

## UK GENERAL ELECTION 2015

# Forecasting & Influencing the Outcome

**Mark Twain popularised the term “There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics” and attributed it to our former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli back in the 19th century.**

It's arguable that at no other time in history has polling yielded so much influence and importance since the method became popular in the 1930s. With the frequency and disparity of polling being published in the lead up to the UK General Election, here is a check list to consider when evaluating them:

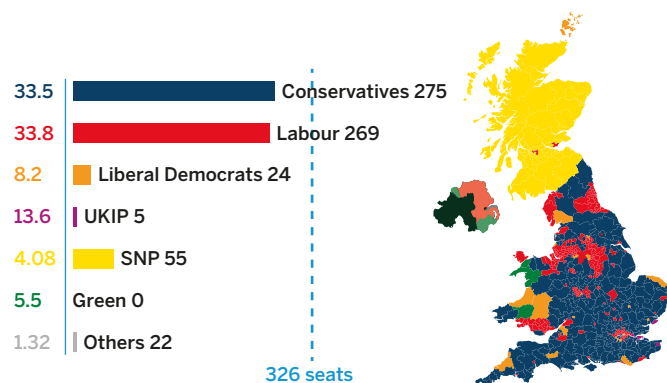
**On Monday 30 March 2015, FTI Consulting** hosted a panel discussion on the influence of polling results on the electorate and understanding the impact this could have as the UK General Election approaches.

### Popularity v Electoral Seats

Many polls hitting the headlines are publicising the intended voting patterns of a representative sample of the entire UK population. These are interesting to monitor the trended movements after key events, but this can have little relevance when transposing these percentages into the expected number of electoral seats for that political party.

For example, in Scotland our polling shows there is a concentration of voters in many electoral seats, such that the 4% that SNP is polling nationally could result in up to 55 MPs being elected. Conversely, UKIP are attracting three times as many supporters across the UK, but their supporters are geographically more widespread and likely to only yield a handful of MPs. In summary, it's not how many voters nationally; it's where they're clustered.

**Graph 1: Predicted concentration and geographic placement of UK electoral seats in 2015 (as of 30th March 2015)**



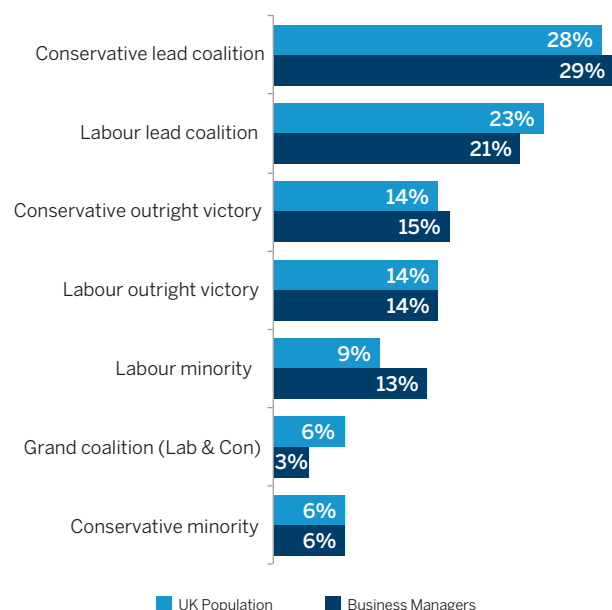
(The "Others" are 3 Plaid Cymru, 1 George Galloway, 8 DUP, 5 Sinn Féin, 3 SDLP & 2 misc)  
Source: www.May2015.com

## Shape of the Government

In spite of polling trends, which have consistently shown a Labour lead, business leaders and the UK population predict that a Conservative lead coalition is the most likely electoral outcome. Making this determination irrespective of voting preference, a clear disillusionment in the potential for a Labour government is uncovered. Businesses demonstrate a greater optimism for a Conservative victory, polling higher than the public for a Conservative coalition and outright victory. This perception has been emboldened by the letters sent to The Telegraph by business executives warning that a 'change of course' to a Labour government would threaten the economy and business confidence.

**Graph 2: Business Managers & Voters – Most likely election outcome**

**Q. Irrespective of your voting preference, which one of the following do you think is the MOST likely outcome of the 2015 UK General Election? (Please select one response)**

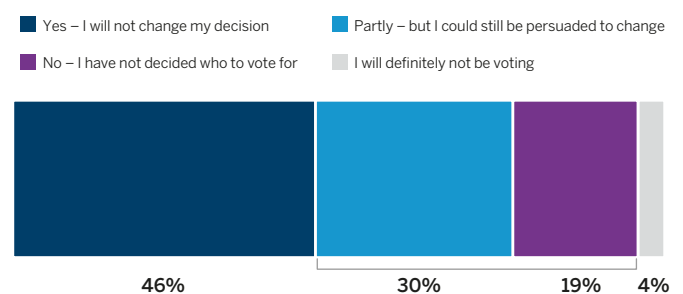


## Fickle voters

In polls, respondents are asked who they've decided to vote for or most likely to vote at that moment in time when being asked. However, our research showed that approximately half of the UK electorate admit that they could still change their mind. With such a huge number of fickle voters, key events such as the televised debates and mistakes by opponents could have a dramatic impact as it can now be mercilessly leapt upon by opposing parties and virally communicated. In summary, polls define the present, but do not take into account how resolute the voting intentions of the UK electorate actually are.

**Graph 3: Opinions of UK Voters – Still up for grabs**

**Q. Have you made your mind up on who to vote for in the 2015 UK General Election? (Please select one response)**



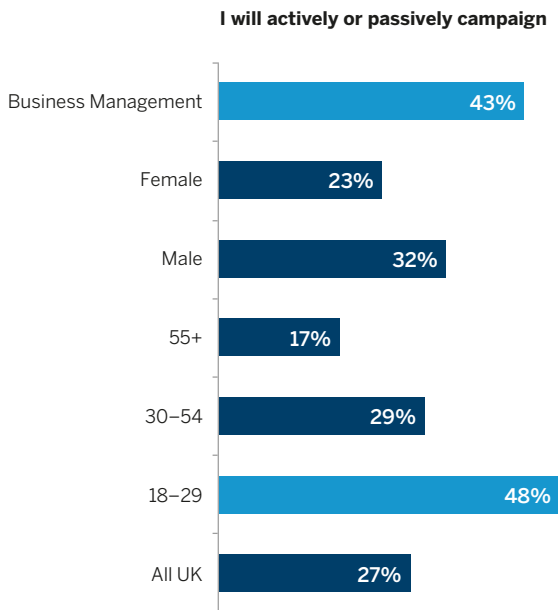
## Voice of the electorate

Engaging the voting public is a clear focus for political parties during the campaign period. Given the economic focus this parliament has taken and the battle to inspire the confidence of business in the UK, it does not come as a surprise that one of the population groups most likely to campaign actively during the election period are business leaders. This is only topped by the 18-29 category, 48% of which indicate that they will be campaigning in the lead up to the election.

“43% of UK Business Management claim that they will be active in campaigning in the lead up to the election.”

Graph 4: Most active campaigners

Q. How involved are (or do you expect to be) in campaigning either actively or passively leading up to the 2015 UK General Election? (Please select all that apply)

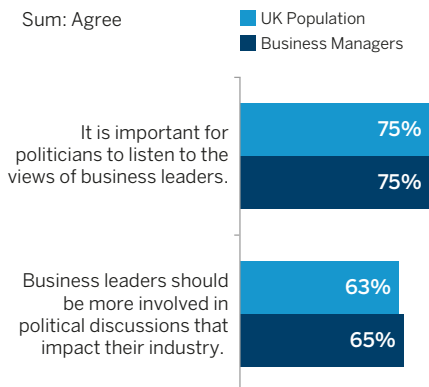


The business of politics

The efforts of the Labour Party to garner support from business and the matched determination of the Conservative Party to ensure that business confidence is maintained by their party serves to prove the importance of the business community in UK politics. With 75% of both the business community and the public signifying the importance for politicians to listen to the view of business leaders in the election discussions, it is certain, now more than ever, that whoever wins the confidence of business will see a return in the polls.

Graph 5: Engaging & Listening

Q. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Please select one column response for each row)



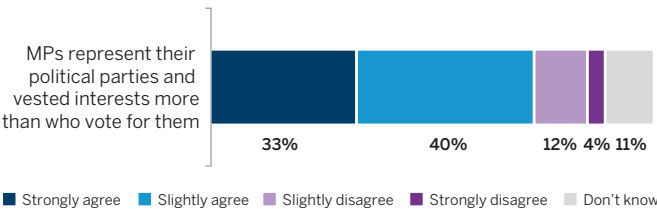
Trust in the leadership

There are several lessons to be learned from the Scottish referendum and the approach taken by party representatives during the campaign. For those who voted 'Yes' for independence, Nicola Sturgeon and Alex Salmond were trusted highly by their supporters. This wasn't mirrored by the Westminster party leaders on the 'No' campaign who maintained low trust levels. It was the Scottish representatives Alistair Darling and Gordon Brown who inspired the trust of the voters there, appealing to traditional Scottish Labour voters. What can be concluded was the importance of relativity to the issue, with local voices leading the campaigns either side.

What is more interesting is the capacity of the UK party leaders to repair trust in Scotland, with Cameron, Clegg and Miliband polling poorly on trust levels consistently throughout the campaign. This inherent distrust of Westminster politicians may however not be exclusive to Scotland. Our research found that 40% of the UK electorate claim none of the four main Westminster party leaders are trustworthy, compounded by a further 73% who claim MPs represent their party and their own vested interests more than the interests of their constituents. The impact of this sentiment is sure to be felt in May. Whether that is in the form of a lower than expected voter turnout, or perhaps as we are seeing in Scotland, will lead to an energised and dramatic shift of voting allegiances to emerging and seemingly more trustworthy parties.

Graph 6: Perception of MPs – UK Voters

Q. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Please select one column response for each row)



Research methods

Over the last decade, online research has increasingly become an accepted representative form of polling and often more accurate than other more traditional methods. However, there is an argument against just relying on this method as there are many segments in society who aren't accessible online. To reach them, more traditional polling methods are utilised such as face-to-face and telephone interviewing.

There are pros and cons with each research methodology and consideration should be made as to what process has been undertaken to ensure respondents are as representative and reflective of the UK population as possible. To potentially confuse this, our own research shows that respondents are less likely to tell the truth of how they actually will vote when being

asked in person or over the telephone and instead prefer a more anonymous online poll. This was a particular issue for the recent Scottish referendum where the 'No' voters were significantly less willing to tell others their intended voting intention, which arguably resulted in a significant difference between the polling predictions and the final outcome.

## Tell Me Now

The build up to the election day is very considered and calculated in terms of the communication, with political parties looking to influence voting decisions right until the last. It is, however, also important for the voters themselves to evaluate all the information they have received and make a considered choice. When polling occurs, respondents are asked to imagine an artificial scenario where the election is the next day and they must make their minds up now. A careful consideration could yield a different choice when the full impact of various scenarios are considered on such key issues, such as a possible EU referendum and what might happen to their job



*The outcome is presently forecast to be another hung parliament with political parties such as the SNP potentially playing the role of Kingmaker. This forecast may actually influence tactical voting to help avoid this, so the main parties certainly don't want to be seen doing deals at this stage.*

— Dan Healy, Head of Strategy & Research



security on the back of a chain of events leading to a BREXIT. That said, when the time comes for the UK electorate to cast their vote, it may be that their previous actions and thoughts prior to this moment may not be a true indication of which box a voter eventually ticks.

With just days left until Britain goes to the polls to determine the next government, politicians, pundits and the general public will be hanging on the word of the pollsters.

Understanding the insights into voting behaviour, political and societal trends and the perceptions of the personalities in politics will be key for parties to capitalise on and great theatre for the rest of us.

With polling intelligence showing a close race between the two major parties, many are predicting that the prospect of a stable government after the election is considerably diminished. In turn, this is having an effect on the markets, with the pound falling against the Euro, which demonstrates the material effect polling has on the political and economic landscape.



*Business is playing a more assertive role in this campaign than at any prior election in modern times. The problem for the business community is that our polling shows their expectations about results to be almost completely out of kilter with the public's voting intentions: that's a potentially explosive contradiction in the run-up to this General Election.*

— Alex Deane, Head of Public Affairs



### Additional links:

FTI Consulting Strategy & Research Blog: [www.fticonsulting.com/researchblog](http://www.fticonsulting.com/researchblog)

YouGov UK Polling Report: [www.ukpollingreport.co.uk](http://www.ukpollingreport.co.uk)

The Spectator Blog by Fraser Nelson <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/author/fraser-nelson>

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### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

UK Voters – A total of n=2,111 respondents across the UK aged 18+ years. Research was conducted from 6th to 9th Feb 2015.

UK Business Managers – A total of n=593 respondents across the UK with a £90 billion global turnover. Research was conducted from 6th to 9th Feb 2015.

Scottish Voters – A total of n=501 respondents across Scotland aged 16+ years. Research was conducted from 19th to 20th September 2014.

All research was conducted online by FTI Consulting. Further information on the results and methodology can be obtained by emailing [dan.healy@fticonsulting.com](mailto:dan.healy@fticonsulting.com). Please note that the standard convention for rounding has been applied and consequently some totals do not add up to 100%.

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