



First prime ministerial debate  
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Transcript

ALASTAIR STEWART: Manchester, in the heart of the northwest of England, is tonight host to a British political first. I'm Alastair Stewart. For the first time on British television, live in front of a representative studio audience, we'll be hearing from three men, each hoping to be the leader of the next UK government in the first election debate.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Good evening, and welcome to the first election debate. Over the past 50 years, there have been numerous attempts to get the leaders of the three big political parties to debate with each other during an election. Tonight, history in the making, as we're joined by the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Nick Clegg, the Conservative party leader, David Cameron, and the leader of the Labour Party, Gordon Brown. This debate will mainly focus on domestic affairs, important issues that affect our everyday lives. If you want to make your own comments and follow the debate online, you can do so by going to [ITV.com](http://ITV.com). In a moment, we'll be taking questions from our studio audience, but first, let's hear a brief opening statement from each of the leaders. We'll start with Nick Clegg.

NICK CLEGG: I believe the way things are is not the way things have to be. You're going to be told tonight by these two that the only choice you can make is between two old parties who've been running things for years. I'm here to persuade you that there is an alternative. I think we have a fantastic opportunity to do things differently for once. If we do things differently, we can create the fair society, the fair country we all want: a fair tax system, better schools, an economy no longer held hostage by greedy bankers, decent, open politics. Those are the changes I believe in. I really wouldn't be standing here tonight if I didn't think they were all possible. So don't let anyone tell you that the only choice is old politics. We can do something new; we can do something different this time. That's what I'm about; that's what the Liberal Democrats offer.

GORDON BROWN: These are no ordinary times, and this is no ordinary election. We've just been going through the biggest global financial crisis in our lives, and we're moving from recession to recovery, and I believe we're moving on a road to prosperity for all. Now, every promise you hear from each of us this evening depends on one thing: a strong economy. And this is the defining year. Get the decisions right now, and we can have secure jobs, we can have standards of living rising, and we can have everybody better off. Get the decisions wrong now, and we could have a double-dip recession. And because we believe in fairness, as we cut the deficit, over these next few years, we will protect your police, your National Health Service, and we will protect your schools. I know what this job involves; I look forward to putting my plan to you this evening.

DAVID CAMERON: I think it's great we're having these debates, and I hope they go some way to restore some of the faith and some of the trust into our politics, because we badly need that once again in this country. The expenses saga brought great shame on parliament. I'm extremely sorry for everything that happened. Your politicians, frankly all of us, let you down. Now, there is a big choice at this election: we can go on as we are, or we can say no, Britain can do much better; we can deal with our debts, we can get our economy growing and avoid this jobs tax, and we can build a bigger society. But we can only do this if we recognise we need join together, we need to come together, we need to recognise we're all in this together. Now, not everything Labour has done in the last 13 years has been wrong - they've done some good things and I would keep those, but we need change, and it's that change I want to help to lead.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Gentlemen, thank you very much indeed. Our first question is from Gerard Oliver who is a retired toxicologist from Cheshire. Mr Oliver.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Good evening. What key elements for a fair, workable immigration policy need to be put in place to actually make it work effectively?

ALASTAIR STEWART: Gordon Brown.

GORDON BROWN: You know, I've heard the concerns around the country. I've been listening to people. I know people feel there are pressures because of immigration. That's why we want to control and manage immigration. And I when I became Prime Minister, I did a number of things. First, I introduced a points system so no unskilled worker from outside the European Union can come to Britain now. I also said that jobs had to be advertised in Jobcentres where there were skills that there were shortages of that we needed people in this country. I then said we're going to look at all the range of occupations where people come from abroad. I talked to a chef the other day who was training. I said in future, when we do it, there'll be no chefs allowed in from outside the European Union. Then I talked to some care assistants - no care assistants come in from outside the European Union. We are a tolerant, we are a diverse country, but the controls on migration that I'm introducing and I will see go further are the right controls, the right policy for Britain.

ALASTAIR STEWART: David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON: Gerard, what I would say is that immigration is simply too high at the moment. It has been these last ten years, and it does need to come down. I think the pressures that we've put on housing and health and education have been too great. If you look at the...what's happening with immigration, the difference between the amount of people going to live overseas and those coming here, it's been often as high as 200,000. That's equivalent to two million across a decade. It's too much. I want us to bring immigration down so it is in the tens of thousands, not the hundreds of thousands. How would we do that? I think we need to have not just a points system, but also a limit on migration when people are coming from outside the European Union for economic reasons. I also think when new countries join the European Union, that actually we should have transitional controls so they can't all come here at once. It's been too high these last few years, and I would dearly love to get it down to the levels it was in the past so it is no longer an issue in our

politics as it wasn't in the past.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Nick Clegg.

NICK CLEGG: Gerard, you talked about a fair, workable immigration system. That's exactly what I want. What's happened over the last several years is almost precisely the reverse. You have had lots and lots of tough talking about immigration from both Conservative and Labour governments, and complete chaos in the actual administration of the system. It was a Conservative government that removed the exit controls so we knew who was leaving as well as who was coming in. It's what the Labour government followed up on as well. What I think we need to do is, firstly, make sure we restore those exit controls, so we have borders so we know exactly who is coming in but also when they are supposed to leave. The second thing I would do is this. At the moment under the immigration system, if you want to come and work in this country, you have to show two things: firstly, that you've got a sponsor who is sponsoring your arrival in this country, and secondly, that there is a job for you to do. I want to add a third element: that you also only go to a place, to a region, where you are needed. So that we only send immigrants to those places where they can be coped.

ALASTAIR STEWART: You've heard what each has had to say on immigration. It's now your chance to contest the others' arguments. And you, Gordon Brown, will start.

GORDON BROWN: Let's be honest with each other, net inward migration is falling. It's fallen three years ago, two years ago, and it's falling this year. It's falling as a result of the action we are taking and will continue to take. To stop illegal migration, which is what Nick has referred to, border controls have been brought in and we're counting people out and in from the end of this year. It was a policy the Conservatives scrapped before 1997. We've got ID cards now for foreign nationals so an employer can see whether they're legal or illegal. So we're taking precise and specific action. What I wouldn't do is have an arbitrary cap. An arbitrary cap means an employer... And I've been visiting a lot of employers in this region, who wants to bring someone in from abroad, needs that skilled worker, the skill is not here, cannot do that. Net inward migration will continue to fall under our policies. 40,000 less students, I suspect, this year, because of our tightening of visa controls. Now, these are the things practically we can do. We're a tolerant country but we want proper control over migration.

ALASTAIR STEWART: David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON: I think a cap is necessary because we're not going to control immigration unless we actually take some quite positive and concrete steps. I think we let down everyone if we don't do this properly. I was in Plymouth recently, and a 40-year-old black man made the point to me. He said, "I came here when I was six, I've served in the Royal Navy for 30 years. I'm incredibly proud of my country. But I'm so ashamed that we've had this out-of-control system with people abusing it so badly." If we don't address immigration properly, we're letting down immigrant communities, as well as everybody else. So we do need a cap. As well as border controls that Gordon talks about, and I support strong border

controls, I think we need to go one step further and have a proper border police force so we combine at our borders, customs, immigration, security, and police, so we make the most of the fact that we do have policeable borders, and we can stop more illegal immigration that way as well.

- NICK CLEGG: The truth is that there is good immigration and there is bad immigration. I was in a hospital, a paediatric hospital in Cardiff a few months ago, treating very sick premature young babies. I was being shown around and there were a large number of babies needing to be treated. There was a ward standing completely empty, though it had the latest equipment. I said to the ward sister "What's going on? Why are there no babies being treated?" She said "New rules mean we can't employ any doctors from outside the European Union with the skills needed". That's an example of where the rules are stopping good immigration which actually helps our public services to work properly. That's where I want to see, not an arbitrary cap. We can't just say a cap, what is it? 10, 10,000? A million? What if you reach the cap in the middle of summer and someone wants to come and play football for Manchester United or Manchester City? Do you say they can't come? No, let's have a regional approach where you only make sure the immigrants who come go to those regions where they can be supported.
- DAVID CAMERON: On Nick's point, of course we've benefited from immigration for decades in our country. People have come here to work hard, to make a contribution, to bring their special skills. We see that in our health service and schools all the time. But I do think it's got out of control, and it does need to be brought back under control.
- GORDON BROWN: I don't like these words, because we're bringing it under control. Net inward migration is falling and will continue to fall as a result of the measures we've taken. We've brought together the police and the immigration officials and the customs officials in one agency. We're doing that already. Illegal immigrants are deterred because we've got ID cards for foreign nationals now, so an employer cannot say to someone "You can come and have this job". They've got to ask for the identity card first. There are big fines if employers break the law. Now, we've got to do more. That means we've got to tighten the number of skills we need in this country. That's why we're moving from care assistants to chefs right through other occupations where we train up British people to do the skills.
- DAVID CAMERON: A lot of people would ask, though, we've had 13 years of a government that's now only started to talk about addressing this issue. If you look at the numbers, net migration levels before 1997 were never greater than 77,000 a year. Under your government, they've never been less than 140,000 a year. That's a very big number.
- GORDON BROWN: But you accept the figures are now falling.
- DAVID CAMERON: You're only starting before an election to take the steps that need to be taken.
- ALASTAIR STEWART: I'm going to bring Nick Clegg in now.
- NICK CLEGG: I think this is partly what's been going wrong for so long. We have had both major parties running governments over the last 20 years

talking tough about immigration and delivering complete chaos in the way in which it's run. I'm like anybody else. I just want a fair, workable immigration system that counts people in, counts people out, only makes sure immigrants come here if there's jobs for them to do in parts of the country where they don't place unreasonable strain on housing, public services and so on. I think the regional approach that we're putting forward, which would be a major innovation, they do it in Canada, they do it in Australia, it would be a major innovation here, which I think would restore public confidence in an immigration where people feel it's complete chaos.

GORDON BROWN: You see, I agree with Nick, an arbitrary national cap will not work. I think the Conservatives are not even giving the number for that cap. They can't tell us what they will do. Take the controls we're putting in, add to the points system, restrict more occupations in future where we can train up people to have the skills. My Britain of vision moving forward is we train the young people up to get the skills for the future and we will need less people to come in to meet the skills shortages of the past. That's now what we're now doing.

DAVID CAMERON: It's absolutely true that the other side of the coin is proper welfare reform. We have got too many people who could work, who are offered work but who don't work. That has actually drawn a lot of people into our country. We do need to reform welfare. But again, 13 years have gone by when welfare hasn't been properly reformed. Can I just ask Nick one?

GORDON BROWN: There are 2.5 million more jobs in this country.

DAVID CAMERON: Can I just ask Nick one question about this regional approach? I don't quite understand how you can ask people to come to one part of the country and rely on them staying in that one country...

NICK CLEGG: Oh, very easily.

DAVID CAMERON: You have a vision of the M62 with a border post?

NICK CLEGG: No, no, no. Very, very easily. They do it in other countries. Basically it means if you're an employer and you're employing someone who's got a work permit, then you will need to make sure that in that work permit, they're only able to work in the region where you are offering them work. And if you offer them work when they don't have a work permit which says they're entitled to be in that region, then you're acting illegally. They do it in other countries, we should do it here. Because the truth is that our country has lots of different needs in different parts of the country. That's not being reflected in the immigration system in which the public has lost any confidence.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Gentlemen, I'm going to leave it there because we have a lot of questions to get through. You yourselves have said we want to get some questions. Let's go to the audience and take another. Our next question is on law and order. I need to point out that it is an area where powers are devolved to the parliament in Scotland and from this week, also the assembly in Northern Ireland. This question comes from optician and mother of two, Jacqueline Salmon. Jacqueline, your question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Good evening. I was born and still work in Burnley, Lancashire. The town has the highest burglary rate per head of population in the entire country. What confidence can you give me that towns such as

this all over the UK can be made safer places to live and work?

DAVID CAMERON: Jacqueline, the system isn't working properly now, there's no doubt about it. We're not seeing enough police on the streets, we're not catching enough burglars, we're not convicting enough. Then we do, when we do convict them, they're not getting long enough sentences. I went to Crosby the other day and I was talking to a woman there who had been burgled by someone who had just left prison. He stole everything in her house. As he left, he set fire to the sofa and her son died from the fumes. That burglar, that murderer, could be out of prison in just four-and-a-half years. The system doesn't work, but that sort of sentence is, I think, just completely unacceptable in terms of what the public expect for proper punishment. What have we got to do? We've got to get rid of the paperwork and the bureaucracy and we've got to get the police out on the streets. We need very clear signals from our criminal justice system: if you cross someone's threshold and rob their home, you go to prison, and you go to prison for a long time.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Nick Clegg.

NICK CLEGG: Jacqueline, you asked, what can we do to stop burglary happening over and over and over and over again. Two things: firstly, quite simply, more police on our streets. This government wants to waste billions of your money on an ID card system so you have to pay for the privilege of having lots of your own details on a piece of plastic card that you carry around. For pretty well exactly the amount of money, your money, that the government is pouring into that, we could put 3,000 more police officers on the streets. That is the absolute priority for me. The second thing is this: there are too many young offenders who start first getting into trouble with low-level nuisance anti-social behaviour who become the hardened criminals of tomorrow. What we've got to do is stop the young offenders of today becoming the hardened criminals tomorrow. In my city of Sheffield, where I'm an MP, we've done some great things to do exactly that. That's the way to get burglary and crime down.

GORDON BROWN: Jacqueline, as long as anybody feels unsafe, and as long as anybody feels insecure, even although crime is falling - official crime figures show it's falling, and violent crime is falling - I feel that we have got to do far more. And that's why there's three things I want to suggest this evening that will make people safer. One is we've got to have effective policing on the streets. Police have got to spend 80% of their time now on the streets. We've got record police numbers in this country, and we want to maintain that level of police force over the next few years. The second thing is, parents have got to accept responsibility for their children. If an order is passed against a teenager, then the parent has also got to accept responsibility, and we're bringing that in now. The third thing I would say is this: if you are dissatisfied with the way the police are treating or the police are dealing with your case, and you are persistently denied the rights you have, then we'll give you the right to take an injunction against the police so you can be sure that your rights against anti-social behaviour and crime are upheld.

DAVID CAMERON: I think one additional point that I would make is if you look at where so much of the burglary, so much of the car crime is coming from, it is actually coming from people who are addicted to drugs. I think

we've got to be much faster at getting drug addicts off the streets and into treatment. And all too often, that doesn't happen. And even when it does today, they get put on a substitute drug. We're not really dealing with the problem, which is to get these people to confront their problems and lead drug-free lives. I even went to a drug rehab recently in my own constituency, and met a young man who told me that he committed a certain amount of crimes so he could get in front of a judge who could then get him a place in a residential rehab centre.

We must be mad as a country not to get people into that residential rehab to get them to clean up their lives, so we cut the crime on our own streets.

NICK CLEGG:

I think, as I say, it's how do we make sure the youngsters of today don't become the hardened criminals of tomorrow? It's that conveyor-belt from nuisance at the beginning, anti-social behaviour in our communities, yobs on the street corner who then become the hardened criminals of tomorrow. I think what makes me so angry is that again, it's like the immigration debate: so much tough talk from different governments of different parties for so long has turned our prisons into overcrowded colleges of crime. Do you know that young men going into prison now on short-term prison sentences now come out, and nine out of ten of them reoffend, so we are reproducing more crime than actually cutting it. What I've seen in my city of Sheffield is that you get these youngsters not when they've done serious crimes, but when they're first starting to get into trouble, to face their victims, explain why they've done what they've done to their victims, apologise for what they've done, make up for what they've done in the community, cleaning up parks and streets. It has a dramatic effect on their behaviour. I want to change people's behaviour before they become the criminals of tomorrow.

GORDON BROWN:

When I was young, my father ran a youth club with my brother for young people, and the more people who do voluntary service and give their time in the community to getting young people off the streets doing purposeful activity, the better, whether it's sports, dancing or music or other activities that get people off the streets. But the one thing I'm absolutely sure of - we've got to maintain the numbers of police we have in this country. We've built up the police force from a period when it was understaffed to a period where they now have more police than ever before. I want to make sure that that continues with neighbourhood policing accountable to you, with you able to direct what happens in your own local police force. If a police force is not performing well, let it be taken over by another police force, so the job is done properly for you. So I would not support those, and I'm afraid the Conservatives are not prepared to guarantee, as we are repared to do, that we will continue to fund the police force and the spending on police will continue to rise so that we have enough police there on the beat for you.

ALASTAIR STEWART:

Mr Clegg, what do you make of what you've heard from the other two gentlemen?

NICK CLEGG:

Well, it's all very well to stay these things, but if what actually happens in practice is that we produce, as I say, these colleges of crime, where we have now, what, about 4,000 people going into our prisons on short-term prison sentences, they sit around, they learn some extra tricks of the trade from some more experienced criminals, and then they go out and nine out of ten of the young men

on short-term prison sentences just commit more crime. I think that's what Jacqueline is talking about, this desperate, hopeless feeling. It keeps happening over and over again. I met a young man in London the other day. His flat had been burgled five times, and one of them, would you believe it, Jacqueline, was when he was away at his father's funeral. He said to me "Why can't this stop?" Unless we do something different, not the same old remedies, but do something different to stop the youngsters today who are getting into trouble from becoming the hardened criminals of tomorrow, I don't think this stuff will make the difference that they say it will.

GORDON BROWN: At Reading Prison, we've been working at this young offenders' institution with companies, and where people are in this institution, they've been trained for jobs that they can get if they don't reoffend and they go out and actually do a decent job. Now, there's been a 75% success in this project, so you can bring the reoffending rate down. But I do come back to this central problem that we face - I'm grateful, by the way, David, for you putting up these posters about me and about crime and about everything else. You know, there's no newspaper editor done as much for me in the last two years, because my face is smiling on these posters, and I'm very grateful to you and Lord Ashcroft for funding that.

ALASTAIR STEWART: David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON: Thank you! Let me take on directly this question of money and public spending. It will be a common feature through these debates about how do we fund the public services we need? I think it's really important that we start focusing on what we get out of the money that we put in, because if we think that the future is just spending more and more money, we're profoundly wrong. Hold on...

GORDON BROWN: The future is not spending more...

ALASTAIR STEWART: I'll get it going between the two of you, don't worry.

GORDON BROWN: The issue here is, will you continue to fund the police?

DAVID CAMERON: Yes, of course. Let me give you an example...

GORDON BROWN: Will you match our funding on the police? The answer is no from your manifesto. This is not Question Time.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Let Mr Cameron answer your point.

GORDON BROWN: It's answer time, David.

DAVID CAMERON: What matters is what comes out. I went to a Hull police station the other day. They had five different police cars, and they were just about to buy a £73,000 Lexus. There's money that could be saved to get the police on the frontline. The Metropolitan Police have 400 uniformed officers in their human resources department. Our police officers should be crime fighters, not form-fillers, and that's what needs to change.

NICK CLEGG: I'm just slightly surprised that there's any discussion going on between you about what money you can put into public services, because I read your manifestos this week. In neither of them are

you coming clean with people about what anything costs, because you haven't got any figures in your manifestos. We've set out clearly not only what we will do, but how we will pay for it.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Cameron, on that point?

DAVID CAMERON: On that point, let me take Nick back to his manifesto and one pledge that's in there that worried me a lot. My mother was a magistrate in Newbury for 30 years. She sat on the bench, and she did use those short prison sentences that you're talking about. I've got to tell you, when someone smashes up the bus stop, when someone repeatedly breaks the law, when someone's found fighting on a Friday or Saturday night, as a magistrate, you've got to have that power for a short prison sentence when you've tried the other remedies.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Brown, on that point?

GORDON BROWN: That's why there are 20,000 more people in prison as a result of the tougher sentences we've been passing. But you've got to answer this question: we will continue to match the funding of the police as of now. You are saying you're going to cut it. Now, be honest with the public, because you can't airbrush your policies, even though you can airbrush your posters.

ALASTAIR STEWART: In one sentence, Mr Cameron?

DAVID CAMERON: Gordon Brown is trying to make you believe he can protect health spending, he can protect education spending, he can protect police spending. He can't do any any of these things, because he's given this country the biggest budget deficit of any developed country in the world.

GORDON BROWN: David, answer the question.

ALASTAIR STEWART: No, I'm going to stop it there, because I want to get more questions in. Who knows, that may be an area that we get a question on. Thank you for that. Now we're going to take another question. Let me remind you that viewers in Scotland and Wales will be able to see Scottish and Welsh leaders' debates next Thursday 28th April at 9 o'clock. Those debates will involve the three parties here tonight, plus the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru in their respective nations. Our next question is from Helen Elwood, who runs a pub with her husband. Helen?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I own a pub, and people like to chat over a drink. Nothing's provoked more discussion than MPs' expenses. Given the recent scandals involving all parties, how are you intending to re-establish the credibility of MPs in the eyes of the electorate?

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Clegg?

NICK CLEGG: I don't think that any politician deserves your trust - and you talked about credibility - deserves any credibility until everybody has come clean about what has gone wrong. Now, there have been some changes to the rules and all that, the changes to the expenses rules. But, you know, there are still people who haven't taken full

responsibility for some of the biggest abuses in the system. There are MPs who flipped one property to the next, buying property, paid by you, the taxpayer, and then they would do the properties up, paid for by you, and pocket the difference in personal profit. They got away scot-free. There are MPs who avoided paying Capital Gains Tax. Of course, you remember, what was it, the duck houses and all the rest of it. But actually, it's the people, the MPs who made these big abuses, some of them profiting hundreds of thousands of pounds. I have to stress, not a single Liberal Democrat MP did either of those things, but they still haven't been dealt with. We can only turn round the corner on this until we're honest about what went wrong in the first place.

GORDON BROWN: I was shocked and I was sickened by what I saw. I'd been brought up to believe by my parents that you act honestly, and you act fairly and you act responsibly. As just as the bankers were irresponsible, so too were members of parliament. Nobody should be standing for election at this election who is guilty of the offences we've seen in MPs. I want to do three things to change the system. First of all, I want to give the right of recall to constituents. If your MP is misbehaving and is guilty of corrupt practices and parliament doesn't act, you should have the right to recall that MP. The second thing we've got to do is give people the right to petition parliament so that your issues can be raised in parliament and that's what we propose to do. Thirdly, and this is quite fundamental, and I don't think David will support us on that, but I hope Nick will, we've got to reform the House of Commons and the House of Lords. We need a new House of Commons, a new House of Lords. We will have a referendum to elect members of parliament with more than 50% of the vote, and to have a House of Lords that is elected rather than hereditary or unaccountable. These are the changes we need.

ALASTAIR STEWART: David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON: Helen, I'm not surprised you talk about it in your pub, because it was just a horrendous episode. As Nick says, it isn't fully finished and sorted out yet. I know how angry people are in this country. They pay their taxes and they don't pay their taxes for MPs to abuse the system. I know how angry I was when I heard about the moats and the duck houses and the rest of it. I was determined to do my bit to clean it up, to get my MPs to apologise, to get them to pay back money, all of which they did before the official reviews started to happen. But do you know one thing I think we really need to do as part of the apology, is to say to the British people, we're going to cut the cost of politics. We're going to cut the size of the House of Commons by 10%. We're going to cut ministers' pay by 5% and freeze it for the whole of the parliament. We're going to cut the size of Whitehall by a third. We're going to get rid of some of these quangos. We're going to make your politics better value for money as well as cleaner. I think that's part of the apology we really badly need to make.

NICK CLEGG: I have to say to both David Cameron and Gordon Brown, what bothers me is that I hear the words, they sound great. But, you know, it's not just what you say, it's what you do. Why is it that when I put forward, Liberal Democrats put forward, a law which would have given all of you and everyone watching now the right to sack their MP if their MP is corrupt, the Labour MPs voted against it, the Conservative MPs didn't even bother to vote. Why is it when we

supported a deal to clean up the really murky business of party funding which has affected all parties, you blocked it, you blocked it.

GORDON BROWN: We supported it.

NICK CLEGG: You wanted to protect the paymasters of the trade union. Paymasters, you wanted to protect Lord Ashcroft in his offshore haven in Belize. It's not good enough to keep talking about how we need to change politics, if when you've got an opportunity to change, you actually block it. I think that's a betrayal, I think that's a con. I think you deserve the right to sack your MPs when they're corrupt, but you also deserve a politics where we finally get the big money out of politics altogether.

GORDON BROWN: You see, I agree with Nick. There's got to be a right of recall for people who are in a constituency and find their MPs corrupt and parliament doesn't act. I agree with that. I think Nick also agrees with me about a new House of Commons and a new House of Lords, properly accountable, with a new system of election that will be put to referendum next year. But David's solution, just to cut the number of MPs. Cut the number of MPs... All of us represent a constituency of people; all of us represent communities; all of us represent neighbourhoods and localities which deserve to have their local representation. I would cut one thing: I would cut the numbers of the House of Lords, and not by 10%, but by 50%. A smaller House of Lords, directly accountable, and David, please, no more hereditary peers.

DAVID CAMERON: I want to see a reformed House of Lords. I think the House of Lords should be predominantly elected. Gordon, you have had 13 years to sort out the House of Lords. If there are still hereditary peers sitting in the House of Lords, if you're not happy with the House of Lords, why on earth haven't you done something about it? You have had all this time. To suddenly now talk about electoral reform, about changing the voting system which you started doing just weeks before the general election, I think people will see that as a bit of a ploy. Let me defend once again this idea of cutting the size of the House of Commons. Who in business, who in public services, who in their family life, hasn't actually had to try and get more for less? Hasn't had to trim their budgets, hasn't had to work a bit harder? Why on earth should MPs and parliament be any different? We could quite as well get by with 10% fewer MPs, we could cut the cost for you, the taxpayer, and we could do a better job at the same time.

GORDON BROWN: We'll cut the cost of politics more by halving the House of Lords and making it a far smaller chamber, making it accountable and making it democratic. David, let's be honest, you voted against taking action against removing hereditary peers from the House of Lords. You don't want that to happen. You blocked it only in the last week. The key issue here is, will we take responsibility for a better form of politics?

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Cameron? Mr Cameron?

GORDON BROWN: Right of recall, right to petition, and a better House of Commons and Lords.

DAVID CAMERON: Let me just make one point after all that Nick said. I thought there

was a slight danger of a sort of holier than thou. We should all be frank. Politics has been in a mess for all of us - we all had MPs with dreadful expenses problems. There are still three Labour MPs in court at the moment. There were Liberal MPs that were criticised. When it comes to party funding, yes, there's been the union money going into Labour from the Unite union. Yes, the Conservative Party has been too reliant for too long on rich individuals, and yes, the Liberal Democrats took £2.5 million off someone who's still, I think, a criminal on the run and the money hasn't been paid back. Let's not get too holier than thou over all this.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Nick Clegg?

NICK CLEGG: Hang on a minute. Before we bandy about these things, let's be absolutely clear. We were completely exonerated for that, it was years ago. I'm talking about what's been going on now.

DAVID CAMERON: Have you paid the money back?

NICK CLEGG: Listen, none of this will make any difference if we allow this rotten system in Westminster to carry on where MPs have jobs for life, where they basically only need to get 20, 30% of your votes in their areas, then no questions asked, they don't even need to bother until the next time there's an election. There is a direct correlation between the hundreds of Labour and Conservative MPs who have got these safe seats, these jobs for life, and the levels of abuse in expenses.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Gordon Brown.

NICK CLEGG: Neither of you want to clean up the system from top to toe in the way that...

ALASTAIR STEWART: Thank you, Mr Clegg. Mr Brown.

GORDON BROWN: I honestly think we should raise the standard of debate here. There's been awful things that have happened. We have had to take action against lots of MPs who have betrayed the public trust. We are in politics I hope for serving the public, not serving ourselves. But we've got to take action that makes a real difference in the future. Now, Nick supports me in reforming the House of Commons and the House of Lords. I think the Conservatives should support us as well.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Clegg, can you clarify that? Can you clarify that assertion?

NICK CLEGG: There was absolutely nothing to support. They did nothing for 13 years.

GORDON BROWN: You support...

NICK CLEGG: No. I mean...

GORDON BROWN: Do you support the alternative vote system in the House of Commons?

NICK CLEGG: What I support is something I've supported all my adult political life, which is a complete clean-up from top to toe of politics. Direct elections to the House of Lords. They shouldn't be there just because they've done favours to politicians making the rules that you need to abide by...

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Brown.

NICK CLEGG: ..getting big money out, fair votes for everybody.

GORDON BROWN: The truth is that Nick does support fundamental reform of the House of Commons...

NICK CLEGG: But you haven't offered it.

GORDON BROWN: We're going to put it to a referendum next year and let the people decide. When politics breaks down in the way it did, and we had corrupt MPs, then we've got to have a new start, a referendum next year on a new House of Commons, and a new House of Lords. That's the way forward. I'm sorry that the Conservatives reject these reforms.

DAVID CAMERON: Well, it's rather difficult, because Gordon says Nick agrees with Gordon and Nick says Nick doesn't agree with Gordon. Let me try and find something we're all agreed on that we could change, it would make a difference. I think it is time that when an MP breaks the rules, that those constituents should be able to throw that member of parliament out of parliament without having to wait for a general election. I think we all agree about that...

GORDON BROWN: I've just said that.

DAVID CAMERON: ..and whoever wins the next election, we can put that in place straightaway.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Let me clarify precisely that assertion. The claim is that we are all agreed upon that point. Mr Brown?

GORDON BROWN: The right of recall, yes. But I want a more fundamental reform. I want an MP to be elected with more than 50% of the vote, and I want a House of Lords that is not hereditary but elected on a proportional representation list system. That's what we want to put to a referendum next year.

NICK CLEGG: I'm absolutely dismayed by this. This is something I actually put forward in the House of Commons. We already could have had that law, people already could have had the right to sack corrupt MPs. Labour MPs voted against it. Conservative MPs didn't turn up.

GORDON BROWN: I'm in favour of it.

NICK CLEGG: It's great we're saying the same thing. You've also got to do the right thing to clean up politics.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Gentlemen, thank you very much indeed on that question. Thank you very much. Now, let me just correct something I said earlier on, heat of the moment, sorry, I do apologise for that. The Scottish and Welsh leaders' debates are on Tuesday of next week, not on

Thursday. My apologies for that. Our next question is on education, an area where again there are devolved powers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, OK? Now, Joel Weiner is a 17-year-old secondary school student from London. Joel, your question?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm in my final year of school. I found that the system is incredibly grades-driven, so much so, that often education for its own sake is at sacrifice. We are over-examined and under-taught. What will the party leaders do to improve education?

GORDON BROWN: I want to see our education improve as it has done over the last few years. We need teachers with better qualifications. We need young people with the aspiration to succeed, and we need to give people the chance to start education early, that's why nursery education starts at three and be able to go through to 18. That's what we are saying in our manifesto, education will be part-time or full-time till the age of 18. As far as grades and standards are concerned, I myself believe in the highest of standards. I believe if we don't search for the highest of standards, then we will not in the end get the best pupils coming out of our schools. Yes, we've got to look at the different types of exams and we will do so. But I think it's important to realise we're in this new world where we are competing with Asia, as well as America and Europe and our young people have got to have the grades, the qualifications to be able to meet the best in the world. That's what I want to achieve and I hope I can work with you to do so.

DAVID CAMERON: I have every sympathy with what you say because education is important, that, as well as getting good grades that actually we're opening young people's minds to all the best things that have been written and all the best things that have been said and to really excite people about education. I think there is a danger that our education system has become terribly bureaucratic. We send 4,000 pages of information to schools every year. We spend £300 million on educational quangos. We're not getting enough to the frontline, following the child into the school. As someone who has got two children, one of whom started at a state school in London, and hopefully another child to come, I'm passionate about getting as much money into the school as possible, rather than wasting it in Whitehall. In terms of exams, we've got to have good external marking, done properly, and high standards. I think that's absolutely key. I wouldn't want to see that change. But let's set the schools free, so we trust in the vocation of the teachers who do what they want - they're there because they have a vocation they care about.

NICK CLEGG: John, I think everyone will recognise what you're talking about, this feeling that you have to constantly jump through hoops. The symptoms are everywhere. Our National Curriculum is 600 pages. The curriculum in Sweden, which has generally got a fairly good education system, is 16 pages. I just read the other day that head teachers now by e-mail over the last year, have received - get this - 4,000 pages of instructions from on high from Whitehall. This is crazy. We've got to let head teachers teach, we've got to let teachers teach. We've got to reconstitute a sense of enthusiasm and creativity in the way that you are taught. That's why we want to do, the Liberal Democrats, is to put on to the statute book an Education Freedom Act which literally bans government from micromanaging what happens every minute of the day with every single test in every classroom in the country. That's what I'd like to see. I think it would make a big difference to you and other people who are at school.

GORDON BROWN: But every school has got to be a good school. We've got to insist on the highest standards for every school. Since 1997, 1,600 underperforming secondary schools in 1997 went down to 250. Next year, down to zero, as a result of the fact that we're allowing federations, academies, to take over underperforming schools. That's the way forward, to insist on the highest standards, to make sure an underperforming school is taken over, to make sure we invest enough in the education system to ensure our children are properly taught. What I'd be very worried about is if in this difficult and straitened time, we were to cut our budgets for education at this point in time. I think that would put our children at risk for the future, and it's very important that we continue to invest in the education of every child in this country.

DAVID CAMERON: What I'd say in terms of what I care about most in education with my own children going through the system, I want what every parent in this country wants, and it starts with something that actually doesn't necessarily cost money, and that is good discipline in our schools. In a typical year now, you get 17,000 teachers being attacked by students. We've got a real problem here. There was a case in Manchester once where a child produced a knife in a school, got excluded, and then the appeals panel put that child back into the school. Imagine what that does to the head teacher that's trying to keep order. So we say head teachers should be able to exclude difficult pupils and not be overruled by appeals panels. We say you've got to change the rules so teachers can keep order in class. Right now, we seem to be treating the teacher like children and the children like the adults. We've got it topsy-turvy, the wrong way round, and we really need to change that so that we have proper discipline and order. Then people can learn.

NICK CLEGG: I think discipline is important, of course. I think creativity, which I think is the point you're saying, Joel - I'm not allowed to ask you questions, that's against the rules, but just nod if - good! I think creativity is important in the classroom, and think freedom for teachers and head teachers. One thing which I think would really help in all of those things - discipline, creativity, freedom for teachers - is quite simply good old-fashioned smaller class sizes. We have 8,000 infants in this country now between the ages of five and seven who are in classes which are so big, they're illegal, technically illegal. It's just logical. If you're a teacher, friends of mine who are teachers say they can't really keep an eye on the troublemakers, but they also can't support the brightest children if the classes are huge. That's why we've got a plan, fully costed, to provide schools with additional resources so that they can bring down the average class size in a primary school, for instance down to 20, and the average class size in a secondary school down to 16.

DAVID CAMERON: Again, we mustn't confuse what goes in in terms of money with what comes out. I spoke about the fact that we spend £300 million on educational quangos. The Department of Children, Schools and Families - a lot of teachers actually call it the Department of Curtains and Soft Furnishings because it's so beautifully done up - they recently spent £3 million improving their own building, and putting in a - I'm not making this up - a contemplation suite and a massage room. As a parent of children at state schools, I want every available penny to go with the child into the school so the teacher can actually provide great education for our children. There is a lot of waste, and it needs to be cut.

GORDON BROWN: Creativity, discipline, standards in schools, but we can't evade this question: if we're going to have the best education for our children, we do need the teachers and the teaching assistants. If you cut money out of the education budget now, you'll be cutting the numbers of teachers and teaching assistants. We say it's so important for our country that while we cut the deficit, we will maintain our investment in education per pupil. Now, the Conservatives cannot say this, and I think we need an answer this evening. Again, it's the risk, the risk to our health service, the risk in crime if you have less police. Now it's the risk to education.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON: What Gordon Brown isn't telling you is that he's putting up National Insurance contributions on every single job in 2011. The biggest cost schools have is teachers. So he's going to be taking money out of every single school in the country, primary school, secondary school, FE college. We say stop the waste in government now so we can stop the lion's share of that National Insurance increase and jobs tax next year. That's the best way to make sure we keep the money going into the school.

GORDON BROWN: But be honest about the risk. You're going to take one billion at least out of the schools this year.

DAVID CAMERON: It's simply not true.

GORDON BROWN: If you were elected, in a budget in July, you've got to take six billion out of the system, other than health and defence. Where does that money come from? You've promised you'll take six billion out. It can only end up with the loss of thousands of jobs, including teachers. You will not back us and support us on keeping education. Why won't you support educational spending, as we do?

DAVID CAMERON: I think people can hear that this is a complete invention of a figure plucked out of the air. We're saying the government could save one pound out of every hundred it spends. Now, what small business, what large business, what family, frankly, hasn't had to do that during this difficult recession?

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Clegg now.

GORDON BROWN: You're going to take money out of the school system.

NICK CLEGG: I'm not sure if you're like me, but the more they attack each other, the more they sound exactly the same. Look, Joel's question - let's go back to the question. Joel asked, why are you being tested so much? How can all pupils in our schools feel they're being supported and getting the best out of education? I come back to this need to combine two things: firstly, more freedom for teachers and head teachers. Remember this crazy thing I told you about head teachers getting 4,000 pages of instructions by e-mail, and secondly, smaller class sizes, more one-to-one tuition, Saturday morning classes, evening classes, so that you can help those children in particular who perhaps aren't being supported at home as much as anybody else. I know from my two sons, who go to an excellent local state-funded school in my area, if a whole class can

move together, then that enriches all children. I think what goes wrong is when classes get so big and classes actually fall apart.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Brown.

GORDON BROWN: We've got to be clear about this. I, too, want freedom for schools, and that's why where a school is failing, it will be taken over by a federation or an academy so that it can work, usually a local federation or a local academy. I want the best discipline in our schools as well, and I'm tough on what head teachers have got to do to ensure there's discipline not just in the school itself, but around the school as well, but we've got to face up to the fact about spending.

NICK CLEGG: Well, Gordon Brown mentioned spending - absolutely, too right. I don't think we're really going to get those smaller class sizes, that one-to-one tuition that I think Joel agrees is necessary, the catch-up classes, unless we find the money from savings elsewhere. We've spelt that out in our manifesto, so we can provide under our plan £2.5 billion extra to our schools.

ALASTAIR STEWART: I'm going to stop you right there, because I know what the questions are and you don't, but the next question continues that debate. Your answers are entirely a matter for you, and your rebuttals as well, but I think you may find that the next question will continue that discussion. It's Robert Lewis, a senior manager in healthcare. Mr Lewis, your question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: How certain can you be that your party's policies will deal with the budget deficits without damaging economic growth?

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Cameron?

DAVID CAMERON: This is an absolutely vital question, and I'm glad it's been asked, because we've got to get this economy moving. We've got to get this economy growing. What we say is save £6 billion in the coming current year in order to stop the jobs tax which we think will derail the recovery. Because if you put a tax on jobs, that I think is a jobs killer, it is a recovery killer, it's an economy killer. A hundred of the leading business people in this country, people who run companies like Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencers and Mothercare have all said that the threat to recovery is not cutting out waste as we say, the threat to recovery is Labour's proposal for a jobs tax. So I think we've got to remove this dark cloud of a deficit over our economy and it makes sense to make a start on that now. Make a start this year, to avoid the tax next year, and then we can go forward with further plans to remove our deficit and our debt that will hold our country back if we're not careful.

NICK CLEGG: Where are you, Robert? I can hear your voice, but... Ah, there you are, right at the back. Sorry. Behind the camera. Now I can see you. Robert, I think we need to just be open with you, straight with you, and we've sought to do that. We've specified - I think we're the only party in politics now, in our manifesto, look at the back of our manifesto, which says, here are the figures, this is the way that we would find cuts and savings of £15 million. How would we do that? By things like removing tax credits for the top 20% of recipients of tax credits, ending the child trust fund, which gives £250 to all 18-

year-olds. I'd love to give everybody £250 but I don't think we can afford it right now. Putting a cap of £400 on any pay increases in the public sector for the next two years. But also some long-term choices. I'm the only leader here who is saying very clearly I don't think we can either justify or afford the like-for-like replacement of the Cold War nuclear missile system, the Trident missile system, over the next 25 years. It will cost you, all of us, £100 billion. We can't afford it.

GORDON BROWN:

We've been through a terrible financial recession - a global financial recession - and every time we have had to make big choices about what we do. To support the economy when there was no private investment happening; to support people who were unemployed so we could keep unemployment down; to support mortgages so there were no mortgage repossessions like the 1990s. Now, we're at a critical point in our economy now. I will be honest with you, you cannot afford to take money out of the economy now because you will put jobs at risk, businesses at risk, and you put the whole recovery at risk. £6 billion out of the economy means lost jobs, it means lost businesses, it means lost growth. If you take that money out now, I fear for what could happen, and we do not want to have a double-dip recession in this country. Take £6 billion out and it is the equivalent of taking out thousands of jobs in this economy today and making a lot of jobs that are safe at the moment unsafe. I would not recommend that at all.

DAVID CAMERON:

Let me take on, Robert, this argument directly, the idea that if you cut waste this year, you endanger the recovery. Just this week, we've seen two I think pretty hideous waste stories. The first is that civil servants have been given credit cards funded by the tax-payer to go out and spend that on food, wine and other things, and that's cost £1 billion. The second story was that managers in the National Health Service, many of whom are paid over £250,000, have had a 7% pay rise. Are we honestly saying that if you didn't have that sort of waste, that sort of excess, that our economy would collapse? I think it's nonsense. It's like saying that giving up smoking is somehow going to be bad for your health. Giving up waste would be good for our economy, and it would mean that we could stop this tax rise that's coming down the track, that Britain's biggest business leaders all say will cost jobs. Cut the waste, stop the tax. That's the right answer.

NICK CLEGG:

These two constantly argue about waste as if we can create...or we can fill the black hole in public finances by saving money on paper clips and pot plants in Whitehall. Of course we can get rid of a bit of waste. But that isn't the big... That doesn't really address the big questions we need to ask ourselves. I think we need to be clear with you, open with you, straight with you. We've tried to do that. We've set out £15 billion worth of savings. I've listed some of them. We have one specific tax that we want to introduce to help fill the black hole. We would impose a 10% tax on the profits of the banks, these banks who have got us into the trouble in the first place. I think they should pay you back because you, the taxpayer, have bailed them out, and use that money to deal with the black hole in the finances. Let's not get obsessed about mythical savings and waste, which is the oldest trick in the book, to pretend that you can square a circle like that. Or get obsessed about when you deliver these cuts. The crucial thing is, are we going to be open with people, with you, about how we're going to save money in the long-term?

GORDON BROWN: Just think how difficult it is to save 50,000, 100,000, 200,000, a million, and then think of 6,000 million to be saved in the next nine months before the end of the financial year. I fear for our economy if that happens. The only way we've kept our economy moving forward is not because there's been private investment or bank lending, it's because the government has had to step in to make sure there is sufficient growth. We've prevented unemployment going to the levels of America and Europe. I say you've got to keep that support now. Every other European country, America, agrees with that. Only the Conservative Party is against keeping that support in the economy now. Now, of course we've got to deal with waste, but if you take the waste out, you put more money into the economy to make sure the economy can continue to grow. It's the only way we can save jobs and businesses in this country now. I say to the whole audience here and to the nation: it is important at this moment to take no risk with the recovery. Once again, the Conservatives are showing they are a risk to the recovery in this country.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Nick Clegg.

NICK CLEGG: We all know we've got this great black hole in our public finances. That's obvious. We all know we're going to have to save money; we all know we're going to have to make cuts. The question at this election is who is trying to be straight with you about the scale of those cuts, how long they'll take? As it happens, this is one area where I would like for once to see politicians put people before politics. What I'm suggesting - I don't know whether Gordon Brown and David Cameron will take up this invitation - is that regardless of the outcome of the general election, that we get the Chancellor and the shadow Chancellors together, the governor of the Bank of England, the head of the Financial Services Authority, to come clean with you about how big this structural deficit is. It's estimated to be somewhere around £70 billion. And straight with you, finally, about how long it is going to take to fill that.

ALASTAIR STEWART: David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON: There's no doubt the country's going to have to come together to deal with this really big problem of the deficit. For every £4 that we spend right now, the government is borrowing one of those pounds. Nick keeps saying he's being very straight with you. In his manifesto is a promise for a £17 billion tax cut. It is a great idea. I'd love to do it but we don't have £17 billion for a tax cut. Gordon is saying...

ALASTAIR STEWART: Nick Clegg on that specific point.

NICK CLEGG: We've spelt out exactly where that money would come from. We would, for instance, stop this grotesque spectacle of this unfair tax system which has been built up under a succession of Labour and Conservative governments, where right now, a greedy banker in the City of London pays a lower rate of tax on their capital gains than their cleaner does on their wages. We have a tax system...

ALASTAIR STEWART: Gordon Brown. Gordon Brown.

GORDON BROWN: Back to the question Robert put, that the PCT, the health authority, was finding it very difficult because of the situation at the moment. Take thousands of millions out of the economy now, take £6 billion out of the economy now, and think of the risk to jobs and businesses. I say to the Conservatives, of course we want efficiency savings and of course we want to deal with waste, but we cannot afford to see private investment so small and then public investment cut at this time and lots of jobs put at risk.

ALASTAIR STEWART: David Cameron.

GORDON BROWN: Please tell us you won't do that.

DAVID CAMERON: £6 billion is one out of every £100 the government spends. What small business in this recession, what big business hasn't had to make that sort of decision? Many people are making a much bigger decision. Turn it round the other way and think about it like this. Gordon is effectively saying, "I want to go on wasting money now so I put up your taxes later." Why should we pay our taxes for government waste?

GORDON BROWN: We've got a responsibility for the overall growth rate of the economy. We've got to get this economy moving forward. You can't do it with private investment alone. The government has got to play its role. Now, next year, we'll make these bigger savings and of course we're going to pay for health and for education, and for policing by what we do on National Insurance. But this year, don't pull the money out of the economy, don't put good people's jobs and their businesses at risk now.

DAVID CAMERON: But why do you think it is, I would say, that a hundred of the leading business people in this country, people who run some of the biggest businesses like Corus, like Logica, like Mothercare, why do they say, and they couldn't be more clear, the risk to the economy isn't cutting waste, the risk to the economy is Labour's proposal of a jobs tax.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Gordon Brown on that specific point.

GORDON BROWN: The risk to the economy is this year, and every country - America, the rest of Europe, including Britain - is saying, we've got to make sure we invest in the economy this year so that we can have the growth we need. Now, pull out the money, and you've proposed it at every point during this recession, pull out the money and you'll have less growth, you'll have less jobs, and you'll have less businesses. That's the fear. We've got to take an overall responsibility for the whole economy.

NICK CLEGG: All I would say is this argument I think just doesn't address the fundamental issue. There are going to be big things over the next few years, and neither will come clean on this with you, that we simply can't afford to do. Trident, I don't think we can afford it. A tax on banks I think is now unavoidable. Tax credits. We need to look at public sector pensions. These are big decisions we need to take.

ALASTAIR STEWART: David Cameron?

NICK CLEGG: I would like us for once to get politicians together...

ALASTAIR STEWART: Yeah. I've got the agenda, Mr Clegg. Mr Cameron's response.

DAVID CAMERON: I just want to make this... I think people at home watching will find it extraordinary that Gordon Brown is really saying, you've got to go on wasting money to keep the economy going. Why not cut the waste and stop the tax rise? It can't be in... How is a 7% pay rise for NHS managers essential for economic growth?

ALASTAIR STEWART: I'm going to have to park it there...

GORDON BROWN: We made 35 billion of...

ALASTAIR STEWART: No, I'm going to stop you because we had some of this in the previous question and I've still got more questions that I really want to take. A lot of information there for people to reflect on. I do want to move it on. Our next questioner comes from an army family and himself has served in the Territorial Army. Nick Brimson, your question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Good evening, guys. British troops seem to be dying unnecessarily and far too frequently. In my opinion, they are under-equipped and massively underpaid. What assurances can you give the armed forces that things will improve?

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Clegg?

NICK CLEGG: You're right, Nick. They are under-equipped and they are underpaid. I think there's something seriously wrong when you've got 8,000 bureaucrats in the Ministry of Defence who work on communications. When we have too many top brass in some of the services - there are, I think, two admirals for every warship. We have 17 brigadiers for every brigade. And we also, of course, have this consensus from the Conservative and Labour Parties that we should spend £100 million renewing the Cold War nuclear Trident missile system. I say if we change our priorities, we can provide our brave servicemen and servicewomen, who do the most astonishing job in the most extraordinarily difficult circumstances, we can give them proper pay. I think it's a scandal that someone who starts in the army on a junior rank now gets paid £6,000 less than someone starting as a firefighter or in the police service. I want them to have the same pay, and I also want them to have proper body armour, proper helicopters, proper vehicles. You can only do that if you cut out spending elsewhere which isn't being well spent.

GORDON BROWN: Let me say, first of all, my pride and my admiration for the armed forces, and our questioner who was in the Territorial Army, all those who serve our nation, and particularly at this time when we're at war in Afghanistan, we've got to remember and we've got to do our best not just by the armed forces but by their families. And let us remember all those who lost their lives in Afghanistan. The important thing is that we're doing the right thing by our troops. And that's why we've increased the spending on equipment dramatically over these last few years. A thousand new vehicles, new helicopters brought into Afghanistan. We used to spend £600 million on Afghanistan three or four years ago. It is now 5,000 million this year.

Now, this... Every time, you know, I've got to write to a family where someone's died, I've got to consider all these issues. I would not send our troops into battle unless I was absolutely sure that they were properly equipped for what they're doing.

DAVID CAMERON:

Sorry, I couldn't see Nick in the audience. Can you put your hand up? Ah... Oh, sorry, you're behind the... Same problem, behind the camera. First of all, can I thank you for what you do, and I join with Gordon in paying tribute to our forces. I've been to Afghanistan in each of the last four years, and just the bravery and the incredible courage and determination of what those men and women do just humbles you every time you see it. They're not just brave fighters, they are brilliant diplomats in dealing with difficult situations, they're incredible athletes, they are brilliant, brilliant people. But I don't think we do enough for them. I know that steps are being taken to try and improve the situation. But, frankly, we shouldn't be in the situation we are. In the last few months, we had to fight a battle in parliament to stop the government cutting the training for the Territorial Army. I think it's madness when you've got soldiers deployed overseas actually not to invest in your Territorial Army, because they're a very, very important part of our armed services.

NICK CLEGG:

I think it's also what kind of equipment we provide. I was in a factory in my own city where I'm an MP in Sheffield just a few weeks ago. There was a great British company there, a manufacturing company, that produces great metal braces with these huge rollers, which apparently are sold to the American army. They attach them onto their vehicles, and when the rollers move over mines, the mines blow up, but of course, they destroy the rollers and not the soldiers. The American army says that those rollers, designed, manufactured by a great British business in Sheffield, have saved 140 lives. Why is it they're not being used by the British army? Apparently they don't somehow fit on to the vehicles that our soldiers use. So I think it's not only that we've got to make sure that we don't waste money on bureaucrats in the Ministry of Defence and all the rest of it, and instead spend that on equipment for our brave servicemen and servicewomen, we should also use the know-how and the manufacturing brilliance expertise in this country to provide our brave soldiers with the equipment which saves lives on the front line.

GORDON BROWN:

Every urgent operational requirement that our armed forces have asked us for has been met. I've got two big questions I've got to answer to the British people for: why are we in Afghanistan? We're in Afghanistan because there is a terror threat and a chain of terror that comes from the Afghan-Pakistan border to our country, and three-quarters of the terrorist plots that we identify start not in Britain, start not in Europe, but start in that border area. The second question I've got to answer is how we can get our troops home. Because that is what we all want to see at the end of the day. We've got to build up the Afghan army, build up the police force in Afghanistan. Our brave troops are helping to train the Afghan army and police at the moment, and that's how we will gradually see the numbers of Afghan forces rise and our troops come down in number so that our troops can come home. As we do that, we've got to ensure that pay continues to rise for our troops, and those people who leave the forces have got to get proper protection - homes, health service and of course, the chance of jobs.

DAVID CAMERON:

We all want to see those things happen, and I think it's an

absolutely vital year we're having in Afghanistan. And you can see, I hope, progress being made but difficult, difficult times lie ahead. There is something more fundamental we need to do in order to answer your question properly. That is we've got to have a fundamental defence review of all that we spend and all that we do and all the equipment that we have. Because if you think about it, over the last decade, since we last did this, we have had 9/11, we have had 7/7 in our own country, we have had the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and yet we fundamentally haven't asked again, what should be the shape of our army, our navy, our air force? How can we best defend our country? How can we best protect our servicemen and women? We need urgently to do that. We make sure if we get involved in these conflicts in the future, we don't have the situation where we have had troops on the ground without enough helicopters. We all know that happened after 2006 and it really wasn't good enough.

GORDON BROWN: No, what happened after 2006 is that the Taliban changed its tactics. Before they were in a one-to-one confrontation with us face-to-face. They couldn't win that armed battle, so they took to explosive devices, guerrilla warfare. And we had to respond to that as all our allies had to do. We have 1,000 new vehicles in Afghanistan as a result of the decisions to get Mastiffs and Ridgebacks and other vehicles into the frontline. And we've also got more helicopters as a result of what we've done.

NICK CLEGG: I actually agree, strongly agree, and it's something I've been calling for for years, that we should have a complete review about whether our military equipment is right for the job that we are asking our brave soldiers and brave servicemen and women to do. Because of course the world is changing and the threats to this country are changing with it. What I simply don't understand is if we hold that review, as I think is going to be likely after the general election, whoever wins that election, both David Cameron and Gordon Brown want to rule out one of the biggest items of defence expenditure of all, which is the Trident nuclear missile system. This was a system that was designed at the height of the Cold War to flatten St Petersburg and Moscow. Is it really that important?

ALASTAIR STEWART: Let me bring David Cameron in on that point.

DAVID CAMERON: Let me answer that directly because I think it's important. I think the most important duty of any government, anyone who wants to be Prime Minister of this country, is to protect and defend our United Kingdom. And are we really happy to say that we'd give up our independent nuclear deterrent when we don't know what is going to happen with Iran, we can't be certain of the future in China, we don't know exactly what our world will look like? I say we should always have the ultimate protection of our independent nuclear deterrent. That's why we voted to make sure that happened.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Gordon Brown.

GORDON BROWN: I've got to deal negotiations over Iran, and we've got the problem over North Korea. If countries unilaterally decide to have nuclear weapons and break the Non-Proliferation Treaty, then we need multi-lateral action with all of us working together. We are nuclear weapon states. We can make a huge difference in the reduction of

nuclear weapons overall, if we can persuade countries not to have nuclear weapons in the first place or force them not to have them, if we can then have a reduction in nuclear weapons all round. But I don't favour Nick's proposal which would unilaterally abandon our nuclear deterrent when we know Iran and North Korea and other countries are trying to get...

**NICK CLEGG:** All I'm saying is, I don't think we should kid people into thinking we can either justify or afford £100 billion over 25 years on a nuclear war system...missile system, which was designed explicitly to flatten St Petersburg and Moscow at the press of a button. I think the world has moved on and I think you two need to move with it. We're not in the Cold War any more, and we shouldn't be spending billions of pounds of taxpayers' money on a Cold War missile system when, as Nick said in his original question, we have people on the frontline of Afghanistan without the right equipment and without the right protection. It's a question of priorities.

**ALASTAIR STEWART:** Mr Cameron, on that context of priorities, a little more clarification. I'd like to put it to the three of you that we've dealt with that nuclear question. More on priorities, as the questioner put it.

**DAVID CAMERON:** We need the defence review, so we can get everything required for the frontline. I just want to go back to what I think Gordon didn't really tell you, which is, after we deployed in Afghanistan at the end of 2005, for several years, I went each year, and each year, you didn't have to talk to many of our servicemen and women before they told you they simply they didn't have enough helicopters. To blame it on Taliban tactics, I think, frankly, is misleading. We didn't have enough helicopters. We needed more helicopters. We should have had helicopters. If the government hadn't cut the helicopter programme back in 2004, we probably would have had more helicopters.

**GORDON BROWN:** This is not correct. The Taliban changed their tactics. We brought in helicopters from Iraq. We had to reprocess them because they were not suitable for the terrain in Afghanistan. We've got Chinooks in, we've got Merlins in, we've got Lynx in, all the helicopters we need have been put into Afghanistan. I would say with the Chief of Defence Staff, who said himself we are the best equipped armed forces in our history as a result of the action we've taken. I'm not complacent. I want to do more, but we put the helicopters in, we put the vehicles in, and we're giving our troops the equipment they need. I'm very proud of our troops.

**ALASTAIR STEWART:** Thank you very much indeed. Again, I'm going to draw the line at that point, but thank you all very much indeed. We're going to move on to take another question now. Again, viewers in Northern Ireland will be able to see a debate between the leaders of the Ulster Unionist Party, the Democratic Unionists, Sinn Fein and the SDLP next Thursday at 9 o'clock on UTV. Our next question is on health, an area covered by devolution settlements in Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland. To put it, we have Sindhu Navel, who's been a hospital nurse for 12 years. Mrs Navel.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** My question is, what are the parties' visions for the future of healthcare in Britain? In particular, how would they address the cost pressures arising from an ageing population and more expensive new treatments?

ALASTAIR STEWART: Thank you very much indeed. Mr Brown?

GORDON BROWN: To help people live at home, to give them the urgent care needs they have and see them met, for example, by home helps and health visitors, so that people who want to stay at home don't have to go into institutional care. We've seen a revolution. Large numbers of people are living longer, which is a great thing, but people need help in their homes so that they don't have to go into nursing homes or old people's homes. My priorities for the health service are that we give people personal guarantees that every individual patient will know they will get a cancer specialist seen within two weeks if need it. They'll get a diagnostic test within one week, and the results to them. They will also be able to know that their operation will be in 18 weeks if you're any patient in need of an operation. You'll be able to see a GP in the evenings and weekends, something which wasn't happening. You'll be able to get a free health check-up on the National Health Service. I want people to know that public services are personal to people's needs, and that's why we need to give these guarantees to individual patients, and that's what we're going to do from now on.

DAVID CAMERON: First of all, can I thank you for your incredible service to the NHS. I think the NHS is a wonderful, wonderful thing. What it did for my family and for my son, I will never forget. I went from hospital to hospital, A&Es in the middle of the night, sleeping in different wards in different places. The dedication, and the vocation and the love you get from people who work in the NHS just, I think, makes me incredibly proud of this country, so thank you for all that you've done. I think it is special, the NHS, and we made a special exception of the NHS and said yes, there are going to have to be difficult financial decisions elsewhere, but we think that the NHS budget should grow in real terms, i.e., more than inflation, every year under a Conservative government. My vision is that we improve it, we expand it, we develop it, we make sure that it's got more choice and more control for the patient. But we need to do some short-term things too, like make cancer drugs available to people to people who need them. There are some tragic cases now of people not getting what they need.

NICK CLEGG: Of course, the easy thing is to say how much we all love and depend and rely on the NHS. The difficult question, which I think is the one you're addressing, is, how do we protect the NHS which we all rely on, maternity services, A&E departments, GP services and so on, when money is tight? I think it's a bit like the earlier discussion about equipment for the army. The priorities at the moment are all wrong. The last year under this government, they've employed 5,000 more managers in the NHS, yet the maternity ward in the NHS hospital where my third son was born just over a year ago is threatened with closure. This government spent £12 billion on a computer testimony in the NHS which doesn't work, yet I was in Burnley the other day, I think Jacqueline was saying you come from Burnley. As you know, they've closed the A&E department there. I think you now have to travel 25 miles to Blackburn. What is going on? We're closing A&E departments and maternity wards and wasting money on computer systems and bureaucracy. I want to turn that on its head so we can protect the NHS we all rely on.

GORDON BROWN: I've got to say that my equipment to the NHS is that we will give people these personal guarantees: the main source of employment

in the NHS is more nurses. We've got 80,000 to 90,000 more nurses across the United Kingdom. We've got 30,000 more doctors. We've got the best equipment now in some of our hospitals. Remember the situation before 1997, when people had to wait two years for operations? It's now a maximum of 18 weeks. Yes, it is our priority that we will support the frontline services, health, the National Health Service, education and policing. These are the frontline services that people depend on. We will make sure that that finance is there. David says he will support the National Health Service, which assumes he will not give the same guarantees to education and policing as I asked him earlier this evening. The main point to recognise is this: David will not give you the guarantee that you'll see a cancer specialist in two weeks, or the guarantee that you'll have a GP in the evenings and weekends. These are personal guarantees written into the NHS constitution that we will give.

DAVID CAMERON:

The point is that today, actually, the number of nurses is going up - the number of managers is going up five times faster than the number of nurses in our NHS. The government has had 13 years to fix these problems, and it hasn't done. Gordon Brown talks about cancer, but what he's not telling you is that there are people in our country, there was a case the other day of someone who had to sell their home to get the cancer drugs. And the Prime Minister, the government, is about to hit the NHS, Britain's biggest employer, with this National Insurance rise. It's going to take £200 million out of our National Health Service. We say stop that National Insurance rise, and instead spend the money on a cancer drugs fund, so people can get the drugs they need. Talk about guarantees, but the fact is for some people, waiting two weeks to see a consultant is too long. We need a faster, choice-driven system, but the drugs have got to be there when you need them. They're not always right now.

NICK CLEGG:

This is a phoney debate. This is pretending that somehow there are billions and squillions of pounds around that we can continue to pour into our NHS. Every man, woman and child in this country spends £2,000 on the NHS through our tax system. I want to judge the NHS about how it helps me and my family when we're ill, sick and in need of NHS care, not just by numbers plucked out of thin air. David Cameron, you simply cannot seriously suggest that we should believe that you can cut the deficit immediately as you want, then have a whole blizzard of tax breaks, including a great big tax break for double millionaires in the inheritance tax system, and provide huge lashings of extra money to the public services. You might be able to do one of those things. You can't do all three. I want to say to people, let's be straight with you. We have to find savings in the NHS. I want to see strategic health authorities, which is a layer of bureaucracy, stripped away altogether and use that money on the frontline NHS services which are so important to us.

DAVID CAMERON:

The point is, we have made a special exception for the NHS for exactly the reason that Mrs Neville gives, which is that there are more older people. There are more expensive treatments. There are drugs budgets that are going up, and we say you need that extra money to even keep going with the NHS. That's why we make the exception of the NHS and say that's the budget that has to go up. What Gordon Brown is not telling you about the situation with cancer, cancer drugs and cancer outcomes is, after all the things he's talked about, all the money that's gone in, our death rate from cancer is actually worse than Bulgaria's. So all that's happened has not actually improved the outcome, which is what matters.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Gordon Brown?

GORDON BROWN: If people get early detection, and that means screening, I had a lady write to me who said that she would not be alive today if we hadn't introduced screening and we hadn't given the chance to see a specialist in two weeks. What David is not telling you is that while we're using the National Insurance to pay for health, policing and schools, he won't give the guarantee on policing in schools...

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Brown, thank you. Mr Cameron?

DAVID CAMERON: The National Insurance increase which Gordon Brown has said is definitely coming in, that will take £200 million out of the NHS. He's not replacing that money, so he would have less to spend on cancer drugs. I have a man in my constituency called Clive Stone who had kidney cancer who came to see me with seven others. Tragically, two of them have died because they couldn't get the drug Sutent that they wanted, that was on the market, that people knew was a good drug. That's a scandal in our country today. So stop the National Insurance rise, use that money for the cancer drugs and help people, so our outcomes can be amongst the best in Europe rather than sadly amongst some of the worst.

NICK CLEGG: All I would appeal for is just a bit of honesty in this debate. People know that money is tight. People know that you can't promise something for nothing. You can't say you're going to fill the deficit tomorrow and you're going to give lots and lots of tax breaks to people, inheritance tax breaks for double millionaires, tax breaks for one in three hand-picked married couples, and also extra, extra money to the NHS without explaining how you're going to do it.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Cameron?

NICK CLEGG: I say again there's something wrong...

ALASTAIR STEWART: Mr Cameron? Thank you, Mr Clegg.

DAVID CAMERON: Nick Clegg is promising a £17 billion tax cut. We're saying, stop the waste of £6 billion to stop the National Insurance rise. I would love to take everyone out of their first £10,000 of income tax, Nick. It's a beautiful idea, a lovely idea. We cannot afford it.

NICK CLEGG: Shall I tell you how we pay for it?

ALASTAIR STEWART: Please do! Mr Clegg?

NICK CLEGG: I'll tell you how we pay for it. We would, for instance, stop the huge unfair loopholes that only benefit the very wealthy at the top of the tax system. At the moment, the top 10% of earners in this country get twice as much tax subsidy from all the rest of you when they make contributions to their pension pot than everybody else. We say give everybody tax relief on their pension contributions but make sure they're the same. And use that money...

ALASTAIR STEWART: Gordon Brown.

NICK CLEGG: ..so no-one pays any income tax on the first £10,000 they earn.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Thank you. Mr Brown.

GORDON BROWN: Where Nick and I are agreed is that to give an inheritance tax cut to the 3,000 richest estates in the country, of £200,000 each, the biggest manifesto promise that the Conservatives made, is totally unfair to the rest of the population of this country. I say to him, we will use the National Insurance to pay for health care, to pay for policing, and to pay for schools. He will not be able to do that, and he's got to tell us the truth about how he will pay for his policies.

ALASTAIR STEWART: I'm going to stop you. I'm going to stop you there, partly because of time, also because, thank you, Mr Brown, people have heard that particular exchange as well. I have time to get one more question in. That's why I interrupted at that point. I'm grateful for you accepting it. Now, in what will be, as I've just told thm, our final question of this evening, it's also a policy area that's devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Alan Shaw is a train driver from Accrington. Your question, sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you, Alastair. Gentlemen. When are each individual party going to introduce a fairer system to care for the elderly when it is required, especially those who have worked and contributed towards the country's economy, without the need for them to sell and dispose of their assets? And what are your policies?

DAVID CAMERON: Thank you, Alan, for asking this question. I think it's an absolutely vital question. I think it's so unfair that today you can have people who have worked hard all their lives, they've saved, they've paid down the mortgage, they've done all the right things, and yet if they go into residential care, they have to spend every penny of that money. And maybe the neighbour who didn't work hard, didn't save, and went about things in a different way, they get the whole thing paid for for free. I think that's just not fair. So we have... As we know, there is a huge budget deficit, a great big hole left by Gordon Brown, so we can't make all care free, I don't think we can afford that. What we can do is say to people, if you put aside £8,000 on turning 65, we can guarantee that you won't have to pay for residential care. That would remove the need to sell your home to pay for care. It would mean you could pass your home on to your children rather than have to pay for your care bills. It doesn't solve the whole problem, but I think it'd be a good start, a fair start, in rewarding the people who have done the right thing.

NICK CLEGG: I think, Alan, this is one of those rare issues where the issue is so big, and the costs are potentially so great, and it affects every family, it affects every individual, that I think this is one of those issues where I would say, it is worth the politicians setting aside their political differences for once and trying to come up with a solution everybody can agree with. We've all got different ideas. We have ideas, proposals, that there's a contribution from the individual and the state. David Cameron's ideas, which helps some but doesn't help people in their home. Gordon Brown has some ideas which help some of the most needy, but not others. Why don't we for once, given this is something which I think is bigger than any

other party, actually work together? There are some things, however, that I think we can do immediately. I, for instance, would like to use the money that the government has allocated for its latest, I think slightly flawed, proposals, to give respite care to the carers who look after loved ones, those who looked after loved ones for the greatest amount of time, give them respite for at least a week every year. That's something we can do now. Let's come up with a longer term proposal together.

GORDON BROWN: Elderly people should not have to choose between the home they own and the care they need. We have to devise a better system for the future. That's why the first stage of it is urgent-needs care. So you can stay in your own home, you don't have to go into a nursing home, you get the support you need to stay in your own home free of charge. We're introducing that from April next year. The second stage in the next parliament is to say to people, if you're in an old people's home and you're in that home for more than two years, it will be free for personal and medical care from then onwards. That will take away the worry and anxiety people feel that their own home will have to be sold to meet the costs of residential care. The third stage will be to move to a more comprehensive system where people can be guaranteed that their needs will be met in the long run. I agree with Nick, we want consensus on this, we want to proceed in a way that every party, that every part of the country is with us. That's why we are consulting the social care groups, setting up a new commission to look at the finding for the future after the next parliament, but we're committed to urgent needs being met now.

DAVID CAMERON: It isn't a small problem about people having to sell their homes to pay for care. I believe it's 45,000 families every year who have to do that. As I say, I think there's a deep unfairness in the system.

DAVID CAMERON: Look, all of us, when we we get older, want to spend as long as possible at home before going into residential care. Anything we can do to help people adapt their homes and live in their homes, and also to help the carers, if carers stopped caring in Britain, whether for disabled children or elderly people, if they packed up and gave up, that would cost us £50 billion as well as the hurt and pain it would cause. So giving carers clearer rights and saying if you care for someone, you should get a break. The thing every carer says to me more than anything else is, "Give me a break every now and again, and I can go on doing what I do". I hope as we try and seek some consensus, let's put the carer absolutely up front and centre. They're Britain's unsung heroes.

NICK CLEGG: Of course, I agree with that. There are about a million carers in this country who care, I think, for 50 hours or more for their loved ones, for members of their family who need care. They are the unsung army of heroines and heroes that keep our society together. They desperately need time for themselves, time to go on holiday. Under our plans, what we could do immediately is give those million carers who care for the greatest length of time at least a week off - at least a week off - just to have a breather, spend some time on their own, visit friends, go on holiday, have some time to themselves again. But as I say, I think we've all got some ideas, but I don't think any of us - and you don't hear this from politicians very much - I don't think any of us, if we're really honest with you, have got the perfect solution. That's why I think this is so important. Let's for once put people before politics and come up with a solution that works for

you and your family in the long run.

**GORDON BROWN:** We have tried to do something about respite care. There are six million carers in this country. I've met many of them and talked to them about their needs. One need is respite, so that they can have a break, as Nick said. We're introducing, and have actually made provision, for more measures for respite care. But the questioner was asking about, also, how he could be sure that he could be less worried about having to go into an old people's home, or what would happen if he got ill later on in his life. That's why the urgent-needs measure we're introducing from April next year is so important. It means that you can stay in your own home, have the help that is available, the equipment, but also the home helps and the health visitors, and at the moment, it is being means-tested. Now, in future, it will be free of charge.

**DAVID CAMERON:** I think one of the biggest things we must do is, I think it's right to try and forge a consensus, because this is a long-term issue we must deal with, is to try and give the carer and those they care for more power and control and influence over their lives. Form an individual budget for each one. Make sure that if they want to, they can take that as a direct payment, they can make decisions about the sort of respite they need. We tried to do this with my son, and when you try and get a direct payment system so you're in charge of the money and you can try and get some help, it's unbelievably complicated. You've got to set up a separate bank account, you've got to read about four lever-arch files. I found it testing enough. What someone who's recently had to start caring, who's under huge pressure, maybe getting ill of what they're doing, to try and get direct payments, let's make it easier. We ought to be trusting people to do this.

**GORDON BROWN:** I think the key is, of course, urgent-needs payments for people so that they are sure they can stay in their own home. I agree that we need to do more for carers. I want carers to be able to manage their own budgets as well, and that's something we're really working on for the future as well. But we've got to find a solution to this big problem. The big problem is, people don't want to have to make the choice between owning their home and getting the care they need. That's why in the next parliament, it's important to try with the commission to reach a consensus on what the funding will be for the future.

**NICK CLEGG:** I think everybody will be surprised that the last question of the evening should actually have flowed into so much consensus. I think it is one of those issues, a bit like public sector pensions. I also think the scale of the public sector deficit is one of those issues where I think if we could introduce a new kind of politics in this country, not the old style of politics, we could actually come up with a solution that everybody could agree to, because I think you and your family would benefit from it so much.

**ALASTAIR STEWART:** Gentlemen, it will disappoint you and many people, but we've come to the end of our debating time. If I can just explain to you, while you mull over what you've heard already, what happens now is that each of them will have one and a half minutes to make their closing statement. The evening began with an opener. You've heard lots of cut-and-thrust about a number of issues, but now each of them has one and a half minutes to attempt to persuade you of their overall position. Mr Clegg, you first.

NICK CLEGG:

Well, thanks for starters, for sticking with us for a full 90 minutes. What I've tried to show you this evening is that there is an alternative to the two old parties. I know many of you think that all politicians are just the same. I hope I've tried to show you that that just isn't true. Whether it is on the questions from Alan on care, Jacqueline on crime, Helen on politics, Joel on schooling, Robert on the deficit, I believe we can answer all of those questions. I believe we can rise to all of those challenges if we say no to the old parties and yes to something new and something different. That's what I offer and that's what the Liberal Democrats offer. So don't let them tell you that the only choice is between two old parties who have been playing pass the parcel with your government for 65 years now - making the same promises, breaking the same promises. Making the same old mistakes over and over again. I think, despite all the challenges, all the problems we have, I think we can be really hopeful about the future. I genuinely believe we can have a better fairer country if we do things differently. So give real change a chance. Trust your instincts. Support fairness. Choose something different. And that will give you and your family a better, fairer life. Thank you.

GORDON BROWN:

You know it's been a great opportunity to exchange ideas this evening. I know we're not up against The X Factor or Britain's Got Talent and I hope people have been able to stay with us in the exchange that we've had about the future policies of this country. I was really struck with a number of questions, but particularly the one from Robert about the future of his healthcare trust and about the jobs that may be at risk. I've got to come to this central problem that we've got at the moment: we've got to make a decision now about how we secure the recovery this year. We've got to make a decision about whether we put funds into the economy or take funds out of the economy. Now, I'm very clear we mustn't make the mistakes of the 1930s or the 1980s when unemployment rose for five years after the official end of the recession. So we've got to make sure the money is in the economy this year so that the recovery is secure. And then we've got to make sure that as we cut the deficit, we are fair to our National Health Service, our policing, and fair to our schools. And that's why the National Insurance rise is necessary, to protect our health service, our schools and our police. I think it was very interesting when David Cameron was asked, he couldn't give a guarantee that we are giving about the funding on schools, he couldn't give a guarantee about the funding on policing. And when it came to the National Health Service, he couldn't give the same personal guarantees that we're giving about cancer specialist care, about seeing a GP at the evenings and weekends. Now these are problems he's got to address in the future. I look forward to the next debate so we can get all the issues raised, aired about the future of our country.

ALASTAIR STEWART:

David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON:

Well I think it has been a great opportunity to have this debate. And I think one of the things I've heard during this debate is just repeated attempts to try and frighten you about a Conservative government. And I would say, choose hope over fear, because we have incredibly exciting and optimistic plans for the future of our country. A great vision where we build a bigger society, where we get our economy moving, where we stop Labour's jobs tax which

could destroy that economy. I think it's been shown tonight the idea you have to go on wasting money to secure the recovery is simply wrong. You heard a lot about policy tonight. But I think as important as policy is your values. Let me tell you mine. If you work hard, I'll be behind you; if you want to raise a family, I will support you. If you're old and you become ill, we will always be there for you. This is an amazing country. We've done incredible things. I think we can go on and do even more incredible things but we need two things: a government with the right values and also an understanding that we're all in this together and real change comes when we come together and work together. That's the sort of the change and that's the sort of leadership that I would bring to our great country.

ALASTAIR STEWART: Gentlemen, thank you very much indeed for your contributions to this, our first debate. Can I turn to you as well, all of you here with us this evening. Thank you particularly to those who asked the questions, and also a heartfelt thanks to those who submitted brilliant questions but for which we did not have time. Thank you so much. Our thanks then to Nick Clegg, to Gordon Brown, and to David Cameron. Stay with us now on ITV1 for instant reaction and analysis of the debate on News At Ten. Including the results of the first opinion poll on who came out on top tonight. At the end of an historic moment in television and political history, a very good night to you. Good night. APPLAUSE.



Second prime ministerial debate

22 April 2010

TRANSCRIPT

ADAM BOULTON: Good evening from the Arnolfini in Bristol and welcome to the Sky News leaders' debate, round two of the first ever televised prime ministerial debates in the UK. The three men who want to run the country after May 6th are here and raring to go, so please welcome David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Gordon Brown. APPLAUSE

ADAM BOULTON: The agreed theme for the first half of this debate is international affairs. Each leader will make a short opening statement before taking questions from the audience. In the second half tonight, we'll move on to general issues. Lots have been drawn to decide who goes first. We begin with the current Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party, Gordon Brown. Mr Brown.

GORDON BROWN: This may have the feel of a TV popularity contest, but in truth, this is an election about Britain's future, a fight for your future, and for your jobs. If it's all about style and PR, count me out. If it's about the big decisions, if it's about judgment, it's delivering a better future for this country, I'm your man. Ahead are huge challenges, delivering the economic recovery in jobs, bringing our brave troops safely home from Afghanistan, keeping our streets free of terrorism, building alliances in Europe against nuclear weapons, against climate change, against poverty and to deal with our banks. Now, not everyone has the answers, but I say get the big decisions wrong and Britain's security and jobs are at risk. Get the big decisions right, and we can have a prosperous, fairer, greener and better Britain. Like me or not, I can deliver that plan. The way to do it is with a majority Labour government.

ADAM BOULTON: Thank you, Mr Brown. Next, the leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON: Thank you. It's clear from last week's debate that the country wants change. But the question is, what sort of change and who's best placed to lead that change? If you vote Conservative, you will get a new team running the country from May 7th. And you won't be stuck with what you've got now. But real change comes from your values, and there, there are big differences between us. I believe that we need to do more to help families. They are the absolute bedrock of a strong society. I want government to be accountable. I want less waste, less bureaucracy. Stopping the jobs tax, but making sure we have good public services that you get good value for money for. As we're going to discuss tonight, I want us to keep our defences strong, I want to keep our borders secure and our country safe. But real change, real change comes not just from politicians, but from when we all recognise that we have responsibilities. We're all in this together, and that's how we will build the big and strong society I believe we need in our country.

ADAM BOULTON: Thank you, Mr Cameron. And finally in this round, Nick Clegg, the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

NICK CLEGG: I am so proud of the values that have made our country so great. Democracy, human rights, the rule of law. But the sad truth is that in recent years, our governments under the old parties have let those values down. We shouldn't have sent soldiers into battle without the right equipment. We shouldn't be facing allegations of complicity in torture, we shouldn't have invaded Iraq. So I want us to lead in the world. I want us to lead in Europe, not complain from the sidelines. I want us to lead in creating a world free of nuclear weapons. And I want us to lead on the biggest challenge of all, climate change. My family knows what British values really mean. My mother was freed by British troops from a prisoner of war camp. And I think, if we do things differently, we can be proud, once again, of the role we can play as a force for good in the world.

ADAM BOULTON: Thank you, Mr Clegg. Those are tonight's opening statements. Now it's time for the questions from the audience. The audience here is made up mainly of local voters from the south-west, some with allegiances, others yet to be persuaded. There will also be some questions in person from Sky News viewers who e-mailed us. Each leader has a uninterrupted minute to answer each question, followed by a second minute to deal with what their rivals have said. Then it's free debate time with no guaranteed time at the microphone. Now, our first question comes from Christopher Nelms, who's from Saltford, near Bristol. Mr Nelms.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hello, I'm Chris Nelms, I work in the building trade. I can't see any advantage of us being in Europe. I think there's far too much interference politically and legally, and I just wonder what you intend to do to stop it?

ADAM BOULTON: How are you going to tackle Europe, David Cameron?

DAVID CAMERON: Very directly, Christopher, I think we should be in Europe, because we're a trading nation, we're part of Europe, we want to co-operate and work with our allies in Europe to get things done. But I do agree with you that we have let too many powers go from Westminster to Brussels, we've passed too much power over and we should take some of those powers back. I want us to be in Europe but not run by Europe. There will... you'll hear big differences between me and the other two parties. I don't want us to join the euro, I want I want us to keep the pound as our currency. I don't want us to give up the British rebate. I want to make sure we get value for money for what we put into Europe. I want to cut some of the bureaucracy, some of the rules, some of the regulations that I think drive business so mad. That's the agenda you'd get from a Conservative government in Europe. To those who say somehow this would be isolation, I say nonsense. President Sarkozy of France, he stands up for France in Europe. Angela Merkel in Germany, she stands up for Germany in Europe. I would do exactly the same for Europe.

ADAM BOULTON: Thank you. Nick Clegg?

NICK CLEGG:

I actually worked for the man who was sent by Margaret Thatcher, would you believe it, to bat for Britain in Brussels. What I learned when I was there was this: the European Union is not perfect - of course not. This is a club that took 15 years to define "chocolate" in a chocolate directive. Anything that takes 15 years to define chocolate is not a model of democratic efficiency. What I also learned was this, that there are a whole load of things, whether we like it or not, whatever your views on Europe and the European Union, which we simply can't do on our own. We can't deal with international crime that touches and affects every single community in this country on our own. We can't deal with climate change on our own. The weather doesn't stop at the cliffs of Dover. We can't regulate these wretched banks that got us into so much in the first place which now sprawl across countries. I don't think the European Union is perfect. I want it reformed, that's why I want to lead in the European Union. But we're stronger together and we're weaker apart.

ADAM BOULTON:

Mr Brown?

GORDON BROWN:

You know, there's three million reasons why we need to be part of the European Union, and they're called jobs. Three million jobs depend on our membership of the European Union. Half our trade is with the European Union. 750,000 businesses - I'm sorry it's not your business, raising the question about the building trade - but 750,000 businesses trade with Europe. The idea that we should again be isolated and on the margins and not in the mainstream of Europe would be a terrible, terrible mistake. Now, I worked with the European leaders through the global financial crisis. I had to persuade them that we had to restructure our banks and they had to restructure their banks. I had to persuade them they had to work with America in the G20, but when Europe and America works together, we are so much stronger. Stronger to deal with climate change, which is one of my priorities, stronger to deal with the economy, stronger to deal with international crime, stronger to deal with terrorism, let us never again be an empty chair in Europe. My fear is that David's policy would put us in that position.

ADAM BOULTON:

Thank you. David Cameron?

DAVID CAMERON:

I understand why people like Christopher are frustrated about the European Union and some of the things that have happened. I think one of the reasons that people are so angry is that politicians at Westminster have given away powers to Brussels without asking us, the people, first. I think people felt particularly cheated when the European constitution came forward and we were told we were going to get a referendum and Gordon Brown and Labour stopped that from happening and Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats didn't vote with us to get that referendum. We should have had one. People feel cheated by that. As a result, one of the things I would do if I was your Prime Minister is straightaway pass a law through parliament that says if ever there's a future occasion when laws are being proposed to pass power from Westminster to Brussels, there will be a guarantee of a referendum held in our

country. You send us to parliament to make decisions, make laws, discuss the issues, yes. You don't send us there to give away powers that belong to you. There should be a referendum guarantee if ever this happens again.

ADAM BOULTON:  
NICK CLEGG:

Thank you. Mr Clegg.

David Cameron talks about a guarantee. It was the Conservative Party that gave a cast iron guarantee to have a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty which it promptly dropped. Look, we do need to have a referendum the next time there's a big transfer of powers to the European Union but it needs to be on the fundamental issue: do we stay in or do we go out? You have a right to make that choice in a referendum. I would argue we should stay in, not because it's perfect but because it's in our interests to do so. Let me give you, Christopher, a very concrete example. There was some time ago a operation by European police authorities which broke open a paedophile ring. They arrested 100 sex offenders, many of them in this country. And they released 20 young women from unimaginable abuse and servitude. something called Operation Koala. ou can Google it and look it up. Guess what? Conservative MEPs, UK Independence Party MEPs voted against the measures which made that possible. That is putting dogma above the safety of children. We are safer together, we're weaker apart.

ADAM BOULTON:  
GORDON BROWN:

Gordon Brown.

Imagine a European Council meeting if David Cameron was in in charge two months from now. He'd have to go along as he said and say he wanted to repatriate the social chapter. That's what gives us paid holidays. He'd have to break up the European Union meeting and say, "Look, 26 of you are against this, I'm the only one who's standign for this". And what would happen? We are trying to get an economic recovery. That depends on economic recovery, depending on Germany, France and other countries growing as well. Taking our exports. We have to get an agreement on climate change because of what happened at Copenhagen. Again, that would be postponed because we would be having a big argument as we did in the past with a Conservative government about repatriating powers in Britain. We've got other props we've got to deal with and these include security and terrorism. These are the issues. Let's look to the future. Let's not have a Britain-only solution and let's not go back to the days when we were fighting with the rest of Europe in the past.

ADAM BOULTON:

David, it's over to you now for a free debate.

DAVID CAMERON:

What I would say is what you're hearing from the other two is frankly don't trust the people, don't ask them when you pass powers from Westminster to Brussels, just give in to everything that comes out of Brussels and don't stand up for your country. That to me is the same old politics. Let me just ask this important point: this idea that somehow an in-out referendum is what the public wants I don't think is right, it's a con. What people want when a new treaty comes along, when a constitution comes along, is to have that choice to vote on that constitution.

NICK CLEGG:

No, no. Let's be clear. What would have been a con would be to have a referendum on one individual treaty, which, even if we'd had the referendum, and then we'd rejected the treaty, would have allowed, Christopher, the European Union to carry on exactly as before. Let's have the fundamental debate. I worked in my previous life before going into politics for a while as a negotiator on behalf of all of us, on behalf of Britain and the European Union, negotiating trade deals with the Chinese government, the Russian government and others. What I noticed there was that the Chinese and the Russians, they only listened to what we were saying because I was representing the largest single market in the world of 475 million consumers. Now, of course there are daft rules, of course it does daft things, but it seems to me that we punch above our weight when we stand together in Europe in a world, frankly, where you've got a lot of superpowers bumping up against each other and where, to coin a phrase, size does matter.

GORDON BROWN:

You see, David wants a referendum if there's any future change; Nick wants a referendum now on the European Union. I think what people want is us to solve the employment problem, the economic problem and get on with the job. I need to work with these other countries in Europe - President Sarkozy, Chancellor Merkel. David's walked away from the European People's Party, which is an alliance of the centre, progressive parties in Europe, and gone in with a group of right-wing extremists. I want to work with the sensible people in Europe to get jobs for our British economy. If we don't trade with Europe, we lose jobs, we lose businesses, we lose growth. Let's make sure our priority trading with Europe, sorting out the problems of the European Union, yes, but let's make sure we get a recovery that's stronger than ever.

ADAM BOULTON:

Mr Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON:

You can hear there is a difference, there's a real difference between us. The reason about this European party is I just think it's the hypocrisy that people are fed up with, of British politicians standing here in Bristol saying, "I'm going to stand up for us in Europe and we shouldn't give away all these powers and we should fight for British interest," and then over they go to Brussels and they do exactly the opposite. I want to make sure we say the same thing when we're in Bristol, about wanting to be in Europe but not run by Europe, wanting to have a single market that's good for our country, wanting to trade with Europe, but not go over to Brussels and say something different. It's that, the same old

politics...

NICK CLEGG: How on earth does it help anyone in Bristol or anyone else in the country for that matter, David Cameron, to join together in the European Union with a bunch of nutters, anti-Semites, people who deny climate change exists, homophobes. That doesn't help Britain. Of course we need to change the European Union, but you change clubs of which you're a member by getting stuck in, not standing on the side-lines and complaining about things.

DAVID CAMERON: What the Liberal Democrats have actually done...

ADAM BOULTON: I think Gordon Brown wants to come in first.

GORDON BROWN: You know who these two guys remind me? They remind me of my two young boys squabbling at bath time. And the squabbling about...

NICK CLEGG: That's a good line in rehearsal.

ADAM BOULTON: I think we're past bathtime now!

GORDON BROWN: Squabbling about whether to have referendums on the European Union. What we need is jobs, and growth, and economic recovery. We work with our partners to get that. The sooner Nick realised also we had to work with America and Europe to get economic growth in the future, the better. I'm afraid David is anti-European, Nick is anti-American, and both of them are out of touch with reality.

DAVID CAMERON: It's not a question of... It's a question of wanting to get things in Europe for your country and standing up for your country. One of the things the Liberal Democrats would want to do is actually take away Britain's seat on the United Nations Security Council and replace it with a European one. That's one of the things that actually gives us the ability to punch above our weight in the world. It gives us influence in the world...

GORDON BROWN: David, David, you're running up the wrong line.

ADAM BOULTON: A final quick word from first of all Gordon Brown, then Nick Clegg.

GORDON BROWN: There is no chance of Britain giving up its seat on the United Nations Security Council. We are stronger, we've just been chairman of the G20 as a result of the efforts we made in the economy. We're leading the negotiations on climate change and we're leading on nuclear non-proliferation.

ADAM BOULTON: Nick Clegg, final word. Anti-American?

NICK CLEGG: I'd simply say don't let people create scare stories to frighten you into thinking that we can't change Europe. Of course we can change Europe. I, unlike David Cameron and Gordon Brown, have been in there, have sought changes. We can do it if we leave and don't complain on the side-lines.

ADAM BOULTON: We're going to have to move on now. Now, question B comes from Stuart Wolvin from Horfield in Bristol. Stuart.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you. Given our involvement in Afghanistan, if there is another multinational operation to remove Al-Qaeda or another terrorist group from a failed state, would the UK participate?

ADAM BOULTON: So, will the UK take part in future multinational operations against terrorists abroad? Nick Clegg.

NICK CLEGG: Clearly, the principle of the reason why we went into Afghanistan, why I supported our mission in Afghanistan, unlike the illegal invasion in Iraq, is to keep us safe. Not to parachute democracy into Afghanistan, it's because we believe that if you allow Afghanistan to be a haven of extremism and terrorism, there will be more terrorist attacks here in Britain. So, from that principle, if we need to do that again, we should. The problem, of course, is we have done it in a manner where I don't think we've pursued the right strategy, we haven't given the right equipment to our troops. We haven't had proper international co-ordination on the ground in Afghanistan, we haven't worked properly with other countries in the region to do so. I think if you put soldiers into harm's way, you either do the job properly or you don't do it at all. If we ever take that decision again, let's make sure we've got the right equipment, the right strategy, so they can come back having done the job we've asked them to do, with their heads held high, knowing they have done the job well.

ADAM BOULTON: Thank you. Gordon Brown.

GORDON BROWN: I want to answer the question directly. Let's be honest, and Nick didn't say this, we've already got Al-Qaeda in Somalia, we've already got problems with Al-Qaeda in Yemen. We are having to take action with our multilateral partners to deal with these problems, and will continue to have to do so. Why are we in Afghanistan, and why we have we got to be vigilant all the time? The reason is, there is a chain of terror that links these Al-Qaeda groups in different parts of the world to action that could happen in the United Kingdom. Every week I get a report, sometimes every day, of terrorist plots, most of which arise in the Afghanistan/Pakistan area, and we have got to deal with. To keep the streets safe in Britain, we have to take on Al-Qaeda wherever it is. I also have to say about Afghanistan that this is a mission that can work. The reason is, we are training up the Afghan soldiers and the Afghan police. So whenever we are in a mission abroad, we have to make sure that we have a means by which, in that country, they can build up their own security staff, so we can bring our troops home. That is my mission, that is my aim.

ADAM BOULTON: Thank you. David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON: Stuart asked, would we participate. If I was your Prime Minister, I would want to think very carefully what's in the national interest, what will make us safer here in the United Kingdom? I think we need to end the division between foreign policy and security policy and Home Office policy. Bring it all together and think about our national security. I would also say this. If you look at future operations like that, we have to learn from the mistakes of the past. We have to make sure we plan properly, we've got to make sure

we never send our troops into battle again without the proper equipment, without the proper helicopters. We have to think through not just what we are doing militarily, but actually is the aid there, are we helping these people? Do we have a political strategy for how we are going to get out of that country once we have tried to make it safe with our allies? In the case of Afghanistan, far too many of those questions weren't answered. And even now, while I support what we are doing and I want it to work, I still worry we are not doing enough to get the political situation right in Afghanistan.

ADAM BOULTON:

NICK CLEGG:

Mr Clegg.

I think everyone is agreed that if we were to do this again, which is Stuart's question, we need to make sure that we've got the right equipment, the right resources. That's why I think it is essential that after the next election, whoever wins, there is a full defence review, so we have a real good look at where we are spending money, whether we are spending it wisely and whether we are providing the troops on the frontline with the resources they need. I personally think that we're not spending money on some of the right things. I wouldn't carry on spending money on the Eurofighter Typhoon, the third tranche of that Eurofighter project, consuming billions of pounds. I don't think it's right to do what both David Cameron and Gordon Brown want, which is now to commit, before we need to make a decision, to spend up to £100 billion renewing, exactly in the same old way, the Cold War Trident nuclear missile system. If you take decisions like that, then maybe you can equip our troops so they don't get so terribly overstretched, as they were in fighting two wars on two fronts in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

ADAM BOULTON:

GORDON BROWN:

Gordon Brown.

My first thoughts will always be for our troops, for our dedicated forces, our professional forces. Every day I meet people who have got people serving in Afghanistan or have served in other parts of the world. We have got to do everything we can to support them, yes there will be a defence review in the next parliament, so we can do our best by our forces. Look, what happened on Christmas Eve was a bomber who would have been in Detroit and bombing that plane, came from Somalia. That was really where he was given his orders from. So we have got to deal with Al-Qaeda in Somalia and Yemen, as well as in Pakistan. We've got to be clear, that we cannot allow terrorists to have territory in the world that then they use as a base for attacking the United Kingdom. I will do everything in my power to protect people, but we rely on the most brilliant, the most dedicated, the great forces that I want to pay tribute to this evening.

DAVID CAMERON:

I completely agree with Gordon Brown about the bravery of our forces. I've been to Afghanistan four times. Every time you're just blown away by the professionalism of these people. I actually, to prepare for this debate, I went for a run this morning with someone who just got back from Afghanistan this morning, I couldn't keep up, he was someone who'd served for six months and had done an incredible job there. Just going back to the point about how we get these things right, one of the things that strikes you when you go to Afghanistan is that actually we are not getting things right politically. The south of the country is where Taliban grew, where they came from, that is the Pashtun part of the country. Yet when you see the Afghan National Army, it is dominated by people from the other parts of the country. There is a really big political issue there. We have to make sure the whole country in Afghanistan feels it's part of the Afghan Government. That's absolutely key for making sure we can bring our soldiers back home. Not just training the Afghan army and police, as Gordon said, vital though that is, we need a political settlement as well to help make sure we can come home.

NICK CLEGG:

I think Stuart's point, which he's pinpointing, even if you decide, even if we as a country decide to undertake a mission like that again, there is no point deciding you want to do it, unless you know how. Unless we can provide the necessary resources. I remember when I was in Helmand visiting the troops there, I talked to some mechanics, who look after the vehicles. They were telling me that they had been on a convoy previously which normally just takes one day to from one place to another, it took them a week, because every time the vehicle broke down in the sands there, they didn't have the necessary parts, they had to take parts from other vehicles. So, if we do this again, we cannot, cannot, cannot allow eight years to elapse, which is what's happened, until proper equipment is finally been provided to our very, very courageous servicemen and servicewomen.

GORDON BROWN:

Look, we've had to change our tactics all the time because of what the Taliban has been doing. Originally, they wanted to win a face-to-face war with us, fighting person-to-person. Now they use explosive devices, these explosive devices are designed to scare as well as to maim our own troops. We have had to change our tactics and therefore bring in the explosive experts, bring in the metal detectors, bring in the drones to survey the land, make sure we have the proper intelligence, go into Pakistan and deal with the making of bombs as well. All these things have had to happen and we've had to change our tactics again because we want to train up the Afghan police and army so we're partnering with the Afghan police. I'd like to say to our troops, come back into the barracks and you will be safe. But I can't say that, because our strategy in Afghanistan depends on contact with the local people, persuading them they are safe with us, and safe in an Afghanistan free of the Taliban. We have had to change, yes, but it's response to the tactics of our opponents.

DAVID CAMERON: I'd just like to take up this point about Trident and about our independent nuclear deterrent. I think it would be completely wrong to try and trade-off equipping our forces properly today, which must be done, with securing our future for the future. I think it's one of the biggest decisions any prime minister would have to take. And we've got to get this right. And I profoundly believe that we are safer having an independent nuclear deterrent in an unsafe and uncertain world, a proper replacement to Trident, because we simply don't know what the world will look like in 40 years time. I think it's a real risk, as the Liberal Democrats say, first to be opposed to an independent nuclear deterrent, now to say they do want one, but it's not the same as Trident, but they can't tell us what it is. You can't take risks with this. It's really important you get it right.

NICK CLEGG: If you don't believe me, then believe the several generals who wrote just this week in a newspaper saying precisely what I have been saying all along, why take a decision now to commit that amount of money on replacing Cold War nuclear missile system, when that system has still got several years to run, when those military people themselves say there are cheaper and better alternatives, and of course most importantly, when the world is changing. President Obama said last week, I think quite rightly, that now the greatest threat to us is not the Cold War threats of old, it's terrorists getting hold of dirty bombs, Trident isn't going to help you with that. Let's move with the times, take decisions when we need to take them, and at least have this review, which I talked about , after the election and consider everything that is possible.

GORDON BROWN: I have to deal with these decisions every day, I say to you, Nick, get real, get real. Because Iran, you are saying, might be able to have a nuclear weapon, and you wouldn't take action against them, but you're saying we've got to give up our Trident submarines and our nuclear weapon now. Get real about the danger that we face, if we have North Korea, Iran and other countries with nuclear weapons....

NICK CLEGG: This is extraordinary, to say get real, what is dangerous is to commit to spend a whole lot of money that we might not have on a system which almost certainly won't help, when the world is changing, when we're facing new threats, when now more and more military experts are saying that there are different alternatives. You want to hold a review, and you want to exclude the one big issue which should be at the heart of that review.

DAVID CAMERON: I thought I would never utter these words, I agree with Gordon. You cannot put off this decision, General Mike Jackson said today we can't go on putting off decision. You have to make it early, you have to keep your country safe and secure. You cannot rustle up a nuclear deterrent at the last minute as the Liberal Democrat seem to think you can. And it's deeply unsafe.

ADAM BOULTON: We're going to move on now to the next question, coming from Nicola Tanner from Horfield in Bristol.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Given that climate change is one of the biggest global threats we face, what have you personally done in the last six months to use more environmentally friendly and sustainable forms of transport, such as bikes and trains, rather than cars and planes.

ADAM BOULTON: So, what are you doing personally to tackle climate change?  
Gordon Brown.

GORDON BROWN: I've been on trains all the time. I don't think I have been on any more than one plane during this campaign time, I have been going around by trains. And I think actually our high-speed rail network will allow people to get off the roads and also to get off domestic air flights, and I think that's incredibly important. I would say the other thing I have done, and I'm very pleased we've managed to do this in our home in North Queensferry, we thought living on a hill with a huge amount of wind, not very good weather in Scotland, as you know, that a wind turbine would be the answer. In fact, we found, far better, even in this area where there's not much sun is a solar panel. I would recommend people if they can to use this form of energy because it allows us to heat our water in a way that is far more environmentally friendly. We've got the first Climate Change Act in the world, we are due to reduce emissions substantially by 2020 and 2030, there is a lot more to be done both individually and as a community. But we've also got to get a world agreement, we've got to work, David, with Europe to do so and work with the rest of the world, and that's the way to get environmental emissions down.

ADAM BOULTON: Thank you. David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON: When I said to my party we had to get real about the environment, and we to be a party that was a blue-green party, not just a blue party. I did actually once get a letter from someone couldn't really agree with this and said, Mr Cameron, if you're so concerned about carbon emissions why don't you just stop breathing? That was the moment I realised I still have some persuasion to do. In terms of my own life, the biggest thing we've done is to have proper insulation in our house and actually really can cut your energy bill and make life cheaper as well as greener. But I would say in the last six months, the biggest change, or the last year, the biggest change that I've been able to make is actually coming out very strongly against the third runway at Heathrow. I think it is wrong to do that. I think we should be going for high-speed rail instead. We should have a high-speed rail hub at Heathrow. Trying to make sure all the flights people take where you could take a train, it is possible to do that. I think it would be a really big step forward.

ADAM BOULTON: Thank you. Nick Clegg.

NICK CLEGG:

I suspect I'm like many people, I of course tried to change my behaviour, when I travel up to my constituency in Sheffield and back again every week, I almost always do that by train, unless there is so much clobber with the kids that I simply can't carry it on the train. But I don't do enough. I'm acutely aware I don't do enough, I'm like many, many people, I wish I could and would do more. Part of the problem, because you referred specifically, Nicola, to aeroplanes, and you're quite right that flights at least when they are able to fly, and there isn't too much volcanic ash around, do create a growing proportion of the CO2 emissions, so we need to tackle it. I think what is irrational is the moment you have a tax system which taxes passengers in aeroplanes, that means that planes with freight in them, for instance, aren't taxed, to reflect the pollution they cause. You've got lots of planes that are half empty or barely got any passengers at all. If you changed it to a plane tax, you would make a dramatic difference in cutting down on unnecessary aviation pollution.

ADAM BOULTON:

Thank you. Gordon Brown.

GORDON BROWN:

If we are going to make a real difference, we've GOT to change the energy balance in our country. We've got to remove this fixation about using oil, our addiction to oil, our dependence on oil. That is why our energy plan talks about how we can move with nuclear and renewables and oil and gas. We want 15% renewables by 2020, with the world's leading offshore wind power at the moment, and we want to do more in every area of renewables. The question I have to ask the two other parties is this, why, Nick, are you so against nuclear power, because it is the means to balance off our energy supply, without having the dependence on oil. And David, why don't you have a renewables target as we do, so that we can use wind power? Why are you so against the on-shore wind that power people are trying to develop? You seem to support it in principle but in every constituency where it happens, you seem to be against it. Let's get real also about getting this energy balance right.

ADAM BOULTON:

David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON:

Of course we need an energy balance, and we need nuclear, we need renewables, we need the full range. It's a great opportunity for our country to do these things. I think one of the biggest opportunities we've got is actually with our own homes. We have a proposal called The Green Deal. We want to say to everyone in this country, that you can spend up to £6,500 on your home to insulate it and better protect it, and then you can see your energy bills come down. And we will have companies, Marks & Spencers and others have expressed an interest, to come and carry out that work and pay for it and share with you the reduction in the bills. I think that would show people that going green actually can save you money. It can actually get Britain working again, it can cut carbon emissions, it can cut fuel poverty. For all those reasons, I'd want it to be a really big part of the first Queen's Speech, if I'm elected as your Prime Minister.

GORDON BROWN:

The only problem, David, is we're doing it already.

ADAM BOULTON:

Mr Brown, you're going to get your turn in a moment. For now, it's Nick Clegg.

NICK CLEGG:

Hold your horses. You've asked... Gordon Brown asked me about nuclear power. I don't have a theological opposition to nuclear power. I just think it's extraordinarily expensive, very, very expensive indeed. There are some calculations that it would lead to average energy bills increasing in this country rather than decreasing. It takes a long, long, long time to build these nuclear plants. All the experts agree that it would take well into the next decade to create new nuclear energy, which would be too late to deal with the energy problems we have now. For a fraction of the money that I think both David Cameron and Gordon Brown want to spend on subsidising the nuclear industry, we could develop mass insulation programmes of our homes, our schools and our hospitals. Remember, 27% of all carbon dioxide emissions in this country go straight out of your window, through the roof of your house. If we only used energy more efficiently and also, of course, invested some of the money which would be wasted on big nuclear projects on wind energy and other renewable energies, I think that is the way towards a sustainable future.

GORDON BROWN:

You can't have a balanced energy policy in the modern world, as almost every country is now finding in the advanced world, without using nuclear power. I do say the schemes we've introduced... I met some young guys yesterday, and girls, who've been working on an energy project in Wales. They'd been taken on as a result of our future jobs fund. They're in the business of helping insulation and giving people advice about the use of energy. So we're trying to do this at the moment and we will do more in future years. Yes, we've got to insulate our houses, yes, we've got to have carbon-free homes where possible, yes, we've got to have the electric car, we're investing in that, the hybrid car, and yes, we've got to develop offshore wind power. But the energy balance has got to be fair. Any party that is now excluding nuclear power, which is already a substantial part of our country, is not really thinking about the needs of a future where we cannot be dependent on these high oil prices forever.

DAVID CAMERON:

Actually, the situation is worse than Gordon Brown describes, because actually, according to the government's own figures, we are potentially heading for power cuts in 2017. And actually, nuclear power stations won't really come on stream by then, so we have a greater emergency and we do need to look at the level of gas storage we have in this country which is much lower than France or Germany. They have up to a hundred days and we have a little over two weeks. We also need to make sure that we get the renewables and maybe even extra gas capacity on stream faster, otherwise we could see the lights go out. That's because we have had over the past 13 years so many different strategies and so little action.

ADAM BOULTON:

This is not the bit for speeches. Trying to get everyone in an

exchange. Mr Clegg.

NICK CLEGG: The one thing which hasn't been mentioned at all which is absolutely crucial to dealing with a global problem is acting globally. I remember seeing the television pictures of Gordon Brown sitting, I have to say, slightly on the side-lines in the summit in Copenhagen while America and China basically cut everybody else out. I think if you're going to lead on this, of course you have to lead at home, but you also have to lead in Europe. There's no point clubbing together as David Cameron has done with people who even deny the existence of climate change in Europe. You've got to create strength in numbers in Europe so that we can really lead in the world, because this is a global problem which requires a global response.

GORDON BROWN: But, Nick, you're right, there is no British-only solution and David has to face up to that. You've also got to face up to the fact that the co-operation we've achieved, 100 countries have now signed carbon emission reduction plans. We're trying to persuade China and America to do so. We need America on our side. Your anti-Americanism will not help us. We need to work with all the different continents to get a climate change agreement.

DAVID CAMERON: Just one point on the European issue. There is a bit of a con going on here as well. The Lisbon Treaty has just about seven words on climate change. You don't need another treaty for politicians to get together in different countries, you need political will, you need action. That is what is required. Instead, what we keep getting from the other two parties is more institutions, more regulation, more new agreements. That's not what's required. It's action at the European level and that requires political will.

NICK CLEGG: Of course you don't need a new treaty, but you do need to at least work with people in Europe who believe climate change exists. That would be a helpful start. On the point that Gordon Brown keeps saying, anti-Americanism. I have a simple attitude towards our relationship with America. It is an immensely important, special relationship, but it shouldn't be a one-way street. We shouldn't always automatically do what our American friends tell us to do. We've got to make sure we act on the world stage in our interests, not simply at the beck and call of anybody else.

GORDON BROWN: And I persuaded the Americans to be part of a G20 that dealt with the banking crisis and I'm still pushing the Americans to take action on climate change as well. But, David, I mean, your anti-Europeanism becomes more and more obvious as this debate goes on. It is the big society at home, but it's the little Britain abroad. I think you've got to rethink your policies.

DAVID CAMERON: I just think they're just trying to frighten you, the other two parties, because they don't want actually a Britain that stands up for itself in Europe. They keep going on about these alliances. One of our main allies is the party of the Polish president who tragically died in that accident, who both the politicians standing next to me praised as a great patriot and a great statesman. I think we can hear no more of that. The fact is, you can co-operate and work with your

European partners without signing a new treaty, without giving away so many new powers.

ADAM BOULTON: That is going to be the last word on Europe for now. I suspect it will come up later on. Let's move on now and a question from Michael Jeans who is from central Bristol.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Good evening. The Pope has accepted an invitation to make an official state visit to Britain in September at a cost of millions of pounds to tax-payers. If you win the election, will you disassociate your party from the Pope's protection over many years of Catholic priests who were ultimately tried and convicted of child abuse, and from his fierce opposition to all contraception, embryonic stem cell research, treatment for childless couples, gay equality and the routine use of condoms when HIV is at an all-time high?

ADAM BOULTON: Thank you, Michael. So, do you back the Pope's visit, David Cameron?

DAVID CAMERON: I do think it's welcome that the Pope is coming to Britain, and I would, if I was your Prime Minister, I would want to support that visit and make sure I could do everything in my power to make it a success. There are millions of people in our country who will welcome that, who shares the Pope's Catholic faith and I think we should try and make a success of it. Do I agree with everything the Pope says? No, I don't agree with him about contraception. I don't agree with him about homosexuality, and I think the Catholic Church has got some very, very serious work to do to unearth and come to terms with some of the appalling things that have happened, and they need to do that. But I do think we should respect people of faith. I think faith is important in our country. I think faith-based organisations, whether they are Christian or Jewish, or Muslim, or Hindu, do amazing things in our country, whether it is working in our prisons or providing good schools or actually helping some of the most vulnerable people in our country. A country where faith is welcome, yes, a visit from the Pope, yes, but does that mean we have to agree with everything he says? No. Nick Clegg.

ADAM BOULTON:

NICK CLEGG: I'm not a man of faith, but my wife Miriam is Catholic, my children are being brought up in her faith, so I have a little bit of an insight into the immense feelings of anguish in the Catholic community here and elsewhere. And I think many Catholics themselves feel really extremely, extremely torn apart by what's happened. I think they do want to see the Catholic Church express greater openness and repentance. You can't keep a lid on sin, and of course you need to move with the times. I do welcome the Pope's visit, but I hope by the time he does visit, there is a greater recognition that there has been terrible, terrible suffering, there have been abusive relationships which have left immeasurable scars on individual people's lives and we need a process of openness and then healing. You can't undo the tragedies of the past, but you can be

open about them so people can start to move on.

ADAM BOULTON:  
GORDON BROWN:

Gordon Brown.  
I've met some of the people who have rightly complained about the abuse that they were subject to when young, and it never leaves them. It is something that is with them always. And no matter what you can try to do to help, there is always this problem that they have to face up to every day, that they were abused, cruelly abused, by people in whom they placed their faith and trust. So the church has got to deal with these problems, and it's got to make sure that there is an open and clean confession about what has happened, and that we help those people who have been put into difficulty by this abuse. You know, I welcome the Pope's visit to Britain. And I want him to come to Britain for two reasons: one is the Catholic Church is a great part of our society, and we should recognise it as such, and I hope every British citizen wants to see this visit by the Pope take place. Secondly, we must break down the barriers of religion that exist in our world. The faiths must come together and recognise they have common values and common interests. They all believe that we should be good neighbours to each other. I'm from the Presbyterian religion, but I support the visit, but I not only support it, I want religious faiths to work more closely together.

ADAM BOULTON:

Before we bring in David Cameron, I would remind you that Michael Jeans is also concerned about the attitude of the Catholic Church to science and also gender matters. David Cameron?

DAVID CAMERON:

Again, I would say to Michael that, again, I would be agreeing with you, and against the Pope in terms of, for instance, the need to make advances in... er... in science. I don't think we should - obviously, you need proper protections and proper rules, and we debated them at great length in the House of Commons, but I do want to see that go ahead. Also, on the issue of abortion. There are lots of areas I don't agree. I don't think that means you should stop someone visiting our country or condemn them. We must try and build a open and tolerant country where we respect people for their different faiths, we bring faiths closer together with each other and we are prepared to have an open and frank discussion about these things. That's the only way to go. It's nice to hear that pretty much we all agree about that.

ADAM BOULTON:

Mr Clegg?

NICK CLEGG: I think on this matter, we do. I don't agree, I've made it publicly clear in the past, that I don't agree with the formal doctrine on homosexuality of the Catholic Church, for instance. I don't agree with it at all. It doesn't mean I don't... I think there should be some, you know, uprising against the Pope's visit, quite the reverse. I would like to see the Pope here. I think the Catholic community in Britain wants to welcome him, but, as we've all acknowledged, that doesn't mean one has to subscribe to the every letter and every crossed T and dotted I of the thee theology and doctrine of that church.

GORDON BROWN: You know, on all these big issues, I think we're proving ourselves to be a tolerant and understanding nation. We introduced civil partnerships, and therefore we changed the laws on homosexuality and said to people, if you're gay or straight, you have a place in British society. I think for many people, that was a great liberation, and I'm pleased that it has happened in Britain in these last few years. On human embryology, I've disagreed with the Catholic Church because I believe if you can treat a disease by using embryos that are enabling us to make sure people can be free of some of the conditions that afflict their lives, we should do so under the right rules. I'm sorry that in principle there is a disagreement with the church on that. On the question of contraception, I think we know that in Africa, we know round the world, that it is important to give women access and choice so that they can make their own decisions, and I regret the fact that the Catholic Church does not do that. The Pope should come to Britain, we should have these debates and we should welcome all religions because bringing religions together is the key to making sure that we have a more peaceful world.

ADAM BOULTON: OK, thank you. Given the degree of agreement, we're going to move on now and take some more questions. That brings to an end the international affairs part of this debate, although we may well come back to it in subsequent questions, and in a moment we're going to move on to the open section. Before we do that, just a reminder that you can see the Sky News Scotland debate this Sunday. It'll feature senior politicians from three parties represented here, plus the First Minister of Scotland, the SNP's Alex Salmond. So, please join me live from Edinburgh at my next gig, this Sunday at 10.30. Let's move on now to the next question. This question comes from Mary Slattery from Montperlier here in Bristol.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Given the scandals of the last year, it is hard to find a person in my neighbourhood who believes in the power of their vote. How do you plan to restore faith in this political system?

ADAM BOULTON: Nick Clegg. Given the powers, given the scandals of the past year, how do you plan to restore faith in politics?

NICK CLEGG:

Firstly, Mary, you need to be given the power to sack any politician who's proved to be corrupt. It's something I advocated in the past, it's something I put forward in Westminster, both David Cameron and Gordon Brown's party didn't support that. They now say, which is good, say they do welcome that. You're the boss, you're the boss. The other thing of course we need to do is clean up all the murky business of party funding. We've all had problems with party funding. Again, there was a deal, there was a deal on the table, we supported it, to clean up party funding. Yet again, the old parties said no. Gordon Brown wanted to protect his trade union pay masters, David Cameron wanted to protect his paymaster in Belize. I think we all agree on the rhetoric of cleaning up politics, but we actually have to act. I'd say one final thing: one of the reasons why your friends and your neighbours are perhaps right in saying they feel ignored is because we have this very odd electoral system which allows Gordon Brown the Prime Minister to be in power when only 22% of people voted for his party last time, many people are being ignored and we need to change that as well.

ADAM BOULTON:

GORDON BROWN:

Gordon Brown?

I think Mary is saying can a vote make a difference? I believe it can. Yes, we will give the right of recall, so if you don't like an MP for being corrupt and parliament doesn't take any action, then you can remove him. Yes, we will give you a right to put petitions to the House of Commons so they have to be debated if you put them in sufficient number to do so. Yes, we want a referendum on the future of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and you, the people, should have a vote on a new voting system for the House of Commons, and ending the hereditary principle in the House of Lords, and making it for the first time elected and accountable. But you know your vote matters as well, because this is a big choice election. We've got to secure the recovery, and it's put at risk by Conservative policies. We've got to make sure we have decent public service, and that's put at risk by Conservative policies. We've got to build the jobs of the future, and that's put at at risk actually by the policies of both parties here this evening. So your vote matters. Please use it. It is the most important and decisive election for years because our future depends on how you vote in the next few weeks.

ADAM BOULTON:

DAVID CAMERON:

Thank you. David Cameron.

Mary, I think the first thing people want to know is they're going to be voting for a cleaned-up parliament. Everywhere I go in this country during the election, it is simmering and bubbling below the surface. There is just anger about the expenses fiasco. People say, "I pay my taxes to have decent politics and yet the money's been spent on all these appalling things." They want to be to be absolutely sure this is never ever going to happen again. So strict limits on what can be spent, total transparency so you, the voters, can see every penny. That I think is the absolutely first thing that needs to be done. I would go on and say we also need to cut the cost cost of politics. Everyone else in this country has had to make

economies and had to make their businesses work better. Why shouldn't politics be the same? I would do that. Then simple changes which would put back in control. I want to see more people involved in choosing candidates for the parties, holding open primaries. I agree we need we have a situation where you can sack your MP but please don't let's give up the way you can sack your government and throw them out. Let's not have permanent hung parliaments.

ADAM BOULTON:

Mr Clegg, you're on the front pages... the front The Telegraph today?

NICK CLEGG:

I am indeed for a complete nonsense story. But, anyway, let's put that aside. Complete rubbish. Mary, one of the most heartening things, back to your question about people sort of feeling disaffected, one of the most heartening things over the last week, and it is one of the great effects of the televised leaders' debates, is that more and more young people appear to be rushing to register to vote before it is too late. That is immensely exciting. There are lots of especially young people, I hope I'm not out of turn saying you look fairly young, who might be in your position, who feel.. who felt for so long completely turned off by the old Party Politics, and they are now excited, they're beginning to hope, they're beginning to think that we can do something different this time. that's what I think. I think we can do something different this time. But get stuck in, if you didn't vote before, if you didn't register, register. It's your country, it's your future, assert your right to vote, assert your right to shape your own future. I think then we could make this election one of the most exciting elections we have had in a very long time. Mr Brown.

ADAM BOULTON:

GORDON BROWN:

Mary, let me just say, I was ashamed by the behaviour of some of the MPs in the House of Commons. What they did was completely unacceptable. And no punishment is too great for them, if they have to go before the courts and answer for their crimes. We have to be very clear, we want nobody standing at this election who is not transparent and open about what they are doing. Anyone who breaches the guidelines we've now laid down, the Independent Standards Authority, should be thrown out of the House of Commons and indeed out the House of Lords if they are member there as well. I was talking to young people only yesterday and talking about politics, if you ask the question, politics don't make a difference? People would probably say, yes. But if you then ask the question, ah, but my job may depend on decisions that are made by government, then people say, ah, I might be interested. People then say my health service may depend on how much resources Government is prepared to invest in the health service, then people say, yes, politics may make a difference. And then when you ask about crime And it depends on how many policemen are on the street, then it makes a difference. And if you ask about schools and what the standard of your schools are, and how you are investing for the future, that makes a difference, too.

ADAM BOULTON: Thank you. David Cameron.  
GORDON BROWN: Politics can make a difference.  
DAVID CAMERON: Politics can make a difference, Mary, but I would say the politicians in this country have been treating the people as mugs for far too long. They've been sort of saying, we can do everything, vote for us and we'll solve all your problems. Let us pass a few more laws, spend a bit more money, pass more regulation and all the trouble will be fixed. It is not really true, it is a big lie. The truth is, if you really want to change things, if you want safer streets, if you want better schools, yes, the Government's got its role, but we've all got our responsibilities, too. We need to bring up our children properly, we've got to make sure we work with the school, we've got to make sure we help the police, we have to make sure there is discipline in schools, real solutions to the problems in a country I think come when we all say, I've got responsibilities as well that go beyond paying my taxes and obeying the law. It's my society, it's my country, I will elect some politicians, but I want to join with them to change the country and make it a better place. I think that's a much more honest answer for how we really get the change we need in the country.

GORDON BROWN: But David, I take responsibility for my decisions, and I ask people right throughout society to take responsibility. But you can't run the health service on a do-it-yourself principle, you have to finance it properly. And I just ask you, why you want to cut...

ADAM BOULTON: Nick Clegg.  
NICK CLEGG: Can I go back to Mary's question, which is about people feeling switched off from politics. Something which neither of the other two old parties want to address is this. We have a culture of jobs for life in politics. You have hundreds and hundreds of MPs from the Conservative party and the Labour party, from the old parties, who basically know all they need to do every four or five years is get the vote of 20-30% of people in their community and then ignore everybody else all the rest of the time. Of course you then start getting trouble with expenses. Because of course if you give people jobs for life, these safe seats for life, no questions asked, then they start cutting corners. That's what we need to change, as well as all the other things to do with expenses...

ADAM BOULTON: You're welcome to come in on this.  
NICK CLEGG: ..and House of Lords, and all the other areas that need to be reformed top to toe.

GORDON BROWN: All parties have had to take action. We have to clean up the politics for every single party. And anybody who commits an offence is out, they're suspended, out. They shouldn't be in politics at all. Public service is about serving the public, it's not about serving yourself.

DAVID CAMERON: I would like to respond to something Gordon Brown said, which is this issue of responsibility, saying he asked people to take responsibility. I think one of the problems in our country today is if you do the right thing, if you take responsibility, all too often you are punished rather than rewarded. If you work hard and save, actually you don't get the Government behind you, you get punished. If you do the right thing... Always in my constituency, you are meeting couples who say, we are trying to get everything together before we get married, before we have children, and they feel that people who don't do the right thing get pushed up the ladder ahead of them. I think there's a sense of unfairness in our country today which goes to the heart of some of the issues we have in our politics.

GORDON BROWN: But David, the biggest unfairness is that the biggest beneficiary from your manifesto is the 3,000 richest people in the country, who would get £200,000 each from an inheritance tax cut. If you want to be fair, you don't give people an inheritance tax and then cut child tax credits for middle-class families, you don't cut the child trust fund, you don't cut the schools budget, you don't have a do-it-yourself society...

ADAM BOULTON: The question was about trust.

NICK CLEGG: Poor Mary asked about politics, she's being told about tax credits. I mean, look...

GORDON BROWN: Well, you want to cut tax credits as well.

NICK CLEGG: David Cameron talked about responsibility. Absolutely. We need to make sure people are responsible where they have made big mistakes. It is a fact that there are a number of MPs in both the old parties, who flipped their home from one to the next, paying from your taxpayer-funded expenses buy properties, do them up, sell them, buy them up, do them up, sell them, then pocket the difference in personal profit, who still haven't been held to account. You can't move on unless the people who've done something seriously wrong are held to account.

ADAM BOULTON: OK. David Cameron. I'll come to you in a moment.

DAVID CAMERON: Along with... The expenses scandal made people incredibly angry. People also got angry by politicians saying, "I only obeyed the rules." I think they're now starting to get angry by some politicians saying, "Well, my party was much better than all the others." Frankly, Nick, we all had problems with this.

NICK CLEGG: Sure.

DAVID CAMERON: Whether it was moats, or whether it was politicians claiming on phantom mortgages, or whether it was kitchens and cake tins and the rest of it, don't anyone try and put themselves on a pedestal over this issue. Let's actually sort it out and clean it up and recognise we were all in this mess.

ADAM BOULTON: Gordon Brown.

GORDON BROWN: No-one should be standing at the election if they are not transparent and tell you everything about what they are doing with their finances. They shouldn't have second jobs either, and that's all too common in the House of Commons. They should be working full-time for their constituents' interests. They shouldn't be in a position where they're not telling you that they will come and report to you every month on what they are doing, holding local surgeries, being held to account. If they are not doing the right thing and are corrupt, you have the right to recall them. That's the most important thing that we can do now to clean up what has been a terrible scandal and something that I am ashamed of on behalf of all politicians.

NICK CLEGG: Of course no-one is blemish-free. Of course people aren't angels. But the point is this. If you are trying to persuade people to invest trust again, which was Mary's question, into politicians, then it's just not good enough to just talk the talk and not walk the walk. You can't say you want to clean up funding and then block deals to do precisely that.

ADAM BOULTON: OK. Time is up. We've got to retire on this. Time is most definitely up. We are now moving on to a question from Grace Lane, who's from Westbury-on-Trym here in Bristol. Grace.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Having brought up five children, worked most of my life, reached the age of 84, do all of you think that a state pension of £59 per week is a just reward?

ADAM BOULTON: Gordon Brown, is £59 a week...

GORDON BROWN: The answer is no, Grace. I'm sorry that that has happened, I hope you are getting the pension credit which is an attempt to make up the pension from what you've had as a result of your earnings being interrupted during the course of your life. What are we doing now? We're going to link pensions to earnings in 2012, so every pension will be linked to earnings and not just prices. Secondly, women, and you are one of them, who have not had the full state pension, we are making it possible for all women in future to have that full state pension. And thirdly, of course, we've got to deal with the poverty that people face as pensioners. That is why the pension credit, the winter fuel allowance, all these things have been introduced. The free concessionary travel as well, the free television licenses over 75, all of these have been introduced over the last few years, because the one thing that scandalises our society above all else is that we cannot give dignity and security to all pensioners in retirement. That's what I want to see and that's what I want to do.

ADAM BOULTON: David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON:

£59 is not enough. We have got to do better as a society giving people what we all want. Those that have done the right thing through their lives, we should be giving you dignity and security in old age. I agree we need to up-rate the pension in line with earnings rather than prices. The reason I feel I can give you that answer with total confidence, that we will really deliver this, is we have made a tough decision to go with it. Which is to say from 2016, we are going to ask, starting with men, to retire a year later. That means we can fund this pledge. Because we all know we have an enormous budget deficit, there isn't any money left in the kitty. So if we're going to make promises like that, and it's a big promise, an important promise, we have to say how we are going to pay for it. I want to make sure that when we see people going into old age that if you have worked hard, if you've saved, if you've put money aside, you are not punished. That is why we say as well, it is not right that you should have to pay for your residential care, and someone who didn't do the right thing gets the whole thing paid for free. That's not fair and we are going to change that.

ADAM BOULTON:

NICK CLEGG:

Nick Clegg.  
Grace, the earnings link needs to be restored. It needs to be restored immediately, there is no doubt about that. It shouldn't have been broken in the first place, you have lost out for many years, it needs to be restored. Something which I'm sure you're familiar with, which is there are so many other costs which the elderly have to confront, which really do make it extremely difficult to make ends meet. Fuel costs. We have just had a very cold winter for example, it's a very good example. I got a letter a few months ago from an elderly couple, who said to me they now found it so difficult to heat their homes on cold winter days, that on those cold winter days, they get into a bus in their town and travel around the bus just to stay warm. That is wrong. It is wrong that energy companies charge you more for the first bits of energy that you use in your home than the later bits. That means someone who's heating a great big five-storey mansion is paying cheaper, paying less for their energy than someone who's just heating a one bedroom flat. That needs to change too, so we can give you the dignity you deserve.

ADAM BOULTON:

GORDON BROWN:

Gordon Brown.

I think Grace's issue is that every woman should have a full state pension. I think it's right that we say that that is what we're going to do as a result of our pension reforms. But it's also the case that everyone who works for an employer will now also have an occupational pension. That is another change we are making that is coming in the parliament to come. When we look at the needs of pensioners, it's absolutely true to say we need help with urgent needs social care in the home. That's what we're introducing over the next few months, so that people don't have to go into old people's homes. If they want to stay at home, they can get the home helps and the health visitors that are necessary for them so that they can have comfort in their own homes. But I've got one or

two problems with the other two manifestos of the other parties. David doesn't seem to have mentioned free prescriptions for the elderly or free eye tests. And to be honest, Nick has a problem in his manifesto, because he seems to be cutting the budget of the winter fuel allowance this year. I would like them to explain to the pensioners of this country what in fact they propose to do.

ADAM BOULTON:  
DAVID CAMERON:

David Cameron, your chance.

I just think it is disgraceful to try and frighten people in an election campaign, as Gordon Brown has just done, and as the Labour Party are doing up and down the country. I would like to take this opportunity to say very clearly to any pensioner in the audience, anyone listening at home, that we will keep the free television license, we will keep the pension credit, we'll keep the winter fuel allowance, we'll keep the free bus pass. Those leaflets you have been getting from Labour, the letters you have been getting from Labour are pure and simple lies. A politician shouldn't say lies very often, I say it because I have seen the leaflets and they make me really very, very angry. You should not be frightening people in an election campaign, it is just not right.

NICK CLEGG:

Well, firstly, before I respond to Gordon Brown's invitation, I'm glad you have been reading our manifesto with such care.

GORDON BROWN:  
NICK CLEGG:

Absolutely.

There are two-and-a-half million pensioners in poverty, so after 13 years and all Labour's promises about giving a fair deal to pensioners, two-and-a-half million pensioners in poverty. That's how bad it is. I think we need to, therefore, make sure that we use what little money we've got, money is tight at the moment, wisely. And what we are saying is this. The winter fuel payments, the age of eligibility is going to rise, this is a decision which Gordon Brown's Government has already taken, from 60 to 65 in the coming years. We're saying if you bring that forward you could use the money to actually extend the winter fuel payments to people who are terminally ill and disabled, who at the moment don't get access to the winter fuel payments. I think that is fair. One final thing. We talked about social care, we talked about this last week, I really cannot stress enough, I think that's one issue where we just have got to put people before politics for once. This is something which is such a big issue, we need to agree on a common approach, that is the only way to provide good social care.

ADAM BOULTON:  
GORDON BROWN:  
DAVID CAMERON:

Free debate, now. Gordon Brown.

I do seem to be right. David did not mention free eye tests.

Well let me do it right now. We'll keep them. Let me challenge you. Will you now withdraw the leaflets... Will you withdraw the leaflets that are going out round the country saying that the Conservatives would take away things like the free bus pass? You know, you really should be ashamed of doing things like that.

GORDON BROWN: David, I have not authorised any leaflets like that. What I would ask to you say is why is it not in your manifesto that you're keeping free eye tests and free prescription charges. To Nick, I would say, if you're cutting the winter fuel allowance, that means that some people will suffer this year. We've already said that all pensioners over 60, all households, will get £250 as the winter fuel allowance and £400 if you're over 80. That's an innovation be brought in during the period of the Labour government. I would not like to see it cut in one of the most difficult years for pensioners when we're just coming out of recession, but you seem to be cutting in.

NICK CLEGG: I've explained before, I don't think there's much. Doing it again. We are actually extending the winter fuel payment to people who are terminally ill and disabled who presently don't get it. We're doing that by bringing forward a decision that Gordon Brown's government has made. But can I just say again before this completely collapses into a game of political ping-pong. There are big issues about how we look after the elderly which are huge. They are financially huge, they're socially huge. It's one of the biggest issues we face on how we provide social care. None of us...

ADAM BOULTON: The question's about pensions.

NICK CLEGG: Yes, but it's also related to it. It is about providing dignity to people in old age which is Grace's question. I don't think we're going to serve the elderly today or those in the future very well if we hijack everything with cheap political point scoring when we can work together on a solution that works for many years in the future.

DAVID CAMERON: I do think it is about dignity and security in old age to be able to say to elderly people that you should be able to if you've worked hard and save hard, you should be able to pass your home on to your children rather than have to use it to pay for your care. That's why we have this plan. If you put aside £8,000 when you become 65, you have the guarantee that your home there will be there for your children because you've done the right thing. That doesn't solve the whole problem. That does seem to me a very good start, ending the unfairness of all those thousands of people who have done the right thing, who've worked hard all their lives, who then get penalised and punished by the system.

GORDON BROWN: The first stage to doing that is making sure people can stay in their own homes. That's the urgent needs payment that should be available to all so that they can stay in their own homes without worrying about finance. The next thing we've got to do is make sure if people have to go into old people's homes, then there is a limit on the costs they have to bear, otherwise they will lose their homes and they'll have to choose between the care they need and the home they own. In the next parliament, what we're proposing to do is put a two-year limit on payments, so if you're, for example, suffering from Alzheimer's or other diseases and you have to be in an old people's home for a longer period of time, can't be in your own home, we will suspend any payments after two years for personal and medical care.

NICK CLEGG: Related to that, are those people who look after loved ones who are elderly and need help with cleaning, washing, getting dressed, getting fed. I do think in the past we've all agreed this is something we need to look at, is we need to provide more respite, more time off for people who care for their loved ones in that way. We have got a proposal which will take the money which the government has allocated to its rather flawed bill on social care and use it instead to say to those who provide a lot of care every week, here's money so you can take a week off, spend some time with yourself on holiday just getting a break. Because I think speaking to go any carers, that makes a huge, huge, dramatic difference to their lives.

ADAM BOULTON: Mr Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON: The point about helping carers is, I think, we need to help them go on doing what they're doing. Talk to any carer, they will say the one thing I need is a break. I don't think we do enough, put the budget in their hands and say, you decide how best to get that respite break, to get the extra help in your home. I remember trying to do this myself with the care for our son. It's incredibly complicated. This whole agenda should be about putting power and control in people's hands, letting them do more, because if Britain's armies of carers gave up, that would cost our country £50 billion and actually would lead heartbreak for many people. They're really heroes and heroines. We need to do more to help them.

ADAM BOULTON: We move on to the next question. And the next question comes from Frank Hemsworth from Whitney, in Oxfordshire.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Gentlemen, given the current financial difficulties facing the country, and now the possibility of a hung parliament, according to the polls, is it time to put aside political differences and form a government of the best talents from all the major parties?

ADAM BOULTON: Is a coalition government the best way forward, David Cameron?

DAVID CAMERON: I think we should try and work together where we can. I've always thought that's important in politics. I helped Tony Blair get his Education Bill through Parliament because I thought it was a good bill, even though a lot of Labour MPs weren't backing it, that helped it go through. On the issue of Trident, which we've covered already tonight, we put the possibility of defeating Labour aside, backed them to do the right thing. Obviously, if there is a hung parliament, we must be responsible, we must try and deliver the best government we can for this country. But I actually, if you want my frank and honest answer, I don't think a hung parliament will be good for Britain because I think we do need quite decisive government to take some of the difficult decisions for the long-term. We've set out some of the things that need to be done to get the debt and the deficit under control. I fear if we put them off, we could have a situation where we see interest rates rise, we see confidence taken out of our economy. I think we need change to get to top of the deficit, to start solving the problems so we get our economy moving.

ADAM BOULTON: Thank you. Nick Clegg.

NICK CLEGG:

Well, I think, Frank, you're right on the simple assertion you're making that when the country's facing very big issues, we just talked about social care, but the one you're highlighting is of course the black hole in the public finances. It is better if politicians, I know it's an unfashionable thing to say, but it's better if politicians try and work together. That's why I proposed several weeks ago, that irrespective of the outcome of the next election, why don't we set up something which I call a council for financial stability, and you'd gather in that council for financial stability the Chancellor and the Shadow Chancellors, the Governor of the Bank of England, the Head of the Financial Services Authority to do one simple thing, which is to come clean with you about how big this black hole is because there's still dispute about exactly how bad it is and then have an agreement on roughly how long it will take to fill it. So that everybody in a sense is being open with you, which hasn't really happened until now, about how bad this situation is and how together we're going to get out of it. I do think there is potential for politicians to work with each other. Don't believe all these ludicrous scare stories about markets and political Armageddon if that is what happens.

ADAM BOULTON:

Thank you. Gordon Brown.

GORDON BROWN:

Nick, we already have what's called the business council for Britain and that brings together all the leading businessmen and women in our country with government ministers to look at what we can do. We have the tripartite committee for financial stability which brings together the Governor of the Bank of England and the head of the Financial Services Authority, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We already have these things. But the key thing is that we've got to have an agreed plan to reduce the deficit, protect our public services, and get growth in the economy. And I'm afraid that we don't have agreement on what needs to be done even this year to sort the economy out. I want to see our economy grow this year. I want to see unemployment come down. I want to see businesses thrive, and that means we've got to keep the government support in the economy for the time being, something the Conservatives don't want to do. But I also want to say we should never take the votes of people for granted. The public must decide, and again it's up to the politicians to do what the public wants them to do. It's for the voters to decide. You're the boss, it's your decisions that will count. You have the votes to make a difference.

ADAM BOULTON:

Thank you. Before we go on to rebuttal round, I will remind you this is not a question about co-operation, it's about coalition, it's about people looking at where the opinion polls are, what might happen after the election and want to know your views. David Cameron?

DAVID CAMERON:

Well, I said very frankly, if it is a hung parliament, we will do our best to make it work. If we win the election outright, I'd do everything I can to take the country with us on some of these difficult decisions and also try and take other politicians with us because there will be some hard times before we get out of this, actually get the deficit sorted. But there is a problem in that you do need to have agreement. There is a fundamental disagreement between me and the other two parties about what we do this year. I think we badly need to roll up our sleeves and make some savings this year so we can stop the jobs tax, the national National Insurance tax rise, that is coming down the road. When you've got an economy that is trying to recover, the worst thing you can do is put tax on every single job in our country. That's why it's over 1,100 business leaders have said don't do this. They've said very clearly the threat to our recovery is not cutting waste, the threat is the jobs tax. The others don't agree about that, but I badly think we really, really need to stop this tax that could kill our recovery and kill jobs. Thank you. Nick Clegg.

ADAM BOULTON:

NICK CLEGG:

Back to Frank's question, in a sense what lurks behind your question is it a bad thing or not if politicians talk to each other? I don't think it is. In many other parts of the bog, it would seem to be a completely standard... I mean, Gordon Brown has talked about various bodies but none involving the different parties. David Cameron says he'll try and make a hung parliament work but spends all his time in the newspapers this week making those ludicrous claims about total meltdown as if the world will end. The world won't end and it will be your choice. If you decide that no-one here deserves an outright majority, then we'll need to be open about it and talk to each other, talk to each other to provide the good government, sound government that you deserve, because you deserve a government where we put your interests first and don't allow everything constantly to be hijacked by short-term political point-scoring.

GORDON BROWN:

I want the parties to work together. When I became Prime Minister, I invited one or two Liberals to do things, like Shirley Williams, to do things for the government. I invited people who are businessmen and women to come into the government to work with us for national economic benefit. I will continue to ask people to give their talents to public service, and that is something that is really important to do. But there is this fundamental position about this year. I think we've got to resolve this. I have had to take the economy through the most global financial crisis. We made the right decisions to take ownership of the banks, and the right decisions to get the world together to deal with that recession. Every time, we've said we have to support the economy through difficult times. Now, what David is saying even when it is fragile, he wants, for ideological reasons I think, to take £6 billion out of the economy. That puts thousands of jobs, teachers, it puts policemen, it puts thousands of jobs at risk immediately, and that's why they're talking about an emergency budget in June. David, you're a risk to

the economy. Nick's a risk to our security with his nuclear weapons policy, you're a risk to the economy.

- DAVID CAMERON: I just think it's another attempt to try and frighten people. After 13 years of failure, 13 years in which we now have a budget deficit the same size as Greece. Don't take it from me, take it from the 1,100 business leaders, people who run Sainsbury's, Mothercare, Next, Marks & Spencer's, these great British businesses who are going to help us out of recession, saying cut the waste this year, stop the jobs tax next year. To go back to Frank's question, I do have one specific proposal where we really think we should come together much more effectively. That is, I want to see the National Security Council sitting as a war cabinet from day one if I become Prime Minister. Because, day one, Afghanistan is the top priority, getting it right. I would invite, as Prime Minister, the leaders of the other two main parties to come to that meeting several times a year to make sure they were really seeing the advice we were getting from the security services, from the generals, from the Chiefs of Staff. I think in matters of peace and war, you've got to bring people together better than we do now.
- GORDON BROWN: It's difficult to bring...
- NICK CLEGG: The only thing I would add to this discussion in response to Frank is that if politicians are going to talk to each other, then I think what we need to do is be upfront about what our priorities are. We need to be upfront about what we would seek in any discussion with other parties. I've been very upfront, dealing obviously with the fiscal deficit, we've been much more open about how we would do that than the other two parties. But also tax reform, educational reform, political reform. Those are our priorities, that's what we would fight for in whatever situation arises after the election.
- GORDON BROWN: The priority at the moment is making sure we have an economic recovery, making sure we don't have higher unemployment. Unemployment in America is a lot higher than Britain. Unemployment in Europe is a lot higher. I want to keep people in their jobs. But take £6,000 million out of the economy, and you lose a lot of jobs and you put businesses at risk. David hasn't thought through his policy and neither is Nick if he's going to argue against this because it's the right thing to do.
- NICK CLEGG: No, Gordon Brown, what I'm saying is, if you care so much about making sure that out of the rubble of this recession we create a new economy, why won't you, and indeed why won't David Cameron, take the radical steps needed to reform our banking system? Nothing has happened which will prevent a disaster in the banking system because of the greed in the banking system from occurring all over again. We're the only party saying split them up,

make sure that they lend to viable British businesses, here in Bristol and elsewhere. That's the way to get the recovery going.

- DAVID CAMERON: You can see one of the problems with hung parliament and coalition forming is there's quite a lot of bickering going on already. There is a difference here, there really is a difference about what we believe particularly on the jobs tax. I think trying to stop this is vital. What Nick and the Liberal Democrats are saying is first of all when we announced let's stop the jobs tax, they said it was nauseating, and in their manifesto, they've now said that actually it's their aspiration. It's the first time in politics I can remember someone coming up with a nauseating aspiration that they want to fulfill. But it is a difference between us. We want to stop this job tax to keep the economy going. The other two parties are not going to do that.
- ADAM BOULTON: Mr Brown.  
GORDON BROWN: You see, David, I see you haven't denied you're taking £6,000 million out of the economy in an emergency budget if you're elected. I would be very very worried indeed. It seems a return to the old Conservative Party. Nick, on this question of banks, you don't solve the problem by making all your banks smaller. Northern Rock was a small bank and it went completely under. What you've got to do is have proper capital controls. What you've got to do is have a global financial supervision system. Alistair Darling, our Chancellor, is now in Washington...
- NICK CLEGG: Gordon Brown, the governor of the Bank of England...  
GORDON BROWN: ..negotiating a global financial tax. That is the right thing to do.  
NICK CLEGG: The governor of the Bank of England has quite clearly said that unless you split high-risk casino investment banking from low-risk high street banking, the banks that you and I depend on, you're always going to get this risk that risks will be taken with your everyday savings. That's what you've got to stop. It's what they did in the 1930s in the Depression in the United States. I think we need to do something similar. It's what President Obama is doing, something similar, in the United States. And yet neither of the old parties want to even contemplate the major reforms needed to our banks. I think we owe it to future generations to make sure that the implosion in our banking system, never, ever, ever, can happen again.
- ADAM BOULTON: I think we're going to have to leave this question there. We're going to move on now to a question now from Bethlehem Negessi who is from Bristol.
- AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm an immigrant, and I have been in the UK for 13 years. I recognise that immigration is becoming a problem in the country. What new measures would you introduce in order to make the system more fair?
- ADAM BOULTON: How would you make immigration fairer, Nick Clegg?

NICK CLEGG:

Firstly, you need to tighten the borders, Bethlehem, so that we know who is coming in and who is going out. Previous Labour and Conservative governments removed the exit controls, so we didn't know who had to leave. I would want to see those reinstated immediately. I want to see a border police force, we have every right to police our borders. Secondly, I would make sure we direct people who come and live and work in the country, to the areas in the country where, of course, they have a job and they've got someone who can vouch for them, but also where there is space for them to live, where there isn't unreasonable strain placed on public services. And thirdly, we have to do something about the legacy about the problem created by the chaos which Labour and Conservative governments created in our immigration system. That was lots of people coming here illegally, who are now still living, years and years and years, in the shadows of our economy. I'd rather get them out of the hands of criminal gangs, so we can go after the criminal gangs, into the hands of the taxman, if they want to play by the rules, pay their taxes, speak English. That is a smart, fair, effective way of dealing with immigration.

ADAM BOULTON:

Thank you. Gordon Brown.

GORDON BROWN:

When we talked about it last week, Nick didn't tell us he wants an amnesty for illegal immigrants. I think that would be a wrong policy for this reason. It would encourage people to come to this country, thinking that at some point we would legalise their presence. I think that would be not a deterrent on people coming to our country illegally, it would mean that more and more people would come into our country. Our policy is to control and manage immigration. We have a points system to do so. No unskilled worker from outside Europe can now come into our country. If you have a skill, then we will get a British person to do that job advertised in a Jobcentre if the skill is available in Britain. We are gradually reducing the number of skills we need to come from abroad. So cooks and care assistants in future, they will come from abroad, they're trained up in Britain. Gradually, we'll go through the skills list and make sure those people who get jobs in Britain are skilled in Britain to do the jobs here.

ADAM BOULTON:

Thank you. David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON:

Thank you. Well, the first thing to say to Bethlehem is that we have benefited from immigration. And people who come here legally and come and live here legally, we should be incredibly warm and welcoming and hospitable and build a strong and integrated country, where actually we build a strong society together. I think that's really important to say that, first up. I do believe that immigration in recent years has just simply been too high. We do need to bring the level down. That is the first bit of fairness that needs to be sorted out. People do want this addressed. The other two parties are not actually really addressing this issue. We believe you do need to have a cap on people coming from outside the European Union, for economic reasons. That would help to bring it down. Added to that, is new European countries, when they join

the EU, we say there should be transitional controls. We were told there would only be 13,000 people coming from Poland, in the end there were hundreds of thousands. That is absolutely vital, we are the only ones saying, let's grip this, let's have a cap, let's bring it down radically. Then it won't be a political issue. It wasn't in the past, and I'd dearly love it not to be an issue again.

ADAM BOULTON:  
NICK CLEGG:

OK, thank you. Nick Clegg.

I think I want I guess you want, Bethlehem, what everyone wants, which is just an immigration system which works. We've had an immigration system which has been absolutely shambolic. No idea who is coming in or going out, no idea who's been living here for many years. Gordon Brown talks about an amnesty, the only person actually in British politics advocating a blanket amnesty, I'm not, it's Boris Johnson, the Conservative mayor for London. What I'm saying is you can't live in denial of a problem which has been created by the chaos of the immigration system in the past. You can wish away, if either of you wish, that there are people who have been living here for a long time in the shadows of our economy. I want to go after the criminal gangs who are exploiting those people. If there are those people who've lived here for ten years, speak English, want to play by the rules, want to pay their taxes, why don't we say to them, OK, you come out of the shadows, pay your taxes, do some community service to make up for the fact that you came here illegally, and then we can free up resources to go after the criminal gangs. I think that is the right balance between fairness but also making sure we have a system which works.

ADAM BOULTON:  
GORDON BROWN:

Gordon Brown.

I think in the last two years we have seen the introduction, since I became Prime Minister, of foreign national ID cards. So anybody who comes into the country now will have to have an identity card. We're also introducing, from the end of the year, a control so that everybody is counted in and everybody is counted out. It was got rid of in the past, it should not have been got rid of. We are bringing that back. Biometric visas mean that we can stop people at airports even before they come into the country if they've not got the right identification. So we're tightening up on that. But the big key to the future is the points system. If you don't have the points to come into this country, in other words if you don't have a skill we need, don't come to the country. But I must say, I'm very worried about Nick's policy, because it sends a message to people all around the world, if you come to Britain there'll be some sort of amnesty that will allow you to come here freely in the end, without having to be thrown out of the country.

ADAM BOULTON:

Thank you. David Cameron.

DAVID CAMERON:

Well, the truth is there's a big difference between the Conservative Party, that is gripping this problem, and the other two parties, that I think are just dancing around it. The Government's had 13 years to control immigration, yet we've had some of the highest levels of immigration in the last 50 years. And frankly, I think Nick's ideas would actually make the situation worse. There are two bad ideas. The idea of the amnesty... It's been shown all over Europe that what that leads to is a big increase in false asylum claims and more immigration. That's a bad idea. And I think this idea of somehow having regional immigration, saying it's OK to come and work in Bristol but you can't live in Birmingham, or you can live in Bradford but you can't live in... I mean, it sounds like they're going to put up border controls along the M5. It really doesn't make sense. It hasn't been thought through, it would make a bad situation worse, we need real change, genuine change that only the Conservatives are offering.

NICK CLEGG:

I just think... Look, this is a really sensitive issue. People feel, quite rightly, really strongly about immigration. People feel very unsettled that they have had no faith in an immigration system which has been run chaotically by both Conservative and Labour governments for a long time. All I would say to both David Cameron and Gordon Brown is, yes, let's have our differences, but please don't live in denial about what is going on. Don't live in denial about the fact that, because of the chaos in the system, we've got lots of people here who are working for criminal gangs rather than for Britain. We've got to deal with that. You can pretend we can wish it away. It is a problem. They are here. Now, of course what I'm saying is controversial and people will try and score points. It is at least an attempt to deal with an issue which we have to deal with. I don't think we can have another ten years, another 20 years in the old way, just ignoring these things. We can't come up with promises like caps, which don't work. And by the way...

GORDON BROWN:

Nick, I'm not really interested in point scoring, I'm interested in doing the right thing. If we send out a message to people in other parts of the world, you get an amnesty if you come to this country, then you've got a real problem.

NICK CLEGG:

What are you going to do?

GORDON BROWN:

Net inward migration is coming down as a result of the points system that we introduced. It's come down three years ago, two years ago, and is coming down this year. We are taking the action that is necessary. From the end of this year, people will be counted in and counted out of the country...

NICK CLEGG:

Gordon Brown, what are you going to do?

GORDON BROWN:

It would be more helpful if you would support identity cards for foreign nationals instead of opposing them.

NICK CLEGG:

I'm just asking for a simple, honest answer to a big question, which is that because of the chaos in the system in the past, we have lots of people who are here. Now, if you just ignore it, they will carry on living in the shadow of our economy. You can either deny it, which you're doing because you have no plan to deal with it, neither do

you...

GORDON BROWN:  
NICK CLEGG:

We're removing them.

Or you try and... No, you can't deport 900,000 people. You don't know where they live.

GORDON BROWN:  
ADAM BOULTON:  
DAVID CAMERON:

We're removing them.

OK. David Cameron.

All I'd say is that the more they argue amongst each other, the more it's absolutely clear to me the only way you'll get real change, real action, sensible action on this issue is from a Conservative Government. It is a sensitive issue, and it needs to be dealt with sensitively and reasonably. It's very important that we talk about this properly. But I think the country wants and deserves firm immigration control rather instead of the nonsense we're hearing.

NICK CLEGG:

What kind of cap?

DAVID CAMERON:

And that would make a difference. And what it would really achieve is getting back to where we used to be, where we didn't have immigration questions at public meetings, we weren't asked about it on the streets. When you knocked on a door, nobody raised it. Why? Because the British public was happy with the level of immigration. We knew that was a level we could integrate and provide good health, housing and schools for people. It's been out of control these last 13 years. That's Labour's fault. And from all I can hear, the Liberal Democrats would make it much, much worse.

NICK CLEGG:

No, David Cameron, what would the cap be?

DAVID CAMERON:

You'd set the cap...

NICK CLEGG:

No, what's the number? Is it ten? Is it 10,000? It is ten million?

DAVID CAMERON:

If you have a cap... Do you want to let me answer the question?

NICK CLEGG:

Just a number.

DAVID CAMERON:

You're reminding me of Gordon last week. It's like another replay. The fact is, every year, you need to talk with the health authorities, the housing authorities, the education authorities, and business, and set a cap to achieve a very big reduction in overall immigration levels. That can be done, we've done it in our past, we can do it again in our future. What's required is political will from a party that's prepared to make the difference.

NICK CLEGG:

David Cameron, you are... Let me get this straight, I genuinely want to understand, you're proposing a cap but you don't know what the cap would be. You're proposing to give people an assurance that we're going to count people in and count people out, but you don't know how many people. All I'm saying on the immigration debate, it's difficult, none of us have got perfect answers. But let's at least not pretend that you can put forward these ideas which have got no substance, haven't been thought through. At least the kind of ideas I've been putting through are trying to deal with a really, really difficult issue which has been brushed under the carpet for too long.

ADAM BOULTON:

Gordon Brown.

GORDON BROWN: Net immigration is falling as a result of the measures we are taking. The points system is the key to this. It's done in Australia and other countries. You can't come in unless you've got a skill to offer, if you're from outside the European Union. That has meant there are no unskilled workers coming into this country, a reduction in skilled workers, a reduction in university students as well. That is what we are actually doing now. We're counting people in and out from the end of the year.

DAVID CAMERON: I don't want to bore people with the figures, but it is important. Up until 1997, the highest number for net migration into the UK was 77,000 in a year. Since 1997, since Labour came to power, it has never been lower than 140,000, sometimes it has been 200,000, that's equivalent to two million across a decade. That's just too high, it can be brought down, we have done it in the past and can do it again.

GORDON BROWN: What happens is there are a million people from Britain who are in the European Union, and staying in homes and staying in countries of the European Union. And there are one million people from the European Union who are in our country, that is what being part of the European Union is about. There are many British citizens who want the chance to stay for a period of time in other countries in the European Union.

ADAM BOULTON: We are going to have to leave it there, I'm afraid that is the end of our audience questions. It's now time for the leaders to make their big pitches for your votes. With their closing statements. A reminder that each leader has one-and-a-half minutes for this. Lots were drawn for the order in which they are going to go, we start now with Gordon Brown.

GORDON BROWN: The buck stops here, if you are in the job I'm in, you've got to take responsibility for the decisions. We've talked this evening about Afghanistan and the responsibility I take, every day, making sure our forces can do the job in Afghanistan, and can soon, as a result of the efforts we are making, bring our forces home. We've talked today also about security, and how we need to be part of multilateral disarmament negotiations, so that we, Britain, do not give up our weapons, unless others are prepared to do so, and reduce their weapons as well. We have talked also about the economy this evening, I've heard a number of people ask questions about the deficit, ask questions about how the economy is going to fare as businesses in the future, whether in or out of Europe. The issue for me is don't do anything that puts this economic recovery at risk. We have fought so hard, for so long, over these last two years, to make sure we get through what has been the worst global financial recession since the 1930s. We've had to take ownership of our banks, we've had call the world together in London to have a big summit so that we can make decisions that everybody will work together. We all decided we'd put resources into the economy. Unfortunately, the Conservatives want to take these resources out far too early and put thousands of jobs at risk. I would say this evening, David, you're a risk to the

economy. Nick, you're a risk because of what you're saying on Iran and on nuclear weapons to our security. Nick, you would leave us weak. David, you would leave us isolated in Europe. I think these are the problems that these parties have got to face up to. We have a credible long-term plan for the future of Britain.

ADAM BOULTON:  
DAVID CAMERON:

Thank you, Mr Brown. David Cameron.

Well, I don't know about you, but I thought all that sounded slightly desperate and an attempt to frighten people, instead of doing what I think we need to do in our country, which is to take and make a clean break from the last 13 years. To have new leadership, to take the country forward, to solve the problems that we have. I think the Conservatives are best-placed to offer that. If you vote Conservative, you know you can get fresh, new leadership, from a new team on May 7th, rather than being stuck with what we have now. You've heard in the debate today some big differences set out between us, about how we believe you have to give more priority to keeping our country safe, keeping our borders secure, making sure we keep our defences strong. But also you've heard a lot of differences on values, how the family comes first for me, how we need to do more to help those who actually do the right thing and want their Government behind them. We do face some difficult times in this country, but I still think we have incredible days ahead of us. We're a great country in so many different ways, with the right leadership, with the right values, with a clean break from these 13 years of failure, we can achieve anything if we pull together and build the big society we all know we need to make our country a better place to live in.

ADAM BOULTON:  
NICK CLEGG:

Thank you, David Cameron. Nick Clegg.

What I have tried to do tonight is to show if we do things differently, we can be a force for good in the world. We can lead, we can shape the world around us, not complain about the world around us. We have talked about a number of things this evening. We've talked about Europe, Afghanistan, climate change, the Pope. We've talked about things closer to home as well, immigration, MPs' expenses, pensions. I believe, on all those things, all those issues, we can act differently. There's still some way to go before this election is decided, but I hope that whether you're going to vote in the next few days by post, or make up your mind in the ballot box on May 6th, you agree with me that something really exciting is beginning to happen. People are beginning to believe, beginning to hope that we can do something different this time. Of course there are people who will try to block change, of course there are people who are spreading fear to stop the change you want. I think they're wrong. I think if we do things differently, if we stand up for the values that have made our country great, then we can be proud again, proud of greater fairness here at home, and proud also, of

standing up for the things we believe in, in the world. We don't simply need to choose from the old choices of the past, we don't need to repeat the mistakes of the past. Don't let anyone tell you this time it can't be different. It can.

ADAM BOULTON:

And that concludes this Sky News leaders' debate. Full reaction and analysis continues, of course, now here live on Sky News. The third and final debate in this general election series will take place next week in the Midlands. After that, of course, it's up to you to cast your vote on May 6th. Many thanks to you for watching, thanks to our questioners, to the our studio audience, and to the people of Bristol. And above all many thanks to our three leaders, the first ever to agree to debate live on television. Gordon Brown, David Cameron, and Nick Clegg who I now invite to step forward and shake hands with each other. APPLAUSE