



# **TRACING BABY BOOMER ATTITUDES THEN AND NOW**

A Comparative Look at the Attitudes of  
Baby Boomers in the 1970s and 2002





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**Data Collected by AARP and Knowledge Networks.  
Data Prepared by AARP and Knowledge Networks.  
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## **Introduction**

In the early to mid-seventies, as the leading edge of the baby boom generation (those born between 1946 and 1952) was coming of age, America was undergoing a period of dynamic change. The Vietnam War had been raging for a number of years, the struggles for civil rights and women's rights were at their peak, and conventional values regarding everything from religion to sex were being questioned as never before. The leading voices in all these debates were young people—the baby boomers insisting that they be heard. And America was listening.

Since then, these same baby boomers have not only come of age, they are now beginning to show their age. Some of them are in their early 50s today, and many boomers have assumed leadership roles throughout society. Many have become parents, themselves, and some are already grandparents. In many ways, their booming voices still dominate public debate in communities and in the media. Some might say that boomers are tenaciously clinging to the mantle of leadership they have worn since the seventies. But, until new voices emerge to replace theirs, boomers are still a force to be heard.

In light of the challenges facing our nation since the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, we have examined attitudes, beliefs and perspectives of leading edge baby boomers to see how they and their perceptions may have changed, or not, over the past 30 years. To do that, we gathered attitudinal surveys conducted in the early to mid 1970s, when these leading edge baby boomers were in their 20s. We then asked the same questions of this same group today, now that they are in their 50s. In some cases, the 30-year time span has meant huge changes in attitudes; in others, it seems as if hardly any time has passed.

The areas we examined included:

- Confidence in American Institutions: Government, Religion, Education and Business
- Perspectives on sex, personal responsibility and ethics; and
- A comparison of the attitudes of baby boomers and their parents' generation of the seventies with the attitudes of those grown-up boomers and their children's generation today—"The Vanishing Generation Gap."

## Summary of Highlights

### Survey Methods

Two modes of data collection were employed for this study. The first mode of data collection was through a review of publicly available data from several 1970s telephone surveys. The second was through a 2002 Internet survey, which replicated the 1970s telephone survey questions from 30 years ago.

Since the 1970s questions were extracted from a variety of surveys, sample sizes vary per question or groups of questions. [A detailed list of survey questions, their origins and respective sample sizes may be provided upon request.] Sample sizes in these surveys range from 611 adults to 3,880 adults. The Internet survey was fielded from June 1, 2002 to July 19, 2002. The survey was completed by a total of 2,246 persons. These individuals represented three separate age groups of individuals: 20-26, 50-56, and 65 and over.

*Here's a snapshot of what we found:*

### Attitudes Toward American Institutions

A cursory comparison of selected American institutions during the early to mid 1970s with those same institutions today reveals some interesting similarities. Presidential misbehavior, global conflict, war, concerns about the status of American education, and questions about organized religion are all issues that were in the headlines both in the 1970s and today.

#### **Today's boomers have increased confidence in the Executive Branch.**

- In the 70s, only 15% of boomers reported a great deal of confidence in the people running the Executive Branch (see Figure #1). In 2002, the percentage of boomers with a great deal of confidence in the Executive Branch has almost doubled (26%).

#### **Baby Boomers still show relatively little confidence in the Legislative Branch.**

- Only 16% of boomers in the 70s and only 13% of boomers now, 30 years later, reported a great deal of confidence in Congress (see Figure #2). The majority of those surveyed in both the 70s and today said they have only some confidence in Congress (63% of boomers then and 62% of boomers now).

#### **Thirty years later few boomers still believe government is telling the truth.**

- In the 70s, only 3% of boomers said they were very confident in what government leaders tell them (see Figure #3). Thirty years later, 6% of boomers now say they are very confident that they can generally depend on what government leaders tell them.

**The Supreme Court continues to be the most trusted government institution.**

- A little over one-third (34%) of boomers in the 70s, versus slightly fewer boomers now (28%), reported a great deal of confidence in the Supreme Court (see Figure #4).

**There has been a sharp decline in corporate trust.**

- Almost twice as many 70s boomers (22%) as 2002 boomers (12%) expressed a great deal of confidence in major companies (see Figure #5). The majority of boomers then (77%) and boomers now (87%) rated their confidence in major companies at only some or hardly any confidence at all.

**Boomer confidence in our education system has drastically fallen.**

- A little over one-third (36%) of 70s boomers had a great deal of confidence in people running the education system. This level of confidence has dropped to 20% among boomers now (2002) (see Figure #9).

**Currently, boomer confidence in religion has taken a big tumble.**

- In the 1970s, 30% of boomers then reported a great deal of confidence in organized religion (see Figure #10). Thirty years later, only 13% of boomers now have this same level of confidence.

## **Attitudes Toward America's Place in the World**

Across the 30-year timeframe, there has been little change in the feeling that the U.S. is losing power around the world. In the early 70s, the U.S. was winding down an intractable conflict in Southeast Asia and perceptions of the U.S. military were largely negative. Boomers then felt that U.S. power was declining and that military power should be reduced. Boomers today are witnessing a global war on terrorism, but the blame for this challenge to U.S. power in the world is not placed upon the military. Unlike 30 years ago, the U.S. military is now held in high esteem, and boomers today feel U.S. military strength should be increased.

**Today's boomers are far more supportive of the military than 30 years ago.**

- In the early 70s, only 41% of boomers felt U.S. military power should be increased (see Figure # 7). In 2002, 66% of boomers feel military power should be increased.

**Boomers overwhelmingly feel America will be at war within the decade.**

- In the 1970s, many boomers (73%) believed that the U.S. would fight another war in the next ten years (see Figure # 8). In 2002, even more boomers (90%) believe that the U.S. will fight another war in the next ten years.

## The Vanishing Generation Gap

In this study, comparisons were made between boomers in the 70s and their parents' generation versus boomers today in 2002 and their children's generation. In several key areas we see a phenomenon that we are calling "The Vanishing Generation Gap." That is, the significant differences of opinion boomers had with their parents in the early to mid 1970s are not so evident today between mature boomers and their children.

### **"Sexual attitudes today are more liberal," say Boomers and Generation X.**

- In the 70s, when the parents of boomers were asked to compare their own sexual attitudes versus those of their children (boomers), 61% of the parents said their children had more liberal attitudes toward sex (see Figure #11). Ninety percent of boomers said they had more liberal attitudes toward sex than their parents. This gap has narrowed in comparisons of boomers now, in 2002, with their children's generation. Both 2002 boomers (86%) and their children (86%) agree that young people today have more liberal attitudes toward sex.

### **Boomers now and their children agree that personal responsibility among young people is diminishing.**

- When the parents of boomers in the 70s were asked to compare their sense of personal responsibility to that of their children (boomers), 86% said their children had less of a sense of personal responsibility (see Figure #13). But, half (51%) of boomers today disagree that they have less of a sense of personal responsibility compared to other generations. Again, the gap is narrowed in comparisons of boomers now versus their children. Over seven in ten of both boomers now and their children agree that young people have less of a sense of personal responsibility compared to other generations.

### **Boomers and Generation X believe young people have less respect for parents.**

- When the parents of boomers in the 70s were asked to assess the respect young people accorded their parents, almost seven in ten (69%) agreed that young people had less respect for their parents (see Figure#14). Over half (54%) of boomers also agreed that they had less respect for their parents. Respect for parents is also an area where boomers now agree with their children. Seventy-seven percent of boomers in 2002 and their children agree that young people have less respect for their parents today.

### **Younger generation isn't very trustworthy.**

- The parents of boomers in the 70s were split when asked to assess their children's honesty, with slightly over four in ten disagreeing (43%), and slightly more agreeing (44%) that, compared to the earlier generation, young people had less concern about being honest (see Figure #16). Again, the generation gap of the 70s is evident in that over half (59%) of boomers disagreed that they, themselves, were less concerned about being honest. In 2002, seven in ten of both boomers and their children agree that compared to the earlier generations, young people today have less concern with being honest.

**Boomers and their children disagree about who is more knowledgeable about what's going on in the world.**

- In 2002, boomers and their children's generation disagree more compared to boomers and their parents in the 70s. Back then, when the parents of boomers were asked to assess their children's knowledge about world events, almost nine in ten agreed that young people of that day had more knowledge about things happening in the world (see Figure #15). Looking back, there was no generation gap since 91% of boomers themselves also agreed with this statement. Boomers today are distinct from their children on this issue. A little over half (55%) of boomers in 2002 disagree that their children are more knowledgeable about world events, while 63% of their children agree that their parents (boomers) are more knowledgeable about things happening in the world.

## Findings

### Confidence in the Executive Branch

In the 70s, only 15 percent of boomers reported a great deal of confidence in the people running the Executive Branch of the federal government (see Figure #1). This is not surprising given the Watergate scandals and the resignations of both Vice President Spiro Agnew and President Richard Nixon. In 2002, the percentage of boomers with a great deal of confidence in the Executive Branch has almost doubled (26%).

**Figure #1**  
**Confidence in the Executive Branch**

*Question: Would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in people running these institutions: [Executive Branch]?*

	1970s	2002
	Boomers Then	Boomers Now
Hardly any confidence at all	36%	21%
Only some confidence	47%	54%
A great deal of confidence	15%	26%
Don't know	1%	--

*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Don't know."*

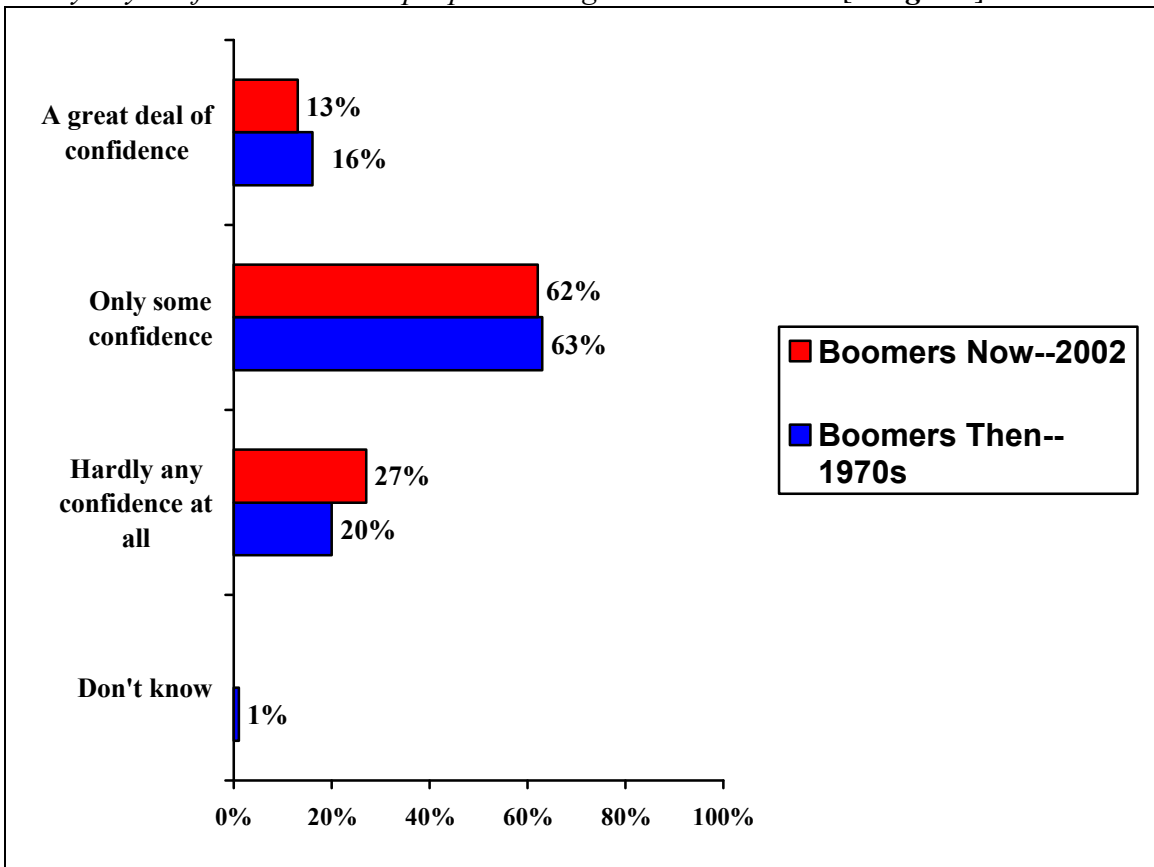
*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

## Confidence in Congress

Over the past 30 years, there has been little change in the lack of confidence in Congress. Only 16% of boomers in the 70s and only 13% of boomers now 30 years later reported a great deal of confidence in Congress. The majority of those surveyed in both the 70s and today, said they had only some confidence in Congress (63% of boomers then and 62% of boomers now).

**Figure #2**  
**Confidence in Congress**

*Question: Would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in people running these institutions: [Congress]?*



*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Don't know."*

*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

## Confidence in Government Statements

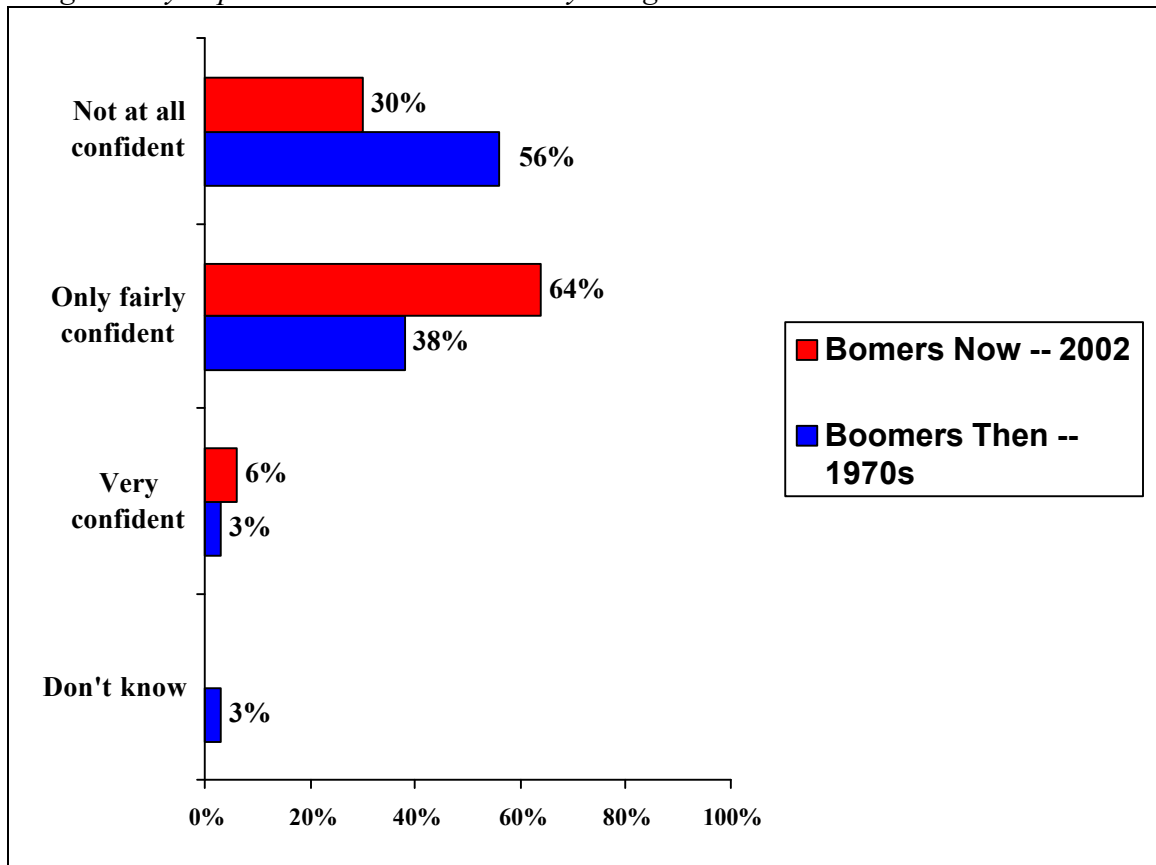
The relatively low level of confidence in Congress may be related to a lack of trust in “government leaders.” In the 70s only 3% of boomers said they were very confident in what “government leaders” told them.

Thirty years later, things have not changed much—only 6% of boomers now say they are very confident that they can generally depend on what government leaders tell them (see Figure #3). About 94% of both boomers in the 70s and in 2002 were either fairly confident, or, not at all confident in what they are told by government leaders.

In 2002, only 2% of boomers consider the ethical and moral practices of government officials excellent, while almost a third (29%) rated the federal government’s ethical and moral practices as good.

**Figure #3**  
**Confidence in the Statements of Government Leaders**

*Question: Do you feel very confident, only fairly confident, or not confident at all that we can generally depend on what we are told by our government leaders?*



*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for “Don’t know.”*

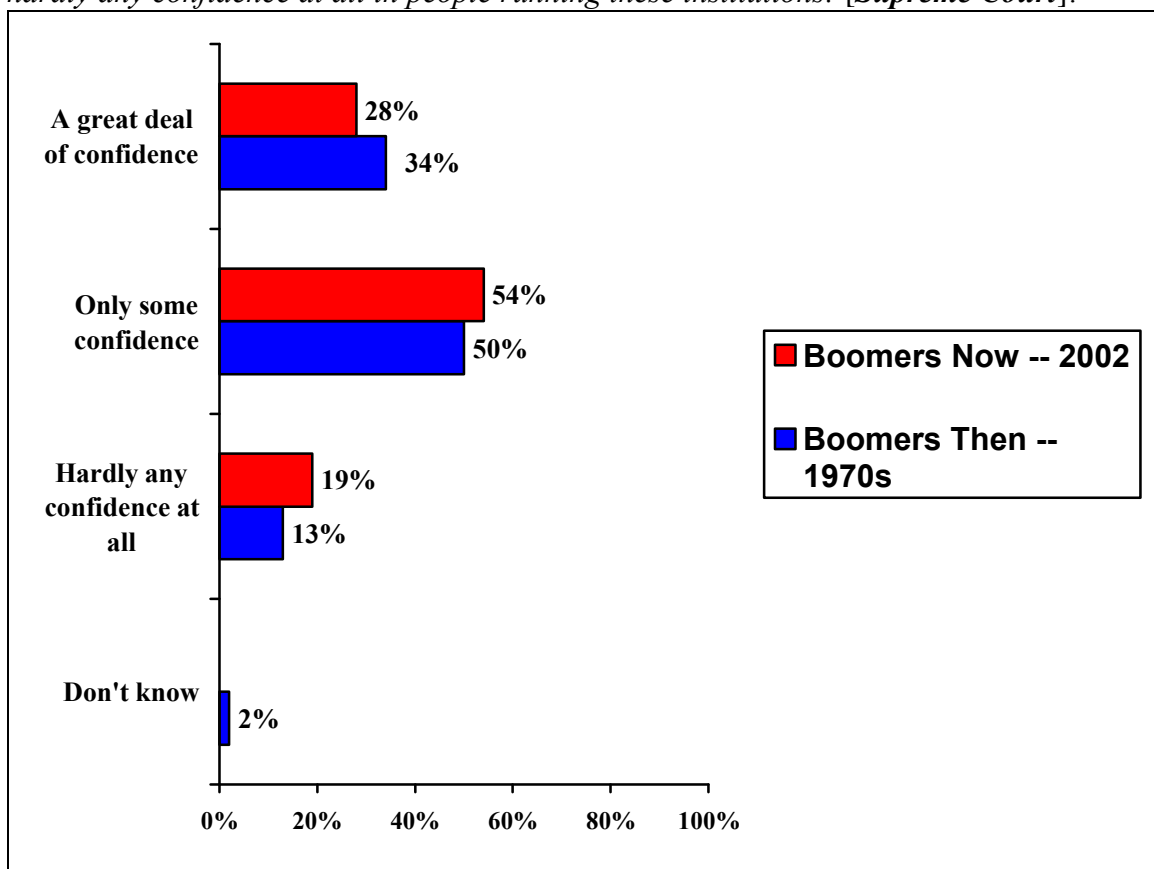
*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

## Confidence in the Supreme Court

Confidence in The Supreme Court hardly changed as boomers matured. A little over one-third (34%) of boomers in the 70s, and slightly fewer boomers today (28%) reported a great deal of confidence in The Supreme Court (see Figure #4). The majority of both boomers then (50%) and boomers now (54%) said they have “only some confidence” in The Supreme Court.

**Figure #4**  
**Confidence in the Supreme Court**

*Question: Would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in people running these institutions: [Supreme Court]?*



*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for “Don’t know.”*

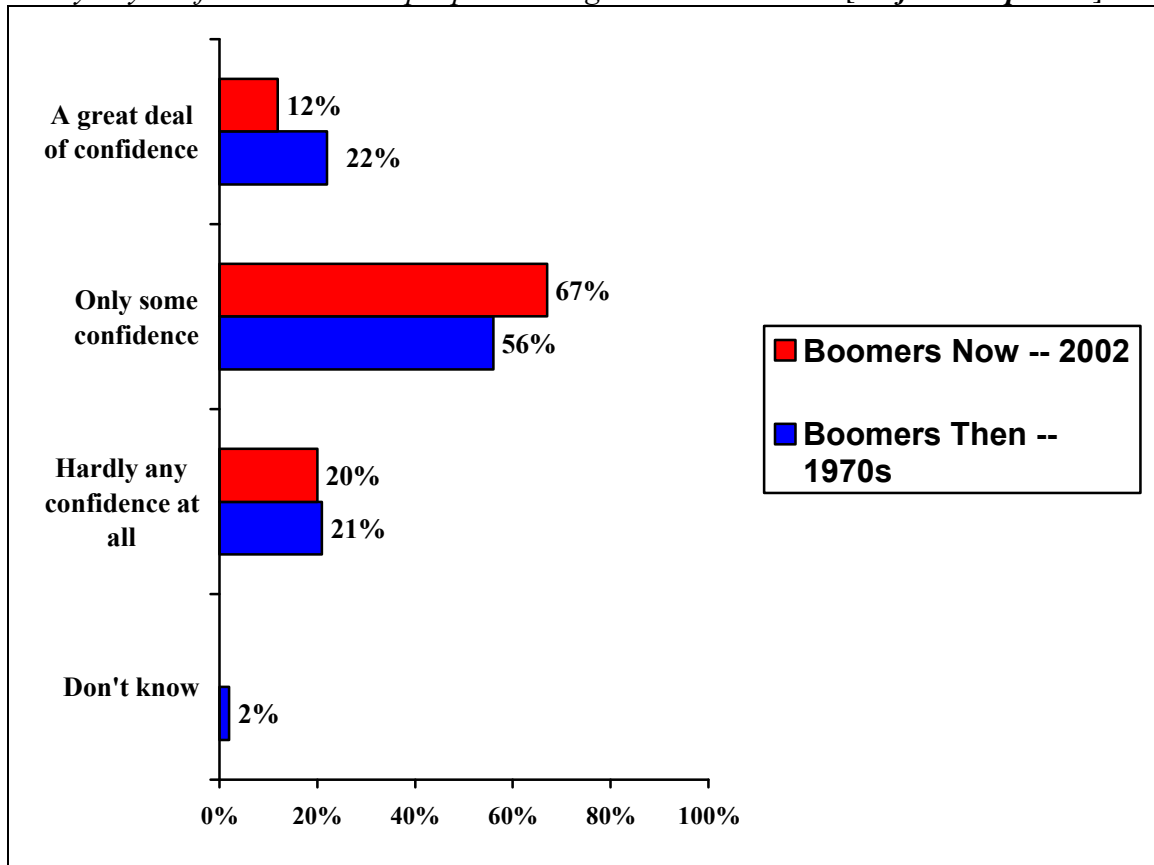
*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

## Confidence in Major Companies

Neither boomers in the 70s, nor in 2002, reported an overwhelming amount of confidence in major companies. Yet, almost twice as many 70s boomers (22%) as 2002 boomers (12%) expressed great confidence in major companies. The majority of boomers then (77%) and boomers now (87%) rated their confidence in major companies at only some, or, hardly any confidence at all. The low current confidence in major companies among boomers now may be explainable given the current wave of improprieties attributed to some business leaders, but these low ratings are not that different from the ratings given by boomers 30 years ago.

**Figure #5**  
**Confidence in Major Companies**

*Question: Would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in people running these institutions: [Major Companies]?*



*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Don't know."*

*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

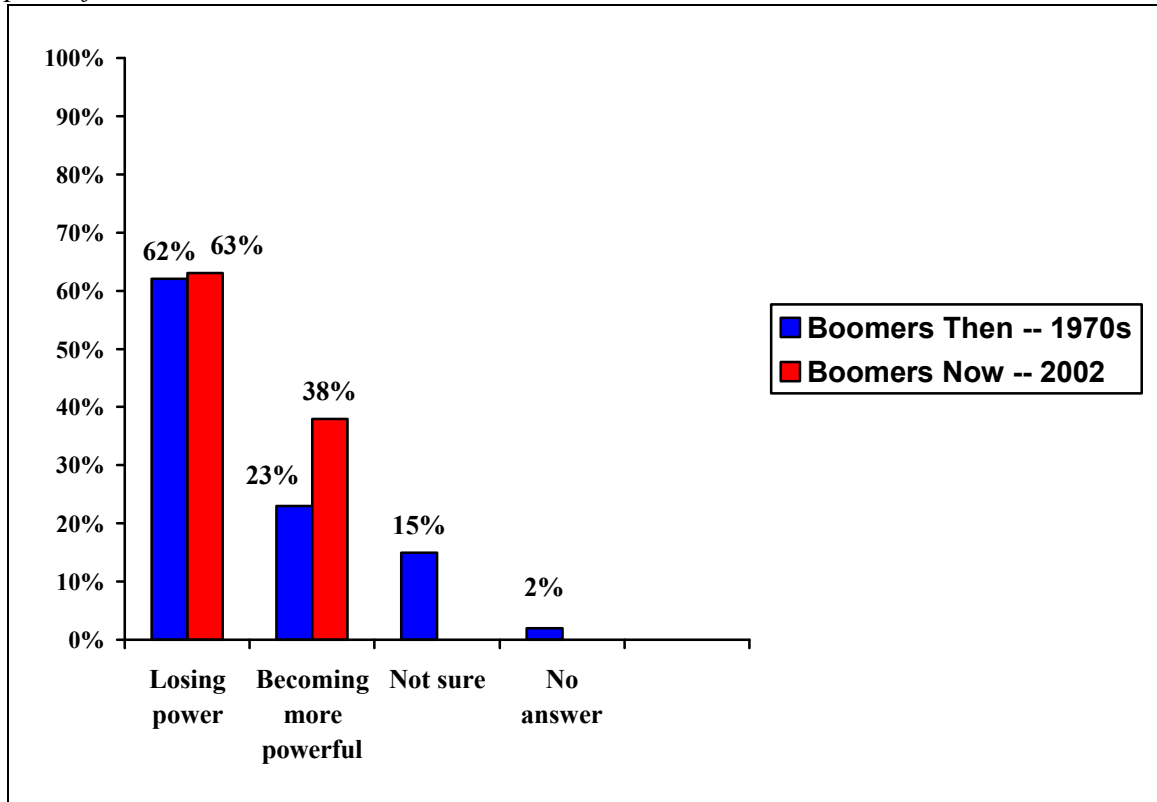
## Perceptions of U.S. Power

There have been many geopolitical transitions on the global stage since the early 70s. The dissolution of the Soviet Union is only one among many notable changes. In the early 1970s, American power had been severely tested by military failures in Southeast Asia, and the attitudes of boomers reflected that. Sixty-two percent of boomers reported that they believed the United States was losing power in the world, and they blamed military actions for this loss of power—only 41% of boomers felt U.S. military power should be increased in the early 1970s.

Thirty years later, boomers still believe the U.S. is losing power in the world, but their sense of the need for a military buildup has greatly changed. Perhaps because of the threat of global terrorism, 66% of boomers now feel military power should be increased. Clearly, over the course of thirty years, concerns that the military is the source of America's declining power has changed into the feeling that the military is a solution to decreasing the presence of terrorism in the world.

**Figure #6**  
**Beliefs About U.S. Power**

*Question: Do you feel that the U.S. is losing power in the world or becoming more powerful?*

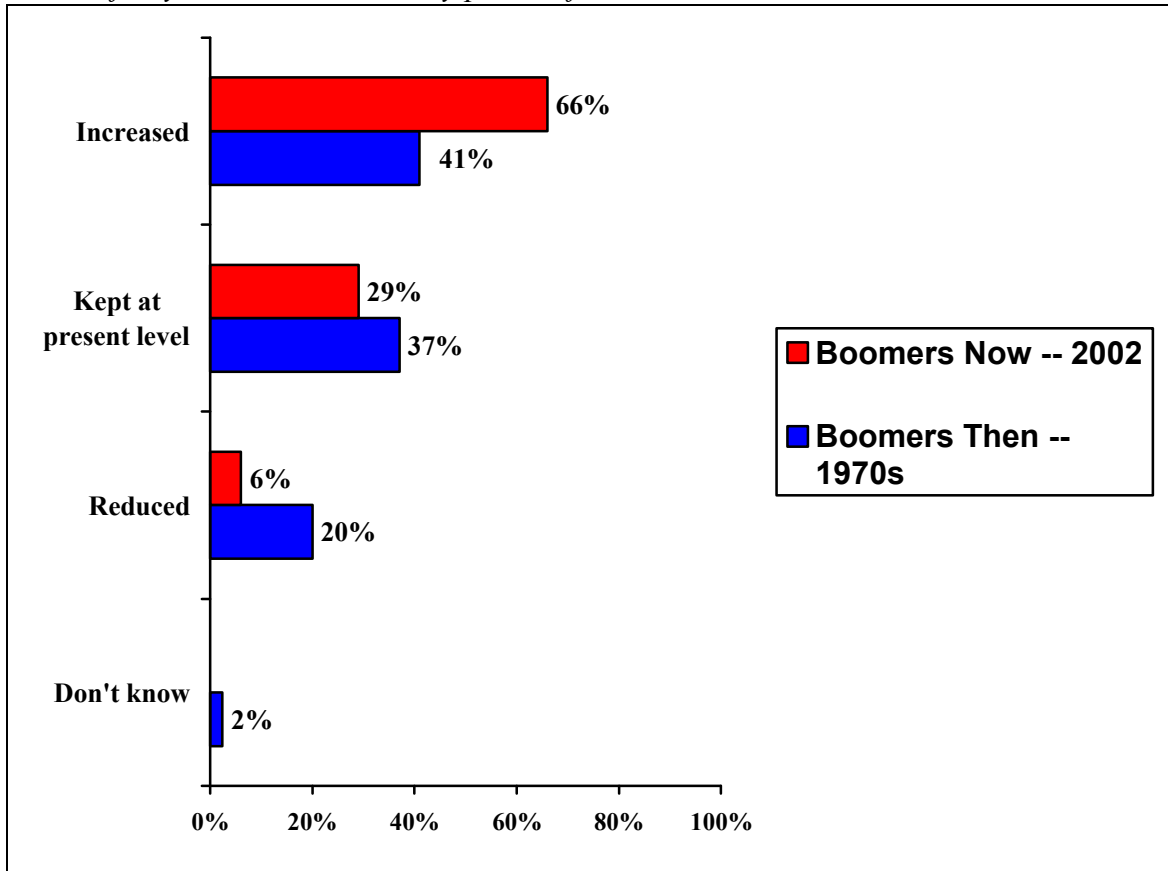


*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Don't know."*

*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

**Figure #7**  
**Beliefs About What should be Done Regarding U.S. Military Power**

*Question: Taking into account the need to protect America's security and interests, but also the high costs of more defense and military forces, do you think on balance that over the next few years the total military power of the United States should be?*



*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Don't know."*

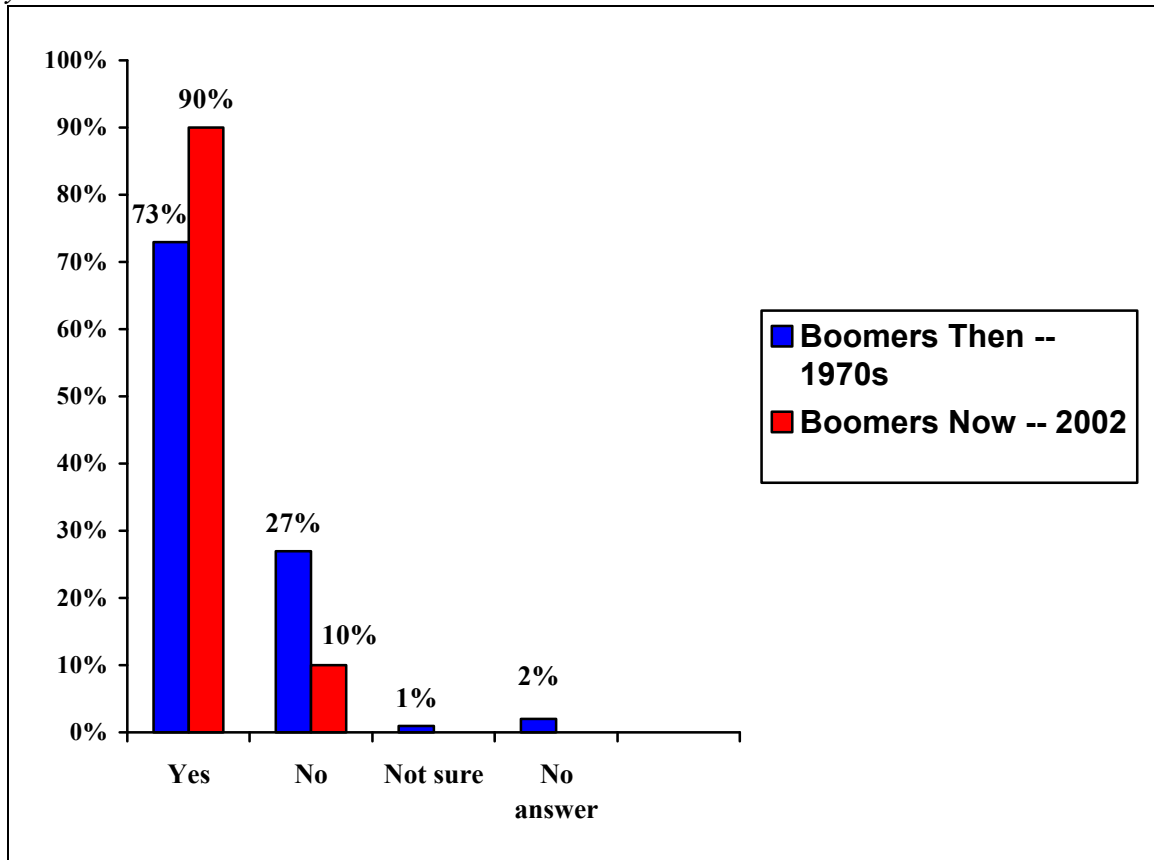
*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

No doubt that the terrorist attacks upon the U.S. on September 11, 2001 are behind the dramatic increase in approval for heightened military strength, regardless of the costs. The terrorist threat is probably also why boomers believe that the U.S. will be at war within the next ten years.

In the 1970s the intractable Vietnam War convinced many boomers (73%) that the U.S. would fight another war in the next ten years. Given the ongoing U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan and other global trouble spots where U.S. troops are involved, it is easy to understand how 90% of boomers now continue to believe there might be another war.

**Figure #8**  
**Predictions of War in the next 10 years**

*Question: Do you expect the United States to fight in another war within the next ten years?*



*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Not sure" or "No answer."*

*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

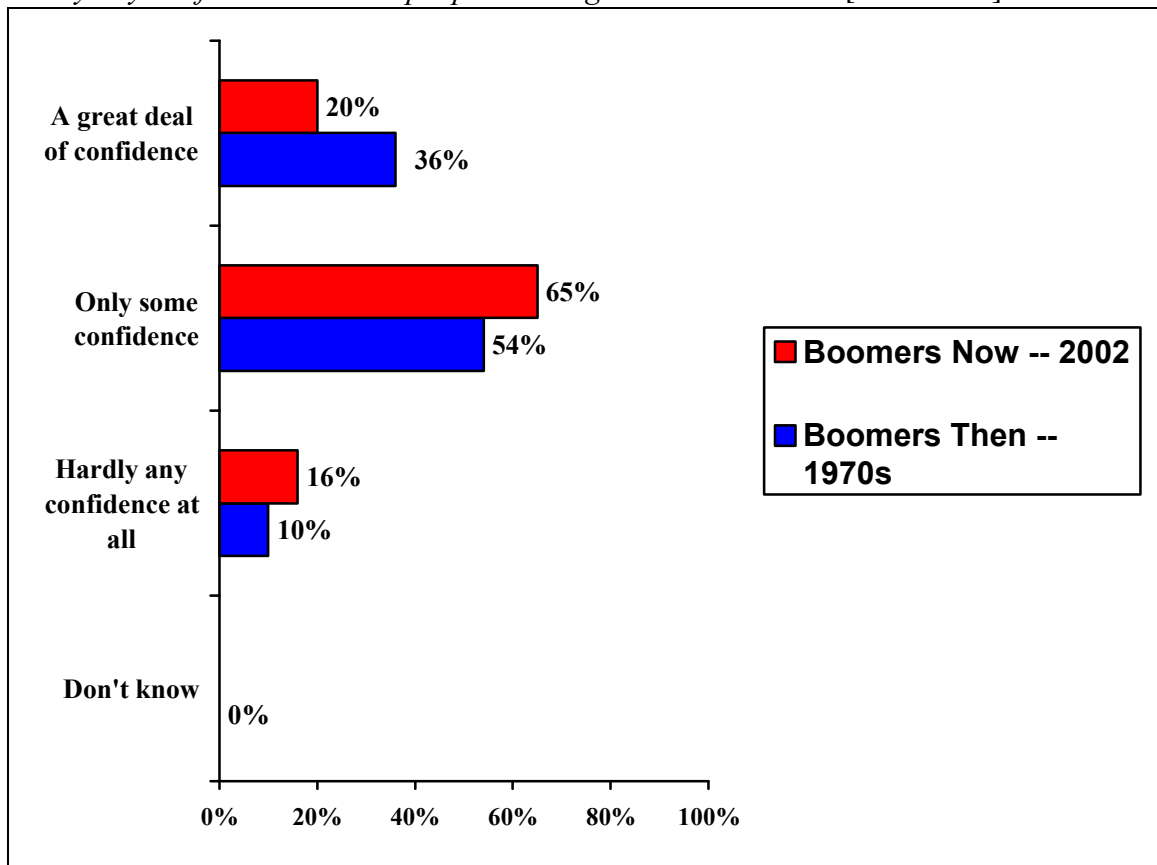
## Confidence in Education

In the early 1970s, many boomers were attending college, or had already earned a college degree. By and large, the baby boomer generation is the most highly educated generation in U.S. history with 89% holding at least a high school diploma.

Many boomers truly value education. Yet, as they aged over the past 30 years, the confidence they felt in the U.S. educational system slipped. A little over one-third (36%) of 70s boomers had a great deal of confidence in people running the education system, but this level of confidence has dropped to 20% among boomers now.

**Figure #9**  
**Confidence in Education**

*Question: Would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in people running these institutions: [Education]?*



*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Don't know."*

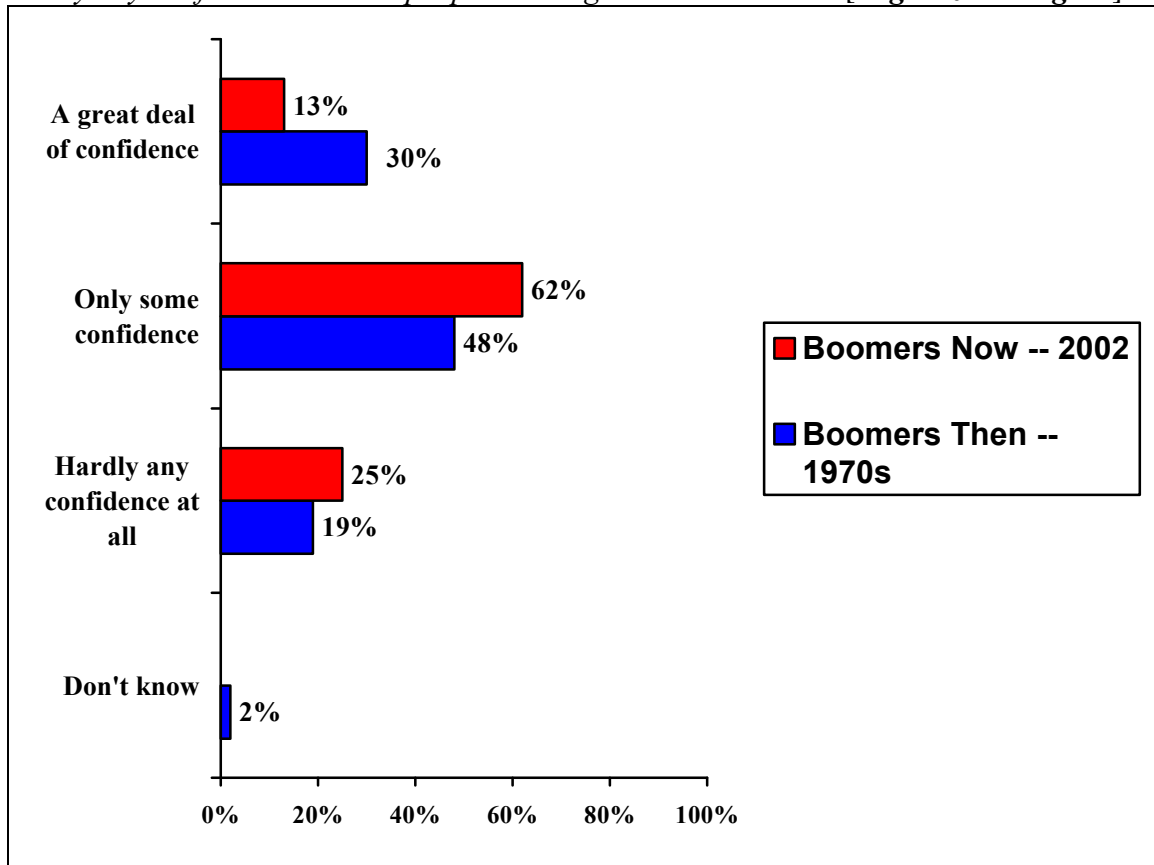
*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

## Confidence in Organized Religion

One thing that certainly has changed between the time boomers tried on Mood Rings to the time some of them applied for AARP membership is boomer confidence in organized religion. In the 1970s, 30% of boomers reported a great deal of confidence in organized religion. Thirty years later, only 13% of boomers now have this same level of confidence. The lack of confidence in organized religion today could be due to recent allegations and admissions of sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church. When boomers in 2002 were asked if the recent findings and acknowledgements by the Roman Catholic Church regarding some priests' sexual abuse of young parishioners affected their opinion of organized religion, 55% answered "yes."

**Figure #10**  
**Confidence in Organized Religion**

*Question: Would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in people running these institutions: [**Organized Religion**]?*



*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Don't know."*

*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

## **Generational Perspectives: The Vanishing Generation Gap**

One of the most often cited phrases of the late 1960s and early 1970s was “Generation Gap.” This difference between the boomers and their parents seemed to sum up the many changes in attitudes, belief and practices of that decade. The questions posed to boomers and their parents in the early 1970s that we have chosen to replicate here indicated a clear generation gap. On issues such as sex, personal responsibility, respect for parents, and knowledge of the world, some real differences do exist between boomers and their parents’ age cohort.

Fast forward 30 years and we find that the generation gap of the 70s has virtually disappeared. In 2002, boomers are not that different from their children on these same issues. Boomers now and their children have very similar opinions about sex, personal responsibility, respect for parents, and knowledge of the world.

Responses to these basic attitudinal questions also reveal some changes across the 30-year time span between boomers in the 70s and 2002. The liberal attitudes that boomers in the 70s had about premarital sex became more conservative as boomers matured. Similarly, boomers now do not share the same confidence in young people as they did when they actually were young people in the 70s. This comparison between boomers with their parents, and 30 years later between boomers and their children, reveals in stark detail the vanishing generation gap.

## Perceptions of Sex

In the 70s, when the parents of boomers were asked to compare the sexual attitudes of themselves to their children (boomers), 86% said their children had more liberal attitudes toward sex. But the self-assessment of boomers then was that 9 in 10 (90%) of them had more liberal attitudes toward sex than their parents.

Similarly, over half (52%) of boomers then felt that premarital sex was not wrong at all, while only 20% of their parents felt premarital sex was not wrong at all, and one-third feel it was always wrong.

This gap has narrowed in comparisons of boomers now, 30 years later, with their children. Both 2002 boomers and their children agree that young people today have more liberal attitudes toward sex. (Figure #11) But the liberal attitudes of boomers now toward sex have not completely carried forward from their youth. In 2002, only 40% of boomers say premarital sex is never wrong and over one-quarter feel it is always wrong (Figure #12). Over half (52%) of boomers' children feel premarital sex is not wrong at all.

**Figure #11**  
**Perceptions of Sex**

*Question: There is a lot of talk today about the way young people think, believe and act, and how different they are from young people twenty or thirty years ago in terms of their values, ethics and morals. Compared with this earlier generation, would you tend to agree or disagree that young people today **have more liberal attitudes toward sexual relationships?***

	1970s		2002	
	Boomers Then	Parents of Boomers Then	Boomers Now	Children of Boomers Now
<b>Disagree</b>	7%	6%	15%	14%
<b>Agree</b>	90%	86%	86%	86%
<b>Don't know</b>	4%	5%	--	--
<b>No answer</b>	--	2%	--	--

*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Don't know."*

*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

**Figure #12  
Premarital Sex**

*Question: If a man and woman have sex relations before marriage, do you think it is?*

	1970s		2002	
	Boomers Then	Parents of Boomers Then	Boomers Now	Children of Boomers Now
<b>Not wrong at all</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>52%</b>
<b>Wrong only sometimes</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Almost always wrong</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>Always wrong</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>--</b>

*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Don't know."*

*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

## Perceptions of Personal Responsibility

When the parents of boomers in the 70s were asked to compare their sense of personal responsibility to that of their children (boomers), 61% said their children had less of a sense of personal responsibility. But half (51%) of boomers disagreed that they had less of a sense of personal responsibility compared to other generations.

Again, the gap has narrowed in comparisons of boomers now with their children. Over seven in ten of both boomers now and their children agree that young people have less of a sense of personal responsibility compared to other generations (see Figure #13).

**Figure #13**  
**Perceptions of Personal Responsibility**

*Question: There is a lot of talk today about the way young people think, believe and act, and how different they are from young people twenty or thirty years ago in terms of their values, ethics and morals. Compared with this earlier generation, would you tend to agree or disagree that young people today **have less of a sense of personal responsibility?***

	1970s		2002	
	Boomers Then	Parents of Boomers Then	Boomers Now	Children of Boomers Now
<b>Disagree</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Agree</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>9%</b>	--	--
<b>No answer</b>	--	<b>1%</b>	--	--

*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Don't know."*

*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

## Respect for Parents

When the parents of boomers in the 70s were asked to assess the respect young people accorded their parents, almost seven in ten (69%) agreed that young people had less respect for their parents. Although boomers then did not completely agree with their parents on this issue, the gap between parents and boomers was smaller in that over half (54%) of boomers also agreed that they had less respect for their parents. One could argue though that agreeing with your parents that you do not accord them enough respect is just another restatement of a generations gap.

Respect for parents is also an area where boomers now agree with their children. Seventy-seven percent of boomers in 2002 and their children agree that young people have less respect for their parents today (see Figure #14).

**Figure #14**  
**Respect for Parents**

*Question: There is a lot of talk today about the way young people think, believe and act, and how different they are from young people twenty or thirty years ago in terms of their values, ethics and morals. Compared with this earlier generation, would you tend to agree or disagree that young people today **have less respect for parents?***

	1970s		2002	
	Boomers Then	Parents of Boomers Then	Boomers Now	Children of Boomers Now
<b>Disagree</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Agree</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>77%</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>5%</b>	--	--
<b>No answer</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	--	--

*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Don't know."*

*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

## Knowledge About Things Happening in the World

In the 70s, when the parents of boomers were asked to assess their children’s knowledge about world events, almost nine in ten agreed that young people then had more knowledge about things happening in the world. Here there is no generation gap on this issue since 91% of boomers themselves also agreed with this statement.

In a reversal of the pattern we noticed thus far, boomers now are distinct from their children on this issue. A little over half (55%) of boomers in 2002 disagree that their children are more knowledgeable about world events, while 63% of their children agree that they are more knowledgeable about things happening in the world (see Figure #15).

**Figure #15**  
**Knowledge About Things Happening in the World**

*Question: There is a lot of talk today about the way young people think, believe and act, and how different they are from young people twenty or thirty years ago in terms of their values, ethics and morals. Compared with this earlier generation, would you tend to agree or disagree that young people today **have more knowledge about things happening in the world?***

	1970s		2002	
	Boomers Then	Parents of Boomers Then	Boomers Now	Children of Boomers Now
<b>Disagree</b>	7%	7%	55%	37%
<b>Agree</b>	91%	88%	45%	63%
<b>Don't know</b>	2%	3%	--	--
<b>No answer</b>	--	1%	--	--

*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for “Don’t know.”*

*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

## Concerns About Being Honest

The parents of boomers in the 70s were split when asked to assess their children's honesty, with slightly over four in ten disagreeing (43%), and slightly more agreeing (44%) that, compared to the earlier generation, young people in the 70s had less concern about being honest. Again the generation gap of the 70s is evident in that over half (59%) of boomers disagreed that they, themselves, were less concerned about being honest.

As in many of these generational comparison questions, boomers and their children tend to agree. In 2002, seven in ten of both boomers and their children agree that compared to the earlier generations young people today have less concern with being honest (see Figure #16).

**Figure #16**  
**Concerns About Being Honest**

*Question: There is a lot of talk today about the way young people think, believe and act, and how different they are from young people twenty or thirty years ago in terms of their values, ethics and morals. Compared with this earlier generation, would you tend to agree or disagree that young people today **have less concern with being honest?***

	1970s		2002	
	Boomers Then	Parents of Boomers Then	Boomers Now	Children of Boomers Now
<b>Disagree</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Agree</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>70%</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>12%</b>	--	--
<b>No answer</b>	--	<b>1%</b>	--	--

*\*\*Note: On the 2002 Internet survey there were no responses for "Don't know."*

*Source: Tracing Baby Boomer Attitudes Then and Now*

## Conclusions

Perhaps the most startling finding from our comparison of boomer attitudes across 30 years is the fact that many very important social indicators have NOT changed. With the exception of greater confidence in the Executive Branch, boomer impressions of government and business were mostly negative in the 1970s and remain so today. And although international circumstances have changed in the past 30 years, boomers still have doubts about the role and power of the U.S. on the global stage.

As boomers continue to be the lead generation in business and government, it remains to be seen if their skepticism about these institutions will result in real changes. As a generation, boomers have been characterized as impatient. If this impatience is combined with a lack of faith in the abilities of government and business to make need changes, then the boomer generation could very well achieve the goals of the social movement it started in the late 60s and early 70s. Stay tuned. There are 76 million boomers out there and almost the same number of the boomers' children waiting their turn to lead.

## Methods

In this study comparisons are made between boomers and their parents in the 70s, and of boomers and their children when they have become the parents in 2002. It is this comparison between boomers and their parents, and 30 years later between boomers and their children, that indicates a vanishing generation gap.

Two modes of data collection were employed for this study. The first mode of data collection was through 1970s telephone surveys. The second was through a 2002 Internet survey.

### 1970s Data

The 1970s data were collected via telephone surveys fielded between 1973 and 1975. A database was constructed which combined the same variables across all three years- 1973, 1974, and 1975. Secondary data analyses were conducted using the combined 1970s data. The analyzed data were then used to compare to data gathered via the 2002 Internet survey. All analyses for this study were conducted by AARP's Knowledge Management-Strategic Issues Research staff.

The 1970s questions were extracted from a variety of surveys whose sample sizes vary per question or groups of questions. [A detailed list of survey questions, their origins and respective sample sizes may be provided upon request.] Sample sizes range from 611 adults national to 3,880 adults national. Therefore, the sampling error ranges from  $\pm 2$  to  $\pm 4$  percentage points at the 95% confidence interval.

For presentation purposes, percentage points are rounded off to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages in a given table column may total slightly higher or lower than 100%. In questions that permit multiple responses, columns may total significantly more than 100%, depending on the number of different responses offered by each respondent. Similarly, when only selected responses are shown, percentages may total less than 100%.

### 2002 Data

AARP commissioned, Knowledge Networks to field an Internet survey designed to replicate questions from the 1970s telephone surveys to see how certain cohorts answer these questions 30 years later<sup>1</sup>. Identical questions were used in both the 1970s database and the 2002 database for comparative analyses. The survey was fielded on June 1, 2002. The survey was completed by a total of 2,246 persons. The survey ended on July 19, 2002. These individuals represented three separate age groups of individuals: 20-26, 50-56, and 65 and over.

<sup>1</sup>Questions included in the composite survey were originally fielded via telephone survey by the following research and polling organizations between 1973-1975: General Social Survey, Opinion Research Corporation, The Roper Organization, Market Opinion Research, Time/Yankelovich, Gallup Poll (AIPO).

## **Knowledge Networks Methodology**

Knowledge Networks has recruited the first online research panel that is designed to be representative of the entire U.S. population. The panel is representative because it is recruited using high quality probability sampling techniques, and is not limited to current Web users or computer owners.

Knowledge Networks selects households using random digit dialing (RDD) and provides selected households with free hardware and Internet access. This allows surveys to be administered using a Web browser and enables the inclusion of multimedia content. Once a person is recruited to the panel, they can be contacted by email (instead of by phone or mail). This permits surveys to be fielded very quickly and economically. In addition, this approach reduces the burden placed on respondents, since email notification is less obtrusive than telephone calls, and most respondents find answering Web questionnaires to be more interesting and engaging than being questioned by a telephone interviewer.

## **Weighting**

Completed interviews were weighted by age within gender, education, and region to match national norms of the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS). The primary purpose of data weights is to reduce the sampling error for characteristics highly correlated with reliable demographic and geographic totals—called population benchmarks.

Although much effort has been made to reduce sampling error and other methodological issues there is bound to be some mode effects given the two different modes of data collection.

## **“Don't Know” Responses**

The Internet survey did not include “Don't know” responses. In an effort to reduce skipped questions and/or non-responses, we opted for this means of forced choice pattern. Although respondents were allowed to skip a question in full, there were no neutral responses.

Typically, telephone surveys do not present “Don't know” as a response, instead a “Don't know” response is volunteered only by the respondent. Since telephone surveys usually do not present “Don't know” as a response, we thought excluding it as a response in the Internet survey would be best for the purposes of replication. Also, the Internet survey does not include “Don't know” responses because unlike written surveys, a “Don't know” response cannot be voluntary if listed on the questionnaire. The data for “Don't know” responses are included for the 70s questions, and may change our comparisons slightly for some questions.

\*\*A more extensive explanation of our methods is available upon request.