

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



Introduction

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 (WBG). 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 panellists, we explored the pressing issues informing women's voting intentions and how political Parties could significantly influence the outcome of the next general election by shifting their focus on women's policy priorities.

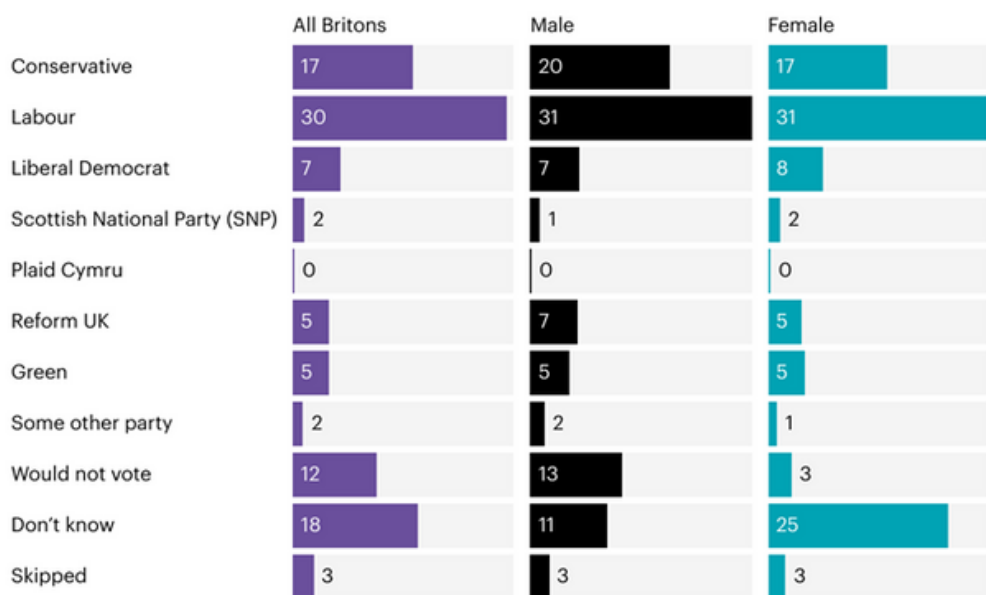
For the purpose of our conference events and this briefing, we took a closer look at the attitudes of women carers, analysing a cross-section of the data according to their caring responsibilities. This briefing provides a summary of this analysis, as well as reflections from our conference panellists.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

“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.”

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

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 nearly every general election between 1945 – 2015 the Conservatives gained more votes from women than men. But there has been a shift in recent years, with Labour winning a significantly larger share of votes from women than the Conservatives in the 2017 and 2019 general elections[1].

Key findings:

- 25% of women and 11% of men said that they are undecided about how to vote at the next election.
- 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%).

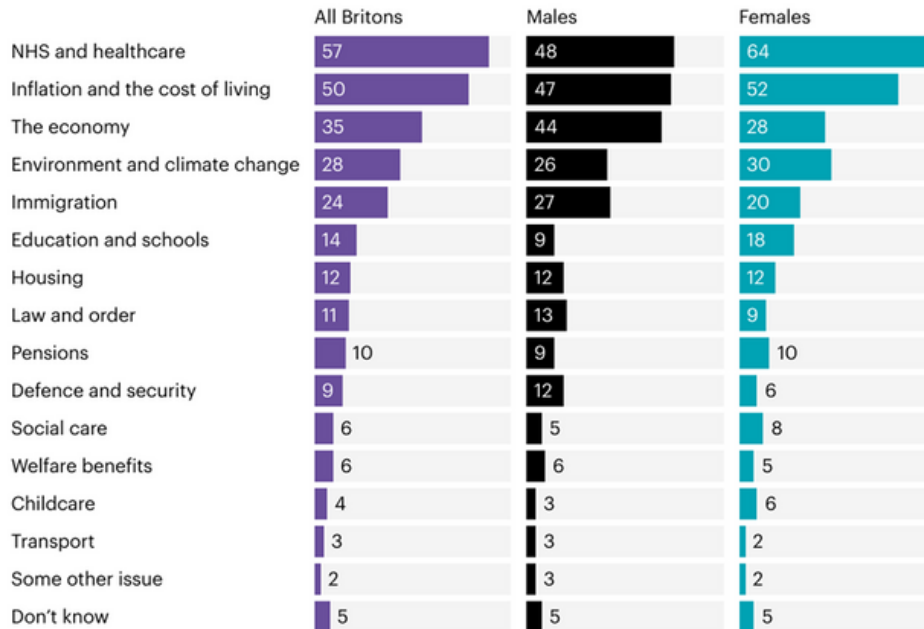
“In many ways, men and women care about the same things. But there are some key differences around the prioritisation of health, childcare, and education. And where men are more concerned about “the economy” generally, women emphasise the more tangible “cost of living”. The political Parties need to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

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

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

What are women's priorities when deciding how to vote?

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 %



% of 2000 adults in Great Britain, including 1117 women

25-26 July 2023

Key findings:

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

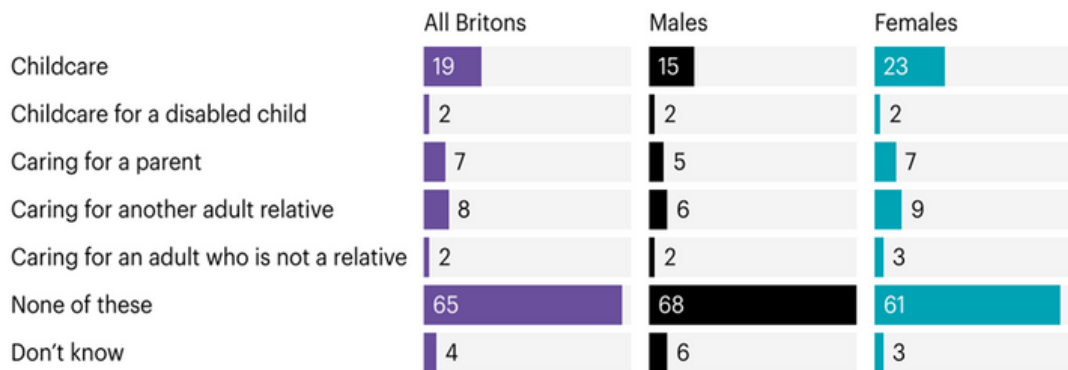
While the top issues for men and women are broadly similar, women are significantly more likely to be concerned about the NHS and the cost of living crisis than men. This is unsurprising since women are the majority of those who provide unpaid care, which makes them more likely to be economically inactive, in low-paid, part-time, or precarious forms of work. Women are therefore less prepared to face the rising cost of living and more likely to be dependent on social security and public services.

“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.”

Victoria Benson, CEO, Gingerbread (Labour Conference panellist)

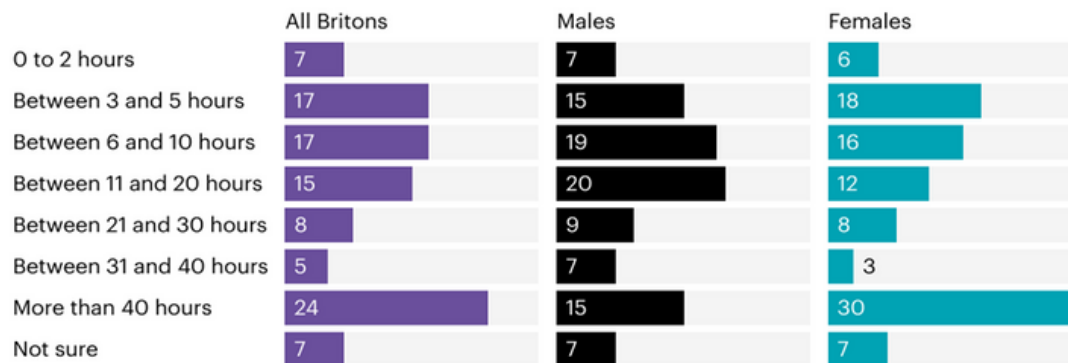
Who carries out unpaid care?

Figure 3: Which, if any, of the following types of UNPAID work do you 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:

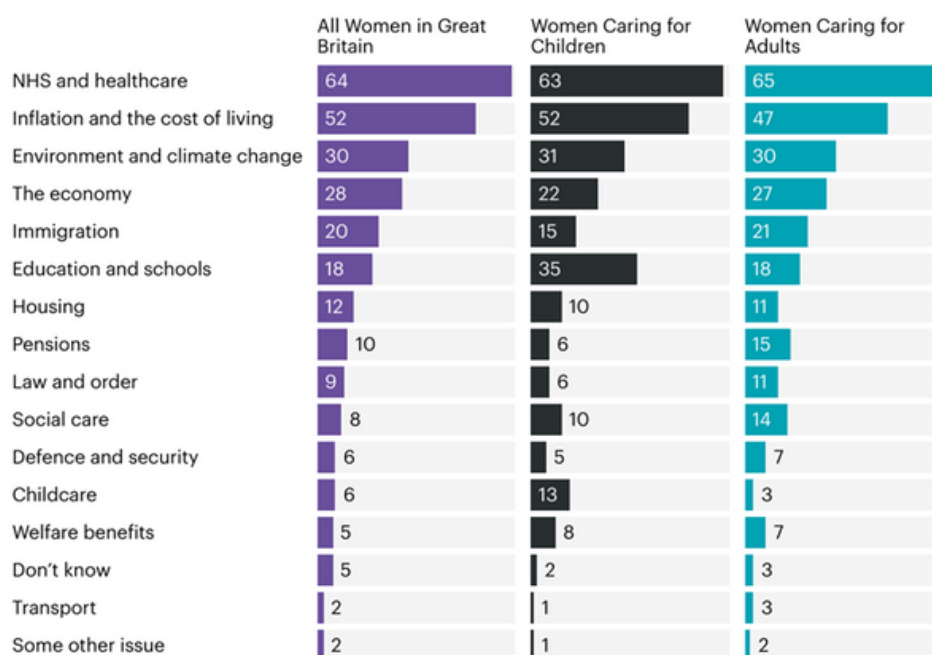
- Women are significantly more likely to be unpaid carers than men.
- Women carers are twice as likely as men to spend 40 hours or more per week caring for others.

“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.”

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

What are the priorities of women who provide unpaid care when deciding how to vote?

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.



% of 1117 women in Great Britain, including 436 women who care for an adult or child on an unpaid basis

25-26 July 2023

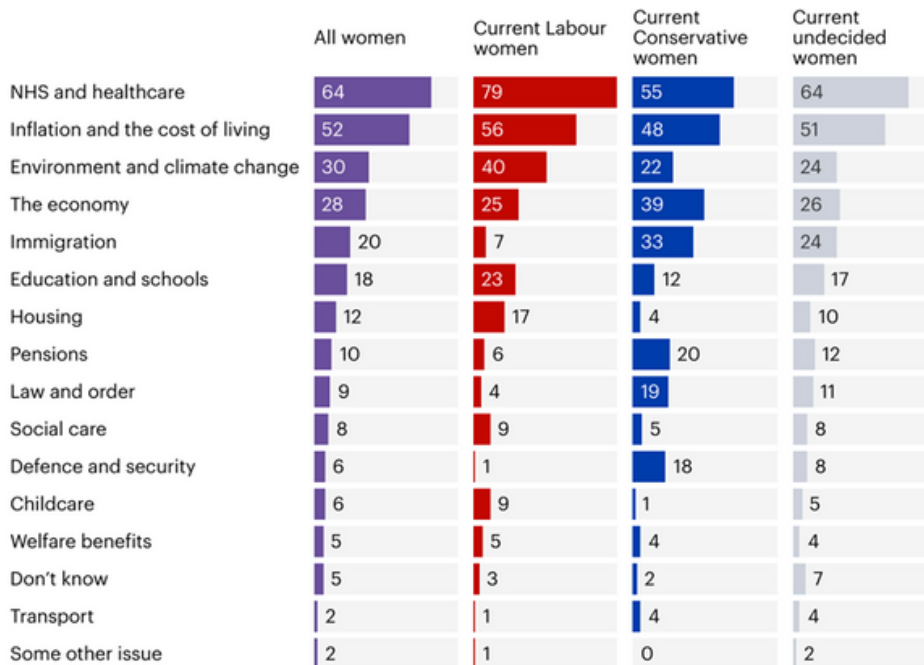
Key findings*:

- 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.

*Drawn from comparisons made with data in Figure 2.

Women's priorities by voting intention.

Figure 6: 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. %



% of 1117 women in Great Britain, including 436 women who care for an adult or child on an unpaid basis

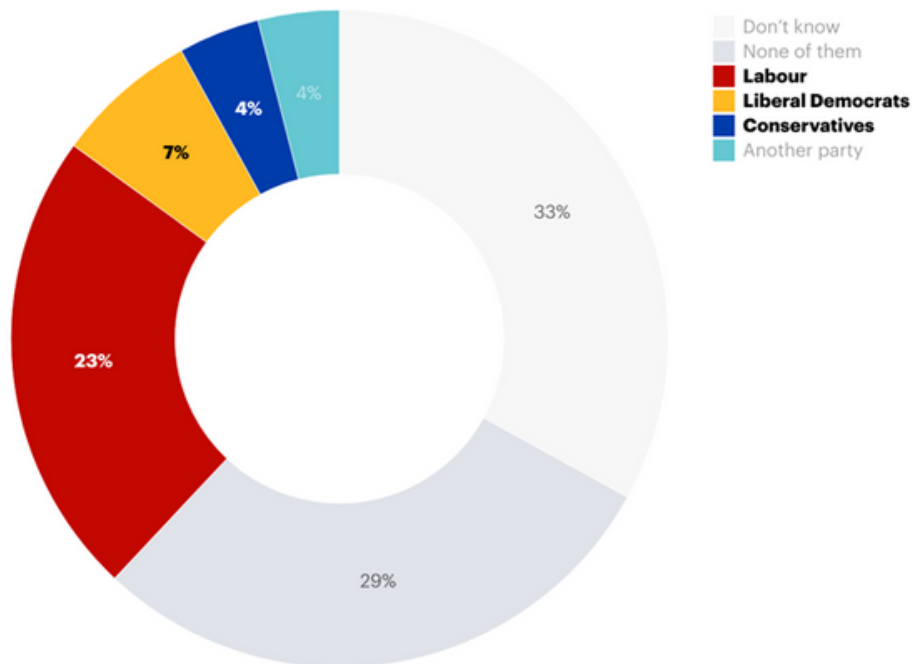
25 - 26 July 2023

Key findings:

- Women who intend to vote Labour are particularly likely to care about the NHS (79%), whilst being less likely to care about immigration (7%) and defence (1%).
- Women who intend to vote Conservative are particularly likely to care about the economy (39%) and immigration (33%), whilst being less likely to care about housing (4%) and climate change (22%).
- Women who are undecided don't care about any issue more than women in general, but are less likely to care about climate change (24%).

Which party is trusted most on gender equality?

Figure 7: 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 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 and taxing wealth directly and equalising tax on income from wealth and income from work. This 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 amy.brooker@wbg.org.uk



Methodology

YouGov surveyed a nationally and politically representative sample of 2000 adults in Great Britain online between the 25th and 26th July 2023.

To construct the sample, quota sampling paired with post-stratification random iterative method weighting was employed.

YouGov invited respondents to complete surveys from its proprietary panel, a group of over 2.7 million people in the UK who have signed up to complete YouGov surveys, via email and the YouGov app.

YouGov employs quota sampling to invite respondents to surveys needed to meet sample quotas based on data from the ONS and election studies.

Quotas are applied to select people based on their:

- Age
- Gender
- Vote in 2019
- Vote in the EU referendum
- Social grade (see MRS)
- Region
- Political attention
- Education level

Analyses for the purposes of this briefing were conducted by Fintan Smith of YouGov UK. If you have any questions about the methodology underlying the findings of this poll, or how you can access these results, please contact fintan.smith@yougov.com

