

## TIGHTEN STRINGS ON PARTY POLITICAL FUNDING

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New online research by leading Baby-Boomers' website ([wiseowls.co.uk](http://wiseowls.co.uk)) reveals that mature workers (aged 45-65) are more-or-less equally drawn on whether British political parties should receive state funding or not. 47.5% of all those who contributed to the political survey indicated that they felt that parties in the UK should be financed through public funds, similar to the system operated in Germany for example. 52.5% voted against the Wiseowls-proposed idea which posed the question: "Do you agree, in principle, that political parties in the UK should be funded by the public?"

The issue of public funding for political parties was brought into the public spotlight in 1997 when it was revealed that Formula One boss Bernie Ecclestone who represents the powerful UK tobacco industry lobby had donated in excess of £1 million to New Labour's election warchest.

In a bid to counter allegations of 'cash for influence' the Government introduced legislation dictating that all donations in excess of £5,000 must be disclosed. Foreign donations were banned along with limitations being placed on total expenditure permitted for general election campaigns.

Wiseowls online survey followed up the initial question of political funding to gauge whether its readership (one of the most active senior online user groups in the UK) supported wide-reaching changes to the funding of British political parties. While the numbers are almost equally divided on the theoretical issue of party funding a substantial number of voters (69.5%) expressed that they felt that political parties should not be solely funded by the public. Only 30.5% were in favour of the idea. However, the need for accountability of funding channels and limitations on donations was also roundly supported by Wiseowls' online users. A hefty 90% of online survey participants felt that individual donations should be limited. When asked to specify that amount 35% expressed that it should be under £5,000; 17% felt that it should be in the region of £5,000 - £10,000; 39% - representing the largest number of respondents - felt that it should be £10,000 - £50,000 and only 2% felt that it should be in excess of £50,000.

While the UK still runs behind the US in terms of party political funding (it is estimated that the U.S. presidential and congressional elections of 2000 cost in excess of \$6 billion) election costs are mounting and change is thought by many to be well overdue. In the 2001 UK general election New Labour spent £11,140,019 while the Conservatives spent £12,769,029.

Chris Walsh, a spokesman for Wiseowls (the UK's leading 45-65 year-olds' advocacy agency) said: "The time when cash buys political influence is over: This survey highlights the growing need for genuine democratic reform in the UK rather than glossing over the cracks. The results reinforce the fact that baby-boomers want greater accountability and generally support the need for political change. 45-65 year-olds are the most prolific voter group in the UK - politicians ignore this key sector at their peril".