

Why Labour Won
Lessons from 2005
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Introduction¹

Why did Labour win the 2005 election? Why did the Tories lose? Where were we successful – and where did we lose support? What do the results of the 2005 election tell us about the electoral battlefield for 2009? These are vital questions for the Labour Party. The answers will help to determine how we conduct our politics over the next four to five years ahead of our bid for a fourth term in office.

If we learn the right lessons from the 2005 election, we can lay the foundations for the next term in office and for an election campaign in 2009/10 where the prize will be a new democratic progressive settlement to put Britain on the right course for the next 30 years. But if we learn the wrong lessons we risk making ourselves more, not less, vulnerable to our opponents at the next election.

The tone and mood of some post-election commentary implies that we lost the 2005 General Election – and that the hard work of thousands of Labour party activists across Britain was in vain. Labour won. It is not just that we have never won three elections in a row before. Remember that Labour won only two double figure majorities in our first 95 years of existence. A majority of 64 for our third victory in a decade shows Labour's historic achievement in building and sustaining a winning coalition - breaking out of a situation where the central question in British election studies had become 'Must Labour Lose?'

But the truth is that Labour could have lost this election. 2005 was the closest election for 30 years and the final margin of victory – 770,000 votes – represented just 1.8 per cent of registered voters. We could have lost our overall majority and our right to govern Britain. Labour's challenge is to renew and rebuild our broad electoral coalition.

To do that successfully, we need an accurate analysis of the threats and challenges we face. This contribution to Labour's post-election debate therefore draws on the electoral evidence, and seeks to ask what lessons we should learn for the politics of this third term and the next election. Party strategists and academic experts regard the 2005 election as more complex

¹ This paper, like all publications of the Fabian Society, represents not the collective view of the Society, but only the views of the individual writers. The responsibility of the Society is limited to approving its publications as worthy of consideration within the Labour movement.

than any post-war British election. Analysis shows that regional and constituency factors challenged the concept of 'national swing' as never before.

But once the complexity of the results is marshalled, the key political lessons which the Labour Party should draw from the election are three-fold:

(1) Sustaining the new Labour coalition of 1997 was decisive in securing victory

Nine and a half million people voted Labour on May 6 because they believed Labour was a party in tune with the values of the country. Labour won its historic third Labour term because it stood as a new Labour. Our support was based on the bedrock achievements of combining sustained economic stability with the highest-ever levels of investment in public services. Labour has been re-elected with a strong cross-class appeal across all of the regions of Britain: the 2005 election map shows that we are the only genuinely national party. The challenge now is to maintain and strengthen this coalition in office. That makes a continued strong opportunity economy and the further improvement of our public services the keys to retaining power. Put together, these are the two areas where the interests of our traditional supporters and those won over by New Labour coincide so strongly.

(2) Don't swing left; the Tories, not the Lib-Dems, are the real threat to Labour in 2009

After the election, many commentators – some not even in the Labour party – focused on the loss of Labour votes to the Liberal Democrats. The truth that Labour lost ground to both left and right risks being overlooked.

This is dangerous, particularly if the Conservatives do finally embark on the serious inquest into their repeated election defeats that they failed to undertake after either 1997 or 2001. Meanwhile, LibDem MPs are engaged in a fierce debate about whether the party has made a strategic mistake in seeking to appeal to Labour's left. Our opponents are not likely to run the same campaign next time as they did in 2005. Labour also needs to ensure that we do not fight the last campaign rather than the next one. Whatever the outcome of these debates within each of the parties, it is already clear that in 2009, the main threat to Labour will come from the right. Among the 100 most marginal Labour held seats, the Conservatives are in second place in 88 and the Liberal Democrats in 11. It would be very strange to conclude that Labour could only get back to the glory days of 1997 by swinging sharply left, and back-peddalling furiously on the reform manifesto on which it has just stood and won.

(3) Radical party reform is critical to mobilising every single Labour sympathiser in 2009

Third, all in the party must face the truth that we under-pollled our full support. In 2009, we must mobilise every single Labour sympathiser – which places a new imperative on party reform. In part this is critical because local campaigns and candidates matter. In fact they assumed unprecedented importance in this election. Seat-by-seat analysis of the election result shows just how much local campaigns made a difference. In seats where MPs were being replaced by new candidates the overall performance of the defending party was demonstrably and significantly worse than average. So just as important as Labour renewing its electoral coalition is the issue of how we renew and rebuild the Labour Party itself.

But we must also accept the truth that we will never communicate the full measure of our radical, progressive ambition – epitomised by our commitment to end child poverty in a generation – through a media distorted by cynicism, and twisted in its search for bad news. Just as, nationally, Labour must hold the radical centre, so must local parties become centres of radicalism in their communities, at once becoming the first port of call for those who are ambitious to change where they live, *and* a network through which we engage progressives in every corner of these islands in our national – and international – campaign for social justice.

I believe this adds up to a clear message; a sharp swing to the left won't take us back to the glory days of 1997. Nor will binning the reform manifesto on which we've just stood and won. But it's equally true that we didn't poll our full support. Radical party reform is vital if we want to mobilise every single Labour sympathiser in 2009.

Why Did Labour Win?

In 2005, Labour retained 85 per cent of the seats won in the great landslide of 1997.

Often in elections, there is a simple story to tell about the result. But the 2005 election was deceptive. On the surface the churn in votes seemed straight-forward; a 1.4 million vote boost for the LibDems, and a 400,000 boost for the Tories sourced from a higher turnout and a drift from Labour.

But a seat by seat analysis reveals a different, more subtle story, in which differential swings between regions and individual seats were decisive to the outcome. Beneath the headline figure of a net switch from Labour to Liberal Democrat of 4.8 per cent, the LibDems' results emerge as highly erratic; focused in a handful of spectacular gains, and at the expense of modest progress and seat losses in traditional heartlands of the South West and South East where the LibDems' share of the vote increased by less than 2 per cent.

There is therefore a premium on drawing the right lessons from the fight. Why did we win? Why did the Tories lose? And what are the lessons of the election for the way we conduct our politics for the next four to five years in advance of our bid for a fourth term?

Once the complexity of the results is marshalled, there are in fact three conclusions:

- The new Labour coalition of 1997 was decisive in securing victory
- The Tories – not the Liberals - are the real national threat
- Local campaigns and candidates assumed unprecedented importance

Labour's Winning Coalition

The key to Labour's 2005 election victory is that we sustained the new Labour coalition, constructed so brilliantly during the 1992 Parliament on the foundations created by Neil Kinnock, and so kept control of the centre-ground of British politics.

We should not forget just what a seismic reorganisation of the political landscape was delivered in 1997 – and what a painstaking business it was to assemble the coalition that underpinned it. And it was not an accidental victory. It was reform – and the creation of new

Labour – during the 1992 Parliament that laid the foundation for the 1997 landslide victory which swept the old landscape away.

Between 1992 and 1994, the Fabian Society published the influential *Southern Discomfort* series of pamphlets by Giles Radice and others, which set out just how far Labour needed to change after its fourth election defeat in 1992.²

The conclusions were blunt: ‘Labour’, wrote Giles Radice in 1992, ‘suffers from a crippling political weakness’. Labour was behind among the critical C1 and C2 sections which made up 51 per cent of the population, who saw themselves as ‘upwardly mobile’ and who despite the growing recession, felt ‘let down by the Tories but [did] not yet trust Labour’³ – a party they felt did not ‘believe in go-getters’ and which, when asked, they associated with words like ‘high tax’, followed by ‘extremism’, ‘NHS’, ‘working class’, ‘of the past’ and ‘economic mismanagement’.⁴ The South East had become ‘one huge Tory safe seat’ and in Southern England Labour held just 10 seats out of 177 outside London, of which just 3 were in the South East (compared to 80 in 1974).⁵

This, Radice wrote, was a problem, not just in the South where Labour needed to transform its performance because of its huge bloc of 177 seats, but because winning the south would entail crafting an electoral appeal that could carry the ‘key seats’ needed for victory across the country – seats like Dudley West and Lincoln which Radice *et al* assessed in their final pamphlet of 1994.

By 1997, new Labour had transformed the party’s electability. The result was that the party won the biggest majority since the National Government of 1935. The swing from Conservatives to Labour of 10 per cent was the largest two party shift since 1945, and Labour increased its 1992 share of the vote by a third, whilst the Tories lost a quarter⁶. Big gains were made among virtually all social groups but especially women, C1s, home-owners, first time and young voters. The biggest increase in vote share came in Greater London and the South East.

² *Southern Discomfort* (1992); *More Southern Discomfort: A Year On – Taxing and Spending* (1993); *Any Southern Comfort* (1994).

³ Giles Radice and Stephen Pollard, *More Southern Discomfort* (Fabian Society, 1993), p18.

⁴ Giles Radice, *Southern Discomfort* (Fabian Society, 1992), p10.

⁵ Giles Radice, *Southern Discomfort* (Fabian Society, 1992), p1.

In 2005, the vast majority of these new seats – some of them like Hove and Crosby never previously held by Labour – were retained, and only 15 per cent lost. In effect, New Labour's key seats strategy remained operational, carrying seats across the country, just as it did in 1997.

Underpinning this success were sustained Labour leads among those sections of the population which propelled us to victory in 1997. The 'geology' of 1997 altered as we left landslide country, but the basic contours stayed the same. Thus in 2005, Labour retained huge leads over the Tories among the under 35s and C2DEs together with solid leads among women (a 6 per cent lead in 2005 compared to 1992 when 45 per cent of women voted Conservative), and voters aged 35-65.

Crucially, among ABC1s – the group which now represents around 54 per cent of the population – the Tory lead was kept down to 3 per cent, a huge reduction on the old Tory majorities among ABC1s which between 1974 and 1992 hovered between 33 per cent and 37 per cent. In fact, the only significant demographic group where there was a significant change of support between 2001 and 2005, was among C2s – 21 per cent of the electorate – where Labour's support dropped by around 5 per cent, support lost principally to the Tories, and where LibDem support has traditionally been, and remains, very weak.

Labour's support among social classes D and E was down from 1997, but was very much in line with levels of support in the 1980s (support in 2005 was around 4 per cent lower than the average level of support between 1979 and 1992). But overall the margin of victory was created by *retaining* our new supporters acquired in 1997. Labour support among ABs was some 15 per cent higher in 2005 than it averaged between 1979-92; among C1s, it was 10 percent higher, and among C2s, it was 6 per cent higher.

The historic new Labour coalition forged during the 1992 Parliament and which propelled Labour into Government in 1997, was sustained in 2005 to carry Labour to victory once again.

⁶ D Butler & D Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997* (1997), chapter 13

Support for Main Political Parties By Key Group

	Lab	Con	LD	Lbr Lead Over Tories	Lbr Lead Over LibDems
Men	38%	33%	21%	+5%	+17%
Women	38%	32%	23%	+6%	+15%
18-24	42%	24%	26%	+18%	+16%
25-34	42%	24%	26%	+18%	+16%
35-64	38%	33%	22%	+5%	+16%
65+	35%	42%	18%	-7%	+17%
AB	32%	37%	24%	-5%	+8%
C1	35%	34%	24%	+1%	+11%
C2	43%	32%	18%	+11%	+25%
DE	45%	28%	19%	+17%	+26%

Source: ICM

Support For Labour By Demographic Group

%	1979	1983	1987	1992	Average 1979-92	1997	2001	2005	Change Avg 79-92 – 05
AB	20	15	13	22	18	30	30	32	+15
C1	29	20	24	28	25	37	38	35	+10
C2	42	32	35	39	37	52	49	43	+6
DE	51	45	46	52	49	58	55	45	-4

Source: ITN/Harris Exit Polls (quoted Radice, 1993, p4); ICM

The Tories – not the Liberals - are the real threat

Not every election, sadly, can be a landslide. Labour lost 47 seats⁷, and with them the service in Parliament of some outstanding individuals who gave their all to the Labour movement. In 2005, Labour's victory in 355 seats was down from 412 in 2001 and 418 in 1997. This included a net reduction of ten caused by the boundary changes in Scotland. There were 31 losses to the Conservatives, 12 to the Liberal Democrats (including the by-election loss of Brent East), two to the SNP and two to other parties. The Conservatives made five gains from the Liberal Democrats but lost three in return leaving them with 198 seats overall. The LibDems also made one gain from Plaid Cymru which left them with 62 MPs.

After the election, many commentators – some within the Labour party - looked at the 1.4 million votes added by the LibDems and the smaller figure of 400,000 gained by the Tories and came to two strange conclusions; first, that it was now the LibDems who somehow constituted the real threat to Labour, and second – as a consequence – that Labour needed to shift to the *left* to compensate, as if that might somehow persuade the 1.4 million new LibDem voters 'back' to Labour. In fact, a seat by seat analysis reveals this as quite the wrong conclusion. The truth is more straightforward. The Tories not the Liberals are the real challengers. The battle-lines for power are if anything, more clearly on the centre-ground.

LibDem gains

Let's deal first with the LibDem challenge to Labour. Though nationally, there was a net swing from Labour to Liberal Democrat of 4.8 per cent, it occurred very erratically as a handful of spectacular gains in different parts of Britain came at the expense of much more modest progress - and seat losses - in previous Liberal heartlands of the South West and South East - regions where their share of the vote increased by less than 2 per cent.

Closer examination of the 12 Labour seats lost to the Liberals reveals that relatively little of national application can really be learned from seats which almost all shared a number of unusual characteristics – except to shatter the myth that a 'shift to the left' drives LibDem voters back to Labour.

⁷ A further 10 were lost due to boundary changes in Scotland

Of the LibDems' 12 gains from Labour, three-quarters were seats recently held by the Tories – which the LibDems won partly by tapping into a bank of anti-Labour voters. Seats such as Manchester Withington, Birmingham Yardley and Cambridge were actually former Tory seats, where the Tories proved incapable of fostering a revival. The Liberals were able to win by picking up votes from former Tory voters.

In most of these seats, the LibDems had made strong progress in 2001. While events of the 2001 Parliament – such as Iraq, or tuition fees - were important in these seats, they can not have been the whole story.

But, third, most of the seats have highly unusual social demographics. The complexity of modern society means that a four way AB/C1/C2/DE does not tell us a great deal about the different identities and values within these classes. Modern social analysts now break the population down using the widely used demographic segmentation developed by Experian, which divides the country into 11 groups and 61 types.

Of the LibDems' twelve gains, seven have a concentration of MOSAIC social class E proportions of over 33 per cent. This group, formally known as 'Urban Intelligence', is described as 'young, single and mostly well-educated ... cosmopolitan in tastes and liberal in attitudes.' The group is divided into seven sub-types of which four are most strongly associated with Liberal Democrat voting.

The whole groups accounts for just over 7 per cent of neighbourhoods so key groups account for less than 5 per cent of the population.

Many will read the *Guardian*. Many will be committed to most of Labour's most deeply cherished values. Good people, with a strong social conscience and often a track record of service to the community in their professional or private lives. People in fact like my parents who spent their careers working in teaching and local government.

But, people who were not necessarily representative of Britain as a whole. Making up 4 per cent of the British population, they are well-informed, big-hearted - but small in number;. They are an important part of a potential Labour coalition (and a good number of party members) but simply not a sufficiently big base on which to win a general election. To win these seats back, Labour will need to ensure that its local campaigning learns the lessons of

2005. But it would be a mistake to base a national election strategy on an appeal to this group alone.

Almost 400 seats have fewer than 3 per cent Mosaic E, and apart from a handful of London marginals, there are very few Labour-Conservative marginals with more than 30 per cent of their population in MOSAIC E.⁸ Perhaps the most significant is Reading East which is one of the seats where it is fair to say that the increase in the LibDems' vote gave the seat to the Tories.

In LibDem gains with a much more balanced demographic profile – such as Chesterfield – the swing from Labour to the LibDems was well below the national average. Indeed in the five other LibDem gains without high proportions of Mosaic social class E mostly long-standing Lib-Dem pockets – Rochdale, Inverness, Falmouth, Yardley and East Dunbartonshire.

Analysis of Seats With Good LibDem Performances

Constituency	Increase in LibDem share 2005	Increase in LibDem share 2001	percentage of population in MOSAIC Group E	Labour gained	Previously
Manchester Withington	20.40%	8.40%	48.40%	1987	Tory
Cambridge	18.90%	8.90%	43.20%	1992	Tory
Hornsey & Wood Green	17.60%	14.50%	46.30%	1992	Tory
City of Durham	16.10%	8.40%	11.40%	n/a	Labour
Cardiff Central	13.10%	11.80%	46.90%	1992	Tory
Newcastle-upon-Tyne Central	12.40%	6.70%	34.30%	1987	Tory
Oxford East	11.10%	8.70%	37.20%	1987	Tory
Chesterfield	-0.50%	8.20%	0.60%	LibDem	Labour

⁸ There are five Labour seats with significant numbers of MOSAIC E that can be gained on a swing of up to 5 per cent.

Rethinking Labour's manifesto or programme in government in a way that would completely satisfy this section of New Labour's 1997 victory coalition would please many. These voters have a disproportionate voice within the media (and perhaps within the party too). But it would lose us power for another generation. The truth is that Labour's appeal has to be much broader – and given the former Tory voting habits of many of these voters, it is far from clear that a 'shift to the left' would be at all persuasive.

Tory gains

This point is most clearly seen when we look at the seats lost to the Tories. Despite the fact that the Tories stood still nationally, in many of the seats which they gained from Labour they did enough to win by themselves without any inadvertant assistance from the Liberal Democrats.

In 15 of the 31 gains, the Tories put on more votes than the Liberals - a feature totally at odds with what was happening nationally. An example is Gravesham. In the next election if Labour is to hold the remaining seven seats in Kent, let alone regain Gravesham, it is the Tories who will need to be beaten.

Indeed only in 11 seats (one third of Tory gains) do the Liberals appear to have absorbed significantly more Labour defectors than the Tories, and in most of them they remain a marginal third force with less than 20 per cent of the vote (Harwich, Northampton South, Reading East, Forest of Dean, Hemel Hempstead, Clwyd West, Rugby & Kenilworth, Scarborough, St Albans, Wellingborough, Lancaster & Wyre, Shrewsbury and Shipley). In only two of their 31 gains did the Tories fail to increase their share of the vote by more than the 0.6 per cent rise which they achieved across the country.

In the new 'super-marginals' of the M25 belt the pattern was the same. In Harlow, the LibDem vote actually went down.

In other seats, particularly in London and the M25 belt, there was simply direct switching to the Conservatives – with swings as high as 7-8 per cent in Bexleyheath, Welwyn Hatfield, and Peterborough. And if there had been any greater swing to the Conservatives in northern England, Labour's majority would have been put in peril.

In other words, when it comes to looking at seats, the real story of the election is of a split to both 'left' and 'right'. In parts of the country – Yorkshire and the Humber, the North and Scotland (together home to 24 per cent of seats) – the swing to the LibDems was over twice the level of the swing to the Conservatives.

But in the crucial south – that part of the country identified as critical to an election victory in the Fabian *Southern Comfort* pamphlets of the early 1990s, and the home of 42 per cent of seats on the British mainland – votes broke away from Labour much more evenly.

When we look at the swing from Labour to opposition parties in the South East, Greater London, the South West and the Eastern region, we see that switches to the LibDems are actually nearly matched by switches to the Conservatives. In fact, in the South East itself (home to 83 seats – 13 per cent of the British total – and 19 of them Labour) the swing to the Tories was bigger than the swing to the Liberals.

Swing from Labour to Opposition Parties By Region

Region	Lab to Con	Lab to LD	Seats	% of seats	Swing to LD/ Swing to Con
South East	3.60%	3.30%	83	13%	0.9X
Greater London	4.90%	6.40%	74	12%	1.3X
South West	1.80%	2.40%	51	8%	1.3X
Eastern	4.20%	5.70%	56	9%	1.4X
East Midlands	3.00%	4.60%	44	7%	1.5X
Wales	3.10%	5.20%	40	6%	1.7X
West Midlands	2.90%	4.90%	58	9%	1.7X
North West	2.70%	5.20%	72	11%	1.9X
Yorkshire and The Humber	2.00%	4.20%	56	9%	2.1X
Scotland	2.30%	5.30%	59	9%	2.3X
North	2.20%	6.20%	34	5%	2.8X
Great Britain	3.20%	4.80%	627		

This picture of seats lost because of shifts to both left and right is reinforced when we look at the evidence about why people voted the way they did.

Research carried out by YouGov among Labour identifiers who either did not vote for voted for a different party (overwhelmingly the Liberal Democrats) indicated that Iraq was the largest single issue. But only 26 per cent of these defectors claimed this as their main motivation, and just 1 per cent tuition fees, perhaps because these groups overlapped. Another 15 per cent cited “the state of the economy” and 14 per cent “Asylum and immigration”. Together, the issues of asylum and immigration, crime and anti-social behaviour were a primary reason for not voting Labour for 22 per cent - not far short of the number of voters lost over Iraq. It is far too simple to regard all lost Labour votes as attributable to anti-war protest or defectors to the “left” as the evidence suggests that this accounts for only a substantial minority of this swing. A majority were people who were just generally discontented and ended up voting for the Liberal Democrats either by default or because they could not bring themselves to make the switch to the Conservatives.

Reasons for Labour Identifiers Not Voting Labour

War in Iraq	26%
The state of the economy	15%
Asylum and immigration	14%
The Health Service	10%
Law and order	4%
Anti social behaviour	4%
Schools	3%
Tuition Fees	1%
Another issue	15%

Source: YouGov/Labour Party

Local campaigns and candidates assumed unprecedented importance

The third and under-reported conclusion from a seat by seat analysis is that local factors – in particular the incumbency of the candidate and the strength of local campaign activity – appeared to have an unprecedented impact.

Despite claims that the Conservatives performed better in marginal seats, the swing in the 50 most marginal battleground seats was in fact just 2.6 per cent compared with 3.2 per cent nationally.

This suggests that once again Labour’s local organisation was a crucial factor, alongside the strong local reputations built up by many Labour members of parliament, in holding seats that might otherwise have been lost. In close fought marginal seats such as Dumfries & Galloway, South Dorset, Oldham East & Saddleworth and Gloucester there was actually a swing to Labour.

The incumbency effect has long been recognised and attempts have been made to quantify it. The moments when it is most evident are when MPs stand down or defend their seats for the first time. In this election the incumbency effects appear to have been very marked - and they provide a clear indicator of the importance of the local campaign and candidate.

Comparison of Swings

	Lab No.	Change in Lab share	Swing to Con	Swing to LD
All seats		-5.8 per cent	3.2 per cent	4.8 per cent
First-time defenders	25	-3.7 per cent	1.3 per cent	3.2 per cent
MP standing down	45	-9.2 per cent	4.3 per cent	7.5 per cent

Aggregate Figures by party (excluding Scotland because of boundary changes)

Analysis of seats across the party spectrum where the candidate was either stepping down or defending the seat for the first time point to an incontrovertible pattern: *In seats where MPs were being replaced by new candidates the overall performance of the defending party was demonstrably and significantly worse than average. But in seats where MPs were defending their position for the first time they did much better than average.*

Many first-time defenders were probably making up for below-average results in 2001 (when of course, they were first time candidates). But as a general rule we can say that a defending MP carries a personal vote and that a change of candidate is a point of danger.

In the 2005 election, the scale of the difference was greater than ever before.

- For **Labour**, seats which had new candidates saw their Labour vote drop by some 13.9 per cent compared with 2001; whereas in seats with a 'first-time defender', the drop-off was just 3.9 per cent.
- In **LibDem** seats, traditionally the biggest beneficiaries of incumbency effects, the bonus to first-time defenders was a 19.5 per cent increase in their vote – but they too lost 5.8 per cent of their vote where MPs were standing down.

Incumbency is not a guaranteed bonus for a first-time defender. In 2005, there was some evidence of second-time defenders' being unable to sustain an extraordinarily good result in 2001 with previous tactical support fragmenting (Kingston & Surbiton, Enfield, Southgate), but this time round strong incumbency effects were seen in for example West Bromwich East, Leigh and Bassetlaw which all had swings to Labour, as well as South Dorset and Gloucester, both of which polled more Labour votes than in 2001.

This variations between seats would suggest that the scale of an incumbency vote is subject to many complicating factors, which would include the type of seat concerned, but also the level of activity and personal profile of the member within the constituency.

The picture that emerges therefore is one of complex currents. Not every election can be a landslide and Labour clearly lost votes to the left and the right, and the strength of the local campaign assumed a level of importance that is unprecedented in British politics.

The key question this leaves is what kind of election will Labour confront at the next election. Where does this assessment of the lessons from the 2005 election leave us?

The battle next time

On current boundaries, Labour now holds 41 seats with majorities of less than 5 per cent. This is where the next General Election will be won and lost. How would they be affected by movements by a Labour government away from the centre-ground?

In most Labour constituencies, the 2005 election has left the Liberal Democrats in second place – but in almost all of them, the LibDems are in a distant third place. In Labour’s most marginal seats it is still overwhelmingly the Conservatives who are the biggest threat.

Our analysis is complicated by the imminent arrival of new boundaries. But, taking these into account, estimates of the notional 2005 results for the new constituencies shows Labour would have won 350 constituencies out of 650, a majority of 50 – and down 14 on the 2005 election. *But, among the 100 most marginal Labour held seats, the Conservatives are in second place in 88 and the Liberal Democrats in 11.*

Of course, many of these seats could in theory be delivered to the Conservatives by Labour votes switching to the LibDems. But, when we analyse the impact of a 3 per cent swing to the Liberal Democrats, we see that 24 seats would fall to the Conservatives and a further 8 to the LibDems, leaving Labour with no overall majority.

But a 3 per cent swing to the Conservatives on the other hand provides the Tories with 46 gains and 4 to the LibDems. The loss of seats to the Tories is nearly twice as big – and would leave the Tories and Liberals with enough seats to form a Government.

Effect of 3 per cent Swings to Tories or LibDems On New Boundaries

Seats	Labour	Con	LibDem	Other	Labour majority
2005 Result	355	197	62	31	65
3% swing to LibDems	323	221	70	31	1
3% swing to Tories	305	243	66	31	-35

A 5 per cent swing to the Conservatives produces even more dramatic results: 78 Tory gains and 84 Labour losses. A swing of 5 per cent to the Liberal Democrats on the other hand cuts the number of Labour seats by only 48.

The battleground, therefore, remains dominated by the fight between Labour and

Conservative, and will be tougher in an election where the Conservatives are regarded as serious contenders for power.

Just as generals are often accused of re-fighting battles of old, so too are politicians accused of re-fighting the last general election. We must not make this mistake.

The Tory inquest – a return to the centre-ground

The opposition will be different in 2009. In many ways the Tories still have a mountain to climb to return to power.

Between 1979 and 1992, the Tory share of the vote was fairly stable at around 42 per cent-43 per cent. It collapsed completely in 1993 to just over 30 per cent and has stayed at around that mark for the last 12 years. Their vote among women fell by 1 per cent in 2005 from 2001; their vote among ABs fell by 3 percent and among C1s by 1 per cent.

In five English regions – the North, Yorkshire and The Humber, the North West, and the East and West Midlands, the Tories' share of the vote actually went backwards. In Britain's major cities, they are unrepresented often locally as well as in Parliament, and the only age-group in which they lead (and have done for many years) is the over 65s.

But clear among the banality of the cacophony from Tory leadership hopefuls is a glimmer that the election will be won by pushing Labour from its lock on the centre-ground.

It is of course always possible that the Tories will remain true to the past eight years and elect Dr Liam Fox as their leader. Fast out of the gates, Dr Fox opened his campaign with a speech at the think tank, Politeia. On May 10 he argued that the Tories 'were successful in selling the product, but not in selling the brand.' He argued that their policies and outlook had been correct, and that it was their 'image' (of all things) that let them down.

But the weight (if that is the right word) of Tory argument has been for a rapprochement with reality. Hence Alan Duncan (June 7): 'The reduction in Blair's majority must not delude us into thinking we don't still have a hill to climb ... One more heave won't answer'.

Hence, David Willetts: 'What we have to do is ... challenge Tony Blair for the centre ground of British politics ... getting government out of the way of strong people at the most dynamic

part of their lives is not necessarily the best way of helping people who are less well off in communities that are deeply fractured.'

Hence Malcolm Rifkind: 'winning back the centre ground is not an option, but a necessity for the Conservative Party'. Hence, David Cameron: 'we understand that there's a "we" in politics as well as a "me" ... that there is such a thing as society, it's just not the same thing as the state. ... [we should start] first, raising tax thresholds to take low-paid people out of tax, and second, introducing tax relief for childcare for those who are paying tax'.

Hence, Andrew Lansley: 'we must recognise that freedom is for everyone. It is the freedom from poverty for a child in Tower Hamlets as much as it is freedom two miles away for the businessman in the City of London from excessive regulation.'

Ken Clarke, the great Tory centrist, appears to have judged the atmosphere benign enough for one last venture and even Tory front-runner David Davis who initially claimed not to believe in the centre-ground – telling Jeremy Vine on June 1, 'I don't agree with the argument on the centre ground' – was forced soon to retreat and in the *Sunday Telegraph* on June 5 he attempted to synthesise contributions from Damian Green, Alan Duncan, Liam Fox, David Willets and Malcolm Rifkind:

'The "modernisers" are right that we must broaden our appeal – for instance to women, ethnic minorities and younger voters. They are right that we should become a party in which everyone can feel comfortable. We should be a one-nation party and there should be no no-go areas for us ... the party [must] retain its integral values – a belief in the nation state, liberty and personal responsibility; a suspicion of big government – but a focus on helping people of every condition to break free of dependence, indignity and poverty.'

An assault on the centre-ground is not quite yet a racing certainty. But it would be foolish to bet against – or indeed take the massive gamble of leaving open the gate.

The LibDems too have exited the election in a degree of philosophical crisis. While the LibDems have shown an ability to make inroads against both Labour and previously against the Conservatives, the evidence suggests that they remain a long way from being regarded as serious contenders for government, even by those who voted for them.

Indeed their positioning, seen by many as to the left of Labour, resulted in some losses in their previous heartlands of the South West and South East where their share of the vote increased by less than 2 per cent. We cannot be surprised therefore if the LibDems actually change position to challenge the Conservatives. The Liberals lost more seats than they gained in LibDem/ Conservative marginals. Charles Kennedy is widely seen by the electorate as a centre-left figure. This explains why the LibDems gained lots more votes but few seats. To make a breakthrough in 2009, they will need to reposition to take seats from the Tories.

So if we are to win the next election, we must guard more carefully against losing votes to the Tories than the Liberals. But as Richard Crossman said over 35 years ago, an election is 'the end of a long process'. A YouGov poll for the Labour party suggests that 59 per cent of Labour voters made up their mind more than a year ago – and that 59 per cent of non-Labour voters made up their minds before the start of the election campaign. As Lynton Crosby memorably put it: 'You can't fatten a pig on market day'. We can't start to prepare for the next election campaign only in 2008-9. What then are the lessons of the election for our next four years in Government?

Three Lessons for the Next Four Years

Public service reform needs to be delivered.

Labour actually starts its third term in good shape with the electorate. But we need to deliver – and we can expect to come under pressure from an ever more demanding public to speed up our reform agenda for the public services.

Asked to choose between Labour and Conservative governments in a YouGov poll, people chose Labour by a margin of 52 per cent-35 per cent. Labour was preferred on the economy, health, education, anti-social behaviour and nearly all the issues which normally determine elections. So while the margin was close, Labour's third term has solid foundations.

But the electorate does not feel that we have made as much progress delivering public service reform as we have in delivering a stable economy. This is the core of the third term challenge. By the end of the election campaign, 70 per cent of voters said either 'a lot' or 'some' progress had been made building a strong economy. The NHS came second, with just under half saying progress was being made to improve. But these figures – and the figures for other major public services, like crime, immigration, education – are still well short of what has been achieved for the economy.

How much progress has been made...?

percentage of people saying 'a lot of progress' or 'some progress'

		2-3	
	05-Apr	May	Change
Build a strong economy	68	70	+2
Improve the NHS	45	44	-1
Reduce the crime rate	36	30	-6
Improve standards of education in state schools	30	35	+5
Implement sensible asylum/ immigration policies	16	19	+3

Source: YouGov⁹

This comes through on the doorstep, particularly in key seats. Labour's delivery of a strong economy is popular – as is our focus on families and policies relevant to them, including Working Families Tax Credit, Education Maintenance Allowances, free travel for under 16s

⁹ Quoted Peter Kellner, *ibid*, p.326

and better school dinners. But people do not get a sense that we are gripping public service reform with gusto. They are often negative about the progress made, and talk about crime and anti-social behaviour as major issues. This contributes to a sense of unfairness – that they paid their dues, but do not get quite enough back. They can themselves point to positive things changing (like investment and Working Families Tax Credit) but they want more concrete evidence of delivery. *They know that government is hard work. They don't expect miracles. But they want a strong sense that Labour is on their side, fighting for a fair deal.*

Even as we deliver strongly on our commitments, we can expect voters to get more demanding still. All political parties confront a long-term dealignment in voter loyalty combined with a step change in what electorates demand from public services. Expectations of quality public services are quite simply higher, as public service users expect higher standards in the growing service sector, and become less afraid to express dissatisfaction. This will change voters' views of politicians and their perceptions of whether or not they have 'delivered'.

Strength of Party Identification, 1974-2001

	1974 Feb	1974 Oct	1979	1987	1992	1997	2001
Very strong	31.70%	28.10%	23.50%	21.30%	19.30%	17.40%	14.80%
Fairly strong	46.40%	50.60%	50.60%	46.90%	47.90%	45.20%	46.60%
Not very strong	22.00%	21.30%	25.80%	31.80%	32.90%	37.40%	38.50%

Source: BES

People are 50 per cent more likely to complain about bad service than 5 years ago. In 2000, 42 per cent of people say they are more likely to complain about poor service or faulty goods on the phone – up from 27 per cent in 1997. Complaints to the General Medical Council have risen from 19 per week in 1995 to 75 per week in 2003. Consumers of public services are also much better informed – there are for example now 46 UK health consumer magazines – compared to 13 in 1992 and there are over 200 patient groups with regular web-sites.

Evidence from researchers such as Michael Marmot demonstrates that people who have more choice and more control over their lives tend to be healthier and to live longer. But we have a two tier system where an articulate, well-informed middle class seem to find their

way around and others do not. We have not yet created a democracy of choice in which everyone has the power to opt for the best available in public services. Labour must recognise that the communities that we were founded to help often feel this inequity most keenly. Two of the three wards in Hodge Hill are in the top 5 per cent most deprived wards in the country. But in coffee mornings and after work get-togethers with hundreds of residents, the core theme is of control, influence and power. Not once every four years. But day to day. Hour to hour. How can *they* as residents get the council to enforce tenancy agreements? Or sweep the gullies as well as the main roads? Or invest in estate security? How can *they* get their school to raise its game, or take bullying seriously or serve halal food at lunchtime? How can *they* get the local police to respond to anti-social behaviour quickly? Or open the local police station? Or get officers out of patrol cars and back walking a beat?

Reforms designed to promote choice simply put the chance to opt for the best around within reach of everybody – not simply the well-informed few, backed by the information, support and confidence of British public service at its best. Choice and diversity are not goals. They are the means by which we deliver a fairer society and give the people we serve more power, not less over the own lives. They are means, just like increased public investment and the extra staff are means, to help improve the quality of our public services.

Public service reform therefore will be critical in winning a fourth term because at the heart of the next election may be the balance of power in public services. In the Tories' attack on 'cleaner hospitals' and 'more police on the beat' we could see the bare bones of their assault on Labour's public service delivery record. It will be nothing compared to the campaign the Tories will run in 2009 unless we deliver our manifesto decisively, transforming the choice and voice that the public has in the services they pay for. We can expect to be judged on whether we have really removed the barriers for ordinary people to shape the services they receive to suit them, their children, and increasingly their parents.

Rejuvenate the full breadth of the 1997 Coalition

The second lesson for the Labour Party is that New Labour has to confront the fact that in 2005 (and indeed in 2001), the Labour party failed to attract its full level of support.

The achievement of new Labour during the 1992 Parliament was to give Labour a clear lead in overall party identification, which we retained through the 2001-2005 parliament.

Percentage Saying They Identify With A Particular Political Party*

Party	% Identifiers
Labour	46
Tory	34
LibDem	14
Other	6

*Base is the 70 per cent of electorate naming a political party. When asked, 30 per cent of electorate say they either 'don't know' or 'don't identify with any particular party'.¹⁰

In 2005, the Conservatives polled their strength in full but could not reach out beyond the 34 per cent who regard themselves as natural Conservatives. Every dog heard the whistle but that same campaign failed to appeal the swing voters the Tories needed. Labour's support is broader – but in 2009, we must ensure that we mobilise our support fully. Upto 13 per cent of people identifying themselves as Labour voters, voted for the LibDems, and 9 per cent stayed at home¹¹. Support among groups where Labour's lead remains strong – such as DEs – was in line with historical trends, but well down on 1997. And in the North, a traditional Labour strong-hold, the decline in Labour's share was slightly higher (0.3 per cent higher) than the national average.

Change in Labour's Share of the Vote By Region

Region	2005	2001	Change
Greater London	38.90%	47.40%	-8.40%
Eastern	29.80%	36.80%	-6.90%
East Midlands	39.00%	45.10%	-6.10%
North	51.30%	57.40%	-6.10%
West Midlands	38.90%	44.80%	-5.90%
Wales	42.70%	48.60%	-5.90%
North West	45.30%	51.10%	-5.80%
South East	24.40%	29.40%	-5.00%
Yorkshire and The Humber	43.60%	48.60%	-5.00%
Scotland	38.90%	43.30%	-4.40%
South West	22.80%	26.30%	-3.40%
Great Britain	36.20%	42.00%	-5.80%

Iraq was clearly a factor in parts of the country – indeed in a Sky News poll on election day, 1 in 4 LibDem voters said they would have voted Labour 'but have not done so because of

¹⁰ Quoted, Peter Kellner, *ibid*, p.326

¹¹ Quoted, Peter Kellner, *ibid*, p.326

Iraq¹². The widespread assumption of a Labour victory undoubtedly made it easier for Labour supporters to believe that they could afford to cast a protest vote. The result was a swing which simply delivered more seats to the Conservatives while their vote was barely changing.

But post-election polling reveals that there is a significant opportunity for Labour over the course of the next Parliament by underlining our values to win back the votes of many of those who chose to stay at home. YouGov polls for the Daily Telegraph show that voters prefer Labour's policies on the issues that are important to them such as the economy (Labour lead of 22% on 3-4May), health (Labour lead of 13%) and education (Labour lead of 7%).¹³

But many on the left of the party have to recognise that mobilising traditional Labour voters in poorer constituencies will require us to deliver – and be seen to deliver – on our manifesto promises on crime and anti-social behaviour; issues with causes that need to be resolved if regeneration is to flourish. But all progressives would surely agree is that there is plenty in Labour's 2005 manifesto to lift hearts across the complete spectrum of the Labour movement – our commitment to end child poverty within a generation; our unprecedented investment in universal, free public services; the new childrens' centres, schools, health centres and hospitals appearing across so many communities; the falling waiting lists; the rising achievements in exam results – rising fastest in inner city areas; the New Deals which have helped 1.2 million people back into work; our leadership of the international community securing aid for Africa; our expansion of rights for men and women at work as we implement the Warwick agreement; the arrest of income inequality.

None of our achievements in the field of social justice have happened by accident. They have happened through careful, difficult, well thought through and sustained effort. Finessed in our policy debates, argued for on the doorsteps and on the 'phones, agreed in Parliament, and pushed through in government and town halls up and down the country by the coordinated action of a Labour movement committed to an ideal of social progress.

They are emotive and motivational accomplishments. They embody the reasons that so many of us joined the Labour party. But how widely are these understood by those who

¹² Quoted Peter Kellner, *ibid*

should see these as strong reasons to re-elect Labour? The Fabian Society/MORI deliberative research on public attitudes to poverty and life chances for the Fabian Life Chances and Child Poverty Commission found very little public knowledge of Labour's commitment to end child poverty within a generation, or the significant achievement in taking a million children out of poverty in the first five years - but the report also showed that this was an agenda and mission which engaged and motivated swing voters when these facts were discussed.

This offers a strange parallel to the fact that in general, people do not connect their own positive experiences of public services with the state of the nation. Just as many underestimate the quality of their public services, so do many underestimate the progressive ambition of the Labour party.

So if our heads tell us that we must stay in the centre-ground to win, then surely our hearts tell us that that we must build out from that point. As Douglas Alexander expressed in his recent Smith Institute pamphlet, for progressives, there is more than the matter of winning elections – there is an ambition to consolidate a progressive consensus:

'how to build a progressive consensus among the British people – not just for progressive politics but for a 'common sense' in which the values of equality, solidarity, and social justice prevail. There is a growing recognition that electoral success is a necessary but not sufficient condition of achieving (such) change.¹⁴

In this Parliament, we must more effectively communicate our radical intentions, achievements and further ambitions if we are to rejuvenate the entire breadth of the 1997 new Labour coalition, by effectively communicating our radical intentions.

Use Party Reform to Strengthen Our Roots¹⁵

How do we communicate Labour's goals of social justice and our belief in the means of collectivism and redistribution through the fog of today's media environment? The task is immensely difficult – perhaps impossible. To campaign effectively for our causes, we need a parallel structure to the media. A structure like the Labour party.

¹³ Quoted Peter Kellner, *ibid* p.327

¹⁴ Douglas Alexander, 'Telling It Like it Could Be: the moral force of progressive politics' smith institute, 2005, p4

The election provided fresh new evidence that local campaigns, and the role of elected representatives in building relationships and communicating our purpose – can make all the difference. Rejuvenated local parties will prove critical in carrying Labour’s core beliefs to that section of Labour’s heartland that stayed at home. But this will require radical party reform. While elected local representatives can play an important role as party leaders, the way in which we organise locally is frankly not up to the job.

‘A sense of civic obligation runs deep among the British’, as Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley conclude on the basis of their extensive study of civic and political engagement.¹⁶ On average people had engaged in at least three of seventeen political activities listed in the previous year. Voters were most likely to have given money (62%), voted (50%) or signed a petition (42%). 28% had participated in a boycott. Just 5% had attended a political meeting or rally but 13% had contacted a politician. As Paul Whiteley notes in *The State of Participation*, ‘the lesson of the audit is not so much that participation has declined, but rather that it has evolved over time and taken on new forms.’¹⁷

We have not stopped being ‘joiners’ either. Four out of 10 people are members of at least one type of group. 19% belong to just one group. 20% belong to two, three or four groups. As the authors noted; ‘18 million adults in Great Britain belong to, 11 million participants participate in, and four million volunteered their time and labour for organisations.’¹⁸ Around 1 million adults (2% of the adult population) are ‘super-activists’ belonging to five or more groups.

Nor has Britain’s social capital – in which organised political activity is routed – evaporated. 71% of respondents to a Home Office survey believe they belonged to a neighbourhood. 65% agreed that people in their neighbourhood pulled together to improve it¹⁹. 81% of the adult population gave to the tsunami appeal. British giving per head was twice the American rate and two-three times that of many European nations. 22 million adults are involved in volunteering each year. 90 million hours of formal voluntary work takes place each week

¹⁵ This section draws on Liam Byrne, ‘Powered By Politics: Reforming Parties From the Inside’, *Parliamentary Affairs* (June 2005).

¹⁶ ‘Civic Attitudes and Engagement in Modern Britain’; Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley, *Parliamentary Affairs*, No 4/ October 2003 vol 56, pp616-633.

¹⁷ *Parliamentary Affairs*, No 4/ October 2003 vol 56, pp610-615.

¹⁸ *ibid*, p.624.

¹⁹ Quoted Alison Beard, *Community Connections Crumble*, *Financial Times*, 19.2.05.

and the economic value of volunteering is some £400 million a year²⁰. Three million young people volunteer each year; 41% of young people are involved in formal volunteering and 67% in some sort of informal volunteering; 59% of young people aged 15-24 want to know about how to get more involved in their communities²¹.

The problem then is not that the British electorate has resigned into a world of apathy. Britain's demand for political activism has not gone. It has just changed. People have not given up on the notion that organised, concerted action is required to change the world for the better. Our problem is that too few people who want to change their communities and their country see their local Labour Party as the platform on which to stand.

So our challenge is to renew our party – to recreate it as the first port of call for people who want to affect the direction of the world. That requires nothing less than reorganising our structures, our networks, our training and the pattern of our activities to support those action-orientated people who feel the injustice that stills lives in Britain today and are prepared to do something about it. In particular, we must make it easier for Labour sympathesiers to become supporters without imposing the full obligations of membership. After Tony Blair's election as Leader of the Labour Party, thousands joined the Party. But many then lapsed (rather than left) once the work of removing the Tories was done. They are clearly hundreds of thousands who sympathise with Labour but do not want to become members. We should help them express that bit of their identity.

Nor should Labour members forget that our frontline is still governed locally by health authorities, primary care trusts, NHS trusts, schools, colleges, universities, learning and skills councils, regional development agencies, councils, police authorities, magistrates courts, housing associations and arts councils. There are burgeoning opportunities to serve and lead the 36,285 institutions that spend £25 million every hour of the working day on the issues that Labour was elected to sort out²². In fact, some 401,445 councillors, governors, board members, quangocrats and JPs look after around £154 billion (£383,614 each), try 95 percent of crimes, and appoint thousands of our frontline public servants. And that is before we consider new government regeneration initiatives.

²⁰ see www.ivr.org.uk/facts.htm.

²¹ Gordon Brown, Speech to the Volunteering Conference, London, 1.2.05.

²² 2001 figures.

Yet how many CLPs educate new members about how to become a school governor, never mind anything more esoteric, like how to win a place on a regional development agency (whose boards members each account for, on average, £14,285,000), or become a primary care trust board member, or a lay representative on a police authority? CLPs may be excellent local party parliaments brilliant at connecting activists to the business of winning council seats and to parliamentary representatives and our vital sister organisations. But they are far too weak at channelling, or even educating, individual members, who joined because they wanted to change things.

Too many CLPs do too little to affect the frontline. Indeed, how many CLPs make sure that Labour school and college governors, LSC board members and members of university courts come together on a regular basis to talk about transforming post-16 education participation rates, or the fact that in London 25 percent of people have a degree, yet in the north-east only one in ten enjoy the same privilege? Very few. Indeed, where are the structures within our party for ensuring that Labour secretaries of state and local governors have the opportunity to tell each other about their analysis of the issues?

The precise models of organisation which can achieve this are less important than the sense of shared purpose and mission. Marshall Ganz at the Kennedy School of Government contrasts 'disorganised communities' and 'organised communities'. The former are divided and confused²³. Each has a different story to tell. There is lots of gossip but not much information. They are largely passive and reactive, and they drift – from one meeting to the next. Organised communities are different. They are united and share an understanding – of what is going on, what the challenge is and why what is being done is being done. People participate and they take the initiative.

Good local leaders make much of the difference. As Ganz puts it 'Organisers exercise leadership by bringing people together to determine their common interests and act upon them.' They bring people together and they develop relationships between them. They facilitate a common understanding of a problem. They develop strategies. They motivate people. Above all, they accept responsibility to get something done. At the heart of this is building relationships – which are more than exchanges because they involve a degree of commitment to a shared future. New relationships reveal new common interests and new

resources – which together can become social capital – a source of power that didn't exist before. Yet, despite the importance of local leaders, how much investment does the Labour party make in identifying, training and developing local leaders? Indeed how much collaboration is there between the branches of the Labour movement – unions, parties, socialist societies – in developing our grass-roots?

Throughout Labour's history, the communities which it has sought to serve have strived to combine and cooperate in order to tackle the difficulties they confronted in their lives. In the 1760s, cooperative cornmills were built by dockworkers in response to monopolistic local millowners. These were the early industrial progenitors of Rochdale Pioneers, a group of artisans who founded the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society in 1844. They reacted to tough economic conditions in Rochdale by combining a variety of principles—such as democratic control, open membership and distribution of surplus in proportion to an individual's contribution—into an alternative system of production and distribution. These examples of self-help have inspired generation after generation of Labour's leaders.

It was Keir Hardie who once proclaimed: 'Socialism is not help from the outside in the form of state help – it is the people helping themselves acting through their own organizations, regulating their own affairs.' A century later, Gordon Brown wrote in *Making Mass Membership Work* (1992):

'In the past, people interested in change have joined the Labour Party largely to elect agents of change. Today they want to be agents of change themselves. Tenants' associations, residents' groups, school governors, community groups. These are where Labour Party members will be in the 90s, bringing Labour values to life'.

This is part of our party's DNA and we need to rediscover it.

The task for us in the third term is to develop our opportunity economy and to give every citizen, not just the better off, more control over their own lives whether it is in health care, education, policing or any other public service. By doing so we will not only improve standards, but expand opportunity and build a fairer society. Our party believes absolutely that we can tackle inequality best through high-quality universal public services. But we

²³ Marsall Ganz, Note on Organising Tools: Leadership, Community and Power; Spring 2000, Kennedy School of

won't deliver if we lose our nerve or retreat from the centre ground. Nor will we achieve everything we can as a movement – of ideas, energy, passion and commitment – unless we reorganise once again to reflect the modern nature of the society we are seeking to change for the better.