

The Research Monitor

June 2009

Why 94.2% of Researchers Hate Voodoo Polls

A readers' poll on the *Daily Mail's* online site on 19 June found 85% of respondents thought "the NHS should allow gypsies to jump the queue". Surprised? The key word here is respondent: in other words, the number of people who wanted to wind up the *Daily Mail* by twisting the results of their poll far outnumbered the readers who wanted to "air their views" about travellers.

These are 'voodoo polls': worthless not only because the respondents are self-selecting, but also because the question is biased. But the dangers of self-selection are more widespread and insidious. Reports based on self-selected samples are everywhere and often used unquestioningly by the media and public bodies. Sometimes the inherent biases are minor. For example, residents who can be bothered to fill in a survey for their local council are not typical of the community as a whole. They will probably be older, more educated, have lived there longer and be more involved in local issues, and the results will be skewed accordingly. By weighting the results demographic biases can be ironed out, but distortions can remain and these 'local citizens' panels' always need careful interpretation.

It is where surveys are used to justify a point of view that self-selection is most dangerous. For example, people who fly a lot are far more likely to fill in a survey on aviation than those who don't, and the results of the survey may be no more reliable than the equivalent in the *Daily Mail*. But it may be tempting for lobbyists, even government ministers, to present the results as reliable and even scientific.

How can you tell the good from the bad? The quality of the sample is part of this – ensure it is properly representative of those it purports to represent and find out how the respondents were selected to take part... There's a lot more to reliable polling, and we'll cover these in future issues.

Economy

30/06/09 **Small businesses report signs of 'green shoots' recovery**
Federation of Small Businesses: Just under a quarter (23%) of small businesses surveyed reported an increasing in trade over the past four months – up 7% from February. [More](#)

22/06/09 **Economic recovery in six to eighteen months**
Association of Private Client Investment Managers and Stock Brokers/YouGov: A recent poll of APCMIS members reveals that eight in ten (81%) expect the UK economy to begin growing again in the next six to eighteen months. Three quarters (76%) expect interest rates to during this period as well. [More](#)

Health

08/06/09 **Ban cigarette vending machines, public urges:**
Action on Smoking and Health (ASH)/YouGov: Almost two thirds (65%) of the public support a complete ban on cigarette vending machines. [More](#)

07/06/09 **British women remain under the influence of health guidelines**
YouGov: Three quarters (75%) of 18 to 24-year old British women said they drink less than the recommended weekly amount of 14 units. A similar proportion was reported amongst 25 to 34-year olds (73%) and 35 to 44-year olds (79%). [More](#)

Welcome

The Research Monitor brings together the main polls and insights across economic, consumer, political and social research in the past month.

This is a free service to our clients and friends. We also offer a more tailored service including in-depth analysis of what the latest research and the current state of opinion means for your organisation or campaign.

Latest News

Woodnewton Associates has been appointed to the Central Office of Information's (COI) prestigious Market Research framework following an intensive evaluation process covering over 200 market research agencies.

Described as the "best of the best", the framework or roster allows government departments and agencies to procure direct from firms proven to provide high quality and cost effective research. [More](#)

Politics

25/06/09 Public set for tax rises

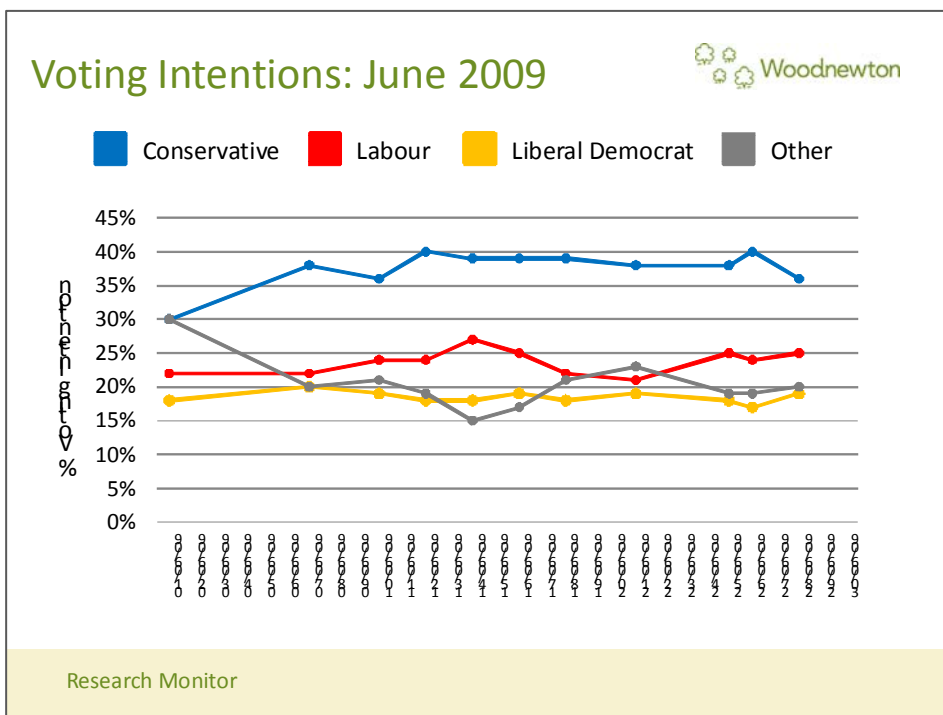
Daily Telegraph/YouGov: Survey shows that the British public expect any government, regardless of it being lead by Labour or Conservative, to raise taxes after the next general election. [More](#)

21/06/09 Norwich North by-election survey

University and College Union/ICM Research: Current voting intention figures for constituents in the Norwich North constituency prior to the upcoming by-election put the Conservatives in the lead with 34%; Labour on 30%, Liberal Democrats on 15% and the Greens on 14%. [More](#)

12/06/09 Low public confidence in most political leaders

ComRes: More than eight in ten of the public are not confident in Alistair Darling (86%) and Gordon Brown (84%). The highest level of confidence for a politician included Vince Cable (62% confident) and David Cameron (62% confident). [More](#)



12/06/09 Sir Alan Sugar: Silly gimmick or sensible move?

Sunday Times/YouGov: Half of the public (49%) believe that it was a silly gimmick for the government to appoint Alan Sugar as Enterprise Champion. Around a third (35%) of the public believe it was a sensible move. [More](#)

10/06/09 Labour supporters say stick with Brown

The Times/Populus: Seven in ten (72%) voters who supported Labour in the 2005 general election agree that Gordon Brown should remain as leader - though over half (53%) of these supporters believe he is doing a bad job. [More](#). For topline results of the ITN/YouGov poll of Labour supporters please follow the [link](#).

31/05/09 MPs should stay in standard budget hotels – survey shows

ComRes: Just under two thirds (64%) of the public think that when on Parliamentary business in Westminster, away from home, MPs should stay in a business standard budget hotel. [More](#)

Social

- 29/06/09 Knife and gun crime – experiences of young people**
 BBC Radio One/ComRes: Just over two in five (22%) young people say it is very easy (6%) or fairly easy (16%) to buy guns. Young people are most likely to carry a knife or gun to protect themselves if they're threatened (28%); to gain respect (27%) or because of pressure from friends (22%). [More](#)
- 25/06/09 Motorway drivers prefer life in the fast lane**
 Department for Transport/GfK NOP: Almost two thirds (63%) of motorway drivers say the most important aspects of their most recent/most frequent motorway journey is finding the quickest way to their destination. [More](#)
- 25/06/09 Lack of public understanding about issues facing disabled people**
 Scope/ComRes: A major study looking at public attitudes to equality for disabled people shows high public support for ensuring disabled people are treated fairly and equally. However, it also suggests that almost all (90%) of those surveyed agree that other people do not really understand the negative attitudes faced by disabled people.
- 24/06/09 Faith schools: a barrier to community cohesion?**
 Accord Coalition/YouGov: Over seven in ten (72%) agree that all state funded schools should operate recruitment and employment policies that do not discriminate on grounds of religion or belief. [More](#)
- 20/06/09 Muslims in Britain poll**
 BBC/ICM Research: A quarter (24%) of Muslims in Britain agree that the British government is anti-Muslim. Seven in ten (72%) agree that this is wrong for the British military to fight in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This said, three quarters (75%) of Muslims in Britain agree that Muslims living permanently in Britain should pledge their loyalty to Britain with a further eight in ten (80%) agree that Muslims should inform the police if they suspect a Muslim is involved in Al Qaeda inspired terrorism. [More](#)

On average, the public spends around 21 hours per week on the internet, new poll reveals.

[More](#)

One in five (21%) agree that MPs should reopen the debate on the ban on hunting with hounds.

[More](#)

Just over two in five (44%) Christians in the UK have been mocked by friends, neighbours or colleagues for being a Christian.

[More](#)

One in eleven (9%) young people in Britain sometimes carries a weapon to feel safe.

[More](#)

International

- 06/06/09 Fire fighters and teachers most trusted internationally**
 GfK NOP: Fire fighters (92%) and teachers (85%) are seen as the most trustworthy in comparison to other professions, according to a recent poll taken across 17 countries. Across 20 different professions, market researchers came 12th with just over half (55%) expressing trust. [More](#)
- 01/06/09 Lowest levels of trust in elected representatives in Britain, research suggests**
 Financial Times/Harris Interactive: In light of the recent MPs' expenses scandal, a new survey shows that Britons have less trust in their elected representatives than a year ago (37% less trust than 12 months ago). This is compared France (13% less trust); Italy (20%), Germany (22%) and the United States (18%). [More](#)

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