UK GENERAL ELECTIONS CASE STUDY CARDS (2000s)

These General Election and Referendum case study cards have been prepared for AQA A-Level Students from AMSR NOP and MORI reports on the Elections, produced at the time, plus 2 detailed analyses of the AMSR Archive Content produced by AMSR Volunteers: *"Polling in UK Elections Since 1945" (focussed on* Voting Behaviour and the Media) *& "Why Polls Go Wrong".* Please read the Technical Appendix at the end of this document for an explanation of the AMSR Archive*, w*hy this resource does not cover all elections, and how we have reported the others. And links to the 2 in-depth documents, links to the actual Election Reports are included in the text.

2001 General Election — Labour's Second Term

Wider Context

- Labour entered the 2001 election from a position of overwhelming strength after its 1997 landslide.
- Tony Blair remained highly popular; the Conservatives under William Hague struggled to regain credibility.
- The Liberal Democrats under Charles Kennedy positioned themselves as a constructive, socially liberal alternative.
- The campaign was widely *described* as "boring" by the media — but MORI's evidence shows this was **not true**.

From the newsletter:

"The myths about the 2001 election are already beginning to become set in stone… the assumption that the campaign was pointless… That simply isn't the case."

Campaign Techniques

- Labour ran a steady, low-risk campaign focused on competence, stability, and public services.
- Conservatives emphasised Europe, tax, and asylum — but struggled to cut through.
- Liberal Democrats campaigned strongly on public services and civil liberties.
- Foot & Mouth disease shaped the early campaign environment, limiting travel and events.

Issue Salience

MORI's 2001 tracking shows the most important issues were:

- **Health/NHS**
- **Education**
- **Law & order**
- **Taxation**

- **The economy**
- **Europe**
- **Sleaze**
- **Foot & Mouth**
- **Privatisation**

These aligned closely with Labour's messaging on public services and economic stability.

Polling & Media

The 2001 election was characterised by **low volatility between parties** but **high churn overall**.

Late decision-making

From the MORI newsletter:

"7% made their final decision within the last 24 hours… and another 7% in the previous week."

Among Liberal Democrat voters:

"10% decided to do so on the final day and another 13% the previous week."

Total churn

The post-election recall survey found:

"The total 'churn'… was greater than it has ever been, **33.7%**, more than a third of the electorate."

This includes:

- undecided voters making up their minds
- voters changing parties
- voters deciding not to vote
- voters deciding to vote late

Postal voting myth

Media speculation suggested **20%** might vote by post.

MORI found:

"A fairly consistent 6% to 7%… and it looks as if about 4% of electors actually did so."

Poll accuracy

MORI's final projection (Times poll + telephone recall) was close to the certified result:

- Con: **32.7%**
- Lab: **42.0%**

- LD: **18.8%**
- Others: **6.4%**

Polls were stable and accurate throughout the campaign.

Voting Behaviour

MORI's election aggregate is based on **18,657 interviews**, weighted to regional results and turnout.

Overall result (MORI aggregate)

- **Conservative: 33%**
- **Labour: 42%**
- **Liberal Democrat: 19%**
- **Others: 5%**

Gender

- Men: Con 32%, Lab 42%
- Women: Con 33%, Lab 42%

Age

- 18–24: Lab 41%, Con 27%
- 25–34: Lab 51%, Con 24%
- 35–44: Lab 45%, Con 28%
- 55+: Lab 37%, Con 40%

Class

- AB: Con 39%, Lab 30%
- C1: Con 36%, Lab 38%
- C2: Con 29%, Lab 49%
- DE: Con 24%, Lab 55%

Housing tenure

- Owner-occupiers: Con 43%, Lab 32%
- Council/HA tenants: Con 18%, Lab 60%

Ethnicity

- White: Con 33%, Lab 41%
- Non-white: Con 12%, Lab 73%

Union membership

- Members: Lab 50%, Con 21%

- Non-members: Lab 36%, Con 36%

Newspaper readership

- Daily Mail: Con 55%, Lab 24%
- The Sun: Con 29%, Lab 52%
- Daily Mirror: Con 11%, Lab 71%
- Daily Telegraph: Con 65%, Lab 16%
- Guardian: Con 6%, Lab 52%

These patterns show Labour's broad coalition and Conservative weakness among younger and working-class voters.

Leadership & Party Image

Leader ratings

- Blair remained highly rated.
- Hague's ratings were significantly lower.
- Kennedy was well-liked, especially among younger and liberal voters.

Party image

Labour was seen as:

- competent
- focused on public services
- moderate
- professional

Conservatives were seen as:

- divided
- out of touch
- overly focused on Europe

Liberal Democrats were seen as:

- honest
- concerned about public services
- constructive

Campaign Participation

- Interest in the election was higher than media narratives suggested.
- Turnout was low (59.4%), but MORI found:
    - **63%** said they were "certain to vote" in the final week

    - Weather had only a small effect on turnout intentions
- Reasons for not voting included:
    - lack of interest
    - belief that the result was already decided
    - dissatisfaction with parties

Outcome

- Labour won a **second term** with a large majority (official certified result).
- Conservatives made only modest gains.
- Liberal Democrats increased their vote share and seats.
- The result confirmed Labour's dominance of UK politics in the early 2000s.

Key AMSR Insights

- **High churn despite low volatility**: 33.7% of voters changed something about their voting behaviour.
- **Late decision-making**: 14% decided in the final week.
- **Postal voting myth**: actual postal voting was far lower than media claims.
- **Poll accuracy**: MORI's final projection closely matched the certified result.
- **Issue alignment**: Labour's focus on NHS, education, and stability matched voter priorities.
- **Demographic divides**: Labour dominated younger and working-class voters; Conservatives held older and AB voters.
- **Turnout dynamics**: "Old Labour" supporters in safe seats were less likely to vote, reducing Labour's share without affecting its majority.

AMSR Link: British Public Opinion Issue 24.03 2001 June - Page 1 - MORI British Public Opinion - The AMSR Online Archive

2005 General Election — Labour's Third Term

Note AMSR does not hold NOP or MORI BPO newsletter for 2005. This analysis uses publicly available Ipsos/MORI commentary, BES data, and exit-poll findings.

Wider Context

Labour entered the 2005 election seeking a **third consecutive term**, something unprecedented for the party. Tony Blair remained electorally formidable but politically damaged by the **Iraq War**, falling trust ratings, and internal dissent.

The Conservatives under **Michael Howard** were more disciplined than in 2001 but still struggled to appear modern or united. The Liberal Democrats under **Charles Kennedy** positioned themselves as the anti-Iraq War party, hoping to convert disillusioned Labour voters and students.

Public mood was shaped by:

- declining trust in government
- concerns about immigration and crime
- debates over public service reform
- fatigue with Blair's leadership style

Campaign Techniques

Labour ran a **professional but defensive** campaign, emphasising economic stability, investment in public services, and leadership experience. Blair was central to the message, despite his declining personal ratings.

The Conservatives focused heavily on **immigration**, **crime**, and **NHS reform**, using sharper messaging than in 2001. Their campaign was more coherent but still lacked broad appeal.

The Liberal Democrats targeted university towns, inner-city seats, and anti-war voters with a strong ground campaign. Kennedy's personal popularity was a major asset.

Media coverage was dominated by Iraq, trust, and leadership credibility. The campaign was more presidential than earlier elections.

Issue Salience

Ipsos/MORI tracking during the campaign showed the most important issues were:

- **NHS/health care**
- **Education**
- **Immigration and asylum** (much higher salience than 2001)
- **Crime and anti-social behaviour**
- **The economy**
- **Iraq and foreign policy**
- **Taxation**

Iraq was not the top issue for most voters, but it significantly affected trust in Blair and Labour's vote among younger and middle-class voters.

Polling & Media

Polls throughout the campaign showed:

- Labour ahead, but with a **shrinking lead** compared with 2001
- Conservatives improving slightly but unable to break through
- Liberal Democrats rising among anti-war voters and students

Because AMSR does not hold a MORI BPO newsletter for 2005, this analysis uses publicly available Ipsos/MORI releases and BES findings.

Ipsos/MORI's post-election commentary noted:

“Labour’s vote was shallower than in 2001 — many supporters were reluctant rather than enthusiastic.”

Polls were broadly accurate, with no major polling failure. Turnout rose slightly from 2001 but remained historically low.

Voting Behaviour

Age

- Younger voters: Liberal Democrats strongest since the 1980s
- Middle-aged voters: Labour decline, Conservative recovery
- Older voters: Conservative strength

Class

- AB/C1: Labour down, Lib Dem up
- C2/DE: Labour still strong but reduced compared with 2001

Housing tenure

- Owner-occupiers: Conservative improvement
- Council/HA tenants: Labour still dominant but lower than 2001

Leadership

- Blair’s trust ratings fell sharply after Iraq
- Howard was seen as competent but not modern
- Kennedy was personally popular, especially among younger voters

Tactical voting

- Anti-Conservative tactical voting persisted from 1997/2001
- Anti-Iraq tactical voting boosted Liberal Democrats in university towns and cities

Outcome

Labour won a **third term** with a reduced majority (official certified result). Conservatives increased their vote share and seats but remained far from power. Liberal Democrats achieved their **best post-war seat total**, benefiting from anti-war sentiment and tactical voting.

The result marked the beginning of a transition period: Labour remained dominant, but its coalition was weakening, and the Conservatives were beginning a long process of modernisation.

Key AMSR Insights

- **Trust mattered**: Iraq significantly damaged Blair’s credibility, reducing Labour’s vote among middle-class and younger voters.
- **Issue salience shifted**: Immigration and crime rose sharply compared with 2001, benefiting the Conservatives.

- **Liberal Democrat growth**: Anti-war voters and tactical voting produced the party's strongest parliamentary performance since the 1920s.
- **Labour's vote became shallower**: Many Labour supporters were reluctant rather than enthusiastic — a warning sign for 2010.
- **Polling accuracy**: Unlike 1992 or 2015, polls were broadly correct; no major polling failure occurred.
- **Leadership effects**: Blair's declining trust ratings mattered more than Howard's competence or Kennedy's popularity.

Technical Appendix

About the Archive (AMSR)

The Archive of Market and Social Research (AMSR) preserves the original reports, surveys, and polling data produced by Britain's major research organisations from the 1940s onwards, offering an unparalleled record of how public opinion was measured, reported, and understood at the time. Because the Archive contains the *contemporary* documents — Gallup, NOP, MORI, and others — it shows elections, referendums, and polling debates exactly as they were experienced, without hindsight or reinterpretation. This makes AMSR uniquely valuable for A-Level Politics: students can see how campaigns unfolded, how issues rose and fell in importance, how voters behaved, and how polls influenced expectations. The Archive also reveals why polls sometimes go wrong, how methods evolved, and how media reporting shaped political understanding. In short, AMSR provides the evidence base that allows students to evaluate elections, referendums, voting behaviour, and the reliability of political information using authentic historical sources.

Why AMSR does not cover all Elections

This AMSR teaching resource draws on two archive documents: *Polling in UK Elections Since 1945 (*which is focussed on Voting Behaviour and the Media) and *Why Polls Go Wrong*. These sources provide detailed historical context, polling evidence, and campaign analysis for UK General Elections from 1945 to 2015. Since these documents were produced the Archive does have a complete summary of the 2024 Election prepared by Ipsos especially for the Archive. To maintain academic accuracy and ensure all content is grounded in verifiable AMSR evidence, this resource therefore covers uses AMSR sources for elections where we have them and uses publicly available Ipsos, BES, BBC/ITV exit-poll findings, and ONS turnout statistics in other cases This is always clearly stated in the introduction to the particular Election/Referendum. AMSR Links are given in the text where we have them

Links to be added

Polling in UK Elections Since 1945

Why Polls Go Wrong