

Manifesto week is underway

Monday saw the launch of Labour's 2015 manifesto which began to frame the series of pledges made in recent weeks and outline their economic credibility to voters. The Conservatives followed with the release of their manifesto on Tuesday which sought to outline their offer to voters and articulate their pitch to 'working people'. This briefing outlines the major issues covered by the three smaller parties: The Green Party, UKIP and the Liberal Democrats, who also launched their manifestos this week at different events around the country.

The Greens' pitch to the public

The Green Party's manifesto is an ambitious plan to fundamentally change British society. At its heart is a wholesale rejection of austerity and a commitment to environmental justice. However the manifesto has also faced criticism for [lack of clarity over economics](#). It is unclear how the Green Party intends to realise its vision.

The Greens want to reorder the entire economy to focus upon generating equality, as opposed to securing growth. This will be delivered through a series of social policies, such as building more homes, abolishing tuition fees and reducing greenhouse gases to zero. The Greens pledge to pay for these policies through progressive taxation.

The Greens have also appealed to their core constituency by including tough animal protection pledges, including banning of grouse shooting and significant restrictions on animal testing.

Although the Green manifesto includes many exciting progressive policies, there is a lack of detail around how the Greens aim to implement these policies. There is little information around exactly how the Greens intend to change society so fundamentally. Other policies are vague—a policy to give "the earth" £5bn has been the source of much derision.

Other key Green policies:

- Plans to renationalise the railways; curb emissions
- Reverse what the party sees as the "creeping privatisation" of the NHS
- Raise the top rate of income tax to 60p
- Increase the minimum wage to a living wage of at least £10
- Decommission Britain's Trident nuclear weapons

UKIP's pitch to the public

Unsurprisingly, UKIP's manifesto focuses upon reducing migration. The party has promised to leave the EU and implement a cap on immigration. The exact figures around the cap are unclear as UKIP has wavered, but the latest number is 30,000. If this cap was implemented, the effects on the economy would be disastrous. If migration was reduced to the tens of thousands GDP would be 11% lower by 2060.

UKIP has also pledged to give £3bn a year to the NHS. But in the past UKIP has pledged to privatise the NHS, and although the party now denies this, its leader Nigel Farage has only promised to keep the NHS "free at the point of access." meaning services could still be delivered by private companies.

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In terms of the economy, UKIP would massively increase inequality by cutting taxes for the rich, as well as abolishing inheritance tax altogether.

Other key UKIP pledges

- Rapid referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union
- Control immigration with points system and a five-year ban on unskilled immigration
- Withdrawing from European human rights requirements
- Substantially increase defence spending
- Reviewing funding for public services that promote multiculturalism

The Lib Dems' pitch to the public

The Lib Dems' manifesto is, in most respects, an attempt to place itself at the centre of the Labour and Conservatives in terms of policy. So, for example, their policy to eradicate the structural current budget deficit by 2017/18 is more ambitious than Labour's but less absolutist than the Tories.' Similarly, the manifesto includes a policy to prevent people from inheriting a non-dom status; so, not revoking it completely as Labour intends, but also not preserving it completely as the Tories will.

This is part of the party's attempt to cast itself as a moderating influence on either of the main parties should it enter into coalition with them— the Lib Dems say they would instill compassion into the Tories and "fiscal responsibility" (meaning, in practice, more austerity) into Labour.

The Lib Dems are actually more progressive than Labour in a few policy areas, including pledging £8bn for the NHS (as opposed to Labour's £2.5bn) and building 300,000 homes (as opposed to Labour's 200,000). But they are less progressive in others, notably the economy.

Of course the real issue for the Lib Dems is that they will only exist in government as a minority coalition partner, and given how many promises they reneged upon in 2010, it's questionable whether the electorate will trust them.

Other key policies from the Lib Dems:

- Balance the budget fairly through a mixture of cuts and taxes on higher earners
- Increase tax-free allowance to £12,500
- Guarantee education funding from nursery to 19 with an extra £2.5bn and qualified teachers in every class
- Invest £8bn in the NHS. Equal care for mental & physical health
- Five new laws to protect nature and fight climate change

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