

The General Election 2005

Campaign Analysis

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Executive Summary

- 3354 candidates were registered to take part in the 2005 general election. Voters, on average, had a choice of five candidates in each constituency.
- Of the 315 parties registered with the Electoral Commission, 118 nominated at least one candidate
- Turnout rose by around 3% to 61%. This was the sixth lowest figure since 1832 and the second lowest since 1928
- Although Labour won a third term, its majority fell by 100 seats. Overall, Labour lost 34 seats, whilst the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Others gained 33, 11 and 3 seats respectively
- 25 third parties were registered at the time of the general election
- The number of women MPs increased to 128
- There was a significant rise in the number minority ethnic candidates of which the Conservatives fielded the largest number. The number of ethnic minority MPs rose to 15
- The three largest parties campaigned strongly on education, health, and law and order
- Commentators over-stated the Conservative focus on immigration
- All the main parties targeted key demographic groups
- Marginality tended to increase the degree of localism and personal attacks in constituency campaigns
- The campaigns by all main parties were strongly focussed on target seats
- Four of the five main parties made extensive use of telephone voter identification
- Automated telephone calls were a particular campaign innovation in this election
- At constituency level, some traditional forms of campaigning continued, but modern techniques were an increasing feature
- The number of campaign workers per constituency increased for the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, but declined for Labour
- Constituencies where parties mounted strong campaigns tended to experience higher turnouts

- Constituency campaigning by the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats appeared to boost electoral performance
- Direct mail and telephone voter identification were viewed as being particularly effective campaign techniques.
- Most party officials view the *Political Parties, Elections & Referendums Act* as being excessively bureaucratic, and this clouds their perception of the Electoral Commission
- Constituency agents were positive about the Electoral Commission, but wished Returning Officers to maintain their current powers.

1. An account of who took part in the general election

Number of candidates

Although the number of parliamentary constituencies reduced from 659 to 646 due to the redistricting exercise in Scotland – there was no shortage of candidates putting themselves forward for election in 2005. All in all, 3351 candidates were registered to take part in the 2005 general election. The postponement of the election in South Staffordshire due to the death of the original Liberal Democrat candidate allowed an extra three candidates to join the election in South Staffordshire on June 23, giving an overall total of 3354. This meant that on average electors were able to choose between just over five candidates on polling day.

Opposition parties do not traditionally contest the seat held by the Speaker – and the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats did not stand against Michael Martin in Glasgow North East. However, just as in 2001 the Speaker did face some competition as the new seat was contested by the British National Party, the Scottish Nationalist Party, the Scottish Socialist Party, the Socialist Labour Party, the Scottish Unionist Party and an Independent candidate. Nevertheless, the Speaker is included separately here rather than as part of the Labour total. The Conservative and Unionist Party put forward three candidates in Northern Ireland but Labour and the Liberal Democrats continued not to stand in Northern Ireland. The Kidderminster Hospital and Health Concern candidate Richard Taylor, who was victorious in 2001, ran again in 2005. Once again his cause may have been assisted by the Liberal Democrats’ decision not to contest this constituency.

Number of parties

There were 315 parties registered with the Electoral Commission at the time of the General election – 61 of whom registered in 2004 alone. There were 118 parties that nominated at least one candidate for election. This list includes some minor or fledging parties, and some single issue organisations - able to put up mini-slates across a small number of constituencies (examples would include the SOS! Voters against the Overdevelopment of Northampton party, which put up two candidates as well as some of the more colourful single candidate parties such as The Resolutionist Party and the Church of the Militant Elvis Party who stood in one constituency each.

Table 1.1: Number of Candidates in 2005*

Party	Candidates
Conservative	630
Labour	627
Liberal Democrat	626
UK Independence Party	496
Green	184
Independents	162
British National Party	119
Veritas	65
SNP	59
Scottish Socialist Party	58
Socialist Labour Party	49

Plaid Cymru	40
Respect-Unity Coalition	26
English Democrats	24
Vote for Yourself Rainbow Dream Ticket	23
Legalise Cannabis Alliance	21
Monster Raving Loony Party	19
Scottish Green Party	19
Democratic Unionist Party	18
“No description”	18
Sinn Fein	18
Social Democratic & Labour Party	18
Ulster Unionist Party	18
Socialist Alternative	17
Liberal Party	14
National Front	13
Alliance Party	12
Operation Christian Vote	10
Workers Revolutionary Party	10
Christian Peoples Alliance	9
Communist Party of Britain	6
Forward Wales	6
Workers Party	6
Alliance for Green Socialism	5
Mebyon Kernow	4
Community Action Party	3
Free Scotland Party	3
Peace and Progress	3
The People's Choice! Exclusively For All	3
UK Community Issues Party	3
Clause 28	2
Death, Dungeons & Taxes	2
Democratic Socialist Alliance - People Before Profit	2
Open Forum	2
Residents' Association of London	2
S O S! Voters Against Overdevelopment in Northampton	2
Scottish Senior Citizens Unity	2
Senior Citizens Party	2
Socialist Unity	2
The Peace Party	2
Third Way	2
Your Party	2
Alternative Party	1
Ashfield Independents	1
Blair Must Go Party	1
British Public Party	1
Build Duddon and Morecambe Bridges	1
Christian Democrat	1
Church of the Militant Elvis Party	1
Civilisation Party	1

Common Good	1
Community Group	1
Croydon Pensions Alliance	1
Demanding Honesty in Politics and Whitehall	1
Democratic Labour Party	1
English Independence Party	1
English Parliamentary Party	1
Families First	1
For Integrity And Trust In Government	1
Freedom Party	1
Get Britain Back Party	1
Glasnost	1
Imperial Party	1
Independent Green Voice	1
Independent Kidderminster Hospital Health Concern	1
Independent Progressive Labour	1
Independent Working Class Association	1
Iraq War. Not In My Name	1
Islam Zinda Baad Platform	1
Justice Party	1
Local Community Party	1
Max Power Party	1
Millennium Council	1
Motorcycle News Party	1
New England Party	1
New Millennium Bean Party	1
Newcastle Academy with Christian Values Party	1
Northern Progress	1
Organisation of Free Democrats	1
Pensioners Party Scotland	1
People of Horsham First Party	1
Personality AND Rational Thinking? Yes! Party	1
Pride in Paisley Party	1
Progressive Democratic Party	1
Protest Vote Party	1
Publican Party - Free to Smoke	1
Removal Of Tetramasts In Cornwall	1
Resolutionist Party	1
Rock 'N' Roll Loony Party	1
Safeguard the NHS	1
Save Bristol North Baths Party	1
Scottish Independence Party	1
Scottish Unionist Party	1
Silent Majority Party	1
Socialist Environmental Alliance	1
Socialist Party	1
Speaker**	1
St Albans Party	1
Telepathic Partnership	1
The Community (London Borough of Hounslow)	1

The Pensioners Party	1
Their Party	1
Tiger's Eye - the Party for Kids	1
United Kingdom Pathfinders	1
Virtue Currency Cognitive Appraisal Party	1
Wessex Regionalists	1
World	1
Xtraordinary People Party	1

* These figures include the candidates who participated in the South Staffordshire re-run election. This meant an increase in candidates for 3 parties, the Clause 28, English Democrats and the Greens.

** Due to the traditional non-partisan treatment of the position, we have treated the Speaker as separate from Labour.

Number of voters

There was a total of 27148975 valid votes cast in the 2005 general election, slightly (including 25635 votes at the eventual South Staffordshire contest) – more than the 16.4 million votes cast in 2001 but significantly below the 31 million voters in 1997.

Estimates of turnout tend to concur that percentage turnout was up slightly on the last general election, from 58% to 61%. Nevertheless in historical context, turnout figures show no signs of significant recovery – the 2005 election witnessed the sixth lowest turnout since 1832 and the second lowest since men and women were given the vote in equal terms in 1928. Turnout fell slightly in Northern Ireland but increased slightly in England, Scotland and Wales. However, given the greater take up of postal voting (and leaving aside the controversy about whether these procedures have diluted public confidence in the security of the vote) the propensity of UK voters to participate in general elections seems not to have increased significantly in 2005.

Table 1.2: MPs Elected in 2005

	MPs Elected in 2005
Labour	356
Conservatives	198
Liberal Democrats	62
DUP	9
SNP	6
SDLP	3
Plaid Cymru	3
Sinn Fein	5
UUP	1
Respect	1
Independent Kidderminster Hospital	1
Health Concern	
Independent (Peter Law)	1

Labour were able to form their third successive administration since 1997 – but the party’s majority fell by 100 seats. Nevertheless, in historic terms Labour’s majority was much safer than that delivered by the party’s election victories in 1950, 1964, and February and October 1974. The exact change in party fortunes can only be estimated due to the redistricting exercise in Scotland and the reduction in the number of Scottish seats, but using notional results for 2001 in Scotland, Labour lost 43 seats in May, the Conservatives gained 33, the Liberal Democrats gained 11 and others gained three seats.

In the run-up to the general election, there was much conjecture about the rise of “Independents” as a political force. (see BBCi, 2005 for details) and noticeable defeats for the established parties such as those experienced in Tatton (1997) and Wyre Forest (2001) were anticipated again.

Former Labour MP George Galloway was able to defeat Labour in Bethnal Green and Bow, but Mr Galloway stood for a political party, Respect – the unity coalition, which stood a total of 26 candidates across Britain. Dr. Richard Taylor was able to repeat his victory of 2001 in Wyre Forest but again does belong to a registered party - Independent Kidderminster Hospital and Health Concern. Peter Law was the sole genuine Independent success in 2005 standing in Blaenau Gwent.

Third parties

Organisations or individuals who are not standing at an election, but who wish to campaign for or against a party or group of candidates can register as ‘Third parties’ with the Electoral Commission. The 2000 *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act* imposed limits on the spending permitted by such third parties designed to control national third party activity.

According to the Electoral Commission, there were 25 registered third parties at the time of the 2005 General Election.

Table 1.3: Registered Third Parties at the time of the General Election

Amicus
The British Declaration Of Independence
Campaign for an Independent Britain
Community
Conservative Rural Action Group
Mr Patrick Evershed
GMB
Mr Zaccheus Gilpin
Howard's End Ltd
The League Against Cruel Sports Ltd
Musicians' Union
Muslim Friends Of Labour
The National Autistic Society
Searchlight Information Services Ltd
Society for the Protection of Unborn Children
TMVO Ltd
Transport and General Workers' Union
Transport Salaried Staffs' Association

UNISON – The Public Service Union
 Uncaged Campaigns Ltd
 Union of Shop
 Unite Against Fascism
 Vote-OK
 Waging Peace
 Working Hound Defence Campaign

Female candidates

Although the number of women MPs increased in 2005 –to 128 from 118, the improvement was significant but rather small. Certainly, it paled alongside the impetus to women’s representation given by Labour’s victory in 1997. Furthermore, with the great majority of women MPs at Westminster representing the Labour party, there remains the possibility that a swift about-turn in public opinion could significantly reduce the proportion of women in parliament at a subsequent election.

The Fawcett Society estimated that if the trends in improvement in women’s representation set by the 2005 election were maintained, Labour would enjoy equity between male and female MPs in 20 years, the Liberal Democrats in 40 years and the Conservatives in 400 years time. (<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/May05electionWomenMPs.pdf>).

Table 1.4: Women’s Representation in 2005

	Women Candidates in 2005	Women Elected in 2005
Conservatives	121 (19.8%)	17 (8.9%)
Labour	166 (26.4%)	98 (27.5%)
Liberal Democrats	142 (22.7%)	10 (16.1%)
<i>SNP</i>	13 (22%)	0
Plaid Cymru	4 (10%)	0
UUP	1 (5.5%)	1 (100%)
DUP	3 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)
Sinn Fein	3 (16.7%)	1 (20%)
SDLP	5 (27.8%)	0

Note: Figures in brackets are a percentage of the total party slate, and of those elected.

After the 2005 election, there were 128 Women MPs – reduced to 127 after the death of Patsy Calton and the return of Mark Hunter as the Liberal Democrat MP for Cheadle in the by-election of July 2005.

Conservative Women MPS: 17 of the 128 Women MPS in the 2005 parliament elected in May were Conservatives, an increase of 3 on their 2001 performance. Three women won seats for the Conservatives in 2005 (Anne Milton in Guildford, Justine Greening in Putney, and Anne Main in St Albans) while a further three women inherited Conservative seats from 2001 (Maria Miller in Basingstoke, Nadine Dorries in Bedfordshire Mid, and Theresa Villiers

in Chipping Barnet). All took the place of retiring male MPs). 11 Conservative women were re-elected in 2005. These were Angela Browning, Angela Watkinson, Ann Winterton, Anne McIntosh, Anne Widdecombe, Caroline Spelman, Cheryl Gillan, Elaine Laing, Jacqui Lait, Julie Kirkbride, and Theresa May.

Labour: Of the Labour 98 Women MPs none were Labour gains but 23 women did inherit the seats of retiring MPs (or won redistributed Scottish seats). These new Labour MPs are Alison Seabeck, Angela Smith, Anne Snelgrove, Barbara Keeley, Celia Barlow, Dawn Butler, Diana Johnson, Emily Thornberry, Jessica Morden, Kerry McCarthy, Kitty Ussher, Linda Riordan, Lyn Brown, Lynda Waltho, Madeleine Moon, Mary Creagh, Meg Hillier, Natascha Engle, Nia Griffith, Roberta Woods, Sarah McCarthy-Fry, Sharon Hodgson, and Sian James.

Liberal Democrats: The Liberal Democrats more than doubled their number of women MPs (to 10), but their baseline from 2001 was so poor that such an improvement in female representative is relative. Annette Brooke, Patsy Calton and Sandra Gidley were re-elected in their 2001 seats, while Sarah Teather retained the seat that she won in 2003 at the Brent East by-election, and Susan Kramer inherited the Liberal Democrat seat of Richmond Park. Five women gained new seats for the Liberal Democrats. They were Jenny Willott in Cardiff Central, Jo Swinson who won the new Scottish seat of Dunbartonshire East, Julia Goldsworthy in Falmouth and Camborne, Lorely Burt in Solihull and Lynne Featherstone in Hornsey & Wood Green.

Others: Three of Northern Ireland's 18 MPs elected to Westminster are female – Michelle Gildernew of Sinn Fein (who may not take up her Westminster seat of Fermanagh and South Tyrone), Sylvia Hermon of the Ulster Unionist Party in North Down and Iris Robinson of the Democratic Unionist Party in Strangford.

Seats with all-women candidates: The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act enabled the re-establishment of all-women shortlists in the selection of prospective parliamentary candidates (see Childs, 2003 for a discussion of the Act). All-women shortlists were used by Labour as a tactic to increase their proportion of female representative in Parliament – although not always without controversy (the victory of Independent Peter Law in Blaenau Gwent was commonly associated with Labour's adoption of (all-women shortlists in Wales). Of the 30 seats in the British Parliamentary Constituency dataset identified as having been the subject of the imposition of all-women shortlisting, Labour won 23, the Conservatives five and the Liberal Democrats two. (*Source: The British Parliamentary Constituency Database, 1992-2005, available from www.pippanorris.com*).

Electors were faced with female candidates for Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties in 8 constituencies. Women were placed first, second and third in the Labour seats of Amber Valley, Colne Valley, Islington South & Finsbury, Liverpool Garston, Stockport, and Wallasey and in the Conservative seat of Maidenhead. All three main parties fielded a woman candidate in Cynon Valley although a male Plaid Cymru candidate was placed second in this constituency.

BME Representation

The 2005 general election saw a significant increase in the number of minority ethnic candidates standing for election. Of all the political parties, the Conservatives fielded the biggest number of black or minority ethnic candidates in 2005. This was assisted by the so-called 'city seat initiative' of the Conservatives in 2005 which was designed to increase the

representativeness of the Conservatives slate in the general election. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that most of these candidates were fighting relatively hopeless causes in seats that the Conservatives were unlikely to win. Indeed although 41 Conservative candidates were from ethnic minorities only two of those elected for the Conservative party were Black or Asian.

Table 1.5: BME candidates in the 2005 General election (Britain only)

	Candidates in 2005 (% of slate)	Elected in 2005 (% of MPs)
<i>Conservatives</i>		
White	586 (93.5%)	196 (99%)
Black/Asian	41 (6.5%)	2 (1%)
<i>Labour</i>		
White	595 (94.7%)	343 (96.3%)
Black/Asian	33 (5.3%)	13 (3.7%)
<i>Liberal Democrats</i>		
White	591 (94.4)	62 (100%)
Black/Asian	35 (5.6%)	0 (0%)

Categorising parliamentary candidates by ethnicity can be a tricky process. For example from the 2001 parliament, Jonathan Sayeed a Conservative MP with Indian heritage preferred not to classify himself as Black or Asian. It is important to note that no attempt has been made here to categorise according to religious affiliation. However we can be fairly confident of the figures used here for the crude measures of “white” or “black or Asian” for the three main parties in 2005 not least because the parties’ desire to demonstrate their increasing ethnic diversity resulted in the publication of these figures. The Conservatives fielded 41 Asian or Black candidates, Labour 33 and the Liberal Democrats 35.

In 2001 all three main parties fielded ethnic minority candidates in a parliamentary constituency – Bradford West - for the first time (see Russell, 2002 “The General Election of 2001 – continuity, apathy and disillusion? In M. Holborn (ed.) *Developments in Sociology 18*, 67-91.). In 2005 there were three constituencies where all three main parties fielded black or minority ethnic candidates. These seats were Bradford West again, Brent South and Bethnal Green & Bow (although the White candidate for Respect, George Galloway was victorious in this constituency).

After the 2005 general election there were 15 ethnic minority MPs, up from 12 in 2001. Again Labour were the most successful party in terms of ethnic minority representation, securing 13 of the 15 elected BME representatives. However, the Conservatives did manage to increase their number of Black or Asian MPs from zero to two. None of the 35 Liberal Democrat candidates from black or minority ethnic backgrounds was successful in 2005. The Liberal Democrat victor in the Leicester East by-election of 2004 – Parmjit Singh Gil was defeated in 2005, leaving the Liberal Democrats with no minority ethnic representatives among their 62 MPs.

Conservatives: Adam Afriyie in Windsor and Shailesh Vara in Cambridgeshire North West became the Conservatives’ two black or Asian MPs. Neither constituency has significant

ethnic minority populations – according to the 2001 census 8.5% of those living in Windsor, and 3.3% of those living in Cambridgeshire North West were “non-white”.

Labour: There were 13 black or minority ethnic Labour MPs elected in 2005. Once again the vast majority of these elected representatives were chosen by voters from constituencies with significant proportions of minority ethnic populations. According to the 2001 census data, only Ashok Kumar in Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (where the non-white population was 1.3% according to the census) and Parmjit Dhanda in Gloucester (where the non-white population was estimated to be 7.5%) were elected in seats where ethnic minorities amounted to less than 15% of the total population. Black or minority ethnic Labour MPs were elected in Birmingham Perry Barr, Bradford West, Brent South, Dewsbury, Ealing Southall, Glasgow Central, Hackney North & Stoke Newington, Leicester East, Preston, Tooting, and Tottenham.

Clearly the numbers of black and minority ethnic MPs has grown in recent years. However the 2001 census revealed that one-tenth of the population could be categorised as non-white, and parliament is still far from a microcosm of society in terms of ethnic representation (whether or not such a state of affairs would be desirable). The symbolic advantages of increasing the number of Black or Asian MPs might also be diluted slightly by concerns about what Saggart has called the ghettoisation of ethnic minority representation – where Black MPs find it hard to be selected to represent non-black areas. (see Saggart, 1998, Criddle, 2002, Russell, 2004).

References:

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- Saggart, Shamit (1998) *Race and Representation: Electoral Politics and Ethnic Pluralism in Britain*.

2. A description of the content and balance of the methods used

Sources of data:

Interviews with party and ‘third party’ staff: In the immediate post-election period, we interviewed key officials from the following parties: the Conservative Party, the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru and the UK Independence Party. We had also planned to interview officials from the Green Party and the British National Party (the selection criterion being entitlement to a party election broadcast). However, it proved impossible to interview officials from these last two parties. In addition, we interviewed an official from the ‘third party’ Vote OK. We also approached Amicus and Operation Black Vote for interviews (as well as a number of other ‘third parties’), but despite our best efforts, it proved impossible to interview officials from these organisations.

Survey of Election Agents: In the immediate post-election period, we sent a questionnaire to election agents of the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party. The survey included a number of questions about the organisation and subject of individual constituency campaigns. In this instance, we asked whether special leaflets were produced targeting particular groups and whether direct mail was sent to particular targeted groups.

Analysis of party leaflets: In a project run with the New Politics Network think-tank, 313 volunteers in 223 constituencies recorded every contact they had with the parties during the campaign and collected every piece of election literature delivered. In total, we ended up analysing the content of some 3,459 letters and leaflets. Leaflets were coded upon mentions of various policy domains, the extent of personal attacks and whether the leaflets featured a significant amount of content related to the constituency itself.

The Conservatives

The Conservatives focussed on five key issues: crime, tax, immigration, healthcare and clean hospitals, and school discipline. A sixth category, pensions, was introduced later in the campaign. Of these issues, immigration generated most media attention. The Conservatives complained that this focus was excessive and that they were, in fact, campaigning on a far wider range of issues, with immigration not being given special prominence. Looking at the analysis of election literature, Table 2.1 suggests that the Conservatives’ complaints were justified. Immigration featured fewer times in Conservative leaflets than law and order, health, education and ‘other’ policy domains (mainly pensions).

The party made efforts to build contacts with a two key groups: ethnic minorities and pensioners. Prior to the campaign, ethnic minorities within key seats were targeted. During the campaign itself, particular efforts were made to target pensioners and people aged 50 upwards on issues such as Council Tax. These intentions are reflected to a certain extent in the leaflets and direct mail distributed in constituencies. Table 2.2 shows that pensioners in particular were the subject of targeting. Interestingly, whilst the central party felt that it could have targeted students more, efforts were clearly made at constituency level, where the Conservatives were almost as likely to have contacted student voters as the Liberal Democrats. First-time voters were also targeted significantly more than they were by the other two main parties

Table 2.1: Coverage of Policy Domains in Conservative, Labour & Liberal Democrat Leaflets

<i>Coverage %</i>	Conservatives n=208	Labour n=211	Liberal Democrats n=205
Economy	18	91	9
Education	93	95	99
Europe	51	2	3
Health	95	97	99
Immigration	84	21	4
Iraq	14	14	97
Law & Order	97	91	99
Security & Terrorism	3	3	4
Tax	73	37	55
Other	98	93	100

Table 2.2: Groups Targeted by the Conservatives in Constituencies

<i>% Saying Yes</i>	Leaflets	Direct Mail
First-Time Voters	41	34
Pensioners	53	29
Ethnic Minorities	15	5
Students	21	24
Postal Voters	85	87
Anti-Iraq War Voters	3	0

n=38

Labour

Labour campaigned principally on three areas – the economy, health and education - under two principal headings: ‘Forward Not Back’, and ‘Vision for a Third Term’. In the latter part of the campaign, the party also campaigned on boosting electoral turnout. Overall, whilst campaigning on these issues at national level, it also sought to translate these national messages into a local context, something that is reflected in the analysis of campaign leaflets (Table 2.1). Only Law and Order was a significant addition to the topics covered in the broader campaign and it is noteworthy that Europe featured so little

Labour sought to target a number of key groups: those in low turnout areas, young people, women and families and Muslims. The women and families strategy in particular saw a focus on education issues. These concerns are reflected to an extent in the analysis of leaflets – Labour was most likely of all the parties to target ethnic minority voters. Youth also featured (in terms of first-time voters) though not to the same extent as amongst the Conservatives.

Table 2.3: Groups Targeted by Labour in Constituencies

<i>% Saying Yes</i>	Leaflets	Direct Mail
First-Time Voters	31	28
Pensioners	23	13
Ethnic Minorities	23	14
Students	9	6
Postal Voters	42	37
Anti-Iraq War Voters	12	9

n=128

The Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats campaigned at national level on five principal areas: the abolition of student tuition fees, free personal health care for the elderly, scrapping the Council Tax, Iraq and the environment. These were all issues where polling suggested that the party was ahead. The local campaign analysis presents a slightly different picture, however (Table 2.1). Whilst the environment fits under ‘other’ in our categories, it is clear that at local level, like the other main parties, the Liberal Democrats placed a great deal of emphasis on law and order. And, like Labour, Europe was almost completely ignored.

The Liberal Democrats tried in particular to engage and mobilise two groups: students and ethnic minorities – especially Muslims. The focus on students was not surprising, given that one of party’s key campaign issues was the abolition of student tuition fees (this assumes, of course, that students oppose fees). The party sought to engage students in two particular ways; first by targeting university campuses (with the assistance of Liberal Democrat student societies), and secondly by targeting mail specifically aimed at students. These patterns are confirmed by our survey of agents. The Liberal Democrats were the party most likely to use leaflets and direct mail to appeal to students: 28% of Liberal Democrat constituencies reported drafting leaflets designed specifically to appeal to students, whilst 22% said direct mail was sent to student voters.

The second group was ethnic minorities and in particular, Muslim voters focussing upon the party’s opposition to the Iraq war. As Table 2.1 shows, the Iraq war did feature strongly in Liberal Democrat literature. However, our survey of election agents suggests that there was less discrimination in the materials distributed within constituencies, with ethnic minority voters featuring no more strongly than for other parties – indeed Labour constituencies appeared to make more effort in this respect.

Table 2.4: Groups Targeted by the Liberal Democrats in Constituencies

<i>% Saying Yes</i>	Leaflets	Direct Mail
First-Time Voters	26	17
Pensioners	28	19
Ethnic Minorities	12	7
Students	28	22
Postal Voters	33	28
Anti-Iraq War Voters	14	7

n=171

The Scottish National Party

The basic, all encompassing message of the Scottish National Party campaign was that the ‘SNP is Scotland’s party’. This underpinned three more specific messages – that the SNP stands up for Scotland, favours Scottish independence, and that, despite devolution, voting SNP at Westminster was a positive protest against the treatment of Scotland and also against the government in particular over the Iraq war. The messages were summed up in the slogan: *Scotland Matters, Make it Matter in May*. In terms of targeting voter groups, the party felt that at Westminster level, it was unlikely to attract many new voters, so it concentrated mainly on its own core support. These aims were reflected in constituency campaigns, where 42% of SNP constituencies distributed leaflets targeting voters opposed to the Iraq war – the largest proportion of any of the main five parties. In addition, constituency analyses also show that pensioners were also targeted with special leaflets – some 58% of SNP constituency parties reporting having done this.

Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru campaigned under the general premise that it was the party looking after the interests of the people of Wales and seeking to build a better Wales. This was illustrated in promoting a series of messages: a proper parliament (in Wales) to deliver better public services; fair taxation and fair funding; affordable homes in safer communities, and action to promote a sustainable countryside. At national level, no particular groups were targeted. However, in target constituencies, ethnic minorities were focussed upon, both on account of Plaid already representing some areas with a large ethnic population, and in part because of the party’s stance against the Iraq war. Not surprisingly, Plaid also targeted Welsh speakers.

The UK Independence Party

The UK Independence party focussed principally on the issue of its opposition to Europe. However, at a constituency level, there was frequently an additional focus on immigration as well as health, education and the economy. There were no special efforts made to target particular social groups.

Vote OK

Vote OK was formed by staff, who had previously worked for the Countryside Alliance. It was formed in January 2005. The group is registered with the Electoral Commission as a recognised ‘third party’. It took this step for two reasons: transparency and a desire to gain legitimacy. Given the group’s origin there were concerns that it would be seen as being too closely aligned to the Conservative Party. The group only campaigned at local level and

applied the following criteria when deciding in which constituencies it should be active: if the MP was opposed to hunting, if the second-placed candidate from the previous election was supportive, and if the constituency was sufficiently marginal. The group sought to support candidates who favoured rescinding the blanket ban on hunting - whatever their party. Once the campaign had begun, Vote OK did not campaign on the issue of hunting. Rather it simply assisted its favoured candidates' campaigns – mainly by providing teams of volunteers.

Localism, Negativity and Personal Attacks

The analysis of party leaflets also allows us to look at three further aspects of the parties' campaigns: the extent to which constituency literature featured a significant local element, how positive or negative the campaign materials were and the extent to which parties engaged in personal attacks (Table 2.5). The percentages in Table 2.5 refer to the proportion of leaflets that were positive, negative, featured local content and personal attacks. Note that in terms of positivity and negativity, the combined percentages exceed 100% as many leaflets were both positive and negative.

Firstly, it is clear that all parties engaged in both positive and negative campaigning. The vast majority of leaflets were at least positive in part. However, negative campaigning was also prominent. The net figure gives an indication of the balance of the campaigning. Conservative leaflets were relatively evenly balanced, whilst Liberal Democrat ones were a little more positive than negative, overall. Labour however, was significantly more positive in its campaigning. A partial explanation for this is that the party is the Government - and will have been keen to promote its achievements. Opposition parties, by way of contrast, are likely to criticise the incumbent in an attempt to show that they could govern better. That said, some of the negative campaigning was not directed at the incumbent, but at the other challenger. In some seats, parties attempted to persuade potential tactical voters that they, rather than the other challenger, were the party most likely to be able to defeat the incumbent.

Table 2.5 also shows two further interesting features. First, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats engaged in a significant level of personal attacks on other politicians. In both cases, over 40% of the parties' leaflets featured such attacks. By way of contrast, Labour engaged in rather fewer personal attacks. Again, this may be a reflection of differences in campaigning between incumbents and challengers. Finally, Table 2.5 examines the extent to which leaflets reflected local constituency concerns. All parties featured a significant local message in a majority of constituencies. However, the Conservatives clearly promoted local concerns most and the Liberal Democrats least.

Table 2.5: Type of Campaigning, Personal Attacks & Local Content

%	Positive	Negative	Net Pos/Neg.	Personal Attacks	Local
Conservative	90	92	-2	45	82
Labour	100	72	+28	16	62
Liberal Democrat	100	87	+13	43	55

n as per Table 2.1

If we break this down by marginality, these patterns become even more pronounced (see Table 2.6). Firstly, whilst Labour’s campaigning was most positive overall, it was more positive in non-marginal seats, suggesting again that negative campaigning is more prevalent in more marginal contests; a result that is mirrored by net scores for the conservatives and liberal democrats.

Secondly, all parties engaged in personal attacks to a greater degree in marginal contests. This is particularly true of the Liberal Democrats, where in the vast majority of these, their leaflets featured personal attacks, many of them featuring attacks on the Prime Minister. Finally, in the case of Conservative and Liberal Democrat campaigns, marginality boosted the extent to which leaflets featured significant local content. For Labour there was no such pattern

Table 2.6: Campaigning by Seat Marginality

%	Net Pos/Neg.	Personal	Local
Cons 1st or 2nd			
<10% (39)	-8	51	94
10%+ (141)	-1	43	79
Lab 1st or 2nd			
<10% (32)	+12	28	66
10%+ (130)	+29	14	69
Lib Dems 1st or 2nd			
<10% (15)	0	87	93
10%+ (63)	+8	43	68

3. A description of the methods used by parties/candidates

The National Campaign: Techniques Employed and the National Management of Local Campaigns

Labour

For the 2005 election, Labour adopted a much more targeted approach than four years earlier. Labour's strategy was to translate its key national messages on the delivery of public services and economic stability into a local context. This involved the promotion of local achievements to key voters in target seats. A significant proportion of Labour's campaign and the national techniques employed were focussed on the 100-111 target seats identified by the party.

Labour's use of billboards was a key feature of the 2001 campaign. In 2005, the party again used them extensively – with separate 'launches' of billboard campaigns for the benefit of the media - although this time mainly in target seats or in prominent 'travel to work' locations. While the party positioned some billboards in heartland areas to promote a positive message and mobilise traditional Labour voters, the marginality of the seat and the best location were the two main criteria used in billboard placement.

The vast majority of tours undertaken by senior party figures were also focussed in key battleground, although some constituencies missed out on the grounds of geographical remoteness (e.g. Ynys Mon and Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey). Labour strategists designed feasible tour routes to maximise interest from the regional press in as many nearby target seats as possible. This enabled Labour to get their message across in regional newspapers without senior figures visiting every marginal constituency.

The Labour campaign also used direct communication techniques to target key voters in battleground seats. The party focussed its efforts on 'weak Labour' voters - those who had supported the party in 2001 but were now undecided or considering voting for other parties. Such voters were pinpointed using a combination of the MOSAIC database, Labour's own national contact database which contained constituency records of previous voting histories and commercial purchased data. This database contained information for all the main target seats and was subsequently used for targeted personal calls and direct mail, which predominantly came from Labour's National Communication Centre in Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. A highly targeted strategic operation emerged with key voters receiving initial telephone contact followed by direct mail to reinforce the message.

The party also began its campaign effort earlier than in 2001, with the first round of direct mail being sent to key voters more than a year in advance of the general election and telephone voter identification beginning as early as January 2004. As in 2001, paid staff were used to make calls. However, Labour also used automated telephone calls. Even though it was recognised that automated calls were less effective than staffed calls, the party estimated that they produced a response rate that was ten times greater than that achieved by direct mail. They were also cheaper and achieved a contact rate of 35%. That said, direct mail also played an integral role in the party's overall campaign strategy, although the material was much more locally focussed than had been the case four years previously.

As in 2001, the party used private polling and focus groups in target seats to determine trends across electorates and pick up any significant shifts in party support. Polling and focus group research was conducted under the stewardship of Phillip Gould with additional staff support from the advertising company TBWA Ltd.

In 2001 Labour had caused something of a stir among campaign observers by circulating more than 300,000 videos to key voters in about 60 target seats. In 2005, things went a stage further as Labour used DVDs to target weak and undecided Labour voters in a similar number of seats. The party distributed around 250,000 DVDs with the cost split between the constituencies and national party headquarters. All viewers of the DVD would see an opening film based upon their constituency (featuring the MP/candidate and work undertaken in the local community). The DVD also contained a menu of additional features including four local stories about health, the economy, crime and education, a national message from Tony Blair, and finally what Labour strategists called the 'attack part', namely a Labour Party election broadcast which focussed on the economy and stressed the economic record of the Conservatives. The DVD also contained a feedback mechanism, which enabled the party to ascertain how much of the DVD was viewed. Labour claimed that many key voters had viewed the whole DVD.

However, other national campaign techniques did not focus entirely on battleground constituencies. First, the party did a U-turn on national newspaper advertising. In 2001, Labour felt that this was neither cost effective nor integral to the campaign given the party's general popularity amongst the vast majority of the national press. This time, press reports were far more critical and the election result was not regarded as foregone conclusion. Consequently, the party chose to advertise in national newspapers to put positive messages across and counter negative stories during the campaign. Yet regional newspaper advertising was regarded by Labour as just as important as the national press. The party believed that regional papers were more localised and personal hence they also used them especially for interviews with senior party figures and particularly during visits to the area. Nonetheless, these interviews were mainly with newspapers covering areas which included target seats. Second, the party's eCampaigns unit used e-mails and texts to mobilise core voters irrespective of the seat status. As in 2001, however, electronic campaigning did not play an integral role in the national campaign. Finally, Labour like the Conservatives had five national party election broadcasts.

The national management of local campaigns enabled Labour headquarters to monitor activity at the constituency level particularly in target seats. In total 80 regional organisers were employed either by Labour central headquarters, or partly by a combination of the regional party and two or three constituencies, or by the constituencies themselves across a county, to inform national headquarters about campaign activity and voters' concerns on the ground. In some areas, unpaid volunteers, usually the election agent, were used. Responsibility for the monitoring process was decided well in advance of the campaign in conjunction with the regional director and was based on merit and local expertise. In addition, some regional officers were also included on the monitoring list. They often had responsibility for counties where there was either one or two target seats. Consequently, every target seat was monitored either by an organiser, regional officer or a trusted party agent.

The vast majority of regional organisers started monitoring local campaigns in target seats from the end of 2003 and provided regular fortnightly reports to national headquarters. By

early 2005, these reports became weekly and once the campaign started there was daily correspondence by e-mail. These reports contained information about the intensity of the local campaigns, targeting strategies and tactics used, and feedback from key 'weak Labour' voters. During the campaign, national staff at party headquarters would phone organisers and talk through issues raised in their e-mails. This enabled them to address particular issues that were causing concern and deal with organisational problems or political issues that had arisen at the local level.

All regional organisers received skills training from party headquarters. More experienced regional organisers received both refresher courses (e.g. legal training) and skills training in areas of campaigning that had changed since 2001. In the summer of 2003, new regional organisers were required to take a more intensive Trainee Organiser Scheme, which involved a series of residential training courses and placements with experienced organisers. Also, Labour provided a training programme for volunteers, lay campaigners, coordinators and volunteer agents. Although this was open to volunteers in all seats, the party ensured that activists in all target seats were always in attendance.

The Conservatives

By their own admission, the 2005 Conservative campaign was ruthlessly focussed on winning support in 180 target seats. The Conservatives adopted an offensive strategy in 164 seats and sought to consolidate their support in 16 others. National messages were created to attract a particular audience, specifically floating voters who might be 'Conservative minded'. The party claimed to have run a 'joined-up campaign', using a number of national campaign techniques to promote similar messages to key voters in battleground seats.

Like Labour, the Conservatives employed billboard advertising in key seats and prominent 'travel to work' locations where they were likely to be viewed by target voters. The statements used on billboards (e.g. 'more police on the street') came out of focus groups and were messages consistent with the five key messages in the party's manifesto. The party also continued to use 'virtual billboards'. In 2005, 'The Wipe the Smile off his Face' campaign was only shown on a few billboards, but an electronic version was sent to news companies and was subsequently covered extensively in the national press.

The party also increased its use of polling and focus group data. Daily tracking polls were undertaken by ORB (a tracking poll company) among key voters living in target seats. These polls focussed on salient issues, candidate recognition (awareness of Conservative and opposition parties' campaigns) and assessments of the party leaders. Focus group research was also employed to check on how messages were being received rather than to set the campaign agenda. The party used these groups to 'tweak messages' on particular issues (such as crime and immigration) in an attempt to attract undecided Labour and Liberal Democrat voters. The increased use of polling partly reflected the smaller number of polls in the national press and a growing consensus among senior party officials that the polls published in the press only provided a rough snapshot and were consequently of limited use.

Individual voter contact was an integral part of the Conservatives' targeting strategy. Using the party's 'Voter Vault' software, the Conservatives were able to identify target voters and send them eight direct mailings of which four were distributed during the four-week election period. This was supplemented by an increase in the use of telephone voter identification. This started just after the 2001 election with the party employing staff in Central Party Office and in the Target Seats Unit near Birmingham rather than relying on volunteers as they did

four years previously. The Conservatives also made some automated calls to generate higher response rates, although initial conclusions suggest that the actual benefits were mixed. These direct communication techniques complemented the targeted messages on billboards and in newspapers.

National newspaper adverts were used at the weekends to try to set the news agenda. As part of what the Conservatives called their 'teaser' campaign, these adverts were followed by more targeted messages in direct mail to key voters and through regional advertising. The national advertising campaign was therefore fairly limited to the 'I believe...' series and one anti-Liberal Democrat advert. By contrast, regional newspaper and cinema advertising was focused exclusively in areas containing target seats. Regional adverts sought to localise the national message. For instance, adverts dealing with MRSA would feature statistics from local hospitals while adverts on violent crime would include statistics from the local police forces. Different messages were targeted in different areas to maximise the local impact. The 'Wipe the Smile off His Face' campaign adverts were only shown in cinemas either in, or in close vicinity to, target seats.

Like Labour, the Conservatives believed that electronic campaigning was of limited use. Despite providing a useful, user-friendly website for voters, the party concluded that as a campaign tool it still doesn't have the capacity to move floating voters as it might in the USA or some European countries. Similarly, the Conservatives were enormously reliant on e-mails, although these mainly served the purpose of providing daily bulletins to campaigners on the ground and monitoring local progress in target seats. Leadership tours took place in key battleground seats while safe Conservative or hopeless seats were largely ignored. The long-term decline in the use of large rallies and meetings continued. In 2005, the Conservatives organised only three major rallies. The party concluded that they were simply too expensive, very difficult to organise and didn't attract extensive media coverage or move floating voters. The Conservatives also used the traditional party election broadcasts but regarded this as the least effective national campaign method.

The Conservatives used a number of tools to monitor progress. These included commissioning tracking polls in target seats and monitoring newspaper polls and media coverage to counter any reduction in morale amongst party workers. Daily intelligence reports about the progress of local campaigns were made by Area Campaign Directors. This information was collated at Central Party Office and correspondence then took place between party headquarters and the Area Campaign Directors. More than 40 Area Campaign Directors were employed by Central Party Office up to 18 months in advance of the election to manage campaigns in target seats. This was a significant increase on the number used in 2001 when the system was in its infancy. Both Area Campaign Directors and the operation of the Constituency Campaign Services Target Seats Unit enabled the centre to manage local campaigns more effectively than in previous elections.

Party headquarters also played a more prominent role in planning and organising local campaigning than ever before. In target seats, the national party distributed literature through direct mailings and took responsibility for advertising and billboards. The style and amount of literature delivered at the local level in target seats was also determined by the centre.

Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats adopted a twin targeting approach, which involved concentrating efforts in around 35 key targets, both Conservative and Labour. These targets were not based

on marginality alone, but on developments since 2001 (e.g. promising results in local government) and the efforts of local constituency parties. Neither were targets fixed: Chief Executive (Lord) Chris Rennard likened target seats to the football Premiership, with constituencies being liable to move up or down depending on performance. They also went into the election with more funds than ever before, but financial resources still did not stretch to engaging in direct voter contact to anything like the same extent as Labour and the Conservatives. Hence there was little direct mail or telephone voter identification.

Given the media focus on the two main parties during the inter-election period, the Liberal Democrats were well aware that their policies often took longer to reach the electorate, Hence the main aim was to provide messages that offered a positive alternative to the other main parties and addressed 'real issues'. The party used a number of national campaign techniques to achieve this goal.

The Liberal Democrats conducted a national advertising campaign during the pre-election campaign. This was a departure from previous elections and reflected the relatively large amount of money at the party's disposal compared to four years earlier. The party used a 'Top Ten' poster which featured Charles Kennedy along with ten reasons to vote for the Liberal Democrats and outlined the key messages that the party wanted to put across to the public during the election. The party also ran full-page adverts in national and regional newspapers. They decided to use regional newspapers because they were more personal and 'trusted' by the electorate.

The Liberal Democrats also tried to get their messages across through their early morning press conferences (focused on specific policy areas each day), which allowed them to obtain morning media coverage before the other parties had the opportunity to divert attention elsewhere, and the leader's tour, which visited two target seats each day. The party also sent prominent national figures across the country during the campaign – concentrating on key target seats – to promote the party and reach a wider national and regional media audience.

The improved financial situation also allowed the Liberal Democrats to make extensive use of billboards. The party used fixed site hoardings to display posters containing important messages (e.g. 'Patients First Rather Than Targets First', scrapping council tax, scrapping tuition fees) or pictures of Charles Kennedy with the party slogan, 'The Real Alternative'.

Unlike the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats believed that their party rallies and large meetings were particularly successful at attracting the attention of the national and regional media. A number took place in key target seats. For example, there was a rally in Cambridge attended by 600 people with a further 700 queuing outside which produced a significant amount of positive media attention.

The Liberal Democrats also used the party website to promote key messages and for people to obtain more in-depth information about particular policies. They were careful to promote the website at every opportunity (in party election broadcasts, at early morning press conferences, on billboards and so on). Using the number of 'hits' on the website as a guide, the party thought that the promotion of the website was fairly successful. However, like Labour and the Conservatives, campaign strategists thought that other forms of electronic campaigning were of limited use. The Liberal Democrats also used polling and a number of paired/individual interviews – but no focus groups or group discussions. The party was also eligible for four party election broadcasts compared to five for Labour and the Conservatives.

The Liberal Democrats monitored progress during the campaign by using internal tracking polls in key target seats but they also kept a careful eye on published polls and kept in close correspondence with key personnel 'in the field' in key battleground seats.

In terms of the management of local campaigns, there was a clear differentiation in the support given by party headquarters to targets and non-targets. In the former, party headquarters monitored canvass figures, while professional campaign officers telephoned local personnel to offer advice and talk through any problems on the ground. In the latter, this was left to volunteer officers. However, whilst the party sent out more direct mail and nationally produced leaflets than ever before, it still believed that these activities should be primarily undertaken at the local level, without large scale supervision or organisation from the centre. Other forms of contact with individual voters such as telephone polling were also conducted at the local level. The party still felt that local knowledge was the best value for money and that volunteers and candidates on the ground were often best placed to oversee party activity. In truth, however, this is a case of necessity rather than preference since the party was relatively limited in what it could offer from the centre given the fact that finance – while healthier than before – remained a problem.

Scottish National Party

Since devolution, Westminster elections have become a much more difficult proposition for the Scottish National Party (SNP) than before. In 2005, the party stressed its pro-independence stance and reiterated the basic message that it was Scotland's party that would stand up for Scotland at Westminster. However, the SNP also wanted to convey to electors that voting SNP was a positive protest in a Westminster election. Since the Scottish Parliament is now the party's main concern, the SNP strategy in this election was largely directed to motivating its core vote across Scotland, but especially in target seats. Like the other parties it used a number of national campaign methods to convey these messages.

First, the SNP conducted 18 national press conferences, handled mainly by the party leader (Alex Salmond) or the leader in the Scottish Parliament (Nicola Sturgeon). This formed part of the media strategy to grab the agenda from Labour. The SNP claimed that this was particularly successful and pointed to six occasions when they managed to get the top news story of the day on Reporting Scotland (BBC Television News).

Second, both the party leader and the leader in the Scottish Parliament travelled around Scotland. These leadership tours were used to boost local campaigning and obtain media coverage. The route was planned after consultation with constituencies that requested a leadership visit. Particular attention was given to top target seats such as the Western Isles (where Alex Salmond started in South and worked north to Stornoway).

Third, in the run-up to the election the party conducted private monthly polling on vote intentions and topical issues of concern (although there was no focus group research). This proved invaluable as the party was able to release polling to counter an STV (Scottish Television) poll which was reported as showing that the SNP would hold on to only one seats in Scotland. In these polls the party also asked a separate question about Scottish independence the results of which it used, to good effect it was thought, during the campaign.

Apart from one large rally to launch the manifesto, no others were organised. Grassroots activists, it appeared, would rather utilise their time 'knocking on doors or delivering leaflets'

The SNP purchased no static billboards, although it did use four mobile poster vans to trail around target seats. It also produced one party election broadcast to get the single message across ('Scotland Matters, Make it Matter in May') which was broadcast four times.

The SNP could not afford to use direct mail from the centre but did use telephone voter identification. The campaign calls stemmed from paid staff at a call centre in Rutherglen and were focussed on target seats. The centre started in May 2002 and was initially manned by volunteers. At first the response rate was poor but the party claimed that it improved markedly as staff gained experience. Ten staff were employed in the call centre during the election. Undoubtedly the most high profile innovation was automated telephone calls to voters. The SNP hired a company to produce and send an automated message from Sean Connery asking voters to support the party. Anecdotally from the grassroots and based on the number of complaints received, the automated message was thought to have gone down well. The SNP claimed that it was a means of trying to engage the public in a way that they would always remember.

Constituencies were largely self-sufficient with little management from the centre on the scale of Labour and the Conservatives. The centre did provide templates for constituencies to add local news and photographs to national leaflets. However, no local organisers were sent from the centre to manage target seats and to channel information back to national party officials.

Plaid Cymru

Like the SNP, Plaid Cymru recognised that, given devolution, articulating a distinctive message that was relevant in the context of the UK general election was a challenging task. However, unlike in Scotland, it faced the perennial problem that the majority of Welsh electors obtain key political (as well as other) messages from the national news and print media in London, which ultimately focus on the UK-wide issues and parties. Nonetheless, Plaid Cymru sought to promote two basic messages – that it could be trusted to look after the interests of the people of Wales and that its policies would help build a better Wales. It illustrated these basic messages by pursuing five key themes – fair taxation and fair funding; affordable homes in safer communities; a proper Parliament would deliver better public services; and action to promote a sustainable countryside.

Strategically – and like everyone else - Plaid Cymru decided to prioritise its efforts in target seats and the use of various national campaign techniques reflected this. However, the party had to operate within a small budget (£50,000 for the election), which ultimately restricted the use of particular techniques. For instance, the party did not use static billboards but instead used one 'poster van', which travelled through target seats and areas of traditional Plaid support. There were also no party advertisements in the Welsh national press, although the advert on the 'poster van' was placed in the local press in target seats. Despite several press conferences and some public meetings, there were also no major rallies. Limited resources also prevented Plaid Cymru from carrying out any external polling, although the party did conduct some limited focus group research in the pre-election period.

The major effort took place in target seats with telephone polling used to identify support. This was carried out by party volunteers and in some cases contracted out to call centres in Wales. However, Plaid Cymru also used automated calls for 'voter id' (and also provide a message in support of the party) in target seats since these are quicker and cheaper than traditional telephone canvassing. Indeed, on one occasion during the campaign, 40,000

automated calls were made across three constituencies in one evening. The response rate of 25% was comparable to personal calls, although the party found that while the automated system was effective at identifying its own supporters it was less effective at detecting opposition voters. The use of direct mail was limited and largely confined to the campaign effort in Ynys Mon. Nevertheless, the party built a national voter identification database which not only aided the party in 2005 but is likely to enhance campaigning at future elections. The focus on key battleground seats also extended to party leadership tours. Both the parliamentary leader and the party president visited a number of key target constituencies during the short campaign.

The centre monitored progress in target seats by e-mail and also sent floating campaign teams to manage selected local campaigns. It also set up automated phoning and conducted and paid for all the telephone identification and direct mail. However, it is clear that the constituency campaign and the national campaign were almost completely integrated in target seats. Non-target seats received little help from the centre.

United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

With the media concentrating on the main parties and the European issue being largely invisible during the campaign, UKIP found it extremely difficult to get their message across in the 2005 general election. Despite producing a manifesto containing policies on a wide range of issues, UKIP sought to emphasis the European dimension but the party believed that it met with little success in this respect. The party found it difficult to get national television coverage and so was reliant on local television and radio for media exposure. They were also largely ignored by the national press. The party's main aim was to consolidate their core vote and build new areas of support for future elections particularly the next European elections. Billboards were used to convey the party's message with 100 hoardings purchased in the North West alone. The party was allowed one election broadcast which, on the evidence of phone calls to the party, was warmly received. The party also used their permanent call centre, manned by six paid operators in Preston, to call supporters and ask for donations. The national website was also a means of conveying important messages and party policies on a range of issues. However, like the other parties, UKIP was sceptical of the effectiveness of the website in engaging and persuading undecided voters. A lack of resources meant that UKIP was unable to employ more modern techniques such as voter id software, automated calls, private polling and focus group research.

While UKIP has a national committee that meets to decide a general line on policy matters, there is considerable organisational devolution to the regions, particularly those of relative strength like the North West. With no real full-time professionals at national headquarters, the party was reliant on strong regional input. This was assisted (as in other parties) by the party's MEPs, whose paid assistants and researchers were able to help the party at the regional level. There was no management of the campaign from the centre. Rather, individual candidates and volunteer supporters in the constituencies were largely responsible for running their own campaigns.

Third Parties: Vote OK

Founded in January 2005, Vote OK sought to assist the campaigns of candidates who supported a reversal of the ban on hunting, were in a relatively close second place to an incumbent MP who had voted for the ban, and who were keen to accept assistance. Vote OK emerged out of the Countryside Alliance and was led by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mann, who recruited three like-minded people to deal with the media, contact and organise supporters

throughout the country and provide campaigning advice. Together, they comprised the central staff of Vote OK.

The objective was to recruit Vote OK Directors for individual constituencies (initially from personal contacts in the Countryside Alliance and then among hunting supporters more generally) in order to link the centre to the candidate and constituency agent on the ground. The constituency Director was then briefed by the centre and was responsible for recruiting and organising workers to assist campaigns in designated seats. At the national level, Vote OK initially sent out press releases to enhance awareness. They also placed articles in what representatives referred to as the 'trade press' (*The Shooting Times*, *The Field* and *The Telegraph*) to boost recruitment. Vote OK Directors were also encouraged to write letters and articles to the local press. However, Vote OK actively sought a low national media profile in an effort not to arouse floating voters who were considering voting against Labour but did not share their views. The organisation was primarily interested in working at the local level. A website was constructed by April 2005 which not only outlined the reasons for the organisation's existence and criteria for selecting constituencies, but also enabled supporters to register their details so that could be contacted and allocated to assist at the constituency level.

The role of the centre was largely one of recruitment, co-ordination and acting as a point of contact. During the campaign, the centre monitored and managed the constituency Directors, providing weekly updated emails, feedback, good news and reminding supporters and volunteers of the strategy.

In respect of the latter, Vote OK was an innovative and unusual 'single-issue' campaigning group in that it did not campaign at all on the issue in question. Rather it simply offered resources – in particular volunteers to help with conventional campaigning – to candidates who supported its position and had a reasonable chance of winning. 110 candidates took up the offer. Overall, it could be reasonably argued that the activity and role of Vote OK in the election represented something of a new departure in modern general election campaigning in Britain.

Conclusion

Overall then, both Labour and the Conservatives ruthlessly used national campaign tools to target key battleground seats and get their messages across. Labour employed the most advanced techniques, seeking more than ever to make direct contact with voters from the centre by means of automated telephone calls, localised national messages and DVDs. However, the 'joined up campaign' of the Conservatives wasn't that far behind, with the party extending its use of polling and focus group data and individual voter contact. While the Liberal Democrat campaign also used more sophisticated techniques than previously, the lack of resources hindered their ability to use direct voter techniques on the same scale as the other main parties. Both the SNP and Plaid Cymru used modern techniques such as automated calling to save money and improve efficiency. However, both parties recognise the difficulties they now face in UK elections and worry about lavishing scarce national resources on what has become for them a 'second-order' election.

More generally, the 2005 campaign saw the re-emergence of national newspaper advertising and the increasing use of regional advertising to convey localised national messages. Increasingly traditional national techniques such as party election broadcasts, party rallies and large meetings are becoming less important as the main parties adopt modern national

methods to target key voters in battleground seats. In this way, the constituency campaign and national campaign are increasingly becoming integrated.

Campaign Activities at Constituency Level

We investigated campaign activity in the constituencies by means of a survey of election agents – thus replicating work that has been carried out at the three previous general elections. Our original intention was to sample 200 constituencies but in the event we managed to send questionnaires by email to the agents of all the major parties in every constituency asking for them to be completed on-line and returned either by post or email. The response was not nearly as good as has been achieved in the past with printed postal questionnaires and we lacked resources to enable us to make major efforts to re-contact non-respondents.

The distribution of useable questionnaires returned from agents of each party was as follows:

		%	% response rate
Conservative:	64	11.7	10.2
Labour	237	43.4	37.9
Lib Democrats	199	36.4	31.8
SNP	34	6.2	57.6
Plaid Cymru	12	2.2	30.0

Clearly the Conservatives are seriously under-represented among respondents and the other parties correspondingly over-represented. Since there are quite sharp differences across parties in the extent and style of campaigning, the data for the 2005 election have been weighted to conform with the average distribution of responses across parties in the three previous surveys. Given the smaller numbers involved, the 2005 data are not as reliable as those for previous elections but they can, nonetheless, be taken as indicative of general trends in campaigning.

We focus first on what might be labelled ‘traditional’ constituency campaign activities (Table 3.1). In the past, almost all campaigns issued an election address, featuring a photograph and message from the candidate, to be delivered free by the Post Office to all households in the constituency. Despite impressionistic speculation that campaigners now prefer to use their free postal delivery for other kinds of material, this tradition remains very strong with no evidence of decline. The same cannot be said of public election meetings which are now rare in urban areas. The average number of meetings held by candidates in 2005 remained smaller than had been the case even in the 1990s.

Table 3.1: Aspects of traditional campaigning - all parties

	1992	1997	2001	2005
% issued traditional election address	-	97	97	97
Mean number of public meetings	2.5	1.2	0.6	0.7
Mean number of posters distributed	1,850	1,800	1,250	1,250
Mean total leaflets distributed	62,000	62,000	59,000	72,000
% undertook doorstep canvassing	83	78	70	79
Mean % of electorate canvassed on doorstep	28	22	17	21
% 'knocked up' on polling day	54	61	59	69
Mean number of campaign workers	52	48	35	42
Mean number of polling day workers	135	106	70	79

Note: The Ns here and in Table 3.2 vary slightly for particular questions but are always close to 1051 (1992), 1368 (1997), 1329 (2001) and 546 (2005). The question about election addresses was not asked in 1992

There is a widespread impression that elections have become less 'visible' of late, in the sense that fewer window bills or garden posters are on display. This finds support in the figures in that the average numbers of posters distributed have been at a clearly lower level in the last two elections than they were in 1992 and 1997, although no further fall was recorded in 2005. On the other hand, the number of leaflets distributed in 2005 increased quite sharply. This may be for two reasons. First, facilities now exist for constituency organisations to insert their own material into nationally designed leaflets via the internet and order directly from companies appointed nationally to handle all leaflet orders. Second, the increase in leafleting activity in 2005 may reflect the fact that the election outcome was expected to be closer than had been the case in the two previous elections. It is worth noting in this context that the proportion of leaflets that were locally (as compared to regionally or nationally) produced has steadily declined from 73% of all leaflets in 1992 to 54% in 2005.

The focus of well-organised traditional campaigns was on mobilising known supporters and this was achieved by doorstep canvassing and 'knocking up' on polling day. Although canvassing of this type declined from 1992 to 2001, there seems to have been something of a revival in 2005 – although it was still below 1992 levels - and in the last election too the proportion of campaigns which 'knocked up' on polling day was greater than it has been in recent years. Again, this partial revival of electoral mobilisation is probably a function of the expected closeness of the national outcome as compared with 1997 and 2001.

All of these traditional campaign activities require volunteers – to stuff envelopes, dish out leaflets, knock on doors and so on. In interviews, some party professionals indicated that they have to cope with a decline in the number of people willing to give their time to election campaigning. The figures tend to bear out their experience. In terms both of the average number of campaign workers and of polling day participants, the 2005 figures show only a slight revival from the low point of 2001 despite the fact that a relatively close result was expected.

Table 3.2 shows the numbers of campaign and polling day workers for each of the major parties. It can be seen that the number of volunteers working for Labour declined (yet again) in 2005 to a new low. This may be evidence of disillusion among activists (and hence Labour had to rely more than ever on call centres). Meanwhile it was among Conservatives and Liberal Democrats that volunteer workers increased.

Table 3.2: Campaign and Polling Day Workers (mean)

	Campaign workers				Polling day workers			
	1992	1997	2001	2005	1992	1997	2001	2005
Con	92	57	61	84	262	134	121	161
Lab	50	55	32	27	124	127	70	51
Lib Dem	30	33	20	26	65	62	32	45

Table 3.3 presents evidence comparable to that in Table 3.1 but focussing on newer campaigning techniques which have been made possible by technological developments - in particular, the availability of relatively cheap and powerful PCs and the now nearly universal ownership of telephones.

The use of computers continued to increase in 2005 and is now all but universal. Making serious use of computers for electioneering involves using a computerised version of the electoral register and the data show a steady upward trend in the proportions of campaigns having this and also in those using specialised election software developed and made available by party headquarters. The last stage of mobilization in a campaign is the knocking-up of 'promises' or 'pledges' on polling day. Previously, only minorities of campaigns used computers for this task, but the proportion has steadily risen and reached 62% in 2005. On all measures, then, the 2005 election saw the most 'computerised' constituency campaigns to date.

Direct mail - the mailing of personalized letters to individual voters made possible by the advent of computers - was virtually unknown in 1992 but in the last three elections respondents were asked whether they used 'direct mail to target individual voters previously identified as supporters or potential supporters'. Only about 20 per cent of all campaigns used this technique in 1997 and 2001 but the proportion rose to almost a third in 2005. It should be remembered, however, that the bulk of direct mailing is done by party headquarters rather than by constituency campaigners.

Table 3.3: Aspects of modern campaigning - all parties

	1992	1997	2001	2005
% used computers	74	85	88	94
% had computerised electoral register	43	64	71	80
% used party software	33	54	61	73
% used computers for knocking up lists	28	37	43	62
% sent 'substantial amount' of direct mail	-	23	21	31
% some telephone canvassing during campaign	32	52	51	63
Mean % of electorate telephone canvassed	-	7.6	7.7	7.5
% 'knocked up' by telephone	-	37	45	60
% some telephone canv in year pre election	-	48	47	57
% had outside telephone calling pre-campaign	-	-	19	31
% had outside telephone calling during campaign	-	10	16	30
% with website	-	-	44	66

Note: For Ns see note to Table 3.1. A dash indicates that the relevant question was not asked in the relevant survey.

The 1992 election was the first in which telephone canvassing was used to any extent as an electioneering technique in Britain and by the following election contacting voters by telephone was being embraced as an essential campaign technique. In 1992 we simply asked respondents whether they had undertaken any telephone canvassing during the campaign but additional questions were introduced in 1997 and 2001. The data suggest that after a sharp rise in campaign telephone canvassing by constituency campaigns in 1997 and 2001 there was a further increase in the proportion of campaigns undertaking this activity in 2005. Although more campaigns used telephone canvassing the average proportion of the electorate contacted in this way remained relatively static. On the other hand, there was an increase in the use of the telephone for 'knocking up' on polling day and again this was more common than ever in 2005. There is no doubt, then, that the use of telephone contacts in campaigning continued to increase in 2005 but even the figures discussed so far underestimate the extent of telephone usage. In the first place, some constituencies contact voters in the pre-campaign period. This was the case for just under 50% of campaigns in 1997 and 2001 but in 2005 there was an increase to 57%. Second much telephone contact comes from outside the constituency concerned – mainly from national and/or regional call centres which all the major parties have now established. These are mainly focused on target seats but, as the data show, by 2005 record proportions of survey respondents were aware that voters in their constituency were contacted by telephone both in the pre-campaign period and during the campaign itself. Finally, Table 3 shows that in 2005 there was a sharp increase - to about two-thirds - in the proportion of local parties/candidates having a website as part of their campaign as compared with 2001.

Overall, then, the main elements of traditional campaigning remained clearly in evidence in 2005. Parties canvassed on the doorstep, delivered election addresses and leaflets and 'knocked up' much as they have done for many years. In 2005, however, these activities were supplemented to a greater extent than ever before by more modern campaign methods – the use of computers, telephones and websites.

4. An Analysis of campaign intensity and electoral outcomes

The Effects of Constituency Campaigning

Variations in campaign strength

We are not yet in a position to provide a full analysis of the impact of constituency campaigning on the basis of the agents' survey. As indicated in our tender document, the much smaller scale of the survey as compared with those in the past means that we are able to provide only suggestive, rather than definitive, figures. In addition the poor response from Conservative agents creates difficulties.

Nonetheless, in order to undertake some provisional analysis, we used responses to create a – necessarily crude – simple additive index of campaign strength. This reflects the extent of canvassing (doorstep and telephone), numbers of volunteer workers, the use of direct mail, the use of computers for knocking up on polling day, numbers of leaflets delivered, telephone contact with voters from outside the constituency, the presence of special organisers and the extent to which the campaign organisation covered the constituency. This produced a score ranging from 0 to 21. Actual scores cover the whole range, have a mean of 9 and a standard deviation 5.6.

Table 4.1 shows mean scores for the different parties overall and according to the electoral status of constituencies from the perspective of the party concerned. Despite the fact that the index is very rough and ready and the response rate problems, the figures are intuitively plausible.

Table 4.1: Mean Scores on Index of Campaign Strength

	Con	Lab	LibDem	SNP	Plaid
Overall	14.3	9.4	7.1	8.6	4.7
Very safe	14.3	10.4	11.4	-	-
Comfortable	13.6	15.1	14.6	15.0	11.0
Marginal held	14.7	15.4	16.0	15.0	-
Marginal not held	16.8	8.0	-	13.7	-
Possible	15.5	6.6	13.8	-	-
Hopeless	9.6	3.1	4.9	7.3	4.1

Overall, the Conservatives appear to have had the strongest constituency campaigns and Labour (some way behind) the next strongest, with the Liberal Democrats and the nationalist parties trailing. That is exactly in line with previous studies. Moreover, as would be expected, in every case much the weakest campaigns are found in seats that were hopeless prospects for the party concerned.

Conservative campaigns were stronger in seats that they did not hold but could win (marginal and possible) than in those that they held while the reverse is true in Labour's case. This is also as would be expected given the context of the election. Labour was almost certain to

lose support and was, therefore, clearly on the defensive; the Conservatives had to be on the offensive. They needed to make gains rather than simply hold what they had. The situation with the Liberal Democrats is a little more complicated in that their strongest campaigns were in marginal held and comfortable seats. Nonetheless, campaigns in possible gains were stronger than in their safe seats.

Campaign effects: turnout

Past research has shown that intense campaigning can have a significant effect on constituency turnout. For obvious reasons, the stronger the parties campaign in a constituency, the higher is the turnout, net of other factors.

In order to investigate whether there is any evidence in our data of a similar effect at the 2005 election, the parties' campaigns were categorised – on the basis of scores on the summary index – as 'weak', 'average', or 'strong'. Table 4.2, which includes only the campaigns of the three major parties, shows the mean turnout and the mean change in turnout from 2001 within each category for each party in turn.

Table 4.2: Strength of Constituency Campaigns and Turnout

	Weak	Average	Strong
Conservative			
Mean turnout	-	64.1	66.5
Mean turnout change	-	+1.6	+2.5
Labour			
Mean turnout	63.1	58.5	61.6
Mean turnout change	+2.3	+1.8	+2.0
Liberal Democrats			
Mean turnout	59.8	63.3	66.0
Mean turnout change	+2.0	+2.1	+2.1

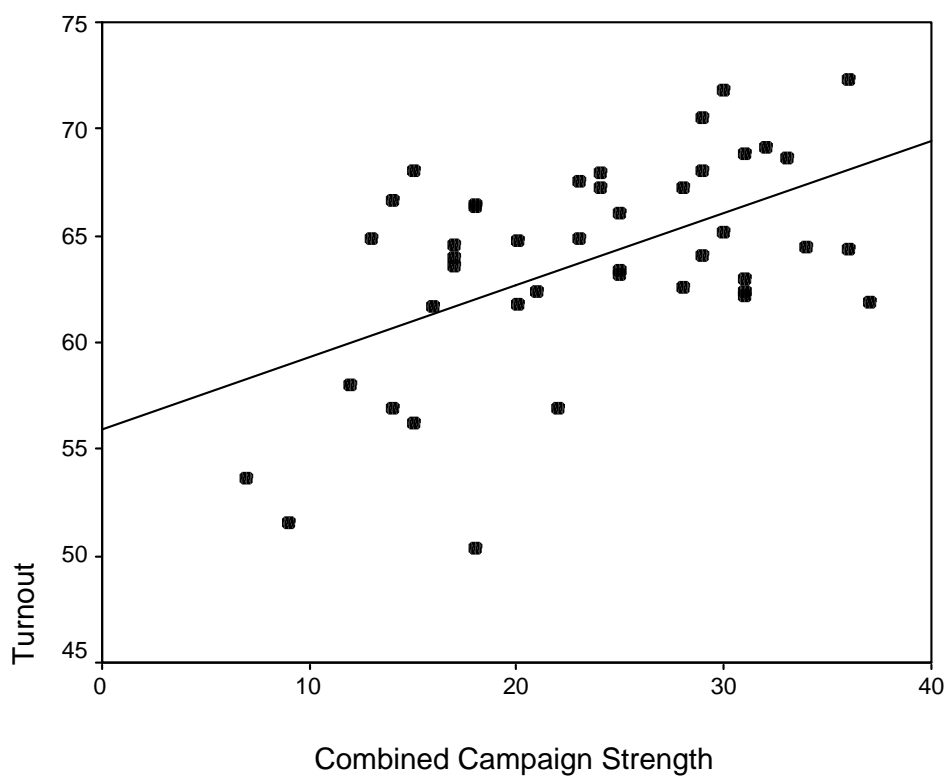
Note: There was only one 'weak' Conservative campaign among our respondents and that case is included with average campaigns. Scottish constituencies are excluded from the analysis of turnout change due to difficulties caused by boundary changes.

Stronger Conservative and Liberal Democrat campaigns are associated with higher turnouts. It is the case, of course, the case that parties campaign more strongly in marginal seats and these have higher turnouts in any event. Arguably, however, it is the fact that parties do campaign harder in such seats that explains the higher turnout in them. The strength of Labour campaigning made no apparent difference to turnout. This probably reflects the difficulties that Labour encountered in the election. In the context of the Iraq war and other matters, the party clearly found it difficult to galvanise its supporters and to stem the tide of opinion against it.

The figures for turnout change are less convincing. Only in the case of the Conservatives were stronger campaigns associated with a larger increase in turnout. It should be remembered, however, that other evidence suggests that 2005 saw an across-the-board increase in turnout that appears to be unrelated to the electoral status, region or socio-economic characteristics of the constituency. Large differences in the actual level of turnout remained, however, and these seem partly to be explained by differential campaigning.

Although a strong campaign by one party can increase turnout among its supporters, it is likely that higher turnout in marginal seats is produced by a combination of strong campaigning by two or more parties. We have 43 constituencies for which we have an estimate of the campaign strength of the two parties which came first and second in the election and, as Figure 4.1 shows, there is a clear relationship between the combined campaign strength of these parties and turnout in the election. The associated correlation coefficient (+ 0.538) is statistically significant. As might be expected in the light of the preceding discussion, there is no such clear pattern when turnout change is analysed in the same way.

Figure 4.1: Combined Campaign Strength of Top Two Parties and Turnout in 2005



There is, then, evidence to suggest that the level of campaigning undertaken – especially on the part of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats - once again influenced turnout levels in the 2005 general election. That conclusion must be a preliminary one, however, as we do not yet have enough responses to control for other variables which also influence turnout variation, such as region or the urban-rural dimension.

Campaign effects: party performance

Parties do not campaign to increase turnout in general, of course, but to maximise their own support. The best measure of this is the change in the share of the electorate (not votes) that they obtain. Using this measure means, however, that Scottish constituencies have to be excluded from the analysis. Again we investigate this on the basis of the agents' survey data, making use of the simple classification of campaign strength described above. The relevant data are in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Strength of Constituency Campaigns and Party Performance (mean change in share of electorate)

	Weak	Average	Strong
Conservative	-	+0.8	+1.9
Labour	-1.4	-3.3	-3.3
Liberal Democrats	+2.5	+2.6	+2.6

As with the impact on turnout, Conservative campaigning seems to have been the most effective. Their performance in constituencies in which they had strong campaigns was clearly better than in those where campaigns were only average. The Liberal Democrats improved by about the same amount irrespective of how they campaigned locally – if there was an electoral payoff from their anti-war stance on Iraq then it applied almost everywhere. Labour now finds itself in the position that the Conservatives did at one time. The harder they campaigned the worse they did. This is perhaps because they put greater efforts into seats where they were aware that they were in danger of losing significant support.

Once again these must be regarded as interim conclusions as we have yet to introduce other variables that would have affected changes in support for the major parties.

5. Consideration of the relative effectiveness of different campaign methods

The data to consider this question are derived from the qualitative interviews with campaign officials. Interviewees were asked which campaign methods were considered most effective and which were least so. Most offered a view on the former, only one interviewee offered one on the latter. These findings should be regarded as largely impressionistic since the disaggregation of different effects is virtually impossible with available methods. Nevertheless, the responses made do provide an indication of which campaign methods – particularly innovative ones - are likely to feature in future campaigns.

The Conservatives identified two particularly important campaign techniques. First were billboard advertisements, which, the party argued, generated a great deal of publicity, thereby promoting the party's campaign. Secondly, the Conservatives highlighted their use of direct mailings to key voters in target seats. Such voters received eight mailings – four before the campaign proper and four during the main campaign period. Of all the campaign methods employed, Party Election Broadcasts were considered the least effective.

Labour also highlighted direct mail as a particularly useful campaign tool. Like the Conservatives, Labour targeted key voters in target constituencies, tailoring the mailing to the particular profile of the key voter. Direct mail was synchronised with telephone contact of target voters such that one form of contact would follow another. Secondly, Labour highlighted the use of automated telephone calls – a technique employed by four of the major parties, the exception being the Liberal Democrats. Labour estimated that automated calls generated a response rate, which was ten times greater than that achieved by non-targeted direct mail. So not only was this technique cheaper, but it also generated much more in the way of voter identification, achieving a contact rate of 35%. Thirdly, Labour highlighted its use of DVDs. These included a number of separate short films and included a feedback mechanism to allow the party to evaluate how much of the DVD was viewed. This feedback suggested that many voters watched the whole thing.

The Liberal Democrats did not offer a view on which was its most effective campaign technique – they merely highlighted 'addressing the most important issues', claiming: 'If we got across distinctive reasons why people would benefit from our proposals we knew we would do better'. Plaid Cymru identified voter identification as their most useful campaign technique, particularly as it helped the party create a national voter database for the first time. Like other parties, Plaid made extensive use of automated phone calls in this respect. The SNP also found automated calls to be particularly useful. In terms of public response – based upon the number of complaints the party had – it was deemed to have worked fairly well. Anecdotal evidence from the grass roots also suggested that the use extended the reach of the party into the electorate.

UKIP identified doorstep canvassing as being the most effective part of their campaign. They observed that in specific constituencies, (Salford was highlighted in this respect), the technique enabled the party to build up support for future elections. Finally, from the perspective of a 'third party', Vote OK highlighted three particularly helpful campaign techniques. The first was simple enthusiastic manpower. They cited constituencies where their volunteers had managed to deliver 25,000 leaflets in one day alone. Providing large numbers of volunteers also allowed parties to campaign in areas that had hitherto been

neglected for whatever reason. Secondly, the group for found face-to-face canvassing effective, and finally they cited their website. This enabled the group to recruit people, who were not in the established hunt network. The group estimated that around 300 people whom they would not normally have been able to reach, registered their details via the website. Not only did this produce more recruits (registration being followed up by a phone call), it also allowed the group to appear more inclusive.

6. Perception of the political parties of the Commission's role

Data were collected from two sources. First, questions about the role of the Electoral Commission were included in interviews with party officials. Secondly, a number of questions, drafted by the Electoral Commission, were included in the survey of election agents. The questions covered the following topics: what guidance was sought from electoral administrators, the role of returning officers; the usefulness of material supplied by the Electoral Commission and the experience of dealing with the Electoral Commission.

Interviews with Officials

It is fair to say that views about the Electoral Commission are inter-linked, to an extent, with views about the provisions of the *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act*. And, whilst parties appear to appreciate that the Commission is simply there to oversee the implementation of PPERA, their views on the legislation inevitably colour their perceptions. In almost all cases, parties considered the burden of PPERA, and by definition the need to comply with the Electoral Commission, as being excessively bureaucratic. One official described it as 'a living nightmare' with PPERA being seen as outdated – in effect, it was argued that the legislation had simply built upon outdated regulations from the nineteenth century: adding 'nonsense upon nonsense'. Another felt that they were required to fill in forms with information that no-one wants to see, the purpose simply being to place the data on the Electoral Commission website. Not all parties were so negative, but a number were unhappy about the inconsistency in the definition of campaign periods. It was deemed an anomaly that national expenditure was regulated over a period of twelve months, whilst local spending was only regulated over 4-5 weeks. The result was that national parties would spend heavily in target constituencies prior to the dissolution of Parliament, but that this would count as a national, rather than a local spend.

At a more micro level there were three more detailed complaints. First, there were concerns that there was no standard form to be used by agents. Some were using forms distributed by the Electoral Commission, others ones from the Returning Officer. This caused confusion – especially amongst volunteers. The solution proposed was a website from which all relevant forms could be downloaded. Secondly, the Commission was criticised for initially failing to produce bilingual documentation in Wales. Finally, one party expressed frustration that the Electoral Commission represented a 'halfway house' between a body with genuine regulatory power and one with advisory power. It was felt that greater regulatory power was needed in cases where there is a wide variation in practice between Returning Officers – an example being the provision of a list of postal voters.

Finally, it is worth noting the views of 'third parties' on the Commission. All agreed that the legislation was complex, but their views varied on the Electoral Commission itself. One group, whilst feeling that the Commission could make clearer what was permissible, found their dealings with the Commission very useful – 'they were very helpful...they were hugely on our side.' This particular group thought that the Commission could do more in the future to promote democracy and run regional road shows, showing 'third parties' how they could campaign. By way of contrast, one prominent 'third party' refused to participate in the study, claiming that the Electoral Commission was effectively trying to close them down.

Survey of Agents

Guidance During the Campaign.

In total 87% of agents contacted either the returning officer or another electoral administrator during the campaign. As Table 6.1 shows, just over 40% contacted more than one official.

Table 6.1: Guidance Sought During the Campaign

	%
Total Seeking Guidance	87
Sought guidance from three officials	9
Sought guidance from two officials	33
Sought guidance from one official	58

n for Tables 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, & 6.5 =375

We also asked about the topics on which guidance was sought (see Table 6.2). The figures in Table 6.2 suggest that there was much more uncertainty about the nominations procedure than the regulations on election expenses. Nearly two-thirds of agents required guidance on nomination forms, whilst only 7% required clarification regarding what counted as election expenditure. For both nominations and expenses, the forms were the source of most confusion

Table 6.2: Topics Upon Which Guidance Was Sought

	%
<i>Nominations Procedure</i>	
Forms	64
Deadlines	44
Requirements	51
<i>Expenses</i>	
Forms	35
Limits	20
What counts as expenditure	7
Deadlines	13

We then sought to ascertain how useful agent found the materials supplied by the Electoral Commission. In the first instance, we asked which source had been the most important means of learning about the legal matters that apply to the conduct of elections. 85% reported that they had found material produced by their own party to have been most helpful and only 4% cited materials produced by the Electoral Commission. However, that figure should be qualified somewhat since some 60% of agents had previously organised a campaign at least once before. Since the Electoral Commission only came into being just prior to the 2001 election, it would be surprising if many agents had not developed most of their knowledge from either their parties or simple experience.

Nevertheless, questions were asked which sought to evaluate which services provided by the Electoral Commission (if used) were deemed to be most useful. Some 77% of agents used one or more of the services and were asked to rank the usefulness of each service. The responses are shown in Table 6.3. They clearly illustrate that agents found the Forms and Website most helpful, and the CD-ROM least helpful overall.

Table 6.3: Most Useful Services Provided by the Electoral Commission

%	Most Useful	Next Most Useful	Least Useful
Forms	68	44	17
Website	28	46	22
CD-ROMS	4	10	61

Finally, we asked agents to assess whether they thought the powers of the Returning Officer should be altered, and to evaluate their experience of the role that the Electoral Commission plays. The results are shown in Tables 6.4 and 6.5. Table 6.4 shows a clear preference for maintaining the status quo. Nearly three-quarters of agent preferred the option of the powers of the Returning Officer to be maintained as they are. Whilst only 10% favoured the Electoral Commission taking a greater role, the experience of most agents in dealing with the Commission was generally positive. Only 9% found the Commission generally unhelpful, whilst 40% found it helpful

Table 6.4: Assessment of Powers of the Returning Officer

<i>Powers of the Returning Officer should be increased</i>	8
<i>Powers of the Returning Officer should be maintained as they are</i>	71
<i>Powers of the Returning Officer should be reduced with the Electoral Commission taking a greater role</i>	10
<i>Don't Know</i>	11

Table 6.5: Experience of the Electoral Commission

Generally Helpful	40
Neither Helpful Nor Unhelpful	52
Generally Unhelpful	9