

**MUNI**

# **Age, Life cycle and Politics**

Pmcb1013: Citizens, media and public opinion

11th November, 2024

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**How do you get your news everyday?**

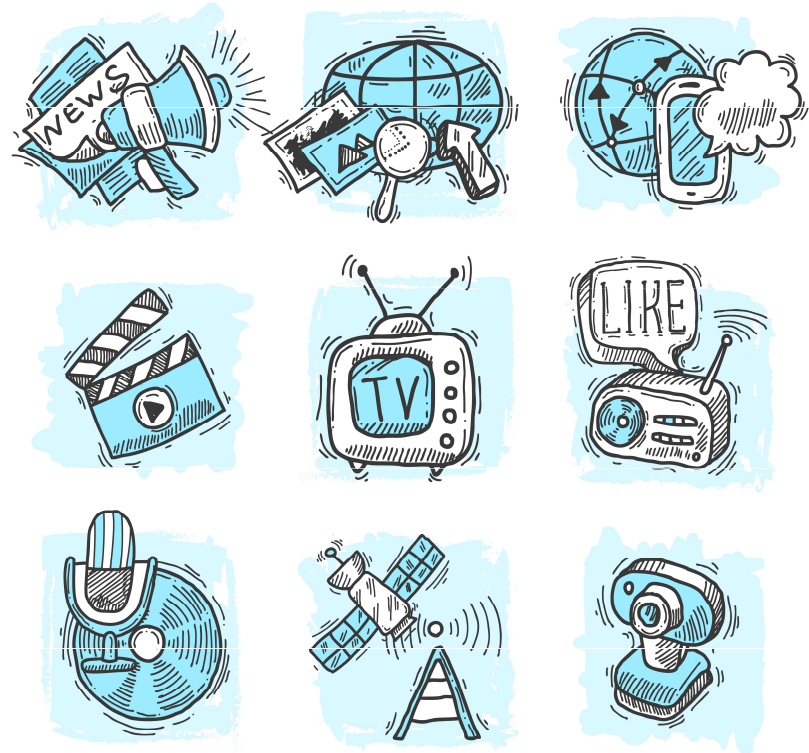
**How do you your parents get their news?**

**How do your grandparents?**

**Does your political attitude differ?**

# Today's agenda

- News consumption
- Political participation
- Perception of citizenship
- Election time



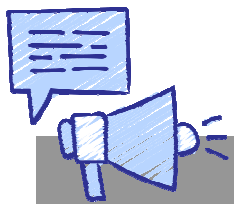
# Different generations

- Traditionalists (1922 – 1944)
- Baby boomers (1945 – 1964)
- Gen X (1965 – 1979)
- Millenials (1980 – 1994)
- Gen Z (1995 – 1997)

# Why is news consumption important?

- News use is a vital factor in influencing people's political opinions and engagement
- Higher political information consumption leads to higher political participation (Boulliane, 2020)
- New information environment first seen as an opportunity for better informed citizens and **higher levels of participation**
  - **BUT** currently can be seen also as a challenge to this established conviction
    - Influence of news consumption on **social media** ([Knoll, Matthes, & Heiss, 2020](#))
    - Dissemination of **mis/disinformation** (Vasoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018; Winnterlin et al., 2023)

# Road to participation



Independent  
media



Informed  
citizen



Political  
participation

# Road to Participation

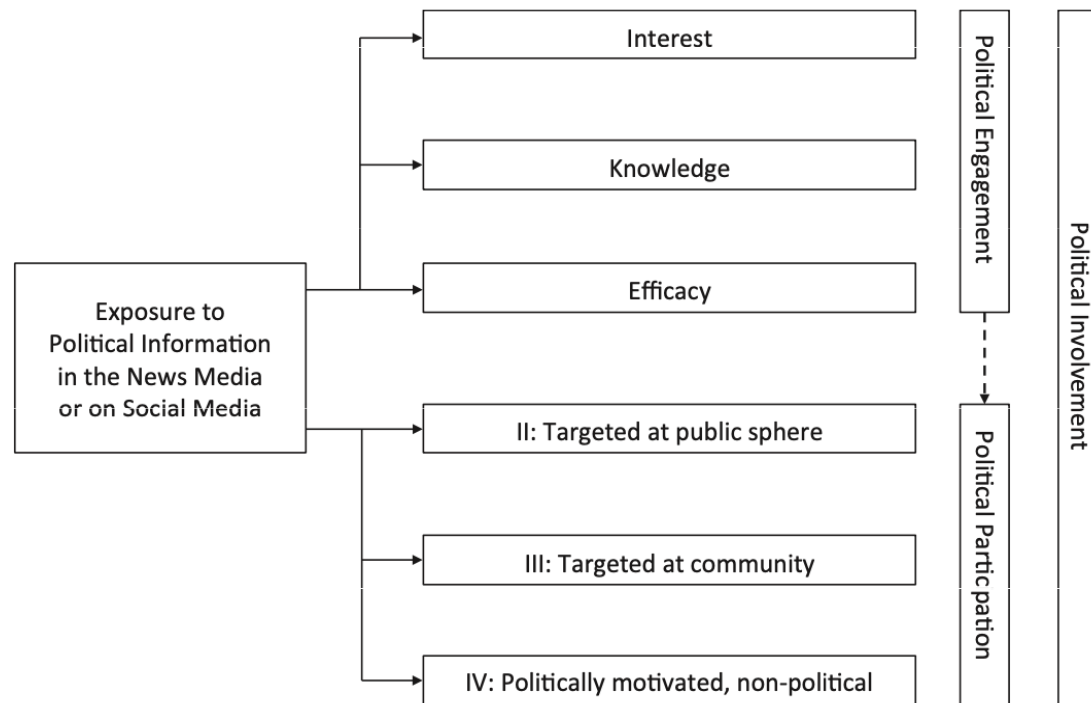


Figure 2.2 Effects of exposure to political information in the media

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## News consumption

Differences between generations





# Change in supply side

- Growing number information sources
  - Personalized media diets (different levels of political content)
- New forms of information sources, that do not adhere to the same ethical and practical rules of traditional journalism – social media
- Change in the news format
- Combining hard news with entertainment
- Using click-bait

# Change in demand side

- Continuing decrease in news subscription
- New ways of consuming news:
  - News-snacking
  - News-find me
  - Small group of political news junkies



# Objective vs. Subjective knowledge

- New forms of news structures is based in new forms of news consumption, e.g. mobile phones
- Consuming news through headlines or social media can impact what we gain from the information we are consuming
  - Objective vs. Subjective knowledge (Dreston & Neubaum, 2023)
- This further impacts political attitudes and/or willingness towards political participation (Ohme, 2020)

# News consumption of our (grand)parents

- Focus on traditional media - newspapers, tv, radio
  - Based on tradition and habit – influences also trust
- Some use of social media and accidental exposure to news
- Specific sources actively targeting older people – chain emails



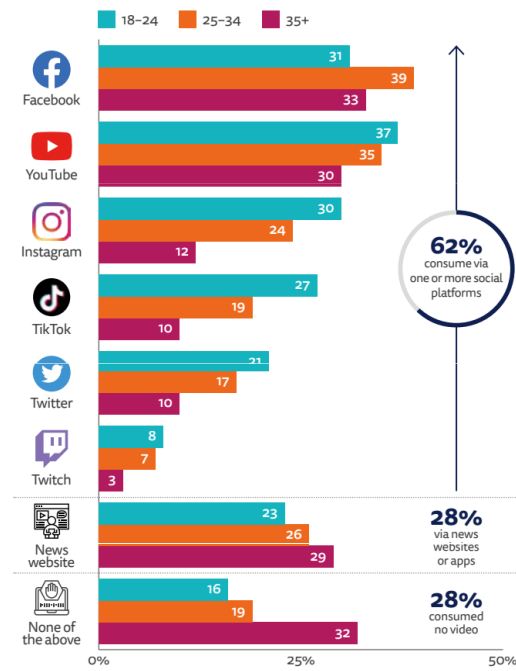
# News consumption of younger generations

- More focus on online sources  
(Boulliane & Shehata, 2021)
  - Rejecting traditional news formats
  - No source preference
- Use of social media as a source of information and a platform for expression (Andersen et al., 2020)

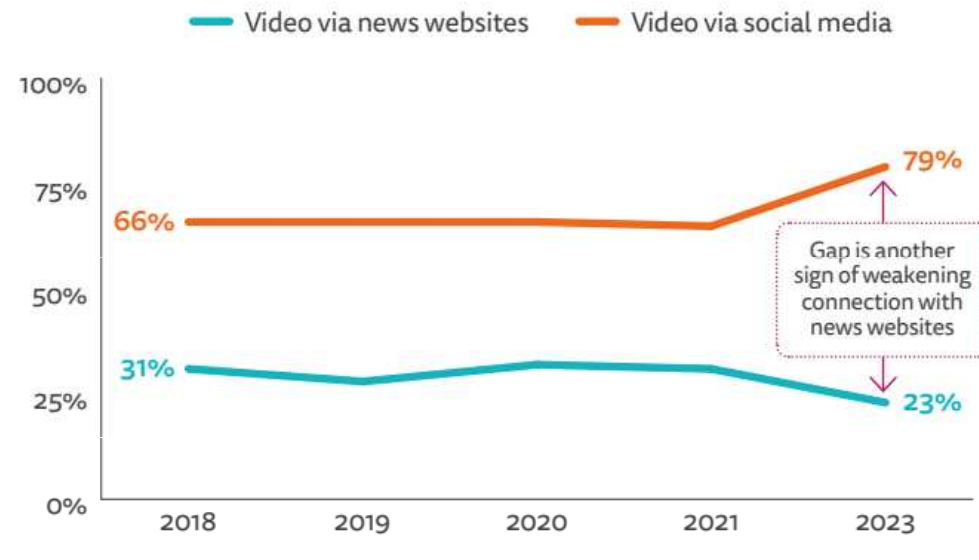


# Who gets information where

PROPORTION THAT WATCHED ONLINE NEWS VIDEO ON EACH IN THE LAST WEEK - ALL MARKETS

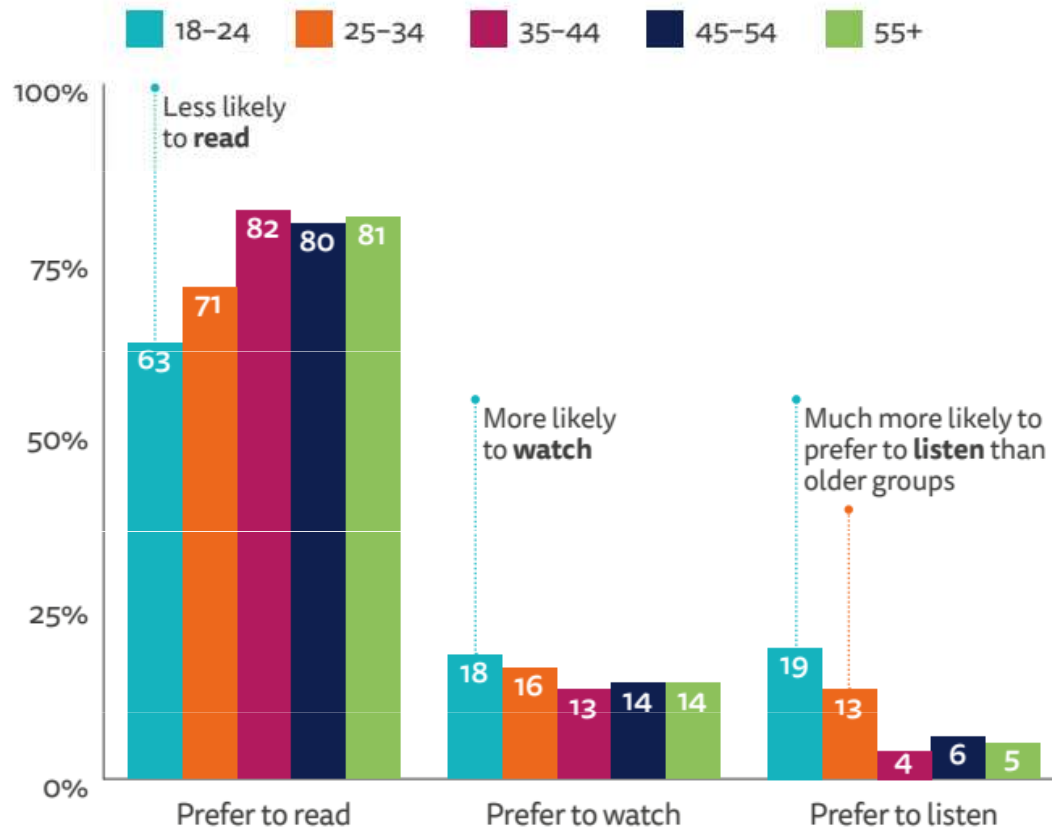


PROPORTION OF 18-24S THAT WATCHED ONLINE NEWS VIDEO VIA SOCIAL/NEWS WEBSITES IN THE LAST WEEK (2018-2023) - ALL MARKETS



## Who gets information where

PROPORTION THAT SAY THEY PREFER TO CONSUME NEWS IN EACH WAY (BY AGE) - UK



*"when a generation has grown old they have already developed strong media habits, which change slowly, whereas when individuals are young there is greater responsiveness to emergent news media that has to do with them being in a formative phase in life. During this period they are more open to trying new media and domesticating these into their lives."*

[\(Westlund and Weibull \(2013: 167\)](#)



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## Political participation and attitudes



# Political participation

- *'those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take'* (Verba & Nie, 1972)
- Reflects activities not attitudes
- Spectrum of what activities are political participation is getting wider with the use of internet and growing number of social media (Waeterloos, Walrave, & Ponnet, 2021; Lee & Kim, 2021)



# Traditional forms of participation (Verba & Nie, 1972)

§ Verba and Nie's seminal definition cited above, political participation has four minimal definitional features:

§ (i) participation is an activity,

§ (ii) it is voluntary and not ordered by a ruling class or obliged under some law,

§ (iii) it refers to people in their role as non-professionals or amateurs,

§ (iv) it concerns government, politics, or the state



**Voting**



**Cooperative activity**



**Campaign activity**



**Citizen-initiated contact**

# New forms of participation

- § Opening up the definition of participation: *'any dimensions of social activity that are either designed directly to influence government agencies and the policy process, or indirectly to impact civil society, or which attempt to alter systematic patterns of social behavior'* (Norris, 2002: 16)
- § Blurring the boundaries between political and civic participation
- § Additional forms of participation such as joining boycotting or attending demonstrations



# Role of social media

- Both the place to get information and to participate
- User can also become a source of information
  - Influencers
  - Comments
- Place of political discussion:
  - Shapes perception on what topics are important
  - Forms a picture of how political attitudes look like in society



# Life- cycle perspective

- Political interest and participation related to which cycle of life you are in – what are your priorities?
- the frequency of participation increases from early adulthood onwards and only drops in the very last stages of life
- In younger years, immediate life challenges, such as education, career planning, dating, and identity building, make political involvement less of a priority
- With responsibilities of adulthood, such as starting a family, work, and paying taxes, political decisions become more relevant in their lives

# Cohort effect perspective

- Challenges the life-cycle perspective
- Each generations has different formative experiences
- Motivation for participation and political attitudes is based in specific events/periods throughout life (e.g. Cold War, Communism, 9/11)



# Cohort effect perspective

- Socio-economic situation in the formative years
  - Citizens' levels of education, the norms and values of their time, and their political socialization create a 'generational imprint' that shapes their political participation throughout life
- With time the way of expressing themselves becomes habitual and defines the way a generation engages in politics
- Early experiences with the political system leaves a permanent mark on adolescents and young adults that affects their future political behaviour



# Generations and their characteristics

## – Traditionalists (1922 – 1944)

- World War II and Great Depression
- Respect authorities through values like obedience, diligence, and duty

## – Baby boomers (1945 – 1964)

- Contrasting Traditionalist: optimistic, collectivistic, and embracing the free expression of opinion
- Grew up in politically stable and economically prosperous times

## – Gen X (1965 – 1979)

- grew up in a highly modern world with less stable social structures
- Questioning traditional norms (e.g. family)
- Less faith in political and economic promises and are known as the first generation to regard political protest as an appropriate means of political expression

# Generations and their characteristics

## - **Millenials (1980 – 1994)**

- Coming-of-age years are characterized by media coverage about permanent threats
- Do not take stability and economic well-being for granted but nonetheless decide to keep an optimistic pace in life
- Greater flexibility in life models

## - **Gen Z (1995 – 1997)**

- Born into the new information age (digital natives)
- Perception of the world as rather unsafe but at the same time sharpened their global awareness
- Believe in power of the network, when it comes to political participation and civic engagement

# Road to Participation

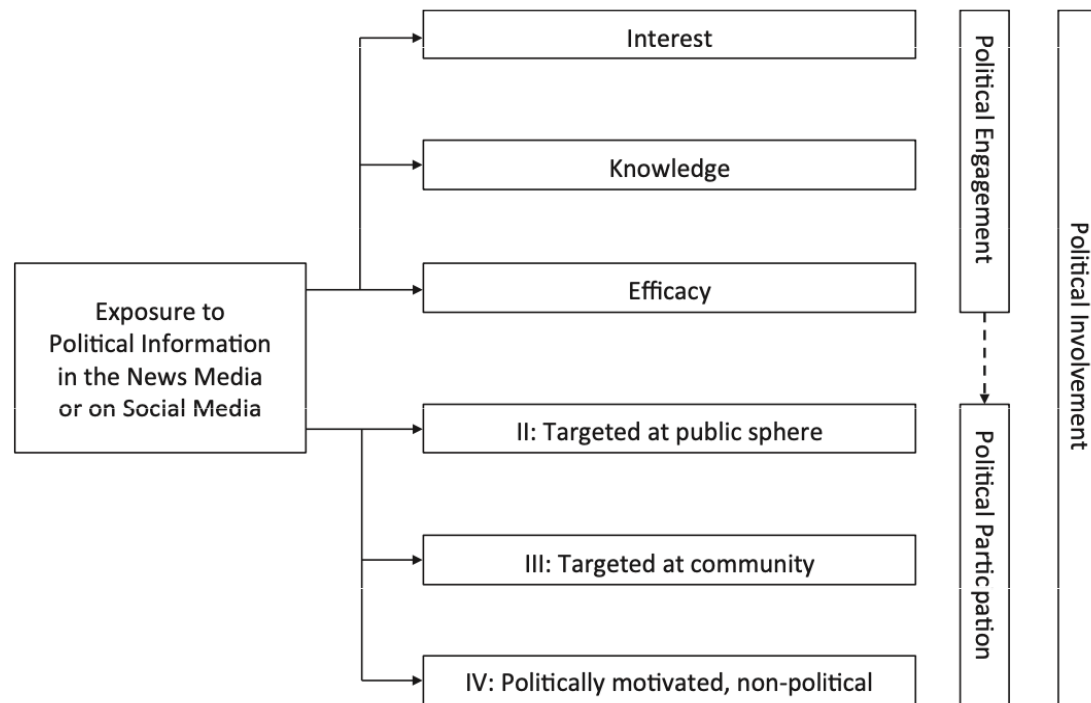


Figure 2.2 Effects of exposure to political information in the media

# Political interest

*" citizen's willingness to pay attention to political phenomena at the possible expense of other topics" (Lupia and Philpot 2005)*

- one of the most important personal motivations explaining news media use and various forms of political engagement
- Shaped by the current information environment with endless choices of information sources and forms of participation
  - More important for younger generations (Boulliane & Shehata. 2021)

# Political interest

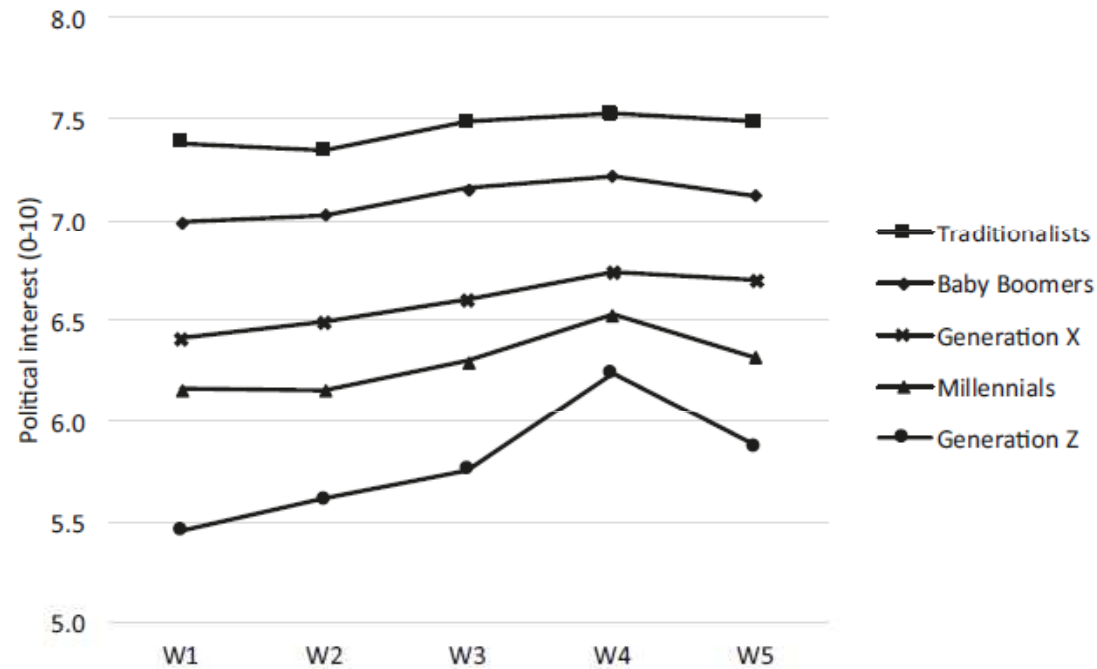


Figure 5.1 Average political interest over time across generations

Notes. Estimates are based on the mean of political interest within each generation for each online survey wave.

# Political knowledge

- News media as a crucial source for what we learn about politics
- Older generation tend to know more about the ongoing in politics
- Political knowledge rises in election time and generation gaps become smaller

# Political knowledge

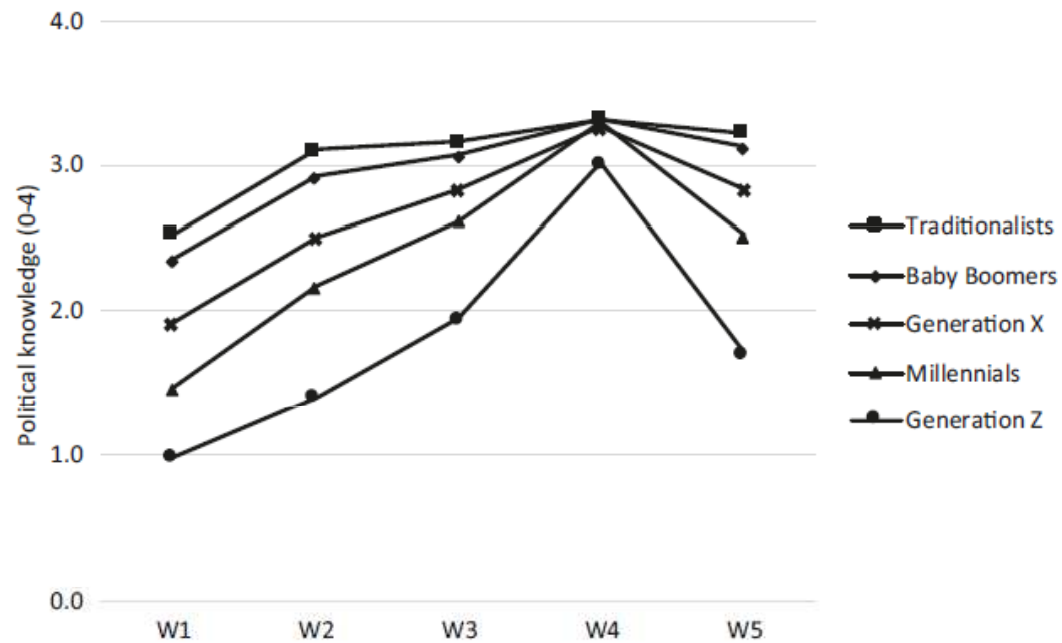


Figure 5.3 Average political knowledge over time across generations

Notes. Estimates are based on the mean of political knowledge within each generation for each online survey wave.

# Political efficacy

*'individuals' self-perceptions that they are capable of understanding politics and competent enough to participate in political acts'* (Miller et al., 1979, p. 253)

- Political efficacy may rise with more political experience, specifically voting
- Exposure to political information in the news media is likely to have a positive effect on the feeling of being efficacious



# Political efficacy

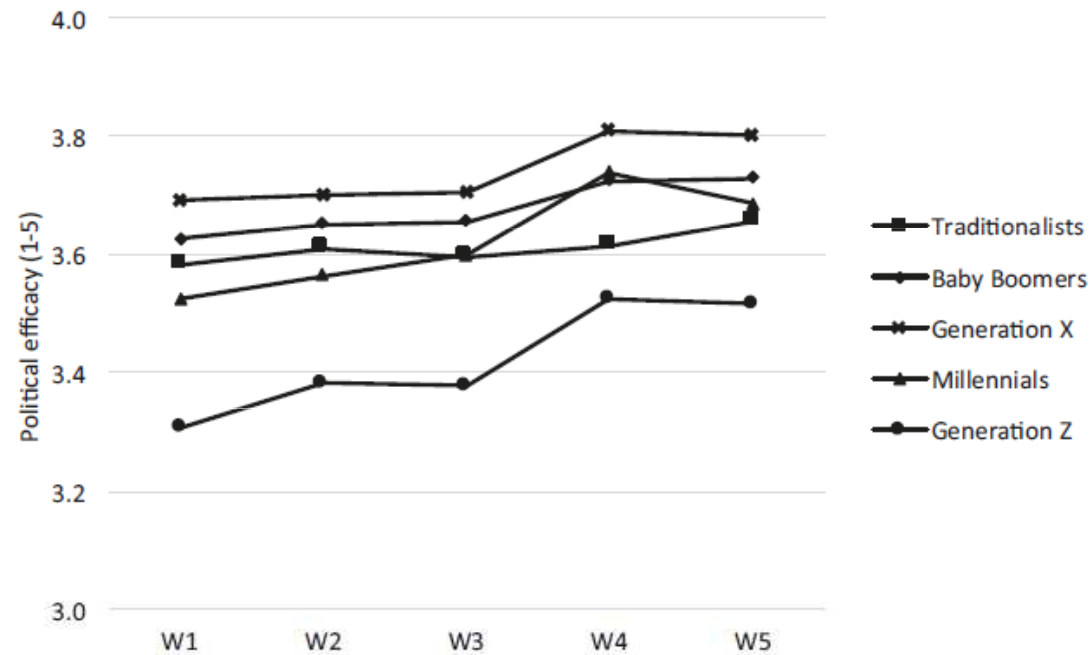


Figure 5.5 Average political efficacy over time across generations

Notes. Estimates are based on the mean of political efficacy within each generation for each online survey wave.

# Types of citizenship

## Self-actualizing citizenship

- Driven by a personal intrinsic motivation
- Typical for younger generation
- Cause-oriented
- Motivated by self-actualizing goals
- Formed by the digital information environment

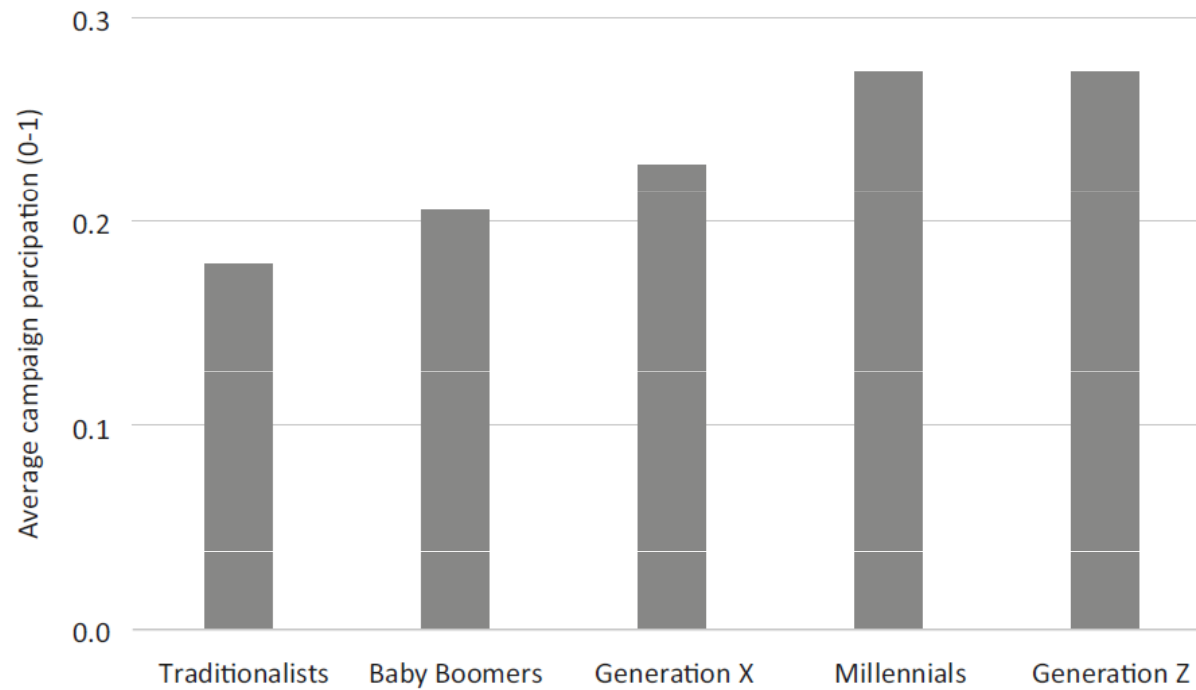
## Dutiful citizenship

- Driven by an extrinsic sense of duty or importance
- Typical for older generation
- Socialized habits oriented toward institutional politics
- Shaped by the use of traditional media

# Election time!

- Heightened exposure to political content
- Media are especially relevant for younger voters since they have just entered the political system and are more uncertain than older generations about whom to vote for in their first elections (Ohme, de Vreese, & Albæk, 2018)
- Difference in political activities across generations before election

# Election time!



# Election time!

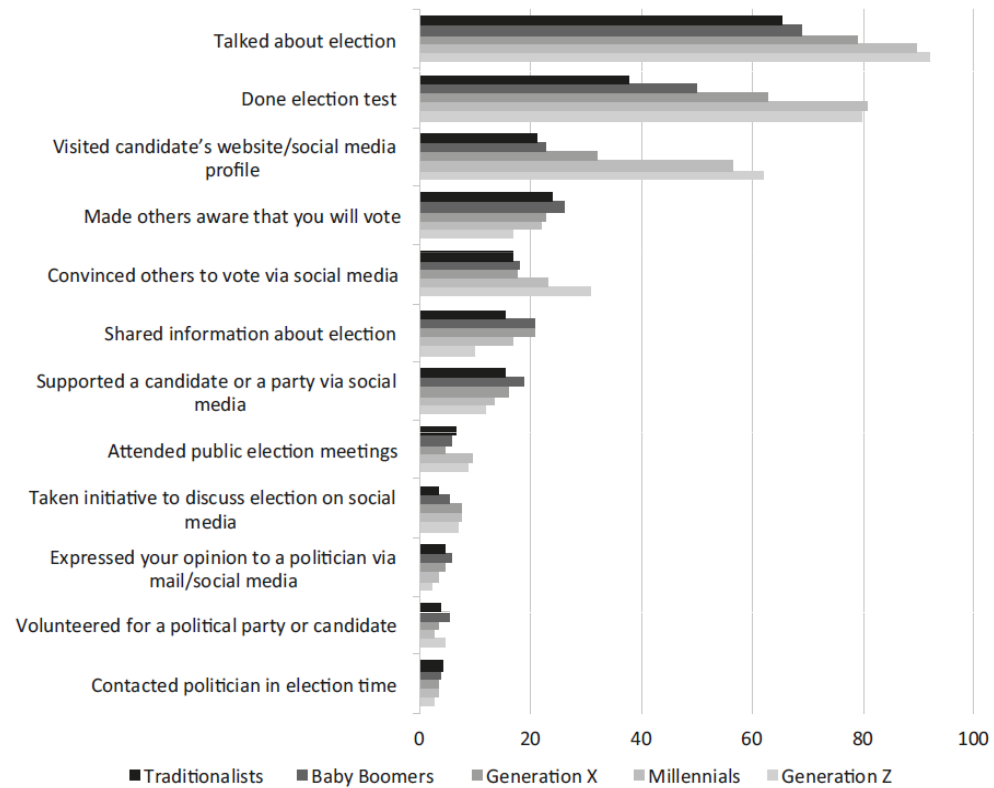


Figure 10.2 Frequency of campaign participation across generations  
Notes. Measured in online survey wave 4.

# Are the kids alright?

- For young citizens, higher political engagement is a more important precondition for news exposure on both traditional media and social media
- Generations who had more time throughout their lives to develop political interest and efficacy more easily consume news = life-cycle difference
- Older generations are more politically active than the younger ones besides election
- Younger generations are prone to using news types of political participation (social media)
- Older generation using social media often targeted against the political system

Table 11.1 Main findings across generations

	<i>Traditionalists</i>	<i>Baby Boomers</i>	<i>Generation X</i>	<i>Millennials</i>	<i>Generation Z</i>
	<i>The Unchangeables</i>	<i>The Evergreen Activists</i>	<i>The Social Media Profiteers</i>	<i>The Lost-in-Transition Generation</i>	<i>The Short-Term Activists</i>
Antecedents	Political engagement motivates political news exposure but not political social media exposure. Political participation motivates political news exposure less than political social media exposure. Overall, weaker effects than other generations.	Political engagement predicts political news exposure and political social media exposure. Political participation most constantly (compared to other generations) predicts political news exposure, also political social media exposure.	Strong relationship for political engagement to political news exposure, less so for political social media exposure. Political participation not main determinant of political news exposure, slightly stronger for social media exposure.	Political engagement predicts political news exposure but not political social media exposure; similar to Generation X. Political participation does not lead to more media use at all.	Political interest and efficacy predict political news exposure and social media exposure, but political knowledge is no predictor. Political participation leads to more political news exposure but no more political social media exposure.
Effects	Benefit least from political news exposure for political engagement. Not mobilized through political news exposure to engage in any type of participation. Political social media exposure only mobilizes PP IV and campaign participation.	Political news exposure predicts higher engagement but at a low level; only Traditionalists lower. Constantly mobilized through political news exposure for all three participation types and campaign participation. Strong effects of political social media exposure on PP IV and campaign participation; similar to Traditionalists.	Political engagement increases more strongly through political news exposure than for the two older generations. Political news exposure mobilizes only PP II. Strong effects of political social media exposure on PP IV and campaign participation; similar to Traditionalists.	Strong benefits for political engagement from political news exposure. After Traditionalists, the least mobilized generation through political news exposure; small effects for PP III and campaign participation. Millennials get most of their political information from social media but are not politically mobilized at all.	Generation whose political interest, knowledge, and efficacy increases most strongly through political news exposure. Benefits strongly from political news exposure for PP II and PP IV but not campaign participation. Political social media exposure makes them more active in PP II; other than that, no mobilization through social media.

Notes. PP II = political participation targeted at the political sphere. PP III = political participation targeted at community issues. PP IV = non-political but politically motivated participation.