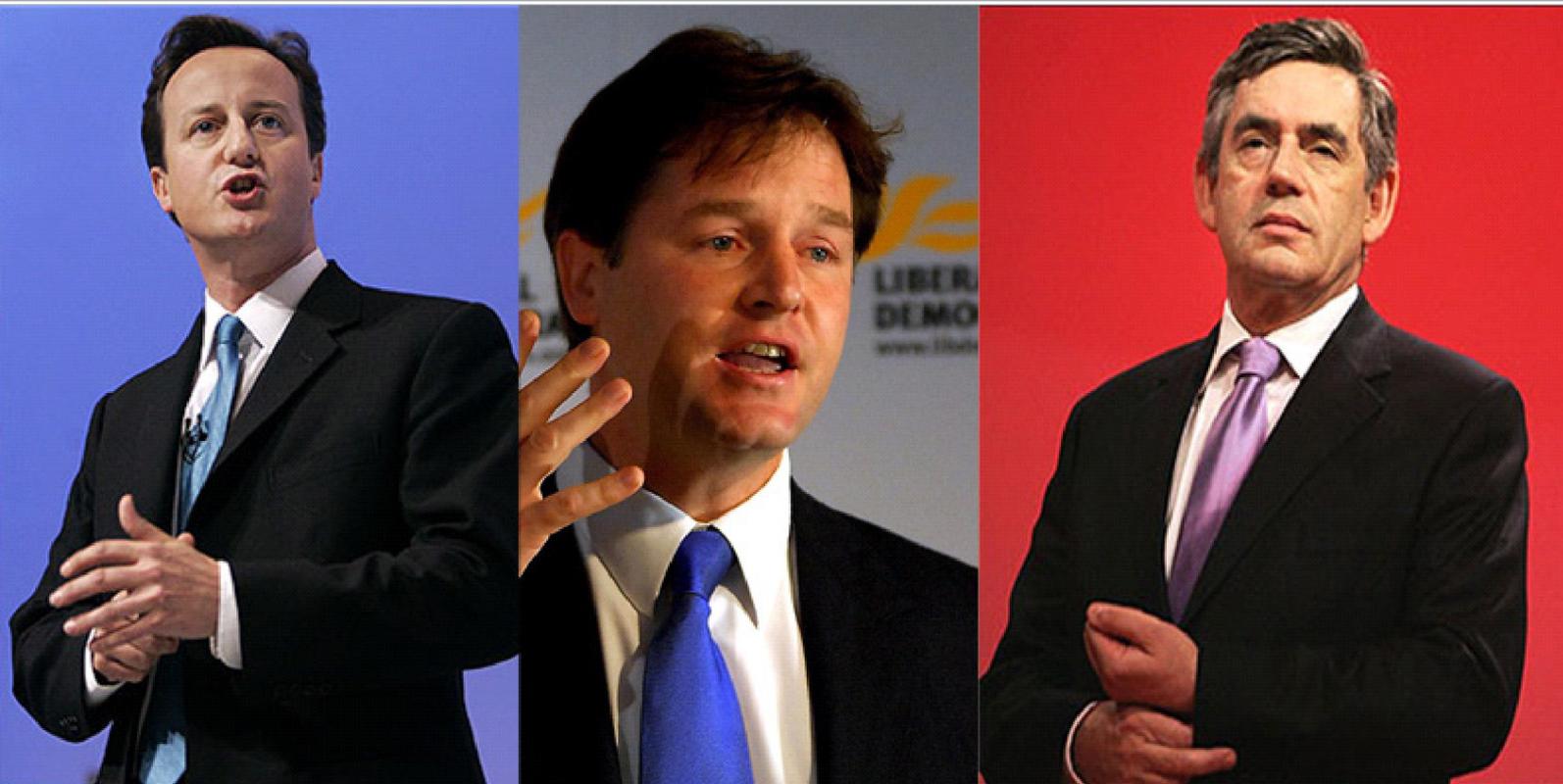


GENERAL ELECTION
 2010

The Second Leaders' Debate

Immediate public reaction – A narrow victory
for Clegg, but the race heats up

23 April 2010



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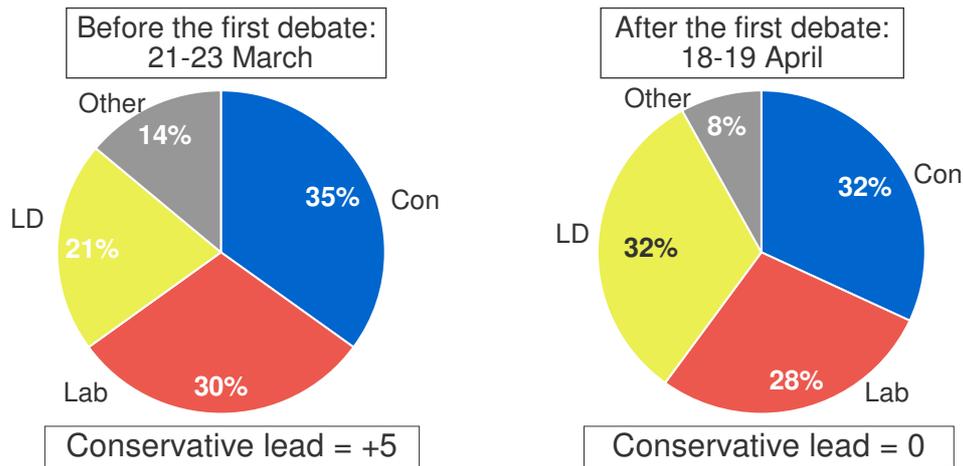
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Race heats up

The first leaders' debate was won decisively by Nick Clegg, and, in response, the Lib Dem support in the polls surged, to tie with the Conservatives in our most recent Political Monitor (as shown in the chart below).

Voting Intention: the impact of the first debate

How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow?



Base: All certain to vote = 833 unweighted; data collected among 1,503 British adults 18+, 19th-22nd March 2010
Ipsos MORI

Base: All certain to vote = 802 unweighted; data collected among 1,253 British adults 18+, 18th-19th April 2010
Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

In the second leaders debate, with expectations high, Clegg still won most approval from our group of undecided voters, but the extent of his victory was less decisive. Nevertheless, the scene is now set for a genuine three-way race, with all to play for in the final debate next week.

Ipsos MORI recruited 36 undecided voters from the Bristol area to watch a live stream of the leaders' debate for the BBC. They were evenly, and representatively, split into three groups of 12, each watching one leader, and asked to vote, using handsets, on their ratings of the leader that they were watching. A real time 'worm' was relayed onto the screen, showing a line for each of the three leaders.

Brown opened with a personal statement to voters, telling them "I'm your man"; however, our audience did not agree and his worm-ratings went down. Overall Brown was more on the attack than last week, making several personal sideswipes at both Clegg and Cameron. As we have seen throughout both debates, personal attacks by Brown and Cameron do not play well with our audiences of undecided voters. Interestingly though, they do seem more prepared to allow Clegg to attack the 'established' politicians (Cameron and Brown) on their behalf. Indeed, Brown's worm fell to its lowest as he directly confronted Nick Clegg, telling him to "get real" on renewing Trident. His other attacks on Cameron and Clegg, describing both as "a risk", were also unpopular with the audience.

As in Manchester, Brown's worm showed little movement when he listed his record of achievements. However, overall this time the Prime Minister seemed to score higher with our audience. In particular he scored well when a question about the Papal visit in September allowed him to talk about achievements on human rights and expansion of rights for homosexuals – such as allowing civil partnerships in the UK – when he was seen to be

reflecting a modern, progressive Britain. Brown's approval ratings also hit a high point when he criticised the country's "addiction to oil" and declared our need to embrace renewable energy sources.



While some instant polls conducted immediately after the debate showed a narrow lead for Mr Cameron, the undecided voters in our Bristol audience were not won over by the Conservative leader. In a repeat of last week, Cameron's satisfaction line peaked when he talked about immigration. His statements that "immigration is too high" and "we need to bring it down" proved very popular. This is a strong area for the Conservatives as we know they are seen by the public as having the best policies on asylum and immigration. He also scored well when he said that "Catholics need to act" on the sex scandals and the need for high speed rail (as it did for Brown when he said a similar thing).

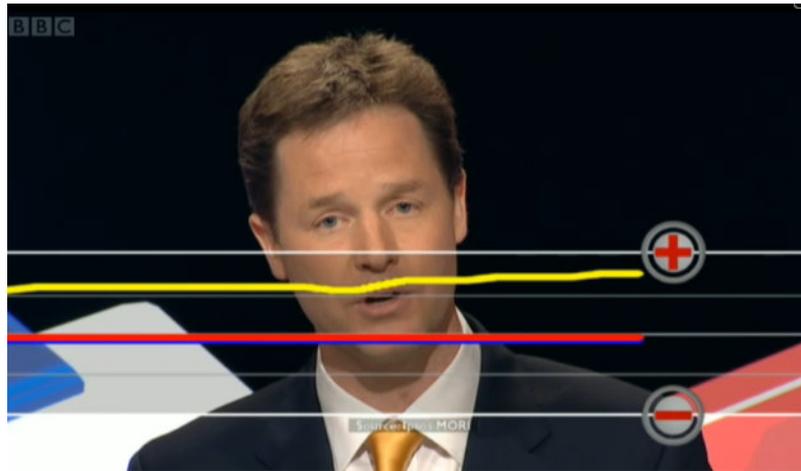


However, perhaps most strikingly – and worryingly for the Tories – Cameron's pronouncement in his closing statement that the Conservatives are best placed to "offer real change" caused his ratings to fall, showing clearly that the undecided voters in our Bristol audience do not believe that the Conservatives are the only option for change. There was also little movement from the worm when he mentioned "big society", suggesting that the public still need clarification about this.

Once again the winner – although by a smaller margin this week – was Nick Clegg. Perhaps his most important victory of the night was to dampen any fears of what would happen in the event of a hung parliament. His worm shot up – indicating popularity with those watching in the audience – when he said that a hung parliament would not mean "the end of the world" and "politicians can talk to each other." This is important for all parties as both Labour and the Conservatives have been warning of the dangers of a hung parliament, saying that only a decisive majority in the House of Commons for their party would be a good result for the

country. According to our poll in key marginal constituencies for Reuters, voters are almost evenly split on whether this would be good (43%) or bad (48%) for Britain. Clegg scored another high when he said that it is “better to work together” in order to deal with the deficit.

Unsurprisingly Clegg’s approval ratings went up when, in his opening statement, he clearly said that “we should not have invaded Iraq”. We know that the Iraq War is deeply unpopular (77% opposed intervention in Iraq without UN approval in March 2003) and as the leader of the only major party that voted against it in Parliament, this is an easy win for Mr Clegg. He also enjoyed highs from the audience when discussing the “special relationship” by standing up for Britain, saying that it is not a “one-way street”.



Clegg’s only significant dips on the worm came when on two occasions he welcomed the Pope to the UK in September. In fact, as a final point of interest, whenever any of the three leaders talked about welcoming the Pope to Britain their ratings fell.

Audience views on holding debates

Having now had two Leaders’ Debates we spoke to the undecided voters in our audience about what they thought of the idea of having debates. Generally they were very positive, and thought it was a good idea. To some extent this is backed up by our Reuters poll in the key marginals; of those who claimed to watch the first debate, about half said it had no impact, a quarter that it encouraged them to vote for the party they already support, and another quarter that it had changed their mind (most often in favour of voting for the Lib Dems)

This reflects the strong feeling among these undecided participants in Bristol that by having the three leaders live on television together gives many more people a chance to hear Nick Clegg and the policies of the Liberal Democrats.

“These are our representatives. We need to see what job they’re going to do. I want to see how they’ll perform and what they’ll do” (Woman, Bristol)

“They’re good for the Liberal Democrats. It gives them an equal voice” (Woman, Bristol)

The increased exposure to the Liberal Democrats is also causing people to consider their votes; even if they have not decided to change their voting intention, they are now at least giving their choice more thought.

“I was thinking of voting for one party but now I’m changing my mind. I’ve got to think about it more” (Woman, Bristol).

However, not everyone is so positive; there is some concern that the debates lead to a greater focus on personality than the substance of policy. They felt that too much attention was paid to the way the leaders come across rather what they actually said, therefore making it feel “*staged*”. Indeed, Mr Brown tried to harness this feeling by telling the audience that if it is an election based on style to “count me out”.

“I didn’t hear anything new; It’s all about how they came across” (Man, Bristol)

We also know that for the first time since we started asking the question in 1987, leaders are as important as policies in determining how people will vote. Perhaps it is the combination of leaders and policies that is making these debates a success.

For more coverage see the BBC Election website:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/election_2010/default.stm

For more on Ipsos MORI’s data, visit our election webpage:

<http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchspecialisms/socialresearch/specareas/politics/generalelection2010.aspx>

Notes to editors

Ipsos MORI recruited 36 undecided voters from the Bristol area. Participants were recruited to achieve a broad demographic mix based on gender, age, social grade and ethnicity as well as voting behaviour. Participants used IML voting pads to record their reactions whilst watching the debate live.

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