

# Which party would win a branding election?

We've asked designers to analyse the branding and visual identities of the five national political parties. Find out which logo wins the most votes and whose brand leaves them trailing in the polls.

By **Angus Montgomery** on May 1, 2015

---



*John Spencer, creative director, Offthetopofmyhead:* “The Conservatives changed their logo from a torch to an oak tree in 2006. They were attempting to communicate tradition, stability and a more environment-friendly party. Its latest transformation, which one wag described as a ‘one-legged pig with a Union Jack painted on it’, is downright vacuous. It’s a spectacular lash-up that communicates nothing at all.”

*Matt Baxter, co-founder, Baxter & Bailey:* “Some have compared the Conservative squiggle to a pecking chicken. Others, such as Michael Evamy, have noted its resemblance to a snuffling pig. For me, it resembles nothing so much as the bristling, twitchy, reactionary moustache of a retired sergeant major. Can you picture him? Red faced. Tweedy. Posh. Pointing his decommissioned blunderbuss at the hippies and scroungers on his lawn. That’s him. But a logo.”

*Nick Asbury, co-founder, Asbury & Asbury:* “That scribbled oak tree was always a travesty, betraying the vague verbal scribble that Cameron called a green policy. Now it’s an incomplete Union Jack, which could be a sign of things to come. The funniest moment of their campaign was Cameron forgetting which team he supported. I like to think of him on the terraces – ‘Villa til I die. I’m Villa til I die. I know I am. I’m reasonably sure I am. Actually, am I West Ham?’”

*Lydia Thornley, founder, Lydia Thornley Design:* “It’s colourful, this election, after a merging of political intent in recent years that’s been more bland than brand. The Conservatives have piled Britishness on to the true blue with this update.”

*David Kimpton, founder, Kimpton Creative:* “It looks like the Tories have followed Maggie Thatcher’s lead on the BA tail-fins with the union jack, but whether it belongs on a scribbled tree is questionable. Is it not more appropriate for UKIP? It’s awkwardly close to the latest BNP symbol. The execution looks a bit basic to me. The lettering is as it says, conservative. Blue seems right – blue blood, Oxford and Cambridge Blue... Chelsea...”

*Bronwen Edwards, executive creative director, Brandhouse:* “Oh, we’ve SO moved on from a clipart scribble of a solid and presumably optimistic tree to a British flag cunningly disguised in the foliage. Clever. That’ll swing the right for sure, oh yes, we’re solid, leaning forward and worryingly vague round the edges – but we’re about Britishness chaps, tally ho!”

*Jack Renwick, founder, Jack Renwick Studio:* “I almost vomited having to have this crap on my screen to double check what the latest smoke and mirrors logo was. I was panicking that someone would come up behind me and think I’d lost all sense of what being a decent human being was. Is this logo a tree of knowledge... ? Knowledge for everyone in Britain? That now costs £9k a year for the privilege of accessing that knowledge? Fuck the Tories! (*ed: Apologies for Jack’s language...*)”

*Michael Smith, founder, Cog Design:* “Politicians and their advisers make for terrible clients. It must have been frustrating for agency, Perfect Day to work with David Cameron on that anodyne Tory tree, but being asked to fill it with a union flag (allegedly under instruction from disgraced spin-doctor Andy Coulson) must have been an excruciating conversation.”



*Michael Smith:* “Labour are equally culpable; they had the evocative red flag as an emblem until Neil Kinnock picked a photo of his favourite rose from a gardening catalogue and asked someone to redraw it as a logo (with, according to Kinnock, Peter Mandelson dictating the length of the stem). Now they’ve packed the rose in a box and painted it white. Still, at least they’ve rediscovered some pride in their name.”

*Nick Asbury:* “‘Better’ is the key word for Labour – ‘A better plan’, ‘Britain can be better’ – and they’ve kept it consistent amid all the media hysteria. The aim is not to convince a jaded electorate that Labour is suddenly perfect, but only that it’s the better of the two main choices. Milifandom may be the most memorable neologism of the campaign.”

*John Spencer:* “When Labour’s logo was launched in 1986 at their party conference, a journalist asked Peter Mandelson why the rose didn’t have any thorns. He allegedly replied: ‘We have enough pricks in this party as it is’. Labour used their red rose vigorously until their 1992 general election defeat. But now they’ve shoved it in a box and you can hardly tell what it is.”

*Matt Baxter:* “Solid, doughty, vigorous and perhaps a little old fashioned. Despite shoving their badly-drawn rose (red – the best kind) in a round-cornered box in a misguided and awkward lunge towards now-outmoded new modernity, it still gets my vote.”

*David Kimpton:* “I associate the red rose with England rather than the UK – I think of English rugby. So I’m not sure it’s appropriate. It’s a bit odd that it’s currently often seen reversed out white, like the House of York (i.e. Richard III). The lettering is quite ‘down to earth’, true to its roots, but a bit too basic. Red is associated with socialism. And Red Ken. It’s ironic that the seats in the House of Lords are red.”

*Lydia Thornley:* “Labour has gone so all-out for its red that we’ll forgive its shocking pink moment.”

*Bronwen Edwards:* “The Labour Party. Or is it a Tudor dating site, hard to tell... It’s actually relatively single-minded. Red being the colour of revolution and the most alarming colour isn’t a terrible place to start – cleverly contrasted with a hit of floral that says ‘We mean business, but we’re delicate flowery softies inside’. Shame the font is so plonky, they-almost pulled it off.”

*Jack Renwick:* “Being a socialist I like the red rose – strong, confident and it matches my lipstick. The rose has lost its clarity for me but the typography works well to reflect the industrial heritage of the party. Respect, humanity and dignity for everyone. It’s not trying to be your friend, it’s got a job to do, a thorn in the side of the rich and powerful. Or is it now representing a load of pricks...?”



*Nick Asbury:* “Birds are powerful symbols, but this one always struck me as lightweight, as though a gust of wind could blow it away. They’ve gone with ‘stronger’ and ‘fairer’ as the key words and I’m actually getting bored writing this sentence.”

*John Spencer:* “The Liberal Democrats’ ‘bird of liberty’ is called Libby. Some say its name is simply an abbreviation of liberty but others claim it’s an acronym for the nauseatingly twee slogan ‘life is better because of you’. Their ‘bird of liberty’ is comically aspirational. Margaret Thatcher said it was “as dead as John Cleese’s parrot” when it was launched. It is now.”

*Jack Renwick:* “This used to feel positive and uplifting but now I just see a sacrificial canary that gets sent down the pits to take the flack before the Tories turn up behind them. Then shut the pit when they get there.”

*David Kimpton:* “This is the most ‘designed’ of all the party logos. The liberty bird symbolising ‘freedom’ has been well crafted. The only question I have is whether the yellowy orange colour causes you to wonder if the bird is in flames. The lettering is now more approachable in upper and lower case.”

*Matt Baxter:* “Not as shoddily drawn as some of the other party logos and certainly with some merits. But where will the bird flit to next? Old bristly Sergeant Major Cameron (see above) has shooed it off. And I’m not sure how aesthetically happy it would appear when placed next to Labour’s red rose. Due to its ‘footprint’, a difficult one to place in any context.”

*Bronwen Edwards:* “Symbol of freedom and a lighter touch. These guys aren’t restrained by boundaries, oh no. Actually one of the most finessed and sophisticated of the bunch, but with its elegance is an air of fragility and I’m strangely reminded of the canaries sent down mines first to die at the first whiff of dangerous gasses...”

*Lydia Thornley:* “The steadfastly yellow Lib Dems have acquired a policy red line...”

*Michael Smith:* “I do have a bit of a soft-spot for the Lib-Dem ‘bird of freedom’ because I can remember how innovative and fresh it felt when it first took flight in the late eighties (and Thatcher referred to it as ‘the dead parrot’). But while the Tories and Labour now have a really slick communication machine, the Lib-Dems seem to be leaving candidates to produce their own leaflets in MS Word and Paint.”



*David Kimpton:* “Q1. Why have they put the green in the sea and not the land? Q2. Are those leaves or petals? Or flames? Q3. Why are the leaves/petals not all the way round? Q4. Why the jaunty angle? The colour is an inspired choice though.”

*Matt Baxter:* “A one-note concept, this one. It’s all about the earth. So I’m clear what this means (and who could argue with those sentiments?). But I feel that there’s something a bit lacking about this single idea solution. Something a bit flat. A flat earth, if you will. However, my design training has left me very fond of big idea solutions and, as such, I could get behind this one.”

*Michael Smith:* “For all their talk of being the most progressive party, the Greens’ visual identity is just as tired and rooted in 1980s as all the others. Their logo in particular seems designed to be a pin-badge, worn on hessian dungarees. The Greens are pushing for innovation across all areas of policy and representation, it’s time they updated their branding to reflect that (rather than reinforcing tired stereotypes).”

*Nick Asbury:* “I feel like the name is holding them back. The opportunity is to become an alternative part of the left, but ‘Green’ portrays them as a single-issue party. They use the phrase ‘The Common Good’ a lot, which is meaningful, but abstract.”

*John Spencer:* “The Green Party was founded as the PEOPLE Party in 1973. They became the Ecology Party in 1975 and that’s when they adopted a sunflower logo. Amusingly, they thought about calling themselves the Green Party rather than that Ecology Party but decided against it because colloquially, green can mean wet behind the ears. They became the Green Party in 1985. Their logo shows a crushing lack of imagination. It’s just what you’d expect.”

*Bronwen Edwards:* “They look like they’ve suffered from design democracy – we’ve all been there. Too many internal stakeholders (“Can we have something natural, ooh and a globe to show we care about the bigger picture, and can we include energy somehow – oh and make sure we exude positivity, importantly we need to be forward facing too...”) There’s a whiff of a vegetable DeathStar exploding – not sure that’s quite on message.”

*Lydia Thornley:* “There’s the nightmare for colour palette wranglers that is a Green Party communicating to the left of Labour.”

*Jack Renwick:* “Looks like they need some funds to help in the design department, sadly the earth looks like it’s on fire. But I like that it’s single colour and cost effective to reproduce, not your full colour expensive print job that the Tories splash cash on. Get in touch Green Party – we’d be happy to help for free as we support your fight.”



*Bronwen Edwards:* “Poundland meets pimble. Brilliantly crap – although one thing they’ve been successful at is that there’s a clear and simple message...the discount brand of politics. In a roundel. With a keyline (classy touch). Sigh.”

*Michael Smith:* “The UKIP logo, like the party themselves, seems beyond parody. Brash pound-land politicians, reveling in their lack of sophistication, flicking Vs at the world. Of all the parties, UKIP have the most consistent brand but only in the way that you can rely on your racist uncle to be drunk and a bit grabby at your next family party.”

*Nick Asbury:* “‘Believe in Britain’ is the manifesto line and ‘believe’ is an interesting word – appealing to gut instincts, rather than annoying facts and realities. SNP voters will notice the internal contradiction in the party name: if you believe in independence, why do you believe in a United Kingdom?”

*David Kimpton:* “The logo is awful! This smacks of something knocked up in a rush. The pound symbol is irrelevant now. It looks like a pound shop logo. Purple might have been a good choice, no-one else uses it and it suggests lots of good things, but the yellow combined with it changes the tone completely. Lurid describes it pretty well.”

*Matt Baxter:* “Once my spellchecker had excised the swears and inarticulate, angry runs of capital letters and exclamatory punctuation, all I was left with was this: absolute cobblers.”

*John Spencer:* “UKIP’s is the only party logo that doesn’t look like the product of market research and groupthink because it’s single-minded. It communicates a spirit of gung-ho crapness. The Spectator described it as ‘Poundstretcher by way of clipart’. UKIP makes a whopping £80,000 a year from branded merchandise like purple polyester ties with the logo ‘tastefully woven into the fabric’. It’s hilariously amateurish but refreshingly honest.”

*Jack Renwick:* “Fucking UKIP. Or UKIPS as Stuart Lee calls them, which always makes me laugh. A fucking pound sign from an ex City boy... seriously? These clowns have had enough air time and I refuse to give them more column inches.”

*Lydia Thornley:* “Furiously purple.”