



**THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE**

GENERAL ELECTION 2010



Introduction

With the highest percentage of world-leading research of any university in the UK, according to the government's assessment, LSE remains at the cutting edge of the social sciences. The School's academic profile spans a wide range, from economics, government and law, to social policy, international relations, and accounting and finance.

LSE academics are constantly engaged with the big policy issues of the day and enjoy a high level of interaction with Westminster, Whitehall, the City, legal organisations and global media. Staff are always in demand as expert commentators and analysts, advising governments, public bodies and international policy-makers.

This guide highlights those LSE academics whose research gives them insight into areas likely to feature in the 2010 general election debates. Their





interests include economic issues such as budget cuts and taxation, political analysis of voting behaviour and MPs' expenses, as well as questions surrounding law and order, health and social policy, education, defence, foreign policy and Europe.

We hope this guide, which will also be available online, makes it easier for journalists to reach the academics available for comment on specific issues in the run-up to the general election and beyond.

Howard Davies, director of LSE

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Big spenders are better members



The MPs' expenses scandal has represented a major crisis in British politics. Because of it some MPs have resigned, many more will not stand again and, most importantly, the public appears more disenchanted than ever about the quality of the political elites. How will this crisis affect the coming general election? And what should we do to avoid abuses of this sort in the future?

My research on MPs' expenses suggests that high spenders are often more active MPs, the ones who provide better services to their constituents and who attend parliamentary meetings more regularly.

In spite of individual abuses, my research provides qualified support for an overall rather benign view of the allowance system as providing a level playing field for politicians. At the same time, the fact that abuses have been placed under the spotlight by the mass media is a good sign for British democracy. The situation is far less dramatic than some would like us to think.

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The secrets of the polling booth revealed



It is extraordinary how little political scientists know about what actually goes through the minds of voters while they are in the secrecy of the polling booth, form in hand, ready to cast their vote in what is probably the most intense moment of civic communion between a citizen and his/her democracy.

This is precisely the object of a €1.2 million project financed by the European Research Council, which I will carry out over the next five years to explore new perspectives in electoral psychology, and create Europe's first and only research structure specifically dedicated to this field.

We know about the issues that many people will have considered in the months that preceded the election: expense scandals, economic and financial crises, military involvements in Iraq and Afghanistan, etc. But elections are not reduced to a mere context and a few topical issues. Election after election, we know that up to 30 per cent of voters, once in the polling booth, do not end up behaving as they were expected to just a few days earlier.

For many of us, the act of voting retains a certain solemnity, and as a result, some deeper and older psychological attributes sometimes counteract our more epidermic reactions to short-term issues and context at the time when it really matters.

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Will defence cuts make Britain more European?



Whichever party wins the election, 2010 is going to be a crucial year for British defence policy. Given the need to repay our unsustainably high public debt, defence spending will be reduced dramatically. Traditionally, Conservative governments have been far more ruthless in cost cutting than Labour.

In the 1981 Review the navy was almost pensioned off, saved only by the Falklands War. The same fate may await the army after the draw down in Afghanistan begins, probably towards the end of the year. One way or the other, Britain is facing the need to reduce defence spending if not to the European average, then quite close to it.

The defence debate has traditionally been sidelined largely because the budget figures very little in the public imagination. It is of concern mainly to political elites. But the next cuts will bring into question Britain's image of itself as a major military power (the first ally to be called upon whenever the Americans despatch their own forces overseas). Existentially, the defence debate will be important for the first time – and if what I predict comes true, will we become more 'European' faster than we think?

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Tackling youth unemployment



A key issue in this election campaign will be how to respond to the reappearance of concentrations of workless young people, particularly in inner city areas – and the long-term implications of growing numbers without experience of work.

My research indicates that the only effective approaches to this will involve a combination of two basic elements.

The first is giving priority to sustaining demand levels – across the country as a whole, but especially in the Midlands and North – against the threat of a double dip.

The second is to reinforce equal opportunities policies, in a situation where an excess of applications for jobs makes it easy for these to slip, with dangerous consequences for the marginalisation of vulnerable groups.

Neither of these basics will be politically easy options, but they are much more crucial than any kinds of targeted initiatives. And the long-term costs of failure now would be at least as great as they were in the 1980s.

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Can the modern Machiavellis win the day?



As Machiavelli wrote in *The Prince*: 'This can generally be said about men: that they are ungrateful, fickle, dissimulators, apt to flee peril, covetous of gain; and while you do them good, they are all yours ... when need is far off: but when it draws near to you they revolt'.

How apt, as we approach an election. Who can really tell the truth? Will George Osborne's strategy of 'brutal honesty' about public expenditure cuts backfire? Will Gordon Brown's promise to maintain public spending 'buy off' the electorate?

Elections, the supreme political event of modern democracies, test not only public opinion, but test political judgement and skill of modern day Machiavellis. Whether attracted or repelled by this cynical approach to power, politicians should be aware that the master of cunning and scheming for one's own benefit is as relevant today as in the 16th century.

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The tactics of cynical voting



Last year's expenses scandal was a perfect example of an episode fostering cynical attitudes which is bound to affect voters in the 2010 general election.

A climate of political distrust, often reinforced by cynicism, can be an alienating factor that contributes to political disengagement, such as declining voter participation (a trend seen in the past decades). Distrust can also encourage change when voting shifts in favour of opposition or third parties.

Our pilot research on cynicism related to different social institutions has raised the question of whether certain behaviours, such as tactical or protest voting, are better explained by political cynicism than distrust, possibly due to the more emotionally charged nature of cynicism.

Political trust is a judgment that the political system will do what is right. Political cynicism relates to distrust of government, but particularly focuses on perceptions of immorality, such as politicians looking out for their own interest rather than that of the public.

In future research, we hope to investigate how different emotions associated with cynicism may encourage positive or negative outcomes, including those in the realm of political participation.

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A new way of predicting the election result



Predicting the result of a general election has always been an inexact science. Nick Vivyan and I are developing a new way of working out what the outcome might be, using a three-stage method.

First, we combine information from recent polling data (including how accurate polling agencies have been in the past) to estimate current party voting intentions at the national level.

Second, we calculate estimated national-level party swings between 2005 and 2010, and combine this with constituency-level information to predict constituency-level swings.

Finally, we aggregate the results to work out the likelihood of particular outcomes in the upcoming election, such as a Conservative majority, or a hung parliament.

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All alone without an enemy in the world



How will the parties try to gain the support of the electorate?

When competing for votes, political parties in Britain, like parties everywhere, have relied regularly on tales about their opponents and the threats those opponents are alleged to pose to nation, society, religion, or the economy.

But the problem for all the major parties in Britain ever since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of Soviet and East European Communism, is that the old enemies have evaporated. Of the plausible enemies, or at least villains, one set are bankers whom both major parties are wary of attacking, and the other set are MPs themselves.

Don't expect any of the major parties to promise voters that they will protect them against the greed and irresponsibility of bankers or Members of Parliament. They are all alone without an enemy in the world, and will be desperately seeking for bogeymen to frighten the voters.

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MPs need to talk the talk and walk the walk



Can MPs win back voter commitment following the expenses debacle? What do MPs do to invigorate voters to join them in building a brighter Britain?

My research suggests a solution – MPs must examine their actions and ensure they reflect a motive to serve the long-term growth and wellbeing of others.

My research has uncovered seven types of leader behaviour, such as placing the needs of others first and engaging in empathy toward followers who, when engaged, showcase a commitment to service.

When followers, in this case voters, perceive that their leaders engage in these behaviours, their commitment, creativity, and community stewardship is ignited. Why? Because the public wants to see a commitment to service to others, before self, manifested in their leaders' actions.

Some leaders might talk the talk, but voters are looking for those who walk the walk and my research explains how they can do so.

David Henderson, lecturer in employment relations and organisational behaviour



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Assisted suicide will be urgent issue for new government



Given consistent evidence from public opinion surveys that a clear majority of the public in the UK favours the legalisation of assisted suicide, provided appropriate safeguards are in place, there is no doubt that, while no political party will stand on a platform of legalisation of assisted dying, there will be pressure in the coming parliament, from the Lords or from backbenchers, to change the law.

Last summer's House of Lords judgement in the case of Debbie Purdy led to the publication, by the Director of Public Prosecutions, of guidance spelling out the factors which are relevant when deciding whether or not to prosecute relatives or friends who assist someone's suicide, most commonly by taking them to Dignitas in Switzerland. This guidance inevitably comes very close to an authoritative statement of when assisting someone to die is and is not legitimate.

It could be argued that if we can tell when assisted dying which takes place in Switzerland meets appropriate criteria, there is no good reason why we shouldn't be able to tell when assisted dying in the UK would also be acceptable.

There are many reasons why we should be concerned about exporting the practice of assisted dying to Switzerland, not least because in practice it may mean that UK citizens experience earlier deaths, given that they have to be fit enough to travel to Zurich.

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Old media stays centre stage with live leadership debates



This was supposed to be the Internet Election where camera-phone-wielding activists will ambush politicians and expose them on YouTube. However, the first ever live leadership debates on TV offer Old Media a chance to keep centre stage. America has had TV Presidential Hustings for five decades so Britain is only just catching up. But the Westminster spin doctors are conversant with all the tricks of the trade and have already planned everything from rehearsals to make-up. They are right to be obsessed by appearance. All the evidence shows that television is still the dominant source for voters seeking political information. The bloggers will tweak mainstream media's tail and thumb a nose at the candidates. Many of the campaigners will be blogging, tweeting and texting as they pound the streets. But it will be the newspapers that seek to set the agenda and television that delivers the message. The live debates will now be the main media event and the first one, at least, will have a unique part to play in the contest.

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*weightless economy; time series econometrics;
technology; business cycles; economic growth; inflation*



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*police and the media; crime media; public order;
criminology; police culture; police politics and policy; crime;
crime trends; criminal justice*

Are migrants squeezing out the locals?



The chronic shortage of affordable housing in Britain affects millions of voters and my current research focuses on many of the big policy debates surrounding this issue.

There are opposing ideas on policy between the current government, which emphasises national housing targets and funding allocations, and the two other main parties who are looking to incentives to local authorities to provide more housing. There are also big differences about how the parties see social housing – in particular with respect to security of tenure and rents policies. If radical change were implemented it would transform the role of social housing especially in London.

Another area which is already part of the pre-election debate is whether the UK is going to grow to 70 million; the importance of immigration in these projections; and the effect on the availability of affordable housing -- in particular are migrants squeezing out the locals? Research on migrant household formation and housing suggests that these concerns – while real – may have been overstated.

Christine Whitehead, professor of housing economics



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families bereaved by homicide; victims of crime; criminal justice policy-making



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urban sustainability; engineering; city design; urbanism; cities and climate change; urban governance; land use analysis; public space; urban design briefs and competitions; urban design and transport politics; transport; architecture; urban age; urban regeneration; global cities; built environment; strategic planning; green economy; urban policy



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consumer advocacy and word of mouth; consumer cynicism and distrust; social psychology; media, cognition and behaviour; behavioural economics; co-creation of value; cognitive biases; cross-cultural psychology; culture and cognition; market research; holistic and analytic thought; consumer psychology



Professor Nicholas Stern

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India; economic development and growth; climate change; economic theory; government; economics; public policy and the role of the state and economies in transition; tax reform



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gender issues; policing; policy evaluation; harassment and violence; crime; anti-social behaviour; personal and community safety



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broadcasting; media regulation; Internet; telecommunications; media policy; press



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international co-operation (burden-sharing); comparative politics and policy; European Union; asylum; migration; immigration



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community charge; poll tax; UK: politics, elections, parliament, political parties, polling, public attitudes/opinions, public services; mayors; council tax; local government; central-local government relations; education finance



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impact of innovation on jobs, skills, wages and productivity; labour markets, competition policy, industrial economics, health systems and econometrics

Youth crime: too little too late?



The issue of law and order has traditionally been a political battleground and the forthcoming election debate is likely to focus on anti-social behaviour and youth crime. Despite investing £100 million in the Youth Crime Action Plan, recent government research has revealed that the majority of those surveyed considered crime and anti-social behaviour committed by young people had either gone up in the past year (27 per cent) or had not changed (48 per cent). Although some people – especially those involved in research and outreach work with young people – are concerned about the dangers of alienating and criminalising a whole generation, there is considerable public disappointment with the government response to anti-social behaviour and youth crime and the majority want to see decisive action. This means that, whichever party wins or holds the balance of power in the 2010 election, the battle cry will be one of enforcement rather than prevention. But, will any party be able to convince the electorate that they can offer anything other than too little too late?

Jan Stockdale, senior lecturer in social psychology



Professor Robert Wade

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international NGOs; economic growth; industrial and technology policy; inequality; East Asian development; International Monetary Fund; World Trade Organisation; World Bank; international environmental politics; multilateral economic organisations; globalisation



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*decentralisation; socio-economic rights;
comparative government; South Africa:
government and politics; budgeting and public finance;
legislatures; Africa: governance and development; federalism*

Getting serious about spending cuts



The UK's fiscal imbalance is one of the worst among industrialised countries. The debate about how – and how quickly – to fix this will be at the core of the upcoming election. Undoubtedly, the next parliament will have to deal with fiscal realignment on an enormous scale. My research suggests that tackling this challenge successfully

will require new procedures that force politicians to get serious about spending restraint.

These include effective fiscal rules, which place tough and binding limits on budgets, and a comprehensive medium-term framework for government spending. Sweden is a much talked about example of successful consolidation that illustrates these points. Current developments in Greece, on the other hand, illustrate the cost of delaying credible budget reform for too long.

Joachim Wehner, lecturer in public policy



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education finance; education policy; European education policy*



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Communist Party; cold war; Russian foreign policy history; third
world revolutions; Chinese foreign policy*



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*urban policy; housing finance; urban land markets;
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*innovation; policy; plagiarism; identity assurance;
information systems; Commons-based peer production;
identity cards*



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the World Bank and regional development banks; environmental and social risk management; international project financing; sustainable banking and responsible investment; non-governmental organisations; corporate social responsibility in the financial sector; voluntary business regulation; extractive industries; global environmental governance



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global financial crisis; UK economy/budget; globalisation; global economy; US economy; Chinese economy

About LSE

LSE was founded in 1894 and has grown to become one of the foremost social science universities in the world, ranked alongside Harvard, UC Berkeley and Stanford.

A specialist university with an international intake, LSE's reach extends from its central London campus to around the world.

- The School has a cosmopolitan student body, with around 9,000 students from 140 countries
- It also has a cosmopolitan staff of just over 3,000, with about 45 per cent drawn from countries outside the UK
- Over 100 languages are spoken on LSE's campus
- An influential network of 92,000 LSE alumni straddle the world, covering 196 countries
- A total of 15 Nobel prize winners in economics, peace and literature have been either LSE staff or alumni. The first was George Bernard Shaw, one of the founders of LSE, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1925. The most recent was Professor Paul Krugman, an associate in the Centre for Economic Performance at LSE, who was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 2008.
- In all, 34 past or present world leaders have studied or taught at LSE and 31 current members of the UK House of Commons and 42 members of the House of Lords have either taught or studied at LSE.

LSE press office

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