



HOUSE OF LORDS

Library Note

Understanding and Sourcing Political Opinion Polls

This Library Note provides an overview of contemporary political opinion polls. Section two of the Note focuses on how to understand political polling data, including the accuracy of polls. Section three discusses professional standards within the polling industry and provides an introduction to the British Polling Council, an association of pollsters that aims to encourage the advancement of such standards. Finally, section four summarises the various types of political poll commonly conducted and where to source them. This includes polls on: voting intention for general elections, as well as by-elections, devolved parliament and assembly elections, and European Parliament elections; perceptions of political parties and their leaders, and of politics more generally; and the issues of most importance to voters, such as the economy and immigration. A short summary of major polling organisations operating in the UK is also provided in the Appendix.

Tom Ashfold
ESRC/POST Fellow
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1. Introduction

Public opinion polls are an increasingly prominent feature of daily life—particularly within politics. Fuelled in part by the rapid growth of the internet in recent years and the advent of online polling, as well as the continuous demand for news items in an increasingly competitive media market, political polls of various types are now published and reported upon on an almost daily basis. Whilst many of these polls focus on voting intention, particularly in the run-up to elections, this is far from the only topic covered.

With this in mind, this Note provides an overview of contemporary political opinion polls. Section two of the Note focuses on how to understand political polling data, including the accuracy of polls. Section three discusses professional standards within the polling industry and provides an introduction to the British Polling Council, an association of pollsters that aims to encourage the advancement of such standards. Finally, section four summarises the various types of political poll commonly conducted and where to source them. This includes polls on: voting intention for general elections, as well as by-elections, devolved parliament and assembly elections, and European Parliament elections; perceptions of political parties and their leaders, and of politics more generally; and the issues of most importance to voters, such as the economy and immigration. A short summary of major polling organisations operating in the UK is also provided in the Appendix.

Other parliamentary research briefings on the subject of opinion polls include the House of Lords Library Notes [Polling Data on the Scottish Independence Referendum](#)¹ and [Public Attitudes Towards the House of Lords and House of Lords Reform](#).² The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology's Note [Getting Opinion Polls 'Right'](#) also examines how opinion polls are conducted.³

2. Understanding Polling Data

This section of the Note provides a detailed overview of polling data. It focuses on what opinion polls are, how political polls in particular are conducted and how to go about understanding them. The emphasis throughout is on professional polling organisations such as members of the British Polling Council (see section three).

An opinion poll is a survey of a particular sample of a population (typically around 1,000 people), which attempts to capture the prevalence of certain views within that population (please note that the word 'population' is used here to refer to a particular group of interest and not necessarily the populace of a specific country).⁴ Studying a subset of individuals in this manner is a common research approach given that surveying an entire population is both expensive and time consuming. As the name suggests, polls tend to measure 'opinions'. In this way, they are different from some of the more comprehensive and long-running surveys conducted by independent research agencies and the Government (for instance, the British Social Attitudes survey conducted by NatCen Social Research), which tend to measure 'attitudes'. Although colloquially these words may be used interchangeably, there is in fact a fundamental difference. Professor Robert Worcester of the University of Kent provides a useful

¹ House of Lords Library, [Polling Data on the Scottish Independence Referendum](#), 23 July 2014, LLN 2014/027.

² House of Lords Library, [Public Attitudes Towards the House of Lords and House of Lords Reform](#), 26 July 2012, LLN 2012/028.

³ Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, [Getting Opinion Polls 'Right'](#), March 1997, PN 96.

⁴ British Polling Council, ['A Journalist's Guide to Opinion Polls'](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

analogy here, describing opinions as “the ripples on the surface of the public’s consciousness, shallow, and easily changed”; by contrast, attitudes are more enduring, and can be regarded as “the currents below the surface, deeper and stronger”.⁵ Accordingly, opinion polls tend to be conducted relatively frequently (ie weekly or monthly), whereas attitudinal surveys are generally repeated on an annual basis.

At first sight, it can be difficult to understand how the opinions of such a small group can reasonably reflect those of an entire population—particularly when this includes upwards of 45 million people, as in the case of the UK electorate.⁶ However, in the same way that a chef need only taste a single spoonful of a well stirred bowl of soup in order to know if it is properly seasoned, the key is in ensuring that the sample is as representative as possible of the population as a whole.⁷ This is not to say that opinion polls are free from inaccuracy.

Indeed, as Nick Moon, Managing Director of the market research company GfK NOP, explains, surveys of this type are subject to error as a result of both the sampling process and the responses provided during the interviews themselves.⁸ In each case a further distinction can be made between ‘simple’ error, which is random in its operation (ie it is just as likely to cause a discrepancy in one direction as the other and is variable in its extent), and ‘systematic’ (or ‘correlated’) error, which operates in one direction only, often to the same extent. Whilst the former is largely self-cancelling, the latter is not: strictly speaking, it should therefore be referred to as bias rather than error. This results in four types of possible error (or bias), which together make up the ‘total survey error’:⁹

- Simple sampling error
- Systematic sampling error (or bias)
- Simple response error
- Systematic response error (or bias)

Each of these receives discussion, in turn, during the summary that follows, with the exception of simple response error. This form of error results from the chance tendency for respondents to accidentally give the ‘wrong’ answer, or for interviewers to incorrectly record the response provided. Such occurrences are inevitable, but relatively infrequent. Furthermore, given that all possible responses are equally likely to be erroneously selected, such error will tend to be self-cancelling over the course of an entire survey.¹⁰ For these reasons, it receives no further discussion in this Note.

2.1 Sample Size and Sampling Error

In any instance where a population is incompletely surveyed (ie where sampling is employed) there will be simple sampling error (often just referred to as ‘sampling error’), reflecting the effects of chance and uncertainty in the sampling process. Whilst it cannot be avoided, statistical theory does at least allow us to quantify this uncertainty, provided that the sample has been

⁵ University of Kent, [‘Public Opinion: Friend of Foe?’](#), January 2013, p 11.

⁶ Office for National Statistics, [‘UK Electoral Statistics, 2013’](#), May 2014.

⁷ British Polling Council, [‘A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸ Nick Moon, *Opinion Polls: History, Theory and Practice*, 1999, p 33.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p 34.

randomly selected.¹¹ Two related terms are of importance here—the ‘confidence interval’ and the ‘confidence level’:

- The confidence interval (also often referred to as the ‘margin of error’ in opinion polls) is the range of values within which the true value (ie the value that would have been obtained had the entire population been surveyed) is likely to lie. Most reputable polling organisations will publish such a figure (typically expressed as plus or minus a certain percentage) in the small print of their polls.
- The confidence level represents just how likely this is (ie the probability that the true value falls within the confidence interval). Again, this figure is sometimes quoted in the small print of polls (although a confidence level of 95 percent is generally taken as standard amongst polling organisations, in line with the convention of statistical significance in hypothesis testing).¹²

For instance, an opinion poll may have an associated margin of error of +/- 3 percent at a confidence level of 95 percent. What this means in practice is that 19 times out of 20 (or 95 percent of the time), the figure within the opinion poll is expected to be within 3 percent of the true value. If, therefore, the same poll showed that a particular party (Party A) had a 40 percent share of the overall vote, we could be 95 percent sure that the true level of support amongst the entire population was between 37 and 43 percent.¹³ It should be noted that this uncertainty applies to all headline figures. Thus if the same poll were showing a rival party (Party B) had a 45 percent share of the overall vote, we could not state with certainty (based on this one poll) that Party B was ahead, since the extremes of the respective margins of error for the two parties give figures of 43 (40+3) percent for Party A and 42 (45-3) percent for Party B. This subtlety is often overlooked in media reports of opinion poll results.

Clearly, the wider the confidence interval (or margin of error) associated with a poll, the less sure one can be that the reported results accurately reflect the views of the entire population. For a given confidence level, there are two key factors that determine the size of the confidence interval—the sample size and the actual percentage values recorded in the poll. (Strictly speaking a third variable—the total population size—is potentially of importance. However, this can be ignored unless the sample size exceeds five percent of the total population, which is very rarely the case with opinion polls):¹⁴

- Sample size: the larger the sample size, the more likely the poll data will accurately reflect the views of the wider population and the narrower the confidence interval.
- Percentage value: the more extreme the percentage value recorded in the poll (ie the closer it is to either 0 or 100 percent) the less likely it is due to chance and the narrower the confidence interval.

This is illustrated further in the table below, which displays computed confidence intervals at the 95 percent confidence level for a range of sample sizes and percentage values:¹⁵

¹¹ British Polling Council, [‘A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹² The Scottish Government, [‘Confidence Intervals’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ The Scottish Government, [‘Calculation of Confidence Intervals for Point Estimates and Change’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁵ Roper Centre for Public Opinion Research, [‘Fundamentals of Polling—Total Survey Error’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

Confidence Interval (in percent) at 95 percent Confidence Level:

		Sample Size				
		100	250	500	750	1,000
Percentage Value Recorded in Poll	10 or 90	6	4	3	2	2
	20 or 80	9	5	4	3	3
	30 or 70	10	6	4	4	3
	40 or 60	10	7	5	4	3
	50	11	7	5	4	3

These figures show that the relationship between the confidence interval and the sample size is non-linear: as the latter increases, there are diminishing returns in terms of the narrowing of the confidence interval. This is one reason why polling organisations rarely employ sample sizes beyond the low thousands.¹⁶ Similarly, there is a non-linear relationship between the confidence interval and the percentage value recorded in the poll: the closer one gets to the extremes in terms of the poll percentage value, the greater the rate at which the confidence interval narrows. Whilst multiple confidence intervals could be reported for a poll that includes a range of different percentage values, in practice pollsters only tend to report the worst case confidence interval (ie the 50 percent value) for a given sample size. Given that samples of around 1,000 individuals are typically employed, this is usually in the region of +/- 3 percent.

Two further points relating to sample size must be highlighted. Firstly, the confidence interval reported alongside an opinion poll applies only to the sample as a whole. This is important because in addition to the headline figures, some polling organisations will provide more detailed summaries of their results, often breaking down respondents by gender, age, social class or some other characteristic. Whilst offering additional insight into the spread of public opinion, these cross-breaks inevitably have smaller sample sizes. The confidence intervals associated with them are therefore wider—sometimes considerably so. Indeed, polling figures for cross-breaks with very small samples (of say less than 100 people) should be treated with real caution, since their associated margins of error can be more than +/- 10 percent.¹⁷

Secondly, although larger samples are associated with narrower confidence intervals, one should not make a straightforward link between the sample size of a survey and the accuracy or quality of its findings. Phone-in polls and self-selecting surveys conducted over the internet, for example, will often involve many more participants than those undertaken by professional polling organisations (for example, members of the British Polling Council); however, these samples will almost certainly be biased (this is a form of systematic sampling bias known as ‘voluntary response bias’) and should therefore be treated with caution.¹⁸ As mentioned previously, samples must be representative if they are to tell us anything meaningful about the views of the wider population.

2.2 Sampling Strategy and Bias

Reputable polling organisations go to great lengths to try and ensure their samples are indeed representative. The first way in which this is done is through the sampling strategy. Ideally, it would be possible to conduct entirely random samples, with each member of the population having an equal opportunity of being selected to take part in any one poll. For various reasons

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ YouGov, ‘[Understanding Margin of Error](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁸ British Polling Council, ‘[A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

this is impractical for most polling organisations, so two alternative methods are generally used—‘quasi-random sampling’ and ‘quota sampling’.¹⁹

Quasi-random sampling is as close to truly random sampling as time and cost allows most organisations, and is typically associated with phone polling (as distinct from phone-in polls). Pollsters take numbers from the phone directory and randomise the last digit in order that ex-directory individuals (who may have appreciably different views) are also surveyed.²⁰

If quasi-random sampling relies as far as possible on random chance to obtain a sample with the desired demographic proportions, then quota sampling takes the opposite approach (whilst this technically means that statistical theory and estimates of uncertainty cannot be applied to quota samples, a margin of error is still often reported alongside polls employing this approach and can be regarded as a rough guide as to their precision).²¹ If it is known (for instance from Census data) that a representative sample will contain a specific number of people of a certain age group, or from a particular region, then individuals fitting these requirements can be approached. As such, quota sampling has traditionally been associated with face-to-face polling—although this approach is now rarely employed. However, competent online polling is often based on a similar premise. YouGov, for instance, has a panel of volunteers, the demographics of whom are recorded in a database. They can therefore invite those with the desired characteristics to take part on a poll by poll basis.²²

Despite the emphasis placed on sampling strategy, however, samples will rarely produce an exact match of the demographic makeup of the wider population. Indeed, by its very nature, quasi-random sampling is subject to the whims of random chance. In addition, two further sources of systematic sampling bias can lead to a slight under- or over-representation of a particular group—‘non-contact bias’ (sometimes referred to as ‘coverage bias’) and ‘non-response bias’:²³

- Non-contact bias: A sampling strategy may inherently exclude certain portions of the population. For instance, phone polling will automatically prevent those without landlines from participating, whilst online surveys are only accessible to those with an internet connection. Additionally, certain types of individual are more likely to be present when contact is first made (for instance, those who are unemployed, retired or who work from home).
- Non-response bias: Certain types of individual may be more likely to reject calls from strangers or to refuse to take part in a phone survey. The same may also be true of online surveys, although as mentioned previously these often rely on a pool of volunteers; in these cases the rate of participant response may pose more of a challenge for polling organisations than outright refusal, therefore.²⁴

In an attempt to overcome these issues and improve the representativeness of their samples, polling organisations use a technique known as weighting.

¹⁹ UK Polling Report, ‘[Sampling](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ YouGov, ‘[Understanding Margin of Error](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

²² UK Polling Report, ‘[Sampling](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

²³ ‘Non-response bias’ is regarded as a form of sampling error rather than a form of response error.

²⁴ Roper Centre for Public Opinion Research, ‘[Fundamentals of Polling—Total Survey Error](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

2.3 Weighting

Weighting is a method for adjusting responses to account for the fact that certain groups may be under- or over-represented in a particular sample.²⁵ For instance, we know from larger surveys of the population (for example the Census) that 52 percent of UK adults are female. If only 50 percent of a particular sample are women, therefore, they are clearly being under-represented. In such a scenario, pollsters would apply a weighting of 1.04 (calculated by dividing 52 by 50) to every female respondent. Accordingly, male respondents would be weighted down as they are over-represented in the sample.²⁶

Weighting of this type is common for categories such as gender, age, region and social class (or socio-economic group). Other features such as level of education, housing tenure, work status, level of car ownership and frequency of foreign holidays may also be accounted for in some instances. Because demographic data of this type is widely available for the whole population (and thus it is clear what a truly representative sample looks like), there is consistency—and thus little controversy—in the way this practice is applied by polling organisations. One slight caveat to this concerns cross-breaks, as some polls are only weighted to be representative at the national level. For example, whilst a weighted sample may contain a representative number of people from the North East, it could be that a disproportionate number of those surveyed in the region were male: the cross-breaks for region and gender will therefore not be representative of the population as a whole.²⁷

In addition to this demographic weighting, and more controversially, many polling companies will also apply some form of political weighting to their samples in an attempt to ensure they are politically representative.²⁸ This is because non-contact and non-response bias can also introduce attitudinal bias into a sample. For instance, individuals who are more willing to give up half an hour of their time in order to take part in a phone survey may have an appreciably different outlook on life to those who decline to do so.

As mentioned previously, certain forms of systematic response bias, such as when the survey answers given by a respondent do not reflect their true beliefs, may also skew the raw poll data.²⁹ Response bias may be the result of wilful deception on behalf of the respondent, but is more likely to be due to a form of ‘social-desirability bias’ (ie the respondent not wishing to reveal an opinion that is considered unpopular at the time in question). The latter is thought to partially account for the failure of polling organisations to accurately forecast the outcome of the 1992 UK general election, when polls in the run-up to the election consistently underestimated the level of Conservative support—a phenomenon labelled the ‘shy Tory factor’.³⁰ Such bias may be influenced by the mode of questioning: the less personal nature of online polling may increase the extent to which people feel able to divulge their true feelings, for example.³¹

Casualties of social-desirability bias will often answer ‘Don’t Know’ if permitted.³² This leads on to a wider question about how best to deal with those who are undecided on a polling issue,

²⁵ UK Polling Report, [‘Weighting’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ UK Polling Report, [‘Dealing With Don’t Knows’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ British Polling Council, [‘A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

³² UK Polling Report, [‘Dealing With Don’t Knows’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

which a genuine minority often will be in the run up to an election. Some organisations will ask a ‘squeeze question’ (along the lines of “Which party are you most inclined to support?”) in an attempt to coax such participants into articulating a firm voting intention. Whilst this risks pressuring individuals into expressing a non-opinion, these participants are generally given equal weight as those who provide a definitive response from the outset. Alternatively, where an equivalent election has previously taken place (for instance with general elections in the UK), some pollsters reassign a proportion of those answering ‘Don’t Know’ based on their past voting behaviour, on the assumption that they will ultimately vote in the same way as at the last election (in practice this is done by reallocating all those who are undecided, but then weighting them down—typically by a half). A third approach adopted by some companies is to ignore the ‘Don’t Knows’ altogether and include only those respondents who express a clear preference within the published figures.³³

None of these methods is necessarily preferable, but the absence of any standard practice across the polling industry is something of a problem given that it can be the cause of substantial variation amongst published results. For example, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology’s Note [Getting Opinion Polls ‘Right’](#) demonstrates how Labour’s lead in one 1996 pre-election poll could be regarded as anything from 20 to 30 percent depending on how the ‘Don’t Knows’ were treated.³⁴ Weighting by past voting behaviour is also complicated by the well-established fact that a significant minority of individuals misreport (whether knowingly or not) their voting history.³⁵ Different companies adjust their weightings in different ways in an attempt to account for this—one further reason why opinion polls on the same subject can give contrasting results.

2.4 Other Sources of Variation

In addition to the whims of random chance, and the sampling strategy and weighting methodologies employed, two other factors can help to account for observed variation between polls conducted by different companies on the same topic. The first is the timing of the poll. Although two polls may be published simultaneously, the underlying fieldwork may have been conducted weeks or even months apart. If public opinion regarding the subject in question is particularly fluid and responsive to current events, then it may be that both polls are relatively accurate and that opinions simply shifted during the intervening period.³⁶

An additional factor (and another potential form of systematic response bias) that can lead to pollsters reporting variable figures is the questionnaire design—including the question wording, format and ordering. It is well established that differences in question wording can have a significant impact upon poll results. For instance, a comparison of two Canadian polls conducted in 2000 showed that support for increased public spending varied from around a third to a half of the population depending on whether this was couched as “new spending on social programmes” or “putting money back into healthcare and education”.³⁷ Even subtler differences in wording can also have an appreciable impact: making specific reference to one’s local constituency (through the inclusion of an additional phrase such as “in your area”) within voting intention questions for UK elections often increases Liberal Democrat support, for example, as people take greater account of tactical voting or the performance of their own

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, [Getting Opinion Polls ‘Right’](#), March 1997, PN 96.

³⁵ UK Polling Report, [‘Weighting’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

³⁶ British Polling Council, [‘A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

³⁷ Queen’s University, [‘Understanding Polling Data’](#), accessed 17 July 2014, p 134.

MP.³⁸ This impact is heightened when the polling topic is one on which few people have strong views.

Whether or not participants are prompted with a list of potential responses (ie whether a question is closed- or open-ended) can also be influential—as can which options appear on this list. For instance, some UK polling companies prompt only for the three major political parties (additionally referring to the existence of ‘other parties’), whilst others specifically mention smaller parties such as UKIP or the Green Party. Prompting for these minor parties tends to result in them polling significantly greater support than is otherwise the case—to the extent that their share of the vote is often overestimated when compared with actual election results.³⁹

In practice, polling companies tend to ask respondents several (usually related) questions within a single survey. The order in which these questions are asked can also be of significance, therefore. For instance, a participant may provide a different response depending on whether they are posed a particular question at the start of a survey (ie ‘cold’) or following a series of related questions (ie ‘warm’), once they have had a chance to think about the subject in greater depth.⁴⁰ As with the specific wording of a question, this is especially true if it is an issue about which the individual did not have particularly strong feelings at the outset.

Whilst little can be done in the way of weighting results, some pollsters attempt to reduce the possibility for systematic response bias owing to questionnaire design by asking two or more versions of the same question (sometimes referred to as ‘split-sampling’), or by varying the order in which questions are asked.⁴¹ However, no consistent methodology is applied across the industry.

2.5 Accuracy of Opinion Polls

Like all surveys of a proportion of a population, opinion polls are subject to unavoidable sampling error. Statistical theory allows this uncertainty to be quantified and this figure is published alongside the headline figures in most reputable polls. However, the above summary highlights that there are a number of potential forms of bias that can also influence the accuracy of opinion polls. Although pollsters attempt to mitigate this threat through the use of methodological procedures such as weighting, the upshot is that in most cases the true margin of error (ie the total survey error) associated with an opinion poll is significantly greater than that which is reported. Exactly how much greater is difficult to say, however, since the impact of these other sources of error (or bias) cannot be quantified. In light of this, one might be forgiven for questioning how much faith to place in polling data.

The obvious test of voting intention polling figures is to compare them against the election results with which they are associated. In the case of UK general elections, the recent record of classically conducted vote intention polls is described as “variable and mixed” by Martin Boon, Director of ICM.⁴² Mr Boon suggests that pollsters failed to accurately forecast the outcome of the 1992 election, and describes their performance at the 1997 and 2001 elections as

³⁸ UK Polling Report, [‘Question Wording’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ British Polling Council, [‘A Journalist’s Guide to Opinion Polls’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁴¹ Queen’s University, [‘Understanding Polling Data’](#), accessed 17 July 2014, p 133, 136.

⁴² Martin Boon, [‘Predicting Elections, A ‘Wisdom of Crowds’ Approach’](#), *International Journal of Market Research*, 20 March 2012, vol 54 issue 4, p 466.

“mediocre”.⁴³ In all three cases the polls appreciably overestimated Labour support and underestimated Conservative support, suggesting the presence of systematic bias.⁴⁴ However, polling figures compared much more favourably with the final election outcome in 2005: analysis conducted by the British Polling Council of its member organisations demonstrates that the average error (ie the average of the percentage differences between the final poll estimates for Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Other support, and the final election results) for all companies was no greater than 1.5 percent.⁴⁵ This is well within the 3 percent margin of error typically attached to political polls as a result of unavoidable sampling error. Whilst this progress can in part be attributed to collective methodological refinements (polls were not regularly adjusted by past vote until after the 1992 election, for instance),⁴⁶ detailed analysis of the 2005 polls revealed that behind the closely aligned headline voting intention figures, there were marked differences between the polling companies in how these were derived. This led Andrew Cooper, the Founder of Populus, to conclude that the companies in question could not “all be right in the methodological assumptions and the weightings and adjustments used”.⁴⁷ It was difficult for pollsters to effectively respond to this finding, however, since they all deviated from the election result by less than the maximum theoretical margin of error: this made it hard to establish how much of the observed discrepancy was the result of flawed methodology and how much was due to sampling error.⁴⁸

Whilst on the face of it pollsters also fared reasonably well at the 2010 general election—the average error for all BPC members was no greater than 2.25 percent (with the exception of two companies who produced an average error of 3.25 percent),⁴⁹ further analysis revealed that all overestimated the Liberal Democrat share of the vote for the first time in recent history, highlighting a new form of systematic bias.⁵⁰ Various analyses have been conducted in an attempt to explain this finding. For instance, Martin Boon and John Curtice, Professor of Politics at the University of Strathclyde, suggest that the ‘shy-Tory factor’ may have played an important role—although it appears to have been the Labour party that was considered unfashionable on this occasion, with post-election analysis by ICM indicating that those voters who failed to declare a firm intention in its final pre-election poll ultimately opted for Labour over the Liberal Democrats by a factor of nearly two-to-one.⁵¹ However, following an examination of polls conducted by several companies from across the course of the 2010 campaign, Mark Pickup, Professor of Political Science at Simon Fraser University, and colleagues are slightly more cautious in their support for such a theory, suggesting that it is difficult to verify on the basis of data from a single election.⁵² This highlights the ongoing challenge pollsters face between attempting to learn from and respond to the most recent election result—which is linked to an ever-changing political landscape, and being appreciative of polling developments over the longer term.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Market Research Society, [‘General Election 2010: Did the Opinion Polls Flatter to Deceive?’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁴⁵ British Polling Council, [‘Accuracy of the Final 2005 Polls’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁴⁶ Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, [‘Getting Opinion Polls ‘Right’](#), March 1997, PN 96.

⁴⁷ British Polling Council, [‘Poll Methodology, Weighting and Adjustment Systems’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ British Polling Council, [‘Accuracy of the Final 2010 Polls’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁵⁰ Market Research Society, [‘General Election 2010: Did the Opinion Polls Flatter to Deceive?’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² Mark Pickup et al, ‘Why Did the Polls Overestimate Liberal Democrat Support? Sources of Polling Error in the 2010 British General Election’, *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, May 2011, vol 21 issue 2, pp 200-1.

There is, however, a wider question to be considered when discussing the accuracy of opinion polls: what exactly are they for? More precisely, should they be seen as snapshots of public opinion, or as predictions of an election outcome? Andrew Cooper provides a succinct summary of this dilemma:

If polls are simply a snapshot of voter opinions taken at the latest moment which newspaper deadlines allow (effectively nearly 48 hours before the election ends), is it reasonable to measure them—and judge their methods—against the actual result? We know that many voters decide at the last moment how to vote and many others change their minds between parties over the last couple of days; ‘final’ campaign polls are bound to miss these movements and there is nothing that can be done methodologically to allow for them. The alternative is for polling companies to produce final projections that are more than just the final voting intention figures derived from polling methodology. But if that is the right approach at election times—ie the approach likely to produce ‘poll’ numbers closest to actual results—why isn’t it the right approach at all other times? These are questions that the polling industry must continue to ponder.⁵³

3. Professional Standards

As mentioned previously, the results of certain polls—such as those where the participants are self-selecting—should be treated with caution. In an attempt to distance themselves from such practices and to increase consumer confidence in their work, most reputable polling organisations agree to comply with certain professional standards, such as those outlined by the British Polling Council and the Market Research Society.

3.1 British Polling Council

The British Polling Council (BPC), an association of organisations that conduct and publish public opinion polls, was established in November 2004 with the following objectives:

- Ensure standards of disclosure designed to provide consumers of survey results that enter the public domain with an adequate basis for judging the reliability and validity of the results;
- Encourage the highest professional standards in public opinion polling;
- Advance the understanding, among politicians, the media and general public of how polls are conducted and how to interpret poll results; and
- Provide interested parties with advice on best practice in the conduct and reporting of polls.⁵⁴

Members of the BPC agree to certain Principles of Disclosure and procedures to be followed in the event that questions are raised about compliance. These principles dictate that, when publishing survey data, members must include reference to the following: the client commissioning the poll; the method by which (eg face-to-face, telephone or online) and dates upon which interviews were conducted; the population effectively represented (eg all adults or voters); the percentages upon which conclusions are based; and both the sample size and geographic coverage of the poll. They also specify that, whenever it is practical to do so, the

⁵³ British Polling Council, [‘Poll Methodology, Weighting and Adjustment Systems’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁵⁴ British Polling Council, [‘Objects and Rules’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

complete wording of questions upon which the release is based should also be published, as well as a web address where full computer tables may be viewed. Attempts should also be made to ensure that print and broadcast media include the above details in any resulting news articles.⁵⁵

Furthermore, the principles specify that, following the publication of a survey, and in addition to the above information, the organisation in question should place the following details on its website within two working days (or provide the information to any interested party upon request): a full description of the sampling procedure that has been employed; computer tables showing the exact questions asked in the order they were posed, as well as all possible responses; a description of the weighting procedures employed including weighted and unweighted figures for all variables used to weight the data; an e-mail address for further enquiries; and a link to the BPC website.⁵⁶

In the case of privately commissioned surveys, the principles state that members have the right to maintain the confidentiality of any findings. However, in the event that the results of such a survey are made public by the commissioning organisation, they will be deemed to have entered the public domain; accordingly, the polling organisation will be obliged to follow the procedures outlined above.⁵⁷

In July 2014 there were 15 member organisations of the BPC:⁵⁸

- Angus Reid
- ComRes
- Dods Parliamentary Communications
- GfK NOP
- ICM
- Ipsos MORI
- LucidTalk
- Opinium
- ORB
- Panelbase
- Populus
- RMG Clarity
- Survation
- TNS-BMRB
- YouGov

Contact details for representatives from each member organisation can be found on the BPC website.⁵⁹ A potted history of each company is also provided in the Appendix (summaries are also provided for two other established pollsters: Lord Ashcroft Polls, which was invited to join the BPC in March 2013;⁶⁰ and Harris Interactive, a former member).⁶¹

⁵⁵ British Polling Council, '[Statement of Disclosure](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ British Polling Council, '[Officers/Members](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ British Polling Council, '[Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2013](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁶¹ British Polling Council, '[Accuracy of the Final 2010 Polls](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

3.2 Market Research Society

Most reputable polling companies (including many members of the British Polling Council) also abide by the standards prescribed by the Market Research Society in its Code of Conduct (the latest edition of which will become operative in September 2014). These standards encompass a range of topics, including commissioning and design, client confidentiality, informed consent, participant anonymity, data collection, analysis and reporting of findings, and data security.⁶²

The Code itself is underpinned by a list of ten more general principles. These state that organisations conducting market, social and opinion research shall:

- Ensure that participation in their activities is based on voluntary informed consent;
- Be straightforward and honest in all their professional and business relationships;
- Be transparent as to the subject and purpose of data collection;
- Respect the confidentiality of information collected in their professional activities;
- Respect the rights and well-being of all individuals;
- Ensure that participants are not harmed or adversely affected by their professional activities;
- Balance the needs of individuals, clients and their professional activities;
- Exercise independent professional judgement in the design, conduct and reporting of their professional activities;
- Ensure that their professional activities are conducted by persons with appropriate training, qualifications and experience; and
- Protect the reputation and integrity of the profession.⁶³

4. Sourcing Political Polling Data

Many of the major UK polling companies introduced above conduct regular surveys on political issues. The majority of these polls focus on voting intention—particularly in relation to general elections, but also by-elections, devolved parliament and assembly elections, and European Parliament elections. However, several pollsters also examine a range of other issues. This includes perceptions of political parties and their leaders, and of politics more generally. The issues of most importance to voters are also scrutinised, and more in-depth opinions sought on those issues that appear to be key, such as the economy and immigration. The following section summarises where polls on each of these topics can be sourced. This should by no means be seen as an exhaustive list.

4.1 Voting Intention

General Elections

As mentioned above, a number of UK polling companies conduct regular polls on general election voting intention, often in conjunction with particular news outlets:

⁶² Market Research Society, '[Code of Conduct](#)', September 2014.

⁶³ *ibid.*

- [ComRes](#) conducts approximately monthly polls on voting intention and other political issues for the *Independent*, and jointly for the *Independent on Sunday* and the *Sunday Mirror*.⁶⁴ It is also conducting a monthly '[Battlebus](#)' poll of marginal seats in the run up to the 2015 general election.⁶⁵
- ICM has conducted a monthly political poll for the *Guardian* since 1984. The complete set of voting intention figures is available on the [Guardian Datablog](#).⁶⁶
- [Ipsos MORI](#) has voting intention data running back to 1976 (this is not an entirely consistent data set, however, as a methodological change was introduced in 2002).⁶⁷ Since 2008 it has conducted a monthly poll known as the [Political Monitor](#) for the *Evening Standard*.⁶⁸
- Lord Ashcroft Polls has recently begun publishing a weekly [National Poll](#), which includes headline voting intention figures.⁶⁹ It also conducts occasional '[battleground](#)' polls of marginal seats.⁷⁰
- Opinium conducts a fortnightly survey of voting intention and other political issues for the *Observer*.⁷¹
- [Populus](#) publishes twice weekly polls on general election voting intention.⁷²
- [Survation](#) conducts regular polls on voting intention and other political issues for both the *Mirror* and the *Mail on Sunday*.⁷³
- [TNS-BMRB](#) conducted regular polls on voting intention up to the end of 2013, but have only published one poll to date in 2014.⁷⁴
- [YouGov](#) conducts almost daily surveys of general election voting intention for the *Sun* and weekly polls on the same topic for the *Sunday Times*.⁷⁵

The latest voting intention figures from all the above companies, and almost daily analysis of these, are collated on the [UK Polling Report](#) website run by Anthony Wells, an Associate Director of YouGov.⁷⁶ This site also has historical records of voting intention polls conducted during each parliament since the 1970 general election.

An additional summary resource is provided by the BBC's [Poll Tracker](#) website, which charts support for the three main political parties and 'others' since 1983, based on opinion poll data from ComRes, Harris Interactive, ICM, Ipsos MORI, Populus, TNS-BMRB and YouGov. A 'poll of polls' is also provided for 2010 onwards.⁷⁷ This is based on the 'median smoothing method', which takes the middle value for each party from the five most recent polls (and then assigns the remaining percentage share to 'others').⁷⁸

⁶⁴ ComRes, '[Poll Digest—Political](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁶⁵ ComRes, '[Poll Digest—Political—ComRes Battlebus](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁶⁶ *Guardian*, '[News—Datablog, Guardian/ICM Polls](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁶⁷ Ipsos MORI, '[Voting Intentions in Great Britain](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁶⁸ Ipsos MORI, '[Political Monitor Archive](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁶⁹ Lord Ashcroft Polls, '[The Ashcroft National Poll](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷⁰ Lord Ashcroft Polls, '[Marginal Seats](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷¹ *Observer*, '[Observer/Opinium Political Polls](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷² Populus, '[Work—Polls](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷³ Survation, '[Archive—2014](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷⁴ TNS-BMRB, '[News—Voting Intentions](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷⁵ YouGov, '[Public Opinion—Politics](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷⁶ UK Polling Report, '[Voting Intention](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁷⁷ A 'poll of polls' is a means of averaging the headline figures from several recent polls in order to examine broad trends in public opinion over the long term. Typically, either the most recent poll conducted by each relevant company, or the equivalent number of polls by date, are included.

⁷⁸ BBC News, '[Poll Tracker](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

Using recent opinion poll data, the [Electoral Calculus](#) website run by statistician Martin Baxter attempts to predict the final result of the next general election (in terms of number of MPs) by translating percentage support for each party into seats in the House of Commons.⁷⁹ Two factors should be borne in mind when assessing these figures: first, the underlying modelling is inevitably imperfect (for instance, it assumes that the swing in party support from one election to the next is uniform across all constituencies); second, the accuracy of the projections made is heavily dependent upon the accuracy of the opinion poll data published by pollsters.

By-Elections

Lord Ashcroft Polls has been the most active pollster as regards recent [UK by-elections](#).⁸⁰ Indeed, it was the only polling organisation to survey constituents in the run up to both of the two most recent by-elections, in Wythenshawe and Sale East (February 2014) and Newark (June 2014). Survation and Populus have also conducted by-election polls in recent years, the former for both Newark and Eastleigh (February 2013), and the latter for Eastleigh. Results of by-election polls tend to be summarised on the [UK Polling Report](#) website.⁸¹

Elections in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

When polling in relation to UK general elections, most pollsters attempt to gain a geographically representative sample of respondents and provide cross-breaks by region, meaning it is possible to specifically examine voting intentions in the devolved legislatures (the exception to this is Northern Ireland, which is rarely covered by surveys: strictly speaking, most general election voting intention polls should therefore be described as representing the views of Great Britain, rather than the UK).⁸² However, as discussed above, such cross-breaks are often based on small sample sizes and thus have relatively large margins of error associated with them. In addition, not all polls are weighted to be representative at a regional level. Westminster voting intention figures for the devolved legislatures that are derived from UK-wide surveys should therefore be treated with a degree of caution.

Some dedicated country-specific polls are conducted however—particularly in relation to devolved parliament and assembly elections. In the case of Scotland, Ipsos MORI produces the quarterly [Scottish Public Opinion Monitor](#) in conjunction with STV News, which includes questions on Scottish Parliament voting intention.⁸³ Both YouGov and TNS-BMRB also conducted frequent surveys in the run up to the 2011 Scottish Parliament election. More recently, both Panelbase and Survation have begun polling the Scottish public on this subject: the former has undertaken [several surveys for the Sunday Times](#),⁸⁴ whilst the latter has been conducting a monthly [Scottish Omnibus Poll](#) for the *Daily Record* since March 2014.⁸⁵

In addition to ICM, the aforementioned five companies (Ipsos MORI, YouGov, TNS-BMRB, Panelbase and Survation) have also regularly polled the Scottish public on their independence referendum voting intention over the past 18 months or more. This data, along with that from other relevant surveys, is collated on the [What Scotland Thinks](#) website run by ScotCen Social

⁷⁹ Electoral Calculus, '[Home Page](#)' accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸⁰ Lord Ashcroft Polls, '[By-Elections](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸¹ UK Polling Report, '[By-Election](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸² British Polling Council, '[FAQs by Members of the Public](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸³ Ipsos MORI, '[Research Archive—Scotland](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸⁴ Panelbase, '[Media—Polls](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸⁵ Survation, '[Scottish Omnibus Poll](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

Research.⁸⁶ It is also analysed in the House of Lords Library Note, [Polling Data on the Scottish Independence Referendum](#).⁸⁷

In the case of Wales, [YouGov](#) has conducted a number of polls for ITV Wales on Welsh Assembly voting intention over the past few years.⁸⁸ As of December 2013 this partnership is producing a regular ‘Welsh Political Barometer’ poll in collaboration with the Wales Governance Centre at Cardiff University. The results of these and other relevant polls (for instance, a recent [ICM poll](#) for BBC Wales that examined feelings towards further devolution),⁸⁹ as well as impartial analysis, are provided on the [Elections in Wales](#) blog run by Professor Roger Scully of the Wales Governance Centre.⁹⁰

Voting intention polls for Northern Ireland Assembly elections are much rarer. Inform Communications, a strategic communications consultancy, conducted a poll for the [Belfast Telegraph](#) prior to the 2011 election.⁹¹ British Polling Council member [Lucid Talk](#) also conducted a poll on assembly voting intention for the same newspaper in September 2013.⁹²

European Parliament Elections

With the exception of Ipsos MORI and Lord Ashcroft Polls, all companies that have regularly polled on general election voting intention in recent times (as listed above) also conducted surveys on voting intention in the run up to the 2014 European Parliament election (Lord Ashcroft Polls did, however, conduct a [post-European election poll](#), which examined why individuals voted for a particular party and whether they intend to vote the same way in the 2015 general election).⁹³ A summary list of these polls is provided on the [UK Polling Report](#) website.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, voting intention poll results from other European Union member states can be found on the website of the [European Voice](#) newspaper.⁹⁵

4.2 Political Perceptions

Perceptions of Parties

Since 2010, YouGov has conducted a fortnightly ‘[party images](#)’ poll.⁹⁶ Participants are provided with a list of eight statements and, for each of these, are asked to say which of the three main political parties it most applies to. The statements include: “the kind of society it wants is broadly the kind of society I want”; “it seems to chop and change all the time: you can never be quite sure what it stands for”; and “it seems to have succeeded in moving on and left its past behind it”. It also conducts an almost daily ‘[Government approval](#)’ poll,⁹⁷ in which respondents are asked to say whether they “approve or disapprove of the Government’s record to date”,

⁸⁶ What Scotland Thinks, ‘[Home Page](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸⁷ House of Lords Library, [Polling Data on the Scottish Independence Referendum](#), 23 July 2014, LLN 2014/027.

⁸⁸ YouGov, ‘[Public Opinion—Wales](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁸⁹ ICM, ‘[ICM Poll for BBC Wales](#)’, February 2014.

⁹⁰ Elections in Wales, ‘[Opinion Polls](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁹¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, ‘[Sinn Fein Tops the Poll](#)’, 12 February 2010.

⁹² Lucid Talk, ‘[Belfast Telegraph NI Wide Poll](#)’, September 2013.

⁹³ Lord Ashcroft Polls, ‘[Post-European Election Poll](#)’, May 2014.

⁹⁴ UK Polling Report, ‘[European Elections](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁹⁵ *European Voice*, ‘[Polls](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁹⁶ YouGov, ‘[Public Opinion—Party Images](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

⁹⁷ YouGov, ‘[Public Opinion—Government Approval](#)’, accessed 17 July 2014.

and a weekly [‘Coalition approval’](#) poll, wherein they are invited to comment on whether “the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition partners are working together well or badly”.⁹⁸

In addition, Lord Ashcroft’s weekly [National Poll](#) occasionally focuses on perceptions of political parties.⁹⁹ In recent polls it has asked people how positive or negative they feel about each of the three main parties plus UKIP, using a scale from -100 (very negative) to +100 (very positive), and which of a list of eleven attributes (such as “honest and principled” and “competent and capable”) are true (or not) of each of these four parties.

Historically, Ipsos MORI also conducted a [‘party image’](#) poll, in which respondents were asked to select which of a list of 14 statements (such as “keeps its promises” and “understands the problems facing Britain”) fitted their “ideas or impressions” of each of the three main political parties.¹⁰⁰ Approximately bi-annual data is available between 1983 and 2006 (with an additional iteration of the survey conducted in May 2010).

Perceptions of Party Leaders

YouGov also conducts regular polls on [‘perceptions of party leaders’](#).¹⁰¹ On a fortnightly basis since 2010 it has asked people which of the three main leaders would “make the best Prime Minister” and which of a list of nine characteristics (including “sticks to what he believes in” and “in touch with ordinary people”) are applicable to each. It also publishes weekly [‘approval ratings’](#) (based on whether they are “doing well or badly”) for each of the three leaders.¹⁰²

Similarly, Ipsos MORI publishes regular [‘satisfaction ratings’](#) for the leaders of each of the three main parties (plus UKIP since March 2013).¹⁰³ Monthly time series data is available running back to 1980, with slightly less frequent data available for a further three years to 1977. Up until 2006 it also conducted regular [‘leader image’](#) surveys, in which participants were asked to pick which of a list of 14 statements (including “good in a crisis” and “has sound judgement”) were applicable to the current leaders of each of the biggest three parties.¹⁰⁴ More recent figures are also available for May 2010 and September 2013.

In addition, ICM’s monthly poll for the *Guardian* sporadically includes leaders’ [‘satisfaction ratings’](#) (based on whether they are “doing a good job or a bad job”).¹⁰⁵ As with the political parties themselves, Lord Ashcroft’s weekly [National Poll](#) also occasionally focuses on perceptions of the current leaders—again asking respondents how positive or negative they feel using a scale from -100 (very negative) to +100 (very positive).¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, [ComRes](#) regularly questions participants on whether they “trust each of the [party leaders] to see the country through the current economic situation” in its polls for ITV News.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁸ YouGov, [‘Public Opinion—Coalition Approval’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

⁹⁹ Lord Ashcroft Polls, [‘The Ashcroft National Poll’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Ipsos MORI, [‘Party Image’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁰¹ YouGov, [‘Public Opinion—Party Leaders, Perceptions’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁰² YouGov, [‘Public Opinion—Party Leaders, Approval’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁰³ Ipsos MORI, [‘Satisfaction Ratings’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Ipsos MORI, [‘Leader Image’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁰⁵ ICM, [‘Guardian Poll—June 2014’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Lord Ashcroft Polls, [‘The Ashcroft National Poll’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁰⁷ ComRes, [‘Poll Digest—Political’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

Perceptions of Politics

Ipsos MORI conducts an annual survey looking at the degree to which different professions are “generally trust[ed] to tell the truth or not”. In addition to “Government ministers” and “politicians generally”, other high profile professions such as doctors, teachers, scientists and journalists are also included. [Continuous data](#) is available back to 1997 (with the exception of 1998, 2010 and 2012), with figures also provided for 1983 and 1993.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, YouGov publishes a [‘trust tracker’](#) charting the extent to which various professions (including leading Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians) are “trust[ed] to tell the truth” (based on the percentage who say they trust them “a great deal” or “a fair amount”).¹⁰⁹ Intermittent data is available back to 2003.

Ipsos MORI also has intermittent polling data on a number of issues to do with the [political system](#) as a whole, including the public’s level of “satisfaction with the way that Parliament works” and the extent to which people feel there is a “duty to vote”.¹¹⁰

4.3 Key Issues

Most Important Issues

Ipsos MORI compiles an [‘Issues Index’](#) of “the most important issues facing Britain today” in conjunction with the *Economist*, with time series data available back to 1974.¹¹¹ Individuals are not prompted with any answers: this allows the index to capture abrupt changes in opinion as a result of unforeseen events (for instance, a sudden increase in May 1996 in those reporting ‘BSE’ as a key issue following the introduction of a slaughter scheme of bovine animals and the banning of exports of British beef), but means it includes a comparatively large number of categories. Since 2010, [YouGov](#) has similarly asked respondents to identify the most important issues facing both the country as a whole and, more personally, them and their family.¹¹² However, in contrast to the approach taken by Ipsos MORI, respondents are presented with a predefined list of 13 options, of which they are permitted to select up to three.

Respectively, Ipsos MORI and YouGov have also conducted polls examining which political party has the [“best policies on”](#)¹¹³ or [“best handles”](#)¹¹⁴ such key issues. The former has data sets of various frequencies and timespans covering 19 different issues, whilst the latter has approximately fortnightly data stretching back to 2010, in most cases for the following issues: National Health Service; asylum and immigration; law and order; education and schools; taxation; unemployment; the economy in general; welfare benefits; and housing.

Economy

TNS-BMRB publishes a poll known as the [Public Opinion Monitor](#), with surveys typically conducted every couple of months.¹¹⁵ In the run up to the 2015 general election this is focusing specifically on the state of the UK economy. Looking first backwards and then forwards twelve

¹⁰⁸ Ipsos MORI, [‘Trust in Professions’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁰⁹ YouGov, [‘Public Opinion—Trust Trends’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹¹⁰ Ipsos MORI, [‘Political System, Constitution and Devolution’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹¹¹ Ipsos MORI, [‘Issues Index’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹¹² YouGov, [‘Public Opinion—Issues 2’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹¹³ Ipsos MORI, [‘Best Party on Key Issues’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹¹⁴ YouGov, [‘Public Opinion—Issues 1’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹¹⁵ TNS-BMRB, [‘Public Opinion Monitor’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

months, respondents are asked to assess the state of the economy as a whole. They are also invited to rate the Government's management of the economy over the past year. In addition, participants are asked to compare their job security and the ease with which they are able to meet their monthly household budget with the situation twelve months ago, as well as about their optimism regarding future pay prospects.

YouGov also conducts regular polls on economic issues. In addition to gauging opinion on the state of the economy as a whole and the Government's economic performance, it asks participants to comment on how they think the financial situation of their household will change over the next year and the degree to which they believe central government or local councils are responsible for cuts to local services. [Weekly data](#) running back to 2010 is available for each of these topics.¹¹⁶ Less frequent data is also available for a number of other questions around the subject of ["tackling the deficit and recession"](#).¹¹⁷

In addition, Ipsos MORI produces an ['Economic Optimism Index'](#), which asks respondents whether they think the "general economic condition of the country will improve, stay the same or get worse over the next twelve months".¹¹⁸ Monthly time series data is available back to 1978.

Immigration

[YouGov](#) polls for the *Sunday Times* occasionally include questions on immigration.¹¹⁹ These tend to cover topics such as whether immigration is, on balance, good or bad for the British economy and whether levels of immigration should be reduced. Ipsos MORI also has three data sets on [immigration](#), including whether there are "too many immigrants in Britain".¹²⁰ In January 2014, it also published [Perceptions and Reality](#), a review of public sentiment on immigration based on data from its own opinion polls (particularly the aforementioned 'Issues Index') and other relevant surveys.¹²¹ Amongst other issues, this examines how concerns about immigration have varied over time, how attitudes vary towards different types of immigration, and how views differ by characteristics such as age, location and party allegiance.

In recent years, the issue of immigration has become closely associated with questions around Europe and the UK's membership of the EU. To this end, Ipsos MORI's occasional [European Pulse](#) poll provides a useful snapshot of public sentiment towards the EU.¹²² Furthermore, in March 2014, Lord Ashcroft Polls published [Europe on Trial](#), a survey of over 20,000 British adults looking at public opinion regarding Britain's relationship with the EU.¹²³ Finally, the bi-annual [Eurobarometer](#) survey conducted on behalf of the European Commission provides an insight into how public opinion towards the EU in the UK compares with other member states.¹²⁴

¹¹⁶ YouGov, ['Public Opinion—The Economy'](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹¹⁷ YouGov ['Public Opinion—The Economy 2'](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹¹⁸ Ipsos MORI, ['Economic Optimism Index'](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹¹⁹ YouGov, ['Search—Immigration'](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹²⁰ Ipsos MORI, ['Immigration/Asylum'](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹²¹ Ipsos MORI, ['Perceptions and Reality'](#), January 2014.

¹²² Ipsos MORI, ['Ipsos European Pulse'](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹²³ Lord Ashcroft Polls, ['Europe on Trial'](#), March 2014.

¹²⁴ European Commission, ['Public Opinion—Standard Eurobarometer'](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

Appendix I: Summary of BPC Member Organisations

- Angus Reid is an established pollster in Canada, but did not launch its political polling operations in Britain until late 2009.¹²⁵ It conducts online surveys using the Springboard UK panels.¹²⁶
- ComRes (Communicate Research Ltd) is a market research agency established in 2003, which conducts both telephone and online surveys. It carries out regular polls for ITV News, as well as approximately monthly polls on voting intention and other political issues for the *Independent*, and jointly for the *Independent on Sunday* and the *Sunday Mirror*.¹²⁷ ComRes also offers clients the opportunity to question parliamentarians through its regular omnibus surveys of MPs and Peers: the former are surveyed eight times a year, with a guaranteed minimum 150 responses per wave, whilst the latter are surveyed twice a year, with a guaranteed sample of 100 responses.¹²⁸
- Dods Parliamentary Communications has been providing political reference data since 1832.¹²⁹ It conducts occasional polls through its intelligence branch, Dods Monitoring, and also offers clients the opportunity to ask questions directly to Members of the European Parliament through the *Parliament Magazine*, its fortnightly publication on EU politics.¹³⁰
- GfK NOP came into being following the 2005 acquisition of National Opinion Polls (NOP) by the German market research company GfK.¹³¹ NOP first started conducting polls in the UK in the 1950s, initially using face-to-face interviews and later telephone polling.¹³²
- ICM (Independent Communications and Marketing) is a market research company formed in 1989 out of Marplan, which had been polling in Britain since the 1960s.¹³³ It regularly conducts polls on UK voting intention for the *Guardian*, as well as on a range of political issues for the *Sunday Telegraph*. At present it is also producing a monthly poll for the *Scotsman* on the Scottish independence referendum. Whilst primarily utilising telephone polling, ICM also carry out some face-to-face and online polls.¹³⁴
- Ipsos MORI formed following the 2005 merger of the market research companies Ipsos UK and Market and Opinion Research International (MORI). The latter was founded in 1969 by Sir Robert Worcester, an established commentator on British and American elections. Ipsos MORI was pollster for the *Times* until 2002 and now conducts a monthly poll for the *Evening Standard*.¹³⁵

¹²⁵ Mark Pickup et al, 'Why Did the Polls Overestimate Liberal Democrat Support? Sources of Polling Error in the 2010 British General Election', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, May 2011, vol 21 issue 2, p 207.

¹²⁶ Angus Reid Global, '[About](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹²⁷ ComRes, '[Poll Digest—Political](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹²⁸ ComRes, '[UK Parliamentary Research](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹²⁹ Dods Parliamentary Communications, '[Products and Services—Data](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹³⁰ Dods Parliamentary Communications, '[Products and Services—Intelligence](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹³¹ GfK, '[Company History](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹³² Mark Pickup et al, 'Why Did the Polls Overestimate Liberal Democrat Support? Sources of Polling Error in the 2010 British General Election', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, May 2011, vol 21 issue 2, p 205.

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ ICM, '[Media Centre—Polls](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹³⁵ Mark Pickup et al, 'Why Did the Polls Overestimate Liberal Democrat Support? Sources of Polling Error in the 2010 British General Election', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, May 2011, vol 21 issue 2, p 206.

- LucidTalk is a Northern Ireland based polling and market research company founded in 2012. It conducts polls on a range of political and social issues for the *Belfast Telegraph*.¹³⁶
- Opinium is an online market research consultancy established in 2007. Since September 2012 its dedicated political and social research team has conducted fortnightly polls on voting intention and other political issues for the *Observer*.¹³⁷
- ORB (Opinion Research Business) is a market research company founded in 1994. Whilst it has conducted telephone polls for a range of UK clients in recent years, including the BBC and Conservative party, it primarily focuses on political and social research in the developing world, particularly in conflict zones and fragile states.¹³⁸
- Panelbase is a division of Dipsticks Research Ltd, which has been operating since 1997. Since 2008 it has conducted polls for external clients through its online panel of members.¹³⁹ It has consistently polled Scottish members on their independence referendum voting intention in recent months, mostly for the *Sunday Times*.¹⁴⁰
- Populus is a research and strategy consultancy formed in 2003 that conducts both telephone and online polling. It was pollster to the *Times* until the end of 2012 and now independently publishes twice weekly polls on UK voting intention. In a similar manner to ComRes, it also conducts a bi-monthly survey of MPs for a range of clients.¹⁴¹
- RMG Clarity is a research and marketing group, the operating status of which is currently unclear.¹⁴² Amongst previous work, it conducted a telephone poll for the Institute of Welsh Affairs on public opinion towards devolution in Wales in late 2013.¹⁴³
- Survation is a market research agency founded in 2010. It conducts both telephone and online polling, and since 2011 has produced regular polls on UK voting intention and other political issues for both the *Mirror* and the *Mail on Sunday*.¹⁴⁴
- TNS-BMRB has a history stretching back to 1933, when the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB) was established. In 1987 BMRB joined the WPP Group, a multinational advertising and public relations company. Following WPP's acquisition of the market research group TNS (Taylor Nelson Sofres) in 2009, TNS-BMRB was formed.¹⁴⁵ Whilst not associated with any one news outlet, it has conducted online polls on UK and European elections, as well as face-to-face polls on the Scottish independence referendum.

¹³⁶ Lucid Talk, '[About Us](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹³⁷ Opinium, '[Survey Results—Voting Intention](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹³⁸ ORB International, '[About Us—Who We Are](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹³⁹ Panelbase, '[Panelbase Answers Esomar's "28 Questions to Help Research Buyers of Online Samples"](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Panelbase, '[Media—Polls](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁴¹ Populus, '[Solutions—MP Panel](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁴² RMG, '[Home Page](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁴³ Institute of Welsh Affairs, '[RMG Poll Undertaken on Behalf of the Institute of Welsh Affairs](#)', November 2013.

¹⁴⁴ Survation, '[Archive](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁴⁵ TNS-BMRB, '[About Us](#)', accessed 17 July 2014.

- YouGov is an established internet pollster, having launched in 2000. It has a panel of over 360,000 members and conducts polls on a wide range of public interest issues.¹⁴⁶ This includes almost daily polls on UK voting intention for the *Sun* and weekly polls on the same topic for the *Sunday Times*.¹⁴⁷

Appendix 2: Summary of Other Polling Organisations Mentioned in this Note

- Lord Ashcroft Polls was founded by Conservative Peer Lord Ashcroft. Having previously produced opinion research for the Conservative party in his role as Deputy Chairman, Lord Ashcroft decided to make his polling public following the 2010 general election, and now publishes a weekly poll on national voting intention, as well as less frequent polls on by-elections and marginal seats.¹⁴⁸ Whilst not a member of the BPC, Lord Ashcroft has been invited to join the organisation.¹⁴⁹
- Harris Interactive, a former member of the BPC, is an internet pollster that carried out its first UK poll in early 2005, prior to the general election of that year.¹⁵⁰ Since 2006 it has conducted a quarterly poll for the *Financial Times* of individuals in five European countries (Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain) covering a range of topical issues. Until late 2012 it also conducted regular polls for the *Metro*.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ YouGov, [‘Public Opinion—Public Opinion Methodology’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁴⁷ YouGov, [‘Public Opinion—Politics’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁴⁸ Lord Ashcroft Polls, [‘About’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁴⁹ British Polling Council, [‘Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2013’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.

¹⁵⁰ Mark Pickup et al, ‘Why Did the Polls Overestimate Liberal Democrat Support? Sources of Polling Error in the 2010 British General Election’, *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, May 2011, vol 21 issue 2, p 208.

¹⁵¹ Harris Interactive, [‘News’](#), accessed 17 July 2014.