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Britain Expects...

Higher mortgage rates, an influx of new immigrants, a Gordon Brown premiership, a royal engagement and a terrorist attack are all expected in 2007, according to the latest Populus poll for The Times. Nine out of ten people expect mortgage rates to rise (the poll was conducted before January's surprise decision by the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee to raise interest rates), and nearly three quarters (74%) expect "hundreds of thousands" of Romanians and Bulgarians to come to Britain following their countries' accession to the EU – a higher proportion than that expecting Gordon Brown to become prime minister (73%).

Nearly two thirds (65%) expect Prince William to announce his engagement. Women (71%) are rather more likely than men (59%) to expect this. 61% think it likely that Britain will suffer a major terrorist attack this year. This figure is identical to the proportion of Americans who expect a terrorist attack in the US, according to an Ipsos poll for the Associated Press and AOL News. Half as many British voters (30%) think it likely that Osama bin Laden will be captured or killed before the year is out; over-65s (41%) are much more likely to believe this than any other age group.

However, Americans (19%) are slightly more likely than Britons (16%) to think it likely that scientists will find evidence of extraterrestrial life this year; nearly as many people in Britain expect evidence of aliens as expect

Andy Murray to win Wimbledon (17%) – in fact, such is the gender gap in expectations of Murray, men are nearly twice as likely (18%) to think life will be found on other planets as to think Britain’s number one will win Wimbledon (10%), while substantially more women (24%) think the latter is more likely than the former (14%).

The Ipsos poll also found that 25% of Americans think it likely that Jesus Christ will return to earth in the next 12 months. 26% think the US will go to war with North Korea in 2007 and 40% expect war with Iran.

http://www.populuslimited.com/poll_summaries/2007_01_09_times.htm

<http://www.pollingreport.com/news.htm>

Quiet Clamour for Early Election

More than half of voters think that whoever takes over from Tony Blair (and, as noted above, nearly three quarters expect that to be Gordon Brown) should call a general election soon after entering 10 Downing Street, according to the latest Populus poll for The Times. 56% think a new Prime Minister should call an election “soon after taking over as Prime Minister to get the country’s endorsement”, while 38% think he should continue until 2009 or 2010 before doing so.

There is a stark divide along party lines: only among Labour voters is there a majority thinking that Mr Blair’s successor should continue for another two or three years before calling an election. 58% of Labour voters take this view, but two-thirds (66%) of all other voters think the new Prime Minister should seek their own mandate soon after taking over. 59% of Lib Dem supporters and more than three quarters (76%) of Conservative voters take this view.

Who would win such an election remains unclear. While the Conservatives lead Labour by 7 points with 39% (the highest ever rating for the Tories in a Populus poll), the gap narrows to 5 points when voters are asked to think ahead to the next election and choose between the Conservatives led by David Cameron, Labour led by Gordon Brown and the Liberal Democrats under Ming Campbell. Previously, introducing Gordon Brown into the equation has widened the Tory lead over Labour – by as much as 9 points in December 2005 and July 2006.

Either of the results suggested by the latest Populus poll – 39%/32% or 39%/34% – would almost certainly lead to there being a hung Parliament. The Times poll puts the Liberal Democrats on 18% – consistent with other recent polls showing Lib Dem support declining a little, having been above 20% throughout the last Parliament – but suggests that their vote would be squeezed further if Gordon Brown becomes Labour leader, dropping to 15%.

http://www.populuslimited.com/poll_summaries/2007_01_09_times.htm

Still Counting the Pfennigs

Less than half of citizens in Eurozone countries think adopting the euro has been beneficial, according to a new poll for the European Commission. Five years after the introduction of notes and coins, 48% say the euro “has been advantageous overall, and will strengthen us for the future” down from 59% when the same question was asked in 2002. The proportion saying the adoption of the euro has been “disadvantageous overall and will weaken us” rose from 29% to 38% over the same period. Ireland (75%), Finland (65%) and Luxembourg (64%) have the highest proportions seeing the euro as advantageous, with Greece (38%), the Netherlands (38%) and Italy (41%) the least likely to agree.

Easier and cheaper travel, simpler price comparisons and a reinforced place in the world for Europe are the main advantages cited by supporters; four fifths (81%) of those who see the euro as disadvantageous cite higher prices, with 19% complaining that it “complicates everyday life”.

After five years, just over half (57%) of Eurozone citizens say they now use the euro as a mental benchmark for small purchases, while just over a fifth (22%) still think in terms of their old national currency and a further 21% mentally use both. For exceptional purchases such as a car or a house, 40% use their old national currency as a mental benchmark while only 29% most often use the euro. The Irish are by far the most comfortable with the new currency, with 88% using it as a mental benchmark for exceptional purchases and 91% for small purchases. At the other end of the spectrum nearly two thirds of Belgians (65%) still think in terms of the franc for exceptional purchases, and nearly a third of people in the Netherlands (31%) still count in guilders for smaller items.

A third of people in the Eurozone say that they buy less since the introduction of the euro because they fear spending too much; a quarter say they buy more because they don't realise how much they are spending.

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl193_en.pdf

Troops Out

90% of French people want troops withdrawn from Iraq and 40% want them to leave immediately – yet a majority also supported enforcing the death sentence on Saddam Hussein, according to a poll for Harris Interactive conducted in December.

Withdrawal of troops is also supported by 84% of people in Spain, 83% in Britain, 82% of Germans and 73% of Italians – as well as two thirds of Americans (66%). At the same time majorities in five of the six countries surveyed supported the enforcement of the death sentence, with Italy the exception at 46%. People in the US (82%) and Britain (69%) were most likely to support the sentence being carried out.

The latest Populus poll for The Times, which presented respondents with two options, found that 60% of people in Britain now think British troops “should be withdrawn from Iraq as soon as possible even if Iraq is not completely stable”, while only 31% think troops should stay “for as long as it takes to make sure that Iraq is a stable democracy” – down 4 points since last November and the lowest such finding in the six times we have asked the question since July 2004.

President Bush is seen as being most to blame for the continuing violence and instability in Iraq. 34% name him as being most responsible (including 48% of Liberal Democrats) with 22% blaming the Iraqi people and 12% Al-Qaeda. Saddam Hussein and Iran tie on 4%, and 3% blame Tony Blair.

<http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/allnewsbydate.asp?NewsID=1133>

Pope Idol

Fidel Castro is more popular than George W Bush in France, Germany, Britain, Italy and Spain, according to the same HarrisInteractive poll. Nearly a quarter of Italians (24%) have a positive view of Cuba's communist dictator, compared to 21% with a favourable opinion of America's 43rd president. While only 11% of French people say their

opinion of Castro is positive, this is almost twice the 6% with a similar view of Bush.

Angela Merkel of Germany was the most popular of a selection of international leaders in three of the six countries surveyed – France, Britain and Spain (Germany itself was more favourable towards Pope Benedict and Jacques Chirac, although 51% of Germans also had a positive view of their Chancellor).

Nearly two thirds of Americans (64%) had a positive view of Tony Blair, making him more popular in the US than the Pope (51%) or President Bush (38%).

Angela Merkel was the most popular leader overall among the six countries with an average 48% having a positive opinion; the Pope was close behind on 46%. President Ahmadinejad of Iran trailed the field with 5%.

<http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/allnewsbydate.asp?NewsID=1133>

New York (v) New York ?

The next US presidential election could be an all-New York affair, according to recent polls of voters in next year's primaries. With the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary only a year away, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York remains ahead in the race for the Democrat nomination, with 33% among registered Democrats and Democrat-leaning voters according to a December Gallup poll, comfortably ahead of Illinois Senator Barack Obama (20%). Former Vice President and defeated presidential candidate Al Gore trails with 12%, ahead of his former running mate John Edwards on 8%. Among Republicans, Arizona Senator John McCain is neck-and-neck with Rudy Giuliani, the former Mayor of New York, with 28% each. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is third on 12%.

Despite the Democrats' victory in the November Congressional elections, some recent polls have suggested that Republican candidates are still favoured for the presidency. McCain and Giuliani lead Clinton by 7 points and 5 points respectively, and Obama by 12 and 13 points, according to a poll for Investor's Business Daily and TIPP conducted by Technometrica Market Intelligence on 2-3 January. Their lead over Edwards is narrower: 5 points for Giuliani and only 1 point for McCain. Both Obama and Edwards are comfortably ahead of the Republican Mitt Romney.

At the end of December Rasmussen found that Giuliani would beat Clinton by 4 points (47%–43%), Gore by 3 points (46%–43%), and Edwards by 8 points (49%–41%). McCain would also beat Clinton by 4 points, Gore or Edwards by 5 points, and Obama by 6 points, according to this poll.

The Republican advantage suggested in these surveys is underlined by research for CBS News which shows that while Giuliani and McCain each have a net favourability rating of 19%, Clinton is a much more divisive figure – while 43% have a favourable view of her, 38% have the opposite.

However, recent polls are not consistent in suggesting a Republican lead. A Newsweek poll conducted in December put Hillary Rodham Clinton ahead of John McCain by 50% to 43%; Mr Giuliani was one point behind his fellow New Yorker, by 48% to 47%. The poll put both Republicans ahead of Senator Obama, but by narrow margins – Giuliani by 47%–44%, and McCain by 45%–43%.

<http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/index.cfm/fuseaction/viewItem/itemID/14277>

<http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/index.cfm/fuseaction/viewItem/itemID/14152>

<http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/index.cfm/fuseaction/viewItem/itemID/14220>

www.pollingreport.com/2008.htm

www.pollingreport.com/WH08rep.htm

www.pollingreport.com/WH08dem.htm

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