

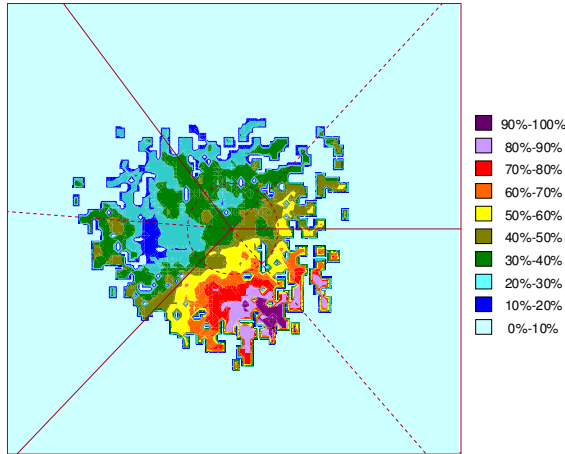


Tipping Point or Falling Down? Democracy and the British General Election 2010

The Liberal Democrat Party

Going into 2005, the Liberal Democrats were still under the leadership of one of their most charismatic (in the eyes of the public) leaders, Charles Kennedy. In the General Election, they soaked up the votes of disaffected Labour supporters, taking about a quarter of the popular vote.

Liberal Democrat Heartland 2005



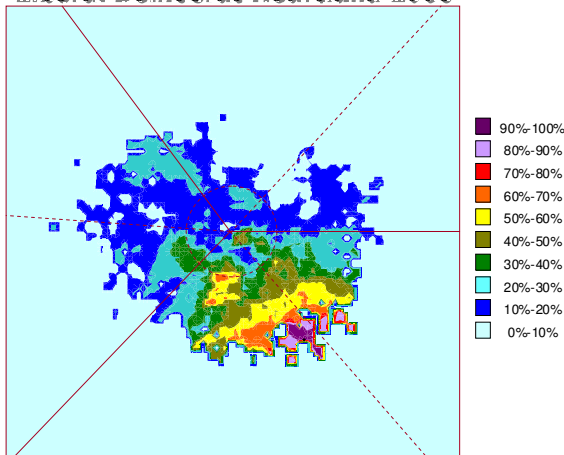
In 2005, the Lib-Dems have the most refined and cohesive positioning of the three main parties. This is both their strength and their weakness and gives party strategists much to think about in terms of ever winning a national General Election.

Overwhelmingly, The heartland support is Pioneer. They also have a rump of Settler support that has a faint class-based orientation to it – that may have tactically voted Tory, but were Lib-Dem in their hearts.

The challenge for the Lib-Dems was to break out of the Pioneer ghetto, while maintaining their political integrity - the basis of their appeal to their core heartland supporters.

This history will not make happy reading for any strategist who tried to make that happen.

Liberal Democrat Heartland 2008



With the end of the Blair years and on their second leader since Kennedy's resignation, the heartland of the Lib-Dems has actually contracted rather than undergoing the needed expansion into other Maslow Groups.

This kind of contraction can be a real strength in focusing decision making - the core of support is very defined and clear for strategists to target.

Unfortunately, their very ethical orientation can make for difficult communications between heartland supporters and Party officials. Officials may well want to expand the appeal into less traditional areas of values – the Prospector area, especially, as this is where young families are more likely to be concentrated in terms of their values.

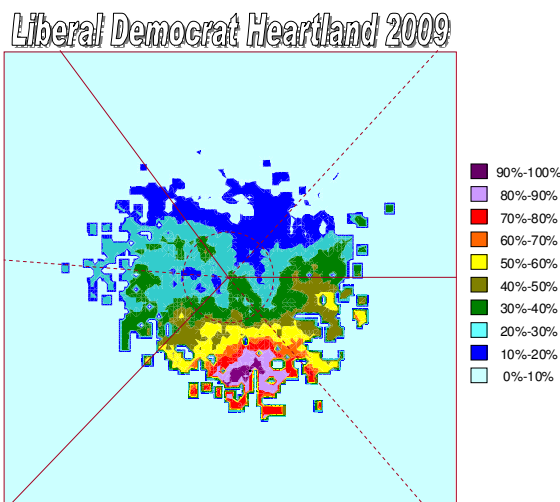


The fierce in-fighting among essentially ethical people can be intense at times, and it shouldn't surprise observers if they see the Lib-Dems shooting themselves in the foot as they chop and change leaders popular with the British electorate.

Lib-Dem core heartland supporters will approve this procedure for the most part, as they could see this as the way to choose the best leader – not just a leader who could assume power at some point, but a leader who is 'worthy of it'. The leaders they most approve of are those that possess more integrity than those of any of the other parties.

We note, when looking at the expansion of support for the Conservative Party in the same period, such a narrow definition of 'integrity' may not be the best way to attain the power of government.

With two years to go to the next General Election the Lib-Dems had a lot to do to expand their appeal to other values groups.



A year before the General Election, there is virtually no change to the values profile of the Lib-Dem heartland supporters. Their appeal has, in some ways, become even more concentrated in one section of the Pioneer Maslow Group to the detriment of overall support among this most ethical of groups.

With a new leader – one who will take them into the next election – the Party still needed to expand its appeal beyond its heartland to have much chance of influencing voters at the election.

Looking back over the four year period from 2005, it appears that there may not have been the will to change significantly - the comfort zone is just **too** comfortable. On the other hand...

They have had to take a journey through the wilderness of the Blair years and the early years of the Brown government, while losing a popular leader, replacing him with a veteran who proved ineffectual, finding a golden candidate in Vince Cable, who understood that the game had changed (now that Blair-lite was order of the day) and passed the reins on to Nick Clegg. All this made it difficult for the electorate to identify with the Lib Dems in any meaningful sense. 2010 could see the breakout as more people demand integrity from their Parliamentarians.

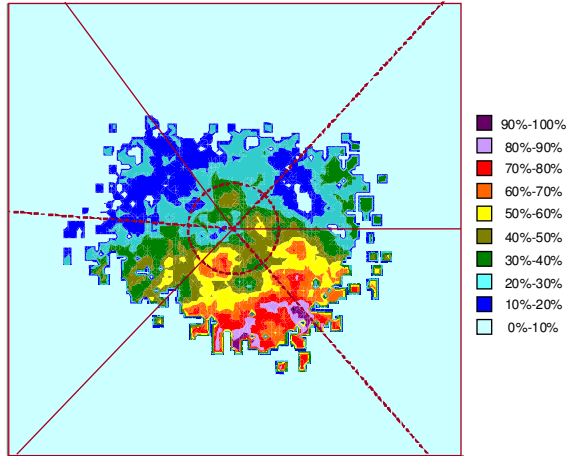
The General Election year sees the Lib-Dem heartland a bit more spread out than in 2009 – but not significantly so. This is a profile that makes the Lib-Dems a permanent minority party if it continues to base policies on its own integrity.

Over the last 20 years this was a good place to be positioned for the long term – the leading edge of new and emerging ideas. The Lib-Dems have a core support among people who value this position – but they may not have a longer term future if trends that began in 2005



continue to grow more influential in the British culture – notably the retrenchment of the Prospectors into Settler.

Liberal Democrat Heartland 2010



The tide of history may have moved temporarily away from this positioning but it is quite likely that society will resume the trend towards Pioneer values later on in the decade, once the disruption of 2008/09 has worked its way through the psyche of British culture.

But the General Election of 2010 has come a bit too soon for the heartland of Lib-Dem support to make their votes count in a major national election.

The Lib-Dem strategists may choose this time to launch Nick Clegg to the wider electorate and display his values – which seem to be in synch with their core supporters – in an election that is likely to get ‘down and dirty’. If this occurs, heartland supporters could have a disproportionate effect on the votes of others, who could be provided with the opportunity to vote for integrity – in many ways a protest vote against the two main parties – and increase the Lib-Dem vote.



A Context for the General Election 2010

Liberal Democrat heartland supporters will find it even more difficult to vote their heart than Labour heartland supporters.

- Only 64% of core supporters say they would vote Liberal Democrat if the election was held tomorrow.

Given the nature of the 'first past the post' political system, it is likely that this is far less to do with issues of integrity and transparency, and more to do with the sheer mountain they have to climb to assume power at Westminster. Their lack of propensity to vote for their party is more to do with a pragmatic awareness that their political capital resides in their ability to be the conscience of the Westminster political process – an ethical voice that does not hold power but holds power to ethics. The personal vote of the Lib-Dem heartland supporter can be wielded for the party most likely to deliver policies to their values – ethical tacticians. This is not a positioning to be embraced by people with needs for Power - and the research shows those people to reject the notion that the Lib-Dems are a party that they strongly identify with.

For many reasons, including the above, the Lib-Dem heartland supporter is less likely to welcome their own Party forming an overall majority in Westminster (60%) than the Tory heartland is to welcome a Conservative overall majority (80%). In fact it is about equal to the percentage of Labour supporters who would welcome a Labour overall majority (59%).

Whereas the Labour support could be called 'soft', Lib-Dem support could be called 'pragmatic'.

- The Lib-Dems, though not reckoned by anyone to form an overall majority in the next government at Westminster, are viewed more favourably by the electorate as a whole in terms of welcoming (6 or 7 on a 7 point scale) them gaining an overall majority than Labour. A Labour overall majority was only favoured by 14% of the general population while the Lib-Dems were favoured by 16% of the population.

This still leaves 84% of the population not welcoming them and hardly matters at all in terms of the population making a stance for ethics and voting Lib-Dem.

It might be thought that these 'ethical tacticians' of the Lib-Dem heartland would welcome a hung Parliament and a chance to be an ethical voice to those valuing power in the Westminster village. With 11% of the population indicating they would welcome this result, the figure for the Lib-Dem heartland supporter is indeed over twice as likely to welcome a hung Parliament – fully 23% of them would plump for this.

33% of the population despairs at the thought of a hung Parliament but only 15% of the Lib-Dem heartland people have a similar response. This truly is a cohort of pragmatic and ethically driven people who do not have a vested interest in maintaining the ideologies, policies and practices of the main two parties.

Interestingly, the Pioneers are over-represented in both welcoming and despairing a hung parliament – but shading more towards welcoming it than despairing. Their AB heartland supporters are three times likely to favour a hung Parliament than their DE supporters, with no difference by age or gender.

The tactical voters in 2010 are more likely to be Lib-Dem heartland supporters making the most strategic use of their vote.