



Live election debate: a 'huge job interview in front of the whole nation'

David Woods 15 April 2010

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Liberal democrat leader Nick Clegg has called this evening's first live television election debate on ITV a "huge job interview in front of the whole nation", but more than 70% of UK senior executives believe Gordon Brown will be let down by his poor television skills.

In an election most believe will be won or lost on the strength of the leaders' broadcast appearances, according to a survey by The Aziz Corporation.

Gordon Brown was perceived as having weak presentational skills compared with David Cameron and Nick Clegg.

More than half (54%) of the 250 senior executives surveyed believe the presidential-style TV debates, starting tonight, will be a useful method of assessing the party leaders.

The survey was issued to business leaders by The Aziz Corporation, one of the UK's leading executive leadership and communications consultancies.

Cameron comes out as the most effective TV communicator among 40% of respondents, compared with 20% for Clegg and 12% for Brown.

Brown also has the weakest verbal and non-verbal skills, critical for making effective presentations, with 76% describing him as poor or very poor in this area.

By contrast 82% believe Cameron has good or very good verbal and non-verbal skills and 63% think Clegg was also strong in this area.

Chairman of The Aziz Corporation Khalid Aziz said: "Effective communication is at the heart of great leadership. The next prime minister will need these skills more than ever to drive the country through very challenging times.

"Tonight's leadership debate will be a pivotal moment in the election campaign."

Personal attractiveness is seen as an important part of the leadership package by more than half of the survey's respondents. More than 60% believe that Cameron's physical appearance enhances his voter appeal compared to 53% for Clegg. More than 80% believe Brown's appearance is a turn-off to voters although no one knows exactly how the voters will respond.

Despite his privileged upbringing Cameron is seen as having the highest emotional intelligence of the three leaders with 77% assessing his skills in this area as average to high, compared with 74% for Clegg and 41% for Brown.

Claims in the media of bullying by Brown had little impact on the executives' opinion of the prime minister. As one respondent commented "as anyone with any experience of management would know, there is little chance to be nice in a crisis".

Clegg is seen to have the highest personal integrity of the three with 32% scoring him highly in this area. On the other hand, 85% of respondents admitted they knew him little or very little.

Clegg's indistinctiveness is believed to detract from his personal effectiveness. One respondent finds him very similar to Cameron describing them as *"the Ant and Dec of British politics"*.

There was vindication for the decision by Nick Clegg's wife to take a back seat in the election campaign. More than two thirds polled believed there was no place for "first families". One respondent describes this creeping trend as "an unctuous policy. My skin crawls". Another asked: "Would you select a managing director because he has a nice little wife and a couple of respectable kids?"