

Society Watch 2024: Understanding the new generation of voters

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MAY 2024

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Contents

| | |
|---|------------|
| Executive Summary | iii |
| What are generations? | 01 |
| Generations as voting blocks | 03 |
| “You’ll understand when you’re older” | 04 |
| Taking liberties: law and order | 05 |
| How liberal are Gen Z? | 06 |
| Will Gen Z grow out of it? | 08 |
| The right to protest | 09 |
| In the weeds: Views on the sale of cannabis | 11 |
| A new generation gap? | 13 |
| Who pays for adult social care? | 14 |
| The British social care crisis: decades of stasis | 15 |
| So, who should pay? | 15 |
| Gen Z and social care spending: a balancing act | 19 |
| Home ownership: a clash between aspirations and reality? | 20 |
| Who can afford to buy? | 21 |
| Do Gen Z want to buy their own homes? | 22 |
| How should housing policy respond? | 23 |
| Give up, or get stuck in? | 24 |
| Do generations matter? | 26 |
| Acknowledgements | 29 |
| References | 30 |

Executive summary

Generations are having a moment.

“Baby Boomers”, “Millennials”, “Gen Z”—these labels have moved from market research and opinion pieces into everyday conversations. Widely used by writers and journalists, they are increasingly present in political debates in living rooms, Parliament, and on social media. As age becomes the biggest demographic divide in British politics (Curtice et al. 2023), this election year edition of Society Watch explores generational views and divides on three contested issues, with a focus on the newest generation of voters.

Generation Z, or Gen Z for short, is one of the most recent and talked about generations. Born between 1997 and 2012, they are the first generation to grow up with the internet, in an era of heightened awareness of environmental and social issues. Gen Z have found themselves discussed in public spaces ranging from the World Economic Forum to advice columns, labelled as anything from illiberal to woke. For many people born into this generation, 2024 will be the first year they have the opportunity to vote in a General Election. As the political influence of Gen Z grows, we want to explore whether and how generational effects will be important on selected social issues of our time.

Society Watch 2024 provides a snapshot of Gen Z’s views and attitudes towards housing, adult social care and law and order.

Drawing principally on new British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey data, we illustrate how these issues are currently perceived by younger and older generations.

Age has become the biggest demographic divide in British politics.

What do Gen Z think about law and order?

Gen Z tend to be less deferential to authority than older generations. They are less likely to think the law should always be obeyed even when it's wrong (16%, compared to 32% of adults overall). And they are more likely to feel it is important to express their moral convictions through civil disobedience if necessary (43% compared to 33% or less of older generations). There appears to be a generational effect at work when it comes to social norms. Gen Z appear more liberal than their parents and grandparents ever were. The average views of older generations have changed little as they've aged, so there's reason to believe Gen Z might remain more liberal than other generations.

What about adult social care?

Gen Z pay high taxes, and on average they have lower wealth and income than other generations. But they are also more favourable towards social welfare than others. Over half of Gen Z (59%) want to see the government pick up the whole of the adult social care bill, with older generations putting more emphasis on the responsibility of the individual. Overall, a majority of the public supports greater funding for health and social care, but they are less clear on how that money should be found (Buzelli et al., 2022). Based on our new data, Gen Z show some caution towards increasing taxes to fund healthcare, and might well oppose tax increases to fund social care as well.

And what do Gen Z think about housing?

When it comes to home ownership, Gen Z face the biggest gap between aspiration and reality of any generation. In 2022, the average household could expect to spend about 8.3 times their annual earnings purchasing a home, up from 3.7 in 1998 (ONS, 2023). Our new data shows that despite this, eight in ten (81%) of Gen Z would buy a home if they could. Many also want to see more support for renters, including from landlords. Time will tell whether the increasing divide between aspirations and reality will contribute to a sense of political disillusionment among Gen Z. Alternatively, given their views on civil disobedience, they may make their housing demands increasingly heard.

Gen Z tend to be less deferential to authority than older generations and appear more liberal than their parents and grandparents ever were.

Will these differences remain as Gen Z age? Based on data from decades of British Social Attitudes interviews up and down the country, our analysis shows it's likely that Gen Z's more liberal views on authority and individual freedom will stand the test of time. But on adult social care and housing – even if data shows differences of opinion between Gen Z and other generations now, we can't be sure they'll remain as time passes. What we might expect is views on social care funding would be likely to partly remain at least in the medium term, as they appear linked to welfare attitudes more broadly. On housing, we're identifying new views and attitudes without a historical trend to refer to. We need to continue tracking Gen Z's views on these issues into the future if we are going to disentangle a potential 'generation effect' from other factors.

Will these differences matter in national politics? We're talking about differences between groups of a few percentage points. When it comes to politics, this matters, even if there's a great deal of diversity within these groups. Knowing what generation someone belongs to doesn't mean you can predict their views, but an understanding of this new generation of voters might tell us something important about how electoral politics could play out over the coming years.

About the data:

This report uses data from the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey, carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), which has been tracking public attitudes for over 40 years. It uses a gold standard random probability sampling design to reduce the risk of bias and produce robust estimates of the views of British adults. Selected insights from the most recent interviews, carried out in September and October 2023, are released in this report.

Throughout, the report also draws on other recent policy research and national statistics to discuss generational views on housing, adult social care, and law and order.

What are generations?

Joe Crowley and Ekaterina Khriakova

We regularly hear sweeping claims about the personalities of whole generations, and our politics can often be framed in terms of intergenerational disputes and grievances. These can lead you to think that every member of your own generation must be just like you, and that we have nothing in common with the members of other generations.

Of course, the real world is much messier and more complicated than that. Even if the people within a generation are similar in some ways, they aren't in many others. And people change as they get older: how do we know that Gen Z won't be just the same as Baby Boomers by the time they reach that age?

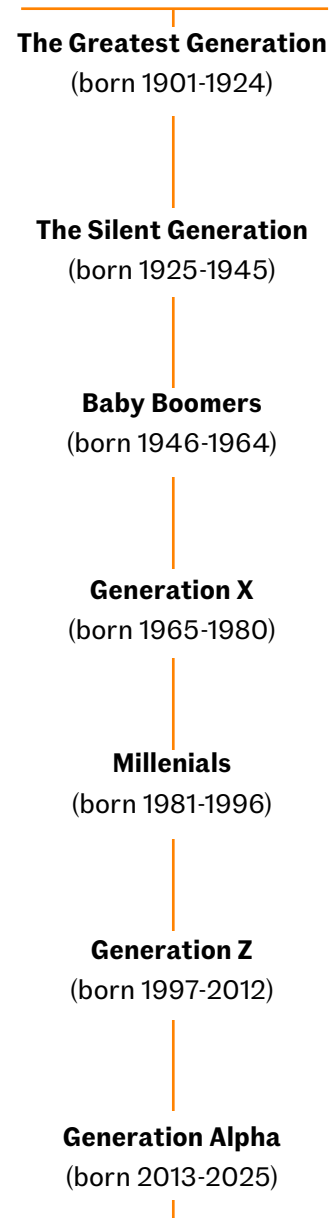


What is a generation anyway?

A generation is a group of people who were all born around the same time. The idea is that their beliefs, behaviours and even their personalities are shaped by the major historical and cultural events of their formative years. These aspects of their identities—so the story goes—are stubborn and resilient: they last a lifetime, barely changing as we age.

Of course, pinning down exactly which historical and cultural events to consider relevant, in which places, and for which age groups, is hard. But it's common in popular literature to group people into one of seven generations:

1. **The Greatest Generation** (born 1901-1924) endured the hardship of two world wars and the Great Depression.
2. **The Silent Generation** (born 1925-1945) were shaped by the post-World War II dynamics of the UK, including the reconstruction efforts and the emergence of the welfare state under the Labour government (Bangham, Finch, and Phillips, 2018).
3. **Baby Boomers** (born 1946-1964) experienced post-war economic prosperity and increased social mobility, cultural revolution, and political upheavals in the UK, including the rise of youth culture, and significant social reforms (Bristow, 2016; Biggs et al., 2008).
4. **Generation X** (born 1965-1980) faced economic uncertainty, rapid technological advancement, and cultural shifts, including the Thatcherite policies of privatisation and deregulation, the decline of traditional industries such as coal mining, and the emergence of the internet (Birdwell and Bani, 2014).
5. **Millennials** (born 1981-1996) faced the challenges of the 2008 financial crisis (Broome et al., 2023), witnessed the emergence of the internet and grew up during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
6. **Generation Z** (born 1997-2012) are the first digital-native generation, growing up in a time of global connectivity, social media saturation, and heightened awareness of environmental and social issues (McKinsey and Company, 2023; Tyson et al., 2021).
7. **Generation Alpha** (born 2013-2025) are the youngest generation and are yet to be defined.



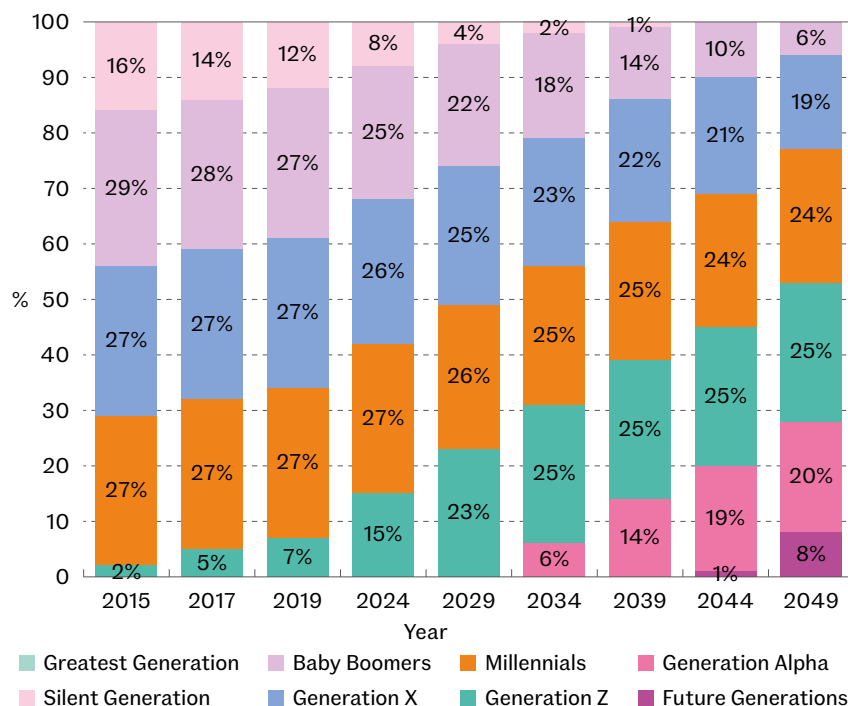
Generations as voting blocks

Knowing someone's age doesn't mean you can infer their political beliefs. But, on average, views on a range of issues do vary between age groups. So, when we group people together into generations, these generations display clear differences in views. They think differently about gender, equality, work-life balance, and education, amongst other things (Duffy, 2021). For example, 66% of Gen Z believe environmental concerns should take priority over economic growth, compared to 44% of Baby Boomers (Duffy, 2021b). If these differences persist over time, they are important politically.

As time passes, the generational mix of the electorate changes: older generations get smaller and smaller, and younger generations become eligible to vote. Drawing on data from the ONS, we calculated that Gen Z, for example, were just 9% of the electorate in 2020, but are expected to make up 25% of the electorate by 2030, and to remain at 25% until the 2060s (see Figure 1). That makes it critically important to understand what they think about issues that matter, and whether their views are likely to change as they get older.

Gen Z will make up a quarter of the electorate from 2030 to 2060.

Figure 1: Projected breakdown of electorate by generation in election years



Source: Authors calculation based on data from ONS, 2023b and ONS 2024

“You’ll understand when you’re older”

But how do we know whether these differences of opinion between the generations will last? How do we know that when Gen Z reach the age that Baby Boomers are now, they won’t think in exactly the same way? After all, as we get older our world changes: we get jobs, have children, buy homes, and retire. Maybe our beliefs are just a result of what is going on in our lives at any given moment. If that were the case, Gen Z’s political views might become more similar to those of preceding generations as they age. The fact they will comprise a quarter of the voting public may have limited political implications after all.

These are questions that social scientists have tried to address. And the answer seems to be that on some issues, generations really are distinct: they think differently, and these differences persist as they age. But on other issues, each generation re-treads the path of the previous, their views evolving as they age, as they move through key stages in their lives.

For example, views on taxes and public spending appear partly generational. In 1984, 42% of people aged 18 to 34 supported increasing taxes and public spending, compared to 33% of those aged over 55. Perhaps this suggests that younger people are, in general, further to the left on economic issues? Not so: as that younger generation got older, they held onto their views. In 2022, when that same group had reached their late 50s and 60s, they were more supportive of a tax and spend approach than newer, younger generations (Curtice et al., 2023).

In contrast, while it is often claimed that younger generations have different attitudes to work than older generations, these differences have been overstated. There have been claims that Millennials are more collaborative than the independently minded Gen Z, or that younger generations have shorter attention spans than older ones, or that Millennials are particularly in need of praise. But research has found these differences to be much smaller than thought, and often explained by other factors, such as how long people have been in their jobs (Duffy, 2021; Costanza, 2012).

It seems that generational differences matter for some of our attitudes and beliefs but are less important in others. In the sections that follow, we look in detail at what data tells us about how Gen Z’s views currently differ from other generations on key policy issues: law and order, adult social care and housing. We consider whether and how these differences might influence British politics in the future.

On some issues, generations really are distinct: they think differently, and these differences persist as they age.

We look in detail at what data tells us about how Gen Z’s views currently differ from other generations on key policy issues.

Taking liberties: law and order

Joe Caluori and Joe Crowley



Gen Z's views on law and order diverge sharply from previous generations. Much like their Baby Boomer grandparents in the 1960s, Gen Z find themselves at odds with previous generations on personal freedoms, civil liberties, and the role of the government in their lives.

Our data shows that Gen Z hold strong moral convictions, which they are willing to voice loudly and confidently. They are willing to break laws they don't agree with and make their voices heard through protests. They also take a liberal approach to personal freedoms on issues such as drug policy, and tend not to support tough, punitive criminal justice policies.

Gen Z hold strong moral convictions, which they are willing to voice loudly and confidently.

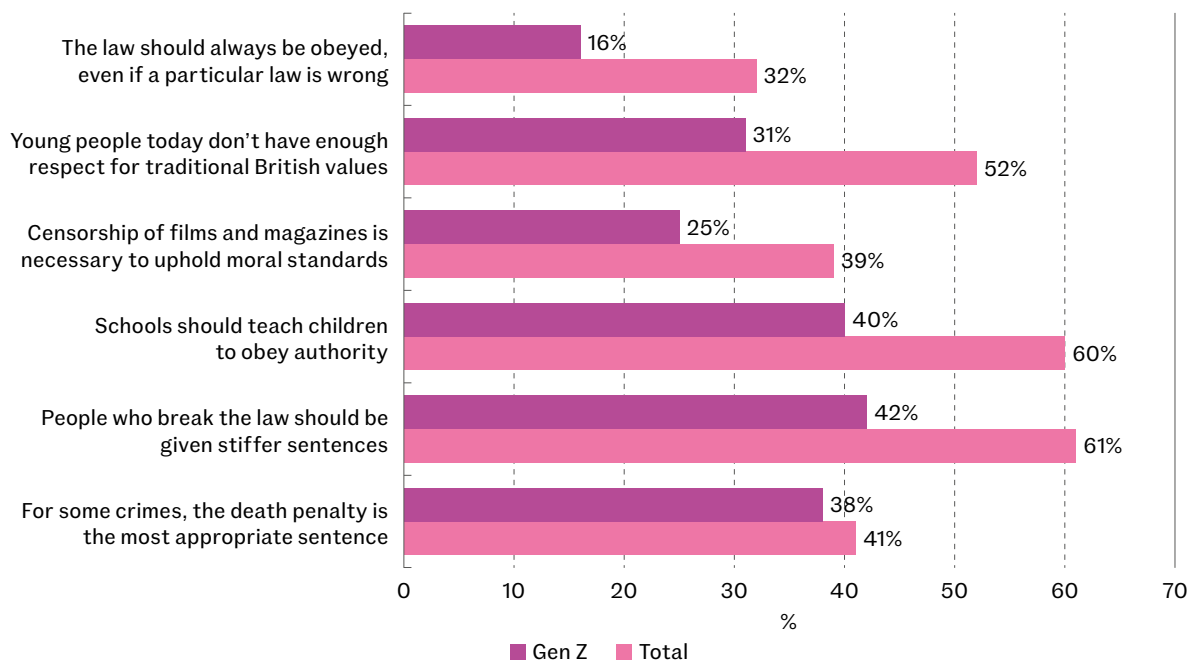
Is this simply a reflection of their youth? Will Gen Z's views on authority, civil disobedience and personal freedoms persist as they age? Since 1986 the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey has asked people about their views on governance, individual freedom, and authority. This data allows us to begin answering these questions.

How liberal are Gen Z?

People who value individual freedom and personal choice over societal rules and norms are considered to have more liberal attitudes, while those who prioritise maintaining social order and conformity with societal rules are understood as more authoritarian. In 1986, the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) developed six statements to measure whether people have a more liberal or authoritarian outlook. We've been asking these questions consistently since then.

If you agree with the statements, you are said to have a more authoritarian outlook. Figure 2 shows what proportion of Gen Z agreed with each statement, compared to society overall.

Figure 2: Gen Z's level of agreement with the six law and order statements



Population: Adults in the UK (Base n= 5541 to 5547).

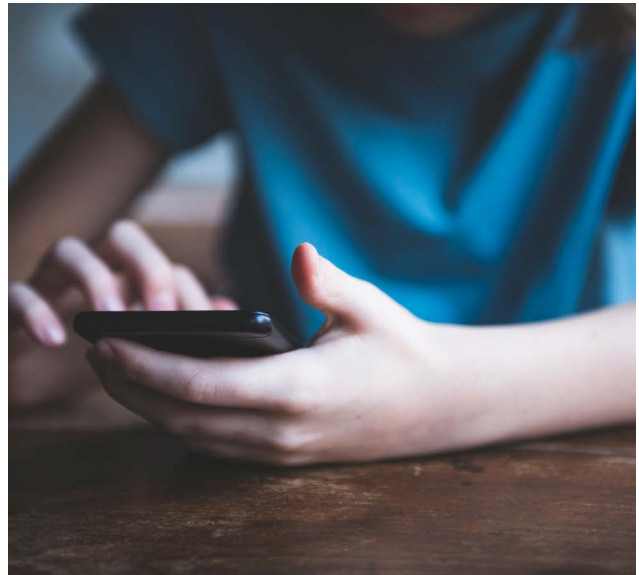
Source: British Social Attitudes. Data collected between 12th September and 31st October 2023.

The latest British Social Attitudes shows that Gen Z are outliers on some law and order issues, and mainstream on others.

The starkest difference in responses is in relation to obeying the law. Voting age members of Gen Z are half as likely as adults overall to believe that the law should always be obeyed (16%, compared to 32%), even if a particular law is wrong. They're also far less likely to believe that young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values.

Another clear dividing line is censorship. Two in five adults (39%) believe that censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards. In Gen Z, it's only one in four (25%).

Voting age members of Gen Z are half as likely as adults overall to believe that the law should always be obeyed.



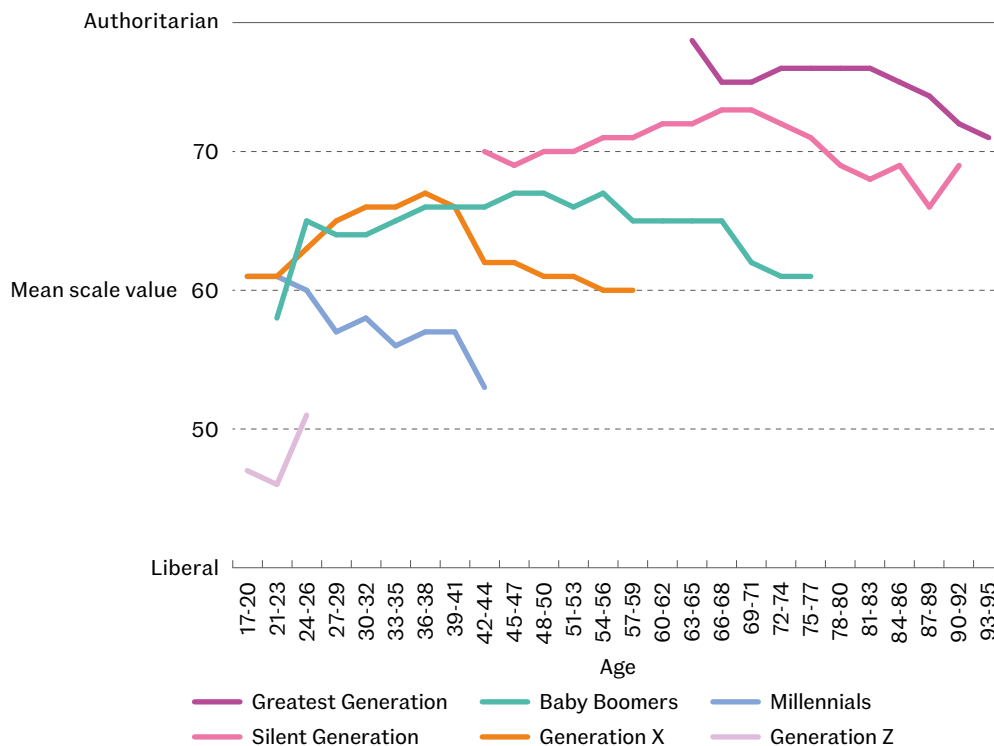
However, when it comes to views on the death penalty, Gen Z aren't so different. About two in five people believe that the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence for some crimes, both among Gen Z (38%) and adults overall (41%).

Will Gen Z grow out of it?

Judging by these statements, it's clear that Gen Z are more liberal than older generations. If we give survey respondents a score out of 100—with authoritarian views getting a higher score, and liberal views getting a lower score—then Gen Z have an average score of 46, compared to 54 for Millennials, 59 for Gen X, and 61 for Baby Boomers.

But we can go further. By looking back in time, at the views of older generations when they were younger, we can see whether views on these issues change as people age, or whether they stay the same. What we find is that the average views of a generation are remarkably consistent, changing very little as people age (Figure 3). Gen Z and Millennials hold more liberal views than their grandparents amongst the Baby Boomers and Silent Generation ever did. In the future, it seems likely Gen Z will remain more liberal than previous generations, even as they age; entering work, having children, and settling down.

Figure 3: Average liberal-authoritarian score by generation and age



Population: Adults in the UK. Source: British Social Attitudes, 1986 – 2023.

Getting technical...

Statistical analysis called 'Age-Period-Cohort Analysis' can untangle three different factors that could affect people's views: their age, when they took part in the survey (period), and the generation they belong to (cohort).

The National Centre for Social Research's analysis of libertarian and authoritarian views over recent decades (Addario and Wilson, 2024) is focused on whether a generation effect can be found in the data.

It identifies a stable trend, with people born in recent years expressing more liberal attitudes than people born in earlier years. Gen Z is the only generation that shows a difference from this trend, as they were found to have expressed attitudes that were even more liberal than their year of birth would suggest.

We did not find indications to claim that the period matters, but specific events do: we found an increase in authoritarianism at a time of national emergency and crises, such as in the years following the London Bombing of 2005 or during the 2007-08 financial crisis. Age seems to contribute very little, with people being more or less liberal or authoritarian depending on the year they were born, or on national and global events unfolding at the time of the survey, but not because they belonged to a specific age group.

These three factors—age, period, and cohort—do not fully explain how liberal or authoritarian a person is. Other factors are relevant, such as socio-economic and demographic characteristics. And the relationship between these factors and people's views may be different for each generation.

Our analysis supports the idea that Gen Z are more liberal than previous generations.

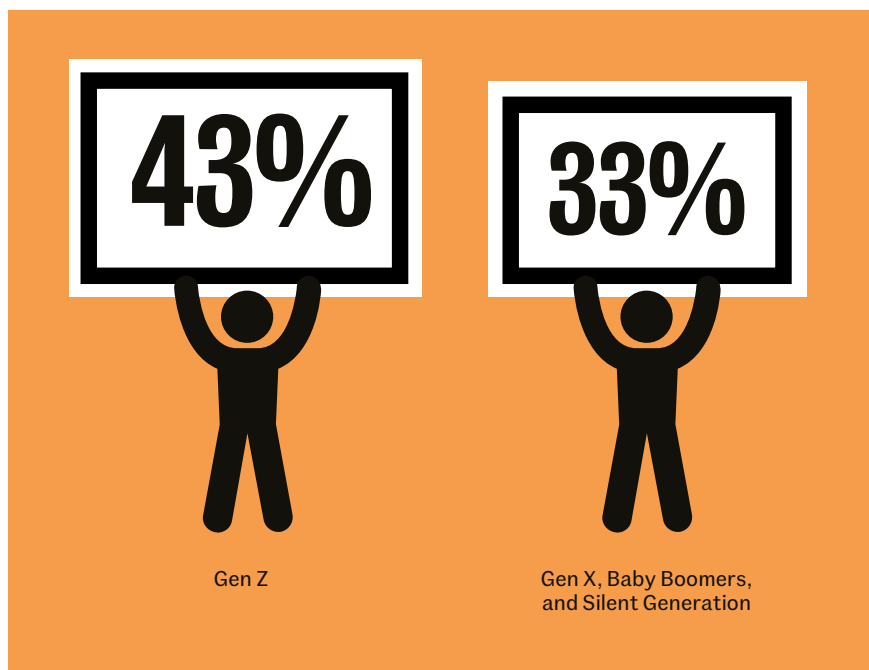
The right to protest

If Gen Z are less deferential to authority than previous generations, and more accepting of civil disobedience and law-breaking where necessary, what might this mean for the future attitudes to crime and justice?

Gen Z have grown up in tumultuous times. High profile, divisive issues such as climate change, austerity, Brexit, and COVID-19 have led to large and highly vocal protest movements. These movements have often used civil disobedience and direct action to make political points. Gen Z have witnessed protesters blockading roads, confronting politicians on social media, and marching on Parliament during their formative years.

Our latest data shows that Gen Z are more likely than other generations to prioritise the freedom of individuals to protest about what they believe is right, above following the letter of the law. Forty-three percent of Gen Z agree that it is important citizens engage in acts of civil disobedience when they oppose government actions, compared to 33% or less for Gen X, Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation. Gen Z share similar views with Millennials on this issue. While 57% of Gen Z think that always obeying the law is an important part of being a good citizen, this compares to at least 78% for all other generations.

% agree that it is important citizens engage in acts of civil disobedience when they oppose Government actions



Going a step further, Gen Z are also far more likely than other generations to support breaking laws that they disagree with. Almost half of Gen Z (49%) disagree that the law should always be obeyed, even if the law is wrong, compared to just a quarter (26%) of Baby Boomers.

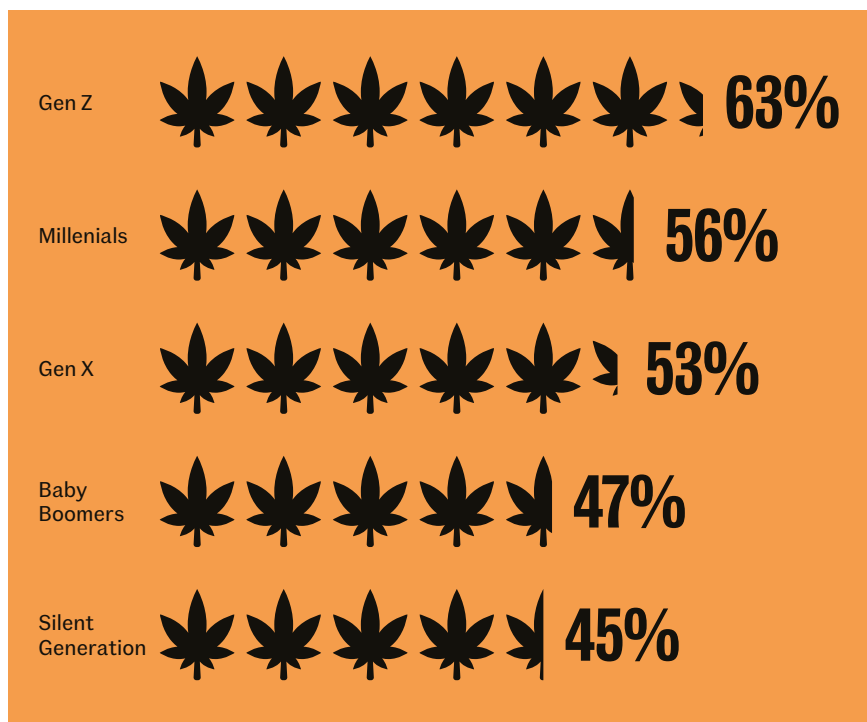
We can see the impact of these views in the responses of Gen Z to the Police Crime and Sentencing Act 2022, which contained measures to limit the right to protest. Gen Z were notably opposed. During the passage of the Bill through Parliament, just 17% of those aged 16 to 24 (all of whom belong to Gen Z) supported extending current powers to set start and end times and noise limits on processions and static protests. This compared to 57% of those aged 50 to 64, and 74% of those aged 65+ ([YouGov, 2022](#))¹.

In the weeds: Views on the sale of cannabis

Views on the sale of cannabis provide a case study of how Gen Z's views on law and order are shaped by distinctively liberal social attitudes.

In recent years there has been a marked shift on the sale, cultivation, and possession of cannabis in twenty-four US States and a number of European countries. In the UK, prohibition has been challenged by licensing of cannabis for medical use. This was precipitated by the high-profile cases of Billy Caldwell and Alfie Dingley, two boys with severe Epilepsy whose parents campaigned for the right to give them cannabis products for medicinal purposes².

% agree that taking cannabis should be legal, but only from licensed shops



1 Weighted sample 1,665. Age range of Gen X in 2022: 43 – 57 years old.

2 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jul/26/medicinal-cannabis-how-two-heartbreaking-cases-helped-change-law>

BSA data shows that Gen Z are overwhelmingly supportive of legalising the sale of cannabis. Around two thirds (63%) support the sale of cannabis in licensed shops, and a further 17% believe the sale of cannabis should be legal, with no restrictions (Figure 4). Just 20% supported the status quo of prohibition. Figure 4 shows that, in comparison, the views of other generations were more polarised, with Baby Boomers split almost down the middle on the issue.

Despite expressing far higher levels of support for allowing the sale of cannabis, Gen Z are in fact significantly less likely to use cannabis than their Gen X parents were at their age.

% agree that cannabis should remain illegal

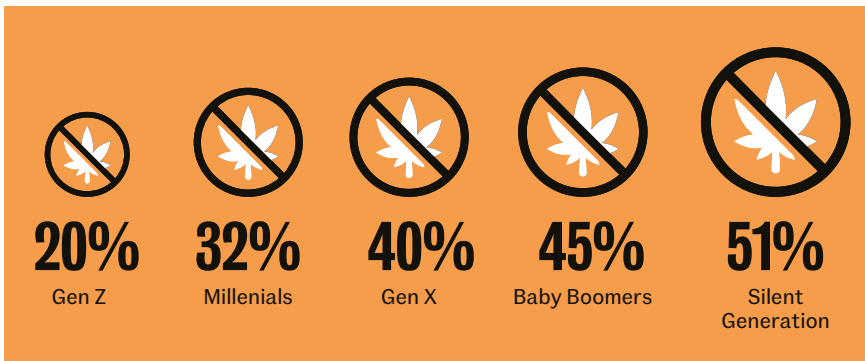
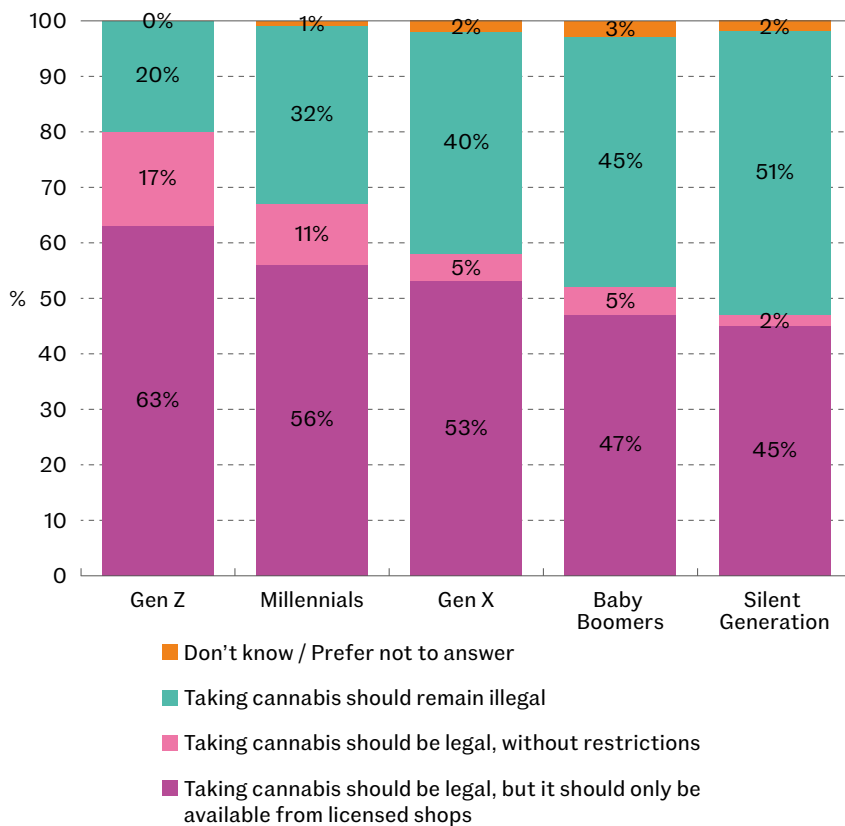


Figure 4: Views on cannabis legalisation by generation



Population: Adults in the UK (Base n=3050). Source: British Social Attitudes 2021.



Despite expressing far higher levels of support for allowing the sale of cannabis, Gen Z are in fact significantly less likely to use cannabis than their Gen X parents were at their age. In 1996,³ 16.2% of 16-24 year olds (now Gen X)⁴ reported using cannabis in the previous month. In 2023, just 8.4% of 16-24 year olds (Gen Z)⁵ reported doing so (ONS, 2023c).

Expressing high levels of support for liberalising drug laws out of principle is another sign that Gen Z are more likely to take a liberal position on issues that challenge authority than other generations.

A new generation gap?

Gen Z's liberal values and willingness to challenge authority places them at odds both with other generations. They disagree strongly with the narrow definition of what is acceptable for protests introduced by Gen X politicians. On issues such as cannabis policy, Gen Z take a more liberal position than other generations, even though their self-reported use is relatively low.

Strong moral convictions, underpinned by liberal values on individual rights and freedoms, could well position Gen Z at the crest of a wave of societal change on law and order policy. If these views are upheld as Gen Z increasingly gain the right to vote and become a larger proportion of the electorate, it could contribute to a countercultural shift on a level with that experienced by their Baby Boomer grandparents in the 1960s, who experienced radical reforms to laws on capital punishment, divorce, contraception, homosexuality, gambling, and censorship within a decade.

3 The first year this question was asked in the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

4 Median age of Gen X in 1995: 22 years old.

5 Median age of Gen Z in 2023: 18 years old.

Who pays for adult social care?

Gregory White and Crescenzo Pinto

There is a crisis facing adult social care in Britain. As more of us reach older age, and as we live longer, the need for social care is increasing. At the same time, the cost of care is going up (Boccarini et al., 2023). But for younger generations such as Gen Z, this can feel a distant concern.

The impact of the cost-of-living crisis has left many members of Gen Z in a precarious financial position. The most affected face immense budgeting challenges, with the cost of essentials such as rent and utilities continuing to increase.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), in 2022, 70% of low-income households with someone aged 18 to 24 were behind on at least one household bill. More than 80% of low-income households with someone aged 18 to 34 are going without essentials (Schmuecker and Earwaker, 2022). In challenging financial circumstances, young people are likely most focused on day-to-day spending.

Gen Z are becoming an increasingly large part of the electorate at the same time as the adult social care system is facing intense and increasing pressure (Bottery and Mallorie, 2024). What do newer voters think about the unavoidable question of who should pay for adult social care?

Our latest data suggests that Gen Z want a progressive approach to funding adult social care: they are more likely to support the idea that the most well-off in society pay the most, whether that's through general taxation or individual contributions.

The British social care crisis: decades of stasis

Government priorities on social care spending change over time. During the coalition government and the austerity years, spending on adult social care was low compared to the previous years of the Labour government. Then, through the COVID-19 pandemic, public spending on social care received a temporary boost ([Bottery and Mallorie, 2024](#)).

There have been many attempts to address the issue of social care funding and reform in the last fourteen years—most notably, the Dilnot Commission and Report. In 2011, the report concluded that the adult social care system was not fit for purpose. Among other recommendations, the Dilnot report suggested capping the contribution to adult social care costs that an individual needs to make during their lifetime at between £25,000 and £50,000, and concluded that if the cap on individuals' lifetime contributions was set at £50,000, then an additional £1.1bn would have been necessary to fund adult social care in the period 2010/11 ([The Health Foundation, 2011](#)).

Many of the core recommendations were subsequently legislated for in the Care Act 2014, but many were not, including a lower spending cap for individuals. The failure to adequately implement the recommendations of the review in full has resulted in a multi-faceted crisis, impacting the quality of care, workforce strain, increased individual financial burden and additional pressure on the NHS.

In 2021/22, local authorities in England spent £26.9bn on adult social care ([The King's Fund, 2023](#)). But although this is a significant sum of money, it is not enough. As our population ages, demand for social care is rising across England and Britain more widely. ONS figures indicate that the number of people over 65 increased by almost 2 million between 2011 and 2021 ([ONS, 2023d](#)). According to the Health Foundation, if we are to meet the demand of an ageing population, funding of adult social care will have to increase by £8.3bn by 2032/33 ([Boccarini et al., 2023](#)).

So, who should pay?

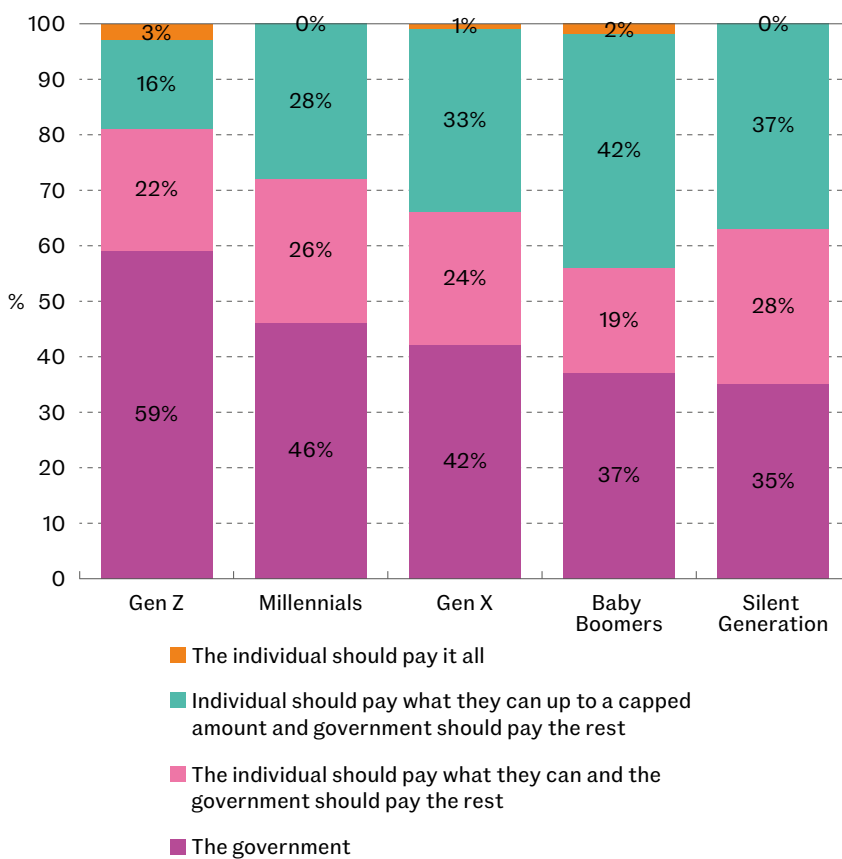
There are different options available: either the government pays for adult social care, individuals pay for their own care, or some combination of the two. If we opt for a combination, we'd need a way of deciding how much an individual contributes. Means-testing would seem the most likely approach: everyone pays what they can afford. An alternative option would be to set a cap on individual contributions, so that no one pays more than a certain amount.

The impact of the cost-of-living crisis has left many members of Gen Z in a precarious financial position.

Two of these options—the government paying the entire bill, or the individual paying as much as they can with the government paying the rest—are more progressive. This means everyone pays roughly the same share of their income or wealth via taxation and/or direct contribution. The other options—the individual pays the entire bill or pays what they can up to a fixed cap with the government paying the rest—are less progressive because the most well-off will pay a smaller share of their income or wealth.

We put these options to the UK public and found that Gen Z are clearly in favour of the more progressive options (Figure 5). Gen Z is the only generation where a majority (59%) want to see the government pick up the whole of the adult social care bill. And of those who prefer a combination of government and individual contributions, Gen Z are much less likely to be in favour of a cap on individual contributions.

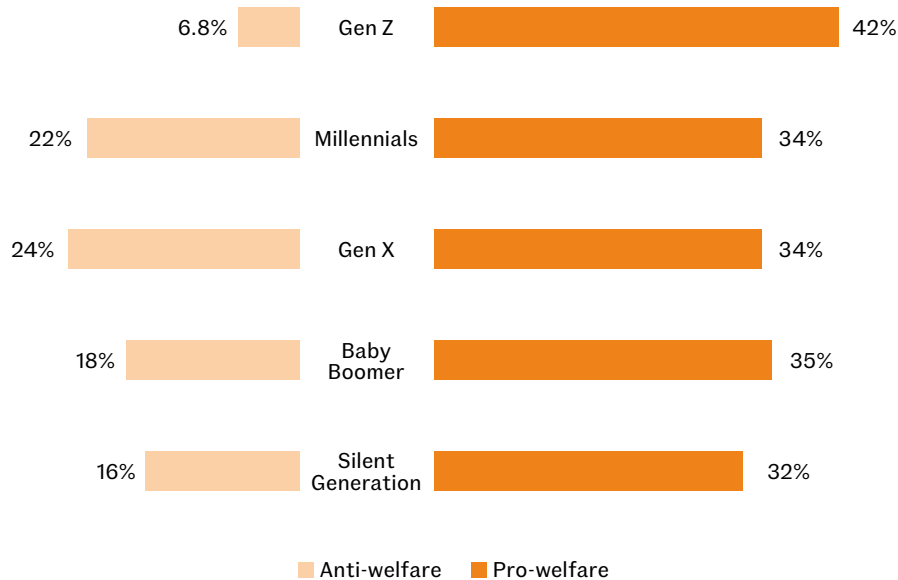
Figure 5: Views on who should pay for adult social care by generation



Population: Adults in the UK (Base n=1255). Source: BSA 2023.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised. Gen Z are also much more favourable towards social welfare than other generations. We used a small number of well-tested questions to group people into 'pro-welfare' and 'anti-welfare' camps. Gen Z are more likely to be in the pro-welfare camp than other generations, and very few of them are in the anti-welfare camp (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Anti-welfare and pro-welfare by generation

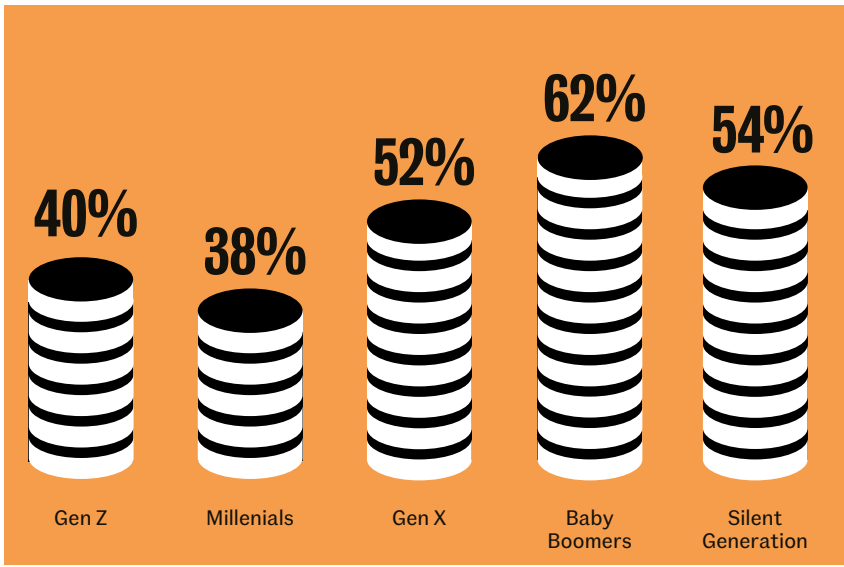


Population: Adults in the UK (Base n=5539). Source: BSA 2023.

However, it's unclear how welfare and adult social care should be funded—whether through increasing taxes or cuts to other public spending. Given the budgeting challenges described before, it would be entirely understandable for Gen Z to oppose increased taxation to pay for public services, including those they are unlikely to need anytime soon, like adult social care. So, our data shows that Gen Z are in favour of the government paying for adult social care, but does this mean they support higher taxes? A possible answer may come from Gen Z's attitudes towards taxation and spending on the NHS.

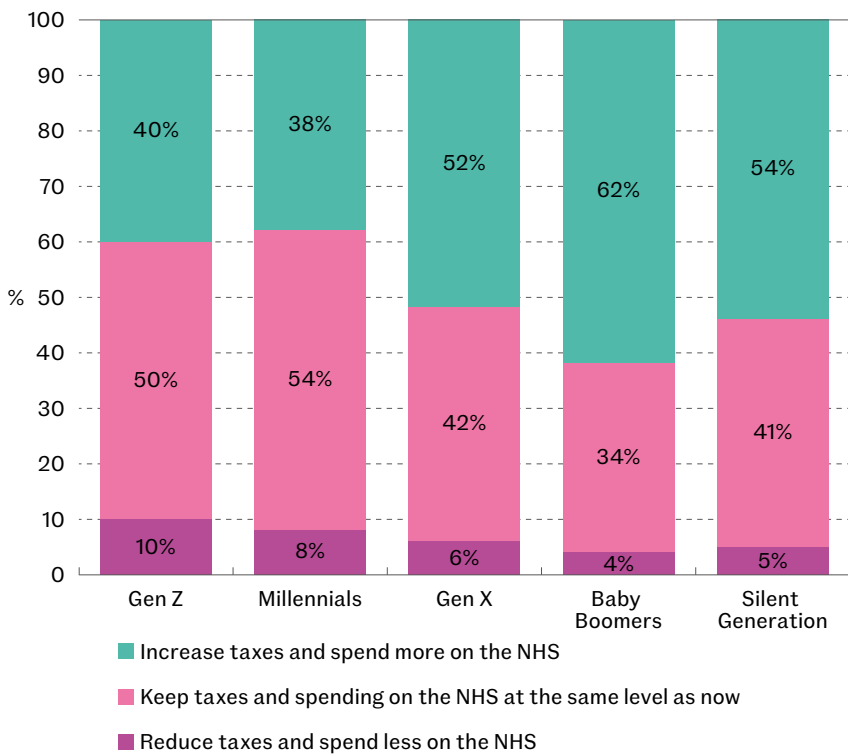
According to a 2022 report by the Health Foundation, the majority of the public supports greater funding for both the NHS and social care, although the public's preference on how to fund this increase is less clear (Buzelli et al., 2022). We asked people whether they'd rather increase taxes and increase spending on the NHS, or decrease taxes and decrease spending on the NHS, or keep things as they are (Figure 7). Gen Z do not stand out as any more in favour of a tax-and-spend approach than other generations. In fact, it's the Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation who are most likely to be in favour of tax rises.

% support increasing taxes and spending more on the NHS



Population: Adults in the UK (Base n=1171). Source: BSA 2023

Figure 7: Views on funding the NHS through taxes by generation



Population: Adults in the UK (Base n=1171). Source: BSA 2023

We have seen that Gen Z are markedly more supportive of social welfare than older generations.

Given the relatively low support from Gen Z for higher taxes to fund spending more on the NHS, strong support for higher taxes to fund social care is probably also unlikely from this group.

Gen Z and social care spending: a balancing act

We have seen that Gen Z are markedly more supportive of social welfare than older generations, but show caution towards general tax increases to fund healthcare spending. In the context of an all-pervasive increase in the cost of living, Gen Z appear to want a more progressive approach to the challenge of social care funding. This model would combine state funding of adult social care alongside individuals paying what they can afford.

Given the crisis in social care, the British government will need to consider how it communicates the pressures on the system and the solutions available. It is likely that Gen Z's support for future settlements will depend on factors like affordability, effectiveness, and transparency.



Home ownership: a clash between aspirations and reality?

Sarah Frankenburg and Olivia Lucas

It is becoming more and more difficult for young people to buy a home on their own. Increasingly, home ownership is only possible with help: in 2022-23, over a third of first-time buyers relied on a gift or loan from family or friends (English Housing Survey (EHS), 2023).

Many Millennials, but not all, are set to benefit substantially from inheritance passed down from the wealthiest generation in history (Resolution Foundation, 2017). This movement of wealth from one generation to the next will peak in the early 2030s. Gen Z, however, will largely miss out on this windfall. For them, home ownership will likely be even further out of reach.

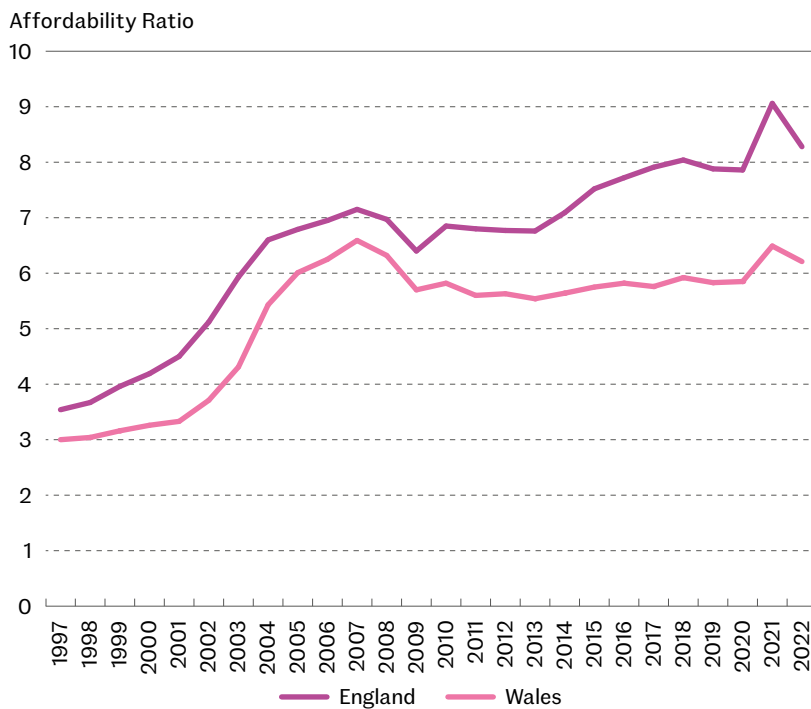
Our latest data show that the majority of Gen Z still aspire to own their own home. As Gen Z become an ever-larger portion of the electorate, will their dissatisfaction with an aspiration they can't realise help to drive through housing reform? Or will it increase the likelihood that they disengage from a political process they see as failing them?

Who can afford to buy?

First-time home ownership is becoming increasingly difficult, especially given the wider cost of living crisis and knock-on impacts on household finances and people's ability to save. House prices are outpacing incomes by a substantial margin. In 2022, the average house price in England was £275,000, and the average annual household income was £33,200. This means that the average English household could expect to spend about 8.3 times their annual earnings purchasing a home, up from 3.7 times in 1998 (Figure 8) (ONS, 2023e).

This suggests that only those set to inherit money from their parents, and those on high incomes, have a realistic chance of getting on the property ladder in most places. Reflecting this, the (mean) average age of first-time ownership has crept up over the last twenty years, from 31.4 in 2003-04 to 33.5 in 2022-23 (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), 2023).

Figure 8: Affordability of house prices over time



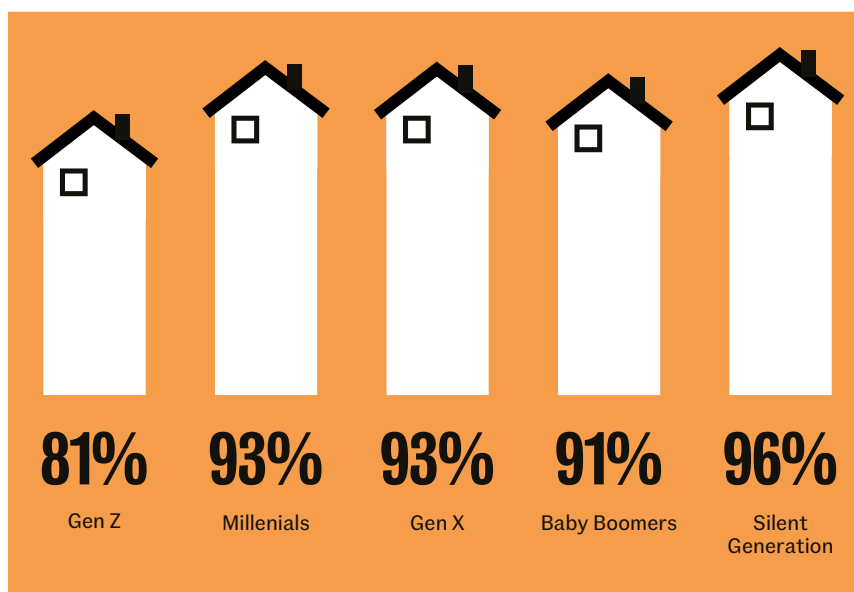
Source: ONS, 2023e

Do Gen Z want to buy their own homes?

Homeownership remains a key milestone for many. While Gen Z are less likely than older generations to want to own a home, the majority still do. Putting affordability to one side, our new data shows that 81% of Gen Z would choose to buy a home if they could, compared to 93% of Millennials, and similar proportions of the older generations.

81% of Gen Z would choose to buy a home if they could.

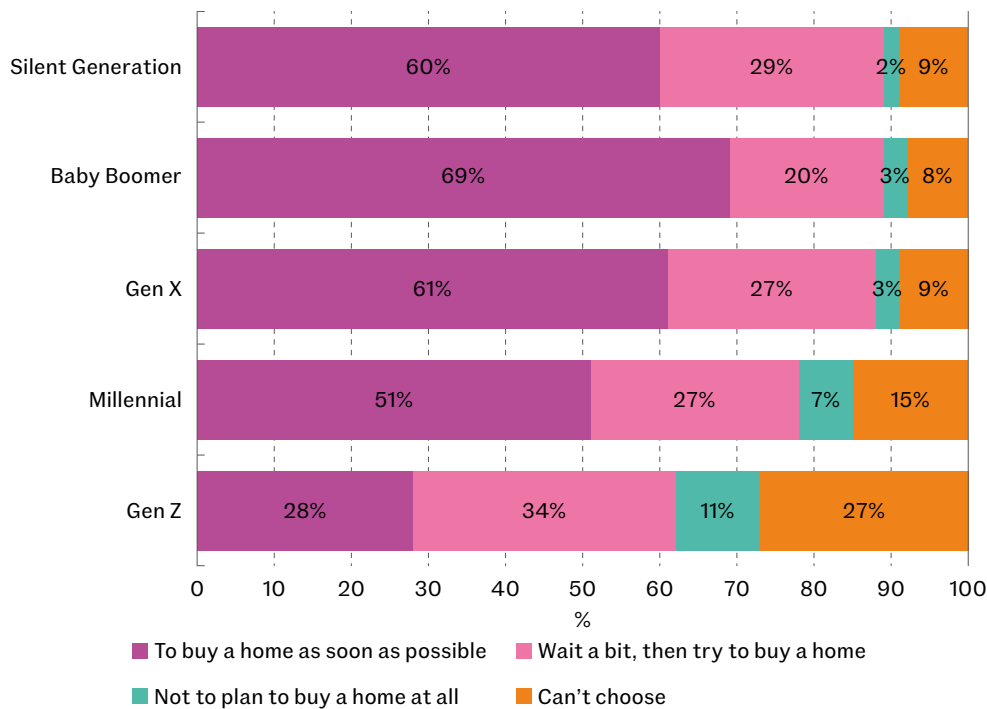
% agree would choose to buy home if given a free choice



But the data also suggests that Gen Z are contending with significant uncertainties. This is revealed when looking at what Gen Z would advise a newlywed couple. Gen Z are much less likely than other generations to say they should try to buy a home as soon as possible, and over a quarter of Gen Z did not know what they would recommend, compared with 10% or less of the other generations (Figure 9). Perhaps it is hard to know what to recommend when the luck of what you are set to inherit dictates what options are available.



Figure 9: Housing advice for a newlywed couple, by generation.



Population: Adults in the UK (Base n=1255). Source: British Social Attitudes. Data collected between 12th September and 31st October 2023.

How should housing policy respond?

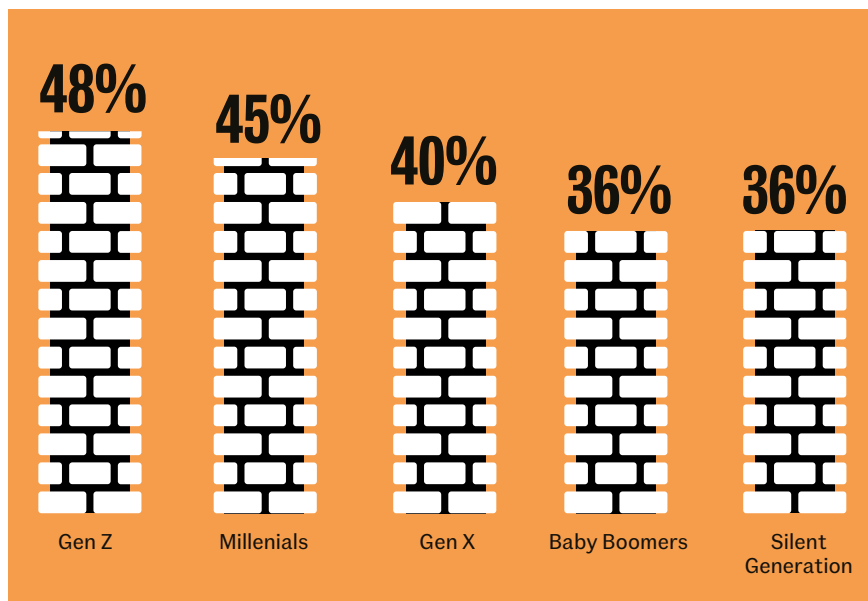
Gen Z are also pessimistic about the affordability of housing in the future. Our new data show over three-quarters (78%) expect house prices in their area to increase further in the next 10 years. Gen Z therefore expect to face a much more extended period living with parents or in rented accommodation than generations before them.

Gen Z therefore expect to face a much more extended period living with parents or in rented accommodation than generations before them.

It is perhaps unsurprising then that Gen Z want to see more support for renters, including from landlords. For example, where rent is increased to cover the costs of insulating a home, over half of Gen Z (53%) felt welfare benefits should increase to cover the difference. This was compared to 39% of Millennials. These views align with their attitudes towards social responsibility and welfare.

Gen Z also want to see new homes being built in their area. Compared to Gen X, Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation, they are also less likely to support new homes only for those with connections to the area.

% support for home building in their local area

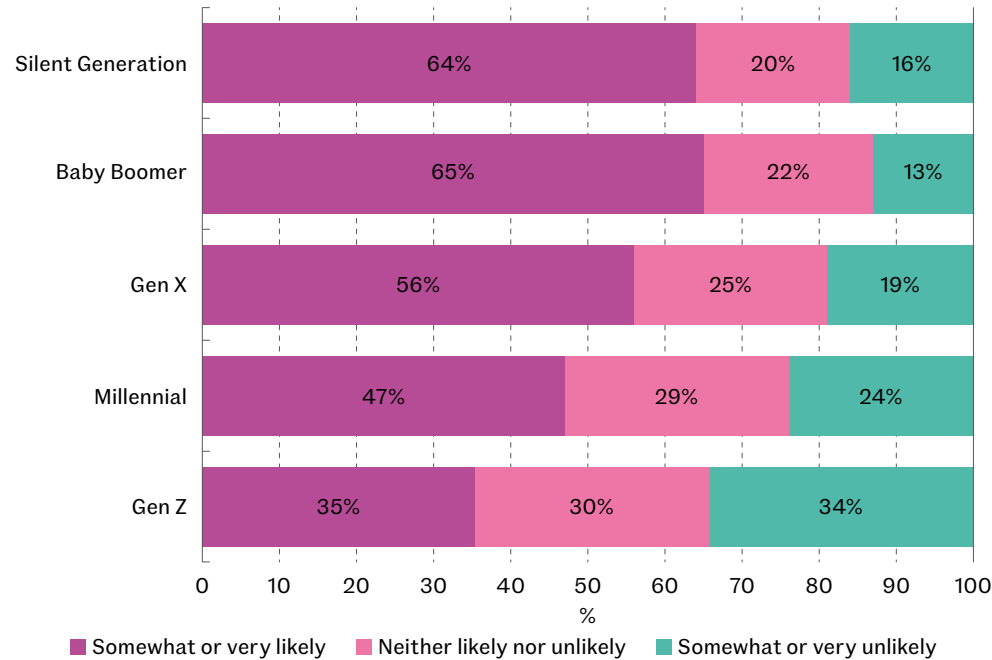


Give up, or get stuck in?

Gen Z represent a significant proportion of the population (and, increasingly, of the electorate) for whom homeownership may not be possible. How is this going to play out in the politics of the coming decades?

The increasing gap between aspiration and reality could lead to lower trust in government and further disengagement by Gen Z from a political process that is failing them. Younger voters are already more likely to express dissatisfaction than older voters by not voting at all. In particular, Millennials, non-graduates and non-homeowners report being less likely to vote: the share of non-graduate Millennials reporting that they are likely to vote is down 12 percentage points on 2019 (Aref-Adib and Hale, 2024). Despite their dissatisfaction with housing affordability, Gen Z are less likely than older generations to actively engage in housing policy or planning in their area (Figure 10).

Figure 10: If your local council was asking residents to express their views on new housing to be built in your area, how likely or unlikely would you be to give your views?



Population: Adults in the UK (Base n=5543). Source: BSA 2023.

However, it is possible that Gen Z go in the opposite direction. They may become increasingly vocal and politically active, demanding substantial change from future British Governments in their approach to housing provision. As we have seen, Gen Z show increased support for renters and house building that genuinely responds to need. This outcome would align with what we know about their support for civil disobedience and activism (see Taking liberties: law and order).

The BSA survey will continue to monitor Gen Z’s housing aspirations over time. We will be able to chart whether, as they progress further into adulthood, their desires for home ownership change or diminish in response to their real-life circumstances.

Concluding reflections: do generations matter?

Lovisa Moller Vallgarda and Bernard Steen

A generational perspective can help explain how Britain is (or is not) changing. By looking at when people were born, we can go some way to explaining views on the relative importance of social order and individual freedom, for example. But whilst some views and attitudes will vary by generation, others won't. How we come to know which prove salient and influential can be put to the test; though how best to do that is up for discussion (Bell, 2023).

There are different views on just how useful generational labels are for explaining society (see e.g. Parker, 2023; Duffy, 2021; Costanza et al. 2020). We rarely use them in our research. But as these terms become increasingly used in political conversations here in the UK, using them in our research has two benefits: it makes that research more accessible to a wider audience, and it allows us to contribute to a more informed discussion on whether people born into different generations see things differently.

When data allows for us to do so, grouping people based on when they were born can also add a new dimension to our analysis. When we collect data over time, we can follow groups of people who were born around the same time to see whether differences persist.

So, is there a generation effect?

As this report partly relies on data from single time points, many of the differences we discuss could be either down to age ('you'll understand when you're older') or when you were born ('where you start matters, and that's it').

By looking at when people were born, we can help explain views on the relative importance of social order and individual freedom.

In this report's exploration of law and order, and the accompanying technical paper on age-period-cohort modelling (Addario and Wilson, 2024), we've used the generations lens to partly explain differences in social norms over time. We therefore believe that Gen Z's more liberal views on authority and individual freedom are likely to stand the test of time.

On social care funding and housing policy, we've identified some noteworthy current differences between Gen Z and other generations, which we'll continue to track to assess whether these differences turn out to be down to age or when people were born.

Gen Z's views on funding for adult social care seem to be influenced more by their political and social beliefs than by self-interest, as there will be decades until the vast majority of this group would benefit from their support for government-funded care. The interplay between ageing, political values and support for specific welfare policies is complex. Among other factors, libertarian values could play a part in shaping egalitarian welfare preferences, such as a preference for non-means tested care. If this assumption holds, we could expect Gen Z's views on adult social care funding to remain somewhat stable over time, at least in the medium term.

On housing policy, we're not as well-equipped to offer a prediction. This report has identified that home ownership is likely to be even further out of reach for Gen Z than Millennials. We plan to track whether the 19% group within this youngest generation of voters that identify as 'renters by choice' will remain. What we can conclude is that Gen Z's preference for more support for renters, including from landlords, will likely remain in line with their self-interest over the coming decade.

Do the differences matter?

Finally, it's worth reflecting on the size of the differences that this report has covered. They often come down to a few percentage points. We're interested in these, objectively quite small, differences.

That does not imply that we overlook the great deal of difference that is present within generations. Some of this difference is linked to factors like family circumstances, income, and education, but that's far from the whole story. To understand social and political attitudes, a range of different complementary perspectives are needed, as well as accepting that even a rich, intersectional analysis only partly explains our similarities and differences in views and attitudes.

But when it comes to politics, percentage point differences between generations matter. If the only thing you know about someone is what generation they belong to, you really don't know very much about them, and you certainly can't infer their views on important issues. But zoom out, look at the averages, and an understanding of this new generation of voters might tell you something important about how some of our live political issues could play out over the coming years.



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