

Is demography moving against the Coalition?

Age and the conservative vote vote in Australia, 1987–2010

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Preface

This report was commissioned by Peter Browne from *Australian Policy Online* to examine Newspoll data for age-related patterns in voting intentions. The starting point was the observation that:

Around the time of the [2004] federal election there was speculation that voter demographics were moving against the government, on the argument that a very conservative group of older voters was inevitably giving way to a younger, less conservative group. We were interested to see whether the Newspoll data showed any trends that supported that view and, correspondingly, conflicted with the standard view that as voters age they become more likely to vote for the Coalition.

The results from an examination of the Newspoll data are presented below. They are written for a general audience, and make use of a series of graphs to illustrate the findings. While there are some technical issues involved, these are presented in a separate appendix at the end of the report.

Thanks go to Sol Lebovic, then of Newspoll, for providing the early data, and to Martin O'Shannessy, Peter Collingridge and Cassandra Marks for their help with more recent data. I am grateful to Anthony Green and Humphrey McQueen for feedback on earlier versions, to Murray Goot for many helpful suggestions and to Peter Browne for commissioning the report. This current report is an update of an earlier version and contains the results of the Newspoll polling prior to the 2010 federal election.

Introduction

Does demography favour the Liberal/National Party Coalition in Australia, or is there a shift underway in the opposite direction? As is well known, the Howard Coalition Government (1996 to 2007) struck a chord with older Australian.¹ Older Australians consistently favoured the Liberal/National Parties from the mid 1990s, with the Newspoll data showing that the first preference vote for the Coalition for those aged 60 and over averaging well over 50 per cent. This idea that once voters enter a certain older group they become more supportive of conservative parties has been around since at least the 1950s,² and various reasons have been advanced to explain this. People in older age groups are said to be more materialistic and more authoritarian, making them more at home in conservative ranks.³ It has also been claimed the ageing process itself makes people more conservative. This ‘life cycle’ thesis was seen as conventional wisdom by the authors of *The American Voter* when that seminal work was published in the early 1960s. The claim was soon contested by the view that conservatism among older people was due to a generational effect, something rooted in their socialisation experiences.⁴ A long debate ensued.

Researchers involved in debates like these need to grapple with a difficult empirical problem. In examining the voting intention patterns of the population over an extended period of time, three separate phenomena are evident: birth cohort effects (which lie behind the generational thesis), age effects (the life cycle thesis) and period effects (historical events or context). Thus an older person may vote the way they do because of their formative years—entering adulthood during the 1930s depression for example—or they may vote the way they do because of their stage in life—on the pension and contemplating financial insecurity. Finally, a particular election may highlight policies—such as pension increases—which appeal disproportionately to older voters. All three influences may operate together, so any conclusions about what induced increased support for a particular party cannot be uniquely attributed to any one of them.

Cohort effects are part of the shared socialisation experiences which form people as a generation, something which usually happens in their youth: ‘the political environment in which a particular birth cohort first enters the electorate may help determine the extent to which individuals in that cohort identify with a political party for the remainder of their lives.’⁵ As Mannheim observed, the older generation ‘still cling to the re-orientation that had been the drama of their youth’.⁶ Clearly, the early

‘baby boomers’—those born in the decade after 1945—constitute a ‘political generation’ and their formative political years were the late 1960s and 1970s. This was an era of political and social radicalism in Australia, and while not every young person went to Sunbury or Nimbin, the impact of the Vietnam War, feminism, Aboriginal Land Rights, and environmental activism on young people was widespread, particularly within the universities where the student intake expanded massively during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many of these students were the children of working-class parents, and the first generation in their family to progress educationally past high school. If ever a ‘political generation’ was left-leaning, this generation was.

As with most Western countries, Australia’s population is ageing. In the ten years to 2006, those aged in their 50s grew from 10 per cent of the population to nearly 13 per cent. This demographic trend raises an interesting question: should we expect the current pattern of older voter support for the Coalition to continue undisturbed or might we see a movement away from the Coalition as the bulge of ‘baby boomers’ move into the ranks of older Australians and moderate this conservatism. This paper is a brief attempt to answer this question by drawing on a well-known data source, Newspoll. While it is always difficult to be definitive with these kinds of questions, the attempt is certainly worthwhile. The results below suggest that demography will *not* be on the side of the Coalition in coming years. As the ‘baby boomers’ age, the voting patterns of older Australians appear to be changing, and changing in a direction which is adverse to the Liberal/National Party vote.

Analysis

Introduction

The analysis in this report draws on 23 years of Newspoll public opinion polling data. People’s voting intentions in the lead up to the Federal elections from 1987 through to 2010 are analysed by age groups (in five year brackets).⁷ The results are mainly shown as a series of graphs and the key findings are presented below. For ease of expression, the terms ‘support for’ and ‘voting intention’ are used interchangeably.⁸ The birth cohorts for this study are the five year age groups, while the term ‘generation’ is reserved for those birth cohorts making up the ‘baby boomers’, in this case, those born in the decade after 1945. The term ‘baby boomer’ is often applied to a longer birth cohort, such as 1945 to 1964. However, the ‘political generation’ analysed here is essentially those whose late teens and early adulthood coincided with the late 1960s and early 1970s, which means that their birth cohort was the decade after 1945. While this is a shorter time period than what demographers mean by a ‘generation’, in terms of political formation the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s constituted a distinct historical period.⁹

Before discussing the results, it's worth reflecting on the difficulty of separating age effects, cohort effects and period effects. In statistical terms, the outcome of interest—voter support—is the product of the additive effects of age, cohort and period. As such, these three effects are always confounded, and without additional outside information, attempts to precisely disentangle these three effects are formidable.¹⁰ The most useful approach is a fairly simple one: visual inspection of the data and deployment of contextual knowledge, such as the political history of the 'baby boomers'. As Glenn demonstrates, one can discern strong age, cohort or period effects by visual inspection of cohort tables. The effects have to be fairly strong, not only because of the confounding problem, but also because of the sampling variability which each survey contains.¹¹

In the case of this analysis, cohort tables—which cross tabulate age cohorts by periods—are not practical. The lack of exact birth dates makes it difficult to construct cohort tables where the age groups line up with the years in which elections were held. Rarely did the latter fall on neat five year intervals, whereas the birth cohorts are all based on five year groups. Instead, the strategy employed here is a graphical one. By comparing the support for the Coalition among all age groups with the support among specific age groups, one can see where there is a trend emerging over time. By visually inspecting the graphs, we can examine whether the gap between the all-age group average and the specific age group has widened or narrowed. This helps deal with the problem of period effects because major electoral issues—like the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001 or 'Work Choices' in 2007—can shift the vote across all age groups in a certain direction. When the all-age average shifts in one direction, this can be viewed as a 'period effect', and the decisive boost in support for the Coalition in 1996, and for the ALP in 2007, are examples of this. While this helps with period effects, the answer to disentangling age and cohort effects relies on outside knowledge (about the 'baby boomers') and sharp movements in directions opposite to those expected from a life-cycle thesis. In other words, if the vote for the Coalition drops dramatically as one age group grows older, this would appear to support a cohort effect, whereas if it rises, this could be consistent with an ageing effect. Finally, the sampling variability resulting from using survey data is dealt with by constructing confidence intervals, which are shown as lines in the graphs. (More on this below).

The 2010 election

The 2010 election presents an interesting complication for this long-term analysis of voting intentions. In 2010 support for the ALP collapsed, but the Coalition's support did not grow commensurately. Rather, a major shift in support for the Greens ensued. This is not captured in the graphs which follow, but can be assessed quite easily by looking at Table 1. This shows that the ALP voting intention of Newspoll respondents changed dramatically in the lead-up to the election. It fell from 48.6 per cent in 2007 to 38.7 per cent in 2010. This was the largest fall for the ALP in the lead-up to any election during the period covered by this series of data (ie. since

1987). Admittedly, there were other elections where the primary voting intention for the ALP hovered around 38 or 39 per cent (such as 1996 and 2001), but the level of support in the lead-up to the previous election had not been as high as was the case for 2007. Consequently, the size of the falls in 1996 and 2001 were more modest than in 2010: 5 percentage points and 2.9 percentage points respectively, compared with the 9.9 percentage points in 2010. (See Table 2 in the Appendix for details).

Despite such a collapse, the Coalition hardly benefitted at all from the ALP's woes. The rise in voting intention for the Coalition was from 39.9 per cent to 41.3 per cent: a lift of just 1.4 percentage points. By comparison, the rise in support for 'Other' parties was dramatic: from 11.5 per cent in 2007 to 20.0 per cent in 2010. It is not possible to track the fortunes of the Greens over this whole period (1987 to 2010) because of their relatively late arrival on the scene. Nevertheless, for more recent years, their fortunes do show up in the Newspoll data. As Table 1 shows, the Greens held only a minor share of this 11.5 per cent figure for 2007: their support was at 4.7 per cent. By 2010, however, the Greens held the major share of the 20.0 per cent figure: their support was now 12.7 per cent, an increase of 8 percentage points. Clearly, the major beneficiaries of this collapse in ALP support were the Greens and not the Coalition.

Fortunately for the story in this article, the voting intention being tracked is the conservative vote, rather than the Labor vote, so this major upheaval in the ranks of the non-conservative voting public is largely irrelevant.

Table 1: Voting intention prior to 2007 and 2010 elections (%)

	2007	2010	Change
ALP	48.6	38.7	-9.9
Lib/Nat Coalition	39.9	41.3	1.4
Greens	4.7	12.7	8.0
Others	6.8	7.3	0.5
Total	100.0	100.0	0.0

Notes: Data weighted. Voting intention is for primary vote. Refusals, don't knows, informal etc omitted. Note that these figures vary slightly from those in Table 2 because the latter is split by age groups and some respondents did not provide information on their age. Hence the totals in this table differ slightly from the totals in Table 2.

Source: Newspoll.

Population: Respondents eligible to vote who indicated a party voting intention in surveys conducted in the three months prior to each election.

Support for the Coalition 1987 to 2010

The all-age average pattern of support for the Coalition are shown as hollow dots (in blue, for those with colour) in Figures 1 and 2.¹² After a fall in support between 1987 and 1990, the Coalition's fortunes improved in the 1990s, increasing steadily through to the Howard victory in 1996. 1998 saw a sharp drop in support for the Coalition, followed by a revival in 2001. From then on it was a steady downhill slide until the 2007 election, Howard's end. 2010 shows a minor improvement in Coalition support, but

this revival does not match the 2004 level and is probably closer to the level of support enjoyed by the Coalition in 1998. That year was actually a low point for the Coalition, with Howard nearly becoming a one-term Prime Minister.

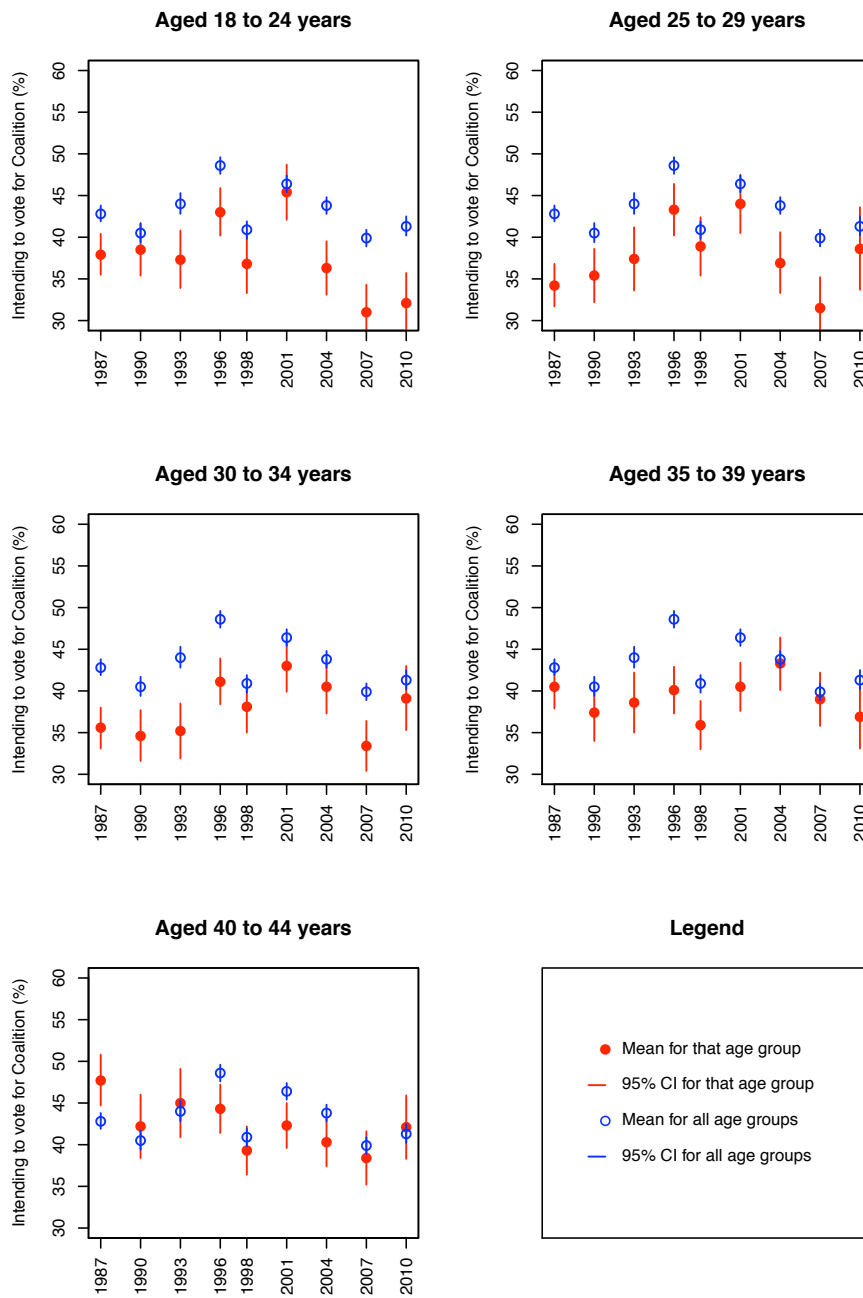
How does the support of older Australians compare? Looking at the solid dots (in red, for those with colour) in Figure 2 (on page 8), it is clear that voters aged 60 and over largely followed the all-age average trend, but they have supported the Coalition to a much greater extent. Over this period, the age gap favouring the Coalition ranges from 5 to 10 percentage points. Only in 1990 was the gap not large enough to count as statistically significant. In every other year, there was a considerable gap. There is, of course, some variability in the size of this gap. In some years where the average support moved against the Coalition, the support by older voters increased and the gap widened (eg. 2001 to 2004). In other years, the gap narrowed (eg. 1996 to 1998).

By 2010 the voters aged 60 and over had begun to depart from this pattern, but the change is hard to gauge. While the all-age level of support rose slightly in 2010, the level of support for the Coalition among the 60 and over age group appeared to fall (though the change from 2007 is not statistically significant). This appears to be the first time that the trend for the 60 and over age group has been the opposite of the all-age trend. The actual size of the gap between the level of support shown by the 60 and over age group and the all-age average is still substantial, but it has begun to shrink. By 2010, substantial numbers of baby-boomers have joined the ranks of this age group, but the majority are still much older. Clearly, having a simple 60 year old cut-off point in the data is a problem if we want to look more closely at the 'baby boomer' cohort. I return to this dilemma later in this article.

If we look at the age group which is younger by five years (55 to 59) we also notice a similar pattern in the years leading up to 1998. As Figure 1 (on page 7) shows the gap between the overall average and this specific age-group was quite wide until 1998. However, for the years 1998 to 2004, the gap either disappeared or narrowed considerably. By 2007 the age-group vote virtually corresponded with the overall average, indicating that this age group was no longer any more conservative than the average. This convergence was also evident in the 2010 figures.

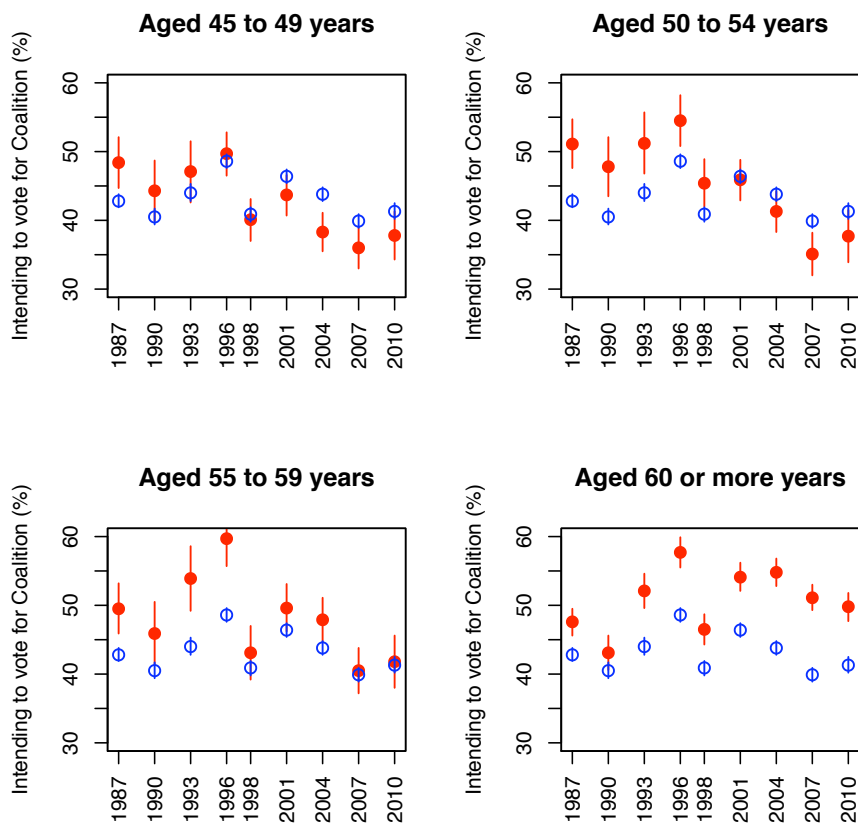
Now what is interesting about this age group—the 55 to 59 year olds—is that by around 2000 the first wave of 'baby boomers' had entered their ranks. Those born in 1945 or 1946 were turning 55 in 2000 and 2001. It is possible, therefore, that some of the downturn in Coalition support by this age group in the lead up to the elections of 2001 and 2004 reflects the arrival on the scene of some of these early 'baby boomers'. By 2007 some of these early 'baby boomers' had entered their 60s, but their presence in that age group (which includes everyone over 60) would be so slight as to make a negligible impact on the voting pattern. On the other hand, by 2007 the youngest among this 55 to 59 cohort were those born in 1952.

Figure 1: Vote for Liberal/NCP Coalition, Younger Cohorts (%)



Source: Newspoll. Note: Data weighted for means and confidence intervals.

Figure 2: Vote for Liberal/NCP Coalition, Older Cohorts (%)



Source: Newspoll. Note: Data weighted for means and confidence intervals.

This notion finds more support in the data for the next younger age group—those aged 50 to 54. Their voting intention pattern up to, and including 1998, showed strong support for the Coalition. This age group consistently supported the Liberal/National Parties through all these years, though the gap began to close slightly in 1998. However, by 2001 this gap had evaporated entirely, and by 2007 the direction in support has reversed. This age group was now more likely to vote against the Coalition than the overall average. In 2001, this age cohort was made up entirely of early ‘baby boomers’: those born between 1947 and 1951 and by 2007 it included those born between 1953 and 1957. By 2010 there is evidence of convergence between the age-group level of support and the all-age level of support. This would be consistent with the passing of the ‘baby boomer’ cohort, who no longer constitute any members of this age group. (Keeping in mind that the definition of ‘baby boomers’ used in this article cuts out at those born in 1955).

Greying ‘baby boomers’

As noted above, 2010 presents a dilemma for the methodology of this article. So far, we have tracked a cohort of people—those born in the decade after 1945—across the period 1987 to 2007. For this 20 year period this cohort moves forward in discrete jumps, and in a manner in which they can

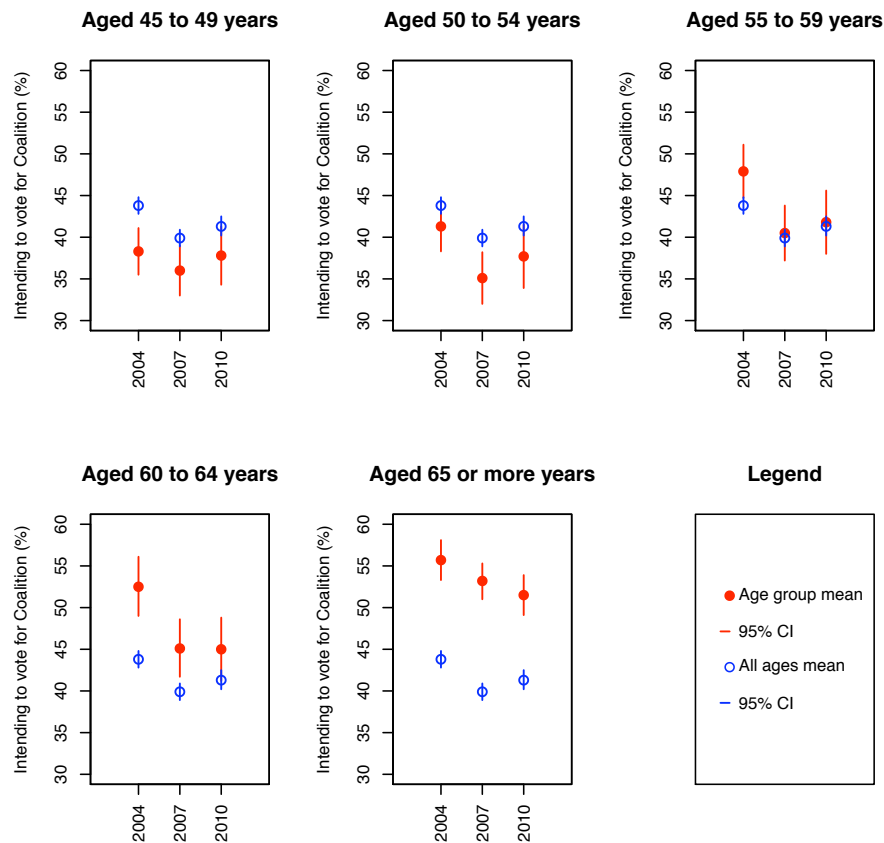
be identified. By 2010, however, a fair proportion of this ‘baby boomer’ cohort is now in the 60 and over age group—alongside a whole lot of other, much older, voters. This 60 and over age group is a very large group: they make up more than one fifth of the sample, whereas most of the other age cohorts range between 7 and 11 per cent of the sample. Thus this group of early ‘baby boomers’—those born between 1945 and 1950—is now much harder to identify. When we look at voting intentions, we should not expect to see much impact from their left leanings because they are buried in a much larger grouping of voters.

Obviously, the 60 age cut-off is a problem, but the original dataset for most of the period uses this particular cut-off, so it’s not possible to revise the time series in this data and fix this problem. The good news, however, is that the Newspoll data for the period 2004 to 2010 used a different age cut-off at the top: 65 year-old plus. This means that at least for 2004 to 2010 we can maintain our methodology and continue to track the ‘baby boomers’ in a consistent manner.

So what do the results show? If we compare the last panel in Figure 2 (‘Aged 60 or more years’) with the last two panels of Figure 3 we observe an immediate difference. In the case of the former (as discussed earlier), the gap between the age-group’s support for the Coalition and the all-age group support is considerable. And this is repeated in Figure 3 for the last panel (‘Aged 65 or more years’). In other words, ‘older voters’ still disproportionately support the Coalition. However, this is not the case for the second last panel, the group aged 60 to 64, the group who now contain the early ‘baby boomers’ (those born between 1945 and 1950). While there is still a gap between this group’s support for the Coalition, and the all-age average, it is not statistically significant.

Importantly, if you go back to 2004 in this panel of 60 to 64 year olds, you notice the gap is quite large. The ‘baby boomers’ had not yet arrived in this age-group and its conservative credentials were well-established. In other words, the pattern of support for the Coalition among older voters holds up right through the period 1987 to 2004, and then begins to change as the ‘baby boomers’ approach retirement. As they enter the ranks of grey voters, their antipathy towards the Coalition begins to surface in these data. To see this, however, requires a different age cut-off which allows us to scrutinise the voting intentions of this 60 to 64 year-old age group. One of the implications of this methodological hiccup is that for this methodology of tracking the ‘baby boomers’ to work in coming years will require that Newspoll collect the data in a way that allows for age cut-offs at 70 and 75.

Figure 3: Vote for Liberal/NCP Coalition, Older Cohorts 2004 to 2010 (%)



Source: Newspoll. Note: Data weighted for means and confidence intervals.

Drawing the story together

Looking across the set of graphs shown on pages 7 and 8, it is evident that as a general rule younger voters—those aged under 40—favoured the ALP over the Coalition. Voters in the middle-aged groups—those between 40 and 59 years—have a less clearcut pattern in their voting intentions. The tendency, however, is toward greater support for the Coalition among the older age groups, particularly in the earlier period (prior to 1998). Finally, as we saw above, voters aged 60 and above strongly favoured the Coalition over the ALP.

However, as we have seen when examining the period up to 2007 is that voters aged in their 50s are changing their electoral behaviour, but this has only happened for the last few elections. They have turned away from the Coalition and this coincides with a change in the composition of this age group: they are now made up of people born in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In other words, the shift away from the Coalition among this particular group of older voters coincides with the arrival of the political generation based on the early ‘baby boomers’. This trend, identified in the last version of this article, still seems valid for 2010. While there are some methodological complications raised by the entry of the early ‘baby boomers’ into the 60 and over age group, the core thesis of this article remains intact. Re-

examining the data with a new age category—those aged 60 to 64 years old—reinforces the original thesis.

As suggested earlier, this generation of ‘baby boomers’ has more left-leaning individuals in its ranks than the generation which preceded it. Those earlier, more conservative birth cohorts still dominate the current ‘over 65s’ age group and we should therefore not expect to see much change in their electoral behaviour in coming years. However, the impact of the ‘baby boomers’ on the voting behaviour of those currently in their fifties and early sixties is more than evident in the data presented. This suggests that while the over 65s will continue to favour the Liberal/National Parties, the greying of the ‘baby boomers’ appears to be over-turning this trend. This may well signal a demographic shift working against the Coalition in coming years.

Technical considerations

It is important to realise that the Newspoll data are not panel data, where the same group of people are tracked over time. Rather, different sub-populations are recruited into the various samples across these years producing a time series of cross-sectional data. You can, of course, follow an age cohort through these kind of data, but it's important to keep in mind that the composition of the cohort will be changing over time. Not only do people die or emigrate, but new entrants—such as immigrants—join the cohort. Consequently, while we may talk about an 'age cohort' in these data, these reservations need to be kept in mind.

Secondly, because the data is based on a survey sample, the figures produced (called 'point estimates') always have a margin of error around them. This is due to sampling variability (also called sampling error). The strategy for dealing with this is to calculate a confidence interval (CI) for each of the point estimates. These CIs are shown as vertical bars in the graphs.

Confidence intervals provide a useful way of illustrating the sampling variability in these Newspoll data because they easily show the margin of error around the point estimates by providing a lower bound (or limit) and an upper bound. In the case of a 95 per cent confidence interval (the level used in this paper), these bounds can be defined as follows. If the sample were to be repeatedly taken, then in 19 out of 20 occasions, the true population value of the point estimate would lie within these bounds.

A common practice is to visually examine two point estimates and their associated confidence intervals. If the two confidence intervals do not overlap, then the difference between the two point estimates can be regarded as statistically significant. Conversely, if they do overlap, then the difference between the estimates may not be statistically significant. In the case of these Newspoll data, the mean value for an age group is compared with the mean value for all age groups and where the confidence intervals do not overlap, an age-related difference is evident.¹³ In the case of the graphs shown in this paper, the confidence interval approach works well: one only need to see if the vertical lines overlap to know whether the differences one is interested in are statistically significant or not.

Table 2: Voting intention by age group and year (percentages)

ALP	1987	1990	1993	1996	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010	All years
18-24	52.7	42.2	48.1	42.7	40.9	38.7	46.1	53.9	39.2	44.8
25-29	58.7	44.5	50.6	42.3	44.2	37.6	42.6	55.9	35.2	45.6
30-34	55.6	46.7	52.6	45.0	45.2	39.3	43.2	52.1	37.5	46.0
35-39	50.4	42.8	48.2	45.8	44.5	44.3	39.1	48.0	40.0	44.7
40-44	44.7	40.2	42.2	41.8	45.5	40.0	41.1	48.5	38.8	42.5
45-49	44.3	37.3	40.6	38.8	41.2	40.3	44.5	53.1	44.9	43.3
50-54	43.6	36.8	42.3	34.6	36.5	38.3	40.7	52.5	42.8	41.0
55-59	44.2	39.9	36.8	32.8	39.6	35.4	34.9	48.3	39.1	39.1
60 plus	46.5	44.8	39.8	34.5	36.8	34.8	34.3	41.3	35.9	38.4
Total	49.6	42.6	44.7	39.7	41.2	38.3	40.0	48.7	38.7	42.4
Lib/Nat	1987	1990	1993	1996	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010	All years
18-24	37.9	38.5	37.3	43.0	36.8	45.4	36.3	31.0	32.1	37.5
25-29	34.2	35.4	37.4	43.3	38.9	44.0	36.9	31.5	38.6	37.9
30-34	35.6	34.6	35.2	41.1	38.1	43.0	40.5	33.4	39.1	37.9
35-39	40.5	37.4	38.6	40.1	35.9	40.5	43.3	39.0	36.9	39.1
40-44	47.7	42.2	45.0	44.3	39.3	42.3	40.3	38.4	42.1	42.1
45-49	48.4	44.3	47.1	49.7	40.1	43.7	38.3	36.0	37.8	42.0
50-54	51.1	47.8	51.2	54.5	45.4	45.9	41.3	35.1	37.7	44.5
55-59	49.5	45.9	53.9	59.7	43.1	49.6	47.9	40.5	41.8	47.2
60 plus	47.6	43.1	52.1	57.7	46.5	54.1	54.8	51.1	49.8	51.0
Total	42.8	40.5	44.0	48.6	40.9	46.4	43.8	39.9	41.3	43.1
Other	1987	1990	1993	1996	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010	All years
18-24	9.4	19.3	14.6	14.3	22.3	15.9	17.6	15.1	28.8	17.7
25-29	7.1	20.2	12.0	14.4	16.9	18.4	20.5	12.6	26.2	16.5
30-34	8.9	18.6	12.3	13.9	16.7	17.7	16.3	14.5	23.3	16.0
35-39	9.1	19.8	13.2	14.1	19.6	15.2	17.6	13.1	23.1	16.2
40-44	7.5	17.6	12.7	13.9	15.2	17.7	18.6	13.1	19.1	15.3
45-49	7.3	18.4	12.4	11.5	18.7	16.0	17.1	10.9	17.3	14.7
50-54	5.3	15.4	6.5	10.9	18.0	15.8	18.0	12.4	19.5	14.4
55-59	6.3	14.2	9.3	7.5	17.3	14.9	17.2	11.2	19.2	13.7
60 plus	5.9	12.1	8.1	7.7	16.6	11.0	11.0	7.6	14.3	10.6
Total	7.5	16.9	11.2	11.7	17.9	15.2	16.1	11.5	20.0	14.5
Sample sizes	17,621	11,977	12,735	15,577	13,205	14,983	15,016	15,069	10,808	126,991

Notes: Data weighted. Voting intention is for primary vote. Note that these figures vary slightly from those in Table 1 because this table is split by age groups and some respondents did not provide information on their age. Hence the totals in Table 1 differ slightly from the totals in this table 2.

Source: Newspoll.

Population: Respondents eligible to vote who indicated a party voting intention.

Notes

¹See, for example, Leigh (2005, pp. 16–18) and Goot and Watson (2007, p. 261).

²Schmidhauser (1958)

³Goerres (2008, p. 2).

⁴Tilley (2002, pp.121–122).

⁵Mason, Karen Oppenheim et al. (1973, p. 244). Tilley (2002, p. 122) also argues (in the British context): “Firstly the young are ‘impressionable’; political events affect their partisanship more strongly than their elders. Secondly, these partisan alignments found in youth are, to some extent, enduring over time. All things being equal the voter who came of age in 1945 should bear some remnants of this landslide Labour victory in their partisan attitudes and behaviour many years later. There is a substantial amount of evidence for these two linked processes.”

⁶Cited in Tilley (2002, p. 135).

⁷This analysis refers to ‘primary’ or first preference votes in the House of Representatives. The Newspan data is weighted with weights supplied by Newspan.

⁸Strictly speaking, Newspan asks respondents about their voting intentions. While this may not translate into the same voting behaviour on election day, it does provide a reasonable measure of voter ‘support’.

⁹Though some researchers have argued that young people in the late 1960s were still quite politically conservative (for example Goot 1969, p. 164), the thesis of this paper does not require that the majority of young people shifted to the left. Rather, it only requires that a large enough group of young people developed left political sentiments that were sufficiently enduring to shift the average cohort sentiment away from that of the cohorts who preceded them.

¹⁰See the original exposition of this in Glenn (1977), Glenn (1976) and Mason, Karen Oppenheim et al. (1973), and more recent attempts to get around the problem in Tilley (2002).

¹¹See Glenn (1977, pp. 46ff).

¹²The coloured dots in these graphs show the mean (average) vote for the Coalition in each year and the coloured lines show 95 per cent confidence intervals around these means. Where confidence intervals overlap, this can indicate that the 'apparent' difference between the means is most likely due to sampling variability and the difference is regarded as not statistically significant.

¹³Another approach, often preferred to the confidence interval strategy, is to calculate the standard error of the difference. See Wolfe and Hanley (2002). However, the confidence interval approach lends itself to graphing data as carried out here.

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