

5

F

Summary of Main Findings of a Survey of the National Political Mood

Fieldwork 6-7 May 1983

Harris Research Centre  
(O.R.C.)

2307 Interviews were carried out with a nationally representative quota sample of electors on 6th & 7th May 1983.

Main Points:-

Voting Intention

The Alliance is taking more votes from Labour than Conservative except in the DE Social Group.  
Amongst the under 44's it is drawing equally from both parties.

Loyalty

Alliance support is weaker than support for Conservatives or Labour.

Local Elections

93% of those who voted Conservative in local elections intend to do so in a General Election.

86% of those who voted Labour intend to vote Labour in a General Election.

76% of those who voted for the Alliance intend to do so in a General Election.

Almost half of those who did not vote in the local elections intend to vote Conservative in a General Election.

Timing

50% of voters, but only 35% of Conservatives want a June Election.

Two thirds of voters think the Conservatives would win in June.

More electors (49%) think it in the National Interest to have a June Election rather than wait (35%)

Propositions

There is more agreement than disagreement with the ideas that

"Conservatives need another 5 years to make Britain prosperous."

"The Economy is gradually improving and will continue to do so."

"Labour policies on nuclear disarmament are not thought more likely to win support than Conservative policies."

Conservative policies are blamed by a majority of voters for

- the level of unemployment
- damage to the Health Service
- damage to the Education system

The Alliance has some attractions ■ to voters from other parties if they are thought to be doing well, but equally if they are thought to be doing badly some of their supporters may not vote for them (up to one third). Considerably more current Alliance supporters were previously Liberal (39%), Labour (37%) than Conservative (30%).

Voting Intention

Current Voting Intention is:- %

Conservative	44
Labour	34
Liberal/SDP Alliance	20
Others	2

The differences in share of the vote between 1979 and now for the three main parties demonstrates that Labour has been losing support to the Alliance to a greater degree than the Conservatives except in its traditional demographic constituency - the DE's.

Difference in % of Vote between 1979-1983

		<u>Conservative</u>	<u>Labour</u>	<u>Liberal &amp;*</u> <u>SDP Alliance</u>
<u>Sex</u>	Men	-1	-8	+9
	Women	-4	-6	+10
<u>Social Class</u>	AB	-1	-3	+4
	C1	-1	-6	+8
	C2	-3	-9	+12
	DE	-10	-3	+13
<u>Age</u>	18-24	-6	-7	+13
	25-44	-4	-5	+9
	45-64	-1	-8	+9
	65+	-1	-11	+11

\*Increase in Alliance share of vote over 1979 Liberal vote.

note: the % vote for other parties is variously up or down by 1%.

Difference in % of Vote between 1979 & 1983

	<u>Conservative</u>	<u>Labour</u>	<u>Alliance</u>
*North	-14	+8	+5
North West	-7	-2	+8
Yorks. & Humberside	+3	-18	+15
W. Midlands	-7	-7	+15
*E. Midlands	-10	+5	+6
*E. Anglia	-	-12	+12
South West	-3	-5	+8
South East	+3	-9	+6
London	-3	-6	+6
*Wales	+10	-16	+7
Scotland	-4	-2	+12 (other -6)

\* Caution. Small sample sizes

Strength of Party Support

Labour voters are somewhat stronger than Conservative or Alliance voters in their allegiance, but is predictable when a Party is down towards its "bedrock" support.

Voting Intention

	<u>Conservative</u>	<u>Labour</u>	<u>Liberal</u>	<u>SDP</u>	<u>Alliance</u>
	%	%	%	%	%
Saying they support their party					
very strongly	42	51	25	26	23
fairly strongly	41	33	49	44	56
not very/not at all strongly	17	15	26	30	21
Don't Know	1	2	-	-	-

Alliance support is significantly weaker than that for the two main parties which suggests an element of 'floating' or 'protest' rather than 'positive' vote.

Local Elections

In regions excluding Scotland - the GLC, 59% of voters claimed to have voted in Local Elections including

58% of those who would vote Conservative in a General Election

65% of those who would vote Labour in a General Election

56% of those who would vote for the Alliance in a General Election

Young people, those least likely to vote in a General Election were much less likely to have voted in local elections.

The General Election voting intention of those who voted for the Alliance demonstrates both the vulnerability of Alliance support and the extent to which they can draw support from those who incline towards the main parties.

	<u>Did Vote in Local Elections for</u>			<u>Did not</u>
	<u>Conservative</u>	<u>Labour</u>	<u>Alliance</u>	<u>vote</u>
Would vote in	%	%	%	%
a General Election for:				
Conservative	93	4	13	45
Labour	3	86	8	25
Liberal	2	2	36	18
SDP	2	4	24	7
Alliance	-	1	16	3
Other	*	*	1	*
Refused/would not vote etc.	*	3	2	9

\* Means less than 1%

The voting intention in a General Election of those who did not vote locally demonstrates why Labour did rather better in fact than opinion polls would suggest. Almost half of those who did not vote locally are Conservative supporters.

There is unlikely to be any bandwagon effect from the local elections. Almost three quarters of voters thought no party had done well and none had done badly.

11% of electors thought the Conservatives had done well

12% of electors thought the Labour Party had done well

19% of electors thought the Alliance had done badly.

Recognition of Alliance failure was strongest in the Midlands and the North West.



Election Timing

Half the voters think the Election should be held in June. In common with other recent Poll Findings this poll indicates that those favouring June are mostly Labour & Alliance voters. Only a minority of Conservatives would prefer the Election then.

Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority of electors believe that the Conservatives would win a June Election.

<u>Preferred Election date</u>	<u>Voting Intention</u>			
	<u>All</u>	<u>Conservative</u>	<u>Labour</u>	<u>Alliance</u>
	%	%	%	%
next month/ June	50	35	70	54
October/the Autumn	16	21	11	16
Later/next Spring	15	22	7	11
Don't Know	19	22	12	19

Irrespective of personal preference who do voters think would win a June Election.

<u>Party which would win in June</u>	<u>Voting Intention</u>			
	<u>All</u>	<u>Conservative</u>	<u>Labour</u>	<u>Alliance</u>
	%	%	%	%
Conservative	67	83	49	63
Labour	18	7	34	15
Liberal/SDP Alliance	3	2	3	8
Other	*	*	*	1
Don't know	12	8	14	13

\*Means less than 1%

When asked whether it was in the National Interest to have an election in June or to wait for a later date, voters gave answers very similar in pattern to their preferences: ie the % thinking it was in the National Interest to have a June Election was very similar to the % preferring to have a June Election.

<u>In National Interest</u>	<u>Voting Intention</u>			
	<u>All</u>	<u>Conservative</u>	<u>Labour</u>	<u>Alliance</u>
	%	%	%	%
to have a June Election	49	37	65	52
to wait until later	35	45	26	35
Don't Know	16	18	9	13

Older and middle class people, more inclined to be Conservative, tended to favour waiting.

A quarter of the electorate feels that it would make any difference for people like themselves whether there is an Election next month - 18% of Conservatives, 38% of Labour voters, 27% of Alliance voters. From the opposition supporters this is clearly a wish to do battle, in spite of the fact that many of them believe they may not win.

Election debating propositions

- i. "The Conservative Party needs another five years in power to make Britain prosperous."

Predictably opinion splits largely along party lines. 48% of voters agree with the concept, 42% disagree. 90% of Conservative accept the idea and only 4% disagree. The argument also has appeal to a minority (24%) of weak Labour voters, and to 28% of weak Alliance supporters.

- ii. "The Economy is gradually improving and will continue to do so."

50% of voters agree - 37% disagree. Although 19% of weak Conservatives disagree, just over a third of weak Alliance and Labour voters agree with the argument.

- iii. "Labour policies on nuclear disarmament are likely to win more support than Conservative policies."

The balance of opinion is against this view - 45% disagree and 37% agree. One Conservative in five agrees with the argument, while a similar proportion of Labour voters disagree. Amongst Alliance voters 38% to 47% disagree. Other surveys have indicated that nuclear weapons are not a leading issue and although highlighting Labour policy may win over some opposition voters it also runs a risk of alienating some Conservative support.

- iv. "Conservative policies have severely damaged the National Health Service."

52% of all voters, including a quarter of Conservatives accept this argument while only 29% of the electorate disagrees. Obviously Labour-Alliance voters are more likely to accept this view, but it has gained considerable credibility amongst middle class and older voters.

- v. "The policies of the Conservative Government have severely damaged the Education service provided for most children."

53% of voters, again, accept this while only 31% disagree. Once more a significant minority of Conservative voters (24%) believe their Government has done harm in an area of some importance. Those under 45 are more likely than others to take this view.

- vi. "The current level of unemployment is largely due to the present Conservative Government's policies."

51% of the electorate agrees with this argument (23% agree strongly, 40% disagree). 21% of Conservative voters accept the proposition as do 86% of Labour and 63% of Alliance supporters.

While the electorate is clearly susceptible to this argument when put so baldly other research has shown that when other reasons are given (e.g. world recession, imports, etc.) these are similarly acceptable.

The Alliance

There is some potential for an Alliance 'bandwagon'. Voters are more likely to support the Alliance if they thought the Alliance would get a majority or hold the balance of power.

While this applies to a significant minority of Conservative voters it applies slightly more so to Labour. Similarly a significant proportion (27%) of Alliance supporters would not vote for them if they thought on a few seats were winnable.

Likelihood of voting for Alliance if:	<u>Voting Intention</u>		
	<u>Conservative</u>	<u>Labour</u>	<u>Alliance</u>
	%	%	%
they would get a majority they were likely to hold the balance of power	18	28	85
they would only win a few seats	17	25	88
	5	10	65

There is a general inclination to think that the Labour Party would be harmed rather more than the Conservatives if the Alliance "did well".

Party most harmed if Alliance do well.	<u>All Voters</u>
	%
Labour	43
Conservative	33
Both equally	10
Other	1
Don't know	

Previous Allegiance of Alliance Voters

77% of those currently intending to vote for the Alliance claim to have voted in 1979.

Of them

39% claim to have voted Liberal

37% claim to have voted Labour

20% claim to have voted Conservative

4% either voted for another party or refused

this is consistent with indications that the Alliance is drawing more highly from Labour than Conservatives.

Government Record and Leaders

Opinion is evenly divided on the Government's record. 42% approve and 47% disapprove. Party polarisation is strong. 81% of Conservatives approve of the Government's record, 83% of Labour and 66% of SDP disapprove.

The Pattern is very similar in respect of satisfaction with the Prime Minister. 45% are satisfied (88% of Conservatives) and 50% dissatisfied (89% of Labour and 75% of Alliance).

Only 22% think Mr Foot is a Good Labour Leader - including only 45% of Labour voters.

Mr Steel's appeal as a Good Liberal Leader (60% overall) is to Conservatives (58%) Labour voters (54%) as well as to Alliance voters (80%).

Mr Jenkins is thought to be a good SDP leader by 29%, compared with 45% who think 'not'. 24% of Conservatives think he is a good SDP leader as do 27% of Labour voters and 61% of SDP voters, but only 34% of Liberal voters.