

# Gender & Voting

Sam Crawley - POLS232

Week 7.2



# Today's lecture

- Measurement — sex, gender, and gender diversity
- Gender gaps — turnout, participation, and vote choice
- Explanations — why do these gaps exist?

# Sex vs. Gender

## Sex

Biologically defined – chromosomes, hormones, anatomy

## Gender

Socially defined – identities, roles and expectations shaped by culture

### Notes

- Often survey questions offer only binary responses, and can be unclear about whether they're asking about sex or gender.
- Academic research (especially older work) often conflates the terms sex and gender.

# Gender diversity

- Non-binary and gender diverse identities increasingly relevant
- Transgender issues highly salient in politics and policy
- Key research challenges: measurement, small-N problem

L7.2: Gender & Voting (2026)

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## Notes

- Two key research challenges: measurement (no consistency in sex/gender questions in surveys) and the small-N problem (gender-diverse people are a small share of the population, making statistical analysis difficult).
- Gender-diverse people also use many different labels to describe themselves, making it hard to aggregate responses into meaningful categories for quantitative analysis.
- Qualitative research is especially important here — it can capture experiences and identities that survey data misses.

# Measuring gender

"Classic" gender question:

*Are you:*

- Male
- Female

## Notes

- Most surveys historically used a binary sex/gender question — male or female — with no space for other identities.
- This approach conflates sex and gender, and excludes non-binary and gender-diverse respondents entirely.
- Since it conflates sex with gender, also challenging for transgender people to answer

# Measuring gender: a recommendation

Cameron and Stinson (2019) recommend:

- Avoid the word "other"
- *What gender do you identify as?*
  - Man
  - Woman
  - I identify my gender as: \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)

## Notes

- Academics / survey researchers do not agree on how to word gender questions appropriately.
- Cameron and Stinson (2019) conducted research to find which question wording best captures gender diversity without alienating respondents.
- Using "other" as a category is problematic — it implies non-binary identities are somehow outside the norm or lesser.
- The open-text write-in option respects the diversity of how people describe themselves, while still allowing quantitative analysis of broad categories.

# History of women in politics

- NZ first country where women gained the vote (1893)
- Most Western democracies followed in the early 20th century
- Gaining the vote did not quickly translate into political representation



## Notes

- After women in NZ got the vote, other countries followed, but the suffragette campaigns were often long (and sometimes bloody)
- Some countries were much later: Switzerland did not grant women the right to vote until 1971.
- Women remained a small minority in most parliaments for decades after gaining the vote, facing structural and cultural barriers to standing for office.

# Gender gaps in electoral behaviour

## Turnout

Who shows up to vote

## Participation

Party membership,  
campaigning, contacting  
politicians

## Vote choice

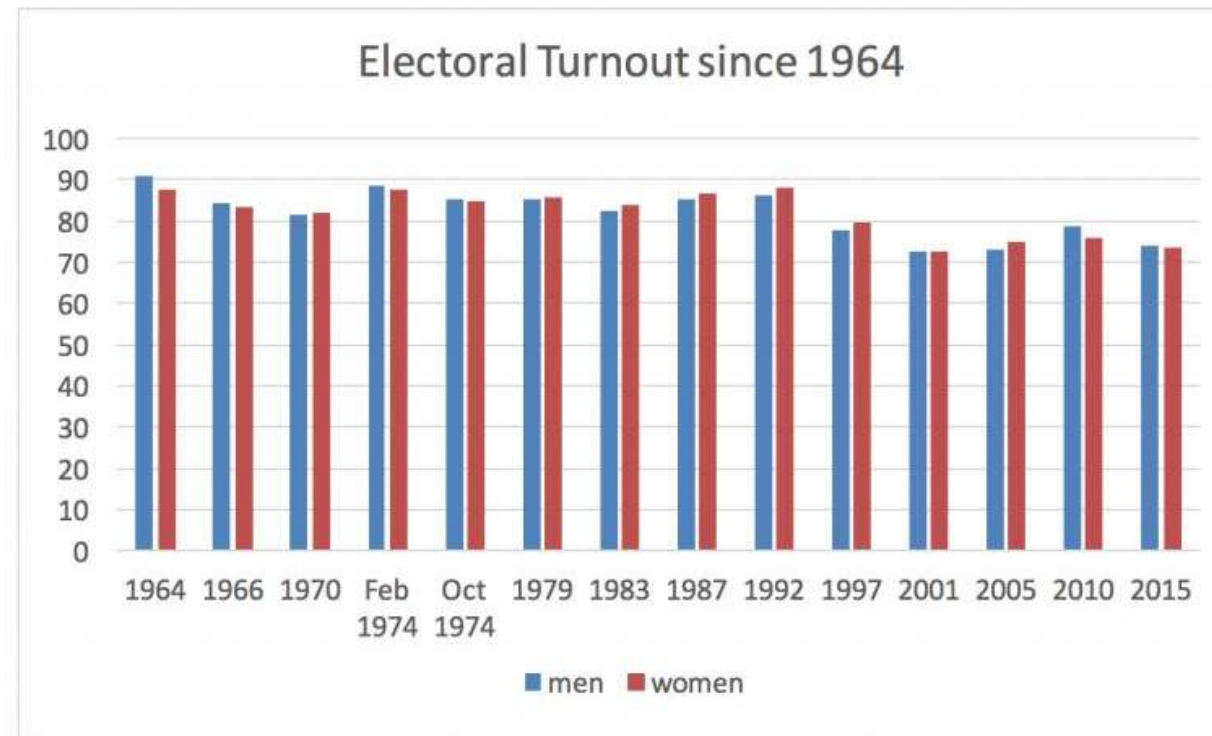
Which party or candidate  
women and men support

### Notes

- Gender differences don't produce a single gap — they show up differently across multiple dimensions of political behaviour.
- The size and direction of each gap varies by country and has changed over time.
- We can also talk about the gender gap in ideology and issue positions (related to vote choice)

# UK turnout gender gap

**Figure 1: Turnout (%) since 1964 for men and women**



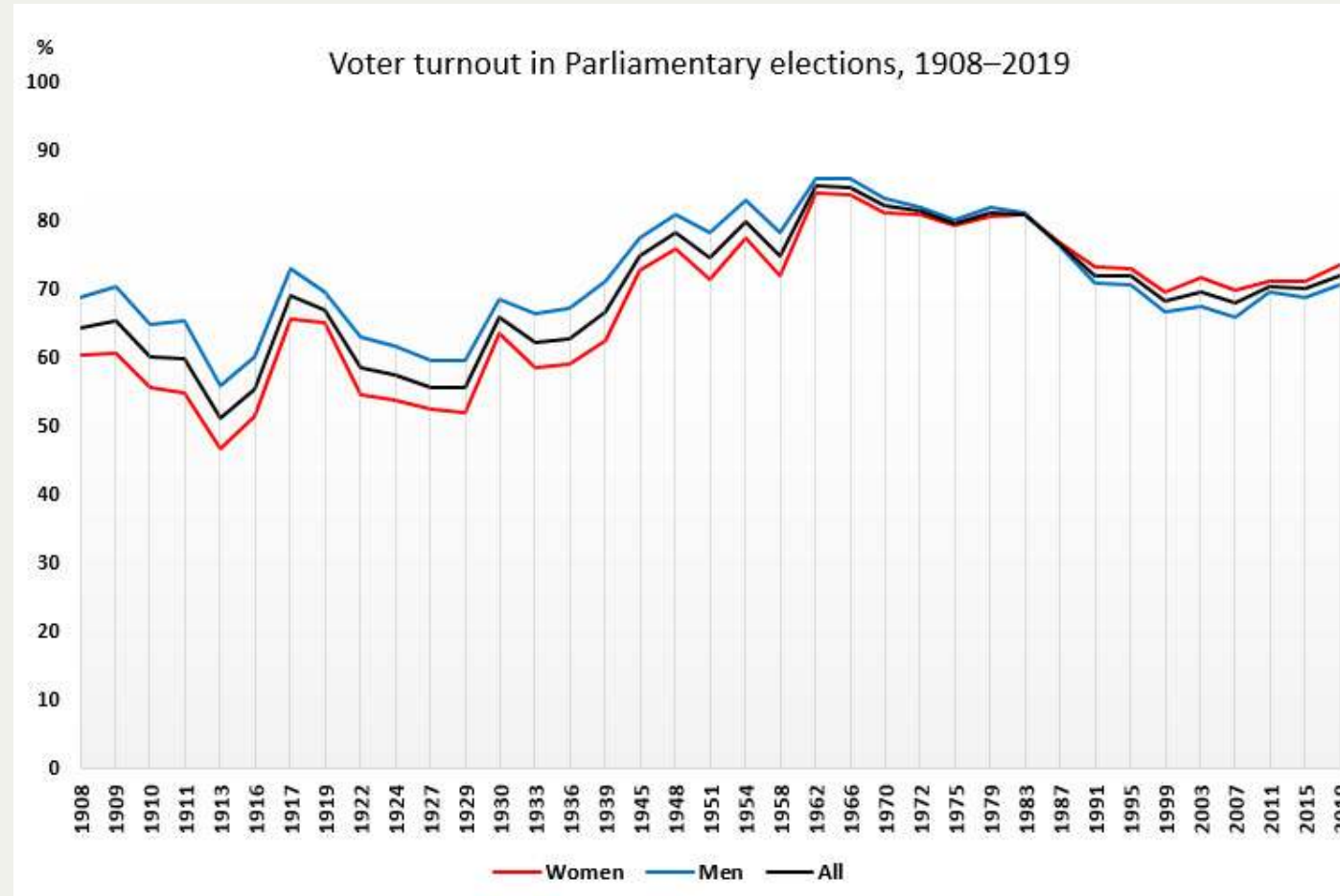
Source: *British Election Studies, 1964-2015*

Source: Shorrocks (2017)

**Notes**

- Historically men voted more than women — but in many countries this has now reversed.
- The UK shows small differences between men & women, with no clear trend (i.e. no real gender gap)
- The gap has not disappeared everywhere — some countries still show men voting at higher rates.

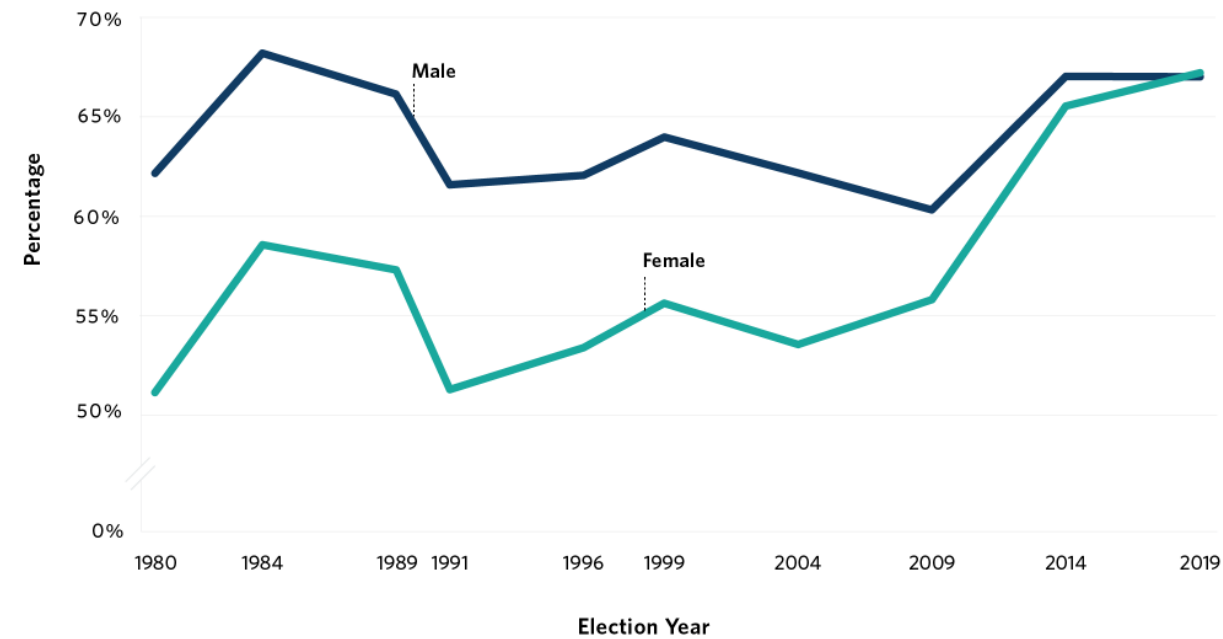
# Finland turnout gender gap



Source: Parliament of Finland

# India turnout gender gap

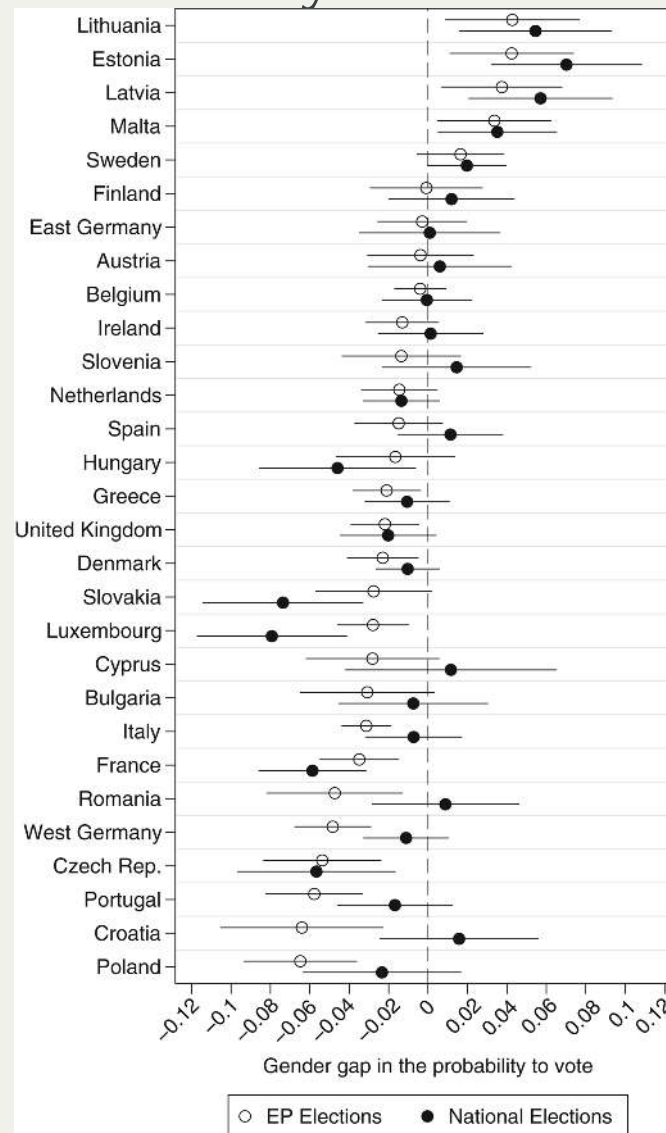
**Figure 1. Disappearing Gender Gap in Voter Turnout**



Note: Voter turnout is calculated as the number of male/female voters divided by the number of male/female electors.  
Figure includes data from general elections held between 1980 and 2019.  
Source: Election Commission of India, <https://eci.gov.in>.

Source: Kumar (2024)

# Country differences



Source: Dassonneville & Kostelka (2020)

Notes

- Positive value: women participate more; Negative value: men participate more

# Gender and political participation

Women are less likely than men to...

Join a political party

Attend political meetings

Campaign for a party

Contact politicians

## Notes

- These patterns generally hold cross-nationally (although there are exceptions)
- The presence of gender gaps across multiple forms of political participation suggests some common underlying causes (which we'll get to later)
- Women also generally less likely to stand as a candidate in an election, which partly explains lower levels of representation in parliament

# Interest in politics

Are there differences in how much interest men & women have in politics?

National & global politics

Men report higher interest

Local politics

Women report higher interest  
(*Coffé, 2013*)

(Generalised finding)

## Notes

- The standard finding that women are less interested in politics may be an artefact of how the question is asked — "politics" typically conjures national government and elections.
- Coffé (2013) finds the gap reverses at the local level, suggesting women's political engagement is different in focus, not simply lower.

# Gender and vote choice



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## Notes

- Campaign advert from the 1956 Eisenhower campaign (Republican president) targeting women
- Note how it largely appeals to women's conservative values

# Gender and vote choice

## Historically

Women tended to vote more conservatively — linked to higher religiosity and the temperance movement

## More recently

Women tend to vote for left-leaning parties — though the size of the gap varies by country

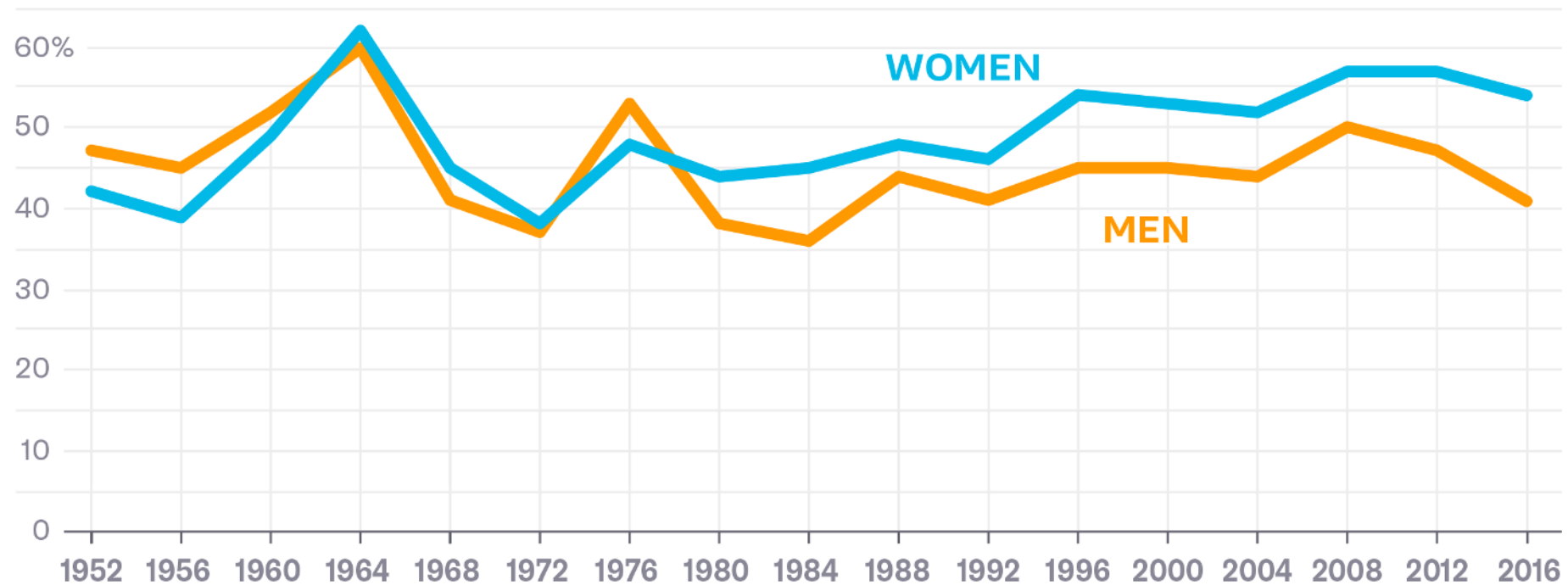
### Notes

- The reversal is one of the most striking findings in the gender and voting literature — the direction of the gap has flipped over the course of the 20th century.
- The shift is linked to women's increased labour force participation, rising education levels, and declining religiosity.
- The gap is not uniform — in some countries it is large, in others small or absent. Context matters.

# US gender vote gap

## Gender Gap in U.S. Presidential Elections

Percentage voting for the Democratic presidential candidate in each election



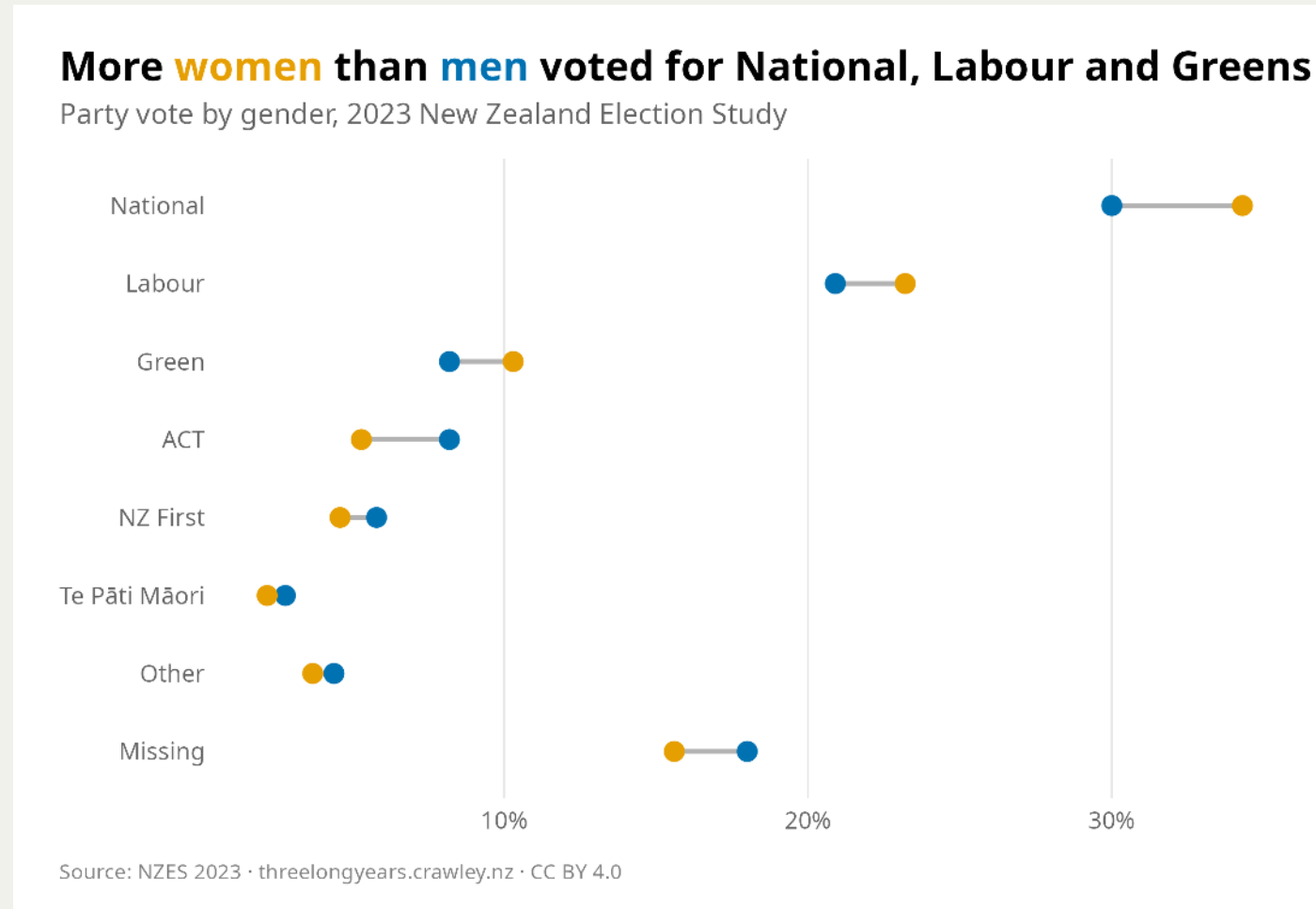
Sources: Gallup Polls (1952-2012);  
Edison Research for the National Election Pool (preliminary 2016)

**BloombergQuickTake**

**Notes**

- Worth thinking about intersectionality (especially in the US context) - in 2024, more white women voted for Trump than Harris, but overall most women voted for Harris

# NZ gender vote gap

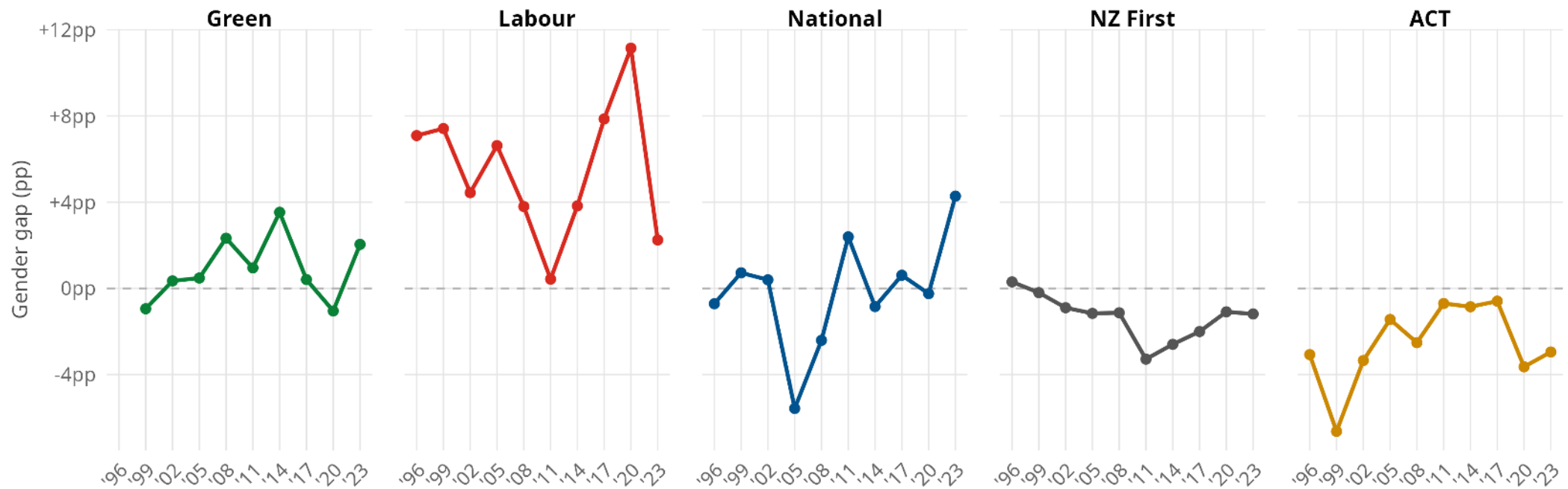


Data source: NZES (2023)

# NZ gender vote gap

## New Zealand's gender voting gap has shifted across parties since 1996

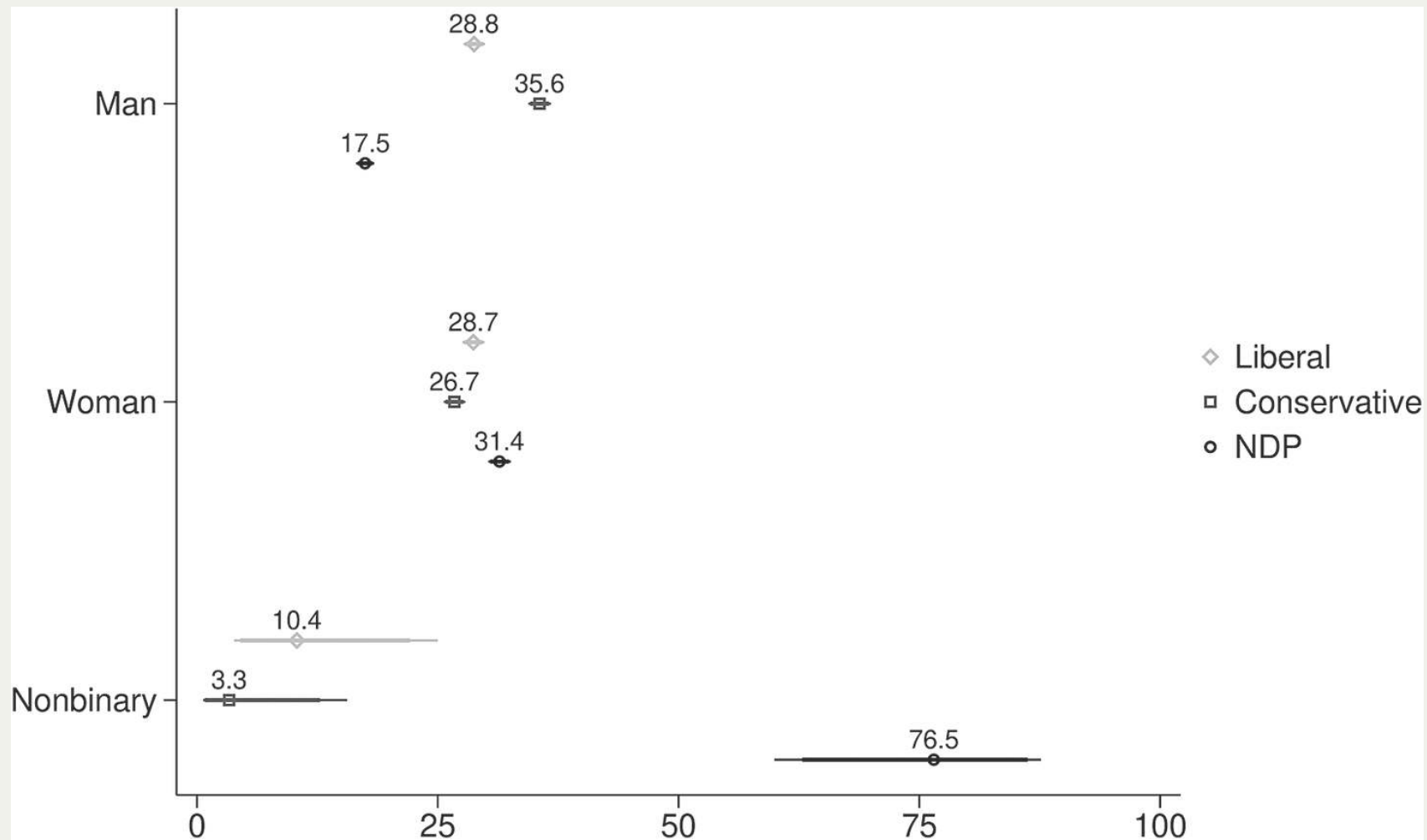
Gender gap in party vote (women % minus men %), 1996–2023 NZ Election Studies



Source: NZ Election Study (weighted) · threelongyears.crawley.nz · CC BY 4.0

Data source: NZES (1996-2023)

# Non-binary people and party support



Source: Albaugh et al. (2024)

**Notes**

- Study shows non-binary people are much more likely to vote for the left-wing NDP in Canada than men or women
- i.e., non-binary people have very different political views from people with binary gender identities

# Question: Why do these gender gaps exist?



# Why do gender gaps exist?

## Supply-side explanations

The voter's own resources, attitudes, and circumstances

## Demand-side explanations

Parties, institutions, and the broader political context

### Notes

- Supply-side explanations focus on what women bring to politics — their resources, socialisation, and attitudes.
- Demand-side explanations focus on how the political system shapes women's participation — whether parties mobilise them, and whether institutions make participation easier or harder.
- Both sides matter and interact — e.g. lack of role models (supply) is partly a product of how parties select candidates (demand).

# Supply-side factors

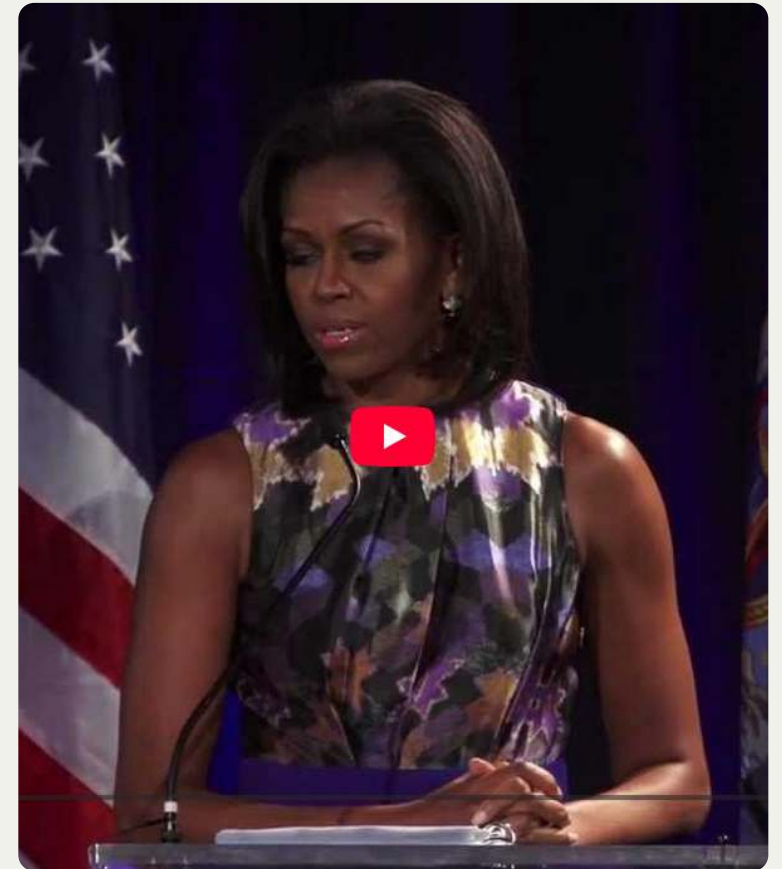
- **Structural:** socio-economic resources (employment, income, education)
- **Cultural:** political attitudes, feminism, worldview
- **Socialisation:** role models, politics seen as a "man's world"

## Notes

- Structural factors: women's historically lower labour force participation and income meant fewer resources — time, money, civic skills — for political engagement.
- Cultural factors: women may hold different political attitudes (e.g. more supportive of welfare), and feminist identity is a strong predictor of left voting.
- Socialisation: politics has long been coded as masculine — fewer female role models, and political discussion less common in women's social networks.

# Demand-side factors

- **Mobilising organisations:** parties, unions, religious groups
- **Media:** how female politicians are covered and framed shapes perceptions of women in politics
- **Institutions:** rules that may disadvantage women (e.g. weekday elections, candidate selection)



Michelle Obama, 2012 DNC

## Notes

- Parties play a dual role: they can mobilise women (as Obama's 2012 campaign did very effectively) or exclude them through candidate selection processes.
- Media coverage of female politicians tends to focus on appearance and personal life rather than policy — this can discourage women from entering politics and shape voters' perceptions.
- Institutional rules can create structural barriers — e.g. holding elections on working days or campaign finance rules that disadvantage challengers.

# Key takeaways

- Gender produces *multiple* gaps — turnout, participation, vote choice, and issue positions
- Patterns have shifted over time and vary across countries — they are not fixed
- Both supply-side and demand-side factors explain the gaps, and they interact
- Gender diversity remains poorly measured and under-studied in voting research

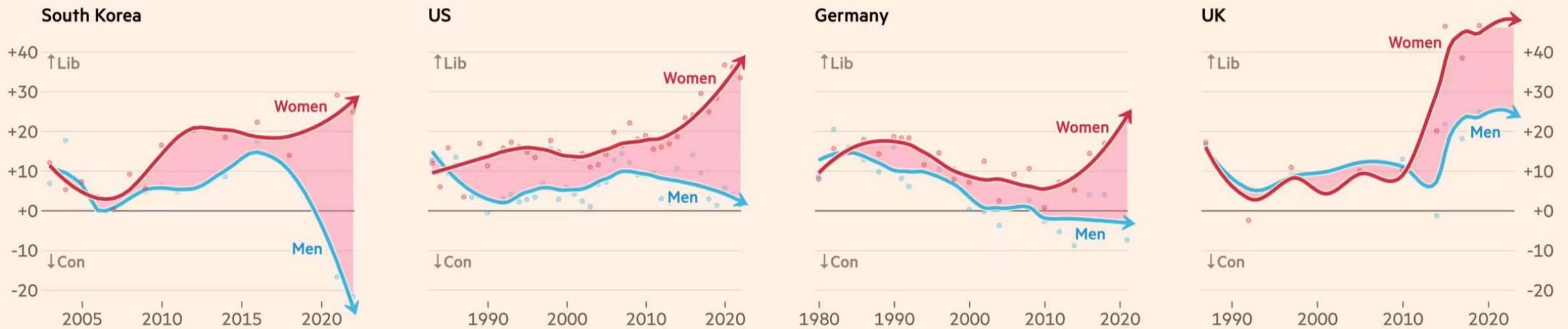
## Notes

- The key message is that gender and politics is a complex, dynamic relationship — not reducible to a single gap or a single cause.
- The historical reversal in vote choice direction is a good illustration: what seemed like a fixed pattern turned out to be contingent on social and economic conditions.
- Gender diversity is an emerging frontier — expect the research to develop significantly over the coming years.

# Gender gap among young people

A wide ideology gap is opening up between young men and women in countries across the world

Political ideology of 18-29s (% liberal minus % conservative), by sex



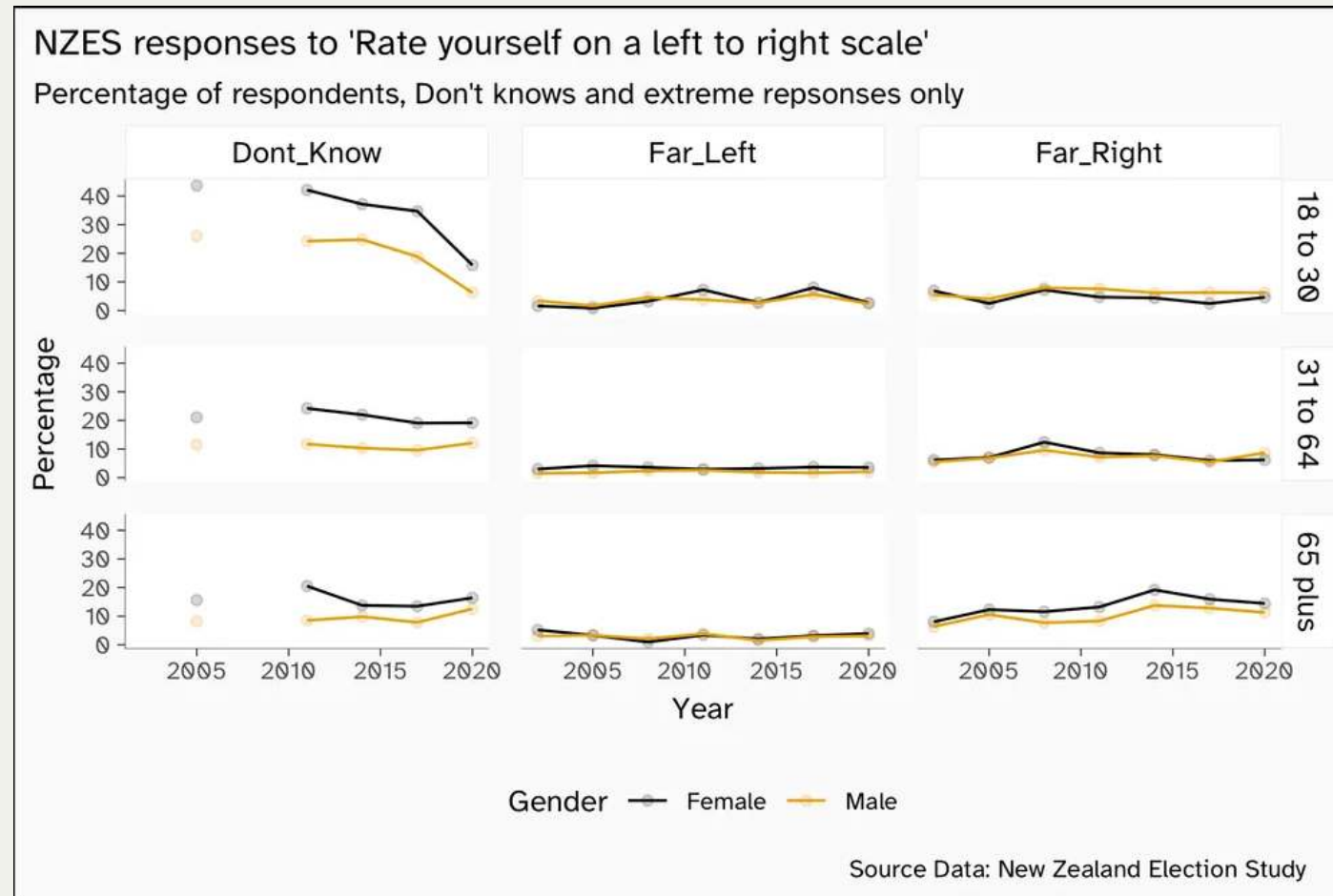
Sources: Daniel Cox, Survey Center on American Life; Gallup Poll Social Series; FT analysis of General Social Surveys of Korea, Germany & US and the British Election Study. US data is respondent's stated ideology. Other countries show support for liberal and conservative parties  
All figures are adjusted for time trend in the overall population  
FT graphic: John Burn-Murdoch / @jburnmurdoch  
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Source: Financial Times

Notes

- **Note:** there have been criticisms of this analysis and suggestions that the findings are over-stated, e.g. <https://youngamericans.berkeley.edu/2024/02/are-the-ideologies-of-young-women-and-young-men-in-the-us-diverging/>

# Gender gap among young people



Source: David Hood