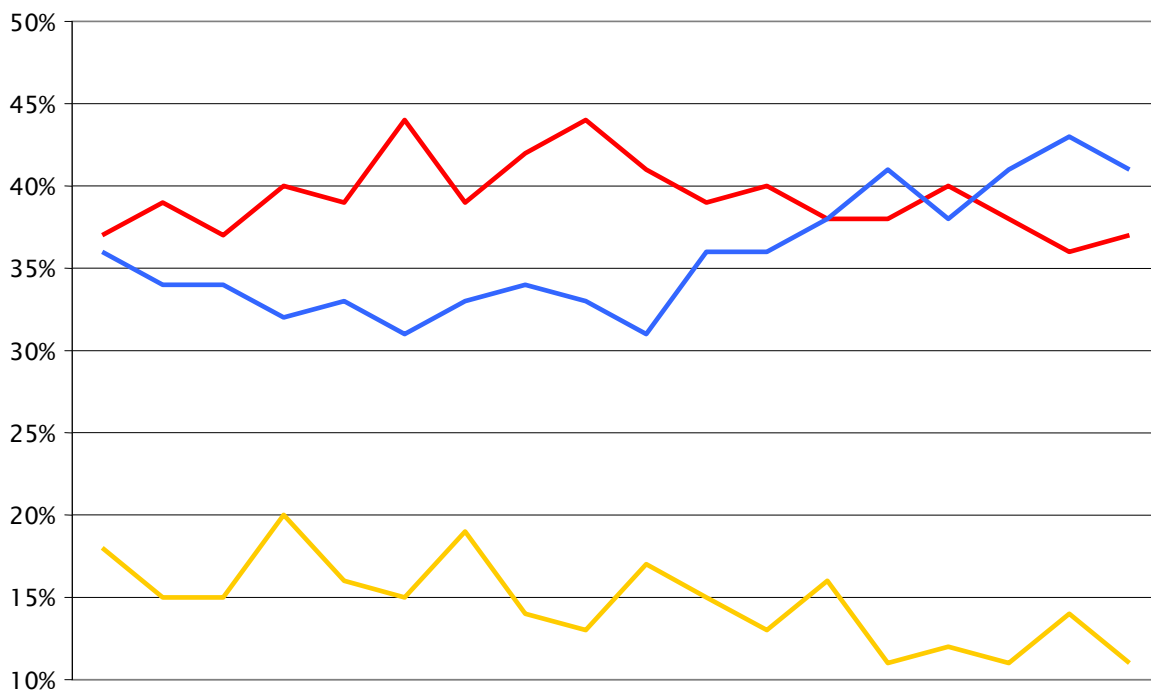


Populus Perspective – October 2007

Election fever burns out

The recent turbulence in British politics – with an 11% Labour lead transmogrifying into a 7% Conservative lead within a fortnight – has provided powerful evidence of how much polls can influence events. Widening Labour poll leads during the summer and through the week of the Labour conference created almost unstoppable momentum for an autumn election, before polls picking up a sharp Conservative revival during their conference caused the electoral brakes to be abruptly applied.

Most of the increase in Tory support over this period came from the Liberal Democrats; their poll rating has dropped to an average of just 13% in October, their lowest monthly average for a decade and 10% down on the last election. Ming Campbell's age – or the media's pre-occupation with it – was (he felt) an insurmountable barrier to getting the Lib Dem message across, but the reason that getting the party message across better was felt to be so critical is that the Lib Dem poll rating has plummeted.



Graph: All published polls in September and October

Countdown to Clinton?

It is less than three months until the US Presidential election campaign begins in earnest, as voters go to the polls in the first of the sequence of primary elections to choose each party's nominee.

The latest polls of likely voters in the early primary states reinforce Hillary Clinton's position as runaway favourite for the Democratic nomination. In Iowa, where the party caucuses traditionally kick-off the election process in January, Mrs Clinton holds a relatively small lead of about 5% over Barack Obama – but it is a sustained and consistent lead: it is more than two months since any other candidate led there. In all the states that follow Iowa, Senator Clinton is 20% or more ahead of her nearest rival and in most cases the gap is widening, not narrowing.

The Republican race remains much less clear-cut. Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani is the leader in national polls, but he is failing to translate that position into leads in the states where the first primary elections are held. Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney is more than 10% ahead in Iowa and has led in every poll there since the end of May. Mr Romney is also ahead in New Hampshire, the traditional second-stop on the primary trail. He will hope success in these high-profile early contests will boost his support nationally and strengthen his position in the southern states of South Carolina and Florida, the only states of the seven voting before 'Super Tuesday' on February 5th – when 20 states hold their primaries – where Mr Giuliani currently leads.

National opinion polls testing the different possible party nominees against one another to gauge the likely outcome of the general election have also recently become more favourable for Hillary Clinton. Earlier in the year these polls consistently showed most of the likely Republican candidates beating any of the probable Democrat ones. This position turned around during the summer and the opposite now applies, with the Democrats winning every electoral permutation, and Mrs Clinton faring better against every Republican than any of her primary opponents. At the same time, however, the New York Senator also has higher negative ratings than any other candidate; according to a recent online Zogby poll, 50% of US voters say they would 'never' vote for Hillary Clinton, compared with 43% who said this of Rudy Giuliani, 42% of Mitt Romney and 37% of Barack Obama.

<http://www.zogby.com/news/ReadNews.dbm?ID=1376>

Wizard of Oz?

After several weeks of pre-election sparring between the parties, Australian Prime Minister John Howard recently called a general election for 24th November.

The first polls since the election date was announced show Mr Howard's Liberal Party halving the longstanding lead held by the opposition Labor Party, from 12% to 6% – with a number of polls in key battleground constituencies suggesting that the swing may be even less in several important marginal seats, casting more doubt on what many pundits had judged to be an inevitable Labor victory, despite a strong economy and polls indicating that well over half of Australian voters think the country is “heading in the right direction” (in stark contrast to other countries – including Britain – where the governing party has been in power for a number of years).

Mr Howard, already Australia's second-longest serving Prime Minister, opened the campaign with a promise of major tax cuts if re-elected – though he has also said that he would stand down well before another election. He trails Labor leader Kevin Rudd in polls on who would be the best Prime Minister and the immediate reaction to Sunday's first televised debate did nothing to close that gap, with some research pronouncing the encounter a messy draw and some finding Mr Rudd the clear winner among swing voters who watched the debate.

<http://www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2007/4230/>

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,22625680-5013871,00.html>

Concerned consumers confirm Sony top spot

Sony has been placed first among consumer electronics manufacturers by the latest poll of Britain's Concerned Consumers carried out by Populus with Good Business for The Times. Reaffirming its reputation as one the world's leading brands, the company finished ahead of rivals such as Panasonic, Philips and Apple in Populus's monthly Corporate Thermometer which measures ethical consumers' overall impressions of firms' general behaviour. Only Google scores more highly across all sectors of the economy.

Respondents also placed Sony first in its class for addressing social and environment issues, but overall 4 out of 5 Concerned Consumers think that consumer electronics manufacturers are failing to do enough to tackle their environmental and social responsibilities. Given a choice of initiatives that manufacturers could undertake, 28% of Concerned Consumers back ensuring that all electronic components are recycled at the end of their lifecycle, compared with only 16% who would like help in changing the way they use products to make them more energy efficient.

Elsewhere, Northern Rock's recent troubles seem to have done little to damage the reputation of banks overall. Instead, 39% of Concerned Consumers blame Northern Rock's management for its recent troubles, compared with just 12% of who blame the Government and 5% who blame the Bank of England. 70% would prefer to see a compensation scheme operated and paid for by the financial services industry, compared with just 19% who believe it is the Government's job to provide full compensation.

Good (European) neighbours can be good friends

Nearly three in five adults across the EU (57%) think that the neighbouring countries to the European Union do not share the same values as the EU, according to a major study recently published by the European Commission. Fewer than one in three (30%) think the EU's neighbours do share its values.

The only two countries thought of as 'neighbours' to the EU by more than half are Ukraine (57%), which shares a border with four EU member states (Slovenia, Hungary, Poland and Romania) and Russia (55%), whose territory borders five EU countries (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland). Belarus, the immediate neighbour of Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, was named by 49%. 29% across the EU and, strangely, more than half of Greeks (53%), think of Georgia as an EU neighbour, even though it is hundreds of miles from the nearest EU country, while slightly fewer (28%) think this of Morocco even though it is just a few miles from Spain.

Two thirds of people (67%) in EU member states are in favour of the EU actively promoting peace and stability among its neighbours by encouraging reform, and believe that doing so 'will reduce the risk of war and conflicts in Europe'. However almost half (45%) think that promoting reforms in those countries 'could endanger our own peace and stability'.

There is a similar ambivalence on the potential economic benefits to EU states of assisting neighbouring ones, with 61% thinking that helping adjacent countries 'will ensure the EU's prosperity', but considerably more (79%) also thinking that helping these countries 'will be very expensive to the EU'. Almost three quarters see the opening to EU companies of markets in neighbour countries as one of the main benefits of helping these nations - with rather fewer, less than two-thirds (62%) thinking that the EU should be willing to give easier access to its own markets in order to help neighbouring countries prosper.

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_285_en.pdf

Opinion formers put parties & leaders further from the centre ground than voters do

Each autumn before the Party Conference season, Populus asks the general population to place the main parties and major political figures on a left-right scale of 1-10 with 5 as the mid-point or centre ground. This year we have repeated the exercise with our panel of opinion formers, the Populus Network, and compared the results.

While the public believes Labour to be a fractionally right of centre party (5.20) and sees both it and the Conservatives (5.76) converging on where the mean voter puts themselves (5.33), opinion formers place much greater distance between the two parties (Labour 4.89, Conservatives 6.43). While the general population believes that Gordon Brown (5.16) and David Cameron (5.63) are converging, opinion formers have them

more widely apart (Brown 4.58, Cameron 6.29). The Network also places Brown to the left of the Party he leads, whereas the public place both in almost the same position. While opinion formers place Cameron's Conservatives to the right of him by almost the same degree as the general population, they put both considerably further to the right than voters do.

Like the public, our opinion formers put the Liberal Democrats (3.87) to the left of Labour (4.89) though they do so to a greater degree both absolutely and relatively. The Network also puts the Lib Dems comfortably to the left of its former leader Ming Campbell (4.25) who himself is seen as being to the left of Brown, though to a lesser extent by opinion formers than by the public at large.