



# RESEARCH REPORT SNAPSHOT



## Generation Left: young voters deserting the right

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### Introduction

There is growing evidence across the Anglosphere that Millennials and Generation Z are not showing the same propensity as earlier generations to vote centre-right as they age. Centre for Independent Studies research, drawing on data from the Australian Election Studies, suggests this is increasingly true in Australia.

The figure below presents the extent of support for the Coalition among a particular age group, compared to the overall level of support for the Coalition at the election, for each of the post-war generations.

**Table 1. Birth years associated with generations**

Generation	Birth years
Silent	1928 to 1945
Boomers	1946 to 1964
Gen X	1965 to 1980
Millennials	1981 to 1995
Gen Z	1996 to 2009

### Boomers and Generation X: From left to right

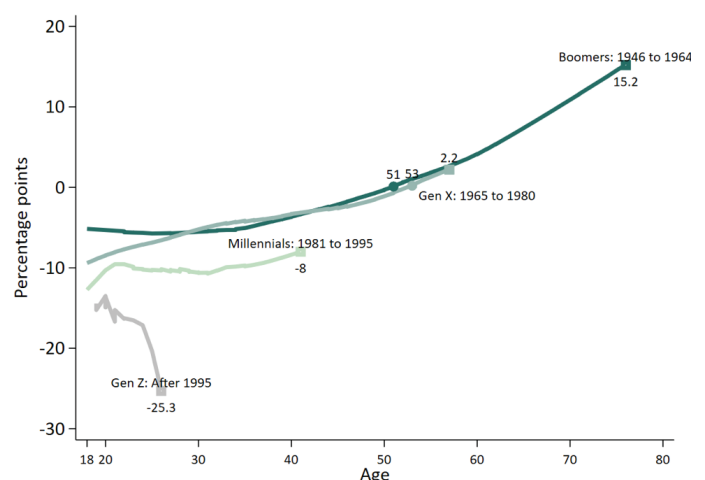
In past decades, it could be reasonably assumed that most voters who leaned left in their 20s would swing right in their middle years. As the figure indicates, this had been a safe assumption for voters born prior to 1981.

- Boomers and Generation X were less likely to vote Coalition, compared to the average voter, up until their early 50s. Boomers were more likely to vote Coalition from the age of 51 and Generation X from the age of 53.

- At the last election, the oldest Boomers were 15.2 percentage points more likely to vote Coalition.
- The oldest of Generation X were 2.2 percentage points more likely to vote Coalition at the last election following the voting trajectory of Boomers at the same age.

The Coalition vote among the generations born after 1980 is shaping up to be very different.

**Percentage point deviation of the Coalition primary vote of each post-war generation from the national average, at age at election, by generation**



Notes: Round markers indicate the age at which a generation was equally likely to vote for the Coalition as the average voter in an election. Square markers indicate the most recently observed level of support for the Coalition for each generation.

Source: Author's calculations based on Australian Election Studies, 1967 to 2022.

## Millennials and Generation Z: Doing their own thing

Millennial propensity to vote for the Coalition as they age is not following that of Boomers and Generation X. Millennials entered the electorate with lower levels of Coalition support than earlier generations and have shown far less of an inclination to vote Coalition as they enter their 40s.

Millennials are unlikely to follow Boomers and Generation X in reaching a level of support for the Coalition equal to the average voter in their early 50s. Based on current trends, this will not happen until their 80s.

The voting behaviour of Generation Z is strikingly different to that of earlier generations — even when compared to Millennials.

Generation Z entered the electorate with the lowest support for the Coalition of any post-war generation. As they approach their 30s, their support for the Coalition is not increasing — it is falling even further.

## The demographic tide is turning

Underneath the short-term political cycles are structural features of the electorate — like generational demography — that can have a significant impact on how often a party is able to form government. For the first time in decades, this structural tide is starting to turn against the Coalition.

If the historically lower level of Coalition support among Generation Z continues, and is reflective of how future generations will vote, the impact on Australian politics could be significant. The next figure gives an indication of the generational make-up of the national electorate in the coming decades. It presents the projected percentage of the Australian population of voting age from 2021 to 2040 from each generation. It also shows the percentage of Australians born after 2009 who will vote in their first election in 2028 (Future Generations).

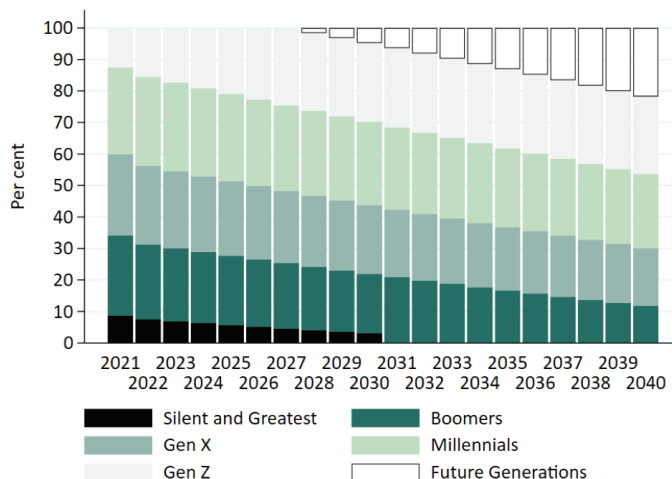
- At the next election the 'pro-Coalition' generations (Boomers and Generation X) will make up 45.7 per cent of the electorate. By 2040, in 6 elections time, they will make up less than 33 per cent.
- The generations born after 1980 will make up 48.6 per cent of the electorate at the next election. By 2040 they will make up just under 70 per cent.

## What are the political implications of generational change?

In light of the stark differences in the relationship between age and support for the Coalition across the generations, this research report presents simulations of how generational change could shape the Coalition's primary vote in elections to come. The modelling considers several different scenarios concerning future support for the Coalition.

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## Generational composition of the electorate, 2021 to 2040



Notes: The Greatest Generation were born prior to 1928. Generations are defined by birth years in Table 1.

Source: Author's calculations based on ABS Census of Population and Housing 2021 and ABS (2018) Population projections by age and sex Australia: Series B.

If the current low support for the Coalition among Generation Z prevails, and is reflective of the generation that follows, then:

- Coalition support among Boomers, Generation and Millennials maintained at current levels could see its primary vote decline to 25.5 per cent and its lower house representation reduced by 35 seats by 2040.
- Even if voters born prior to 1996 increase their support for the Coalition at current rates, the Coalition's electoral prospects would be little different.
- For the Coalition to return to government, extremely large increases in the Coalition primary vote among those born prior to 1996 would be required to compensate for the continued low level of support among younger voters.

The simulations presented in the report strongly suggests even an increasing share of the vote from the shrinking Boomer/Generation X slice of the electorate will be insufficient to return the Coalition to power in the medium term.

In summary: there is a narrow path back to government for the Coalition. That road goes through Millennials and Generation Z; not around them.