

Conclusion: Whether the Campaign Mattered and How*

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THE foregoing chapters tell us a lot about what happened when the voters went to the polls on 5 May 2005. In chapter 11 we saw that voters split along traditional cleavages such as social class. In chapters 10 and 11, we found that voters also responded to shorter-term forces. To begin with, performance mattered. The economy played a big role. The government's record in various areas, such as health and education, did too. This clearly benefited Labour. Put simply, things in the country were going pretty well and most people did not want to change course, at least on these grounds alone. The story has a familiar ring to it and is the one that most accounts for Labour's first reelection.¹ Policy also mattered, just as it did in 2001, though the consequences in 2005 were more mixed. While the government benefited from a moderate tack on fiscal issues—New Labour's pillar of policy strength—it nevertheless suffered from positions on other issues. Despite a clear performance advantage and an apparent leadership advantage too, Labour eked out a small plurality victory in votes. With the seats-votes translation well in its favour, as discussed at some depth in chapters 9 and 13, the government still won a healthy 66-seat Parliamentary majority.

Although we know a good amount about what voters did on Election Day, we know relatively little about how preferences evolved to that point. How did the outcome come into focus as the election campaign unfolded? Did voters' preferences evolve in a patterned and understandable way? Or was the outcome largely already in place when the campaign began? What role did the election campaign actually play? Scholars debate the influence of campaigns and campaign events in electoral decision-making. Few argue that campaigns do not matter at all, but a number of scholars maintain that campaigns mostly serve to steer the vote toward a verdict that can be foreseen in advance.² From this point of view, the campaign effectively delivers the effects of fundamental variables, such as economic and policy performance, that are known or knowable before the campaign itself begins. Others argue that the conduct of campaigns determines election outcomes.³ That is, it has effects that cause the final outcome to differ from what the so-called fundamentals would predict. Election campaigns may have both types of effects, of course. It also may be that the outcome already is in place early on, before the formal campaign begins, and that what happens during the period of the campaign has little ultimate effect.⁴

This concluding chapter considers the effects of the 2005 UK election campaign, focusing on voter preferences for the nation as a whole. We first examine voting intention in the many polls conducted over the course of the election year, especially the period of the official campaign. We want to see whether there was real change in electoral preferences as opposed to mere noise due to survey error. Our analysis suggests that preferences did change during the campaign. We then consider why preferences changed, focusing on issues and other factors. Based on our examination, it appears that the campaign served to *persuade* some voters as to which party was best on the issues and perhaps also to *prime* certain domains for voters. It also served to activate individuals' underlying predispositions. We consider the implications for our understanding of voting behavior and elections in the UK and beyond.

The evolution of preferences

For over half a century, pollsters have been asking samples of the public about their choices in the next election. The practice now is so common that hardly a day passes during the official campaign without encountering results of new polls, often from multiple organisations. In these trial-heat polls, citizens typically are asked about how they would vote 'if the election were held tomorrow', with some differences in question wording. In some polls, respondents are asked how they will vote 'in the general election', also with some differences in wording depending on the survey organisation.

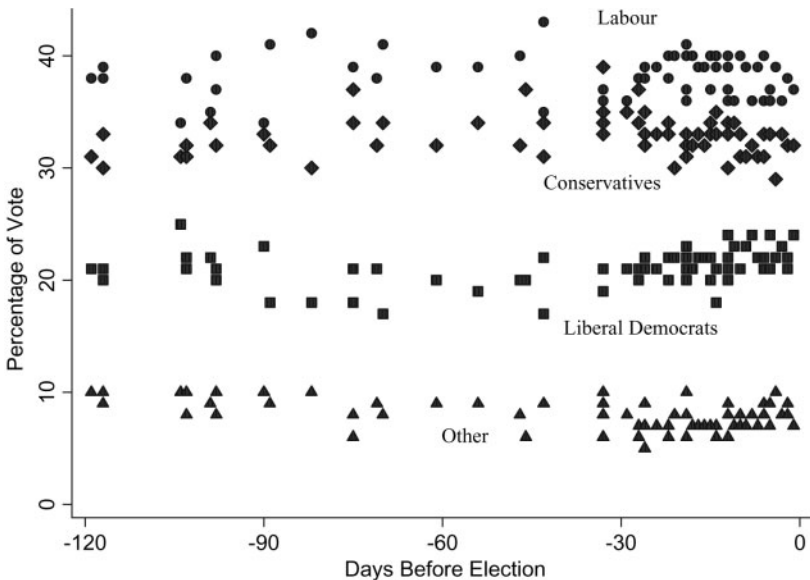
From 1 January 2005 until 5 May 2005, we located results for 67 country-level polls of the Labour-Conservative-Liberal Democrat vote division reported by different survey organisations. The population is Great Britain, not the UK, as none of the organizations poll in Northern Ireland. The data were drawn primarily from the BBC poll tracker website but were supplemented using other sources, including the MORI compilation.⁵ The polls are from seven different survey organisations—BPIX, Communicate Research, ICM, MORI, NOP, Populus, and YouGov—two of which (BPIX and YouGov) rely on internet polls. Excluding the internet polls makes almost no difference and does not change any of the results and conclusions that follow. Each of the survey organisations reports results for a sample of 'likely voters'. That is, they attempt to anticipate the Election Day electorate. This is not easy to do.⁶ Some organisations rely on 'screens' to classify voters as likely or not likely. Late in the campaign, for example, MORI reports results for those respondents who say they are 'absolutely certain' to vote, those who respond with '10' when asked to place themselves on a one to ten scale of voting likelihood. Other organisations use combinations of variables to weight the probabilities of voting. ICM, for example, uses responses to the subjective likelihood scale as well as past voting behavior itself.⁷ Note finally that we have eliminated all overlap in polls conducted by the same house for the same reporting organisation, as

with tracking polls. For example, where a survey house runs a daily tracking poll and reports three-day moving averages, we only use poll results for every third day. Thus, our 67 polls provide *separate* readings of electoral preferences.

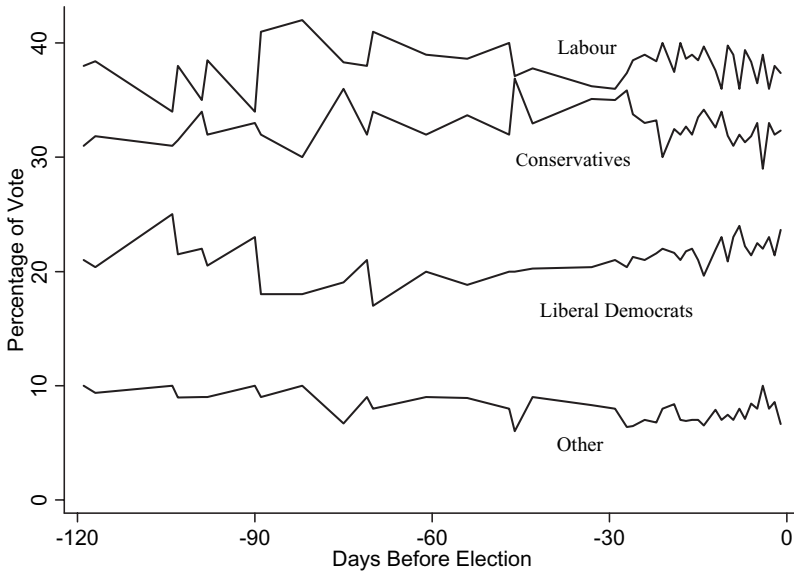
Figure 1 displays results for the complete set of polls. Specifically, it shows the percentage shares for Labour, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats, and all other parties for each poll. Since most polls are conducted over multiple days, each poll is dated by the middle day of the period the survey is in the field.⁸ The 67 polls allow readings for 42 separate days during 2005, 24 of which are after the election was called, which permits a virtual day-to-day monitoring of preferences during the 30-day official campaign.⁹ Prior to that time, polls are much less frequent. We can see in Figure 1 some patterned movement over time. From day to day, however, the poll results bounce around a lot. For any given date, the results differ. Some of this noise is sampling error. There are other sources of survey error, reflecting the practices of the different survey organisations, or houses. These commonly are referred to as ‘house effects’.

The daily *poll-of-polls* in Figure 2 reveals more distinct pattern. The observations in the figure represent vote intention shares for all respondents aggregated by the mid-date of the reported polling period. That is, the numbers for each day register support for the grand N for all polls centered on the particular day. We can see in the figure that we began the year about where we ended up in the polls on Election Day. Labour’s percentage share was in the mid-to-high 30s, the Tory share in the low 30s and the Liberal Democrat number in the low 20s. The total

1. Voting Intention by Date During the Election Year, 2005



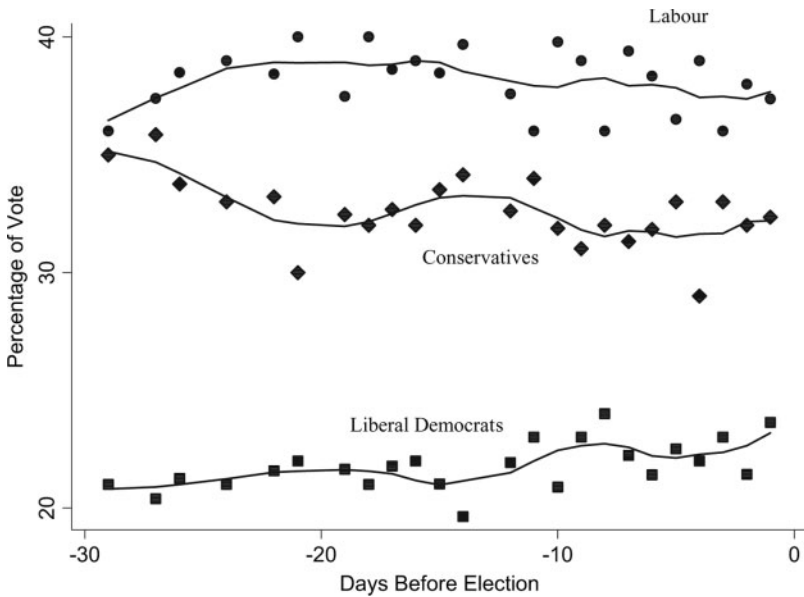
2. Voting Intention During the Election Year Aggregated by Date, 2005



for all other parties was 10%. Over the course of the ‘long campaign’ between New Year’s Day and Election Day, the polls do change. Some of the change is survey error, but there also is evidence of real change in preferences.¹⁰ Early on the Liberal Democrat share drifted up but the apparent gains dissipated leading up to the election call on 5 April. During the same period the Conservatives’ share edged upward in a fairly secular way, reaching within a percentage point of Labour just before the official campaign began. In contrast to 1997 and 2001, Labour’s popular vote victory was not obvious, at least in the polls.

Much of the action was in the final 30 days. Figure 3 focuses on this period and on support for the three major parties, incorporating a ‘smoothed’ preferences series.¹¹ Here it is clear that the Conservative share declined from approximately 35% at the beginning of the period to 32% at the end. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democratic share increased from 20% to 22%. It also appears that Labour’s share peaks slightly in mid-April before dropping off, though we cannot be absolutely sure that the change is real. What we are confident about is that the final polls on average exaggerated—by about 1.5 percentage points—the Labour portion of the vote, as we saw in chapter 2. Perhaps there was a last-minute shift away from the government, too late to be detected in the pre-election polls. Perhaps instead the polls were biased and overstated the Labour share from beginning to end, *which would imply that the Conservative Party may really have been ahead when the campaign began.*¹² Regardless of what did happen at the very end, Labour vote preferences did not move very far for very long during the official campaign. This contrasts

3. Voting Intention for the Three Major Parties, 2005



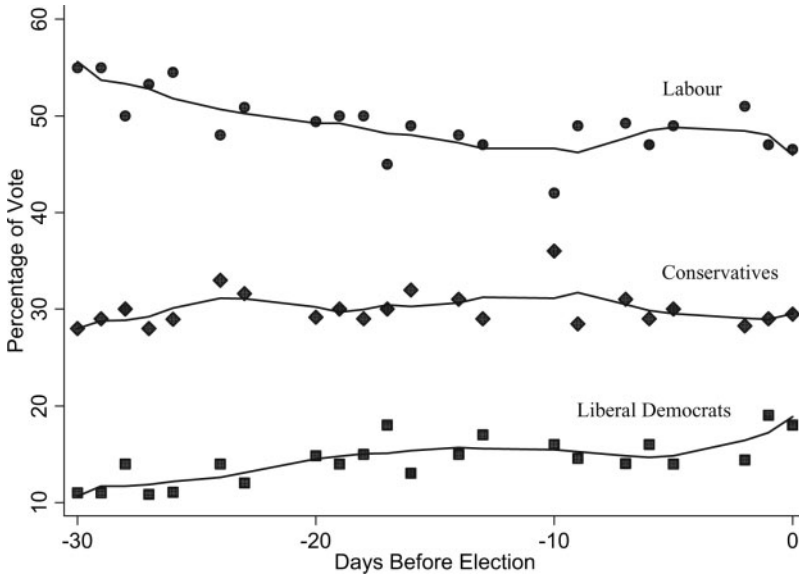
with what we observed in the previous two elections, in 1997 and 2001. In those years, the leading party at the beginning of the campaign consistently lost ground during the last 30 days. This can be seen in Figures 4 and 5, which displays the daily poll-of-polls for the two elections.¹³

The pattern of polls in 1997 and 2001 is exactly what we observe in US presidential elections. There, polls almost always overstate the margin of victory. Leads on Labor Day, the unofficial start of the general election campaign some two months before Election Day, ultimately are halved.¹⁴ Even final polls from the day before the election do not neatly predict the ultimate vote. The pattern implies a systematic evolution of preferences during the campaign. One possibility is that some portion of old shocks to preferences, which benefit the leader by definition, decays as the campaign unfolds. Preexisting leads would thus decline quite naturally. Another possibility is that individuals' underlying preferences actually diverge over time, i.e. preferences become more polarised. It may be that the campaign activates voters' predispositions, causing them to gravitate toward their partisan 'equilibria' or some broader underlying preference, or it just may be that individuals react differently to the events and media coverage of the campaign. Regardless of its particular underpinnings, the polarisation of underlying preferences during the campaign would produce a predictable decline in poll margins.¹⁵

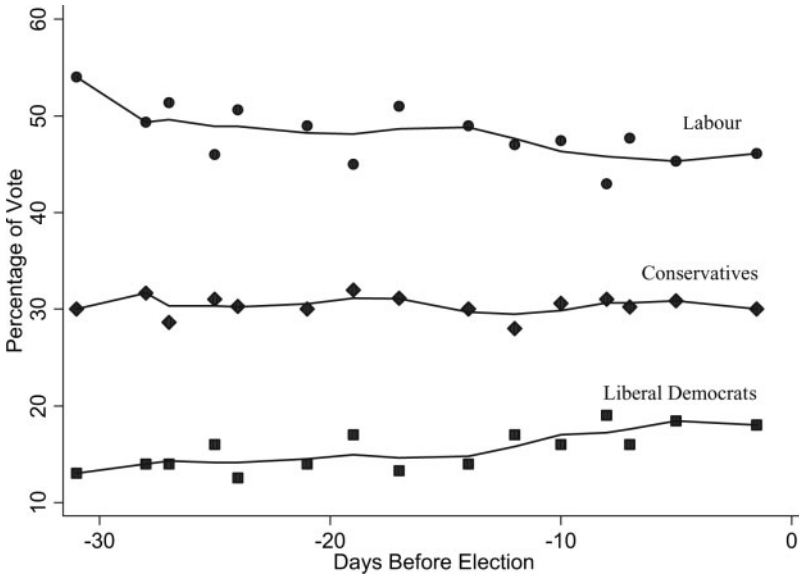
This did not happen during the 2005 UK campaign, as we have seen. The Labour share did not change much at all; if anything, it increased. What did change are the Conservative and Liberal Democratic shares.

The increase for the latter was not surprising, as we also saw such an increase in 1997 and 2001 (see Figures 4 and 5). In those years, however, the Liberal Democrats gained at the expense of Labour. This was not true in 2005. Rather, the Conservative share declined. The change in preferences during the campaign was not fundamental, in that it did

4. Voting Intention During the Campaign Aggregated by Date, 1997



5. Voting Intention During the Campaign Aggregated by Date, 2001



not alter party control of Parliament or even the rank ordering of the parties. Yet it did alter the balance of power in meaningful ways. Based on our simulation, it cost the Conservatives 38 seats, 23 of which went to Labour and 14 of which went to the Liberal Democrats.¹⁶ In effect, had preferences not changed, Labour's majority would have been a mere 18 seats or so, more like what John Major had during his term as Prime Minister. The election campaign clearly mattered in 2005. Let us now consider how.

The coordinates of preference change

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, various factors impacted the Election Day result. We want to see whether and how this structure changed during the campaign. There are two well-known mechanisms.¹⁷ First, the events of the campaign can change people's evaluations of parties. That is, the campaign may have persuaded voters on different policy issues and caused them to change their electoral preferences over time. Second, the events of the campaign can alter the importance of different factors, in effect priming some things in voters' minds at the expense of other things. To the extent that the public perceives differences in the parties on different dimensions of evaluation, priming will tend to produce changes in vote intention over time as one party benefits from the added salience and others lose. Of course, it may be that both processes were at work and that campaigns serve to prime and persuade.

Ideally, to assess the impact of the campaign in 2005, we would have data on individuals' characteristics and their attitudes and perceptions, along with vote intention, at weekly intervals in the cycle. This would allow us to neatly trace changes in attitudes and voting intention over time. As we conducted our analyses in May 2005, however, we did not have such data. We did have access to aggregate results of polls conducted by ICM Research, available on-line.¹⁸ This information allows us to assess changes in the poll aggregates from the beginning of the campaign until the end.

POLITICAL ISSUES. We begin with the issues. For the analysis, we rely on the results of the four April polls and the final pre-election poll conducted for the *Guardian*. In each of these five polls, ICM interviewed a stratified random sample of slightly more than 1,500 adults and then weighted the data to the profile of all adults 18+ years of age.¹⁹ To be clear, the data are not weighted to take into account individuals' likelihood of voting, either subjective or objective. The respondents were asked various questions relating to the election. Among the items is a battery that asks about which party is best on different issues. The specific question wording is:

Irrespective of how you yourself will vote at the next election, which political party do you think is putting forward the best policies on . . .

Respondents were asked about health, education, law and order, asylum and immigration, Europe, the economy generally, taxation and public

services, and the fight against terrorism. Exactly the same question and categorical answers were used in each of the five surveys, providing us with a basic time series. We thus can see whether and how the numbers changed over time. Table 1 summarises the ‘best party’ responses across the different issues early and late in the campaign. The upper frame is based on responses from the first two April surveys, conducted 1–12 April. The lower frame relies on data from the last April survey and the May pre-election survey which were in the field between 24 April and 3 May. Issues are aligned along the top in order of Labour preference, with Labour’s best issue, the economy, on the left and it’s worst issue, asylum and immigration, on the right. The numbers in the table are percentages of responses in each survey, e.g. 44% of adults surveyed in early April thought that Labour was the best party on the economy. Vote intention is included in the first column to provide a basis for comparison. It is an important baseline because we know that people’s political judgments can color their evaluations of candidates and parties on the issues, in addition to influencing perceptions and issue positions.²⁰

In the upper half of Table 1 it is clear that Labour was advantaged on most issues early in the campaign. It was the plurality winner in six of the eight domains, and the differences between the percentages thinking Labour and the Conservatives were the best parties exceeded the difference in vote share in each case. This was true even for Europe. Whether the result of performance judgments or policy evaluations per se, Labour stood in good stead with the public on most issues. Only on law and order and asylum and immigration did the Conservatives have the advantage. The Liberal Democrats, meanwhile, were rated much less favorably across the board. On average, only about 11% thought that they were the best party on issues, less than half of their declared vote share (22%). There were hints of latent strength on education and taxation and public services, though only 13% of the public thought that they were best even on these.

Things changed to a degree as the campaign evolved, which can be seen in the lower half of Table 1. Notice that Labour retained its advantage across most issues while its vote share edged up slightly. There was a small but significant drop-off on education and on taxation and public services, but otherwise things remained essentially the same as at the beginning of the campaign. This was not true for the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. During the campaign, evaluations of the former clearly dropped and assessments of the latter rose, changes that even exceeded the shifts in party vote shares in the polls.²¹ The changes in issue assessments were mostly concentrated in the four domains where the Conservatives were doing best—immigration, law and order, taxation and public services, and Europe—and the shifts for the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats largely mirrored each other. The pattern implies that in these issue areas Liberal Democrats gained at the expense of the Conservatives. The changes were greatest on taxation and public services, one of the main planks of the Liberal Democratic campaign. Interestingly,

1. Best Party on the Issues Early and Late in the Campaign, 2005 (Percentages of Responses)

Party	Early in the Campaign (April 1-12), Sample size = 3,031							Average
	Vote Preference	Economy	Health	Education	Terrorism	Europe	Tax/Services	
Labour	38	44	38	37	36	32	34	34.6
Conservatives	34	24	27	24	24	25	29	28.2
Lib Dems	21	9	12	13	9	11	13	10.9
Other	7	2	1	1	1	4	2	1.9
DK	-	17	17	21	23	25	18	20.3
Party	Late in the Campaign (April 24-May 3), Sample size = 2,991							Average
	Vote Preference	Economy	Health	Education	Terrorism	Europe	Tax/Services	
Labour	39	44	38	35	35	31	33	34.2
Conservatives	33	22	24*	23	23	23	25*	25.6
Lib Dems	22	10	13	16*	10	12	17*	13.9
Other	7	2	2	1	2	4	2	2.0
DK	-	18	19	20	23	26	19	20.9
Party	Law/Order							Average
	Immigration	Law/Order	Immigration	Law/Order	Immigration	Law/Order	Immigration	
Labour	25	30	26	31	31	31	26	34.2
Conservatives	37	35	34*	31*	23	23	25*	25.6
Lib Dems	10	9	12	11	10	12	17*	13.9
Other	2	2	3	2	2	4	2	2.0
DK	21	20	21	21	23	26	19	20.9

Notes: Numbers in bold designate a two-point change from early to late in the campaign (approximate $p \leq .05$); Numbers with an asterisk (*) designate a change of greater than two points (approximate $p \leq .01$).

Source: ICM Research (<http://www.icmresearch.co.uk/reviews/pollreviews.asp>).

gains also were large on one of the Liberal Democrat's other main planks, education, though these looked to be mostly at the expense of Labour. The Conservatives, meanwhile, found themselves losing ground in other areas—health and the economy—but to no one party's evident benefit. Policy really mattered in the 2005 election campaign. Regardless of the details, the campaign helped the Liberal Democrats and hurt the Conservatives on the issues. There was persuasion. This may explain the evolution of electoral preferences visible in Figure 2.

Now let us consider whether there also was priming. This is trickier to detect. How does one tell whether an issue is important to people? Survey organisations do frequently ask, for instance, 'Which of the following issues is most important to you in deciding how you might vote?' But what exactly do the responses to this question reflect? It is hard to tell, at least at particular points in time. The fact that I say that 'health care' is more important than 'the economy' to my vote may not tell us much about their real effects on vote choice. We simply do not know much about what different responses to the question reflect. The change in responses over time may be more meaningful, however. That is, it may tell us something about the changing importance of issues to voters. We examine responses to the question about issue importance included in the five ICM polls used above. They asked:

Which of the following issues will be most important to you in your decision on how to vote in the next general election?

Respondents were provided with a list of issues, including the eight from the 'best party' battery summarised in Table 1 and also 'Iraq'. One response was coded for each respondent. The results for each of the five polls are shown in Table 2.

We can see in Table 2 that responses were quite dispersed, especially just prior to the election call in early-April. At that time, six different issues were named as most important by more than 10% of the respondents. Among these issues, health was the plurality issue winner,

2. Most Important Issues During the Campaign, 2005 (Percentages of Responses)

	Survey Dates				
	April 1–3	April 10–12	April 17–19	April 24–26	May 1–3
Health	21	21	21	21	21
Tax/Services	16	13	14	14	15
Education	12	15	13	15	15
Law/Order	14	16	13	15	13
Economy	11	13	12	13	12
Immigration	12	8	10	8	9
Terrorism	5	3	3	3	3
Europe	4	3	3	3	3
Iraq	—	3	3	2	2
Sample size	1507	1524	1513	1547	1444

Source: ICM Research.

considered the most important by 21%, followed by tax and services with 16% and law and order with 14%. Education and immigration were named by 12%. The economy was mentioned by only 11%. The ordering differs from what we saw from the British Election Study (BES) rolling campaign data in chapter 10. In particular, the percentage mentioning immigration is much lower, about half of what we observe in the BES, and the percentages for health and education are both about seven points higher. The numbers from ICM are much more consistent with what we see in surveys prior to the campaign.²² The different results may be traceable to the differences in methodology, as ICM rely on a close-ended question wording that lists the different issues for respondents, whereas the BES uses an open-ended wording. It is possible that the latter encourages people to name what is top-of-the-head and thus increases the mentions of issues being emphasised in the campaign. It also is possible that the coding of open-ended responses has an effect. Of course, there are other possibilities, including the use of internet polls by BES for the rolling campaign survey.

What we do know is that Labour had the advantage on most of the issues at the top of the most important list in Table 2—all but law and order and asylum and immigration. Things changed little during the course of the campaign. The most notable development is the increase in the importance of education, which rises to 15% and becomes the second most important issue, along with taxation and public services. We also observe an initial drop in the importance of immigration that lasts through Election Day. There is a hint of an increase on the economy, but only that—a hint. On other issues, there was no change whatsoever.²³ Based on this analysis, then, the campaign did not fundamentally alter the salience of issues to voters, at least at the broad aggregate level. It may have primed some issues at the expense of others, and these were ones on which the Liberal Democrats were making gains in support—education and immigration. Still, the main impact of issues on electoral change is the persuasion documented in Table 1.

PARTY LEADERS. Evaluations of party leaders may also contribute to changing vote preferences during the campaign. We know from chapter 11 and elsewhere that assessments of leaders influence vote choice.²⁴ Did evaluations of the leaders change during the campaign? Does any change help us account for the evident gains by the Liberal Democrats and the losses by the Conservatives? To see, we rely on a broad summary judgment of party leaders from the ICM polls. Respondents were asked:

Irrespective of which party you yourself will vote for, which of these three do you think would make the best prime minister for Britain?

Only Howard, Blair and Kennedy were named, though ‘someone else’ and ‘none of the above’ responses were recorded. The percentages for each of the five polls are described in Table 3.

3. Best Prime Minister During the Campaign, 2005 (Percentages of Responses)

	April 1–3	April 10–12	April 17–19	April 24–26	May 1–3
Blair	38	39	38	44	38
Howard	26	27	23	22	26
Kennedy	18	21	21	19	18
Other	1	0	1	1	0
Sample size	1507	1524	1513	1547	1444

Source: ICM Research.

Notice first in the table that Blair held a clear lead over Howard before the campaign began. Fully 38% thought Blair would make the best prime minister, exactly the same as his vote preference share in the poll (see Table 1). Only 26% named Howard, which is eight points below his vote share. Kennedy was well below at 18%, though this is closer to his vote share in the polls—only four points less. Things do change when the campaign begins. In particular, Kennedy's evaluations increase to 21%. Thereafter, we see Howard's evaluations drop and then Blair's jump up sharply. By the end of the campaign, however, the numbers were exactly where we began in early-April. Basically, nothing had changed overall. It may be that true underlying evaluations did fluctuate and that the effects decayed before Election Day. While this is an interesting possibility, it ultimately does not explain why aggregate electoral preferences changed in 2005 from the beginning to the end of the campaign. To the extent that party leadership influenced the final outcome, based on our analysis, the effects were already in place when the official campaign began.

UNDERLYING DYNAMICS. Priming and persuasion may produce changes in broad public opinion aggregates, as we have seen. They also may generate shifts in the underlying distribution of preferences across individuals, ones that may not have any real implications at the aggregate level. For example, as we noted earlier, campaigns can activate political predispositions. This is the gist of Gelman and King's conjecture about 'enlightened preferences'.²⁵ They argue that campaigns inform individuals about candidates and parties and thus enlighten their electoral preferences over time. To Gelman and King, this means that certain fundamental variables, such as the voter's ideological orientation and party identification, and various demographic variables, such as class and race, better predict the vote as the campaign progresses. The hypothesis has a certain intuitive appeal, and ultimately may reflect priming and/or persuasion. It may be that campaigns prime certain factors, such as ideology, that cause them to increase in importance over time. It alternatively may be that campaigns persuade people, as candidates and parties take positions designed to win votes, for example. The difficulty is sorting among these possibilities.

Let us consider how underlying preferences evolved. For this, we again rely on the ICM polls. Specifically, we assess the evolution of vote intention for different demographics recorded in the surveys, specifically, age, gender, and social class. These are the only demographic variables included in the surveys. Although we might have expectations regarding age and gender, our theoretical expectations are strongest for class. ICM used the Market Research Society's A-E classification of social class based on occupation. In the coding scheme, 'A' designates upper middle class, 'B' middle class, 'C1' lower middle class, 'C2' skilled working class, and 'D' working class. The last category, 'E', designates people at the lowest level of subsistence. For purposes of analysis, ICM combined upper middle and middle class into one category, A/B, and working class and subsistence into a single category, D/E. This is common practice in political surveys. Table 4 summarises 'vote intention' responses across the different demographic categories both early and late in the campaign. As in Figure 1, the upper frame is based on responses from the first two April surveys, and the lower frame relies on data from the last April survey and the May pre-election survey. Once again, overall UK vote intention is included in the first column to provide a basis for comparison.

The top frame of Table 4 shows some demographic structure to vote preferences at the beginning of the campaign. Women were slightly—by two percentage points—more supportive of Labour and the Liberal Democrats than men and equally less supportive of the Conservatives and other parties. Older votes (65+) were almost twice as likely as young voters to support the Conservatives. They were much less likely to vote for the Liberal Democrats, who received most of their support from voters under the age of 35. Young voters also were more supportive of 'other' parties. The effect of age on Labour support was less pronounced, as vote preference ranged between 35% among the 65+ group to 40% for the under-25s. The patterns are not surprising. As expected, social class also is important. The middle and upper middle classes (A/B) are more supportive of Conservatives than either of the other two parties. The lower middle class (C1) is as well. Among these groups, the Conservatives received an average of 36% of the vote share in the polls against 34% for Labour and 24% for the Liberal Democrats. Among the working class (C2 and D) and below (E), the portrait is quite different. Here support for Labour is about 44% on average against 30% for the Conservatives and 19% for the Liberal Democrats. Given the parties' positions and previous patterns of voting behavior, the differences come as little surprise.²⁶

The underlying structure became even clearer during the campaign. This can be seen in the bottom frame of Table 4. Notice first that gender differences widened. Specifically, women became less supportive of the Conservatives. Preferences among men did not change. The result is a real, if small, gender gap in vote intention leading up to Election Day.

4. Vote Preferences by Selected Demographics Early and Late in the Campaign, 2005 (Percentages of Responses)

Party	Early in the Campaign (April 1–12), Sample Size 1,738									
	Gender		Age					Social Class		
	Male	Female	18–24	25–34	35–64	65+	A/B	C1	C2	D/E
Labour	37	39	40	39	38	36	33	34	45	43
Conservatives	35	33	24	26	34	43	35	38	29	30
Lib Dems	20	22	27	29	20	15	26	21	19	19
Other	8	6	9	7	8	6	6	7	7	8

Party	Late in the Campaign (April 24–May 3), Sample size 1,514									
	Gender		Age					Social Class		
	Male	Female	18–24	25–34	35–64	65+	A/B	C1	C2	D/E
Labour	37	40	44*	42*	39	33*	31	34	46	48*
Conservatives	35	30*	22	23*	33	43	38*	34*	29	26*
Lib Dems	21	23	24*	27	21	17	26	23	19	18
Other	7	7	10	8	7	7	6	9	7	8

Note: Numbers in bold designate a two-point change from early to late in the campaign; Numbers with an asterisk (*) designate a change of greater than two points.

Source: ICM Research.

The effects of age also changed during the campaign. It clearly became more important for the Labour vote, as support among young people increased and support among the elderly declined. Age became more important for the Conservative vote, as support dropped among young voters in approximate correspondence with Labour gains. For the Liberal Democrats, however, age mattered less late in the campaign than it did early on. That is, the differences across categories declined, particularly for the very young (18–24) and very old (65+), the latter of which actually became more supportive of the Liberal Democrats.²⁷

The class structure evolved most of all. Support for both Labour and the Conservatives much more neatly reflected class differences toward the end of the campaign. Indeed, we see clear polarisation. Among middle and upper middle classes, support for Labour declined and for the Conservatives increased;²⁸ among the working class and those on at subsistence levels, support for Labour increased and for the Conservatives declined. There were no such effects for the Liberal Democrats, and the pattern of class voting remains comparatively modest, as expected given previous research. Indeed, the effect of class on Liberal Democrat support may be more apparent than real, reflecting differences in education.²⁹ (We cannot explicitly address this possibility given that the ICM data do not contain a measure of education.) It nevertheless is fairly clear that the campaign did in some way activate class interests, with implications for the distribution of Labour and Conservative voters. How exactly it happened, we do not know. The same is true for other demographic variables, the effects of which may not have been foreseen. There is reason to think that the issues emphasised and the strategies adopted by each of the parties, as well as the news media coverage of the election, influenced how preferences evolved. We just cannot be sure given our analysis. The nature of the process remains elusive.

Conclusion: the fundamentals and the campaign

Election outcomes are remarkably predictable.³⁰ Certain ‘fundamental’ variables matter. This was true in 2005. Our investigation indicates that the 30-day official campaign played an important role to effectively deliver these fundamentals on Election Day. In particular, we see that social cleavages, especially class, became much more pronounced as the campaign unfolded. We also observe increased gender- and age-related structuring. Although the official campaign mattered, the long campaign set the stage; indeed, electoral preferences at the national level were largely in place when the election was called on 5 April. Presumably, this partly reflects what the parties and candidates did. In 2005, the New Year began with political initiatives by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. There were the spring conferences and the party platforms. Candidates were in the field through the winter and spring. The official campaign now is only a part of a much longer campaign.

In one sense, the process begins the day after the last election. The 2009/10 campaign is *effectively* underway. Between now and Election Day, the parties will continually reposition themselves with the political future in mind. Candidates will do the same. The public, meanwhile, will update their evaluations of parties and candidates, especially about the performance and policies of the sitting government. What the opposition parties do also matters, of course. It clearly is not easy to win an election from across the aisle. It nevertheless is easier to win in some positions than in others. Crucially, parties can to a large extent control their locations. They can choose policy positions; they can select new party leaders; they can undertake activities that best exploit their advantages on the issues and their leaders. Candidates can do the same at the constituency level. This is what election campaigns are all about, as we saw in chapters 4–7. To a large extent, these campaigns serve to deliver the fundamentals on Election Day.

Yet campaigns can have less predictable effects. There is evidence of both in the 2005 election cycle. Of course, what we reveal at the national level may conceal more pronounced effects at the constituency level where 646 or so separate (though related) campaigns were waged. There is a strong hint of this in chapter 9, where we see that the swing in the vote between 2001 and 2005 was hardly uniform across constituencies. Given the differences in the balance of party preferences across constituencies and the focus of the campaigns on key marginal seats, this may come as little surprise. Given the advantages the government had, the final result on Election Day also comes as little surprise. It was Labour's election to lose, and they didn't lose it.

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- 1 H. Clarke, D. Sanders, M. Stewart and P. Whiteley, *Political Choice in Britain*, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- 2 T. Holbrook, *Do Campaigns Matter?*, Sage, 1996; J.E. Campbell, *The American Campaign: US Presidential Campaigns and the National Vote*, Texas A&M University Press, 2000.
- 3 See, e.g. R. Johnston, A. Blais, H.E. Brady and J. Crete, *Letting the People Decide: Dynamics of a Canadian Election*, McGill-Queen's Press, 1992. Also see R. Johnston, M.G. Hagen and K. Hall Jamieson, *The 2000 Presidential Election and the Foundations of Party Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- 4 For a detailed exposition of different models of campaign effects, see C. Wlezien and R.S. Erikson, 'The Timeline of Presidential Election Campaigns', 64 *Journal of Politics*, 2002, pp. 969–93.
- 5 The BBC poll tracker site is: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2005/polltracker/html/polltracker.stm>; the MORI compilation is at: <http://www.mori.com/polls/trends/voting-allpub.shtml>.
- 6 R.P. Daves, 'Who Will Vote? Ascertaining Likelihood to Vote and Modeling a Probable Electorate in Preelection Polls' in P. Lavrakas and M. Traugott (eds), *Election Polls, the News Media and Democracy*, Chatham House, 2000.
- 7 For more information on the methodologies employed by the different survey organisations, see the BBC website: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/vote_2005/basics/4275273.stm.
- 8 For surveys in the field for an even number of days, the fractional midpoint is rounded up to the following day. There is a good amount of variance in the number of days surveys are in the field: The mean number of days in the field is 3.06; the standard deviation is 1.09 days.

- 9 Note that polls on successive days are not truly independent. Although they do not share respondents, they do share overlapping *polling periods*—the periods during with surveys are in the field. Thus, poll results reported on neighboring days will, by definition, capture much of the same information.
- 10 Specifically, the probability that the movement is due to chance is less than one-in-a-hundred.
- 11 The smoothed series were generated using the ‘lowess’ (locally weighted scatterplot smoothing) procedure. This procedure creates a new value for each time point based on the results of regressions using a designated number of surrounding data points. To generate the new value, predictions from these regressions are weighted based on their temporal distance from the particular point in question. Lowess tends to follow the data quite well, though the degree to which it does depends on the bandwidth, or share of time points in the full series, one uses to generate the smoothed values. For this exercise, a bandwidth of 0.3, which means that (a rolling) 30% of the cases was used to generate each point. See W. Jacoby, *Statistical Graphics for Univariate and Bivariate Data*, Sage, 1997. For applications to pre-election polls, see R.S. Erikson and C. Wlezien, ‘Presidential Polls as a Time Series: The Case of 1996’, *63 Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1999, pp. 163–77.
- 12 This is what the British Election Studies shows among likely voters, i.e. those scoring a ‘10’ on their likelihood of voting scale: <http://www.essex.ac.uk/bes/>, though they overstated Labour’s share at the end by about 1%. All of the other polls also overstated Labour’s share—see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/vote2005/polltracker/html/polltracker.stm>—except for NOP, who were spot on.
- 13 Data are drawn from the MORI on-line compilation: <http://www.mori.com/polls/trends/voting-allpub.shtml>. We exactly followed the procedures used with the 2005 polls, described in the text above.
- 14 Wlezien and Erikson, op. cit.
- 15 C. Wlezien and R.S. Erikson, ‘Campaign Effects in Theory and Practice’, *29 American Politics Research*, 2001, pp. 419–36.
- 16 To generate these estimates, we simulate the voting day results at the constituency level, using Pippa Norris’ *British Parliamentary Constituency Database, 1992–2005* at: <http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~pnorris/datafiles/Britain%20Votes%202006%20Resources.htm>. Specifically, we assume uniform swing and adjust the results in each constituency based on the changes in preferences from our exercise: (1) we subtracted 1.16% from Labour; (2) added 2.76% to the Conservatives; and (3) subtracted 3.25% from the Liberal Democrats.
- 17 See E. Gidengil, A. Blais, N. Nevitte and R. Nadeau, ‘Priming and Campaign Effects: Evidence from Recent Canadian Elections’ in D. Farrell and R. Schmitt-Beck (eds), *Do Political Campaigns Matter? Campaign Effects in Elections and Referendums*, Routledge, 2002. Also see the review in J.N. Druckman and J. W. Holmes, ‘Does Presidential Rhetoric Matter? Priming and Presidential Approval’, *34 Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 2004, pp. 755–78.
- 18 [Http://www.icmresearch.co.uk/reviews/pollreviews.asp](http://www.icmresearch.co.uk/reviews/pollreviews.asp).
- 19 For more specifics relating to their sampling and weighting methods, see the results pages for any of the specific polls on the ICM website: <http://www.icmresearch.co.uk/reviews/pollreviews.asp>.
- 20 See A. Campbell, P.E. Converse, W.E. Miller and D.E. Stokes, *The American Voter*, Wiley, 1960. Vote intention even appears to influence people’s perceptions of the economic future and past. See C. Wlezien, M.N. Franklin and D. Twigg, ‘Economic Perceptions and Vote Choice: Disentangling the Endogeneity’, *19 Political Behavior*, 1997, pp. 7–17. It also appears to structure issue positions as well. See G. Evans and R. Andersen, ‘Do Issues Decide? Partisan Conditioning and Perceptions of Party Issue Positions across the Electoral Cycle’, *14 British Elections & Parties Review*, 2004, pp. 18–39.
- 21 Note that, due to rounding, the numbers in Table 1 do somewhat understate change in vote intention in the ICM polls.
- 22 See the MORI website: <http://www.mori.com/polls/trends/issues12.shtml>.
- 23 The BES internet rolling campaign data also reveals little change in issue importance during the campaign.
- 24 See A.F. Heath, R.M. Jowell and J.K. Curtice, *The Rise of New Labour: Party Policies and Voter Choices*, Oxford University Press, 2001, and Clarke, Sanders, Stewart and Whiteley, op. cit.
- 25 A. Gelman and G. King, ‘Why are American Presidential Election Polls so Variable When Votes are so Predictable?’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 1993, pp. 409–51. Also see the extensive examination of campaign communication in P. Norris, J. Curtice, D. Sanders, M. Scammell and H. Semetko, *On Message: Communicating the Campaign*, Sage, 1999.
- 26 See Clarke, Sanders, Stewart and Whiteley, op. cit.
- 27 Perhaps the party’s promises on tax relief for the elderly really paid off.
- 28 Conservative support among the lower middle class (C1) did drop during the campaign, from a level that actually was above that for the upper middle and middle classes (A/B) to one in between that for A/B and the working classes. In one sense, support early on was ‘too high’ given the underlying class structure and the national political context.
- 29 G. Evans (ed.), *The End of Class Politics? Class Voting in Comparative Context*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

- 30 See D. Sanders, 'The Political Economy of UK Party Support, 1997–2004: Forecasts for the 2005 General Election', 15 *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 2005, pp. 47–71. For a similar approach to US presidential elections, see J.E. Campbell, 'The Fundamentals in US Presidential Elections: Public Opinion, the Economy and Incumbency in the 2004 Presidential Election', 15 *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion, and Parties*, 2005, pp. 73–83.