

Ballot of the Sexes

The gender gap in political attitudes



Nicholas Stephenson

ONWARD➤



About Onward

Onward's mission is to develop bold and practical ideas to boost economic opportunity, build national resilience, and strengthen communities across all parts of the United Kingdom. Our vision is to address the needs of the whole country: young and old, urban and rural, for all communities across the UK – particularly places that have too often felt neglected or ignored by Westminster.

We believe in an optimistic conservatism that is truly national – one that recognises the value of markets, supported by a streamlined state that is active not absent. We are unapologetic about standing up to vested interests, putting power closer to people, and supporting the hardworking and aspirational.

Thanks

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About this poll

With our partners, JLP, we conducted a poll of 16-40 year olds to understand young people - their concerns, values, and politics.

- Sample: surveyed 5,000 people aged 16-40 across Great Britain.
- Fieldwork was conducted between 26th August 2025 and 8th September 2025.

We also held two online focus groups. The first consisted of those aged 16-28 (Gen Z) who would consider voting Conservative. The second consisted of those aged 29-40 (Millennials) who would consider voting Conservatives. All came from a mix of gender, ethnicity, education, and social grade



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Introduction



Elections from across the Western world have shown a widening gender gap between men and women. America, Germany, and South Korea have all seen political polarisation along gender lines, with young women moving rapidly leftwards and young men drifting right. Pressures like unaffordable housing and the high cost of living are felt by young men and women alike, but young people's political and attitudinal responses to those challenges are increasingly diverging by gender.

Polling and focus groups conducted by JL Partners on behalf of Onward and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation shows that this gender divide is also opening up in the UK, with the split being the most pronounced among Generation Z (those aged 16-28). With a nationally representative sample of 5,000 16-40 year olds, our polling shows that young men are increasingly opting for Reform UK while young women are moving towards the Greens.

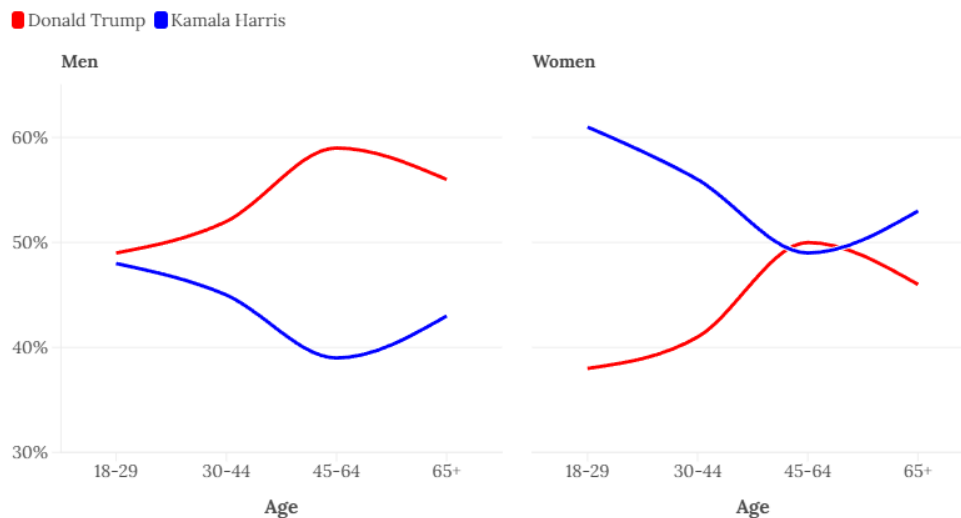
We also find ideological and wellbeing divides: young women report lower life satisfaction and feel stressed more often compared to men. They also overwhelmingly think society treats them worse than men and are less likely to view immigration and crime as major issues.

The International Gender Divide



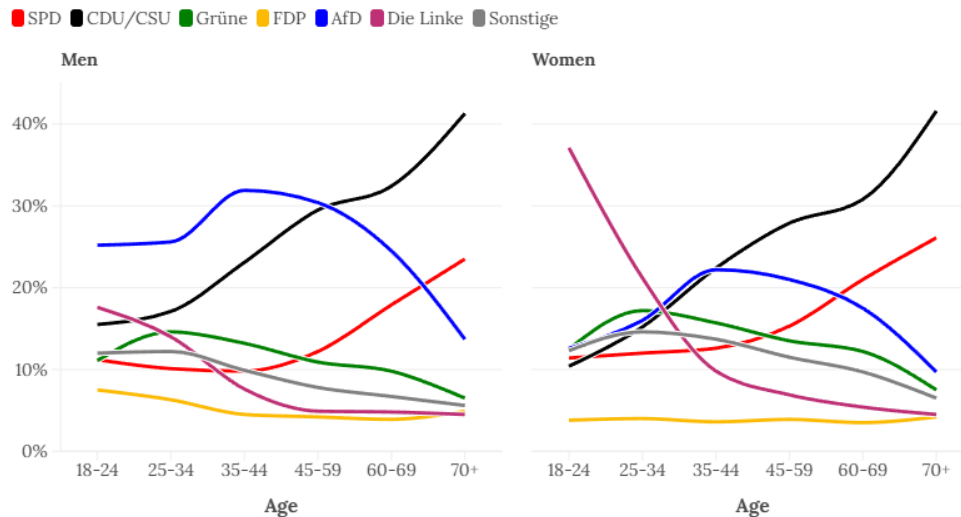
As discussed in the introduction, the widening gender divide is part of a broader global trend occurring throughout Western societies. A key example is offered by the 2024 US election. Trump won the support of 49% of men aged 18-29, but only 38% of women in that age group. Whereas Harris won 61% of women aged 18-29, but only 48% of young men.¹ Elections elsewhere show even wider gender divides opening up.

Figure 1 – 2024 Presidential election vote shares by age and gender²



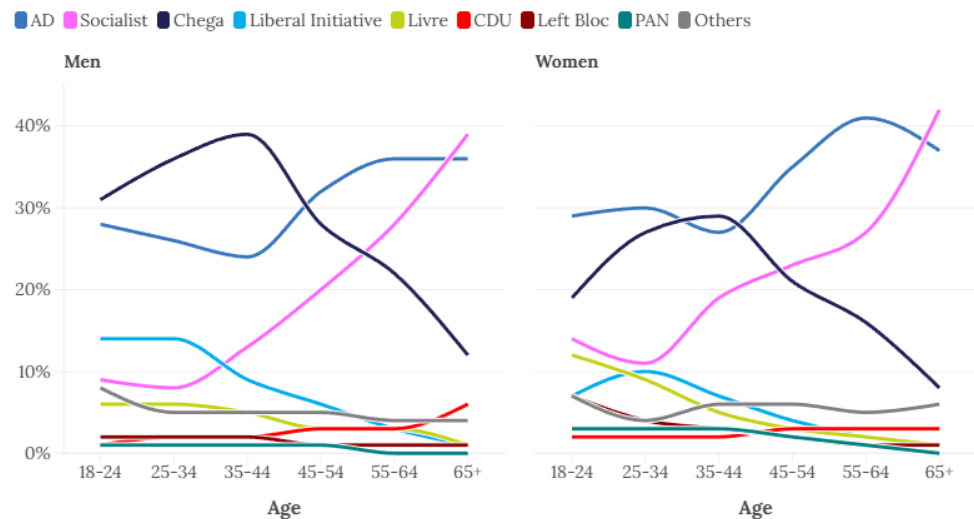
For example, in Germany's 2025 federal election, the far-right AfD secured the largest share of 'zweitstimme'³ among young men, with 25.2% of those aged 18-24 and 25.6% of 25-34 year olds voting for the party.⁴ Meanwhile, left wing Die Linke dominated among women in the same age group, winning 37.1% of those aged 18-24 and 21.2% of 25-34 year olds.⁵ Die Linke's stellar performance among young women was made all the more surprising given that it was polling consistently below the 5% threshold for seats just the month before the elections.⁶

Figure 2 - 2025 German federal election vote share of the second vote (zweitstimme) by age and gender⁷



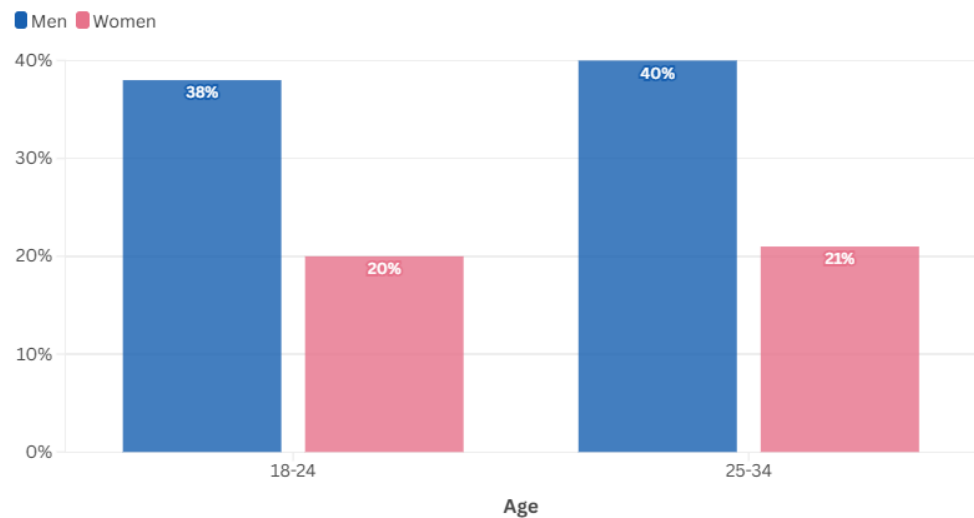
The 2025 Portuguese legislative elections also had a large gender gap, with 31% of men aged 18-24 voting for Chega, the insurgent right-wing populist party, compared to only 19% of women in the same age group.⁸ Women aged 18-24 were more likely to vote for the centre-left socialist party, the left wing/green Livre party, and the far left Left Bloc.

Figure 3 – 2025 Portuguese legislative election vote share by age and gender⁹



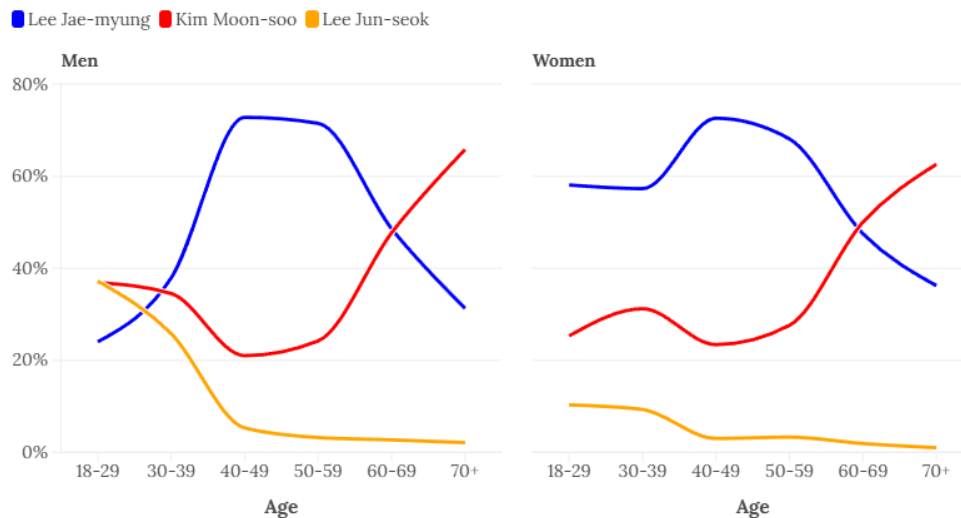
A similar trend also seems to be emerging in Portugal's Iberian neighbour, Spain. Recent analysis of polling microdata by El Pais shows Vox, a right-wing populist party, polling as high as 40% among men aged 18-34 while barely reaching 20% with women of the same age group.¹⁰

Figure 4 – Percentage intending to vote for Vox at the next election by age and gender¹¹



Yet none of these quite compare to the extreme gender polarisation seen in the 2025 South Korean presidential election. Called after the impeachment of the previous president, Yoon Suk-Yeol of the right-wing People Power party, for leading an insurrection and amid a massive fertility crisis the 2025 elections saw a huge divide between men and women.¹² “Anti-feminist” candidate Lee Jun-Seok and right-wing candidate Kim Moon-Soo garnered 37.2% and 36.9% of the vote respectively among men in their 20s, while women in their 20s overwhelmingly voted for left-of-centre Lee Jae-Myung.¹³ As if symbolic of the huge gender rift in Korean politics, Jun-Seok drew controversy after a remark about “sticking chopsticks in women’s genitals” during a TV debate.¹⁴

Figure 5 – 2025 South Korean presidential election vote share by age and gender¹⁵



While the UK may not yet be quite as polarised along gender lines as South Korea, our polling shows a similar divide opening up among young men and women. This deepening rift of the sexes is an international phenomenon, and could be here to stay.

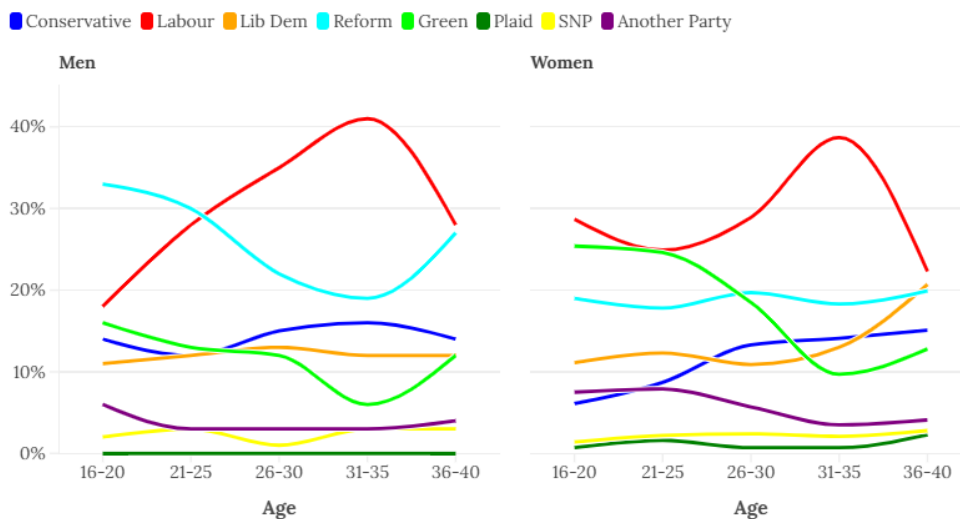
1. The Partisan Divide



1.1) Headline voting intention¹⁶

That younger women are moving leftwards and younger men are moving rightwards emerges clearly from our polling. Among young people intending to vote, Reform UK leads among men aged 16-25 with 31% of the vote, yet they are a distant third with women of the same age group. Generation Z women are instead turning to the Green Party, which polls at 25% with women aged 16-25, second only to Labour.

Figure 6 – Headline voting intention by age and gender



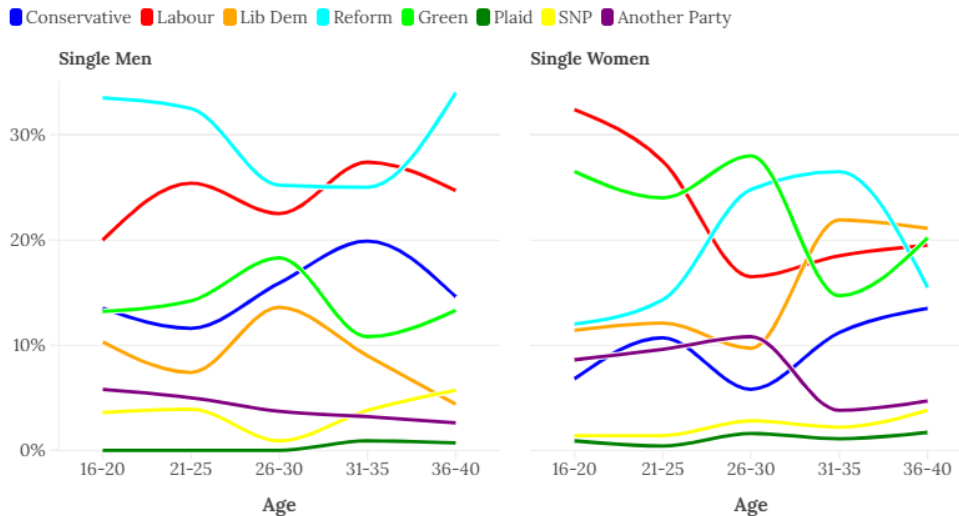
The political gender gap¹⁷ narrows in the 26-35 age group, where men and women vote for parties of the left and right in similar numbers, before widening again among those aged 36-40. In this way the gender gap roughly tracks life satisfaction as those in the prime of their life, aged 26-35, report higher life satisfaction than those aged 16-25 and 36-40. The gender gap is widest in the 16-20 age group where 47% of men intend to vote for either Reform UK or the Conservatives, compared to only 25% of women.

1.2) Voting Intention, Gender, and Relationship Status

The political gender divide is wider between single men and single women. 31% of single men intend to vote Reform UK compared to only 26% among men overall. By comparison, 24% of single women intend to vote Green compared to

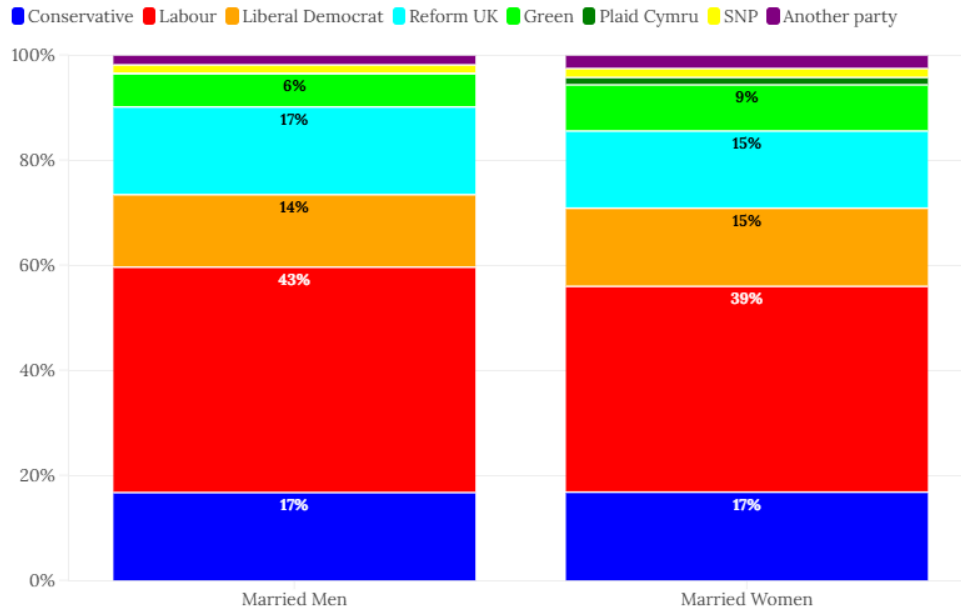
only 18% of women overall. Those who are single are also much less likely to vote for Labour: only 24% of those who are single intend to vote for Labour at the next election.

Figure 7 - Headline voting intention by age, gender, and relationship status



The political gender gap is barely noticeable among those who are married. An identical percentage of married men and married women (63%) intend to vote for either Labour, Lib Dems, or the Greens. Married men and women are also much more likely to vote for Labour — 41% of those who are married intend to vote Labour. While a similar percentage of single women (62%) intend to vote for Labour, Lib Dem, or the Greens only 47% of single men intend to vote for a party on the left.

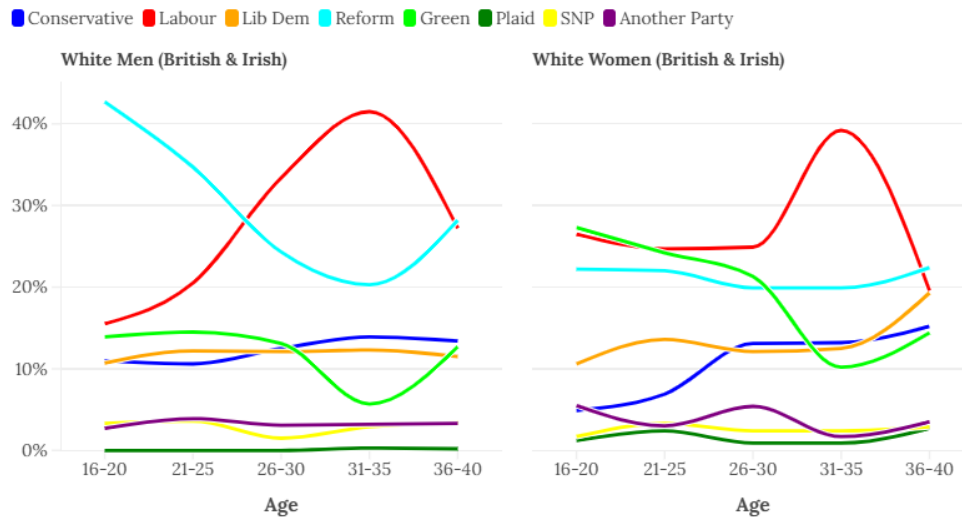
Figure 8 – Headline voting intention: married men and married women



1.3) Voting Intention, Gender, and Ethnicity

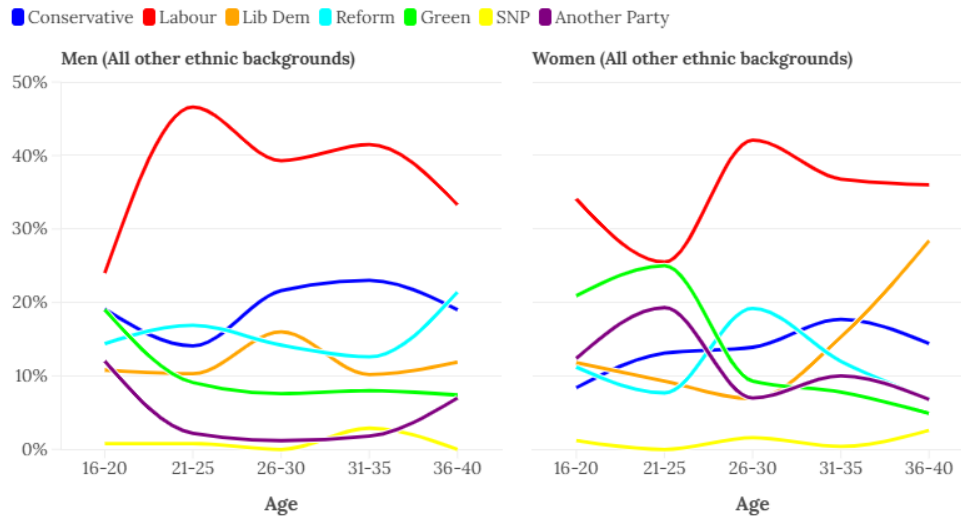
There is particular political and gender polarisation among white British and Irish people compared to those of other ethnicities. While Reform UK lead by 27 points among white British and Irish men aged 16-20, Greens lead with women of the same age and ethnicity. Reform UK and the Greens also outperform among young white British and Irish people compared to those from other ethnic backgrounds, performing particularly well among those aged 16-25.

Figure 9 – Headline voting intention: white British & Irish men and women by age



The gender gap is comparatively narrower on average for those from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly among those aged 16-25. The gap between white British & Irish women aged 16-25 is 40%, but is only 15% among 16-25 year-olds from other ethnic backgrounds. The Conservatives and Labour also perform better among those from minority ethnic backgrounds, while Reform UK and the Greens perform worse.

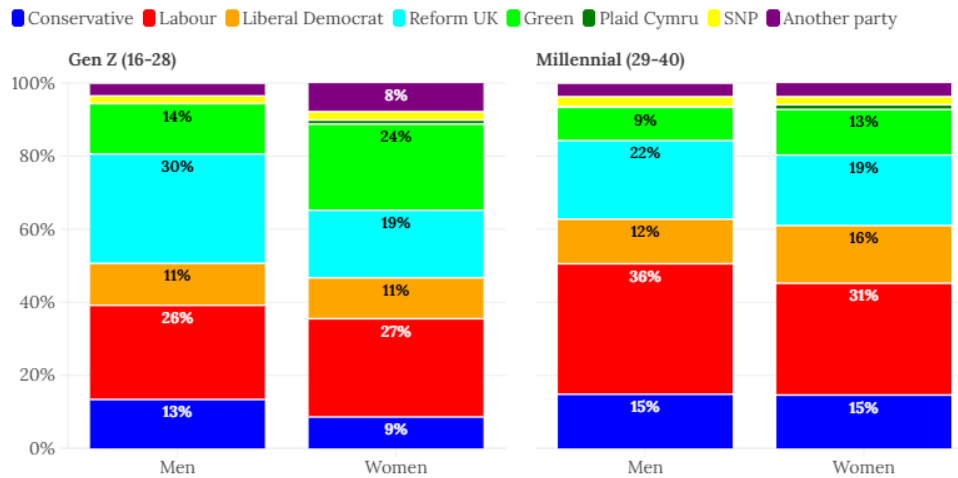
Figure 10 – Headline voting intention: men and women from all other ethnic backgrounds by age



1.4) A tale of two generations?

Generation Z (aged 16-28) and Millennials (aged 29-40) are notably different from one another when it comes to their voting intentions. Millennials are more likely to vote for parties closer to the centre (Labour, Lib Dem, Conservatives) while Generation Z are more likely to opt for radical options (the Greens and Reform UK). The political gender gap is also significantly smaller among Millennials than Generation Z, with Millennial men and women voting for parties of the left and the right in similar numbers. However, a closer examination reveals two smaller age groups that are even more distinct from one another than the classic Generation Z-Millennial distinction: 'Generation Covid' and 'Generation Coalition'

Figure 11 – Headline voting intention: Generation Z and Millennials by gender

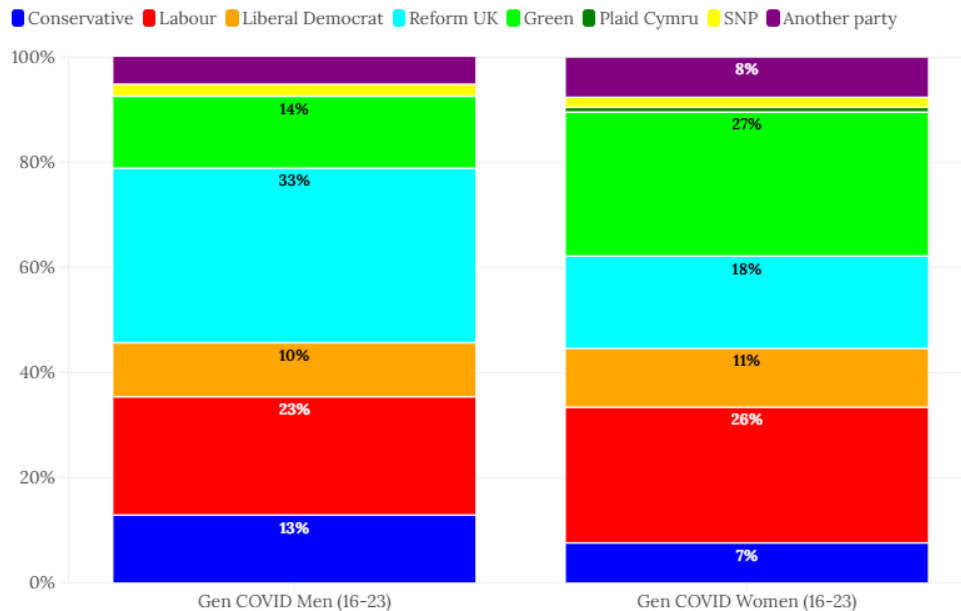


1.4.1) Generation COVID

Those aged under 18 during the COVID pandemic, which we dub ‘Generation COVID’, are particularly polarised by gender. All aged 16-23, Generation COVID are more likely to vote for Reform UK or the Greens: Reform UK hold a 10 point lead with Generation COVID men, while the Greens are in front among Generation COVID women.

They are also more polarised in general, 47% of Generation COVID men and 45% of Generation COVID women intend to vote for either the Greens or for Reform UK compared with just 33% of men and 33% of women aged 24-40. Generation COVID are also the most likely to think that democracy is completely broken.

Figure 12 – Headline voting intention: Generation COVID by gender



To an extent, this mirrors some of the findings of the Yale Youth Poll which showed that American 18-21 year olds were more likely to vote for the Republicans compared to those only a few years older.¹⁸ Our findings may give some weight to the theory that Gen Z were radicalised through spending a lot of time online during COVID, especially as 43% of this age group said they spent “far too much time on social media”.

“I think because our generation, you have social media, you have so much access to news and stuff that you see it every minute. Every minute you open the phone there's something else going on, whereas 30 years ago you'd have to wait for the newspaper and you'd only see it once a day at most.” – Generation Z Focus Group Participant

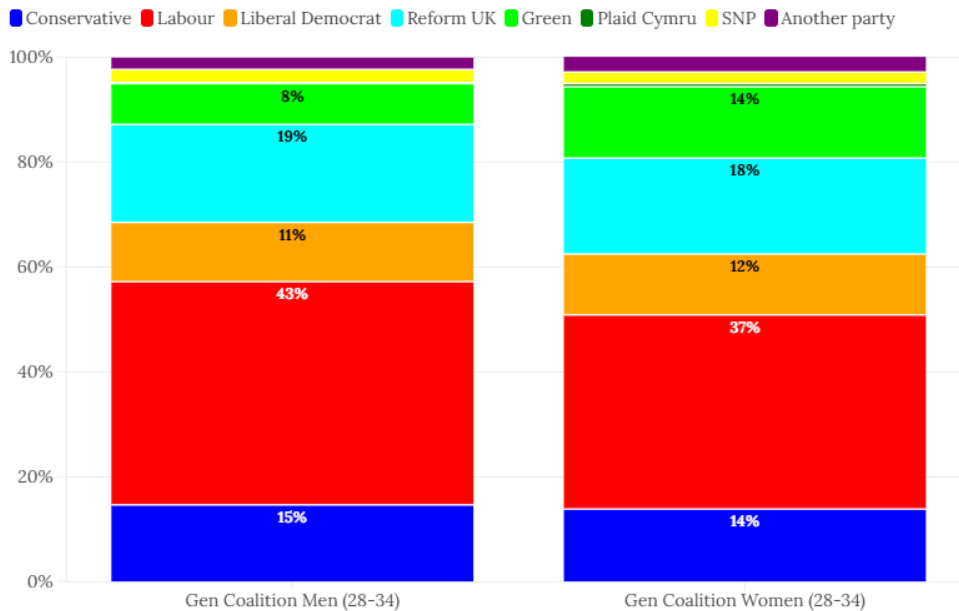
1.4.2) Generation Coalition

Standing in stark contrast to Generation COVID, is Generation Coalition. All aged 28-34, this generation turned 18 just before or during the coalition years. This

generation are very likely to vote Labour and somewhat more likely to vote Conservative. They are generally more satisfied with life and are more positive about the state of democracy in the UK. 46% of Generation Coalition said they were either “doing well”, “progressing”, “thriving” or “flourishing”, compared with only 33% of Generation COVID.

“For me personally I have improved in my career, gone through the ladder, worked hard. And it has really paid off so definitely that’s positive. Fortunately in this crazy world that we live in I have managed to own a property, got married” – Millennial Focus Group Participant

Figure 13 – Headline voting intention: Generation Coalition by gender



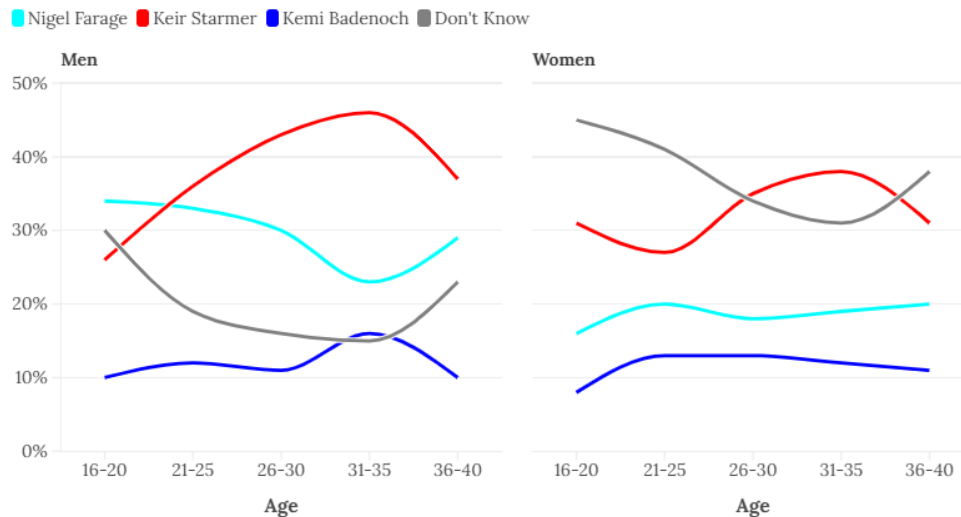
2. Political Leaders and preferences for Prime Minister



Opinion on political leaders also sharply diverges by gender. For example, 40% of men under 40 hold a positive view of Nigel Farage compared to only 24% of women. More than a third of men aged 16-25 think Farage would make the best Prime Minister when pitted against Badenoch and Starmer. Less than 20% of women in the same age range agree.

"I know it's not necessarily the most politically correct thing to say, but personally, for me, I'd say I'm quite proud to be a British person, and I think Nigel Farage, as a leader, most aligns to me, in that sense." - Generation Z Focus Group Participant

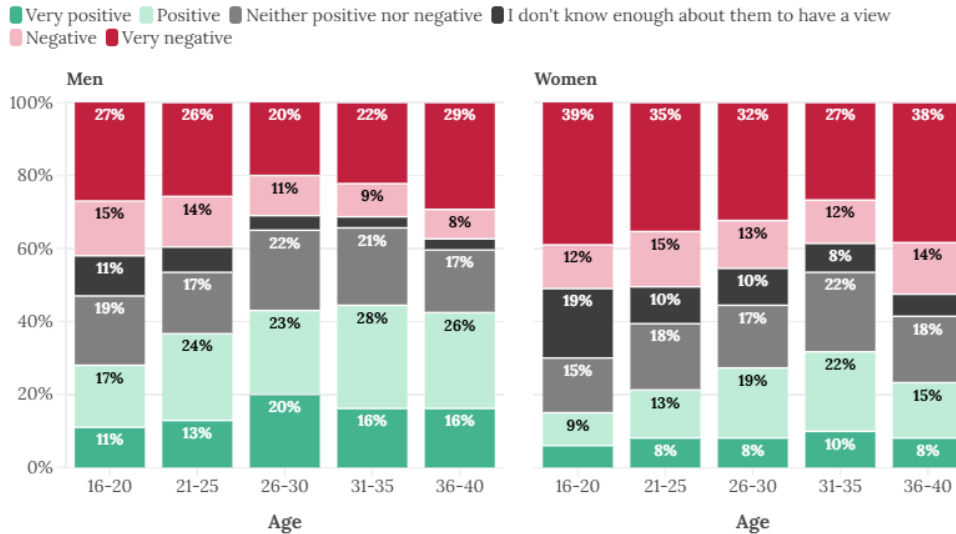
Figure 14 – Of the following choices, who do you think would make the better Prime Minister?



Although Reform's support is concentrated among younger men and the share who say that Farage would make the best Prime Minister declines with age, men aged 26-30 view him more positively than men aged 16-25. 40% of men aged 16-25 have a negative view of Farage compared with only 30% of men aged 26-40. This suggests that there may be a sizable portion of young men who support Reform in spite of their dislike or ambivalence towards Farage.

"I don't think Reform are miles away with some of their policies, but then, I just look at Nigel Farage and I just think, 'He's a serial liar'" - Generation Z Focus Group Participant

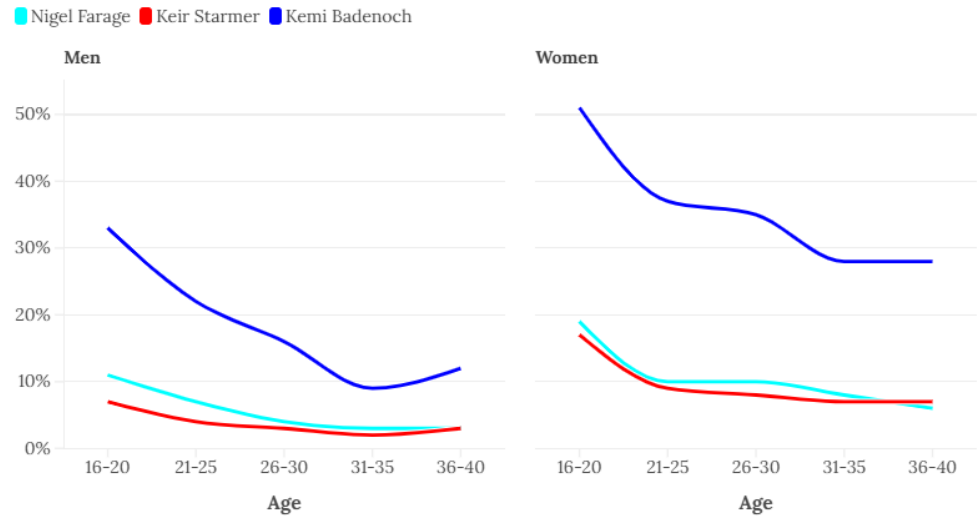
Figure 15 – Nigel Farage’s favourability among men and women by age



Young women are, overall, much more undecided than men on who would make the best Prime Minister. 37% of women said they didn't know who would make the best Prime Minister compared to only 20% of men. This was highest in women aged 16-20 with 45% giving a don't know response. This likely comes down to many simply not knowing enough about the candidates, 17% of women aged 16-20 said that they didn't know enough about Starmer to form an opinion, rising to 19% for Farage and 51% for Badenoch.

"Kemi Badenoch, personally, I don't see her on any social media, any news, which is what you need to be on to win votes" - Generation Z Focus Group Participant

Figure 16 – Percentage that don’t know enough about the candidate to have a view



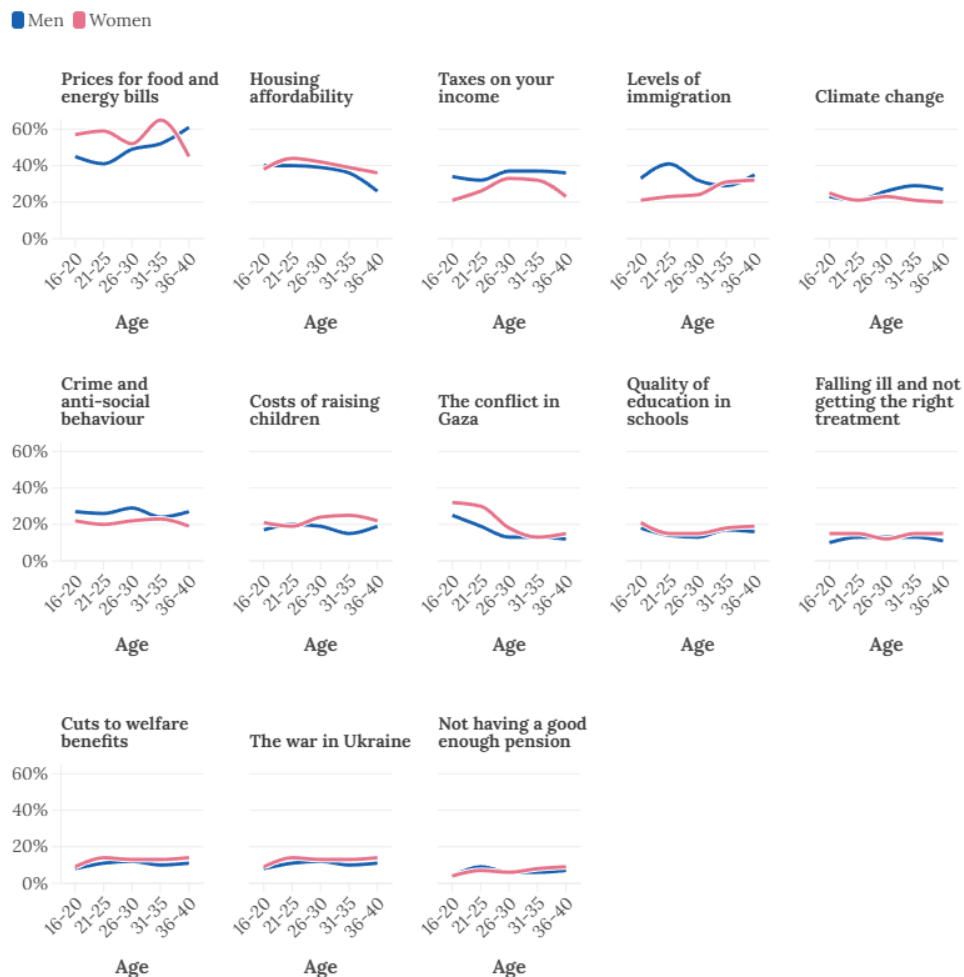
3. The Ideological Divide



3.1) Top 3 concerns

In addition to differences of opinion on which party to vote for, men and women under 40 also differ in their political priorities. When asked to select three issues that most concern them from a given list, women were more likely to pick prices for food and energy bills, housing affordability, and the conflict in Gaza than men. On the other hand, men were more likely to pick taxes on their income, crime & anti-social behaviour, and levels of immigration than women.

Figure 17 – Percentage of men and women selecting x as a top three issue

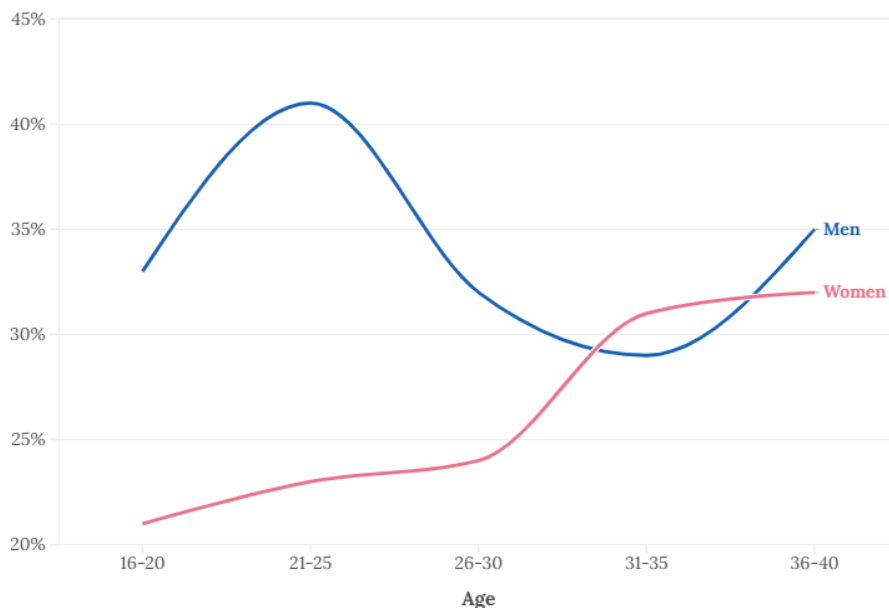


Similarly to voting intention, young people aged 16-25 had the biggest gender

divides on what issues concerned them the most. While only 22% of women aged 16-25 selected “levels of immigration” as a top three concern, this rose to over a third of young men (37%). 41% of young men aged 21-25 picked levels of immigration as a top three concern, tying with prices for food and energy bills for their most commonly selected top three concern.

“I’m an immigrant and I’ve got no issue with what Reform stand for. I don’t view it as racist or anything of that sort. I think it’s putting British people first. What’s wrong with that? ... You know, before I moved to the UK I lived in an Arab country, and if you see how they treat their citizens and how they put them first before everybody else you’d be dismayed at how the UK treats its citizens.” - Millennial Focus Group Participant

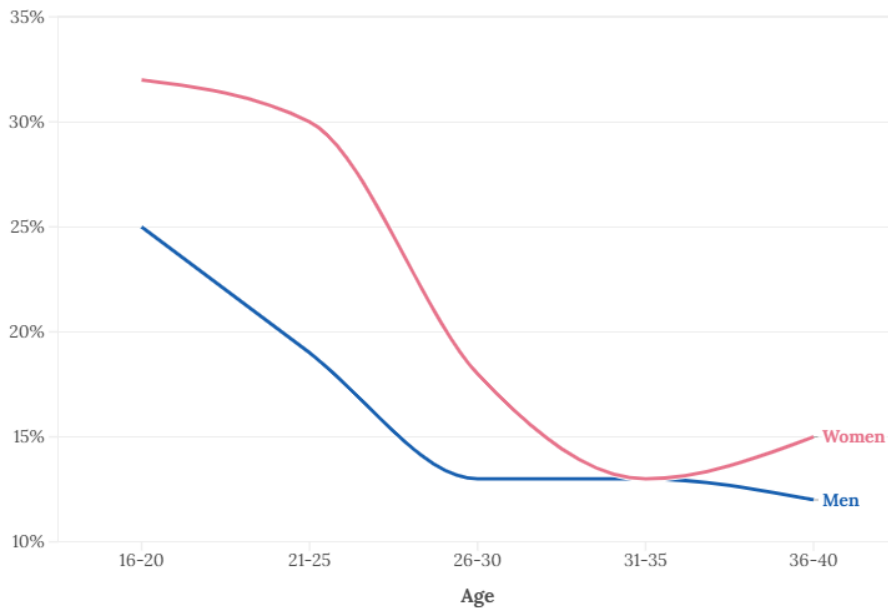
Figure 18 – Percentage selecting levels of immigration as a top three issue



For women aged 16-25, the conflict in Gaza is among their top three concerns, ahead of issues like immigration, climate change, and taxes. 31% of women aged 16-25 selected Gaza as one of the three issues they are most concerned about compared to only 22% of men in the same age bracket.

"I've never met someone that's not English have a bad work ethic, and when they do, it's because they're young and they're children and they're learning, and they are below the age of 18. ... I've never felt afraid of any type of non-white man. I've only been afraid of white men." - Generation Z Focus Group Participant

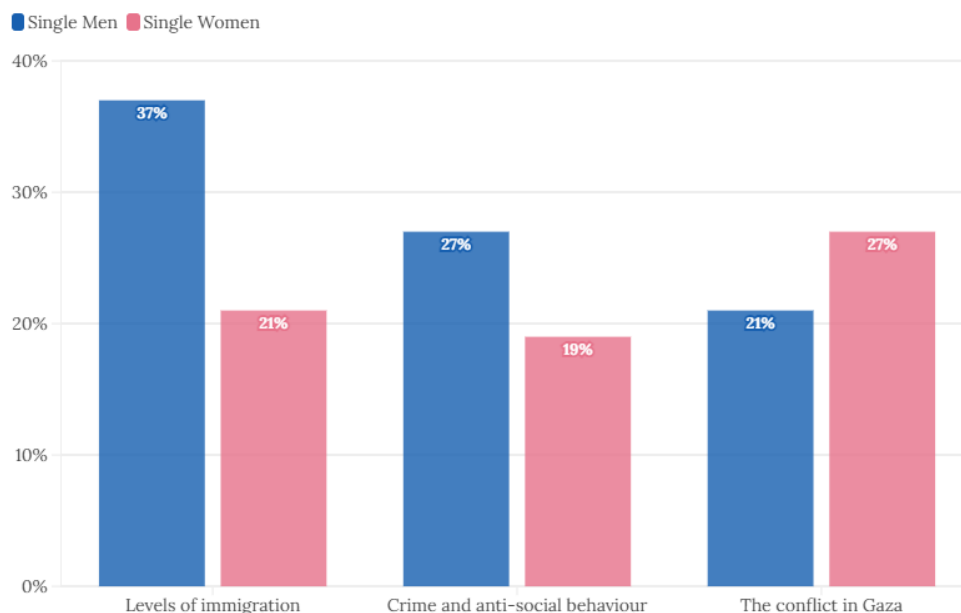
Figure 19 – Percentage selecting the conflict in Gaza as a top three issue



The gender divide in terms of political priorities widens even further amongst those who are single. 37% of single men picked “levels of immigration” as a top three concern compared to only 21% of single women. Only 19% of single women picked crime and anti-social behaviour as a top three concern while 27% of single men did.

"You have people who are charged with an offence plead not guilty, and they don't see the inside of a courtroom for 2 years, because that's how delayed the justice system is. So, I think it pays to commit crime in this country. That's why you see shoplifting is through the roof, things like that. We just don't have the [prison] capacity to deal with it." - Millennial Focus Group Participant

Figure 20 – Percentage of single men and women selecting levels of immigration, crime and anti-social behaviour, and the conflict in Gaza as top three issues

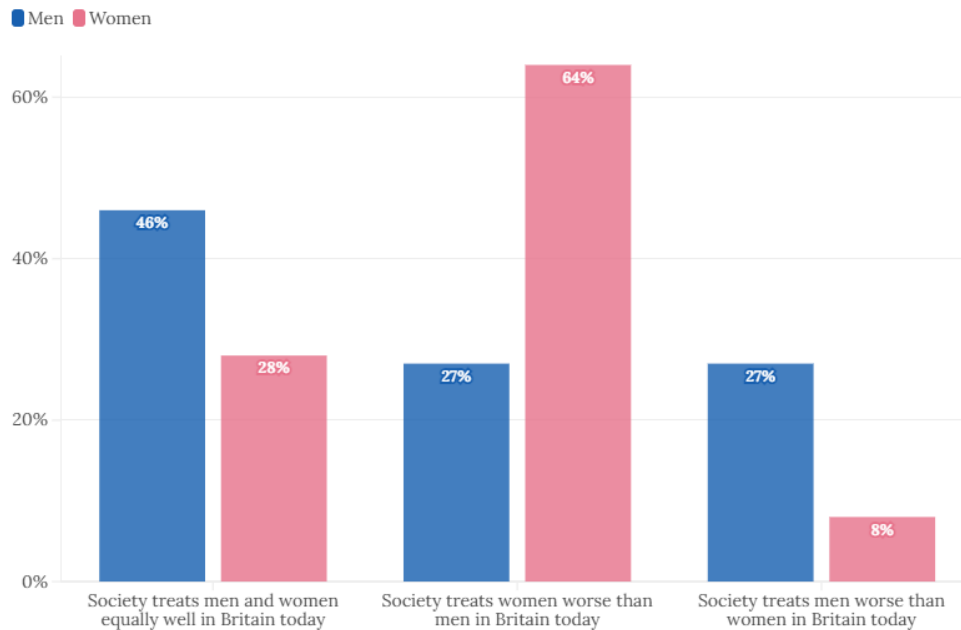


3.2) Gender Equality and Fairness

On the state of gender equality in the UK there are major attitudinal divides between young men and women. 46% of young men agree that “Society treats men and women equally well in Britain today”, while only 28% of women agree. Most women instead believe that “Society treats women worse than men in Britain today” (64%). Only 27% of men agree and more think that society treats men worse than women.

“The reason why Australia is so desirable is because they've got space, they want people to come over, they pay people a living wage. The way that they dealt with COVID, the way that they tax you. Their laws are so honest, and I will say the government is run by women.” – Generation Z Focus Group Participant

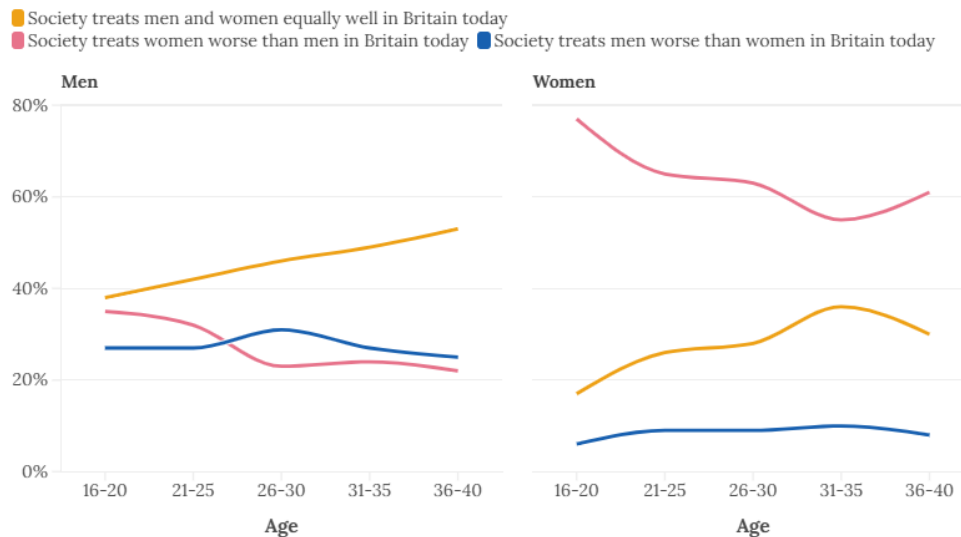
Figure 21 – Views on Gender Equality by Gender



The younger you are, the more likely you are to think society does not treat men and women equally, with only 28% of 16-20 year olds holding that view. This number falls to only 17% among 16-20 year old women, with 77% of the view that society treats women worse than men.

Among men of the same age group, the results are roughly split equally between those who think men are treated worse, women are treated worse, and that both are treated equally. However, younger men are still more likely than older men to say that women are treated worse.

Figure 22 – Views on Gender Equality by Age and Gender

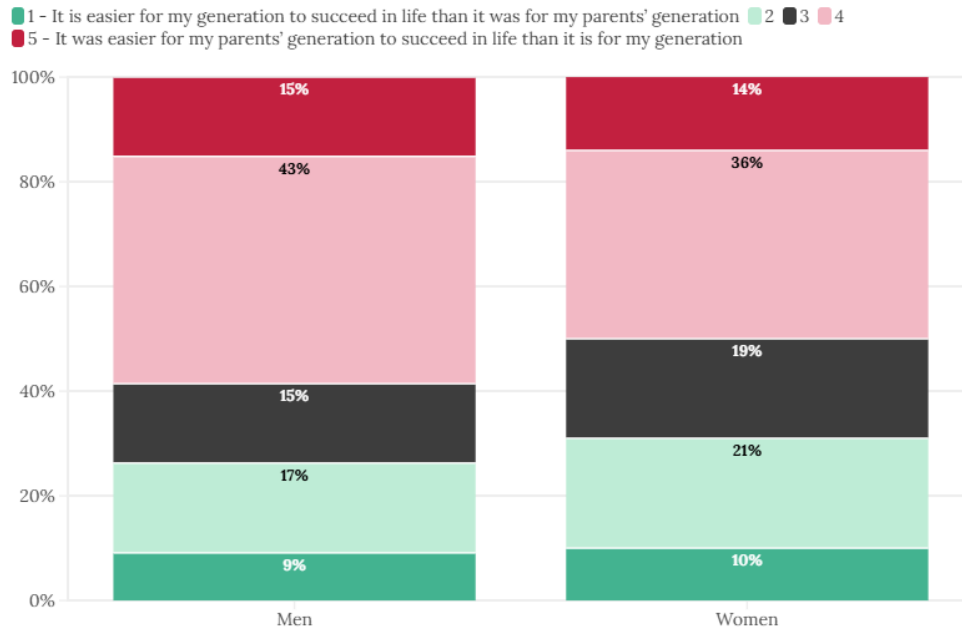


Young men are also more likely than women to think that their parents' generation had it easier than young people do now. Asked whether it was easier for their generation or their parents' generation to succeed in life, a majority of men (58%) think it was easier for their parents' generation to succeed in life, while 26% think it is easier for their generation (net +32%).

In comparison, 50% of women think it was easier for their parents' generation to succeed in life and 31% think it is easier for their generation (net +19%). This may be a result of respondents comparing themselves to their same-gender parent: men may feel it is harder to measure up to their fathers' success than women to do to their mothers', perhaps reflecting women's expanded career opportunities and pathways.

"Even looking back to when I was younger, compared to my parents, how much has changed and I just think, 'What is it going to look like in the next 10 years?' And honestly, I don't know." – Millennials Focus Group Participant

Figure 23 – Opinion on inter-generational unfairness



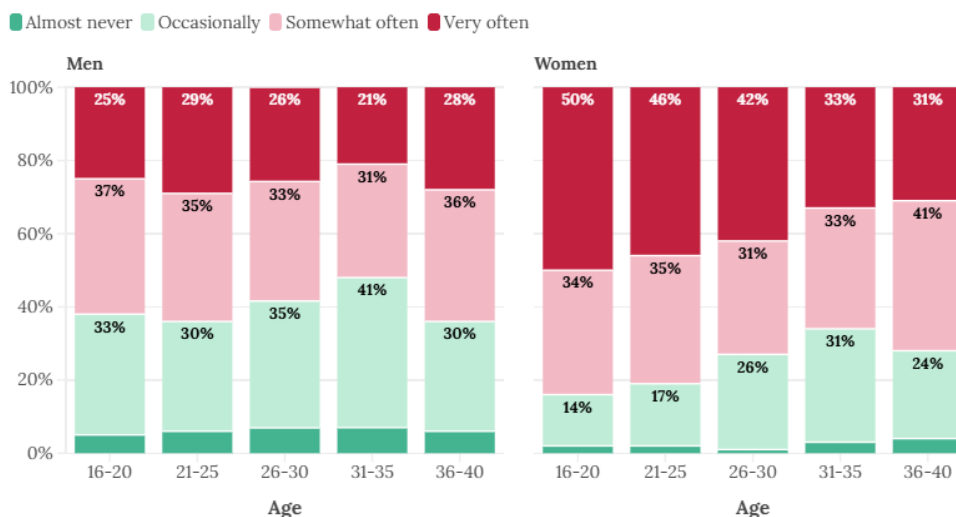
4. The Wellbeing and Social Media Divides



4.1 – The Wellbeing Divide

Women report feeling stressed and lonely more often than men, and are also less satisfied with life. 40% of women said they felt stressed “very often”, compared to only 26% of men. Younger women feel particularly stressed, with 50% of women aged 16-20 reporting they feel stressed “very often”.

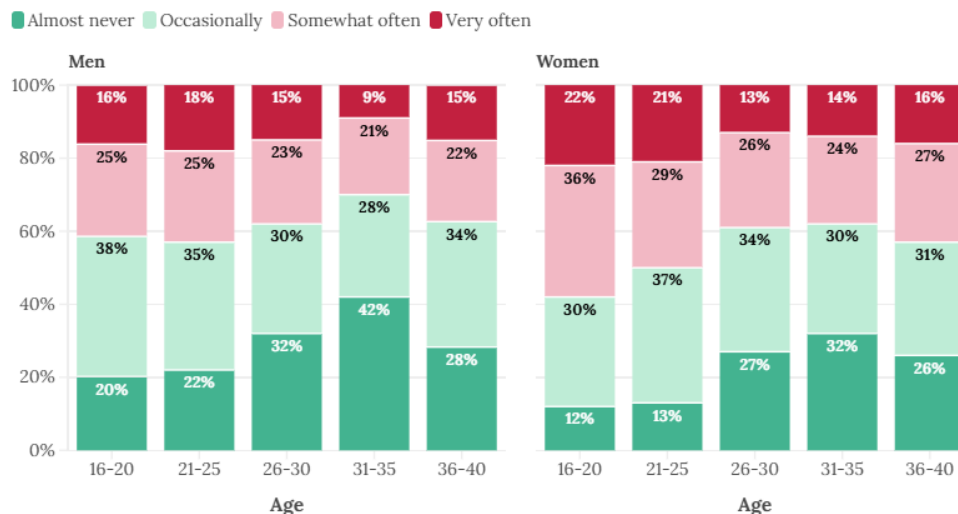
Figure 24 – How frequently respondents report feeling stressed by age and gender



Loneliness is also notably higher among younger women. 53% of women aged 16-25 report feeling lonely very or somewhat often compared to 43% of men aged 16-25. Single women also report feeling lonely more than single men, but the gap narrows slightly. 57% of single women feel lonely very or somewhat often compared to 53% of single men, with the difference at 4% compared to 7% among all men and women.

“I don't have that many friends. I don't go out. I work all the time. I'm tired. I live in the middle of Birmingham, and I never go out. So, I think, for that question, I'll say my close friends are, unfortunately, my co-workers and my neighbour. So, I think I'm a bit of a reclusive young person. I think I should have more friends than I do” – Generation Z Focus Group participant

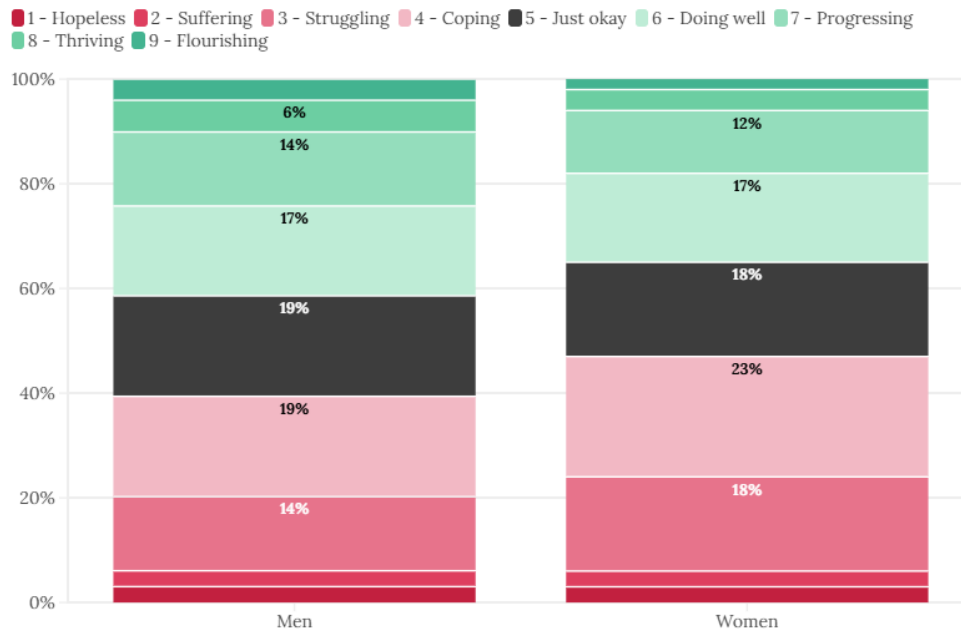
Figure 25 – How frequently respondents report feeling lonely by age and gender



When asked to rate their life satisfaction, 44% of women say they are suffering, struggling or coping while only 36% of men said the same. Meanwhile, 24% of men say they are progressing, thriving, or flourishing compared to 18% of women.

“I think the majority of working maybe, some middle-class people are in this position where they're struggling...I have had promotions in my job and actually financially don't feel much better off. I am not, kind of, where I thought I'd be at this age. – Millennial Focus Group Participant

Figure 26 – How respondents rated their life satisfaction by gender

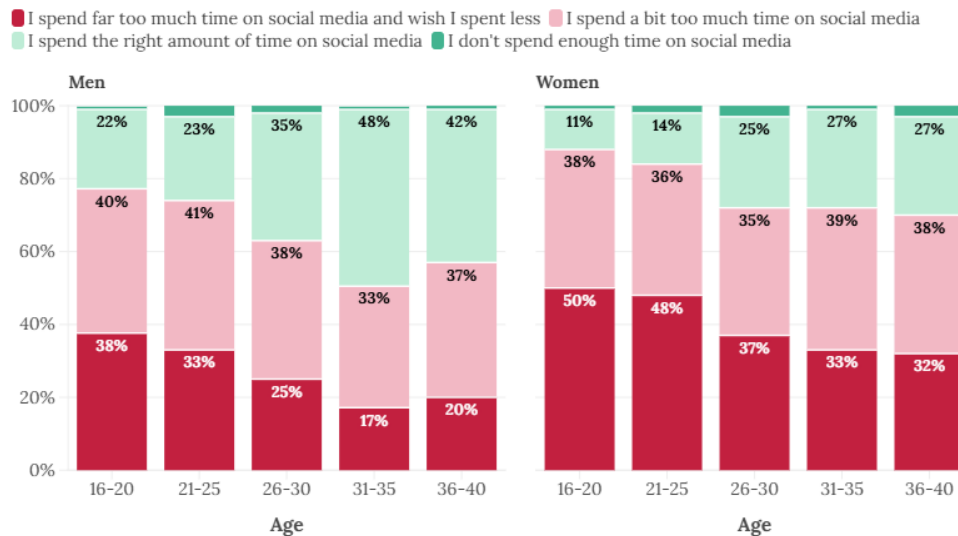


4.2 - The Social Media Divide

Young women are more likely to say that they spend “far too much time on social media” than men. 39% of women said they spent far too much time on social media compared to only 26% of men. This number rises to 49% among women aged 16-25, with 36% of men in the same age group saying the same.

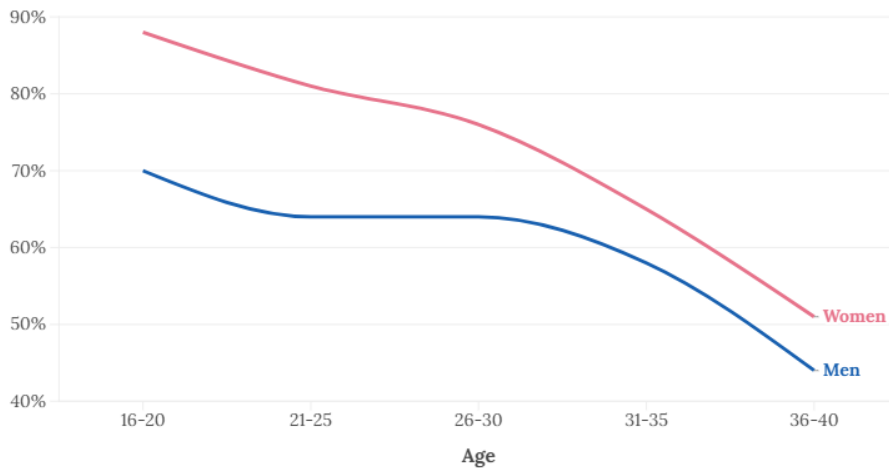
“I find when I am on my phone I am not actually even really looking at anything I am just scrolling for the sake of scrolling. Just because it's out of habit.” . - Millennial Focus Group Participant

Figure 27 – Self-reported time spent on social media by age and gender



While both young men and women say they spend either “far too much” or “a bit too much” time on social media, the specific apps that they use are not necessarily evenly balanced by gender. For example, 71% of women use TikTok regularly but this number falls to 60% of men. And TikTok’s gender gap is also notably wider among the 16-25 age group, where 84% of women use TikTok regularly compared to only 67% of men.

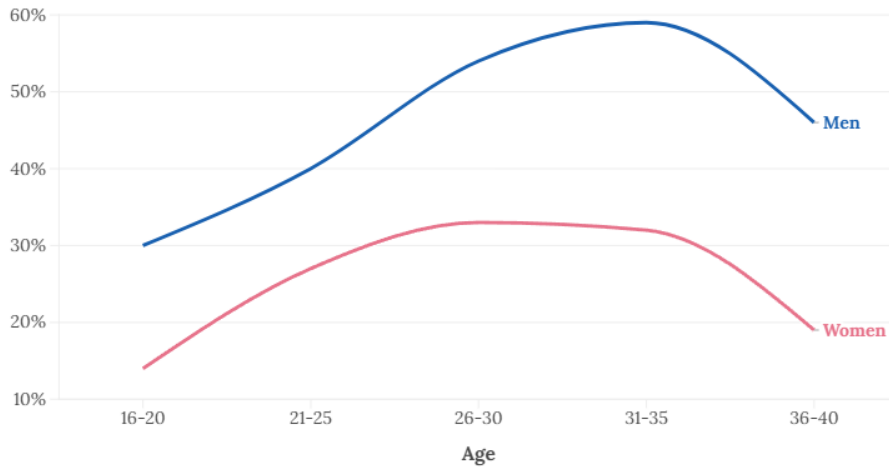
Figure 28 – Percentage using TikTok regularly



The inverse is true for Twitter / X, which 46% of young men use regularly compared with just 26% of women. Twitter / X's gender gap, as well as general usage, increases with age. 56% of men aged 26-35 use Twitter / X regularly compared to only 33% of women in the same age group.

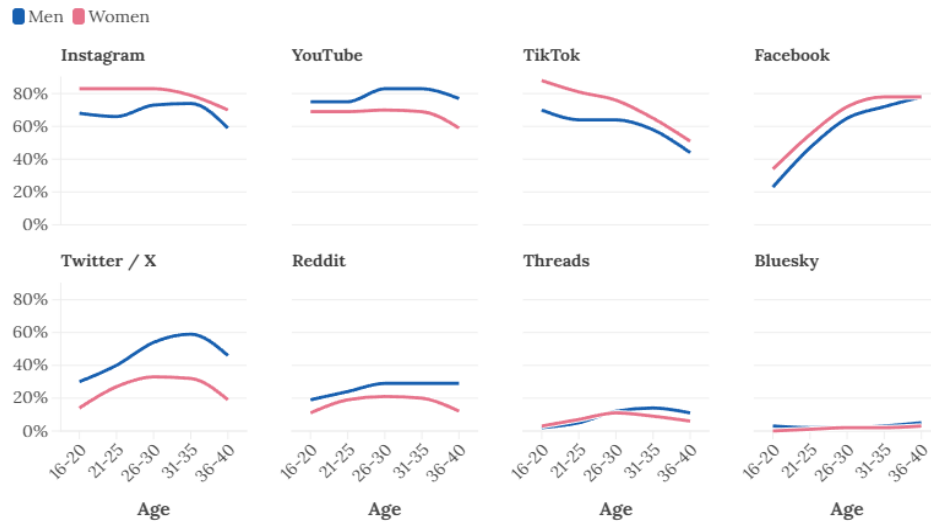
"You see it all over X at the moment...all the protests going on in the world, it's just not nice at all and, yes, you worry for the future and the future generation." – Millennial Focus Group Participant

Figure 29 – Percentage using X / Twitter regularly



Instagram and Facebook are also used more by women than men, although Facebook has a sharp drop off among both men and women aged below 30. Meanwhile, Reddit and YouTube are used more by men, with both having relatively smooth age profiles. Threads and Bluesky still struggle to cut through among men and women of all ages.

Figure 30 – Percentage using social media apps regularly



Conclusion



Like the rest of the Western world, a significant gender divide is emerging in the UK. As Reform builds their lead among Generation Z men, the Greens are increasingly winning over Generation Z women. But while men and women increasingly differ on who has the solutions and what they are, they are united in their call for change. Disillusioned with democracy, dissatisfied with life, and facing falling living standards, Generation Z, and particularly Generation COVID, could represent an existential threat to mainstream political parties if their voting behaviour does not change.

One cause of the gender divide may be that men and women, particularly those in Generation COVID who spent much of their time in the pandemic in digital communities, increasingly inhabit parallel online spaces which reinforce radically different worldviews. At the same time, these are far from being conventional echo chambers; social media algorithms actively promote provocative counter-views, likely further entrenching division through provoking outrage and hardening beliefs, rather than insulating users against opposing ideas.

The antidote to this polarisation may lie in the formula that has made those only a few years older more likely to vote for Labour, the Liberal Democrats, and the Conservatives: prosperity. Those who are wealthier, married, and feel they are doing better in life are more likely to vote for one of the big three mainstream parties. While this might only be a temporary fix, as Reform's vote share only continues to rise after the age of 35, it represents one of the few remaining roads to recovery for Britain's traditional parties.

If Generation Z continues to be let down by the political mainstream and fails to reach key life milestones by the age millennials are now, political parties will have to adapt to a more volatile and gender polarised political environment if they are to survive.

"I would consider voting for Conservatives, like, if I could have another choice tomorrow, but that's based on Labour not doing much, right now. I think there [will] be a rise in new parties and, yes, maybe better, maybe for the best." - Generation Z Focus Group Participant

Endnotes



- ¹ <https://edition.cnn.com/election/2024/exit-polls/national-results/general/president/0>
- ² Ibid
- ³ Germany has an electoral system whereby the voter casts two votes. The first is constituency vote (erststimme), while the second (zweitstimme) is a national vote
- ⁴ https://www.bundeswahlleiterin.de/dam/jcr/63623bc5-20fc-449f-a032-7ecd508f04ad/btw25_heft4.pdf (Übersicht 9)
- ⁵ Ibid
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_2025_German_federal_election
- ⁷ https://www.bundeswahlleiterin.de/dam/jcr/63623bc5-20fc-449f-a032-7ecd508f04ad/btw25_heft4.pdf (Übersicht 9)
- ⁸ <https://www.publico.pt/2025/07/10/politica/noticia/chega-capitalizou-abstencao-so-votassem-mulheres-ps-ficava-segundo-2139793>
- ⁹ Ibid
- ¹⁰ <https://elpais.com/espana/2025-09-14/quienes-son-los-nuevos-votantes-de-vox-datos-por-edad-sexo-y-clase-social.html#?rel=mas>
- ¹¹ Ibid
- ¹² <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/09/27/south-koreas-birth-rate-collapse-threatens-growth.html> & <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd97ez54dlyo>
- ¹³ <https://news.kbs.co.kr/news/pc/view/view.do?ncd=8271638> & <https://www.ft.com/content/76c5981c-2bf0-4ee4-959c-cddaffc05d3a>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/southkorea/politics/20250528/reform-party-candidate-under-fire-for-misogynistic-remark-during-tv-debate>
- ¹⁵ Ibid
- ¹⁶ Headline voting intention only includes those that intend to vote for a party at the next election (those giving an “I would not vote” or “don’t know” response when asked are excluded). Unless explicitly stated otherwise, this is the case for all graphs in section 1.
- ¹⁷ Henceforth in this paper, the political gender gap shall be defined as the gap between those voting for parties on the left (Labour + Lib Dem + Green) and those on the right (Conservative + Reform)
- ¹⁸ <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2025/04/26/two-gen-zs-young-conservative-polling-00307375>

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