

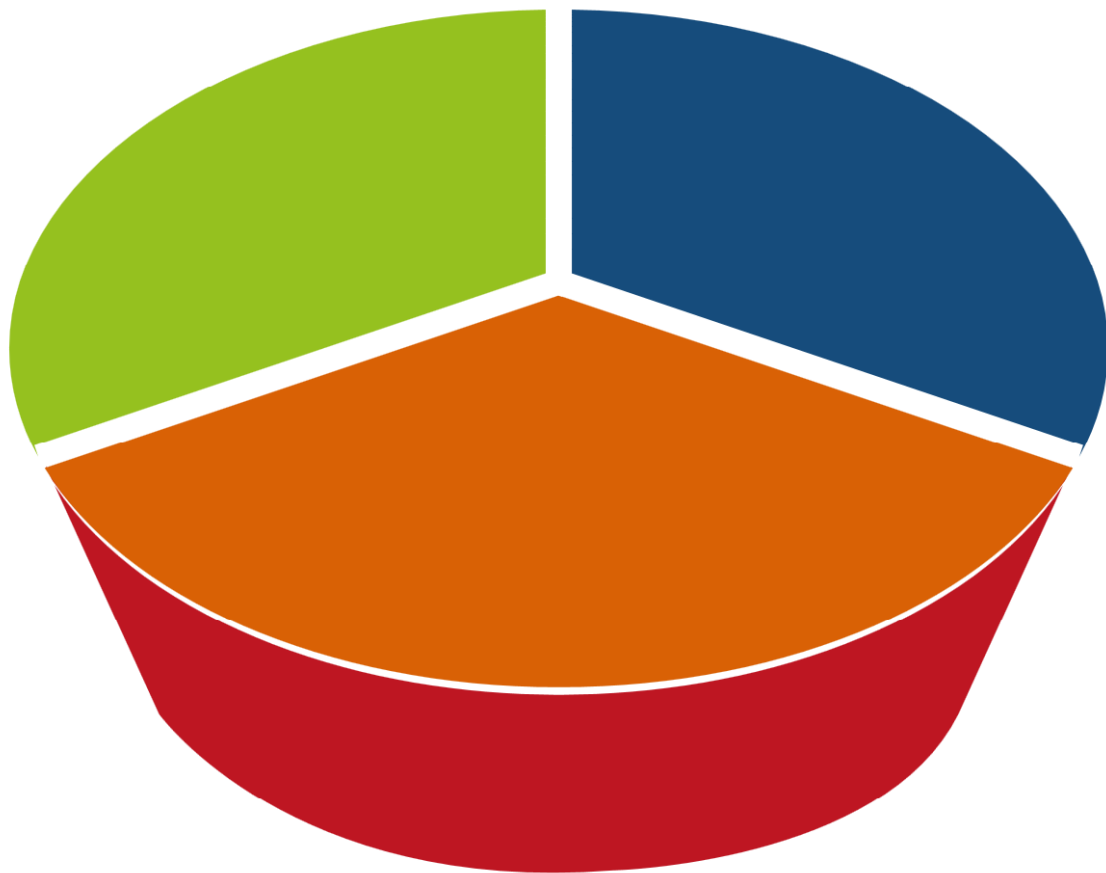
UK Election 2015 – wisdom of crowds?

Pre-election summary

May 6th 2015

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About [X-MR](#):

X-MR was founded in 2005 by Geoffrey Roughton and Iain MacKay to innovate with software in collection and interpretation of questionnaire survey data.

We conduct and promote survey research using both outsourced interviewing and our own [InABI.ink](#) web platform.

The principals of X-MR are both long-standing members of the UK Market Research Society and we adhere to their Code of Conduct and the mandates of the Information Commissioner.

Introduction

X-MR has been asking people about their expectation for the outcome of the general election since October 2014:

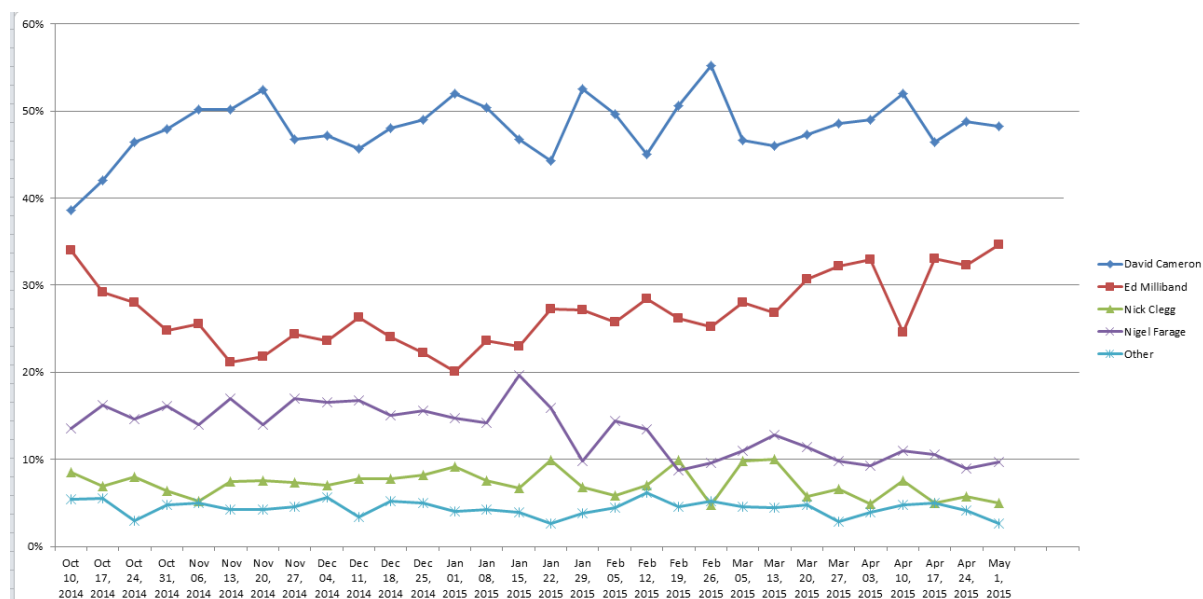


Figure 1 - "Who do you think most likely to be UK Prime Minister after the May 2015 election (whatever your personal preference)?"

Our intention is to compare this wisdom-of-crowds approach to conventional polling. We have presented this question using the Google Survey platform to 500 UK adults each week, increasing to 1000 for the final two weeks.

To emphasise – we are not asking people about their own intention, but their personal expectation of the collective decision of the electorate as a whole.

We have consistently found that David Cameron is well ahead in expectation to lead the next government, contrary to all opinion polling that puts the Conservatives at best neck-and-neck with Labour in terms of voting intention, and additionally facing adverse constituency boundaries.

We have used two alternative interviewing methodologies for the same question yielding the same broad picture.

We are publishing only unweighted data. We have analysed our Prime Minister data across the whole period so far and found no significant variations in respondent's assessment across age, gender or regional groups.

In addition we have experimented with using wisdom-of-crowds methods to estimate parameters for models of the outcome at the constituency level.

The motivation for this work and more detailed discussion of the methodology may be found in our first report prepared in April 2015. A full report will be prepared after the election.

The constituency level work in particular is experimental. If the results show any promise there are numerous refinements we would like to introduce in examining the next major political event, such as a UK EU membership referendum, should it happen, or the US or French Presidential Elections.

Constituency level A – local MP change

In the last week of April 2015 we asked respondents the party affiliation of their local MP in the last Parliament, and (a different sample) the party affiliation they expect after the election. The difference in these distributions may be expected to model the change in distribution of seats.

We used a sample of 1000 in England and 500 in each of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The crowd demonstrated a poor knowledge of the composition of the previous Parliament, hence our focus on the difference in composition.

	Previous Parliament					Implied new Parliament					Seat %	Change
	Eng-land	Scot-land	Wales	NI	UK	Eng-land	Scot-land	Wales	NI	UK		
Seats	533	59	40	18	650	533	59	40	18	650		
Labour	191	40	26		257	195	24	25	0	245	38%	-12
Conservative	294	1	8		303	271	0	9	0	280	43%	-23
Liberal Democrat	42	11	3		56	31	8	2	0	42	6%	-14
UKIP	2				2	33	0	0	0	33	5%	31
Green	1				1	2	0	0	0	2	0%	1
Independent	1	1		1	3	1	1	0	1	4	1%	1
SNP		6			6	0	25	0	0	25	4%	19
Plaid Cymru			3		3	0	0	4	0	4	1%	1
DUP				8	8	0	0	0	8	8	1%	0
SDLP				3	3	0	0	0	3	3	0%	0
Alliance				1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0%	0
Sinn Féin				5	5	0	0	0	5	5	1%	0
Respect	1				1	1	0	0	0	1	0%	
Speaker	1				1	1	0	0	0	1	0%	
Other						0	0	0	0	0	0%	

Only the parties with significant national presence were included in the questions. No attempt was made to balance the sample with respect to constituency size, so we may expect some bias.

However – the result is not hugely out of line with [consensus forecast \(at the time of writing, 17:00 6 May\)](#), especially for the smaller nation samples where probably we have respondents from every seat. The exception is the increased expectation for UKIP and diminished for SNP.

These figures are consistent with David Cameron being the most likely Prime Minister.

Constituency level B – Switching

In the week preceding the election we examined people's expectation of how voters will switch their choice between 2010 and 2015. Time and budgetary constraints meant this work was confined to England where the outcome has greatest significance for the UK result, and where the competitive situation is most complex.

For each of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties we asked:

Which party do you think people in England who voted {a party} in 2010 are most likely to choose this time?

We did not ask this question for the smaller parties on the assumptions that their voters are likely to be very loyal and they didn't have many votes so their switching won't be very influential anyway, and we assumed 100% loyalty.

To explore the issues of voters lapsing and new voters we asked five questions to 500 adults in England using separate Google Surveys.

Exploring switching:

- *Voters for which party in 2010 are most likely to stay away and not vote on Thursday do you think?*
- *Which party in the general election do you think is most likely to get the votes of people in England who didn't vote in 2010?*

Exploring turnout:

- *Thinking about people who didn't vote in the last General Election in 2010, how likely are they to vote on Thursday?*
- *Thinking about everyone who voted in the last General Election in 2010, how likely are they in general to vote again on Thursday?*
- *What do you expect the turnout of people voting to be at the UK General Election on Thursday (last time was 65%)?*

The answers for these questions and their implications for turnout and share of lapsed and incoming votes will be described fully in our final report.

However, the standout features of the crowd answers were:

- Turnout will be similar to last time – two separate estimates from different questions suggest 66% or 68%, compared to last times 65.5%.
- **Only 18% of Liberal Democrat voters are expected to vote Lib Dem again.**
- Liberal Democrat voters are considered the most likely to abstain (30% say this).
- New voters are very unlikely to vote Liberal Democrat (only 5% put them as most likely).
- New voters are most likely to vote either Labour or UKIP (33% and 30% respectively)

If these effects are real, applied across England the electoral landscape would completely change, as shown in the following page.

The model makes no allowance for individual constituency effects, but these have to be very large to disturb the big picture.

Switching summary

Voting 2015	Voting 2010				
	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	UKIP	Green
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Conservative	58%	15%	21%	0%	0%
Labour	18%	57%	31%	0%	0%
Lib Dem	4%	3%	18%	0%	0%
UKIP	14%	18%	18%	100%	0%
Green	4%	5%	11%	0%	100%
Other	2%	2%	2%	0%	0%

Based on 3 samples of 500 *Assumptions*

The crowd tells us that the Lib Dem vote will be carved up between the other parties, leaving a catastrophically small residue of loyal voters.

Assuming these apply uniformly across England, the expected outcome for the 533 English seats is as follows, based on the 2010 constituency results (and ignoring all by-elections since):

	Seats
Conservative	289
Green	1
Labour	240
Lib Dem	0
UKIP	0
Other	3

This still leaves the Conservatives likely to be able to construct a minority government, depending on the outcome in Scotland

This situation becomes more pronounced when the turnout and lapsed/new voter estimates are brought in:

	Seats	Share of seats	Share of vote	Difference
Conservative	238	45%	29%	15%
Green	1	0%	8%	-7%
Labour	291	55%	31%	23%
Lib Dem	0	0%	5%	-5%
UKIP	0	0%	22%	-22%
Other	3	1%	5%	-4%

This is very different from polling forecasts. One possible explanation is that Wisdom of Crowds is including the supposed “shykipppers” – there being enough of them to destroy the Conservative’s opportunity but not quite enough to benefit themselves.

We have placed a spreadsheet showing the individual constituency forecasts derived by the method on our [blog](#).