



# AGE AND CLIMATE CONCERNS

Why climate action is not just for the young

by

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## Key insights

- Age must be considered carefully in assessing climate change attitudes. Which age groups hold particular views or take specific actions differs between countries (here the US, UK, and Germany). Age patterns on climate change views are not identical across countries.
- There are more consistent differences by age in climate action than there are in levels of concern overall. We see variation within each age group – and a substantial degree of concern also amongst older people.
- When it comes to taking private, consumer action on climate change, older people are more likely to engage in some forms (that partially reflect greater resources) than younger people, who tend to be more likely to engage in other forms, for example in dietary changes.
- Young people are much more likely to take collectively oriented action (such as demonstrating, joining organisations, etc.) than older people – especially in the UK and Germany.
- Ideological self-positioning partially trumps age for climate change action patterns. However, the two also interact significantly. In the US, for example, amongst people identifying as “left”, older groups are more likely to engage in collective action – while the opposite is true in Germany and the UK.
- Further research is needed to deepen our understanding on the role of age in climate change action. But it provides us with an opportunity to realise greater potential for engagement across all age groups.

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# 1. Rationale

## ***Why age matters***

Concern and engagement on climate change is growing across all ages. But how does that concern vary across age groups? Knowledge of an age differential can help us understand broader citizen engagement with climate change action, but also the specific concerns, motivations, responsibilities and engagement of different cohorts. That more nuanced understanding could help governments, civil society groups and the public understand how climate change might affect different cohorts differently, and why different sorts of engagement might be more popular or successful with different groups. Youth climate concern and action has recently received considerable attention due to young people's growing involvement, their distinct perspectives and motivations, and their effective strategies for mobilization (Cripps 2022; Neas, *et al* 2022). But we know much less about the perceptions and participation of older citizens (over 60s). This briefing seeks to address that gap.

An assumption expressed in some public discourse and press reports is that that older generations are not as concerned with climate change as are other age groups. Older attitudinal studies (see Gifford and Sussman 2012) indicated older cohort's lower concern and comparative reluctance to commit resources to environmental issues. 'Baby Boomers' (those born 1945-65) in particular are signalled out as out-of-touch and less bothered about climate change. The 'Boomer Ok' meme - depicting that generation as selfish and unconcerned - underlines this view (Swim et al 2022). Yet recent studies suggest a significant rise in concern amongst older citizens in several countries (Duffy 2021; Gutterman 2022; Scottish Government 2021) prompting some academics to suggest that an increasing proportion of older demographics are 'going green' (van Hoof 2023).

Certainly older people have reasons to be concerned which are linked to their age. First, older people are **more vulnerable** to the adverse health impacts of climate change. According to the European Climate and Health Observatory, projected increases in average temperature due to climate change are likely to have serious impacts on public health across Europe, particularly among elderly people (EEA 2022:17). To illustrate, heat-related mortality in people older than 65 in Europe has

increased by more than 30 percent in the last 20 years (EEA 2022: 19; see also Thompson and Montanez 2022). That vulnerability has prompted some groups to take legal action. For instance, in spring 2023 a group of older Swiss women (the ‘Club of Climate Seniors’, average age of 73) filed a case with the European Court of Human Rights claiming climate change is putting their human rights, their health and even their lives at risk (Foulkes and Durbin 2023).

A second motivation is a **moral imperative** (Shue 2022) linked especially to older people’s role as grandparents and great grandparents. Early research suggests elders’ concern is focussed on a desire to avoid ‘passing a wrecked climate to coming generations’ and protecting young persons’ future (Ardelius et al 2020). The very name of several new climate action groups in the UK, US, and Europe (‘1000 Grandmothers’, ‘Grandparents for a Safe Earth’, ‘Grandparents for the Future’) is another indication of that distinct generational motivation.

Linked to that moral imperative is the desire to leave a positive **legacy**. Research on ageing and development capture this dynamic through the notion of ‘generativity’ – the idea that concern for future generations is a legacy of the self. Scholars use the term to underline the psychosocial challenge of older years when an adult comes to understand that ‘I am what survives me’ (Erik Erikson quoted in McAdams 2018). That motivation can spur action on issues like climate devastation, even if older people will not be alive themselves to feel the worst effects. In sum, there are reasons to suspect that concern over climate change is not necessarily reserved for the young. We need a more nuanced research investigation into the levels of concern across ages.

### ***Age and action***

While concern for climate change is a pre-condition for engagement, we also need to examine to what extent such concern translates into action. Does an individual’s age shape how they engage with climate action? Studies on older citizens’ general political participation are scarce (Serrat, *et al* 2023), but we know elders enjoy a distinct mix of resources which could shape the way they engage with climate change action. Often retired and without childcare duties, elders have more time. They can bring more life experiences and skills from earlier employment or roles (Moody 2017). This age cohort also tends to have greater financial resources than younger groups (Pillemer et al 2022). And older people enjoy political and electoral clout; they are the age group most

likely to vote (Jones and Hiller 2021). As summed up by one senior climate movement member: elders can ‘lend their time, social capital, financial resources, and unique lived experiences to the broader climate movement’ (quoted in Ardeluis, et al 2020).

This briefing analyses the different forms of participation older people are likely to undertake. Research on climate friendly behaviour (Howell 2013) suggests there is often a gap between environmental concern and actual behaviour, so it is useful to track actions in addition to perceptions and concerns. We analyse whether older cohorts are as likely as other age cohorts to engage in personal consumer-oriented as well as collectively oriented action (such as demonstrations, protests, movement activity).

### ***Why country comparisons matter***

Climate concern and participation can differ across age, but also across countries. Eichhorn *et al*'s (2020) study of the US and eight European countries shows that overall a clear majority know climate change is occurring, that the impacts will be adverse, and that humans are important contributors. But the study also indicated cross national differences in the depth of awareness, the level of concern, and willingness to act to address it. Similarly, a Pew Research (2022) survey of 19 countries in North America, Europe and the Asia-Pacific found high levels of concern overall, with a median of 75 percent of respondents labelling global climate change as a major threat. But the survey also revealed cross-national variation, with the US demonstrating much lower levels of concern than any of the European countries surveyed.

These are useful starting points, but we know less about cross-national differences within the older age category. Very little research exists on this specific question. Indeed, the vast majority of survey research on older activists covers one country only – the US (Yale 2022; Gallup 2018; Pew 2021). Other academic studies on older person's climate concern and action focus on a single country case. We can look to these other single country studies to reveal interesting insights into why elders' climate concern and action takes the form it does in that particular country (Keller and Bornemann 2021; Duffy, 2021; Ayalon et al 2022). But we want to go beyond single case studies to examine whether age profile differences in attitudes and engagement are universal or not.

In this briefing we focus on three important countries – the US, UK, and Germany. These countries share certain features – all are advanced economies with democratic systems and a range of climate threats and responses. But they also differ in their political systems, government structure, and party-political profiles. We build on existing studies to ask a specific question – do older citizens' views and participation vary across countries? If so, that could open up intriguing areas of study, suggesting the concern of older people may be shaped as much by contextual factors including ideology or party systems.

To capture these dimensions this briefing investigates how certain variables such as partisan ideology intersect with age. The question about ideology is especially important given evidence for the overwhelming impact that party identification has in shaping Americans' views on climate change. Multiple studies show that Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to downplay or ignore the threat of climate change or doubt the validity of scientists. Republicans also show less inclination to support policy change or take individual action to address it (see Ballew *et al* 2019; Marlon, *et al* 2022; Pew Research 2021). While these US findings are clear, less is known about what role partisan ideology plays in other countries and, crucially, how it intersects with age.

In sum, both academic and policy-makers' understanding of the perceptions, action and country variation in elder climate action is nascent and full of promise. This briefing paper offers a useful start to that further investigation.

## 2. Data background

This briefing uses data from an original survey carried out by d|part in cooperation with the Open Society European Policy Institute. In August 2020 survey participants were asked about their views on the climate crisis, related policies and their own engagement. For Germany, the US and the UK there were just over 4000 survey participants in total (roughly 2000 in Germany and just over 1000 in the other two countries). The data was collected through a large online panel utilising a complex quota design that ensured the sample reflected population characteristics in demography and socio-economic status. The survey is representative for the respective populations aged 18 to 74 years.<sup>1</sup>

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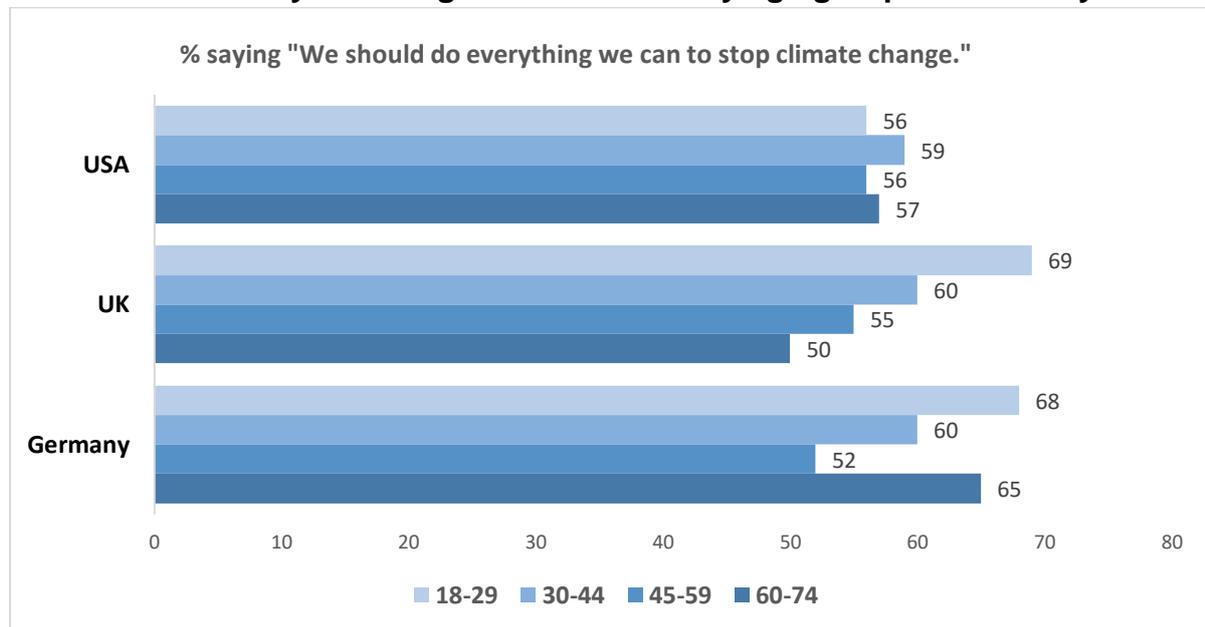
<sup>1</sup> For a detailed methods note, see: <https://dpart.org/methods-note-there-is-space-for-everyone-climate-crisis-messages-across-the-political-spectrum/>.

### 3. Climate attitudes: the question matters

Figure 1 shows why it is important to assess the link between age and climate attitudes carefully – and comparatively. Answers to a general question (how we should engage with climate change, if at all) showed very different age patterns in the three countries studied. In the US, there were no major differences by age groups. Just under 60 per cent in each group said that “we should do everything we can to stop climate change.” In the UK, however, we saw a very different picture and a strong age gradient. The older the respondents, the less likely they were to support the statement. While more than two thirds of those aged 18 to 29 years agreed, only half of those aged 60 to 74 did. In Germany, differences between age groups exist, but in a U-shaped pattern. Around two thirds amongst the youngest and oldest groups were calling for strong action, while that figure was much lower in the middle age groups. Findings on age and climate change attitudes in one country can therefore not be assumed valid in other countries.

**Figure 1**

**General desirability of strong climate action<sup>2</sup> by age group and country**

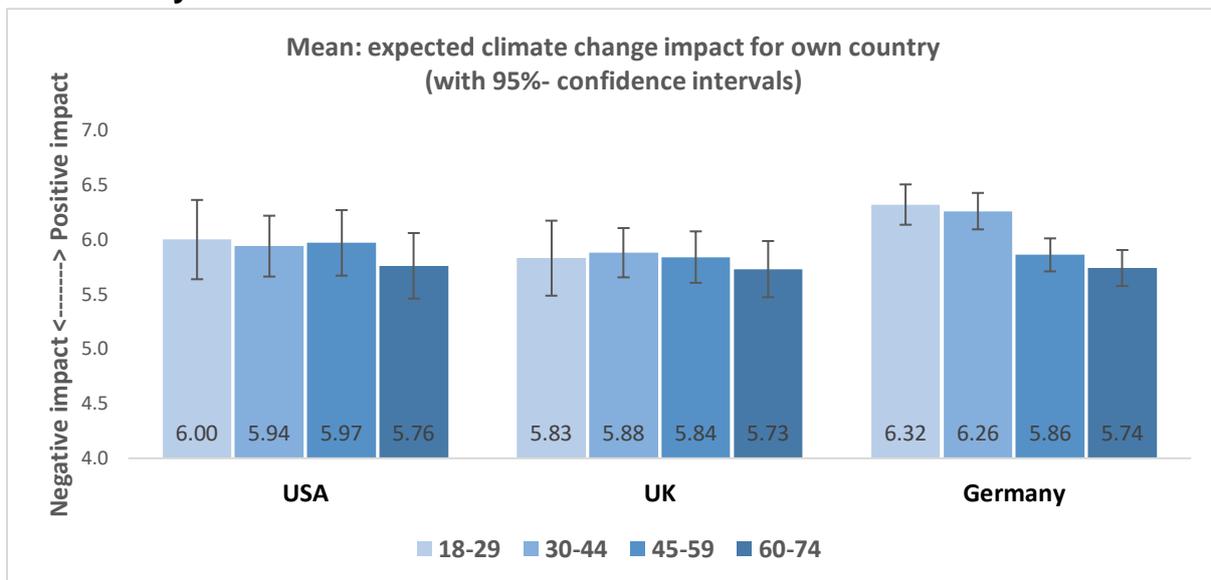


<sup>2</sup> Question wording: “Taken together, what should people in [COUNTRY] do to respond to climate change overall?”; Answer options: “We should do everything we can to stop climate change”; “We should adapt to climate change, so that we can live well with a changed climate in the future”; “We do not need to do anything, because climate change is not a big issue”; “Don’t know”.

Appreciation of citizens' complex perspectives are also needed because age differences in one set of attitudes do not necessarily imply that we find the same patterns for other issues. For example, general attitudes were heavily stratified by age in the UK. But there were no statistically significant differences between the age groups when asked about their expectations of how good or bad the impact of climate change might be for their country compared to the rest of the world (figure 2). The same pattern applied in the US, while in Germany those aged 18 to 44 were less pessimistic about the relative impact of climate change on the country than older age groups. In short, differences appear both across countries and across questions.

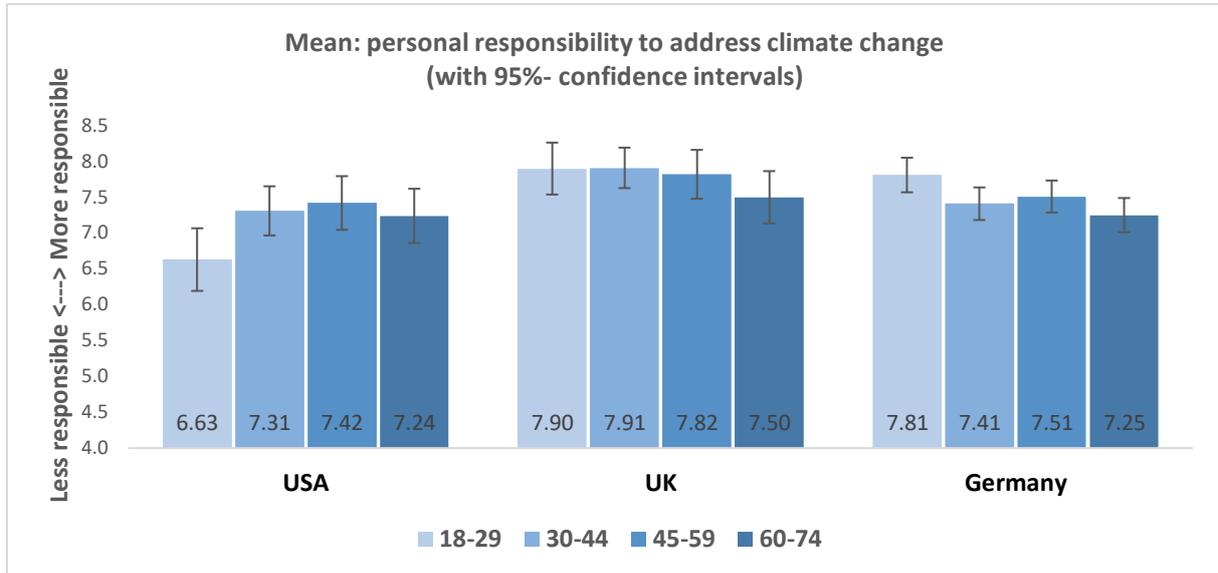
**Figure 2**

**Expected impact of climate change for respondents' own country<sup>3</sup> by age group and country**



Substantial cross-country differences also emerge when we move from the big picture to personal evaluations. In Germany, those aged 18 to 29 years were more likely to say that they had a personal responsibility to address climate change than did all other age groups (figure 3). In the US, it was the opposite. The youngest age group there showed the lowest level of personal responsibility (and tended to attribute more responsibility to other actors like government or firms). In the UK differences between the age groups were small in comparison.

<sup>3</sup> Question wording: "How good or bad do you think the impact of climate change will be for each of the following? Please choose a number from 0 to 10, where 0 is extremely bad and 10 is extremely good."  
– "For [COUNTRY] compared to most of the world?"

**Figure 3****Feeling of personal responsibility to address climate change by age group and country**

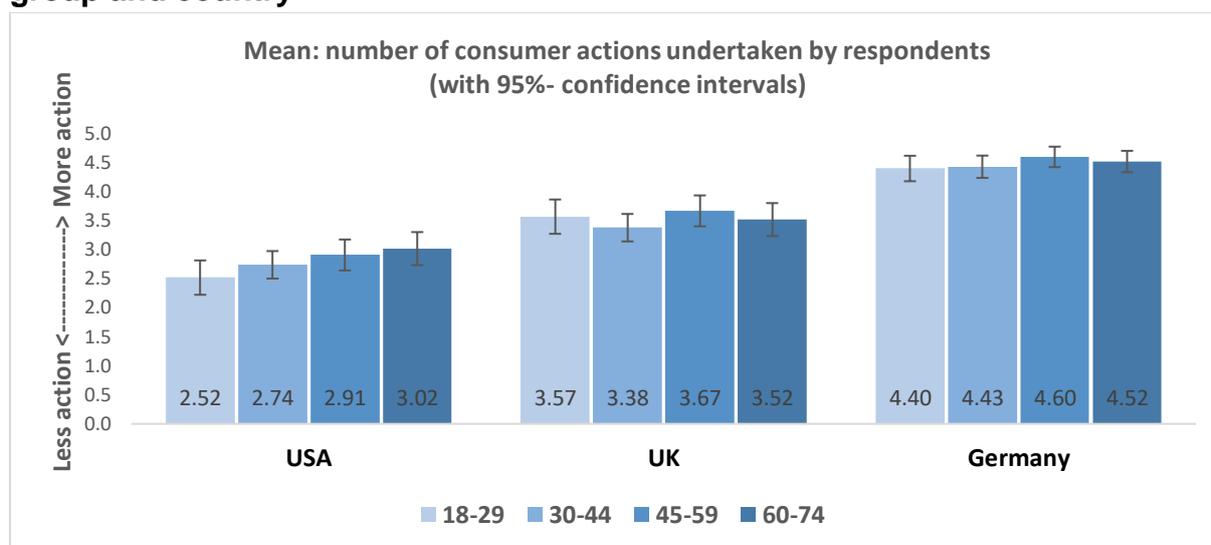
In summary, age patterns in attitudes on climate change are not uniform, either across issues or countries. We need to assess them carefully. There appears to be a wide range of views within each age group. It is worth deepening analyses to understand which younger and older people might be most likely to hold which views – and even more importantly, which would be more likely to engage in action to counter climate change. Moreover, the strong cross-national differences suggest that the domestic context (political, economic, cultural) may be a potent shaper of climate concern.

## 4. Consumer or collective action?

When it comes to individual consumer actions, there were no major differences between age groups. In the survey we asked respondents about a range of measures that they might have undertaken already. Figure 4 displays how many of those activities participants within each age group said they had already carried out. Differences between the age groups in Germany and the UK were marginal and mostly not statistically significant. In the US, older respondents, on average, had undertaken a slightly higher number of consumer actions. However, the gap was not large. Overall, differences between countries were much higher than differences between age groups on this issue of consumer action; Germans reported the greatest mean number of actions taken, and US respondents the lowest).

**Figure 4**

**Undertaking individual consumer actions to address climate change<sup>4</sup> by age group and country**



These overall patterns, however, do mask some differences by specific activity type (see table 1). Overall, older people report that they had reduced plastic use, non-local food and car travel (less so in the UK on the latter) and that they had switched to green electricity (in the UK and Germany). Younger people on the other hand appeared more likely to have said they consumed organic food, reduced their consumption of dairy (and in Germany also meat). We do not see entirely consistent patterns across

<sup>4</sup> Question wording: "Of the following, which, if any at all, have you personally already done or plan to do in the future to reduce your impact on climate change?" – for answer options, see tables 1 and 2.

countries but notice some intriguing key differences which need further investigation. It is plausible, for instance, that younger people focus on dietary changes more than, say, electricity supply because they are able to control the former much more than the latter; fewer younger people live or own a dwelling where they can control utility supplier choices. Similarly, older people may be less mobile overall (hence less driving and flying) or may feel they have more resources to afford plastic alternatives. The propensity of older generations to wield financial muscle is also evident in the rise in the number of older citizens questioning their financial institution's investment portfolio (Jones and Hiller 2021). Further research is required to properly understand those differences.

**Table 1****Types of private consumer actions undertaken by age group and country**

	US				UK				Germany			
	18-29	30-44	45-59	60-74	18-29	30-44	45-59	60-74	18-29	30-44	45-59	60-74
Buy fewer goods that contain plastic	37.6	43.7	48.7	44.9	57.8	54.7	63.4	66.2	67.1	69.9	74.0	73.5
Travel less by car	35.3	40.2	53.4	62.4	60.8	58.1	61.6	64.9	59.1	59.0	66.7	68.2
Cut back on food that is not produced locally	25.4	29.2	31.5	32.9	27.6	31.7	42.5	35.0	56.9	63.5	66.8	69.0
Take fewer flights	50.7	56.1	55.1	58.3	62.8	56.0	62.9	57.0	63.5	67.0	71.7	73.5
Switch electricity supply to a green energy firm	17.9	12.0	17.6	10.6	27.6	34.2	35.8	40.7	35.1	43.5	44.5	45.8
Buy more organic food	34.2	37.9	33.0	32.1	37.2	31.7	26.1	21.4	56.8	53.4	51.2	46.5
Reduce consumption of meat	23.4	26.9	31.1	37.9	49.2	39.7	43.7	42.4	60.3	57.1	58.8	53.2
Reduce consumption of dairy products	26.9	27.9	20.6	22.2	33.7	31.7	31.3	24.7	40.9	29.4	25.9	22.7
<i>% within age group in the respective country that say they have done this thing to reduce their climate change impact</i>												

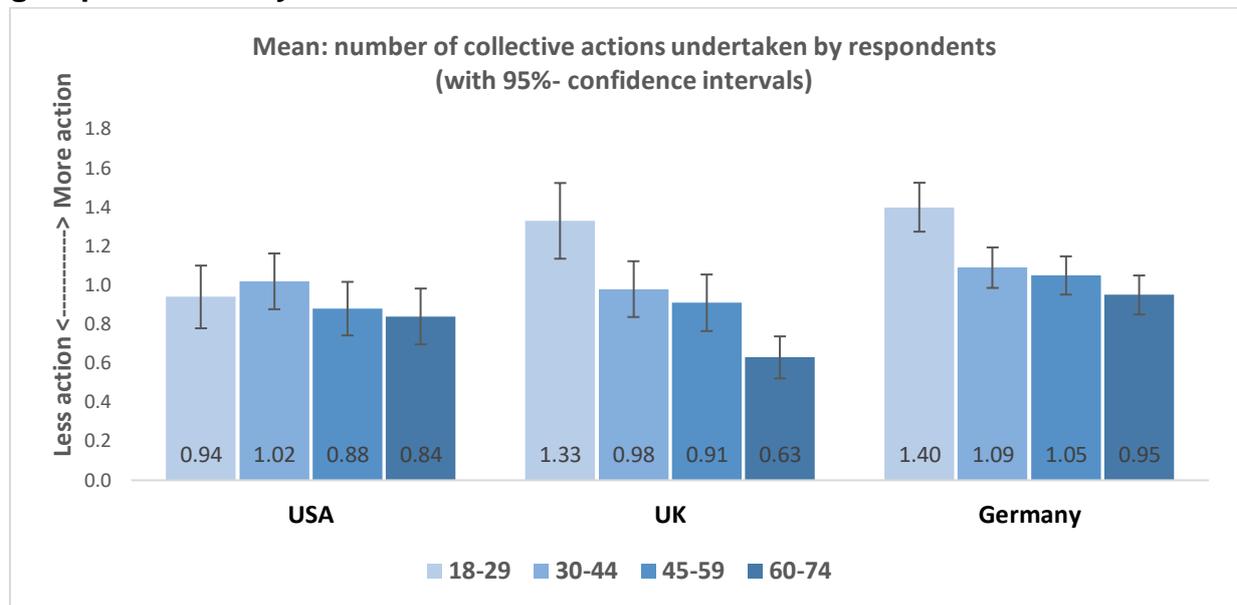
**Collective actions**

The age dimension is much clearer when we look at collectively oriented action such as speaking, voting, and protesting. Here, a clear age pattern is visible. Younger respondents were more likely to have engaged in these activities, especially in comparison to the oldest age group. Having said that, the gap was less pronounced in

the US and it was not the 18- to 29-year cohort which stood out particularly, but rather those aged 30 to 44 (compared to the oldest group). In contrast, the age gradient was steepest in the UK with those in the youngest age group reporting engagement in more than double the number of collectively oriented activities compared to those aged 60 to 74 years. In any case, overall, younger people are significantly more likely to engage in collective action than their older cohorts.

### Figure 5

#### Undertaking collectively oriented actions to address climate change by age group and country



When we look at collectively oriented action (table 2) we see consistent sub-patterns: young people tended to be more likely to engage in efforts to convince friends and family, consider climate change in party political choices, and engage in direct action (through, donations, membership in organisations or donations). Their engagement was not limited to demonstrations which often receive the most extensive media attention but is only one type of collective action. The only exception to that pattern was in the US with regards to party-political choices. Here, older people were more likely to say that climate change was a key decider (which might reflect the greater overall degree of partisanship on the issue there).

**Table 2*****Types of collectively oriented actions undertaken by age group and country***

	US				UK				Germany			
	18-29	30-44	45-59	60-74	18-29	30-44	45-59	60-74	18-29	30-44	45-59	60-74
Convince friends or family to be more climate-friendly	31.3	37.2	31.8	28.9	47.2	37.1	37.7	30.8	52.3	45.9	46.8	40.4
Vote for a party because of their climate change agenda	21.9	24.9	28.0	32.1	34.2	24.5	22.1	12.6	38.9	24.6	24.7	23.9
Donate to an organization that works on climate change	22.4	19.3	15.7	15.0	27.1	17.8	16.4	11.8	19.4	18.0	16.7	15.7
Join an organization that works on climate change	9.4	11.0	7.1	5.1	11.1	11.6	9.3	3.8	10.8	10.2	7.5	7.2
Join an environmental protest	8.5	9.6	5.2	3.0	13.6	7.4	5.2	3.4	18.7	10.0	9.6	7.6
<i>% within age group in the respective country that say they have done this thing to reduce their climate change impact</i>												

To sum up, we do not see a general age gradient when it comes to the prevalence of individual consumer actions on climate change overall; the evident differences are cross national and vary a lot across activities. The picture is very different for *collectively* oriented actions where the age differential is clear. Both types of activity are important, but collective action is arguably more important in addressing broader, systemic changes and bringing about large-scale policy shifts through voting behaviour and collectively organising interests and views to affect system-wide change. Young people were much more likely to engage collectively to achieve these goals. However, even amongst them it was much less common to undertake any collective endeavours than it was to make at least some consumer choices. Only a minority engaged in collective action in proactive ways. So, while levels are higher amongst young people, there is a lot of room to increase participation across the board.

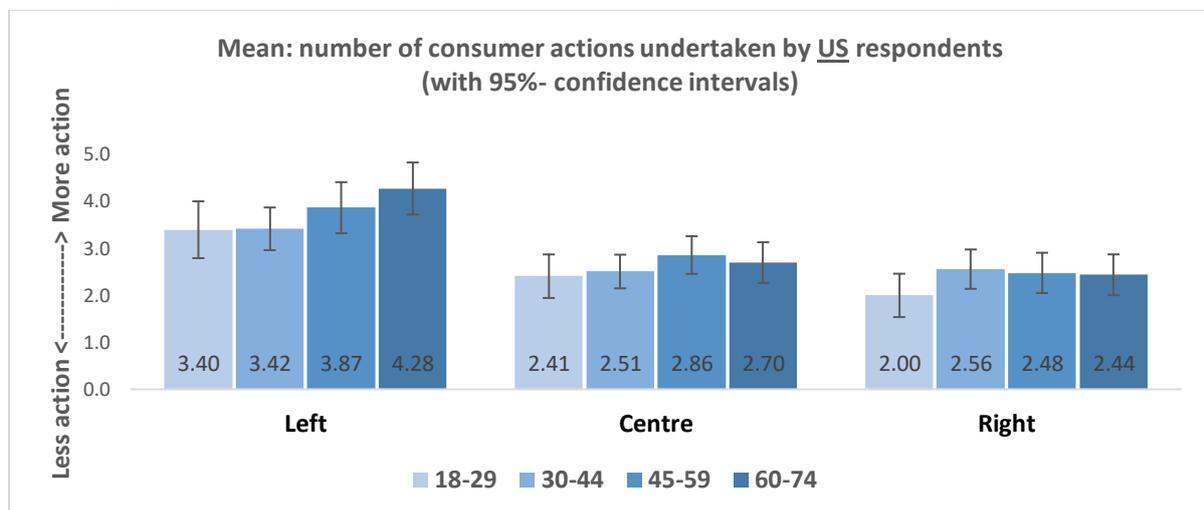
## 5. Politics matters: ideological alignment varies between countries

### *Individual action*

The engagement with climate change action unsurprisingly also reflects ideological positions. Broadly speaking, people who self-identified as more left-leaning were more likely to take consumer action to address climate change (figures 6a-c). However, age patterns were not identical for people in different parts of the ideological spectrum. Old people identifying centre or right were not necessarily more or less likely to take action. There was variation across countries, too. In the US, especially amongst the left, older people had, on average, taken a greater range of private consumer actions (figure 6a). This corresponds to the earlier finding of older US respondents saying they were more likely to consider parties' climate change agendas in their vote choice. It seems that at either ends of the political spectrum in the US, ideological differences are visible amongst older generations and they correspond to different levels of action.

### Figure 6a

#### Undertaking private consumer action by age group and ideological orientation<sup>5</sup> in the US



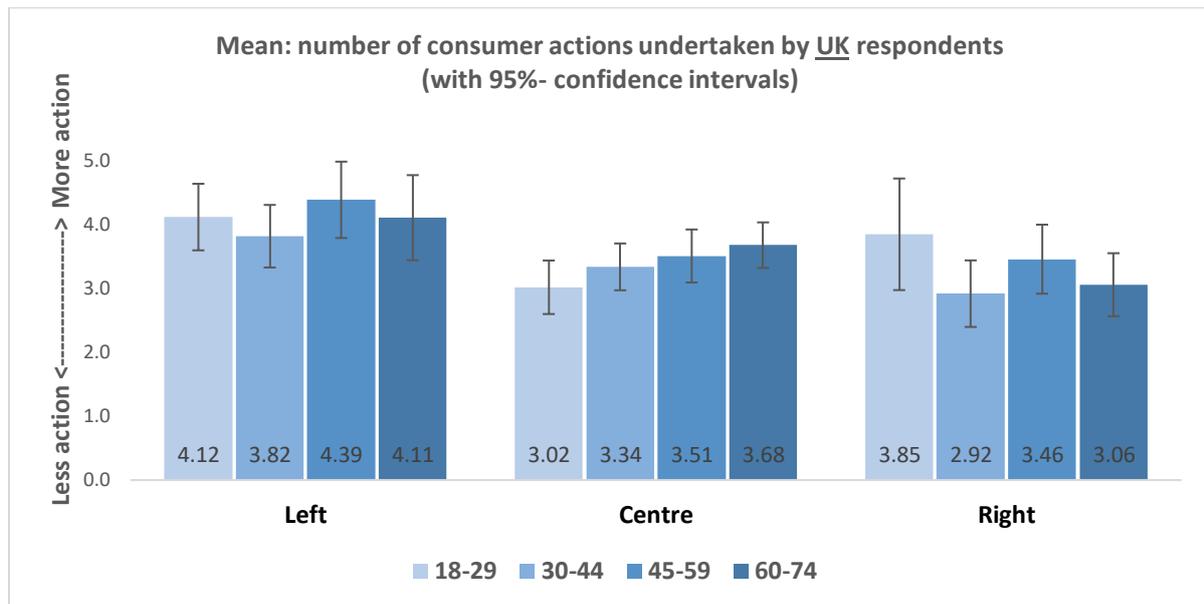
In the UK, by contrast (figure 6b), we see no major statistically significant age differences amongst the left. Left respondents appeared most uniform in their consumer action across age groups, with young and old taking the same level of

<sup>5</sup> Question wording: "In political matters, people often talk of 'the left' and the 'the right'. Generally speaking, how would you place your views on a scale where '1' means 'the left' and '10' means 'the right'?"

consumer action. Amongst those identifying as centrist, older respondents were slightly more likely to have engaged in actions than younger ones. Amongst right leaning respondents, younger people had engaged more than older right respondents. In short, in the UK, one's ideology shaped activity more than one's age, but even these differences were not major.

**Figure 6b**

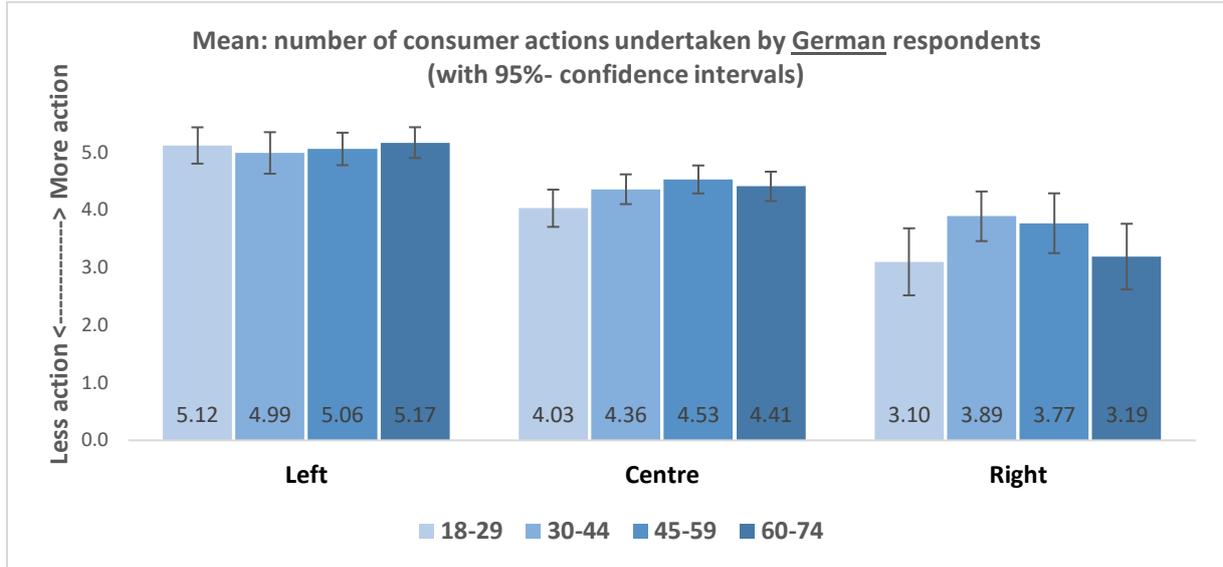
**Undertaking private consumer action by age group and ideological orientation in the UK**



Germany was similar to a certain extent (figure 6c). People on the left engaged more overall in consumer action against climate change but without significant differences between age groups. Interestingly, especially amongst right-leaning Germans, those in the middle age groups (30-59 years) showed the greatest number of consumer actions undertaken – while the oldest and youngest right-leaning respondents showed the lowest levels of participation. These cross-country differences and similarities point again to the possible impact of domestic factors including party ideology and culture.

**Figure 6c**

**Undertaking private consumer action by age group and ideological orientation in Germany**

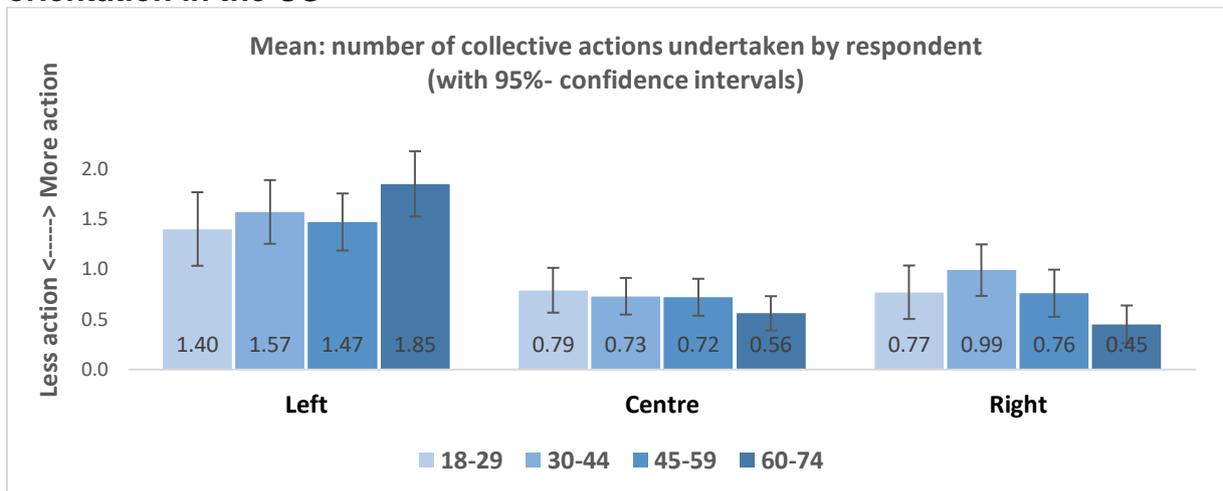


**Collective action**

Several of the ideological differences identified were even more prevalent when we look at collective action on climate change. People on the left were significantly more likely to have engaged in such action. In the US the difference between ideological categories was greater than it was for consumer action (figure 7a). Also, the age patterns are more pronounced. On the left, the oldest age group was more likely to have engaged in collective actions than the youngest group. However, amongst the centre and the right we see the opposite: those aged 60 years and above were less likely to take part in various collectively oriented activities to address climate change.

**Figure 7a**

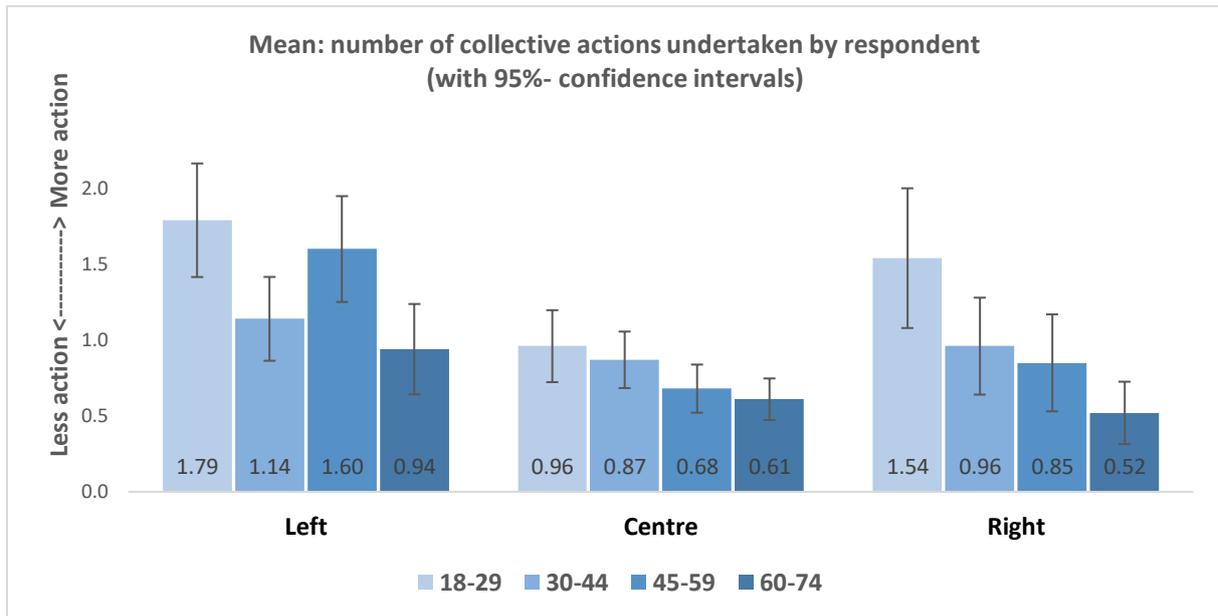
**Undertaking collectively oriented action by age group and ideological orientation in the US**



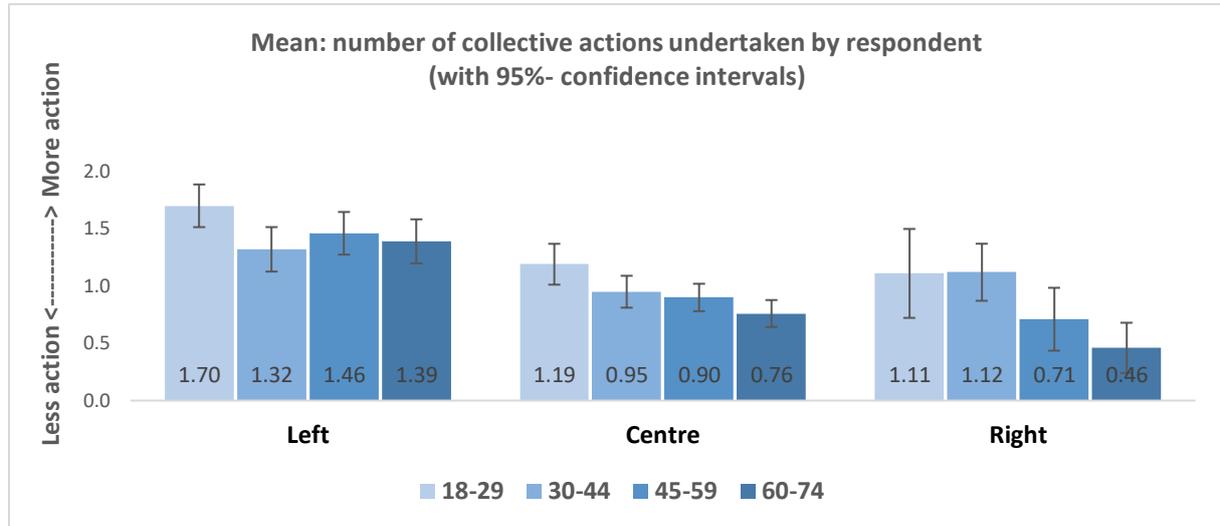
In the UK the picture is different (figure 7b). Those in the youngest age group consistently participated most in collectively oriented actions. Amongst the left, those in the oldest age group only engaged in half as many activity types on average than those aged 18 to 29 years. Of those self-identifying as right, the youngest on average took part in three times as many activity types as the oldest.

**Figure 7b**

**Undertaking collectively oriented action by age group and ideological orientation in the UK**



Overall, in Germany the youngest age group was also most likely to engage in collective actions (figure 7c). However, except for those identifying as right (where the group of young people was smaller), the gap in engagement compared to the oldest age group was less pronounced than in the UK.

**Figure 7c****Undertaking collectively oriented action by age group and ideological orientation in Germany**

Our analysis shows that the relationship between age and climate change action appears to be contextualised politically. The US stands out with action amongst the left, both consumer and collective action, more likely to be taken by older age groups – while the UK and Germany see the opposite for collective action. The findings also emphasise again that we need to carefully distinguish not just between countries, but also between consumer and collectively oriented actions, as the age-ideology profiles differ depending on what sort of engagement we examine.

## 6. Lessons learned

### *Does age matter?*

Age does matter for understanding climate change attitudes. Our study found that **expectations and concern** about the impact of climate change do *not* differ significantly by age; the responses revealed no age difference in the UK or US, and in Germany a slight difference only. Yet that lack of differentiation is itself an important finding because it challenges press reports or common tropes about unconcerned or uncaring oldies. It also underscores emerging work by policy experts (Gutterman 2022; Smyer 2022, Duffy 2021) outlining the growing concern of older generations on the issue of climate. Moreover, this concern exists across countries studied. This is an important finding; the vast majority of survey and scholarship on this issue covers the US only, our study expands this finding to other states.

Linked to the level of concern is the questions of **action** - how do different age groups engage with the issue of climate. Overall, younger cohorts are generally more likely to demand major action, even if that age differential is much sharper in the UK than in the US and Germany. In terms of the number of individual, consumer-oriented actions people have undertaken themselves, the age differences are not great - the older cohorts in Germany and US (but not the UK) report slightly more actions. But if we look at type of choices we do find age differences. Older cohorts are more likely to make individual behavioural changes in regards to travel, energy supply and consumer behaviour. In the area of diet choices; younger cohorts are more likely to adopt climate-friendly dietary practices such as consuming less meat and dairy. We offer tentative reasons for that including home ownership, variable access to different energy providers and finances, but we need more research to confirm those possibilities.

The age differential is much sharper when it comes to **collective action**. Youth across all countries are more likely to take collective action to address climate change - that includes protest action, but also joining or donating to environmental organisations and/or talking to their friends and family about climate change issues. Older generations are less likely to engage in these activities but differences amongst groups of older people vary across countries. In any case, this differentiation matters because it may help explain perceptions of the old as inactive. Protest, environmental NGO

action and demonstrations are the most visible sort of climate engagement. Given the more limited involvement of older people in these public activities it is perhaps not surprising the older generation is seen as neither terribly concerned nor active. We now know that not to be entirely true.

### ***Do country differences matter?***

Our results suggest a more nuanced examination of age is necessary. In many areas, age differences are present, but they vary significantly across countries. Even in areas where an overall age differential is clear (such as collective versus consumer action), we find some interesting country variation. To illustrate: in the UK, only slightly more older people than younger people are likely to make climate-friendly travel or consumer choices, whereas in the US and Germany this differential is much larger. Similarly, in the UK and Germany, far more older people have switched to a 'greener' energy supplier. But in the US, the 60-74 age cohort is the least likely to have switched. This nuance suggests how local contexts (such as availability of subsidies, proximity to services) can shape consumer choices linked to climate action.

Another area where national differences dominate is the question of whose responsibility it is to reduce climate change. Here we see slight but still significant differences across all countries. In the UK and Germany older respondents felt they held the *least* responsibility to take action to reduce climate change, but in the US younger groups felt they held the least personal responsibility. German youth answered they had greatest responsibility, whereas in the UK and US it was the middle age groups (neither youngest nor oldest). Note these are not huge differences in percentages, but they do suggest that the question of which age group should take most responsibility to tackle climate action does vary across countries. Important to note is that this question may not represent an abdication of responsibility; it could be that older respondents in the UK and Germany felt that other actors – governments or corporations – should take most action.

Despite these important cross-national differences the overall engagement trend – that older cohorts are also concerned, albeit in different ways, and that they are more likely to engage with climate-friendly consumer action than with collective action – provides an important insight into generational action on climate. Crucially, rather than assuming that young or old people are homogeneous in their views, we should appreciate that

there is variation in each group regarding their behaviour and attitudes. Understanding these patterns better would allow for more fruitful engagement with people concerned about climate change – across all ages.

### ***Cross cutting cleavages***

When examining cross-cutting indicators we uncovered interesting relationships across age cohorts and countries. Overall, those self-identifying as left are more likely to take climate-friendly action, regardless of age. In other words, political alignment can trump age when it comes to defining levels of action. But the interaction is nuanced, and it varies across countries. In the US, older left self-identifiers are the group most likely to take consumer action; in the UK, however, this demographic (left, old) is not as inclined to take action as are other age groups. On the question of collective action, the country difference is even wider. Whereas amongst left self-identifiers in the UK, the oldest are the least likely to engage in climate action, older left self-identifiers in the US are the most likely to do so.

These differences suggest there may be differences in the political context which either facilitate or hinder action. The differences may also be linked to different historical trajectories of leftist voters in the different countries. For instance in the 1970s and 1980s in Germany the dominant segment of the Green party ('Realos') were for many years aligned with leftist social positions (Bomberg 1998). Similarly, in the US the 1960s and 1970s left and protest movements – with which these Baby Boomers may well have been involved - encompassed peace but also ecology concerns. By contrast, in the UK green concerns have not historically been as closely associated with the 'traditional' Left which grew out of the workers or miners' movement (see Carter 2007).

It is reasonable to conclude that the party system and affiliation shapes climate concern, but it interacts differently with different age groups. The question on voting underlines this nuanced connection. Whereas US older voters are *more* likely to vote for a party because of the party's climate change position, the opposite holds in Germany or the UK. The impact of partisan affiliation on climate views and action is well researched in the US. A recent study of the US (Marlon *et al* 2022) examining both age and party affiliation indicates that differences in partisanship (and race) are more pronounced than differences in age. But they also highlight 'a notable exception'-younger Republicans. This subset is much more likely than older Republicans to

support climate action – that finding is mirrored in this study which showed young right-leaning Americans are more likely to take consumer and collective actions. In any case, it is clear that age matters on its own, but even more so when contextualised politically.

## 7. Further research needed

Our examination of different age cohorts across three different countries has addressed several fascinating questions. But our study has been necessarily limited in scope; our knowledge and insights would benefit greatly from further research to address questions that this survey could not. These include:

- How might we explain the different reasons for, and type of, environmental and climate action taken by different age groups. While we have been able to demonstrate the variation in patterns, we could not study the causes of attitudes and choices people make regarding taking up action. Future research could examine, in particular, which **motivations** galvanise older cohorts and to what extent such motivations differ from those of younger groups. It might help us understand why older groups are less likely to engage in collective action, but more likely to engage in consumer action, and whether there is potential to increase participation in the former, if opportunities were targeted in a specific manner.
- What **strategies** are older groups adopting in their engagement with climate, and why. In the US, for example, the consumer behaviour identified in this survey now often extends to banking and investment choices where climate groups, including older people with significant capital, are focusing their action.
- Understanding cross-country **variation**. While we have been able to show significant variation between countries, we can only speculate about the reasons for those differences. Our country comparison suggests systemic factors (partisan but also policy context) may matter significantly in shaping action, but detailed investigations that studied this variation systematically would be required to substantiate our hunches.
- How political context specifically **interacts** with age. We see that ideological self-positioning is associated non-uniformly with consumer and collective climate action by age across the countries studied. But why exactly that is the case and to what extent it may reflect different historical trajectories of protest experiences and green movements, would require more detailed engagement.

Directly engaging with older activists could be particularly useful in this regard. Furthermore, other factors contextualising citizens' political positions (such as gender, education or race) may similarly interact with those age patterns, but in country-specific ways that we should study in greater depth.

In the end, the analysis in this briefing paper may raise more questions than it answers. These questions connect to the existing research we cite, but they also suggest an exciting further research agenda. Both scholars and practitioners need an enhanced understanding of the interplay between age and climate change attitudes and behaviour, including an explicit focus on older generations as active participants (actual and potential) keen to help address the climate change challenge.

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d|part is a non-profit, independent, and non-partisan think tank based in Berlin. The focus of our work is to research and support different forms of political participation. With our research, we seek to contribute to a democratic society in which all people can voice their opinion as well as participate and contribute to political processes. Thus, we need to better understand, strengthen, and enhance political participation.

In our work, we use evidence-based research and scientific expertise to gain new insights to inform policy and social debates and to actively disseminate to different target groups. These include state institutions, politicians, and political parties as well as civil society organisations, the media, and public administrations. We want to engage with and advocate with our research for social groups that are otherwise reached less frequently or with greater difficulty by "the politics".

We have particular expertise in working on the participation of social groups that are often politically underrepresented. As such, we focus on addressing and enhancing the political participation of young people, people with migration biographies, and people with lower socio-economic status.

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