OPINION POLLS IN SCOTLAND
JUNE 1990-JUNE 1991

David McCrone

With no actual elections during the last year (with the exception of the two Paisley by-elections in November 1990), pundits have had to make do with the opinion polls to chart the fortunes of the political parties in Scotland. Labour continues to outstrip its competitors at the national level, while the battle for second place between the SNP and the Conservative Party saw the latter's share settle at around 25%, some 6 or 7 percentage points ahead of the Nationalists. The Liberal Democrats' share of the vote moved into double figures for the first time since 1988. The Greens occupied bottom spot with a couple of percentage points, around half of their support in the halcyon days of late 1989, but enough to keep them on the Scottish political map.

VOTING INTENTIONS

Scotland now has three sets of opinion polls. ICM carry out periodic national polling for The Scotsman since August 1990 (and in September, February and May 1991), with around 1000 people polled in 50 constituencies. System Three poll for the Glasgow Herald on a monthly basis, interviewing approximately 1000 adults in 38 to 40 sampling points across Scotland. MORI, who used to be The Scotsman's pollsters, now do monthly polls for the Sunday Times, using between 800 to 900 adults in 43 constituencies, boosted for voting intention to around 1000.

The System Three polls suggest a much tighter battle between the SNP and the Conservatives over the last twelve months than the polls carried out by MORI which has the Conservative Party clearly ahead since October 1990, but this might well be an artefact of the constituency sampling procedures adopted. Pollsters who concentrate their activities in the Central Belt are likely to understate the support for the SNP in the North and East of the country. While System Three uses a showcard listing the political parties for the benefit of respondents, MORI and ICM do not. The monthly polls carried out by System Three and MORI can be compared in figures 1 and 2.

The ICM polls for The Scotsman showed comparable support (22%) for the SNP and the Conservatives until the beginning of 1991 when the latter pulled ahead of the former.

Figure 1: Voting Intentions (System Three)

Figure 2: Voting Intentions (MORI)
The Conservatives and the Nationalists continue to show differential support among age groups, with the former doing more than twice as well among older people (over 65) than among the young (18 to 34), while the SNP does disproportionately well among young people. However, Labour's solid support in Scotland outweighs both parties, for it is by far the most popular party in all age groups. Labour challenges the Tories for middle class (ABC1) support (Labour took 30% of the ABC1 vote in August 1990, and the Tories 28%; in June 1991, the figures were 35% and 36% respectively). In the Paisley South seat, 59% indicated that they would vote Labour, with the SNP on 26% (compared with 46.1% and 27.5% in the by-election itself). The dominant issues in the minds of those polled were the poll tax, unemployment, the National Health Service, and education. A mere 3% claimed that the Tory leadership contest would influence their vote.

BY-ELECTIONS

In the midst of the Tory leadership crisis in November 1990, two by-elections occurred in the Paisley seats due to the deaths of the sitting Labour members. These are reported elsewhere in this edition of the yearbook. ICM's polls for The Scotsman a few days before the by-elections indicated that Labour would hold both seats comfortably. In Paisley North, duly held by Irene Adams, 57% of those asked said they would vote Labour, with the SNP a poor second on 25% (in the actual result, the figures were 44.0% and 29.4% respectively). In the Paisley South seat, 59% indicated that they would vote Labour, with the SNP on 26% (compared with 46.1% and 27.5% in the by-election itself). The change of leader brought some comfort to the party, and while Mrs Thatcher struggled to get a 20% rating, Mr Major was getting well over 40% by the early months of 1991. Nevertheless, this personal support was not translated into approval of government policies. Under the last few months of the Thatcher regime, more people were dissatisfied with the government than with the Prime Minister to the order of four or five percentage points. Under Major, the differential between approval of government actions and satisfaction with his own performance stood at 20 percentage points, suggesting that while Scots found him less objectionable than his predecessor, they continued to withhold their support for his government's policies.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION

The polls carried out by MORI and by ICM continue to show desire for constitutional change. The monthly MORI polls indicate that around one-third of those questioned wanted some form of Independence (either inside or outside the EC), and over 40% a devolved assembly with some taxation and spending power. Support for the status quo rarely exceeded 20%.

The ICM polls used the same form of words and categories as MORI, and the question was asked on three occasions, in August 1990, and in February and May 1991.

It was this last poll which caught the media eye, because it showed for the first time in recent years that more people wanted Independence (37%) than a devolved assembly (33%). Support for the status quo had also firm ed up at 28%, compared with 19% in August 1990, a finding at odds with MORI's poll in the same month which recorded the status quo response at 19%. The SNP in particular seized on the shift to the Independence option, and it does appear from the ICM poll that more Labour voters were supporting Independence (33% in August, 35% in February and 40% in May, contrasted with 48%, 43%...
and 35% respectively for the assembly option). However, the firming up of support for the status quo among all respondents does not seem to result from Tory voters rallying to the 'status quo' option of the new leadership. Only around half of Tories do so (47% in August, and 50% in both February and May). The possibly 'rogue' finding of 28% in May for the status quo appears to derive from a shift in Liberal Democrat support (from 9% to 16% to 30%) coupled with growing Liberal Democrat support more generally (suggesting that much of this growth came from disaffected Tory voters). Given that this result is so much at odds with previous polls and with party policy itself, we have to be cautious in concluding that there is indeed a firming up of support for the constitutional status quo particularly among Liberal Democrats.

The May 1991 poll by ICM which carried this seeming shift to the 'extreme' options of Independence versus the status quo, also sought to ascertain the strength of feeling for Home Rule. Respondents were asked 'If a Scottish Assembly or Parliament were to be set up with its own taxation powers, do you think it would lead to Scotland having higher taxes than England, lower taxes than England, or the same taxes as England?'. Thirty six percent said higher taxes (including 56% of Tories, 43% of Liberal Democrats, 29% of Labour, and 28% of SNP supporters), 30% the same taxes, and 21% lower taxes.

When asked 'If a Scottish Assembly or Parliament was to lead to Scotland having higher taxes than England, would you consider it worth having such an Assembly or Parliament?', the same proportion – 43% – said yes and no (Labour supporters were also evenly divided, and even 21% of SNP supporters said no (68% - the largest proportion - saying yes)). This poll result was seized upon by Conservative politicians such as Allan Stewart as proof of the shallow support for Home Rule, while he conveniently forgot to mention the substantial support among his party's own supporters. The proportion of Tories who would still support an Assembly if taxes were higher in Scotland was not wildly out of line with support in other parties. For example, 57% of Tories favouring an Assembly would continue their support confronted with higher taxes, compared with 59% of Labour devolutionists, 62% of Liberal Democrats and 71% of SNP supporters of Home Rule.

In its February 1991 poll, ICM asked whether, if there was a Scottish Assembly or Parliament, it would be better if one political party was in overall control, or two or more parties governed in coalition. Intriguingly, only 31% preferred the 'strong government' option (and only 29% of Labour supporters, whose party would be most likely to benefit from such), and 54% the coalition option (56% of Labour supporters). Interestingly, Conservatives were more in favour of the one party option (with 39%) than supporters of other parties, although 48% preferred coalition government.

Similarly, while 35% preferred the first-past-the-post system of electing governments (the question dealt more generally with 'seats in Parliament'
rather than Scottish government), 53% preferred Proportional Representation. A majority of Labour (56% to 33%) and SNP supporters (63% to 27%) preferred PR, and only the Tories gave a majority to the present electoral system (51% to 43%).

**CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN BRITAIN**

Confirmation of the demand for constitutional change in Scotland, and in Britain more generally, came from the MORI survey in April 1991 commissioned by The Joseph Rowntree Trust. That survey sampled 1547 people, 1034 adults in 146 constituencies boosted by 513 adults in 34 Scottish constituencies, all conducted in March 1991. The results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK sample</th>
<th>Scottish sample</th>
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<tr>
<td>An independent Scotland separate from both England and Wales and the EC</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An independent Scotland separate from England and Wales, but part of the EC</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland remaining part of the UK but with its own devolved assembly with some taxation and spending powers</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change from the present system</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>11</td>
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N=1034    N=612(inc Scots in UK sample)

These results indicate that there is support for Scottish constitutional change throughout the UK, not simply north of the border, and that some form of devolution is the option favoured by the largest number. Support for devolution to Wales and Northern Ireland is more evenly balanced, with roughly as many opposing the proposals as supporting them (for Wales, 42% support and 40% oppose, with comparable figures of 42% and 43% for Northern Ireland). There is less support for devolution to the English regions, with 27% supporting, and 61% opposing the idea.

The survey more generally showed that there was substantial support in the UK generally for constitutional change. For example, 63% of those questioned supported reform proposals endorsing both a Bill of Rights and Proportional Representation; three-quarters wanted a Freedom of Information Act; six out ten agreed that government power is too centralised; three-quarters would like to see more use of referenda; over half support fixed-term parliaments; and half even favour compulsory voting. At the UK level, while 57% thinks that Parliament works well or fairly well (with 16% that it works badly), 63% believed that the system of government more generally could be improved quite a bit or a great deal (with 33% thinking it worked well). Scots were marginally less likely to think it worked well (29%), with 65% agreeing that it needed substantial improvement, and slightly less inclined to think Parliament worked well (54%), with 21% that it worked badly. In general, the message of the survey was that there was much stronger and more consistent public support for constitutional reform in the UK generally than previously thought, and not simply in Scotland.

**THE ISSUES**

The opinion polls showed consistency with regard to salient issues in voters' minds, although these fluctuated as they shifted up and down the media agenda. Unemployment figured as the dominant issue in both the MORI and the ICM polls, with the poll tax, the health service and education continuously on the agenda. As the government dealt with the fall-out from the poll tax in early 1991 so its salience waned (from 38% in April to 21% in May), just as the health service increased in importance in those same months from 15% who mentioned it in April, to 36% in May.

The polls paid particular attention to those issues which were the subjects of government policy shifts, notably education, health and the poll tax. On each of these, Scottish public opinion was largely hostile to the government's actions.

**(a) Education**

The ICM poll in February found that only 29% of respondents thought the government was doing a very good or fairly good job as far as education policy was concerned. Fifty per cent though it was very poor or fairly poor. Government supporters took some comfort from the poll finding that 37% of those asked the question 'If you could afford it, would you send your children to a private school?' replied 'yes' and 58% 'no'. These results are comparable with those of a MORI poll in April 1989: 34% said yes and 58% no.

National testing of Primary school children also drew some flak during 1990-91. ICM asked in its February poll 'Next month, the Government intends that every child in Primary 4 and Primary 7 should sit a test to measure the child’s educational progress against national standards. From what you have heard about this national test, on balance do you approve or disapprove of this plan?'. 33% approved, 46% disapproved, when, in response to a similar question, 36% approved, 47% disapproved, and 16% had no opinion. These questions were asked of all respondents regardless of whether they have school-age children or not. However, MORI also asked such parents their attitudes to
testing. Eighty one percent said that parents should be able to withdraw their children from proposed tests if they wished (15% disagreed). In the event, around two-thirds of children in Scotland did not take the tests, although a proportion of these would have been prevented from taking the tests by the teachers’ boycotting action.

The March 1991 poll by MORI asked more generally about government plans for education. Sixty two percent of respondents agreed that the tests were part of government plans to re-introduce streaming for children when they get to secondary school. Only 23% of parents questioned thought that parents had been provided with plenty of information about planned national tests (56% thought they hadn’t). MORI also asked whether the tests should be carried out by the child’s teacher, and got the obvious answer (from 84%) that they should be. All respondents were asked an odd question ‘Do you support or oppose the principle of streaming classes in secondary schools?’ to which 44% said ‘yes’, and 33% ‘no’. Exactly what they thought they were being asked remains a mystery.

(b) The National Health Service

The government’s proposed changes to the health service, the subject of questions in the ICM poll of May 1991, were fairly unpopular in Scotland. Only 9% thought they would improve the standard of health care, 24% that they would make no difference, and 58% that standards would deteriorate. More specifically, proposals to create self-governing hospitals within the NHS were deemed by 59% to be likely to make standards of health care worse, 16% thought they would improve, and 17% that it would make no difference.

In their June 1991 poll, MORI tapped similar dissatisfaction with government proposals for the NHS. While only 14% thought that the government’s main aim was to try to improve care, 73% believed that the main aim was to try and reduce spending, with 8% agreeing that both were true and 2% neither. Similarly, 70% believed that the real intention in encouraging trust status for hospitals is to privatise hospital services (20% dissented), and only 22% thought that government proposals for the NHS would make it more efficient (68% disagreed). The same percentage (22%) agreed that ‘the NHS is safe in this government’s hands’ (69% disagreed).

(c) The Poll Tax

The Poll Tax was given its death sentence in early 1991, while its execution has been delayed for a couple of years. Sixty nine per cent of Scots questioned in ICM’s poll in September 1990 disapproved of the tax, and only 26% approved, findings in line with previous polls. Nevertheless, only 15% said they did not intend to pay the tax, and 3% refused to say. Sixty seven per cent claimed they had already paid, and a further 14% that they intended to pay.

In May 1991, ICM asked what voters thought of the proposed council tax compared with other means of raising revenue for local government. Half of those questioned approved of the tax, and 35% disapproved. However, when asked about alternative ways of raising the money, 36% preferred the old rating system, 29% a local income tax, 13% modified rates, and only 12% the new council tax. A mere 8% preferred the dying poll tax.

THE GULF WAR

The first few months of 1991 were dominated by the Gulf War, and while opposition to it attracted media attention, Scottish public opinion was largely supportive of the efforts to evict Iraq from Kuwait. In August 1990, ICM asked ‘If Iraq attacks Saudi Arabia, would you be in favour or against the use of armed forces against Iraq to get them to withdraw?’ Seventy per cent said they were in favour, and 22% were against. By February 1991 when the war had begun, 86% of those questioned said that the Allied coalition was justified in using force to get Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait, and only 10% that it was unjustified. Support was of the same order regardless of gender, age, class, housing tenure or voting intention, with 83% of Labour and 86% of SNP supporters, and 96% of Tories giving it their approval. The same orders of magnitude were evinced when people were asked whether they approved of the bombing of Iraq by the Allied coalition, with 75% in favour, and 18% against; again, no social variable made a significant difference to the response. Seventy per cent of women, 71% of young people aged between 18-34, and 71% of Labour voters were in favour.

In February 1991, MORI asked ‘If forcing Iraq out of Kuwait was important enough to justify the loss of British servicemen’s lives, or not’, and found that 55% said it was, 38% no, and 7% did not know. Women were more inclined than men to say no (44% compared with 32%), while 46% of women said that the action was justified in these terms. Fifty six per cent of men agreed. Labour supporters had more qualms than members of other parties (including the SNP) with 49% saying ‘no’, and 46% ‘yes’.

THE SNP LEADERSHIP ELECTION

Following Gordon Wilson’s resignation as party leader, the election for his successor took place in Autumn 1990 between Margaret Ewing and Alex Salmond. ICM asked in its September 1990 opinion poll whether respondents were aware of the contest. Equal proportions (48%) said they were aware and unaware. Thirty seven per cent thought Ewing would make the better leader, compared with 28% for Salmond (the eventual winner). There was support for a more cooperative and gradualist approach. Fifty six per cent thought that the SNP should cooperate more with other parties in pursuit of an assembly (35% disagreed), and 49% said that the party was wrong to campaign for full independence and not an assembly (40% thought it was right).
Most respondents (57% compared with 35%) thought that the SNP was wrong to campaign to encourage people to stop paying the poll tax, but 61% (31% dissented) thought it should campaign against nuclear weapons in Scotland. A similar percentage agreed with the statement that the party 'should do more work in parliament and less in the streets', with 26% against. The SNP was not easily labelled a right-wing or a left-wing party. While 30% believed it was more right-wing than previously, and 15% more left-wing, the largest number - 40% - found it impossible to label the party in these ways.

**OPINION MISCELLANY**

The MORI polls for the Sunday Times, while seeking a degree of continuity in questions, are more likely than the other pollsters to ask one-off sets of questions, presumably at the behest of the newspaper. Hence, MORI have asked about religious practices and affiliations, leisure pursuits, and attitudes to Hogmanay (including reactions to the statements 'I blame the English for reducing the importance of only 21% blamed the English, and only 17% said they drank too much - respondents were not asked the same question of Hogmanay, presumably on the grounds that it was normal so to do, or that people couldn't be expected to remember anyway).

One of the most interesting sets of questions, however, related to gender (MORI, July 1990). Fifty four percent of those questioned denied that Scots were prejudiced against women, and 42% agreed. Surprisingly, the opinions of male and female respondents did not diverge as much as might be expected. While 62% of men denied prejudice, so did 46% of women, while 48% of women and 34% of men thought Scotsmen were guilty of prejudice. Nevertheless, young women (between 18 and 34) were much more likely to complain of male prejudice than women over 55 (60% compared with 35%), and similar ratios occurred among men with 42% of young men acknowledging male prejudice compared with 21% of those over 55. If anything, then, there is a stronger age effect than a gender effect.

Respondents were quite happy with women going out to work, with 60% agreeing. Again, there appears to be a life-experience effect, with comparable proportions of men and women over 55 preferring women to stay at home (41% and 42% respectively). Employment outwith the home is still seen as more important for men than for women (56% compared with 35%), and similar ratios occurred among men with 42% of young men acknowledging male prejudice compared with 21% of those over 55. If anything, then, there is a stronger age effect than a gender effect.

Slightly more respondents agree that 'In Scotland, life is better for men than for women' (39% to 33%), but in this case the gender effect outweighs the life-cycle effect, with the largest proportions of older and younger women (45% and 40% respectively) agreeing with the statement. Men are less convinced, with 38% of young men, and 41% of older men taking the opposite view. However, there is very little support for the statement that 'Men have a more difficult life than women do' (13% agree and 76% disagree). In this case, all groups of men and women, young and old, dissent, with, as expected, more women in each case than men (only 2% of young women agree, compared with 22% of older men).

Finally, there is little support for the view that 'Scotsmen are more prejudiced against women than English men' (20% agree and 51% disagree). Interestingly, older people, male and female, are more likely to agree than younger people, with 19% of older males and 31% of older females compared with 13% of younger women and 11% of younger men.

All in all, these data reveal some interesting variations among the Scottish population. In general terms, respondents take a fairly optimistic view (or blinkered, depending on your predilection) of gender prejudice, on the whole denying that is is worse in Scotland than south of the border. Young women, on the other hand, are more likely to accuse Scotsmen of prejudice than either men themselves, or older women. Attitudes to women working, on the other hand, are much more age related than gender related, with more younger people of both sexes accepting it as more normal than older people do. These data provide a useful benchmark for future studies of gender attitudes, and rest on a substantial data base of over 800 cases.

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David McCrone, senior lecturer in sociology at Edinburgh University, and co-editor of Scottish Government Yearbook.

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