 election was the number of newly-elected MPs. A full 36% of the House was newly-elected, including some 48% of Conservative MPs. In the past, newly elected MPs have tended to be relatively acquiescent – at least to begin with – but one of the most noticeable features about the 2010 cohort, especially on the Conservative side, is how troublesome they have been.

Of the 86 Conservative rebels, more than half are from the new intake, and between them the newbie Tory rebels have cast a whopping 249 rebellious votes, compared with a modest 23 for Labour, and only a slightly higher number, 27, for the Liberal Democrats. Tory newcomers have accounted for 31% of all the rebellious votes cast by Conservative MPs; new Lib Dems MPs account for 15% of all Lib Dem rebellions. This compares to a tiny 5% of the Labour total caused by new Labour MPs.

Yet whilst numerically smaller, rebellion is much more widespread amongst the Lib Dems. Just over a quarter of Conservative MPs have rebelled; but a total of 30 Lib Dems, over half the parliamentary party, have now done so. The Liberal Democrat parliamentary party currently comprises 57 MPs, but of these 22 (or 39%) are members of the payroll vote, either as ministers or parliamentary private secretaries, expected to remain loyal in voice but especially vote to the government. The Liberal Democrat 'backbench' therefore consists of 35 MPs. For 30 of these MPs to have voted against the Government therefore means that a whopping 86% of backbench Lib Dems have defied the whip. In fact, once you take into account Lib Dems known to have abstained on some votes,

there are just two Lib Dem backbenchers who have not yet rebelled in some form.

## The good news for the whips

The good news for the whips is that these two groups of rebels rarely coalesce. The two wobbly wings of the coalition mostly do not rebel at the same time. More than half of the coalition rebellions have seen Conservative MPs rebelling alone; just over a quarter have seen Lib Dem MPs rebelling alone, and fewer than one in five of the rebellions to date have seen dissent by both Lib Dem and Conservative MPs. This is because the two groups rebel on very different issues. More than 80% of Lib Dem rebellions have been on social policy (broadly defined), such as the increase in VAT, the introduction of free schools and the expansion of academies, and curbs to superannuation for civil servants. But more than 60% of Conservative rebellions are on constitutional policy (broadly defined), such as the bills relating to the introduction of AV and fixed-term parliaments. Of this last category, a big chunk (one in five of all Conservative rebellions) has been on Europe, rebellions which are double the average size of all Conservative rebellions.

The fact that Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs rarely combine to rebel against the government on the same issues is one of the reasons why the Coalition's majority has not yet been seriously threatened. In addition, although the frequency of rebellions is alarmingly high, the average rebellion is small, comprising just seven MPs. (The average Conservative rebellion is seven MPs, the average Liberal Democrat revolt is even lower at just three MPs).

Perhaps because it is the result of a coalition between two parties, the size of the Government's majority is often not appreciated. Even its formal majority of 76 is a substantial majority. Not quite of landslide proportion perhaps, but it is bigger than that enjoyed by Churchill after 1951, or by Eden, or by Wilson (except between 1966-70), or by Heath, or by Callaghan, or by Thatcher (in her first term, 1979-1983) or by Major (after 1992), or indeed by Blair and Brown (after 2005). Moreover, once you add in the non-sitting Sinn Fein MPs, plus the Speaker and his Deputies, and then note that the eight DUP MPs usually (though not always) vote with the government, the paper majority is close to 100.

In reality, because of votes in which Labour vote with the government or abstain, the (mean) average majority in practice has been an even larger 142.[2] In the majority of votes (some 238 votes so far), Labour oppose the government, and when they do the government's average majority has been 91 (with a median of 87). But when Labour abstain (44 votes), the majority averages 270 (median: 276); and when Labour support the government, the average majority rises to 421 (median: 450).[3] The most striking example of this occurred on 21 March this year when the Government won a vote endorsing military action in Libya by 557 votes to 13, thanks to the support of the Labour frontbench, producing the largest Coalition majority so far this Parliament of 544.

The consequences for any government backbench rebellion succeeding should be obvious. Even taking the paper majority as our guide, it would take 39 Coalition MPs to rebel to defeat the Government – but only if the Labour frontbench was to side with the rebels. There are plenty of issues on which 39 Conservative MPs might rebel, but there are fewer on which the Labour Party would be willing to join them. This is clear from Table 2, which shows the proportions of coalition rebellions to see Labour either vote against the government or abstain/support the government. Overall, 22% of coalition rebellions occurred when Labour was not voting against the government – and when there was therefore no chance of a defeat. But that figures rises to 37% of Conservative rebellions.

### Table 2: The direction of rebellions (column %)

| | All revolts | Con revolts | LD revolts |
|---|---|---|---|
| Labour against | 78 | 64 | 83 |
| Labour not against | 22 | 37 | 17 |

The hurdles in overturning a large in-built Coalition majority are even more acute for the Liberal Democrats. Lib Dem rebellions were more likely to take place when Labour was opposing the government, but because their backbench MPs number only 35, even if all of them vote against the Government with all the Opposition MPs, that would still not be enough to defeat the Government.

In practice, for the Government's majority to fall much below 50, both Conservative and Liberal Democrats need to rebel in decent numbers, with the support of the Labour frontbench and the minor parties. This has happened rarely since May 2010, and the Government's majority has only fallen below 50 on only six occasions in its first fifteen months in power.

## The bad news for the whips

Nevertheless, the Coalition is saddled with two wobbly wings, which require careful handling, and there are plenty of issues ahead in the immediate future that will ensure continued high levels of Coalition dissent.

And there are issues that can unite both of the coalition's wings. On 9 December 2010, over university tuition fees, 21 Liberal Democrat rebels combined with six Conservative backbenchers, the Labour frontbench and the minor parties, reducing the Government's majority to 21, the lowest Coalition majority thus this Parliament. The issue of allowing prisoners to vote also had the potential to unite both wings of the coalition (a vote which therefore the government ducked), as does the forthcoming boundary review.

And over time, the ranks of rebellious new MPs are bound to swell, unless the Government can create a whole raft of new jobs to keep its backbenchers occupied. We find it difficult to imagine the rate of rebellion remaining quite this high over the entire parliament – the whips will certainly hope not – but in parliamentary terms the government needs to brace itself.

1. Both authors are from the University of Nottingham, which has funded this research. Further details of the research project from which this chapter draws are available from www.revolts.co.uk. This is an updated version of the paper presented at the UEA/IfG 'Coaliton at One' conference.
2. This is the mean average in the 306 whipped votes to have taken place since the election; we have excluded the 25 occasions when Coalition MPs were given a free vote.
3. These three numbers do not sum to 306, as a result of one vote when the government was whipped, but Labour allowed a free vote.

# The Conservative Party and the Coalition

**Iain Dale**

When election night was over, I had the distinction of declaring live on LBC that if the Liberal Democrats got 57 seats or thereabouts I would run naked down Whitehall. I have to admit that I am yet to fulfil that promise. The point, though, is that for me it was clear during election night which way the wind was blowing and as someone who is, I would suggest, regarded as not necessarily on the Cameron side of the party, I almost surprised myself in that I instantly thought that with this result there would have to be a full Coalition or nothing – there could be no halfway house.

Those thoughts were, it seems, replicated fairly quickly by both David Cameron and Nick Clegg. They had to be the drivers of any Coalition, and it is very interesting when we look back at the relationship that existed between the two of them to see that actually, beforehand, there really was not much of a relationship. Although feelers had been put out by some of the people around them, they did not actually know each other well at the time. However, I think that what really facilitated the Coalition was the fact that the Conservatives had moved on to Liberal Democrat territory in policy terms, and the Liberal Democrats, to some degree certainly, had moved onto Conservative territory through the Orange Book Tendency.

During the two or three days of the negotiations immediately after the election, I was one of the few Conservative supporters on College Green. I conducted a virtually continuous tour of the different news channels, offering comment on what was going on. The main point I kept making was actually contrary to what most other commentators were saying – i.e. that there was far more in common between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats than most people seemed to understand at the time, and that that was the reason why I was relatively confident from the beginning that it would be possible for them to stitch a Coalition agreement together.

At that time new Conservative MPs – indeed, all Conservative MPs – had been put under a vow of silence by the party leadership and were told not to do interviews. As a consequence, it was just myself, Tim Montgomerie of Conservative Home, and one or two others who were providing the media with any kind of Conservative voice, although it was a totally unofficial and unauthorized one. Contrary to popular rumour at the time, I never had a daily phone call from Andy Coulson giving me my marching orders and telling me what to write on my blog. Not a single call. And actually, at times I was thinking it would have been quite useful to get such a call from him to say, “this is what we’re thinking”. It would have been rather helpful in steering the conversation.

Overall, it was an interesting few days. David Laws has written an excellent book about it – *22 Days in May* (which I published, incidentally) – and one of his observations, which I particularly agree with, is the significance of David Davis in this whole process. Had Davis not moved Conservative home affairs policy on to pseudo-Liberal Democrat territory in terms of civil liberties in his time as Shadow Home Secretary,

I am not sure it would have been as easy for the Liberal Democrats to bring themselves to sign up to a Coalition as in the end it proved to be. Furthermore, the fact that the Orange Book Tendency was in control of the Liberal Democrats (and still is) made it a lot easier for Conservatives to countenance the thought, particularly when it was people like David Laws who were driving the process, who most Conservatives believe is actually one of them.

Right from the beginning, though, despite the honeymoon press conference, it was clear that there would be difficulties along the way. I do not think anybody was in any doubt about that. Most Conservatives believed that the negotiating process that resulted in the Coalition had been "won" by the Liberal Democrats who out-negotiated the Conservative team in many policy areas. It helped that most of their people were actually used to negotiating – particularly David Laws and Chris Huhne – whereas if you look at the makeup of the Conservative team, they did not have much of a track record when it came to negotiating. So it was a really hard negotiation in that sense.

Consequently, I think most Conservative backbenchers and grassroots supporters felt that they had been out-manoeuvred in the negotiating process and they still feel that way to an extent. They still feel that the Liberal Democrats have far too much influence over policy in the Government, and if you look at the accounts that have been written of those negotiations it is almost unbelievable that at no time up until the last 24 hours did anyone discuss the actual number of ministers that each party would have. It was just coupled together in a fairly short conversation between Nick Clegg and David Cameron at the end.

Now in many ways Nick Clegg got a good deal out of that. He got far more ministers, I think, than most Conservatives were comfortable with: five around the Cabinet table and another 17 or 18 in more junior positions. But I think the master stroke was actually by whoever on the Conservative side decided to have a Liberal Democrat in more or less every government department – I think only DfID does not have one but I cannot think of another. As a result, they are bound in to every single Government decision and I think that was absolutely crucial later on, particularly when it got sticky over tuition fees. The jobs they were all given were also significant. There were even rumours, apparently, that Vince Cable had put in a pitch to be Chancellor of the Exchequer. Looking back, imagine – if that had happened – how different things might have been, although he is still in a key economic portfolio. As things have transpired, though, because of the difficulties he had with the Daily Telegraph journalists, his influence has certainly been on the wane over the last few months.

In terms of economic policy, I believe it was incredibly important for there to be a senior Liberal Democrat in the Treasury. To begin with it was David Laws and in the first three weeks of the Government most people thought he was the star of the Coalition. Every Conservative I spoke to named him as the Cabinet minister they most respected – and I think most people were slightly incredulous when Danny Alexander replaced him. Having said that, though, I think most Conservatives today think Alexander has done quite a good job – he has not "gone wobbly", as Mrs. Thatcher once said about George Bush. Indeed, with the exception of Vince Cable, I think all of the Liberal Democrat Cabinet ministers have been, again, what Margaret Thatcher would have called "staunch".

They have not wobbled, and they understand the concept of collective responsibility, unlike most of their Parliamentary party, I am afraid to say. I think both Conservative and Liberal Democrat ministers have had to learn on the job, and some have found it more difficult than others.

For the Conservatives, meanwhile, if you look at the Conservative Home surveys and popularity of Cabinet ministers at the end of each month, it is interesting to see that Eric Pickles has been one of the stars, as has Ian Duncan Smith for the reforms that he is putting in place. In Duncan Smith's case, it helps that he no longer has any wider political ambitions and so in a sense he can actually do what he wants. At the same time, even though the Conservative Party has never really learned to love David Cameron, most people – whether they are loyal backbenchers, those with an axe to grind, or the grassroots of the party – feel that the job of Prime Minister fits him like a glove, in a way that it never did with Gordon Brown. There are a lot of Blairite analogies to be drawn, I think, between the way that David Cameron does the job and the way Tony Blair did it. Indeed, Oliver Letwin apparently said the other day that Blair's memoirs "are our bible". Any of you who have actually read them might be worried by that one! (I read them on a flight to Australia a couple of weeks ago – it was rather enjoyable but a very odd book, nonetheless.)

Relations between David Cameron and the Parliamentary Party have been at best lukewarm over the past year and at worst downright hostile because of course there were 20 or 30 very disillusioned people following the creation of the Coalition. People who had done the legwork in opposition but who did not subsequently get a job in government, and believe me, some of them are incredibly able people. If there has been dissent – and I am slightly surprised at the apparent lack of it – it is really those people that it encompasses, but you cannot really blame them. The fact of the matter is that Number Ten made no attempt to mollify or "cuddle" them and they should have done. There should have been a clear strategy: how do we make these people feel wanted? How do we make them feel that they are going to be valued in the future? Nothing was done until about six months afterwards when a reception was held in Number Ten, but by then it was far too late, and there remains a lot of resentment over that to this day.

The key issue for backbenchers is that they feel they cannot get to Cameron if they have ideas and that they are dismissed by his inner circle. This is something they felt in opposition too, and it is absolutely nothing new. At the same time, the voluntary party does not feel loved by Cameron, while the staff at Conservative Central Office feels very disillusioned because since the election I think he has only been there once. Part of the job of being a political leader is to make people feel enthused, feel wanted, and I think a lot of them, certainly the professional staff in the Conservative Party, do not feel that way now. For their part, the voluntary party recognized that there had to be a Coalition and although they are uncomfortable with certain aspects of it, I think they view it as a way, essentially, to smash the Liberal Democrats out of sight. And certainly, if you look at the opinion polls, their hopes might well come true in three or four years' time.

The fact of the matter is that most Conservatives think the Liberal Democrats have nowhere to go, particularly after they were trounced in the local elections. The AV referendum was a disaster for the Liberal Democrats and yet immediately after that they appeared to think that they had much more bargaining power in the Coalition. The reality is that they do not, and certainly Conservative ministers realize that.

Most Conservative ministers have actually developed very good working relationships with their Liberal Democrat colleagues. Chris Huhne is a good example. One Conservative minister said to me, "if I want something done and Chris Huhne tells me he's going to do it, I know he will deliver on it. He's someone I trust". This is something they would never have said that in opposition. The question remains, though, how long they will be able to say that in the future. But there is certainly a trust between among the members of the Cabinet which I really do not think has been reflected in many of the so-called "esteemed columns" that we read in our newspapers all the time which give the impression that their daggers are permanently drawn. That is simply not the reality in my view.

There have, of course, been things that have caused significant upset within both the parliamentary party and indeed the voluntary party. The "Big Society" is one. Nobody understands what it really means. They just about get the general concept but it was introduced too late in the political cycle. As Lynton Crosby would say, "you can't fatten the pig on market day". The voters simply do not get what it means. They see it as a cheap way of saving money by getting people to volunteer for things, and however many re-launches it has, this view does not seem to change. I think most of the parliamentary party considers this one of the biggest disappointments of the Coalition so far.

I have not yet mentioned the Labour Party, and I would like to say just a couple of things about them. For Labour, the key question is how quickly they get their act together, how quickly Miliband establishes a presence – which I do not think he has managed so far – and so how quickly he is really able to put together a sellable political programme. I do believe he has actually put the mechanics in place to do that, and they certainly have the people who are capable of doing it. It is going to be very interesting to see when in the electoral cycle they start rolling policy out. I think Miliband has started to perform well at PMQs and that has unsettled some in the parliamentary party because he is going for detail all the time. Cameron is a lot of things but he is not a details man – something which has actually served him quite well in the first year. However, I think Miliband has now discovered a chink in his armour.

My final observations concern the group who I believe will be the key people over the next three or four years: the 2010 intake of Conservative MPs. I thought that when they were elected they might well act almost as a splinter group and certainly be a real, cohesive force because after all they form well over half the parliamentary party. They certainly ought to be a major influence on it. I also thought that there were enough independent voices within that group to really have an impact and take Cameron to task if he failed to deliver more freedoms in Parliament, giving backbenchers more power, etc. While he has done that to an extent, it is certainly not anywhere near the extent that all of us thought he might. However, careerism has got the better of them, I am afraid – they are more interested in climbing the greasy pole than really pressing him on these issues.

There remains, though, a lot of discontent among the 2010 intake. I know personally that five of them are thinking of standing down at the next election because the job is not what they thought it would be. Now, perhaps they were naïve, but there is a lot of frustration and while some of this may be mitigated through promotions and reshuffles, we need to watch carefully exactly who is being promoted. I can say honestly that if it is just the usual Cameron suspects, that will cause a lot more dissatisfaction.

# Planning, positioning and policy process: Why coalition has tested relationships between the Liberal Democrat leadership and grassroots

**David Hall-Matthews**

Peacetime coalition in the UK is virtually unprecedented. No living politician, activist or commentator knew what to expect – and few had given serious thought to its likely implications, opportunities and threats. Liberal Democrats were no different from anyone else in this respect; but they should have been. They had by far the most to gain – and lose – from going into coalition. Indeed it had been obvious, at least since the failure of the Alliance to "break the mould" in 1983 – and arguably for sixty years before that – that the Lib Dems would need coalition to enter government. Nor was this only electoral realism. For some at least, it was a virtue in itself. For all its internal birth pains, the merger of the Liberal and Social Democratic Parties in the late 1980s offered voters an alternative to the highly polarised confrontational politics of the Thatcher years. Here were two parties willing to come together and – by implication at least – to work with others to develop policy consensually. This attracted many activists to the party in the intervening years – and has remained at least notionally popular with voters, as evidenced by the attempts of all prime ministers since Thatcher to reach out on occasion beyond their parties (albeit with mixed results) – and by the (ephemeral) enthusiasm with which Nick Clegg's call for "new politics" in the first General Election leadership debate was received.

So the Liberal Democrats had been ideologically and strategically wedded to the idea of coalition since their formation. Yet there appears to have been an almost complete absence of ideological or strategic planning within the party for what to do when the opportunity arose. Despite its extensive European connections, no survey of Liberal or third parties' experiences in coalition on the continent was mooted until after the UK coalition was formed. Ben Seyd's weighty decade-old analysis was not apparently widely read in Cowley Street.[1] Without such prior evidence-gathering – and debate – the Liberal Democrats found themselves in an unexpected coalition with the Conservatives with several different internal views as to how to handle it – none of them fully fleshed out or tested against each other. The only thing that had been thought through seriously was how – and on what – to bargain. As a result, the party negotiating team secured an impressive list of policy wins in the coalition agreement, but failed to raise key issues regarding the mechanics of coalition – including, above all, how new policy would be developed, negotiated and announced.

This paper thus briefly explores two areas of fundamental importance, in which the Liberal Democrat leadership has found itself at odds with the majority of party members and activists. First, conceptions of the nature, purpose and public presentation of coalition government itself – intensified by the fact of

coalition with the party's natural and historical opponents – the Tories. Second, policy-making processes – and in particular the importance of continuing work to develop Liberal Democrat policy, as distinct from government policy.

It became apparent to all Liberal Democrats very early in the coalition – if it had not before – that a junior party in government has to try and achieve three things that are in some ways contradictory. First, demonstrate that coalition government is good government; second, maximise input into government policy; and, third, retain a distinctive identity and a critical distance from the Conservatives (Hall-Matthews, 2010: 25-6).[2] Each goal can be – and has been – interpreted both positively and negatively. Good coalition government could be seen, positively, as an antidote to "Punch and Judy politics", in which politicians with differing views and priorities can be seen trying to work out solutions through compromise, rather than exaggerating each other's mistakes. Alternatively, coalition can be shown to work simply by overcoming the main charge levelled at it when it emerged as a real prospect during the 2010 election campaign – that it would be weak and unstable. It has clearly been Clegg's priority to show the coalition to be united. He has been remarkably successful in this, with only occasional outbursts from Vince Cable (resolutely on issues within his brief) upsetting the consensus. The current government is less divided in public than Labour was under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

However, such a defensive definition of strong government plays into the larger party's hands. Indeed it was the Conservatives rather than Labour that did most to raise the spectre of instability in advance. Most grassroots activists are uncomfortable with the creation of a public impression that Lib Dems and Tories agree. It looks to voters like a sell-out. It is also dishonest – in reality Lib Dem and Tory ministers argue every day, often fiercely. But the fights are so well hidden that some activists have themselves come to the conclusion that Clegg and the so-called "Orange Bookers" on the right of the party are trying to steer the Lib Dems away from their natural heritage. This is at best exaggerated. Lib Dems in cabinet are not right of centre, especially since the early demise of David Laws; self-evidently not in the case of Cable and Chris Huhne. Even Clegg has taken the risk of highlighting obstacles presented by privilege to social mobility. The charge that he is a secret Tory admirer is unproven. But he is guilty of a serious strategic error: presenting an image of coalition that allows voters to perceive that he is. This has been damaging to the party as a whole – and it has also mis-sold the whole idea of coalition. Voters will not be persuaded in the long run to prefer politicians working together to thrash out their differences if they cannot see it. Having promised new politics, Clegg's disinclination to disagree with David Cameron in public (except over AV) – or indeed ever to agree with Ed Miliband – makes it look like he has given up on three-party politics altogether.

This touches on the very raison d'etre of the Liberal Democrats in the coalition. Clegg's argument is that they have been willing to work with Conservatives in the national interest, at a time of economic crisis. The majority of grassroots activists – who voted overwhelmingly to support entry into the coalition at the Special Conference in Birmingham in May 2010 – would prefer a different emphasis. Liberal Democrats are there as a counterweight to Conservatives; seeking to block more right-wing agendas, prioritise social justice and promote liberal concerns, such as rights, protection against discrimination and democratic reforms. This is not easy – especially when electoral arithmetic means that more battles will be lost than won:

few politicians like to draw attention to defeats. The philosophical differences between Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, lasting over 150 years, are fundamental. Liberals have always stood against concentration of power and sought to attack the self-interest of wealth and privilege. For local councillors and grassroots activists – for decades the most successful part of the party machine – this is a sine qua non. So how to compromise when neither party could conceivably concede on its core beliefs? It is not impossible. If it had been more public, the process of compromise would have been messy and confrontational – so, yes, possibly unstable. But it would have allowed both parties to demonstrate willingness to work together for the common good, without appearing to sacrifice their principles. The Liberal Democrats' justification for entering government would have been better aligned with what the party grassroots thought they were signing up to – and clearer to voters.

This leads to how Lib Dems seek to influence the government's policy agenda. Again, the goal can be both positive (pursue Liberal Democrat goals) and negative (thwart Tory ones). The leadership's strategic mistake here was to focus on policy outcomes, rather than processes. Not having Liberal Democrat ministers in every department – including some, such as DEFRA, where the two parties' approaches are widely diverging – has made it difficult to "coalition proof" policy prior to its announcement. While the paucity of Lib Dem MPs made this understandable, it is rumoured that it never occurred to Clegg to use Peers. This has, in turn, stretched the concept of collective cabinet responsibility to breaking point. There is no reason why that precedent should apply to a peacetime coalition government. As it is, ministers outside cabinet are bound by decisions they have had no part in, to the extent that they cannot point out differences between government and party policy in public. With a bold approach, exemplified almost exclusively by Cable, that could have been overcome. But, working alongside Tory colleagues in the Westminster village, almost all Lib Dem ministers have been too cautious to challenge the system. After decades of standing four-square against such centralised, non-transparent governance, Lib Dem activists are frustrated by this. It looks to them as though Lib Dem ministers are more worried about upsetting Conservatives – and thus losing goodwill towards their policy suggestions – than they are about upsetting voters. This has proved disastrous at the ballot box – and the dividend for cooperative behaviour has not been huge.

In addition, no thought was given to ensuring that Lib Dem ministers had appropriate research support. Both Tories and Lib Dems had been highly critical of Blair's proliferation of Special Advisers in the 1990s, but having so few (two per cabinet minister) in coalition government has been crippling. Junior ministers' researchers have been refused briefings by officials – equally unfamiliar with coalition – on the grounds of protocol that could easily have been over-ridden in the Coalition Agreement. Given this, the cessation of Short money payments to Lib Dems on entering government was illogical and harmful. They ended up neither able to request civil servants to research policy options in all areas, nor to conduct it at party level. Cowley Street's Policy Research Unit (PRU) was decimated. As well as significantly undermining Liberal Democrat capacity to feed positively into the government's agenda-setting, this has also created a critical cleavage between ministers and grassroots activists. Part of the PRU's role was to assist the elected Federal Policy Committee and Policy Working Groups,

charged with producing detailed policy papers for debate at conference. As someone foolish enough to have chaired such working groups in both 2009-10 and 2010-11, the drop in support available has been striking.

Considerable efforts have been made over the first year of government to create parallel structures for Liberal Democrats – and indeed Conservatives – outside government to feed into policy processes. In particular, the creation of Parliamentary Committees, covering broad policy areas, has allowed backbenchers and Peers both to engage with ministers (from both parties) and suggest policy ideas. However these, too, suffer from a lack of research support. It is no coincidence that the Lib Dems' most obvious success in forcing a re-think on government policy – over the Health and Social Care Bill – was the result of a concerted campaign by activists and the drastic amendment of a pro-government motion at the party's Spring Conference. The relevant Parliamentary Committee's role was to support an essentially grassroots campaign.

This suggests that there is potential for re-engagement between activists and the Lib Dem leadership – although it currently depends on the former taking the initiative and conducting research in their own time, which is not a recipe for detailed engagement. It is hardly surprising that leaders of any party in government spend relatively little time reaching out to hear the voices of their grassroots – indeed some of the points made above relate as much to the Lib Dems' presence in government per se as to the specifics of coalition. However, grassroots activists would argue that Liberal Democrats should be different. Neither Conservatives nor Labour have democratic conferences or policy processes to ignore. Lib Dems could make a virtue of their democratic structure – and historical success and experience in local government – by seeking to establish new precedents for democratic engagement between cabinet and voters. It would make policy development slower and messier – but more open and, arguably, better. Grassroots activists believe that nothing would do more to change British politics and justify entry into coalition. But will the daily grind of government cause party leaders to overlook the Liberal Democrats' unique selling point?

1. Seyd, B (2002) Coalition Government in Britain: Lessons from Overseas, UCL Constitution Unit.
2. Hall-Matthews, D (2010) 'A View from the Liberal Democrats', Renewal, volume 18, issue 3/4, pp. 21-7.

# The Labour Party and the Coalition[1]

**Nick Pearce**

Until the 2010 election I was the Head of Policy at Number Ten. In that capacity I was the Labour official in the abortive Coalition negotiations between Labour and the Liberal Democrats and I would like to reiterate what previous speakers have indicated: that on the Labour side there was a distinct lack of preparation for the Coalition.

This stands in marked contrast to the period before 1997 when there had been structured conversations about constitutional democratic reform in the Cook-McClellan talks, and there was a strong personal relationship between Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown. Some of those links were taken into the first term of the Labour Government but they did not go very far, particularly after the Jenkins Report on Electoral Reform was not implemented. Nonetheless, they helped to create a climate of goodwill, ideological overlap, and the sharing of personal contacts which made relations between Labour and the Liberal Democrats relatively friendly in the immediate period before and after the 1997 general election. In 2010, none of that was the case and if, as previous speakers have suggested, there was a lack of preparation for the Coalition in the other main parties, this was certainly true for Labour, apart from some attempts to steer constitutional and electoral reform legislation through Parliament in the last session before the election.

The fact that very little was done on our side to prepare for the possibility of Coalition government was, in hindsight, a quite remarkable failing given that most people in the campaign thought that we were heading for a hung parliament. I believe this was certainly the case for the Conservatives, because they spent a great deal of time in their press conferences telling everybody what a disastrous outcome that would be. The rest of us could clearly see that – both from what our MPs, pollsters and party strategists were telling us, and also from what was happening in the different constituencies. But, on the policy side at least, we only started preparations for potential Coalition discussions in the final days before the election.

To that end, I and others put together a note for the Prime Minister analysing in depth the Liberal Democrat manifesto, identifying where we could make concessions, where Labour could afford to change its policy, and what the outline of an agreement might contain. However, because it was done literally in the last few days, it meant that when the moment arrived, and the result was clearly a hung parliament, Labour was not in a good position to advance the case for a progressive Coalition.

Of course, the electoral arithmetic was also against it. There were plenty of people in the Labour Party who thought the situation was hopeless and they said so on election night. Others felt that a spell in Opposition was better than a deal with the Liberal Democrats. There was quite a lot of what you might call this drive and sentiment in the Labour Party, and I think that was an important factor in shaping the climate over the five days of negotiations that followed the inconclusive election result. But although the arithmetic and general climate of

opinion was against it, there was still a lot of to-ing and fro-ing over the course of that weekend to see if a deal could be put together were the talks between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats to collapse.

My personal view is that David Cameron was very bold in what he did following the result, seizing the moment to craft a new governing alignment in British politics. Nick Clegg effectively tore up all the constitutional conventions which the Cabinet Office and others had put to us before the election, which said that the Prime Minister must have the first opportunity to try and form a Coalition. That all went right out of the window the moment that Nick Clegg declared that Cameron should be able to have the first go at forming a Coalition.

Come the Monday, when Gordon Brown announced the he would resign in due course as leader of the Labour Party and as Prime Minister in order to facilitate a potential Coalition, the dynamic had obviously changed somewhat. This is certainly what the public thought after Gordon had made that announcement and gone back into Number Ten.

Following his announcement, a Cabinet meeting was called to endorse his strategy. It was a political Cabinet and it was the last Cabinet of the Labour Government. It all felt rather odd because about half a dozen members were not there who had either lost their seats or were in their constituencies and certainly not expecting to be called to Number 10. However, technology being what it is in Whitehall, there was a spider phone being passed around which people had to speak into. Somebody described it as being a little like a séance because you could hear these disembodied voices coming into the room, to which another responded, “we’re not dead yet”. Of course, the reality was that they were – it just took a couple more days for this to become clear to everyone.

At this time the negotiations were still underway, and having been involved I can say that the first set of discussions did seem relatively genuine. There was certainly purpose to them. However, by the time we got to the Tuesday it was clear that it was all over, particularly after the Liberal Democrats had extracted from the Conservatives a very important concession – or so it seemed at that time – on the holding of a referendum on AV. This was obviously a big and important concession for them to make. It then became a matter of just working through the rest of the day, all the while knowing that the serious action was somewhere else.

Now, I know there has been a great deal of public debate about the negotiation process, with suggestions that Labour’s team was not serious and that it was dismissive, even sneering, towards their Liberal Democrat interlocutors. This is simply not true, and certainly not in the discussions I was involved in. There was clearly a large section of the Cabinet and the Labour leadership who thought that the negotiations were not going anywhere, and they could look at the numbers like anybody else. But I can tell you from my personal experience that the notion that those negotiations were not held in good faith from the Labour side is just not the case.

The big division – and the thing that has really defined British politics ever since – was on economic policy. Labour simply did not want to accept a change in stance on deficit reduction for the year 2011 and nor did we want to sign up to the eradication of the cyclically adjusted structural deficit by the end of Parliament. Those two things were not in the Liberal Democrat manifesto and neither were they in ours, and we were not going to shift on these. The fact is that this change in the Liberal Democrats’ position on the deficit from being broadly in the Keynes camp before the election

to shifting into the Conservative camp afterwards was the breaking point for any possible centre-left unity in ideological terms. Moreover it has, I think, been the main reason why the Liberal Democrats have been punished by their supporters ever since. It is what led to the big cut in BIS funding which meant that university tuition fees had to go up, for example. And it explains most of what has happened to their political fortunes ever since. Whatever you think about the actual substance of the issue, politically it has been absolutely central.

Shortly after this, Labour went very quickly into a leadership election. In essence, from May to the end of September last year, Labour was talking to itself. The candidates in the leadership contest were focused on talking to the party "selectorate", and not the electorate as a whole. This meant that Labour was being defined by the Coalition every day in the press and on TV, and in Parliament, and it was unable to respond properly because it was engaged in this internal election process (which many people incidentally felt went on far too long). In addressing the all-important question of the deficit, it was unable to rebut effectively the charge of "deficit denial" and this became one of the key ways the Government sought to define the Labour Party. Its record in government was very firmly set in that period and it was very difficult to break out of that with a new leader, particularly one who most of the party did not expect to win – certainly not the party staff who all thought that David Miliband would be successful. All this is central, I think, to understanding what has happened to the Labour Party since May last year.

The other thing, of course, is that there are lots of people in the Labour Party who like nothing better than to attack Liberal Democrats day-in, day-out. Most of Labour's losses were predominantly in the South and in the Midlands, while it won in the North, in Scotland and in Wales – its heartlands. This meant that the balance of power in the Parliamentary Labour Party lay with people who tend to be far more opposed to the Liberal Democrats because they fight them in northern Councils on a regular basis. As a consequence, they have a much more antagonistic relationship with them than is true of Labour MPs in the South, many more of whom lost their seats. It was, therefore, a re-assertion of Labour tribalism in the sense of seeing the Liberal Democrat agreement with the Conservatives as a betrayal. As Tony Blair put it recently, it was the sense that the Liberal Democrats, having fought three elections to the political left of Labour, had then decided to go into government with the Conservatives.

This created a huge amount of resentment within the Labour Party, and meant that in the campaign for the AV referendum, Labour supporters – who effectively had the casting vote – did not vote in favour but instead sought to punish the Coalition and Nick Clegg in particular. But this revealed big divisions in the Labour Party. The reality was that the PLP was split. The Shadow Cabinet was split. The Trade Unions were almost entirely hostile to AV. And so, party voters did not come out in the way that anti-AV Conservative voters did, and mobilize for a "yes" vote. Thus, the sort of political realignment that electoral reform might facilitate, and which has been the long held dream of reformers across the centre-left, has been set back for a generation. At the time, there were of course people saying to Ed Miliband, "if you back yes and it fails – and it's going to fail – and you're associated with it, it will heavily damage your leadership, so steer clear of it". I think many people felt he did as much as he possibly could as a supporter of AV in those circumstances. It was a very difficult call for him.

To conclude, I would like to turn to what has occurred subsequently to all of this. In particular, we need to consider the impact of the collapse in Liberal Democrat support. Many people are saying, "now that phoney stuff is out of the way we can just talk about Labour versus Conservatives. We can go back to the familiar kind of politics". However, the more knowledgeable Labour strategists recognise that this really is a false choice. To win again, it needs supporters from both sides: Conservative supporters as well as Liberal Democrat supporters.

But this does leave Labour with a something of a problem. Many of those returning to the Labour fold today are those who left after Iraq and tend to be more liberally inclined. However, they are joining a core Labour vote and a not-so-core Labour vote, but a Labour vote nonetheless, which is more small "c" conservative in many of its instincts, and that likes what the Coalition is doing on things like crime, at least at the moment. This Labour vote is not liberally minded and so the difficulty for Labour now is to find a way of putting together an electoral coalition of the kind that brought it to power in 1997. It has both these liberal and more conservative Labour voters in its sights, and the challenge is to find a way of speaking to both. Tony Blair did this with great success: the phrase "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" is a perfect example.

One of Ed Miliband's key tasks is to fashion a strategy which can have that same broad appeal to people who come from very different perspectives. My own sense is that John Curtice's argument that Coalition politics is probably here to stay is probably correct. 97 percent of the electorate voted Labour or Conservative in the 1950's, but only 65 percent did in the last election. You have a significant rise in votes for smaller parties – the Greens and particularly UKIP – and similar things are happening all over Europe. In general, Social Democratic parties are polling less than 30 percent across Europe as a whole. Green parties are on the rise, as are populist anti-European parties, so the likelihood of being able to form a government on your own is that much less. This means that coalition politics is more likely to stay and so, intellectually, if Labour wants to fashion a broader programme the reality is that it needs to be able to talk to people who have different traditions to its own, including Liberal Democrats.

Despite what some people are arguing currently, I believe strongly that Labour cannot simply renew itself out of its own tradition. It may be true that the high point of liberalism in British politics – which people like David Davis helped pre-figure and is symbolised by things like getting rid of ID cards and so on – has passed. But it still seems to me that the electorate is more liberal than it was, although it does seem to have these contradictory conservative/liberal tendencies. Fashioning a viable coalition from these two tendencies is going to be an incredibly important and challenging task. And it is one that really cannot be achieved if your starting point is to think that you can win on your own and from your tradition alone.

1. This is the transcript of the speech given by Mr Nick Pearce at the conference on 29-30 June 2011

# Hung together?

**Adam Boulton**

I would like to talk in two phases. The first phase will offer some observations about the media during the election and the second will consider the media now because I would argue strongly that 2010 was very much a watershed election for the UK. For me personally, my observations and remarks about the 2010 election start here in this very building because I know you have been discussing a great deal about whether or not people – politicians, civil servants and the media – were prepared for the possibility of Coalition.

To begin with, I would argue that in a really exceptional way, news broadcasters – and particularly the 24-hour news broadcasters – were actually prepared to a very unusual extent for the possibility of Coalition. We were actually summoned here to the Institute for Government to discuss the possibilities for a Coalition: the constitutional proprieties of the transition period; how the Prime Minister would remain in office until a new government had been formed; and how the "golden triangle" of the Cabinet Secretary, the Prime Minister's Principal Private Secretary and the Queen's Private Secretary would interact on the key issues.

This was backed up by the active participation of the Cabinet Secretary, Gus O'Donnell, who also made himself available to give briefings and, as we now know, "war-gamed" with civil servants the various options in a hung parliament. As he himself has said, they did not get it right necessarily, but nonetheless they prepared themselves.

If you like, therefore, there was a digging over of the flower bed in preparation for a Coalition government. This was partly because the civil service resented the old government, and so saw an opportunity to reassert control. It was also partly because political observers were using the empirical evidence which said that if you looked at where the votes stood or were likely to stand, a Coalition government was a real possibility.

The other sort of preparation which I was involved in, and which made it into such a transformative election, was of course the campaigning for the TV debates. I will not go into detail about those except to say that with hindsight what is interesting was that really at no stage in the negotiations was either side questioning that there should be three participants; and that those three participants should be Nick Clegg, Gordon Brown and David Cameron. It really never featured as a problem in the negotiations at any point.

Now, and again with hindsight, that judgement has been questioned, both on the Labour and on the Conservative sides. But my view, and it remains my view, is that there has been a steady growth of non-Labour and non-Conservative voting over the last 30 years or more that I have been covering British politics, something that has to some extent been reinforced by devolution. I therefore admire David Cameron, Gordon Brown and their teams for apparently accepting this political reality. The debates would have been much less representative of the mood of the country had

they simply been between two people – between the Conservative leader and the Labour leader. This is not to say that a Liberal Democrat leader is the perfect representative of all of the others, but I think it is a truer reflection of political realities. I have always argued, and this is a matter of public record, that it was the non-red and non-blue vote that would, in some senses, be the most interesting aspect of the way things would ultimately work out.

However, while all of those things were of great interest to live broadcasters and to academics and civil servants, they were of zero interest to my friends and colleagues in print. For me, the evidence from the 2010 election is that print is now at death's door as far as making a useful contribution to active politics is concerned. I cannot think of any significant press stories published during the course of the election campaign, except for the polls on the performances of the leaders in the television debates. I believe that highlights the reality these days: which is that people get their primary information about world and national events from the television, while their main source of facts about the election was online. Thus newspapers, frankly, are flapping about looking for a role.

This became even clearer when it came to the outcome of the General Election itself once we started to get the results coming in on the Friday. For me, one of the most astonishing moments of my entire career was sitting at the St Stephens Club when David Cameron made his pretty unambiguous statement about his willingness to form a Coalition. Now if you look back at the print coverage of that offer, it was largely dismissed. Most of the journalists in the room were not interested in listening to what was being said. They largely concluded that this was a ruse that Cameron was playing because he had not done so very well.

In the rolling media, however, we did not have that choice. We had to follow what was going on and that led to the most extraordinary five days where we were literally breaking news all the time by being live and accessible to as many politicians as we could get hold of. At the same time, we became, or rather we realized, that as had been predicted by the Institute for Government, we were also becoming a channel for negotiation between the various parties. There were some very significant people phoning us up, even though they were not prepared or were unable to appear on screen – those who are referred to simply as a "senior cabinet minister" – of course, they never say junior cabinet minister! They would phone us, giving us their opinions, explaining what was going on because I think they saw us as a constructive part of those negotiations.

Throughout, I was pretty fixated on the arithmetic of what was going on and was also aware – perhaps more than some of my colleagues – that certainly in the Liberal Democrat Party and in the Conservative Party there had been considerable preparations for what would happen in the event of a Coalition. It seems that their leaders or party leaderships had also talked to Gus O'Donnell, who had offered them facilities and briefings. However, Labour, as we now know, was completely unprepared and had simply not wished to countenance the practicalities of negotiating a Coalition. Indeed, as Lord Mandelson has described it, it all rather started to unfurl and unfold during breakfast time on the Friday with Labour being in the position, unlike the other two parties, of not having prepared a

negotiating team. Indeed, those acting for it were a group of advisers who were unelected. In the forefront you had Peter Mandelson and Andrew Adonis and, in the case of Alastair Campbell, an adviser who was not even officially appointed.

With live broadcasting, there is always a danger – particularly if it is infinite in the sense that you can go on for as long as you like – that he who shouts the loudest will sometimes prevail. Indeed, it reminded me very strongly of 1995 when John Major had resigned the leadership of the Conservative Party. When the results of the vote that re-elected him were announced, it was clear that it was at least as bad as the vote in 1990 which had forced Margaret Thatcher from office. However, Lord Cranborne, Ian Lang and others had worked out that if they flooded every single live point, saying what a tremendous victory this was for Major, what an enormous success and vote of confidence he had had etc – if they could shout as loud as they could about this for a period of perhaps two or three hours, they would probably prevail. And, indeed, this is what they succeeded in doing.

In the case of Labour, as you know, there was no formal consultation of the party membership, of the Parliamentary party or indeed the Cabinet until the Monday evening. When the first consultation was finally underway, inevitably it was Alastair Campbell who appeared, going on television to tell us it was all sorted out, that Gordon Brown could save the world. He continued the briefing that Brown would remain in office until a new government had been formed, and that this was his constitutional duty. And it was about this that I had an altercation with Alastair on air. I took him through the facts and the arithmetic, and he conceded every point. However, being clever and being a former journalist, having lost the substance of the argument he proceeded instead to wind me up – which he succeeded in doing – by attacking the integrity of my reporting and the organization which I work for.

Looking back on this incident, for me the key point in the confrontation was that the facts simply overcame Mr. Campbell's skill with words. Just as important, I was well aware of what was going on: Downing Street was simply not expressing the views of Cabinet Ministers or former Cabinet Ministers across the board. A number of the latter came forward: David Blunkett, John Reid, and subsequently even Diane Abbott. From having talked to such figures throughout the weekend it had become clear that many of the big hitters thought Labour simply should go into opposition and rebuild.

The other lesson comes from the coverage provided by newspapers over that entire weekend. I genuinely do not believe that, apart from those researching for academic purposes, you will find anything particularly useful in any of what the newspapers reported – and that, frankly, has continued into the media coverage of the Coalition more generally. We in the electronic media have, by and large, reported the facts of a government being assembled; the facts of government policy; the problems of that policy; and the problems of implementation of that policy. That is what we are doing on a daily basis.

The newspapers and print journalists, on the other hand, have looked for a secondary market and by and large coalesced around a kind of template which says, essentially, that the Coalition is unnatural; it cannot last; there is no commitment to a programme for government; the

words of ministers are consequently meaningless; they are simply jockeying for position and they are preparing to stab each other in the back.

My strong view is that none of that is true. I think what we can see before our eyes is quite a successful attempt to at least create a stable government. Indeed I was sitting with Jon Snow and we were about to interview Nick Clegg, I think it was, and he said, "I'm warming to this majority government" on the grounds that, with exception of war-time I think, this is the first time since 1935 that the majority of voters have one of their representatives in government. And that is another way of looking at how our democracy has worked this time round.

One can see very obvious reasons why it is in the interests of the Liberal Democrats for this to work. By Nick Clegg's own admission, they are in a process of reconstruction, of shedding some of the voters they inherited from Labour and the anti-war movement, and trying to reconstruct themselves. They need this to work for five years. I don't think that's stupid, and I don't think Simon Hughes is stupid and I think they will probably see it through equally.

The big unanswered question at the moment is the performance of the economy. Effectively, all the chips have been gambled not just on the economy recovering, but on it recovering better than equivalent economies that have not gone through such overt austerity. That, again, requires a great deal of time.

Finally, I am of the opinion that if we look not just at our country but at similar countries over recent decades, what becomes clear is that once electorates make a decision to change a government, they are fairly reluctant to change again after just one term. Therefore, while it may be boring, my position is that you can bet long on the Coalition.

And watch it on television, don't read it in the papers!

# Coalition Government: First anniversary

**David Cowling**

What can we discern from the polls about public attitudes towards the Coalition Government at the end of its first year? I would define three broad phases of public reaction to date: firstly, the short period prior to the May 2010 general election, when opinion broadly favoured a majority single party government outcome; secondly, the aftermath of the election when the coalition was formed and public opinion broadly favoured the venture; and, thirdly, the phase where opinion began to harden and polarise.

## Prior to the 2010 general election (April-May 2010)

Given the grave economic circumstances facing the country and the fact that we had not experienced peacetime coalition government for 80 years, it is perhaps not surprising that public opinion favoured a decisive outcome to the election rather than the indecisive alternative required for coalition government to occur. MORI/News of the World (sampled 23 April, 2010) suggested that 57% thought no party achieving an overall majority would be a "bad thing". ComRes/ITN (sampled 24-25 April, 2010) found 72% preferred "a clear majority government", compared with 20% who favoured "a hung parliament with a coalition government". And when Populus/Times (sampled 19-20 April, 2010) asked what outcome their respondents hoped for, 39% chose the options of either the Conservatives or Labour in coalition with the Lib Dems. Yet, as the election campaign progressed, despite their preference for single party government, more and more people came to expect a hung parliament. Populus/Times (sampled 6-7 April, 2010) found 39% expecting a hung parliament; but by their final campaign poll (sampled 4-5 May, 2010) this figure had increased to 47%.

## The coalition honeymoon (May-September, 2010)

Following some days of negotiation, the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition government was formed on 12 May, 2010. ComRes/BBC Daily Politics (sampled 12-13 May, 2010) found 44% who thought the creation of a coalition government would be "good for Britain", compared with 21% who thought it would be "bad" and 28% who thought it would "make no difference". MORI/News of the World (sampled 12-13 May, 2010) found 72% thought it was right for David Cameron to form a coalition with the Lib Dems; and 64% thought Nick Clegg was right to join with the Conservatives. Some 59% thought the new Government would be good for the UK; 59% thought it would deal effectively with the economic crisis; 63% thought it would work as a united team; and, on balance, 54% felt more hopeful than fearful (36%) of what the new Government would do. However, amidst all these positive responses, there was a serpent in the Rose Garden; whereas 35% subscribed to the view that the coalition "combines the best policies from both parties", some 44% thought "it compromises the principles and beliefs of both parties".

By the end of May 2010, ComRes/Independent (sampled 28-31 May, 2010) registered 45% agreement that Britain was better off with a coalition government compared with either Labour or the Conservatives having won outright (43% disagreed). However, 65% of respondents also agreed that since joining the coalition "it is difficult to know what the Lib Dems stand for".

The first real political test for the coalition came with its Emergency Budget, published on 22 June, 2010. The public reaction was very favourable. Populus/Times (sampled 22-23 June, 2010) found 64% who thought the coalition was doing well so far overall. Some 56% thought they were handling the economy well; and 55% said the same about the coalition's broad decisions about public spending cuts. The poll suggested overwhelming support for the main proposals in the Budget, as well as finding 57% who thought the VAT increase to 20% was "unavoidable".

However, by August 2010, ComRes/ Independent (sampled 6-8 August, 2010) found 36% agreeing that Britain was better off with a coalition rather than a Conservative or Labour government, compared with 45% who held that opinion in May. And whereas in June they found 22% who thought the coalition was doing a bad job, ICM/Guardian (sampled 13-15 August, 2010) saw that figure rise to 36%.

## Falling out of love with coalitions (October 2010-June, 2011)

The October 2010 coalition Spending Review seemed to mark a point of departure for some electors. ComRes/Independent (sampled 21 October, 2010) registered 59% agreement that the cuts announced in the Review were "unfair because they will hit the poorest people"; and 64% disagreeing that "the better off will bear most of the burden of the cuts". Populus/Times (sampled 22-24 October, 2010) found some significant changes in opinion compared with the immediate aftermath of the coalition's foundation in May. Some 58% of respondents thought the effects of tax rises and spending cuts were spread "unfairly" (37% thought this in June); 51% thought the Government was "cutting spending more than they have to" (39% in June); and 38% thought they were getting the right balance between tax rises and spending cuts (61% in June).

By November 2010, resentment against the Lib Dem partners in the coalition began to surface more frequently. MORI/Reuters (sampled 12-14 November 2010) found 26% support for the proposition that the coalition was one where decisions are made jointly by the two parties and 63% of the view that the Conservatives "are making most of the decisions". The respective figures when this same question was asked in June were 41% and 51%. The ICM/Guardian (sampled 16-19 December, 2010) found 47% who thought the decision to form the coalition was wrong, compared with 43% who thought it was right.

MORI/Reuters (sampled 21-24 January, 2011) found public opinion evenly split on whether the coalition's policies would improve the state of the economy – 47% agreed they would and 47% disagreed. However, 60% disagreed that their policies would improve Britain's public services (including 44% of Lib Dem voters). ComRes/BBC Newsnight (sampled 11-13 February 2011) registered 51% disagreement that more frequent coalitions "would be good for Britain". MORI/Reuters (sampled 15-17 April 2011) revisited several questions they had asked just after the coalition was formed and found that approval remained firm in terms of the coalition's ability to react quickly in a crisis and in providing stable government.

But 42% thought they were dealing effectively with the economic crisis, compared with 59% in May 2010; and 43% thought they were working as a united team, compared with 63% in May.

Populus/Institute of Government (sampled 15-17 April, 2011) found 63% who thought it a bad thing that no party had achieved an overall majority in the 2010 general election. Compared with single party government, coalitions were considered weaker (68%), more indecisive (73%), less responsive to the public (57%); and more confused about what it stands for (80%). As for the Lib Dems, whilst 52% thought they were right to join the coalition, 58% thought they had abandoned their principles in doing so. And whereas 66% disagreed that there is no difference between the Lib Dems and Conservatives over important policy issues, over half of respondents judged the former not to have had a significant influence on government policy towards the NHS, university funding and tuition fees, or tax and spending decisions.

Following their heavy losses in the national and local elections on 5 May, 2011 Populus/ Times (sampled 6-8 May 2011) concentrated on the Lib Dems, asking whether their participation in the coalition had demonstrated: a vote for the Lib Dems was not a wasted vote (54% said no); that the Lib Dems are a responsible party of government (54% said no); that coalition governments can be strong and decisive (57% said no); or that the Lib Dems have made a difference to the direction of the Government (64% said no).

## What can we conclude from the above?

Firstly, that there was no great fervour for coalition government prior to the May 2010 general election, even though increasing numbers of people expected a hung parliament to be the most likely outcome as the four week campaign progressed.

Secondly, there was a clear mood that coalition government was the best outcome, compared with a minority government, once the indecisive result in May 2010 became clear. There was a powerful wish for that coalition to succeed and considerable good will supporting the enterprise.

Thirdly, that as we progressed further and further into the life of the coalition, its novelty offered no special protection against the public's reaction to events that traditionally batter governments, whatever form they take.

Fourthly, coalitions seem to offer an additional element of grievance to many of those who disagree with any, or all, of their actions. MORI/News of the World (sampled 9-10 December, 2010) recorded 56% of respondents strongly agreeing that "MPs should never break the promises they make to get elected, even if they have changed their minds about what is best for the country" (a further 12% tended to agree with this statement).

Fifthly, the Lib Dem junior coalition partner has suffered heavy losses of support in both elections and opinion poll ratings since joining the Conservatives in government. By contrast, the Conservatives have held their support.

# The Coalition Government and the media

**Nick Anstead**

In the aftermath of the 2010 election and the coalition agreement forged between David Cameron and Nick Clegg, it became common to argue that the UK had not been in this situation for a long time. It was certainly true to say that the creation of a formal coalition is unusual in this country - we have to go back nearly eighty years to find the last peacetime example. But it is arguably better to think of the country's current circumstances as being unprecedented, because the world it occurs in, whether defined politically, socially or economically, is so different.

1931 was only the second election where women were able to vote on equal terms to men and the decline of the Liberals meant the country was entering into a period of class-defined politics. The alien nature of the world in which the National Coalition was created is equally clear if we examine communication at the time. The primary mechanisms for distributing information were print and cinema. 1931 also saw the development of the first newsreels integrated into film showings. By the middle of the decade, the average British citizen was going to the cinema 20 times a year, in comparison with about three visits today. Even radio was still a relatively new technology, with only a 50 per cent household penetration rate.[1] This is a world away from the political communication environment of 2010, with multichannel television, 24 hour rolling news, social media and smart phones. As such, contemporary politicians face a range of different challenges when it comes to managing the media. Therefore, in forming a coalition in 2010, David Cameron and Nick Clegg went into uncharted territory.

This process is about more than how politicians communicate, though. It is also about the increasing centrality of the media to the political system. To underline this point, consider recent British history. Image and news management was at the heart of the reinvention of both New Labour and the Cameron Conservatives, while arguably the most interesting memoir of the 1997-2010 period comes not from a minister but a spin doctor.[2] Indeed, Campbell's diaries, as well as Tony Blair's infamous indictment of "the feral media", demonstrate the great antipathy that has developed between politicians and journalists, while dodgy dossiers, allegations of “sexing up” and phone hacking have ensured that media did not just cover political stories, but made them. Scholars have theorised this process as mediatization, an idea perhaps best broadly defined as the impact of media logic on non-media institutions, such as governments or political parties.[3]

However, where there is a lack of research - clearly because the circumstances are so historically unusual - is in understanding the interplay between coalition government and the contemporary media. The tensions are manifold. Research shows that politics is increasingly covered as a zero-sum game of winners and losers. Yet what happens when this so-called horse race coverage[4] comes up against the inevitable horse-trading required by coalition? Can the press continue to play one of its traditional roles - namely, holding politicians accountable for their actions? This article is a very provisional attempt to examine that question or, at the very least, suggest directions for future research.

## 15 months in: some early observations

In many ways, the ebb and flow of media coverage and public support in the post-2010 election environment replicated patterns established in previous contests. The new government started out with a period of honeymoon, both with the media and the electorate. During the now infamous Rose Garden press conference in May 2010, David Cameron and Nick Clegg both heralded a new kind of politics that would be less tribal, more open to compromise. The public seemed to like this approach too, offering high levels of support for the creation of the coalition.[5] However, within just a few months, the inevitable laws of political gravity asserted themselves, and things were looking far less pleasant for the coalition, especially the Liberal Democrats. The setbacks for the party were manifold, including by-election and council election defeats, widespread public disquiet and protests against coalition policies such as the increase in tuition fees, and defeat in the AV referendum.

How have the media covered these developments? A few observations can be made, even at this early stage. Both the political and media class continue to grapple with defining coalition and finding appropriate forms of language to describe it. Indeed, this process began even before the coalition agreement was finalised, with politicians debating with journalists about who had won and lost the election, and who had the necessary legitimacy to try to form a government. There were obviously political motivations within this discussion, but it was also illustrative of the old structures and norms of two party "first-past-the-post" struggling to adapt to the new political landscape.

This process has continued, most famously with the demand from Labour communication chief Tom Baldwin that the press stopped talking about a coalition and instead referred to a 'Conservative-led government'.[6] The request indicates both the power and contestability of terminology surrounding the new government, and the potential minefield that journalists are entering into when they try to report it. Baldwin's request did not quite fall on deaf ears, but certainly found more traction among Labour's natural supporters. A search of newspaper coverage in the past year shows that the only paper to employ this terminology was *The Daily Mirror*, with occasional mentions in *The Guardian* and *The Morning Star*.[7]

The position of the Liberal Democrats has also proved challenging. During the General Election campaign, David Yelland admitted that *The Sun*, which he had edited for five years, deliberately went out of its way to avoid covering the Liberal Democrats, not even sending a reporter to the third party's annual conference.[8] Clearly, such a situation would no longer be sustainable with the Liberal Democrats in government.

As yet, no research has been carried out to examine if and how coverage of the Liberal Democrats has shifted, either quantitatively and qualitatively since they entered office. Indeed, one interesting project for the future will be to undertake a content analysis, comparing pre- and post-2010 news reporting about the party. However, a very brief examination of press coverage during the first year of the coalition suggests two provisional conclusions. First, the Liberal Democrats have received a lot of coverage over the past year, almost certainly more than they would expect as a third party in opposition. However, this coverage is frequently driven by events that are seen as bad for the party. For example, between May 2010 and May 2011, Nick Clegg appeared most frequently in the papers in October 2010 (when protests were starting about budget cuts and tuition fees protests) and May 2011 (when the party suffered huge setbacks in local elections and the alternative vote proposal was defeated).

Second, and more optimistically for the Liberal Democrats, there are also a significant number of policy based stories that do put them at the heart of government, focusing on the role they play in shaping the coalition's legislative agenda. Going forward, the political communication challenge for the party is to ensure that the politics does not drown out these other stories, especially in the more fevered atmosphere that will surely emerge as the coalition reaches its climax and we move towards an election.

## What does accountability mean now?

One of the primary objectives of the media in any liberal democratic system is to hold the governing class to account. Yet, since the processes of policy and decision making are so different in a coalition, so too is the nature of accountability.

The equation used to be very simple. Political parties published a manifesto. Since parties have tended to win an outright majority in an election, the expectation was that their manifesto would become their legislative programme over the course of the parliament. Any omission or obfuscation could be flagged up by the media and ministers questioned on it. Considered within the broader constitutional framework of the UK, this process is actually quite surprising. After all, there is no law that states politicians in power have to follow their manifesto. Every Parliament, once sitting, is sovereign. However, the role that the manifesto has come to play in British politics shows that it has developed into an important extra-Parliamentary political institution.

Coalition complicates this matter greatly, however. After all, no one single party won the election, meaning everyone has to compromise to some degree. Manifesto promises will inevitably be reneged on by any party entering into a coalition agreement.

There are two possible responses to this development. The first is for the media to take a business as usual approach, attacking politicians for abandoning manifesto pledges. The second is to argue that the politics of coalition takes us beyond manifestos, and that a list of promises made by a party on the assumption that it will become the sole wielder of power is an outmoded idea in the more complex and pluralistic politics of the early twenty-first century.

There has been some reflection on the value of these two approaches among political journalists. Writing on the BBC College of Journalism weblog, for example, Kevin Marsh asked: '[D]oes a line of questioning that says, in effect, "you can't deliver on this promise from your manifesto" tell us anything we don't already know? Does it take us any closer to finding out what the coalition will do?'[9] Marsh was responding directly to broadcast interviews in which his BBC colleagues had questioned new ministers on the grounds that they not going to fulfil their manifesto pledges in government.

Ultimately, neither approach seems very satisfying, however. Inevitably, coalitions will lead to deals being made between parties, and it is foolish not to acknowledge this. Equally though, to give political leaders a free pass on policy changes because they are in coalition seems to be a deathblow to accountability.

Finding a middle way between these two approaches requires us not to reject the idea of manifesto-based accountability, but instead to conceptualise it in a different way. In particular, the idea of mediatization is useful, especially if we start to think in terms of the idea of mediatized manifestos. The core concept here is not the manifesto as a textual document, but instead the manner in which a party's priorities and beliefs are communicated to the electorate and, in turn, the expectations this creates. Importantly, there may be tensions between the manifesto and the mediatized manifesto.

Take, for example, the most high profile policy change that the Liberal Democrats have made since their entry into government: fees for higher education. Liberal Democrats have attempted to defend themselves by arguing hat their manifesto highlighted four key policy areas – for the record, fair taxes; a fair chance for every child; a fair future, creating jobs by making Britain greener; and a fair deal for you from politicians – and tuition fees were not among them. This is substantively true. However, what it downplays is the mediatized manifesto the Liberal Democrats campaigned with, which put tuition fees and higher education at the forefront of their political identity. Evidence of this can be found in the more than 400 Liberal Democrat candidates (famously including Nick Clegg) who signed an NUS pledge to scrap tuition fees. Although, making statements about sub-sections of the electorate is very difficult, it seems that this approach was successful for the party. Their vote share among students was 42 per cent, compared with 24 per cent for Labour and 21 per cent for the Conservatives.[10] This at least gives us some idea as to the impact of the Liberal Democrat's mediatized manifesto.

Of course, the mediatized manifesto is not new. Politicians have long used the media to highlight parts of their platform that seemed advantageous to them or exposed their opponents' weaknesses. However, 2010 saw an institutional intersection between coalition government and the mediatized manifesto and, in so doing, highlighted the significance of the latter in contemporary British politics in a manner that had previously not occurred.

The mediatized manifesto is certainly a useful explanatory tool. It seems, at least, to offer an insight into the growing unpopularity of Nick Clegg since the election. More importantly though, focusing on the way politicians communicated their policies in the run-up to an election and their efforts to sell their platform to the electorate allows both for a more sophisticated form of political accountability to develop, while remaining compatible both with the institutions and norms of British politics. This seems important for at least three reasons. First, it allows journalists to develop a line of enquiry that is able to transcend the divide between both the business as usual and the beyond manifestos approach. Second, this approach is especially useful for coalition governments. This may become particularly significant in a future where coalition government seems to be becoming more and not less likely. Finally, but no less important, the mediatized manifesto seems to be a far more realistic approximation of the way in which most British voters consume politics and construct their political expectations of the parties they are voting for, and so arguably has greater legitimacy than referring to the textual document.

## The end of the affair?

How the coalition ends - and in particular whether it burns out or fades away - will play a huge role in defining the tone and narrative of the next election, whenever it occurs. There are actually four possible scenarios for the conclusion of this government. First, the agreement might run its full course, with an election taking place on 7th May 2015. Second, the coalition could collapse at some point before this, leading to the dissolution of Parliament and an early election. Third, the formal coalition could collapse, but the Conservatives could attempt a period of time governing as a minority before an election, as many predicted would happen in May 2010. Finally, an early ending to the coalition could theoretically lead to a new governing configuration without an election, such as a Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition.

As well as recording this process, the media will also be an active participant. Already, there is disquiet within the Conservative and Liberal Democrat ranks about the level of compromise coalition government is requiring. Here, new

media is playing a particularly important role, with influential blogs such as Conservative Home and, to a lesser extent, Liberal Democrats Voice offering criticism of their respective party leadership and claiming to represent the authentic voice of grassroots activists. In turn, mainstream media amplifies these opinions, giving them a far broader audience, and thus political significance. The representativeness of such forums is open to question, but undoubtedly the interaction between old and new media has created a powerful new political actor which might, in the future, have the potential to destabilise the coalition.

There way in which the coalition ends will also play a large role in how the next election is covered. The election will be technically challenging both for parties and reporters, not least because the coalition partners will rapidly move from a position of working together to opposing each other (this is, of course, assuming that no formal election pact emerges, as some have argued for[11]). They will necessarily have to attempt to walk a fine line between defending their achievements while in coalition and opposing their former colleagues. There are also broader, narrative questions that will be contested. Will this experiment in cross-party governance be seen as a success or failure? Will coalition government be portrayed as an historical anomaly, a necessary evil or the new normal in British politics? It is a cliché to talk of media coverage as the first draft of history, but that will certainly be the case as we approach the next election. Furthermore, it will be a first draft of history with the potential to have a profound impact on the future of British politics.

1. Data from: BFI Screenonline, 'Cinemas and Cinemagoing', 2010 www.screenonline.org.uk/film/cinemas/sect3.html [accessed 15 September 2011]; Cinema Exhibitors Association, 'Annual UK Cinema Admissions 1935-2010', 2010 www.cinemauk.org.uk/ukcinemasector/admissions/annualukcinemaadmissions1935-2010/ [accessed 15 September 2011]; BBC, BBC Yearbook (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1931).
2. Alastair Campbell, The Blair Years: Extracts from the Alastair Campbell Diaries (Knopf, 2007).
3. For a more in-depth discussion of mediatization see Andreas Hepp, Stig Hjarvard and Knut Lundby, 'Mediatization – Empirical Perspectives: An Introduction to a Special Issue', Communications, 35 (2010), 223-228; J. Strömback, 'Four Phases of Mediatization: An Analysis of the Mediatization of Politics', The International Journal of Press/Politics, 13 (2008), 228.
4. For an early use of this metaphor see C. Anthony Broh, 'Horse-Race Journalism: Reporting the Polls in the 1976 Presidential Election', Public Opinion Quarterly, 44 (1980), 514 <doi:10.1086/268620>.
5. Andrew Grice, 'Cameron and Clegg Hail a New Political Era on Their First Day in Power', *The Independent* (London, 13 May 2010); UK Polling Report, 'Polls on the Coalition', UK Polling Report Blog (London, 2010) http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/blog/archives/2703 [accessed 20 September 2011].
6. Joe Murphy, 'Don't Say Coalition, Say Tory-led Government, Labour's Spin Chief Tells Media', *The Evening Standard* (London, 18 January 2011).
7. All data in this and following paragraphs generated through Lexis searches in the year following the creation of the coalition. A fuller discussion of this information can be found at Nick Anstead, 'The Relationship Between Politics and the Media Has Changed Significantly Since Our Last Coalition Government. We Now Need to Ask More from Politicians and Their Manifestoes.', LSE Politics and Policy Blog, 2011 http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/2011/09/13/coalition-media-relationship/ [accessed 21 September 2011].
8. David Yelland, 'Nick Clegg's Rise Could Lock Murdoch and the Media Elite Out of UK Politics', *The Guardian* (London and Manchester, 19 April 2010).
9. Kevin Marsh, 'New Politics #2', BBC College of Journalism Blog, 2010 www.bbc.co.uk/journalism/blog/2010/05/new-politics-2.shtml [accessed 21 September 2011].
10. UK Polling Report, 'The Student Vote' (London, 2010) http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/blog/archives/2894 [accessed 20 September 2011].
11. Nick Boles, Which Way's Up? (London: Biteback, 2010).

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich, NR4 7TJ

01603 456161

www.uea.ac.uk

Institute for Government
2 Carlton Gardens
London, SW1Y 5AA

020 7747 0400

www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk