

The Conservative Manifesto

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1 Overview

The Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron, launched his party's manifesto this morning at a new university technical college in the marginal seat of South Swindon. In a campaign which had, up until this week, seen the two main parties focusing on their core votes, the choice of a marginal seat was perhaps fitting as Cameron, like Miliband yesterday, used this major set piece of the election campaign to attempt to reach out beyond usual Tory voters.

The announcement that Margaret Thatcher's flagship 'Right To Buy' policy would be extended to housing association homes dominated the build up to the launch, and the launch itself featured Cameron proclaiming that the Conservatives are the true party for working people, using eye catching announcements on childcare and the minimum wage to attempt to support his claim.





The launch also marked a noticeable change in tone of the Tory campaign. In what was perhaps a reaction to the recent attacks by Labour on the Conservatives' alleged negativity, Cameron attempted to convince the electorate that he has a positive vision for the country and that its best days still lie ahead of it.

However, as has become familiar over recent weeks, the manifesto and the launch itself both focused on the theme of 'security', with the Prime Minister claiming that only his party would 'deliver security for working people throughout their lives, throughout our country'. This theme was then built on to suggest that anything but a vote for the Conservatives at the general election would put the nation's security, particularly its 'economic security', at risk.

The analysis below focuses on the key themes that featured in today's launch, with sector specific commitments then outlined.

2 Key Messages

The front page of the manifesto illustrated the Conservatives' three key messages:

- Strong leadership
- A clear economic plan
- A brighter, more secure future

2.1 Strong leadership

Throughout the campaign, the Conservatives have attempted to frame the election debate as a choice between David Cameron and Ed Miliband in the belief that, when presented with a straight choice, the public would prefer Cameron to the Labour leader. Indeed, a giant photo of the Prime Minister graced the fourth page of the document. However, with the recent accusations of 'back stabbing' levelled at Miliband in recent weeks appearing to backfire, it was notable that Cameron's launch speech adopted a much more restrained tone when referring to the Labour leadership.

2.2 A clear economic plan

Unsurprisingly given the relentless repetition of the phrase 'long-term economic plan' over not just the campaign but the past few years, today's manifesto launch was centred on the economic recovery and an appeal to the public not to 'risk' Britain's economic security through abandoning the current plan. Indeed, the first two sections of the manifesto were dedicated to the 'economic plan' and 'jobs for all' respectively, however, despite this theme there remains a considerable lack of clarity over how many of the spending commitments will be funded.



2.3 A brighter, more secure future

In a departure from what has been perceived by many to have been a negative campaign so far, the manifesto is surprisingly positive in tone. Despite mentioning the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury's 'no money left' note in its second sentence, one of the key themes of the manifesto is optimism, with the promise that the Party has a plan for a 'better future for you and your family'.

2.4 Key policies

The manifesto and the Prime Minister's launch speech focused on the Conservatives' 'plan for every stage of your life', with the manifesto structured in a way designed to show that the Party supports people whatever their age.

Some of the key announcements set out in today's manifesto are listed below:

- Expansion of the 'Right to Buy' scheme to include housing association tenants.
- Build 200,000 starter homes for first-time buyers under the age of 40.
- Provide 30 hours of free childcare for parents of three and four year olds (doubling the current allowance and more than the pledge contained in Labour's manifesto).
- Increase the inheritance tax threshold on family homes to £1million by 2017.
- An extra £8 billion in NHS spending per year by 2020.
- Removing all workers on the minimum wage from income tax through increasing the personal allowance to £12,500
- Opening 500 more Free schools.
- Delivering an 'in/out' EU referendum by 2017.
- Keep commuter rail fares frozen in real terms for the whole of the next Parliament.

3 Technology

Tech featured quite prominently in the manifesto document and David Cameron described access to communications data as 'vital' in his launch speech. The document included a pledge to 'make Britain the technology centre of Europe', with more specific details revealed in the following subject areas:

Broadband, Internet and mobile communications

- Meet the current Government superfast broadband rollout target and aspire to rollout ultrafast speeds (100Mbps) to all premises as soon as practicable.



- Subsidise the cost of installing superfast capable satellite services in the hardest to reach areas and release more spectrum from public sector use to allow greater private sector access.
- Continue to 'top-slice' the licence fee for digital infrastructure to support superfast broadband across the country.
- Continue to require ISPs to block sites and proxy sites that carry large amounts of copyright infringing content.
- Require age verification for access to all sites containing pornographic content or age-rated music videos
- Ensure that Britain seizes the chance to be a world leader in the development of 5G, playing a key role in defining industry standards.
- Hold the mobile operators to their new legally binding agreement to ensure that 90 per cent of the UK landmass will have voice and SMS coverage by 2017.

Government surveillance, extremism and law enforcement

- Introduce new communications data legislation (authorities' interception powers would be maintained with oversight of these powers strengthened).
- Tackle online radicalisation and extremist propaganda through measures including 'Extremism Disruption Orders' which could prevent people from using the Internet or social media if suspected of radicalising others.
- Publish standards, performance data and a ranking system for the security of smartphones and tablets, as well as online financial and retail services.
- Direct further resources towards the 'Eight Great Technologies', including robotics and nanotechnology, where Britain aims to be a global leader

4 Health

Despite traditionally being an area of weakness for the Party, the NHS and health policy does feature prominently in the Conservative manifesto. It included the following key points:

- Increase NHS spending by £8 billion a year by 2020.
- Allow everyone to be able to see their GP seven days a week from 8am-8pm by 2020.
- Allow people to access a specific named GP.
- Ensure that patients can access the full information about the safety record of a hospital and other NHS or independent providers.
- People will have access to their own electronic health records; with the ability to opt-out of having records shared electronically
- Guarantee that everyone over 75 will get a same-day GP's appointment if they need one.



5 Transport

The manifesto included a section titled 'Better roads, trains and modern communications', stating that a Conservative Government would 'invest over £100 billion' on infrastructure over the next Parliament. The section on transport included the following pledges some of which had been previously announced:

- Keep commuter rail fares frozen in real terms for the whole of the next Parliament.
- Invest £15 billion in roads as part of the Roads Investment Strategy.
- Invest £38 billion in the rail network over the years until 2019.
- Invest £500 million over the next five years to help achieve the aim of all cars and vans being zero emission vehicles by 2050.
- Improve cycling safety through spending £200 million.
- To respond to the Airport's Commission's final report upon its publication.

6 Energy

Two pages of the Conservative manifesto focused on energy policy specifically. The section titled 'Guaranteeing you clean, affordable and secure energy supplies' included the following policies (some which have been previously announced):

- Keep energy bills as low as possible through promoting competition in the energy market (through implementing the recommendations of the Competition and Markets Authority investigation).
- Ensure that every home and business has a Smart Meter by 2020.
- Continue to support the safe development of shale gas and share the wealth they generate through generous community benefit packages.
- End any new public subsidy for onshore windfarms and change the law so that local communities have the final say on windfarm applications.
- Continue to support the UK Climate Change Act.

Political Intelligence

The 2015 general election is the most unpredictable election in over a generation. The Political Intelligence team will be following developments closely both on the campaign trail and following the outcome of the 7th May. Given the current unlikelihood of an outright majority for any party, it will be important for all organisations who engage with Government to be up to speed on the new



developments as soon as possible and to consider how a new coalition (potentially of more than two parties) may impact their sectors.

We will be helping clients both new and old to:

- Identify key influencers of relevance to their businesses across all political parties;
- Analyse the policy priorities within the first Queen's speech of the new Parliament;
- Develop a proposed public affairs engagement strategy for the initial 6/12 months of the new Parliament;
- Develop the necessary messaging and briefing collateral to resonate most effectively among key audiences.

If you would like to consider an initial strategy workshop to discuss your current plans post-election or would like discuss ways in which Political Intelligence could support your organisation in your public affairs activity, please do not hesitate to contact us on 020 3397 3300 or our Group Managing Director [Nicholas Lansman](#) for further information.