

OPINION POLLS IN SCOTLAND MAY 1993-JUNE 1994

David McCrone

Surveying public opinion in Scotland is now largely the preserve of two companies, System Three who carry out monthly surveys of voting intention for **The Herald** (supplemented by additional questions on two occasions), and ICM for **The Scotsman** who did three substantial surveys, in September 1993 and March and June 1994.

VOTING INTENTIONS

In last year's survey of opinion polls for **Scottish Affairs** (number 4), we pointed out that by late 1992 the SNP had overtaken the Conservatives, who averaged 20% of the popular vote. In 1993 the Tories only managed to achieve this on two occasions, and in the last year have averaged a mere 15%, compared with 24% for the SNP, and on a par with the Scottish Liberal Democrats at 14%. Labour continues to outstrip the other parties with an average poll rating of 46%. There have been two actual contests in Scotland this year, the regional elections in May 1994 when Labour took 40.9% of the vote, SNP 26.6%, Conservatives 13.9% and the Liberal Democrats 12.5%. In the June 1994 European elections, support for the parties was as follows: Labour 42.5%, SNP 32.6%, Conservative 14.5% and Liberal Democrats 7.2%.

Of the two polling organisations, System Three estimates a lower share going to Labour than ICM (by between 6 and 10%), and broadly comparable results

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for the other parties. The broad monthly trends in the System Three polls are as shown in the graph on page 126.

Voting Intention
(percentages reported by ICM)

	Con	Lab	SLD	SNP
September 1993	12	53	10	23
March 1994	14	52	11	22
*June 1994	10	46	11	31

**The June 1994 figures indicate voting intention for the European election, whereas the earlier polls asked about a future general election.*

For technical details, see note at end of article.

The three ICM polls (in the table on page 126) reflect the fact, also shown in the System Three polls, that there has been very little shift in Scottish political opinion over the last 12 months (the Green Party failing to reach 1% in the polls).

As regards support from different social groups and genders, the patterns are broadly in line with previous ones. The gender gap in support for the Conservatives has disappeared (although there was a 5 percentage-point gap in their favour among women when they were asked in March 1994 to recall how they had voted at the last general election nearly two years earlier). However, fewer women than men give their allegiance to the SNP (a gap of between 6 and 7 percentage points at the two polls), and slightly fewer women than men gave their support to Labour (a gap of between 3 and 5 points). The failure of the SNP to appeal to women voters remains one of the puzzles of Scottish politics. It is not that they vote disproportionately for other parties, although twice as many women as men claim to be 'don't knows', and given what we now know about the reluctance of Conservative supporters to declare their vote openly, it might be that more women are closet Tories than men (remembering the general election recall vote we referred to earlier).

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The SNP continues to do well among the age group 18 to 34 (though most still vote Labour), and fairly badly among those over 65, a reverse image of support for the Conservatives. In social class terms, Labour captures the largest share even of the AB vote, as well as of all the other social groups, reinforcing its position as Scotland's dominant political party.

The main interest of the ICM poll on voting intentions in the Monklands by-election was the evidence it revealed of a religious divide. For the electorate as a whole in the constituency, the poll found 50% intending to vote Labour, 43% SNP, 5% Conservative, and 2% Liberal Democrat. (This predicted the actual result quite closely: 49.8% Labour, 45% SNP, 2.3% Conservative, and 2.6% Liberal Democrat.) Among Catholics, Labour had 85% and the SNP 15%. In stark contrast, among Protestants, the SNP were far ahead, with 65%; Labour had only 24%.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION

The pollsters still cannot resist tinkering with the wording of questions on constitutional options. ICM have reworded theirs so that the 'independence' option now reads *'Scotland should have its own independent parliament with full taxation and spending powers, and leave the UK parliament at Westminster'*. Previously ICM used two options on Independence, one reading *'an Independent Scotland which is separate from both England and Wales, and the European Community'*, and the other *'an Independent Scotland which is separate from both England and Wales, and part of the European Community'*. The previous 'devolution' option which once read *'Scotland remaining part of the UK with its own devolved assembly with some taxation and spending power'* now reads *'Scotland should have its own parliament with some taxation and spending powers but also remain part of the UK parliament at Westminster'*. The 'status quo' option which simply had *'no change from the present system'* says more positively *'Scotland should continue to have taxation and spending decided at the UK parliament at Westminster as at present'*. System Three on the other hand has opted for a more economical form of questioning with four options: *'complete Independence regardless of whether a member of the EC or not'*, *'complete Independence in Europe - an independent Scotland but only if a member of the EC'*, *'a Scottish parliament responsible for Scottish affairs, but within the UK'*, and *'no change from the present system'*. None of this word-changing may matter much except for the tendency for politicians and journalists to make political mountains out of statistical molehills, and to draw extravagant conclusions about the long-term trends in Scottish politics.

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The two sets of polls are on page 130; it is noticeable that the broad patterns are remarkably similar, regardless of the changes of wording. Further details of the polls showed that there is more support for Independence proportionally among men than among women (a differential of between 5 and 12 percentage points across the polls), among young people aged 18-34 than among those aged 65 plus (differential of between 10 and 15 points); and among socio-economic groups DE than among the group AB (differential of between 17 and 24 points). Differentials were also evident for the status quo option, although it is important to point out that it is a minority option for all social groups, with the highest support among those over 65 (27%), and AB groups (28%). The intermediate option of a Scottish parliament in the UK is the most popular one for men and women, for all ages, and for all social groups. It also attracts around 38% of Conservatives, and between a quarter to a half of SNP voters, as well as a majority of Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters. No other option commands such broad support across social and political groupings.

Constitutional options

1. percentages as reported by ICM

	September 1993	March 1994	June 1994
'Independence' option	34	38	35
'Devolution' option	47	44	46
'Status Quo' option	17	16	15

2. percentages as reported by System Three

	May 1993	May 1994
Independence regardless of in or out of Europe	16	10
Independence in Europe	18	19
Scottish parliament within UK	49	52

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No change

15

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For technical details, see note at end of article.

VOTER SATISFACTION

Politics and politicians are not universally popular in Scotland. The dissatisfaction levels with the government (at nearly 9 out of 10 voters), with the Prime Minister (80%), and with Ian Lang (around 70%) are not surprising, while opposition politicians do not rate particularly highly. Jim Wallace of the Liberal Democrats rates a satisfaction level of 24%, with 30% dissatisfied. Even George Robertson has figures of 35% and 43% respectively, better than his predecessor Tom Clarke (28/40). Alex Salmond on 39/38 is the best of the bunch. The untimely death of John Smith, the UK Labour leader, brought generous tributes, but while he was alive he struggled to improve his ratings in Scotland with 48% satisfied with his performance, and 35% dissatisfied in the March 1994 poll, better than his predecessor Neil Kinnock, but by less than one might have expected.

John Major's unpopularity is reflected in the fact that two-thirds thought that he should regard the outcome of the European elections as the people's vote on him as prime minister, and 62% thought that the Conservatives should replace him in the event of them doing badly (ICM June 1994). As regards Labour's leadership issue, this poll indicated that there was strong support for Tony Blair in Scotland, with 32% supporting him as Labour leader against 20% for Gordon Brown (and only 8% for Robin Cook). Asked to choose when Brown announced he would not stand, support for Blair rose to 41%, with Prescott and Beckett poor seconds on 13% each. However, only 16% thought that Labour had a better chance of winning the election under a leader other than John Smith, compared with 36% who thought it would have a worse chance, and 42% who said it would make no difference.

SOCIAL CLASS

The ICM September 1993 poll carried a set of interesting questions about social class. These are particularly interesting north of the border given the myths of classlessness as well as of class action which many have written about. Only 30% thought that they belonged to any social class, and two-thirds denied that they did. The tendency to claim allegiance to a class was slightly stronger among men than among women, among Labour and SNP

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voters than among Conservatives or Liberal Democrats, and in social groups C, D or E than in groups A or B. If forced to choose, two-thirds of all respondents would describe themselves as 'working class', and only one-quarter as 'middle class'. In terms of actual occupation, it is interesting that so many of the non-manual ABC1 classes (as many as 52%) described themselves as 'working class', suggesting that the general propensity of people in Britain to describe themselves as working class (according to British Social Attitudes Surveys) is also common in Scotland.

Respondents were also asked to define the key characteristics of different social classes. The 'Upper Class' (there were, incidentally, only two people in the survey who owned up to being in this class) was defined by most people in terms of their wealth (41%), where they lived (32%), and their education (31%). Those in socio-economic group AB - in objective terms likely to be the middle class - thought that being 'upper class' depended on who your parents were. Being 'Middle Class' was for most respondents an issue of where you lived (37%), the job you did (36%), and the money you earned (34%), with the AB group stressing the importance of educational credentials. It is unfortunate that ICM opted to ask people about what made people 'lower class' rather than 'working class', as the terms have quite different meanings. Being 'lower class' in this survey was deemed by most people to be a matter of where you lived and the job you did.

Finally, respondents were asked their views on social mobility. Sixty one per cent disagreed with the view that 'it is easy for people to move from one social class to another', with men, young people, Labour and SNP voters thinking it especially difficult. Asked about the statement 'You are much more likely to get to the top in this country if you've been to a private school', 61% thought that it was true, especially men, those over 65, Labour and SNP voters. All in all, Scots seem quite pessimistic about John Major's 'classless society'.

LAW AND ORDER

ICM's September 1993 poll also sought out opinions about the police. In ideal terms, respondents thought that the police force should 'treat all members of the community equally' (59%), 'be successful in combatting crime' (54%), 'be patient in dealing with the public' (50%), 'spend a lot of time getting to know the local community' (46%), and 'be more honest than most people' (45%). The 'social' aspects of policing were especially highly rated by women, manual workers, and young people. There was, however, a

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considerable gap between the 'ideal' and how the police were judged to operate in the local area. The shortfall between actual performance and expectations was particularly large in regard to community policing, being patient, getting to know the community, and combatting crime. Only on the police force's being 'well paid' was there rough parity between reality and expectations, a somewhat cynical estimate of esteem.

As regards penal policy, Scots seem to be largely conservative. Forty nine per cent thought that the main purpose of prison should be to punish the criminal, and only 31% to reform them. The most 'authoritarian' in these regards turned out to be the old, the working class, and Labour/SNP voters. The most 'liberal' appeared to be the young, AB social classes, and, surprisingly, Conservative voters. Again, most people thought that prison was too little used rather than too much (46% compared with 24%), community service too much used rather than too little (39% versus 30%), and a fairly even balance in the use of fines as a form of punishment (30/31% respectively). There was overwhelming support for the view that the prison regime was too soft (65%) rather than too hard (5%) or 'about right' (19%).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

The 1993-4 period saw major, and contested, proposals work their way through parliament to reform local government. In their March 1994 poll ICM asked a battery of questions about this. Fifty one per cent thought that it was not a good idea, with only 30% in favour. Forty per cent judged that the boundaries for their new council were 'wrong for the area', double those who were favourable. There was general scepticism that services would improve, with 39% thinking they would get worse, and only 11% that they would improve. Not even Conservative supporters were optimistic in this regard, with only 22% thinking they would improve, and the majority - 52% - that they would stay at the same level. However, not even Tories were convinced that local taxes would remain the same or be reduced. Overall, 62% of respondents thought taxes would be higher, including 50% of Conservative supporters.

System Three also asked questions about local government reform in their March 1994 poll. Over half - 52% - preferred the present two-tier system, and only 35% a single tier. This poll was carried out during the Strathclyde referendum on the government's proposals for water and sewerage which was to show that 97% in that region were opposed to the plans. The Strathclyde findings had not been made public by the time the System Three poll

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published its results, but these were broadly in line with the referendum result, with 81% opposed to the government's proposals for the future of the water and sewerage services, and only 10% in favour. The proposals were not even convincing to the government's own supporters, with 65% of Tories hostile to the government's plans.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

General pessimism about the government's strategy was reflected in people's assessments about the economic conditions of themselves as well as the country at large (ICM March 1994). Fifty per cent of respondents thought that their family's standard of living would deteriorate in the following 12 months (only 10% that it would improve), and the same percentage - 50% - were pessimistic about the economic conditions in Scotland generally, with only 8% thinking that it would improve. Labour was judged to be the party most trusted to run the economy (45%), as well as to be fair with taxes (47%). The Tories languished on 12% and 11% respectively.

WOMEN AND POLITICS

ICM's 1994 poll carried questions about women in politics. Very few - 18% - thought that men are better at politics than women (75% dissented), and 85% agreed that there were not enough women involved in politics. This was in line with support for the view that 'governments would make better decisions if more women were involved in politics' (72% agreed, and 18% disagreed). Three-quarters of respondents agreed that political parties should make special efforts to involve more women, and only 20% disagreed. There was broad support for these views in general among all social groups, ages and genders, with older people especially supportive.

PERSONAL MORALITY

The conservatism of Scots is reflected in their hostility to the proposal which was carried in a free vote at Westminster to reduce the minimum age for legal gay sex. Fifty four per cent of respondents disapproved of the age reduction from 21 to 18, and even more - 73% - opposed a further reduction to 16. There was particular opposition to both sets of proposals from those over 65, and in manual classes DE.

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Respondents were also asked in this ICM March 1994 poll about their attitudes to the private lives of politicians. Nearly three-quarters thought that politicians should observe higher standards of behaviour than the public in their private lives, while 72% disapproved of the media paying too much attention to politicians' private lives. Nevertheless, a majority - 56% - did not think a government minister should be dismissed if he had an affair.

The government's attempts to develop a 'back to basics' policy was clearly causing confusion, at least in Scotland. Seventy five per cent thought that the aims of the policy were unclear, and even 63% of Conservatives thought so too.

EUROPEAN UNION

System Three asked a series of questions in anticipation of the June 1994 European elections. While Labour was judged to be the party most Scots would vote for (41%), the largest response to the question 'Which party has the best policies and approach on European affairs' was 'don't know' (31%), with Labour a close second on 27%. Seventy three per cent thought that they were likely to vote in the Euro-elections, with 17% unlikely. Worryingly for the Tories, 20% of their supporters were likely to abstain.

The coolness to Europe does not extend to wishing the UK to leave the European Union. Only 23% wish this to happen, disproportionately women, manual workers, over 65s, and SNP supporters, who continue to show an ambivalence to the European Union despite the party's current slogan of Independence in Europe. There is strong support (61% versus 20%) for the view that Britain should make more effort to become part of Europe 'by supporting European unity more', with more positive support coming from the young, professional workers and managers, and Labour supporters. Once more, there is approval for Britain staying a member of the EU (70% compared with 15% who dissent). In broad terms, the European project has particular support from social classes AB, young people, and, on different questions, supporters of Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives. Only SNP supporters are more equivocal, probably because their political agenda does not include being part of the UK and its position within the EU.

ICM's June poll carried good news for the SNP. The party's victory in the North East Scotland Euro-seat was predicted on the basis of these poll results. The SNP also did well in the poll as the party which would best

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represent Scotland's interests in Europe (33% compared with 35% for Labour). However, there was an interesting symmetry between SNP and Labour voters, with 24% of SNP supporters thinking Labour best represented Scotland's interests in Europe, and 22% of Labour supporters thinking the SNP fulfilled that role.

This poll showed strong support for the view that an independent Scotland ('like Ireland and Denmark') would get a better deal in Europe, with 48%, compared with 15% who thought it would be worse, and 28% who said it would make no difference. On the other hand, there was no great enthusiasm for European economic and political integration, with 45% wanting the process slowed down (especially strong among older people, Conservatives, and social classes DE), and only 29% wanting it accelerated. This Euro-scepticism was also reflected in attitudes to a single European currency (39% for, 49% against), and in the view that less importance should be given to the European Commission, and to the European Parliament (43% and 39% respectively). Nevertheless, three-quarters wanted the EU to guarantee employment rights and salaries in its member states. Fifty per cent thought that the EU should only deal with issues not adequately dealt with by national governments, while, on the other hand, 83% wanted a referendum to decide on a single European currency rather than leaving it for the state parliaments to decide (supported by only 15%).

Finally, the ICM June poll tried out a variant of the 'national identity' question which it had used previously (most recently in April 1992: see **Scottish Affairs**, no.4, pp.130-1). Forty per cent described themselves as Scottish only, 33% Scottish and British, 10% Scottish and European, 5% British and European, and 11% Scottish, British and European. In other words, just over a quarter currently describe themselves in part as 'European', suggesting that national (Scottish) identity, and state (British) identity are still more significant in Scotland than European identity. Conservatives and Liberal-Democrat supporters are more likely than Labour or SNP supporters to claim European identity, although mainly in conjunction with being British.

CONCLUSION

The opinion polls continue to provide a valuable insight into public opinion in Scotland. In the last few years the number and extent of such surveys has diminished, as the **Sunday Times** withdrew funding from MORI for its polls north of the border. System Three for **The Herald** continues to be an

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invaluable source of information on month-on-month voting intentions, while ICM for **The Scotsman** gives important in-depth data on a range of social and political attitudes. Both newspapers and their pollsters provide an important service not only to readers of this journal, but to Scotland as a whole.

TECHNICAL NOTE

ICM interviewed quota samples of just over 1000 adults aged 18 and over in 52 randomly selected constituencies throughout Scotland in September 1993, and March and June 1994. In the Monklands poll, they interviewed 614 adults in 35 randomly selected enumeration districts, between 22 and 25 June 1994.

System Three interviewed over 1000 adults aged 18 and over in 40 constituencies across Scotland.

The editors are grateful to the polling organisations and their respective sponsors, **The Scotsman** and **The Herald**, for permission to use these polls.

June 1994