Figure 2.8b. SURVEY SAMPLING: Poll Answers as Misinformation

EM9206: The Globe and Mail, April 11, 1992, pages A1 and A2

Kinnock under pressure to quit as Labour leader

British voters and party are polls apart

BY PAUL KORING
European Bureau
with Reuter and Associated Press

LONDON – As the Labour Party sought answers, and perhaps scapegoats, for its failure to unseat Britain's Conservatives in Thursday's election, party leader Neil Kinnock added to speculation yesterday that he may quit.

And pollsters who had predicted that Mr. Kinnock would be the next prime minister were wiping egg from their faces.

The Labour Leader said he was "consulting colleagues to inform them of the action I propose to take in the wake of the election defeat," adding that he will announce his intentions on Monday.

The 50-year-old Welsh miner's son, widely credited with saving the party from self-destruction by purging it of its hard-left elements and who jettisoned most of the party's socialist doctrine in a radical policy reformation aimed at appealing to the political centre, has been party leader since 1983.

Some Labour backbenchers, such as George Galloway, already are suggesting that Mr. Kinnock will "quit soon" and that John Smith, an urbane Scot on the party's right wing, should be the next leader. Mr. Smith would attract voters in areas "we are not currently reaching," Mr. Galloway said.

As Conservatives rejoiced in the triumph of a fourth consecutive majority, pollsters were at a loss to explain how they had failed to assess the strength of the Tory vote, which was at least five percentage points higher than predicted, either by the more than 50 polls during the month-long campaign or two massive exit polls conducted for TV networks on election day.

"It's a very big embarrassment, no doubt about that," said Nick Moon, political research director of National Opinion Polls. "One possibility was that we were polling in the wrong places."

Robert Worcester head of Market and Opinion Research International, said: "It's the worst performance of the polls in British polling history."

Alan Terry, a MORI research executive, said voters may have been frightened by Labour proposals to raise taxes by as much as 19 per cent. "When they actually stood there with their ballot paper and their pencil, tax rose up in their minds."

MORI's Simon Brown said: "I'm inclined to think it was a late and remarkable swing." But he conceded that the exit polls, conducted on behalf of Britain's major broadcasters, also had failed to accurately predict the outcome. Those polls, like the campaign polls, suggested a hung parliament, with no party winning the 326 seats needed to command a majority.

Pollsters also cited sunny weather and voter turnout of 77.7 per cent, one of the highest in two decades. "In the past, high turnouts always favoured Labour, but this time it appeared to be the Conservatives making sure to vote," said Gordon Heald, managing director for the Gallup organization.

Bookmakers also misjudged the election. On election day, some betting shops were giving 14-to-1 odds on the Conservatives' winning with a margin of 15 to 20 seats.

According to the final results, the Conservatives won 336 seats (and 41.9 per cent of the vote), Labour 271 (34.4 per cent) and the Liberal-Democrats 20 (18 per cent). Ulster Unionists won nine seats, Scottish Nationalists three and the Welsh Plaid Cymru four. Eight others also were elected. That gave the Tories a 21-seat majority over the combined opposition in the House of Commons.

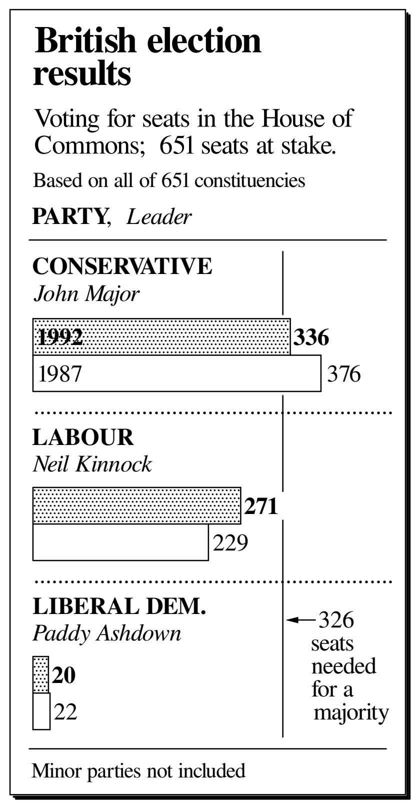
Yesterday, the pollsters were checking back with those surveyed. "We are currently carrying out two surveys, going back to people we surveyed before, finding out whether they voted, whether they changed their minds and when," said Brian Gosschalk, MORI's director of political research.

While most exit polls predicted Labour would win the most seats but not a majority, only a Harris poll for Independent Television News came close. It suggested that the Conservatives would win 41 per cent of the vote and Labour 37 per cent. Even that poll, however, did not predict a majority.

As the election dust settled, Prime Minister John Major, clearly conscious of the fact that a majority of Britons had voted against the Conservatives, said he was determined that his government would reflect the needs of the whole country. And he vowed to protect, improve and "never privatize" the National Health Service, a clear response to the stinging attacks by opposition parties on that issue.

Mr. Major, who succeeded Margaret Thatcher 16 months ago when she was ousted by Tory MPs apparently fearful of their re-election chances, said: "It is very important ..... the country has elected me in my own right to become prime minister."

He is expected to announce his new cabinet next week. Nine ministers were among the 40 Conservatives who lost their seats on Thursday.



1 Starting in its second paragraph, the article EM9206 reprinted above mentions, in several places, the 'error' in the (*i.e.*, the mistaken) poll predictions of the outcome of the 1992 British general election. What *quantitative* information on this matter is given in the article EM9206?

- List the *reasons* given in the article for the 'error' in the (*i.e.*, the mistaken) poll predictions.

(*continued overleaf*)

2 Explain briefly how the Conservatives obtained a *majority* in the House of Commons with only 41.9% of the vote.

- Outline whether it would be possible, at least in theory, for the Conservatives, with 41.9% of the vote, to have obtained:
  - all 651 seats,
  - no seats

  in the House of Commons. Indicate clearly any assumption(s) you make to answer these questions.

3 In the sixth paragraph of the left-hand column of the article EM9206 reprinted overleaf on page 2.73, it is stated that .... *the strength of the Tory vote .... was at least five percentage points higher than predicted ....* and, in the first paragraph of the middle column, that .... *Labour (had made) proposals to raise taxes by as much as 19 per cent.* Explain briefly why the *units* (percentage points and per cent, respectively) are *different* in these two statements.

- Outline the effect on each statement if it had contained the *other* units.

4 The first and third paragraphs of the middle column of the article EM9206 reprinted overleaf on page 2.73 contain the respective statements: .... *proposals to raise taxes by as much as 19 per cent* and *Pollsters also cited sunny weather and voter turnout of 77.7 per cent ....*, both of which use units of *per cent.* Describe briefly the essential difference, if any, between the two quantities under discussion in these statements.

- Explain briefly what effect it would have on each statement if its units were *percentage points* instead of percent.

5 In the last paragraph of the middle column of the article reprinted EM9206 overleaf, the results are described for a Harris poll that came *closest* to the actual election results. Discuss critically the possible use of this information as the basis for a claim that this Harris poll used the *best Plan* of the more than 50 polls that the article states were carried out during the election campaign.

The article EM9206 reprinted in this Figure 2.8b is also used in Figure 8.15b in the STAT 220 Course Materials.