

## Effect of the expenses scandal

Many of the MPs who were most prominently caught up in the scandal decided, or were ordered, not to stand for re-election in 2010. Among them were Margaret Moran, Elliot Morley, David Chaytor, Quentin Davies, Nicholas and Ann Winterton, Derek Conway, John Gummer, Douglas Hogg, Anthony Steen, Peter Viggers, Julie Kirkbride and her husband Andrew McKay.

Where sitting MPs did stand for re-election after their expenses claims were criticised, there were some notable losses. Former Home Secretary Jacqui Smith lost her marginal Redditch seat, which showed a large 9.2% swing to the Conservatives. Smith had claimed expenses on a large family home in Redditch by declaring her house-share with her sister in London as her main home, had been described as "near fraudulent" by the former chairman of the committee on Standards in Public Life, although she had only been ordered to apologise rather than repay the money. Former Home Office minister Tony McNulty lost Harrow East to the Conservatives on an 8% swing, after repaying over £13,000 claimed on a second home, occupied by his parents, which was 8 miles away from his primary residence. Ann Keen lost Brentford and Isleworth on a 6% swing, but her husband Alan Keen retained Feltham and Heston. The couple were criticised for claiming for a second home in central London while rarely staying in their nearby constituency home.

Shahid Malik lost his Dewsbury seat on a 5.9% swing to the Conservatives. Malik had been required to repay some of his expense claims and, at the time of the election, was under investigation for other claims. David Heathcoat-Amory was one of only two sitting Conservatives to be defeated when he lost Wells to the Liberal Democrats by 800 votes. Heathcoat-Amory was criticised for claiming manure on expenses. Phil Hope, who repaid over £40,000 in expenses, was defeated in his Corby constituency although the swing was lower than the national average at 3.3%. Lembit Öpik was defeated in his Montgomeryshire constituency on a 13% swing. Öpik had claimed a £40 summons charge for non-payment of Council Tax, although media coverage of the loss placed more emphasis on the politician's colourful personal life.

Hazel Blears, who had paid more than £13,000 to cover capital gains tax which she had avoided by "flipping" the designation of her main residence, suffered a large drop in her vote in Salford and Eccles, but was still comfortably re-elected; a 'Hazel must go' candidate won only 1.8%. Conversely, Brian Jenkins lost his Tamworth seat on a large 9.5% swing despite being described as a "saint" by the *Daily Telegraph* on account of his low expenses.

Predictions of a rise in the number of successful Independents in the election as a result of the 2009 expenses scandal failed to materialise. Independents supported by the Jury Team or the Independent Network, support networks who both attempted to select and promote high quality Independents who had signed up for the so called Nolan Principles of public life, set out in the Committee on Standards in Public Life, failed to have any significant impact. Broadcaster Esther Rantzen gathered a great deal of publicity for her campaign in Luton South constituency where the former MP Margaret

Moran had stood down, but ended up losing her deposit in 4th place with 4.4% of the vote; the winner was Moran's successor as Labour candidate.

There was also a high profile campaign over expenses directed against Speaker John Bercow, who had 'flipped' his designation of second home. An imperfectly observed convention states that the major parties do not oppose the Speaker seeking re-election; Bercow faced two main opponents in Buckingham. Independent former Member of the European Parliament John Stevens, standing on the Buckinghamshire Campaign for Democracy ticket, campaigned with a man dressed in a dolphin costume whom he called 'Flipper' and polled second with 21.4%. Former leader of the UK Independence Party Nigel Farage also fought the seat but came third in the vote with 17.4%. Bercow won with 47.3%.

## Voting problems

Problems occurred with voting at 27 polling places in 16 constituencies, and affected approximately 1,200 people. This situation which was condemned by politicians of various parties. Jenny Watson, chair of the Electoral Commission, the independent body that oversees the electoral process, was forced on to television to defend preparations and procedures. The Electoral Commission has announced it will be carrying out a "thorough investigation". Under the law in force at the 2010 election, voters had to have been handed their ballots by the 10pm deadline; people who were waiting in queues to vote at 10pm were not allowed to vote.

In Chester there were reports that 600 registered voters were unable to vote because the electoral roll had not been updated, while in Hackney, Islington, Leeds, Lewisham, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield long queues led to many voters being turned away and unable to vote as the 10 pm deadline arrived. Some dissatisfied voters staged sit-ins to protest against what some of them had called "disenfranchisement". In Liverpool, higher than expected turnout meant several polling stations ran out of ballot papers, with defeated council leader Warren Bradley stating that some residents were unable to cast their votes. In Wyre and Preston North, a 14-year-old boy cast a vote after being sent a polling card.

In parts of Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg's Sheffield Hallam seat it was reported that students from the city's two universities were placed in separate queues from 'local' residents, who were given priority, resulting in many students being unable to cast their votes.

Just days after the election Clegg spoke at a Take Back Parliament rally saying the results showed the British system is broken and needs fixing, while vowing the voices of the protesters would be heard. The rally demanded Clegg affirm his promise to push for "*democratic and proportional representation of the British public*".

Because of closure of United Kingdom airspace as a result of the Iceland volcanic eruption, potential expat voters in New Zealand were denied a vote when postal voting

papers arrived too late to be returned to the UK, although Australian broadcaster SBS suggested that given the extremely tight timetabling of overseas votes, *there is very little chance that voting papers [for voters outside Europe] will be received, let alone returned, in time to be counted.*

## Post-election events

When it became clear that no party would achieve an overall majority the three main party leaders made public statements offering to discuss the options for forming the next government with the other parties.

On 11 May 2010, as coalition talks between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats seemed to be drawing to a successful conclusion, Gordon Brown announced that he was resigning as Prime Minister and also as Labour leader. He then left Downing Street, accompanied by his wife and children, driving to Buckingham Palace where he tendered his resignation to the Queen and advised her to call for David Cameron. Cameron became Prime Minister one hour after the Queen accepted Brown's resignation. In his first address outside 10 Downing Street, he announced his intention to form a coalition government, the first since the Second World War, with the Liberal Democrats. As one of his first moves, Cameron appointed Nick Clegg as Deputy Prime Minister.

Just after midnight on 12 May 2010, the Liberal Democrats emerged from a meeting of their Parliamentary party and Federal Executive to announce that the coalition deal had been "approved overwhelmingly", meaning that David Cameron would lead a coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

Later that day, the two parties jointly published the Conservative – Liberal Democrat Coalition Agreement specifying the terms of the coalition deal.

On 27 May 2010 the Conservatives won the final seat of Thirsk and Malton in a landslide result, thus giving them 306 seats. The election in that constituency had been delayed due to the death of the UKIP candidate.

## Exercise One:

Make a time-line of key events in the general election and note the *possible* effects those events may have had.

**As you read through highlight any points / terms you do not understand**

## Exercise Two:

### Group work

**Instructions:** Construct a handout (approx two sides) which covers the **key issues and controversies** associated with:

*The election results*

**Group 1**

*The key events in the build-up to the election*

**Group 2:**

*The events following the election*

**Group 3:**

You have one hour plus a homework to complete this task.

## Extension questions (pick one or two that interest you most)

- What are the pros and cons of opinion polls in a democracy?
- What are the controversies surrounding boundary changes?
- What is the significance of minor parties in UK Politics?
- How central is the role of media endorsement in this and past elections?

## Pressure groups

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## Definitions

- Organisations whose members share common interests and which seek to *influence* the government
- Do not put candidates up for election
- Focus on single issue
- BUT: Dr Richard Taylor Independent MP for Wyre Forest (Save Kidderminster Hospital) elected 2001

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## Types of PG (main classifications)

- Sectional; often defending members economic interests  
e.g. NUT, IoD
- Cause or Promotional,  
e.g. ALF, Greenpeace, CND

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### Types of PG

(other classifications / often also fitting within main classifications)

- Local e.g. Kidderminster Hospital
- National i.e. local groups working with national bodies e.g. on environmental issues
- Trans-national e.g. FOE, Greenpeace
- Peak / umbrella e.g. CBI, TUC
- Temporary e.g. National Campaign for the Abolition of Capital Punishment (1955-69)
- Permanent e.g. Oxfam (unintentionally)

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### Classification by influence

#### INSIDER

BMA  
NFU  
NT  
CBI  
Law Society  
RSPCA  
RAC

#### OUTSIDER

Countryside Alliance  
ALF  
OutRage  
CND  
Life  
Fathers for Justice

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### Classification by Strategy

#### DIRECT

Lobbying  
Funding  
Boycotting  
Law breaking  
Terrorism?

#### INDIRECT

Letter writing  
leafleting  
Internet  
Demonstrating

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### Problems of classification

- Multiple classification
- In-between classification
- Cause groups acting like sectional groups
- Sectional groups acting like cause groups
- Insider – outsider changes

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### Factors influencing success or failure

- Political context
- Climate of opinion
- Resources
- Membership
- Motivation of members
- Organisational /campaigning quality
- Quality of leadership
- Celebrity / media support
- Strength of opponents

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### Pressure groups and democracy

- Corporatism / tripartitism
- Elitism/ Marxist arguments
- Pluralism
- Thatcherism and the new right

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**Pressure groups:  
arguments for**

- Participation between elections
- Voice for minorities
- Providers of information
- Give credibility to pluralist liberal democracy

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**Pressure Groups:  
arguments against**

- Single issue groups take interest away for national issues
- Power and influence can be gained by minority / powerful / wealthy organisations
- Well organised minorities can drown the voice of the silent majority
- Provide biased evidence
- They expose the limits and issues of our 'democracy'

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