Falling short

The key factors that contributed to the Conservative Party’s failure to win a parliamentary majority
Vote shares won by Conservative Prime Ministers over the last century

1885, Robert Cecil, 247, 43.5%
1886, Robert Cecil, 393, 51.1%
1895, Robert Cecil, 313, 49.0%
1900, Robert Cecil, 402, 50.3%
1902, Arthur Balfour, 402, -
1922, Andrew Bonar Law, 344, 38.5%
1923, Stanley Baldwin, 344, -
1924, Stanley Baldwin, 412, 46.8%
1935, Stanley Baldwin, 386, 47.8%
1937, Neville Chamberlin, 386, -
1940, Winston Churchill, 386, -
1951, Winston Churchill, 321 (inc. 19 National Liberals), 48.32% (3.70%)
1955, Anthony Eden, 345, 49.7%
1957, Harold Macmillan, 345, -
1959, Harold Macmillan, 365, 49.4%
1970, Edward Heath, 330, 46.4%
1979, Margaret Thatcher, 339, 43.9%
1983, Margaret Thatcher, 397, 42.8%
1987, Margaret Thatcher, 376, 42.2%
1990, John Major, 376, -
1992, John Major, 336, 41.9%
2010, David Cameron, 307, 36.1%
David Cameron is Britain's new Prime Minister. He has ended thirteen long years of Labour rule. So much has gone wrong with our country. So much damage has been done by the incompetence and misjudgements of the Blair/Brown era.

Mr Cameron and his coalition government need the goodwill and support of every Conservative as they set about the daunting task of repairing Broken Britain.

The Cameron leadership also needs to learn the lessons of the past five years in Opposition and the past few weeks of the election campaign. Some things, like the marginal seats operation or the wooing of the national newspapers, worked well. Others, such as the failure to translate the Big Society philosophy into doorstep messages, were less successful. Waiting until Cameron was safely over the Downing Street threshold, ConservativeHome published its online guide to the campaign, the modernisation programme and the legacy of the opposition years. This paper version of that online guide includes some additional material and polling.

Some Conservatives think it inappropriate to discuss the election. Don't look back, look forward, they say. But it is crucial to the future of the Conservative Party to establish if failure to win a majority was a product of (1) a long-term decline in support for the Conservatives and right-of-centre views or (2) an inadequate campaign. This paper argues that the correct explanation is (2) and the party should not surrender to the accommodationists who believe that the Conservatives can never win a majority again. One of George Osborne's closest advisers would appear to agree. Before the result, surveying opinion polls, they said: "A 38% vote share would be a very poor return on modernisation." As the table on the previous page shows, the Conservatives only won a little more than 36%.

In preparing this guide I have talked to many senior figures across the party about what worked and what did not. This is not a kiss and tell memoir. Look away now if you are wanting stories of who fell out with who and so on. This is an attempt to identify the main themes of the last few years and, in particular, offer recommendations for a second election that - despite the hopes of the new coalition - may not be so far away.

Tim Montgomerie
Executive summary

The unpopularity of Gordon Brown and Labour's economic record meant 2010 was the Conservatives' best electoral opportunity in a generation.

The party won nearly 100 more seats in the party's best electoral performance since 1979. The party came agonisingly close to a majority; falling short by 16,000 votes spread across nineteen constituencies.

62% of Conservative Party members thought the Tory campaign was poor. Just 20% thought it was good or excellent.

The team around Cameron failed to decide a big theme for the election, choosing instead to run a presidential campaign based around the personality of David Cameron.

The Conservatives won 21 more seats than if the national swing towards the party had been averaged evenly across the nation.

The Tories' fundraising machine was a huge success; raising more money than the party could spend, putting the party in a good place for a second election.

The decision to agree equal status for the Liberal Democrats in the election debates was the most avoidable cause of the Tory failure to win a majority. The debates confused the Tory campaign and have institutionalised three party politics.

The Conservatives never developed a consistent economic message, choosing - perhaps rightly - to downplay the austerity message in favour of caution.

The 'Big Society' message was never poll tested or properly focus grouped and failed to cut through on the doorstep.

After having led public anger on expenses throughout the summer of 2009 David Cameron did not develop his anti-politics message in 2010.

The Conservative leader's decision not to give the British people a referendum on Lisbon - once it had been ratified - contributed to a sense that he wasn't very different from other untrustworthy politicians.

Tory strategists underestimated David Cameron's ability to sell traditional Tory messages - such as a tough approach to immigration - to floating voters.

Tax cuts twice reversed the Conservative Party's slide in the opinion polls - both at times of maximum vulnerability.

Team Cameron achieved considerable success in winning the support of key newspapers but the BBC remained hostile, complicating the Tories' electoral task.

The Tories lacked the killer touch that characterised Blair's campaign against Major in 1997. Although Labour performed badly the Tories shrank from the same kind of negative strategy. David Cameron was right to modernise the Conservative message but newer messages on, for example, civil liberties and the environment should have been integrated with more familiar messages so that modernisation appeared authentic to voters.

The Conservative Party underperformed in Scottish constituencies, seats with large numbers of public sector workers and also amongst ethnic minority voters. It must now decide whether reassuring those voters could be at the expense of easier-to-reach voters in England and in the highly taxed private sector.

The Cameron project remains an exciting project - blending traditional Conservatism on tax, crime and immigration with new messages...
on the environment, poverty-fighting and civil liberties.

In preparing for a second election the Tory leadership needs to negotiate for the debates to take place earlier in the campaign; put more money into its ground war; build better relations with the whole of the party and conservative movement; trust professional polling to test messages; and develop clearer decision-making structures.

> SOME TORY POSTERS THAT WERE NEVER USED

![Tory Poster 1: Taxes the poor, bails out the rich & inherited his title.](image1)

![Tory Poster 2: Labour’s not renewable.](image2)

![Tory Poster 3: Vote to cancel Heathrow expansion and renew emission targets on 4th June.](image3)

![Tory Poster 4: Evict Big Brother.](image4)
The 2010 General Election was the Conservative Party's best opportunity for victory in a generation and with a strong campaign it should have been won

2010 was the Conservative Party's best opportunity to win a General election for twenty years. A tired and often disunited Labour government was led by a very unpopular leader. The British economy was weak and performing badly compared to competitor economies. At one point the Conservatives were 20% ahead in opinion polls. They won by-elections on swings that reminded people of Blair's pre-1997 victories. Policy announcements by shadow ministers earnt more media attention than announcements from government ministers. Lobbying firms hired well-connected Tories in large numbers after years of neglecting relations with opposition parties. The party raised twice as big a financial war chest as Labour. David Cameron was much more popular among voters than Gordon Brown.

Perhaps expectations got out of hand? Perhaps we forgot that Cameron needed a bigger swing to win a majority than Margaret Thatcher achieved in 1979? Perhaps we forgot the hostility of the broadcast media? Perhaps we forgot the inbuilt bias in the electoral system that meant the Tories needed a much bigger lead in the popular vote than Labour to win a majority? Compared to Tony Blair's relatively smooth ride into Downing Street we shouldn't forget that Cameron had to cope with three massive events on his journey; a change of Prime Minister; the credit crash; and, of course, expenses-gate.

But although the mountain was tough to climb the party came agonisingly close to the summit. If the Conservatives had won 16,000 more votes across 19 seats David Cameron would be Prime Minister, leading a majority government. This General Election Review argues that a good campaign should easily have secured those 16,000 votes, and many more.
A YouGov poll found that nearly twice as many voters thought the Liberal Democrats had run a better campaign than the Conservatives (37% to 19%). ConservativeHome’s survey of more than 3,000 Tory members found 62% judged the overall campaign to have been “poor”. 55% of successful candidates agreed. 65% of unsuccessful candidates agreed.

In many ways CCHQ ran a presidential campaign focused on David Cameron. This was most obvious in the last 48 hours. Cameron's through-the-night marathon conveyed energy and determination but there was little attempt by CCHQ to convey a big message then or at any time in the campaign.

For a period, the 'Big Society' was put at the heart of the campaign. Amazingly, the Big Society was never tested in focus groups and it failed on the doorstep. One leading adviser to the campaign complained of a “cavalier” approach to research. “They latched on to research that backed their views and ignored any research that challenged it.” The party had no powerful message on political reform, even though the expenses-gate had traumatised the nation’s relationship with parliament only twelve months earlier. For twelve months the Conservative Party said that Britain’s debts risked Greek-style problems but - perhaps astutely - it never spelt out a deficit reduction programme that was significantly different from that of Labour or the Liberal Democrats. Some of voters' top concerns - like immigration - were barely mentioned in the party manifesto. Immigration was never given a day in the party’s election grid. A day was found, however, for a schools music competition. Six themes were launched at the Conservatives' pre-election conference in Brighton, in February 2010, to bring clarity to the Tory campaign but they were hardly repeated again. The Tory leadership promised change but only defined what change meant at the end of the campaign, via its 'Contract with voters'. A poll of Tory activists at the start of the election campaign called for more specifics from the Tory leadership. An astonishing 97% said the campaign was too general.

It is difficult to know why strategic consistency was never achieved. Some suggest it is in Cameron's personality. He likes to keep his options open and allowed many campaign themes to run simultaneously. He was also reluctant to choose between the recommendations of his three most influential advisers. In crude terms, Shadow Chancellor George Osborne wanted a focus on the economy. Strategy director Steve Hilton preferred a big picture vision of change. Communications director Andy Coulson wanted a more retail, detailed offering. All options were pursued simultaneously against the advice of the party's polling and creative advisers. Only when George Osborne moved into Conservative HQ for the election campaign did clarity begin to emerge. Inconclusive and never-ending meetings were curtailed and decisions started to be taken more quickly, and were acted upon. Cameron still lacks a Chief of Staff in the Jonathan Powell/ Leo McGarry mould. Someone ready to bang heads together. One CCHQ insider complained: “People are added to the operation to solve a problem but problem individuals are never fired from the leader's circle.”

The Conservatives never developed a strategic message for the General Election
The Conservative Party fought a good ground war, winning more seats than the average national swing would suggest.

Lord Ashcroft built a ground operation under Stephen Gilbert's direction that was more targeted and professional than any ever mounted by a British political party. Gilbert's team knew that the earlier and longer that candidates were selected the more chance they had of unseating incumbent MPs. Advantages of incumbency had grown because of the extra taxpayer-funded communication allowances that MPs had enjoyed ever since Labour came to power. Candidates had to run their campaigns according to audited business plans. Battleground seats were heavily polled and then target voters were identified by the best consumer profiling software. By the time of the election the Conservative Party had built a database of 2.5 million swing voters in swing seats. They were then direct mailed on the issues that mattered most to them. Cameron signed letters on immigration. Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague signed letters on Europe. All of the methods for the battleground seats had been road-tested in local elections and in the three parliamentary by-elections of Cameron's leadership, all won comfortably by the Conservatives. This included the technique of directly rebutting negative attacks on the Conservative Party once it had been established by phone canvassing that the attacks were causing harm. In the final months of the campaign the literature in target seats focused on three top issues: the economy, the NHS and immigration.

The Tory ground war was as focused as the air war was unfocused. Results suggest that the party won 21 more seats than if the national swing had been averaged evenly across the nation. Twenty of those seats (Montgomeryshire being the exception) had been part of the target seats programme although further research will be needed to establish the exact contribution of the programme.
A SENSIBLE APPROACH TO IMMIGRATION

As you will know, we are now only weeks away from a general election. Like most people, I think Britain needs change. But I know that before deciding how they will vote, many people want to hear more about what sort of change we will deliver.

One of the issues that I know worries many people is immigration, and I understand why. I wanted to write and tell you about the approach that a Conservative government will take on this important issue.

I believe that Britain benefits from immigration – but only if it is properly controlled. However, there is growing concern about the level of immigration under Labour. I share that concern.

Under Labour immigration has trebled. This has put a strain on our public services and local communities. We can’t go on like this.

A Conservative government will reduce immigration to the levels of the 1990s – tens of thousands a year, instead of the hundreds of thousands a year under Labour.

We have detailed plans in place to achieve this aim. The measures a Conservative government will take to reduce immigration include:

- an annual cap on the number of non-EU citizens allowed to work in the UK
- ensuring that only those who will benefit the economy are eligible to work here
- new rules to stamp out abuses in the student visa system
- creating a proper Border Police Force
- only allowing people to come here to marry if they can speak English

With the Conservatives, there will be no open door to Britain.

I hope you will vote Conservative at the general election to make sure Britain gets the change it needs.

Yours sincerely

David Cameron
The decision to agree to equal status for the Liberal Democrats was the number one explanation for David Cameron's failure to win a majority. The damaging effect of the election debates was predictable and predicted. When, just before Christmas 2009, the Conservative Party agreed terms for the debates, emails arrived in ConservativeHome's inbox from around the world. A strategist from Ottawa warned that the debates would be a “massive boost for the Liberal Democrats”. A leading Republican consultant simply asked “why risk a winning lead by giving your opponents a lifeline?” And from Canberra; “Cameron cannot exceed expectations on these debates. They are 90% certain to hurt your election chances.”

In the event, the Liberal Democrat surge petered out but it caused enormous disruption to the Tory campaign. Plans to attack Brown were abandoned and firepower was redirected towards Clegg. In addition, the debates have now institutionalised three-party politics, making a Tory majority and strong governments much harder to achieve in future.

The debates were a lifeline for Brown that he was unable to take advantage of. They were a predictable and predicted breakthrough opportunity for the Liberal Democrats. Nick Clegg seized his opportunity with considerable skill. The Liberals have never broken through in a General Election in modern times because they could never match the financial muscle of the two main parties and they had little support in the written press. The massive audiences for the TV debates threatened to wipe out the advantage given to David Cameron.
by the support of key newspapers and by his Rolls Royce ground operation. They effectively gave the Liberal Democrats the same status they enjoy in by-elections where (unlike in national campaigns) they are more than able to match the big parties; pound-for-pound, leaflet-for-leaflet, footsoldier-for-footsoldier. Fortunately for David Cameron the Liberal Democrats seemed as surprised by 'Cleggmania' as Conservative HQ. Although paralysed for 72 hours, Team Cameron did devise a very successful plan to address the Liberal Democrats' debate bounce and Team Clegg never found a way of developing their advantage. Cameron improved by the second debate and won the third - largely by speaking more slowly, more directly and by addressing the bread and butter issues of tax, welfare and particularly immigration. Taking the three debates together, however, Clegg won and he avoided what might easily have been a squeeze of the LibDem vote in what was expected to be a tight election.

Debates will now be a feature of UK elections but consideration needs to be given to timetabling the debates over a longer period. Drawn out scheduling will make debates less dominant in the main campaign period and also give parties the opportunity to tackle any debate-induced surge by normal processes of examination.

The Conservatives successfully punctured the Liberal Democrat bubble by highlighting Nick Clegg’s unpopular policies on crime, tax, immigration and Europe.
During George Osborne's five year stint as Shadow Chancellor the Tory deficit on economic competence was eliminated but never reversed. Osborne was always a part-time Shadow Chancellor, also acting as elections co-ordinator. That didn't matter in the calm before the storm of 2008/9 but it was heavily questioned once Britain went into recession. George Osborne's time as Shadow Chancellor can be roughly divided into four periods;

In period one he briefly flirted with radical tax reform, commissioning Lord Forsyth to recommend a flatter, lower, simpler tax system. Some of these ideas may yet come to pass in the shape of changes to corporate taxation.

In phase two - after Cameron became leader and until the end of 2008 - he pursued a policy of what the Right called economic disarmament. Osborne matched Labour's spending plans in a bid to take the issue of the economy off the table. In fairness, Osborne was only carrying on what Michael Portillo had instituted when he was Shadow Chancellor. For a good number of years the Tories had decided to accept Gordon Brown's big economic judgments.

In phase three, once the economic troubles emerged, he became more muscular, promising less spending than Labour and opposing Alistair Darling's fiscal stimulus. During this period David Cameron promised an age of austerity.

Phase three didn't last until the election. The spending cuts announced at the October 2009 party conference did not turn out to be the first instalment of the party's deficit reduction plans but the only instalment.

Just as Osborne couldn't deliver a 'I told you so moment' on the economy (because he never had warned that Brown was leading the UK economy off the cliff) Cameron never had a "levelling moment" with the voters - when he looked down the barrel of a TV camera and warned voters of the difficult decisions ahead. His mandate to take those measures will thus be called into question.

Osborne would argue that without his caution there'd be no Tory government at all. Undoubtedly, his tax proposals twice rescued the Conservatives' electoral position. Despite his unpopularity on the doorstep, his "numbers" did not collapse during the campaign and neither did the Tory economic framework fold under Labour or media fire. Osborne performed respectably during the two televised economy debates but the Tories ended the campaign with only a very small lead on economic competence. Given Labour's woeful economic record they might have expected to perform better. A politician with brilliant antennae, immersed in the Party at senior levels for most of his working life, Osborne put getting the Conservatives elected before charming City movers and shakers. His youth, inexperience in office and evident love of the political game combined to worry voters that he wouldn't be a heavyweight Chancellor. His unpopularity with voters may yet be a major problem for the Cameron-Clegg government. He is not the ideal salesman for very difficult spending cuts.

The Conservatives stopped losing on the economy but they didn't develop a strong or consistent economic message
The Big Society slogan was the crystallisation of "social responsibility" - a consistent Cameron theme, and an expression of his belief that "we're all in this together". The society it points towards is an ideal shared by One Nation Tories and smaller state liberals alike. The Big Society catch-phrase was first unveiled during the October 2009 Party Conference. It was presented as an alternative to 'big government' and immediately unnerved The Guardian. “Cameron's war on the state,” was that newspaper's front page splash on the day after the Tory leader had given his speech to the party gathered in Manchester. The newspaper stayed sour towards the Tories thereafter.

The 'big society' theme wasn't developed after the Manchester Conference. In fact, it was largely dormant until the campaign launch apart from one major speech from David Cameron (interestingly to The Guardian). The theme wasn't even poll-tested until the middle of April. When it was tested it received a thumbs down. Such testing might have helped to close down Labour's main line of attack on the idea: that hard-pressed voters, struggling to juggle family and work, would be expected to take on further burdens that government should shoulder. A more fundamental problem may have been that the Big Society is a big idea requiring much explanation - and in any event isn't a voter-friendly "retail offer". Some Party sources claim that Steve Hilton used his power as Strategy Director to place more weight on the Big Society than a testing election campaign could bear.

The Big Society agenda is an exciting governing philosophy but it should never have been put at the heart of the Tory election campaign.
No party ran a campaign responsive to the seismic impact of the expenses scandal - and to the prevailing mood of disillusion with Westminster politics

David Cameron leads the oldest political party in the world - one often perceived as an establishment party. The expenses scandal thus left the Conservatives peculiarly vulnerable. Although Labour MPs were most guilty of expenses abuse and three are facing criminal prosecution it was the Tory stories of claims for duck houses, moats and chandeliers that caused most public excitement. Cameron was quickest of the party leaders to respond to the public mood and put pressure on Brown during the summer expenses crisis of 2009. He forced his front bench to publish details of their expenses and pay back money if necessary. He was also prepared to force Conservative MPs to stand down.

But if Cameron led on expenses he took his eye off the ball. By the autumn it was politics as usual at the Tory Party Conference - with the focus on the Conservative "Big Society" alternative to Labour's Big State. The Tories also prepared for an election as usual. Although they won the early exchanges with Labour over national insurance, the campaign failed to move voters decisively. A key reason was the background of public suspicion of all politicians and the Westminster system. The TV debates gave the Liberals the chance to claim ownership of this disillusion, and project themselves as the champions of radical reform.

The handling of the Lisbon Treaty issue also suggested the Tories hadn't quite understood the public suspicion of politicians. In the autumn of 2007 - during Brown's honeymoon as the new PM - Cameron had written an article for The Sun in which he gave a "cast-iron guarantee" that "a Conservative government will hold a referendum on any EU treaty that emerges from these negotiations." Looking at the exact context of the article Mr Cameron was clearly referring to the Treaty in pre-ratification stage. Two years later, however, after the Czech Republic became the last country in the EU to ratify, Cameron was forced to admit that there would be no referendum. Cameron made the announcement calmly when many Eurosceptics would have appreciated some of the anger they felt to the Labour government's manoeuvring on the Treaty. While it was legitimate for Cameron to state that a ratified Lisbon Treaty could not be 'unratified' by a vote of the British people he had boxed himself into a corner with the strong language he had used in his Sun article. The Cameron gamble that Czech President Vaclav Klaus would delay signing the Treaty until the British general election had failed. The Sun was furious but having already endorsed the Tories it swallowed its anger. The Daily Mail did not. It accused Cameron of "retreating" from his pledge. His cast-iron pledge was no better than wax, it thundered. The fall in Cameron's personal ratings that continued until the election campaign began at this moment - rather than after the austerity speech at the Manchester conference as is commonly suggested. The 'broken cast-iron pledge' - as many voters unfairly saw matters - contributed to a sense that the Tory leader was just like other politicians.
The Tory silence on the electorate's second biggest issue, immigration, was like Manchester United leaving Wayne Rooney on the substitutes' bench

After (1) the Rebalancing of the Cameron project in the autumn of 2007 - driven in large part by the then new Director of Communications, former News of the World Editor Andy Coulson - and (2) Gordon Brown's decision to 'bottle' calling a honeymoon election, David Cameron enjoyed stratospheric opinion poll ratings. Unfortunately there was also something of a return to safety first conservatism. Rather than deepening their lead in the opinion polls the party tended to coast. The party decided that Brown was on course for a massive defeat and the party should not risk adopting bold or controversial policy positions that could be attacked. This meant that certain policy areas were completely neglected - particularly if they were likely to offend left-of-centre journalists in the BBC or Guardian.

David Cameron stopped, for example, talking about immigration even though, after the economy, it was voters' most important issue. YouGov polling of marginal seats found a tough policy on immigration was ten times as likely to win votes as lose votes. The Sun and Mail were urging Cameron to campaign on the issue but their pleas fell on deaf ears. The Tory reticence on immigration was like Manchester United leaving its star striker Wayne Rooney on the substitutes' bench. The Tories assumed that voters would always regard them as toughest on immigration but an opinion poll for The Daily Express, conducted in February 2010, found that voters were giving up on all politicians when it came to controlling Britain's borders. By not addressing big issues the party failed to build loyalty or enthusiasm in the electorate and this made the party's support much softer than it should have been.

By early 2010 the party realised its error and immigration messages became a big part of direct mail operations. Alongside the NHS and the economy it was the biggest issue mentioned in the party's eve-of-poll literature. Immigration was also the only issue to be raised in all three election debates. Cameron was forced to address the subject after nearly two years of silence.
International observers of the Tory revival under David Cameron are naturally drawn to its most novel features. David Cameron’s campaigning on climate change, for example, encapsulated in the Tory leader’s husky-driven ride to a melting glacier. His cycling to work. His embrace of gay rights - notably his decision to extend tax relief to same sex partnerships - has also captured the attention of international observers, particularly on the Left. It would be wrong, however, for these international observers to conclude that the greener, more gay-friendly measures were decisive features of Tory success. They certainly made many people more open to the Party - as did commitments on social and international justice - but more old-fashioned and less sexy tunes still moved most votes for the Conservatives.

In the autumn of 2007 when Gordon Brown was enjoying a brief honeymoon as the new Prime Minister, the party disowned what George Osborne dubbed uber-modernisation and promoted more traditional tunes on Europe, crime and, in particular, tax. A pledge to abolish inheritance tax for all but millionaires produced a surge in the Conservatives’ opinion poll rating and persuaded Gordon Brown not to call a General Election that William Hague later admitted would have probably been lost by the Conservatives. A promise to stop the bulk of Labour’s ‘jobs tax’ - a £6bn increase in National Insurance Contributions - was also important in March of this year. A Tory slippage in the polls was reversed. David Cameron’s best performance in the three election debates came when he talked tough on immigration, the Euro and welfare. He was able to sell traditional Tory messages more successfully than previous leaders. Cameron was right to broaden the Tory appeal but the imbalanced modernisation that he pursued up until August 2007 took the party perilously close to electoral defeat.
At the height of its power, Blair’s media machine dominated the media - placing articles in the Telegraph designed to prove that New Labour was tough on defence, while giving stories to the Guardian detailing anti-poverty measures. The Conservative leadership was never likely to win similar influence. Its broad aim, however, was similar: to neutralise media outlets unfriendly to it, to win over the Murdoch stable, and to retain the support of the Telegraph/Mail.

Winning the endorsements of the Sun, Times, London Evening Standard, Economist, Financial Times and City AM were significant successes. The Sun’s early endorsement was particularly important. From its October 2009 abandonment of Labour until polling day it became a non-stop champion of a change of government.

The wooing of The Guardian was less successful. The Guardian is important because it is the newspaper of ‘the ideas class’. ‘Reach the Guardian and you reach the BBC’ was the understanding inside CCHQ. Cameron won the Tory leadership in 2005 without the support of the right-wing press and has always regarded broadcast media - and the BBC in particular - as the real opinion-shapers in the land. At times in early 2010 the BBC seemed to closely follow The Guardian’s news agenda - particularly in a five day obsession with the tax status of Lord Ashcroft. From the summer of 2009 until polling day The Guardian regularly ran damning front page attacks on the Tories. Cameron’s charm offensive which included regular exclusives and op-eds did not transform the newspaper of the ideas class but the attacks were neither as strong nor frequent. Some figures on the Left also became more interested in the Conservatives; notably Oliver Kamm, Martin Kettle and John Rentoul.

The Telegraph/Mail “Tory Press” have remained hostile, though for different reasons. Neither can be relied upon to support a Cameron Government automatically. The Daily Mail, especially, is uncomfortable with modernisation, and Cameron has yielded little ground to them. The Lisbon policy and a failure to campaign on immigration meant the Mail never believed that Cameron was the ‘real deal’.
After Labour's 1992 defeat, they determined to be ruthless, disciplined and unremitting in their destruction of Conservative legitimacy. Their attacks were without mercy. They wasted no opportunity to revile any Conservative that came into view as corrupt, uncaring or stupid. They endlessly, single-mindedly repeated the charges of sleaze, weakness and incompetence. Tony Blair himself was all smiles and beamed a positive message, but the dogs of Millbank tore into every mistake or ambiguity with speed and efficiency. Labour strategists monitored their spokesmen ensuring they used the right language. Pensioners became nervous at deliberate spreading of false rumours about what Conservatives were doing next, from destroying the health-care on which they depended, to cutting their pensions. Even as the economy recovered, they never hesitated to "paint it black": it was a masterfully negative campaign. By the time they were finished with the Conservative Party, large parts of the electorate not only disagreed with them, they were disgusted by them.

Conservative campaigners, rather than learning from this, seemed to have developed a nervous aversion to professional negative campaigning. Perhaps they felt that it was morally wrong or disliked by the public. But all campaigning experience shows that negative campaigning works. (Negative campaigning being distinct from ad hominem attacks.) And there is also a moral case for it: we have an oppositional system which insists good ideas must be tested by attack. It is one of the ways of ensuring a vivid public debate. Some Tory strategists believed Brown was beaten and broken and should have been left for political dead by the end of 2009. They wanted the Conservatives to focus on a positive message. This produced the weekly launches of chapters of the manifesto during January and February 2010. As it turned out, voters remained confused about the degree to which Brown was responsible for economic failure. He was allowed to portray himself at least half-convincingly as some kind of saviour in the banking crisis; and the degree of waste that Labour introduced into public services was never impressed on the voter. The situation didn't seem so bad to them. They still had something to lose through change. This helps explain the resilience of the Labour vote - particularly in Scotland, in constituencies with large public sector votes (ie people dependent on the state for earned income or benefits), and amongst black and ethnic minority communities.
The Conservatives distributed leaflets in every constituency where Labour scare stories were biting. Labour targeted fears about the NHS and pensioner benefits, in particular.
DON'T LET LABOUR SCARE YOU

The Conservatives will:

- Increase the basic state pension
- Keep free bus passes
- Keep free TV licences
- Keep the winter fuel allowance
- Keep the pension credit

Team Cameron believes that they have exhausted the possibilities of reassuring from opposition. Only in government can the most sceptical voters be convinced that Tories are not heartless cutters.
The party suffered its worst modern day defeat in 1997. At that election the party won just 31% of the national vote. The Conservatives made little progress at the two subsequent elections. The party won 32% in 2001 and 33% in 2005. When David Cameron became Tory leader, in the aftermath of the party’s third successive defeat, there was speculation that the Conservatives were finished forever. It was certainly obvious to Cameron that the party couldn’t rely on ‘one more heave’. The key modernisation model for the Team Cameron was Tony Blair’s transformation of Labour during its opposition years. Indeed, Cameron declared himself during the party leadership election to be “the heir to Blair”. To his team, modernisation meant prioritising issues previously treated by the Conservatives as second-order matters: the environment, international development, civil liberties, social justice, more diverse Parliamentary candidates. Particular stress was placed on preserving the NHS and its budget. Simultaneously, more traditional Tory issues received much less attention. The near silence on issues like tax, immigration and crime was believed essential if the modernisation message was to reach voters. Not until Gordon Brown replaced Tony Blair, and built a large poll lead, did Team Cameron decide that "uber-modernisation" had failed to deliver results. During the Party’s 2007 Conference, tax cuts and welfare reform were revived. Chris Grayling was promoted to toughen up criminal justice policy as part of a ‘pub ready’ reshuffle that also saw Eric Pickles become Tory Chairman.

This more balanced modernisation - what ConservativeHome called “the politics of and” - seemed to be delivering results and was less confusing and more authentic. The failure to integrate the old and new messages from the start fed a sense that there was something inauthentic about the Tory message, however. No big idea - such as economic renewal - linked the commitments to social justice, the environment and the education reform.
The big test for Cameron, given these tactical shifts, was whether he could convince voters that he was "the real thing"

As this review has noted, Cameron originally marketed himself as the "heir to Blair" - and sought to mirror in the Conservative Party what Blair had done for Labour. This revolutionary modernisation was later succeeded by a more evolutionary modernisation. Despite this shift, and frequent tactical adjustments, Cameron was consistently marketed as stylistically similar to Blair: a young, fresh, energetic, often tieless leader - informal in style, at ease with modern Britain. Such branding was designed to appeal to younger, aspirational, floating, liberal-minded voters. This presentational style worked triumphantly for Blair in 1997. It didn't achieve the same "big bang" in 2010. This isn't to say that it was mistaken. However, an extra ingredient was essential almost 15 years after New Labour's first victory - namely, authenticity. Blair promised much and delivered little. Post-1997, disillusion with the Westminster system deepened. Under New Labour, election turnout started low and stayed there. Votes drifted to the minor parties - the Greens, UKIP, the BNP. The expenses scandal detonated an explosion of voter anger and contempt. Presented with what many saw as a "Blair Mark Two", voters were always likely to ask: "I've seen this movie before - will it end in the same way as the last one?" The artificiality of revolutionary or uber-modernisation, and the tactical shifts that followed it, made it hard for Cameron to convince voters that his was an authentic mission.
By choosing not to define change, the Conservatives did not own it - leaving them vulnerable to the Liberal Democrats

Cameron's slogan for the 2005 Conservative leadership election was "Change to Win". It offered a clear goal - a modernised Conservative Party capable of ending the years in the electoral wilderness. After winning that election, "Change" became a key Tory message. At various stages the Tories promised “a plan for change”, “ready for change”, “now for change”, “year for change” and finally “vote for change”. The vagueness was deliberate. The Conservatives - inspired by Obama's campaign in America, and informed by poll findings suggesting that voters were clamouring for change - wanted maximum room for manoeuvre in government. They thus maintained the flavour of the Cameron leadership campaign's three-word mantra - 'change, optimism and hope" - without offering much definition.

The gambit was always vulnerable to an alternative champion of change. Nonetheless, it held up against pressure reasonably well - until the first TV leaders' debate and the Liberal Democrat poll surge which followed it. The Liberal Democrats were perceived to be more of a change party than the Tories, and during this period they seized ownership of "change". The Conservatives had to strain every sinew to try to reclaim it, arguing that since Nick Clegg might prop up Labour during a hung Parliament, only a Tory Government could guarantee immediate and significant change.
One of Cameron's greatest legacies may be a new generation of Conservative MPs

will force MPs to pay close attention to the views of their local parties and electorates. The Whips will struggle to get MPs in very marginal seats to vote for tough spending control if it means the loss of significant local assets, such as a library or infrastructure project. There are other factors that will also cause a headache for the Whips' office as they marshall backbench MPs for late and controversial votes. Many of the new Tory MPs were selected despite being left off David Cameron's 'A List' of candidates. Many have fought seats for the second or third time and will not feel that their election owes everything to Cameron. Rightly or wrongly many veteran Conservative MPs also resent the Tory leader's failure to protect their interests during the expenses row.

The media tended to focus on the ethnicity and gender of the Tory candidates list. ConservativeHome has always been more interested in their ideology. In many ways they are the children of Margaret Thatcher. Just as the Iron Lady inherited the parliamentary parties of Ted Heath and Harold Macmillan David Cameron inherits a generation that cut its political teeth during the Thatcher years. The new intake is consequently very Eurosceptic and prioritises lower taxation and borrowing for example. In other ways they are Cameron, strongly supporting the Conservative leader's commitments on protecting the NHS and fighting poverty. Some of their views, however, do not fit so easily with David Cameron. They are split on the future of the Union and combating climate change is their lowest priority. Cameron's promise to cut the number of MPs by 10% will mean massive boundary changes across the country. This
The fundraising operation was another huge success of the campaign. ConservativeHome understands that the party raised £2m to £5m more than it could legally spend; putting it in a good place for a second election if one became necessary.

Treasurer Michael Spencer, Stanley Fink, Andrew Feldman, Howard Leigh, Ian McIsaac and Olivia Bloomfield also successfully diversified the funding base and the party is confident it could flourish in a regime where a £50,000 cap was imposed. There were 35,000 different donations to central funds in the last year. 306 people gave £5,000 or more. None gave more than £1m. Despite the Left's obsession with Michael Ashcroft, his contribution to party funds has been on a long-term declining curve; standing now at no more than 2% of total funds (although his executive contribution to the efficacy of the ground war is priceless). The party's overall debts have been reduced from £20m to about £3m because of a combination of one off asset sales and revenue raising.

The Tories are now hugely better placed in financial terms than the heavily-indebted Labour Party. Questions, however, have to be asked about expenditure. £500,000 was spent (incredibly) on newspaper ads in 2008 that were designed to recruit internet-based supporters. Another half-a-million was spent on a much-mocked viral campaign - the so-called 'tosser' campaign - to encourage less consumer borrowing. In recent months £500,000 was wasted on a cinema campaign that was vetoed by leading donors. More generally, overall priorities have been questionable. Huge sums have been unimaginatively spent on billboards when the ground war was often denied funds and the external relations department - which could have built online armies of third party friends - was shut down at the end of 2008.
George Osborne earned his chance to be Cameron’s effective number two by running a scintillating 2005 leadership campaign on his behalf. Although William Hague was the Party’s nominal Deputy Leader, Osborne was in effect its real one. He was also kept in place by Cameron as Shadow Chancellor - an appointment originally made by Michael Howard after Cameron, reportedly, turned it down.

Having a young Shadow Chancellor with no government experience may be unproblematic during a boom. But it’s a big ask for voters once a bust sets in. Cameron and Osborne recognised this themselves - hence the return of Ken Clarke to the Shadow Cabinet during the autumn of 2008. There's a case for arguing that Osborne, a politician to his fingertips, should at that point have been moved to be a powerful Party Chairman and Election Coordinator. It's fair to say that the Cameron/Osborne ticket projects an unbalanced appeal. Both are young, male, professional politicians raised in England’s south. No American Presidential/Vice Presidential ticket would run two candidates from the same state. The parallel isn't perfect, but it's suggestive. Nor has this leadership team been recently complemented by the presence at the Tory top table by a vigilant voice from the Party’s right-of-centre.
The Tories failed to break through with three big voting groups

CCHQ believes that they fell short with three key voting groups; Scotland, public sector workers; and ethnic communities;

> The failure in Scotland was most evident. The party kept its one seat but actually lost vote share.

> The party under-performed in constituencies with large public sector votes - either as people working for the state or receiving benefits from the state. Polling of local government workers, the state-dependent charity sector and other state-dependent groups had consistently shown little Tory progress over the last few years.

> The party also struggled in seats with large ethnic communities; even when, as in Hammersmith, the party had recruited ethnic candidates. This was most evident in inner London. The pattern evident at the last mayoral election when ethnicity was a more reliable predictor of voting intention than class has persisted.

CHQ hope to address these weaknesses in government by massive efforts at reassurance. The leadership believes that the fears of Scottish, public sector and ethnic voters can only be addressed from government. "They don't believe us when we say we're not two-headed, monstrous Thatcherites so we'll just have to prove it in government", one leading Cameron told ConservativeHome. A reassurance strategy will be reinforced by the pressures of coalition government status. It will be challenged by the voices within the Conservative Party who believe that the party will get more vote conversion by focusing on England and over-taxed private sector workers. “All sensible marketing strategies focus on the most receptive customers, not the least receptive customers,” said one Tory insider.

Polling provided to CCHQ suggests that tax cuts for low income private sector workers and a promise to get a fairer deal for London and England are big vote winners. Cameron's deep commitment to the Union means he remains reluctant to play 'the English card', however.
Cameron won two-thirds of the voluntary Party’s vote during the 2005 leadership election - a crushing endorsement. In the same contest, he gained support from the right of the Party in Parliament as well as the left and centre. Much of the media greeted him with enthusiasm. Five years later, he’s viewed with suspicion by many within his own Party and the blue parts of the press. He can only rely on a few columnists to consistently champion his approach; notably Daniel Finkelstein at The Times, Bruce Anderson in The Independent, Matthew d’Ancona in The Sunday Telegraph, and to some extent Benedict Brogan (Telegraph) and Peter Oborne (Mail).

Team Cameron’s modernisation drive provides much of the explanation. The right, especially the parts which didn’t support Cameron, has always been distrustful of elements of it. The Telegraph and Mail stables have been resistant. But policy alone isn't the reason for this tense relationship. From the first, Team Cameron’s been a small, tightly-knit group of politically motivated people bent on driving change through. The Shadow Cabinet hasn’t been a decision-making body. Shadow Ministers are at a further remove from the leadership. Utilising MPs’ policy views isn't a priority. Older MPs resent Cameron for his handling of the expenses scandal. The voluntary Party is increasingly reliant on long-standing activists, and there's often a generation gap between Team Cameron’s view of the world and theirs.

He has the authority of the new Prime Minister but two new doubts hang over him; his failure to deliver outright victory at the General Election and the scale of the secretly agreed concessions given to the Liberal Democrats, in order to secure the coalition deal. The landslide election of the grammar schools rebel Graham Brady as Chairman of the Parliamentary Conservative Party suggests the Right is ready to be more assertive.
Between David Cameron himself and the mass of Britain's individual voters lie a mass of intermediate institutions - charities, interest groups, think tanks, media outlets, and so forth. Some Shadow Ministers were assiduous during the last Parliament in building and maintaining relationships with interest groups. Iain Duncan Smith's Centre for Social Justice slowly did the same with a swathe of smaller, non-establishment charities and voluntary groups. However, Team Cameron built no organised structure during the last Parliament for building and maintaining relationships with key opinion formers - an omission which would raise eyebrows among America's professional campaigners. When the credit crunch bit at the end of 2008 the External Relations unit was shut down. It will be particularly important for a new Conservative Government to keep campaigning groups such as the Taxpayers' Alliance informed and, when possible, onside.

If Team Cameron had better relations with all parts of the party it could, for example, have charged the likes of Dan Hannan and John Redwood with the wooing of Eurosceptic voters, unhappy with the party's position on Lisbon. In the event UKIP may have denied the Conservatives victory in about twenty constituencies according to a crude survey of their vote tallies in very close races. Other MPs and conservative movement leaders could have played equally pivotal roles in maximising support among key voter groups - notably churchgoers and ethnic minority voters.
David Cameron has drafted the most interesting definition of conservatism since the Thatcher-Reagan era. In the 1980s it was enough for Conservatives to focus on the size of government, crime, trade union power and national security. Cameron, like George W Bush in 1999, knew that conservatism had to be broader and gentler. Unlike George W Bush, Cameron arrives in office with a four year policy development process under his belt, coordinated by Oliver Letwin and Steve Hilton.

The ideas were hard to communicate in opposition but plans for transparency of government contracts, payment-of-contractors by results, greater localism and reform of Whitehall offer massive potential. Influential think tanks like the Centre for Social Justice have spent years developing Cameron's approach to fighting poverty. In Michael Gove the Tory leader has one of the brightest political thinkers of his generation, and who has drafted the flagship new schools policy. It won't be easy. The public finances are in a mess. The new government is very inexperienced. Even aligned with the Liberal Democrats the Tories are a minority government in the Lords.

And yet, there’s hope and possibility. If, in government, Cameron can occupy the full political stage - blending traditional Conservatism on tax, crime and immigration with new messages on the environment, poverty-fighting and civil liberties - he could yet realign British politics. His alliance with Nick Clegg adds a fascinating extra dimension to that realignment narrative.
Key recommendations of ConservativeHome's General Election Review

The appointment of a conventional Chief of Staff to head David Cameron's office and ensure fast, definite decision-making.

The appointment of a full-time, experienced campaigns co-ordinator who reports directly to the party leader. Lynton Crosby who ran the party's 2005 campaign provides a model.

The appointment of a full-time professional pollster who will report unfiltered to the party leadership, ensuring all big initiatives are properly market tested so they are communicated in the best possible way.

The utilisation of all the party's talents including the rehabilitation of some of the individuals who have fallen out of favour with Team Cameron in the last five years.

The establishment of a campaigns committee that will both listen for and communicate campaigning ideas with the voluntary party and Tory MPs.

The development of an External Relations Unit that will develop much better relations with the leading opinion formers in the third sector and conservative movement.

Integration of the party's new media operation into the field operations team so that the party has the ability to communicate to a wide range of voters motivated by single issue concerns.

Ground war operations have sometimes been starved of funds but were the most successful part of the CCHQ operation. The ground war team should receive a greater share of the party's revenues so that it can spend early and over the long-term.

The party must also be careful about the implications of the failure to break through in Scotland, among public sector workers and in seats with large numbers of ethnic voters. While reassurance for these groups is important there may more votes to be won amongst voters in England in the private sector.

The creation of a functionally independent Scottish Conservative Party on the CDU/CSU model able to develop a distinctive centre right pitch for Scottish voters.
The party must be careful about the implications of the failure to break through in Scotland, among public sector workers and in seats with large numbers of ethnic voters.

One of CCHQ's big conclusions about the General Election campaign is that the party's greatest electoral failure was in not breaking through in Scotland, amongst public sector workers and with ethnic minority voters. This General Election Review has already examined this here.

One of the biggest decisions the party has to now take is the extent to which the party can ever win a majority if it does not break through into these three groups. The default response from Team Cameron seems to be that these groups have to be wooed. That's one explanation for the fact that Cameron's first visit as Prime Minister was to Scotland. There's certainly more that can be done. My understanding is that Conservative HQ had no defined strategy for ethnic minority communities throughout the last two years. Such a defined relationship-building strategy would be the job of a professional External Relations operation.

It is important, however, that CCHQ does not rush into the belief that converting Scotland and public sector workers is the easiest route to majority status. "All sensible marketing strategies focus on the most receptive customers, not the least receptive customers," said one Tory insider. Would the party be better choosing to target more campaigning efforts on English constituencies and highly-taxed private sector workers? There is certainly a danger that the Conservatives will shower 'goodies' on voters that won't convert to the Conservative Party but the cost of those 'goodies' will alienate English, private sector supporters.

The ground war team should receive a greater share of the party's revenues so that it can spend early and over the long-term.

A full audit of the effectiveness of Tory election spending needs to be undertaken. In many ways the party fought a very conventional election campaign - spending millions of pounds on billboard poster campaigning during the months running up to the election campaign. Two key areas of activity - which should have been funded from 2007 - were neglected as a consequence:

> The use of US-style micro-targeted internet campaigning where the party ensured it reached the 'influentials' within all key voter groups in society - from teachers to environmental campaigners to churchgoers.
> The proper funding of the ground war. Candidates in marginal seats during 2008 to late 2009 often receiving key funding three or four months late because money was being spent on expensive air war projects of dubious value. In addition and in aggregate too much was spent on the air war relative to the ground war according to key CCHQ insiders.

Team Cameron needs a conventional Chief of Staff or/and full-time Campaign Director.

Two of this review's recommendations overlap:

> The appointment of a conventional Chief of Staff to head David Cameron's office and ensure fast, definite decision-making.
> The appointment of a full-time, experienced campaigns co-ordinator who reports directly to
the party leader. Lynton Crosby who ran the party's 2005 campaign provides a model.

When meeting campaign insiders for this review two of the most common things said were 'there have been no major fallings out' and 'decisions aren't taken'. Those two observations are obviously connected.

The roles of chief of staff to the leader and campaign co-ordinator are different but they both address a key weakness in the Tory election campaign; inconclusive discussions. Staff inside CCHQ, suppliers to CCHQ and journalists complained of a lack of clear direction and inconsistent messages. A strong Chief of Staff or/and campaign co-ordinator is needed to bang heads together when there are disagreements and to ensure that those disagreements are resolved. Steve Hilton is accused by many of a volcanic temper - something he concedes. He often erupts because of the failure of the machine to function decisively. A strong Leo McGarry-style force within the operation will ensure key themes are chosen and then prosecuted. The figure could also resolve the creative tensions within the team - personified by Steve Hilton, strategy director, and Andy Coulson, communications director.

David Cameron's existing chief of staff, Ed Llewellyn is popular and trusted on foreign policy but, for whatever reason, does not fulfil the role recommended here.

The development of an External Relations Unit that will develop much better relations with opinion formers in the third sector and conservative movement

The future of political communication - like the future of all communication - is about delivering targeted products to ever larger numbers of smaller groups. Macro or broadcast messaging still matters but micro-messaging or narrowcasting will be the difference between winning and losing elections.

A successful political party won't just have a big economic message but it will have effective, finetuned messages for groups interested in human rights abuses in Burma, who care about wetland preservation or the taxation of classic cars.

Team Cameron needs to develop better relations with leading third party organisations - both within and, most importantly, outside the Conservative Party.

Good relations with think tanks, charities, representatives of minority communities and thought-leaders matter for a number of reasons:

> They are a source of ideas for policy innovation and policy improvement;
> Trusted third party organisations provide more persuasive endorsements for policy initiatives than newspapers or politicians;
> In the internet age access to the supporters of third party organisations has never been more important or easy.

At present Team Cameron have a poor record of nurturing relations with the Conservative coalition. James Forsyth's Spectator article from January this year captured the problem perfectly. By way of example, despite their enormous contributions to the Conservative Party's decentralisation and political reform policies Douglas Carswell and Dan Hannan have received no formal acknowledgement of their input. There should be a regular traffic of ideas and insights between the authors of 'The Plan' and 10 Downing Street. Someone or some entity needs to make that traffic happen. David Cameron should establish an External Relations Unit to develop constant, high quality relations with the leading charities, think tanks and campaigning groups in the country. The Downing Street model needs to be integrated into similar operations in every department. The ERU - or whatever it is called - must be headed by an individual known to have access to the Prime Minister.

The appointment of a full-time professional
pollster who will report unfiltered to the party leadership, ensuring all big initiatives are properly market tested so they are communicated in the best possible way

A good pollster-politician relationship is not about the pollster telling the politician what to believe but the pollster will perform three main roles. He/she will give the politician an early warning of the issues worrying voters - particularly the voters in swing seats. Second, they will advise on which of the policies already chosen by the government/ political party should be front of shop and which should be back of shop. Thirdly the pollster will advise on how best to communicate policies, especially on language and tone.

It seems clear that the Tory leadership did not use polling properly in opposition. Three very good sources said that the 'Big Society' agenda was never properly tested or focus grouped. That is a political crime. It would be like Alex Ferguson buying a footballer even though he'd never seen him play. Although an impressive governing philosophy the Big Society was too nebulous for an election campaign. Key figures in the leader's circle acted as "creative directors". A typical creative director is so convinced of their idea that they *know* the public will come round to accepting their great idea, if only it is presented to them again and again. Only a powerful, full-time pollster - enjoying the party leader's confidence - can stand up to such a belief and ensure mistakes like the Big Society are avoided in future.

In government the party cannot continue with what has been described as a pick'n'mix attitude to research - choosing findings that reinforce instinctive views and ignoring others. Team Cameron, so careful to study the Blair project, need their own Philip Gould.

The creation of a functionally independent Scottish Conservative Party on the CDU/CSU model able to develop a distinctive centre right pitch for Scottish voters

At the depths of Labour's unpopularity, with the Tories gaining more than ninety seats across England and five in Wales, the Tories could not add to their miserable representation in Scotland. David Mundell held his constituency but the Scottish Conservatives fell further behind in some of its eleven key target seats despite spending £400,000 on the campaign. The Tory share of the vote was just 16.7%.

Conservative strategists believe that Scotland - and the other two groups most resistant to Tory charms, those dependent on the state for income and ethnic minorities - can begin to be won over by a Conservative government that does not live up to the nightmarish caricature that many voters have of the 'Thatcherite' Tories.

I believe a more radical option is required and one that fits the Coalition model now being developed with the Liberal Democrats. That idea is a separate Scottish party, able to develop distinctive policies for Scotland. The idea was first mooted in April 2007 and these were the two arguments for it then:

"It gives the Scottish party - with a new name and a truly Scottish leadership team - the opportunity to break free from the long-held belief that it is a fully-owned subsidiary of the London party. With its own distinct identity the Scottish Unionist Party (the name of the party until 1965 and a possible name for the 'new party') could be a leading advocate of The Union and would be more likely to be seen to be motivated by an unambiguous commitment to Scotland's interests rather than those of England. The election of its leader - which should follow independence - would give the party the serious debate it desperately needs about its long-term identity. Should it be defined by its Unionism, for example, or by a commitment to provide an alternative to the high tax, anti-business parties that dominate the Scottish landscape.

The move will also be helpful for Project Cameron. The impact David Cameron has had on
Conservative fortunes in England could count for more. If the Scottish party continues to struggle he will no longer be tarnished by that underperformance. If, however, there is a revival of the 'Scottish Unionists' he can claim credit for taking the bold decision to return the party to a degree of independence that it enjoyed until that 1960s name change."

There would still be a formal relationship between the Scottish identity and the Conservative Party - much like the CDU and CSU have a relationship in Germany - but it would be a Scottish party entirely focused on Scottish interests. Ideally it should have a new name. At the time we suggested the Scottish Freedom Party or Scottish Reform Party.
ConservativeHome invited Tory candidates to say whether they agreed or disagreed with the key conclusions of our General Election Review. 109 candidates took part. 60 candidates who had been unsuccessful and 49 who had been successfully elected. The two sets of candidates did not answer the questions in significantly different ways. Their responses are listed below with those most supported at the top of the list.

The election debates gave the Liberal Democrats by-election status, and disrupted an already disjointed Tory campaign

Agree: 91% / Disagree 2%

The Conservative Party enjoys a massive financial advantage over Labour and the Liberal Democrats

Agree: 78% / Disagree 11%

Tax cuts twice reversed slides in the Conservatives' opinion poll rating

Agree: 77% / Disagree 10%

The Big Society agenda is an exciting governing philosophy but it should never have been put at the heart of the Tory election campaign

Agree: 71% / Disagree 15%

The Conservatives stopped losing on the economy but they didn't develop a strong or consistent economic message

Agree: 70% / Disagree 17%

Team Cameron's success with the Murdoch empire could not compensate for continuing difficulties with the BBC

Agree: 65% / Disagree 22%

This election was the Conservative party's best opportunity in a generation and with a strong campaign it should have been won

Agree: 63% / Disagree 23%

The Tory silence on the electorate's second biggest issue, immigration, was like Manchester United leaving Wayne Rooney on the substitutes' bench

Agree: 63% / Disagree 28%

The Conservatives never developed a strategic message for the General Election

Agree: 62% / Disagree 22%

The Conservative Party fought a good ground war, winning more seats than the average national swing would suggest

Agree: 55% / Disagree 22%

Having two young and broadly similar politicians at the top of the Party remains problematic

Agree: 51% / Disagree 44%

No party ran a campaign responsive to the seismic impact of the expenses scandal - and to the prevailing mood of disillusion with Westminster politics

Agree: 51% / Disagree 45%

Because the Conservatives didn't fight Brown with the same ferocity that Blair fought John Major, Labour survived electorally

Agree: 47% / Disagree 44