

**Genshagener
Papiere**

N° 33

August 2026

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**Youth Voting in Key Elections
in France, Poland and Germany
(2024–25)**



**Stiftung
Genshagen**

Europäischer Dialog –
Europa politisch denken

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Preface

In recent years, right-wing populist and nationalist parties have achieved unprecedented electoral success in France, Poland and Germany, as part of a broader European trend. In France, Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement national (RN) obtained the most votes in the 2024 European elections. In Germany, the 2025 federal elections made the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) the second-largest party in the Bundestag. And in Poland, Karol Nawrocki, backed by the national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party, won the 2025 presidential election. In this tense environment, understanding young people's attitudes toward democratic values is crucial for anticipating how political majorities in the Weimar Triangle may evolve over the coming decades and what consequences these developments may have for Europe.

We asked Damien Bol, Sonia Horonziak, and Kira Kurz—experts from France, Poland and Germany—to compare the political preferences of young voters (aged 18 to 24) in their countries in the 2024–2025 elections. What are their political attitudes toward democratic, pro-European, and nationalist ideas? Which key factors influence party preferences, and how do regional, gender and age subgroups differ among young people? The goal of the resulting publication is to identify trends in the current voting behaviour of young people, in order to draft strategies to promote their electoral participation and political orientation in the long term.

Guillaume Ohleyer

Entre ancrage à gauche et attachement démocratique : le comportement électoral des jeunes Français aux élections de 2024

Damien Bol

Contrairement à l'idée selon laquelle les jeunes générations se détourneraient de la démocratie au profit de partis autoritaires, le cycle électoral inédit de 2024 en France, avec une élection européenne suivie d'une élection législative, dessine un tableau différent. Les 18-24 ans, et plus encore les jeunes femmes, apparaissent fortement ancrés à gauche et expriment un rejet plus net de l'extrême droite. Leurs attitudes politiques témoignent par ailleurs d'une confiance et d'une satisfaction à l'égard de la démocratie et du politique supérieures à celles des générations plus âgées.

Introduction

Ces dernières années, le narratif dominant insiste sur un tournant à droite, voire à l'extrême droite, des jeunes électeurs en Europe et au-delà¹. En France, ce phénomène se traduirait par une adhésion croissante des jeunes, et en particulier des jeunes hommes, au parti d'extrême droite du Rassemblement national (RN). Longtemps sous-représentés au sein de son électorat, les jeunes y occuperaient désormais une place plus importante, notamment à la suite de la stratégie de « dédramatisation » mise en œuvre par Marine Le Pen, fille du fondateur du parti, Jean-Marie Le Pen, qui s'est efforcée de lisser l'image du RN en adoptant une rhétorique moins clivante². Dans ce contexte, une analyse systématique du vote des jeunes Français lors des élections de 2024 est essentielle, dans la mesure où il constitue une cible en perpétuel mouvement. Ceux qui avaient 20 ans lors de l'accession d'Emmanuel Macron à la présidence en ont désormais presque 30. L'étude du vote des jeunes reste dès lors cruciale, car ils constituent le socle de l'électorat de demain.

La séquence électorale de 2024

L'année 2024 a été particulièrement marquante d'un point de vue électoral en France. Comme ailleurs en Europe, les élections européennes se sont tenues en juin. En France, comme dans beaucoup d'autres pays, elles ont été dominées par des enjeux nationaux, comme le pouvoir d'achat, l'immigration et la sécurité. Toutefois, la soirée électorale a débouché sur une séquence politique inédite dans le pays : à la suite de la lourde défaite de son parti de centre-droit, Renaissance (REN, 15 % des voix), arrivé à plus de 15 points derrière le RN (31 % des voix), le président Emmanuel Macron a annoncé la dissolution de l'Assemblée nationale. S'en est suivie une campagne législative extrêmement courte centrée sur la montée de l'extrême droite dans le paysage politique français et une élection à deux tours, organisée début juillet afin d'élire une nouvelle Assemblée nationale. Si le RN est une nouvelle fois arrivé en tête en nombre de voix (31 % au premier tour et 37 % au deuxième), l'écart avec les partis du centre s'est considérablement réduit (22 % au premier tour pour la coalition soutenant le président, 25 % au second tour). Cette élection a ainsi amené une forte instabilité politique, aucun parti ni bloc de partis ne disposant d'une majorité absolue à l'Assemblée nationale, rendant l'action gouvernementale particulièrement fragile.

¹ Beniamino Morante, Partout en Europe, l'extrême droite séduit les jeunes, mais pourquoi ?, *Courrier international*, 18 juin 2024, <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/analyse-partout-en-europe-l-extreme-droite-seduit-les-jeunes-mais-pourquoi>.

² Nonna Mayer, From Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen: electoral change on the far right, *Parliamentary Affairs* 66(1), 160–178, 2013.

	Total		Hommes		Femmes	
	18–24 ans	25 ans et plus	18–24 ans	25 ans et plus	18–24 ans	25 ans et plus
LFI	17,4 %	5,4 %	14,9 %	5,6 %	20,1 %	5,3 %
EELV	9,1 %	4,6 %	7,9 %	3,9 %	10,3 %	5,3 %
PS	7,3 %	13,3 %	7,5 %	13,6 %	7,2 %	12,9 %
REN	6,2 %	13,5 %	7,7 %	14,3 %	4,6 %	12,7 %
LR	4,9 %	7,2 %	6,0 %	6,8 %	3,8 %	7,5 %
RN	25,2 %	26,4 %	27,7 %	27,2 %	22,5 %	25,7 %
Autres	18,3 %	16,2 %	18,9 %	16,3 %	17,7 %	16,2 %
Abstention	11,6 %	13,3 %	9,6 %	12,2 %	13,7 %	14,4 %

Tableau 1 : Le vote des jeunes aux élections européennes de 2024 en France

Note : auprès d'un échantillon représentatif de la population pondéré selon les attributs sociodémographiques (N = 10 811). LFI = La France insoumise, EELV = Europe Écologie Les Verts, PS = Parti socialiste, REN = Renaissance, LR = Les Républicains, RN = Rassemblement national.

Les jeunes Français et les élections européennes

Les 18–24 ans se sont davantage tournés vers les partis de gauche que leurs compatriotes plus âgés. Cette tendance est particulièrement marquée pour La France insoumise (LFI), l’une des formations les plus à gauche du spectre politique : elle recueille plus de 17 % des suffrages chez les jeunes, contre environ 5 % dans le reste de la population. Le parti vert et écologiste, également de gauche, Europe Écologie Les Verts (EELV) connaît une dynamique comparable, avec 9 % chez les 18–24 ans, contre moins de 5 % chez les électeurs plus âgés.

À l’inverse, les partis du centre et de la droite rencontrent peu de succès auprès des jeunes électeurs. Le parti Renaissance (REN), soutenant le président Emmanuel Macron, ne recueille que 6 % de leurs suffrages, contre 13 à 14 % dans le reste de la population. Le parti de droite Les Républicains (LR) obtient

également des scores plus faibles chez les jeunes (5 % contre 7 % chez les 25 ans et plus), tout comme le Parti socialiste (PS) de centre-gauche (7 % contre 13 %). Une exception notable se dégage toutefois : le RN apparaît aussi populaire parmi les jeunes que parmi les électeurs plus âgés. Il ne s’agit donc pas tant d’un tropisme spécifique des jeunes en faveur de l’extrême droite que d’une absence de rejet, contrairement à ce que l’on observe pour les partis du centre, y compris du centre-gauche. Pour autant, les jeunes Français demeurent avant tout des électeurs orientés vers la gauche.

Des différences marquées apparaissent également entre les jeunes femmes et les jeunes hommes, en particulier s’agissant du vote pour l’extrême droite. Les jeunes femmes, étant traditionnellement un peu plus progressistes en termes de valeurs que leurs homologues masculins, sont nettement moins enclines à voter pour le RN (22–23 %, contre 26 % parmi les femmes plus âgées) que les jeunes hommes (28 % contre 27 % chez les

hommes plus âgés). À l'inverse, les jeunes femmes se tournent beaucoup plus massivement vers les partis de gauche. Elles accordent environ 20 % de leur soutien à LFI et 10 % à EELV. Ces partis sont toutefois également surreprésentés chez les jeunes hommes mais dans une moindre mesure (respectivement 15 % et 8 %). Il ne s'agit donc pas d'un sur-vote des jeunes hommes en faveur de l'extrême droite, mais bien d'un vote particulièrement ancré à gauche chez les jeunes femmes.

De manière tout aussi notable, les jeunes ne se sont pas davantage abstenus que les électeurs plus âgés lors des élections européennes de 2024³. Ils ont même légèrement plus participé, ce qui constitue une exception au regard de la tendance de long terme à l'érosion de la participation électorale des générations les plus récentes⁴.

Les jeunes Français et les élections législatives

Les tendances observées aux européennes se sont confirmées aux législatives, tant au premier qu'au second tour. Les jeunes se sont largement tournés vers les partis de gauche, réunis cette fois-ci au sein de la coalition du Nouveau Front populaire (NFP), avec 33 % des suffrages contre 24 % parmi les électeurs plus âgés. Ils se sont en revanche détournés des autres forces politiques, en particulier la coalition Ensemble (ENS) du président Emmanuel Macron (10 % contre 18 %), mais aussi du RN (22 % contre 28 %). Ces résultats suggèrent que la coalition de gauche, incluant des partis de

centre-gauche, n'a pas dissuadé les jeunes électeurs, qui s'y sont au contraire fortement mobilisés. Là encore, cette dynamique est particulièrement marquée chez les jeunes femmes, même si les jeunes hommes apparaissent également plus à gauche que leurs homologues plus âgés.

Enfin, les jeunes ont moins participé aux élections législatives qu'aux élections européennes, contrairement aux autres catégories d'âge pour lesquelles la participation a augmenté, conformément à une régularité bien établie selon laquelle les élections nationales sont perçues comme plus importantes que les élections européennes⁵. Cette singularité tient peut-être au calendrier spécifique du scrutin, organisé en plein mois de juillet, période de vacances, et pourrait également contribuer à expliquer la baisse du score du RN parmi les jeunes entre les deux élections.

Comment expliquer ces résultats ? Par le passé, les jeunes Français se sont tournés vers les partis les plus extrêmes de l'échiquier politique en raison de leur méfiance à l'égard des élites politiques traditionnelles⁶. Cependant, les Français âgés de 18 à 24 ans déclarent désormais avoir davantage de confiance dans la politique que les tranches d'âge plus élevées (35 % contre 30 %) et estiment plus souvent que les responsables politiques prennent en compte leur opinion (28 % contre 17 %)⁷. Ils se montrent également plus satisfaits du fonctionnement de la démocratie dans leur pays (40 % contre 31 %). L'explication de leurs comportements électoraux semble dès lors moins relever d'un rejet du système politique que de leurs orientations en matière

³ À noter que, comme dans la plupart des enquêtes, notre échantillon ne constitue pas un miroir parfaitement représentatif des abstentionnistes, ceux-ci étant généralement sous-représentés en raison de leur moindre propension à participer aux enquêtes. Les résultats doivent donc être interprétés en termes de différences relatives entre classes d'âge, et non à partir des niveaux absolus.

⁴ Filip Kostelka, André Blais, The generational and institutional sources of the global decline in voter turnout, *World Politics* 73(4), 629–667, 2021.

⁵ K. Reif, H. Schmitt, Nine second-order national elections: a conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results, *European Journal of Political Research*, 8(1), 3–44, 1980.

⁶ Anne Muxel, *Avoir 20 ans en politique : les enfants du désenchantement*, Le Seuil, 2010.

⁷ Selon les données du *Baromètre de la confiance politique* du CEVIPOF, réalisé en janvier 2024 auprès d'un échantillon représentatif de la population française d'environ 3 500 personnes.

	Total		Hommes		Femmes	
	18–24 ans	25 ans et plus	18–24 ans	25 ans et plus	18–24 ans	25 ans et plus
1er tour						
NFP	32,6 %	23,6 %	28,2 %	23,7 %	37,2 %	23,5 %
ENS	10,2 %	18,8 %	11,3 %	19,0 %	8,9 %	18,6 %
LR	0,7 %	1,1 %	0,9 %	1,4 %	0,6 %	0,8 %
RN	22,2 %	27,6 %	25,3 %	28,3 %	19,1 %	26,9 %
Autres	11,3 %	16,4 %	11,4 %	16,2 %	11,1 %	16,6 %
Abstention	22,9 %	12,4 %	22,8 %	11,3 %	23,1 %	13,5 %
2e tour						
NFP	29,7 %	20,8 %	24,8 %	20,5 %	34,5 %	21,0 %
ENS	16,2 %	20,9 %	17,8 %	21,2 %	14,5 %	20,7 %
RN	25,4 %	35,1 %	28,2 %	36,1 %	22,5 %	34,2 %
Autres	7,1 %	9,5 %	6,4 %	8,7 %	7,8 %	10,1 %
Abstention	21,7 %	13,7 %	22,8 %	13,4 %	20,7 %	14,0 %

Tableau 2 : Le vote des jeunes aux élections législatives de 2024 en France

Note : données issues de la vague 7 de l'enquête électorale française du CEVIPOF réalisée la semaine ayant suivi les élections législatives de 2024 auprès d'un échantillon représentatif de la population pondéré selon les attributs sociodémographiques (N = 10 811). NFP = Nouveau Front populaire (coalition des partis de gauche), ENS = Ensemble (coalition soutenant le président Macron), LR = Les Républicains, RN = Rassemblement national.

de valeurs. Les jeunes générations apparaissent en effet de plus en plus progressistes sur le plan socioculturel, notamment en ce qui concerne l'égalité de genre, le soutien aux droits des personnes LGBTQ+ et celles issues de l'immigration⁸. Cette évolution des valeurs peut contribuer à expliquer leur fort ancrage à gauche, en faveur des formations qui portent le plus explicitement ces enjeux.

La génération 2024 : cap à gauche

Alors qu'une thèse largement répandue suggère que les jeunes générations se détourneraient progressivement de la démocratie et se tourneraient vers des partis autoritaires⁹, les élections de 2024 en France offrent un tableau sensiblement différent. Les 18–24 ans, et en particulier les jeunes femmes de cette tranche d'âge, apparaissent nettement ancrés à gauche et se distinguent par un rejet plus marqué de l'extrême droite.

⁸ Vincent Tiberj, *La droitisation française : mythe et réalités, comment citoyens et électeurs divergent*, Presses Universitaires de France, 2024.

⁹ Roberto Foa, Yascha Mounk, The signs of deconsolidation, *Journal of Democracy* 28(1), 5–16, 2017.

L'analyse de leurs attitudes politiques montre par ailleurs qu'ils sont relativement plus satisfaits de la politique et de la démocratie que les générations qui les précèdent. Ces résultats s'inscrivent dans une littérature plus large montrant qu'en France¹⁰ comme ailleurs en Europe¹¹ et dans le monde¹², les jeunes générations continuent à soutenir les principes mêmes de la démocratie. Si les préférences politiques peuvent naturellement évoluer au cours du cycle de vie, ces résultats suggèrent que le renouvellement générationnel pourrait constituer un facteur de résilience démocratique. En poussant le raisonnement plus loin, il est possible de se demander si le principal défi pour la démocratie ne réside pas moins dans la jeunesse que dans l'allongement de l'espérance de vie et le vieillissement de la population.

¹⁰ Élodie Druetz, Frédéric Gonthier, Camille Kelbel, Nonna Mayer, Felix-Christopher von Nostitz, Vincent Tiberj, (dir.) *French democracy in distress: challenges and opportunities in French politics*, Springer, 2025.

¹¹ Alexander Wuttke, Konstantin Gavras, Harald Schoen, Have Europeans grown tired of democracy? New evidence from eighteen consolidated democracies, 1981–2018. *British Journal of Political Science* 52(1), 416–428, 2020.

¹² Christopher Anderson, Damien Bol, Aurelia Ananda, Estimating humanity's attitudes about democracy and political leaders: patterns and trends. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 85(4), 957–986, 2021.

Left-leaning and committed to democracy: the voting behaviour of young French citizens in the 2024 elections

Damien Bol

Contrary to the idea that younger generations are shifting away from democracy and towards authoritarian parties, the unprecedented 2024 electoral cycle in France, with the European elections followed by the legislative election, paints a different picture. Young people aged between 18 and 24, particularly young women, seem to be firmly rooted to the left and express a clearer rejection of the far right. Their voting patterns also show that they have higher levels of trust in and satisfaction with democracy and politics than older generations.

Introduction

In recent years, the prevailing narrative has emphasised a shift to the right, and even to the far right, for young voters in Europe and beyond¹. In France, this trend is reflected in the growing number of young people, particularly young men, joining the far-right Rassemblement national (RN, National Rally) party. Young voters have traditionally been under-represented within its electorate, but their numbers are now increasing, particularly following Marine Le Pen's "de-demonisation" strategy. Daughter of party founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, she has sought to soften the RN's image through less divisive rhetoric². Against this backdrop, it is vital to conduct a systematic analysis of young French citizens' voting patterns in the 2024 elections, as this is a constantly moving target. Those who were twenty when Emmanuel Macron was elected President of France are now almost thirty. Therefore, a study of young people's voting patterns is essential, as they form the basis of the future electorate.

¹ Beniamino Morante, Partout en Europe, l'extrême droite séduit les jeunes, mais pourquoi ?, *Courrier international*, 18 June 2024, <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/analyse-partout-en-europe-l-extreme-droite-seduit-les-jeunes-mais-pourquoi> (in French).

² Nonna Mayer, From Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen: electoral change on the far right, *Parliamentary Affairs* 66(1), 160–178, 2013.

The 2024 electoral cycle

2024 was a particularly significant election year in France. The European elections were held in June, as they were in all other EU Member States. In France and in many other countries, national issues such as purchasing power, immigration and security dominated the campaign. However, the evening of the election sparked a political cycle that was unprecedented in France: following the heavy defeat of his centre-right party, Renaissance (REN, 15% of votes), arriving more than 15 points behind the RN (31%), President Emmanuel Macron announced his decision to dissolve the French National Assembly. What followed was an extremely short legislative election campaign which focused on the rise of the far right in French politics and a two-round election held in early July to elect a new National Assembly. While the RN was once again in the lead in terms of votes cast (31% in the first round and 37% in the second), the gap between the centrist parties narrowed considerably (22% in the first round for the coalition supporting the President, rising to 25% in the second round). This election resulted in major political instability, with no party or bloc of parties obtaining an absolute majority in the National Assembly. This in turn undermined governmental action.

Young French voters and the European elections

The 18–24 age group voted for left-wing parties in greater numbers than the older generations of French citizens. This trend was particularly evident for supporters of La France insoumise (LFI), one of the most left-wing parties on the political spectrum. LFI won more than 17% of votes from young people, compared to roughly 5% of votes from the rest of the

	Total		Men		Women	
	18–24-year-olds	25 years and over	18–24-year-olds	25 years and over	18–24-year-olds	25 years and over
LFI	17.4%	5.4%	14.9%	5.6%	20.1%	5.3%
EELV	9.1%	4.6%	7.9%	3.9%	10.3%	5.3%
PS	7.3%	13.3%	7.5%	13.6%	7.2%	12.9%
REN	6.2%	13.5%	7.7%	14.3%	4.6%	12.7%
LR	4.9%	7.2%	6.0%	6.8%	3.8%	7.5%
RN	25.2%	26.4%	27.7%	27.2%	22.5%	25.7%
Other	18.3%	16.2%	18.9%	16.3%	17.7%	16.2%
Abstention	11.6%	13.3%	9.6%	12.2%	13.7%	14.4%

Table 1: Voting patterns of young people in the 2024 European elections in France

NB: according to a representative panel of the population, weighted based on socio-demographic characteristics (N = 10,811). LFI = La France insoumise, EELV = Europe Écologie Les Verts, PS = Parti socialiste, REN = Renaissance, LR = Les Républicains, RN = Rassemblement national (National Rally).

population. A comparable pattern was seen for the left-wing green and ecologist party, Europe Écologie Les Verts (EELV), which won 9% of votes from 18–24-year-olds, compared to less than 5% from older citizens.

In contrast, the centre and right-wing parties failed to garner significant support from young voters. The Renaissance party, which supported President Emmanuel Macron, received only 6% of their votes, compared to 13–14% from citizens aged over 25. The right-wing party Les Républicains (LR) also performed less well among young people (5% compared to 7% among voters aged 25 and over), as did the centre-left Parti socialiste (PS) party (7% compared to 13%). However, there is a notable exception to this trend: the RN was as popular among young voters as it was among older voters. It appears that young people are not specifically leaning towards the far right, but rather there is a lack

of opposition, unlike what can be observed in relation to the centrist parties, including the centre-left. Nevertheless, young French voters remain predominantly left-leaning.

Clear differences also emerged between young men and women, particularly with regard to voting for the far right. Traditionally more progressive in terms of values than their male counterparts, young women are much less likely to vote for the RN (22–23% compared to 26% for older women) than young men (28% compared to 27% for older men). Conversely, young women are largely shifting towards parties on the left of the political spectrum. Around 20% voted for LFI, and 10% for EELV. These parties are also over-represented among young men but to a lesser extent (15% and 8% respectively). Therefore, it can be concluded that young men are not voting en masse for the far right, but rather that young women are leaning more to the left.

	Total		Men		Women	
	18–24-year-olds	25 years and over	18–24-year-olds	25 years and over	18–24-year-olds	25 years and over
1 st round						
NFP	32.6%	23.6%	28.2%	23.7%	37.2%	23.5%
ENS	10.2%	18.8%	11.3%	19.0%	8.9%	18.6%
LR	0.7%	1.1%	0.9%	1.4%	0.6%	0.8%
RN	22.2%	27.6%	25.3%	28.3%	19.1%	26.9%
Other	11.3%	16.4%	11.4%	16.2%	11.1%	16.6%
Abstention	22.9%	12.4%	22.8%	11.3%	23.1%	13.5%
2 nd round						
NFP	29.7%	20.8%	24.8%	20.5%	34.5%	21.0%
ENS	16.2%	20.9%	17.8%	21.2%	14.5%	20.7%
RN	25.4%	35.1%	28.2%	36.1%	22.5%	34.2%
Other	7.1%	9.5%	6.4%	8.7%	7.8%	10.1%
Abstention	21.7%	13.7%	22.8%	13.4%	20.7%	14.0%

Table 2: Voting patterns of young people in the 2024 legislative elections in France

NB: data from Wave 7 of the French Electoral Survey conducted by CEVIPOF in the week following the 2024 legislative election which polled a representative panel of the population, weighted based on socio-demographic characteristics (N = 10,811). NFP = Nouveau Front populaire (coalition of left-wing parties), ENS = Ensemble (coalition supporting President Macron), LR = Les Républicains, RN = Rassemblement national (National Rally).

Another noteworthy finding is that, in the 2024 European elections, the abstention rate among young people was no higher than that among older voters³. Indeed, they even voted in slightly greater numbers proportionally, which is an exception to the long-term trend of declining voter turnout among younger generations⁴.

³ As with most surveys, it should be noted that our panel does not perfectly reflect abstaining voters, who are generally under-represented due to their lower inclination to participate in surveys. Therefore, the results must be interpreted in terms of the relative differences between age groups, rather than absolute levels.

⁴ Filip Kostelka, André Blais, The generational and institutional sources of the global decline in voter turnout, *World Politics* 73(4), 629–667, 2021.

Young French voters and the French legislative elections

The trends that emerged from the European elections were confirmed in both the first and second rounds of the French legislative election. Young people largely voted for left-wing parties, this time under the Nouveau Front populaire (NFP) coalition, receiving 33% of votes compared to 24% from older voters. There was a greater shift away from the other political parties among younger voters, particularly President Emmanuel Macron’s Ensemble (ENS) (10% versus 18%), and also the RN (22% versus 28%). These results suggest that the left-wing coalition, which included centre-left parties,

did not deter young voters who, on the contrary, turned out in large numbers in its favour. Once again, this trend is particularly evident for young women, though young men also voted more to the left than their older counterparts.

Lastly, the turnout for the legislative election was lower than for the European elections among young voters. The opposite was true for the other age groups, in line with the long-standing perception that national elections are more important than the European elections⁵. This may be related to the timing of the legislative election, which was held in July during the holiday period. It may also go some way to explaining the drop in young people voting for the RN between the two elections.

How should these results be interpreted? In the past, young French voters expressed their support for the more extreme parties on the political spectrum due to their distrust of the traditional political elites⁶. However, French voters aged between 18 and 24 now express greater trust in politics than older age groups (35% versus 30%) and are more likely to believe that political leaders take their opinions into account (28% versus 17%)⁷. They are also more satisfied with how democracy functions in their country (40% compared to 31%). Their voting behaviour can therefore be interpreted as being influenced by their value system rather than opposition to the political regime. Younger generations are increasingly progressive in socio-cultural terms, particularly with regard to gender equality, support for LGBTQ+ rights and for people with an

immigrant background⁸. This shift in values may go some way to explaining why they vote for left-wing parties that explicitly champion these issues.

Generation 2024: a shift to the left

Although the argument that young people are gradually turning away from democracy in favour of authoritarian parties is widely supported⁹, the 2024 elections in France tell a very different story. The 18–24 age group and young women in particular, seem to be firmly rooted to the left, standing out for their clearer rejection of the far right. An analysis of their political attitudes also shows that they are relatively more satisfied with politics and democracy than previous generations. These findings are consistent with broader literature indicating that young people in France¹⁰, elsewhere in Europe¹¹ and across the globe¹² continue to support the fundamental principles of democracy. While political leanings naturally change over a lifetime, these results suggest that generational renewal could bolster democracy's resilience. Furthermore, it is worth considering whether the main challenge facing democracy is not young people, but rather increasing life expectancy and an ageing population.

⁵ K Reif, H. Schmitt, Nine second-order national elections: a conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results, *European Journal of Political Research*, 8(1), 3–44, 1980.

⁶ Anne Muxel, *Avoir 20 ans en politique : les enfants du désenchantement*, Le Seuil, 2010 (in French).

⁷ According to data from the CEVIPOF *Baromètre de la confiance politique*, conducted in January 2024 based on a representative panel of the French population of roughly 3,500 individuals.

⁸ Vincent Tiberj, *La droitisation française : mythe et réalités, comment citoyens et électeurs divergent*, Presses Universitaires de France, 2024 (in French).

⁹ Roberto Foa, Yascha Mounk, The signs of deconsolidation, *Journal of Democracy* 28(1), 5–16, 2017.

¹⁰ Élodie Druetz, Frédéric Gonthier, Camille Kelbel, Nonna Mayer, Felix-Christopher von Nostitz, Vincent Tiberj, (dir.) *French democracy in distress: challenges and opportunities in French politics*, Springer, 2025.

¹¹ Alexander Wuttke, Konstantin Gavras, Harald Schoen, Have Europeans grown tired of democracy? New evidence from eighteen consolidated democracies, 1981–2018. *British Journal of Political Science* 52(1), 416–428, 2020.

¹² Christopher Anderson, Damien Bol, Aurelia Ananda, Estimating humanity's attitudes about democracy and political leaders: patterns and trends. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 85(4), 957–986, 2021.

Między mobilizacją a rozczarowaniem: zachowania młodego polskiego elektoratu w wyborach w 2025 roku

Sonia Horonziak

Młode Polki i Polacy to grupa, wokół której narracja zmienia się w zależności od okoliczności politycznych. Przykład wyborów prezydenckich 2025 wskazuje na ich silny potencjał mobilizacyjny, gdy sama frekwencja wśród młodych w II turze wyniosła ponad 76%. Ich wsparcie, pomogło wynieść na zwycięską pozycję Karola Nawrockiego (51,9% głosów wśród młodych w wieku 18–29 w II turze) i znacznie wzmocniło kandydatury skrajnie prawicowego kandydata Konfederacji Sławomira Mentzena (36,1%) i lewicowego kandydata Partii Razem Andrzeja Zandberga (19,7%) w pierwszej turze. Czy jednak wybory polityczne młodych przekładają się na realne kształtowanie polityki w państwie? Zwrot polityk publicznych, przede wszystkim w kierunku bezpieczeństwa czy emerytur, powoduje, że młodzi to często osoby rozczarowane, poszukujące nowych kierunków politycznych i mówiące głośno o wyzwaniach, które przed nimi stoją.

Dwa sposoby postrzegania młodych w Polsce

Narracja w Polsce wokół młodych Polek i Polaków często prowadzona jest dwubiegunowo. Z jednej strony, młodzi traktowani są jako obciążona ekonomicznie i zanikająca grupa społeczna (według danych Głównego Urzędu Statystycznego na 2026 rok, osoby do 29 r.ż. stanowią niecałe 30% społeczeństwa, przy czym młodzi w wieku 18–24 lata to jedynie 7%¹). Rzadko kiedy programy partyjne nakierowane są więc bezpośrednio na problemy, z którymi mierzą się młode obywatelki i obywatele. Choć tematy takie jak jakość edukacji czy dostępność mieszkań zajmują wysokie miejsca wśród hierarchii krajowych problemów dotyczących

młodych², to niekoniecznie są równie istotnym problemem dla większości społeczeństwa, które kładzie większy nacisk na kwestie związane ze służbą zdrowia czy przyszłością emerytur³. Jest to również odczuwalne w perspektywie samych młodych – badania pokazują, że jedynie 29% młodych w wieku 18–29 lat deklaruje, że na polskiej scenie politycznej znajduje się partia, która dobrze reprezentuje ich poglądy⁴. Z drugiej jednak strony, potencjał młodego obywatela w Polsce został nie tylko zauważony, ale również wykorzystany w trakcie kampanii prezydenckiej 2025 roku. Okazało się bowiem, że głos młodych może zaważyć na wyniku wyborczym, a postulaty kierowane do nich przyciągają znaczne ilości elektoratu. Wpłynęło to również na istotną zmianę narracji, szczególnie w drugiej turze wyborów. Wybory prezydenckie 2025 roku pokazały, że młodzi w Polsce to grupa o ogromnym potencjale mobilizacyjnym, a narracje do niej kierowane mogą i kształtują polską rzeczywistość polityczną.

Kto i kiedy mówi do młodych?

Jeszcze przed wyborami parlamentarnymi w 2023 roku polityczna uwaga skupiła się na osobach młodych, a w szczególności młodych kobietach, zauważając, że są to grupy w których największe odsetki w porównaniu z innymi nie miały sprecyzowanych deklaracji

¹ Piramida wieku ludności Polski od 1970 roku (wraz z prognozą), Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2026, [dostęp: 16.02.2026] <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/ludnosc/ludnosc/ludnosc-piramida/>

² S. Horonziak, F. Pazderski, Młodzi w Europie Środkowej 2024. Wyniki badania w Polsce, Instytut Spraw Publicznych 2025 [dostęp: 10.02.2026] <https://www.isp.org.pl/pl/publikacje/mlodzi-w-europie-srodkowej-2024-wyniki-badania-w-polsce>

³ S. Horonziak, F. Pazderski, *Time for Changes. What Poles Expect on Selected Social Issues and How to Reach the Undecided*. Opinion poll results, Institute of Public Affairs 2024 [dostęp: 15.02.2026] <https://www.isp.org.pl/en/publications/time-for-changes-what-poles-expect-on-selected-social-issues-and-how-to-reach-the-undecided-opinion-poll-results>

⁴ L. Jędrzejak, *Stan młodych 2025*, Fundacja ważne sprawy, Fundacja More in Common 2025, [dostęp: 16.02.2026] <https://waznesprawy.org/mlodzi-o-zmienianiu-swiata-aktywnosc-spoeczna-i-polityczna/>

politycznych⁵. Ze względu na konieczność dużej mobilizacji społecznej po stronie ówczesnej opozycji, młodzi stali się jednym z głównych podmiotów zainteresowania politycznego, jako potencjalna siła wyborcza, która przeważa szalę zwycięstwa. Taktyka ta w październiku 2023 roku przyniosła zwycięstwo Koalicji Obywatelskiej (KO), centrowej partii politycznej o profilu głównie socjalliberalnym pod przewodnictwem Donalda Tuska. Startując w ramach koalicji, partia uzyskała 30,7% głosów w wyborach do Sejmu. Rezultatem tego zmobilizowanego podejścia była też najwyższa frekwencja wyborcza wśród wszystkich wyborów w Polsce po 1989 roku (74,38%). Jednak tuż po wyborach zainteresowanie polityczne grupą młodych wyraźnie spadło. W obliczu zmieniającej się sytuacji geopolitycznej, kwestie związane np. z prawami reprodukcyjnymi czy rynkiem pracy, zostały wyparte przez m.in. bezpieczeństwo i stosunki międzynarodowe. Z biegiem czasu, ignorowanie postulatów kierowanych wcześniej do osób młodych zaczęło się przekładać na ich niechęć i kryzys zaufania do głównych sił politycznych w kraju. Zarówno rządząca KO, jak i opozycyjna Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), partia o charakterze prawicowym i profilu konserwatywnym pod przewodnictwem Jarosława Kaczyńskiego, przestały odpowiadać na potrzeby i oczekiwania młodych. Rozczarowanie to przełożyło się na rosnące w siłę pozarządowe formacje w kraju, które budowały swoją pozycję jako przeciwstawienie się tzw. „duopolowi KO-PiS” oraz postanowiły kierować swój przekaz przede wszystkim do młodego wyborcy. Z jednej strony była to skrajnie prawicowa i populistyczna Konfederacja, która oprócz antymigracyjnej i eurosceptycznej polityki, zaczęła stawiać na tematy związane z przedsiębiorczością i obniżeniem podatków, oraz prezentować się jako partia antyestablishmentowa, która do tej pory nie była w rządzącej koalicji. Z drugiej, lewicowa Partia Razem, która w 2024 roku odłączyła się

od rządzącej koalicji oraz przeszła poważne zmiany osobowe. W jej programie nacisk był położony m.in. na kwestie związane z mieszkalnictwem, w szczególności akademikami dla studentów, a także zwalczaniu tzw. umów śmieciowych, czyli kontraktów które skutkują brakiem wielu obowiązkowych świadczeń dla pracowników, a które najczęściej otrzymują właśnie ludzie młodzi.

Wybory prezydenckie 2025 – jak głosowali młodzi Polacy i młode Polki

Analiza wyników wyborów prezydenckich w 2025 roku po pierwszej turze wywołała duże zaskoczenie, którego źródłem okazali się właśnie młodzi. Po pierwsze, po grupie wiekowej 50–59 lat, drugą najwyższą frekwencją wyborczą wykazali się właśnie głosujący w wieku 18–29 lat. 72,8% młodych, uprawnionych do głosowania stawilo się do urn. Co więcej, największego poparcia wśród młodych nie uzyskali czołowi kandydaci rządzącej KO i opozycyjnego PiS, a właśnie przedstawiciele wspomnianych Konfederacji i Partii Razem tj. Sławomir Mentzen, który uzyskał ponad 36% głosów oraz Adrian Zandberg uzyskując 19,7% głosów⁶. Poza paletą tematów związanych właśnie z kwestiami rynku pracy, podatków i mieszkalnictwa, obaj w swoich kampaniach podkreślali przede wszystkim swoją odrębność od głównych partii w kraju oraz zapowiadali zerwanie z naprzemiennymi rządami KO i PiS w Polsce. Ponadto obaj w znacznym stopniu wykorzystywali nowe technologie do prowadzenia kampanii, w tym media społecznościowe. Sławomir Mentzen miał największą ilość obserwujących wśród wszystkich kandydatów na prezydenta na najważniejszych platformach społecznościowych, a generowane przez niego treści wywoływały

⁵ W. Szkwarek, *Grupy zawodowe, które pomogą wygrać wybory. Kogo słucha rząd PiS?* Money.pl 2023, [dostęp: 14.02.2026] <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/grupy-zawodowe-ktore-pomoga-wygrac-wybory-kogo-slucha-rzad-pis-6944343982775040a.html>

⁶ Sławomir Mentzen na czele. Tak zagłosowali najmłodszy wyborcy, Money.pl 2025, [dostęp: 13.02.2026] <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/slawomir-mentzen-na-czele-tak-zaglosowali-najmlodszy-wyborcy-7158156690873056a.html>

Kandydaci	I runda wyborów		II runda wyborów	
	18–29 lat (Exit Poll)	Ogółem (oficjalne wyniki PKW)	18–29 lat (Exit Poll)	Ogółem (oficjalne wyniki PKW)
Karol Nawrocki (kandydat obywatelski wspierany przez Prawo i Sprawiedliwość)	10,5%	29,54%	51,9%	50,89%
Rafał Trzaskowski (Koalicja Obywatelska)	12,2%	31,36%	48,1%	49,11%
Sławomir Mentzen (Konfederacja)	36,1%	14,81%	—	—
Adrian Zandberg (Partia Razem)	19,7%	4,86%	—	—
Magdalena Biejat (Lewica)	5,1%	4,23%	—	—
Grzegorz Braun (Konfederacja Korony Polskiej)	5,1%	6,34%	—	—
Szymon Hołownia (Polska 2050)	4%	4,99%	—	—

Tabela 3: Rozkład głosów według wieku oraz tury głosowania w przypadku pierwszych 7 kandydatów – wybory prezydenckie w 2025 r.

W Polsce oficjalne wyniki wyborów ogłasza Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza (zob. <https://prezydent2025.pkw.gov.pl/prezydent2025/>). Przedstawiają one jedynie rozkład głosów, bez rozróżnienia ze względu na płeć lub wiek. Wszelkie pozostałe dane pochodzą z badań exit poll przeprowadzanych po zakończeniu głosowania, zazwyczaj na zlecenie mediów. Zob. N. Nowakowska, „Jak głosowali najmłodsi wyborcy, a jak najstarsi? Mamy wyniki badania exit poll”, Interia, 2025, [dostęp: 02.04.2026].

ponad 5 mln reakcji ze strony odbiorców, w szczególności na Instagramie oraz X⁷.

Z kolei wsparcie wśród młodych dla kandydatów, którzy dostali się do drugiej tury – Karola Nawrockiego, startującego jako kandydat niezależny, ale wspieranego przez PiS i Rafała Trzaskowskiego, wystawionego przez KO oscylowało w granicach 10–12%. Ze względu na wyrównany wyścig wyborczy, próba przyciągnięcia głosów młodych z pierwszej tury, stała się jednym z celów kampanii w drugiej turze, zwłaszcza w obliczu faktu, że ani Sławomir Mentzen (reprezentujący

Konfederację), ani Adrian Zandberg (współprzewodniczący Partii Razem), nie wyrazili otwarcie poparcia dla żadnego z ostatecznych kandydatów. Ten pierwszy jednak aktywnie uczestniczył w kampanii drugiej tury przeprowadzając m.in. wywiady z oboma kandydatami i proponując im podpisanie tzw. deklaracji ośmiu punktów Mentzena⁸, którą zdecydował się podpisać jedynie Karol Nawrocki. Ostatecznie, zarówno w ogóle głosujących, jak i wśród młodych wyborców w wieku 18–29 lat zwyciężył Karol Nawrocki uzyskując 51,9%. Na

⁷ S. Horonziak, D. Owczarek, A. Mierzyńska, M. Pańków, R. Załęski, *Algorithms and Agendas: The Digital Fight for Poland's Presidency 2025*, Institute of Public Affairs, Democracy Reporting International 2025 [dostęp: 14.02.2026] <https://www.isp.org.pl/en/publications/algorithms-and-agendas-the-digital-fight-for-poland-s-presidency-2025>

⁸ Osiem punktów Sławomira Mentzena to lista ośmiu deklaracji działań przyszłego prezydenta RP, która zakładała m.in. niepodwyższanie podatków, nieratyfikowanie akcesji Ukrainy do NATO, nieograniczanie swobody poglądów czy kompetencji władz Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w stosunku do organów Unii Europejskiej. Co istotne punkty te szeroko wykraczały poza kompetencje prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, zob. S. Mentzen, *MENTZEN GRILLUJE: Karol Nawrocki*, YouTube 2025, [dostęp: 13.02.2026] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WY5TnYfEiQQ>

Rafała Trzaskowskiego zagłosowało 48,1% osób z najmłodszej grupy wiekowej. Druga tura przyciągnęła zresztą jeszcze większe rzesze młodych głosujących, z frekwencją na poziomie 76,3%.

Młodzi nie są monolitem

Choć na podstawie samych wyników wyborów w perspektywie młodych, można by się pokusić o stwierdzenie zwrotu w „prawą” stronę, warto podkreślić, że takie wnioskowanie sugeruje, że młodzi w kraju są pewnego rodzaju monolitem. Istotne są jednak szczegóły, które pomagają niuansować perspektywę najmłodszych członków społeczeństwa. W przypadku pierwszej tury wyborów, choć reprezentujący skrajnie prawicową formację Sławomir Mentzen był faworytem, to w tym rozkładzie istotną rolę odgrywała również płeć. Kandydat Konfederacji zwyciężył przede wszystkim wśród młodych mężczyzn w wieku 18–29 uzyskując w tej grupie aż 47,6% głosów. Adrian Zandberg, choć znalazł się na drugim miejscu, uzyskał jedynie 13,07% głosów młodych Polaków⁹. Odwrotnie ta kolejność przedstawiała się wśród młodych kobiet. Wśród nich przodował Adrian Zandberg z wynikiem 24,9% poparcia. Drugie miejsce zajął Sławomir Mentzen z 21,3% głosów¹⁰. Młode kobiety też w większym stopniu wspierały kandydata KO Rafała Trzaskowskiego. Wydaje się więc, że dominacja partii i poglądów skrajnie prawicowych to w Polsce ciągle bardziej domena męskiej części społeczeństwa, choć program Mentzena przyciągnął też spore rzesze młodych kobiet.

Również patrząc na sam przedział wiekowy 18–29 lata, warto zwrócić uwagę, że są to ludzie w różnych momentach swojego życia. Dane sondażowe pokazały, że 55,7% uczniów i studentów, a więc osób najczęściej między 18 a 23 rokiem życia, oddało w drugiej turze głos na przedstawiciela Koalicji Obywatelskiej, znacznie wyprzedzając wsparcie dla kandydata wspieranego przez Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, który uzyskał w tej grupie ponad 10 pp. mniej tj. 44,3% głosów¹¹. Wygląda więc na to, że Karol Nawrocki, prezentujący zdecydowanie prawicowe poglądy, jest popularny raczej wśród młodych dorosłych zbliżających się do 30tki.

Po głosowaniu: pragnienie zmian

Tym, co wydaje się jednak punktem spajającym grupę młodych Polek i Polaków w wieku 18–29 lat, to wyraźne zmęczenie i rozczarowanie głównymi obozami politycznymi i dotychczasową polityką, która ignorowała ich potrzeby, obawy i wartości. Podczas wyborów parlamentarnych w 2023 roku osoby w wieku 18–29 głosowały przede wszystkim na KO i pozostałe partie obecnie rządzącej koalicji, dając wyraz sprzeciwu okresowi rządów PiS. W wyborach prezydenckich w 2025 roku postawili jednak na kandydatów prezentujących nowe, świeże podejście, odpowiadających na ich potrzeby, a ostatecznie wsparli mocniej Karola Nawrockiego – kandydata nieco bardziej odsuniętego od partyjnych powiązań niż jego konkurent Rafał Trzaskowski. Poszukiwanie nowych kierunków w polityce przez młodych, nie oznacza jednak postawienia wszystkiego na jedną kartę. W społecznym badaniu młodzieży z grudnia 2025 roku na pytanie do jakiej partii jest im najbliższej, młodzi w 32% zaznaczyli odpowiedź „do żadnej”¹². Dopiero na drugim i trzecim miejscu

⁹ Wybory prezydenckie 2025. Jak głosowali młodzi? TVN24 2025, [dostęp: 8.02.2026] <https://tvn24.pl/polska/wybory-prezydenckie-2025-jak-glosowali-mlodzi-st8487068>

¹⁰ Tamże.

¹¹ Tamże.

¹² Raport z badania społecznego młodzieży, Nowy Ład, Centrum Badań Marketingowych INDICATOR 2025 [dostęp: 13.02.2026] <https://nlad.pl/czy-zwrot-mlodych-w-prawo-bedzie-trwaly-wyniki-badania-nowego-ladu/>

znalazła się Konfederacja oraz Partia Razem z kolejno 15 i 14% poparcia. Pokazuje to dystans, jaki młodzi ciągle zachowują w kwestiach politycznych, co jest jednocześnie ostrzeżeniem, ale też możliwością do rozpoczęcia dialogu z tą grupą. Choć demografia wskazuje na to, że inwestycja polityczna w młodsze pokolenia niekoniecznie przyniesie wzrost poparcia w skali całego społeczeństwa, to jednak w kluczowych momentach siła mobilizacyjna mniejszości okazuje się w Polskiej polityce wręcz kluczowa. Z tego względu rozpoczęcie dialogu i wyzbycie się stereotypów w myśleniu o młodym pokoleniu może pomóc na nowo zbudować zaufanie, którego w polskiej polityce skierowanej do młodych zdecydowanie w ostatnich latach zabrakło.

Between mobilisation and disillusionment: young Polish voters in the 2025 elections

Sonia Horonziak

The narrative around young Polish men and women seems to be dependent on the political climate. The example of the 2025 presidential election has proven that this group has a strong potential to mobilise as voters with turnout in the second round alone at over 76%. Their support helped propel Karol Nawrocki into victory (51.9% of the vote among 18–29-year-olds in the second round) and significantly bolstered the campaigns of Sławomir Mentzen, the far-right candidate for Konfederacja party (36.1%) and the left-wing candidate for Razem party, Andrzej Zandberg (19.7%) in the first round. But do young people and their political choices actually have an influence on policy-making in the country? Due to the shift in public policy – particularly towards security and pensions – young people are often left disillusioned, seeking new political directions and speaking out about the challenges they face.

Two ways of perceiving young people in Poland

The discourse in Poland concerning young Polish men and women is often polarised. On the one hand, young people are regarded as an economically burdened and a diminishing social group (according to Poland's Central Statistical Office data for 2026, people aged 29 and under account for just under 30% of the population, whilst those aged 18–24 make up only 7%¹). For this reason alone, political parties' manifestos rarely address directly the issues faced by young citizens. Although issues such as the quality of education and the availability of housing rank highly among the country's problems affecting young

people², they are not necessarily of equal importance to the majority of the public who place greater emphasis on issues relating to healthcare or the future of pensions³. This is also evident from the perspective of young people themselves – research shows that only 29% of young people aged 18–29 can point to a party on the Polish political scene that properly represents their concerns⁴. On the other hand, however, the potential of young people in Poland was not only recognised but also harnessed during the 2025 presidential campaign. It has become clear that the votes cast by the young can influence the election result and that the policies aimed at them attract a significant proportion of the electorate. This also led to a significant shift in the narrative, particularly in the second round of the election. The 2025 presidential election showed that young people in Poland are a group with enormous potential to mobilise and that narratives aimed at them can and do shape the political landscape in Poland.

When are young people addressed and by whom?

Even before the 2023 parliamentary elections, political attention focused on young people, and in particular young women, noting that these groups, compared with others, were most likely not to have clearly

¹ Piramida wieku ludności Polski od 1970 roku (wraz z prognozą) [Age structure of the Polish population since 1970 (including projections)], Główny Urząd Statystyczny Office 2026, [accessed: 16 February 2026] <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/ludnosc/ludnosc/ludnosc-piramida/>

² S. Horonziak, F. Pazderski, *Młodzi w Europie Środkowej 2024. Wyniki badania w Polsce* [Young People in Central Europe 2024. Survey results in Poland], Instytut Spraw Publicznych 2025 [accessed: 10 February 2026] <https://www.isp.org.pl/pl/publikacje/mlodzi-w-europie-srodkowej-2024-wyniki-badania-w-polsce>

³ S. Horonziak, F. Pazderski, *Time for Changes. What Poles Expect on Selected Social Issues and How to Reach the Undecided. Opinion poll results*, Institute of Public Affairs 2024 [accessed: 15 February 2026] <https://www.isp.org.pl/en/publications/time-for-changes-what-poles-expect-on-selected-social-issues-and-how-to-reach-the-undecided-opinion-poll-results>

⁴ L. Jędrzejak, *Stan młodych 2025* [The Condition of the Young 2025], the Ważne Sprawy Foundation, the More in Common 2025 Foundation, [accessed: 16 February 2026] <https://waznesprawy.org/mlodzi-o-zmienia-niu-swiata-aktywnosc-spoleczna-i-polityczna/>

defined political views⁵. Given that the opposition at the time was in need of large-scale mobilisation of public support, it was young people who became the focus of political attention as a potential electoral force capable of tipping the balance in favour of victory. In October 2023, this strategy led to victory for the Civic Coalition (KO), a centrist political party with a predominantly social-liberal profile, led by Donald Tusk. Running as part of a coalition, the party won 30.7% of the vote in the Sejm elections. This proactive approach also resulted in the highest voter turnout compared to any election that has taken place in Poland since 1989 (74.38%). However, shortly after the election, the political interest in the young people dropped significantly. In the face of the changing geopolitical situation, issues relating, for example, to reproductive rights or the labour market were overshadowed by matters such as security and international relations. Over time, the failure to heed the demands previously made by young people began to result in their dislike and a crisis of confidence in the country's main political forces. Both the ruling KO and the opposition Law and Justice (PiS), a right-wing, conservative party led by Jarosław Kaczyński, ceased to respond to the needs and expectations of young people. This disappointment led to the rise of smaller political parties organisations which built their identity in opposition to the so-called 'KO-PiS duopoly' and decided to target primarily the young voters. On the one hand, there was the far-right, populist Konfederacja which, in addition to its anti-immigration and Eurosceptic policies, began to focus on issues relating to entrepreneurship and tax cuts while marketing itself as an anti-establishment party, which had not previously been part of the ruling coalition. On the other hand, the left-wing Razem

party broke away from the ruling coalition in 2024 and underwent significant personnel changes. Its programme focused on housing issues, in particular student halls of residence, as well as combating precarious “junk” employment contracts, mostly offered to young people, that do not provide a number of mandatory employee benefits.

The 2025 presidential election – who young Polish men and women voted for?

An analysis of the 2025 presidential election first round results came as a major surprise and it was the young people who were found to be the source of this astonishment. Firstly, after the 50–59 age group, it was voters aged 18–29 who recorded the second-highest turnout. 72.8% of young people eligible to vote turned out at the polls. What is more, it was not the leading candidates from the ruling KO and the opposition PiS who received the most support from the young, but rather representatives of the aforementioned Konfederacja and Razem, namely Sławomir Mentzen (36.1% of the vote) and Adrian Zandberg (19.7% of the vote)⁶. As well as addressing a range of issues relating specifically to the labour market, taxation and housing, both candidates emphasised in their campaigns, above all, their distinctiveness from the country's main parties and pledged to put an end to the alternating rule of KO and PiS in Poland. Furthermore, both made extensive use of new technologies in their campaigns, including social media. Sławomir Mentzen had the highest number of followers of all presidential candidates on the major

⁵ W. Szkwarek, *Grupy zawodowe, które pomogą wygrać wybory. Kogo słucha rząd PiS?* [Professional groups that will help win the election. Who does the PiS government listen to?] Money.pl 2023, [accessed: 14 February 2026] <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/grupy-zawodowe-ktore-pomoga-wygrac-wybory-kogo-slucha-rzad-pis-6944343982775040a.html>

⁶ Sławomir Mentzen na czele. Tak zagłosowali najmlodszy wyborcy [Sławomir Mentzen in the lead. This is who the youngest voters voted for], Money.pl 2025, [accessed: 13 February 2026] <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/slawomir-mentzen-na-czele-tak-zaglosowali-najmlodszy-wyborcy-7158156690873056a.html>

Candidates	First round of the elections		Second round of the elections	
	18–29 years old (exit poll)	Total (official results from the National Electoral Commission)	18–29 years old (exit poll)	Total (official results from the National Electoral Commission)
Karol Nawrocki (an independent candidate supported by Law and Justice)	10.5%	29.54%	51.9%	50.89%
Rafał Trzaskowski (Civic Coalition)	12.2%	31.36%	48.1%	49.11%
Sławomir Mentzen (Konfederacja)	36.1%	14.81%	N/A	N/A
Adrian Zandberg (Razem)	19.7%	4.86%	N/A	N/A
Magdalena Biejat (The Left)	5.1%	4.23%	N/A	N/A
Grzegorz Braun (Konfederacja Korony Polskiej)	5.1%	6.34%	N/A	N/A
Szymon Hołownia (Polska 2050)	4.0%	4.99%	N/A	N/A

Table 3: Breakdown of votes by age and voting rounds for the top 7 candidates – 2025 presidential election.

In Poland, the official election results are announced by the National Electoral Commission (see: <https://prezydent2025.pkw.gov.pl/prezydent2025/>) and show only the distribution of votes, without distinguishing by gender or age. All other results are based on exit polls carried out after voting was closed, usually commissioned by the media; see: N. Nowakowska, *How did the youngest voters vote, and how did the oldest? We have the exit poll results*, Interia 2025, [Accessed: 2 April 2026] <https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/wybory/prezydenckie/news-how-did-the-youngest-voters-vote-and-how-did-the-oldest-vote-we-have-the-results,nld,21823699>

social media platforms and the content he posted generated over 5 million reactions from the audience, particularly on Instagram and X⁷.

Meanwhile, the candidates who made it through to the second round – Karol Nawrocki, running as an independent candidate, but backed by PiS, and Rafał Trzaskowski, put forward by KO, received 10–12% of the youth vote. Given the tight election race, both campaigns in the second round made an attempt to attract young voters from the first round, particularly

in view of the fact that neither Sławomir Mentzen (representing Konfederacja) nor Adrian Zandberg (co-chair of Razem) had openly expressed support for either of the remaining candidates. The former, however, played an active role in the second-round campaign, hosting interviews with both candidates and proposing that they sign the so-called ‘Mentzen Eight-Point Declaration’⁸ which only Karol Nawrocki

⁷ S. Horonziak, D. Owczarek, A. Mierzyńska, M. Pańków, R. Załęski, *Algorithms and Agendas: The Digital Fight for Poland's Presidency 2025*, Institute of Public Affairs, Democracy Reporting International 2025 [accessed: 14 February 2026] <https://www.isp.org.pl/en/publications/algorithms-and-agendas-the-digital-fight-for-poland-s-presidency-2025>

⁸ Sławomir Mentzen's ‘Eight Points’ is a list of eight policy pledges by the future President of the Republic of Poland which included a commitment not to raise taxes, not to ratify Ukraine's accession to NATO, and not to restrict freedom of expression or the powers of the Polish authorities in relation to the institutions of the European Union. Importantly, these points went well beyond the remit of the President of the Republic of Poland; see S. Mentzen, *MENTZEN GRILLUJE: Karol Nawrocki*, [MENTZEN PUTS THEM ON THE SPOT: Karol Nawrocki], YouTube 2025, [accessed: 13 February 2026] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy5TnYfE1QQ>

agreed to sign. Ultimately, Karol Nawrocki won both the overall vote and the vote among young voters aged 18–29, securing 51.9% of the vote. 48.1% of voters in the youngest age group voted for Rafał Trzaskowski. The second round attracted even larger numbers of young voters, with a turnout of 76.3%.

The young are not a monolith

Although, based solely on the election results among young people, one might be tempted to suggest their shift to the ‘right’, such a conclusion implies that the young people in Poland are some sort of monolith. However, it is the details that are important and these details contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the youngest members of society. In the first round of the election, although Sławomir Mentzen, representing a far-right party, was the favourite, gender also played a significant role in this outcome. Konfederacja’s candidate was particularly successful among young men aged 18–29, securing as much as 47.6% of the vote in this group. Although Adrian Zandberg came second, he received only 13.07% of the votes cast by young Polish men⁹. The pattern was reversed among young women. Adrian Zandberg led with 24.9% of the vote. Sławomir Mentzen came second with 21.3% of the vote¹⁰. Young women also tended to support the KO candidate, Rafał Trzaskowski, to a greater extent. It therefore seems that the dominance of far-right parties and views in Poland remains primarily a male-driven phenomenon, although Mentzen’s programme has also appealed to a significant number of young women.

Furthermore, when looking at the 18–29 age group itself, it is worth noting that these are people at different stages of their lives. The poll data showed that 55.7% of school pupils and university students – that is, people mostly aged between 18 and 23 – voted for the Civic Coalition candidate in the second round, far outstripping support for the candidate backed by Law and Justice who received over 10 percentage points fewer votes in this group, i.e. 44.3%¹¹. It would therefore appear that Karol Nawrocki, who holds decidedly right-wing views, is popular mainly amongst young adults approaching their thirties.

After the vote: a desire for change

What seems to be the common thread uniting the group of young Poles aged 18–29, however, is a clear sense of weariness and disillusionment with the main political camps and the politics which have continuously ignored their needs, concerns and values. During the 2023 parliamentary elections, voters aged 18–29 mainly voted for KO and the other parties in the current ruling coalition, thereby expressing their opposition to the PiS government. In the 2025 presidential election, however, they backed candidates who offered a new, fresh approach and responded to their needs, and ultimately gave stronger support to Karol Nawrocki – a candidate somewhat less tied to party politics than his rival Rafał Trzaskowski. However, young people’s search for new directions in politics does not mean that they intend to put all their eggs in one basket. In a public opinion survey conducted among young people in December 2025, when asked which political party they felt closest to, 32% of the subjects selected

⁹ Wybory prezydenckie 2025. Jak głosowali młodzi? [The 2025 presidential election. How did young people vote?] TVN24 2025, [accessed: 8.02.2026] <https://tvn24.pl/polska/wybory-prezydenckie-2025-jak-glosowali-mlodzi-st8487068>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

‘none’¹². Konfederacja and Razem came only second and third with 15% and 14% of the vote respectively. This highlights young people’s unwavering detachment from political issues which serves as both a warning and an opportunity to initiate a dialogue with this group. Although demographic trends suggest that political investment in younger generations will not necessarily lead to an increase in support across society as a whole, at crucial moments the mobilising power of minority groups proves to be absolutely vital in Polish politics. For this reason, initiating a dialogue with the young and overcoming stereotypes about the younger generation could help to rebuild the trust that has been sorely lacking in Polish politics aimed at young people in recent years.

¹² Raport z badania społecznego młodzieży [Report on a social survey of young people], Nowy Ład, Centrum Badań Marketingowych INDICATOR 2025 [accessed: 13 February 2026] <https://nlad.pl/czy-zwrot-mlodych-w-prawo-będzie-trwały-wyniki-badania-nowego-ładu/>

Zugewinne an den Rändern: Das Wahlverhalten junger Menschen bei der Bundestagswahl 2025

Kira Renée Kurz

Die Polarisierung der Gesellschaft in Deutschland nimmt zu, und besonders klar zeigt sich das am Wahlverhalten der jungen Deutschen. Bei der Bundestagswahl 2025 stimmten über ein Viertel der jungen Wähler*innen für die Partei Die Linke; ein knappes Fünftel für die AfD. Eine wichtige Rolle spielte hierbei die aktive Ansprache junger Menschen und das Besetzen von Themen, die für junge Menschen wichtig sind, wie beispielsweise das Problem sozialer Ungerechtigkeit. Auffällig ist, dass junge Frauen deutlich weiter links wählen als junge Männer.

Eine Analyse der Bundestagswahl 2025 zeigt, dass bei einer sehr hohen Wahlbeteiligung die Parteien am Rande des Spektrums – hier Die Linke, dort die AfD – große Zugewinne verzeichnen konnten, insbesondere bei jungen Menschen. In diesem Beitrag wird der Frage nachgegangen, mit welchen Themen die Parteien Erfolge bei jungen Menschen verzeichneten. Auch der Einfluss des Bildungsniveaus und der Lebensumstände in Stadt oder Land wird betrachtet. Noch viel gewichtiger sind die Unterschiede im Wahlverhalten von jungen Frauen und Männern. Im Ergebnis zeigt sich das Bild einer stark an Politik interessierten Jugend, die sich von den traditionellen Parteien abwendet. Sollte es der Linken und der AfD gelingen, ihre Erfolge bei den nächsten Wahlen zu konsolidieren, könnte dies die deutsche Parteienlandschaft auf viele Jahre prägen.

Eine zunehmend polarisierte Jugend

Die wachsende Polarisierung der Gesellschaft in Deutschland schlägt sich besonders stark im Wahlverhalten junger Menschen nieder. Bei der Bundestagswahl 2025 errang die sozialistische Partei Die Linke bei den 18- bis 24-Jährigen die mit Abstand meisten Stimmen. Auf ihren Anteil von 27,3 % der Zweitstimmen folgte als zweitstärkste Partei die rechtsextreme AfD mit 19,0 %. Wenngleich das Ergebnis der Linken damit

stark über deren Gesamtergebnis und das der AfD leicht unter deren Gesamtergebnis liegt (siehe Abbildung 1), gibt es eine Gemeinsamkeit: Beide Parteien gewannen in dieser Altersgruppe im Vergleich zur Wahl 2021 stark hinzu, Die Linke um 19,5 und die AfD um 12,6 Prozentpunkte.

Die Verlierer sind nicht nur die traditionellen deutschen Volksparteien CDU/CSU und SPD, sondern auch die Grünen, die in der Altersgruppe der 18- bis 24-Jährigen gegenüber der Bundestagswahl von 2021 deutlich verloren (-12,2 Prozentpunkte). Noch dramatischer waren die Einbußen bei der liberalen FDP (-14,9 Prozentpunkte). Sie blieb auch insgesamt unter der Fünf-Prozent-Hürde und verpasste so den Einzug in den Bundestag.

Besonders interessant ist zudem der starke Anstieg der Wahlbeteiligung junger Wähler*innen, auch wenn sie etwas unter dem – ebenfalls deutlich gestiegenen – Durchschnitt aller Altersgruppen von 82,5 % lag.¹ Von den 18- bis 20-Jährigen nahmen 78,8 % an der Wahl teil, von den 21- bis 24-Jährigen waren es 78,3 %. Dies ist die Altersgruppe mit der niedrigsten Wahlbeteiligung. Junge Frauen wählten dabei – wie in Deutschland seit langem üblich – etwas häufiger als junge Männer. Bei den 18- bis 20-Jährigen lag dieser Unterschied bei 3,4 Prozentpunkten, bei den 21- bis 24-Jährigen bei 3,7 Prozentpunkten.²

Wie bei der vorangegangenen Wahl unterscheidet sich das Wahlergebnis bei den jüngsten Wähler*innen klar von dem der Gesamtbevölkerung. Im Folgenden wird der Frage nachgegangen, warum die Parteien an den Rändern so stark abschnitten und welche Faktoren zu der Polarisierung junger Wähler*innen beitragen.

¹ Bundeswahlleiterin. 2025. Wahl zum 21. Deutschen Bundestag am 23. Februar 2025. Heft 4, Wahlbeteiligung und Stimmabgabe nach Geschlecht und Altersgruppen. https://bundeswahlleiterin.de/dam/jcr/63623bcs-zofc-449f-a032-7ecd508fo4ad/btw25_heft4.pdf

² Ebd.

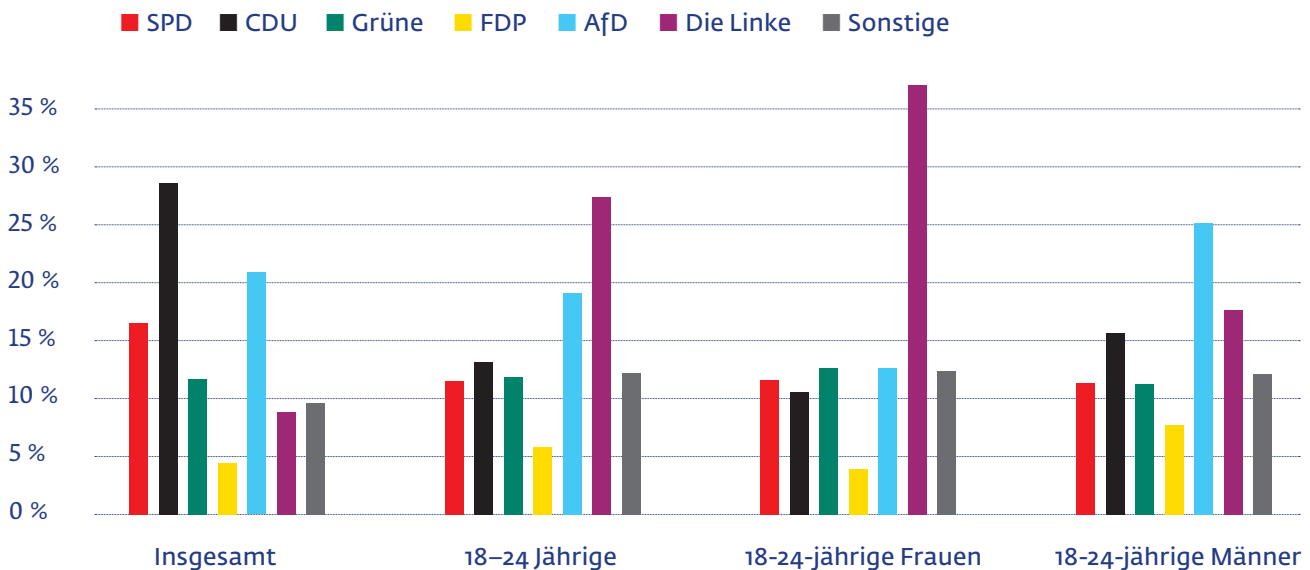


Abbildung 1: Zweitstimmenanteile der Parteien bei der Bundestagswahl. Gesamtergebnis, Ergebnis in der Altersgruppe 18–24 und Ergebnis in der Altersgruppe 18–24 nach Geschlecht.

Quelle: Eigene Darstellung basierend auf der repräsentativen Wahlstatistik der Bundeswahlleiterin.

Die Sehnsucht nach sozialer Gerechtigkeit

Ein wichtiger Grund für das starke Ergebnis der Linken und der AfD bei jungen Menschen ist die Themensetzung der Parteien. Basierend auf der Nachbefragung einer Wahlhilfleanwendung stand für die Wählergruppe der 18- bis 20/21-Jährigen das Thema soziale Gerechtigkeit und Bekämpfung der Ungleichheit an erster Stelle – ein Thema, das besonders Die Linke, die sich als sozialistische Partei definiert, mit Erfolg besetzt hat. Dies dürfte ein wesentlicher Faktor für ihr starkes Abschneiden bei jungen Wähler*innen gewesen sein.

Als weitere Schwerpunkte nannten junge Wähler*innen die Umwelt- und Klimapolitik, Migration, die Wirtschaftspolitik sowie die Bildungspolitik.³ Gerade das Thema Einwanderung verdient allerdings einen genaueren Blick: Obwohl Migration auch von vielen unter 30-Jährigen als wichtiges Thema benannt wird, ist der Anteil dort deutlich geringer als unter älteren Menschen. Das hängt womöglich damit zusammen, dass jüngere Menschen bereits in einer stärker von

Migration geprägten Gesellschaft aufgewachsen sind. Die starke Ausrichtung des Wahlkampfs auf das Thema Migration sprach also nur einen Teil der jungen Wähler*innen an. In diesem Segment profitierte jedoch klar die AfD.

Warum junge Frauen anders wählen als junge Männer

Eine große Rolle bei der Erklärung von Wahlverhalten spielen die Lebensumstände und das Bildungsniveau. Das gilt auch für die Jugend: Junge Menschen mit Abitur bewerten linke Parteien (Die Linke, Grüne, SPD) besser als Menschen ohne höheren Schulabschluss. Das Gleiche gilt für Menschen in der Stadt im Vergleich zu Menschen auf dem Land. Spiegelbildlich dazu schneidet die AfD unter jungen Menschen mit niedriger formaler Bildung besser ab als unter Menschen mit höherer formaler Bildung, und sie ist außerhalb der Großstädte erfolgreicher als in den Großstädten.⁴

³ Reinbold, J.; Kurz, K.R.; Schleeauf, R.; Fröhle, M. & S. Jäckle. Campaigning for whom?. Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft 19, 361–379 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12286-025-00644-z>

⁴ Thorsten Faas, Sigrid Roßteutscher, Armin Schäfer (2025). Überraschende Wahl, überraschende Stimmen. Junge Menschen und die vorgezogene Bundestagswahl 2025. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. <https://collections.fes.de/publikationen/download/pdf/1912786>

Insbesondere lohnt sich mit Blick auf die Polarisierung jedoch ein genauer Blick auf Geschlechterunterschiede im Wahlverhalten. Während bis in die späten 1970er Jahre Frauen im Durchschnitt rechter oder konservativer wählten als Männer, hat sich dieses Verhältnis in den vergangenen Jahrzehnten umgekehrt: Frauen wählen nun linker als Männer. Dies hängt unter anderem mit Unterschieden bei der Themengewichtung zusammen: Frauen nannten im Wahlkampf 2025 bei der bereits genannten Umfrage deutlich häufiger die Themen soziale Gerechtigkeit sowie Umwelt- und Klimapolitik an erster Stelle als Männer.⁵ Und diese Schwerpunkte werden eher von linken Parteien bedient. Männer hingegen priorisierten häufiger Wirtschaftspolitik und Migration; Themen, die eher rechts der Mitte bespielt werden.

Besonders deutlich zeigte sich der Geschlechterunterschied in der Altersgruppe der 18- bis 24-Jährigen mit Blick auf die Randparteien. Zwar wählten auch junge Männer deutlich häufiger Die Linke als die Gesamtbevölkerung (17,6 %), ihr Anteil lag aber weit unter dem Stimmenanteil bei jungen Frauen (37,1 %, siehe Abbildung 1). Ein gegensätzliches Bild zeigt sich bei der AfD: Diese gewann auch bei jungen Frauen stark hinzu, schnitt dort aber immer noch unterdurchschnittlich ab (12,6 %). Bei jungen Männern hingegen wurde sie mit 25,2 % stärkste Kraft. Befunde aus der Einstellungsforschung legen nahe, dass sich das starke Abschneiden der AfD bei jungen Männern auch auf Einstellungen zu Gleichstellungsthemen zurückführen lässt.⁶

Noch sind die Präferenzen volatil

Die hohe Wahlbeteiligung unter den jungen Wähler*innen in Deutschland zeigt ihre große Bereitschaft, sich einzubringen – von Politikverdrossenheit kann keine Rede sein. Eine einheitliche Festsetzung der Altersgrenze für das aktive Wahlrecht auf 16 Jahre für alle Wahlen in Deutschland könnte einen weiteren positiven Beitrag leisten, da 16- und 17-Jährige etwas häufiger an Wahlen teilnehmen als ältere Erstwähler*innen.⁷

Darüber hinaus wird deutlich, wie rasch Parteien bei jungen Wähler*innen stark hinzugewinnen oder verlieren können. 2025 profitierten vor allem Die Linke und zu einem geringeren Anteil die rechtsextreme AfD. Beide Parteien haben junge Menschen nicht nur thematisch, sondern auch durch die Gestaltung ihrer Wahlkämpfe aktiv angesprochen, zum Beispiel durch die strategische Nutzung von Social-Media-Plattformen. Insbesondere das starke Abschneiden der Linken hat gezeigt, dass es sich für Parteien lohnt, die Themen und Anliegen junger Menschen ernst zu nehmen. Dies gilt auch dann, wenn deren Wählergewicht in Zeiten gesellschaftlicher Alterung abnimmt.

Auf ihre großen Erfolge bei der Bundestagswahl 2025 können sich die Randparteien allerdings nicht für die Zukunft verlassen – das Wahlverhalten junger Menschen ist häufig sehr volatil, und stabile Parteipräferenzen bilden sich erst im Laufe des Lebens heraus. Wenn Die Linke und die AfD es jedoch auch bei zukünftigen Wahlen schaffen, die jungen Wähler*innen von sich zu überzeugen, könnte dieses Muster der starken Ränder die Bundesrepublik auf Jahrzehnte prägen.

⁵ Siehe Fn. 4

⁶ Off, Gefjon; Alexander, Amy & Nicholas Charron (2025): Is there a gender youth gap in far-right voting and cultural attitudes? *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, <https://doi.org/10.1332/25151088Y2025D000000077>

⁷ Thorsten Faas, Arndt Leininger (2023): Mehr Wählen wagen? Ungleichheiten beim „Wählen ab 16“ und ihre Folgen. OSB-Arbeitspapier 56, Otto-Brenner-Stiftung. <https://archiv.otto-brenner-stiftung.de/mehr-waehlen-wagen/>

Gains on the fringes: The voting behaviour of young people in the 2025 Bundestag elections

Kira Renée Kurz

Polarisation in German society is on the rise, and this is particularly evident in the voting behaviour of young Germans. In the 2025 Bundestag elections, over a quarter of young voters cast their ballots for Die Linke while just under a fifth voted for the party Alternative for Germany (AfD). A key factor here was the parties' active engagement with young people, addressing issues that matter to them, such as social injustice. It is striking that young women vote significantly further to the left than young men.

An analysis of the 2025 Bundestag elections shows that, against a backdrop of very high voter turnout, the parties on the fringes of the political spectrum – Die Linke on the left and the AfD on the right – were able to make significant gains, particularly among young people. This article examines which issues helped the political parties gain support among young people. It also considers the role played by levels of education and living conditions in urban and rural areas. The differences in voting behaviour between young women and men are even more pronounced. The overall picture that emerges is that young people are keenly interested in politics but turning away from the traditional parties. Should Die Linke and the AfD manage to consolidate their gains in the next elections, this could shape the German party-political landscape for many years to come.

An increasingly polarised youth

The growing polarisation of German society is particularly evident in the voting behaviour of young people. In the 2025 Bundestag elections, the socialist party Die Linke won by far the most votes among 18- to 24-year-olds. It received 27.3% of the second votes (Zweitstimmen) cast, followed by the far-right AfD in second place with 19.0%. Although Die Linke's result in this age group was significantly higher than its overall result, and the AfD's was slightly lower than its

overall showing (see Figure 1), they have one thing in common: both parties made significant gains in this age group compared with the 2021 election, with Die Linke up by 19.5 percentage points and the AfD increasing its share by 12.6 percentage points.

The losers are not only the traditional German mainstream parties, the CDU/CSU and the SPD, but also the Greens, who suffered significant losses (–12.2 percentage points) among 18- to 24-year-olds compared with the 2021 Bundestag elections. The losses were even more dramatic for the liberal FDP (–14.9 percentage points), which also failed to clear the five percent hurdle and thus failed to enter the Bundestag.

Particularly interesting, too, is the sharp rise in voter turnout among young voters, even though it was slightly below the average for all age groups – which had also risen significantly – of 82.5%.¹ Of those aged 18 to 20, 78.8% voted in the election; among those aged 21 to 24, which is the age group with the lowest turnout, the figure was 78.3%. Young women voted slightly more frequently than young men – as has long been the case in Germany. Among 18- to 20-year-olds, this difference stood at 3.4 percentage points; among 21- to 24-year-olds, it was 3.7 percentage points.²

As in the previous election, the result among the youngest voters differs significantly from that of the population as a whole. The following section explores why the parties on the political fringes performed so strongly and which factors contribute to the polarisation of young voters.

¹ Bundeswahlleiterin. 2025. Wahl zum 21. Deutschen Bundestag am 23. Februar 2025. Heft 4, Wahlbeteiligung und Stimmabgabe nach Geschlecht und Altersgruppen. https://bundeswahlleiterin.de/dam/jcr/63623bc5-20fc-449f-a032-7ecd508fo4ad/btw25_heft4.pdf

² Ibid.

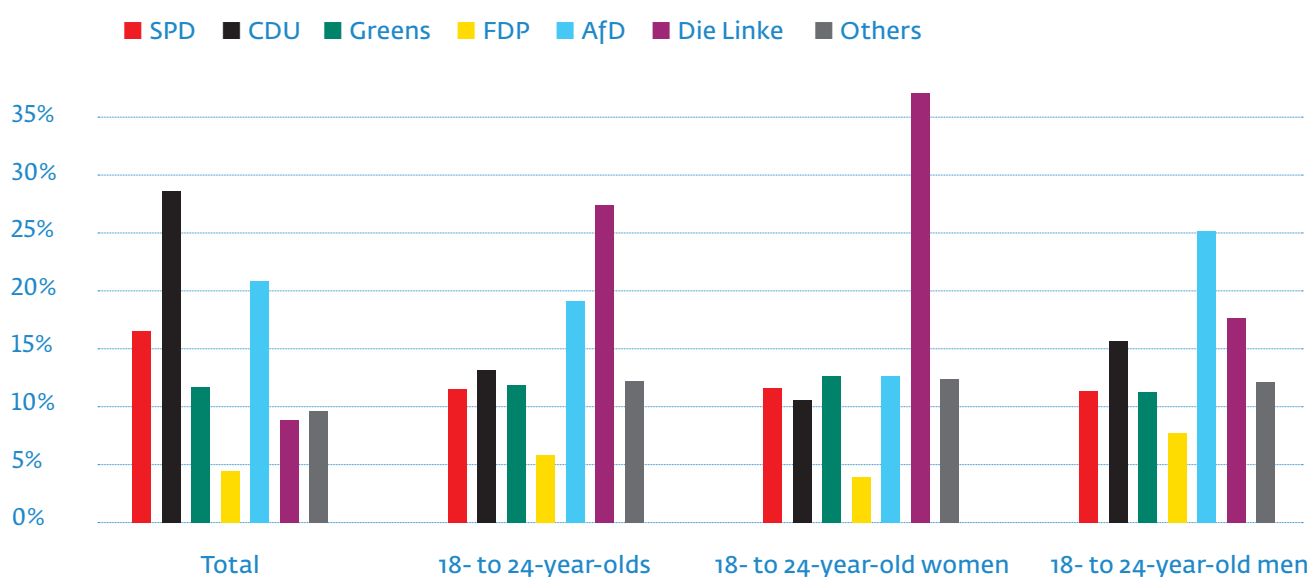


Figure 1: The parties' shares of second votes in the Bundestag elections. Overall result, result in the 18–24 age group and result in the 18–24 age group by gender.

Source: Author's own illustration based on representative election statistics published by the Federal Returning Officer.

The desire for social justice

An important reason for the strong performance of Die Linke and the AfD among young people is the issues prioritised by the parties. Based on a post-election survey conducted by a voting guidance app, the issue of social justice and the fight against inequality was the top priority for the 18 to 20/21-year-old voter group – an issue that Die Linke, which defines itself as a socialist party, has successfully championed. This is likely to have been a key factor behind its strong performance among young voters. Young voters also cited environmental and climate policy, migration, economic policy and education

policy as key priorities.³ The issue of immigration merits closer scrutiny, however. Although many people under 30 also cite migration as an important issue, the proportion is significantly lower among this group than among older people. This may be related to the fact that younger people have grown up in a society already more strongly shaped by migration. The election campaign's strong focus on the issue of migration thus appealed only to a section of young voters. In this segment, however, the AfD clearly benefited.

³ Reinbold, J.; Kurz, K.R.; Schleeauf, R.; Fröhle, M. & S. Jäckle. Campaigning for whom?. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 19, 361–379 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12286-025-00644-z>

Why young women vote differently than young men

Living conditions and level of education play a major role in explaining voting behaviour. This also applies to young people. Young people with a higher education entrance qualification rate left-wing parties (Die Linke, the Greens and the SPD) more favourably than those without such a certificate. The same is true for people living in cities compared with those in rural areas. Conversely, the AfD performs better among young people with lower levels of formal education than among those with higher levels of formal education, and it is more successful outside major cities than within them.⁴

However, particularly in light of polarisation, it is worth taking a closer look at gender differences in voting behaviour. While women, on average, voted more to the right or more conservatively than men until the late 1970s, this ratio has reversed in recent decades with women now voting more to the left than men. This is bound up, among other things, with differences relating to the prioritisation of issues. In the 2025 election campaign, women cited social justice in addition to environmental and climate policy as their top priorities significantly more often than men in the aforementioned survey.⁵ These priorities are more commonly addressed by left-wing parties. Men, on the other hand, more frequently prioritised economic policy and migration – issues that tend to be the focus of parties to the right of the political centre.

The gender difference was particularly pronounced among 18- to 24-year-olds with regard to fringe parties. Although young men also voted for Die Linke significantly more often than the general population (17.6%), their share was far below the share of the vote among young women (37.1%; see Figure 1). The opposite picture emerges with the AfD, which also gained significant ground among young women, but still performed below average in that group (12.6%). Among young men, however, it became the leading party with 25.2%. Findings from attitude research suggest that the AfD's strong performance among young men can also be attributed to attitudes toward gender equality issues.⁶

Preferences remain volatile

The high voter turnout among young voters in Germany demonstrates their strong willingness to get involved – there is certainly no sign of political apathy. Setting a uniform voting age of 16 for all elections in Germany could make a further positive contribution as 16- and 17-year-olds participate in elections slightly more frequently than older first-time voters.⁷

Furthermore, it becomes apparent how quickly parties can gain or lose significant support among young voters. In 2025, Die Linke benefited the most, and to a lesser extent, the far-right AfD. Both parties actively engaged young people not only with their policy proposals, but also through the design of their election campaigns, for example, with the strategic use of social media platforms. In particular, Die Linke's

⁴ Thorsten Faas, Sigrid Roßteutscher, Armin Schäfer (2025). Überraschende Wahl, überraschende Stimmen. Junge Menschen und die vorgezogene Bundestagswahl 2025. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. <https://collections.fes.de/publikationen/download/pdf/1912786>

⁵ See footnote 4.

⁶ Off, Gefjon; Alexander, Amy & Nicholas Charron (2025): Is there a gender youth gap in far-right voting and cultural attitudes? *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, <https://doi.org/10.1332/25151088Y2025D000000077>

⁷ Thorsten Faas, Arndt Leininger (2023): Mehr Wählen wagen? Ungleichheiten beim „Wählen ab 16“ und ihre Folgen. OSB-Arbeitspapier 56, Otto-Brenner-Stiftung. <https://archiv.otto-brenner-stiftung.de/mehr-waehlen-wagen/>

strong performance demonstrated that it pays for parties to take the issues and concerns of young people seriously. This continues to be the case even as the electoral clout of young voters declines in an ageing society.

However, the fringe parties cannot rely on their major successes in the 2025 Bundestag elections in the future – the voting behaviour of young people is often highly volatile, and stable party-political preferences only develop over the course of a person's life. If Die Linke and the AfD manage nevertheless to win over young voters also in future elections, this pattern of strong fringe parties could shape the Federal Republic for decades to come.

The Genshagen Foundation

Germany, France and Poland for Europe

The Foundation

The Genshagen Foundation evolved from the Berlin-Brandenburg Institute for Franco-German Collaboration in Europe, which was founded in 1993 by historian Rudolf von Thadden and Brigitte Sauzay, who later became an advisor to German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Since 2005, the Foundation has been run as a non-profit foundation under German civil law. Its founders and main sponsors are the German Government, represented by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, and Land Brandenburg. The most important third-party donor is the Federal Foreign Office.

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Imprint

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This publication was funded by the Franco-German Youth Office and the German-Polish Youth Office



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