

## **The Conservative Party Representatives Study 2002: Overview**

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### **Aims and History**

The *CPRS 2002* was conducted at London Metropolitan University (London Guildhall University at the time of commencement). It was a quantitative analysis of the attitudes, beliefs, behaviour and socio-demographic background of Conservative Party politicians in 2002.

There was no single hypothesis. Instead, there were four aims to the research. First, as already noted, a systematic portrayal of the attitudes, beliefs, behaviour and socio-demographic background of Conservative Party politicians in 2002. Second, predictions about the impact of generational replacement as lower-level politicians progress to higher positions, replacing incumbents. Third, the investigation of a number of specific issues of particular interest to the researcher. Fourth, the creation and lodging of a datafile with the relevant academic authorities to allow for further analysis of the captured data and to serve as the possible basis of a time series dataset.

### **The Targets**

The targets were members of all the main groups of the British Conservative Party's publically elected (or appointed or inherited in the case of Peers) politicians. These groups were the Party's members of the House of Commons (MPs), members of the House of Lords (Peers), members of the European Parliament (MEPs), members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), members of the Welsh Assembly (AMs), members of the Greater London Assembly (GLAs), and local councillors in England (ELCs), Scotland (SLCs) and Wales (WLCs).

In the case of all but local councillors in England, names and adequate contact details were a matter of public record. For local councillors in England, because of the numbers involved, a mailing list was purchased from a commercial source, Keystroke Knowledge, Northumberland, UK.

The survey was an attempted census for all members of all groups except for local councillors in England. For the latter group, resources did not permit this. Instead, questionnaires were sent to a 10% random sample.

### **The Questionnaire**

The paper questionnaire, created using *SPSS Data Entry Builder*, was a 20-sided item in two versions, one designed for local councillors in England and one designed for all others. For both versions, the front cover or page 1 consisted of an introductory letter and set of instructions from the researcher and page 2 was left deliberately blank.

For both versions, pages 3 to 18 consisted of blocks of items under the following headings:

- The United Kingdom
- The Environment
- Business, Labour Relations, Welfare and the Economy
- Britain, Europe and the Wider World
- Ethnicity, Citizenship and National Image
- Society and Culture
- The Conduct of Politics
- The Political Parties
- The 2001 Conservative Party Leadership Contest
- Religion
- A Few Questions About Yourself.

For the version for all other respondents, pages 19 and 20 (the back cover) were left deliberately blank. For the questionnaire designed for local councillors in England, pages 19 to 20 consisted of an additional battery of socio-demographic items under the heading:

- Additional Questions for Local Councillors in England.

Since the survey was designed to be anonymous, there were no items that identified individual respondents. (Upon detailed analysis, one Westminster MP could be identified due to a unique combination of responses.) There are therefore no meaningful confidentiality issues.

A copy of the both questionnaires, the longer one used for local councillors in England, 'CPRS2002, ELCs Questionnaire', and the shorter one for all others, 'CPRS2002, Others Questionnaire', accompanies the other documentation.

### **The Accompanying Letter from Eric Forth MP.**

The questionnaire was accompanied by a separate letter urging response from the Right Honourable Eric Forth MP (1944-2006), the researcher's own Conservative MP and then Shadow Leader of the House of Commons. The mastercopy was signed by Mr Forth on his personal House of Commons stationery and dated the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2002. The text was as follows:

*Dear Colleague,*

*I have pleasure in introducing the enclosed survey from Nigel Meek, a researcher at London Guildhall University.*

*As well as his work at London Guildhall, Nigel has been an activist in what is now the Bromley & Chislehurst Conservative Association since the mid-1980s. He has served on its Executive Committee and various candidate selection panels, and was a member of the former London South-East European Constituency Council.*

*I think that one of the striking aspects of contemporary political reporting is the often poor coverage given to the Conservative Party itself. At times, this may be due to the political inclinations of many in the media. However, even when well-intentioned, reports often derive from anecdote and gossip on the one hand, or serious study which is nevertheless partial or out of date on the other.*

*Nigel's work is important for two reasons. First, being both an academic and a member of the Party, he is able to bring to bear objective analysis on an institution that he is part of and understands. Second, the outcome will enable serious commentators to draw upon reliable, up-to-date, and wide-ranging data about the Conservative Party's "front-line" representatives.*

*These days, some politicians are deluged with surveys of one sort or another. Others seem comparatively ignored. In either case, please see if you can spare the time to complete and return the enclosed questionnaire.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*[Eric Forth's signature]*

For a number of reasons, the researcher left the Conservative Party at a date after Mr Forth's death in 2006.

### **Deployment and Fieldwork**

Deployment was by a single mail-shot. The questionnaires were despatched from the University in the first two weeks of April 2002. All questionnaires were accompanied by a pre-paid reply envelope addressed to the researcher at the University. The reply envelopes for the use of MEPs had the appropriate Belgian postage affixed.

## Numbers Despatched and Response Rates

Almost all questionnaires that were returned were fully completed and were accepted as valid. The number of questionnaires sent to each group of politicians, the numbers returned and the valid response rate was as follows:


Group	Sent	Returned	Response Rate
Local councillors in England (ELCs)	655	283	43%
House of Lords (Peers)	221	60	27%
Westminster MPs (MPs)	166	52	31%
Local councillors in Scotland (SLCs)	112	48	43%
Local councillors in Wales (WLCs)	70	28	40%
European Parliament (MEPs)	36	14	39%
Scottish Parliament (MSPs)	19	14	74%
Greater London Assembly (GLAs)	9	4	44%
Welsh Assembly (AMS)	8	2	25%
Total	1296	505	39%

Since the survey was anonymous, there were no reminders nor were there any follow-up questionnaires.

## Data Capture

Using the mask created by *SPSS Data Entry Builder*, the data was manually input over a deliberately prolonged six-month period during the remainder of 2002 to lessen the chances of error from fatigue. It did not prove possible to scan the data electronically given the design of the questionnaire, the nature of the responses and the equipment available to the researcher.

## The SPSS Datafile

The *SPSS* datafile for the study, '*CPRS2002, Data Archive*', contains 505 cases or respondents as noted above, and 236 raw variables drawn directly from the questionnaire items. 

In the *SPSS* datafile, some additions or amendments shown in square brackets have been made to the variable labels where the raw variable labels omit information such as an introduction to a battery of items that was instead on the original paper questionnaire. For the precise wording presented to respondents, the questionnaires should be consulted.

## The Multi-Item Scales

In addition to the raw variables, in the datafile there are an additional 19 variables added or created by the researcher. One of these is the ID number assigned to each returned questionnaire and the other 18 are a range of multi-item scales or dimensions derived from a variety of sources.

Few of the attitudinal items in the questionnaires were designed to be used on their own. Instead, they were intended as components of multi-item scales or values dimensions. This was for the usual reasons. For example, rather than crudely ask people if they considered themselves "libertarian, authoritarian or somewhere in-between", one can assess complex constructs that cannot be summarized in a single question. Also, multi-item scales are also more reliable and less volatile than single-item questions: they even out the impact of individual "bugbears".

These 18 scales cover a wide range of topics, the better to assist in a research project aimed at producing a systematic and wide-ranging portrayal of attitudes, beliefs, behaviour and socio-demographic background of Conservative Party politicians in 2002.

Their origin was varied. Some of them, in some formulation, have been widely used, often for many years, in respected social research. *Authoritarianism, Environmentalism, Left-Right, Pride in Heritage and Culture, Pride in the Way the Nation Functions, Protectionism, Welfarism and Xenophobia* have been used in some manner in the *British*

*Social Attitudes* series. *Religiosity* and *Theocratism* were drawn from the *International Social Survey Programme*, *Feminism* was drawn from the *British Representation Study* and *Intra-Party Inclusivity* from the *British Election Panel Study*. Postmaterialism is also a well-known if controversial dimension. Others were drawn from more scattered sources or, particularly in the cases of *Traditional British Liberties* and *Optimism*, were created by the researcher for the *CPRS 2002*.

These 18 scales, brief notes about their purpose, responses (i.e. the number of those who validly responded to all constituent items of each scale), response rate and Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value of reliability were as follows:

Scale	Target	Responses	Response rate	Cronbach's $\alpha$
<i>Authoritarianism</i>	Law and order; morality	492	97%	0.71
<i>Environmentalism</i>	Individual/government responsibilities towards the environment	484	96%	0.71
<i>Europeanism</i>	UK's relationship with the European Union	459	91%	0.73
<i>Feminism</i>	Role of women in society	489	97%	0.62
<i>Intra-Party Elitism</i>	Control of the Conservative Party	501	99%	0.69
<i>Intra-Party Inclusivity</i>	Promoting women and minorities with the Conservative Party	495	98%	0.8
<i>Left-Right</i>	Economic relations; egalitarianism versus inegalitarianism	488	97%	0.72
<i>Optimism</i>	Present state and future fortunes of the Conservative Party	484	96%	0.74
<i>Political Elitism</i>	Control of the government and country	493	98%	0.69
<i>Postmaterialism</i>	Physical security versus self-expression	436	86%	n.a.
<i>Pride in Heritage and Culture</i>	Of the UK	489	97%	0.57
<i>Pride in the Way the Nation Functions</i>	Of the UK	489	97%	0.64
<i>Protectionism</i>	Foreign people and goods/services	495	98%	0.61
<i>Religiosity</i>	Personal religious beliefs	482	95%	0.84
<i>Theocratism</i>	Role of religion in public life	495	98%	0.74
<i>Traditional British Liberties</i>	Double-jeopardy law, ID cards etc.	477	94%	0.6
<i>Welfarism</i>	Self-help versus state-help	493	98%	0.72
<i>Xenophobia</i>	Immigrants within the UK	483	96%	0.84

Regarding Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , this is a measure of how well a set of variables measures a single construct, with the nearer to 1.0 the better. There is no firm agreement in the literature as to how near to 1.0 the alpha value should be before a scale is considered acceptably robust. However, a "liberal" level of 0.5 was treated as the minimum throughout the *CPRS 2002*. As can also be seen from the figures, all of the scales displayed a value greater than this and usually much greater. Regarding Postmaterialism, the unusual nature of it makes calculation of the value inappropriate. It also probably explains the lower response rate: some respondents had difficulty understanding what was expected of them.

The following is an expanded list of the multi-item scales displaying the wording of each constituent item. Unless otherwise indicated, all items were introduced with, "How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following?" Unless otherwise indicated, respondents were presented with a five-point, Likert-type "Agree strongly" to "Disagree strongly" response set. The direction of the wording of the individual items is as found in the original *CPRS 2002*. Where necessary, the order of individual items was reversed to compute the final multi-item scale.

#### *Authoritarianism*

- Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values
- People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences
- For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence
- Schools should teach children to obey authority
- The law should always be obeyed, even if a particular law is wrong
- Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards
- Homosexual relationships are always wrong

Note: This scale is sometimes found, such as in the *British Social Attitudes* series, without an item specifically used to identify attitudes towards gays and lesbians. This slightly shorter version of the scale can be easily recalculated from the *CPRS 2002* data by omitting this item.

#### *Environmentalism*

- The government should do more to protect the environment, even if it leads to higher taxes
- Industry should do more to protect the environment, even if it leads to lower profits and fewer jobs
- Ordinary people should do more to protect the environment, even if it means paying higher prices
- People should be allowed to use their cars as much as they like, even if it causes damage to the environment
- Many of the claims about mankind's damage to the environment are exaggerated

#### *Europeanism*

- The UK should embrace the concept of a federal Europe
- Membership of the Euro is crucial for Britain's future prosperity
- The EU's budget should be enlarged
- A single European Army would undermine rather than underpin the security of the UK
- Britain should withdraw from the EU
- The strength of national identities rules out parliamentary democracy on a European scale for the foreseeable future
- Conservative MEPs should remain committed members of the EPP/ED group

#### *Feminism*

- Government should make sure that women have an equal chance to succeed
- Men and women are equally suited emotionally for politics
- All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job
- Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay
- A husband's job is to earn the money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family

#### *Intra-Party Elitism*

[Members of the Conservative Party should have more influence in...]

- Basic principles and beliefs of the Party
- Formulation of Party policy and writing of manifestos
- Running and administering the Party and its finances

#### *Intra-Party Inclusivity*

[More should be done to advance members of the following groups within the Conservative Party...]

- Women
- Racial minorities
- Homosexuals and lesbians

### *Left-Right*

- Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off
- Big business benefits owners at the expense of workers
- Ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth
- There is one law for the rich and one for the poor
- Management will always try to get the better of employees if it gets the chance

### *Optimism*

- People do not trust Conservative politicians at a national level
- People do not trust Conservative politicians at a local level
- The Conservative Party can win the next general election
- The Conservative Party can win the next-but-one general election
- The Conservative Party as an institution is in better shape than many seem to think
- Opinion polls underestimate the level of support for the Conservatives amongst ordinary people
- The Conservative Party should change its name
- The view that the Conservative Party is culturally and socially "out of touch" is exaggerated
- The Conservative period in office between 1979 and 1997 brought about a major change in public attitudes
- Depictions in recent years of the Conservative Party as being "extreme" have some validity

### *Political Elitism*

- Ordinary citizens should have more say in the decisions made by government
- More should be done to interest people in government
- More should be done to involve ordinary people in decision making
- It is for politicians rather than the public to make decisions on issues and priorities

### *Postmaterialism*

[First and second most important aims of the country in the coming years]

- Maintaining order in the nation
- Giving people more say in important government decisions
- Fighting rising prices
- Protecting freedom of speech

### *Pride in Heritage and Culture*

[How proud or not are you of Britain in each of the following? "Very proud", "Somewhat proud", "Not very proud" or "Not proud at all"]

- Its armed forces
- Its history
- Its achievements in sports
- Its achievements in arts and literature
- Its scientific and technological achievements

### *Pride in the Way the Nation Functions*

[How proud or not are you of Britain in each of the following? "Very proud", "Somewhat proud", "Not very proud" or "Not proud at all"]

- Its political influence in the world
- Its social security system
- The way its democracy works
- Its economic achievements

### *Protectionism*

- Britain should limit the import of foreign products to protect its national economy
- British television should give preference to British films and programmes
- Foreigners should be allowed to buy land in Britain as easily as British people
- Britain should follow its own interests, even if this leads to conflicts with other nations
- People do not have to share British customs and traditions to become fully British

### *Religiosity*

- How close do you feel to God most of the time? [5-point text-based ordinal scale.]
- How often do you attend a religious service? (Excluding weddings & funerals etc.) [4-point text-based ordinal scale.]
- [Concerning the existence of God] Which of the following comes closest to your own view? [6-point text-based ordinal scale.]

Note: Because each individual item possessed a different response option set, the reliable but unwieldy *Religiosity* scale was computed from the three items after they had been standardised using *SPSS*. This also explains the unusual range of the scale in the *SPSS* datafile, ranging from approximately -5.97 to approximately 4.04 depending upon the number of decimal points displayed.

### *Theocratism*

- Religious leaders should not try to influence how people vote in elections
- Religious leaders should not try to influence government decisions
- Churches and religious organisations in this country have too much power

### *Traditional British Liberties*

- Britain should introduce compulsory identity cards
- Jury trials should be reserved only for the most serious of criminal charges
- The “double jeopardy” principle should be abolished for the most serious crimes
- Successive governments have been right to place stricter controls on the ownership of firearms

### *Welfarism*

- The welfare state makes people nowadays less willing to look after themselves
- People receiving social security are made to feel like second class citizens
- The welfare state encourages people to stop helping each other
- The government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor, even if it leads to higher taxes
- Around here, most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one
- Many people who get social security don't really deserve any help
- Most people on the dole are fiddling in one way or another
- If welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet

### *Xenophobia*

- Immigrants take jobs away from people who were born in Britain
- Immigrants increase crime rates
- Immigrants are generally good for Britain's economy
- Refugees who have suffered political repression in their own country should be allowed to stay in Britain
- Immigrants make Britain more open to new ideas and culture
- British schools should make much more effort to teach foreign languages properly
- The number of immigrants allowed into Britain nowadays should be increased
- Race relations will improve over the next few years

### **Contacting the Researcher**

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