



AGE
Concern

Winning in 2009
The importance of the
Baby Boomers

Contents

Executive summary	4 - 5
Older voters – introducing the ‘Baby Boomers’	6 - 7
Understanding older voters	8
Demographic change – the significance of older voters	9 - 11
Older voters’ world view	12
Revisiting 5th May	13 - 20
Parties, leaders and campaigns	13
The issues	17
Looking to the future – the search for security	21 - 24
Conclusions	25
Footnotes & related publications by Age Concern	26

Executive summary

Older voters already represent a quarter of all voters and their importance is increasing as a result of three key social and political trends.

- Growing numbers of us are aged over 50. That trend will accelerate as the post war 'baby boomers' reach retirement.
- Older voters are more likely to vote. As young people continue to drift away from the ballot box, the over 50s make up a growing percentage of the voting electorate.
- Older voters are increasingly prepared to switch their vote to the party that best addresses their concerns. 1.8 million describe themselves as 'floating' voters.

Older voters include not only pensioners, whom parties recognised in the election campaign, but also 'baby boomers'. The first 'boomers' are marching towards retirement and are a very distinct generation with different experiences, values and expectations from their parents. They have actively created change at every stage of their lives - in family life, the labour market and education. Politicians will need to refine their views of this generation's diverse values, attitudes and issues in order to communicate effectively with it.

Although there is no 'age interest' block, there is a common world view and opinion is coalescing on many of the major issues. For older voters:

- An anti-politics mood prevails.
- No political party won their enthusiastic allegiance in the 2005 election. There is widespread dissatisfaction with all the main parties. Many voted with reluctance and for negative reasons.
- Perceptions of insecurity (both on a personal and national level) dominate.

They are seeking leadership, locally and nationally, to counteract this malaise.

Leadership and policies are central to older voters. They criticised the negativity of the 2005 campaigns, which obscured where parties stood on a range of issues.

- They felt that all campaigns were boring and lacked any noticeable highlights.
- They were sceptical of politicians, their motives and promises.
- They want to see strong leaders who are inspiring, energetic and trustworthy but they were not impressed by any of the leaders in 2005.
- They want a greater presence in their area from sitting MPs and candidates during and between election times. Active local campaigning made a positive difference, but was rare.

Crucially, older voters do not believe that any party understands the problems facing Britain, empathises with their lives or the issues that matter to them.

Older voters are concerned about national, personal and generational security.

- **National insecurity:** Immigration, asylum and terrorism have become linked in their minds and have gained a new importance since the London bombings. They need to be convinced that effective policies are in place to address their concerns.
- **Personal insecurity:** These national anxieties have added to their sense of personal insecurity. Older voters are worried about money, their future care, public services, and their personal safety.
- **Generational insecurity:** The present and future well being and security of their children and grandchildren influenced how they voted. Their

concerns centred on educational standards, access to Further and Higher Education, affordable housing and levels of debt.

The Issues

- **Economic stability** was crucial. Their perception of a strong economy was the main reason for Labour 'stickers' and Liberal Democrat 'considerers' remaining loyal.

- **Taxation and public services** were central issues. There was a marked tendency to discuss taxation not so much in terms of its level but as an investment. They wanted to see an improvement in the provision and quality of public services in return for their taxes and few were satisfied with the pace of change. Perceptions of delivery were key to defections from Labour to other parties. Many Labour 'stickers' were giving the government a 'last chance' to deliver.

- **Council Tax** levels are already an emotive issue for those on fixed incomes. Older voters linked dissatisfaction with the level of the Council Tax to the failure of local councils to deliver better services.

- **Pensions:** Uncertainty about pensions makes a major contribution to feelings of insecurity. There is significant dissatisfaction over private pension plans. Many are not saving enough for retirement, or have found that their savings are insufficient. However, they are anxious about having to work for longer. Low income voters' and female voters' concerns focus on state pension levels. Reform of the pension system to ensure a decent standard of living for current and future retired people is essential if individuals are to plan confidently for retirement and to feel that they have been dealt with fairly.

- **Health and care:** Older voters' were very concerned, often as a result of caring for their own older relatives, about the cost and quality of their future care. Similarly, the quality and provision of health services are already top current concerns for retired people. 'Boomers' expect their concern for the NHS will grow as they age. All want immediate and ongoing investment and the delivery of perceptible improvements.

- **Crime and public safety:** 'Boomers' fear for their safety as they age and become more vulnerable. The sense of national malaise, the loss of public values like respect, and fear that the country is run down and heading in the wrong direction, played out at a local level with issues like crime, binge drinking, anti-social behaviour and general disrespect.

Floating voters are 'up for grabs'. No party currently has provided what older voters are looking for. All the parties need to rethink their policies fundamentally and the way in which they interact with older people. Parties need to connect with, listen to and communicate with older voters around older voters' agenda, recognising the special character of the 'boomers'.

'Boomers' respect strong leadership that expresses a clear, positive vision and principles. They are looking for a champion who understands their interests and the issues facing the country as a whole. But being a champion requires listening to and showing empathy with older people's concerns and aspirations and not just in campaigns but during the whole parliament.

Older voters – Introducing the Baby Boomers¹

Older voters are already important, as each of the parties noted in the 2005 General Election. But their importance is growing thanks to three key social and political trends. First, in our ageing society, growing numbers of us are aged over 50. That trend will accelerate as the post war ‘baby boomers’ reach retirement. Second, older voters turn out to vote in much larger numbers than younger people. In fact, as young people continue to drift away from the ballot box, the over 50s make up a growing percentage of the voting electorate. Third, older voters are increasingly prepared to switch their vote to the party that best addresses their concerns. The days of loyalty to one party are fast diminishing among the over 50s.

Demographic changes are transforming the age structure of Britain. For the first time there are more people over 60 than under 16. There are 11 million pensioners and 17 million ‘baby boomers’, those aged between 45 and 65.

Pensioners have long been an important political force, but ‘baby boomers’ have also proved a very significant section of the population with different experiences and expectations from their parents. 11 million ‘baby boomers’ are now approaching retirement and research consistently shows that they are determined to reinvent the experience of retirement. They are savvy and sceptical, individualistic and community orientated, and consumerist. Quality of life is an important issue for many. They have diverse life styles.² One in 14 of younger ‘boomers’ are from ethnic minorities.³ ‘Boomers’, especially the younger group, have also experienced widening inequality, which has shaped their adult lives and will follow them into retirement.

‘Boomers’ have created change at every stage of their lives, in family life, the labour market and education. Many of the older group benefited, for example, from the post war expansion of Further and Higher Education. They arrived on the scene with the welfare state, take its existence as a given and focus on the quality and extensiveness of its services. Not only has this generation experienced change, it also contains a leavening of people who have taken action to bring change about. While financial pressure is reinforcing ageist prejudices, this generation have opposed discrimination and are unlikely to tolerate age discrimination.⁴

‘Boomers’ tend to vote and increasingly to switch their votes. Politicians and those who seek to represent and work with older people will need to refine their views of this generation’s diverse values, attitudes and issues in order to communicate effectively with it.

As the population profile changes so does the electoral register. In the future, there will be more older voters and they are more likely to vote than other age groups. In 2005, 75% of over 65s voted making them a quarter of all voters. This compares with a 37% turn out of 18-24 year olds, just 7% of all voters.

Older voters are also becoming more volatile. 1.8 million describe themselves as ‘floating’ voters. Lifelong loyalty to a particular party is declining. ‘Baby boomers’ especially are likely to shop around and are sceptical about politicians.

I was brought up in South Wales and it was all staunchly Labour and nobody questioned there... That's the way my parents always did it. So that's the pull for me, the pull is I was brought up in that area, and quite poor, so my circumstances always governed that choice. But now that I live in London... I do have different circumstances. So I have got my allegiance, which comes from where I was brought up and struggling with the life I live now, what I want for myself, not just sticking with the one party and my strong allegiance, if you like.

Switcher, female, 56-69, Croydon



Understanding Older Voters

Age Concern is working to build a greater understanding of the characteristics of older voters. This report builds on understanding gained from earlier research conducted by Demos focussed on the characteristics of 'baby boomers' and work with TBWA to identify the different kinds of older voter who reflect the diversity of this generation.⁵

Winning in 2009 – The Importance of Baby Boomers brings together two pieces of research. The first is quantitative research by Scott Davidson of Loughborough University which identifies constituencies where the 'older vote' is particularly influential.⁶ Although research often focuses on retired voters, ageing and ageing issues do not begin to affect voters the day after retirement but become more central to older people's thinking in the last decade before retirement. 'Older voters' in this demographic research refers to voters over the age of 55. Based on differential turnout by age group in 2005, the research applies a model of demographic change to project forward to 2009 and 2025.

The research, **Growing Importance of Older Voters: An Electoral Demographic Model for Analysis of the Changing Age Structure of the Electorate**, is available in more detail on our website: www.20millionvotes.org.uk

Demographic analysis is complemented by in-depth qualitative research by Opinion Leader Research which seeks to understand what older voters in marginal constituencies think of political parties, leaders and issues. This examines their voting decisions on the 5th May and explores the issues that are rising up their agenda. Twelve group discussions of male and female voters aged between 45 and 69 were held in the 'super marginals' of Enfield North, Selby, Croydon Central, Hemel Hempstead, Hornsey, and Dorset South.

The discussions involved four voter segments:

- 'Stickers' who voted Conservative in 1992, Labour in 1997, 2001, and 2005
- 'Switchers' who voted Labour in 1997 and 2001 but Conservative in 2005
- Liberal Democrat 'switchers' who voted Labour in 1997 and 2001 but Liberal Democrat in 2005
- Liberal Democrat 'considerers' who voted Labour in 2001, considered voting Liberal Democrat in 2005 but voted Labour

Demographic change - the significance of older voters

Older Voters in 2005

Older people are more likely to vote than the rest of the electorate. In 2005, 71% of 55 to 64-year-olds voted and 75% of those over 65.⁷ One in four voters was aged over 65. Older voters accounted for 41.2%, over 10 million, of all votes cast.

There are regional variations in the proportion of older voters. The South West had the highest proportion with 45.3% and London had the lowest with 32.5%. There are 24 seats in England and Wales, mainly concentrated in the South East and South West, where there is an older voter majority. Before 2005, 16 of these were Conservative and the other eight shared between Labour the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru.⁸

The top 70 seats, where older voters accounted for more than 47% of the turnout, are more evenly spread across England and Wales. The seats are also distributed more evenly across the parties. Before the 2005 elections, the Conservatives held 32, Labour held 20, Liberal Democrats 14 and Plaid Cymru three. In 2005, the Conservatives made eight gains (five from Labour, three from Liberal Democrats) and now hold 40 of the 70 seats. The Liberal Democrats also gained two seats, one from Labour and one from the Conservatives.

Overall in 2005, no party won older voters support. In fact, Labour lost ground and the Conservatives stood still. 'Boomers' swung to the Liberal Democrats but as we shall see, many reported dissatisfaction with all of the main political parties.

Older voters in 2009

A General Election in 2009 or 2010 would be particularly significant, as this is the time when the first 'baby boomers' reach state pension age.

From 2009, older voters will be in a majority for a significant and growing number of seats. In England and Wales, the proportion of older voters is set to rise another 2.1% by 2009 to 43.3%. The proportion of older voters will be 48% in the South West.

While there are 43 seats, mainly urban areas within cities such as London, Birmingham, Manchester and Nottingham, where the proportion of older voters decreases by 2% or more, it increases in 448 seats. There are 29 seats in England and Wales which are projected to see increases of over 5% by 2009. These seats are distributed across the regions and especially noticeable is the rapid growth in many northern seats and seats away from the traditional coastal retirement towns.

Older voters in 2025

It is estimated that, by 2025, the proportion of older voters will make up half of all votes cast in the UK. In 295 seats, 52% of the total seats in England and Wales, older voters will be in a majority. Only London among the regions will not have an older voter majority and only 26 inner city seats are projected to have less than one third of votes cast by older voters.

Older voters are not only growing in number, they are also more volatile. 1.8 million voters describe themselves as 'floaters'. Seats with a high concentration of older voters are more likely to swing. 14% of the top 70 older voter seats changed hands in 2005, compared to 8% of seats nationally.

Demographic change - the significance of older voters

Table 1: Voting by age group in 2005 (compared with 2001)

	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat
45-54	31 (-1)	35 (-6)	25 (+5)
55-64	39 (0)	31 (-6)	22 (+5)
65+	41 (+1)	35 (-4)	18 (+1)

Source: Mori



Table 2: Estimated proportion of turnout made up of older voters in a General Election

Harwich, won by the Conservatives from Labour in 2005

Estimated percentage of voters aged 55+ in		
2005	2009	2025
57.9%	60.7%	68.1%

South Thanet, Labour marginal held by Labour in 2005

Estimated percentage of voters aged 55+ in		
2005	2009	2025
49.1%	51.5%	58.7%

Source: Scott Davidson, Loughborough University, 2005



Older voters' world view

Older voters did not turn out with enthusiasm in the General Election of 2005. Our research since then shows that the attitudes of older voters in the new super marginal constituencies are dominated by insecurity and a sense of national malaise.

Many older voters feel that the country is run down compared with the past. Their perception is based on a number of concerns from the state of public services and community safety to immigration and national security. They feel that their way of life is under threat. The threats came from anti-social behaviour and binge drinking; lack of respect and discipline among the young; immigration; and crime.

This malaise is felt most strongly by those who switched to the Conservatives, by those on low income and among the 55 to 69 age group. It is weakest among those who considered switching or actually switched to the Liberal Democrats. Some younger, relatively better off 'boomers' talked of moving abroad.

These anxieties have fuelled personal insecurity. Older voters are worried about money, their future care, public services, their personal safety and also about their families.

**Everything's got worse under Labour.
It's going to rack and ruin.**

Switcher, female, 45-55, Hemel Hempstead



Revisiting 5th May - Parties, leaders & campaigns

An anti-politics mood prevails. Older voters complain about a lack of political choice and are generally sceptical about politicians, their motives and promises. Any suspicion of 'spin' arouses hostility.

They're all much of a muchness. They promise the earth and then give nothing for fear of offending.

LibDem switcher, male, 44-55, Hornsey

Many Labour 'stickers' only voted reluctantly for the party. On the other hand, 'switchers' voted without enthusiasm for alternative parties, often as a protest against Labour.

I voted Labour... I just don't think they've done that great a job but didn't think any party offered anything better.

Sticker, male, 45-55, Enfield

I just thought that, in this instance, Labour lied the least, that's all.

LibDem considerer, male, 56-69, Dorset South

I don't think the Lib Dems are up to much, but I wanted to cut the majority off, cos he (Blair) just seems to do whatever he wants.

LibDem switcher, male, 56-69, Hornsey

I don't particularly think they (Conservatives) are up to much. I just knew Labour wasn't for me.

Switcher, male, 45-55, Croydon

Parties

Many 'stickers' only voted Labour reluctantly. Many older, low income female 'stickers' only decided which way to vote on polling day. They had lost the optimism about Labour that they had felt in 1997.

I really didn't agree with the war but I didn't think there was anyone else so I stuck with Labour.

Sticker, female, 56-69, Enfield

Former Labour voters switched to the Conservatives mainly out of anger and disappointment rather than being positively attracted. In Croydon and Hemel, the Conservatives' platform on crime and immigration did connect with 'switchers', yet they were largely dismissive of Michael Howard and the election campaign. Some 'switchers' from Labour to the Liberal Democrats rejected the Conservatives because their policies were not forward thinking, because the party itself lacked credibility and the campaign was perceived as negative.

They've got no figurehead, no one to inspire you at all... and until they've got someone like that, there's no one there to tell you what their policies are.

Sticker, male, 44-55, Enfield

Liberal Democrat 'switchers' are more positive towards the party but the vote still represented a protest vote. Liberal Democrat 'considerers' found Charles Kennedy appealing and honest but did not see the Liberal Democrats as having any possibility of forming a government.

I think even though I voted Lib Dem, you know, they were just saying ...what they thought you wanted to hear, rather than they actually believed in those policies.

LibDem switcher, male, 56-69, Hornsey

Crucially, voters did not feel that any party either understands the problems facing Britain or looks after the interests of ordinary members of the public.⁹

Revisiting 5th May - Parties, leaders & campaigns

Leaders

Older voters want to see strong leaders who are inspiring, energetic and trustworthy and they were not impressed by any of the leaders in 2005. Male voters especially feel that politicians 'sit on the fence' and there is some nostalgia for past leaders.

Older voters discussed the election in terms of who was right for the Prime Minister's job. Michael Howard was widely seen as an ineffectual and weak leader. 'Switchers' to the Conservatives were also critical and compared him unfavourably to Margaret Thatcher. Charles Kennedy was liked by most for his honesty and down-to-earth approach but was seen as lacking the gravitas and dynamism to be Prime Minister. Although voters mistrust Tony Blair, 'stickers' tended to see him as the most suitable of the party leaders at the time of the election to be Prime Minister.

Maggie had balls. There's no one like that now. They (the Conservatives) need a real statesman to lead them properly into the 21st century.

Switcher, male, 45-55, Croydon

Kennedy seems much more honest than the rest of them but who knows if he's up to much, hard to tell.

LibDem considerer, male, 56-69, Dorset South

He's (Blair's) made mistakes, some big ones, but he's still the best we've got.

Sticker, female, 56-69, Enfield

You have to like the leaders. Part of Blair's problem is so many people don't like him. He's not got the appeal he used to have. He's less trustworthy.

Switcher, female, 56-69, Croydon

The campaigns

Older voters felt that all of the campaigns were boring and lacked any noticeable highlights. In particular they found the campaigns negative, especially that of the Conservatives. Back-biting and slanging matches obscured the issues. This was a particular turn off for women voters.

It was all about slagging each other and each other's policies off, rather than telling us what they were going to do.

Switcher, Female, 56-69, Croydon

Reflecting their lack of enthusiasm for any one party and their perception that the parties were too close together to offer meaningful choice, many only made up their mind very late in the campaign, sometimes not until they were in the polling booth. This hesitation was especially prevalent among low income, female 'switchers' and some Liberal Democrat 'considerers' and 'switchers'.

I kept vacillating, going from one to the other, and then, in the end, I thought I've got to make a decision, it's voting day.

LibDem Considerer, female, 44-55, Dorset South

In general, those who stuck with Labour did so reluctantly. They could not see a credible alternative and detested Howard. They believed Labour had good aims and values and appreciated a strong, stable economy.

Those who switched to the Conservatives did so more as a protest against Labour's broken promises than positively for the Conservatives. They were angry about crime and immigration and very antagonistic to Tony Blair.

Those who considered voting Liberal Democrat did so because of the war in Iraq and because they felt let down by Labour. They did not switch in the end because of the local MP and the lack of a strong alternative. Those who did switch to the Liberal Democrats did so in protest against Labour. They were particularly angry about Iraq. They felt let down by Labour and highlighted concerns about the Council Tax and poor public services.

Local campaigns and candidates

Active local campaigning made a positive difference, but was rare. Many older voters expressed frustration that local campaigns and candidates were simply not visible in their area, with the notable exceptions of Dorset South and Enfield. Older voters are often less mobile and are therefore particularly conscious of their immediate environment. They care about local issues as well as national ones and want to know how candidates will tackle them. Successful candidates had often developed a record and profile in their constituency. For example, in Dorset South the Labour MP kept Liberal Democrat 'considerers' on side because of his visibility in the area. In Croydon Central, the Conservative candidate was visible and vocal. Older voters wanted to see a greater presence in their area from both sitting MPs and candidates during and between election time.

It would have been nice to see a more local campaign, one that talked about issues around here. It would kind of show they cared and they knew what was going on, not that they're just sitting in Westminster arguing politics.

Sticker, female, 45-55, Selby



Revisiting 5th May - A summary

Switchers

Anti-Labour vote
**Protest against Labour's
broken promises**
Anger over crime/safety
and immigration
**Antipathy towards Tony
Blair**

LibDem Switchers

Anti-Labour vote
Anger over Iraq
Council Tax
Poor public services
Let down by Labour

Stickers

A reluctant vote
No credible alternative
Detest Michael Howard
Strong economy
**Credit Labour with good
aims and values**

LibDem Considerers

Anger over war / let down
Local MP and lack of
alternative ensures loyalty

Revisiting 5th May - The issues

Policies were of prime importance to older voters. One of the main criticisms of the campaigns was the lack of clarity about where the parties stood on a range of issues.

A lot of personalities first, and policies afterwards, almost so policies don't matter.

Sticker, male, 44-55, Enfield

National issues were important in voters' decisions, especially the economy, public services, national and local taxation, immigration, crime and the war in Iraq.

In most constituencies, local issues were national ones played out on a local level. The voters were concerned about local hospital standards, crime in the area, Council Tax levels, and asylum and immigration. Liberal Democrat 'considerers' in Dorset South were an exception, where a very specific local issue - a proposal to construct a by-pass - carried greater weight.

It's the big stuff that counts.

Sticker, male, 56-69, Selby

The local concerns are pretty much the same as the national ones really. We've had problems with the local hospital but that's something you hear on the news too.

Switcher, female, 45-55, Hemel

At the end of the day, I think, knowing Jim Knight, yeah, I think he swayed it, probably more the local politics swayed it more than national.

LibDem considerer, female, 44-55, Dorset

The Economy

Economic stability was the main reason for Labour 'stickers' and Liberal Democrat 'considerers' remaining loyal. 'Stickers' associated Labour with economic stability, low interest rates, low inflation and affordable mortgages. These are particularly important issues for people on fixed income. In contrast, the Conservatives are still associated with negative connotations of 15% interest rates, three million unemployed and negative equity. Memories of the last Conservative government were particularly influential with low income women in Selby and Enfield, who stuck with Labour as a result.

I was in two minds but the state of the economy persuaded me to give Labour another shot.

Sticker, male, 45-55, Enfield

You can't underestimate the importance of a stable economy. It impacts everything and is worth a few errors.

Sticker, female, 45-55, Selby

Public services and taxation

Concern about taxation has risen over recent years. There was a marked tendency among older voters to discuss taxation, not so much in terms of its level but as an investment on which they wanted to see a clear return and nowhere more so than in the provision and quality of public services.

It's time to deliver. We've paid in to the system. Now we need to see the real benefits coming our way.

Sticker, female, 45-55, Selby

Revisiting 5th May - The issues

All voters were concerned about the provision and quality of public services but their perceptions of how much improvement had been achieved varied. The difference in perception marked a dividing line between those who stuck with Labour and those who switched.

'Stickers' credited Labour with good intentions and having the right values regarding public services. Male 'stickers', especially, openly approved of increased taxes to fund better services.

I would vote for any party that said they would invest in the NHS more. That was Labour's thing so they did it for me.

Sticker, male, 56-69, Selby

However, even 'stickers' were unhappy about the slow rate of progress.

Nobody's happy with the health service. There's been lots of promises. There's lots of money talked about. I think it's getting better but progress is so painfully slow that that's what people worry about.

Sticker, male, 44-55, Enfield

'Switchers' to the Conservatives, on the other hand, were dismissive of Labour's plans and the view that they had not delivered contributed to the anti-Labour vote. They felt that money had been wasted without any improvement in services. Male 'switchers', especially, believed that investment in the NHS has simply led to more bureaucracy.

They just haven't delivered on enough of their promises enough of the time over the last two terms of the Government.

Switcher, male, 56-69, Hemel Hempstead

Liberal Democrat 'switchers' accepted that high taxes were necessary for better services but they also felt that Labour had failed to deliver quickly enough and therefore that they had not seen results from their investment.

Apparently they've invested all our money in public services. That's fine, but if this is the case, why are they still inadequate? A friend of mine had to wait nearly a month to have a scan for cancer – a whole month when it could have been life threatening.

LibDem switcher, female, 45-55, Hornsey

Liberal Democrat 'switchers' were also critical of Labour's policy on tuition fees and childcare.

We were promised very good childcare for going back to work...and we never got that.

LibDem switcher, female, 44-55, Hemel Hempstead

Local services and Council Tax

Levels of Council Tax are a very emotive issue for older people who struggle with rising charges levelled on fixed incomes. The Liberal Democrats benefited in Hornsey from anger over the level of the Council Tax. However, the main issue for voters was making a link between rises in Council Tax and the failure to deliver better local services.

I wouldn't mind if the council were spending their money wisely, but they're not.

Switcher, female, 56-69, Croydon

Council Tax has been increased last year by 30%. This year it's been increased by 15%. And what do you get for that? We have to pay for a wheelie bin and pay again if our wheelie bin is broken or stolen. So where is it our Council Tax goes to?

Switcher, female, 44-55, Hemel Hempstead

Immigration

Immigration, often spoken of interchangeably with asylum, was a highly emotive issue for older voters. This was particularly the case for 'switchers' to the Conservatives in Croydon, where the Home Office Immigration Service is based. Labour was criticised for being 'soft' on immigration and asylum. A link has been made in the minds of older voters between immigration, asylum and terrorism. Many 'stickers', especially those on low income, considered voting Conservative because they were perceived to be tougher.

This open door policy is just madness. You don't know who's here, who's not, who's coming next.

LibDem switcher, male, 56-69, Hornsey

I just fear for my grandchildren now, cos we, I think multiculturalism has gone too far.

Switcher, male, 44-55, Croydon

Crime and public safety

Anger over crime and anti-social behaviour also led 'switchers' to vote Conservative. Voters felt that Labour is too lenient towards criminals. They were also concerned about community safety and binge drinking. Some Labour 'stickers' on low income

considered voting Conservative because of crime.

It does seem that the people who deserve a stiff penalty get let off, and the people that don't deserve a stiff penalty get it lumped on them because they are an easy target.

Switcher, male, 44-55, Croydon

Crime appears to be on the increase despite these so called statistics they keep spouting at us to say that it's improving.

Switcher, male, 56-69, Hemel Hempstead

Iraq, trust and Blair

Iraq was a significant issue, including for those who stuck with Labour. Older voters wrestled with it in different ways. Going to war was not just important in itself but was linked to a loss of trust, especially in Tony Blair. It compounded other discontents about spin and sleaze.

'Switchers' to the Liberal Democrats gave anger over Iraq as a major reason, linking going to war with Tony Blair's perceived evasions and lies. 'Switchers' to the Conservatives also cited anger over Iraq as well as broken promises and handling of allegations of sleaze and spin.

The war was crucial for me. I lost my faith in Labour and it broke my heart as I've always been Labour. I was gutted.

LibDem switcher, male, 56-69, Hornsey

Although I'm normally a Labour voter, it was as a protest. I switched due to the Iraq war and I will probably vote Labour again next time.

Switcher, female, 44-55, Hemel Hempstead

Revisiting 5th May - The issues

I really didn't agree with the war but I didn't think there was anyone else, so I stuck with Labour.

Sticker, male, 45-55, Enfield



Implication for parties

Many 'stickers' had decided to give Labour another chance. They will be seeking evidence of public service improvement. Low income 'stickers' need to be convinced about Labour's policies on crime, immigration and anti-social behaviour. Strong negative feelings of frustration, anger and lack of trust have attached themselves to Tony Blair personally.

It's about results. We need them and hopefully they will deliver.

Sticker, female, 45-55, Selby

Conservatives need to position themselves as a credible alternative government. Even voters who have switched still feel that they lack an effective leader and a proper raft of policies and proposals. Non-Conservative voters see them as marginal at present.

They're just not strong enough or suitable for government. They could be built but they need more gravitas.

Sticker, male, 56 – 69, Selby

Perceptions of Charles Kennedy and the Liberal Democrats are largely positive but they are still not seen as a credible alternative. 'Switchers' to them are conscious that they will not win power. However, they have connected with some older voters through their local income tax policy and position on the war in Iraq.

You're championing the lesser of three evils, if you like, not because you necessarily want the party to win, as we don't know if they would be any good, although they seem genuine and balanced.

LibDem switcher, male, 56-69, Hornsey

Looking to the future - The search for security

One key battle ground will centre on addressing security, both on a personal and a national level. Not only are voters anxious now about their finances and safety but they are nervous for the future and worried about health, care and the prospects for future generations. This debate will hinge on the relationship between public services and tax. Older voters warn that they are seeking evidence of a return on their taxes.

Financial security: provision

Financial worries are a dominant theme, with many worried about their quality of life as they get older. Different social groups voice different concerns.

Low income voters worry whether they will be able to afford their basic living costs and say they will probably be forced to come out of retirement to afford increased costs. Relatively better off voters want to be able to leave something for their families, in addition to supporting themselves.

Younger 'boomers' expect to be working until 70 if they can find work. They want to retire earlier but are not sure that they will be able to afford to do so.

Inflation is eroding our savings for the future.

Switcher, male, 45-55, Croydon

Financial security: pensions and tax

Uncertainty about pensions and tax makes a major contribution to feelings of insecurity. 'Baby boomers' empathise instinctively with the warning of the Pension Commission that the next generation of pensioners will be poorer in relative terms than today's are.

Relatively better off older voters receiving pensions do not feel that they are keeping up with rising standards of living. They may resent paying taxes when their disposable income is being squeezed by, for example, higher than inflation increases in Council Tax and fuel bills. Inheritance Tax levels are a particular concern amongst better off voters in constituencies in the South.

There is significant dissatisfaction over private pension plans amongst relatively better off older voters and 'boomers'. Many are not saving enough for retirement, or have found that their savings are insufficient. However, they are anxious about having to work for longer.

Low income voters and female voters focus strongly on state pension levels.

Well, all the pension schemes have failed and people have been paying into their pensions for donkey's years and haven't got anything. It's a major concern and worry for everyone.

Switcher, female, 56-69, Croydon

Personal security: care

Older voters' future care is a very emotive issue. Many fear they will have to sell everything to provide for their own age. Relatively better off voters are annoyed at the Government's means testing policy for care homes. Some are, or have been, concerned about the cost of care for their parents.

Female voters also raise concerns about the quality of care in residential homes often based on their experiences of caring for older relatives. These concerns are shared by those on a low income.

Looking to the future - The search for security

My main worry is health and who is going to look after me.

LibDem considerer, male, 56-69, Dorset

You work all your life and pay into the system and then all you seem to get is below standard care. I think we are all, and should all be, concerned about what's going to happen to us in those (care) homes.

Sticker, female, 45-55, Selby

Personal security: health

For older grey voters, especially women, the quality of health provision is already a top current concern. They want immediate and ongoing investment.

We want to know we can see a doctor when we need to and that help is immediately on hand.

Switcher, female, 56-69, Croydon

'Boomers' say their concern for the NHS will grow. They expect to be increasingly reliant on its services and are worried about waiting lists and the standards and levels of care. They demand a return for the taxes that they have paid towards improvements.

We've funded the NHS so long. It will become even more important to me that improvements continue to occur.

Switcher, female, 45-55, Hemel Hempstead

Personal security: crime and public safety

'Boomers', both men and women, fear the prospect of crime and anti-social behaviour as they age. As they become more vulnerable, they expect to be more concerned about their personal safety. They also

expect the law and order situation to deteriorate in the next 10-15 years, especially in some constituencies, such as Hornsey and Croydon, which voters perceive to have high levels of crime.

You want to know that you can walk down the street and be safe. The way it's going, I don't think we'll be able to do that in 10 years.

Stickers, male, 45-55, Enfield

People need to remember to respect others. It's going to pot and we need to address it. Britain is not what it used to be.

Switchers, male, 45-55, Croydon

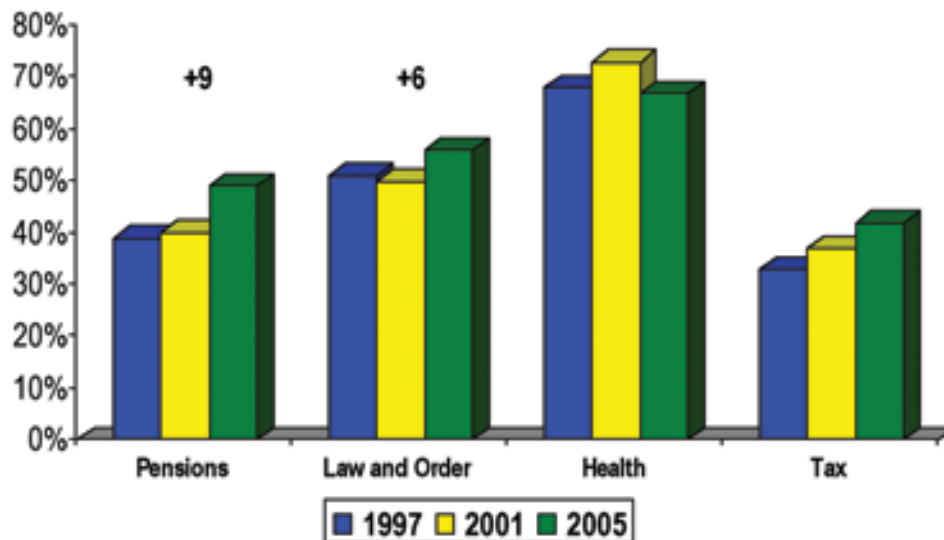
Table 3 opposite reinforces the findings of our research that law and order, taxation and, in particular, pensions are rising up voters' agenda.

However, table 4 shows that Labour's lead on these crucial issues has slipped. Although Labour still has a 2 point lead on pensions, this marks a sharp decline from a thirty point lead in 2001. Our research suggests that this decline reflects the insecurity and frustration caused by a failure to make significant progress on fundamental pension reform.

National security

All older voters were concerned about national security. Immigration has gained a new importance since it has been linked in the minds of many older voters with the London bombings. This connects in turn to wider concerns about physical safety and was a particular concern among male voters and those who moved towards the Conservatives.

Table 3: Issues rising up voters' agendas



Source: Mori, 2005

Table 4: Labour's lead in key issues

	1997	2001	2005
Pensions	+25	+30	+2
Law & order	-2	+2	-12
Health	+38	+35	+14
Tax	-15	-3	-6

Source: Mori, 2005

Looking to the future - The search for security

I'm very concerned about loyalty to this country. Terrorism is a major concern. Brainwashing in universities, mosques etc. needs to be eradicated.

Switcher, female, 44-55, Hemel Hempstead

Generational security

Older voters are not just concerned for themselves. They also look to the future for their children and grandchildren.

Generally, people hope and expect that life will be better for their children than it has been for themselves. Many, especially older women voters, express concerns about policies which will affect their children and grandchildren negatively over the coming years. Such issues will influence their voting decisions.

Their concerns centred on educational standards and access to Further and Higher Education. They were also concerned about affordable housing, levels of debt and their inability to contribute to their children's financial security because of Inheritance Tax.

You think about your kids and their kids too. Just because we're not being educated, or whatever, doesn't matter.

Sticker, female, 45-55, Selby



Conclusions

Older voters represented a quarter of all voters in 2005. They will be even more influential in the future. A downbeat mood of malaise and negativity largely dominates floating voters' perceptions of party politics and society.

Older voters are increasingly volatile. They are 'up for grabs' because of their disappointment with the current government and dissatisfaction with the alternatives. 'Boomers' are discerning voters weighing up different parties, leaders and policies. Older voters want politicians to be clearer about what they are offering and to deliver when in power.

No party currently has provided what older voters are looking for and there is widespread dissatisfaction with all the main parties. Many people voted with reluctance and for negative reasons. There is a need for all the parties to rethink their policies fundamentally and the way in which they interact with older people. Parties need to connect with, listen to and communicate with older voters around older voters' agenda, recognising the special character of the 'boomers' who are less deferential and more anti-establishment than earlier generations. 'Boomers' are sceptical and will see through short-term bids to win their support.

Politicians will need to answer the key questions of older voters:

- How will my care be paid for?
- Will I be able to find good quality health and personal care?
- Will I have enough money to support myself and my family?
- Will public services be able to look after me?
- Will I be safe in my community?
- Will my children and grandchildren have a good life?

MPs and candidates need to establish consistent connections and communication with voters in constituencies throughout Parliament, not just at election time. More local activism and campaigning would win trust and show that parties care about older people's immediate environment.

Parties need to re-launch their appeal to older voters. To counteract the sense of malaise, parties should make a positive and inclusive case for Britishness and communicate a sense of national collective endeavour. A new kind of leadership is needed which is inspiring, trusted and respected. 'Boomers' respect strong, decisive leadership that expresses clear values, a positive vision and principles and is not afraid to speak hard truths.

Older people do not want government to be the answer for all their problems, but they are looking for a champion who understands their interest and the issues facing the country as a whole. However, being a champion requires listening to, and showing empathy with, older people's concerns and aspirations.

Footnotes & related publications by Age Concern

Footnotes

¹ In this publication 'older voters' refers to those over 50. 'Baby boomers' are those aged 45 to 64 born during the sharp increase in birth rates. The 'grey vote' refers to people aged 65 and over.

² Looking Beyond the Grey, Age Concern England, 2004.

³ Maria Evandrou (ed), Baby Boomers: Ageing in the 21st Century, Age Concern England, 1997.

⁴ Julia Huber and Paul Skidmore, The New Old: Why the baby boomers won't be pensioned off, Demos, 2003.

⁵ Looking Beyond the Grey, Age Concern England, 2004.

⁶ Scott Davidson, The Growing Importance of Older Voters: An Electoral Demographic Model for Analysis of the Changing Age Structure of the Electorate, Loughborough University, 2005. For greater detail on this research visit our website: www.20millionvotes.org.uk.

⁷ MORI, 2005.

⁸ Although statistics refer to England and Wales, Scotland follows a similar trajectory but more quickly. In 2005, in Scotland the grey vote represented 44.2% of turnout and is projected to rise to 45.7% in 2009 and 53.9% in 2025.

⁹ Source MORI/ Financial Times 2005, (base 2256), in R. Worcester, R. Mortimore, P. Baines, Explaining Labour's Landslip, Politico's 2005, p.41.

Related publications by Age Concern

Looking Beyond the Grey, Age Concern England, 2004

Baby Boomers: Ageing in the 21st Century, Maria Evandrou (ed), Age Concern England, 1997

The New Old: Why the baby boomers won't be pensioned off, Julia Huber & Paul Skidmore, Demos, 2003

One in Four, Age Concern England and Fawcett, 2003

The Women and Pensions Scandal: A blueprint for reform, Age Concern & Fawcett, 2005

Age Concern is the UK's largest organisation working for and with older people. In England, we are a federation of over 400 charities working together to promote the well-being of all older people.

Age Concern's work ranges from providing vital local services to influencing public opinion and government. Every day we are in touch with thousands of older people from all kinds of backgrounds - enabling them to make more of life.

Age Concern is working to build a greater understanding of the characteristics of older voters. This report brings together two pieces of research:

- Quantitative research by Scott Davidson of Loughborough University which identifies constituencies where the 'older vote' is particularly influential
- In-depth research by Opinion Leader Research which seeks to understand what older voters in marginal constituencies think of political parties, leaders and issues



Age Concern England
Astral House
1268 London Road
London SW16 4ER
Telephone: +44 (0)20 8765 7200
www.ageconcern.org.uk
Registered Charity No. 261794

Published by Age Concern England
December 2005