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An election now?

Just over half the country wants an immediate general election, according to a new poll by Populus for ITV Ten O'Clock News. Within this headline figure there is a stark divide between the supporters of different parties. Three quarters of those who say they would vote Conservative want an election now, but only just over half (52%) of people who would vote Lib Dem and less than a third (30%) of Labour voters share this view.

The poll also indicates that many voters have responded to the ongoing stories about MPs' expenses by deciding they probably won't vote at all. The Populus survey conducted on Tuesday and Wednesday found the average likelihood to vote at its lowest point since the last election – and only 45% said they were 'certain to vote', down from 51% ten days earlier and 57% a month ago. This would represent a significant drop in turnout from the 62% who voted at the last general election.

Links – <http://populus.co.uk/itv-news-itv-news-poll-may-2009-200509.html>

A plague on both their houses?

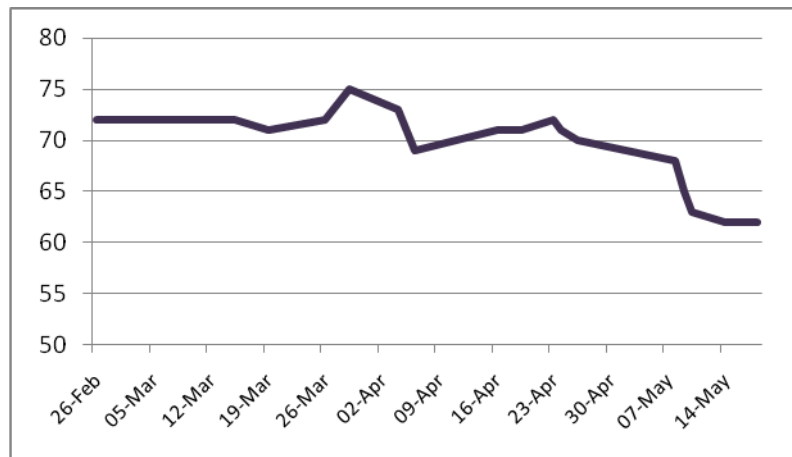
Revelations about the gory details of abuse of the system of Parliamentary allowances by some MPs has hit the Labour and Conservative parties equally hard, according to the latest round of published polls. The latest Populus poll for The Times was the first to be conducted after the scandal broke and showed support for both main parties dropping by 4%. Subsequent polls have told essentially the same story. Regardless of which party's MPs have been more in the spotlight on particular days, or which party those accused of the most serious abuses represent, the great

majority of voters think that the parties are “as bad as each other”: 86% agreed with this statement in the most recent Populus poll.

Because Labour and the Conservatives have seen their support fall by similar amounts over the last couple of weeks, the Conservative lead has remained about the same – but David Cameron’s party has slipped below 40% for the first time this year and the Conservative average in published polls for this month matches its lowest level since the non-election of October 2007.

Labour meanwhile is averaging less than 24% in published polls since the Daily Telegraph started to publish details of MPs’ allowances – their lowest level of support since the Michael Foot era over 25 years ago.

The graph below shows the decline in the proportion of voters backing the two main parties – from over 70% in late April to barely 60% now, representing about 5 million voters switching away from both Labour and Conservative, with the main beneficiaries being UKIP, the BNP and the Greens.



Labour support plus Conservative support (published polls)

Links – <http://populus.co.uk/the-times-times-poll-may-2009-080509.html>

The state of the Union

Most voters in England and Wales think that Scottish devolution has been better for Scotland than it has for the rest of Britain, according to a special poll by Populus to mark the tenth anniversary of the Scottish Parliament. 70% in England and Wales think devolution has been good for Scotland – and exactly the same proportion of Scottish voters agree – while only 42% think Scottish devolution has been good for the rest of Britain. Most think that relations between Scotland and England haven’t changed as a result of devolution, but one in four Scottish voters think that relations have worsened, compared with only one in 7 voters in England and Wales.

The poll found widely differing views on the flow of funds to Scotland. Scottish voters were ten times as likely (41%) as those in England and Wales to think that Scotland gets too little money from the rest of the UK; voters in England and Wales

were ten times as likely (31%) as those north of the border (3%) to think that Scotland gets too much money from the rest of the UK.

21% of Scottish voters now favour full independence, while 15% in England & Wales say that if there were to be a referendum on the issue they would 'hope to see Scotland become an independent country'; a further 36% of voters in England and Wales 'wouldn't mind either way what Scottish voters decided in such a referendum' – meaning that slightly less than half of voters in the rest of Britain now actively want Scotland to remain part of the UK.

Links – <http://populus.co.uk/the-times-the-times-scotland-poll-anniversary-of-devolution-may-2009-030509.html>

How satisfied is Dimitar Berbatov?

87% of UK voters are satisfied with the life they lead, making us one of the more contented nations in the EU, according to a study published recently by the European Commission. Britain ranks alongside Belgium on this measure and fractionally behind Ireland (88%). The Dutch top the contentment league table, with a remarkable 98% saying they are satisfied with the life they lead, just ahead of Sweden 97%, Denmark 96% and Finland 95%. The Bulgarians are least contented, with just 38% saying they are satisfied with their lives. Hungary and Portugal (both 46%) and Romania are the only other member states where less than half of people are satisfied with their lives.

Across the EU voters are substantially less satisfied with their national governments than with their own lives. For the EU as a whole 76% are satisfied with the life they lead and only 34% with their national government; satisfaction with national Parliaments is, across the board, even lower. In only six of the 27 EU member states are more than half of voters satisfied with their country's government: Finland (68%), Netherlands (66%), Cyprus (65%), Denmark (60%), Luxembourg (60%) and Sweden (56%). The UK (29%) ranks in the bottom third of EU countries in terms of trust in its government; among western European countries only Italy (26%) and Greece (23%) are lower, and satisfaction is, again, lowest in Bulgaria (15%).

Links – http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_uk_nat.pdf

Generation O

We are familiar with the 'nature versus nurture' debate in relation to child development. In political science a similar debate rages over how party allegiances are formed, between advocates of the 'lifecycle' theory, which holds that the greatest influence on people's views is the changes in their responsibilities and priorities as they get older and backers of the 'generational influences' theory, which holds that

political affiliation is forged more by the social, economic and political culture that prevails when people are entering adulthood.

The ever-fascinating American blog www.fivethirtyeight.com has explored this debate by analysing the responses of an aggregated poll sample of 123,000 US voters interviewed by Gallup over the last year to the question of which party they more identified with, Democrat or Republican. The table below shows the mean lead for the Democrats among current voters who were born during the last ten Presidencies. The party advantage for the Democrats does not correlate simply with age (as perhaps it should if the 'lifecycle theory' was wholly right); the Democrat lead is markedly lower among those having their 18th birthday during the tenure of the two most popular Republican Presidents, Eisenhower and Reagan, offering some support for the 'generational influences' theory - on which basis President George W. Bush may be judged to have left his party a most unwelcome generational legacy.

18th birthday in the Presidency of...	Now aged...	Democrat lead in party ID...
George W. Bush	18-25	16%
Bill Clinton	26-33	11%
George H.W. Bush	34-37	9%
Ronald Reagan	38-45	6%
Jimmy Carter	46-50	8%
Gerald Ford	51-53	11%
Richard Nixon	54-59	14%
Lyndon Johnson	60-65	12%
John F. Kennedy	66-69	14%
Dwight Eisenhower	70-77	6%

Links - <http://www.fivethirtyeight.com/>

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