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Poll Watch: January 2008

In the latest monthly Poll Watch, the BBC's political research editor, David Cowling, reviews the political opinion polls published in the UK in January.

This was an unusually busy January as far as polling was concerned.

Voting intention figures ranged between a 10-point Conservative lead through to a one-point Labour lead.

Generally, compared with December, Conservative support fell back about 3%, Labour has stayed the same and the Liberal Democrats' share increased about 2%.

A Mori/BBC poll (sampled from 3 to 6 January) concentrated on issues of trust in British society.

This was a wide-ranging survey (24% think the death of Diana, Princess of Wales was the result of a conspiracy, 30% believe evidence of UFO landings is being hidden from the public and a refreshing 16% believe in witches) in which politicians fared badly.

Some 83% did not trust politicians, 46% said they trusted government least among a list of seven national institutions; and only 4% thought MPs put the country's interests first.

However, friends also took a knock, with only 35% agreeing that they generally believed what their friends told them. And whereas 54% agreed that "most people can be trusted", 45% disagreed.

A survey by ICM for the Sunday Telegraph (sampled from 9 to 10 January) found 78% agreement that immigration to Britain should be made harder and 56% who thought British Muslims need to integrate more into mainstream British culture.

Half of respondents (51%) agreed that Muslims enriched British society and were not a threat to it (37% disagreed). But opinion was more evenly divided about whether British identity would be endangered if more Muslims came to live here - 48% agreed and 45% disagreed.

European issues

In light of the growing number of reports predicting a harsher economic climate in the coming year, Populus/ITV News (sampled from 9 to 10 January) tested public opinion.

They found 47% of respondents were pessimistic (35% were optimistic) about the state of the British economy over the next 12 months. Yet, when it came to predicting their personal and family economic prospects, 52% were optimistic compared with 32% who were pessimistic.

ICM/Guardian (sampled from 18 to 20 January) probed European issues and found 58% who thought membership of the EU was good for Britain, compared with 35% who said it was bad.

Some 54% thought the EU was good for British jobs and trade, whereas 41%



One poll found Lib Dem support rose after Nick Clegg became leader

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disagreed. However, 67% also thought EU membership resulted in Britain's national identity being lost.

And when it came to judging Britain's relationships, 64% thought they were warmest with the USA, as against 29% who chose the EU.

Home Secretary Jacqui Smith was criticised when she said she felt unsafe walking in London at night.



Jacqui Smith (right) was criticised over her concerns about safety

However, ICM/Sunday Telegraph (sampled 30 to 31 January) found a very clear gender divide on this issue. They asked respondents to what extent they personally felt safe walking the streets late at night in their area and found 16% of men felt unsafe doing so, compared with 41% of women.

The same poll also tested public opinion in the aftermath of the recent furore about parliamentary allowances and found 74% who said MPs should not be allowed to employ family members if they are paid from public money.

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