

March Political Monitor Briefing

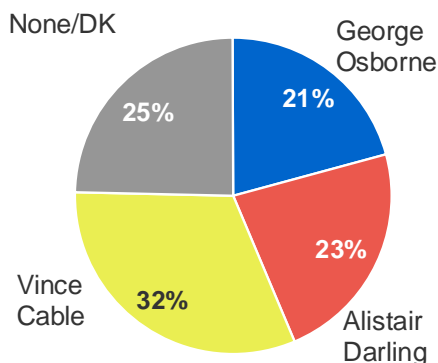
Ipsos MORI's March Political Monitor shows that the economy remains the top issue for voting. The Conservatives have a narrow lead over Labour on the best party to manage the economy, even though the public prefers Labour's approach of postponing cuts in public spending. The Conservatives maintain their lead over Labour in voting intentions (Con 35, Lab 30, Lib Dem 21), reflecting expectations of a hung parliament among 59% of the public.

The economy continues to dominate the political landscape in Britain. A third (32%) of the British public name 'the economy' as an issue that will be very important in helping them decide who to vote for (more than any other issue). Nevertheless, more of the public think the economy will improve (36%) than think it will get worse (29%) in the next 12 months. It is within this context that on Wednesday 24th March Chancellor Darling will announce the last Budget before the General Election.

Despite its importance, none of the parties have managed to establish a lead on the economy. Half of the public are dissatisfied with the way Darling is doing his job, yet many seem unconvinced by the Conservative alternative. Less than a third (29%) of the public believe the Tories have the best policies on the economy – barely more than the 26% saying Labour. Although George Osborne is enjoying higher ratings than Alistair Darling as 'the most capable Chancellor', when Vince Cable is added to the mix he has a clear lead over both Osborne and Darling: 32% rate Cable as the most capable Chancellor compared to 23% saying Darling and 21% Osborne.

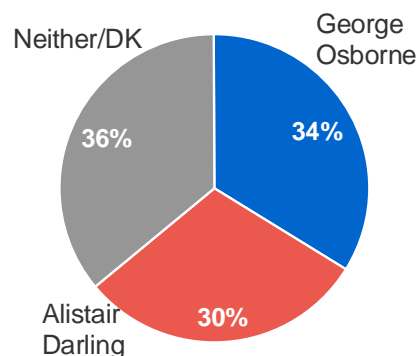
But will Osborne or Cable do better?

Who do you think would make the most capable Chancellor, Labour's Alistair Darling, the Conservatives' George Osborne or the Liberal Democrats' Vince Cable?



Base: 735 from 1,503 British adults 18+, 19th-22nd March 2010
Ipsos MORI

Who do you think would make the most capable Chancellor, Labour's Alistair Darling or the Conservatives' George Osborne?



Base: 768 from 1,503 British adults 18+, 19th-22nd March 2010
Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

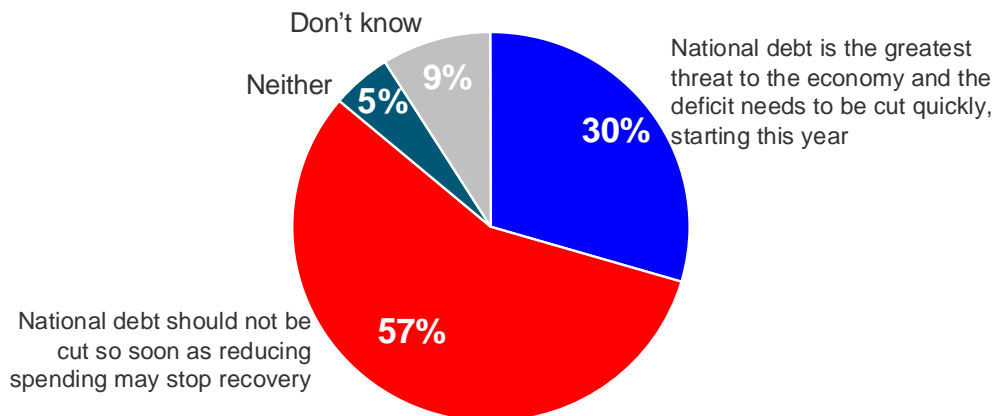
However, encouragingly for the Conservatives, almost half of the public (47%) believe that having the Conservatives as the largest party in Parliament following the election would be the best result for the economy.

All the parties have to deal with a sceptical public when it comes to cuts. A majority still think that efficiencies in public services will save enough to pay off the national debt (64%). Indeed, the public remain unconvinced of the need for cuts to public spending: 49% agree that there is a 'real need to cut spending on public services' while 45% disagree, although acceptance of the need for cuts has risen slightly since June (when 40% agreed).

Labour seems to be winning the argument on how to deal with the national debt; just 30% agree with the Conservative view that 'the national debt is the greatest threat to the economy and the deficit needs to be cut quickly, starting this year' while 57% say that it should not be cut so soon as reducing spending may stop the economic recovery.

Labour's more cautious approach is favoured

Q. The Conservatives/some economists say that the national debt is the greatest threat to the economy and the deficit needs to be cut quickly, starting this year. Labour/other economists say that it should not be cut so soon as reducing public spending may stop the economic recovery. Which of these do you think is right?



Base: 1,503 British adults 18+, 19th-22nd March 2010

Ipsos MORI NB. Half of the sample was asked about Conservatives and Labour approaches, half was asked about economists

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

Political context

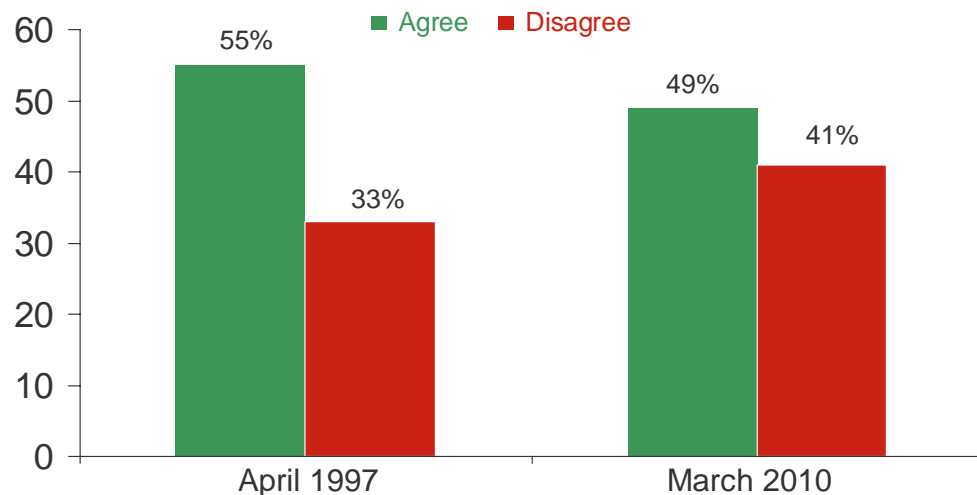
A hung parliament with the Conservatives holding the most seats is seen as the most likely outcome of the next election. In fact, three in five people (59%) believe that the next election will result in a hung parliament (with either Labour or Conservatives as the largest party). Just one in ten (10%) think Labour can hold on to an outright majority while a quarter (24%) expect the Conservatives to win a majority in the House of Commons, allowing David Cameron to form a Conservative government.

Indeed, the voting intention of the British public currently points towards a hung parliament with the Conservatives on 35%, Labour on 30% and the Liberal Democrats at 21%. Should this result be replicated nationwide at the election (with a universal swing) no party would have an outright majority.

Doubts appear to be growing on whether the Conservatives are ready to govern. Although half the public (49%) agree that the Conservatives are ready to form the next government, there is (as with voting intention) a narrowing of the gap they once enjoyed. In August 2008, 58% felt the Tories were ready, while 49% say the same now: the number thinking they are *not* has risen from 29% to 41%. Comparison with April 1997 shows that many fewer doubted New Labour's credentials for government then. However, there is a strong appetite for fresh leadership: three quarters (76%) agree that 'Britain needs a fresh team of leaders' – seemingly this is something that Cameron could capitalise on.

Cameron's Conservatives are seen as less ready than Blair's Labour in 1997

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Conservatives/Labour are ready to form the next Government?



Ipsos MORI Base: 1,503 British adults 18+, 19th-22nd March 2010
Base: 1,114 British adults, 8 April 1997

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor



Satisfaction with Mr Brown and Mr Cameron has fallen in the past month – perhaps as a result of further expenses revelations and other ‘cash for influence’ scandals making the headlines damning both the biggest parties. Satisfaction with David Cameron (equal numbers are satisfied and dissatisfied - 42% each) is now at its lowest level since February 2008. Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg is now the most popular leader with 45% saying they are satisfied with the way he is doing his job – although a third (30%) say they ‘don’t know’ how he is performing.

Notes

Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative sample of 1,503 adults aged 18+ across Great Britain. Interviews were conducted by telephone 19-22 March 2010. Data are weighted to match the profile of the population

About Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI is one of the largest, and best known research companies in the UK and a key part of the Ipsos Group, a leading global research company. With a direct presence in 60 countries our clients benefit from specialist knowledge drawn from our five global practices: public affairs research, advertising testing and tracking, media evaluation, marketing research and consultancy, customer satisfaction and loyalty.

For further information:

Ben Page

Chief Executive, Ipsos MORI
T: 0207 347 3223
E: ben.page@ipsos.com

Bobby Duffy

Managing Director, Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute
T: 0207 347 3267
E: bobby.duffy@ipsos.com

Roger Mortimore

Head of Political and Electoral Research, Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute
T: 0207 347 3218
E: roger.mortimore@ipsos.com

Helen Coombs

Deputy Head of Political Research, Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute
T: 0207 347 3118
E: helen.coombs@ipsos.com