

In This Issue

- Bouncing to an Autumn Election?
- Solid as a Rock
- It's getting crowded in the centre
- Green Energy
- Troops Out?
- Less smoke

You can read this issue of Populus Perspective online at www.populus.co.uk.

Bouncing to an Autumn Election?

With the Labour party conference underway, the latest Populus polling suggests Gordon Brown has had a highly successful first few months as Prime Minister.

A little over half of the public (53%) believes that Gordon Brown “has succeeded in bringing a real feeling of renewal” to the government – a figure that includes three quarters of Labour supporters, over half of Liberal Democrat voters and even a third of Conservative supporters. Gordon Brown has also convinced 73% of the public that the New Labour project will continue and that “the Labour Party is never going to return to being Old Labour.”

Across a range of issues – the NHS, improving standards in schools, managing the economy and representing Britain’s interests in the EU – the Labour party leads the Conservatives. When presented with a ‘forced choice’ – the choice of Prime Minister without the option of Ming Campbell or other parties – over half of voters (55%) choose Brown versus 36% choosing Cameron.

With most recent voting intention polls suggesting that Labour is maintaining a lead of more than 5% over the Conservatives, the Prime Minister is facing a dilemma: should he call an early election in late October or early November,

when dark evenings and uncertain weather are likely to affect turnout, or get on with governing and risk his poll lead diminishing.

Labour's fortunes contrast with the difficulties faced by the Liberal Democrats. More than two thirds of people, 69%, believe that the "Liberal Democrats are basically a protest vote" and that they have no realistic chance of "ever forming a government". This figure has increased by 8% since last year. Even amongst Liberal Democrat voters, 41% see their own party as a protest vote rather than a potential party of government. The same percentage of Liberal Democrat voters agree that, while they are decent people, Liberal Democrat policies "don't really add up". Across all voters this figure rises to 68% (a small increase of 2% over last year).

When offered the statement "If the Liberal Democrats are to stand any chance of making an impact they need to replace Ming Campbell with a younger and more charismatic leader", 63% agreed. Among Liberal Democrat supporters, two thirds (67%) agreed that the party should look to replace Sir Menzies with a new leader.

The Times will publish further Populus polling to coincide with the Conservative party conference. As ever, this polling will be available via our website.

Links - <http://www.populus.co.uk> and <http://www.populus.co.uk/the-times-the-times-party-conference-poll-2007-090907.html>

Solid as a Rock

A special Populus poll for The Times on the Northern Rock crisis - the first on the bank's troubles - shows the public remains confident in the economy, their banks, and the Government's economic leadership.

86% of people have either a "great deal" or "moderate" confidence in their own bank or building society to manage its lending and protect savings. By contrast, only one in twenty have "no confidence". Confidence in the housing market remains strong too, with 48% expecting prices to rise, more than three times the number (15%) expecting them to fall. When asked about Britain's economy as a whole people remain, on balance, optimistic with 53% expecting it to do "very well" or "quite well" against 45% expecting it to do badly. However, since Populus last asked this question in March 2007 net optimism has declined by 14%.

Previous research has suggested that a major asset for the Labour government - and Gordon Brown in particular - is their strong economic record. The polling suggests this reputation remains intact. When asked which team - Labour's of Brown and Darling or the Conservative's of Cameron and Osborne - would best deal with economic problems, 56% of people chose the Labour team. This is more than three times the number that chose Cameron and Osborne, with fewer than one in five (18%) choosing the Conservatives. Indeed, even amongst their own voters, only 60%

back the Conservative duo – with one in four Conservative voters preferring Brown and Darling to Cameron and Osborne. While confidence in the Labour team has declined by 5% since this question was last posed at the start of September (as part of our regular Times polling), trust in the Conservative team has declined by 9% in the same time frame.

When asked to attribute blame for the problems experienced by Northern Rock, the public places more blame with Northern Rock itself, the Bank of England and City authorities and the problems in the American mortgage market than they do on the Labour Government.

Links – <http://www.populus.co.uk/the-times-northern-rock-170907.html>

It's getting crowded in the centre

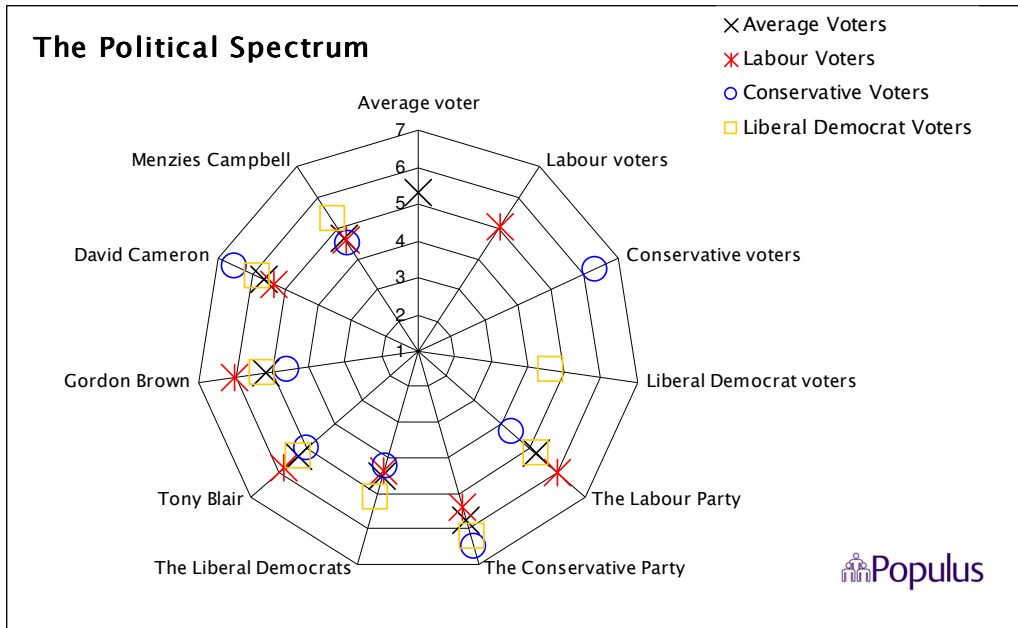
The results of recent Populus polling show that more voters place themselves in the centre ground and that the parties and leaders are converging around them. Both major parties and their leaders are seen by voters as moving ever closer to the centre of the political spectrum. The Liberal Democrats and leader Sir Menzies Campbell are seen as drifting to the left, away from average voters.

For the fifth consecutive year Populus and The Times, as part of a special party conference poll, have asked voters to place themselves, the parties and the leaders on the traditional left to right political spectrum. Half of all voters place themselves exactly in the centre ground (up from 45% last year). Voters were asked to place themselves on a ten point scale, with 10 meaning very right wing and 5 being exactly in the centre and the average score of all voters on this measure was 5.33 points.

Of all the parties, the Labour Party is seen as the closest politically to the average voter being slightly to the left at 5.20 (the difference between them is 0.13 points). The Conservatives are seen as being 0.43 points to the right of the average voter at 5.76, but this is considerably closer than the Conservative Party was viewed last year when they were seen as 0.82 points adrift from the average voter. The Liberal Democrats are the party seen as both the furthest to the left and furthest from the average voter; they are 0.80 points to the left of the average voter at 4.53.

None of the current party leaders manage to match the political positioning of Tony Blair, who was placed on almost exactly the same spot as the average voter at just 0.02 points to the left of them. Of the current leaders, Gordon Brown is seen as closest to the average voter: he is 0.17 points to their left, a position considerably closer than last year when he was viewed as 0.42 points to the left. David Cameron has also moved significantly closer to the average voter compared to his position last year; he is now viewed as 0.30 points to the right of them compared to his position last year when he was 0.73 points to the right. Sir Menzies Campbell is the only party leader to have moved away from the average voter: he is now seen as 0.67 points to their left whereas last year he was placed 0.45 points away.

Labour voters, curiously, place their own party further to the right than they do either the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats (6.03, 5.30, 4.37) making them the party supporters furthest from their own party (a full point away).



Links - <http://www.populus.co.uk/the-times-the-times-party-conference-poll-2007-090907.html>

Green Energy

The latest Populus survey of Concerned Consumers – those consumers who not only care about social, environmental and ethical issues but actually change their purchasing behaviour in response – suggests widespread uncertainty over how ‘green energy’ is produced and scepticism over the environmental credentials of the UK’s energy companies.

When asked to rate energy companies on a scale of 1 to 100, with 1 meaning respondents would avoid the company themselves and advise friends and families to do the same and 100 meaning the respondent is a strong advocate for the company, no energy company achieved a score above 50 (the neutral point). Good Energy, the top performing company, managed a score of 48 with the worst performing companies EDF and United Utilities scoring 42. For comparison, this month’s top performing company across sectors was Google at 70 and the worst performing McDonalds at 36.

While the concerned consumers took a broadly negative view of the industry as a whole – with only 14% agreeing that energy companies were doing enough to address green issues – particular companies were singled out as positively addressing environmental concerns. When asked to rate the performance of

individual companies on a 1 to 5 scale Scottish and Southern, United Utilities, Ecotricity and Good Energy all scored above 4.5 with Good Energy topping the list at 4.76. The strong showing for Good Energy suggests their advertising as “100 per cent renewable” is proving successful. British Gas is bottom of the table at 3.56, despite the recent launch of a ‘zero carbon’ tariff.

However, concerned consumers, like the public at large, were confused by so called ‘green’ energy tariffs. Over a third (35%) believe the tariffs meant that all their electricity would come from renewable sources, just under one in four (24%) thought their supplier would increase the total amount of renewable energy it generated and 29% thought a contribution would be made on their behalf to support new renewable energy development. Nearly one in eight, or 12%, thought that no new renewable energy was generated, and that energy companies were merely marketing the energy from renewables the law required them to produce.

These figures highlight the widespread confusion over green energy that has prompted consumer groups to call for an independent rating system and for government regulator Ofgem, to begin an enquiry. In most cases, the ‘green’ energy simply forms part of the overall mix sent to everyone.

For more information about the Concerned Consumer Index – and the innovative Populus methodology to identify those whose purchasing decisions are affected by ethical decisions – see our website

Links – <http://www.populus.co.uk/-the-concerned-consumer-index-article.html>

Troops Out?

A survey by Rasmussen Reports has shown that American voters are fairly evenly split over the report produced by the Commander of the US Army in Iraq, General David Petraeus, with 43% supporting his recommendations – which include a withdrawal of 30,000 of the current 160,000 soldiers from Iraq by next summer. Around 38% of voters oppose the recommendations.

Support for the recommendations varies sharply across party lines: 66% of Republicans support the plan compared with just 27% of Democrats. Women and those on higher incomes also tend to be more supportive of the plan.

In a poll taken shortly before the report’s publication, 54% stated that the report was not likely to change their opinion on future American involvement in the war. In part, this may be because only 39% of voters believed that the report would accurately and honestly present the Commander’s own views, despite his assurances to the contrary. Belief in the report’s honesty was as low as 25% among Democrats.

A majority (71%) of American voters expect that “a large number” of US troops will still be serving in Iraq at the end of the *next* Presidential term, in five years time.

Iraq continues to be of major interest among American voters, with 92% saying they are following events closely according to a poll earlier in the summer – a figure likely to be related to the fact that 55% of Americans know someone serving in Iraq.

Links –

http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/43_support_petraeus_recommmendation_38_oppose

Less Smoke

More than half of smokers light up fewer cigarettes following the introduction of the ban on smoking in public places in England in July. The poll conducted by Ciao Surveys in August showed that 52% of respondents now smoke fewer cigarettes, at least when they are in pubs and bars, although only 2% have kicked the habit entirely. Over 15% say the ban has prompted them to smoke less at all times.

The smoking ban had also changed the behaviour of non-smokers with nearly a third stating that they have visited pubs and bars more often since July.

Smokers and non-smokers are, perhaps unsurprisingly, divided in their attitudes to the ban, with around 32% of smokers supporting the law preventing them from lighting up in enclosed public spaces compared to more than 87% of non-smokers. Non-smokers are also more likely to support the introduction of a ban preventing the use of cigarettes, pipes and cigars in all outdoor areas, with more than half of non-smokers supporting such a measure compared to just over 11% of smoking respondents.

If you, or someone you know, would like to receive Perspective please let us know by e-mailing perspective@populus.co.uk or you can subscribe online at www.populus.co.uk.

**Populus, Northburgh House, 10 Northburgh Street, London EC1V 0AT.
T: +44 (0)20 7253 9900**