



The Generation Myth

Bobby Duffy

@BobbyDuffyKings | bobby.duffy@kcl.ac.uk

Thanks to Sir Roger (and Alison)...

CREST

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH INTO
ELECTIONS AND SOCIAL TRENDS

Working Paper
Number 67
September 1998

Young People, Politics and Citizenship

By Roger Jowell and Alison Park

**... and thank you
for access to
British Social
Attitudes data,
incredible asset**

#generations

generations-book.org

Generational thinking is a powerful idea...



Auguste Comte

***"We should not hide the fact that our social progress rests essentially upon death...
...the successive steps of humanity necessarily require a continuous renovation ... from one generation to the next"***

José Ortega y Gasset: 'the concept of the generation is the most important one in the whole of history', because it constitutes the mechanism by which 'history moves, changes, wheels and flows'

Today we get...

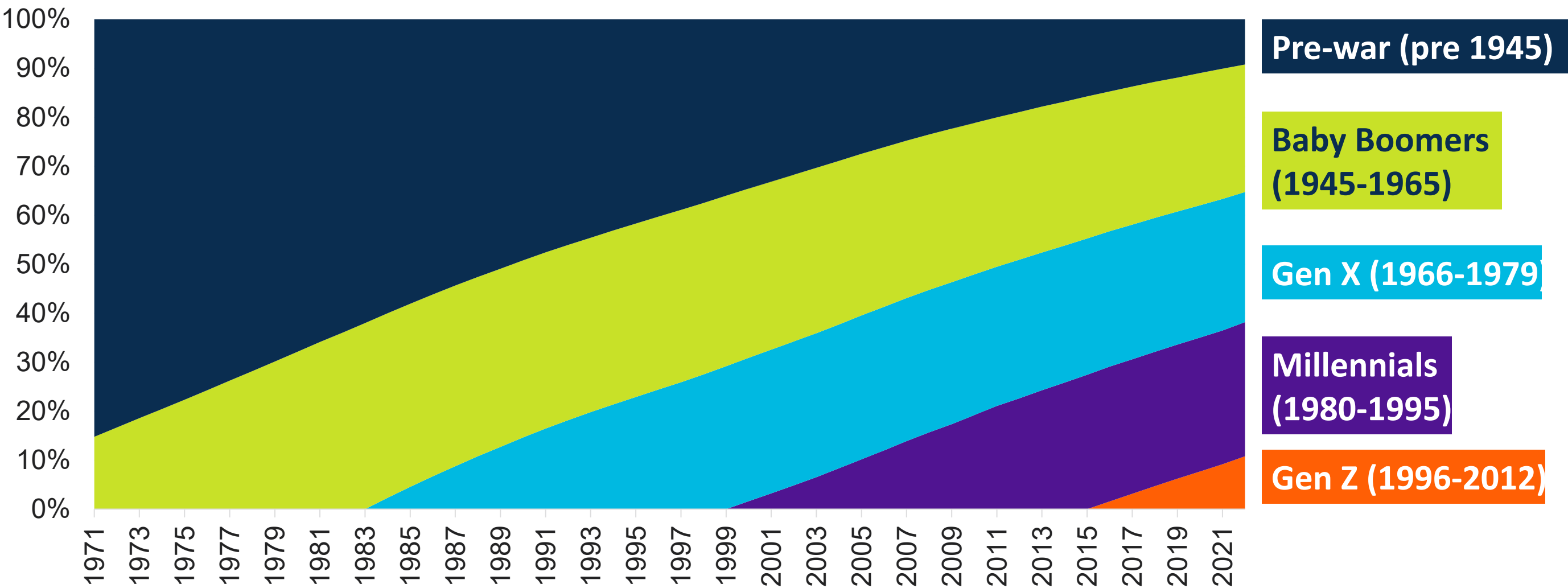
Millennials are killing the napkin industry

The Boomers Ruined Everything

Power-hungry hedonists? Survey reveals what drives generation Z

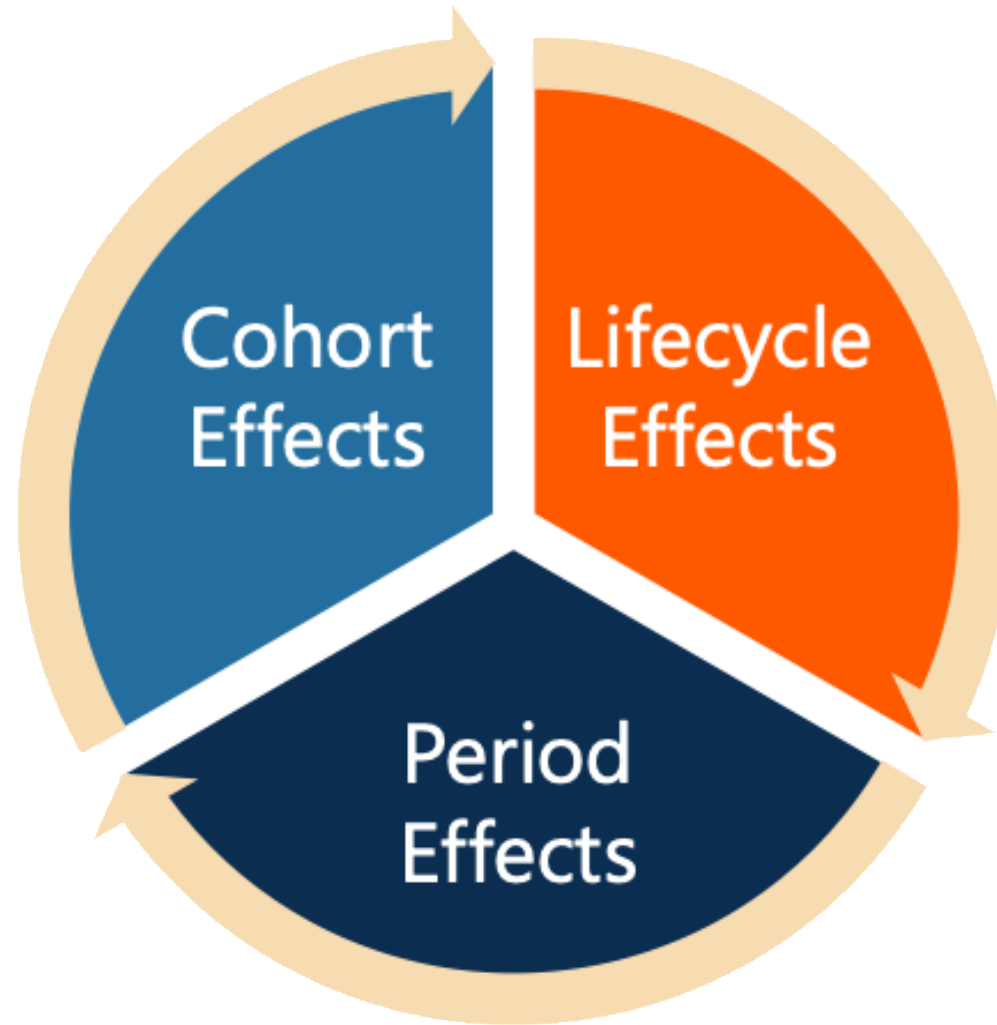
Can only understand future if understand generations...

% of UK individuals aged 18+ in each generation



Source: ONS (1971-2022)

Book separates myth from reality – but real task is to separate 3 effects...



Mixing up effects is the main reason we have so many generational myths...



1. Generational stereotypes fuel fake generational battles that distract us from vitally important trends...

We (unthinkingly) encourage generational conflict...

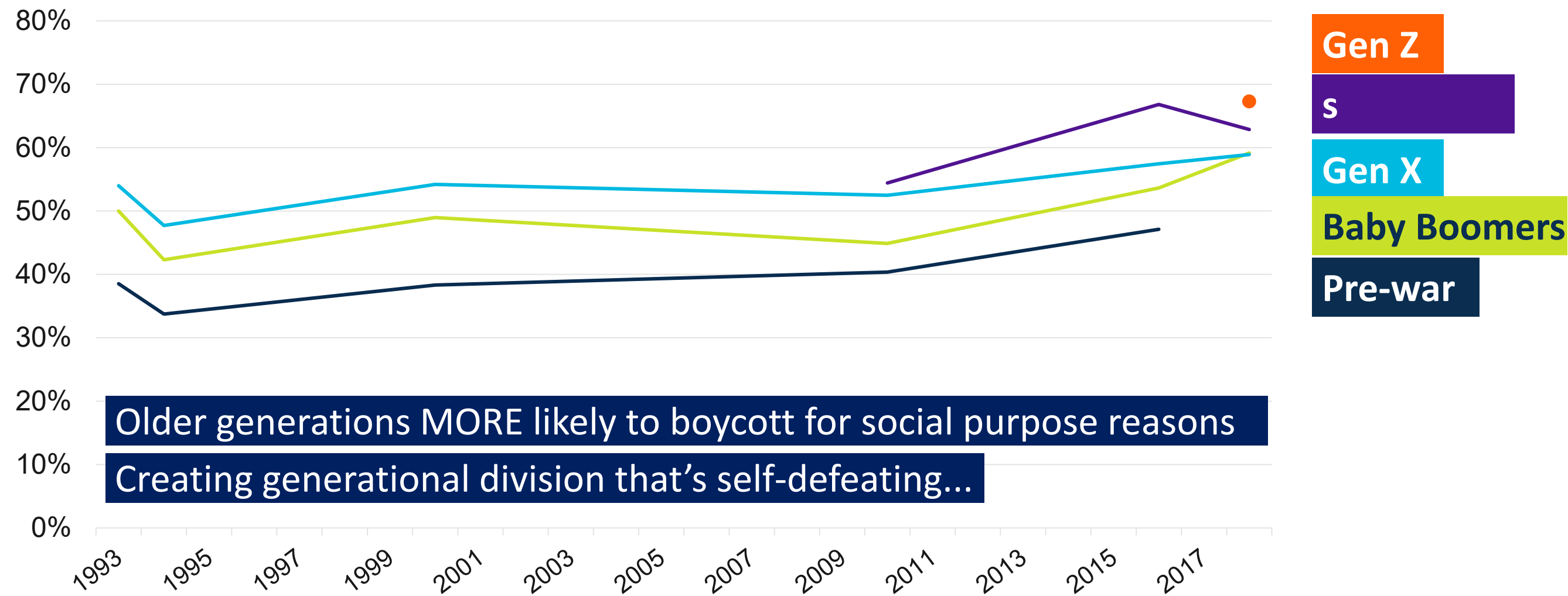


A “standard bearer in a **generational battle**”
– Time

“Hopefully the adults and the old people start listening to us [about climate change]. Old people are gonna die and don’t really care if we die, but we don’t wanna die yet”
– Billie Eilish

No real generational break in concern about the environment...

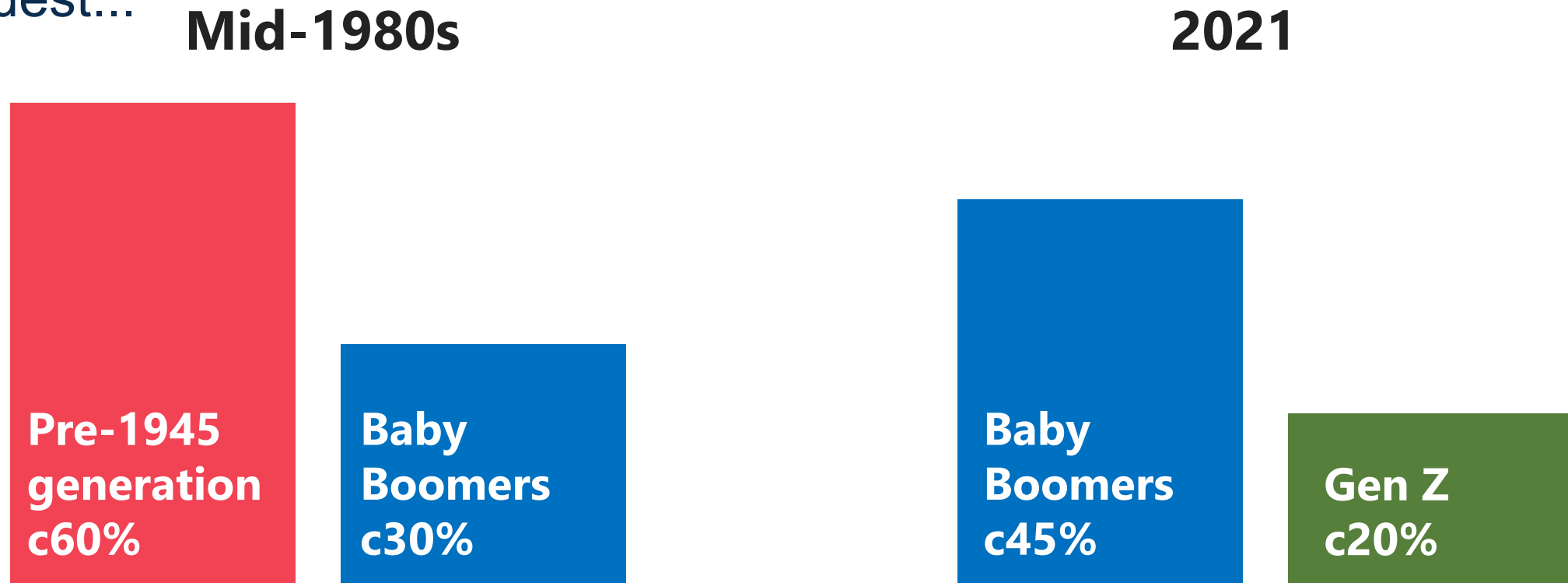
Proportion of American adults thinking that the rise in world temperature caused by the greenhouse effect is “extremely” or “very dangerous”



Source: US General Social Survey (1993-2018)

“Culture wars” NOT down to new generation of “snowflakes” or “social justice warriors”

- Evidence shows clear gaps between young and old on attitudes to race, immigration, gender equality and identity, sexuality etc – but **NOT** unusual gaps...
- ...constant ratio – youngest generation 2x as likely to be comfortable with changing norms than oldest...



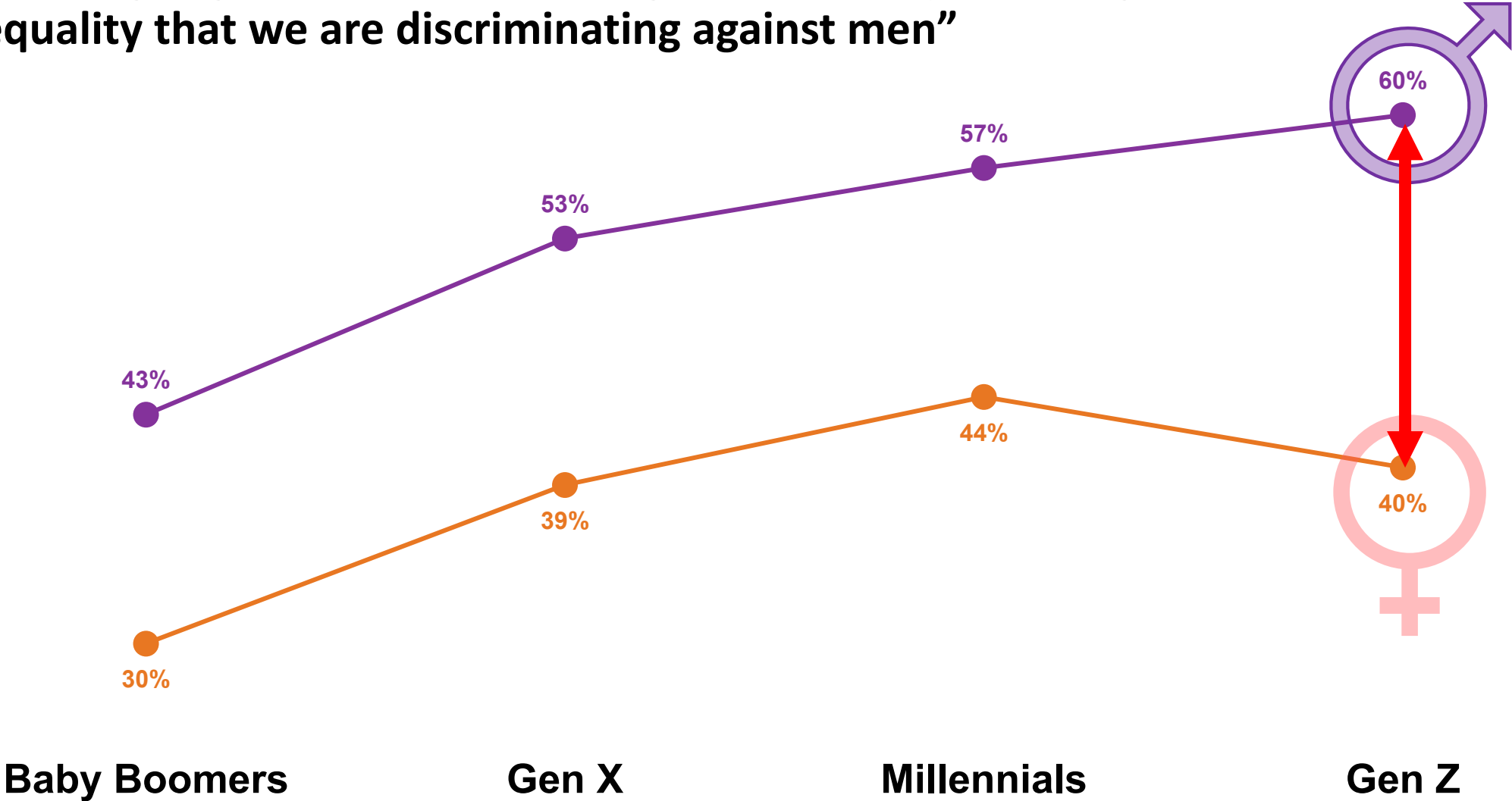
“Women should stay at home”

“Proud of British Empire”

- Not just inevitable, but *beneficial* – a type of “demographic metabolism” that prevents us becoming a “stagnant pond” (Norman Ryder)

NEW trend: Gen Z men and women are dividing...

32-country average agree that... “We have gone so far in promoting women's equality that we are discriminating against men”



Base: 24,269 online adults aged 18-74 in Canada, Republic of Ireland, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Africa, Turkey and the United States, 20-74 in Thailand, 21-74 in Indonesia and Singapore, and 16-74 in all other countries, 22 December 2023-5 January, 2024

Thinking today's young are uniquely wrong or weird is a constant of history...

400 BC

“The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise...”*

– Socrates

355 BC

“...the young men did not waste their time in the gambling-dens or with the flute-girls ...but remained steadfastly in the pursuits to which they had been assigned”

– Isocrates

1771

“A race of effeminate, self-admiring, emaciated fribbles”

– Letter in Town and Country magazine

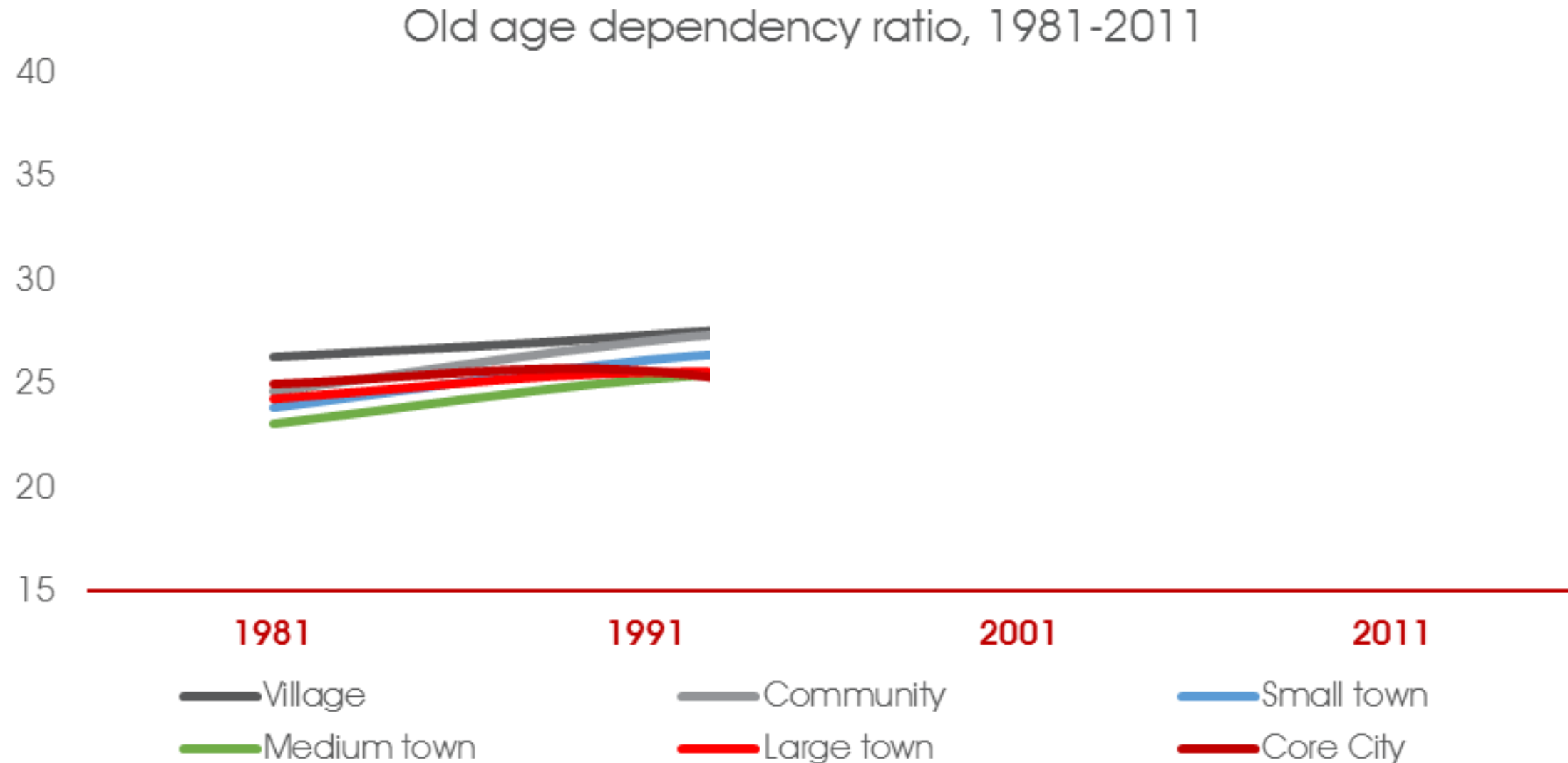
- **Feels** more divided now – for two main reasons...
- ...more fractious media, social media and politics...

* Summary of general Athenian sentiment by Kenneth Freeman, 1907



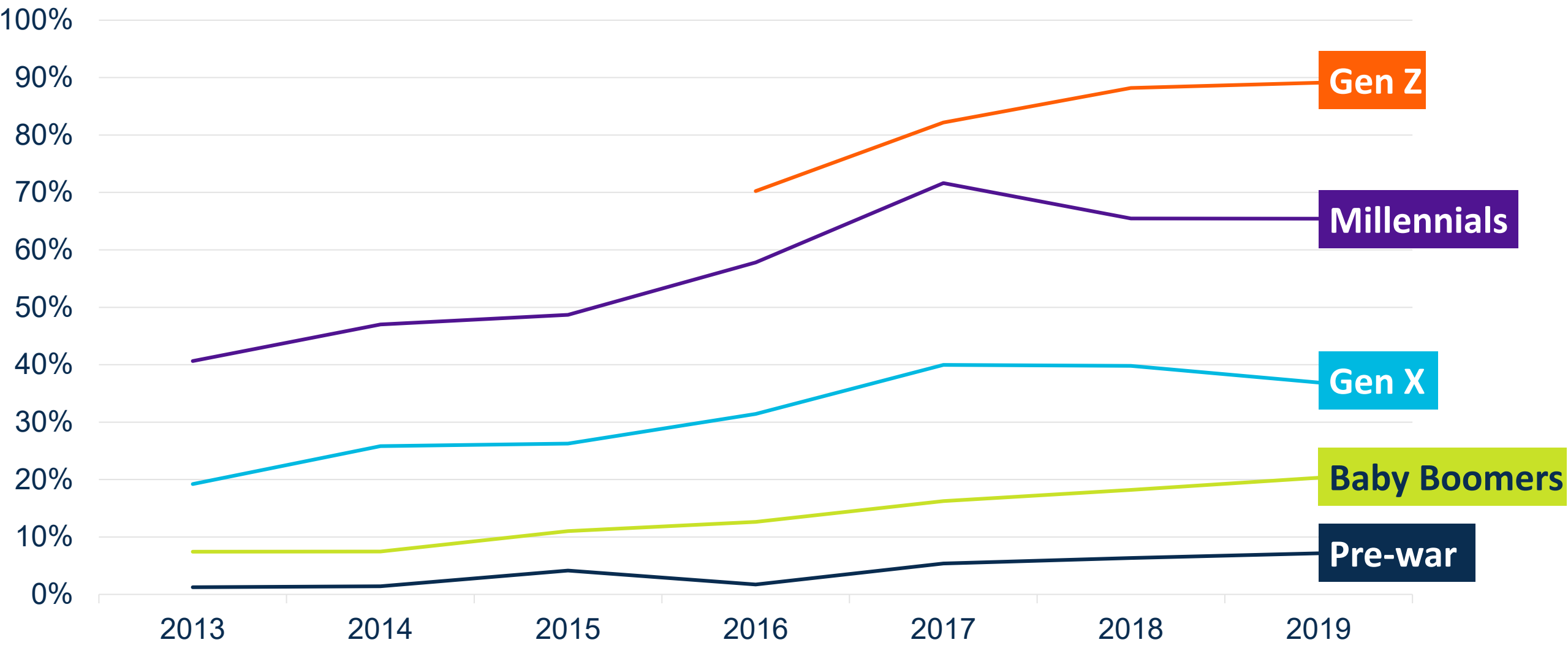
2. ...but generational conflict also related to increased *separation*...

A “dangerous experiment” in age segregation...



...and living very separate digital lives...

Proportion of French adults using online social networks everyday





Separation fuels stereotyping...

facebook A group where we all pretend to be boomers

MY GRANDSON FORGOT TO CALL ME ON MY BIRTHDAY. THANKS BIDEN.

Good home remedies for anal tremors?



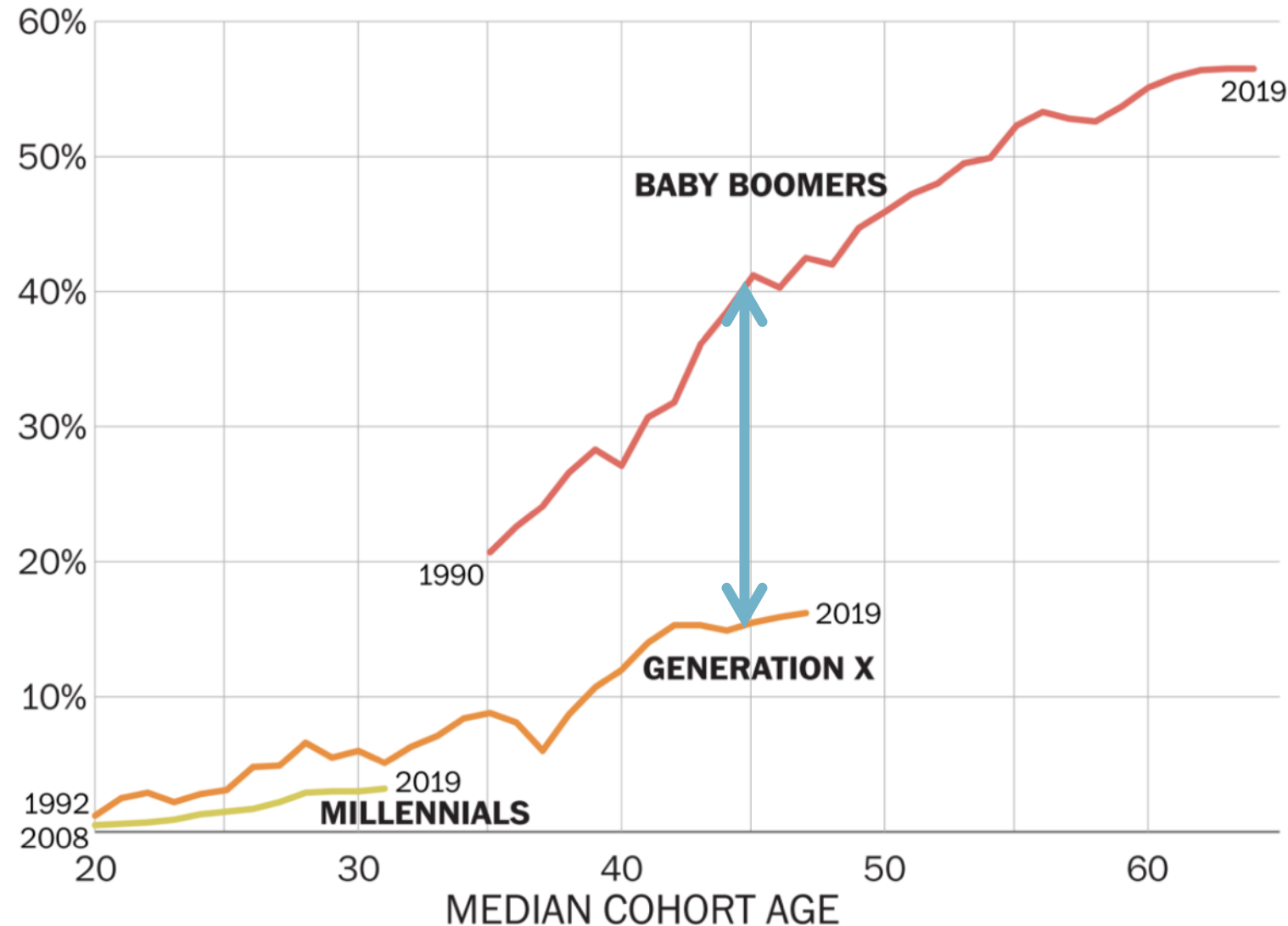
BUT can be destructive... and we're losing the benefits of intergenerational connection



**3. Inequality is increasingly
generational – and
intergenerational**

An extraordinary concentration of wealth by generation in some countries...

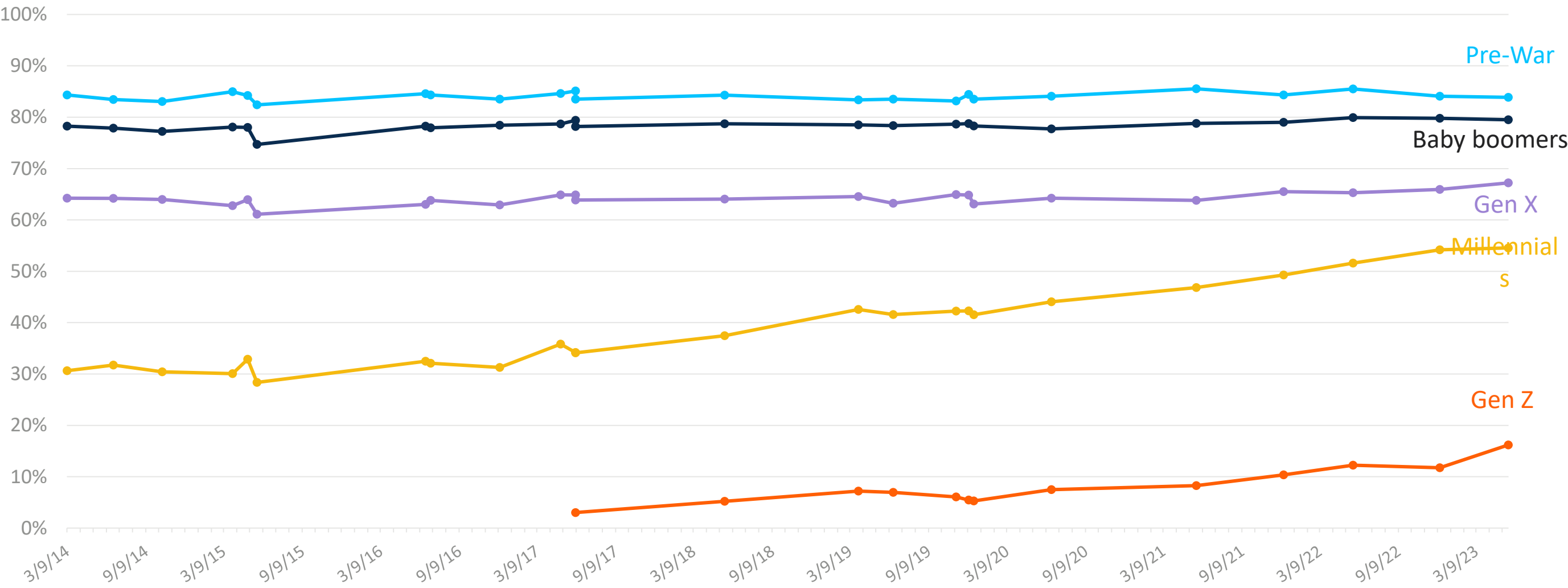
Share of national wealth owned by each generation, by median cohort age



...life chances increasingly set by family resources, in many countries

Extraordinary change in home ownership...

% who own the house in which they live (own outright/paying mortgage/shared ownership scheme)



Source: British Election Study Online Panel

And it's worse than that – they get the blame...

Kirstie Allsopp's property advice for young people sparks Twitter debate

VIEW 1 COMMENTS



“When I bought my first property, going abroad, the EasyJet, coffee, gym, Netflix lifestyle didn't exist...”



Matt Zarb-Cousin

@mattzarb



To be fair to Kirstie Allsopp, if you cancelled your Netflix and PureGym subscription and instead saved that £40 a month, as long as the housing market doesn't go up at all then in just 54 years you'll have enough for a deposit on an average house

7:29 PM · Feb 6, 2022



14.8K



Reply



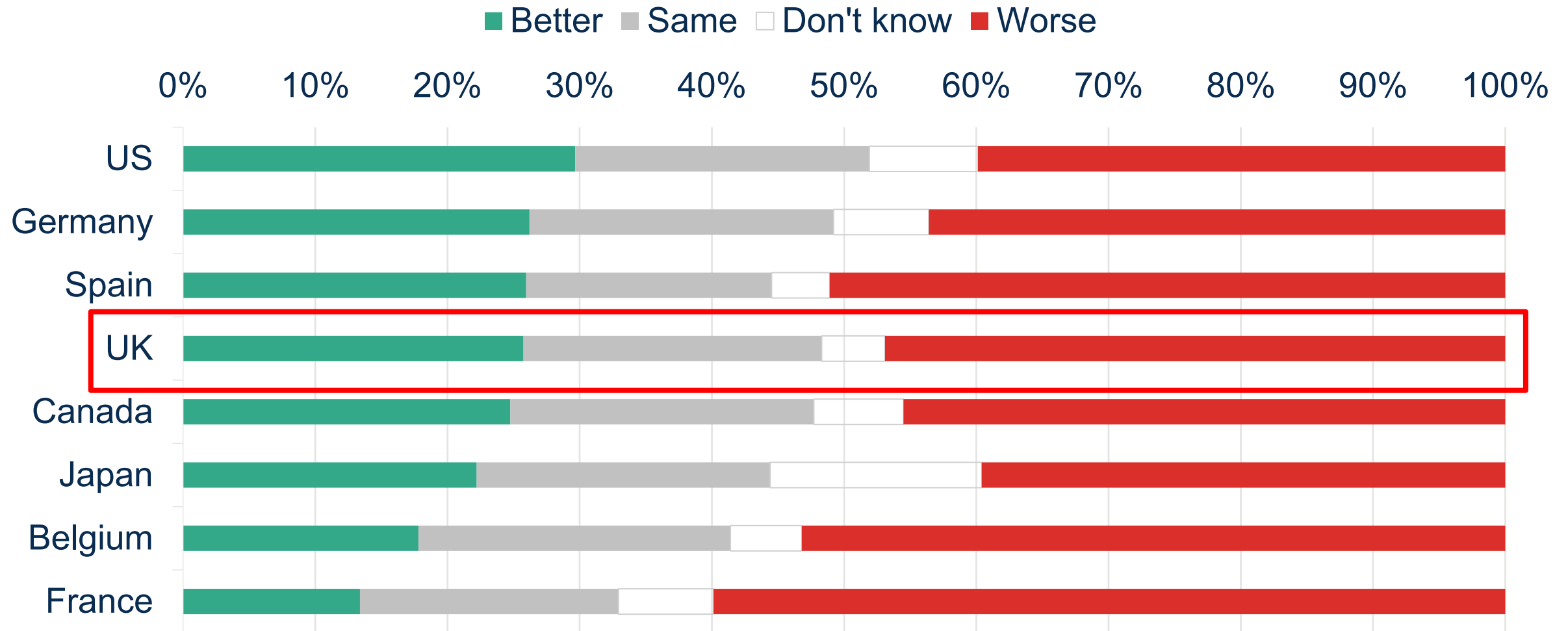
Copy link



4. Many losing faith that things will be better for our kids than us...

A loss in optimism across many more developed countries...

To what extent, if at all do you feel that today's youth will have a better or worse life than their parents, or will it be about the same?



NOT *just* about young vs old: about how we ALL see the future



5. The workplace is one of few places we're still pushed together – should be an opportunity for connection, but is one noisiest engines of myths...

Workplace generational “research” is often actively unhelpful...

‘Entitled’ Gen Z is the most difficult generation in the workplace: poll

How Gen Z are proudly shirking from home
– and taking the economy down with them

'I'm so upset.' Gen Z woman is devastated after her first day at a 9-to-5 office job.

Workshy Gen Z staff who can't be bothered to read their emails need a reality check

Gen Z need to understand that reading emails is part of the job – as is working hard

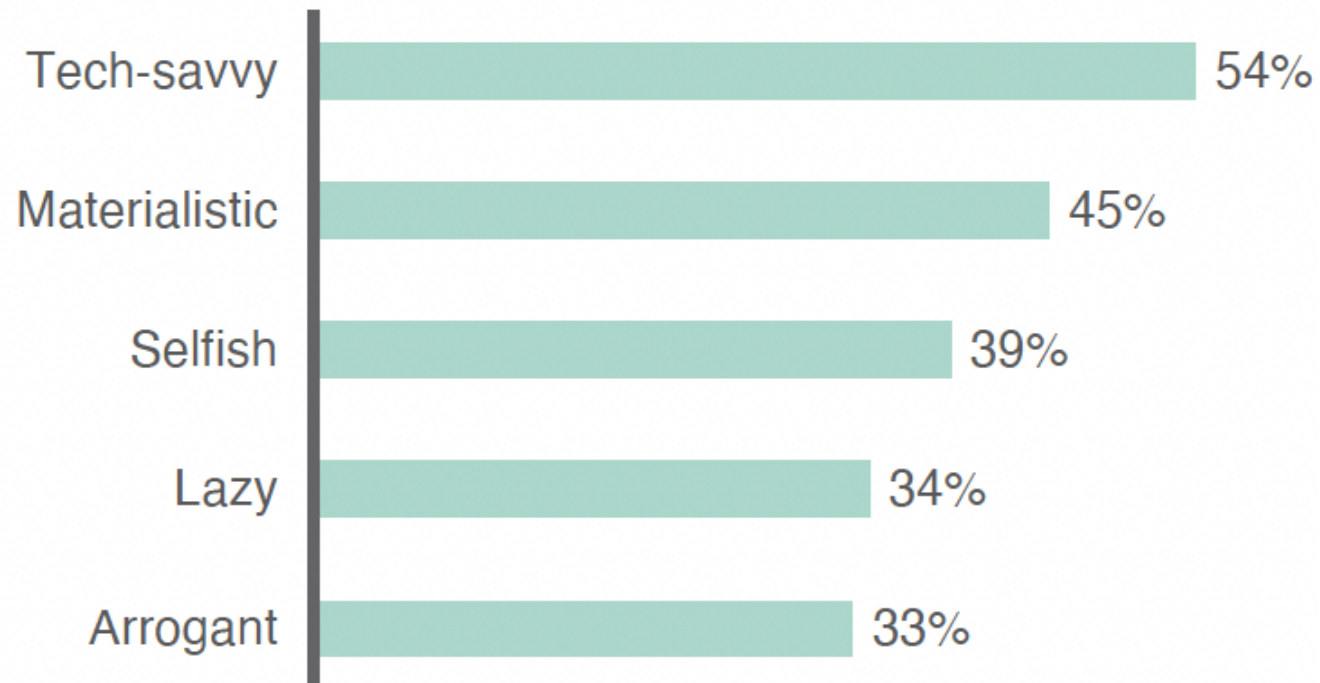
Why can't Gen Z cope with the real world? I'll tell you why...

Based on 'rosy retrospection' and lifecycle effects...

...industrial sociologist Michael Rose, writing in early 1980s - bosses said (young) Baby Boomers lacked: "professionalism, self-discipline and drive"

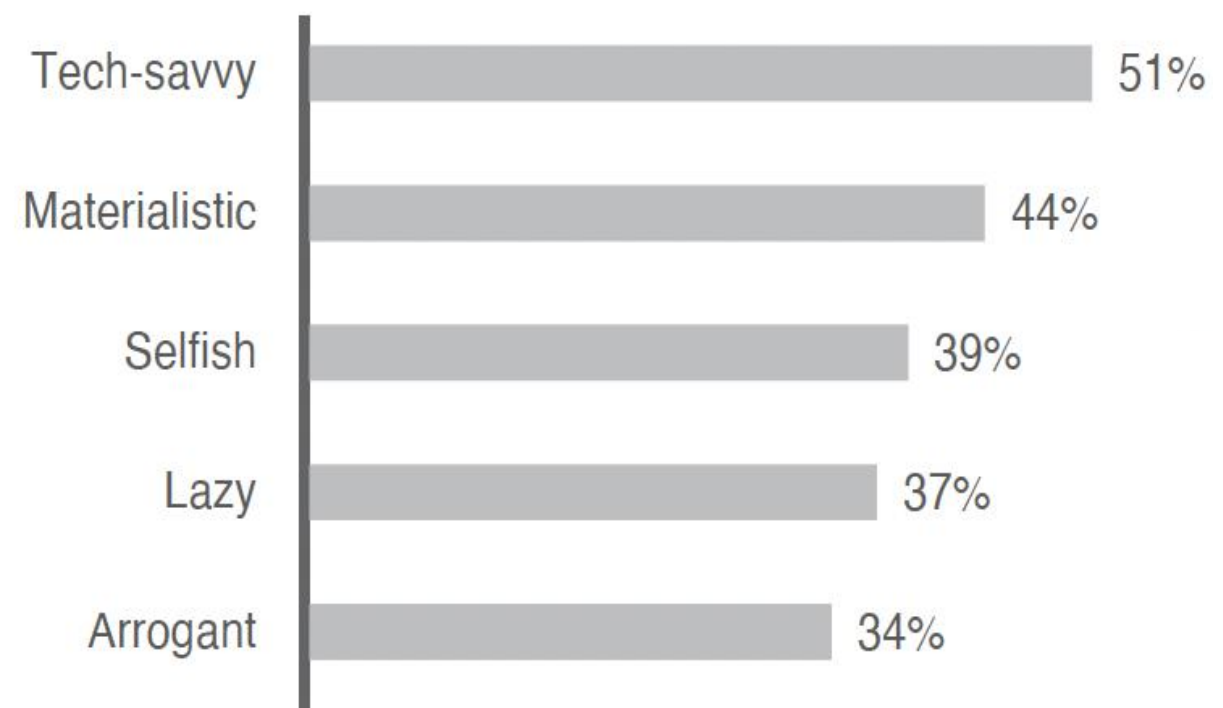
Millennials in 2017 versus 2019

2017 Millennials Top 5 Characteristics



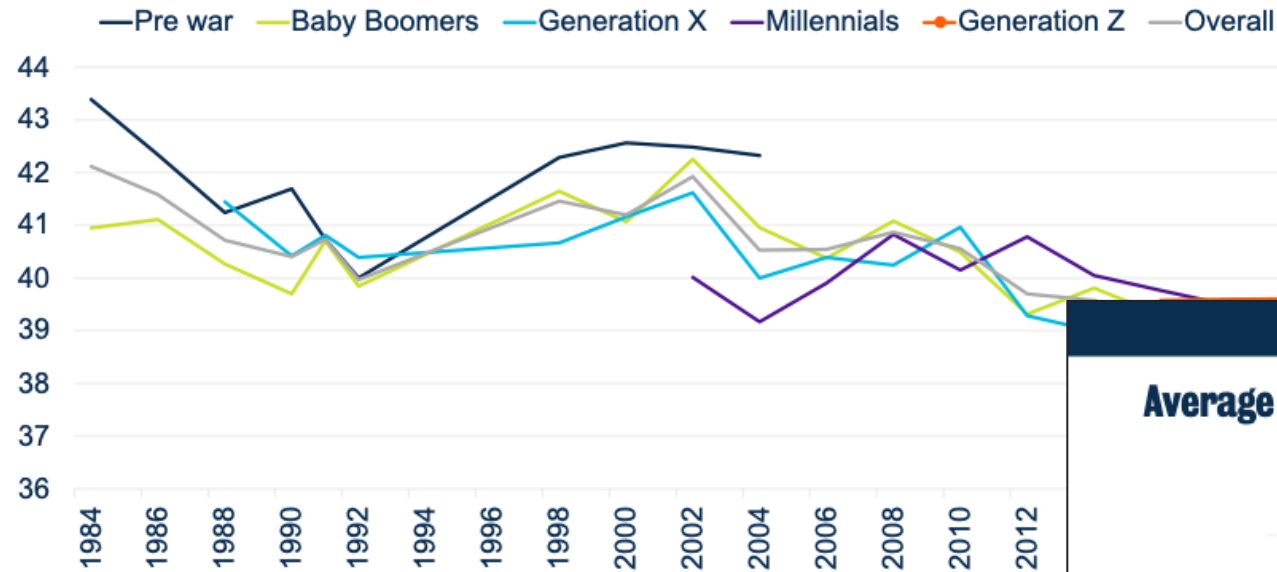
Gen Z

Top 5 Characteristics



Seen as lazy and disloyal at work – BUT we're mixing up effects...

Average number of hours worked per week, including overtime, by German adults

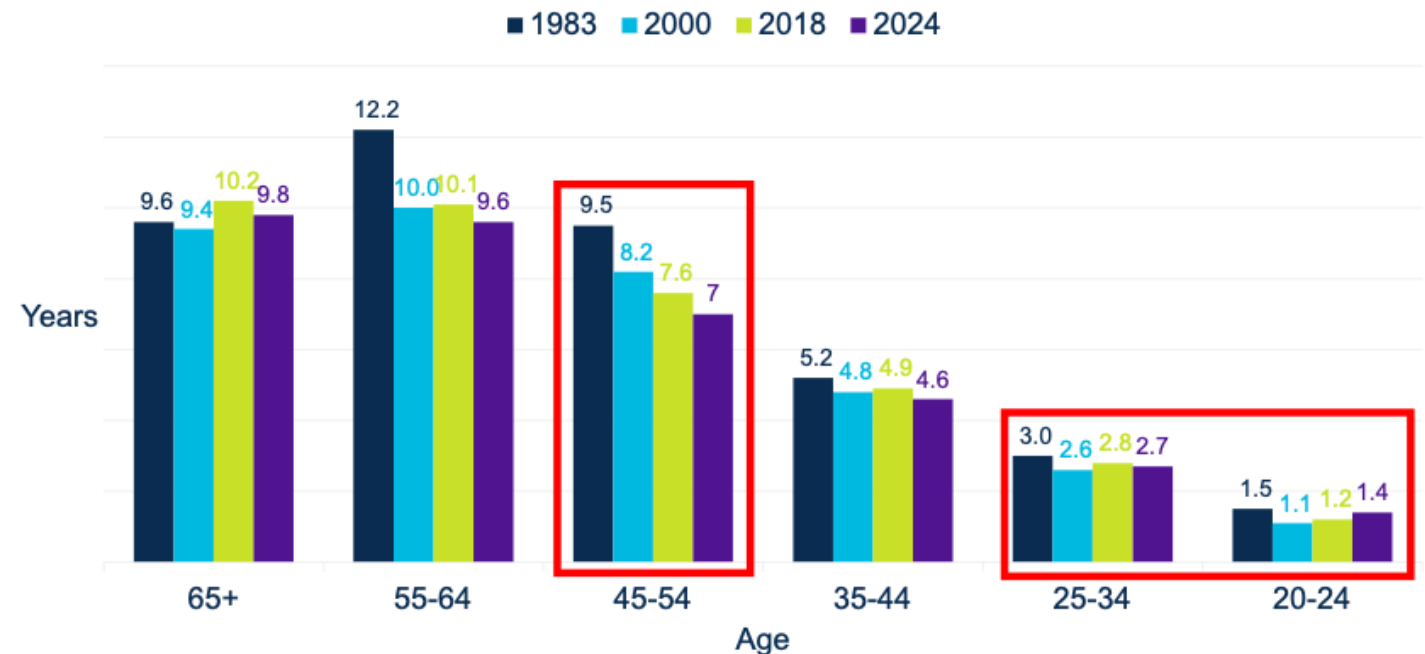


Source: ALLBUS (1984-2016)

Gen Z *are* working fewer hours than past young – BUT we *ALL* are... work-life balance is (largely) a period effect

Young people do move jobs more but Gen Z *not* less loyal to employers than past young (lifecycle effect)

Average tenure at current employer, in US



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

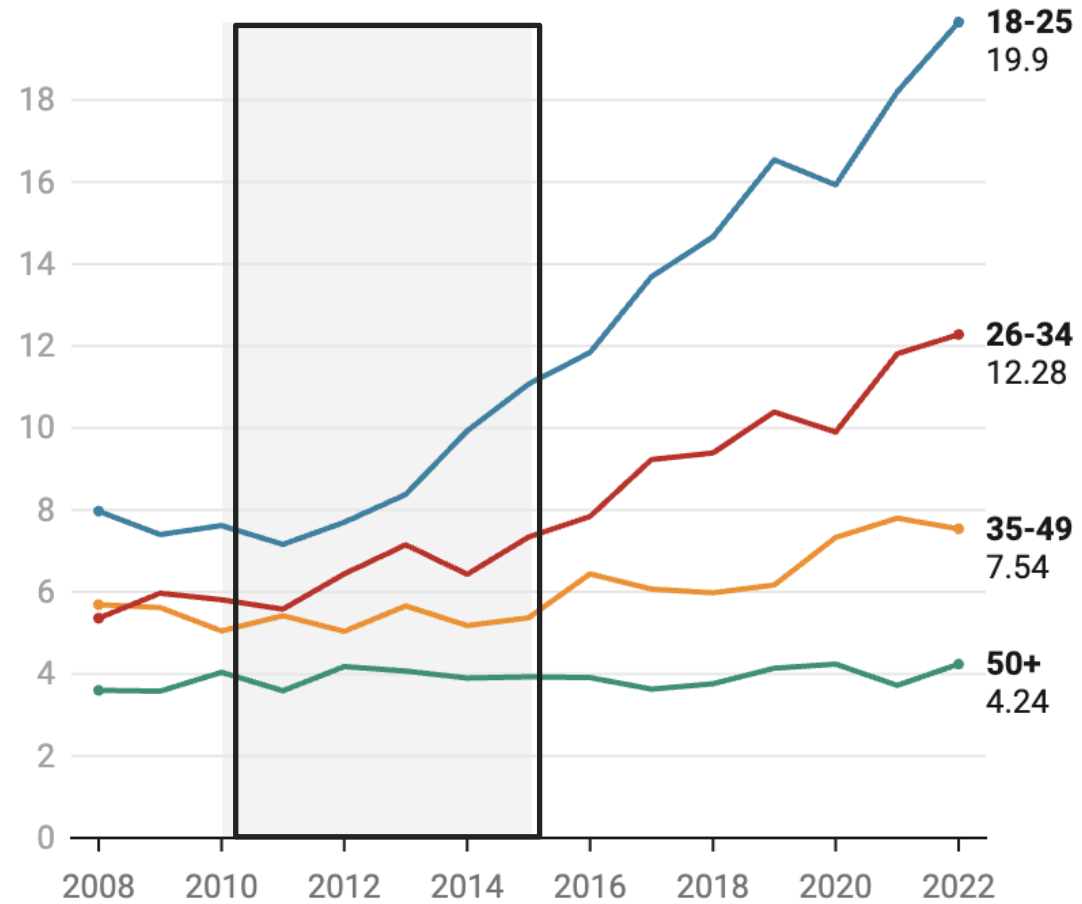


**There ARE real cohort differences
with younger generations...**

1. Economic pressures, plus...

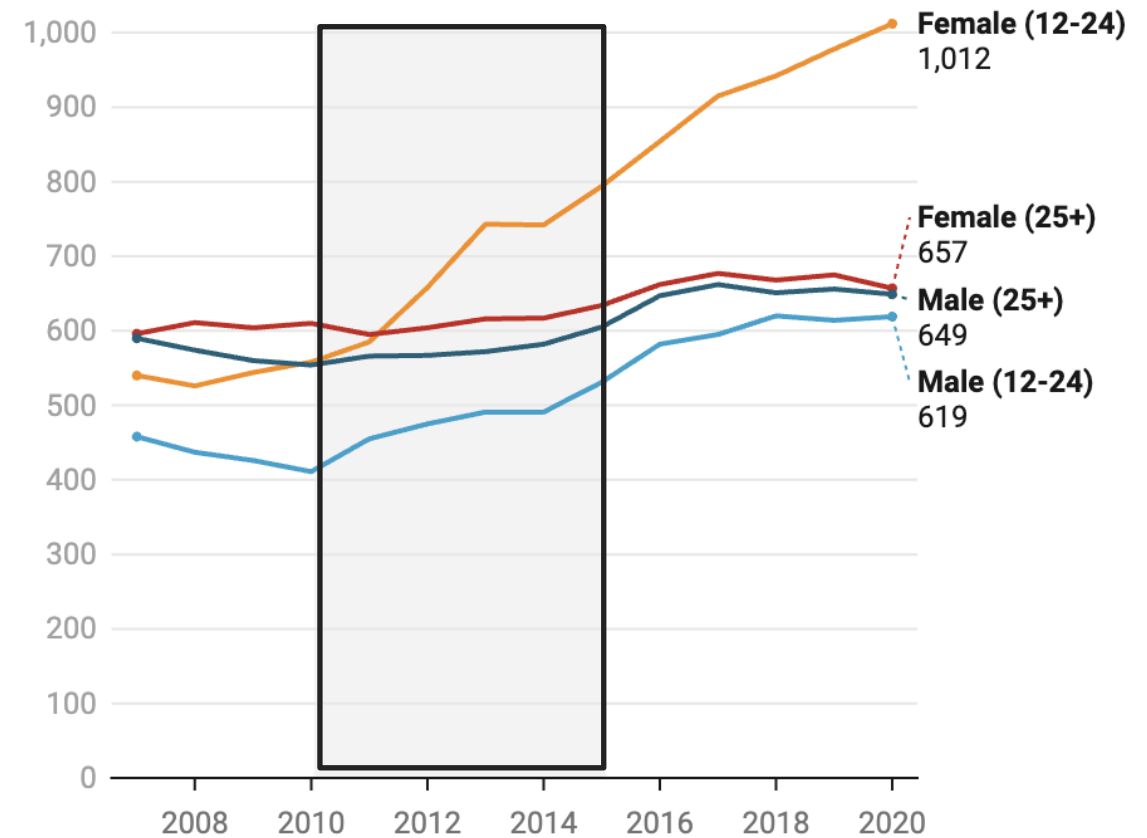
2. Increase in mental ill health...

Percent U.S. Anxiety Prevalence



Overnight Mental Health Hospitalizations, Australia

Rate per 100,000 Population



3. “Delayed adulthood”

- % of 25-34-year-olds living with parents increased by a third 2006-2024 (now 2 in 5)
- Getting married c8 years later, on average
- Having kids c4 years later, on average

The Death of the Saturday Job %
of 16-17 year olds working

Older Millennials in 1991 48%

Middle Gen Z in 2019 25%

Generational perspective important – what's right?

My Mum

Born 1945

Left school at 15...
...straight into full-
time job in factory

Me

Born 1972

Jobs by 17:

Paper round, washing
dishes in hotel, corner
shop, Sainsbury's,
Boots, crate washing
in factory, office
removals for very
dodgy temp agency

My Daughter

Born 2008

Jobs by 17:

Selling stuff on Depop
and Vinted...
that we bought her...
and we do the admin
for...



DON'T build a Gen Z workplace strategy – build an *intergenerational* strategy...

- so many myths – because separation exaggerates difference
- even real differences are average trends, not defining or exclusive to Gen Z
- increasing evidence of benefits of intergenerational connection (OECD & LSE)



3 main actions:

- **focus on intergenerational inequality**
- **rebuild and protect
generational connection**
- **embed longer-term thinking...**

Mooted 10-year plan and a National Long-term Strategy...

The National Strategy Playbook

Guidance on the cycle
of national strategy



<https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/heywood-fellowship-national-strategy-playbook>

Generational thinking is vitally important...

- ...but most generational analysis is mix of fake conflict and astrology...



Over 400 “Millennial consultants”

Only 22 “Gen Z Whisperers” so far...

- **Use the labels sparingly/correctly... keep** the framework: lifecycle, period, cohort – **AND** focus on **intergenerational connection** and **longer-term thinking**



Jonathan Walker ✓

@jonwalker121

I am neither a millennial nor a boomer. I come from a generation so irrelevant that people can't even be bothered to hate us

Thank you

@BobbyDuffyKings

bobby.duffy@kcl.ac.uk

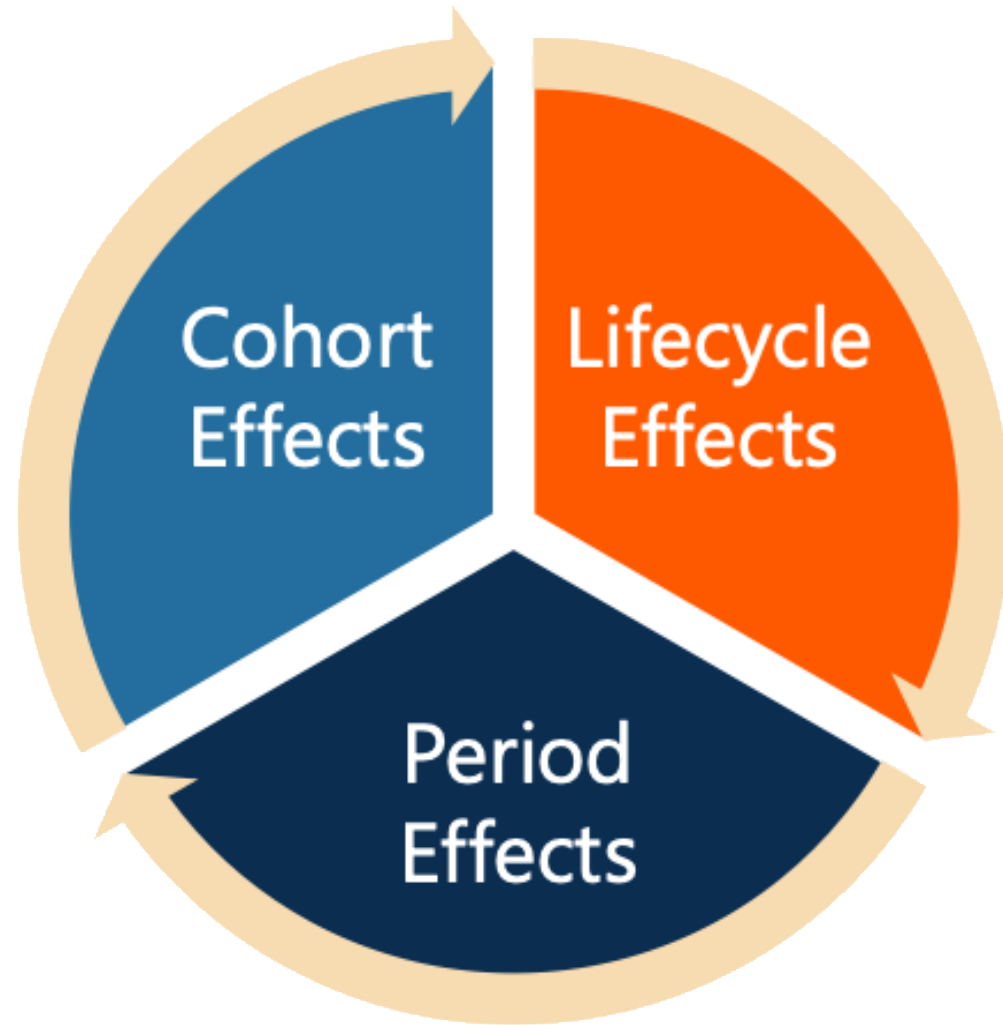


generations-book.org

**THE
POLICY
INSTITUTE**

KING'S
College
LONDON

Book separates myth from reality – but real task is to separate 3 effects...



Karl Mannheim: The Sociological Problem of Generations

Norman Ryder: developed sociology of cohort analysis

Wilhelm Lexis, German statistician: the Lexis diagram

Angus Deaton: synthetic cohort analysis...

Mixing up effects is the main reason we have so many generational myths...

Visualising the three effects...

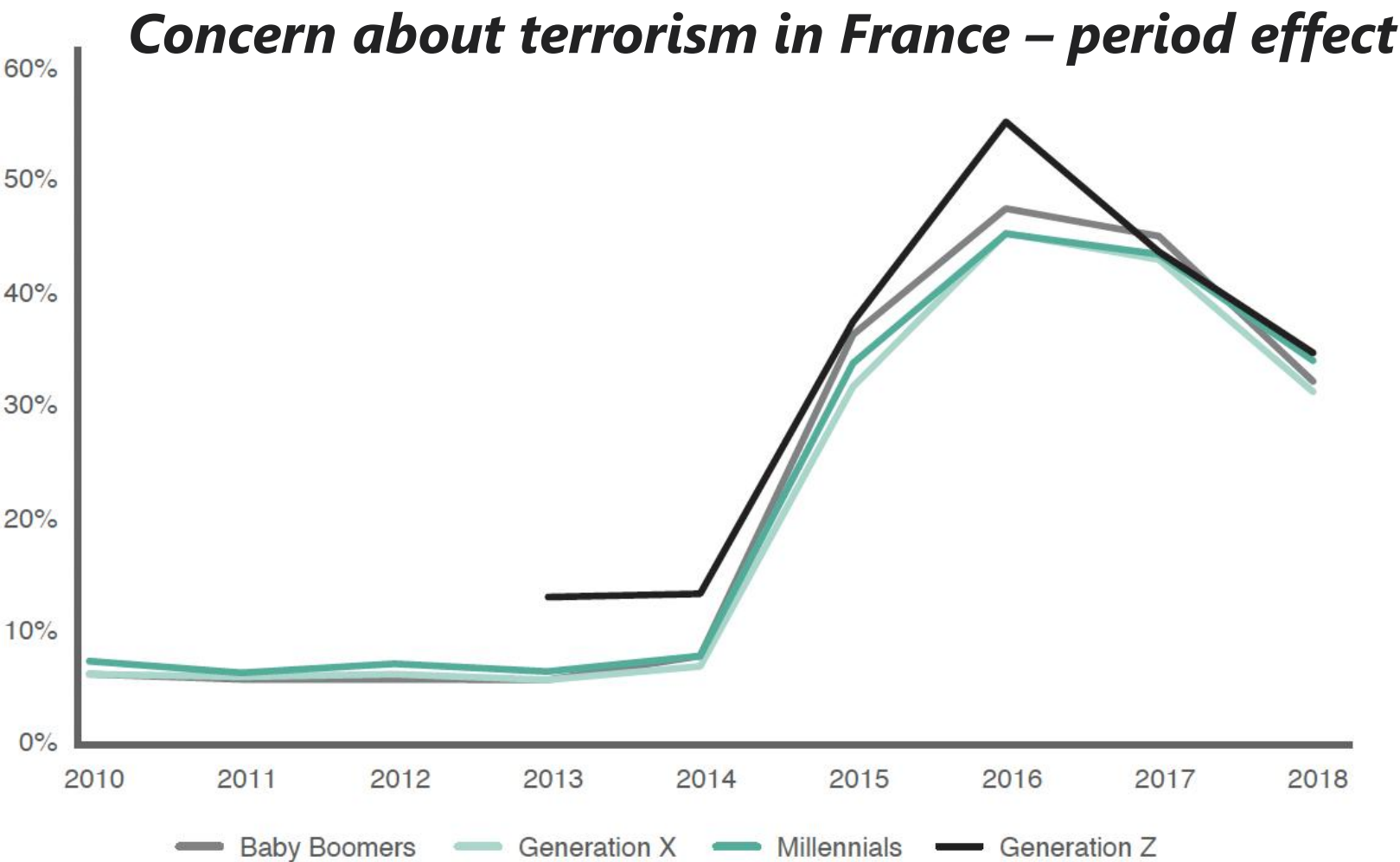


Figure 0.1: Percentage of adults in France who say terrorism is one of the most worrying issues in their country⁹

Visualising the three effects...

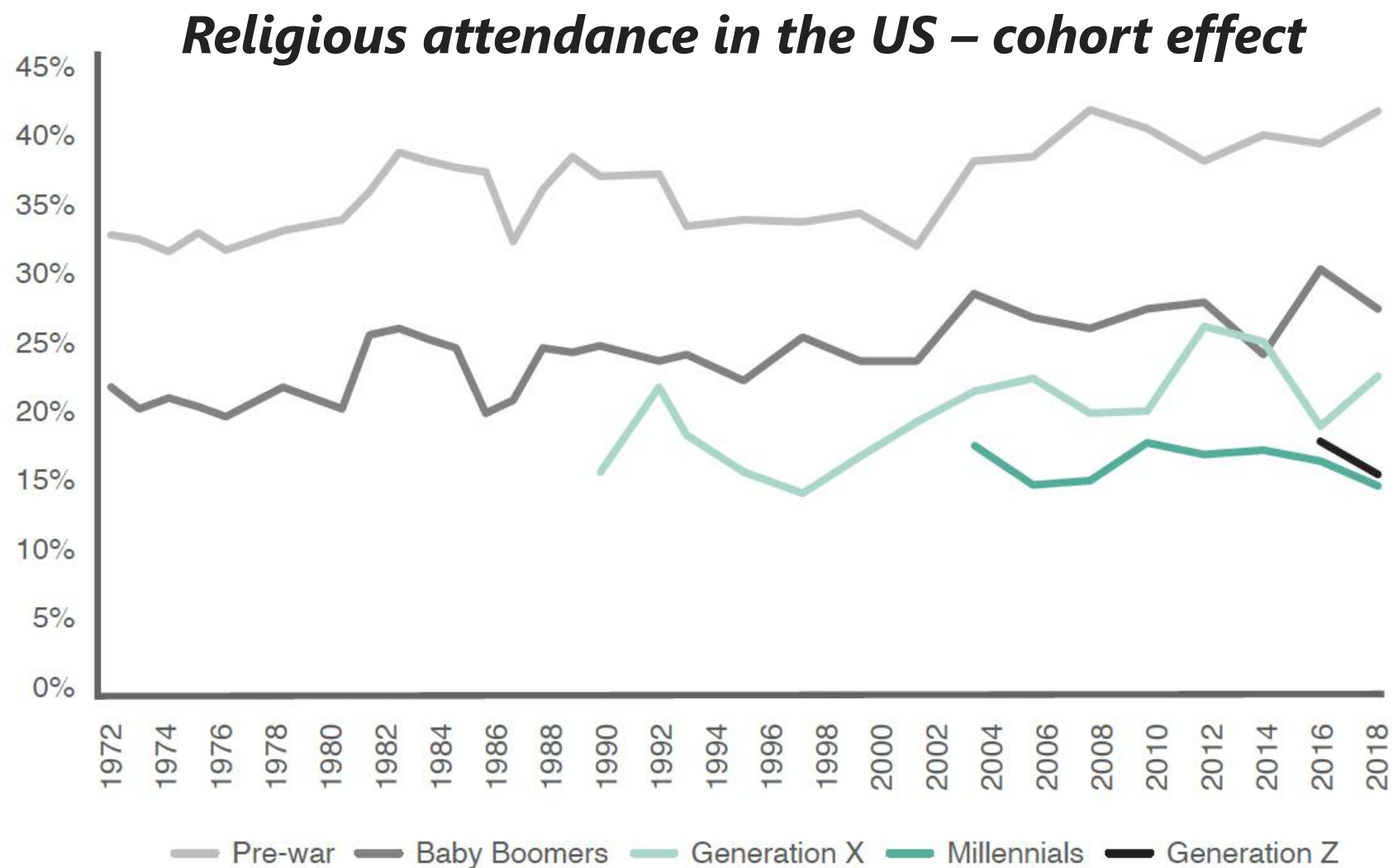


Figure 0.3: Percentage of adults in US attending religious services at least weekly¹¹

Visualising the three effects...

Healthy BMI in England – lifecycle effect

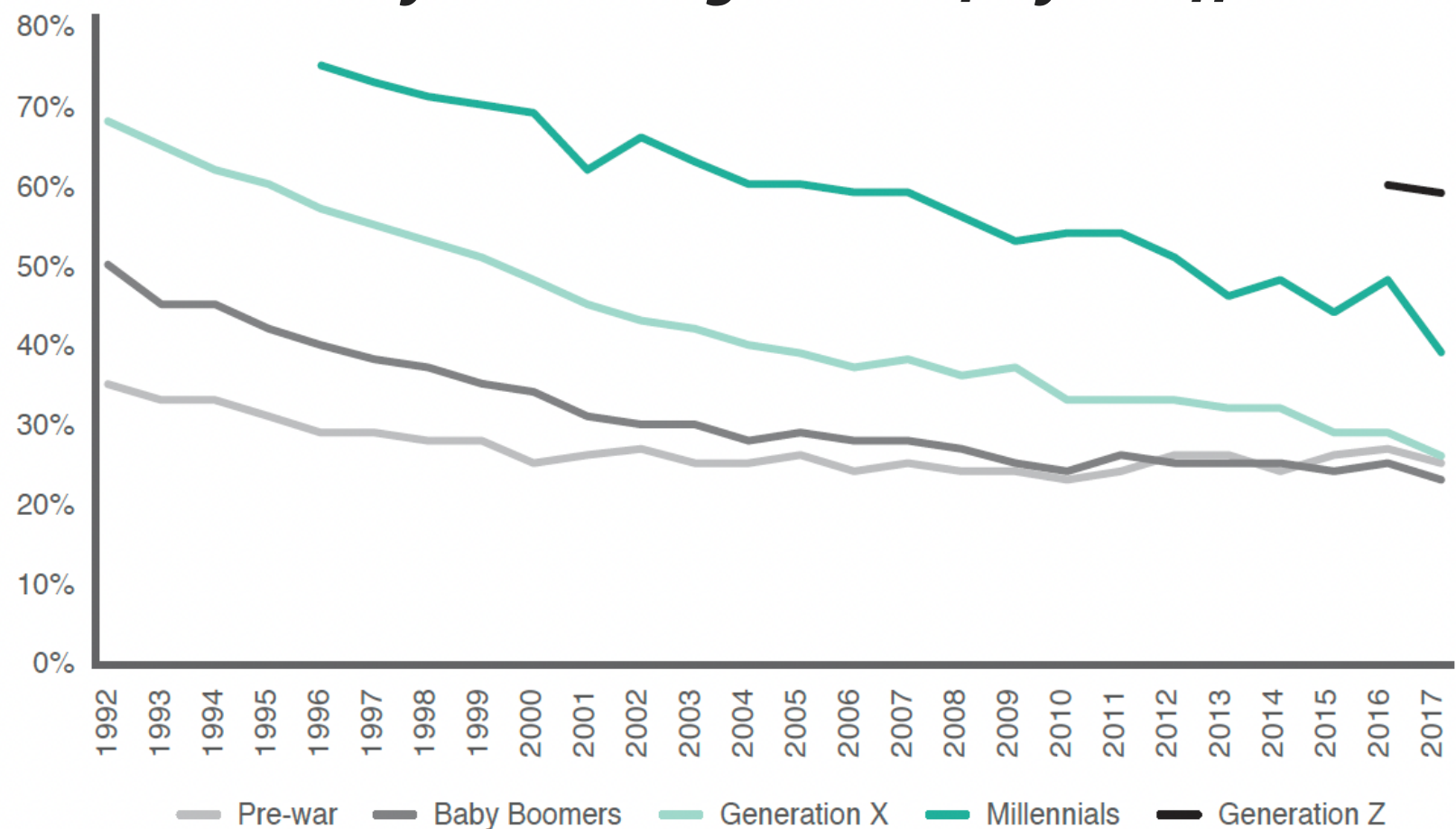


Figure 0.2: Percentage of adults in England with a healthy weight (defined as BMI score between 18.5 and 24.9)¹⁰