Can Europe save the Centre?

The British Liberal Democrats and Europe, 1988-2014

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Table of contents

Introduction

In his 2014 New Year's wishes, the Liberal Democrats' leader Nick Clegg spent half of his message defending Britain's membership to the European Union and presenting the Liberal Democrats as the "Party of In", a line the party defended for months in the run-up to the European elections. However, when the previous European elections were held in 2009, Nick Clegg's New Year's message barely mentioned Europe at all. Back then, Europe was even regarded like a "toxic" topic within the party (term used by interviewee 1, see annex 2). In the meanwhile, the party's European persuasion has been taken from the backstage to the frontline of the party's political strategy despite the growing Eurosceptic debate in the United Kingdom. The rationale behind this strange shift is to be found in the peculiar events the Liberal Democrats have gone through since 2010, as a small political party entering a coalition government for the first time. Explaining it will participate in understanding the way the first British coalition in decades was formed and the impact it had on the parties working together in government, and in a broader perspective on British politics.

The Liberal Democrats is a party that was born from the merging of two small British parties. On the one hand, the remains of the Liberal Party, which used to occupy the forefront of British politics before the 1920s, when it virtually disappeared from the political scene, leaving the floor to the Conservatives and Labour. On the other hand, the Social Democratic Party, which left Labour in 1981 under the impulsion of Roy Jenkins, David Owen, Bill Rodgers and Shirley Williams to get closer to the centre-left of the political spectrum. After the merging in 1988, the Liberal Democrats was determined to being a third force (Whiteley, 2006) in British politics, which its members considered to be too polarised and lacking modernity (Ashdown, 2000). The party managed to survive in an unfavourable two-party political context, even getting into government after 2010.

This trajectory went somehow unnoticed in academic literature. Scholars studying British

politics tended to focus their attention on the two governing parties, the Labour and the Conservatives, who had their share of internal disputes and strategic challenges. Those studying Liberal Parties also turned their attention to these parties who had a fair chance of entering government, which was not seen as being the case for the Liberal Democrats until most recently. Political scientists interested in small, non-governing parties rather favoured parties addressing new issues such as the Green parties which started appearing over Europe in the 1980s (Spoon, 2009). Small parties who received the scholars' attention were mostly the ones addressing new issues or accessing government and therefore able to have a direct impact in national politics (Müller-Rommel and Pridham, 1991; Deschouwer, 2008). Regularly enough though, these works included a chapter on the Liberal Democrats, especially as it became clear this party was not going to give up on the idea of getting into government (Agnès Alexandre, 2010 et 2013; Philippa Sherrington, 2006). Still, very little research has been done on the Liberal Democrats as such, to understand how this party managed to survive in an unfitting political context to the point of actually jeopardising its definition as a two-party system. Even fewer research has been devoted to their current challenges and their change in strategy over the European issue, despite the potential it bears in terms of understanding the impact incumbency can have on a small third party and the setting of its political strategy.

This work will attempt to do so in order to allow for a better understanding of how a small party struggles for survival in a difficult national political context. The case of the Liberal Democrats sheds a new light on the process of setting up a party's political strategy, and the criteria upon which the party can decide to change such a strategy. The analysis of the party's political resources, of the constraints it faces both internally and externally, will participate in the research over the challenges a small party faces when entering a coalition, and the strategic solutions it can use to face them. More particularly, studying the Liberal Democrats' relation to the European topic will lead to analysing the rationale that makes a party move from a strategy

based on avoiding divisive topics to a new one, where positioning becomes the party's new tool in reaching its political objectives. Indeed, the Liberal Democrats had the possibility to appeal to their pro-Europeanism as a political strategy way before 2013. They were more pro-Europeans than the Conservative or Labour parties are or claim to be. However, they did little to build on this peculiarity until very recently, and they decided to do so at a moment when it seems politically more promising for a British party to adopt an anti-European stance rather than a pro-European one. In terms of the parties' rationality as developed already by Downs, this reasoning seems rather challenging.

In other words, studying the Liberal Democrats will show the driving forces of a change in political strategy for a less consensual approach to positioning issues, by discussing the party's constraints and resources and the way they are articulated towards its goals. The driving question of this study, namely "can Europe save the centre?" is therefore aimed at understanding why the Liberal Democrats have shifted from ignoring the European topic until very recently, to finally conducting a vocally pro-European campaign, at a moment when being in government had already damaged their political prospects and when the dominating speeches of political parties on Europe in the United Kingdom were far from being unequivocally in favour of European integration. By answering this question, we will participate in understanding the incentives that can make a party change its strategy to favour positioning over valence.

Our working hypothesis will be that the Liberal Democrats party is not facing the same challenges now as it was before the coalition, and that Europe is a tool to deal with these novel issues. It will also be that the very participation in government has actually increased the Liberal Democrats' need for differentiation and by then the importance of their positioning on Europe, and of engaging into this question in an original, positive way.

In terms of methodology, the study will rely on a combination of theoretical and empirical approaches. The theory will be used to identify tools and frames that can apply to the Liberal

Democrats in a meaningful way and help understanding their trajectory. This will include referring back to the works realised on other small parties such as the ones referred to there above (Green parties, small governing parties or liberal parties in government), to use the analytical frameworks developed in these studies and apply them to the Liberal Democrats. In particular, the analysis made of how a party choses to occupy a political corner rather than another (niche party or mainstream party), the way it positions itself towards the main national parties (protest, hinge, fringe, centre, pivotal party) and the challenges entry into government bears for its political survival will structure the work on the Liberal Democrats. The empirical approach will combine qualitative and descriptive quantitative data. The qualitative approach will be aimed at gathering appreciations of either officials or active members of the Liberal Democrats on their party's trajectory and strategy towards Europe. The interviewees were chosen in order to have a balanced perspective between party's officials or administrators (interviews 1 to 5, annex 2) and active members chosen on the basis of their involvement at various levels of the party (interviews A to E, annex 2). All the interviewees had either a direct link with the way the party deals with the European question, mainly by attending the working group and/or the internal pressure group on the topic, or were chosen because their answers could clarify the state of affairs on topics which have not been dealt with extensively in previous research, such as the party's new internal divisions since 2010 and the reaction of the leadership to these new challenges (for a full list of the questions asked, see Annex 2). By approaching people with various levels of responsibility and various backgrounds within the party, it was possible to cross answers to try and get a broader picture of the way the European issue has been dealt within the party and of the challenges it is actually facing. The demonstration will also include personal observations of the author, gathered when accessing party's conferences and internal functioning. The first observations were conducted at the Liberal Democrats' spring conference in Brighton in 2013, where the consultation session of the policy paper on

Europe took place. The second round of observation was conducted in London in November 2013 during the ALDE party congress. In addition to providing the time to interview several members gathered in Canary Warf for the congress, the ALDE gathering was an occasion to see the Liberal Democrats' way of behaving when hosting a major event of their European party. The fringe events addressed to the party's members and the speeches in the main hall were in this regard most interesting to see the dynamic the leadership wanted the members to get in a few weeks ahead of the European campaign, coupled with the image the party wanted to give of itself to its European allies. Since most of the topic of the study is linked to very recent evolutions on which personal appreciations can miss the broader picture, these subjective comments and observations will be crossed with a quantitative study of the party's victories and failures in terms of electoral results and polls, in addition to the evolution of the party's manifesto (referring for instance to the Comparative Manifesto Project database) and compare these data to similar ones that can apply to other British parties. With these tools, the study will seek to highlight the changing constraints the Liberal Democrats have been facing, the resources it had and the goals it is pursuing in the perspective of the current British political context.

The study is structured around three main steps. The first part will be aimed at understanding where the Liberal Democrats come from in terms of political strategy. It will show the importance of the objectives a party has chosen in determining its strategy by analysing the place of Europe in the Liberal Democrats' speeches and public positioning compared to their internal political persuasion between 1988 and 2010. This part of the study will indeed be aimed at understanding the strategy Liberal Democrats had adopted before their entry into government towards Europe, and the reasoning behind it. It will show that Europe has always been for the Liberal Democrats a tool among others which they can either use or leave behind in order to achieve an aim, namely fitting in the British political system in terms of relevance, saliency and

valence, in order to broaden their political space and strengthen their influence.

The second part of the study will highlight the strategy the Liberal Democrats had developed when deciding to get into government, and the impacts the government period has had on their political ambition. The aim will be to understand the reasoning that made getting into coalition the Liberal Democrats' preferred option in 2010. Subsequently it will show that despite mistakes made when bargaining the coalition and which heavily weight on the party's political prospect, the party is pursuing the same objectives now as it was before and is still aiming at being a party of government. This calls for a new strategy to be developed as the constraints the party needs to face are different from before its entry into government.

The redefinition of the party's strategy will come under scrutiny in the third part of this study, where it will be shown that the entry into government has changed the face of challenges the party is facing to maintain its political influence. It increased the Liberal Democrats' need for differentiation and by then the suitability of using their positioning towards Europe as a tool in their political strategy, in an attempt to regain the voters' attention and to consolidate their internal cohesion. This part will therefore explain the rationale behind the Liberal Democrats new strategy towards Europe, and why they consider being openly pro-European as being suitable to face their current challenges.

I.   The strategy of the Liberal Democrats: becoming pivotal, not holding firm on Europe (1988-2010)

The way the Liberal Democrats, as a small, hinge and third party have been structuring themselves and managing their resources in constraints and objectives to become pivotal has led them to see their European positioning mostly as a brake towards their political ambition to reach power. Since 1988 Liberal Democrats have been struggling against the British political system to establish a credible party that would be able to influence the British political life (relevance), that would be fighting the same catch-all strategy as its political contenders rather than turning into a niche party (saliency) and that would fit in the peculiarities of the British political scene (valence). For all these reasons, and up until the creation of the coalition, Europe was seen as a too risky bet for the Liberal Democrats that would prevent them from achieving their goals.

A. The test of relevance: becoming pivotal

In Penderson's lifespan model of a party's life, relevance is the fourth step in the establishment of a new party (Deschouwer, 2008). The three first ones are 1) the declaration, meaning the announcement of the creation of the new party, 2) the authorization, depending on the requirements the country has for the establishment of a party, and 3) the representation, meaning seats in Parliament. By referring to Sartori (REF), relevance can be defined as either a blackmail potential or a governing potential for the party; meaning the party is able to influence the political life of its country. In the case of the Liberal Democrats relevance was the most challenging element of the process, especially because the British political system is not meant to leave much room for third party (Smith, in Müller and Pridham, 1991) due to its First-Past-The-Post system and the absence of proportional representation in Westminster. They already had representation in 1988 from the Liberals and Social Democrats Party (SDP) deputies, and the permissive character of British electoral laws that allows for a smooth creation of new

parties (Smith, in Müller and Pridham, 1991; 23) made the remaining two steps straightforward.

a. Developing a pivotal party: building a third force that would appeal to the voters

In the British two-party system, creating a relevant third party requires to be able to attract votes in order to become pivotal. In order to achieve that, there is therefore a critical size necessary for the party's relevance that can only be reached by one third, centre party. Several of them would be blocks challenging one of the two main parties before being absorbed by them; while one centre party means a pivot between the two main ones (Smith, in Müller and Pridham, 1991; 36). The structuring of the Liberal Democrats is consistent with this reasoning. By going back to the creation of the party and the reasoning behind it, it will be possible to understand its aims and therefore its strategy.

During its first years of existence (1988 to 1992), the main challenge for the Liberal Democrats was to unite the centre. This was the condition to be a pivotal element in British political life because only by presenting a united centre could the Liberal Democrats hope to convince voters
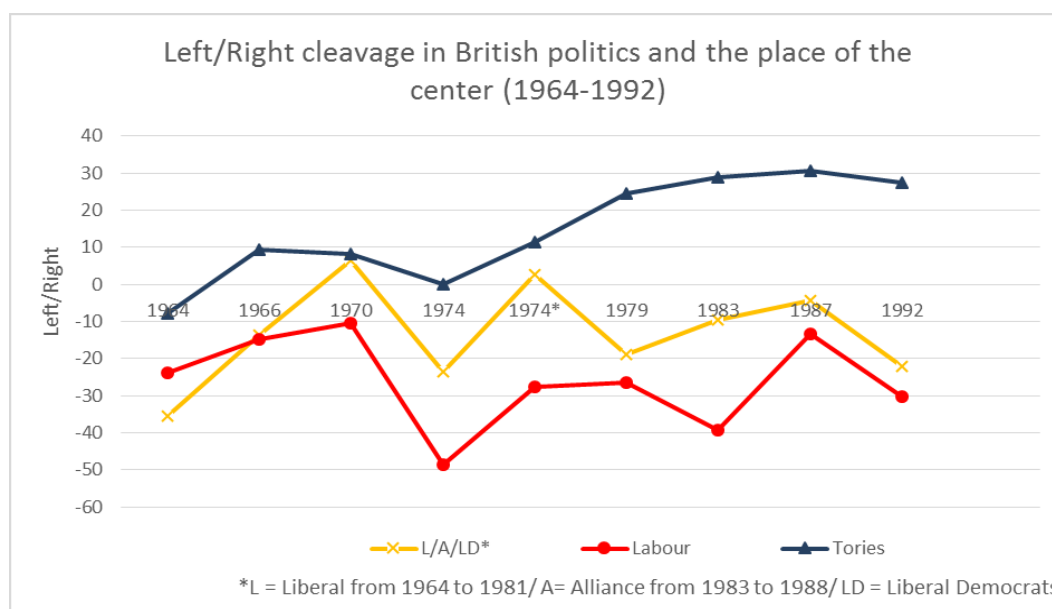
Graph 1 : Left and right cleavages in British politics and the place of the centre (1964- 1992); Source: CMP; Graph: Claire Taglione-Darmé

they could have a political relevance and exert influence. Indeed, before the SDP was founded,

the Liberals had occupied the political centre for more than a decade as shown in graph 1, where based on the Comparative Manifesto Project's database we have put together the evolution of the left-right positioning of the British political parties from 1964 until 1992. For this reason, as soon as the SDP was announced an 'Alliance' was formed by the Liberals and the SDP – because that was the only viable option for the two of them to coexist while both occupying the centre. The Alliance worked on the basis of a shared manifesto for the two parties in elections, but with each party maintaining at the same time its own legal existence and, most importantly, its own candidate.

However, despite this *modus vivendi* between the two parties, electoral results were still disappointing for members and that was what triggered the decision of merging. This is what appears in statements made by former members of either of these parties, such as Lord William Rogers, one of the founder of the SDP, who subsequently became the Liberal Democrats' leader in the House of Lords and who wrote in his biography for the Liberal Democrats' website: "When it became clear that the SDP and Liberals could not be a really effective force in British politics if we remained two separate parties I supported the merger as Chairman of the "Yes to Unity" campaign which won the ballot amongst SDP members" [1]. Disappointment was especially high after the 1987 General Election where only 22 seats where won by both SDP and Liberals, which meant one less seat than in the previous General election of 1983. Frustration from the lack of positive dynamic was the main reason the merger process started in the aftermaths of the 1987 elections. This is illustrated by Lord William Goodhart, a former SDP who helped drafting the Liberal Democrats constitution and wrote for the Journal of Liberal Democrats History in 1998: "the fiasco of the two Davids' campaign in 1987 changed people's minds and convinced many of us that merger was essential"[2]. The prominent Liberal

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[1] See http://www.libdems.org.uk/william_rodgers#

[2] http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/uploads/18_goodhart_the_merger_process.pdf

Richard Holme expresses the same conclusions when saying to the Liberal Democrats History group in 2009: "I believe that had we been able to fight in 1987 as two parties totally united in purpose and planning to come together formally in the next Parliament, we should have got that vital step ahead of Labour and subsequent history might have been different." [3] Right after these elections, the Liberal leader David Steel started working for a merging of the two parties. In order to understand the subsequent challenges, it is important to notice that this was not a smooth process, especially within SDP where the "Yes to Unity" campaign found a tough opponent in the "No to the merger" group, led by David Owens (Archives of the Library of Sussex University). The new party would have to be the mediator between the two former ones and to find an equilibrium between the two party's narratives and visions of what the British society should look like. If there were topics, such as the when dealing with Europe, where the two parties had similarities, their diverging vision of liberty and equality were a strong brake to the first hours of the new party – and echoed even in the discussions around its very name (on this topic see Bennie & altr, 1994). The problem was that some members of the Social Democrat Party (SDP), who were involved in the Alliance between the Liberals and the SDP during the 1980s, refused to join in the Liberal Democrats and wanted to keep an existence of their own as they considered merging with the Liberals meant the end of the values they had been defending as SDP when splitting from the Labour Party. The anti-merger campaign used arguments such as claiming "pride in (the) party and its achievements" or "social democracy is a distinctive philosophy" (Archives of the Library of Sussex University). They considered the new party could not manage to embrace their political persuasion, and therefore decided to keep their former party alive. Among them was David Owen, one of the founder of the SDP. The reason why having a remaining group fighting in the centre under the name of the SDP was such a challenge to the Liberal Democrats was that because the latest was prevented from

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3 http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/item_single.php?item_id=76&item=history
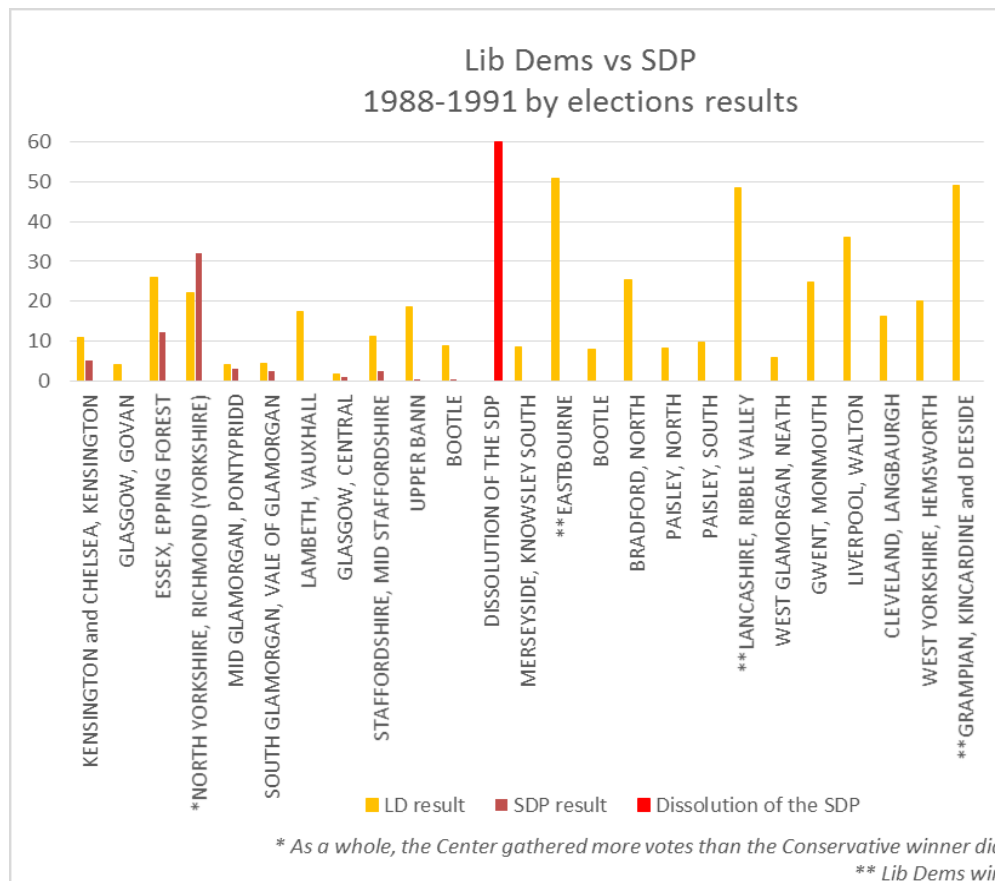
Graph 2 : Liberal Democrats vs Social Democratic Party: 1988-1991 by-elections results; Data: Full table of by-elections results (1988-1992) : Annex 3 ; Graph : Claire Taglione-Darmé

becoming a hinge party by the very existence of the latter, because they were two parties fighting in the centre of British politics (Smith, in Müller and Pridham, 1991, 30-36). Because of this process, the main competitor for the Liberal Democrats' first years of existence was the remaining SDP, and for a while the question was to know who would outlast the other. (Ashdown, 2000). Indeed, voters were split between the two to an extent that could prevent them from winning seats as in the Yorkshire by-election of 1989 (see graph 2, which presents the centre partis' results in by-elections before and after the dissolution of SDP). The best illustration of this process is that it was not before SDP's dissolution that the Liberal Democrats actually managed to win by-elections. After the dissolution in 1990, Liberal Democrats won three by-elections: in Eastbourne in Octobre 1990, in Lancashire, Ribble Valley in March 1991 and in Grampian, Kincardine and Deeside in Novembre 1991. The end of the split of the vote

for centre parties already allowed the Liberal Democrats to gain relevance by being a more successful player of the British political life. Plus, it gave them a free hand to start focusing on broader goals and political ambition than their sole survival. Only once the Liberal Democrats finally found themselves alone in the centre of British politics was it possible for them to attract enough votes to become relevant; that is to say to exert some leverage on the Labour and Conservative parties by making use of their blackmail potential (Sartori), especially in the Commons where most of the struggle between majority and opposition takes place. After the SDP's dissolution, Liberal Democrats were able to focus on building a party (interview A), making it a sustainable third force (Whiteley, 2006) and transform the British political system (Ashdown). It is in this process that Europe would become a brake towards their goals, and that Liberal Democrats would start facing difficult choices. A striking example of this was the voting of the Maastricht Treaty.

b. From Maastricht to the shadow cabinet: building an independent political strategy

The voting of the Maastricht Treaty was a turning point for Liberal Democrats. It became clear that building a third party would require strategic moves where the Liberal Democrats political persuasion, in this case regarding Europe, could only come second. Indeed, when the Treaty was presented to the House of Commons after the 1992 General Election, the Liberal Democrats only held twenty seats, which meant only little leverage capacity on the governing Conservative Party as twenty seats stands for no more than 3,5% of the total number of seats in the House. However, the Conservative government's majority was only of eighteen members of Parliament, and there were also around twenty rebels among the Conservative backbenchers who would not support the government on the Maastricht Treaty by voting with Labour plus an additional sixteen more who would abstain[4]. This is a moment when the Liberal Democrats had

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[4] See http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/maastricht-vote-labour-jubilant-at-governments-commons-defeat-opposition-mps-claim-amendment-28-result-is-a-humiliation-for-john-major-as-conservatives-appear-dismayed-and-confused-1496521.html

therefore a very relevant position, as twenty votes casted either in favour or against the Treaty could alter the outcome of the process. In this situation, the question of the European commitment of the party was on the table. The leadership's decision and rationale crystallises the Party's line towards Europe for the years which followed. In his diaries, Paddy Ashdown, then leader of the Liberal Democrats wrote that the Party's line towards the Maastricht Treaty shall be that "if it is about the future of Britain in Europe (the Party) will vote in favour; if it is about the government (the Party) will have to vote against" (Ashdown, 2000). This line shows that the question of Europe comes second in the leader's mind when in early 1990s his aim was to build a third party that would have relevance in the British political system. This tension between the Liberal Democrats political persuasion that the European construction was a good thing, and the party's strategy to occupy a strong place in the British political landscape would

Item in the manifesto	Party	General Election	
		1992	1997
Positive occurrence on Europe	Lib Dems	7,3	4,5
	Labour	1,9	3,4
Difference		**5,4**	**1,1**
Negative occurrence on Europe	Lib Dems	0	0
	Labour	0,9	0,2
Difference		**-0,9**	**-0,2**

Table 1 Europe in the Liberal Democrats and Labour manifesto, 1992 and 1997 Data: CMP remain up until 2010.

However Europe proved itself useful in another manner: not to attract votes from the electorate, but to find ways of working with the Labour led by Tony Blair against the Conservative party. In his diaries, Paddy Ashdown singles out Europe as a compromising item between the main opposition party and the Liberal Democrats (Ashdown, 2000). By participating in bringing the two parties' leadership closer together, this topic was an element of the strategy developed to create a common front against the Conservative Party. It is not this strategy in itself that is

interesting to the topic detailed here, but the place Europe occupied in it. Indeed, the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) shows that between the 1992 and 1997 General Elections, the two parties manifesto had been brought closer to each other on the question of Europe (see table 1, where we present the evolution of the European issue in the Liberal Democrats' and Labour's manifesto between 1992 and 1997), meaning they both said very little on the topic by 1997, when the Liberal Democrats had been relatively vocal in 1992 on their support to the European project. This reflect the strategy that was, back then, established between the two parties in order to block the Conservative score in 1997, and by which Paddy Ashdown hoped the Liberal Democrats would make it to a coalition government with the Labour Party. The work to increase the party's coalition potential (Bolleyer, 2008) also implied to enhance the programmatic compatibility (Sartori, quoted by Bolleyer 2008) between the Liberal Democrats and Labour; therefore it only makes sense that the two parties have had closer manifestos during this period as exemplified there-above with the topic of Europe. The strategy set up by the two parties in order to make sure the Conservative would lose the 1997 General Election is described by Paddy Ashdown in his Memoires (Ashdown, 2000). The strategy involved targeting constituencies where the Liberal Democrats would be presented as an alternative to the Conservative less radical than Labour and therefore more likely to attract the votes of those who did not want to support the Conservative anymore but were not ready to shift to Labour neither. For Paddy Ashdown, participating in making the 1997 General Elections a victory for Labour and Tony Blair was the best way to reach the goal he had set up for the Party, meaning getting into government. However the reality was different, although not because the strategy did not work, because the Liberal Democrats did win seats from the Conservative especially in the South-East; but because Labour did too well. The 1997 General Elections results were such that "Labour's 13.5 million votes have only been exceeded in 1951 and the party's share of 43.2% was its highest since 1966. The 418 seats won were the party's

most ever, and compare with 393 won in 1945. The Conservatives' 9.6 million votes was the party's lowest total since 1929 and their share of 30.7% the lowest since 1832. Their 165 seats were the party's fewest since 1906. The Liberal Democrats' 5.2 million votes were fewer than in 1992, as was the party's share of the vote, but 46 seats represents the party's most since 1929, when it won 561." [5] Because of these exceptional results for Labour, who had a majority of their own in Parliament, the Liberal Democrats became irrelevant to the building of the government. Put simply, the Labour party 'did not need' the Liberal Democrats (according to the words used in interview D), which mean they had lost their coalition relevance (Bolleyer, 2008). Because of that, and in order to restore the Party's political relevance, the Liberal Democrats had to find new ways to make themselves visible in the British political landscape. Once Paddy Ashdown willingly left the leadership of the Party and Charles Kennedy got elected in 1999, the Party therefore developed a new strategy to be part of the opposition to the government. However, contrarily to the Ashdown-era, this time this did not mean allying with the Conservative in order to destabilise the Labour's government majority. Rather, the Liberal Democrats decided to build an alternative opposition of their own, to go back to the doctrine of equidistance Paddy Ashdown had chosen to leave behind. The best illustration of this new strategy is the use of the term 'shadow cabinet' by the Liberal Democrats frontbenchers, which started in 2000, shortly after Charles Kennedy became leader of the party (as confirmed in nterview D).

In the British system, the 'shadow cabinet' refers to the official Opposition to the government in the House of Commons. It grants the so-called opposition specific advantages in terms of salary and most importantly to the Liberal Democrats, of higher visibility and "gravitas" (interview D). This move, therefore, allowed the Liberal Democrats to both oppose the Labour Party and differentiate from the Conservative Party, in a logic of equidistance that goes hand in

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[5] House of Commons Research Paper 01/38, p.7

hand with its positioning in the centre of the political spectrum, and made the Liberal Democrats an unavoidable third party. In that sense it participated in reaching the party's objective of maintaining its political relevance. Within this calculations for achieving broader political influence, the Liberal Democrats' European persuasion was a tool among others and nothing more. The rationale behind the drafting of the Party's manifesto after 1992 was indeed to fit into the British party system and appeal to as many voters as possible, in a catch-all manner. In this regard, both in terms of saliency and valence, Europe could simply not fit in.

B. The threshold of saliency: becoming a mainstream party

There were several possibilities for the Liberal Democrats in order to achieve sustainable political relevance. Being a small party, several strategies or combination of strategies were open to them in positioning themselves within the political spectrum. One of them could have been to play the part of a 'niche' party, as done by the Greens (Spoon, 2009) for instance. However, their ambition to be a pivotal party however lead them to choose to adopt a strategy that was closer to the one of the mainstreams party than the one which they could have chosen due to their European persuasion.

a. Identifying niche and mainstream parties in the United Kingdom political context

The salience theory (Green and Hobolt 2008) refers to the idea that a party's strategy will reflect the saliency of an issue among the electorate; in other words, that a party will deal with issues that are important to the electorate in priority. A niche party is a party where the dominant goal (Storm 1990) is to achieve a certain policy, where the party appeals to a narrowly defined band of the electorate, deals to one or two main core topics which are chosen for other reasons than their saliency, where it positions itself and suffers little political competition. These parties are often seen as issue owners (Green and Hobolt, 2009) more than agenda makers, and they do not particularly worry about the saliency of the topic they are dealing with, which explains the low level of political competition they suffer in their field. The topics dealt with by niche parties

will therefore not reflect the ongoing political debate, and particularly the saliency of their issue within the electorate might not affect the party's positioning and the share given to this one specific topic in their manifesto. A niche party is therefore not a 'mainstream' party, as detailed

	'Niche' party	'Mainstream' party
Dominant goal (typology: Strom 1990)	Policy	Aspiration to being in government (Policy, Office, Voters)
Relation the electorate	Appeals to a politically narrowly defined band of the electorate	Functions according to the catch-all party model
Topics it deals with	One or two core topics	Top-agenda issues e.g. economics, foreign policy and law, order, security
Importance of saliency in choosing a topic for campaigning	Low	High
Level of political competition it suffers	Low	High
Approach of the topics	Positioning	Valence
Primarily seen as	Issue Owner	Agenda Maker

Table 2: Features of a niche party compared to a mainstream party

in table 2, which compares the features of niche and mainstream parties on a variety of criteria. One field where the Liberal Democrats could have indeed been able to use a niche, and have sometimes been seen as doing so, is the European question. An openly pro-European party is a rare item of the British political scene, and this question had the potential of being used as a differentiating tool by the Liberal Democrats. It is possible to tell what approach the Liberal Democrats have chosen by referring back to the study of their manifesto for General elections between 1992 and 2010, especially when compared to the ones of the other British parties. A first step will be to analyse the composition of a niche vs a mainstream party's manifesto, in order to then define the place the Liberal Democrats occupy within the British political spectrum.

A niche party is expected to have a different manifesto structure and composition from a

mainstream party. Due to the differences outlined in Table 2, a niche party will be expected to have a shorter manifesto, focusing on one or two core topics to the detriment of other considerations. Indeed, when focusing on British politics using the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) database, it appears that mainstream parties such as Labour and Conservatives have different manifesto's structure from for instance UKIP, which back in 2001 could be considered a niche party – the niche being anti-Europeanism. The choice of these parties to observe the difference between a mainstream and a niche party in the UK is linked to the data available through CMP. A first observation which can be made is that mainstream parties tend to deal with more topics than niche parties. For instance, within our time frame the Conservatives dealt in average with 37,4 topics and the Labour has an average of 37,2 topics (CMP). In 2001, the UKIP party dealt with 28 topics. Related to this finding is the fact that
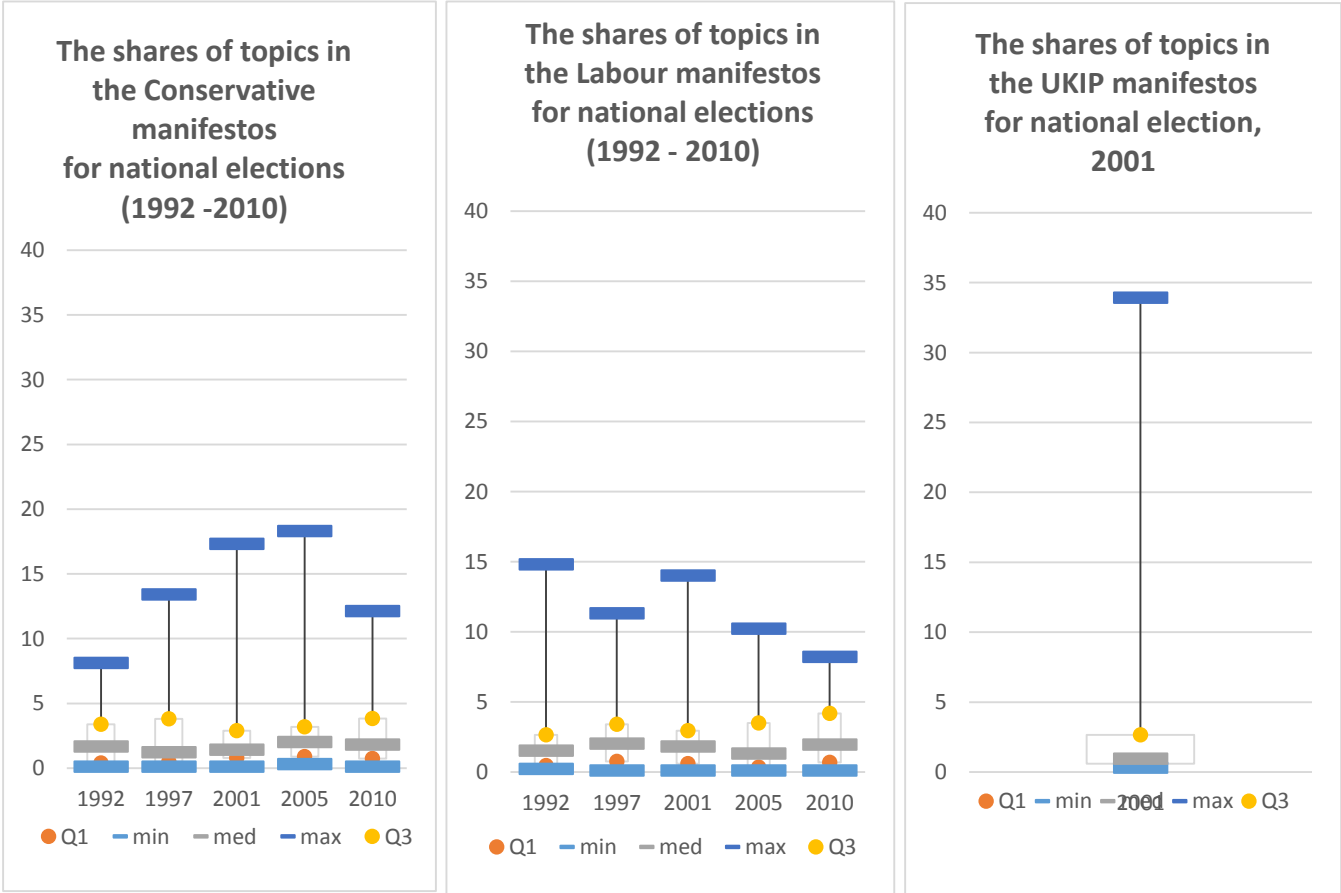
Graph 3 : The structure of the manifesto: niche party vs mainstream party Comparison Conservatives/ Labour (1992-2010) and UKIP (2001) – data CMP, graph Claire Taglione-Darmé

when comparing the length of the manifesto (addition of the 'frequency' column in CMP), the Conservative Party reach an average of 959.6 entries listed each year between 1992 and 2010, the Labour Party 1016.6 and the UKIP, in 2001, only 360. This is consistent with the idea that a niche party is not a catch-all party, and has policy as a main goal rather than voters; its preoccupation is not to address as many voters as possible, but to stand for one specific issue or policy. This is further reflected by the different structure of the manifesto of a niche party and the ones of mainstream parties, as shown in Graph 3. Graph 3 presents a comparison of the structure of the parties' manifesto since 1992 until 2010, where the data available thanks to CMP allows. The graph give a global perspective on the relative share of the manifesto dedicated to the treatment of each issue (a CMP 'category'). For instance, in the case of the UKIP manifesto for 2001, the maximum share for one topic was more than one third of the manifesto, namely 33,9%. The graph therefore allow to highlight the difference in manifesto's structure between parties which have a few first-rank topics (ranking between 10% and 15% of the manifesto), and parties dealing with one core topic (above 20% of the manifesto). A mainstream party's manifesto will allow for a structure aimed at pushing forward a few core issues, but will also focus on several 'second-rank' topics, which will rank between 10% and 3% of the manifesto. Indeed, the Conservatives Party manifesto deal with an average of 10,8 'second-rank' topics, when the Labour Party manifesto counts in average 10,4 'second-rank' topics. The UKIP manifesto from 2001 only encompasses 5 'second-rank' topics (CMP). This was expected as the consequence of the fact that as mentioned above, these second-rank issues will be more numerous in the case of mainstream parties than in the one of a niche party, built to deal with a specific question. Even more revealing is the fact that in 2010, the Labour Party's manifesto first topic only stood for 8,2% of the whole document.

Apart from their structure, a second feature of a niche party's manifesto regards the substance of its composition. In order to make sure whether a party is a niche party or not, one

CMP	Labour Party	Conservative Party	UKIP
1992	1.Welfare State Expansion 2. Education expansion 3.Technology and Infrastructure	1.National Way of Life: Positive 2.Free Market Economy 3.Governmental and Administrative Efficiency	n.a.
1997	1.Political Authority 2.Law and Order: Positive 3.Technology and Infrastructure	1.Political Authority 2.Law and Order: Positive 3.Economic Goals	n.a.
2001	1.Political Authority 2.Welfare State Expansion 3.Law and Order: Positive	1.Political Authority 2.Welfare State Expansion 3.Non-economic Demographic Groups	1.European Community/Union: Negative 2.Freedom and Human Rights 3.National Way of Life: Positive
2005	1.Non-economic Demographic Groups 2.Welfare State Expansion 3.Political Authority	1.Political Authority 2.Education Expansion 3.Law and Order: Positive	n.a.
2010	1.Welfare State Expansion 2.Technology and Infrastructure 3 .Education Expansion	1.Political Authority 2.Governmental and Administrative Efficiency 3.Law and Order: Positive	n.a.

Table 3 : The first three topics in the parties' manifesto (1992-2010)
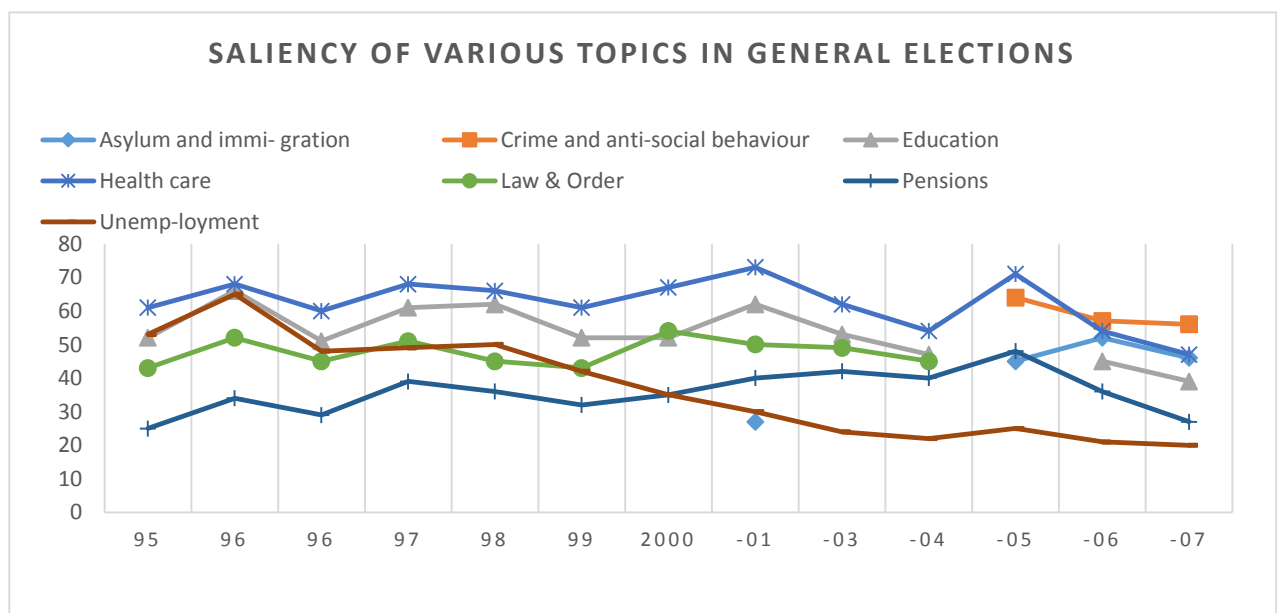
Graph 4 : Saliency of various topics in general elections – data IPSOS-MORI, graph Claire Taglione-Darmé

should also figure out the extent to which it is subject to political competition over the issues it

deals with and their saliency. To this regard, Table 3 presents a comparison of the first three topics (in terms of share) in each manifesto for the Conservatives, Labour and UKIP in 2001.

Table 3 confirms the fact that in 2001 UKIP was a niche party according to our definition, and that there are a few topics such as Political Authority ("References to the manifesto party's competence to govern and/or other party's lack of such competence. Also includes favourable mentions of the desirability of a strong and/or stable government in general" in the CMP handbook) which have been the focus of the mainstream parties in particular during the years 2000s. The Labour and Conservative Party were focusing on topics such as welfare, law and order or education, which according to Graph 4 which presents a compilation of polls results among the voters on their main preoccupation were high saliency issues.

b. The Liberal Democrats, working hard to be a mainstream party

We now have a clearer picture of what niche party's manifesto looks like in comparison to a mainstream party's one, and how it is reflected in the British political context. It is now possible to see whether the Liberal Democrats have been adopting a mainstream position within their political scene by evolving towards a more 'mainstream' position, developing the range of topics they are dealing with in general elections manifesto. A first observation from CMP database is that the Liberal Democrats' manifesto includes an increasing number of topics between 1992 and 2010, from 28 in 1992 to 39 in 2010, with an average of 36.2. Both the number and the trend are indicating a strategy, which brings the Liberal Democrat Party close to the Conservative and Labour than to a niche party. Secondly, the Liberal Democrats manifesto consists of an average of 806.8 occurrence per year. If we refer back to previous analysis, this is closer to the structure of a mainstream party (Conservatives and Labour, average of 959.6 and 1016.6) than of a niche party (UKIP had 360 occurrence in 2001). The Graph 5 goes in the same direction as presenting the structure of the Liberal Democrats' manifesto for General Election between 1992 and 2010, according to the same methodology as used

previously for Graph 3. Graph 5 shows that the balance in the treatment of topics treated is rather similar in various manifesto, even though the share of topics between Q1 and Q3 tends to be slightly growing. This shows a tendency to including more secondary topics (standing for less than 10% and more than 3% of the whole) in the party's manifesto.

Similarly, the average share for a topic is slightly (though not significantly) lower in 2010 than

CMP	Liberal Democrats
1992	1.Environmental Protection: Positive 2.Education Expansion* 3.Welfare State Expansion*
1997	1.Welfare State Expansion 2.Environmental Protection: Positive 3.Equality: Positive
2001	1.Political Authority*** 2.Environmental Protection: Positive 3.Welfare State Expansion***
2005	1.Political Authority*** 2.Non-economic Demographic Groups* 3.Environmental Protection: Positive
2010	1.Political Authority** 2.Technology and Infrastructure* 3.Environmental Protection: Positive

*: priority shared with the Labour Party;
**: priority shared with the Conservative Party;
***: priority shared with both.

Table 4 : The first three topics in the Liberal Democrats' manifesto (1992-2010)
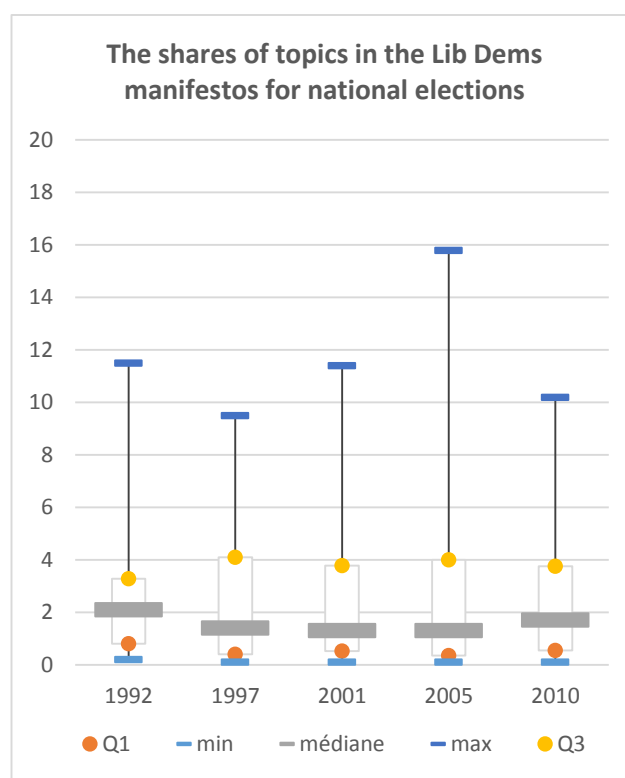
Graph 5 : The structure of the Liberal Democrats' manifesto Data : CMP ; Graph : Claire Taglione-Darmé

it was in 1992, from 2.95% to 2.57%, showing once more a higher number of secondary topics. It is also striking that in 1997, the highest share of a single topic in the manifesto is below 10% (9.5% in this case), a situation already observed when analysing the Labour Party's manifesto but not consistent with the strategy of a niche party. When dealing with the structure of the manifesto, the tendency is therefore to see a Liberal Democrats Party adopting a strategy, which

recalls more of the one of a mainstream party than the one of a niche party. This should now be confirmed by the substance of the manifesto, and the analysis of the main topics the Liberal Democrats have been pushing for in national elections. Table 4 presents the first three topics in the Liberal Democrats manifesto and compares them to the priorities of the other parties. In 1992, the Liberal Democrats were only sharing priorities with the Labour Party. Since then there have been a tendency to deal with topics shared by both the Conservatives and the Labour, as in 2001 (when UKIP did not share any priority with either of them), or after 2001 to deal with priorities shared by either the Conservatives or the Labour Party, but not anymore only one of them. What these findings show is first that the Liberal Democrats Party has been sharing priorities with the mainstream parties, showing some flexibility in adapting its strategy to the one of the main two

Parties who were dealing with high saliency issues. Indeed, if in 1997 the Liberal Democrats did not participate in the debate over Political Authority, the first priority of both Labour and Conservatives, they adopted it as a first priority in 2001. This shows that Liberal Democrats do care about the saliency of the topic they are dealing with, even seeking the political competition that goes with them. Liberal Democrats did not try to remain on the fringe of the British political
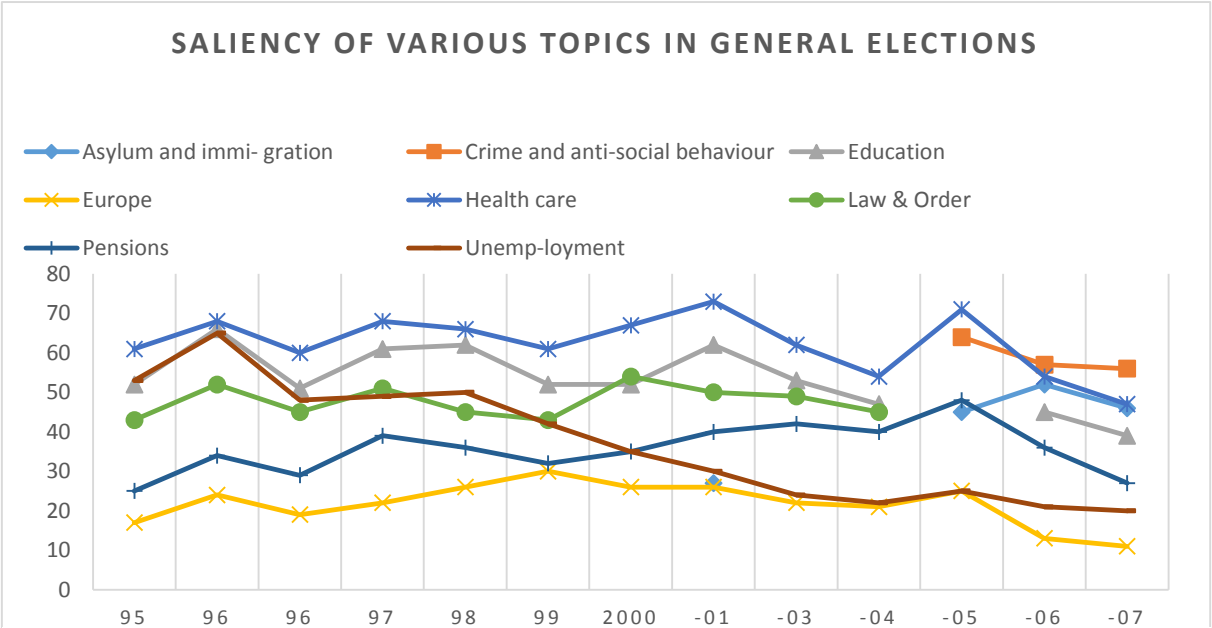
Graph 6 : The saliency of the European topic in General Elections; Source: Ipsos Mori ; Graph Claire Taglione-Darmé

life. As far as the European issue is concerned, the issue is that it is unlikely that mainstream parties will dedicate an important share of their manifesto to Europe. By going back to Graph 4 and adding to the database the answers on Europe as in Graph 6, it appears that Europe is a low-saliency issue to the electorate, which participates in explaining the small share of Europe topics in the main parties' manifesto as shown in Graph 7. This Graph builds on data from the Comparative manifesto project to compare the totality of references to Europe in the parties' manifesto. It appears clearly in this graphic that the Liberal Democrats have followed the dominant pattern of British politics, giving less and less space to dealing with Europe in their manifesto between 1992 and 2010. In 2005, the Liberal Democrats actually was the party who spoke the less about Europe in its manifesto. This is in the line of the idea of the Liberal Democrats as a party positioning itself according to a mainstream political strategy, echoing the high saliency preoccupation of the electorate in a catch-all approach of the elections.
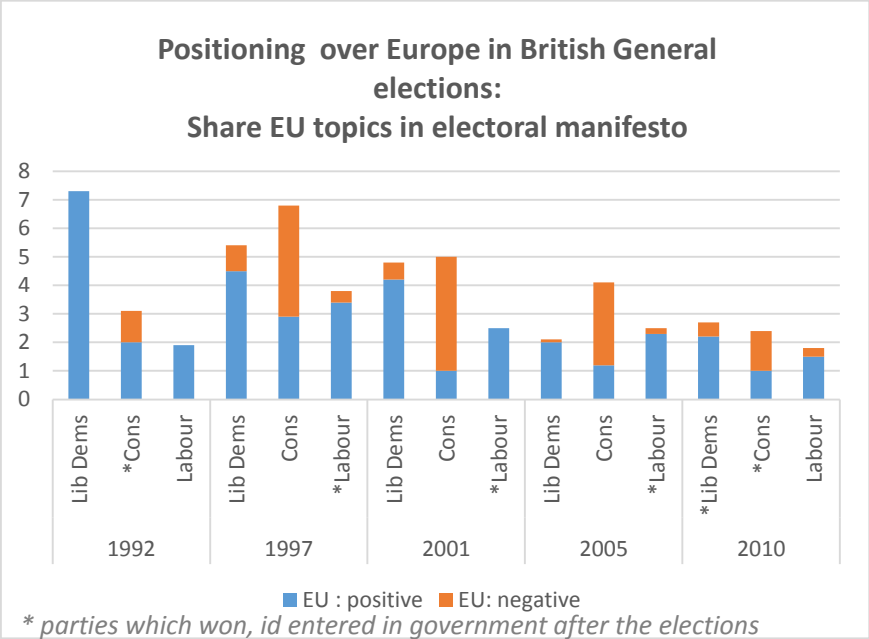
Graph 7 : Positioning over Europe in British elections; Source: CMP; Graph Claire Taglione-Darmé

Similarly enough, the fact of sharing priorities with each party separately might be revealing of a will to appear as a central, pivotal party within the British political spectrum. This could be further confirmed by the study of the slogans of the three parties (Table 5) and an overview of

a Left/Right positioning of the parties over time thanks to the CMP database (Graph 8). Bearing in mind the limited input of slogans as a picture of a party's strategy, it appears nonetheless in Table 5 that the Liberal Democrats have been using slogans more and more aimed at positioning the party as playing on the same lines as the Labour and Conservative Party. In 2005, the Liberal Democrats use the word 'Alternative' in their slogan, which refers to the idea of a choice between several possibilities rather than to a party standing on its own political agenda. Even more striking is the fact that the Liberal Democrats' slogans refers increasingly to the idea of 'fairness' and to the theme of economy, themes that as described in Table 3 are used by mainstream parties. Coupled with Graph 8 on left and right positioning of these parties within the British political spectrum, one can conclude that the Liberal Democrats' strategy has been to maintain the statute of a pivot more than the one of using a niche.

	Lib Dems	Conservatives	Labour
2015	'Stronger Economy, Fairer Society'	'For Hardworking People'	n/a.
2010	'Change That Works For You. Building A Fairer Britain'	'vote for change'	'A future fair for all'
2005	'The REAL alternative'	'Are you thinking what we're thinking' replaced by 'Taking a stand on the issues that matter'	'Britain Forward not back' replaced by 'If you value it, vote for it'
2001	'A real chance for real change'	'time for common sense'	'Ambitions for Britain'
1997	'make the difference'	'You Can Only Be Sure With The Conservatives'	'new Labour because Britain deserves better' 'Britain will be better with new Labour'
1992	'Changing Britain for good'	'The Best Future for Britain'	'It's time to get Britain working again'

Table 5 : The parties' slogans in General Elections

The general trend for Labour and Conservative Parties was to get closer to the centre of the political exchequer. The Liberal Democrats have also been getting closer to the right and maintaining, despite the huge shift of the Labour Party under the impulse of New Labour, their

position as a party in the centre, between the two dominant parties.

The conclusion from this demonstration should be to validate and deepen the idea that since they have merged, the Lib Dems have evolved towards a more 'mainstream' position, developing the range of topics they are dealing with in general elections manifesto. It has been shown that the Liberal Democrats have included a growing number of topics within their political manifesto since they have merged in 1988, with an increasing interest for discussing the high-saliency priorities of the two dominant parties as well as their own. Plus, this relative flexibility in their positioning was further confirmed by an overview of the left/right divide within the UK political spectrum, where the Liberal Democrats appear to be willing to stand in the centre. This idea of a pivotal party standing between the Labour and Conservative Party is also reflected in the evolution of the Liberal Democrats' slogan over time, in comparison to the ones of the Conservative and Labour parties. The number of similarities between the political
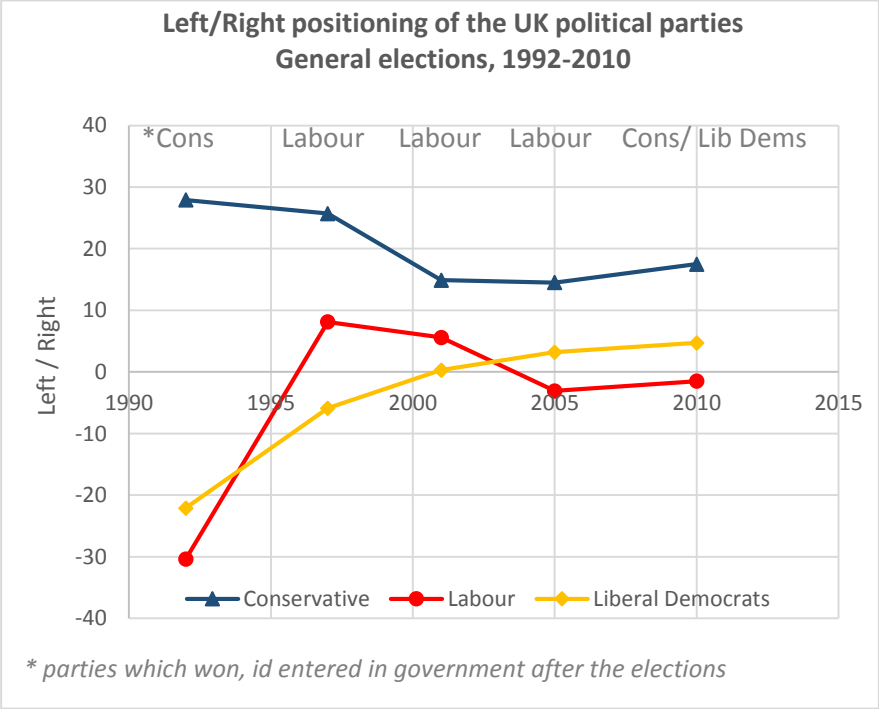
Graph 8 : Left/Right positioning of the British political parties in General Elections (1992-2010) Source: CMP; Graph: Claire Taglione-Darmé

strategies of the Liberal Democrats and the Labour and Conservative Party, and the equal

number of disparities between the Liberal Democrats' strategy and the one of UKIP in 2001, confirm the idea that the Liberal Democrats are closer to a 'mainstream' position that to being a 'niche' party. The Liberal Democrats always saw themselves as a Party that was meant to be in the centre of British politics, challenging the two big parties on their ground. In order to stay relevant and appeal to the voters, the Liberal Democrats therefore needed to deal with topics that interest the voter: topics with high saliency. The fact that 'no one cares about Europe' (Ashdown, 2000) meant that this topic was seen as irrelevant to the Party's strategy. However this is not the final point to the explanation of the political strategy the Liberal Democrats have developed despite their European persuasion. As Graph 9 will show with the dominant share of negative references to Europe in the Conservative's party manifesto, even mainstreams parties can decide to position themselves on a given topic.

C. The issue of valence: coping with the centripetal force of British politics

The British political scene has been characterized in the recent years by a strong centripetal force, with parties coming closer to the centre of the political spectrum (graph 8 and Bentley, 2007). Because of this dynamic, the place of valence rather than positioning has become more and more key in determining to whom the voters would cast their vote. The term valence refers to the idea that voters will focus on competence in a given area rather than positioning on a specific topic to choose who they vote for. When parties are getting more and more alike in terms of idea, competence is indeed a criteria that yet can be used to differentiate them (Sherrington, 2006). Because of this dynamic, positioning issues have become less prominent in British politics. Therefore the question of Europe, as a risky positioning issue, could have lead the Liberal Democrats to lose votes they were trying to appeal to in a catch-all manner. the Liberal Democrats are no exception to the rule. The European theme reached its peak in their manifesto back in 1992, searching the relatively low score of 7.3% of the manifesto. The increase between 2005 and 2010 is residual (0.6 points). The positioning aspect of the European

question in the British electorate between 1992 and 2010 results was one of the reasons for the low commitment of the Liberal Democrats to stand for Europe, even when their political opponents get critical towards the European Union.

a. Leaving the floor to increasingly Eurosceptic Conservatives

Indeed, as reflected in Graph 9, the Conservative anti-Europe and anti-Euro campaign of the late 1990s early 2000s did not impact the decline of the share of pro-European occurrences in the Liberal Democrats manifesto – quite the opposite. Rather, CMP started referencing a slight increase in the number of negative reference to European in the Liberal Democrats manifesto.
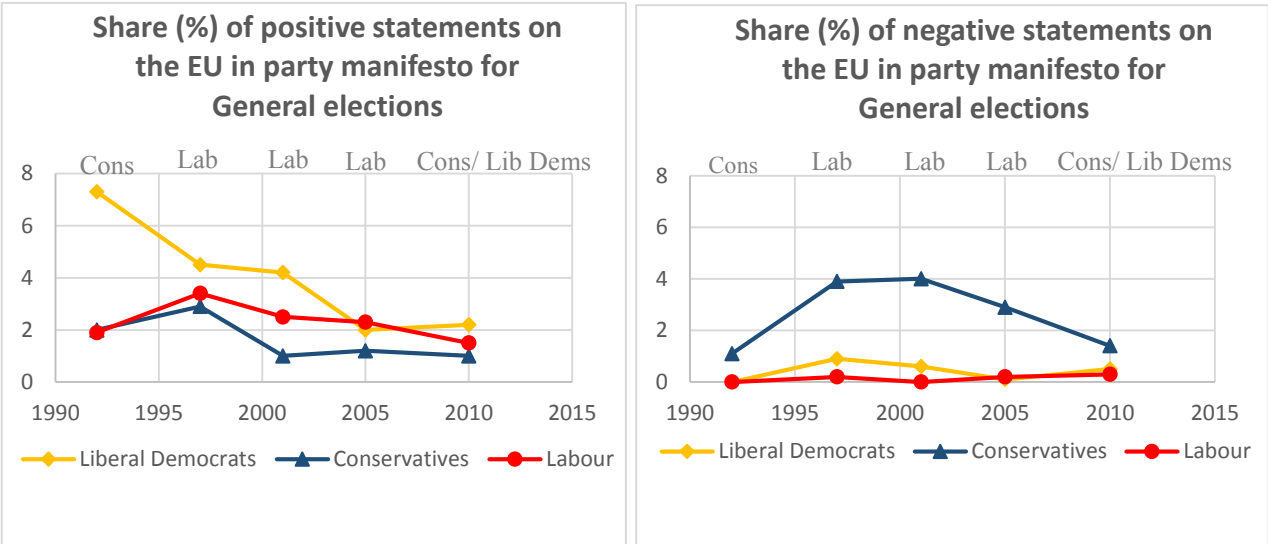
Graph 9: The parties' positioning over Europe in General elections (1992-2010); Source: CMP; Graph Claire Taglione-Darmé

Generally speaking, Graph 9 shows that the difference in the positioning over Europe among the three parties has become virtually non-existent, especially in 2010. However Graph 9 also shows an anomaly in the reasoning by showing that it is actually possible, even for a mainstream party, to position himself on a given issue. The rationale behind the Conservative Party's leadership choice to do so is another illustration of the importance of priorities in determining a party's political strategy and explains why it was then seen as a possible strategy by the Liberal Democrats.

The first reason why the Conservatives adopted a tough line on Europe was because they were

facing internal tensions that had been extensively growing since 1992, when the rebellions which had been growing within the party since the 1980s (A. Alexandre) became vocal in Westminster on European questions after the debates on the Maastricht Treaty and the Black Thursday on 16 September 1992 and the retrieval of the British pound from the European Monetary System. If the number of Eurosceptic rebels was then rather small, being only twenty of them, it was enough to jeopardize the short twenty-one seats majority of the Major government (A. Alexandre, 2010). After the resounding defeat of the Conservatives in the 1997 General Elections, the Conservative Party's leadership needed to keep the party together and find a new dynamic to restore its members in their determination, another reason to use a differentiating topic like Europe to highlight distinctiveness. A report was conducted by Geoffrey Evans based on polls made amongst the members of the party. He came up with the answer that adopting a Eurosceptic line was the best strategy for the Conservative Party. After that, campaigns against the euro were being driven by the leadership, and candidates were chosen to be Eurosceptic (A. Alexandre 2010). In 2001, when the Conservative anti-Europe campaigning was at its peak according to Graph 9, Eurosceptic represented the majority of the Conservatives seats in Parliament. Ian Duncan Smith, who took part to the Anti-Maastricht rebellion in 1991, was elected as leader. Being pro-European became a reason to be pointed at (A. Alexandre) and even though pro-European within the party like Ken Clarke tried to fight back they could not reverse the trend. Being Eurosceptic was too useful to the Conservative Party at the time. Indeed, the third reason that make the Conservatives' party leadership willing to adopt a tough line on Europe was that it was a differentiating topic from the Labour government (A. Alexandre 2010), who following Tony Blair's New Labour line was then much more pro-European than it has been before and who was negotiating the Nice and Constitution Treaties, making the issue more topical. Adopting an anti-European line was therefore useful in terms of finding a new dynamic after electoral backlash; uniting most of the members behind

the leadership, to at least assure sustainability of the coherence of the Parliamentary party: and make sure the Conservatives would indeed be seen as a strong opposition to the governing Labour Party. None of these reasons could apply to the Liberal Democrats, who despite their European persuasion left the Conservatives unchallenged.

The Liberal Democrats, on the contrary, were not concerned about their internal cohesion to the point of making it a priority for their political strategy. On the contrary, they were focused on reaching out to voters by being seen as a pivotal party. This left little space for positioning, especially on Europe. Indeed, there was at this time a mismatch between the Liberal Democrats' members' persuasion on Europe and the one of their voters. Europe was the one topic where the difference between what the Liberal Democrats thought and what their electorate did was the highest (Whiteley, 2006). Adopting a pro-European stance was therefore taking the risk of losing votes without being assured of gaining any, since pro-Europeans could then also turn the New Labour to cast their votes. Indeed, last but not least, the fact the Liberal Democrats were aiming at building an alternative opposition as illustrated earlier in this work meant that they had no interest in adopting the Conservative's line for the sake of being in opposition to Labour either.

b. The Liberal democrats and Europe until 2010: don't ask, don't tell

In its quest for broadening its electoral base, due to its internal cohesion and because of the relative struggle that was taking place between New Labour and the Conservative on the question of Europe, the Liberal Democrats chose not to adopt a vocal pro-European line, and mainly remained silence on the question until 2010 in a "don't ask, don't tell" manner. The search for relevance, the objective of being a mainstream party plus the ongoing lack of saliency of the issue in the context of the valence system of British politics made the Liberal Democrats not be particularly keen on standing for Europe within the UK political spectrum. The formulation is even a euphemism of the true situation. Not only have the Liberal Democrats not

been keen on standing for Europe; they have also let unchallenged the anti-European stance of the one of the two dominant parties, the Conservative. Being pivotal, relevant and challenging the mainstream parties on their grounds have made the Liberal Democrats a catch-all party. It has also led to hiding their European persuasion, because they were afraid positioning themselves in favour of Europe would mean losing votes.

What happened next was that by focusing on being as close as possible to the criteria of the catch-all party in British politics in the years 2000s, meaning respecting the valence system, and building an alternative opposition, the Liberal Democrats actually did get closer to the Conservatives, especially after the Orange Book was published in reaction to Charles Kennedy's leadership. In 1997, Liberal Democrats deputies in Parliament were voting 80% of the time with Labour. In 2010, they were voting 80% of the time against them (Hazell and Young, 2012). By participating in the opposition to a same government, and because the Liberal Democrats were downplaying differences were they existed in order to fit in the British political system, the evolution of British politics in 2000s made the 2010 coalition possible, even with the Eurosceptic Conservatives.

II.   The coalition and the Liberal Democrats' political prospects: the limits of a strategy, not of an ambition

It has been shown that for twenty years, Liberal Democrats had been struggling to make sustainable a third party in a two-party system. However, they diverged from the strategy they had been setting up since 1988 when they decided to adopt an openly pro-European line. The analysis of what happened between 2010 and 2013 with the entry into government shall therefore explain the rationale behind a radical change in the political strategy of a small party in a coalition government for the first time.

As a third party, the opportunity of getting into government in 2010 was a much awaited prospect. The Liberal Democrats' leadership did try to get the most out of the Coalition deal in order to protect their party but were not safe from making mistakes. Most notably, the Liberal Democrats' failures to change the British electoral system for a more proportional one and to distance itself from harmful coalition politics are in this regard revealing of the balance of power between a junior, unexperienced partner and a senior one in a coalition, and of the limits of the deal negotiated in 2010 to safeguard the Liberal Democrats from electoral backlash. Despite everything, the Liberal Democrats remain convinced their place lies in government as a pivotal party. If the goal has not changed, the dynamics and obstacles have been altered by the course of events and therefore the Liberal Democrats must renew their strategy to achieve their objectives.

A. The government threshold: a much awaited marriage of convenience for a British third party

In order to understand how the decision to form a coalition has been made, it is necessary to look back at the results of the 2010 General Elections, when "the Conservatives won 306 seats, Labour won 258 and the Liberal Democrats 57" (House of Commons, Research paper10/36 p.1) meaning the Conservatives had gained 96 seats compared to 2005; that the Labour Party had lost 90 of them and that the Liberal Democrats had lost five of their seats. Graph 10 presents
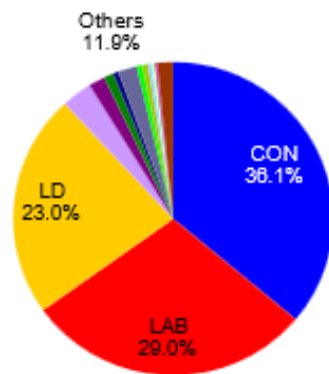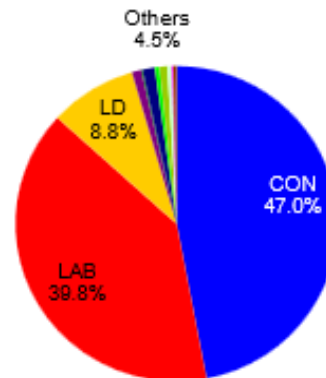
Graph 10 : The results of the 2010 General Elections; Source House of Commons

the results in terms of share of votes and share of seats in the Commons by party. The outcome

of these elections was that no clear majority could build a self-sufficient government. However,

going into coalition was not the sole option on the table; it was even a risky one. Indeed,

research has shown that going into coalition is a bet for political parties, as only 5% of the

parties taking part into a coalition have won altogether in the subsequent elections, where 66%

of them lose votes (Budens and Hino, quoting Rose & Mackenzie 1983). Plus this risk is not

easy to pre-evaluate as there is no evidence it is linked to either the party's size, type or its

newness into government (Budens and Hino, 2010). Therefore the bet was a risk for both the

Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. The two parties had to sort out their pros and cons to

bargain a better deal for themselves in the coalition, and were both hoping they would be able

to take the most of the advantages of being into government even to the disadvantage of their

coalition partner.

a. Explaining David Cameron's "big, open and comprehensive offer" to the Liberal
   Democrats: alternative scenarii for 2010

Building a coalition was not the only option available to the Conservative Party; however it

might have been the sole option of its leader. If they had not been willing to join a coalition, the

Conservative could have either run in a second round of elections; form a minority government; or agree on a deal in the vein of the Lib-Lab pact of the 1970s, when the Liberal party was supportive of the Labour government in the Chamber even though the Liberals were not invited to take part into the government. Building a coalition was therefore "a coalition of choice" (Heywood, 2013). The coalition was a better deal for the Conservative party than a highly unstable minority government, which would have prevented it from implementing its policies, especially when more than twenty seats were missing to gain a majority. It was particularly true in 2010, when due to the difficult economic crisis the Conservatives were planning on implementing tough economic reforms which would require a supportive Chamber to be carried out. The maths and the political calculus were against this solution. However, the idea of a second election is not as easily ruled out as the one of a minority government. Indeed, being the main party of opposition, it is most likely that the Conservatives would have won a majority in a second election run for instance during the autumn 2010. Nonetheless an offer was made to rather build a coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

In order to clarify this possible paradox, it is worth taking into account two elements. First, the results of the elections were not good at all for the Conservatives; second, the person who was responsible for this poor results, and who would therefore be the first to be threatened in case of a call for a change of leadership, was also the one who was able to come up with a "big, open offer" to the Liberal Democrats. He was saving his own political sake at the same time. On the first point, in 2010 "the Conservatives polled 10.7 million votes, 36.0% of the total. This compares with 32.4% of votes in 2005. The Conservative vote share (was) higher than in the previous three elections, but lower than any other post-war election, except October 1974 when they had 35.7% of the vote in an election in which they were second" (HoC research paper 10/36). In other words, the outcome of the 2010 General Elections was one of the worst results for the Conservative Party since the end of World War II, and this despite having been the main

opposition party for more than ten years – since 1997. The main person likely to be blamed for this result was the party's leader, namely David Cameron, whose personal political survival was at stake. To put it plainly, the Conservative Party might have won in a second round of elections a few months later in 2010; but it is also likely that they would have done so without David Cameron. Having received the authorization from the Queen to try and establish a workable government, David Cameron had therefore every reason to try every combination to get his party into a sustainable government, with him at its head. Negotiating the coalition with the Liberal Democrats was therefore a last-chance round for David Cameron. Furthermore, the centre-right party also had another added value. Elected in 2005 as leader of the party, David Cameron was indeed representative of a certain part of the Conservative Party that is very liberal in terms of the economy (Alexandre, 2013). Working with the Liberal Democrats could therefore also be seen by David Cameron as an opportunity to control the most difficult elements of his party by placing them in the situation of having to support the more moderate policies of a right-of-the-centre, coalition government.

Another element that could explain Conservative party's leadership's decision to go into coalition was that the bargain made around the coalition was actually very good for the Conservatives. The coalition was indeed based on a Coalition Agreement and a Programme for Government, co-signed by the two parties and which would serve as a basis for cooperation. Even though the Liberal Democrats could indeed claim they had managed to get 75% of their pledges from the manifesto in the agreement, many of these actually were pledges that were shared by the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats ahead of the elections. As shown by Hazell and Young, in absolute terms there was more Conservative input in the coalition document than Liberal one, simply because the Conservatives had a bigger manifesto (Hazell and Young, 2012, 37). The two authors conclude, after studying in details the composition of the two documents, that "the Programme for Government was strongly Conservative

flavoured", especially as far as economy is concerned since Liberal Democrats have tended to focus on "minor policies" in getting their way through the negotiations (Hazell and Young, 2012, 40). This observation bears a double interest for this study; first, it reinforces the impression that the coalition was for the Conservatives an occasion to have their economic programme being carried out in a context where they would share the blame with another party. Secondly, it also questions the limits of the Liberal Democrats' ability to negotiate a fair deal for their entry into a government they had not been part of for decades. This latest observation
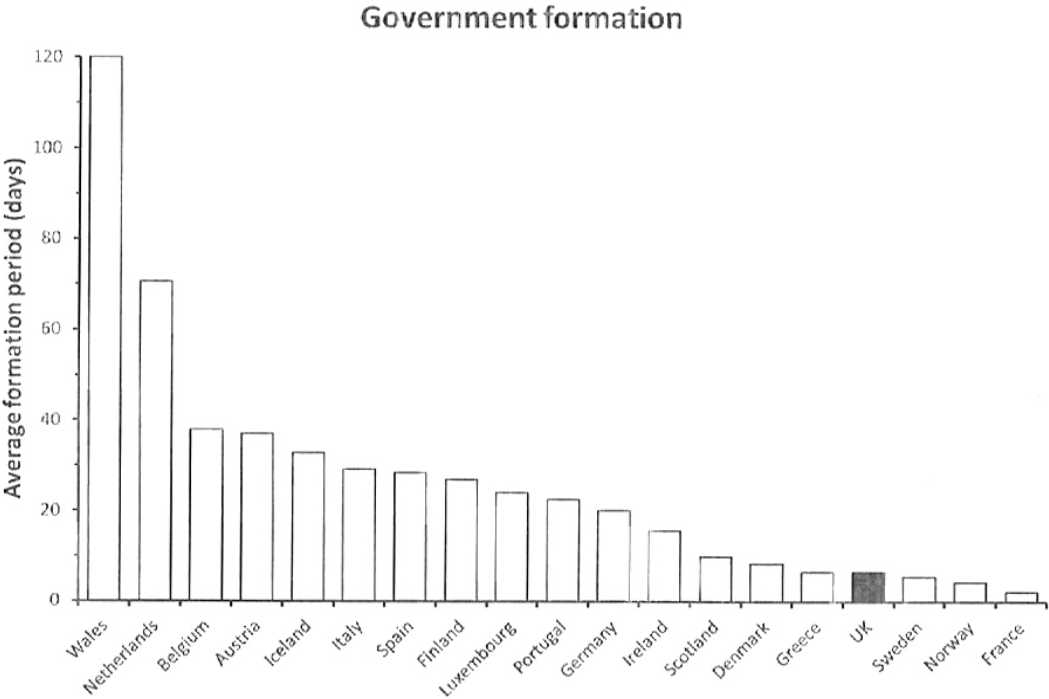
Graph 11 : The average coalition formation time in Europe, from Hazell and Young, 2012

particularly makes sense when taking into account the fact that, despite the unusualness of having a coalition in the Westminster system, the amount of time it took to form the government has been remarkably short. This is what is made striking in Graph 11 from the work by Hazell and Young, which shows that the length of government formation in the aftermaths of the 2010 General Election was among the quickest in Europe. The average formation period for government are usually much higher in the rest of Europe, and most notably in some regions of the United Kingdom as well – it was in Wales it took the longest to form a coalition government,

at the time between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. This finding might also indicate that the Conservatives have been able to play around with their less experienced partner in government. With this possibility in mind, the rationale behind joining the government was an even more risky bet for the Liberal Democrats. Despite the risk of political backlash and despite the risk of being used by the Conservatives as a shield for tough economic reforms, they chose to take these risks and joined the coalition.

b. The Liberal Democrats: a newly governing party

In order to understand this decision, it is useful to remember that despites being the heirs to an old ideology, inherited from Gladstone, the Liberal Democrats is a newly governing party (Kris Deschouwer, 2008). Not so much in terms of age or organisation, even though the party in itself is quite recent indeed, but in terms of being into government. Most importantly, as any newly governing party, the Liberal Democrats had to make the decision to cross the "threshold of government", which is not an easy one to make for a party (Deschouwer quoting Müller and Strom, 2008), with the risk of not being able to convince the voter getting into government was a good idea in the first place (Deschouwer, 2008). In the case of the Liberal Democrats, when trying to figure out the exact rationale behind their decision to get into coalition, it is not always easy to differentiate the policy and the office-seeker dimensions from one another. Indeed, when interviewing Liberal Democrats from various layers of the party with different degrees of responsibility within it on the reasons that made the Liberal Democrats join the coalition, two answers are being given almost systematically and show the tension between two different rationales. The first answer given is that the coalition government happened because of "the maths", meaning a very rational approach in terms of share of seats in Parliament. The second answer emphasizes the importance of "the ambition" of the Liberal Democrats' leadership for themselves, meaning a possibly less rational approach. Indeed, many of the people involved in negotiating the coalition deal happened to be in government as ministers once it was settled

(Hazell and Young, 2012). The question can therefore be asked of the extent to which joining the coalition was a rational choice for the Liberal Democrats.

Incentives for a newly governing party to join a government are related to its electoral dynamism, with parties having suffered political loss recently or a fragile electoral boost being more likely to cross the government threshold to restore a positive dynamic between their party and the electorate (Budens and Hiro, 2008); to the structure of the political system it belongs to, and especially to the relationship between the executive and the legislative branch with a party more likely to go into government when the executive monopolises the policy-making process (Bolleyer, 2008); and to the extent to which the party thinks it can control the electoral backlash of getting into government (Budens and Hiro, 2008). We will now see how these criteria fit in the Liberal Democrats' decision to join the coalition in 2010.

As far as the criterion of electoral dynamism is concerned, it appears when detailing the Liberal Democrats' performances at the European, national and local level that the party was struggling to regain a positive dynamic. In General Elections, the Liberal Democrats had been winning
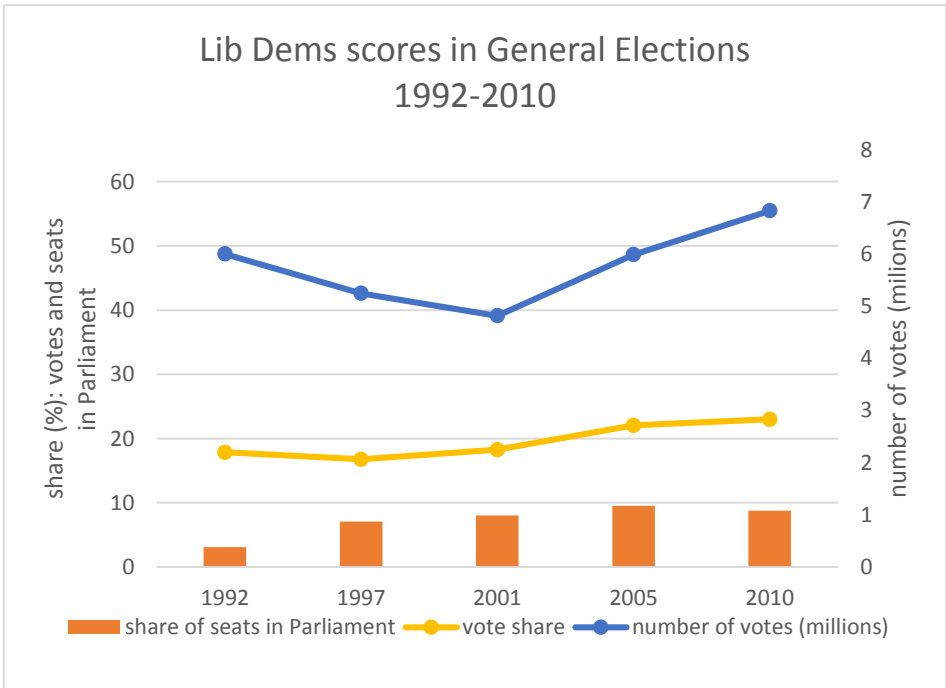
Graph 12: Liberal Democrats' scores in General Elections ; Data CMP and House of Commons : Graph : Claire Taglione-Darmé

some votes in absolute terms since 1997 but they tended to lose seats anyway according to the data available thanks to the CMP and at the House of Commons and presented in Graph 12. The First-pass-the-post (FPTP) electoral system only allows for those who gather the majority of votes on their name in a given constituency to get a seat in Parliament. Highly damaging for smaller parties, it had been preventing the Liberal Democrats from making a major breakthrough in the houses of Westminster for decades by blocking the correlation between the number of votes casted nationally and the number of seats the party won. For instance, between 1992, 1997 and 2001, the number of votes casted for the Liberal Democrats diminished in absolute terms and were stagnant in relative terms. Nonetheless, they gained more seats in Westminster following the targeting strategy set out in the first part of this work. Reversely, between 2005 and 2010 the system played against them as they gained more vote in absolute terms but received fewer seats in Parliament. In General Elections, the Liberal Democrats lacked therefore regularity, and most importantly stability.

What is more, Liberal Democrats were not going through ecstatic times at the local level either

Graph 13 Percentage of local councillors who are Liberal Democrats ; Source : http://www.markpack.org.uk
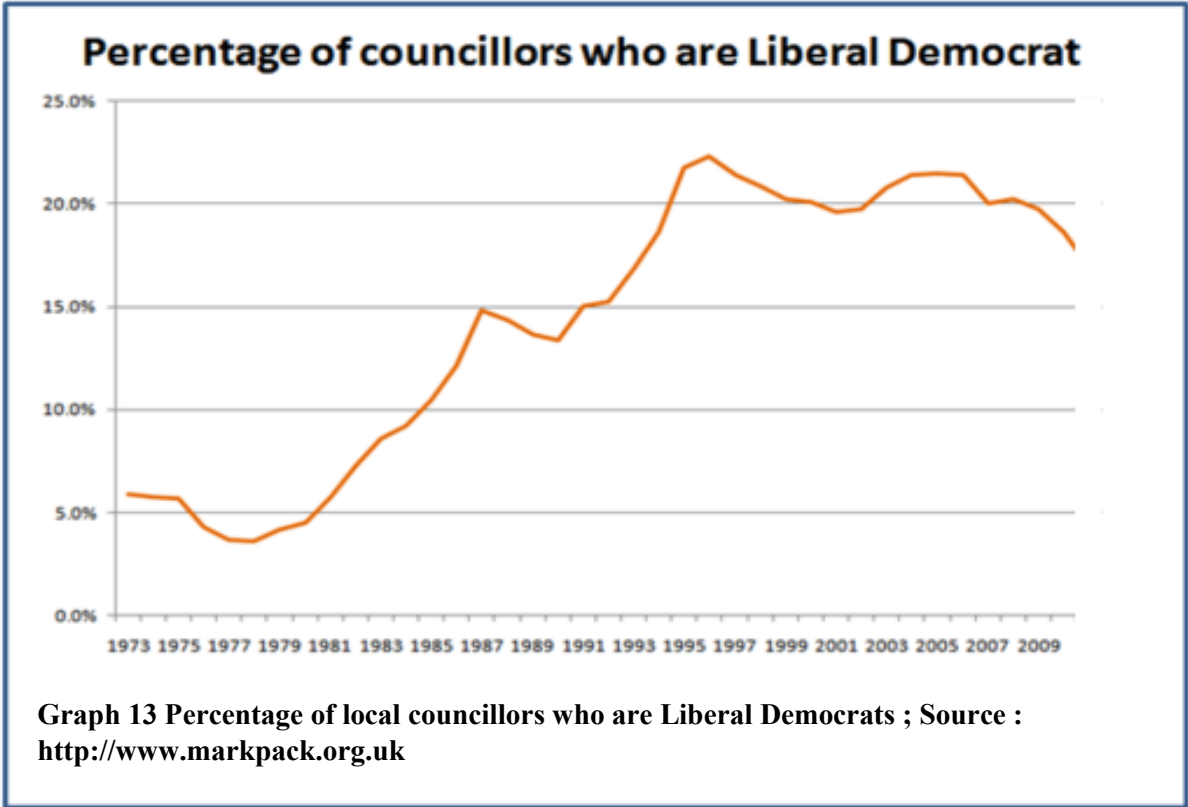
as reflected in Graph 13 which shows the evolution of the percentage of local councillors who were Liberal Democrats since 1973. Once more, the 1990s had been particularly good for the Liberal Democrats in this regard, but the dynamic had been lost since the early 2000s, with the party having its share of councillors at best stabilised and at worse decreasing.

If struggling with an unfavourable electoral system is one thing, the Liberal Democrats' lack of electoral dynamism was not limited to structural barriers. The Liberal Democrats had indeed failed to take the most out of the Proportional Representation (PR) system that was introduced in 1999 for European elections. Graph 14 presents the votes received, their share in the total number of votes casts and the seats won by the Liberal Democrats in European elections since 1994. It shows that the introduction of PR was indeed a major step for the Liberal democrats in bringing their number of MEPs closer to their real level of support among the population. Apart from that, the Liberal Democrats have not dramatically increased their support in European elections since 1999; on the contrary, the votes cast for their party, the share of total votes they represent and the number of seats it represents have tended to decrease since 1997.What makes
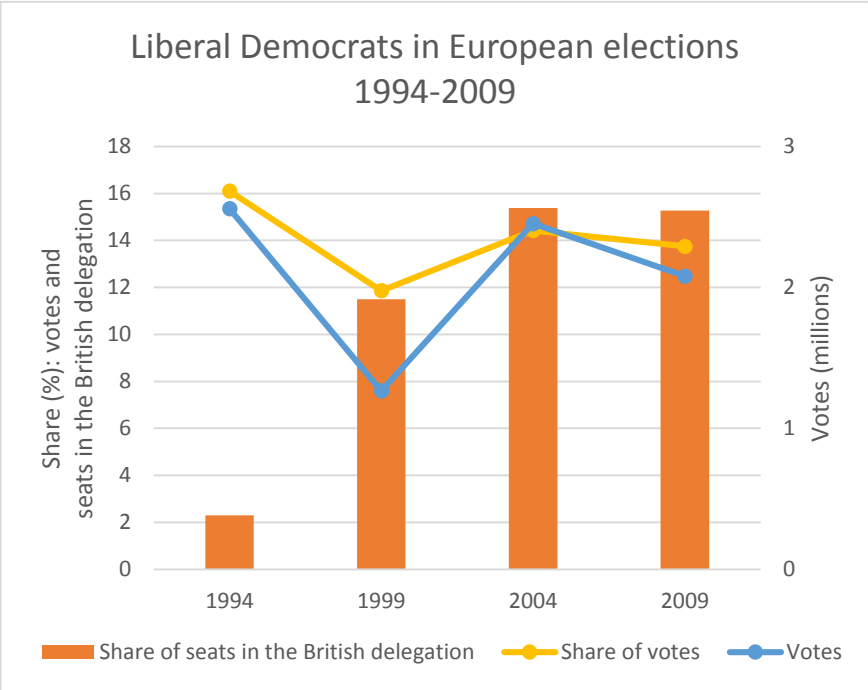
Graph 144: Liberal Democrats in European elections (1994-2009);
Data European Election Database ; Graph : Claire Taglione-Darmé

it even more frustrating for the Liberal Democrats is the fact that in the meanwhile, PR was beneficial to other parties which gained a lot more seats in the European Parliament between 1999 and 2009. As shown in Graph 15 from the House of Commons library, this was particularly true of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which in 1999 barely had any seats but in 2004 and 2009 gained more MEPs than the Liberal Democrats. To put it plainly, Liberal Democrats had been fighting hard to ensure PR would be applied to the European Elections; and they were not the main beneficiary of the reform.
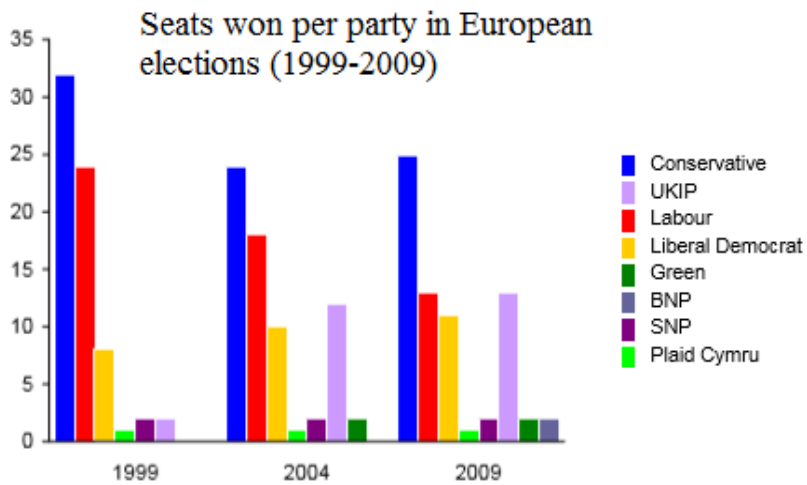
Graph 15 : Seats won per party in European elections (1997-2009); Source House of Commons

Another reason in terms of political trend was that the occasion to be in government was still linked to a relative electoral boost which they could not be sure to reiterate, say in a second General elections in the autumn 2010. Indeed, the way the campaign took place in 2010 shows that if Nick Clegg did a very good impression at the first TV broadcast debate between the heads of party in the United Kingdom, this was not sufficient to gain the adhesion of a majority of voters to the Liberal Democrats' ideas. When looking at the voting intentions in the run up to the 2010 General elections, as done in Graph 16 (BES), it appears that the Liberal Democrats was the party with the biggest amplitude in terms of voting intention between their minimum and their maximum between April and May 2010. Graph 17 shows that there was a strong

correlation between the voters' choice of the party leader conducting the best campaign for the elections and the voting intentions. Indeed, the amplitude between the minimum and the maximum amount of voters saying Nick Clegg, as the Liberal Democrats' leader, was conducting the best campaign is dramatic, going from less than one voter in ten naming Nick
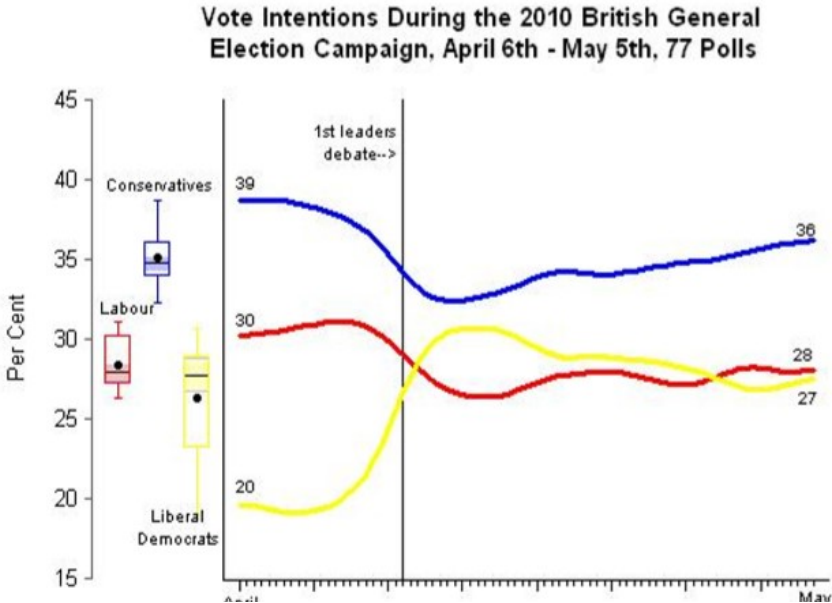
Vote Intentions During the 2010 British General Election Campaign, April 6th - May 5th, 77 Polls

Graph 16 Voting intention during the 2010 British General Election Campaign; Source: BES report on 2010 General Elections

Party Leader Conducting Best Election Campaign, April 7th - May 5th Rolling Campaign Survey

Note: two-day moving averages
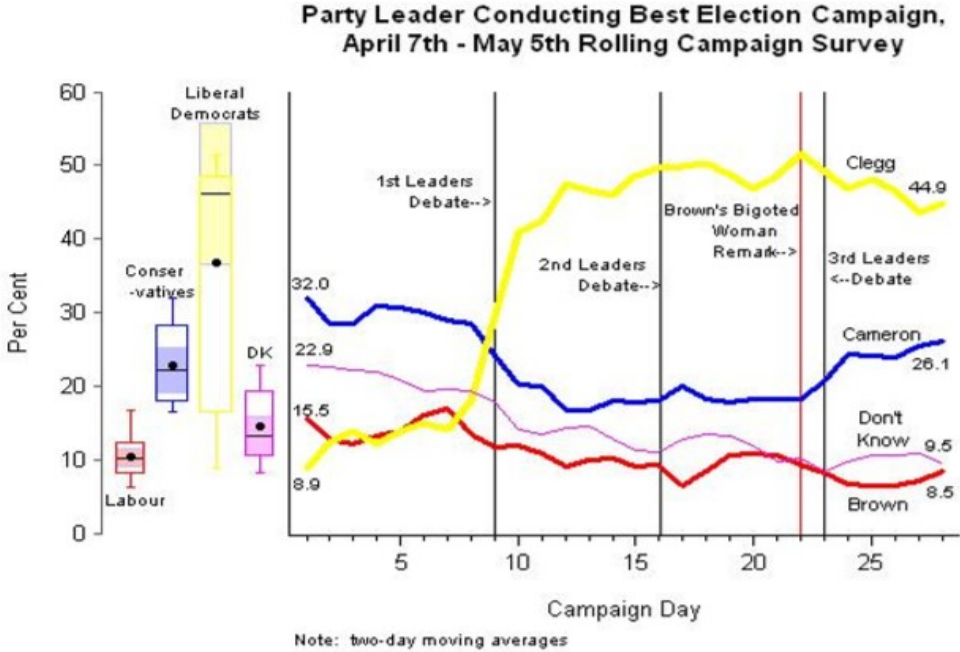
Graph 157 : Party leader conducting the best election campaign ; Source: BES report on 2010 General Elections

sClegg to more than one in two voter referring to him when asked this question. This "Cleggmania" was mainly due to a novel exercise within the frame of British electoral campaign, meaning the TV broadcasted debate between the leaders of the three main political parties. Graph 18 from BES shows that Nick Clegg did by far the best impression in the first round of these debates – there were three of them – by gaining the preference of almost eight watchers in ten. This resulted in the boost in the positive image of the party that was commented above. This means that first the Liberal Democrats had indeed known an electoral boost which is hard to reiterate compared to their pre-campaign levels in the polls. However this boost was more linked to the campaigning of the party and the party's leader than the content of the Liberal Democrats' programme, which explain that in the end as shown previously in Graph 12 the Liberal Democrats did not gain a significant share of new seats in Parliament and actually lose some between 2005 and 2010.

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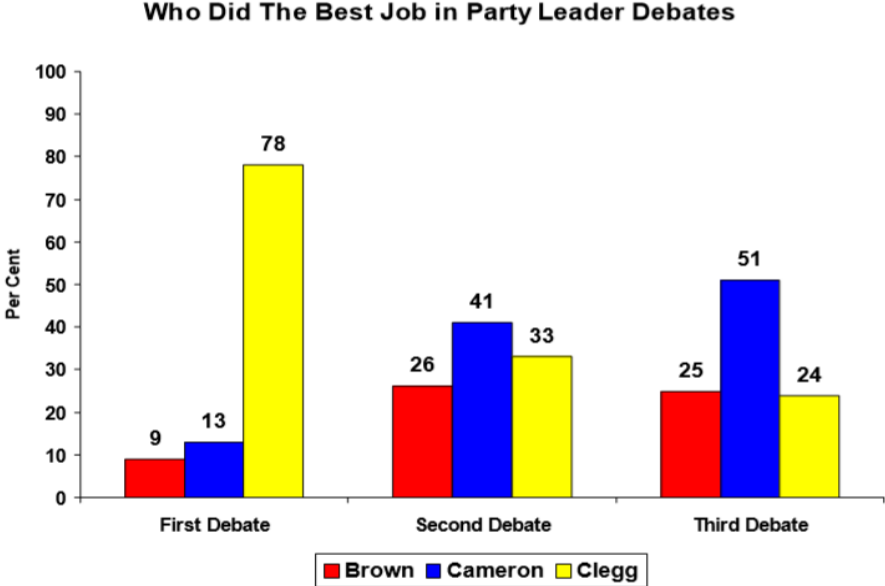
Graph 18 : Who did the best job in party leader debates; Source: BES report on 2010 General Elections

The criterion of electoral dynamism therefore played in favour of the Liberal Democrats joining the coalition. The second criterion, related to the structural relation between the executive and

he legislative, did as well. The Liberal Democrats were seaking to "expand within the public realm from legislative to executive" (Bolleyer, 2008 p.21). The British system meant that despite the efforts the party was putting in being relevant, it still had a limited impact when seating in Westminster. First because they were failing to significantly increase their number of MPs, but most importantly because Westminster itself is not a strong institution which visibly and efficiently oppose government (Russel and Benton, 2009). The Liberal Democrats are a small party in a rather weak Parliament. Therefore there was no incentive for the Liberal Democrats to limit themselves to keep on playing the role of an alternative opposition when the occasion to switch to a more influential position came up. The other alternative of a system such as the one adopted in 1974, when the Liberals were backing the Labour government in the Chamber but were not part of the government, was reminded as lacking stability and most importantly to the Liberal Democrats as not giving any visibility to their frontbenchers (interview D). Because of these constraints, it only makes sense the Liberal Democrats were willing to seize the opportunity of crossing the line between the legislative and the executive when the occasion finally came up.

The momentum also came in terms of programmatic compatibility of the two parties. If David Cameron was representative of a more centrist part of the Conservative party, Nick Clegg and many members of his team were also representative of an economically liberal part of the Liberal Democrats, the Orange Bookers – from the title of the *Orange Book*, which was a call for a more liberal approach to economy within the Liberal Democrats party. Therefore, it is also likely that the Liberal Democrats' leadership saw political advantages to working with the Conservative, and that political contingency played a part in reaching the coalition deal (Hazell and Young, 2012).

The party had therefore a rational reason to go in government, an occasion to do so and its

leadership had a political compatibility with their potential partners. In addition to all this, the Liberal Democrats went into government convinced they had done the maximum to limit the risks of electoral backlash for their party and that they had maximised the party benefits of getting into government. In terms of risks, the stakes were high for the Liberal Democrats. First because parties find it hard to gain in subsequent elections if benefited from a boost (Budens and Hino, 2008) and second because with incumbency, they were entering the establishment and therefore risked losing a certain range of voters they benefited from in the past (Budens and Hino, 2008). On the other hand, the risks were limited because the Liberal Democrats, being a centre party, belong to a category of parties who sometimes suffer less from incumbency compared to the other parties (Budens and Hino, 2008). Plus, joining the coalition was an occasion for the Liberal Democrats to strengthen the cohesion of the party's leadership after a tensed 2009 autumn conference due to division within the leadership on the question of tuition fees. In addition, when doing their maths the Liberal Democrats could be satisfied: they had in proportion more cabinet ministers in government than they had deputies in the House of Commons (see annex 4 from Hazell and Young, 2012), ant they were present in almost all the cabinets (see Annex 5 from Hazell and Young, 2012). Also, they had indeed managed to get 75% of their manifesto in the Programme for Government (Hazell and Young, 2012).

However, the possibility of explaining rationally the decision to get into government does not indicate that personal ambition played no part in the process: the decision to go in government was taken by those who would be in cabinets as ministers. The special conference called on 16th May 2010 was rather meant to acknowledge the fact the party was getting into government than voting on the idea itself. The decision had already been taken ahead of the meeting by the leadership on 11th May by the Federal Party Committee and the parliamentary party, in agreement with the "triple lock" procedure the statutes of the Liberal Democrats foresaw. The special conference was only able to discuss the party's declaration on the fact it was joining the

coalition, a mostly internal document used by and for the members first and foremost. A few amendments were indeed made to this document, as when emphasizing the importance of keeping the party's political independence from the coalition's doings, and a vast majority of the members who attended the conference were most enthusiastic at the prospect of being into government at last. Regardless of this, the special conference does not alter the idea that the negotiations were made and the decision taken by those who would eventually get into a governing position themselves shall the coalition be successful. Since "being in government is not a default position" (Deschouwer, 2008), the importance of personal ambition cannot be dismissed, which might explain that some mistakes were made by over-enthusiastic or over-ambitious Liberal Democrats in the course of the negotiations, and which would impact the subsequent working of the coalition and its consequences for the party (Hazell and Young, 2012).

To conclude on the rationale behind the Liberal Democrats' decision to join the coalition, it would be wrong to assume that because the Liberal Democrats were able to be in government, the party was in a good and promising shape. The steady decline of the two big parties had not been correlated with a significant rise of the Liberal Democrats' vote or number of seats neither European, national nor local elections. Actually, back in 2010, the Liberal Democrat party was on a stagnant if not declining trend and was in need of some new impulsion. The coalition provided them with a chance to switch to a different sort of influence and to be regarded as a credible party, something the Liberal Democrats had been hoping for since 1988 and which was reflected in the shape of the government coalition, where they were present in most ministries. The rationale behind joining the government was strong; however the place of personal ambition cannot be dismissed because those who negotiated the Coalition Agreement were the ones who would occupy ministerial offices if it came into life. Coupled with the lack of experience of the Liberal Democrats as a newly governing party, this might explain that

rationality did not always prevail and that mistakes were made when negotiating with the Conservatives. In all fairness, the Liberal Democrats' leadership did try to get a better deal for their party when bargaining the Coalition Agreement. Most importantly, they managed to get in the Coalition Agreement the referendum on the Alternative Vote (AV), a first step towards changing the British electoral system and hopefully secure an easier future for their party.

B. Balancing party's independence and government's policies: the difficult bargain of the Liberal Democrats

After struggling with the FPTP system for more than two decades, it only makes sense that when negotiating the Coalition Agreement the Liberal Democrats were willing to seize the opportunity to change the British electoral system. As a consequence, it was agreed in the coalition deal that a referendum would be held to ask voters whether they would be willing to see Britain change its electoral system. Nonetheless, the deal was not an ideal one for the Liberal Democrats and the way the referendum campaign occurred show the limits of their strategy. They had to compromise on having the Alternative Vote system as the only proposed alternative to FPTP, but in exchange they did not manage to oblige their coalition partner to abstain from campaigning against the proposal. Reversely, the Conservatives managed to have policies that were harmful to the Liberal Democrats passed as coalition policies, sharing the blame with them. The lack of balance was a blow to the Liberal Democrats' strategy.

a. The AV attempt: the Liberal Democrats' unability to engage their coalition partner in electoral reform

The electoral reform was a "deal-breaker" in the run-up to the coalition government (Hazell and Young, 2012). This proposal had indeed been a core policy of the Liberal Democrats party since 1988. It was also meant to balance the risks they had taken by getting into government by lifting the structural barrier in stood in the way of better electoral prospects. However, the Liberal Democrats did not manage to get their coalition partner to engage positively with the reform, which was not presented as a government's proposal, damaging its chances of success.

The reform of the electoral system had always been, since 1988, one of the main topic for the Liberal Democrats. This is particularly striking when reading Paddy Ashdown's Memoires. In his view proportional representation was the guarantee for the political sustainability of the party. Even Paddy Ashdown, the craftsman of the Liberal Democrats/Labour strategy in the 1990s, wrote that the Liberal Democrats were "prepared to sustain a government with the Tories as the largest party, unless and until Labour agree to PR for Westminster" (Ashdown, 2000, 145). The Liberal Democrats see a double disadvantage in the way the FPTP system works. Since there is only one way to win a seat in Westminster, which is to gather the majority of ballots, smaller parties have no chance whatsoever to be represented for a smaller share of votes. This gives place to a vicious circle where voters, who want to make a difference, will tend to choose to vote rationally for a party who actually stands a chance of being elected. As a consequence some voters will not vote for the Liberal Democrats since they consider voting Liberal Democrats is a wasted ballot; as a result, Liberal Democrats will reach a lower score and not win the seat; for this reason next time even fewer people might vote Liberal Democrats and so on. A poll conducted by Yougov in the weeks preceding the 2010 General Election reflects this influence of the structure of the electoral system on the voters' choice, and the fact it makes a Liberal Democrats' victory less likely. Indeed, the director of Yougov Peter Kellner explains that they "asked: "How would you vote on May 6 if you thought the Liberal Democrats had a significant chance of winning the election". The responses: Lib Dem 49%, Conservative 25%, Labour 19%. On the – admittedly unrealistic – assumption of uniform national swing, there would be 548 Lib Dem MPs, 41 Labour MPs and just 25 Tories." (Kellner, 2010). The Liberal Democrats' final result was obviously much lower than the one found in this poll, for which some of the Liberal Democrats blame the FPTP system.

The second reason why the FPTP system is damageable to the Liberal Democrats is that even where they manage to convince British people to vote for them, the outcome of the vote and

the number of seats in Parliament are not correlated, as it has been shown previously in this work (Graph 12). Under the FPTP system, what makes a difference is not to gather more votes at the national scale; it is to gather a majority of votes in one constituency. As a consequence, the Liberal Democrats could gather 23% of the votes in the 2010 General Elections, and get only 57 seats out of 650 in the House of Commons, which means just fewer than 9% of them. The FPTP system establishes therefore a double lock for smaller parties in the United Kingdom by creating a mental barrier in the voters' mind and a structural barrier in the distribution of seats in Parliament. That is the reason why until 2010, the demand for a reform of the electoral system has been present in almost all Liberal Democrats' manifesto. In 2010, the electoral reform was presented in page 87-88 of the Liberal Democrats' manifesto, as the first thing Liberal Democrats were ready to do in order to "change politics and abolish safe seats". In this manifesto, however and most notably, it is the Single Transferable Vote that was presented as the Liberal Democrats "preferred" system (Liberal Democrats Manifesto 2010), and not the AV

Voting system applied to the 2010 GE results	Liberal Democrats		Conservatives		Labour	
	Seats	Share (%)	Seats	Share (%)	Seats	Share (%)
First-Pass- The-Post (FPTP)	57	8,78	306	47,15	258	39,75
Alternative Vote (AV)	79	12,15	281	43,23	262	40,31
Alternative Vote + (AV+)	110	16,90	275	42,24	235	36,10
Proportional Representation (PR)	149	22,92	234	36,00	189	29,08
Single Transferable Vote (SVT)	162	24,92	246	37,85	207	31,85

Table 6 : Projection of the 2010 General Election results with different voting systems; Source: Electoral Reform Society (or full data and a brief explanation of the different electoral systems, see annex 6); Table Claire Taglione-Darmé.

one. When looking at the maths, the Single Transferable Vote system would indeed have been the most beneficial to the Liberal Democrats in 2010 as shown in table 6, which was realised based on the work of the Electoral Reform Society and compares the different outcomes the

electoral system could have made to the parties' results in 2010. It also shows that a first aspect under which the deal the Liberal Democrats reached in the Coalition Agreement regarding the electoral system was only a compromise agreement between the coalition's partners. The projections summarized in table 6 show indeed that among all the possibilities AV was the second less-favourable system for the Liberal Democrats, ranking right after the FPTP system in terms of seats the Liberal Democrats would have won in 2010. With the FPTP system they won 57 seats, which would have become 79 under the AV rule. However, the Liberal Democrats could have reached an even better score under other systems and especially under a full proportional representation system or a single-transferable vote system, where the Liberal Democrats might have won respectively 149 or 162 seats, which would have resulted in the Liberal Democrats holding more than 20% of the seats of the House of Commons instead of less than 10% under the current FPTP system. In the same time, AV was the system under which the Conservatives would have seen the smallest margin of evolution between their actual result in the 2010 General Elections and the hypothetical ones presented by the Electoral Reform Society. What this calculation implies is that in order to have a chance to see the electoral system start changing, and in order to reach a deal that would allow Liberal Democrats to get into government, the negotiating team had accepted to accept a minimum-change solution. The deal was not half way between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats' position; it was the minimum concession the Conservatives could have made on this topic, what is more under the condition of holding a referendum rather than passing the law through Parliament directly. This explains why, when asked whether they would like to see more options available through referendum for the British electoral system, Liberal Democrats would tend to answer they would like to see a wider range of options when the Conservatives would not (see Annex 7, Yougov).

All this shows that the AV vote was nothing more than a compromising item for the coalition.

For the Liberal Democrats, it was a first step in the right direction; for the Conservatives, it was damage control in case the referendum would be passed. The Conservatives were however unnecessarily worried. The proposal was not defended as a government one but as a proposal from the Liberal Democrats only. As a whole, voters decided not to back the Liberal Democrats' proposal to change the British electoral system.

The referendum on the reform of the British electoral system was finally held on 5 May 2011. With 13,013,123 voters, standing for 67.90% of the expressed ballots casting their vote against the proposal, the result was a clear no to the electoral reform. The way the campaign took place and was held was revealing of the weaknesses of the Coalition deal. Indeed, the main problem the Liberal Democrats faced in the run-up to the AV referendum was the fact that no other major party was clearly and univocally campaigning in favour of the reform; and that the parties' electorate seemed to reflect almost perfectly their party's stance. The Labour party, although officially in favour of reform, was actually much divided on the issue and therefore did not run a very effective campaign towards their electorate (BBC, 2011). As shown in Graph 19, which presents the results of a study by TCS and Yougov realised in the run-up of the AV vote, the electorate of the Labour party reflected this internal division, with slightly more people being
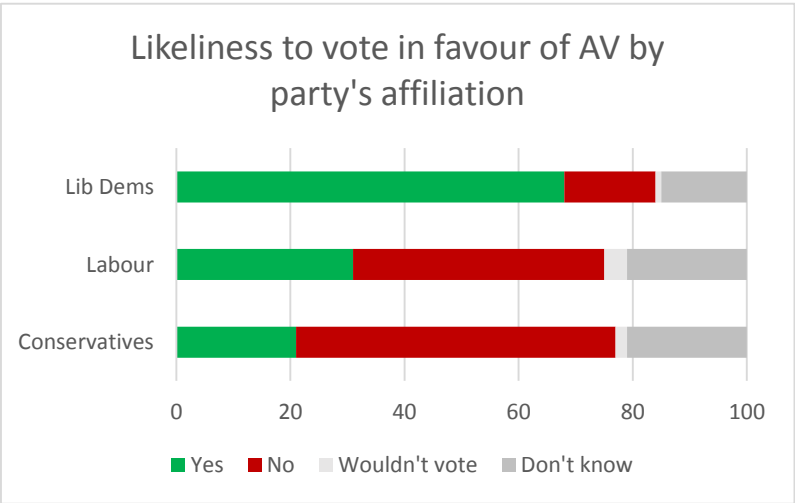

Graph 16 : Likeliness to vote in favour of AV by party's affiliation; Data: TCS and Yougov; Graph: Claire Taglione-Darmé

against AV than in favour of it, and more than one voter in five not being decided. However, if the Labour party's position could have been a disappointment for the Liberal Democrats, it was by no mean within their reach to alter the course of the Labour campaign on this issue. Much more problematic, in terms of impact and in terms of the sustainability of the Liberal Democrats' strategy, was the fact the Conservatives party and David Cameron himself campaigned against the proposal. When negotiating the Coalition Agreement, it might have been possible for the Liberal Democrats to try and get the insurance that their senior partner in coalition or at least the person of David Cameron would not campaign against the proposal himself, thereby giving less visibility and impact to the "No" campaign. For the sake of comparison, when negotiating a deal with Labour in the 1990s, Paddy Ashdown refused to consider the possibility of Tony Blair campaigning against Proportional Representation (Ashdown, 2000). In Paddy Ashdown's view, this would have been some sort of a betrayal of the agreement concluded between the parties. When negotiating the Coalition Agreement in 2010, the Liberal Democrats' team seems to have consider it was more relevant to insist on each party's independence rather than making sure the Conservative party, or at least the Conservative leadership, would not vocally stand in the way of electoral reform. Due to this missed occasion, the Conservative party's line reflected the state of its electorate which was quite extensively against the proposed AV system (Graph 19). Most notably David Cameron claimed, in a meeting three weeks ahead of the vote, that the proposed AV system was "obscure, unfair and expensive", that it would take some of the power out of the people's hands, diminish accountability of representatives and endanger equality among voters (The Telegraph, 2011).

The result of this campaigning was that on polling day, a correlation appeared between the amount of people who voted for the Liberal Democrats' party in the 2010 General Elections and the amount of people who voted in favour of the AV system one year later, showing the possibility that very few voters who were not Liberal Democrats' sympathizers voted in favour
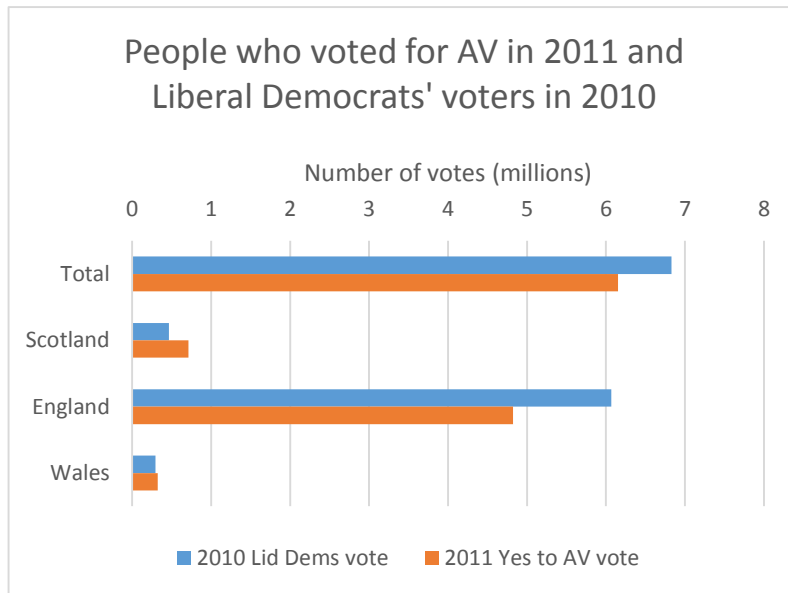
Graph 17 : People who voted for AV in 2011 and Liberal Democrats' voters in 2010; Data: Electoral Commission results and the House of Commons; Graph Claire Taglione-Darmé

of the AV system, as shown in Graph 20 which presents the result in terms of absolute number of voters of the Liberal Democrats in 2010 and of the "Yes" to AV in 2011. The Graph shows that there were fewer people who voted in favour of AV than there had been people who voted for the Liberal Democrats in 2010. This could be explained either by the fact some people voter for the Liberal Democrats in 2010 without agreeing with this proposal; or because some Liberal Democrats would rather not vote for the AV system since they were aiming at electoral reform towards a more propositional system (The Constitution Society and TCS/Yougov, 2010).

One further nuance should be added by reminding that the Liberal Democrats were not the sole party campaigning in favour of AV. Other small parties, such as the Scottish National Party in Scotland, Plaid Cymru in Wales or most of the smaller parties from Northern Ireland did the same. This explains why there were slightly more people voting in favour of AV in Scotland and in Wales than people who voted for the Liberal Democrats in 2010, and that the share of people voting in favour of AV was above 40% in Northern Ireland, where the Liberal Democrats are not represented, meaning a higher level than the ones of Scotland, Wales or England.

The proposal was not defended as a government's one since the Conservatives opposed it. The result of the AV referendum shows the limits of the Liberal Democrats strategy when negotiating the Coalition deal. Reforming the electoral system to bring it closer to a proportional one was one of the key elements of their strategy to bounce back in subsequent elections despite being into government for the first time. The fact they accepted to go for the second-less favourable system after FPTP rather than pushing for a more proportional set up for the elections; the fact they decided to adopt it via referendum, which is a peculiar item of the British political life; and the fact they left open the possibility for David Cameron to campaign against the reform altogether indicate the Liberal Democrats might have done too many concessions in order to reach a workable coalition deal. As a consequence of the result of the AV referendum, the electoral risks they took by joining the coalition had not been structurally diminished.

If the Liberal Democrats failed to engage their coalition partner in electoral reform, the reverse was not true. Conservatives managed to associate the Liberal Democrats to harmful reforms, such as the tuition fees, in a way that made the Liberal Democrats take most of the blame.

b. The tuition fees episode: the Liberal Democrats failure to disengage from damaging government proposal

This increase in the students' annual university fees was passed into law in December 2011 despite the fact the Liberal Democrats had announced in their manifesto they would block such a rise from becoming reality. What was highly damaging for the Liberal Democrats was the fact it was passed in Parliament, obliging them to show to the open each deputy's stance on the topic. On this occasion, the Parliamentary party appeared most divided, which was a first blow for the Liberal Democrats. Twenty eight Liberal Democrats voted in favour of the government's proposal; twenty one voted against and eight were either absent or rebelled. The bill was passed with twenty-one vote. It is therefore a highly divided party who allowed a proposal to pass that was, in the voter's eye and despite members of Parliament trying to explain they had gained

concessions from the Conservatives to make the reform less painful for students (see for instance Duncan Hame[6], Nick Harvey[7] or Michael Moore[8]'s reasons to vote), in direct contradiction with their 2010 manifesto.

It appears quite clearly in Graph 21 that there is a strong correlation between the decision to
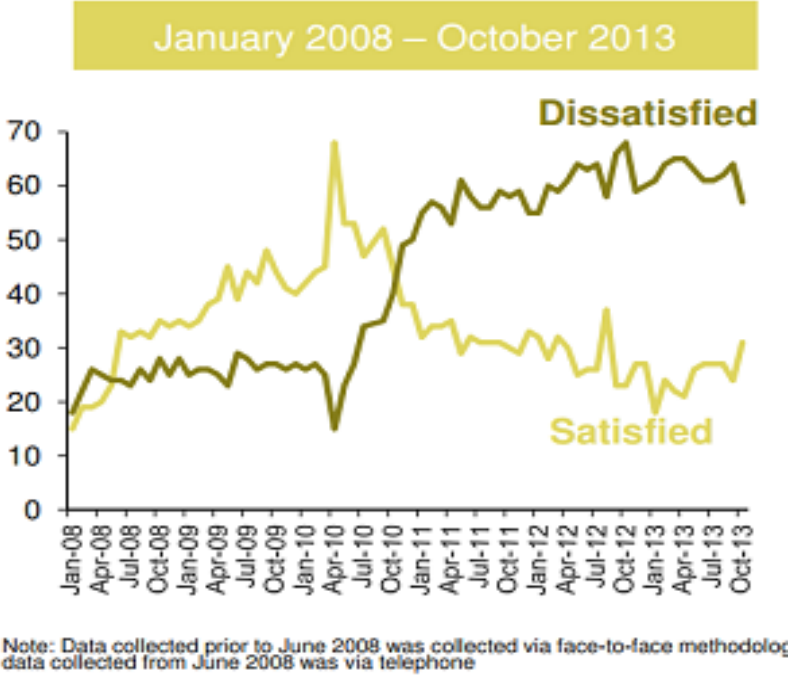
Graph 18: Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with Nick Clegg's performance; Source Ipsos Mori

increase tuition fees and the overtaking of the share of voters satisfied with Nick Clegg's handling of his political responsibilities by the share of people dissatisfied with him. This situation is challenging for the Liberal Democrats because both Liberal Democrats and Labour voters blame the Liberal Democrats for this outcome, as shown in Graph 22 thanks to Yougov data. This moment of the voting of the increase in tuition fees was a point of rupture for the voter's trust in the party and in Nick Clegg personally. The Liberal Democrats gave the impression they were no different from other traditional parties, breaking their promises only a

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[6] See http://www.duncanhames.org.uk/2010/12/10/decisions-on-higher-education-funding-debate-9th-december-2010/ (last consultation 03/06/2014)

[7] See http://nickharveymp.com/en/article/2010/401304/tuition-fees (last consultation 03/06/2014)

[8] See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-south-scotland-11968462 (last consultation 03/06/2014)

few months after entering government. Therefore, the first thing Liberal Democrats need to do is to restore their image as a trustworthy party towards the voter.
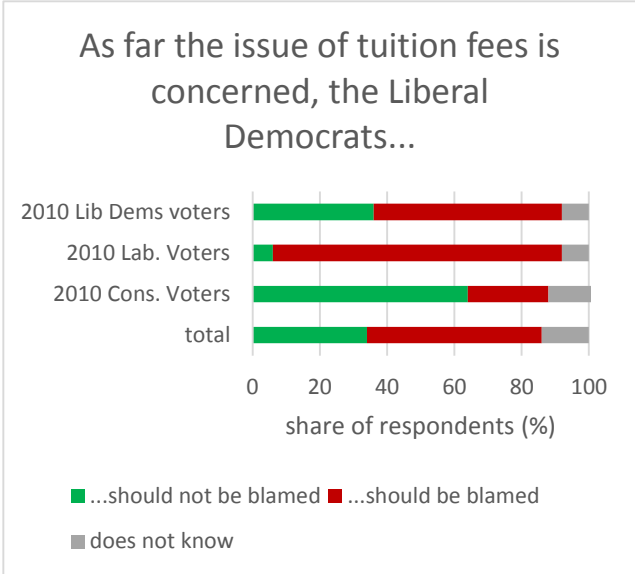
Graph 19: The Liberal Democrats and tuition fees; Data : Yougov; Graph Claire Taglione-

C. The will to remain pivotal: the unaltered ambition of being into government

Despite this failure in the Liberal Democrats' strategy, the party has not put into question the fact its place belong in government. It is crystal clear in Nick Clegg's most recent speeches and allocutions that the ambition has remained unaltered. However, in order to fulfil this goal, the party will have to preserve its "coalition potential", a term which "captures the relevance of a party in a system resulting from this party's decisiveness for the formation of possible government majority" (Sartori, quoted in Bolleyer, 2008). This means assuring it can play on its assets when negotiating with other parties, at the condition it successfully attempted to access the power-bargain area (Bolleyer, 2008).

a. Preserve the party's governing relevance

A party governing relevance depends on the use the party makes of its resources in order to be considered a worthwhile coalition partner (Bolleyer, 2008). In terms of political positioning, such a party would be programmatically compatible with their potential partner (Sartori in

Bolleyer, 2008), meaning that the party's best option would be to be seen as just sufficiently different, and yet as much needed as possible by their partner. In order to achieve this status, parties can play on two main assets: their centrality, which allows to bargain with several partners at the same time, and their pivotal character, which makes them decisive for the outcome of the process (Bolleyer, 2008).

The Liberal Democrats have this chance that they can play on both. Indeed, when Nick Clegg declares in one of his speeches that "Liberal Democrats take that message out to the country. Our mission is anchoring Britain to the centre ground. Our place is in Government again." (Clegg, 2013b), he is explicitly referring to the Liberal Democrats as a party of the centre, an "anchor" for British politics, which gives the voter the image of a stable element in a moving political landscape. In 2013 already, Nick Clegg said the party's conference ""In 2015 the clapped out politics of red, blue, blue red threatens everything we have achieved. But, back in Government – and next time that will mean back in coalition Government – the Liberal Democrats can keep the country on the right path." (Clegg, 2013b)". The fact Nick Clegg did not specify with which party the Liberal Democrats might end up with in a second government highlights the fact that the party sees himself has having than one government option, a feature of centrality (Bolleyer, 2008).

As far as being pivotal is concerned, the motto the Liberal Democrats have chosen for the 2015 General Elections is revealing of the importance of the equidistance principle in their strategy, as not being any closer to Labour than to the Conservatives. The motto is "A stronger economy in a fairer society"; which for some equals "neither Labour nor Conservatives" (interview D). It is important that the Liberal Democrats leadership leaves open all possibilities of coalition because being pivotal means the party is needed to build a sustainable government, and on the level of its pivotal character will depend his margin of manoeuvre to negotiate its place in government (Bolleyer, 2008). Therefore the party needs to leave both doors open in order to

have more bargaining power, should the next General Election result in a hung Parliament once again. In this political positioning, one element cannot be questioned: it is the leadership's determination to stay into government. This is illustrated by Nick Clegg's definitive statement that "Liberal Democrats (…) are a party of Government now" (Clegg 2013b), and by the setting up of a negotiating team already in 2014 to start preparing the potential negotiations should they be necessary in the aftermaths of the 2015 General Elections (Parker in the Financial Times, 2014). However one key element will determine the party's governing relevance: its size in Parliament, which will impact the party's governing potential.

b. Preserve the party's governing potential

The governing potential does not, contrarily to the governing potential, lies in the hands of the party it applies to. It is not a proactive feature but a passive one. In Bolleyer's definition, the governing potential is "assigned by others", and depends upon the way other actors of the political scene see the party and its level of general acceptance (Bolleyer, 2008).

Liberal Democrats are very much aware of this constraints and are struggling to keep their party's potential intact. During the interviews, some members say the other parties' opinion is the reason why the Liberal Democrats will not leave the coalition before the end of the term, despite the opportunity they would have by doing so to differentiate themselves from the Conservatives in order to limit their electoral loss in 2015. They want their party to be seen as strong and reliable by potential coalition partners.

However, regardless of how much they have done and will keep doing in order to improve their governing potential, the Liberal Democrats perspectives in government will remain dependent upon the choice of the voters. Just like in 2010, the maths will do most of the bargaining in 2015. This is what appears from various interviews of Labour officials, who sometimes reject the idea of a coalition with Nick Clegg and sometimes admit they will have to act according to the maths of the elections results (Eaton in the New Stateman, 2014).a As Nick Clegg, being

pretty much aware of the situation puts it: "there's nothing like the prospect of reality in an election to get politicians to think again and the Labour Party, which is a party unused to sharing power with others is realising that it might have to" (Eaton in the New Stateman, 2014b). The problem for the Liberal Democrats is that in order to get the Labour party to take into consideration the "prospect of reality", they need to be in a sufficiently strong position in the next Parliament – or reality will turn Labour away from them, as it did in 1997. Since the structural barrier remains in place after the failure of the AV referendum, this will only depend upon the voters. This reasoning leads us to conclude that the one way for the Liberal Democrats to increase their governing potential and thereby make more credible their governing relevance is by regaining the trust of the voters.

To summarize, there are several reasons to question whether the Liberal Democrats can fulfil their objective of being into government again. First, they need to access the power-bargain area again, in order to be able to build on their central, as in having more than one government option, and pivotal, so that they can demand higher concessions, features. Because the coalition together with ongoing events have changed the challenges Liberal Democrats have to face and especially their relation to their voters, reaching these objectives required setting up a new political strategy for the party. More than anything, the Liberal Democrats were in need for visibility and credibility to regain the voters' trust and unity from their members. Part three of this study will detail the changing political obstacles the Liberal Democrats had to cope with, and how and why Europe fits in as a potential healing curse for the party.

III.   The constraints of the Liberal Democrats new strategy, and why Europe fits in

With the flaws of their political strategy, the Liberal Democrats have been reminded the hard way that 'the law of the jungle still lives in coalition politics' (Budens and Hino, 2008). In order to be a plausible coalition partner in 2015, they need to better understand the ambivalent interaction between coalition partners, and especially the balance between tension and compromise (Bolleyer, 2008). This is where differentiation comes in as a now decent tool in their strategy. It was meant to repair the lack of balance between their visibility and blame on the one hand, which will influence the way the voters see them on the one hand, and their compromise and influence on the other, which will influence their members' adhesion to the choice of getting into government on the other (Deschouwer, 2008). Indeed, in the most recent book by Agnès Alexandre on British political parties, the chapter on the Liberal Democrats argues that there is a "factionalisation" of the party (Alexandre, 2013). If that was to be the case, it could endanger the party's cohesion. By failing to realise these trade-off in a balanced way, the party's relevance and strength might have been jeopardised.

Due to new constraints, the leadership considered relevant to leave valence aside and use Europe as a differentiating tool, in order to try and solve both dilemma at the same time by becoming a mobiliser, a party using a new topic to occupy a free spot on its national political spectrum (Deschouwer, 2008). Europe was not a new topic as such; however, the current context made it an increasingly salient topic in public debate, to the extent that it became for some the "major factor of competition between parties" (Alexandre 2010, 8), at a time when the country is discussing its belonging to the European project, when the crisis has enhanced the visibility of European affairs in European politics, and when European elections were to be held.

The first new constraint the party has to deal with because of its involvement in a government is linked to the structure and political equilibrium of the coalition and the electoral loss it has been causing since 2010. There are two main objectives for a party when in government: visibility and influence (Deschouwer, 2008). Reaching these objectives will allow the party to maintain its relevance and limit its electoral vulnerability (Bolleyer, 2008). When setting up the coalition deal, the Liberal Democrats wanted to achieve a large and encompassing influence, which explains why they agreed to an integrated coalition (Hazell and Young, 2012). However, this meant they had less visibility, which actually damaged their electoral results.

a. The structure of the coalition: blurring visibility and diluting the Liberal Democrats' relevance

Paradoxically enough, it seems that being in government has damaged the Liberal Democrats' relevance to the voter. This is what appears from Graph 23, which based on data gathered by
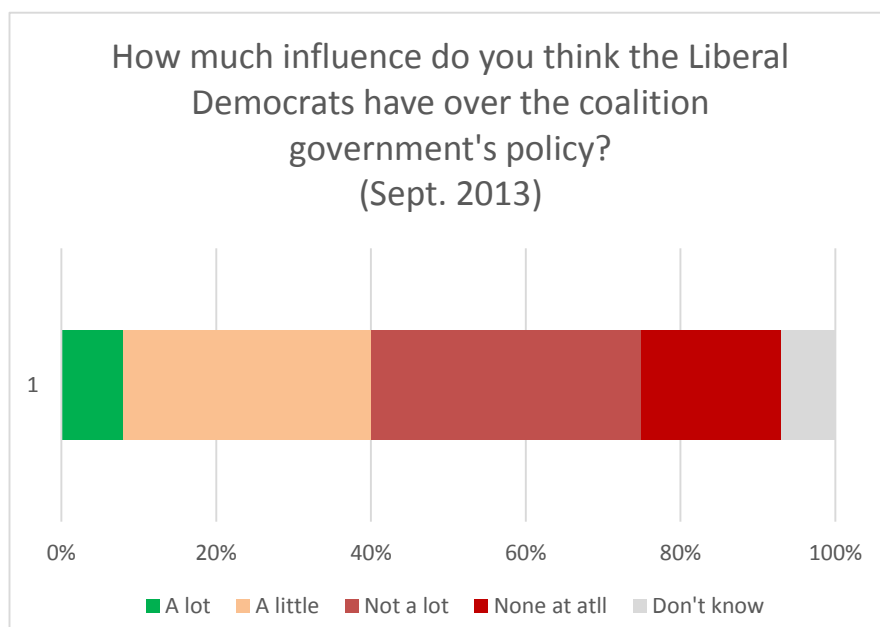
Graph 20 : How much influence do the Liberal Democrats have over the coalition government policy ? Data Yougov ; Graph Claire Taglione-Darmé

Yougov shows that in September 2013, more than one respondent in two (53%) thought the Liberal Democrats had either not a lot of influence, or none 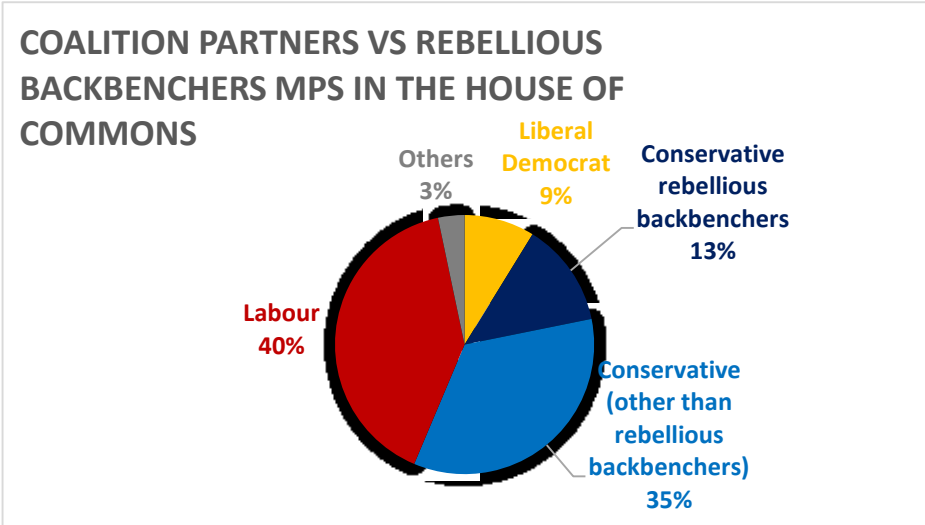at all, in the coalition government. This disturbing result for a party who had by then been in government for more than twenty-

eight months is furthermore to be crossed with another result of the poll, which says that more than two third of the respondents answered they had the feeling they did not know a lot, if nothing at all, about what the Liberal Democrats party stood for, which means very low relevance for the party. This failure in increasing the party's relevance despite being into government can be explained by different key points.

First of all, if the structure of the 2010 coalition is in line with the Liberal Democrats' objective of being seen like a full, encompassing governing party, it is not the most easily readable option for the voter. There were several models the Liberal Democrats could have relied on, especially in terms of the way they would spread their Liberal ministers across the cabinets. One of the possibilities was to pick a few topics on which the Liberal Democrats had a distinctive policy they wanted to implement and gather their representative in government within these portfolios. This model of coalition would have allowed for an easier distinctiveness and highlight the difference Liberal Democrats were making into government. However this was not their final choice. Rather, the Liberal Democrats chose to try and cover a broader range of topics and therefore be present in as many cabinets as they could, even in a junior position. The result of this choice was an integrated coalition" without clear separation between the parties, with Liberal Democrats' representative in nearly each and every cabinet (see annex 5). The case of the deputy Prime minister, who is in the centre of government without holding a clear mandate on a specific topic, is a strong illustration of this rationale. This strategy of going for "breath" rather than "depth" (Hazell and Young, 2012) was coherent with what has been shown earlier in this work regarding the Liberal Democrats' determination of being seen as a mainstream party rather than a niche party, but added to the confusion for the voter.

Secondly, and in terms of the content of what the coalition government is doing, there are two elements which can explain this loss in the party's distinctiveness. On the one hand, for the first eighteen months of the coalition, the Liberal Democrats' credits were damaged by a succession

of failures (Hazell and Young, 2012), such as the tuition fees or the AV referendum mentionned before. On the other hand, and to add up to the Liberal Democrats' difficulties of being visible,

COALITION PARTNERS VS REBELLIOUS BACKBENCHERS MPS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

- Others 3%
- Liberal Democrat 9%
- Conservative rebellious backbenchers 13%
- Conservative (other than rebellious backbenchers) 35%
- Labour 40%

Graph 21 Coalition partners vs. rebellious backbenchers; Claire Taglione-Darmé

Note: 'Conservative rebellious backbenchers' based on the rebellion over Europe within the Conservative Party in October 2011.

they have to deal with a coalition partner who had other political priorities than keeping the deputy Prime minister pleased at all times. David Cameron's priority has rather been to keep his party united, which requires manoeuvres that sometimes clash with the Liberal Democrats', if not the Coalition Agreement's, line. This is particularly the case when dealing with Europe. The fact the Coalition Agreement's foresaw a United Kingdom being a "positive participant" to the European Union did not prevent David Cameron from using the British veto in December 2011 when negotiating the Banking Union, without contacting first his coalition partner (Interview B and Heywood, 2013), or from making a strong speech on Europe at Bloomberg in January 2013, without either letting his coalition partner know beforehand the content of this speech (interview D and 2). On this occasion as in a few others, the Conservative Prime minister reflected the tensions which were damaging his own party more than the coalition's line. This example illustrates how the Prime minister's difficulties in keeping his party together has had an effect on the Liberal Democrats' influence and therefore relevance because the maths were not in the Liberal Democrats' favour. Graph 24 shows how the share of rebellious backbenchers

within the Conservative party is to be put in relation with the share of Liberal Democrats within the House of Commons. When in October 2011 Conservative members of Parliament defied the government on Europe, 81 Conservatives formed the vast majority of the "largest rebellion on the issue of Europe of the post-war era"[9]. Keeping in mind the fact the coalition's majority is of 76 seats, it appears that having all the rebellious Conservatives against the government can block any coalition deal passing through the Chamber. Reversely, a handful of Liberal Democrats following their frontbenchers is enough to get the bill passed, as it did when the tuition fees were voted. The threat to David Cameron's political survival, and therefore his interest in pleasing his backbenchers, cannot be bypassed either in explaining his willingness to take his rebellious backbenchers' opinion into consideration. Thus, the intensity of rebelliousness within the Conservatives, crossed with the yet relatively low number of Liberal Democrats' deputies meant that in order to reach a majority, David Cameron needed to convince his own backbenchers more than he needed to please the Liberal Democrats, whose loyalty to the coalition would in any case lay within Nick Clegg's hands. As Nick Clegg is trying to show a coalition government can be a strong and successful item of British politics, the Liberal Democrats' have no reason to encourage rebellions. David Cameron can rely on his junior coalition partner to make sure to work hard in order to gather his votes on government's bills. This situation exemplifies how members of a coalition become "enemies from within" (Burden and Hino): David Cameron will not try to spare his coalition partner, and the Liberal Democrats have to fight for their own political survival.

There are thus several traps within the strategy developed by the Liberal Democrats, threatening their political relevance for the voter. As a newly governing party, their electoral vulnerability (Bolleyer, 2008) was indeed strong and they indeed suffered particularly tough electoral backlash.

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[9] See http://nottspolitics.org/2012/05/08/the-bumper-book-of-coalition-rebellions/

A newly governing party faces two sources of vulnerability. It is first, an electoral one, related to the lack of reliable core voters comparable to the ones the elder parties enjoy (Bolleyer, 2008). Smaller parties in the coalition will tend to suffer more than others from this situation, because the loss are more painful and risky to them than they are for bigger parties (Deschouwer, 2008). It is furthermore very rare that in a coalition all parties would manage to maintain their electoral score. There is usually a winner and a loser, as the success or failure of each party seems to be correlated to the other's achievement: a coalition is a "zero-sum game" (Budens and Hiro, 2008). Second, there can be an organisational vulnerability, linked to the party's less developed internal structure (Bolleyer, 2008, 22).

The lack of visibility added to the failures detailed before in this work to distance themselves from the damageable coalition policies make the Liberal Democrats the first victims of electoral backlash within the coalition. The United-Kingdom has a system were elections happen constantly, mostly at the local level but not only. As a consequence, it is possible to estimate even before the next General Elections in 2015 the extent to which the Liberal Democrats are suffering from electoral backlash. The first level of election that makes sense for a comparison with 2010 is the by-elections, which are held in a constituency if ever a Member of Parliament leaves his position, whatever the reason. Since 2010, the Liberal Democrats have lost in by-elections in average per year 10% of the votes they had gathered in the area in 2010, as shown in Graph 25 which builds on the results of all the by-elections held since 2010 and shows the variation, for each party, of its share of votes in the constituency where the by-election was held (for the detailed data, see Annex 8). What is worrying for the Liberal Democrats is that first there seems to be no improvement of this decreasing trend as time goes by, and second that they are in average and in terms of share losing more votes than the Conservatives. What is also a problem for the Liberal Democrats is that by-elections used to be a strategic moment for them,

when it was possible to focus the entire party's resources into fighting for one seat and one seat only. The party had therefore been rather stable in by-elections over the previous Parliament,
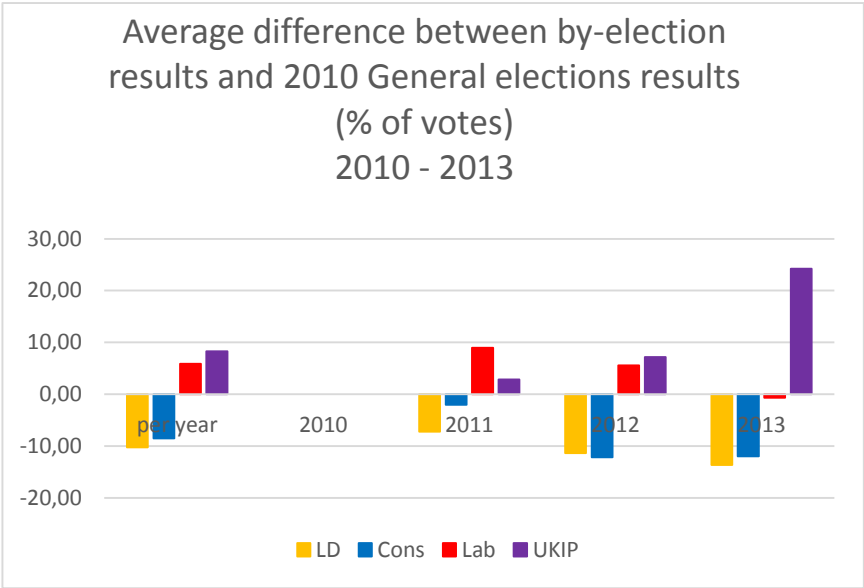
Graph 22 Average difference between by-elections and General elections results (2010 to 2013); Data: House of Commons; Graph and Calculations: Claire Taglione-Darmé

as shown in Graph 26 which makes the same calculations as Graph 25 on a similar amount of time after the 2005 General Elections. On average per year, the Liberal Democrats used to
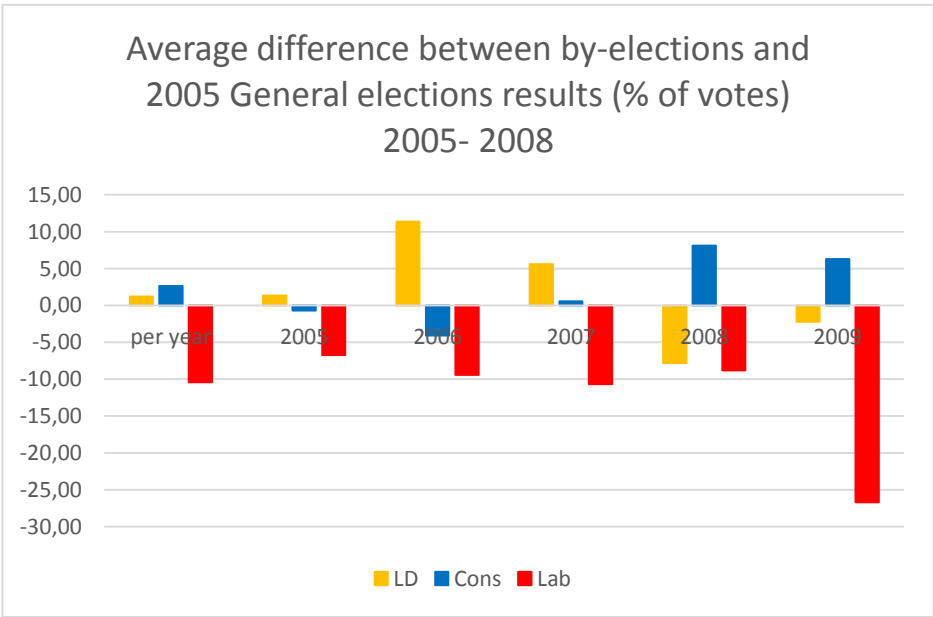
Graph 23 Average difference between by-elections and General elections results (2005 to 2008); Data House of Commons (full data Annex 9); Graph and calculations Claire Taglione-Darmé

maintain their number of votes in a constituency; whereas between 2010 and 2013, they have seen their share drop more than the one of the Conservative, with 9 out of 16 by-elections where the Liberal Democrats had a biggest decrease in votes than the Conservatives did (see Annex 8).

As a newly governing party, the Liberal Democrats are an example of how losing votes is more painful for smaller parties than it is for their coalition partners (Deschouwer). Indeed, as shown in table 7, it is important in order to establish who is suffering the most of being into government, from the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats, to distinguish between the absolute and relative lost. Table 7 illustrates how, in net results, it can seem that the Liberal Democrats are facing fewer loss than the Conservatives in local elections, since they have lost in average 3.33 Councils per year since 2010 when the Conservatives have lost in average 6.33

	Councils won or retained			Net result			Share of gains/lost in number of councillors compared to the previous election* (%)		
Year	Lib	Cons	Lab	Lib	Cons	Lab	Lib	Cons	Lab
2011	10	157	58	-9	3	27	-47,37	1,95	87,10
2012	6	42	75	-1	-12	32	-14,29	-22,22	74,42
2013	0	18	3	0	-10	2	Na	-35,71	200,00
Average	5,33	72,33	45,33	-3,33	-6,33	20,33	-30,83	-10,14	80,76
Seats contested in 2013 were previously fought in 2009 (rule).									

Table 7 Parties' results in local elections (2011 – 2013); Data : Westminster Reports; calculations : Claire Taglione-Darmé

		Conservatives	**Liberal Democrats**
Share of votes	2014	23,31	6,69
	2009	27,7	13,7
Difference between 2014 and 2009		-4,39	-7,01
Share of lost votes in 2014 compared to 2009 (%)		-15,85	-51,14
Seats won	2014	19	1
	2009	25	11
Difference between 2014 and 2009		-6	-10
Share of lost seats in 2014 compared to 2009 (%)		-24	-90.91

Table 8 : Parties' results in European elections (2009 and 2014); Data Source: Electoral Commission; Calculations Claire Taglione-Darmé

of them. In relative terms however, it is clear that the impact of the loss is tougher for the Liberal Democrats than for the Conservatives. Indeed, the Conservatives have lost between 2010 and 2013 an average of 10% of their share of councillors in local elections. For the Liberal Democrats, the loss stands for 30% of their share of councillors compared to the previous elections. The same reasoning can be held at the level of the European elections. As shown in Table 8, in absolute terms there seems to be only a small difference between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats loss between 2009 and 2014. In terms of share of votes, the difference between the two parties is rather small in absolute terms but huge in relative ones. The Conservatives have lost less than 4.5 points of votes and the Liberal Democrats have lost a little roughly 7 points in 2014 compared to a similar period in 2009. This represents 50% of the Liberal Democrats' vote, when it only stands for 15% of the Conservatives' one. In terms of seats the difference is even more striking: where the Conservatives lost 6 seats, or 24% of their seats in Strasbourg, the Liberal Democrats lost 10 of them, meaning 90% of their representatives in the European Parliament. The case of the Liberal Democrats therefore particularly well illustrates the point made by Deschouwer: smaller parties tend to find the loss of votes more painful when entering government for the first time than their coalition partner usually do (Deschouwer, 2008).

These results show that the Liberal Democrats' party is vulnerable to electoral backlash and in need to regain relevance towards the voter. In the meanwhile, due to the fact they are a newly governing party but not a new party, it seems the Liberal Democrats stood relatively safe from the organisational vulnerability. The internal structure of the party, with the leadership split between a Federal Policy Committee, a Federal Executive and the Conference Committee remained largely unchallenged. The party has kept developing policy papers based on proposals made by working groups, whose selection process has not changed either. The amount of topics covered has even slightly increased since the coalition started as shown in Graph 27, which gathers the various consultation and policy papers presented to the conference before and since the coalition started. The number of consultation papers presented for discussion in autumn 2010, meaning at the first conference after the beginning of the coalition, plus the fact most topics that were dealt with where related to the work of at least one Liberal Democrats' work in government (see annex 10, the example of 2013) shows a clear correlation between being in government and covering a wider range of topics. However, it does not imply a major shift in
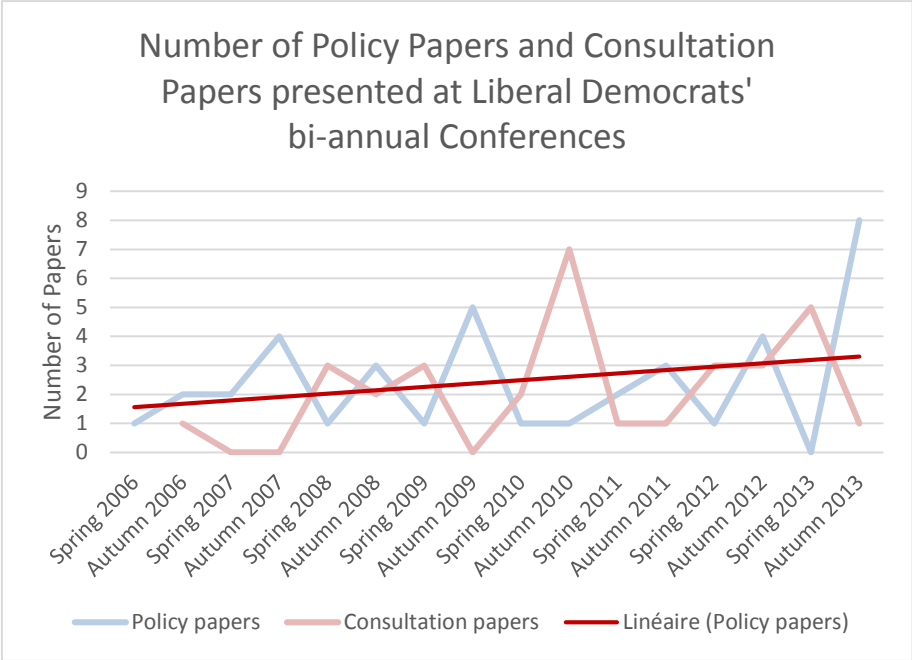
Graph 24: Number of Policy Papers and Consultation Papers presented at the Liberal Democrats' conferences; Data: Conference agendas; Graph and calculations Claire Taglione-Darmé

the Liberal Democrats' way of functioning. Thanks to their relative age in terms of organisation, the Liberal Democrats have been able to cope with the internal organisational challenges that bears an entry into government. However, being able to keep the procedures running relatively smoothly is not the same as being safe from internal contestations and disruption.

The first new constraint the party needs to deal with is therefore its loss of relevance for the voter. As dealing with a new constraint requires finding a new strategy, it is vital to the leadership to make sure the party's core supporter and members, is not endangered (Bolleyer, 2008). In that sense, internal divisions could be even more damaging than electoral backlash, if they prevented the party from being able to bounce back and if as some scholars argue it was becoming more factionalised (Alexandre, 2013).

B.   Too much compromise: the need to reaffirm the party's distinctiveness to the core

In order to evaluate the need for internal cohesion, one should first analyse the current state of the party's internal dynamics. The entry into government has strengthened rebellions within the Liberal Democrats. In the House of Commons, the rate of rebellions for a new government is seven times higher than the average ones usually observed in the post-war era (see Annex 11). Similarly enough to the question of electoral backlash, the Liberal Democrats have fewer rebels in absolute terms than the Conservatives, but they stand for a bigger share of the Parliamentary party. By 2013, 80% of the Liberal Democrats deputies had rebelled at least once (Hazell and Young, 2012). However, as long as these rebellions remain unorganised and specific, they do not endangered the cohesion of the party. What would put at stake the cohesion of the Liberal Democrats would be the apparition of factions, as a sign of a growing division amongst members.

When a party sees a change in its political environment that changes the resources available to its action, factions can appear (Bailey, 1969). Entering into government has induced some changes in the political resources available to the members of the Liberal Democrats Party.

However, speaking about factions in the degenerative sense would be overstated, even though a polarising trend has been accelerated by the entry into government.

a. The internal dynamics at play before the party entered the coalition: under-factionalisation but a tendency to polarisation

In order to be able to evaluate the seriousness of the level of internal contestation within the Liberal Democrats' party, we should identify potential factions and sort them out between different categories. According the David Hine (Hine, 1982), the policy, organisational, ambition and coverage criteria can be tools to identify a faction. Hine differentiate between a faction and tendency by defining factions as being, unlike tendencies, "solidly organised, disciplined, self-aware groups, enjoying a relatively stable and cohesive personnel over time" while tendency are more the expressions of "attitudes" within the party (Hine, 1982, 38). He subsequently differentiates factions from an issue-group by the scope and duration criteria (Hine, 1982, 39). We will use these criteria (duration, policy difference or scope, organisation, ambition, coverage, sense of belonging and exclusiveness) to determine whether various groups within the Liberal Democrats party can be classified as factions.

In case it is so, we will try to determine which kind of factions they are and what threat they represent for the party's integrity based on the typology developed by Boucek (Boucek, 2009). In an attempt to show factions can also happen to be an asset for a party, Boucek defines factionalism as a "process of sub-group partitioning" (Boucek, 2009, abstract) and identifies "three faces of factionalism": cooperative, competitive and degenerative factions (see Annex 12). A cooperative faction does not endanger intra-party harmony because it plays the role of a consensus-builder by assuring the preservation of sub-groups entities. A competitive faction will result from internal disagreements within the party, in a context of "centrifugal competition" (Boucek, 2009, 473). Potentially destabilizing for a party, these factions will be opposed to one another. Finally, a degenerative faction is defined by Boucked as being the result of "perverse incentives and mismanagement" (Boucek, 2009, 477), and as having a "self-

serving" prospect which can potentially lead to party break-up. Based on observations and interviews, a typology will now be applied to the various groups that exist within the Liberal Democrats, in order to determine to which extent the party is indeed becoming more factionalised than in the past. The typology is presented in Table 9, which shows in the first column a list of criteria based on the works by Hine and Boucek, and in the second column the way a group that would be classified as a faction would fulfil these criteria.

Table 9 : idenitifying a faction within a political party

Criteria/ Sub-group	A faction
Based on Hine, 1982 and Boucek, 2009	
Criteria/ Sub-group	**A faction**
Duration of the group	Long
Intensity of policy differences	Policy differences are easily identifiable and touch upon the core of the party's political persuasion
Organisational development	High: the group has a structure of its own and works as a parallel organization within the party
Ambition for the group/ members	Get the faction's members in influential positions within the party and eventually replace the party's leadership
Coverage within:	Strong
The Federal Policy Committee	A faction is structured in such a way it has influence in different layers of the party's internal organisation
The Parliamentary Party	
The Constituency	
The Grassroots	
Sense of belonging among the members	High
Sense of exclusiveness among the members	High: belonging to a faction means you will not belong to another comparable group
Classified as a single-issue group	Where the aim of the group is to defend or promote a specific policy that is not linked to the general orientation of the party
Classified as a tendency	Where there is no structure or organizational development comparable to the one of a faction
Classified as a Faction	If the group answers most of the criteria above it will be classified as a faction
- A cooperative faction	If the group's aims it not to question other groups' existence or the party's leadership it will be classified as a cooperative faction
- A competitive faction	If the group's aim is to challenge the existence of another group or the party's leadership, it will be classified as a competitive faction
- A degenerative faction	If the group is behaving in such a way it jeopardizes the party's stability and cohesion, it will be classified as a degenerative faction

Chronologically, the first type of sub-groups within the Liberal Democrats' Party to which this typology can be applied are the Specified Associated Organisations (SAOs) and the Associated Organisations (AOs). Table 10 shows how both category of sub-groups fit in the

Table 10 : Liberal Democrats sub-groups: factions, tendencies or single-issue groups? The case of the SAOs and AOs

Criteria/ Sub-group	Specified Associated Organisations	Associated Organisations
Based on Hine, 1982 and Boucek, 2009		
Duration of the group	Not applicable	Not applicable
Intensity of policy differences	Low or inexistent	Limited
Organisational development	High – funded by the party	Unequal
Ambition for the group/ members	Get Liberal Democrats candidates elected in local councils or in Parliament ; campaign on specific issues within and outside the party ; participate in creating the basis for policy-making (debate, talks)	Promote a specific policy within the party in a lobbying-like manner (niche) ; develop the link between the party and one community ; Liberal Democrats' section of a broader organisations
Coverage	Strong	Lesser than SAOs
FPC	Possibility to move motions at the conference as a group	No possibility to move motions at a conference as a group
Parliament		
Constituency		
Grassroots		
Sense of belonging within the members	High	Lesser than SAOs
Sense of exclusiveness within the members	none	none
Classified as a single-issue group	Some of them	Most of them
Classified as a tendency	No	No
Classified as a Faction	No	No
See annex 13 for a full list of Liberal Democrats SAOs and AOs		

typology of a faction. As far as the SAOs are concerned, it is quite easy to demonstrate that they are no factions: they are barely trends and not even courants. They are financed by the party and are allowed to present motions as a group at the Party's conference, they often have a training purpose for the members and candidates (Agents and Organisers Association), they

possibly have an outreaching goal in terms of policy, not directed towards the internal sphere of the party (Liberal Democrat Women, LGBT +), and although members usually feel they belong to the group there is a total lack of sense of exclusiveness among their members. It is quite common to see people belonging to several SAOs (interviews B, C, D, E and 5). Despite the fact AOs are more specific than the SAOs and more targeted towards the members of the party than the general public, they cannot be counted as factions either. Most of AOs should rather be regarded as single-issue groups as defined by Hine. AOs are often directed towards a narrowly delimited topic (ALTER, Association for Liberal Democrat Trade Unionist, Liberal Democrat for Electoral Reform...), and do a "lobbying" work within the party on this niche (interview B). For instance, the Liberal Democrats European Group (LDEG) sees itself as the "heart of the party when it comes to Europe", and see its first objective as being to "reinforce the stand" of the party on Europe, by providing members with trainings or information and by making sure the party's candidate do not deviate from the party's line on Europe (Interview B). These AOs, like SAOs, will organize fringe events at the party's conference and try to contribute to the party's internal debate. Finally, AOs are not factions because the sense of belonging is not very pronounced among their members. In terms of priority, members will into government and the coalition have accelerated a tendency to polarisation that had existed first privileged their belonging to SAOs, who have more impact in the party's internal policy-making: AOs cannot move motions as a group in the conference, and mostly intervene in the party's policy-making by applying for membership in working groups. None of these traditional Liberal Democrats' groups are factions, which explains that until very recently the Liberal Democrats' party was often called an "under-factionalised party" (Grayson, 2010).

However, separately from the existing the SAOs and AOs which definitely cannot be regarded as factions, a new polarising trend started to appear within the party starting from the mid-2000s. The turning point of this trend had been the publication of the "Orange Book" in 2004,

which was aimed at reclaiming the party's adhesion to economic liberalism. At this point, the party was led by Charles Kennedy, a former member of the SDP who had a more leftist approach to the economy. The Beveridge group and its "Orange Bookers" were not a highly structured group, and this term is now used in a rather blurred manner to refer to the part of the party who is in favour of greater economic liberalism (interviews C and D). At most the Orange Bookers, should they be submitted to the typology of the Liberal Democrats' subgroups classification, would be regarded as a tendency within the party. Nonetheless, they managed to get Nick Clegg elected as leader of the party, and in that sense achieved the objective of a faction, even without being one themselves. The chain of events that followed show a succession of steps towards the creation of group more and more faction-like within the Liberal Democrats: groups that were less focused on demographics or on a "niche", but with a political tone.

The first group of this kind was the Social Liberal Forum (SLF), which started also as a book being published within the party to discuss the party's general orientation, *Reinventing the State*. The SLF was created before the time of the coalition, but has been developing since then. The SLF was created in order to stand for a Keynesian approach to the economy when the party's leadership was becoming more liberal. Table 11 shows that this group tends to fulfil some of the criteria for being called a faction.

First, in terms of structure and policy difference, the SLF does have a well-established structure, with active core members and internal hierarchy. In terms of policy difference, the SLF divergence with at least some members of the Liberal Democrats is easy to identify as it touch to the approach to economy the party should defend. Also, in terms of ambition for the group and for the members, being a SLF member is indeed seen as an asset when running for elections within the party: in 2012, the SLF had recommendation votes for the elections of the party's executive (interviews C and D). The group itself wants to keep growing, as one of its objective is to build connections with the Members of the House of Commons and help organising them

in order to act consistently with the line the SLF sticks to (interviews D). The SLF political line is also presented to the members of the party at conferences, where documents are circulated to encourage sympathisers to vote a certain way when motions are presented to the conference. For all this reasons, it is possible to classify the SLF as a faction, as long as we further differentiate among various kinds of factions. People in SLF do not "see themselves as enemy to the party" (interviews D) but as an "internal party pressure group" (SLF website). Additionally, they will not oppose the coalition as a goal for the pressure group as a whole.

Table 11: Liberal Democrats sub-groups: factions, tendencies or single-issue groups? The case of the Social Liberal Forum

Based on Hine, 1982 and Boucek, 2009	
Criteria/ Sub-group	**Social Liberal Forum (SLF)**
Duration of the group	Created before 2010
Intensity of policy differences	Claimed as being low, mainly on the economy
Organisational development	Strong
Ambition for the group/ members	Get the group to be a central element of intra-party democracy; get their members in interesting positions within the party
Coverage	High
FPC	Yes
Parliament	Help "organising" sympathisers among the MPs is part of their objective
Constituency	Yes
Grassroots	Yes
Sense of belonging within the members	Yes
Sense of exclusiveness within the members	No
Classified as a single-issue group	No
Classified as a tendency	No
Classified as a Faction	Yes
- A cooperative faction	Yes
- A competitive faction	No
- A degenerative faction	No

This approach reflects the one that was adopted when publishing the book *Reinventing the State*, which welcomes contribution from members from different backgrounds within the Liberal Democrats: people like Tim Farron or Richard Grayson, from the left of the party, or Nick Clegg, leader and on the centre-right of the party. As a result, it is often seen as a "constructive" force within the party (interview 5) even though its influence is sometimes seen as too important (interview C). Since the SLF is concerned of not being as a disruptive element within the party, and because it wants to be seen as "fostering debate" (website) rather than taking over the party's leadership, the SLF can be regarded as a cooperative faction. A faction indeed, but not one that will seek to jeopardise the party's internal stability.

b. The internal dynamics after entering the coalition: not yet factionalisation, but some worrying prospects nonetheless

The entry into government and the coalition deal accelerated and altered the polarising dynamic at play within the party. It gave birth to another kind of sub-groups, which emerged as a reaction to the changes in the party's political environment and its new capability to influence policy (interview C). The first was Liberal Left, which was initiated by Richard Grayson, the former head of policy of the party. The group was meant to be a gathering of people who were dissatisfied with the direction the party was taking by joining the coalition with the Conservatives. Representing a minority in the party, they would oppose the Coalition Deal as a betrayal of Liberal Democrats' values and seek dialog with Labour instead. Table 12 shows that this group does fulfil some of the criteria of a faction in terms of policy differences, ambition,

and to a certain extent sense of belonging. This group went a step further in terms of factionalisation by openly opposing the party's leadership. However, this is to be balanced by

Based on Hine, 1982 and Boucek, 2009	
Criteria/ Sub-group	**Liberal Left (LL)**
Duration of the group	Founded in March 2011
Intensity of policy differences	Strong in its opposition to the coalition and economics
Organisational development	Small
Ambition for the group/ members	Be more vocal than SLF and mark its opposition to the coalition with the Conservatives
Coverage	Small
FPC	No
Parliament	No
Constituency	No
Grassroots	Small
Sense of belonging within the members	Yes for some core members
Sense of exclusiveness within the members	None towards SLF Yes towards Liberal Reform
Classified as a single-issue group	No
Classified as a tendency	No
Classified as a Faction	Yes
- A cooperative faction	No
- A competitive faction	Yes
- A degenerative faction	No

Table 12 : Liberal Democrats sub-groups: factions, tendencies or single-issue groups? The case of Liberal Left

the fact that one of the objectives of Liberal Left was to prevent people from leaving the party (interview E). The members of Liberal Left seem to still care for the Liberal Democrats as a party, which explains the contradiction of remaining members despite disagreeing with the leadership – a tension Richard Grayson himself did not solve when he finally left the party. Hence, since Liberal Left oppose the leadership but will not threaten the existence of the party or consider leaving the party as a whole like for instance the SDP did with Labour, this group shall be considered a competitive faction.

The creation of the Liberal Reform took the party a further down the road of internal division by factionalisation. This group as presented in Table 13 was created after the coalition was set up as a reaction to the party's new possibilities to influence national politics. The goal was to drive a counter reaction to the development of the other sub-groups, especially SLF, and there growing influence within the party. In the line of the current leadership, this group wants to

Table 13 Liberal Democrats sub-groups: factions, tendencies or single-issue groups? The case of Liberal Reform

Based on Hine, 1982 and Boucek, 2009	
Criteria/ Sub-group	**Liberal Reform (LR)**
Duration of the group	Founded later than LL in 2011
Intensity of policy differences	Strong differences focused on the economy with SLF and LL
Organisational development	Small but structured
Ambition for the group/ members	Counter balance SLF, be an alternative to their Keynesian vision of the economy.
Coverage	Small
FPC	No
Parliament	No
Constituency	Small
Grassroots	Small
Sense of belonging within the members	Yes for some core members
Sense of exclusiveness within the members	Some towards SLF Yes towards Liberal Left
Classified as a single-issue group	No
Classified as a tendency	No
Classified as a Faction	Yes
- A cooperative faction	No
- A competitive faction	Yes
- A degenerative faction	No

which differs from the SLF and LL more Keynesian approach to the economy. It has the ambition of growing and becoming more structured than it is now, in order to serve as an alternative to SLF and Keynesianism within the party. With the creation of Liberal Reform, there was for the first time a sense of exclusiveness developed between the various sub-groups

that were merging within the Liberal Democrats. Being a member of SLF would not prevent anyone from belonging to another group, as there was no other; joining Liberal Left was not incompatible with being a member of SLF, and most of them actually did; but being part of Liberal Reform was not consistent with being a member of either SLF or LL. Contrarily to Liberal Left, Liberal Reform supports the leadership but is in competition with other intra-party groups. For this reason it can be called a competitive faction as well.

There therefore is a tendency to see new groups appear which are closer to being factions than most of the groups that existed since 1988 within the party. They now tend to openly oppose the leadership more than previous groups did, and they have irreconcilable visions of some topics, and especially of the economy. They are therefore in competition with one another, trying to influence the party's political orientation, as factions would do. However, the factionalising trend cannot be considered to be completed yet because most of these groups, apart from SLF, lack coverage and have no little of attraction for the members; and because none of them has yet structured groups of influence within the Parliamentary Party. For a party which was born out of the merging of two groups, the Liberal Democrats seems to be far less inclined to internal divisions than for instance the Conservatives. Factionalisation within the Liberal Democrats is a trend, a "dynamic" (Boucek, 2009), which for now is limited to non-degenerative groups often with a low power of attraction. This trend could be potentially worrying but only in a mid-term perspective. Therefore, speaking of the "factionalisation" of the Liberal Democrats could be some kind of an overstatement, especially if understood in the destabilising sense of the term.

What would rather been seen as a direct threat for a party such as the Liberal Democrats is the decrease it has suffered from in terms of membership. The party relies heavily on grassroots campaigning to gain elections as it has shown once again in the Eastleigh by-election in 2013. Between 2010 and mid-2013, the membership figure has been constantly decreasing, with

people shifting away from the party. It was not before mid-2013 that some new people started joining again (interview 4). On a short term perspective, this decline in membership seems much more worrying than a tendency to factionalisation, and would in itself be seen as a new constraint by the leadership. Therefore, there is indeed an internal constraint the party needs to deal with, which calls for a strengthened sense of belonging and attractiveness of the party towards the members. However, this is not mainly due to factionalisation, but to the decrease in the membership.

C. The Liberal Democrats' strategic European 'moment': from challengers to mobilizers?

In order to address the constraints it is facing, a party can either be a challenger, fighting the mainstream parties on their grounds, or a mobiliser, using new issues to gather votes around its stance (Deschouwer, 2008). Until 2010, the Liberal Democrats adopted a strategy that would put them in the position of challenging the main parties, by fighting on the same topics as they did and adopting the valence system (see Part I). However, the coalition has damaged the adequacy of the valence strategy for this small party. Electoral backlash, risks of polarisation and loss of attractiveness for the membership were new constraints induced by the lack of visibility and the level of compromise required by incumbency. They led to a change of the party's strategy. In order to restore a "security net" (Bolleyer, 2008), the leadership needed to find a topic that would be differentiating enough from both Labour and the Conservatives, and which appeal to the electorate well enough to ensure the party's political survival. The party has since autumn 2013 adopted a strategy of a mobiliser in a vote-seeking perspective to restore its stance by differentiating from its coalition partner and from the rest of the British political scene.

a. Last resort Europe: the one differentiating and topical issue for the Liberal Democrats

Contrarily to bigger, older parties, small parties do not enjoy a reliable "security net" of core

voters (Bolleyer, 2008). This is particularly true in the case of the Liberal Democrats, for whom incumbency has damaged the party's relation to some share of its electorate together with its capacity to appeal to some traditional Liberal Democrats' topics (Table 14).

The Liberal Democrats have first to face the loss of two kind of votes they had been benefiting from in the past: the youth vote and the protest vote. In 2010, although they were not a protest party, the Liberal Democrats benefitted from the protest vote (interview 5), a vote that is automatically lost with incumbency. Similarly enough, educated young people below 35 were the more likely to vote for Liberal Democrats (Ipsos Mori, 2010); but the trust of this age group has been severely damaged by the tuition fees episode. These are two electorates the party cannot target the way it did in the past. The leadership needed to find a way to appeal back to the electorate, and especially those who used to vote for the Liberal Democrats but were tempted to cast their vote for another party instead (interview 5). For this purpose, the party had several topics at its disposal that were traditionally seen as being specific to the Liberal Democrats' party. However, the capacity to appeal to most of this topics had also been damaged by incumbency (Table 14). The main topic, in terms of saliency, is the economy. However, due

Table 14 The state of the political scene for the Liberal Democrats

	Liberal Democrats' differentiating topics (5E*)	**Prospect in upcoming elections**
Topics where the Liberal Democrats are usually seen as having a "different story to tell"**	Economy	Orange Book effect – too close to the Conservatives to be used as a differentiating tool
	Education	Damaged due to tuition fees and not differentiating enough
	Electoral and constitutional reform	Out of the agenda due to the failure of the AV referendum
	Environment	Low saliency issue + niche party fighting on the same grounds
	Europe	**No big party taking an unambiguous pro-European line + Potential high-saliency issue**

*"5E", Agnès Alexandre, 2013; ** interview 1

to the leadership's closeness to the Conservatives on the topic plus the controversial outcomes of the party's time in government, for instance on the so-called bedroom tax, make focusing on this topic a risky strategy the Liberal Democrats.

Second in terms of saliency, education as a Liberal Democrats' topic has been severely damaged by the tuition fees episode. The party cannot rely on this topic, which makes them look untrustworthy. Third, the electoral reform was a key element of the Liberal Democrats' political campaigning in the past. However, the failure of the AV referendum has taken the topic off the political agenda, at least for the years to come. The topic of environment might have been a possibility for the Liberal Democrats, but its saliency is relatively low and most importantly there is a niche party, the Greens, who already fill this political space. The only spot where there seemed to be a place to take was Europe, which occupied the front of the political scene in the run-up to the 2014 European elections because of the debate on an "in or out" referendum which David Cameron started in Bloomberg in January 2013. This was in addition a divisive issue for the main parties and a traditional Liberal Democrats' identifier, as confirmed by all of the interviewees. Plus, the mobilising potential of this issue appealed to the leadership, as despite the lack of pro-European stance within the political scene, polls kept showing a real support for
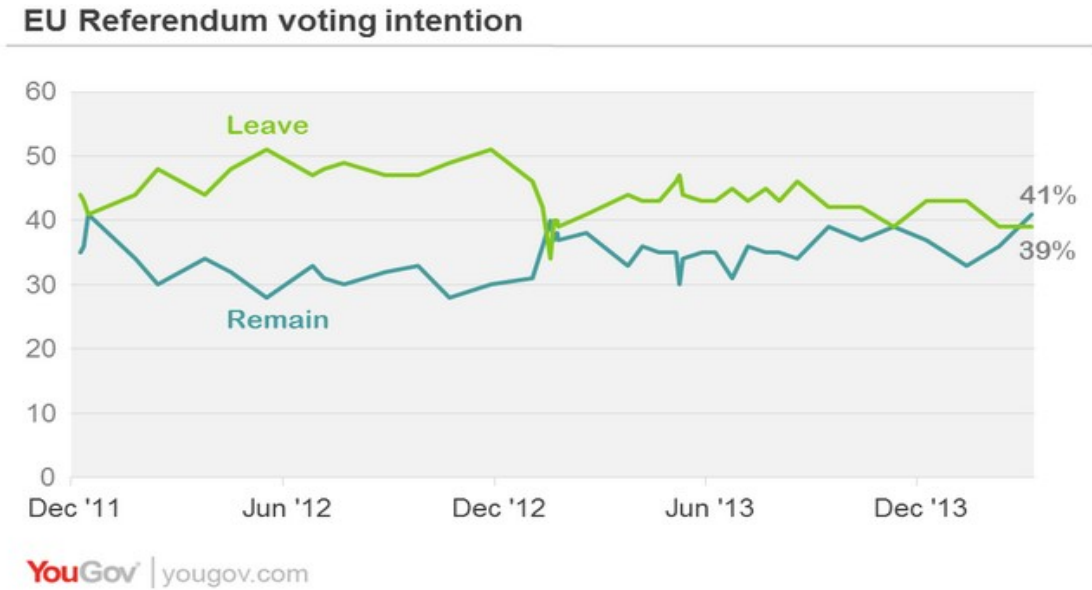
Graph 25 European Union referendum voting intention; Source: Yougov

87

EU membership amongst the voters (see Graph 28 from Yougov).

The possibility of appealing to an average of 35% of the population was also one of the reasons that made the leadership choose to adopt a pro-European line (interview 5). From being a "toxic" asset for the party a few years ago (interviews), pro-Europeanism became the core of the party's political strategy.

b. Gathering the core around a common stance

In order to reinforce the party's internal cohesion and force of attraction, the leadership needed to find a way to renew the members' adhesion and feeling of fighting for a common cause. Since European elections were to take place in 2014, there was the possibility of using the European question to address the risk of lack of homogeneity within the membership by taking the attention away from purely economic matters. These questions are polarising for the members, and allow for little differentiation because of the lack of distinctiveness in the coalition policies between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

It would be wrong to assume the Liberal Democrats all share a same view over the European question. As shown already by Whiteley in 2006, there are a federalists, pro-integration, reformists and even Eurosceptic within the party (see Graph 29, from Whiteley, 2006). Only a
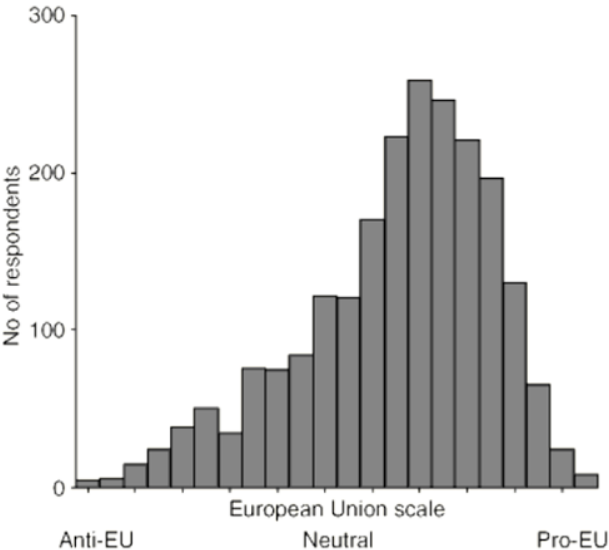
Graph 26 The Liberal Democrats' opinion on European integration; Source: Whiteley, 2006

few Liberal Democrats ever were for the status quo at the European level. However, and contrarily to other British parties, most of the Liberal Democrats remains in favour of the idea of European integration. As shown in Graph 29, most of the Liberal Democrats stand in the middle of the scale between federalists and Eurosceptic. This is still the case in the current state of the party, as shown by the mostly united front the Liberal Democrats have shown in the process of ratifying the Lisbon Treaties in March 2008 (Cowley, 2010). The only major argument within the party was then on the question of holding or not a referendum on British membership to the European Union.

Ahead of the 2014 European elections, the leadership had the occasion to test the state of the membership's relation to Europe thanks to the process of the working group that took place between July 2012 and September 2013. A working group is in charge of drafting during a series of meetings held over a few months a policy paper for the party's conference to vote upon. This paper serves as the basis for further elaboration of the party's manifesto on this topic. The previous policy paper dealing with Europe dated back from 2008. According to the interviewee 3, Europe policy papers are usually supported by the conference. The question is rather the extent to which the final manifesto will differ from them. For this working group as well, the leadership was seeking a united Liberal Democrats front on Europe. The interviews conducted with several members of this working group show a common feeling that one of its main purpose was to create a document that would reflect the party's position as a whole. According to most of the interviewees, the choice of the members of the working group was done in such a way that it would ensure a diverse representation of the members' opinion on the topic, from pragmatic to federalists, so that no one would feel "left behind" (interviews 1 and 2).

This working paper was meant to find a line the whole party would be ready to stick to. For the few months that the discussion lasted, the one main point of divergence was, like for the

ratification of Lisbon, the question of a referendum (interviews 1 and 2). This was true not only of the members of the group, but also of the wider audience within the party. Indeed, when the consultation session of the policy paper took place in Brighton for the spring 2013 conference, most of the Liberal Democrats who were attending the session agreed on the general direction the paper shall take, only diverging on whether or not to hold a referendum on British membership immediately. However, despite these lines of disagreement, the party did give once more at the autumn 2013 conference in Glasgow the image of a united front on Europe. Indeed, the voting was then split in two parts: first, the question of whether or not to hold a referendum; second, the adoption of the policy paper as a whole. The working group's position on the referendum was adopted with a majority of votes; the policy paper received for his part quasi unanimity. What would be remembered by those who attended the conference, members and candidates, would be a strongly united party around the European question, for a positive approach to European integration.

Moreover this time several members of the working group ended up being part of the team working on the European election manifesto as well. Contrarily to past experience reported in interview 3, the leadership adopted a manifesto that was not only in the line of the policy paper, but which was even to some extent more pro-European than the policy paper itself, according to an interviewee (A) who took part to the drafting of both. It was the leadership who came up with the slogan of the "Party of In", which was not found within the working group (interviews 1, 2 and B), and build an even more pro-European campaign (interview A).

Indeed, the party has since the autumn 2013 conference in Glasgow, been 'unashamedly' pro-European (Clegg, ALDE 2013). The party describes itself as 'The Party of IN', and since Nick Clegg's speech in Glasgow this stance is reiterated both internally, via informative and participative electronic campaign addressed to the members, and externally via speeches and publications. An interesting example of this is the profile adopted by the Liberal Democrats

when hosting the ALDE party congress in London from November, 28th 2013 to Saturday, 30th 2013. Nick Clegg's speeches at this occasion resonated as a promise made to their European partners that the Liberal Democrats would fight for Europe. The article he wrote for the third issue of the Liberal Bulletin, meant to be circulated among the attendees of the conference consisted of several pro-European stance and commitment such as 'Liberal Democrats are determined to fight an unashamedly pro-European campaign' or 'only the Liberal Democrats, the 'Party of In', are prepared to make a positive, passionate case for Britain's continued EU membership' (p.5). His opening speech to the plenary of the Congress was also marked by his claim that 'the Liberal Democrats will fight an unambiguous pro-European campaign in the 2014 European elections (…) as a committed member of the European construction, full stop. We are the party of In'. The Liberal Democrats delegation, which consisted of more than 100 delegates, also showed a united front to the delegates for instance when triggering a standing ovation at the end of Nick Clegg's speech to the plenary. This is a reflection of the process ongoing within the Liberal Democrats Party, which could be described as gathering forces in order to be able to stand coherently as the British pro-European party. That was for instance striking when the Liberal Democrats delegation was invited to join all the fringe events in order to "rebuild their community business" and acquire a greater knowledge of EU affairs. Finally, the fact the strategy of the Liberal Democrats' party over Europe was aimed at regaining visibility was further confirmed by the tactic adopted by Nick Clegg in the early months of 2014, when Nick Clegg challenged the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) Nigel Farage in a round of debates over Europe, addressing UKIP as their main political opponent, defining him as the "adversary" (interview 4). These debates were a trade-off between the two leaders: Nigel Farage has visibility but wants credibility; Nick Clegg has the credentials of his position of deputy Prime minister, but lacks visibility. In that sense, even though Nick Clegg failed to win the debate against Nigel Farage, the target was still reached: according to the

membership officer of the Liberal Democrats, the day of the first Nick vs Nigel debate was the best recruitment day for the party since the beginning of 2014 (interview 4).

All of the interviewees, belonging to a faction or not and if yes whatever the faction, expressed support for the "Party of In" campaign. For some its pragmatic character was a reason to support it; for others it answered a personal frustration with the party's behaviour towards the European question in the past. As far as members are concerned, it seems the leadership did a good choice by betting on the European horse. Working from a more pro-European perspective was a positive one for the internal health of the party, and it also helped reverse the decreasing trend in the membership.

As a conclusion, valence was too uncontroversial for the Liberal Democrats when the party needed to restore its relevance towards the voter. The lack of security net also explains that the party decided to turn to a more narrowly defined part of the electorate, the pro-Europeans, hoping it would secure support at least from those who needed to be reminded "why they are Liberal Democrats" (interview 5). Europe being "almost the one issue everyone agrees with in the party" (interview 4), it had the potential of strengthening the party's internal cohesion, enhancing its visibility by making it the main opponent of the highly visible UKIP, and dividing the Conservatives and Labour who find it very difficult to agree on a common line on the topic. All these elements explain why, in the leadership's view, Europe could save the centre.

Conclusion

The Liberal Democrats' trajectory within British politics shows the various constraints that a party needs to deal with in order to achieve an objective, and how a change in these constraints oblige the party to alter its strategy. It is an example of a small, third party, who has been struggling to get into government and finally did so. Once in government, the need to re-orientate the party's political strategy has become pressing: the challenges the party was facing have changed with incumbency. It forced the party, originally rather likely to adopt valence over positioning, to reconsider the suitability of taking a different stance than the other main parties' ones on some topics. Being in government has reminded the Liberal Democrats that there was a need to be unique in politics. The coalition has increased their need for differentiation. Due to the political calendar (European elections) and British political context (debate on a referendum), Europe came in as a relevant tool in this regard.

As a small third party, the Liberal Democrats have been struggling to get into a government. Their first challenge had been to build a strong centre party after a difficult merging in 1988 between the Liberals and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Their political survival depended upon overcoming the remaining SDP, whose existence jeopardised the party's relevance to the voter. Once standing alone in the centre, the party focused on reaching its second objective: be the third force of the British two-party system. They therefore focused on challenging the two main parties in order to be seen as a plausible alternative to Labour or Conservatives. In their manifesto, they chose to deal with salient issues that the voter would feel strongly about and that other parties would be debating as well. They did not choose to occupy a political niche on topics where they could have differentiate from the other two main parties, such as Europe for instance. The Liberal Democrats relied on valence more than positioning to be seen as

mainstream party. They wanted to be a challenger, a centre party that would become pivotal and eventually get into government. With this strategy, the Liberal Democrats managed to survive despite the British two-party system, which leaves little room for a third voice.

In the meanwhile, the two main parties have had the tendency to lose votes in general elections, and in 2010 it reached a point when no party would be able to form a government all by itself. For the first time in decades, a coalition was possible in the United-Kingdom. The Conservative leader, David Cameron, had every reason to try and reach a deal with the Liberal Democrats. He was responsible for leading a campaign that had failed to bring the party a sustainable majority, and he was about to try and implement tough economic reforms in order to cope with the crises. With this considerations in mind, he made a "big, open offer" to the Liberal Democrats to invite them in government. His proposal arrived at a moment when the Liberal Democrats were in a bag-end of their political strategy. Their share of seats in general elections, their share of councillors and their number of members of the European Parliament were stagnant at best, if not declining. A vicious combination of voters' expectations and structure of the electoral system prevented them from any major breakthrough in Westminster, an institution which in any case only has a limited influence on policy making. The party was in need of a new dynamic. Coupled with the fact the party had since its creation been aiming at being in government, the 2010 opportunity was worth a few compromises for the Liberal Democrats, and they decided to join a coalition government.

The negotiations to form the coalition government were remarkably short, and mistakes were made by the unexperienced Liberal Democrats. Their main concerns while setting up the coalition was first to reach a deal and get into power, and second to then influence as many political areas as possible. With these objectives in mind, they accepted compromises sometimes at their disadvantage. On policies that were key to them and to their political survival on a mid-term perspective like the electoral reform, they did not take enough guaranties from

their coalition partner. The Alternative Vote, a more proportional system for Westminster's elections, was submitted to a referendum instead of being passed through Parliament and furthermore was not backed by the whole government, as the Conservatives campaigned against it. Reversely, on topics where the Liberal Democrats had disagreement with the Conservatives, they did not manage to dissociate themselves well enough from their coalition partner to preserve their political credibility. The case of the tuition fees is revealing of this flaw in the Liberal Democrats' strategy. This reform, which was in direct contradiction with the campaign they run in 2010, was presented as a government's bill and passed through Westminster, forcing Liberal Democrats frontbenchers to vote in favour of it. Put together, these two examples show how the Liberal Democrats failed to reach a bargain where they would risk as much as their coalition partner. All in all, they failed to grasp the subtle balance between differentiation and compromise necessary to exist as a viable coalition partner as well as an independent party. As a result, they took most of the blame from unpopular government measures and lost the trust of many voters while enjoying little of the visibility of a party in government.

However, and despite these failures, Liberal Democrats have not differ from their conviction that their place remains in government. The leadership is mainly concerned with maintaining the party's coalition potential and their influence on the government's action. This includes strengthening the governing potential via centrality, which provides the party with possibilities of alliance with different partners, and its pivotality, so that it can be seen as the unavoidable partner in the next formation of a government. Restore the party's coalition potential however requires reaching a sufficient amount of votes and seats in the next general elections, which will make cooperation with the Liberal Democrats a practical requirement for whichever party is in the lead in a hung Parliament. Since the electoral reform failed, and because the trust of the voter has been altered, the party needs to change its strategy if it wants staying into government to be a likely prospect.

The Liberal Democrats have been trying to alter the course of their political strategy in order to differentiate at last from their coalition partner. Their situation was paradoxical: because of the structure of coalition they had agreed to, because of their commitment to seeing the government last and because of the internal divisions within the party of their coalition partner, being into government has seemingly decreased their relevance to the voter. The party has been losing votes in every levels of elections since 2010. The new constraint was the need to reaffirm its distinctiveness to the voter in order to regain relevance. Challenges were also internal as the entry into government had trigger the formation of sub-groups within the Liberal Democrats which are not yet factions but tend to be closer to being one than most of the groups that used to exist in the party before. The party's membership has become more polarised on the topic of the economy, where cooperation with the Conservatives had led to the bigger compromises from the party's political line. Most importantly to the Liberal Democrats' Party, which heavily relies on local door-to-door campaigning in political campaigns, there were fewer and fewer party members. The leadership needed to address these internal constraints.

Europe was a topic that could solve these dilemma. With the European elections and the debate on a "in or out" referendum, the topic had gained enough saliency to catch the attention of the voter. It also had the advantage of being a topic which clearly differentiates them from the other parties, and especially from the Conservatives. They could incarnate the pro-European side of the government, and regain the visibility lost during the first years of coalition. Moreover, it was one of the few traditional Liberal Democrats' identifiers that had not been damaged beyond immediate repair by the coalition. The party's members would be able to gather around a pro-European stance more than they could do on any other topic. Therefore, the leadership decided to break from the political oblivion they had been putting on the European topics beforehand. The party's new strategy was to restore a "security net" of core voters by addressing the 36% of British citizens who would rather remain in the European Union than leave it. The European

elections campaign was therefore run under the "Party of IN" banner, in a strategy that put the Liberal Democrats leader Nick Clegg in direct confrontation with the United Kingdom Independence Party's vocal leader Nigel Farage.

As far as the results of the elections went, it seems the strategy was a disaster for the party who lost all but one of its Members the European Parliament (MEPs). When crossing the Liberal Democrats' score with the ones of other parties, it seems a great share of the pro-European vote was absorb by the Green Party who also decided to run a pro-European campaign and gained three MEPs. The United Kingdom Independence Party might also have benefited from the credibility and coverage it gained thanks to the face-to-face debates between Clegg and Farage, although the far right's party dynamic was already well established even before these debates took place. What is striking is that from the first post-electoral reactions for instance on Liberal Democrats Voice website, it seems most of the members do not question the fact of standing in favour of Europe. Most of the damage is attributed to the leader, Nick Clegg, who some believe has lost the trust of the voters for good. On explanation of the outcome of the election would be that if the party has managed to be more distinctive, its relevance is still damaged by the lack of trust of the voters, in a "tuition-fees effect" manner. Running for Europe has therefore still reached only half of its objective. In terms of votes the disaster was not avoided. However, it has strengthened the sense of belonging within the members for the time of the campaign, although it now seems the party divides upon the question of keeping Nick Clegg in office or not.

Finally, this trajectory confirms the need for a smaller coalition partner to maintain a strong tension between cooperation and competition within a coalition government. It is also an example of how getting into coalition can damaged the leadership's relationship to its membership by making more salient internal divisions within the party on topics on which it used to make little difference in national politics, such as in this case the economy. Last but not

least, it shows how differentiation, when it used to be seen as an unsuitable item, can become a useful tool in assuring a party's political survival.

What the Liberal Democrats' relation to differentiation tells us about the future of the British party system would require further enquiry. It has been shown in this study that the coalition was partly the result of the compatibility of the programmes of the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, which itself resulted from a strong centripetal force at play in British politics since the start of Tony Blair's New Labour. This centripetal dynamic led to the point where in 2010, on a left/right scale such as the one used by the CMP, all three parties were ranked very closely to one another (Graph 8). Due to the lack of differentiation between the parties, the British party system was identified as being driven by valence more than positioning (Sherrington, 2006). Since another explanation of the coalition is the loss of electoral dynamism of both Labour and Conservatives, it can also be understood as a sign of saturation of the British political spectrum in the centre. This would explain the rise of third parties, including the Liberal Democrats but also the more vocal United Kingdom Independence Party, not to mention the Green Party who did rather well in the 2014 European elections. The way the Liberal Democrats have been forced to resort to differentiation on a positioning topic first and for all in order to hope restore their relevance to the voter can therefore also be a sign of the end of the valence-era in British politics. Driven by the fear of UKIP and the same run for relevance as the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives have also started drifting away from the centre, more to the right of the political spectrum. There is a possibility that in 2015, the CMP will identify a bigger gap between parties, with a Conservative party further on the right and a Labour party heading back towards the left of the political spectrum. In a mid-term perspective, this would restore the need for a centre party as it existed in the 1980s, when the SDP broke up from the Labour party, and the Liberal party started winning again. So, this difficult moment might not be the end of the Liberal Democrats' as a party. Although it will surely lose seats in 2015, it

might find itself relevant once more because of the trajectory of the other British parties. If that were to be the case, Europe would only be the tip of the iceberg of the process that actually saved the centre.

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Annexes

Annex 1: List of graphs and tables

Graph 1 – Left and right cleavages in British politics and the place of the centre (1964- 1992)

Graph 2 – Liberal Democrats vs Social Democratic Party: 1988-1991 by-elections results

Table 1 – Europe in the Liberal Democrats and Labour manifesto, 1992 and 1997

Table 2 – Features of a niche party compared to a mainstream party

Graph 3 – The structure of the manifesto: niche party vs mainstream party

Table 3 – The first three topics in the parties' manifesto (1992-2010)

Graph 4 – Saliency of various topics in General Elections

Graph 5 – The structure of the Liberal Democrats' manifesto

Table 4 – The first three topics in the Liberal Democrats' manifesto (1992-2010)

Graph 6 – The saliency of the European topic in General Elections

Graph 7 – Positioning over Europe in British elections

Table 5 – The parties' slogans in General Elections

Graph 8 – Left/Right positioning of the British political parties in General Elections (1992-2010)

Graph 9 – The parties' positioning over Europe in General elections (1992-2010)

Graph 10 – The results of the 2010 General Elections

Graph 11 – The average coalition formation time in Europe

Graph 12 – Liberal Democrats' scores in General Elections

Graph 13 – Percentage of local councillors who are Liberal Democrats

Graph 14 – Liberal Democrats in European elections (1994-2009)

Graph 15 – Seats won per party in European elections (1997-2009)

Graph 16 – Voting intention during the 2010 British General Election Campaign

Graph 17 – Party leader conducting the best election campaign

Graph 18 – Who did the best job in party leader debates

Table 6 – Projection of the 2010 General Election results with different voting systems

Graph 19 – Likeliness to vote in favour of AV by party's affiliation

Graph 20 – People who voted for AV in 2011 and Liberal Democrats' voters in 2010

Individuals who are part of the party's internal administration (chronologically)

N°	Date	Place	Quality
1	28.11.13	Canary Warf, London	Staff member of the 2013 Europe working group
2	03.12.13	Skype	Staff member of the 2008 Europe working group Chair of the 2013 Europe working group
3	05.12.13	Mail	Chair of the 2008 Europe working group
4	28.03.14	Westminster, London	Membership and development officer at the Liberal Democrats
5	30.03.14	Cambridge, UK	Member of the Federal Policy Committee

Individuals who are active members of the party (chronologically)

N°	Date	Place	Quality
A	28.11.13	Canary Warf, London	Former MEP, former member of the 2013 Europe Working group Member of the 2014 European manifesto working group
B	29.11.13	Canary Warf, London	Officer at the Liberal Democrats European Group (AO)
C	28.03.14	La City, London	Active member of Liberal Reform
D	28.03.14	Cambridge, UK	Council member of the Social Liberal Forum
E	01.04.14	Skype	Active member of Liberal Left

General questions (to all, according to their time as a party member)

1. Shadow cabinet: when did the Lib Dems start using the term in Parliament?
2. What can they remember from the autumn 2009 conference (which was reported in the media as being quite difficult)? Did they attend it? How was the atmosphere? Was it different from other conferences they attended?
3. What was the top-one reason that, in their view, made the Lib Dems join the coalition in 2010 when they did not in 1997?
4. Did they attend the 2010 Birmingham special conference and do they remember from there?

To active members of the Liberal Democrat European Group (interview B)

1. When was this group created ?
2. Is this group's purpose to inform MEPs, to train the bases, to create a link between the grassrootsa and the national, European levels of the party ? What is the sense priority between these ?
3. Can you give me examples of actions the LDEG sets up ? Is there any lobbying action towards the party's political line ?
4. How do you feel this group is welcomed within the party ?
5. What is the trend as far as the group's membership is concerned ?
6. Broadly speaking, what is your feeling over the party's European line ?

<u>**Effects of the coalition within the party**</u>
To the chairs of the working groups (interviews 2 and 3)
1. How was the Chair of the Working group appointed ? Why did you choose to take on this role ?
2. How were the members chosen ? Did you play any part in the selection ?
3. Can you describe a typical session of the working group to me ?
4. How was the atmosphere within the group ? Was the question of the voter's reception of the party's European policy important ? If yes, to whom ?
5. What do you recall from the consultation session in spring 2013 ?
6. Generally speaking, how would you evaluate the impact of the working group on the
    o Party/ conference
    o The Federal Policy Committee
    o The broader party's line (as in manifesto)
7. Are you satisfied with the work achieved ?

To voluntary members of the working group (interviews A and 1)
1. On which bases were you picked to be a member of this working group ?
2. Why did you want to be part of it ?
3. What is your braod impression of the atmosphere in the working group ? How involved were people ? Were debates equilibriate, was their a dominant pattern ?
4. Generally speaking, how would you evaluate the impact of the working group on the
    o Party/ conference
    o The Federal Policy Committee
    o The broader party's line (as in manifesto)
5. Are you satisfied with the work achieved ?

To active members of newly created sub-groups (interviews C, D and E)
1. What was the date of creation and closure (if ended) of the body?
2. How and why was this group created? Why and how quickly did they join this group?
3. How would they estimate of intensity of policy differences with the rest of the party? On which topics do they see these differences as important or non-significant?
4. What is the level of organisational development of their body? Is there an internal hierarchy, an internal coherence and a certain level of discipline among the members, for instance when delegates vote during the Congress?
5. What is the final ambition/aim of the group? How specific is the objective of the group? If it is specific, was it here since the very beginning?
6. Coverage : are they represented in/ is the fact of belonging to this group an additional reason to be chosen for
- FPC ?
- Parliament ?
- Constituency ?
- Grassroots?
7. What is the degree of sense of belonging within the members of the body? How high is it, in terms of priority, compared to other groups members may also belong too?
8. Is there any sense of exclusiveness within the members regarding other Lib Dems groups – especially between LL and LR (why did they not join the new groups?)?

9. Do you have the feeling the dynamic within the Lib Dems party regarding the creation of new intra-party groups has changed over the past few years? If so, how would you explain it?

To the member of the FPC (interview 5)
1. What was the reaction within the FPC of the creation of new groups within the party? Is there a feeling that more and more groups are being created? Are the new groups seen as a threat by FPC?
2. There are some members in the FPC who belong to these groups. Is it something they claim for? Is it sometimes used within the FPC as a tool to win an argument or towards the membership to single someone out from the rest of the FPC?
3. Do the groups usually try to influence the FPC? Are members contacted in a lobbying-like manner in order to discuss the group's priorities and ideas?
4. What can of trend is there within the party as far as new groups go, in the FPC's point of view? Would the FPC be keener on containing the creation of new groups or on the contrary are they seen as an asset for internal debate within the party?
5. Do you have the feeling the dynamic within the Lib Dems party regarding the creation of new intra-party groups has changed over the past few years? If so, how would you explain it?

To the member of the membership and development office (interview 4)
1. What is the state of the Lib Dems membership four years after the beginning of the coalition?
2. What kind of audit does the Lib Dems central office conduct among members?
3. What is the share, in this work, of studying the voters' preferences compared to studying the members' positioning?
4. Was there a recent audit on the members' opinion on Europe? If so, what kind of results did they get? Was there a trend depending for instance on age, social background or education?
5. What is the perception he has of the reception among members of the current 'Party of In' campaign and to what extent is this perception based on facts?
6. Does the office also keep an eye on the creation of new groups within the party (Liberal Left, Liberal Reform, SLF) and their membership? Do you have the feeling the dynamic within the Lib Dems party regarding the creation of new intra-party groups has changed over the past few years? If so, how would you explain it?

Annex 3: By-elections results (1988-1991)

By election	Date	LD result		SDP result	
		votes	share (%)	votes	share (%)
KENSINGTON and CHELSEA, KENSINGTON	14.07.1988	2,546	10,8	1,19	5
GLASGOW, GOVAN	10.11.1988	1,246	4,1	-	-
ESSEX, EPPING FOREST	15.12.1988	8,679	26	4,077	12,2
NORTH YORKSHIRE, RICHMOND (YORKSHIRE)*	23.02.1989	11,589	22,1	16,909	32,2
MID GLAMORGAN, PONTYPRIDD	23.02.1989	1,5	3,9	1,199	3,1
SOUTH GLAMORGAN, VALE OF GLAMORGAN	04.05.1989	2,017	4,2	1,098	2,3
LAMBETH, VAUXHALL	15.06.1989	5,043	17,5	-	-
GLASGOW, CENTRAL	15.06.1989	411	1,6	253	1
STAFFORDSHIRE, MID STAFFORDSHIRE	22.03.1990	6,315	11,2	1,422	2,5
UPPER BANN	17.05.1990	6,698	18,6	154	0,4
BOOTLE	24.05.1990	3,179	8,9	155	0,4
Dissolution of the Social Democratic Party					
MERSEYSIDE, KNOWSLEY SOUTH	27.09.1990	1,809	8,5	-	-
EASTBOURNE**	18.10.1990	23,415	50,8	-	-
BOOTLE	08.11.1990	2,216	7,9	-	-
BRADFORD, NORTH	08.11.1990	9,105	25,3	-	-
PAISLEY, NORTH	29.11.1990	2,139	8,3	-	-
PAISLEY, SOUTH	29.11.1991	2,66	9,8	-	-
LANCASHIRE, RIBBLE VALLEY **	07.03.1991	22,377	48,5	-	-
WEST GLAMORGAN, NEATH	04.04.1991	2	5,8	-	-
GWENT, MONMOUTH	16.05.1991	11,164	24,8	-	-
LIVERPOOL, WALTON	04.07.1991	14,457	36	-	-
CLEVELAND, LANGBAURGH	07.11.1991	8,421	16,1	-	-
WEST YORKSHIRE, HEMSWORTH	07.11.1991	4,808	20,1	-	-
GRAMPIAN, KINCARDINE and DEESIDE**	07.11.1991	20,779	49	-	-

* The voice of the centre parties (Liberals and SDP) would have outweighted the Conservative candidate and winner
** Liberal Democrats win
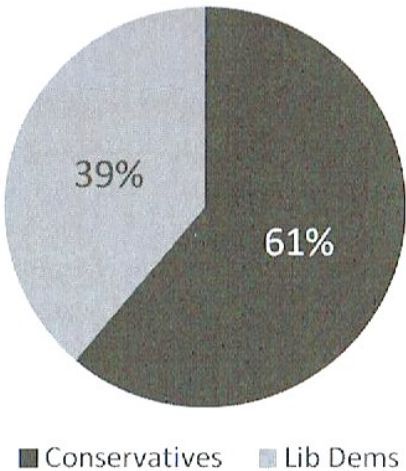Data: http://www.election.demon.co.uk/by1987.html

Figure 3.1 Proportion of Vote Share between Conservatives and Lib Dems after the 2010 General Election

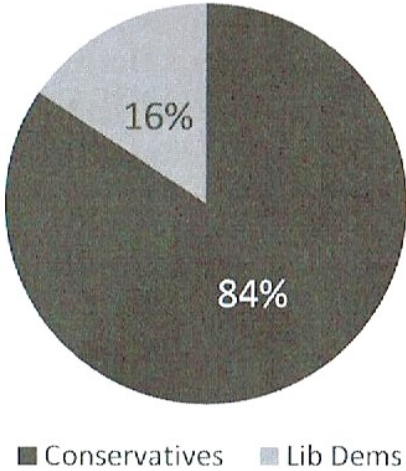Source: Institute for Government, *United We Stand*, 31

Figure 3.2 Proportion of MPs Share between Conservatives and Lib Dems
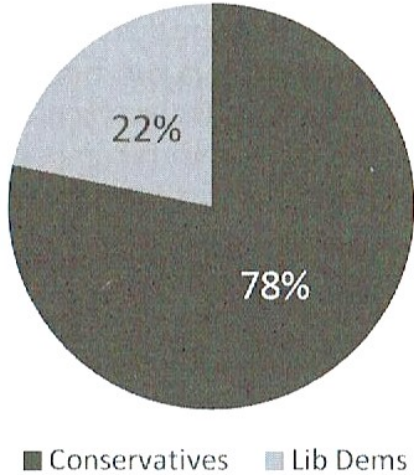
Source: IFG, ibid

Figure 3.3 Proportion of Cabinet Ministers Share between Conservative and Lib Dems in the 2010 Coalition Government
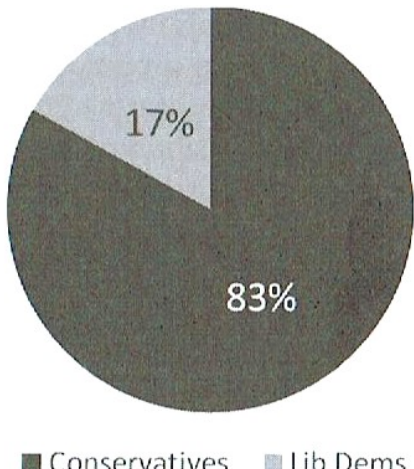
Source: IFG, ibid

Figure 3.4 Proportion of Junior Ministers Share between Conservatives and Lib Dems in the 2010 Coalition Government

Source: IFG, ibid

Source: Robert Hazell and Ben Yong, *The Politics of Coalition; How the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government Works* Portland; Hart Publishing, 2012

Figure 5.1 Ministers in Departments by Party Affiliation, 2010–11
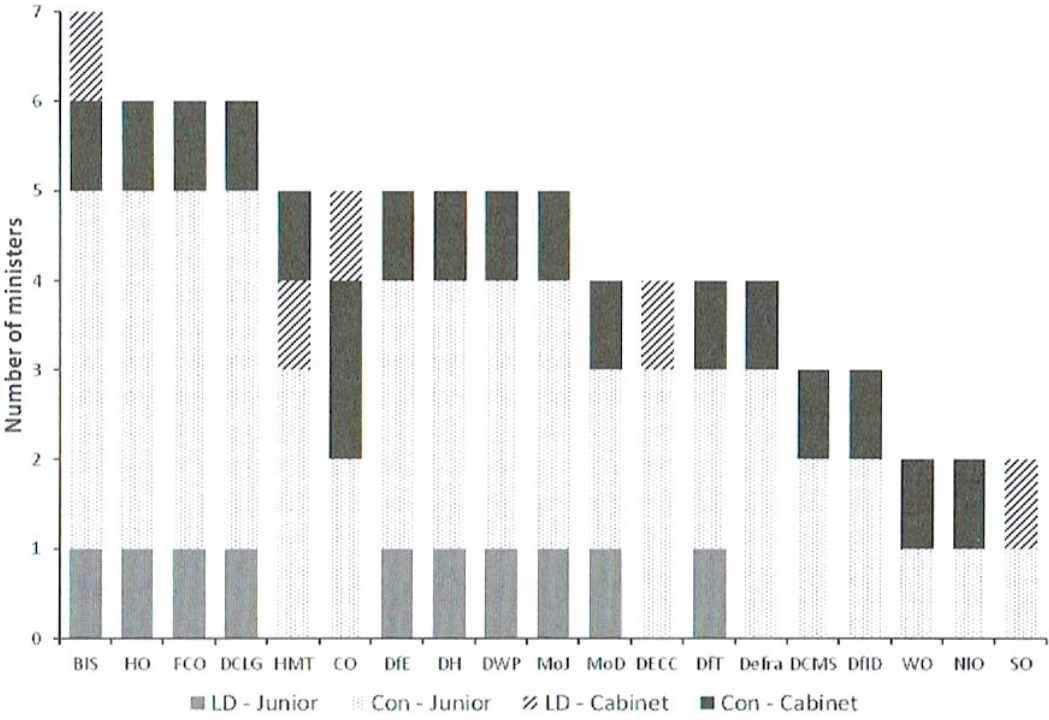
Source: adapted from Institute for Government, *United We Stand*, 34

Source: Hazell and Young

Annex 6: Projections of different voting systems

First-past-the-post

In the current system, people get a single vote for who they want to represent their constituency and whichever candidate gets the most votes wins.

UK use: Election to Westminster and local government in England and Wales.

What happened in 2010
Winning post: 326

Con: 306

Lab: 258

LD: 57

Others: 28

Source: Electoral Reform Society
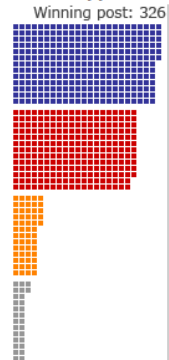
Single transferable vote

Several constituencies are combined and voters rank the candidates. Members are elected once they pass a certain number of votes, known as a quota.

UK use: Used in Northern Ireland for elections to Assembly, European Parliament and local government. Also used for local elections in Scotland.

Applied to 2010 result

Con: 246

Lab: 207

LD: 162

Others: 35
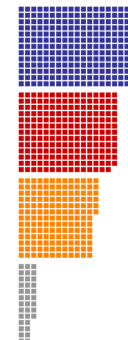
Source: Electoral Reform Society

Alternative vote

Voters rank the candidates. If no candidate has 50% of first preferences then second preferences are counted and so on until someone has a majority.

UK use: By-elections to Northern Ireland Assembly.

Applied to 2010 result

Con: 281

Lab: 262
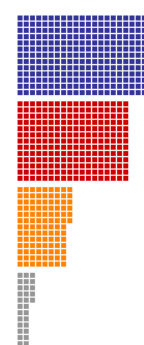
LD: 79

Others: 28

Source: Electoral Reform Society
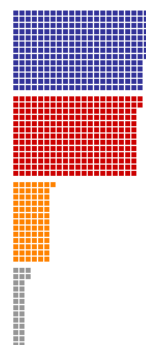
Alternative vote plus

The same as AV to elect most of the Commons but with a second element - the "plus" part - which would be used to elect 100 MPs in a more directly proportional system.

AV+ has yet to be put into practice anywhere in the world.

Applied to 2010 result

Con: 275

Lab: 234

LD: 110

Others: 31

Source: Electoral Reform Society

Proportional representation

The crudest version of proportional representation would give all parties seats in parliament based directly on their share of the vote. In practice, countries which employ PR have thresholds in place to screen out the smallest parties.

Simple PR is not in use in the UK.

Applied to 2010 result

Con: 234

Lab: 189

LD: 149

Others: 78
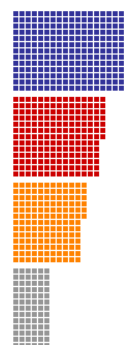
Source: Electoral Reform Society

Source : http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/election_2010/8644480.stm

TCS/YouGov Poll: Briefing Paper

Results by party allegiance:

2.1.8   A majority of Lib Dem supporters wanted a wider choice (53%) while a significant number of Conservatives opposed a widening of the question (46%).

Source: http://www.re-constitution.org.uk

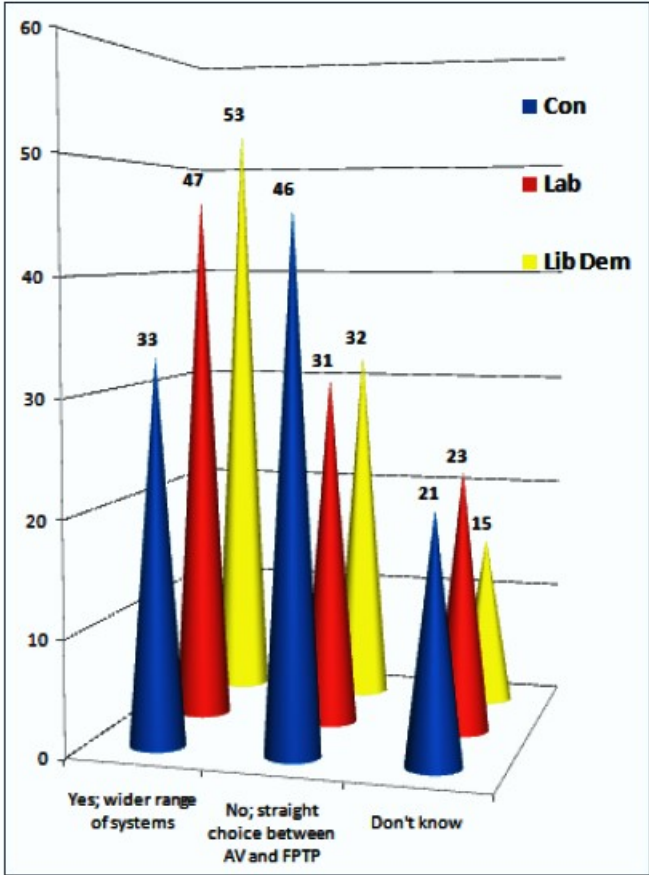| Constituency	2010 win	Date of by-election	Result	LD	Cons	Lab	UKIP
Oldham East and Saddleworth	Lab	13 January 2011	Labour hold	0,4	13,6	10,4	2
Belfast West	SF	9 June 2011	Sinn Fein Hold	-	-	-	-
Barnsley Central	Lab	3 March 2011	Labour hold	-13,1	-9	13,5	7,5
Leicester South	Lab	5 May 2011	Labour hold	-4,4	-6,2	12,3	1,4
Inverclyde	Lab	30 June 2011	Labour Hold	-11,1	-2,1	-2,2	-0,1
Feltham and Heston	Lab	15 December 2011	Labour Hold	-7,9	-6,3	10,8	3,5
Bradford West	Lab	29 March 2012	Respect Win	-7,1	-22,8	-20,4	1,3
Corby	Cons	15 November 2012	Labour/Co-op Win	-9,5	-15,6	9,7	-
Croydon North	Lab	29 November 2012	Labour Hold	-10,5	-7,3	8,7	-
Middlesbrough	Lab	29 November 2012	Labour Hold	-10	-12,5	14,6	8,1
Cardiff South and Penarth	Lab	15 November 2012	Labour/Co-op Hold	-11,4	-8,4	8,4	3,5
Manchester Central	Lab	15 November 2012	Labour Hold	-17,2	-7,3	16,4	-
Rotherham	Lab	29 November 2012	Labour Hold	-13,9	-11,3	1,8	15,7
Mid-Ulster	SF	7 March 2013	Sinn Fein Hold	-	-	-	-
Eastleigh	LD	28 February 2013	Lib Dems Hold	-14,5	-14	0,2	24,2
South Shields	Lab	2 May 2013	Labour Hold	-12,8	-10	-1,5	24,21
Wythenshawe and Sale East	Lab	13 May 2014					
Total number of by-elections	17		**Average difference with 2010**	-10,21	-8,51	5,91	8,30
Per year			per year				
2010	0	0	2010	-	-	-	-
2011	6	6	2011	-7,22	-2	8,96	2,86
2012	7	7	2012	-11,37	-12,17	5,60	7,15
2013	3	3	2013	-13,65	-12	-0,65	24,21

Source: http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/commons/hcio/by-elections-2010/

Annex 9: By-elections results 2005-2008

Constituency	2005 win	Date of by-election	Result	LD	Cons	Lab
Cheadle	LD	15 July 2005	L Dem hold	3,3	2	-4,2
Livingston	Lab	29 September 2005	Lab hold	-0,6	-3,4	-9,3
Dunfermline & West Fire	Lab	9 February 2006	L Dem gain	15,4	-2,6	-17,4
Blaenau Gwent	Ind	29 June 2006	Ind hold	1,2	1,4	4,7
Bromley & Chislehurst	Con	29 June 2006	Con hold	17,5	-11,1	-15,6
Ealing, Southall	Lab	19 July 2007	Lab hold	3,2	0,9	-7,3
Sedgefield	Lab	19 July 2007	Lab hold	8	0,2	-14,1
Crewe & Nantwich	Lab	22 May 2008	Con gain	-4	16,9	-18,3
Henley	Con	26 June 2008	Con hold	1,8	3,5	-11,7
Haltemprice & Howden	Con	10 July 2008	Con hold		24,1	
Glasgow East	Lab	24 July 2008	SNP gain	-19	-0,6	-8,4
Glenrothes	Lab	6 November 2008	Lab hold	-10	-3,3	3,2
Norwich North	Lab	23 July 2009	Con gain	-2,2	6,3	-26,7
Glasgow North East	SKP	12 November 2009	Lab win			
Total Number of by-elections:		14	**Average difference with 2010**	1,22	2,64	-10,43
Per year:			per year			
2005		2	2005	1,35	-0,7	-6,75
2006		3	2006	11,37	-4,10	-9,43
2007		2	2007	5,6	0,55	-10,7
2008		5	2008	-7,8	8,12	-8,8
2009		2	2009	-2,2	6,3	-26,7

Source: http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/commons/hcio/by-elections/

Title of the Policy Paper	Field	Situation of the party in government (when the WG was established)
A balanced working life	Social (welfare)	Danny Alexander is Chief secretary for Treasury since 2010 Vince Cable is Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills President of the Board of Trade
Green Growth and Green Jobs	Green	Chris Huhne is Secretary of State for Climate change since 2010 until February 2012 Ed Davey is Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change since 2012
Learning for Life	Social (education)	David Laws is Minister of State for Schools and the Cabinet Office since September 2012
Fairer Taxes	Taxation	Danny Alexander is Chief secretary for Treasury since 2010 Vince Cable is Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills President of the Board of Trade
Defending the Future	Defence	Nick Harvey was Minister of State for the Armed Forces between 2010 and 2012 Danny Alexander appointed to review alternative to Trident in September 2012 (after the creation of the WG)
Prosperous Sustainable and Secure	Europe	Upcoming elections
A Stronger Economy in a Fairer Society	General Election Manifesto	Upcoming elections

% of divisions to see a government MP vote against the whip, by session, 1945-

Source: http://revolts.co.uk/?p=711
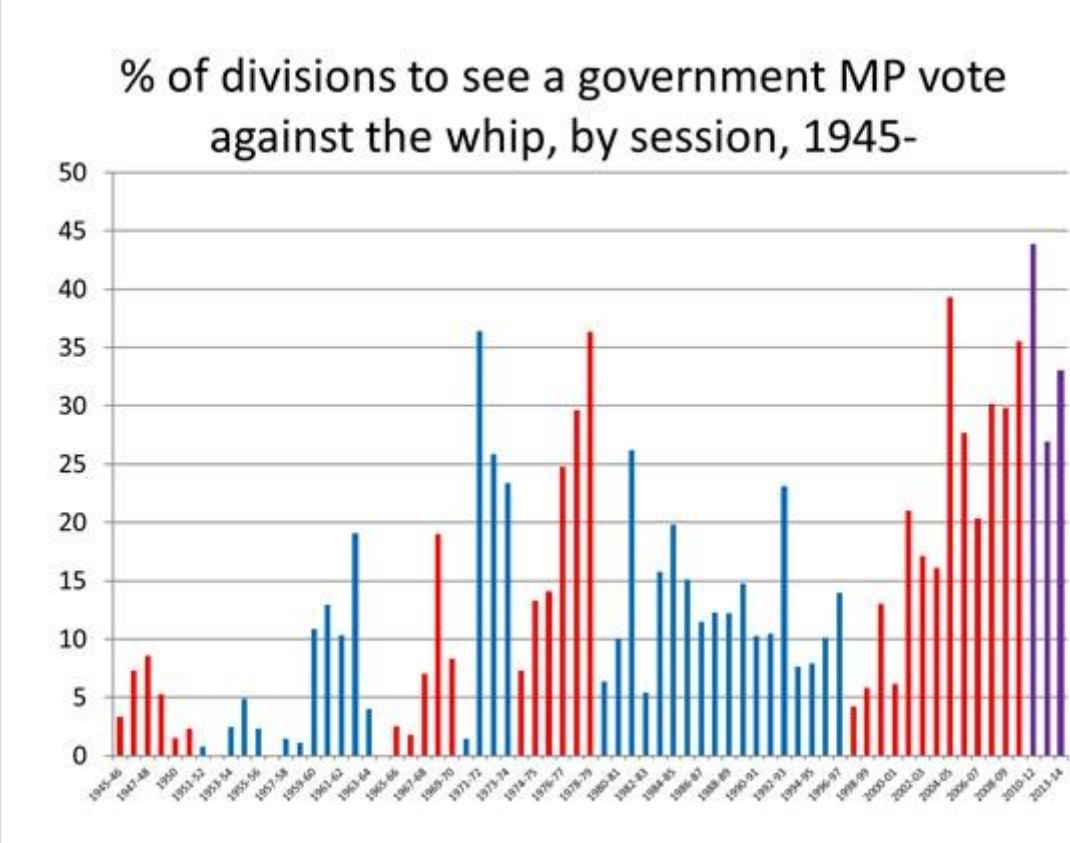
Table 2. Three faces of factionalism

	Cooperative	Competitive	Degenerative
Factionalism as a process of	Partitioning under centripetal incentives.	Splitting under centrifugal forces.	Fractionalization/segmentation from excessive focus on factional interests.
Factions are	Separate.	Opposed.	Self-serving.
Conditions for existence of factionalism	Transition to democracy. Party formation, splits, mergers. Party system realignment.	Intra-party conflict/dissent/rivalries. Polarized party opinion. Fragmentation-inducing incentives.	Privatized incentives. Clientelism. Machine politics.
Function of factionalism	Consensus building. Aggregates separate groups; blurs cleavages; articulates subparty group preferences and interests; facilitates party consolidation and district-level electoral coordination.	Diffuses conflict internally; facilitates elite circulation; widens voter choice; moderates leaders and policies; empowers party followers. *Dangers:* Growth in number of factions; factional veto games; fragmented party vote.	Promotes rent-seeking and the exchange vote; structures the division of the spoils; encourages factional jockeying; shifts focus away from party collective goals.
Outcomes	Intra-party harmony. Integrated party. Preservation of subgroup identities in 'big-tent' parties.	Intra-party democracy; balance of internal power; moderate change; party renewal; rejuvenated politics. *Dangers:* Churning; unstable factional coalitions; intra-party gridlock; policy drift.	Factional capture; instability; decisional stalemate; wasted public resources; corruption → value-destroying brand. Potential party break-up or collapse.
Examples	Italy's Christian Democrats (DC) 1940s–50s; Japan's Liberal Democrats (LDP) 1955–mid-1970s; French Socialists 1970s; Spain's PSOE; Australian Labor (ALP); American 104th Congress.	DC 1960s–70s; LDP mid-1970s; British Labour (1970–80s) and Conservatives (1990s)	DC from late 1970s until implosion in 1994.

Françoise Boucek, "Rethinking Factionalism: Typologies, Intra-Party Dynamics and Three Faces" Party Politics, 2009 15:455

Annex 13: Liberal Democrats traditional sub-groups (SAOs and AOs)

Specified Associated Organisations	Role
Agents and Organisers Association	training
Association of LD Councillors	local campaigning
Association of Liberal Democrats Engineers and Scientists	expertise
Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats	Greater involvement of minorities in the party Ethnic minorities interests in party policy
Liberal Democrat Lawyers' Association	Law Reform – expertise and contribution to policy making
Liberal Democrat Women	eliminate discrimination based on gender – campaigning outside the party
LGBT +	promote LGBT rights within the party and outside
Liberal Youth	youth and student wing
Parliamentary Candidates Association	support, receptions, briefings, campaigning

Associated Organisations	Role
ALTER	Campaign to increase the understanding of Land Value Tax among members and party policy
Association for Liberal Democrat Trade Unionist	On the TUs role, to get LD active in TUs and TUists active within the LD
Chinese Liberal Democrats	Closer links between the LD and S-E Asian community in the UK
Green Liberal Democrats	Promoting and campaigning for environmental policies.
Humanist and Secularist Liberal Democrats	We are affiliated to the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society.
Liberal Democrat Christian Forum	25 years, 'Christian witness', for Christian involvement in politics
Liberal Democrat Disability Association	21 y – platform for disabled members
Liberal Democrat Education Association	Promote Lib Dem values in education Develop Lib Dem perspectives on education Link up with Lib Dems involved in education
Liberal Democrat for Electoral Reform	LDER works within the party to promote electoral reform as a key policy priority and to educate party members on its benefits.
Liberal Democrat European Group	Prepare and distribute European political campaign material Set up and run stalls and fringe meetings at conferences. Arrange discussion meetings on European themes. Organise study visits to European institutions Publish briefings on European policies. Provide information on Liberal Democrat activities in European politics.

Liberal Democrats Friends of the Armed Forces	Members who have served in the Armed Forces or who have links with or an interest in them. Campaign (veterans).
Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel	support and promote policies which lead to peace and security for Israel
Liberal Democrat Friends of Kashmir	Forum for discussion with guests from outside the party, demonstrating and supporting important dialogue, and promoting support for the Party amongst the 700,000 plus British Kashmiris in the UK and aboard.
Liberal Democrat Friends of Pakistan	Since 1999, the Friends of Pakistan has publicised its support locally, nationally, and internationally. Objectives include promoting support for the Party amongst the million plus British Pakistanis.
Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine	The Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine exist to fight for the rights of the Palestinian people through the medium of the Liberal Democrat Party.
Liberal Democrats for Peace and Security	Liberal Democrats for Peace and Security work to secure policies in support of: Peace and common security; Arms control, disarmament and the control and reduction of the arms trade. Action at the earliest possible stage for the avoidance and peaceful resolution of conflicts; Over many years we have worked to ensure that Liberal Democrats play a leading role in nuclear disarmament.
Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary	aim to stand up for those seeking sanctuary in our country, believing that asylum seekers should be treated with compassion, humanity and dignity.
Liberal International (British Group)	Liberal International (British Group) is part of the world federation of liberal political parties - Liberal International.

Source: http://www.libdems.org.uk/committees_organisations