

[generations-book.org](http://generations-book.org)

THE  
POLICY  
INSTITUTE

KING'S  
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LONDON



# Generations

## Myths and realities...

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# Generational thinking is a powerful idea...



Auguste Comte

***"We should not hide the fact that our social progress rests essentially upon death... the successive steps of humanity necessarily require a continuous renovation ... from one generation to the next"***

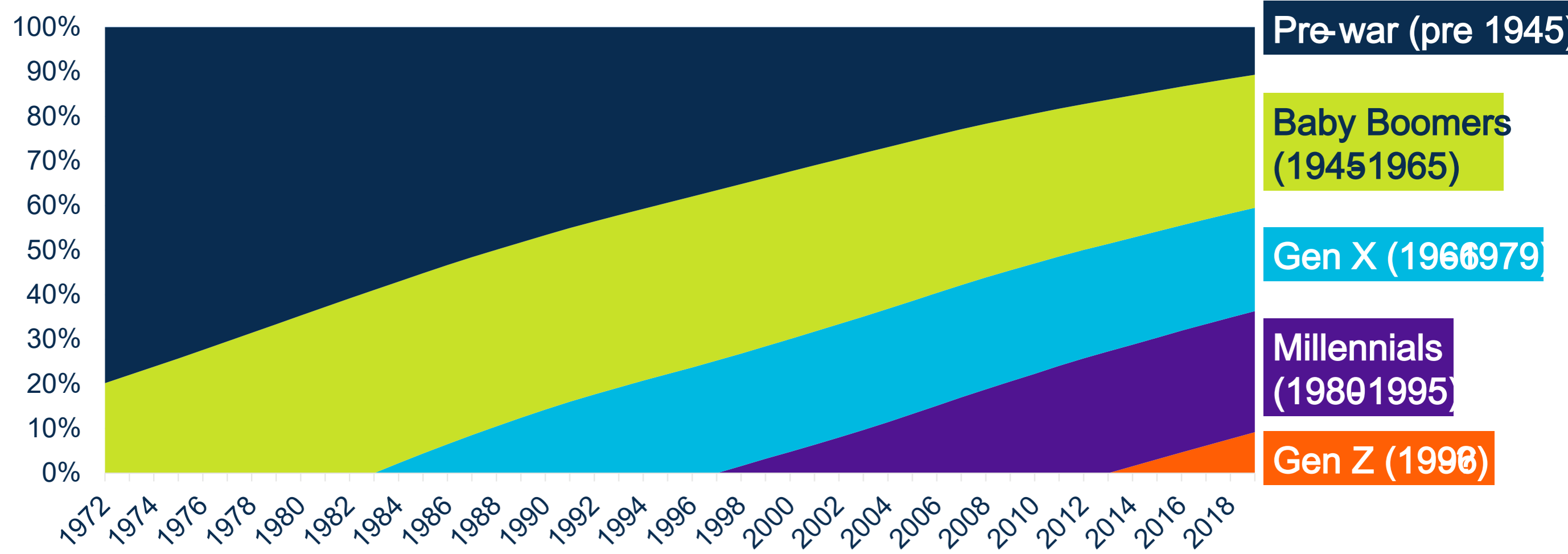
Today we get...

Millennials are killing the napkin industry

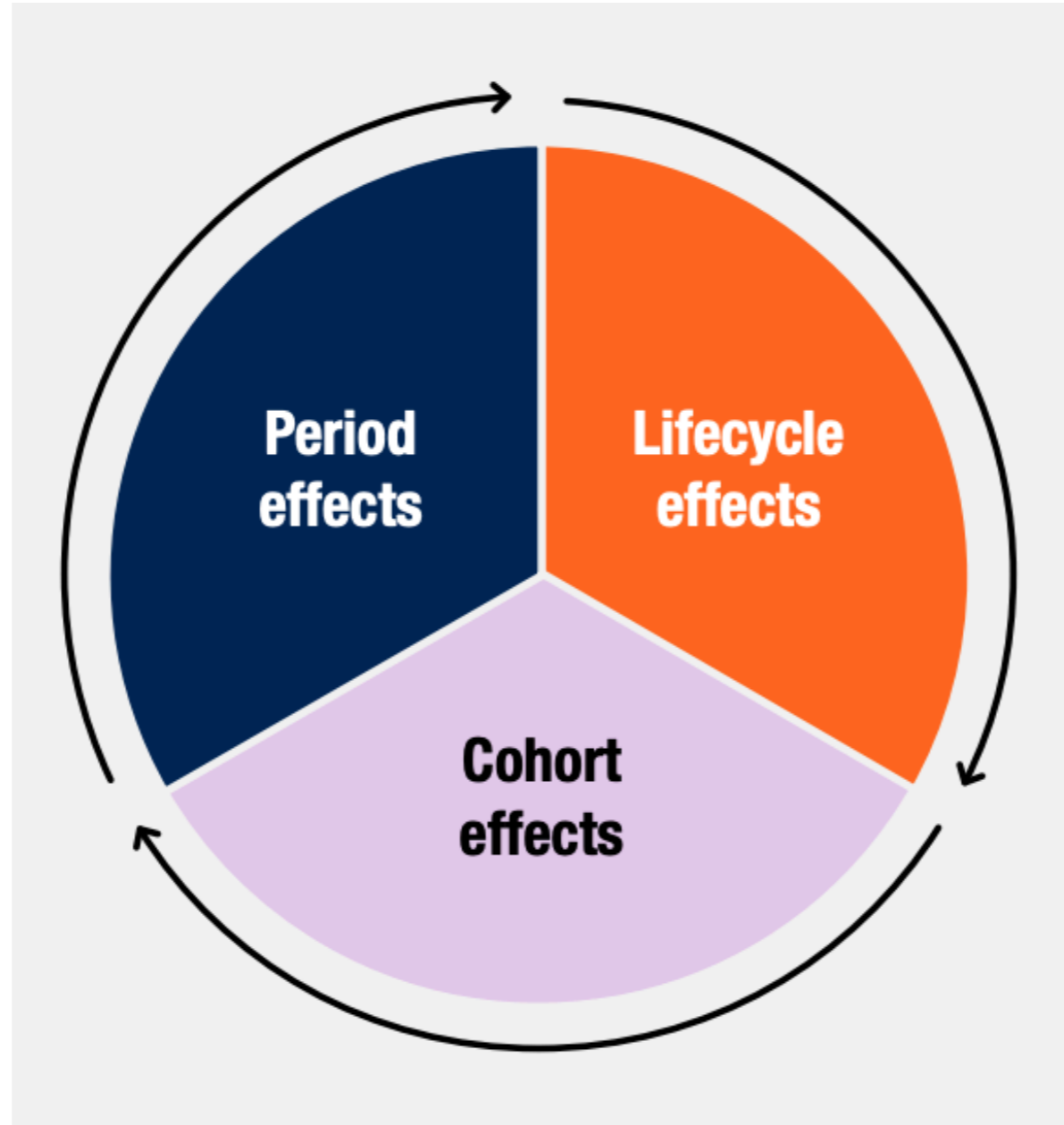
The Boomers Ruined Everything

# Can only understand future if understand generations...

% of UK adults in each generation



# The key task of the book and framework to remember...





**1. Generational stereotypes fuel fake generational battles that distract us from vitally important trends...**

# We (unthinkingly) encourage generational conflict...

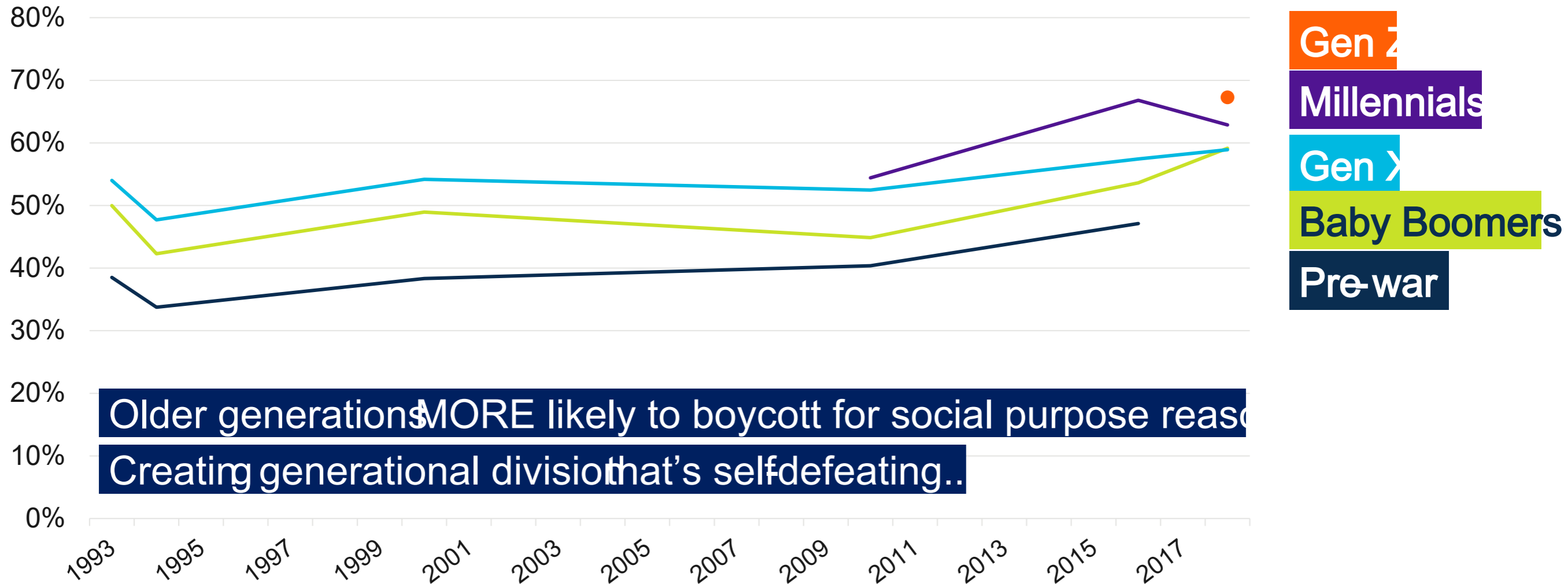


A “standard bearer in a generational battle”  
– Time

“Hopefully the adults and the old people start listening to us [about climate change]. Old people are gonna die and don’t really care if we die, but we don’t wanna die yet”  
– Billie Eilish

# No real generational break in concern about the environment...

Proportion of American adults thinking that the rise in world temperature caused by the greenhouse effect is “extremely” or “very dangerous”



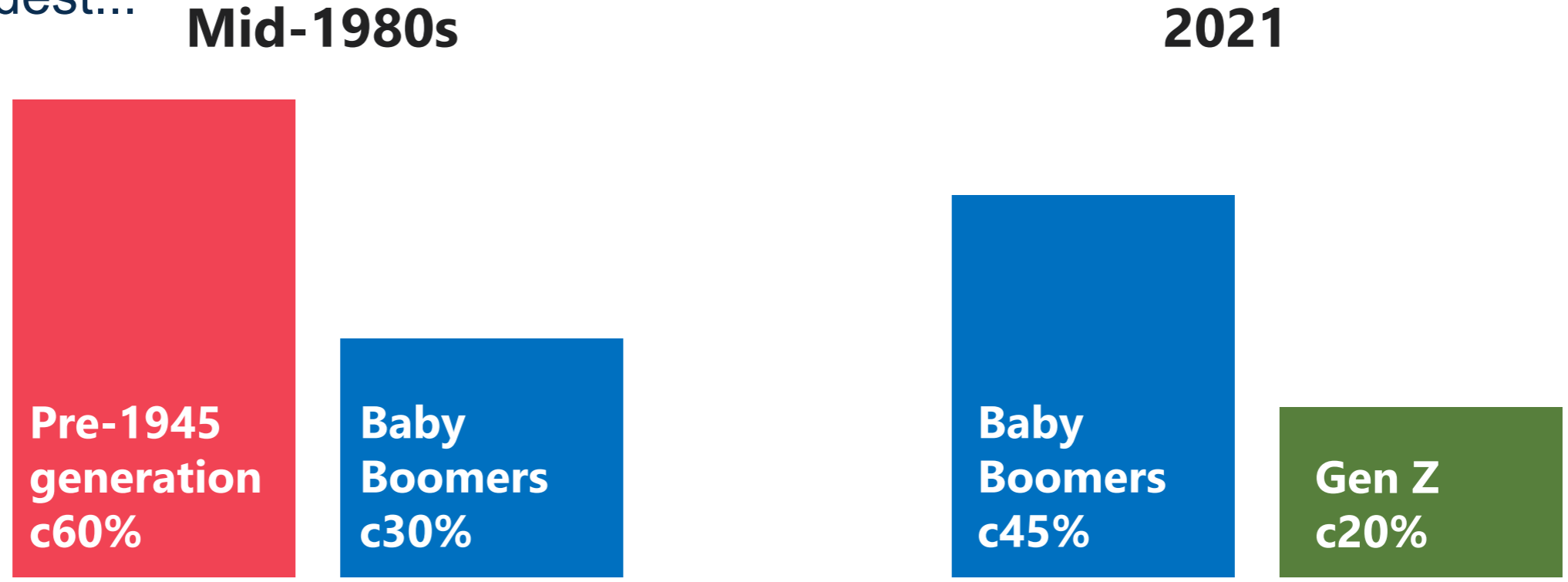
Older generations MORE likely to boycott for social purpose reasons

Creating generational division that's self-defeating..



# “Culture wars” NOT down to new generation of “snowflakes” or “social justice warriors”

- Evidence shows clear gaps between young and old on attitudes to race, immigration, gender equality and identity, sexuality etc – but **NOT** unusual gaps...
- ...constant ratio – youngest generation 2x as likely to be comfortable with changing norms than oldest...



“Women should stay at home”

“Proud of British Empire”

- Not just inevitable, but beneficial – a type of “demographic metabolism” that prevents us becoming a “stagnant pond”

# Thinking today's young are uniquely wrong or weird is a constant of history

400 BC

“The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, they show disrespect for elders and love gossip in place of activity...”

– Socrates

1771

“A race of effeminate, self-admiring, emaciated fribbles”

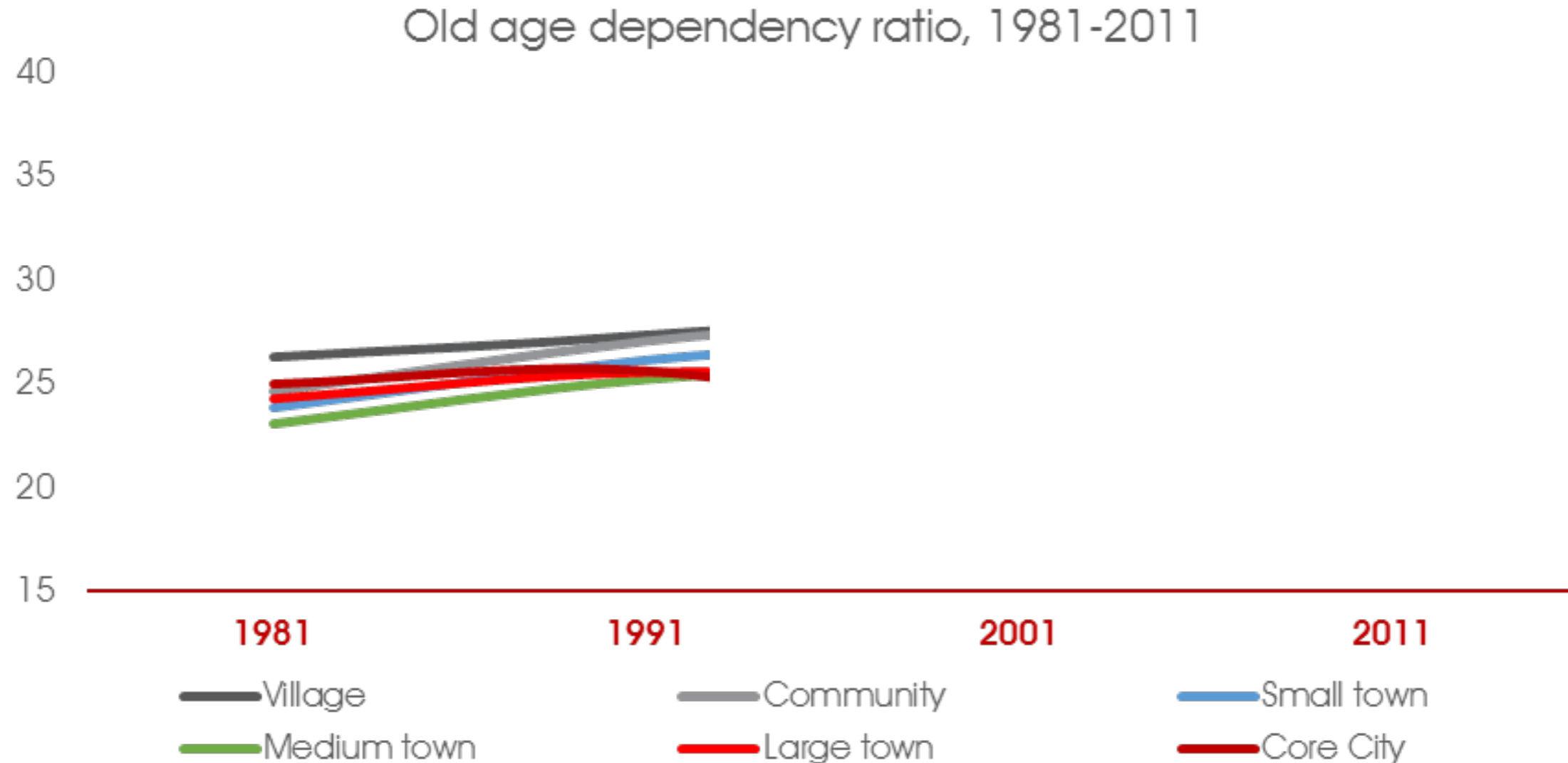
– Letter in Town and Country magazine

- **Feels** more divided now – for two main reasons...
- ...more fractious media, social media and politics...



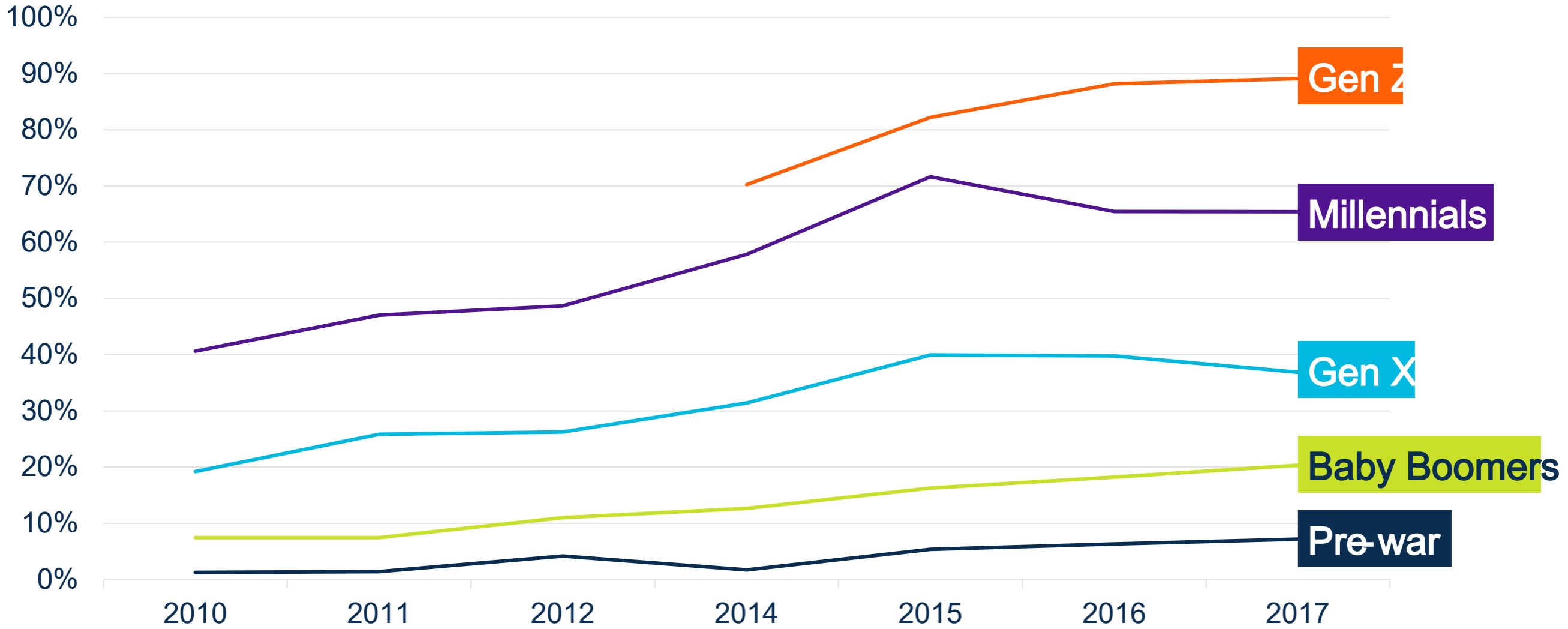
**2. But generational conflict also related to increased *separation*..**

# A “dangerous experiment” in age segregation...



# ...and living very separate digital lives...

Proportion of French adults using online social networks everyday





# Separation fuels stereotyping...

**facebook** A group where we all pretend to be boomers

MY GRANDSON FORGOT TO CALL ME ON MY BIRTHDAY. THANKS OBAMA.

Good home remedies for anal tremors?



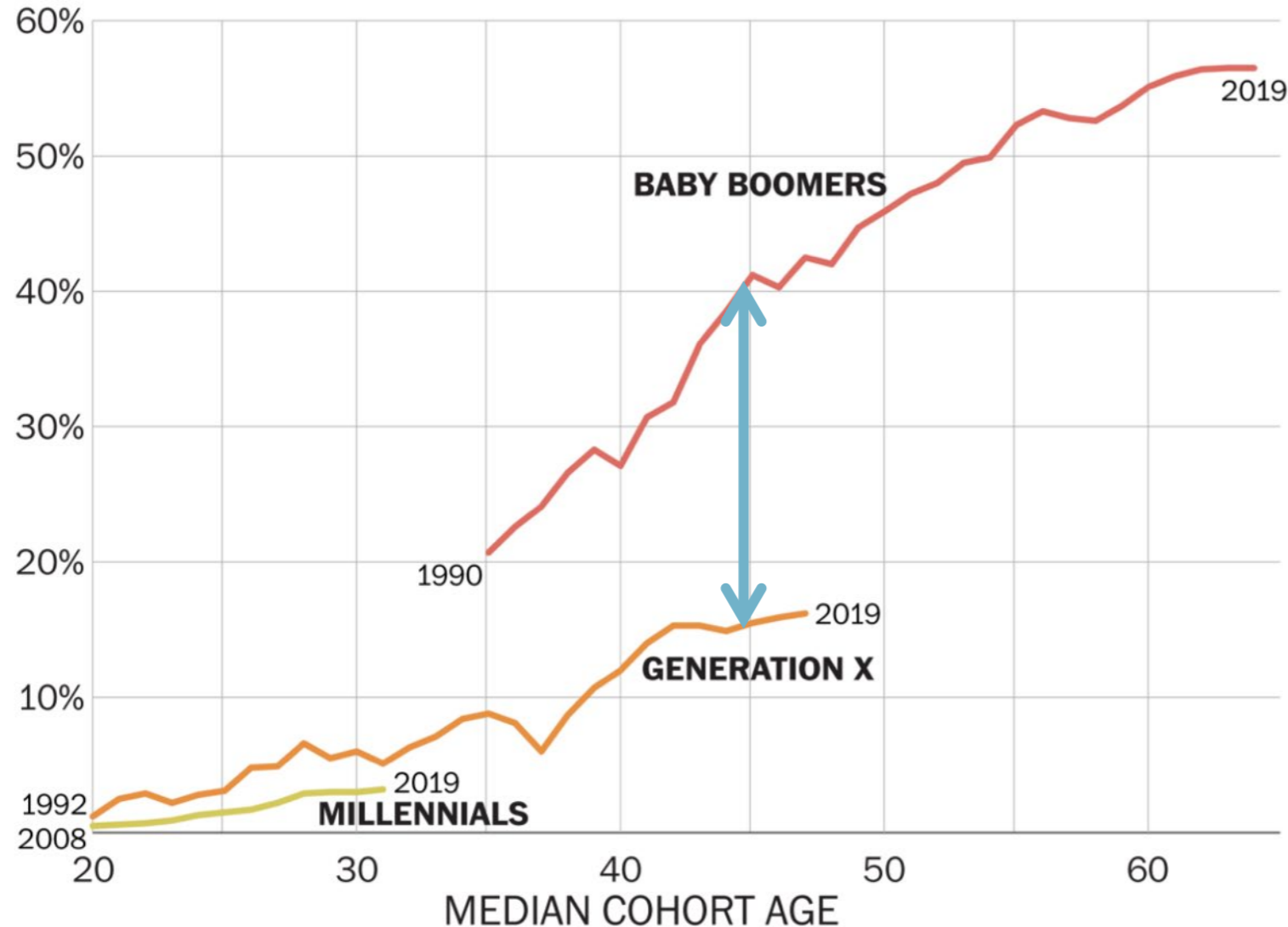
BUT can be destructive... and we're losing the benefits of intergenerational connection



**3. Inequality is increasingly  
generational– and  
intergenerational**

# An extraordinary concentration of wealth by generation...

Share of national wealth owned by each generation, by median cohort age



...life chances increasingly set by familial resources



# ...mirrors extraordinary change in home ownership...

Britain

## Kirstie Allsopp's property advice for young people sparks Twitter debate



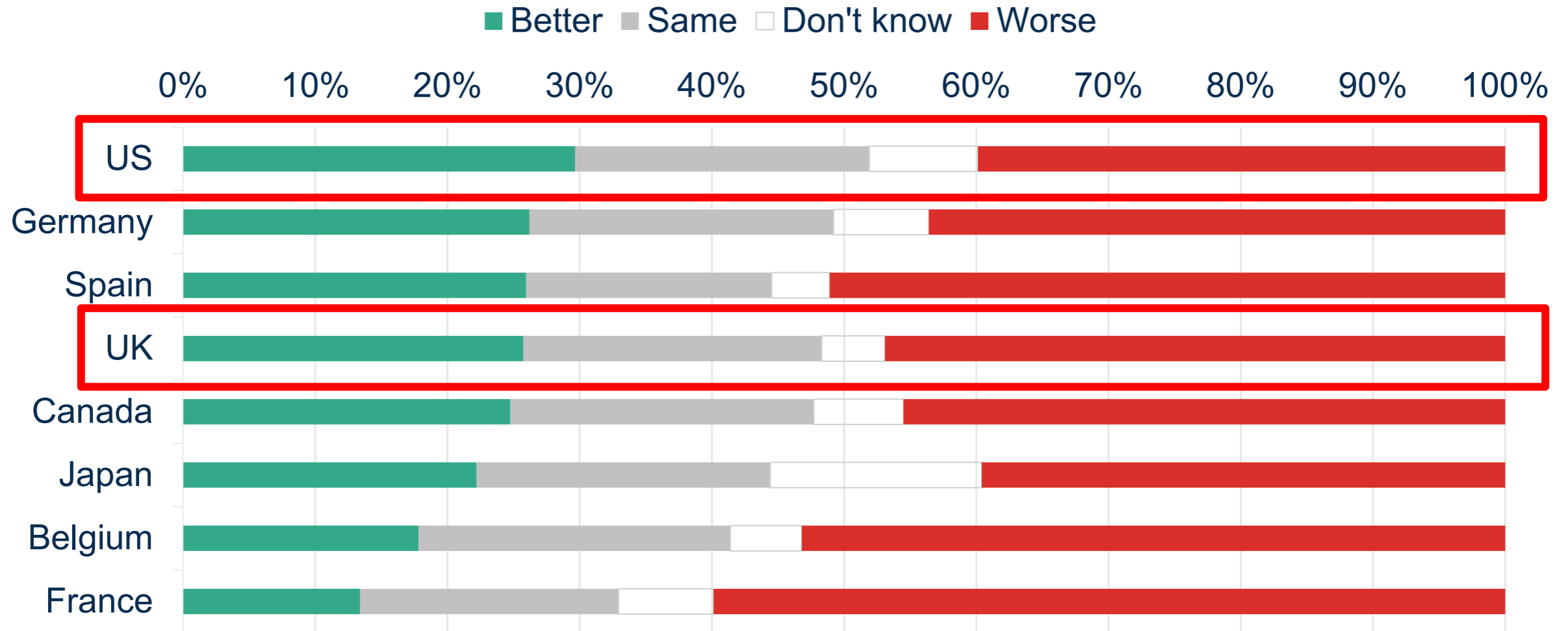
1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016



**4. We're losing faith that things will be better for our kids than us...**

# A loss in optimism across more developed countries...

To what extent, if at all do you feel that today's youth will have a better or worse life than their parents, or will it be about the same?



**NOT just about young world: about how we ALL see future**

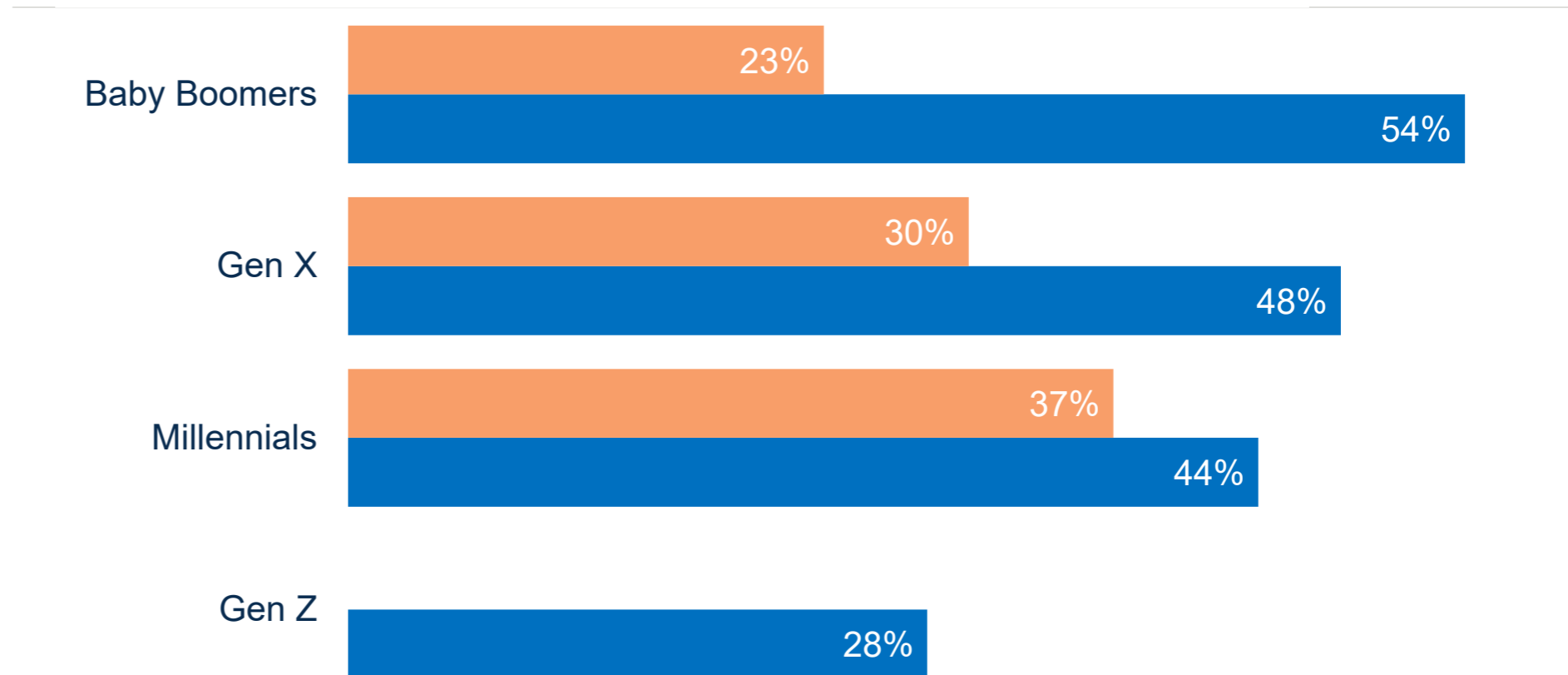
## 5. Workplace generational research...

- ...is one of noisiest engines of generational myths
- Target retail chain “praise cribsheet” ... praise Millennials in public, Boomers privately
  - *“Coaching tips for every generation: patronise everyone in their own way”*
- Generations as star signs:
  - *“Generation X are cynical and independent. Millennials are optimistic and focused on themselves. Gen Z are open-minded, caring, with a sense of integrity”*
- What is actually different in satisfaction, motivation and job moves? Very little...
  - *“...the relationship between generational membership and work-related outcomes are moderate to small, essentially zero in many cases”*
- Younger workers and older workers ARE after different things – but always the case
- Avoid exaggerating how unique and different coming cohorts are...
- ...often leads to generational stereotypes: one of last acceptable forms of prejudice?

# ...and fight our “rosy retrospection” about our own past...

% who **strongly agree/agree** with each statement

- Younger workers less motivated than older workers today
- Younger workers less motivated than older workers when YOU first started work



Base: 2,291 UK adults aged 18+, interviewed 13 to 15 May 2022 1,646 UK adults aged 30+, interviewed 13 to 15 May 2022

# Embracing the “new normal”

## The longterm costs & benefits of hybrid working



November 2022



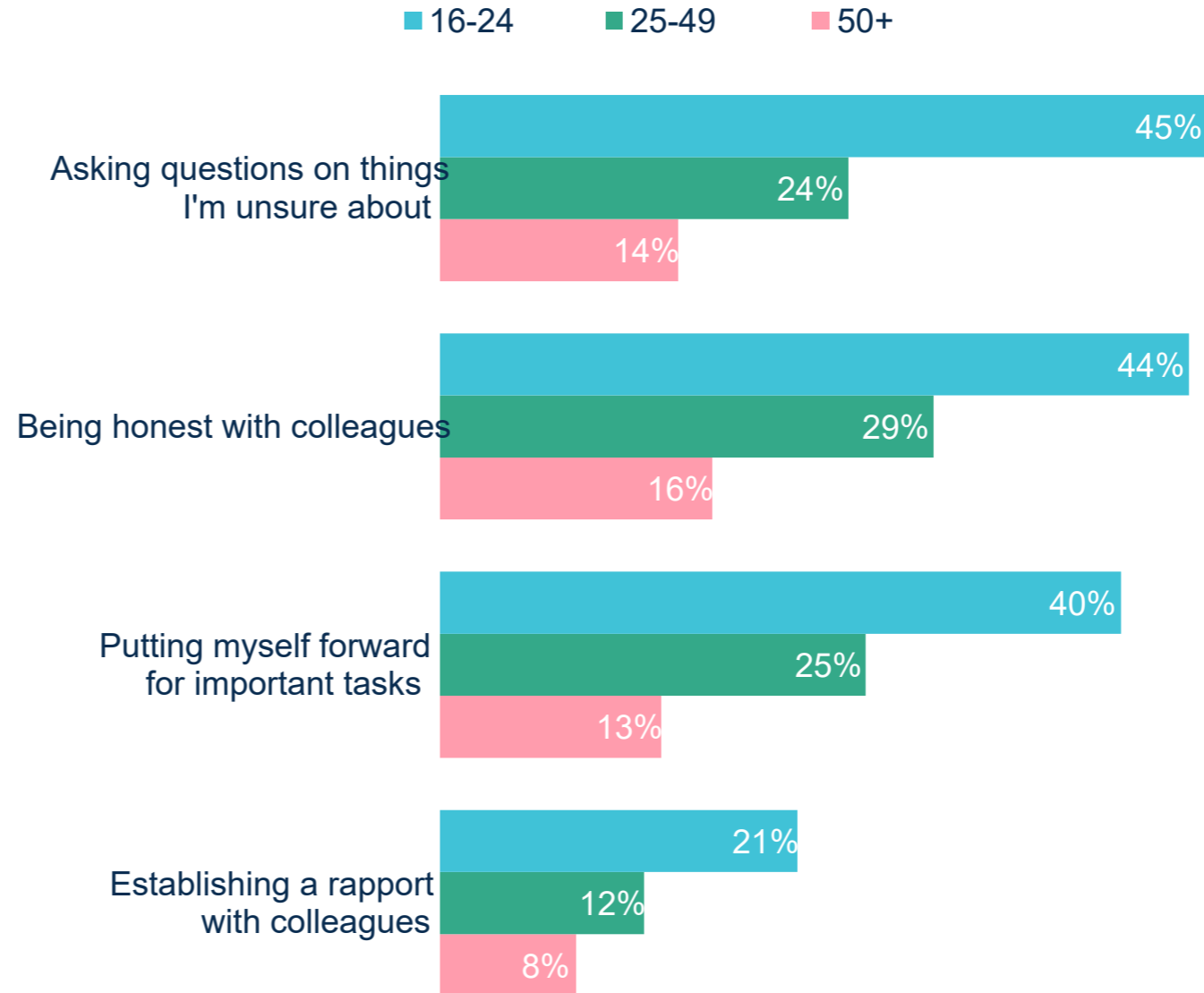
**Work/Place**  
**London returning**

Often suggested that remote working will be detrimental to young people's careers, BUT young people themselves are much less worried....

## Young people in particular are more likely to see some benefits from WFH...

Needs some careful thought: not aware of what they're missing? Or is that a patronising /old view of workplace?

To what extent, if at all, do you find the following things easier or harder to do when working with colleagues remotely compared with working with them in person? % who say much easier/easier, by age



Base: 1,567 London workers aged 16+ who work from home at least one day a week, interviewed 12-13 July 2022



# Generational thinking is vitally important...

- When you were born **DOES** matter and generations **DO** change society...
- ...but most generational analysis is mix of fake conflict and horoscopes...



Over 400 “Millennial consultants”



**Jonathan Walker** ✓

@jonwalker121

I am neither a millennial nor a boomer. I come from a generation so irrelevant that people can't even be bothered to hate us

# Thank you

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