

# Halfway there: The Midterm review of the Coalition

**Dominic Madar** looks back at the past two and a half years since the Coalition came to power, and reminds us of how far it has come and how far it has to go until it's time for us to hire or fire them

COALITIONS aren't really Britain's thing. We normally leave that kind of horse-trading and cooperative style politics to our neighbours on the Continent. It was to everybody's surprise therefore when Nick Clegg and some very reluctant Liberal Democrats cozied up with Cameron and his Conservative Party back in May 2010. Considering that and the enormity of cuts proposed to take place it's a minor miracle in itself that the government is still standing (just about) and Labour hasn't already sewn up a 2015 election victory.

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The backdrop of 2010 was very simple: the UK had been left a gaping budget deficit thanks to a combination of the 2008 global financial crisis and Labour's profligacy. After five years of fiscal prudence Gordon Brown ditched the stereotypical reputation of a stingy Scot and set off in 2002 on a disastrous spending rampage that would later come back to haunt him. The Tories (and Lib Dems) were voted in to do what they do best: clean up the economic mess left behind by a financially irresponsible Labour Party. Looking back over the last two and half years, a few successes stand out amongst the general doom and gloom. The most significant of these include raising the threshold at which income tax is paid for the lowest earners and maintaining a triple A credit rating amidst the chaos experienced by many other EU members.

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The first major incident came in the shape of a much publicised broken promise: If sharing a bed with the Tories was treacherous enough for the Lib Dems, then propping up their trebling of university tuition fees – akin to sleeping with the devil himself – was electoral suicide. Although hardly a supporter of paid higher education the money has to come from somewhere and just maybe university graduates should contribute more to a system that heavily subsidises them a good shot at significantly higher earnings in the future (I'm

still glad I don't have to pay those astronomical £9,000 fees though).

As time has gone on it has become increasingly evident that Cameron and Clegg are both at odds with plenty within their own parties. The Lib Dems have recently been overtaken by UKIP in recent opinion polls and look set to experience political wipe-out in 2015. They face a no win situation: heavy scrutiny for supporting any unpopular Tory-led policy and minimal credit for anything vaguely in the realms of success. Clegg may even be overthrown before we get that far, leaving the coalition in mass disarray.

The Tories meanwhile are clinging on by the skins of their teeth to Labour's coat tails, in the hope that a more sizable gap doesn't open up in the polls. For Cameron the major dilemma lies in whether to take the easy path and lurch to the right in a bid to silence UKIP and satisfy his far more conservative backbenchers, or take the bolder and more difficult route and stick to the centre-right to keep the Labour Party at bay. Tony Blair had the

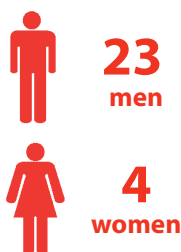
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guts, arrogance and audacity to take his own party on, stick by his convictions and win three elections on the spin. The political climate is far tougher for Cameron but to have any hope of winning and keep what remains of his tarnished reputation he shouldn't give in to growing party pressure.

Ultimately, how much of the deficit can be slashed (with as little impact as possible) and how much the economy will grow will have a pivotal impact on the 2015 election. Unfortunately for Cameron much of that depends on the global economy and in particular what shape the spluttering EU is in. Those on the left should give Cameron more credit for continuing to take strong stances in favour of socially liberal issues such as gay marriage against the wishes of most of his party. With his (relatively) pro-business mantra, cautious approach to an overbearing and increasingly dictatorial EU and recent support of free press (unlike Clegg and Miliband), Cameron could arguably be the most liberal mainstream party leader. I fear at this moment in time however that a combination of Western economic sluggishness, coalition infighting and Tory backbencher rebellion will leave him as a one-term PM.

## A Coalition's Break Down

### Cabinet's gender balance



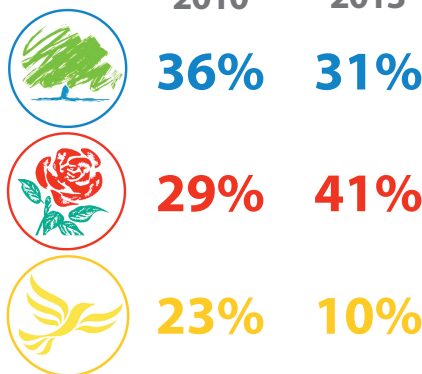
### Government u-turns



### Economic growth



### Opinion polls



### Number of bills passed



### Oxbridge educated



## James Crouch, Features Editor, asks what the figures mean for the all important 2015 general election

AFTER two and a half years in power, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition is now going through mid-term blues. It's been a bad year for the government, after "ominous shambles" earlier on this year. The government has been seen to u-turn on up to 37 separate policies, while the economy has improved little since the Prime Minister came to office.

Opinion polls over the past year have appeared dire for the Coalition. Labour is well ahead in the polls, and the Liberal Democrat polling figures have nothing short of collapsed – some even put them in fourth place

behind UKIP.

The Conservatives are now also worried by the failure to change the constituency boundaries to redress the numerical favourability it gives Labour, making it hard for the Conservatives to win an outright majority in 2015.

However, the future may not be too bad for David Cameron. Rightly or wrongly, the Government is still trusted more than Labour on the economy according to opinion polls, which every winning party has had in modern times. And the dreadful looking polling figures are surpris-

ingly, not that bad, considering two years into Brown's premiership, Labour was commonly behind by anything up to 25 points. On top of this the Conservatives are still the largest party in local government, and are likely to stay so.

For Clegg's Liberal Democrats, it's far harder to find a silver lining. Some of the low polling figures are almost record breaking. To add insult to injury, most LibDem seats are vulnerable to Tory challengers, and their loss may actually be a mathematical fluke be the thing that brings about a Conservative victory in 2015.