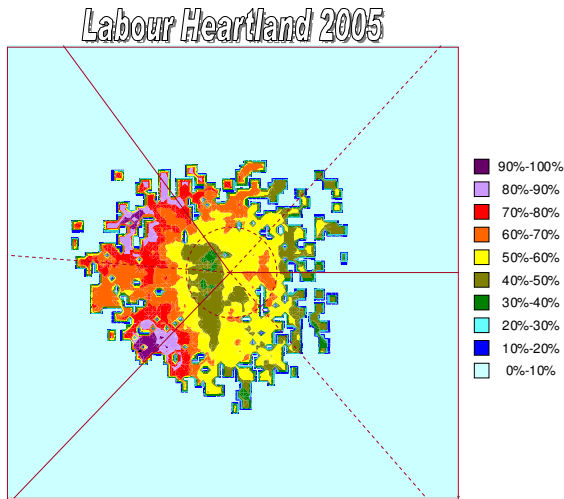




Tipping Point or Falling Down? Democracy and the British General Election 2010

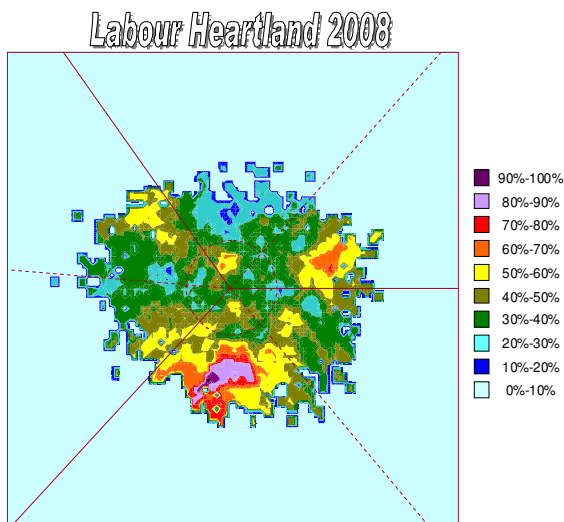
The Labour Party

The transition from the New Labour ‘project’ of Tony Blair’s leadership to the Gordon Brown era has produced a pronounced shift in the nature of those supporters who claim greatest political affinity with Labour.



In 2005, Blair’s government still holds attraction for voters who supported the New Labour realignment of the old Labour Party.

All three of the major Maslow groups are represented within the values map¹. This is a strong position politically but holds the seeds of discontent and disagreement over theoretical policy positions. It looks from this map as if Prospector values (the sector that takes up the left side of the map) should guide any policy decisions by the party if they are to turn support into votes. There will be some dissent, as would be expected from this broad church of support, but in the bull market of 2005 Labour has the support of the mainstream of the British population.



By 2008, the Brown years have seen a total collapse of the broad based values support picked up by Tony Blair in his ten years as Prime Minister.

The people in the areas of highest concentration – the Pioneer (lower right) and Settler (upper right) sectors of the map – are in some ways a reflection of the attraction of the old Labour Party.

The Settler class-warriors, banished to the sidelines by the Blair regime, are hanging on in there and providing heartland support to ‘their Party’. This values set is least likely to change its support in the face of new evidence – change is anathema to them. This is as true for the Tory Settler heartland as it for Labour. This is support that is unwavering.

The Pioneer support will have many issues, such as “fairness” and the moral/ethical behaviour of MPs, in common with the Settlers – a dynamic that can have an impact on policy making in the Party if it wants to appeal to its heartland supporters – which in itself is debatable.

¹ These maps show the “likelihood of support” across the Maslow values space. They are scaled so that the dark purple areas always represent maximum likelihood.



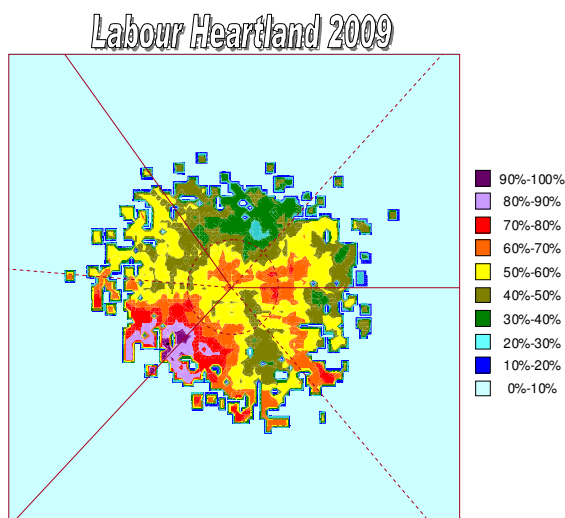
The interesting thing about the retention of the Pioneers as a core support group is that many of the policies and behaviours of the Parliamentary Party in its execution of government are counter to the Pioneer values – indeed, in many cases it is repugnant to them. For example, the seemingly duplicitous handling of the run-up to the Iraq war.

These Pioneers should have been ready to walk when the expenses scandal hit in 2009. For them, sleaze issues aren't just about a few MPs treading too close to the line and crossing over it, or even resignedly accepting that this is just 'doing what politicians do' – rather they are seen as a conscious rejection of personal ethics by the offending MPs, resulting in a huge values-based judgement passed against them.

Yet this most ethically minded of the Maslow Groups is turned off by the behaviour of the MPs but still maintains a deeply held belief that Labour is the party most likely to hold values that match theirs. In other words, Tory supporters may have their impressions of Labour reinforced by the disclosures – indeed, the Telegraph thought so when they ran the series of exposés – but the Labour heartland Pioneer supporters would be more chagrined or angry.

Though this is the group most likely to change their vote – while maintaining their heartland support – they are also the ones leading new ways of thinking and may even withdraw their vote as more people turn out to vote. They are contrarians by nature, but always ethically driven.

In 2009, heartland support has returned and the New Labour experiment is almost back on track.

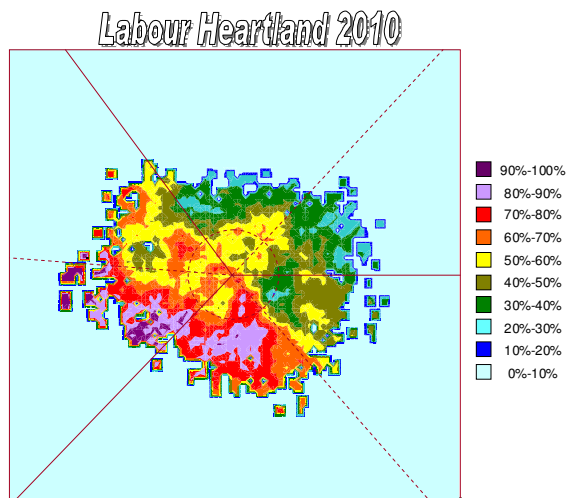


There is less of the Prospector supporter base. This was the new generation of supporters that had grown up with Labour (New and Old) and, for all the false steps and foibles of the Party in government, was looking to them to satisfy their 'aspirational' values.

The big purple splodge in the overlap areas between the Pioneer and Prospector areas of the map defines 'modern families'. The optimistic values of the struggling families of 2009 aligned themselves with the New Labour of Gordon Brown. These are the people who have been educated in the New Labour system and look to the party to maintain its hold while their children are raised.

This is the constituency that David Cameron needs to win if he is to establish a consensus if he wins the next election. In 2009 he is finding it difficult to persuade these people – often his peers in age terms – that he has what it takes to transform the old Conservatives into the New Conservatives.

Labour strategists picked this up in their polling and translated it into the dumbed-down message – 'getting the Mum's vote'.



At the start of 2010, a looming General Election concentrates the heart and mind. 2005's across-the-board support is missing. The most optimistic of the groups, the Pioneers and the Prospectors, form the core concentrations of heartland Labour supporters.

The dichotomy at the heart of that support – between the ethically driven Pioneers and the materialistic Prospectors – will have to be confronted in appeals if this affinity is to translate into votes on Election Day.

The media have been covering the apathy of the electorate in the run-up to the election and the problem for the Labour government is writ large in this map. Do they tell the truth about the critical state of public finances and the swingeing cuts in services and increases in taxes that follow from the bailouts of 2009?

This is the bottom line for turning Pioneer heartland support into real votes – the truth and nothing but the truth is the only ethical thing to do. The Pioneer heartland has learned not to trust the rhetoric of politicians of any party and just wants a transparent discussion of policy – so that they can make up their own minds about the best choice for the General Election.

On the other hand the Prospectors want to know what this means as far as satisfying their aspirations for a better tomorrow – the long term expressed in the manner of 'satisfaction today'. Yes, they want transparency – but not necessarily the truth, *i.e.* give me the benefit of the policy, not the policy itself.

Labour strategists need to tread carefully if they are to maintain this profile of support.



Labour's Context for the 2010 General Election

Labour heartland voters are finding it difficult to vote their heart.

- Only 67% of the people who most identify with Labour would vote Labour if the election was held tomorrow.

This vital core of supporters is finding the actions of the Government difficult to align with their Labour orientation. With integrity and transparency being an integral part of their personal values sets, each new revelation about further sleaze harms their propensity to get out on election day and cast their vote for 'their own' government.

This bodes ill for Labour support from their core and also bodes ill even if Labour wins the next election.

- Only 59% of Labour heartland supporters would 'welcome' (scoring 6 or 7 on a 7 point scale) a Labour overall majority.

But compared to the general population this is over four times higher.

- In the national sample, only 14% of the population would welcome a Labour majority being returned to Parliament.

When asked about the prospect of a hung Parliament, the good news for Parliamentarians is that it would be welcomed (6 or 7 on a 7 point scale) by only 11% of the population. This is almost identical to the 10% of Labour heartland supporters who say they would welcome this outcome. In values terms, the two profiles are very much the same, with a skew to over-65 down-market males – mostly disaffected Settlers.

At the other end of the scale, those who claimed they would 'despair' (1-2 on a 7 point scale) at the prospect of a hung Parliament were 33% of the population but over 39% of the Labour heartland supporters. There is little difference in this across the Maslow Groups in the general population – but this response was significantly higher among the over 45s than among the 25-44 age group. This was matched in the Labour heartland but with the DE social grade more despairing than the national sample.