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No third bounce

Gordon Brown has benefited from two periods of poll upswing during his 21 months as Prime Minister: a three month 'honeymoon bounce' when he took over from Tony Blair and a two month 'bail-out bounce' at the end of last year. There was much speculation in the Westminster village last week about whether Mr Brown may now be boosted a third time – an 'Obama bounce'. The first poll conducted since the Prime Minister became the first European leader to meet the new US President last week suggests not.

The Populus poll put the Conservatives on 42%, Labour on 30% – exactly the same vote shares as the most recent Guardian poll, the week before Mr Brown's trip to America. The Populus poll for The Times also suggests there is little prospect of any 'G20 bounce' for the Prime Minister either: only 6% of voters have a high degree of confidence that the gathering of leaders in London next month will help in dealing with the recession.

There have been nearly 150 polls published since the non-election of October 2007. The Conservative Party has led in all but four of them – and in every published poll since January last year. With the first quarter of 2009 almost complete, the Conservatives have been above 40% in every poll this year, averaging 42.8% to

Labour's 30.2%. Conservative strategists may, nevertheless, be disappointed as the party shows no current signs of restoring the 15%–20% leads it enjoyed between April and September last year.

Links – <http://populus.co.uk/the-times-the-times-poll-march-2009-080309.html>

Public sector swingers

Both Labour and Conservative parties are doing less well among public sector employees than among those working in the private sector, according to a detailed new analysis by Populus. As the table below shows, the Liberal Democrats consequently do disproportionately well among public sector workers, particularly teachers, who the Populus analysis suggests split roughly evenly between the three main parties. Those who work in public sector jobs are also more likely than other voters to support one or other of the smaller parties, with around 7% backing the Green Party, more than twice its level of support among the whole electorate. The poll breakdown also suggests that the Conservatives hold a lead among both NHS employees and local government workers.

	All	Public sector	Private sector
Labour	30%	27%	30%
Conservative	42%	37%	44%
Lib Dem	19%	23%	17%
Others	9%	13%	9%
Net Conservative lead	12%	10%	14%

Many voters find the terms 'public sector' and 'private sector' confusing: people who work for charities and pressure groups have a tendency, for example, wrongly to identify themselves as being in the public sector. So Populus based the public/private sector split in the sample on a question listing all the areas of employment officially defined as being in the public sector.

Euro-bore

British voters are among the least aware and least interested in this year's European Parliament election according to a new study of attitudes across all member states published by the European Commission.

Only 14% of UK voters are spontaneously aware that the European elections are taking place this year – a lower proportion than in every country other than Lithuania (12%) and Finland (9%). Awareness is highest in Luxembourg (56%) and Malta (55%).

Only in the Czech Republic (25%) and Latvia (19%) is interest in the elections lower than in the UK (34%); interest is highest in Ireland and the Netherlands (both 60%). British voters also consider themselves less well informed about the European Parliament's activities than those of any other EU country, with 19% saying they are 'well informed' compared with 42% in Luxembourg at the other end of the scale.

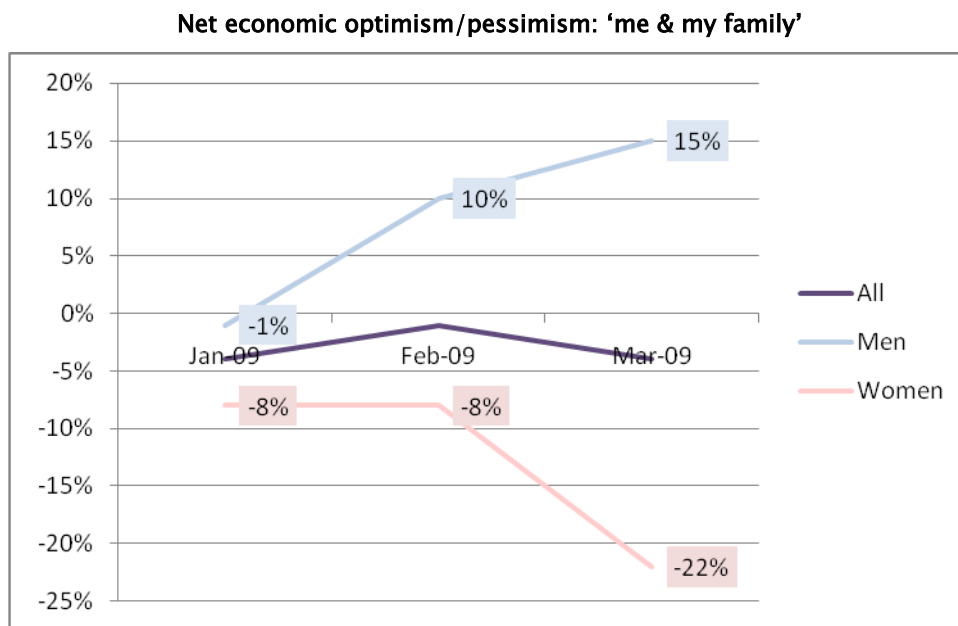
Across the EU, on average 28% say they will definitely vote in the European elections in June, but this ranges from just 8% in Portugal to 55% in Belgium. In the UK 18% say they will definitely vote suggesting that turnout this time could be well down on the 38% who voted in the last European elections in 2004; 30% say they definitely won't vote, twice the average for all member states.

Links –

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_303_presentation_en.pdf

Life on Mars & Venus

A huge gender gap in the expected impact of the recession on families has emerged over the last three months, the latest Populus poll for The Times reveals. Research on economic expectations consistently finds that men are more positive than women. But in the first quarter of 2009, perceptions of how well or badly the economy will fare over the next year 'for me & my family' have diverged sharply, resulting in a net 37% difference between men (who are optimistic by a margin of 57% to 42%) and women (who are pessimistic by a margin of 59% to 22%).



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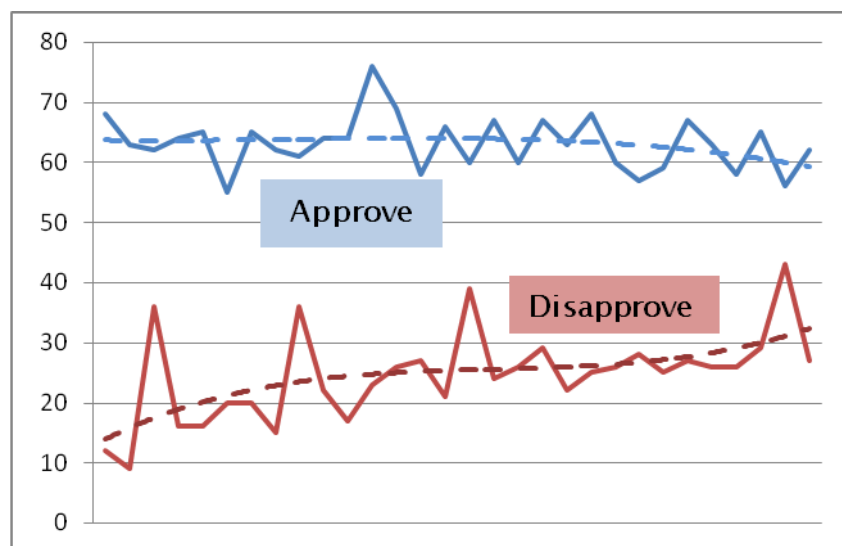
Obama's honeymoon

Even with unemployment at its highest level since the early 1980s, and retail sales declining more steeply than ever before, the latest US polls report that nearly 3 in 5 Americans think 'the worst of the economic crisis is still to come' with only 3% thinking that the country 'has turned the corner'. But, though some pundits in Washington DC are starting to turn on President Obama, his ratings are regarded as impressively high.

Only three previous Presidents have had a higher approval rating at the same stage than Barack Obama: Eisenhower, Kennedy and Carter.

But this doesn't tell the whole story. For it is also true that few Presidents have had as high a disapproval rating, at this point in their first term, as the current one (over 40% in a recent Rasmussen poll & consistently about 30%); in the past more voters have been 'don't knows', suggesting perhaps that voters are now quicker to judge than they used to be.

And, as the graph below shows, the trend in President Obama's favourability is clearly downward.



Solid line = published polls. Dashes = trend

Heathrow party lines

There is a clear party-political split on the question of expansion of Heathrow airport, according to the latest findings from the Populus Parliament panel. Overall 53% of MPs both supported the expansion of Britain's aviation capacity and a third

runway at Heathrow, with Labour MPs particularly likely to take this position (71%). Most Conservative MPs (55%) supported the expansion of Britain's aviation capacity but did not support the building of a third runway at Heathrow. MPs were also asked when they thought the third runway would be completed and ready for use. The average prediction was 2020, but almost a third of all MPs (31%) and 61% of Conservative MPs thought that the runway would never be built.

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