

Why millions of young Brits will reject the Tories

By Josh Smith

The troubled Conservative Party is losing support from Gen Z and millennials - significantly more so than other generations, academics have warned.

The latest polling shows that only one in 10 people under 40 in the UK will vote Tory at the next general election.

“You’ve never had a majority of young people across the country voting Tory, but what appears to be happening is that fewer people are moving towards the Conservatives as they grow older,” said Dr Peter Finn, senior lecturer in politics at Kingston University.

One main factor contributing to this is the decline of upward social mobility across the UK. “If the gap between the rich and poor is very large, then it will be harder for people to move up the socio-economic ladder,” said Dr Simon Choat, head of the department of economics at Kingston University.

Homeownership has become a significant area of inequality between generations in the UK.

The number of 25-to-34-year-old Brits who own their own home is 22% lower than in 1990, compared with 8% in Germany, 6% in the US and just 3% in France, according to the Financial Times.

“It’s unaffordability, price versus wages,” explained Dr Rex A

McKenzie, senior lecturer in economics at Kingston University.

“House price increases have outweighed wage increases for a number of years and that has a lot to do with government policies.”

The average house price in the UK has risen by 239.8% since January 2001, while the average wage has only increased by 117.4%, according to government data. While in London, the average house price has risen by 297.3% in the same period.

“The Tories have completely failed the country and have caused the massive wealth disparities we see,” said Felix Butler, 24, a member of the Kingston Labour Party. “Home ownership is barely a dream due to rents being so high... aspirational thinking isn’t present in the way it’s been in older generations.”

However, addressing high house prices presents a dilemma for governments. For many people, housing wealth has compensated for stagnating wages, with this housing wealth being used to preserve living standards.

This is especially difficult for the Conservatives as homeowners are more likely to vote Tory, so lowering house prices would negatively affect their support, Choat explained.

Another factor contributing to declining social mobility among young people is the challenging landscape of job opportunities,

with the expansion of the gig economy meaning that secure, well-paid jobs are increasingly hard to come by.

Then there is austerity. Cuts to social services by successive Conservative governments have exacerbated regional inequalities and negatively impacted young people.

Along with economic disparities, there seems to be a growing misalignment in values, particularly since Brexit.

The number of 18-34-year-olds who said they “strongly disliked” the Conservative party was around 20% before the 2016 referendum but has more than doubled in the years since, according to Focaldata.

“Brexit has had a negative effect on economic growth, which is slower than it would have been if we had remained members of the EU, meaning that as a country we are poorer than we would have been,” Choat said.

It has also restricted the opportunities of young people because it is now much harder for young people to live, study and work in other European countries.

Another source of a misalignment in values is in areas around identity politics and the culture war, which can be perceived as “off-putting and mean” says Finn.

He uses the example of the Rwanda Policy as not only an ineffective policy that has cost lots

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of money but also a policy that is unappealing to younger voters.

“The Tory party refuse to conduct politics in a positive way - they consistently allow

attacks from party members and MPs on trans people, refugees, Muslims, and disabled people,” Butler said. “As a whole they stoke division.”