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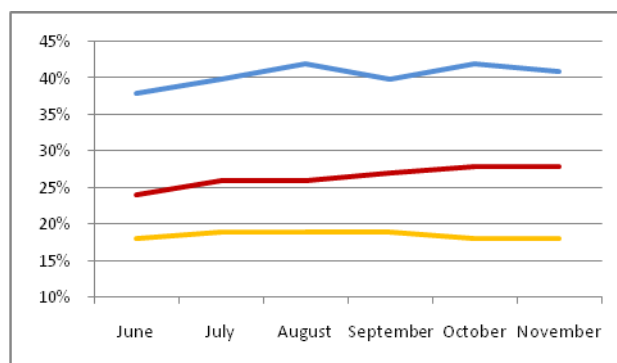
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Settled picture?

The last possible date for the next general election is June 3rd. Most pundits agree that May 6th – local election day – is much more likely. There is occasional speculation about earlier dates, with March 25th the latest rumoured option. Either way, in five months' time at most Britain will be embroiled in a general election campaign.

Voting polls inevitably fluctuate – as they're bound to, within the range of their margin of error – and the closer the election gets the more prone some commentators are to draw big conclusions from small (often statistically insignificant) movements between one poll to the next. But the monthly average of published polls reveals a fairly stable picture of support for the main parties, as the graph below shows – with the Conservative lead over Labour running at around 13%.



The orthodox psephological rule of thumb is that the Conservatives need to beat Labour by at least 10% in order to get an overall majority of 1 in the Commons – and by rather more than that to get a reasonable working majority. This means that any narrowing of the polls from their current approximate status quo could result in a

hung Parliament – a scenario gaining, for that reason, increasing attention in the media. More than a quarter of voters (26%) now expect the election to produce a hung Parliament, according to the November Populus/Times poll.

Links – <http://www.populus.co.uk/the-times-the-times-poll-november-2009-081109.html>

Copenhagen challenge

Despite the considerable political consensus in favour of this conventional wisdom, only two in five British voters (41%) believe both that climate change is happening and global warming is taking place and that it is an established scientific fact that it is largely man-made, according to a new poll by Populus for The Times. Younger people are no more likely to take this view (42% of 18–34 year-olds) than older ones (41% of 35–54s and 42% of over 65s). A recent Pew poll in the US found, asking a very similar question, that 36% of American voters believe that climate change is happening and that human activity is a major cause. The same poll found that one third of Americans (33%) do not believe there is solid evidence that the climate is changing and the Earth warming, compared with only 15% taking this view in Britain, according to Populus.

The Populus poll also found that Conservative voters (38%) are slightly less likely to believe in man-made climate change than Labour (45%) or Lib Dem voters (47%). In America, the Pew survey found that 50% of Democrat supporters believe in man-made climate change, as did a third of non-aligned voters but only 18% of Republicans.

In Britain, even among those who think climate change is happening, the Populus poll found that barely a third (34%) think it is 'the most serious problem we face as a country & internationally'. The great majority think it is a problem, but that other issues are of greater concern. Among all adults (i.e. taking into account the minority who don't think climate change is happening), only 28% think climate change is the most serious problem we face, while just over half (51%) think that it is a serious problem, but other problems are more serious.

Links – <http://people-press.org/report/556/global-warming>

Discriminating Europe

A majority of people across the EU – and in most member states – believe that discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin is 'widespread' in their country, according to a newly published study by the European Commission. 58% of British voters say that discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is widespread in the UK, just below the EU average of 61%. In the Netherlands, France and Hungary eight out of ten people

believe ethnic discrimination is widespread in their country, while at the opposite extreme only 26% do so in Lithuania, 33% in Poland and 34% in Latvia.

Age discrimination is felt to be almost as widespread overall – cited by an average of 58% across the EU. In Britain age discrimination is felt to be slightly more widespread (61%) than discrimination on the basis of ethnicity – one of ten countries in which this is the case. In the European Union as a whole there has been a 16% jump since last year in the perception that age discrimination is widespread, whereas the perception of discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin is unchanged. There has also been a rise across the EU in the feeling that discrimination on the basis of disability is widespread. 50% think this is true in the UK, slightly below the EU average of 53%.

Just under half of adults across the EU think that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is widespread in their country, ranging from a high of 66% in Cyprus to a low of 22% in Bulgaria. 40% in the UK say this form of discrimination is widespread here, slightly below the number (43%) thinking that gender discrimination is widespread in Britain – just above the EU average (40%). Across all 27 EU states only 37% of men think gender discrimination is widespread in their country, compared with 44% of women.

In the UK religious discrimination is felt to be more widespread (45%) than discrimination on the basis of either gender or sexual orientation. In only six member states is there a majority thinking religious discrimination is widespread: in ascending order Greece, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, France and the Netherlands. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic only 12% think religious discrimination is widespread – much the lowest for any form of discrimination in any EU country.

The French, uniquely, judge the incidence of discrimination in their country to be sufficiently widespread to rank them among the three worst nations for every form of discrimination covered in the study.

Links – http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_317_en.pdf

Afghan dividing lines

The mounting toll of casualties from Britain's engagement in Afghanistan seems to have caused divergent reactions in men and women, according to the most recent Populus poll for The Times.

In September there was no gender difference in support for immediate withdrawal of British troops, with about 30% of both men and women backing this viewpoint. Over the last two months, as the number of British soldiers killed in Afghanistan has risen to twice the 2008 figure, the proportion of women wanting our troops brought home now has risen sharply, to 43%, while the proportion of men doing so has fallen slightly to 27%.

Support for immediate troop withdrawal has also risen particularly (from 19% to 31%) among ABs (senior professionals and managers) and those supporting Labour (from 24% to 35%) and the Liberal Democrats (from 17% to 37%).

Links - <http://www.populus.co.uk/the-times-the-times-poll-november-2009-081109.html>

Republican trauma

A study of core Republican voters in America has presented further evidence of the scale of the party's challenge as it strives to rebuild after last year's electoral setbacks. Focus groups and polling among Conservative Republicans, who represent two-thirds of all Republican voters and a fifth of the overall electorate, found that they "stand a world apart from the rest of America". Whereas most American voters want President Obama to succeed - even those who didn't vote for him and those who are currently sceptical about the job he's done so far - Conservative Republicans "are committed to seeing the President fail". This is because they share a conviction that Mr Obama is "advancing a secret socialist agenda" which, if successful, would destroy what these voters see as the core identity of the United States.

US polls consistently show that though many voters harbour strong doubts about different aspects of the various plans being considered for healthcare reform, a majority are eager for healthcare reform of some kind, and want it to be passed this year. Conservative Republicans, by contrast, are "militantly opposed" to healthcare reform of any kind. Asked which issues are of most importance in deciding how to vote, these Republicans rank healthcare sixth, below tax cuts, immigration and "a candidate's personal faith"; among independent voters, healthcare is the number one issue of concern.

These hardcore Republicans see their own party currently as "weak, old and out of touch" and in desperate need of new leadership. The report - produced by former Clinton pollsters James Carville and Stan Greenberg - notes that "although they expressed some hope for a variety of names... there was only one figure who truly excited them and created real passion: Sarah Palin".

Links - <http://www.democracycorps.com/wp-content/files/TheVerySeparateWorldofConservativeRepublicans101609.pdf>

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