

OPINION POLLS IN SCOTLAND, JULY 1997 - JUNE 1998

David McCrone

Opinion polling since the general election of 1997 which swept Labour to power at Westminster, and the Tories out of Scotland, can be divided into two phases. The first, from May 1997 until the referendum on a Scottish parliament in September, charted the movement (or lack of it) in Scottish public opinion anent a parliament. The second phase focused on the likely voting intention for that parliament in the context of Westminster voting.

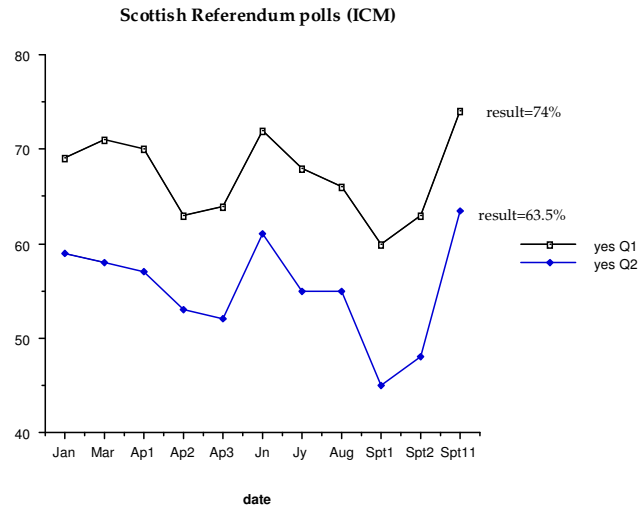
THE REFERENDUM

With hindsight, always a wonderful thing in politics, we can see, in John Smith's phrase, the settled will of the Scottish people. Both ICM polls for **The Scotsman**, and System Three polls for the **Herald** showed consistent support of around 3 to 1 for a parliament in principle (question 1), and around 2 to 1 for tax-varying powers. Figure 1 plots the 'yes' vote on both questions in the ICM/**Scotsman** polls, and, if we discount the 'don't knows' (which run at less than 10% on question 1, and somewhat higher on question 2), then both ICM and System Three can take considerable credit in predicting the result. For example, ICM's final poll (discounting don't knows) gave a yes vote on question 1 of 72%, and on question 2 of 59%, compared with actual results of 74% and 63.5% respectively.

System Three's final poll put the predicted result at 75% and 59%. Both polling organisations slightly underestimated the yes vote on the second question, which is likely to have been the result of differential turnout. Support for double-yes votes was most likely to be found among males, 18-34 year olds, and working-class voters, mainly in the Central Belt of Scotland.

*David McCrone is the convener of the Unit for the Study of Government in Scotland, Edinburgh University, and is an assistant editor of **Scottish Affairs**.*

Opinion Polls, July 1997 - June 1998



The effects of a Scottish parliament were deemed to be positive by respondents to these polls. In the August 1997 poll for ICM, 73% thought it would bring fairer representation, 71% that it would bring government closer to the people, 66% that it usher in new talent, and 58% that it would create a new political consensus. Respondents were evenly divided between those who thought it would generate 'jobs for the boys' (47%) and those who disagreed (46%). There was not strong support for the government's view that the new parliament would strengthen ties with the rest of the UK (only 17% thought so), with the largest number (43%) believing that it would have no difference. A third thought it would lead to the break-up of the UK. The sense of there being a settled will was confirmed by the fact that fewer than one in ten of respondents indicated that they were less likely to vote for a parliament as a result of Princess Diana's death (which came a mere 10 days before the vote), and despite the fact that 37% said the events surrounding her death made them more proud of being British.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION

While the Referendum was of course about people's attitudes to a devolved parliament, there was relatively little change in opinions about other constitutional options. Before the Referendum, the ICM polls showed support for Independence varying between 26% and 29%, for Home Rule between 37% and 48%, and for the status quo between 24% and 30%. The ICM polls

after the Referendum continued to ask the constitutional option question, and showed Home Rule steady at 48%, with support for the status quo falling back to 17% and 21%. Independence was somewhat higher than pre-Referendum at 28% and 33%, confirming that the main constitutional battle thereafter was between Home Rule and Independence. The status quo had ceased to be an option. The complex relationship, however, between voting and constitutional preferences persisted.

Table 1
Cross-voting: Voting Intention by Constitutional Option (ICM polls)

	Labour voters for independence (%)	SNP voters for home rule (%)
July 97	27	42
Aug 97	30	36
Sept 97	27	33
Sept 97	24	28
Feb 98	24	31
April 98	30	33

VOTING IN SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

When polling recommenced after the May 1997 general election, Labour, which had a 23 percentage-point lead at the election over its nearest challengers, the SNP, continued to be by far Scotland's most popular party (see figure 2). While its margin over the SNP had narrowed during the previous 12 months, it still had a 14 point lead in the polls. However, a different story was told when pollsters began to ask about voting intentions for an Edinburgh parliament. As figure 3 indicates, by the early months of 1998, the SNP's standing drew level and then overtook Labour's, so that by April 1998 it was 5 points ahead, and by May/June it was 9 points ahead. A similar picture emerged from ICM polls for **The Scotsman**. In its February poll, Labour's lead over the SNP was 12 points compared with 21 points for Westminster elections.

A MORI telephone survey for **The Mail on Sunday** in March 1998 reinforced this Westminster/Holyrood differential. While Labour had a lead

Opinion Polls, July 1997 - June 1998

Figure 2: Voting Intention for Westminster Election

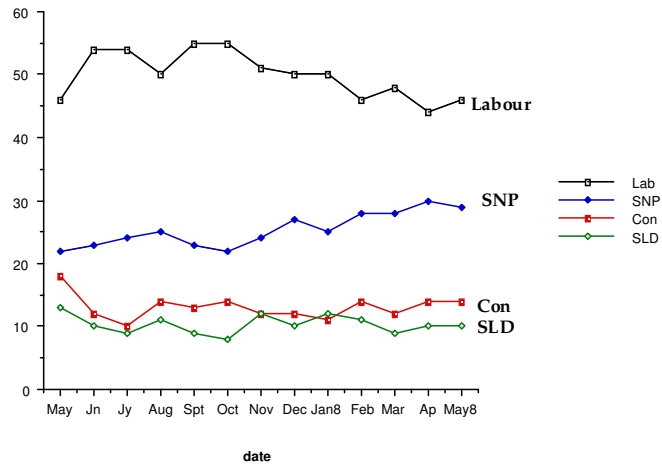
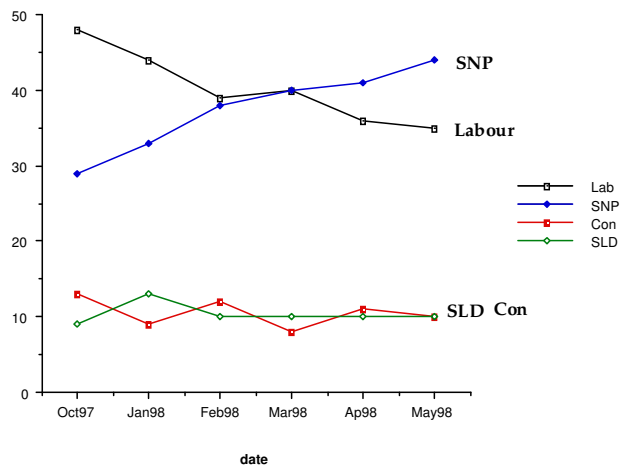


Figure 3: Voting Intention for Scottish Parliament



over the SNP for Westminster of 32 points, in Scottish parliamentary elections the lead had fallen to 6 points. This poll achieved a degree of publicity because it showed that a majority of Scots - 47% to 40% - preferred Independence to Home Rule. This was reinforced by the view that 62% of those questioned thought Scotland would be independent within 15 years, and 75% that it would be independent within 50 years, though only 25% put the figure at 5 years.

The problem with asking a simple 'how would you vote' question is that electors will have two votes in an Edinburgh parliamentary election. ICM's April 1998 poll devised two questions for this purpose. The first asked: 'Your first vote will be for one member for a constituency as Westminster. If the elections were held now, which party would you vote for?'. The second question asked: 'Your second vote will be for a list of candidates put up by each party to represent your region of Scotland. You can vote for the same party as you did with your first vote or for a different party. If the elections were held now which party would get your second vote?'. The results were as follows:

Table 2
Scottish Parliamentary Elections, first and second vote
(%)

	Lab	SNP	Con	SLD	Lab lead over SNP
1st vote	36	32	11	7	+4
2nd vote	31	34	10	10	-3
vote intention in British general election	36	20	12	7	+16

The key to understanding these shifts lies in vote-switching between the parties. The most significant feature is that while 30% of those voting Labour on 1st vote would vote SNP on 2nd vote, only 20% of SNP 1st voters would vote Labour on 2nd vote. Sixty seven percent of SNP voters said they would vote SNP on the 2nd vote, while Labour could manage only 60% vote retention. In similar fashion, the SNP is able to pick up 13% of the Tory vote, and 12% of the LibDem vote. A similar picture emerges if we do the same

Opinion Polls, July 1997 - June 1998

calculation on the basis of how people said they voted at the 1997 general election. Labour manages to retain only 54% of its 1997 vote on the 2nd vote, while the SNP holds on to 67% of its 1997 vote. What is particularly worrying for Labour is that its Westminster vote holds up well (see table 2) where it has a lead of 16 percentage points over the SNP. As one might expect, there is agreement among respondents that there is better reason for voting SNP in Scottish elections than for Westminster ones (68% to 35%).

The poll a month later - in May/June - confirmed these trends. While Labour led the SNP on the first vote by 40% to 35%, on the second vote the SNP was ahead by 31% to 29%, identical margins to the April poll. What caught the eye in the May/June poll was that a majority of respondents said they would vote for an independent Scotland in a referendum (52%), reversing an earlier System Three poll which put support for independence at 34%. This led to a dispute about question wording. Whereas the System Three poll used the word 'separation', the ICM poll question asked: 'In a referendum on independence for Scotland, how would you vote?' - with two options available: 'I agree that Scotland should become an independent country' - 52%, and 'I do not agree that Scotland should become an independent country' - 41%. Support for independence was strongest among young people (63%), and skilled manual workers (60%), with the majority of Labour voters opting for Independence (48% to 44%).

The ICM April poll explored attitudes to coalition politics. It found 62% supporting the idea of a coalition government formed by 2 parties, with 33% supporting single-party government. The preferred party coalition was Labour and the Liberal Democrats (50%), although a SNP/LibDem coalition was not far behind on 44%. Interestingly, Tories split 49/43 on these options, and LibDems themselves 50/45, suggesting that a non-Labour government is viewed as a distinct option by voters.

As regards the revenue of a Scottish parliament, almost half (47%) agreed that it should accept funding from Westminster, with 38% supporting the view that a Scottish parliament should raise all its revenues in Scotland. Only SNP supporters were in a majority on this latter position (51%), with Tories weakest (22%). Respondents were almost equally divided on whether the tax-varying powers which loomed so large in the referendum, and which were supported by 64% in the actual vote, should be used. Forty eight percent agreed that income tax should be increased by up to 3p in the £ to be spent on more public services, with 43% agreeing that income tax rates should stay as they are. Only 6% argued that this tax should be reduced by up to 3p in the £.

NATIONAL IDENTITY

In terms of national identity, the findings of the ICM September poll were broadly in line with previous ones on the issue. Twenty nine percent said they were Scottish not British, 30% more Scottish than British, 28% equally Scottish and British, 2% more British than Scottish, and 8% British not Scottish. The May/June ICM poll repeated the question, and the results were comparable, with 26% saying they were Scottish not British, 33% more Scottish than British, 26% equally Scottish and British, with 5% more British than Scottish, and 7% British not Scottish. Those forefronting Scottishness were young people, and skilled manual workers. As before, there is no simple relationship between voting intention and national identity, with only 37% of SNP voters saying they considered themselves Scottish not British; the largest number of SNP voters - 41% - said that they were more Scottish than British.

MINISTERIAL POPULARITY

There can be little doubt that government ministers in Scotland have not had it easy in the year or so since the general election. Nevertheless, they can take comfort from the findings that their satisfaction levels are high. Donald Dewar earned a 68% to 12% satisfaction to dissatisfaction score in the February 1997 poll, though this had narrowed to 51%/37% by June 1998. In the February poll, opinion was broadly split between Dewar and Salmond as regards who would make the best First Minister in a Scottish Parliament (41% to 40% respectively). Conservative and LibDem voters opted for the Labour over the SNP leader. Other Scottish Ministers earned good satisfaction ratings: Sam Galbraith with 51/17, Brian Wilson 44/19, Henry McLeish 40/15, Calum McDonald 28/16, and Lord Sewel 26/19 (reflecting in large part the fact that only 31% have actually heard of the minister for agriculture who has a seat in the Lords). The Prime Minister Tony Blair received mixed reviews. Marginally more thought him 'out of touch with the needs of people in Scotland' (46%) than thought him in touch (45%).

THE GLASGOW FACTOR

ICM's February poll contained a boosted sample of 508 in Glasgow. In a putative local election, 35% said they would vote Labour, but 29% that they would vote SNP, with Tories and LibDems taking up the rear with 10% and 5% respectively. While nearly 8 to 1 agreed with the view that the embattled Lord Provost Pat Lally should step down, Glasgow's citizens were not minded to think ill of all their councillors. Only 7% thought that all councillors were corrupt, but 82% that some were, and some weren't. Only 3% thought none were corrupt. Similarly, they were fairly sanguine about the effect of recent

Opinion Polls, July 1997 - June 1998

allegations on the city's reputation. Twenty nine percent thought it had been damaged a lot, 46% a little, and 22% not at all.

Finally, this ICM poll asked about religious sectarianism. A majority of Glasgow citizens (55%, disproportionately young, male, Labour voters) thought sectarianism 'a big problem', with 34% that it was a small problem, and a mere 6% that it was no problem at all. There was little difference between Catholics and Protestants in this assessment, with 58% and 57% respectively thinking it a serious problem. As regards the contribution of the city's two main football clubs to sectarianism, Rangers come out worse than Celtic. Fifty three percent thought the former have not done enough (even most Protestants think this), while Celtic were judged to have done more (44% to 40%). Glaswegians opt 55% to 40% to end separate Catholic education in Scotland, compared with a breakdown of 54/39 in Scotland as a whole. Catholics split 38/59, with Protestants opting 58/34. Those wishing to end separate schooling were disproportionately male, SNP voters, and the middle classes.

APPENDIX

(a) System Three carried out the following polls for **The Herald**:

Poll on a Scottish Parliament: 1039 adults at 39 sampling points throughout Scotland between 6-7 September 1997.

Voting intentions for Westminster and Scottish Parliaments: 1019 adults in 38 constituencies throughout Scotland between 23-28 April 1998.

Voting intentions for a Scottish Parliament: October 1997 (N=864); January 1998 (N=851); February 1998 (N=886); March 1998 (N=863); April 1998 (N=870).

(b) ICM carried out the following polls:

June 1997 (N=1801) for **The Scotsman**

July 1997 (N=1007) for **Scotland on Sunday**

August 1997 (N=1001) for **The Scotsman**

September 1997 (N=1010) for **Scotland on Sunday**

September 1997 (N=1809) for **The Scotsman**

February 1998 (N=1022) for **The Scotsman**

April 1998 (N=1017) for **Scotland on Sunday**

May/June 1998 (N=1000) for **The Scotsman**

(c) MORI carried out a poll for **The Mail on Sunday** in March 1998 (N=862).

The **Scottish Affairs** editors are grateful to the polling organisations System Three, ICM and MORI and their respective sponsors, **The Herald**, **The Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday**, and **The Mail on Sunday** for permission to use these polls.

June 1998