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Populus Launches 'Concerned Consumer Index'

Everyone these days is being encouraged to think more broadly about the products they buy, the companies that are trying to sell to them and the places they shop, but there is a difference between thinking about these things and acting on them. That is why Populus in conjunction with Good Business has launched the Concerned Consumers Index in the business section of The Times.

Populus has identified that part of the adult population – roughly half the general public – that not only cares about social, environmental and ethical issues surrounding the products and services they buy but actually does so enough to change their purchasing behaviour as a result. These people make decisions based on values as well as value for money and they are prepared to reward companies that they feel care about more than just selling to them as cheaply as possible.

Not only do Concerned Consumers vote with their own wallets, they are also ready to urge others to do the same. Two in five of them say they recommend goods and services to other people frequently, nearly half as many again as the rest of the population. They are also more likely to pick up on stories both good and bad about the way businesses conduct themselves, to register these and to translate them into future buying decisions.

Alongside a regular 'thermometer' tracking the overall reputation among Concerned Consumers of some of the UK's biggest companies and most

recognisable high-street names, the index also focuses on specific sectors each month: Who is the greenest supermarket? (Marks & Spencer); Which airline is doing most to address the environmental impact of flying? (Virgin). We also explore reaction to the latest environmental innovations. Less than 10% of Concerned Consumers have been involved in carbon offsetting and nearly half (44%) say that it is a gesture rather than an effective or even a modest way of tackling climate change.

If you would like to know more about the Index, and the opportunities for adding questions to it and seeing a more detailed analysis of its results, please contact Sarah Hill (shill@populuslimited.com).

US Presidential Elections

The precise dynamics of the US Presidential primaries depends on which poll you believe. Seven major polls of likely primary voters have been published in the past three weeks and they paint very different pictures of who has momentum.

On the Democrat side, three polls have shown Hillary Clinton's lead over Barack Obama significantly narrowing, but four other polls show precisely the opposite, with her support rising and his declining. On the Republican side, four polls suggest Rudy Giuliani's lead has been significantly eroded by John McCain, while two different polls find the lead widening. Mr Giuliani's support may be as low as 27% or as high as 38%, Senator McCain's as high as 22% or as low as 16%; Mrs Clinton's ratings range from 31% to 41%, Senator Obama's from 20% to 29%.

A different perspective on the primary contests comes from the Iowa Electronic Markets (IEM). The IEM, a long-established project of the University of Iowa's Tippie College of Business, uses a small-stake real-money futures market as a predictor of political outcomes and has a strong record of accuracy in predicting Presidential elections.

The IEM currently suggests that there is a 42% chance that Hillary Clinton will win the Democratic nomination, against a 32% chance that Barack Obama will do so; three weeks ago the two were neck and neck. The IEM indicates a 29% chance that former New York Mayor Giuliani will be the Republican nominee compared with a 20% probability for former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney and 18% for Senator John McCain. But the most likely outcome on the Republican side is, according to the Iowa Electronic Markets, that none of these three – the current front-runners in the polls – will be the Republican candidate for President.

This comes as much media attention has been paid to the possible candidacy of former Tennessee Senator and sometime actor Fred Thompson, better known to many as District Attorney Arthur Branch in the TV series 'Law & Order' and its various spin-offs; or as Air Traffic Control Chief Trudeau in

'Die Hard II'; or as White House Chief of Staff Harry Sargent in Clint Eastwood's 1993 film 'In the Line of Fire'. Thompson has not yet confirmed that he will put himself forward, but has already overtaken Senator McCain in some polls – and as Republican commentators have started to remark, last time they picked an actor to be their candidate it turned out OK.

Climate Concern

Britons are slightly less concerned about climate change and global warming than the EU average – and significantly less concerned than many southern Europeans – according to a recent poll across the 27 EU member states by Gallup. The poll, published by the European Commission, finds that 48% in Britain say that climate change is 'very much a concern' for them. This compares with an average of 50% across the whole EU, but concern is rather greater in Spain and Cyprus (70%), Malta and Greece (68%) and Portugal (65%). At the opposite end of the spectrum, concern is lowest in the Baltic region: 22% in Estonia, 24% in Latvia and 24% in Finland – and is only 28% in Holland.

The Spanish are much more likely than any other nation to believe that the way 'we in our country' produce and consume energy has a 'big negative impact' on climate change. 63% of Spaniards think this; the next highest level of agreement is in Italy (48%), Greece (45%) and France (43%). Only 11% of Finns, 12% of Latvians and 13% of Estonians think this is true of their country.

The same survey found that people in the UK are among the least likely (33%) to say that energy efficiency is an important factor when buying household appliances. In only four EU countries is the proportion saying this lower, while it is highest in Italy (66%).

The poll also asked whether people in each EU country on balance favoured increasing use of nuclear energy because it doesn't contribute to climate change, or reducing its use because of safety concerns about nuclear waste and possible accidents. There are only two EU states where more voters take the pro-nuclear position than the anti one – Bulgaria (where opinion splits 51/33) and the Czech Republic (48/40). In three countries – Sweden, Finland and Slovakia – opinion divides more or less equally. In the UK 57% were against more use of nuclear energy, 36% in favour. Opposition is strongest in Greece (83%), Austria (78%), Cyprus (76%) and Spain (72%).

The French Election: Sarko v. Segol

More than one hundred different polls were published in the four months before the first round of voting in the French Presidential elections on April 22nd. Only a handful of these showed support for the leading candidates

(Nicolas Sarkozy and Segolene Royal) differing from their actual vote share by more than the standard margin of error. This suggests two conclusions – firstly that the French election polls were commendably accurate and secondly that there was very little movement in support for the candidates of the two main parties, Sarkozy of the UMP and Royal of the PS, throughout the campaign. The only significant development in the run-up to voting was the quick rise and slow decline in support for Francois Bayrou, the candidate of the Giscardian UDF party, whose flirtation with second place in the polls was achieved overwhelmingly by squeezing smaller parties rather than seriously eroding the vote of either Sarkozy or Royal.

With the decisive run-off on May 6th, all of the polls so far published since the first round of voting indicate victory for Nicolas Sarkozy, who currently holds a lead of between 6% and 8% over Ms Royal.

The Other Election: The Armenian National Assembly

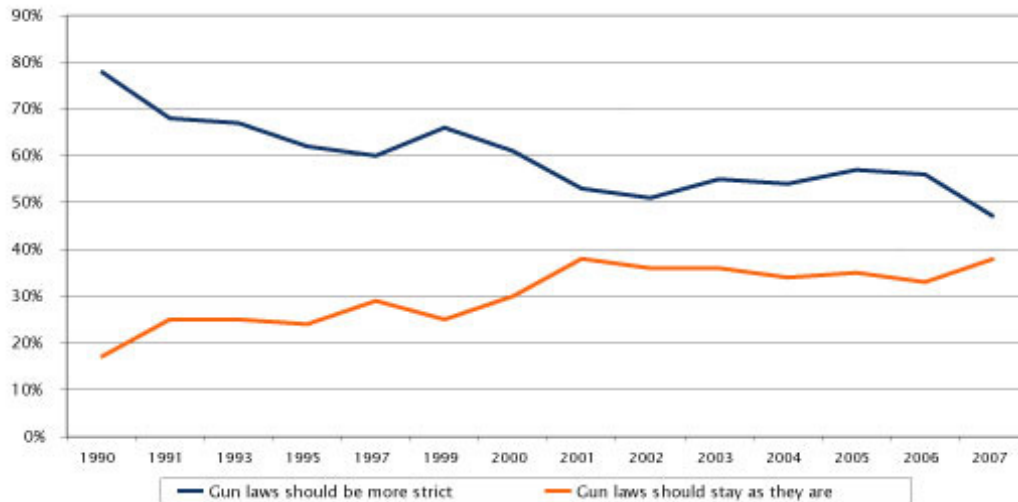
Garnering rather less media attention than the French elections, the following weekend elections take place for the Armenian National Assembly. There are more than 25 parties contesting the elections, but two parties are far ahead of the rest, according to a recent poll by Populus for Armenia TV. The Republican Party, currently the largest partner in a three-party governing coalition, has 31% well up on the 24% it gained at the last election four years ago. Close behind, on 27%, is the Prosperous Armenia part, founded barely a year ago by billionaire businessman and former arm-wrestler Gagik Tsarukyan.

The poll suggests that Prosperous Armenia is regarded as the best party to improve Armenia's economy and to handle a range of domestic and infrastructural issues. The Republicans – led by Serzh Sargsyan, a distinguished veteran of the Nagorno-Karabakh war in the early 1990s, who was elevated from Defence Minister to Prime Minister in early April – hold somewhat bigger leads on issues related to Armenia's national security and relations with other countries, issues which, the poll suggests, are of pre-eminent importance to most Armenian voters.

Gun Control

The shocking murder of 33 students at Virginia Tech University has put the issue of gun control back into the media spotlight – but not, it seems, onto the political agenda. American polls taken in the aftermath of the shootings have found no increase in support for further restrictions on gun ownership, though this did occur in the wake of the Columbine school murders eight years ago. Indeed some polls have found a drop in support for tighter gun controls (as shown in the graph below), presumably a reflection of the view expressed by some commentators that

many fewer students would have died at Virginia Tech had Seung-Hui Cho not been the only one with a gun.



A Good Week for Virgin Atlantic

Twice as many opinion formers judge Virgin Atlantic to have the best environmental record among leading airlines as its nearest competitor, BA, according to the latest Populus Network Poll.

42% say Virgin is best in this regard compared with 21% who opt for BA. The company is also believed to have the best record on employee relations (55%) and to have the best customer service along with Emirates (37%). EasyJet is judged to offer the best value for money (40%).

In a good week for Virgin, April's Concerned Consumer Index published in The Times showed the most environmentally-conscious half of the general public believing that the airline was doing more to address the climate-changing impact of flying than any of its competitors. 62% said that Virgin was doing the most to tackle the issue, three times as many as opted for its nearest rival BA (20%).

If you know anyone else who might like to receive *Perspective* please let us know their e-mail address and we'd be delighted to add them to the circulation list.

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