

# **Gen Z, Politics & Social Media during the Pandemic**

**Research findings  
& commentary**

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**ON  
ETERON**

# Gen Z - Voice ON

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## Introduction

# What we know about Gen Z and what we fail to see



**Costas Gousis,  
Project Coordinator of "Gen Z Voice On"**

During the pandemic, the topic of generations became increasingly popular in the public sphere, from the everyday chitchats and the concerns of affected people to the official political discourse, mainstream media, social media or even Netflix series.<sup>1</sup> The discrepancies of Covid-19's effects on different age groups undoubtedly came to the spotlight. Regardless of conflicting viewpoints, one cannot deny that if we want to better understand how the pandemic has affected our lives, it would be a grave omission to ignore the generational dimension. Even more so, if we want to consider the overall economic, social, and psychological effects of the pandemic in relation to the reproduction and

widening of social inequalities. Within this broader discussion, we turn our attention to Generation Z, the generation that follows the Millennials and includes everyone born from the mid to late '90s till early 2010s; all those who were raised in a time of global crisis after 2008 and experience the coronavirus pandemic at a very crucial — from every aspect — stage of their life.

What are, then, the dominant images of young people during recent media coverage and to what extent do they correspond to reality?

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# Challenging stereotypes against Gen Z and Millennials

Mainstream media's representation of Gen Z during the pandemic could be summarised as follows: Gen Zers are “careless”, “irresponsible”, “uninformed” and “spreaders of the virus”. These labels have been heavily criticised as reproducing stereotypes and stigmatizing an entire generation. As social scientists working in two international settings — Canada and France — argued in [The Conversation](#), these representations are not substantiated by research and have distorted the actual experiences, practices and attitudes of young adults

towards COVID-19. Even more, these labels are often used in public discourse to sidetrack discussions from the actual impacts of the pandemic on this generation.

On a broader perspective, the way Gen Z is recently framed has many similarities with the way millennials were framed the past decade. If we searched for a term that pops up in both cases and sums up the stereotyping and belittlement of a whole generation, it will surely be “snowflakes”. Espoused not only by the mainstream media but also by the alt-right,<sup>2</sup> this term is portraying the

new generation as “oversensitive”, that “cannot withstand the cruel real world and end up melting like a snowflake”.

The beginning of an article published in the [Daily Star](#) in 2018 is indicative of the way this term is used in public discourse: “SHELTERED snowflakes with no idea how to survive in the real world are having to pay for ‘adulthood’ classes”.

Gen Z has also been at the centre of the debate in the Greek public sphere during the pandemic. Stereotypical portrayals of Gen Z, accusing them of socializing

recklessly and not acting responsibly, were yet again not at all absent. In this regard, most iconic moments were the references to the “youngsters’ erotic summer”, blaming them for the second wave of Covid-19 or the 150-euro voucher for people aged 18 to 25, as a reward for getting the vaccine.

At the same time, young people seem to have turned their back on the mainstream media, as evident from

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# Are Gen Zers getting more radical during the pandemic?

relevant research that records high levels of media distrust. This trend is even more palpable in Greece, given the heightened controversy over news coverage during the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

While the dominant narrative frames youth as “reckless” and “apathetic”, there is a growing number of recent articles turning attention to the increasing engagement of Gen Z with political issues and analysing political radicalism among the younger generations. According to the recent article in [Financial Times](#) “[Losing the generation game](#)”, young people feel marginalised from mainstream politics, which, combined with the harsh experiences they had during the pandemic, is likely to lead to their radicalisation, “potentially in a dramatic fashion”. In the same article, Keir Milburn, professor of political economy

and author of the book *Generation Left*, describes the emergence of a “radical pragmatism” within the new generation, a firm position “that things need to change”.<sup>4</sup> In recent years, there are many signs of political radicalism across the globe, such as the mobilisations for climate change, gender equality and racial justice.<sup>5</sup>

Bringing more specific data into the discussion, rather impressive insights are offered by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), one of the most important conservative think-tanks of Britain. The survey was carried out in winter of 2021 with responses from just under 2,000 participants, all aged 16-34, from every region of the UK. The following are some of the key findings: a) four in five respondents believe that solving Britain’s housing crisis requires large-scale government intervention, through measures such as rent controls and public

housing, b) 72 per cent of young people support the (re)nationalisation of various industries such as energy, water and the railways, c) 72 per cent also believe that private sector involvement would put the NHS at risk, and d) 67 per cent of younger people say they would like to live in a socialist economic system.<sup>6</sup>

From the conservative point of view, as articulated in IEA's report titled "[Left Turn Ahead?](#)", these findings "should act as a wake-up call". As Kristian Niemietz, the author of the report and IEA's Head of Political Economy, explains, these findings support the hypothesis that the description of millennials as "a hyper-politicised generation, which embraces 'woke', progressive and anti-capitalist ideas, is increasingly extended to the first cohorts of the subsequent generation, 'Generation Z'".

Even more recently, Gen Z is driving "The Great Resignation", a wave of mass voluntary resignations happening during the pandemic. For example, in the beginning of the autumn of 2021, the total number of employees quitting their jobs in the US reached 4,5 million.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the [r/antiwork](#) forum in Reddit numbers 1,7 million members, including thousands of young adults sharing their own stories of job precarity and their unwillingness to accept what they are given. The above trend should be seen in combination with the recent findings of [Gallup research](#) in the US, according to which 77% of young adults aged 18-34 approve of unions.

To further complement this picture, we now turn attention to stories of young workers fighting to create new unions, like it happened at Starbucks cafes in New York. The members of the collective "Starbucks Workers United", mostly female employees under 25, succeeded to overcome all the anti-union efforts of the company.<sup>8</sup> Starbucks' union vote

by the end of 2021 became a [landmark victory for Gen Z workers](#). The tweet of the collective, signaling their victory, has a lot to say about their zeal to improve working conditions: "Forget Gen-Z, call us Gen-U from now on. Generation Union!" On the other hand, reality leaves no room for simplified generalisations and idealisation. The overall number of unionised workers in the private sector in the US is just above 6%.<sup>9</sup> Respectively, 38% of trade union members in the UK are over the age of 50, with just four percent younger than 24.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the debates around working conditions and the new generation in the EU are happening in the light of the latest data from [Eurostat](#), according to which over 2,8 million young people were unemployed in the autumn of 2021. It's worth mentioning that Greece ranks first among all EU members, with the unemployment among young people under the age of 25 recorded at 39,1%.

From the above, we can conclude that there are significant indications of the new politicisation of Generation Z. However, we need to carefully consider all parameters, otherwise we will end up underestimating difficulties and contradictions, thus beautifying and not changing reality.

# The impact of neoliberalism and the danger of alt-right

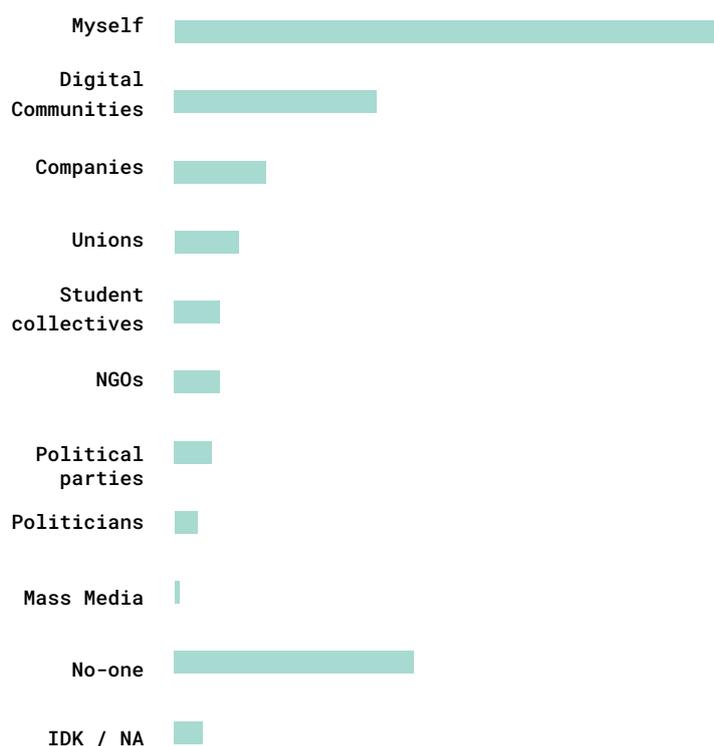
When turning our attention to Generation Z in Greece, we see that it seems to follow these global trends. In a nutshell, there are sufficient indications that a significant segment of Gen Z in Greece is increasingly active in the social and political arena, such as the recent student movements, as well as antifascist and feminist mobilisations, something that is also substantiated from relevant studies.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, we should also take into careful consideration data revealing existing contradictions. For example,

[Kapa Research](#) recently carried out a survey on “the identity of the new generation” focusing on both Gen-Zers and Millennials in Greece. The following question is indicative of the opposite tendencies related to political attitudes and behaviors of the youth: “Personally, which of the following do you trust most in defending the interests of your generation?” The answer “myself” was by far the most popular response, while more traditional forms of collective action, like unions, students’ political organizations and political parties, were ranked very low.

Which of the following do you personally trust most to defend the interests of your generation?

Kappa Research, Greek Youth Survey 2021



To take this discussion further, the research programme “Radicalism and youth in crisis-stricken Greece” stands out and provides a deeper look into these questions. Conducted by the Institute of Greek Politics at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens under the supervision of Prof. Maro Pantelidou-Malouta, this research has explored the political identity of youth in the second decade of the 21st century in Greece elaborating on the term “radicalization” and its uses. As the researchers conclude, despite the increased non-institutional political engagement or the clear left turn of young people and their electoral preferences during the past decade, “there is no sufficient evidence to suggest that the young people’s ideological formation could allow us to claim that their radicalisation is an accomplished process”.<sup>12</sup>

On the other side of the collective action and the fighting spirit of the youth, we find widespread despair, the absence of political vision and, often, the cynicism that is quite prevalent in many segments of this generation. What they emphatically stress in their analysis is that the impact of neoliberalism on the younger generations should not be underestimated, since its hegemony affects all the spheres of social life, not just that of economy.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from neoliberalism, it would be a major fault to underestimate the increasing influence of the extreme right on the new generation. After all, it’s a quite common alt-right practice to attack, on the one side, the “oversensitive” new generation, and on the other side, to try and win them over through their tactics and ideas.

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# Reframing the discussion on Gen Z in Greece and abroad

How can we challenge these mainstream narratives and stereotypical portrayals of Gen Z? There are no easy answers, especially because dominant narratives are powerful enough to become common sense. This e-book attempts to open the “black box” and potentially contribute to reframing the discussion on Generation Z. Of course, we acknowledge the difficulties to identify what constitutes a key arena to dispute common sense, but we won’t begin at ground zero. In “Gen Z, Politics & Social Media during the Pandemic: Research findings &

commentary”, we bring together all the written material of the one-year project “Gen Z - Voice On”.

This collective volume begins with the research report by Anastasia Veneti, Stamatis Poulakidakos, and Alexandros Minotakis, providing the presentation and analysis of the main findings of Eteron’s research. The report is presenting new findings from an Aboutpeople Research poll that has been specifically commissioned by the Eteron Institute for the purpose of filling gaps in the existing

research. Aboutpeople conducted this quantitative research in December 2021 on a sample of 403 people across Greece aged 16-25 years old throughout Greece. This quantitative research contributes to the broader discussion, providing additional data, analytics and insights focusing exclusively on Gen Z in Greece during the pandemic and shedding light on the following questions: *What do young people up to 25 years old think regarding issues that were central to the public discourse in the past two years? Which social media platforms do they use the most? Which are their information sources of choice and how do they form their political views? What do they think regarding misinformation and how easily do they fall victims to fake news? Do they plan on voting in the next elections?*

In this context, seeking to open up a broader dialogue on how Gen Z perceives, reinterprets or challenges inherited concepts and practices of politics, as well as communication methods. The articles included in this online edited volume delve into a number of themes, placing the research findings in a broader social and political context in Greece and abroad. Thus, starting from different backgrounds and following different paths, Yiannis Balabanidis, Lina Zirganou, Spyros Papadopoulos, Alexandros Papageorgiou, Thomas Siomos and Antonis Galanopoulos comment on the research findings and enrich our perspectives on the new generation. Adding to the international discussion about Gen Z, the volume includes a comparative analysis of the results of Eteron's research and those of the DigiGen European research project regarding young people's political participation and the impact of technological transformations on the digital generation, by Athina Karatzogianni, Professor at the University of Leicester.

To avoid the trap of, even unconsciously, reproducing stereotypes, we tried to deploy methodologies emphasizing the need for a self-reflective approach related to our own positionality as part of the project "Gen Z/ Voice On". In other words, there is always an even greater need to carefully consider this matter when researching, talking, and writing about Gen Z, when we ourselves are not Gen Z. This is why we combined our initial research with multiple collaborations with Institutes, Universities and researchers, as well as initiatives creating space for participation, interaction and co-production of knowledge and material together with young people. Drawing from the methodological toolkit for reframing public debates,<sup>14</sup> we wholeheartedly agree on the importance of storytelling and the power of stories and values that resonate well and can have the maximum impact. Such initiatives included the [Gen Z Unmuted](#) series, curated by Korina Petridi, as well as a series of seminars, workshops, and conferences. Having participated in many of these events, Alexandros Minotakis summarizes in his final report the conclusions of the second phase of the "Gen Z - Voice On" research project with a specific focus on the two main themes: the relationship between Gen Z and politics and the relationship between Gen Z and the media.

The volume closes with the interviews that Eteron conducted with academics and writers such as Ruth Milkman, Keir Milburn and Donatella Della Porta, which shed light into methodological issues surrounding the use of the concept of "generation" in social movement studies and link international trends around Gen Z to their earlier research on the Millennials. Among other things, they highlight the younger generation's role

in the Black Lives Matter movement, Gen Z's contribution to union organising, as well as the psychological impact of the multiple crises, especially that of the pandemic, and the use of social media as a tool for social movements.

Building upon social movement and media studies, the evidence and analyses gathered in the e-book directly challenge the widespread stereotypes that Gen Z is uninformed, apolitical and indifferent to society and current affairs. Instead, they reinforce the hypothesis that Gen Z in Greece seems to follow international trends, seeking alternative and collective solutions in the face of an ongoing condition of multiple crises and precarity.

The research report enriches our understanding of issues regarding politicization, information sources and social media usage. The findings prove a number of stereotypes wrong, such as that the young people are uninterested and indifferent regarding the public sphere. In contrast with those analyses that either praise social media without a second thought on their harmful impacts, or see social media one-sidedly as a "threat to democracy"<sup>15</sup>, this collective volume aspires to explore if digital communities and platforms, like instagram, facebook, tiktok, twitter etc. can, under certain conditions, reinvigorate public discussion and have a positive impact on social change.

All in all, Gen Zers are stressed out, "cannot breathe", fight and rediscover politics in both traditional and novel ways, in a complicated and contradictory process that does not fit into predetermined schema. Returning to our starting point, namely the "snowflake" label, we can see that mainstream narratives tend to blame the new generation for some of their most interesting characteristics: increased empathy for each other's experiences of oppression, based on their race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation etc., as well as their outrage against stigma and discrimination. Even more, these mainstream narratives call on the youth to focus on their individual survival in a competitive world and leave aside social concerns, climate anxiety, labour unions, feminism, and other so-called "sensitivities".

It's evident that within this new generation there is an ongoing internal conflict related to politics, values, and worldviews manifested in all spheres of life. Therefore, Gen Z can be seen as a seismograph, indicating which are the existing dynamics in the wider society and which are the alternatives that seem to take form. Having this in mind, this edited volume will try to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics and hidden potentialities of Gen Z's social and political action.

*Costas Gousis is the project Coordinator of "Gen Z/Voice On".*

# Footnotes

1. "Inside" is a characteristic example. Released on Netflix in May 2021, it is a comedy special written, directed, filmed, edited, and performed by comedian Bo Burnham. Recorded in the guest house of his Los Angeles home during the COVID-19 pandemic, among other themes, it explores the generational aspect.

2. The [L.A. Times](#) included the "snowflake" label in their guide to the language of the 'alt-right', while [the Guardian](#) described the phrase 'Poor little snowflake' as the defining insult of 2016.

3. Flamingo, '[How Young People Consume News and the Implications for Mainstream Media](#)' (Reuters Institute, 2019); Antonis Kalogeropoulos, '2021 Digital News Report' (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2021)

4. In our [interview](#) with Keir Milburn for Eteron, we had the opportunity to discuss some of the ideas he has put forward in the international debate on generations.

5. Paul Mason, '[How the Covid shock has radicalised generation Z](#)', Guardian, 2 June 2021

6. Kristian Niemietz, '[Left turn ahead: Surveying attitudes of young people towards capitalism and socialism](#)' (Institute of Economic Affairs, 2021): 7

7. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, '[Job Openings and Labor Turnover Summary](#)', Economic News Release, January 4, 2022

8. Michael Sainato, '[Starbucks launches aggressive anti-union effort as upstate New York stores organize](#)', 23/11/2021

9. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, '[Union Members Summary](#)', Economic News Release, 20/1/2022

10. James Meadway, '[Generation Left Might Not Be That Left After All](#)', 22/7/2021

11. Nicos Poulantzas Institute, '[Youth: Trends, Attitudes & Political Behaviour](#)', 2021; Ntina Daskalopoulou, Rafaella Maneli and Eva Papadopoulou, '[Youthquake in the 21st Century](#)', 20/9/2020; Alexandros Skouras, '[Generation 17](#)' (ERTFLIX, 2021-2022)

12. Maro Pantelidou-Malouta and Lina Zirganou-Kazolea, '[The young Greek voters of the Left and radicalism during 2010s](#)', Greek Political Science Review, 46 (2020), 172 (in Greek)

13. In this regard, the fact that the most popular party for first-time voters in the recent German election was the neoliberal FDP, along with the environmentalist Greens, is quite thought provoking

14. George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate—The Essential Guide for Progressives* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004)

15. For example, during a parliamentary [debate](#) over police violence in Greece in March 2021, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis "blamed social media for the increase of unrest in the country and depicted them as a 'threat to democracy'", see '[PM Mitsotakis says Social Media are "bad for our democracy"](#)', Keep Talking Greece, 12 March 2021

# **Έρευνα Research Gen Z Voice ON ETERON**

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# Eteron Research: Gen Zers in Greece claim their own voice



## Research Identity

The research was conducted by aboutpeople (data collection) on behalf of Eteron - Institute for Research and Social Change, between 10-18 December 2021. The data was collected using structured online questionnaires that were answered by a sample of 403 people aged 16-25 years old throughout Greece.

The research took place online using panels and advertising in social media. Weighting adjustments were made, relevant to the participants' gender.

Since the research focuses on Gen Z, the age range of the participants was 16-25 years old. Even though there isn't a universal consensus on the date range, the general trend is to say that it spans between 1995/6 and 2010.<sup>1</sup>

Bearing in mind the methodological limits regarding the length of a questionnaire - especially when it's an online questionnaire that participants have to fill in themselves - there was a limited number of questions that we could include, in order to avoid as much as possible the abandonment of a questionnaire before it was completed. Therefore, the questionnaire focuses on specific investigation topics.

## Research Goals

1. To explore the information sources that Gen Z youths choose and also how they form their political opinions.
2. To document behaviours and patterns relevant to Social Media usage, regarding news consumption and political behaviour.
3. To analyse Gen Z's opinions on misinformation and fake news.
4. To find out what Gen Z thinks and does regarding current socio-political matters.

## Research Goals

During the last few years, Gen Z has become the subject of rigorous academic research and a trending topic of public debate. As early as 2019, the number of Google searches for “Gen Z” was a lot higher than that of all previous generations,<sup>2</sup> including the millennials, that up until then were “monopolising” interest in talks regarding the modern “generation gap”. The increased interest regarding Gen Z is (partly) due to its increased presence in the public sphere and its impact in politics. In the 2020 US general election, one out of ten possible voters belonged to that generation.<sup>3</sup> Also, the vast majority of the people currently studying in US Universities belong to Gen Z, thus posing new challenges regarding the (re)structuring of educational programs.<sup>4</sup>

Till now, Gen Z is viewed as a challenge and at the same time a mystery for the established institutions in the fields of politics, media and the market. Political strategy teams have to modify their content as gender, race and diversity issues seem to affect the political and electoral preferences of

Gen Z as well as the way they evaluate political parties and/or figures.<sup>5</sup> The so-called “traditional” media find it hard to attract dynamic audience from younger ages.<sup>6</sup> Also, the fragmentary way in which Gen Z internet, causes issues to the marketing departments who are seeking ways to make the new generation focus on the “appropriate” advertising messages.<sup>7</sup>

As expected, one of the main areas of interest regarding Gen Z, is this generation’s relationship with technology, and, more specifically, its great competence in the use of Web 2.0 technology. It is a fact that social media is part of Gen Z youths' everyday life from a very young age - indeed Gen Z is the first generation that is “internet native”. Gen Z youths familiarised themselves with smartphones and high speed internet during the first decade of their lives.<sup>8</sup> Also, a distinct trait of Gen Z is their distancing from “traditional” social media, such as Facebook<sup>9</sup>, and their preference for more image-focused platforms like Instagram, as well as their ability to

express themselves in a multimedia fashion. It is important to keep in mind, though, that this “distancing” is different from one country to another. Gen Zers are usually very comfortable combining image, video and text<sup>10</sup>. Another observation is that they tend to prefer customised digital environments that merge information-entertainment and socialising and where boundaries become porous.<sup>11</sup>

Still, by over-focusing on this aspect of Gen Z, we risk downplaying the social, cultural and political framework within which the new generation youths express themselves and utilise new media. The difficulties that established institutions are facing when addressing Gen Z aren't merely due to their inability to adjust to the reality of new media. The new generation grew up in a time of increased delegitimation of the dominant institutions that older generations recognised as the political, financial and communication status quo. In Greece, this tendency is exceptionally strong. The findings of a relevant research by the Nicos Poulantzas Institute<sup>12</sup> showed that 82% distrust banks and political parties, while 92% don't trust the media. In a Kappa Research survey, 79% stated that they feel that the solutions suggested for Greece's future don't take into account the needs of their generation.<sup>13</sup>

Gen Z seems to have come of age within a frame of distrust towards the institutions and of concern regarding the future. The pandemic certainly aggravated those circumstances. In the US, the Gen Zers that were already

working in 2020 - usually under precarious employment circumstances- were the most affected by the pandemic, with most of them facing lay-offs and cuts on their wages.<sup>14</sup> This is their “convergence point” with the Millennials, whose coming of age happened at the same time as the 2008 economic crisis. Still, there is a significant difference between the two, within Greece's reality. The Millennials have memories of Greece entering the Eurozone and of the Olympic Games, as these are events that happened in their adolescence or their post-adolescent years. While, even for the older people who belong to Gen Z, their adolescence was marked by the 2008 economic crisis and the memorandum reforms.

In that sense, Gen Z is at the same time the Instagram and Tik Tok generation, but also the “generation of constant crisis”, as it's a generation for which critical (economic, sanitary, environmental) conditions are the norm rather than the exception. All efforts to investigate and comprehend Gen Z, will have to consider what kind of media they use, the way they use them and also the social events and opportunities that inspire them to express themselves and form their own opinions in public life.

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**A**

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**Information  
sources, politics  
& the Internet**

## **A. Information sources, politics & the Internet**

As mentioned earlier, one of the basic traits of Gen Z is that they're a generation of digital natives that grew up using digital technology. They're a generation that didn't experience the world without the internet and spends (very) large parts of their day online. According to the present research, 51.6% spend 5-10 hours per day online, 36.7% spend less than 5 hours, while 10.6% spend over 10 hours on the internet.

The present research aims to document Gen Z's interest in current events, their habits regarding informational content consumption, the role of Social Media in political content consumption and their political activity in online platforms. According to studies, news consumption patterns are shaped by individuals as they grow and are not concretely defined before the age of 30.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the study of behavioural patterns of news consumption in younger ages has a particular dynamic. It is amply proved that the internet and new technologies increase the frequency of the change of habits and routines regarding news' search methods among young people.

According to the present research, young Gen Zers show a high interest in keeping up with current events. When asked "How interested are you in keeping up with current events", 55% of the participants replied "Very much/ A lot" and 30.5% picked "Sufficiently". Based on the distinct demographic traits of our sample, we can state that the interest in keeping up with current events increases proportionally with the education level of the participants (51.2% of participants that have reached up to secondary school level replied "Very much/ A lot", while the relative percentage among higher education graduates is 61.4%). Also, we found that those who reside within the Attica region are more interested in current affairs (60.8%) than those who live elsewhere (50.9%), as are the men and the people who work (See Graph 1).

How interested would you say you are in keeping up with current events?

	Very much & a lot	Sufficiently	Not so much & not at all	IDK/NA
Men	57.3	29.7	12.3	0.71
Women	53.9	31.6	13.3	1.2
Currently working	57.4	30.1	12.5	-
Currently unemployed	53.3	30.8	14.3	1.6
Secondary education graduates	51.2	31.2	16.4	1.2
Higher education graduates	61.4	29.9	8.2	0.5
Attica residents	60.8	25.5	12.4	1.3
Rest of the country	50.9	34.1	14.3	0.7

Graph 1

The internet (news websites and social media pages) are the main sources of information. According to this research's findings, when asked "How often do you get information on current events from online news websites", 48.7% replied "Very often (daily)" and 37.1% replied "Often (e.g. 1-3 times per week)". A similarly high preference for news websites as information sources was depicted in the Poulantzas Institute's research (2021), where 78% of the participants replied they get information online, by directly accessing websites. The social media question gathers similar results: When asked "How often do you get

information on current events from social media", 50.2% replied: "Very often (daily)" and 34.8% said "Often (1-3 times per week)". Women, people with higher education and Attica region residents are the majority of those who replied "Very often" (see Indexes 1 and 2). It is worth noting that according to other surveys too, social media are a popular information source, not just for the younger generation, but for the general population as well [see Reuters Institute research, 2021, where more than two thirds of Greeks (69%) said they're informed via social media].<sup>16</sup>

### How often do you get informed on current events from online news websites?

	Men	Women	Cur- rently work- ing	Cur- rently unemplo- yed	Second- ary edu- cation	Attica resi- dents	Rest of the country	
Never	3.6	0.4	2.5	1.5	3.1	0.0	2.5	1.5
Seldom (less than once per week)	8.7	13.7	8.0	14.5	13.3	8.6	9.4	13.4
Often (e.g. 1-3 times per week)	35.5	38.3	39.4	35.3	38.7	34.4	35.4	38.3
Very often (daily)	51.4	47.3	50.1	47.7	44.0	57.0	51.9	46.4
IDK / NA	0.8	0.3	0.0	1.0	0.9	0.0	0.8	0.4

Index 1

### How often do you get information from social media;

	Men	Women	Cur- rently work- ing	Cur- rently unemplo- yed	Second- ary edu- cation	Attica resi- dents	Rest of the country	
Never	3.6	1.6	3.4	2.3	3.5	1.5	1.4	3.7
Seldom (less than once per week)	10.9	13.3	13.1	11.4	12.3	11.3	9.3	14.1
Συχνά (e.g. 1-3 times per week)	37.0	32.8	31.9	36.9	36.2	32.5	36.8	33.3
Very often (daily)	48.5	52.0	51.6	49.2	47.7	54.7	52.0	48.8
IDK / NA	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.5	0.1

Index 2

According to literature, the general tendency to pick the internet as a main information source, and more specifically social media, is due to the youths' desire to control media usage, by being able to customise the consumption of news that are offered to them by the Media.<sup>17</sup> The content consumed via social media reflects the internet's ability to "adapt" to the user's/consumer's needs: the algorithms determine the choice of information that will be shown to each user; information that results from the user's social and geographical environment.<sup>18</sup> For Gen Z, that grew up with the internet and social media right from the start, the choice of the internet as an information source is reinforced by the practical nature and the increased usage of mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, laptops)<sup>19</sup>

Of course, it is important to note that besides the obvious relation between this generation and technology and its influence on young people's informational and recreational habits, another important factor that partly determines their choices is their documented distrust towards the traditional media. Even though the current research doesn't focus on traditional media<sup>20</sup>, several studies in Greece and abroad have documented young people's growing distrust towards them. In Poulantzas Institute's research (2021), 58% of the participants said they have "Zero trust" towards the media, while 33% replied that they only trust them "A little bit". Also in a research conducted in the UK, 85% of young people aged 17-30 stated they are distrustful of traditional media. The main reasons behind this lack of trust is the media's scrappy coverage of topics and events relevant to young people and also the biased way they present youth related content. Additionally, this negative stance towards the media seems to be proportionate to

the growing distrust towards other institutions as well, but at the same time underlines the fact that the media carry a significant responsibility in terms of shaping the quality of democracy itself.<sup>21</sup>

The choosing process online and especially in social media platforms is very different to that in traditional media. For example, a post on social media could be accompanied by a friend's comment recommending that people read the article or it could have received a significant number of likes and emoticon reactions. This type of elements that accompany a news article on social media carry a particular dynamic as they increase the chances said article gets picked. Those same elements can be used as interpretive tools and at the same time affect the way the article is read.<sup>22</sup> The different traits that we come across on social media platforms can have significant effects on our exposure to political news/ information and, therefore, on our political behaviour.

Of course it is critical to keep in mind that each country's distinct characteristics (media system, political and cultural behaviour, internet expansion level and the culture formed around each social media platform) should be taken into account when examining viewpoints and behaviours relevant to the internet and social media usage. For instance, regarding social media usage, the present research shows that Instagram and Facebook are the most popular platforms both in terms of general usage (Graph 2) and of following political parties/ political figures (Graph 3). Instead, in several Northern European countries (such as the UK), Twitter is the most popular platform that young people use in order to get informed on current events.<sup>23</sup>

**Gen Z - SoMe**

**Instagram**

**YouTube**

**Facebook**

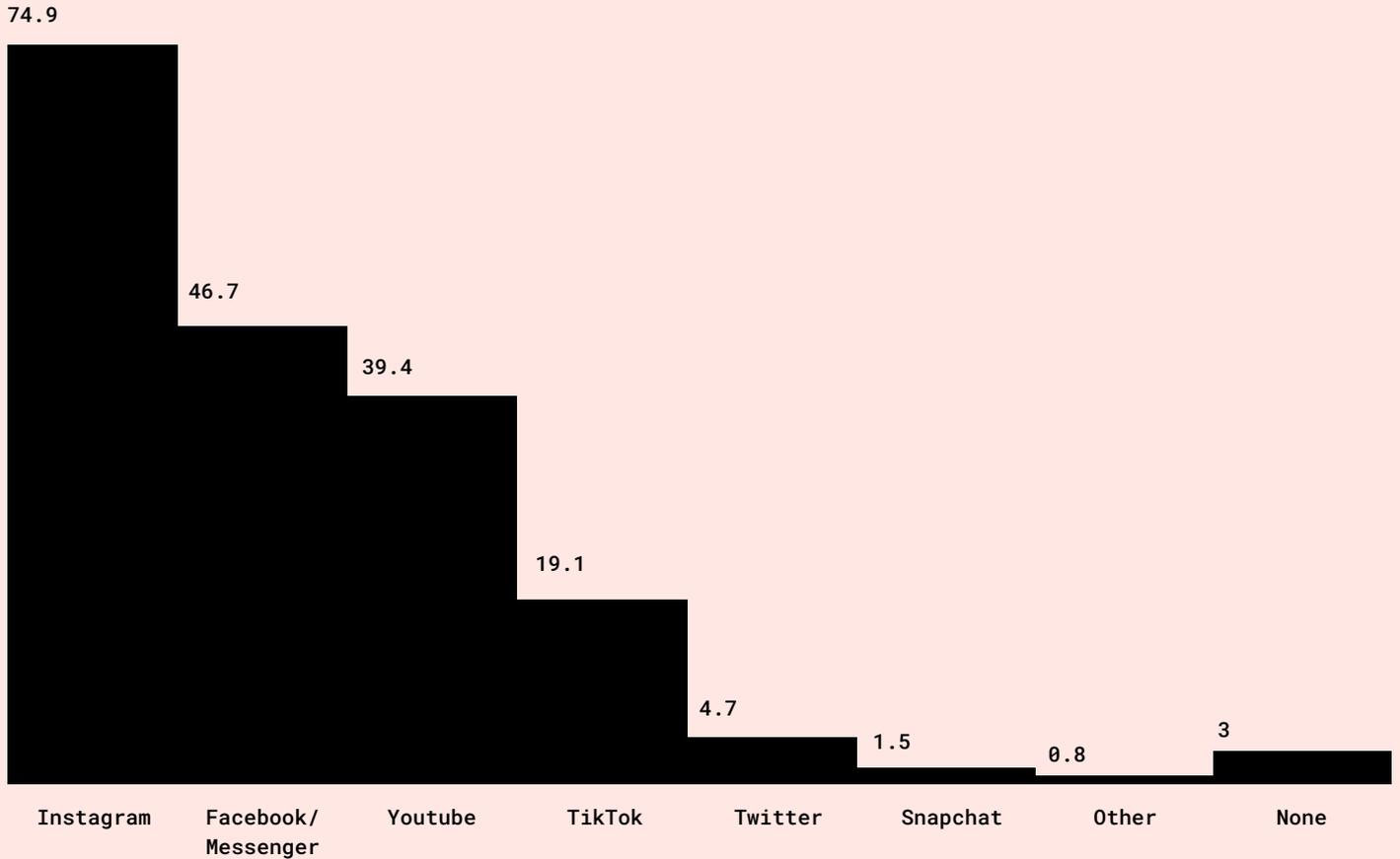
**TikTok**

**Twitter**

**Snapchat**

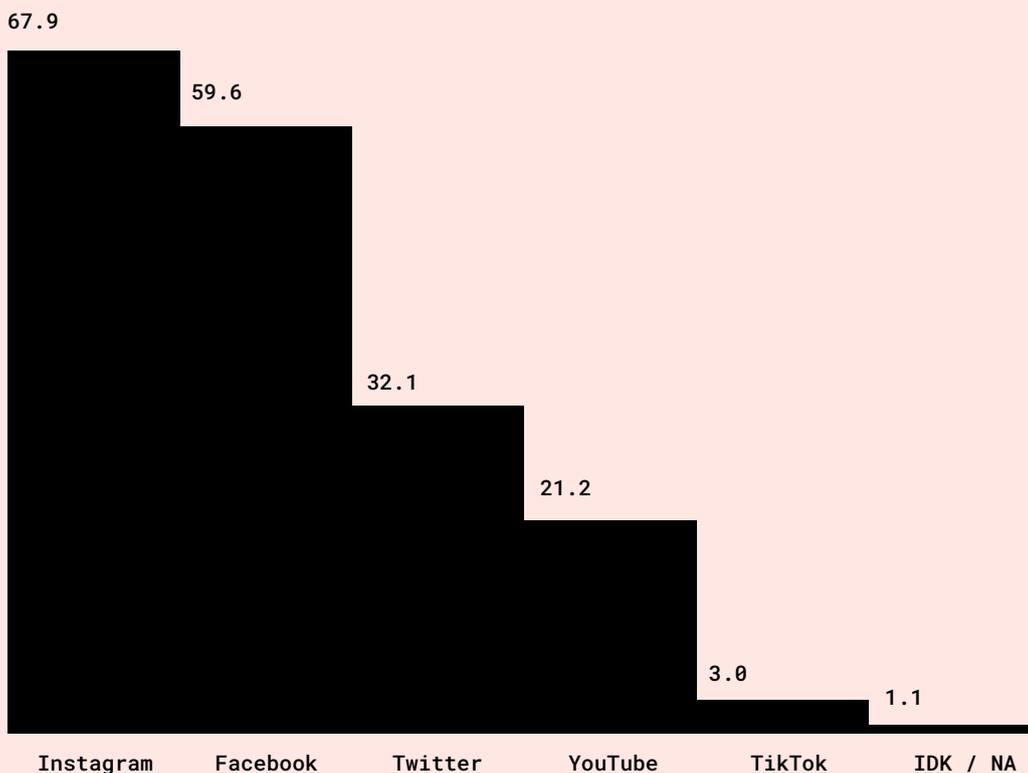
Which social media platform do you use the most? (pick up to two options)

Graph 2



In which social media platform do you follow politicians or political parties? (multiple choice) - for those who follow politicians and political parties on social media

Graph 3



According to this research, Instagram is the most popular social media platform among young people in Greece. The young people's preference for image-focused platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube has been amply documented.<sup>24</sup>

Within this new digital information and recreation environment, influencers have become increasingly important. The term "influencer", that has become incredibly popular in the last few years, refers to a person who is very active and has a significant number of followers in one or more social media platforms. According to this research's findings, the majority of the participants in our survey follow one or more influencers (Graph 4). Women (70.7%) more so than men (55.8%) and employed people (67.5%) more so than the unemployed (59.8%) (see Graph 5).

# INFLUENCERS

In the last few years, the term “influencer” has been used broadly to describe people with strong social media presence and numerous followers in one or more platforms.

Do you follow any influencers on social media?

**YES**  
**63.0%**

**NO**  
**37.0%**

Graph 4

In the last few years, the term “influencer” has been used broadly to describe people with strong social media presence and numerous followers in one or more platforms. Do you follow any influencers on social media?

	NO	YES
Men	55.8	44.2
Women	70.7	29.3
Currently working	67.5	32.5
Currently unemployed	59.8	40.2
Secondary education graduates	63.5	36.5
Higher education graduates	62.8	37.2
Attica residents	63.8	36.2
Rest of the country	62.4	37.3

Graph 5

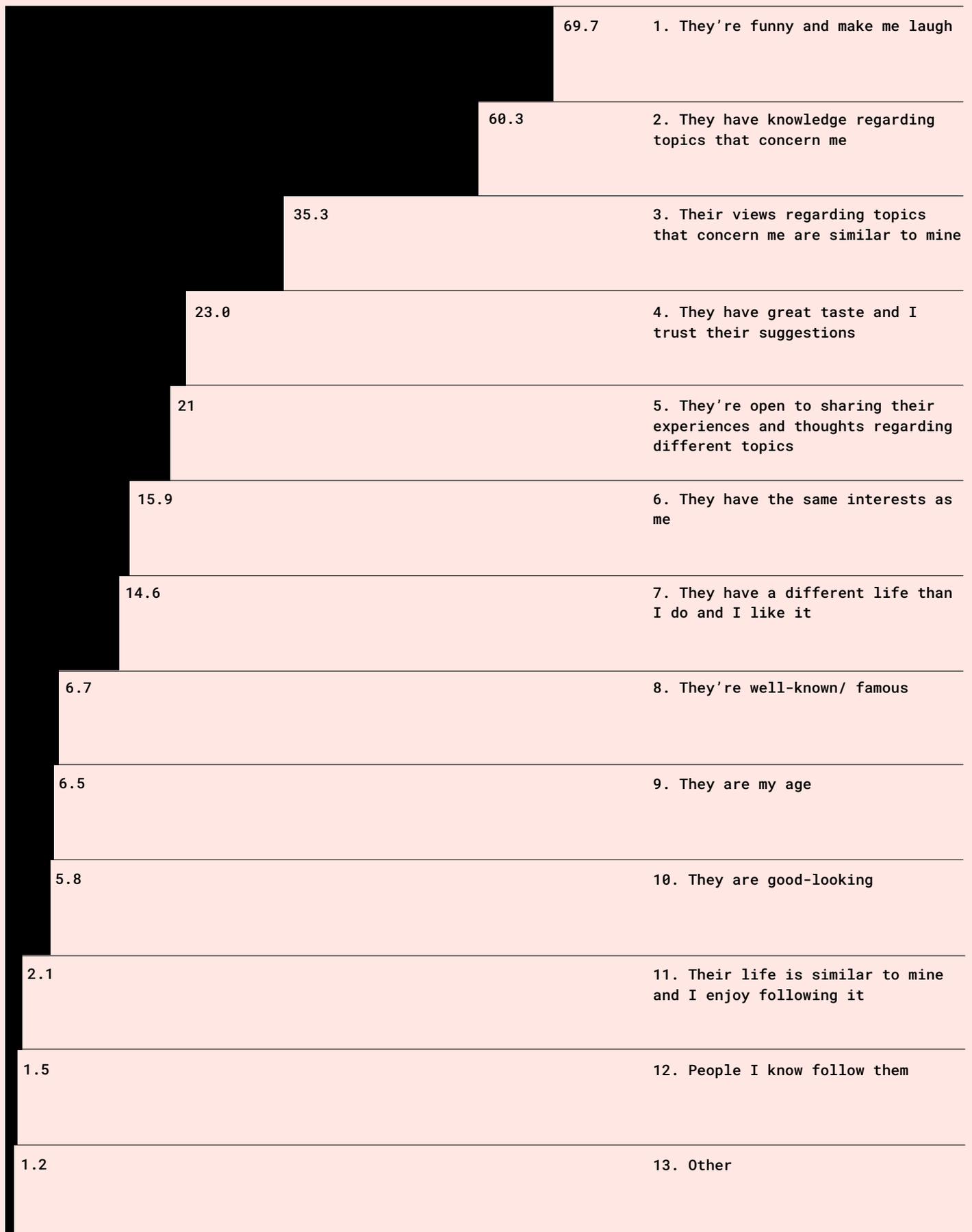
# INFLUENCERS

According to the participants, the main factors that attract them to an influencer are “humour” and the “knowledge” they believe that person has “regarding topics of interest” (Graph 6). Another factor would be “the influencers’ taste” and their suggestions - something that’s linked to the influencers’ knowledge regarding topics of interest.

Influencers (known celebrities or even “micro-celebrities” - a term referring to people who became popular through social media) have created a huge and prospering market where they push products as well as ideas and ways of life (new class of cultural tastemakers). An interesting fact is that 20% of the participants picked the option “They’re open to sharing their experiences and thoughts regarding different topics”. No matter how pretentious and/or edited this type of posts are, they probably seem “genuine” and manage, at least to a certain extent, to emotionally touch the content consumers.

Which of the factors above are more important to you when deciding if you will follow an influencer? (up to 3 options) - for those who follow influencers on social media.

Graph 6



One of the main findings of the present research is that even though Gen Z youths use the internet and social media extensively, they're still relatively cautious towards them. The participants' answers regarding their trust levels towards online information sources, social media and influencers, to a great extent show a tentative trust.

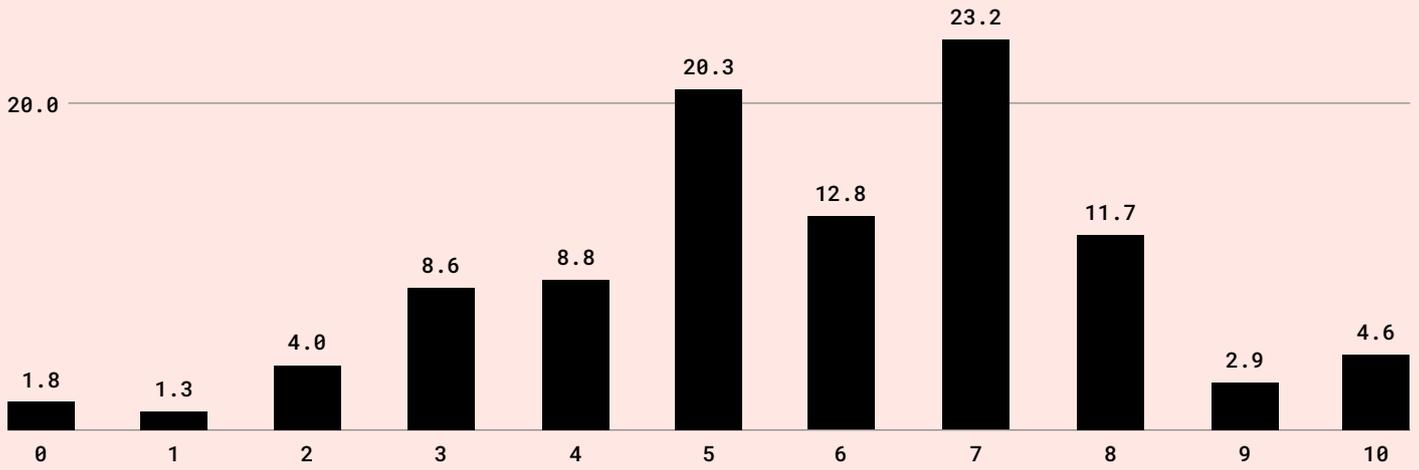
When asked "How reliable do you think online information websites are as information sources?" on a scale of 0 ("not at all") to 10 ("very"), the average score is 6. Social media scored a 5 at the same question regarding their liability. We can therefore see that social media have less credibility among Gen Zers. When asked "How much would you say you trust suggestions and opinions on political and social matters from influencers that you follow?", 33.7% replied "A lot" and "Somewhat", while 59.9% of participants replied "A little bit" and "Not at all" (Graphs 7, 8 and 9)

**0**  
**Not at all**  
**10**  
**Very**

How reliable do you think online information websites are as information sources?

Graph 7

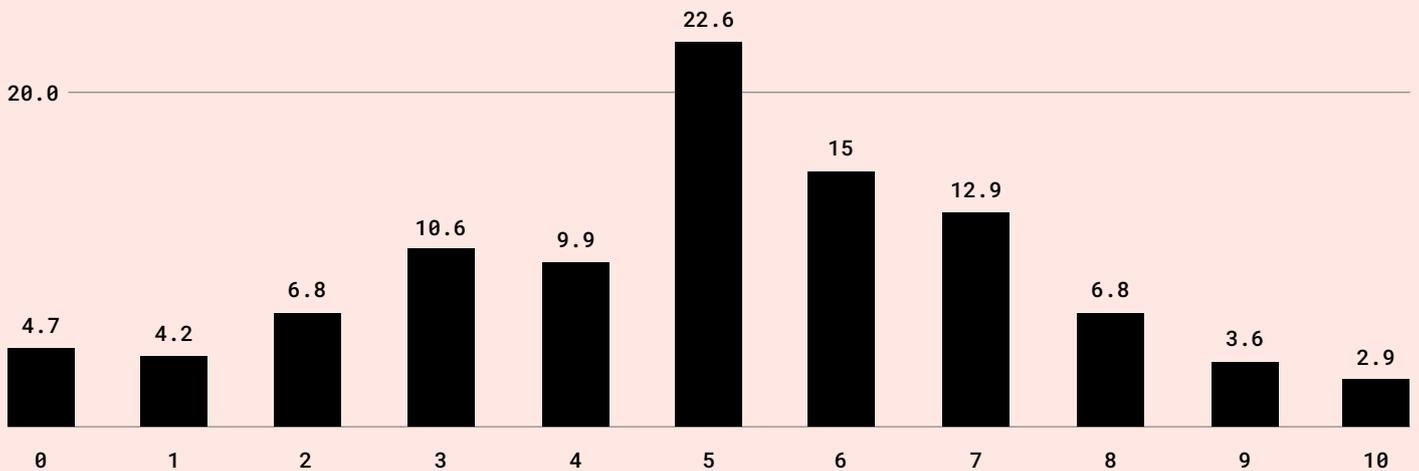
0=Very - 10=Not at all



How reliable do you think social media are as information sources?

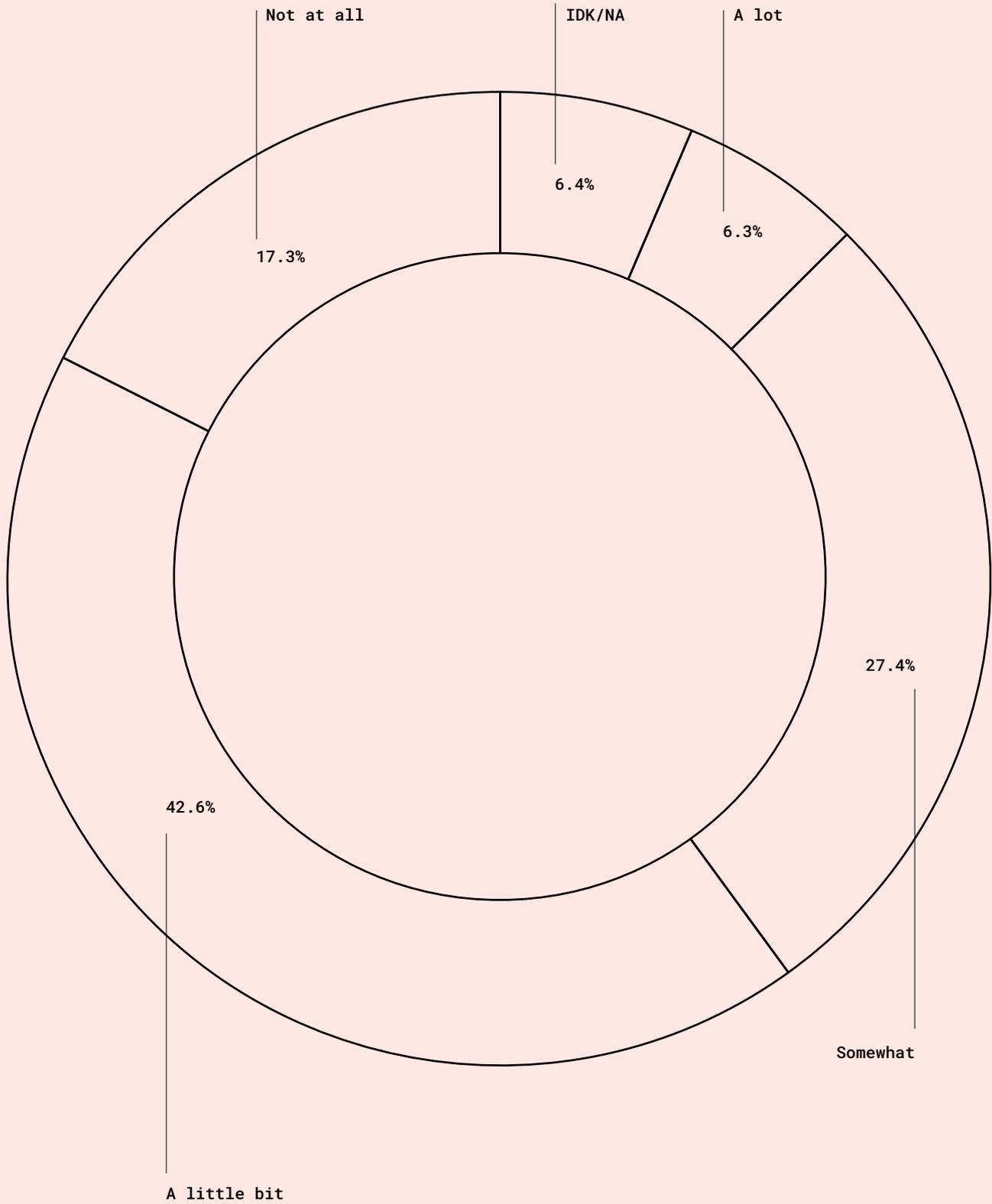
Graph 8

0=Not at all - 10 Very



How much would you say you trust suggestions and opinions on political and social matters from influencers that you follow - for those who follow influencers on social media

Graph 9



According to the research's findings, family and friends gather the highest trust rating, while politicians, political parties and the Church are on the bottom three of Gen Zers list (Graph 10). The issue of the lack of trust towards political parties and politicians in Greece has been proved by multiple surveys.<sup>25</sup>

The high level of trust towards scientists essentially proves a closer link between Gen Z and education and science. It is important to bear in mind, though, that the high ratings when documenting trust towards scientists in this research, may be the result of the communication strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and the resulting presence of scientist specialists in the media (mostly doctors and other health specialists).

When asked if they follow politicians on social media, 17.7% replied they do and 79.9% said they don't. Gender and employment status seem to be the two main differentiating factors, as 23.9% of the male participants replied they follow politicians/ political parties on social media, while amongst female participants the relevant percentage is 12.1%. Similarly, 22.4% of those who work gave a positive reply, while only 14.3% of those not currently employed did the same (Graph 11). According to the research's findings, the social media accounts of politicians and political parties don't attract young people's attention.

Still if we take the following into account:

1. The young age of the participants
2. The general distrust against politicians and political parties
3. The (with very few exceptions) uninspired and standardised use of social media by Greek politicians and political parties and their reluctance to make better use of the interaction tools that those platforms have to offer,<sup>26</sup> the percentage of young people who follow accounts of politicians/ political parties is rather significant and could be an indication of young people's interest in politics.

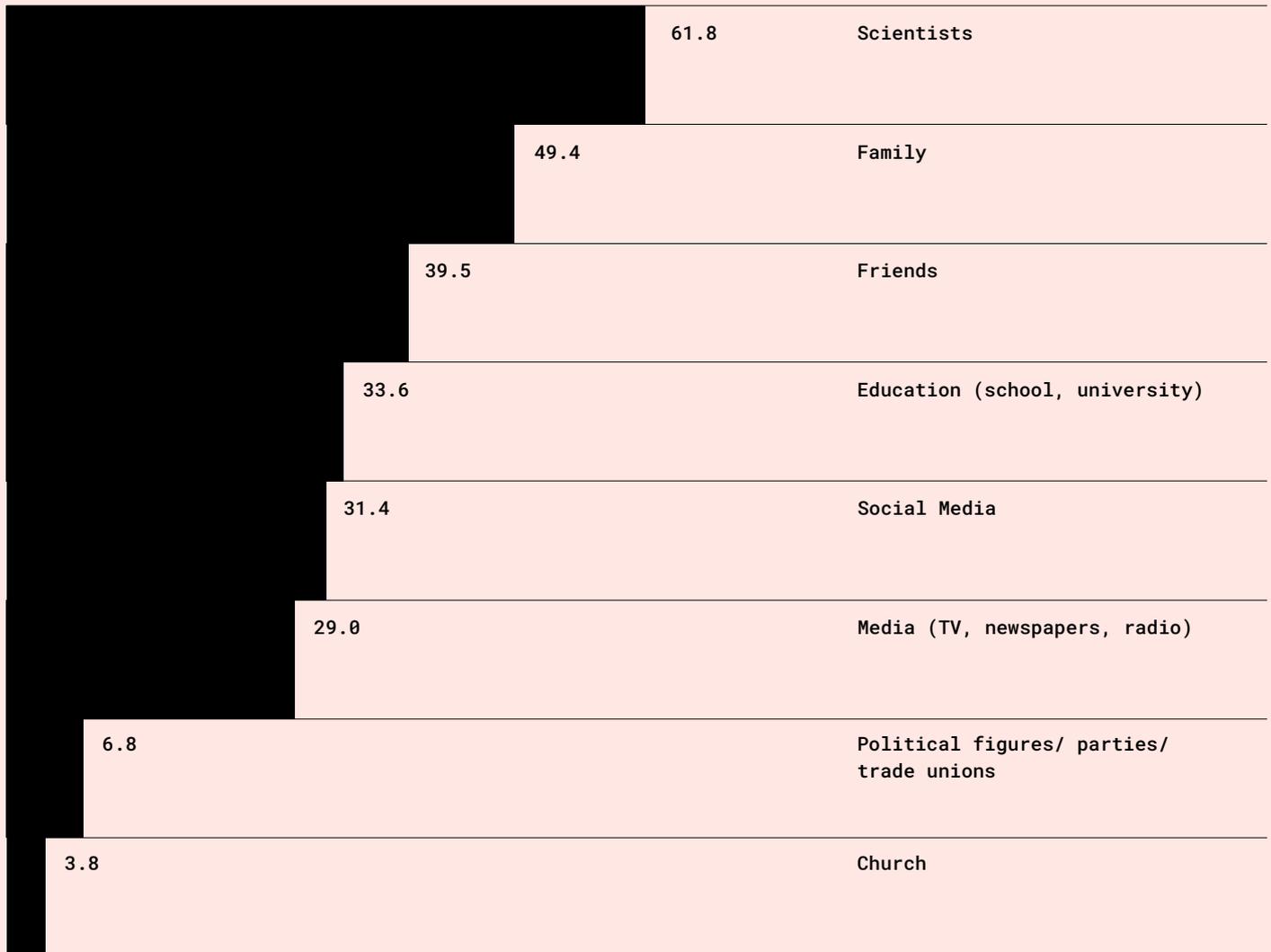
The participants' activity regarding political posts on social media is rather temperate. When asked "Do you share posts with political content (e.g. posts on political issues by politicians, political parties, NGOs, media outlets, other internet users)?" 21.9% of the participants replied "Yes", while 75%

replied "No". The groups that share the most are the people who work and those who reside in the Attica region (Graph 12).

When asked if they create politically related posts of their own (posts on political/ social matters), 20.9% said they do and 76.5% replied they do not. The groups that create the most political posts are men, people who work and university graduates (Graph 13).

The present research detects a restraint activity on social media when it comes to posting or sharing political events or other political content. The motives regarding when and how young people choose to "expose themselves" in the digital public sphere regarding their political opinions is a topic that requires a more thorough investigation. According to recent studies<sup>27</sup> personal and/or family experiences are impactful factors in the forming of the young generation's political identity and in determining their level of political participation. We should also note that even social media low-effort activities are linked to an increase of political participation in general.<sup>28</sup> For example, the change of one's profile picture to express their support to a specific cause (such as the #MeToo movement etc) is an act of political expression that could be the precursor of further political activity.<sup>29</sup>

Pick the top 3 of the options below that you mostly trust regarding current events.



Graph 10

Do you follow any politicians or political parties on social media?

	Men	Women	Cur- rently work- ing	cur- rently unemplo- yed	Second- ary edu- cation δευση	Higher edu- cation	Attica resi- dents	Rest of the country
YES	23.9	12.1	22.4	14.3	18.8	16.3	19.6	16.3
NO	73.2	84.8	76.6	80.9	78.0	81.2	78.2	79.8
IDK-NA	2.9	3.1	1.0	4.8	3.2	2.5	2.2	3.9

Graph 11

# SHARE

Do you share posts with political content (e.g. posts on political issues by politicians, political parties, NGOs, media outlets, other internet users)?

	Men	Women	Cur- rently work- ing	cur- rently unemplo- yed	Second- ary edu- cation δευση	Higher edu- cation	Attica resi- dents	Rest of the country
YES	21.0	22.3	25.2	19.6	22.2	21.9	25.3	19.5
NO	76.8	74.2	71.3	77.7	75.1	74.5	70.7	78.2
IDK-NA	2.2	3.5	3.5	2.7	2.7	3.6	4.0	2.3

Graph 12

# POST

Do you create politically related posts of your own (posts on political/ social matters)?

	Men	Women	Cur- rently work- ing	cur- rently unemplo- yed	Second- ary edu- cation δευση	Higher edu- cation	Attica resi- dents	Rest of the country
YES	26.8	15.2	25.9	17.3	17.1	27.8	20.5	21.2
NO	71.0	81.6	71.4	80.2	80.8	68.6	76.8	76.3
IDK-NA	2.2	3.2	2.7	2.5	2.5	3.6	2.7	2.5

Graph 13

**B**

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**Fake  
News**

## B: Fake News

As mentioned above, Gen Z is interested in current events, among other things, and therefore, news consumption is a standard activity for young people, even on a daily basis. As depicted in Graph 14, 55% of young people who participated in this research replied that they are “Incredibly” and “Very” interested in following the news. It is also worth adding to that the 30.5% who replied that they’re “Somewhat” interested, to reach a total of 85% who are interested in following current events. This shows us that 8 out of 10 young people are interested in getting informed regarding what’s happening in the world today.

That’s why, we assayed that this research should also cover the issue of credibility of the available public information, through the lens of the “fake news” phenomenon and the consequent public discussion.

Even though “fake news” isn’t such a recent phenomenon, the arrival of social media has caused an increase in the spreading of inaccurate information and/ or completely fake news<sup>31</sup>

With the rise of the echo chambers and filter bubbles, the decline of traditional media and the diffusion of online information, we are faced with a kind of “infodemic”, that is characterised by disinformation, misinformation and conspiratorial tales.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, many people are confused regarding what is actually “true” out of the sum of the information they receive/ consume on a daily basis regarding current topics of public interest.

Additionally, the increasing political polarisation in several Western societies, acts both as a cause and an effect of the spread of fake news. The polarisation is a result of the combination of

increasingly intense economic inequalities that have a negative effect on those left “vulnerable” from globalisation and “fuel” a rising “silent counter-revolution”<sup>33</sup> which, in turn, nurtures identity politics and existential angst. Such a dynamic encourages the manifestation of deviating moral feelings, through which many feel that they belong in “competing moral tribes”.<sup>34</sup>

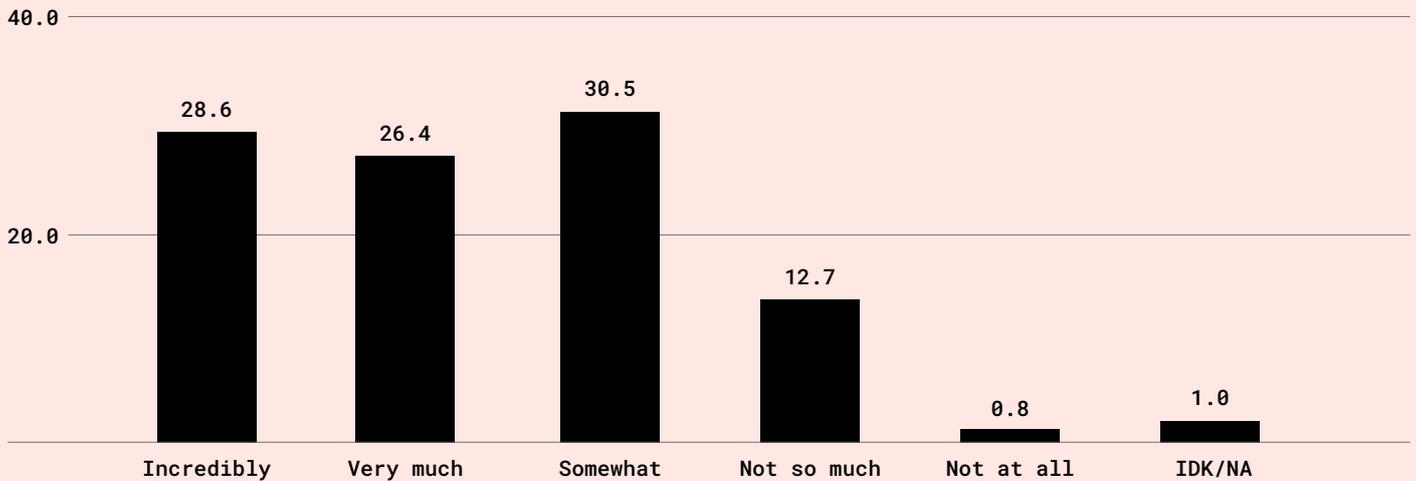
In a general sense, within the framework of late modernity in Western societies, people experience the loss of a stable rational and moral compass that could guide their judgement. Given that the “master narrative” has lost its credibility thus causing a core distrust and a de-legitimisation of “predetermined rules”<sup>36</sup>, people have become increasingly distrustful of the available ideological truths. In that sense, modern Western societies are “meta-ideological” and “meta-ethical”. Within this social framework, the “meta-truth” has become a popular phrase in today’s political discourses.

In total, the existing social turmoil, political polarisation, widespread cynicism, ethical relativism, increased commercialisation of mass media where the main trend is “infotainment”, the mediatisation of politics and the consequent politico-tainment, are the ingredients to create a “perfect storm” that can ignite the crisis of public knowledge. This crisis doesn’t just contain a multitude of fake news and conversations regarding the “alternative truth”, but it also promotes nativism, angry populism and anti-politics.<sup>38</sup> Undermining the value of public interest and of the feeling of a common political and cultural common ground, directly erodes the democratic values and citizenship.

Given that fake news “travel” in social media six times faster than real news<sup>39</sup> an information ecosystem is formed where the undermining of credible information sources tends to be the norm and a condition that constitutes a great challenge for the democratic public sphere. With that in mind, the participants in this research were asked if they believe that they have been victims of “fake news” and 71.9% said “Yes” (Graph 15).

How interested are you in keeping up with current news/ events?

Graph 14



Do you think that you have ever been a victim of "fake news"?

Graph 15

**YES**  
**71.0%**

**NO**  
**22.4%**

More specifically, the groups that mostly believe that they have been victims of disinformation are women, people who are currently working, the higher education graduates and those residing outside of the Attica Region (Graph 16).

Even though the majority of the participants believe that they have been victims of fake news, most of them (74.7%) think that they can detect fake news (Graph 17).

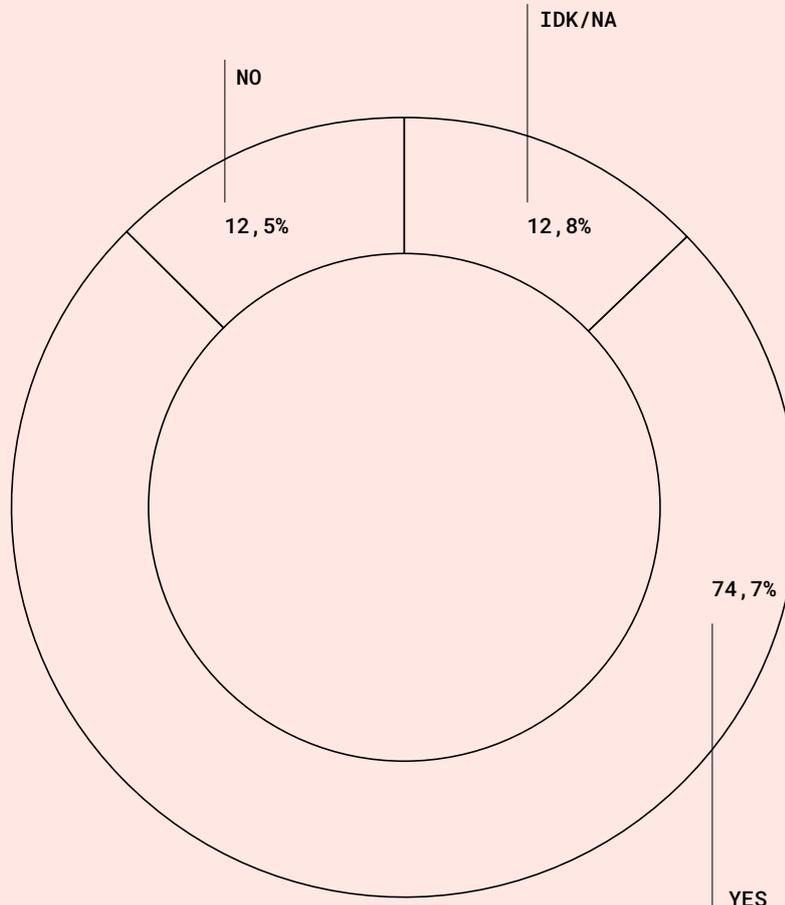
Do you think that you have ever been a victim of “fake news”?

	Men	Women	Cur- rently work- ing	cur- rently unemplo- yed	Second- ary edu- cation δευση	Higher edu- cation	Attica resi- dents	Rest of the country
YES	65.9	76.6	72.9	69.7	68.9	75.4	69.1	72.4
NO	28.3	16.8	23.1	21.9	23.3	20.5	23.8	21.3
IDK-NA	5.8	6.6	4.0	8.4	7.8	4.1	7.1	6.3

Graph 16

Do you believe you can detect fake news or not?

Graph 17



Based on demographics, the groups that are more confident regarding their ability to detect fake news are men (with a significant difference of more than 10% compared to the female participants), those currently employed, higher education graduates

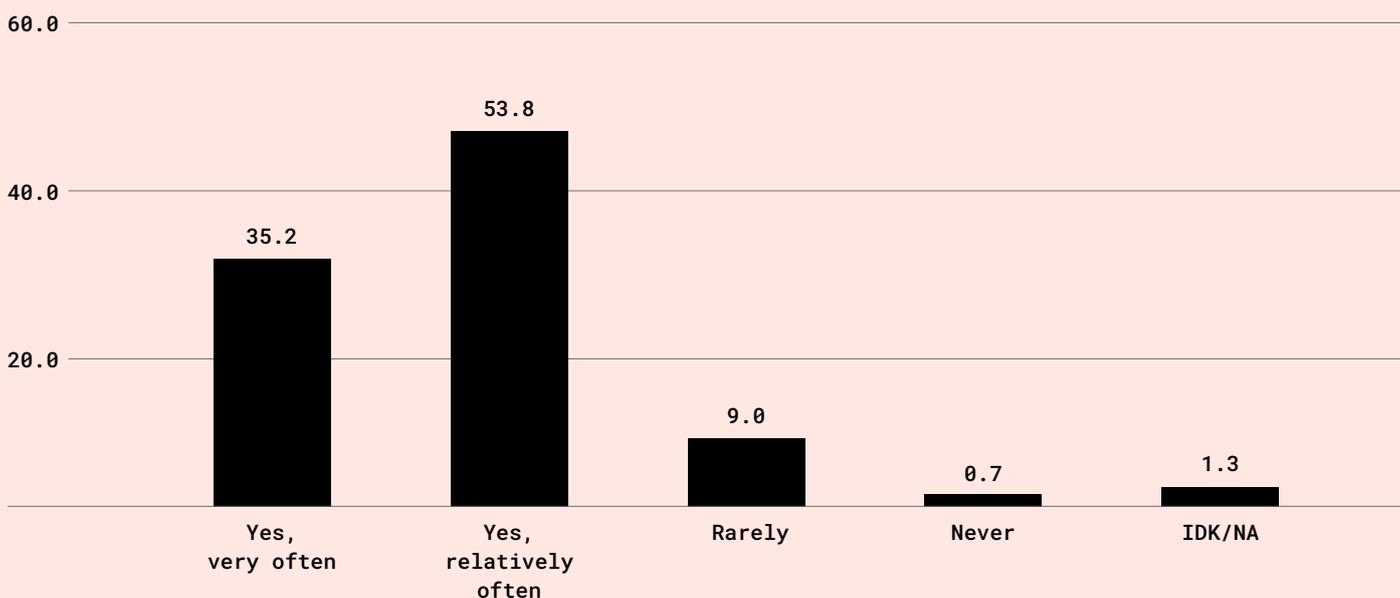
and those residing outside of the Attica Region (Graph 18). Regarding whether or not they cross-check sources while consuming news articles that interest them, a total of 89% replied that they do so “Very often” and “Relatively often” (Graph 19)

Do you believe you can detect fake news or not?

	Men	Women	Cur- rently work- ing	cur- rently unemplo- yed	Second- ary edu- cation δευση	Higher edu- cation	Attica resi- dents	Rest of the country
YES	80.4	69.5	75.0	74.4	73.6	76.7	73.9	75.2
NO	8.0	16.8	14.1	11.3	13.4	11.1	13.7	11.5
IDK-NA	11.6	13.7	10.9	14.3	13.0	12.2	12.4	13.3

Graph 18

When reading a news article that interests you, do you cross-check it from different sources?



Graph 19

According to Index 3, those who cross-check the most (if we add the “very often” and the “relatively often” replies) are women, the currently unemployed, the higher education graduates and the Attica residents. Finally, participants were asked which factors they consider in order to judge if a news article is “real” (Graph 20). In this case, the power of familiarity becomes apparent, as the most important factor that was mentioned by almost half of the participants (49.1%) was “If I trust the person that (re)posted it”.

In second place (45.1%) was “If the article first originated from an official State institution”, while in third place (41.2%) is the self-referential factor “If it makes sense and suits my way of thinking”. The fourth factor, with a significantly lower percentage than the other three, was “If it was posted

by a well-established media outlet”. Two out of four credibility factors are indicative of the subjectivity of each person’s evaluation of a news article, thus underlining the need for media education/ literacy since one’s early years.

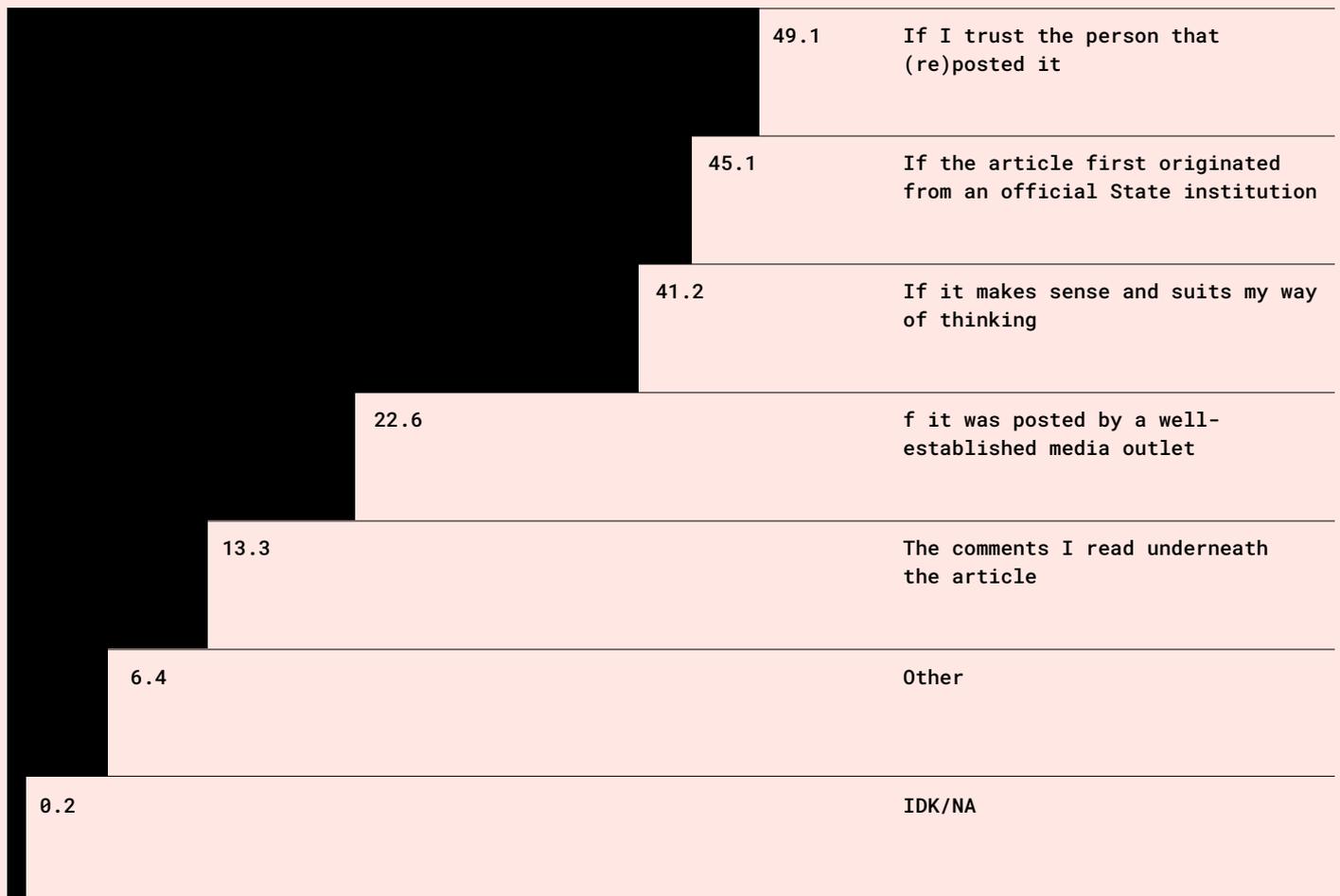
To break things down a bit more, according to Index 4, men insist more on the issue of trust towards the person that (re)posted the news article, the higher education graduates focus more on whether or not an article originated from an official institution. Also, men -more so than the other demographic groups- increasingly factor in whether or not a news article makes sense and if it suits their way of thinking, while secondary education graduates care more than the rest of the groups about whether or not a news article was posted by a well-established media outlet.

When reading a news article that interests you, do you cross-check it from different sources?

	Men	Women	Cur- rently work- ing	cur- rently unemplo- yed	Second- ary edu- cation δευση	Higher edu- cation	Attica resi- dents	Rest of the country
Very often	38.4	32.8	35.8	34.8	31.1	42.4	30.1	39.0
Relatively often	50.0	57.8	51.8	55.2	53.4	54.9	61.3	48.3
Rarely	8.0	9.4	9.3	8.7	12.8	2.7	6.4	10.9
Never	1.4	0.0	1.6	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.8	0.6
IDK/NA	2.2	0.0	1.5	1.3	1.6	0.0	1.4	1.2

Index 3

When reading a news article, which factors do you consider in order to evaluate if it's real? (pick up to two factors)



Graph 20

When reading a news article, which factors do you consider in order to evaluate if it's real? (pick up to two factors

	Men	Women	Cur- rently work- ing	cur- rently unemplo- yed	Second- ary edu- cation δευση	Higher edu- cation	Attica resi- dents	Rest of the country
If I trust the person that (re)posted it	55.1	44.1	53.8	45.7	50.4	47.9	51.5	47.3
If the article first originated from an official State institution	37.7	52.7	44.2	45.8	40.1	53.3	43.2	46.5
If it was posted by a well-established media outlet	25.4	19.8	23.0	22.2	25.7	17.7	23.3	22.0
If it makes sense and suits my way of thinking	44.2	38.3	40.0	42.1	44.1	36.5	41.9	40.8
The comments I read underneath the article	11.6	14.5	15.3	11.8	14.0	12.3	13.6	13.0
Other	6.5	6.6	2.6	9.2	6.4	6.6	3.1	8.8
IDK/NA	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.8

Index 4

**C**

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**Viewpoints  
and practices  
regarding  
current socio-  
political  
matters**

### **C. Viewpoints and practices regarding current socio-political matters**

As mentioned in the introduction, the coming of age of Gen Zers around the world - and maybe more so in Greece - happened during difficult conditions such as crises, political power shifts and instability. The current research doesn't aim to paint a complete and comprehensive picture of Gen Z's points of view. Still, we tried to showcase the young generations's stance and their practices regarding current social and political issues that affected the public sphere in the past two years. The issues in question are either directly connected to the health crisis - such as wearing a face mask at school and vaccination - or issues that concern young people - such as establishing university police force units- or global issues that seem to be a main concern for Gen Zers - such as climate change.

Regarding the issue of climate change, almost 60% said it concerns them deeply, while just 1.4% claims it doesn't worry them at all. The differentiating points in this case are gender (women are more concerned regarding climate change than men - 62.5% over 55.8%), the participants' education level (56.7% of secondary education graduates over 63.8% of higher education graduates) and also the place where they live [Attica residents are more concerned (65.6%) than people who live at the rest of Greece (55.3%)] (Graph 21). In terms of gender, there is a global tendency that shows men being less interested/ concerned regarding climate change. Recently, in the USA, a survey showed a possible confutation of that dynamic within Gen Z,<sup>40</sup> yet the findings of this research can't confirm the same thing in Greece.

# Climate Change

How concerned are you regarding climate change?

	Men	Women	Cur- rently work- ing	cur- rently unemplo- yed	Second- ary edu- cation δευση	Higher edu- cation	Attica resi- dents	Rest of the country
Very much & a lot	55.8	62.5	60.3	59.1	56.7	63.8	65.6	55.3
Somewhat	30.4	32.0	32.5	30.0	33.3	27.8	28.9	32.6
Not so much & Not at all	12.3	5.5	7.2	9.6	8.9	8.4	4.8	11.4
IDK/NA	1.5	0.0	0.0	1.3	1.1	0.0	0.7	0.7

Graph 21

On the other hand, what is confirmed is the global tendency that wants Gen Z to be increasingly concerned regarding environmental issues. In a global research conducted in 20 countries in 2017, climate change was the third most important issue that concerned Gen Zers, after terrorism and extremism. In a more recent survey<sup>42</sup>, though, that was conducted in 2021 in 45 countries, it was proven that climate change was the issue that concerns young people the most - and the same happened in a relevant 2020 survey. In Greece, the young generation seems to be relatively less concerned about this specific issue, though the concern rate is rising, according to a survey by the Nicos Poulantzas Institute showing that climate change is third on young people's (17-39 years old) list of topics that concern them, right after low salaries and unemployment.<sup>43</sup> The emergence of Greta Thunberg as a leader of the movement against climate change may have boosted that tendency. We just need to see what happens in the next few years and if climate change will become Gen Z's politicisation symbol.

In the case of the Golden Dawn trial and subsequent conviction that was linked to the hashtag #Δεν είναι αθώοι (#deneinaiathwoi = they are not innocent), there is a high degree of convergence amongst participants: 72.2% agree with the relevant hashtag, while 8.7% disagree (Graph 22). Gen Z is a generation with increased antifascist reflexes and this is something that has been depicted in other researches as well - for example, as we can see in the Nicos Poulantzas Institute's research on ideological-political concepts, while 20% had positive views on nationalism, only 3% had a positive stance towards nazism.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, according to a

relevant research by EKKE<sup>45</sup> (National Centre for Social Research), the murder of Pavlos Fyssas (along with the refugee crisis and the Prespa agreement) is a major event that contributed to the politicisation and the opinion forming of Gen Z. In fact, this was the major differentiation point with the millennials that respectively referenced the events of December 2008, the signing of the Memorandums and the 2015 referendum.<sup>46</sup>

The highest convergence rate, though, was noted when participants were asked regarding the Greek #MeToo, with 86.9% saying they agree with the logic and the goals of this particular movement. Only 1.6% stated they disagree with the Greek #MeToo. The support for #MeToo is clearly influenced by the accusations that arose last year regarding the sexual harassment of several athletes. As expected, there is a significant gender-based differentiation in the answers to this question: 81.1% of the men agree with the Greek #MeToo movement as opposed to 91.8% of the women (Graph 23). The rise of the feminist movement (that was reflected in the amendment of the legal definition of rape in 2019) may have affected the young generation and Gen Zers reflexes regarding the #MeToo accusations and charges brought to light. The importance of gender equality for Gen Z has been recorded in international surveys where almost 90% stated they agree with the equality of men and women.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, in the case of the protests against protective face masks and covid vaccines, participants appeared to be divided. The percentage of people who agree with said actions is relatively low (18.8%), while the majority disagrees (59.8%) (Graph 24). Yet, there is a significant number of people (20.8%) that “Neither agree or disagree” with the goals of those specific protests. It seems like a part of the young generation is affected by those particular demands.

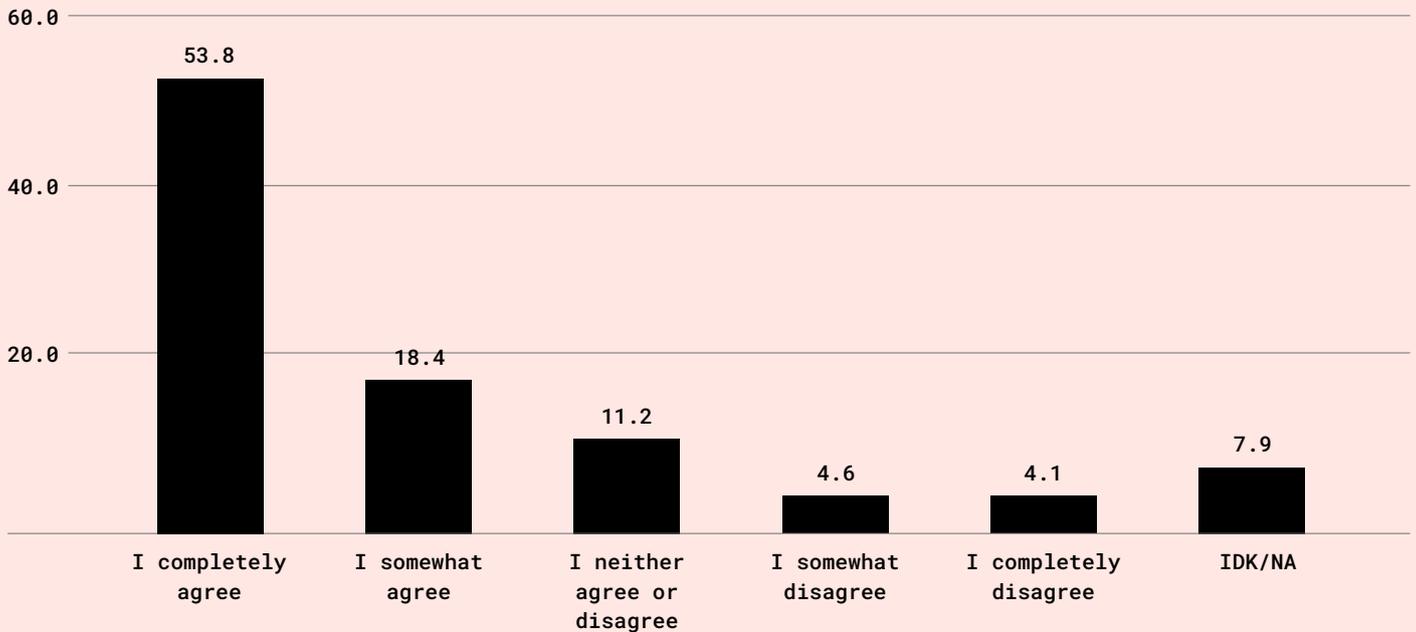
Regarding the protests that took place in February-March 2021 against the creation of a University Police Force, 48% said they agree with the protests, 18.8% disagrees, while a significant amount of people (31% - the largest number than on any other question) stated that they “Neither agree or disagree”. There are two main differentiation points here, according to the participants’ demographics (Graph 25). The first is gender: 54.7% of the women agree with the protests against a University Police Force compared to 40.6% of the men. The second (and certainly most unexpected one) is the employment status: 57.3% of people who are currently working support the protests as opposed to 41.2% of those who are currently unemployed.

In the case of another movement-wise significant recent event, the mobilisation of e-food employees, 64.2% agrees with the relevant hashtag (#cancelefood) that was used widely in social media in mid-September 2021 in order to express solidarity with the employees’ movement (Graph 26). Only 9.5% disagree with this hashtag, while 21.7% are neutral. Fights and mobilisations against platform capitalism have a significant impact on young people worldwide, as they highlight the struggles and demands of a new generation of workers who are experiencing conditions that are increasingly unstable.<sup>48</sup> In Greece especially, with youth unemployment reaching 39.1% in November 2021,<sup>49</sup> the workers’ strike demanding fixed employment contracts seemed to resonate significantly with young people.

Do you agree or disagree with the hashtag #Δεν είναι αθώοι (#deneinaiathwoi = they're not innocent) referring to the conviction of Golden Dawn for being a criminal organisation?

Graph 22

# den\_einai\_athwoi



Since December 2020, there have been a series of accusations by female athletes and actresses exposing the fact that they have been sexually harassed during their career (#MeToo movement). Do you agree or disagree with the logic and the goals of the #MeToo movement?

Graph 23

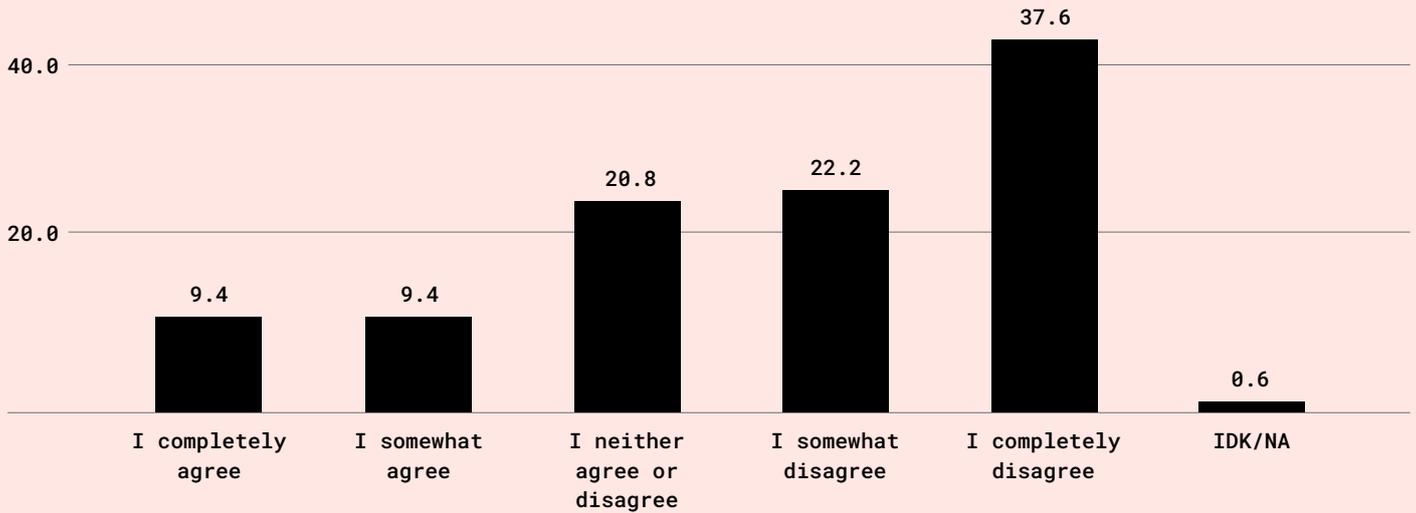
# metoo

	Men	Women	Cur- rently work- ing	cur- rently unemplo- yed	Second- ary edu- cation δευση	Higher edu- cation	Attica resi- dents	Rest of the country
I completely or somewhat agree	81.1	91.8	85.1	88.3	84.7	90.5	87.2	86.6
I neither agree or disagree	14.5	7.0	10.8	10.2	11.9	8.1	10.2	10.6
I completely or somewhat agree	2.8	4.0	2.9	0.6	2.2	0.5	1.6	1.5
IDK/NA	1.6	0.8	1.2	0.9	1.2	0.9	1.0	1.3

Do you agree or disagree with the protests against the covid vaccine and the use of protective face masks in schools?

Graph 24

# SARS-CoV-2



Do you agree or disagree with the protests that are taking place against the creation of a University Police Force?

Graph 25

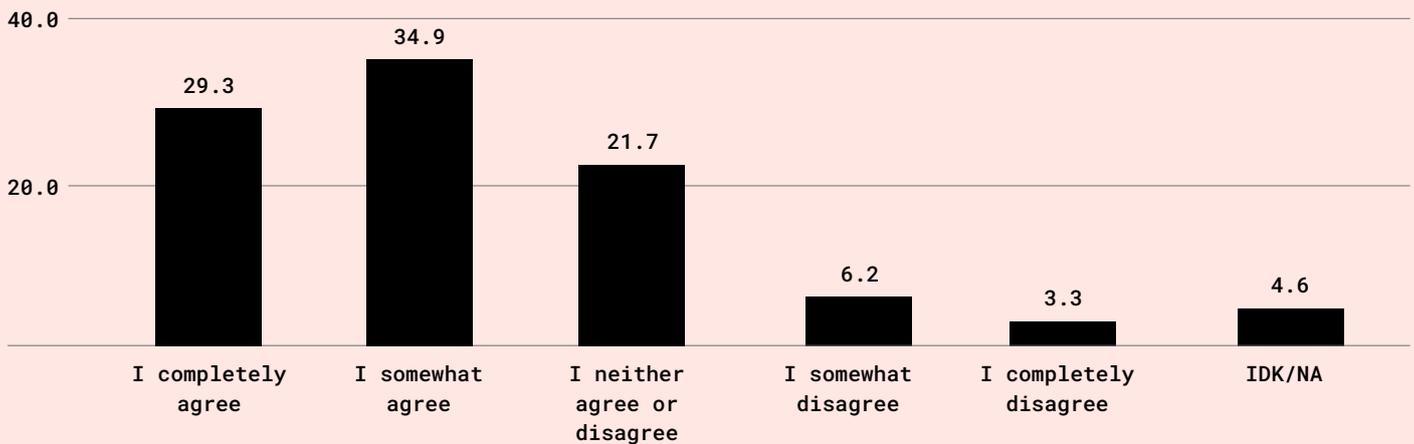
# UNIPOLICE

	Men	Women	Cur- rently work- ing	cur- rently unemplo- yed	Second- ary edu- cation δευση	Higher edu- cation	Attica resi- dents	Rest of the country
I completely or somewhat agree	40.6	54.7	57.3	41.2	45.0	52.7	50.4	46.2
I neither agree or disagree	33.3	29.3	26.3	34.9	35.5	24.2	29.1	32.9
I completely or somewhat agree	24.6	13.7	15.1	21.5	16.6	23.1	19.5	18.4
IDK/NA	1.5	1.5	1.3	2.4	2.9	0.0	1.0	2.5

Do you agree or disagree with the hashtag #cancelefood as an indication of solidarity towards employees/ delivery people of e-food in mid-September 2021?

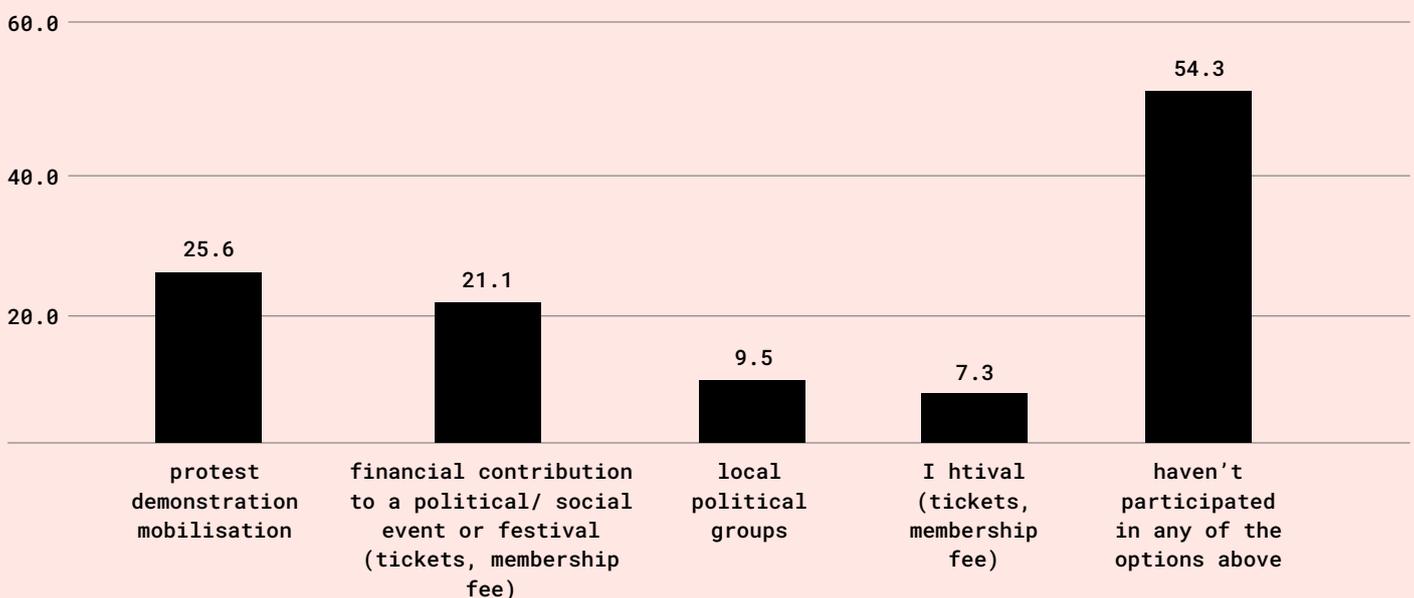
Graph 26

## #cancel\_efood



Have you participated in any of the above in the past year?  
(multiple choice)

Graph 27



The above are indicative of a generation that is familiar with movements and mobilisations on a wide range of topics and that has an opinion and is concerned regarding those topics. When asked regarding their political collective action repertoire during the past year that required a physical presence, 25.6% stated that they participated in at least one protest/ demonstration/ mobilisation, 21.1% said they contributed financially to a political/ social event or festival, 7.3% replied that they are members of a local organisation in their area of residence and 9.5% said they're members of a political party or a youth wing of a political party (Graph 27). The majority (54.3%) replied that they haven't participated in any of the above.

Still, the results above show a tendency towards a general interest in politics that goes beyond online political participation. The high percentage of Gen Zers that have contributed financially to political/ socio-political festivals could be due to the large number of such youth-targeting political festivals that exist in Greece and that just made a come-back in 2021 after the 2020 mandatory "break". Also, the percentage of young people that attended protests, demonstrations and/ or mobilisations in the past year is of great interest.

It is worth noting that participation in such political activities is rarely the majority - even in turmoil years such as 2011, a relevant research revealed that only 43% of the general public had participated in a protest of any kind.<sup>50</sup> Given the limitations that the pandemic imposed in the planning of protests, the percentage recorded shows that Gen Z has turned towards this type of political participation. Also, even the percentages of young people who said that they participate in political parties or local organisations is not insignificant. Such a tendency was also recorded in the Nicos Poulantzas Institute's relevant research, as a significant percentage of young people (35%) replied that they'd be interested in joining a political party or a youth wing.<sup>51</sup> The same tendency is evident in the question regarding their intention to vote, with the vast majority (84%) saying they intend to vote in the coming elections (Graph 28). It is obvious that this percentage is higher than the percentage of Gen Zers that will end up actually voting when the time comes. Still, it shows an intention to engage even with institutions (such as the Parliament and political parties) that have a low recorded legitimisation in young people's consciousness. This tendency has been recorded in previous research as well: the Nicos Poulantzas Institute<sup>52</sup> recorded that 83% of the participants in their research voted in the July 2019 general election. Additionally, in a research conducted in the US in 2016, when the vast majority of Gen Zers couldn't vote yet, 47% replied that they believe voting is important.<sup>53</sup>

Do you intend to vote in the coming general elections?

**YES**  
**84.0%**

**NO**  
**8.8%**

**IDK-NA**  
**7.2%**

Graph 28

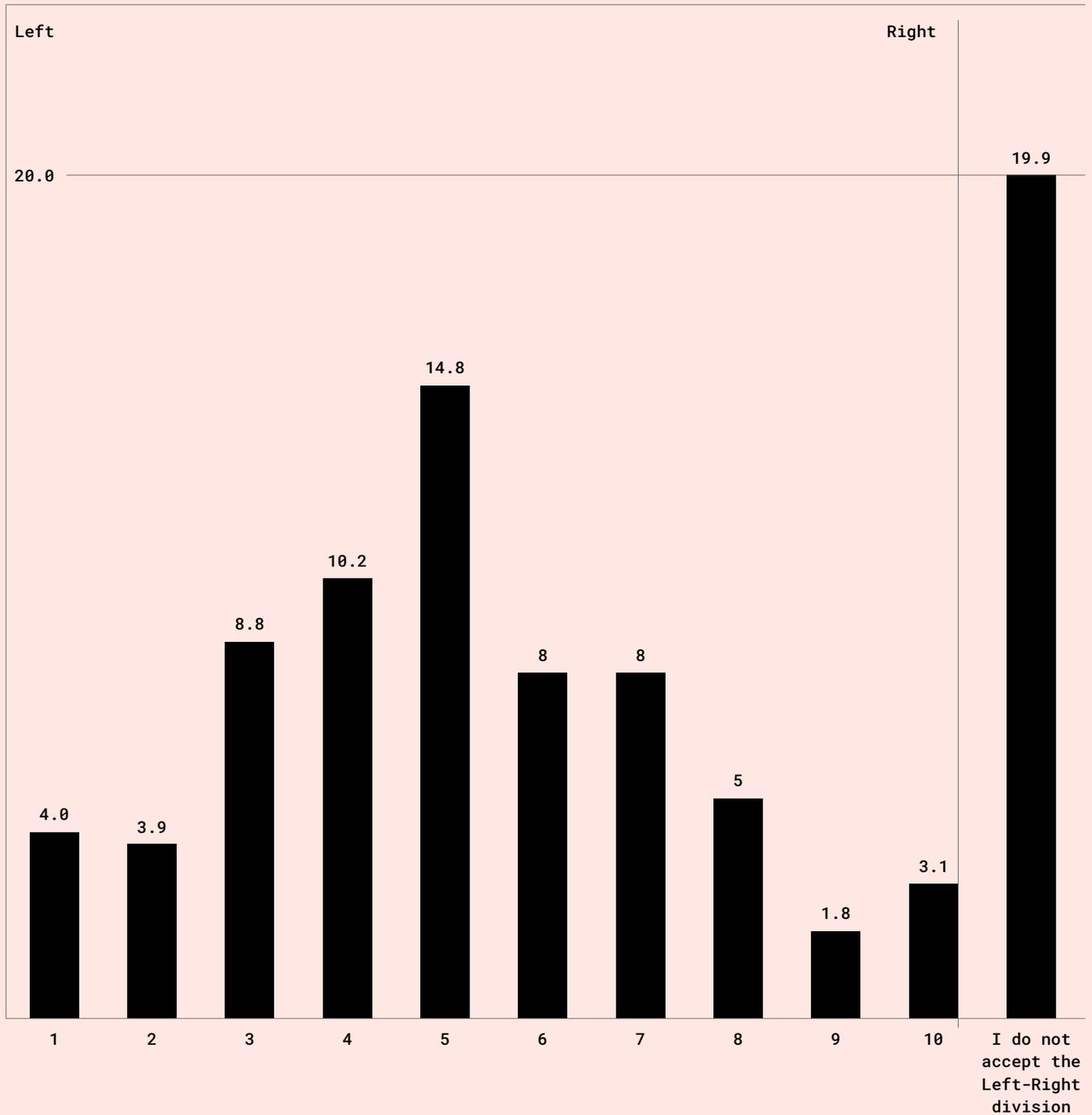
In terms of the political self-placement in the standard Left-Right scale, the resulting image is mixed (Graph 29).<sup>54</sup> For starters, almost 1/5 of the participants refused to place themselves on that scale, stating that they “do not accept the Left-Right division”. Including the 12.5% that didn’t answer the question at all (which makes sense given their young age), almost 1/3 of the participants didn’t place themselves in the respective Left-Right scale. This shouldn’t be interpreted as a lack in politicisation among Gen Zers - after all, it has been shown that they have formed opinions regarding significant issues of the past two years and have developed a repertoire of political action. It more likely looks like there isn’t a linear correspondence between practices and opinions on certain issues on one hand, and an overall ideological placement on the other. Therefore young people may be familiar with social movement practices, with defending workers’ demands and questioning the state’s oppression mechanisms without necessarily placing themselves politically to the Left.

Still, among the people who did place themselves ideologically, the Left seems to be leading to a certain extent. 26.9% placed themselves between 1 and 4 (with 1 being the left end of the scale), and 17.9% placed themselves between 7 and 10 (with 10 being the right end of the scale), while 22.8% placed themselves between 5 and 6.

The closest position to the findings of the present research is that of a survey conducted by the conservative think tank Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), that concluded that the new generation is significantly affected by left ideals and that the Millennials’ radicalisation seems to have passed on to Gen Z.<sup>55</sup>

On a scale of 1 (Left) to 10 (Right), where would you place yourself politically?

Graph 29



**D**

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# **Essential conclusions**

## D. Essential Conclusions

Generally speaking, Gen Zers seem to be interested in politics, they develop a repertoire of political actions that isn't exclusively online, they have concerns regarding future developments and are worried because of the pandemic. The above are reflected in their replies regarding their interest towards current events: 55% stated that they are very interested, 30.5% are somewhat interested and just 13.5% said they have little to no interest in current affairs. This tendency towards politicisation is indicative of the experiences of the young generation and the fact that they seem to be living in a permanent state of crisis, especially in Greece. They've spent most of their lives in a condition of economic crisis and political austerity, they are coming of age during a global pandemic and they can see

their future being threatened by a new severe economic recession and climate change. They seem to be looking for institutional but also extra-institutional solutions, they're defending gender equality and are increasingly concerned regarding climate change. Ideologically, the Left seems to have a relative lead but generally speaking, Gen Z is expressing a core dispute against the current ideological spectrum. All of the above speak of a generation that is seeking solutions, has political concerns and also experiences that have been accumulating during the turbulent years of the pandemic.

Finally, regarding the informational content consumption, young people are aware of the current issue of fake news that is circulating in the

public sphere and even though the majority are confident that they could distinguish between fake and real news, they're equally ready to admit that they've fallen "victims" of fake news. At the same time, the Gen Zers replies regarding the factors they take into account in order to assess the validity of a news article, are indicative of the power of the interpersonal relations network and bring forward an intense subjectivity, as the primary parametre that is factored in when assessing the validity of a news article is the trust towards the person that (re)posted it and on third place (by a small margin) they replied that they check whether the post makes sense to them. Those findings show that young people lack the knowledge and ability to assess the validity of the information they consume on the internet - and that was something to be expected and can be justified. This is why it'd be very useful for them to become partakers of such knowledge, especially given the fact that a (very) significant part of their daily (communication) activities takes place within online environments.

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**“This tendency towards politicisation is indicative of the experiences of the young generation and the fact that they seem to be living in a permanent state of crisis”**

**Research report  
Gen Z - Voice On**

# **Commentary & Discussion**

**Yiannis Balabanidis**

**Lina Zirganou**

**Spiros Papadopoulos (Vytio)**

**Alexandros Papageorgiou**

**Thomas Siomos**

**Antonis Galanopoulos**

**Athina Karatzogianni**

# “OK, zoomer”: In search of Gen Z’s multiple identities



**Yiannis Balabanidis**  
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In October 2021, the American critic and essayist Louis Menand wrote in the *New Yorker* that it's time to stop talking about "generations".<sup>1</sup> Even if we set aside the fact that they're defined in a conventional and therefore broad manner, says Menand, generations don't help us understand social history – or at least not as much as we think. He cited Bobby Duffy, author of *The Generation Myth*,<sup>2</sup> according to whom a generation is an interpretative factor among others, that ought to be combined with significant historical events as well as each generation's development in time, in a way that any distinctive traits, stances and opinions can be specified.

His warning has a point. Indeed, why should someone born in 1964 be considered a baby boomer and not generation X (respectively: people born between 1946-1964 and 1965-1980)? How different is a Millennial born in 1995 from generation Z that conventionally starts with those born after 1996? And what does this age group succession teach us about the world around us?

The word "generation" is broadly used nowadays, both in public speaking and in research, though often with a conceptual looseness. Oftentimes, it is mentioned in a purely empiric manner, thus being limited to referring to a certain age group, or an age cohort, as they're called. According to Karl Mannheim, though, the formulation of biological generations is a convention that can only be used as an analytical tool if it's historicised, that is if linked to a broader historical and social context within which everyone who belongs in each "generation" forms common – albeit not uniform – viewpoints regarding the world, values, politics, and even aesthetics.<sup>3</sup> A generation is an operational notion only if it helps us examine the production of meaning within the framework of a community of people who form their multiple identity within history.

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In recent years, there has been an increased researchers' interest in the younger generations in Greece as well. There are specific research projects that focus on young people between 17-29 years old, the age group 17-34 or the "new generation", defined as Gen Z and the millennials.<sup>4</sup> As far as I know, though, Eteron Institute's research report on "Gen Z" is the first to focus on the Greek Generation Z as such, referring to the age group 16-25 years old, that is people born between 1996 and 2010.

Other than the conventional chronological definition, let's remember two of the basic traits of this forming generation. The first is that we're talking about a generation that is growing up in a digital world. Generation X's first contact with the internet was as grown people, the millennials grew up during the passage from analogue to digital, so Generation Z is the first one to live right from the start within the world of Web 2.0, social media and digital platforms – Facebook, Netflix, Instagram, TikTok.

The second is that they're growing up and form their consciousness within perpetual crisis conditions. Zoomers may have been at best middle school students when the global economic crisis of 2008-2009 broke, but their identities are formed during the trying decade of 2010 till today, within a succession of destabilising events: the economic crisis, the refugee/ migrant crisis (2016), the pandemic (2020), the climate crisis. And, of course, in the present day, this generation is marked by a global scale event: The war that Russia unleashed upon Ukraine – a war that might define this generation, just like 9/11 and the war in Iraq defined the previous generation's politicisation 20 years ago.

"Generational" research is more advanced in the USA, where most discussion threads as well as concerns regarding the

differences in values between generations start. Two recent researches by Pew Research Center<sup>5</sup> paint a very distinctive values outline of this generation, while asking at the same time “How different are zoomers from the millennials?”.

The two generations seem to share certain defining characteristics: They consider ethnic/race diversity to be positive, they accept that climate change is caused by humans, they support the Black Lives Matter movement, they are for same sex marriage and mixed marriage, they support free sexual self-definition beyond the male-female dipole (non-binary) and they support politically correct language, especially in gender related topics. At the same time, Gen Z continues and expands trends that were prominent with the millennials: they're the better educated generation in history to this date, they want an (even) more active state, they're (even) more open in matters of sexual orientation.

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As we start picking on the concept of generations in Greece, will we reach similar findings? Eteron's research highlights two important components of Gen Z: its digital citizenship and its still forming politicisation.

The digital natives' generation seems to be well-informed, familiarised with and at the same time cautious towards the various available information sources it utilises. They keep up with current events, not just with a vivid interest (55% said they're “Very much or A lot” interested and 30.5% said they're “Somewhat” interested) but also with regularity. They're for the most part informed by online sources: Almost half catch up with the news on a daily basis using online news websites (48.7%) or social media (50.2%). Even though the question isn't being asked directly, the findings confirm the gradual forming of two worlds: The world of the older people that are informed via traditional

media and the world of the younger, that are more familiar with online news following.

At the same time, it is significant that contrary to the majority of the older generations, digital natives are more cautious regarding the validity of the information they consume online. On a trust scale of 0-10, online information websites score an average of 6, while social media are on 5. The majority admit they have fallen victims to misinformation and fake news (71%), but also state that they try to cross-check the information they read in news articles (89% do so “very often” and “often”). It'd certainly be interesting to investigate if and to what extent they adopt news fact-checking practices or if they trust the existing fact-checking mechanisms that exist in Greece in multitudes, for the time being.

The multitude of available sources, though, may be balancing the lack of trust or “loyalty” to a specific media outlet or information source. The fact that among the factors considered in order to determine whether a news article is true or not, the factor “if the original source was a well-established media outlet” comes in fourth place (22.6%), is an indirect but impressive indication of the cautiousness towards traditional media – even more impressive if we take into account that amongst higher education graduates the relevant percentage drops to 17.7%.

If this is a generation that moves on the internet and social media like fish in clean waters, but still doesn't seem to trust its information sources, the more political question raises: Who do zoomers actually trust?

For a mainly customised generation, it is significant that the highest trust rates are those of family and friends (respectively 49.3% and 39.5%). Then, somewhere in the middle, one finds

education, new and traditional media (33.6%, 31.4% and 29%), while right at the bottom with a wide margin, we have political parties/figures & trade unions as well as the church (6.8% and 3.8%). The lack of trust towards politics can also be detected in the low percentage of zoomers who follow politicians or political parties on social media (just 17.7%) and also on the percentage of those who either share political posts on social media or post their own political content on those platforms (21.9% and 20.9%). This distance from the political system is a clear indication of “anti-systemism” – or rather, of a political representation crisis that isn’t relevant just to the younger generations.

New politicisation fields emerge though, that stray from “traditional” politics and so far, political parties seem to be having a hard time responding to that new reality and therefore fail to offer adequate representation channels. Climate change is a major concern, as 60% state they’re very worried about its repercussions – though this is a percentage that is in line with the general population’s opinion across Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, new types of social movement actions emerge, that are linked to democracy issues, such as the Golden Dawn trial (72.2% agree with the hashtag #δενειναιαθωοι -which means “they’re not innocent”), gender issues, such as the #MeToo movement [86.9% agree with the goals and mindset of the movement and that includes men (81.1%) but even more so, women (91.8%), as was to be expected], issues of employment instability, such as the hashtag #cancelefood (64.2% agree with the hashtag, 21.7% don’t have an opinion and only 9.5% disagree with it). Democracy & human rights – gender identities – material injustice is a determining triptych for the youth’s political identity.

On the other hand, the anti-vaxxers’ movement doesn’t seem to have a

significant influence on the younger generation, as just 18.8% agree and 59.8% disagree with it. This finding could be combined with the fact that in first place on the list of those the youth trust the most are specialists/ scientists (61.8%). This could be due to the pandemic, but in any case it shows that zoomers are more inclined to trust scientific knowledge – which makes sense given the increasing number of young people attaining high levels of education. The protests/ movement against the establishment of a university police unit weren’t that impactful either, as 48% agree, 18.8% disagree and a significant 31% didn’t express an opinion. Those two facts could be interpreted as a symmetrical denial towards different versions of antisystemism: of the irrational anti-vaxxers’ movement but also of the old-school movement theme of anti-oppression.

Beyond the realm of symbolic or digital politicisation, the physical political participation seems to still be of a noteworthy significance, though it’d hardly be comparable to the “over-politicisation” tendencies found in previous generations in Greece after the change of the regime back to democracy in 1974. 25.6% stated they have participated in a protest/ demonstration, 21.1% said they’ve contributed financially to a political/ social event or festival, 7.3% said they participate in a local political group where they live and 9.5% are members of political parties or youth wings of one, while 54.3% hasn’t participated in any of the above. Surely, one must take into account that during the pandemic and given the limitations imposed by social distancing, the physical dimension of politics would in any case be undermined. Still, zoomers aren’t opposed to institutional politics per se: 84% stated that they intend to vote in the next elections, which will be the first for most of them.

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If we were asked to summarise the politicisation terms set by Gen Z, as demonstrated in the findings above, we could say that what emerges is a “rationalised anti-systemism” with leftist inclinations. Recently, triggered by young people’s preference for political figures such as Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders (as a reaction to the rise of ethnocentric-oppressive neo-conservative populism that we saw in 2016 with Trump’s election and Brexit), some thinkers such as Keir Milburn wondered whether we are seeing a global emergence of “generation left”.<sup>7</sup> Let us be cautious in any case.

The numbers speak of a more moderate situation, at least regarding Gen Z in Greece. For 19.9% of the zoomers in Greece, the distinction between Left and Right is no longer relevant, following the commonality of the times, or rather of previous years. Their political self-placement, though, tends to be more on the Centre-left than the Centre-right: 26.9% place themselves between 1-4 (with 1 = Left and 10 = Right), 17.9% place themselves between 7-10 and the most popular choice is 5, which is the most central end of the Left towards the Centre (14.8%).

We could say that it’s a Left-inclined generation, rather than a Left one, especially if we combine its political self-placement with the qualitative politicisation elements that we mentioned earlier: human rights, climate change, gender issues, inequalities. At the same time, we can’t possibly claim that this is a uniform situation. No generation is immune to neo-conservative radicalism. One only needs to remember Trump’s or Marine Le Pen’s popularity with anti-systemic outsiders’ groups of young people, or Eric Zemmour, the far-right presidential candidate in France who is trying to arrogate younger audiences with a slogan aiming for their identity-nativistic reflexes (Generation Z = Generation Zemmour), or, in Greece,

the participation of 16-year-olds in racist violence incidents in and out of schools, their presence in the protest gatherings for the “Macedonia” naming issue etc.

In any case, this research, just like any research that has something to say, creates more questions than answers. The first mapping in generational terms was a significant step; we now need to dig deeper.

We need to follow the tracks of the main research question: What differentiates Gen Z from the previous generations? Those essentially “children of crisis” may be developing a distinct political culture. They’re born and socialise through social media, prefer participatory platforms but are at the same time cautious towards them, they politicise intensely but use hybrid methods to do so. The particular historical circumstances in the European South for the past ten years, may have encouraged the forming of a new, politically “critical” generation – meaning a generation that, in countries such as Greece and Spain, combines an intense politicality with low levels of satisfaction regarding the ways democracy functions.<sup>8</sup>

Can we tell if what’s forming is a generational political conscience, though, and not just shared traits? A political conscience that would shape shared codes, not just political but also values and aesthetics through common experiences?

Mainly, the question is if zoomers are expanding, delving deeper and radicalising the millennials’ “legacy”. If they’re participating in the “culture wars” that increasingly divide Western societies regarding gender, sexuality, ecology and diversity issues; if they perceive them as issues that are interconnecting with social class, material instability and inequality issues – according to the intersectionality term that the millennials adopted.<sup>9</sup>

An additional question would be whether with each new crisis there'll be new values' crossroads. In Greece, can we confirm the same willingness that young people have expressed around the world, to accept more public interventions, after the global experience of the pandemic?<sup>10</sup> And also, equally importantly, how will the liberal and pluralistic self-consciousness of this generation be affected by this new global event that will most likely seal not just their history, but also that of the whole world: the Russian invasion in Ukraine?

Let's keep the matter open: Are Greek zoomers part of a "global" generation that is becoming aware of itself through core events within a crisis continuum? And what sense can their open, hybrid and contradictory identity make – if indeed it makes any sense?

## Footnotes

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# **“Dimensions of Gen Z gender differentiation in Eteron’s research”**



**Lina Zirganou,  
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Nowadays, in Greece too, discussions regarding young people have come to the forefront, as part of the public discourse, as well as at an academic level, with the production of primary data by institutions and institutes, and also thanks to relevant scientific articles. Eteron's research on Gen Z reflects the rekindled researchers' interest in young people, and is based in part on the (unspoken) assumption that generational succession is a driving factor for social and political change.<sup>1</sup>

This paper's intention is to comment on the research's main findings focusing on the gender aspect, the ways it interacts with age and generation factors and its (possible) significance regarding the shaping of different participatory practices and attitudes.

*Disclaimer: Due to the way that gender is represented in the questionnaire of this survey (as well as in those of several other surveys), which insists on a binary divide, gender is used here as a dichotomous variable (with two values, woman-man), without this being in any way an epistemological or political assumption that the author agrees with.*

The structure of gender relations in any society, as a system of social hierarchy and classification, constitutes one of the "heavy" variables that influence citizens' political behaviour, since it constitutes (or rather constituted, as we shall see below) two differentiated patterns of political participation, with women historically represented as lagging behind men. This finding does not only refer to the limited presence of women among global political elites,<sup>2</sup> but rather is a more general assessment of their political participation in institutional and non-institutional forms of action, as well as in other measures of political behaviour. This "gender/activism gap" has been attributed, among other things, to a lack of symbolic and material resources, institutional factors, the (unequal) impact of the life cycle, and gender-

differentiated socialisation, which often acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>3</sup>

More recent critical approaches stress the significance of the gender bias<sup>4</sup> that permeates the classical indicators of political participation, which emphasise practices in which men traditionally have higher rates of involvement. A question therefore arises as to how traditional political science has approached the issue of gender inequality. Usually, gender differences in political behaviour were examined with the "male" model of political participation as a fixed reference point and standard of comparison, by exaggerating the differences between men and women and treating them in an essentialist way, thus reproducing a binary and hierarchical conception of gender.<sup>5</sup>

The most recent empirical data indicate – in general terms – a narrowing of the gender gap, calling into question the validity of many of the above established assumptions of political science regarding modern Western societies. Gender differentials have almost disappeared with respect to voting<sup>6</sup> (at least in first-order elections<sup>7</sup>), but still exist for other forms of institutional political participation (e.g. political party and union membership), as well as broader measures of engagement in the political process, such as political interest and a sense of subjective political efficacy.<sup>8</sup>

However, when it comes to new, non-institutional forms of participation, such as political consumerism (i.e. boycotting products for political, ethical or environmental reasons and, conversely, choosing certain products/companies as a reward) and online activism, the gender gap seems to be narrowing, even reversing. Women are overrepresented in said forms that link politics to everyday life, thus challenging the strict distinction between public and private and bypassing the traditional institutional channels that excluded

them from the political process.<sup>9</sup>

In Greece, gender has been an important factor in differentiating patterns of politicisation, especially when it comes to expressing political interest and engaging in institutional participatory practices. In fact, the interplay between gender and age seems to determine – or to have done so until very recently – different ways people associate with politics, with senior women showing not only less (predisposition to) participation, but also a greater distance from politics in general.<sup>10</sup> This is a consequence of the time lag in the acquisition of political rights, but also of a rather traditional system of gender relations, which perpetuates gender inequalities and stereotypical gender roles.

However, the rapid socio-economic transformations and the consequent changes in the system of gender relations have led to a convergence of male and female politicisation models and the refutation of many common political certainties and stereotypes in Greece as well. A survey conducted as early as 2006 reflects the partial narrowing of the gender gap in the political behaviour of young women and men, especially when taking into account the influence of the participants' educational level.<sup>11</sup> The conjuncture of the economic crisis will accentuate such developments, offering an additional participatory outlet through the mobilisations against the austerity measures and the various civil disobedience actions, in which women participate en masse.<sup>12</sup>

Also, in Greece too, one of the most common electoral behaviour assumptions, namely that women's vote tends to be more conservative, has proved to be untrue.<sup>13</sup> Overall, the existence of greater intergenerational rather than intra-generational differences can now be attested, at least in the Athens greater area, thus confirming a hypothesis suggesting the emergence of a new

politicisation pattern amongst young people.

Based on the above and taking into account some widely accepted characteristics of zoomers (a highly educated generation that is characterised by strong individualisation and insecurity; a “woke” generation, which is socially progressive and is concerned about new topics), it makes sense to expect a decrease in the importance that gender has as a differentiating factor of young people's political participation. This hypothesis is largely confirmed, since Eteron's research reveals relatively small gender differentials, thus disproving another stereotype, that of women's reduced interest and participation in politics.

However, the areas where differences are identified and manifested are not negligible, since they show that there are distinct ways and areas of manifesting their participatory intention and suggest that there are qualitative rather than quantitative differences in the politicisation of young men and women, thus confirming the relevant literature.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding the issues of concern to zoomers, Eteron's research findings confirm the trends observed internationally, namely that Gen Z as a generation is more progressive, even socially radical, and expresses concerns that extend to new fields of interest and politicisation, such as the environmental crisis. More specifically, young women aged 16-25 seem to be slightly more concerned than men of the same age regarding the issue of climate change (62.5% are very and extremely concerned, compared to 55.8% of the men), while, as expected, they express overwhelming agreement with the content and objectives of the #metoo movement in Greece (91.8% of women in the sample and 81.1% of men strongly or fairly agree).

Along similar lines, the majority of women zoomers agrees with the mobilisations against the establishment of a police force that would patrol universities and campuses (54.7%), significantly more so than men zoomers (40.6%). It is worth noting that the online campaign/ hashtag #they\_are\_not\_innocent (#δενείναιαθωοί), regarding the conviction of Golden Dawn as a criminal organisation, gathers equally high support rates (although less high than one might expect a year after the Supreme Court's conviction ruling) in both men and women (almost 73%).

When trying to analyse zoomers' ideological constitution, the main finding, as already mentioned in the relevant dialogue on Eteron's research<sup>15</sup>, concerns the small percentage of those who would reply to that particular question: more specifically, 20% of the participants refuse to place themselves on the axis, stating that the distinction between the Left and the Right is no longer relevant, while a further 12.5% choose not to answer the question. At the same time, if we take into consideration the high response rate that values 5 and 6 on the axis gather (22.8%),<sup>16</sup> (a fact that may indicate not so much that participants place themselves at the centre of the axis, but rather an indirect refusal or inability for self-placement), questions arise regarding the classificatory function and the interpretative power of the axis, thus confirming findings of other relevant studies.<sup>17</sup> Of the 67.6% who answered the relevant question, the general conclusion is that there's a left or rather left-leaning self-placement, as already emphasised, with 28.9% of the women and 23.9% of the men placing themselves on the left of the axis (positions 1-4).

As for right-wing self-placement, it is significantly more prevalent among the male participants in the survey (21% of men placed themselves in positions 7-10 and 14.8% of women), a fact which is

in line with the exit polls conducted in recent years confirming the mass vote for left-wing parties by (especially young) women. Interestingly, however, female zoomers, although explicitly reject the Left-Right axis in similar proportions to men, refuse to answer that specific question in almost double the proportion (15.7% of the women refused to answer compared to 8.8% of the men).

Interest in following current affairs appears to be generally high, with 55% of participants stating that they are very or extremely interested. Women and men are informed by online news sites to an equal extent, and internet use seems to be at similar levels, with the majority stating they spend more than 5 hours per day online. There are differences in the qualitative characteristics of internet use, though, and, more specifically, in the type of social media they prefer. Women use Instagram more than men (81.3% compared to 68.1%) and men use Twitter and YouTube more than women (2% compared to 7.2% and 35.5% compared to 44.2%, respectively). Now, regarding the credibility of news websites and social media as sources of information, this is generally low, especially for the latter, and women appear to trust them less so than men.

Moving on to actions of practical political participation, its most obvious form, that of voting in elections, is very popular, regardless of gender: more than 84% of the participants said that they intend to vote in the next elections. The wide acceptability of voting within Greek political culture is also confirmed by past surveys.<sup>18</sup> In terms of the rest of the repertoire of live political action, participation in a demonstration, march and protest is the most popular one (25.6%), followed by financial contribution to a political/social event or festival (21.1%), participation in a political party (9.5%) and participation in neighbourhood collectives (7.3%). The only significant gender difference

here is found when it comes to rates of young people that are members of a political party or youth organisation: male zoomers are twice as likely as female zoomers to sign up as members of a political party (12.3% and 6.3% respectively), a percentage that is particularly high, when taking into account the age of the participants in the survey.

Finally, the findings regarding the generally low “political use” of the Internet by a generation of digital natives are interesting. Almost 18% follow accounts of politicians on social media and the relevant percentage reaches 40% when it comes to NGO accounts. When it comes to more “active” online activities, about 22% of respondents state that they share posts with political content (e.g. posts from politicians, political parties, NGOs, media outlets, or other internet users) and 21% make their own political posts. In this section, though, there is a more pronounced gender differentiation. Women zoomers follow more NGO accounts and (a lot) less politicians and political parties on social media, while the most interesting finding concerns the significantly smaller percentage of women who post their own “political” content: the rate is 15.2% compared to 26.8% of men who engage in such an activity.

This is a recurring pattern in Eteron’s research, here replicated in the digital environment. In this particular case, the disparity is not about access itself, but rather about qualitative characteristics and confidence in the use of the internet, which is also evident from the relevant existing literature.<sup>19</sup>

The figures are similar when it comes to the issue of fake news, where more women state that they have been victims of fake news compared to men (76.6% and 65.9% respectively), while, at the same time, they seem to have considerably less confidence in their ability to detect fake

news (80.4% compared to 69.5% of the men).

In conclusion, the general picture that emerges from the research findings confirms that gender is becoming a less important differentiating factor in zoomers’ political behaviour. The convergence, however, primarily concerns the level of participatory disposition and practical political participation, while a more in-depth investigation reveals some qualitative differences in the way women and men relate to politics. More specifically, they seem to follow different paths of engagement with political processes, with women largely bypassing institutional forms of inclusion, such as party membership, while appearing to participate equally in other, non-institutional forms and being more attracted to NGOs. At the same time, they appear to be more left-leaning (whatever that may mean) and socially progressive than men on a range of issues, ranging from gender equality to the establishment of a university police force.

What still seems to differentiate women and men zoomers significantly is their stance concerning practices that are characterised by greater public exposure, a pattern that is reproduced in the digital environment: women are less likely to post their own political content and less likely to use more “political” social media, such as Twitter. Furthermore, they appear to have less confidence in their abilities to identify fake news despite cross-checking sources more often than men; or, if we reverse the perspective, men tend to overestimate their respective abilities. Therefore, we see that gender-determined expectations continue to create inequalities in the expression of politicisation, where women’s occasionally reduced engagement does not indicate a lack of knowledge, skills or interest. At the same time, measurement tools continue to be male-centric, often leading to an

incomplete account of the participation of women who may be engaged through alternative networks of socialisation and politicisation, both offline and online (e.g. they may be more active in closed groups or group chats on social media).

Finally, there are some additional limitations to our conclusions: on the one hand, the focus of the sample on zoomers does not allow comparisons with other generations and, furthermore, there is no possibility to examine the effect of different variables such as gender and place of residence, which evidence suggest that they lead to significant differences. Lastly, another aspect to be taken into account is the future impact of the life-cycle of young

people's politicisation, since numerous studies have shown that the transition to the 'family-intensive' stages of life has an unequal impact on women and men, who usually assume different roles.<sup>20</sup> Although we can justifiably talk about a new and distinct pattern of zoomer politicisation in Greece, the question remains open whether this concerns all young people aged 16-25 or whether it is limited to those living in Athens and/or other large urban centres, and also whether the image of convergence will persist as a characteristic trait of a generation.

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**“Eteron’s research reveals relatively small gender differentials, thus disproving another stereotype, that of women’s reduced interest and participation in politics”**

**Lina Zirganou**

# **About Gen Z: in the mood for destabilising narratives**



**Spyros Papadopoulos (Vytio),  
Co-Publisher of Yusra Magazine**

While thinking about stuff I could write in an article regarding Gen Z, I keep finding myself flirting with cringe./ I find solace in Ruth Milkman's interview at Eteron where she states that "Mannheim defines generations on the basis of their distinctive lived experiences and the worldviews that those experiences generate. (..) From a Mannheimian perspective, one might argue that Millennials and Gen Zers constitute a single generation, since they were shaped by so many of the same historical experiences./" Then I dwell on the fact that every time I think of something, I tend to lump groups of things or people. I don't know how to explain what Gen Z is. How can anyone say what a generation is, anyways? I like to think of this generation through its discourse, or at least through the part of its discourse I choose to read and listen to.

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*you don't have to sleep to see nightmares*  
– Ann Clark

The distinctive lived experiences that Milkman talks about are the extended use of police brutality and sexual assaults. The relationship with the internet and insecurity. To those, we should add the pandemic, the (Greek) economic crisis that lasted over ten years, the consecutive rise of the Greek nazis and the Greek alt-right.

*hell exists but only for the living*  
– Kostas Tripolitis

(Did I just quote Tripolitis in an article about Gen Z? Sure, because this generation truly knows how to enjoy and embrace awkwardness; an awkwardness that lightly treads between cringe and acceptance).

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It is a weekday and I'm walking down

Sina Street in the city centre of Athens, passing right outside the School of Law of the University of Athens. There's a bunch of people right outside. Judging from the books they're holding, I'd say they're first or second year law students. I observe their outfits, their hair, their looks. Do queer youth go to Law School? Apparently they do. If my memory isn't failing me, back in the day, the School of Law was filled with either well-dressed conservative party youth members that practised on their ravenous neoliberal future, or tough boys from the trenches of the Left. Things have shifted apparently. A huge distance has been covered.

Using Milkman as my starting point, I pondered over some experiences that have common traits and now the time has come for me to think of our differences. The freedom there is now in gender expression, the distance kept from a predefined kind of normality, the challenge of a framework that is suffocating by default. Without claiming that I am able to correctly guess what each of those people waiting outside their faculty building is doing in their lives, I'd say that all that I just mentioned is combined with an unapologetic exploration of their desires and an expanded fluidity.

Gender roles destabilisation, identities destabilisation, destabilisation of all regulatory frameworks that originate from the national patriarchy; frameworks that were left untouched by the previous generations and were (and still are) underrated by large parts of the extended progressive movement. Everything can be traced back to our way of living, though, and it's no accident that Paul Preciado in "Can the Monster Speak?", which was recently translated and published in Greek by Antipodes Editions, references Monique Wittig who claimed that heterosexuality isn't a sexual practice or a gender identity, but a political regime. In "One Is Not Born A Woman", Wittig states that by denying heterosexuality,

lesbians are class fugitives, just like the American slaves had to escape, in order to live free.

Milkman says that Millennials and Gen Zers are instinctively for intersectionality. I'd say that this is absolutely true for Gen Z. It is very hard to find a conversation where the different sides of patriarchy can stay hidden. It is hard to find a conversation where the class element will remain suppressed. It is hard to find a conversation that doesn't contain criticism against the national core's racism and violence.

Where the previous generation saw secondary contradictions, naturalities, sanctities, exaggerations and extremes, Gen Z recognises the political origins of the everyday stench that exists in the way we connect, flirt and have sex; in the way that capitalism defines our own identities. There has always been criticism that was expressed towards family, that much is true, but now it seems like it is taking a more central position and is coming from a side that doesn't just want to talk about the oppression that often exists in this crucial nucleus, but also about unconventional family making and new kinds of relations.

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When you tell me your life story/ I often respond/  
With shivers down my spine/I curl up in an orange blanket/  
I am being hauled around, blind and end up/  
To the edge of the couch, of the cliff/  
Inept at tears and poetry/  
Asking for another kind of vision/  
It's only then that survival comes, suddenly and forcefully/  
And sets me into a mandatory takeoff/  
In defensive speed, nearing the speed of light

*Lena Platonos*

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I came upon an article about the French existentialist philosopher, Gabriel Marcel. Marcel believed that an experience is unmediated by language and yet that every person should strive to be available to listen to the first-person narrations of others. I like that idea. I let it in.

At the same time, at [yusra](#), a magazine I'm a part of, we receive an article written by a female worker in the catering industry. A first-person narrative, an experience from her workplace, self-observation, life in a metropolis. I feel like I'm reading something moving but also crucial, not just because the article is well-written, but also because I realise that all claims of vulnerability narratives – the personal that becomes collective and then political – are to be found in a rather heart-wrenching way.

We read many such texts (poetic, accusatory, autofiction). Such narratives are produced online, on the city's walls, in slams, in magazines such as [Teflon](#), in zines, in the current hip hop scene. Those narrations start from the personal gaze and direct experiences and give us brilliant images about what it means for someone to travel in public transport, to have an unprotected and precarious job, to walk alone at night, to show solidarity to one's friends or to feel exhausted from a hostile reality. Those texts don't fear a clash with patterns, they're little cries, slogans, complete (whatever that means) poems, short novels, collages and memes, dystopian landscapes' creation, spoken word, raps, performances. They're narrations that even though they might look like the experiential posts that came out of millennial writings, especially after December 2008, they have significant differences.

The self-reference is there, just like in older texts, but in this case self-reference doesn't use personal experience in a way that it leads to a (leftist) cool and sensitive depiction of the self, a lyrical phrasing of expectation or a future

political optimism that connects the individual to an abstract collective. We are past this era when social observation, lived experience fragments and a pinch of Livaditis' poetry could describe pretty much everything that was written (the signatory has lapsed into such vileness several times).

On the contrary, today there's a text body that dives into lived experience only to touch trauma, bring it to the surface, process it and more importantly, share it. The strive to appear cool isn't so intense anymore, instead there's prominence of the broken self in an unapologetic manner, a tendency to express anxiety and to ensure that talking about mental health issues is no longer problematic. There's a strong trend to discuss in detail and show in a practical manner what it means to live in a patriarchal society, what does aggression and violence mean in our entertainment, workplaces, meetings, relationships and everyday life. There's class, insecurity, work and lack /denial of work and povertisation. Erotography is still unapologetically present, a claim for a new version of trash folkness, a link with pop culture and, more importantly, the body. Hotness and acceptance are there, at the centre of the narrative, without any strict limits or prerequisites of "normality" of any kind. There's a constant renegotiation; frustration and exploration. At last we don't talk (or, to be more precise, we don't read) vaguely about girls and boys and beauty that will save the world, but rather for bellies, sweat, fingers, mouths and how we feel when one touches the other.

Milkman said that storytelling has been a characteristic trait of several social movements, clearly thinking of the history and practices of BLM. I think that this truly is a Gen Z trait. Both the will to narrate their lives in numerous media as part of the collective history, as well as the intention to run their course along the concept of availability, of "insatiable

openness" (according to Marcel).

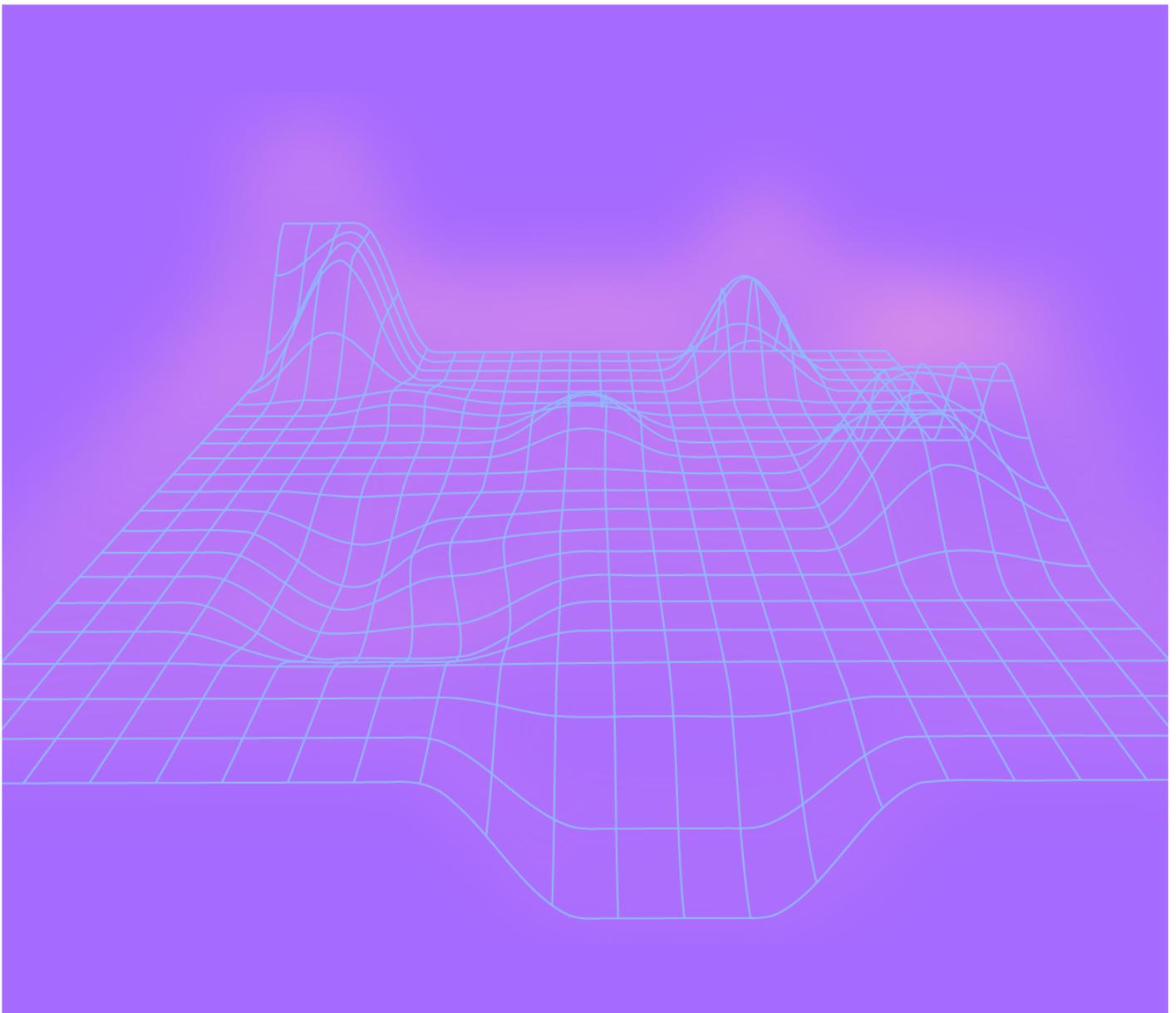
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What I wrote is obviously a generalisation and, more specifically, a generalisation written from a distance – the distance of a (very) early millennial. Also, I wrote this piece focusing on a very specific (micro) cosm. Thus, I unavoidably turn to this particular (micro)cosm and this offers me great relief, because in it I can find words and lyrics such as these:

From the circle's centre til the edge of the night/  
I need a denial that won't burn my throat/  
Will love always be unpaid labour?/  
Will we piss side by side and then say "oh well"?

*Sci-Fi River*

# A contrast generation – image natives



**Alexandros Papageorgiou,**  
**Film Critic**

Talking about generations is at the same time enticing and reckless. In a sense, our culture is obsessed with chattering about them. Although the origins of generational theories go further back, one could argue that the 20th century elevated the “generation concept” to a point it became a valuable intellectual commodity. The interwar period brought forward an analysis of generation as a cultural and sociological phenomenon, especially in the field of literary theory with Gertrude Stein’s conceptualisation of the “Lost Generation” and in the social sciences with the publication of Karl Mannheim’s “The Problem of Generations”.

Gradually, and especially after the Second World War (perhaps as a reflection of the crisis that the traditional means of modernity interpretation were undergoing), the “generation concept” became an increasingly central element of the political-cultural vocabulary of the time. Given the fact that generation itself began to emerge as a political category linked to youth as a collective subject referring to the post-’68 international left, and that generational succession (with its inherent conflictuality) has become a cultural obsession of a culture that’s addicted to talking about boomers, Gen-X-ers, millennials and zoomers, I would go as far as say that generationality has become a grand narrative for the age of the end of grand narratives.

As the language of generational succession suggests, albeit in a conventional way, a system of periodisation and a conceptualisation of historical phenomena, it is in a way like a pop philosophy of history that flourishes where traditional schools of thought (the old ideologies, one might say) fade away in people’s minds. From this perspective, generational language also constitutes a methodology and a worldview, a way of understanding the world and participating in it: boomers

are like this, millennials do that, what’s with zoomers? (question.)

Internationalised and digitised pop culture can’t stop talking about generations and their characteristic traits, just like narcissists can’t stop talking about themselves. This does not mean, of course, that the discourse on generations is a mere rant. Or, maybe, just like any rant, it hides a kernel of truth. The contemporary “generationalisation” of culture and history is a way for the current vernacular to visualise and process its own shifts and contradictions.

“Generationalism”, the contemporary obsession with generational identity, often “erases” or obscures other historical determinants of immediate experience, such as social class, language and nation, race and gender, urban and spatial planning, ability, symbolic capital and the people’s position within the existing power grid. To the extent that it doesn’t (also) talk about these things, the generational chatter simply ends up being a version of the political element’s appropriation by the cultural element, a narcissistic aestheticisation of politics that extends a subjective generational bias to the whole of reality.

Even so, however, we shouldn’t underestimate its moments of truth. The narrative quality that’s inherent in the conflictual generational succession scheme (with all its emphasis on subjectivity and the self) is a way for contemporary subjects to confront paradigm shifts at the level of an unstable and fragmenting social totality. It is in part an intellectual and emotional survival tactic. If your parents are jerks, is it because they’re boomers? If your peers can’t figure things out, does it mean that this is how millennials are? If as far as you’re concerned young kids are an enigma, maybe you should study Generation Z?

It was through such a prism that I read Eteron's research on Generation Z, since the Institute kindly asked me to comment on it in my capacity as a columnist on issues of film, television and visual culture. As with any other abstraction, generational abstraction can be not only useful but also necessary in order to provoke reflection, but at the same time it is crucial not only to be aware of, but also to test its limits. That is, in other words, to confront it with real-life challenges. Researchers are of course aware of the fact that their project must historicise its object of study.

Thus, they make it clear from early on that they see the experience of Gen Z as a historical one: "Gen Z is at the same time the Instagram and Tik Tok generation as well as the 'generation of constant crises', a generation for which crisis conditions (economic, health, environmental) have become the norm rather than the exception." Even more, they detect a conflictuality in this historical experience, and see Generation Z individuals as active agents of the contradictions of their time: "GenZ seems to have come of age in a context of distrust towards institutions and concern for the future."

Indeed, if it is useful to talk about generations, then it is rather this immanent conflictuality (i.e. not necessarily as a conscious individual or collective practice but mainly as a historically determined way of existing in the world) that should come to the fore. That is, to illuminate the experience of the subjects you are investigating through the contradictions that life throws at them. The research rightly highlights the distrust towards the official political discourse and the dominant truth regimes, tracing its roots to the legitimacy crisis of the hierarchy and oppression systems brought about by the continuous, numerous and overlapping capitalism crises from 2008 to this day.

Next to this mega-scale of conflictuality, of course, there is a smaller scale (micro-political in the molecular sense), which concerns the conflictuality within subjects: within and between them. If we see the "constant crisis" of which the research speaks, also as a crisis at an identity level, i.e. a crisis of how subjects themselves are historically produced, then we will find a conflictuality that divides them internally, both at the level of the generation as a collective-body-with-contradictions, as well as at that of the individual as a subject that's in a continuous process of identification and de-identification with itself.

In this sense, if we choose to interpret the research politically, we find Generation Z positioned within a socio-cultural civil war around the challenges generated by contemporary conflictual practices and attitudes regarding nationalism, authoritarianism, racism, the environment and sexuality. The research rightly highlights the new contradictions that feminisms have created between subjects, citing as examples #MeToo and the modification of the legal definition of rape (to those we could also add the resistance current in the case of the murder of Zack Kostopoulos/Zackie Oh and the recent wave of femicides).

But if, in line with the pattern I have tried to outline above, we extend these oppositions within the subjects, then we might be able to discern the conflictual character of the new masculinities and femininities themselves (and that of non-binary self-identifications), as well as the ways in which the new forms of sexual self-expression test the limits and constants of the heteronormative world. According to the survey, nearly 90% of Gen Z agrees with #MeToo and gender equality, but I wonder if it has a common or coherent understanding of what it means to be male or female today.

Of course, the political interpretation of

the generation issue (and therefore of a research such as this one) always has a pitfall. Or, rather, it is a discussion mined with feelings of optimism or pessimism about the future. Just as speaking from within a generation contains the risk of a biased extrapolation of a limited experience to the entire reality, speaking from the outside of the generation you are commenting on contains the risk of projecting perceptions and expectations onto a human material that is indifferent (and/or resistant) to your own fantasies. In other words, even without realising it, one risks revealing more about him/herself than about what he/she is talking about.

Hence, it is very easy to evaluate the “new generation” (in this case Gen Z) through the investment of abstract qualities of progressivism or conservatism, as the presence or absence of hope for the future. Seeing youth as something that’s inherently good and hopeful may help one avoid the resentment of elders towards young people disguised as “criticism” (“they spend all day on Tik Tok” or “they listen to trap music”), but it puts them in the same loop of general condemnation or defence of “young people”. Certainly liking the young is kinder (and less miserable) than calling them out, but it’s no less abstract, generalising and homogenising as a practice. As far as I’m concerned, because of my profession (and maybe also my temperament), I’m interested in commenting here on a particular aspect of the contemporary contradictory youth experience: the relationship with the digital image.

It seems trite that if you are going to talk about Generation Z, then you have to talk about the digital field: about subjectification through contact with digital technology and ways of existing within the digital public sphere of new media. In this sense, the emphasis that Eteron’s research gives on interaction with the digital environment is

definitely justified both empirically and methodologically. For people born in the 21st century and who have spent their formative childhood years during the era of fast internet (in Greece that’d be from the mid 00s onwards), the experience of the self is interconnected with digital environments. It’s not a coincidence that we think of zoomers as digital natives.

Of course, this in itself would require a deeper discussion, since on the one hand, digitality is more than the sum of individual digital media/technologies, and on the other hand, the relationship between digital and analogue is much more complex than it may seem from the outside. In any case, if there is a digital centrality in the experience of Generation Z (that the research examines mainly regarding the field of information and the formation of political opinions) then this should not be understood as an autonomy (an independent existence), that is as if the digital world unidimensionally absorbs every other aspect of the youth experience, but rather to serve as a new window (or tab) of understanding for the multiplicity of digital activity itself.

The basis of this reflection is already clearly summarised in the research analysis: “Indeed social media is part of Gen Z youths’ everyday life from a very young age – in fact Gen Z is the first generation that is ‘internet native’. Gen Z youths familiarised themselves with smartphones and high speed internet during the first decade of their lives”. Digital citizenship doesn’t just stem from demonstrating competence in the use of new media from a very young age. It is also about the fact that being online itself is a dominant activity in people’s lives. According to the research “they’re a generation that didn’t experience the world without the internet and spends (very) large parts of their day online”.

With this in mind, it seems to me that the quantitative depiction of this online

presence based on the participants' responses is rather conservative. We read that "51.6% spend 5- 10 hours per day online, 36.7% spend less than 5 hours, and 10.6% more than 10 hours", but it is probably not sufficient to think of digital presence as a separate leisure activity that can be contrasted with other activities or quantified accurately in terms of time. It would probably be better to think in terms of a continuum of digital-analogue presence, as if digital presence mediates and 'colours' all aspects of the young person's experience.

In this context, it is difficult to define how many hours "you are online", since the temporality of digital presence and the way it is diffused in the overall social experience, does not necessarily correspond to the time you spend in front of your laptop or holding your smartphone. Similarly, the way the "analogue" self flows into the digital self, makes it hard to clearly distinguish between the "inside" and the "outside". If we look at things in such a way, then it will perhaps seem like the research treats Gen Z's relationship with the digital in terms of passivity, as if there's just consumption of content and interaction with an interface/platform. But if there is something specific to Gen Z in terms of its relationship with the digital, then in my opinion it is less about the uniqueness of their digital native status or the temporal measurability of their online life, but the distinct expressiveness that many young people channel in their digital presence.

This expressiveness is a productive force in the sense that it's actively shaping the terms of the digital-analogue continuum of life. It is the productive force behind the desire, creativity, imagination, emotion, skill, technology, knowledge and general intellect of people moving in the digital space. The digital expressive media of Generation Z – that self-fictional universe of memes, stories, selfies, weird jokes, confessional

shitposting and libidinal streams (all of them directly related to the specific expressivity of the digital image) – shape the digital self but also the very platforms, the interfaces that make the existence of a digital self materially possible.

Of course, the way we perform and curate the digital self is not a singular and homogenised process. The research rightly notes that zoomers "tend to prefer a personalised digital environment where information-entertainment-socialisation all merge and boundaries become porous", but we need to look at the specific and new features of this digital personalisation. Perhaps here it would be helpful to compare this with the dominant digital experience of performing/curating the self of the immediately preceding generation, that of us millennials.

For many of the people who were digitally subjectified within Web 2.0 of active online participation, which followed the passive consumption of content that corresponded to Web 1.0, the space of digital self-fashioning was a constellation of forums, blogs and early social media, organised around the idea of a carefully curated online profile that digitally represented the self as the sum of public self-expression of one's preferences. It was a time when Blogger, Tumblr, MySpace, Hi5 and, later on, Facebook were thriving. In these mediums, self-presentation resembled a digital archive, a scrapbook or an album. The public display of the self was made so as to be meaningful, long-lasting, coherent, and able to be communicated (or consumed) as a package.

Back to Generation Z, the research tells us what we already suspected: that the preferred social media platforms for young people today reflect a change, a shift. When asked which social media they use the most (with a choice of up to two), an overwhelming 74.9% chose

Instagram while 19.1% chose the fast-rising Tik Tok app. Right after presenting this result, the researchers rightly add that “The young people’s preference for image-focused platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube has been amply documented.” If we focus more specifically on Instagram and Tik Tok, which are probably the most prominent reference points for the formation of the new trends, we can detect a logic of performance / curation that presents several differences from what we outlined earlier.

Instead of duration and coherence we find a more chaotic, discontinuous and fleeting performance of the self, which also corresponds to a different algorithmic logic, programmatic construction and interface culture of these platforms. Social media such as Instagram and Tik Tok rely solely on the direct active participation of users in content production, while also encouraging a more fluid image expressiveness through the provision of possibilities for easy, fast and complex iconography through a wide variety of templates, filters and other image and video editing options.

All this should not be seen in terms of exercising an unlimited digital freedom that unleashes the imagination with regard to the self-plasticity of the self and the self-expression of young people. This would be overly one-sided and rather politically naïve. On the contrary, we should instead also view them as a more profound degree of the subjects’ integration into the logic of platforms. In this sense, the virtual self-expression of zoomers is more immanent to the flows and functions of digital machines.

At this point we could probably use Maurizio Lazzarato’s concept of “machinic enslavement”, which is how he describes the way that modern media invest in senses, emotion, cognition and language in order to harness the

most fundamental impulses of human activity and life itself, which thus function as components of a machine. This perspective paints a darker picture of “digital natives” status, but it should still not be seen one-sidedly. Felix Guattari, whose theory was Lazzarato’s foundation so to speak, reminds us that machines have a “living” side, an expressive capacity, a reserve of potential. For Guattari, the machine has power: the power to set creative processes in motion.

In terms of common, conventional categorisation, people who grew up in the 21st century are considered to be “image-driven people”. And Generation Z, which according to the dominant demographic classification mainly consists of people born around the turn of the millennium, is also regarded as the first “authentic” image-driven generation. What we usually mean by this, is that these people have learned to interpret the world and participate in it through the production and reproduction of images – or, more precisely, through a virtual grid of observation, classification, organisation and representation of the world at the level of the exchange of signs and symbols.

However, despite the usual abstract appeals to the “age of the image”, it would be rather inaccurate to argue that this is an exclusive property of the “digital age” (an image, after all, is more than just a sum of pixels on a screen, just as digitality is more than an electronic device interface). Therefore, when the survey states that a characteristic trait of Generation Z is its “preference for pictorial social media, such as Instagram, as well as its ability to express itself in a multimedia fashion”, we should not take this as a statement of a magical (positively or negatively charged) quality of young people in terms of their contact with the image, but as an account of new ways of virtually organising and expressing this semiotic exchange.

In this sense, the sentence that follows a bit further down in the research analysis is more significant: “Gen Zers are usually very comfortable combining image, video and text”. In other words, closer to my area of interest, we could say that Generation Z shows a remarkably spontaneous fluency in the use of cinematic grammar. Their distinct digital expressiveness, as reflected in the above mentioned social media, is a clear indication that individuals are not just directing themselves. Even more so, they render their iconoclastic gaze visible, making explicit the fact that they are organising the world through a new way of producing and reproducing images. And this, of course, should not come as a surprise, since it is a reflection of tectonic technological changes in the realm of external (material) reality.

As Evan Calder Williams has recently shown with the introduction of the term “shard cinema”, the cinematic way of seeing has spread everywhere through the dominance of the digital camera and the visual culture it has created. This, in turn, has changed images themselves. With their smartphones and laptops, young people are creating complex and dense images to which it is not easy to apply the traditional binaries between word and image, thought and emotion, material and digital, original and copy, production and reproduction, subject and object.

One will often come across articles on how “bizarre” and “incomprehensible” Gen Z’s online expressiveness is: How little sense today’s kids’ memes, Instagram stories or Tik Tok videos make (ironically, the majority of those articles are written by millennials, who are just a few years older, but then again, pop culture is obsessed with intergenerational relationships to the point of creating contradictions even where they don’t exist). Still, it’s not that hard to decipher Gen Z’s expressiveness, or at least to identify some of its main

pillars. For example, it seems obvious that younger people’s preference for more ephemeral and temporary audiovisual production options (both of those are features of Instagram/Tik Tok) shows a different relationship with temporality, reflecting perhaps a pervasive no future atmosphere that has led to a crisis of even the very ideas of duration and futurity.

The expressiveness of Generation Z seems to have fully embraced the logic of the limited life cycle of digital signs and events, and therefore has no difficulty in parting not only with stories that will be lost forever, but also with entire profiles, accounts and pages that are treated as emphatically disposable and fleeting. On the other hand, for a person who has been moulded into a previous digital paradigm and feels that the digital self must be absolutely archived, the loss of a properly sorted profile can be a minor semiotic (and emotional) death.

In this digital give and take, the notions of authenticity and uniqueness (both modernist burdens that weigh down expression and consciousness) are losing more and more of their value. The semiotic exchange in which the online avant-garde of Generation Z participates, rather embraces the ideas of ironic pleasure, the immanence of humour, the constant reference to external reference points, the declaration of identity through the repetition of motifs (memes templates viral challenges etc.) with slight variations. After all, repetition itself is a form of difference and copies breathe through their impertinence towards the original.

Rather than launch themselves in a chimerical pursuit of an authentic and unique digital self, Gen Zers manifest their expressivity through a multimedia (and sometimes quite experimental) participation in shared communicative-semiotic events. Perhaps it may seem as if this expressive experimentation is

something that concerns only the form and not necessarily the content. On the other hand, one could argue that there is no real distinction between content and expression. Expression itself contains an essence – perceptual, interactive and emotional – that permeates every form of communication without being limited to the linguistic one. For example, the spontaneous combination of image, voice, text and movement (as well as of rich subtext) that we see in many of Tik Tok's hand-crafted viral videos points to a conception of composition and editing more diverse and communicative than those to which we are accustomed.

The idea that Generation Z (or at least a large creative portion of it) demonstrates proven communicative wealth through its digital expressiveness is in contrast to the frequent claims that it is a generation that cannot read and write, is addicted to screens or that they're borderline functionally illiterate. According to this point of view, young people merely consume images passively. The problem here is not only that the active image-producing power of the digital subject is obscured, or that the aforementioned point of view overlooks the fact that the gaze itself is an active practice. The main issue is that it implies a clear hierarchical distinction between the word and the image. According to this very common stereotype, especially among sophisticated circles with high cultural capital, the image is always inferior to the word – and the preference for it must be accompanied by a sense of micro-shame, or at least awareness of its poverty.

Fortunately, Jacques Ranciere has shown in great detail that this perception is an outgrowth of a dominant logic that takes the visual as the lot of the multitude and the verbal as the privilege of the few. Taking this thought even further, he stated that there is no point in juxtaposing words with images. On the contrary, words are already images, that

is, forms of distribution of the elements of representation. And in this very sense they are political, since they contain the possibility of a radically different representation. It is this thought that also enables us to move from the poetics of the digital image to politics of the digital image.

We mentioned earlier that the research raised a number of questions about political issues in order to gauge the participants' stance. From climate change to the Golden Dawn trial and from university police to gender equality, the sample of participants seems to lean quite heavily on the side of contemporary identity, visibility and anti-discrimination politics. Moreover, given all of the above, it should come as no surprise that Gen Z is extremely friendly towards forms of political expression that are more or less inherent in the digital sphere, such as support for the #MeToo movement (86.9% are in favour) or the #cancelefood campaign (64.2% are in favour). But apart from political attitudes at the level of explicit opinions, it is also worth looking at the political subjectification of Gen Z through the digital realm itself. That is, in a way that is linked to the new virtual expressiveness and communicability that we have so far tried to outline in the context of this text.

The broadening of the possibilities for political expression is quite evident to those who closely follow the production of images by young people on social media: We are witnessing a shift away from logocentrism and literalism in favour of a turn towards a connection with the senses and emotions, but also an awareness of the performativity, corporeality and theatricality of political expression itself (which of course makes body, gender, sexuality and desire politics a privileged field for contemporary subjects moving in the digital space).

But it would be a mistake to assume that

Gen Z's digital political expressiveness is limited to issues such as these. For example, it was very interesting to see the recent trend in Greek Tik Tok where many young people shared and exposed in the form of viral ironic/humorous videos their experiences of the conditions under which they were asked to work during the summer season on Greek islands. If we reflect upon this trend in relation to the international post-covid trend of young people's dismissal of work (the current crisis of positive investment in work) that has been coined as the Great Resignation or the Big Walk-Out, then we can see how digital iconography can not only bring to the surface molecular political processes of the social, but also give them new, refreshing, creative and radical forms of expression.

Of course, on the other hand, it'd be rather naive for this broadening of possibilities to make us over-optimistic. The concept of "machinic enslavement" that we used earlier can help us think productively within the contrasts of the actual situation. As the digital realm is itself enclosed by tech capital and its devices, radical social practices within it tend to be absorbed by platform capitalism itself as a technological and desirable calibration of the digital machines themselves. In other words, the operational integration of this digital expressiveness, helps the platforms become an even more compelling and sought-after product and infrastructure.

It is well known that the field is never neutral. It is itself a realm of contradictions, only at a deeper level, below the ground – and therefore its particular conflictuality has to be mined, in order to draw a geological picture. In this sense, the radical political image

dynamic seems to be a living productive force suffocating within the productive relations of the existing technological, infrastructural and power grid.

"Abandon all hope, ye who enter the Hell of images", wrote Paul Virilio, echoing the famous Dantean inscription. Indeed, there is no hope, but there is a lot of potential.

**“The digital expressive media of Generation Z – that self-fictional universe of memes, stories, selfies, weird jokes, confessional shitposting and libidinal streams- shape the digital self but also the very platforms, the interfaces that make the existence of a digital self materially possible”**

**Alexandros Papageorgiou**

# Gen Z: democratic disconnect and digitality



**Thomas Siomos,  
PhD in Political Sciences, AUTH Postdoctoral  
researcher at University of Crete**

*This is an intervention piece by Thomas Siomos at an event organized by Eteron at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) as part of the Gen Z | Voice On research.*

Seeking to make sense of the so-called Generation Z and its political dimension, we have to take into account the context in which the lives of these young people unfold. Said context is clearly crisis-ridden, fluid, radically contingent and uncertain. In the economic, political and social field, it conveys a message that consolidates the TINA doctrine (“There Is No Alternative”) – a doctrine that attempted to neutralise the millennials (Generation Y) and the generation of the fall of the Berlin Wall (Generation X).

But in the case of Generation Z, the message directed at them seems not to just be grounded in the cynicism of TINA: it does not simply aim at the propagation of a hegemonic message that there is no alternative, that a different world is not possible, that it is better to imagine the end of the world than the end of the market and capitalism.

The message that is being conveyed to young people seems to go one step further, or rather, one step backwards. It does not merely urge Generation Z to lose all hope of a potential social change, but it also wants it to submit to a dismantling of the *acquis* that has been achieved through the toil and struggles of previous generations, accept the role of the dominated, and be left at the mercy of decisions that undermine democracy and strip it of its participatory and radical content. It is being pushed not only to accept the terms of a democratic disconnect but to make it a reality, to be the generation that will accept the end of democracy as a core and necessary element of modern societies. In Žižek’s terms, Generation Z is called to embody “cynicism as a form of ideology”.

In 2016, a scientific study was published

on the subject of “[the democratic disconnect](#)”, the concept that stipulates that democracy is not effective and functional, and that the freedoms, rights and guarantees provided by any democratic framework are not an essential concern of the citizens of Europe and the US. Research based on decades worth of data showed that citizens are becoming increasingly critical of established democracies in North America and Western Europe.

Moreover, they have grown more cynical regarding the value of democracy in the political system. They believe they have less chances of influencing the political system and tend to back oligarchic regimes.

The ongoing democratic crisis is reflected in many ways. For example, participation in protests and trade unions has declined while, consequently, political apathy has increased. Another important research finding is that the affluent tend to support authoritarian regimes more ardently. This anti-democratic turn is more easily legitimised within the context of a crisis (be it economic, health, energy, etc.) and takes on the character of a demand.

This way, democracy becomes a problem and its restriction is seen as the cure for that problem. The argument expressed by the extremely conservative anti-democratic side is that “too much democracy can be a problem” and so, they demand the end of *acquis* such as university asylum, for instance. It is clear that many European governments are on the path of democratic disconnect – a concept that gives little or no respect to citizens’ freedoms, such as the freedom of expression, assembly, information, privacy, etc. A monotonous message of dominance and authority is sent out on a daily basis, draining democracy of its essential content and reducing it to an empty shell, causing anger, resentment, frustration, disillusionment and shame

in a large part of society, but more so in Generation Z.

ETERON's research and the debate around Generation Z enables us to attempt a construction of conditions that serve as a meaning for the new generation. Gen Z may not "meet the requirements" that would allow us to call it a political generation, but it certainly embodies elements that indicate that it is politically charged.

**It possesses social and anthropological traits that differentiate it from previous generations and set the terms of a political action both in technological terms as well as physically, in person. Environmental concern, interest in gender issues, sensitivity regarding diversity and resentment towards inequality are some of the findings of the research that set the political context for connecting with the world and the societies of which it is a part.**

Something that emerges from the research findings is that the political element is often hidden in non-political practices, even in anti-political orientations. In order to understand this pattern, it is useful to distinguish between politics and the political, as outlined by Chantal Mouffe. Politics refers to the practices (parties, trade unions, collectives, etc.) through which political discourses compete for dominance in the social field. At an ontological level, the political refers to the competitive nature of the social field and arguably both defines it and identifies with it.

In this sense, Generation Z keeps away from parties, unions, etc. but remains within the political in an ontological dimension through the way it prioritises

its concerns and priorities.

Generation Z takes a stand on issues such as #MeToo, the environment, University police. It is a generation that faces dilemmas every day. But as it perpetually moves from one crisis to another, these dilemmas intensify and form a more polarised landscape. Faced with this dichotomous condition, Generation Z has to form a clearer self. The self in Generation Z is now shaped by a polysemy that incorporates double amphisemias (X sometimes means one thing, and others, another thing altogether) but also enantiosemasias (X means two antonymous things at the same time). This radically contingent identity is not to be perceived as problematic but rather as an asset.

Also, we must bear in mind that we cannot construct meanings regarding Generation Z unless we view it in the context of the legacy passed on to it by previous generations. Neoliberalism is changing our societies in a profit-driven direction. So the questions that arise are how can there be resistance mechanisms against neoliberalism, how can we ensure that issues concerning equality will arise, how will priorities that aim for social justice emerge?

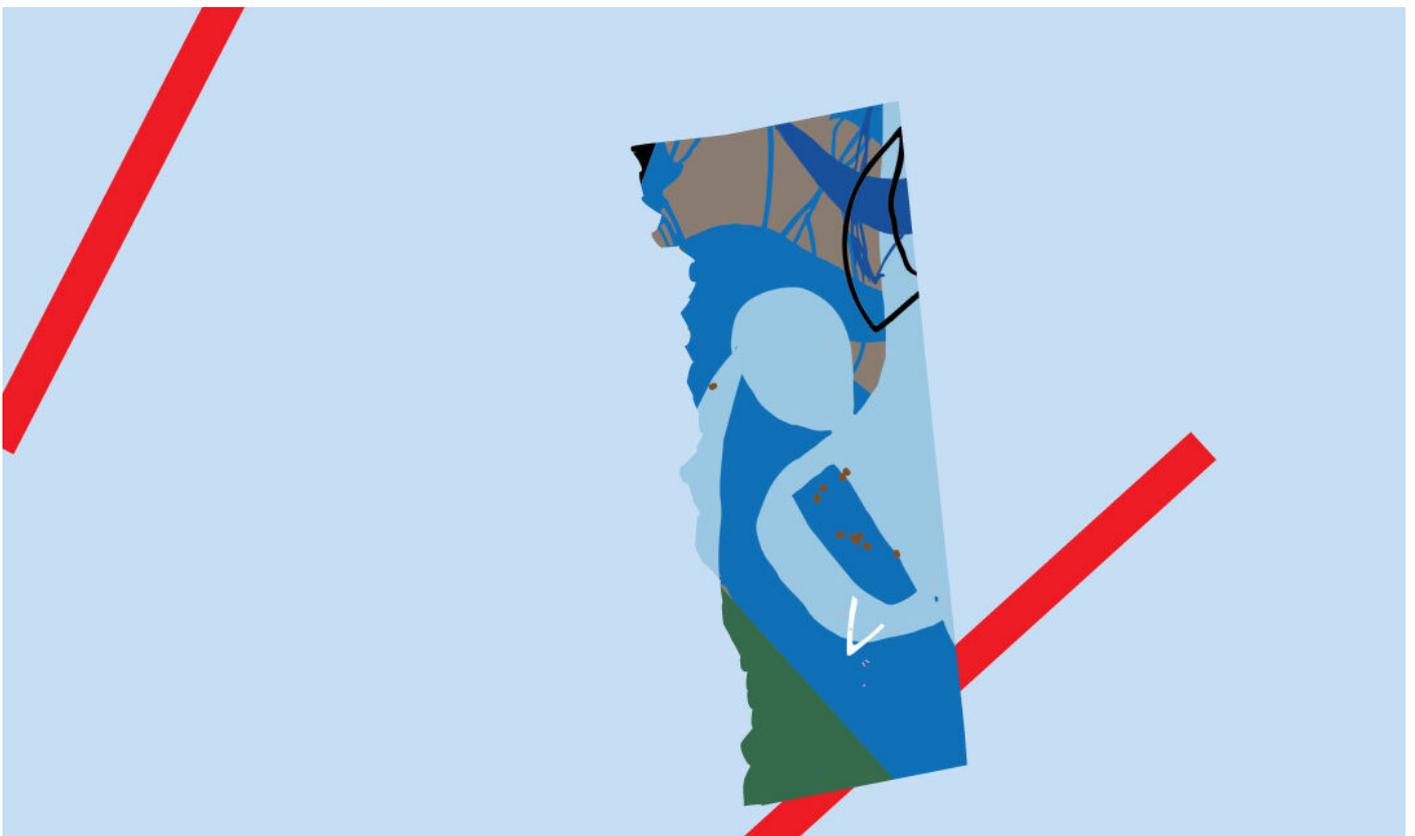
One source of optimism about Generation Z is its nativeness in the land of technology and new media. The members of Generation Z are digital natives, born into a digitised world. Unlike us, digital immigrants, who have "migrated" from an analogue world to a digital future. For Generation Z the self is mediated, politics is mediated, everyday life is mediated. Generation Z is possessed by media logic. Steeped in mediation, it must navigate an ocean of information. In order to do so, it develops a range of skills, has a different sense of spatiality, physicality and therefore a different perception of what it means to participate in social affairs.

Each of the previous generations were associated with the development and

diffusion of a medium. The silent generation with the arrival of the radio. Boomers with the versatility of television and film. The millennials with the transition from analogue to digital and the development of the internet. Generation Z has latched onto digitality and social networking.

Baby boomers made '68 unforgettable. Generation X came together in Seattle and set the foundations for the creation of the World Social Forum. Millennials made Occupy and the Indignados happen. Gen Z's skills and the way they perceive and participate in the social arena makes me optimistic. There are many opportunities for Gen Zers to make their mark. I think it is highly likely that there will be a political and social expression of Generation Z in the direction of equality and social justice.

# Gen Z: between progressive values and political alienation



**Antonis Galanopoulos,  
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*This article is an intervention by PhD candidate Antonis Galanopoulos at an event organised by Eteron at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) in the context of the Gen Z | Voice On project.*

Studies and articles focusing on youth and specifically on the so-called Generation Z often start with the metaphor of the “black box” – Generation Z as a “black box” that needs to be unlocked. Why do we need to unlock it, though? Are we just curious or does this generation have some special political significance today?

In recent years, major dictionaries have offered us a roadmap of political developments through their pronouncements of the Word of the Year. Especially if we combine the Oxford and Cambridge dictionaries’ statements. In 2017, for example, the former chose “youthquake” as its word of the year and the latter chose “populism”. In 2020, their choices were “unprecedented” and “quarantine”. Now, let’s go back to the concept of “youthquake”. The neologism “youthquake” was not coined in 2017 but back in the 1960s and the youth (counter)culture movements of the time. In 2017, however, it became associated with the support of young people for the Labour Party and Jeremy Corbyn, who led the party to a better-than-expected result in that year’s election. The dictionary noted at the time that the use of the term in public discourse increased fivefold during 2017. Therefore, something began to happen, or at least to be noticed, from 2017 onwards.

In 2020, professor John Curtice attempted to explain the outcome of Brexit and the 2019 UK elections. His article in Political Insight magazine had the title “A Brave New World” from, like the well-known book by Aldous Huxley. In the article he talks about a remarkable change in the voting demographics in the UK. His conclusion was that age is now the principal demographic division in British

electoral politics.<sup>1</sup>

This division has also recently become apparent in France. In the first round of the presidential election, Macron won the young people’s vote, while 44-year-old Macron only won in the 60-69 and over-70 age groups. The same pattern emerged in the first round of the parliamentary elections. 42% of 18-24 year olds voted for the coalition of the united Left (NUPES) as opposed to only 18% who voted for the presidential bloc (Ensemble). The percentages are reversed in the 65+ age group (19% voted for NUPES and 36% for Ensemble). In Greece, apart from some exit poll data, we do not know much about the age group called Gen Z. The exit polls suggest that the trend we saw in the UK and France is also occurring in our country. Relevant surveys suggest that young people, and in particular members of Gen Z, are making more left-wing or generally progressive choices in the elections in which they participate.

There is, however, another aspect of the political profile of this generation, which is structured around abstention and political alienation. In the French parliamentary elections mentioned above, in which the majority of the French people abstained, the abstention rate in Gen Z reached 76%.

A recent YouGov survey showed that young people 18-24 are less likely to claim that democracy in their country serves their interests. Positive responses were less than 20%.<sup>2</sup> The percentage of positive responses was below 20%. The number of positive responses gradually increased along with the participants’ age, to reach a peak of 45% amongst those belonging to the age group of 65+.

What are the beliefs and political engagement practices that could shed more light on these two aspects of Gen Z’s political profile? Eteron’s research, the first to focus exclusively on this

generation, offers some initial data we can use in order to reflect on the issue, with a focus, of course, on the Greek context.

In any such discussion we are bound to make certain simplifications and/or abstractions. No generation is homogeneous. I would argue that so far we have maintained some stereotypical ideas and notions regarding this age group: (a) digital generation, platforms, apps, social media; (b) generation of progressive attitudes particularly on issues of sexual orientation, the environment and liberties in general; (c) relative detachment from politics, abstention from elections; (d) cosmopolitan generation, with trips and friends abroad; and (e) annoyed and annoying generation, nothing expresses it better than the well-known catch phrase “Okay, boomer”.

Eteron’s research confirms some of those stereotypes and disproves others. Gen Z is indeed a digital generation, as more than half of the people that belong to it claim to spend 5-10 hours a day online. The view that they are indifferent does not seem to bear out. In fact, over half say that they follow the news somewhat or a lot. Around half stay informed on current affairs through news websites and social media, although at the same time they do not particularly trust them. The most predominant social media platform is Instagram, a fact that also shows the current predominance of image over text.

The institutions that Gen Zers trust the least are the Church with 4% and political parties and trade unions with 7%. They trust either people who are close to them [such as friends (40%) and family (50%)] or those who are seen as “superior” [scientific experts (62%)]. We are dealing with a generation that is very much questioning the “truth”, but, at the same time, they’re the most educated generation, and so they trust people with knowledge. The fact that the research

was carried out during the pandemic, when the role of experts was highlighted and reinforced, has obviously played an important role. Although they declare an interest in current affairs and are mainly informed via social media (79%), they do not follow politicians, since they don’t trust them, as stated earlier.

At the heart of their concerns and interests are – mainly – questions that have to do with values. From the #MeToo movement, with which the vast majority (87%) agree, to this generation’s great interest in climate change and the environment. They express an anti-fascist stance, as indicated by the participants’ agreement (72%) with #They\_are\_not\_innocent, but also a pro-mobilisation attitude, as 64% support #cancelefood. Evidence of the political engagement practices mentioned above is emerging quickly. The interest in politics, which is real, seems to be expressed in other, non-traditional ways. Political action seems to have a strong digital dimension as it’s passing through the screen of their devices, thus participating in a digital “us” that perhaps lacks the typical features of collective movements of the past.

Is it a form of performative activism or something more? In this case, the answer is unclear and rather difficult to extract from the research, as it is not clear what Gen Z members perceive as “political” action, at least not to those of us who do not belong to this generation. For example, Gen Zers state that they stay informed on current affairs through social media, agree with the content of the hashtags mentioned above, but 75% of them state that they do not post political content. Before passing value judgments, we should ask ourselves: what do Gen Z members perceive as “political content”? In order to do so, this useful quantitative research should be accompanied by qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews with members of this generation. The

first indication we have, with a tentative degree of certainty, is that in their minds “political” is synonymous with “partisan” and evokes denial or at least a reflexive urge to distance themselves.

We can get a more accurate impression from the replies Gen Zers gave when asked about their ideological self-positioning. One in five do not accept the left-right distinction, and, in a way, this is understandable. Gen Z includes young people born after 1996, the emblematic year of the modernisation effort, the year when the convergence of centre-left and centre-right in Greece began to deepen. Later on, they saw the transformation of the traditional two-party system into a single “memorandum governing party” and then witnessed a series of political parties with different ideological identities implement austerity measures.

Furthermore, there is a concentration at the axis’ centre, which accounts for about a quarter of the responses, with a tilt towards the (centre)left rather than towards the (centre)right. The question remains as to whether this concentration at the centre actually constitutes a political identity with a specific meaning. It is worth noting that the same concentration has also been observed in other surveys and could be an alternative and indirect way of stating one’s opposition to the right-left distinction.

In his article on Gen Z’s multiple identities, Yiannis Balabanidis claims that it’s a Left-inclined generation, rather than a Left one.<sup>3</sup> Several theorists suggest that this youth radicalism could essentially be a radical progressivism at a social values level leading to the prevalence of a post-materialist version of the Left. What Piketty called “the Brahmin Left”,<sup>4</sup>

referring to the Western left-wing parties turning into parties of the young and educated. The more we

analyse the data from various surveys on youth, and Gen Z in particular, and despite the contradictions that one may observe, it seems that issues of social values are closely linked to issues of youth housing, living conditions and the minimum wage. It seems that Greek Gen Zers are living in a prolonged crisis condition, and as a result their political identity combines materialist and post-materialist projections in a more inherent way than classical post-materialist theory could have predicted.

As a millennial, I’d like my thoughts on this text to be seen as an indirect conversation, mediated by Eteron’s research data. Gen Z and millennials still have significant similarities or at least points of contact: we have common concerns, similar values, we are very much alike, we vote more or less the same way. In order to better understand Gen Z’s social and political beliefs and action repertoires, it’d be best not to talk about them, but to talk to them. And if there was one question I would like us to answer together that would be: what is the future of a political system, a state, that satisfies neither the millennials or Gen Z?

# Foodnotes

1. John Curtice, Brave New World: Understanding the 2019 General Election (Political Insight, March 2020) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2041905820911739>
2. Toby Helm, Young adults have dramatic loss of faith in UK democracy, survey reveals (April 10, 2022) <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/apr/10/young-adults-loss-of-faith-in-uk-democracy-survey>
3. Yiannis Balabanidis, “Ok zoomer”: In search of Gen Z’s multiple identities (Eteron, 1st April 2022) <https://eteron.org/en/ok-zoomer-quot-in-search-of-gen-z-s-multiple-identities/>
4. Thomas Piketty, Brahmin Left vs Merchant Right: Rising Inequality and the changing structure of political conflict (World Inequality Database, 2018) <http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/files/Piketty2018.pdf>

**“It seems that Greek Gen Zers are living in a prolonged crisis condition, and as a result their political identity combines materialist and post-materialist projections in a more inherent way than classical postmaterialist theory could have predicted”**

**Antonis Galanopoulos**

# Towards Generation Alpha

**Commenting on Eteron's research  
from the perspective of the  
DigiGen project**



**Athina Karatzogianni,  
Professor at University of Leicester,  
United Kingdom**

## Introduction

This is a response to Eteron's invitation to comment on their research 'Gen Z Voice ON ETERON', from the perspective of the DigiGen H2020 project 'The impact of technological transformations on the Digital Generation'.

The Eteron research was conducted by about people (data collection) on behalf of Eteron – Institute for Research and Social Change, between 10-18 December 2021. The data was collected using structured online questionnaires that were answered by a sample of 403 people aged 16-25 years old from the whole of Greece.

For the DigiGen project, we led a study on ICT and Civic Participation in Estonia, Greece and the United Kingdom focusing on adolescents 16-18Y of age, but also inclusive of older ages where that was contextually relevant using netnography (online content analysis, online interviews), digital story telling workshops, and digital citizenship policy analysis documents. Additionally, we contributed to a study on ICT and Leisure in Austria, Greece, Norway, Romania and the UK, where we co-researched with 9–15-year-old children, using interviews, app diaries and observation of their playing Minecraft.

In this response, I shall include results from the latter research that relate to Eteron ICT use results, only in the concluding section. As pertains to the Generation Z focus of the Eteron research, in both studies we have researched digital technologies on the youngest population of that generation Z, i.e., those born between 2003-2012, thereby spilling over to Generation Alpha.

This commentary on the Eteron research is structured in three sections. After this introduction, the second section explains our methodology and how

our key findings from the 'ICT and Civic Participation' DigiGen research are positioned in relation to the Eteron one, with the caveat that we are mostly looking at younger population, as well as how certain findings regarding ICT use from the 'ICT and Leisure' DigiGen research relate to the Eteron research as well. The final section concludes with a policy discussion about several issues identified in both research projects that may inform future digital citizenship policies for Generation Alpha (born between 2010-2024).

## **Key similarities and differences in the results of Eteron and DigiGen regarding civic participation and general ICT use**

In DigiGen, we examined the digital transformation's impact on children and young people from the ages 5- to 18-year-olds in the domains family, education, leisure and civic participation, each sampling from specific age frames (2019-2022). In the work we led at the University of Leicester, we set out to assess the online political behaviour of young people accounting for socio-economic and gender considerations and their motivations for using digital content and devices to express political opinions and engage in political actions as they move to work and public life (digital citizens). Overall, we set out:

- To identify the socio-economic, gendered, and political culture-related pathways of young people's engagement in online political life in diverse societies (UK, Greece and Estonia) and how this might affect them offline.
- To investigate how young people are engaged in different kinds of (digital) networks associated with setting up, explicitly or implicitly, political, social, professional or public profiles as digital citizens.
- To explain why and how some young people are politically active in hybrid

(online and offline) environments while others are not, and what forms these activities take.

- To critically assess educational systems and the incorporation and promotion of digital citizenship among their priorities.

These translated to three major comparative qualitative phases. In the first, we produced netnographic research (online observation, content and 65 interviews in total) conducted between September 2020 and April 2021 in Estonia, Greece and the United Kingdom, comparing the reasons and the means by which youth engaged in online civic participation, focusing on online movements mobilising for racial, social and environmental justice (see [Karatzogianni et al., 2021](#)). In the second phase, focus group discussions were organised as digital storytelling workshops with young people involved in the production of online political discourse with the aim of identifying how they are affected by the online environment of their choice and key strands in youth ideological online production.

Within the workshops, a digital tool (PowerPoint) was used for the co-production of relevant material (photos, screenshots of relevant online content) to inform on the motivations, causes and means that young people find appropriate and meaningful for what they perceive as civic participation (as digital citizens) (see [Karatzogianni et al., 2022a](#)). In the third phase, we critically assessed digital citizenship in educational systems and in national digital citizenship documents (multimedia included) in the UK, Greece and Estonia, focusing on the inclusion and promotion of digital citizenship (see [Karatzogianni et al., 2022b](#). Available [here](#)).

Here, it is worth summarising only the 'ICT and Civic Participation' results which relate to Eteron's results, so that

we can see differences and similarities, considering DigiGen included three countries Estonia, Greece and the UK and focused on adolescents but not exclusively, while Eteron focused only on Greece and included only partly adolescents but mostly young adults.

In the first phase in the three countries, we focused on dominant strands of civic participation, focusing on online movements mobilising for racial, social and environmental justice. In Greece, we collected primary data of youth mobilising against gender-based violence and against police brutality, in Estonia we focused on online youth activism regarding LGBTQ+ and Black Lives Matter (BLM), while we focused on anti-racist civic participation BLM Leicester and environmental civic participation Extinction Rebellion (XR and XR Youth) in the UK. In the latter case, we also interviewed older participants to find out how they were mentoring the youth in these organisations and their own experience of adolescent political education and ICT use development. In Estonia, speaking out for the marginalised is seen as a matter of responsibility and the only way forward to a better society, leading to other people becoming more informed and changing their minds.

Reasons for political engagement are linked to personal experience of discrimination that informs a person's capacity for empathy, as well as cultural discourses surrounding social justice. In Greece, there is mistrust of political parties and governmental organisations and there is interest to do some things, not to change the world, but first to change everyday life. Activation and politicisation are triggered by personal experiences linked to the ways (multiple) gender identities are treated in a specific social context, but also in society at large. In the UK, there is adoption of new more effective approaches to environmental activism, anger about police brutality

and fight for equal rights, because of widespread inequality: ‘people relying on handouts to feed their children in a rich country’.

In terms of organisational and communication aspects, in Estonia there is use of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, VKontakte and Tiktok, with participants not preoccupied with questions of surveillance and taking no extra steps to protect themselves. International (English speaking) accounts are seen as much better for informational purposes than local Estonian ones, which are often accused of being ill informed, narrow minded, even racist and homophobic. In Greece, there is use of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and messaging apps as well as video conferencing platforms. There is reluctance, distrust and criticism towards platforms and apps and preference for open-source software. Digital networks are seen more as means of (counter) information diffusion and less as a meaningful space where political strategies can be deployed. In the UK, there is innovation in organisation and communication, for example in XR and XR Youth (holacracy model, carbon neutral cloud, use of glassfrog, basecamp, mattermost), while at BLM Leicester we see pre-existing networks supporting very social media savvy young people. Adolescents tend to not use Facebook, unless they want to reach parents, but use Twitter and Instagram a lot for their in-formation, coordination and publicization of political participation.

Estonia is different to Greece and the UK, because participants are speaking out for the marginalised, but might not be themselves marginalised, and are less worried about issues of privacy and surveillance. Similarities include that their civic participation is linked to personal experience of discrimination and injustice and there is similar use of commercial platforms.

Greece is different to Estonia and UK, because there is far more distrust to political parties and commercial platforms, and ICT is seen as less of a space for organisation and strategy. A similarity here is that politicisation may be triggered by personal experiences. UK is different to Greece and Estonia, in that there is organisational and communication innovation, there is heavy reliance on pre-existing networks, and there is more systematic mentoring for the younger activists. The UK is similar to Estonia, in that there is anger about inequality, racial, social injustice, and with Greece in terms of a certain level of distrust of police and government.

Overall, we found that participants who are active members of civic society organisations which are robustly organised (decentralised or hierarchical) utilise specialised types of platforms for different activities and are mindful of internet safety and surveillance issues, while those that are members of less organised movements rely on more commercial and general platforms to organise, communicate, coordinate, and publicise their activities.

The key findings from the second phase co-researching with 12 young people between the ages of 15-18, using the technique of digital storytelling workshops conducted between September 2021 and January 2022 in Estonia, Greece and the United Kingdom: The aim was to compare the visual, discursive content produced by the participants and their interactions, on the topic of what inspires and challenges their civic participation when they use digital technologies.

In Estonia, the participants that self-identified as activists had a much clearer vision from the start on what they want to focus their stories on, while the youth who were interested in politics and considered activism important tended to

stick more strictly to the two suggested themes of inspirations/motivators vs challenges. A participant who was involved in an LGBTQ+ organisation talked about her inner need to do something about the inequalities in the world, using images that were either photographs taken by the participant or illustrations from the organization's Facebook page.

In contrast, the stories from the other young people were less coherent narratives and more presentations of things that make them want to be politically active and things that deter them from doing so or make political engagement challenging. The overarching rhetoric was that of positioning political participation as very important, even morally imperative, then confessing to not being as active as one would like, and offering reasons and justification for what was presented as 'not enough' participation. Participants spoke of the feeling that one has a choice to support local initiatives that one holds dear and to 'speak with' others about important problems such as climate change. All of the non-activist participants listed the lack of time as their predominant challenge when it comes to political participation, whilst fear of judgement or politics as such and lack of self-confidence were also mentioned as challenges to their civic participation.

Motivation for political participation was also linked to self-improvement, 'being knowledgeable of the political situation and feeling as if I am included', and the need to 'do something about it'. In terms of similarities across activist and non-activist stories, they spoke of the desire for a better world and political participation as something that is edifying. They all talked about digital technologies as enabling their civic participation, being able to speak up and make their voice heard as motivating, however, one of the participants in their

story placed importance to doing so anonymously, preferring to speak up as part of a crowd and not being among the few in the foreground.

In Greece, all participants chose issues that marked Greek society during the last decade, issues that revolved around violence: three of the participants chose the topic of fascist violence as it was manifested by the neo-Nazi political party Golden Dawn, while one built his story on sexist violence that occurred in the killing of the LGBTQ activist Zak Kostopoulos/Zackie Oh, by two men and several policemen. In all the stories, the role of mainstream media was discussed in a critical way, while coverage of the facts in social media was also part of each story presented by the participants. The first story focused on the Golden Dawn trial that lasted five years.

Details were provided through the narrative on the investigation whether Golden Dawn constituted a criminal organisation, and the three specific crimes that members of the organisation were accused of. The second story focused on one of the crimes of the Golden Dawn: the assassination of Pavlos Fyssas, a rapper with an anti-racist and activist background. The participant insisted on the immediate coverage by the mass media, which was significantly slow in presenting the assassination as a political assassination and underestimated it by portraying it as a fight around football. The third story focused on history of the Golden Dawn since the early 1980s. The participant showed the Neo-Nazi roots of the organisation and its gradual steps towards its consolidation as a parliamentary party in 2012. The fourth story focused on the killing of the gay activist Zak Kostopoulos/Zackie Oh and particularly on the media coverage, together with reactions of the LGBTQ community and other citizens who have been protesting against homophobic reactions by socio-political and media

actors in Greece.

These story choices do not seem to follow theoretical or abstract ideological interest, but they seem to be based on extraordinary events that have marked the collective memory in the Greek society and for these young people. Their stories reflect on the quality of democracy and its institutions in a society scattered by social and political unrest, where young people grow up encountering severe cases of racist and sexist violence and their political participation is clearly influenced by the resulting polarised political culture.

In the United Kingdom, the three stories focused on racism, hate speech and police violence. The first story was about the wedding of Megan Merkle and Prince Harry, where the participant narrated how important was that a person that looked like her would become a princess, but also pointed out examples of racist posts attacking Megan Merkle by a well-known journalist, and included in her story a picture depicting the royal offspring as a monkey on social media. In this first story the participant pointed to comments on social media being made about the royal family and references to how dark the baby would be and she also talked about a later Oprah Winfrey interview with the royal couple. Other participants also reflected on what they saw as widespread racism across society in the UK and in the media environment.

The second story was about the tragic killing of a young person, George Nkencho in Ireland, the protests after his death, as well as false information circulating about him on social media. The participant identified that event as was 'the key factor in me speaking about the rights of black people and what really got me engaging within the online community and talking about problems within our community'. He also pointed to the false information 'spread by people who wanted to justify his killing,

which caused me to speak out and speak against all of this information'. The third story was about the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria, which triggered the participant's political engagement due to photos of casualties of police brutality on Twitter and Instagram. She also talked about Aisha Yusuf, a co-founder of the BringBackOurGirls movement, as one of the main reasons of inspiration. She pointed out that the event was not visible in UK media or talked about by the UK government. She also felt that there was misinformation, and nevertheless that this event helped her connect to her homeland, as well as other people from the Nigerian diaspora. 'I didn't feel that a lot was being done on this side of the world. I felt like a lot of the education of the situation had to be done by myself'.

There are clearly common political concerns by the 12 young people who participated in the digital storytelling workshops. These concerns include political polarisation, violence, and securitisation be it racist (UK and Greece), gender-related (Greece and Estonia), or emerging environmental consciousness (Estonia). These issues echo the topics discussed during the previous research phase (see Karatzogianni et al., 2021). The Estonian participants identified challenges such as time constraints, fear, and lack of confidence, focusing more on themselves and their motivations and having their voice heard to improve society in the fight for more justice and against LGBT and racial discrimination, while in Greece and the UK, they chose to speak about violent events involving structural, institutional racism, gender-based violence and problems relating to media visibility, misinformation and police violence. This is in continuation with findings from the first phase, where Estonian participants were less mistrustful of government and the media establishment in general, in comparison to the Greek and UK participants, who perceive that they

live in a much more polarized political environment, where misinformation, hate speech and securitisation is more widespread.

The key findings above from the first two phases confirm four key findings by Eteron's research, namely:

1. The global tendency that wants Gen Z to be increasingly concerned regarding environmental issues. However, in the DigiGen, we had no examination of environmental activism in Greece as there were clearly other more dominant concerns, which Eteron explains as 'In Greece, the young generation seems to be relatively less concerned about this specific issue, though the concern rate is rising'.
2. Gen Z is a generation with increased antifascist and anti-racist reflexes. This is evident from the two phases of DigiGen the Golden Dawn trial and murder of Pavlis Fyssas dominating the digital storytelling of adolescents we co-researched with, and with anti-racist reflexes in the UK and Estonia with BLM activism and broadly anti-racists activism and civic participation storytelling. In Eteron, we similarly read, 'In the case of the Golden Dawn trial and subsequent conviction that was linked to the hashtag #Δεν είναι αθώοι (#deneinaiathwoi = they are not innocent), there is a high degree of convergence amongst participants: 72.2% agree with the relevant hashtag, while 8.7% disagree'.
3. The rise of the feminist movement and anti-gender-based violence in Generation Z. Eteron finds that 'The highest convergence rate, though, was noted when participants were asked regarding the Greek #MeToo, with 86.9% saying they agree with the logic and the goals of this particular movement. Only 1.6% stated they disagree with the Greek #MeToo'. DigiGen confirms this as per above

results as well with the Estonia case on top of that where this is a dominant mobilisation against the government's plans regarding LGBTQ+ laws. Where this is not the case as a dominant theme for political protest is the United Kingdom.

4. Generation Z has multifarious ideological spectrum that is not reproducing the traditional Left-Right distinction. In Eteron this is expressed in the results as 'Ideologically, the Left seems to have a relative lead but generally speaking, Gen Z is expressing a core dispute against the current ideological spectrum', while indeed an indicative example in the DigiGen research we have witnessed the paradox of an Extinction Rebellion Youth activist who was a member of the Conservative Party in the UK and decided to leave it, due to the protest policing laws.

Lastly, there is a key difference between Eteron and DigiGen results. Eteron presents findings such as 'Regarding the protests that took place in February-March 2021 against the creation of a University Police Force, 48% said they agree with the protests, 18.8% disagrees, while a significant amount of people (31% – the largest number than on any other question) stated that they "Neither agree or disagree". There are two main differentiation points here, according to the participants' demographics (Graph 25). The first is gender: 54.7% of the women agree with the protests against a University Police Force compared to 40.6% of the men. The second (and certainly most unexpected one) is the employment status: 57.3% of people who are currently working support the protests as opposed to 41.2% of those who are currently unemployed.'

DigiGen results show significant anti-policing and anti-securitisation mobilisation and sentiment in this generation both in Greece and the United Kingdom, not so in Estonia. This can be

explained as the political culture in those countries is highly polarised in the last decade, and there is widespread mistrust of both the political establishment and the news media industries.

## Digital Citizenship for Generation Alpha

Demos, a cross-party think-tank in the UK defines digital citizenship as consisting of ‘the civil, political and social rights of a citizen in their online activities, their political engagement and action through digital means, and their membership of an online community that is a distinct source of identity (Reynolds and Scott 2016: 19). The report explained that digital citizenship comprises effective informed engagement of people within their local or digital environment on public issues in an educational context. Their definition encompasses both young people, children and adults. Whether political or civic, engagement appears a core element of digital citizenship. The use of digital citizenship as a thematic concept is closely associated with the works and interventions of NGOs and other third-party organisations working alongside other actors in the education domain.

In the last phase of the DigiGen ‘ICT and Civic Participation’ study, we critically assessed over forty policy documents relating to digital citizenship from Estonia, Greece and the United Kingdom. The analysis is conducted in the three countries focusing on the inclusion and promotion of digital citizenship. The focus is on policy documents by government bodies, educational organisations, and civil society actors where these are available.

We found that overall, there is a tendency to reduce digital citizenship to technical ICT competencies or at best digital competencies that focus primarily on using e-governance and other digital

services as part of one’s everyday life as a citizen. We recommend a more involved definition of digital citizenship competencies that focuses on the use of digital services, the Internet, ICT tools and social media as part of not only living one’s life as a citizen but also as part of political participation, civic engagement and expression of personal political agency. Ideally, digital citizenship competencies should be more than the sum of their parts (e.g., more than digital competencies plus ICT skills plus media literacy).

It would be useful for future digital policy in anticipation for the digital citizens of the Generation Alpha to offer a few thoughts of how the overall results all the other dimensions of DigiGen (family, education and leisure can inform EU Policy, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and best practices across the board.

In that sense, overall results (see Ayllón, et al., 2020; Ayllón, et al., 2021) point to the following factors, others impacting negatively and others positively on digital citizenship:

1. Digital deprivation, because digital citizenship is not possible when access is a problem, as it is for 5.4% of school-aged children in Europe (23.1% of children and young people are digitally deprived in Romania, while such percentage is only 0.4% in Iceland), with Children that cohabit with low-educated parents, in poverty or in severe material deprivation are those most affected. Hence measures to boost the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights principle 20 on access to essential services should include access to digital infrastructure and services as a pre-requisite for digital citizenship.
2. Education and socio-economic standing of the family: The education of parents and caregivers, because those most affected are in families

with low-educated parents, in poverty or in severe material deprivation. The EU Child Guarantee (adopted in June 2021 and now in the implementation phase through national action plans) is essential to bridge the digital divide and prevent digital poverty for children and their families. The national action plans on the Child Guarantee should include a stream of actions to for structural support to families as a key environment to empower children and youth as digital citizens.

3. Low digital engagement and low digital confidence are two country clusters with a particular West-East divide. Whereas in Belgium, France, Germany and Spain, the percentages of digitally disengaged children are relatively low, in Eastern Europe, such percentages are high, together with being bullied, and a low level of home possessions also increases the likelihood of being digitally disengaged. The fact that overall digital engagement and digital confidence are important is also reflected in the way qualitative research in Greece shows more appetite for physical, political participation rather than online, as it is more evident in Estonia and the UK.
4. Exclusion of younger children, especially when there is limited range of functions in digital affordances. For example, when younger children are denied access to things such as a class-chat in schools. Chat functions can allow children from an early age to develop the ability to learn how to participate in an online group community, provide a sense of belonging and help develop online writing skills that are crucial when interacting with elected representatives or community organisations. Also, in youngest children (age 5-10), they can be deterred if they experience things like harassment and trolling and digital

surveillance.

5. Directly relating to adolescents, they could be more encouraged and supported to build confidence to combat their fear of participating politically online, and more attention may be given during their education toward allowing for the time to do so (see Karatzogianni et al., 2021; Karatzogianni et al., 2022).

Overall, in terms of positive and negative practices for children or young people as users of ICT, results from our discussions in a recent Consortium meeting show the following (see also Eickelmann et al., 2021):

1. Young people are aware of threats in the online world (considering responsible behaviour online (e.g., in Estonia).
2. Learning to see the Internet as a tool to inform yourself, whether in a school-related context or only out of children and young people's own interest (Germany).
3. A sense of possibility to learn additional things about social issues beyond school requirements is shared by children (Greece).
4. Children link digital responsibility to how to behave online (Norway).
5. Some young people are aware of some threats online, and most digital education has focused on safety online (Romania).
6. Showing video clips helps students develop their thoughts on a topic and develop a greater sense of responsibility (Norway).
7. Awareness of internet safety is raised by drawing attention to hate speech and cyberbullying, and children are reflecting on this (Germany).
8. Children have a strong foundation in being critical of sources, and schools focus a lot on looking at multiple sources for information, especially if they are not sure if the information is true/correct or not (Norway).
9. Online dangers (phishing, frauds,

- lack of knowledge regarding in-App purchases). Yet, some teachers also worry that students may become too clever in the online world (... and start to hack!).
10. Blurred lines between school and leisure for both students and teachers. Leisure is considered the opposite of education. School closures during COVID and online schooling challenged the amount of quality leisure time.
  11. Health (physical): headaches and 'digital fatigue' from losing oneself in social media. Teachers and families worry about too much screen time and deterioration of health and fitness.
  12. Misunderstandings in communication between friends via chatting.
  13. Uncritical use of social media, distorted perception of sociability, sexuality and fame, comments on social media can be challenging), being bullied and excluded from groups.
  14. Loss of concentration and challenges in separating computers as a learning and gaming devices. Poor connection between leisure use and developing creativity.
2. Parents should be (more) aware of their function as role models for children.
  3. Learning-by-teaching can occur for all family members – not top-down only.
  4. Parents need easily accessible, evidence-based information.
  5. Parents need to be encouraged and enabled to cooperate with other persons in relevant systems (e.g., school).
  6. Interventions should comprise participatory co-creation of clear rules in the family.
  7. They should avoid the situation of a 'lonely child'/excluded child
  8. Interventions should ensure children's right to participate in the digital world in general, as many families have no access for various reasons (e.g., digital deprivation)
  9. In the digital world, children's rights in different spheres of their life must be ensured as well (e.g., private, family, school)
  10. Support for parents who experience insecurities and tensions in their parental mediation practices relating to digital citizenship.
  11. Families should be cautious about sharing private information – e.g., through practices like sharenting.

In terms of results indicating good practices enabling civic participation for parents, as DigiGen research into children's ICT use and its impact on family life (see also Lorenz and Kapella 2020) indicated:

1. Parents should be encouraged to use different styles of mediation in relation to Digital Technologies (DT), e.g., regulating screen time, offering co-use and active distractions through other activities and strengthening the general communication in the family about DT. Support to parents should be organised to provide them with the knowledge and suggestions of ways to approach this in parental education.

Results across DigiGen, show that school is the arena of first experiences of participation/activism. As a place of discriminatory experiences that lead to participation, an environment that affords or constrains participation/activism, but also as something keeping one from participation because it takes so much time. First participation in mobilisations occurs either at high school or university. As political awareness-raising often occurs through alternative information channels and/or social media, school as such is not considered useful to learn how to become an informed citizen. For that to change, in terms of good digital citizenship practices for educators for the use of ICT for students under

18, relevant DigiGen results (see also Eickelmann et al. 2021) emphasise:

1. Lack of teacher's knowledge leaves some civic participation activities out from the classroom (Estonia).
2. Hardly any education on digital citizenship and political engagement related to ICT (Germany).
3. Social and civic education is taught in the 5th and 6th grades, but no digital citizenship and participation references exist (Greece).
4. Children report having a lot of lessons and discussions in school about being critical of sources and about fake news (Norway).
5. There is basically no education about digital citizenship, European digital values, datafication, no holistic picture of what the digital entails (Romania).
6. Social media is of great importance for children and young people already in the 4th and 5th grades; in this context, only some children receive education about personal data protection and the dangers of hackers (Germany).
7. Discussions with teachers and parents are limited to issues of internet safety and sometimes privacy; no discussions on possibilities for further participation (Greece).
8. Covid-19 has increased the isolation in separate social bubbles, increased cyber-aggression and hatred online, distorted perception of sexual-objectification of women (Romania).
9. Teachers believe they need to teach students to be able to use digital tools in the modern world, both technically but also in terms of privacy (Norway).
10. Children perceive digital competencies and digital skills as a necessary means for professional development, not as an enhancement of one's civic responsibility (Greece).

11. Teachers try to explain how algorithms work and what happens if you, for example, send a nude photo on Snapchat or write something nasty in a comment section of an online newspaper (Norway).

Overall, in relation to industry practitioners, results point to the fact that ICT use enhances everyday communication and maintenance of friendships, even in extraordinary circumstances, such as the pandemic. Gaming and in general 'screen time' help strengthen one's digital competencies (e.g. practising a language, reading coordinates, logical thinking, hand-eye coordination skills), which can have an enabling effect for digital citizenship. Children and young people may develop an interest in politics, obtain information through digital platforms (Twitter, YouTube or creating political memes), and influence the development of normative guidelines/moral codes of conduct, for example, when gaming, as they learn how to deal with conflicts online.

This is why the governance architectures for digital gaming, or other social environments that allow children, would need to consider that through them, children and young people can be trained toward enhanced or reduced political behaviour, as future digital citizens.

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**Report**  
**Gen Z | Voice ON**  
**ETERON**

**The Things We**  
**Didn't Know**  
**About Gen Z**

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# Gen Z Voice ON

## Introduction

In recent years, interest regarding generations has increased both in Greece as well as internationally. Generations are used with increased frequency as an analytical tool in order to interpret political-cultural and other differentiations within the general population. At the same time, the reference to generation is in danger of becoming detached from historical and social determinants, thus turning it into a concept that explains everything but means nothing. With regards to Gen Z in particular, although there is no universal consensus, it includes everyone born between 1995/96 and 2010 - for the purposes of Eteron's Gen Z research, this resulted in a sample of 403 people between 16 and 25 years old. This generation emerged at the spotlight of attention during the pandemic years. Although there is a strong interest in Gen Z, the fact is that media portrayals of Zoomers in particular rely mostly on stereotypes and/or an one-dimensional identification of the new generation as internet and social media users.

For our part, by launching the research project "Gen Z - Voice On", we sought to place the new generation in a historical context of significant changes and critical (economic, health, environmental and political) conditions. In this light, we examined Gen Z as the "generation of constant crisis" and profound distrust towards established institutions but also as the first "digitally native generation". The research findings provided valuable insights into Gen Zers' political stances (focusing on events that took place in the last two years), their political action both offline and online, their communication practices as well as their views on fake news. Of course, this data does not constitute a complete or conclusive picture of the new generation, but a necessary starting point for further research and critical reflection on the concept of generations.

In addition to the findings themselves, Eteron-Institute for Research and Social Change took the initiative to promote the research in many different ways, sparking a series of conversations and interventions that contribute significantly to exploring the characteristic traits of the new generation. Through discussions with academics from Greece and abroad,

who have contributed significantly to the advancement of generation studies, as well as events at [universities](#), where Gen Zers are currently studying, and a series of workshops, we had the opportunity to present the research's findings, discuss and even challenge them.

More specifically, on 12/04, an [event](#) was organised with guests from research institutes, Greek and foreign universities, political youth organisations, the Press and other national media, in order to present and discuss the research's findings with collaborators and institutions that are actively involved in topics regarding the new generation. Furthermore, on 19/05, a second original [event](#) called "Ok Zoomer" took place, in collaboration with [The Signal for Researching and Confronting the Far Right](#). The main findings of Eteron's and the Signal's researches were presented, Vyron Theodoropoulos and Irimi Xygaki performed stand-up comedy and then a discussion followed among the panellists and young people. At the same time, presentations were made at universities, mainly at departments specialising in the study of communication and political participation, topics that are at the epicentre of the research in question. Thus, on 19/05 the research was [presented](#) at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies of the University of Athens, then, on 23/05, a lecture-discussion was organised at the [Department of Communication and Digital Media](#) of the University of Western Macedonia, followed by one at the [Department of Political Sciences](#) of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki on 24/05.

Undoubtedly, the most outstanding Eteron initiatives were the two workshops that were organised at the Eteron's premises: the first one was on 15/05, in collaboration with [femicide.gr](#), the Greek section of the European Observatory on Femicide, and the second took place on 29/05 and focused on Gen Z's relationship

with the media and political participation. In collaboration with the team of [femicide](#), we examined the genealogy of the term femicide, the term's inclusion in legislation and the media's representation of gender violence. In the media workshop, we looked at issues around fake news, the use of social media and whether and how digital media could be part of progressive social change.

Both workshops had a dual character, related to educational as well as research purposes. Following an open call on social media, there was a significant response from Gen Z members who were willing to discuss the topics in question. Each workshop contained 3 subtopics and at the beginning of each one, basic information on its focal point was presented, combining elements of research with definitions and concepts relevant to the respective field. Then, material, mainly videos and photos, from news reports and social media posts were presented. The videos were selected on the basis of their content (touching "grey" areas between politics/society/personal life or, for instance, containing hard-to-verify fake news) but also their aesthetics and presentation - i.e. following the codes and symbols used by the young generation through social media. Participants were invited to comment on the material and then discuss their own experiences, both with each other and with the organisers.

Having participated in all of the events presenting the findings, in my capacity as a member of the research working group, and also through my involvement in designing the workshops, this paper is an attempt to summarise the main elements and conclusions of this process, focusing on the research's two central themes: Gen Z and politics and Gen Z's relationship with the media.

# A

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# Gen Z and Politics

## **A. Gen Z and Politics**

**«The only constant in our case is that there's no constant at all - we live in the present»**

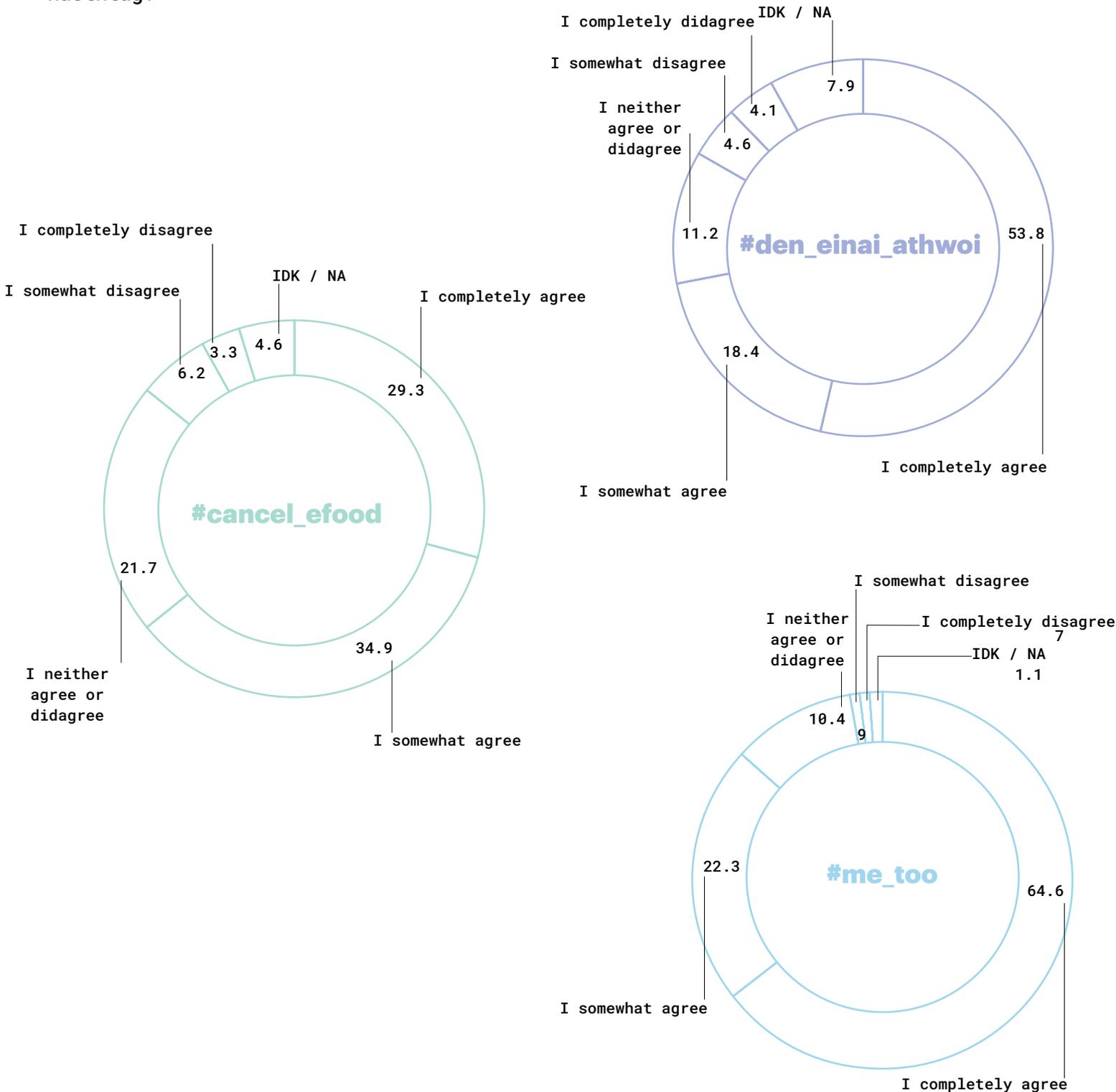
**Workshop  
Gen Z & Media  
29.05.2022**

One of the main findings of the working group’s report regarding Eteron’s research [Gen Z - Voice On](#), is that it would be false to think of the new generation as “apolitical” or as being generally disinterested. This assessment is based, among other things, on the fact that the majority (55%) of young people who participated

in the survey said they are a lot or very much interested in current affairs. At the same time, equally high are the rates of those who are interested (and concerned) in the issue of climate change (59.7% somewhat/a lot), the #MeToo movement (86.9% somewhat/ completely agree), the condemnation of Golden Dawn (72.2%

Do you agree or disagree with this hasthtag?

aboutpeople



believes that #they\_are\_not\_innocent) but also more “traditional” issues of social inequality, such as the e-food workers’ mobilisations (64.2% somewhat/ completely agree with #cancel\_efood).

On the other hand, there is a clear contradiction between a generally declared interest in politics and the limited (avowedly political) activity on social media (SoMe) - about 8 out of 10 say that they don’t follow politicians, don’t share political posts nor do they create their own political content. Our comparative examination of these findings raised legitimate concerns and interest for further research focusing on the question of “what Gen Z

sees as politics”.

What is important first of all is to think about the environment in which Gen Z develops political stances and practices and how it perceives it. We have already referred to this generation as the “generation of constant crises”. Indeed, Gen Z grew up in a context of rupture with everything that was considered “normal” in the post-war context of Western societies, namely the ability of each generation to provide the next with better living conditions, greater stability and security in setting a life plan - in contrast, for Gen Z “the only constant is that there is no constant at all”.

**"We know what we oppose, but not what we express"**

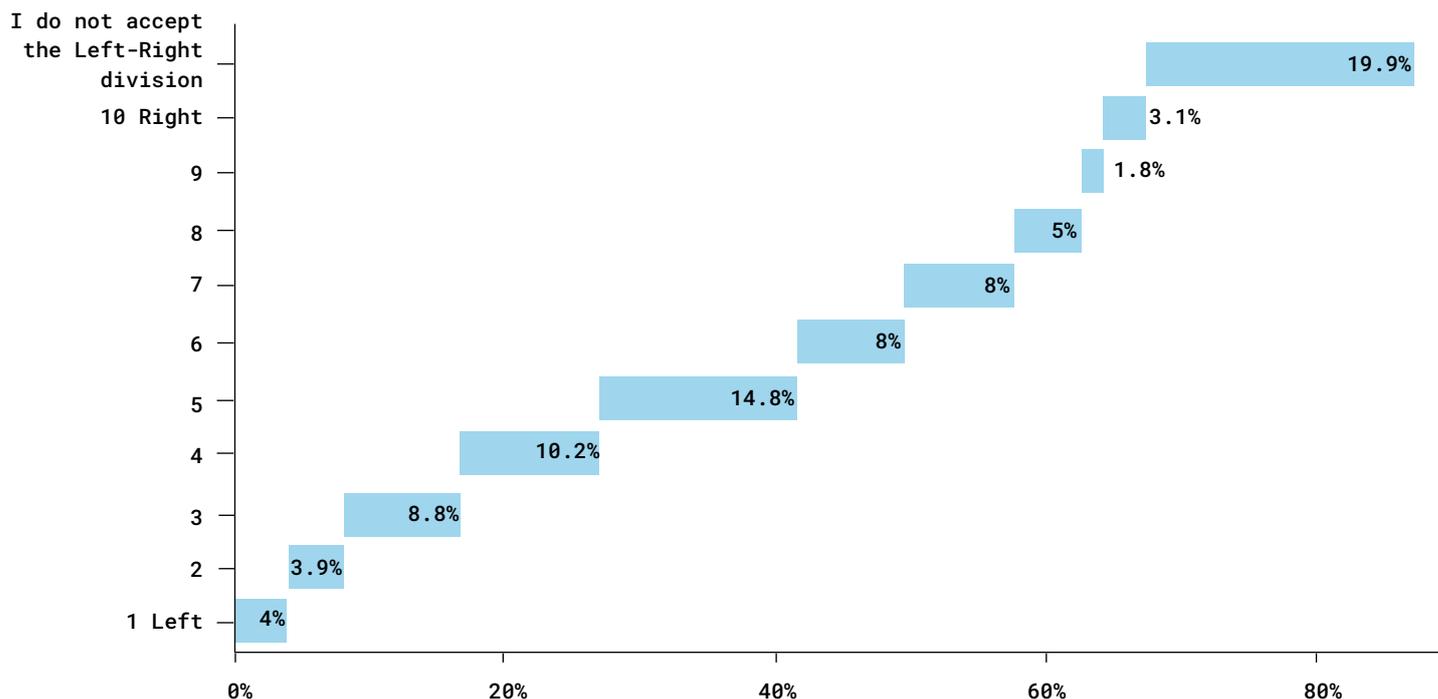
**"OK Zoomer" event  
9.05.2022**

This phrase encapsulates the concerns of this radicalism that wants to express itself while avoiding symbols, terms and political identities of the past that it may feel burdened by.

In the traditional Left-Right division, there seems to be a left-leaning tendency, as the relatively larger percentage (25%) placed themselves “to the left of the centre”, while at the ends of the spectrum, the concentration is also greater on the Left (7.9% vs. 4.9%).

On a scale on 1 (Left) to 10 (Right), where would you place yourself politically?

aboutpeople



This condition defines an emerging radicalism with particular characteristics: it is oriented towards the present, opposes the established order on the basis of experience and emotion, and has an ambivalent attitude towards grand narratives.

At this point, it is also interesting to compare the answers to the relevant questions given by people in the 17-24 age group who participated in [Eteron's first major research on the economy and social justice](#), which was published in February 2022. Notably, 35.7% said that the Left represents something good, compared to 21.6% positive responses about the Right - it should be noted, however, that in both cases, the majority trend was negative. Furthermore, in the same research and age group, 32.4% (compared to 38.2% who hold the opposite view) said that they associate the notion of neoliberalism with something good. This should be combined with the fact that about 1 in 5 (19.9%) refuse to place themselves on a left-right axis. In that sense, in his article in this volume, Antonis Galanopoulos reasonably invites us to reflect on what the relatively high rate of self-placement in the Centre signifies. Keeping all

the above in mind, we'd rather speak of a left-inclined generation or a generation that is familiar with the themes of a left-progressive ideology but does not accept it in its entirety and, in any case, approaches it in an original way.

This is related to their distrust of ideology in general, as reflected in phrases such as the one quoted above (“we don't know what we express”). In a similar line, at the “OK Zoomer” event, the participants seemed to agree on the need for political action “on immediate issues”, without wasting much time discussing “ideology”, as we would put it in a more traditional approach. This can perhaps be interpreted as an influence of postmodernism and the conviction that we are experiencing the “end of grand narratives”. However, this is one side of the coin. Donatella della Porta, commenting on the findings from her own research, spoke in her interview of a generation that does not have the time/ability “to sit for two hours in a room to talk about, let's say, generic issues” - therefore this, combined with new technical possibilities, leads to a preference for directness and rapidity.

But if we observe the “Ok Zoomer” event more closely, it is significant that as the discussion went on, ideology tended to return to the conversation, even though in disguise. Commenting, for example, on specific activisms concerning the environment and gender oppression, one participant stated his need for “something that would bring them together”; the rest agreed without naming that “something” as being ideology. In fact, one of the participants pointed out that terms already exist for what they were looking for, and then used three “anti-ism”: “anti-sexism, anti-racism, anti-capitalism”.

This tendency is probably best described as “rationalised anti-systemism” which, as Yannis Balabanidis [comments](#), builds on the radicalism of the previous generation, the millennials, while at the same time modifying it. In this sense, the discussion regarding Generation Left (a term introduced into the international debate by Keir Milburn) should be seen more as a possibility than as a reality describing Gen Z. In an [interview](#) for Eteron, Keir Milburn states that this radicalism is fuelled by inequality and the generation gap, but also stresses the fact that Generation Left is a goal (for the Left itself) rather than an entrenched reality.

Moreover, this “rationalised anti-systemism” seems to be both fuelled and fed into cultural trends, such as the new generation's renewed preference for hip hop, which brings along a new wave of politicisation and socially oriented perspectives. An indicative example was Lex's gig earlier this summer that “forced” all mainstream media outlets to discuss it, as well as the massive presence of the younger generation at the Nea Smyrni stadium. Predictably, in their attempt to discuss the “Lex phenomenon”, the media's stance had a ring of that uncle pretty much everyone has, who wants to “hang with the young ones” at family reunions, and offered the public several front covers and news story coverages that served more as memorials to moral panic. We'll try not to imitate them and just hazard a guess. The lyrics of this “socially sensitive” hip hop bring to the fore social inequalities, marginalised groups and even individual aspirations, but always in the light of the struggle for survival. Gen Z's radicalism that has no clear ideological identity is understandably expressed through new musical currents, which engage in collective causes without being militant in the traditional sense.

Attempting to detect the particular traits

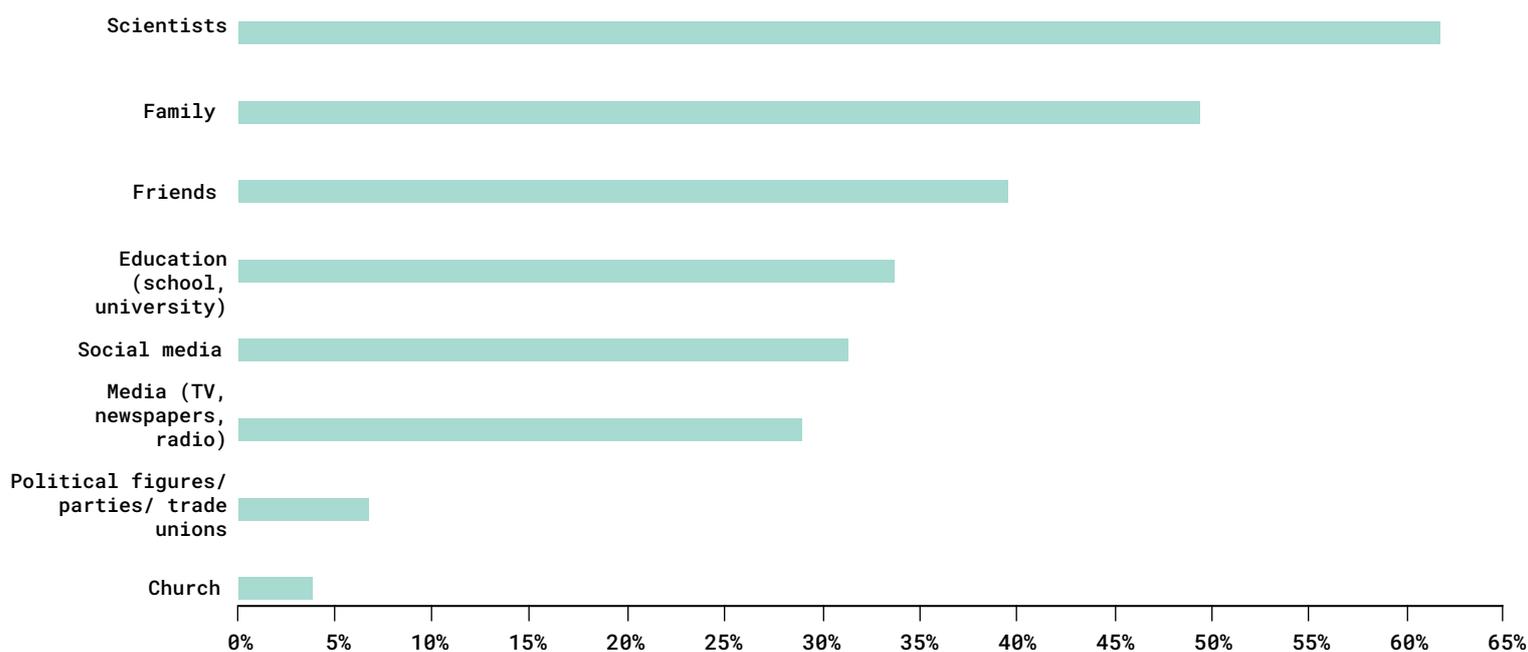
## "How is the MeToo movement relevant with politics?"

During an Eteron event held at the [Department of Communication and Digital Media in Kastoria](#), the above question-objection was raised regarding Gen Z's new forms of political practices and in particular in relation to the #MeToo movement. Several female students agreed with this comment and (risking a misjudgement) it could be argued that they did not do so because they wanted to underestimate the importance of the movement but, on the contrary, because they considered the

relevant complaints/ lawsuits, testimonials, and the movement to be particularly important and therefore, did not want to let them be “contaminated” by a correlation with mainstream political perceptions. Of course, this tendency to discredit politics has already been documented in the research findings where a very low percentage say they trust politicians and political parties (only 6.8 mentioned them among those they trust the most).

Pick the top 3 of the option below that you mostly trust regarding current events

aboutpeople



of Gen Z's political consciousness, it is important to examine how members of the new generation themselves view contemporary issues and social movements and whether and how they perceive them as fields of politicisation. Already from the examination of the research results, concerns had been raised concerning the finding that more than 3/4 of respondents stated that they do not share or create “political posts”. At the same time, however, as already mentioned, they are concerned about gender and climate inequality and agree with relevant hashtags shared online. In addition, 25% stated that they have participated in protests and rallies in the past year - a particularly high percentage for such a question especially considering the pandemic factor. After all, isn't that politics?

The distinction between social and political issues highlights yet another contradiction in how we discuss and research the young generation. Researchers often start from the position that in turning to movements and political concerns about gender, sexuality, cultural preferences<sup>1</sup>, climate change and humanity's relationship with the natural environment, Gen

Zers are acting politically, thus modifying the relationship between political and personal, private sphere and public life. In her interview for Eteron where she summarises her research on millennial and Gen Z movements, della Porta describes a condition where the activism of the new generation “pays much more attention to the politicisation of the private sphere of life”.

This fuels the rise of the feminist movement which, as mentioned above, has a significant impact on Gen Z - this aspect was also highlighted in the femicide workshop where the participants' significant familiarity with the slogans and terminology of the feminist movement was evident. However, such an approach tends to be only partial and, influenced by the legacy of the new social movements, takes for granted that a feminist mobilisation is a political practice. Indeed it is - but it is not a given that this is how it is experienced by Gen Z. In practice, a more contradictory and complex condition emerges which, obviously, requires further investigation.

A case can be made here that could help

us when considering this issue. Post-war societies had strictly established boundaries (public-private life, work-recreation, and so on) which made it easier to keep gendered (and other) oppression invisible. The new social movements of previous decades sought to render visible issues that were typically private (for example, gender inequality in domestic labour). This was a struggle to make private life an object of study and political contestation. However, these boundaries no longer exist or, rather, they are not as strictly or intensely set.

More so, for the new-media-savvy Gen Z, the relativisation of the boundaries between private and public life is technologically facilitated and, more importantly, culturally acceptable in many cases. Social media “train” users to develop a “transparent” self that shapes private time and space in a way that can be made public<sup>2</sup>. This difference is probably one of the reasons why publicising allegations of gender-based violence is not perceived as a political practice.

In any case, this distinction should not be seen as an unshakeable truth. Through discussions and workshops on the subject, it became clear that this is a contradictory and constantly changing position - just like the generation that expresses it. For example, while discussing the topic of online political participation, some social media posts (mainly from Instagram and TikTok) were presented in the workshop and participants were asked whether they fall into what they themselves consider “politics” to be. This initiated a discussion about what politics is for Gen Zers, how it is conducted online and, most importantly, how they view it. A [video](#) of a feminist protest against femicides or a [complaint of a sex worker](#) who was attacked was thus classified by the participants as “social issues”. However, when asked to comment on publications that related gender inequality to immediate demands (e.g. [legal recognition of same-sex marriage](#)), they were more easily classified as “political”. Coming back

to the issues of the #MeToo movement or femicides (linked to the claim for legal recognition of femicide), with the above as a starting point, participants seemed more willing to acknowledge that these movements were “political”.

A particularly important aspect of the relationship between Gen Z and politics was highlighted by Assistant Professor, Eftychia Teperoglou, at Eteron's event at the School of Political Sciences of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki on 24/2/2022. Prof. Teperoglou pointed out that each generation has particular characteristics of political participation, but can only be defined as a “political generation” to the extent that it manifests these characteristics in large-scale political events that change the terms of dialogue and political action. For Gen Z, this challenge is open; to the extent that the new generation acknowledges its actions (online and offline) as being “political”, its confidence and ability to leave its own mark on developments is reinforced.

A more specific aspect of the development of political consciousness is the stance towards issues concerning labour. Admittedly, the research and the subsequent events and workshops did not focus on the issues of Gen Z's work-related experiences. However, in light of the research findings regarding the #cancel\_food hashtag, the participants showed interest in the issue and revealed some new areas for investigation.

When, during the workshop, they discussed a humorous video about the minimum wage and their preference for trap music, they unanimously considered the video to be political. This was somewhat unexpected because, up to that point, they had considered various videos and media posts that, in our opinion, had a clear political character, to be strictly “social”. When asked to interpret their stance, there was an initial awkwardness. One of the participants mentioned that “the government is the one that sets the minimum wage”, thus explaining

why she thought that the video's topic was political. In any case, they seemed to identify with the video, as minimum wage was either a reality they've experienced at their jobs or something they thought they'd experience in the future.

According to the research findings, a high percentage (64.2%) somewhat or strongly agreed with the hashtag #cancel\_efood and as mentioned in the original report, “with youth unemployment at 39.1% in November 2021, the workers' strike demanding fixed contracts seems to have received significant support”. Sociologist of labour and labour movements Ruth Milkman, points out in her interview that Gen Z “shares” with the previous generation, the millennials, “a labour market in which precarious employment is increasingly the norm – made worse by the timing of their entry into the labour market during a major economic crisis.” At the same time the research was published, a strong current of unionisation emerged in the US in industries as well as in corporations (such as Amazon and Starbucks) where a significant proportion of the employees belong to Gen Z. There is already a discussion in the American public sphere about the relationship between the new generation and trade unionism as well as about their increased interest in collective organisation in the workplace<sup>3</sup>. Even the very recent discussion concerning the “Great Resignation” has at its epicentre the young generation that refuses to work under appalling con-

ditions, with low wages in the midst of a pandemic<sup>4</sup>. It is an open question whether Gen Z could be linked to a rebirth, in contemporary terms and expressions, of workers' identity and demands.

However, the above should not lead to an underestimation of the impact that neoliberal ideology has on the new generation. In Eteron's research on the economy and social justice, when asked which social group mainly produces wealth (business owners or workers), Gen Z registered the highest percentage among all age groups (46%) in answering that business owners are the ones who mainly produce wealth. This generation is currently in the process of shaping consciousness and gaining their first work experiences and it is very likely that contradictory feelings of solidarity and collegiality coexist with the pursuit of individual advancement in positions of power/ownership.

In any case, the above could be the subject of a separate study. As Gen Z will move from schools and colleges into the workplace in an environment of precariousness and economic hardship, further research needs to be conducted on their attitudes towards work.

# Gen Z & Politics

**B**

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# **An online generation rethinking the internet**

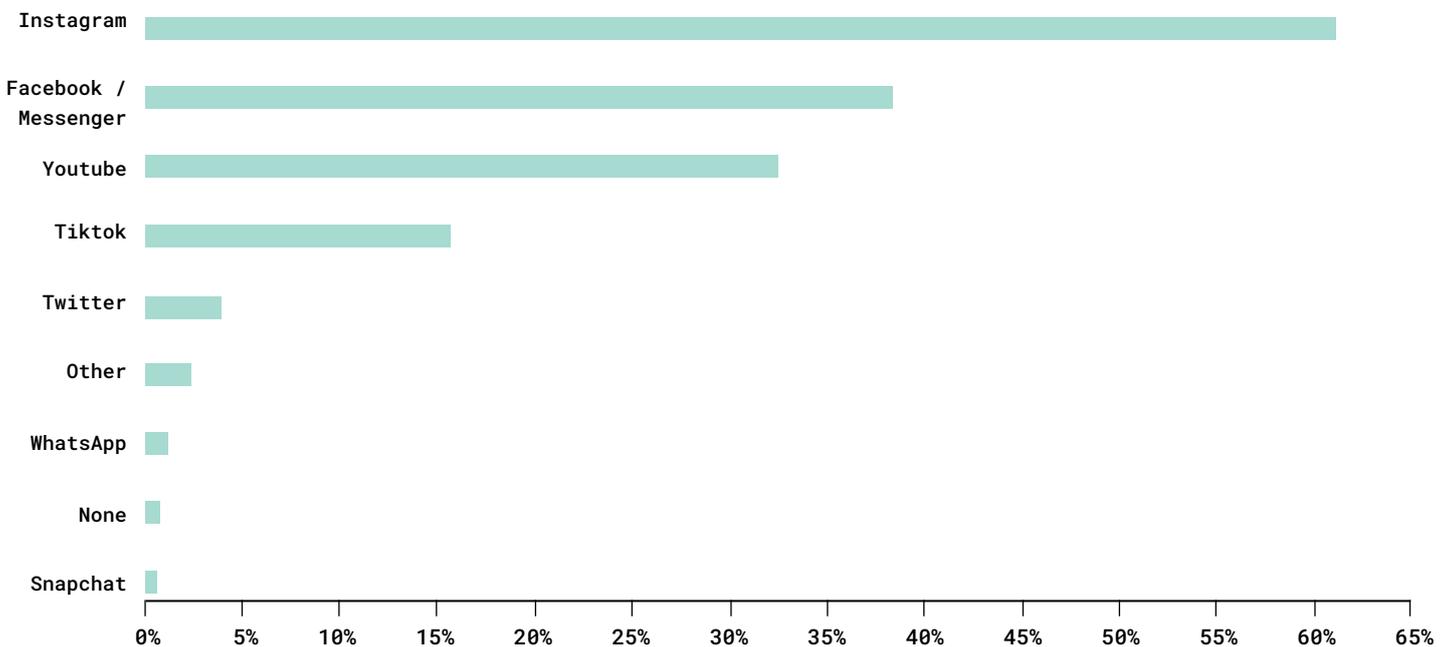
## B. An online generation rethinking the internet

One of the key assumptions about Gen Z that was disproved by the research findings was that it was solely associated with the use of the internet and especially social media. At the same time,

we realised that this issue needs to be studied further, as Gen Z has indeed (also) been shaped by its special connection to new media, being the first generation to be indigenous to the internet and - more

Which social media platform do you use the most?  
(Pick up to 2 options)

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importantly - to social media and what is called Web 2.0.

At events and workshops organised after the results were published, Gen Z members showed particular interest in the part of the results that documented their communication practices, their preferred social media, etc. Some of the research findings were confirmed and developed through relevant discussions: several hours online every day, high diffusion of social media, a strong preference for image-based media with Instagram being the most dominant. The workshop discussion on Gen Z and media suggests that the survey findings (51.6% spend 5-10 hours a day online and 10.6% spend more than 10 hours) are likely an underestimation of the amount of time the new gen-

eration spends online. One participant asked the question “what does it mean to be offline?”, pointing out that, as he has his mobile phone constantly connected and never puts it away, the offline-online distinction may not be as clear as one might expect. This was aptly pointed out by Alexandros Papageorgiou in his [article](#) in Eteron, stating that “It would probably be better to think in terms of a continuum of digital-analogue presence, as if digital presence mediates and ‘colours’ all aspects of the young person’s experience”.

Social media is the preferred tool for almost every activity: It is a field in which work obligations, socialising, relaxation and a lot more are mixed. This relativisation of boundaries is experienced as a

contradictory phenomenon: it becomes a source of pleasure but also one of constant stress and it seems that, for some, it is a goal to re-establish some boundaries. Talking to professionals belonging to Gen Z at the media workshop, they described how they try to manage this situation, for example by muting certain conversations or avoiding using certain apps at work. It is interesting to see this attempt to re-separate work from leisure and socialising. However, we must not forget that a key element of social media is precisely this relativisation of boundaries. In that respect, when Instagram or Facebook messenger is a key tool for work (as Zoomers claim), it seems quite difficult to set strict boundaries.

Moreover, there seems to be a certain dismissal of Facebook as a “1st generation” social networking medium, as it is now seen to have been “taken over” by older generations, whom they seek to avoid in the online environment. This is a first point of differentiation with other generations. In the same line, there appears to be a characteristic “pride” in their familiarisation levels with new media and, more importantly, with the particular codes and symbols that distinguish them - this is a cultural rather than a technical issue for them as well. Alexandros Papageorgiou, delving into Gen Z's preference for image-based media, states that their preference for Instagram and TikTok expresses a significantly different practice of “curating the digital self”. In this context, it is no surprise that Gen Z shows a great familiarity with “cinematic grammar” since:

**“Individuals  
are not just directing  
themselves.  
Even more so,  
they render their  
iconoclastic gaze  
visible, making  
explicit the fact that  
they are organising  
the world through  
a new way  
of producing and  
reproducing images.”**

**Alexander Papageorgiou  
(Alexander Platz)**

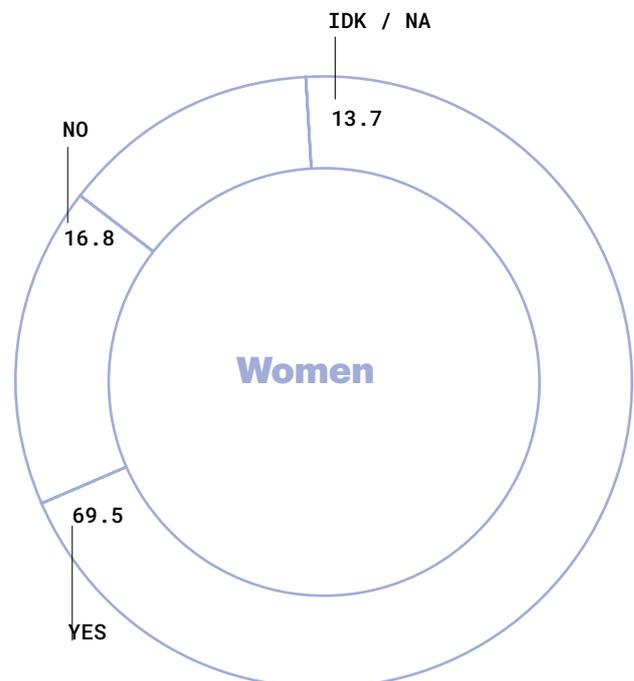
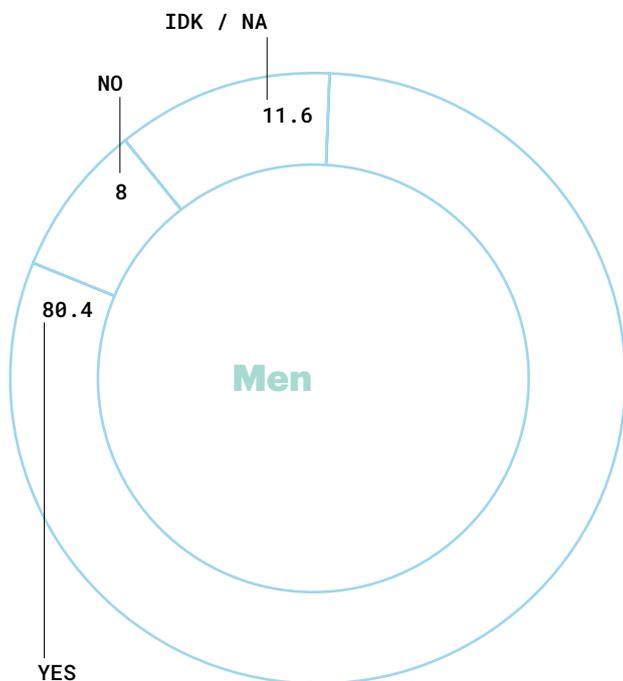
This familiarity, which is both technical as well as cultural, permeates what Zoomers understand as politics. In the media workshop, we showed participants an example of an Instagram post about the minimum wage, which was immediately labelled as “political”, since, as one participant commented, “It contains graphs. Who puts graphs on Instagram?”. According to that mindset, politics is non-cinematic, has an outdated aesthetic and, therefore, can be easily detected. If the new generation has an everyday engagement with the “filmmaker’s/editor’s perspective”, then further research is needed into how they produce politics that differ not only in terms of content but also in terms of form/aesthetic - which, at the end of the day, is also content.

In the same way, the unfamiliarity of

previous generations with the particular cinematic codes of the new social media is an object of mockery and another reason to avoid Facebook. Extending this reasoning, they also seem to interpret the older generations’ vulnerability against fake news by comparing it to their own ability to recognise sensationalist headlines, untrustworthy websites and altered photos. Of course, this logic also carries the risk of an arrogant attitude that fails to understand the various different types of fake news. This differentiation is gender-specific in the research findings, as 80.4% of men versus 69.5% of women believe they are able to identify fake news. However, when cases of news that are in a “grey area”<sup>5</sup> were examined during the workshop, they appeared to grasp both their own limitations as well as the pervasiveness and complexity of the fake news phenomenon. After discussing these ex-

Do you think you can detect fake news or not?

aboutpeople



amples, fake news was seen as a blending of truth and reality that goes beyond each dubious item's simple categorisation as "lies".<sup>6</sup>

In the same context and given the lack of trust towards media, Gen Zers seem to take for granted that it is their responsibility to cross-check the news that they consume. Similarly, during the "Ok Zoomer" event, one speaker talked about the daily responsibility one has as a media user "to think about what they read, cross-check facts and check other websites regarding the same topic". Thus she described a hybrid of user/consumer-journalist; this way of thinking is indicative of both the hybridity of new media and the low level of trust in professional journalists.

This dismissal emerges both as a finding of the research<sup>7</sup> as well as in discussions with Gen Z members at relevant workshops and events. Although this trend is international<sup>8</sup>, the specific-national context is also relevant: Greece's 108th position in the World Press Freedom Index, the contestation of large media corporations and outlets, the National Council for Radio and Television's report for 2020<sup>9</sup> are all elements that have permeated the public discourse and helped shape Gen Z's distrust of the media. Especially the portrayal of Gen Zers during the pandemic using moral panic terminology, essentially blaming them for spreading COVID-19, has certainly had an impact.

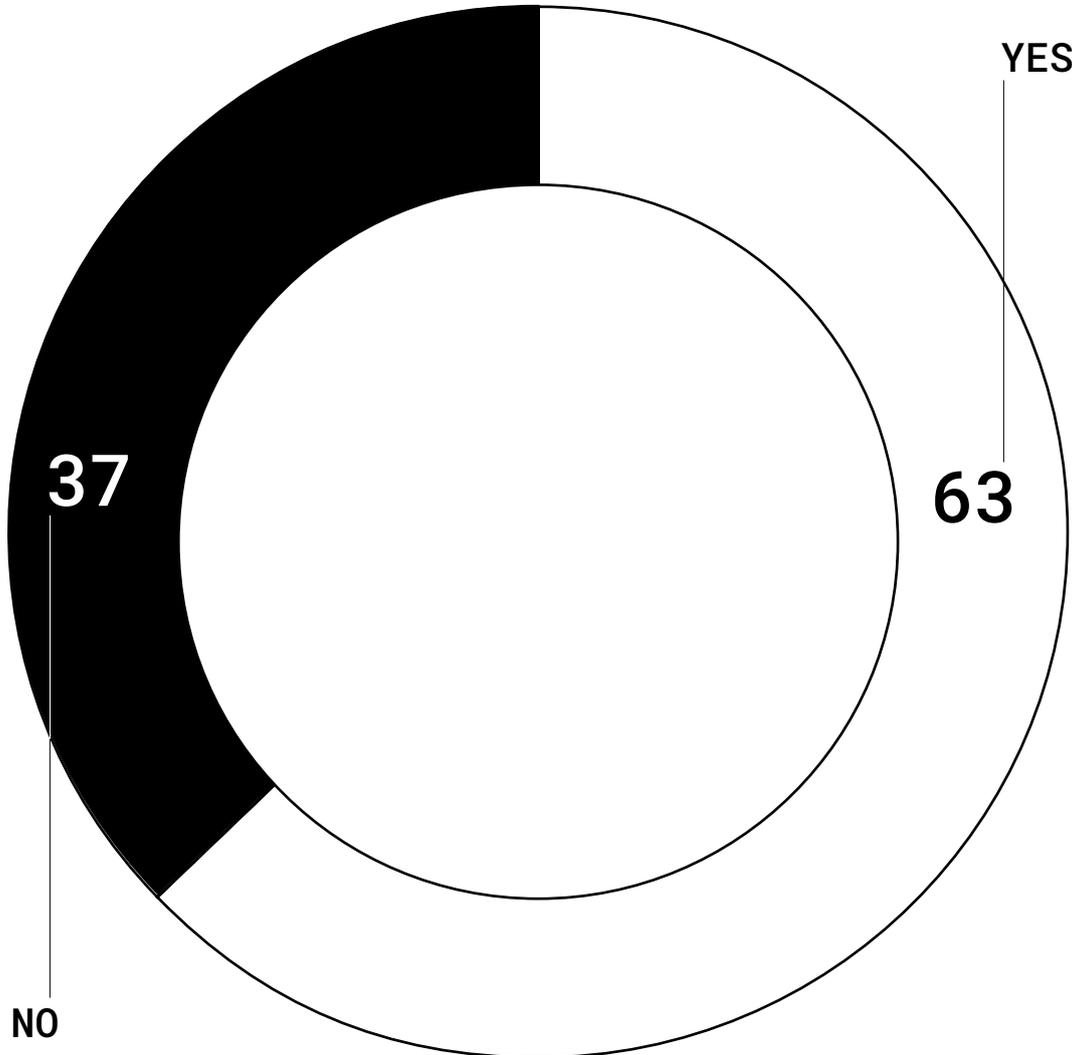
Overall, the most important consideration in relation to communication practices, seems to be a qualitative (and not just quantitative) change in media use. This is not a generation that is merely

using media more, but Zoomers are essentially developing a reflective relationship with them. This is a point worth dwelling on a bit more. The reflective relationship with the media is seen as a characteristic trait of the "information society" and can be summarised in the transition "from observing the world through the media to observing the media themselves"<sup>10</sup>. In this sense, a traditional norm of journalism is gradually being abolished and we begin to consider the media themselves, their choices, the people who work there etc. as news. The first elements of a reflective use of the media by the television audience had already developed in the dominant field of commercial-private TV channels. This was becoming more evident in the reporting (and subsequent debate) on TV ratings, the treatment of journalists-presenters as if they were "stars", who don't just present the movements of public figures, but are themselves part of the "media elite".

This trend is growing and evolving through the practices of Gen Z, which is becoming the predominant generation that reflects on the very media it uses. Obviously, the focus here is not on journalists but on a) new media micro-celebrities (influencers) and b) the media themselves, their technical characteristics and the way they operate. Already the research findings registered Gen Z's great interest in influencers, with 63% stating that they follow influencers on social media. Furthermore, during the workshop it became evident that Zoomers have a clear understanding of the mechanism through which influencers and social media in general turn their audience into a commodity, i.e. they convert clicks and views into advertising revenue.

Do you follow any influencers on social media?  
(In the last few years, the term "influencer" has been used broadly to describe people with strong social media presence and numerous followers in one or more platforms)

aboutpeople

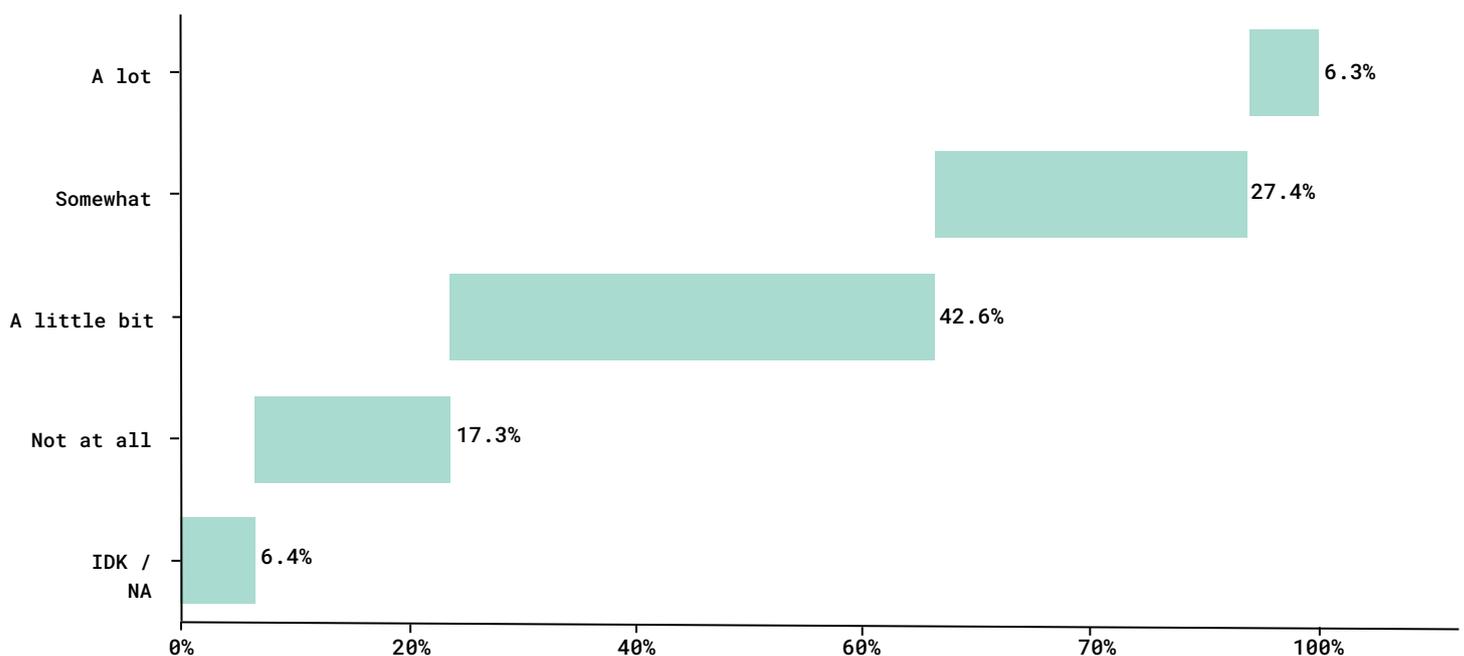


This understanding is related to the algorithm logic used by the new media, which operates in a cycle of self-validation, where, through constant metrics of users' behaviour, they end up seeing more and more posts with which they already agree. This leads to the echo chamber phenomenon, i.e. an advanced fragmentation of the public sphere where users increasingly interact only with people of similar views and interests. This cycle, as far as information is concerned, also acts as a filter bubble that determines which news people will come across and which they will not. These terms, a few years ago, would probably appear in discussions between experts in the field of new media. But members of Gen Z, who have a great understanding of how social media works, technically and economically, show a considerable ease in using these terms.

In this sense, Gen Z uses new media extensively and en masse, but at the same time critically questions its relationship

with them. Through the discussions, a double dynamic emerged for Gen Z: on the one hand, an emerging cynicism and on the other, the need for democratisation/transparency in social media. As one of the speakers at the “Ok Zoomer” event said, “everyone lives in bubbles - we should try to create our own”. Echoing her views, the other speakers described this process as an act of self-care: a conscious effort to distance oneself from views that outrage, offend and belittle oneself or someone in one's social environment. At the same time, this approach suggests an absence of patience to shift one's interlocutors's opinion or to get in touch with ideas and perspectives outside one's familiar online environment. This was most pronounced when members of Gen Z were asked to discuss how they handle disagreements that arise online. As another speaker at the same event put it, “we don't feel like arguing but as we get older, our tolerance decreases.” Others agreed with him and mainly spoke about racist, sexist or

How much would you say you trust suggestions and opinions on political and social matters from influencers that you follow? about people



homophobic views that anger them and that they strongly associate with their older generations and their circle of relatives. However, this phenomenon is not limited to this circle, but it is rather linked to the general belief that in an environment of intense polarisation, individual “fish bowls” are firmly established and not open to challenges.

On the other hand, the above expresses a positive aspect regarding the potential of Gen Z. Reflection on the algorithm practice and the commercial use of data can potentially be linked to issues that have been raised in the public discourse and are related to oligopolistic media practices, the lack of transparency regarding algorithms and the dangerous use of the huge amounts of data that are collected every day. Moreover, a critical attitude towards the use of media emerges, something that was also recorded in the research findings, where 59.9% say they have little to no trust in influencers regarding social and political issues, and was also evident in the media workshop, where, regardless of whether they define

what they do as “politics”, Gen Z members highlighted how they are using new media to create more inclusive communities.

Gen Z's capabilities also call for a rethinking of the concept of media/digital literacy. This is often understood as a sum of technical and cognitive skills related to the use of media and the processing and production of content in them. However, this definition of literacy as well as the corresponding government programmes that promote it, are incompatible with Gen Z. The new generation is certainly not lacking in technical knowledge on the use of digital media, nor should it be perceived as a “victim” of information overload. More importantly, Gen Z can potentially be a generation that not only reflects on new media but also acts to transform them by rendering algorithms more transparent and pushing for a democratisation of the public sphere. In this sense, any attempt to literate the new generation must be critical and, consciously, political.

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# D

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# Conclusions

## D. Conclusions

It is obviously difficult to draw definite conclusions about a generation that is still in the process of forming itself, and some of the people belonging to it have not even come of age yet. What is for sure is that, in the coming years, there will be an increased research interest in Gen Z. Eteron's research findings as well as the reports and commentaries on them that followed, constitute a valuable foundation that can serve as raw material, which will hopefully influence similar future endeavours.

In relation to the two subject areas examined here (politics and media), there are a few points that stand out. First, it seems that Gen Z's relationship with new media is highly complex, contradictory and multilayered. It cannot be defined by quantitative criteria alone, but rather requires new and original research tools in order to be properly understood. This is a generation that is immersed in the logic and code of digital media, but at the same time distrusts them. This leads to an ambivalent relationship in which the media become, often at the same time, a source of stress and pleasure, an outlet for creativity, but also a field of polarisation and tension. With regard to political com-

munication in particular, Gen Z seems to distance itself from what it sees as "politics", often identifying it with political parties and established institutions. Still, this has not led to a simplistic identification of politics with political communication, since Zoomers often seek online and offline modes of individual and collective expression - even if they do not consider them to be "political action". This is another indication that the younger generation should not be identified with the use of social media and the political spectacle through them.

Overall, Gen Z is looking for new words for institutions that already exist but do not satisfy it in the way that they are currently functioning - or in some cases young people may even be completely indifferent towards them. During the events and workshops organised lately, they seemed to be looking for new terms to talk about politics, ideology and journalism with a creative awkwardness. Of course, this is not some kind of obsession with "anything new" or neologisms, but rather a need to address in a contemporary manner their needs and concerns, which the world that they have inherited cannot satisfy.

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# Ref.

1. The issue of political correctness in pop culture is particularly important for the new generation, and could be the focus of a future research/ project.
2. The concept of the “transparent self” is a critical perspective on the permeation of new media culture into everyday life and the essential elimination of any unseen aspects of privacy and subjectivity. This elimination, according to Han, is at the same time desirable by the subject and a constant source of anxiety, see Han Byung-Chul, *The Transparency Society*. Stanford UP, 2015.
3. See Ramishah Maruf, [Here’s why Gen Z is unionizing](#), CNN Business και Elizabeth Garone, [How Gen Z Baristas Are Spreading the Starbucks Unionization Effort](#), Time.
4. See Madison Hoff, [How Gen Z is winning the Great Resignation, from pay increases to better work-life balance](#), Insider.
5. Among others, participants were shown the doctored video from Alexis Grigoropoulos’ assassination as well as more recent news articles that falsely presented one of Eteron’s recent researches as being a poll. Ενδεικτικά: <https://www.news247.gr/politiki/diapseydei-o-sakellaridis-den-ypirche-erotisi-gia-prothesi-psifoy-stin-ereyna-toy-eteron.9538317.html>
6. In that sense, it’s better to use the term “tampered” rather than “fake” news.
7. Even though they were instructed that they could choose up to 3 options, only 29% of the participants mentioned the media as the body/ institution that they trust the most.
8. In a relevant research in the UK, 85% of young people between 17-30 years old state they are distrustful towards traditional media. Banaji, S. & Cammaerts, B. (2015) *Citizens of Nowhere Land, Youth and News Consumption in Europe*. *Journalism Studies*, 16:1, 115-132
9. The report is available [here](#) (in Greek). According to the survey, the governing political party occupied the (disproportionately) high share of 61.7% of the total air time allocated for political parties’ presentation.
10. Pleios, G. (2011), *The Society of Pleasant Information. Modernity and the News 2011* - Athens: Kastaniotis (in Greek) p. 196-197 & 211-214.

# **Interviews**

**Ruth Milkman**

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**Keir Milburn**

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**Donatella  
della Porta**

**The interviews  
were conducted by  
Costas Gousis and Corina Petridi**

[go to  
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## Interview

# RUTH MILKMAN



**Both Millennials  
and Gen Zers  
face deep  
uncertainty  
about the future**

In 2016, Ruth Milkman took over the presidency of the American Sociological Association. Back then, the distinguished American sociologist specializing in labor issues, dedicated her entire presentation to the generation of Millennials.

A year later, her presidential address was published in the academic journal *American Sociological Review*, titled “[A New Political Generation: Millennials and the Post-2008 Wave of Protest](#)”.

In her paper, Milkman argues that the US Millennials “comprise a new political generation with lived experiences and worldviews that set them apart from their elders”. She also notes that this is a generation that fights against class, gender and racial inequalities.

Almost 6 years after her initial speech, we asked her to describe the role that Gen Z – and the young generation in general – has played in the major social events and movements of recent years in the United States.

In her interview at Eteron, Milkman refers to the new generation’s involvement in the Black Lives Matter movement, the ways it has contributed to the reorganization of labor unions, and the narrative techniques it uses to spread its message.

**What is the impact of the millennial cycle of protest on the following generation, Generation Z? What would you identify as the most important continuities or discontinuities between Millennial and Gen Z activism, as related to modes of organization and strategic repertoires?**

I have not done any primary research on Generation Z, but the evidence I am familiar with (at least in the U.S.) suggests that they are strikingly similar to Millennials in their worldviews and political attitudes, as this report from the [Pew Research Center](#) documents. Like Millennials, Gen Zers express more progressive views than their elders on issues ranging from race to climate change, from the rights of sexual minorities to organized labor. Both age groups are more racially diverse and more highly educated than any previous generation, and the college-educated among them tend to be the most politically progressive. For both, expectations and aspirations have been frustrated at key junctures – for Millennials by the Great Recession, and for Gen Zers by the economic crisis tied to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both Millennials and Gen Zers also face deep uncertainty about the future – not least in regard to climate change. The movement of climate activists is among those disproportionately populated and led by Gen Zers and Millennials.

*The interview was originally published in English at [Eteron's website](#) in March 2022*

**The framework of intersectionality is used in your work in order to highlight the interconnections between different struggles against racism, sexism, and widening class inequality. How does the framework of intersectionality influence youth political participation and vice versa?**

Millennials and Gen Zers are instinctively intersectional. They themselves are more diverse demographically in terms of race and ethnicity than any previous U.S. generations. They overwhelmingly accept same-sex marriage, transsexuals and other sexual minorities. Many actively oppose racism and support movements like #MeToo and immigrant rights. And as I already noted above they are both aware of and critical growing class inequality. They see these issues not as competing but instead as interconnected parts of the neoliberal order.

It's also worth noting that self-identified queer and trans activists are overrepresented among Gen Z and Millennial political activists. I'm not sure why this is the case, but it amplifies the intersectional aspect of all the movements they are engaged in.

**The Black Lives Matter movement became an international reference point in 2020. Based on your previous analysis of BLM during the 2010s, how would you comment on the recent developments and more particularly the role of Gen Z and the uses of social media in the BLM movement?**

The first wave of Black Lives Matter was led by black Millennials, disproportionately female and often queer-identified, as I documented in the [article](#) you mentioned. More recently, we have seen Gen Zers of all races and ethnicities protesting against racism in even greater numbers. [Authoritative accounts](#) of the massive 2020 street protests over the murder of George Floyd suggest that more than half of the U.S. protesters were under age 30. The

leaders were also disproportionately young, and their organizing was largely done on Instagram and other social media. Another difference was that while the initial wave of BLM protests was dominated by Blacks, in 2020 the protests attracted massive numbers – indeed often a majority – of [white participants, most of them young and highly educated](#).

The social media piece is increasingly complex. In the first wave of Millennial political activity – for example Occupy and the first wave of BLM, young people were far more adept at using these tools for organizing than older people – and crucially, than the police and other state agencies. Now many of these groups have caught up. Social media is still deployed by young activists, but it's also used by older right-wing activists, the police, and all sorts of other people.

**According to a recent Gallup poll, U.S. Gen Zers appear to be overwhelmingly in favor of organized labor. Further, there are examples of “Gen Z workers’ victories”, like the Starbucks union vote in New York in December 2021. Is this actually massive as a tendency in the US?**

Yes, interest and involvement in the labor movement has been growing rapidly among young Americans. When I was researching Millennial social movements, labor had not yet emerged as a major field of activity for them as a generation, but that has changed now. Building on the awareness and concern about skyrocketing inequality first expressed in the Occupy Wall Street movement, as well as Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaigns and the spectacular growth of the Democratic Socialists of America, recognition of the potential of labor unions to empower workers and combat inequality has exploded among Millennials and Gen Zers, especially the college-educated.

The occupations where unionizing efforts are most notable include journalists (in both print and digital media), college adjuncts and teaching assistants, political staffers, museum workers, nonprofit staffers, and other fields that recruit highly educated workers but offer meager salaries incommensurate with their skill levels. The 2018 wave of teachers’ strikes was led by Millennials, many of them veterans of the 2016 Sanders campaign, and it is no accident that the initial organizing took place on Facebook. The Starbucks case is different because higher education is not required to perform the job of a barista, but the leaders of the successful 2021 union campaign in Buffalo, New York were in fact college-educated, progressive young activists. Their success has inspired similar union drives at other Starbucks stores around the U.S., underway at this writing.

These efforts are definitely having an impact, but I would not call it “massive.” The number of new union members resulting from these efforts is modest, far too small to impact the nation’s low unionization level. Only 6 percent of private-sector workers, and 11 percent of all workers in the U.S., are unionized today – the lowest level in a century. Public approval of labor unions is higher than it has been in many decades – especially but not only among young Americans. And President Joe Biden is more sympathetic to organized labor than any U.S. president since World War II. But translating all that into a true upsurge of unionism is a challenging project.

The labor relations law in the U.S. is extremely biased in favor of employers. Corporations routinely take both legal and illegal actions to squash unionization efforts, often successfully. For example, just [Starbucks recently fired](#) a group of seven workers in Memphis, Tennessee who were actively trying to unionize. It is illegal to fire workers for union activities, but it is a common practice. (Typically, as in this case, management claims that the firings were for other reasons.) And there are many perfectly legal means of combating unionization efforts as well. The employer intimidation tactics that are often highly effective in workplaces where unions are organizing may be less potent where workers are both highly educated and politically committed, like the young journalists, college teachers, and other professionals I mentioned earlier.

There is a proposed labor law reform measure currently under consideration in Congress, the [PRO Act](#), but it has no prospect of passage in the foreseeable future. That does not preclude continuing union organizing by young workers, but it definitely makes it harder to imagine a broader labor upsurge. And we know from history that union growth comes in spurts, not incrementally. It’s too early to say whether such a spurt is possible in the coming years, but I’m skeptical.

**In your analysis of the youth-led movements during the 2010s, you emphatically note the importance of Karl Mannheim’s theory of generations. In what ways can a return to Mannheim be useful for a contemporary understanding of the generational aspect and the making of political generations?**

In contrast to many recent commentators who differentiate between Millennials (also known as Gen Y), “Gen Z,” and “Gen X” mainly on the basis of demographic characteristics (and sometimes consumer tastes), Mannheim defines generations on the basis of their distinctive lived experiences and the worldviews that those experiences generate. For Mannheim a generation is not a biological phenomenon defined by age but a sociological one defined by the dramas of history. What matters is not the year in which people happen to be born, but rather their historically specific, shared experiences, especially during the formative life stages of adolescence and early adulthood. Those shared experiences decisively shape worldviews that set one generation apart from others. Although Mannheim developed this theory in the 1920s, the most familiar example of what he had in mind, at least in the U.S., is the “Depression generation” – which came of age during the economic and political upheaval of the 1930s, a crisis that shaped their worldviews not only during the Depression itself but also throughout their adult lives.

From a Mannheimian perspective, one might argue that Millennials and Gen Zers constitute a single generation, since they were shaped by so many of the same historical experiences. Both groups grew up expecting that inequalities along racial and gender lines had been largely eradicated, and then learned about widespread police brutality and sexual assault. Both are “digital natives” who are far more adept with social

media than previous generations. And both faced a labor market in which precarious employment is increasingly the norm – made worse by the timing of their entry into the labor market during a major economic crisis. Indeed, some mainstream commentators like William Frey, a Brookings demographer, treat the recent [activism of Gen Z and Millennials](#) as a single phenomenon (although with no reference to Mannheim).

**As you argue in your work, storytelling, i.e. the art of telling stories, appears to be an increasingly important strategy for several youth-led contemporary social movements. What is your opinion on the development of this skill within social movements?**

This was an especially important strategy among the “Dreamers” – young immigrants who came to the U.S. as children and lacked legal status. They were initially mentored by an older generation of immigrant rights activists who helped them craft stories that would inspire sympathy from a wider public. At a later stage, however, the Dreamers became critical of that approach, because it appeared to demonize their parents even as it presented them as model citizens. They chose to adopt a more complex narrative that recognized as valid the reasons their parents had entered the U.S. without authorization, and that embraced the range of experiences of immigrant children, not only the most exemplary.

In recent years, storytelling has become a feature of many social movements – not only among those led by Gen Zers or Millennials. By crafting compelling narratives, social movement leaders hope to win support from broader constituencies than those they represent directly, in order to advance their goals. Social media, which can communicate those narratives or stories, are often instrumental in those efforts.

**“From a Mannheimian perspective, one might argue that Millennials and Gen Zers constitute a single generation, since they were shaped by so many of the same historical experiences”.**

**Ruth Milkman**

# Interview

## KEIR MILBURN



**Responses  
to the pandemic  
are shaping  
a new political  
generation**

On October 15, 2011, protesters took to the streets of 951 cities in 82 countries, from the United States and Latin America to Europe and Asia. This was the tipping point, after many months marked by mobilizations and riots around the world. A common denominator of all was the dissatisfaction over the economic policies that emerged after the global financial crisis of 2008. At the same time and in such a socio-economic environment, Millennials took their first steps into adulthood while Generation Z was entering adolescence.

According to Keir Milburn, professor of political economy<sup>1</sup> and author of the book “Generation Left”,<sup>2</sup> these events were decisive for the political, ideological, and demographic formation of the new generation.

In our interview with Keir Milburn for Eteron, we had the opportunity to discuss some of the ideas he has put forward in the international debate on generations. In addition, we elaborated on recent tendencies and developments during the pandemic.

Since 2019, when his book was published, until today, Milburn has been a frequent guest on podcasts, has participated in many events of institutes and research projects on the new generations,<sup>3</sup> and has written extensively in newspapers and alternative media, such as Novara Media,<sup>4</sup> in which he is the co-presenter of the show #ACFM.<sup>5</sup> Milburn’s key position is that [age has now become the most reliable predictor of somebody’s political opinions and voting intentions](#).

It turns out, thus, that young people today are much more likely to have leftist views and to vote for left-wing parties, as opposed to the conservative views and corresponding electoral behavior of the older generations. Although there is often a sense that this is a timeless phenomenon, he argues that the situation has not always been this way.<sup>6</sup> In his interview, Milburn demonstrates that a

crucial factor in analyzing this phenomenon is the economic gap between the younger and the older generations, which was exacerbated since the 2008 global financial crisis.

Focusing on countries such as the US and the UK, he explains that young workers who are largely cut off from home ownership, dependent on the level of wages and exposed to increased costs of living, have been facing a different material reality than the one of elderly property owners.

These different realities and experiences thus created a “divergence in images of the future” as Milburn describes. “In my book I argue that this combined but uneven collapse of neoliberal aspiration has led to a crisis in the way young people make sense of the world. As a result, the nascent generation of 2008 is large and disgruntled, but it is also politically ambiguous” Milburn says.

According to him, this is the basis of the electoral turn that took place in the second half of 2010, with the youth supporting political projects such as that of Sanders and Corbyn in the US and the UK, respectively.

By the time Milburn’s book “Generation Left” was completed, the Covid-19 pandemic had not yet appeared. For this reason, we asked him to share with us some of his thoughts on the impact of the new situation on the political formation of the Millennials and Generation Z. In other words, if the financial crisis of 2008 set the conditions for the emergence of Generation Left, could the pandemic and its economic effects produce a new political generation?

Milburn argues that the Covid pandemic is one of those events that can produce significant political effects. As the large differences in resources, prospects and material interests remain, he estimates that it seems quite likely that these effects will take on generational dimensions. At present, the situation seems to be contradictory. On the one hand, there have been significant signs of solidarity between young people and

the older generations. On the other hand, the impact of what is happening today is likely to widen the generation gap in the future:

**“While the old are more at risk of suffering serious consequences and even death from Covid infections it is the young who have borne the heaviest costs of social distancing both in terms of income and reduced social lives. While, overall, this burden seems to have been willingly borne the longer-term economic and so political effects of the pandemic are more uncertain”,** he explains.

At the same time, Milburn believes that what is happening during the last couple of years will leave a deeper imprint on the new generation and will play a key role in formulating its future political demands and its conception of freedom:

“One political dimension the pandemic has brought to the fore is a growing division around different senses of what freedom consists of. It’s something that is likely to persist as both the pandemic and the climate crisis are immediately planetary in scale and reveal our intimate interdependence with other human and non-human actors. As such they problematise a particular, neoliberal conception of freedom as a sense of autonomy from others, indeed, as the ability to act without the need to consider others. It’s a sense of autonomy that rests on the obscuring of the reproductive and infrastructural work of others which enables it. The risk of infection momentarily brought such ‘essential work’ to the fore as the working conditions of those performing it became an important possible vector of infection. Similarly, social distancing, vaccination and activities that produce carbon emissions all make clear that our actions impact others and vice versa.”

This experience, in Milburn’s view, is likely to lead to a more democratic conception

of freedom in the future, as well as to the search for solutions that can help bridge the generation divide. One of the criticisms over Milburn’s Generation Left thesis concerns the adoption of an “over-optimistic” conception of the political formation of the younger generation. Milburn argues that behind such critiques is lurking the wrong assumption of some sort of automatic connection between social position and political consciousness. These assumptions, Milburn continues, follow from a core component of contemporary political common sense, implying that the unfavorable economic conditions experienced by the younger generations automatically make them more radical in a progressive direction.

Milburn draws on his analysis of Mannheim’s theoretical work on generations. The classic theorist of generations, Karl Mannheim, argues that events which produce generation forming conditions also produce different generational units (e.g. on the left-right axis). If a coherent political generation is to be formed, then one of those units must become hegemonic in relation to its contemporaries.

In this regard, Milburn develops the position that large-scale events “can become generation forming if they impact in a generationally uneven manner on what seems possible, if they alter assumptions about what the future could look like”.

He argues, then, that material living conditions are nothing more than the basis on which different political narratives can be built:

**“We should instead think of lived experience, for instance the shared lived experience of deteriorating conditions and prospects among many young people through the 2010s, as the**

## **raw material from which several different political projects could be created”.**

Within this process Milburn describes the production of left “generational units” in many countries and the formation of the Generation Left during the past decade.

At the same time, he admits that the wave of optimism that prevailed in early 2019, when the book was published, has begun to subside. At the time, Generation Left appeared to be winning. Jeremy Corbyn, after the encouraging results of 2017, seemed close to electoral victory. So did Bernie Sanders in the presidential race: “These ageing leftwing leaders had rallied young voters in each of their respective countries, allowing the shift left among the youth to accelerate and

become visible”. However, the defeat of both changed the big picture, bringing to the fore a new wave of uncertainty about the future directions of the new generation.

In any case, while it remains unclear what will happen in the post-pandemic period, Milburn’s argument reflects the challenge of the feeling that “there’s a North-East passage to a better world which can bypass the treacherous field of political action”. The latter, as he told us, “is one of the core fantasies of our time”.

As he concludes, the Generation Left phenomenon represents “an opening in history” and refers “not only to the current left tendency of the young, but also to the political project to develop and assert a new left politics adequate to its experiences”.

*The interview was originally published in English at [Eteron's website](#) in February 2022*

# Footnotes

1. Keir Milburn has taught at the University of Leicester. He collaborates with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in London on issues of publicity, economic democracy and political economy

2. Keir Milburn, *Generation Left* (Polity, 2019)

3. *The World Transformed*, 'What is Generation Left?', 28/9/2021; DigiGen webinar, "The digital generation's political voices", 26/5/2021

4. Keir Milburn, 'The Pandemic is Changing How It Feels to Be Free', Novara Media, 6/1/2020

5. #ACFM is a podcast on Novara Media, presented by Milburn with Nadia Idle and Jeremy Gilbert. The range of their topics covers, beside others, "left politics, culture, music and experiences of collective joy"

6. According to Ipsos MORI, in Thatcher's election victory in 1983, the Conservatives took the lead with 42% in the 18-24 age group, 9 points ahead the Labour Party

**“The Generation  
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**Keir Milburn**

# Interview

## **DONATELLA DELLA PORTA**



**Gen Z has been  
born and  
has developed  
in crises**

In May 2022, Eteron conducted a video [interview](#) with Donatella Della Porta, Professor of political science and Dean of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Florence, where she also leads the Center on Social Movement Studies (Cosmos). Her work is an international reference in the field of social movement studies.

In the context of the Gen Z | Voice On project, we discussed the politicisation of young people worldwide, the psychological impact of multiple crises and the use of social media as a tool to diffuse social messages. Below you can find the transcript of the interview that she gave us.

### **What are the main findings of the research you have conducted on the Millennials' protests?**

I think that the concept of generation is, in general, very important in the development of a critical view of different types of injustice, intersectionally addressing the issues of injustice in social terms, in gender terms, in racial terms and so on. And we should start from an acknowledgement of some specific characteristics of Millennials' own experiences. So, what we have studied is especially the mobilised part of this generation, those who were politically active. What we saw is that it is a generation that defines itself as precarious not only in terms of the work conditions but also, more generally, in terms of their life experience.

And this is so because there is at the same time a reduction of labour market protection and a decline, in general, of social rights that affects this generation in a very deep way, changing the perceptions of what their life is going to be, procrastinating the achievement of some of the main steps in the process of entering societies and so on. It is also a generation that has a strong sense of betrayal, of being betrayed not only from the previous generations but mostly from the political and social system that does not include the Millennial generation in the political and social process. And it feels betrayed not only from the government but also, often, from those parties that are supposed to care about

social injustice. Nevertheless, it is a generation that doesn't despair because it is very committed to transformation. We know this because besides the research that we have done on the most mobilised side of this generation, what we learn looking at opinion polls is that against the expectations of depoliticization, in reality in many countries this generation has been characterised by high sense of commitment, high tolerance and sensibilities to issues of rights in general.

### **What are the differences between the politicisation of Gen Zers and that of the Millennials?**

What we pointed out in our research is that for activists, generations are short cohorts, smaller groups, because their understanding of generations is very much related to specific experiences during adolescence and is also very much affected by the specific characteristics of the social movements in that period. For instance, what I mean is that the protests against austerity had different types of effects for the Millennial generation in Greece or in Germany because they had different degrees of intensity and different capacity to involve the young generation. Considering these differences and the differences in the definition of generations, I think that what we can say is that the Millennial generation has been characterised by experiences of very broad movements, that have been able to have an impact on the political and social level, but especially on the cultural level

in several European countries.

Generation Z is a generation that has been born and has developed in moments of crises that have been extremely intense and have interacted with each other. So, the financial crisis was not yet over in several countries, in particular in European peripheries like Southern Europe, and the pandemic crisis arrived. The climate crisis became more and more visible and now there is a military crisis. So, it is a generation that has been embedded in a situation of multiple crises.

It's this generation that undergoes different types of experiences in different countries. The pandemic times had a particularly high impact on this generation. However, in some countries political experience and participation of Gen Z has been quite important. Chile, for instance, was able during the pandemic to put forward and develop the seeds of a change that has been already developed in 2019 in the pre-pandemic period. Generation Z has been very much involved in Lebanon in the protests for democracy, in Catalunya and several other countries. So it has been a mobilised generation. But we still have to see what type of opportunities were created.

### **What psychological impact have the past decade's crises, such as the economic recession and the pandemic, had on the Millennials?**

I am not a psychologist but what we see in our research on the mobilised part of this generation is that the personal life conditions are very relevant to mobilisations. So, we have seen that many of the protests, like the Fridays for Future and the Black Lives Matter, have been characterised by a high level of self-reflexivity, reflecting on their own conditions of life. While in the past, progressive movements and movement

activists tend to focus on the collective experiences, these movements also pay a lot of attention to the ways in which people individually live through these experiences. The sufferance related to the multiple types of exclusions, as well as the insecurity related with all these crises have been part and parcel of the discourse of the Fridays for Future as a generation that is denied a future and the possibility to decide on their future life and so on. Of course, at the individual level, then, the way of reacting to these feelings of insecurity could be very different. What we saw in the protests that I mentioned is that this generation is not totally resourceless because they are capable of using their skills in technological issues, to trigger responses to these conditions, in quite inventive ways and effective ways.

### **What is the correlation between the use of social media and youth movements?**

The activists we interviewed were very explicit in connecting their own general experience of social interactions with their online experience. And they did so in criticising the ways in which social movement organisations are often organised. So, I remember one of the interviewees saying: "Yes, we are the generation that is always texting and is accustomed to very fast connections. We are not a generation that can sit two hours in a room to talk about let's say generic issues." And the experience with technologies often pushes towards the search for very rapid responses. At the same time, it pushes towards a positive sense of creativity. And this is something that we have seen in the Black Lives Matter protest for instance; pragmatic use of very different forms of communications elaborated by young people. From what we saw in our research, they also pay much more attention to politicise the private sphere of life.

Many of the groups of young activists in our research were also focusing their activities on sports and art and they said “we need to do this because this is a precarious generation, a generation that doesn’t have time, that needs to have 3 jobs, to attend universities and so on. So, we cannot ask people to sacrifice the small amount of free time they have, we have to politicise it.” I think this is important. Another general observation on communications is the fact that the young activists are online doesn’t mean that they are not offline as well.

The communicational skills are influenced by the experiences online but are also made by different forms of interactions offline. And this is already a lesson from the 2011 protest and the activists had already learned it before. So, the movements of the squares were such because the activists had realised that they cannot only mobilise on facebook, or by tweeting, that they have to use these instruments, but they also have to meet other people in person. And this is something that passed from the Millennial generation to the Generation Z with forms of protest in which direct face to face interactions are facilitated.

### **How can social movements effectively defend civil liberties and protect their protests from police violence?**

I think communication plays an important role. In the protest against the assassination of George Floyd, we saw how important it was that the killing was documented. This very skilled generation is also very careful in acquiring and preserving knowledge which is also particularly important because it is a type of knowledge that is better able to stimulate emotions, negative but also positive ones. So, in a period of infodemic that is produced

on several challenges, from the pandemic to the war, I think that it is very important to document repression, making it visible and providing alternative knowledge and counter-information.

The case of Assange is an example that shows how repression connects activism to the freedom of the Press and freedom of the Media. The Black Lives Matter protest could also be taken as an example of how repressions can be resisted because it highlights that it is not just a matter of denouncing what happened and collecting evidence. Much depends on the ability to spread this information. And the successful global campaign around the assassination of George Floyd is indicating that the message had to be spread through different channels and in different forms.

For instance, what we saw in our research is that memory is very important for young people, connecting the memories of specific acts of repressions with previous ones and also connecting generational experiences with different forms of repressions. Besides state repression, like repression of street protest, more and more activists are facing stigmatisation and harassment by the mass media; that is what the pacifist movement is facing at the moment. And, then, there are also other forms of repression, denounced by the movements, from the new generations of women movements denouncing violence against women, to the assassinations of activists related to the climate justice movement. These crimes are not only committed by the state but also by private actors. So, I think that resisting repression goes also beyond resisting state repression and requires thinking about how to resist and oppose repression by private actors, as well as cultural forms of repression.

**“ Activists' understanding of generations is very much related to specific experiences during adolescence and is very much affected by the specific characteristics of the social movements in that period ” .**

**Donatella della Porta**

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