

JW has survey
in his file 15/9

PRIME MINISTER

Detailed Opinion Survey of
Current Political Attitudes

The Chairman has sent over the findings of an in-depth study of current political attitudes, which the Party recently commissioned from Harris Research.

On the whole, it makes for encouraging reading and Peter Brooke's covering note provides a useful commentary; ~~and~~ attached to it is a summary of the findings. The report itself is optional but you might like to glance through it.

JW
7

Thank you.

JOHN WHITTINGDALE

6.8.88

very helpful. Agree that

Peter Brooke should send the report to the people he indicated. not



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From:
THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARTY
The Rt. Hon. Peter Brooke MP

PB/AM

CONFIDENTIAL

29th July 1988

From: The Chairman
To: The Prime Minister

SUMMER STRATEGY SURVEY

We now have the results of the major Opinion Research Survey which I commissioned from Harris Research. A note summarising the findings is attached to this minute. In an appendix to that note we compare the results of this year's Survey with those of 1985 and 1986. I also enclose the full document for you to read at greater leisure.

The purpose of such Surveys is to provide a basis on which to plan political strategy. This Survey confirms the great strength of our position and the weakness of our opponents, particularly the SLD and (probably terminally) the SDP. It reveals how and where future problems might arise. But overall it provides a strong endorsement of the style and content of our approach - and a more reliable one than day-to-day Opinion Polls or by-election results.

I would draw your attention to five areas of particular interest.

1. COMMITMENT

Our supporters are firmly committed to us, as are Labour's to them: commitment among the reduced ranks of Centre Party supporters is very weak. Among our supporters, it is the young and trade unionists whose support appears most fragile.

2. ISSUES

We chose for good reason to ask people about the problems facing their families rather than the problems facing the country, a technique which is more likely to yield honest and useful replies. The result shows that unemployment has fallen well down the list of problems - below health, the Community Charge, pensions and education and stands joint fifth with inflation.

3.

PARTY IMAGE

We are far ahead of Labour and further still ahead of the Centre Parties as regards overall image. We are thought decisive, well led, purposeful, capable, respected and united. Labour are none of these things but, as has been true for many years, they are well ahead on 'caring'.

4.

BRITAIN IN THE WORLD

There is evidence of increased pride in Britain as a place to live and optimism about the country's future.

5.

CHANGE

The thirst for change is unabated - though there is evidence to show that Labour and Conservative supporters, not surprisingly, want changes of different kinds. We are the Party thought best able to effect change.

The Survey does show our weak points:

- (a) Our record on the NHS and education are still heavily criticised.
- (b) Our policies are considered to be unfair and divisive and to encourage selfishness.
- (c) Misunderstandings and fears about the Community Charge are widespread.

I draw several conclusions.

First, competence, strength and leadership remain fundamental to our appeal. We must not be deflected by the criticism which that style of politics attracts.

Second, our record on the economy underpins our political strength. It is because we are competent in dealing with economic matters that we are considered competent to tackle other tasks.

Third, we must continue to harness the desire for radical change: the 'consolidators' have no constituency.

But, fourth, the areas in which people expect us to make changes and improvements - health, education and law and order - are ones where results are particularly slow to appear. Of these I consider law and order to be the most intractable.

Fifth, in spite of the ambiguous attitude of the electorate to politicians talking about morality (see pages 10 and 22 of the full Survey), we must make new efforts to explain why our approach is not only practical and successful but also morally right.

Sixth, our rhetoric should be unashamedly patriotic: people want to believe in Britain.

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I would like, subject to your views, to send the full report to the Chancellor of the Exchequer since economic matters figure large in it. I would prefer not to circulate either the summary note or the full report more widely. But I would wish to send the findings on the NHS to Ken Clarke and on the Community Charge to Nicholas Ridley. (On both these topics I am considering whether further Opinion Research is necessary).

You may wish to discuss this note and the Survey at one of your morning meetings. Here in Central Office we shall use the findings as a basis for our communication strategy during the Parliament.

Agreed mb

Pam Brooker