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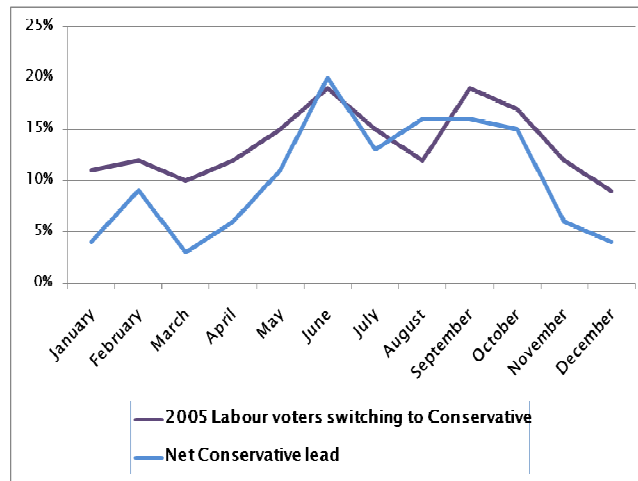
Brown's bailout bounce

There has been a sharp narrowing of the Conservative lead in the aftermath of the recent Pre-Budget Report, according to the latest round of published polls.

The Budget in March and the government's 'u-turn' over 10p tax in April led to a significant widening of the Conservative poll lead, which averaged more than 15% from then until the banking crisis in mid-September lifted the Labour vote from about 28% to about 32% – mainly at the expense of the Liberal Democrats, Scottish and Welsh nationalists and Greens.

Since the government's package of measures to address the recession was announced in the PBR Labour's average rating in published polls has risen further to 34.5%, with the Conservative lead down to about 6%.

Part of this latest narrowing is a result of Labour supporters becoming more likely to say they would definitely vote – solidification, rather than growth, of Labour's vote – but there is also clear evidence that some former Labour voters who had switched their support to the Conservatives during the summer have reverted to Labour. The graph below, based on Populus poll data for The Times, shows the steep decline in the proportion of past Labour voters switching to the Conservatives – and the correlation between this proportion and the overall party lead.



Links – <http://www.populus.co.uk/the-times-the-times-poll-december-2008-071208.html>

Dealing with recession

Underlining Labour's (relative) recovery in the voting intention polls, Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling have slightly increased their lead over David Cameron and George Osborne as the team most trusted to deal with Britain's recession. The latest Populus poll for The Times finds 40% preferring the Labour team against 31% for the Conservatives – the clearest lead for Labour on this measure since the end of the Brown honeymoon bounce in October last year. But comparing current voter attitudes on which team can be most trusted on the economy with the period before the collapse of Northern Rock the picture is less positive for Labour. At the end of the summer of 2007, 61% preferred Brown & Darling, compared with 27% favouring Cameron & Osborne. The turbulent economic and financial events since then have had the overall effect of reducing trust in the Prime Minister and Chancellor by more than 20%, while increasing trust in the official Opposition team by just 4%. The number of voters not trusting either party has nearly trebled.

Ambivalent about the future

Poll data continues to show a marked dichotomy between the views of voters about the prospects for the country and the prospects for themselves and their families – with most people significantly more optimistic about their personal position than they are about Britain. A new online survey by Populus puts optimism/pessimism about 'the current situation and prospects' for families at +4%, but for the country as a whole at -35%. The polls consistently suggest that most voters think the recession will hit the country in general – other people and other businesses – harder than it will hit them. If they have cause to revise this judgement in the months ahead we can expect a major correction not only in polling on views of the economy, but probably in terms of political attitudes too.

Record breaker

As George W. Bush enters his final month in the White House he is tantalisingly close to the setting an unwanted record for the lowest Presidential approval rating ever. The 44th President has already achieved a lower approval rating than Richard Nixon managed at the height of Watergate (24%) – but he has so far only equalled the all-time low of 22%, garnered by Harry Truman in January 1952. President Bush has, however, already set the record for the highest *disapproval* rating – because he divides opinion more starkly than any of his predecessors and very people are neutral, or don't have a view. In November a CNN/Opinion Research Centre poll found 76% of US voters saying they disapprove of his record as President, smashing the previous highs of 66% for President Nixon and 67% for President Truman. The same pollster found in August that 26% of Americans think Mr Bush is the very worst President ever, while not a single respondent thought he had been the best ever.

Links – <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/05/01/bush.poll/>

Emptier stockings

British consumers will spend 8.8% less on Christmas presents than they did last year, according to new Populus polling data for The Times. Every December Populus asks a nationally representative sample of adults how much they expect to spend on Christmas presents. The average this year is £358.56, down £34.64 on last year's figure. 4% plan to spend nothing at all, while at the opposite extreme 5% say they will spend more than £1,000.

Gifts from grandparents may be particularly Spartan this year, the poll suggests: the cut-back on Christmas spending is particularly severe among over-65s, who say they expect to spend a third less than last year. There will also be far fewer presents under trees in Scotland and Wales this year than last, with a 24% drop in spending predicted by voters in those parts of Britain.

Links – <http://www.populus.co.uk/the-times-the-times-poll-december-2008-071208.html>

Retirement dreams

Britons are more likely to want to retire to another country than the people of any other EU country, according to a new pan-EU study commissioned by the European Commission. 15% of British voters said this; only Ireland, Belgium and Luxembourg were also in double figures. Ironically, some might feel, the lowest proportion of people aspiring to retire abroad is in Poland and Romania (both 1%).

The survey found further marked differences between EU countries about where people would like to live when they retire,

In southern European countries, the largest group of respondents would like to retire to the countryside – with Greeks (46%) most likely to do so. Northern Europeans do

not share this aspiration: only 6% of Danes, 8% of Germans and Swedes and 9% of Finns say they would like to love to the countryside upon retirement. In Britain about one in seven (14%) would like to retire to the countryside.

Nearly three in five Danes (59%) say they would like, when retired, simply to move to a smaller home in the same place they currently live, nearly twice the average for all EU countries. 41% of British people said this – but only 15% of Greeks.

Slovenians are vastly more likely than any other EU population to want to move into sheltered housing upon retirement: 41% said this. Germany and Austria had the next largest proportion, 24%, taking this view – with less than 10% sharing this aspiration in most other EU countries. 6% of British adults hope to retire to sheltered accommodation.

Links – http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_247_en.pdf

Populus in brief

- Recent data from the AA/Populus Panel of AA members has found that 65% of panellists would never use so-called ‘pay lanes’. The Government is considering introducing an additional lane to some of Britain’s busiest motorways, with this lane being reserved for those drivers who are willing to pay to use it. However, 34% of AA/Populus panellists said that they wouldn’t use ‘pay lanes’ out of principal and a further 31% said they would never use the lanes because they would not want to incur a charge.
- A recent Populus poll for the National Year of Reading has shows that nearly half of all men have lied about books they’ve read to impress a potential partner. And nearly a third of women have done the same.
- A Populus survey for the Government’s ‘Time to Talk’ campaign has revealed the pressures faced by teenagers at Christmas; two thirds feel pressured to drink, and a third feel pressure to have sex. 77% of boys say pressure from friends influences their actions at Christmas.
- A Populus poll conducted in Greater Manchester in September & October successfully predicted the outcome of the Congestion Charge referendum – the only poll to do so. As the poll had indicated, all ten boroughs voted overwhelmingly against the Congestion Charge.

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