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Who will win the General Election?

As the UK waits to go to the polls, our academic experts put forward their predictions for the General Election.

Howard Elcock, Emeritus Professor of Government:

The latest polls show the main parties tied at 34% each but how this will translate into seats? The pollsters do not tell us how they do this and the failure to redistribute the seats gives Labour an advantage of up to 20 seats, according to some estimates. So Labour will end up as the largest party, perhaps only marginally. The Liberal Democrats will retain seats where they are firmly bedded in, with control of local councils and a solid voter base –

between 25 and 30 seats. There is an interesting Guardian/ICM poll this morning that indicates that Conservative tactical voting will counter the effect of student dislike of Nick Clegg and secure his survival.

Scotland is the real conundrum. The demonstration in Glasgow against the Scottish Labour Leader Jim Murphy was interesting with its stress on “Red Tories”. Labour has taken Scotland for granted for too long but just how big will the swing to the SNP be? Some voters will return to their traditional Labour allegiance so the SNP will win between 25 and 30 seats but not 50. As for UKIP, there seems to be a bulge in support for them in an East Coast area between Grimsby and Margate. Douglas Carswell will survive because he is locally popular but he may be the only UKIP MP if Farage does not win South Thanet and this is an open question.

As to what happens afterwards, the party that secures sufficient support to secure a majority in the House of Commons gets the right to govern, even if it is not the one with the most seats. The Conservatives face several parties that will not support them, so a Labour minority Government is most likely. Sometime soon, Ed Miliband will walk through that famous front door into Number 10 but for how long?

Dr Lee Barron, Principal Lecturer in the Department of Media and Communication Design:

At this stage I think that a very likely outcome of the General Election will be a close result between the Conservatives and Labour with a resulting hung Parliament in favour of Labour that will require support needed from the SNP who look set to utterly dominate Scottish politics (which polls even suggesting that it could be a complete SNP victory in Scotland).

In this regard, the result will be potentially result in one of the most Leftist governments that the UK has seen for decades. With regards to the Liberal Democrats, I think that they will see a substantial loss of seats due to their position within the coalition.

Jonathan Blackie, Visiting Professor and Culture Partnership Manager for the Association of North East Councils:

What might greater Scottish autonomy mean for the North of England? This

is the question that Keith Shaw and I have worked on at the University in recent years. Now it seems to be one of the central issues in General Election 2015.

The prospect of more than 50 SNP MPs travelling across the border has taken centre stage. This gives new meaning to our argument that we should refresh our relationship with Scotland, particularly across the border. The 'Borderlands' report recognise that this area represents almost 10% of UK land, and includes over 1 million people, more than each of the cities that surround the area. We have vital common interests in transport, the land based economy, energy, and tourism. We share a heritage, from the River Tweed to the 'debateable lands' in the west.

Recent work by the OECD has recognised that the border can be a bridge, not a barrier. Best known is the Oresund bridge between Sweden and Denmark, connecting Copenhagen and Malmo. Nearby the city of Gothenburg is planning to make more of the high speed rail link to Oslo in Norway.

It's not only high speed rail that could make the case. The opening of the new railway from Edinburgh to Galashiels has prompted the border local authorities to advocate an extension to Carlisle. Our east west links are also poor. The train service from Newcastle to Carlisle, is antiquated, and needs investment. Is the prospect of trains carrying SNP MPs to Westminster likely to improve our rail services, or lead to further delays?

The University will play an active part in helping the Border Councils shape a fairer deal for the North of England. Together with the cities of the North, the emerging Combined Authority for the North East and businesses we want the General Election to establish a 'Northern Powerhouse' to forge a stronger connection with our neighbours across the border.

Professor Karen Ross, Professor of Media:

In 2010, the early surprise was the triumph of Nick Clegg in the first Leaders' Debate, prompting a slew of 'I agree with Nick' T-shirts and other assorted marketing gimmicks. This time around, it was almost *déjà vu*, with Nicola Sturgeon being the pretty impressive newbie on the block and both Leanne Wood and Natalie Bennett turning in respectable performances although with Nigel Farage as competition, it would have been hard to not outshine him. The point is that last time we had three suited and booted blokes and this

time, at least for that first debate, we had three women and four men.

For the first time in many years, it looked like there might be some genuine differences between the parties and therefore some real choices on offer for those millions of swing voters who apparently tilt towards whoever appears to offer them the best deal. With a matter of days to go before we drop our slips into the ballot box, the promise of policy discussions which would genuinely animate a real debate about key issues has been mostly false, the major parties retreating into name-calling and attack advertising, with various coalition nightmare combos being dangled as spectral devils on the shoulders of Dav-Ed.

Where might the dice fall in this odd election? During the first Leaders' Debate, the top search on Google was: "can I vote SNP?", mostly asked by people not living or eligible to vote in Scotland and therefore probably knowing the answer but presumably trying to start a trend. On Friday 1 May, William Hill was quoting odds of 1/9 for no overall majority, 13/2 in favour of the Tories and 28/1 in favour of Labour. I'm with the bookies on this one.

Alex Hope, Senior Lecturer in Business Ethics:

Forecasting election results in the UK is notoriously difficult and as the, 6th Century BC Chinese Poet Lao Tzu is reputed to have said " Those who have knowledge, don't predict. Those who predict, don't have knowledge". With this in mind here are my 2015 general election predictions....

Perhaps the only outcome which seems to be clear is that no-one will win with a majority. I think that the outcome will be that the Conservative party will win the most seats, but not enough to form a majority government. They will seek to form another coalition with what's left of the Liberal Democrats with perhaps assistance from the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland. The effect on the country that this will have is uncertain. There will be an even greater divide than already exists between North and South with the SDP taking a stronger hold in Scotland winning seats from Labour who will continue to dominate Northern England. Austerity policies will continue, as will the widening gulf between the rich and the poor. However there may be reason to be cheerful amidst all this potential gloom. The smaller parties such as the Green's, Plaid Cymru and perhaps unfortunately UKIP will benefit from the attention they have received over the last few months and emerge stronger, more focussed and better placed to really contest seats in the 2020 general election. That is of course assuming that we still have a functioning

environment, society and economy to govern!

Dr Hans-Christian Andersen, Senior Lecturer at Newcastle Business School:

Normally, in British elections, the excitement is caused by uncertainty: how close are the polls to the actual result, will the party that seems strongest end up losing to the party whose supporters won't declare their intentions until they are in the polling booth, and, of course, which of the two parties is going to win? It is often exciting up until the evening of election night and even beyond, as you wait for the results to come in for your own ward. Labour or Conservatives? Working class or bosses?

2015 is different and the problem is a new one: certainty. It is certain that no party will actually win the election, there will not be one party with a majority. Indeed, there will probably not be a single party with enough seats in Westminster to create a coalition with one other partner, as Britain has had in the last five years.

Political chaos threatens the nation: who will be prime minister in a month's time? When the Queen turns up on May 27th to open Parliament, and the Lord Chancellor reaches into the black silk bag to hand the speech to Her Majesty, will there actually be anything in the bag?

The answer is, of course, yes: there will be. It is almost like a British rejection of the kind of parliamentary untidiness suffered in other, less well organised countries (perhaps like my own, Denmark): we know when the Queen will turn up to open Parliament, she will not simply sit at home and wait until somebody says they have sorted a government out. There will be one.

Undoubtedly we are entering a new and exciting period in British politics – politics in the UK were never more fun to observe.

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Contacts



Rik Kendall

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Business and Law

rik.kendall@northumbria.ac.uk

07923 382339