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The youth gender gap in support for the far right

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ABSTRACT



The 2024 European Parliament election showcased a surprising new trend. While progressive parties have traditionally done well among younger voters, it was far-right parties that enjoyed unprecedented electoral support among young voters in the 2024 EP elections. Analyzing data from the European Election Studies (EES) 2024, covering 27 countries and almost 25,000 voters, this paper shows that there is a sizable gender gap in voting for the far right. The electoral success of far-right parties among young voters is primarily driven by the support of young men, peaking at over 21% of all young men in 2024 compared to only about 14% among women of the same age cohort. Descriptive analyses from the EES shows that this gap can partially be explained by attitudinal differences, with young women holding more socially progressive views than young men. Age-Period-Cohort models based on EES data covering eight elections from 1989 to 2024 further reveal that this gender gap is greatest for Millennials and Generation Z. Since political attitudes and voting behaviour during the formative years may have a long-lasting effect on voting patterns and attitudes later in life, our findings have important implications for the future of European democracies.


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KEYWORDS Gender gap; young voters; far-right parties; European parliament elections

Introduction

Support for far-right parties¹ is on the rise all over Europe. The far right has had significant successes in regional, national and European elections: In November 2023, the far-right Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) won the Dutch

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parliamentary elections and subsequently formed a coalition government. In September 2024, the far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) placed first, winning 28.8% of the vote and achieving its best result in the party's history, while the extreme-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) demonstrated unprecedented successes in German regional elections in Thuringia, Brandenburg, and Saxonia. The European Parliament (EP) elections in June 2024 demonstrated that this move to the right is a Europe-wide phenomenon, with historical wins for far-right parties in several member states such as Germany, Italy and France.

The political science literature has pointed to a number of different explanations for the rise of the far right, including, among others, economic grievances among the 'losers of modernisation and globalization' (Rodrik, 2017), perceived cultural threats linked to immigration and 'wokeness' (Norris & Inglehart, 2019), and competition – real or perceived – with migrants for vital public services (Cavaillé & Ferwerda, 2023; Dickson et al., 2024). Moreover, existing literature has documented that support for far-right parties follows certain demographic patterns, one of the most consistently observed being the gender gap – men are significantly more likely to vote for far-right parties than women (Allen & Goodman, 2021; Givens, 2004; Hartevelde et al., 2015; Immerzeel et al., 2015). This phenomenon has been attributed to factors such as economic concerns and status decline among men (Immerzeel et al., 2015), gendered political socialisation and the resulting differentiation in political values and norms (Langsæther & Knutsen, 2024), feelings of being left behind by mainstream parties (Guth & Nelsen, 2019) and far-right parties' policy strategies (Chueri & Damerow, 2023; Shorrocks, 2021; Weeks et al., 2023). However, these explanations often overlook the potential variation in the gender gap across different generations, leaving this aspect both undertheorized and empirically underexplored.

In this article, we explore this phenomenon, namely a widening of the gender gap among the younger generations in both attitudes and behaviours relating to far-right support. While progressive parties typically enjoyed the strongest support among young voters (Inglehart, 2020; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Norris & Inglehart, 2019), many young voters today increasingly support far-right parties. For instance, among voters aged 16 to 24, the AfD ranked as the second most popular party in Germany during the recent European Parliament election, securing 17% of young voters – an 11% points increase in support since the 2019 EP election. Moreover, a recent *Financial Times* article that triggered considerable attention showed that differences in attitudes between young men and women are much larger than the differences between middle-aged and older men and women, with young men gradually becoming more conservative while young women becoming increasingly progressive². However, this claim has been refuted by others³.

The supposed increase in the gender gap among younger generations is indeed puzzling as many of the prevailing theories explaining the gender gap would predict the opposite trend. With the progress of female emancipation and greater gender equality in lifestyle and career choices, one might expect young men and women to display increasingly similar political attitudes. Secondly, given that many leaders of far-right parties are female such as Alice Weidel (AfD), Marine Le Pen (Rassemblement National) or Giorgia Meloni (Fratelli d'Italia), it is also reasonable to expect that young female voters might be equally mobilised by the far right. Finally, as far-right parties become more normalised, women—who, according to previous research, tend to be more sensitive to and influenced by social norms (Harteveld et al., 2019; Ivarsflaten et al., 2010; Oshri et al., 2023)—may feel less stigma associated with supporting these parties and, consequently, be more likely to vote for them.

To address this puzzle, this paper explores to what extent there really is a widening gender gap in far-right voting among young voters across Europe. To achieve this, we rely on the EES data, which provides greater cross-national and longitudinal coverage compared to other cross-country surveys, making it uniquely suited for this analysis. Analyzing data from the 2024 European Election Studies (Popa et al., 2024) covering 27 countries and almost 25,000 voters, we show that there is indeed a sizable and increasing gender gap in far-right voting specific to younger voters. Moreover, the electoral success of far-right parties among young voters seems to be particularly high among young men, peaking at over 21% of all young men in 2024 compared to only about 14% among women of the same age cohort. To explore whether this gender gap among young voters is driven by age or by generational effects, we run Age-Period-Cohort (APC) models by drawing on EES voter studies ranging from 1989 to 2024, spanning 35 years and 8 European Parliament elections. Our results show that the gender gap among young voters is unique to Millennials and Generation Z. Finally, the cross-country analysis of the 2024 EP election moreover presents preliminary and descriptive evidence that this gap can partially be addressed through attitudinal differences, with initial evidence showing that young women are much more progressive in comparison to young men.

This paper thus makes an important contribution, both to the academic literature, but also to the wider policy debate. Our contribution is primary empirical and descriptive: (1) confirming the existence of the widening gender-gap in radical right support, and (2) demonstrating that it is a recent development specific to Millennials and Generation Z. On the theoretical front, we offer and discuss several potential explanations for this newly observed trend. These explanations include: (a) the relevance of economic challenges which might disproportionately affect young people but may be especially pronounced for young men who perceive women's educational and professional advancements as a 'zero-sum game'; (b) cultural shifts, such

as changing gender norms: movements like #MeToo and the rise of progressive gender debates may be empowering for young women, while potentially provoking feelings of uncertainty and insecurity among young men; (c) supply-side factors and social media influence: far-right narratives and ‘manfluencers’ amplify the grievances of young men, mobilising them by exploiting a sense of gender backlash and status decline.

Due to its primarily descriptive focus, this paper does not propose or explicitly test hypotheses regarding the proposed explanations of the youth-gender gap. However, with the goal of laying the foundation for research into the causes of this trend, we offer a number of potential explanations that may serve as guidance for future work.

From a policy perspective, the results of this research point to a potentially concerning outlook for European liberal democracies. Since political attitudes and voting behaviour during the formative years have a long-lasting effect on voting patterns and attitudes later in life, our findings would suggest that as young voters today age and their attitudes remain stable, the support for the far right may continue to grow.

Explaining the gender gap in far-right voting

Previous studies have established that there is a persistent gender gap in support and vote choice for far right parties, with men being significantly overrepresented among the electorate of the far right (Allen & Goodman, 2021; Givens, 2004; Hartevelde *et al.*, 2015; Immerzeel *et al.*, 2015). Already in 2007, Kitschelt (2007) argued that it was an ‘incontrovertible fact’ that ‘radical-right wing parties attract substantially more men than women’. This pattern has been consistent over time and across countries, although with some variation in the size of the gender-gap (Hartevelde & Ivarsflaten, 2018; Immerzeel *et al.*, 2015; Spierings & Zaslove, 2015). Only a limited number of studies conclude that the gender gap might be less strong than often assumed (Spierings & Zaslove, 2015), or slowly closing, as Mayer (2015) argues for France. Why are men more likely to support the far-right compared to women? In this section, we look at some of the key explanations for the under-representation of women among the electorate of the far right.

First, scholars have pointed to economic concerns and the status decline among white working-class men as motivations for voting for the far right (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Givens, 2004; Immerzeel *et al.*, 2015). These parties tend to attract voters who perceive themselves as losers of modernisation and those who are worried about status decline. Men are over-represented in occupations that experience status loss and increased competition due to immigration and automation. In line with this argument, Immerzeel *et al.* (2015) find that gender differences in employment status, occupational type and education partly explain the gender gap in radical right voting.

Another explanation rests on the idea that gender differences in political socialisation lead to different political values and norms. Women tend to have more progressive political orientations (Langsæther & Knutsen, 2024), and they tend to be more supportive of a generous and inclusive welfare state, which is at odds with the far right's welfare chauvinism. Women tend to be more sensitive to, and abiding by, social norms (Harteveld et al., 2019; Ivarsflaten et al., 2010; Oshri et al., 2023; Valentim, 2024). Harteveld and Ivarsflaten (2018) moreover argue that women are less likely to support the far right due to normative concerns about racism and prejudice and their fascist legacy. In a similar vein, Oshri et al. (2023) argue that women are less likely to vote for the far right because they are more risk averse, and endorsing far right platforms involves a social risk of deviating from the established norm.

Some scholars have argued that men vote for the far-right because they feel abandoned by established democratic parties and lost trust in democracy. Men might feel overlooked by mainstream parties, which they perceive as failing to address their concerns, aspirations, or economic prospects (Guth & Nelsen, 2019). Uba and Bosi (2022) show that this sense of disillusionment can drive young men to seek alternatives that promise radical change, assert national identity, or critique the status quo, all of which are often central to far right platforms.

Finally, another set of explanations focus on the supply-side rather than the demand-side. Far-right parties tend to be 'Männerparteien' (Weeks et al., 2023), that is, they are predominantly led and represented by men. Their communication strategies very often idealise traditional gender roles, cultivate ideals of masculinity, and propagate sexism (Anduiza & Rico, 2024). This makes them less appealing to women, but attractive to men with strong masculinity traits (Coffé, 2019). At the same time, Off (2023) show that (perceived) increases in competition between men and women provoke modern sexism. Some progressive gender policies seem to have triggered a backlash, which in turn fuels far right voting (Off, Charron, & Alexander, 2022). Indeed, Dancygier et al. (2022) demonstrate that concerns among native men about refugees being rivals for female partners are a significant predictor for hate crimes against refugees.

These explanations all seek to explain the gender gap across generations, but what might help us understand why *younger voters* are more divided along gender lines when it comes to far right support? We turn to the literature that has sought to explain voting behaviour among younger voters.

Age versus generational differences

The explanations discussed in the previous section all seek to explain why far right support may differ between men and women, regardless of their age or

generation. However, another question is whether the contemporary increase in the gender gap among the younger age group is really a new phenomenon, particular to the younger cohorts of today or whether it also existed among older cohorts when they were young. When it comes to explaining the voting behaviour of young people, two broad approaches can be distinguished, namely age-based and cohort-based theories (Alwin & Krosnick, 1991; Garcia-Albacete, 2014).

Starting with age-based explanations, age effects relate to changes experienced by individuals as they go through the different stages of the life cycle (Bell & Jones, 2013). These suggest that young people's political behaviour is shaped by their current life stage. Young voters are often more progressive, idealistic, and less attached to established parties, partly due to limited life experience and lower personal investment in economic stability. As they age, they may shift towards more conservative or mainstream views, aligning more with older generations (Peterson *et al.*, 2020). Age-based explanations would therefore suggest that voting patterns among young people today are similar to voting patterns of older cohorts when these were young.

Cohort theories by contrast suggest that the political preferences of young people are influenced by the unique historical and social context during their formative years (Inglehart, 2020; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Attitudes, such as ideological beliefs are often considered to be deeply ingrained through early-life socialisation and remain highly stable throughout adulthood (Alwin & Krosnick, 1991). Each generation may develop lasting political attitudes based on significant events, social movements, or economic conditions they experience in youth (Dinas, 2013; Schröder *et al.*, 2024; Wiertz & Rodon, 2021). This approach suggests that the political leanings formed in youth could remain relatively stable over time, even as they age. On the basis of cohort-based approach, voting pattern of young people in 2024 would be different to voting patterns of older cohorts when they were young.

In summary, age-based theories see young people's voting behaviour as transient and shifting with age, while cohort-based theories view it as rooted in generational experiences, potentially leading to long-term political trends⁴. This leads us to the question of whether the gender gap in far-right support among young people is likely to be age-based or generational phenomenon.

Young voters and the far-right gender gap today

There are many reasons why the contemporary gender gap in far-right voting might be particularly pronounced among younger cohorts while remaining relatively stable among their older counterparts. Although the existing literature has largely been silent on whether the gender-gap in far-right voting might vary across age groups (for recent preliminary work see Abou-Chadi,

2024; Off, Alexander, & Charron, 2025), we build on the literature addressing the gender gap and discuss potential explanations for this phenomenon. However, as these explanations cannot be rigorously tested within the scope of this study, they should be considered as preliminary insights aimed to understand the asymmetric rise in far-right support.

As noted, a key question is whether the gender gap in far-right support is driven primarily by age-based dynamics or generational factors. On the one hand, we might speculate that the difference in the far right gender gap across different age cohorts could be the result of life cycle effects specific to men and women – the idea that young men and women differ from their older counterparts in, for example, their level of idealism and progressiveness (e.g. Peterson *et al.*, 2020). In other words, if young women are, for whatever reason, intrinsically different from young men, regardless of the generation they belong to or the wider social context they are brought up in, this would be reflected in the gender gap among younger voters. If our analysis shows no differing gender gap in support for the far right across different generations, it would lend evidence in support for the age-based explanations of the gender differences.

On the other hand, the youth gender gap in far-right support might be the result of generational differences – following the notion that different generations respond to and are formed by significant events, social movements or wider macroeconomic conditions (e.g. Dinas, 2013). Particularly important to the gender gap in support for the far right, we point out and discuss a number of factors which might be considered important.

One explanation centres on economic concerns and perceived status decline. Across Europe, younger generations increasingly face significant economic challenges, such as difficulty finding housing, prolonged dependency on parental support, precarious employment and limited access to stable career paths in a competitive job market (Bessant *et al.*, 2017; Mitrea *et al.*, 2021; Zagórski *et al.*, 2021). While these issues impact both young women and men, young men may be especially vulnerable to them. With the increasing participation of women in university education (Van Bavel *et al.*, 2018), competition for high-status jobs may lead young men to perceive that women's gains come at the expense of their own, viewing these developments as a 'zero-sum game' (Green & Shorrocks, 2023). Moreover, struggling to meet traditional expectations of success – historically defined by older men as the role of breadwinner and provider – young men may feel particularly vulnerable. Therefore, young men might be particularly likely to respond to far-right party appeals addressing these grievances.

Another explanation stresses the importance of cultural shifts driven by broader social forces, including movements like #MeToo, woke and trans rights debates as well as the heightened salience of gender issues and increasingly progressive gender norms (e.g., Lisnek *et al.*, 2022; Maricourt &

Burrell, 2022). These changes may have affected young men and women differently, thereby influencing the gender gap in far-right support. While young women may view these shifts as empowering and see themselves as potential beneficiaries of the push for gender equality, young men might feel more uncertain about their (new) societal roles. Therefore, the loss of previously assumed high status compared to women might leave young men struggling to navigate rapidly changing and unclear 'rules of the game', fostering feelings of threat and insecurity.

We speculate that younger men are particularly likely to respond to progressive gender movements and changing norms for two main reasons. Firstly, they might be more directly influenced by interactions with their female generational counterparts when compared to other men and secondly, younger men might be more likely to experience insecurities tied to their still evolving sense of masculinity. This aligns with prior research on gender backlash, emphasising the role of masculinity in driving far-right support (Coffe et al., 2023). Related studies also highlight how men's perceptions of discrimination against men contributed to voting Leave in the Brexit referendum (Green & Shorrocks, 2023) and how sexist attitudes help explain outcomes like far-right support and the Leave vote in 2016 (Anduiza & Rico, 2024; Coffe et al., 2023; De Geus et al., 2022; Off, 2023).

Finally, young men may be particularly influenced by content from far-right parties and 'manfluencers' circulating on social media (Renström & Bäck, 2024). Early evidence from parties like the AfD in Germany (Classen et al., 2024) suggests that far-right parties might be harnessing the mobilising power of gender backlash on TikTok, possibly translating these sentiments into electoral support. Such supply-side explanation aligns with prior research demonstrating how far-right parties adjust their policies to appeal to specific segments of the population (Churi & Damerow, 2023; Shorrocks, 2021). Interestingly, prior research has found that these far-right policies often promote gender equality, particularly in response to perceived threats from non-Western and Muslim cultures (Churi & Damerow, 2023; Ralph-Morrow, 2022), indicating a possible strategic targeting of voters through seemingly contradictory policy positions.

If our analysis shows a dynamic change in the gender gap in support for the far right across different generations, it would provide evidence in line with the generational explanations of the gender gap, although our study does not allow for robust testing of these causal explanations.

Data and Methods

To shed light on the youth gender-gap in far-right support, we rely primarily on the 2024 European Election Studies (EES) data (Popa et al., 2024). Additionally, to analyze trends over time, we merged the 2024 EES data with seven

previous waves (1989, 1995, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019) (Schmitt, Bartolini *et al.*, 2009; Schmitt, Hobolt *et al.*, 2019; Schmitt, Popa *et al.*, 2015; Van Egmond *et al.*, 2013). EES is a recurring cross-national post-election survey which has so far been conducted after each European Parliament Election since 1979, with an exception in 1984⁵. With repeated questions on vote choice and propensity to vote throughout our intended study period and a stratified sample with, on average, 1,000 respondents per country, EES represents a great data source to study voting patterns of young people today and compare it to voting behaviour of older cohorts when they were young. In other words, given its considerable longitudinal and cross-national data coverage, the reliance on the ESS data ensures empirical prerequisites for capturing the apparent recency of the phenomenon of interest, both through the descriptive analysis of the of the most recent 2024 survey wave as well as the longitudinal age-period-cohort analysis.

The EES dataset provides another advantage for our analysis. Specifically, it offers access to two measures: reported vote choice in European elections and the probability of voting for a far-right party irrespective of the election type. The availability of both of these measures, combined with the dataset's longitudinal and cross-national coverage justify the use of the EES data over alternatives.

To identify far right parties, we rely on the 2023 PopuList data (Rooduijn *et al.*, 2023). We focus specifically on parties classified by the *PopuList* as populist far right and far right. In the case that there are no far right or populist far right parties in a given country-wave as an option in the EES, or the respondent does not provide a response, we do not include the observation. A detailed list of countries and corresponding far right parties can be found in Table A.1.

We create two variables intended to capture support for the far right. The first variable reflects the respondent's vote choice in the European Parliament election. If the respondents reported that they voted in the 2024 European elections, they were asked 'Which party did you vote for in the European Parliament elections?' We created a variable *Vote FRP* that takes a value of 1 if the respondent reported voting for a far right party and 0 otherwise. The second variable represents the respondent's probability of voting for a far right party – *PTV FRP*. The variable is derived from the question 'How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties?' and ranges from 0–not at all probable to 10–very probable. In the case that there is more than one far right party in a given country and therefore multiple observations for the propensity of voting for the far right, we use the mean value for all far right parties.

Recall vote choice in European elections helps us to better understand the increasing importance of voting dynamics in European Parliament elections (Braun & Schäfer, 2022; Gattermann *et al.*, 2021; Schäfer, 2021). Moreover, the propensity to vote (PTV) indicator has been widely employed in the

empirical literature, commonly to measure party preference or as an alternative to vote choice (Boonen *et al.*, 2014; De Angelis & Garzia, 2013). Some more recent studies have used PTV to assess partisanship in multi-party systems (Paparo *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, as all respondents rate all parties when responding to PTV items, relying on PTV items maximises the item response rate for all far right parties among all respondents in the sample—thus capturing a more fine-grained attitude towards the far right in comparison to a reported vote choice (Boonen *et al.*, 2014; Van der Eijk *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, leveraging both items in our main analyses might help us strengthen the robustness of our results and offer nuance both in terms of distinguishing the election in question (EU Parliament or voting in general) and in terms of getting more fine-grained attitudes among all voters, regardless of whether they reported voting for the far right party or not. As such, we do not anticipate drastically different findings from using these two measures and view vote recall and PTV as complementary.

Our key explanatory variables are gender, age cohort and generation. Gender is coded as 1 for females and 0 for males. For the age cohort indicator, we created three categories following previous literature on life cycle events (Arnett, 2000; Rekker, 2024; Srivastava *et al.*, 2003): *Early Adulthood* for young voters (aged 16–29), *Middle Adulthood* for middle-aged voters (aged 30–64) and *Late Adulthood* for older voters (aged 65 and above). Finally, we created a variable *Generation*, based on respondents year of birth, and code them into the following categories: *Greatest Generation* (born before 1926), *Silent Generation* (1927–1945), *Baby Boomers* (1946–1964), *Generation X* (1965–1980), *Millennials* (1981–1996) and *Generation Z* (1997–2012). The *Generation* variable is only used in the age-period-cohort analysis. These demographic variables allow us to explore how men and women across different age cohorts and different generations engage with the far right parties across Europe.

In addition, to shed light on potential explanations for the gender gap in far right voting, we include variables measuring the different explanatory approaches discussed above. The *socioeconomic variables* include a dummy indicating unemployment, education, self-assessment of the family's living standard and social class. Variables related to *values and norms* are ideological self-placement, items tapping into attitudes towards liberal democracy—support for an independent judiciary and strong leadership – and attitudes related to immigration and climate change. Variables tapping into the potential effects of *masculinity and sexism* are support for same-sex marriage, traditional gender roles and religiosity, while variables tapping into the *lack of trust in democracy* are satisfaction with EU democracy, perceptions of fairness in EU elections and political interest (see Appendix E for question-wording and Table A2 of the supplementary material for descriptive statistics).

Results

Is there a gender gap in far-right voting among young people? To assess the gender gap across different age groups in the 2024 European Election, we descriptively examine far right voting across gender and age cohorts. In [Figure 1](#), the data reveal a much larger gender gap in support for the far right among those belonging to the youngest age cohort compared to all other age groups. Specifically, the gap in far right support between young men and women is roughly double compared to that of the middle and older cohorts. While the difference in support for the far right between young men and women stands at 7.4%, the gap for middle-aged and older cohorts is closer to 3.3–3.7%, respectively. Looking beyond within-age cohort comparisons, young women are the least likely of any age group to vote for the far right, whereas young men are as likely to vote for the far right as their middle-age and older counterparts.

Looking at the measure of the propensity to vote for a far right party, [Figure 2](#) reveals similar findings, with the gap between young men and women being notably larger in comparison to the gap between their middle-aged and older counterparts. This difference is not only more pronounced among younger cohorts, but it is also substantively large—exceeding 1 point on an 11-point scale. Moreover, looking beyond within-age cohort comparisons, younger men are much more likely to foresee voting for a far right party than any other age-gender group. A gender-age cohort interaction analysis on both vote choice and PTV reveals statistically significant results, indicating that the gender gap among younger cohorts is is

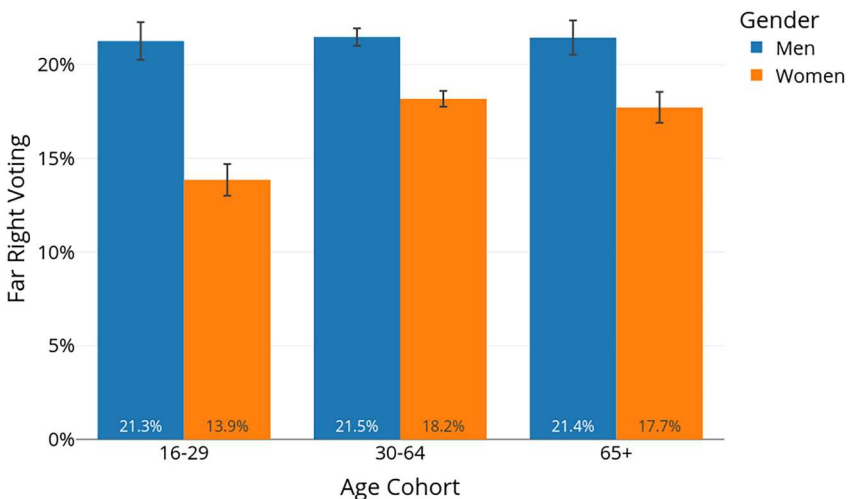


Figure 1. Gender gap in Voting for the Far Right Party by Age Cohorts in 2024.

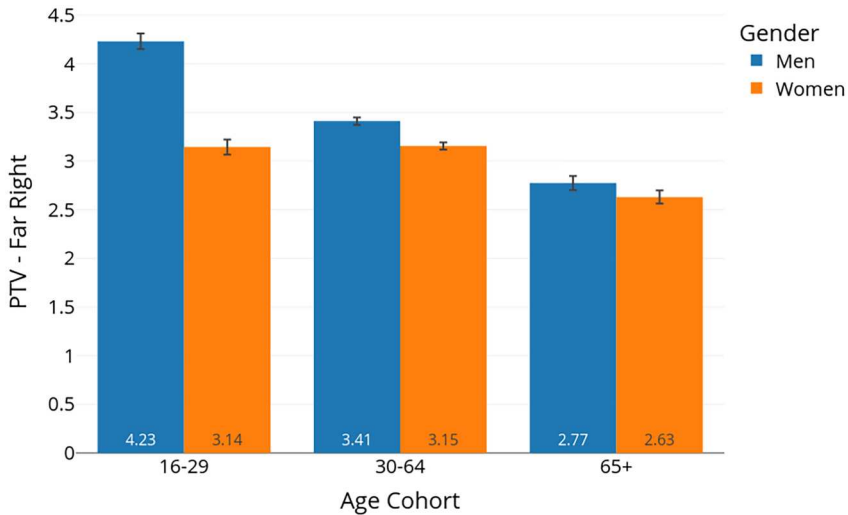


Figure 2. Gender gap in Propensity to Vote for the Far Right Party by Age Cohorts in 2024.

substantially larger compared to that observed among older cohorts (see Table A5 in the supplementary materials for details).

Taking together the descriptive results from both Figures 1 and 2, it seems that young men tend to have a preference for far right parties more than any other cohort of men as well as any other age-gender group—as indicated by the results on PTV, but still not enough to vote for them. Moreover, young women do not dislike far right parties substantively more than other women but are substantively less willing to vote for them⁶.

Looking at the age-gender differences in support for the far right across countries, we observe very similar trends, with young men being more likely to support the far right than young women in the majority of the countries in the sample. Figures A1 and A2 in the supplementary material provide bar plots for the same descriptive analyses by country.

Given the cross-country nature of the 2024 EES data used in the analysis so far, we are not able to examine whether the magnitude of the youth gender gap has been observed due to an increase in support for the radical right among younger men, a decrease among young women or both. While our findings suggest a differential gender gap in far right support between younger, middle-aged, and older cohorts, we cannot confidently attribute these differences solely to respondents' age rather than generational influences. To explore this further, using EES data spanning from 1989 to 2024, we turn to regression analyses interacting gender, age cohort and election cycle and an age-period-cohort analysis.

Who is driving the gender gap among young voters?

Figure 3 shows how women and men respond when being asked about their probability with which they would vote for a far right party between 1989 and 2024. Overall, young men have always been most likely to vote for the far right. Starting with 2020, while the gap appears to narrow over time between men and women for the middle and older age cohorts, the gap appears to widen for the youngest cohort. Moreover, this gap appears to be extending primarily due to a steeper increase in support for the far right among young men vis-a-vis young women. Thus, the gender gap in far right voting is primarily driven by the significantly larger support of the far right among young men today.

To more formally test the temporal changes in the support for the far right, we rely on the EES surveys since 1994 and interact gender with age, cohort and election cycle on reported vote choice for the far right and the propensity to vote for the far right. The specifications include fixed effects for election year, age and country. The results, presented in Table 1, highlight a significant gender gap among young voters (aged 16–29) in the 2024 election cycle. The triple interaction term for this cohort shows a statistically significant and negative effect for women, for both reported vote for the far right parties and the PTV for the far right parties. These findings indicate that young women are significantly less likely to express political support or vote for FRP in 2024 compared to their male counterparts. Notably, the magnitude of this gap is far larger and statistically significant compared to previous

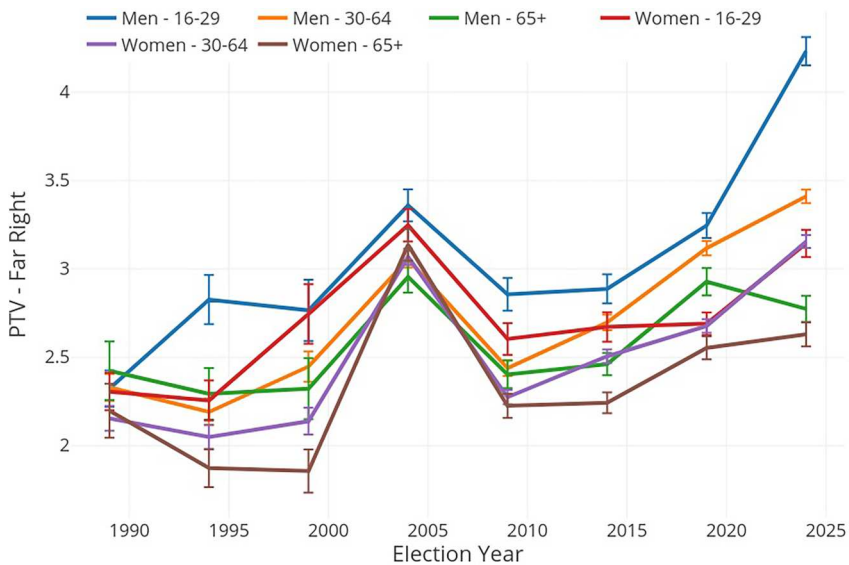


Figure 3. Probability to Vote for Populist Right Wing Party.

Table 1. Interaction effects of gender, age cohort, and election cycle on reported vote and propensity to vote for FRP.

	PTV FRP	FRP Vote
Women	−0.203 (0.155)	−0.002 (0.002)
Cohort 16–29 × Women × 1994 Election	−0.508 (0.499)	−0.002 (0.003)
Cohort 16–29 × Women × 1999 Election	0.095 (0.403)	0.005 (0.005)
Cohort 16–29 × Women × 2004 Election	−0.290 (0.330)	0.000 (0.010)
Cohort 16–29 × Women × 2009 Election	−0.158 (0.292)	0.024 (0.018)
Cohort 16–29 × Women × 2014 Election	−0.140 (0.378)	−0.043* (0.016)
Cohort 16–29 × Women × 2019 Election	−0.286 (0.318)	−0.012 (0.019)
Cohort 16–29 × Women × 2024 Election	−0.995** (0.304)	−0.041** (0.014)
Year FE	✓	✓
Age FE	✓	✓
Country FE	✓	✓
Observations	101790	164661
S.E. Type	Country	Country
R ²	0.053	0.161

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; Models are estimated using logistic regression for reported vote choice (FRP Vote) and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression for PTV (PTV FRP). Table omits additional coefficient estimates, which are available in full in Appendix I.

election cycles, suggesting a sharp and distinct recent divergence in political behaviour by gender among young voters. For the full table of regression results see Table A6 in the supplementary materials.

We further examine generational differences in voting for a far right party by estimating the conditional probability of voting for the far right as a function of age, period, gender, country and generation. Given that age, period and generation are linearly related, we estimate the conditional probabilities using generalised additive models (GAMs). This approach allows for modelling non-linear effects without requiring parametric assumptions and is a common approach to estimating the differential effects of age, period and cohort/generation on political attitudes (Grasso et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2019; Smets & Neundorf, 2014). Appendix D in the supplementary materials provides additional details on the GAM models.

Figure 4 illustrates the predicted probabilities of voting for a far right party across different generations and by gender. The results indicate a clear generational divide, with younger cohorts—especially Generation Z and, to a lesser extent, Millennials—exhibiting higher probabilities of supporting far-right parties compared to older generations like Baby Boomers and Generation X. Among the younger generations, men consistently show a higher likelihood of voting for radical right parties than women, a pattern that

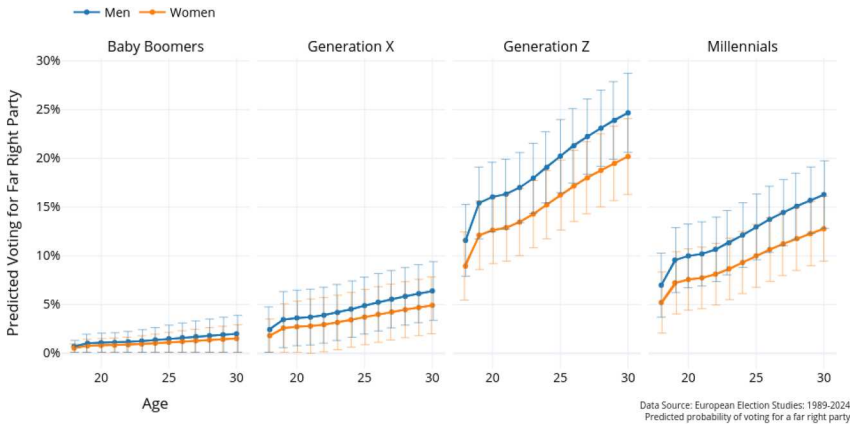


Figure 4. Predicted Probabilities of Voting for a Far Right Party by Gender and Generation.

remains stable across age groups. This gender gap is less pronounced among Baby Boomers, where the probabilities for men and women are almost indistinguishable. The overlap of confidence intervals for Baby Boomers suggests that the differences between men and women in this cohort is not likely to be statistically differentiable, whereas the separation of intervals for younger generations implies a more robust gender effect, which is further evidenced by the regressions in [Table 1](#).

Interestingly, the data also reveal that Generation Z not only starts at a higher baseline probability of voting for far-right parties but also appears to increase this probability at a faster rate as they age. This steep upward trajectory for Generation Z contrasts with the more gradual increases observed for Millennials and Generation X, suggesting that this youngest cohort may continue to diverge politically as they grow older. The patterns observed imply a potential cohort effect where Generation Z's early and rapidly growing support for radical right parties might signify a broader shift in political alignments that could reshape the electoral landscape in the future. Further analysis, including projections for later years of life, is discussed in [Appendix D](#) of the supplementary materials.

What Explains the Gender Gap among Young Voters?

We extend the descriptive analyses presented in [Figures 1](#) and [2](#) by relying on a set of multilevel regression models to estimate the gender differences in far right support for the youngest cohort (16–29).

[Figure 5](#) presents the results of models estimated using logistic regression for the case of reported vote choice and ordinary least squares (OLS) for the

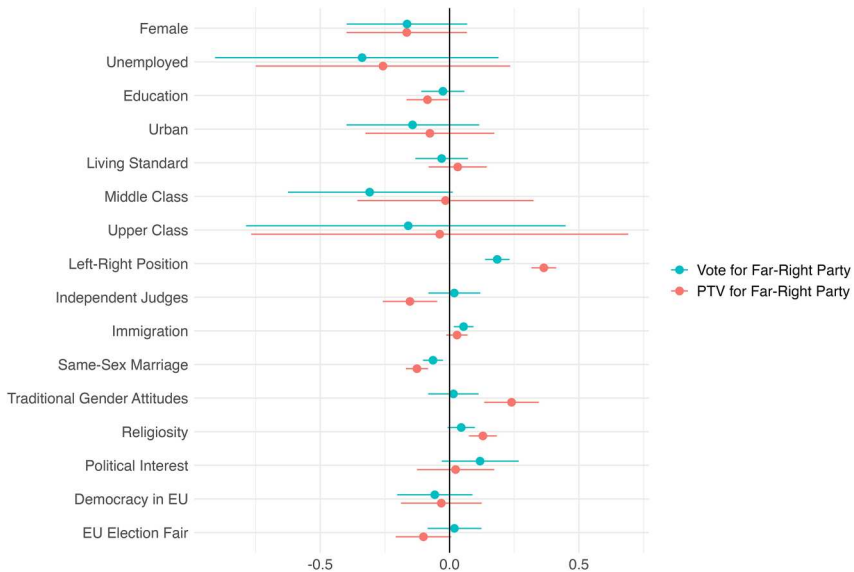


Figure 5. Determinants of the Youth Far Right Support in 2024 EP Elections.

The coefficient plots are derived from the results presented in Table A3, Model 6 for vote choice, and Table A4, Model 6 for PTV in supplementary materials G. The models are estimated using logistic regression for reported vote choice and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression for PTV, incorporating country fixed effects, survey-provided weights, and robust standard errors displayed in parentheses. The reference category for locality is 'Rural', and for social class is 'Lower class'. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

case of PTV with country-fixed effects, and survey-provided weights with robust standard errors. Models include a number of explanatory variables following the literature review on the potential drivers of the gender gap presented above. For details see Table A3 and the Table A4 in the supplementary materials.

Education is negatively associated with the propensity to vote for the far right. Attitudinal factors related to norms and values, including self-placement on the right, prioritisation of economic growth over climate policies, and stronger authoritarian attitudes, exhibit significant positive associations with the propensity to vote for the far right. In contrast, progressive attitudes toward same-sex marriage and gender roles are negatively associated with far right support. Interestingly, attitudes toward immigrants are not significantly associated with the propensity to vote for the far right among this cohort. For vote choice, the results are substantively the same, with an exception that education is not significant, although negative, while being in favour of restrictive policy on immigration is positively and significantly associated with voting for the far right in the 2024 European Parliament elections. Together with the findings presented in five model specifications in Table A3 and A4 of the supplementary materials, in which we show that the

effect size of the gender coefficient is diminished with the inclusion of a set of controls, the findings presented in [Figure 5](#) suggest that the gender gap in far-right support might largely be shaped by differences in values, norms, and socioeconomic status, rather than by gender alone.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored the existence of the gender gap in support of the far right across different age cohorts in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of how age and gender intersect to shape voting preferences. Focusing on both reported voting behaviour for the far right in the 2024 European Parliament elections and the general likelihood of voting for far right parties, we shed light on recent trends suggesting an increase in support for the far right, largely driven by young men.

Our analysis of the EES data from 2024 presents descriptive evidence confirming a gender gap in support for far right parties across all three age cohorts, using both reported voting and propensity to vote measures. Notably, we find that the gender gap is significantly larger among the early adulthood cohort (ages 16–29) than among both middle and late adulthood groups, suggesting what we termed as the emergence of a *youth gender gap* in support of the far right. Moreover, descriptive trends over time indicate that this gap is primarily driven by a recent increasing support for the far right among young men, corroborating earlier journalistic observations and pundit commentary⁷.

Focusing more closely on the youngest cohort, we employed an age-period-cohort (APC) analysis to assess whether the observed youth gender gap might be attributed to generational effects. The APC analysis provides evidence that this gap might be a predominantly generational phenomenon. In other words, while the youth-gender gap may appear to reflect age-related factors, the observed (and substantively larger) magnitude of this gap seems to be predominantly rooted in deeper generational dynamics. Finally, to investigate the drivers of the youth gender gap, we conducted a set of cross-country regression analyses using the 2024 wave of the EES. These analyses provide initial evidence pointing to the possible relevance of cultural attitudes in explaining the differences in the youth gender gap.

Since our analysis focuses on European elections, which are typically considered second-order elections (Braun & Schäfer, 2022; Schäfer, 2021), it is reasonable to question whether the observed patterns would extend to national elections as well. Although we acknowledge their second order nature, we believe the results of our analysis should not be, by definition, dismissed as less relevant. As highlighted by Dinas and Riera (2018), second-order elections can have significant spillover effects, especially among voters who are not yet socialised into voting, such as the youth. Moreover, as Schulte-Cloos (2018) showed, far right parties can gain momentum for

the national elections through increased visibility on the European elections, suggesting that the observed patterns of far right support might be even stronger in the national elections to come. Finally, while we acknowledge that our reliance on EES data limits our ability to directly infer voting patterns in national elections, the consistency of the findings across our two measures—EU election vote recall and PTV—suggests that our findings might be considered as early evidence of a possible emerging voting pattern that extends beyond voting patterns of the European Parliament elections. Moreover, relying on these two measures showed interesting patterns in actual voting and party sympathy, suggesting a potential new direction for future research.

Similarly, while this paper acknowledges the differences in the youth gender gap across various countries, it only serves as a starting point for further exploration of the potential causes and consequences of this gap across a set of different geographical contexts. Future research could examine how supply-side factors, such as regional differences in political systems between Eastern and Western Europe, and demand-side factors, including differences in political attitudes and norms, may influence this gap.

Our findings have potentially worrying implications. Although our analyses indicate that young men have consistently exhibited higher likelihood of far right support, the contemporary youth gender gap, driven by Generation Z and Millennial men, is likely to expand further. Consequently, overall support for the far right may also continue to grow. Since prior research has shown that first-time voting and preference formation during the formative years have a lasting impact on attitudes and voting behaviour later in life, far-right support could dramatically increase in the future as today's young voters age. With the youth belonging to these generations growing up, the gender gap is likely to become frozen, 'spill over' and widen among middle age and older cohorts in the future. As a result, with far right parties steadily increasing their presence in parliaments and governments across many countries in Europe, the threat from democratic backsliding (Alonso & Espinosa-Fajardo, 2021; Biard *et al.*, 2019) and worsening bureaucratic quality (Bellodi *et al.*, 2024; Mauk, 2020) might become more severe in the future. However, given that far-right parties in Europe exhibit certain differences, there is a need for further research in this area.

The observed youth gender gap in support for the far right could signal broader societal concerns beyond the political sphere. If this gap reflects an expanding ideological divide closely tied to gender and sexuality issues (see Figure A4 in the supplementary materials and Off (2023) for initial evidence), such polarisation in attitudes may lead to an increase in between-gender rejection rates, leading to a possible decline in the quality of personal relationships, and an increase in loneliness (Renström *et al.*, 2020). This trend could also affect demographic patterns, influencing birth and divorce rates.

While this paper has made an important contribution by showing that there is a sizable gender gap in far right voting among young voters belonging to the generation of Millennials and Generation Z, much remains to be done. Firstly, this paper takes a descriptive approach. Given that the youth-gender gap is a relatively recent phenomenon, the primary objective of this paper has been to rigorously establish its existence across a number of countries. Although we do discuss, test and find largely stable results across different models and specifications for a set of possible theoretical explanations, rigorous explanatory analyses, hypothesis testing, mediation analysis and causal investigations of potential drivers are left for future research. Therefore, this paper does not aim to provide decisive evidence of either correlational or causal nature. We nevertheless encourage future research to delve deeper into potential explanations, particularly by examining the experiences of younger generations. Secondly, this paper does not attempt to extensively address nor explain the cross-country variation in gender patterns of far right support as this has already been attempted by prior research (Immerzeel *et al.*, 2015; Spierings & Zaslove, 2015). While we fully acknowledge the existence of cross-country differences in the gender gap, this paper also demonstrates a diverse cross-country pattern of the age-gender gap in support for the radical right.

Taken together, despite the limitations, this paper provides initial evidence suggesting that the youth gender gap in support for the radical right represents a new generational phenomenon with the potential to significantly impact European societies. Given that it remains unclear whether this gap can be explained by existing theories, we encourage future research to explore its underlying causes. Understanding these causes could help in developing strategies to reduce the gap, thereby strengthening the resilience of European democracies in the long term.

Notes

1. We include both right-wing populist as well as far right parties as classified by the *PopuList* as far right parties (Rooduijn *et al.*, 2023). The use of the term 'far-right party' resonates with the idea that these parties are likely to hold both nativist and authoritarian stances. As such, the term 'far-right party' describes the parties in question in a more narrow sense (Rooduijn *et al.*, 2023).
2. See e.g. <https://www.ft.com/content/e77e1863-5a78-4d16-933c-6a665a66f261?sharetype=blocked>, last accessed 24 June 2024
3. See e.g. <https://www.allendowney.com/blog/2024/01/28/is-the-ideology-gap-growing>, last accessed 4 November 2024.
4. These two different expectations follow a larger debate in political science on the stability of political attitudes. Thus, while some scholars believe that political attitudes are formed during an early age and become firmly 'frozen' over time, an opposing perspective argues that ideological convictions remain 'malleable' well into adulthood (Alwin & Krosnick, 1991; Miller & Sears, 1986).

5. A standard European Election Study 1984 was not conducted, but a set of questions were added to the regular Eurobarometer 21 and Eurobarometer 22.
6. We thank one of the reviewers for bringing this to our attention.
7. See footnotes 2 and 3 above.

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Declaration of Use of AI Tools

The authors declare that they have used ChatGPT 4 for editing the text of the manuscript for better readability and for grammar and syntax checks.

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