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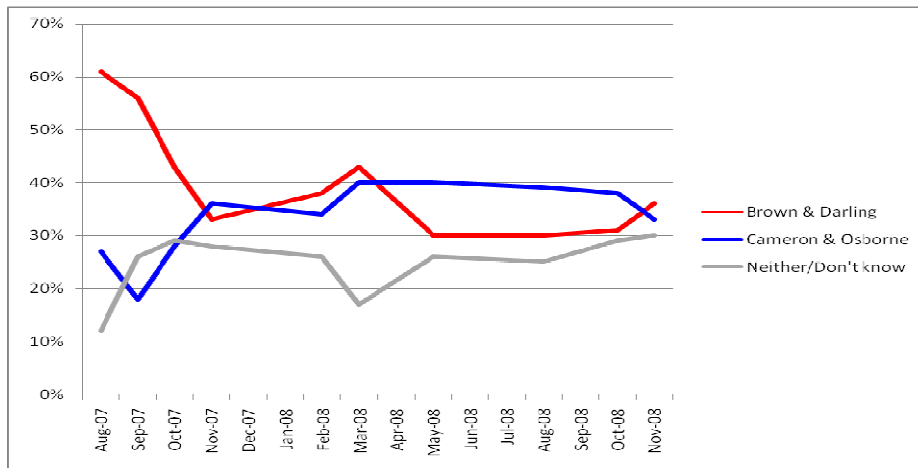
Brown's bailout bounce

The financial crisis and worsening recession have brought clear political dividends for Gordon Brown and the Labour government, according to the latest Populus poll for The Times. The Conservative lead, which has averaged 15% since the Budget in March, is down to 6% in the new poll.

Fieldwork for the survey took place only a few days after the Bank of England's surprise 1.5% interest rate cut and the poll suggests that this announcement has been well received by the public. More than three quarters (77%) think that the big rate cut will be effective in dealing with the downturn and this is probably a factor both in the rise in support for Gordon Brown's government and the big drop that the poll found in pessimism about the economy's prospects.

The boost for Labour has come largely at the expense of the Liberal Democrats (who have lost an average of 1.5% since mid September, when the banking crisis broke), the SNP (as further evidenced by the recent Glenrothes by-election result) and the sum of 'others', down from a total of around 12% to around 8%, with the Greens hit hardest.

As the graph shows, Gordon Brown & Alistair Darling have also moved back into the lead over David Cameron & George Osborne as the team most trusted to manage the economy – though the surge over the last year in the proportion of voters not knowing which team to trust, or trusting neither, is even more noteworthy.



Links - <http://www.populus.co.uk/the-times-the-times-poll-november-2008-091108.html>

Horses for courses

The recent poll boost for Labour may not necessarily be grounds for party optimism in terms of the prospects for the next general election, according to the new Populus poll.

Gordon Brown has a 20% lead over David Cameron (52% vs. 32%) when voters are asked which the two is the best leader for Britain 'right now, to deal with the economy in recession'. But when the same voters are asked which party leader would be the right Prime Minister 'to lead Britain forward after the next general election', David Cameron is favoured over Gordon Brown (albeit by a narrower 42%/35% margin).

Amber waves of change

Barack Obama's election to be the 44th American President has had a marked impact on the attitudes of UK voters to the United States, the latest Populus poll reveals. The number of British adults believing that it is important for us to have 'a close and special relationship with the USA' has jumped from 58% to 80%, the number judging America to be 'a force for good in the world' has risen from 44% to 54%.

In a telling turnaround of attitudes, revealing how much more warmly Britain feels towards the President-Elect Obama than to the current incumbent, more than three voters in five (61%) want Gordon Brown to be 'as close to Barack Obama as Tony Blair has been'.

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Change most of them believed in

In the end the US polls got it about right: there was a range of predictions, of course, and some were closer to the result than others, but the average of the final campaign polls was virtually spot on, showing Obama beating McCain 52% to 45%, compared with an actual margin of 52%/46%. Barack Obama is the first Democrat since Jimmy Carter in 1976 to win more than half of the popular vote. Some key factors in the result:

- Overall turnout was higher than in 2004, but especially so among African Americans and those voting for the first time – the two groups among whom Obama had his biggest leads.
- John McCain won the election by a 12% margin among white voters – but they made up less than three quarters of the electorate (20 years ago about 90% of US voters were white).
- Barack Obama won 95% of black voters and two thirds of Latinos; with the electorate projected to become progressively less white in the years ahead, it is arithmetically impossible for the Republicans to win a Presidential election again unless they can do substantially better among non-white voters.
- Women favoured Obama by a big margin (13%), men only narrowly (1%), but the latter is a more significant result – it is the first time since 1976 that the Democrat candidate for President has won a majority of men.

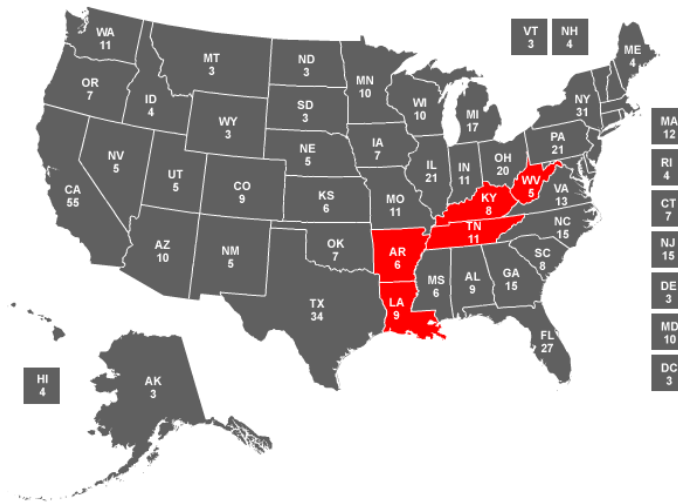
Clinton plus/minus

In terms of scale, the Obama victory closely resembles Bill Clinton's first win, in 1992: a margin of about 6% in the popular vote and around 200 in the electoral college.

But Barack Obama won two states that Bill Clinton didn't win (nor Jimmy Carter, the previous Democrat to win the Presidency): Virginia and Indiana. Neither state had voted for a Democrat since 1964, when Lyndon Johnson won all but six states in his decimation of Barry Goldwater. Before that Virginia hadn't backed a Democrat for President since Harry Truman in 1948, and Indiana, which gave Obama a clean-sweep of the Midwest, hadn't done so since Franklin Roosevelt's second term, in 1936. These were significant – surprising – victories, powered by the strength of the Obama 'ground war', the impact of the economy as an electoral issue in these states and, in the case of Virginia, significant demographic change.

Tellingly, however, there were five states (highlighted on the map below) that Bill Clinton won in 1992 – which, in fact, every winning Democrat has always won – but which went this time to John McCain, not Barack Obama. Furthermore, on a day when almost every single part of American society was swinging to the Democrats at

least to a degree, in three of these states (West Virginia, Tennessee and Arkansas) there was a swing away from the Democrats. The exit poll in these states reveals that nearly a third of white registered Democrats voted for John McCain – more than twice the national average. This is evidence that there remained to the end a corpus of white blue-collar Democrats who Barack Obama never convinced. They had strongly preferred Hillary Clinton as Democrat candidate and in the end some of them were willing to vote Republican rather than for Barack Hussein Obama.



A shortened version of the Populus US election analysis prepared for the BBC's post-election briefing, can be found here: <http://www.populuslimited.com/uploads/USElectionde-brief.pdf>

Links – <http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2008/president/>

The economy: what MPs really think

The latest Populus Parliament Panel survey has revealed that MPs are less optimistic than voters are about how the economy will fare over the next 12 months. Populus interviewed more than 100 MPs in October and November* and found that almost a quarter of them (23%) expected the economy to fare 'very badly' over the next 12 months for the country as a whole, while 48% predicted that it would fare 'quite badly'. This in contrast with recent data** for the general public, which found that just over a fifth (21%) of British adults expected the economy to fare 'very badly' for the country as a whole over the next 12 months, while 45% predicted that it would fare 'quite badly'.

Despite this pessimistic economic outlook about the next 12 months, MPs are generally more positive when asked to think about where the economy will be in five years time. More than half (53%) felt that the standard of living for a typical British family would be better in 5 years time than it is now, and just under a third (28%)

said it would be about the same. Many MPs also thought that house prices would be higher (49%) or about the same (35%) and unemployment lower (31%) or about the same (31%) in 5 years time as it is now. Conservative MPs tended to be less optimistic about the future than Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs, with 29% of Tories predicting that the standard of living for a typical British family would be worse in 5 years than it is now, 62% saying that unemployment would be higher in 5 years time and 17% saying that house prices would be lower in 5 years times than now.

When it came to predicting the condition of the Government's finances, 61% of MPs said that the national debt would be higher 5 years from now than it is today, and half of all respondents (50%) predicted that the tax burden – as represented by the proportion of GDP taken in tax – would be higher in 2013. However, the Government's finances were predicted to benefit from the recent intervention in the banking sector, with 73% of MPs predicting that the shares acquired in high street banks would be worth more in five years time than the Government paid for them.

In the context of the global downturn, most MPs expected that the British economy would be in a better condition (48%) or about the same condition (36%) in 2013 as the Eurozone economies (though most Liberal Democrat MPs thought the Eurozone economies would be doing better). MPs were split when it came to predicting the standing of the British economy in comparison with the US economy, with 33% predicting the British economy would be in better shape, 30% saying it would be in a worse state (including 63% of Tories), while 37% thought the US and British economies would be faring about the same.

*Populus Parliament Panel survey, 20th October – 7th November 2008

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