The 2010s Hung Parliament and the Conservative-Liberal Ideology to Political Reconciliation in Britain

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Abstract: This paper lays potential stress on David Cameron and his strategy in countering the dilemma of hung parliament. Notably, the 2010s general election pushed the Conservatives to rationally manage a consensual reputation. The conservatives, who have been committed to exchanging victories with the Labourites, seem now ripe for devolving more power to Liberal party. In plain truth, the Conservative-Liberal coalition government was dedicated to institutionalising the duplicitous governmental identity. Strictly speaking, the formation of Cabinet Government in the UK relies decisively on the majority rule. However, when the inclusive general election breaks the swing between the major Parties, only political alliance would be the tool for converting the hung parliament into majority rule. In very broad terms, the top-down coalition is an unfamiliar political territory at Westminster. Furthermore, the bringing of two rival ideologies into closer intimacy threatens to fuel unbalance between constitutional order and parliamentary discipline. Against this backdrop, it is through the ground of cross-party consensus that the battle for a stable and responsible government would be fought and won. In this vein, my paper hypothesises the legislative equilibrium as the key ingredient in formalising the Conservative-Liberal welding. Ultimately, the crux of this paper assumes that the political agenda for reconciliation strives to advocate the democratic reform of the existing legislative institutions.

Keywords: David Cameron, Nick Clegg, Hung Parliament, Coalition Government, Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Political Ideology, Constitution, Parliament, House of Commons, Social reform, political Reconciliation.
المليس: يسُمِّي هذا البحث الضوء على البرلمان المتعلق الذي كان نتيجة للاختيارات البرلمانية الشاملة لسنة 2010، حيث يركز على زعيم الحزب المحافظ، ديفيد كاميرون، وسمعته التوافقية مع الحزب الليبرالي، وأن كان تأثير المحافظين حافلاً بنتائج الانتخابات مع حزب العمل، فإنه أصبح اليوم ناضجاً بمبادئ الكفاءة لقليل الميزان السلمية إلى الليبراليين. شُكِّل حزب الائتلاف بين المحافظين والليبراليين كنموذج بديل لحكم القيادة الجماعية، مكرسة جديرة لإضفاء الطابع المؤسساتي على رئاسة حكومة ذات تعددية جزية إلى حد كبير، يعتمد تشكيل الحكومات الوزارية في المملكة المتحدة بشكل حاسم على الأغلبية البرلمانية. لكن حين تحطم الانتخابات التأرجح بين الأحزاب الرئيسية، فإن التحالف السياسي وحده هو الأداة الفعالة لتحويل البرلمان المتعلق إلى حكم الأغلبية. لكن تجد الأثارة هنا على أن بعض تحسينات جديدة للتحالف بين حزب رئيسي وحزب ثانوي يعتبر عادة دخلية على البرلمان. علاوة على ذلك، جلب ايديولوجيين متطرفين إلى سلطة الحكم هو تهديد قوي للعلاقة الوطيدة بين النظام الدستوري والانضباط البرلماني. من خلال أرضية الإجماع بين حزبين، سيتم خوض وكسب الحرب من أجل حكومة مستقرة ومسلوبة. وبالتالي، إذا كان التحالف التشريعي هو المكون الرئيسي لإضفاء الطابع الرسمي على حكومة الائتلاف، فإن هذا البحث مكمل لإمكان أن الإجتهاد السياسي النضالية لكاميرون وشريكة الليبرالي، نيك كالاغي، تدعو إلى الإصلاح الديمقراطي للمؤسسات التشريعية القائمة. وأن كانت سياسة لم شمل الجليد عرضة لللاسقاط لكبّا جعلت من الحزب المحافظ حزباً داعماً للحركات الليبرالية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ديفيد كاميرون، نيك كالاغي، البرلمان المتعلق، الحكومة الائتلافية، حزب المحافظين، الحزب الليبرالي، الأيديولوجية السياسية، الدستور، السياسة البرلمانية، مجلس العموم، الإصلاح الاجتماعي، المصالحة السياسية.

Introduction: Little did David Cameron know, or even suspect, that he would be engaging in a mythic projection of entrepreneurial bi-partisan spirit through assuming the title of coalition government. Arguably, the 2010s general elections resulted in a hung parliament in which no party gained a majority rule in the House of Commons. Because of the shift in the legislative, it was of great importance to repose faith on a political welding. Around this synthesis, the alignment with a more liberal partner would pour cold water on the feverish quest of Hung Parliament. What is
debateable in this context is that when it comes to cultivating the ground of office-sharing deal, Westminster would levy against any movement for coalitional behaviour. Because the both of these trends seem to be disconnected that the generis research of this study lies in the following question: was Cameron able to detoxify the old brand of the existing majority rule? If yes, what were the adopted deviations in the context of Hung Parliament? What really matters as to fit the nub of this research is: a) how to lobby the House of Commons to veto ‘the Motions of non-Confidence’, and b) what measures were taken by the Conservatives and the Liberals to mutually satisfy their needs? The bulk of this paper is devoted to investigating the ideological trends of each political Party within approaching the ideology of political reconciliation.

1-The 2010s Hung Parliament: The 2010s hung parliament was the canvas on which the Liberals and the Conservatives painted a picture of political alliance, an alliance that aimed essentially to trigger the foundation of coalitional behaviour. Central to this line of thinking, the 2010s General Elections “led to a historic outcome, a further decline in support for the top two parties and the advent of the first peacetime coalition government in the UK.”¹¹. The wholly unexpected electoral results brought the full tide of the swings between the two major parties into ebb. The Labour Party, who has been the governing party since 1922, finished by losing its surge of unpopularity. Furthermore, the Conservatives, who have cruised over the first position for the first time since 1997, lost their chance for securing an overall parliamentary majority. Remarkably, the apparent volatility of voters has approached a premature euphoria emphasised with “a hung parliament in which the only chance of a stable government would lie in some combination of parties”.²

In getting to grips with this opportunity, the leader of the major party “may either select one of the other parties to form a minimal winning government, or may form a consensus government that includes all three

In more intimate details, the calls for bringing the top two parties into closer intimacy fell on deaf ears. Besides, a power of patronage emerged to convert the top-down ruling into a top-down coalition. Enthusiastically Committed to seeking a new hegemony for political alliance, Cameron tilted the bias in favour of the Liberal Party rather than the Labour party. As this alliance took many observers by surprise, Clegg had already taken the post of Deputy Prime Minister.

In fact, the speculations on coalitional behaviour between the Conservatives and the Liberals have been a very lively site for political discourse. From slightly wider perspectives, the essence of two-party system aims at building a benign government which is not ideologically anti-pluralism, but, rather as responsive to those norms of interventionism. With this theme at the heart, Cameron and Clegg came together on a long journey to launch a wide-ranging agenda for partnership. However, because of their adversarial national policies, “it came as a surprise to many that the centrist Liberal did not form a progressive coalition with the Labour Party, but rather chose to sign an agreement with the right-of-centre Conservative Party”2. It is simply argued that the Conservatives and the Liberals have been buffeted by a long history of ramshackle marriage. The historical records bear out their long-standing contention to the chasm between traditionalism and modernism. Within the heat of their opponent ideologies, it was too daunting to disentangle and reconcile their various conflicting interests.

Substantially, “the Conservatives are said disproportionately to value self-reliance, limited government, and so on, while Liberals are thought disproportionately to value equal opportunity, tolerance, and so on.”3 While all connotations on the liberal ideals are pivotal around social values and parliamentary reform, all conceptualisations on the conservative doctrine revolve crucially around a centralised Westminster and limited welfare programs. It is therefore of utmost importance to cast a fine-grained understanding on the factors and actors shaping each

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2- Wintour, Patrick. Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition hopes end in recriminations - The Guardian. 2010
ideology.

2- The Liberal Democrats Ideology: As the progenitors of welfare state, the Liberals have never ceased to stand up for values of a centralised society. It should be noted that the liberal ideology is “a set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved”\(^1\). As the major preferences cohering together, society and social reform are the hallmark in the liberal agenda for leadership. The radical instinct for revolutionary thought was well touched in the 2010s Liberal Manifesto to political campaign. In this vein, Clegg pointed out: “This election can be and must be a turning point for Britain. This must be a moment of great change, so that we emerge from the recession as a fairer, greener, stronger and more united society”\(^2\). In point of fact, Clegg responded favourably to the policy of re-engineering the sharply fragmented society. With a more compassionate face on social democracy, Clegg seemed ripe for codifying the rules of a more coherent and sophisticated society.

Furthermore, it is too often stressed that the liberal creed tends to venerate “progressive and idealistic values”\(^3\). When it comes to action-oriented sets of beliefs, behaviour and attitudes can consciously be arranged or altered according to the major interest and preferences. In this review, a platform of an intensively radical change is imperative to trigger a liberal departmental autonomy. Since the proper order of society was increasingly disengaging with mainstream politics, it was of palpable emergency to call for legislating and sponsoring major acts for reform. It was this matter that brought Clegg to the fore, and on his path to launch his organic agenda for overhauls, he fulminated against the centrality of Westminster: “We will reinvigorate our democracy by dispersing power, breaking open Westminster and Whitehall and embracing fair votes for every level of election”\(^4\).

Invariably subject to the Conservative veto players in the House of Commons, the Liberals hardly seize opportunities to wield influence over converting their bills into laws. In the interest of gleaning the tools and measures that would promote a functioning society, it was inevitably

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2- Clegg, Nick - Liberal-Democrat Manifesto2010-London: Chris Fox-2010-p10
4- Clegg, Nick - Liberal-Democrat Manifesto2010-London: Chris Fox-2010-p10

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inescapable to reform the existing legislative and executive institutions. In a particularly famous quote within progressive liberal thought, Clegg argued that in order to make the liberal agenda inclusive and all-encompassing as possible, it is *sine qua non* to “put power back where it belongs: into the hands of people”\(^1\). More importantly, over all, the decentralisation of Westminster is a thrilling opportunity for society to be the challenging partner of government. As a substantive matter, the destruction of the unlimited hierarchical political system is, in large measure, the chemical pesticide that would fertilise the democratic foundations. With the intention to attain support that broadly coincides with this principle, it seemed of vital importance to call for a constitutional exceptionalism.

In the British context, the constitutional stretching aims decisively at fostering an orderly framework within which democratic standards can be maintained. However, it is widely noted that Westminster is committed to subjugating each successive system in the flood of novelty. Grant, for the sake of argument, that the malleability of the British constitution is theoretically unrestrained and practically narrowed. The British Constitution, in spite of getting mature, its process for democratisation is dedicated to producing conservative constitutional overhauls. There is in fact something ideologically old ‘Tory’\(^2\) in this stance. The historical records on constitutional stretching are often perceived as scholarly virulent narratives. Because of the constitutional order and the parliamentary discipline, the Conservatives have historically expressed an ongoing reticence with regards to liberal reforms. According to such an understanding, the British monarchical tendencies stand in awe of sovereign entities. For the aim of well grasping this freezing mechanism, it is more useful to delve into the Conservative ideology.

**3-The Conservative Ideology:** In a world where the old-existing dispositions of Toryism are the norm, it should come as no bolt from the blue that with such stubborn political infrastructure, Cameron’s biography is represented with an array of challenges. Quintessentially dogmatic in their policy formation, the Conservatives “prefer the familiar to the unknown, the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the

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1- idem- p87.
2- Tory was the traditional and conventional version of Conservatism.
possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant…”\textsuperscript{1} In a very broad sense, the conventional values have been a firm support for the conservative party’s long-term stability. The Conservatives, who ground their moral beliefs in tradition, are resistant to provide big-bang blueprints for constitutional amendments. Committed to remaining immune to any new constitutional malleability, the Disraelian conservatism has been well accustomed to riding roughshod over the social and economic liberal ideologies. In the same harmony, the post-Thatcherite leaders have scantily shown a smooth touch with developing new approaches to disjunctive leadership.

When nesting broad approaches that work in the pure conservative creed, ‘Parliamentary Sovereignty’ emerged as an area for intense political survey. Examined widely across academic literature that sweeps disciplines from constitution, “the principle of Parliamentary sovereignty means neither more nor less than this, namely, that Parliament has under the English constitution, the right to make or unmake any law what-ever; and further ... no person or body is recognised by the law as having a right to override or set aside the legislation of Parliament.”\textsuperscript{2} The Parliamentary Sovereignty has shown beyond any doubt to be rather a gate keeping tenet seeking to maintain Westminster as unaffected by any alternative action. Moreover, the Conservatives have never abstained from ditching their obsession with parliamentary sovereignty. The highly pathological character of the Westminster structure lies in the Parliament – Constitution dependency. When it comes to the code of governance, the big stress would be placed under the claim that « a sovereign entity forms part of the very essence of a constitution; that, minus this element, it would be a mistake to describe something as a constitution”\textsuperscript{3}. Given the understanding of the challenges posed by the parliamentary democracy, the House of Commons would strike down any legislation that is not harmonious with the constitutional clauses.


The poignant example on this debate was Cameron’s Coalition Government. In his path to recast government in his own design, Cameron bemoaned conservatism as an obstacle rather than resource. It is worth noting that the concessional policy, within the pair-wise choice mechanism which sponsors it, is perceived as unfamiliar political territory. In more critical perspectives, “the British electoral system has traditionally been credited with the supreme virtue of providing decisive results: it discourages minor parties, forcing voters to choose between alternative governments, and it gives a clear majority to the winner”.

Besides, when the hypotheses on worldwide wars of unprecedented scale and ferocity loomed, the British political arena had already managed to burst the alignment between major and minor Parties. Central to this line of thinking, the outbreak of the WWI and WWII has offered a unique picture of the emerging Conservative-liberal political ideology. Furthermore, since the wartime political alliances were in essence Conservative-led coalitions, any endeavor for launching post-war departmental elasticity within the Cabinet system was marked as an abortive attempt. Obviously, the single-party government is a prevailing trait in the Westminster Model. Given these points, the cobwebs of ‘Single-Party System’ have in fact hung over far too much the functionality of government, and its rejection has been a tough line to walk. Explicitly, the break of the old Tory norms is an ideological cul-de-sac which is destined to be confined to the margins of politics. The more that conservative standards are centralised, the more the Prime Minister’s power of patronage is used unwisely. In this review, the British parties seem inevitably “developed as subordinate institutions to the political constitution itself”2. According to this synthesis, the decipherment of the strategies for personal prerogatives and resources is viewed as an amorphous informality.

However, given the breadth of the 2010s Hung Parliament, what was at stake may more readily be appreciated. Whereas the wartime coalitions were an exception, the peace time coalitions are the norm. As a means to that end, the detoxification of old politics was imperative to strengthen Downing Street’s policy input across Westminster. As he expressed his liberal beliefs in a conciliatory language, Cameron adopted the equation that the Tories had rejected: the adaptation of a concessional policy in

2- Smellie, K.B- The British Way of Life- London-1955- p 153
exchange of office-holding. This equation was, indeed, the product of a legislative equilibrium.

4- The Legislative Equilibrium: Broadly Speaking, the May 2010 general elections resulted in a Hung Parliament in which no party sustained a plurality of vote. From a pragmatic electoral arithmetic, the concept of hung parliament in the British context unveils that no party secured “the overall majority of 326 seats from the 650 seats in the House of Commons”¹.

The pie chart identifies the House of Commons’ seat-share for each political party within the voter demographics to which each candidate appealed. Initially, the Labourites, who used to steering their competitors away from the political arena, finished a distant second with 258 MPs. Moreover, “in the last two weeks before the election, the Lib-Dems moved ahead of Labour in the opinion polls and came neck to neck with

the Conservative”1. However, the ballot paper finished with pushing the Liberals to the third position. Complementarily, the Conservatives who manoeuvred heavily for a second term leadership, “…had come out on top with 36% of the popular vote, but with only 306 seats in the House of Commons”2. Explicitly, the party, at 306 seats, emerged as the largest party by far, but in no sense, the major one. The status quo prompted a dissent debate on whether the political arena is eager to leap with great appetite at any proposition allowing for collectivism.

When it comes to governing with multi-party system, there is a need to admit that Prime Ministers do face a myriad of constraints. The contemporary historical records bear out theses constraints for approaches that adopt ‘Motions of non-Confidence’ as an overarching analytical framework. In effect, Cameron never entertained the idea that he would be challenged by a ‘Yes-No’ referendum in the House of Commons. It is therefore crucial to outline the extent of hung parliament vis-à-vis the Motions of non-Confidence.

4.1-MOTION OF NON-CONFIDENCE:

The collapse under the weight of the hung parliament was a feverish quest that projected its outlets into ‘Motions of non-Confidence’. As an area of intense political survey, a Motion of confidence is a vote in the House of Commons which aims at legitimising the nature of policy outcomes. More precisely, “in a parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster System, confidence and supply are required for a minority government to retain power in the Lower House”3. Because of the scant influence over decisions, it was not easy to craft a more expansive vision for a legislative equilibrium. Consequently, the Conversion of the hung parliament into a coalition government was challenged in stark terms: “A Cabinet which represented all shades of opinion would be a Ministry which could not act at all”4. The Commons, who occupy a dominant position in the executive body, have frequently bolstered their authority on the expense of Prime Minister’s departmental autonomy. Besides, the adaptation of a Conservative minority government brought significantly the theory of dissolution of parliament.

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2 Ibid
3 Cook, James -Governments, coalitions and border politics- BBC News- 7 May 2010.
into practice. These issues left Cameron with few options, causing him to call for political reconciliation. In order to formalise the hung parliament, it was of vital importance to manoeuvre heavily for political reconciliation.

4.2-THE POLITICAL RECONCILIATION:
In very broad terms, the hung parliament left the Conservatives 20 short of the 326 imperatively required to sustain a majority in the 650 seats of the House of Commons. Disadvantaged by the status quo, the Conservatives bargained for a solid backing to counteract the motion of non-confidence. Whereas Cameron’s new disjunctive leadership lies in navigating a cooperative form of alliance, the liberal Party’s major interests really boil down to one interest: edging towards a premature general election. In his first speech to the Party Conference in Manchester, the new elected Labour leader, Ed Miliband, stressed “We want to win an argument about the danger this coalition government poses to our economy and our society”\(^1\). However, as the hung parliament enabled Ed Miliband to recruit voters ripe to break the mould of any political welding, Cameron had already attracted core support to veto the Motion of non-Confidence. After losing their concrete proposal for dissolving parliament, it was argued that “if labour had elected a more credible leader than Ed Miliband, another election in 2010 or early in 2011 might have well seen the Conservative Party win fewer seats, rather than more”\(^2\). This interpretation was, forsooth, the ultimate factor behind the widespread opposition to the Labour Party’s interventionism.

Even though it was born accidently, the Liberal intervention was maintained on purpose. Prior to this performance, the political reconciliation was devoted principally to bargaining for a task-division deal. Central to this argument, it was the Liberal Party’s firm lead in the public opinion polls that had given hefty shove to the office-sharing. In a flagging endeavour to dampen the escalation of deadlock, Clegg responded favourably to the policy of political pluralism. Relatively, the convention-challenging is viewed as the building block in fixing the nostrum for liberal leadership. In Clegg’s Manifesto to the 2010s electoral campaign, the call for eradicating the stitch-up between the two dominant parties was obvious: “We’ve had 65 years of Labour and the

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Conservatives: the same parties taking turns and making the same mistakes". Throughout his daunting initiative to temper the absolutism of the legally unlimited single-party government, Clegg went on to lead the Liberal party to a landslide victory over the top-down ruling. Excitedly embarking on his own task agenda for partnership government, Clegg pointed out “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.” On one side, fighting the old politics aims at tearing down contentions and affording new challenges to agreements. On the other side, the process looks forward to launching massive legislative overhauls and passing bills for social reform.

For Cameron, the consensual reputation is dedicated to espousing a full-fledged political secularism. In this sense, the dissociation of the conventional Tory ingredients from his Party would be the bully pulpit from which to trigger a bargaining dynamism. Accordingly, Cameron cultivated a new hegemony for political alliance with the Lib-Dems because it “offered him a better chance of maintaining his modernising agenda.” Continually adjusting his strategies in response to new challenges, the Third-Thatcherite leader emerged ripe for codifying the rule of duplicitous governmental identity. In an interview with the BBC, Cameron pointed out “I believe there … I’ve always described myself as a Liberal Conservative. I’m Liberal because I believe in freedom and human rights, but Conservative - I'm sceptical of great schemes to remake the world.” This ambivalent position was designed to meet the need of a broadly hyper-partisanship. As a matter of fact, the sacrifice of some principles in exchange of office-sharing is the essence of political reconciliation. In order to win the race in ease, it was of a palpable emergency to build a cohesive platform that resonates well with a progressive and reformist conservatism. Indeed, Edmund Burke’s most

1 Clegg, Nick - Liberal-Democrat Manifesto2010-London: Chris Fox-2010-p4  
famous phrase “a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation”\(^1\) became the default position of Cameron. According to such an understanding, the alteration of the previous version of Conservatism aims in essence to promote a functioning coalition government. Complementarily, it is worth noting that “studies of political ideology must reckon on and accept multiformity, overlap, divergence, inconsistency, obliquity and change as features intrinsic to their subject matter.”\(^2\) Accordingly, this interpretation cannot be interpreted as a lack of competencies in the Prime Minister’s statecraft, but rather as pragmatism stemming from an awareness of the need to remedy the longstanding constitutional stagnation. The political ideology is, after all, a dynamic process unfolding over time. Because of the incredibly fluid and volatile nature of contemporary British politics, building a mature political ideology seems a complex, long-term, dynamic and open-ended process.

**CONCLUSION:** The Conservatives and the Liberals, who have seemed for centuries more bent on cutting each other’s throats, are now at the centre of intersection where the main direction is legislative equilibrium. Even though their electoral campaign espoused different shades of opinions and attracted swathe of audiences in different contexts, their political brandings were knitted to similar preferences. In order to cultivate a parallelism of interest, the ideology of coaltional behaviour should stem its creed from commonalities and differences within the Parties joining together. For the purpose of outlining the parallelism of interest, Cameron and Clegg emerged as autonomous agents, scaling alternative actions for reaching key voting demographics. Ultimately, the pair-wise choice limitations in the context of reconciliation are inherited in the collective consciousness of reconciliation. Widely tempering the absolutism of the legally unlimited majoritarian parliament, the 2010s Coalition Government was committed to fertilising the soil of constitutional exceptionalism through reconciling the interests of major and minor Parties. Central to this line of thinking, the both of leaders carried the banner of political reconciliation to reform the relationship

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between the State and society. In the same token, the coalition’s political deviations are devoted to making the Prime Minister the key executive player, dominating the most influential power and managing the institutional basis. Though occasionally championed, those traits would go down in history as a bold step toward bringing the theory of Prime Minister’s centrality into currency.

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