

## Social Research Call

**Title:**

# *Understanding the role of social media in shaping the gender political gap*



**Acronym:** DIVERGE

**Project leader:** Anna Bernard

**Host organisation:** Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics, Universidade Católica Portuguesa

**Main purpose of the project:** A growing political divide between young men and women, mainly driven by young women shifting to the left. The DIVERGE project investigates the causal role of social media in driving this gender political gap. We hypothesize that beyond creating echo chambers, social media platforms have distinctly affected young women's political preferences by increasing awareness of gender-related issues.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Our research combines two complementary approaches: first, a large-scale analysis exploiting the rollout of 3G networks across Europe and the #MeToo movement as natural experiments; second, a randomized controlled trial in Portugal measuring the impact of reduced social media usage on political preferences and awareness about gender-related issues.

**Potential results:** The project aims to document on the causal effect of social media in widening the gender political gap. First, we will show that the rollout of 3G networks since 2010 has significantly contributed to this widening gap. Second, we will show that deactivating social media use leads to a measurable reduction in the gender political gap.

**Social relevance of the research:** The DIVERGE project aims to understand how digital technologies shape political polarization across gender and how this dynamic may threaten social cohesion, a key pillar of resilient democracies. As such, the findings will inform policy discussions around social media regulation.

**Originality/value of the project:** While social media are often cited as a key factor in explaining why young men and women are drifting apart politically, this project is the first to provide causal evidence of that relationship. In addition, we will shed light on the asymmetrical nature of this trend by showing that social media have affected men and women differently, particularly by increasing awareness of prejudice and discrimination against women.