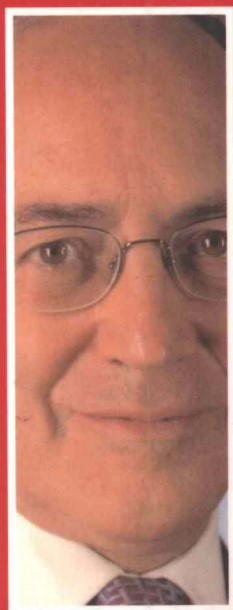
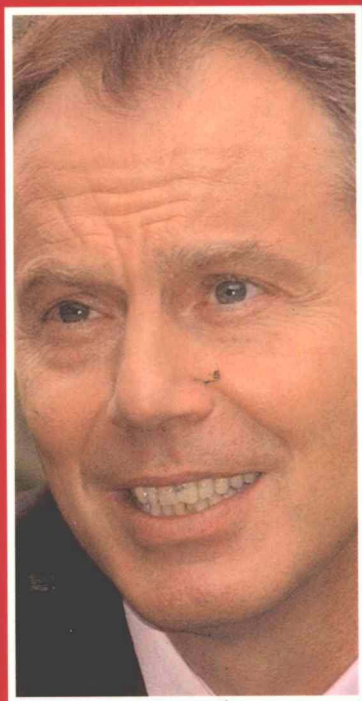
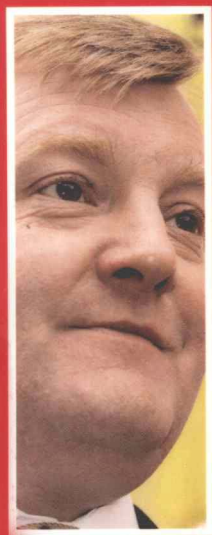
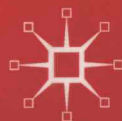


The British General Election of 2005



Dennis Kavanagh and David Butler



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Dennis Kavanagh

Professor of Politics, University of Liverpool, UK

David Butler

Emeritus Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford, UK

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Editorial matter, selection, conclusion and chapters 1–7, 11–13
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Preface

This is the seventeenth in a series of British general election studies sponsored by Nuffield College since 1945. With the help of many participants and many observers, we were fascinated observers of the latest evolution of campaigning techniques; in changed circumstances, each of the participants sought to exploit the new thinking about strategy and the new methods of communication which made the 2005 contest different from its predecessors a generation ago.

In the pages that follow we describe how Labour sought to secure a third term and how it was knocked off course by the Iraq war and for a time by the tensions between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. We explore how the Conservatives sought to come to terms with their second consecutive defeat, in 2001, as well as the efforts of the Liberal Democrats to expand their bridgehead. The national campaign, its handling by the media and its reflection in the polls, are analysed as well as the new focus on a more intense but less visible struggle in the target seats. The way the parties played their hands is critically assessed and the statistical and electoral implications of the results are fully discussed.

We have to express our institutional, and still more our personal, gratitude to our colleagues in Nuffield College and Liverpool University for all the support they have given. We have to thank the Leverhulme Foundation for again so generously financing our operations and for imposing so little in the way of bureaucratic restraints. Our friends in each of the party headquarters and in the media know how much we owe to them – although they might not thank us for naming them.

We have particular debts to all our contributors whose names appear in the table of contents and who met our demanding deadlines. Among the many who have provided helpful comments on our repeated drafts we should particularly thank Chris Ballinger, Hugh Berrington and Vernon Bogdanor. Claire House at Liverpool did much more, over longer hours, than could be expected of any research assistant. We are also grateful to Geoff House's assistance in providing photographs. Lastly we must once again thank our long-suffering wives for bearing up with our electoral enthusiasms.

For 30 years these works have been published under the alphabetical label, David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh. It has been a very equal and

congenial partnership. In 2005 we once again worked very hard together, but the burden fell more heavily on Dennis Kavanagh. It therefore seems appropriate, as David Butler bids farewell to the chronicling of general elections, that this final joint venture should be marked by a reversal of names.

Dennis Kavanagh
David Butler
August 2005

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1

The Political Scene, 2001–04

The scale of its general election victory on 7 June 2001 surprised Labour. The Government had achieved another record majority – 167 over all other parties. The net loss was only six seats. But what were they to do with this commanding position? Their very long manifesto had, in essence, merely offered more of the same, even though it had included two promises which were to haunt them. The pledge not to increase taxes was followed in the next budget by an increase in National Insurance contributions which was widely seen as an increase in taxation. The pledge not to introduce top-up fees for university education in the lifetime of the Parliament was followed in 2004 by their imposition (the fact that the fees would not come into effect until the following Parliament did not quell the sense of betrayal).

In any case, such grand plans for public service reform as Tony Blair may have had were knocked off course by the event that shaped the political scene for the next four years. On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda launched hijackers on an aerial attack on the World Trade Center in New York and on the Pentagon, causing 3,000 deaths and a fundamental shock to American attitudes. Tony Blair then led Britain in support of the US in two wars, in Afghanistan and later in Iraq, which were to dominate the headlines, year after year. The war produced deep divisions in Parliament, in the Labour Party and in the nation, and ultimately it became a key factor in the 2005 general election. The glow of military victory in Iraq did not last long and for many the war and its aftermath scarred the Blair image. However, these developments joined with the politics of the economy and of relations with Europe in shaping public opinion about the Labour Government and about Tony Blair.

After the election Tony Blair reshuffled his Cabinet, moving Jack Straw from the Home Office to the Foreign Office, demoting Robin Cook to the

Table 1.1 Economic and political indicators, 2001–04

		(1) <i>Real households' disposable income (2000= 100)</i>	(2) <i>Average earnings (2001= 100)</i>	(3) <i>Value of retail sales per week (2000 =100)</i>	(4) <i>Year on year inflation (%)</i>	(5) <i>Unem- ployment (%)</i>	(6) <i>Days lost in strike (000s)</i>	(7) <i>Gross domestic product (2001 =100)</i>
2001	1	99.1	103.5	102.9	0.9	5.1	133.9	98.4
	2	98.6	104.0	105.6	1.5	5.0	121.2	99.5
	3	100.0	104.7	107.2	1.5	5.1	65.0	100.2
	4	102.5	105.5	108.1	1.0	5.2	203.1	101.9
2002	1	100.2	106.5	110.1	1.5	5.1	197.4	102.7
	2	102.0	108.0	111.3	0.9	5.2	158.1	104.2
	3	101.8	108.6	112.1	1.1	5.3	544.5	106.2
	4	101.6	109.6	113.7	1.6	5.1	423.6	106.9
2003	1	101.9	110.2	112.5	1.5	5.1	119.1	108.6
	2	104.6	111.2	113.3	1.3	5.0	69.0	109.6
	3	104.2	112.6	114.6	1.4	5.0	82.8	111.9
	4	105.2	113.5	116.3	1.3	4.9	228.3	113.0
2004	1	105.7	115.9	118.0	1.3	4.8	383.4	114.5
	2	106.5	115.8	119.7	1.4	4.8	281.1	116.2
	3	107.4	116.8	120.4	1.2	4.6	115.8	117.4
	4	106.9	118.4	120.2	1.4	4.7	123.9	118.6
2005	1	107.9	121.2	120.3	1.6	4.7	12.4	119.7

Sources: 1–5, 7–8, 10–12 *Economic Trends*; 6 *Labour Market Trends*; 9 *Financial Statistics*; 13 *Monthly Digest of Statistics*; 14–15 MORI.

Commons leadership and promoting David Blunkett to take over from Jack Straw. Further reshuffles followed so that by the end of the Parliament only Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, together with John Prescott, Margaret Beckett, Jack Straw and Alistair Darling, survived from the original 1997 Cabinet. Over the course of the Parliament Stephen Byers and David Blunkett as well as Peter Mandelson were forced to resign. Estelle Morris, Alan Milburn, Robin Cook and Clare Short chose to resign, while Lord Irvine was *de facto* dismissed. But it could hardly be said that any great new talents shone forth although John Reid and Charles Clarke came to the fore as tough defenders of Government policy.

The economy continued to flourish. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown could boast of the continuing increase in employment, of the lowest rate of inflation in Western Europe and of the sustained growth in GDP. Despite the unexpected costs of war and the rise in the price of oil, Gordon Brown continued to refute the lugubrious forecasts of his critics as he devoted increasing resources to the public services. Tony Blair,

(8) <i>Balance of payments (£m)</i>	(9) <i>FTSE 100 share index (1 Jan 1984=1000)</i>	(10) <i>US\$ to £</i>	(11) <i>Sterling exchange rate index index (1990=100)</i>	(12) <i>Interest rates (%)</i>	(13) <i>House prices (1 Feb 2002 =100)</i>	(14) <i>MORI 'State of the economy poll': net optimists</i>	(15) <i>MORI polls (voting intention) C L LD</i>
-4756	5634	1.46	104.5	5.75	92.6	-13	31 50 14
-5467	5643	1.42	106.4	5.25	95.4	-13	29 51 15
-5686	4903	1.44	106.1	4.75	98.8	-34	26 53 16
-6276	5217	1.44	106.1	4.00	96.8	-36	25 57 14
-4702	5272	1.43	106.9	4.00	100.0	-21	28 50 17
-4988	4656	1.46	105.3	4.00	108.2	-15	29 48 17
-2287	3722	1.55	105.7	4.00	115.5	-25	27 53 16
-4510	3940	1.57	106.0	4.00	121.2	-32	31 41 21
-577	3613	1.60	102.3	3.75	123.4	-45	26 45 21
-4613	4031	1.62	99.1	3.75	127.2	-21	27 44 21
-5554	4091	1.61	99.2	3.50	130.7	-24	30 41 21
-6007	4477	1.71	100.2	3.75	133.4	-24	31 41 21
-4908	4386	1.84	104.1	4.00	136.4	-20	32 40 21
-5038	4464	1.81	105.2	4.50	142.5	-22	30 38 20
-8926	4571	1.82	104.8	4.75	148.8	-22	29 37 23
-4103	4820	1.86	102.4	4.75	149.8	-24	28 40 23
-5824	4894	1.89	102.9	4.75	448.3	-15	30 41 20

Note: C = Conservative, L = Labour, LD = Liberal Democrat

though sometimes through gritted teeth, could pay tribute to Gordon Brown as the most successful Chancellor ever. Nonetheless, economic commentators continued to point to the inevitability of the tax rises that would be needed to cover social outlays if Mr Brown's Golden Rule of fiscal prudence was to continue to be honoured.

Europe was never far from the news. In 2001 the Prime Minister announced that by mid-Parliament the Government would make available the Treasury assessment of the extent to which Gordon Brown's five conditions for joining the euro had been met. From the beginning it was plain that Mr Blair was more enthusiastic than Mr Brown and came to regret that he had conceded so much influence to Brown and his assessment over the decision. It was no surprise when, on 9 June 2003, the Chancellor reported that only one and a half of the five conditions had been satisfied. The promised referendum on joining the currency receded from the scene.

On 28 October 2002 the European Convention, under the former French President, Giscard d'Estaing, published its draft European Constitution. The document got a mixed reception in Britain. Its critics argued that it was a draft for a United States of Europe. Its defenders suggested that it represented only a tidying up of the complex and much amended Treaty of Rome, a necessary development to cope with the enlargement of the European Union from 15 members to 25. At first the Government argued that the changes involved were too minimal to need ratifying by referendum. But pressure grew from all sides, and, in a surprise move on 20 April 2004, Tony Blair announced that there would be a referendum after all.

The volte-face attracted some derision but it was of great tactical importance on the eve of the European Parliament elections. It saved the contest from being, as the Conservatives intended, a referendum about having a referendum. It also took the issue out of the general election, already universally expected for May 2005.

At the same time the Government also defended itself from the Eurosceptics by laying down 'red lines' beyond which it would not go when the Constitution came up for approval at a European Summit. Indeed, when that happened in Dublin on 20 June 2004, Tony Blair could boast that none of the red lines had been breached.

Chronology of events from June 2001 to December 2004

2001

- 7 Jun General election: Lab 413 seats, Con 165, Lib Dem 52. Record low turnout
- 8 Jun W. Hague announces resignation
Reshuffle: J. Straw to Foreign O.; D. Blunkett to Home O.; R. Cook Commons leader
- 12 Jun P. Hain appointed Minister for Europe
- 7 Jul Bradford race riots
- 14 Jul Stoke-on-Trent race riots
- 16 Jul 100 Labour MPs rebel over Whips' removal of two Select Committee Chairmen
- 19 Jul Lord Archer found guilty of perjury and sentenced to two years in prison
- 2 Aug Bank of England cuts interest rates by 0.25% to 5.00%
- 6 Aug IRA agrees a means of decommissioning its weapons
- 11 Sep Terrorist attacks on Twin Towers and the Pentagon
- 13 Sep I. Duncan Smith elected Conservative leader

18 Sep	Bank of England cuts interest rates by 0.25% to 4.75%
1 Oct	War on Afghanistan declared
4 Oct	Bank of England cuts interest rates by 0.25% to 4.50%
8 Oct	H. McLeish resigns as Scottish First Minister
8 Nov	Bank of England cuts interest rates by 0.5% to 4.00%
13 Nov	Kabul captured
26 Nov	US economy declared to be in official recession
27 Nov	J. McConnell elected to succeed H. McLeish as Scottish First Minister
10 Dec	G. Marsden MP defects from Lab to Lib Dems
14–15 Dec	Laeken European Council meeting launches European Convention process
2002	
1 Jan	Euro notes and coins begin circulating in 12 EU member states
14 Jan	Government declares that the UK is officially free of foot-and-mouth disease
29 Jan	President Bush labels Iran, Iraq and N. Korea as an 'axis of evil'
3 Feb	T. Blair pledges that 'wreckers' will not prevent public service reform
5 Feb	C. Kennedy calls for voting age to be reduced to 16
6 Feb	Queen Elizabeth II celebrates 50th anniversary of her accession
12 Feb	Colin Powell speaks of investigating how to topple Saddam Hussein
13 Feb	Scottish Parliament outlaws hunting with hounds in Scotland
14 Feb	President Bush announces his laxer alternative to the Kyoto protocol
28 Feb	G. d'Estaing opens the Convention on the Future of Europe in Brussels
5 Mar	R. Balfe MEP defects from Lab to Con President Bush imposes tariffs of up to 30% on European steel
30 Mar	Queen Mother dies
5 May	President Chirac wins second term, defeating le Pen 81%:18% A. Winterton sacked from Shadow Cabinet after making racist joke
10 May	Potters Bar rail crash kills seven

28 May	Transport Secretary S. Byers resigns. A. Darling succeeds him P. Boateng as Chief Sec. to Treasury is first black Cabinet minister
1 Jun	Four days of celebrations begin for the Queen's Golden Jubilee
11 Jul	Home Sec. D. Blunkett reclassifies cannabis from Class B to Class C drug
16 Jul	IRA publishes a full apology to families of all its victims
23 Jul	D. Davis replaced as Conservative Chairman by T. May
26 Aug	Ten-day UN Summit on Sustainable Development opens in Johannesburg
11 Sep	C. Kennedy becomes first Lib Dem Leader to address TUC annual conference
12 Sep	President Bush at UN General Assembly calls for rapid action on Iraq
22 Sep	Countryside Alliance protests at Westminster against banning fox hunting
24 Sep	In dossier on Iraq, T. Blair says that weapons of mass destruction (WMD) can be used in 45 minutes
7 Oct	Theresa May declares Conservatives are seen as 'the nasty party'
12 Oct	183 people killed in Bali bomb attacks
14 Oct	J. Reid suspends Northern Ireland Executive
24 Oct	Education Sec. Estelle Morris resigns. C. Clarke succeeds her. J. Reid becomes Party Chairman. P. Hain becomes Welsh Sec.
26 Oct	127 people killed when Russian troops storm hijackers in a Moscow theatre
28 Oct	European Convention publishes its draft Constitution
4 Nov	J. Bercow resigns from Con front bench over stand against adoption by gay and unmarried couples
8 Nov	Security Council passes Resolution 1441, returning weapons inspectors to Iraq
13 Nov	Firefighters commence 48 hours of strike action
7 Dec	Iraq publishes a 12,000-page denial of WMD
10 Dec	Cherie Blair apologises over lack of clarity about purchase of two flats in Bristol
12-13 Dec	Copenhagen European Council
14 Dec	Red Cross camp at Sangatte closes permanently
17 Dec	Polls show lowest Con ratings for four years