THE POLITICS OF AGEING IN ENGLAND:

INSIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH OLDER PEOPLE

BY

JANE ELIZABETH FOODY

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ABSTRACT

England's population is ageing. Older people's issues have entered political agendas. Yet much remains unknown about older people's political lives. Although older people can be unfairly treated by governments and public employees, an 'older people's political movement' has not emerged. For example, some older people require publicly financed social care services to continue living in their own homes. But as demand for social care increases, political decisions make it increasingly difficult to access these services.

This thesis seeks to explore older people's political understandings and experiences through qualitative semi-structured one-to-one interviews. Three research locations were selected as potentially deviant socio-political contexts, where local politicians set either the lowest threshold (Calderdale) or the highest threshold (Northumberland and West Berkshire) for individuals' eligibility to access publicly funded social care services. In the run-up to the 2010 general election, interviews were conducted with 41 people aged 51 to 90.

This research reveals some of the rich diversity and complexity of older people's political behaviour and understandings. Some research participants demonstrate openness to learning from their socio-political context. And some people are choosing to change long-standing political behaviour. Therefore, older people's political participation should not be taken for granted by politicians.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Abstract
Acknowledgements
Table of Contents
List of Figures
List of Tables

Introduction 1
Research questions 4
Key definitions and research design decisions 6
Structure of the thesis 16

Chapter 1: Older People's Political Participation 21
1.1: Introduction 21
1.2: Age-related patterns in political participation and organisational influences 21
1.2.1: Age-related patterns by types of political activity 22
1.2.2: Age-related patterns in organisational membership and support 39
1.3: Understanding political participation as part of individuals' lives 44
1.3.1: Moving beyond research with a narrow political focus 44
1.3.2: Situating individuals' lives in historical time 47
1.3.3: Exploring multiple dimensions of individuals' lives 52
1.4: Theoretical explanations of political participation 55
1.5: Age, time and political participation 64
1.6: Geography and political participation 68
1.7: Conclusion 70

Chapter 2: An 'Older People's Politics' and Social Care Services for Older People as a Political Issue 71
2.1: Introduction 71
2.2: An 'older people's politics' 72
2.2.1: Factors supporting an 'older people's politics' 73
2.2.2: Factors undermining an 'older people's politics' 78
2.2.3: Existence of an 'older people's politics' 81
2.3: Social care services for older people as a political issue 88
2.3.1: Social care services for older people: Home care 89
2.3.2: Politics, and spatial and temporal variations in home care services 92

Page
2.3.3: Policy feedback 98
2.4: Conclusion 103

Chapter 3: Learning from Older People 105
3.1: Introduction 105
3.2: Choice of research approach 106
3.3: Selection and characteristics of research locations 108
3.3.1: Calderdale 110
3.3.2: Northumberland 116
3.3.3: West Berkshire 120
3.4: Recruitment of research participants 124
3.5: Research participants 128
3.6: The interviews 132
3.7: Data management, analysis and reporting 139
3.8: Conclusion 144

Chapter 4: Older People's Experiences and Understandings of Elections and Political Party Membership 146
4.1: Introduction 146
4.2: Electoral participation 146
4.2.1: The act of voting 147
4.2.2: Deciding who to vote for 152
4.2.3: Electoral participation across the adult life course 165
4.3: Party membership 183
4.3.1: Joining 183
4.3.2: Being a member 186
4.3.3: Competing to be and being a local councillor 188
4.3.4: Staying or leaving 191
4.4: Conclusion 195

Chapter 5: Older People's Political Lives: More than just voting in elections and joining political parties 196
5.1: Introduction 196
5.2: Types of political activities 197
5.2.1: Contacting activities 197
5.2.2: Petitions 201
5.2.3: Badges and symbols of support 204
5.2.4: Consumer politics 205
5.2.5: Lawful public demonstrations 208

Page

5.2.6: Group action 212
5.3: Political campaigns 214
5.4: Roles of organisations 217
5.4.1: Trade unions and professional associations 218
5.4.2: Other organisations 221
5.5: Experience of public involvement activities 227
5.6: Personal histories and political repertoires 230
5.6.1: Exploring older people's life courses to learn about their political lives 231
5.6.2: Applying ideas about capitals and life-spheres when investigating older people's political lives 238
5.8: Conclusion 246

Chapter 6: Older People and an 'Older People's Politics' 250
6.1: Introduction 250
6.2: Who is 'old'? 251
6.3: Why have an 'older people's politics'? 253
6.4: Political issues considered to be important 260
6.5: Political representation 268
6.6: Organisations run by and for older people 276
6.7: Conclusion 280

Chapter 7: Social Care as a Political Issue for Older People 283
7.1: Introduction 283
7.2: Awareness 284
7.3: Thinking about social care 300
7.4: Lifestyles and feelings 307
7.5: Conclusion 311

Conclusion 313
Contribution of this research 314
Observations on older people's political understandings and activity 316
Researching individuals' political understandings and activity 321
Limitations and Future Research 324

End Notes 328
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations 341

Page

Appendix A: Some relevant age-related patterns in ESS 2008 survey data for England 342

Appendix B: Some relevant age-related patterns in 2000 survey data for England 345

Appendix C: The Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) eligibility bands 347

Appendix D: Euthanasia 348

Appendix E: Poster used in recruitment 349

Appendix F: Recruitment Information Sheet 350

Appendix G: Example of letter sent to research participants 351

Appendix H: Example of checklist for research participants 352

Appendix I: Interview questions 353

Appendix J: Diagrams used in interviews 358

Appendix K: The consent form 359

Data sources 360

References 361

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

1.1: Percentages of ESS respondents in England who said they voted in the last general election, were members of a political party, or in the last 12 months had participated in specified political activities, by age and sex, 2008. 25

3.1: Members of Parliament (MPs) and political control of local councils and Northumberland district councils, 1997-2009. 113

3.2: Percentages of council seats held by Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat or other councillors immediately after local elections in Calderdale, Northumberland and West Berkshire,1997 to 2009. 114

4.1: Diagrams illustrating lifetime patterns of levels of commitment to voting for a political party and major influences on voting behaviour for a) a 90 year old man currently living in Calderdale and b) an 80 year old woman currently living in West Berkshire. 177

4.2: Diagrams illustrating lifetime patterns of levels of commitment to voting for a political party and major influences on voting behaviour for a) a 78 year old man currently living in West Berkshire and b) a 72 year old woman currently living in Calderdale. 178

4.3: Diagrams illustrating lifetime patterns of levels of commitment to voting for a political party and major influences on voting behaviour for a) a 63 year old woman currently living in Northumberland and b) a 63 year old man currently living in Calderdale. 179

4.4: Diagrams illustrating lifetime patterns of levels of commitment to voting for a political party and major influences on voting behaviour for a) a 60 year old woman currently living in Northumberland and b) a 58 year old man currently living in Calderdale. 180

4.5: Diagrams illustrating lifetime patterns of levels of commitment to voting for a political party and major influences on voting behaviour for a) a 78 year old woman currently living in West Berkshire and b) a 63 year old woman currently living in Northumberland. 181

4.6: Diagrams illustrating lifetime patterns of levels of commitment to voting for a political party and major influences on voting behaviour for a) a 51 year old woman currently living in West Berkshire and b) a 63 year old woman currently living in Calderdale. 182

5.1: Solo local campaigner: Illustration of some current and historical influences on the political behaviour of a 65 year old woman living in Northumberland. 244

5.2: Campaigners: Illustration of some current and historical influences on the political behaviour of couple aged in their 60s living in Calderdale. 244

Page

5.3: Active Political Party Members: Illustration of some current and historical influences on the political behaviour of a couple aged in their 70s living in West Berkshire. 245

5.4: Illustration of the main influences across the life course on the political behaviour of a 73 year old man currently living in Northumberland. 247

5.5: Illustration of some influences across the life course on the political behaviour of a 58 year old woman currently living in Calderdale. 248

6.1: Diagram illustrating ways in which some research participants view 'Education' as a political issue and some major influences on these opinions. 264

6.2: Diagram illustrating ways in which some research participants view 'The Environment' as a political issue and some major influences on these opinions. 265

6.3: Awareness of organisations run by and for older people. 278

7.1: Percentage of respondents in the 2008 Place Survey who said they thought that older people in their local area get the help and support that they need to continue to live at home for as long as they want to, by local authority of residence. 285

7.2: Research participants' social relationships as sources of information about social care services: memorable, relevant lifetime experiences, by age. 291

A.1: Paid and Voluntary Work: Percentages of European Social Survey respondents in England who said they had done paid and/or voluntary work in the previous month, by age, 2008. 342

A.2: Trade Union Membership: Percentages of European Social Survey respondents in England who said that they are, were or never have been members of a trade union, by age, 2008. 342

A.3: Personal use of the internet, email or World Wide Web (WWW) by respondents in the European Social Survey in England, by age, 2008. 343

A.4: Percentage of European Social Survey respondents in England with either degree level or no qualifications, by age and sex, 2008. 343

A.5: Percentages of respondents in the European Social Survey in England by the time they said they spent following the news, politics and current affairs in the media on an average weekday, by age and medium, 2008. 344

B.1: Beliefs about political participation: Percentages of survey respondents in England who strongly agree or agree that 'it is every citizen's duty to vote' and that 'all should get involved with politics', by age and sex, 2000. 345

LIST OF TABLES

Page

1.1: Political participation: Percentages of people in England who claimed to have undertaken different types of political activities, 2000. 24

2.1: Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) in *The Guardian*, 2005-2010. 94

2.2: Social care in the 2010 general election manifestos of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. 96

3.1: Research Participants' place of residence (local authority) and age at time of interview, their sex, recruitment approach, interview date, and if they belonged to one of the four couples who were both interviewed separately. 126

3.2: Research participants' party membership and electoral politics. 129

3.3: Research participants' geographical mobility. 131

4.1: Examples of research participants' self-reported long-term patterns of voting in general and local elections. 166

4.2: Examples of positive influences on research participants starting to vote regularly for either the Labour party or the Conservative party. 168

4.3: Examples of reasons given by research participants for ceasing to vote regularly (either temporarily or potentially indefinitely) for the Labour party or the Conservative party. 170

4.4: Examples of reasons given by research participants for continued support or voting for either the Labour party or the Conservative party 171

4.5: Reasons research participants gave for joining political parties. 184

4.6: Reasons research participants gave for either staying a member of or resigning from the Labour party. 193

5.1: Examples of politically relevant organisational influences. 222

5.2: Examples of research participants' experiences of public consultations or similar activities that could promote or discourage sustained involvement. 228

5.3: Examples of research participants' diverse adult life course experiences that could have positive or negative implications for their political activity, interest and understanding. 233

5.4: Examples of political implications of 'hard times' for individuals. 235

Page

5.5: Examples given by research participants about aspects of personality-related influences on their political participation. 237

6.1: Examples of ways in which some research participants said that England could or could not be described as a ‘senior-friendly’ country. 255

6.2: Research participants’ responses to being asked if they agreed that older people in England should stand up more actively for their rights. 257

6.3: Research participants’ responses to being asked if they agreed that older people in England are not playing a full enough part in political life. 259

6.4: The political issues that are most important to research participants. 262

6.5: Examples of how cross-age and same-age social relationships can feature in some research participants’ political lives. 267

6.6: Research participants’ opinions on the idea of joining, supporting or voting for a political party formed to further the interests of older people. 270

6.7: Research participants’ opinions on the idea of independent pensioner candidates standing in the 2010 general election. 272

6.8: People identified as being ‘real older people’s champions’ by 26 of the research participants. 275

7.1: Research participants’ responses to being asked if they believe that older people receive the support they need to live independently at home. 287

7.2: Geographical and temporal proximity of research participants’ experiences of their parents (or a partner’s parents) receiving social care services in their homes. 294

7.3: Some aspects of social care services for older people in their homes that attracted negative comments from research participants. 296

7.4: Research participants’ comments about thinking about using social care services themselves. 301

7.5: Research participants’ responses to being asked if social care for older people in their own homes is a political issue? 303

7.6: Examples of research participants’ opinions about the state’s responsibility for social care services for older people in their own homes. 304

Page

B.1: Identification with political parties: Responses of respondents in England to the question: ‘What party do you think of yourself as?’, by age, 2000. 345

B.2: Modal age groups for organisational membership, England, 2000. 346

C.1: The Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) eligibility bands. 347

D.1: Selected programmes from a search for ‘Euthanasia’ on the BBC website. 348

INTRODUCTION

England's ageing population has entered the political agendas of national and, especially, local government. This increased political attention appears to be driven largely by politicians' awareness of marked demographic changes and speculation about their implications, especially in terms of potential political demands for additional public resources. Yet much remains unknown about England's older population and their political lives.

The main purpose of this thesis is to contribute to knowledge of older people's political understandings and experiences. This thesis is based on exploratory, empirical research that builds upon and contributes to the broader literature on political participation (mainly within political sociology). Specifically, this research focuses on older people resident in England and evidence of changes in their individual-level political participation and understandings. To deepen these understandings, two potential aspects of older people's political lives are explored separately: age-based politics and social care as a political issue.

Qualitative interview-based research with older people is used in this thesis to attempt to illuminate the diversity and dynamics of individual-level political participation and understandings within social and geographical contexts. This type of rich interview data can be used to contribute to the development of improved theories concerning political participation.

Recently, a framing paper by two leading political scientists reviewed research on political disaffection and disengagement found in contemporary Britain. Perhaps surprisingly, they concluded that:

> We lack a real understanding of how citizens understand politics. Any strategy for revitalising politics needs to take seriously the issue of how politics is perceived by citizens. We know a fair amount about what kinds of political activity people engage in and what factors drive that activity. We can offer some reasonable empirically-informed insights into issues such as electoral turnout and election outcomes. What political science – and the social sciences in general – are less good at understanding and explaining is what politics means to citizens at the beginning of the twenty-first century.
>
> (Hay and Stoker, 2009, p. 227)

Arguably, research on older people's political lives is important because it appears to be under-researched, especially in comparison to research on young people. Disappointingly, the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) asks few questions about participants' social and, especially, political lives.[1] Major cross-sectional, quantitative surveys tend to have inadequate numbers of older participants and publish their findings in terms of unhelpfully broad age groups, such as '65 and over'. Qualitative studies, while often insightful, appear to have tended to focus on aspects of older people's political lives, such as council tax protesters in England (Goerres, 2009, chapter 7). Therefore evidence from qualitative research is fragmented.

Older people are expected to comprise a growing part of the electorate in England (Davidson, 2006). And they have tended to be dutiful voters (Metz, 2002, p. 325). However, there is no reason to assume that this situation will persist. A rapid, marked reduction in voting by older people would undermine the legitimacy of politicians and governments. Advance notice of any potential changes in older people's voting and

other political behaviour would be useful; for example allowing modifications to the political system.

Furthermore, England's ageing population can reasonably be expected to create increased demands for publicly financed services, especially for health and social care. To the extent that any services provided exclusively for or disproportionately used by older people are perceived as quantitatively or qualitatively inadequate, then more older people could add these services to their personal lists of important political issues (e.g. Metz, 2002). As will be seen, the literature does not suggest the emergence of strong forms of 'older people's politics'; such as an active effective older people's pressure group or increasing numbers of MPs belonging to older people's political parties. This observation raises many questions, including: Are 'older people's issues' being dealt with adequately through the existing political system? And: How interested are politically active older people in these types of issues? Therefore, these questions are addressed in this thesis.

A potential social justice issue exists. The socially heterogeneous population of older people in England includes a proportion of what might be called 'frail' people, who require social support to undertake some everyday activities, like feeding, drinking, getting dressed, getting up from bed, and bathing. Some of these people live alone and, if housebound, may have limited social networks. They tend to be older old people (aged over 85), who have a markedly lower propensity to vote in elections than younger old people. This raises questions about ensuring that they have a voice, not just as 'consumers' of social care services, but as citizens. While a

comprehensive study of older people's political participation would include these frail, older people, the time and resources required for this substantial research project place it beyond the scope of this thesis.

However, frail older people can have younger old kin, who help provide or arrange their social care. Therefore, it is of interest to find out if social care for older people in their own homes features in younger old people's social and political lives. Furthermore, forward-looking younger old people could also be engaged in debates to develop the types of social care that they want for their relatives and, potentially, themselves. Yet, as will be seen, there is little evidence of older people engaging with these issues in England. Questions about if and how younger old people think about social care for older people are addressed in this thesis.

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to argue the case for and to conduct research into older people's political understandings and experiences. Furthermore, this research includes investigation of an 'older people's politics' and social care as a potential political issue concerning older people.

Research questions

This thesis argues that older people's political participation is an important but under-researched topic within political science, therefore research is required to help fill this gap in the literature. The main research question is:

- *What is the nature of older people's political understandings and experiences?*

In turn, this research question and the research findings direct attention to the question:

- *How can individuals' political lives be explored and explained?*

In this project, these research questions are addressed by conducting individual-level research with older people and drawing on biographical approaches that treat individuals' diverse political lives as part of their wider social lives. Key research questions that contribute to answering the main research question are:

- *What political activities have individuals ever undertaken?*
- *What is the nature of individuals' political lives?*
- *What, if any, changes are reported in an individuals' political understandings and practices?*

Therefore, it is intended to build a picture of research participants' current and lifetime political understandings and activities.

Further research questions focus on distinctive aspects of politics associated predominantly with older people and their political concerns, asking:

- *Is there any evidence of the existence of 'an older people's politics'?*
- *What are older people's opinions of the idea of 'an older people's politics' and their involvement with it?*

In particular, attention is given to the long-running political debate in England about social care services for older people in their own homes by asking:

- *Do older people think that social care for older people in their own homes is a 'political issue'?*

- *What factors might contribute to individuals' reported levels of political engagement with or interest in the social care debate?*

Therefore, these research questions inform research intended to produce rich pictures of research participants' political lives as part of their broader social lives. It is anticipated that while conducting this research, some explanatory insights will be generated into continuity and change in individuals' political understandings and activities, and that ways of researching older people's political lives can be explored.

Key definitions and research design decisions

The empirical research conducted for this thesis was also shaped by decisions made about the research design and some key definitions. Below is an explanation of the choice of England as a research location, followed by an introduction to three key terms ('older people', 'political participation' and 'social care') used in this project, Next, major decisions made about the research approach are discussed. Then, attention turns to the place of gender, class and ethnicity in this research project. Finally, the potential transferability of the research findings is considered.

Research is conducted in England. This research location was chosen because England has an ageing population, a history of research on political participation and other potentially relevant aspects of social life, local media, and marked geographical variations in various aspects of social care services for older people.

‘Older people’ are defined as people aged over 50 years. This age group was selected partly because it is relevant in terms of recent cross-cutting government strategies, such as *Opportunity Age* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005). Also, this is the age group used for the ELSA (Scholes *et al*, 2009, pp. 1-2).

‘Political participation’ also needs defining. The empirical research is designed to build upon existing research, in particular the work of Pattie *et al* (2004) and Parry *et al* (1992), therefore a broad definition is adopted. Political behaviour can be explored in terms of individuals’ involvement with a range of activities that are undertaken “to influence rules, laws or policies”. Also included are so-called ‘micro political activities’ – attempting to influence the provision of services used by research participants or their families (Pattie *et al*, 2004, p. 113). Like Pattie *et al*, questions are included about talking politics, political interest, and keeping up-to-date with politics and current affairs. These three types of activity are viewed as being potentially important for learning about and maintaining interest in politics. Although a more unstructured qualitative approach to researching political participation, as used by Marsh *et al* (2007), is appealing because of its potential to reveal deeper and novel insights, the objectives of this thesis demand coverage of a broad range of political and social activities across all research participants. However, the research interviews were flexible enough to allow participants to talk about their political understandings and experiences in their own terms.

‘Social care’ for older people can be delivered through informal care from kin, friends and neighbours, as well as by voluntary, public, and private sector provision. Of

particular relevance to this empirical research are social care services for older people accessed through local authority social services.[2] Marked temporal and geographical variations exist in the characteristics of these services, especially in the availability of practical help with cleaning older people's homes and shopping (provided by 'home helps') and personal social care ('home care'). Individual older people tend to need home helps before they require any additional support. Given sufficient time, a caring and competent home help might be expected to offer some companionship and informally monitor the older person's wellbeing. Further blurring of caring roles can occur. For example, if an older person makes private arrangements with a home help for some home care tasks. Study locations were identified on the basis of formal eligibility criteria for social care services accessed through social services. But during the interviews and data analysis, account was taken of the complexity of social care arrangements and the likelihood that research participants' information about organisational aspects of provision might be incomplete or inaccurate.

In terms of the research approach, I argue that the flexibility of qualitative approaches make them appropriate for this exploratory research project. However, this empirical project drew upon the literature concerning individual citizens' political participation and was intended to contribute to a cumulative research-based knowledge about individuals' political understandings and experiences. As will be seen in Chapter One, this literature has been dominated by quantitative research, especially survey data about individuals' reported political behaviour and opinions. Therefore, my research interviews used categories of political behaviour used by quantitative

researchers, as well as some survey questions. However, no assumptions were made about the different meanings that individual research participants might attribute to specific questions or to the terms used to label political activities and organisations. Therefore, these terms and questions could be used to help prompt research participants to explore their political understandings and activities; thus providing a richer, more comprehensive picture of different types of political activities than would be obtained by using a questionnaire survey.

In addition, time-related issues should be considered when researching individuals' political understandings and experiences. Survey questions about voting have tended to focus on the last general election. And arbitrary time frames are used in most research and opinion surveys concerning citizens' political participation. For example, survey respondents have been asked about their political activities 'over the past five years' (e.g. Parry *et al*, 1992, Appendix C) or, more commonly, 'in the last 12 months' (e.g. Pattie *et al*, 2004, Appendix B). Apart from the questionable ability of research participants to date these potentially low salience events, these questions exclude individuals' earlier political experiences. As will be noted, many political opportunities occur infrequently. Consequently, these time-bound research approaches could produce a misleading picture of the nature of different types of political activity. And research participants could be inaccurately categorised based on their predominantly synchronic reported political experiences and opinions. Therefore, for this empirical research, I decided to allow respondents to reflect back on any experiences they could remember about different types of political activities.

As my research questions require attention to continuity and change in individuals' political behaviour and understandings during their lifetimes, this indicates that an appropriate research approach would be diachronic in nature. Life course perspectives employed in survey-based research have been productive in generating insights into diverse aspects of individuals' social lives, health and socio-economic circumstances (e.g. Elder, 1994 and Moen and Spencer, 2006). And biographical life history approaches as used, for instance by Andrews (1991) and Passy and Giugni (2000), have produced rich descriptions and valuable explanatory insights into continuity and change in various aspects of political participation using qualitative interview data. Adopting flexible biographical research approaches facilitates study of interconnected and dynamic aspects of individuals' thinking, their social and political lives, and their physical and mental health. Also, individuals' biographical histories should be contextualised in historical, geographical and social terms. Therefore, this empirical research drew inspiration from these research approaches when analysing the interview data.

Moreover, regarding individuals' diverse political lives as part of their wider social lives informed the research interviews. For example, asking questions about involvement with trade unions and other organisations encouraged research participants to reflect on their histories of paid employment and associated social lives. Research participants could identify any aspects of their lives that they believed were relevant to the topic under discussion, which should help to produce insights into the underlying processes and influences that would be missed by using more narrowly focused research approaches. Furthermore, as research participants are

encouraged to reflect on their lifetime experiences in their own terms, biographical research approaches are equally suitable for research participants who would characterise themselves as uninterested and relatively inactive in politics and for long-term political activists of various types.

Therefore, my research benefits from drawing on biographical approaches, which reconnect research with individuals' "lived realities", link "macro and micro levels of analysis", have concern with agency and history, and value "subjective experience" (Chamberlayne *et al*, 2000, pp. 1-4, 8, 20). But questions have been raised about the role of memory in biographical life history research (*ibid*, pp. 4-7). However, my research does not seek to capture detailed descriptions of individuals' lifetime political experiences and misrepresent them as accurate factual accounts. I acknowledge that, during their lives, individuals will be exposed to various collective discourses about political activities and specific events. The duration and nature of these influences seem likely to vary among individuals.[3] Furthermore, it is plausible that individuals' memories are 'social tools' that change to meet their current social needs (Tanner, 2010). Therefore, individuals' political memories and understandings could change over time. And individuals' memories of involvement in different types of political activities will partly reflect their salience in their wider social lives. But, it should be possible to obtain outline pictures of individuals' experiences of different types of political activities; even if incomplete, especially for infrequent, historically distant and low salience experiences. And, importantly for this thesis, these biographical research approaches should produce insights into factors influencing

continuity and change in individuals' political understandings and experiences over their lifetimes.

Apart from age, three other personal, social characteristics could reasonably be expected to be associated with different political experiences and understandings: class, ethnicity and gender. Only age was used in recruitment of research participants. Gender and, to a lesser extent, class were considered, whenever appropriate during interviews, data analysis, and reporting.

Statistical analyses continue to find strong associations between social class and measures of political attitudes and behaviour, although its influence is reported to have declined (Pattie *et al*, 2004, p. 57). For instance, some leading quantitative researchers of British politics wrote:

> Despite dealignment, social class remains a factor underlying vote. While it is no longer the case that particular classes give majority support to single parties. (Pattie and Johnston, 2003, p. 401)

And:

> the very stark reality of class inequalities in political influence, efficacy and representation. (Fieldhouse *et al*, 2010, p. 122)

However, inclusion of class in an empirical project with the over-50s in England is problematic. One problem is the use of occupation in paid employment as a basis for categorising people. Pensioners tend to be placed in a residual category of class by companies conducting opinion polls. Academic surveys can ask pensioners a series of questions about their last job and workplace, excluding people who have never worked full-time (e.g. Pattie *et al*, 2004, pp. 318-320). Among the research

participants are several people who have had marked changes in their career, as well as people who left the labour market more than ten years ago. It is doubtful that asking these types of question would provide meaningful responses for this research. A second, more general, problem is that fewer people appear to adopt, or at least report, an explicit class-based identity. Interview-based research in North West England in 1997-1998, reported sizeable minorities of people either 'refusing to see themselves in any class' or 'mentioning class spontaneously'. There was said to be a "complex ambivalence in which classes and individuals are held to be different yet also inherently related" (Savage *et al*, 2001, p. 880; Savage *et al*, 2004, p. 111). On balance, this research suggests that as class is not the primary target of research for this thesis, specific questions should not be asked about class identity. However, during the interviews and analysis, attention should be given to any class-related comments.

Bourdieu's concept of capitals might provide an alternative to class. At any point in time, it is possible to position individuals in social space based on the associated quantity and mixture of economic, cultural and social capitals. Here class position is "defined in terms of relations" (Atkinson, 2010a, pp. 415-416). Based on life-history interview-based research with 18 to 53 year old employed people living in Bristol, it apparently proved possible to classify people as 'dominant' or 'dominated'. Here, the dominant were distinguished by having "high incomes, higher education, significant others ... with ample capital" (*ibid*, p. 417). However, this approach could not be adopted fully in research for this thesis because of the amount of detailed, potentially sensitive information required; the potentially limited duration of research interviews,

during which discussion of other issues had priority; and uncertainty about this approach's applicability to economically inactive older people.

Understandably, ethnicity turned out to be irrelevant in research undertaken for this thesis. According to the 2001 Census, the proportion of people in Great Britain identifying themselves as belonging to 'minority ethnic groups' was around 3.5 percent among the over-50s, 2.5 percent among the over-65s, and 1.1 percent among the over-85s. Moreover, these older people are unevenly distributed geographically (Tomassini, 2005b, p. 8). My estimate of the percentage of the over-50s in the 2001 Census who claimed to be 'white British' is around 92.1 percent for England, with higher percentages in the three research locations (98.5 percent in Northumberland, 95.5 percent in West Berkshire, and 94.2 percent in Calderdale). The lowest percentages of white British people aged over 50 are in the London boroughs.[4] It is beyond the scope of this research project to recruit and obtain meaningful interview data from older people from minority ethnic groups. This would require a separate project and might require specialist resources, such as interpreters and advice on relevant cultural matters.

Gender is salient for this thesis. One reason is that differential life expectancy means that women usually outnumber men in the oldest age groups (Tomassini, 2005a and 2005b, p. 4). Furthermore, among the over-50s, somewhat more women than men said that they provided unpaid informal care to family, neighbours or relatives (Evandrou, 2005b, pp. 62-63). A 'gender gap' in electoral turnout started to disappear in the 1980s. But there remain apparent inequalities in other aspects of women's

political participation; for instance as reflected in the low proportion of MPs who are women (Fieldhouse *et al*, 2010, pp. 26, 42).

The exploratory empirical research for this thesis cannot be used to provide quantitative estimates of the prevalence or strength of specific political and social behaviours or opinions among the over-50s population in England. This research was designed as a qualitative project to help illuminate the diversity and dynamics of these behaviours and opinions among the over-50s in England. However, if behaviours and opinions are found in all three research locations, it adds some weight to tentative suggestions that these things might occur more widely in England's over-50s population. But some behaviours and opinions appear to be influenced by their geographical setting. Therefore, further research to extend geographical coverage into other types of socio-political contexts is desirable. In particular, entering a few 'urban' settings. A wider and more complete age range of research participants in each study location would also strengthen confidence in any patterns in observations across age groups and study areas. By providing information about the research process and examples of the interview data, knowledgeable readers might be able to assess the extent to which the political activities and understandings described and explored in this research are applicable to other locations within and possibly even outside England.

Therefore, this empirical research was shaped by decisions made about the research design and some key definitions. And the research questions informed these decisions.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises an introduction, seven chapters, and a conclusion. An overview of the contents of each chapter follows below. Variations in the sizes of chapters reflect differences in the amount of relevant research findings presented and discussion associated with each topic.

Because this empirical research is connected to large and growing literatures, the first two chapters provide a necessarily selective literature review. Reference is made only to the literature that is judged to make a meaningful contribution to understanding the background to and findings of this research project. This judgement was informed by a wider reading of the literature.

Currently, research-based knowledge of political participation, especially of older people's political lives, is uneven and incomplete. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature that this thesis addresses. Chapter One provides some background information about age-related patterns in a range of political activities and in involvement with diverse organisations known to have potential political impacts. An argument is made for adopting research approaches that treat political participation as part of individuals' social lives. Expanding the focus of research beyond narrowly defined political activity and extending the timeframe to cover individuals' lifetimes, helps to build clearer pictures of individuals' political repertoires and experiences, and to detect interrelationships between different social and political activities and political opinions. Furthermore, as political activities are diverse, it is argued that a

mixture of theoretical explanations are required to help explore political participation and, especially, continuity and change in individuals' political understandings and activities. A particularly useful combination of ways to think about individuals' political participation is argued to comprise a version of the civic voluntarism model modified to include age-related effects (Goerres,2009, p. 25), Bourdieu's ideas about capitals (Bourdieu, 1986), and the life-spheres concept (Passy and Giugni, 2000). The complexity of the task of attempting to explain individuals' political lives is highlighted by noting the existence of different age-related effects, historical changes in the socio-economic and political context, and the importance of geographical factors during individuals' lifetimes.

Chapter Two introduces two topics that could feature in some older people's political lives: 'an older people's politics' and social care services for older people in their own homes. The notion of a politically powerful 'selfish' older people's pressure group appears intermittently in the media and academic literature; seemingly attacking older people and their legitimate political claims. Yet the literature provides no evidence of the existence of any politically influential 'older people's politics' in England. And factors can be identified that both undermine and support the idea of an 'older people's politics'. Then, the complex topic of social care for older people is introduced, focusing on the political decisions behind the marked spatial and temporal variations in older people's access to publicly financed home care services in England. Although social care services can impact greatly on some older people's quality of life, these services are generally becoming harder to access; therefore it should be a politically salient issue for older people. But it appears to have attracted

little political attention from the growing numbers of older people in England. The policy feedback literature is introduced as a way to help explore this apparent paradox. Application of policy feedback ideas is illustrated in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Three introduces and discusses how the empirical research was designed and conducted and describes how the interview data were managed, systematically analysed and reported. Some relevant background information is provided about the three research locations (Calderdale, Northumberland and West Berkshire) and the 41 research participants. The research locations represent potentially deviant socio-political contexts in terms of political decisions made about social care services. The research participants have diverse political lives and understandings. Therefore, this thesis provides both descriptions of and some explanatory insights into individuals' political lives.

Findings from the empirical research are presented and discussed in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven. Space constraints in this thesis limit the research findings that can be presented and discussion about research participants' comments.

Chapter Four considers research participants' reported understandings and experiences of two inter-related political activities: voting in elections and membership of political parties. Chapter Five considers research participants' understandings and experiences of six other political activities commonly included in political participation research in England: contacting, petitions, displaying symbols of support, consumer politics, lawful public demonstrations, and group action. Further

relevant insights were obtained by exploring research participants' experiences of (multi-activity) political campaigning and public involvement activities. Drawing on the literature, it proved fruitful to explore research participants' diverse involvements with a variety of formal organisations for their potential political influences. Relevant insights into individuals' political lives as part of their wider social lives were gained by applying a life course perspective (Elder *et al*, 2003) and ideas about capitals and life-spheres. This research succeeded in illustrating the diversity of research participants' political lives and understandings. Importantly, examples were found of political learning by older people and of voluntary changes in their political behaviour.

Chapters Six and Seven present further insights about research participants' reported political understandings and activities, as well as dealing with specific research questions. While Chapter Six focuses on research participants' awareness of, opinions on and involvement with an 'older people's politics', this part of the research interviews also generated insights into the political issues that mattered to the research participants and their thoughts about the political system, political parties, and political representation. Chapter Seven focuses on social care as a political issue and the factors that might contribute to individuals' reported levels of engagement with or interest in the national social care debate. In both chapters, biographical evidence covering research participants' wider social lives and networks contribute to some explanatory insights. Overall, there is limited support for or engagement with either an 'older people's politics' or social care as a political topic.

The Conclusion notes the contribution of this research to the literature. Some observations are made about research approaches, as well as the findings and their implications. Limitations of this research are identified. Finally, some suggestions are made for future research. The major contributions of this project are empirical – providing a richer and more nuanced picture of older people's political activity and understandings. Therefore, this research helps to fill a gap in the political participation literature. In addition, this thesis demonstrates the usefulness of adopting broadly focused biographical research approaches when attempting to explore and explain individuals' political understandings and activity. Individuals' political lives are best understood as part of their wider social lives set within geographical, socio-economic and historical contexts. A useful feature of these research approaches is that they neither impose nor are they constrained by notions of what counts as 'political activity' and potential influences on it. As seen in this thesis, even activities categorised by researchers as being 'political', such as party membership, can be experienced as being predominantly 'social'. And some political activists, see 'politics' in formally 'non-political' activities.

Having introduced this thesis, we can now turn to Chapter One for an introduction to older people's political participation in England. This chapter starts by illustrating the uneven and incomplete research-based knowledge of older people's political participation.

1

OLDER PEOPLE'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

1.1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the main substantive, theoretical and research issues informing this empirical research into older people's political understandings and experiences. First, evidence is presented of age-related patterning in a range of political activities and potential organisational influences. Then, an argument is made for adopting biographical approaches to help to explore and explain individuals' political lives. Next, it is suggested that a mixture of theoretical approaches is required to explore diverse political activities as part of individuals' social lives over their lifetimes. Finally, there is a brief introduction to other important considerations for this research project: age and time-related issues, and geography.

Overall, this chapter presents some evidence for research to be conducted to help fill in gaps in knowledge about older people's political understandings and experiences. Acknowledging the complexity of this topic, it is suggested that it would be fruitful for this research to adopt biographical approaches informed by a mixture of theories.

1.2: Age-related patterns in political participation and organisational influences

Awareness of different types of political activities and their possible age-related relationships is required to inform research into the nature of older people's political

experiences and understandings during their lives. First, some research-based evidence is presented about age-related patterns of participation in a range of political activities. Then, attention is given to some formal organisations that can influence individuals' political participation.

1.2.1: Age-related patterns by types of political activity

This section introduces the main research evidence that can inform empirical research into contemporary individual-level political participation by older people living in England. After presenting evidence of age-related patterns in a range of political activities, attention focuses on nine commonly identified activities: voting, political party membership, petitions, consumer politics, contacting activities, public demonstrations, illegal protests, displaying symbols, and political groups.

Survey-based research provides evidence about the prevalence, nature and levels of political participation. Starting with the influential 1967 survey in the United States (Verba and Nie,1972), there have been other national and cross-national projects on political participation. Two major projects explored aspects of political participation in Britain. First, the 1984-1985 survey of Parry, Moyser and Day (1992). They dedicated 18 pages to age-related analyses (*ibid*, p. 153-171), arguing that, together with gender, age was a 'central' personal factor contributing to "our understanding of the process whereby individuals become politically activated" (*ibid*, p. 143). Then, the 2000-2001 surveys of Pattie, Seyd and Whitely (2004). Although they wrote that "it is well known that there are age-related differences in participation and civic values"

(*ibid*, p. 173) and age featured in their statistical analyses, they provided little age-related discussion. Both of these surveys produced datasets from which age-related data for respondents in England could be explored. But older people were under-represented to some extent in both surveys.[1] Surveys designed specifically to research older people should provide more robust age-related statistical estimates. A major national survey, ELSA, adds a desirable longitudinal element to age-related research. But this panel survey's emphasis on health and financial data raises doubts about the social representativeness of ELSA's participants[2] and provides little information about political participation.

'Political participation' covers an increasing range of activities. As noted by Parry *et al* (1992, p. 41), initially 12 types of political acts were identified (Verba and Nie,1972). 'Protest' acts were recognised following the work of Barnes and Kaase (1979). Later, researchers sought recognition of the emergence of 'consumer politics' (e.g. Pattie *et al*, 2004) and 'internet activism' (e.g. Dalton, 2008, p. 34).

Age-related patterning of self-reported political participation in different types of political action is visible in selected 2000 survey data for England (Table 1.1). Charts using quinary age groups with 2008 European Social Survey (ESS) data for England[3] provide a clearer picture of patterning in self-reported participation by age and gender (Figure 1.1). Each type of political action seems likely to be understood and experienced in different ways. Therefore, it seems appropriate to explore current research-based understandings of relevant age-related aspects of nine types of political action.

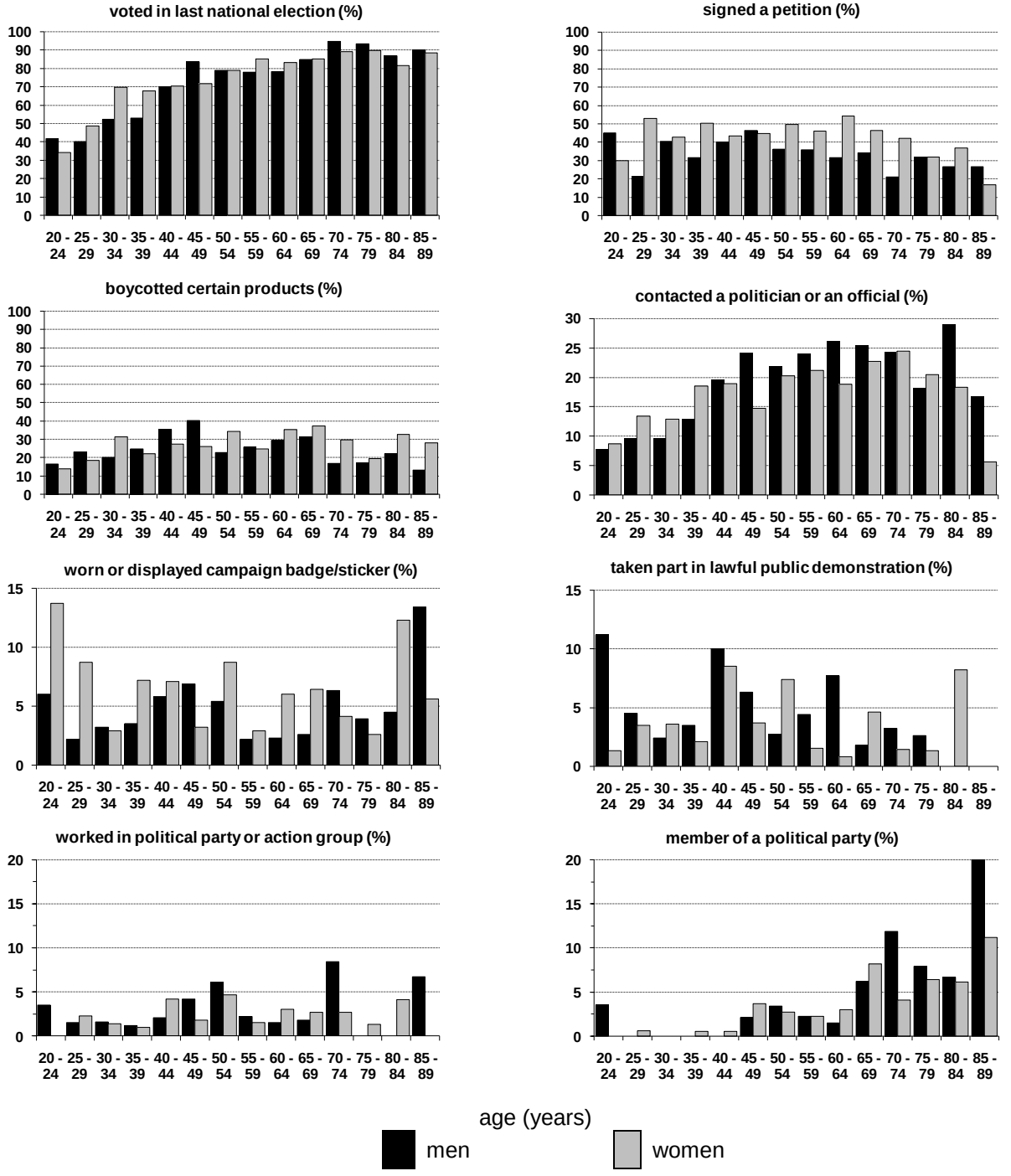
Table 1.1: Political participation: Percentages of people in England who claimed to have undertaken different types of political activities, 2000.

Type of political action	Percentage of respondents in each age group						
	18-29	30-49	50-64	65-74	75-84	85+	All 18+
Voted in last election	36.1	73.4	84.1	85.8	87.3	87.5	72.6
Donated money	58.4	62.2	64.5	63.9	57.4	48.2	61.6
Voted local gov. election	27.0	49.6	55.9	62.1	58.7	54.5	49.8
Signed a petition	41.9	46.4	42.2	35.1	25.3	5.5	40.5
Boycotted products	26.8	34.7	38.1	30.4	23.8	14.5	32.2
Raised funds for org.	24.1	35.5	29.7	22.3	20.3	9.1	28.6
Bought for ethical reason	29.4	33.1	30.0	19.7	16.9	1.8	28.0
Contacted public official	23.2	29.4	26.9	21.5	19.6	12.5	25.5
Worn campaign badge	27.4	22.2	20.1	18.1	18.2	7.3	21.4
Contacted a solicitor	20.8	23.8	18.9	13.4	11.9	9.1	19.5
Contacted politician	7.1	13.5	17.6	13.9	16.1	5.4	13.5
Contacted organisation	8.6	10.5	14.1	13.6	13.1	9.1	11.6
Contacted the media	9.3	9.8	10.0	10.0	6.4	0	9.3
Attended political meeting	5.2	5.0	5.9	5.6	6.3	1.8	5.4
Formed gp. of like-minded	6.5	5.5	4.4	2.5	4.3	0	4.8
Taken part in public demo	7.3	5.0	3.7	2.8	2.5	0	4.5
Taken part in a strike	1.7	2.2	2.6	0.6	1.3	0	1.9
Participated illegal protest	1.5	1.6	1.0	1.7	0.9	0	1.4

Source: Whiteley *et al* (2005) dataset. Author's estimates using weighted data.

Note: 'last election' is the last general (national) election. 'demo' is demonstration. 'gov.' is government. 'gp.' is group (here, of like-minded people). 'org.' is organisation. The estimates above include people who said they were not eligible to vote in last election: 3.9% of all respondents and 18.6% of 18-29 year olds, 1.4% of 30-49 year olds, 0.6% of 50-64 year olds, 0.6% of 65-74 year olds, and 0.4% of 75-84 year olds.

Figure 1.1: Percentages of ESS respondents in England who said they voted in the last general election, were members of a political party, or in the last 12 months had participated in specified political activities, by age and sex, 2008.



Source: European Social Survey (ESS) Round 4, 2008. Weighted data (design weight). Base: voting (respondents eligible to vote in age group in England) and all other charts (all respondents in age group in England).
Vertical axis: percentage of men or women who said they had voted in the last national election, were a member of a political party or participated in the specified political activity in last 12 months. Note different scales have been used. Horizontal axis: age (years) as quinary age groups, excluding people aged 90 or over (fewer than about 10 people) or aged under 20.

a) Voting

Electoral politics and voting have attracted much research attention because they are directly related to the selection and removal of politicians and governments. Elections are times when political priorities and issues receive heightened public coverage in the media. However, there is an incomplete understanding of the relationship between age and voting behaviour.

Survey-based research indicates that voting in general (national) elections tends to be the most commonly reported political action among adults living in England (Table 1.1). A curvilinear relationship between age and electoral turnout has often been observed in survey data. Middle-aged people are more likely to vote than either younger or older people. In Britain in 1984-1985, voting declined among people aged over 75, while the 50 to 64 year age group was described as "the golden age of voting turnout" (Parry *et al*, 1992, pp. 166-7). In England in 2000, the percentage of respondents[4] claiming to have voted in the last general election tended to increase with age. However, self-reported voting in the last local election peaked among 65 to 74 year olds (Table 1.1). Furthermore, possible gender differences exist in voting among older people. Among 2008 ESS respondents in England eligible to vote, voting in the last general election peaked among 75 to 79 year old women (at 89.7 percent) and 70 to 74 year old men (at 94.7 percent)(Figure 1.1). A gender gap in self-reported voting in the last general election was observed to be most marked among 2004 ELSA respondents in the 70 to 74 and 80 and over age groups (Hyde and Janevic, 2003, Table 5A.21).

Processes underlying this under-representation of older old people in electoral systems, and its political and social implications remain inadequately understood. Age-related patterns in electoral turnout often received little attention in the literature beyond reporting whether relationships achieved statistical significance. If researchers commented on age-related patterns associated with electoral turnout, these comments appeared to be based on assumptions. A popular suggestion is that declining participation might reflect age-related increases in disability and worsening health (e.g. Fieldhouse *et al*, 2010, p. 29; Takao, 2009, p. 862; Wass, 2007, p. 1; Bukov *et al*, 2002; Jankowski and Strate, 1995, p. 91; Strate *et al*, 1989, pp. 444, 451; Verba and Nie, 1972, p. 139; Glenn and Grimes, 1968, footnote 11, p. 565). Ageing tends to be associated with a greater likelihood of developing health problems and becoming disabled (Evandrou, 2005a). But research in the USA suggests any relationships between disability and voting are not straightforward. 'Difficulty in remembering and concentrating' and, especially, 'difficulty in going outside alone' depressed voting but did not "fully explain the lower voter turnout of older people with disabilities" (Schur *et al*, 2002,p. 183). Disability tended to be associated with higher levels of political participation among the youngest adults, but lower levels among the oldest (Schur *et al*, 2005, p. 494). Small numbers of respondents with self-reported 'disabilities' make it difficult to explore possible statistical associations between age, reported disabilities, and electoral turnout in the 2008 ESS in England. Furthermore, surveys probably exclude the "senile, bedridden, or very feeble" (Glenn and Grimes, 1968, p. 572); arguably, people whose political interests are too easily neglected by governments.

Furthermore, changes have occurred in electoral processes. Postal-voting-on-demand was introduced across England in 2001. In British general elections, this option accounted for around four percent of votes cast in 2001, rising to over 15 percent in 2005 (Norris, 2005, p. 13). The proportion of voters using a postal ballot tended to increase with age up to around one in five people aged between 66 and 90 (*ibid*, Figure 2, p. 23). Predominantly practical reasons, like convenience, 'health reasons', and being away from home, were given for postal voting (*ibid*, Figure 3, p. 24; Research Works Limited, 2005, pp. 22-27). Postal voting could help counteract the decline in voting among older people, to the extent that this reflects solely practical barriers. Comments on 2007 local election pilots suggest that the small number of internet and telephone voters also tended to be people who would have voted anyway. Users commented on the convenience of these options, especially for disabled people. Internet voters were slightly younger and telephone voters slightly older than mean voter age (Boon *et al*, 2007, pp. 4-5,22, 32-33, 41).

Another aspect of voting is selection of a political party or candidate. Age-related patterns are visible in the parties voted for in elections. For example, the most popular party reported by validated voters in the 2005 general election in Britain was the Conservatives for people aged 56 and older and Labour for 18 to 45 year olds, with both these parties receiving equal proportions of votes from 46 to 55 year olds (Clarke *et al*, 2009, p. 321). A similar pattern was found for political party identification in the 2000 survey in England.[5] However, the relationship between reported strength of party identification and voting is not straightforward. Although non-identifiers in the 2005 British Election Survey (BES) had a significantly lower

likelihood of voting in the general election than party identifiers (Johnston and Pattie, 2006, Figure 7.7, pp. 251-2), they might be open to persuasion in election campaigns (Clarke *et al*, 2009, Figure 5.2, p. 147). Partisan instability exists (*ibid*, pp. 145-147, 327-330) and citizens do not always vote for their preferred party; for example engaging in tactical voting in general elections (Clarke *et al*, 2009, pp. 162-174).

Many 2005 BES respondents expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of the party system, with more than eight in ten agreeing that there was "too much time bickering" and a "big difference between what parties say and what they do". Just under three in ten people agreed that parties "offer real choice in elections" (Clarke *et al*, 2009, pp. 278-280). Qualitative research with people aged 50 and over in the United Kingdom in 1998-1999 found "fairly widespread cynicism" about local and national politicians' motives and a "sense of disillusion with government". Some voters "said that they felt used" when electoral promises were undelivered (Hayden *et al*, 1999, p. 68). The implications of such dissatisfaction for older citizens' political behaviour is unknown.

Voting turnout dropped sharply in 2001 (Kavanagh and Butler, 2005 in Clarke *et al*, 2009, Figure 1.1, p. 7 and Figure 1.2, p. 8). Non-voting is difficult to interpret. Survey-based evidence from the 2005 general election in Britain suggested non-voting by Labour identifiers dissatisfied with the 'Labour offer' and Conservative campaign 'failure' with its identifiers (Clarke *et al*, 2009, pp.185-191). Exploratory analysis of 2005 BES data identified a small group of 'non-conformists': predominantly men who were likely to abstain voluntarily because "elections do not appear to provide for a satisfactory expression of their political preferences". Among the over-65s, the

probability of being a ‘nonconformist’ increased strongly with age, while the probability of being an ‘engaged voter’ decreased (Shryane *et al*, 2006, pp. 20-25).

Between 1979 and 2001 in England, turnout at national elections has been markedly higher than at local elections, which, in turn, have tended to attract more voters than European elections (Rallings and Thrasher, 2003b, Figure 1, p. 701). These turnout patterns are reflected in survey findings about self-reported levels of interest in local, regional, national, European and international politics, in perceived influence of voting on decision-making in different levels of government, and in perceived differences in power of these governments. In the 2000 survey of adults in England, national politics tended to attract the greatest interest and European politics the least interest. Respondents aged 50 to 85 were most likely to report being very or fairly interested in all types of politics. However, 35.1 per cent of 75 to 84 year olds claimed to be either ‘not at all’ or ‘not very’ interested in both national and local politics, increasing to 51.8 per cent of people aged 85 and older. Furthermore, sizeable minorities of respondents were pessimistic about the influence of their voting on local authorities and even more pessimistic about the House of Commons. Around 57 percent of people who voted in the 2001 general election but not in the 2002 local elections agreed ‘general elections are more important than local elections’ and 23 percent agreed ‘local authorities have no power, so there is no point in voting’ (Rallings and Thrasher, 2003b, Table 7, p. 713). However, older people as a group have characteristics that are independently associated statistically with voting in both general and local elections: age over 65, residence at address for at least ten years, agreeing that is a citizen’s duty to vote, agreeing that it is important

which party won the local election, and paying some attention to the election campaigns (*ibid*, Table 6, pp. 712-713).

b) Political party membership

Among 2008 ESS respondents in England, political party membership was uncommon among the under-45s and appeared to peak at around 8.4 percent of 70 to 74 year olds. Among 70 to 74 year olds, men (11.9 percent) were more likely than women (4.1 percent) to say they are party members (Figure 1.1). Reliable information about party members is unavailable. The available data suggests there were about 50 percent fewer party members in the UK in 1998 compared to 1980 (Mair and van Biezen, 2001, Table 2, p. 12). Total party membership apparently continued declining in Britain (Morales, 2009, Graph 2.10B, p. 56).

An internet-based survey in 2008, suggested that retired people were over-represented among party members compared to the electorate (Whiteley, 2009, Table 2, p. 245). In Britain, Conservative members were older, with an average age of 51.9 years, compared to 47.4 years for Labour members and 48.5 years for Liberal Democrat members. Around 36 percent of Conservative members were retired, compared to just under 24 percent of Labour and Liberal Democrat members. Having a higher education was markedly less common among Conservatives, but more common among Liberal Democrats. Manual workers were under-represented in all parties, being commonest (around 13 percent of members) in the Labour party

(*ibid*, Table 3, p. 246). Reasons for leaving a party could only be speculated based on the timing of large numbers of resignations and changes in each national party, especially leadership changes, relations between national party leadership and the local 'grassroots party', and decisions made in government (*ibid*, Table 6, p. 249). 'Party membership' covers varying levels and types of involvement in political activities. Activity levels probably vary across the electoral cycle (Clarke *et al*, 2009, pp. 241-242). Survey evidence suggests that passive membership is much more common than active membership. For example, in Britain in 1990-1993 about six percent of World Values Survey (WVS) respondents said they were party members and two percent said that they had done some voluntary work for the party (Morales, 2009, Table 2.7, p. 60; Table 2.8, p. 61). The literature on political participation appears to neglect party members who stand for election, mostly unsuccessfully, and the few who get elected, mainly within local councils. But these experiences could be important parts of these citizens' political lives.

Parry *et al* (1992) suggested that party membership could usefully be thought of as a political resource; potentially providing access to local politicians and political information (*ibid*, pp. 111-112). Compared to non-members, party members in the 1984-1985 survey in Britain have higher levels of overall political participation, as well as voting, contacting, and collective action (*ibid*, Figure 5.8, p. 113; Figure 5.9, p. 115). However, the three major parties differ. For instance, the Conservatives were "strongly averse to protesting activity" (*ibid*, p. 114; Figure 5.9, p. 115) and were the least active, with nearly six in ten members never attending a party meeting (*ibid*, Table 5.10, p.116). Although party members in England in the 2008 ESS tended to

report higher levels of political interest than non-members, a minority express little or no interest.

c) Petitions

Signing a petition has become a common political activity. Although petitions can be a way for citizens to express their political preferences or concerns, there appear to be few research insights into any relationships between age and petitioning. As captured by surveys in Britain, about 62.6 percent of WVS respondents reported signing a petition in the early 1980s rising to 74.5 percent in the early 1990s (Norris, 2002b, Table 5, p. 17). Markedly lower levels of respondents in England reported signing petitions in both the 2000 and 2008 ESS surveys. In 2000, reported participation peaked at around 46 percent of 30 to 49 year olds before decreasing strongly with age (Table 1.1); while the proportion who said they would not consider signing petitions increased with age from about 21 percent of 50 to 64 year olds. But in 2008, this marked age patterning in reporting to sign petitions was not seen among respondents (Figure 1.1). In England in 2000 and 2008, women were more likely than men to report signing petitions (Figure 1.1).

Organising petitions is more demanding and therefore less commonly experienced. In England in 1984-1985, around 8.2 percent of respondents said they organised and 63.9 percent signed a petition.[6]

d) Consumer politics

Boycotting can be traced to at least the early 1900s (Stolle *et al*, 2005, pp. 246-248). Survey evidence suggests that boycotting has became more prevalent in England. In the mid-1980s, about 4.6 percent of respondents claimed to have engaged in 'political boycotts' in the past five years. In 2000, almost a third of respondents reported boycotting products or services for political, ethical or environmental reasons in the past 12 months. Respondents aged 50 to 64 were most likely to report boycotting (Table 1.1). Boycotting potential[7] appears lowest for the over-75s and greatest for 30 to 64 year olds. Women were slightly more likely to boycott than men. In the 2008 ESS, middle-aged respondents were most likely to report 'boycotting certain products'. Men tended to be more likely to boycott among the under-50s, but less likely among older respondents (Figure 1.1). 'Buycotting' – purchasing based on political reasons – was more recently recognised. In 2000, respondents in England were less likely to report having 'bought for ethical reasons' than having boycotted (Table 1.1). People aged 50 to 64 might have the greatest buycotting potential. Women were more likely to participate than men.

Political consumption is a challenging subject for survey-based research because it involves people acting individually, with varying frequency, and targeting diverse organisations. Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate between boycotting and buycotting (Neilson, 2010, p. 218). In the 2008 ESS, compared to all respondents in England, those who boycotted were generally more interested in politics and more likely to have voted in the last national election. Buycotting might be "more resource-

dependent and individualistic" than boycotting (Yates, 2010, p. 1). Although the media can make people aware of boycotts and buycotts, people might be discouraged if, for example, doubts are raised about the effectiveness of campaigns (e.g. Shah *et al*, 2007, p. 224).

e) Contacting activities

'Contacting activities' allow specific and detailed political communications. In 1984-1985, respondents in England were more likely to report contacting local decision-makers (20.2 percent contacted a councillor and 17.5 percent a local government official) than their MP (9.6 percent), a civil servant (7.1 percent) or the media (3.7 percent). In 2000, people in each age group were most likely to contact a public official and least likely to contact the media. People aged 50 to 64 years were most likely to report contacting a politician or organisation (Table 1.1). Men were more likely than women to contact a solicitor or the media. Contacting a public official or politician was commoner among men than women in the 50 to 84 year age group. The proportion of the over-50s saying they would not undertake contacting tended to increase with age. Both age- and sex-related differences in reported contacting of politicians and officials also occurred in the 2008 ESS (Figure 1.1).

Little information exists about contacting activities. Partly, this reflects their diversity and invisibility to observers. The latter, contributes to their 'low pressure' status on recipients (Dalton, 2008, p. 35). Largely self-initiated activities demand some skill to articulate and target appropriate messages. Organisations can initiate action; for

example, inviting supporters to forward prewritten communications. It was speculated that direct contacting was more common among older people "because they have greater needs and more experience of working with government" (*ibid*, pp. 65-66).

f) Public demonstrations

Participation in lawful public demonstrations is also difficult to investigate using population surveys. In England, around 5.1 percent of respondents in 1984-1985 and 4.5 percent in 2000 claimed to have demonstrated. In 2000, the proportion of people who had demonstrated tended to decrease with age (Table 1.1), with men more likely than women to demonstrate. But there is no obvious age-related patterning in the 2008 ESS (Figure 1.1). Although responses in the 2000 survey suggest greater acceptance of demonstrations, the majority of people, increasing strongly with age, did not envisage participating. This changing age profile undermines assumptions that demonstrating is "the domain of the young" (Dalton, 2008, p. 69). Furthermore, these activities have changed in character, with more 'small demonstrations' held locally, growth in organisational sources of mobilisation (*ibid*, p. 52), and emerging issues. Although population survey-based research can neglect the possibility of older people demonstrating (Schussman and Soule, 2005, p. 1085), some findings appear relevant. For example, that "being asked to protest is the strongest predictor of participating in protest", which in turn is strongly associated with 'political interest' and 'organisational ties' (*ibid*, p. 1083).

Some researchers have started to survey demonstrators. However, the inflexibility of surveys is a limitation. For example, it could only be speculated that the age profile of anti-Iraq war protesters in 2003 might reflect 'reactivation' of people engaged in peace activism in the 1980s (Walgrave *et al*, 2010, pp. 90-92). Surveys of protesters in eight countries in 2003-2007, suggested that 'first-time participation' is influenced by an 'interplay' of individual-level (age, motivation, and non-organisational mobilisation) and aggregate-level (timing in 'protest waves', large demonstrations, and organisation by either old social or 'new emotional' movements) factors (Verhulst and Walgrave, 2009). Older people could have greater involvement than younger adults with 'old social movements' (Figure 1.1). Becoming 'economically inactive' can isolate people from "formal and informal networks and mobilising organisations" that could initiate protests (van Aelst and Walgrave, 2001, p. 471). However, some protests, notably those of 'new emotional' movements[8], have a broad appeal among the population (e.g. Norris *et al*, 2005, Table 5, p. 202).

Council tax annoys many people in England. Recent high profile media coverage focused on older council tax protesters (Goerres, 2009, p. 139). Interviews with some of these protesters aged over 60 revealed that most had "prior political experience, as well as prior engagement inside and outside the electoral process" (*ibid*, pp. 157, 144-145). Role models of older protesters helped mobilisation; as did information and transport provided by organisations run by and recruiting older people (*ibid*, pp. 155,158).

g) Illegal protests

Surveys in England suggest that participation in illegal protests is uncommon. In 1984-1985, few respondents said they had 'blocked traffic' (1.2 percent) or 'used physical force against political opponents' (0.3 percent). Most people claimed they would never do these things. In 2000, about 1.4 percent of respondents in England said they participated in 'illegal protests', with men more likely than women to say this, but none of the over-85s (Table 1.1). Among the over-50s, the proportion saying they would not participate in illegal protest tended to increase with age. These responses partly reflect expressed attitudes to obeying the law (Pattie *et al*, 2004, p. 68). Among people supporting these campaigns 'at a distance', perceived personal physical risks and physical demands could deter participation.

h) Displaying symbols of support

Wearing or displaying campaign badges or stickers was reported by just over one in five of all adult respondents in England in the 2000 survey; being rarest among the over-85s (Table 1.1) and commoner among women than men. Just over half of all respondents would not consider doing this activity; this proportion tending to increase with age. Generally lower levels of participation in this activity were reported in the 2008 ESS (Figure 1.1). The major national surveys provided no insights into individuals' experiences and understandings of this activity.

i) Political groups

Informal groups can provide political mobilisation, accounting for about 19 percent of group action among 1984-1985 British survey respondents (Parry *et al*, 1992, Table 5.1, p. 87). Such groups often arise temporarily in response to specific political stimuli, like proposals to build a new road. Groups differ in their socioeconomic resources, which affects how they work, their access to the media, and "ability to evoke sympathy" (Dowse and Hughes, 1977, p. 86). Participation tends to be flexible in character. The localised and transient nature of these groups is reflected in a fragmented research literature, providing few insights into any relationships between age and forming or joining political groups.

Therefore, existing research presents an incomplete picture of any relationships between age and nine types of political activities, including voting in elections. Given that there is also evidence of change in these activities and the broader social context, it is timely to undertake research into older people's political understandings and experiences. This research will illuminate the characteristics of different types of political activities and any interrelationships between participation in them.

1.2.2: Age-related patterns in organisational membership and support

During their lives, older people tend to have some contact with formal organisations that could influence their political participation. First, this section focuses on organisations that can feature during people's working lives. Then, attention is given

to the diverse organisations that can complement, stimulate, reinforce or change individuals' varied political interests and values.

a) Trade unions and professional associations

Trade unions and professional associations could influence some of their members' political activities. Both types of organisations act as 'representative links' between their members and people with whom they need to negotiate, especially employers. Competition is used to select representatives (Morales, 2009, pp. 27-28). Therefore these organisations can provide opportunities to develop politically relevant skills and knowledge. But they have few active members. In 1990-1993, WVS respondents in Britain included members of trade unions (14 percent) and professional associations (11 percent) but only around one percent were active in each type of organisation (*ibid*, Table 2.7, p. 60, and Table 2.8, p. 61). Typically, membership is terminated on retirement. In the 2008 ESS in England, women aged 60 and over were markedly more likely than men to report never joining a union. And some adults do no paid work.[9] Therefore, there is uneven exposure of the population to these political influences.[10]

Evidence from the 1984-1985 British survey suggests that both trade unions and staff associations could influence active members' levels of overall political participation. Overall political participation was markedly higher among 'very active' members compared to 'fairly active' members (Parry *et al*, 1992, Figure 5.7, p. 111). But these organisations' influence appears short-lived (*ibid*, Figure 5.5, p. 107). Moreover,

because of their historical links with the Labour party, trade unions could play a role in political mobilisation of their members by providing 'political cues', such as providing analysis of policy proposals (Dalton, 2008, pp. 25-26; 144-145).

b) Formal organisations in civil society

There are numerous formal organisations in England that could influence the political lives and understandings of older people, whether economically active or inactive. Citizens can choose whether or not to become members of one or more of these diverse organisations. Cross-national surveys have not sought information about organisations' political characteristics (Morales, 2009, p. 48). And distinguishing between 'political' and 'non-political' organisations can be difficult. For example, the British Legion engages in political activity, but for many members it is "a drinking club" (Sainsbury, 1993, quoted by Vincent, 1999, p. 96).

If a political association's "main goal [is] to influence political decision-making processes" (Morales, 2009, pp. 47-48), then two types of political association are identifiable. First, 'traditional' political organisations that have representative links with their membership and competitions to choose the people to represent their interests and demands. Second, the 'new' political organisations associated with the new social movements (NSMs). The latter tended "to mobilise their members directly", put forward 'universalist' issues, and tend to work outside representative institutions (*ibid*, p. 25-29). Recently, environmental organisations have apparently been the most successful NSMs at attracting members in Great Britain (*ibid*, Table

2.7, p. 60; Graph 2.12, p. 59). Although most membership is passive, members might be exposed to political information, sustaining a potential for political action. Levels of self-reported voluntary work or activism vary; for example, being commoner for environmental and human rights/Third World organisations than for the peace movement among the 1990-1993 WVS's British respondents (*ibid*, Table 2.8, p. 61).

Even formal organisations that are not primarily 'political' in character can enhance their members' political resources; for example by providing opportunities for debating and organising (Quintelier, 2008), and exposure to 'political stimuli'. Therefore, diverse organisations can usefully be considered when researching citizens' political participation (e.g. Parry *et al*, 1992, Table 5.8, p. 103; Pattie *et al*, 2004, Table 3.13, p. 98). The 2008 ESS suggests that a sizeable minority of older people might take up voluntary work after retirement. Participation in voluntary work while economically inactive peaked at around 21.9 percent of 70 to 74 year olds.[11]

But only a minority of older people living in England appear to join organisations. Of 23 separate categories of organisational membership used in the 2000 survey in England, only motoring associations were mentioned by more than 10 per cent of all respondents aged 18 and over; peaking at 39.7 percent of 50 to 64 year olds, declining to 18.7 percent of 75 to 84 year olds, and then to its lowest rate (3.6 percent) for older respondents.[12] In ELSA 2004, some gender and class differences in organisational membership were reported (Hyde and Janevic, 2003, pp. 171-172).

However, older people might be more likely than younger people to engage in unpaid organisational activities that are potentially relevant politically. Citizenship Survey 2001-2008/9 data reveal a curvilinear relationship between age and 'leadership role' in civic associations (Fieldhouse *et al*, 2010, p. 64). And in the 2007 Citizenship Survey, leading the group or being on a committee, working as representatives, and campaigning were most commonly reported by volunteers aged 50 to 74; while organising or helping to run activities and events were most often undertaken by 30 to 74 year old volunteers.[13]

A strong statistical relationship exists between the number of "voluntary group ties" and overall political participation measures (Parry *et al*, 1992, Figure 5.2, p. 99), especially for contacting and collective action (*ibid*, Figure 5.3, p. 101). Political impacts appear to reflect the "extent to which each group discusses social and political issues" and the "level of a person's activity" (*ibid*, p. 102).

Importantly, people can have informal contact with diverse organisations. By contacting many non-members, political associations can be "vehicles of political engagement" (Morales, 2009, p. 60). More people donate money than join organisations. In 2000, more than one in five 50 to 64 year old respondents reported donating money for medical patients, disabled people, ex-service clubs, animal rights and pensioners. Among the over 50s, increasing age tended to be negatively associated with making donations (Table 1.1).

Therefore, surveys have been the dominant source of research-based evidence about older people's political participation in England, including the role of formal organisations in some people's political lives. This research approach has major limitations, such as focusing on selections of current or recent political activities, uneven research coverage into specific political activities, and reliance on respondents' memories of the timing of potentially low salience political activities.

1.3: Understanding political participation as part of individuals' lives

This thesis argues that it is unsatisfactory to undertake political participation research focusing only on individuals' political activities and understandings. To produce insights into older people's political lives, a broader research focus is required: treating political participation as an integral part of individuals' social lives. Also, research must explore interrelationships between individuals' participation in (and opinions on) different types of political activities over their lifetimes. This section starts by calling for a broader social research focus. Then, attention turns to the timing of activities and events in individuals' lives and historically. Finally, consideration is given to ways of researching individuals' social lives.

1.3.1: Moving beyond research with a narrow political focus

Existing research into political participation has tended to focus on aspects of political behaviour and/or opinion. However, as will be illustrated below, this unnecessarily

restricted scope of research has little resonance with most individuals' lives and will limit explanatory insights from this research.

Disagreement exists about what counts as 'political action'. Survey-based analyses would exclude activities with contested status; for example, some older women's "small scale and emotional political work" during the1980s miners' strike (Spence and Stephenson, 2007). Furthermore, what is called 'activism' at one time can become normalised as part of many people's everyday life; for example, practical aspects of 'environmentalism' in England.

The literature suggests that political participation plays a minor part in most people's lives in England. For example, based on the previous five years, around half the 1984-1985 survey respondents in Britain were classified as 'just voters' and a quarter as 'almost inactive' (Parry *et al*, 1992, Figure 10.1, p. 229). But these people cannot be assumed to remain, at best, 'spectators' (*ibid*, p. 48). There could be a "growing army of 'sporadic interventionists' – ready to act ... when their backyards are threatened" (*ibid*, p. 425). These actions tend to be 'short-term' reactions by people "who have been upset or angered by governmental politics" (Dowse and Hughes, 1977, p. 84), such as threatened leisure activities (*ibid*, p. 85). New types of citizen are claimed to have emerged. 'Monitorial citizens', for example, are people outside traditional political organisations, who are interested in politics, actively make sure they are "informed enough and alert enough" to potential 'dangers' (personal or otherwise), and have sufficient resources to engage in appropriate political action (Schudson, 1999, p. 21; Hooghe and Dejaeghere, 2007, p. 249). Age-related

statistical data, such as media consumption patterns[14], suggest, that some older people could behave like monitorial citizens, but this evidence neither proves this nor explains how they came to take these roles.

Research on citizen's lifestyles in Germany suggests other possible political lives for older people, distinguished by levels of political interest and action. For example, it is plausible that some older old people in England combine high levels of political interest, a belief in a "duty to be involved in politics beyond the mere act of voting", and active participation in "church life". Also, that 'isolated elderly people' exist, who might be non-voters, disinterested in politics, and dissatisfied with the political system (Mochmann, 2003, work described by Edwards, 2009, pp. 43-44). While usefully stressing the diversity of political life in populations, this research provides limited understanding of individuals' political lives, in which political action "might ebb and flow across a lifetime" and change in character (Hunt, 2009, p. 220).

Therefore, research focusing only on individuals' self-reported political behaviour and/or opinions, especially if synchronic, is an unsatisfactory way to obtain explanatory insights into older people's political participation. Focusing on individuals' social lives, especially if diachronic, appears to be a more fruitful approach to investigating continuity and change in older people's political understandings and experiences. As will be seen, longer time frames and a focus on individuals' social lives are appropriate to explore the interconnections between different parts of individuals' social lives and their historical experiences of diverse political activities.

1.3.2: Situating individuals' lives in historical time

If research is to be extended to cover individuals' lifetimes, then attention must be given to potentially relevant social characteristics and political events associated with the historical period through which people live. This section presents some examples of recent changes that plausibly impact on contemporary political participation and understanding among older people in England.

Changing social contexts can modify citizens' potential political repertoires. For example, greater access to higher education[15] and information, combined with generally reduced deference to professionals supports 'micro-politics' – attempts by individuals to alter the way that services they use are provided or, if appropriate, to improve their working conditions (Pattie *et al*, 2004, pp. 113-125). In the 2000 survey in Britain, for example, 25 to 64 year olds were most likely to report trying to influence medical treatment, usually by contacting medical personnel (*ibid*, Table 4.9, p. 124). Yet the over-65s are more likely to use health services (Evandrou, 2005b, p. 52).

The trend towards governance in Britain, arguably helps create new citizen roles (Newman, 2005, pp. 4-5). In Copenhagen, Bang claimed to identify 'expert citizens' and 'everyday makers'. Both groups of people seemingly share a focus on 'getting things done' politically (Bang, 2005, pp. 164, 167, 169). Expert citizens tended to take voluntary roles within the political system; engaging in "negotiation and dialogue" to try to influence policy decisions (Bang, 2005, pp. 163-166; Bang, 2009, p. 131). Everyday makers sought 'concrete' outcomes through unplanned,

temporary actions; preferring to work informally with other 'reflexive individuals' (Bang, 2009, p. 131) and might be concentrated among young people (Bang and Sørensen, 1998, p. 22). Unfortunately, national surveys in England that can reveal any age-related patterns cannot identify people in these roles (Li and Marsh, 2008).

However, especially since 1997, public participation has been sought within the public sector and multi-sector local governance arrangements in England. Typically, these are public events tending either to 'deliver information' to or 'collect information' from the general public (Lowndes *et al*, 2001a; 2001b). Thus, citizens' political involvement seems variable and potentially unsatisfying. For instance, studies of interactions in a British initiative for older people found that "rather than creating better government for citizens, such processes filter and create better citizens for government" (Williams, 2004, 4.2). Furthermore, these activities tend to appeal most to 'natural joiners' of community groups or people "active in other forms of consultations" (Lowndes *et al*, 2001b, p. 448). Around one in five respondents in the 2007 Citizenship Survey for England said they participated in a consultation in the last 12 months, peaking among 65 to 74 year olds (24.5 percent) and dropping to 12.1 percent for people over 85. Yet older old people are "precisely the group of people who needed a voice" (Barnes *et al*, 2003, p. 392).

Passivity in participatory practices appears to have grown over the last fifty years. For example, giving financial support to charities, political parties and other organisations is prevalent (Table 1.1). Often this is the only support provided and sought (Faucher-King, 2010, pp. 2, 5-6). In qualitative research in Belgium, some women reported

psychological barriers to participation. Self exclusion could be based on individuals' doubts about their ability to "function in political life"; for instance, fearing that they would not be 'taken seriously' by male politicians. People with little formal education felt participation was 'not for our kind of people' and financial costs deterred low income people. Importantly, there was perceived to be a wide 'cultural distance' from politicians (Hooghe, 2001, pp. 165 -170). Qualitative research with young people in Britain also found a 'dominant perception' that "politicians were disconnected from the lives of the ordinary" people and were uninterested in engaging with issues affecting young people (Marsh *et al*, 2007, pp. 216, 220). Some older people would probably agree with these sentiments, finding them applicable to their age group (Hayden *et al*, 1999, pp. 67-68, 79). Hooghe argues credibly that both passivity and intensive participation could be 'self-reproducing phenomena' (Hooghe, 2001, p. 173). Partly, this could reflect a two-way relationship between political knowledge and political participation (*ibid*, p. 172).

Rapid developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) facilitate information exchange and co-ordination of political action by large numbers of geographically dispersed people, provide alternative ways for individuals and organisations to undertake political activities and supported the emergence of new forms of political action (Pickerill, 2006, pp. 268-270).[16] However, the impact of ICT-based activities is not straightforward. For example, although the 'Number Ten e-petitions site' enabled citizens to raise issues, the promised 'government response' could disappoint people expecting engagement or action (Miller, 2009, pp. 163-168).

Moreover, according to the 2002 ELSA, access to the internet was related to age, gender and occupational class (Hyde and Janevic, 2003, p. 167). The proportion of respondents saying they used the internet and/or email tended to decrease with age from around half of 50 to 54 year olds to fewer than one in ten of the over-80s *(ibid*, Table 5A.21, p. 202).[17] In England, older people's lack of access to and limited use of the internet can reflect health-related reasons and, importantly, choice based on their ambivalence and perceived personal relevance (Selwyn, 2004, pp. 371, 381-382). Although 'silver surfers' might have an increasing share of internet time use in Britain (Ferguson, 2008, p. 217), little is known about their online political activities. Internet-based activism appears uncommon in England, especially among older people (Dalton, 2008, Table 3.4, p. 43). But possibly, as in the USA, "the relatively few elderly Web users are particularly likely to exploit the political capacities of the internet" (Schlozman *et al*, 2010, p. 503).

People aged over 60 have lived through a period of marked change in electoral campaigns. In the 1950s, national election campaigns tended to be more local, short-term activities in the context of a relatively stable social and partisan electorate. Then, there was social and partisan dealignment. Campaigns lasted longer, were nationally coordinated and more professionalised. In the 1990s, use was made of a wider range of media, regular monitoring of public opinions, and greater professional input into arguably 'permanent' campaigns (Norris, 2004, Table 1, p.15). In constituencies, local meetings became much less important (Pattie and Johnston, 2003, p. 394). Printed material formed "the backbone of the constituency campaign" by 2001 (*ibid*, p. 401). The 2005 BES suggests "constituency spending and individual

voter mobilization are complementary activities" (Clarke *et al*, 2009, pp. 215-216). However, campaign spending and activity apparently targeted potentially winnable marginal seats in the 2001 and 2005 British general elections (Johnston and Pattie, 2006, Figure 7.8, p. 254; Clarke *et al*, 2009, Figure 6.7, pp. 204-205). Just over one in five of 2005 BES respondents remembered being canvassed face-to-face, with many fewer telephoned by a party or reminded to vote on polling day (Clarke *et al*, 2009, Table 6.2, p. 209). In 2001, the dominant means of communication was through televised party broadcasts (Pattie and Johnston, 2003, Table 3a, p. 396). But "vigorous campaigning by the parties and massive media coverage" could potentially demobilise some voters, at least temporarily, as in the 2005 general election (Clarke *et al*, 2009, pp. 198- 200). Recent trends in media content include greater coverage of Prime Ministers' personal lives (Inés Langer, 2007) and a focus on "political impressions" of "a limited range of issues" in the 2005 general election (Deacon *et al*, 2006, p. 252).

Since 1945, voters in England usually go in person to a polling booth. Almost one fifth of survey respondents voting in-person in the 2005 general election claimed this public display of performing a civic duty was a source of 'enjoyment' (Norris, 2005, Figure 3, p. 24). And Goerres (2007a) argued that older people in Europe are more likely to vote partly because they "have habituated voting over their lifetime" (*ibid*, p. 90).[18] However, habits can change in nature or be abandoned; as illustrated by recent trends in divorce (Tomassini,2005c, p.12) and smoking cessation (Evandrou, 2005a, p. 45). Women in Britain were granted full rights to vote in 1928 (Mateo Diaz,

2005, Table 1.2, p. 39), within some older people's lifetimes. And new voting methods could change some voters' habits.

These examples illustrate the importance of taking account of potentially relevant social, technological and political changes and events occurring during older people's lifetimes when exploring and attempting to explain their political understandings and experiences. Not only is a broader focus on individuals' historical context required, but the topics researched should extend beyond the political aspects of their lives.

1.3.3: Exploring multiple dimensions of individuals' lives

When conducting research into older people's political experiences and understandings over their lifetimes, I argue that it is also important to explore individuals' lives more fully than is common in political participation research. After presenting an example of a biographical approach that produced insights into some older people's political lives, I introduce the life course perspective as a potential approach to help investigate older people's diverse political experiences and understandings.

A biographical approach proved fruitful for research into some older people's long-term[19] commitment to socialism in Britain. Interviews by Andrews (1991) revealed class differences: working-class activists could base their beliefs on analysis of personal experiences and empathy, while middle-class activists tended to have a more abstract basis for their beliefs. Although all the activists engaged in different

mixtures of political activities, they shared a 'culture of responding': their social awareness and sensitivity to situations helped them to perceive problems, which they then wanted and were able to respond to through personal action (*ibid*, p. 165). Politics was a 'high priority' in their lives (*ibid*, p. 143) and their political beliefs were restated and recreated in 'actions of everyday life' (*ibid*, p. 164). They were optimistic; apparently believing they were contributing to processes that would continue after their deaths (*ibid*, p. 204). This type of biographical approach based on lengthy and repeated interviews focused on political topics seems likely to be particularly useful with older people for whom politics is an important component of at least part of their adult lives. For example, people engaged in the so-called 'direct action movement', who are apparently expected to "live out their lives politically in a fuller sense" and also tended to engage in "alternative practical projects", such as arts projects, community gardens and advice services (Doherty *et al*, 2003, p. 670, 677, 679-680). Although most of these activists are believed to be 'young' people, older people were involved in physically demanding lifestyles in earlier social movements, such as in the Greenham Common women's peace camp (*ibid*, p 686; Blackwood, 1984, pp. 5-9).

However, as noted in section 1.2.1, political participation does not appear to play an important part in the lives of most older people living in England. Therefore, many older people might not want to participate in research focused predominantly on their political lives. Adopting a life course perspective can make participation in research more relevant to potential research participants. The five principles associated with life course theory are: human development or learning occurs across the life span;

timing within life span is important; 'linked lives' – interdependence and social relationships; that the individual's life course is "embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places experienced over their lifetime; and 'human agency' (Phillips *et al*, 2010, p. 140). A life course comprises potentially changeable 'age-graded trajectories', such as work career, residential location, family life, and political life. Embedded in trajectories are 'transitions', such as migration, partnering, and retirement (*ibid*, p. 5; Bailey, 2009, p. 408). Sometimes distinctions are made, as between developmental (normative changes that can be anticipated), situational (unexpected events), and health and illness-related transitions (Jarrett, 2000 cited in Liddle *et al*, 2004, p. 1397). Older people may experience "multiple and involuntary transitions" that are "difficult to deal with" (Liddle *et al*, 2004, p. 1396). Adopting elements of the life course approach can help avoid making assumptions about people's lives; such as imagining that transition to retirement is always immediate (from 'full-time employment' to 'retirement') when diverse and prolonged pathways into 'full-time retirement' exist (Fairhurst, 2003, p. 187). Although exploring all relevant dynamic processes in older peoples' lives is a major research challenge (Elder *et al*, 2003, pp. 5-7), the life course perspective suggests productive ways of systematically investigating politics within older people's diverse social lives.

Therefore, there is a strong case for treating exploratory research into older people's political experiences and understandings as "studying human development within socio-cultural and historical contexts" (Phillips *et al*, 2010, p. 141). The biographical approaches used in this thesis offer insights into continuity and change in individuals' varied political lives.

1.4: Theoretical explanations of political participation

Theoretical insights can inform research design and interpretation of research findings. For this project, theoretical insights are required about ways in which political participation 'works' and its continuity and change at the individual level. First, insights are presented from a crude but useful conceptual model (civic voluntarism) used to explain political participation. Then, other major, relevant theoretical insights are introduced for political participation in general and for specific types of political activity.

Given the diversity of people and political activity, it is understandable that no single theory provides a satisfactory explanation of political participation in general. However, Goerres (2009) demonstrated that the civic voluntarism model provides a useful basis for conceptual frameworks for investigating age-related political participation by individuals (*ibid*, pp. 24-29). Possible answers to the question 'why do people not take part in politics?' are that people cannot participate, they do not want to participate and/or because 'nobody asked' them. Therefore, Verba *et al* (1995) focused on three factors (resources, engagement, and recruitment) to build a model of political participation (*ibid*, p. 269). Here, political resources are represented by measures of time, money and civic skills.

Marked variations exist in the time demands of different political activities. Age-related patterns in paid and voluntary work[20] suggest that older people could have more free time as they age, which some people could use for politics (Goerres, 2009,

p. 146). But older people may have other commitments, such as caring for relatives (Breeze and Stafford, 2010, pp. 377-379).

Money can be donated to political organisations (Table 1.1) and used to pay for any financial costs required for more active participation. Older people's incomes are unequal and vary over time. For most people in England, retirement is associated with a significant reduction in income (Muriel and Oldfield, 2010, pp. 76, 80, 89).

'Civic resources' were conceived as "the communications and organizational abilities that allow citizens to use time and money effectively in political life" (Verba *et al*, 1995, p. 304). In models, civic resources were operationalised by measures of formal education, language skills, and transferable skills developed through non-political institutional involvement (*ibid*, pp. 304-313). In England, access to further and higher education has increased[21], and there have been changes in the 'occupational mix' and work-related skills.[22] Therefore, more people should reach their 50th birthdays with the skills to participate effectively in activities like contacting and organising informal protest groups.

As political resources are insufficient to explain why anyone would actually participate, the civic voluntarism model includes engagement and recruitment. Political engagement is represented by four measures: political interest, political information, political efficacy, and partisan strength (Verba *et al*, 1995, pp. 343-348). Age-related patterns exist for party identification and political interest. 'Political information' measures tend to be based on numbers of correct answers to questions

about the formal political system (Pattie *et al*, 2004, p. 314). Although tapping aspects of political engagement, this approach reveals little about individuals' acquisition and use of political information, as indicated by research on citizens' understandings of politics (Marsh *et al*, 2007; van Wessel, 2010) and on gender differences in these and "more practical types of political knowledge" (Stolle and Gidengil, 2010, p.93). Perceived political efficacy refers to beliefs that citizens could influence decision-making in political systems individually and/or collectively. To the extent these beliefs are captured in surveys, levels of perceived political efficacy can be positively associated with individual and, especially, micro political action (Pattie *et al*, 2004, Table 6.12, p. 182). Age-related patterning exists for these measures. In the 2001 to 2008 Citizenship Surveys, the over-66s were least likely to agree that they could 'influence decisions affecting the local area' (Fieldhouse *et al*, 2010, p. 89). Arguably, the subjective nature of these measures could be useful in individual-level qualitative research into what could be contradictory and dynamic beliefs associated with political participation. Relationships between political engagement and political participation could be complex. For example, reciprocal relationships could exist between political interest and political acts (Brady *et al*, 1995, Figure 3, p. 277). As Goerres (2009, pp. 28-29) observed, measures like political interest could also be viewed as personal resources.

Other salient psychological topics include emotions and learning associated with political participation. Emotions experienced will vary across individuals and actions; like the 'fun' and 'friendship' of some expressive and creative political activism (Caissie, 2006, p. 127) or the "widespread anger" among older council tax protesters

(Goerres, 2009, p. 148). Exploratory studies with National Election Panel Study data suggest that internal efficacy could "boost participation in part by facilitating anger, but not fear", associated with policy threats (Valentino *et al*, 2009, p. 307).

Recruitment is the third component of the civic voluntarism model. In 2000, mobilisation of British respondents through personal requests was associated with greater individual, collective, and micro political participation (Pattie *et al*, 2004, Table 6.12, p. 182). But three-quarters of the British respondents claimed to have not been asked to participate (*ibid*, Table 6.3, p. 164). And recruitment processes can increase participatory biases. People believed likely to participate effectively are targeted; especially people with previous experience of the political activity and, for donations, more affluent people (Brady *et al*, 1999, pp. 159, 162; Abramson and Claggett, 2001, p. 905, Table 2, p. 912). People tend to respond more positively to requests from close friends or relatives, and their 'job supervisors' (*ibid*, 1999, Table 3, p. 160). An individual's personality and interests are likely to be important considerations in recruitment. And there could be a small sub-group of older people whose personality type is associated with "scarce participation in public events and associations' activities" (Steca *et al*, 2010, p. 445).

Arguments made for political action can influence participation. An experiment in the USA found that, given the same response options, presenting a "policy change opportunity" increased the numbers of postcards sent to the President, while a "policy threat opportunity" increased the number of donations (Miller and Krosnick, 2004, pp. 507, 513-514). Research on demonstrators in the Netherlands found "that

power-oriented collective action appeals to instrumental motives and efficacy, and that value-oriented collective action appeals to ideological motives" (van Stekelenburg *et al*, 2009, p. 815).

"Networks of political solicitation" (Verba *et al*, 1995, p. 144) include diverse organisations. "The likelihood of recruitment is increased when institutional affiliation is coupled with some kind of political exposure within the institution" (*ibid*, p. 148). People joining political and non-political organisations, may be mobilised to become more actively involved (Devine, 2003, p. 8). Social network analyses reveal distinctive patterns of interpersonal relations within local organisations; with varying proportions of current members classified as members of the 'core', 'periphery' or 'isolates' based on number of "ties of communication and discussion" (Ray *et al*, 2003, pp. 46-49).

The importance of social relationships – within both formal and informal social networks – for political participation is picked up by social capital approaches. For Putnam (2000), social capital comprises diverse "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity" (*ibid*, p. 21). This generalised reciprocity is presented as a "community asset" that can sustain normatively desirable cooperative behaviour (*ibid,* pp. 134-136) and help resolve collective problems (*ibid*, p. 288). Measures of social trust are strongly correlated with a social capital index (*ibid*, Table 4, p. 291). But as "the causal arrows among civic involvement, reciprocity, honesty, and social trust are as tangled as well-tossed spaghetti", Putnam argued they should be viewed as "a coherent syndrome" (*ibid*, p. 137). The theoretical distinction between social trust

(concerning other people) and political trust (of institutions and political authorities) is stressed, as is the inherent ambiguity of trust-related data obtained by surveys (*ibid*, p.137-138). Putnam noted that the linkage to 'public life' is "sometimes tenuous" for small groups, but "omnipresent" for social movements. The latter being "closely connected" to and capable of creating social capital (*ibid*, pp. 152-153). Although Putnam's version of social capital is "easily amenable to empirical investigation" through surveys combining "levels of trust and voluntary association involvement" (Silva and Edwards, 2004, pp. 3-4), its application for individual-level analyses of political participation receives equivocal support (Pattie *et al*, 2004, pp. 178-179).

However, examples in the literature (Atkinson,2010b; Kauppi, 2003; Lowndes, 2004; Portes, 1998; Wacquant, 2004) suggest that Bourdieu's concepts of capitals, habitus and field could be useful 'thinking tools' to explore older people's political participation.[23] Three types of capital – economic, cultural and social – are identified that can be "traded for each other and actually require such trades for their development" (Portes, 2000, p. 2). Thus, social capital is viewed as "the aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 51). Individual and collective resources must be invested to maintain and develop these relationships (*ibid*, p. 52). Groups may concentrate social capital in 'forms of delegation' involving representatives (*ibid*, p. 53). Political capital is recognised in Bourdieu's political sociology; with more holistic analyses including the concepts of habitus and field (Kauppi, 2003). A strong case was made to redefine political capital as applicable to all citizens; suggesting it is the actual or potential

"capacity to influence political decisions" within specific contexts (Schugurensky, 2000, pp. 5-6).[24]

Bourdieu's work also features in a 'unifying, interdisciplinary framework' being developed for research on "learning through the life course" (Evans *et al*, 2010, pp. 41-42). Qualitative researchers are exploring age-patterning in learning experiences, including political life, and preferences (Field *et al*, 2008, pp. 24, 28-44). An influential assumption in political science is that "openness to political learning, and hence attitude change, declines with age in a nonlinear fashion" (Stoker and Jennings, 2008, p. 620). But evidence about older people's learning and leisure activities (Martínez del Castillo *et al*, 2010, pp. 1097, 1099; Soule, 2005, pp. 90-91) suggests that, unless prevented by health problems, learning can support both continuity and change in older people's political participation.

Most political learning is probably informal, for example through everyday conversations within social networks (Walker, 2008, Figure 1, p. 131), exposure to political content in the media[25], and experience of using publicly funded services. Older people involved in local political action may invest their time in researching 'problems' and learning about political processes (Boggs, 1992, p. 395, 398-399). Transmission of political ideas may occur initially from parents to children (Jennings *et al*, 2009; McIntosh *et al*, 2007), and later from children to their parents (Wong and Tseng, 2008, p. 151). Some evidence suggests that the breadth, prominence and volume of media coverage can independently influence people's acquisition of policy-relevant knowledge (Barabas and Jerit, 2009). And different 'communication

channels' in the 2005 general election seemed to "serve different functions for the electorate" (Norris, 2006, p. 217); with the internet apparently rarely used for 2010 general election campaign information (Gibson *et al*, 2010, Table 1, p. 8).

An insightful, complementary approach to researching continuity and change during individual's political lives focuses on life-spheres and social networks. Illustrated by their life-history interview-based study of activists in a social movement, Passy and Giugni (2000, p.117) said:

> When activists remain embedded in social networks relevant for the protest issues and, above all, when they keep a symbolic linkage between their activism and their personal life-spheres, sustained participation is likely to occur. When these two factors become progressively separated from each other and the process of self-interaction by activists loses its strength, disengagement can be expected.

And they highlight:

> The importance of a sense of coherence and of a holistic view of one's personal life for keeping commitment over time.

Their concept of 'life-spheres' adds a 'subjective side' to social networks; based on recognition of 'social actors' perceptions' of their belonging to groups and networks (*ibid*, p. 121). Individuals' personal lives can be envisaged to comprise a number of distinct but interconnected life-spheres. For political research, Passy and Giugni pragmatically defined relevant life-spheres as: political action, family, education, work, friends, and leisure, and, for some people, religious participation and political engagement. The number and personal importance of life-spheres will vary over time and among individuals, (*ibid*, p.122-123). Their research illustrated how coherence in thought and action among individuals' life-spheres helps sustain or increase their

political commitment (*ibid*. 128) and how changes in other life-spheres can impact on political action or engagement (*ibid*, p. 130).

Other theoretical perspectives serve as a reminder about other potentially important considerations. For example, social movement research provides some potentially useful ideas about mobilisation, political opportunity structures, framing of political arguments, and identity politics. Systems-related approaches appear relevant when thinking about possible feedback effects from personal experiences or observations.[26] Rational choice theories usefully highlight the potential role of costs and 'selective incentives' (Pattie *et al*, 2004, Table 6.2, pp. 158-159; Table 6.12, p. 182) in older people's political participation. Different political activities could be associated with different patterns of self-reported material, social and civic 'gratifications', which could 'matter fundamentally' to individuals (Schlozman *et al*, 1995 p. 7). Also helpful are the major competing models of voting, emphasising either competition on positional issues (associated with partisanship and political ideology) or valence issues (where voters somehow asses the performance or likely performance of a party). The image of the party leader is another consideration (Clarke *et al*, 2009).

Therefore, a range of theories can provide useful insights for research into older people's dynamic and diverse political lives. As will be seen in Chapters Four to Seven, it proved particularly useful to explore continuity and change in individuals' political understandings and behaviour by referring to the life-spheres concept, Bourdieu's concept of capitals, and modified versions of the civic voluntarism model.

1.5: Age, time and political participation

Age-related change in individuals' political behaviour or understanding could reflect ageing, period, and/or generation effects, which are introduced briefly in this section. These three effects can coexist to varying extents and are difficult to distinguish.

As the ELSA is showing, at least four ageing processes can be identified. First, chronological ageing - the number of years a person has lived. Second, biological ageing, which refers to physical changes over time. Third, psychological ageing, which includes changes in adaptive capacity, personality, and cognitive abilities. Finally, social ageing, which concerns changing social roles and relationships. Chronological age cannot be translated directly into biological, psychological and social age because these are independent processes that vary within populations.[27]

Goerres (2009) produced an insightful account of different types of ageing and their political implications for individuals and for ageing populations.[28] He found it useful to distinguish two types of age effects ('individual ageing' and 'life cycle') and two types of cohort effects ('socio-economic cohort' and 'political generations'). As period effects impact on everyone being studied at a point in time, he argued that they cannot help explain differences between people in different age groups. In aggregate, marked changes in the life cycle and individual ageing could lead to long-lived change in associated political behaviour; while marked changes associated with cohort effects can be expected to be temporary (Goerres, 2009, p. 17). Although, a large cohort might impact on aggregate political behaviour for a decade or more.

Everyone experiences individual ageing. Goerres (2009) identified two mechanisms ("accumulation of past experience" and "growing adherence to social norms") arguably contributing to older people's greater propensity to vote in England compared to younger people (*ibid*, pp. 33-34). And research in Russia provides evidence for political 'lifetime learning', where it is suggested:

> For most attitudes and behaviours, generational differences are a fraction of those produced in all generations over time by contemporary political and economic experiences. (Mishler and Rose, 2007, p. 832)

Life cycle effects are associated with social roles occupied by individuals over their lifetimes, that vary with social and cultural contexts. Goerres (2009) stresses the 'probabilistic character' of life cycle effects. Each social role can create political resources, motives for action and/or mobilisation (*ibid*, pp. 16, 26, 31-33). Political examples arguably based largely on life cycle effects include older people's greater political engagement than young people and older people prioritising health and pensions for public spending (Huber and Skidmore, 2003, p. 48). Jennings (1979) suggested:

> that the relationship between life stages and political participation could be better understood as a response to changing motivations (perceived stakes) and the penetrability of the opportunity structure (defined and accessible entry points). (*ibid,* p. 767)

It was argued convincingly that researchers should avoid "crude classifications" for life stages and "narrow constructions" of political participation (*ibid*, p. 755).

Different understandings of the word 'generations' exist. Three understandings are relevant to this thesis. First, there is the idea of generations within a family; such as children, their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents (Phillips *et al*, 2010, pp.

113-117). The family can be the setting for political socialisation, especially if "parents provide consistent cues over time" (Jennings *et al*, 2009, p. 782). Another usage of the term 'generation' is based on birth cohorts: people born in the same year. People born at different points in history may be exposed to different socio-political contexts that can influence their political lives; as for example with the introduction of mass secondary and then higher education in England (Goerres, 2009, pp. 26, 31,34). Goerres (2009) also identifies 'political generations' in England. These are cohorts of people who have a "shared historical, political experience", for example of 'street demonstrations', as young adults that could lead to distinctive political understandings (*ibid*, p.13, 25).[29] Based partly on the work of Butler and Stokes (1974) and Russell *et al* (1992)[30], Goerres suggested a list of possible political generations for the British population.[31] His statistical analyses suggested "generational differences ... are the dominant sources of differences between age groups". But:

> Even these differences become less important because early socialisation plays less of a role in party systems characterised by dealignment and increasing voter volatility. (Goerres, 2009, p. 94)

Thinking about political generations has been strongly influenced by Mannheim's (1952) essay about generations. Like social class, the emergence of conscious generations is argued to rely on "similarity of [social] location" of some people sharing the same year of birth (*ibid*, p. 290) and participating in the "same historical and social circumstances" (*ibid*, p. 298). It is envisaged as a cultural process, whereby each new birth cohort makes "a fresh contact" with the "accumulated heritage" (*ibid*, p. 293) that can involve 'shifts in social relations' or emergence of a new attitude

among newcomers (*ibid*, p. 294). Social context is important. In “static conditions”, “the younger generation tends to adapt itself to the older” generation. As the “pace of social change” increases, there is ‘re-orientation of the system’ (*ibid*, pp. 302, 309). A shared historical experience has the potential to lead to “different intellectual and social responses”, providing a basis for some distinctive ‘generation units’ to be actively constructed within each generation (*ibid*, p. 304). It was suggested that older people could act as ‘forerunners’ of this change (*ibid*, p. 308). Therefore, researchers should look at “the whole historical and social process” (*ibid,* p. 317).

However, is it plausible that older people cannot change markedly? Especially, if they are living through rapid social change. The lifelong learning perspectives suggest continued openness with age. In the USA, Ragan and Dowd (1974) believed that “age-group political consciousness[32] among the elderly may be an emergent feature of the current political scene” (*ibid*, p. 137). Currently, in England, rapid social change is being experienced by people entering ‘retirement’. More people can look forward to an expanding phase of retirement. A ‘Third Age’[33] has emerged: a time “for personal achievement and fulfilment” (Phillips *et al*, 2010, p. 215). Newly retired people have no established model(s) for living this phase of their lives. Focusing on so-called ‘baby boomers’[34] as age cohorts is believed to usefully direct attention to their heterogeneity, unlike a focus on the socio-cultural construct (Huber and Skidmore, 2003, p. 47). One opinion is that ‘baby boomers’ might become ‘invisible elders’ (a ‘fragmented generation’), a ‘selfish generation’ (individualistic consumers) or ‘civic defenders’ (*ibid*, p. 49). But Higgs and Gilleard (2010) argue that all generations now belong to a ‘consumer culture’, having “inextricably intertwined” incomes, and living in

a “new landscape of contingency where the boundaries of age, generation and cohort seem less easily defined or contained” than in the 1940s (pp. 1446, 1448).

The complexity of age-related processes indicates that broad age-related research questions cannot be tackled in single projects. Each research project should be designed to make specific contributions to what will be a major, long-term, interdisciplinary research programme investigating people’s social lives, including their political understandings and experiences.

1.6: Geography and political participation

It seems likely that ‘place matters’ in older people’s political lives. This thesis draws on two major national studies. Pattie *et al* (2004) only presented sub-national data at a regional level. However, Parry *et al* (1992) demonstrated the usefulness of case studies to reveal insights into the relationships between political participation and geographical locations. This section outlines some relevant geographical topics: geographical distribution and mobility, and social context.

Older people’s geographical distribution across England is very uneven; as is the direction and scale of changes in the proportion of older people in local authority area populations. For example, most of London is atypical in terms of having decreasing proportions of residents over state pension age (SPA).[35] While people over SPA comprised over 30 percent of the populations of parts of Dorset, East Sussex, and East Devon in 2001 (Tomassini, 2005b, pp. 6-8). Older people can become

concentrated in places; for example, in new developments of sheltered or 'retirement' accommodation. These spatial patterns reflect migration patterns, where people "approaching retirement" tended to move out of urban areas and older people to move nearer to relatives or into residential care (*ibid*, p. 8). The socio-economic characteristics of older people who move and stay in a place could impact on local politics and the character of political life open to older people. Furthermore, everyday travel, especially commuting, and 'busy' lifestyles can impact on their political lives.

Over-simplistic thinking features in some quantitative studies. For example, Davidson (2006) used population projections and electoral turnout for parliamentary constituencies to suggest where the 'grey vote' (over-55s) might become important in electoral politics.[36] New data, and statistical and geographical techniques enable patterns in the data concerning British voting and electoral politics to be explored at individual, household, 'neighbourhood', 'regional' and national levels.[37] But problems persist, especially, their limited ability to make sense of the behaviour and thinking underlying observed patterns and estimates.[38] For example, BES-based analyses usefully confirmed that "political conversation is a form of participation that mirrors and reinforces other patterns of political participation" but "the diversity of individuals' discussion networks" could not be 'fully investigated' (Johnston and Pattie, 2006, pp. 119-120, 125). Qualitative research could usefully complement these investigations by providing insights into social contexts. For example, a "kind of locally embedded habitus" in Manchester was identified by detecting "dominant local lifestyles and shared dispositions, sustained by local neighbouring relationships as well as common experiences" and "rooted in manual skills"(Savage *et al*, 2004, p. 96).[39]

Therefore, careful attention should be given to geographical aspects of any research into older people's political experiences and understandings. The complexity of this task increases when research focuses on people's lifetime experiences.

1.7: Conclusion

This chapter illustrated that although research-based evidence has shown age-related patterning in participation (and non-participation) and opinions across a range of political activities in England, little explanatory research has been conducted. Age-related patterns have also been observed in a range of formal organisations that could impact on individuals' political capital and mobilisation. Moreover, the socio-political implications of these patterns are unknown, especially for older people and the total population. Therefore, there is a case for wide-ranging research into specific aspects of older people's political understandings and experiences.

It is argued that biographical research approaches informed by a mixture of theories should provide useful insights into older people's diverse political understandings and experiences. By focusing on political lives as part of individuals' broader social lives, these approaches avoid making assumptions, for example, about the characteristics of different political activities, individuals' abilities to remember details and the dates of activities of possibly low personal salience, and that everyone shares the same definition of 'politics'. These approaches appear particularly appropriate for researching continuity and change in political understandings and experiences.

2

AN ‘OLDER PEOPLE’S POLITICS’ AND SOCIAL CARE SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE AS A POLITICAL ISSUE

2.1: Introduction

As there might be distinctive aspects of some older people’s political lives that are in some ways age-related, research into older people’s political understandings and experiences should be sensitive to this possibility. Therefore, this chapter introduces two topics that could plausibly play a disproportionately large part in some older people’s political understandings and experiences as they age. First, there is the notion of an ‘older people’s politics’. This could mean an older person adding to their personal list of important political issues something that disproportionately affects older people. If strongly committed politically, the older person could become an active member of a pressure group or other political organisation run by or for older people. Second, social care services for older people in England is introduced as a potentially salient political issue. Political decisions determine the accessibility and design of some social care services that could impact greatly on the quality of life of some older people and their close friends and relatives.

Overall, this chapter reviews the empirical research into older people’s political understandings and experiences. In particular, it deals with the research questions about the existence of ‘an older people’s politics’ and older people’s involvement in

and opinions about it; as well as whether older people view social care as a political issue and engage with the ongoing social care debate.

2.2: An 'older people's politics'

Intermittently, the notion of an 'older people's politics' appears in either the academic literature (e.g. Haas, 2007; Binstock, 2005, p. 267; Vincent, 2003) or in the media (e.g. Marrin, 2011; Phillipson *et al*, 2008, 4.7). In both contexts, it is typically associated with negative imagery or rhetoric that appears hostile to older people. The basic message seems to be that in an ageing population, older people will make political demands to serve their own interests and which, importantly, are at the expense of other people or publicly financed activities. In this context, any interests disproportionately affecting older people appear to be treated as if somehow politically illegitimate. As Walker (2006, p. 348) wrote:

> the ideological construction of gray power sits closely alongside the neo-liberal myth of aging as a burden on society and serves a complementary purpose.

And the potentially damaging impact on older people (and their political participation) has received some recognition among politicians; for example:

> We are concerned that an ageing population is too often seen in public debate as something negative, a problem to be solved, with older people regarded as a burden. The fact that many more people can expect to live well into old age is one of society's greatest achievements and something to be celebrated rather than lamented. (House of Commons Health Committee, 2010, p. 30)

This section comprises three parts. The first two parts look at factors either supporting or undermining the idea of an 'older peoples' politics' in England. The final part looks at the evidence of the existence of an 'older people's politics in England.

2.2.1: Factors supporting an 'older people's politics'

Awareness of age discrimination and ageism could encourage some older individuals to react; ranging from adoption of a specific topic among their political priorities to joining collective action for older people. As pensions and retirement income are increasingly a concern for adults of all ages, this section focuses on examples of other potential sources of concern for older people. Six areas of potential concern for older people were identified: health services, housing, education, work, the media, and politics.

Use of health services tends to 'rise sharply with age' among the over-65s, with the over-50s accounting for around half of total health spending in England (Evandrou, 2005b, p. 52). Yet, health service professionals have long been criticised for tending to patronise older people (Gourlay, 2008). There appears to be a scarcity of reliable information about health services and their impacts on older people. The Department of Health commissioned a literature review about potential age discrimination. Among other things, low priority was found to be given to services, such as chiropody, that impact greatly on older people's quality of life. Contradictory opinions exist about the impact of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence's (NICE) guidelines on older people's access to medical treatments (Centre for Policy on Ageing, 2010, pp. 55-56, 60-62). But this year, the Health Service Ombudsman for England published a report presenting sample accounts of complaints investigated about NHS Trusts and GP practices showing that:

> NHS provision is failing to respond to the needs of older people with care and compassion and to provide even the most basic standards of care.

She concluded that:

> The reasonable expectation that an older person or their family may have of dignified, pain-free end of life care, in clean surroundings in hospital, is not being fulfilled.
> (Abraham, A., *in* Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, 2011, p. 5)

Worryingly, she reports that "many older people experience" injustice and that she has "yet to see convincing evidence of the widespread shift in attitude towards older people across the NHS" required to fulfil the commitments in the NHS Constitution (*ibid*, p. 10). This is set in the context of an ageing population of 'health service users' and increasing life expectancy associated with "more years spent in ill health" with "multiple and complex issues, disabilities and long-term conditions", as well as end-of-life palliative care (*ibid,* p. 8).

Housing quality impacts on people's quality of life. 'Non-decent homes' are judged to fail minimum statutory standards for housing, require substantial repairs and essential modernisation, and, especially, 'fail thermal comfort'. The 2001 English House Survey estimated that around 34 percent of the over-50s lived in 'non-decent' homes, rising to 51 percent of owner occupiers aged 85 and over (Pandya *et al*, 2005, p. 25). Some older people choose to move into a 'warden-controlled property'. But recent "cuts in the warden service", especially loss of 'resident wardens', have reduced regular, social contact for single, older people with 'limited mobility'. It has also raised concerns about their increased 'vulnerability', because they might be unwilling or unable to "reach the pull cord" alarm, if they fall (Hill *et al*, 2009, p. 29).

Cuts in public funding for adult education stimulated a Women's Institute (WI) campaign seeking "fairer funding, choice and opportunities". They reported a marked

reduction in the number of over-60s in further education colleges between 2004-2005 and 2006-2007. Evidence was also presented of reduced choice and higher fees for courses in languages, keep fit, ICT, and “courses that rebuild confidence”. These cuts are plausibly argued to impact on “well-being and happiness”, maintenance of self-confidence, as well as ability to deal with technological change (National Federation of Women’s Institutes, 2011).

Walker and Maltby (1997) observed that in the UK during the late1970s and early 1980s, older people received “active encouragement of early exit” from the labour market (*ibid*, p. 75). Unemployed older people were less likely to “regain secure employment”. For many people, premature, enforced exit from the labour market means a marked reduction in pre-retirement incomes (*ibid*, p. 77). A government consultation started in 2004 received evidence of continuation of this problem and suggested that high proportions of older people believe that their employers discriminate against them. Moreover, age segregated workplaces exist, with possibly 10 percent of companies employing no-one aged over 50 (Social Inclusion Unit, 2005, p. 48). Legislation has been enacted against age discrimination in employment, but after that for race and gender. And age-based discrimination persists; as illustrated by the recent successful claim made against the BBC by a 53 year old female television presenter (Plunkett, 2011).

Generally, the media appears unwelcoming to older people. In 2003, Help the Aged’s research on television advertisements was reported to claim that 95 percent were “aimed at people under 35” and 35 percent included someone over 50.

Advertisements including older people "were generally found to be ageist or patronising" (Timms, 2003). In 2009, sizeable majorities of the over-50 participants of an opinion poll "believed there was a bias in favour of younger people in the media ... and that the needs and interests" of their age group "were ignored by programme makers" (Saga, 2010?).

Sir Menzies Campbell stood down as leader of Liberal Democrat party in October 2007, apparently as "a victim of ageism" (Campbell, M., interview in Geoghegan, 2010). This was associated with "age-related mockery" by the media because he was aged 65 at the time. Among the people using ageist stereotypes, the cartoonist, Steve Bell was singled out (Weaver, 2006). Perhaps surprisingly, his cartoons appear in *The Guardian*.

In the 2010 general election, Sir Menzies Campbell became, at 68, the oldest Liberal Democrat MP. The average age of MPs when elected in 2010 was 50; the oldest was aged 80 (Cracknell *et al*, 2011, p. 42-43). Around 68 percent of MPs elected in 2005, were aged 41 to 59 and 18 percent were aged over 60. Then,14 MPs were aged over 70; the highest number since 1979. In 1992, three MPs were aged over 70 (Cracknell, 2005, p. 2). To the extent that younger MPs are uninterested in or unaware of older people's concerns, then older people might have been inadequately represented in recent governments. A pre-election opinion poll of the over-50s, suggested a demand for "a representative age balance" of MPs entering Parliament, especially for MPs with greater experience of "business and life in general" (Saga, 2010?). Some evidence suggests that many older people believe that "politicians do

not listen to the views of older people when making decisions" (Help the Aged, 2007a, p. 40; also Postle *et al*, 2005, p. 180-181).

Therefore, there is objective evidence of plausible reasons for some older people to react and make age-related political demands. However, if older people do not believe that existing political channels can achieve their desired changes, then they could choose not to participate in their current political activities and/or seek to participate in other forms of political action.

In 2008, two government appointments could be interpreted as acceptance that something was wrong with its relationship with older people. First, Sir Michael Parkinson became a "dignity ambassador" for a "government campaign to encourage more respect for older people in care" (BBC News 2008a). His report in 2010 presents alarming evidence of ongoing deficiencies in some older people's services (Williams, 2010). Second, Dame Joan Bakewell became "a Voice of Older People" to act as an "independent and informed advocate" on older people's issues. She claimed to feel 'free to criticise the government'. Her role was said to include "raising the profile of age equality issues and encouraging public debate around age discrimination laws", "giving her views on key policy developments and to speak at government events". Another function was as "a role model for active and positive senior citizens" (Harriet Harman quoted in BBC News, 2008b). It is unclear what these people have achieved or changed; or if older people regard these as legitimate and desirable appointments.

Therefore, it is possible to identify examples of potential sources of concern for older people that are associated with health services, housing, education, work, the media, and politics. These concerns could increase the salience of age-related political action for some older people.

2.2.2: Factors undermining an 'older people's politics'

However, there are also some considerations that appear to reduce the salience of age-related political action for some older people. This section considers four possible factors: personal attitudes to ageing, relevance, diversity, and assumptions made by some older people.

Personal attitudes to age and ageing seem a major impediment to any political activity that involves acceptance of being 'old'. Three-quarters of respondents in the 2004 ELSA were reported to "not think of themselves as old" and the majority "feel younger than their actual age" (Demakakos *et al*, 2006, p. 343, 348). Similar observations were made of the over-55s in two Dutch cities, where:

> Numerous people make the transition in identity only when a decline in health forces them to do so. Therefore, self-categorization as an elderly person hardly stimulates political activism. Only if there is some level of commitment to the category does a link to activism develop. (Klandermans, 2002, p. 894)

Moreover, an old-age based politics might seem irrelevant to any older people with supportive interdependencies with people of different ages, especially with family members. Multigenerational families can provide opportunities for reciprocal support (emotional, financial, and providing informal care) across age groups (Hooyman and

Kiyak, 2011, p. 339-378). Importantly, different generations within a family become aware of each others' political concerns, sustaining intergenerational solidarity to protect everyone's well-being (Goerres and Tepe, 2010, p. 819).

Older people's heterogeneity in terms of socio-economic, political and psychological characteristics means that individuals will tend to have different experiences and understandings of life (Soule *et al*, 2005). This diversity seems likely to reduce the potential for large, stable political groups to form around old age-related issues.

Moreover, older people may make assumptions that deter old-age related political interest or action. For example, some people might assume or expect that the government and other public bodies will 'look after them'. And some people might believe that they have been treated fairly by public authorities, even if they have personally unsatisfactory experiences. Some people, for whatever reason, might have acquired low expectations of services for older people. Or people might not want to feel that they are being 'greedy' or 'selfish' in their requests, especially in a social environment that includes hostile and misleading 'intergenerational equity' arguments (Street and Cossman, 2006; Goerres, 2007b).

General beliefs about the existing political system could be important influences on promoting passivity. For example, if older people believe politicians are attempting to deal with a complex, technical problem, instead of interpreting events as political inertia. Or if older people believe that any requests or demands they make of politicians will receive a hostile reception or provoke action against them. Arguably,

the latter situation is nurtured by the neo-liberal agenda, where population ageing is defined as a 'burden' that is used to justify privatisation and a reduced role for the state (Estes *et al*, 2003, p. 123-144; Walker, 2006, p. 355).

Mismatched understandings of the welfare state could occur at times of rapid social change and vary across age groups. Qualitative interviews by Moffatt and Higgs (2007) plausibly suggested that low take-up of means-tested benefits by older people in England could partly reflect a "generational welfare 'habitus'" – the "particular social, economic and political circumstances" through which individuals have lived (*ibid*, p. 461). Many 'baby boomers' grew up in circumstances that tended to facilitate their ability to behave as 'citizen-consumers' in today's welfare state. But older old people can be 'unprepared' to act in this way, having grown up to experience and understand welfare in different ways. For instance, self-reliance could be promoted by their own or their parents' experience of "hard lives" before the creation of the welfare state. And among older old people, the persistence of "a high degree of stigma" associated with claiming benefits could reflect the recency of the notion of 'entitlement' (*ibid*, pp. 458, 460).

Therefore, at least four possible factors were identified that could undermine the salience of age-related politics for some older people in England. These factors are personal attitudes to ageing, relevance, diversity, and assumptions made by some older people.

2.2.3: Existence of an 'older people's politics'

Some older people might be dissatisfied with the current political system: the major political parties, politicians, and electoral system. Assuming they have not been 'turned off' political action or have decided to concentrate on other political interests, then some older people might choose to engage to some extent in what might be termed an 'older people's politics'. This is politics focused on political issues associated with older people. As a minimum, older people might support a political campaign concerning a personally, salient topic. A more committed person might join a political organisation run by or for older people, or even stand for election. But what evidence is there of the existence of 'an older people's politics' in England? And if it exists, what are its characteristics? First, attention is given to electoral politics: introducing older people's political parties and independent electoral candidates. Then, the focus turns to local and national organisations run by or for older people.

Hanley (2010) observed the emergence of 'pensioners' parties' as "a fringe phenomenon in the late 1980s and early 1990s" in Western Europe. And they have "remained a largely peripheral phenomenon". Ginn and Arber (1999, p. 162) noted that the Pensioners' Protection Party was formed in 1989, with around 3,000 members, but made little impact" in the 1992 general election. In the 2004 European election, the Pensioners' Party got 33,501 votes in the West Midlands and the Senior Citizens' Party got 42,861 votes in the South East. Both parties "performed poorly" in the 2005 general election. But as their candidates were standing against Labour and

Conservative party leaders, it seems likely that constituencies were chosen primarily for publicity reasons. Brice (2008) also noted that :

> independent candidates standing explicitly on platforms relating to pensioner issues began to make appearances in England at General Elections during the early 1990s but support has been very low at fewer than 500 votes per candidate.

However, few independent candidates have ever become MPs. In 1997, Martin Bell was the first independent candidate to become an MP since 1951 (Moss, 2010). Yet the Senior Citizens' Party urged more people to stand as independents to reach their target of 360 candidates in the 2010 general election. By standing as independents, it was hoped to broaden their appeal to "voters of all ages":

> In this crisis we must think of our country and not of ourselves and therefore all SCP candidates in this election will stand as Independents in cooperation with the Alliance for Democracy, which includes other small parties who have no chance of getting elected until we get a fair voting system.
>
> (Senior Citizens' Party, 2010)

But perhaps all of these observers are looking in the wrong place for signs of older people's political activism? As Walker (2006, p. 354) wrote:

> The truism that "all politics is local" applies particularly to older people and, if the new grass-roots politics of old age is to develop into effective gray power, then it is most likely to happen at the local level.

And the type of activity might include local pressure groups or even high-profile individual activists.

Local organisations run by and for older people can undertake political activity to varying extents. The uneven geographical coverage and activity of these groups makes them politically weak at a national level. However, many organisations have affiliated to the major national umbrella body, the National Pensioners Convention

(NPC). The NPC's trade union roots are reflected in the central role of Jack Jones (a retired trade union leader) in its creation in 1979, a structure "as a delegatory democracy so that the widest possible number of pensioners can have their views represented and discussed", and organisation of numerous lawful public demonstrations (National Pensioners Convention, 2011a,b, c). The NCP have an ongoing campaign for "three basic rights in retirement": focusing on pensions, health and social care, and warm homes (National Pensioners Convention, 2011d). Their frustration with the current political system is reflected in their Pensioners' Manifesto for the 2010 general election:

> Everyone wants our votes, but they are slow to act on the changes we want to see. Everyone says what a wonderful asset we are, yet we are described as a burden on society and everyone says we deserve dignity, but not everyone receives proper care.
>
> Much has been written about the 'grey vote' – but few politicians have sufficient understanding or commitment to addressing the really important issues that affect our older population.
>
> Sympathy and good wishes are no substitute for political will and the support for policies that would improve the lives of Britain's existing 11m pensioners, as well as future generations. (NPC, 2009a)

Their 'Pensioners Parliament' in 2009 included a discussion about the upcoming general election and their manifesto. Notes on this discussion revealed concerns, such as some MPs not turning up for lobbies and allegedly supportive MPs who claim that they are constrained by party whips. "There was overwhelming support for pensioner candidates for Parliamentary Elections" in an informal straw poll to test opinions about this idea (NPC, 2009b).

However, the NPC's political influence appears limited. Partly, this is because it makes a list of strong demands, some of which are unrealistic (Paul Routledge in NPC, 2009b). Their perceived unwillingness to engage in constructive dialogue might have reduced their potential communications with senior civil servants (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 348). And, if the NPC's strength is based on political pressure (NPC, 2009b), then the number of older people actively engaged with their work is crucial. However, there is vagueness about even the numbers of people nominally associated with the NPC through membership of affiliated organisations. In 2009, the NPC's website suggested they represented around 1.5 million members (NPC, 2009c). But this is the same number reported around 10 years earlier (Ginn and Arber, 1999, p. 161). Currently, membership size is unreported on its website, but it says:

> With more support the NPC will be able to continue to develop its organisation and strengthen its influence as the campaigning voice of both today's and tomorrow's pensioners. (NPC, 2011d)

These observations could suggest that "the only national campaign group ... run by pensioners for pensioners" (NPC, 2011e) has not attracted substantial support among England's growing pensioner population.

Even more tenuous implicit claims to represent older people come from charities for older people.[1] Two national charities, Age Concern and Help the Aged, can trace their origins to the 1940s. In April 2009, they "joined together to create a new charity dedicated to improving later life for everyone". The following year, the name Age UK was adopted. As well as fundraising and service provision, these organisations have

"awareness-raising initiatives" and publish reports (Age UK, 2011). In their first annual report, Age UK (2010) plausibly claims to be "leading public debate":

> Age UK is the most active voice for people in later life in national debates, in Westminster and in the media. (*ibid*, p. 26)

They describe their work with MPs, civil servants, policy advisers[2] and the media, for whom they are probably a convenient resource because of their role in service provision. Less clear is their depth of engagement with and understanding of older people. Older people's forums are presented as ways to "ensure that" older people's "voices are heard" (*ibid*, p. 30). Over the last ten years, they have "worked with and supported a variety of forums and older people's organisations". In the last year, 620 forums "involving over 10,000 people" were supported (*ibid*, p. 32). While this support is laudable, it cannot be taken to imply that strong communications were established, even with these older people. After all, forums are supposed to offer "an independent voice" and be "run by older people for older people" (*ibid*, p. 32). Moreover, if these forum members provide Age UK with a convenient resource for 'researching' specific issues, there is a risk of obtaining a distorted picture of older people and their political concerns.

Some evidence suggests that Age UK might be neither a reliable nor legitimate 'representative' of older people in England. For example, in 2008, Age Concern infuriated some older people by seeking the removal of 'outmoded' road signs warning of 'elderly people'. Critics perceived this as 'wasting their money and effort' on 'ridiculous' campaigns (Millward, 2008). Even more disastrous was Age Concern's failed attempt to establish a membership organisation (Heyday) targeting younger old people. They made generational assumptions:

> The Heyday generation is part of a 'quiet revolution' taking place in the UK. ... Through the 'Have Your Say' survey, Heyday will listen to what Boomers want out of work and modern retirement to help them reinvent retirement in the same way they invented the teenager in the sixties and seventies.
>
> (Alisa Ogilvie quoted in Age Concern, 2006)

Heyday launched in May 2006 with a target of 300,000 members. Heyday closed in 2009, after only around 45,000 people joined. As well as seeking "a wealthy customer base", the symbolic linkage with a large number of the over-50s could have strengthened Age Concern's political influence (Revill, 2007). It is unknown why people viewed as leisure-focused consumers, who emerged with a youth-oriented society, were imagined to want to join an organisation for older people focused on retirement-related issues.

Both Age Concern and Help the Aged attempted to influence politicians before the 2005 general election. The latter sponsored a face-to-face survey of the over-18s in Britain in February 2005, reporting the findings in an 'Election Special' edition of their magazine. Attention was drawn to estimates that around 28 percent of the over-55s had not decided who to vote for and that the issues reported most likely to help them decide were pensions, health care, and law and order (Help the Aged, 2005, p. 7-9). Age Concern sponsored mixed methods research with 45 to 69 year olds, using attitudinal segmentation to identify six groups of 'older voters'. These are the "next generation of older voters":

> The baby boomers supported Thatcher in 1979, Blair in 1997 and many of them seem undecided about which party to support at the next General Election. (Age Concern, 2004, p. 2)

While noting the diversity within their sample, four 'key issues' were identified: pensions, public services, crime, and care (*ibid*, p. 2). A recent claim is:

> Age UK is now recognised as one of the top three influencing charities in Westminster and had a profound impact on the election manifestos of all the political parties and the resulting Government.
>
> (Dianne Jeffrey in Age UK, 2010, p. 4)

Other national voluntary sector organisations, such as the Anchor Trust, and Counsel and Care[3], have engaged in consultations about public service developments. Additionally, there are charities based on illnesses or disorders that tend to be associated with older people, like the Alzheimer's Society and the Macular Disease Society. Although these specialist organisations may engage in political campaigns, they could be influenced by potentially powerful stakeholders, such as health professionals and pharmaceutical companies. Finally, the over-50s travel and services company, Saga, has engaged in some political activities, including production of a manifesto based on opinions of large numbers of the 'Saga Generation' in 2009 (Saga, 2010?).[4]

On balance, there is little evidence of widespread or growing active political engagement by older people with a wide range of 'older people's issues' and, especially, membership or support of older people's political organisations. But there could be greater political engagement by older people affected by certain issues that are disproportionately associated with their age group, especially for people with certain long-term age-related health problems. These topics were discussed in the research interviews and the findings are presented in Chapter Six.

2.3: Social care for older people as a political issue

Social care for older people in their own homes is introduced as both a growing practical and political problem in England. Logically, it should be highly salient for older people. But it seems to have attracted little political action or debate. Help the Aged (2007b) said they "want to engage the public in a vigorous discussion" because this could help 'energise' a debate, which could be "part of a process of getting a reform agenda started" (p. 1). They ask: 'What are we waiting for?' (*ibid,* p. 3). Possibly, they provide a partial answer: "there is no strong lobby for change from older people themselves" and with their unsatisfactory suggestion that it is only "care users" who 'need to be listened to' (*ibid,* p. 21). They assume that when the "new generation of serial consumers moves into the care service economy" there will be changes (*ibid,* p. 21). Thus, it seems that today's younger old people, as citizens, are believed unlikely to engage with this subject politically. But if they come to use social care services in their older age, it is assumed that their experience as consumers will translate into their adoption of effective 'citizen-consumer' roles. However, this could only comprise local-level negotiations. But as Help the Aged has correctly stated, a more substantial task was required – 'renegotiation of the 'deal' between individuals and state' (*ibid,* p. 1).

This section starts by looking at the nature of social care and social care services in England, especially services for older people in their own homes. Then, the politics underlying the spatial and temporal variations in home care services in England are

introduced. Finally, consideration is given to the possibility of political feedback effects from awareness or use of these social care services.

2.3.1: Social care services for older people: Home care

For this empirical research, it is important to have some understanding of the complex subject of social care provision for older people in England. Of particular interest is publicly financed 'home care' – services delivered to older people in their own homes. As these services receive public funding, there are political aspects to their provision.

Many older people find their ageing is accompanied by long-term illness that limits their ability to undertake everyday activities (Evandrou, 2005a, p. 42). The timing and characteristics of these long-term changes will vary among individuals. Some people may eventually require support "to live as independently, safely and fully as possible" in their own homes, which survey evidence suggests is where the majority of people want to live (Commission for Social Care Inspection, 2004, pp. 2, 6-7). The term 'social care' covers a wide range of activities, including informal unpaid care from family, friends and neighbours, as well as formal, usually paid for, services provided by public, private or voluntary sector organisations. Families provided most social care for people living at home in 2001-2002. Therefore, older people living alone were more likely to require formal assistance with 'self-care and domestic tasks' (Evandrou, 2005b).[5]

Access to publicly funded social care services is through local authority social services departments.[6] Social care provision has a long history in England, but modern public social care services date back to the 1940s. Emerging alongside the NHS in the welfare state, social care services differ in two practically and politically important ways. First, the NHS was originally "free at the point of use", whereas social service users always faced means-testing and the possibility of charges. Second, the NHS is perceived as "a service for all citizens", while social care is perceived as "more residual provision" (Means, 1986, cited by Wanless, 2006, p. 11). Initially, the emphasis was on residential care for older people. The 1990s saw a switch in emphasis towards 'community care' (Wanless, 2006, p.13). Since the 1950s, resources have been 'targeted' at people judged to be in greatest need. By the late 1990s, potential long-term problems were acknowledged, as increasing numbers of people with 'lower level needs' were excluded from services, but can reasonably be expected to eventually re-appear with more complex problems (*ibid*, p. 16). The available statistics are problematic.[7] Statistics for home help/home care in England show that between 1994 and 2004, the proportion of 'client households' receiving 'high intensity' services tended to increase and 'low intensity' services to decrease.[8] At the same time, overall 'contact hours of home care' tended to increase, but with an increasing share being provided by 'independent' organisations. 'Direct provision' by English local authorities accounted for about 81 percent of all contact hours in 1994 and 31 percent in 2004 (Evandrou, 2005b, pp. 58-59).

The nature of work undertaken by people working in domiciliary care is reflected in the aggregation of home care and home help statistics. As noted:

> Domiciliary eldercare comprises different forms of services, ranging from out-patient medical care for personal support to housekeeping work. The frontiers between these different pillars of care are not clear-cut. Housekeeping and day care, for instance, frequently embraces some body-related care acts.
>
> (Bode, 2007, p. 208)

Also, the range of support activities offered tends to vary among local authorities and over time. Apparently, an increasingly common problem is a mismatch between the help that older people tend to seek initially, and the help available through social services. For example, researchers found that the over-85s "experienced as most difficult ... odd jobs around the house, shopping, using public transport and dealing with finances" (Bowling *et al*, 1997, cited by Henwood and Hudson, 2008a, p. 22). Timely support with so-called 'low level' services "can have a major impact on ... quality of life" (Social Exclusion Unit, 2005, p. 59). But these services are difficult or impossible to access, unless the older person also requires, for example, 'personal care', such as help with washing, feeding and getting dressed (Henwood and Hudson, 2008a, pp. 94-95).[9]

Little attention has been given to how older people excluded from services were managing their everyday activities in their own homes. Some older people might be able and willing to buy their own support services, which may or may not prove satisfactory. But, as Wanless (2006b, p. xxv) observed, services were likely to be unaffordable for "a significant proportion of" the over-50s. Although some older people were 'resourceful' and created "a patchwork of support using a combination of friends, family and privately purchased services", these arrangements tended to exhibit "fragility" (Henwood and Hudson, 2008a, p. 9).

Therefore, the characteristics of social care provision in England have changed over time. And as numbers of older old people increase, it is tending to get more difficult for them to access publicly financed home care services.

2.3.2: Politics, and spatial and temporal variations in home care services

Because of the complexity of social care provision in England and the need to focus on overtly political aspects, this thesis focuses on the bureaucratic/professional mechanisms used to restrict access to publicly financed home care services. First, relevant aspects of formal access criteria for these services are introduced. Then, attention turns to the politics underlying spatial and temporal variations in services.

For this thesis, an important period in the history of these services concerns the introduction and implementation of the Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) criteria. Department of Health (2002) guidance informed councils with social services responsibilities (CSSRs) that this national "framework for determining eligibility for adult care" should be implemented by 7 April 2003. The framework comprises four bands of "potential eligibility": low, moderate, substantial, and critical (Appendix C). Each band "describes the seriousness of the risk to independence or other consequences if needs are not addressed" (*ibid*, pp. 4-5). CSSRs are responsible for deciding which bands will comprise their 'eligibility criteria' based on "local resources and circumstances" (Department of Health, 2003, p. 6). Social care support is requested for 'presenting needs', which are "explored and evaluated against risks to independence". It is these risks that are used to identify 'eligible needs'. Addressing

eligible risks should “ameliorate, contain or reduce” them. Therefore, offers of assistance may only cover aspects of an older person’s ‘personal care’ and ‘domestic routine’ difficulties (*ibid*, pp. 6-7,20).

As “additional resources [were] made available” to the CSSRs from April 2003, eligibility criteria “should not become any tougher” (*ibid*, p. 6). But the Department of Health (2003, p. 12) noted that:

> The effect of local decision-making means that FACS will not lead to a situation whereby similar decisions about eligibility are made for individuals with similar needs but living in different parts of the country. What FACS will do is to ensure that decisions about eligibility are made for the right reasons and in a way that takes full account of immediate and developing needs.

Marked geographical variations in access to social care services existed before FACS. As noted by the House of Commons Health Committee (2010), the current social care system leaves “a great deal of unmet need” and “varies geographically to an extent that is perceived as unfair” (p.105). Temporal and spatial variations in FACS criteria are indicated in articles in *The Guardian* (Table 2.1). The overall picture is one of increasing difficulty for older people to access social care.

Social care services are political on several levels (Henwood and Hudson, 2008a, p. 17; Burau and Kröger, 2004, pp. 807-808). Governments make decisions about welfare budgets and their allocation across local authorities (Henwood and Hudson, 2008a, p. 17). They also influenced trends towards privatisation of services (Bahle, 2008, p. 31). However, national guidelines were lacking and regulation of service quality is relatively recent (Burau and Kröger, 2004, p. 797). Successive governments have failed to resolve enduring service boundary problems between

Table 2.1: Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) in *The Guardian*, 2005-2010.

"In our first two terms in office, this government made great strides to modernise social care. A new framework of entitlements was set out in fair access to care, and in national service frameworks for older people and long-term conditions. We established the right structure of regulation and resources were doubled." (Byrne (care services minister, edited transcript of speech, November 2005)
"Councils are considering raising the eligibility criteria for older people's services in a bid to avoid unacceptable council tax rises in the next financial year ... Two-thirds of councils have already begun delivering services only to older people ... with "substantial" or "critical" needs. But many cash strapped councils are considering raising the bar so that only those with critical needs receive services." (Mulholland, January 2006)
"A new report this week warns that as the number of older people grows ... and costs increase, many local authorities are raising the qualification thresholds for "social care" ... "fewer people are receiving services and those that do qualify for care have a high level of need." [Commission for Social Care Inspection] ... "It means a postcode lottery for those who want to remain independent in their own homes but who need regular help ... Local councils blame the lack of central government funding." (Levene, January 2007)
"The [FACS] framework requires all councils to set out which needs they will meet in categories of low, moderate, substantial and critical levels. CSCI has found almost two-thirds of councils setting their entry point at "substantial" in 2006/07, and almost three-quarters expecting to be operating at this level in 2007/08. Some councils have gone further and now only recognise "critical" needs as their core responsibility. Councils develop and implement their [FACS] policies as a key mechanism for rationing and controlling demands on limited resources. ... The reality of priority setting and rationing unravels - usually privately and beneath public gaze - in people's real lives. We found [FACS] used too easily as a crude means of curbing demand, with potentially risky and miserable consequences for people needing support." (Henwood and Hudson, February 2008b)
"Funding for home care for the elderly is under intense pressure from town hall cutbacks, according to a report this week – with pensioners suffering a massive postcode lottery on home help and meals on wheels. ... Coverage varies enormously across the UK. The CQC report found that three councils in its survey had only enough cash to offer home care assistance to people rated "critical". It also found a few councils that had enough cash to provide home care to individuals assessed as low or moderate needs." (Collinson, February 2010)

Source: *The Guardian. Note:* CQC is the Care Quality Commission

CSSRs and the health service (Lewis, 2001). Although the House of Commons Health Committee (2010) concluded that there is "a compelling argument for thoroughly reforming the social care system" (*ibid,* p. 104), they present reasons for pessimism:[10]

> Achieving consensus on all these difficult and enduring issues requires calm, rational deliberation and an informed national debate. We would have liked to see all the political parties come together in that spirit to map out a programme of sustainable reform. Instead, regrettably, the Government is hastily drafting a White Paper while also rushing through Parliament a hurriedly concocted Bill that cuts across its own Green Paper, in a febrile atmosphere of unedifying pre-election party-political squabbling and point-scoring. (*ibid*, pt. 372, p. 103)
>
> ... Current and future generations will be betrayed if the failure to achieve consensus means that social care reform is once more left to languish near the bottom of Government's list of priorities in the next Parliament. (*ibid*, pt. 373, p. 103)

And the 2010 general election manifestos of the three main political parties (Table 2.2) are equally unpromising for urgent action to deal with a system that is currently believed to be 'failing' many older people (Hill, 2011).

Decision-making by CSSRs about the priority, and therefore funding, allocated to social care for older people have largely created the geographical variations in access and other service characteristics. Decisions are made by councillors. Some evidence exists of the role of politics in geographical variations in public services. For example between 1958 and 1968, Alt (1971) found that greater Labour representation in English and Welsh county boroughs was correlated with higher levels of spending on services like local health and education. In 1975 to 1982, a comparative case study of two Greater Manchester districts found "considerable local autonomy in the mediation of central government requests for spending cuts". Local political control was found to be a 'key factor', with the Labour controlled district

Table 2.2: Social care in the 2010 general election manifestos of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties.

Mention of social care in people's own homes in the 2010 general election manifestos of the		
Conservative Party	Labour Party	Liberal Democrat Party
"We reject Labour's plans for a compulsory 'death tax' on everyone to pay for social care regardless of their needs. We want to create a system which is based on choice and which rewards the hundreds of thousands of people who care for an elderly relative full-time. So we will allow anyone to protect their home from being sold to fund residential care costs by paying a one-off insurance premium that is entirely voluntary. Independent experts suggest this should cost around £8,000. We will support older people to live independently at home and have access to the personal care they need. We will work to design a system where people can top up their premium – also voluntarily – to cover the costs of receiving care in their own home." (p. 48)	"A new National Care Service to ensure free care in the home for those with the greatest care needs and a cap on the costs of residential care so that everyone's homes and savings are protected from care charges after two years in a care home." (p.11:3) "From 2011 we will protect more than 400,000 of those with the greatest need from all charges for care at home" (p. 6:5); "...after 2015, ... a comprehensive National Care Service, free at the point of use not just for older people, but for all adults with an eligible care need." (p. 6:6)	• "There is a further, serious, long-term crisis facing older people: the sustainability of the systems for providing long-term care. It is unacceptable that this challenge has been treated as a political football. A Liberal Democrat Government would immediately establish an independent commission to develop future proposals for long-term care that will attract all-party support and so be sustainable. We believe that the eventual solution must be based on the principles of fairness, affordability and sustainability."(p. 53) • "Integrate health and social care to create a seamless service, ending bureaucratic barriers and saving money to allow people to stay in their homes for longer rather than going into hospital or long-term residential care." • "Use the money for Labour's flawed Personal Care At Home Bill to provide guaranteed respite care for the one million carers who work the longest hours. We will establish an independent commission, with cross-party support, to develop proposals for long-term care of the elderly." (p. 41)

Sources: Conservative Party (2010), Labour Party (2010) and Liberal Democrat Party (2010).

"ideologically committed to the welfare state" and the Conservative district "highly receptive to privatization" (Duke and Edgell, 1986, p. 267). These differences were reflected in "pre-existing levels of service provision", which were lower in the Conservative controlled district (*ibid*, pp. 264, 266). Between 1984 and 1988, "party effects are significant" in English non-metropolitan districts, with Labour control associated with "additional spending of around £2.73 per head" and Conservative control with "an expenditure cut of 87 pence per capita" (Boyne, 1998, p. 219). Also in the 1980s, a study of local authority 'services for the elderly' in English nonmetropolitan counties, metropolitan boroughs and metropolitan districts reported:

> Despite the much touted authoritarianism of the Conservative government ... local parties still seem to act much as their ideological stances lead us to expect. Despite fiscal pressure, Labour councils continued to respond to service need, whereas, perhaps on account of this pressure, Conservative councils expanded services little, responded weakly where nongovernmental options were available, and reacted to needs primarily in the context of resource availability. (Hoggart and Smith, 1991, p. 1755)

Implementation of local authority policies by social services can also contribute to geographical variations in social care services for older people (Henwood and Hudson, 2008a, p. 17). Research into home care services for older people undertaken between 2001 and 2004 found:

> signs of a long-standing general culture among purchaser staff in either a customer-centred or a system-centred direction.
> (Patmore and McNulty, 2005, p. 28)

Two separate influences on the latter were identified as an emphasis on "curbing service costs" and a concern with "smooth or efficient running of the service" (*ibid*, p. 27). Some senior social service managers were observed to be "proactively and

energetically directing relevant policy" – in both directions. In customer-centred home care there is resistance to 'warehousing' older people in the community (*ibid*, p. 28).

Therefore, the available evidence suggests that the politics concerning social care services for older people in their own home is complex and dynamic. Older people do not appear to have played a major part in the ongoing political debate about these services. But it is possible that policy feedback might influence some older people's engagement with this debate.

2.3.3: Policy feedback

A growing literature has emerged based on research on the association between public policies and political participation. Some empirical evidence supports the idea that public policies can have consequences for political participation. This section starts by introducing some of the most relevant literature. Then, implications of policy feedback are considered for social care for older people as a political issue in England.

Pierson (1993) produced a useful book review. He attributes the idea that "new policies create a new politics" to Schattschneider in the 1930s. As the scope of public policy increased in 'advanced industrial democracies', interest in policy feedback increased. Pierson identified two feedback mechanisms which could affect 'mass publics'. First, "resource and incentive effects" in the form of 'lock-in' effects:

> the possibility that policies provide incentives that encourage individuals to act in ways that lock in a particular path of policy development. (*ibid*, p. 606)

This is based on North's (1990) argument that about developing technology.[11] Adopting new 'institutional arrangements' can lead to retention of 'suboptimal' collective behaviour (*ibid*, pp. 606-7). Second, "interpretive effects", where potential feedback is associated with policy effects' visibility (people ask about the cause of a 'discernible outcome' that they experience) and traceability (voters can "link that outcome to some governmental action") (*ibid*, p. 622). Arnold (1990)[12] is said to believe that to "generate a response from mass publics" both conditions are required:

> The critical point is that both visibility and traceability can vary independently of a policy's actual impact and that this variation may be a product of policy design. (*ibid*, p. 622)

'Policy learning' is suggested to affect government elites and interest groups, but not mass publics (*ibid*, p. 626). But this seems to be only a reflection of types of research undertaken at that time.

Of particular interest is Campbell's empirical research because she focused on older people's political behaviour in the USA. She presents strong evidence that:

> Social Security ... provides an important instance of self-interest significantly influencing participatory behaviour. It would not be an exaggeration to conclude that the program is largely responsible for the creation of the senior constituency and its electoral significance. (Campbell, 2002, p. 572)

Low-income, older people's dependence on Social Security provides resources that 'boosted' their political participation. Entitlement to Social Security is based on contributions made when working, so people tend to treat it as a political right.[13] Having a 'large stake' in Social Security, recipients tend to react against policy threats. Moreover, sources of mobilisation were identified, including a large national membership organisation (the AARP) and local "old-age social welfare clubs", that provide information and opportunities for discussions (*ibid*, p. 571-2).

Campbell (2003) produced some useful insights by plotting survey data about rates of contacting Congress in 1973 to 1994, when there were two policy threats. First, a threat to Social Security, which produced a 'contacting surge' among those with the largest stakes: retired people, especially women. Later, a new Act threatened mainly high-income older people, who were "quite vociferous" (*ibid*, pp. 38-40). Some low-income older people, who would have benefitted from this Act, also 'agitated against this law'. An AARP opinion poll suggested that many older people did not understand the Act (*ibid*, pp. 41-42). Campbell noted that:

> The mismatch between subjective and objective self-interest shows the tremendous potential interest groups and other elite actors have to frame issues and shape both perceptions and opinions. ... It also clearly demonstrates the need for a program's proponents to communicate clearly to the prospective clientele the nature of their new benefits. (*ibid,* p. 42)

Campbell also confirmed that "as people get closer to retirement", they become "more focused on age-related issues" (*ibid*, p. 38).[14]

Another US-based researcher engaged in policy-feedback research is Soss. Also focusing on welfare recipients, he adopted a 'political learning perspective' when comparing the experiences of recipients of a means-tested program and a social insurance program. He claimed:

> Policy designs structure clients' program experiences in ways that teach alternative lessons about the nature of government. Through their experiences under a given policy design, welfare clients develop program-specific beliefs about the wisdom and efficacy of asserting themselves. Because clients interpret their experiences with welfare bureaucracies as evidence of how government works more generally, beliefs about the welfare agency and client involvement become the basis for broader political orientations.
>
> (Soss, 1999, p. 363)

Soss provided evidence suggesting some experiences could help explain political quiescence.[15]

A comparative study of disability claims in the USA yielded further insights. Soss and Keiser (2006) examined the ability of 'state environments' (in terms of civil society organisations, state officials' political ideology, 'economic need' for programs, and the 'generosity' of state-run programs) to shape aggregate welfare demand (*ibid*, p.133). The processes involved appear complex, and vary across programs and stages of making a disability claim (*ibid*, p.143).

But not everyone is or has been a welfare claimant or recipient. A helpful general framework for analysing mass feedback processes concerning welfare reform was used by Soss and Schram (2007).[16] For each 'particular public', a policy is placed on two continua: visibility and proximity. Policy design can "maintain or disrupt the status quo of public quiescence". Policies may either 'reassure' or 'threaten' individuals, when they become visible or salient. And policies can be proximate to distant, based on geography, "patterning of social relations", or time. If a policy is proximate, then "it exists as a tangible presence affecting people's lives in immediate, concrete ways". If a policy is distant, then cues from other people will become important (*ibid*, p. 121).

Hetling and McDermott (2008) found evidence suggesting that the reasons behind individuals' judgements on the effectiveness of US welfare reform are important. If welfare reforms are deemed 'effective', this can contribute towards support for government policy. But if welfare reforms are deemed 'ineffective', then people might want public spending to either increase to 'assist' more people or decrease to reduce the number of people supported (*ibid*, pp. 471, 483).

Although all these examples are from the USA, there is no reason to assume that policy feedback effects do not occur in England. However, some differences must be taken into account, such as the absence of a large membership organisation like the AARP and the presence of the NHS.

Social care for older people in their own homes could be a source of political feedback in England. It seems likely that, at any point in time, people might relate very differently to this subject. But interviews about 65 to 84 year olds' views and experiences of social, health and economic resources in later life revealed uncertainty about health, which was associated with "attitudes of hoping for the best and facing problems if and when they arose" (Hill *et al*, 2007). This suggests some people might choose not to pay attention to political debates about social care.

Even if attempts were made to publicise the introduction of FACS in April 2003, this coincided with a period when national and local media were dominated with coverage about the Iraq war (BBC News, 2011). Thereafter, the nature of home-based personal social services means that they get infrequent media attention.[17] For example, an article appears each year in *The Guardian* reporting further deterioration in these services (Table 2.1). But arguably, this national newspaper can be expected to be read mainly by a minority of people, who already have some interest in these issues.[18] Overall, the evidence suggests that many people could have little or no media-derived awareness of FACS or these social care services.

In the absence of evidence, it can only be speculated that satisfactory social care services might prolong the period in which an older 'customer' could maintain interest and some involvement in politics. Older people providing some informal care might also benefit from reduced demands on their time and energy. However, active political participation could become impossible, if social care services are unsatisfactory for older customers and/or are provided only at a time of 'crisis' for them or their informal carers. The durability of any learning from these experiences is unknown, especially in a context of changing services. Negative experiences of social care services might have some subsequent political implications; for example, placing it on some individuals' lists of important political issues. But, older people able to afford to pay for social care services that they find satisfactory seem unlikely to pay much attention to publicly funded services they do not use.

Therefore, the subject of social care as a political issue for older people was introduced in the research interviews. Evidence was sought of political learning or policy feedback. The research findings are presented in Chapter Seven.

2.4: Conclusion

This chapter introduced the topic of an 'older people's politics'. Some evidence was presented for the existence of an older people's politics in terms of political parties, organisations campaigning on behalf of older people, and possibly increased political salience of some 'older people's issues' for some older people. However, it appears to have attracted little active support among older people in England. And there were

logical arguments for and against older people engaging in an ‘older people’s politics’. Therefore, key questions remain unanswered, including: Are older people in England interested or involved in any types of older people’s politics? What do older people in England think about political action by and for older people? What do older people in England think of the government appointed ‘champions’ for older people?

Also introduced in this chapter was the topic of social care as a potentially salient political issue for many older people in England. Arguably, the adequacy of social care could also impact on older people’s political participation. Evidence was presented of the complexity and dynamics of social care provision, especially publicly funded home care services. There are political aspects to these home care services, underlying their spatial and temporal variations. There appeared to be potential for political feedback associated with publicly funded home care services, but little evidence of this. Therefore, key questions to answer include: Do older people in England think that social care for older people in their own homes is a ‘political issue’? And: What factors might contribute to individuals’ reported levels of political engagement with or interest in the social care debate in England?

Questions raised in this review were dealt with in the research interviews. The findings are reported in Chapters Six and Seven. As will be seen, there are no straightforward answers to these questions. The next chapter describes this study’s research approach and conduct. In addition, background information is provided about the research locations and participants.

3

LEARNING FROM OLDER PEOPLE

3.1: Introduction

This exploratory empirical research project attempts to address deficiencies in the literature by learning from older people about their political understandings and experiences. This chapter explains the major research decisions and outlines how this research was conducted and reported. First, the choice of research approach is explained. Then, the process by which the research locations were identified is described. Some relevant characteristics of these research locations are presented. Next, attention is given to the recruitment of research participants and some of their characteristics. After describing how the research interviews were conducted, attention turns to data management, analysis and reporting. Overall, this chapter provides background information to assist with understanding and evaluating this research project and its findings.

First, as the research design is driven by the research questions, these are listed below. Evidence presented in Chapter One suggests that the main research question is:

- *What is the nature of older people's political understandings and experiences?*

This broad research question is approached by focusing on four key questions:

- *What political activities have individuals ever undertaken?*
- *What is the nature of individuals' political lives?*

- *Have there been any changes in an individual's political understandings and activities?*
- *How can continuity and change in an individuals' political understandings and behaviour be explained?*

Based on Chapter Two, another four key research questions are added to this list to approach the topics of an 'older people's politics' and social care as a political issue:

- *Is there evidence of the existence of an 'older people's politics'? And if there is, how can this 'older people's politics' be characterised?*
- *What are older people's opinions on and involvement with 'an older people's politics'?*
- *Do older people think that social care for older people in their own homes is a political issue?*
- *What factors might contribute to individuals' reported levels of political engagement with or interest in the social care debate?*

3.2: Choice of research approach

The first research design decision concerned selecting the most appropriate research approach to tackle the research questions. The major considerations are presented here.

The main statistical and survey-based resources were accessed and some were used in Chapters One, Two, Five and Six. While these resources permit estimates to be made of the prevalence of some self-reported opinions and characteristics in

England's over-50 population, they are inadequate for the task of exploring older people's political understandings and experiences.

A quantitative research approach was considered inappropriate for this exploratory research project. In particular, being considered too inflexible for data collection in the context of marked uncertainty about likely responses. Also, there are no relevant sampling frames for the over-50 populations of the geographical areas of interest. However, this research was designed to build on two existing surveys (Parry *et al*, 1992; and Pattie *et al*, 2004). Moreover, some survey questions were used (without providing any response options) to help research participants to talk about topics of interest. Sometimes, this practice revealed insights into different understandings of questions, which tend to remain hidden within survey-based research reports.

Qualitative research approaches were believed to offer an appropriate degree of flexibility for data collection. Group interviews were considered, but were felt likely to be problematic. For example, some people might feel uncomfortable about talking about politics and/or social care within a group. In research about social care, a preference for one-to-one interviews was reported among some older people (Resolution Foundation, 2008?, p. 14). And one-to-one interviews allow an attempt to be made to cover a range of topics with everyone within the expected minimum interview duration. Therefore, in-depth one-to-one interviews were selected as the most appropriate approach to try to answer research questions about older people's political understandings and experiences in general, and with regards to social care and 'an older people's' politics.

3.3: Selection and characteristics of research locations

As there were practical constraints on the number of interviews that could be conducted with the available resources, the next major research design decision was to select the research locations. After describing the reasons for selecting these research locations, some background information is provided about them.

England was chosen as the location for this research because it has an ageing population, a history of research on political participation and other relevant aspects of social life, local media, and marked geographical variations in social care services for older people. Councillors in local authorities with responsibility for social services (CSSRs) make the decisions about overall funding priorities and setting of eligibility criteria for social care (FACS).[1] Thus FACS thresholds are local political decisions that should reflect the local political context; especially concerning older residents as political actors and as existing and potential sources of demands on social services.

As it was believed that 'geography matters' for individuals' political lives (see section 1.6), it was important to select a few study locations. Investigation of statistical and documentary data about the 152 CSSRs in England, suggested that, for whatever reasons, three CSSRs were potential deviant cases in terms of their decisions about thresholds for FACS between 2007-2008 and 2005-2006 (data supplied by the Commission for Social Care Inspection). Each year during this period, these councils decided to maintain their FACS threshold at either the lowest level (Calderdale) or the highest level (Northumberland and West Berkshire). Formally, access to publicly

financed social care in their own homes was restricted to people in the 'critical' FACS eligibility band in Northumberland and West Berkshire. While in Calderdale, older people formally assessed as belonging to either the 'low', 'moderate', 'substantial' or 'critical' FACS eligibility bands should be able to access publicly financed social care in their homes. When these interviews were conducted in 2009-2010, these areas had maintained their FACS eligibility bands.

Preparation for recruiting the research participants and designing their interviews included going to each local authority area, visiting local libraries to look at local newspapers and local history resources, and interviewing people considered likely to be aware of relevant aspects of local politics and social care services.[2] These interviews were conducted between 23 September and 29 October 2009, with the final interview postponed to 23 December 2009. These interviews were with the council leaders of West Berkshire and Northumberland, the Liberal Democrat group leader in Calderdale council, the Portfolio holder in West Berkshire council, the Scrutiny chair in Northumberland council, and the senior officers of Age Concern branches covering Calderdale and West Berkshire. Ideally, a wider range of local politicians and representatives of organisations by and for older people would have been interviewed. But it proved difficult to make contact with some groups and individuals, and the timing of the interviews was problematic because of local party political activities in Calderdale[3] and the 2010 general elections. However, these interviews helped to identify socio-politically distinctive geographical locations within each local authority and provided useful insights into local politics and social care services.

Awareness of some relevant geographical, socio-economic and political characteristics of these three local authority areas is required to interpret this research. The following three sections present information collected from statistical sources[4], local authority websites, local media, and the research participants.[5]

3.3.1: Calderdale

Located in Yorkshire and Humberside, Calderdale covered around 192,405 hectares in 2001. Then, compared to Northumberland and West Berkshire, Calderdale was estimated to have the highest population density (5.29 people per hectare) and the highest proportion (83.3 percent) of its Census Area Statistics (CAS) wards classified as 'urban'. Yet outside the largest town (Halifax), much of Calderdale looks rural in character because of the Pennines. These hills influenced the physical development of settlements and impact on social interactions.

Historically, industry underpinned the development of the larger settlements in Calderdale. More recently, financial services become prominent in Halifax. This economic heritage is reflected, for example, in Calderdale residents' employment-related statistics. Compared to figures for England, median gross hourly pay (excluding overtime) of male full-time and female part-time workers were below the national figures in 2009 and people in employment in 2008-2009 tended to have generally lower-paid types of work. In February 2009, around 9,570 people aged over 60 were claiming Pension Credit because of their low incomes.

Life expectancy estimates at age 65 serve as indicators of variations in local authority populations' morbidity and mortality. Life expectancy, healthy life expectancy (HLE) and disability-free life expectancy (DFLE) at age 65 for both men and women in Calderdale in 2001 were all lower than the estimates for England as a whole.

In 2009, around 70,400 residents were estimated to be aged 50 and over; comprising about 45.1 percent of Calderdale's voting age population (VAP) compared to 43.5 percent in England's VAP. Older people's share of Calderdale's VAP was believed to have tended to increase from around 42.4 percent in 1997, largely through growing numbers of 50 to 74 year olds.

Calderdale has two Parliamentary constituencies. In 1997, 2001 and 2005, electoral turnout was higher in 'Calder Valley' but lower in 'Halifax' than the average for England. From 1997 to 2009, there were only Labour women MPs in Calderdale (Figure 3.1). However, relations between the Labour MPs and the national Labour Party appear sometimes strained. And in 2009, a former Labour MP resigned publicly from the party because of perceived 'betrayal' by the Labour government (Sutcliffe, 2009). Before the 2010 general election, Calder Valley was suggested to be "highly vulnerable and will probably fall with ease", while Halifax was on the "real front line between Labour and the Conservatives" (The Electoral Reform Society, 2010).

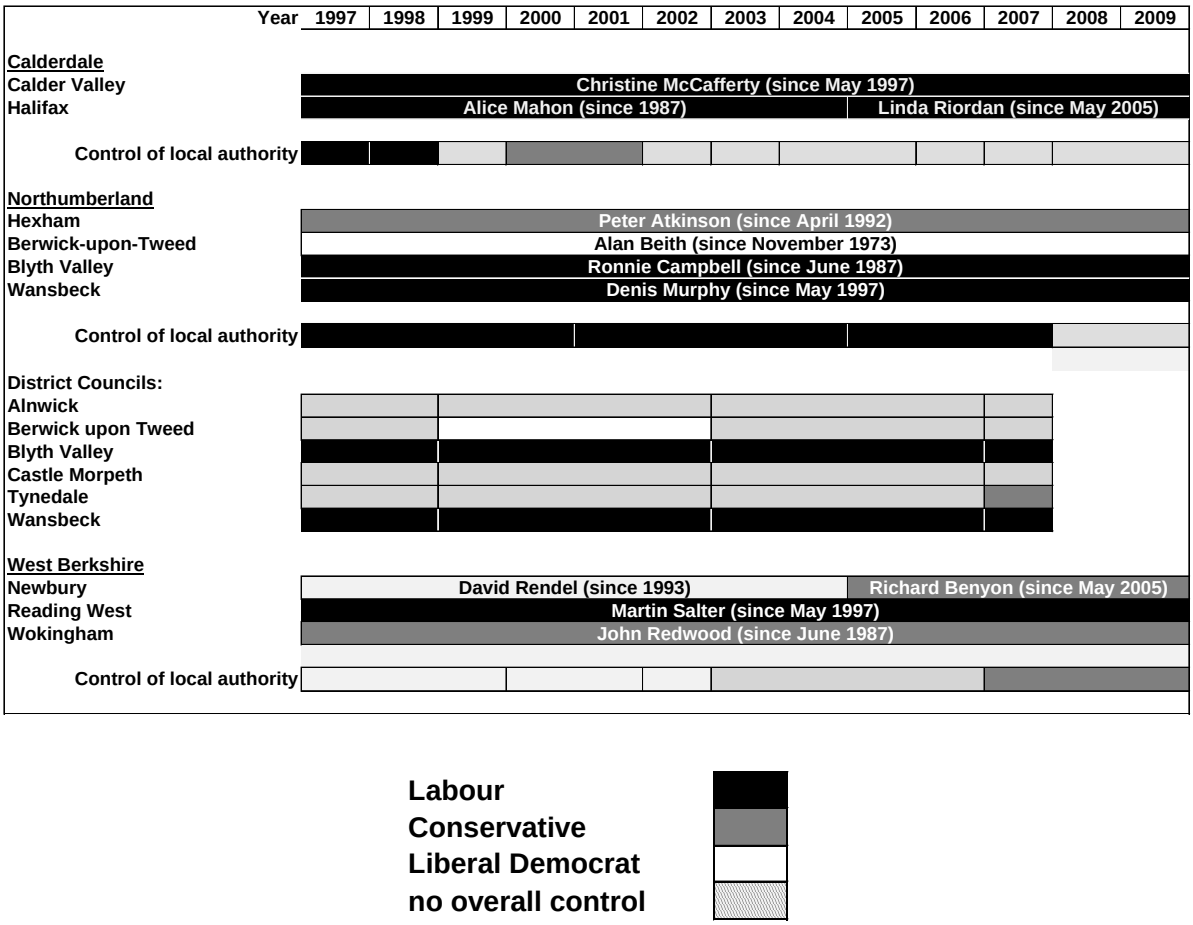
Between 1997 and 2009, political control of the local authority varied, including periods of control by either Labour or the Conservatives. But mainly the council had 'no overall control' (Figure 3.1). Before 2001, there was an marked decline in the

number of seats held by Labour, with increased representation of Liberal Democrats and especially Conservatives (Figure 3.2). Since 2003, minor parties, including the British National Party (BNP), and independents won seats in Calderdale council.

Within Calderdale, at least three settlements (Todmorden, Hebden Bridge and Halifax) appeared to be distinctive in potentially relevant ways for research into older people's political participation. House building, transport infrastructure development, and economic activity influence the diversity and size of local populations. Thus the textile industry in Halifax led to an inflow and concentration of people of Asian heritage. Recently, electoral fraud associated with this sub-population attracted media attention and formal investigation (e.g. Halifax Courier, 2010a; White and Coleman, 2011). Reported changes in the social composition of populations could have political implications. Thus, the conspicuous 'ecological turn' of Hebden Bridge might plausibly be associated with many of its incomers since the 1960s, including artists, writers and former Manchester and Leeds university students. Certain changes were associated with differences in income levels, as well as social backgrounds, between some incomers and long-established residents. In particular, with the emergence of 'commuter' areas. For example, since the early 1970s, Hebden Bridge experienced an inflow of many well-educated, and often well paid, people, who worked in Manchester and Leeds. Therefore:

> It's actually relatively expensive to live here. So it's become more middle class. There's no doubt about it. There's still a remnant of the old working class.
>
> (63 year old man, Calderdale*)

Figure 3.1: Members of Parliament (MPs) and political control of local councils and Northumberland district councils, 1997-2009.

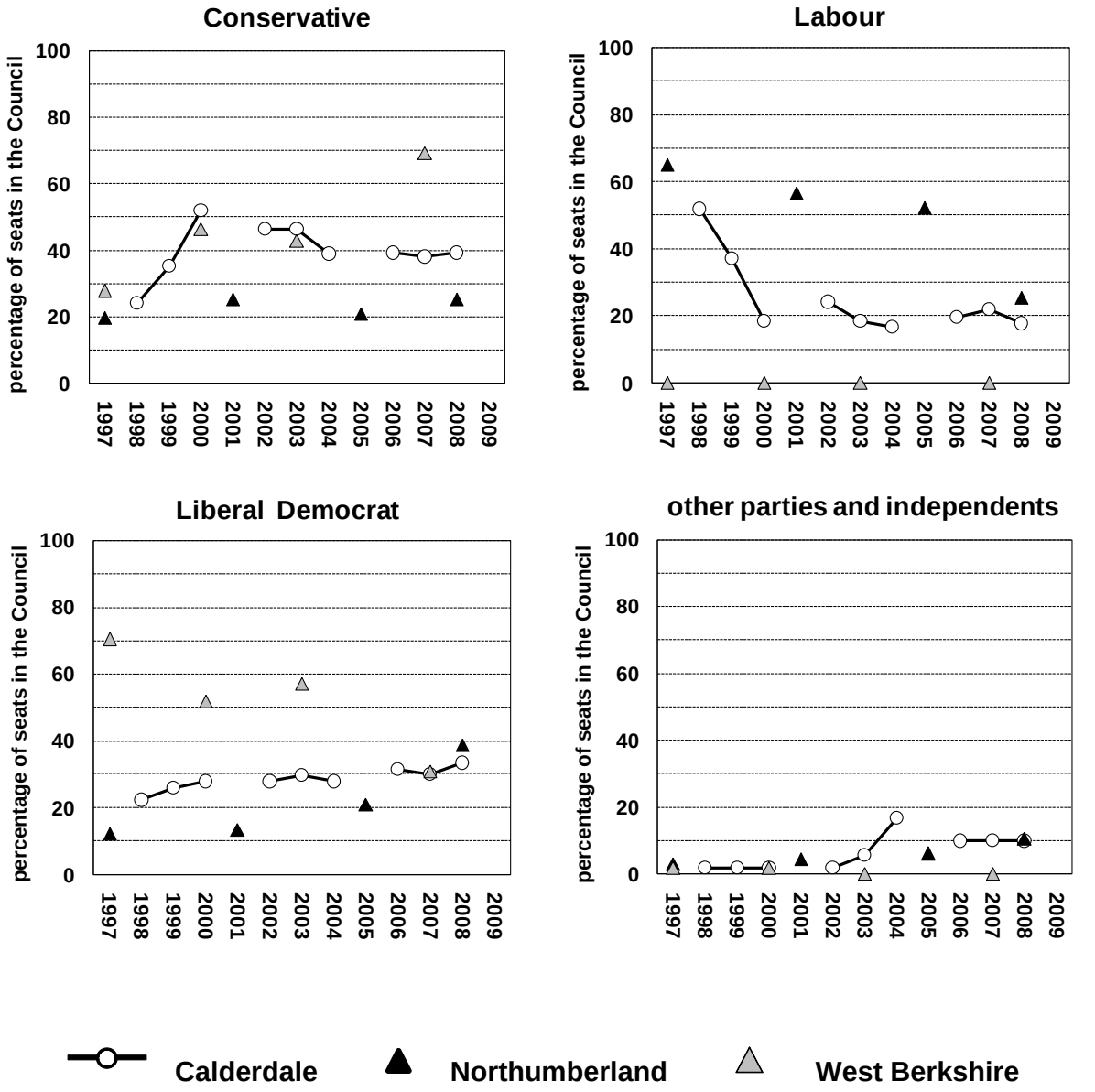


Sources: BBC website (local council election results), local council websites; Houses of Parliament website for biographies of MPs [http://biographies.parliament.uk].

Note:

- 'Northumberland' was a county council (with six district councils) until the creation of a Unitary Authority in 2008.
- Reading West and Wokingham constituencies mainly cover an area outside that of West Berkshire council.
- Linda Riordan (MP) is officially 'Labour-Co-operative'.
- Election intervals vary. Vertical lines represent the start of a year having either a general election with change of MP or a local election.

Figure 3.2: Percentages of council seats held by Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat or other councillors immediately after local elections in Calderdale, Northumberland and West Berkshire,1997 to 2009.



Sources: Rallings and Thrasher (2003a, pp. 75, 312-318, 430) for elections up to and including 2002. BBC local council elections websites for 2003 to 2008 elections. Local authority websites.

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Note: Percentages are used because the number of seats vary between councils and over time. All seats were up for each election in Northumberland and West Berkshire. One third of seats were up for each election in Calderdale.

This man observed a “sort of cultural change” associated with the ‘generally higher expectations’ of these affluent incomers, such as the establishment of an arts festival. But higher property prices attract property developers, therefore increasing the possibility of disputes over planning proposals. Also, these incomers can have different party political preferences. One woman, who lived in different parts of Calderdale since 1979, expected it to be “very socialist”:

> Because it’s – mill town working. – The co-operative movement was quite important in Hebden Bridge. ... But it isn’t the case. Because people have come up here from all over the country – and some are quite wealthy.
> (78 year old woman, Calderdale)

So her hopes of joining a lively local Labour party evaporated. Improved road networks, spread the impact of commuting to more rural locations in Calderdale. In one valley, the population was said to have changed from a “very close-knit” community, with most residents being related, to having a majority of residents believed to originate from Lancashire.

Lacking a major city might have some social implications. As one incomer commented:

> A lot of people. Especially, I noticed when I got here. Had lived in Halifax all their lives. And they hadn’t lived in a big city. And they hadn’t been away to college or anything. (56 year old woman, Calderdale)

While the many incomers to Hebden Bridge reportedly made it feel ‘quite metropolitan’. A 58 year old woman said “There’s still places in Yorkshire where you can walk into the pub and they’ll spot an accent that fit”.

Political events with marked local impacts mentioned by Calderdale-based research participants included the Don’t Bulldoze Our Library (DBOL) campaign focused on

Halifax and defence of a council-owned cinema in Hebden Bridge. Major local political issues and concerns in 2009-2010 were said to include environmentalism in the form of practical action such as Transition Towns in Hebden Bridge and Incredible Edibles in Todmorden; promoting countryside access and walking, such as Hebden Bridge Walkers Action; and building, including proposals for wind farms.[6]

3.3.2: Northumberland

Northumberland is located in North East England. In 2001, compared to Calderdale and West Berkshire, this local authority covered the largest area (around 307,190 hectares), had the lowest estimated population density (0.61 people per hectare) and the lowest proportion (40 percent) of its CAS wards classified as 'urban'. Only Northumberland had CAS wards (37.5 percent of the total) classified as being 'sparsely populated'. Sparsely populated areas present distinctive problems for organisations providing services, including social care in people's own homes. And Northumberland was the only research location with a coastline.

Until April 2008, Northumberland was a County Council working with six lower tier (district) councils. Potentially distinctive places for research into older people's political participation were the major settlements (Berwick-upon-Tweed, Alnwick, Hexham, Morpeth, Blyth, and Ashington) in these former local authority districts. Berwick-upon-Tweed is a border town – close enough to Scotland for many residents to be aware of national differences in older people's social care provision.[7] Alnwick is a small market town, where Alnwick Castle and gardens attract tourists. Morpeth is

the administrative centre for local government in the former county and current unitary authority. Hexham is a market town in Tynedale; an area benefiting from good road and rail connections to Carlisle in the west and the university city of Newcastle to the east. Blyth and Ashington are in the most densely populated part of Northumberland. Here:

> particularly Ashington area, has always had a long history of support of Labour and being politically active ... because of the mines. It was a large mining area until all the [*deep pit*] mines closed ... in the 80s.
>
> (60 year old woman, Northumberland)

Compared to England, higher proportions of Northumberland residents in employment in 2008-2009, worked in skilled trades but lower proportions were in professional occupations or managers and senior officials. Median gross hourly pay (excluding overtime) for full-time workers in 2009 was above the national figure for men but lower for women. In February 2009, around 15,770 people aged over 60 clamed Pension Credit – by far the largest number in these three local authorities.

However, aggregate employment- related data hide substantial variations among Northumberland's former district council areas. Life expectancy estimates at age 65 in 2001 reflect the different socio-economic contexts across Northumberland, being consistently lowest for people in Wansbeck (including Ashington) and highest for women in Berwick-upon-Tweed. For example, in 2001, district level estimates of DFLE at age 65 ranged from 6.9 to 9.8 years for women and 5.5 to 8.3 years for men compared to estimates for England of 9.1 years and 8.1 years respectively.

In 2009, around 131,200 residents were estimated to be aged 50 and over, comprising about 52.4 percent of Northumberland's VAP, a markedly higher

proportion than in England, Calderdale or West Berkshire. Northumberland's VAP is ageing faster than that of England. Since 1997, older people's share of Northumberland's VAP tended to increase for both 50 to 74 year olds (comprising 41.1 percent of VAP in 2009) and older old people. A contributory factor could be migration patterns of younger old people. Estimated net migration of 50 to 70 year olds within the UK in the year before the 2001 Census was positive for Northumberland but negative for Calderdale and West Berkshire.

Some social changes were reported by Northumberland-based research participants. One village was described as "very middle class":

> People are in the middle to upper income bracket. [It's become] very much a commuter village. ... Families move here for their kids' education.
> (63 year old woman, Northumberland)

Around 30 years ago, this village was said to have "a very active Labour party" and "quite active" Liberal Democrats. Now it is "Conservative with a large C". This change was plausibly suggested to reflect a persistent underlying 'inclination' associated with Shire counties combined with the changing political input associated with some incomers. This changing input was partly attributed to some incomers' temporary residence and to other incomers' expressed party political preferences changing with age:

> There were a lot of ... university lecturers. And teachers. And I think they – perhaps changed the political – face more towards – socialism. – But ... quite a few of them moved on. Or grown older and ... gone more towards the centre ground with Blair politics. So the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have become predominant again. (63 year old woman, Northumberland)

But parts of Northumberland appear less affected by these types of party political influences associated with population movement. For example, Ashington remained

a ‘Labour stronghold’, although one person speculated that some MPs’ behaviour might encourage some people to become ‘thinking voters’:

> There’s competition. ... I think, since last year, with all the expenses scandal and that, people are getting their eyes opened a bit. But. ... everybody [blithely] follow that pattern [that] their fathers and their grandfathers ... [how they voted] Everybody just carried on because they were that kind of class.
>
> (65 year old woman, Northumberland)

Northumberland has four Parliamentary constituencies. Electoral turnout in 1997, 2001 and 2005 was above the average for England in Berwick-upon-Tweed, and especially Hexham, fluctuating around the average in Wansbeck, and consistently markedly below the average in Blyth Valley. Since 1997, each of these constituencies has retained its MP – Labour MPs in Wansbeck and Blyth Valley, a Conservative in Hexham and a Liberal Democrat in Berwick-upon-Tweed (Figure 3.1). All Northumberland constituencies were suggested to be ‘safe seats’ for the parties holding them (The Electoral Reform Society, 2010).

Since 1997, Labour controlled the County Council; reflecting Labour control of the former Blyth Valley and Wansbeck district councils combined with the other district councils predominantly having no party in overall control. The new Northumberland unitary authority started with no party having overall control (Figure 3.1). Underlying changing political control in Northumberland as a whole appears to be a marked decrease in the number of seats held by Labour since 1997 and especially since 2005. Over this period, Liberal Democrats have taken a markedly increasing share of seats. Councillors outside the three major political parties, including independents, held seats in the former district councils, especially in Alnwick and to a lesser extent

in Berwick-upon-Tweed, and had a small but growing share of seats in the former county and new unitary councils (Figure 3.2).

Past political events with marked local impacts mentioned by Northumberland-based research participants included the 1984 Miners' Strike and marches organised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), such as the Druridge Bay Campaign. Major local political issues and concerns in 2009-2010 were said to include local government re-organisation (the new unitary authority) and decisions about the location of public facilities, such as a fire station in Prudhoe and a new hospital.

3.3.3: West Berkshire

Located in South England, West Berkshire covers around 144,483 hectares, with an estimated population density of around 2.05 people per hectare in 2001. Although none of the CAS wards were classified as 'sparsely' populated, half were classified as 'urban' and a third as 'village, hamlet and isolated dwelling'.

Statistical evidence suggests that West Berkshire has a relatively prosperous population. For example, residents' median gross hourly pay (excluding overtime) in 2009 was markedly above the national figures for full-time workers. In 2008-2009, around 22 percent of employed people were classified as 'managers and senior officials', while the proportions in low-paid employment were markedly below the national figures. Also, West Berkshire has a more highly educated population than Calderdale, Northumberland and England; reflected in higher proportions of West

Berkshire residents across all quinary age groups from 20 to 24 to 70 to 74 having the highest (Level 4 or 5) qualifications and lower proportions reported as having 'no qualifications' in the 2001 Census. However, even in West Berkshire around 3,860 people aged over 60 claimed Pension Credit in February 2009.

Reflecting the relative prosperity and lifestyles of West Berkshire's population, life expectancy estimates at age 65 in West Berkshire in 2001 were above those for England and Calderdale. However, women's life expectancy at age 65 was similar in West Berkshire and the former Northumberland district of Berwick-upon-Tweed.

In 2009, an estimated 51,800 people in West Berkshire were aged over 50, making up about 44.5 percent of the VAP, which is above the figure for England but lower than in Calderdale and Northumberland. Since 1997, most growth has been in 50 to 74 year olds' share of the VAP (around 35.6 percent in 2009 – similar to Calderdale). Throughout, lower proportions of the VAP were estimated to be aged over 75 in West Berkshire than in England, Calderdale and Northumberland. A contributory factor might be migration patterns among older people. Net migration in the UK was negative for 50 to 74 year olds in West Berkshire in the year before the 2001 Census.

Newbury (the main town in West Berkshire), Thatcham and Reading were identified as being potentially distinctive areas for researching older people's political participation. In Newbury, improved transport connections, especially road and rail links with London and Oxford, and creation of varied, often well-paid local employment appear to have contributed to a rejuvenation and expansion of the local

population. Research participants commented that Newbury changed from a small market town with few facilities to a better resourced settlement, albeit for a 78 year old woman, “now very much a dormitory development”.

Rapid population expansion through new housing estates could be problematic. An example was given of a “big new estate” that was:

> thought to be so bad. Because it was full of youngsters with ... no idea of how to manage houses or their children or anything.
>
> (82 year old woman, West Berkshire*)

People did not ‘”mix very easily”; a situation possibly intensified by more affluent neighbours not sending their children to the local school and by the location of a community centre within that estate.

One Parliamentary constituency (‘Newbury’) exists within West Berkshire’s boundaries, while ‘Wokingham’ and ‘Reading West’ extend mainly outside this local authority area. In 1997, 2001 and 2005, electoral turnout was consistently below that for England as a whole in Reading West, but higher in Wokingham and especially in Newbury. Between 1997 and 2009, Reading West had one Labour MP and Wokingham had one Conservative MP. However, in Newbury, a Liberal Democrat MP was replaced by a Conservative MP in 2005 (Figure 3.1). Newbury was judged to be a ‘marginal seat’ in competition between Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats in the 2010 general election, Wokingham was a ‘safe seat’ for the Conservatives, and Reading West was on the “real front line between Labour and the Conservatives” (Electoral Reform Society, 2010).

Between 1997 and 2009 in West Berkshire council, there was also a swing from Liberal Democrat to Conservative control (Figures 3.1 and 3.2). Noteworthy is the absence of Labour representation in West Berkshire council. Both the 2003 and 2007 local elections resulted in council seats being shared exclusively by Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

Political events with marked local impacts mentioned by West Berkshire based research participants include the Newbury by-pass protests, the Greenham Common women's peace protest, and CND's Aldermaston marches. None of these examples is recent. All these events were largely controlled by and consisted of non-residents. Like Calderdale, major local political issues and concerns in 2009-2010 were said to include countryside pursuits and new buildings. However, in West Berkshire the former concerned hunting- and fishing-related disputes instead of walking-related action, and the latter included large scale development of new houses.

Therefore, the three research locations – Calderdale, Northumberland and West Berkshire – have some similarities and differences in their socio-political characteristics. Although lacking major urban areas, they include diverse residential locations. Importantly, these local authorities were selected using criteria relevant for this research project.

3.4: Recruitment of research participants

This section describes how the research participants were recruited. Reasons are given for this recruitment process.

Having identified politically relevant spatial variations within each local authority area, it was considered important to take this into account when recruiting research participants. The absence of personal local connections and a sampling frame for the over-50s living in each area, combined with limited time and financial resources, suggested that the most appropriate approach would be to try to contact potential research participants through organisations.

Recruitment of research participants took place in three waves. Starting in November 2009, recruitment focused on charity shops because it had been suggested[8] that a high proportion of their volunteers might be older people. Lists of charity shops were obtained using YELL.com. Initially, selected charity shops in each local authority were contacted in person to invite any volunteers aged over 50 to participate. These visits generated useful comments from volunteers and staff; for example, enabling me to change the message from 'seeking volunteers' to a more accurate 'wanting to learn from older people'. Some mismatches were observed between managers' and volunteers' perceptions that some people would be interested in participating, for example because they talked a lot about politics, and these people's expressed interest in participating in research interviews about political participation. Practical problems were encountered; including flooding in the Calder valley and the time

required to visit geographically dispersed shops using public transport. Subsequently, recruitment material (poster, information sheet and contact arrangements) was posted to charity shop managers. Of the 56 charity shops contacted,18 were in Calderdale, 28 in Northumberland and 10 in West Berkshire.[9]

Communications problems combined with recruitment of only three research participants (Table 3.1) led to further waves of recruitment using modified recruitment material distributed mainly by email.[10] Potential contact points with people aged over 50 were considered to be the Women's Institute (WI), local University of the Third Age (U3A) branches, local history groups, and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). These organisations had websites providing information about their activities and contact details.

WI members could have a distinctive perspective on politics, including women aged over 75 and rural residents. In December 2009, advice was sought about contacting WI members in Berkshire, West Yorkshire and Northumberland. Only one research participant was known to have been recruited through this approach. A contributory factor might have been severe weather in January and February 2010, when it had been hoped to arrange interviews.

In January 2010, contact was made with the WEA's offices for the Yorkshire and Humberside, Southern and North East regions. As the WEA provides varied courses, including local history and politics, and has programmes encouraging political

Table 3.1: Research Participants' place of residence (local authority) and age at time of interview, their sex, recruitment approach, interview date, and if they belonged to one of the four couples who were both interviewed separately.

ID	Local authority	Age (years)	Sex	Couple	Recruitment approach	Interview date
C90M	Calderdale	90	Male	No	U3A	16/02/10
W82F	West Berkshire	82	Female	No	U3A	27/04/10
W82F*	West Berkshire	82	Female	No	U3A	29/04/10
C80F	Calderdale	80	Female	No	U3A	22/02/10
W80F	West Berkshire	80	Female	No	U3A	27/04/10
C79M	Calderdale	79	Male	No	U3A	02/02/10
C78F	Calderdale	78	Female	No	U3A	17/02/10
W78M	West Berkshire	78	Male	Yes (a)	U3A	26/04/10
W78F	West Berkshire	78	Female	No	U3A	29/04/10
W78F*	West Berkshire	78	Female	No	U3A	30/04/10
W76F	West Berkshire	76	Female	Yes (a)	U3A	26/04/10
C75F	Calderdale	75	Female	No	History group	05/03/10
W75M	West Berkshire	75	Male	No	U3A	30/04/10
N73M	Northumberland	73	Male	No	Charity shop	14/01/10
C72F	Calderdale	72	Female	No	History group	24/03/10
N71F	Northumberland	71	Female	No	Unknown**	09/03/10
C68M	Calderdale	68	Male	No	U3A	29/03/10
C67F	Calderdale	67	Female	Yes (b)	History group	04/05/10
C67M	Calderdale	67	Male	Yes (b)	History group	04/05/10
C66F	Calderdale	66	Female	No	U3A	19/02/10
N66F	Northumberland	66	Female	No	Charity shop	18/12/09
N66F*	Northumberland	66	Female	No	U3A	25/02/10
C65F	Calderdale	65	Female	No	U3A	01/02/10
N65F	Northumberland	65	Female	No	U3A	10/03/10
N64F	Northumberland	64	Female	No	U3A	19/03/10
C63F	Calderdale	63	Female	No	History group	12/02/10
C63M	Calderdale	63	Male	No	History group	01/03/10
C63M*	Calderdale	63	Male	No	History group	23/03/10
N63F	Northumberland	63	Female	No	U3A	16/03/10
N63F*	Northumberland	63	Female	No	U3A	18/03/10
C61M	Calderdale	61	Male	Yes (c)	History group	17/02/10
W61F	West Berkshire	61	Female	No	U3A	28/04/10
C60M	Calderdale	60	Male	No	History group	26/03/10
C60M*	Calderdale	60	Male	No	History group	31/03/10
N 60F	Northumberland	60	Female	No	U3A	28/01/10
C59F	Calderdale	59	Female	No	History group	22/02/10
N59F	Northumberland	59	Female	No	Charity shop	24/02/10
C58F	Calderdale	58	Female	Yes (c)	History group	17/02/10
C58M	Calderdale	58	Male	Yes (d)	History group	30/03/10
C56F	Calderdale	56	Female	Yes (d)	History group	30/03/10
W51F	West Berkshire	51	Female	No	Women's Institute	05/02/10

Notes : Research participants are listed in approximate order of chronological age at time of interview. ID: code identifies each research participant. The * indicates that a second person was interviewed, who had the same basic ID code as another research participant. 'Unknown**' recruitment approach: a neighbour had received the project information through an unknown source. U3A is University of the Third Age. Couples identified as 'a', 'b', 'c' and 'd'. All interviews were conducted separately with each research participant. Interview dates are given in day/month/year format.

activity, this could be a way to reach diverse older people. However, this approach was not known to have directly recruited research participants.

U3As are self-organising educational groups for older people, who should therefore be open to learning. Some local sub-groups focused on current affairs or politics. In January 2010, I emailed the contact people for U3As in Calderdale (Todmorden), Northumberland (Ashington, Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed, mid-Northumberland, and Prudhoe and district) and West Berkshire (Newbury, Thatcham and Reading). This approach was known to have led to the recruitment of over half (22) of the research participants, including 17 of the 24 research participants aged over 65 and everyone aged 76 and above (Table 3.1). All but the youngest research participant in West Berkshire was recruited through the voluntary activity of one U3A member.

While conducting background research in these three local authority areas, I became aware of numerous active local history groups. People engaged with local history seemed likely to take a critical interest in their localities. Some people might also be engaged in oral history projects involving older old residents. In January 2010, I contacted three groups in Calderdale (Halifax Antiquarian Society, Hebden Bridge Local History Society and Greater Elland Historical Society). Soon, I had recruited 14 research participants, including 10 of the 17 people aged under 65 (Table 3.1). By this time, I had to cease recruitment to start conducting the research interviews.

Timing seems likely to have played a role in making this research project seem appealing to members of local history groups in Calderdale, where, as will be seen,

they had recently been engaged in a political campaign. Whereas feedback from the Berwick-upon-Tweed U3A suggested that this border locality has been the subject of much research and local residents were getting weary of research requests. However, recruitment through learning-related organisations, especially U3A branches and local history groups, appears to be a particularly effective way to make contact with older people interested in participating in research interviews.

3.5 Research participants

To facilitate evaluation of this research project and to assist interpretation of the research findings, it is necessary to consider some potentially relevant characteristics of the research participants. Although the 41 research participants are unlikely to be representative of all over-50s living in England, this was not required for this exploratory project. The overall aim of this project is to obtain insights into older people's political understandings and experiences. It was correctly anticipated that these research participants would tend to be comfortable about expressing their political views and experiences. Over half the research participants reported experience of membership of political parties, which suggests that politics might be perceived as important in their lives. However, research participants have a wide range of political views and experiences; for example, in terms of party and electoral politics (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Research participants' party membership and electoral politics.

	Number of research participants living in Calderdale (N = 21)	Northumberland (N = 10)	West Berkshire (N = 10)
Have ever been a member of a political party:	11	4	7
Labour	5	4	3
Conservative	1	0	3
Liberal Democrat	3	0	1
Green	2	0	0
At the time of their interviews, they said that they:			
were a member of a political party	3	0	4
have no sympathy with any political party	7	8	1
have 'no vote' (i.e. they cannot vote for their preferred political party or political goals)	3	0	3

Note: 'N' is the total number of research participants living in the local authority area. Membership of named political parties includes related youth parties. If people belonged to more than one political party, they were classified by longest duration of membership.

Two criteria were used to identify eligible research participants: that they were aged over 50 at the time of the interview and that they lived in Calderdale, Northumberland or West Berkshire. Research participants were aged 51 to 90 years (mean 68.3 years; median 66 years). Research participants tended to be younger in Calderdale and Northumberland than in West Berkshire, with median ages of 65, 64.5 and 78 years respectively. Ideally, research participants in each area would come from across the full age range. Overall, there were 28 women (aged 51 to 82; mean 68; median 66) and 13 men (aged 58 to 90; mean 68.8; median 67). The gender balance varied across research locations, with fewer men in Northumberland (one) and West Berkshire (two) than in Calderdale (ten). Moreover, research participants were not

found in all potentially distinctive geographical areas. However, conducting 41 interviews and the subsequent data analysis proved only just about manageable in the time available.

No systematic attempt was made to characterise the research participants in terms of their socio-economic status or ethnicity. However, some evidence of their diversity emerged during the interviews. As might be expected from the local demographics[11], all the research participants were 'White'. The majority of research participants could probably be described as being 'middle class'. Some research participants enjoyed upward social mobility during their lifetimes. A few adult lives were shaped by low-paid employment and/or periods of unemployment and redundancy. Self-employment featured in some people's later working lives: allowing some people to choose to retire before state pension age, while providing additional income and stimulation for others aged up to 79. Overall, 31 people could be described as 'retired'. Some people enjoyed a 'comfortable' retirement, while others experienced financial constraints. Of people below state pension age, only one was in full-time employment, while disability prevented another person from working. While all research participants' exhibited a lively interest in diverse topics, their formal education ranged from completion of secondary education to studying for research degrees. Ten research participants (aged 58 to 80 years) mentioned that they are or were 'mature students' in higher education. Most people mentioned using the internet or computers, including a few novices and people with advanced computing knowledge. People lived in both 'urban' and 'rural' settings. Importantly, most research participants have been geographically mobile (Table 3.3), indicating the

Table 3.3: Research participants' geographical mobility.

	Number of research participants living in		
	Calderdale (N = 21)	Northumberland (N = 10)	West Berkshire (N = 10)
Known to have lived in this local authority area for:			
Less than five years	1	2	0
More than 25 years	13	6	7
Could be described as:			
'Incomer'	15	4	9
'Returnee'	1	5	1
Known to have lived:			
In more than one location in this local authority area	5	6	0
In London	9	2	8
In Europe	3	0	0
Outside Europe	1	1	0

Note: 'N' is the total number of research participants living in the local authority area. 'More than one location' refers to living in different settlements in the local authority area, not to moves within a settlement. As this table is based on information volunteered during interviews it could under-estimate numbers of research participants in each category.

complexity of research into potential relationships between geographical place and political lives.

Therefore, this research approach produced interviews with 41 people exhibiting sufficient diversity in their social and political lives for this exploratory research project into older people's political understandings and experiences. Moreover, as the research participants are articulate and reflective, they could participate effectively as co-producers of insights into their political experiences and understandings during their interviews.

3.6: The interviews

Data were collected through in-depth interviews. The characteristics of these interviews will impact on the quality of the research findings. Therefore, this section describes and comments on how these interviews were arranged and conducted.

Interviews with 41 older people were conducted between 18 December 2009 and 4 May 2010, coinciding with the run-up to the 2010 general election on 7th May 2010. Therefore, research participants' differential exposure to electoral information has to be taken into account. Any additional interviews would have taken place after the election, which resulted in a coalition government and would have unnecessarily complicated interviewing and data analysis.[12] Ideally, interviews would have been conducted within a shorter period of time. But it took longer than anticipated to contact potential research participants and arrange interviews, combined with other factors, especially transport disruption associated with heavy snowfall.

Prior to interview, there was an exchange of project and personal information with the research participants. I sent potential participants a letter, an information sheet, a copy of the recruitment 'poster', and a 'checklist' (Appendices E to H). I provided some information about myself because I believed that some people could feel uncomfortable talking to a stranger and be wary of possible biases in this research project. As I have no involvement in party politics or political activism, but am interested in understanding these activities, I was open to learning from people with any level or no involvement in diverse political activities. A few people took up my

invitation to ask questions before their interviews were arranged. Research participants were also asked to complete a 'checklist', which helped them to check their eligibility and provided information to follow up in the interview. Immediately before the recorded interviews, all research participants engaged in some informal conversation lasting from around ten minutes to just over an hour. Care was taken to minimise talk about topics to be covered in the interviews. Generally, these conversations appeared to be undertaken to help to establish a 'working relationship' for the interviews.

Interview locations were chosen by research participants. In six cases, we had to relocate from the chosen public venues, usually because they were too noisy, and move to either another public venue or the research participant's home. Most (25) interviews were conducted in research participants' homes, while eight were conducted in cafés, seven in 'offices', and one mainly outside in a public park.[13] There were often fluctuating levels of background noise in public venues, mainly from customers and staff talking. Within 'offices' there could be occasional interruptions, typically from telephones. Even in individuals' homes, there could be occasional interruptions, especially if pet animals were present, as well as some background noise, such as antique clocks chiming.

Research participants included four couples (Table 3.1), with husbands and wives interviewed separately. Before each one-to-one interview, I talked with research participants about the interviews. With their permission, interviews were digitally recorded. Recorded interview durations ranged from 50 minutes to 2 hours 33

minutes, with a mean of around 1 hour and 25 minutes. Four interview recordings lasted over two hours, and six lasted less than an hour. Some research participants requested breaks in recording, which were typically used to take refreshments. One research participant took several breaks to collect her thoughts about her responses to some questions.

Interviews were semi-structured. An interview guide (Appendix I) was used to facilitate discussion of all topics while permitting some flexibility in the ordering of questions and topics. All research participants were invited to talk about their experiences and understandings of major types of political activity (voting, party membership, contacting activities, individual and collective mode activities). Their understandings and experiences of key organisations (trade unions, the NPC, new social movements, organisations by and for older people, and voluntary organisations) were also explored. Focusing on issues related to perceived political influence helped to develop research participants' comments. I raised the issue of social care for older people for the first time at the interviews. Then, research participants were invited to talk about the political issues that were most important to them.

Initially, connections were made to previous research by talking about 'senior-friendly societies'. Goerres (2009) used this term when attempting to "capture public opinion concerning old age" using World Values Survey data that suggested that Britain is not a senior-friendly society (*ibid*, pp. 48-50). Further connections were made by asking some survey questions (without response options) from the 1992

Eurobarometer survey of older people (aged 60 and over); six popular survey questions about voting, political parties and political influence of the type used by Pattie *et al* (2004); and two questions from government surveys (Best Value and Place surveys).[14] Kriesi's (1993) ideas about levels of mobilisation by political parties, trade unions and new social movements informed the development of three diagrams used to help explore this topic (Appendix J). These diagrams also provided research participants with another opportunity to recall relevant experiences and their understandings. In particular, the term 'new social movements' was unfamiliar to most people, including people with long-standing active membership of some organisations listed in these diagrams. Therefore, this exercise elicited insights into research participants' opinions on diverse organisations.

Compatible with observations made by Barnes (2005), a few people liked to communicate their experiences through 'story telling'. This could provide very rich data, but could limit time to explore the full range of topics. It also provided a challenge for my listening skills.[15] First, I had to identify relevant subject matter in these 'stories'. Later in the interview, my questions had to demonstrate awareness of the extent to which topics were covered in these stories.

If appropriate, clarification of research participants' meanings were sought during interviews. Occasionally, statements were challenged, for example if they appeared inconsistent (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009, pp. 166-167). My overall approach was to try to intrude as little as possible into the recorded interviews and attempt to 'steer' research participants through the research topics, encouraging them to express their

opinions and recount memories of their politically relevant experiences in their own terms.

The interviews were designed to allow research participants opportunities to reflect on their experiences and understandings. Key topics were touched upon on more than one occasion, in particular through use of the diagrams and research participants' completed checklists. This approach was particularly helpful when talking about involvement with organisations and NSMs. While a few highly politically engaged research participants were familiar with the term NSMs, this was just jargon to most people, even if they had been members or supported one or more organisations listed on the diagrams.

During their interviews, research participants were encouraged to ask questions and make comments. Some people made insightful criticisms about the diagrams and the wording of several survey questions. In particular, criticisms were made about the usefulness of survey questions that were perceived as over-generalisations about groups of people, such as MPs, or misrepresentations of political activities. And one man found it incomprehensible that the description with the NSM diagram put together organisations that he could respect, like Amnesty International, with an organisation that he did not respect, Greenpeace. He became angry talking about the potential of such questions to produce "a totally meaningless answer" and said that he would not answer the question about involvement with NSMs. The strength of his reaction was greater than the other research participants, but these people's feedback raise doubts about the usefulness of some survey questions to provide

meaningful insights into people's political understandings and experiences. Furthermore, it is possible that some politically engaged, if not always politically active, people might decline to participate in or abandon surveys comprised of many such questions, especially if they have sets of closed answers.

There were minor problems associated with some research participants' hearing and visual impairments. When research participants mentioned their hearing impairments, I tried to speak clearly and, if requested, repeated my questions or statements. Hearing impairments appeared to be a reason why some research participants preferred to be interviewed in their own homes instead of a potentially noisy public venue. Many research participants required spectacles to see the diagrams and one person required special visual aids. In future research involving visual elicitation, it would seem appropriate to notify research participants in advance to permit discussion of the most appropriate materials for use with all research participants. However, the simple design of the visual material used in this research project proved accessible to all the research participants and elicited insightful comments about the dynamics of their political understandings and experiences.

As this research explored research participants' politically relevant experiences, the interviews were mainly retrospective in character. Unlike many surveys on political participation (e.g. Parry *et al*, 1992, p. 43, and Pattie *et al*, 2004, p. 292, 294, 297), it was not assumed that individuals' could accurately recall details, including dates, of all their previous activities. However, it seemed reasonable to assume that people would remember events and experiences that were important to them in some way.

Also, these interviews could reveal activities that were undertaken with limited intellectual or emotional engagement. Some research participants said that they were surprised that they had been able to talk about a subject – political participation – that they gave little thought to. Their participation was probably facilitated by allowing them to talk about activities that they had undertaken and how they fitted into their lives. Therefore this research approach was appropriate for people with little or no political engagement, as well as for political activists.

Although there were no formal procedures concerning ethics, this topic received careful attention when designing, conducting and reporting on this research project. Use was made of resources and information from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Social Research Association. Two major ethical issues were anticipated and encountered during this project. First, a few people voluntarily mentioned participation in illegal activities. As self-reported illegal political action appears to be rare in England (e.g. Table 1.1) and to avoid unjustifiable exposure of participants to potential legal action, discussion of these topics was discouraged. None of these alleged illegal activities appeared to constitute a major or ongoing part of their political repertoires. However, it was noted that among research participants of all ages there were strongly divided opinions on illegal activities, which were said to be either unacceptable or acceptable under certain circumstances. And when one research participant misheard the question asking about her experience of participating in ‘lawful public demonstrations’, she was somewhat offended, not only for herself, but by the idea that these things happened in her locality, saying “they’re not lawbreakers”. Later in her interview, she took the opportunity to talk about her

preferred types of activity, emphasising that she “certainly could not break the law”. Therefore, care was taken in asking about people’s experience of demonstrating. Another ethical issue for this project was the potential of causing emotional distress when talking about experiences of social care services. During the interviews, some people did express anxiety about social care, especially concerning their relatives. Therefore, care was taken during the interviews to undertake probing only directly related to the research questions and to avoid unnecessarily intrusive questioning. Ethical consent forms (Appendix K) were based on the British Society of Gerontology model agreement form. These forms were signed at the end of interviews, when research participants were fully aware about their part in the research.[16]

Therefore, semi-structured interviews were designed to deal with the research questions and were informed by relevant parts of the literature. Interviews were conducted in ways which were intended to give research participants time to reflect and report on their experiences of a range of political activities and to express their opinions about these political activities and how they fitted into their lives.[17]

3.7: Data management, analysis and reporting

This section first describes how the recorded interview data were transcribed and analysed. Then, comments are made about the ways in which the findings are reported.

Just over 58 hours of recorded interview data were obtained. I transcribed the recordings as fully as possible and saved them as Microsoft Word documents. The Olympus Digital Voice Recorder produced usable recordings, even when there was some background noise, such as the interview recorded by a fast flowing river. However, sometimes the words were unclear. Then, what could be heard and/or guessed was placed in square brackets in the interview transcripts. Sources of interruptions were noted; as were pauses, differentiating between a short pause (represented by three dots) and one that subjectively seemed longer (represented by a dash). If the written sentence was ambiguous, then a note was made of the correct interpretation. If relevant, comments were made about laughter and, occasionally, research participants' tears and visible annoyance. A note was made of any research questions that were misunderstood by research participants. This level of detail in the transcripts proved appropriate for the subsequent analyses, which focused on the interview content and not, for example, details of the interview context or research participants' narrative style.

Each interview transcript was read a few times to become familiar with its content and develop ideas about coding and data analysis. The large quantity of data made it appropriate to use software to manually code and manage the interview data. QSR NVivo 8 was the most appropriate product available at the University of Birmingham. After loading the interview transcripts into this software, 39 Attributes were created and completed for each interview transcript. This enabled a quick overview of aspects of research participants' diversity; such as age, sex, political generations,

and aspects of political party membership and support. Then, I decided that it would be convenient to create two NVivo projects.

The first NVivo project focused on political participation and had 101 Free Nodes (hereafter called 'Nodes'). Most (87) Nodes were created over ten days in October 2010; with 76 Nodes created on the first day. Nodes were chosen to assist data retrieval. For example, some Nodes captured responses to survey questions. Other Nodes captured topics of theoretical interest; such as references to intrinsic and extrinsic factors, comments about 'politics', instances of continuity and change, and examples concerning political socialisation and learning (see Chapter One). Many Nodes identified transcript content about each type of political activity, as well as relevant topics, such as reasons for (non)participation, nature of involvement and perceived impacts. As the transcripts were being coded, other useful Nodes were identified. In November 2010, another 16 Nodes were created, including Nodes for transcript content referring to identifiable stages of an individual's life course, their expressed self-image as political actors and preferences concerning political activity, and references to knowing, believing and feeling.

A second NVivo project focused on social care and older people's politics. In January 2011, 118 Nodes were created. The first 99 Nodes were created over three days; including responses to key interview questions, comments (general and about experiences of social care) concerning other people by their age and social relationship with the research participants, and theoretically relevant transcript content, such as perceptions of being 'old' (see Chapter Two). Again, as the

interview transcripts were coded, additional useful Nodes were identified and created; for example, for interview content concerning self-reported ‘hard times’ of various types associated with different stages of research participants’ life courses.

When all the interview transcripts were fully coded in NVivo, the contents of each Node were downloaded. Searches for interview content were facilitated by using Matrix Queries; for example to identify interview content coded for Nodes concerning both change and voting. A few Text searches were used; for example to help locate interviews mentioning political cynicism or MPs’ expenses.

Microsoft Excel spreadsheets were used to facilitate systematic analysis of responses to questions asked of all research participants and to focus on specific topics. Typically, matrices were created, with each research participant’s data occupying one row. Relevant extracts from the interview transcripts were copied into the cells. Later, additional columns could be used for category labels based on interpretations of the data; for example, if negative, positive, qualified or no opinions were expressed on a topic. Datasets could be sorted by age, sex and/or other characteristics. Colour coding of text was also used to facilitate exploring the data for patterns; for instance, identifying reasons given either for or against something. Columns could be used in various ways, including sequencing of different parts of an individual’s comments on a topic and to sort data in relation to stages in their life courses.

Spreadsheets were also used to produce individuals' timelines/summaries. The amount of data varied among research participants and across topics. These timelines were also useful to help identify individuals' approximate chronological age across historical time.

A common approach to reporting qualitative research was adopted, whereby each chapter provides an overview of the research findings and their interpretation, drawing on research participants' quotes. When using quotes from interview transcripts, I decided to remove parts of the quote that interfered with reading but did not alter the meaning. Repetitions and 'ums' were replaced with '...'. If considered appropriate, comments concerning the quote are included in italics within square brackets; for example, when a reference was made to a named member of their family. Research participants are identified by their age, sex and local authority, if necessary abbreviated (see their IDs in Table 3.1).

Sometimes the number of research participants is mentioned to indicate recurrent topics. It is impossible to estimate the strength and prevalence of categories of responses, even among the research participants. The aim of this a qualitative research project is to illuminate older people's diverse political understandings and experiences.

When appropriate, findings are presented for all the research participants. As research participants' dates of birth were not recorded, any ordering of research

participants by their chronological age is only an approximate ranking by age to help illustrate age-related patterning.

Diagrams were used to help to explore aspects of the findings. In Chapter Four, diagrams are used to explore continuity and change in commitment to voting for a political party and major lifetime influences on voting behaviour. In Chapter Five, diagrams are used to illustrate major current and lifetime influences on the political behaviour of individuals and couples. In Chapter Six, diagrams are used to explore different ways of understanding either 'education' or 'the environment' as a political issue and some major influences on these opinions from different life-spheres.

Therefore, recorded interview data were transcribed. Interview transcripts were stored in and coded using NVivo 8 software. Several different approaches were used to systematically explore the interview data, mainly assisted by using spreadsheets. This process revealed insights into research participants' political understandings and experiences. The research findings and their interpretations are presented in the form of text, tables and diagrams.

3.8: Conclusion

This chapter described the main research design decisions, the way the research was conducted, and data management, analysis and reporting. Qualitative research based on individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews with older people was selected as the most appropriate way to approach the research questions. This

approach allowed a wide range of political activities and understandings to be covered with all the research participants, while avoiding the imposition of arbitrary time frames on political experiences. Individuals' political lives were viewed as part of their social lives. However, more than one interview with each research participant would have been required to capture all relevant biographical insights from all the research participants. But conducting follow-up interviews would have been beyond the resources and time frame available for this empirical research study. And the research interviews succeeded in making a contribution to improved understanding of the complexity and dynamics of older people's political understandings and experiences.

Also included in this chapter are descriptions of relevant characteristics of the three research locations (Calderdale, Northumberland and West Berkshire) in England and the 41 research participants. This contextual information will assist readers to understand and evaluate this research project and its findings. The diversity of these research participants and their political experiences suggest that some of the research findings could have implications for other older people in England. Importantly, examples were found of political learning and voluntary changes in political activity, including voting in elections.

The next four chapters present and interpret the research findings from this study. First, consideration is given to one of the most common types of political participation for older people – voting in elections. In addition, this chapter considers the related but less common activity of political party membership.

4

OLDER PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTY MEMBERSHIP

4.1: Introduction

This chapter illuminates older people's understandings and experiences of politics by exploring research participants' remembered experiences of and opinions on voting in elections and party membership. Guided by the research questions, attention is paid to continuity and change in individuals' experiences and opinions. First, findings concerning participation in general (national) and local elections are reported. Then, findings about party membership are presented.

Analysis of these interview data succeeded in revealing insights into aspects of the diversity and dynamics of research participants' experiences and understandings of voting, elections and, where appropriate, party membership experiences. Understanding of continuity and change in individuals' voting behaviour and party membership was improved by taking into account biographical evidence, as well as their current socio-economic circumstances and political contexts.

4.2: Electoral Participation

Voting is one of the most common types of political participation for citizens in England. As noted in Chapter One, older people have a greater propensity to vote

than younger adults. And where older people comprise a growing share of the electorate, their ‘electoral weight’ will increase. But it cannot be assumed that older people will continue to vote in elections. And it is unknown whether the nature of their electoral participation is stable or changing. This section starts by looking at research participants’ experiences and understandings of the act of voting. Then, their decisions about who to vote for are explored. Finally, research participants’ comments about electoral processes and outcomes are considered.

4.2.1: The act of voting

Registered voters must decide whether or not to cast a vote in an election. Potential voters may face another decision: how to cast their vote. Research participants’ comments about these activities are considered in this section.

When asked about their experiences as voters, research participants’ responses generally suggested that the act of voting was a taken for granted behaviour. Thus, their responses typically focused on the parties they chose to vote for. Research participants who talked about the act of voting said they tended to vote regularly in elections. While a few people stressed that they ‘always voted’ in elections, some people carefully qualified their responses to allow for possible unintentional non-voting, such as when hospitalised.

Even the oldest research participant would have been a young child when equal voting rights for men and women were introduced in 1928. So it is unlikely that

anyone had direct personal awareness of the suffragette movement or of women's initial responses to this new right. Yet the suffragette movement was voluntarily mentioned by five women (aged 58 to 75) as something that increased the perceived importance of their voting. For instance:

> I really strive to vote. I feel very strongly that women fought for the vote for women ... in the suffragette movement. And that – their sacrifice should not go wasted. So I make a point of voting in all the elections I can. The European elections. The local elections. And the national.
>
> (59 year old woman, Calderdale)

A man adopted a broader historical view:

> I'm aware of the whole history of voting. For men and for women. And for all classes. (67 year old man, Calderdale)

Historically informed thinking might reasonably be expected among four of these people, who are members of local history groups. Another woman's passion for voting was increased through her experience as a mature student. Aged 50, her studies included A-level history:

> And part of it was the suffragette movement. – So I'd always supported – and voted ... and was very keen on it. But after doing that, I was even more keen on it, when I ... understood the background.
>
> (60 year old woman, Northumberland)

Research participants generally appeared to have parents who voted regularly in elections, thus acting as role models for voting. One woman's interest in voting was encouraged by her mother:

> She was a great believer ... Voted. – She always did. And she always encouraged me as well. – Yes – It was a big thing. The first time. It was 21 then, of course. Not 18 as it is now. – And it was a *really* big thing. – Oh this was wonderful! You're going to vote for the first time!
>
> (60 year old woman, Northumberland)

In turn, some people actively encouraged their children to vote. For instance:

> And ever since my children were. Well. In pushchairs. I've taken them and shown them what one does. Taking them into the ballot box. [I did that] so they grew up thinking one does vote. It's ones – responsibility.
> (72 year old woman, Calderdale)

But parental example was insufficient encouragement for some people to vote at the first available opportunity. For example, a woman who started to vote regularly when aged around 40 said:

> When I was younger ... I don't remember voting at all really. ... But now I've got older, I can see that it's quite important. (66 year old woman, Calderdale)

Parents who were active in political parties might inspire their children, at least initially, to engage with elections. For example:

> I helped as a schoolgirl ... with elections and things. – It was our life! – In our family. (80 year old woman, Calderdale)

Voting as a public performance appeared to be important for some people. For instance:

> I think it's ... the whole thing of going and putting your cross in a box. So I would only ask for a postal vote – if – I wasn't going to be around. And I will always make the effort to go and vote. ... Just because ... I think the actual act of voting is important. (56 year old woman, Calderdale)

While some research participants said they never used a postal vote; more commonly people claimed to have used a postal vote at least once. Consistent with previous research, postal voting was used to enable votes to be cast when people were away from home (for work or holidays) or suffering from temporary health or mobility problems. Sometimes postal voting was seen as a convenient way to ensure always being able to cast a vote; for instance:

> We do that now. ... Because now we're older ... I feel that if we couldn't get out. ... Even the other end of the village. If it was bad weather or what. ... I think it is – essential we vote. So we registered two years ago.
> (71 year old woman, Northumberland)

However, four people expressed concern about the risk of fraud or abuse with postal voting. Their concerns could change the way they voted; for example:

> I registered – for postal voting, a couple of elections ago. And then – I read so much about corruption ... that [I've] changed and go back to – crossing the box. (63 year old woman, Northumberland*)

Consistent with previous studies[1], research participants tended to agree that it is every citizen's duty to vote. Sometimes the 'importance' attributed to voting was explained by positive reasons, such as viewing it as an 'opportunity to influence' how the country is run and that voting allows you to legitimately 'criticise' when 'things don't work out'. Three people stressed that 'people had fought for the vote' and one man said he would "never not vote" because:

> There's always the danger that someone, some group, will use it as an excuse to deny people the vote. I mean. I know that sounds a little bit alarmist. But. You know. Anything's possible in politics. ... People's desire for power.
> (63 year old man, Calderdale*)

But five people (aged 59 to 67) disagreed that it was every citizen's duty to vote; for example stressing that it was not compulsory and noting:

> I support those who take the view – 'None of the above'. ... Because there are a lot of people, who don't have candidates that reflect their political opinions.
> (68 year old man, Calderdale)

Of particular interest are the three people who regularly voted but appeared close to abandoning voting. One man's position recently changed largely because of a combination of the Iraq war and MPs' expenses scandal[2]:

> Well ... [*pause*] I think it's regrettable. – My position of feeling that I cannot vote for any of them. But – I think that you have got to have that right. I will go and spoil the ballot paper – or put on it ... 'None of Them'. But – So it's not laziness. (73 year old man, Northumberland)

And a similar protest was being considered by a woman who, like her husband, talked of their long-standing frustration with the electoral system preventing any meaningful representation of their political views. Her husband said:

> For the last 20. 25 years, I and [*his wife*] have been incredibly unhappy about the electoral system. And it's possible, after this election, that we will send letters to all and sundry indicating that we're going to abstain until what we would regard as a more democratic – system of voting is instituted in the country along the lines of [several] other countries that we could identify, including Germany. And then we may abstain from voting. But we have never abstained before. So we've reached an impasse. As far as we're concerned. We've also been involved in campaigns to introduce proportional representation. And we've got nowhere with the present government. (67 year old man, Calderdale)

In addition, a woman who agreed with the idea that there is a duty to vote said she had already abandoned voting regularly in elections:

> Since I've had the vote, I've always used my vote. – In the last few year, getting a bit disillusioned. Not only because of – what happened last year.[3] But ... when you get better educated ... you tend to look at things a different way. Instead of just following the herd and that. ... So I've changed my policies from ... which party I voted for. And sometimes, if it's a local election, I don't bother. (65 year old woman, Northumberland)

When asked if she ever chose not to vote, she agreed; adding that "there's times when I've thought it's pointless".[4]

Therefore, some research participants' understandings and experiences of the act of voting have changed. Importantly, some regular voters were deciding not to vote.

4.2.2: Deciding who to vote for

If research participants decide to cast a valid vote, they have to choose which political party and/or candidate to vote for. This section looks at what research participants said about these decisions.

The party is the key consideration for strongly partisan people or those who apparently habitually voted for one party. An 80 year old woman remembered going to the polling station when she was a young Labour supporter. As she had not been 'following who' was the Labour candidate, she was thwarted by a ballot paper that did not identify candidates' party affiliations. Younger research participants could also focus primarily on the party; for instance:

> I've always voted for the party rather than the – actual leader. But it seems to be. There is an element of that more and more. ... You know. Who do you prefer? – Which is ... shocking, I think. (59 year old woman, Northumberland)

A party focus is also required for tactical voting. For example, a 60 year old man in Calderdale said that in 'most places' he had lived, he voted for "the person most likely to beat the Conservative candidate".

Research participants said their voting in general elections was informed by diverse considerations. Some people believed one party best represented their political interests; for example:

> I really do feel – that even now – for all the changes of the Labour party, they still do understand the working – person – better than the – Tory party. You know. And when I look at the parties, at least Labour: they have women MPs, they have people from varying backgrounds. ...You see the Tories lined up. And you see these grey suits. And I think: What do you say for me?
>
> (60 year old woman, Northumberland)

Two people in West Berkshire wanted to express support for Labour, even though their vote has 'never really counted'. But other people say that they are making a positive choice at each election based on considerations such as the candidate believed to 'do the best job for the country' or the party believed to make credible promises or to best complement their political values, such as 'social justice'. Negative reasons can also inform voting decisions; for example, when people want to protest against a party they would otherwise have voted for or want a change of government. The way that individuals make these decisions can vary over their voting life; for example:

> I try not to waste my vote now. I'd rather make it a positive vote. So – if Labour stands a better chance of winning, then I [wouldn't vote] for the Greens or Lib Dems. ... And I don't think any of the far left parties stand a chance now. So there's no point wasting my vote with them. (60 year old man, Calderdale)

Furthermore, different criteria can be employed in local and national elections. In local elections, the party can be much less important than the candidate.

But how well informed are these individual decisions? These interviews suggest that people have diverse potential sources of information about local, publicly financed services and facilities and about politicians and electoral candidates. When combined with information about research participants' media usage[5], this evidence suggests that most people tend to have limited awareness of locally provided services and facilities that they do not use themselves. However, people could be aware of variations in services and facilities across their local authority areas. Useful information about local politicians and electoral candidates might also be scarce, especially for people who are not active party members.

Some compelling evidence was provided that involvement in local political campaigns could greatly increase awareness of political processes and politicians. As one woman said:

> I feel ... unless you belong to a political party or some sort of active group – you just don't get to know who the present MP is. – Never mind the ones that are putting up ... as candidates. And, in a way, the same goes for local elections. Because I was quite active in a group at one time, I got to know more about the local councillors. (75year old woman, Calderdale)

These experiences did not necessarily create favourable impressions of politics and politicians. One man said:

> I've been seeing at fairly close quarters. With this campaign. And going and sitting in council meetings. And it just was a complete shambles. ... There didn't seem to be an ounce of integrity between them. The – positions taken by various parties seem to have nothing to do with principle. But to do with power. – Or – influence or whatever. (58 year old man, Calderdale)

He described recent party-based power struggles in Calderdale Council as "the politics of the madhouse". He questioned "the point of voting for any of this shower".

More favourable impressions of politics and the political process could be cultivated by purposeful interactions between politicians (or candidates) and their electorate. In places, there was an impression that canvassing had declined or disappeared. Leaflets and other printed material could be regarded as inadequate forms of communications, especially for people used to personal contact and debate with local politicians. For instance, a woman who was disappointed not to have the opportunity to discuss points that were important to her said**:**

> I came from an eclectic background ... where politicians needed your vote. ... But ... I don't think they *need* it now. – And it's no good. Yesterday, I got in the post. From the new Conservative guy in Hexham. ... And I didn't even read it. Because he'd posted it. Well I can't argue with a piece of paper, can I?
> (66 year old woman, Northumberland*)

Some people reported not even receiving printed electoral material. One woman was surprised by current levels of public displays:

> I've not seen any up anyway. ... Normally the town is ablaze! All the way round. Posters of 'Vote for this'. I haven't seen any. ... There doesn't seem to be publicity on the ground. I think I had a card through the door from Conservatives saying they had called. ... I've had nothing from anybody else. (82 year old woman, West Berkshire)

Unsurprisingly, people who are or were active party members appeared to be most sensitive to the apparent reduction in electoral activity and engagement. And the novelty of a candidate visiting could apparently win votes, at least in local elections:

> One of the few times I've ever voted Lib Dem – was recently. ... For the Town Council. ... Was after someone came round the house. I thought: Oh well, I'll give him ... my vote. ... I thought: Oh someone's bothered to come round! I was so shocked. So I voted for them. (63 year old man, Calderdale*)

However, contact with party supporters and candidates can have limited impact on other people, which could partly reflect their lower levels of interest in elections. Additionally, little interest would be inspired if people are only contacted at election time and in a superficial way. An example is this memory of canvassing in previous elections:

> I think they were just – going through the motions. Really. ... I mean. Got to knock on doors, hour after hour after hour. It gets very hard to be genuine. And sincere. (59 year old woman, Calderdale)

Public meetings provide another way of at least seeing and hearing electoral candidates. But few research participants mentioned recently attending such meetings. Three people (aged 63 to 79) living in Calderdale went to meetings for their 2010 prospective parliamentary candidates. One man said that listening to the

candidates ‘answering the public’s questions’ helped him to make up his mind. In particular:

> I’m really concerned about the person. ... You can tell ... whether they’ve got integrity or not. At least, I feel I can. ... I mean, we’ve got one Labour candidate at the moment who’s right bad news. ... She’s no chance.
>
> (79 year old man, Calderdale)

Although having a controversial candidate possibly attracted non-party members to these meetings. But, some people remain doubtful about any candidate’s veracity.

In the 2010 general elections, there were also televised debates by the leaders of the three main parties. These debates elicited a mixture of interest and concern for someone who is “not a party animal”:

> Although it seems terribly well organised. Doesn’t seem to be much room for sort of independent thought or – [speech]. The trouble with that sort of thing is you get a ... person ... who’s got a great personality, comes over. You get somebody who might have better ... ideas ... and might not be able to present them so well ... and come over on the media ... so well. So ... you’ve got to listen carefully to what’s being said. Which a lot of people won’t.
>
> (71 year old woman, Northumberland)

Between elections, apart from contacting activities (see Chapter Five), research participants might have little direct contact with or even awareness of the activities of their local politicians. Party newsletters raised little interest. A 78 year old woman in Calderdale thought that party “politics are in the doldrums” and did not think that newsletters “do much good at all really”.

Further insights into research participants’ political understandings and experiences were prompted by asking some survey questions about parties and politicians. Responses to the question ‘Does it matter which party is in power?’, asked

separately about the national and local levels, confirm that some people find the major parties increasingly similar. A 78 year old woman believed it was “the politicians’ fault” that her young friend “couldn’t differentiate” between the parties. And an 80 year old former town councillor argued that “it’s up to the politicians to make it more interesting to encourage people to vote”. At national level, informal comparisons appear to be made of some of the visible impacts of recent Labour and Conservative governments. Informal evaluations appear more difficult at local authority level, partly because it tends to receive less attention from the media and research participants. Additionally, frequent changes in political control and hung councils can make it difficult for actions to be attributed to any party. And there is awareness of central government’s influence on diverse, publicly financed, locally provided facilities and services. Experience of previous governments appears to have led to an expectation of a lengthy period before a change in government leads to any promised changes. The great emphasis placed on the economy in the 2010 general elections, appears to be generating broadly similar expectations of whatever government is elected.

As might be expected, most current party members tended to agree that it mattered which party was in power. Some non-party members also thought there were differences; for example in political priorities. Interestingly, some people wanted to believe that there are differences between the parties; possibly associating one party with desirable actions they imagine happen now or would like to see.

Understandably, both survey questions asked about politicians attracted some criticism because of their generality: seeking comments about a large, diverse and changing group of people. Many sitting MPs did not stand in the 2010 general elections (Cracknell *et al*, 2011, p. 42) and some candidates were not well-known, local people (e.g. Hebweb, 2010). However, some insightful comments were prompted by these questions.

Diverse comments arose from asking: 'Do you think that politicians in general care what people like you think?'. Lack of meaningful contact or communication with politicians made this an implausible idea for some people. While for others this was something normatively expected of, or at least hoped for, any politician. Although the ongoing 'expenses scandal' was generally detrimental to opinions on MPs, some people apparently want to believe that MPs tend to start with less self-serving behaviour. Timing in the electoral cycle was considered important. Care (sometimes of doubtful sincerity) was believed most likely to be expressed during election campaigns because candidates wanted to be elected. The broadcasting of Gordon Brown's unfounded, offensive remarks about a pensioner he met during the 2010 general election campaign (BBC News, 2010) made an 82 year old woman laugh when saying "he cared a great deal about" her. Contrary to some opinions (e.g. O'Donoghue, 2010), some politicians' disconnection from and disrespect for all or part of the electorate would not have surprised some research participants.[6] At any time, electoral candidates' and politicians' personal and party-political agendas might render other concerns invisible or unsupportable.

Some research participants talked about the role of the public in encouraging effective political representation. Two women adopting this approach said:

> I think if we never said anything and never did anything, certainly wouldn't come and seek us out. Or ask. No. – I think you've got to push it in their face first. – Get their attention. – Maybe a bit cynical?
>
> (60 year old woman, Northumberland)

And:

> I suppose I'm a bit naive – or idealistic, in that I think that ... I've got a right to tell my MP or my local councillor my views in the hope that they will pass them on. ... But. You know, if we don't – persist in doing this, then politicians will – eventually drift off, quite off message and not do what they're supposed to do. ... It's a ... symbiosis. – Without people expressing their views, then politicians don't know what to say. Do they? (59 year old woman, Calderdale)

Other people believe in long-term relationship building approaches to promote political action about specific issues or in unfavourable political contexts. These behaviours could impact on voting decisions.

Another survey question asked was: 'Do you think that politicians are just interested in getting people's votes rather than people's opinions?'. This question was justifiably criticised for attempting to separate out two interrelated actions. As one man said:

> You could actually argue that people are wanting the votes because they actually are – concerned about particular issues. And that these – particular issues they are concerned about: your opinions basically. Once the politicians are actually focused on – the manifesto commitments – they're not going to be necessarily all that interested in opinions which clash with that. Unless those opinions cumulate and they start to realise there's a [post bag] on it.
>
> (67 year old man, Calderdale)

The timing of the interviews makes it likely that some responses would be influenced by the general election campaign. However, this question raised three useful points.

First, a former party member said of politicians:

> They're opinion shapers, they don't react to other opinions.
>
> (60 year old man, Calderdale)

If correct, his observation raises the question of how people can get a meaningful voice in the political system. Certainly the response of the Blair government to the anti-Iraq war protest tended to be interpreted as ignoring widespread public opinion. But examples could be given of politicians reacting to other opinions, albeit sometimes reluctantly.

Second, a woman agreed that "politicians should be our leaders, they don't just reflect". She developed this idea about politicians' role in the context of unhelpful distortion by the media:

> They spend the whole of their lives – in politics. Looking in detail at various issues. And it's their job to educate the populous. But in the end ... no man is any better than any other man in making that moral decision. In my opinion. But you've got to understand it. ... And the problem at the moment, I think, is that we've got a little bit too much of government by media. Who tend to take the exciting, eye-catching, slightly ... sort of *Eastender* attitude.
>
> (76 year old woman, West Berkshire)

Third, comments were made about the extent to which politicians adopted and voted for their party's official views. Some MPs apparently publicised their willingness to vote against controversial actions supported by their party. Some politicians resigned from their parties to stand in elections as 'independents'. And it was suggested that "conviction politicians" have sometimes been "very beneficial to the country".

By collecting together all the fragmented pieces of interview transcripts referring to politicians, an impression was gained of things that research participants tended to

like or dislike about them. Four major points could be identified referring to both MPs and local councillors. Two of these points refer to normative expectations of politicians' key personal qualities: being intelligent enough to cope with the demands of their work and possessing integrity. These expectations can be based on observing the activities of respected politicians or, sometimes, of people who appeared 'out of their depth' or acting in undesirable ways. The third point reflects a widespread acceptance of the idea that politicians experience constraints (budgetary and legal) on their activities, which are often associated with higher levels in governance systems, envisaged as stretching from the town or parish council to the European Union. However, these constraints are sometimes seen as an excuse, for example, for inaction. Finally, any locally decreasing levels of contact with politicians can reduce interest in politics, especially for people brought up to 'talk politics'.

Research participants mentioned numerous things they either liked or disliked about MPs. Most observations apparently focused on the previous 13 or so years. 'Likes' concentrated on MPs' actions (communications, active concern for residents, and working hard to get things done) and on their personal characteristics (honest, have principles, have 'something to say', are likeable, and have some understanding of the local context). Within each local authority area, at least one MP was identified as possessing most or all of these characteristics.

The list of 'dislikes' about MPs was much longer. Some dislikes, in particular, the recent 'expenses scandal' and perceived dishonesty, are the opposite of things people said they liked about MPs. Additionally, there was some distaste for 'political

careers' and Tony Blair's apparently presidential style of working; a belief that most local MPs (outside the Cabinet) are unlikely to be able to 'do anything'; perceptions that media image and personality have become more important than policy and action; and evidence of recently increased concerns about the competence of politicians, especially party leaders.

People can disagree about subjective assessments. For instance, 'yah-boo politics' is disliked by some people but enhanced one person's political interest. However, all these people would probably agree that increased amounts and quality of political discussion of substantive matters is desirable. It was clear that some people were 'monitoring' politicians to some extent, probably facilitated by recent improvements in media coverage of Parliamentary activities.[7]

Fewer comments were found when repeating this exercise for likes and dislikes about local councillors. This probably reflects generally lower levels of interest in and awareness of local politics compared to national politics. The list of likes was similar to that of MPs, but with much less emphasis on councillors' personal characteristics, beyond an expectation of being 'hard-working'. In terms of action, councillors were hoped to be more accessible for informal conversations than MPs. It seems plausible that councillors' greater accessibility contributes to some items on the list of dislikes; for example, providing awareness that individuals are prejudiced or inflexible. Dislike of career politicians surfaces again in this analysis. Some of the older research participants made unfavourable comparisons of current councillors and their activities with their counterparts some decades ago. A key historical change appears to be the

introduction of allowances for local councillors; which although apparently diversifying the types of people becoming councillors, has not necessarily improved the quality of decision-making or services.

Another fruitful exercise involved identifying all interview references to sources of dissatisfaction with governments (local and national) and elections. Varying levels of frustration with the democratic system were associated with people finding it difficult to give voice to things that were important to them. Some frustrations were associated mainly with the limitations of party political manifestos providing an incomplete match for and/or coverage of their views. The way in which governments worked, such as Cabinet government and politicians voting strictly on party lines, could increase these frustrations. As the 2010 general election saw further increases in the number of career politicians, concerns about the competence of politicians seem likely to grow. Some people sought alternative ways to get things done. Therefore, some people might increasingly support independent politicians. While action-oriented people could focus more of their efforts on supporting temporary, publicly funded, group action.

Research participants were also asked a question from the Place Survey: 'How satisfied are you with the local authority?'. People across the age range said they were either at least 'fairly satisfied' (51 to 90 year olds) or generally dissatisfied (56 to 78 year olds). This was a difficult question for some residents of Northumberland because of the recent changes in local government. Many respondents could think of both favourable and unfavourable aspects of their local authority, although the latter

appeared much easier to recall and share. Comparisons of apparent sources of dissatisfaction with the local authority in Calderdale and West Berkshire reveal some shared concerns; such as the perceived negative impacts of senior officials having careers based on working temporarily for a council, unsatisfactory practices around allocating budgets, and some disputed planning decisions concerning new buildings. Living in the 'new' Northumberland has already led to perceptions of predominantly negative changes in terms of local democracy, service quality and some increased local charges.

A diverse range of issues might feature in older people's decisions about who to vote for (see section 6.4). However, contrary to possible expectations (e.g. Goerres, 2009), council tax did not appear to be a major issue for most research participants. Although an 82 year old in West Berkshire disliked paying council tax because she felt it was 'a lot' of money and a 68 year old man in Calderdale believed a local income tax would be 'fairer', council tax appeared to be a generally accepted part of people's often limited experience of local authorities. For instance:

> All you do is pay your council tax and they empty the dustbin.
> (79 year old man, Calderdale)

And one library user said:

> I think I'm perfectly happy to pay my council tax because I get it back every year in books! (59 year old woman, Calderdale)

And council tax can feature in local politics; for example, when Calderdale council was last under (highly contested) Conservative control:

> We have had the council tax lowered a little bit this year.
> (72 year old woman, Calderdale)

Other Calderdale residents emphasised that this tax reduction would probably adversely affect public services that they valued.

Evidence from these interviews suggest that deciding who to vote for involves diverse personal considerations and sufficient informal feedback for voters to at least feel comfortable with their choices. Although older old people tended to be more aware of alternative approaches, especially to local government and party politics, marked age-related patterning was not discernible in these research participants' current and recent electoral decisions. But, as will be seen in the next section, individuals' voting decisions may vary across their lifetimes.

4.2.3: Electoral participation across the adult life course

Arguably, electoral participation should be studied as diverse, dynamic processes within individuals' personal histories. By adopting this approach, it should be possible to identify major influences on continuity and change in these individual-level processes. This section starts by noting some broad temporal patterns in individual-level electoral participation. Then, apparent influences on individuals' support for the Labour and Conservative parties are considered. Finally, some individuals' electoral participation histories are studied.

Research participants have diverse electoral participation histories (Table 4.1). Individuals could initially vote in a different way from how they vote as mature adults; thereafter two stable voting patterns can be identified. First, people who tended to

Table 4.1: Examples of research participants' self-reported, long-term patterns of voting in general and local elections.

How do research participants tend to vote in local and general elections?	Number of people	Age (years)
Tend to vote for one political party.	14	60 to 82
And do this even if this candidate cannot win this seat.	2	76 to 78
Tend to take each election as it comes. Therefore, can vote for different political parties in different elections.	5	59 to 79
It is important that one political party does not win. If necessary, vote tactically.	3	60 to 67
Recent change in voting. Now tend to vote for one political party in general elections, but might vote for another political party or an independent in local elections.	8	58 to 90
Have changed their pattern of voting one or more times during their voting lifetimes.	11	51 to 80

vote for one party for most or all their adult lives. This voting behaviour is strongly tested where their preferred party has no hope of winning elections; for instance Labour voters in Newbury. Second, people who say they make independent decisions about who to vote for in each election. This can mean that different parties are voted for in different elections. In practice, this can mean voting for one party in several consecutive elections because of the perceived qualities of a candidate. Tactical voting reflects residence in locations where elections could be won by a party that the individual 'dislikes' or 'fears'.

Of particular interest are people who changed their voting behaviour. Two broad groups are identifiable. First, people who tended to vote for one party throughout their adult lives, but in recent local elections voted for another party. Thus, among long-term Labour voters who voted for another party in recent local elections are

three people (aged 58 to 90) who voted Green and a 58 year old who voted Liberal Democrat. A 63 year old long-term Conservative voter recently voted for UKIP. A second group of people had one or more complete changes in voting patterns in both local and national elections. Only in one case was there said to be a gradual 'drift' – as a woman sought a party that was a better 'fit' for her political opinions than the Conservatives. More often, there appeared to be a reaction to something concerning the party usually voted for. For instance, three people (aged 56 to 72) who regularly voted for Labour said they ceased to vote for Labour because of either the attack on grammar schools in the 1960s, New Labour, or the Iraq war. Additionally, moving home can rupture established voting patterns. For example, after moving to Newbury within the last ten years, an 80 year old long-term Labour supporter voted Liberal Democrat.[8]

An impression can be gained from the interview data of the diverse influences on becoming, remaining and ceasing to be a regular voter for a party. Most evidence was available about voting either Labour or Conservative (Tables 4.2 to 4.4).

Evidence existed of political socialisation of some people into starting to vote Labour or Conservative through their parental families and/or their peers (Table 4.2). Among research participants, Labour voters tended to be most inspired by people involved in political or union activism; whereas Conservative voters tended to admire more their parents' everyday lifestyles. Place of residence could promote regular voting for either party, especially if it 'dominated' elections. Different types of work and

Table 4.2: Examples of positive influences on research participants starting to vote regularly for the Labour party or the Conservative party.

Influences	Examples of positive influences on starting to vote regularly for the	
	Labour party	Conservative party
Family background: as child and young adult	Have Labour party and/or union activists in family and agree with their activism and the Labour party (C80F, W78MF, W75F, N60F). Especially, if they take pride in their activities, e.g. union worker father happy to have helped solve problems (C80F) and a "very politically active mother" in the 1930s, when hard to find 'the time and energy' (W76F). Important where wider local population has little support for the Labour party, e.g. "very rural East Anglia" (W78M).	Aware that "thoughtlessly" copied her parents in voting for the Conservatives (W51F). Admired their parents, e.g. 'putting themselves out' for their children (C65F) and struggling to rebuild a career after the Second World War (W78F). Being a Conservative voter is part of their lives. Parents are members of the local Conservative party. But social interests could dominate, e.g. mother was only interested in 'running their whist drives' (W82F).
Social life - peer group	Active branches of Young Socialists. Attending political meetings and demonstrating could be the main attraction (C63M).	Young Conservatives joined mainly for the "social scene", e.g. – it was something ' her crowd' did (W82F). As a teenager from a non-farming background moving to a Cornish market town, it was the only place to meet potential friends of her age (W61F).
Geographical location	Live in a 'Labour stronghold' when young: access to local party branches and 'your vote' should count' (elect Labour party politicians) (C63M, N63F).	Living in a 'Conservative stronghold', e.g. in Tynedale, can believe there is 'no point voting' for any other party (N63F). Access to local party branches.
Employment	Some types of work, e.g. teaching (W75M) or railways (W78M), involve union activism.	May have little or no involvement with unions, e.g. self-employed (W78F). Can be by choice (W51F).
Perceptions of party's politicians and electoral candidates, and its proposals and actions when in government.	Believed to be "very good" (C72F). Or their counterparts from other political parties are believed in some way(s) to be unacceptable. Important for many people, especially any likely impact on their employment; e.g. schoolteacher (N59F).	Believe it is 'the best' political party. But might be predominantly because they are anti-Labour or anti-socialism (N63F, W78F). Impressed with politicians (C78F).

workplace, at different historical times, could support interest in either party. Conservative voters tended to be less involved with unions than Labour voters.

Some research participants who regularly voted Labour have ceased to vote Labour (Table 4.3). With 13 years of Labour governments, their actions and inaction contributed to some decisions to cease voting Labour. Related to this were changes in the Labour party, especially its transformation into New Labour in the late 1990s. Worth noting is one woman's recent change of voting behaviour from 'habitual Labour' to 'independent thinking', associated with increased political awareness. Also a long-term Labour party member, who became 'bitterly disillusioned' by Blair's government, discovered 'excitement' in elections after releasing herself from a self-imposed obligation to vote Labour. Fewer insights were available about reasons for weakening support for the Conservative party (Table 4.3).

It was possible to identify a number of things that helped some research participants to continue to vote either for Labour or the Conservatives (Table 4.4). Typically, individuals mentioned more than one of these things.

Some research participants were long-term Liberal Democrat voters. A 63 year old woman joined the party when aged in her 20s. Three women (aged 66 to 82) were middle-aged when they started to vote Liberal Democrat: two being recruited into the party and one only just starting regular voting, having moved frequently as a young woman and later becoming a busy single parent.

Table 4.3: Examples of reasons given by research participants for ceasing to vote regularly (either temporarily or potentially indefinitely) for the Labour party or the Conservative party.

Reasons	Reasons to cease to vote for or vote regularly for the	
	Labour party	Conservative party
Action and inaction when in govern-ment	Key decisions precipitating abandoning support for Labour varied among individuals, e.g. military action in Afghanistan and Iraq (C58M) and loss of grammar schools (C72F). Could be overall perception of a mismatch, e.g. not being her "idea of socialism" (C78F) or "rich people ... not paying enough tax" to assist poorer people (N66F).	Concerns about the 'choice of leader', e.g. Cameron (C72F). And when Thatcher was perceived to have become "too domineering and unlistening" (W75M). React strongly when aware of a major mismatch with personal values and ideas, e.g. the "no such thing as society statement associated with" Thatcher (W51F).
Find better matches on key issues	Some people came to believe that other parties might be a better match for their left-wing views, e.g. the Liberal Democrats in the 2010 election (C58M).	Emergence of a personally acceptable alternative that dealt with issues that were important to them, e.g. vote UKIP in local elections (C72F and N63F).
Their MP and electoral candidate	There may be no personally acceptable Labour candidate standing, e.g. 'dilemma' faced by many Labour supporters in Calderdale when a well-regarded Labour MP retired and the Labour candidate failed to win their respect (C59F).	Acts as a 'thinking voter' – assessing what the candidates and parties 'offer'. Select whoever seems the 'best' to her, which currently happens to be the Conservative parliamentary candidate (W61F).
Their local councillor	A highly regarded Labour councillor resigned from the party because the national party promoted female candidates. As an independent, he retained his seat (N63F).	
They change	Labour party members might decide to resign after one or more negative experiences. Although some may continue to vote Labour (N60F), others find this inconsistent and vote for other political parties (N66F). Acquire increased political awareness and interest: no longer "just following the herd" (N65F).	Over time may get to learn more about the ways that people feel and think about things, e.g. social interaction with other Conservative party members revealed a mismatch in 'ways of thinking' (W78F).
They migrate	Moved somewhere that Labour cannot win a seat (W80F).	

Table 4.4: Examples of reasons given by research participants for continued support or voting for the Labour party or the Conservative party.

Reasons	Reasons to continue to support or vote regularly for the	
	Labour party	Conservative party
Can deal with sources of dissatisfaction	Recent Labour governments: could believe MPs still retain underlying 'sympathies' and values but are just making very slow 'progress' in the desired direction (W78F). Believe controversial changes in Labour party reflect a pragmatic response to the changing political context. Need to get into power to get desired action (W78M).	As have not had a Conservative government since 1997, there is no recent exposure to decisions or actions that conflict with their personal views or interests. Personally important, negative experiences of a Conservative government have either not occurred or have been forgotten.
Have favourable opinion of local politicians	May have a favourable opinion of their Labour MP and/or local councillors. But this cannot override high levels of dissatisfaction with Labour governments (C56F).	Are/were satisfied with their Conservative MP (W78F). Conservative controlled councils are perceived either positively or as similar to another party (C65F and W82F).
Improve the quality of their electoral experience	Party members in Newbury may volunteer to help election campaigns in neighbouring (Labour) constituency (W76F) or take up active, party neutral role in electoral process, e.g. poll clerk (W78F).	
Active party members	Especially, if have decades of active involvement, can help reinforce commitment to party. Also difficult to disengage if membership is a valued part of personal identity and source of valued friends (N66F and C90M).	Continued membership of the Conservative party could help reinforce commitment to the party (C82F).
Find alternative ways to desired changes	Where have a personal desire to 'do something' for the 'local community', e.g. voluntary work to improve the range of educational opportunities available locally (W78M).	
Find ways to feel happy about your values	Opportunity to interact socially with like-minded people important in 'Conservative strongholds' (W78F).	A former social worker said that she saw her many 'left-wing' views as 'being caring' (C65F).

Political opportunities vary over time. The Green party only become a regular option in local elections in recent decades. This party is apparently an attractive local election alternative for former Labour voters. But it also appeals to research participants with other voting patterns. However, Green party parliamentary candidates struggle to get votes in marginal parliamentary seats, like Calderdale, which increased some Green party supporters' frustration with the electoral system.

Some research participants who regularly voted were 'struggling' in the run-up to the 2010 general elections. A 64 year old woman in Northumberland is "quite cynical about voting", a feeling which grew "since Tony Blair took over" Labour. For her, the major parties "all seem to say the same thing". While a 78 year old woman in Calderdale became disillusioned by Labour governments in "the last few years" and now apparently disbelieved all politicians' electoral promises. And after wars in Iraq and Afghanistan lost Labour a long-term voter, the MPs' expenses scandal led this 73 year old man in Northumberland to feel that he could not vote for anyone.

One way of attempting to understand better these dynamic processes as they occur across time and space is to attempt to construct individual life histories and identify major influences. Variable amounts of information were obtained in each interview, therefore some important influences might be omitted. Adequate life histories could only be produced for 12 people. The diversity of these research participants' electoral participation histories is illustrated diagrammatically (Figures 4.1a to 4.6b, starting on page 177).

As children and young adults, their families apparently provided variable influences on research participants' voting decisions in terms of who to vote for and the duration of this influence (Figures 4.5a and 4.6a). Class identification was important to some long-term Labour voters. Consistent with Andrews' (1991) findings, class identification appeared an intellectual exercise for someone with a more affluent background (Figure 4.1b), but was associated with living in difficult circumstances for other people (Figure 4.3a and 4.3b). Growing up in 'strong working class areas' helped to reinforce support for the Labour party. For two 63 year olds raised in urban, working class areas, there were possible gender differences: the woman focused politically on children (Figure 4.3a) and the man on housing (Figure 4.3b). Contrasting their early life histories with that of a 63 year old woman raised in a low income household in a less urban situation (Figure 4.6b) indicates the role of differential opportunities for political participation. Where there are few personally appropriate opportunities and limited family or peer influence, then intrinsic motivation could dominate early political decisions.

Limited information was collected about individuals' educational and working lives. However, higher education contributed to some younger research participants' social mobility (Figure 4.3a and 4.3b). Changes in a Labour government's secondary education policy were interpreted as reducing their children's educational opportunities, leading one person to cease voting Labour (Figure 4.2b). Although Labour seemed to benefit from a widely perceived compatibility with employment in education and membership of teaching unions, some decisions made in government seriously weakened these associations (Figure 4.1a). Similarly, a socialism-inspired

former social worker's Labour vote was lost when she felt 'betrayed' by senior Labour party members' school choices for their own children (Figure 4.3a). Greater opportunities for mature students in higher education were enthusiastically taken by some older people. Often, subjects were chosen that complemented pre-existing political preferences (Figure 4.4a). Importantly, this practice reflects continued openness of some older people to unfamiliar ideas and activities.

For these research participants, there was little evidence that voting decisions were influenced by major life transitions changing family life: marriage and partnership formation, having children, separation and divorce, and widowhood. However, a woman 'drifting leftwards politically ' believed that meeting her future husband helped her to identify a good match between Labour and her views (Figure 4.6a). She said:

> In my family, when I was growing up, [the idea of voting Labour was so out there] ... you couldn't think about it. So it probably took a slight outside influence for me. (51 year old woman, West Berkshire)

Having a wife who shared his strong support for the Labour party probably helped sustain a West Berkshire resident's satisfaction with voting Labour (Figure 4.2a). As already seen, issues related to their children can impact on voting behaviour. In turn, adult children may introduce their parents to alternative political parties to vote for (Figure 4.1a).

Working lives could end before (through resignation, redundancy, ill-health or planned retirement), at, or after state pension age[9]. However, only possible indirect influences on voting behaviour were observed. For instance, retirement could create an opportunity to re-engage with active party membership that could help sustain

continued votes for that party (Figure 4.1a). But votes could be lost to a party following retirement migration of non-party members to locations dominated by other parties (Figure 4.1b).

Non-voting aspects of individuals' political lives can also help discourage voting for one – or any – party. For example, unsatisfying experiences of interacting socially with other party members at branch meetings (Figure 4.4b). Individuals who do not belonging to a party, could feel comfortable about changing who they vote for (Figures 4.1b and 4.6a). Even non-party members might choose to cast a 'wasted vote' to express their sympathies with a minority party (Figure 4.3b). And the emergence of new political opportunities, such as the Green party and environmental NSMOs, could encourage people to change their political affiliations (Figure 4.6b). Some localities, like parts of Calderdale, support alternative lifestyles and politics through numerous high profile local events and resources.

Other aspects of individuals' lives, such as voluntary work and leisure activities, may also influence their voting choices to some extent. Thus, 'church and Mothers' Union' apparently provide complementary influences helping sustain one woman's Labour vote (Figure 4.4a).

Long-term Conservative voters appear to have been less challenged by changes in their party than Labour voters. And recent Labour governments' actions helped reinforced one woman's 'anti-socialism' tendencies (Figure 4.5a). However, some people switched to UKIP in recent local elections, partly because of UKIP's

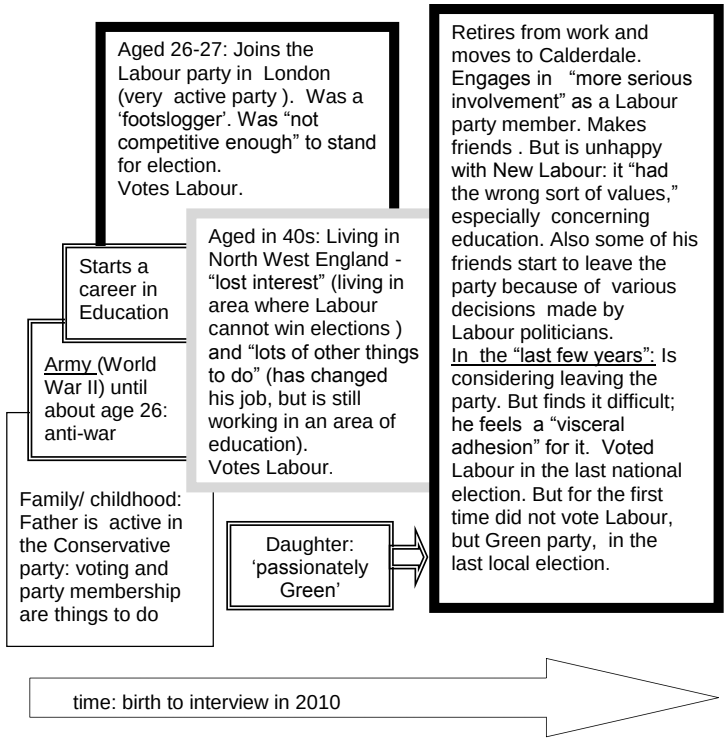
manifesto and partly because of doubts about the Conservatives and their current leader (Figures 4.2b and 4.5b).

Some age-related patterning was observed in these people's life histories. As expected, there were possible generational differences associated with the Second World War. One man had been in the army (Figure 4.1a). Some older research participants have memories of parents returning from the war (Figure 4.5a). The varied nature of these experiences are reflected in their diverse political influences. More localised – in space and history – is the experience of 'growing up in poverty in working class, urban areas with lively socialist groups' (Figures 4.3a and 4.3b). This potent political stimulus disappeared with 'slum clearances' and the decline in active formal political groups.

Further information is required for meaningful analyses of other research participants' voting histories. A noteworthy example is a younger research participant's experience of redundancy late in working life, which contributed to her becoming more sceptical of the chances of implementation of superficially attractive election manifesto items. Now, she tended "to err on the side of caution" when voting. Therefore, biographical research approaches offer explanatory insights into older people's opinions and experiences of voting and elections.

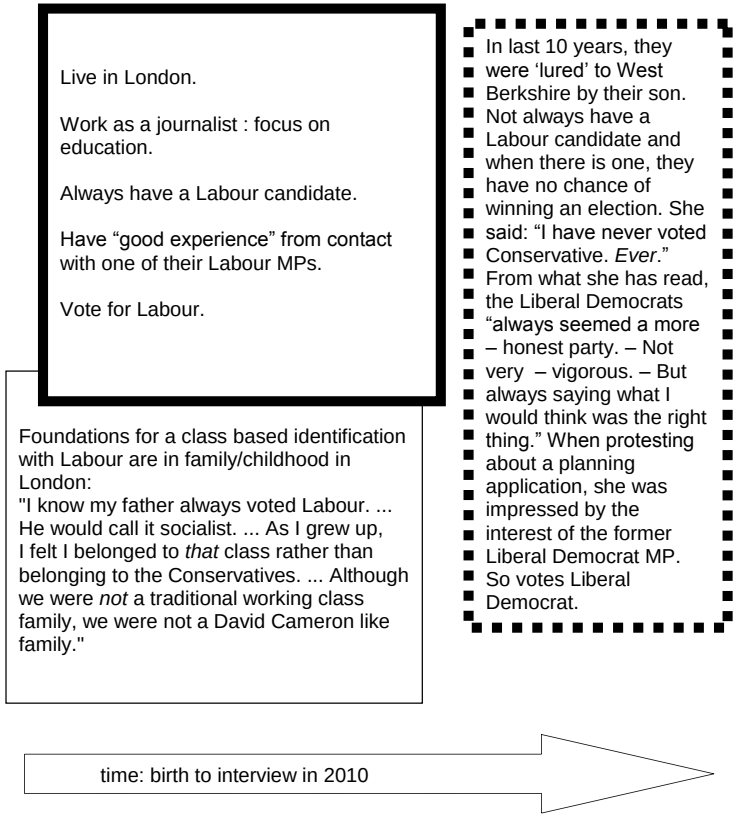
Figure 4.1: Diagrams illustrating lifetime patterns of levels of commitment to voting for a political party and major influences on voting behaviour for

a) a 90 year old man currently living in Calderdale



"I've been a [very] committed Labour party supporter – virtually all my life. Until the last few years."

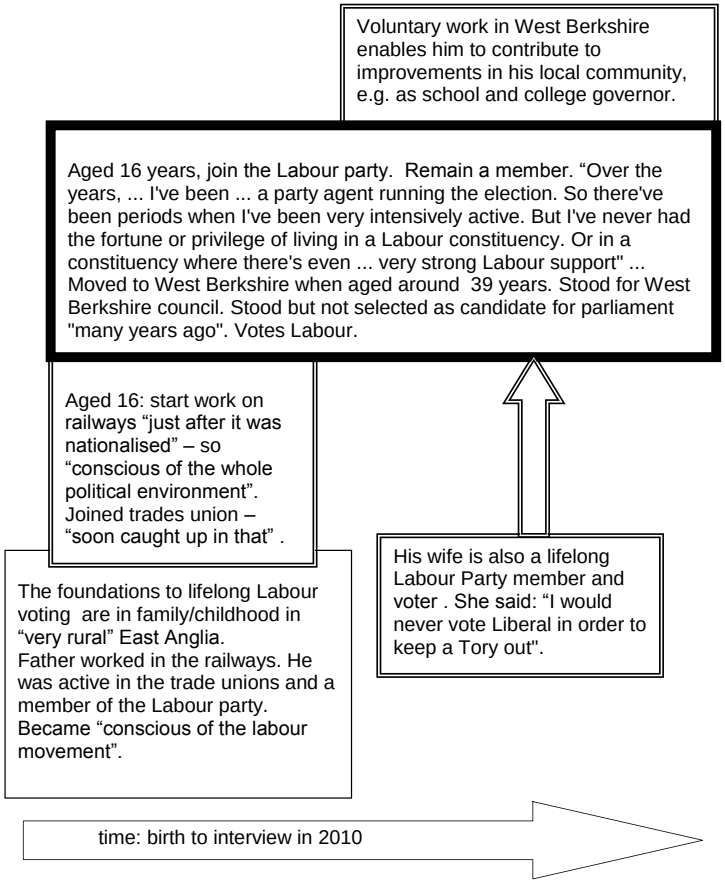
b) an 80 year old woman currently living in West Berkshire



Key (Figures 4.1a to 4.6b): Approximate sequence of events/actions. Boxes with thick borders represent phases in this person's political life. A thick, grey border represents a lower level of political activity/interest. A thick, broken line represents a marked change in voting behaviour. Other boxes represent other aspects of this person's life that apparently influence their political life. Box with arrow represents a person's influence on this person's political thinking and action

Figure 4.2: Diagrams illustrating lifetime patterns of levels of commitment to voting for a political party and major influences on voting behaviour for

a) a 78 year old man currently living in West Berkshire



b) a 72 year old woman currently living in Calderdale

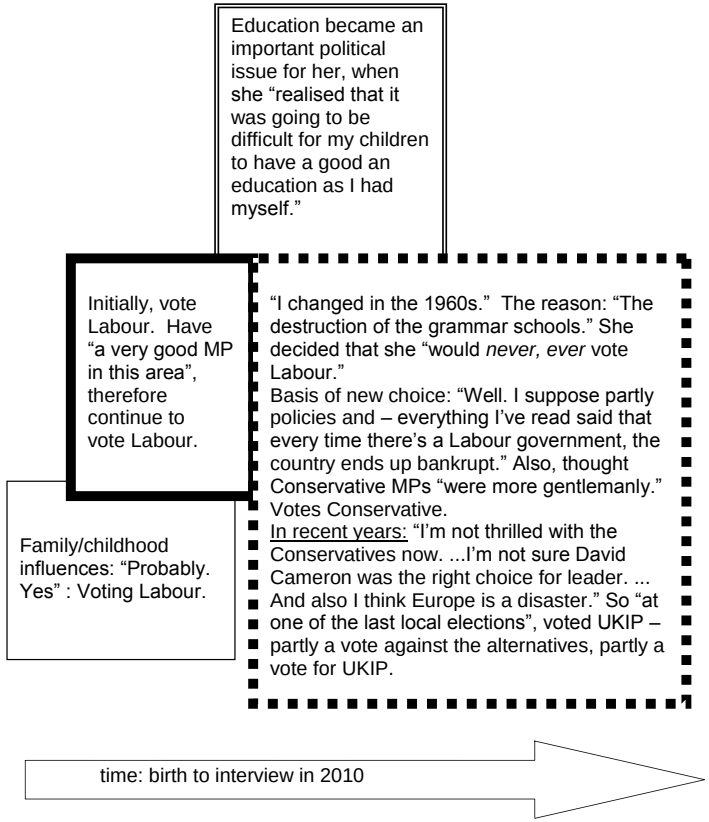
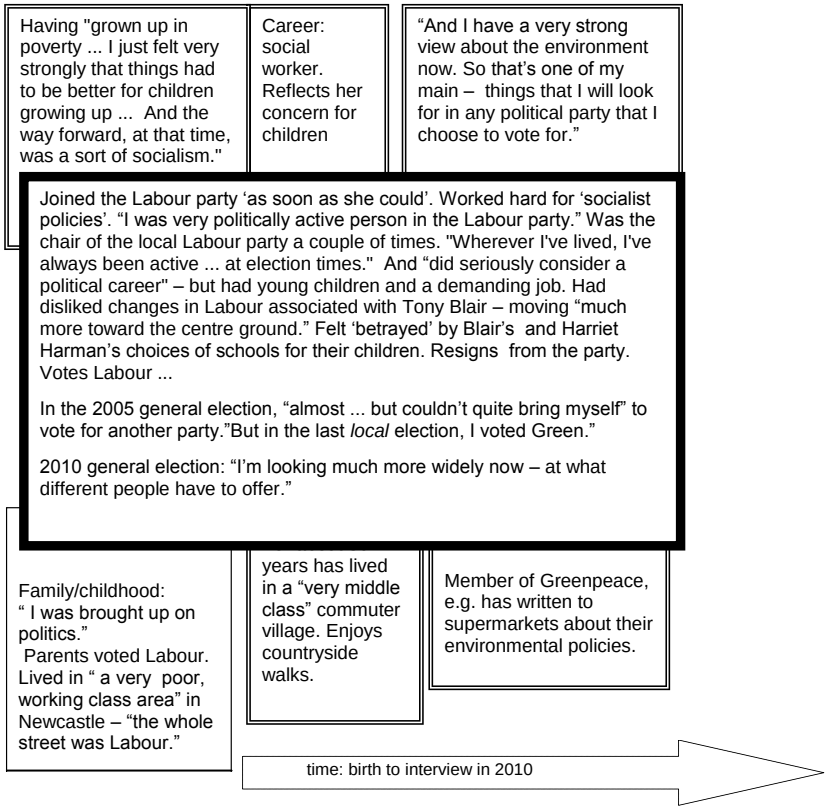


Figure 4.3: Diagrams illustrating lifetime patterns of levels of commitment to voting for a political party and major influences on voting behaviour for

a) a 63 year old woman currently living in Northumberland



"Until – very recently, I voted for one political party." – "I was a lifelong Labour voter."

b) a 63 year old man currently living in Calderdale*

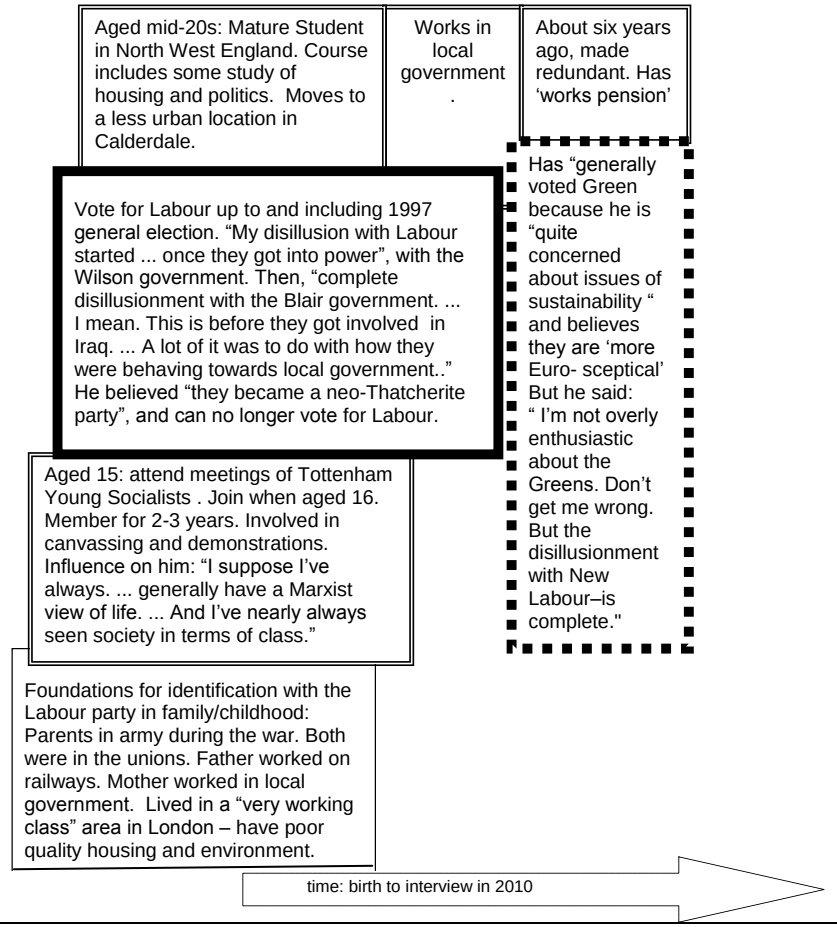
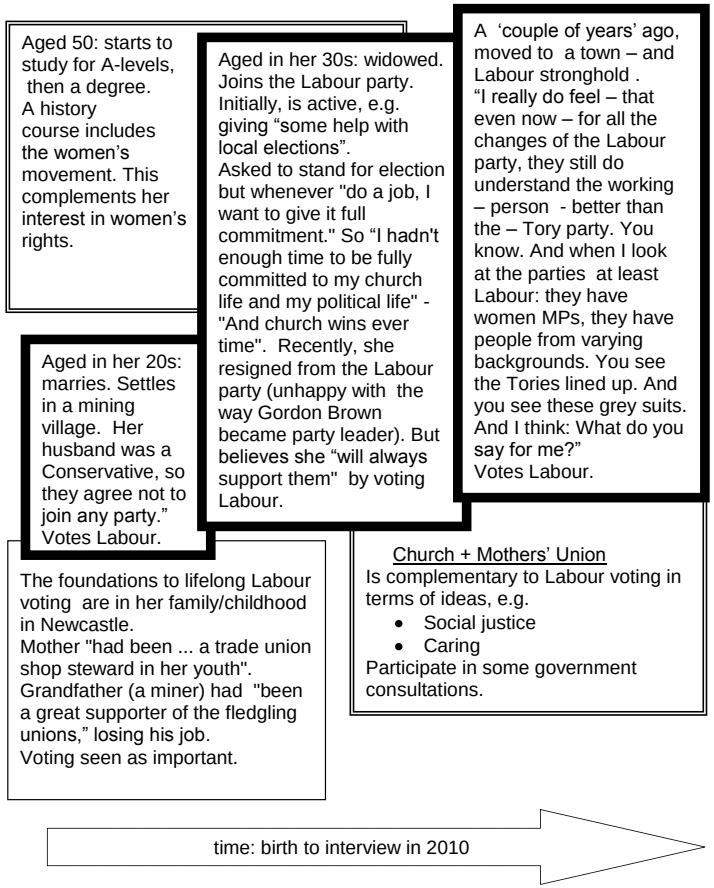


Figure 4.4: Diagrams illustrating lifetime patterns of levels of commitment to voting for a political party and major influences on voting behaviour for

a) a 60 year old woman currently living in Northumberland



b) a 58 year old man currently living in Calderdale

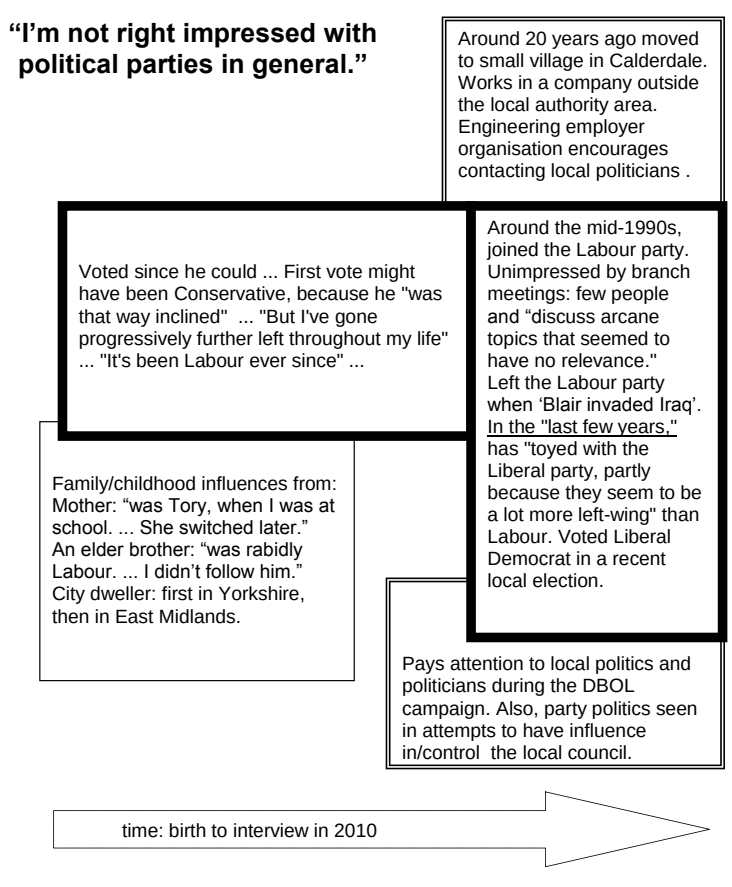
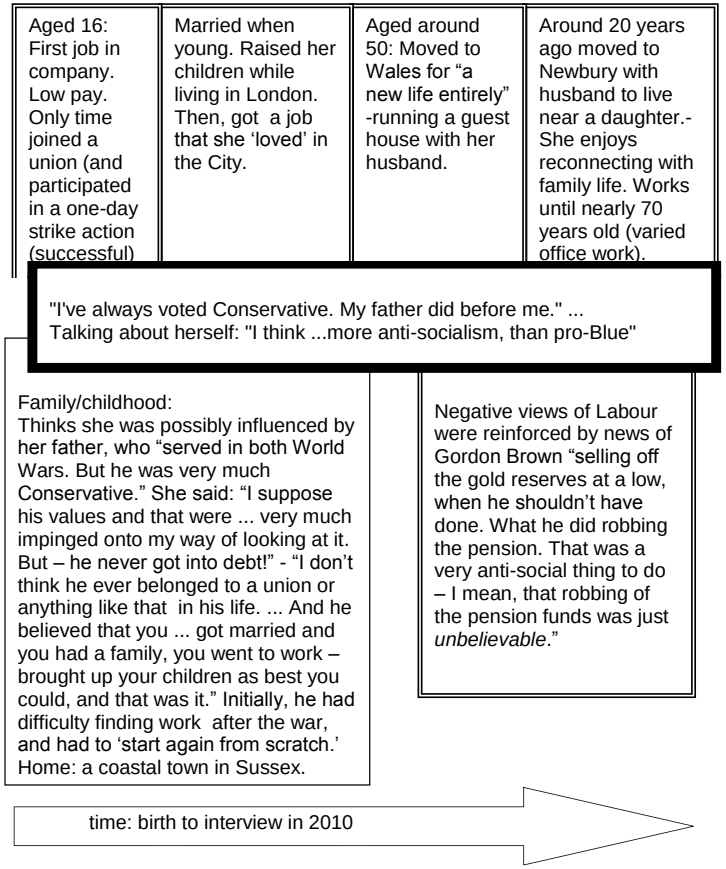


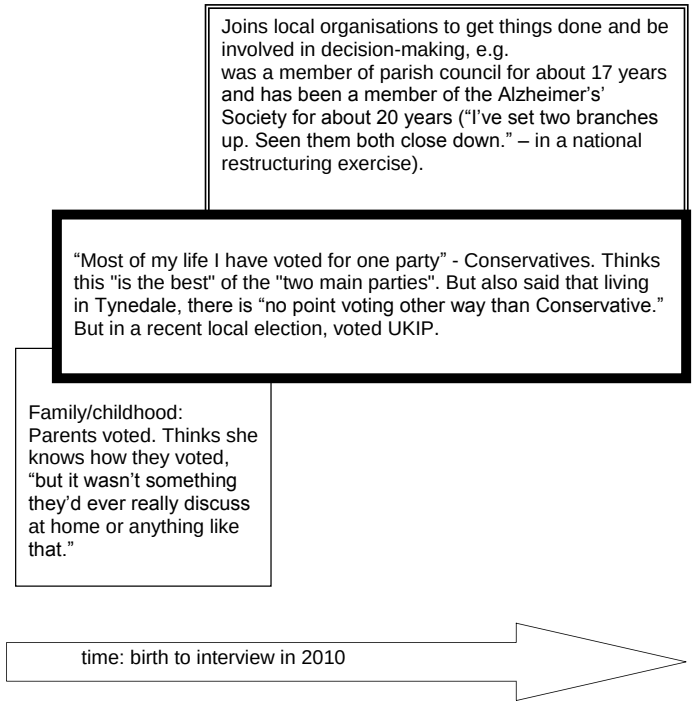
Figure 4.5: Diagrams illustrating lifetime patterns of levels of commitment to voting for a political party and major influences on voting behaviour for

a) a 78 year old woman currently living in West Berkshire*



"I never, ever got involved politically as a worker ... It wasn't my scene at all ... I didn't feel strongly enough ... about it."

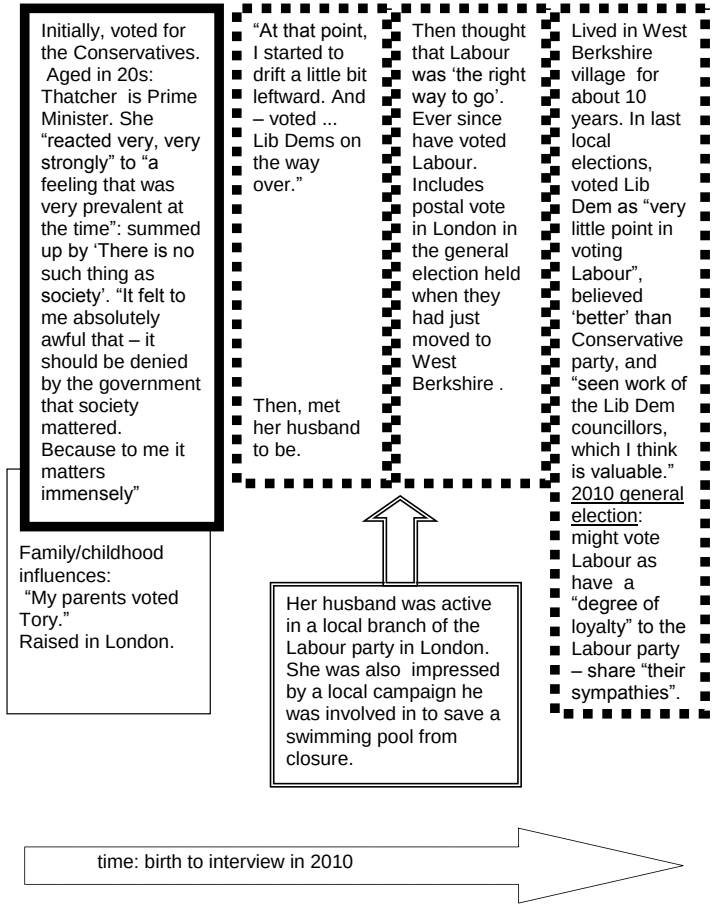
b) a 63 year old woman currently living in Northumberland



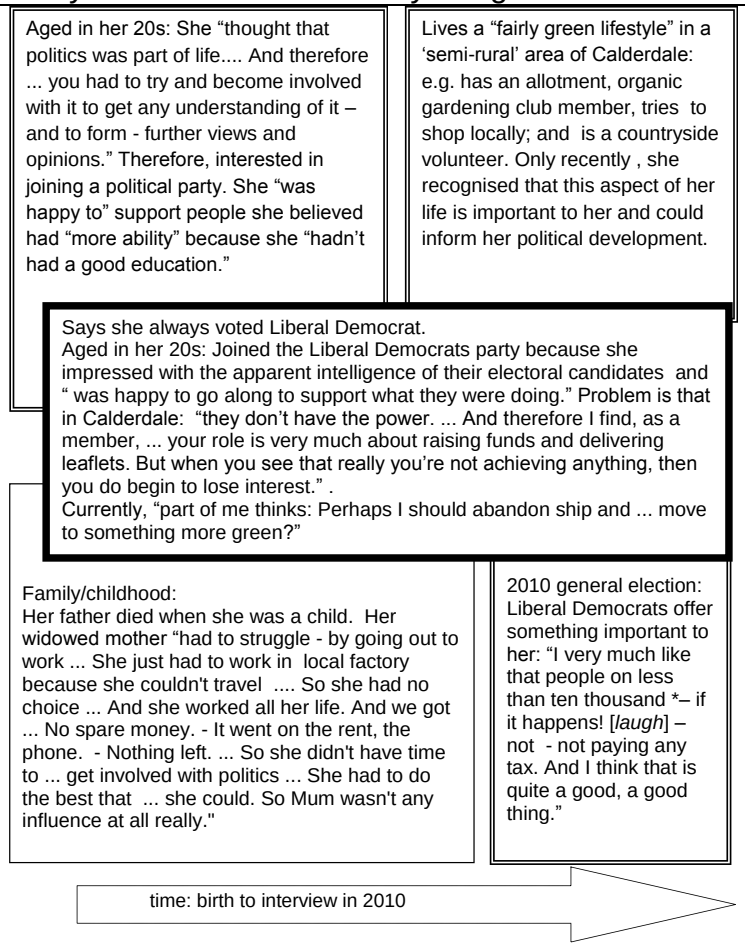
"Most of my life, I've voted for one party." – "I'm totally anti-Labour."

Figure 4.6: Diagrams illustrating lifetime patterns of levels of commitment to voting for a political party and major influences on voting behaviour for

a) a 51 year old woman currently living in West Berkshire



b) a 63 year old woman currently living in Calderdale



4.3: Party Membership

As seen in Chapter One, currently, party membership is uncommon in England and the membership of the major political parties is ageing. This section reports evidence about the nature of research participants' lifetime experiences and understandings of party membership. Just over half (22) of the research participants joined one or more political parties during their lifetimes. However, only seven people were paid-up, party members when they were interviewed. This section starts by looking at their self-reported reasons for joining parties. Then, examples of some of their experiences as party members and local councillors are outlined. Finally, reasons given for staying with or leaving parties are considered.

4.3.1: Joining

As joining a political party is voluntary, individuals must choose to become party members. This section considers what research participants said about their experiences of joining parties.[10]

Table 4.5 presents examples of the reasons given by research participants for joining a political party. A distinction can be made between people who joined a political party as young adults and those who made this decision later in life. Additionally, these decisions varied in the importance of either political (affective or intellectual) considerations or more generally social reasons.

Table 4.5: Reasons research participants gave for joining political parties.

Reasons research participants gave for joining a political party	Number of people	Age (years)
Joined early in their lives because:		
• they wanted to join the party as soon as possible. Usually, have active party members in their immediate family.	6	60-80
• she wanted to learn about politics because 'politics is part of life' and to help to develop her own views and opinions.	1	63
• this was something that their social group did.	2	66, 82
• it helped him to get away from his family home – a 'difficult' social environment.	1	68
• it was the only viable opportunity for a young newcomer to a Cornish market town to "find some friends" in her age group.	1	61
Joined as a mature adult because:		
• the opportunity to join her preferred party only arose when she moved home to another area.	1	78
• a new political party was recently created that 'seemed to be just what they wanted', e.g. the Green Party.	2	67
• she was invited to join by someone in her employment-related social circle and it 'sounded interesting'.	1	78
• they were invited to join more than one political party after attracting attention through some public action, e.g. organised a successful local petition or a vocal critic of Blair.	2	60, 82
• they were asked to join a party to stand for election as a local councillor.	1	82
• a close relative was asked to join the party to stand for election as a local councillor and she initially joined to 'help with the election'.	1	80
• they were dissatisfied with the government and felt some affinity with another party.	2	58, 75

Note: 'early joiners' were teenagers or young adults aged in their 20s. Some people have been members of more than one political party.

Like electoral participation, political socialisation in childhood and youth appears important for joining a party while a young adult. Close family members' and peers' party activism or membership can encourage membership, although not necessarily in the same party (Figure 4.1a).

Although his parents were not party members, the Young Liberals provided one research participant with a socially acceptable 'escape' from his parental home. In rural locations, parties provided the only acceptable social opportunities for some research participants in their youth. Parties benefited financially and from associated recruitment opportunities, which have diminished with the emergence of alternative opportunities for young people to socialise (e.g. Beith, 2008, pp. 59-60).

Lacking any family influence, one woman's strong intrinsic motivation to understand politics was crucial. She decided to do this by joining the Liberal Democrat party (Figure 4.6b).

Some people first joined a party when they were over 30 years old (Table 4.5). Two people said they were reacting against the government at that time. Opportunity was the reason given by three people: reflecting geographical and temporal variations in the presence and level of activity of different parties. And the other people were recruited by local parties, sometimes with a view to becoming a local councillor. The Liberal Democrats appear particularly active in trying to recruit members; for example in adult education classes and among voluntary sector committee members.

Sometimes, the decision to join a political party involved limited personal reflection, especially when predominantly undertaken for social reasons. For instance, when a busy professional was recruited:

> Somebody came around the door and sounded interesting. And ... I didn't honestly give it a lot of thought. (78 year old woman, West Berkshire)

Therefore, there appears to be marked diversity in individuals' timing and reasons for joining political party. Adopting a biographical approach helps reveal insights into individuals' typically temporary membership of one or more political parties. Furthermore, this approach copes with historical changes in political parties (their characteristics and numbers) and the socio-political context.

4.3.2: Being a member

Having joined a political party, what did being a 'party member' mean for individuals? This section considers research participants' comments about their experiences.

Research participants experiences of being party members were diverse. The range of activities experienced and levels of participation appeared to vary considerably among research participants, across the electoral cycle, and sometimes during individuals' lives (Figure 4.1a). People who moved homes could find local parties more or less satisfying. For instance, an 82 year old woman in West Berkshire remembered the "very active lot" in the Young Conservatives in Oxford creating a "very lively scene". In contrast, "it all seems a bit moribund" in her local Conservative party.

People might do little more that pay their membership fees. Generally, it was acknowledged that few people are active party members. Two people commented about presenting a 'facade' to the public:

> Now it's just this minority that – are giving this impression that there might be ... a lot going on. But actually, it's really minimal.
>
> (63 year old woman, Calderdale)

Having few active members makes it difficult for some local parties to undertake canvassing and leafleting. It can also contribute to internal communication problems and members' dissatisfaction; for example, if local councillors are 'too busy' to inform other party members about their involvement in contentious Council decisions. Some party members found ways to remain actively involved as they aged. Their commitment is illustrated by an 80 year old woman in Calderdale who, until 2009, hand delivered leaflets in settlements located on steep hillsides. Some older research participants displayed party posters; although even this activity could be problematic:

> I'm a Liberal Democrat. And I've had a poster up, which has been pinched and pulled out of the ground. ... Only a couple of days ago. I'm quite annoyed.
>
> (82 year old woman, West Berkshire*)

Party membership provided opportunities to learn informally by doing; for example, developing organisational skills. 'Political thinking' might be developed through party meetings and other social interactions. Although one former party member said:

> I used to find the sort of endless political discussions a bit boring.
>
> (61 year old woman, West Berkshire)

But she discovered an interest in "the mechanics of elections and the law", which led her into personally satisfying employment as a trainee political agent.

It cannot be assumed that a party member will always vote for that party whenever a candidate is available. If their candidate has no hope of getting elected, some people choose the 'closest' alternative party with a chance of winning or prefer tactical voting. Those choosing to 'waste' their vote on their preferred party, such as Labour

in West Berkshire, appear to value highly both party loyalty and the expressive aspects of voting.

Therefore, these findings are consistent with the existing literature. Party membership covers diverse activities among party members and for individual party members over time. However, relationships between membership of and voting for any political party are not straightforward.

4.3.3: Competing to be and being a local councillor

A greater commitment of time and personal resources is required to be a political representative in the local council. Seven of the research participants said they had competed in local elections, including three women who were elected as parish or town councillors. Another ten people said that they had thought about standing for election. This section concerns research participants' comments on their diverse experiences of and opinions on standing for election and being a local councillor.

Geographical location was a consideration, partly because:

> Being a local councillor in – Westminster would have been harder work than ... being a parish councillor – in a little place. – In a smaller place ... I might think of doing that. Not in a town. – Not even in Morpeth.
>
> (66 year old woman, Northumberland)

Additionally, people could be asked to compete in 'supposedly unwinnable wards'. For some people this would be unappealing. But for others, it could be seen as an 'experience' or, if competitive, as an opportunity to 'surprise' their party. New party members can feel that they should volunteer to demonstrate that they are 'really

keen'. Established party members tended to be encouraged to stand by other party members.

Family and paid work commitments can influence decisions to compete in elections. Generally, these commitments changed over historical time; with possible generational variation in family roles. For instance, a woman said:

> I had a ... toddler and a ... baby and a husband paddling his own canoe up the river. And I simply could not. ... It was after that ... I sort of more or less withdrew a lot from politics. ... I helped him in the [*architecture*] practice and I helped the family. Basically that was my concern. ... Because in those days, fathers didn't help. ... He didn't do anything to help with the children.
>
> (82 year old woman, West Berkshire)

And in the 1970s, a 66 year old woman remembered having to stop work (as a social worker) when she had her children. However, another 82 year old woman received "tremendous encouragement" from her husband, who rushed home to "mind the children" so that she could be a parish councillor.

Diverse perceptions exist about councillors. Some comments are apparently based on observing councillors' performances, in terms of 'getting things done well' within the political system. Alternatively, comments reflect individual's normative beliefs about what a 'good councillor' is. Here the individual's political resources are compared with those of real or imagined 'good politicians'. For instance:

> I would have liked to have been. But I feel that to do it well ... you should be fairly well educated and ... and be able to – I mean, I've got one friend who does a good job. But she's had a good education and she can ... digest a lot of information about meetings and what have you. Where I think – I've a sense of what I think is right and in my view I would fight for. ... But whether I would ... [have the ability] to stand [in the council] and put things into words – and to do it well? – And that is one of my fears. (63 year old woman, Calderdale)

For some people there were other personally preferable ways of ‘doing politics’, such as campaigning. And two people came to realise that they were not ‘competitive enough’ or were lacking in ‘personal ambition’ to stand for election.

Old age did not discourage people from being local councillors. An 80 year old woman in Calderdale said: “I was well over 70 when I was made mayor”. She confirmed the time-consuming nature of being a councillor, which partly depended on their participation in voluntary activities, such as answering consultations. For her, being any sort of representative was a way of ‘getting her voice heard’. She said she used her status as leverage to bring about tangible change, such as footpaths to playgrounds. But reflecting on her experience, she said she had “lost faith in the council”.

While two women appeared satisfied with being parish or town councillors, a woman, who had been a parish councillor in West Berkshire, stood unsuccessfully for election to her district council. Being a councillor for decades appeared less personally satisfying and constructive than other aspects of her life. She reflected:

> But over all my years, have I actually changed anything in the political world? Don’t know. (82 year old woman, West Berkshire*)

A research participant, who felt unable to start a ‘political career’[11] because of her family and paid work commitments, did not think she would have “been content to be just a councillor”:

> I would have been a councillor because ... I actually think that politicians should go through that. And then I would have ... thought about becoming an MP. (63 year old woman, Northumberland)

Over individuals' lifetimes, their circumstances tended to change, including things that prevented or discouraged them from becoming a councillor. But during these periods, their political interests may also change, and other interests and lifestyles may be preferred. For instance:

> For the last 22 years, we've had my parents living with us. ... So in addition to working full-time and looking after them, being a councillor was not something that was necessarily going to fit in with that job. – Yeah. – And now they've gone and we're free, yes ... it certainly is something ... I think ... my husband and I considered it, in the past. But I'm not sure that we – really want to become that involved now. We want to enjoy our time together. And do what we choose. (61 year old woman, West Berkshire)

Therefore, these findings suggest that important insights into some individuals' political lives and learning will be missed if research excludes consideration of pressures (real or perceived) on party members to stand in elections, as well as any experiences of entering these electoral competitions and of being local politicians.

4.3.4: Staying and leaving

For some party members, there can be times when they find themselves deciding whether or not to resign from their party. This section considers these situations, which inevitably overlaps with aspects of decision-making about voting for a political party (see section 4.2). But choosing to leave a party can be more difficult for emotional and social reasons, especially for people who have been active party members for decades. For instance:

> People you're with are your social group, as well. And so it's very hard to leave – because you might lose all your friends. ... I found it terribly difficult – to actually bring myself to the point of leaving the Labour Party. – I really, really miss [it]. (66 year old woman, Northumberland)

Research participants, who had decided whether or not to leave the Labour party, volunteered some of their reasons (Table 4.6). People who remain members constructed arguments that maintain compatibility between their reportedly unchanged political values, and the nature of the Labour party and the Labour governments' actions. Some of these arguments are based on historical understandings that reflect their age (in their 70s) and retention of unfavourable memories about life under Conservative governments in the 1980s. Resignations appear to be largely reactive. People tended to resign after several, personally unsatisfactory experiences with their party. Sometimes, people reacted quickly to a perceived 'betrayal' of personally important, political principles.

Similar reasons reportedly informed these decisions by members of other parties. As socialising appeared more important than politics for some Conservative party members, changes in friendships can encourage resignations:

> I just drifted away from that group of friends. Really. I did. I just ... drifted away. Things happened. And things change. Don't they?
>
> (65 year old woman, Calderdale)

And attending a local Conservative party meeting, led one woman to discover that she did not share the other party members' values and beliefs.

Changes in personal circumstances or thinking can prompt termination of party membership. For example, party membership became unaffordable for one couple in the late 1970s, when they had to work long hours to meet their rapidly increasing mortgage payments. Recently, an 82 year old woman thought her membership of the Liberal Democrats was "a waste of money". She prefers to give financial support

Table 4.6: Reasons research participants gave for either staying a member of or resigning from the Labour party.

Reasons research participants gave for staying or leaving	Number of people	Age (years)
<u>Happy to remain a member because:</u>		
• they take a long-term view on progress towards desired outcomes. Expect to have some 'disappointments'.	3	76-78
• can imagine how controversial actions or decisions might have arisen.	1	76
<u>Considering leaving the party:</u>		
• but although feeling that the party has "the wrong sort of values", he feels "some sort of visceral adhesion" when he thinks of resigning. Has many years of commitment to the party. Also, has valued friendships among party members.	1	90
<u>Have resigned from the party because:</u>		
• they felt disconnected from New Labour, which is not representing their political views or values.	2	63, 66
• disagreed with actions of Labour governments, in particular, for example, for recent involvement in Iraq.	2	58, 66
• disagreed with the way Brown became party leader without a 'proper election'.	1	60
• disagreed with Blair becoming party leader. One women said she felt 'betrayed'.	2	63, 66
• disagreed with senior Labour MPs (Blair and Harman) choosing selective schools for their children.	1	63
• unsatisfactory experiences of social interactions with local party member because:		
○ they have fixed political views and think everyone else is 'wrong'.	1	80
○ few people attended local meetings and they discussed "arcane topics that seemed to have no relevance".	1	58
• she was 'not interested enough'. Her parents were 'very active' Labour party members. She was disappointed to find that the experience of party membership has 'changed completely' from when she was a child.	1	78
• he believed that other political parties better represented his 'left-wing views', e.g. International Marxist Group.	1	60

Note: some research participants talked about more than one reason. Date of resignations varied, as did the duration and characteristics of party membership.

directly to the local party and was supporting her grandson's campaign in the 2010 general election.

Alternative ways of trying to get things done politically have emerged, especially for issues inadequately dealt with by existing political parties (see Chapter Five). Any changes in existing political parties do not appear to have increased their appeal, even to former party members. For example, one man who abandoned active party membership by his mid-30s said:

> I think my political thinking's increased again. But my political activities ... they've kind of – [gone in all sorts of different directions].[12]
>
> (60 year old man, Calderdale)

Even long-term active party members can increasingly struggle to believe that their parties are distinctive and can achieve desired changes. For instance, a 63 year old Liberal Democrat party member was unhappy about her local party's "lack of openness" making it "hard to know what you are working for". She had started to think: "What is being achieved?".

Therefore, a variety of practical, social and political reasons can inform decisions about whether or not to resign from a political party. Adopting a biographical approach helped to generate insights into decision making in a context where individuals and their socio-economic circumstances can change, as could the parties they joined.

4.5: Conclusion

Empirical evidence was presented that illustrates some of the diversity and dynamics of research participants' lifetime experiences of voting in elections and party membership. Therefore, this chapter contributes to a richer and more nuanced understanding of voting and party membership in England.

All the research participants tended to vote regularly in elections. However, elections have tended to become less intellectually and emotionally engaging for older people. Partly, this reflects informal feedback on the performance of recent Conservative and Labour governments. Observed changes in election campaigns do not appear to have improved communications between candidates and voters. Although the introduction of postal ballots was welcomed by some older people, the electoral system and existing parties could be sources of dissatisfaction. Examples were found of individuals changing their pattern of voting one or more times. Importantly, one person had ceased to vote regularly in local elections and another person felt he could no longer vote for any candidates in the 2010 general elections. Although the recent MPs' expenses scandal contributed to increasingly negative evaluations of politicians, generally it appeared insufficient to cause people to abstain from voting.

The relationship between party membership and voting for that party is not straightforward. Active party members can be unaware of even their local politicians' activities. Consistent with the literature, members can have little or no interest in party politics. Social aspects of membership can be important in recruitment and retention.

5

OLDER PEOPLE'S POLITICAL LIVES: MORE THAN JUST VOTING IN ELECTIONS AND JOINING POLITICAL PARTIES

5.1: Introduction

Political participation covers more than just voting in elections and party membership, as seen in Chapter One. This chapter further illuminates older people's diverse understandings and experiences of politics by exploring research participants' remembered experiences and opinions of participating in a range of political activities. In particular, attention is paid to changes in individuals' political activities and opinions during their lifetimes. First, consideration is given to some political activities, both separately and as part of political campaigns. Then, the roles of organisations in some individuals' political lives are noted. Finally, some ways to research older people's personal histories and political repertoires are introduced.

This chapter demonstrates that valuable insights, which can be used to inform future research, can be gained into older people's political activities and opinions by focusing on a wide range of political activities, both separately and as part of campaigns. The potential political influences associated with diverse formal organisations and public consultation/involvement activities should not be neglected. Adopting a biographical approach proved a fruitful way to generate explanatory insights into individuals' diverse political lives: revealing interconnections between

different parts of individuals' social lives, and between individuals' participation in and understandings of different types of political activities.

5.2: Types of political activities

This section reports research participants' diverse experiences and understandings of six types of political activity identified in previous research (see section 1.2.1): contacting activities, petitions, badges and other symbols of support for causes and campaigns, consumer politics, lawful public demonstrations, and group action. Therefore, this section directly addresses research questions about types of political activities ever undertaken, and about continuity and change in individuals' political understandings and practices. Also, it helps to develop a clearer picture of the nature of individuals' political lives and ways to explore and explain them.

5.2.1: Contacting activities

Contacting activities can be classified by types of target (MPs, local councillors, public officials, and organisations) or approaches (legal or through the media). Each category of contact was reportedly experienced by some research participants. Space constraints limit reporting to the most commonly mentioned experiences and understandings of contacting; that is contacting MPs, organisations and the media.

a) Contacting MPs

Research participants' most common target for contacting was their MP. For 12 people, contacting appeared to be initiated by organisations that individuals belonged to or supported. Some organisations, such as Amnesty International, were supported for decades. Other organisations were more recent features in individuals' lives. Individuals, such as general practitioners, could mobilise contacting. Self-initiated contacting was also reported, including eight people protesting or raising objections.

Some contacting sought to win MPs' support: two people sought help to solve family problems (nationality questions and a dispute with property developers), two people made suggestions (teach children to use keyboards and urging support for 'reform of parliament'), and two people's MP 'facilitated contact' with ministers, with whom they corresponded as part of their long-term campaigns. These two campaigners spent considerable amounts of time attempting to establish and maintain effective ongoing communications with their MPs. As one of them said:

> We tend not to give up easily. And we will make sure that ... whatever we send is very scientifically and professionally based. Really. So ... we're not perceived as eccentric, ageing nutters. ... But this notion that people who are writing a lot must ... have [some] bee in their bonnet – a certain eccentricity. We'd not want that – perception to be gained. (67 year old man, Calderdale)

The perceived impact of contacting apparently depended partly on MPs' own opinions and interests. These activists' MP was responsive to information about environmental and 'Third World' issues. But communications were different with a previous MP:

> We had some very interesting exchanges. ... Because we were different – political persuasions. And therefore the only comment we got from that

> particular MP was that our letters were. How did he put it ...? – The best informed letters he'd received from his constituency. But we didn't influence him one bit. (67 year old man, Calderdale)

Usually people expressed satisfaction with the written responses they received from their MPs. But most MPs were believed to be unable to do much about many major issues concerning older people.

Some research participants' current or previous employment, such as former public servants, involved communicating with MPs. One man was arranging for prospective parliamentary candidates to visit the company he worked for as part of a national employers' campaign to raise the profile of manufacturing. However, not everyone had this experience to build upon. For instance, a 78 year old woman said she "was a bit disgusted" that her son apparently had to contact an MP before she received her Pension Credit.

b) Contacting organisations for political purposes

Ten research participants said that they had contacted various organisations. Again, sometimes organisations played a role in initiating contacts; for instance, Greenpeace's 'cards' facilitated a 63 year old woman's contacting Tesco and Asda "about their environmental policies". Two self-motivated people regularly wrote to diverse organisations to try to influence their policies or practices:

> Well we contact – organisations we're sympathetic to. To support them. Send them money. Encourage them. Criticise them, at times. We've had a running – discussion with Friends of the Earth about one or two issues, where we felt they've lost their radicalism, *et cetera*. (67 year old man, Calderdale)

Generally, contacting tended to be reactive – to protest about changes to services; such as the 63 year old woman contacting health authorities about local hospital services that “were reduced drastically”.

c) Contacting the media

Contacting the media was reported by 27 people, including 19 people giving examples of contacting independently for political purposes. Most commonly (11 people), letters were sent to newspapers. Topics were diverse, including suggesting building nuclear power stations, criticising higher education, and commenting on government policies. A 65 year old woman used ‘the press’ to publicise her local petition. Two people provided information they considered important to correct or counter potentially damaging media reports: a 63 year old woman was so ‘annoyed’ that she participated in a radio phone-in programme about pensions and a 78 year old man wrote letters and was interviewed by reporters because of his role as a governor of a school that received arguably unfair criticism from a local councillor. Sometimes (four people), the media itself was the source of objections; for instance, complaining about loud music making it impossible to listen to documentaries. Emotional reactions could stimulate some contacting; such as the 67 year old woman who was “just incensed” by a radio interview about the banking crisis that did not ‘take up’ or adequately ‘challenge’ the banking industry’s representative. Some people derived personal satisfaction from joining in debates in local newspapers’ letters’ pages.

Research participants have varied experiences of contacting the media. Published letters could help individuals to achieve desired outcomes. For example, a 72 year old remembered her letter to *The Times* generated 'public support' that helped discourage the Methodist church from converting a graveyard into a car park. But exposing one's views in public has unpredictable responses; for example:

> I once did. And then it engendered such a lot of horrible letters ... that I thought: Well I'm not doing it again. (75 year old woman, Calderdale)

And as contacting the media requires some skill and effort, some people excluded themselves. For instance, a man who was politically active in other ways said:

> I don't consider my verbal skills quite good enough and ... I suffer a little bit from dyslexia. So my written [skills] not good. (60 year old man, Calderdale)

And some people were 'wary' of making contact based on experience of working with the media either as part of their employment or union activities.

Research participants reported participating in diverse contacting activities for political purposes. Often, contacting appears to have been stimulated by diverse organisations and to be largely reactive in nature.

5.2.2: Petitions

Consistent with survey evidence (e.g. Table 1.1), research participants were likely to have come across at least one petition in their lives. Most people recollected signing a petition. However, there were variations in the range of topics that individuals supported, the numbers of petitions signed, and how they came across the petitions.

Some people said they only signed petitions after deciding that it was about 'something that mattered' to them and they agreed with the petition. People could sign petitions on many topics. But some people tended to focus on narrower ranges of topics that they felt particularly strongly about; for instance:

> I'm quite ready to sign – for things like – anti-war protests or ... any good left-wing causes. (90 year old man, Calderdale)

Petitions were encountered in different ways; for example, in local shops, being approached in the street, or reading about petitions in local newspapers. Organisations sometimes ran petitions that their members or supporters might sign. At least six people signed petitions online; including three people who used the government's 'Number 10 Downing Street' petitions website. Consistent with the literature, information about petitions received from close family, friends and colleagues can be influential. For instance, a woman "involved a lot in Green – alternative type issues" introduced the last petition signed by her friend, who said:

> I find it quite hard not to sign a petition, if I'm – asked personally. But I probably wouldn't ... sign, unless I agreed with it.
> (56 year old woman, Calderdale)

But the process of petitioning raised some concerns, undermining its value as a 'political tool'. Two people commented on perceived abuses; such as non-residents signing a 'local petition' and people signing a petition several times. An 80 year old woman was concerned about recently received publicity suggesting that Calderdale council has ignored "small petitions, that deal with a small local area".

Many research participants expressed the opinion that petitions either are (12 people) or can be influential (12 people); for example, if petitions are 'large' and associated with 'a lot of publicity'. Additional potential impacts were suggested, such as awareness raising or indicating levels of public concern. Interestingly, some people who doubted that petitioning could influence decisions, might sign petitions; for instance, 'hoping that something will be done'. Responses to petitions influence individuals' perceptions of this activity. While the Chinese government's response to an individual's recent petition on animal welfare was perceived as being 'very helpful', a signatory of a 'Number 10 Downing Street' petition said:

> If they get more than so many hundreds[1], I think. ... they're supposed to respond to them. Or Gordon Brown is supposed to do something. But then you get this most anodyne reply that says that the third under-secretary on the right has read your blah, blah, blah, blah. Just reiterate government policy and ... 'There, there. Don't bother us anymore' sort of thing.
>
> (58 year old man, Calderdale)

Nine research participants remembered organising a petition. Two petitions arose from the organisers' concerns about the wellbeing of their children or grandchildren. But a planning-related petition was described as "purely selfish" – for existing local residents. A former school teacher was spurred into action to petition the Chinese government because of information displayed in the RSPCA shop in which she volunteered.

Although it was common for research participants to remember signing petitions, their experiences and opinions about petitions as political tools varied and could change over time. Organising petitions was uncommon but appeared to provide greater political learning than signing petitions.

5.2.3: Badges and symbols of support

Wearing badges or other symbols of support for causes or campaigns (hereafter, for brevity referred to as 'wearing badges') was something that research participants either said that they never did (19 people)[2], used to do, or tend to do. This section considers the experiences and opinions of people who do or have worn badges. Twelve research participants (aged 51 to 82) used to wear badges. Commonly this change reflected their changing patterns of involvement in political action. For example, people who terminated their membership of organisations like CND and the Labour party 'years ago'.

Fashion and purpose were among topics raised by the ten people (aged 59 to 78) who tend to wear badges. One man talked about wearing traditional badges[3]:

> Not as much as we used to do, because wearing badges has gone out of fashion – in the last 20 years. In the 60s, you did it. In the 70s, you did it. In the 80s, you did it. But ... since the 80s, people have not worn badges. We lost all our badges. Mislaid ... them. ... And we found them. ... So we've started to wear some again. Basically. – But I wouldn't be wearing loads of badges on my clothes. I might wear one – discrete badge, here and there. And vary it.
>
> (67 year old man, Calderdale)

Furthermore, any badge has to serve some purpose for the wearer. Badges could simply express the personal importance of belonging to or supporting an organisation.[4] But some people chose badges to attract public attention and stimulate conversations in which they could present their views. Diverse responses could be elicited from the public; for instance:

> I've only ever had one really negative response. And that was in – Manchester Piccadilly station. ... And ... I had a – argument with a chap about – 'Meat is Murder' badge. – But that's the only one really. So it's quite good. And in fact

> two women, both who work for the post office, asked me where I got my badge. And I got them one each. And I gave them a load of literature as well.
> (67 year old woman, Calderdale)

An individual's personality and commitment to a cause are probably important influences on whether badges are worn. Social context could also be important for the impact of badge wearing. For instance, a 60 year old man wore an amusing 'Pooh for Peace' badge in the late 1960s, encountering no serious comment; probably partly because many of his peers wore similar items. But today, the 'Meat is Murder' badge appears 'confrontational' partly because of the rarity of traditional badges, the blunt message, and minority status of vegetarianism.

Research participants' experiences of displaying symbols of support for causes or campaigns covered diverse topics and symbols. Emotional considerations appeared to strongly influence some participation (and non-participation). A biographical approach appears appropriate for investigating these activities, especially as they can be associated with temporary individual involvement.

5.2.4: Consumer politics

Consumer politics was experienced by most research participants during their lives. After considering research participants' experience of and opinions on consumer politics in general, this section focuses first on boycotting and then buycotting.

Generally, research participants lacked personal knowledge about the problems targeted by their actions. Most of the boycotts mentioned were supported by various

national organisations and received widespread publicity in the national media. Labelling schemes, such as Fair Trade, facilitated buycotting. Some research participants tried to keep up-to-date with ethical concerns by subscribing to consumer magazines. Self-initiated or informally organised consumer politics appeared uncommon. A possible exception is a 72 year old woman's boycott of 'Boots chemists'; reflecting her feelings about a former employer and blaming its former chief executive for recent adverse economic impacts in Calderdale.[5]

Levels of commitment to consumer politics varied among research participants and over time. People could 'sympathise' with, for instance Fair Trade, but not 'go out of their way' to purchase it. However, consumer politics was believed to play a useful part in long-running campaigns employing diverse activities; such as campaigns against animal testing of cosmetics.

Residents of Hebden Bridge and Todmorden are exposed regularly to stimuli and opportunities for consumer politics. The local supermarket (the Co-op) is widely viewed as 'ethical' or 'green' and there are many small independent shops. Similar stimuli and opportunities appear less common in Northumberland and, especially, West Berkshire. These differences could help explain why 'green' and 'organic' buycotting featured among Calderdale's research participants, but not among those in West Berkshire. 'Local purchasing' in Calderdale appeared more likely to focus on avoiding foodstuffs imported by air than expressing a desire to 'support British farmers', as found in West Berkshire.

Both the youngest and oldest research participants had boycotting experience. The most commonly reported boycott (12 people) was the long-running, highly publicised boycott of South African products for the anti-apartheid campaign. For example:

> For a very long time – until the 1990s, I didn't buy South African – food. ... That was probably my first – [that I] can remember, political experience – Going with an aunt, the one whose husband was an MP, to the local shops and she's saying 'No. I won't have that, it's from South Africa'.
> (66 year old woman, Northumberland)

Currently, boycotting is more common among research participants aged under 70; which might partly reflect geographically-related influences. For example, all but one of the eight research participants (aged 56 to 90) who mentioned boycotting Nestlé lived in Calderdale, where the company has a large factory.[6] Moreover, boycotts can be irrelevant to many older research participants' lifestyles; for instance:

> I don't like. Well it doesn't affect me now so much. But clothing which comes from these sweat shops. ... These Nike things that are sold at a huge price over here. (71 year old woman, Northumberland)

Importantly, some people now believe that boycotting is an undesirable way to achieve changes. For instance:

> I have boycotted some things – in the past. But ... after – looking into it – and discussing it – I decided that didn't work. ... What you were doing was taking it out on the little local farmer – who couldn't help anyway. ... Boycotting – South African goods during apartheid. (60 year old woman, Northumberland)

Buycotting is liked as a more positive way for individuals to support desired changes. Buying Fair Trade products was the commonest example, reported by 17 people (aged 51 to 90). Although there is an expanding range of everyday Fair Trade products in mainstream retail outlets, they might not be purchased. Some people's incomes limit their participation because of these products' generally higher prices.

Choosing to regularly purchase local, organic and Fair Trade products is acknowledged as “a privilege” by a “very conscious eater”. And the perceived social pressure to be seen to ‘do the right thing’ by choosing a Fair Trade product was a source of irritation to some people.

Complementarities existed between individuals’ life histories and consumer politics. Thus, a man previously involved in a woodland-related charity emphasised timber labelling schemes and a woman whose father had worked in the food industry believed that British farmers “need our support”.

There was considerable variation in the extent to which, when and how consumer politics featured in research participants’ lives. Some evidence suggested that where people lived could influence their participation in consumer politics. Importantly, complementarities were observed between individuals’ life histories and consumer politics.

5.2.5: Lawful public demonstrations

Consistent with the literature, some research participants, for various reasons, said that they had not and would not participate in lawful public demonstrations.[7] Space constraints limit reporting to research participants’ diverse experiences and opinions of demonstrating.

A majority (24, aged 51 to 90) of the research participants said they had participated in at least one public demonstration. There was considerable variation in frequency, biographical timing, and types of demonstrations. Some research participants aged in their 60s have considerable experience of demonstrating. This could reflect generational differences in access to higher education and to being aged around 18 to 27 years old in 1968 – a peak year for student activism. For example, a man reflected on being "much more politically active" than his parents:

> Partly, happened when I went to university. – Because I went to Warwick in it's opening days. ... And ... because I also grew up at the period when the Vietnam war protests – were going on. So I took [part in] Grosvenor Square demonstrations and marched with car workers in Coventry. – And – that kind of thing. – And I've been ... kind of involved – more or less ... ever since – in some kind of campaign. (63 year old man, Calderdale)

Place – in terms of social networks – appeared to be important among people who had participated in several demonstrations. Thus, a 68 year old man's political activism appeared to have been stimulated by exposure to diverse political groups and ideas in his 'formative years' in London. A 63 year old man became politically active through living in a politically-charged working-class area of London. He demonstrated "a lot" as a teenager, although sometimes just doing "what other people do".

Although some people demonstrated several times as young adults, they have not demonstrated for many years. Contributory factors include moving away from central London or working outside Britain.[8] Some people said that they had to feel strongly or 'passionately' about a demonstration's cause.

Some people's experience of demonstrating is limited. For example, the youngest research participant's first demonstration was in 2009. Then, the mobilisation efforts of a personally valued organisation (the WI) combined with her family's enthusiasm to participate together, helped overcome her 'reserved' and 'cautious' nature. Important influences apparently include a combination of individuals' personalities, the demonstration's characteristics, and how participants were mobilised. For instance, a 66 year old woman is "a big countryside supporter" but disinclined to do "things through organised groups". Her sole remembered experience of demonstrating was taking up her friends' invitation to join them for a moorland walk to protest about countryside access.

Research participants reported both positive and negative personal experiences of demonstrating. Positive experiences could be associated with interactions with other participants; such as:

> Heartening. Because you find yourself among people who all care as strongly as you do about something. And that's a – very ... good experience.
> (78 year old woman, West Berkshire, CND march)

Participants in large demonstrations could feel as if they 'were part of something important'. Expressing their views was important, therefore the public's response could enhance their experience; for instance:

> A lot of – people were agreeing with us. As we walked around. And talking to us. (63 year old woman, Northumberland*, Alzheimer's Society march, 2006)

But the public's reaction could vary between demonstration, as one woman found in her 'marching decades' in London in the 1970s and 1980s:

> But I went on – a women's march once – I can't tell you the date. It was fascinating because of the misogynistic comments that we got from the pavements, which I'd never had before. (66 year old woman, Northumberland)

And some research participants recalled experiencing real or threatened violence, which could sometimes be predicted by the type of demonstration. Even experiences described as “scary – it felt life threatening” did not deter a strongly motivated 60 year old man’s participation in anti-fascist demonstrations.

Diverse views existed about the impact of demonstrations. Although a 73 year old man “never thought they were terribly influential”, he demonstrated, but mainly for social reasons.[9] Some frequent demonstrators adopted a long-term view and do not expect to see “an immediate impact”. Some demonstrations are apparently designed to be memorable and can facilitate cross-generational sharing of ideas. For example, a 76 year old woman remembered the “very uplifting” experience of taking her daughter to join other women protesters encircling Greenham Common.

Some comments were made about the role of the media, which sometimes created misleading impressions of demonstrations[10] or even failed to report some large demonstrations.[11] Media accounts also provided feedback about the impact of demonstrations. For instance, the anti-Iraq war demonstrations involved large numbers of people, were widely publicised in the media, and did not deter the government, leading some people to conclude that governments do not ‘take much notice of them’. For instance, one non-participant said:

> I don’t understand what they base their decisions on. – Or what kind of groundswell that they need in order to tip it the other way. To listen to people – what they’re saying. (58 year old woman, Calderdale)

Research participants who had participated in lawful public demonstrations reported diverse experiences of and opinions on these activities. It is noteworthy that some younger old people had demonstrated recently and that some old-age-related organisations were mobilising their supporters to participate. This flexible research design helped to illuminate the influences of diverse organisations and the media on individuals' understandings and experiences of demonstrating.

5.2.6: Group action

With the exception of planning-related activities, forming or joining a group of like-minded people to influence rules, laws or policies was uncommon among research participants. Careful interview probing for involvement was required because informal groups were sometimes disregarded and planning-related action was not always perceived as political action.

A few people said that they were involved in forming or had joined an organisation that could be characterised as being political. A 67 year old woman was an active member of a women's peace group in Halifax in the 1980s. And a 68 year old man recalled being involved in attempting to establish a 'peace group'.

Walking-related political action was prominent in parts of Calderdale, with protests about access to moorland. Around five years ago, a few enthusiastic walkers formed a walkers action group leading to Hebden Bridge becoming the first Walkers are Welcome town in Britain in 2007 (Walkers are Welcome, 2011). More generally,

Todmorden and Hebden Bridge were suggested to have less interest in 'politics' than in 'ecological interests'. Interested local people were engaged in practical action formalised through organisations like Incredible Edibles in Todmorden (Incredible Edibles, 2011) and the Transition Towns movement (Transition Network, 2010).

Planning-related protest activities were a common focus for temporary, informal group action. Affected parties could meet local politicians to raise their concerns and seek support. The nature and level of participation in these group activities varied. Some places, like Hebden Bridge, attract numerous controversial planning applications. Although planning proposals can cause anger, and even, allegedly, death threats (Merrick, 2008), there can be positive impacts for individuals. Many of the skills involved in planning objections, like collating evidence and presenting an argument, are transferable to other political arenas. Some complementarities existed with participants' personalities and types of employment.[12]

Forming or joining a 'group of like-minded people' for political purposes covers diverse activities. Biographical research approaches could be helpful in gaining insights into these temporary activities that can be characterised by participants as predominantly 'non-political'.

Therefore, this section illustrates the diversity of research participants' experiences of and opinions on six commonly researched types of political activity. Some evidence was found of the varied intrinsic and extrinsic factors supporting non-participation, and continuity and change in participation during individuals' lifetimes.

5.3: Political campaigns

Although much political participation research has focused on different types of political activities separately, individuals and groups may engage in political campaigns involving different types of political activities over a prolonged period. By exploring research participants' involvement in political campaigns, further insights can be gained into the nature of individuals' political lives and understandings. This section focuses mainly on one recent example of a campaign in Calderdale that was commented on by six research participants, who had varied involvement with it.

The 'Don't Bulldoze Our Library' (DBOL) campaign ran between March and October 2009, but has roots dating back to July 2008 (DBOL, 2010). This campaign protested against the local councils' plan to 'knock down' the central library in Halifax and relocate it. Six points about DBOL are noteworthy for research into older people's political understandings and experiences.

First, a group of generally older old people (Calderdale Pensioners Association) noticed the problem and started to campaign against the council's decision (DBOL, 2010). They identified an appropriate local organisation (Halifax Antiquarian Society) to work with and made a favourable impression on some of its members.

Second, the services and facilities under dispute were used by diverse people of all ages. DBOL's organisers gained support from organisations ranging from children's

nurseries to various religious and ethnic organisations (DBOL, 2010). It was plausibly suggested that some groups were activated politically by this campaign.

Third, there appeared to be many more people willing and able to help organise this campaign than actually formed the DBOL organising committee. Some people had previous experience of political activism, as well as relevant specialist technical knowledge and international social networks for advice and support.

Fourth, this campaign appeared to have stimulated people to pay greater attention to local politics. For instance, a 67 year old man had for decades been "more involved in campaigns that were national" or international. Partly, this neglect of the local reflected the nature of existing political organisations and media coverage.

Fifth, all active participants and many 'interested bystanders' learned politically from this campaign. It was a new experience for most participants because, as a 'seasoned' campaigner said, they "had to really engage with the political processes". In particular, greater awareness was acquired about the roles and varied competence of local councillors, and the power of local council officers. And although local media coverage (e.g. Drury, 2009; Peel, 2009a) was difficult to obtain, it probably helped raise local awareness of the campaign.

And sixth, the personal demands (including cancelled holidays) and rewards of campaign activism were mentioned. For instance:

> It was invigorating. It was exciting. ... *Extremely* time consuming. – By the end, I had had enough of it. But that didn't mean to say that we were going to stop.

> But, you know, we'd all had enough of it because – it was four or five months [absolutely intensity of running it.] ... it just took over my summer.
>
> (56 year old woman, Calderdale)

They anticipated about a month of "fairly intensive work", but the council and officers "put up a huge fight". Possibly, the combination of their relative youth, their professional backgrounds, and generally having 'retired' status enabled them to commit themselves effectively to this campaign.

Three other research participants reported experiences of political campaigns that could illuminate aspects of older people's political lives. Two key points from their accounts are personal commitment and political learning.

Personal commitment was highlighted in two accounts. A 65 year old woman in Northumberland spoke about independently organising a petition and involving the local media as part of a campaign to persuade her council to erect a fence around a play area. This approach appeared to complement her preferred style of working and situations where few people would participate. A 75 year old woman was aged around 50 when she became actively involved in a ten-year campaign seeking the redevelopment of an historic property in Greater Manchester for public use.

Political learning featured in all three accounts. For example, the 75 year old woman's experiences reinforced her perception of her local council's spatial bias in resource allocation. That effective political support was required but might be impossible to achieve was also learnt by a 60 year old woman, who was involved in the late 1990s in an unsuccessful campaign against proposed planning consent for

open cast mining around a Northumberland village. Her group had local (Labour) council support, but faced a pro-development (Conservative) government. As the council's support seemed likely to lose 'much-needed' public money, this group took a pragmatic approach, and successfully negotiated an agreement with the developers to minimise adverse local impacts.[13]

Therefore, research participants' varied reported experience of involvement in political campaigns suggests that they can be powerful sources of political learning. Moreover, some older people appear to possess the personal and collective resources required for political campaigning about topics they can commit to.

5.4: Roles of organisations

As noted in Chapter One, diverse organisations can play varied roles in older people's political lives, especially through political mobilisation and developing their political capital. Therefore, exploring research participants' organisational involvements can contribute to explanations of individuals' political experiences and understandings.

First, this section outlines research participants' experiences of trade unions and professional associations. Then, consideration is given to the roles of a range of other organisations in research participants' political lives.

5.4.1: Trade unions and professional associations

Any influences of trade unions and political associations (hereafter referred to as 'unions' for brevity) on older people's political behaviour and understandings inevitably reflects individuals' working lives and their associations, if any, with unions. Because of space constraints, this section concentrates on people's experiences of union membership. However, four research participants (aged 51 to 80) said they were never union members and eight others (aged 58 to 78) said they were not union members throughout their working lives. Among working age people, age appeared to be a less important influence on union non-membership than gender, type of employment, and political beliefs. Union membership may have little relevance for anyone in temporary and low-paid or part-time employment. Such work appeared to be common in Calderdale.

When research participants were members, they tended to have limited involvement with their unions. Several people only remembered paying their 'dues' or, at most, attending an occasional meeting. Memorable aspects of union membership tended to be 'non-political'. For example, an 80 year old woman said "it was considered really quite nice to be a member of the NUJ". More often, people commented on the importance of access to advice and information about dealing with personal workplace problems. Professionals might receive career-enhancing information and opportunities for networking with their peers.

Political mobilisation by unions appeared to be limited to when research participants were members. Even then, evidence on meeting attendance and strikes suggests that some unions might have limited influence on their members. Some people were satisfied with their working conditions, discouraging active engagement with unions.

Strikes can be opportunities to participate in and learn from collective action. At least 15 research participants participated in one or more strikes. People differed greatly in their feelings of obligation to their union and in their experiences of strikes. Some people said they would only strike if they 'felt it was right' to do so. Often, these people provided public services that they believed were important to service users. Personal principles could undermine the perceived legitimacy of some strike calls. Thus, a 66 year woman said "I cannot and will not ever strike – for money"; a principle which was tested during the "scary time" when she refused to join a ten month long strike of social workers. Seeing adverse impacts of strikes can influence outsiders' opinions against strikes and unions. For example, some Northumberland residents saw the material hardships experienced by miners' families in the1980s miners' strike and the enduring social tensions created in some mining communities.

Nine people reported having formal roles within their unions. No-one used unions as part of a political career. Some people were willing to take up a vacant role. Other people were strongly motivated to challenge or do something about problems in their workplaces. Historic context could present distinctive opportunities. For instance, a 71 year old woman recalled 'daring' to speak critically about her union's activities at

their conference; after which she was nominated to help challenge sexism in the civil service in the 1970s.

Being a union representative, helped some people to become more confident and acquire politically relevant skills and knowledge. However, there were some negative experiences. For instance, ill-health was experienced by two people working in problematic workplaces with stressful relations with management.

Individuals' opinions and support for unions could change during their working lives. This change could reflect individuals' changing priorities, especially prioritising their careers. For example, a 60 year old man's union role became "far too time consuming" and a 59 year old former school teacher grew to feel that her union caused unnecessary problems because some "people were too bolshie". Taking time to reflect on their union and its activities could contribute to growing dissatisfaction. Thus, a man became disillusioned with being a union representative and "less enamoured of unions" partly because:

> In local government. ... you've got lots of people who are not members of any union. And you've got some people who *are* members of the union and then, when there's an industrial dispute, decide they're not to go out on strike. When ... people have voted for it. ... You're in a really ... weak position.
>
> (63 year old man, Calderdale*)

The few retired people who remained union members tended to value the information it provided and/or wanted to support their union. It was uncommon to attend meetings. The 'narrow outlook' of unions could make them irrelevant to individuals' post-employment phase of life, when other organisations might influence individuals' political understandings and experiences.

Consistent with the literature, most research participants with experience of union membership were only members during their working lives and their membership was often passive. Relationships between members and their unions were not straightforward, casting doubt on unions' capacity for political mobilisation. Some of the people who took up formal union roles gained political capital.

5.4.2: Other organisations

Research participants talked about diverse formal organisations that featured in their lives in ways that could sometimes impact on their political capital or mobilise them into political action. Examples of these organisations are given in Table 5.1.

Importantly, the presence of organisations and their activities vary geographically and over time. Reduced levels of organisational activity can impact on individuals' political activity. For example, a longstanding Friends of the Earth member was disappointed to discover that her local group was not arranging transport to "a big demonstration in London last year".

As involvement with these organisations is voluntary, changes in personal interests and circumstances will be reflected in an individual's range and type of organisational involvements. For example, two people terminated some memberships because of temporary financial problems during their transition from self-employment to retirement. And a woman choose between two personally valued activities: active membership of the local Labour party and of the Mothers' Union. Assumptions should

Table 5.1: Examples of politically relevant organisational influences.

Type of organisation	number of research participants **	Politically relevant types of activity experienced by research participant(s)					
		can talk/ learn about politics and current affairs	access information	mobilised to make political contacts	mobilise into campaign or public demonstration	involved in organising or leading activities (including fundraising)	other
Educational							
U3A	23	x	x	x		x	
WEA	7	x	x	x		x	
Interest-based							
Local History Groups	14	x	x		x	x	R
Wildlife	1	x	x			x	R, P
Countryside volunteer	2		x				V
Walking	3		x	x	x		
Town Twinning	3	x	x			x	
Motorcyclists	2	x	x	x	x	x	
Alzheimer's Society	2	x	x		x		B
Macular Disease Society	1	x	x	x			
Voluntary & Community							
Charity shops, e.g. RSPCA and Oxfam	6	x	x		x		
Charities providing local services (not driving)***	17		x			x	D, B
Local 'driving service'	5	x	x				
Playgroups	1		x			x	B
New Social Movement							
Amnesty International	16	x	x	x			
Greenpeace	9	x	x	x		x	
Friends of the Earth	4	x	x		x		
Womens'							
Women's Institute	2	x	x	x	x	x	
Townswomen's Guild	1	x	x	x	x	x	
Soroptomists	1	x	x		x	x	V
Widows	1		x			x	
Religious/Womens'							
Mothers' Union	1	x	x	x	x		V

Note: ** Number of research participants who mention membership and/or unpaid/voluntary work. *** direct provision of services, including advice, and social and technical support. 'X' means this activity was mentioned. 'Other': D = developed services, e.g. 'home visiting', B = set-up local branches; P = engages in local planning decisions; R = undertakes research; V = includes practical voluntary work.

not be made about the political nature of an organisation or type of organisational involvement. For instance, this woman's involvement in the Mothers' Union presented opportunities to engage in personally satisfying political activities; such as debating and responding to government consultations. Some organisations, such as the 'Soroptomists', were described formally as being 'non-political' but engaged in political lobbying (Soroptomist International, 2011).

Individuals' social networks can be expanded by organisational involvements. This could be a reason to start activities; as when some recent 'incomers' volunteered to work in charity shops. Changed social networks could impact on individuals' political experiences and understandings; as when a 68 year old unexpectedly met "someone who's introduced me to her friends, who are anarchists" through U3A membership.

Some organisations were valued as sources of information complementing research participants' varied interests. For instance, an 80 year old woman's "make do and mend" and "stop waste" sentiments encouraged her to remain a member of Friends of the Earth, partly "to support them financially and to read the leaflets". But information provided by organisations could fuel opposition to their activities. For example, when Greenpeace's messages conflicted with two men's professional scientific knowledge. And a former Greenpeace member changed her views after working for an oil company and a mining company; saying that she now disagreed with their "sweeping ... condemnation of nuclear ... advancement".

Learning-related activities are central to organisations such as the U3A, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and local history groups. Although the WEA provided adults of all ages with valued educational experiences that enriched their lives, their increasing fees and restricted range of courses appear to be increasingly problematic for older people. The U3A apparently replaced the WEA for some older people and could be their sole or main personal interest outside their homes. Several people expressed enthusiasm for various forms of lifetime learning, such as:

> Enriching your life by learning more about things. Which I think is something you can go on doing. And it's a good thing to do.
>
> (82 year old woman, West Berkshire)

Apart from opportunities to meet people and talk politics informally, many U3As run current affair discussion groups. However, politics, especially party politics, is often perceived as problematic. One U3A current affairs group discussed electoral systems but avoided discussing local politics. Elsewhere, a U3A lunch club incorporated politics within their varied conversations by adopting informal rules to deal with disagreement. Consequently, they were exposed to different points of view.

Voluntary work could present opportunities for politically relevant, informal learning. For example, awareness of diverse lifestyles and personal circumstances can be gained by people volunteering in family contact centres, supporting recently bereaved people and prison visitors, and acting as volunteer drivers for older people living in rural areas. The impact of these experiences on an individual's thinking may be long-lasting and can be intensified by timing in an individual's life. For instance, voluntary service overseas when 'young' gave a 63 year old woman "a much greater awareness of third world issues, which" she "carried right through". While a woman

engaging in pre-retirement voluntary work in Asia became sensitive to differences in intergenerational social interactions compared to England.

Like unions, organisations can provide opportunities to develop politically-relevant skills, especially for people helping with management or organising activities and events (Table 5.1). These organisational involvements could play a major role in an individual's life. For example 'joining the playgroup movement' led one woman to start a playgroup and become a chairman and employer; therefore:

> I began to see that I could actually do something outside my own sphere, of being a mum and a housewife. (82 year old woman, West Berkshire)

But volunteering to help organise things appeared to have a limited appeal among older people. For example, only about a fifth of the members of one U3A music group, with a "lot of ... members in their 80s", were prepared to take a more active role by 'doing a programme'. According to their 78 year old group organiser "they said they don't want to stand up – and talk". Such attitudes could threaten the sustainability of organisations requiring some active participation. And if organisational roles are taken from feelings of obligation or to ensure the survival of personally valued activities, research participants' comments suggest there could be little or no enhancement of their political capital. For example a woman talked about a natural history group she had belonged to:

> Then, one year, the chairman wanted to resign. And *nobody* would take it on. So I said "Well look, if you do the report, ... I'll do the chair". I didn't like doing it. I must say. Even though it was only small. No. – I sort of don't like – standing up there and saying. ... And then, there were some, several affiliated bodies that I attended. (75 year old woman, Calderdale)

Diverse organisations mobilised research participants' politically. This can be a reaction to a threat to something valued by the membership of diverse, apparently 'non-political', locally-based voluntary and community groups (see section 5.3). National organisations can engage in multiple campaigns trying to influence diverse targets using different approaches. For example, recently the Women's Institute (WI) encouraged a 51 year old woman to send postcards to British tea companies to ask them to change to Fair Trade, attend her first public demonstration ('Stop Climate Chaos'), and participate in a joint project with Oxfam (complementing her interest in interconnections between development, climate change and women's lives).

Finally, organisations are a way to 'get things done'. Participating in practical activities that complemented their personal interests allowed people with modest incomes to enjoy making a visible contribution to their locality. Examples included helping to manage almshouses and to monitor and maintain footpaths. Practically-focused organisational activities could provide an effective alternative to working through politicians, sometimes benefitting from considerable local support, as with environmental-related activism in Todmorden and Hebden Bridge[14], or, more generally, benefitting from changes in public funding arrangements.[15]

Consistent with the literature, enhanced political capital and mobilisation can be associated with individuals' diverse involvements with a variety of formal organisations. The political aspects of these experiences were not always sought or recognised by research participants.

To conclude, this research illustrated something of the diversity of political influences associated with research participants' varied involvements with unions and other organisations. It also suggested that these types of influences on individuals' political experiences and understandings would be best investigated by exploring how and when they appear in individuals' lives.

5.5: Experience of public involvement activities

Diverse public involvement and consultation activities exist in England. These activities can allow individuals to contribute towards political decision-making. Moreover, participation in and perception of these activities could impact on individuals' political capital and mobilisation, and therefore on their political lives. Therefore exploring individuals' varied experiences of these types of activities contributes directly to answering questions about the nature of their political lives.

Research participants who had been involved in public involvement and consultation activities described their varied character; for example, in terms of organisers, roles for 'the public', degree of formality, timing and location, and topics. Aspects of these experiences seem likely to have positive or negative implications for subsequent engagement in similar activities (Table 5.2); possibly even spilling over into other aspects of individuals' political lives.

Some health-related activities apparently allowed patients to contribute to improved services, encouraging their continued involvement. Possibly, this is facilitated when

Table 5.2: Examples of research participants' experiences of public consultations or similar activities that could promote or discourage sustained involvement.

Experiences	Examples of potentially	
	positive experiences	negative experiences
Learning	Obtain information about what is happening (W78F* and C80F).	Believe it is pointless, if lack of resources is always used to excuse inaction over problems (C63F).
Expressing opinions or sharing information	Are encouraged to make comments (C80F).	Perceive that 'public discussion' is not wanted (C58M and C90M). Lots of points are raised but do not feel that any are 'dealt with adequately' (C67M).
Decision making	Feel that you are making contribution (C63M). Believe that your opinions are valued (N59Fand N71F).	Are told what is happening but not given any meaningful opportunities to influence decisions (C58M and C90M).
Getting feedback	Told the findings of the consultation, e.g. written or verbal reports (N59F and C80F). Decisions explained, including input of consultation (N59F and C80F).	Can raise issues or ask questions but these are either ignored or given unsatisfactory responses (C63F). Believe they are misleading, e.g. report high percentages of 'support' but omit low numbers of participants (C67F).
Seeing something happen	See real changes that you value, e.g. new or modified services (N71F).	See no desirable changes occur. A perception that 'all talk, no delivery' (N64F, C67M and C78F).
Other aspects	Consultation includes some enjoyable opportunities for socialising (W78F*).	Feel pressured into 'signing up' for an activity (W78F). 'Signed up' for an activity but have not been consulted (C63F). Time limit imposed on active participation, e.g. two or three years on panels (C80F). Organise consultations on contested issues in ways (e.g. when and where held) likely to reduce public opposition (C67F). Focus on 'unnecessary' or 'wasteful' things (C61M and C78F).

there is mutual benefit for patients and decision-making health service staff, and for relatively small organisations, such as GP practices or hospitals. These activities also helped highlight issues, such as the operation of commercial pharmaceutical services, that might require political action. But some activities associated with local government or partnerships appeared either to have been unsuccessful in engaging the public or to have actually frustrated, or even enraged, individuals. For instance:

> We've been along to – a number of – meetings where Calderdale council was – supposedly consulted – the public. – Taking onboard what was said. All they did was *told* the public what they're going to do and waited to see what happened. (58 year old man, Calderdale)

Negative political implications increase when consultations fail to deliver any personally valued changes. For instance a woman became "cynical about the whole thing" based on her experience of a local regeneration partnership consultation:

> The first meeting that they held – I went. It was in Todmorden. Sounded brilliant. But. – Most of the things haven't materialised. ... You lose interest.– I'm afraid. (78 year old woman, Calderdale)

Active and sustained participation can be supported if individuals' value the type of information offered; especially if combined with realistic expectations of opportunities to influence decisions. For instance:

> Membership doesn't mean much more than keeping in touch with what's going on. – So I think it probably has some influence. But not a huge amount. (90 year old man, Calderdale: NHS consultative body)

A 63 year old woman's continued attendance in her local area forum was promoted by having questions that she wanted answered combined with the tenacity to undertake the "sheer hard work" involved.

Consultations on topics of personal interest can promote active involvement, but could result in potentially politically damaging perceptions that some activities neither appropriately inform nor meaningfully involve people.[16] And negative experiences can be discouraging; for instance:

> I don't want to appear too cynical because I believe these are important ways of going forward. But the way they have been conducted leads me to suspect that they could be, on occasions, just talking shops.
>
> (67 year old man, Calderdale, local area forums)

Therefore, as public involvement activities have potential political impacts on participants and non-participants, these activities should be included in research trying to explain older people's political lives and opinions.

5.6: Personal Histories and Political Repertoires

As stated in Chapter One, evidence from relevant literatures suggests that a fruitful way to explore and explain older people's political understandings and experiences is to focus attention on different aspects of individuals' personal histories. Therefore this section deals with both the questions about the nature of individuals' political lives, including any changes in their political understandings and practices, and how to explore and explain individuals' political lives. This section also uses interview data concerning voting and party membership. First, insights that can be gained into individuals' political lives from adopting life course approaches are considered. Next, an attempt is made to learn about individuals' political lives by simultaneous application of ideas based on capitals and life-spheres. Then, brief consideration is given to using diagrams in research into older people's political lives.

5.6.1: Exploring older people's life courses to learn about their political lives

This section explores the insights that can be generated into older people's political experiences and understandings by applying life course ideas to research interview data. Here individuals' political lives are conceived as being an integral part of their wider social lives.

As this research was not designed as a systematic, in-depth, life course study, variable amounts of evidence were obtained from individuals, and about the timings and characteristics of specific life stages and transitions. However, politically relevant interview data associated with major life stages in individuals' lives could be identified. Major stages in most research participants' adult lives are paid employment, marriage, parenthood, and, eventually, retirement from paid work. Other relevant stages in some research participants' lives are higher education, working outside the UK, divorce, widowhood, and grandparenthood. Considerable diversity existed among research participants in the characteristics of each life stage, their sequence, and the timing of transitions.

First, key insights into the nature of individuals' political lives were revealed by exploring their interview data by life stages. Further insights were sought by considering three potential influences on diversity in individuals' political lives: geographical mobility, experience of physical, financial and/or emotional 'hard times', and personality-related factors.

Research participants' diverse adult life course experiences are illustrated by examples of experiences that might reasonably be considered to have potential to sustain or promote political activity, interest and understanding or could plausibly lead to reduced political activity or interest, and even to abandoning activities (Table 5.3). Experiences associated with education and paid work are noteworthy.

As expected (section 1.3.2), younger research participants tended to benefit from the expansion of higher education. Importantly, people starting their studies around the late 1960s might have been exposed to high levels of student activism, as well as to NSM-related activism and emerging NSM organisations. But contrary to some opinions (e.g. Stoker and Jennings, 2008, p. 620), the openness of older people to new ideas is reflected in people starting higher education when aged over 50 and by the rapid growth of the U3A. Lifelong learning in humanities and social sciences could apparently reinforce interest and participation in community life and politics. In terms of paid work, some of the older women appeared to have had limited involvement in the labour market. Although child-care responsibilities dominated part of their adult lives, some women also engaged in unpaid voluntary activities.

Geographical mobility, including everyday travel and moving home, features in varying ways in all research participants' lives and can impact on their political lives. All the research participants lived in more than one location during their lives. Some people remained within the same local authority area. A few people lived outside the UK at times. Duration of residence in a locality can have varying political influences;

Table 5.3: Examples of research participants' diverse adult life course experiences that could have positive or negative implications for their political activity, interest and understanding.

Stage in adult life course	Examples of experiences with potential implications for research participants' political activity, interest and understanding	
	Positive (e.g. sustain or promote)	Negative (e.g. weaken or lost)
Higher education student	Led to participation in NSM activism in 1960s (e.g. C59F, C63M and C67M).	Did not participate in NSM activism in 1960s, e.g. as was concentrating on study (C60M*).
Mature higher education student	Age 40+: reinforce interests, e.g. women's issues (N60F), peace studies (C68M) and older people in the media (C80F).	Aged in 20s, married, and spouse wants to live in a 'less urban place': is likely to impact on social activities (C63M*).
Employment	Develop professional social networks, e.g. nursing (C56F). Training for and working as union representative (e.g. N65F and C58M).	Fragmented career, especially with small employers (C63F). Do not join a union, e.g. cannot afford to strike (W61F) or had temporary employment (C68M).
Redundancy	Start new types of paid or unpaid work and develop social networks, e.g. former academic became CHC chair (C79M).	Smaller social networks, e.g. decide to concentrate on maintaining a few close social relationships (C63M*).
Unpaid work outside their homes	Willing to undertake voluntary work, especially in committees (e.g. N71F, W76F and C80F).	Avoids voluntary work, especially committee work, e.g. deterred by cliques (C80F).
Paid/ unpaid work outside the UK	Exposed to political issues and opportunities, e.g. German Green party in 1980s (C63M).	
Marriage	Develop shared political concerns (e.g. C67F and C67M).	Couple agree not to join their preferred parties (N60F).
Divorce and Widowhood	Resume or start activities voluntarily suppressed (N60F).	Financial uncertainty or marked income reduction (e.g. C72F).
Parenthood	Partner can support and encourage activity (W82F). Encourage children's interest (e.g. N66F*). Exposed to ideas and mobilised by adult children (e.g. C90M).	Social worker in 1970s had to resign when she became a mother (N66F*). Some older women took sole responsibility for childcare (W82F). Single parenthood (C66F and N66F).
Grandparent-hood	Awareness of political issues concerning younger people (e.g. C80F) and support their political activity (W82F).	Providing regular care for grandchildren reduces available time and energy (W76F and N65F).
Retirement (phases of)	Health problems leading to participation in consultations (W78F) and joining specialist organisations (W82F*).	Busy enjoying travel and leisure (N63F) or paid work (C67M). Low incomes (C68M and N64F). Poor health/pain (W78F*).

for instance, a relatively short-term residence might be insufficient to engage with local electoral politics. Everyday travel can occupy much time in the lives of people engaged in paid work. Therefore, commuters can have few connections with social networks associated with their place of residence. For instance:

> When I worked, really I didn't bother so much in the community. Since I retired, I thought: Well, it would be nice to get to know some *local* people. Because you tend to just ... travel to work. And – you come home. And all of my friends were outside ... the village. But now ... I do quite a lot in the village.
>
> (64 year old woman, Northumberland)

Further insights into political lives could be gained by considering the nature, severity, timing and duration of experiences of physical, financial and/or emotional 'hard times' across the life course. Table 5.4 presents examples of the positive and negative political implications associated with experiencing 'hard times' as children or teenagers, adults, and older people.

Six research participants remembered experiencing 'hard times' in their childhood and as teenagers (Table 5.4). But focusing exclusively on this life stage and on narrow political topics risks missing important aspects of their political lives. For example, two people aged in their 60s started with almost a 'political blank canvas' but developed different types of active political lives when they were young adults.[17]

More research participants remembered experiencing 'hard times' as adults. In addition, social interdependence is reflected in some memorable experiences of 'hard times' by close relatives, especially their children and parents, and friends.[18] Some of these direct or indirect experiences of 'hard times' could provide political

Table 5.4: Examples of political implications of 'hard times' for individuals.

Age when experienced 'hard times'	Known/potential political implications for individual are positive	negative
Children and teenagers		
Living in low-income households	Lived in 'very working class urban areas' in North East (N63F*) or London (C63M*) with a lot of party political activity visible to children and welcoming young people.	Situation where father dies (C63F) or parents get divorced (C67M) and they live in rural locations or small settlements. Family activity provides no party political influences.
Other situations	Lived in London. Joined and was very active in the Young Liberals, partly to escape from a difficult family life (C68M).	Her formal academic education was terminated before she could go to university because of serious injuries received in an accident, combined with a system precluding her return to school (N71F).
Adults aged under 50		
Time-consuming commitments	Possibility of increased awareness of politically relevant topics, e.g. changes in the character of health services used by a wife with long-term health problems (W75M).	Examples include supporting a wife with serious long-term health problems (W75M), single-parenthood (N66F* and C66F), and renovating a property to create a family home (C79M).
Employment-related	Has had no stable employment. But worked in co-operatives, initially in London, through which he encountered political activists and ideas (C68M).	Had to find work that 'fitted in with home' and children: mainly temporary, low-paid work in small companies with limited engagement with unions (C63F).
Older people aged 50+		
Being made redundant	Annoyed that over 50s were "asked to go" by his employer, but freed up time to engage in political activities (C79M). Became sceptical that parties can deliver on electoral promises (W61F).	It was "a difficult time", when he left work. After more than five years, his "opinion of the local authority [*his former employer*] is not very high" (C63M*).
Develop health problems	Losing eyesight. Joined a specialist organisation and was mobilised into political action (W82).	Forced to give up personally valued role as an active union representative (C63M).

feedback, as well as either expanding or reducing individuals' political repertoires. Political impacts can persist long after the relevant experience. For example, redundancy changed how one woman thinks about electoral promises and damaged a man's opinion of local and national government.[19]

Some adverse personal experiences, like widowhood, are more common with increasing age. Other experiences, notably periods of unemployment, tended to be more common at certain periods of historic time. As one woman observed:

> In many ways, we were the lucky generation. Because we didn't have unemployment. Not really. It was ... later on, in the 80s, that it came. By that time we were well established. (76 year old woman, West Berkshire)

Another way of exploring political aspects of individuals' life courses is to focus on personality-related aspects of their lives and their participation in various political activities. Exploring and explaining the psychological aspects of research participants' lifetime political participation are beyond the scope of this project. But even with this interview data, it was possible to observe some personality-related aspects of parts of some individuals' political lives (Table 5.5).

Therefore, many insights can be gained into research participants' political lives by exploring continuity and change in individuals' political activities and understandings across their life span, by focusing on key life stages and taking into account geographical mobility, exposure to 'hard times', and personality-related influences.

Table 5.5: Examples given by research participants about aspects of personality-related influences on their political participation.

Influences	Potential influences on political participation are	
	positive	negative
Want involvement	Want involvement in certain types of public decision-making (C60M and N71F). Want to help other people – and can do this through political activity (C58F, C65F and W78M).	Do not want an active role, e.g. at best are "interested bystanders" at meetings (C58F). Tend to 'commit fully' to any activities, which might not always be wanted, e.g. when adjusting to post-retirement migration (N66F). Cannot do 'things for self' (C65F).
Emotional responses	Can encourage activity, e.g. getting 'very upset about the Arab-Israeli situation' led to boycotting Israeli products and signing relevant petitions (C78F).	Can inhibit activity if have feelings like: "I don't feel strongly about a lot of things" (C66F). Or if dislike feeling 'forced' to accept or do something, e.g. to buy Fairtrade produce (C72F).
Preferred style of political activity	Choose activities that complement their temperament and skills, e.g. researching and presenting arguments about planning applications (C59F). For much of adult life, seek information and debate about political themes of personal interest, e.g. 'green politics' (C67F and C67M) and anti-violence and anti-war (C63M, N66F* and C90M).	Cannot engage in illegal activities (N60F) or those likely to be violent (C67M and W51F). Set a personal 'retirement age', e.g. from chairing a community group (N71F) and delivering electoral leaflets (C80F). Do not want to go out at night, e.g. for meetings or consultation activities (C72F and C80F). Do not 'search for' political networks or look up local activities (C68M). Have felt uncomfortable about and lack confidence in challenging people and decisions because have been brought up not "to rock the boat" (W82F* and C65F). Working life involved 'negative situations' – realise that now want to avoid them (N66F*).

5.6.2: Applying ideas about capitals and life-spheres when investigating older people's political lives

This section considers the contribution to answering questions about the nature of individuals' political lives, especially explanations for continuity and change, that can be made by applying Bourdieu's notion of capitals and the life-sphere ideas of Passy and Giugni. Additionally, diagrams are suggested to have a potential role in researching older people's political lives.

Bourdieu's notion of capitals usefully directs attention to the dynamics and role of individuals' social networks in older people's political lives. Examples are given of insights that can be gained by focusing first on his notion of capitals and then on social networks.

Three noteworthy observations were made following analyses focused on research participants' capitals. First, some people excluded themselves from political activity because they believed they lacked sufficient skills; for example, to write letters that would be published in newspapers. Second, experiences of political participation can support long-running activities, but this experience may prove inadequate for seemingly similar activities. For example, a 67 year old man had decades of experience of campaigning through organisations and MPs on a range of environment-related issues. He discovered that he had a lot to learn quickly when engaging in a short-term, single-issue, local campaign (DBOL). And third, research participants varied greatly in the extent to which and how they went about 'keeping

up-to-date' with current affairs and politics. In turn, this will influence the quantity and content of politically-relevant information that they posses. At one extreme, are research participants who said that they had 'more important' or 'more interesting' things to do; for instance:

> I don't particularly try to. I do listen to Radio Four. [*laugh*] Having said that. – I don't try to. – It's just sort of – because it's on the television. [*Partner's name*] likes it. – It's around. (65 year old woman, Calderdale)

Other people actively sought out this type of information; which could be facilitated my new media offerings, such as *The Week* publication and the 'Parliamentary Channel'[20], but constrained by lack of time or money. Although 20 research participants (aged 58 to 90) said that they were interested in all geographical levels of politics from local to international, their strength of interest varied across these levels and over time. Individuals tended to routinely use specific types or combinations of media, which could change because of age-related visual or hearing impairments. Radio appears to be a particularly common source of information for people of all ages and all strengths of political interest. But mainstream media coverage sometimes proved unsatisfactory to meet some people's information requirements; for example, a 59 year old woman's interest in 'overseas news'. And it added little to the political capital of a 67 year old long-term campaigner in 'green politics', who felt "quite alienated from the entire political mainstream".

Analyses of research participants' interview data focusing on their social networks during their lives indicated various ways in which these were associated with their political interests and action. For example, variations existed in the extent to which an individual's social networks can be characterised as being 'political' at any time. As

seen in Chapter Four, some people were raised within families for whom active political participation within a political party was a ‘way of life’. As adults, some people actively sought to develop their political networks, usually through engaging with various organisations either directly or indirectly; such as the 65 year old woman who obtained information concerning marine wildlife from a friend belonging to an Australian organisation. Importantly, examples were noted of social networks that were apparently ‘non-political’ in character but could play an important role in some political action. For example, one of the DBOL campaign organisers (section 5.3) was a woman who said “I wouldn’t really say I’m that politically bothered”, preferring to spend her time researching local history. Therefore, she became an active member of a local history group. The threat to her local archives drew her into the DBOL campaign. Although some DBOL campaign organisers cultivated political social networks, seemingly non-political social networks associated with their previous employment proved invaluable for this campaign. Therefore exploring social networks helps avoid erroneous assumptions about their political character and roles.

Talking about politics could be a potentially enjoyable part of social life, as well as a way of exchanging, developing and testing political information and ideas, and of promoting or discouraging political action. Research participants were most likely to report talking politics with family and friends. Often, people did not want to risk losing friends or engage in futile political argumentation. Therefore, much political talk tended to be with like-minded people. However, some people found someone with different political opinions who also enjoyed political debate. But if older people talked politics with few people, this aspect of their political lives was vulnerable to disruption

or loss through, for example, these people's death, serious illness or migration. As they age, people seem increasingly likely to lose valued political talk; such as the 79 year old man who only tended to talk politics in 'pub conversations', but said "I don't go to the pub very much these days". However, some social activities outside the home, such as U3A groups, could expand individuals' social networks and opportunities for political talk (section 5.4.2).

Geographical location, as well as historical timing, can also impact on the political characteristics and influences of individuals' social networks. Where people live can be reflected in the political characteristics of their immediate social circles and, if wanted, opportunities for meaningful political talk. For example, an 82 year old woman talked about her bridge playing companions, who "don't follow the same politics at all". And migrating broke or reduced previous social networks, with new social networks taking time to develop and possibly differing in character. For example, a man spoke of moving from London, where he enjoyed exposure to diverse political influences without organisational membership:

> And I guess because I wasn't in a very political environment. ... There weren't the same networks, unsurprisingly ... political. And I didn't go searching for it.
> (68 year old man, Calderdale)

Exploration and explanation of older people's political lives is facilitated by using the life-spheres approach, which highlights agency and the interconnections existing between different aspects of individual's lives. At any time, an individual's social activities and their meanings across different life-spheres may complement each other (sustaining continued interest and activity) or conflict (threatening abandonment

of the activity or weakening interest). Changes in any of the life-spheres will impact on other life-spheres. Some examples have already been presented of continuity and change in political behaviour which were illuminated by this approach (Chapter 4 and sections 5.2 to 5.5). Thus, the 'work sphere' could psychologically sustain complementary political activities, such as a former midwife's ongoing boycott of Nestlé, or help to undermine political participation or support, as when employment with oil and mining companies led a Greenpeace member to question this organisation's activities. Generally, political participation has low priority for individuals. Therefore, new demands in the 'family sphere', such as child care, or at work adversely impacted on political participation, especially time-consuming political activities. Sometimes, dynamic interconnections were observed between several life-spheres. An example is the 58 year old man, who in his 'work sphere' inadvertently became active in his union, through which he acquired skills and knowledge, such as running public meetings. He transferred these skills and knowledge to his 'leisure sphere', facilitating his ongoing organisational role in a motorcyclists' club. In turn, when he engaged in club-related political activity, such as demonstrating against proposed legislation, this impacted on his 'political action sphere'.

The life-sphere approach allows a useful distinction to be made between 'political action' and 'political engagement'. The latter sphere could overlap substantially with some research participants' 'leisure sphere'. Actively following aspects of politics through the media could be an important leisure activity; for instance complementing long-running active political party membership.[21] And some research participants in Calderdale who enjoy walking for leisure, engaged with and were active to varying

extents, at different times, with walking-related pressure groups. Furthermore, marked changes can occur in the 'political action' and 'political engagement' spheres. For instance, having long abandoned active membership of political parties, a 60 year old man is getting involved in decision-making public bodies and using his leisure time to engage intellectually with aspects of political history.

Finally, using simple diagrams is helpful when investigating the characteristics and dynamics of research participants' diverse political lives. These types of diagrams could also be used in follow-up interviews to help clarify and confirm understandings and as a basis for further investigation of individuals' political lives. Space constraints allow only five examples to be presented. In each case, the characteristics of the research participant's reported political behaviour were identified. Then major reported influences on and personal resources for this behaviour were identified from different life spheres and across the life course.

First (Figure 5.1), is a woman whose voting recently changed from seemingly 'habitual' to more 'thoughtful' voting. Party politics has a minor place in her social life. This woman is interesting because of her preference and willingness to be a 'solo local campaigner'. These occasional political actions are clearly associated in various ways with her family, previous employment, and organisational activities.

Couples' political activities can sometimes be usefully explored for each couple (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). The overlap of partners' political activities and interests will vary. One couple worked very closely together (Figure 5.2) and might be

Figure 5.1: Solo local campaigner: Illustration of some current and historical influences on the political behaviour of a 65 year old woman living in Northumberland.

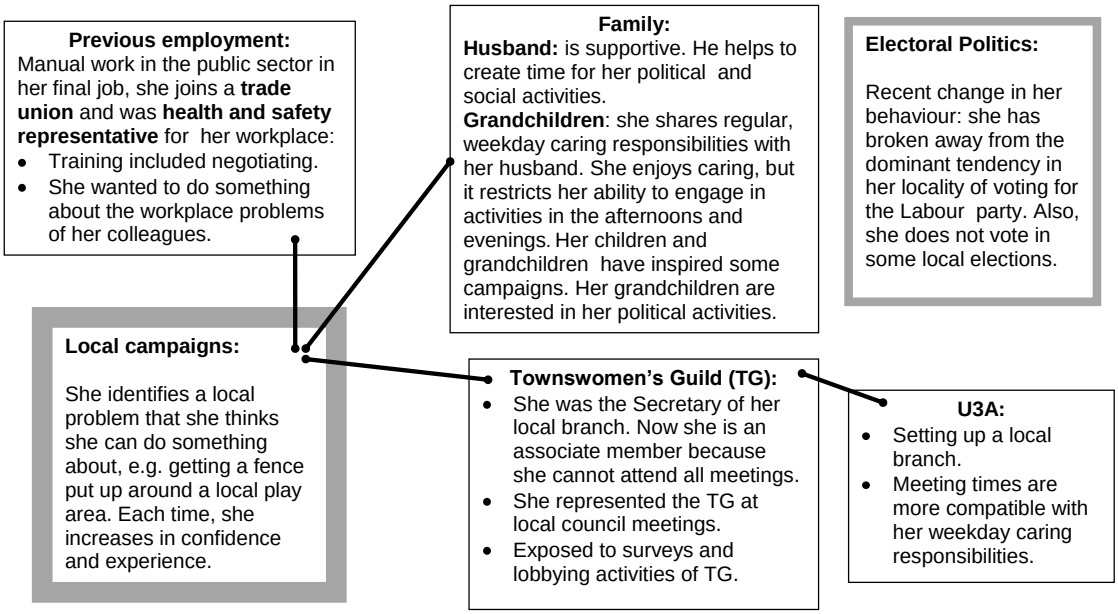


Figure 5.2: Campaigners: Illustration of some current and historical influences on the political behaviour of couple aged in their 60s living in Calderdale.

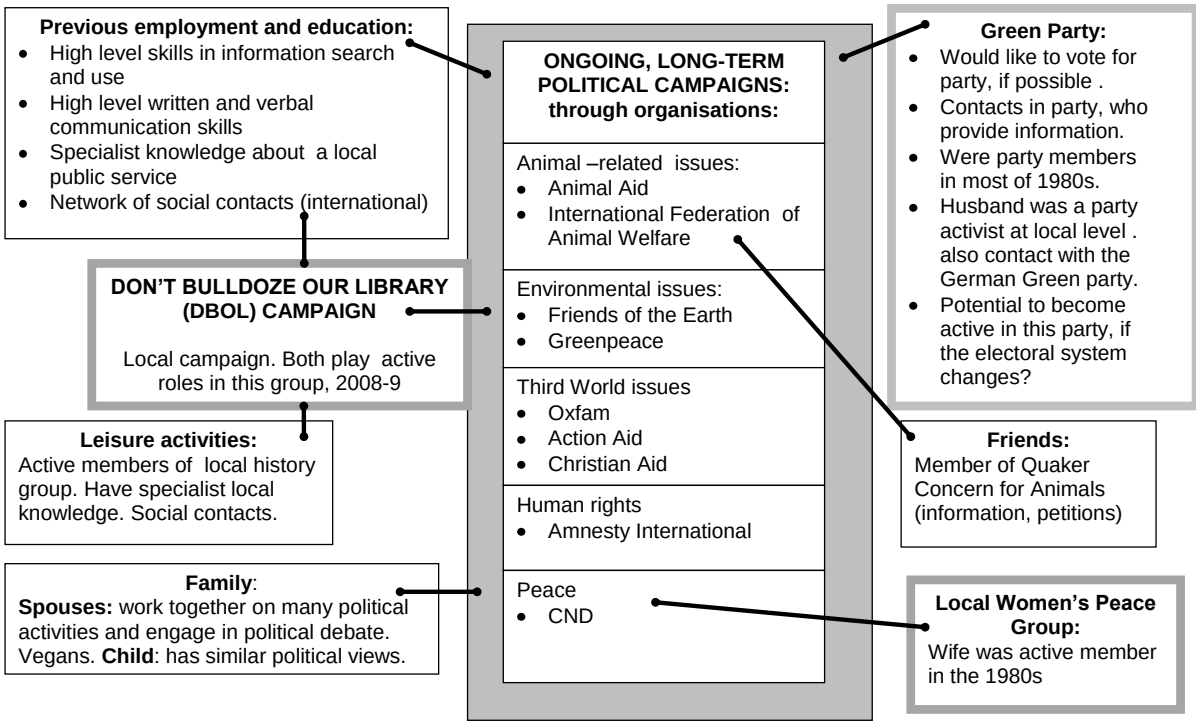
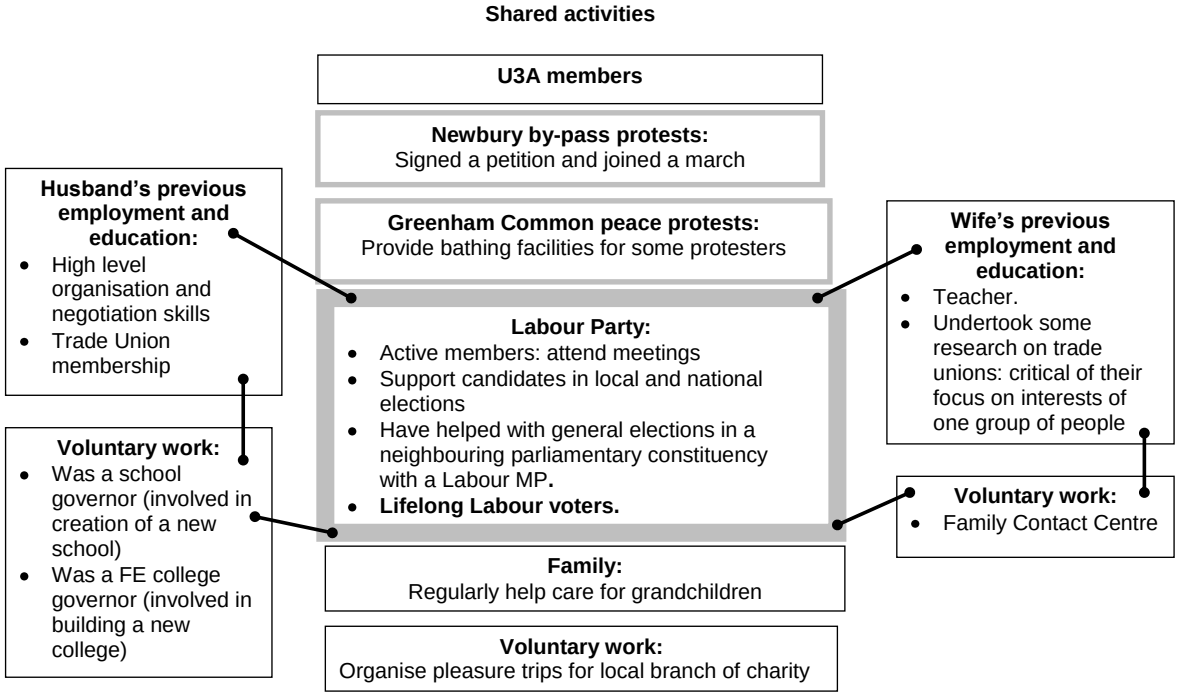


Figure 5.3: Active Political Party Members: Illustration of some current and historical influences on the political behaviour of a couple aged in their 70s living in West Berkshire.



characterised currently as 'political campaigners'. They have campaigned for decades on a number of logically related topics through various organisations, developing skills in contacting activities. Contacting complements their personalities and political capital derived from their previous employment and education. They experienced temporary, but intensive, involvement in other types of political activities, notably as members of the Green party and through the DBOL campaign. Another couple (Figure 5.3) are 'active political party members'. Active membership of the Labour party is an important part of their social lives. Possibly, their shared political support for this party helps sustain their membership in this politically hostile environment. Their separate voluntary activities allowed them to make tangible contributions to their community, while accumulating politically relevant awareness.

Diagrams are also useful to explore the main reported political influences across an individual's life course. Two examples show politics apparently having a recently diminished (Figure 5.4) or increasing place (Figure 5.5) in individuals' social lives. For example, influences on one man's changing support for the Labour party apparently go back to his childhood (initiating anti-war sentiment) and a career in education (initially complementing support for the Labour party, and providing skills for recent letter writing and social contacts for protest involvement) (Figure 5.4). A woman's political life appears to have started to change after her migration to Calderdale when aged around 50. These changes apparently reflect the diverse political influences and opportunities associated with Hebden Bridge that complement her leisure interests in walking and local history. Recently, retirement gives her more time to engage with local political issues (Figure 5.5).

Therefore, by applying concepts associated with capitals and life-spheres it is possible to gain insights into research participants' political understandings and experiences. In addition, diagrams can assist with systematic interrogation of the interview data and help reveal insights, for example, associated with key social relations or diverse life course influences.

5.8: Conclusion

Empirical evidence was presented that illustrates some of the diversity and dynamics of research participants' lifetime experiences and understandings of six types of activities (contacting, petitions, wearing badges, consumer politics, lawful

Figure 5.4: Illustration of the main influences across the life course on the political behaviour of a 73 year old man currently living in Northumberland.

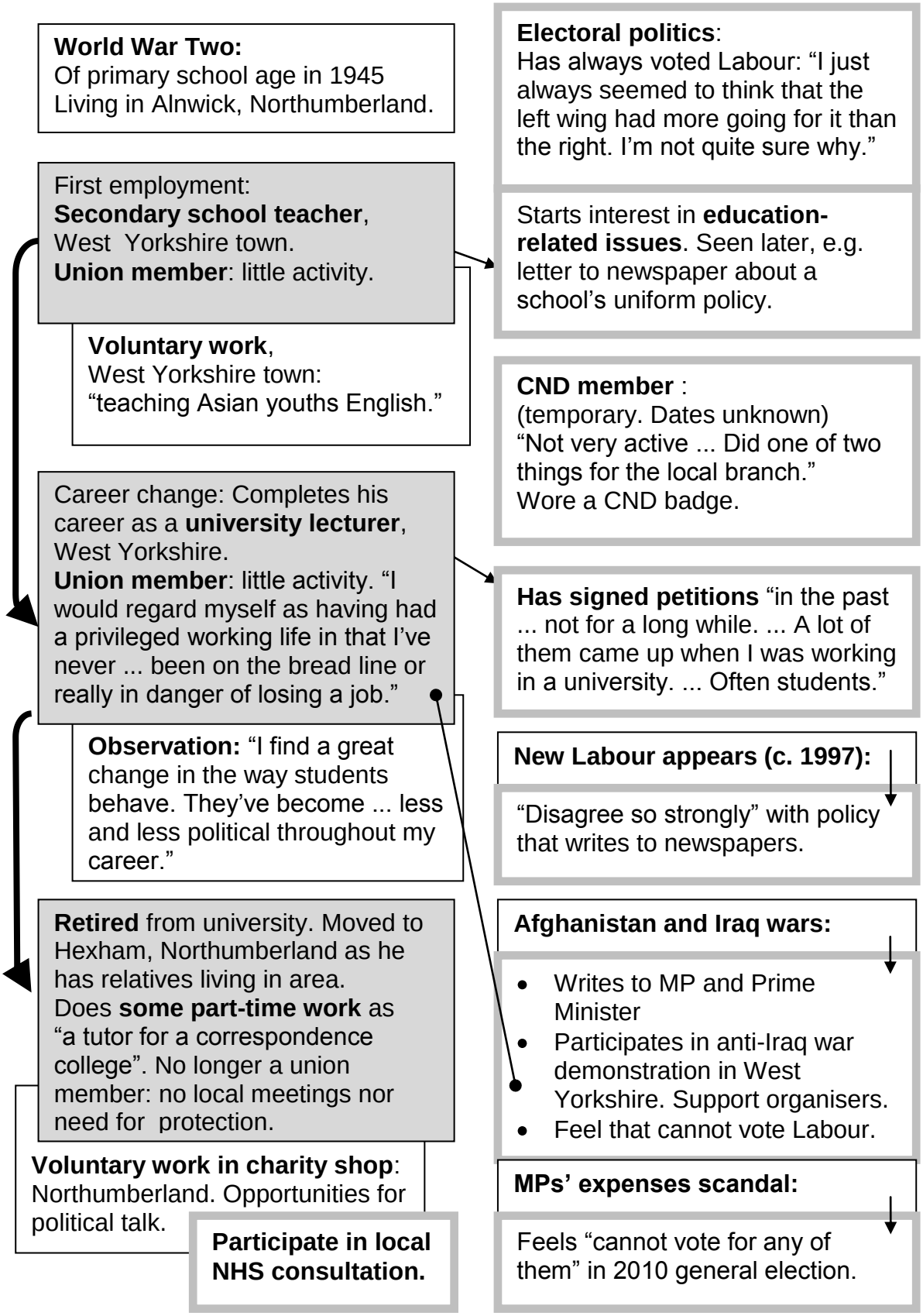
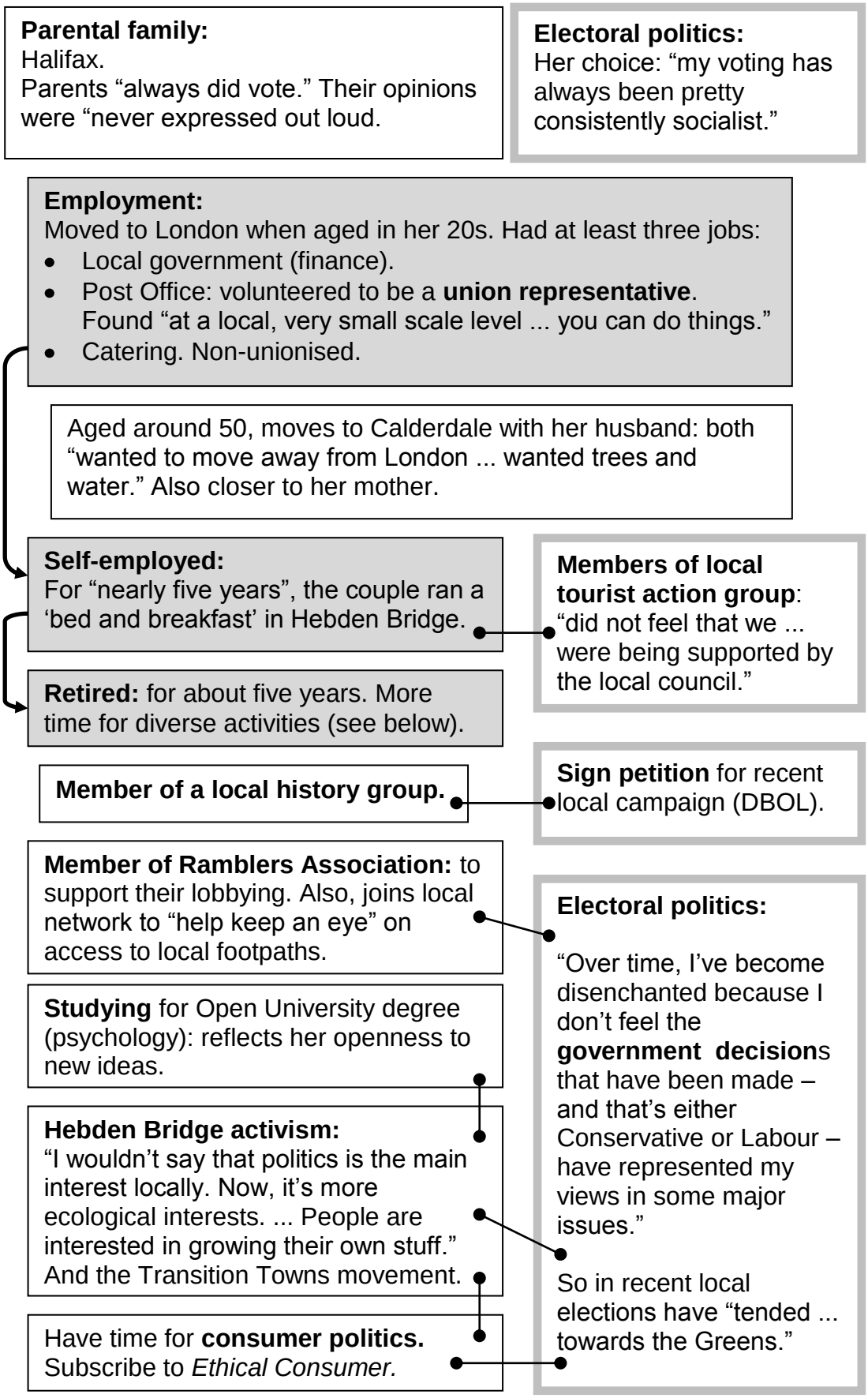


Table 5.5: Illustration of some influences across the life course on the political behaviour of a 58 year old woman currently living in Calderdale.



public demonstrations, and group action), as well as of public consultations, political campaigns and politically relevant organisational involvements. Therefore, this chapter presents a richer and more nuanced picture of older people's political lives.

Investigating political activities separately demonstrated their heterogeneity. Diverse organisations could mobilise political action and enhance individuals' political capital. Interestingly, some organisations concerned with old age related issues mobilised older people with little or no history of political protest. Political participation could provide political learning. Greater inputs from individuals tend to be rewarded with greater political learning; as when organising a petition. High levels of personal commitment were required by long-term political campaigners.

Explanatory insights were obtained by exploring interconnections between individuals' lifetime experiences and understandings of different types of political activity. For instance, participating in local campaigns could provide opportunities to view politicians in action; which can produce negative evaluations of individual politicians and the way that local government works (see Chapter Four), that can impact on individuals' subsequent electoral participation. Further explanatory insights were produced by exploring associations between different parts of individuals' social lives (life-spheres and social networks) over their lifetimes. Changes in political understandings and activity could be promoted by information obtained through social networks and changes associated with formally 'non-political' life-spheres. Diagrams helped to explore and illustrate aspects of continuity and change in individuals' political understandings and behaviour.

6

OLDER PEOPLE AND AN ‘OLDER PEOPLE’S POLITICS’

6.1: Introduction

As illustrated in Chapter Two, reasons exist that could support and undermine the development of older people’s political action focused specifically on their age group. Existing evidence suggests that such activities remain uncommon in England. However, this does not deter media comment or political debates raising, intermittently, the spectre of some sort of intergenerational conflict in ways that could be unnecessarily detrimental to older people’s ability to even voice their legitimate concerns and interests. It also provides cover for political actions against older people. Both perceived political attacks on older people and inadequate treatment of their concerns by governments could, in turn, foster greater interest and participation in some sort of age-based politics. Therefore, the existence, characteristics and perceived political implications of an ‘older people’s politics’, as well as individual older people’s involvement with it, should be included in research exploring older people’s political understandings and activities.

Research participants’ opinions about the idea of an ‘older people’s politics’ were sought. If research participants’ perceived the existence of an older people’s politics, their opinions and experiences of it were explored. Therefore this chapter deals directly with the research questions concerning ‘an older people’s politics’ in England, as well as contributing towards a richer picture of older people’s political

understandings and experiences. First, this chapter notes research participants' comments about being 'old'. Then, some evidence for and against having an older people's politics is explored. Next, political issues currently considered important by the research participants are discussed. Then, research participants' comments about political representation are explored. Finally, findings are reported about awareness of and opinions on some organisations run by and for older people.

Overall, it appears that the idea of 'an older people's politics' tended to have a limited appeal for research participants. However, there was some awareness that the current political system was 'letting down' some older people in England. Therefore, some 'older people's issues' were appearing on some personal political agendas. Furthermore, researching this topic generated insights into research participants' political understandings and experiences, especially about political representation.

6.2: Who is 'old'?

Some sort of self-identification with being 'old' is likely to be associated with older people's political participation or support for what might be termed 'older people's issues'. This section considers research participants' self-image and association with terms such as 'older people'.

It is beyond this project's scope to investigate individuals' self-image, and their direct and indirect experiences of ageing. However, this project advertised for participants using the title 'Learning from the Over 50s' (Appendix E). And this project's purpose

was identified as contributing to improved understanding of politics by and for older people in England. Only a confirmation of chronological age at the time of interview was sought. However, several research participants volunteered relevant age-related comments, which are considered here. These data seem adequate for this thesis because some people expressed strong age-related feelings or opinions, that were sometimes linked to their political action.

Consistent with findings from the ELSA and the literature (Section 2.2.2), people tended to accept their chronological age while not 'feeling' that they are 'older people'.[1] Two women's sensitivities were increased by recent experiences involving unwelcome age-based assumptions about their lifestyles; for instance, a woman asked "well why did they have to put the 65?" in a newspaper report on her activity in a diving club. Consistent with research on younger old people and the notion of a 'Third Age' (Section 1.5), some research participants talked about 'real old age' and being a 'senior' as a future life stage associated with deteriorating health, increasing social support needs, and having a limited social life.

Although the term 'pensioner' is unambiguous, there can be some disconnection between receipt of a pension and self-image as a pensioner. A contributory factor could be that after leaving full-time employment, some time is required to adjust mentally. And some people ended their formal careers when under state pension age.[2] Furthermore, some people have 'busy lives' during the early part of their formal retirement, including paid and unpaid work.[3]

Overall, this evidence suggests that it cannot be assumed that older people in England will choose to identify with political activity associated with old-age or pensioners.

6.3: Why have an 'older people's politics'?

Unless an older people's politics is perceived to be both relevant and important to their lives, it is unlikely to attract older people's interest and participation. Three questions were used to encourage research participants to explore aspects of this topic.

Near the beginning of interviews, variants of the question 'Do you think that England is senior-friendly?' were asked. The ambiguity of this question contributed to the diverse responses. As well as different understandings of what might constitute a 'senior-friendly' society[4], some people were unsure about what could inform their responses; for instance:

> I can only go on hearsay and very limited experience.
>
> (80 year old woman, West Berkshire)

People appeared to base their responses on a mixture of personal experience and observation, communication with close friends and relatives, and from the media. Even this was insufficient to enable three people (aged 51, 56 and 78) to attempt an answer. Another complication was deciding what, if any, comparisons should be made. Thus, twelve people (aged 59 to 82) made informal comparisons with countries they recently visited, between different geographical locations within England, or between cities and more rural areas. For example:

> Obviously it does depend on place. ... There are [parts] of Uxbridge – Lots of busy roads, lots of different people. ... It's not particularly friendly to older people ... especially if [they go out]. ... In ... smaller societies ... people – are seen. There's a few people looking out for each other. We've an elderly neighbour, who's losing it a bit. And she going out to the shops several times a day. ... But people watch her. (61 year old man, Calderdale)

The impact of some recent personal experiences can be heightened by their timing in the life course. For instance, a woman approaching retirement started to 'work a lot in Asia' and was shocked by the contrast:

> When you go to a society where ... older people are very respected and honoured – and their wisdom is very much appreciated and sought after. And their advice and their opinions and – what they say carries a lot of weight. – It's quite a shock to come back to this society where older people are marginalised. (59 year old woman, Calderdale)

Research participants' opinions were split, with 12 people (aged 59 to 90, mean age 73.8) agreeing and 13 people (aged 58 to 78, mean age 64.1) disagreeing to varying extents that England is 'senior-friendly'. Diverse reasons informed these decisions (Table 6.1). Limited evidence was presented to support the notion that England is 'senior-friendly': emphasising various age-related concessions and suggesting that political parties tended to offer 'handouts' to older people. Many more comments focused on ways in which England is not 'senior-friendly'. 'Unfriendly' personal experiences included redundancy and becoming 'invisible people'. Cultural and material issues are likely to be interlinked.

Research participants were also asked two questions from the 1992 Eurobarometer survey about older people standing up for rights and playing an active role in political life. Agreement or disagreement with these statements provides limited meaningful

Table 6.1: Examples of ways in which some research participants said that England could or could not be described as a 'senior-friendly' country.

Comments focus on	Examples of ways in which England might be described as	
	'senior-friendly'	not 'senior-friendly'
Governments	Bus pass (C60M, C63F, C63M, and W78F). Free television licence (W82F). Winter fuel payment (C66F and W78F).	State pensions are low (C63M and N65F). Perceived as 'soft targets' for public spending cuts, e.g. closing 'care homes' but not 'mother and toddler groups' (N60F).
Political parties	Belief that party politics encourages "handouts for the older people" to try to win their votes (C80F).	
Wider society	Think presence of more older people in the population increases awareness and support (N65F and W78M). Age-related concessions, e.g. reduced entry charges (C60M and W78F).	Experience or awareness of over-50s being targeted for redundancy (C63F and C79M). Culturally: Believe that older people and their views are not respected, e.g. recent reports of their treatment by the NHS (C58F, C59F, W61F, C63F, C63M, N66F and N71F). Social segregation of older people – they 'become invisible'(C58F and C59F). Perception that larger cities have 'much more a youth culture' and do not 'cater for' older people (N60F). Spatial segregation, e.g. older people settling in coastal areas (C58F). Assumption that 'a one-bedroom house is fine' for older people (N64F). Perceived youth-orientation of the mainstream media and advertising (C66F and C72F). Media reports, especially radio, about resources given to older people's health services and age discrimination in employment (C68M).

information. However, seeking expansion of initial answers to these questions elicited some relevant information about older people's understandings of politics.

First, research participants were asked: 'Do you agree that older people in England should stand up more actively for their rights?'. Similar proportions (around 10 percent) of research participants disagreed with this statement here and in the UK in 1992 (Walker and Maltby, 1997, Figure 7.1, p. 112). Four people (mean age 78.5) disagreed, saying that they disliked age-based labels, thought older people were active enough, or believed it was unnecessary (Table 6.2). Varying degrees of agreement to the statement were given by 36 people. A 59 year old woman only replied "Well. Why do older people have rights?". An 80 year old woman's comment about 'feeling bound to say yes' suggests that 'rights' might be understood simply as a 'good thing' or part of some sort of contract with governments. Two replies indicate disagreement about what constitutes a 'right' as opposed to a political demand. Furthermore, some people either did not know how people could stand up more actively for their rights or had different ideas about it; such as acting through active membership of various organisations or pressure groups (Table 6.2). The prevalence of these activities might have changed recently:

> [I don't really] know why there's a difference ... I've had the impression ... in the last year or two – that they do more than perhaps they did in the past.
>
> (73 year old man, Northumberland)

This opinion was based on things like "some newspapers" carrying 'sympathetic' articles. Moreover, one man commented on the absence of any strong political lead inside or outside government, especially with the death of Jack Jones in 2009.

Table 6.2: Research participants' responses to being asked if they agreed that older people in England should stand up more actively for their rights.

	Should older people in England stand up more actively for their rights?	
	No	Yes
Reasons for response	Think that older people already stand up for their rights (W75M and C79M). Think that this is unnecessary because, on the whole, "we get pretty good care" (C78F).	Just believe that they should stand up more actively for their rights (C58M, C66F, C67F, W78F, W78F*, W80F and W82F*). Belief encouraged by media coverage of older people protesting (C59F, N66F*, N73M and C75F). Based on experience of older people they know, who 'struggle' on rather than claim help or entitlements (N60F). Influenced by personal experience: to 'counteract this invisibility' (C58F). Because no-one is actively taking a political lead, e.g. no activists like Jack Jones (C60M). Because trends in media could exclude older people. And media pressure can encourage politicians to act (C63M).
Qualified responses	Should stand up for rights, but not under the label of 'older people'. This 'segregates ... the generations' (W82F).	Should stand up – at any age – if feel discriminated against or that an issue matters (W51F, C56F, C60M*, C63M and C67F). But have to overcome barriers, e.g. if they are unwilling to 'make a fuss' or they feel discouraged by being formally 'consulted' but not listened to (W61F, N66F, C67M, C68M, N71F, C72F and W78F). This must be done by joining organisations, e.g. a pensioners' society or pressure group (C63F, C63M*, N63F*, W78M and C90M). Disagreement about place of political activity in some organisations, e.g. controversy about lobbying by U3A members (W78F and W82F). Disagreement sometimes about what is a 'right', e.g. to not sell home to fund your care (W76F and C80F).

Although no-one mentioned active involvement in ‘standing up for rights’, there were some credible expressions of interest in potential involvement. But a 66 year old woman’s comment about being “altogether behind the government having ... a representative for older people” suggests that some older people hope to be ‘too busy doing other things’.

The other question based on this 1992 Eurobarometer survey is: ‘Do you agree that older people in England are not playing a full enough part in political life?’. As in the survey (Walker and Maltby, 1997, p. 111), a majority of research participants (24 people, aged 58 to 82) tended to agree that ‘older people are not playing a full enough part’. Eight people (aged 56 to 90) disagreed with the statement. Two 78 year olds found reasons to both agree and disagree. Five people (aged 51 to 80) said they did not know. Again it was not self-evident what ‘political life’ or ‘playing a full enough part’ in it meant. A 60 year old man replied “I don’t know a lot about ... official political life”. People with limited personal insights, possibly replied with media-informed opinions. A reported “paradox underlying this question” was that older people are “prominent political figures” while “the mass of senior citizens” may be relatively inactive (*ibid*, p. 111). Reasons given for disagreeing and agreeing with this statement (Table 6.3) show that people could be focusing on different aspects of political life; in particular, answering about either politicians or older citizens. Some people believed there are ‘many’ older MPs and councillors. However, other people noted the apparently ageist treatment of ‘Ming’ Campbell and recent trends towards fewer older MPs entering Parliament (section 2.2.1), which raised concerns about formal representation of older people’s interests.

Table 6.3: Research participants' responses to being asked if they agreed that older people in England are not playing a full enough part in political life.

Responses focus on	Are older people in England not playing a full enough part in political life?	
	Disagree	Agree
Older people themselves	Talk about older people as members of the public or citizens, e.g. tend to vote, those who want to and are 'confident enough' participate, and other people believed likely to participate if they 'feel strongly enough' about something (C56F, N63F, N66F, C67F, N71F, C78F, W78F, W82F* and C90M). Think older people are treated unfairly and therefore believe more of them are 'getting involved' (N65F).	Suggest that this is by older people's choice – they do not want to participate (C66F, N73M, C75F, C78F, W78F* and C79M). Age-related changes can impact on participation, e.g. have 'less energy', do not want to go into town centres for evening meetings, and ill health (N60F, C65F, C72F, W76F and C80F). Some people might not know how to 'make their voice heard' (W78M and W82F*). Some older people cannot get their 'voices heard', especially if they 'need help' and/or do not 'have money' (C58F and W78M). Might not always be sufficiently forward looking to make useful contributions in political debates (W76F).
Government and political parties	Talk about political representatives in local and national government including 'lots of old people'(C59F, C60M*, C65F, N63F*, C80F and W82F).	Perceived ageism within political parties. In particular, 'Ming' Campbell giving up the leadership of the Liberal Democrats party (C58M, N66F* and C68M). Perceived downward trend in the age of MPs on entry to Parliament. Combined with 'question of class' – with more affluent people and professionals (C61M, C63M* and W75M).
Wider society		In the last '30 or 40 years', there has been a cultural focus on 'youth'. Perceived neglect of older people and their opinions can contribute to older people feeling alienated (C67M). In this society, older people feel uncertain about 'where they stand' and are scared to participate fully. Fear being 'put in a ghetto' (C60M).

Research participants also disagreed about whether older people were 'playing a full enough part in political life' (Table 6.3). Some people suggested that this could be from choice; with different underlying reasons, including the ongoing 'MPs' expenses scandal'. In recent decades, various influences might be encouraging passivity. For instance, the emergence of larger numbers of financially comfortable younger pensioners:

> In a way, the fact that people are not politically active is almost a little bit of a reflection: Well, I'm too busy doing other things. I'm too busy enjoying the life I've got. Unless ... you're committed ... like if you're a committed socialist or committed to a religion, then you do it. (76 year old woman, West Berkshire)

And contemporary culture's apparent 'youth orientation' and associated social marginalisation of older people could discourage some people from participating.

Therefore, some research participants could identify political issues associated with old people that can (like pensions) or could (like growing awareness of ageism and ageist treatment in the NHS) justify political action. Arguably these issues could or should concern all adults. However, a case could be made for action by older people, if existing political processes fail to deal adequately with these concerns. Some research participants believe that 'an older people's politics' is either necessary or even desirable. Worryingly, if correct, some comments were made about perceptions that older people are 'afraid' to make legitimate political demands.

6.4: Political issues considered to be important

If an 'older people's politics' exists, then political issues strongly associated with older people might be expected to be found among the over-50s' political priorities.

Therefore, near the end of each interview, research participants were invited to identify any political issues that are important to them. Pre-interview information had stated that there would be an opportunity to talk about these issues (Appendices E, F and G).

Table 6.4 summarises the political issues mentioned as being most important to the research participants. Types of response varied. Five people (aged 58 to 90) identified a 'main issue': anti-war, education, support of pre-school age children and their parents, social justice, or support for families. Another five people (aged 58 to 78) emphasised that they have numerous political concerns. For instance:

> Cuts right across the entire political spectrum of activity really. With deficiencies on all fronts as far as we're concerned.
>
> (67 year old man, Calderdale)

Two people (aged 60 and 76) could not think of any particular issues that were important to them. Another response was:

> Nothing specifically. And anything would interest me. And I ... would take an interest in what happened to be current or happened to be the issue of the moment. (82 year old woman, West Berkshire)

A possible age-related pattern was observed in the responses (Table 6.4). Anti-war concerns were found among people aged 73 and older, as well as among the under-60s. The former group's feelings could reflect their experiences as children or young adults during the Second World War. While the latter group could have been influenced in their youth by the emerging peace movement; now sometimes extended to a concern about 'foreign policy'. Ongoing military action probably heightened the perceived importance of these issues.

Table 6.4: The political issues that are most important to research participants.

Research participant	Political issues that are important to the research participant
C90M	“The war” is the main thing. Includes, a possible war with Iran.
W82F	“Nothing specifically. And anything would interest me.”
W82F*	“A huge list.”
C80F	“The economy” (debt); not having a PM “who could take us to war.”
W80F	Inheritance tax; education (less interference); Afghanistan and Iraq.
C79M	Global warming; energy conservation.
C78F	First: “very much anti-war.” Plus, “so many things” – “all sorts.”
W78M	“The economy” (protect, improve public services; help business).
W78F	“Can’t think of anything particular – issues.”
W78F*	“Young people and jobs”; education; housing ; manage immigration.
W76F	Employment (includes reducing the income gap); education; health.
C76F	Education; “the elderly” (social care); biodiversity.
W75M	Global population; global warming; UK energy supply; UK economy.
N73M	Anti-war; integrity of politicians; freedom of speech; taxation.
C72F	Education; pensions.
N71F	“I’m sort of generally interested in everything.”
C68M	“I could give you a whole list.”
C67 F	Proportional representation; “all sorts of things really.”
C67M	“Cuts right across the entire political spectrum of activity really.”
C66F	“Voting system reformed”; “cutting back on wasted spending.”
N66F	“Much more equality in income”; inc. influence Christian churches.
N66F*	“Children. Just children.”
C65F	“It’s just caring for people.”
N65F	“Soldiers not being looked after properly.”
C63F	“Economy and jobs” (support manufacturing); education.
C63M	“Treatment of minority groups”; older people; environment.
C63M*	Dealing with the banks; protection of civil liberties; taxation.
N63F	Education; health; environment; “a good deal for the third world.”
N63F*	“ All areas are really”: Health; education; anti-social behaviour.
C61M	“The upcoming election and what happens.”
W61F	“Provision of care for the elderly”; fuel supply; EU (v. bureaucracy).
C60M	“Having a fairer society” with “less emphasis on greed.”
C60M*	“I’m not sure that there is really.”
N60F	“The core is social justice:” equal opps.; women’s issues; caring att.
C59F	Social justice; Afghanistan; MP’s expenses; more women MPs.
N59F	Education; health; jobs.
C58F	Family (young children and old people); environment; anti-war.
C58M	“Just for starters”: voting system; “dealing with the banks.”
C56F	Services “organised & financed properly; “the vulnerable”; anti-war.
W51F	Equality & justice (internationally); environment (climate change).

Note: research participants identified by (local authority, age in years, and sex) and * where a second research participant shares a label (see Table 3.1). There was insufficient time in one interview (N64F) to ask this question. Abbreviations: ‘att’ is attitude, ‘EU’ is European Union, ‘inc’ is increase, ‘opps’ is opportunities, and ‘v’ is versus.

Old-age related issues were not prominent. However, social care for older people [5] was mentioned by six people (aged 56 to 82). This topic will be covered in Chapter Seven. Some people contradicted the 'selfish' image found in some of the literature (section 2.2). Two women (aged 80 and 66) indicated a preference to avoid 'wasteful' government spending. For example:

> I think the Labour government has thrown too much money indiscriminately at people. I mean, I get free bus travel. – Which is very nice! But it's costing somebody a lot of money. And I don't need it. – And I get a winter fuel payment. ... I think hard won resources should go to people who really need them. (66 year old woman, Calderdale)

And concern, not greed, was said to underpin a desire to avoid inheritance tax:

> I think it's a very hard thing for people who have worked and saved all their lives to have to give something to the government that they have supported. ... To give something back in that way. Instead of it being able to be passed on. – ... If you're ... ever so rich, it's not so bad. Because you've got enough. – But. ... if ...wasn't able to ... help the kids a bit, when one knows they needed it. – I think that's awful. (80 year old woman, West Berkshire)

Predominantly negative responses were given by two people (Table 6.4). A 73 year old man, who suggested that for the first time he might not vote in the 2010 general election, identified: anti-war, integrity of politicians (arising from the 'MPs' expenses scandal'), and 'deteriorating freedom of speech'. A 63 year old man, who became 'completely disillusioned' with New Labour, identified some recent sources of concern: failure to 'deal with the banks', increasing surveillance, and tax.[6]

Some political issues identified by research participants are labels, like 'education' and 'the environment', that cover diverse topics (Figures 6.1 and 6.2). Therefore it could be misleading to rely on opinion poll findings using broad labels to investigate current political concerns and changes in them. Evidence from the interviews show

Figure 6.1: Diagram illustrating ways in which some research participants view 'Education' as a political issue and some major influences on these opinions.

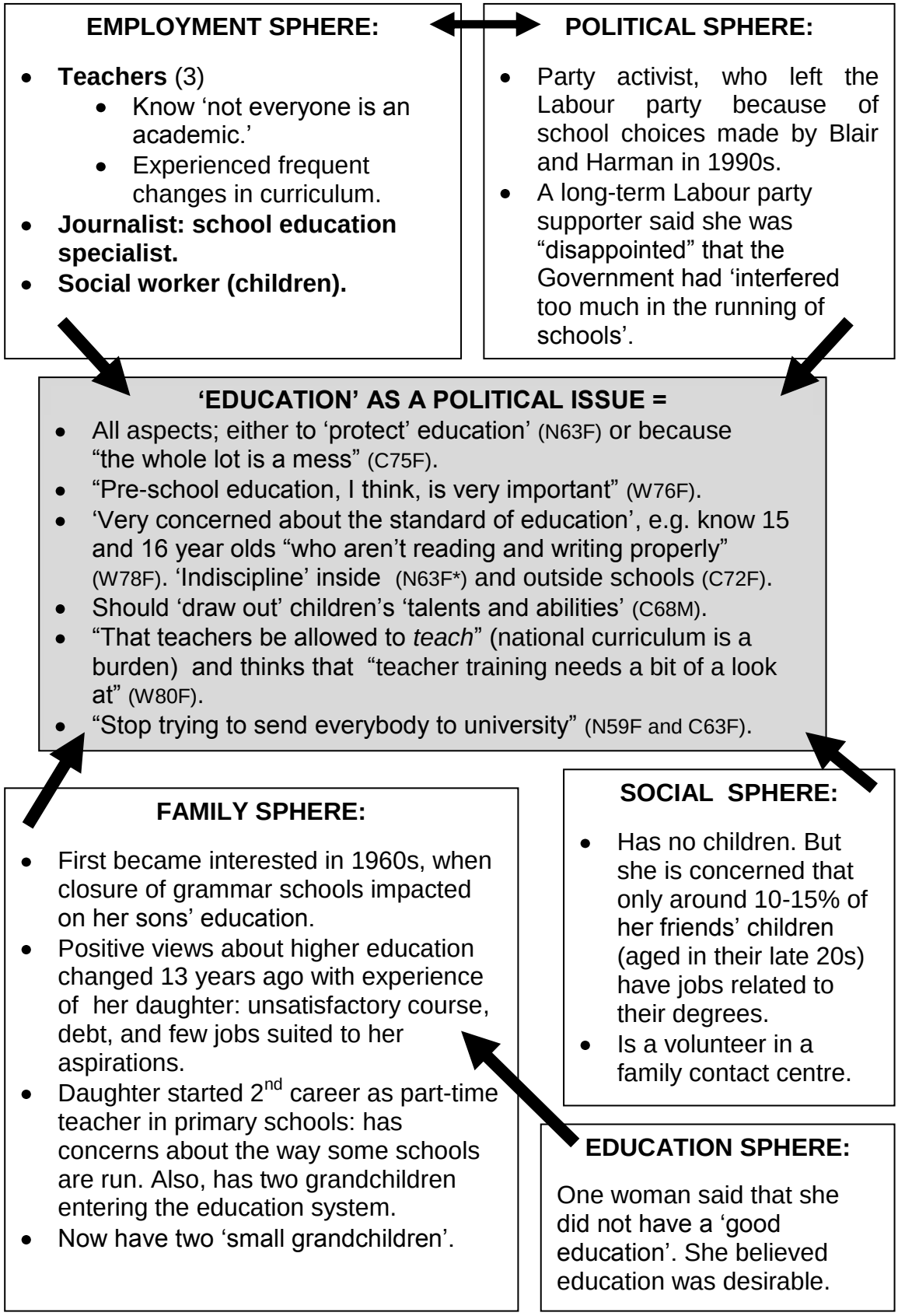
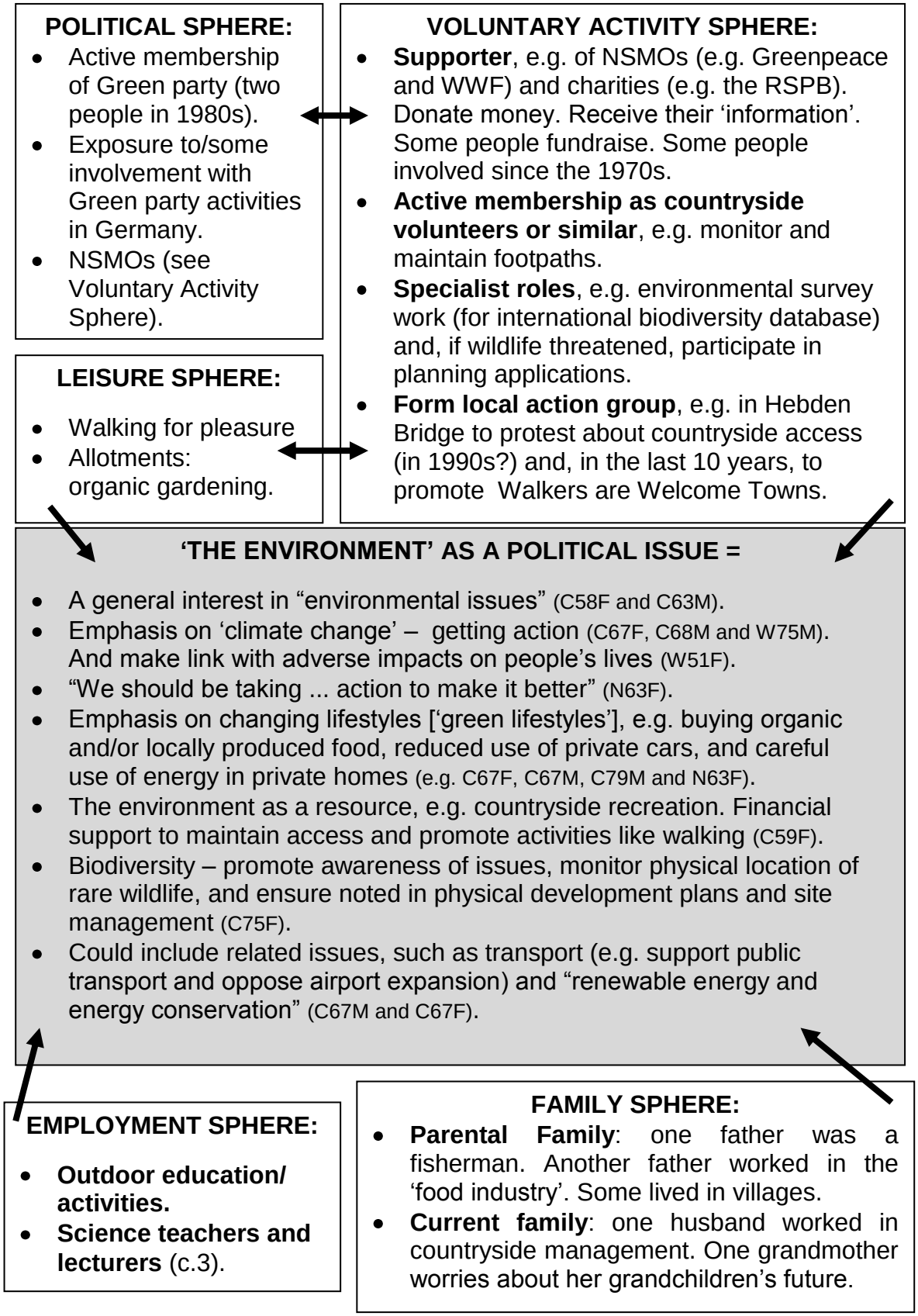


Figure 6.2: Diagram illustrating ways in which some research participants view 'The Environment' as a political issue and some major influences on these opinions.



individual-level variations in the type and timing (historical and biographical) of major influences on the emergence of these personally important political issues (Figures 6.1 and 6.2). Social relationships play a role in these processes.

When considering possible intergenerational conflict, it seems appropriate to look at social relationships within and across generations (in terms of kin and extended to include non-kin of similar chronological ages). Both same-age and cross-age relationships appeared to be valued by research participants (Table 6.5). And these relationships could provide awareness of things that become personally important political issues.

Therefore, these research participants' provide no evidence of the existence of a strong form of older people's politics. However, some older people's issues appear to have become more salient and were incorporated within individuals' personal political concerns. It appears that maintaining valued intergenerational social relations could help reduce any intergenerational tensions.

Table 6.5: Examples of how cross-age and same-age social relationships can feature in some research participants' political lives.

Relationships involve	Examples concern research participants' relationships with their			
	grandchildren	children and their partners	peers and siblings	parents/ other older people
Exchange of political opinions and ideas	Nine year old talks with his grandmother about her 'letter-writing' campaigns (N65F).	Discussed with adult sons whether or not to vote for Blair as party leader (N66F*).	Long-standing friends can provide 'political talk' (W78F* and W80F).	Enjoys local meetings with lifelong Labour party members aged around 90 years (W78F).
Giving or receiving support in political activity	Supporting her grandson, who was standing in the 2010 general election (W82F).	Joined Liberal Democrat party to 'help her daughter', who was recruited by the party to stand for election to the local council (C80F).	Her husband encouraged her to become a local councillor and looked after their children when there were evening meetings (W82F*).	Some active members of the Calderdale Pensioners' Association encouraged younger old people in the DBOL campaign (C67M).
Awareness of issues which can join their other political concerns	Difficulties experienced in getting a mortgage, even for young professionals (W78F*). Concerned about the risk of drug addiction for her young grandchildren (W76F).	Believes that promoting higher education is undesirable based on her child's experiences (C63F). Her child is disabled, so she is concerned about disability-related topics (W78F).	Through trying to support his brother who 'handled a lot' of their mother's ongoing social care in another part of England (C63M).	Worry about how best to support older relatives, who live alone and start to become visibly 'frail' (C56F and W76F).

6.5: Political representation

To achieve change through the formal political system, older people's interests require politicians' active support. Evidence of politicians' perceptions of older people's 'electoral power' includes relevant items appearing in major political parties' electoral manifestos. If the major political parties are failing to deal adequately with older people's political issues, then older people's political parties and independent candidates might stand for election. Within the time constraints of these interviews, three questions were used to elicit comments concerning older people's political representation.

First, research participants were asked variants of the 1992 Eurobarometer question: 'Would you join a political party formed to further the interests of older people?'. This was a hypothetical question for these research participants. Moreover, it seemed a meaningless question for people who never joined a party. Therefore, these people were introduced to the original question and then asked about supporting or voting for such a party. Although not directly comparable with the 1992 survey (Walker and Maltby, 1997, p. 111 and 113), overall responses are similar. A majority (28 people, aged 51 to 90) said they would not join, support or vote for this party, while a sizeable minority (11 people, aged 58 to 78) said they would or might do. Only four people said they would support this party, including a woman apparently recently sensitized to these issues:

> I'm facing old age now ... just about to reach my 60th birthday. So ... I suddenly feel as though I'm in a state of transition between being an adult and being – an older person. You know. I feel as though 60 is quite a big watershed really. Because ... although ... nowadays people don't regard 60

> as old, I think ... in society, people over the age of 60, once that's sort of perceived as their age ... it – changes people's attitudes towards you.
> (59 year old woman, Calderdale)

A 65 year old woman, who previously said that she did not think that 'her age group' were "very well treated", was "all for the older vote getting a decent crack of the whip". Her response could be interpreted as a negative reaction to major political parties based on what politicians have said and done. As could the woman who recently read a 'SAGA magazine':

> They asked all the readers what they wanted out of the next government. And ... got a consensus of what older people wanted. And then they did interviews with each of the leaders – who all waffled and ... promised the same things.
> (66 year old woman, Calderdale)

A 63 year old man who would support an older people's party saw a need for attitudinal change among both the public and politicians. Seven people's support for this party appeared to be weaker and possibly conditional; such as when they are 'old enough' for it or see credible policies on other issues. When asked if she was worried that the focus on older people's interests might be a problem, a 64 year old woman replied: "Well somebody's got to, haven't they?".

Diverse reasons were given for not joining, supporting or voting for a party to further older people's interests (Table 6.6). Some people emphasised that older people are members of society and this party could increase their social marginalisation. The commonest responses concerned beliefs that parties should be 'for everybody'. If this party did not have other policies, then one person indicated that a pressure group would be more appropriate. And a woman believed that this party is unnecessary because these issues should be dealt with by 'socialist parties'. Doubts were

Table 6.6: Research participants' opinions on the idea of joining, supporting or voting for a political party formed to further the interests of older people.

Reasons focus on	Research participants' opinions on the idea of joining, supporting or voting for a political party formed to further the interests of older people	
	Disliked because	Liked because
Idea of a party for older people	Believe that a political party should be for everybody: all ages, all social groups (W51F, C58F, N59F, N60F, C63M, N66F, C67M, C75F, W75M, C80F and W82F). Do not support single issue parties. Not 'legitimate politics' at national level – should 'form a pressure group' (C60M*, C63F, N63F, C68M, N71F, W76F and W82F). Believe it is unnecessary to form a new party. These interests should be dealt with in 'socialism' (W51F).	Do not believe that major political parties will deliver what older people need or want, e.g. fear likely to cut health and other services that they need (C65F, C66F and W78F).
Ability to get things done in government	Believe likely to win too few seats to have much influence on national policy (C67M, C68M and C72F).	Having a 'higher agenda' might help to improve government by getting away from 'yah-boo politics' (C58M).
What they might do in government	Concerns about how they would deal with other issues (C58F, N63F*, N66F*, C67F and N71F).	
Society	Believe it is undesirable, like other forms of 'segregation'. Older people are 'part of society' and have wider concerns (C60M, W61F, C72F, W78F*, W80F and C90M).	Could help to change ageist attitudes of politicians and the general public (C59F and C63M*).
Self-image	Incompatible with self-image: Do not consider oneself as being and/or do not want to be labelled as being 'old' (C56F, C58M, N73M and W80F).	

Note: Research participants gave one or more reasons for their opinions.

expressed that such a party could stand for and win many seats with the existing electoral system.

Next, research participants were asked: 'What do you think of the idea of independent pensioner candidates in the next election?'. Again this was a hypothetical question that split research participants' opinions. Responses were predominantly positive from eight people (aged 51 to 80) and negative from 24 people (aged 59 to 82). Inevitably, some similar reasons were given for liking and disliking this idea (Table 6.7) and a party to further older people's interests. This question also exposed diverse opinions about 'independents' and pensioners as candidates and politicians. Favourable characteristics attributed to pensioners as candidates and politicians include their 'experience of life', less 'vanity', and potentially having a 'higher profile' than a party. But two women raised concerns that some pensioners could be prejudiced and disregard other views.[7] Independent candidates were also believed likely to have 'experience of life' and potential to publicise issues, as well as potentially being 'a voice of conscience'. Having more independent politicians was favoured by a woman with growing doubts about the desirability of party politics.[8] But doubts were expressed about the likelihood of independent candidates getting elected and, if elected, being able to do anything beyond publicising issues.

Both of these questions raised the idea of 'selfishness'.[9] For instance one response to the question about supporting a party formed to further the interests of older people was:

Table 6.7: Research participants' opinions on the idea of independent pensioner candidates standing in the 2010 general election.

Reasons focus on	Research participants' opinions on the idea of independent pensioner candidates standing in the 2010 general election	
	Disliked because	Liked because
'Pensioners'	Believe their focus on older people is too narrow, especially for Parliament. (C60M, C60M*, W61F*, C63M, N63F, C66F, N71F, W78F*, W78M and C80F). Think this is a 'mad' idea because 'pensioners' are a diverse group, e.g. in terms of incomes (N66F* and W76F).	Could have 'wide experience of life' and of seeing 'what works and doesn't work'; more likely to have time and energy for task, less concerned about their public image (C58F).
'Independents'	Unimpressed by experience of independents. Based on the performance of an independent at a public meeting for all local candidates in the 2010 general election (C63F).	Associated 'independents' with people with 'years of experience in something' outside politics and having the potential to act as a 'voice of conscience' (W51F, C56F, C60M*, N63F* and W75M).
'Independent' and 'Pensioners'	Similar to the idea of having a pensioners' party, so not interested (W78F). Have met older people who are 'prejudiced' and/or unrealistic about what can be done (C72F and W82F*).	Like both aspects and think they 'can work together' (N66F*). Need a 'voice' – inadequacy of pensions is relevant to 'all of us' (C65F).
Likelihood of getting elected	Unlikely to get elected, if only because of the electoral system (C58M, C59F, W61F, N63F*, N64F, C67M, C68M, N73M, C78F, W78F, C79M and C90M). Unlikely to be standing in all constituencies (W61F and C75F).	Could get 'a lot of votes' (C56F).
Ability to get things done in government	Believe unable to achieve much change or action as they could lack support within Parliament. Need to 'do it through parties' (N60F, C63F and N64F).	
Self-image	Does not want involvement in anything distinguishing between people based on their age (N73M).	Could imagine being candidate (C65F and N66F).

Note: Research participants gave one or more reasons for their opinions.

> It would depend on the, what their other policies were. ... I would be drawn to reading up about it and looking into it more and asking questions. But not specifically just for that. Because I think that would be selfish. Because I think government, you've got to look at governing the whole – people, looking at all the problems. Can't just have an oldies [*laughs*] parliament.
>
> (71 year old woman, Northumberland)

A 63 year old woman described independent pensioner candidates as "very self-centred people". Their arguments appear based on unrealistic assumptions about the ability of a few independent MPs or a minority party to greatly influence overall resource allocation decisions. As well as unlikely assumptions that 'older people's interests' exclude things like 'health' and 'education'. The latter assumption is undermined by research participant's diverse political concerns (Table 6.4) and valued intergenerational social relationships (Table 6.5). However, if there is widespread sensitivity among older people about being branded 'selfish' for voicing their concerns, this could discourage political action by older people.

Recent government appointments of people to act as 'voices' for older people creates an unusual status: neither politicians nor political activists with some citizens' support (section 2.2.1). Also, other people might be considered to be championing 'older people's issues'. Therefore, at the end of their interviews, research participants were also asked: 'Do you think that there is or has ever been a real older people's champion, either in this area or nationally?'. A majority of research participants (26, aged 51 to 90) said there is or had been a champion. However, ten people (aged 58 to 82) disagreed. A 75 year old woman did not think a champion was necessary and 'hated the idea of champions'. And, after laughing at idea that the "odd TV personality" is 'a champion', another woman said:

> Then again, I don't particularly want one. – See. [*laugh*] I don't really think we need an old people's anything. (78 year old woman, Calderdale)

Table 6.8 shows the people who were identified as 'older people's champions'.[10] Joan Bakewell (a government-appointed champion) was mentioned by 11 people, predominantly aged over 65. One could speculate that this observation might reflect patterns of media consumption and attention paid to 'older people's issues'. The same number of people identified Jack Jones (the former trade union and pensioner activist), who was named by more under-65s than Joan Bakewell. Jack Jones died in April 2009, therefore some people might remember national media reports (e.g. Pattinson, 2009). If these people are effective champions of older people, then it is of concern that only dead people (Jack Jones and Barbara Castle) were identified by five people. Some of the people identified were not involved in 'fighting for older people's interests'. For instance one woman identified an actor and a broadcaster because they were 'interesting', visibly older people.[11] She said:

> No one champion though. ... I don't think that would work. Because I think you need a variety of people so that ... they appeal to different people. If everybody thought: 'Oh this is the champion for the older people'. Think: 'Oh well, got nothing to do with me!' ... I think we need to keep on encouraging more older people. Just in life generally.
>
> (60 year old woman, Northumberland)

Diverse opinions about older people's champions appeared in research participants' comments. For example, talking about Joan Bakewell:

> I don't know what she does. But ... It's better to have something than nothing.
>
> (79 year old man, Calderdale)

Table 6.8: People identified as being 'real older people's champions' by 26 of the research participants.

Research participant	People identified as 'older people's champions'			
	Joan Bakewell	Jack Jones	Barbara Castle	Other people
C90M	X	-	-	
W82F*	X	X	-	
C80F	-	X	-	
C79M	X	-	-	
W78M	-	X	X	
W78F	-	X	X	Tony Benn
W78F*	X	-	-	Terry Waite, Esther Rantzen
W76F	X	-	-	
C75F	X	-	-	
C67F	X	X	-	
C67M	X	X	X	
C66F	X	-	-	Tony Robinson, Terry Pratchett
N66F	-	-	-	Tony Benn, Bobby Robson
C65F	-	-	-	Julie Walters, Churchill, John Major
N64F	-	-	X	Shirley Williams, Jack Cussons
C63M	-	-	-	Michael Parkinson
N63F	-	X	-	
C61M	-	X	-	
W61F	-	-	-	"Age UK people", Saga
C60M	-	X	-	Jack Ashley
N60F	-	-	-	Helen Mirren, David Dimbleby
C59F	X	-	-	
N59F	X	-	-	Alan Beith
C58M	-	X	-	Tony Benn, 'Joan' [?]
C56F	-	-	X	Jack Ashley
W51F	-	X	-	

Note: The 26 research participants (identified by local authority, age in years, and sex) are listed approximately in order of age, with the oldest person at the top of the table. * indicates research participants sharing an identity (as shown in Table 3.1). Underlined names are 'local older people's champions'. The people identified are:

- 'Joan' was the name by which an active member of the Calderdale Pensioners' Association was known to this research participant. Early in 2010, this local activist moved from Calderdale and the association was trying to find a 'younger' old person to 'take over' (Halifax Courier, 2010 c and d).
- Dame Joan Bakewell was appointed as an older people's champion by the government in 2008. Jack Jones died in April 2009. After his retirement from being a trades union leader, Jack Jones became active in older people's organisations, including the NPC (see Pattinson, 2009). Barbara Castle (deceased) was a senior Labour MP.
- Helen Mirren, Tony Robinson, and Julie Walters are actors. David Dimbleby, Michael Parkinson (see 2.2.1) and Esther Rantzen were primarily television presenters, although the latter has stood for election (Harrison, 2009) and written a relevant book (Rantzen, 2008).Terry Pratchett is an author. Saga is a business specialising in services for the over-50s. Bobby Robson (deceased) was a sportsperson and football club manager. All other individuals are/were MPs.

> I've not got an awful lot of time for people like Joan Bakewell ... and that. I think [she's] very lightweight. ... [I don't think] she justified all the fuss made about her. ...
> It's very difficult when you get ... a celebrity. Because they're...self-serving. And I find that quite bothersome sometimes.
>
> (78 year old woman, West Berkshire*)

> It's nice to have – someone older putting forward older people's views. Because ... as we get older we're less able to get out there and say things and do things. And she seems quite an energetic and ... charismatic and – good speaker and [so she can] put forward our point of view.
>
> (66 year old woman, Calderdale)

When people had heard a champion speak, they did not always agree with their message. Importantly, the ability of official or unofficial champions to achieve any change or action was generally doubted.[12]

Therefore, much remains unknown about older people's political representation. However, there is evidence that some older people believe that their age group has political concerns that are inadequately addressed in the existing political system. Dissatisfaction with existing political parties and previous governments, combined with increased perceptions of ageism in society, and especially in public services, could play a role in increasing older people's political activism. But neither older people's parties nor independent pensioner candidates promise satisfactory solutions.

6.6: Organisations run by and for older people

England has numerous local and national-level organisations run by or for older people. These organisations vary greatly in the extent and nature of their political activities. If there is 'an older people's politics', older people might be expected to

have some awareness of relevant local and national organisations, and their political activities. Research participants were asked questions about three major organisations: the NPC, Age Concern, and Help the Aged.

The NPC is the national-level organisation for independent, local pensioner organisations (section 2.2.3). A majority (23) of research participants said that they had heard of the NPC (Figure 6.3). No-one belonged to a pensioner organisation. Awareness about the NPC's activities appears limited and largely derived from the media. Although an active union member, who was still working, said:

> UNISON has its own pensioners' conference. And they send delegates to it. ... So we get fed back information from it through the union.
>
> (63 year old man, Calderdale)

Local pensioner organisations are not available everywhere; for example:

> I think that within certain parts of Calderdale, there will be things called pensioners' groups. – But we don't have one in this part of the world.
>
> (63 year old woman, Calderdale)

And one potential member said:

> I have thought about joining. But ... I sometimes feel I'm in too many things. And that's one too many. I do know somebody who is very active in it.
>
> (63 year old woman, Northumberland*)

Some people were not interested in joining pensioner groups; reasons volunteered include disliking pressure groups, thinking pressure groups 'cannot achieve anything on their own', and a preference for 'mixed age' activities. Non-pensioners and those who had not accepted that they were pensioners have little reason to pay attention to these organisations.

Figure 6.3: Awareness of organisations run by and for older people.

Research participant	Heard of NPC	Heard of Age Concern & HtA	Aware of campaigning by Age Concern and Help the Aged
C90M			
W82F			
W82F*			
C80F		was a volunteer	reads their newsletter
W80F		info. for self	
C79M			keeping warm
C78F			
W78M			requests Christmas donations
W78F			
W78F*			always 'something going on'
W76F			'a pressure group'
C75F		tried to get info.	
W75M			pensions
N73M			
C72F			
N71F			
C68M			
C67M		info. for relative	is 'campaigning organisation'
C67 F		info. for relative	
C66F		from vol. work	
N66F		use services	
N66F*		was a volunteer	
C65F		through work	'advertise and on television'
N65F	#	travel insurance	
N64F			'imagine pensions'
C63F		worked for it	
C63M		supporter	reads their newsletter
C63M*		donates to it	
N63F		through work	domestic violence, pensions
N63F*			'they do campaign'
C61M			
W61F		info. for parents	'very good' issues
C60M		through a friend	claiming benefits
C60M*			
N60F			
C59F		info. for father	are mentioned on radio
N59F		volunteer	
C58F		mother used	
C58M			
C56F			
W51F			

Note: Research participants identified by (local authority, age in years, and sex), with * as in Table 3.1. NPC: National Pensioners Convention. HtA: Help the Aged. # not asked question. 'info' is information. Dark grey cell: has heard of/is aware. Pale grey cell: is possibly aware.

Examining all the interview data suggested that some people might not have heard of the NPC as a title; for example, the woman who answered an earlier question with:

> Jack Jones.[13] That union man. He ... tried to start some Grey Power thing. ... I haven't noticed them. (82 year old woman, West Berkshire*)

Yet she said she had not heard of the NPC. Also, some people might not realise that local pensioner groups can belong to the NPC.

All the research participants had heard of Age Concern and Help the Aged (Figure 6.3). Sometimes this was because they had some sort of contact with these organisations. But fewer people reported awareness of their campaigning activities. For instance:

> Only peripherally ... You just hear of them sometimes in the News. ... That they've got a particular issue that they're campaigning about.
> (78 year old woman, West Berkshire)

People reporting awareness of these campaigns, tended to struggle to remember examples. Two men providing clearer examples, both found a personal resonance with an issue: either needing advice on claiming benefits or living in a location where keeping warm in winter was important. For some people, they were just understood to be 'campaigning organisations'. One man said:

> Now my impression is. I don't have a clear working knowledge of the campaigns that have run up to it. But I do know that some of the things that are provided by social services would not have been provided without campaigning organisations such as Age Concern. So I believe that my stepfather benefited from some of those. (67 year old man, Calderdale)

For this man, Age Concern was a 'social movement' – "campaigning on behalf of older people". And it was credited with 'improving facilities for older people' by 'putting pressure' on local authorities to act. Another man said:

> In the media. ... When an issue comes up that's being discussed that affects older people ... they might have a ... representative on to give that organisation's view. (63 year old man, Calderdale*)

This comment suggests that these campaigns present an 'organisational view' that could differ from that of some older people and should not be viewed as 'older people's voice'.

Once again, even if research participants were aware of these organisations, they were not necessarily interested enough to acquire any appreciation of these organisations' political activities. For example:

> Just because I'm an old person, I don't just want to concentrate on older people! (78 year old woman, Calderdale)

Therefore, neither the NPC nor Age UK's campaigning activities seem to have generally attracted much interest among these research participants. And the diverse local organisations run by and for older people tended to be classed as 'social' rather than political in character.[14]

6.7: Conclusion

This chapter presented some insights into research participants' understandings and experiences of an 'older people's politics'. Overall, this idea appeared to have limited appeal among research participants. Consistent with the literature, there was no evidence of any strong old age related identification among these research participants. And some people strongly opposed any old age based political – or even social – activity. However, some research participants could think of reasons

why England might not be characterised as being ‘senior-friendly’. And some research participants believe that politicians in England tend to pay inadequate attention to dealing with older people’s concerns. Although old age related issues were not prominent among research participants’ reported current major political concerns, social care was mentioned. Research participants’ social relationships, including those with younger and older people, could influence their political concerns and opinions. Research participants tended to have little knowledge of or interest in the major national organisations’ campaigning activities on behalf of older people.

While researching into an ‘older people’s politics’, some insights were obtained into research participants’ wider political understandings and experiences, especially concerning political parties and politicians. One recurrent theme was that it was believed to be either illegitimate or inappropriate for political representatives and parties to concentrate on the concerns of ‘older people’ as a group. Also, the electoral system tended to be considered likely to work against the election of candidates campaigning for older people. And the ability of minority parties to achieve change within government tended to be doubted; for example, because of the perceived concentration of political power within national government and sometimes even local government. Although there were mixed opinions about having unelected ‘older people’s champions’, it was generally doubted that they could achieve any political change or action on service provision.

Adopting a biographical research approach reveals useful insights into older people’s political understandings and experiences. By considering individuals’ political lives as

part of their social lives, for example, it was possible to explore political influences associated with their changing social relationships and with different types and timing of involvement with organisations like Age Concern. In addition, the importance of 'unpacking' broad categories of political issues, like 'Education' or 'The Environment', was illustrated. Interpretation of survey-based political opinion data would be improved by identifying exactly what people are concerned about. The next chapter considers 'social care' as a political issue for older people.

7

SOCIAL CARE AS A POLITICAL ISSUE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

7.1: Introduction

Although England has an ageing population and social care can improve the quality of individuals' lives, social care for older people has not been a major political priority. As seen in Chapter Two, publicly financed social care for older people appears to be inadequately funded and increasingly difficult to access. Councillors of local authorities with responsibility for personal social services make key decisions about access criteria and funding for these services. Thus, political decisions create the geographical variations in these services. Interviews were conducted in local authority areas that had, for whatever reasons, chosen to set formal access criteria[1] at either the lowest (Calderdale) or highest (Northumberland and West Berkshire) levels.

These research interviews explored whether and how social care for older people in their own homes appeared in these research participants' social and political lives. Therefore, this chapter further illuminates older people's political understandings and experiences. In particular, this chapter deals directly with the research questions concerning whether older people think of social care as a political issue and what factors might contribute to their levels of engagement or interest in the social care debate. First, this chapter explores research participants' awareness of social care.

Next, ways in which research participants think about social care and the state's role are considered. Finally, some aspects of lifestyles and feelings are highlighted.

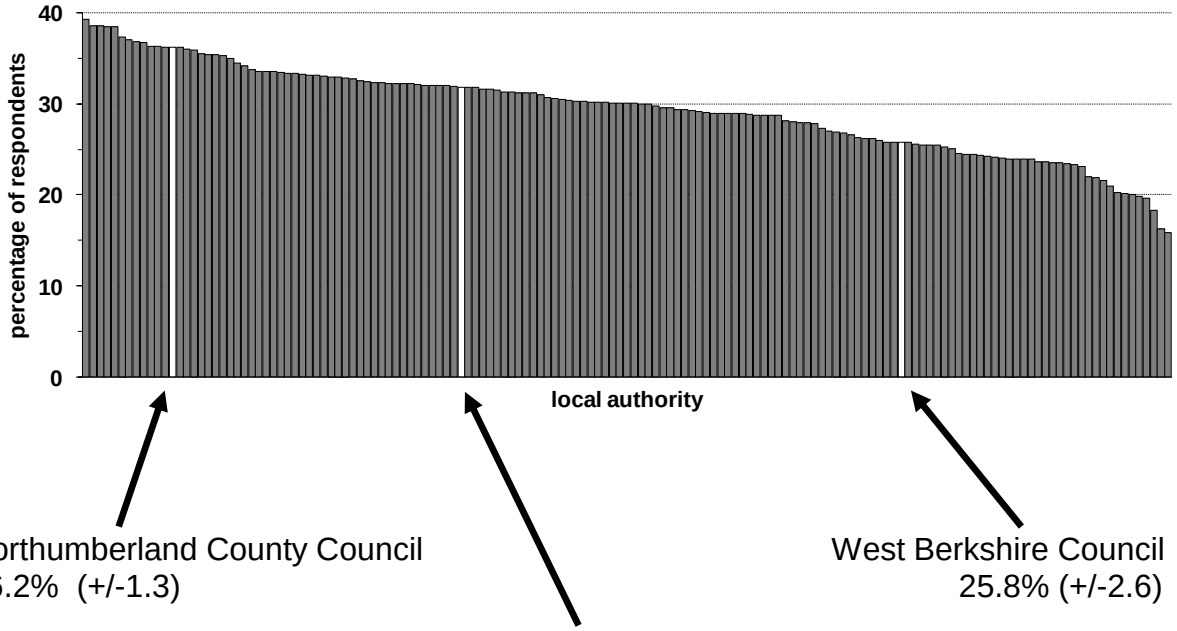
Overall, social care services for older people appeared likely to have a very variable place in the social and political lives of older people living in England. This research helped illuminate aspects of the complexity and dynamics of social care as both a practical and political issue.

7.2: Awareness

For social care for older people in their own homes to become a major political issue for individuals, it must be perceived as salient. Individuals require some awareness of social care for older people, possibly including trends in provision and relevant policy. Drawing on Soss and Schram (2007, pp. 121-122), evidence was sought about the proximity (in terms of space, time, and patterning of social relations) and visibility of social care policy and provision as threatening or reassuring older people.

Survey evidence suggests that a minority of adults living in England believe that older people get adequate support, including social care services, to continue living in their homes for 'as long as they want to' (Figure 7.1). To some extent these expressed beliefs might reflect awareness of formal access criteria to publicly supported services. Responses from West Berkshire are broadly consistent with local access criteria. However, Calderdale's responses are more pessimistic and

Figure 7.1: Percentage of respondents in the 2008 Place Survey who said they thought that older people in their local area get the help and support that they need to continue to live at home for as long as they want to, by local authority of residence.



Source: Department for Communities and Local Government. 2008 Place Survey, England. Headline results (23 June 2009).
Notes: Figures in brackets are the confidence intervals at the 95% level. Warning: there were some low response rates (below 30%). Estimated percentages of respondents who agreed with this statement ranged from 39.3% for Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council to 15.9% in the London Borough of Lambeth, with 30.0% (+/- 0.2) for England. This postal survey of residents aged 18 and over was conducted between September and December 2008. Chart shows estimates for 151 of the 152 unitary authorities in England (no estimate was published for the Isles of Scilly). Data from http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/placesurvey2008 on 29 June 2009.

Northumberland's responses are markedly more positive than might be expected if based solely on their access criteria. Research participants were also asked about their local authority area: 'Do you believe older people receive the support they need to live independently at home?'. People understood and replied to this question in diverse ways. Overall, around 39 percent[2] of the research participants (aged 56 to 80) said that they 'did not know', rising to just over half of those in Calderdale. Some people seemed to want a factual basis for any agreement or disagreement with this question; as one woman said:

> I don't really know. My information is out of date. I used to work in the local social services and so I had a much better insight into what was going on locally. But ... I'm talking about 20 years ago now. ... That was the days when the local authority still had old people's homes.

Later, adding:

> I'm not a user. And I don't have friends who are users.
>
> (59 year old woman, Calderdale)

Other people had relevant personal experience but either were unsure how typical this was or the experience occurred in another geographical location. One man living in a rural location was most strongly aware of informal 'neighbourly' activity:

> I really can't answer that. ... I know ... on this hillside, for instance, there would be ... widows – living alone ... in their late 80s. But the neighbours look after them. ... We look after them. – I'm not aware of any – sort of local authority intervention. (79 year old man, Calderdale)

Half the research participants in Northumberland and West Berkshire, and a third of those in Calderdale agreed with the statement about support for older people. These people (aged 51 to 90) gave diverse reasons (Table 7.1). Understandably, this response could reflect positive experiences of either receiving or organising formal social care, as well as close social relations' positive experiences. Voluntary work is another way in which people may become aware of the various carers visiting older people, like the almshouse residents. However, agreement with the statement was sometimes qualified. And there could be potential for political action arising from caveats, such as the lack of specialist services, the effort involved in accessing services, and limited support for shopping and house cleaning that can impact adversely on individuals' quality of life. One research participant was aware from experience 'in her village' of current and potential problems associated with changes

Table 7.1: Research participants' responses to being asked if they believe that older people receive the support they need to live independently at home.

Basis for response	Locally, do older people receive the support they need to live independently at home?	
	Yes, they do	No, they do not
Personal experience	Are receiving or have been offered support, including during times of changing personal circumstances (W78F* and W82F).	Offered post-hospital social care - "a really good service". But she declined the offer of being "put to bed at 8 o'clock" (W78F).
From organising services	Over 16 years ago, so assumed that local services have improved. See leaflets about services (C67F).	
From experience of people they know	Know older people who are receiving services at home. May know little or nothing about how these services are organised or funded (W51F, W61F, N66F, W80F).	Believes it is "absolutely appalling" based on apparent inaction concerning a neighbour 'with Alzheimer's', living alone, who has had several fire alarms (C60M).
From work in social services	Former social workers stress the 'responsiveness' (C65F), and the experience and commitment (N66F*) of local social workers. From talking to a relative who works in social services (C63M).	Been told that home helps are only allowed 15 minutes per person, whereas it was two hours when she did that work for social services. Thinks "it's crazy" (C78F).
Qualified responses	Active member of Alzheimer's Society knows that there is "a lack" of specialist services (N63F*). Impression that "it doesn't just happen. ... You've got to push it" to access services (N60F). Believe that services could be improved, e.g. concerns about 'time-dominated' service provision (C61M and C90M). Have to pay for services, which are "not cheap". Limited access to home care through social services ("got to be bedridden") and, then, may have insufficient time or do not cover all social needs (N60F). Problems with the introduction of 'personal budgets', e.g. a long wait for advice and concerns about personal security for people with dementia (N71F).	If locally offered only 'quarter of an hour' support, as provided temporarily to a woman aged in her late 80s by another local authority. This was "not only awful but totally pointless" (W75M).

in the way in which services are provided, such as the introduction of 'personal budgets':

> You buy in your own stuff. Which is fine if you are *compos mentis* and can do this and have done budgeting – and know what you're doing. But they're – issuing it out to elderly people. (71 year old woman, Northumberland)

Some older people were said be "becoming depressed and feeling helpless", especially as there was a "three month waiting list" for advice. Additionally, there were concerns about their personal 'security'. Two former social workers' positive views on support for local older people appear to be based largely on the perceived 'commitment' of social services personnel, rather than from the perspectives of older people. And one woman's response focused on visible recent investment in sheltered housing, rather than social care services provided in people's own homes.

A minority of research participants said they did not believe that older people received the support they needed to live independently at home (Table 7.1). Two people focused on the arguably inadequate duration (15 minutes) of carers' visits to people's homes. One man was 'appalled' by the perceived neglect of an older neighbour, which seemed to be based partly on an assumption that there is 'a system' that connected emergency services and social services, and that social services would intervene. Hospitalisation and temporary, post-hospital social care are likely to be more commonly experienced by older people. Two people disagreed in their evaluations of temporary, post-hospital care. Another person's membership of the Liberal Democrat party probably drew her attention to a local Liberal Democrat councillor's public complaints about allegedly premature discharge of older people from hospital. A complicating factor in people's informal assessment of support

appears to be possible differences in services offered by different types of service providers; for instance, public and private sector hospitals. Finally, the 'effort' involved in accessing social care services through social services is viewed as unsupportive of older people applying either for themselves or older relatives.

All the research participants were also asked about their experiences of trying to access or use social care services for older people in their own homes. Variable amounts of time were devoted to replying to this question; largely reflecting the amount, nature and recency of any experiences. Some insights emerged about the proximity of social care issues.

Personal experience of social care services in their own homes was reported by a minority of research participants. As might be expected, they were all aged over 65. Two people were receiving long-term support in the form of a cleaner, either obtained through social services or independently sourced. Another two people received specialist information about aids available for people with either hearing or visual impairments. Temporary, post-hospital care generally won favourable impressions from four people, but might bear little resemblance to local, long-term, social care services in ease of access and quality. Thus, personal experience provided limited awareness of social care among research participants.

Looking across individual research participants' wider social relations, reveals diverse patterns of social proximity and informal assessments made of these people's social care experiences (Figure 7.2). By far the commonest social

relationship providing some awareness of social care services for older people is that between research participants and their parents and/or their partners' parents. These relationships increased the visibility of a wider range of social care services, including assistance with meals, bathing, and getting dressed. Also, more of the social care experiences were perceived as being unsatisfactory in some way. And in three cases, the quantity and quality of services were perceived to vary over time. If these are or were strong social relationships, then any unsatisfactory experiences are likely to be memorable and could provide a focus for political interest and possibly action. For instance, one woman recently started to pay attention to social care for older people:

> Because I've got an elderly father and his girl friend's husband – and those are the people I know best, who are at that point in their lives where they need ... care – at home. And ... I think because ... the realisation has come through my own family, rather than from my community, it's quite powerful really. The impact it's had. (59 year old woman, Calderdale)

Social relationships with partners appeared to contribute little to the visibility of social care among research participants. Some people were single or divorced. Some people were widowed, possibly decades ago. Among the older research participants, there was evidence that most of their partners' social care was informal care that they and possibly other family members provided. For example:

> My husband. When he was getting towards the end. And he was getting quite ill. – I asked for help. I couldn't leave him in the house by himself. ...They came to see me – one week and said they'd send someone. ... I think the next day he went into hospital. And the following week, he died.
> (80 year old woman, Calderdale)

Figure 7.2: Research participants' social relationships as sources of information about social care services: memorable relevant lifetime experiences, by age.

research participant	self	parent or partner's parent	partner	other relatives	close friends	other people	person with relevant work	own work is relevant
C90M			NHS					volunteer
W82F	info eq							
W82F*		'uneven'					SW-O	
C80F		bath eq hh	arranged					volunteer
W80F						bath		
C79M								
C78F	NHS							hh
W78M		care						
W78F	NHS					care		
W78F*	clean eq					care		
W76F		care			care			
C75F								
W75M								
N73M		hh do less						
C72F	NHS							
N71F						budgets	carer	
C68M								
C67F		hh						
C67M		hh						
C66F	info	NHS						
N66F	NHS clean							
N66F*								SW-O
C65F							SW-O	SW-O
N65F			applied					
N64F		hh do less						
C63F								volunteer
C63M		unreliable					SW	
C63M*		NHS						
N63F				eq				SW
N63F*								SW-O
C61M								
W61F		care				care		
C60M								
C60M*		one varied						
N60F					care			volunteer
C59F								SW
N59F							SW	
C58F		clean meal						
C58M								
C56F					care	care		nurse
W51F		NHS care						

Note: This figure illustrates comments made during the interviews and might not be a comprehensive picture for any individual. Rows are in order of approximate ages of the research participants, with the data for the oldest research participant in the top row. The research participants are identified by (local authority, age in years, and sex), with a second person sharing an identity marked * (as in Table 3.1).

Cell colour: light grey (mainly satisfactory or good experiences), mid-grey (aspects are unsatisfactory or cause for concern), and black (mainly unsatisfactory experiences or have cause for concern).

Abbreviations: bath (help with bathing), clean (cleaning the house), eq (aids, equipment, and/or adaptation to home), hh (home help), info (information and advice), meal (help with meals), NHS (post-operation care in home), SW (social work), and SW-O (social work with older people).

Although research participants living with a partner seemed to have strong social relationships, they tended to enjoy generally good health and did not require any social care.

Other social relationships provide some people's only reported source of awareness of social care services (Figure 7.2). The closeness of these social relationships is likely to influence the accuracy and completeness of information about individuals' social care. Uncertainty about how they will be dealt with when they need support themselves can encourage an interest in practical aspects of neighbours' experiences. For instance:

> She'll be 88 ... this year. ... Her health is not wonderful. And ... so I follow her movements through these services – with great interest. In care.
>
> (80 year old woman, West Berkshire)

Visibility of social care services can also arise through other active or former social networks associated with work, especially in social services, and unpaid voluntary work with older people (Figure 7.2). Some older research participants could learn from the diverse experiences of younger members of their family who are paid carers or social workers.

Geographical and temporal proximity impact on practical and political awareness of social care based on social relationships. Although variable amounts of relevant information were volunteered by research participants, these aspects of social relationships with parents and/or partner's parents were explored (Table 7.2). Marked variation existed in geographical proximity: from co-residence to several hours driving

time. Generally, the evidence suggested that awareness of the older person's social care was more complete and accurate, the closer the geographical proximity. At greater geographical distances, other relatives might take on most of the responsibility for organising and informally monitoring care services. Furthermore, some research participants were aware that geographical variations in access to and provision of social care services meant that they could not assume that they would have the same experiences as older relatives living in other local authority areas. Turning to consider temporal proximity, it was striking that most of these social care experiences were believed to have occurred two or more years ago (Table 7.2). Changes in social services within recent decades (Table 7.3) devalue any awareness based on some of these historical experiences.

Satisfaction with social care services for older people in their own homes, might encourage some older people to seek to protect or even increase investment in these services. However, it was beyond this research project's scope to investigate this possibility.

Often political action tends to be motivated by negative experiences. Some aspects of these services that attracted research participants' negative comments could be identified from the interview transcripts (Table 7.3). Only residents of Northumberland raised concern about the high level of recognised needs required to access social care services. Yet West Berkshire residents face the same formal access criteria. Allocation of insufficient resources to these services could underlie expressed concerns about unmet need, replacement of wardens with alarm systems, insufficient

Table 7.2: Geographical and temporal proximity of research participants' experiences of their parents (or a partner's parents) receiving social care services in their homes.

Research participant	Parents (or partner's parents) who have received social care services in their homes			
	relation to research participant	live(d) in same local authority area	when received social care services in their homes	current status
W82F*	Mother	Yes - in walking distance	Probably within last 10 years	Lived to 99 years
C80F	Mother	No - possibly, in Stockport	About 20 years ago	Dead
W78M	Father	No - in East Anglia	Within last 12 years	Lived to 95 years
W76F	Father-in-law	No - in East Anglia	Within last 12 years	Lived to 95 years
N73M	Mother	Yes - in another town	About 10 years ago	Dead
C67 F	Mother	Yes - in same town	Over 16 years ago	Dead
	Father-in-law	No - about 26 miles away	Within last 2 to15 years	Dead
C67M	Stepfather	No - about 26 miles away	Within last 2 to15 years	Dead
	Mother-in-law	Yes - in same town	Over 16 years ago	Dead
C66F	Parents	No - in Devon	Don't know	Don't know
N65F	Mother	Yes - in same town	About 10 years ago.	Dead
	Parents-in-law	Yes - in same town	More than 10 year ago	Dead
N64F	Mother	Yes - N64F moved to be closer	around 8 to18 years ago	Lived to 85 years
C63M	Mother	No - in Eastbourne	Within last 20 years	Alive - has moved into a residential home
C63M*	Mother	Yes - in same town	Temporary care: 4 years ago	Alive
N63F	Mother	No - in Gateshead	Don't know	Don't know

Table 7.2 continues on the next page.

Table 7.2: Geographical and temporal proximity of research participants' experiences of their parents (or a partner's parents) receiving social care services in their homes. (continued).

Research participant	Parents (or partner's parents) who have received social care services in their homes			
	relation to research participant	live(d) in same authority area	when received social care services in their homes	current status
W61F	Mother.	Yes - lived with W61F for 22 years	During the last 22 years	Lived to 94 years
C60M*	Mother	No - in Northumberland	Over 10 years ago	Alive - has moved into a residential home
	Partner's mother	No - in North Wales	Has been receiving services for a 'long time'	Alive
N60F	Mother	No - possibly, in Newcastle	Nearly 20 years ago	Don't know
C58F	Mother	Yes - in another town	Within the last 5 years	Alive. Chose to move into a residential home within the last month, as 'frail' and "afraid to be on her own". Self-funding.
W51F	Mother-in-law	Yes - in walking distance	Temporary care was about 6 years ago. Current, long-term care started within the last year.	Alive

Note: Research participants are identified by (local authority, age in years, and sex) as in Table 3.1. Table is ordered approximately by ages of the research participants. Here 'social care' includes home helps, and help with getting up from and to bed, getting dressed, meals, and bathing. 'Home help' services tend to be accessed before personal care services. Temporary care': post-hospital after-care that involves the services of health service staff. 'Don't know': have no information.

Table 7.3: Some aspects of social care services for older people in their homes that attracted negative comments from research participants.

Themes	Types of concerns raised about social care services

Are the services adequate?	• Believe that services do not work, especially timings, e.g. put people to bed too early in the evening (W61F, N64F, C75F, W78F and C90M).
	• Believe that the quantity (time) of services provided is inadequate, especially, allocating 15 minutes per visit (W75M, C78F and C90M).
	• Have experience of unreliable services, e.g. 'occasionally miss' a planned home visit (C63M).
	• Know that social care services have changed, with reduced provision (N63F*, N64F, N73M, C72F, C75F and W82F*):
	  • Home helps used to do cleaning, dusting, shopping and lighting fires, but 'very little personal care'. Now, it is the reverse.
	  • Longer-term service users have experienced increasing need for help, but were allocated decreasing amount of service time.
	• Concerns about the quality, training and pay of social care staff Argue for better rates of pay and training (C63F, C78F and W82F*).

How accessible are the services?	• Concern about the high level of 'needs' that is required to pass the threshold for access to social care through social services. Older people will find that they cannot cope with many activities, such as shopping and housework, before they are eligible for any social support (N60F, N63F and N65F). • Believe that the presence of someone in the family identified as an informal carer makes it hard to access support services through social services (N65F and W82F). • Who is identifying older people who need social services? Although struggling to cope at home, older people can be unwilling to initiate requests for support and if living alone may have no-one to notice and encourage them (W51F, C60M, N60F and C67M).
Are the services what older people want?	• Services offered may not be what some older people want, especially alarms (service user: loss of social interaction with wardens and cannot reduce 'fear of falling'; older carers: have to respond to alarm calls) (C58F, C63F, W76F and W82F*). • Living in your own home may not be everyone's preference, especially for people living alone who feel lonely (W76F and W78M).
Other concerns	• Practical and emotional problems associated with geographically dispersed families (C58M, C63M and W76F). • Some older people refuse all or some of the support that they are offered. Relatives may be unaware of this (W51F, C58F, C58M, C66F, C67F, C67M and C75F). • Believe administration of social care services is too costly, e.g. scarce resources spent on assessments and reviews (C63F). • Concerned about profit motivation in care services (C58M and C78F).

duration of carers' visits, having socially unacceptable times to get people to bed or for their meals, and the difficulty of getting assistance with tasks like house cleaning and shopping. In turn, these under-resourced and sometimes apparently unreliable services constitute reasons for older people to refuse them. Additional resources would also be required to improve the terms and conditions and training of paid care workers, which are reasonably believed to be too low to ensure sufficient numbers and quality of care workers for an ageing population. Therefore, many of the research participants' concerns about social care could be reduced to a resource allocation issue. Consequently, political demands could be made for increased investment by the state.

Not all concerns about social care services for older people in their own home are primarily financial. For example, practical and emotional problems arose among some geographically dispersed families when they were organising social care for older relatives (Table 7.3).

Finally, questions were asked about three potentially, politically relevant aspects of social care services for older people: means and needs testing, and the Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) criteria. Generally, research participants said they were aware that applications were means and needs tested. Two people (aged 78 and 79) in Calderdale said they did not know these services were means-tested, and the younger person was surprised that they were needs-tested. Overall, the impression was gained that means-testing tended to be accepted, if not liked.

In contrast, a majority of research participants (31 people, aged 51 to 82) said they had not heard of the FACS criteria. Two 63 year olds said they had heard of FACS criteria. One man explained:

> We're applying for my mother. We have done twice.
> (63 year old man, Calderdale)

And a former social worker who worked with older people said:

> Northumberland – their Fair Access is only for Critical need. And ... luckily, the authority I worked for, we dealt with Critical, Severe and Moderate. ... I think it must be pretty awful, if you don't have Critical needs and you still need help to – survive and to manage. (63 year old woman, Northumberland*)

Two other people were aware of access criteria, but not of this term (FACS): a 66 year old former social worker, who after retirement worked for an Over-60s team, and a 78 year old woman, who is receiving support from West Berkshire social services.

Another five people thought they had heard of FACS criteria, including the mother of a social worker in older people's services, who said:

> I think my daughter witters on about these things.
> (82 year old woman, West Berkshire*)

If the FACS criteria have little resonance with many older people in England, then this suggests that they are not used as inputs for informal personal evaluations of local services over time or to make comparisons with other local authority areas. Indeed, it is possible that the 'Fair Access' part of the term 'FACS' could lead to some misunderstandings, such as:

> We're all supposed to have the same access throughout the country. ... No matter where you live. (60 year old woman, Northumberland)

Awareness of geographical variation in these services and access to them were raised with 29 research participants. The media appeared to be the major source of awareness of 'postcode lotteries and variations'. Voluntary organisations providing social care services, like Age UK and the Alzheimer's Society, could also be a source of information for people actively involved with them. Two men in Calderdale (aged 58 and 63) indicated awareness of national variations in services and access between England, Wales and Scotland.[3] But noticing these variations does not necessarily mean that individuals would check up the national rankings of their local authorities. One plausible explanation is:

> You tend only to read or take notice of things that affect you.
>
> (66 year old woman, Calderdale)

Even if geographical variations in services are acknowledged, their political origins might not be. For instance, in West Berkshire, an 82 year old woman attributed service variations to spatial patterning of needs and income, while a 78 year old raised the possibility of differences in "how well the social services are run".

Therefore, even among this small number of research participants, there was considerable variation in awareness of social care services. The complexity, history and characteristics of social care provision across England contributed to uncertainty about existing local services. Some explanatory insights were produced by focusing on individuals' social networks; especially, potential learning from close social relations' experiences of social care services.

7.3: Thinking about social care

How individuals think about social care for older people in their own homes will impact on the extent to which it features in their political lives. This section reports on research participants' thinking about these services as either a practical or a political issue.[4] It also explores research participants' views on what governments should do about these services.

First, 24 research participants (aged 56 to 80) were asked if they had thought about practical arrangements for social care that they might need in the future. A minority (five people, aged 63 to 72) said they had not thought about it (Table 7.4). Four of these people appear to suggest that they will only think about this, if their personal circumstances make it necessary. The fifth person claims to be focusing on 'enjoying' a pleasure-seeking phase of their retirement.

Close social relations' experiences appear to play an important role in getting people to think about their own social care (Table 7.4). Thinking ahead can be encouraged by personal circumstances, especially living in isolated rural locations or having no children. If informal care by family members is to be provided, then adult children or their parents might need to move home to live geographically closer together. However, some older people expressed a strong disinclination for their adult children to care for them. Some people appeared to habitually make plans, which in this context usually took the form of making various financial arrangements. Some changes in personal circumstance were identified by individuals as indicators for

Table 7.4: Research participants' comments about thinking about using social care services themselves.

Focus of comments	Do you think about social care for yourself?	
	No	Yes
Personality-related	Tries not to think about 'that sort of thing' (N65F and C72F). Being 'complacent', e.g. take continued 'good health for granted' (C68M).	Believe in planning ahead, e.g. income for retirement (N66F*, N71F and C80F). Do not want their children or other members of their family to provide informal social care (C63M*, N63F, N66F*, W76F and W78F).
Social relations	Have no children – so intend to 'enjoy themselves' by 'spending their money' (N63F*).	Have no children – so have started to think about 'Who's going to look after us?'(C56F, C58M, C59F and W61F). Started to think about social care. Sometimes because of recent experiences of close friends. Or have negative impressions from visiting close relatives and friends in 'care homes' (C60F, C63M, C63M* and C67F).
Practical matters	Believe that entitled to social care services, especially having retired from paid employment when aged nearly 70 (W78F). Influenced by their recent failure to get any support from social services. Assume that they will just 'muddle through by ourselves' (N65F). Irrelevant as they can imagine an alternative future. Consider committing suicide, in certain situations. Being 'independent' is important (C59F, C60M, C63M*, N63F and N66F*). Or they support assisted suicide or euthanasia (C66F and C80F).	Have moved to live closer either to someone they want to support or who wants to be able to support them, i.e. arrangements for informal care (W51F, C58F, C63M*, N64F, C75F and W80F). Live in rural areas, therefore have to think ahead, e.g. move 'closer to services' when they cannot drive (C66F and C79M). Know social workers living nearby who can advise them on who to contact, as and when they need help (N71F).

practical action; for instance, people living in rural locations used an inability to drive as an indicator of the 'need to move' to a more urban setting that could prolong their 'independence'.

Perceived threats to 'independence' were sometimes suggested as reasons to consider committing suicide (Table 7.4). That euthanasia is mentioned is perhaps unsurprising, given the ongoing national media coverage it has received in recent years.[5] Indeed, if the 2005 British Social Attitudes findings are accurate and applicable at the time of the interviews, then a higher proportion of research participants might be expected to agree in principle with euthanasia.[6] It is possible that some research participants felt uncomfortable admitting that they seriously considered these still controversial and illegal acts. Further (unjustifiable) probing would have been required to identify situations in which people believed they might consider euthanasia. However, if people believe that they will avoid using social care, then it becomes logical for them not only to abstain from any debates or work to improve social care provision[7], but also to ignore social care as a political issue.

Around a quarter of the research participants (aged 51 to 90) said that they had never thought about social care for older people in their own homes as a political issue (Table 7.5). If it was considered to be a political issue, this was usually in terms of party politics and government decision-making. An alternative focus was on 'empowerment' of older people. Therefore, there appears to be some potential for political feedback associated with exposure to close social relations' unsatisfactory social care experiences.

Table 7.5: Research participants' responses to being asked if social care for older people in their own homes is a political issue?

Is social care for older people in their own homes a political issue? Reasons given by research participants to say	
Never thought of it as a political issue	Yes, it is a political issue
Thought of it as a practical issue, e.g. 'getting the best treatment' (C90M). More practical than political. People are not going to protest that they are not going to have it (W75M). Know it is 'a political issue' but have never thought of it that way (C60M).	The state and public resources are involved (C58F, C61M, C67F, C67M, C78F and W82F). Features in party politics. Some people noticed it in the 2010 general election campaign (C58M, C63F, C63M*, N64 and N71F). Noticed it in the media, e.g. varying standards of services (C58F, C58M, C63M*, C66F, N66F, C68M and C75F). Based on unsatisfactory experiences of people that they know (C63F, C75F and W78M). Speculate that politicians have only started to take an interest in social care because of the numbers of 'baby boomers', who 'make a noise'(C63M). Believes that support services to stay at home should be available but not compulsory (C67M). It is part of a personal lifelong political goal of seeking a 'fairer society' (C60M).

There was a normative expectation among research participants that the state should have some responsibility for social care services and that these services should be adequately funded (Table 7.6). One reason for state involvement is because these services are unaffordable for 'many older people'. Older people can believe that they are entitled to services because of their financial contributions through tax and National Insurance. There was some acceptance that means-testing might be required for these services. Apparently, some people erroneously assume that either governments or local authorities identify the social care needs of their populations.

Table 7.6: Examples of research participants' opinions about the state's responsibility for social care services for older people in their own homes.

Research participants' views about the state's responsibility for social care services for older people in their own homes	Number of people	Age (years)
The state should:		
• Look after older people who need social care.	7	58 to 75
• Provide adequate social care services, if necessary, investing more in these services.	8	58 to 82
• Provide care services because older people have paid a contribution; i.e. they are entitled to services.	6	65 to 82
• Be involved because of the cost of care services. Many people cannot afford these services.	3	59 to 80
• Provide care services for which there is means-testing, even if not 'liked'. Acceptance of making a contribution, if you can afford to pay.	6	59 to 80
• Set national policy and provide funding. Clarity is required about what public support is offered everywhere – and the implications for taxation.	6	58 to 78
In addition, some comments were made about:		
<u>Families:</u>		
• There is or should be a role for informal care within families. Family should accept their responsibilities. Require better state support for carers.	3	63 to 72
<u>The 'community':</u>		
• Need to work with the state – be prepared to get involved and raise any concerns about the welfare of older people living in their community.	1	63
<u>The private sector:</u>		
• Acceptance that it now has a role because the state is unlikely to fund all social support services wanted by all older people.	4	60 to 75

Complementary social support was noted to be provided informally by family members and volunteers, and by the private sector.

People's media consumption could be their major source of awareness about social care services for older people and any related political debate (Table 7.5). These interviews were conducted during the run-up to the 2010 general election. Social

care for older people in their own homes was not perceived to have featured prominently throughout these campaigns:

> There's been very little about ... the ageing population. And what are [we need]. There was a smidgen about pensions. ... But there's been very little about care in the community. (78 year old woman, West Berkshire*)

Although the three major political parties might formally have distinctive stances on these services (Table 2.2), the research participants generally did not appear to have taken much notice of them. For instance:

> Yeah. I am aware of it. But I couldn't say! ... Off the top of my head. Which party has which policy. (68 year old man, Calderdale)

People did not always distinguish between different aspects of the broader area of social care, including residential care. Moreover, there was some disbelief that politicians would actually do anything. For example:

> I know David Cameron said something. And Gordon Brown said he – can't do it ... it's impossible. – But it's difficult to take these promises, if you like, seriously. Because I think a lot of it's just electioneering. And – when it comes – to the crunch, they'll say: 'Well we would have liked to have done this and that – but we can't afford'. (72 year old woman, Calderdale)

Little evidence emerged to suggest that many people's voting in 2010 would be influenced by proposals about social care services. Only one 66 year old woman agreed that unfavourable changes to these services would affect her voting. But this response from a man in a marginal parliamentary constituency is more typical:

> I haven't followed that particular issue. ... That's not going to be the issue that will swing it. Because we will look at things in the round.
> (67 year old man, Calderdale)

And social care services for older people in their homes was not perceived to have featured prominently in local elections in these three local authority areas:

> I've never been very aware that ... in – election manifestos, the local people would say a great deal about these sort of things.
> (73 year old man, Northumberland)

> I don't think it's ever. ...They talk about – roads and – traffic and things like that. (82 year old woman, West Berkshire*)

> Partly when they're trying to close down a home, for example. Or that kind of thing. ... Partly when they move people about between homes. It hasn't featured really ... as a kind of campaign. It's more that there's been a reaction to when it happens. (63 year old man, Calderdale)

Recent media and electoral emphasis has been on residential care and, especially in Northumberland, on day centres (e.g. Peel, 2010; The Journal, 2009a and b; Sloan, 2008). Possibly, services delivered in people's own homes are neglected by the media partly because these are personal services that are largely 'hidden' from public view.

Therefore, the research participants varied in their reported thinking about social care. Social care services for older people were generally regarded as something that the state should be involved with. However, it is noteworthy that some people viewed social care for older people as predominantly a practical matter, not a political issue. Also, some people had no intention of using social care services themselves, which made this an irrelevant political topic for them. Despite key political decisions about social care services being taken at local government level, the political social care debate tended to be noticed as predominantly a national level activity. So this debate could appear geographically remote from older people interested in participating in it.

7.4: Lifestyles and feelings

During data analysis, lifestyles and feelings (or emotions) emerged as topics worthy of further investigation. This section briefly considers how these topics might be associated with social care services for older people as a political issue.

Aspects of research participants' lifestyle were introduced in Chapters Four and Five. Four lifestyle-related issues appear relevant to social care as a political issue for older people: geographical mobility, chronological age and social activities, busy lifestyles, and being informal carers of older people.

First, geographical mobility of research participants. If research participants moved home, especially across large distances, this can result in weakening and loss of long-established social networks, as well as the development of new ones. Living at a distance from key social relations, like parents (Table 7.2), can markedly reduce awareness of social care services. Furthermore, migration can devalue awareness of social care services acquired in former places of residence. In addition, some of the more affluent younger research participants adopted 'travelling' as a leisure activity. Lengthy periods of travel outside England seem likely to disrupt exposure to media and social sources of awareness of social care.

Second, lifestyles can be chosen that deliberately minimise same-age or older-age socialisation. For instance:

> I find that there are ... things like, well, the University of the Third Age. – There's some very interesting things to do. But the odd things that I have been

> to that – are ... particularly for older people – can make you feel older than you are. ... Not quite there yet! ... I prefer to go to yoga and circle dancing with mixed ages. (63 year old woman, Calderdale)

Having few social interactions with people older than yourself can reasonably be expected to reduce opportunities to learn from their social care experiences.

Third, some people's retirements were surprisingly busy. Thus, their time will be spent predominantly in social networks associated with their everyday activities. Generally, these networks might be expected to provide few opportunities to engage with social care issues. For example, some of the people who retired early from their formal paid careers might engage in diverse time-consuming paid and unpaid activities. For example, one man started his 'retirement' with a "fairly hectic" period working for five organisations:

> When I took early retirement, ... I was offered an awful lot of extra work. So I really haven't been free. – I retired early, you see. 1994. ... I was working flat out after I retired until 2007. ... And ... by the end of 2008 we'd got involved in the library campaign. ... So I don't really feel I've experienced retirement. (67 year old man, Calderdale)

And finally, some people may temporarily be heavily involved in providing social care for older relatives. While engaged in caring, they might have insufficient time and energy for political activity focused on social care. And at the end of a lengthy period of providing care, people might reasonably want to 'enjoy themselves' before they themselves might require social care.[8]

Emotions were expressed by research participants talking about social care for older people in their own homes. These feelings were predominantly negative. While it is

plausible that these emotions could affect individuals' political interest and activity associated with social care, their investigation is a specialist task (Mutz, 2009, pp. 80-96). However, a few useful points can be made.

Anxiety, expressed in terms of 'worrying' about yourself and other people might reasonably be expected to attract individuals' attention to political debate about social care issues. For instance:

> I think it is a big worry. – And that's why I'm so pleased that the political parties appear to be giving some thought to it now.– Because it's not before time. – Because it is – difficult. (56 year old woman, Calderdale)

Anxiety-reduction is presented as a positive feature of services, such as moving into residential care, as well as euthanasia (Cacciottolo, 2008). For example, one research participant's mother recently chose self-funded residential care because:

> She has been afraid to be on her own. She's afraid of falling – and there being no-one there. And ... we gave her one of these alarm things. .... But even that wasn't ... helpful. She'd just become ... increasingly frail and more anxious. (58 year old woman, Calderdale)

Some negative feelings about social care tended to be more commonly expressed by either younger or older research participants. For example, fear about potential loss of 'independence' tended to be expressed by younger old people; for instance:

> I think I would commit suicide rather than. In fact, if I. Yes. If I thought I was going to have to go into an OAP place – care home or something ... I think I would just end my days. Because – I couldn't bear it. ... I could not bear to lose my independence. ... And I don't want someone to wipe my bottom. And feed me. And to go to bed when I'm told. ... And I want to get up when I want. And I want to eat what I want. And I want to do what I want. (66 year old woman, Northumberland*)

Older research participants appeared more likely to be 'undemanding' and not wanting to take up 'too much' public money. For example, one woman said:

> Certainly wouldn't want to be a burden on any of my children. They've all got enough on their plates, as it is.

And also said:

> I mean, I've got *nothing* to complain about! Nothing at all. If I wanted, I could have her [*the cleaner provided through social services*] for a second hour to do my shopping. But I don't need that. ... I really don't need it. And I certainly don't want to ... be any more cost than I need.
>
> (78 year old woman, West Berkshire*)

This possible age-related patterning is consistent with other evidence from these interviews; such as these comments based on talking with people aged in their 80s:

> They're not very proactive about their hospital appointments. ... And they're not of a generation that's forceful. ...
>
> They tend to be – more accepting. It's a generation that put up with a lot during the war. Didn't they? (66 year old woman, Calderdale)

While a man talked about a "very independent-minded" older relative:

> She would experience all the hardships that life would throw at her without telling anybody. (67 year old man, Calderdale)

These examples resonate with the notion of 'welfare generations' (Moffatt and Higgs, 2007).[9] If currently, older old people tend to be undemanding about access to practical support, it seems reasonable to suggest that they are unlikely to engage with social care as a political issue. And, when talking about accessing social care, one woman said:

> *These* are the ones in their 70s – and coming up to 80. And I do feel a ... generation difference between *me,* who's just turned 60 ... and the older.
> *I* wouldn't think twice about asking for help if I needed it! But – I do think the older people ... they need to be mobilised. ... In both senses of the word!
>
> (60 year old woman, Northumberland)

Therefore, aspects of research participants' lifestyles and emotions could impact on their political lives in general and, in particular, their engagement with social care as a political issue. Some aspects of older people's lifestyles could reduce opportunities

to acquire politically relevant learning about social care services for older people. And, logically, it seems likely that some expressed emotions, like frustration, upset, guilt and fear might serve to undermine individuals' potential political engagement with social care, unless there are credible political will and mechanisms to improve social care services.

7.5: Conclusion

This chapter described the variable place that social care services for older people appeared to have in research participants' social and political lives. Research participants tended to give little thought to social care, which is not always perceived as being 'political'. Adopting a biographical approach informed by the policy feedback literature produced some insights into possible reasons why social care appears to be a practical problem for growing numbers of older people (as service users and organisers), yet not a major political issue for older people. Awareness of social care could reflect media consumption patterns combined with the social proximity of people they know who received social care. It was somewhat surprising how uncommon it was for research participants to have recent local experience of close relatives' trying to access and using social care services. This is partly a reflection of geographical mobility, resulting in physical separation of generations within many families, and of improved life expectancy, with many older old people having longer lives. Thus, many older people seem likely to have an incomplete and possibly inaccurate picture, not just of social care, but of ageing today in England. Geographical and temporal distance could devalue individuals' understandings or

experiences of social care. Social, geographical, and temporal proximity could increase awareness.

Additionally, while some emotions associated with social care, such as anxiety, might promote interest in following relevant political debates; other emotional responses and common aspects of younger old people's lifestyles could logically be imagined to have the opposite effect. The topic of publicly financed social care can be perceived as irrelevant, especially for people who believe that they will never use it. Some, predominantly younger, research participants suggested that euthanasia was a preferable end-of-life experience to social care, especially residential care or dependence on informal carers.

The findings reported in this chapter illustrate the complexity and dynamics of social care as both a practical and political issue. With growing demand for social care for older people living in their own homes in England combined with generally decreasing access to publicly financed services and political inaction by recent governments, this topic merits ongoing study.

CONCLUSION

Awareness that populations in England and many other developed countries are ageing has placed this topic on their governments' political agendas and attracted some public speculation about the political implications. However, older people's political understandings and activities have attracted little research attention. This thesis addresses this research gap by reviewing relevant research findings and conducting empirical research in England to explore the nature of older people's political understandings and experiences. A richer picture of older people's diverse political lives was obtained by exploring the topics of an 'older people's politics' and social care for older people. Throughout this thesis, attention was given to considering productive ways to gain insights into older people's political lives.

Having introduced the research topic and project (Chapters One to Three) and presented the main research findings and analysis (Chapters Four to Seven), this thesis concludes by first noting the contribution of this research. Then, based on the research findings, some observations are made about older people's political understandings and experiences. Next, consideration is given to learning from this project about ways to conduct research to explore and explain the character of and continuity and change in older people's political lives. After the limitations of this project are acknowledged, suggestions are made for some further research.

Contribution of this research

The main contribution of this research is to provide empirical findings concerning older people's political understandings and experiences. The empirical research addressed three groups of key research questions. First, investigating older people's participation across a range of political activities, the nature of individual's political lives, and, in particular, changes in their reported political understandings and experiences. Next, investigating the existence of an 'older people's politics' and older people's experiences and opinions of it. Finally, exploring perceptions of social care as a political topic and factors that could influence individuals' levels of political engagement with or interest in the social care debate.

By making a detailed empirical contribution to knowledge of older people's political understandings and experiences, this research also contributes to the broader field of political participation, especially political sociology; as well as to social gerontology and social policy. This has been achieved in ways that build upon two major national surveys (Parry *et al*, 1992, and Pattie *et al*, 2004) and deal critically with some of the questions and responses found in ongoing surveys and opinion polls. The 41 research participants exhibited considerable diversity in their political understandings and experiences; which is illustrated in summary tables, quotes from interview transcripts, and diagrams. Readers can use the background information and empirical findings to assess the quality of the research and the extent to which parts of the research or individuals' political lives could apply to other people and locations.

Improved understanding of continuity and change in older people's political behaviour and thinking was achieved by adopting a biographical and historical perspective that extends beyond a single type of political activity to incorporate all reported aspects of individuals' political lives and other major parts of their social lives. Even with the limitations associated with the comparative aspect of these interviews, productive analyses of the interview data were achieved by applying a combination of theoretical approaches, especially the age-centred model of political participation (Goerres, 2009, p. 25), Bourdieu's version of capitals (Bourdieu, 1986), the life-spheres concept (Passy and Giugni, 2000), and a life course perspective (Elder *et al*, 2003). Interviews that invited exploration of individuals' wider social lives proved particularly useful because research participants could be uncertain about the major influences on their political behaviour and thinking.

This research generally supports the contention that strong forms of 'age-based politics' have not emerged in England and have limited appeal. However, there are signs that some older people were beginning to adopt an 'old-age related topic', such as social care, and add it to their list of personally important political issues. And some people did think that there were reasons to at least investigate what, for example, an older people's political party has to say. In part, this interest reflects negative evaluations of the major political parties and their times in government. These findings are relevant to some of the literature on 'intergenerational (in)equity'.

Finally, this research makes a contribution towards understanding the apparent paradox of England's ageing population and the low political priority generally given

to social care for older people. This work links into the political feedback literature. The nature of social care services for older people in their own homes and the types of people who use it both play an important role in the politics of social care for older people. Service users tend to be 'invisible' – sometimes even among family members – and tend not to be heard in the media. Everything about this topic can be perceived as being psychologically threatening, which could discourage people from spending much time thinking about even their own potential use of social care. Typically, politicians have been inactive, while services deteriorate. Thus adding to the anxiety associated with this topic; for example, among people with an older relative who might soon require support.

Therefore, the main contribution of this research is to produce empirical findings providing rich descriptions of older people's political understandings and experiences. Valuable insights into continuity and change in older people's political lives were obtained by investigating interconnections between individuals' historical participation in and understandings of different types of political activities, and exploring lifetime associations between individuals' political and wider social lives.

Observations on older people's political understandings and activity

In the process of producing rich descriptive data about and insights into older people's political understandings and activities, this research raised many noteworthy observations. This section introduces some of the major observations that have

implications for politics in England and/or for future research into older people's political lives.

Contrary to notions that older people are less open to learning that features in some of the political participation literature, some research participants demonstrated considerable openness to new experiences and ideas. This openness is reflected, for example, in the rapid growth of U3As in the study locations.

Evidence exists that some older people were choosing to change their political behaviour. In particular, some regular voters were deciding not to vote in elections. These research participants showed openness to new ideas and political feedback. Further research is required to estimate the prevalence among older people in England of regular voters who are either contemplating or have taken voluntary decisions not to vote in general and/or local elections. If widespread, any turn away from electoral participation could have major political implications.

Some of the research participants might be described as being either activity-oriented ('getting things done') or problem-solvers. However, it was noticeable that some of these people might choose apparently 'non-political' ways to do these things; in terms of activities outside formal politics. These people include a former councillor, who found working on committees with access to public funding was a better way to 'get things done'. In contrast, one member of a political party was struggling with feelings of doubt that her years of active participation actually achieved anything.

When talking about political issues that were currently important to the research participants, it is noteworthy that alongside more traditional items, like ‘education’, there appeared what might be termed ‘negative items’. These are items that focus on things that the government is believed to be doing ‘wrong’, such as ‘going to war’. And some people volunteered lists comprising only negative items. For example, a 63 year old man talked about ‘dealing with the banks’, ‘protection of civil liberties’, and excessive ‘tax’. When politics comes to be dominated with negative evaluations of government action and inaction, then it is perhaps unsurprising that some research participants report feeling increasingly disillusioned.

It is beyond the scope of this research to confirm the exact nature of any age effects on individuals’ political behaviour and thinking. However, some possible age-related differences in behaviour and thinking are noted in the following four paragraphs.

Generations, in terms of family or kin relationships, were mentioned in this research. These social relationships are salient to individuals’ political lives in general; for example, through early political socialisation from their parents to receiving informal political learning from their adult children or from the experiences of other members of their family. Close family relationships were also potentially important sources of information about social care services for older people in their own homes.

Talk of ‘older’ or ‘younger’ generations sometimes emerged in the interviews. Usually, a comparison was made with people from outside their immediate families with whom the research participants have some social contact. Thus, a 60 year old

woman said she would ask for help if she ‘needed it’, in contrast to her friends aged in their 80s, who have to be persuaded to seek support. A 67 year old man had experience of a distant relative, who would ‘put up’ with things rather than seek help. Although there might well be a tendency for age-related differences in support-seeking behaviour, the reasons are unknown. For example, some older old people could reject support that either is or is believed to be unsatisfactory in some way; which is something younger old people might also do in the same situation.

Some people aged in their 70s, who were active in organisations, observed that there was a tendency for younger old people to be unwilling to participate in running these organisations or their activities. For example, in 2010, this problem was reported for the Calderdale Pensioners Association and compounded by the loss of a leading activist (Halifax Courier, 2010c and 2010d). This organisation had played an active role in initiating the DBOL campaign. If widespread and persistent, then younger older people’s reluctance to work in organisations could lead to closure or reduced political effectiveness of membership-based social and political organisations.

Another possible age-related difference among research participants was a tendency for younger old people to be more focused than older old people on activities related to their leisure interests, such as walking. They also appeared more likely to engage in lifestyle-related activity, such as adopting ‘green lifestyles’. Formal politics seemed to be less fashionable than participating in lifestyle-related activities in parts of Calderdale.

This research confirmed that diverse organisations can play an important part in older people's political lives. It was noteworthy that some organisations, like the Townswomen's Guild and the WEA, appeared, for different reasons, to be becoming less popular; while there was recent rapid growth of organisations like the U3A. Formally non-political organisations appeared to vary in how they contributed to individuals' political engagement and activity.

Generally, research participants expressed little interest in or desire to engage in older people's politics. One argument against this was that 'older people are part of society'; suggesting a constructive view of English political life. However, there were also expressions of concern about further 'marginalising' older people – 'putting them in a ghetto'; suggesting a more negative view about England's 'senior-friendliness'. The ambiguous and contradictory findings raise questions about the nature of the political system in England and its inclusiveness of people of all ages. As a few people expressed some support for ideas like an older people's party, this suggests that the existing political system is perceived to be failing some older people.

Talking about social care for older people as a political issue, also raised concerns about the functioning of the English political system. Nationally, no-one seems to be acting as an effective advocate for change. And much of the debate about social care seems to have been diverted by considerations of dealing with the approaching first wave of 'baby boomers' (Huber and Skidmore, 2003, Figure 3.1, p. 33), while presiding over services that are increasingly difficult to access by the growing numbers of vulnerable older old people.

Therefore, this research produced some valuable insights into older people's diverse and dynamic political understandings and experiences, both in general and concerning an 'older people's politics' and social care. In the process, questions are raised that have implications for politics in England and/or for future research into older people's political lives.

Researching individuals' political understandings and activity

Planning, conducting and writing about this research project raised questions about identifying productive ways to obtain insights into older people's political understandings and activities. Based on this project, this section presents some observations about ways of researching this topic.

Focusing on political activities allowed this project to draw on existing, largely survey-based research and make a complementary contribution to increase understanding of older people's political participation in England. As participation in public consultation and involvement activities served some research participants' political purposes and, more generally, contributed to their political learning, it appears appropriate to include these activities when researching political participation. Avoiding imposing an arbitrary time frame helped to illuminate individuals' understandings of and participation in a wide range of political activities, some of which were undertaken either infrequently or years ago. Revisiting types of political activities during the interviews helped research participants to reflect on their

experiences; especially as political participation tended not to be an important or personally valued part of individuals' everyday social lives.

Adopting a qualitative approach allowed the research participants to talk in their own terms about their understandings and experiences of different types of political activities. Therefore, compared to quantitative surveys, a richer picture was obtained of the nature of each of these political activities, individuals' political repertoires and some major influences on individuals' participation. Some research participants are or were involved in various political campaigns, involving variable levels of action in a mixture of political activities.

Drawing on diverse theoretical perspectives, especially the civic voluntarism model and Bourdieu's version of capitals, usefully directed attention to exploring research participants' social networks and their involvement with diverse organisations. But, consistent with the literature, research participants varied in what they regarded as 'political activity'. Furthermore, although individuals could sometimes identify politically-relevant experiences from their organisational involvements, such as being a trade union representative; more often, they were uncertain about how their political skills and knowledge were acquired.

Explaining older people's political understandings and experiences demands focusing attention on individuals' political lives as part of their wider social lives over their lifetimes. During their lifetimes, they would be exposed to many potential opportunities for 'political learning' that could sometimes impact on their range and

level of political understanding and engagement. Therefore, adopting a biographical and historical perspective reveals insights into continuity and change in individuals' political lives. As this research project was not designed as a biographical study, uneven amounts of biographical data were obtained from the research participants. However, analysis of the research interview data was greatly enhanced by drawing on the life course perspective and applying the notion of life-spheres. These two approaches could be used because research participants tended to identify timing of many political events and understandings in terms of broad life-stages, transitions and areas of their social lives. Therefore, these two approaches are appropriate for research participants who have forgotten details of their political participation and do not know how they acquired their political understandings. Importantly, these two approaches avoid directing attention solely on what the research participants understand to be 'political' aspects of their lives, and can indicate major influences from other areas of their social lives that might otherwise go undetected.

Applying a life course perspective when analysing the interview data, helped to systematically explore evidence concerning individuals' understandings and experiences of political activities over their lifetimes. It facilitated investigation of the political implications of diversity in social lives and other important contextual factors, especially associated with geographical mobility and historical time.

Greater insights into research participants' political understandings and activities during their lifetimes were obtained by drawing on the notion of life-spheres. This approach usefully directs attention to psychological aspects of political participation

and their relationships with continuity and change in the characteristics of individuals' overall social lives. Thinking about life-spheres was particularly useful to explore individuals' decisions about the priority to be given to either political engagement and activity or to competing social demands and activities.

Therefore, experience from this research indicates the usefulness of systematic application of a range of comparisons to help illuminate individuals' current political understandings and activities, as well as their political lives. Furthermore, it is helpful to conceive of individuals' political lives as part of their broader social lives, which are located within historical and geographical contexts.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite some unavoidable limitations, this exploratory research project produced useful insights into older people's political understandings and experiences that open up many possibilities for future research. This section starts by considering this project's limitations. Then, a couple of ideas for future research are introduced.

Ideally, if time and resources had permitted, and the research participants were willing to engage again with this topic, it would have been useful to have follow-up interviews. This would allow gaps in the data to be filled and feedback obtained on my interpretations concerning individuals' political lives.

While adopting a comparative approach in these interviews was invaluable in attempting to make meaningful links to previous and ongoing survey-based research, it did limit the time available for some research participants to talk about their political lives. Again, follow-up interviews would have helped illuminate more fully points, such as the possible origins of and nature of their major political concerns. And, it would be useful to try to capture their feelings and thoughts about the 2010 general election resulting in a coalition government.

Although these interviews succeeded in illustrating some of the diversity in older people's political participation and understanding in England, it is acknowledged that the research participants are unlikely to capture all the diversity found in the over-50 population. Understandably, a project seeking to recruit voluntary research participants is unlikely to engage the attention of the more politically passive and inactive older people. A long-term comprehensive study could adopt alternative research approaches to increase the diversity of research participants and include people across the entire 50 to 90 plus age range. But this is unrealistic for this project. Moreover, it could be argued that the 41 research participants are sufficiently diverse to act as a sort of early warning system of changes in older people's political thinking and behaviour in England.

This research was designed to illuminate some of the diversity and dynamics of older people's political participation. By its nature, exploratory research opens up numerous research avenues. Examples of potential projects include extension of this type of study to local authority areas that could reasonably be expected to provide

different socio-political contexts (e.g. Parry *et al*, 1992), such as large urban centres. Studies investigating social care as a political issue could usefully focus on one or two local authority areas characterised by marked reductions in formal access to services. In these areas, decisions about new FACS criteria should have been subject to some sort of public consultation.

Among other possible subjects for further research, two are mentioned here: political feedback and the idea of 'selfishness'. As this research has shown, older people are capable of learning and changing their political behaviour. It also suggests that they are making various informal evaluations of, for example, governments, politicians, and policies. Exploring what and how older people are 'evaluating' will make a useful contribution to research concerning political learning, policy feedback, and voting behaviour.

The idea of 'selfishness' as a normatively undesirable characteristic emerged in several places in this research. As the 'selfish' label seems to be employed as a weapon in politically inspired arguments against older people, it would seem useful to explore older people's notions of selfishness and politics. In particular, are older old people, with potentially a more collectivist outlook on politics, having their voices suppressed by this line of public attack? And are the oldest wave of 'baby boomers' behaving like 'the selfish generation' (Huber and Skidmore, 2003, p. 49)?

Many potential topics for future research into older people's political understandings and experiences would benefit from establishing or joining interdisciplinary research

groups. Additionally, the research findings suggest that the interpretation of socio-political opinion survey findings would be improved by greater use of complementary qualitative research. Also, undertaking complementary qualitative research with ELSA participants would enrich that study's otherwise impoverished contribution to understanding older people's socio-political lives.

To conclude: interviewing older people in England proved an effective way of gaining insights into their diverse political experiences and understandings. Therefore, this research is successful in making a contribution to the more general literature on political participation. Furthermore, explanatory accounts of older people's political lives were developed using historical and biographical approaches to analysis that focused across all major aspects of social life. Diagrams were useful tools for data analysis and to display the research findings. Importantly, evidence of voluntary changes in older people's political participation were observed; including decisions by regular voters not to vote in elections. Furthermore, there was evidence of considerable openness of these research participants to learning from political feedback and of being willing to participate in unfamiliar political activities.

END NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. An example of the ELSA self-completion questionnaire can be accessed from the survey website [http://www.ifs.org.uk/elsa/docs_w4/self_completion_main.pdf].
2. Councils with Social Services Responsibilities (CSSR). These are unitary authorities, county councils, metropolitan boroughs, and London boroughs.
3. For example, Bornat *et al* (2000, p. 256) found that older people's narratives found "ways to account for their personal feelings and experiences of family change in relation to" public debates about family change.
4. ONS. 2001 Census. Standard Table S101. Downloaded from NOMIS website.

CHAPTER 1

1. Author's calculations. For each age group, the estimated number of people in the population of England was divided by the number of people in the survey. I used quinary age groups for the survey samples and the ONS population estimates for either mid-1984 or mid-2001, excluding the youngest (18-19) and oldest (90 and over) age groups. Compared with all people aged 18 and over, these ratios are higher for people aged 75 and over in 1984-1985 survey and people aged 85 and over in the 2000 survey. The over-90s were the least well-represented age group in both surveys. (Moyser and Parry,1989, and Whiteley, Pattie and Seyd,2005, datasets).
2. In England, there tends to be some sensitivity about answering income-related questions. Research undertaken into a potential income question on the 2011 Census reported lower response rates among the over 65s, women, and people living in 'low income areas' (Collins *et al*, 2008, p. 12). Yet, ELSA reported a "very high" (99 percent) response rate for questions about income and assets (Taylor *et al*, 2004,p. 367).
3. Unless stated otherwise, all references to ESS statistics (for example '2008 ESS respondents') for England are based on the author's estimates. Weighted data were used for estimates. Data were accessed using the ESS's Online Data Analysis facility.
4. Unless stated otherwise, all references to the '2000 survey' in England refer to the author's estimates based on the Whiteley *et al* (2005) dataset. Weighted data were used.
5. See Table B1 in the Appendix. This table summarises the responses of respondents in England in 2000 to being asked 'What party do you think of yourself as?' by their age.
6. Unless otherwise stated, all references to the '1984-1985 survey' in England refer to the author's estimates based on the Moyser *et al* (1989) dataset. Weighted data were used.
7. As used by Pattie *et al* (2004), the term 'potential' participation in a type of political activity is based on individuals' responses to the survey question "Would you do any of the following to influence rules, laws or policies?", which was asked while showing respondents a card listing a range of political activities. Yes and No responses are recorded for these activities (*ibid*, p. 294). If respondents answered

Yes, then it was argued that they might undertake the activity, "if the opportunities arose" (*ibid*, p. 82).

8. The notion of 'emotional movements' is based on the observation of protests "driven by emotions" among recent demonstrations. For example, demonstrating "sympathy and solidarity with the parents of murdered and abused children" in the White March in Belgium in the late 1990s. This cause appeared to have "mobilised the population as a whole" – people of all ages. The media was the mobiliser (van Aelst and Walgrave, 2001, pp. 477-480).
9. See Figure A.1 in the Appendix. This figure illustrates the relationship between chronological age and reported paid and voluntary (unpaid) work among 2008 ESS respondents in England. This 'snapshot' picture illustrates aspects of the diversity of people in different age groups. However, it is unclear what these categories mean, for example in terms of individuals' lifestyles. In particular, this evidence cannot reveal insights into politically relevant aspects of these statuses, or of continuity and change in individuals' lifetime experiences, such as any experiences of 'hard times', such as redundancy or having unstable, low paid employment.
10. See Figure A.2 in the Appendix. This figure illustrates the relationship between age and reported trade union membership of 2008 ESS respondents in England. Note that across all ages groups, sizeable numbers of people say that, for whatever reason, they have never been trade union members.
11. See Figure A.1 in the Appendix.
12. See Table B.2 in the Appendix. This table uses quinary age groups for respondents to the 2000 survey in England to identify the modal age groups for each type of organisation included in this survey. This table is one way of illustrating an aspect of age-related variations in organisational memberships. The age-related pattern of membership in motoring organisations is of interest because it reflects driving (see Pattie *et al*, 2004, p. 98). Car driving can be an important part of the lifestyles of many people aged over 50 and has potential political impacts, for instance through access to services and opening up opportunities to participate in political consumption and public consultations.
13. Citizenship Survey 2007. Weighted data.
14. See Figure A.5 in Appendix A illustrates age-related patterning in 2008 ESS respondents' reported time spent 'following the news, politics and current affairs' by medium (television, radio, and newspapers).
15. See Figure A.4 in the Appendix. This figure illustrates the relationship between chronological age and highest level of qualifications (degree or 'no qualification') reported by men and women responding to the 2008 ESS in England. Note that compared to the over-50s, respondents aged under 50 show much less age-related variation in their tendency to be in either of these two categories.
16. Examples given by Pickerill (2006, pp. 268-269) include hacktivism ("a form of politicised hacking"), culture jamming ("political satire on a website"), and mobile phone mobilisations.
17. See Figure A.5 in the Appendix. This figure illustrates the relationship between chronological age and aspects of reported personal use of the internet, email or World Wide Web by respondents to the 2008 ESS in England.
18. 'Regularity of voting' was suggested to be "the most important direct cause" of participation in the 1972 American national election (Brody and Sniderman, 1977, pp. 347-348). Qualitative interviews (Research Works Ltd., 2005, pp.15-22) and

survey data supported the notion that in-person voting in England could be a habit (Norris, 2005, Figure 3, p. 24).

19. Here 'long-term' means over 50 years.
20. See Figure A.1 in the Appendix.
21. See Figure A.4 in the Appendix.
22. An example is the growth of ICT in the last 50 years that has changed the activities undertaken in many jobs, such as administration, and created new jobs, such as website designers.
23. Where 'habitus' is understood as accumulated cultural capital that has become "an integral part of the person" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 48). A 'field' refers to "the social space in which interactions, transactions and events occurred" (Thomson, 2008, p.67). At any time, a person lives in multiple fields (Silva and Edwards, 2004, p. 3).
24. Bourdieu focused on politicians operating within the 'political field'. Schugurensky, (2000, pp. 5-6) is arguing "from an emancipator adult citizenship education perspective".
25. See Figure A.5 in the Appendix A. These surveys leave unanswered many questions about how people are using media and the part it plays in their political lives.
26. Research on policy feedback on citizens features in Chapter 2 (section 2.3.3).
27. After introducing these ageing processes, Hooyman and Kiyak (2011, p. 4) present the example of an 89 year old with limited physical functioning but who would be considered psychologically young, if 'intellectually active' and 'adapts well to new situations'.
28. More controversial are references by Goerres (2009, p. 10) to Cumming's and Henry's (1961) disengagement theory as helping to explain patterns of decreasing political participation with age. On retirement, both the older person and society are assumed to 'disengage', reflected in the observed reduction in social activity among older people. This theory has apparently been "widely discounted by most gerontologists" (Hooyman and Kiyak, 2011, p. 317). Now, political aspects of gerontological research tend to adopt either a political economy or cultural approach (Estes *et al*, 2003, pp. 19-21).
29. For Goerres (2009) the 'impressionable years' refer to 15 to 30 year olds (p.13).
30. Russell *et al* (1992, pp. 742-743) focused on a highly distinctive time politically – "the years of the 'Thatcher ascendancy', especially the late 1970s and early 1980s However, more variable party political experiences seem to characterise two of the 'gap filling' political generations (Goerres, 2009, Table 4.2, p. 77).
31. Another example of putative political generations is the work of Tilley (2002) on partisanship (continued, self-reported identification with the Labour or Conservative parties) in Britain.
32. These authors chose this term in preference to 'generational consciousness' to distinguish their views from Mannheim's and to cover all age-groups (Ragan and Dowd, 1974, p. 139).
33. This term is commonly associated with Peter Laslett, writing in the late 1980s.
34. In England, the term 'baby boomers' has been used to label people born after the Second World War, between around 1945 and 1955 (Goerres, 2009, p. 5). This term emphasises the greatly increased numbers of births that were observed in several countries after this war. Although this term has been used by the media

and some researchers, it does not appear to be widely adopted by older people in this age group in England.

35. In England in 2001, the SPA was 65 for men and 60 for women.
36. Davidson's assumptions include that older people will continue to vote at the same rate.
37. See Johnston and Pattie (2006) for an overview.
38. Similar problems are encountered in attempts to make sense of aggregate patterns of, for example, measures of deprivation, electoral turnout and satisfaction with local authority services (Lister, 2006, pp. 18-19).
39. Another relevant example for this thesis is the notion of a 'welfare habitus' in the UK, reflected in individuals' different orientations to welfare across age groups. Importantly, this is subject to 'localized influences', which in parts of the North-East of England could include the dominance and decline of heavy industry, experience of mass unemployment, and dominance of the Labour party and trade unions (Moffatt and Higgs, 2007, p.p. 449-452).

CHAPTER 2

1. For example, a journalist wrote: "Age Concern, a charity that represents 11 million older people across the UK" (Revill, 2007).
2. It is unclear to what extent Age UK's involvement with policy-makers reflects it being a voluntary sector organisation and a major service provider throughout England (Age UK 2010, pp. 13-45). Having chartable status places legal constraints on political activity. As does any requirement for public donations and organisational anxiety about the possibility of losing a self-appointed role as 'consultant' about topics concerning older people (Vincent, 1999, p. 94).
3. Both of these organisations contributed, for example, to *Opportunity Age* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005, p.x).
4. The Saga Generation Manifesto identified six key issues for the over-50s in the 2010 general election: 'fairer finances' (taxation, benefits and a 'flat-rate state pension for all UK residents'), 'abolish ageism' (including bias against older people in "evaluation of potential treatments" in the NHS and within the media), the 'age balance in parliament' ("representative age balance" of MPs and "more older people with experience of business and life in general"), 'support for carers' (need a 'coherent support structure', 'assured quality and quantity of care', and 'proper recognition and training for care workers'), 'intelligent retirement' (ending compulsory retirement age, over-50s employment services), and 'better, safer streets' (reduce fear of crime) (Saga, 2010?, p. 3). Saga used several sources of information. Their December 2009 survey suggested that their informants might have a higher propensity to vote than among the wider population (*ibid*, p. 2). Therefore, some issues important to older people might not have been captured.
5. Evandrou (2005b, p. 59, Table 6.19) analysed General Household Survey data for Great Britain in 2001-2002 for 'use of personal social services for people aged 65 and over living in the community'. Among the over-85s, she estimated around 18 percent used local authority home helps, 28 percent used private home helps and 19 percent used a district nurse/health visitor. Her data shows earlier uptake of private than local authority home helps (reportedly used, respectively, by 10 percent and three percent of 75-79 year olds).

6. Not all local authorities have social service departments. Councils with social services responsibilities (CSSRs) are London Boroughs, Metropolitan Borough Councils, County Councils, and Unitary Councils.
7. 'Problematic' in terms of failing to provide a clear picture of any aspect of the provision of these services at any point in time, as well as over time. Also, these statistics provide limited information about how well these services are supporting older people living in the community.
8. 'Low intensity': one visit of up to 2 hours. 'High intensity': six or more visits and a duration of more than 5 hours. Based on usage in one survey week. (Evandrou, 2005b, pp. 58-59).
9. Some older people may, for whatever reason, self-exclude themselves from services (Henwood and Hudson, 2008a, p. 55).
10. Another pertinent example is illustrated by this comment:"There was surprise when, during our inquiry and while consultation on the Green Paper was still continuing, the Prime Minister announced to the Labour Party conference a policy for free personal care at home which appeared to cut across the Green Paper proposals" (House of Commons Health Committee, 2010, p. 10).
11. A reference to D. C. North. (1990) *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
12. A reference to D. Arnold (1990) *The Logic of Congressional Action*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
13. Examples of the diverse ideas about social citizenship can be seen, for example, in Dwyer (2003, p. 85).
14. However, Campbell (2003) used quinary age groups up to 60 to 64 years, with most older people put into a '65+' category.
15. However, Soss (1999) had no over-50s among research participants on the means-tested program. There were several over-50s in the social insurance based program, but only two people were aged over 60 – the oldest was 65.
16. In addition, Mettler and Soss (2004) usefully suggested "a framework for thinking about how policies influence mass politics" (*ibid*, p. 55).
17. News articles about residential and nursing homes, and hospital services appear to be more common. This could partly reflect easier organisation of protests against threats by service users, their family and friends, and staff, who could reasonably be expected to have more frequent social interactions than found among housebound home care users living alone in their own homes.
18. For example, *The Guardian* has a weekly *Society* section including job advertisements in social services. One could speculate that coverage of home care services for older people might be less common and thorough in other national newspapers, especially the tabloids. In addition, many ESS 2008 respondents of all ages report spending little time generally 'following the news, politics and current affairs in the media' (see Figure A.5 in the Appendix A).

CHAPTER 3

1. See Appendix C for information about the FACS eligibility bands.
2. Background interviews: requests for interviews were sent to people considered likely to have some understanding of the local political context and issues covered in this thesis:

- all the local MPs (nine people);
- local councillors selected on the basis of their roles, i.e. leaders of the major political parties in the CSSR (eight people), and scrutiny committee chairs(three people) and portfolio holders concerned with social care services (three people); and
- people in charge of running Age Concern in these places (three people). In Calderdale, the Labour group leader in the council also ran the local Age Concern.
- In addition, an unsuccessful attempt was made to contact local NPC representatives.

3. After making initial contact with local councillors in Calderdale, a party political dispute in Calderdale council led to members of the Labour party who were chairs of scrutiny committees to resign from these positions (see Peel, 2009b).
4. Sources of statistical data presented here are:
   a) Population statistics: ONS mid-year population (all residents) estimates. The VAP is the estimated number of people aged 18 and over. 'Net migration' estimates were calculated using 2001 Census data concerning people living in households who reported moving within the UK in the previous year, either moving into or leaving an address in the research locations (Standard Table S008 from ONS).
   b) Employment and income statistics: ONS data from NOMIS website (for historic 2009 local authorities): Occupational breakdown statistics are from the Annual Population Survey for April 2008 to March 2009, pay rates are from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, resident analysis, 2009, and Pension Credit statistics are from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Longitudinal Study. 'Full-time' employment is defined as 30 hours or more a week.
   c) Life expectancy estimates for 2001 are from the ONS and were accessed through their Neighbourhood Statistics website. For HLE, people are classified as 'healthy' based on their self-reported 'good health' or 'fairly good health'. For DFLE, people are classed as 'disability-free' if they do not report having a 'limiting long-term illness'. Estimates for Northumberland were only published at former local district level. These estimates are based on limited data and involve assumptions that individuals will experience the same area-based morbidity and mortality rates throughout their lives.
   d) Rural and urban classification of Census Area Statistic (CAS) wards, and local authority area and population density: ONS statistics for 2001 accessed through their website. The urban/rural classification is based on 2001 Census data and has two parts: first, the type of settlement; then the sparsity of the population. CAS wards were classified as 'urban' if the 'majority of the population live inside a settlement with a population of 10,000 or more people'.
5. Research participants whose quotes are used are used are identified by their local authority, age in years and sex. Where this identity is shared by another research participant, the symbol * is used to identify the last person interviewed. See Table 3.1 for the abbreviated identities used in tables.
6. For information about some of these recent political events and actions see: DBOL (2010) and Peel (2009a) about the DBOL campaign, Hebden Bridge Web

(2010) and Transition Network (2010) about Transition Towns, Incredible Edibles (2011), and Hebden Bridge Walkers Action (2011).

7. Among the papers concerning 'free personal care' in Scotland, a useful introduction is provided by Bowes and Bell (2007).
8. Dr. Peter Kerr suggested approaching charity shops. He had viewed a television series that showed that many of their volunteers were older people.
9. Of the 18 charity shops contacted in Calderdale, 11 were in Halifax, two in Todmorden and five in Hebden Bridge. Of the 28 charity shops contacted in Northumberland, six were in Berwick-upon-Tweed, three in Blyth, three in Ashington, four in Alnwick, six in Hexham, and six in Morpeth. And of the 10 charity shops contacted in West Berkshire, 10 were in Newbury and three in Thatcham. It was considered unsatisfactory to contact any charity shops in the built-up areas near to Reading because of the proximity to the local authority boundary.
10. Examples of the modified recruitment material are given in the appendices: Appendix E (poster) and Appendix F (recruitment information sheet). The emails requested advice about making contact with organisations' members.
11. See the Introduction (p. 14).
12. Since the end of the Second World War, a coalition government can be regarded as novel in the UK, after governments controlled by either the Labour or Conservative parties.
13. The word 'office' included a sitting room in Newbury U3A's headquarters, as well as some formal meeting rooms. Some interviews were conducted outdoors, for example on a café's riverside patio and in one research participant's garden. Rain led to the relocation of the interview held mainly in the public park to a nearby museum.
14. These are the survey questions used in the research interviews, with their sources. The letters A to D are used to label these questions in Appendix I.

    A: Questions based on the 1992 Eurobarometer survey of older people (see Walker and Maltby, 1997):

    - Do you agree that older people [in England] should stand up more actively for their rights?
    - Do you agree that older people [in England] are not playing a full enough part in political life?
    - Would you join a political party formed to further the interests of older people? (Usually, this question was modified to make it relevant for each research participant's reported history of involvement with political parties).

    B: Questions based on some common survey questions, e.g. used by Pattie *et al* (2004, pp. 301-303, 315) and The Hansard Society's *Audit of Political Engagement* reports:

    - Do you agree that it is every citizen's duty to vote?
    - Do you think that your vote makes a difference?
    - Does it matter which party is in power?
    - Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions made by the government?
    - Do you think that politicians in general care what people like you think?
    - Do you think that politicians are just interested in getting people's votes rather than people's opinions?

- How interested are you in (local, regional, national, European, and international) politics?
- Do you try to keep up-to-date with politics and current affairs?
- Do you talk about politics?

C: A question from the Best Value Survey:

- How satisfied are you with the local authority?

D: A question from the Place Survey 2008 (Department of Communities and Local Government):

- In your area, do you believe older people receive the support they need to live independently at home?

15. A thought-provoking article by Randall *et al* (2006) speculates about the potential importance of researchers' listening skills in interviewing older people. It is plausible that researchers' listening – and questioning – styles will impact on the "patterns of interaction" with each research participant and, therefore could impact on research findings based on 'remembering' experiences. They also noted the tension between 'active' and 'passive' interviewing, where researchers "found it impossible not to become active participants in the interview process and to try and connect with the life worlds of our interviewees" instead of being totally "neutral and unbiased" presences (*ibid,* p. 393).
16. In her introductory course on qualitative interviewing at the University of Surrey (4th November 2009), Dr. Sarah Earthy talked about getting consent forms signed at the end of interviews. I agree that this process appears more likely to achieve informed consent and less likely to distort interviews, than the more conventional practice of seeking signatures on consent forms before starting interviews. None of the research participants expressed any reservations when signing.
17. Dr. Therese O'Toole provided invaluable practical advice on using recording equipment in research interviews.

CHAPTER 4

1. See Figure B.1 in Appendix B illustrating age-patterning in responses to this question by men and women participating in the 2000 survey in England.
2. See Barrett and Bloxham (2010) for a timeline about the 'MP's expenses scandal'.
3. A reference to the 'MP's expenses scandal'.
4. This woman wants to vote for a party or candidate other than the Labour candidate in a 'Labour stronghold'.
5. Because of space constraints, research participants' reported media usage cannot be reported in detail. Although most (32) research participants said they were trying to keep up-to-date with current affairs and politics, three people said that they did not try to do this. Furthermore, two politically engaged people reported dissatisfaction with the mainstream media, which failed to adequately cover topics that interested them. And discussion of individuals' use of different types of media, suggest that it is uncommon for people to spend much time on this activity.
6. Some MPs have even published books revealing disconnection from and disrespect for all or some of the electorate. For example, Mullin (2009) wrote of "Chronic Whinger Syndrome, a disease all too common in these parts" (*ibid*, p. 96). He agreed with his wife's advice that he had "to be seen taking more interest in the issues that concern my constituents" (*ibid*, p. 260). Later, he wrote: "Reluctantly, I

am coming to the conclusion that I don't like the electorate any more than they like us. Time to go?" (*ibid*, p. 526).

7. Among new media products, the BBC's Parliament channel attracted favourable comments from some research participants; for instance a 79 year old man found it "quite interesting" and a 63 year old woman was fascinated by its coverage of "the Iraq inquiry".
8. As seen in Chapter 3, the electoral competition in Newbury is between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, therefore voting for the Labour party can be viewed as a 'wasted vote'.
9. At the time of these research interviews, State Pension Age was 65 for men and 60 for women.
10. As the focus of these interviews was on exploring political experiences, reasons for not joining parties were not probed. However, four people volunteered their reasons: lacking 'strong feelings' for the party they always voted for, finding the types of activities (especially meetings) unappealing, or having an informal agreement with their spouse not to join.
11. A contrary view exists among non-party members: that political careers are undesirable.
12. Now, this man enjoys engaging intellectually with political issues by joining a local history group and starting to conduct historical research into "mass political movements". He is a member of a local NHS Trust because of his interest in "mental health issues". In the last few years, he has become more involved with social housing.

CHAPTER 5

1. Meaning 'hundreds of signatures'.
2. It is noteworthy that wearing badges or other symbols of support for causes or campaigns elicited negative responses among the 19 people who said they never participated. Reasons for disliking badges could reflect individuals' personality and/or communication styles; for instance equating badges with equally disliked logos on clothing, 'liking to be anonymous', and believing badges could be barriers to communications.
3. Meaning a circular badge that is often made of metal and can be pinned like a brooch onto clothing. The badge can carry political symbols and/or text.
4. For example, a 60 year old woman in Northumberland said she wore her Mothers' Union badge "all the time – for the church".
5. Alliance Boots employed Andy Hornby as chief executive after he left a bank with offices in Halifax close to collapse. See Prosser (2011).
6. This is a chocolate factory in Halifax. The boycott of Nestlé centres on their marketing of "baby milk products in the third world" (56 year old woman, Calderdale).
7. When asked for their opinions, none of the people without personal experience of demonstrating suggested that lawful public demonstrations were inappropriate political activities. A 75 year old man expressed the opinion that they were necessary in some circumstances. And a 75 year old woman believed it was "very good" for people to stand up, if it is "in the public interest". Some people appeared

to be potential participants. But other people expressed the opinion that demonstrating was in some way 'not their style'.

8. As a 66 year old woman noted, there are numerous opportunities to join in lawful public demonstrations in central London, but participation becomes less convenient for local residents who move out of London and become commuters. And for a 59 year old woman, frequently working overseas limits her engagement with political activities based in her place of residence in England.
9. Talking about his participation in an Iraq war demonstration, this man said: "I agreed with the cause ... and I wanted to support those who had organised the march". The organisers were based in his former workplace.
10. For example, a 68 year old man in Calderdale spontaneously mentioned 'kettling', which featured in some recent national media coverage of how the police were dealing with demonstrators. He said: "This thing about kettling. I remember being kettled outside ... Rhodesia House, as it was. ... So. – *The media* gave this impression that kettling was something that's – recently come up."
11. For example, a 58 year old man in Calderdale remembered participating in a protest rally of "in excess of 25,000 motorcyclists", who "brought the entire middle of London to a halt. That did not make the national news."
12. For example, a 59 year old woman in Calderdale said: "I really don't like to be part of a group which meets formally with a chairman and a secretary and – It just doesn't appeal to me at all. I'm much better doing things on my own – writing letters, making phone calls, speaking at planning applications. That suits me much better. For my temperament."
13. For instance, agreement was obtained that lorries would not go through the village at the start and end of the primary school day.
14. Describing the Transition Towns movement in Calderdale, a 58 year old woman said: "That's ... how do individual communities deal with – post-oil – and trying to keep the carbon footprint down – and then all of that. ... So it's about the things that we can do locally, since government are not doing – enough."
15. For example, in Calderdale, an 80 year old former local councillor laughingly said that she had "lost faith in the council". Partly, this reflected the time-consuming, bureaucratic procedures they used to get things done. In addition, her membership of several committees of local organisations, such as Todmorden Together and Todmorden Pride, had revealed that these provided ways to access public funding and 'get things done'.
16. For example, a 67 year old woman believed a recent consultation on Calderdale council's regeneration policy was insincere because it appeared to be designed to reduce the numbers of people 'consulted' by being held over a few days shortly before Christmas. And an 82 year old former local councillor in West Berkshire was "incensed" with a recent 'presentation' about new housing. She was concerned that Greenham was going to get new houses (despite not being mentioned in the presentation) but not get any of "the money they get from developers to put into the local community".
17. A 63 year old woman living in Calderdale chose to become a long-term, active member of the Liberal Democrats (see Figure 4.6b). And a 67 year old man living in Calderdale become a long-term campaigner about a range of logically interconnected topics. He identified the two major influences on his "pathway to political consciousness" as his involvement with student politics in Germany in the

1960s and marrying someone with complementary political concerns (see Figure 5.2).

18. Examples include awareness that young relatives (professionals) are finding it difficult to purchase their first homes, that there is limited state support for self-employed people experiencing periods of unemployment, and that public health services provided worse "levels of care" over the time they were used by a spouse with major, long-term health problems.
19. This man was made redundant from a job in local government.
20. Currently, this television channel is known as 'BBC Parliament'. *The Week* is a subscription magazine with "the most important news stories from the last 7 days". It targets "busy people" (http://www.theweek.co.uk/). Both of these examples were founded in the 1990s in England.
21. For example, the oldest research participant, who was still a member of the Labour party, said: "I mean – my main interest in life – other than the actual activities that I'm involved in, is – reading about politics – watching *Newsnight* – enjoying battles between Labour and Conservative – and so on. Hissing and booing."

CHAPTER 6

1. A BBC Radio 4 program (*Am I Normal? Ageing*.) broadcast on 9th and 10th March 2010 apparently covered this topic. A 68 year old man in Calderdale mentioned this programme and concurred with the view expressed that people tended to think of themselves as younger than their chronological age.
2. State pension age has become an important 'social marker' of a key life transition.
3. See a quote from this 67 year old man on page 308.
4. Research participants were asked to use their own definitions of 'senior-friendliness'.
5. Immediately beforehand topics related to social care for older people had been covered in the interviews. However, the people mentioning social care in this section, all appeared to have real, personal concerns about these services. And earlier in their interviews, a few people had raised this topic themselves.
6. Abolition of the 10% lower tax rate meant that his pension was taxed. Issues around civil liberties were said to have increased greatly since 1997, e.g. he found it 'appalling' that people were "arrested for taking photos of tourist sites in London". While the events of recent years included: "how the banks ... brought the country to its knees."
7. Although these negative characteristics seem likely to also apply to some younger people.
8. This 56 year old woman said that in "this political climate ... we probably need to have more independents. ... I'm not sure party politics is the way to go."
9. Also noteworthy is that the notion of 'selfishness' was associated with the motivation of many MPs – of any age; New Labour was alleged to pander to people's 'selfish interest', and that local residents – of all ages – had 'purely selfish' motives for undertaking a planning-related petition.
10. Often people struggled to remember the names of their 'older people's champions'. Excused in one case as "I can't think of any because I'm not very

politically aware" (56 year old woman, Calderdale). But this also raises questions about how much impact these 'champions' have had.

11. Talking about seeing Helen Mirren on television, she said: "You could see that she was an older woman. But – Not ... the youth culture thing." (60 year old woman, Northumberland).
12. A 60 year old man in Calderdale identified three politicians. He commented on the "difference between being a champion and being effective" and did not think there has been 'a real effective champion'.
13. Jack Jones was associated with the NPC. Seven of the people who identified Jack Jones as an older people's champion had heard of the NPC. Four people said they had not heard of the NPC, but identified Jack Jones as an older people's champion. A 67 year old woman in Calderdale spoke of being impressed by the work of a local pensioners' group and also identified Jack Jones as an older people's champion – but as a trade unionist.
14. Research participants were asked if they were 'aware of any organisations by and for older people locally'. This question yielded highly variable responses but provided little additional evidence for this thesis. Responses ranged from "there's an awful lot really" (82 year old woman, West Berkshire) to nothing other than an organisation that they belonged to, such as the U3A (e.g. 90 year old man, Calderdale). Only one person mentioned an Over 50s Forum, of which she was Secretary (63 year old woman, Northumberland). But generally, 'older people's organisations' that were identified were classed as 'social' rather than 'political' in character. Cultural preferences and timing of activities, contributed to some organisations unintentionally comprising predominantly older participants, for example the Halifax Antiquarian Society (67 year old man, Calderdale).

CHAPTER 7

1. Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) criteria.
2. These percentages are used only to indicate the distribution of responses among research participants. As this is not a representative sample of the over-50s in any of these locations, these percentages do not estimate likely responses in these wider populations.
3. In England, local authorities can choose to charge users of social care services. However, in Scotland in 2002, "charges for personal care for older people living in their own homes ... were abolished". Bowes and Bell (2007) state that "free personal care was represented as a 'flagship' policy by the new Scottish Parliament (formed at devolution in 1999) and thus invested with ideological significance" (*ibid*, p. 435). National variations in services have received some publicity. Importantly for this thesis, Northumberland has a border with Scotland. One research participant living in Northumberland was raised in Scotland, regularly visiting relatives. And a research participant living in Calderdale was raised in Berwick-upon-Tweed (a border town), where his mother lives.
4. Coverage of these topics varied across interviews, largely depending on the time available after talking about research participants' political lives. Follow-up interviews with research participants could return to this topic. Alternatively, the political and practical aspects of social care for older people could be the focus of a separate research project.

5. Appendix D presents a selection of the lengthy list of programmes returned by a search for the term ‘euthanasia’ in the BBC website on 29 August 2011.
6. BSA 2005 (weighted data: WTFactor. These data were accessed from http://www.britsocat.com) One question asked: “Suppose a person has a painful incurable disease. Do you think that doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient’s life if the patient requests it?” Percentage agreement by age group was lowest (75.4%) for 60-64 year olds and highest (84.1%) among 25-34 year olds. Another question was: “Do you think the law should allow doctors to decide to end a patient's life on the instruction of the ‘living will’ or not?” The response “definitely should be allowed” was commonest (57.8%) among 45-54 year olds and least common (38.5%) among people aged 66 and over. One of the younger research participants said that she had prepared a ‘living will’.
7. An example is Age Concern’s (2008) campaign: ‘The Big Q’ – “to improve the quality of care”. This included running a series of ‘listening events’ across England in April to November 2008. MPs were invited to attend.
8. See a quote from a 61 year old woman on page191.
9. See page 80.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Automobile Association
AARP	American Association of Retired Persons
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BES	British Election Study
BNP	British National Party
BSA	British Social Attitudes
CAS	Census Area Statistics
CHC	Community Health Council
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CSCI	Commission for Social Care Inspection [replaced by CQC]
CSSR	Councils with social services responsibilities
CQC	Care Quality Commission [replaced CSCI in March 2009]
DBOL	Don't Bulldoze Our Library [a campaign in Calderdale]
DFLE	Disability-Free Life Expectancy
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ELSA	English Longitudinal Study of Ageing
ESDS	Economic and Social Data Service
ESS	European Social Survey
FACS	Fair Access to Care Services criteria
GP	General practitioner [a type of medical practitioner/doctor]
HLE	Healthy Life Expectancy
ICT	Information and communication technologies.
ID	Identity [e.g. the code used to identify research participants, see Table 3.1]
Lib Dem(s)	Liberal Democrat party
LE	Life Expectancy
MP	Member of Parliament
NHS	National Health Service
NOMIS	NOMIS [website for official labour market statistics]
NPC	National Pensioners' Convention
NSM	New Social Movement
NSMO	New Social Movement Organisation
NUJ	National Union of Journalists
OAP	Old age pensioner
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PCT	Primary Care Trust [part of the public health service]
PM	Prime Minister
RCN	Royal College of Nursing
RNIB	Royal National Institute of Blind People
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Saga/SAGA	Saga [a business: tourism and other services for the over-50s]
SPA	State Pension Age [in 2009-2010, 60 for women and 65 for men]
Tory/Tories	Conservative Party [also referred to as 'the Blues']
TV	television
U3A	The University of the Third Age
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UNISON	UNISON [a public services union]
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
VAP	Voting age population [in 2009-2010, people aged 18 and over]
WEA	Workers Educational Association
WI	Women's Institute
WVS	World Values Survey
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Appendix A

Some relevant age-related patterns in ESS 2008 survey data for England

These charts are included to make readily accessible some information to complement Chapter One and to assist with interpretation of the empirical research.

Figure A.1: Paid and Voluntary Work: Percentages of European Social Survey respondents in England who said they had done paid and/or voluntary work in the previous month, by age, 2008.

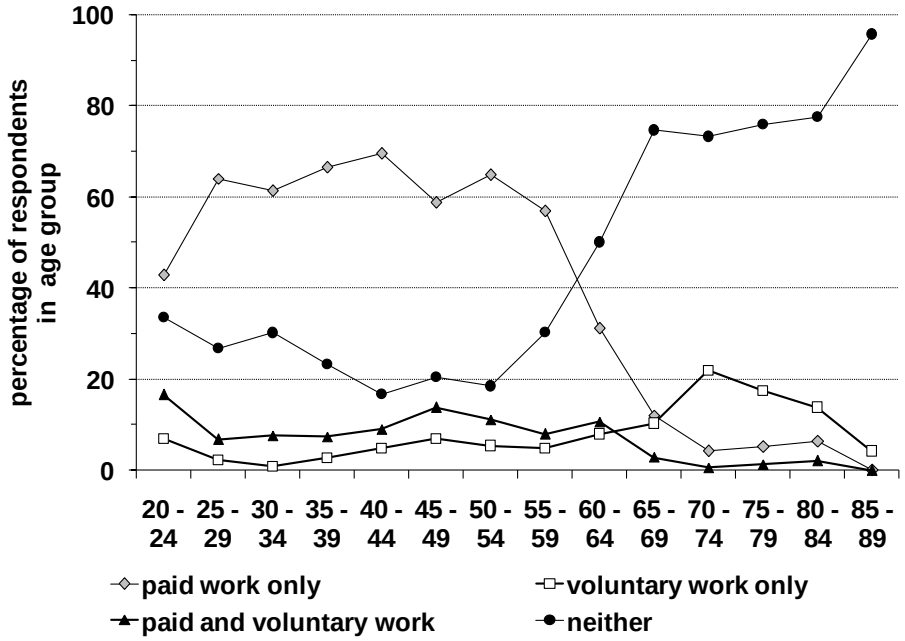


Figure A.2: Trade Union Membership: Percentages of European Social Survey respondents in England who said that they are, were or never have been members of a trade union, by age, 2008.

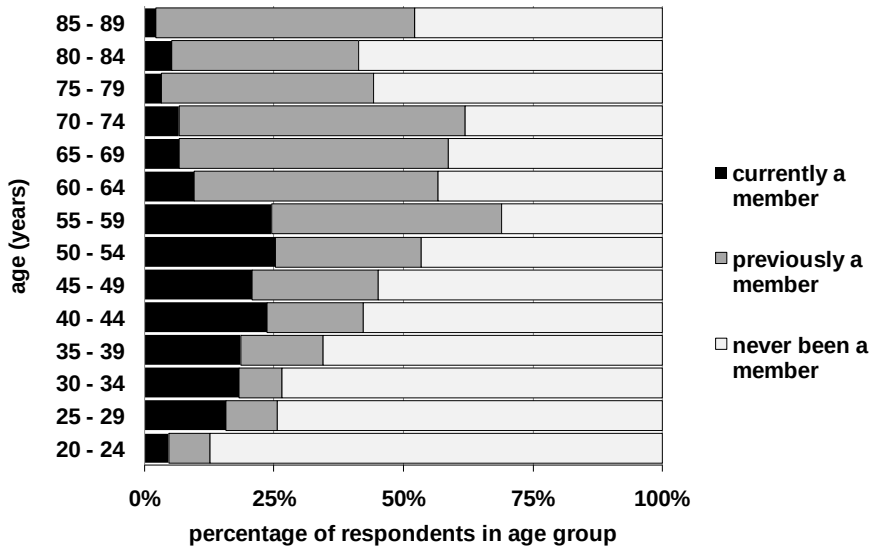


Figure A.3: Personal use of the internet, email or World Wide Web (WWW) by respondents in the European Social Survey in England, by age, 2008.

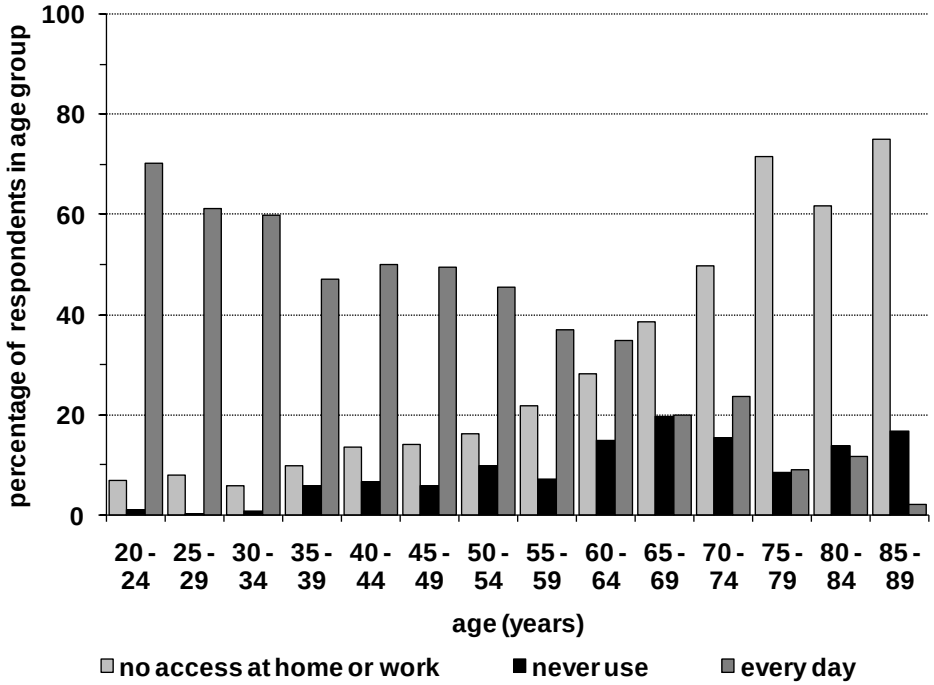
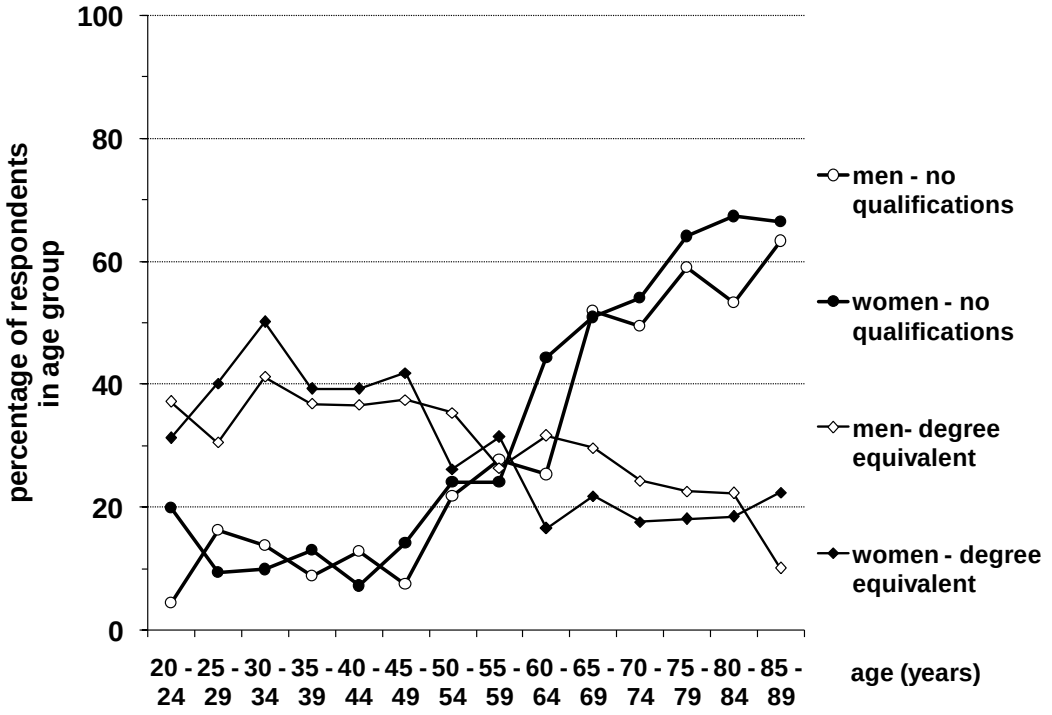
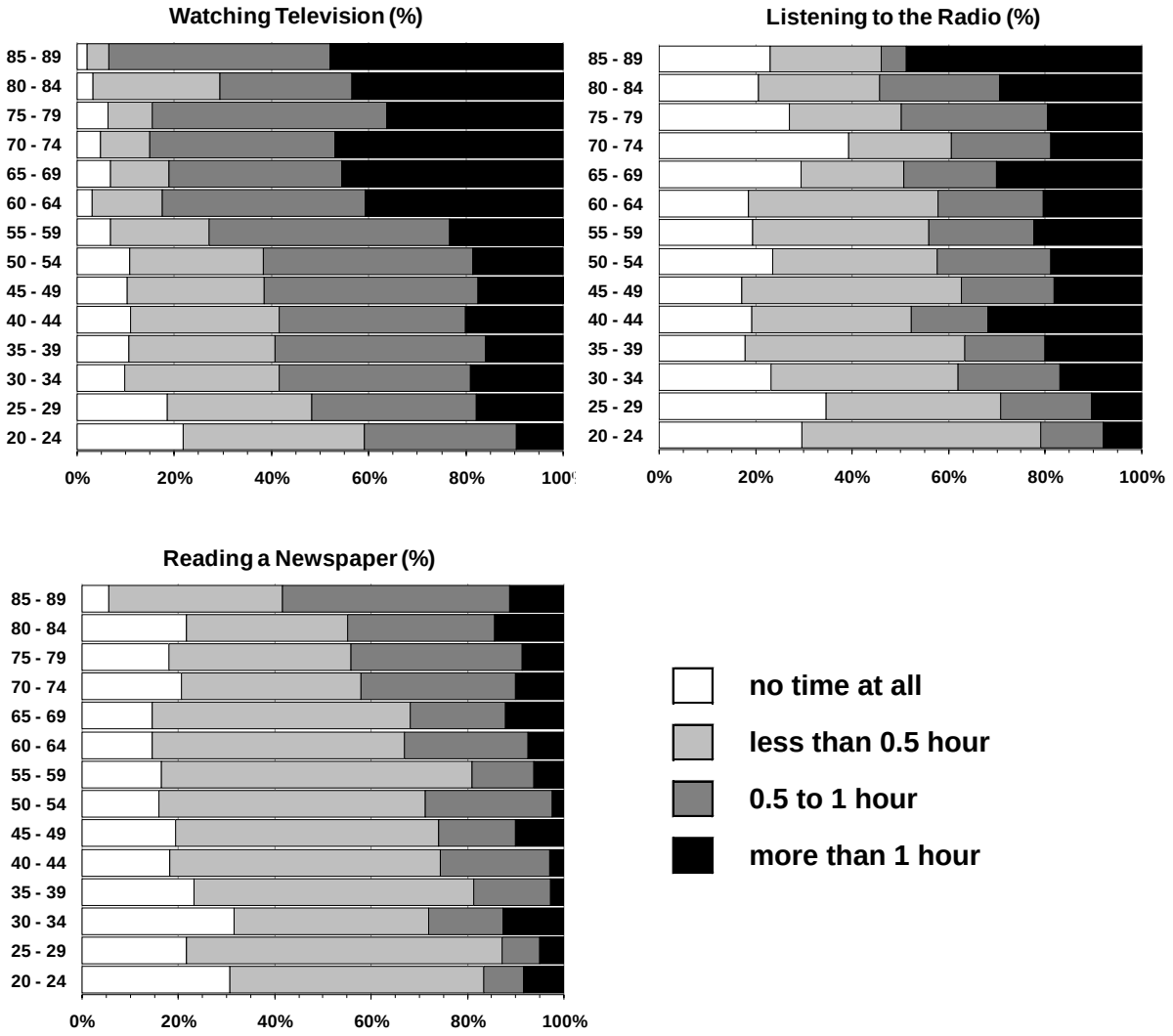


Figure A.4: Percentage of European Social Survey respondents in England with either degree level or no qualifications, by age and sex, 2008.



Source (charts A.1 to A.4): European Social Survey (ESS) Round 4, 2008. Weighted data (design weight). Excluding people aged under 20 years and 90 years and over.

Figure A.5: Percentages of respondents in the European Social Survey in England by the time they said they spent following the news, politics and current affairs in the media on an average weekday, by age and medium, 2008.



Source: European Social Survey (ESS) Round 4, 2008. Weighted data (design weight). Excluding people aged under 20 years and 90 years and over.

Horizontal axis is the percentage of respondents in each age group.
Vertical axis is the age of the respondent in five-year age groups.

Appendix B

Some relevant age-related patterns in 2000 survey data for England

These charts and tables are included to make readily accessible some information to complement Chapter One and to assist with interpretation of the empirical research. Source: Whiteley *et al*, 2005, dataset (weighted).

Table B.1: Identification with political parties: Responses of respondents in England to the question: 'What party do you think of yourself as?', by age, 2000.

Political party identified with	Percentage of all people in the age group						
	18-29	30-49	50-64	65-74	75-84	85+	all 18+
Conservative	15.4	18.9	26.8	30.3	35.9	55.4	23.8
Labour	17.3	31.6	34.8	33.9	35.0	17.9	30.2
Liberal Democrat	8.7	9.8	12.0	10.0	8.0	5.4	9.9
other party	0.9	3.2	2.4	1.1	0.4	0	2.0
none	41.6	24.3	15.3	16.4	9.7	17.9	22.8
don't know	16.2	12.2	8.8	8.3	11.0	3.6	11.3
total number of people	469	995	627	360	237	56	2,744

Source: Whiteley *et al* (2005). Question14a. Ages in years.

Figure B.1: Beliefs about political participation: Percentages of survey respondents in England who strongly agree or agree that 'it is every citizen's duty to vote' and that 'all should get involved with politics', by age and sex, 2000.

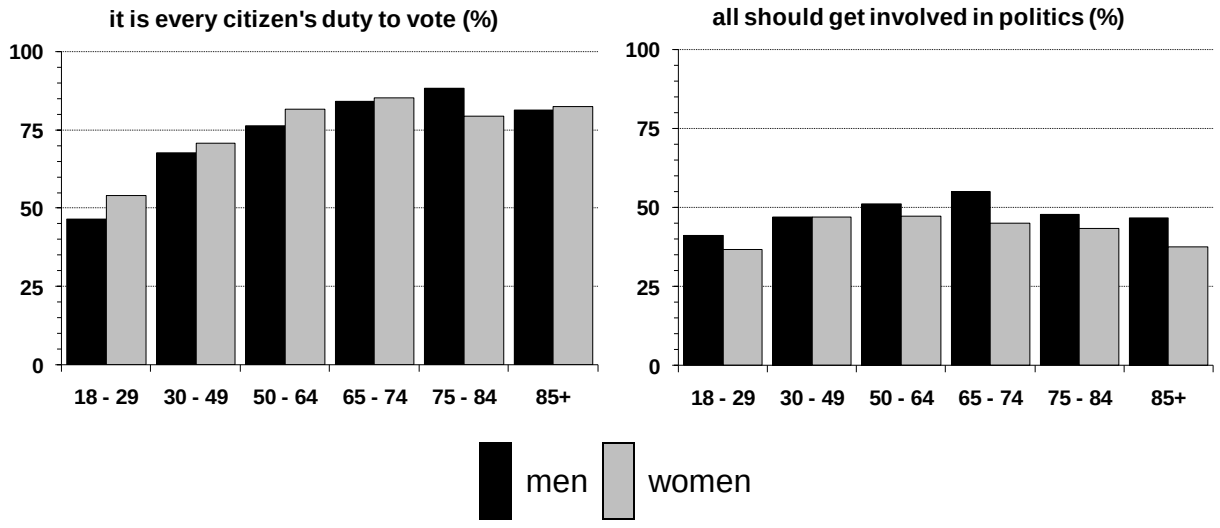


Table B.2: Modal age groups for organisational membership, England, 2000.

Age Grp.	Type of organisation, where the highest percentage of respondents is in one age group	two or more age groups
85 +	• women's (e.g. Women's Institute) (3.7%) • pensioners or retired persons (e.g. Help the Aged) (1.9%)	
75 to 84	• religious or church organisation (8.1%) • ethnic organisation (e.g. Black Resource Centre) (0.9%) • peace organisation (e.g. CND) (0.4%)	• cultural/musical/dancing/ theatre organisations (3.1%) • organisation for medical patients, specific illnesses or addictions (e.g. British Heart Foundation) (1.3%)
65 to 74	• residents/housing or neighbourhood organisation (e.g. Neighbourhood Watch) (9.8%) • conservation organisation (e.g. The National Trust) (7.1%) • ex-service club (e.g. Royal British Legion) (4.4%)	• cultural/musical/dancing/ theatre organisations (3.1%)
50 to 64	• motoring association (e.g. AA) (39.7%) • hobby organisation (e.g. stamp collecting group) (3.8%) • consumer organisations (e.g. The Consumer Association) (2.3%) • organisations for disabled people (e.g. RNIB) (1.0%) • social welfare organisation (e.g. Shelter) (0.5%)	• social club (e.g. Working Men's Clubs) (6.1%) • organisation for medical patients, specific illnesses or addictions (e.g. British Heart Foundation) (1.3%) • humanitarian aid/human rights organisation (e.g. Amnesty International) (1.1%) • organisation for animal rights or protection (e.g. RSPCA) (1.0%)
30 to 49	• sports club or outdoor activities club (9.9%) • parent and teachers organisation (PTA) (1.6%) • environmental organisation (e.g. Greenpeace) (1.3%)	• social club (e.g. Working Men's Clubs) (6.1%) • organisation for animal rights or protection (e.g. RSPCA) (1.0%)
18 to 29	• gymnasium (11.8%) • youth organisation (e.g. Scouts) (1.5%)	• humanitarian aid/human rights organisation (e.g. Amnesty International) (1.1%) • organisation for animal rights or protection (e.g. RSPCA) (1.0%)

Source: Whiteley *et al* (2001) weighted data. Authors calculations. Descriptions based on show card (Pattie *et al*, 2004, p. 292). For 12 months before interview. 'Grp.' is group.

Appendix C

Table: C.1: The Fair Access to Care Services (FACS) eligibility bands.

Judgement made about present and near future	**FACS eligibility band:**			
	low	**moderate**	**substantial**	**critical**
life threatened				yes
health problems				significant
choice and control over immediate environment			partial control	little or no control over vital aspects
abuse or neglect			abuse or neglect	serious abuse or neglect
personal care or domestic routines	inability to do one or two	inability to do several	inability to do majority	inability to do vital aspects
work, education or learning	cannot sustain one or two aspects	cannot sustain several aspects	cannot sustain many aspects	cannot sustain vital involvement
social support systems and relationships	cannot sustain one or two	cannot sustain several	cannot sustain the majority	cannot sustain vital systems and relationships
family and other social roles and responsibilities	cannot undertake one or two	cannot undertake several	cannot undertake the majority	cannot undertake vital roles and responsibilities

Source: Department of Health (2002, pp. 4-5).

Appendix D: Euthanasia

Table D.1: Selected programmes from a search for ‘Euthanasia’ on the BBC website.

Broadcast:	Title of Programme
24.02.2011	'I don't want another 20 years of this' *Today.* BBC Radio 4. [Discuss about people with ‘locked-in syndrome’]
19.06.2010	‘The end-of-life dilemmas experienced by GPs.’ Kelly, J. BBC News UK
19.06.2010	‘My father had no intention of dying.’ BBC News UK. [retired GP ‘struck off the medical register for giving excessively high doses of morphine to 18 patients’]
28.04.2010	‘Surrey right-to-die campaigner seeks day in court.’ BBC News. [Retired GP - former chairman of Voluntary Euthanasia Society (now ‘Dignity in Dying’) said taken terminally-ill people to Dignitas in Switzerland – a euthanasia clinic.]
15.03.2010	‘Suicide workshop held in London.’ BBC News. [About 100 people were reported to have attended.]
25.03.2010	‘Motivation key over assisted death prosecutions.’ Triggle, N. BBC News. [Director of Public Prosecutions published new guidelines. Intended as ‘clear framework’ for decisions.]
18.02.2010	‘Do some doctors use sedatives to hasten patient deaths?’ *The Report.* BBC Radio 4.
15.02.2010	‘BBC reporter Ray Gosling admits helping lover die.’ BBC News.
14.02.2010	‘Archbishop Vincent Nichols attacks NHS over compassion.’ BBC News. [Leader of Roman Catholic Church in England: “argued calls for assisted suicide and euthanasia reflected a society that did not know how to deal with death.”]
2.02.2010	‘Elderly ‘conscious of being a burden’’ Today. BBC Radio 4. [Discuss ‘new play’ by Tamsin Oglesby ‘Really Old, Like Forty Five’ – “argues that the elderly will eventually be killed by the state.” Then, discuss how older people are viewed by society” with ‘supporter of euthanasia’, Baroness Mary Warnock.]
3.11.2009	‘Have your say on suicide couple.’ BBC Berkshire. [Newbury couple in 80s sent “a suicide letter to the BBC criticising UK euthanasia laws.]
19.10.2009	‘Author Ludovic Kennedy dies at 89.’ BBC News. [noted that he was president of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society.]
23.09.2009	‘Debbie Purdy’s husband helping her die.’ McFarlane, A. BBC News. [Fight for clarification of guidance for prosecutions.]
25.07.2009	‘RCN now ‘neutral’ on euthanasia.’ BBC News.[The Royal College of Nursing previously opposed helping patients to commit suicide.]
13.10.2008	‘Suicide workshops for the over-50s.’ Cacciottolo, M. BBC News. [‘Australian euthanasia expert Dr. Philip Nitschke’ and his organisation: Exit International. Argue if people prepared to end their life, have a “better quality of life, they stop worrying.”]
24.01.2007	‘Most support voluntary euthanasia.’ BBC News. [On BSA survey]

Appendix E
Poster used in recruitment

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Department of Political Science and International Studies

Learning from the over 50s

If you are a U3A member aged 50 or older living in Sunderland, then your help is wanted in a research project.

- Could you spare around an hour of your time?
- Would you like to talk about your experiences of and opinions on politics, your views on a policy issue concerning people in your age group, and the issues that matter most to you?

Great uncertainty exists about the interconnected social, economic and political implications of England's ageing population. Older people could have a growing influence on local, regional and national political agendas and decisions. But the over 50s are a diverse group of people. You can contribute to improved understanding of politics by and for older people in England.

A broad definition of 'politics' is used in this project, including voting in elections, campaigning, public demonstrations, consumer boycotts, petitioning and other activities aimed at influencing decisions by politicians and diverse organisations.

My name is Jane Foody. I am a doctoral research student with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for this exploratory research project. I want to meet a variety of people aged 50 and over, including:

- People with little or no interest in party politics
- People who are or have been politically active
- People who moved into this area around or after their retirement
- Lifelong residents of this area
- People whose political behaviour has changed or been stable
- People who have been involved in decision-making processes, for example through membership of a forum or participating in a public consultation.

If you are interested in finding out more about this participating in th project, please email me at [redacted] Saturdays or Sundays. Light refreshments are offered

University of Birmingham Edgbaston Birmingham B15 2TT United Kingdom
T: 0121 414 6526/6527 F: 0121 414 3496 W: www.bham.ac.uk/polsis

Appendix F
Recruitment Information Sheet

The Politics of Ageing in England: Exploring Local Differences
Project Information

This project aims to improve understanding of older people's politics by exploring the marked variations across England in both political participation and welfare state provision. Local variations in public services could reasonably be expected to be associated with differences in politics by and for older people.

Calderdale is one of four English local authority areas selected for in-depth study. These four local authorities were chosen because they are politically distinctive in terms of decisions made about services that are largely used by older people. In each area, some local politicians and representatives of local organisations will be interviewed, and relevant documents and statistics will be investigated. However, the most important part of this project is finding out the views and experiences of older people.

Participation is voluntary. You can ask about the reasons for any question.
You can refuse to participate at any point in time by saying so.

Who will be interviewed?

People aged 50 years and older are invited to find out more about this project. We believe that U3A members take an interest in their communities. The views and experiences of a diverse group of men and women are wanted, therefore you will be asked a few questions about yourself when discussing the project with the researcher.

What is involved in being interviewed?

Your interview should take around one hour – or longer, if you prefer, including some time for introductions. It should feel like having an informal conversation with the researcher. First, we will focus on your understandings of and opinions on politics. Then, we will talk about an issue relevant to older people. You will have an opportunity to talk about issues of importance to you.

A convenient and reasonably quiet location will be agreed for you to meet with the researcher. Light refreshments are offered. Your permission is requested to record your interview. This is the most accurate way of capturing what you and the researcher say. It is much more difficult to have a conversation when the researcher is making detailed notes.

What about confidentiality and anonymity?

Recordings will be kept by the researcher for the period required to complete her thesis and then they will be deleted. Transcriptions of the interview will be made and stored securely by the researcher. Information supplied before your interview will be kept confidential.

Some of the things that you say will be used in publications and might even be quoted. Your identity will be concealed by labelling any quotes with broad categories, such as '75-84 year old U3A member, Calderdale' and '86 year old man, Calderdale'.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated. Parts of the draft thesis referring to information provided by you, including any quotes can be sent to you for your comments. If wanted, you can be named as a research participant in the acknowledgements.

Further information can be obtained from the researcher:

Researcher: [redacted]

Supervisor: [redacted]

Address: Department of Political Science and International Studies (POLSIS), Muirhead Tower, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham. B15 2TT.

Appendix G
Example of letter sent to research participants

Contact Address
Date

Dear ..... ,

Here is some background information about me, the project and the interviews.

Before returning to my studies in 2007, I worked as a research analyst in the chief executive's department in Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council and as an assistant for social and educational research projects in the Open University. While switching from my early career path, in horticulture, I enjoyed undertaking voluntary work for Nottingham Mencap. I have never lived in the four research locations, which were chosen for their politically distinctive characteristics. I have never been associated with any political party or organisation for older people. In public policy, the term 'older people' tends to refer to people aged 50 and over - an age group I joined in 2008. I have became aware that older people's political participation is under-researched, despite widespread public comments concerning England's ageing population.

I started my research by exploring local authority level statistical and other evidence about political participation, selected welfare services and socio-economic characteristics. Soon, I became aware that there are large gaps in the information available. In addition, I believe that there are likely to be multiple pathways to any outcome of interest and that place is important. Therefore, I decided to focus on researching in greater depth politics for and by older people in four areas in England. Comparison of information from diverse older people both within and between these four locations should help to improve understanding of politics by and for older people. These insights can be used to further explore variations across England in older people's political participation and associated welfare and other policy outcomes. Given the limited amount of relevant information, it is likely to be a long-term project to slowly unravel these complex processes.

The interviews will have three interlinked parts. First, we would explore your understandings and experiences of politics, including any changes and the role of place. Next, I want to explore your understandings of and opinions on a controversial area of social policy concerning the welfare of older people. I do not want to specify the topic because I am interested in your responses and do not want you to feel that you have to read up or think about it before the interview. Then, we would explore the political issues that are most important to you.

Potential research participants are being approached through a variety of organisations. Association with one or more of these organisations is considered to indicate some interest or involvement in the local community. I have enclosed an information sheet for residents of Northumberland who heard about this through the U3A. However, apart from the local authority name and reference to U3A, the same information is provided for people living in each area and associated with each organisation.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to answer any question or to participate in the project at any time. I will try to make the interview as stimulating and enjoyable as possible. To help me to assess how well I am doing at meeting a diverse group of older people from across each area, I have produced checklists of questions. Please either bring the completed checklist to the interview or complete it at the start of the interview. Your answers would be part of the research and treated as confidential.

I look forward to meeting you on the afternoon of Tuesday 9 February. I will contact you nearer the date to confirm the location and time. Pease let me know if you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix H
Example of checklist for research participants

The Politics of Ageing in England:
Exploring Local Differences.

To help me to check that I am arranging to meet a diverse group of people and to focus interviews on relevant topics, please could you answer these questions.

I want to talk to people across the 50 plus age group because age-related differences are expected. I want to meet people in each of four age groups (50 to 64, 65 to 74, 75 to 84, and 85 and older) in each local authority area.

How old are you? .....

You must be a resident of West Berkshire. I believe that place is important, therefore it would be useful to include some long-term residents and people who migrated to the area.

Have you moved to live in West Berkshire around or after your retirement?

.....

Have you lived in West Berkshire for most of your life? (You can ignore, for example, a temporary posting overseas or periods of study)

.....

The first invitations to participate in this project were sent to volunteers in charity shops in four parts of England. This set of invitations are to members of the U3A in these areas.

Are you a member of the U3A?.....

If you answered Yes, which U3A?

The following questions concern activities that could influence your political experiences and understandings. In addition, some of these organisations are likely to be approached to ask if anyone wants to participate in this project.

Have you ever...	**Cross if the answer is Yes**
done any voluntary work?	
participated in a WEA (Workers' Educational Association) course?	
belonged to a politically active pensioners' or older people's group?	
belonged to any politically active group or organisation, excluding pensioners' or older people's groups?	
belonged to a social group for older people?	
belonged to a political party?	
been a member of a trade union?	
been a member of a professional association?	
been a regular churchgoer? Or had a similar level of religious practice or commitment?	
been a regular churchgoer? Or had a similar level of religious practice or commitment?	

'groups' refers to any formal group, club, association or other organisation, as well as temporary informal groups set up to deal with specific issues.

'political' refers to any activity designed to influence either public [redacted]

Note: The original checklist was made up of two A4 sheets, including tick boxes.

Appendix I
Interview Questions

Questions and some notes (references and reminders) were written on a separate A4 sheet. Questions that I attempted to ask everyone (if appropriate) are in bold. If underlined, this wording was used. Letters in square brackets , e.g. [A], refer to notes about the questions, which are located below the questions. Square brackets are also used to indicate where an early change was made to a question; e.g. [CHANGE 1]. Unless repeating a survey question, the exact wording and question varied in response to the interview and research participant. Also the sequence and content of the interview varied according to what they research participant is saying and the time available. Below are listed the questions brought to the first interview.

INTRODUCTION

Place is important:

If moved into LA around or after retirement, please can you expand on this?

... think of anything distinctive about the area politically?

'Senior-friendly' societies:

Do you think that England is 'senior-friendly'? ...and this LA?

[*see Goerres, 2009*]

Link to two questions Europe 1992 survey:

Do you agree that "older people [in England] should stand up more actively for their rights"? [A]

Do you agree that "older people [in England] are not playing a full enough part in political life?" [A]

VOTING AND PARTY POLITICS

The type of political activity that adults are most likely to have experienced is voting in national elections. ...

Please tell me about your experiences as a voter ...?

Any changes? ... reasons? Mobilisation – by parties?

Political socialisation – (in family, school, friends, everyday life)?

Do you agree that it is every citizen's duty to vote? [B]
Do you think that your vote makes a difference? [B]
Does it matter which party is in power? [B] Nationally? Locally?

Do you identify with any party? .... support ....? [CHANGE 1]
Ever been a candidate (includes independent?) in local/national election?
Ever **been a councillor/MP**?
Ever chosen not to vote in local/national elections?
Plans for next elections?
Ever used a **postal vote**? [opinion ....?]

Would you join a political party formed to further the interests of older people?
[A] Modify as appropriate: e.g. If never been a member of a political party: state original question, then ask if would 'vote for or support?'

What do you think of the idea of independent 'pensioner candidates' standing in the next national election? [*Based on an idea discussed informally at the NPC*]

Party membership? History? ... Source of friendship? Or identity?

CONTACTING ACTIVITIES

People can make contact with individuals and organizations for political reasons – to influence processes or decisions affecting more people than themselves and their immediate family. [CHANGE 2]

Please tell me about your experience of contacting ...?

Public officials: Local (officers, social workers...); National (civil servants,...),

Politicians: Councillors – Leader; MPs, **Solicitors**: make a legal challenge? [CHANGE 3], **Organisations:**. which ones? **The media**

Questions: Ever? ... Would consider –if? Or definitely would? [mobilisation potential] ...Changed views?

Do you think that the local media is influential? (newspapers, radio, TV)
Has the local media taken any interest in older people's issues?

INDIVIDUAL MODE

Please tell me about your experience of ....?

Signing petitions ... now one of commonest types of political activity

e.g. Ever organised one? 'Who' organised? Impact? How mobilised?

Worn a badge ... or other symbol of support for a cause/campaign?

Buycotts (buying) **or Boycotts** of products/services for political / ethical reasons?

Questions: Ever? ... Changed views? ... Would consider - if? Or definitely would do?

COLLECTIVE MODE

Please tell me about your experience of ....?

Ever taken part in a **lawful public demonstration**?

Ever **formed a group** of like-minded people? ... Or joined?

Include temporary informal groups set up to deal with a local issue or problem

Ever taken part in a **strike**?

ORGANISATIONS

TRADE UNIONS

Please tell me about your experience of trade unions ...?

Has it contributed to/influenced your political interest and activity?

After retirement, can older people remain members? Terms?

Heard of the National Pensioners Convention (NPC)? (as have Union link)

NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS (NSMs) > single issue organisations

Examples: humanitarian aid, human rights, minorities, immigrants, environmental protection, peace movement, animal rights. Specific organisations...

Please tell me about your experience of NSM and associated organisations

Membership of organisations? Support? .... Fundraise for? Donate to (generally? Specific campaigns?) Type of activity ...Occasional or one-off? More regular? Has involvement/support (therefore paying attention to message) influenced your political interests and activities? Source of friendship? ... identity?

Diagrams about political mobilisation by political parties, trade unions and NSMs: For each diagram: **... can you see yourself fitting into this? ... any comments?**

ORGANISATIONS BY OR FOR OLDER PEOPLE:
Are you aware of any organisations by and for older people? Locally?
Are these organisations considered to be mainly 'social' in nature? ...
Aware of Age Concern and Help the Aged? (= 'Age UK' now)
...: **aware of any campaigning activity**?

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS: [*first: refer to checklist*]
Has your voluntary work influenced your political interests and activity? ... How?

OTHER ORGANISATIONS: [*first: refer to checklist*]
If applicable. Example: U3A and WEA. Roles? (learner/student ... organiser/convenor/tutor). Source of friendship?...

Has your involvement with these organisations influenced your political interests and activity?

POLITICAL INFLUENCE

Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions made by the government? .... local authorities? [B]
How? In what ways? To what extent does voting/petitioning allow influence?
Do you think that politicians in general care what people like you think? (councillors, MPs) [B]
Do you think that politicians are just interested in getting people's votes rather than people's opinions? [B]
What is your experience of councillors/candidates visiting your home?
During the year? In run-up to elections?
How satisfied are you with the local authority? ... its services? [C]

[first: refer to checklist] **Please tell me about your experience of belonging to:**
A citizen's panel, service users' forum, or other consultation group concerned with public services or decision-making
How did you come to be involved? [mobilisation?] Feedback? ... Evidence that actually listened to – acted upon? Nature of consultation? ... Has it changed? Is council/other organisation seeking views? Freedom re. agenda?
If not involved – check if ever involved? If say never involved, check awareness.

SOCIAL CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Main focus: '**personal care' – home care ...**regular help with, for example, bathing, dressing, feeding, going out, going to bed, and getting up from bed.
Should include other tasks required to maintain 'independent living' in own home, e.g. assistance with housework, DIY and gardening.

Have you ever received any informal (unpaid) care from family, friends or neighbours? Have you ever been a carer?

Have you ever used – or tried to access – personal social care services for adults/older people living in their own homes? Do you know anyone who has?
If 'Yes': **Please tell me about your experiences ... (changes?)**
Have you ever been recommended services that you have either not taken up or abandoned/gave up? Why? (cost? Characteristics...?)
Are there services that you cannot access because your needs were not judged to be severe enough?... or because there is a waiting list? [demand management]... or services did not exist/are not available locally?
What is your experience of 'user feedback'? [performance assessment - proactive suggestions?] [CHANGE 4]

> Places Survey 2008 (performance of local authority areas):
> **'In your area, do you believe older people receive the support they need to live independently at home?'** [D]
> Survey r*esponse options: Yes – No – Don't know....*
> *Longer version of question: "services and support ... need to continue to live at home for as long as they want to" ...distinguishing (public, private and voluntary services) from (family, friends and wider community).*

Check awareness:

- **These home care services are means-tested? ..... needs-tested?**
- **Fair Access to Care Services criteria (FACS)**

Should home care services be 'free' like most health care?
To what extent are these support services the responsibility of the state?
Should you be able to decide when you require help or support? [CHANGE 5]
FACS – aware of situation in other areas? ... In Scotland?

Is social care for older people in their own homes an issue that you have given any thought to? [CHANGE 6]
Would decisions about these local services influence your voting decisions? [problem: speculative?] ... If more expensive? And/or Harder to access?
Has this issue featured in local election campaigns?
At a national level - awareness of the views of the three major political parties on this – and related – issues?
What do you think of these ideas? [see manifestos] Plausible? Timely? ...

YOUR ISSUES

If not already covered in the interview:
What political issues are most important to you?
What do about it? How to 'make a difference'? Change? How know?
How get involved?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Some things are associated with political activity:
Economic activity status ... 'retired'? Early retirement – voluntary?
Highest level of education ... degree level or equivalent or higher? Or left school as soon as possible?
Where live – 'urban' or 'rural'? ... small town, village, suburbs, sparsely populated?
Own transport ... have access to and can use a vehicle?
Interest in politics ... **how interested are you in (local, regional, national, European, international) politics?** Survey responses: 'very' ... 'not at all' [B]
Do you **try to keep up-to-date with politics and current affairs?** (watch TV – radio – newspapers ?) [B]
Do you **talk about politics?** (When? Where? With whom?) [B]

Final question:
Do you think that there has been/is a real 'older people's champion' in the area? ...Nationally?

CONCLUSION

Consent form. Any questions. Future contact.

Changes

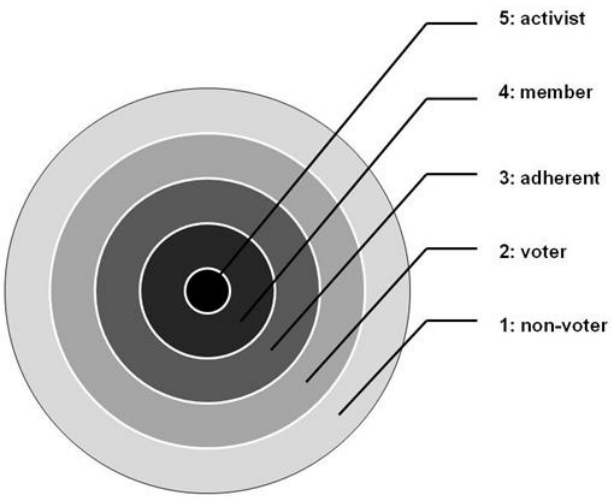
1. I decided in the first interview to not ask specifically questions seeking identification of a political party because this person appeared sensitive about this subject. Usually, if people supported a party for a long-time or changed their party preference, they would mention this during the interview when talking about patterns in their voting behaviour.
2. Surveys like Pattie *et al* (2004) tended to separate out these activities. In interviews, this did not always work well because of the way people chose to answer the question. For example, mixing together politicians and officials. Therefore, it was sometimes necessary to follow-up initial responses.
3. As expected from the literature, legal challenges were uncommon. Therefore this question was not always asked.
4. In the first few interviews, it never seemed appropriate to ask the secondary questions listed here. Instead, follow-up questions were used for any potentially relevant points raised in this part of the interview. Care was taken to try not to intrude on any potentially sensitive issues.
5. The question about deciding when help or support was required was deemed out of scope for this project during the first interview.
6. I noted in the first interview that it was important to find our if social care is thought of as a political issue or only as a practical (or personal) issue.

Sources of Questions: Labelled A to F (see Chapter3).

Appendix J
Diagrams used in interviews

Three A4 sheets of paper were produced for use in the research interviews with older people in Calderdale, Northumberland and West Berkshire. Each diagram had the same format, which is illustrated below:

Levels of Mobilization by Political Parties



1: Non-voter

2: Voter – in last national election

3: Adherent – votes and has a 'closer attachment' to the party voted for

4: Party member – and voter

5: Party activist – voter and active member

After Kriesi (1993)

Categories provided by Kriesi (1993) for levels of mobilisation were used; that is mobilisation by:

a) **Political Parties** 1. Non-voter. 2. Voter – in last national election., 3. Adherent – votes and has a 'closer attachment' to the party voted for. 4. Party member – and voter. 5. Party activist – voter and active member.

b) **Trade Unions** 1. No support at all with union goals. 2. Sympathiser – has 'some' or 'much' support with unions' goals but is not a formal member. 3. Member – formal member who has at least 'some' sympathy with unions' goals. 4. Participant – has ever participated in union campaign. Is not necessarily a member now. 5. Core activist – has ever participated in core union activities. Is not necessarily a member now.

c) **New Social Movements (NSMs)** 1. No support at all with NSMs' goals. 2. Sympathiser – has support with NSMs' goals. 3. Supporter – of social movement organisations (SMOs), e.g. Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, Amnesty International. 4. Participant – has ever participated in NSM campaigns. Is not necessarily an SMO supporter. 5. Core activist – has ever participated in core activities of NSMs.

Appendix K
The Consent Form

The consent form is based on a model agreement to participate form from the British Society of Gerontology. Available at: http://www.britishgerontology.org/ageing-studies/bsg-ethical-guidelines.html. The consent forms were produced on A4 sheets of paper, the contents of which are illustrated below.

The Politics of Ageing in England: Explaining Local Differences

Agreement to Participate

I, ...(print name) agree to take part in this research project.

I have had the purposes of the research project explained to me.

I have been informed that I may refuse to participate at any point in time by simply saying so.

I have been assured that my confidentiality will be protected as specified in the information sheet.

I agree that the information that I provide can be used for educational or research purposes, including publication.

I understand that if I have any concerns or difficulties I can contact the researcher, Jane Foody, at:

Department of Political Science and International Studies (POLSIS)
Muirhead Tower,
University of Birmingham,
Edgbaston,
Birmingham
B15 2TT
[redacted]

If I wish to complain about any aspect of my participation in this research project, I can contact Dr. Peter Kerr, Senior Lecturer, [redacted]

I assign the copyright for my contribution to Jane Foody for use in education, research and publication.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

DATA SOURCES

British Social Attitudes (BSA) British Social Attitudes Information System

Note: Data for Britain as a whole. Weighting (WTFactor) turned on to obtain estimates. From http://www.britsocat.com.

Citizenship Survey. Communities and Local Government. Race, Cohesion and Faith Research Unit and National Centre for Social Research, ***Citizenship Survey, 2007*** [computer file]. 6th Edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], October 2008. SN: 5739.

ESS Round 4: European Social Survey Round 4 Data (2008). Data file edition 4.0. Norwegian Social Science Data Services, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data.

Note: I used the Design weight (DWEIGHT) to obtain estimates. Data were accessed using the Online Data Analysis facility, which allows recoding of variables (e.g. for age groups) and selections (e.g. data for England). This is available at: http://nesstar.ess.nsd.uib.no/webview/.

Moyser, G. N., and Parry, G., *Political Participation in Britain, 1984-1985; National and Community Studies* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], October 1989. SN:2659.

Note: I used weighted data ("scaled respondent selection weight" (nv9996) only should be used when analysing data for England": User Guide) to obtain estimates.

Neighbourhood Statistics. Statistical data provided by the ONS at: http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/.

NOMIS. Official labour market statistics provided by the ONS Access at: http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/.

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