

Bartek Staniszewski: Public attitudes towards the plight of and policies for younger people

Younger people in this country are disillusioned with the Conservative Government. [Only 1% of 18-24-year-olds in the UK intend to vote for the Conservatives in the next election](#), according to a recent YouGov poll.

There has been much debate about whether this collapse in support for centre-right politics among younger adults in Britain is largely because of material or cultural reasons; whether the economic circumstances of younger adults – squeezed living standards and expensive housing – are more to blame for their turn away from the Conservative Party, or whether diverging cultural values are.

This polling seeks to answer those questions and provides a snapshot into the current public attitudes concerning how younger people are and should be supported by government.

Methodology

Polling was undertaken by YouGov and conducted between the 28th and the 29th of September 2023. It consisted of a nationally representative sample of 2,098 GB adults.

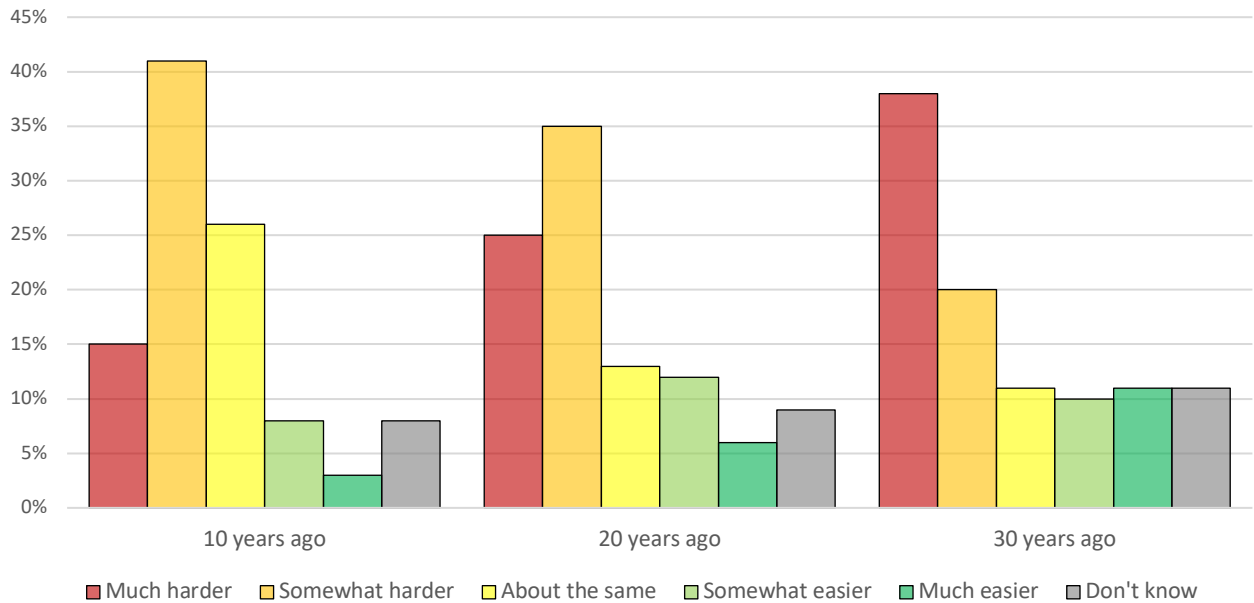
The sample was derived using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc GB panel of 185,000+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample, inviting them to take part in the survey and providing a link to the survey. The responding sample was weighted to the profile of the sample definition, which, in this instance, consists of all GB adults, to provide a representative reporting sample.

The polling did not define what a young person was. Nor do we, but we assume that it could mean anyone up to the age of 40.

1. The current situation

As seen in Chart 1 below, a clear majority of the GB public believe that the economic prospects of younger people are harder (“Much harder” and “Somewhat harder” together) than those of younger people 10 years ago (56%), 20 years ago (60%) and 30 years ago (58%).

Chart 1. Views on whether the younger people of today have it economically easier or harder are in comparison to the younger people of 10, 20 and 30 years ago.



Base: 2,098 GB adults.

In contrast, only a small minority of all respondents think that younger people today have it easier (“Much easier” and “Somewhat easier” together) when it comes to economic prospects than young people at any point within the last 30 years. Only 11% of respondents think that the younger people of today have it easier than the younger people of 10 years ago; 18% think that in comparison to the younger people of 20 years ago; and 22% think that in comparison to the younger people of 30 years ago.

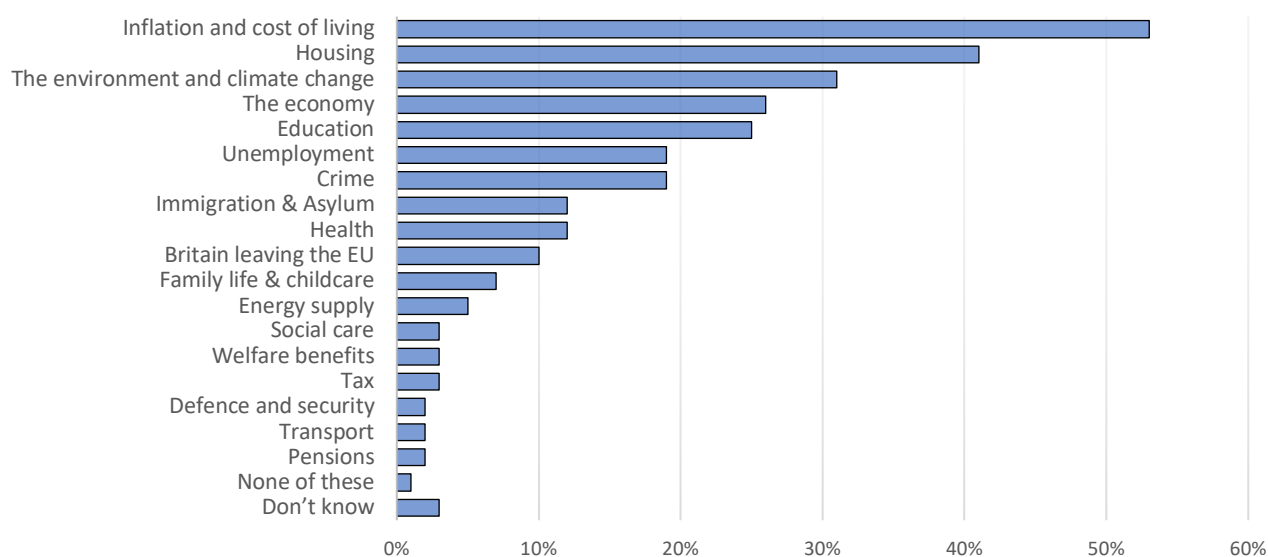
There is some notable differentiation by voting history in the 2016 EU referendum. At least 68% of Remain voters think that the younger people of today have it worse in terms of economic prospects than younger people at any point within the last 30 years; the same can be said for only 47% of Leave voters.

Interestingly, there is broad agreement across all age groups as to the current economic prospects of young people relative to previous generations. For example, 50% of 18-24-year-olds said that the younger people of today have it harder than the younger people of 10 years ago; and the same was said by 52% of over 65-year-olds. In that, a majority of all ages say that the younger people of today have it worse in terms of economic prospects than the younger people of several decades ago.

2. Current priorities

As can be seen in Chart 2 below, a majority of the GB public (53%) think that inflation and the cost of living is one of the top three most important issues facing young people of Britain at this time. This is even more pronounced among 18-49-year-olds, 58% of whom are of that view.

Chart 2. Views on the top three most important issues facing young people in Britain at this time.



Base: 2,098 GB adults.

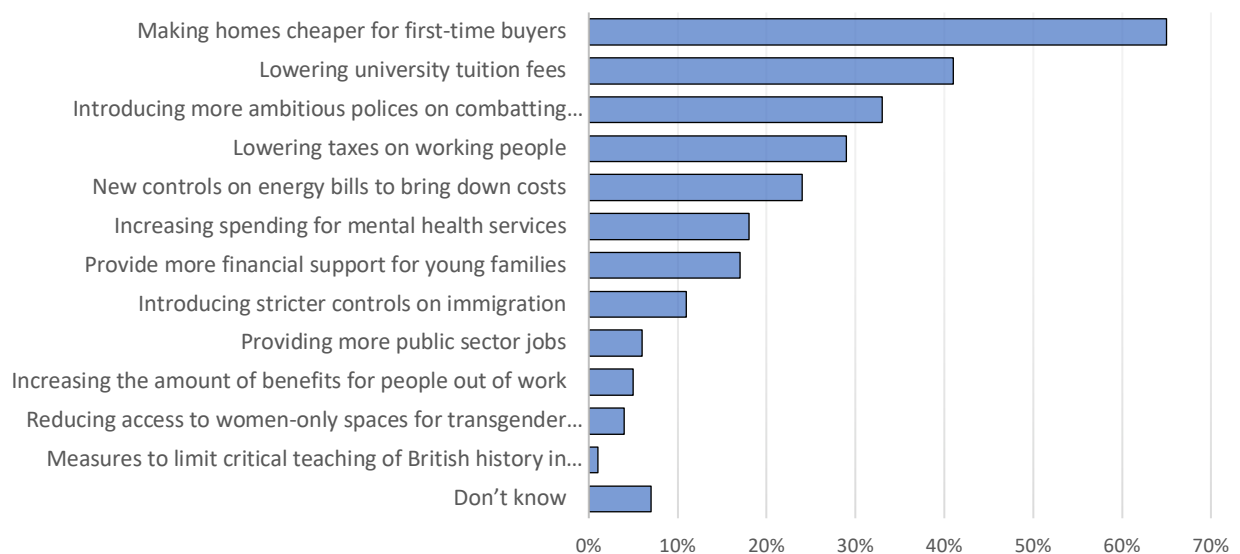
The next issues that were ranked as among the top three most important for the young people of today by the GB public include housing (41%), the environment and climate change (31%), the economy (26%) and education (25%).

Again, there was broad agreement among all age groups as to the priorities of young people. For no question was there a divergence of more than 18 percentage points between the answers of any two age cohorts; indeed, a divergence of 18 percentage points occurred on the topic of inflation and the cost of living, where a majority (61%) of 18-24-year-olds pointed to this as one of the top three most important for the young people of today, as compared to a plurality (43%) of over 65-year-olds. Proportionally, however, the biggest discrepancy occurred on the issue of immigration & asylum, where 5% of 18-24-year-olds pointed to this as one of the top three most important for the young people of today as compared to 18% of over 65-year-olds.

In general, the most notable divergence in attitudes was, again, between Leave and Remain voters. In particular, the environment and climate change was chosen as a top three issue for young people in Britain by 46% of Remain voters, but only 23% of Leave voters. Similar disparities occurred in connection to crime (12% vs 23%), immigration & asylum (4% vs 21%) and Britain leaving the EU (21% vs 5%).

The view that housing is one of the top issues facing young people in Britain today was also consistently reflected in our next question, which asked the GB public about the top three policy proposals that would appeal to younger voters. As can be seen in Chart 3 below, the most popular answer, by a significant margin (65%), for a policy proposal that would appeal most to younger voters was making homes cheaper for first-time buyers. Indeed, this was the only policy proposal chosen by a majority of people as one of the top three policy proposals that would appeal to younger voters.

Chart 3: Views on the policy proposals that would most appeal to younger voters.



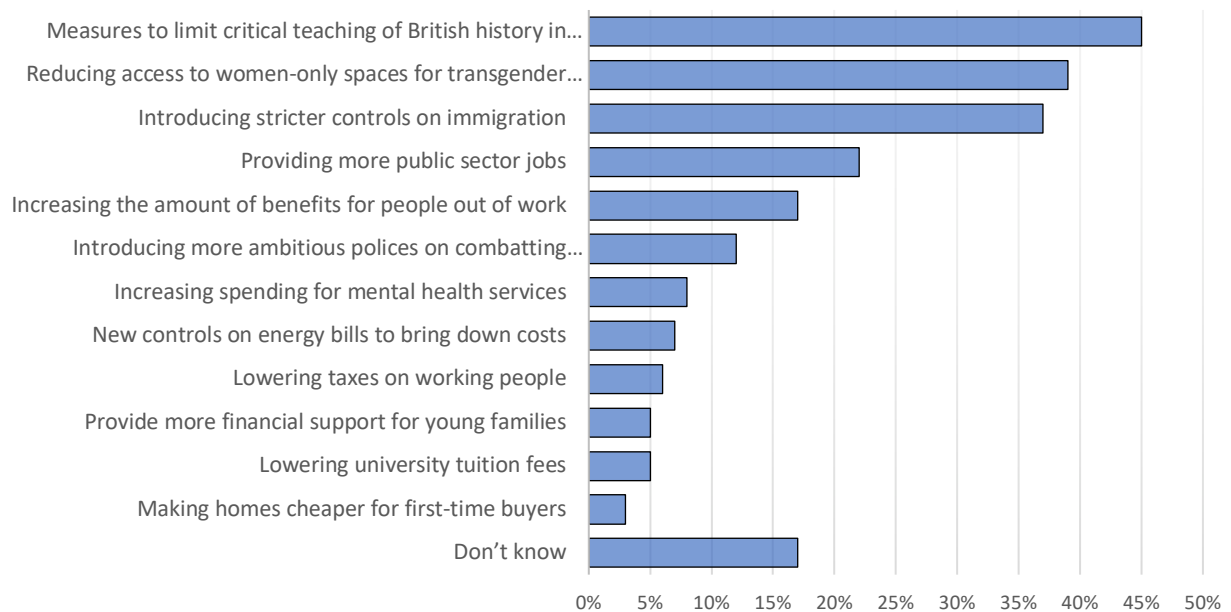
Base: 2,098 GB adults.

The other popular policy proposals to appeal to younger voters included lowering university tuition fees (41%), more ambitious policies on combatting climate change (33%), lowering taxes on working people (29%) and new controls on energy bills to bring down costs (24%).

As before, there was no significant divergence between age groups; while 63% of 18-24-year-olds considered making homes cheaper for first-time buyers a top three policy proposal to appeal to younger voters, 69% of over 65-year-olds were of the same view. The only policy proposal on which divergence between age groups did occur was introducing stricter controls on immigration; while 20% of over 65-year-olds considered it a top three policy proposal to appeal to younger voters, a mere 3% of 18-24-year-olds thought the same.

We also tested what the GB public thought would be the least appealing policy priorities for younger voters. This is shown in Chart 4 below. It is worth highlighting that the data here again shows that the GB public tend to think that economic policies will be most appealing to younger voters, whereas cultural policies will be the least appealing to younger voters.

Chart 4: Views on the policy proposals that would least appeal to younger voters.



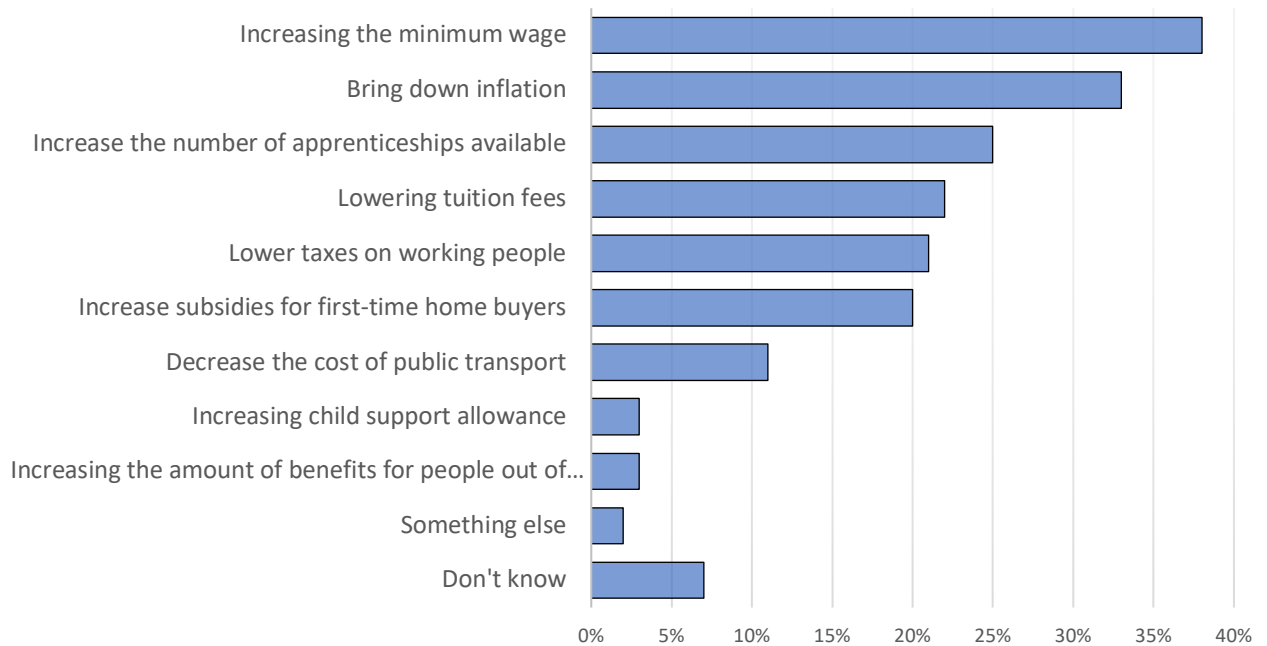
Base: 2,098 GB adults.

The three least popular policy priorities to appeal to younger voters among the GB public were “Measures to limit critical teaching of British history in schools” (45%), “Reducing access to women-only spaces for transgender people” (39%) and “Introducing stricter controls on immigration” (37%).

Again, divergence between age groups on this question was limited. While a large plurality (45%) of 18-24-year-olds considered “Measures to limit critical teaching of British history in schools” unappealing to younger voters, 41% of over 65-year-olds thought the same. Significant disparity again occurred on the question of stricter controls immigration, whereby a majority (52%) of 18-24-year-olds considered it an unappealing policy for young people, as contrasted to only 26% of over 65-year-olds. The only other answers that involved notable disparity between age groups were “Providing more public sector jobs” – 12% of 18-24-year-olds considered it an unappealing policy for young people, as contrasted with 30% of over 65-year-olds – and “Increasing spending for mental health services” – here, only 4% of 18-24-year-olds considered it an unappealing policy for young people, while 12% of over 65-year-olds agreed.

Considering that the GB public thinks that economic, rather than cultural, policy proposals will be most appealing to younger voters, we tested what the GB public considers to be most likely to improve the financial situation of young people. This is shown in Chart 5 below.

Chart 5: Views on the policy proposals that would best improve the financial situation of young people.



Base: 2,098 GB adults.

A plurality of the GB public think increasing the minimum wage is one of the two best policy proposals from the ones provided for improving the financial situation of young people (38%).

However, unlike with previous questions, there was limited consensus on what policy proposals would improve the financial situation of young people in this country. The next five most popular proposals were all chosen by between 20% and 33% of the GB public.

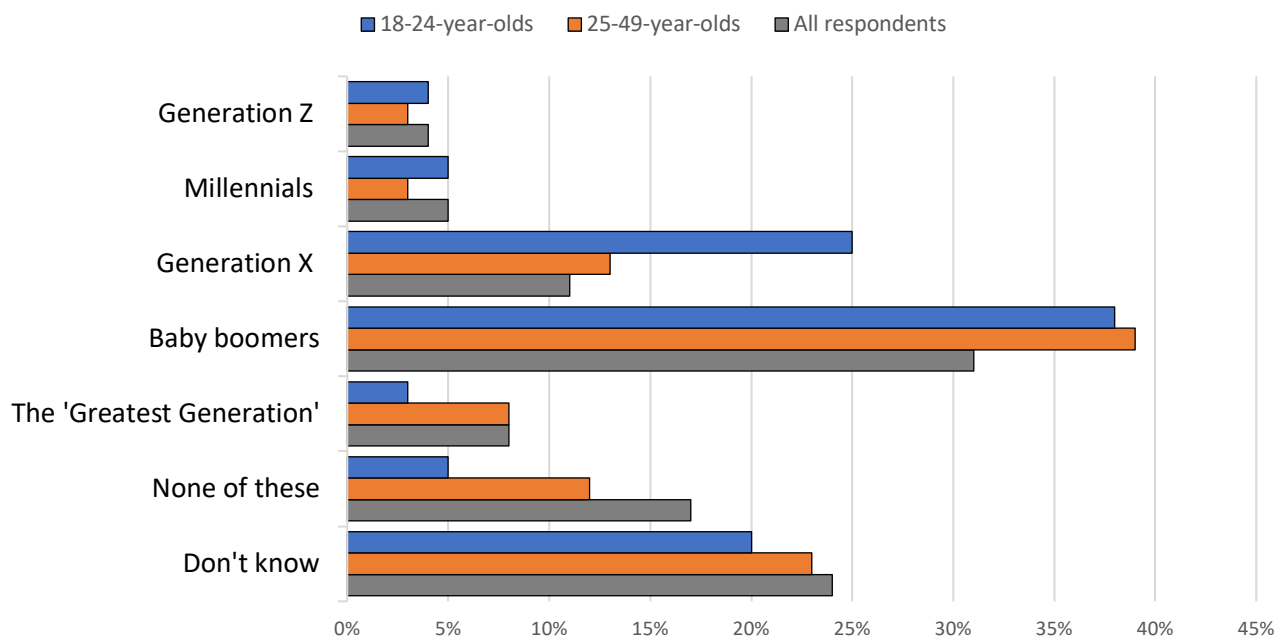
The biggest disparity between younger and older GB respondents, and indeed between different socio-demographic groups of respondents in general, occurred regarding the proposal to increase the number of apprenticeships available. While a plurality of over 65-year-olds (41%) deemed this to be one of the two best proposals for improving the financial situation of young people in the country, only 11% of 18-24-year-olds agreed.

3. Perceptions of the Conservative Government

As seen in Chart 6 below, when asked to think about different generations, a plurality of the GB public (31%) said that the Conservative Party looks out for the interests of baby boomers the most.

It should be noted that we defined the 'Greatest Generation' as people born roughly before 1945, Baby boomers as people born roughly between 1945 and 1964, Generation X as people born roughly between 1965 and 1979, Millennials as people born roughly between 1980 and 1995 and Generation Z as people born roughly between 1996 and 2015.

Chart 6: Views on who the Conservative Party looks out for the interests of most.



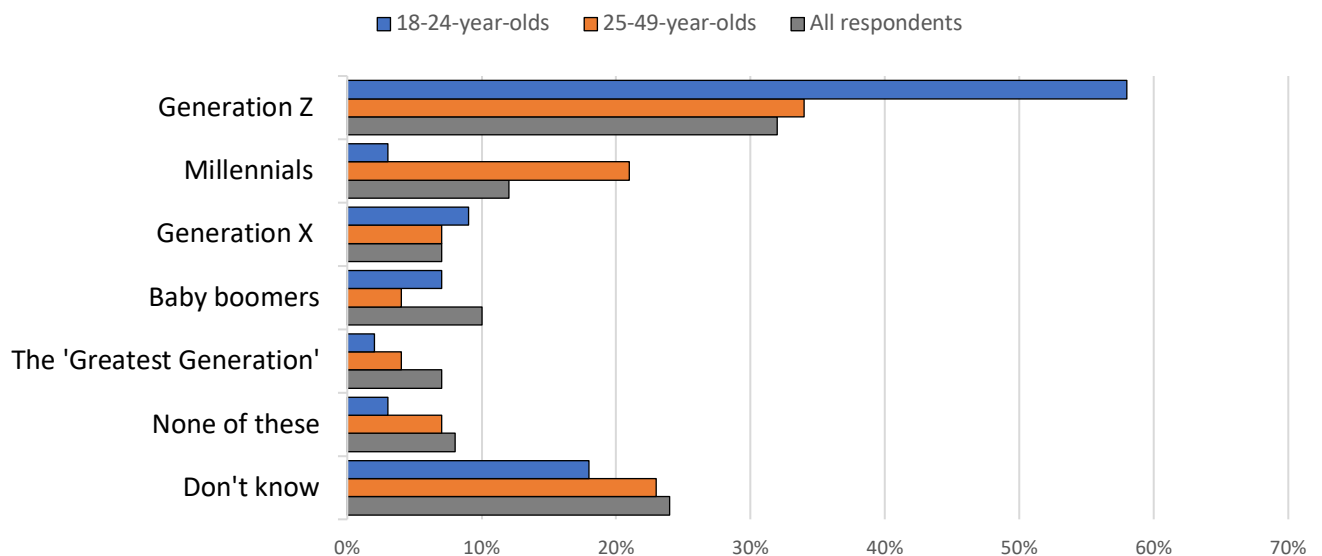
Base: 2,098 GB adults.

Seventeen percent of the GB public – the second most popular response – claimed that the Conservative Party looks out for the interests of no generation the most.

This question aroused the greatest divergence between different age groups of the GB public. While a clear plurality of both 18-24-year-olds (38%) and 25-49-year-olds (39%) thought that the Conservative Party looks out for the interests of Baby boomers the most, only 17% of over 65-year-olds and 28% of 50-64-year-olds said the same. Indeed, for over 65-year-olds, the most popular responses to this question were “Don’t know” (29%) and “None of these” (27%). Responses shifted quite gradually with age, with the notable exception being 18-24-year-olds being much more likely (25%), as compared to 25-49-year-olds (13%), to think that the Conservative Party looks out for the interests of Generation X the most.

We also asked the GB public which generation they felt was least served by the Conservative Party. This is illustrated in Chart 7 below. A plurality (32%) of the GB public answered “Generation Z.” The second most popular answer was “I don’t know,” with a minority of 24% of responses, followed by “Millennials” (12%). The GB public clearly feel the Conservative Party is less responsive to younger generations.

Chart 7: Views on who the Conservative Party looks out for the interests of least.



Base: 2,098 GB adults.

Indeed, of people aged 18-24, a majority (58%) felt that the Conservative Party looks out for the interests of Generation Z the least. This view was a lot more toned among 25-49-year-olds, only 34% of whom felt the same way; on the other hand, 25-49-year-olds were particularly likely to think that the Conservative Party looks out for the interests of Millennials least, with a plurality of 21% of them having this view, as compared to only 12% of the general public and a mere 3% of 18-24-year-olds.

While a plurality of over 65-year-olds (28%) did not know which generation the Conservative Party looks out for least, their second most popular response to the question of who the Conservative Party looks out for the interests of least was "Baby boomers" (20%), demonstrating general dissatisfaction with the Conservative Party among all generations.

Conclusion

A lot has happened over the last few decades to warrant pessimism among today's young people. While some Remain voters may point towards Brexit being a reason for this pessimism, one theme can be weaved throughout all of the above questions: housing. [Real house prices](#) and the [price-to-income ratio of UK homes](#) have both increased significantly over the last 30 years. Housing is seen as one of the top priorities for this country's young people, while making homes cheaper for first-time buyers was the strong preference of the GB public for how best to appeal to younger voters.

Of course, other problems also shine through: the cost of living crisis chief amongst them. Worries about inflation, energy costs and costs associated with education and the family remain very strong.

But most interesting is probably what does not shine through: cultural policies. The GB public, both young and old, were in agreement that the way to appeal to younger voters is not

through politics that concerns itself with sexual identity or the legacy of the British Empire, but rather with economic realities.

Finally, once again are we reminded of the extent to which there is a strong view that the Conservative Government has failed younger people. Equating 18-24-year-olds with Generation Z, this age bracket was also the only age bracket where a majority said that the Conservative Party looks out for their interests the least. And while all generations felt like the Conservatives failed them specifically, nowhere was this sentiment as powerful as it was amongst the youngest adults.

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Notes:

The full data tables for the polling can be found [here](#).

We are grateful to YouGov for advising on and carrying out the survey.