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Brownian Motion

As the moment of Tony Blair's retirement as Prime Minister nears, speculation grows about the impact that Gordon Brown – his presumed successor – will have on the poll ratings of the main political parties.

The latest poll, by Populus for The Times suggested that the Conservative Party's lead would rise from 8% now to 13% if Gordon Brown was Labour leader.

But closer analysis suggests that the clearest message from the polls is that many voters are simply not sure what they'll do if and when Gordon Brown succeeds Tony Blair as Labour leader and Prime Minister.

In these polls we first ask respondents how they would vote if there was a general election tomorrow. We then ask how they would vote at the next election if Gordon Brown is the Labour leader (and Conservatives and Lib Dems continue to be led by Messrs Cameron and Campbell). In the latest Populus poll, conducted a few days ago, more than one person in four (27%) gave a different answer to the second question than to the first. Only 6% of current Conservative voters did so, but nearly a quarter of those naming Labour (23%) or Lib Dem (24%) as the party they would vote for in an election now said they would do something different at the next election with Gordon Brown as Labour leader. Half of those giving 'don't

know' as their answer to the question of how they would vote at the next election, were willing to name a party they would vote for if Mr Brown was Labour leader.

Pollsters call such movements of voters 'churning'. The biggest aspects of the 'churn' are 7% of current Labour voters becoming 'don't knows' with Gordon Brown as leader and 9% saying they wouldn't vote at all, while slightly fewer (10% of current 'don't knows' and 6% of those saying they wouldn't vote in an election now) move in the opposite direction.

Churning of roughly this scale is beneath the surface of almost all polls asking how people would vote if or when the Chancellor becomes Prime Minister, with the overall net effect of the churn varying somewhat from poll to poll depending on exactly when the snapshot of opinion was taken. The constant is the uncertainty.

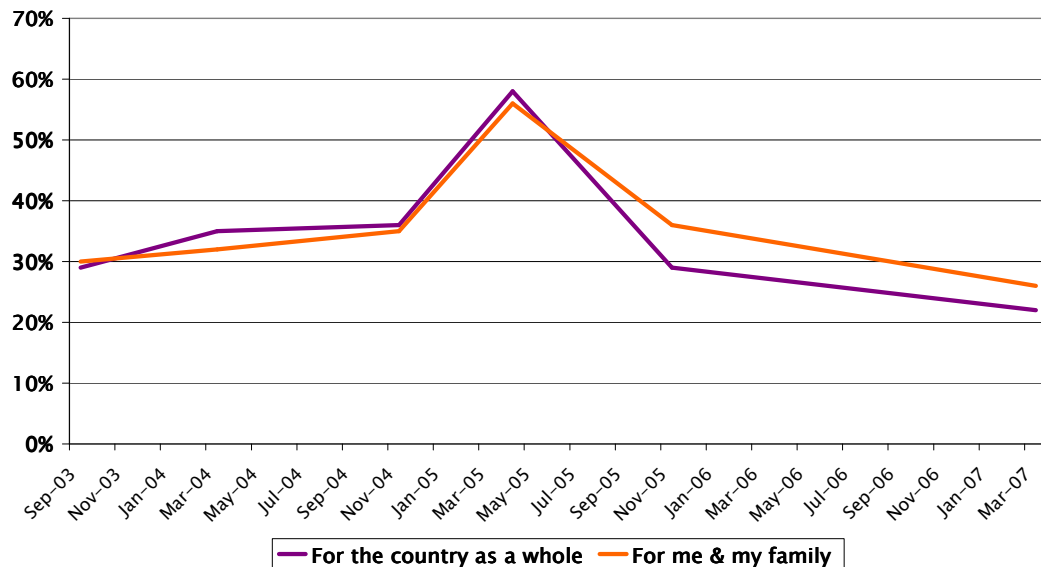
http://www.populuslimited.com/poll_summaries/2007_03_06_times.htm

Blue economic skies?

Most voters remain optimistic about how the economy will fare in the year ahead – both for the country as a whole, and for 'me and my family' – according to the latest Populus poll for The Times, though net optimism has fallen slightly, and is markedly lower than at the time of the last general election (as the graph below shows).

The Populus question asks respondents to think "about all the things that may affect the economy – such as changes in salaries and wages, the level of interest rates and tax, the rates of inflation and unemployment, and the strength of the pound". Half the sample are asked about the economy of the country as a whole – which found 58% thinking it will fare well over the next twelve months, 36% that it will fare badly – and the other half are asked about the economy as it affects them and their families, where net optimism is fractionally higher, with 60% thinking the economy will do well, against 34% saying it will do badly.

Net economic optimism



http://www.populuslimited.com/poll_summaries/2007_03_06_times.htm

Economic Trust

As Gordon Brown prepares what is expected to be his final Budget, new poll figures suggest that Labour has lost its long-term lead as the party most trusted on the economy.

Labour has led on the economy almost continuously since the aftermath of the ERM crisis and 'Black Wednesday' more than 14 years ago. At the last election, in May 2005, 45% regarded Labour as the best party when it came to 'managing the economy overall', more than twice the number (22%) preferring the Conservatives, with just 7% favouring the Liberal Democrats. Nearly two years later, the latest Populus poll finds that on the same measure only 33% now trust Labour most, barely ahead of the Conservatives on 31% and with the Lib Dems on 14%.

And on four other, more specific, questions about party trust on the economy, the Conservatives now lead Labour by small margins: by 1% on 'raising taxes in the fairest possible way', by 4% on 'getting the balance right between the level of taxes and the level of public spending' and 'taking economic decisions in the best long term interests of the country, not for short-term political gain', and by 6% on 'putting our economy in

the strongest position to compete successfully with the growing economic challenge of countries like India and China’.

http://www.populuslimited.com/poll_summaries/2007_03_06_times.htm

President 44

There are potentially a dozen Republicans and at least eight Democrats already running for their party’s nomination for the American Presidency, or considering doing so. But the latest national polls suggest that the two candidates will emerge from a shortlist of five: – for the Democrats Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, for the Republicans Senator John McCain, former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney.

Between them these politicians offer the prospect of America’s first President to be female, black or Mormon as well as the oldest President ever elected, making the personal characteristics of the candidates of unusual interest in the media and prompting a spate of polls exploring the extent to which these characteristics may be an electoral asset or liability.

A recent ABC News/Washington Post poll found that Mrs Clinton’s gender makes more than one in eight people (13%) say they are less likely to vote for her – but about as many say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate if she was a women. Twice that number (26%) say they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who, like Rudy Giuliani, has been divorced twice. Mitt Romney’s faith is a barrier for slightly more, with 29% saying they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who is a Mormon. The characteristic which puts voters off Barack Obama is not his colour – only 6% of voters say they are less likely to vote for a candidate who is black, with slightly more saying they would be more likely to do so – but the fact that he smokes cigarettes, which makes more than one in five Americans less likely to back him. But the personal attribute presenting the biggest obstacle to the electability of any candidate is John McCain’s age. If elected he would, at 72, be the oldest person ever elected to the job (nearly three years older than Ronald Reagan was when first elected in 1980). More than half of US voters (58%) say they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who is ‘over the age of 72’.

Field of Dreams

Whoever is elected as the next President of the United States on November 5th 2008 will have spent the best part of two years campaigning full-time for the job. 2007 is set to be a year of shadow-boxing, fund-raising and intense efforts by candidates to position themselves – and their opponents – in the minds of key groups of voters. But 11 months from now the race to choose the Democrat and Republican candidates for President will be all but over: more and more states are bringing their primary elections forward so as to take place when the contests are still competitive, with the result that within 3 weeks of the process starting 21 states, representing well over half the population, will have voted. This condensed timetable makes the traditional first stops in the primary process, Iowa and New Hampshire, more important than ever, with defeated candidates having virtually no time to regain momentum before a further nineteen states vote.

In Iowa, which is first up, on January 15th, Hillary Clinton holds a clear lead in the Democrat race, backed by 35% of likely voters, well ahead of former Vice Presidential candidate John Edwards, 18% (and falling) and Barack Obama, 14% (and rising). On the Republican side, Rudy Giuliani leads the apparently waning John McCain by 27% to 22%.

In New Hampshire, which votes on January 22nd, the lead in the Republican race is the other way around, with McCain (27%) ahead and Giuliani now caught in second place, on 20%, by the rapid advance in recent weeks of former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. On the Democrat side, Hillary Clinton has increased her lead over Senator Obama, from 27% / 21% in December to 39% / 19% in February.

In both Iowa and New Hampshire, Mrs Clinton's lead rests on the strength of her support among women – 56% and 57% respectively, compared with 30% among men in both states.

Happy smiley (European) people

Danes are the happiest people in Europe, according to a poll of social attitudes across all EU member states recently published by the European Commission, while the Bulgarians (despite their recent admission to the EU) are by far the least happy. 97% in Denmark say that “taking all things together” they are happy, just ahead of the Netherlands (95%). In Britain 92% said this – ranking us eighth of the twenty seven countries, slightly

above the EU average of 87%, and well over twice the equivalent figure in Bulgaria (39%), which is the only country where less than half the population is happy.

The poll also reveals a big difference between countries in “the importance of religion in your life”. Across the EU 52% on average say religion is important, but this ranges from a high of 88% in Malta to a low of 28% in the Czech Republic. In Britain 45% say that religion is important.

The survey also asked about “the social reality of household chores” and found that Greece is the country where women are most likely to have main responsibility for ‘cleaning the house’ (91%), ‘cooking’ (93%) and ‘doing the ironing’ (95%). Men are most likely to clean the house in Sweden (19%), Luxembourg (17%) and Finland (14%) – in Britain 11% said the man in their household is responsible for cleaning. Men in Luxembourg (25%) and Sweden (21%) are also most likely to have main responsibility for cooking, compared with 18% in the UK. Ironing is the household chore most likely to be done by women in the household, the highest percentage for men being just 14% (in Denmark) – in the UK it was 10%.

Invitation to the Populus Budget Briefing

Once again Populus is holding a Budget Briefing in Westminster on the evening of the Chancellor’s budget statement featuring specially commissioned research on voters’ attitudes to the economy, taxes and public spending as well as original analysis from Peter Riddell, Assistant Editor of The Times. The event, in association with the British Chambers of Commerce, will take place on Wednesday 21st March, beginning at 6.30 for 7.00pm and will be held in Central Hall Westminster, London SW1.

Space at the briefing is limited, if you or a colleague would like to attend, or you’d like more information, simply email us at budgetbriefing@populuslimited.com or call us on 020 7253 9900 to reserve your place.

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