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On the wrong track

A new US poll puts the proportion of Americans thinking that their country is 'on the wrong track' at its highest level since 1992, when the current President's Father was in the Oval Office. Seventy-five percent think America is going in the wrong direction, according to the survey, by Harris Interactive, while only 15% think the country is on the right track – a level of dissatisfaction with the status quo that explains why all the various candidates, from both parties, aspiring to be the next US President have in one way or another tried to present themselves this year as the candidate of change.

In Britain, voters are scarcely more content about the direction of the country. The latest Populus poll for The Times asked exactly the same question and found less than a quarter thinking 'Britain is on the right track at the moment', with 70% saying that the country is 'going off in the wrong direction'. Women (21%/71%) are somewhat gloomier about the direction of the country than men (27%/69%) – and manual workers (C2/DEs) more negative than white-collar workers and professionals (AB/C1s).

Links – http://harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=893
<http://populus.co.uk/the-times-the-times-poll-april-2008-060408.html>

Dark clouds for the country, blue skies for the family?

Relentless media coverage of the 'credit crunch', falling house prices and restrictions in the mortgage market have been matched by a sharp rise in pessimism about how Britain's economy will fare over the next 12 months in the latest Populus tracker of economic expectations. Overall, 39% still think the economy for the country as a whole will do well this year, but 59% now think it will do badly. This net rating of -20% compares with +8% last September and +20% a year ago. Opinion in Scotland on prospects for the economy 'for the country as a whole' revealingly splits almost exactly the opposite way, with 58% optimistic and 42% pessimistic - the only part of Britain still to have a positive net view.

The poll also found a sharp contrast between these generally pessimistic perceptions of how the economy will fare 'for the country as a whole' and a markedly less downbeat view of how it will do 'for you and your family'. In this case too, opinion is much less optimistic than six months ago, but it is still, narrowly, positive - with 50% saying they expect the economy to fare well over the next year for them and their family, and 47% saying they expect it to fare badly.

Bleak Brown

Nearly two-thirds of voters (62%) believe that Gordon Brown 'has made no difference at all' to Britain since he took over as Prime Minister nine months ago - and even more (67%) think he has been 'all talk and no action', according to this month's Populus poll for The Times. The poll also found that more than a third of voters think Mr Brown has done 'worse than expected', with only 5% thinking he has done 'better than expected' and more than twice as many voters think he is turning out to be 'worse than Tony Blair' (31%) than 'better than Tony Blair' (14%).

Links - <http://populus.co.uk/the-times-the-times-poll-april-2008-060408.html>

Excess Baggage

The opening of Heathrow's Terminal 5 was a public relations disaster on a grand scale, played out over days across all media, and it has had a devastating effect on the reputation of both BA and BAA, according to the latest survey of the Populus Network of leading opinion formers - the biggest panel of opinion leading stakeholders in the UK.

Almost two-thirds (62%) of the opinion formers surveyed said they were less likely to fly with BA as a result of the problems at Terminal 5 and almost as many (59%) are now less likely than before to use Heathrow. A third (33%) of opinion formers say

they are now less likely to fly from any airport owned or managed by BAA, if they have a choice.

The Populus Network survey brings more bad news for BAA, as three-quarters of opinion formers surveyed believe that the problems at Terminal 5 have strengthened the case for breaking up BAA's London airport monopoly by selling one of its three major London airports.

Diana Inquest

A Populus poll conducted for BBC News shortly before the result of the inquest into the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, has found that almost four-fifths (78%) of British adults believe that the inquest will not put an end to speculation about her death.

The poll also found that 15% of British adults – more than 6 million voters – think that Diana was killed as a result of a conspiracy.

The majority of people felt that the Princess's reputation and that of the Duke of Edinburgh remained unchanged as a result of the six-month process (61% and 60% respectively), though more felt that both their reputations had been damaged than improved. Mohamed al Fayed's reputation has been hit harder, with more than half (52%) of all respondents believing his standing has been damaged by what emerged during the inquest. Paul Burrell fares worst, with 70% believing his reputation has been damaged and only 3% believing it has improved.

The BBC poll also found that more than four out of five people think that the inquest was not worth undertaking at all. Three-quarters felt it had failed to discover the whole truth about Princess Diana's death. More than two thirds (69%) do not believe that the inquest will bring 'closure' on the issue.

Links – <http://populus.co.uk/bbc-princess-diana-poll-220308.html>

Old and online

Increasing numbers of older people are turning on, tuning in and going online, challenging established stereotypes of the over-50s and bringing new opportunities and challenges for business.

Populus has just conducted the first survey of its new 'Silver Panel', which has been created specifically to understand the attitudes and preferences of this rapidly growing and increasingly influential section of society – the active and tech-savvy over-50s. More than 15,000 over-50s were surveyed – making this the biggest panel of its type in the UK.

Nine out of ten (91%) have used a website to find out more information on a news story, advert or product or service that interested them. Fifty-seven percent have used eBay and one in five (17%) have used social networking sites. Almost all, 96%, have sent a text or email.

Socially, 86% met friends or family in the past week, three-quarters (72%) had eaten out and 15% had taken in some culture such as a play, opera or musical. Moreover, over 50% are socially engaged as members of a local committee, part of a neighbourhood watch scheme, are a school governor or volunteer for a charity.

There's good news in the survey for travel companies. When asked what one thing they would like to do which they had never experienced before, 42% said they would like to travel. Suggested destinations included a cruise down the Nile, taking the Trans Siberian railway or going on a safari. America, Australia and New Zealand were the three most popular destinations.

Idea of paying for plastic doesn't carry with consumers

Over the last year there has been a rise in concern about supermarket packaging among Concerned Consumers, according to the latest monthly survey by Populus of this important group of ethical shoppers. The removal of all packaging from fruit and vegetables is regarded as a priority by 7% more consumers than a year ago, with a 4% rise in the number wanting to see supermarkets committing not to use landfill sites at all, and to making all packaging compostable.

Eight out of ten (82%) Concerned Consumers say that media coverage on the issue of packaging has resulted in them using fewer plastic bags than in the past, and a similar number (80%) say that over the coming year they intend to buy food with less packaging.

But even these most environmentally and ethically Concerned Consumers oppose the idea of paying for plastic bags to reduce their usage. Three-quarters (76%) feel the best way to reduce the waste created by plastic bags is to reward customers who reuse bags. Over half (56%) believe ceasing to offer bags at all is the solution, but barely a quarter (28%) would be willing to pay a small amount, around 5p, per carrier bag.

Doing your bit for the environment?

Most Europeans say they care about the environment, however, few have made it beyond good intentions, according to a survey recently published by the European Commission.

Ninety-six percent of Europeans say that protecting the environment is important for them personally – two-thirds of this group say it is very important. Eighty percent

also believe that environmental factors impact upon their quality of life, only just behind economic factors (84%), and ahead of social factors (76%). The environmental issue citizens are most concerned about is climate change (57%), followed by water (42%) and air (40%) pollution respectively.

Two-thirds (67%) of Europeans would prefer environmental decisions to be made jointly within the EU, with 82% feeling EU-wide legislation is necessary, 80% supporting assistance to non-EU countries to improve their environmental standards, and 78% supporting increased EU funding for environmental protection even if it came at the expense of other areas.

Whilst 90% of Europeans feel that the biggest industrial polluters should be mostly responsible for protecting the environment, 86% of citizens feel they have a role to play as individuals. The survey also suggests, however, that most people do not act accordingly. Although 9 out of 10 have done at least one thing in the last month for environmental reasons – with recycling their household waste being the most common, mentioned by 59% across the EU – the great majority of these actions are what the European Commission defines as “passive” (which covers things like recycling, cutting energy usage, and lowering water consumption). Less than one-fifth of Europeans made what are defined as “active” changes, such as using their car less or buying environmentally-friendly products (17% in both cases) – despite the fact that three-quarters (75%) said that they would buy such products even if they were more expensive.

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