

Not your average voter? How women will shape the general election.

With a general election likely to be called any time in the next year, and with women making up more than half of the electorate, understanding their voting intentions and policy priorities should be imperative to any Party wanting to lead the next Government. Crucially, **a quarter of women are currently undecided** on how they will vote at the next election compared to only 11% of men according to polling conducted by YouGov for the Women’s Budget Group. The polling also found that women with caring responsibilities were more than twice as likely to name childcare or social care as one of their top three priorities than the average voter.

This is the data we delved into at our fringe events at the 2023 Conservative and Labour Party Conferences. Together with our expert panels, we explored the pressing issues that will motivate women’s voting intentions at the next general election. From childcare and the cost of living crisis, to education and social care, we discussed how the political parties could significantly influence the outcome of the next general election by shifting their focus on women voters’ policy priorities.

It’s important to remember that there is no such thing as a homogenous group of ‘women’, but that women’s attitudes will differ according to their positionalities and intersecting inequalities across race, class, disability, sexuality, age, and region.

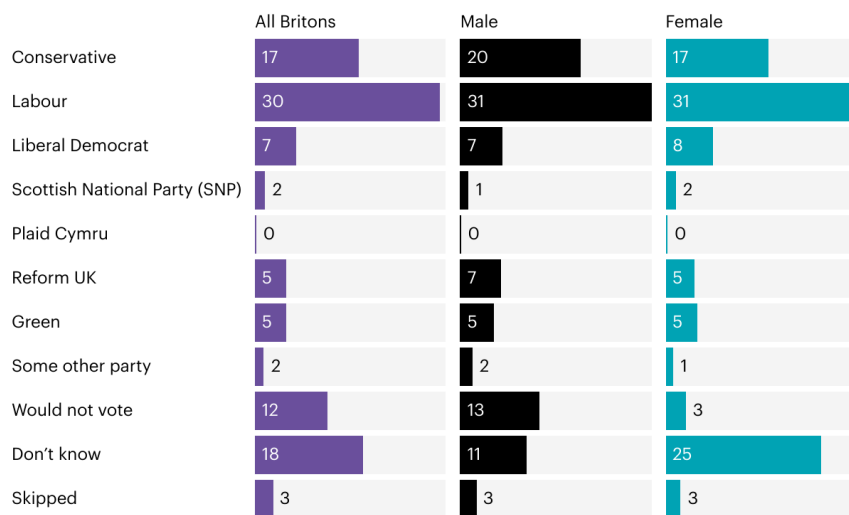
Alba Kapoor, Head of Policy, Runnymede Trust (Labour Conference panellist)

“Women of colour should be a critical barometer to understanding how and in what way our social systems are failing. They stand at the centre of the racialised and gendered impact of crises in our services, and should not be ignored. Political parties must listen to the findings of this polling, and commit to centring women’s voices in the run up to the General Election.”

For the purpose of our conference events and this briefing, we took a closer look at the attitudes of women carers, analysing a cross-section of the data according to their caring responsibilities. This briefing provides a summary of this analysis, as well as reflections from our conference panellists.

How will women vote at the next general election?

Figure 1: Voting intentions at the next general election



% of 2000 adults in Great Britain, including 1117 women

25-26 July 2023

In the UK, traditionally, the ‘women’s vote’ has tended to lean to the right of the political spectrum. In fact, in nearly every general election between 1945 – 2015 the Conservative Party gained more votes from women than men. However, there has started to be a shift in recent years, with Labour winning a

significantly larger share of votes from women than the Conservatives in both the 2017 and 2019 general elections¹.

This trend has been confirmed by our polling, which found that:

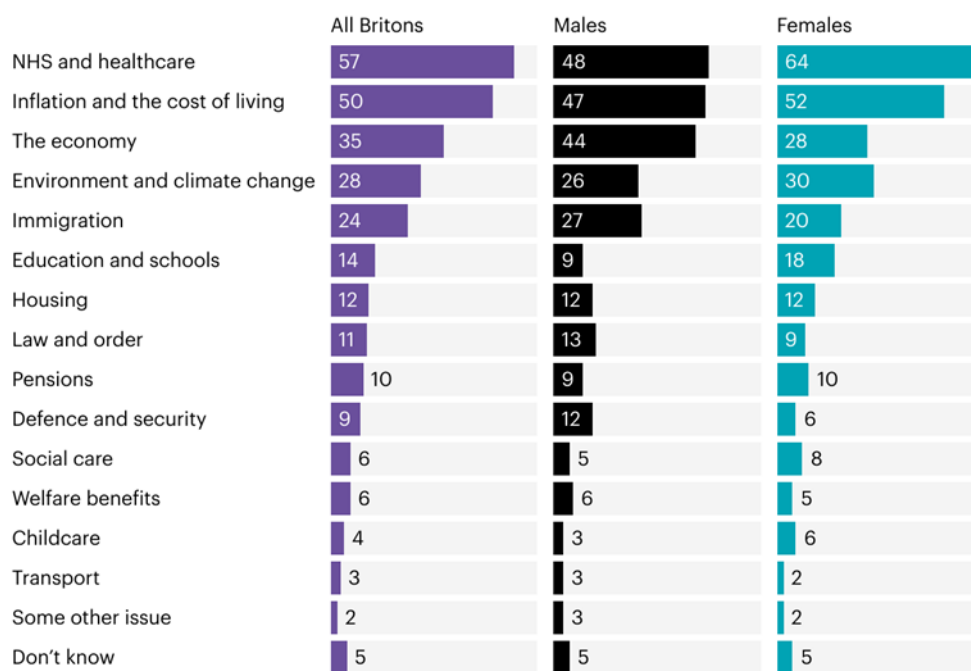
- Women are as likely to vote Labour as men, but less likely to vote Conservative
- Younger women are most likely to vote Labour (44%) with around one in twenty saying they would vote Conservative (4%) and Lib Dem (5%).
- Yet with increasing age, Labour’s lead decreases, with the Conservatives in the lead in over 65s (27%).

James Blagden, Head of Politics & Polling, Onward (Conservative Conference panellist)

“In many ways, men and women care about the same things. But there are some key differences around the prioritisation of health, childcare, and education. And where men are more concerned about “the economy” generally, women emphasise the more tangible “cost of living”. The political Parties need to respond to this with a policy offering that shows they understand voters’ concerns.”

What’s informing women’s voting intentions?

Figure 2: Which of the following issues will be most important to you in deciding how to vote at the next general election? Please tick up to three %



2000 adults in Great Britain, including 1117 women

25-26 July 2023

Key findings:

- Nearly two thirds of women (64%) and just under half of men (48%) named the NHS as a top priority.
- 52% of women and 47% of men named cost of living/inflation as a top priority.
- Women were more likely than men to name the environment and climate change (30% compared to 26%).
- Men were more likely than women to name the economy (44% of men, 28% of women).

¹ Cooper, C. and Campbell, R. (2023) [What women want: Why women will decide the next general election](#), Labour Together

While the polling found that the top issues for men and women are broadly similar, when you dig into the data, women are significantly more likely to be concerned about the NHS and the cost of living crisis than men.

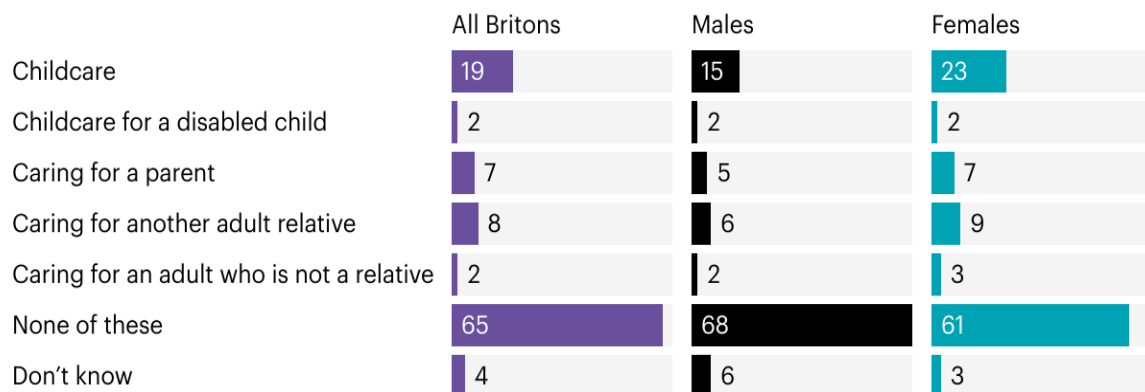
This is unsurprising since women are the majority of those who provide unpaid care. And since women providing unpaid care are more likely to be economically inactive, in low-paid, part-time or precarious forms of work, they are therefore more likely to be dependent on social security and public services. The gendered nature of unpaid care therefore has significant consequences for economic inequality, meaning that women are less prepared to face the rise in the cost of living.

Victoria Benson, CEO, Gingerbread (Labour Conference panellist)

“The soaring cost of living is one of the biggest challenges single parents currently face - 69% of calls to our Gingerbread helpline are about Universal Credit alone and the majority of the rest are related to household finances. It’s clear that not only in order to win votes, but in order to improve the lives of the 1.8 million single parents and their children in the UK, the cost of living crisis and improving social security is something politicians must be focusing on.”

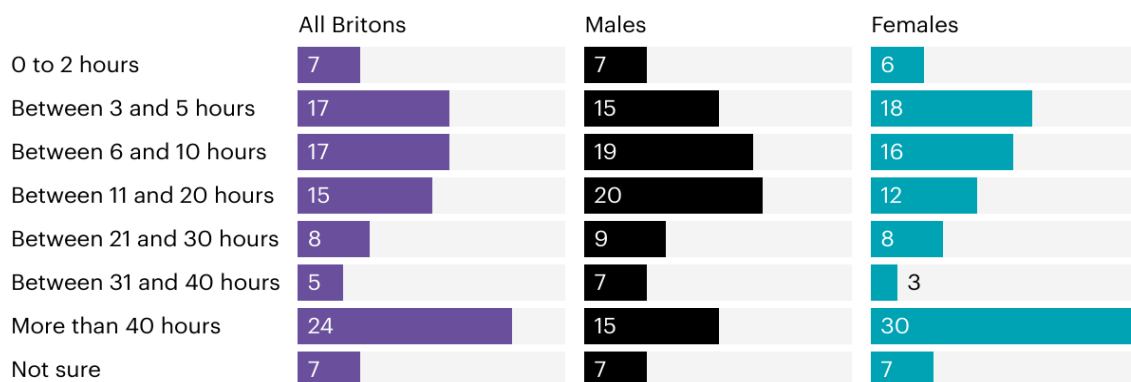
What’s the disparity of unpaid care?

Figure 3: Which, if any, of the following types of UNPAID work do you do carry out in the average week? Please tick all that apply. %



25-26 July 2023

Figure 4: How many hours do you provide this care for in a typical week?



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Key findings:

- Women are significantly more likely to be unpaid carers than men;

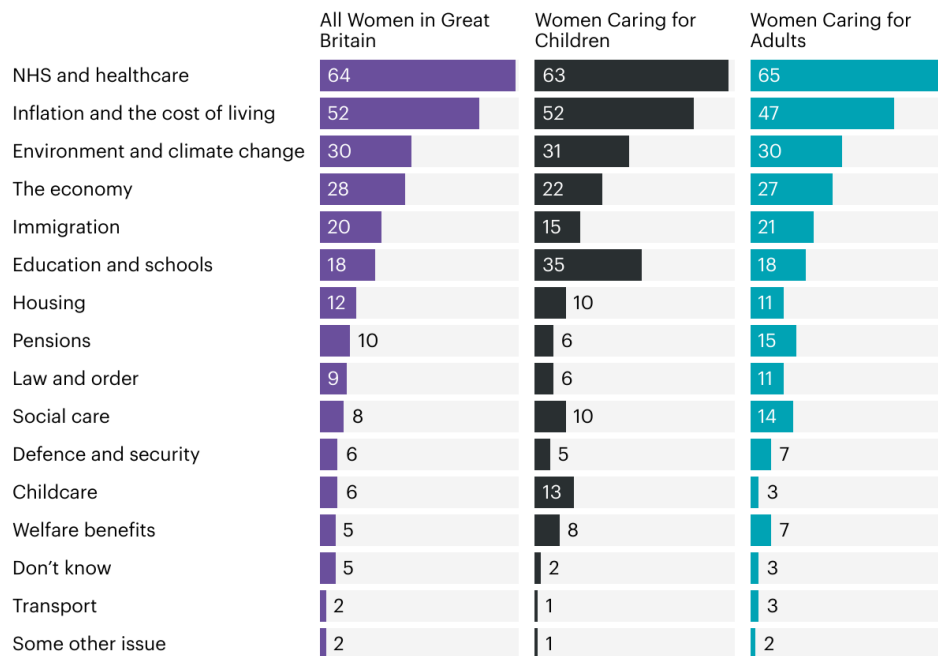
- Women carers are twice as likely as men to spend 40 hours or more per week caring for others.

Emily Holzhausen, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, Carers UK (Conservative conference panellist)

“Women are more likely to provide care, with a 50:50 chance of providing care by the time they are 46, while men don’t have the same chance until they are 57. Meaning that women miss out on an additional 11 years for earning potential. Women are also more likely to give up to work to care; more likely to be working part-time if they are providing care to an adult; and more likely to be working below their potential as a result of their caring responsibilities”

What’s informing the voting intentions of women who provide unpaid care?

Figure 5: Which of the following issues will be most important to you in deciding how to vote at the next general election? Please tick up to three. Cross section of data by unpaid care type.



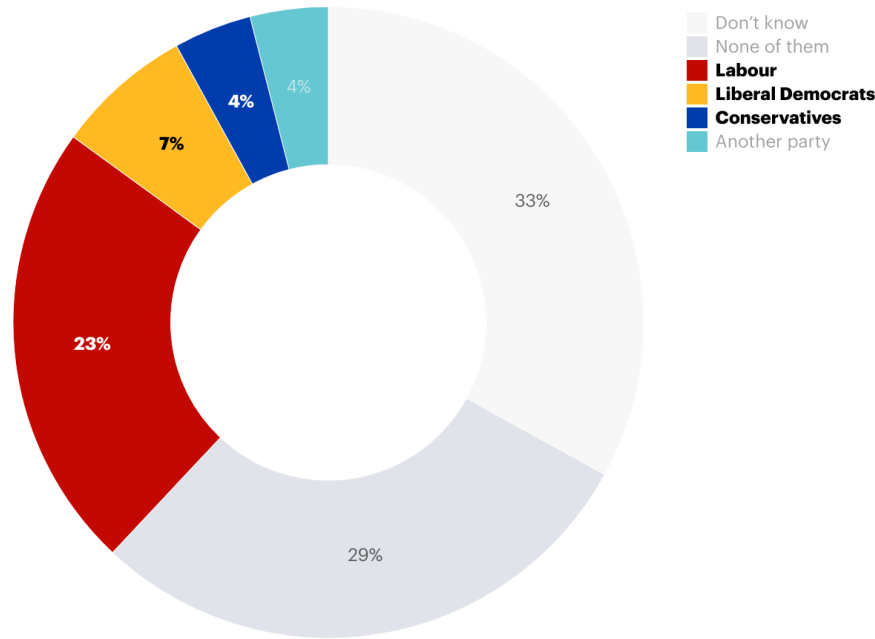
25-26 July 2023

Key findings:

- Women caring for adults are almost twice as likely to cite social care as one of their top three issues (14%) compared to all women (8%).
- Women caring for children are nearly four times as likely to cite education as a priority than men (35% vs. 9%).
- Over a third of women caring for children (35%) named education as one of their top three priorities, compared to 14% of voters in general.

Women's priorities and attitudes to parties

Figure 3: Which of the following political parties would you trust the most to improve gender equality in society? %



% of 1117 women in Great Britain

25 – 26 July 2023

Key findings:

- Women are most likely to trust Labour (23%) to improve gender equality, while the Conservatives rank lowest (4%). A significant percentage remains uncertain (33%) or believes no party would be most likely to tackle gender inequality (29%).
- Only 25% of women who intend to vote Conservative say they trust the party to improve gender equality, while 31% say they are uncertain.
- Women who intend to vote Labour are most likely to cite Labour as the party most likely improve gender equality (52%). But nearly one in four (23%) are unsure and 16% don't know.

What does this mean for the political Parties' as we head towards the election?

We know that unpaid care is the root cause of women's economic inequality, with women more likely to be economically inactive, in low-paid, part-time or precarious forms of work, and thus more likely to be dependent on social security and public services. Fairer and more progressive tax policies, such as windfall taxes on industries that have profited from the cost of living crisis, taxing wealth directly and equalising tax on income from wealth and income from work would go a long way to funding the services and social security needed to immediately ease the current economic pain of women and their families.

As well as the day-to-day challenges women are worried about, they are also more likely than men to say that the environment and climate change will be important to how they vote in the next election. This should be a warning to all parties not to row back on their climate commitments, and an invitation to make clear in their manifestos how their environmental policies will also tackle gender and other inequalities.

When over 60% of women are either uncertain which party is most likely to improve gender equality or don't trust any of them to, politicians still have a way to go to win women's trust and votes and should not lose sight of the gains and losses to be made by recognising and addressing women's economic inequality.

For a full breakdown of our polling results, as well as a full set of graphs and tables, please see [here](#) or contact admin@wbg.org.uk