

# Nostalgia as a Cultural and Political Force in Britain, France and Germany...

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AT HOME IN ONE'S PAST

Sophie Gaston

and

Sacha Hilhorst

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DEMOS

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# Executive Summary

## Research Overview

An appeal to a glorious past has been a prominent feature of European politics in recent years. While there are common elements to the nostalgic discourses seen across European politics, nostalgic narratives are clearly heavily mediated and contextualised by a nation's esoteric cultural and historical background. This report sets out the findings of our qualitative and quantitative research into nostalgia in contemporary Great Britain, France and Germany – three leading European nations in which the past feels ever-present.

Methodologically, we gather in this report a large suite of academic, quantitative and qualitative research, including original surveys. In particular, we present the insights gained from an extensive suite of citizen focus groups conducted in cities and towns throughout England, France and Germany, which together provide a comprehensive illustration of the many contributing factors behind commonly held anxieties about the present, and apprehension towards the future. We contextualise these through researching the employment of nostalgia as a rhetorical device in each country's contemporary political cultures, particularly focusing on recent political campaigns, and through interviews on this subject with leading political figures, campaigners and commentators.

The research reveals three countries with profoundly different histories, political cultures and national psychologies, yet also bound together by a common affliction. In these great nations, each with, in historical terms, momentous levels of prosperity, standards of living, and global influence, a substantial minority – or even majority – of citizens are gripped by a kind of malaise, a sense that something is fundamentally rotten at the heart of their societies. Moreover, an omnipresent, menacing feeling of decline; that the very best of their culture and communities has been irreversibly lost, that the nation's best days have passed, and that the very essence of what it means to be French, or German, or British is under threat. While the political consequences of this psychological state are unique to each country, our research demonstrates that many of their antecedents are shared.

Our studies of the use of nostalgic rhetoric in the recent French and German election campaigns, and the European Referendum in Britain, demonstrate the pervasive extent to which language speaking to the security, status and simplicity of previous decades has infiltrated contemporary political cultures. The currency of the past, so to speak, is so influential that even those guardians of the status

quo are seeking to define their legitimacy in historical terms. While it is certainly the case, as our research shows, that nostalgia has long been a feature of Western politics on both the Left and the Right, there is a particular urgency around the issue at the moment due to the sheer depth of dissatisfaction in our societies, as we stand on the cusp of another era of major economic transformation.

Despite the tremendous volume of nostalgic rhetoric speaking to the restoration of a 'golden age', a particularly striking finding of the research is the extent to which the word 'nostalgia' itself is seen in a pejorative light. It is a relatively small tranche of citizens and politicians who will openly proclaim themselves to be nostalgic, or to speak in such explicit terms, and the content analysis and focus groups reinforce the extent to which the term is used as a liberal slur. For example, in our study of the Brexit Referendum, we witness the ongoing efforts of those involved with, and convinced by, the campaign to Leave the European Union to define its legacy as fundamentally future-oriented. These insights suggest that in some ways, paradoxically, the 'doctrine of progress' continues to dominate European political cultures, even as they struggle to galvanise towards the future.

# Key Findings – British Survey on Social and Political Attitudes

To contextualise our research in England, we partnered with Sky Data to conduct a nationally representative survey of British adults – capturing their views on nostalgia, as well as economic transformation, British culture and values, and immigration, and the Government’s role in managing such changes. We also sought their perspectives on the legacy of the European Referendum campaign, and whether the Leave and Remain sides were considered to have been future-oriented or consumed by the past.

## Nostalgia

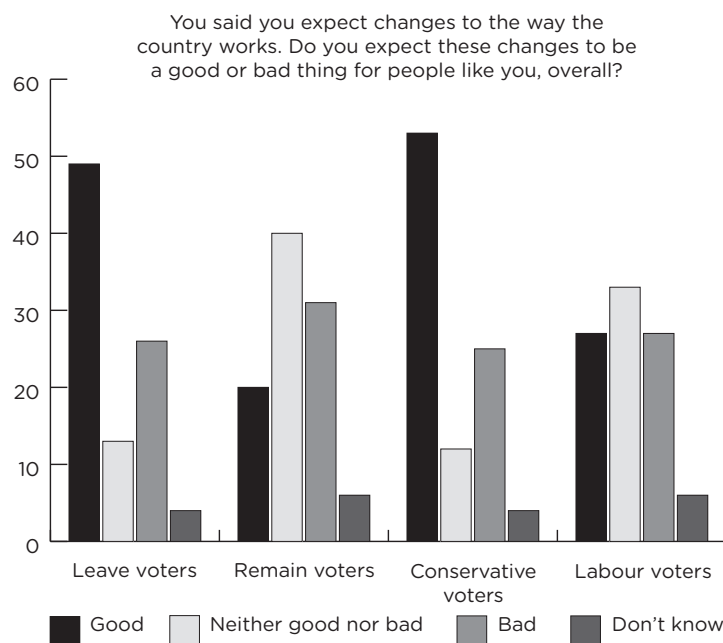
- 63 per cent of British citizens believe life was better when they were growing up, compared to 21 per cent who believe that life is better now.
- 55 per cent of citizens believe that job opportunities were more accessible and plentiful in the past, 71 per cent believe their communities have been eroded over the course of their lifetimes, and 63 per cent believe that Britain’s status on the world stage has declined.

## Economic Transformation

- 26 per cent of citizens believe the Government should focus on encouraging businesses to change with the times, to keep the economy competitive, compared to 16 per cent who feel they should favour protecting existing jobs and traditional ways of life. Half the population believe both should be balanced equally.
- 48 per cent of Britons believe that those who lose their jobs due to economic change (ie. globalisation, automation) should be given additional preferential support, and 35 per cent believe they should be treated with equivalence as any other person who loses their jobs.
- 55 per cent of citizens feel it is only appropriate for the Government to subsidise industries at risk of closure due to globalisation “in certain circumstances”, with 15 per cent believing the state should always step in, and 11 per cent believing they should always abstain.

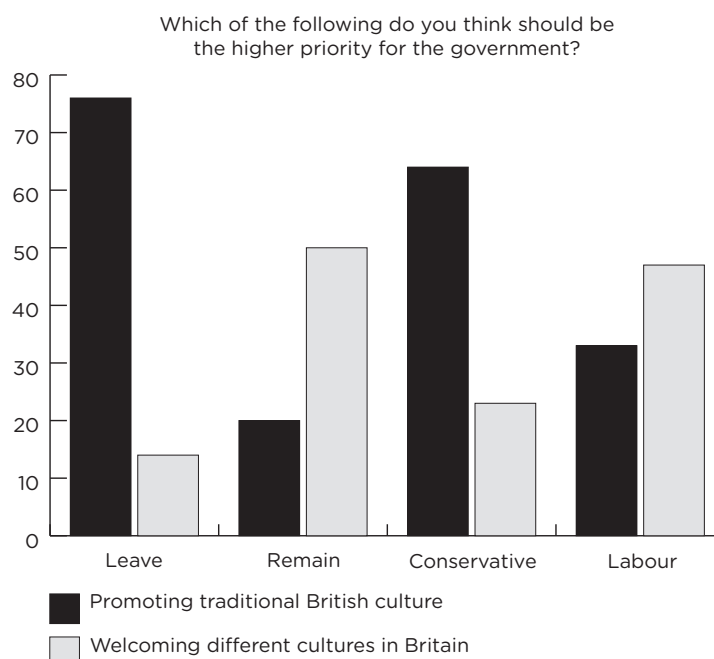
## Change and the Future

- 82 per cent of Britons anticipate a “fair” or “great” level of change lies on the horizon.
- 31 per cent of citizens believe the change that lies ahead will benefit them, and 30 per cent believe they will lose out.
- 49 per cent of Leave voters, who tend to be more pessimistic on every other question, believe they will benefit from future change, compared to 20 per cent of Remain voters, suggesting that when presented as an unspecified force, ‘change’ has become intrinsically linked in citizens’ minds, for good and for bad, with Brexit.



## Community and British Culture

- 46 per cent of Britons believe the Government should prioritise economic growth over stronger communities, with 34 per cent – more than a third of adults – willing to favour community over prosperity.
- 47 per cent of Britons (and 76 per cent of Leave voters) feel that protecting British values should be favoured over multiculturalism, compared to 36 per cent of citizens (and 55 per cent of Remain voters) who feel ‘welcoming different cultures’ is more important.
- 55 per cent of Britons do not believe the Government is doing enough to promote traditional British values. 66 per cent of Conservative voters believe their own Party is not succeeding in this area in power, as do 80 per cent of Leave voters, compared to 33 per cent of Remain voters.



## Immigration

- 43 per cent of Britons believe immigration has been positive for Britain, and 44 per cent believe it has been a negative development.
- Most hostile to immigration are Conservative voters (55 per cent), Leave voters (63 per cent), Northerners (53 per cent) and the working classes (51 per cent).
- 71 per cent of Britons believe that immigration has made the communities where migrants have settled more divided, reaching 78 per cent in areas that report having experienced large-scale migration in recent years, and 81 per cent amongst Conservative voters.

## The European Referendum Campaign

- Reflecting on the messaging of the EU Referendum, 40 per cent of citizens overall felt the Leave campaign's rhetoric was focused on restoration and the past, and 26 per cent felt it emphasised the future.
- 36 per cent of Britons felt the Remain campaign was future-oriented, and 11 per cent restorative, while a considerable proportion of citizens (41 per cent) either felt it was 'neither' or selected 'don't know'.
- 50 per cent of Leave voters felt the campaign they supported was future-focused, and 58 per cent of Remain voters believe the campaign they supported looked to the future.

# Key Findings – European Referendum

## Content Analysis

To interrogate the information environment in which the European Referendum took place in Britain, with a particular focus on the employment of nostalgic rhetoric amongst politicians and the media, we undertook a media content analysis of British newspapers for the three months ahead of the vote, through the use of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media at Demos' in-house big data technology.

The analysis identified that nostalgic rhetoric was contained both within the writing of columnists and comment pieces, and also, quite significantly, in the reporting of politicians' speeches and interviews throughout the campaign. Overall, we identified around 3,300 articles during the campaign and its immediate aftermath, with three publications standing out with the highest number of such articles – *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and the *Express* – although it should be noted that a substantial proportion of articles in *The Guardian* were challenging the perceived nostalgia of the Leave campaign.

We conclude that nostalgic rhetoric clearly played a significant role in the Referendum campaign, in particular, emphasising particular tropes around the Second World War, Empire and the 're-installation' of British sovereignty. The content analysis reveals that nostalgia was not contained solely within the pro-Brexit side; rather, the Remain campaign also sought to match and even 'out-play' its competitors' nostalgic discourses to demonstrate that membership of the EU reflected a continuity of national history.

More broadly, this study also reveals the discipline of the Leave campaign's messaging which, while often simplistic, was faultlessly deployed by a diverse range of actors. By contrast, the Remain campaign's language is considerably less consistent and heavily shaped by its messengers, hampering its ability to create a resilient, cohesive narrative. Interviews with leading figures in both the Leave and Remain campaigns conducted as part of this project reveal the ongoing debates regarding the legacy of their strategic approaches.

# Key Findings – Focus Groups in England, France, and Germany

The extensive suites of focus groups conducted throughout England, France and Germany revealed that these three countries are experiencing many consistent trends in terms of social, economic and political insecurity. However, they also highlight the unique role that national history, character and identity play in shaping the manifestations of these anxieties, how they impact citizens' behaviour, and the efforts of politicians to address them.

In Britain, despite significant numbers of participants expressing a desire to return to a bygone era or a resistance to further change, 'nostalgia' remains a pejorative word, and a taboo. Moreover, despite the widespread critiques of contemporary British society, and anxieties about the future, many citizens remain both resilient and begrudgingly optimistic – a point that sets them apart from participants in our French and German focus groups. In France, discussions were uniquely framed by an enduring consciousness of the 'nation in decline' – an abstract sense of decay and squandered global status. There were also extensive discussions regarding the 'quality' of public life, considering the country's intellectual trajectory, culture of ideas and civil liberties as fundamental cornerstones of France's overall health. Finally, in Germany, the contested narratives between the East and the West about the country's present state, necessarily gave rise to the contested narratives of the past, and highlighted the tremendous variances of personal and collective experience held by citizens.

These distinct characteristics captured in the focus groups underscore the fact that political and social trends that can feel they are 'sweeping' Europe are also a very national story.

## **The Economy and Political Agency**

- The processes of de-industrialisation have had extremely long-term consequences for communities and their residents, even casting a shadow across the optimism and ambitions of generations born long since the last mines or factories closed their doors.
- Even more discombobulating than the loss of a city or town's central industry is the perception that Government 'turned a blind eye' or 'chose to forget us' – a feeling that can fester over time to manifest in

social disengagement, and feed conspiracy thinking about endemic corruption in political institutions.

- The turbulence of de-industrialisation has also coincided with the decline of many of the institutions that have traditionally given representation and voice to the working classes – including social democratic parties. Many of these parties' former voters feel alienated by the staunch cosmopolitanism and intellectualism of their contemporary representatives, and are naturally attracted to smaller parties offering to defend the values and former ways of life that once defined their personal and vocational identities.
- The ongoing effects of the global financial crisis, which accelerated labour market shifts towards short-term, insecure contracts, has expanded economic precariousness to the middle classes.

### **Social and Cultural Change**

- However, the feeling of dislocation consuming citizens is not confined to economic, or even material, losses. In France, Britain and Germany, citizens feel they are witnessing the fragmentation of communities, as we enter an age of isolationism; the erosion of respect, as societies emphasise rights over responsibilities; and the collapse of public safety, as crime and opportunism menace the streets.
- Moreover, citizens believe the forces that once held us together – our shared cultures, traditions and values – are being displaced by an emphasis on pluralism, perceiving governments are failing to actively defend and promote their nation's heritage.
- Immigration plays an important role in the salience of nostalgic rhetoric, beyond a desire to return to a 'Whiter' nation. Firstly, through the 'exhaustion' of the responsibilities to adapt and accommodate cultural diversity, which citizens feel are inflicted upon them as the dominant culture. Secondly, through a framework of social competition; with the state's resources seen as a zero-sum game, the environment in which citizens consider immigration is underpinned with an acute level of anxiety that their own meagre access and power will be compromised.

- The hesitancy, and even active resistance, of political leaders to create space for open, constructive debate about issues of migrant crime, in particular, has fostered a cottage industry of conspiracy thinking, and reduced citizens' propensity for tolerance and understanding of cultural difference.
- There is a clear compound effect of these social, cultural and economic anxieties, which manifest together to create an overall impression of the nation's health and the country's global standing.

### **Change and the Future**

- While contemporary life in Britain, Germany and France brings unprecedented standards of living, health and convenience, for some citizens, the trade-offs between these gains are not sufficiently off-set by the tangible losses they observe in terms of security, community and cohesion.
- Even more significant in size and, perhaps, in political terms, is the large majority of citizens we identified those whose nostalgia does not compel them to return to the past, but simply to reject further change.
- In considering that governance in a globalised age at its most simplistic form is essentially a process of managing change, this inclination represents an equally challenging phenomenon to the effective functioning of our political systems.
- It is evident that citizens are not only dissatisfied with the present, but fearful of the future – with an immense level of anxiety regarding technological change and the influence of automation on our economies and human existence. The change ahead is anticipated to be cataclysmic in nature, with the economic, social and political world order all considered vulnerable to upheaval.

## Conclusions

Reflecting on what this research reveals regarding the role of nostalgia as a cultural and political force, a number of conclusions can be drawn.

- Britain, France and Germany are experiencing profound level of social, economic and cultural transformation, and the breadth and depth of this change has been alienating for many citizens to the extent that many feel unwilling or even incapable of looking to the future.
- Each country holds a varied and complex history of nostalgic narratives, some of which have gained renewed salience in a period in which citizens no longer accept a doctrine of progress.
- These narratives are being skilfully harnessed by insurgent politicians of varied ideological inclinations to galvanise a force of protest against the status quo, rejecting a vision for the future that positions citizens as passive in the process of change.
- Those who benefit from citizens' anxieties about change are those peddling the promise of 'control', not just over immigration, or laws, or even whether the national flag is displayed with gusto, but over time itself. Time is presented as a wild and unruly force, which can be secured, regained, and tamed.
- The cost of mainstream politicians failing to respond to these developments may well be our societies becoming more exclusionary and less communal, underpinned by a more desperate, dangerous form of social competition – in short, the imperilling of our liberal democracies.

It is true that if we accept that nostalgia reflects the complex compounding of citizens' experiences and observations about their present condition, we cannot dismiss nostalgia itself as irrational, hyperbolic or feeble. Nor should we undermine the value of evidence that can be harnessed from the past, to demonstrate the gains that can be wrought, over time, in democratic societies. Moreover, we should not ignore the opportunity to face up to urgent questions about the processes of decline, and how governments and societies can work together to prevent them from happening again.

## Responding to Nostalgia

Our research underscores that governments continue to be seen as responsible for both the conceptualisation and preservation of national identity, for harnessing economic opportunity and shielding citizens from the consequences of economic transformation, and for upholding the standards and responsibilities of civic life. The discontent evident within French, British and French societies will necessitate significant political responses, which may include:

- Transformative efforts from Government and business to promote local economic growth, rendering the ‘forgotten communities’ more attractive places to live, work and invest;
- Considering how greater security could be achieved within the labour market in an age of precarious employment, while also ensuring economies remain dynamic and competitive;
- Extensive preparation to redesign skills, education and welfare systems to face the significant changes that lie ahead in the age of the fourth industrial revolution, and addressing the dichotomised visions of technology as offering either a utopian or dystopic future;
- Greater proactive investment to promote integration on social and also cultural levels, recognising that this is a fundamental responsibility of the state in exchange for the economic benefits immigration can bring;
- A stronger emphasis on international engagement within the education curriculum, moving beyond the histories of empire and conflict to demonstrate the ongoing, contemporary value of international leadership and collaboration; and
- Courage from political leaders to engage with contentious issues, to defend freedom of expression, and create greater space within politics and society for more robust, constructive and open debate.

There remains huge capacity to influence not only the material health and prosperity of citizens, but also their sense of the nation's trajectory and sense of purpose. Due to its importance in the formation of national narratives, mythologies and identity, this process will, somewhat paradoxically, necessarily involve some interrogation and harnessing of the past – reconciling the forces of cosmopolitanism, globalisation and pluralism with citizens' clear desire for a greater emphasis on national patriotism, values and community. These are by no means mutually exclusive; while diversity necessarily renders unity more difficult, it is by no means a *fait accompli* that politicians have surrendered the capacity to build common ground and consensus within European societies.

In conclusion, there are two imminent challenges for politicians at stake, both of which necessitate the full power of Government both as a vessel for policy action and for national leadership. First, to address citizens' concerns about the present through frank and open debate and robust policy responses, and second, to securitise them with a compelling, pragmatic vision, which helps them to feel confident that the social, economic and political settlement that lies ahead warrants looking to the future with hope, not fear.

# Foreword

“One is always at home in one’s past...”  
- Vladimir Nabokov in *Speak, Memory* (1951)

An appeal to a glorious past has been a prominent feature of European politics over recent years. Nostalgia can be seen as both a political force, and a social consequence of political choices. In one conception, nostalgia is associated with change, trauma and “turbulent times”<sup>1</sup>, and is elicited at a social level as a result of the upheaval prompted by policy-making decisions that encourage negative material impacts for citizens. Nostalgia is also increasingly activated and harnessed by politicians and political movements to achieve their goals. The rise of UKIP (the United Kingdom Independence Party), the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) and the Front National in France can all be seen to reflect the strategic mobilisation of disenfranchisement with the contemporary world order, and the promotion of the past as a desirable social destination.

The growing influence of nostalgia on our political cultures requires urgent investigation, not least of all because it so potently distils the cultural and economic ailments plaguing our societies. Standing, as we do, on the cusp of another profound level of economic transformation in the fourth industrial revolution, it is critical that European governments and societies are both willing and able to successfully adapt to the change that lies ahead, without abandoning the rich narratives imbued within the fabric of their national cultures. Moreover, there are a number of reasons to consider that a level of endemic nostalgia – particularly that which focuses on restoring the structures and relationships of the past – poses a distinct and present threat to the functioning of liberal democracies and good governance.

At its most dangerous, nostalgia can hold strongly exclusionary effects at a collective level, drawing and reinforcing divisions between groups of citizens, undermining social cohesion, and promoting a sense of mistrust in institutions. Nostalgia also poses a threat to governance, as political campaigns built on nostalgic appeals can also heighten the risk of policy failure, selling an imagined, utopian past that cannot be realised in contemporary environments. Moreover, a political landscape shaped by nostalgia can stifle the salience of the narratives and policy-making often pressingly needed to respond to shifting conditions both within and external to the nation, and create the impression that change can be resisted rather than managed.

Sociological and psychological studies into nostalgia have shown that personal ‘nostalgic episodes’ are often triggered in response to “fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties”.<sup>2</sup> Nostalgia is therefore commonly conceptualised as a coping strategy to life events that generate feelings of discontinuity. Nostalgic memory consequently helps to strengthen self-esteem and identity, to give meaning to an uncertain present, and to reinforce social bonds with symbolic others. As Andreas Huyssen writes, “One of modernity’s permanent laments concerns the loss of a better past, the memory of living in a securely circumscribed place, with a sense of stable boundaries and a place-bound culture, with its regular flow of time and a core of permanent relations. Perhaps such days have always been a dream rather than a reality... But the dream does have staying power.”<sup>3</sup>

This understanding of nostalgia at an individual level provides a possible explanation for the recent shift in European political discourse. The receptiveness of citizens to a politics of nostalgia may be viewed as a response de-territorialising and destabilising tendencies of globalisation and its economic, social and cultural consequences, increasing the value and resonance of idealised visions of ‘home’.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that while there are common elements to the nostalgic discourses seen across European politics, nostalgic narratives themselves are clearly heavily mediated and contextualised by a nation’s esoteric cultural and historical background. This report sets out the findings of our qualitative and quantitative research into nostalgia in contemporary Great Britain, France and Germany – three leading European nations in which the past feels ever-present.

France, a nation shaped by its revolutionary spirit and in which the ideas and ideologies of its heritage of great minds are liberally conjured and revered. Britain, in which the ‘Blitz spirit’ continues to inform its national sense of self, and where passion for the preservation of its history palpably emanates from its landscape. Finally, Germany holds a special place in the discussion of European nostalgia, with its dismantled Wall and the delicate negotiations of reunification symbolising a continent’s struggle to move forward from its history. In each of these three countries, nostalgia has also been prominent in recent political campaigns, or, in the case of France, has come to stand in competition with future-oriented political narratives.

We have sought to investigate the nuances both within and across countries, pertaining to the supplanting of nostalgia; the dynamics of nostalgic solidarity based on exclusion; the weaponising of specific groups as outside of shared nostalgic narratives; the resilience of regional identities and their interactions

with attitudes towards national political cultures; the disruptive forces of negative or shameful memories of recent pasts in fostering collective nostalgia; and the resurrection of ‘false memories’ as contemporary political instruments.

Methodologically, we gather in this report a large suite of academic, quantitative and qualitative research, including original surveys. In particular, we present the insights gained from an extensive suite of citizen focus groups conducted in cities and towns throughout England, France and Germany, which together provide a comprehensive illustration of the many contributing factors behind commonly held anxieties about the present, and apprehension towards the future. We contextualise these through researching the employment of nostalgia as a rhetorical device in each country’s contemporary political cultures, particularly focusing on recent political campaigns, and through interviews on this subject with current political figures and commentators.

Bringing together these cross-country findings, we then consider the scale of the challenge for political campaigning and governance in an age in which ‘future thinking’ has come to incite such profound levels of insecurity amongst segments of the population. Finally, we explore how politicians committed to progress, modernisation and change management can respond to citizens’ anxieties, and construct political narratives that encourage citizens to feel unified, safe and with a stake in their country’s future.

**Sophie Gaston**

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May 2018

# Defining Nostalgia

Nostalgia has been simply and succinctly defined as a ‘sentimental longing for one’s past’<sup>5</sup>. However, this straightforward definition belies a complex, contested, and often paradoxical concept, which simultaneously describes a personal emotion and a collective discourse, combining empathy and exclusion, and historical fact and romantic imagination. Nostalgia blurs the boundaries between space (home) and time (the past), and in doing so both juxtaposes and connects past, present and future. Like ‘populism’, ‘nostalgia’ is a term easily deployed and often without a consistent academic consensus. It is therefore essential to explore the plurality of its uses and seek to develop a consistent framework of reference for the purposes of this study.

‘Nostalgia’, a compound of Greek *nostos* (return) and *algos* (pain), was coined by Johannes Hofer, a Swiss physician, in 1688, to describe a form of ‘medical malaise’ cultivating a desire to return to one’s homeland. Hofer developed the term to describe the homesickness of Swiss mercenaries fighting in foreign countries. Crucially, he saw nostalgia as encouraging an emotional state of indifference and detachment to the present.<sup>6</sup> From its origins until the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, nostalgia was seen as a psychological disorder. As Pickering and Keightley have suggested, nostalgia is a complex emotion housing dual sensations of loss and longing, which can mean it can transgress the boundaries of the past and the future, the positive and negative.<sup>7</sup>

Studies of nostalgia predominantly sit at the intersection of psychology and sociology, differing in their methods and scope of analysis on the basis of their respective disciplinary roots. While there is significant overlap between these disciplines, psychological studies into nostalgia have tended to focus on its emotional and affective qualities, as well as the determinants of variations of nostalgia propensity between individuals. Sociological studies, on the other hand, have sought to draw connections between individual experiences and collective memory at a social level, not only assessing how nostalgia is experienced, but also how it is utilised as a rhetorical tool.

## Nostalgia as a Psychological Condition

Extensive psychological tests have sought to induce nostalgia in clinical conditions, to build an empirical evidence base of the physical and emotional environments that both foster, and are produced by, nostalgic thinking<sup>8</sup>. Researchers have also built quantitative frameworks for the measurement

of nostalgia susceptibility, suggesting that there appears to be a number of demographic and social factors that contribute towards the ‘triggering’ of nostalgia. Research into the use of nostalgic references in advertising have, for example, show that people are more reactive to nostalgic messaging as they age<sup>9</sup>.

Nonetheless, the picture is nuanced and nostalgic impulses seem to reflect a confluence of factors interplaying in particular ways. For example, researchers at the University of Southampton’s Nostalgia Work research unit have argued that in fact “nostalgia transcends age... [and is] present and prevalent across the lifespan”.<sup>10</sup> People are more likely to feel nostalgic at certain points in the life course, but this is more strongly related to the correlation of key life events with certain age groups. As Krystine Batcho, author of one of the first empirical psychological studies into the phenomenon, notes, “nostalgia waxes and wanes for various spheres of experience as their salience shifts across age groups and as different demands are imposed on individuals”.<sup>11</sup>

One of the most prominent theories in explaining the psychological triggers of nostalgia, first proposed by Fred Davis, is the so-called discontinuity hypothesis. The theory states that nostalgic episodes are triggered in response to “fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties”.<sup>12</sup> Since Davis first proposed the theory in 1979, a number of empirical studies have lent support to his idea. Experimental research has, for example, shown that an induced negative mood<sup>13</sup> or feeling of loneliness<sup>14</sup> are likely to make participants feel more nostalgic. Similarly, some form of existential threat has been shown to induce greater nostalgic proneness. For example, an experimental study found that when subjects were reminded of their own mortality, they tended to feel more nostalgic than a control group<sup>15</sup>.

These findings highlight one of the core psychological functions of nostalgia, as a human coping mechanism at times of personal change or crisis<sup>16</sup>. According to social psychology academic Constantine Sedikides, nostalgic memory supports individuals to respond to these destabilising events in three central ways: strengthening self-esteem and identity; giving meaning to an uncertain present through reference to the past; and reinforcing social connectedness<sup>17</sup>.

These build on a large and growing evidence base from neuroscience, which promotes nostalgia as a constructive phenomenon critical to individual wellbeing and social relations – for example, a recent study from Sun Yat-Sen University and University of Southampton, which concludes that “nostalgia is a psychological resource that protects and fosters mental health”<sup>18</sup>, and another study by American and British scholars, which determines, “nostalgia generates

positive affect, increases self-esteem, fosters social connectedness, and alleviates existential threat”<sup>19</sup>.

## The Sociology of Nostalgia

A number of sociological and anthropological studies have argued that the rising influence of nostalgia in public discourse reflects a coping response to the enhanced mobility of the globalised world. The sociologist Bryan Turner has described four aspects central to most nostalgic discourses: a sense of loss from a golden age of ‘homefulness’; a fragmentation or collapse of values; isolation and a loss of social relationships; and a loss of simplicity and personal authenticity<sup>20</sup>.

Anthropologist Nigel Rapport has argued that idealised visions of ‘home’ have taken greater salience as a result of the de-territorialising and destabilising tendencies of the global economy, leading to “widespread nostalgia for a condition of being at home in society, with oneself, and with the universe: for homes of the past that were socially homogenous, communal, safe and secure”<sup>21</sup>. Andreas Huyssen also draws a link between the salience of nostalgia and a time of high modernity, encouraging citizens to compensate for “unmet cultural needs” in a time of globalisation, including: “slowing down rather than speeding up, expanding the nature of public debate, trying to heal the wounds inflicted in the past, nurturing and expanding liveable space rather than destroying it for the sake of some future promise, [and] securing ‘quality time’”.<sup>22</sup>

Nostalgia is often described as a ‘social’ emotion, as it can typically evoke memories in which other people significant to an individual’s life take a central position. In a prominent study into the coping strategies of ageing Holocaust survivors, Dan Hertz described how ‘the mind is “peopled”’ during nostalgic experiences, generating empathetic emotions and feeling<sup>23</sup>. Many studies have emphasised the ‘thickness’ of the nostalgic experience, detailing ‘the canvas of nostalgia [which] is rich, reflecting themes of selfhood, sociality, loss, redemption, and ambivalent, yet mostly positive, affectivity’<sup>24</sup>. This notion of nostalgia as an ‘affective discourse’ refers to its capacity to bind particular self-identifying groups together, and to legitimate action in the present by reference to the past.

A key distinction, to some extent illuminated by the above definitions, can be drawn between personal and collective forms of nostalgia. Much of recent psychological research has focused on personal nostalgia, assessing the triggers, frequency and function of an individual’s nostalgic experiences. These empirical studies have tended to show largely positive impacts from personal nostalgic

experiences. There is, however, emerging psychological and more long-standing sociological research into collective nostalgia, described as “the nostalgic reverie that is contingent upon thinking of oneself in terms of a particular social identity or as a member of a particular social group”<sup>25</sup>.

This research has demonstrated that collective nostalgia can be an important factor in strengthening in-group bonds and communication. The flipside to collective nostalgia is clearly that in “defining group boundaries membership criteria and [marking] group boundaries”, it can also act to exclude those who don’t have access to the same shared (imagined) memory<sup>26</sup>. It is likely that the reality of most people’s nostalgic experiences contains elements of personal and collective nostalgia, stitched together by memory and imagination.

# Nostalgia as a Political Force

## Political Narratives and the Nation

Given its 'social' functions, nostalgia is a natural bedfellow with the practice of politics – particularly in terms of political campaigning, as a rhetorical tool, in the construction of the nation as a community, and in the narratives politicians and political parties seed and foster to reconcile or activate our memories of the past. The most prominent body of academic research in terms of nostalgia's political function relates to the concept of 'post-Soviet nostalgia'<sup>27</sup>, which has extensively explored the process by which tremendous shifts in national and cultural identity intersected with new mandates on political ideology, and new economic structures, to foster extremely highly polarised viewpoints on the value of modernity and nostalgic impulses towards the past. While the experience of the collapse of the Soviet Empire was undoubtedly unique, over recent years, Western political systems have also begun to experience similar forms of fundamental structural upheaval, as competing ideologies, social divisions and poorly functioning economic models create more polarised, less unified societies – fertile ground for nostalgic cultural and political expression.

The political construction of nostalgia was most recently explored with substantial scholarly attention in Western Europe and the United States during and in the aftermath of the Reagan-Thatcher period, which saw both leaders employing language of restoration and 'lost values' as core elements of their political strategies.<sup>28</sup> One of the most prominent critiques of this period was *The Heritage Industry* (1987) from Robert Hewison, which argued that such messages were constructing an environment incompatible with progressive action and positive social change.<sup>29</sup>

Lowenthal<sup>30</sup> observes that nostalgia is once again gaining a particular currency in contemporary society, sensing that it has proliferated throughout many aspects of our social and economic spheres; in particular, he notes its increasing role marketing and advertising. Writer Owen Hatherley shares this perspective, describing a 'Ministry of Nostalgia' in Great Britain<sup>31</sup>, constituted by a sense of omnipresent nostalgia permeating all forms of life – from public policy to architecture. Paul Gilroy, a scholar of cultural studies, draws a relationship between nostalgia and melancholia for the past, which he believes is fundamentally embedded in the British character, living in the shadow of empire.<sup>32</sup>

Within the canon of literature devoted to nostalgia as a political concept in Western countries, there is a degree of consensus around its potential as a narrative to achieve power and influence among citizens.<sup>33</sup> While some academics caution that such a relationship could be dangerous to the functioning of liberal democracies<sup>34</sup>, Albert Weale draws an explicit link between political campaigning and nostalgic messages in his assertion that the Brexit vote represents a direct consequence of ‘nostalgic democracy’, a kind of aberration that encourages restorative policy-making.<sup>35</sup> Michael Kenny furthermore considers nostalgia an essential constituent to a populist political style and anti-establishment politics<sup>36</sup>, emphasising nostalgia’s saliency as a tool of political campaigning and governance.

Benedict Anderson famously described the nation as an ‘imagined community’<sup>37</sup> – a description worthy of consideration in exploring the role of nostalgia in political cultures. Nostalgic memory does not consistently conjure an historically accurate recollection of past events, and is rather prone to inaccuracy, and centres on emotion, rather than the details of what happened. At a societal level, this means that nostalgic discourses have a strongly idealised and utopian streak, which eradicates the negatives of the historical past, and develops a “longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed”.<sup>38</sup>

Nostalgia can stand as central to narratives of nationhood and social belonging, both through its rhetorical emphasis on an imagined ‘home’, and its practical psychological capacity to strengthen human bonds. At the same time, the connection between nostalgia and the nation, particularly the role of collective nostalgia in delimiting social boundaries, may suggest an automatically exclusionary effect, particularly to newcomers or migrants. The question then becomes how to reconcile this exclusionary propensity, which jars with the known empathetic qualities of nostalgia, and its role in strengthening social connectedness.

One recent study has found that ‘nostalgia-prone’ individuals are more likely to demonstrate prejudice-reducing or prejudice-controlling behaviours as a result of the empathetic emotion linked to nostalgic experiences.<sup>39</sup> However, the authors of this study also note that while their findings show that nostalgia is not exclusionary or regressive *per se*, understanding the ‘referent’ or object of this experience is key to determining its social impact: “When one nostalgises about ‘the way the country was’, one may express conservative attitudes towards migrants or minorities; conversely, when one nostalgises about social protest, civil rights movements, or tradition of tolerance, one may express more liberal attitudes towards immigrants or minorities”.<sup>40</sup>

## Restorative and Reflective Nostalgia

Central to exploring the manifestation of nostalgia in contemporary Western cultures are the dual concepts of ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective’ nostalgia, a distinction devised by novelist and academic Svetlana Boym.<sup>41</sup> By her definition, ‘reflective nostalgia’ involves the revisiting and savouring of the past, with the recognition that while some things have been lost, much has been gained in the present. ‘Restorative nostalgia’, on the other hand, is driven by the desire to pristinely restore an idealised past.

Broadly, the former is seen as a more benign force, common to the human condition. Boym uses the Tate Modern as an example of reflective nostalgia. In this sense, a reflective political discourse would celebrate and, to some extent preserve, the ruins of past (imagined) glories, but would creatively recycle and re-inhabit these spaces to serve contemporary progressive needs. On the other hand, restorative impulses implicitly suggest the desire to restore previous societal and economic structures and relationships, which may come at the expense of certain groups – thereby inferring a sense of exclusion.

## Restorative Nostalgia and Populism

According to Boym, restorative nostalgia has two core elements: the restoration of origins and the conspiracy theory about how home or values were lost.<sup>42</sup> Much of the rhetoric of populist parties conforms strongly to this restorative form, premised on an idealised memory of the ‘past’ and/or of ‘home’, and a conspiratorial narrative about the role of external forces in threatening this vision. In this sense, we can regard nostalgia as a concept of time; Tannock describes three stages of nostalgic rhetoric, which essentially distinguish between the ‘golden days’, the ‘great rupture’ and the ‘present discontent’<sup>43</sup>.

Considering the receptiveness of citizens to such messages, there appears to be a particular affinity between those experiencing social pessimism and populism parties<sup>44</sup>. When describing ‘populist’ parties or referring to the phenomenon itself, this report for consistency evokes Cas Mudde’s definition, which speaks to the defence of ‘the people’ against a corrupt, self-serving establishment, often standing accused of privileging the needs of ‘undeserving’ interests<sup>45</sup>. There is a moral dimension to populism, in which distinctions are made on values between groups seen to be irreconcilable, and a radical element to the changes populists propose. However, this change is often positioned as reactionary, and therefore backwards-looking in nature<sup>46</sup>; populists are often deeply suspicious of progress, favouring human experience as the defining human condition<sup>47</sup>.

As Steenvoorden and Hartevelde explain, populists “provide a clear vision of how society should change, namely returning to how it used to be before the social changes that have occurred in recent decades”. Taggart has written extensively about the role that the ‘heartland’, a romanticised physical, emotional and temporal place, has played in the formation of populist narratives.<sup>48</sup> Inglehart and Norris emphasise that populism captures “a mythical ‘golden past’ for a time when society was less diverse, the nation wielded greater global influence, and traditional gender roles offered natural status and agency.”<sup>49</sup>

Many of the now-infamous slogans of successful populist campaigns of recent years emphasise the nostalgic desire to restore a home of the past, for example, Donald Trump’s ‘Make America Great Again’. Trump’s campaign machine actively targeted de-industrialised, ‘rust-belt’ communities, in particular, visiting coal-mining regions with pledges to re-open the mines. As President, Trump has signed an executive order rolling back Obama’s Clean Power Plan, an act described by the *Financial Times* as motivated by “nostalgia, not economics”.<sup>50</sup> The signing of the executive order provided a theatrical addition to the restoration narrative, with Trump flanked by coal miners and bosses.

The Trump campaign also spoke in a focused, strategic way to groups he identified to be especially dissatisfied with the contemporary direction of the nation’s social and political settlement. According to exit polls, 81 per cent of White Evangelicals voted for Trump in the Presidential Election, and it appears that the restoration narrative was particularly effective for this group. Research by the Public Religion Research Institute in 2016 found that 74 per cent of White Evangelicals believed that American culture had ‘mostly changed for the worse since the 1950s’, presenting a stark contrast to other ethnic groups, with 62 per cent of African Americans and 57 per cent of Hispanic Americans thinking American culture had changed for the better.<sup>51</sup>

## Nostalgia and Conspiracy Theories

The second central component of Boym’s ‘restorative nostalgia’, is the element of conspiracy theories, which describe how the past (‘home’) has found itself under siege, or has been lost. This, according to Boym, is constructed through a narrative that is “based on a single trans-historical plot, a Manichean battle of good and evil, and the inevitable scapegoating of the mythical enemy”<sup>52</sup>. Across many Western countries over recent years, immigrants have found themselves constructed as the principle obstacle or threat in such a conception. In the Netherlands, for example, sociologist Jan Willem Duyvendak has argued that

the nostalgic rhetoric employed first by populist Geert Wilders and (then- and now-) Prime Minister Mark Rutte in the 2017 election campaign, took a strongly exclusionary tone because of the Dutch conception of home, which extends beyond the private sphere to encompass what is public and collective.<sup>53</sup>

While migrants have been central to the restorative conspiracy theories of the populist Right across many countries, other enemies have also been constructed. The aftermath of the divisive European Referendum in Britain, for example, has seen ‘Remoaners’, ‘vindictive EU bureaucrats’ and ‘unelected judges’ condemned as ‘enemies of the people’<sup>54</sup> – obstacles to the restoration of Britain’s true greatness.

### Left-Wing Nostalgia

It is important to note that restorative nostalgia has been deployed over recent years by politicians on both the Left and Right of the spectrum. For example, both Jeremy Corbyn in Great Britain, and Bernie Sanders in the United States, have evoked memories of the golden age of the Fordist system and welfare state. For example, speaking at a campaign rally in April 2016, Sanders reflected, “Forty years ago, in this country, before the explosion of technology and cell-phones, and space-age technology and all that stuff, before the explosion of the global economy, one person in a family—one person—could work 40 hours a week and earn enough money to take care of the whole family”.<sup>55</sup>

What is particularly striking within Left-wing nostalgia is that it can often fail to recognise the substantial political and social gains that have been made in subsequent decades, in no small part as a result of campaigning and governance from the Left itself. Further examples of Left-wing nostalgic narratives, present in the contemporary political cultures of Britain, France and Germany, are described in detail in the respective case studies.

In recent years, in the face of a collapse of the political centre-ground in many Western countries, there also appears to be an emerging strand of nostalgia for a more contemporary liberal centrist form of nostalgia. In Great Britain, for example, nostalgia for the New Labour years is closely tied to a wider sense of fond remembrance to a period of change, innovation and cultural production during the late-1990s and early-2000s – the Cool Britannia era<sup>56</sup>. More broadly, there is an impulse towards the restoration of a very recent past pre-dating the upheaval since 2015, in which a previous world order is restored, empowering to the previously dominant political class. Inherent within this nostalgia stands a fundamental contradiction, in which the narrative of a liberal, progressive, egalitarian society jars with the historical reality of political disenfranchisement, uneven regional development and social fragmentation.

These examples emphasise that nostalgia is not necessarily an inherent feature of the authoritarian Right, but more related to an absence of inclusive, future-oriented political visions that feel empowering to citizens. As Cas Mudde has explained, “When established politicians no longer offer attractive visions of the future, people look for solace in the past”.<sup>57</sup>

## Other Significant Discourses on Nostalgia

Another important contribution to the study of contemporary nostalgia was introduced by anthropologists Angé and Berliner (2014), distinguishing between ‘endo-’ and ‘exo-’ forms of nostalgia. Endo-nostalgia is a personal nostalgia for something that has occurred in one’s personal lifetime, which they themselves have experienced or lived through. For example, former members of mining communities pining for the working and social experience their previous occupations afforded. By contrast, they define exo-nostalgia as a more abstract force, which has not been personally experienced, its discursive and emotional features felt vicariously by those who have been detached from its direct effects. At an environmental level, Thorleifsson proposes a form of ‘structural’ nostalgia, to explore how nostalgia becomes embedded within wider political, social and economic contexts, becoming generic, imagined and stylised and without direct relationship to past events – providing the example of nostalgia for dismantled empires as a particularly potent form.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, two other forms of nostalgia are explored as more positive social forces, endemic within progress and potentially offering constructive social outcomes. The first is ‘anti-nostalgia’, through which the past is mobilised to justify political change. New Labour is often cited as an example of this form of anti-nostalgia; the Labour party under Tony Blair clamoured for a ‘break with the past’ by a new political-economic mandate. Political analysts Richard Jobson and Alistair Bonnett highlight how nostalgia came to be considered a backward political force during this period, positioned as an affliction preventing development and social advancement.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, both also emphasise how, simultaneously, even New Labour maintained an obscured degree of nostalgia for historical Labour figures, such as Clement Attlee.

Secondly, Smith and Campbell<sup>60</sup> distinguish ‘progressive nostalgia’, as harnessing emotion to “use the past to contextualise the achievements and gains of present day living and working conditions and to set a politically progressive agenda for the future”. This concept is further developed by geographer Alison Blunt in her exploration of how ‘productive nostalgia’ can play a positive role in politics, and, similarly, ‘radical nostalgia’, which purports that nostalgia can be a galvanising, unifying and emotionally driven force to bring about change

to existing, seemingly insurmountable structures.<sup>61</sup> It should be noted, however, that radical nostalgia also has the capacity to be employed as a force of anti-establishment politics that could, in turn, become both exclusionary and divisive in practice.

## Susceptibility to Nostalgia

When looking across the deployment of nostalgic discourses in contemporary European countries, a number of conclusions can be drawn on the openness and susceptibility of voters to such messages. Firstly, age appears to be an important,<sup>62</sup> but not exclusively critical factor in the propensity to feel nostalgic, with young people also susceptible to subscribing to idealised visions of the past, as evidenced in the resonance of Marine Le Pen's message to restore France to its Gaullist traditions with younger age cohorts.<sup>63</sup> More crucial, it appears, to an individual's receptiveness to restoration narratives, is the perception of decline, whether on an individual or national level.<sup>64</sup>

It is important to note that there are clear distinctions between citizens experiencing material deprivation, for example, the 'losers of globalisation', and those who perceive a broader sense of pessimism about the nation<sup>65</sup>. Societal decline must therefore be perceived as both an abstract and personal sensation, experienced as a result of myriad influences, including, as some have argued, the sense that 'change' is coming too fast, is increasingly ungovernable and actively encroaching on long-held values<sup>66</sup>.

Nostalgia appears to be particularly resonant in communities that have lived through times of "social catastrophe...[which] radically changed the traditional order". Mazur describes the nostalgia that emerges in the aftermath of such experiences, followed by a decline in personal security, as a kind of "post-traumatic shock", which creates fertile ground for the mythology of the 'golden age', as citizens' memories become split between the 'before and after'.<sup>67</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that the conclusion to a period of unrivalled economic growth and social progress was a cottage industry of focused on the past; the immense emphasis placed on the relentless embrace of change and modernity transformed nostalgia into a taboo.<sup>68</sup>

Ekman and Linde argue that we cannot dismiss nostalgia as an entirely irrational impulse when it is clear that it is often rooted in genuine personal experiences of material loss and disruption – noting that "the simultaneous political and economic transformation has been no stroll in the park" and is accompanied by understandable feelings of insecurity. That said, they also caution that nostalgia's "potential danger" is considerable, with the capacity to "constitute a substantial

challenge to the legitimacy of democracy”, uniquely galvanising to insurgent and protest parties.<sup>69</sup> As Zala Volcic has written, “Nostalgia offers an idealized version of an unattainable past that can stunt the cultural imagination by discounting and excluding real viable options for social change”.<sup>70</sup>

## This Report

For the purposes of this report, we will focus primarily on the broad framework of ‘restorative’ vs. ‘reflective’ nostalgia, to make sense of the political expression and activation of nostalgia in our three case study countries. With regards to the cultural manifestations of nostalgia, both symbiotically linked to, and distinct from, political communication, we undertake extensive fieldwork with citizens and their communities, exploring the ‘endo’ and ‘exo’ forms of nostalgia – pertaining to their own personal lived experiences, and more abstract forces shaped by social and political environments at a national level.

Bringing these two frameworks together, we acknowledge the observance of William Cunningham Bissell, who described how “nostalgia is [...] uniquely capable of bridging gaps and crossing boundaries between public and private spheres. In the nostalgic domain, the personal is inherently political- and vice versa. Above all, sentiments of longing and loss can supply a critical framework that dynamically links intimate and individual domains to broader issues of political import”.<sup>71</sup> And we build on the contributions of Kenny in presenting nostalgia as both a symptom of political dysfunction, and “an incubus for illiberal fantasies and political desires”, to make sense of nostalgia as a concurrent proactive and reactive political and cultural force.<sup>72</sup>

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# Great Britain

## Nostalgic Narratives

As a small, island nation with a rich historical tradition, a commitment to preservation, and a consciousness of its geographical isolation, Britain's past palpably continues to shape its modern identity. Its immense wealth of cultural heritage and artefacts, the consistency of its language, and the continuum on which it has celebrated and upheld, and even exported, its cultural and political traditions, fuse together a sense of proximity to decades and even centuries gone before. The ghosts of history haunt this 'Green and Pleasant Land', and, as George Orwell noted, are reflected in the "continuous" nature of our national identity, which "stretches into the future and the past"<sup>73</sup>. Britain clings to its past because in our tumultuous history we find the measure of our character, and our defining purpose as a "small, nobly embattled people"<sup>74</sup>.

There is a continuity to Britain's nostalgia. As Simon Heffer explains in *The Age of Decadence*, Britain experienced a surge in nostalgic sentiment during the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras, as the tremendous pace of change flowing from the industrial revolution prompted a psychology of preservation<sup>75</sup>. It is also true that countries with imperial histories are especially prone to contested narratives about the past, which can manifest in a potent form of nostalgia for a time of global status and cultural influence. Paul Gilroy contends that there is a melancholia in Britain related to the dismantling of the British Empire during the Twentieth Century<sup>76</sup>, suggesting that the impact on the nation's global standing and influence has been profoundly felt by citizens. Polling undertaken in 2014 suggests that 59 per cent of Britons regard their colonial history as 'something to be proud of', and 49 per cent believe countries colonised by Britain are 'better off' as a result.<sup>77</sup>

There is a particularly strong relationship between citizens' nostalgia for Empire and nostalgia for a specifically White cultural expression of community. As Virdee Satnam and Brendan McGeever argue, Empire was seen to be uniquely English form of expression and enterprise, and also – in the development of values, standards and practices for imperial export – a process of defining a national identity that was then compromised and even rejected in the decline of Empire<sup>78</sup>. They also draw a relationship between England's class structures and a propensity for nostalgia, arguing that policies of neoliberalism and the decomposition of traditional societal strata have encouraged "a politics of nationalist resentment"<sup>79</sup>; an insular and exclusionary form of nationalism that

glorifies a past conception of ‘Englishness’ associated with economic, social and cultural stability.

However, it is clear that such sentiments pre-date the emergence of a new global economic order over recent decades, so clearly embodied in the writings and speeches of Enoch Powell, a Conservative politician and scholar who served in the Cold War period. Powell came to national attention in 1968, when he delivered a speech which has become colloquially known as the ‘Rivers of Blood’, in which he criticised mass immigration and called for the restoration of the “real England” of pre-empire ethno-purity<sup>80</sup>. Importantly, while Powell was sacked from the Shadow Cabinet by Conservative Leader Ted Heath, his nostalgic plea found widespread support amongst the public, with opinion polls suggesting as many as eight in ten Britons agreed with the content of his speech at the time<sup>81</sup>.

In April 2018, marking its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the BBC aired the speech in full on Radio 4<sup>82</sup> – a controversial decision which some felt risked sanctioning, or even glorifying, its content during a time of significant social fragmentation in the aftermath of the European Referendum. Some commentators critiqued the decision as exemplifying the “normalisation of racism”, however others reinforced the value of revisiting our national history. Writing in *The Telegraph*, Jemima Lewis contested that “it served the purpose of archival history: opening a window onto the past, to better to illuminate the present”<sup>83</sup>. The BBC also defended its decision<sup>84</sup> to broadcast the speech, as offering “a rigorous journalistic analysis” of the speech’s content and legacy.

On the Left, some of more recent discourses regarding austerity in contemporary Britain echo a nostalgia for the era of state capitalism predating the 1980s and Prime Minister Thatcher’s leadership, in which the Government stood as the most prominent force in delivering services and instrumentally promoting economic growth. Somewhat confusingly, ‘austerity nostalgia’ – coined by critical theorist Owen Hatherley<sup>85</sup> – seeks to restore the period of post-war austerity, which in fact saw significant levels of Government investment – through the creation of the welfare state, as well as comprehensive healthcare and education systems. The constituencies in whom this message finds particular appeal tend to be those most actively opposed to contemporary austerity policies exercised by the Conservative Government, which focus on reducing state expenditure.

While renowned for its anti-nostalgic political approach, which emphasised positive change and youthful exuberance, New Labour also practised its own unique form of engagement with nostalgia. Its leaders denounced state

capitalism, decrying the Party's former leaders for being stuck in the past. At the same time, there was an evident nostalgia evoked with strategic care for the Labour Party under Clement Attlee, whose commitment to progress and modernisation was emphasised. New Labour's commitment to global engagement prioritised trade and cultural partnerships in a distinct break from the discourse of Empire, and yet in doing so, it was able to appeal to many of those who valued Britain's historical global eminence<sup>86</sup>.

Recognising a burgeoning backlash towards the perceived erosion of British values in the face of rising immigration levels, in 2005, Tony Blair's successor Gordon Brown recognised the 'soft power' achievements of Empire and encouraged the restoration of a lost sense of confidence and identity. "The days of Britain having to apologise for its colonial history are over," he said. "We should talk, and rightly so, about British values that are enduring, because they stand for some of the greatest ideas in history: tolerance, liberty, civic duty, that grew in Britain and influenced the rest of the world".<sup>87</sup>

As New Labour evolved under Gordon Brown, a different movement emerged under the name 'Blue Labour', which sought to reformulate discursive forms of nostalgia in an attempt to rebrand the Labour Party as a more grassroots, values-based community. Working-class male nostalgia for traditional forms of labour and devalued and unacknowledged past struggles, were merged with more traditionally Conservative expressions of 'Englishness'. Spearheaded by Jon Cruddas and Maurice Glasman, Blue Labour leveraged nostalgia to rebuild a relationship between the Party and its constituents – particularly those at risk of alienation in the new era of cosmopolitanism – through a more personable style of political language<sup>88</sup>. Its emphasis was on reinstating the Party's "forgotten tradition" of conservative principles, of "faith, family and flag...community, responsibility and belonging"<sup>89</sup>. A prominent criticism of the Blue Labour movement is that its focus on a specific segment of the community came at the exclusion of women and other traditional Labour Party supporters, and failed to acknowledge and harness the diversity of its constituency base.<sup>90</sup>

The struggle to position the 'party of progress' as sensitive to the preservation of hard-won and treasured values has continued to define the Labour movement over the following decades. At the memorial held for Keir Hardie, the founder of the Labour Party, David Miliband cautioned against the blindness of wholesale nostalgia for the past, which can encourage the sense that the present is inadequate: "The first of these is nostalgia, and the temptation to view his life and times as not simply better than our own, but to ignore the poverty, the exploitation of the insanitary housing, the illiteracy, the dangerous pits, the precariousness of the lives of working people at that time".<sup>91</sup>

Nonetheless, he also criticised anti-nostalgia, arguing that “The second peril is a superficial modernist contempt for the achievements of our forebears in perilous circumstances”<sup>92</sup>, suggesting that the desire for progress should not come at the expense of conserving and promoting enduring values, nor representing Labour’s core constituencies of the working class.

Typically also linked to the politics of the Left and exemplified in the Blue Labour movement, however increasingly split amongst political parties in an age of polarising cultural values, is the phenomenon of ‘working-class nostalgia’. This can be understood as a primary example of both endo- and exo-nostalgia, felt by those who grew up in tight-knit communities based around social class, and also embodied and imagined in a romanticised form by those without personal experience of such a time. This form of nostalgia is connected to the changing nature of class and labour market structures, and often emphasises the breakdown of communities related to de-industrialisation and the declining investment in social housing.

It is interesting to note that references to Britain’s ‘working classes’ have, in recent years, been frequently preceded by noting their White ethnicity. The acronym ‘WWC’, meaning ‘White Working Class’ is now readily deployed in academic and media circles. Researcher Chris Haylett has noted that this labelling in part reflects a growing consciousness of ‘Englishness’ as a distinct form of identity, in the face of Britain’s changing demographics.<sup>93</sup> While some commentators on the Left have condemned what they interpret to be a nostalgic mythologising – ergo, privileging – of the White working classes<sup>94</sup>, academics have also noted that employment of the word ‘White’ can create a sense of endemic difference in a pejorative sense, legitimising their belittling by affluent cosmopolitans as inherently backwards<sup>95</sup>.

Anthropologist and historian Catherine Thorleifsson studies working-class communities in Doncaster, which are nostalgic for the coal industry and the social foundations it provided<sup>96</sup>. In this area, and elsewhere in the North of England, she observed that residents’ regional identity remains built on the history of coal industry, which once brought prosperity and pride to the area. Importantly, working class nostalgia emphasises status as well as material security, a theme emphasised by Vik Loveday, a sociologist who specializes in working-class memory and education<sup>97</sup>, who explains that the capacity to contribute to, shape and be recognised within previous economic models cements the enduring romanticism of a bygone era.

Thorleifsson presents the poem ‘Farewell Brodsworth Pit’ by Brian Gray, as an

example of the complex scope of physical and emotional meaning embedding in these now-forgotten industries:

*Gone – The darkness and the grime, the heat, the dirt, and the slime.*

*Gone – The laughter, the mates and the hot canteen, the showers, the lockers and the scrubbing clean.*

*Gone – The dust, the bile and the smell that makes you ill, the face, the gate, and the roof that can kill.*

*Gone – The union, the strikes, and the rage, the defeat, the humiliation, the wage*

*Gone – The Deputy, the Over-man, and the Boss, the union man, who was always at a loss.*

*Gone – The certainty, the dignity, and the grit, the friendship, the community, the Pit.*

This form of ‘coal nationalism’ was essential in the rise of UKIP, a party that emphasised the important relationship between regional identity and local industry. Its 2012 report, *Keeping the Lights On*<sup>98</sup> connected a rejection of the growing environmentalism movement, and the lionisation of a time when ‘coal was king’, to the protection of working-class values and English identity. Thorleifsson considers UKIP’s rising parliamentary influence in light of this strategic association: “In May 2015, Ukip got its electoral breakthrough in Doncaster, obtaining 24.1 per cent of the votes, an increase of 20 per cent from...2010. The party became the second largest after Labour, on a heavily anti-EU, anti-immigration, pro-coal platform”.<sup>99</sup>

Since becoming a leadership candidate, and then leader, of the Labour Party in 2015, Jeremy Corbyn has also promoted a particular mode of ‘grassroots’ working-class nostalgia tied to local communities and their vocational heritage. Speaking at the Durham Miners’ Gala in July of that year, Corbyn “recalled the struggles and sacrifices of the Labour Party’s industrial working-class past”; at another festival some eight days later, he urged the labour movement to “remember where we come from”.<sup>100</sup>

Over the ensuing years, Corbyn’s particular brand of nostalgia has found a fertile home amongst the younger generations, on the wrong side of inter-generational inequalities, and in those who benefited from the social contract of the Attlee era, and “who believe the post-War elevator of social progress has broken down and needs to be repaired”<sup>101</sup>. On the day Labour’s 2017 General Election manifesto was published, at the heart of which was a pledge to renationalise a wide number of industries that had been privatised under previous governments, *The Daily Telegraph* declared, ‘Corbyn’s Manifesto to take Britain back to 1970s’.<sup>102</sup>

Much of Jeremy Corbyn's historical invocations also stem from his passionate interest in foreign policy, and his long-held support for civic uprisings, socialist and communist governments, and his condemnation of Western 'imperialism' and interventionism. These consistent beliefs have informed his sympathy for the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the 1980s, his solidarity with the Palestinian movement, his denunciation of the 'war on terror', and his expressed admiration for Venezuela's autocratic government and the late Hugo Chávez<sup>103</sup>.

Writing in his book, *Nostalgia and the Post-War Labour Party*, Richard Dobson notes a major structural shift in the Party's engagement with the past and the future. "Whereas nostalgia had previously been suppressed and pushed underground by New Labour, it now appears to be flourishing....[and has] served to legitimise the type of nostalgia that exists amongst the party's rank-and-file members." He concludes, "'Corbynism' does not represent a break with Labour's past; it represents a celebration of it"<sup>104</sup>.

# Nostalgia in the European Referendum Campaign

In the aftermath of the Referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union, a large canon of punditry and commentary emerged regarding the Leave campaign's employment of nostalgic rhetoric. Considerably fewer academic studies have addressed this topic in empirical detail, however it is generally agreed that Empire and English identity formed two important<sup>105</sup> – if not exhaustive – elements of the campaign's messaging. Others go further, to regard the Brexit vote as a moment in political history that is a conclusive testimony to the political potency of nostalgia; an outcome that would not have been achieved without it.<sup>106</sup>

It is important to contextualise the vote to leave the European Union within a particular social, economic and political context; one which, this report will argue, demonstrated a considerable level of alignment with conditions conducive to the activation and salience of nostalgic narratives. To summarise this environment, we can draw on the immense body of diagnostic literature that has been developed in the aftermath of the Referendum, to observe the most correlated characteristics associated with a propensity to vote for Leave during the Referendum.

While clearly concealing considerable diversity, demographically, there are some prominent consistencies within the respective Leave and Remain voting constituencies. Leave voters tend to be White, older, less economically secure, to hold less formal education, and be of a low socio-economic group<sup>107</sup>. Individual mind-sets and ways of seeing the world are also critical to understanding voting behaviour. Previous Demos research has found that propensity to trust others, to build expansive networks, and to be internationally connected and curious, are all highly correlated with the Remain vote, and their inverse with the Leave vote<sup>108</sup>.

It is certainly the case that 79 per cent of voters who identified as exclusively 'English not British' voted Leave, as did 66 per cent of those who identified as 'more English than British'.<sup>109</sup> Other research emphasises the relationship between the Leave vote and authoritarian attitudes<sup>110</sup>, and the feeling of having lost a 'stake' in Britain's political and economic centres of power – echoing academic Peter Mair's warning in 2005 that, "...traditional politics is seen less

and less as something that belongs to the citizens or to the society, and is instead seen as something that is done by politicians”<sup>111</sup>.

As journalist John Harris described on the day following the Referendum, “In so many places, there has long been the same mixture of deep worry and often seething anger. ...What defines these furies is often clear enough: a terrible shortage of homes, an impossibly precarious job market, a too-often overlooked sense that men (and men are particularly relevant here) who would once have been certain in their identity as miners, or steelworkers, now feel demeaned and ignored. The attempts of mainstream politics to still the anger have probably only made it worse”<sup>112</sup>.

In their own words, the single biggest factor given by Leave voters to explain their vote after the Referendum was (at 49 per cent) ‘the principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK’, followed by ‘...for the UK to regain control over immigration and its own borders’ (33 per cent). Crucially, Lord Ashcroft’s research also demonstrates that Leave voters were significantly more likely to believe that ‘for children growing up in Britain today, life will be worse than it was for their parents’, and ‘with the way the economy and society are changing, there will be more threats to my standard of living in the future than there will be opportunities to improve it’<sup>113</sup> than their Remain counterparts. These responses confirm the role that disenchantment with the current social and economic order, and an immense level of pessimism and apprehension about the future, played in the psychology behind the Brexit vote.

While many elements of campaign messaging were forward-looking, promoting ambitious self-confidence and a new era of opportunities, it cannot be denied that the Leave campaign also harnessed a range of different types of insecurities and dissatisfaction with the current status quo and suggested that a form of rightful restoration could be achieved through a vote to leave the European Union. This approach was tactical and effective, tapping into the propensity amongst the campaign’s diverse constituencies to feel nostalgic about past economic, social and cultural conditions. Ultimately, almost 80 per cent of those who agree with the statement, ‘things in Britain were better in the past’ voted Leave, compared to fewer than 15 per cent of those who strongly disagree with the statement<sup>114</sup>.

Ahead of the triggering of Article 50, YouGov<sup>115</sup> conducted a survey that revealed 53 per cent of Leave voters would welcome the restoration of capital punishment, 52 per cent would like British passports to become blue again, 48 per cent would prefer imperial measurement reinstated, 42 per cent would favour the return of corporal punishment in schools, and 30 per cent want non-environmentally friendly lightbulbs back on supermarket shelves after Brexit.

The results of this survey were greeted with some astonishment in Westminster, surprised at the depth and breadth of the nostalgic sentiment within the country, which was clearly not contained to concerns regarding the European Union.

At this point, it is worth highlighting the distinctions between the ‘designated’ (official) Leave and Remain campaigns, and the unofficial campaigns that ran beside them – often in fierce competition for the campaign’s narrative. These divergences are important to underscore, because each of these campaigns took – sometimes subtly, sometimes vastly – different approaches to their campaign messaging, and therefore resonated more fiercely with voters motivated by different issues and language. Broadly, we can characterise the Leave campaign as split between the ‘Vote Leave’ designated campaign, which grew from the Conservative and libertarian establishment and emphasised global ambition, free trade and sovereignty, and the unofficial ‘Leave.EU’ campaign, which was led by UKIP and its donors as spoke directly to a culturally conservative, working-class base cobbled together from disaffected Tory and Labour voters, and former non-voters.

As Tim Shipman notes in *All Out War*, the Vote Leave leadership quickly identified that their fellow Brexit campaigners held influence through UKIP Leader Nigel Farage’s celebrity, however simultaneously, Farage also stood as an obstacle to winning over undecided, middle-class voters on the issue of the European Union<sup>116</sup>. The result was two campaigns conducted concomitantly, but separately, appealing to a relatively broad church of voters between them.

On the Remain side, the primary distinction lay between the official campaign, Britain Stronger in Europe (known widely as ‘Stronger In’), largely staffed by Labour ‘top brass’, and Number 10, whose approach was determined by the responsibilities, practicalities and psychology of governance. The gulf between these two staging points was more related to operational choices than messaging. Arguably, this proved more challenging than the differences between the Leave campaigns, as the dysfunction in communication and decision-making at times significantly constrained Stronger In’s capacity to realise its ambitions<sup>117</sup>. These problems were further compounded by the fact the newly anointed Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, a lifelong Eurosceptic, appeared an unenthusiastic participant in the Remain campaign<sup>118</sup>.

The first prominent component of nostalgic discourse in the Leave campaign was the choice of its core slogan, ‘take back control’ coined by campaign chief Dominic Cummings, whose focus groups had highlighted its potency<sup>119</sup>. The use of ‘back’ here implies the restoration of a previous era of supreme sovereignty, and positions the European Union as an incursion and constraint towards Britain’s

freedom, success and global status. The word ‘control’ became a powerful activation point to garner support across heterogeneous constituencies within Britain, whether experiencing personal or more abstract manifestations of social, cultural or economic insecurity. As the British Election Survey explains, “The Leave campaign’s central slogan was ostensibly about restoring British control over laws and public policy. However, our data suggests that this slogan may also have tapped into something more fundamental to some people’s lives”<sup>120</sup>.

A 2016 study<sup>121</sup> found that a propensity to feel a lack of ‘control’ in one’s life was highly correlated with anti-immigration attitudes, also evidenced in self-described motivations of Leave voters<sup>122</sup>. Weale suggests that the practicalities of leaving the European Union were secondary concerns to many Leave voters, who “believed themselves to be fighting for a cause greater than the standard of living or the control of tariffs on goods and services. For them, the single market was a mundane matter”<sup>123</sup>.

Another, more controversial, element of campaign positioning was the concept of ‘Global Britain’, which emphasised the re-establishment of the nation’s trade eminence. While many aspects of the Leave campaign’s discourse regarding trade were future-oriented and presented as an ambition of growth rather than restoration, some figures strayed into more complicated territory through their focus on promoting relationships with Commonwealth nations – damningly described by the civil service as ‘Empire 2.0’<sup>124</sup> – and emphasising a cultural predisposition towards the Anglosphere.

During the campaign, prominent Leave voice and MEP Daniel Hannan wrote, “The world’s leading English-speaking democracies — the U.S., Canada, Australia and India — are growing handsomely. And these are countries where Britain has strong cultural links. What a contrast with the European Parliament, where we are forever hectored and criticised by people who resent us for having kept our currency and for our commitment to Anglo-Saxon capitalism.”<sup>125</sup> For some critics of such rhetoric, the link forged within the Referendum between the restoration of Commonwealth relationships and British power and sovereignty treads a dangerous line towards the glorification of an historical period whose legacy has been fundamentally compromised. As Gary Younge writes, “Our colonial past, and the inability to come to terms with its demise, gave many the impression that we are far bigger, stronger and more influential than we really are. At some point, they convinced themselves that the reason we are at the centre of most world maps is because the Earth revolves around us, not because it was us who drew the maps...Once again, Britain has overplayed its hand. Preferring to live in the past rather than learn from it, we find ourselves diminished in the present and clueless about the future.”<sup>126</sup>

Some academics and commentators have emphasised the importance of misremembrance and denial in the formation and solidification of British nostalgia. Referring to the football chant, ‘Two World Wars and one World Cup!’ that aroused much enthusiasm when England and Germany would meet on the pitch, Paul Gilroy notes, “The boast to which the phrase gives voice is integral to a larger denial. It declares nothing significant changed during the course of Britain’s downwardly mobile 20th Century”<sup>127</sup>. Indeed, Britain’s decision to join the Common Market in the 1970s was in fact propelled by necessity, as the nation stumbled to harness economic growth in the early phases of globalisation. It corresponded with a time when the country’s own political power on the world stage was also faltering, with the final throws of empire still fresh in mind<sup>128</sup>.

International Trade Secretary Liam Fox, responsible for forging the new trading relationships the Leave campaign promised during the Referendum, declared on Twitter that “The United Kingdom, is one of the few countries in the European Union that does not need to bury its 20th century history”<sup>129</sup>. Writing in the Financial Times, columnist Gideon Rachman retorts that Britain’s relationship with its past is not characterised by ‘obsession’ with empire, but rather, “the British have largely consigned the whole imperial experience to George Orwell’s “memory hole”. Most British people, including leading politicians, are profoundly ignorant of the country’s imperial history”. Rachman believes that this “imperial amnesia” poses significant implications for Brexit, “with dangerous consequences for the future” stemming from a level of “overconfidence about the ease of recreating a global trading destiny, in a world in which Britannia no longer rules the waves”<sup>130</sup>.

The momentous task of Brexit has been repeatedly framed within the Government as an act surely within national capabilities, given Britain’s past military triumphs and with the Blitz spirit at our disposal. As Brexit Secretary David Davis announced, “Our civil service can cope with World War Two, they can easily cope with this.”<sup>131</sup> Former UKIP Leader, Nigel Farage, repeatedly referred to the Second World War in his framing of the Leave campaign as a fight against ‘oppression’, declaring, “I believe...that in many ways this referendum on EU membership is our modern-day Battle of Britain”<sup>132</sup>. In October 2017, prominent Leave-supporting MP Jacob Rees-Mogg drew explicit links between the Brexit negotiations and Britain’s historical successes, declaring: “This is Magna Carta, it’s the Burgesses coming at Parliament, it’s the great reform bill, it’s the bill of rights, it’s Waterloo, it’s Agincourt, it’s Crecy. We win all of these things.”<sup>133</sup>

Whether historically accurate or morally sound, the use of nostalgic tropes pertaining to Britain's imperial history during the Referendum campaign emphasised the power and influence of such language in building a sense of national vision, identity and purpose. As academic Tom Whyman wrote, "Brexit is rooted in imperial nostalgia and myths of British exceptionalism, coming up as they have — especially since 2008 — against the reality that Britain is no longer a major world power. Those most under the spell of imperial nostalgia have now become the sorcerers themselves, having somehow managed to conjure up a mandate to transform Britain in their image"<sup>134</sup>. In a similar vein, Samuel Earle wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* that, "Brexit, in this regard, is already a success. Because, finally, Britain can speak of itself in the lofty language of "destiny": its "place in the world," its glorious past and glorious future, a fairy-tale distraction from the dull failures of its domestic politics—soaring inequality, falling living standards and poor economic growth."<sup>135</sup>

It is particularly notable that while extensive political and media rhetoric has been devoted to promoting and condemning a form of colonial nostalgia during and after the Brexit Referendum, our focus groups revealed scant evidence of any support at the citizen level for such ideas. In fact, many participants in our groups spoke vehemently against Britain's colonial legacy, with the violent word "rape" frequently employed to describe the nation's imperial role in a range of Commonwealth countries. The contrast with political debate is striking, and suggests that citizens have been educated and socialised to hold considerably more negative views regarding Britain's imperial history than is perhaps understood within Westminster. The positive impact of language that skirts around the topic of empire is likely manifest in its implication towards global influence, agency and status – an emotive evocation utterly distinct in citizens' minds to the practical realities of colonisation from which it stems.

Another aspect of the 'Global Britain' rhetoric during the Brexit campaign, which speaks to these same emotional impulses while also remaining abstract from the practical economic and political order was the idea that a vote for Leave would spark a 'march of the makers' – kick-starting Britain's factories and reinstating the nation as a leading global manufacturer<sup>136</sup>. While it was palpably clear in our focus groups that in many de-industrialised towns, the idea of reopening and restoring past economic bulwarks would be met with great delight, it is difficult to consider how a manufacturing 'renaissance' could be achieved in reality without a major structural reorganisation of the UK economy. The Department for International Trade encouraged the entire conversation towards farce when it promoted the country's "innovative jams" as a key trading asset for Brexit Britain<sup>137</sup>.

Nonetheless, the level of public and political support for a ‘made in Britain’ strategy was revealed in its full extent in early 2018 when it became clear that the contract for the blue passports the Government had promised would be returned to their former ‘sovereign’ blue colour after Brexit, would in fact be taken by a French firm, whose competitive offer had out-bid the British applicant<sup>138</sup>. As politicians voiced their outrage at this symbolic defeat, a YouGov poll revealed that 49 per cent of Britons would prefer that the passports were made in Britain, even if it would mean higher costs, compared to only 29 per cent who prioritised value for money<sup>139</sup>. In the aftermath of a Referendum that had emphasised so clearly the ‘control’ the nation could wield over its political and economic future, politicians found themselves facing difficult trade-offs to meet the public mood and expectations.

Some two years on from the historic Referendum vote, nostalgia continues to stand as a political battleground, as leading campaign figures on both sides fight to settle the legacy of the voting environment, and to agitate over whether ‘drawing on our nation’s historical victories’ can or should be conflated with a restorative form of nostalgia. The question of the weight and nature of the Brexit legacy is distilled in two fascinating surveys, which capture the extent to which Leave voters wish to memorialise the decision taken in June 2016. They reveal that 51 per cent of Leave voters agree that the Government should produce a stamp to memorialise the vote, and 43 per cent believe that a national bank holiday should be created to celebrate Britain leaving the European Union<sup>140</sup>.

Almost two years after the Referendum campaign, Vince Cable, the pro-Remain leader of the Liberal Democrats, described Brexit voters as driven by “nostalgia for a world where passports were blue, faces were White and the map was coloured imperial pink”. He positioned this clearly against a vision of a modern, youthful future, adding: “And it was their votes on one wet day in June which crushed the hopes and aspirations of young people for years to come”<sup>141</sup>.

Some weeks later, a number of former Leave campaigners announced that they would be working together on a project to create a Museum of Brexit – formally known as the Museum of Sovereignty – cataloguing and archiving material from the many decades of campaigning to leave the European Union. The town of Lincoln, a bastion of Euroscepticism, was provisionally chosen to house the Museum, which is intended to create a historical record of the movement from across the political spectrum, to serve partly as a temple of achievement and partly as an academic resource<sup>142</sup>. While, as of publication, it is not entirely clear as to whether this Museum will come to fruition, the announcement of the intention to construct such a building in many ways exemplifies some of the

most prominent themes of the Eurosceptic movement: a self-consciousness about its historical magnitude, a desire to write its own narratives and define its image, and the value it has placed on ideas of history, legacy and the tension between the past and the future.

## **Perspectives from the Campaign's Frontline**

To better understand both the conscious strategic decisions that were made within the demanding Referendum environment, and the retrospective conclusions of those on the frontline, we anonymously interviewed a number of senior figures involved on both sides of the campaign during the course of this research project.

One leading representative from the official Leave campaign emphasised the importance of the distinction between the official, designated branches on both sides, and the non-official campaigns that ran separately alongside them. They highlighted that the strategic approaches of each of these official branches was dramatically different to their non-aligned co-campaigners, with the latter tending to be considerably more nostalgic. The official Leave campaign, they felt, had been “less harking back” to regarding joining the EU as a mistake or even a “con”, and more focused on “how leaving the EU would present us with new opportunities”.

Nonetheless, in reflecting on the genesis of the ‘Take Back Control’ slogan, a number of other figures on the Leave side explained that the campaign presented a fundamental messaging challenge. Those at the helm of the Brexit movement were united in their belief that a Leave vote was an inherently positive, forward-looking act. And yet, to demonstrate the gains that could be made, “we have to look back at our national experience of independence”, which necessitates an element of reflection on the past. As one described, the “gift of a better future” was “wrapped in the Union flag”.

Despite this acknowledgement, there was a clear compulsion on the Leave side to underscore that nostalgia is a “lazy accusation” with regards to the focus of their campaign. Nostalgia, one argued, inherently implied a sense of abstract or imagined memories, and this campaign was grounded in specific historical achievements and experience. Another highlighted the fact that shared culture and national symbolism is naturally forged through “a journey travelled”, however a clear distinction was made between “the past” and “nostalgia” – again with the implication that nostalgia is an emotional, temporal condition. Furthermore, a number of Leave campaign figures explained that the nation’s tendency towards conservation and preservation, means that it is impossible to

harness and activate any sense of emotional unity around political campaigning without pulling on these levers.

One particularly fascinating insight from a former leading UKIP figure was that one of their greatest lessons from the decades spent building a cohesive Eurosceptic movement was that their most efficacious tactics lay in “utilising traditional campaigning methods that other, wealthier and better-connected parties had dispensed with”. Without the means to employ data scientists and pursue digital targeting, their grassroots approach, encompassing public meetings and community events and old-fashioned door-knocking, had helped them to build a profile and activate particularly non-voters to make their voice heard. An approach built “out of necessity” ended up reinforcing their messaging of representing the citizens long-ignored by other parties and for whom modernity presented as many challenges as opportunities.

Reflecting on the rhetoric employed by the Remain campaign, those involved on the Leave side highlighted the “utterly implausible” apocalyptic scenarios painted by their competitors which, in a sense, created a feeling of foreboding about the future. Just as the Leave campaign had been accused of fostering a rose-tinted view of Britain’s past ‘independence’, one former campaigner condemned the Remain side’s selective focus in its own scaremongering about the nation’s history, which they saw as limited to “three-day weeks, strikes and economic horror”. This approach may have ultimately backfired for the Remain campaign; as another senior Leave figure notes, “In making people aware of all the very worst that the future has to offer, they inadvertently made the past feel safer”.

Stronger In campaigners tended to fundamentally refute the idea that the campaign had employed any nostalgic rhetoric, with one Remain insider explaining that “the words and concepts that people associated with Remain and those that tested the most compelling reasons to vote Remain were future-focused and about a stronger future for Britain”. Another Remain campaigner acknowledged that there had been “a small focus” on European solidarity in a historical frame, but they, along with a number of other interviewees from the Remain side, highlighted that their messages were largely grounded in the present. One former campaigner explained that their intention was to focus on the benefits of “the here and now”, emphasising what could be lost in the risk of leaving the European Union. Interestingly, the Remain camp also wanted to emphasise patriotism in their messaging, and thus the campaign logo was emblazoned with the colours red, white and blue to evoke the Union Jack<sup>143</sup>.

Turning to the Leave campaign, one senior Remain campaign figure explained

that it was clear from polling as early as April 2015 that the propensity to regard Britain's best days as behind us, or still to come – on both abstract and personal levels – was a prominent dividing line between voters included to vote Leave or Remain. With this knowledge in hand, it was therefore “logical for them [the Leave campaign] to have appealed to those sentiments”. Another former Remain campaigner clarified that Brexit voters didn't necessarily want to return to an amorphous past, but rather to restore a very specific moment. “[They] felt that Britain had gone down the wrong track in 1972 and had to go back there to start again”. The campaigner described the Referendum as “the car from Back to the Future”, which enabled the Leave campaign to appeal “to a belief that Britain's true talents...were suppressed by EU membership”.

Reflecting on the employment of nostalgic framing in the Leave.EU side, one senior Remain figure highlighted the ‘Brexit Flotilla’, which emphasised the restoration of Britain's fishing industries and its maritime history more generally, as “one of the most vivid examples of wanting to show voters that Britain could be taken back to a better, bygone era”. Another Remain campaigner explained that their polling had demonstrated that a significant subset of Leave voters simply didn't believe there would be any negative consequences of leaving the European Union; not reflecting a nostalgia to return to times past but simply the opportunity to “recover” the achievements of Britain's history, in modern times, in one swift act.

Another Remain campaigner observed that nostalgia “certainly played a role” in the Leave campaign, but was in many ways secondary to its more effective focus on “scaremongering about things that were not going to happen...or simply misleading the public”. They particularly regard the focus on EU expansion to Muslim-majority countries and the £350 million-a-week pledge as more effective at mobilising undecided voters. While the Leave interviewees were keen to make distinctions between the “crude” approaches of the Leave.EU campaign and the official Vote Leave side, Remain campaigners drew parallels between the former's ‘Breaking Point’ posters, which were condemned as hyperbolic and xenophobic for presenting a sense of urgency about immigration as an overwhelming force, and the Vote Leave focus on EU accession, which warned – incorrectly – that ‘Turkey (population 76 million) is joining the EU’ and henceforth ‘Britain's new border is with Syria and Iraq’.

Critical to both these messages was a focus on change and the lack of agency wielded by citizens in the face of such transformations. The Remain campaign's focus groups had emphasised that it was not only the social and economic changes taking place in Britain that were dislocating to citizens, but the feeling that “nobody had sought their permission” for policies that were permissive

to change. A former Leave campaigner noted that, “the current pace of change is unsettling people and making previous times seem more slow and stable by comparison”, although they cautioned that this sensation is probably “simply a trick of the mind”.

A number of figures in the Remain campaign acknowledged the role that the “liberal consensus” had played in shaping these nostalgic perspectives, emphasising pragmatism and economic growth over less tangible, less measurable characteristics important to ordinary citizens. As this doctrine has broken down, “a space opens up for people to say: remember the past, before the technocrats with their wizardry and mathematics and theories, when we knew where we stood”.

While Remain staff acknowledged that the Vote Leave side did also look to the future through its ‘Global Britain’ focus, they were broadly scathing about the validity of the argument that leaving the European Union would benefit Britain’s trade balance sheet, with one denouncing this notion as “blatant misinformation”. One campaign figure highlighted the ‘win-win’ of this messaging, which both enabled Vote Leave to present themselves as future-oriented, while also highlighting the historical precedent afforded by the country’s former greatness, which suggested that the ‘Project Fear’ scaremongering would never come to pass. One area of consensus between many of our Leave and Remain interviewees was the instrumental role that Boris Johnson played in fostering an appetite for risk, primarily due to his skill as a communicator and the sense of boundless optimism he is able to convey. As one Remain figure reflected, the campaign then “felt like a battle between maths and classics: a more fact-focused rational case, versus a colourful canvas painted in words”.

Finally, acknowledging the effectiveness of the Leave campaign’s messaging, one senior Remain campaigner highlighted the fact that 1.8 million non-voters had been mobilised to vote to leave the European Union – a task impossible to achieve without having presented the vote as a “once in a lifetime opportunity to take back control”. While the Remain campaign staffers we interviewed were dismayed at what they saw to be the strategic harnessing of fears and insecurities and the employment of misinformation and false narratives, ultimately many acknowledged that something could be learned in the manner with which the Leave campaign was able to activate those long disengaged from the political process.

Considering the context in which the Referendum took place, and the broader salience of nostalgic messages in British society, our interviewees on both the

Remain and Leave sides agreed that there was much solace to be found in Britain's past, and a form of 'constructive nostalgia' and a careful reflection on the lessons of our history, could serve a positive purpose in our society. One former Leave campaigner explained the "critical, unifying role" that a curiosity for understanding the past could have in giving meaning to Britain "as more than a country, but a story".

Nonetheless, there were some clear divergences in perspectives beyond these areas of common ground. A number of former Brexit campaigners observed that the growing propensity for 'political correctness' and the education system were seeking to foster an undue sense of discomfort and unease about the nation's history. As one described, "There has been a concerted, state-sponsored attempt to re-educate ourselves...where the concentration is...on the flaws and failures, slavery, dictatorships". By contrast, one former Remain campaigner urged a "reality check" on Britain's history, arguing that "deconstructing the mythology of all these 'great moments' would help us to realise international cooperation is not a matter of choice, but urgency".

On the question as to whether nostalgia is a benign or dangerous force in British politics, most interviewees agreed that this ultimately depended on the individual or campaign seeking to wield it, noting that it can be used for positive or nefarious motivations. Nonetheless, there was a broad consensus that the selective focus by politicians on the positive aspects of previous decades, without acknowledging the myriad trade-offs that accompanied them, was not a "constructive" approach that would ultimately support good governance. Ultimately, offering to return the country to "a land of milk and honey" is a promise that can never be realised, and therefore the prospect of disappointment, and therefore disengagement, is extremely high.

Surveying the considerable change that lies on the horizon, most of our interviewees agreed that politicians would need to "step up to the challenge of leading from the front" in order to guide citizens through the process. It is important to recognise that fears and anxieties about the future are not just understandable, but also often legitimate. Listing major structural shifts in economic power and global security, as well as the technological change on the horizon, one former Remain campaigner noted, "Fear isn't entirely unreasonable...there are scary things about even the immediate future". Moreover, they noted that the current political system does not necessarily reward future-oriented or long-term thinking.

In their concluding thoughts, some interviewees acknowledged that a difficult

line must be tread between listening to citizens and pandering to their darkest fears, and that effective, clear and respectful political communication would be fundamental to “bringing people along” to the future. “They [politicians] need to be honest and upfront about it. They need to tell a story about how it’s nothing new...And they need to reassure people that they have a plan to make the change as seamless as possible.”

## **Nostalgia in the Campaign Media Environment**

To interrogate the information environment in which the European Referendum took place, with a particular focus on the employment of nostalgic rhetoric amongst politicians and the media, we undertook a media content analysis for the three months preceding and following the vote. This content analysis was conducted using an experimental methodology, through the use of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media’s in-house big data technology, which – using natural language processing – was able to collate a classified data-set for analysis<sup>144</sup>. Our intention was not to produce a quantitative analysis of nostalgia, but rather to bring together a large-scale representative catalogue of the diversity of nostalgic language. To ensure the consistent availability of full news content throughout the research period, we chose to focus our analysis on print newspapers, spanning both daily and Sunday publications.

While the exclusion of broadcast, still the most popular source of news in Britain<sup>145</sup>, ultimately means we are not able to provide a completely holistic impression of the media landscape, it is self-evident that the nation’s pugnacious, forensic, and often polemic, newspapers play a fundamentally consequential role in setting and responding to the mood and tone of political debate. This is reinforced by the substantial scale of the findings within our analysis, which confirmed that nostalgic rhetoric received extensive coverage during the full length of the Referendum campaign.

The rhetoric was contained both within the writing of columnists and comment pieces, and also, quite significantly, in the reporting of politicians’ speeches and interviews throughout the campaign. We sought to explore this coverage through a series of set thematic areas, which have each been explored in greater social, political and historical context above. In particular, these focused on the ‘restoration’ of power/sovereignty/freedom; the Second World War; and Empire, and Britain’s colonial past. We also determined that the notion of ‘taking back control’ was inherently about the reinstallation of a level of power that had been lost or taken, and therefore for the purposes of this research, this phrase was captured in our content analysis.

Overall, we identified around 3,300 articles during the campaign and its immediate aftermath, which contained references to language we had identified as related to empire, British identity, sovereignty, the Second World War, and the concepts of ‘remembrance’ and ‘restoration’. Of these, the most prominent classifier was ‘sovereignty’, present in around 40 per cent of all articles in the data-set set, although many articles contained multiple classifiers. Three publications stood out with the highest number of articles containing nostalgic rhetoric – *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and the *Express* – followed by the *Daily Mail* and the *Independent*. *The Times*, the *Mirror* and *The Sun* all contained significantly less nostalgic-themed content than the aforementioned publications.

Our contextualising content scan indicates that the specific terminology of ‘nostalgia’ itself has been used more frequently in the aftermath of the Referendum than it was during the campaign itself. Nonetheless, there were a number of examples of this phrase being employed during the campaign period, on both sides; principally, accusations towards the Leave campaign that it was fundamentally nostalgic – in a pejorative sense – in its messages, or indeed explicit attempts, principally from UKIP rather than the official Leave campaign, to evoke nostalgic images of Britain’s past as a galvanising force. For example, in a speech given at Princeton University during April 2016, Nick Clegg explicitly accused the Leave campaign of nostalgia:

*Those campaigning for us to leave the European Union like to evoke a sentimental, nostalgic vision of Britannia, proud and independent, ruling the waves once again. But the truth is leaving cannot return us to a halcyon age – if such an age ever existed – and may even mean sacrificing the United Kingdom itself.<sup>146</sup>*

In *The Guardian*, writing an emotive letter directed to the United Kingdom itself, author Anne Enright urged:

*But as you would say to any grand old lady, in her nostalgia and wounded pride, ‘Don’t isolate yourself’.<sup>147</sup>*

By contrast, *The Telegraph*’s Tim Stanley refuted the idea of nostalgia in the Leave campaign, arguing its motivations were forward-looking and ‘ambitious’. The title of the piece was, ‘Brexit isn’t about nostalgia. It’s about ambition. Trust me, I’m a historian’<sup>148</sup>. However, UKIP – not technically associated with the largely Conservative-led Leave campaign holding official designation, although inherently linked in citizens’ minds to the Brexit movement – compromised this argument by opening Nigel Farage’s speeches with films of Britain’s ‘defining historical moments’.

*While Woolfe wiped aside a tear, a short film of the Battle of Britain, the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, Winston Churchill and Ian Botham winning the 1981 Ashes series was played on a screen behind him. There was a short glitch as John Barnes's wonder goal against Brazil in 1984 was removed after it was revealed that the former England striker wasn't actually supporting a leave vote, but the message was still clear. Absolutely nothing good had happened in the UK for the best part of 40 years<sup>149</sup>.*

The content analysis revealed that one of the most prominent nostalgic invocations throughout the campaign related to the Second World War. In this narrative, leading voices in the Leave campaign cast the European Union as akin to Nazi Germany, on an imperial mission to colonise its sovereign neighbours, and likened David Cameron's negotiated deal to Chamberlain's non-aggression pact with Hitler. This ultimately became a focus for the Remain campaign, who sought to seize the initiative and repurpose historical nostalgia for their own purposes – reflected in the language used by campaign leaders and also commentators writing in favour of Britain's membership in the EU.

As the campaign dynamics escalated, both sides fought to dominate the symbolic narrative of the Second World War, and sought to find historical anchors to evidence their case. The Remain campaign identified war veterans to warn that a Brexit vote could jeopardise the peace they had fought for.

*"We sacrificed many, many men in both world wars and this was to establish a peaceful and prosperous union. We can't sacrifice that now," one veteran says in the 60-second video. "For me, Britain is stronger in Europe because it reflects the values my generation fought for in Europe during the second world war."<sup>150</sup>*

The Leave campaign then duly found a group of war veterans with opposing views, throwing their weight behind British sovereignty and independence.

*"The EU is not democratic, and indeed the whole of Europe which we liberated together with our Allies during the Second World War, needs to know that." They told voters: "We plead with you. Please don't give away everything we fought for. Please give your vote to our great country on Thursday."<sup>151</sup>*

*"He talks about isolationism [but] Britain was not isolationist before the Second World War – we joined a French and Russian alliance and fought the Germans and we joined it 10 years before the First World War started. 'I'm afraid Cameron has forgotten his history or was fast asleep getting his history lessons,' he said."<sup>152</sup>*

Addressing then-Home Secretary Theresa May from the House of Commons' Home Affairs Select Committee, Sir Bill Cash was quoted as saying:

*"Does the Home Secretary agree given today is the anniversary of the Normandy landings those who fought and died there did not do so to enable convicted EU rapists, paedophiles and drug dealers who are now here in prison to be protected under the new European human rights laws - including the European charter and the European Court - and they should be deported?"<sup>153</sup>*

On the Remain side, comment pieces setting out personal family histories linked to the War as arguments for staying in the European Union began to proliferate, including Sir Patrick Stewart in *The Guardian*.

*And when the European Union came into existence and the UK became a member, it was for me a triumph of all those convictions that the future must be one of worldwide cooperation and unity, and here we were paving the way with the beginnings of collaboration across Europe and learning the lessons of our own history.<sup>154</sup>*

The Prime Minister also upped the ante on the rhetoric of 'Project Fear', warning that Brexit would risk plunging the fragile European continent into 'World War Three', and positioning the Referendum as a defining historical choice.

*The Prime Minister will suggest the referendum will form a pivotal moment in Europe's history as both sides step up their campaigning ahead of the June 23 vote. Mr Cameron will stress the long, historic links with continental Europe and highlight the sacrifice of British military personnel to ensure the peace of the continent as he makes a "patriotic case" for a Remain vote. But he will also warn that the peace which Europe has enjoyed in recent years cannot be guaranteed "beyond any shadow of doubt". He will rank 2016 alongside other turning points in European history including the year of the Spanish Armada in 1588, Blenheim in 1704, Waterloo in 1815, the First World War in 1914, the Battle of Britain in 1940 and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.<sup>155</sup>*

Recognising his significance in terms of national pride and identity, and Britain's relationship with her past, both campaigns fought over wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill's legacy and the question as to whether he would have favoured Leave or Remain in such a hypothetical vote. As has been extensively noted by Britain's cultural documenters, Churchill stands alone in terms of the immense status he holds as an individual actor in our national psyche<sup>156</sup>. Boris Johnson, who has himself authored a biography on Churchill, went out on a limb and asserted that he would have voted Leave.

*He claims Winston Churchill would be joining him on the Brexit bus; he warns that the EU shares the same flawed ambition to unite Europe that Hitler pursued, and he challenges the Prime Minister to a proper “democratic debate” about the referendum live on television.*<sup>157</sup>

However, Sir Nicholas Soames, Churchill’s own grandson, issued an embarrassing rebuke to Mr Johnson, refuting such a suggestion and clearly stating that Churchill would definitely have chosen Remain.

*“People say to me well, Churchill would have wanted, he definitely would have wanted out. Everyone claims him for their own. It is 51 years since his death and do we really, any of us, think seriously that Churchill would look out over the world today with all the instability still and its difficulties and its challenges, and say this is the right moment for Britain to cut itself free against all the advice of all our allies? I feel that he would think it wasn’t, that the founders of Europe would think it was not.”*<sup>158</sup>

As the campaign headed into its final month, Boris Johnson continued to evoke the Second World War, however he began to stray into more controversial territory, likening the European Union to Adolf Hitler’s vision for a European ‘super-state’.

*The former mayor of London, who is a keen classical scholar, argues that the past 2,000 years of European history have been characterised by repeated attempts to unify Europe under a single government in order to recover the continent’s lost “golden age” under the Romans. “Napoleon, Hitler, various people tried this out, and it ends tragically,” he says. “The EU is an attempt to do this by different methods.”*<sup>159</sup>

This statement drew a considerable backlash from Remain-supporting politicians across the political spectrum, with accusations that Johnson had lost his “moral compass” and become “hysterical”<sup>160</sup>. However, once again, the Remain campaign sought to repurpose the comparison, albeit more benignly, for their own intentions. In the final days of the campaign, Prime Minister David Cameron likened his experience over the previous few months as akin to ‘fighting Hitler’, reflecting his awareness that victory was not by any means guaranteed.

*David Cameron has compared his battle to keep Britain in the European Union to Sir Winston Churchill’s fight against Hitler as he admitted he has to do more if he is to win the referendum. In his most passionate intervention to date, the Prime Minister appeared stung by suggestions from an audience member that he is like a “21st century Neville Chamberlain”.*<sup>161</sup>

*David Cameron has issued impassioned appeal to voters not to give up on the European Union but “stay and fight” Britain’s corner in the way that had made the country great in the past. “At my office, I sit two yards away from the Cabinet Room where Winston Churchill decided in May 1940 to fight on against Hitler - the best and greatest decision anyone has made in our country. He didn’t want to be alone, he wanted to be fighting with the French and with the Poles and with the others but he didn’t quit. He didn’t quit on Europe, he didn’t quit on European democracy, he didn’t quit on European freedom.”*<sup>162</sup>

The Chancellor, George Osborne, also waded into terminology of the Second World War. After the Leave campaign published a poster widely deemed to be xenophobic in nature, he likened the image to having “echoes” of far-right propaganda from the 1930s – a reference clearly drawing equivalence with Nazism<sup>163</sup>.

Throughout the Referendum campaign, both sides were contesting not just Britain’s relationship with Europe, but the foundational history of the European Union and its success as a project. Within the content analysis, we see the campaign rhetoric as a whole come together as an exercise in historical revisionism, with both sides seeking to reframe the events of the past to their own advantage. For example, those on the Leave side refuted the notion of a peaceful union between nations.

*There’s the lie that the EU is popular with those it governs, spreading peace and harmony between nations. Certainly, this was among its founding fathers’ dreams, when Europe lay ravaged by World War II. The reality has turned out very differently.*<sup>164</sup>

Meanwhile, those on the Remain side emphasised the enormous gains that have been made, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby.

*“Sacrifice, generosity, vision beyond self-interest, suffering for others, helping the helpless, these are some of the deeply Christian principles that have shaped us. [...] Those who fought in two world wars were not looking back but forward.*

*Those who built the EU after the two wars, in which millions of Europeans had died, looked forward”.*<sup>165</sup>

Another area of nostalgic rhetoric that evidently seeped into the campaign with prominence was the topic of empire and Britain’s colonial past. Again, politicians associated with both the Leave and Remain campaigns invoked this

theme, however so too did many columnists express their dissatisfaction for the Leave campaign through the accusation of ‘empire fantasies’.

*Since the war, Britain has had to let go of its empire. Simultaneously, many of the building blocks of British identity, such as majority Protestantism and a cult of distinctive constitutional liberties, have ceased to apply or lost force.<sup>166</sup> Lest we forget, turning the native poor against the migrants is a variant of the old divide-and-rule trick that the British establishment honed ages ago to dominate the empire. Today it uses the same strategy to dominate the domestic “natives”, hide austerity’s effects, and deflect anger toward the other – the foreigner, the migrant<sup>167</sup>.*

Also harnessing anti-empire sentiment, the Leave campaign positioned Europe as an empire, to emphasise the significance of Britain’s ‘emancipation’ from its yoke.

*“The Prime Minister’s ‘special status’ for countries outside of the Eurozone will leave Britain as a colony of Europe if we vote to remain, with the Prime Minister reduced to a Roman governor handing down diktats from what Jose Manuel Barroso, former President of the European Commission, described as the ‘empire’,” he [Owen Paterson MP] will say.<sup>168</sup>*

Nick Clegg flipped this idea on its head, suggesting that the EU was Britain’s only chance to maintain empire-level global clout.

*“Leaving the European Union will have an unravelling effect on all our most important relationships – with our neighbours in Europe, with our cousins in America and even with our brothers and sisters within the United Kingdom if it pushes Scotland closer to independence. We will be left with no empire, no union and no special relationship. We will never have been so alone. Never so isolated. Never so powerless.”<sup>169</sup>*

Most controversially, Boris Johnson caused outrage when he suggested that President Obama, visiting during the campaign and making an explicit case for Remain, was genetically predisposed to resent Britain due to his Kenyan heritage and the legacy of empire.

*Something mysterious happened when Barack Obama entered the Oval Office in 2009. Something vanished from that room, and no one could quite explain why. It was a bust of Winston Churchill – the great British war time leader. It was a fine goggle-eyed object, done by the brilliant sculptor Jacob Epstein, and it had*

*sat there for almost ten years. But on day one of the Obama administration it was returned, without ceremony, to the British embassy in Washington. No one was sure whether the President had himself been involved in the decision. Some said it was a snub to Britain. Some said it was a symbol of the part-Kenyan President's ancestral dislike of the British empire – of which Churchill had been such a fervent defender.*<sup>170</sup>

The data-set also makes clear that there were contemporary battlegrounds in play to define the future legacy of each of the campaigns themselves, with the Leave campaign in particular sensitive to not be seen as nativist or insular, and rather to reinforce their democratic motivations. In a piece for *The Telegraph* titled, 'Brexit vote is about the supremacy of Parliament and nothing else', Ambrose Evans-Pritchard wrote:

*Stripped of distractions, it comes down to an elemental choice: whether to restore the full self-government of this nation, or to continue living under a higher supranational regime, ruled by a European Council that we do not elect in any meaningful sense, and that the British people can never remove, even when it persists in error.*<sup>171</sup>

Similarly, writing in the *Mail on Sunday* the weekend before the Referendum, Peter Hitchens said:

*The part of the referendum campaign that has angered me most is this: the suggestion, repeatedly made by pro-EU persons, that there is something narrow, mean and small-minded about wanting to live in an independent country that makes its own laws and controls its own borders.*<sup>172</sup>

On the same day in *The Telegraph*, Simon Heffer wrote:

*[Leave voters] resent a foreign power overruling their courts and their elected government. They are frustrated at being unable to change key policies when they vote. They detest contributing 8.5 billion a year net for Brussels to spend in countries less efficient, less productive and more corrupt than ours. They have had enough, above all, of being told that unless the UK concedes in perpetuity to foreign rule it will be worthless, and face ruin, danger and unremitting failure.*

This struggle to define the antecedents and motivations of the Leave vote within the grounds of sovereignty has continued in the months, and now years, since the vote. Interestingly, the Lord Ashcroft surveys mentioned in the first section of this chapter, reinforcing the self-described 'democratic' motivations of Leave voters, can appear contradictory to surveys taken in the days prior to the vote<sup>173</sup>,

which clearly identified immigration as the most salient factor. This suggests that perhaps immigration, and other forms of control, were the compulsive driving forces behind turnout and voting behaviour across the Leave constituencies as a whole; however, having secured the change they had clamoured for, some Leave voters would prefer to retrospectively align their motivations with the elite ‘Liberal Leavers’ discourse promoted during the campaign.

Two of the newspapers with the largest proportion of nostalgic content, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, required deeper analysis, as both these publications had openly supported a Remain vote during the campaign and are bastions of progressive politics. We undertook a specialised study of the findings of both of these newspapers, to identify and classify the content pertaining to factual news reporting, quoting politicians and other influential actors; content genuinely promoting nostalgic rhetoric, whether in favour or against the Brexit vote; and content mocking perceived nostalgia on either side of the campaign. This deeper data-check revealed that news reporting made up the predominant form of nostalgic discourse in these titles, followed by mocking content hostile to the Brexit campaign, and a small number of pro-Brexit articles employing nostalgic devices.

For example, writing in the aftermath of Boris Johnson’s declaration for the Leave campaign, *The Guardian*’s John Crace’s parliamentary sketch described a man ill-at-ease with modernity.

*“The mayor of London has suggested that leaving the EU would herald a return to the halcyon days of the British empire,” smirked Yvette Cooper. “Can the prime minister invite him to return to the 21st Century?” BoGo [sic] winced. Anywhere other than the 21st Century would be preferable right now.”<sup>174</sup>*

After Liam Fox made the clumsy suggestion that Britain was a country singularly defined by its positive 20<sup>th</sup> Century history, *The Guardian* rather snidely offered him a history lesson.

*So here is our timeline of the things Guardian readers most frequently suggested*

*Liam Fox needed to brush up on, and some ideas of where he - and you - might be able to read more about them.<sup>175</sup>*

These two publications also frequently referred to their interpretation of the Leave campaign’s nostalgic messaging, to then challenge the evidence behind the vision.

*Before anyone confidently asserts the triumphant return of our sovereign powers, they need to understand what EU law regulates and how it is enacted in UK law.<sup>176</sup>*

*The goblins they tell us we should run from come in the form of “faceless bureaucrats” in EU institutions; they come in the form of “uncontrolled” immigrants; they come in the form of “crazy” European judges. In the Brexiteers’ vision, the world is a frightening place and one from which anxious Britain should retreat, returning somehow to a version of the UK circa 1952 that actually never existed in the first place.<sup>177</sup>*

*The Empire is gone; the Commonwealth is but a shadow. Britannia has not “ruled the waves” for a good long while - Europe’s biggest ports are Rotterdam, Antwerp and Hamburg.<sup>178</sup>*

To conclude, nostalgic rhetoric clearly played a significant role in the Referendum campaign, in particular, emphasising particular tropes around the Second World War, Empire and British sovereignty. While the Leave campaign’s slogan of ‘taking back control’ was inherently restorative, this content analysis reveals that nostalgia was not contained solely within the pro-Brexit side; rather, the Remain campaign also sought to match and even ‘out-play’ its competitors’ nostalgic discourses. This in part reflects a conscious awareness that the EU, and its proponents, can often be associated with a particular form of cosmopolitanism, positioned as inherently incompatible with national pride and sovereignty. Moreover, a desire to instill a sense of historical continuity in Britain’s close relationship with Europe.

Through seeking to ‘beat them at their own game’, anticipating a slew of nostalgic emblems and language, the Remain campaign fought to challenge the notion that history was invariably on the Leave campaign’s side. The strong relationship between citizens’ propensity to identify with nostalgic themes and the tendency to vote Leave suggests that the Remain campaign was unsuccessful in this endeavour.

The content analysis also provides insights pertaining more generally to the discourse of the campaign. Most prominently, it reveals the consistency and discipline of the Leave campaign’s messaging which, while often simplistic, was faultlessly deployed by a diverse range of actors. By contrast, the analysis highlights how the Remain campaign’s messaging frequently changes and evolves, is clearly tightly scheduled around different topics of focus, and is highly responsive in nature to the landscape of the campaign. Moreover, the voices within the campaign offer distinct arguments and language; and while

many of these interventions were clearly highly articulate, the Remain side distinctly under-performs in creating a 'block-out' form of resilient messaging to the same extent as the Leave campaign. Ultimately, we surmise that the Leave campaign created a more successful, cohesive narrative.

# Citizens' Voices - England

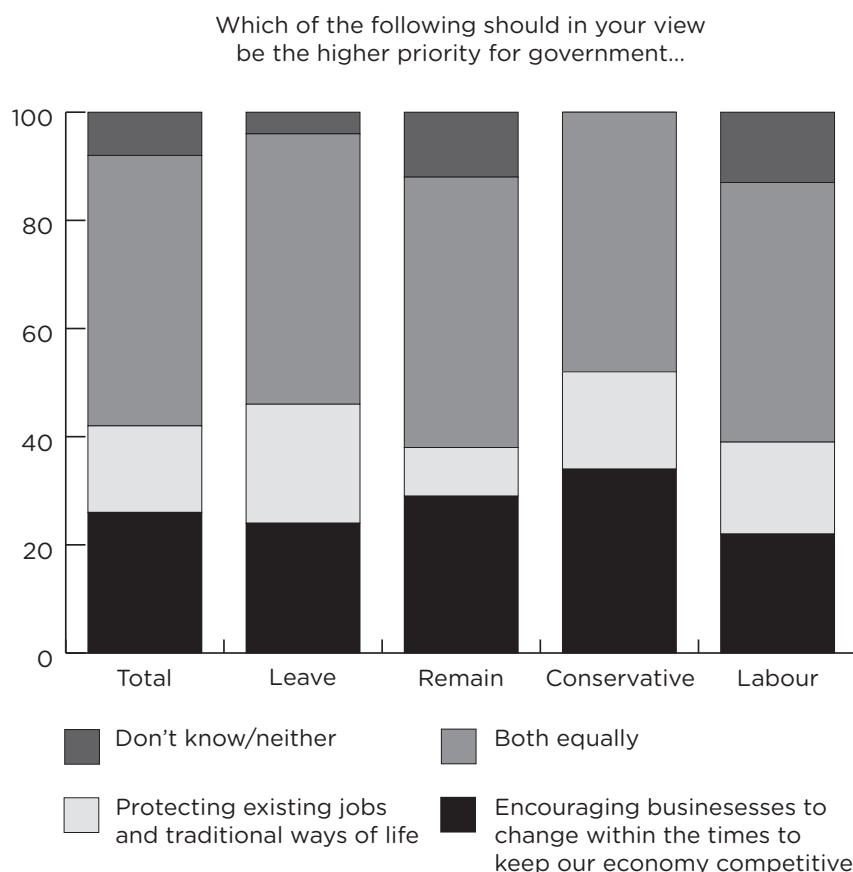
## National Survey

To contextualise the project's qualitative research, and extrapolate our findings out on a national scale, we partnered with Sky's data team<sup>179</sup> to conduct a nationally representative survey of British adults on a number of the most pertinent, contentious issues at the heart of this research. We addressed both explicit manifestations of nostalgia, and other areas of discontent with contemporary life crucial to the cultivation of nostalgic impulses – including issues around immigration, community cohesion, culture and values. Moreover, we asked citizens to set out their expectations of the role in Government in the upholding of both communities, in the face of economic transformation, and British traditions, in the face of multiculturalism and a globalised world.

Overall, we find a nation deeply divided between age, geography, gender, education, party affiliation, socio-economic status and voting behaviour in the European Referendum. Importantly, the three issues on which the country appears to be most united are the belief that the country is in a state of decline, feeling that immigration has negatively impacted British society, and that the nation's cultures and traditions are not be sufficiently defended and promoted.

## Nostalgia

Our survey reveals that 63 per cent of British citizens feel life was better when they were growing up, compared to 21 per cent who believe that life is better now. Strikingly, Labour voters were more likely to exhibit nostalgia, at 70 per cent compared to 59 per cent of Conservative voters. Moreover, the young were just as likely, or in some cases, even more likely, to be nostalgic for the recent past than their parents were for their own childhoods; 71 per cent of 25-to-34-year-olds believed life was better when they were going up. Geography appears to play a strong role in shaping perspectives on this issue – those in the North are more likely to pine for the past than those in London (71 per cent to 57 per cent) – as does socio-economic standing, with the working classes 17 percentage points more likely to be nostalgic. On this question, Leave voters, those without a degree, and women, were all more likely to see the past through rose-tinted glasses.



When asked specifically regarding access to job opportunities, we saw a similar story, with 55 per cent of citizens feeling they were more plentiful in the past. Again, a Leave vote in the Referendum, lower socio-economic status and living in the North of England all appear to be highly correlated with a propensity to feel that jobs opportunities were better in the past, although education is especially important on this question, with 59 per cent of those without a degree believing the jobs market has declined, compared to 43 per cent of those with further education.

Nonetheless, the most illuminating responses came when citizens were asked to consider whether the sense of community in their local area had improved or declined over the course of their lifetimes. A staggering 71 per cent of citizens believe their communities have been eroded, with just six per cent observing an improvement. Political affiliation does not appear especially significant on this point, although Conservative voters were somewhat more likely than Labour voters to have witnessed a decline (77 per cent to 72 per cent). Those aged 35-44 years were the least likely to feel pessimistic on this point, with those aged 65-74 the most likely. An astonishing 81 per cent of those in the North feel their communities have declined, compared to 61 per cent of Londoners.

Turning to the nation, 63 per cent of citizens also believe that Britain's status

on the world stage has declined. Interestingly, 75 per cent of those aged 25-34 – Millennials, who grew up under the Blair, Brown and Cameron years – believe this, compared to 55 per cent of 18-24-year-olds. The Millennials are only matched in their nostalgia for global influence by the Baby Boomers, born just following the Second World War in the last days of Empire. This topic is also the one point of acute nostalgia for Londoners, who are more likely than those living in any other region to feel conscious of the nation's declining international influence, as are Remain voters – 20 percentage points more likely than Leave voters to regard our global status as on the wane.

## **Economic Transformation**

We asked citizens whether the Government's attentions should focus on encouraging businesses to change with the times, to keep the economy competitive, or protecting existing jobs and traditional ways of life. Overall, half the population felt both should be balanced equally, while 26 per cent of the population favoured economic innovation and modernisation, and 16 per cent favoured conserving existing types of work and communities. Interestingly, the percentage of those favouring 'protecting existing jobs and traditional ways of life' was almost identical between those who voted for Labour and the Conservatives at the 2017 General Election. Those in the Midlands were most likely to want to conserve, as were working-class respondents, who were almost twice as likely (22 per cent to 12 per cent) as those from the middle classes to want to eschew economic transformation. Those who voted Remain, are degree-educated and male, were also considerably more inclined towards economic change.

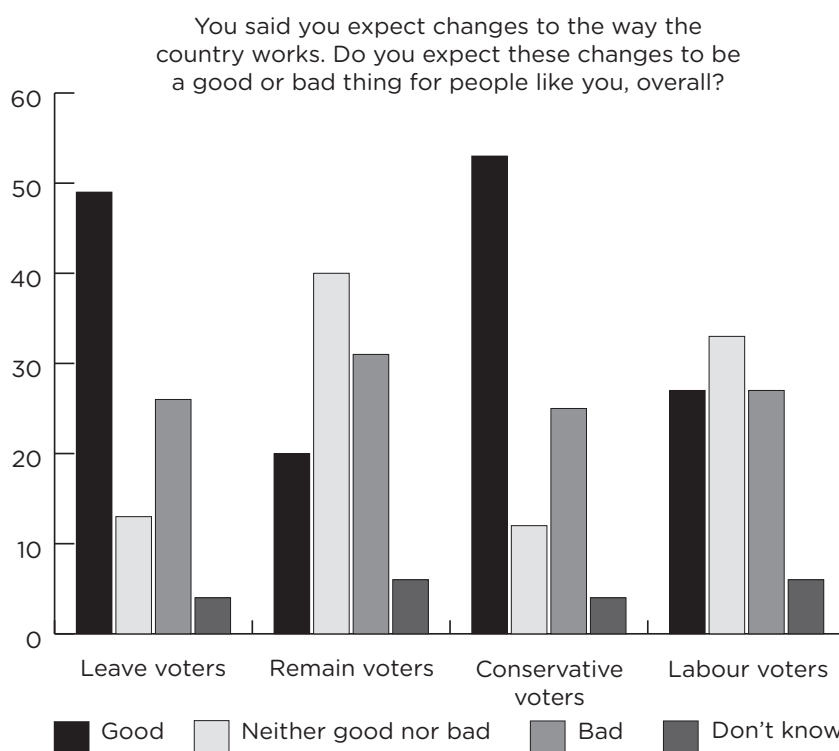
When specifically asked whether those whose careers end due to globalisation or automation should be given preferential treatment, the population is divided. 48 per cent of Britons believe that those who lose their jobs due to economic change should be given additional support, and 35 per cent believe they should be treated with equivalence. Differences in party political affiliation are evident: 58 per cent of Labour voters favour special treatment, compared to 45 per cent of Conservative voters. Interestingly, those aged between 55 and 75 are the least likely to agree that globalisation's 'losers' should be given special support, with young workers aged 25 to 45 the most likely to favour such an approach. It could be assumed that those who have already lived through de-industrialisation and felt they were forced 'to go it alone' find the notion that the next wave of the displaced would be more generously treated to be unwelcome. Little difference is observed between EU voting behaviour and gender, although those without a degree are more likely to favour Government intervention.

When asked to identify if the Government should subsidise industries at risk of closure due to globalisation, a majority of citizens (55 per cent) felt this was only appropriate “in certain circumstances”, with 15 per cent believing the state should always step in, and 11 per cent believing they should always abstain. Labour voters were more than twice as likely to believe the Government should take an interventionist approach, as were those with working-class backgrounds, and Leave voters. In Scotland, 37 per cent of citizens favoured the subsidisation of industries, compared to just 10 per cent in London.

## **Change and the Future**

When asked to turn their minds to the coming decades, 82 per cent of Britons anticipate a “fair” or “great” level of change lies on the horizon. Those aged 35-44 were the most likely to expect a “great” deal of change; curiously, some 20 percentage points higher than their immediate elders, aged 45-54. A clear distinction can be made between the views of those living in London and those in the broader South of England – despite living in the world’s global city, Londoners are the least likely to anticipate large-scale change, at 39 per cent, compared to 52 per cent of their geographical neighbours. However, Remain voters more likely to expect the coming decades to bring change, at 89 per cent, compared to 76 per cent of Leave voters. These responses raise the question as to whether citizens consider themselves to be explicitly complicit in either creating or resisting such change, or if the ‘winds of change’ will stand in their favour.

To explore this further, we asked citizens to consider whether ‘people like you’ would benefit or suffer from the changes that lie ahead. Overall, Britons were almost evenly split in their estimations, with 31 per cent believing it will benefit them, and 30 per cent believing they will fall foul of change. The youngest respondents are the most positive, however again Millennials – who have borne the brunt of the introduction of tuition fees, and the housing crisis – reveal themselves to be especially pessimistic on this point. Northerners are optimistic that change will come to their benefit, perhaps in a ‘the only way is up’ mentality, while the Scottish are the most acutely pessimistic. The European Referendum appears to have fundamentally shaped views on this question, with some striking results: 49 per cent of Leave voters believe they will benefit from future change, compared to 20 per cent of Remain voters, while 13 per cent of Leave voters believe they will suffer, compared to 40 per cent of Remain voters. These findings suggest that when presented as an unspecified force, ‘change’ has become intrinsically linked in citizens’ minds, for good and for bad, with Brexit.

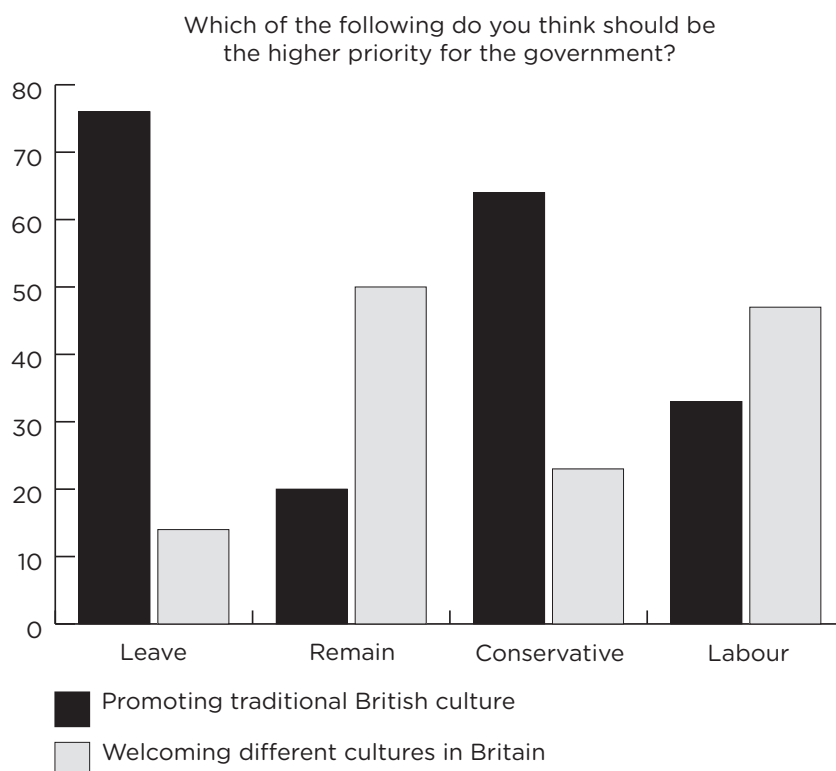


## Community and British Culture

Turning to the Government, we asked citizens as to whether they would prefer that economic growth or a stronger sense of community was prioritised, finding 46 per cent in favour of the former, with a smaller, but still sizeable 34 per cent willing to favour community over prosperity. There is little difference in party affiliation on this point, however a considerable gulf between the views of those aged 65-and-older and the younger generations. In England, residents in the Midlands were the most likely to favour community over the economy, and Londoners the most likely to favour economic growth. Some distinctions can also be observed within European Referendum voting behaviour – 39 per cent of Leave voters favour community, compared to 31 per cent of Remain voters – however it is education that appears to be especially significant, with 37 per cent of those without a degree choosing community over the economy, compared to 25 per cent of those with further education.

Focusing on the dichotomy between ‘promoting British values’ and ‘welcoming different cultures’, 47 per cent of Britons believe that British values should be favoured, compared to 36 per cent who see multiculturalism as more important. Conservative voters were twice as likely as Labour voters to preference upholding British values, although a third of Labour voters did choose national traditions over multiculturalism. Age plays a strong role in shaping viewpoints on this issue, with those aged over-55 twice as likely as the younger generations to preference the preservation of British values. Geography is also significant –

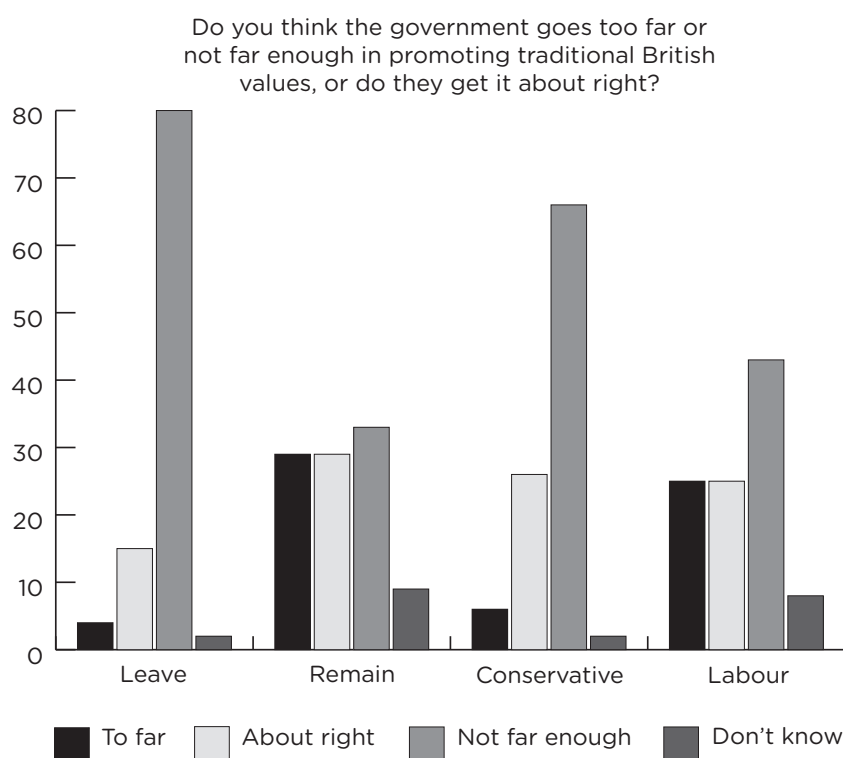
60 per cent of those in the Midlands favour promoting British values, compared to just 34 per cent of Londoners, and the degree-educated are also 20 percentage points more likely to choose multiculturalism. Most striking, however, is the distinction between Remain and Leave voters – 55 per cent of Remain voters choose multiculturalism, compared to just 14 per cent of Leave voters, of whom 76 per cent favour British values, a choice made by only 20 per cent of Remain voters.



A further analysis of viewpoints on this issue in the context of the level of immigration citizens perceived they have experienced in their area over the period, reveals that those areas believing they had absorbed large-scale migration during this time were twice as likely to favour promoting British values over cultural pluralism (56 per cent to 26 per cent). Interestingly, the next largest cohort to preference British values were those who reported having small levels of recent immigration. It is those living in areas which have perceived 'moderate' levels of migration, which are most favourable to multiculturalism (49 per cent to 41 per cent).

When asked to assess whether the Government 'goes too far' or 'not far enough' in promoting traditional British values, the resounding impression, held by 55 per cent of citizens, is that not enough is being done, compared to just 22 per cent who feel the state is taking the right approach, and 17 per cent who feel they have 'gone too far'. Conservative voters are the most likely to believe their

own Party is not succeeding in this area in power, at 66 per cent, although 43 per cent of Labour voters would also like to see more action in this area. Again, older voters, those without a degree, and those living in the North and Midlands are the most vehement in their belief that the Government is failing to promote British values.



Furthermore, profound differences can be observed by the European Referendum vote, with 80 per cent of Leave voters condemning the Government, compared to 33 per cent of Remain voters. Unlike the previous question, however, Remain voters are also more likely to agree that the Government is not performing well on this issue than to suggest they are 'going too far'. Once again, those living in areas with perceived 'moderate' levels of recent migration are the most likely to believe the Government 'goes too far' with British values and the least likely to favour further emphasis on national traditions.

Moving from culture to the topic of immigration, the British public is evenly split as to whether it has been a positive or negative force for the country, with 43 per cent believing it has been positive and 44 per cent regarding it as a negative development. Conservative and Labour voters are split down the middle on this point, with 37 per cent of Tories seeing immigration positively and 53 per cent negatively, compared to 55 per cent and 30 per cent of Labour voters respectively. Similar trends can be observed by European Referendum vote, with 63 per cent of Leave voters negative about immigration, compared

to 26 per cent of Remain voters, and vice versa, and between those with and without further education. While older citizens are considerably more likely to hold negative views regarding immigration, it should be noted that a sizeable percentage of even the younger generations also share this perspective, including 30 per cent of 18-to-24-year-olds. Those in the North of England are the most hostile to immigration, with 53 per cent regarding it negatively, compared to 30 per cent of Londoners.

Socio-economic background is strongly correlated with a propensity to see immigration as having been a positive change for Britain, with the 50 per cent of middle-class citizens believing this, compared to 32 per cent of the working classes. So too is living in an area that is perceived to have experienced a high level of immigration over recent years correlated with a negative viewpoint, with 58 per cent of citizens in such places sharing this perspective. Those in areas that feel they have received a 'moderate' – as opposed to large, or small – proportion of immigration are again the most likely to be favourable towards it, with 56 per cent of citizens in such towns and cities seeing immigration positively, and 38 per cent negatively.

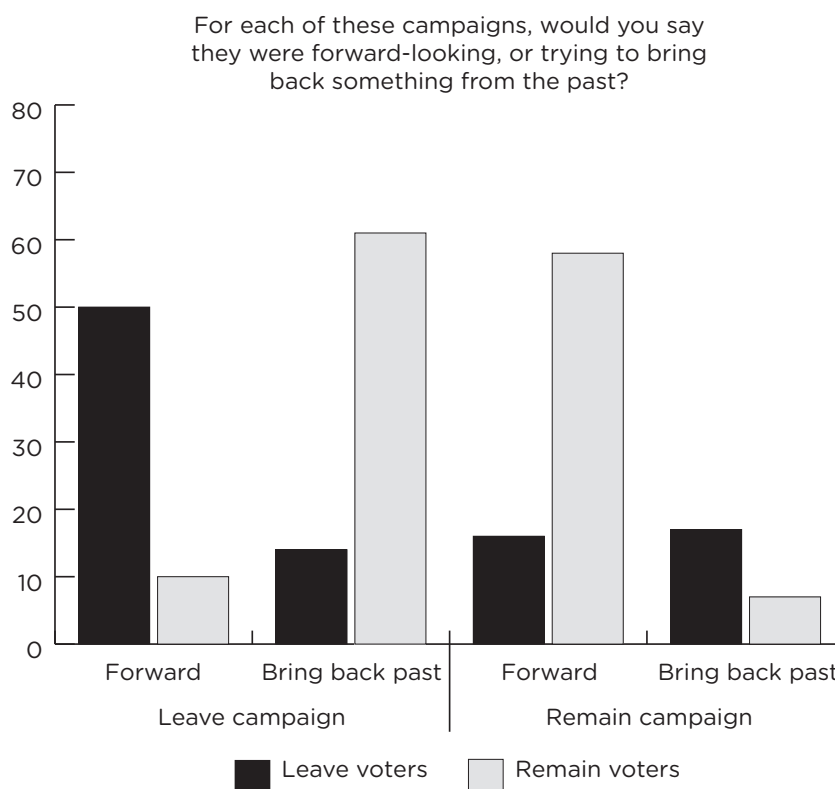
Finally, when asked to consider whether immigration had made the communities where migrants have settled more united, more divided, or made no difference, British citizens were emphatic in their belief that migration has been a divisive experience, with 71 per cent believing this, compared to just nine per cent of Britons who believe it has aided cohesion. This number soared as high as 78 per cent in communities that claim to have experienced large-scale migration over recent years. At 81 per cent, Conservatives were 20 percentage points more likely to feel that immigration has been divisive than Labour supporters, however a clear, substantial majority of Left-leaning voters share this view. Those aged 18-24 were the only age group differing substantially in their perspectives on this issue, however 50 per cent of this age group agreed that immigration has divided communities. Interestingly, when asked whether immigration has divided their own community, only 31 per cent of Britons agreed.

## **The European Referendum Campaign**

In considering the messaging used by the campaigns during the Referendum, 40 per cent of citizens overall felt the Leave campaign was more focused on restoration, and 26 per cent felt it was more focused on the future. Conservative voters were split along the opposite numbers, with 40 per cent believing it was future-oriented, and 26 per cent restorative. Labour voters were more emphatically convinced it was backwards-looking, with 51 per cent believing this. Baby Boomers and those living in the North of England were most likely

to consider the campaign forward-focused and Millennials aged 25-to-34 and Londoners backward-looking. On a socio-economic level, a considerable proportion of working-class respondents were unsure as to how to categorise the Leave campaign, while the middle classes were more confident in their responses, and more likely to decisively feel the campaign was restorative.

Most significant, however, is the finding that 50 per cent of Leave voters felt the campaign they supported was future-oriented, compared to 14 per cent who saw it as primarily restorative and 16 per cent who felt it equally balanced the two. Only 10 per cent of Remain voters felt the Leave campaign looked to the future. It is important to consider these findings in the context of the previous discussions regarding the campaign's legacy, and the shifting perspectives of Leave voters in their self-described contemporary and retrospective voting motivations.



Also revealing are citizens' perspectives regarding the Remain campaign. While overall, 36 per cent of Britons felt the campaign was future-oriented, and 11 per cent restorative, a considerable proportion of citizens (41 per cent) either felt it was 'neither' or 'don't know'. These findings highlight a sense of confusion surrounding the campaign messaging. Nonetheless, 58 per cent of Remain voters are firm in their belief that the campaign they supported was future-oriented, a larger proportion than their Leave counterparts.

## Focus Groups across England

Qualitative research for this case study was undertaken within a wide variety of cities and towns across England, including Sunderland, Leeds, London, Birmingham and Essex. We chose to focus on England to limit the research to a manageable scope of nostalgic narratives, which, as explained above, are clearly heavily linked to a particular sense of place and identity embedded in the nation. While we interviewed participants from a range of cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, and across a variety of age groups, the overwhelming majority of our participants were White British, and aged 50 years and older, and were concentrated in lower socio-economic groups. This reflects the fact that these three characteristics are highly correlated with a propensity for nostalgia, as reinforced by our survey, and therefore offered the most fertile ground for exploring its antecedents.

Two large suites of focus groups were undertaken in England for this project – one round across England between October and December in 2017, and a second round in April 2018, which primarily focused on the South-East of England. In January 2018, we published *Citizens' Voices*, a compendium of verbatim quotes from the first round of focus groups, and we encourage readers to explore this earlier publication for a full understanding of the depth and breadth of issues addressed within the focus group, across a wide diversity of regional profiles. Below, we present new, unpublished material from the focus groups conducted in 2017, and also a selection of verbatim quotes from the most recent focus groups in 2018.

A snapshot of the diversity of the historical, social and economic contexts of a number of the locations we visited as part of this research is embedded within this case study, to illustrate the important environmental role that 'place' – and all its history, mythologies and the realities of the opportunities it presents to its citizens – can play in shaping public opinion.

## Nostalgia

Overall, the English focus groups suggested that citizens are considerably less pre-disposed to explicit forms of nostalgia than in France and Germany, likely because the country carries fewer contested historical narratives, and also as there appears to be a more resilient level of overall optimism. Participants could make clear arguments as to the areas of social and national progress over the course of their lifetime, particularly citing advances in elderly health, children's wellbeing and technology as positive developments.

*As a nation today, we are healthier than we were 10, 20 years ago [...]*

*Nowadays, if your child got leukaemia, something like 98% will survive. We got our gadgets, our food, our comfort.*

*Let me say, people say about the good old days, and in some sense, yes, you did have more of a community and you did not have to lock your door. But nowadays old people are well looked after and there's no need for anyone to go hungry.*

A sizeable proportion of our English participants (varying between a quarter, and a third) appeared to be relatively willing to embrace the change of the future, less emphatically rooted in the norms and structures of the past, and accepting of the necessity of change, while appreciating the challenges it presents. Many accepted that nostalgia was a social condition of ageing, and while acknowledging its potency, dismissed its legitimacy.

*We, I mean everything, has to move on.*

*I have been involved in change since I left school, in various industries and jobs, so that doesn't bother me. But I do understand that some people don't like change and they will resist it.*

*I think nostalgia is natural as you get older. There is not much for us older people.*

Nonetheless, the majority of participants in the focus groups exhibited a profound sense of disenchantment with Britain's current trajectory, and in a more implicit sense, it was clear that feelings of loss and longing are prominent across the population.

*We're going back to the Victorian times. Victorian times had it better than what we have.*

*It's true that as a matter of things, they [the younger generations] will never have the same childhood as I did.*

*I think if you certainly look at the grassroots level of it, you know, there's a lot of people that are a lot worse off at the moment, and I think with obviously what's going on at the moment with Brexit going on, the Government taken its eye off the ball really and is not putting the care into what's needed.*

When asked if there was a time in their past when they thought things were going really well, participants were divided on the exact timing of the 'glory

days'. As Andrew Marr has noted in his *A History of Modern Britain*, our choice of a specific period to symbolise a great rupture or moment of decline in the nation's history dismisses the decades before, and afterwards, and all of their tangible achievements – “all of the things that went right, all of the successful lives that were lived”<sup>180</sup>. For those who had lived through the Second World War, the late-1950s and the 1960s felt a moment of extreme liberation and empowerment.

*Living through the War, and then living after the War when rationing and all that was happening...because of that, to me the 60s was wonderful. People felt good that they were alive. People wore nice clothes for the first time.*

It was suggested in a number of focus groups that the mid-1980s was a time of particular excitement and growth – “The 80s, we were going out of a pretty dire period, and the 80s were pretty good” – although others cautioned that “we were living on the crest of the wave”. Some participants were rather quick to identify the 1970s, often the period of their early adulthood, as the most fulfilling time of their lives and felt hugely encouraged that politicians might be proposing policies evocative of the period. However, when scrutinised, almost every decade raised as many problems as it held fond memories. As one man explained:

*I started working in 1970, and I can remember the days of hyper-inflation of 30% and the wage increases going up by ridiculous amounts, and you know, just completely out of hand. And you go through the miners' strike and the electric strikes, and three-day weeks and power cuts, and you go to a pub and you can't get a pint of beer, you've got to drink bottled beer, and in candle light...so the 70s were pretty dire.*

Change, on an economic, political and cultural level, stands at the heart of citizens' concerns about British society today. Crucial elements of the social fabric, and the character of its people, are felt to have been directly challenged by modernity.

*I think it is coming too fast, people are not adjusting. Ask a child to calculate something, just mental arithmetic, and they can't do it. They couldn't work on a till, give you your correct change. Skills are disappearing, like carpentry. All these skills have gone.*

*In the past, we had no washing machines, no jet planes. But I would go back if I could because there was more respect and discipline, no half-naked models on the telly, no children eating on the floor.*

While participants were broadly supportive of many aspects of social liberalism,

we observed a clear feeling that a 'tipping point' had been passed in some areas, with 'change for change's sake' unsettling citizens' desire to preserve and conserve long-held standards and norms.

*It has to be proportionate. And the issue being, we go back to this political correctness, people are very afraid to stand up and say, well, I think that's wrong, because then they get this label to say that they're against, you know, liberalisation and things like that. So, people who want to speak out are frightened of that because they get labelled.*

To extrapolate this further, we conducted another nationally representative survey of British adults<sup>181</sup> on their views regarding the pace of change in Britain. We found that 41 per cent of Britons believe the pace of change is 'too fast', 47 per cent believe it is 'just right' and only 12 per cent believe it is 'too slow'. There were no considerable gender differences observed, however there were clear discrepancies between ages and geographies. Of the over-55s, 52 per cent feel change is taking place too quickly, compared to only 31 per cent of 18-34-year-olds. Citizens in Wales, Scotland, London and the North-West of England were the least likely to think change had become too accelerated, with those in the East of England and the South-West – two Brexit-supporting areas – the most likely to want to see change slowing.

The question of change also divides party politics. A substantial 66 per cent of UKIP voters feel society is changing too quickly, compared to 44 per cent of Conservatives and 38 per cent of Labour voters. The Greens are the only party with a majority of voters who believe change is taking place too slowly, at 32 per cent, compared to 22 per cent who think it's too fast. There are also clear distinctions between those who voted to Leave and Remain in the EU Referendum; 51 per cent of Leavers believe British society is changing too quickly, compared to 33 per cent of Remain supporters.

Another manner in which views on 'the nation' appear to be intrinsically linked to propensity to feel unwilling to embrace further change and/or to feel attracted to nostalgic narratives is the perception of the resilience of Britain and her people. While some participants felt Britain remains inherently capable of "bouncing back" from set-backs that might come its way, others questioned whether we had lost not only our unity, but our strength.

*I don't think we are, cos I think it's all changed. You go back to the Second World War and we were very resilient then, and the aftermath of the Second World War, we were quite resilient, but I think that's drifted out society.*

Nonetheless, when specifically asked if the ‘Blitz spirit’ was still alive in Britain, it was impossible to find a negative answer amongst the focus groups, with participants unanimously declaring it was “still underneath the surface”. This immensely powerful trope, which reflects the ‘egalitarian’ nature of the necessary social levelling that took place during the Second World War<sup>182</sup>, appears to be a crucial element in the sense of comparative unity and optimism of the English, compared to the French and German focus groups.

## **The Economy and Industrial Change**

Britain was once considered ‘the workshop of the world’,<sup>183</sup> but the share of industrial jobs in the labour market has been falling since the late-1950s, from 48 per cent in 1955 to 14 per cent in 2016.<sup>184</sup> In the 1970s, a new term came into use to describe this phenomenon: de-industrialisation.<sup>185</sup> In the public mind, this phenomenon is often associated with the Thatcher Government and the miners’ strike of 1984. ‘Thatcher broke it’, was a frequent narrative in one interview project about memories of deindustrialisation in working-class communities<sup>186</sup> - a theme echoed in many of our own focus groups – with participants nostalgic for the camaraderie of the strikes and the solidarity they perceived to be implicit in their (or even their parents’) old workplaces.

Most economists agree, however, that although the Thatcher Government’s economic and monetary policy certainly contributed to the decline in industrial manufacturing<sup>187</sup>, de-industrialisation was mostly caused by larger technological changes in modes of production and, to some extent, the processes of globalisation and the opening up of the international marketplace.<sup>188</sup> When the Labour Party next regained power in 1997, it was reluctant to fundamentally intervene in these processes, maintaining that it would not ‘pick winners’ to support through state subsidisation.<sup>189</sup> Meanwhile, the nation’s financial industry and services economy, largely based in London and the South-East, was thriving, exemplifying large regional disparities in economic performance.<sup>190</sup> These processes contributed to a polarised job market<sup>191</sup>, with jobs growth over recent years largely contained in highly skilled, highly paid jobs, as well as in the low-skill, low-pay sectors (such as distribution centre work) that have taken the place of manufacturing as mass employers.<sup>192</sup>

These processes, combined with an increased share of foreign-born workers in the UK labour market,<sup>193</sup> have contributed to resentment about globalisation and economic change amongst certain segments of the population. While economists point to the advantages the high-performing South-East brings to the nation as a whole, many citizens struggle to see the benefits in their own personal situation.<sup>194</sup> A survey undertaken in 2016 found that 29 per cent of the

UK population believe the country's involvement in the global economy is a bad thing, doing the country more harm than good.<sup>195</sup>

Over the past decade, both the Cameron and May-led Governments have made commitments to stimulate manufacturing and encourage greater local economic growth in the former industrial heartlands, with the importance of 'place' gaining currency in the political sphere. George Osborne envisioned a 'march of the makers', especially in high-tech industries.<sup>196</sup> More recently, Theresa May has promised to rebalance the economy, pursuing a more active industrial strategy.<sup>197</sup> Economists, however, are sceptical that decades-long processes could be reversed<sup>198</sup>, a view encapsulated in the shift of focus under Secretary of State for Digital, Media, Culture and Sport, Matt Hancock, to look to the forthcoming 'fourth industrial revolution' as an opportunity for Britain to regain a sense of agency and leadership in global markets<sup>199</sup>.

Two of the areas in which we undertook a large range of focus groups for this project, Sunderland and Bermondsey, were particularly exposed to the processes of de-industrialisation, and the legacy of their shifting economic profiles, and fortunes, have left deep scars on citizens with both direct and indirect connections.

Sunderland's first shipyard was built in 1346 along the River Wear, a river which runs through Durham county and has its mouth in Sunderland. By the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, it had become the shipyard centre of the world<sup>200</sup>, home to over 400 registered shipyards. Sunderland was also mining as early as the Roman period, and exporting during medieval times<sup>201</sup>, acting as a significant source of London's coal by the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, after Newcastle lost its monopoly of production during the English Civil War. Coal mining also expanded during the industrial revolution, and as collieries in the local area multiplied, so too did the number of docks rapidly expand to support these two industries. Sunderland's geography also provided the key ingredients—limestone, sand and coal for heating furnaces—for making glass, and a flourishing pottery industry took off from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century.

This industrial boom changed life in Sunderland; providing unprecedented levels of employment and industrial activity<sup>202</sup>. By the time of the 1851 census, Sunderland was home to 63,897 people, the majority of whom were involved in the shipping and mining industries. By 1906, at the height of its success, around 20,000 men and women were involved in the shipyards alone. Living conditions were often desperately poor: in 1946, over 20 per cent of the population lived in overcrowded conditions, compared with a national average of 3.8 per cent<sup>203</sup>.

The Second World War provided first a boom and then a depression for the local economy, and the area never quite picked itself up again to retain its level of industrial productivity. The 1950s and 60s saw shipyards merge and close down, and by 1977, the industry was completely nationalised. Employment almost halved between 1978 and 1984 alone; in 1988, the final shipyard was closed, and in 1993, the largest mine was also shut down<sup>204</sup>. Sunderland's industries had held on for longer than many other areas of the country – with textile manufacturing for Marks & Spencer enduring until 1997, and Corning Glass Works only closing its doors a decade later after 120 years of operation. Nonetheless, the cumulative losses over thirty years were catastrophic<sup>205</sup>, leaving behind derelict buildings and mass unemployment.

In the years since, the old shipyards have been transformed into a mix of commercial, leisure and residential buildings. The St Peter's Campus of the University of Sunderland has been built on the site of some of the largest shipyards, and many of the collieries are now museums of the area's industrial heritage<sup>206</sup>. Notably, Monkwearmouth colliery has been converted into Sunderland's Stadium of Light, home to the area's football team. In addition to the Stadium of Light, a symbol of change and successful regeneration is the Nissan Motor Manufacturing, which opened in 1986. It is now is the largest employer in the region and one of the most productive car plants in the world<sup>207</sup>.

Sunderland's contested relationship with Newcastle has continued, with Newcastle considered the 'poster child' of the North<sup>208</sup>, receiving most of the investment in the region. In contrast, Sunderland is the only UK city that has lost population over the last ten years; between 2004 and 2013 Sunderland's population decreased by 1.4 per cent. Today, Sunderland has one of the worst employment rates in the UK, at 66.5 per cent – in contrast to the UK average of 71.9 per cent<sup>209</sup>. The largest percentage of those employed are working in retail and services (15.9 per cent) and the second largest being human health and social work (12.5 per cent)<sup>210</sup>— dramatically different to its industrial profile in previous decades. Issues with unemployment disproportionately affect the young, and just over 600 16-to-19-year-olds left Sunderland in 2016 –more than double the average departure count for all 326 local authorities in England<sup>211</sup>.

Sunderland's economic growth continues to lag behind the rest of the region<sup>212</sup>, however there are plans to achieve status as the City of Culture in 2021. Ethnically, Sunderland remains a predominantly White British (93.1 per cent) area.

In our focus groups in the Sunderland area, when discussions moved to its industrial heritage, we witnessed the particular accountability that Margaret

Thatcher continues to experience, carrying a unique legacy as “the one that closed the mines”. Dr Richard Beeching, who infamously led an overhaul of the British railways in the 1960s that resulted in the closure of dozens of lines, also attracts an especially vitriolic form of blame for having isolated communities and fostered a ‘two-tier’ system of transport. The frequency with which the words ‘closed’ and ‘took away’ were used implies a strong sense of loss has been etched into the social fabric of such communities, which feel ill-at-ease with their trajectory over recent decades and attach culpability to politicians for poorly managing change.

Many focus group participants in this area feel they had been vindicated by history, with the passionate campaign fought against de-industrialisation having resulted in depleted local economies from which communities never recovered. Their nostalgic compulsions to ‘re-open the mines’ were based in both rational observation, given they had previously enjoyed greater personal and societal prosperity, and in the immense emotional pull of the lost industrial camaraderie.

*It's like the miners when they went on strike and people said, in 30 years' time we'd be importing our coal from South Africa. And what are we doing now? We're importing our coal from South Africa. We've got coal mines that can be mined, we've shut them all and now we're importing coal from South Africa.*

*Years ago, there was thousands of jobs; loads of different factories, shipyards, coal mines and now there's nothing at all.*

Professor Tim Strangleman, who has also interviewed working-class residents of de-industrialised towns for his research across England, recalls a particularly profound moment of nostalgia. “I remember vividly a former coal miner from the North East of England,” he writes. “...telling me that he despised the physical labour of the mine but would return tomorrow if he could because he missed the comradeship of those he had worked with.”<sup>213</sup> Other investigations into the economic under-performance of these communities finds that the employment pathways for men, traditionally “from the terraces to the factory, the fields or the farm” have not been replaced by meaningful career options suitable for those without higher education<sup>214</sup>.

In perhaps the most explicit expression of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities”<sup>215</sup>, we saw that the influence of the mythology, storytelling and folklore of North England’s industrial heritage was so profound as to be actively defended, and desired, by younger generations born well after the deepest shocks of de-industrialisation. In focus groups in towns and cities that had once thrived and prospered on local trades, men and women in their 20s and early-

30s sadly recalled a time when “we had status”, and called for the reopening of mines, mills and manufacturers.

*They should open all the factories again...like open the shops that were there and all those factories and the docks. The factories that used to be here were unbelievable. And there was a car factory too. They were great times. Golden times. We lost our identity.*

*We're a laughing stock now, but back then we were a big deal.*

*Things were better in the past, like there was a lot more things to do, there were more jobs, and people even wanted to come here to live. To travel up North.*

Another area whose economy has been utterly reshaped over the last half-century is the South-East of London, once a hub of activity employing huge numbers in industrial production and docking trades. While London as a whole dominates Britain's economy and is one of the most productive regions in Europe, it continues to house a diverse and extremely economically polarised population, boasting some of the poorest boroughs in the whole country<sup>216</sup>. Many of these areas were once centres of industrial activity, and while gentrification has recently seen former factories converted into luxury accommodation, those who were born there during the 1950s and 1960s have experienced significant displacement over the course of their lifetimes. In particular, children born into White working-class communities during this period, whose parents lost their jobs during the docking closures and found themselves on the frontline of the decline in social housing.

The borough of Southwark has a long and rich history dating back to the Roman period, and a particularly strong industrial heritage; Bermondsey was once the hub of Britain's leather and manufacturing industry and Rotherhithe a centre of shipyards and commercial docking. These industries saw significant expansion between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, and Bermondsey was dubbed the 'Land of Leather', producing a third of the country's leather by 1790<sup>217</sup>. The area is, however, most well-known for its centrality to London's docking industry, and with the wider Docklands area, it grew substantially with the expansion of trade and industry under the British Empire. The docks required an army of workers, chiefly lightermen and quayside workers; some workers were considered highly skilled, for example, lightermen had their own company or guild, but the majority who worked on the docks were unskilled and involved in casual labour<sup>218</sup>.

Industrial expansion encouraged unprecedented levels of population growth.

In Bermondsey alone, the population grew from 17,000 to 86,000 between 1801 – 1881<sup>219</sup>. Living conditions were often incredibly poor, and many were engaged in casual work, which had no contract or employment security. These issues did not go unprotested, and the area has a long history of citizen strikes and protests against socio-economic exploitation. During the 1920s and 1930s, Bermondsey was nicknamed 'Red Bermondsey' to account for the local working-class population's militancy and the borough's progressive social programmes in response. The council created a form of municipal socialism, providing state housing, healthcare schemes, sanitation utilities, and communal green areas.

The end of the Second World War saw the beginning of the end for the area's heavy industry, which had employed the majority of its working-class population. After a brief spell of post-War economic activity spurred by the need to counter heavy damage incurred in the Blitz, by the 1960s, local economic growth had stalled, as the docking industry faltered – largely due to technological developments in transport i.e. Roll-on/Roll-off Delivery and containerisation. It is estimated that half the manufacturing jobs were lost in Southwark between 1971 and 1986, and by the mid-1980s, most of the buildings surrounding the docks were left derelict. The industrial profile of London was changing considerably, as the city began an irreversible shift towards a new economic model<sup>220</sup>. By the turn of the century, the city's finance and business services industries would be four times larger than manufacturing, accounting for a third of the local labour market.<sup>221</sup>

The character of London's population changed immensely during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, not just as a result of immigration, but also because of the evolving attitudes of middle-class residents towards city life. While many of the upwardly mobile had left London for the suburbs following the Second World War<sup>222</sup>, causing the population to dwindle<sup>223</sup>, trends began to shift during the 1960s and 70s, as the early processes of gentrification took hold.<sup>224</sup> Middle-class families began moving into cheap areas, buying houses to renovate, often aided by improvement grants. One study by the Department of the Environment from 1974, looking into renovations, concluded, "the improvement of living conditions did not benefit the original residents". In most cases, the houses that were being restored had previously been rented out to working-class Londoners, who had often left because of harassment from landlords who wanted to take advantage of rising house prices.<sup>225</sup>

Between 1981 and 1991, London's most gentrifying areas lost some 46 percent of their working-class residents. Most of them moved to other, less gentrified parts of London.<sup>226</sup> By contrast, even poorer groups of migrants would tend stay in their places of settlement, accepting rising prices and changing living conditions

rather than moving to the suburbs.<sup>227</sup> Together, these developments have spurred far-reaching demographic change in London.

The redevelopment of the Southwark precinct, driven by New Labour in the 1990s,<sup>228</sup> ignited economic revival, with a focus on regenerating the South Bank area and the riverside as a new cultural hub and host to new commercial industries. New galleries and museums were commissioned—such as the celebrated Tate Modern that opened in 1994—which renovated an old factory on the riverside. In addition, four new jubilee line tube stations were built to connect the area to the rest of London, to attract new high-skilled commerce and professionals. Rotherhithe was redeveloped with luxury accommodation to accommodate the new, more affluent population. The intention had been to encourage a broader social mix into the area, with the presence of high-earning workers seeking to encourage market forces to improve local services. In Blair's own words "Our goal is simple, it is to bridge the gap between the poorest neighbourhoods and the rest of Britain"<sup>229</sup>.

The riverside location attracted lots of private investment, for offices and luxury accommodation as the regeneration programme had planned. However, this manifested in large-scale removal of social housing and selling off of public land; by 2004, the private rented sector took over from social housing as the largest contributor to the housing stock of the borough<sup>230</sup>. Ultimately, New Labour's growth strategies for the South-East of London succeeded in breathing cultural and economic life into the area, but largely failed to create new employment opportunities for the previous working-class population. Today, the borough is still an ethnically diverse community: 52 per cent of the population are White British, while 48 per cent are Black, Asian or other ethnic minorities<sup>231</sup>. Overall, it is still relatively deprived — however the changing demographics, split between high and low earners, have meant statistics presented a distorted picture to show its residents now earn above-average wages overall<sup>232</sup>.

In our focus groups in this area, we witnessed a very clear sense of the sometimes-uneasy relationship between different generations of residents, with those having lived through the tremendous upheaval of de-industrialisation, and whose families were dispersed across the city and elsewhere in the aftermath, conscious of the fragility of their once-dominant cultural position. While many participants were open and accepting of newer residents from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, they were also extremely conscious of their 'uphill battle' to preserve the particular accents, language, and ways of life, unique to the tight-knit White working-class communities they had grown up inside.

*I wish we could put ourselves back 50 years, to be quite honest. I don't know about British society [as a whole], but I know about London and the break-down of society here. When I was young, I grew up in the house I was born in. I lived two doors away when I moved away from my Mum, and my sister moved opposite. So, it was a community, and there was other people there – they lived there, they grew up, so we all looked after each other's children and we all looked out for each other. It was a community. Now there's no community.*

*We were in a community, we were raised as children together, but over time everybody has left, and now it's only me that's left and the community isn't there anymore.*

For many in our focus groups in London and its outskirts, their experiences of having seen their parents lose their livelihoods in the 1960s and 70s has fundamentally shaped their political outlooks, and fostered a level of inherent scepticism towards the Government's capacity and willingness to support industries in transition.

*My dad was a docker. And so when the docks closed, he was out of work. When you were a docker, what other trade did you do? They brought containers in. So, where my dad used to carry big frozen legs of lamb, beef on his shoulders, when it came in a container they didn't need those men no more, they just needed one man driving a crane. So, they shut the docks. The big lesson is – think about the little people. It's nothing to do with class. What jobs they gonna be doing?*

Many of those previously involved in large-scale manufacturing industries have found themselves, over the ensuing decades, in low-paid, low-skilled occupations with scant opportunities for progression. These jobs are particularly over-represented in the British economy<sup>233</sup>, creating a new under-class of the 'working poor'; according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, one in every eight workers is now living in poverty.<sup>234</sup> This trend towards in-work poverty has been revealed as an unsavoury aspect to the otherwise hugely positive employment growth Britain has experienced since the financial crisis<sup>235</sup>, with many of those who lost their jobs in the crisis now re-employed in poorer-quality occupations, which do not allow workers to become financially secure.

The precariousness felt by many workers has been further compounded by rising housing costs and the consequences of welfare reform programmes.<sup>236</sup> It has been estimated that between May 2010 and January 2018, those in the bottom quintile of earnings in Britain lost, on average, 10 per cent of their income, with single parents and those with disabilities particularly affected.<sup>237</sup> As welfare reforms

have begun to impact larger swathes of the population, public opinion on austerity has begun to shift, with the most recent British Social Attitude Survey indicating increasing support for raising taxes and public spending, with health and education the areas singled out for Government spending priorities.<sup>238</sup>

Participants in our focus groups were acutely aware of the shift in the nature of job opportunities available to workers in lower socio-economic brackets, and many of those we interviewed had personally experienced a decline in their capacity to earn and progress over the course of their working lives. They looked back fondly on a time when the balance of power between employees and employers seemed less distorted, and female participants in particular spoke with visceral concern about the impact of the stress from financial insecurity on their families.

*Back in them days, the employees had the power, 'cause they would start at a factory on a Monday, and if they didn't like that job go and get another job on the Tuesday. Now it's employers who've got the power and [...] they've got the pick of the crop.*

*Jobs were secure then; no job is secure now.*

*To me the element of the population that suffers the most are not the people on benefits, but the people just above the line where you qualify for benefits; they don't get anything.*

*It's got so much more stressful and more worrying and more concerning, thinking about 'are we actually gonna have food on our table?', and 'are we actually gonna have roof over our heads?' So yes, life's got a lot more stressful.*

Changing dynamics in party politics has also compounded the sense of alienation and loss of agency for lower-socio-economic citizens. While the Labour Party long held the status of 'the party of the workers', the difference in the class vote between Labour and the Conservatives has evaporated in recent years.<sup>239</sup> In their book, *The New Politics of Class*, academics Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley argue that Labour lost much of its working-class base because of its attempts to appeal to the professional classes.<sup>240</sup> The changing nature of Parliamentary candidates themselves has also challenged the Party's working-class legitimacy; in 1959, 40 per cent of Labour MPs had worked blue-collar jobs before entering Parliament, compared to just 10 per cent today.<sup>241</sup> The language of 'workers' was exchanged for the rhetoric of 'families', opening up new constituencies, but also alienating those who had identified exclusively with a working-class labour-focused movement.<sup>242</sup>

While the Labour Party's membership has always been more affluent than its voter base, a further substantial shift took place after the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader. While many long-standing members left the party in protest, thousands more joined in their place – especially the young, the non-religious and degree-educated.<sup>243</sup> Over recent years, the Party has increasingly replaced its traditional 'heartlands' in industrial Northern cities with prosperous university towns.<sup>244</sup> The current Labour Shadow Cabinet is heavily skewed towards London, and specifically affluent North London, with tabloids delighting in mocking their working-class credentials and labelling them 'the Islington set'.<sup>245</sup>

Participants were acutely aware of these changes in the Labour Party's constituencies, and many ridiculed what they perceived to be 'working-class affectations' among its materially wealthy MPs. In the North of England and the outskirts of London in particular, citizens noted that Labour no longer felt like a party that represented their needs.

*Years ago, we had nothing, it was rationing. We would all vote Labour, for the poor. The haves and the have-nots, that sort of thing.*

*My family always voted Labour, because we were poor. I don't know when that changed.*

The feeling of not being able to 'start at the bottom and work your way to the top' is also a topic of great concern for citizens, with a strong consensus amongst all our focus groups that social mobility was in decline – seen as particularly linked to the erosion of manufacturing careers and the perceived lack of investment in, and status of, apprenticeships and other non-university career paths. The observation of declining social mobility in Britain is supported by substantial research evidence, and, unusually, runs alongside an immense level of stated political support for the concept. From the 1940s through the 1970s, social mobility improved both in terms of class and in terms of income. But since the 1980s, it has either stopped improving or deteriorated, depending on which measure is used.<sup>246</sup>

Lack of wage growth, educational disparities and lack of access to job opportunities have all contributed to this trend.<sup>247</sup> Moreover, there are large regional differences in social mobility. Traditionally, inner-city areas have fared poorly, but London boroughs such as Tower Hamlets, Newham and Hackney are now 'hotspots' for social mobility, while in a contemporary context, rural and coastal areas offer little opportunity to move up in income or class.<sup>248</sup> A recent Government report has called this a 'social mobility postcode lottery'.<sup>249</sup>

The decline in social mobility is also visible in public attitudes. The Government's 2017 Social Mobility Barometer found that 44 per cent of Britons believe it is getting more difficult to be socially mobile, compared to only 18 per cent who think it is becoming easier. Roughly half the population feel that, 'where you end up in society is largely determined by who your parents are', with only a third perceiving that everyone has a fair chance to get ahead. This feeling is especially acute for younger people, who also tend to believe they have drawn a tougher hand than their parents when it comes to job security and job satisfaction.<sup>250</sup>

*They used to start as like a junior didn't you, in an office and then you did the basics and you worked way up, worked your way up.*

The sense of a labour market stacked unequally has increased pressures of social competition between different groups of citizens, as perceptions of 'resource scarcity' become more prominent after many years of Government spending reductions. Nowhere has this trend been more prominent than in discourses around Britain's welfare system. As public attitudes towards welfare recipients hardened, British television saw a proliferation of documentary programmes focusing on the lives of those receiving benefits – often focusing on 'extreme' cases in which lazy citizens were shown to be exploiting the welfare state<sup>251</sup> and emphasising the notion that some citizens are more 'deserving' of state benefits than others.

*It seems there's a big divide between them and us, people kind of think people who are on benefits are kind of cheats. And many things feed into that. Television programmes, all sorts of things.*

'Welfare chauvinism' refers to a set of attitudes, "where a fairly generous welfare state is generally supported for the 'own people', but 'aliens' are to be excluded from most of the provisions".<sup>252</sup> In Britain, welfare chauvinism is often especially related to anxieties regarding the use and funding of the National Health Service.<sup>253</sup> In 2015, Chair of the House of Commons' Work and Pensions Committee Frank Field MP announced an inquiry into the concept of a contributory welfare system<sup>254</sup> – an idea then championed by Ed Miliband in his ultimately unsuccessful 2015 election campaign.

As concerns regarding immigration grew, however, attitudes of welfare chauvinism became increasingly linked to attitudes towards migrants – particularly manifest in an increased hostility towards 'health tourism', and the perceived exploitation of the British welfare system by those who had not adequately contributed to the tax base over many years<sup>255</sup>. It has even been

argued that the NHS was seeking to attract immigrants keen to profit from generous welfare provisions.<sup>256</sup>

According to the British Social Attitudes survey, some 24 per cent of UK citizens believe that claiming benefits is the most common reason for migrants to come to the UK.<sup>257</sup> This is strongly related to one's overall view of immigration: amongst those who see immigration negatively, the figure rises to 55 per cent. The same study found that most British citizens (85 per cent) would prefer giving migrants access to benefits only after a period of time, such as one year (23 per cent), three years (24 per cent) or five years (21 per cent). Other surveys found similar results, with 81 per cent favouring a two-year residency requirement for benefits, and 66 per cent in favour of restricting free NHS services to migrants with a job.<sup>258</sup> For these reasons, David Cameron's renegotiation with the EU ahead of the Referendum prioritised reforms to the timing and eligibility of welfare benefits for European citizens.

Another area of the welfare system that has become a source of anxiety for many citizens is pensions, with many older people in the twilight of their working lives particularly concerned that the benefits they had felt assured to receive are now potentially under threat. While assurances have been given over the year in the form of the 'pensions triple lock', the pressures of the ageing population has forced the British Government to reform the pensions systems on numerous occasions over the past decade, including changes to the state pension age.<sup>259</sup> Over half of workers aged 40-64 now expect they will not have built up enough money to retire when they reach state pension age,<sup>260</sup> and a large personal finance survey found that one in three UK citizens will have to survive on state pension alone, having not amassed any personal savings.<sup>261</sup> Many people are uncertain about how much they will have, how much they will need, and when they will have enough to retire.<sup>262</sup>

*We've worked all our lives, paid into the system and we can't, well I can't, have my pension until I'm 66 now.*

As the population looks to the Government for greater support in a time of perceived financial insecurity, the desire for greater state intervention in the economy – even amongst many groups traditionally hostile to such a concept – is growing rapidly. This trend is clearly evidenced in the growing support for the renationalisation of public services – a pivot that signals a divergence from a sustained cross-party period of privatisation and market-based ideologies.

In 1995, the Labour party abolished Clause IV of its constitution, which committed to party to public ownership of “the means of production,

distribution and exchange”. Then-Labour leader Tony Blair argued forcefully for amending the clause, saying: “The people of this country are not looking to us for a revolution. They want us to make a start.”<sup>263</sup> But under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, there have been discussions of bringing back the old Clause IV and renationalising public utilities.<sup>264</sup> Labour’s 2017 manifesto included pledges to renationalise the rail, water, energy and Royal Mail.<sup>265</sup> These policies have proven popular with the wider public. A survey by Populus found over three-quarters of citizens in favour of nationalising the water (83 per cent), gas (77 per cent), electricity (77 per cent) and railways (76 per cent), with even 65 per cent of Conservative voters supporting the nationalisation of the railways.<sup>266</sup>

It was clear in our focus groups that there is widespread support for renationalisation, primarily for the purpose of achieving greater accountability on areas of national life citizens consider to be ‘essential services’. Many of the participants had had extensive conversations about this topic amongst their friends and family, and reported a clear feeling that the transparency and motives of business could not be trusted to act in the common interest on such important areas of policy such as transport. As one man said, “I think most of the people would like to see it go back to national industries”. In particular, participants were sensitive to the perceived ‘corporatisation’ of the NHS, which they feel had been enacted on a promise of improving standards and had ultimately eroded the quality of patient care and staff support.

*With hospitals as well, you can’t even get an appointment. It used to be, need to see the doctor? In you go.*

*The NHS with all the private healthcare providers, not everybody has the money to pay for it. If I have to get surgery on my knee, it would cost me £12,000. Years ago, you would get it done no problem.*

In the 1997 General Election campaign, Tony Blair famously told voters that they had ‘24 hours to save the NHS’<sup>267</sup>, promising to modernise and invest in an increasingly dysfunctional system. Under his leadership, NHS funding increased at an unprecedented rate, however the Government also introduced national targets and standards, new regulations and inspections and market-style incentives.<sup>268</sup> National Service Frameworks, detailing standards of care, were developed for the most common conditions, and implemented by newly-appointed national directors. The Government also introduced a plethora of targets, focusing on areas such as waiting times and health outcomes.<sup>269</sup>

Although New Labour’s record on meeting these targets is generally assessed

positively,<sup>270</sup> health care professionals have also complained of being “micro-managed”. The public are also ambivalent or anxious about New Labour’s reforms, and targets in particular, which were perceived to be “distracting or preventing NHS staff from delivering quality of care”.<sup>271</sup> Moreover, researchers have described “a culture where NHS organisations and their leaders are placed under great pressure to meet certain targets, targets that sometimes look as if they are derived more from the desire to avoid media embarrassment than from coordinated system-wide priorities.”<sup>272</sup>

## Community

The perceived breakdown of community in Britain is felt across a number of levels, and is grounded in both abstract and specific, often personal, experiences. Participants frequently described a complete lack of political agency and an acute feeling of individual isolation, indicating the interrelationship between social, political and community spheres of detachment.

*In buses, trains, in markets, you hear people voice their discontent all the time. But it is your voice in the wilderness. You are not heard, nobody seems to listen.*

Turning to the past, participants recalled small acts of community and sharing that now seem impossible to reconcile with contemporary lifestyles – idealised memories of close-knit streets, the equal distribution of resources and seeing neighbours as ‘family’.

*My grandpa would get a load of manure delivered to our garden but would be for everybody on the street and it was all shared out.*

*It’s like the days where free coal used to get tipped at the street and everybody came out. Nothing like that now.*

*Also, you got that sort of 24-7 working thing now, everybody’s doing shift work. There isn’t a day when the family get together, which there used to be – Sunday.*

*When I was a child, I was born in the early 60s...people did know their neighbours. Our parents got together, clothes swapping and things. My recollection is, knowing the people in the street and talking — there was much more of a sense of community.*

*You called people ‘Auntie’ and ‘Uncle’, and older ones, you called them ‘Grandpa’.*

*There was a lot of community cohesion there, and as you say, everybody knew each*

*other. We lived in flats and everybody knew each other. Even in the 70s, when my children were born.*

In the former White working-class communities of the outer-London boroughs, the changing demographic profile of the area was seen to be contributing to older participants' feelings of cultural alienation. Many explained they were now the 'last one standing' in a street that had formerly been home to extended family and a close-knit community of highly dependent neighbours, and which now houses families and single young men from diverse cultural backgrounds. While cultural differences were clearly consciously noted, it was the lack of interaction between new arrivals and the older residents that sparked anxiety and fears of isolation; many elderly residents explained how even small daily interactions, such as greetings, would make them feel considerably more at home.

*In the past, we were more in the community. I remember during the war, we had chickens, and my mother would say: go bring some eggs to the neighbours. If they learned the language and integrated it'd be fine, but they don't want to. They don't want to meet with us.*

*They say there is integration, but there is not. In my street there's Asians, Nigerians, Polish people, Kosovans. I have these five Polish guys living next door, they never say hello. They just go inside, they don't even make eye contact. A lot of British people want to make friends I think, but they just don't want to. If they spoke English... even a smattering of English would help.*

In some areas, community centres had become refuges from the complex, changing world outside, providing a sense of family and meaning to those especially vulnerable to isolation. Although many of the more elderly citizens we spoke with as part of this project held either direct experiences or personal fears regarding the future sustainability of these critical local resources.

*If we didn't have this community centre I don't know what we would do. Even when the community centre shut for a couple of days, we didn't know what to do with ourselves!*

When asked about how the 'feel' of society was different in past decades, participants in our focus groups consistently mentioned "friendliness" and "respect" as two defining characteristics. "Safety" was also frequently recalled, and interestingly this was evident in discussions prompted by questions about Britain's place in the world, indicating there is some relationship in citizens' minds between global status and personal security. On a national and local level,

this personal insecurity is also felt in a more physical sense, with citizens in wide agreement across all focus groups that Britain's towns and cities have become plagued with more petty crime, and a general air of menace, over the course of their lifetimes.

According to figures released by the Office for National Statistics, 60 per cent of UK citizens believes crime is on the rise. This is a long-held perception of a majority of the population, even though crime has been steadily falling since its peak in 1995.<sup>273</sup> Regarding crime in their local area, citizens' perception of crime are more closely in step with the ONS statistics.<sup>274</sup> Perhaps this is due to different sources of information: people tend to base their opinions of local crime on local newspapers and word of mouth, whereas they rely on national newspapers for a sense of crime at the national level.<sup>275</sup> National newspapers also tend to focus more on violent crime<sup>276</sup>, which has in fact been on the rise, according to police statistics. 2017 did not see a rise in crime overall, but there were more recorded instances of knife and gun crime, burglaries and sex offences.<sup>277</sup> The severe impact of such crime on the victims, and the more extensive news coverage of such crimes, is likely to make the public as a whole feel significantly less safe.

Many of the older participants in our focus groups told personal stories of their experiences with crime, and the small but potent impact that anxiety about victimhood would have on their daily lives.

*You really are afraid to go outside nowadays. During the war, the sirens would go and you could go and run into any house. Could you do that now...?*

*I have a porch door and when someone rings the doorbell, I speak to them through the glass. It is rude, but I cannot afford to take chances. I have had a burglary and a home intruder already.*

*Not too long ago I was with my daughter. She went inside to get something from the house, and I got the groceries out of the car. I had my bag over my shoulder, and suddenly this man runs past and grabs it. He cut the strap! He cut it right off me...he must have been watching me, waiting for the right moment. I didn't have any cash in my bag, but still.*

Nonetheless, we also witnessed quite complex debates in our focus groups around whether society has become fundamentally corrupted. Many participants argued that, while stories of violent, depraved and/or large-scale criminal acts – including, for example, sexual abuse in the Catholic Church – have proliferated, this is more reflective of a democratising of information after many decades of repression.

*Things were going on in the world that we didn't know about, and things were going on in society that we didn't know about, like all the problems with*

*Catholic schools, Church, all the abuse and everything. All that's all come out, over the last 10 years.*

Participants also consider that Britain's sense of community has been fundamentally eroded from a shift towards greed and individualism, which is intrinsically linked in citizens' minds with the processes of economic transformation in the 1980s and 1990s, a rise in consumer spending, and the feeling of a profound gulf between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'.

*I think it probably started in the 80s, I'm biased, but I can remember Thatcher saying, 'there's no such thing as society, only the individual'. And I think the balance changed a lot.*

In her 1986 Conservative Conference speech, Margaret Thatcher argued that capitalism and property ownership were essential democratic values. "Popular capitalism is nothing less than a crusade to enfranchise the many in the economic life of the nation", she said, "We Conservatives are returning power to the people."<sup>278</sup> Roughly 30 years later, citizens largely associate 'capitalism' with negative traits, including 'greed', 'selfishness' and 'corruption'; only small minorities regard capitalism as a force for the common good<sup>279</sup>. More broadly, surveys over recent years reveal the British public also favours equality over economic wealth, undermining support for the notion of 'trickle-down economics'.<sup>280</sup>

Participants' concerns regarding the fragmentation in British society is also intrinsically linked to a feeling that the nation's shared sense of identity is under threat. Many clearly expressed a desire for greater opportunities to demonstrate their patriotism and pride, and felt that Britain should more overtly embrace its national and historical symbols.

When asked what makes them most proud of being British, citizens reliably identify 'British history' and the National Health Service<sup>281</sup>, often followed by the royal family, 'British culture' and the esoteric British sense of humour. There are indications that national pride in Britain is experiencing a declining trend<sup>282</sup>; only six in 10 Britons would choose to live in the UK than anywhere else on earth.<sup>283</sup> The British Social Attitudes Survey suggests that the falling levels of nation pride are predominantly due to the lower levels of patriotism held by the young and by highly educated cohorts; only one-in-five Britons in their 20s feels 'very proud' of being British, compared to two-in-three over-75s.<sup>284</sup>

The disproportionate representation of over-50s in our focus groups may well account for the palpable consensus that declining civic and national pride has been an unwelcome consequence of cosmopolitanism, cultural pluralism and political correctness. In particular, participants were visibly agitated about the emphasis placed on respecting and tolerating other cultures, faiths and traditions, which they felt has come at the expense of what they consider to be Britain's enduring, fundamental values. They observed that expressions of distinctly British identity and patriotism were limited to sporting occasions and royal weddings, and were concerned that the younger generations and migrants to Britain were not be encouraged, let alone required, to adopt, respect and uphold the nation's history and traditions.

*If people come here, they should adapt to our culture. When in Rome, do as the Romans do.*

*I worked for 25 or 30 years in Africa or the Far East, and each country I went to, I obeyed the laws of that country. I saw the results of one or two people who did not obey the laws, did not acknowledge the culture, and they were treated very harshly.*

*[There are] too many people coming into our country and not knowing anything about it, and trying to get rid of Christmas and St George's Day.*

One participant, a self-described monarchist, even suggested that as an immigrant, Meghan Markle was undermining British traditions through presenting herself in a more 'casual' form of dress at official engagements.

*I am a royalist, and I am really, really pleased about Harry and Meghan. But the other day, she was going to a memorial service and she wore a sleeveless dress. You simply can't. To a memorial service, you have to wear sleeves. And yes, maybe she is learning, and she is American, but you have to adapt.*

Most alarming for our focus group participants was the feeling of shame and repression they felt was directed towards explicit acts of patriotism, explaining they felt embarrassed to be associated with particularly English forms of identity – such as the St George's flag – as these have become inextricably linked to accusations of racism, nativism and small-mindedness.

*In the past, there was all pride, for the army and the navy, but now the heroes don't matter anymore. We won the war, but they are not looked after*

*They object to us flying the English flag – we are told it is bad. If you put a flag up in your garden, you are told it is racist. You may have Muslim neighbours and they will take offence.*

*But if you go to Ireland everybody has flags up, especially in the republic. Or America! Flags everywhere! But we can't put up the St. George's flag.*

*My husband's got a van and it's got an English flag and [...] he's been doing this business for 40-odd years and he actually got pulled up the other day by somebody, and they said why have you got an English flag on your van?*

*That's the way it's gone unfortunately, where we can't be proud of our own flag.*

Somewhat surprisingly, for a nation in which religion plays only a relatively small role in public and political life, the subject of Christianity in Britain was a frequently discussed topic within our focus groups. Many felt that the accommodation of different faiths and religions was actively curtailing our collective capacity to celebrate and defend Christian values and their role in British cultural traditions.

*What I find terrible is in Easter time, when the shops are open on Good Friday.*

*I used to work for Marks and Spencer and they said, will you be in on Friday? I said absolutely not.*

*We are a Christian country, but multicultural now. I am not saying they should give up their religion. Just if you are here you have to adapt.*

*They're absolutely terrified to be called racist, and that's the problem. Everything's cut short, we can't say this, we can't do that. And that's terrifying. At the end of the day, it's a Christian country and people should abide by our religion in this country and sometimes that doesn't happen.*

*As a Christian country, that's our country and we're happy to embrace other religions and other faith groups, but is it the same on the opposite side to embrace what we're doing in this country? I don't know, sometimes when I read things, and I think to myself, it's not an equal playing field here, we're happy to do it, but other groups aren't too happy to integrate.*

As a vicar's daughter, Prime Minister Theresa May is open about having been raised in a religious household, however her religiosity is not a major part of her public profile.<sup>285</sup> In 2014, she said on a radio programme that it was “right

that we don't flaunt these things here in British politics".<sup>286</sup> Britain occupies something of a middle position between the overt religiosity of US politics and the strict secularism of France. Many former Prime Ministers have been personally religious, however have chosen not to emphasise it within their political messages. Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair's head of strategy and communications, famously said that "We don't do God."<sup>287</sup>

In the population at large, the percentage of citizens identifying as Christian or attending church is steadily declining. More than half (53 per cent) of the population regard themselves as not belonging to any particular religion.<sup>288</sup> Among 18-24 year olds, this rises to 71 per cent.<sup>289</sup> Pew counts by the Church of England found church attendance at its services is also falling, with only just over one per cent of the population attending each Sunday, with numbers several times higher for the major holidays of Christmas and Easter.<sup>290</sup> Over the past decade alone, Church of England attendance measures have fallen by about 10-to-15 per cent.<sup>291</sup>

Beyond discussions of cultural heritage, participants' hostility towards 'an era of political correctness' was also directed towards gender pluralism, a hyper-consciousness of 'acceptable' terminology, and a much broader sense that open political debate regarding contentious issues is no longer considered a fundamental part of British democracy.

In 1990, the *New York Times* published an article titled 'The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct'. It was an article by reporter Richard Bernstein on campus culture, which had embraced, according to some, a "stifling new orthodoxy" on matters of race, ecology, feminism, foreign policy and other topics.<sup>292</sup> In Britain, the term has become intrinsically linked to discussions about multiculturalism, free speech and gender identity.<sup>293</sup> Surveys reveal that two-thirds of Britons believe that 'too many people are too easily offended these days over the language that others use'.<sup>294</sup> Leave voters in the European

Referendum are especially likely to believe that people 'are not allowed to say what they think', with 60 per cent of them believing this to be true, compared to 39 per cent of Remain voters<sup>295</sup>.

Commentaries about political correctness in the British press have touched on many different topics. In 2017, the Daily Mail published an 'A-Z of politically correct madness'. "Every day", the article opened, "it seems, someone else falls foul of the New Censors".<sup>296</sup> The piece took aim at groups arguing that clapping could cause anxiety, that White people should not wear dreadlocks and that universities should use of 'trigger warnings' to caution for potentially upsetting

content.<sup>297</sup> The Spectator magazine has particularly championed the dismantling of a political correctness orthodoxy, citing, for example, its influence in suppressing debate on university campuses, shaping broadcast television production, and in defining 'acceptable language'<sup>298</sup>. A number of provocative commentators such as journalist Rod Liddle, have made themselves household names on the back of their staunch resistance to the politically correct 'world order'.

On the Left, however, many writers have argued that political correctness is a phantom enemy and reporting of incidents of its 'chilling effect' are blown out of proportion.<sup>299</sup> Stig Abell has described political correctness as, "a very British concept, encompassing as it does the triumvirate of moaning, self-consciousness and a suspicion that forces somewhere might be trying to sneak something past us". He considers political correctness as a form of taxation paid in exchange for a more harmonious, less prejudiced society, and while "when it is joylessly enforced, and limits free expression, and precludes honest debate" it can feel "a hefty price to pay", he judges it is ultimately a reasonable trade-off for a society to make<sup>300</sup>. Others argue that political correctness celebrates victimhood and the impediments it creates for open debate, particularly on topics such as migration, can prove dangerous in the longer term.<sup>301</sup>

*It's the minority groups who have ruined the country. Because every time they [the Government] come up with something, there are groups that will protest and say this is against my rights, so then the Government thinks, 'Well we better not do that' and they go off to something else. And I am sure that we are dominated by small groups of people who don't like something - if they don't like something they make a lot of noise and so the Government backs down because it's easier.*

*It feels like you're standing on eggshells sometimes.*

The rise of political correctness is seen as fundamentally related to growth in Britain's migrant population, with citizens regarding this type of cultural sensitivity as a zero-sum game contest between previously dominant and minority values.

Between 1993 and 2015, the size of the foreign-born population more than doubled in the UK, from 3.8 to 8.7 million. The largest group of migrants within this growth period came from Poland after its accession into the Europe Union in 2004, and the most common destination for migrants has been London.<sup>302</sup> There was a marked increase in concern regarding the level and nature of immigration in the decade preceding the European Referendum<sup>303</sup>, however the

population is polarised between those who believe in its economic and cultural value, those who recognise its economic value but not its cultural value, and those who regard immigration as a fundamental threat to Britain.<sup>304</sup> Differences in views between the young and the old, and between those with and without a university degree have increased over recent years, although there is widespread agreement across the population that Britain must apply a level of selectivity, that migrants need to speak English, be committed to “a British way of life” and have useful skills.<sup>305</sup>

There is evidence to suggest that opposition to immigration in Britain is becoming more predominantly civic in nature rather than inspired by racial prejudice, a theme clearly demonstrated in our focus groups. Many participants told stories of their positive interactions with citizens from other cultures and communities, and were openly appalled at the concept of racial discrimination. These findings are consistent with other qualitative research projects, particularly those focused on low socio-economic communities, which have emphasised the varied and complex perspectives held on migration and highlighted the thematic dominance of social competition in shaping negative views<sup>306</sup>.

*In the past, people would talk about the ‘Blacks’ and all that, but that’s wrong. Colour is nothing to me. I am a Christian. I had surgery in June, and I was helped by this lovely man, the surgeon, he was Black.*

However, participants were also highly sensitive to the concept of ‘contribution’ and ensuring that all citizens actively engage in economic, cultural and civic life. They referenced their own involvement in charitable and community projects, and their long history of ‘paying in’ to the tax base, and felt it was reasonable to expect that new arrivals to Britain were held to the same standards.

*[We want] people that are coming into to work, to make a good living and who want to pay their taxes and whatever...not them people that are just coming in to live of the state.*

*At the end of the day, look, we’re not gonna stop immigration, but I think what it’s down to, if people have got jobs and come into this country that’s fine, there’s nothing wrong with that.*

*Whether it’s picking fruit or what have you, or joining the NHS, what people were against, and me included, was people coming to the country that have no jobs that couldn’t speak English and just drained the country. We all play taxes; we’ve paid taxes all our lives.*

It was within this context that previous waves of migrants were consistently discussed more favourably than recent arrivals, with the Windrush generation seen to have “earned their keep” by working hard and conforming to the standards and norms naturally expected of them.

*Part of our multicultural population here is obviously ex-Commonwealth. And they've got a right to come here and a right to live here, and whether that was right or wrong I don't know, they certainly put this country on its feet after the war.*

*There is a history to this of course, the reason Commonwealth citizens have had a right to come here, it's because in most cases it's where countries gained independence from the old Empire, rather than suing us for billions of pounds for reparations for the damage and the thieving we did from their countries as part of the Empire. The answer is you can have passports to come here. And we desperately needed them.*

It should be noted that contemporary accounts from the 1950s and 60s provide an alternative perspective on historical attitudes, suggesting that previous migrants were also often treated with scepticism and even suspicion, hostility and exclusion – particularly from those who felt economically and culturally threatened.<sup>307</sup> Another interview project exploring competition between working-class communities and new migrants found that this nostalgic view of the ‘worthy, earlier migrants’ in contrast to recent arrivals, “masks and writes over the social divisions of the past, and leads to a negative and disappointed sense of the present imbued with a blame culture, a celebration of the past and a fatalism about the future”. However, it also noted that individuals, particularly those from low socio-economic circumstances, may also regard their viewpoints on immigration as legitimate responses to a situation in which they feel powerless and lacking agency.<sup>308</sup>

Even more so than immigration and border control, the issue of integration appears to be a hugely energising topic for citizens – seen again as a failure of Government to intervene authoritatively to define and enforce a requirement for some level of cultural assimilation. This topic is discussed with particular fervour in relation to Islamic migration, and cuts to the heart of a broader question frequently debated in focus groups but rarely addressed in Britain's political discourse, as to whether a strict interpretation of the Islamic faith is fundamentally ‘incompatible’ with Western liberal democracies. As one participant described:

*It's like my father always said, you'll never see a blackbird lay down with a starling.*

The issue of integration in Britain has experienced spikes of political salience over recent decades, although it is still the case that the subject as a whole remains challenging for political representatives to engage with. One prominent example was the Oldham Riots in 2001, which spread to a number of neighbouring communities in the worst racially-motivated violence Britain had seen since the 1960s. The conflict saw the White working-class communities of these deprived, former industrialised cities and towns, pitted against the local South Asian communities, which had continued to live largely segregated lives as their population had grown. A strong element of mythology was at play, with both sides believing that local and national governments were favouring the advancement of the other<sup>309</sup>. The riots created a political opportunity for the far-Right British National Party, which made inroads in the area in the subsequent years. A research report conducted 10 years after the incidents concluded that the British Government had “not succeeded in creating shared values or reducing intolerance” and that low-socio-economic communities continued to feel they were losing out from multiculturalism<sup>310</sup>.

In December 2016, the Casey Review into opportunity and integration in Britain was published, which again was sharply critical of existing Government integration strategies, which were failing to keep up with the pace and scale of immigration. While Government initiatives too often focused on symbolic, incidental initiatives (“saris, steel drums and samosas for the already well-intentioned”), the Review highlighted widespread evidence of cultural and socio-economic segregation. In certain wards in Blackburn, Birmingham, Burnley and Bradford, for example, the Muslim population exceeds 70 per cent, and many school populations are comprised of over-50 per cent pupils of Bangladeshi or Pakistani heritage. Meanwhile, economic inactivity amongst the Muslim population is unusually high, especially amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, at 57.2 per cent. Together, this form of cultural ‘ghetto-isation’ and the inequalities in economic participation between groups are fostering poor outcomes for migrant communities and broader social tensions.<sup>311</sup>

These issues have been especially highlighted in a series of recent ‘grooming’ scandals, predominantly afflicting Northern English towns and communities. After decades of institutional suppression, large-scale abuses conducted by British Pakistani gangs towards largely White working-class underage girls were brought to light, sparking national outrage. The Jay Report into the abuse conducted in Rotherham alone, estimates there were a staggering 1,400 victims

in the area between 1997 and 2013, many of whom were in care or otherwise isolated from their families. Several inquiries have found that the victims were let down by the police and the council, who failed to take action to defend their safety. In particular, the dismissal of the claims raised by girls of such low social status<sup>312</sup>, and institutional concerns about the racial implications of identifying the ethnic backgrounds of perpetrators, prevented many of those charged with protecting the public from responding to the abuse.<sup>313</sup>

In the ensuing years since the Rotherham case came to public and political consciousness, the revelation of further abuse scandals, many of which also involve similar demographic dynamics, have become a focal point for discussions about race, class, gender and political correctness in contemporary Britain. Despite inquiries emphasising the dangerous consequences of the 'chilling effect' of an extreme interpretation of racially aware political correctness, many politicians have felt unwilling or unable to engage with the scandals and their implications.

In 2017, former Shadow Women and Equalities Minister, and local MP for Rotherham, Sarah Champion, was forced to resign from her position after uproar over her claim that "Britain has a problem with British Pakistani men raping and exploiting white girls", as she called for the nation's politicians to face up to the "realities" of the situation to prevent its recurrence.<sup>314</sup> In her defence, Trevor Philips, the former chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, said, "I am absolutely gobsmacked...even in the darkest days [of the Labour Party], I don't remember people being asked to stand down for trying to represent their constituents, which is what I think Sarah Champion was trying to do."<sup>315</sup>

On the whole, racial prejudices in Britain are broadly softening<sup>316</sup>, and the Casey Review does report that "in 2015-16, 89 per cent of people thought their community was cohesive, and a similar proportion felt a sense of belonging to Britain."<sup>317</sup> Nevertheless, the recent All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration finds that the state currently does not sufficiently support new migrants in their integration. Rejecting the 'laissez-faire' British model of integration, the APPG advises that "targeted interventions to support new arrivals are required", including standard enrolment in English as a Second Language (ESOL) classes for those who don't speak English<sup>318</sup>.

After years of cuts to ESOL budgets under austerity, in 2016 David Cameron announced a series of new initiatives to address the poor language skills of some migrant groups, including making spousal visas dependent on learning English.<sup>319</sup> With limited resources to direct to ESOL investment, the Prime

Minister explained that the decision had been taken to target where language skills were weakest and therefore most needed – the female Muslim population. Cameron detailed that there were 38,000 Muslim women living in Britain who could not speak English at all, and a further 190,000 with limited language skills, which hampered their social and economic integration, and could make them receptive audiences for extremist propaganda. The decision to link integration and extremism was widely criticised<sup>320</sup>, with several liberal newspapers, politicians and civil society leaders condemning the approach.<sup>321</sup> Once again, an attempt to address issues at the heart of the integration question descended into a divisive and partisan debate.

## **Politics, Europe and Britain's Place in the World**

The EU Referendum may stand as the most prominent expression of an anti-establishment backlash in Britain's modern history, however the roots of the mistrust in Britain's institutions were formed over many years – in particular, accelerating in the aftermath of the Expenses Scandal in 2009. The Scandal was a watershed moment in British politics; a vehicle through which suspicions of corruption and malpractice were able to coalesce and gain footholds in the public imagination.

The introduction of the Freedom of Information Act had, for the first time, enabled journalists and campaigners to obtain information that previously had been out of reach of the public domain. In particular, the expenses that Members of Parliament in Britain were claiming, including for second homes, building works and other unreasonable costs – famously, one MP had claimed £1,645 in expenses for a duck house in her garden.<sup>322</sup> In the wake of the scandal, surveys revealed that 62 per cent of UK citizens felt that politicians put their own interests first – a collapse of almost 20 per cent in two years – with only one in five trusting MPs to tell the truth.<sup>323</sup>

Public resentment was not contained to the specific MPs implicated in the furore, with the majority of citizens believing the misuse of funds was so widespread as to be considered endemic. Of particular concern was the fact that four-in-five Britons felt the Parliamentary system itself was culpable for the transgressions.<sup>324</sup> The impact of the Scandal has had a lasting impact on the climate of trust in British politics. Surveys years later have shown that 72 per cent of citizens agree with the statement that 'not enough has been done to stop MPs wrongfully claiming expenses and MPs are probably getting up to the same abuses as before'.<sup>325</sup>

*In politics, nothing gets done anyways. What do you even vote for?*

*The politicians now, they are so young, how would they know how to run a country?*

*There is a backlash going on as well, isn't there, against Government, lack of trust in Government and all sorts of associated issues, which meant that [with the Brexit vote], people said, we've got an opportunity to really throw a spanner in the works.*

*There's such a mode of apathy at the moment and despondency with the Government. The fact that no one believes that they're going to do anything for the country anymore.*

*They're robbers, they're robbers. They're only for themselves.*

*They promise you everything, until they get in power, until they get in position and then you don't exist.*

*All their interests are to line their own pockets, the politicians.*

The Expenses Scandal also facilitated structural change in Britain's politics-business-media nexus, opening new space for 'grassroots' campaigning organisations focused on exposing Government corruption, waste and ineptitude. In particular, the TaxPayers' Alliance (TPA), led by Matthew Elliott, was able to garner considerable support from politicians, the media and citizens in his quest to build scepticism of the size and reach of the British state. The TPA ushered in a new era of hyper-accountability for Government, and became the most influential pressure group in the country, gaining hundreds of annual citations in newspapers and attracting more than £1 million in donations at the height of its powers<sup>326</sup>.

In his 2006 book, *The Bumper Book of Government Waste*, Elliott made clear his viewpoint on Government spending was a default position of mistrust, writing, "It is an axiomatic truth that people take better care of their possessions than other people's...And when it comes to state assets, the ownership connection is very distant indeed. [...] Sadly, this money is real money – it belongs to taxpayers, who have worked hard to earn it. Through legalised theft, Parliament sequesters it to fritter on more or less anything they fancy."<sup>327</sup>

The TPA's mission extended beyond domestic Government expenditure, becoming a rallying point for the burgeoning Eurosceptic movement. In 2009, then-editor of the Conservative Home website, Tim Montgomerie, set out the influential role the TPA could play in shifting public opinion and political action

on 'the Europe question', writing: "All Eurosceptics should rejoice that The TaxPayers' Alliance...have turned their considerable skills to the European issue. Their determination to connect the issue of the EU with people's wealth and policy on immigration is particularly important. Too many of the Eurosceptic groups have been too abstract in their campaigning. My guess is that, in the long-term, the campaigning of the TPA will do more to move the nation's political establishment to a Eurosceptic position than UKIP."<sup>328</sup>

Over the coming years, the TPA would both seed the organisational structure and lay down the ideological messaging framework for the Brexit movement – as instrumental, if not as well publicised, as Nigel Farage and UKIP in galvanising hardened support from mild antipathy. One of their most critical contributions came in the association of the EU with 'red tape' and bureaucratic dysfunction. By 2016, when surveyed on their motivations to vote Leave, many citizens frequently cited a desire to cut 'EU red tape', which was said to "strangle British firms"<sup>329</sup>, however the connection between the EU and red tape extended further across the population, with 72 per cent of all adults seeing this as a problem.<sup>330</sup>

In this effort, the TPA had been assisted by Governments of all persuasions, who have consistently shifted blame to the EU as a source of bothersome rules and regulations. The result is a considerable level of misinformation regarding the European Union and its capacity to influence British life, which manifests in a more diffuse form of mistrust. For instance, 15 per cent of Britons believe the EU regulates things like the name of 'Bombay Mix' and the depth of barmaids' cleavages. One in four believe the EU bans 'bendy bananas' (whereas the actual regulation refers only to acute malformations).<sup>331</sup> Perhaps more importantly, the EU is often blamed for the large and sudden influx of Polish labour migrants following the EU's enlargement to the East, when in fact the UK had the right to initially limit the scale of workers it would accept and, unique among Europe's major economies, chose not to.<sup>332</sup>

*Who wants a straight banana? Or a straight cucumber? And the human rights stuff has gone too far, especially with some of the people coming into the country.*

*You can't even smack your own child now. That's all come from the EU.*

*All that focus on minorities. That's because we're in Europe.*

Similarly, Jeremy Corbyn has cautioned that a left-wing program of renationalisation and state aid to certain industries, such as the steel industry, might not be possible under EU law, saying "we need to be quite careful about the powers that we need as national governments."<sup>333</sup> But these arguments have

since been dispelled by other politicians and EU experts.<sup>334</sup> One EU law expert said: “I think what we see in the UK is too often government refers to EU law as an excuse, as a reason for not investing. But it could do so, and it could do so within the law.”<sup>335</sup>

Beyond hard-wired gripes regarding bureaucracy, however, Britain’s Eurosceptic sentiments reflect a long tradition of being both enamoured with European culture, while also retaining an all-encompassing sense of profound national exceptionalism. As Jeremy Paxman notes, the English and French, in particular, “remain profoundly divided and mutually suspicious”. Resenting and disparaging the French, while also fetishising its ways of life and certainly indulging in its physical spoils on holidays, is a clear mark of being a true, patriotic Englishman – and sets one aside as distinct from ever-flexible cosmopolitan elites. Moreover, the mythology of the country being governed by hapless politicians “prepared to surrender the country to European Union” – seen as a ploy by the Germans to remake history in their favour – has become an indelible part of our national psychology and folklore<sup>336</sup>. As in many other countries, the light-hearted competition we persist in stoking with our neighbours also reflects a serious foundation of nationalism, in which our unity is forged and re-fused, generation after generation, through a sense of urgent proximity to our history.

*It just seemed a little bit futile for so many lives to have been lost in wars, to have been absorbed by the same people that we were fighting against. I know that’s history, but what was the point of it all if we were just going to give into it?*

In our April 2018 focus groups, it was clear that the issue of Brexit remains hugely polarising and divisive to communities and families, and that participants continue to self-identify in terms of their vote in the Referendum. Many of those who voted to Leave expressed frustration that the Brexit process had not been “an overnight change”; some even appeared to be more angered by the length of the time that the negotiations were taking than if the outcome itself had been different – suggesting that the vote itself was seen as an acute expression of the will for demonstrative action.

*Brexit was exciting at first, but I didn’t know it was going to take this long.*

Participants noted that the Referendum had activated an otherwise moderate people. Many Leave voters were clear that they had “voted for a better future”, and saw the delays in the negotiation as stymying the nation’s chances of realising its potential; there was little awareness that the Government was, in its approach to the negotiations, seeking to minimise economic harm.

*English people are like terriers, really placid until you overstep the line.*

*We voted Brexit so we could run our own country again. So things would get better instead of worse.*

*It wasn't about economics, they told you, you could have your country back, that's why people voted.*

*I feel the United Kingdom is such a diverse and richly populated country that we can be hugely successful again waving our own flag and progressing as a total sovereign nation and not as a sovereign European country.*

As in the focus groups conducted in late-2017, we saw a sizeable proportion of Leave-voting participants who remained anxious regarding the impacts of the vote on the economy, and questioned whether they had taken the right decision. Awareness of rising consumer prices and the impact of the fall of the Pound against the Euro on holiday costs has become more widespread.

*I'd hate for people to say, I told you so. If it doesn't go alright with Brexit.*

*A lady in our [community] group said, it's all your fault for voting Leave – the prices in the shops are rising and it's all your fault.*

Many Remain voters continued to voice a passionate defence of Britain staying in the European Union, however there was a clear, enduring sense of qualification and pragmatism underpinning their arguments. Many noted that immigration does need to be controlled, and explained that their motivations for voting were not inspired by support for the EU project, but rather their belief that our departure could expose the country to economic harm, security weaknesses or indeed challenge our capacity to tackle the issue of immigration.

*With Brexit, I was a Remainer, because I could see what they [the Leave campaign] were doing. But I do think there should be a limit on the amount of*

*people coming into the country. Everybody will do anything to better themselves and you cannot blame them, but people will take advantage.*

*I voted Remain. The Leave side said to vote Brexit because of immigration. But immigration is not going away. And do you think if we leave, France will come to our side? France will help us control migration?*

The debate over Europe during the past five years has represented the most

significant public examination of Britain's place in the world for many decades; certainly, in terms of the questions it raises regarding multilateralism and sovereignty, defence, security and trade in the era of globalisation, and Britain's capacity and desire for 'moral' leadership. In many ways, it reflects a conversation of a depth and complexity that Britain has struggled to hold since the end of its imperial era, when the country commanded the largest Empire in world history. After the Second World War, Britain rapidly lost almost all of its colonial holdings, particularly following the announcement of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that he would not try to fight the "wind of change" sweeping the African continent. Between 1945 and 1965, Britain went from having 700 million subjects outside of the UK to just five million, largely in Hong Kong.<sup>337</sup>

This sense of 'Empire lost' has left its marks on the British psyche. While it is clear that there is scant evidence of open public support for the concept of colonialisation in the contemporary age, as our content analysis has shown, its mythology continues to haunt the spectre of British politics. As Jeremy Paxman writes, "The British Empire had begun with a series of pounces. Then it marched. Next it swaggered. Finally, after wandering aimlessly for a while, it slunk away. The British have spent the years since then alternately embarrassed and ashamed"<sup>338</sup>.

It was striking how profoundly the vast majority of participants in our focus groups rejected the nostalgia of empire, holding firmly negative or uncomfortable views about the nation's colonial past, concluding, "It was about profit" or "It was about taking things from other countries".

*An empire? Who wants an empire? What, when we used to rape and pillage and take other people's stuff?*

*We was raping and pillaging and taking everything out of their country and now we're moaning about people coming to our country and taking our jobs? Wait a minute, wasn't that what we was doing? But we was doing it much worse. I don't want another Empire.*

*We're proud of a country that was supposedly top in the world, but most of that was down to bullying and slavery. If you look at history, I'm ashamed of my history.*

*Those from an older generation have a larger sense of pride. Whereas I see our Empire as, you know, we went and plundered the world, and took advantage of, like the Romans probably we did some good things. So I'm not ashamed of it but, I don't think it was marvellous, wonderful thing.*

Paxman notes that, “instead of trying to grapple with the implications of the story of empire, the British seem to have decided just to ignore”, in an act of “collective amnesia”<sup>339</sup>. This approach has certainly been helped by the fact that living standards continued to rise while its role in the world decreased, insulating Britain from an existential crisis about its global standing – a conversation now forced to the front of the nation’s political consciousness following the Brexit vote.

*What makes Britain great is also what holds it back dramatically – its history, its infrastructure, its density of housing, everything that made it a superb country in the past and the greatest nation in the world is exactly what holds it back now.*

At different points over recent decades, politicians have tried to recreate Britain as a global actor, albeit on a different footing. The development of a global financial industry operating out of the City of London was arguably one such attempt.<sup>340</sup> Similarly, the Blair Government promoted a sense of ‘Cool Britannia’, a Britain that dominated the world not through its military might, but through its cultural achievements. It presented an image of a stylish, patriotic and ascendant Britain.<sup>341</sup> Ultimately, however, Cool Britannia was unable to extend beyond a superficial engagement with Britain’s ‘soft power’, and failed to confront the broader questions regarding the nation’s international role – particularly during a time when the Government continued to intervene – successfully, in the case of Somalia and the Balkans, and less so in the case of Iraq – in military affairs.

Britain’s occasionally uncomfortable relationship with its global role is evident in the ongoing debate regarding national foreign aid spending, the benefits of which politicians appear to have struggled to convince many citizens. The tensions have played out most recently during the premiership of David Cameron, whose ‘compassionate conservatism’<sup>342</sup> policy platform sought to resolve the crisis of post-Thatcherite Party identity, and reposition himself as a credible competitive successor to the New Labour era<sup>343</sup>. As part of his platform, Cameron sought to enshrine a commitment to spending 0.7 per cent of the nation’s GDP on foreign aid, a policy upheld by his successor, Theresa May.<sup>344</sup>

The policy is not especially popular with the public, although polls differ widely depending on how the question is asked.<sup>345</sup> By and large, however, UK citizens have long held that the budget for foreign aid ought to be decreased, by rates ranging from 66<sup>346</sup> to 78 per cent.<sup>347</sup> In our focus groups, we found widespread consensus that foreign aid should be either reduced or abolished, so that spending could be directed towards those in need in Britain.

*For foreign aid, some places need money, but we don't need to give away as much as we do now.*

*We need to cut foreign aid...I don't know how much it is, but it's a lot. We should put it back in our economy; it would help a lot, dealing with cutbacks on law enforcers, police, NHS and all that. So cut back on things like that, 'cause then we can use foreign aid for our aid, you know what I mean, it makes more sense.*

*We're the first ones to put our hands in our pockets, you know, help people and all that, but now we got to worry about our own country and get back on our feet and once we have, we can start helping out again but, but we got to look at our own country first.*

## **Conclusions**

These focus groups underscore that there is a considerable diversity of views and experience amongst Britons, even amongst those who share many demographic characteristics, in terms of age, socio-economic status and geography.

Nonetheless, reflecting on the research presented here and the findings previously published in *Citizens' Voices*, a number of conclusions can be drawn.

It is clear that many Britons feel the country is on the wrong path, that vital social values and cultural traditions are threatened, and that the political and economic settlement is 'broken' in some fundamental capacity. These trends have naturally encouraged the salience of restorative nostalgic messages, and the resonance of these undoubtedly poses some critical challenges to citizens' belief in the 'doctrine of progress'. Through these extensive discussions with citizens across England, we are able to distinguish between two primary manifestations of social and political disenfranchisement around the concept of change.

The first is the deep and profound, lasting impact of the processes of economic transformation, on those who have lived through the material deterioration or demographic dislocation of their communities. While the term 'left behind' is often applied without qualification to the many diverse constituencies that are mobilised behind populist parties and campaigns, it is used in its most appropriate form to define such citizens. They have watched economic opportunities evaporate, communities splinter, and their political agency and representation dwindle as life has moved on.

The second group are less individually impacted by change in a specific, material sense, although they feel acutely exposed to its cumulative stresses – particularly

those pertaining to social interactions, cultural pluralism and political correctness. While they may be relatively financially secure, perhaps having experienced some social mobility over the course of their lifetimes, they are sensitive to the notion that their children might not be so fortunate. Nonetheless, their primary anxieties coagulate around the public sphere, the nation's values and their sense of 'cultural' agency through the favouring of British traditions.

For both groups, the past holds understandable comforts and security, in a form that may feel utterly out of reach to the modern age. Nonetheless, there is something to be learned in the resistance of the proponents of such rhetoric and the citizens for whom it brings comfort and security to accept that it carries any element of retrospection; in Britain, 'nostalgia' remains a pejorative word, and a taboo.

The number of participants who expressed a genuine desire to return to live in a long-passed era was significant – partly due to the passion with which they felt this compulsion – but relatively small. Considerably larger in size was the number of those who observed in great detail many of the ways in Britain's economy and society had declined over the course of their lifetimes, but were ultimately unwilling to trade the advantages of contemporary life to re-experience their nostalgic remembrances. This group, the most substantial of all, were exhausted, stressed and even angry at the prospect of enduring further change, particularly that which is seen to benefit minorities at the expense of 'the many'.

Nonetheless, we also find a sizeable proportion of citizens in our focus groups – somewhere between a quarter and a third, depending on the location – expressing an acceptance or even a willingness to embrace change. Moreover, despite the widespread critiques of contemporary British society, and anxieties about the future, many citizens remain both resilient and begrudgingly optimistic – a point that sets them apart from participants in our French and German focus groups.

As a people, the British consider themselves to be outward-looking, ambitious and plucky, and this image of the nation's character has endured – thus far – despite the forces of dissatisfaction and disengagement sweeping the country. One has the sense that the nostalgic tendencies of the working-age and older population are somewhat tempered by their inherent moderation; that Brexit stands as a profound act of self-expression, a culmination of grievances, but an anomaly, and not the canary in the coalmine of radical action. What is important here is perhaps not the pull of the past, but the widespread nature of the resistance to further change amongst older Britons – particularly in

the context of a younger generation clamouring for transformative upheaval, even revolution. In this dichotomy, we find the immovable object and the unstoppable force of Britain's contemporary politics.

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# France

## Nostalgic Narratives

A sense of a shared, grand history has been central to French political culture for centuries. From its inception, rulers of the Republic sought to overcome the narratives of church and monarchy and promoted a sense of national, historical greatness instead<sup>348</sup> - and this notion of a glorious past appears to have persisted. The French appear in surveys to be an especially nostalgic people, compared to many of their other European neighbours; 46 per cent of French citizens feel that '50 years ago, life was better for people like me', with only 33 per cent feeling that progress has been made over the course of half a century.<sup>349</sup> 65 per cent say they are 'more and more inspired' by the values of the past.<sup>350</sup> Moreover, 61 per cent of the population says they do not feel as at home in the present – a number that rises to 86 per cent for supporters of the Front National.<sup>351</sup>

Sudhir Hazareesingh argues that the French character is unique for its historical character, its fixation with the nation and the collective self, its intensity, its "constant interplay between the themes of order and imagination" and its complicated relationship with "the classic distinction between 'reason' and 'religion'"<sup>352</sup>. The French also demonstrate an enduring self-awareness and preoccupation with the concept of the nation in 'decline', which continues to ebb and flow in potency and urgency and to swing between the narratives of the Right, Left, and – on occasion – in a shared consensus.

In the late-1980s, at the height of the ascent of the neo-liberal global world order and reaching the pinnacle of his acute disenchantment with social and political progress, Guy Debord observed that both "collectivity" and "community" had been fatally eroded<sup>353</sup>. By 2011, Pascal Perrineau diagnosed that France was facing the dismantling of its most valued asset, its holistic identity, in a period of economic stagnation, intellectual conflict and political dysfunction<sup>354</sup>. As Barbara Cassin, author of *La Nostalgie. Quand donc est-on chez soi?* has contested, nostalgia for the past ultimately represents the erosion of confidence in the concept of progress, and our mourning for a time when we could be certain in the idea that 'things will get better'<sup>355</sup>.

Of all the nostalgic narratives that persist in French social and political life, the narrative of the Trente Glorieuses is among the most prominent. The term "Trente Glorieuses" (the Glorious Thirty) was coined by a French demographer to describe the three decades between 1946 and 1975, when living standards rose

rapidly throughout the country.<sup>356</sup> It also saw the establishment of the French ‘social state’, the country’s elaborate system of workers’ protections and social security.<sup>357</sup> Over time, the Trente Glorieuses have become not just an economic, but also a social and moral, benchmark – an image of national unity and optimism.

This time also represents the heyday of Charles de Gaulle, who was President from 1959 to 1969, and is still strongly associated with French identity<sup>358</sup>, much like Winston Churchill remains for Britain. De Gaulle is frequently invoked by politicians across the political spectrum<sup>359</sup>; in many ways, he rejected the xenophobia and nationalism previously rampant amongst the Right, and was able to build a broad church of support due to his strength of vision at a time of heightened aspirations<sup>360</sup>. While a younger generation of writers and economists has challenged the dominant view of the Trente Glorieuses<sup>361</sup>, they nevertheless endure in the public mind as representing a better, fairer and more hopeful France.

Like the narrative of the Trente Glorieuses, the celebration of the country’s industrial past invokes a sense of a more prosperous time, when jobs were plentiful and workers held a considerable degree of choice in their opportunities. For politicians of the Left, celebrating France’s manufacturing industry is also to applaud the historical empowerment of French workers and the galvanising of the trade unionism cause. As a candidate for the Parti Socialiste Presidential nomination, François Hollande frequently invoked France’s industrial heritage, proposing, amongst other things, a law against factory closures.<sup>362</sup>

In a speech, said: “Industry plays a central role in the history of our country, and it always has. The history of the past three centuries is the history of industry, of its progress, of its mutations, and sometimes of its difficulties.”<sup>363</sup> This narrative is not limited to the Left, though politicians on the traditional Right have appeared less credible in their efforts to engage with this issue. For example, when President Sarkozy praised factory work, *Les Echos* published a political cartoon, in which a Sarkozy figure spreads his arms and says, ‘I love factories... I personally know watches, yachts and bracelets made in factories!’<sup>364</sup>

Those who worked in factories, too, are often nostalgic about France’s industrial past. One study based on interviews with French women who lost their job in the Moulinex factory closure found an endemic level of nostalgia.<sup>365</sup> Although all interviewees emphasised that production line work was physically demanding, often gruelling work, they were nevertheless nostalgic for the conviviality and the camaraderie it offered - for instance, celebrating birthdays together and

taking care of one another when someone had trouble keeping up. ‘I loved my factory’, one former employee said.

In seeking to manage the difficult transitions inherent in de-industrialisation, some public officials have sought to present nostalgia as an impediment to progress. The Mayor of a town hit particularly hard by the Moulinex closure argued, “one cannot build a new story [*histoire*] if one is nostalgic for the previous one”. Nonetheless, he found an unexpected level of resistance from the former employees, unwilling to ‘turn the page’ or ‘let go’ of their past; reminiscing about the factory together was for these women a way to maintain their solidarity in the present. Moreover, their nostalgia motivated them to campaign against Moulinex, both inside and outside the courtroom.

The enduring distinctions between the Right and the Left of French politics has not only enabled the formation of collective movements and identities around positive visions for change and preservation, but also to construct unity around exclusionary notions of belonging – particularly of nefarious unseen forces, ‘alien’ interests or cultures, seeking to impede on the integrity of French society. This phenomenon is particularly striking on the Left, seemingly at odds with its progressive, open, positive and collaborative values, and can lend a certain ‘conservatism’ to its politics<sup>366</sup>. As in Great Britain, the far-Left in France has been accused of harbouring and sanctioning anti-Semitism under the guise of criticism of Israel, an issue especially salient as the proportion of physical attacks and even murders committed in the name of Islam has become an issue of public and political outrage<sup>367</sup>.

However, in many ways, the most consistent narrative of hostility amongst the French Left over the past half-century has been the visceral opposition towards America and its neo-liberal economic model. As Philippe Roger explains, France’s visceral anti-American sentiments reflect a cultural class on a civilizational level, with the growing power and influence of the United States interpreted as an existential threat to the unity and pre-eminence of the idealised French nation<sup>368</sup>. Episodes such as the Vietnam and Iraq Wars, and the global financial crisis, have served as galvanising forces<sup>369</sup> for anti-Americanism on the Left, often applying a level of equivalence to the United States’ military and economic leadership, as a form of ‘imperialism’<sup>370</sup>.

This sentiment has also found some sympathy on the far-Right and is, along with favourable impressions of Russia, an element of ideological overlap on the fringes of French politics. In an interview in 2015, Eurosceptic Right-wing politician Philippe de Villiers warned that France’s future in a globalised world was to become a market “annexed to America” and would find itself “turning its

back from the future and good sense” (*un marché annexe de l'Amérique tourne le dos à l'avenir et au bon sens*)<sup>371</sup>.

This rejection of the ‘Anglo-Saxon model’ is further embodied in the ongoing battles to preserve the French language in the face of the global dominance of English, which has been systematically assimilated into international dialects through the proliferation of cultural, economic and political ideas and cooperation. Defended in France by the *Académie Française*, the public and intellectual anger directed towards the incursion of English into French social and political life has experienced various peaks and troughs of salience over recent decades, including outpourings of emotional despair in 2013 when the National Assembly, during the Presidency of Hollande, enabled the tuition of English-language courses in universities<sup>372</sup>. The tremendous response to this decision on both the nationalist Right and the hard-Left again exemplified the increasing areas of political confluence between these two groups, in an era of acute malaise around perceived national decline.

A crucial antecedent to the escalation of the notion of France in an ‘era of decline’ was the dissipation towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century of the intellectual class and its cohesive power, particularly on the Left, in shaping national identity and preoccupations. Hazareesingh notes that this signalled “the beginning of a slide back towards the national horizon, accompanied by a less universalist, more defensive and pessimistic demeanour, and a revival of old myths about national cohesion and the threat to the French collective self”. He identifies the rejection of the European Constitution at the May 2005 Referendum as a symbol of the coming together of various hostile political messages to create a sense of the nation under siege; partly with a specific focus on the threat of European enlargement and integration, but also a broader absorption of negative campaigning and discourse into French political life – exemplified in the failure to “confront the rise of the Front National and the growing dissemination of its ideas amongst the French people”<sup>373</sup>.

In the 1980s, the Front National – a party in its second decade at the time – began to promote an image of pure peasants threatened by a corrupt world.<sup>374</sup> The Party’s 1984 manifesto used farming as a metaphor for respecting and protecting the land, stating “the cultivator doesn’t treat his land with contempt, unlike the nomad who leaves a field as soon as his flock has grazed it into a no-man’s land”. Two years later, its 1986 manifesto similarly invoked agrarian images, referring to France as “the land of our fathers, the land that they have cleared and defended for centuries; the country that they have shaped in its landscapes [...] and that they have fertilised with their sweat and their blood”.<sup>375</sup>

Nationalist historian and World War II veteran Raoul Girardet has described “the myth of the Golden Age” as a driving force in French politics.<sup>376</sup> When politicians refer to an unspecified ‘Golden Age’, Girardet argues, they celebrate the innocence of times past. It also upholds a rural social model against the dirty, corrupting city, invoking a dream of a fraternal community and a return to a form of solidarity seemingly incompatible with modernity.<sup>377</sup> This idea is fundamentally embedded in a sense of place, linked to the powerful force of territorial attachments held ever since the 1789 Revolution, and which have “remained the primary source of intellectual and emotional identification” for many people<sup>378</sup>.

This celebration of timeless, rural France is still prominent in contemporary political discourse, particularly amongst parties and candidates on the Right. Nicolas Sarkozy used to refer to the “countryside [Provinces] that root even those who have left”, providing a “mysterious bond” with the land of France.<sup>379</sup> This bucolic, nostalgic narrative emphasises that the establishment of France in its rural world is what guarantees its permanence. It both values the harmony and uniformity of the land and warns against the dangers of technology, markets and modern industry.<sup>380</sup> Moreover, it facilitates the construction of clear distinctions between the ‘true’ France in its agricultural heartlands, a bastion of “the moral and cultural treasures of the nation”, and the artifice of urban existence<sup>381</sup>.

The Front National has also sought to appeal to a form of colonial nostalgia for France’s imperial past, particularly over the loss of Algeria – appealing to France’s pied-noir communities, who continue to be a source of support for the Party.<sup>382</sup> Their multi-constituency approach, positioning themselves as a home for a variety of disaffected and disenfranchised groups, has also focused their attentions on those nostalgic over the collapse of the collaborationist Vichy regime, hardline Catholics and ultra-nationalists.<sup>383</sup>

Traditionally, the National Front has advocated a form of ethno-nationalism “rooted in myths about the distant past and its programme advocates strengthening the nation by making it more ethnically homogeneous and returning to traditional values”.<sup>384</sup> As elsewhere in Western Europe, this concept has grown in salience and infiltrated the policy positions of the mainstream parties, as France has become more ethnically diverse, and insecurity regarding the pace of demographic change has escalated.

In late-2009, President Sarkozy ordered the creation of a Ministry of National Identity; an exercise that ended in public humiliation for the Government<sup>385</sup>, as an immense wave of criticism towards the initiative as divisive and stigmatising

turned initially favourable opinion against it. Ultimately, even Right-wing parliamentarians couldn't throw their weight behind the concept, with Nicolas Dupont-Aignan explaining, "The Government poorly framed this debate from the outset and — for electoral objectives — spoke of national identity rather than national unity"<sup>386</sup>. Sarkozy's misjudged execution, however, concealed widespread support for a greater level of interrogation of the question of cultural integration and the pre-eminence of French values, virtues and traditions in a multicultural age. This question has ultimately come to frame France's contemporary discourse on its identity, its international engagement, and its willingness to embrace the trappings of a particular kind of 'globalised' modernity.

As Sophie Heine writes, the discussions around the banning of the hijab in public life became an act of "defending French identity against a perceived growing cultural affirmation by Muslim citizens"<sup>387</sup>. This visceral 'cultural warfare' was explored by conservative writer Hervé Juvin in his book *La Grand Separation*, which argued that globalisation had created a world of isolationists, and rather than fostering a global community, it had emphasised the individual at the expense of brotherhood and togetherness. He saw the natural conclusion to the globalist orthodoxy in conflict, competition and hostility, as citizens sought to defend the unity and status they had once held<sup>388</sup>.

While the Front National's electoral fortunes have increased as the political resonance of issues of identity and cultural traditions have gained traction, since becoming leader in 2011, Marine Le Pen has also attempted to 'modernise' her father's Party, expelling anti-Semitic members and announcing the birth of a new Front National.<sup>389</sup> This has allowed her to appeal to new groups previously unreachable to the 'toxic' party of the past; however nostalgic narratives continue to remain a predominant aspect within its messaging.

For example, in the de-industrialising region of Nord-Pas-De-Calais, Marine Le Pen invoked industrial nostalgia, arguing borders must be closed if France is to protect its industrial heritage.<sup>390</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, she has also historically employed a form of 'rural' nostalgia, declaring, "the French soul is intrinsically peasant. Our countryside is immensely rich, and this is where the best of France's civilization is perpetuated".<sup>391</sup> These tropes have been hugely successful and speak to high levels of apprehension held amongst Front National voters towards life today and what the future will bring. Surveys reveal such voters are 25 per cent more likely than the general population to feel ill at ease with the present<sup>392</sup>, 94 per cent believe France is in decline, of which 47 per cent believe to be irreversible<sup>393</sup>, and 91 per cent indicate they personally are increasingly guided by the values of the past.<sup>394</sup>

One consequence of the growing pessimism about the state of contemporary France has been the renewed interest of its politicians and its people with national history and heritage, and the development of a French consensus ‘position’ on various historical events through the establishment of the *lois mémorielles*. Over two decades from 1990, French governments sought to define the nation’s history, through passing laws that set out clear, definitive positions around the past and the acceptable form of historical remembrance, including the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, and France’s colonial history<sup>395</sup>. While this particular trend, mired in controversy, eventually lost its political appeal, it had centred public attention on the question of France’s comparative present, and the fixation on the nation’s historical path only continued to grow as citizens’ dissatisfaction with contemporary life solidified. In 2013, an editorial in *Les Echos* pronounced that, ‘Decline is all we have left’<sup>396</sup>.

## Nostalgia in French Political Culture

To better understand the role that nostalgia is playing in contemporary French political culture, we sought the perspectives of leading commentators, researchers and political staffers on the dynamic interactions between the rhetoric of the past and the future. One leading progressive political commentator noted that recent decades have seen clear advances on economic, social and political levels, but also, with the end of the Cold War, in geopolitical terms.

*Each generation of citizen had the clear feeling that they will be wealthier than their parents. Therefore, there was a sort of comfortable belief in a clear and secured international political context and a daily perception of the improvement in social and economical conditions.*

They argue that after 9-11 and the launch of the ‘War on Terror’ in 2001, however, new amorphous threats began to emerge, with insecurities compounded after the global financial crisis and the start of a new global economic order.

*The two main pillars that held the political and economical situation had failed: a confused and thrilling geopolitical context, and an economical crisis never seen before, where guarantees of an ever-increasing wealth were over.*

Other political analysts agreed that citizens’ feeling of risk exposure had increased enormously over recent years, and the abundance of perceived threats

and the growth of a hyper-information environment means that the past, in hindsight, now appears more ‘homogenous’.

*Factors such as the intensification of competition due to globalisation, the emergence of alternative models challenging western democracies and the so-perceived loss of international relevance of the latter, the environmental and the economic crisis make citizens worry about the future. Basically, citizens think that the future will be worse than the present. In this context, the past seems more homogeneous, a moment when people were less exposed to so many kinds of risks.*

When asked to consider the role that politics and the media have played in cultivating such anxieties, the majority of our interviewees felt that both industries had been too cynical in harnessing citizens’ anxieties, whether for commercial reasons or electoral gains.

*[The] media are too often playing with fears, in particular concerning the cultural, economical and security threats to our society...Politicians, in particular [the] extreme-right and populists, follow these fears...and try to obtain electoral success from these fears.*

*In order to pass some hard reforms, politicians (reinforced by the analysis of the media) play the ‘catastrophe’ card too often, creating a bleak image of the future. The impression that there is no-alternative to welfare state reform makes citizens feel anxious about the future.*

However, one political commentator questioned the supreme influence of the media and politics, and rather felt that the issue rather lay in the lack of understanding between citizens’ genuine concerns and the concerns of the media-political establishment.

*Maybe politicians and media haven’t done anything ‘wrong’ per se, only that their projects and vision of the future doesn’t correspond with the vision of citizens.*

When asked if it was more difficult to unite contemporary French society than in the past, some interviewees explained that the gulf of mistrust between politicians and citizens stood as a fundamental obstacle. Others felt that social dynamics have become more complex, and therefore difficult to find common ground around which to harness a cohesive national sentiment.

*Today societies are much more complex, and with a stronger degree of self-*

*consciousness than before; hence it is [more] difficult to unite a country only on 'patriotic' values as it was in the past. Unfortunately, the only way to unite a country seems to be against an enemy. The big challenge is...to unite our countries on the values we acquired in the 'wealthy' decades, in particular being proud of the advances [we have made] in social and civil rights, and in the defence of democratic societies.*

*Due to the dynamics of globalisation and democratisation, together with the emergence of social media, the idea of uniting a country around a shared identity seems more difficult. Having said that, concepts such as 'shared identity' and 'unity' are idealisations, just like the perception of a homogeneous past. New structural configurations have always come with new challenges.*

When asked if the recent pace of change had been too accelerated for citizens to bear, many interviewees rejected the notion of change being associated with speed as a 'false narrative'. They explained that change is an inevitable part of life, and change itself carried no inherent positive or negative connotations. However, one progressive political figure suggested that the national narrative was more important than the changes taking place beneath it:

*The main problem is not the pace, but the trend: if changes are towards improving conditions, they are welcomed; if they are toward a less secure society, the lack of protection felt by citizens makes them fear the future.*

Implored to consider how politicians could make French citizens more comfortable with embracing change in the future, one political commentator said more work was needed to determine the myriad contributing factors to shape the rejection of change, and how these could and should be digested by a political class that often sees the world through fundamentally different prisms.

*Either we consider that change is positive per se, and people reject it because fear or misinformation, or because of missing values, or because we consider they lack intelligence, or because they lack pedagogy and education. Or we consider that the rejection of such change is based on the quality of the change we are talking about.*

Other interviewees agreed that understanding was critical, but also emphasised the important role of political communication and offering a genuine, comprehensive and radical vision for the future.

*Politicians need to be able to imagine new answers to problems we're experiencing... This needs a large [amount of] pedagogical work, by explaining*

*that politics...can give dynamic solutions to protect them from a social and economic point of view.*

*The best way to make people feel confident is by creating the conditions for a desirable new economic and social model worth fighting for.*

# Nostalgia in the 2017 French Election

Nostalgia was endemic in the 2017 Presidential election campaign in France, with the legacy of Charles de Gaulle, who had stepped down as President in 1969, especially dominant. *Libération* magazine described the obsessive focus on De Gaulle as “the fetish of presidential candidates”, adding that he was being invoked at an unprecedented level.<sup>397</sup> For example, far-Left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon promised to pay his own electricity bills if he were voted into the Elysée Palace, just as De Gaulle had done.<sup>398</sup> Marine Le Pen defended her vision of the French economy by calling it “the vision of De Gaulle”.<sup>399</sup> And Emmanuel Macron shared a video of De Gaulle explaining France is neither Right nor Left – implying De Gaulle shared much in common with Macron himself.<sup>400</sup>

Although Macron, Le Pen and Mélenchon all referred to the symbols of the Republic and the values of France, they each had a distinct approach to nostalgia in their campaigns. Le Pen invoked an apocalyptic nostalgia, emphasising that France’s cultural heritage was under threat, and time was running out to save it. Mélenchon sketched a hopeful vision of the future, but also referenced the history of working-class struggle and the French values that were being lost to “Anglo-Saxon culture”. Finally, Macron, despite his celebrations of the images of the Republic, urged the French to embrace the future, or be left behind.

The contrast between Mélenchon, Le Pen and Macron was clearest in the February weekend when all three candidates launched their campaigns in the city of Lyon.<sup>401</sup> Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party, La France Insoumise, had amassed a large following of young, enthusiastic supporters. Although Mélenchon’s speeches are certainly populist (“Down with the Presidential monarchy! Don’t let the fabulists out there deceive you!”), they swing violently between the future and the past. For example, in campaign interviews and debates, he often referred to “the happy days ahead” and “the shared future that we must build”<sup>402</sup>, and his campaign events often employed futuristic technologies such as holograms, to address several crowds simultaneously<sup>403</sup> - a bid to demonstrate that his party was on the side of progress, unlike his other fringe rival, Marine Le Pen<sup>404</sup>.

At the same time, Mélenchon presented his policy platform as a chance to salvage “traditional French values such as love and harmony” from “the Anglo-Saxon domination”.<sup>405</sup> He also regularly referenced the French Revolution in

describing a powerful agitation for change, remarking, “Yes, there are thousands of red flags at the Bastille again...Yes, we are very dangerous”.<sup>406</sup> After a long speech about the future that would be forged, his launch event ended on a nostalgic note, leading the crowd in a rendition of *Le Chant des Canuts*, a folk song from 1894 about the dispossessed silk workers of Lyon, which roughly translates as, “We are the *canuts*, we don’t have any clothes. To govern, one needs mantles and ribbons on one’s back. We will weave them for you, Lords of the Earth [...] But our reign will begin when yours will end”.<sup>407</sup>

The same day, in the same city, Marine Le Pen delivered a speech tapping into a different type of nostalgia, presenting the elections as an epoch-defining moment that would determine whether France would continue to exist as a liberated, prosperous nation. “The question is simple,” she said. “Will our children continue to live in a free, independent, democratic country? [...] Will they be able to live like we did, and our parents before us?”<sup>408</sup> Le Pen presented herself as the candidate who would protect France’s cultural heritage (“our thousand-year-old country”) from global capitalism and mass immigration, which would “destroy the values France is built on”.<sup>409</sup>

To achieve this, Le Pen argued, France must leave the Euro and reconsider EU membership, returning the nation to its sovereign independence of the past. The Government must also expel all foreigners suspected of terrorism, raise import taxes and hold a referendum on limiting social services to French citizens only.<sup>410</sup> These proposals were shrouded in a lyrical, nostalgic nationalism: “France is an act of love and that love has a name: patriotism. It is what makes our hearts beat in unison when the Marseillaise sounds or when our national colours wave in the breeze of history”. Finally, Le Pen cited French writer Victor Hugo, who wrote after the Franco-Prussian War: “We are not done being French yet”.

By contrast, candidate Emmanuel Macron’s campaign launch urged citizens to throw off the shackles of the past and all its disappointments, and to move bravely into the future. He offered a new movement, *En Marche!*, which translates roughly as ‘Forward!’ or ‘Onward!’, and promised a new type of politics that would break free from the constraints of traditional party politics. Nonetheless, particularly striking about Macron’s centrist positioning was his choice to balance a defiant embrace of modernity with a recognition of the importance of patriotic symbols and national pride. Addressing the crowd in Lyon, Macron said, “We are here today, brought together by that unique fervour, the love of our country. [...] We pursue the same ambition of bringing France into the new century, bringing with us our values and our history.”<sup>411</sup>

Macron spoke of rejecting the established order and throwing out the rulebook,

of forging a collective future for a country that had lost its way, and “retrieving the progress that unites us”. He promised to ensure that every citizen found a place in the new France,<sup>412</sup> as the country faced up to its “historical challenge”.<sup>413</sup> Addressing the issue of nostalgia directly, Macron branded Le Pen a defeatist – a “ventriloquist” who claimed to speak for the people, but instead could only invoke “a France that never existed”. Challenging her argument that France should be remade in the image of its past, Macron declared, “Together we say to them, to those who believe in nothing anymore...that the best is yet to come, that the best belongs to us.”<sup>414</sup>

In the televised debates held prior to the final vote, Le Pen’s nationalist nostalgia and Macron’s anti-nostalgia met head-to-head in heated and often uncivil contest, as both sides wrestled to declare themselves to be the true patriot.<sup>415</sup> Upon his victory, Macron brought his particular marriage of the past and the future with him to his Presidency. In his official Presidential portrait, Macron stands in front of a desk fenestrated with a range of powerful symbols, with De Gaulle’s memoirs and a figure of the French rooster sitting alongside two iPhones, stacked on top of one another.<sup>416</sup>

# Citizens' Voices - France

The focus groups conducted in France for this project spanned a variety of regions, each with a distinct economic, social and historical profile manifest in their unique political voting patterns. We particularly focused on communities in the immigration-sensitive South, including cities such as Marseille and Nice, the de-industrialised North-East, including cities such as Lille, and both deprived and affluent areas in Paris, as well as its surrounds, including cities like Beauvais. Each of these areas typically holds different traditional political predilections, although they have undergone some shifts over recent years as fringe and insurgent parties have become increasingly dominant.

Overall, we observed a relatively consistent suite of themes across these geographies, with some topics especially dominant in particular places – for example, the issue of integration in Marseille. Where especially relevant, a number of regional profiles are provided to contextualise the local environment in which the focus groups took place.

## The Economy

Over recent decades, the French economy has moved away from manufacturing and towards a greater share of service industry employment. Between 1975 and 2015, the proportion of manufacturing jobs in the wider economy roughly halved<sup>417</sup> - contributing to the nation's economic polarisation, with growth in both the high-skill and the lower-skill segments, coinciding with a decline in middle-rung occupations.<sup>418</sup> The growth of new technologies has been especially instrumental in encouraging polarisation, with French studies suggesting they have tended to increase the proportion of managerial employment at the cost of office and retail workers, as well as of blue-collar workers in manufacturing.<sup>419</sup> Other studies have found that technological change in France has driven blue-collar workers away from routine jobs and into service jobs or unemployment.<sup>420</sup>

While the National Statistics Office estimates that the decline of industry is largely explained by domestic factors, it is clear that globalisation has exacerbated the upheaval. Factors related to globalisation are thought to explain between 13 and 40 per cent of job losses in manufacturing in France, as French factories either move offshore or go out of business, unable to compete with production in low-wage countries.<sup>421</sup> In an economic climate marked by crisis and unemployment, the French have come to favour economic protectionism. One opinion poll found that 65 per cent of the population opposed further

Free Trade Agreements, with the largest group in favour of instituting more protectionist policies.<sup>422</sup> Blue-collar workers are especially critical of free trade.<sup>423</sup>

Before the global financial crisis, in 2006, 50 per cent of the population felt France was able to compete in the global economy. By the start of the Hollande presidency, however, in 2013, this number had fallen to 27 per cent.<sup>424</sup> A different survey found that for 60 per cent of the population, the word 'globalisation' had a negative connotation.<sup>425</sup> In Demos' own research<sup>426</sup>, we found that the French were considerably more likely than the British, German, Swedish, Polish or Spanish to hold unfavourable views of globalisation.

- ***[At Renault], they showed 700 employees the door in order to relocate to Romania. People there will work for 300 euros, how could we ever compete with that?***

*Ils ont décidé de mettre 700 personnes la porte pour aller s'installer en Roumanie, comment peut rivaliser avec ces gens là ? Travailler pour 300 €.*

As in Great Britain, the structural changes that have taken place in the labour market over recent decades were a source of acute personal anxiety for many of the participants in our French focus groups. It was clear that citizens identified that change had particularly disadvantaged the working classes, in favour of those able to participate in a service-oriented economy, reducing opportunities and fostering a sense of precariousness, while also trapping many workers in undesirable employment conditions.

- ***The position of the French is essentially linked to the economic position of France.***

*La position des Français est essentiellement liée à la position économique de la France.*

- ***It used to be the case that manual work was valued, there were a lot of apprenticeships, you could learn a trade and gain experience, and if it did not suit you, you could find another trade easily enough.***

*Avant, du travail manuel n'était pas dénigré ; il y avait beaucoup d'apprentis, le métier s'apprenait et on arrivait à avoir de l'expérience, on apprenait son métier, si ça n'allait pas on changeait de métier et on allait faire encore de l'apprentissage chez un autre ; et ça pouvait se faire assez facilement.*

- ***It has really changed, the escalator [of social mobility] has broken down.***  
*Ca a vraiment changé, c'est l'ascenseur social qui est en panne.*

Among the most worrying trends was the perceived barriers to accessing both secure and flexible professional opportunities in an environment marked by scarcity. Moreover, the sense of a double retrenchment of professional careers – with the younger generation facing delayed entry into the labour market, and simultaneously, workers over 50 struggling to maintain their appeal to employers.

The French labour market has historically been renowned for offering strong worker protections, generous holidays and ample health benefits.<sup>427</sup> Labour protections for those on a long-term contract (a CDI, or *Contract du Duration Indeterminée*) have persisted, at least partly due to the uncompromising stance of unions.<sup>428</sup> Provisions for job-seekers, such as unemployment benefits and training, are also relatively generous compared to other European countries. At 2.98 per cent of GDP, France has spent almost twice as much as Germany on its labour market policies over recent years.<sup>429</sup>

However, more precarious forms of employment are on the rise, with three-quarters of new contracts issued only for a fixed term.<sup>430</sup> Moreover, only a minority of these jobs are likely to lead to more stable employment, with the percentage of short-term jobs leading to CDIs dwindling from 62 to 25 per cent over the past three decades.<sup>431</sup> Meanwhile, unemployment remains high.<sup>432</sup> The result is a dual labour market, comprising those holding secure jobs, enjoying the protections embedded in the CDI contract, and also many people, especially the young and manual workers, who find themselves in short-term, insecure contracts, often renewed monthly with the same employer.<sup>433</sup> President Macron's labour reforms introduced in the Autumn of 2017 aimed to promote open-ended (CDI) contracts by making it easier to terminate the contract and capping unfair dismissal compensation, making the CDI less of a risk to employers.<sup>434</sup>

- *I have a friend who was fired after 20 years of hard work. She was 50, and tried to find another job. It was impossible.*  
*J'ai une amie qui est au chômage et qui a été licenciée après 20 ans de commerce; elle a été licenciée et elle essayait de trouver, à 50 ans, du travail: impossible.*
- *Nowadays, [to get a job] you have to have these diplomas. You have to be able to do lots of different things.*  
*Maintenant il faut être diplômé, il faut être très polyvalent.*
- *When I was 30, I applied to get promoted and the DHR said to me 'but you are too young!', and I told him: in this company, in all cases, you are too young until the day you become too old.*

*J'ai prétendu à un poste de directeur [...] J'ai été convoqué par le directeur des ressources humaines qui m'a dit : « Mais vous êtes trop jeune ! » Je ne devais pas avoir 30 ans. Et là, je lui dis : « Oui, mais de toute façon, dans ce groupe, on est trop jeune jusqu'au jour où on devient trop vieux ». Et c'était tout à fait ça.*

- *I worked in the catering business, and when I was leaving a position, the day after I had another one, and we were making a good amount of money.*

*Dans mon travail qui est dans la restauration, je changeais aujourd'hui et demain j'avais un travail. Pour gagner plus ; et on gagnait bien notre vie.*

- *In the past, things were quite straightforward. You negotiated a position, if it went wrong you could go to the restaurant just in front because there were vacancies everywhere. Now we are not even paid sometimes, and we have to work, and to work, and on top of that you are not even respected because we are only interested in making profits and good margins.*

*Avant, on négociait, si ça n'allait pas on partait, on allait voir le restaurant d'en-face parce qu'il y avait du travail. Maintenant, on n'est pas payé, les gens font des heures, on en fait, on en fait énormément, et on n'est plus du tout considéré, parce qu'il faut faire du profit.*

- *Currently, what I say to the next generation: you are employed [now], but always seek employment, because the day you lose it, people don't know you anymore. People don't know you when you are unemployed.*

*Actuellement, c'est ce que je dis aux jeunes : vous avez du boulot, mais cherchez du travail, parce que le jour où vous n'en aurez plus, on ne vous connaît plus.*

- *I have a 28-year-old son who is unemployed, who did a two-year master's degree. In our day, you would quit a job on Friday and you would have a new one on Monday; therefore, we did not have this worry.*

*Moi j'ai un fils de 28 ans qui est au chômage, qui a un Master 2 [...] autrefois on quittait un boulot le vendredi et le lundi on avait un autre boulot ; donc, on n'avait pas cette inquiétude.*

- *There used to be work for everyone.*

*Il y avait du travail pour tout le monde.*

The fragmentation of France's labour market was exacerbated by the global financial crisis. Initially, the crisis did not hit the country as profoundly as in countries such as Spain, probably because of French labour protections.<sup>435</sup> But France has been slow to recover, and unemployment rates remain significantly

above the Eurozone average, particularly for young people. According to Eurostat data, unemployment is twice as high as in the UK and almost three times as high as in Germany, with almost a quarter of under-25s remaining unemployed.<sup>436</sup> Moreover, many find themselves unable to work as much as they would like – compelled to be self-employed when they would rather be working for an employer, or working part-time when they wish to be full-time. Of those on non-traditional contracts, only a fifth are in continuous, full-time employment.<sup>437</sup>

Many of our participants, particularly those on the outskirts of Paris, explained the impact of the financial crisis on their young adult children, who had been forced to return to their home, unable to afford to live independently. They observed an acute level of generational inequality, and felt a sense of failure that they would be unable to help their children to seize the same standard of life and opportunities for social mobility as they themselves had experienced.

- *There is a social crisis. It is a money crisis. They stay a long time with their parents, or they come back, until an age where it isn't normal. That's the crisis.*

*On est dans une crise sociale, une crise d'argent ; donc il y a des enfants qui vont rester extrêmement tard chez les parents ou qui vont revenir à un âge où ça n'est pas normal ; c'est la crise!*

- *In our day, this phenomenon of older children coming back to live with their parents did not exist. When you left, you left!*

*Le phénomène des retours tardifs d'enfants chez les parents n'existait pas ! Quand on était parti, on était parti !*

- *When I was 20 years old I said to myself, if I keep my job as long as I can,*

*I will be fine. I don't think my children, who are now 30-40 years old, can afford to say things like that.*

*Moi, quand j'avais 20 ans, je me disais : je garde mon travail maintenant et plus je serai peinarde, je serai tranquille. Je ne pense pas que mes fils maintenant, qui ont entre 40 et 30 ans, puissent dire la même chose.*

- *The young people nowadays, they can only get short-term, insecure contracts [CDD], and no assurances for the future. In the past, if you wanted to work, you would have a good contract straight away.*

*Les jeunes de maintenant ne trouvent pas de CDI, ils ont des CDD, donc pas de sécurité pour l'avenir. Avant on commençait, à travailler on avait un CDI*

However, there was also a feeling that such financial precariousness is not limited to the younger generations, and is becoming increasingly widespread across the population. Participants spoke extensively about the 'squeeze' on the middle classes, who fall between the comfortably affluent and the truly impoverished, who are supported by the state.

- *I think before, the middle class was really a middle class, but now it is impoverished.*  
*Je pense que la classe moyenne avant c'était une classe moyenne, mais maintenant elle s'appauvrit.*
- *If you see people making minimum wage and they have rents to pay in the vicinity of 800 or 700 euros, especially in Paris and the big cities, and then what do you have left to live off? 300 euros!*  
*C'est dû à quoi ? Aussi à la crise de l'immobilier ! Quand vous voyez des gens qui gagnent le Smic et qui ont des loyers à payer, en région parisienne ou dans les villes, de l'ordre de 800 ou 700 euros, qu'est-ce qui leur reste pour vivre : 300 euros !*
- *It is part of the misery right now, the houses, the price of houses [...] a couple that works cannot even necessarily find a place to live.*  
*Ce qui fait un peu la misère actuellement, c'est l'immobilier, le prix de l'immobilier [...] un couple qui travaille, et qui n'a pas toujours le revenu nécessaire pour avoir une location.*
- *40 years ago, you had the political class, which was very rich. You had the poor class, and then you had the middle-class, which was managing to keep the country turning because everyone was getting some kind of share of the cake. There was a kind of a flux. Now, there is another kind of flux: the poor have quite a lot of advantages, rich have enormous advantages because they manage not to pay back [into society], and in the middle, you have the middle-class that pays for everyone.*  
*Il y avait la classe politique qui était riche, celle qui était pauvre, et il y avait une classe moyenne et qui arrivait à faire vivre le pays, parce que c'est la classe moyenne qui fait vivre le pays et qui était assez complaisante ; et ça se partageait bien. On va dire qu'il y avait une espèce de flux. Maintenant, il y a un flux : les pauvres ont pas mal d'avantages, pare que tous ceux qui sont des aides sociales ont énormément d'avantages, les riches ont énormément d'avantages parce qu'ils arrivent à ne pas payer, et au milieu, on a toute la classe moyenne qui paie pour tout le monde.*

- *The poor get help [from the Government] and the rich are rich, but the middle classes...*  
*Les pauvres ont des aides, et les riches sont riches, mais la classe moyenne...*
- *We are going back to a medieval system, with a noble class and a class of paupers.*  
*On va revenir comme au Moyen Age: il y avait les nobles et le peuple.*

Participants observed that those seeking 'honest work' are striving for dignity and respect in a marketplace geared to reward complete inactivity, and disincentivise part-time and lower-paid employees. This creates the impression of a system encouraging double standards, and stokes negative attitudes towards welfare recipients as 'free riders'.

Recent polls show large majorities (84 per cent) of French citizens favouring an overhaul of the unemployment benefit system and more stringent controls on the unemployed.<sup>438</sup> Some 43 per cent of citizens feel employment benefits should be lowered so as to incentivise people to find work, however, an equal percentage feel it would be wrong to do so.<sup>439</sup> Academic studies have long found that the material difference between receiving benefits and a hold a minimum-wage job is small in France – particularly frustrating for those who cannot work full-time, for instance, because of children or other caring duties.<sup>440</sup> Successive French governments have attempted to tackle this problem, but the effects on jobseekers have not been studied well.<sup>441</sup>

Some features of the welfare and benefit system may contribute to the impression of a lenient institutional structure. When an employee is terminated from their job in France, they are still entitled to 67 per cent of their last wage for a period of two years, or three if they are close to the retirement age – an unusually long period.<sup>442</sup> In the first year on unemployment benefits, jobseekers are only obliged to take a job which pays at least 85 per cent of their last salary. They can also reject one such job offer without repercussions. The IMF writes, "While benefit recipients are required to conduct an active job search, this condition is not always strictly enforced for either welfare or unemployment benefits."<sup>443</sup> For high earners, the unemployment benefits can total more than 7000 euros per month.<sup>444</sup> The Macron Government has cited these extreme examples as a reason to bring the unemployment scheme under stricter state control, and to reinforce existing restrictions on those receiving benefits.<sup>445</sup>

- *Right now, it is actually better to be unemployed than to work, because if you are unemployed, you are entitled to more. I have employees right*

***now who work part-time because they have kids, and they get a miserable wage. Taking home only 800 euros per month, I call that miserable. They have no rights at all!***

*Donc, actuellement, il vaut mieux être au chômage qu'aller travailler, parce qu'en étant au chômage, on a beaucoup plus de droits qu'en travaillant. Moi, j'ai des employées actuellement, elles travaillent à mi-temps parce qu'elles ont des enfants, elles touchent une misère ; j'appelle ça une misère quand on touche 800 euros par mois. Elles n'ont aucun droit, mais aucun!*

- ***People prefer to stay unemployed, because they can either work for 1,100 or 1,200, or be on benefits for 1,300 or 1,400.***

*On préfère rester au chômage plutôt que d'aller travailler, et c'est une logique : on va te donner 1.100 ou 1.200 euros pour travailler à plein temps et le gars au chômage il va prendre 1.300 ou 1.400.*

- ***If you are unemployed you get help, you get plenty of rights because you are job seeking: we help you to pay the rent, we help you to pay the electricity... but when you work, then you don't get help for anything.***

*Qui est au chômage, il a des droits parce que, étant au chômage, c'est pris en compte : on vous aide pour payer le loyer, pour payer l'électricité... Alors que quand vous travaillez, on vous aide pour rien.*

- ***30 years ago, the mentality was different. It was shameful to be unemployed. Now we are happy about it and we take advantage of it.***

*Il y avait une mentalité, il y a 35 ans, quand on était au chômage on avait honte d'être au chômage. Maintenant, on est content et on profite du système.*

- ***But with the salaries as they are, if I ask someone to come work for me for 1000 euros, they say to me: I am a jobseeker and I make twice that amount.***

*Mais avec les salaires qu'on propose, quand on propose 1000 euros pour venir travailler, on me dit : moi je suis au chômage et j'en gagne deux fois plus.*

## Education

A theme discussed at considerable length in the French fieldwork, in the particular context of the labour market, was the state of the education system, with participants highly critical of its 'dysfunctional' current structure, the emphasis it places on certain capabilities and subjects, and its perceived disengagement with the needs of businesses. Many participants were incensed at what they perceived to be an over-emphasis on university education as the

singular pathway to employment success, meaning the barriers to entry to work from vocational education are growing significantly higher. At the same time, university education was frequently condemned for offering a superficial level of studies at the expense of basic, foundational learning and broader adult life skills.

Promoting vocational education and apprenticeships in order to tackle youth unemployment has stood as a policy priority for the previous several French governments.<sup>446</sup> At 15.6 per cent, France has high rates of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), compared to Germany and the UK.<sup>447</sup> A 2013 study found that 85 per cent of NEETs in France had not studied beyond secondary school.<sup>448</sup>

The vocational education system offers two different routes to a qualification: either a school-based, vocational learning programme, or on-the-job apprenticeships with part-time schooling.<sup>449</sup> To some degree, efforts to boost apprenticeships have been successful: the amount of vocational degrees and apprenticeships has almost doubled since 1992.<sup>450</sup> However, outcomes in terms of numerical and literacy skills remain poor<sup>451</sup>, and overall numbers of apprentices still lag behind traditional apprenticeship countries such as Germany. Half of all young Germans take a vocational path, compared to only a quarter of French people.<sup>452</sup>

Even though employment outcomes for those who have completed vocational training tend to be quite good, especially for on-the-job apprenticeships, vocational training still has an image problem, with many families seeing it as a sub-par option for their child.<sup>453</sup> Now once again, President Macron is promising a system overhaul for apprenticeships, to reduce stigma and boost employment.<sup>454</sup>

- *In France [now] you need to have a diploma and twenty years of experience and otherwise it is “no, sorry”.*  
*Et en France [maintenant], il faut être diplômé et avoir 20 ans d’expérience, sinon c’est « non désolé »*
- *My father worked his whole life at Citroën. He [...] came in as nothing, and I saw him go through all this education and training and he left as an engineer. That was possible then.*  
*Mon père il a fait toute sa carrière chez Citroën, [...] au debut il n’était rien, j’ai vu mon père passer des formations des diplômes, il est sorti ingénieur que chez Citroën, à cette époque, on pouvait le faire.*

- ***We used to have about 15 per cent children of manual workers at university, but now it is more like 5 per cent.***  
*A l'université, il y avait 10 à 15 % de fils d'ouvriers, mais aujourd'hui ça doit être 5 %*
- ***But then we switched to a policy where everyone had to be highly educated, because we had to have an elite education. And so people get the bac, but they don't know how to do anything.***  
*Il y a eu une politique où on a eu besoin de bacheliers parce qu'il fallait qu'on ait une élite d'éducation, donc, ils sont partis avec leur bac, mais ils ne savaient rien faire.*
- ***Back in the day, people learned the basics: reading, writing, calculus, arithmetic, simple things! Mental arithmetic. Vendors never used to have calculators, but just a pencil behind the ear. Mental arithmetic, simple things we have lost.***  
*Ils maîtrisaient les fondamentaux : lecture, écriture, calcul, arithmétique, des trucs simples ! Calcul mental... Les commerçants n'avaient pas de calculatrice au marché, ils avaient le crayon sur l'oreille... Du calcul mental, des trucs tout bêtes qu'on a perdus.*

Declining standards of education were also highlighted as contributing to a lowering of social standards and an entire generation coming of age without an appreciation of the need for discipline. Participants in our focus groups offered a vision of 'shared responsibility' amongst families, schools and the community, but observed that each tend to blame the other for the delegation of accountability. They consider a dangerous and self-destructive cycle has emerged, in which parents eschew responsibility to teachers, teachers pass their responsibility to the state, and the state tightens budgets and asks for parents to absorb the ultimate burden of shaping children's character.

- ***What made your education before was the fact that everyone was rowing in the same direction. You learned how to behave with the baker; you learned it from your neighbour. Everyone was throwing in their two cents. Now, even teachers cannot say all they want.***  
*Quand tout le monde mettait son grain de sel c'est ce qui faisait l'éducation. On l'apprenait du boulanger, on l'apprenait du voisin et chacun apportait sa petite graine. C'est ce qui faisait que nous devenions ce que nous sommes devenus. Maintenant, même les instituteurs n'ont plus le droit de dire quoique soit.*
- ***Teachers are almost forced to do the job of parents. This means that they***

*don't reach the end of the curriculum because they spend all the time on discipline and good manners.*

*Les instituteurs sont presque obligés de faire l'éducation à la place des parents, ce qui fait que dans le programme ils n'arrivent pas jusqu'au bout parce qu'ils passent leur temps sur la discipline et les règles de vie.*

- *There is a law forbidding a child to get spanked. We don't even have the right to spank our own children: where is the limit?*

*Il y a une loi sur la fessée, on n'a plus le droit de donner une fessée à son propre fils : c'est quoi la limite ?*

- *I used to work as a nursery assistant and some mums used to arrive and tell me "So, are you handing me over a clean child?". But that's not my role.*

*Je travaillais en crèche comme auxiliaire et des mamans arrivaient et disaient « alors, tu me l'a rendu propre mon enfant ? ». Mais ce n'est pas mon rôle.*

- *Children are raising themselves.*

*Les enfants s'élèvent tout seuls.*

- *Local educators are aware of which young people in the neighbourhood are carrying knives but they don't report it. The Mayor told me: "If educators start reporting it, there wouldn't be trust between them and the youth anymore". I mean, when you have the Mayor itself telling you that, you lose any hope.*

*Les éducateurs sont au courant dans le quartier des jeunes qui portent des armes blanches mais ils ne font aucun signalement. Le Maire m'a dit : « si les éducateurs font des signalements il n'y aura plus de confiance entre eux et les jeunes » ; alors quand vous avez le Maire de votre arrondissement qui vous dit ça, vous ne croyez plus à rien.*

- *All problems were handled within the family: if you had insulted the teacher, you took a slap and you went to bed.*

*Tous les problèmes se réglaient en famille : tu avais insulté le professeur tu prenais une claque et tu allais te coucher.*

- *You need to know that in our national educational system, when you have a high rate of absenteeism, you need to declare it to the rectorate, which has to report it, and parents need to be brought in and fined. But we never do it, because it means too much work for the educational centre.*

*Il faut savoir que dans l'éducation nationale quand il y a un taux d'absentéisme on doit le déclarer au rectorat qui doit faire un signalement et les parents doivent être convoqués et là il y a une amende. Mais ça ne se fait jamais parce que c'est trop de travail pour l'établissement.*

Finally, the introduction of the Euro was also frequently mentioned as a turning point in France's economic destiny, both in terms of the nation's sovereignty, but also the practical consequences for citizens' purchasing power. Many felt they had 'become poorer' with the removal of their national currency, and cited myriad examples of rising consumer prices; equally strong, however, was the sense of the Euro having symbolised the end of France's "great era".

## **The Nation**

The focus groups we have conducted in France suggest that the French hold a considerably greater active consciousness of 'the nation' and its trajectory than their counterparts in other Western European countries. There was a very clear sense that the nation is in decline, both in terms of its internal functioning and its capacity to wield global power and influence.

On an internal level, participants observed that French society is undergoing a transformation towards becoming, in their perception, increasingly riven by greed, mistrust and resentment. These developments have undermined social cohesion and the sense of shared citizenship that should collectivise the French nation. In particular, participants frequently referred to citizens as having eschewed their consciousness and respect for civic responsibilities in favour of a sole emphasis on their individual rights.

- ***There used to be duties (devoirs) as well as rights. Now there are no duties.***  
*Moi, je vais vous dire une chose : avant, les gens avaient des devoirs et des droits ; maintenant, ils ont des droits, mais ils n'ont plus de devoirs, en fait.*
- ***Young people now talk a lot about their rights. I have a right to this and I have a right to that. But they don't recognise that they have duties as well!***  
*Les jeunes réagissent en termes de droits. « J'ai droit à, j'ai droit à », mais leurs devoirs, ça, ils ne connaissent pas!*
- ***People used to respect authority. People do not recognise hierarchies anymore.***  
*On avait plus de respect de l'autorité ! On avait plus de respect de la hiérarchie.*

In 2012, the Hollande Government published a document outlining the inherent rights and duties of French citizens.<sup>455</sup> The declaration sets out a definition of France as an indivisible, democratic, social, secular republic. Citizens have the right to be free and equal, and to be supported by the state when they are unable to support themselves. They are obligated to respect one another's freedom, and to protect the nation. Citizenship can be lost, the document warns, when citizens fail to comply with their jury or military duty.<sup>456</sup>

Peacetime military service was dropped in 1997, but young people are still obliged to register, in case they need to be conscripted in the future<sup>457</sup>.

Emmanuel Macron has vowed to reinstate a national service for all young people.<sup>458</sup> A commission is currently evaluating what form such a civil service could or should take, whether it should be compulsory and how it could be implemented.<sup>459</sup> In our focus groups, young people were particularly singled-out for their apparent lack of respect for authority, their poor manners, and their contempt for traditional standards of social order.

- ***Young people nowadays are not communicative, they have no respect for their parents, their families. Values have disappeared.***  
*Les jeunes aujourd'hui ne sont plus communicatifs, avec leurs parents leurs familles ils n'ont plus de respect, les valeurs ont disparu.*
- ***There is no more authority, the children have taken over from the parents.***  
*Aujourd'hui il n'y a plus d'autorité, l'enfant a pris le dessus sur le parent*
- ***I accompanied a friend who was walking her dog the other day, and we came across these two young boys, maybe 13 and 8 or 9 years old. They were eating packets of crisps, and they tossed the packaging on the pavement, even though the bin was one metre away. My friend said, 'Could you put it in the trash?' And they got violent! Two days later, I see the same boys eating sweets. And they were littering again, just to annoy me.***  
*J'accompagne une copine devant chez elle, elle sortait son chien, et deux petits jeunes, le plus grand devait avoir 13 ans, 9 ans et 8 ans, un paquet de chips, et en marchant, ils jettent le paquet de chips au pied d'une poubelle : la poubelle était à 1 mètre. Et ma copine dit : « tu ne peux pas le mettre dans la poubelle ? ». [...] Et il était violent ! Deux jours après, je revois le même gosse avec ses deux petits copains, et il était en train de manger des bonbons, et les bonbons il les jette par terre, exprès pour me faire chier.*

Moreover, they observed a fragmentation of communities, as France becomes a 'society of individuals' driven by material ambitions. One participant described

the meaning of life in France as “Buy, work, work to consume” (*Acheter, travailler, travailler pour consommer*). This observation is reflected in national surveys. A large majority of French citizens report feeling that society is becoming more individualist (76 per cent), that citizenship and public-mindedness are disappearing (74 per cent) and that people have become less respectful of their fellow citizens (85 per cent).<sup>460</sup>

- ***I am always nostalgic about before, I told my daughter: you don't know what it was like in my time.***  
*J'ai toujours la nostalgie avant, je dis à ma fille tu n'as pas connu mon époque à moi.*
- ***We don't have solidarity and brotherhood anymore.***  
*Il n'y a plus de solidarité et de fraternité*
- ***I am nostalgic for the France before. When I see the change, it scares me - we live in a violent society, more and more violent; before there was a humanity of gentleness, people loved each other more, there were links between families, but all that we lost.***  
*Je suis nostalgique de la France d'avant. Quand je vois le changement ça me fait peur - on vit dans une société violente, de plus en plus violente; avant il y avait quand même de l'humanité de la douceur, les gens s'aimaient davantage, il y avait des liens entre les familles, mais tout ça on la perdu.*
- ***In a village, in the past, everyone would know each other. Now you live in an apartment block and you do not know your own neighbour. It's a situation of frenzied individualism.***  
*Dans un village, avant, tout le monde connaissait tout le monde. Aujourd'hui, vous êtes dans un immeuble, vous ne connaissez pas votre voisin de palier ! En fait, on est dans une situation d'individualisme forcené.*
- ***There used to be a community in which people could meet. But now that's completely exploded and we only have small groups, tiny groups, on Left and Right.***  
*Il y avait une communauté, en fait, dans laquelle les gens se retrouvaient. Aujourd'hui, cette communauté a complètement éclaté ; il y a des groupes, pour ne pas dire des groupuscules, à droite ou à gauche...*
- ***It is the power of money that ruins the earth [the environment], which ruins values, which ruins everything.***  
*Le pouvoir de l'argent qui détruit la terre qui détruit les valeurs qui détruit tout*

- *30 years ago, football players always sang The Marseillaise [national anthem]. Nowadays they just receive millions and they feel they don't have to sing anymore.*  
*Il y a 30 ans, les joueurs de foot, ils chantaient tous la Marseillaise.*  
*Maintenant, ils sont payés des millions...*
  
- *If you ask an 8-year-old what they want to be when they grow up, and they say they want to be a commodities trader, because they make millions and millions. They could be carpenters or craftspeople but they want to be bankers and footballers. It is all about the money. That's it, money, money, money. Everything is for sale, everything is commodified.*  
*Vous demandez à un gamin de 8 ans « qu'est-ce que tu veux faire plus tard ? » , « Je veux faire trader », parce qu'il a vu que les traders ils gagnaient des millions et des millions. Il pourrait être menuisier et faire un métier d'art, mais « je veux être banquier ou je veux être footballeur ». Pourquoi ? Un petit gringalet: « Parce que ça rapporte ! » C'est ça : c'est l'argent, l'argent ! On vend tout : tout est marchandisé. La marchandisation de tout !*

Critical to the sense of community under threat is the notion that its once-central axis, the family, has itself been 'compromised' as divorce rates have increased, single-parent households have become commonplace, and a larger proportion of people choose to live alone. Again, this reflects the findings of national surveys: the perceived bulwark against such individualism in French culture and society is the family, which is still described by virtually all as the most important source of solidarity.<sup>461</sup>

The number of single-parent households in France has almost doubled since 1990, rising from 12 to 22 per cent of households with children.<sup>462</sup> Since the turn of the millennium, the divorce rate has fluctuated, with a spike in 2005, when divorce law was liberalised.<sup>463</sup> In general, divorce rates now are significantly higher than in the 1990s.<sup>464</sup> Since 1980, the raw number of divorces has gone up (from 1.5 to 1.9 couples per 1000 inhabitants), even as the number of couples getting married in a given year has declined (from 6.2 to 3.7 couples per 1000 inhabitants).<sup>465</sup>

Citizens in our focus groups speculated as to whether the breakdown of families, the microcosm of community, had contributed to the proliferation of societal dysfunction and children's disruptive behaviour, which they felt reflected a lack of guidance and discipline.

- *You have a lot of isolated mothers, and lot of divorced parents, and this makes it more difficult to have a family core. I was a teacher once and at*

*some point I had in my class 75% of pupils that didn't live with mummy and daddy. It changes everything.*

*Il y a beaucoup de mères isolées, il y a beaucoup de parents séparés ; et on parlait tout à l'heure du réseau familial, du noyau familial ; c'est vrai qu'aujourd'hui, ce n'est pas général mais c'est quand même... Moi j'étais dans une classe, quand j'étais enseignante, j'avais à un moment trois-quarts de mes élèves qui ne vivaient pas avec papa et maman ; ça change complètement.*

- *When it comes to family values, the family as a structure has imploded. You have now a lot of single-parenting, with a mum or a dad, and when it is like that is much harder to give a good education. My son was educated as I was, and when he sees a pregnant woman, or an old man or grand-mother, he has to give up his seat in the bus. It's the least you can do.*

*Sur le plan des valeurs familiales, tu as la famille qui a explosé, tu as beaucoup de familles monoparentales, avec qu'un papa ou une maman, c'est beaucoup plus dur à éduquer. Moi, j'en ai un, je l'ai éduqué comme on m'a éduqué moi. S'il a une femme enceinte, qu'il avait une mémé ou un pépé, ils devaient céder leur place; c'est la moindre des choses.*

Participants also perceived that crime was rising and the country had become less safe place to live. This is consistent with opinions in a number of other Western countries, and seems to be interlinked with a broader sense of precariousness, and concerns that social fragmentation and the erosion of tightknit communities has filled the streets with 'strangers'. It also reflects the 'activation' of crime as a key component of political messaging, galvanising a sense that decisive action must be taken – a strategy employed by Donald Trump as a Presidential candidate, with his supporters substantially more likely to believe crime in the United States was rising<sup>466</sup>.

According to French police statistics, the crime level in the country rose sharply between 1965 and 1985. It then began to fall<sup>467</sup> with the most recent statistics showing a roughly stable trend.<sup>468</sup> Some have argued, however, that police statistics do not adequately capture the level of crime, because not all crimes are reported to the police.<sup>469</sup> The large-scale victimisation survey of the National Delinquency Observatory (l'Observatoire national de la délinquance et des réponses pénales, or ONDRP), which has been running since 2006, shows roughly similar trends. Most indicators reveal a stable or downward trend<sup>470</sup>; there is, however, a slight rise in the percentage of French citizens indicating a sense of insecurity, with a fifth of the population now reporting feeling unsafe in their own area or neighbourhood.<sup>471</sup>

- *We all used to know each other, shake hands, I could leave my apartment unlocked and never get burgled.*  
*Tout le monde se connaissait tout le monde se donner un coup de main, je pouvais laisser la porte de mon appartement ouverte, je n'étais pas cambriolé.*
- *When I see the change, it scares me. We live in a violent society, more and more violent. There used to be more of a sense of gentleness, people loved each other more, there were family ties, but all that has disappeared.*  
*Quand je vois le changement ça me fait peur on vit dans une société violente, de plus en plus violente; avant il y avait quand même de l'humanité de la douceur, les gens s'aimaient davantage, il y avait des liens entre les familles, mais tout ça on la perdu.*
- *I had an accident and cars were passing by me. They saw me and opened their windows, but no one stopped.*  
*J'ai eu un accident, les voitures passaient à côté, me regardaient, ouvraient leurs carreaux, [mais] personne ne s'est arrêté.*

On a national level, more abstract insecurities manifest in an acute consciousness of France's declining international role, shifting from a colonial superpower to an individual role in a globalised economy. Until the middle of the last century, France commanded a large empire, with significant holdings in Africa and Southeast Asia,<sup>472</sup> and chief among these was Algeria. “*L'Algérie, c'est La France*”, President Francois Mitterand famously declared.<sup>473</sup> The North African country was home to over a million European settlers.<sup>474</sup> After the First World War, anti-colonial protest movements gained momentum throughout the Empire, as nationalists, reformers and trade unionists challenged the colonial status quo.<sup>475</sup> After the Second World War, president Charles de Gaulle attempted to assimilate the French colonies into the post-war Fourth Republic, which eventually sparked several bloody wars of independence.<sup>476</sup>

Resentment over the perceived ‘surrender’ of Algeria in particular has remained a powerful political force in France, and was essential to the politics of the founders of the Front National political party.<sup>477</sup> Jean-Marie Le Pen, father of 2017 Presidential Candidate Marine Le Pen, still maintains that by allowing Algeria to become independent, De Gaulle “made France smaller”.<sup>478</sup> President Emmanuel Macron, on the other hand, declared on a recent visit to Algeria that colonisation had been a crime against humanity.<sup>479</sup>

The French population is divided on how to assess and commemorate the colonial past.<sup>480</sup> Voters on the Left tend to be critical of France's imperial era, while voters of the Right tend to feel it is something to accept, or even a source

of pride.<sup>481</sup> In 2016, François Fillon condemned the education curriculum for encouraging students to feel “ashamed” about France’s colonial past, and denied that France was in any way culpable for having “wanted to share its culture” with countries around the world (*Non, La France n’est pas coupable d’avoir voulu faire partager sa culture aux peuples d’Afrique, d’Asie et d’Amérique du Nord*)<sup>482</sup>. Nevertheless, some 71 per cent of French citizens now believe that Algerian independence was a positive development for France.<sup>483</sup>

While some participants in our focus groups were relatively sanguine about the shift in France’s global standing, others felt the forces of global interconnectedness had brought new challenges to their shores, and threatened to dilute their proud French national character and heritage. Participants spoke of France as exposed, and even vulnerable to, international influence, with globalisation appearing to have accelerated the diffusion of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ language, ideas, and consumer products throughout French society. There was also an evident level of anxiety towards a more abstract sense of the ‘diminished nation’, with the perceived loss of national agency trickling down to contribute to a more personal feeling of ineffectiveness and disempowerment - particularly in discussions regarding the European Union. This can manifest in a certain level of hyperbole; when asked to describe France’s position today, some would respond: “c’est fini”.

- *Back in the day, France used to be France, we were a bit like Asterix [of the Asterix and Obelix comics, set in one Gallic village resisting the Romans], but now we follow all the global trends, we follow... In fact, we want to be globalised. The policies promote globalisation.*  
*Dans le temps, la France était la France ; on était un peu Astérix, maintenant, on suit les mannequins, on suit... En fait, on veut être mondialisé. Les politiques nous poussent à la mondialisation.*
- *The role of France, France was followed, was listened to [...] Today, since Mitterrand, Chirac, Sarkozy, Hollande or, today, Macron, the impact of [our] positions is no longer the same.*  
*Le rôle de cette France, la France était suivie, était écoutée [...] Aujourd’hui, depuis que ce soit Mitterrand, Chirac, Sarkozy, Hollande ou aujourd’hui Macron, l’impact des prises de position n’est plus le même.*
- *We used to think we were the centre of the world.*  
*On se croyait le centre du monde*
- *The state of France is mediocre, it is worse by the day.*  
*Médiocre, ça se détériore de jour en jour.*

- *We used to be more proud, but now we don't really know what France is. On était plus fier, mais là on ne sait plus vraiment sur les Français*
- *We have always been good at exterior politics, Versailles, Napoleon, but we have never wanted to confront our interior problems. There are French problems we should solve. The Swiss are the opposite. They don't engage internationally, they just care about the Swiss, for the Swiss.*

*La France essaie de briller à l'extérieur. Versailles... Napoléon... Mais en politique intérieure, on a toujours été mal dirigés. On n'a jamais voulu vraiment régler les problèmes à l'intérieur de la France. [...] Les Suisses ont toujours été les mêmes, les Suisses n'ont jamais eu de guerres. La Première Guerre mondiale ils n'étaient pas dedans ; en 45 ils n'étaient pas dedans ; ils ne s'occupaient que des problèmes des Suisses par les Suisses et pour les Suisses.*

## Politics and the Media

Emmanuel Macron's victory in the 2017 Presidential Elections was a profound shock to the French electoral system, which had long been dominated by the main centre-Left (Parti Socialiste) and centre-Right (Républicains) parties. Neither of the old 'big beasts' made the Presidential run-off, which was instead fought between two parties that had never governed at the national level.<sup>484</sup> This result must be understood in terms of the acute disappointment amongst citizens with the politics of the preceding decade, including the corruption charges levelled against President Sarkozy and the perceived weakness of Macron's predecessor, President Hollande.

On the eve of his election in 2007, the *New York Times* described the popular, law-and-order candidate Nicholas Sarkozy as "passionate and pugnacious", promising a new style of leadership.<sup>485</sup> However, his promise of full employment evaporated as the financial crisis hit.<sup>486</sup> Moreover, the administration was hit with a series of corruption scandals. Sarkozy's political mentor was implicated in a scandal involving kickbacks on a submarine contract with Pakistan, some of which were funneled into a French presidential campaign – all while Sarkozy was Budget Minister.<sup>487</sup> Sarkozy was also investigated for illegal contributions to his own campaign from a French heiress.<sup>488</sup> But most damning were documents revealed in 2012 by news website Médiapart, showing Sarkozy had accepted 50 million euros in illegal campaign contributions from Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi.<sup>489</sup> Currently, Sarkozy is being formally investigated in one corruption case and due to stand trial in another, although he has so far not been convicted on any of the corruption charges.<sup>490</sup>

After the perceived excesses of previous presidents, Francois Hollande was hailed as “Mr. Normal”.<sup>491</sup> But his popularity would soon plummet; as the French economy hit a second dip in the Eurozone crisis in 2012, Hollande’s consensus-style politics were increasingly seen as weakness and indecisive.<sup>492</sup> His Government was marked by in-fighting, policy u-turns, and an inconsistent response to the several terrorist attacks that France endured during the Hollande presidency.<sup>493</sup> An old nickname for Hollande came back into use: ‘Flanby’, after a type of wobbly pudding. On-record comments mocking the poor, the judiciary and the national football team were also unhelpful.<sup>494</sup> By the end of his Presidency, his approval rating was at an unprecedented 4 per cent, setting the stage for Macron’s long-shot outsider bid.<sup>495</sup>

The depth of dissatisfaction with President Hollande’s legacy was clearly felt in our focus groups in the town of Lille, nearby the Belgian border, home to a little over 200,000 residents and several universities. Traditionally a bastion of the Parti Socialiste, the outcome of the 2017 elections in Lille was seen as a stunning humiliation for the centre-Left party<sup>496</sup>; the collapse of the mainstream parties has been extraordinarily visible here. Nord, the voting district Lille is contained within, was swept up by Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the first round, with the two fringe candidates claiming roughly half of all votes in a stunning rejection of the status quo.<sup>497</sup> In Lille itself, Mélenchon won the first round by some margin, but Macron ultimately won the city convincingly.<sup>498</sup>

Our discussions with citizens in Lille emphasised the impression of a city with two faces. On the one hand, it is a major source of employment in the region and a magnet for young people.<sup>499</sup> At the same time, it counts a higher rate of youth unemployment than the average for regional capitals<sup>500</sup> and a swiftly declining industrial sector.<sup>501</sup> In this part of France, people tend to favour higher taxes on the rich<sup>502</sup>, and the wider region, the North East of France, more people place themselves on the Left of the political spectrum than in any other part of the country.<sup>503</sup>

Nonetheless, political dissatisfaction was not contained to this part of the country. Our French focus groups revealed the extensive toll this long period of instability and scandal has taken on citizens’ opinions of the political class as a whole, although individual politicians themselves encouraged more varied perceptions. Participants observed that politicians have become compromised by personal issues and motivated by financial gain. We also witnessed widespread distrust in politicians on a personal level, and also high levels of cynicism

regarding their capacity to affect change – which participants linked to declining voter turnout figures.

- ***Politicians said they would not lie anymore, “we will tell you the truth”, but they continue to lie, and lie and lie.***  
*Ils nous promettent qu'ils ne mentiront plus, « on va dire la vérité... », ils continuent à mentir, ils continuent à mentir...*
- ***Considering that promises to the voters were not kept the first, second and third time, the fourth time people will no longer vote. The fall in turnout is the consequence.***  
*Les gens, considérant que les promesses qui leur sont faites ne sont pas tenues, une fois, deux fois, trois fois, la quatrième fois ils ne vont plus voter. Et la dégringolade des électeurs, c'est la conséquence.*
- ***For me, politicians are greedy for money and power.***  
*Pour moi, les politiques sont des gens qui sont avides de profit et de pouvoir.*
- ***What I want of a politician is [for them] to be frank and do as you say. Because so often they make empty promises.***  
*La parole : simplement la parole, que ce qu'ils ont avancé qu'ils essaient de le faire, parce que la plupart du temps ils annoncent et ils n'y a rien qui vient derrière. Etre franc.*
- ***Now we have the impression that as soon as they get to power, hurrah! They only have to get their pockets full.***  
*Maintenant on a la sensation que dès qu'ils arrivent au pouvoir, youpi ! On va s'en mettre plein les poches.*
- ***We take the benefits off simple people, we lower down their pensions, and then you have those ministers for whom we pay even pay for their coffee. It has been always like that, but now we know.***  
*On retire des avantages à des petites gens, on leur baisse leur retraite, et à côté de ça il y a des ministres à qui on paie même leur café. Ça a toujours été le cas, mais maintenant on le sait.*
- ***It's the productivity that always take precedence, all the time. And this obsession with savings. You have always to make more savings. You only hear that.***  
*C'est la rentabilité qui prime, tout le temps. Et l'obsession des économies. Toujours faire plus d'économies. Tu entends que ça.*

Finally, speaking specifically about the perceived inaction of successive governments in controlling immigration, particularly seen in the South as the critical issue of failed governance, a number of participants warned of the

potential for grave social consequences – even a civil war: “Il y aura peut-être une guerre civile”. When asked what could be done to improve their trust in the ruling class, participants largely focused on a core set of characteristics – “honnêteté”, “transparence”, “intégrité” – and, crucially, “aller sur le terrain”, the need to get out of the capital and visit the depth and breadth of the country.

It is against this backdrop that on 7 May 2017, French voters delivered Emmanuel Macron a resounding electoral victory over opponent Marine Le Pen in the Presidential elections.<sup>504</sup> He had left François Hollande’s struggling, unpopular government in which he was the Economy Minister a year earlier to launch a presidential bid with his own upstart movement, *En Marche!*<sup>505</sup> Macron, who had never been elected to any office before, ran as a political outsider, not beholden to the political Left or Right. He promised to modernise the French economy, strengthen Europe and cut back the French state to unleash a new era of prosperity and national pride.<sup>506</sup>

Having also decisively won the Parliamentary elections that followed the Presidential vote, Macron seized the numbers he needed to push through his controversial reforms,<sup>507</sup> and some four months later he succeeded in liberalising labour laws, to “unblock” the French economy.<sup>508</sup> Another objective of Macron’s is to harmonise different pension schemes and to reduce public sector employment. One element of these reforms is to curb the special benefits afforded to train drivers and other employees of the loss-making national railway company, SNCF.<sup>509</sup> Employees of the state-run train company and a number of other unions announced an extensive period of strikes<sup>510</sup>, which took place throughout our second wave of focus groups, in addition to protests from public sector workers and students, angered by his overhaul of university admissions.<sup>511</sup>

Citizens in our focus groups treated President Macron with hesitant caution; after many years of political disappointment, there was a quiet level of optimism, even amongst Le Pen voters, that he will indeed realise his grand reforms, but also a strong feeling of inherent scepticism towards the man himself, seen as ‘superficial’ and ‘obsessed with image’. On balance, participants broadly took a pragmatic view of their President, feeling it was too early to judge his record, however it was also clear that citizens’ goodwill towards politicians has been utterly exhausted, and the need for ‘delivery’ on tangible results has never been greater. The nature of his victory, and the extent of his party’s parliamentary representation, means the scrutiny of Macron as an individual actor is especially concentrated.

- ***We are not told the truth about Macron. There is nothing but optics.***  
*On ne nous dit sûrement pas la vérité ; il n’y a que l’image.*

- *Superficially, he [Macron] seems new. It is the look, the PR, the communications strategy!*  
*Cosmétiquement, c'est nouveau. Le look, le look, la com!*
- *It is the youth, the spirit, the promises.... But we will have to wait a bit longer to see what will happen.*  
*C'est la jeunesse, c'est l'entrain, c'est des promesses... Mais il faut voir un peu plus loin !*
- *There is now [with Macron] a bit more dynamism, you didn't have that with Hollande.*  
*on a peut-être quelqu'un qui est un peu plus dynamique, qui a un peu plus de mordant qu'on avait avec le précédent, avec Hollande*
- *Macron to me is a bit better, a little bit. I don't trust him 100% but I prefer him over Hollande or Sarkozy.*  
*Macron, quand même, je trouve qu'il a un petit plus, il a un petit plus, mais je ne lui ferais pas confiance à 100%, mais je le préfère à Sarkozy ou Hollande*
- *He [Macron] is refined and charismatic.*  
*Il est cultivé et a du charisme*
- *He [Macron] has an oversized ego.*  
*Il a un égo surdimensionné*
- *Macron is too [economically] liberal: everything for the rich and nothing for the poor.*  
*Macron est trop libéral, tout pour les riches et rien pour les pauvres*

There is evidently some discomfort, too, with Macron's utter dominance in Parliamentary terms, with many participants expressing concern at his monopolies of power and the absence of a coordinated, robust opposition to challenge his programme of reforms.

- *It could be dangerous, that he has such a monopoly on decision-making, if there is no opposition, well, he has absolute power.*  
*Mais ça peut être dangereux si Macron a le monopole, sinon il y a plus d'opposition, alors là, il a le pouvoir absolu.*
- *If Sarkozy had tried to do the things Macron is doing, we would have protested 24/7. But now there is nothing, no Socialist Party, no Republican Party, there's nothing.*

*Sarkozy, il aurait fait ça, le gens auraient manifesté 24 24 [...] [Mais] Il y a plus rien, plus de parti socialiste, les républicains, il y a plus rien, franchement, il est balèze.*

- ***Today there is no opposition, it is clear...that is especially empowering for Emmanuel Macron: there is no opposition.***  
*Aujourd'hui il n'y a pas d'opposition, c'est clair, c'est surtout ça qui fait le lead d'Emmanuel Macron, il n'y a aucune opposition.*
- ***But it can be dangerous if Macron has the monopoly, otherwise there would be more opposition...and here he has the absolute power.***  
*Mais ça peut être dangereux si Macron a le monopole, sinon il y a plus d'opposition, alors là, il a le pouvoir absolu.*

The focus groups conducted in April 2018, coinciding with the aforementioned strikes, revealed a fundamental shift in the conception of industrial action as a core element of the French character – in particular, an emergent sense that the strikes were an act of individual expression that could derail the advancement of the nation as a whole. The justification of the strikes was called into question; some participants asked why they should feel compelled to support those protesting for conditions that unreasonably exceeded their own. This trend could reflect a nascent strand of Thatcherism entering French society, or it could also exemplify a reframing of the Gallic interpretation of solidarity. In either case, the evolving attitudes towards the strikes clearly reflects a hopeful, and even desperate, nation, eager to create space for positive change to be realised.

- ***20 years ago, at the time of that famous strike of 1995, there was solidarity.***  
*Il y a vingt, avec cette fameuse grève de 1995, il y avait de la solidarité.*
- ***The SCNF (French national railway company) tries to give a positive image, they are spacing out the strike each week... but before, when we did a strike, we didn't know when it was going to end.***

*La SCNF essaie de se faire bien voir, ils échelonnent la grève... mais avant quand on faisait grève on ne savait pas quand ça allait s'arrêter.*

- ***The SCNF is now striking but in the past the job was much harder than now; so when you see them going to strike and everyone is held hostage... it's shameful***  
*La SNCF fait grève mais le travail à l'époque était beaucoup plus dur que*

*maintenant ; quand on les voit faire grève, et tous les gens sont pris en otage... c'est honteux.*

- ***Before, when we went on strike. we had some support, and it led to something quite quickly. Now it takes considerable effort...and it keeps going and going.***  
*Avant quand on faisait grève on avait un appui, et ça menait à quelque chose assez rapidement. Maintenant ça prend des proportions, ça traîne en longueur.*
- ***He [Macron] has been democratically elected and now he is going to undertake some reforms, so we need to wait for the results to see if there are more jobs openings, less unemployed... if he has succeeded.***  
*Il a été élu démocratiquement et maintenant il va faire des réformes, il faut attendre les résultats pour savoir s'il y a plus d'emplois, s'il y a moins de chômeurs... s'il a réussi.*
- ***He [Macron] has started his reforms and he is not giving up. In the past, as soon as you had some kind of mobilisation (the Ecotaxes, the Bretons, the Red Hats...) we used to stop everything and we moved up. But now we have the impression that reforms are really starting to be achieved.***  
*Il a commencé des réformes et il ne cède pas. Précédemment dès qu'il y avait un mouvement (les écotaxes, les Bretons, les Bonnets Rouges...), on arrêta et on passait à une autre chose. Mais là on sent que les réformes commencent à se faire.*
- ***I really think it's too early to tell, but it's true I see in him a man that holds his ground and that holds his positions, we have the feeling that the strikes are not going to change him.***  
*Je pense que c'est vraiment encore trop tôt pour donner une idée, mais c'est vrai qu'il me semble voir un homme qui est ferme dans ses positions, on sent que les grèves ne vont rien faire pour le changer.*

Intrinsically linked to attitudes towards politics in our focus groups was the consciousness of an evolving media environment, which constructs the stage on which politics plays out. Participants were acutely aware of the democratisation of news content production, and expressed anxieties regarding the dissemination of 'fake news' and how to sift through the multitude of information available to them. Some expressed consternation that they were forced to bear witness to the full scope of horrors of modern life, reminiscing fondly about a time where they were less informed, but felt less disenchanting.

- *As soon as something happens we know it by the second. We don't have the capacity to take some distance; we are notified quickly about everything. It kind of creates a mood of animosity as well as a feeling of insecurity. Back then, things happened as well, but we were less informed.*  
*Dès qu'il y a un événement on le sait à la seconde près. On n'a plus de recul sur tout, on est averti rapidement sur ce qu'il se passe. Ça crée une animosité et un côté insécurité. Avant des choses se passaient, mais on était moins informés.*
- *Even when we don't want to know, we know everything.*  
*Même quand on ne veut pas, on sait tout.*
- *Back then, ghosts stayed in the closet.*  
*À l'époque les fantômes restaient dans les placards.*
- *One thing shocked me at the time of the terrorist attacks in France. News coverage channels were saying that Daesh was calling their members to use anything to perpetrate attacks: cars, guns... and then shortly after you had this kind of attack. So I keep asking myself, wasn't it the news giving them the idea?*  
*Une chose qui m'avait choqué à l'époque des attentats. Des sites comme [main channel of news coverage] disait que Daesh incitait les gens qui faisaient des attentats à se servir de tout, des armes, des voitures... et après il y a eu ce genre d'attentats. Alors, est-ce que ça ne leur aurait pas donné des idées ?*
- *I have the impression that it is only since we have had the smartphone that disasters have taken place.*  
*J'ai l'impression que c'est depuis qu'on a le Smartphone que les catastrophes sont arrivées.*
- *I am on sick leave and I watch the news all day. There is enough to go mad. Before, you had one round of information once in the morning, once in the evening at 8pm, and it was relayed the day after in the newspapers. But nowadays, news is on a loop – every 10 minutes we have the same information, which doesn't make any sense. And even if they don't have something to say, journalists have to talk.*  
*Je suis en arrêt maladie et je regarde les chaînes en continu. Il y a de quoi devenir fou. Avant une info on l'avait une fois le matin, une fois le soir à 20h et c'était repris par les journaux. Mais maintenant c'est en boucle, toutes les dix minutes on a la même information qui ne veut rien dire et même s'ils n'ont rien à dire, il faut qu'ils parlent les journalistes.*

## Patriotism, Identity, Culture

Participants in our focus groups expressed widespread anxieties regarding a perceived threat to foundational aspects of French culture and traditions, which - like their counterparts in Britain - was thought to have been accelerated by the connected forces of cultural pluralism and political correctness.

In 2009, almost 20,000 French citizens submitted their views on the essence of French identity, as part of a Government-organised discussion on identity and the nation<sup>512</sup>. These short responses provide a snapshot of a people proud of their intellectual and cultural heritage, particularly emphasising France's history (military, political and artistic); symbols of the Republic; traditions and faith; and the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, with *laïcité* (secularism) often mentioned as a fourth characteristic.

Many respondents to this survey spontaneously mentioned Charles de Gaulle, France's war-time General-turned-President, seen as a defender of core French values, stemming back to the French Revolution. These values in turn are connected to the symbols of the Republic. Respondents spoke fondly of the *tricolore* flag and their national anthem, the Marseillaise. These symbols are protected by law and enshrined in the Chart of Rights and Duties of the French Citizen, which states that each French citizen must respect the symbols of the Republic, including the flag, the anthem, the national holiday (14 July), and Marianne – the portrayal of the Goddess of Liberty and a symbolic representation of the Republic<sup>513</sup>.

Although French nationalism is often seen as a civic, rather than an ethnic conception of nationalism, faith and heritage also feature prominently in the minds of many French citizens. There is a tension here between the Catholic faith of many French citizens, and the strict secularism of the French state. Some respondents complained that Catholicism is not as prominent as it should be, where others proudly defend the strict separation of church and state, with religion relegated to the private sphere – developed historically as a response to the powerful hold of the Catholic church over French society<sup>514</sup>. Civil servants are not allowed to display religious symbols and public schools require pupils to leave religious symbols at the door<sup>515</sup>.

Surveys reveal that a large majority of French citizens feel an emotional attachment to the French nation, with 86 per cent indicating they feel strongly connected.<sup>516</sup> Nevertheless, 28 per cent of citizens would define themselves as first and foremost European, a phenomenon especially concentrated in the Paris region (38 per cent). In comparison, 58 per cent define themselves firstly as

French, and seven per cent define themselves by their region.<sup>517</sup> A large majority (77 per cent) of citizens also declare that they feel proud of France; interestingly, supporters of the Front National are least likely to be proud of France, at 67 per cent<sup>518</sup>.

- *It's values we had before; we were proud to fly the French flag, we were proud to have made the army [...] We were proud to be French; we had an education that was much stricter, much more respectful of people ... Now we have nothing left.*

*C'est des valeurs qu'on avait avant, c'est-à-dire qu'on était fier d'arborer le drapeau français, on était fier d'avoir fait l'armée [...]... On était fier d'être français, on avait une éducation qui était beaucoup plus stricte, beaucoup plus respectueuse des personnes... Maintenant, on n'a plus rien.*

- *We have lost our values. Our flag says: liberté, égalité, fraternité. Which means we can be proud of our values. But they are not there anymore.*

*On a perdu nos valeurs. Sur le drapeau, il est marqué : liberté, égalité, fraternité. Ça veut dire quoi : qu'on pourrait être fier de ces valeurs. Mais ces valeurs n'ont plus lieu.*

- *Culturally, we have lost a lot. We have sold off French culture to our own detriment. It is because of American or Anglo-Saxon culture. On the radio, in the 50s, we would speak French. But now every second word is some type of Frenglish.*

*Au niveau culture, on a beaucoup baissé ; on a bradé notre culture française au détriment... ça a été fait plus pour les cultures américaine ou anglo-saxonne. A la radio, avant, dans les années 50, on parlait français. Maintenant, il y a du franglais tous les deux mots.*

- *30 years ago, it was still the moral foundations of society [which shaped behaviour]; our grandparents, our parents, they inculcated moral values to children. And [from] religion, there was a moral education, which is lost now. Religion has been abandoned, and people, young people now... the moral bases are evaporating.*

*Il y a 30 ans, c'était quand même les bases morales de la société, nos grands-parents, nos parents, ils inculquaient des valeurs morales aux enfants. Et la religion, il y avait une éducation morale, qui est perdue maintenant. On a abandonné la religion, et les gens, les jeunes maintenant...les bases morales s'évaporent.*

In particular, there was a clear feeling that the nation's religious identity was at risk from an enforced accommodation of other cultures and their traditions,

which extended beyond 'mutual tolerance' towards unequal subjugation. Islam was especially singled out for its perceived inability to be reconciled with some aspects of both traditional conceptions of Christian culture, and French liberalism. Many female participants in particular described the hijab or burqa as "une provocation", explaining they felt scared and affronted by its presence on their streets, and suggesting that symbols of the Islamic faith have become inherently linked in some citizens' minds with a sense of personal insecurity.

- ***It is also a problem with religion. Islam is a problem.***  
*Il y a un problème religieux, aussi ! L'islam est un problème.*
- ***The burqa has become a provocation, rather than a sign of religion. I feel attacked when I see it in the street.***  
*C'est [le burqa] devenu de la provocation et pas un signe de religion. Je me sens agressé quand je vois ça*
- ***The problem with all the migration now is we do not have the same religion at all, and they do not agree at all. In addition, they have a religion that is really strict.***  
*Le problème avec toute cette immigration d'aujourd'hui, c'est qu'on n'a pas du tout la même religion, et ils ne sont pas du tout d'accord. En plus, ils ont une religion qui est vraiment stricte.*

While some participants expressed a sense of visceral fear and incursion regarding the Islamic religion, others demonstrated considerably more nuanced opinions, hypothesising that an extremist or fundamentalist interpretation of its culture was a specific manifestation, or even a corruption, of its inherently benign nature.

- ***But it is not Islam itself, because under Nasser in Egypt or Bourguiba in Tunisia, they tried to completely liberate women in those countries. So it is not inherent to Islam.***  
*Mais ce n'est pas l'islam, parce que vous avez Nasser en Egypte, Bourguiba en Tunisie, on veut libérer complètement la femme dans ces pays. Donc, ce n'est pas un problème lié à l'islam.*
- ***Amongst my clients I see some 40 per cent Tunisians, Moroccans, Algerians, and I see them integrate well once they have a job and a family, they are moderates. And we should not condemn a whole community for a small, Islamised minority.***  
*Dans ma clientèle j'ai 40% de tunisiens marocains algériens, je vois bien du moment qu'ils ont un travail une famille ils sont très bien intégrés, modérés; et*

*pour une minorité islamisée, très mal dans sa peau, il ne faut pas condamner toute une communauté*

Critical to the notion of 'cultural adaptation' is the concept of political correctness, which participants feel has become a mockery of its good intentions, necessitating a level of hyper-consciousness about difference and the accommodation of individual choices. Aside from cultural difference, participants were highly attuned to debates regarding sexual identity and the sensitivity of language around these, which many found exasperating and confounding.

- *Nowadays you don't have a TV show where you don't have a couple of homosexuals or a couple of black people. It is like that everywhere. You are looking for an apartment and then you have the advertisement showing a gay or lesbian couple. Ok, that's how it is nowadays, but you are forced to say, that is a normal thing. When I hear parents say 'children choose their gender'... stop the bullshit! A man is a man, a woman is a woman!*

*Regarde : tu n'as pas une émission de télé où tu n'as pas un couple d'homosexuels, que ce soit hommes ou femmes, si tu n'as pas un couple de Blacks. Regarde : ils essaient toujours de te faire des trucs ; tu dis : putain, recherche appartement ; tu auras un couple de gays ou un couple de lesbiennes. D'accord, c'est d'aujourd'hui, mais on t'oblige à dire que c'est normal. Quand j'entends des parents dire : « ah, les enfants ils choisissent leur sexe. » Arrêtez vos conneries ! Un homme est un homme, une femme est une femme !*

Citizens recalled how political correctness had changed the scope of acceptable language, and inferred connotations towards the use of previously neutral, common terminology. While these observances may appear to focus on very small issues of no special significance, it is clear that the compound impact of these adjustments contribute to a sense of self-consciousness that some participants found particularly stressful.

- *Before at the bakery you had some candy called 'black heads'. We cannot call them that anymore; it's not 'correct'. Likewise, for the Christmas chocolate log, we will have to call it 'Festivity log'... We try to be aseptic with everything because we want to please everyone, but [in doing so] we forget our French values.*

*Dans les boulangeries, avant on avait des bonbons ça s'appelait « des têtes de nègres ». On ne peut plus avoir « des têtes de nègres »... On change ça. Là, j'ai entendu dire qu'on ne va plus appeler « les bûches de Noël, on va les appeler «*

*les bûches de fête ». On est en train d'essayer d'aseptiser tout ça, de faire plaisir à tout le monde et d'oublier les valeurs françaises.*

- *Nowadays, we are ashamed of setting up a Nativity scene in the main square of the town. Because we are secular we cannot put a cross... I even read that the Red Cross is thinking about changing its name because it connects with a religious sign... I mean, the Red Cross!*  
*On a honte de mettre une crèche maintenant ! Comme on est laïc, on ne peut plus mettre une crèche, on ne peut plus mettre de croix... J'ai lu avant de venir que la Croix Rouge [...] allait enlever la Croix rouge qui est un signe religieux. La Croix rouge !*

Participants also expressed acute concerns that political correctness was having a 'chilling' effect on free speech, with concerns about immigration being universally dismissed as 'racism'. Moreover, anxieties around the resurgence of the far-Right in France has framed patriotism as a symbol of exclusionary nationalism, preventing the natural expression of pride - for example, through displaying the French flag or singing the national anthem.

- *If people speak their minds... There are non-politically correct people, and they are treated like racists, homophobes, xenophobes... You are immediately labeled. Even in the Front National, even Marine Le Pen is compelled to follow a certain politically correct discourse, otherwise she can be destroyed.*  
*S'ils parlaient franchement... Il y a les non-politiquement corrects, on les traiterait de racistes, d'homophobes, xénophobes... Tout de suite, tu es catalogué. Peut-être qu'ils pensent certaines choses, même au Front national ! Marine Le Pen, elle est bien obligée, on ne sait pas vraiment, mais elle est obligée d'avoir une ligne politiquement correcte, sinon elle se ferait détruire.*
- *At the moment, national identity is equated with nationalism, is equated with being right-wing. If you put a French flag in your garden, that's suspicious. People will say: that one over there is far-right. It is quite serious. We put the blue-white-red on our balcony when Martin Fourcade was almost world champion, and that did not necessarily go down well. We were asked why we put the flag there.*  
*On est jugé par la société qui a une mode en ce moment, c'est : identitaire égale nationaliste égale extrême droite. Celui qui met un drapeau français dans son jardin, c'est suspect. Déjà, on dit : ce type-là doit être d'extrême droite. C'est quand même grave. [...] Nous, on avait mis une fois un drapeau bleu-blanc-rouge pour soutenir Martin Fourcade quand il a failli être champion du*

*monde, on l'avait mis sur le balcon, et dans le village, ça n'avait pas forcément été bien interprété. On nous a demandé pourquoi on avait mis un drapeau bleu-blanc-rouge.*

- ***People, especially the Front National, use the flag in their campaigns, in their PR, and it is all appearances and not sincere anymore.***

*Des gens, en particulier le Front national qui a mis le drapeau au premier plan de sa communication – puisque malheureusement, aujourd'hui tout est communication - n'est pas fond; c'est de l'apparence et pas du fond.*

- ***When I was in school, we were taught the Marseillaise. Nowadays, if you sing the Marseillaise, in the eyes of some, it is tacky, it means you are right-wing.***

*Quand j'étais à l'école, on m'apprenait La Marseillaise. Aujourd'hui, quand vous chantez la Marseillaise, aux yeux de certains, c'est ringard, c'est que vous êtes d'extrême-droite.*

In seeking to understand the discursive transformation in their national political culture, participants considered whether an institutional belief that France was ill-reconciled with its history had become entrenched, and was now promoted as a doctrine within with public sector. In particular, some participants were incensed at what they saw to be as a kind of revisionist, historical propaganda dominating the education curriculum and inculcating children to feel ashamed about their national identity.

- ***In schools, it seems to me like they focus on terrible things that split society, like the Second World War, and racism.***

*Dans les programmes, il me semble qu'on insiste terriblement sur des choses justement polémiques et qui vont faire de la scission dans la société, je ne sais pas : la Seconde Guerre mondiale, le racisme.*

- ***The guilt, the finger-pointing... You should see the school books! It is unhealthy.***

*La culpabilité, la culpabilisation... Il faut voir les manuels scolaires ! [...] C'est malsain.*

## Immigration

Immigration was discussed at length throughout the focus groups, although there were clear differences in the saliency and prominence of the issue between different regions. In the South, the heartlands of the National Front, immigration was a considerably more exercising issue than in other areas where,

despite frustrations being evident, immigration was not necessarily the primary driver of anti-establishment sentiment. By contrast, in the South, immigration was frequently the first topic of conversation, when participants were asked to reflect on the current state of France.

These phenomena reflect the regional differences to attitudes to immigration throughout France. 55 per cent of the population agrees with the statement that 'there are already a lot of foreigners in our country and we cannot take any more'<sup>519</sup>, rising to 60 per cent in the South East, 58 per cent in the North West, home to the port of Calais and the former Calais Jungle, which has become a focal point of the immigration debate in France<sup>520</sup>, and falling to 48 per cent in the Paris region. Citizens in the North West and the South East are also somewhat more likely to feel the Government prioritises the needs of migrants over the needs of the established resident community,<sup>521</sup> and in the North, to feel that migrants make it more difficult for French people to find jobs.<sup>522</sup>

Anti-immigration sentiments in the North and the South reflect different economic and social contexts, with the North under a process of de-industrialisation over many decades,<sup>523</sup> suffering heavy job losses, and particularly hard-hit by the global financial crisis.<sup>524</sup> The South has been affected by migration flows, as migrants pass the region from Italy on their way North<sup>525</sup>, however the region is generally prosperous,<sup>526</sup> was less exposed to the financial crisis<sup>527</sup>, and has a longer history of social conservatism. The South East has become a heartland for the Front National<sup>528</sup>; in part explained by the presence of large communities of *pieds-noirs* – the French population in Northern Africa who were forced to evacuate as Algeria and other colonies became independent. They are a markedly conservative, right-leaning constituency, which is still visible in voting patterns, many decades after decolonisation.<sup>529</sup>

Overall, in our focus groups, it was evident that concerns about immigration are highly interrelated to other policy areas, including education, the labour market, social welfare, as well as social and cultural anxieties. The language used to describe integration was often highly emotive, and spoke of a kind of personal, guttural conflict between the native French and 'outsiders' unwilling to assimilate; the word 'rejection' was frequently employed to denote a refusal to conform to dominant values.

- *They are French. With a face and a surname that is not French. So, they already feel at birth rejected. They are not like us.*  
*Ils sont français. Avec un visage et un nom de famille qui n'est pas français.*  
*Donc, ils se sentent déjà à leur naissance rejetés. Ils ne sont pas comme nous.*

Consistent with Britain, clear distinctions were also made regarding different waves of migration, with participants regarding earlier periods of large-scale migration more favourably than contemporary migration patterns and the nature of recent migrants themselves. After the First World War, large numbers of Italians and Poles were brought to the country to work in mining and other industrial professions, and by the 1920s, the country had the second-highest share of immigrants relative to its population size in the world.<sup>530</sup> By 1931, France was home to half a million Polish migrants and over 800,000 Italians.<sup>531</sup>

After the Second World War, migration was dominated by Tunisians, Moroccans and especially Algerians, with decolonisation sparking further large waves from sub-Saharan Africa and, somewhat later, from South-East Asia. From the 1970s onwards, labour shortages in particular sectors also attracted Eastern European and Turkish migrants.<sup>532</sup> These historical waves have embedded a sense in citizens' minds that previous migrants were economically motivated, distinct from more recent waves of migrants who are seen to be associated with unemployment and the processes of family reunion.<sup>533</sup>

- *I think immigration at the time, when we were young, people respected the country. They came to work, they respected France, they were polite; they were discreet, we did not hear them.*  
*Moi, je pense que l'immigration à l'époque, nous, quand on était jeunes, les gens respectaient le pays, les anciens. Ils venaient pour travailler, ils respectaient la France, ils étaient polis ; ils étaient discrets, on ne les entendait pas*
- *In comparison to thirty years ago, there are too many migrants and they have too little respect.*  
*Pour comparer à il y a 30 ans, ils sont beaucoup trop et ne respectent rien.*
- *My regret is that it was us that invited them, because at some point we needed them to work here. But the new generations, we let them live anywhere, in places without order and lawless, they grow up without any control, and now they don't respect the country that feeds them.*  
*Ce que je regrette, c'est qu'on les a fait venir, parce que c'est nous qui les avons fait venir parce qu'à un moment donné on a eu besoin de ces gens-là pour travailler ; Ceux qui sont venus, les anciens qui ont travaillé, ils ont fait des enfants qu'on a laissés libres parce qu'on les laissés grandir comme on voulait, avec aucune règle, et en plus, ils ne respectent pas le pays qui les a accueillis, qui les nourrit et qui les fait vivre.*

While as previously mentioned, Islam itself was singled out by some participants as 'culturally incompatible' with French values and traditions, in broader discussions about immigration, migrants were regularly spoken of as an amorphous collective group, without distinction of origin, legal status or race. That said, it was clear that Muslim migration was implicit in their references to 'recent arrivals', often singled out for their perceived inability – or unwillingness – to integrate. On the whole, participants were sensitive to the increased visibility of migrants in their communities, and spoke in a mixture of abstract concerns and detailed, personal experiences to evidence their discomfort.

- *It is funny how we don't have any problem with the Italians, the Portuguese... they arrived here and they started working. The Chinese also settle their problems by themselves.*  
*C'est marrant, mais on n'a pas de problèmes avec eux, avec les Portugais... Les Chinois ils règlent leurs problèmes.*
- *But there is a difference [between earlier waves of migration and the current], because except for the people we mentioned earlier, they wanted to integrate, and not recreate an entire community.*  
*Mais, il y avait une différence fondamentale, sauf dans les gens qui étaient cités tout à l'heure, c'est la volonté de s'intégrer. La volonté de s'intégrer et non pas la volonté de reconstituer une communauté à part.*
- *Immigration used to be different. 40 years ago there was immigration from the Maghreb as well, but we didn't see things like child marriages. I don't know where we went wrong, what happened, but nowadays we have a problem.*  
*Il y a une différence entre l'immigration d'avant et celle d'aujourd'hui. Il y a 40 ans il y avait aussi les migrations venant du Maghreb, c'était les premiers qui arrivaient, il n'y avait pas encore vu les mariages des enfants, [...] je ne sais pas d'où vient l'erreur, ce qui n'a pas marché, mais aujourd'hui, il y a un souci assez voilà*
- *There is a refusal of French identity [on the part of migrants], and often even a hatred.*  
*Il y a un refus de l'identité française. Il y a une volonté nette souvent de haine.*
- *When my grand-parents arrived from Italy they had nothing. They managed to find their way, they looked for a job because when they arrived, if they didn't work they had nothing. If someone offered a job, even if they didn't like it, they took it. Otherwise they starved. The problem is that nowadays immigrants when they arrive they have already*

*social benefits, we give them shelter and food... while French people are rough sleeping in the street.*

*Quand mes arrière-grands-parents sont venus d'Italie, ils sont arrivés, ils n'avaient rien, [...] ils ont cherché du travail, parce que, quand ils sont arrivés, ils n'avaient aucune aide. S'ils ne travaillaient pas, ils n'avaient rien. Si on leur proposait un travail qui leur plaisait plus ou moins, ils le prenaient. S'il leur plaisait ou pas, c'était ou ils travaillaient ou ils mouraient de faim, il n'y avait pas le choix. Actuellement, le problème c'est qu'ils arrivent, que ce soit n'importe quel étranger, sans travailler il a déjà le RSA, le truc... On leur donne déjà... Regarde les migrants, on leur donne déjà pour dormir, alors que des Français sont dans la rue.*

- *I feel like it is our obligation to integrate them. Someone that comes as a foreigner to another country, he abides to local traditions. Now it is we who are forced to adapt to them, to not offend them... we don't have to eat here, we don't have to do that...*

*Quelqu'un qui vient dans un pays comme étranger, tu te plies aux coutumes, aux us et coutumes. Maintenant, c'est nous qui sommes obligés de faire en sorte de ne pas les fâcher, de ne pas les vexer, il ne faut pas qu'on mange ci, il ne faut pas qu'on fasse ça ...*

Immigration was most passionately discussed in our focus groups held in the city of Nice and its surrounding areas, which have traditionally been a stronghold of the centre-Right, shifting in recent years in favour of Marine Le Pen's Front National. While Macron ultimately succeeded in topping the vote in the second round<sup>534</sup>, the strong performance of the minor party is notable, and reflects a particular affinity between residents and the Front National's policy platform; in particular, it captures how concerns regarding immigration grew palpable for the communities fronting the Mediterranean after the unprecedented migration crisis of 2015 and 2016<sup>535</sup>.

In recent years, immigration and integration, the '*reflexion identitaire*', have dominated the political debate in the region<sup>536</sup>. On issues such as the '*burqini ban*', proposed and enforced by the Mayor of Nice, the South-East of France favours a considerably more hardline approach than the rest of the country<sup>537</sup>. A bastion of social conservatism, the South-East is also prominent in its opposition to gay marriage and gay adoption<sup>538</sup>. Prior to the 2017 elections, citizens in the region indicated their number one concern was national security, followed by labour market reform, controlling the public debt and issues related to immigration and national identity<sup>539</sup>.

For many participants in our focus groups in the South, anger regarding

immigration was directed more emphatically towards the Government than to migrants themselves. They felt that the state had been too relaxed about upholding standards of citizenship, and unwilling to sufficiently defend the importance of French values and cultural traditions in public debate, and to ensure they were firmly embedded in the national consciousness.

- *In Canada, if you want to become a citizen, you have to pass a test and prove your ability to integrate, you have to know the national anthem.*  
*Au Canada, quand quelqu'un vient demander la nationalité canadienne, il faut qu'il sache écrire, il doit passer un examen pour pouvoir justifier de sa capacité à s'intégrer, et il doit connaître l'hymne national.*
- *The politicians who were responsible have given migrants rights that allow them not to make an effort to integrate. Maybe they would have the will to integrate if they didn't have the possibility to be themselves.*  
*Les responsables politiques les ont donné des droits qui font que ce n'est pas une évidence de s'intégrer. Peut-être qu'ils auraient la volonté de s'intégrer s'il n'y avait pas cette possibilité d'être soi-même.*
- *From the moment you live in France, you have plenty of rights. Too many rights. And foreigners know them even better than us!*  
*Maintenant, dès qu'on habite en France, du moment qu'on habite en France, on a trop de droits. Et les étrangers les connaissent mieux que nous !*

In this respect, they felt that political leaders ultimately held a greater responsibility for creating the parameters to guide immigrants' behaviour than immigrants themselves. Some participants went further, expressing genuine sympathy for migrants and the practical challenges presented by the task of integration, particularly when vulnerable to exploitation.

- *When we say, the foreigners come for our jobs, we forget that when someone wants to reside in the country they have to pay 80 euros, and if it is refused and they want to reapply they have to shell out another 80. We forget that, we say: foreigners want to steal my things, but that's not true.*  
*On oublie, quand on dit les étrangers veulent notre travail, que quand quelqu'un fait une demande pour rester ici, il doit payer à chaque fois 80 euros quand il fait une demande, donc c'est fait une demande et qu'on lui refuse, il va en refaire une autre il a le droit, et il doit casquer 80 € ; mais ça, on oublie, on voit tout de suite l'étranger, vient me voler mon truc, mais c'est pas vrai*

The narrative of 'control' was less prominent amongst French citizens than the English, for whom a sense of powerlessness – both on an individual level, and

an associated sense of inefficaciousness the part of the Government – clearly underpinned frustration and animosity regarding immigration. Where this concept did emerge in the French focus groups, it was more closely related to policy decisions on behalf of the European Union – particularly the 2015-16 migration crisis – and the ever-present threat of terrorism, which has formed a more amorphous sense of insecurity and prompted scepticism towards refugee claims.

- *We have more and more political refugees, more and more people who we can't identify, we don't know who they are. They are often not who they say they are, they come in with false passports, I think we should not be letting them work.*

*An a de plus en plus de réfugiés politiques, on a de plus en plus de personnes que nous ne pouvons pas identifier... [...] Dans bien des cas, ce ne sont pas les personnes qui se présentent, ce sont des falsifications. Nous ne devons pas les faire travailler.*

- *Another big problem with immigration is that it makes terrorists return [to France, from conflict countries].*

*Concernant l'immigration, il y a aussi un autre gros problème, c'est que ça fait rentrer les terroristes.*

Nonetheless, there were certainly specific concerns regarding the impact of migrants entering under Freedom of Movement rules from Eastern Europe on the livelihood of France's working classes, through their willingness to undercut the wages and conditions of local workers. During the 2017 Presidential Election, this subject of 'social dumping' formed one of Marine Le Pen's most effective Eurosceptic messages, as she condemned the European Union's Posted Workers directive<sup>540</sup> for penalising French workers.

Under EU law, workers can be 'posted' to another country for up to two years. If a Slovenian worker, for example, is posted to France, his employer still needs to pay the French minimum wage, but social security can be handled in Slovenia, meaning French rules on overtime, holiday payments and bonuses need not apply.<sup>541</sup> Le Pen argued that the Posted Workers Directive, initially intended to relieve the administrative burden for workers and employers, is misused to undercut wages.<sup>542</sup> A report compiled for the French Senate confirms that companies misuse the directive, often in conjunction with shell companies, fake self-employment and underpaid temp work, to employ migrants on lower wages.<sup>543</sup>

President Emmanuel Macron has also come to criticise the Directive. In 2017,

he spearheaded a tightening of rules on the EU level, including a provision to ensure that foreign workers are paid in accordance with sector-wide collective wage agreements.<sup>544</sup> Critics have argued the effect on French wages is likely to be small either way:<sup>545</sup> in France, the majority of posted workers come from neighbouring countries such as Spain, Italy, Germany and Belgium, where social security payments differ little from France.<sup>546</sup> Nevertheless, the total number of posted workers has been rising rapidly, increasing fourfold between 2006 and 2011, with posted workers especially prevalent in sectors such as construction and manufacturing.<sup>547</sup>

- *Unfortunately, the Polish and the Hungarians come and they work for 6 euros per hour, and it is legal! So, we cannot fight it.*  
*Malheureusement des Polonais et des Hongrois qui viennent travailler, ils travaillent pour 6 euros de l'heure ! Et c'est légal ! Donc, on ne peut pas lutter.*

## The European Union

The participants in our focus groups were generally moderately critical of the European Union, with the majority of criticism centring on the notion of the EU as an 'elite' project, removed from the concerns and influence of ordinary citizens. There was some discussion about how France could and should use more its political and economic 'weight' to defend its national interests, and a level of anxiety about how to maintain sovereignty and a distinct identity in the face of further political integration.

The French in general are positive about the EU, but negative about EU institutions. 57 per cent believe the EU is good for France<sup>548</sup>, and 43 per cent believe driving the EU forward should be a priority for the Macron presidency.<sup>549</sup> Moreover, a very large majority is opposed to leaving the European Union. A full 70 per cent of French citizens are opposed to the idea, with 45 per cent indicating they are "very opposed".<sup>550</sup> That does not mean, however, that the French are unqualified Europhiles. Emmanuel Macron himself said that in a Brexit-style Referendum, France would have probably also opted to leave.<sup>551</sup> Moreover, trust in EU institutions is very low among the French, with only 33 per cent saying they trust the EU, compared to 56 per cent saying they do not. The only countries where the EU enjoys a lower level of trust are the UK and Greece.<sup>552</sup>

In such a climate, Macron took a substantial risk in his Presidential campaign, running on a pro-European platform, often speaking with both a French and EU flag behind him.<sup>553</sup> Upon his victory, he audaciously walked onto the stage to the sound of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, the EU anthem.<sup>554</sup> However, Macron is also

seeking to drive major reforms within the EU, including establishing a shared EU Finance Minister and a common EU Treasury as a stabilising mechanism in the eurozone.<sup>555</sup> In 2015, he wrote in the Guardian: “We have to launch an economic and social union by agreeing on a new, staged process of convergence that would involve not only structural reforms (labour, business environment) and institutional reforms (functioning of economic governance) but also social and tax convergence where necessary”.<sup>556</sup> As of 2018, Macron is working on plans to hold citizen debates in all EU member states to debate the future of the European Union<sup>557</sup>, however the transparency, inclusivity and effectiveness of these have been criticised<sup>558</sup>.

In our focus groups in Beauvais in particular, the sense of discomfort with Macron’s leading role in Europe, and what this might mean for the promotion of national identity, was particularly apparent. Although the town of Beauvais is highly connected regionally and internationally, with an airport offering budget flights to European destinations and a train station with a direct link to Paris, its citizens certainly do not feel metropolitan or European, and the town has been held up as an exemplar of anti-EU sentiment in France<sup>559</sup>.

The area has been particularly exposed to the processes of de-industrialisation; in Beauvais alone, the Bosch, Nestlé and Spontex factories have closed over the past 10 years. Although some new manufacturing has also entered, de-industrialisation and unemployment have been persistent in the district, although there are signs that some jobs growth is picking up<sup>560</sup>. Across the broader region, however, it is clear that there are widespread issues regarding precarious work across the Hauts-de-France, with a relatively high rate of workers on temporary contracts, and a greater proportion of people juggling several jobs than in the general population<sup>561</sup>.

Politically, while the larger Oise district tends to lean towards Les Républicains, the city of Beauvais has been known to vote for centre-Left candidates as well. In 2012, Francois Hollande finished first in both rounds here. In the Presidential elections of 2017, Marine Le Pen won the first round both in the city and districtwide, to be beaten almost 2-to-1 in the second round by Emmanuel Macron, suggesting a high level of protest votes and a rejection of the establishment they had supported some five years earlier<sup>562</sup>.

- *What shocked me about Macron was the day he was elected, when he arrived, he was walking to the European anthem. And every time we see him in photos, there is always the flag of Europe. I mean, it [should be] the French country first, and it looks like Europe is becoming more important than France.*

*Ce qui m'a choquée au niveau de Macron, c'est que le jour où il a été élu, quand il est arrivé en marchant sur l'Hymne européen. Et à chaque fois qu'on le voit en photo, il y a toujours le drapeau de l'Europe. Je veux dire: c'est le pays français d'abord, et on dirait que l'Europe est bientôt plus importante que la France.*

- ***There were broadcasts on Arte saying he would be President because he is good for Germany, that he was pushed by the Germans.***  
*Il y avait des émissions sur Arte qui disaient qu'il allait être président car il était bien par rapport à l'Allemagne, et qu'il était poussé par les Allemands*
- ***It isn't France. It is Brussels that has forced the integration of European countries without prior steps to prepare us.***  
*Ce n'est pas la France, ça ; c'est Bruxelles qui a voulu faire la marche forcée de l'intégration de l'ensemble des pays européens sans des marche-pieds préalables pour l'intégration.*
- ***It used to be the President who would lead the country, now it is part of Europe***  
*Avant le président gèrait ce pays, maintenant qu'on fait partie de l'Europe*
- ***We don't make our own choices anymore, Europe decides for us, we do not manage anything anymore.***  
*C'est plus nous qui décidons, c'est l'Europe qui décide, on ne gère plus rien*
- ***The Europe that De Gaulle fought for is not the same Europe we have now. It was a Europe of independent, sovereign states, but all that has gone out the window now, with 2005 and with Maastricht...***  
*Pour revenir à De Gaulle, ce n'était pas la même Europe ; c'était une Europe d'Etats souverains, alors que là on a glissé avec 2005 et Maëstricht ...*
- ***The feeling we have is that Europe comes first, France second. The new politicians they are more European than French. De Gaulle and Pompidou were the opposite, first French, and then European.***  
*C'est le sentiment qu'on a. L'Europe d'abord, et la France, bon... Alors que De Gaulle ou Pompidou étaient d'abord français, et d'ailleurs European.*
- ***France is extremely limited in what it can do in Europe.***  
*La France est limité dans ce qu'elle peut décider et faire.*
- ***Because of European regulations, we cannot even properly make our own products anymore in France. It's like that! And we always want to be***

***holier than the pope. Europe gives us five rules, we implement ten.***

*On n'a même plus le droit en France de faire nos propres produits. C'est comme ça! Et en France, on est actuellement au niveau de l'Europe où il faut laver plus blanc que blanc. L'Europe nous donne cinq conditions, et nous en met dix.*

- ***It's difficult to defend France when you are in the EU.***  
*C'est difficile de défendre la France quand vous êtes dans l'UE.*
- ***France is not really free because of Europe, it would be good to clean out first in front of our door before going to see the neighbour's one.***

*La France n'est pas vraiment libre par rapport à l'Europe, ça serait bien qu'on s'occupe de balayer devant notre porte avant d'aller voir chez le voisin.*

Participants also reflected on France's broader global engagement, in particular, its relationships with the United States and Russia, and their polarising leaders. While President Trump did not receive a particularly favourable reaction in our focus groups, with many citizens condemning his absence of moral virtue, others acknowledged his commitment to 'speaking the truth', and praised his honest confrontation of controversial issues. More unexpectedly, we saw quite widespread level of favourability from citizens towards Vladimir Putin and Russia more generally, with many participants, particularly in the South of France, regarding him as a compelling, strong leader who was not afraid to stand up for his nation.

- ***Trump's ideas on immigration, there a lot of people that have the same ideas in their heads but don't dare to say it: lots of people don't want immigrants coming in, but go and say this on French TV, you will have everyone coming at you. But people are starting to talk (...), we are talking about reforming the law of naturalisation based on the place you were born, so people start talking about these things, and more people talk about that, the more they will start speaking out.***  
*Les idées de Trump sur l'immigration, il y en a beaucoup qui ont ses idées dans la tête mais n'osent pas le dire : beaucoup ne veulent pas voir débarquer des immigrés, mais allez dire ça en France à la télé : vous avez tout le monde qui vous tombe dessus. Mais des gens commencent à parler (...) on parle de réformer le droit du sol, donc des gens commencent à sortir, et plus y en aura, et plus de gens vont sortir*
- ***Goldman Sachs is starting to get some power in Europe and in the USA they have already done it, so Trump doesn't have his hands free, and I think that if he would have more freedom then we could have maybe the***

*equivalent of an American Putin, focused on doing what his country wants. What I retain from him is 'I am not here to govern the world, but my country'.*

*Goldman Sachs est en train de mettre la main mise sur l'Europe et bien aux USA elle l'a déjà fait, et Trump n'a pas les coudées libres et je pense que s'il les avait réellement on aurait peut-être l'équivalent d'un Poutine américain qui focalise sur ce que veut son pays. Ce que je retiens de lui c'est 'je ne suis pas là pour gouverner le monde mais mon pays'.*

- *Putin is a bit scary, but he still wants peace, and he is respected in his country.*

*Putin, il faut un peu peur, mais il veut quand même la paix et il est respecté dans son pays.*

- *For Putin, peace in Europe is important.*

*Putin, en Europe il tient à la paix.*

- *Putin is someone respected in his country. When he says something, he does it. Russians love their President.*

*Putin est respecté dans son pays. Quand il dit quelque chose il le fait. Les Russes ils aiment leur Président.*

## Conclusions

The French focus groups were conducted in the first year of Emmanuel Macron's Presidency, and reveal a nation exhausted and weary from years of dysfunctional leadership, unrealised promises and increasingly fractious community divides. With the spectre of terrorism, economic malaise and political scandal looming over the country's recent years, Macron has come to power at a time of great cynicism, anxiety and, most palpably, immense hope.

Our discussions suggested there is good reason to believe that the President will find the support he needs to fulfil his transformative programme. While it is clear there is a widespread level of cynicism towards Macron and his motivations, with many describing him as 'image-obsessed' and superficial, mocking his love of grandeur and pomp, the desperate desire for change supersedes their scepticism. Even Le Pen voters repeated the refrain, also sung throughout the media, that it is 'too early to judge' the President and his record. This sentiment was manifest in the emergent hostilities we witnessed towards the transport strikes taking place during our second phase of research, with the French eschewing their long-held conception of solidarity for a collective desire to support 'once in a lifetime' reforms.

Nonetheless, the scale of the challenge facing Macron is significant, with many citizens clearly having lost faith in the capacity of politicians to affect change. As in England, the French observe an increasing precariousness in the labour market, which appears to penalise both the young and the old. The middle classes appear to have been especially disadvantaged by the current economic settlement, with many participants observing that the wealthy are comfortable, and the destitute are supported by the Government. The welfare system is critiqued as disincentivising employment, penalising those who favour 'honest work'. We also observed a highly developed level of concern regarding the opportunities available to youth, which exceeded that of other countries.

Two issues appeared to energise French participants to a special degree. The first was the education system, seen to have deteriorated in quality and function, having become too focused on 'soft skills' and the agency of children, at the expense of rigour, discipline and equipping students for productive careers. The second is immigration, which connected into other topics such as the state of the welfare system, social cohesion, the erosion of communities, political correctness, and respect for French values and traditions. While distinctions were made between different waves of migration, Islam was frequently singled out as 'culturally incompatible' with the French way of life, particularly in the South of France, where this subject dominated all discussion. The Government was condemned for its 'relaxed' approach to integration, which they felt had enabled second- and third-generation migrants to feel alienated and resentful towards France, their home.

One area of distinction for the French is the enduring consciousness of the 'nation in decline' – with this abstract sense of decay and squandered status interrogated much more heavily within focus groups than in England and Germany. There were extensive discussions regarding the 'quality' of public life, considering the country's intellectual trajectory, culture of ideas and civil liberties as fundamental cornerstones of France's overall health.

When asked to recall the nation's defining historical moments, participants frequently recalled "*la Revolution*", "*La séparation de l'église*", "*la République Napoléon*". More recently, and negatively, "*l'arrivée de l'euro*" et "*la mondialisation*" were singled out for their perceived dramatic, consequential influence. While participants could recognise that the standard of living in France has, in many ways, improved immeasurably over the course of their lives – "*on vivait mieux*" – still, many feel a strong pull to the past, particularly to the early years of their adulthood: "*Si je devais choisir, je choiserais il y a 30 ans. C'est clair.*"

Finally, France global 'role' was debated in great detail, with participants conflicted between their desire for a 'stronger leader' on the world stage, and their discomfort at the thought that Macron's leading stance on Europe may come at the national expense. Striking were the favourable observations we heard, particularly in focus groups held in both strongholds of Mélenchon and the Front National, regarding Vladimir Putin and the Russian state. The language used to describe the Russian leader, a man 'committed to his country', reveals much about the psychology of a people who feel they have been repeatedly disappointed by those entrusted to serve in their interests. Here again, we witnessed the weight of expectation carried on the shoulders of President Macron.

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# Germany

## Nostalgic Narratives in Germany

So especially fascinating about Germany within the context of a thematic interrogation of the past is that it is at once home to one of the most potent, confounding and enduring forms of contemporary nostalgia – in *Ostalgie* – but also a country with such a unique, painful relationship with its own history. The physical separation of the country during the Cold War in many ways compounded the hyper-federalism and strong regional identities that had always challenged the formation of a cohesive German national identity. The great ruptures of its leading role on the wrong side of history in the First and Second World Wars have created a stain that is at once both openly felt and forcefully forgotten. The result is a particular challenge to forge a unifying, pragmatic but also hopeful narrative that can acknowledge the past without it becoming a prison, and which can turn to the future with sensitivity to both the mistakes and achievements of its history.

In his book, *Memories of a Nation*, Neil MacGregor writes persuasively about the challenges Germany has faced in confronting these unique circumstances, and the contested narratives that have germinated through its divisions. He describes the country as possessing “a history so damaged that it cannot be repaired but, rather, must be constantly revisited”. The partitioning of the country after the Second World War meant that its Eastern and Western sides experienced vastly different processes of immediate acknowledgement and memorialising of the recent violence. “If German monuments are different from those in other countries, it is because German history is different,” he writes. “The long political fragmentation of Germany into autonomous states makes that kind of history impossible: for most of German history, there can be no one national story.”<sup>563</sup>

The concept of shame also plays a critical role in the nation’s remembering. In 1945, Swiss psycho-analyst Carl Jung introduced the term ‘collective guilt’ into mainstream German intellectual discourse, exploring how citizens individually and collectively must bear the load of past atrocities<sup>564</sup>. Today, the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* continues to hold a prominent role in the national consciousness and in the lives of Germans, whose education system, religious institutions and political culture enforces the active acknowledgement of the atrocities of the Third Reich<sup>565</sup>. Heimannsberg and Schmidt note the paradox of Germany’s commitment to simultaneously upholding and silencing memories, especially evident during the period of the Cold War, which has created a

shameful allure to the gruesome realities of the past. “On one hand, since concrete reminiscences are not permitted, the Third Reich seems infinitely far away; on the other hand, since the memories are repressed, they are very much present beneath the surface, showing themselves in fear of the sinister and in secret fascination”<sup>566</sup>.

As MacGregor notes, the absence of formal days of recognition of the two major World Wars, a central time of patriotic celebration for its European neighbours, reminds the German people of their dishonourable trajectory. This guilt has flowed into the physical rebuilding of Berlin, the country’s most important city, after decades as a symbol of division taped over a most regretful past. In an unflinching manner, “there has been a conscious attempt to make public the most painful memories...I know of no other country in the world that at the hearts of its national capital erects monuments to its own shame”<sup>567</sup>.

Germany’s long and complex relationship with its history and its identity is embodied in the Walhalla, a monument to great German minds erected in the mountains of Bavaria in the early-19<sup>th</sup> Century. Over the decades since, successive leaders have continued to develop this canon of achievement through the addition of further busts<sup>568</sup>, many in tribute to figures who have, at various points in the nation’s history, been deemed unworthy of admiration. These acts of remembrance are also a process of healing for Germany. Today, in Berlin, the Reichstag, which proudly lays bare its scars and histories of violence, also stands tall as a powerful monument to the nation’s ambitions for rebirth. More than any other aspect of German architectural and cultural symbolism, the building has effectively balanced the past and the future, and feels both inclusive and distinctively German.

Despite this progress, it is clear that it is impossible for the nation to make a ‘clear break’ with its past, and the narratives of its former and contemporary identities remain fundamentally contested. Paul Betts observes that the physical obliteration of the GDR from the political map has contributed to the sense of discordancy and caution; “Unlike the upheavals of its Eastern bloc neighbours,” he writes. “East Germany’s so-called peaceful revolution did not result in the victory of diplomatic sovereignty and political independence”<sup>569</sup>.

While nostalgia is undeniably also present within Western Germany<sup>570</sup>, the assimilation of Eastern Germany into the Western hegemony has naturally fostered a particular propensity for the defence and propagation of alternative histories. The final Prime Minister of the GDR had described the occasion of the dissolution of the state he governed as “a farewell without tears”, however this expression of explicit anti-nostalgia has ultimately been unsuccessful in

encouraging a fearless trajectory to the future. The people of the East were offered “blooming landscapes”, and many instead found themselves feeling they were seen as second-class citizens in the new united Germany. As Noel Cary writes, “Easterners were not so much colonized as they were immigrants in their own land. Their condition was characterized not by the loss of sovereignty but by the exercise of volition under circumstances that laced the action with ambivalence”.<sup>571</sup>

In this context, it is clear to see why a sentiment of displacement, represented in the phrase, ‘emigrated without leaving home’, can awaken the spirit and linger with such resonance in East German society<sup>572</sup>. Despite the support for reunification itself, many continue to look back fondly at the social and economic benefits they were offered under the former system, including the omnipresent welfare state, the lack of unemployment, the opportunities for women and the collective feeling of solidarity<sup>573</sup>. The strength of the memories is so profound, that they have imbued a sense of imagined nostalgia even amongst younger generations who themselves did not live under East German rule. In this respect, the “boundary in the mind” of many Germans has not been erased<sup>574</sup>.

The particular form of nostalgia experienced by those who had lived in the GDR provides an especially prominent example of the cultural impacts inherent in periods of change and transition – particularly when social, political and economic security is challenged in such a fundamental manner<sup>575</sup>. As Ekman and Linde note, there is a unique challenge with the post-GDR experience in differentiating between the elements of past genuinely favoured and a nostalgia compelled by disillusionment with the realities of the transition to life in a Western, capitalist democracy<sup>576</sup>.

In many ways, the lack of opportunities for grief and reflection after the collapse of the regime extended a process experienced by citizens during the GDR period, during which examination of the shameful war-time past was suppressed by the relentless focus on modernity and progress – a process only further heightened by the splintering of the country and its consequences for the formation of split narratives<sup>577</sup>. In this sense, while in demonstrative terms, the demarcation of the East-West divide was dismantled after 1989, the lack of agency in the expression of ‘what came next’ has limited the proximity felt in the East to their future pathways.

Betts describes this phenomenon as the “deregulation of the East German past”, which he observes “unleashed a veritable free-for-all for new cultural squatters and carpetbaggers, whose historiographical perspectives have ranged from

post-1989 exoticism about the ‘wild, wild East’ to blatant exercises in political nostalgia”. Ultimately the psychological divides between the two halves of the country were under-estimated, and the struggle to define a cohesive national identity has persisted. In particular, concerns regarding how best to forge a national citizenship without fostering nationalism, have abounded.

In order to build a new common ground of national proximity and understanding, the process of unification became a ‘discourse on normalisation’ after many years of disruption from internal and external forces. This approach, however, presented fertile ground for contested narratives to emerge, ultimately battling for agreement as to whether the nation’s new architectural image, its monuments, philosophy and all forms of cultural expression should seek to restore the past – and if so, which one? – or forge a new future on scorched earth.<sup>578</sup>

Life under the GDR offered profound struggles alongside comforting securities, and with the failure of its leaders to inculcate a sense of a broader ‘socialist nationalist consciousness’, citizens’ identity was shaped by their personal experiences – with food, the scant consumer products available, the visual and architectural landscape, and the communities that formed around streets and apartments, taking on a profound level of symbolic significance<sup>579</sup>. As Timothy Barney notes, when “pulled from their context of a backwards regime”, GDR-era consumer items now superseded in the plentiful landscape of post-unification “gained new life as tokens of nostalgia for a future-past”<sup>580</sup>.

In 1995, *Der Spiegel* reported on the views of East Germans in the half-decade since the collapse of the Soviet Union, finding that 64 per cent believed reports of life under the GDR were too negative, and 15 per cent wanted to go back to life under GDR rule. However, it also captured the complex mix of trade-offs citizens evaluated in the process of balancing their nostalgia and liberation, with safety, security and solidarity contesting with independence, freedom and choice<sup>581</sup>. In 2009, on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Wall, the magazine conducted another survey, finding 57 per cent of East Germans felt that ‘the GDR had more good sides than bad sides’<sup>582</sup>.

Interestingly, there are also strands of nostalgia simmering about reunification on the Western flank, with a survey in the *Economist* finding 24 per cent of West Germans wishing the Berlin Wall was resurrected<sup>583</sup>. As Heimannsberg and Schmidt note, this discomfort with the reunification process reveals the disputed conceptualisation of the country’s status both before and after the erection of the Wall. “From a West German perspective,” they write. “It is not that two

‘Germanys’ have been reunited, but rather than new provinces have been added to the old.”<sup>584</sup>

In his book, *Simple Stories*, Ingo Schulze describes how East Germans found themselves in “the midst of America” after the fall of the Berlin Wall, fighting to define and regain their identity in the face of new competition from capitalism and Western ideologies. Schulze notes how the concept of identifying as ‘East German’ in fact gained strength and more emphatic meaning during the period of unification, when it was felt the unique aspects of cultural and economic life were coming under threat.<sup>585</sup> Particularly for those who had been negatively impacted in a material sense by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the dramatic events of 1989 do not represent a great moment of national articulation, but rather “a traumatic rupture in their biographies.”<sup>586</sup>

The proliferation of economic precariousness in the globalised era, and particularly after the 2008 global financial crisis, has also fostered new constituencies for the cultivation of a kind of economic nostalgia, expanding the experience of social exclusion and inequality beyond the poor and destitute to encompass citizens who once felt financially secure. For those in the East who had previously experienced certainty, a clear, fixed status and a less hierarchical economic model, the allure of a Western capitalist market economy can often feel a mirage<sup>587</sup>.

Furthermore, liberties such as freedom of movement may feel a hollow victory for those who have experienced genuine deprivation in the reunification era, unable to fully compete in a capitalist marketplace, after decades of full employment and state-subsidised holidays.<sup>588</sup> Some scholars argue that the dismissive discourses regarding ‘Ostalgie’ have failed to accommodate a valid critique and re-examination of the current social and economic model and its efficacy in post-unification Germany.<sup>589</sup>

In promoting a resistance to the new order, Ostalgie reveals the complex relationship between identity, history, and community in Germany. Ostalgie, in particular, has vast social and cultural implications for East Germans that live in a present that becomes distanced to them in both space and time<sup>590</sup>. Still today, many German citizens living in the former GDR identify primarily as ‘East Germans’<sup>591</sup>, although their nostalgia about East Germany might ultimately relate more strongly with the end of the humanitarian, or utopian, socialist project rather than the genuine lived experiences under the GDR state.<sup>592</sup>

# Nostalgia as a Political Force in Germany

As part of this project, we conducted interviews with a range of political elites in Germany, including journalists and politicians from across the political spectrum. These conversations allowed us to better understand the complex and often contradictory views amongst German political elites and opinion-makers regarding the changes taking place in society, and the responsibility their own industries hold for shaping public opinion.

When asked why citizens are drawing comfort from the past, the political journalists highlighted economic change and the visible and emotional consequences of globalisation, particularly migration, as trends compelling nostalgic impulses.

*I think that we had a narrative of progress... that also worked to some extent, as many people did experience tangible improvements for quite a long time. Then...in Germany, the Agenda 2010 reforms and the increasing deregulation of labour led to increasing insecurity.*

*The present seems very complex and confusing to many citizens, so they develop a desire for a supposedly safe and manageable past. Globalisation, migration, climate change, war and terror...also, digitalisation and the structural change connected to that, as well as perceived threats to democracy – they are all causes of fear.*

One non-partisan political researcher highlighted the fact that nostalgia has been present in many societies over many eras, and is a natural human inclination.

*The question already indicates one crucial answer: When the past is seen in a positive light, it can provide emotional comfort in times of uncertainty and anxiety; it may even provide a temporary escape from an unpleasant present. In addition, human beings have always turned to the past in search for orientation. In this sense, selected elements of the past can be comforting because they offer us a way forward.*

Members of Parliament we interviewed from the Social Democratic Party, which has arguably been the party most exposed in electoral terms to the heightened currency of nostalgia, also cited the pace of change, fears about globalisation and the compounding emotional impact of international hyper-connectivity as

triggering a longing for the ‘simple’ past. However, they also cautioned against the dangerous practice of “suppress[ing] disturbing features of the past”.

*Change supposedly happens faster today - technological advances, including social media etc., give people the impression that things are constantly moving and that it is somehow obligatory to move with them and stay up-to-date. This creates a feeling of being overwhelmed in and with the present - while things were somehow more under control in the past. A feeling of control creates comfort.*

*A lot of things that happen in the world feel much closer than in the past. Crises in other countries have a direct impact on us. If there is civil war in Syria, that also becomes our issue, since people are looking for security here. If countries refuse to commit to our climate targets, then all people in all countries suffer together from the consequences of climate change. Perhaps, people ache for a time before these complexities of globalization, and have the perception that things used to be more straightforward back then. But the past was not more comfortable or cozy. It seems to be a human trait to remember the past positively and to forget and suppress disturbing features of the past.*

A political staffer for the Greens also highlighted the challenge that compounding ‘crises’ can pose to the idea that Government holds the capacity to shield and protect citizens.

*Complexity of accumulating crises causes a feeling of insecurity, even among at least half of the German middle class. It triggers the sensation that national politics or any democratic institution can make a real difference and bring back security/order. The past always looks rosier from afar.*

When asked to reflect about the role that their own industries of politics and the media have played in making citizens fearful of the future, it was clear that many felt aware of a collective complicity in fostering a ‘negative’ public discourse – suggesting the notion that there is an element of fabrication and hysteria underpinning a national mood of precariousness and anxiety. One MP warned that, in an era abundant with information, ‘fear’ is an especially potent emotion that can ‘cut through’ with citizens.

*The enormous focus on negative news leads to an impression that everything is getting worse. The permanent blast of negative, and partly false, news provokes fear regarding the present among many people. And these fears supposedly grow exponentially in the future...Those who benefit from such developments are those who benefit from fear in an economy of attention.*

It was a view shared amongst the journalists we interviewed, who highlighted the allure of stories focused on problems and challenges facing German society.

*A focus on the negative, and the menacing aspects of these processes, has certainly contributed to [creating] widespread fears.*

One journalist even claimed that there is an endemic level of racism in German media and politics, which is flourishing at the same time as social liberalism movements are gaining traction.

*The media has certainly contributed to enhance the fears towards migration. There is an increasingly racist mood in society... a specifically German racism with roots long back [...] Back then [in the 1990s], the CDU had positions that now the AfD is advocating. So, the media and politics play hand in hand here. What has changed is that 10 years ago, there was little sensitivity among editorial departments, to consider the debates on 'Me Too' and 'Black Lives Matter'. What is interesting is that this increasing sensitivity runs parallel to counter-trends, such as the election of Trump.*

Another MP suggested that the globalisation of news, and particularly negative news, created anxieties about the inevitability of a kind of contagion of misfortune.

*Threats are more easily documented and communicated today - what happens elsewhere reaches us more easily, which in turn makes it easier to see patterns and wonder whether, for example, nationalist uprisings in Hungary and Poland will reach Germany to a similar extent soon. Politics has equally become more globalised - international threats are more easily framed in domestic terms.*

Political staffers also highlighted the impact of structural shifts taking place in the media industry, as the proliferation of news sources and contested narratives fracture the concept of 'mass media'.

*The media is dissolving, in the sense that less and less people perceive well-researched and balanced journalism, while more and more people gasp sketches or fractions of somewhat sensational information, and then communicate [only] within [their] so-called 'echo-chambers'.*

When asked if it was more difficult to unite the country around a shared identity and vision than it was in previous decades, there was widespread agreement

amongst MPs, political researchers and journalists alike that migration and the consequences of globalisation had rendered this task more difficult.

*Globalisation has multiplied the visions around which one could unite - the challenges, opportunities and (national) identities are manifold, thus it is harder to unite around one one-dimensional frame.*

*Since migration and the growing gap between rich and poor lead to increasingly segregated societies, it might be more difficult to find a common identity beyond plain nationalisms. One could also define national identity in the virtue of*

*pluralism and democracy, as well as [our] social achievements. Yet, the political will to do that is missing in many places.*

*In European countries, where national identities played a huge role in the process of state formation (and led to numerous wars), it is probably harder today to formulate a coherent idea of a shared identity than it was in the past, yes. Economic globalisation and global migration movements have made the idea of a homogenous ethnic-national identity even more implausible than it has always been.*

One MP suggested that the European Union should have played a critical role in unifying previously divided countries, but the challenges it has faced over recent years – and the divisions now apparent amongst member states – has compromised its capacity to influence.

*In the context of globalisation, this is really difficult, for sure. We simply need an alternative narrative that is also identity-generating and does not focus on a narrow, economic identity only. I believe Europe could provide that. But then again, the way Europe is developing is frightening. We need a transnational project that is primarily social and thus able to provide a feeling of security.*

However, it was also noted by some MPs and staffers that Germany has long held specific challenges in developing a shared national vision, and in many ways its current fragility on a national level reflects the legacy of such experiences.

*Certainly, Germany has had special experiences regarding the question of how to unify a country that used to build its national identity on different foundations – primarily due to its past of separation and re-unification. Germany is also a country that was founded later than other countries and has since struggled to find its national identity. With the Shoah and thus a clear*

*break of civilization, developing a positive relationship is certainly a difficult task. Thus, I do not really see that it has become more difficult today.*

*The notion of 'identity' itself is already a political frame. In post-War Germany, politics of identity have not been successful for 70 years, but the minority that strives for a somewhat coherent national identity is actually growing.*

Asked if the pace of change in German society is too fast for citizens to bear, MPs reflected on the mistakes made during the reunification period for lessons to help respond to the challenges of the present. One SDP Member of Parliament emphasised that citizens were also responsible individually and collectively for embracing change, but that their capacity to do so was dependent on the narrative presented by Government.

*That opportunity was missed out during reunification. The changes from an increasing influx of people from other countries, and an increasing push to the [political] Right in several countries, including Germany, should be addressed differently. More people, not only in politics and media, should assume responsibility and steer that change positively. Also, they [citizens] have to strengthen their capacity for change, instead of holding on to an allegedly better past. For that, we also need positive, clear and connecting visions for where we want to go as a society."*

Another MP felt that the pace of change was not necessarily growing, but the information regarding change was being more widely shared, overwhelming citizens and creating a feeling that society is constantly transforming.

*I do think it has led to a feeling of [being] overwhelmed. But not necessarily because things were changing more slowly in the past - it was just not communicated in the same way then. Today, everything can be tracked, everything is documented. This definitely creates an overload - in politics and peoples' private lives.*

A political researcher contested that 'change' itself was not the issue, but rather the consequences of the changes in terms of social, political and economic equalities – many of which, he noted, had been unevenly experienced over recent decades.

*I do not think that "change" as such is the problem. Open, democratic societies constantly reinvent themselves. The real question is whether all members of a society (or at least most of them) feel that (a) they are procedurally part of this reinvention, and (b) that the results are sufficiently fair. My impression is*

*that many recent developments in democratic society have led to a saddening increase in social injustice. As a consequence, many people rightly feel that recent “changes”, especially in the economic realm, have disadvantaged them.*

A number of political staffers and researchers explained the process of managing change is also an exercise in political communication.

*Explanation. Responsibility. Ownership. Time. Conviction that it will work, and empathy for those that are afraid, plus acceptance that some will remain firmly against it. Time and again.*

*Politicians would need to address the growing inequality in modern democratic societies. In order to do so, it would certainly be helpful to find a political*

*language that can grasp the complexities of modern governance without sounding technocratic and detached.*

Finally, the journalists we interviewed for this project declared that responsibility for managing change lies solely with politicians, whose failure to galvanise the public and explain the benefits of change had fostered a level of inertia and an aversion for progress.

*I don't think so. It is much more due to a 'head in the sand' politics that long-term developments come across [to the public] as sudden events. Migration, climate change and digitalisation - to name only three major processes of change - would have been much more manageable with a more forward-looking politics.*

*I think what matters with [current technological and political developments] is how this is explained and accompanied. You need to explain well what the benefits could be of such changes, for instance on the European level.*

# Nostalgia in the 2017 Federal Elections

Germany's democracy is a multi-party system, which since 1949 had been dominated by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). In the previous elections in 2013, Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CDU/CSU) political alliance received 41.5 per cent of the popular vote, resulting in nearly 50 per cent of the seats. However, having failed to reach an overall majority, a coalition was formed with the Social Democratic Party (SPD), after disagreements on foreign policy meant the SPD was unable to reach an agreement with the other parties of the Left. This particular coalition had taken place before in 2005, but was unusual in international terms, and in many other contexts would have been unthinkable outside of wartime – the equivalent of the Conservatives and Labour in the UK joining forces to govern together. It effectively saw the two dominant parties working collaboratively, leaving the process of opposition to smaller parties with weaker mandates.

In 2013, Die Linke came in third place, with 8.6 per cent of the vote.<sup>593</sup> It was an impressive result for the Party, even if it was down from its previous high water-mark of 11.9 per cent.<sup>594</sup> Even before the results were tallied, all parties had ruled out a coalition with Die Linke because of the lingering involvement of a section of the Party with ties to the former GDR.<sup>595</sup> This meant that Die Linke became the main Opposition to the Grand Coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD. It was unable to capitalise on this position however, at least in part because the coalition Government together held such an outsized majority.<sup>596</sup> Finally, with 4.7 per cent of the vote in 2013, the Right-wing populist party, Alternative for Deutschland (AfD), had failed to secure the necessary threshold for representation in the Bundestag. Nonetheless, their presence in regional parliaments was strong, with representatives in 13 of the 16 German states.

Four years later, coming into the 2017 elections, citizens cited 'fairness and equality' as their primary concern, including a focus on educational opportunities for children and elderly poverty.<sup>597</sup> A month prior to the vote, only 29 per cent of Germans identified 'limiting immigration' as a very important issue in shaping their behaviour. At the same time, 46 per cent of citizens were still undecided, the highest number in over 20 years.<sup>598</sup>

Germany's contemporary election campaigns have typically avoided appeals to both explicit nostalgic nationalism and a utopian vision of the future, tending to be grounded in pragmatism and moderation. Chancellor Angela Merkel has etched a political persona grounded in her unchangeable nature; known as 'Mutti', she is the mother of the nation, a figure of reassuring predictability and stability against a changing world.<sup>599</sup>

In the 2017 elections, the campaign slogan employed by the Chancellor's CDU Party roughly translated as 'For a Germany in which we live gladly and live well', and its manifesto was seen as a balancing act between the CDU and its partners, the more socially conservative Christian (CSU), who contest elections only in Bavaria. Promising modest tax cuts and full employment by 2025, the programme continued a long tradition of avoiding conflict, sentimentality and hyperbole; it referred to the future only in terms of setting policy targets, and looks to the past only to highlight policy achievements.<sup>600</sup> The Chancellor's political adversary, the SPD's Martin Schulz, described the manifesto as "faint-hearted", and the campaign a deliberate attempt to suppress turnout by being uncontroversial.<sup>601</sup>

Despite the practicality and policy focus of the CDU/CSU manifesto in 2017, it is also true that there is a distinct current of thinking, and indeed, an intellectual history within the parties, which is eager to celebrate German culture and history. Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière, for instance, penned an essay on German *Leitkultur* ('leading culture' or 'guiding culture') for *Die Zeit*, in what was widely seen as an attempt to pacify the more nationalist elements of the party.<sup>602</sup> De Maizière wrote: "Leading [*leiten*] is something different different from compelling or coercing. Rather it is about what guides us, what is important to us, what we orient ourselves towards." The essay goes on to present 10 principles of the German *Leitkultur*. Most controversially, it states, "We are an open society. We show our face. We are not Burqa".<sup>603</sup>

Although the essay takes care to acknowledge the dark pages of Germany's history ("We inherit our history, with all its highs and lows"), it also celebrates German cultural traditions, highlighting figures such as Bach and Goethe. "We are cultural nation. Hardly any other country is as influenced by culture and philosophy as Germany." De Maizière describes himself and his fellow Germans as 'enlightened patriots'. "Yes, we have had problems with our patriotism... [But] our national flag and national anthem are a natural part of our patriotism: unity and justice and freedom." Patriotism is no longer taboo, De Maizière declares. Although not explicitly nostalgic, the essay, and to a lesser extent the CDU/CSU election campaign, celebrated a vision of Germany rooted in the nation's past achievements and defining characteristics.<sup>604</sup>

The CDU/CSU's main challengers, the social democratic SPD, based their campaign around solidarity and social justice, with the slogan 'Time for more justice'. The manifesto involved several pledges to redistribute wealth and offer social protections, however according to many commentators, the party had a difficult time distinguishing itself from its long-term coalition partner and its long track record in Government, much of which (such as the Hartz reforms) cannot be easily defended to a disillusioned public.<sup>605</sup> Seeking to evoke the positive, modernity-focused campaign that had proved so successful for President Macron in the French elections some four months earlier, the SPD manifesto largely concentrated on future-oriented solutions to technological, economic and social change.<sup>606</sup> "The SPD stands for a modern policy that combines justice and economic success," its leader, Martin Schulz, decalred.<sup>607</sup>

In his speech to the party congress, Schulz became nostalgic only when talking about the great founders of Europe.<sup>608</sup> He explicitly dismissed the "fearmongering" and "Leitkultur nonsense" of the CDU.<sup>609</sup> By contrast, Schulz compelled his fellow citizens to look forward: "Comrades, Germany is facing a directional decision. Yes, we can decide in which country, in which society we want to live: we want to continue to live in a free, social and diverse country, which is embedded in a strong, renewed Europe. A country that believes in itself and believes that the best is still ahead of us. A confident, open, optimistic country for whom the future is not a threat but a promise. A country that trusts its opportunities and its own power. A country ready for new paths and a new departure. A land of courage, progress and solidarity."<sup>610</sup>

This dynamic message of hope and change characterised the early stages of the campaign, as the 'Schulz Effect' swept the country, increasing the SPD's ratings by around 10 percentage points<sup>611</sup>. The fervour quickly abated, however, as the momentum could not be sustained throughout the campaigning period, and a series of televised debates tested the feasibility of Schulz's vision.<sup>612</sup>

Amongst the insurgent, smaller parties, the AfD led the most controversial campaign, featuring posters with slogans including, 'Burqas? We prefer bikinis.' and 'New Germans? We make them ourselves', featuring an image of a pregnant woman.<sup>613</sup> In her campaign speeches, AfD co-leader (Spitzenkandidat) Alice Weidel argued the future of Germany is in peril under the current status quo. "This Sunday, mark two crosses on your ballot, for the Alternative für Deutschland. For our country, for our home, for our Germany, which deserves a future."<sup>614</sup>

While the AfD began, as so too have many of its Right-wing populist counterparts, as a primarily Eurosceptic party, it is now more appropriately

defined as a ‘nationalist’ party, whose anti-establishment sentiments manifest in its opposition to immigration and its defence of ‘traditional German values’ as a source of pride and patriotism. The AfD continues to campaign against Europe, often linking the loss of sovereignty wrought by immigration with the threat of increased European integration<sup>615</sup>, enabling it to draw in voters from numerous disparate constituencies, including those holding either socially conservative or Eurosceptic viewpoints.<sup>616</sup>

The 2017 AfD election manifesto preamble harked back to revolutionary episodes of Germany’s past: “Democracy and freedom are vested in our common cultural values and historical tradition. The recollection of the two revolutions of 1848 and 1989 drive our civil protest and the determination to complete our national unity in freedom.”<sup>617</sup> The concept of ‘restoration’ became a defining principle of the AfD campaign, with the manifesto frequently speaking of national ‘roots’ and ‘heritage’; traditions that would be destroyed, it argues, by the Euro, mass migration, and other forces of modernity. “We maintain an open mind towards other nations and cultures, but wish to be and remain German at heart. Therefore, we shall continuously strive to uphold human dignity, support families with children, retain our western Christian culture, and maintain our language and traditions in a peaceful, democratic, and sovereign nation state for the German people.”<sup>618</sup>

Die Linke, Germany’s far-Left party, had performed well in previous elections by attracting the protest vote. It struggled, however, to shake off its association with the East-German ruling party (which morphed into the PDS, which merged into Die Linke), even though Die Linke itself is a merger of both Eastern and Western groups.<sup>619</sup> The Party’s polarising leader, Sahra Wagenknecht, has been described as a populist firebrand.<sup>620</sup> Wagenknecht tends to be more critical of migration than many others in her Party.<sup>621</sup> For instance, after the assaults in Cologne, Wagenknecht said that those who “abused Germany’s hospitality” ought to be deported.<sup>622</sup> Many saw these comments also as an attempt to compete with the AfD for the votes of disillusioned working-class people, particularly in East Germany.<sup>623</sup>

Contrary to the AfD, however, Die Linke is hesitant to appear nostalgic. In the 2017 elections, the party ran on a thoroughly socio-economic platform, focusing on taxing millionaires and making housing more affordable.<sup>624</sup> Traditionally, Die Linke has been the home base of GDR nostalgia,<sup>625</sup> but in campaign speeches and in the manifesto, the sentiment is almost entirely absent. One exception was, while on the campaign trail at a nudist beach in East Germany, a key party figure argued that in some senses, the GDR was in fact more open-minded than the West, and that naturism and ‘free body

culture' has been suppressed since reunification, often to satisfy the demands of investors and real-estate owners.<sup>626</sup>

Nonetheless, its manifesto took care not to take a position on life in the GDR, using phrases such as "whatever people's experiences were before and after 1989/1990...". While it did denounce the privatisation that accompanied the unification, and referred to unification as a "humiliation", this was framed as only on the basis that East Germans did not get "what they were promised".<sup>627</sup> Similarly, in her speeches, Wagenknecht rarely refers to the past, except to point out that real wages have fallen compared to 1990.<sup>628</sup> Die Linke's attempts to disassociate itself from the communist party of the GDR seem to limit the extent to which the party can appeal to nostalgic sentiments.

As Germany went to the polls, it was widely expected both within and outside the country that Chancellor Merkel would emerge victorious. In the end, however, she was only able to secure 33 per cent of the vote, the lowest vote share for the CDU/CSU since 1949. The SPD ended up in second place with 20.5 per cent of the vote, which represented another historic defeat.<sup>629</sup> Die Linke made small gains, but lost out on the coveted third place<sup>630</sup> to the AfD, who, in obtaining 12.6 per cent of the vote, was the unqualified winner of the elections.<sup>631</sup>

Merkel's decisions on the migration crisis and the integration that has followed has divided the country, fundamentally compromising her ability to govern for 'one Germany'.<sup>632</sup> As her overall programme has shifted to the Left of the political spectrum, she has fostered a direct challenge with the SPD, and also made herself vulnerable to losing votes on the Right.<sup>633</sup> Uniquely in this election, the suffering of the largest party did not appear to benefit the second-largest, with both parties losing substantial ground to smaller insurgent parties. The SPD's historically disappointing result appears to have been linked to both a souring of affection for the party's leader Martin Schulz, poor campaign tactics and the broader legacy of having served as a minor governing coalition partner.<sup>634</sup>

Having stood in Government with the CDU/CSU, the SPD could not decide whether to criticise Merkel's record, or to flaunt its own achievements within it.<sup>635</sup> More broadly, the SPD's fate appears to reflect consistent trends facing social democratic parties across Europe and the West.<sup>636</sup> Three factors in particular seem to have contributed to the Party's catastrophic result: the loss of their traditional base of working class voters, a lack of appeal to young people, and a concentrated exodus by voters in East Germany – leading the SPD to shed voters on all sides, and in roughly equal measure to other parties on the Left, the Right, and to non-voters.<sup>637</sup>

According to analysis by Die Welt, the SPD did only marginally better amongst working-class voters than the AfD, and the two parties were roughly tied when it came to support from the self-employed. The AfD in particular made inroads with those who had spent less time in formal education. The average AfD voter lives in the East, is between 30 and 60 years old and received an intermediate or vocational high school education. They are also more likely to be manual workers and more likely to be male, with 16 per cent of men voting for the party compared to only 9 per cent of women, according to exit polls.<sup>638</sup> The Party also seems to have benefited from 1.47 million non-voters (i.e. people who did not vote in 2013) casting their vote for them.<sup>639</sup> This makes previous non-voters a crucial source of AfD support, contributing almost as many votes as the entire number of AfD-voting CDU/CSU and SPD detractors combined (at 1.04 and 0.51 million respectively).<sup>640</sup>

These results left two feasible coalitions. One option was to continue the Grand Coalition of the CDU/CSU and SPD, despite both parties losing heavily in the elections. The other option was for the CDU/CSU to join a coalition with two smaller parties, the centrist-liberal FDP and Die Grüne, the German green party.<sup>641</sup> Initially, SPD-leader Schulz said his party was not available for Government.<sup>642</sup> The Party needed to regroup and regain its strength by playing a leading role as the country's official opposition.<sup>643</sup> But negotiations between the CDU/CSU, FDP and Grüne collapsed after they failed to reach a compromise on migration and energy policy.<sup>644</sup> The only remaining options were another Grand Coalition or dissolving Parliament to schedule a new election. Eventually, after receiving support from a two-thirds majority of its members, the SPD decided to join another Grand Coalition after all.<sup>645</sup>

# Citizens' Voices - Germany

Focus groups conducted in Germany as part of this project spanned the full length of the country, capturing areas such as Dresden, Essen, Cologne and Frankfurt. Overall, the economy was the singularly most uniting issue for all Germans, as was the sense that community and social values are in decline. In the East, the feeling of constraints being placed on free expression was the most animating issue, and in the West, a sense of growing economic precariousness and anxieties regarding the rise of a nationalist culture consumed participants. The ideological and historical divisions between the two halves of the country at times felt overwhelming, and at others, less apparent. Nonetheless, it was clear that the country does not feel especially cohesive nor at ease with itself, a development evident in the fragmentation of its political system in the 2017.

## The Economy

In the post-war decades, Germany's *wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) saw the decimated country transformed into one of the world's foremost economic powers.<sup>646</sup> While other major economies have battled de-industrialisation and joblessness, the German economy is almost at full employment,<sup>647</sup> making it “the envy of Europe”<sup>648</sup>.

The share of manufacturing in the German economy is much higher than for other major European economies, partly as a result of the country's prolific high-tech sectors, including the pharmaceutical, aerospace and computer industries. Germany has the highest high-tech manufacturing turnover in Europe; at 121 billion euros, it is almost twice as high as the next-biggest high-tech manufacturer, France.<sup>649</sup> Efforts have been made to direct high-tech production (including solar panels, medicine and environmental products) into old industrial areas such as the Ruhr Valley, which has suffered heavily from the decline of mining and heavy industry.<sup>650</sup> Although rates of unemployment and poverty remain high, the Ruhr Valley is seen nowadays as a success story of “innovation-led regional restructuring”.<sup>651</sup>

But sustained economic growth has been unable to fix several long-term economic problems, especially the issues related to structural adjustment in East Germany's former industrial cities. Many of these cities had been dependent on jobs in mining and manufacturing, but employment in these sectors fell by three-quarters during reunification.<sup>652</sup> East Germany's economic growth (including in manufacturing) over the past decades has not been able to quite

reverse the trend.<sup>653</sup> As a result, three of Europe's fastest-shrinking regions are in East Germany.<sup>654</sup>

Altogether, day-to-day life may not be entirely as positive as the national statistics suggest. Germany has seen sustained wage stagnation for the better part of the last 20 years, as well as income<sup>655</sup> and job polarisation<sup>656</sup> throughout the 2000s, as the share of middle class jobs shrinks and the segments at the top and bottom grow. Meanwhile, Government data reveals that poverty is accelerating<sup>657</sup>, partly due to an influx of poor immigrant families, but also due to broader trends affecting the German-born population.<sup>658</sup>

Participants in our focus groups felt acutely aware of a growing sense of precariousness in the German labour market, citing the increasing predominance of fixed-term contracts, long-term job insecurity and the suppression of wages, as ongoing concerns for them on a personal level, and among their close networks. They also perceive that the upper hand appears to have swung to the favour of employers, with the access requirements to secure jobs – including extensive applications, and qualifications – becoming prohibitive and time-consuming.

These observations were especially acute amongst citizens in Essen in the Ruhr Valley, once a centre of coalmining and heavy industry. Since its final mine closed in 1986,<sup>659</sup> the city has sought to reinvent itself as a commercial, high-tech and environmentally friendly city.<sup>660</sup> The city is still home to major energy companies, such as STEAG and OGE, and has been the headquarters for Thyssenkrupp, a steel company, since 2010.<sup>661</sup> Essen is also attempting to encourage students from its two universities to stay in the area by supporting start-ups through subsidized co-working spaces.<sup>662</sup>

However, despite these improvements, the city has still struggled with high rates of unemployment and poverty. According to the Federal Employment Agency, the unemployment rate in Essen is 11.1 per cent, over twice the national average.<sup>663</sup> The relative poverty rate in the Ruhr region is at 20 per cent, meaning one in five residents are living on less than €917 euros per month.<sup>664</sup>

The area's economic trajectory has been reflected in its politics. Once once a reliable SPD stronghold, led by the Party for 45 of the past 50 years, the 2017 election results showed signs that this relationship has grown strained. The SPD does not have a substantial majority in Essen, winning 34.33 per cent of the vote, with the CDU close behind with 31.67 per cent.<sup>665</sup> In Essen, the AfD won 11.8 per cent of the votes, which is especially high for West Germany.<sup>666</sup> Many blame the reforms enacted by the last SPD chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, which resulted in a loss of job security and deep benefits cuts, for the working class'

declining support for the SPD.<sup>667</sup> Karl-Rudolf Korte, a politics professor at the University of Duisburg-Essen, said, “there are a lot of people in parts of the Ruhr who have been left behind economically, and they see the SPD as the cause of their problems. They never forgave the party for Schröder’s reforms.”<sup>668</sup>

- *Everyone is afraid to lose their jobs. I experienced that first hand, and was bullied out of my job.*  
*Jeder hat Angst um seinen Arbeitsplatz, ich habs live miterlebt und wurde rausgemobbt dadurch.*
- *The people go there [temporary employment agencies] because they have to. They are sent by the employment office because they are the ‘stupid unemployed’. They earn a fraction of what their colleagues earn even though they do the exact same task. And they have zero security about how long they can keep the job. That is a crime, definitely. That is modern slavery.*  
*Die Leute gehen da hin, die müssen da hin. Die werden vom Arbeitsamt dahingeschickt, weil sie dann die doofen Arbeitslosen sind. Die kriegen einen Bruchteil von dem, was der Kollege, der neben ihnen genau das gleiche macht. Und haben null Sicherheit wie lange sie den Job noch behalten können. Und das ist ein Verbrechen. Definitiv. Das ist schon moderene Sklaverei ist das.*
- *Epecially this arrogance, I’ve experienced that over and over again for quite some time. This arrogance for even the most messed-up job, they want a written application. What is that? After the fall of the Wall...I simply called and said, I saw your announcement, called and they said, yes, come over. But today, they want a written application for every job, even if you only do it per hour.*  
*Vor allem diese Arroganz, die, das hab ich auch ne ganze Zeit immer wieder durchgemacht. Diese Arroganz für jeden aber wirklich den abgefücktesten Job wo ich denn immer gedacht habe, wollen sie eine schriftliche Bewerbung. Ich sage, was ist das? Nachdem die Wende ähm... denn war, habe angerufen, habe den Inserat gelesen, habe angerufen, ja, kommen sie vorbei. Bin ich hingegangen, so, ja wann kannst du anfangen, morgen, oder? So. Aber heute für jeden Job, ob das auf stundenweise.*
- *Back then, you could also ask, what do you pay? Do you pay vacation allowances, Christmas allowances? Today they only say, come, start work. Just work [...] Work at all costs. And they also don’t ask you if you can live off that.*  
*Früher da konnte man auch noch fragen, was zahlt ihr? Urlaubsgeld, Weihnachtsgeld, heutzutage heißt es nur noch, komm her, fang an zu arbeiten.*

*[...]. Nur Arbeit, [...] Arbeit um jeden Preis und da wird auch gar nicht danach gefragt, ob du davon Leben kannst.*

Moreover, many participants observed that the cost of living had increased substantially over the course of their lifetimes, placing immense pressures on families to maintain a certain quality of life.

- *Everything has become really expensive. A family with two children can hardly afford a visit to the amusement park... events, amusement park, entertainment.*

*Ist schon alles sehr teuer geworden. Eine Familie mit zwei Kindern kann sich ganz schwer einen Kirmesbesuch... Events, Kirmes, Unterhaltung*

- *Back then, you could nourish a family of four with one income. Today, you need four jobs to support one family.*

*Früher konnte man mit einem Einkommen eine vierköpfige Familie zu ernähren. Heutzutage braucht man vier Jobs um eine Familie zu ernähren.*

Some participants noted a long-term trend towards the 'Americanisation' and corporatisation of employers, which had changed the culture within workplaces and encouraged a sense of ruthlessness and individualism, in a domain that had previously offered a form of solidarity and community to many workers.

- *Also, firms have changed. Back then you had a lot of small enterprises. Today, they are growing bigger and bigger; they get many ideas from the US. You have to work fast and people are exchanged at a much higher speed. Fixed-term contracts become normal. That is the change that is happening.*

*Dass auch die ganzen Betriebe sich verändert haben. Früher hat man viel mehr mit kleineren Betrieben gearbeitet. Heutzutage werden die Unternehmen immer größer immer größer. Holen sich sehr viele Ideen auch aus den USA. Da wird sehr viel schneller gearbeitet, die Leute werden sehr viel schneller ausgewechselt. Zeitverträge ist da ganz normal. Und das ist sicherlich genau der Wandel.*

- *A sense of community is not present any more, not at all. [at the office] It is partly intended that people do not talk to each other anymore. [...] back then, we used to talk about our vacation, or if a child was born we [would] send our congratulations, all this does not exist anymore. Everything has become very anonymous.*

*Diese Zusammengehörigkeit ist überhaupt nicht mehr da, gar nicht, es wird ja auch teilweise ja auch schon so gewollt, dass man sich kaum mehr untereinander unterhalten kann. [...] Früher war es immer so, da hat man sich*

*auch mal über Urlaub unterhalten oder wenn mal ein Kind geboren wurde, da wurden Glückwünsche übermittelt, das ist alles nicht mehr. Es ist sehr anonym geworden.*

Our focus groups also revealed that many German citizens believe that the capacity to advance within careers over the course of one's lifetime is being eroded, partly by the shift to contract-based work, but also because workers' agency within the workplace relationship is diminishing. Certainly, social mobility in Germany is relatively low and not improving<sup>669</sup>, and is even actively declining by some measures.<sup>670</sup> Compared to the early 1990s, it has become harder to escape poverty and the lower-middle class is at particular risk of decline.<sup>671</sup> Although social mobility for women has improved somewhat, through broader trends of economic emancipation, these gains are offset by class positions becoming more rigid for Eastern German men.<sup>672</sup> In general, social mobility is strongly tied to region: the old East-German territories have significantly less social mobility than West-German regions.<sup>673</sup>

Another important factor in the shifting social mobility landscape is related to unequal rates of access to university. Germany is often praised for its high-quality vocational training and its low rate of youth unemployment, but this same system is partly responsible for the country's faltering social mobility.<sup>674</sup> Over time, access to the upper-middle-class has come to consist almost entirely of university graduates,<sup>675</sup> and working-class pupils rarely make it to university.<sup>676</sup> One study finds: "Irrespective of the level of grades, the propensity of high-origin students to enter a university is about 20-30 percentage points higher than that of the low-origin group for all cohorts".<sup>677</sup> Pupils are sorted into vocational or academic pathways at 10 or 12-years-old and rarely change track.<sup>678</sup> Both the difference between vocational and academic education and between different vocational programmes are linked to social background.<sup>679</sup> Altogether, this makes for a system where social background holds an outsized influence on life chances.

- *Today, they only give you fixed-term contracts and such crap. Back then, you could start and work your way up. You were in one firm and there was an 80% likelihood you also stayed there. This is not the case now. With the fixed-term contracts you cannot work your way up any more at all. If you only get 18 or 9-month contracts.*

*Also heute kriegst du nur noch Zeitverträge und so ein Kikifax und früher bist du angefangen und konntest dich hocharbeiten bist du weiß ich nicht, warst in einer Firma und bist auch da geblieben zu 80 Prozent, dass ist schon lange nicht mehr so. Mit den Zeitverträgen ist das Hocharbeiten mal gar nichts mehr. Wenn du nur noch 18 Monate oder 9-Monatsverträge kriegst.*

- *Around the 1970s, it used to be the case that several people did an apprenticeship in a firm and could then work their way up. Today, it is totally different. These bosses, who have studied of course, they come from abroad, they have no clue, but are immediately pushed into leading positions.*

*So in den 70er-Jahren, da war es ja tatsächlich so, dass sehr viele Leute eine Ausbildung in einer Firma angefangen haben und die haben sich tatsächlich hochgearbeitet. heutzutage ist das Verhältnis doch ganz anders. Dann kommen diese Chefs schon, die haben dann natürlich studiert, die kommen dann von außerhalb, die haben relativ wenig Ahnung, und die werden dann da in den Firmen gleich oben angesiedelt.*

- *You can always do an apprenticeship, or school. But if I look at my daughter, I am afraid for her university studies. I work three jobs to finance that. And the financial burden at a Gymnasium is not equal to that of a normal school.*

*Man kann immer Lehre, Schule machen. Aber wenn ich das bei meiner Tochter beobachte, da wird es mir jetzt schon vor dem Studium bange. Ich arbeite in drei Jobs, um das finanzieren zu können. Und das finanzielle beim Gymnasium ist nicht was das einer normalen Schule.*

- *Today, you need Abi [university entrance diploma] to become a carpenter. Back then, it was no problem to say, I have Hauptschulabschluss [Certificate of Secondary Education], that was totally normal. You could still do anything. Could educate yourself. If you were good at what you did, you could even make a career. But today, they require such a high level.*

*Heute brauchst du ein Abi um Schreiner zu werden. Früher was es kein Problem zu sagen, ich habe einen Hauptschulabschluss, das war etwas ganz normales. Damit stand dir alles offen. Konntest dich weiterbilden. Wenn du gut bist, in dem was du getan hast, konntest du auch die Karriereleiter hoch. [...] Und heute wird ja schon ein so hohes Level vorausgesetzt, da kommt ja nichts mehr drüber.*

- *On the one hand, they [businesses] all shout that they have so many apprenticeships available, but on the other hand, there are several people who write applications like world champions but don't get an apprenticeship.*

*Einerseits schreien sie wir haben so und so viele offene Lehrstellen, wir kriegen keine Lehrlinge und andersrum gibt es genügend die schreiben Bewerbungen wie die Weltmeister und kriegen keine Lehrstelle.*

Some 10 years after the height of the global financial crisis, participants also reflected on the double standards in the world of business, with employees' agency depleted while corporations involved in destabilising the global economy are able to continue without fear of retribution.

- *When you are broke, normally you are broke. I do not understand that Deutsche Bank gets bailed out. If I screw up, I am fired. They get fired and receive bonuses. If I get fired because of something similar, I get barred from unemployment benefits for three months. There is an imbalance which I cannot understand.*

*Wenn du pleite bist, dann bist du eigentlich pleite. Ich habe kein Verständnis dafür, dass die Deutsche Bank da unterstützt wird bis zum geht nicht mehr. Wenn ich Scheisse baue, werde ich gefeuert, die werden gefeuert und kriegen Boni. Wenn ich wegen sowas gefeuert werde, dann kriege ich drei Monate Arbeitslosengeldsperre. Das ist Ungleichgewicht was ich überhaupt nicht nachvollziehen kann.*

One of the most contentious areas of discussion regarding the Government's role in addressing economic inequalities and welfare provision in our focus groups were the 'Hartz Reforms', introduced to Germany in 2003 by a Social Democrat-led coalition. The reforms merged the systems of unemployment benefits and social welfare, while also cutting the overall level of benefits to "the social minimum"<sup>680</sup>. The monthly payment for the lowest level of benefits, commonly known as Hartz IV, is 418 euros per month, as of 2018<sup>681</sup>, in addition to the costs of 'adequate housing' and healthcare.

The unemployed were also required by Hartz to sign a contract with a job centre, outlining how they intended to secure employment, with those refusing to comply seeing their benefits cut. Combined with the fact that Germany at the time did not have a minimum wage, many found themselves in very low-paid, very short-term 'mini-jobs'.<sup>682</sup> The reforms were intended to bring down unemployment, and in that regard, they seem to have been successful<sup>683</sup>. But critics maintain that people have little choice but to accept any job, however low-paid or part-time, explaining in part the growth of the low-wage segment in Germany throughout the 2000s.<sup>684</sup> Although Germany has always had a relatively large low-wage sector, risk of poverty, insecure and low-wage work have all increased in the wake of the reforms.<sup>685</sup>

The reforms have been a highly contentious issue in Germany and a political disaster for the Social Democrats. Large majorities of citizens now want to get replace Hartz with a 'fairer' system,<sup>686</sup> although there is still support for welfare sanctions across the population as a whole.<sup>687</sup> In the 2017 elections, changing

Hartz was at the centre of the Social Democratic Party's platform.<sup>688</sup> But many observers think it is too late for the Social Democrats to bring back the voters alienated by the reforms they introduced.<sup>689</sup>

- *Children of Hartz IV families have no chance.  
Kinder aus Hartz IV Familien haben keine Chance.*
- *Yes, our politicians think that they deal with the problem of poverty among elderly. But in the small Netherlands all pensioners receive a minimum pension of 1,100 €. And here in Germany you are put off with 464 €. And then this Spahn [Minister for Health, CDU] says that you are not poor with 464 €. Then there is the rent on top. ... And then they want people to work until they are 70. If you worked hard with your body, how can you work until 70? With a walking frame? These pen pushers in Berlin. Especially, if they have worked for 12 years, they go home with a pension of 7,500 € at the age of 50.  
Ja, das unsere Politik umdenkt, das Thema Altersarmut, da den Riegel umlegt und sich besser mit dem Problem beschäftigt weil wiegesagt das kleine Holland hat jeder Rentner eine Mindestrente von 1100 Euro und hier in Deutschland wirst du nach 45 Jahren abgespeist mit 464 Euro. Und dann sagt der Spahn man ist nicht arm mit 464 Euro. Dann kommt die Miete dazu. Und dann wollen die noch, dass Leute bis 70 arbeiten. Wer körperlich schwer arbeiten muss, wer soll denn das mit 70 machen? Mit dem Rolator auf die Arbeit? Diese Sesselpupser in Berlin. Vor allen Dingen, wenn die 12 Jahre im Amt sind, dann gehen die mit 7500 Euro Rente nachhause. Und das mit 50.*
- *It's really sad, if you work full time and still have to receive benefits to actually meet your subsistence level, no? And then, at the end of your life, you don't even have enough for minimum-pension [...] there is something going terribly wrong in politics, but really bad indeed.  
Es ist traurig eigentlich, wenn man Vollzeit arbeiten geht und man muss aufstocken, ja? Und dann am Ende nachher des Lebens, dann hat man noch nicht mal die Mindestrente [...] da läuft ganz dolle was quer in der Politik, aber so böse*
- *People who worked for 40 years and then slid down into Hartz IV [social security] since they cannot find another job due to their age. This person is treated just like someone who never worked in his life. Whether German or foreigner doesn't matter.  
Leute, die 40 Jahre gearbeitet haben. Dann nach der Arbeitslosigkeit in Hartz IV rutschen weil sie einfach altersmäßig nicht mehr vermittelbar sind, der wird*

*genauso behandelt wie einer, der noch nie gearbeitet hat. Ob Deutsch oder Ausländer ist egal.*

- *Me for example, I am an early pensioner, they pulled my plug from the socket at the age of 50. I did not choose it that way myself. I raised two children, paid my taxes, I worked my whole life but my pension is so small that I receive a so-called "Grundsicherung" [basic security] on top [...] But imagine someone who has not worked a day in their life and says, 'Me, going for work? I am not stupid, am I?' Well, he receives the very same amount as me.*

*Ich bin zum Beispiel Frührentner, mir haben sie mit 50 nen Stecker aus der Dose gezogen, hab ich mir auch nicht ausgesucht. Ich hab zwei Kinder großgezogen, die Steuern gezahlt, ich hab mein Leben lang gearbeitet aber ich habe eine Rente, die so gering ist, dass ich eine sogenannte Grundsicherung ergänzend bekomme, was gleichbedeutend ist von der Summe her wie Hartz IV. Aber jemand der noch nie gearbeitet hat und der sich vor mich hinstellt und sagt, ich arbeiten gehen? Ich bin doch nicht bekloppt. Der kriegt auf einen Heller und Cent genau das gleiche wie ich.*

- *Because they [Hartz reforms] generalize, everything becomes the same. They abandoned the merit principle.*  
*Weil da wird pauschalisiert, es wird alles über einen Kamm geschoben. Es liegt kein Leistungsprinzip mehr zugrunde.*
- *Do you know how many people have to augment their salary through social welfare? So they count as working people, but in reality they are recipients of Hartz IV. But they don't appear in the statistics.*  
*Wissen Sie wie viele Menschen aufstocken müssen? Also die zählen dann zu der arbeitenden Bevölkerung sind aber eigentlich Hartz IV-Empfänger. Sind aber aus der Statistik raus.*

There was considerable anger within the focus groups regarding the disproportionate impact that the welfare reforms were perceived to have had on the elderly population, who participants felt were especially vulnerable to financial insecurity, and whose contribution to the nation was not being adequately recognised. They spoke at length about the proliferation of food banks, and the increasing elderly dependence on these for basic provisions.

- *People who have built the country, here in Germany, and who fought in the War and all, old people, they are really doing badly. With their Hartz IV and their elderly pension, they now have to go to the "Tafeln" [food*

*bank] and even get in a fight with some other people. I mean, this is not Germany any more.*

*Menschen, die jetzt hier Deutschland aufgebaut haben im Krieg, mitgemacht haben alles, alte Menschen, denen es so schlecht geht, die müssen jetzt im Prinzip mit ihrem Hartz-IV, mit ihrer Altersrente zu den Tafeln gehen und müssen sich dort auch noch mit anderen Menschen, da Streit kriegen, da sag ich immer, das hat, das ist, das ist nicht mehr Deutschland.*

- *Yes, I cannot find words for this. These people built the country, these old people. I worked in care work for old people for six years and they are really forgotten, it is far too little that we do for them.*

*Also ich find dafür keinen Ausdruck ehrlich gesagt, die Leute haben das Land aufgebaut, die alten Menschen. Ich hab in der Altenpflege sechs Jahre gearbeitet und ähm, die werden wirklich vergessen, es wird einfach zu wenig gemacht für die.*

In early 2018, the manager of a Tafel food bank responded to a series of incidents at his facilities in which elderly and vulnerable recipients had felt intimidated and even physically pushed by the large number of young men, including many migrants, seeking food support. He took the decision to ban all young men, including migrants and German-born young men, from the food bank to ensure a safer and more comfortable environment for his longer-term clients . In the wake of this scandal, our participants in Essen also spoke to the growing sense of social competition for state resources between the elderly population and migrants, expressing a clear preference for the ageing community to be prioritised.

- *There are 75 per cent foreigners at the Tafel in Essen and he [the man running the food bank] said that he would not accept new applications from foreigners any more, only people with a German passport, because some of the foreigners [were] pushing.*

*Es sind 75 Prozent Ausländeranteil in der Essener Tafel und der hat gesagt, er nimmt jetzt keine Ausländer mehr an, er nimmt nur noch Menschen mit deutschem Pass auf, weil die Ausländer, einige der Ausländer gedrängt hätten*

In one sense, the strict rules of Hartz may have paved the way for more radical changes, as a greater number of citizens and politicians express an openness to the idea of a universal basic income.<sup>690</sup> This trend was evidenced in our focus groups, as a number of lower socio-economic participants advocated for the introduction of Universal Basic Income in Germany, as a means of liberating workers with a poor quality of life.

- *With the universal basic income there would be a chance that everyone could do what he/she wanted to. With this huge unemployment, there is a lot bubbling beneath the surface, and we don't control that. People need to work. They don't have to get rich, but participate in society. I realised that as an unemployed person, it is not that easy.*  
*Beim Bedingungslosen Grundeinkommen gäbs die Chance, dass jeder macht was ihm liegt. Mit dieser riesen Arbeitslosigkeit haben wir noch einen Kessel am kochen, den wir nicht unter Kontrolle haben. Der Mensch möchte arbeiten und muss nicht reich werden, aber teilhaben. Das merke ich als Arbeitslose, das ist nicht so einfach.*

## German Culture and Identity

The question of the German 'nation' was also discussed and debated across the country, although profound regional differences in the interpretation of the 'essence' of German identity were expressed. Our focus groups in East Germany, in particular, highlighted a palpable sense of frustration at having to carry the 'enforced guilt' of Germany's past; an ongoing responsibility to make amends for the crimes of their forebears. They called for the Government to 'draw a line in the sand' and liberate the country to move on and forge a new identity free from the shame of historical wrongdoings.

- *What do I have to do with these few years of history? Nothing. That's none of my business. Also, I have nothing to do with WWI. But with people like Bach, Heine, Goethe, Schiller, with those I have something to do.*  
*Also mit den paar Jahren Geschichte habe ich gar nichts zu tun. Das geht mich nichts an. Zum Beispiel, ja. Auch mit dem ersten Weltkrieg habe ich nichts zu tun. Aber mit den Leuten wie Bach, Heine, Goethe, Schiller, mit denen habe ich was zu tun.*
- *Why should we reduce Germany to a few years of war? Other countries committed crimes that are far greater. Look at America, right, how they exterminated all indigenous people and so on. So, this really needs to end now, finally and for real.*  
*Warum soll sich bei uns Deutschland auf ein paar Jahre Kriegszeit reduzieren lassen? Es gibt andere Länder, die haben viel größere Verbrechen begangen. Siehe Amerika, ne, die Indianer ausrotten und so weiter. Also das muss vorbei sein, endlich, schluss.*
- *This 'cringing' in Germany is what I find awful. This ducking down in front of other nations. That one says, oh, we are the bad guys.*

*Das Duckmäusertum in Deutschland finde ich furchtbar. Das Ducken vor anderen Nationen. Das man sagt, ah, wir sind die Bösen so ungefähr.*

- *Unfortunately, this is fostered by our politicians. For years already. We are always kept on a short leash, we need to apologise and so on.*  
*Das wird ja leider von der Politik gefördert. Schon seit Jahren. Da werden wir immer schon so klein gehalten, wir müssen uns entschuldigen usw.*

In other parts of the country, however, we saw a more mixed suite of feelings. In Frankfurt, for example, a number of participants expressed cosmopolitan forms of identity, and others felt that it was fundamentally correct that the country should continue to acknowledge and make clear its understanding of its historical indiscretions.

- *Why should I be proud to be German? That is all accidental. I could have been born elsewhere.*  
*Wieso soll ich stolz sein, deutsch zu sein? Das ist doch Zufall. Ich hätte irgendwo anders geboren werden können.*

Nonetheless, we did also see evidence that the yearning for a clear national identity divorced from the burdens of the past is relatively diffuse throughout the country. Also in Frankfurt, distinct from the cosmopolitan self-perception of other participants in this prosperous Western city, we heard echoes of the same of claims of suppressed German pride as had dominated the focus groups in the East.

- *There are more countries with a problematic past. Still, they are patriotic. This is why it is no reason at all to say, no, I am not German, or a cosmopolitan or whatever. I am German and I am proud of that.*  
*Es gibt noch mehr Länder, die ihre schlechte Geschichte hinter sich haben und trotzdem patriotisch sind. Deshalb ist das für mich überhaupt kein Grund zu sagen, nee, ich bin kein Deutscher oder ich bin Weltbürger oder sonstwas. Ich bin Deutscher und da bin ich stolz drauf.*

In addition to Germany's past, participants also identified political correctness and an 'anti-nationalist fervour' as curtailing citizens' opportunities to express their patriotism. Reflecting on the quiet feeling of pride experienced under the GDR, one participant argued that patriotism was not being promoted as ardently as multiculturalism, and that the 'inclusive agenda' was in fact coming at the expense of celebrating a unified German identity.

- *I'd like to say, we old 'Ossis' still had national pride. Not very pronounced, they also suppressed that a little bit, but the kind of suppression that we see today did not exist back then, and it is getting worse and worse... When, ah, the Green Party wants to prohibit the national flag at football. [...] This gets worse and worse. And that is the mistake they are making. Because at some point, this will backfire. [...] the national pride is more and more suppressed and this multiculturalism is ever-more promoted.*

*Ich sach mal ein bisschen Nationalstolz, hatten wir alt-Ossis noch. Zwar nicht ausgeprägt, da wurde natürlich auch ein klein bisschen gedrückt, aber diese Unterdrückung wie sie jetzt stattfindet und wie sie immer schlimmer wird... das eh.... Wie die Grünen, wollen die Nationalfahne verbieten, wenn man beim Fußball ist. [...] Und das wird immer schlimmer. Und das ist der Fehler den die machen. Weil das kehrt sich irgendwann ins Gegenteil um. [...] der Nationalstolz wurde immer mehr unterdrückt, und dieses Multi-Kulti wurde immer mehr gefördert.*

Other participants felt globalisation, and the supra-national governance of the EU, were challenging the ability of nation-states to define and defend their identity in the face of hyper-pluralism. One participant described this phenomenon as rendering the citizen 'replaceable'; a commodity in a global marketplace.

- *If I am completely replaceable, the system turns me into an exchangeable slave. And this is how I see it on a societal level: the German is made replaceable. This Europe doesn't give a damn about its identity. I have the impression that other European countries are struggling for their identity as well. The Italians want to quit, the British already did, the Poles are also in line to do that. We in Germany are fighting in the same manner.*

*Wenn ich völlig austauschbar bin, macht das System aus mir einen austauschbaren Sklaven. Und so sehe ich das gesamtgesellschaftlich: Der deutsche wird austauschbar gemacht. Dem seine Identität ist dem Europa scheiß egal. Die anderen europäischen Länder, habe ich den Eindruck, die kämpfen auch um ihre Identität. Die Italiener wollen aussteigen, die Engländer sind ausgestiegen, die Polen werden irgendwann auch noch kommen. Wir in unserem Deutschland kämpfen genauso.*

The process of reunification has also further complicated identities. During the four decades that Germany was split up into the East and the West, the two countries grew politically, economically and culturally detached. Germany had

only been unified for about 70 years when it was divided in 1949, as the zone occupied by the Soviet Union became the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The GDR was effectively a one-party state, which modelled its government and society on the Soviet Union.<sup>691</sup> By the late-1980s, the average worker in the East put in 300 more hours of work per year, while enjoying a much lower standard of living.<sup>692</sup> Culturally, too, differences became more marked. Under leader Erich Honecker, the GDR pursued a policy of “demarcation” (*Abgrenzung*), emphasising a distinct East-German identity.<sup>693</sup> By 1988, only nine per cent of Germans believed they would see reunification during their lifetimes.<sup>694</sup> Just a year later, the Berlin Wall would be torn down.

Interior minister Wolfgang Schauble soon set out the terms of reunification, arguing that East Germany would have to accept the entirety of West Germany's constitution and legal system. “This is the accession of the East to the West and not the reverse. We have a good Basic Law which has proven itself. We want to do everything for you. You are cordially welcome. We do not want to trample coldly on your wishes and interests. But this is not the unification of two equal states.”<sup>695</sup> Economically, too, the GDR had to adapt completely. An organisation, the Treuhand, was created to privatise East Germany's state companies. One academic summarises: “For East Germans, privatisation has created a mistrust of government, a withdrawal from economic matters, and a general social divide between citizens of the East and West. The East Germans' position has led some commentators to label the transformation a ‘colonisation’ or ‘occupation’ of East Germany.”<sup>696</sup>

Although West Germany was strict when it came to East Germany's social and political transformation, it was generous with financial aid and through the equivalent currency exchange rates offered after reunification. The German state still offers large amounts of financial aid to East Germany every year, raised through a ‘solidarity surcharge’ or Soli, as it is commonly known. Between 2004, when the most recent pact was signed, and 2019, this will total cash transfers of 156 billion euros.<sup>697</sup> Deprived, de-industrialising towns in the West have been campaigning against the Soli, arguing they also need financial aid.<sup>698</sup>

Despite this investment, economic and cultural differences between the West and the East are still very visible. Citizens in the East have tended to be less supportive of Germany's mainstream parties, voting for the Left-wing Die Linke and the Right-wing AfD instead.<sup>699</sup> They are also underrepresented in government; Angela Merkel is an ‘Ossi’, but such power is rare for former inhabitant of the GDR.<sup>700</sup> The editors-in-chief of the major newspapers are also overwhelmingly West German.<sup>701</sup> A sense of cultural, political and economic powerlessness fosters narratives of ‘second class citizenship’.<sup>702</sup> As former SPD

politician Matthias Platzeck explained, “There is a lot that went wrong in those [Reunification] talks. [...] It was like ‘Look, children. We’ll take you in, we’ll pay for it all, but forget your demands’”.<sup>703</sup>

Almost 30 years after the fall of the Berlin wall, the *Mauer im Kopf*, the “mental wall” between East and West persists.<sup>704</sup> East Germans still see themselves as more modest, more respectful of authority and more committed to solidarity, and West Germans as consumerist, individualist and arrogant, while West Germans regard East Germans as xenophobic.<sup>705</sup> Interview studies record unease and frustration amongst East Germans with the Western way of life after reunification. One study explains that citizens reported, “negative changes in interpersonal relations: working-class communities were destroyed as a result of lay-offs and a fierce competition for jobs, people at the workplace are individualised and atomised, solidarity has declined and everybody is focused only on himself/herself.”<sup>706</sup>

Many East Germans never quite embraced the ‘West German way of life’ and satisfaction with the post-reunification political system remains low.<sup>707</sup> The phrase ‘reunification by accession’ crops up regularly, referring to the notion that reunification in fact masked the absorption of the East into the West, losing valuable aspects of its society in the process.<sup>708</sup> In a survey marking 20 years after the fall of the Berlin wall, almost half of East Germans agreed with the statement that ‘The system of the West was forced on the citizens of East Germany, without ever asking for their opinion’.<sup>709</sup>

It was clear from our focus groups that many citizens have not experienced a smooth transition of their Cold War-era identities, and that the process of being assimilated into a singular national story had not been smooth. The economic disparities between the East and Western sides of Germany meant the feeling of ‘otherness’ was being perpetuated, with East German identity retained as an act of defiance and to uphold a sense of status. In a country that also retains such profoundly important regional identities, and in which entire generations had grown up with such a clearly delineated East-West concept of self imposed upon them, the weakest identification for many participants was with the German nation as a whole.

- *Part of it is that most have lost their identity due to reunification. The fraud of reunification. So many things happened after this reunification that no one needs to be proud of. It all begins with the ‘Treuhand’ and ends with our banking system. The Eastern German citizen feels cheated by politics. There is no reunification in the minds of people, neither financially. We are still 40 years behind. [...] That has a lot to do with the*

*sell-out of Eastern Germany, the sell-out of all state property. In the East, everything belonged to the people, and that was privatised. That's also why Eastern Germans have a distinct identity.*

*Da spielt auch mit rein, dass den meisten die Identität abhanden gekommen ist durch die Wiedervereinigung. Durch den Betrug der Wiedervereinigung. Also es sind genügend Dinge passiert nach der Wiedervereinigung, wo niemand drauf stolz sein muss. Es geht bei der Treuhand los und hört beim Bankensystem auf. Der Ostdeutsche Bürger fühlt sich eigentlich betrogen durch die Politik. Es gibt keine Wiedervereinigung in den Köpfen und auch nicht finanziell gesehen. Wir hinken immer noch 40 Jahre hinterher.[...] Das hängt mit dem Ausverkauf des Ostens zusammen, dem Ausverkauf der Staatsgüter. Im Osten gehörte ja alles dem Volk und das wurde privatisiert. Deswegen haben die im Osten auch eine eigene Identität.*

- *What happened after reunification was our own work. But they always pretend as if we only received charity the whole time.*

*Was nach der Wende passiert ist, ist unsere eigene Arbeit. Aber es wird immer so getan als hätten wir nur Almosen bekommen*

The complicated relationship between citizens of the former GDR and their sense of identity is manifest within the endurance of 'Ostalgie', a particular form of nostalgia pertaining to citizens who previously lived under East German rule. Our focus groups highlighted the depth and breadth of this fond remembrance for life under the GDR, certainly present amongst large numbers of those in Berlin, but endemic throughout East Germany – especially in the city of Dresden.

Dresden, the capital city and second-largest city of Saxony, with over half a million residents, has experienced first-hand many of the turbulent events of the last century. In February 1945, the city was firebombed over the course of three days by allied forces, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 25,000 people, and the destruction of 75,000 dwellings, including the historic city centre.<sup>710</sup> Dresden was then under the control of the GDR for 40 years, until October 1989, when the peaceful demonstrations in Dresden and the rest of Saxony sparked the revolution that would ultimately lead to the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>711</sup>

With reunification came massive social and economic change. East Germany's population decreased by nearly 15 per cent between 1989 and 2013, as Easterners – particularly younger citizens – flocked to the West.<sup>712</sup> In the three years after the Wall fell, East Germany's GDP decrease by around 30 per cent<sup>713</sup> and as of 2015, its GDP per capita is still only 67 per cent of that of western Germany.<sup>714</sup> The Saxon region has now become a stronghold for the far-Right, with the

xenophobic Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West) rallying weekly at Dresden's Theaterplatz,<sup>715</sup> and the AfD winning 27 per cent of the vote in the region.<sup>716</sup>

Despite the challenges of reunification, Saxony has recently sought to market itself as a high-tech 'Silicon Saxony', attracting companies such as Porsche, which makes all of its hybrid cars in the state, and Volkswagen, which is making its e-Golf in Dresden.<sup>717</sup> Dresden's economy has made major improvements since the 1990s, with its GDP growing by more than 50 per cent since 1995, and now bringing in around a sixth of Saxony's GDP.<sup>718</sup> Nonetheless, Dresden's unemployment rate of 6.3 per cent is higher than the national average<sup>719</sup>, and labour productivity remains sluggish.<sup>720</sup>

The nostalgia we witnessed in our focus groups in East Germany is not 'blind'; it reflects awareness that many aspects of life under the GDR were restrictive, repressive and menacing. However, the benign memories of its 'benefits' appears to hold a more persuasive, emotive role in their recollections. These memories are held against life in the West, which was consistently described as "grey", "detached", "competitive" and "cold", in contrast to the robust sense of community and belonging many recalled in their former lives.

- *Until the 1990s, we felt love, shelter, patience, joy, beauty, carelessness. Still in GDR times. Well of course, there is also a little black spot, but otherwise...today I picture everything dark, grey, egoistic and cold.*  
*Bis knapp zu den 90ern, Liebe, Geborgenheit, Geduld, Freude, Schönheit, Sorglosigkeit. Noch DDR Zeit. Also so ein bisschen ist da ja auch ein schwarzer Fleck drin, aber ansonsten.. in dem zweiten Zimmer ist alles düster, grau, egoistisch, und kalt.*
- *In the GDR, we did not have much, but with the little bit we had, we were happy and we cooperated with our neighbours. [...] Back then, we knew exactly that we could afford vacation once a year. If I am old one day, I won't suffer etc...all this is gone. I am going into pension this year, in two months that is. And I will get 700€ in pension. I did not expect that at all. There is simply a feeling of threat, worry about the future.*  
*Die DDR. Wir hatten nicht viel, aber mit dem bisschen, das wir hatten, damit waren wir glücklich und es gab ein Miteinander mit den Nachbarn [...]. Damals wusste man ganz genau, einmal im Jahr kann man sich einen Urlaub leisten. Wenn ich mal alt bin werde ich nicht Not leiden und so weiter. Das ist heute alles weg. Ich gehe dieses Jahr, also in zwei Monaten, in Rente. Und ich werde 700 Euro Rente bekommen. Das hatte ich damals nicht erwartet. Da ist einfach nur ein Gefühl der Bedrohung, der Angst vor der Zukunft.*

- *I am from the East. I also remember the ties of friendship that we used to have. The similarities, the sense of community. The cheerfulness [...]. And we had many more intangible values, the material values were not as relevant. Today I see existential fear, all the egoism.*

*Ich komme ja auch aus dem Osten. Ich habe auch das freundschaftliche Verhältnis, das man früher hatte. Die Gemeinsamkeiten, das Gemeinschaftsgefühl. Der Frohsinn, [...] Und wir hatten viel mehr ideelle Werte, die materiellen Werte waren für uns nicht so relevant. Im zweiten Raum, da habe ich Existenzangst. Der Egoismus, der heute herrscht.*

- *Many things were not nice in the East of Berlin, or in the GDR. But quite a few things were not that bad either, to warrant the way it is demonised today.*

*Vieles war nicht schön im Osten von Berlin oder auch in der DDR aber Manches war auch nicht so schlecht, dass man das heute alles verteufelt, wie es heute verteufelt wird*

- *In GDR times, no one had to worry, that he or she would not get a job. Everyone worked. Even the most stupid person, if I may say so, was deployed somewhere. And for work that others, more skilled workers, did not have time, these 'putz' were deployed and contributed to society. I worked in a butcher shop and there was someone who had the mind of a five-year-old. But he was still treated respectfully.*

*Sagen wir mal so, da brauchte sich erstmal in der DDR keiner Sorgen machen, dass er keine Arbeit hatte, da hatte jeder Arbeit. Sogar der Dümme sag ich jetzt mal, der wurde irgendwo eingesetzt, was denn die anderen, die Facharbeiter sag ich mal keine Zeit für hatten, da wurde, ich sag mal ganz böse, der Dödel eingesetzt aber der hatte seine Arbeit, der wurde dann auch da, dem wurde geholfen, der hat uns geholfen. Ich habe in einer Fleischerei gearbeitet, da war einer, der war geistig wirklich wie ein Fünfjähriger, aber hat man den vernünftig angesprochen.*

## Community

A sense of community fragmentation was distinctly felt in our focus groups, with participants describing a confluence of economic, social and cultural factors as contributing to a breakdown of solidarity, common understanding and neighbourliness. However, it was clear that Germany's 20<sup>th</sup> Century history, and the process of unification and national rebuilding, has complicated the feeling of consensus as to the lived experience of the past. In French and English focus groups, participants consistently recalled the same forms of social relations, living environments and cultural values as definitive to a certain age.

In Germany, however, many had been born into utterly different contexts, with different 'feels' and henceforth, different memories. By consequence, the topic of community was less cohesive in our focus groups than in other countries. Nonetheless, some areas of relative consensus lay in observations regarding the erosion of community cooperation and civic culture, and the impact that demanding careers have had on the sanctity of family life.

- *The Germany that it was doing best was that of the 1970s. I was father of a family, had two kids, sole wage earner, who had his house, his car, went on vacation once a year. Flourishing landscapes. The solidarity in society, where mutual help was still a given. And then, imagining the Germany of today, one sees grey walls, people are egoistic, elbowing their way through life, because it is not possible otherwise. If there are still married couples, both have to work from early til late, because it is not enough otherwise. And they consider hard whether they really want kids, since this is expensive. And support from the state is missing. And what you then feel is sorrow, anger towards politics.*

*Das war das Deutschland Ende der 1970er. Familienvater, 2 Kinder, der allein arbeiten gegangen ist, der sein Häuschen hatte, sein Auto hatte, der einmal im Jahr in den Urlaub gefahren ist. Blühende Landschaften. Der gemeinschaftliche Zusammenhalt in der Bevölkerung, wo noch Hilfe angesagt war. [...] man sieht graue Betonwände [...] die Leute sind nur noch Egoisten, setzen sich mit Ellenbogen durch weil es gar nicht mehr anders möglich ist. Wenn es noch Ehepaare gibt, dann müssen beide von früh bis abends arbeiten, weil es sonst gar nicht mehr reicht. Und die überlegen sich stark ob sie noch Kinder kriegen, weil das teuer ist. Und die Unterstützung vom Staat fehlt. Und was man dann fühlt ist Trauer, Wut auf die Politik.*

Some participants clearly felt that German society had become more competitive, exacting and onerous over the course of their lifetimes, and this could prompt a high degree of pessimism about the country's future – and their children's opportunities.

- *I had fun at work, fun with my friends, we met and partied together. I felt totally secure, without any worries. Today, I am just afraid. Just afraid because of the future, worried about myself, and especially about my own children. Afraid. That is a really depressing feeling.*

*Dass ich Spaß an der Arbeit hatte, Spaß mit Freunden, man hat sich getroffen, man hat gefeiert zusammen. [...] Ich habe mich total sicher gefühlt, ohne Sorgen irgendwo. jetzt in dem zweiten Raum ist es wirklich einfach nur so, dass man ja, Angst hat. Einfach Angst hat, um die Zukunft Angst hat, um sich selbst, und vor allem auch um die eigenen Kinder. also es ist ein richtig bedrückendes Gefühl.*

Efforts were made to theorise on the exact moment that sparked a decline in German values and community, although this was heavily contested and participants' views were shaped largely by their own experiences. Among those in the West, for example, there was some speculation about whether the 1968 revolution, which swept Germany along with many other Western nations, had 'thrown the baby out with the bathwater' and set off a chain of events that would lead to the complete erosion of national pride and identity. In the East, by contrast, the fall of the Wall continues to stand as the seminal moment of rupture between the 'before' and the 'afterwards', and therefore the positive memories of times past are contained within its legacy.

- *I have the theory, that values were lost with the 1968 generation, probably as a counter-movement to the Nazis. There the Germans are a little radical. And perhaps a few too many values were lost back then. Then you have globalization on top and well, cultural mixing.*  
*Ich hab so diese Theorie, dass die Werte mit den 68ern ein Stück verloren gingen, weil man wahrscheinlich als Gegenbewegung zu den Nazis...und Deutsche sind dann gerne immer so ein bisschen radikal, dann wird das alles gemacht. Und da sind vielleicht auch ein bisschen zu viele Werte verloren gegangen und dann kommt eben Globalisierung dazu und eben ja die kulturelle Vermischung*
- *Together, the cohesion is not there anymore among us Germans. We split, and as people we're better and better off. But when we all had nothing, after the War, or, when I was born in 1961 until the 80s or 90s, then everyone helped everyone. All doors were open and as a kid, I could access all apartments. I stayed wherever food was best. Today, everyone closes his door, does not let anyone in. Properties are fenced completely.*  
*Zusammen, der Zusammenhalt, den gibt es bei uns so gut wie gar nicht mehr unter den Deutschen. Wie alle nichts hatten nach dem Krieg, oder ich bin 61 geboren, bis so 80, 90, da hat jeder jedem geholfen. Die Türen waren alle auf, ich konnte als Kind in jede Wohnung. Bin da geblieben wo es das beste Essen gab. Heute macht jeder die Tür zu, lässt keinen mehr in die Wohnung. Grundstücke werden riesig eingezäunt.*

## Immigration

Historically, German citizenship has been difficult for immigrants to obtain. The state applied *jus sanguinis* until the 1990s, offering German citizenship only through parental lineage, leaving millions who were born and raised in Germany in permanent 'foreigner' status.<sup>721</sup> Some administrations, including the Kohl Government, which lasted for most of the 80s and 90s, were famously tough on migrants and asylum-seekers.<sup>722</sup> From early on in her leadership, Chancellor

Angela Merkel has attempted to offer a more coherent and inclusive immigration and integration strategy, in part to combat the labour shortages associated with Germany's rapidly ageing population.<sup>723</sup>

In early 2015, a confluence of factors, including heightened global conflicts, drought and civil wars, led to a dramatic surge in the number of refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe by boat. Predominantly young male adults from Muslim-majority countries, the scale of the migration quickly escalated from tens to hundreds of thousands<sup>724</sup>. The Schengen Agreement, which facilitated free movement across the continent, enabled arrivals to travel towards their desired place of settlement, with a small number of countries – particularly Germany – finding itself the target of a disproportionately large number of both refugees and economic migrants<sup>725</sup>.

In August 2015, during her annual summer press conference, German chancellor Angela Merkel said the now-famous words: “Wir schaffen das” – *we can do it*.<sup>726</sup> She had just visited a refugee centre in the East German city of Dresden, where the locals had expressed concerns regarding Germany's relatively lenient asylum policy.<sup>727</sup> But Merkel believed Germany, with its booming economy and its leadership role in Europe, was able to absorb the migrants applying for asylum in the country. At the time of the speech, Germany was receiving about 36,000 new asylum applications per month, roughly a quarter of all EU applications.<sup>728</sup> Over the next year, the figure would rise to a peak of 92,000 first-time applications per month, more than two-thirds of the EU total.<sup>729</sup>

The Merkel Government's decision to not shut the borders and to continue to offer asylum to refugee arrivals has had vast political consequences. Initially, the public was split evenly on “wir schaffen das”, but by mid-2016, two-thirds of the Germany population disagreed with Merkel's statement.<sup>730</sup> Merkel attempted to change course, lending her support to a EU-Turkey deal; in March 2016, the EU announced all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to Greece would be returned to Turkey.<sup>731</sup> Her approval rating improved again, but not enough to prevent major electoral losses in the 2017 elections.<sup>732</sup>

The challenge for the Government has now shifted from border control to the process of integration. In 2015 and 2016 alone, some 1.2 million requests for asylum were filed in Germany.<sup>733</sup> Senior figures in Government have since admitted they underestimated the challenge of integrating a million people into German society,<sup>734</sup> and providers of integration courses said the large influx has brought the integration system ‘to its knees’.<sup>735</sup> While there have certainly been some success stories, with some communities demonstrating tremendous acts of compassion, the Government has also been forced to house people in mass

shelters in sports halls, airport hangars and other improvised facilities,<sup>736</sup> as there is not enough housing available to move on those who have been granted refugee status. Many of those who have been homed have found themselves in areas of endemic unemployment and poor job prospects.<sup>737</sup> A large influx of migrants has also proven a shock to locals in deprived, isolated areas, at times emboldening violent radical Right-wing groups. As public discord grew, asylum accommodation was frequently attacked, with roughly 1,000 police reports filed for arson and other attacks on migrant shelters in both 2015 and 2016.<sup>738</sup>

In 2016, over half a million people were entitled to start integration courses, consisting of 600 hours of German language and 100 hours of civics education. But the system was unable to absorb such a large number of students, and waiting lists grew to many months.<sup>739</sup> Moreover, only Syrians were allowed to start integration courses before being granted asylum. Others, such as Afghan asylum-seekers, often have to wait many years before they know the final decision on their application, during which time, they cannot work or follow an integration course.<sup>740</sup> In general, children and people with strong ties to the native community (for instance, through one of the many volunteer schemes) have seemed to integrate relatively smoothly, while the majority have struggled to gain a foothold.

Waiting times for integration courses and language classes also slow down labour market integration. Although most migrants are still in language courses, in school or other training programmes, and therefore not registered as unemployed, official figures do show that only 34,000 refugees found paid employment between December 2015 and November 2016.<sup>741</sup> However, forecasts by the Institute for Employment Research estimate – a forecast heavily promoted by the Government – that in five years' time, half of all refugees will have a job (including part-time work and paid internships).<sup>742</sup> The feasibility of this estimation is both untested and unclear.

Against this transformative context, it is unsurprising that the subject of immigration was one of the most extensively discussed within our focus groups, throughout the country. The concerns of German citizens are widespread – encompassing the impact on the nation's welfare system and broader finances, issues pertaining to integration and the consequences for increasingly 'mixed' communities, and perceptions of rising crime. Participants' views were nuanced; clear differentiations are made between legal and illegal immigration, and, as in Britain and France, between previous waves of migrants and more recent arrivals. Moreover, some observations are made at a civic level, and others are concerned with cultural differences.

A very clear narrative pertaining to the 2015-16 migration crisis relates to the sense that the country has lost 'vetting' control on its borders, raising fears regarding security and migrants' identities. Moreover, that the very terminology of 'refugee' status was negated as many had passed through multiple 'safe' countries on their passage to Germany, and were in possession sophisticated technology like mobile phones, heightening the sense that the country was being taken advantage of for its generosity.

- *It is not immigration, but illegal immigration, which has happened here. When 70 to 80 per cent are coming undocumented [...]. People then start going to the barricades, because there are daily homicides, criminal offenses, women are disgraced, God only knows...that can all be traced back to that. You don't even know who you are dealing with. They then run around with different identities. I personally have nothing against foreigners [...]. But I have something against this illegality. That gets on my nerves, that really agitates me.*  
*Das ist ja keine Einwanderung, sondern eine illegale Einwanderung die hier stattgefunden hat. Wenn 70 – 80% ohne Reisepässe hier rein kommen [...]*  
*Da gehen die Leute auf die Barrikaden, weil es täglich Morde, kriminelle Handlungen, Frauen geschändet, weiß der Geier nicht alles.. das ist alles darauf zurück zu führen. Man weiß ja gar nicht mit wem man es zu tun hat. Die laufen dann mit verschiedenen Identitäten durch die Gegend. Ich habe persönlich gar nichts gegen Ausländer[...] bloß gegen diese Illegalität habe ich was. Das nervt mich tierisch an, da geht mir die Halskrause hoch, da kann ich durchdrehen.*
- *Legally, there are no refugees in Germany. If someone crosses seven borders, then legally, he is not a refugee any more.*  
*Juristisch gesehen gibt es in Deutschland keine Flüchtlinge. Wenn jemand über 7 Grenzen kommt, dann ist der juristisch gesehen kein Flüchtling mehr.*
- *We guaranteed them humanitarian aid, because they were in distress. War refugees. Although, they could have also defended their country, against ISIS or the other terror groups. They didn't, but preferred to flee and left their women and children at home. But now, the next thing coming up, now they talk about family reunification. I am in favour of family reunification, just not in Germany [laughs].*  
*Wir haben denen humanitäre Hilfe gewährt, weil sie in Not waren. Kriegsflüchtlinge. Wobei, sie hätten ja auch ihr Land verteidigen können, gegen den IS oder die Terrortruppen. Haben sie nicht gemacht sondern sind lieber geflüchtet und haben ihre Frauen und Kinder zu Hause gelassen. Jetzt kommt aber der nächste Punkt, jetzt redet man über Familienzusammenführung. Ich bin für Familienzusammenführung, aber nicht in Deutschland.*

- *At our place in Fechenheim, there was an asylum-seekers home a few years back and you wouldn't [have seen] so much dirt in a long time. And what made me furious, they all needed to get a smartphone. Why a smartphone? Is a simple mobile phone not enough? Does it have to be a smartphone?*

*Bei uns in Fechenheim, da war ein Asylantenheim vor ein paar Jahren und erstens soviel Dreck hatten wir in Fechenheim lange Zeit nicht mehr und was mich da so geärgert hat, ja, die mussten alle ein Smartphone bekommen, warum ein Smartphone? Reicht nicht so ein einfaches Handy? Muss es ein Smartphone sein?*

The migration crisis of 2015-16 was not the first time that Germany has had to confront its immigration policies. As in many other European countries, after the War there was an urgent need to bring in able-bodied men to work largely industrial, low-skilled occupations to support the nation's economic recovery. A series of bilateral recruitment agreements enabled large inflows of migrants from Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Portugal and Yugoslavia to come to Germany as 'guest workers', for a period of up to two years. Poorly enforced and administered, the scheme eventually became a means of permanent migration, with Turks the largest population. As Germany entered a recession in the 1970s, the Government took action to halt the recruitment of migrant workers, however the intended temporary nature of its former immigration programme had been utterly unsuccessful, with large numbers of workers now settling permanently. Moreover, the process of family reunification facilitated the growth of migrant communities<sup>743</sup>.

There have been many periods of discord regarding the legacy of the guest worker programme over recent decades in Germany<sup>744</sup>; in our focus groups, however, previous waves of migrants – particularly those who had been enticed to the country to support its economic growth – were seen more favourably than recent arrivals. Many participants regarded the value of migration as entirely framed by their capacity to contribute to the nation's prosperity, and were therefore dismayed at the concept of accepting migrants who needed extensive support to integrate and become productive.

- *The thing with the guest workers, I always understood it in the following way: There was the 'economic miracle' [after the War] and we had more work than people and we were already arrogant enough to refuse doing certain jobs, such as working with garbage. And we demanded labour forces from Spain, Italy, Turkey – people who came from a situation of economic suffering. And we had the jobs and barely didn't know how to*

*fill it. And now, we have managed to fill these jobs and now more people are coming into this labour market – people who are not well qualified and have to learn German.*

*Das mit den Gastarbeitern hab ich so verstanden, wir sind das Wirtschafts-wunderland und wir hatten mehr Arbeit als wir Menschen hatten und wir waren teilweise schon arrogant genug gewisse Arbeit wie Müll nicht mehr machen zu wollen. Und wir haben gezielt Arbeitskräfte aus Spanien, Italien, der Türkei angefordert, eben Leute, die wie sie sagte, eine wirtschaftliche Not auf ihrer Seite hatten und wir hatten diese Arbeitsplätze und wir wussten kaum, wie wir sie füllen. Und jetzt haben wir ein Großteil der Arbeitsplätze mühsam gefüllt. Und jetzt drängen weitere Menschen, die zum Teil gar nicht gut ausgebildet sind, Deutsch lernen müssen auf diesen Arbeitsmarkt.*

As in Britain and in France, Islamic migration was especially singled out as particularly disorienting for the 'native' German population, noting a wide range of cultural differences perceived to stand as fundamental obstacles to integration. There were extensive references made in our focus groups to the number of children born to Muslim migrants in Germany, and even accusations of polygamy and paedophilia, suggesting that sensationalised political and media narratives may have had some influence in shaping such perspectives and creating the impression that they are widespread<sup>745</sup>.

- *Yes, it is bubbling underneath the surface. No matter where you are, you hear a lot of ranting among the population, ranting about immigrants or foreigners. There are so many cultures as well. Back then, in GDR times, we had Hungarians, Vietnamese, but we did not have such a ragtag population. That does cause fear, if they walk the streets with a burqa. Then they all have four or five children.*

*Ja, es brodeln schon. Egal wo, man hört schon viel Geschimpfe in der Bevölkerung, auf die Einwanderer oder Ausländer. Das sind auch so viele Kulturen. Damals zu DDR Zeiten hatten wir die Ungarn, Vietnamesen, also man hatte nicht so eine bunt gemischte Bevölkerung. Aber das macht schon Angst wenn die mit Burka durch die Straße gehen. Die haben dann alles vier oder fünf Kinder.*

- *And if I hear that a man from a country where it is normal to have four women and perhaps twelve children, that this man can bring all his women into our country, which does not have such traditions.*

*Und wenn ich höre, dass ein Mann, in dessen Land es üblich ist, dass er vier Frauen hat und vielleicht zwölf Kinder, dass der seine ganzen Frauen in unser Land mitholen kann, das nicht diese Einrichtung hat.*

- *First, the masses, the speed at which they all suddenly came. And then the religion. Because, those which came back then, if they were Russians, Turks, Italians. They all tried to integrate themselves, they all sought work. Today, even where refugees themselves would like to integrate, they don't manage, because there simply aren't the opportunities to do so due to these masses. [...] I cannot invite people over and not know at all how to serve them and so on..*

*Erstens, in der Masse, in der Schnelligkeit, wie viele auf einmal kommen. Dann die Religion. Auf alle Fälle weil ähm die früher ähm die zu uns gekommen sind, ob das jetzt Russen waren, Türken waren, Italiener waren. Die haben sich alle irgendwo auch versucht zu integrieren, die haben alle versucht Arbeit zu bekommen. Heutzutage ist es eben auch so, selbst die Flüchtlinge, die jetzt kommen, die jetzt vielleicht sich auch integrieren würden wollen, schaffen es ja gar nicht, weil gar nicht die Möglichkeit dafür da ist durch diese Massen.[...] Ich kann mir auch keine Leute einladen und kann die ja die nicht versorgen und was weiß ich...*

- *And then it is the case that this religion [Islam] should be imposed upon us. That was not the case back then. Everyone was tolerant. I, for example, was not bothered whether someone was Christian or whatever. One had no problem. But today, we have to adapt and we do not want that. That is the worst, right? That in kindergartens, now they do not want to serve pig anymore. That in part Christmas celebrations are supposed to be shut down.*

*Dann ist eben so, dass diese Religion und aufgezwungen werden soll. Das wurde früher nie gemacht. Jeder, man hatte ne Toleranz. Ich hab zum Beispiel auch keine Probleme, wenn jemand christlich ist oder irgendwas hatte man keine Probleme aber heutzutage ist das so, wir müssen uns jetzt dem anpassen und das wollen wir nicht und das ist glaube ich auch das Schlimmste dadran, ja? Das in den Kindergärten jetzt keine, kein Schweinefleisch mehr gegeben werden darf, das teilweise eben die Weihnachtsfeiern unterbunden werden sollen.*

Some participants spoke of an imbalance in the 'bargain' between the German-born population and migrants, who overtly demonstrate their difference and then question why they are treated as 'the other'. Again, recriminations fell heavily on the Government, who they felt had enable a civic environment to flourish that demanded they accommodate different cultures, while simultaneously diminishing the prominence and supreme status of German heritage and traditions.

- *I think that the telling difference is that these people come demanding [things] and then they demonstrate their otherness. Well, I mean, already*

*with the Turks here, if you only go around the corner here. I cannot run around with a headscarf as a woman and at the same time complain that I am treated differently by the Germans. [...] And all official parties, no, um, all parties except for the AfD, the FDP, they are a little different here, they all buckle and surrender? That is a capitulation of the German culture. Ich glaube, dass ist der gravierende Unterschied. Die Leute kommen fordernd und demonstrieren ihr Anderssein. Ich meine, naja, das ist doch, wobei ja auch schon die Türken hier, da brauch man bloß um die Ecke gehen. Ich kann doch nicht mit einem Kopftuch rumlaufen als Frau und mich gleichzeitig darüber beschweren, dass ich von den Deutschen als anders behandelt werde [...]. Und die offizielle Politik, nech äh, alle Parteien außer die AfD, die FDP ist da ein bisschen anders, knicken da ein und kapitulieren. Das ist eine Kapitulation der deutschen Kultur*

The most contentious issue pertaining to the topic of immigration, particularly relating to the 2015-16 intake of migrants, is crime, with many highly publicised criminal cases remaining vivid in participants' minds. The most prominent incident took place during New Year's Eve in 2016 in Cologne, where large groups of men from immigrant communities ganged up on and sexually assaulted scores of German women, in a series of attacks many speculated had been coordinated.<sup>746</sup> A series of other notorious cases, including the fatal stabbing of a 15-year-old girl by an Afghan migrant taken in by her family in Kandel<sup>747</sup>, heightened by speculation that some migrants had lied about their age on entering Germany and Sweden<sup>748</sup>, has fostered fears that Germany has made itself vulnerable.

While the sheer scale of recent migrant arrivals means the entire cohort cannot be considered in singular terms, these individual cases have been seized upon by the AfD and have spurred an extensive number of Right-wing websites spreading misinformation<sup>749</sup>. Nonetheless, the counter-argument delivered by fact-checkers in the press that 'there were 100 crimes recorded, not the 400 as claimed' has failed to convince many citizens who felt they were never given a choice to accept such large-scale migration. Moreover, the issue has sparked fierce debates among feminist communities, with some campaigners claiming the interest in women's safety is simply an acceptable shield for racism, and others condemning the endangering of women as a set-back in Germany's gender relations<sup>750</sup>.

It is difficult to draw conclusions about migrant crime in general, because the German Government has generally not published migrant crime statistics for fear of stoking division. One study, commissioned by the regional government of Lower Saxony, found that migrants did commit more crimes than native-born Germans. This was echoed in another study conducted in North Rhine-

Westphalia, which found that newly arrived migrants were responsible for the vast majority of the increase in local offences.<sup>751</sup> In part, this can be explained by the demographics of the migrant populations, being younger, and overwhelmingly male. The lack of open political debate and transparency regarding migrant statistics is fuelling misinformation and even conspiracy theories, and encouraging many citizens to regard an extremely diverse, large group of people as a homogenous, threatening entity.

The issue of crime was especially resonant with the older members of our focus groups, who were clearly quite viscerally affected by what they saw to be a considerable decline in standards of personal and public safety. Immigration was often the explanation most readily drawn upon in fuelling the perception of rising crime – at once a ‘general feeling’ or suspicion, and in some occasions, as a result of direct personal experience.

- *For me, the issue of security did change a lot. In the 1980s, for instance, or even before I was waiting on tables in Sachsenhausen, there I did not have any problem, no fear. But today, I do consider whether I should walk around alone after dark. In my personal environment, there were assaults of some sort, snatching of purses, mobile phones stolen. I blame the immigrants once more unfortunately, because back then there were only Americans.*

*Also für mich persönlich hat sich das Thema Sicherheit sehr verändert. In den 80er-Jahren zum Beispiel, habe ich, oder noch früher als 80er in Sachsenhausen bedient, da hatte ich überhaupt kein Problem, hatte keine Angst. Und heutzutage mache ich mir schon Gedanken, ob ich im Dunkeln alleine draußen herumrenne. Halt auch im persönlichen Umfeld schon mit Überfällen irgendwelche Vorfälle, Handtasche weggerissen. Handys geklaut. Ich schiebs leider wieder auf die Zuwanderer weil damals gab es nur die Amerikaner.*

- *I, for example, live in a row house, there are 6 or 8 row houses. In these houses, there live two German families. My family, and the neighbours. All others are Moroccan, Muslims, and there you have to be very careful what you say. You also need eyes in your back. It is possible that you suddenly have a knife in your back. That's how it is.*

*Ich wohne zum Beispiel in einer Reihenhaussiedlung, da sind 6, 8 Reihenhäuser. In diesen Häusern wohnen zwei Deutsche Familien. Meine Familien, Nachbarn. Alles andere sind Marokkaner, Moslems, da muss man sehr sehr vorsichtig sein, was man da sagt. Da musst du auch hinten Augen haben. Könnte sein, dass du eventuell ein Messer im Rücken hast. So sieht es da aus.*

- *[on violence] Yes, because a human life does not count much for them. Even though I personally am not against individual people; it is clear, you need to help refugees from war. But the pack that the Merkel let in, no way.*

*Ja weil bei denen Menschenleben nichts wert ist. Wobei ich persönlich nichts gegen die einzelnen Personen habe. Klare Sache, jedem Kriegsflüchtling muss geholfen werden. Aber das Pack, was uns die Merkel alle reingeholt hat, nee.*

Another area of anxiety for citizens regarding immigration is the impact that particularly the sudden, large-scale influx of migrants and their integration needs are having on the German welfare state and the Government's finances more generally. Many expressed frustration that either they themselves, or 'those struggling in society', are not adequately supported by the state financially, and yet the system has now been able to carve out funding to support integration.

- *Two days ago, there was this report from Fokus [a German magazine] that the Government had taken 700 billion from the pensions to finance their asylum policies. Why do they take that from the pensions? The politicians should give 50% of their salary and help co-financing all that. Dann war jetzt vor zwei Tagen ein Bericht von Fokus, die Bundesregierung hat 700 Milliarden aus der Rentenkasse genommen um die Asylantenpolitik zu finanzieren. Wieso nehmen Sie das aus dem Rentenpott? Das sollen die ganzen Politiker 50 Prozent ihres Gehalts verzichten und sollen den ganzen Kram mitfinanzieren.*

- *Here the state takes care of everything, and we who worked here, who live here. For our poor there is no money, because the money is spent on something like that [giving benefits to immigrants]. And that is not right at all.*

*Die wir hier gearbeitet haben, die wir hier leben und die wir recht leben wollen, gehts ab. Für unsere Armen ist kein Geld da, weil das Geld für soetwas ausgegeben wird. Und das ist ganz und gar nicht richtig.*

One participant felt that the Government was already being duplicitous in its employment statistics, and therefore the basis on which the country's capacity to cope with the migration crisis was being assessed was fundamentally flawed.

- *I think we have currently 10 million recipients of Hartz IV who are not working at the same time. Hence, in my opinion, there are many more unemployed than the statistics tell you, because they are all excluded from the statistics. This is why we cannot bear this influx in my opinion.*

*Ich glaube wir haben momentan 10 Millionen Hartz IV Empfänger, die auch nicht in Arbeit sind. Also meiner Meinung nach viel mehr Arbeitslose als wie in der Statistik drin steht weil sie alle rausgenommen werden. Deswegen können wir auch diesen Zugang so nicht mehr verkraften meiner Meinung nach.*

The education system was also highlighted as an area citizens feel is under particular strain, as the hyper-concentration of migrants in particular areas creates pressures for schools and other public services. Some participants felt that the presence of such large proportions of non-German-speaking migrant children in classrooms could undermine the education standards of native students.

- *Our children are getting more and more stupid. And I can say that I am proud that in the East, children still learned something. The education system was better, definitely. Today, they don't even know what apples and pears are. It's not that the foreigners are to blame for everything. But because of the influx of refugees, the share of foreigners grew so that there are almost no teachers who can handle it. In some schools the share is for example 98% of children from refugees or migrants.*

*Unsere Kinder verblöden hier immer mehr. Und da kann ich eigentlich auch nur sagen, da bin ich auch zum Beispiel stolz drauf, im Osten haben die Kinder noch richtig was gelernt. Schulsystem hat besser funktioniert, definitiv). Heutzutage ist es auch so. Die wissen ja gar nicht mehr was nen Apfel und ne Birne ist). Es ist jetzt nicht immer unbedingt, dass man das auf die Ausländer in dem Sinne schiebt aber das größte Problem ist gerade auch durch diesen Flüchtlingszuzug ist der Anteil der Ausländer eben in den Schulen so gewachsen, dass es kaum Lehrer gibt, die das bewältigen können. So, und der Anteil manchmal ist zum Beispiel 98 Prozent ist, sind Flüchtlingskinder oder Immigranten.*

A number of participants observed that Germany's increasing multiculturalism can feel alienating, observing that they would often find themselves the only German-speaker in an area, and that the nation's language was a critical part of what had previously defined and contained the country's sense of unity and identity.

- *For sure, much has changed lately. I don't want to harp on it, but all those immigrants. You don't feel so German in your own country, because you barely hear it, the language. Or maybe I am moving in the wrong circles, but if you go by public transport for example, you don't hear anything German, except for the announcements perhaps.*

*Ich will nicht drauf rumreiten aber die vielen Zuwanderer jetzt, das nimmt schon Überhand. Das man sich in seinem eigenen Land nicht mehr so als Deutscher fühlt, weil man es kaum hört, von der Sprache her. Oder vielleicht bewege ich mich in den falschen Kreisen aber wenn man mit öffentlichen Verkehrsmitteln zum Beispiel fährt, hört man ja nichts Deutsches mehr, außer der Durchsage vielleicht.*

- ***It used to be good before the fall of the Wall. And after the fall it used to be good for some time as well, there still was an easy-going vibe. So, I felt all right then and all. Today, I feel really alien and, it's a cold atmosphere, and yes, very uncomfortable. I am sorry to say, but this has a lot to do with the immigrants. It can be no coincidence that it used to be different before.***

*Ich war kurz vor der Wende. Nach der Wende ging es ja auch noch, da war es ja, also war auch noch so mit Unbeschwertheit. Also da habe ich mich wohl gefühlt und alles. Und in dem zweiten Raum ziemlich fremd und ähm kalte Atmosphäre und ja, völlig unwohl habe ich mich da gefühlt. Das hängt nunmal leider Gottes viel mit den Flüchtlingen zusammen. Es kann ja kein Zufall sein, dass es vorher nicht so war.*

- ***When I take the subway in the evening [...], I notice a tourist from Dortmund or so, and I say to myself, I am glad, 'cause there is finally someone who speaks German. Then I am frightened. Because it is really like that, when I go home in the evenings. Then I turn around and feel lonely as a German.***

*Wenn ich zum Beispiel abends in die Straßenbahn einsteige [...], da ist ein Tourist aus Dortmund oder so und da sage ich zu mir, jetzt bin ich aber froh, endlich mal jemand, der hier Deutsch spricht, da kriege ich dann einen Schreck. Weil es ist so, es ist wirklich so, wenn ich abends nachhause fahre, dann drehe ich mich um, und dann fühle ich mich als Deutscher allein.*

- ***I used to feel at home here. Shortly after the fall of the Wall it was still alright and so on. But I now say it as it is: since all the refugees are here... I am not right-wing, no way, but since all these refugees are here and these politics, a lot has changed and I do not feel at home any longer.***  
*Nee, ich hab mich hier mal wohl gefühlt aber wie gesagt, kurz nach der Wende ging's auch noch und Pipapo und ich sags jetzt so wie es ist, seit die ganzen Flüchtlinge hier sind... Ich bin nicht rechts, auf keinen Fall aber seit die ganzen Flüchtlinge hier ist und diese Politik, das hat sich hier sehr vieles geändert, ich fühle mich hier nicht mehr wohl.*

In Essen, many of the participants expressed distinctly more positive opinions regarding migrants, condemning punitive border control policies, which they saw as inhumane and against liberal values, and railing against the 'demonisation' of migrants in the media. They felt that their motivations had been misrepresented, and that they held genuine desires to contribute actively through economic and social means.

- *Among those who are coming now, 80% want to work. Our politicians are making the mistake that they are not allowed to work. They don't want to receive social benefits. People are sent back who are integrated, who speak German, they have a job or an apprenticeship.*

*Auch von denen die jetzt kommen, sind auch 80 Prozent, die wollen arbeiten. Unsere Politik macht aber Fehler, die dürfen nicht arbeiten, die wollen nicht Sozialhilfe kriegen. Es werden Leute zurückgeschickt, die sind integriert, die sprechen Deutsch, die haben ne Arbeit oder ne Lehrstelle.*

- *If someone is integrated, and makes an effort, who works, speaks the language, he is sent back home into a country that is really not peaceful. Then I ask myself, hello, is that ok?*

*Aber jemand der integriert ist, sich Mühe gibt, der arbeitet, der die Sprache kann, der wird nachhause geschickt in ein Land, was wirklich nicht friedlich ist? Da frage ich mich wirklich, hallo geht es noch.*

Regardless of their personal views on the migration crisis and immigration more generally, almost all participants agreed that the issue had become immensely divisive, and had split opinions in a country already struggling to overcome divisions of history. There was a sense of real pathos at the 'mood' that had proliferated across the country, with towns and cities at odds as the differences in attitudes regarding the issue of immigration has become another mark of identity.

- *Me, I don't want to deal with xenophobia. I feel there is such a bad mood in the country. Just a bad mood, distrust, resentment, and our sense of humanity has completely disappeared. And this is a reason for me to say I do not feel so comfortable in my own country any longer. But not due to the immigrants, but due to the mood.*

*ich möchte nicht auf Ausländerfeindlichkeit, ich finde einfach, dass eine schlechte Stimmung. Ich möchte einfach nur sagen schlechte Stimmung. Misstrauen, Missgunst, also ich finde solche menschlichen Aspekte, die fallen total hintenrunter und das ist für mich so ein Grund, wo ich sage, ich fühle mich einfach nicht mehr so richtig wohl*

in meinem Land. *Aber nicht ob der vielen Ausländer sondern wegen der Stimmung*

- *I really enjoyed how 2006 was perceived, the World Cup in Germany [...] But now, I agree that things have changed again. That we are not in 2006 anymore emotionally. Because people are apparently not able to deal with the immigration and I think that we in Frankfurt, a big city that has always been multicultural [...]. We are most likely dealing with this much better than smaller towns.*

*Ich fand 2006 so wunderbar in der Wahrnehmung, WM in Deutschland [...] Mittlerweile stimme ich auch zu, dass sich das doch wieder geändert hat. Das wir emotional nicht mehr in 2006 sind. Weil die Menschen scheinbar mit der Zuwanderung nicht zurechtkommen und ich glaube wir in Frankfurt, in einer Großstadt, die immer Multi-Kulti war.[...] Wir kommen damit wahrscheinlich noch viel besser mit klar als eine Kleinstadt.*

Finally, in Dresden, one participant took a different view, observing that concerns regarding the migration crisis had resulted in an unexpected development, uniting the country in frustration at the Government.

- *Because of the problems with the refugees, we are somehow growing together, East and Western Germany. Only in this sense though. Most people in West Germany are also waking up.*

*Durch das Problem mit den Flüchtlingen, wachsen wir komischer Weise gerade zusammen, Ostdeutschland und Westdeutschland. Aber nur in diesem Sinne. Die meisten werden auch schon munter da drüben.*

## **Politics, Media and Public Debate**

Prior to the migration crisis, Chancellor Angela Merkel's national and international position appeared extremely strong, with high levels of economic growth and stable governance. While her approval ratings were resilient<sup>752</sup>, underneath the surface, however, many Germans were growing increasingly concerned about her monopoly on power, and the lack of options within the political party system. As she had ascended and consolidated power, other parties had become weak and fractured; in particular, the SPD, which had found itself the ill-fated smaller coalition party, a scapegoat for the coalition's failings and lacking the agency to claim credit for its achievements. The path Germany took in the migration crisis reflects Chancellor Merkel's supreme agency during this period, and also the tremendous influence this could wield across the broader political-media nexus.

The sense of the nation on 'one path', united in its commitment to absorbing large-scale migration, saw an unprecedented level of consensus form within the Government and across the mainstream media. For citizens uncomfortable or ill-at-ease with the decision taken by the Chancellor, there was the impression that there were few avenues to voice dissent and hear their concerns represented in political discourse and public debate. Increasing polarisation in the electorate has seen rising concerns in some parts of the population about the emergence of a radical form of nationalist politics, manifest in the electoral gains made by the AfD at the 2017 elections, while others feel their legitimate views are being persecuted and suppressed by a liberal cosmopolitan hegemony in the media and politics.

Against this backdrop, the issue of 'freedom of speech' was strikingly dominant in many of our focus groups discussions, particularly in the East of Germany. The right to free speech is guaranteed through Germany's 'Basic Law' (*Grundgesetz*), but it also provides for a fairly wide range of exceptions. Introduced in 1949, just a few years after the Second World War, the Basic Law portrays free speech as something to be balanced against other rules and protections rather than an absolute right.<sup>753</sup> Laws against hate speech, in particular, have been invoked to curb free expression; because of Germany's history with Nazism, the state is arguably more willing to censor radical viewpoints.<sup>754</sup> A recent case concerned Lutz Bachmann, head of the Pegida movement, who had referred to migrants as "filth" and "cattle" on his Facebook page. He was convicted of inciting hatred and ordered to pay a 10,000 euro fine.<sup>755</sup>

Some have argued that the curbing of free speech has extended from the political domain to a form of cultural censorship.<sup>756</sup> For instance, Frankfurt's Mayor criticised the city's annual book fair for including Right-wing publishing houses. The organisation defended their decision, citing freedom of speech,<sup>757</sup> but the events and presentations were disrupted when Left-wing protesters clashed with attendants.<sup>758</sup> Authors and publishers from all over the political spectrum decried the events as "unworthy of a free intellectual life".<sup>759</sup>

The issue of freedom of speech has intensified recently with the introduction in early 2018 of German hate speech legislation, which sets out punitive fines for social media organisations 'platforming' any content deemed to be unacceptable. A number of politicians on the Right, including the AfD, who have been able to harness social media to communicate directly with their constituencies, have already had material removed from platforms, which tend to err on the side of caution given the scale of the fines<sup>760</sup>.

In our focus groups, we witnessed both sides of the discord at play, however the greatest passion was exerted by those who argued that the proliferation of the 'Nazi' slur was too expansive and was being wielded carelessly to denote provocative, not hateful, opinions. Citizens' concerns around the consequences of this trend were framed both in terms of individual freedoms and also, more broadly, the nature of society and the public sphere that Germany should defend.

- *Either you side with official politics, or you are a 'Nazi'. That is totally wrong. Most likely, most people don't even know what the term 'Nazi' means anyway. The youth for sure doesn't.*  
*Entweder Du bist auf Seiten der Politik, oder Du bist ein Nazi. Das ist vollkommen falsch. Wahrscheinlich wissen die meisten einfach nicht was der Begriff Nazi überhaupt noch bedeutet. Die Jugend sowieso nicht.*
- *Actually, the term Nazi means something good. In contrast to "fascism", right.*  
*Eigentlich ist der Begriff Nazi ja was Gutes. Im Gegensatz zum Faschismus, ne.*
- *The bad thing is, that if you say something that someone else dislikes, it goes into the 'right-wing corner' [...] Or if you read something online, and you state your opinion, you are immediately put into this 'right-wing corner'.*  
*Das ganz schlimme was jetzt ist.. wenn man irgendwo hinget. Und irgendeiner hört jetzt a Wort, was dem nicht passt, was so in die rechte Ecke geht [...] Auch wenn man jetzt irgendwas liest, im Internet oder so, man sagt seine Meinung, man wir gleich in die rechte Ecke geschoben*
- *Yes, if for example a distressed wannabe Nazi tries to throw a Molotov Cocktail in there, they are making a song and dance about it, even though this has nothing to do with being Nazi. So, they report on it for three days. But in reality, here women are raped, women are killed, children abused, animals abused, on a daily basis, and on these you hear nothing. We have demonstrations against the Government every day, but only if something "right-wing" is involved do they cover that.*  
*Ja wenn zum Beispiel ein verstörter Hilfs-Nazi versucht, einen Molotow-Cocktail da rein zu schmeißen, da wird ein Trara gemacht, dabei hat das noch gar nichts mit Nazi zu tun. Da wird dann drei Tage lang berichtet. Aber hier werden wirklich tagtäglich Frauen vergewaltigt, Frauen umgebracht, Kinder missbraucht, Tiere missbraucht, da sieht man nichts. Hier sind tagtäglich Demonstrationen gegen die Regierung, aber nur wenn es heißt, jetzt kommt etwas von rechts, dann zeigen wir das.*

In Dresden, where weekly Pegida demonstrations take place in the main square, participants were especially conscious of what they perceived to be double standards in the condemnation of their area's form of radical expression, compared to the anarchism unleashed by Antifa, a Left-wing movement in the West.

- *Pegida for example, they are supposed to be Nazis all of them. I do not go yet, not yet, but I am playing with the thought. There is a professor, I know from my son, other pensioners, but they are all supposed to be Nazis. What happened to the slob [Antifa] in Hamburg? Nothing.*

*Pegida zum Beispiel, dass sollen alles Nazis sein. Ich bin noch nicht hin, noch nicht, spiele aber mit dem Gedanken. Da ist einer Professor, weiß ich von dem Sohn, andere Rentner, aber alles sollen Nazis sein. Was ist denn den Chaoten in Hamburg passiert? Nichts*

- *Yes, they are "activists". It is about how the media refers to things and people. G20, you surely saw that, these lootings. These are 'activists'. But if on Monday evenings 5,000 people from the pensioner to the child from the midst of our society take to the streets against these religious warriors on German soil, who are already here, then those who take to the streets are 'right-wing' people. Or even Nazis. Or right-wing populists, or right-wing extremists.*

*Ja, das sind aber Aktivisten. Es geht um die Bezeichnung in unseren Medien. G20, hast Du bestimmt erlebt, gesehen, die Plünderung. Das sind Aktivisten. Und wenn Montagsabends 5.000 Menschen vom Rentner bis zum Kind aus der Mitte der Gesellschaft gegen diese Glaubenskrieger auf deutschem Boden, die ja bereits hier sind, auf die Straße gehen, das sind dann Rechte. Oder gar Nazis. Oder Rechtspopulisten, oder Rechtsextreme.*

- *We all went through the shitty War. And I think especially the GDR has paid enough. But no one wants to hear that. Ms. Merkel doesn't hear me. For me, politics, politicians, are a bitch.*

*Wir sind alle durch den scheiß Krieg gegangen. Und ich glaub gerade die DDR hat genug gezahlt. Aber das will halt keiner mehr hören. Mich hört die Frau Merkel nicht. Für mich ist die Politik und die Politiker ne Hure.*

This perspective was also widely shared in our focus groups in Berlin. Our focus groups here took place in the aftermath of a major public debate held in Dresden<sup>761</sup>, in which two leading intellectuals on the Right and the Left, Uwe Tellkamp and Durs Grünbein, went head-to-head on the state of Germany and the legacy of the migration crisis. The debate was a huge success, and sparked weeks of discussion across the media – primarily, the condemnation of

Tellkamp's misuse of statistics regarding the refugee status of migrant arrivals<sup>762</sup>. It was apparent in our focus groups that many citizens, however, felt buoyed to hear such a vocal expression of provocative viewpoints in an intellectual context.

- *You know, Tellkamp, who wrote Der Turm? He said at a discussion in Dresden, that well, 95% of the refugees are coming because of our social welfare system. They are launching a major campaign against him, how can he say something like that? And the only the word they didn't use yet is 'Nazi', right? But that will come, too. The problem is, that Tellkamp, he is famous. You cannot shut him up. But how many hundreds of thousands of people are silenced as a consequence, because they know what happens if you say something like that. That is the problem. And exactly that is what they want to achieve, that people are not supposed to talk about things like that.*

*Tellkamp, heißt der, der Turm. Der hat nur bei einer Diskussion in Dresden gesagt, naja, die meisten 95 Prozent kommen wegen der Sozialsysteme. Da wird eine Kampagne gegen den gefahren, wie kann der sowas sagen, und das ist ja, nur das Wort Nazis fiel noch nicht, ne? Aber das kommt auch noch. Das Problem ist ja, der Tellkamp, der ist berühmt, dem kann man das nicht verbieten. Aber wieviele Hunderttausende halten daraufhin ihre Klappe weil sie wissen was da losgeht, wenn man sowas sagt. Und das ist das Problem. Und genau das soll erreicht werden, es soll nicht darüber geredet werden*

The traditional media is also considered by some citizens to be complicit in the suppression of free speech, cultivating a false sense of consensus and a singular narrative that sweeps alternative perspectives out of the limelight. In our report, *Mediating Populism*, interviews with German journalists revealed many were aware that the profession was dominated by employees in possession of similar backgrounds and mind-sets, and that not enough time or care was taken to understand the motivations and concerns of the public<sup>763</sup>. While trust in institutions is often higher in Germany than many of its European neighbours, a survey taken just prior to the 2017 elections showed 60 per cent of Germans are satisfied with the political coverage in the German media, with wide disparities between age and education level<sup>764</sup>.

- *Everything is made to look a little more beautiful, no? For public broadcasters, this is all somehow steered by the state. So that they cannot really say what they actually think.*

*Ja, also ich finde, das wird alles ein bisschen verschönigt, was? Von den Öffentlich-Rechtlichen wird, finde ich irgendwie ein bisschen gesteuert vom Staat. das die gar nicht ihre richtige Meinung äußern dürfen, also.*

- *I see the media as very manipulative and limited. What really affects the citizen is swept under the carpet – whether these are social focal points, economic stuff that should interest us...doesn't matter whether private or public.*

*Ich empfinde die Medien als sehr manipulativ und als sehr eingeschränkt. Das was den Bürger tatsächlich betrifft wird unter den Tisch gekehrt – ob das soziale Brennpunkte sind, ob das wirtschaftliche Dinge sind die interessieren sollten.. egal ob öffentlich-rechtlich, oder ob privat ist egal.*

- *It's all covered for two days only, then it's over. They only produce headlines all the time. What really matters to us is not covered in big parts. Crimes that are not reported on in the press and so on.*

*Es wird alles nur für zwei Tage, dann ist das Thema immer durch. Es werden nur noch Schlagzeilen produziert immer nur. Was wichtig wirklich ist für uns wird nicht mehr gebracht zum großen Teil. Teilweise Verbrechen die begangen werden, die gar nicht mehr in der Presse stehen und und und.*

However, some participants had observed a 'step change' in the media over recent months, as they have begun to incorporate a wider range of perspectives, or to diverge from the Government's desired narrative. This has not, however, inspired greater levels of trust, as citizens appear sceptical as to their motivations behind the change.

- *The media strangely only starts now to be a little more honest, now that there have been complaints.*

*Aber die Medien fangen komischerweise erst jetzt an, nachdem es viele Beschwerden gab, ein bisschen ehrlich jetzt zu sein.*

- *Yes, I was surprised when I saw on SternTV, the first time a report about that Syrian guy, probably you have all seen it, about the Syrian guy with his three or four women...with all his children, who did not feel like working. And the best, his third woman, still a minor, was apparently still in Turkey. Normally, something like that would not be shown.*

*Ja, ich war erstaunt, dass ich jetzt zum Beispiel, der SternTV das erste Mal einen Bericht über diesen Syrer, habt ihr sicherlich alle jetzt mitbekommen, über den Syrer mit seinen vier, drei, vier Frauen...mit seinen ganzen Kindern, der hat keine Lust zu arbeiten und am besten, seine minderjährige dritte Frau, die ist wohl noch in der Türkei. Sowas würde gar nicht gezeigt werden eigentlich.*

Our focus groups suggested that many citizens appear to have been discouraged by the media's homogeneity and its failure to address 'the issues that matter to citizens', and have turned to the Internet as a primary news source in its

place. A number of participants felt that the Internet in fact enabled them to be more widely ready and better informed, because it felt considerably more diverse than the 'one line' promoted by the mainstream press and broadcast organisations.

- *Yes, yes, the truth you find in the internet.*  
*Ja, ja, die Wahrheit liest man im Internet*
- *I am not right- or left-wing. I look at the stuff on television or on the internet. And then I compare, what do they say, what do the others say, who has what proof? And if I then find a video online where the ZDF shows the same images of the wars in Syria and Afghanistan, well, what am I supposed to think?*  
*Ich bin auch nicht rechts oder links. Ich gucke mir das im Fernsehen an und dann im Internet. Und dann kann ich vergleichen, was sagen die, was sagen die, welche Belege hat jeder? Und wenn ich dann im Internet Videos finde, wo ZDF die gleichen Bilder für den Krieg in Syrien und Afghanistan nimmt, ja was halt ich denn davon?*

A similar trend can be observed within the political sphere, as exemplified in the elections that took place in September 2017, which saw the two major parties suffer widespread losses at the hands of smaller, insurgent parties. Having governed in coalition, the CDU/CSU and the SPD were accused by citizens of having become indistinguishable, and the anger about the perceived absence of a robust, substantial party of opposition was palpable.

- *Back then, when the SPD used to be the SPD, a big coalition would have probably been really good. But now, they are all too alike. That is all the same, whether I'm talking about the CDU or the SPD or the Greens.*  
*Früher als die SPD noch die SPD war, da wäre eine große Koalition wahrscheinlich super gewesen. Aber jetzt, die sind sich doch zu ähnlich. Das ist doch das Gleiche ob ich jetzt CDU oder SPD oder von mir aus auch die Grünen oder so. Im Grunde ist das doch alles in.*
- *It all remains the same. No difference to what was before. Only the positions are exchanged among themselves. Nothing more. So all that remains the same. Doesn't matter, who is in charge.*  
*Bleibt alles beim alten. Ist kein Unterschied zu dem, was vorher gewesen ist mit der Regierung. Nur das die Posten untereinander ausgetauscht werden, wie schon gesagt wurde. Mehr ist nicht. Also das ist immer wieder das selbe. Egal wer oder was dran ist.*

In Essen and Cologne in particular, a number of participants were especially incensed regarding the 'capitulation' of the social democratic party, the SPD, which they felt had moved from representing 'the workers' to cosmopolitans over the course of their lifetimes.

- ***Participant 1: The Unions used to fight for the employees. Fight for days off, holidays, Christmas allowances. Who fights for Christmas allowances these days? Who pays vacation bonuses? Voluntarily?***

*Die Gewerkschaften haben doch früher für die Arbeiter gekämpft. Um freie Tage, um Feiertage. Um Weihnachtsgeld. Wer zahlt denn heute noch Weihnachtsgeld? Wer zahlt Urlaubsgeld? Welche Firma freiwillig.*

- ***Participant 2: The same holds for parties. The SPD used to be a party for the workers. It long ceased to be one.***

*Und mit der Gewerkschaft das ist wie mit der Partei. Die SPD war früher mal eine Arbeiterpartei. Ist sie schon lange nicht mehr.*

Overall, politicians were broadly described as self-serving, dishonest and out-of-touch with the German people. Having lived through moments of major change that necessitated exemplary political leadership, many participants felt that the politicians of today lacked the character and moral fortitude of their forebears.

- ***I would like to see honesty. Before they start their jobs, they should live off Hartz IV for half a year, so that they get to know which laws they are passing there.***

*Aufrichtigkeit. Bevor sie ihren Job antreten, ein halbes Jahr Hartz IV, damit die überhaupt wissen was die da verabschieden.*

- ***I would like a government, which should work to the benefit of the people***  
*Ich wähle mir ne Regierung, die soll zum Wohle des Volkes.*

- ***They are supposed to be honest and represent the people. And they do exactly the opposite.***

*Die müssten ehrlich sein und das Volk vertreten. Und die machen genau das Gegenteil.*

- ***To have the courage. I think our politicians don't have courage any more. Nobody risks anything. If I think of earlier years, the 1960s or 1970s, of Schmidt or Brandt or such people, who actually risked something. That doesn't mean that they always did the right thing, but at least they took a position. And I think our politicians are not taking positions anymore.***

*Den Mut haben vor allen Dingen. Ich finde unsere Politiker haben überhaupt keinen Mut mehr. Keiner mehr der was wagt. Wenn ich so an die frühere, in den 60er, 70er Jahren denke, wie es Schmitt und Brandt und solche Leute, die einfach auch nochmal was riskiert haben. Das heißt nicht, dass die immer alles richtig gemacht haben aber die haben wenigstens Position bezogen und ich finde unsere Politiker beziehen überhaupt gar keine Position mehr.*

For many participants, the AfD party, which stormed into the Bundestag in the elections in September 2017, represents a genuine alternative to the liberal centre-ground consensus offered by the largest parties. They were most regularly endorsed for their courage, their lack of inhibitions and their unique connection with the values and mind-sets of 'ordinary Germans'.

- *They [AfD] are not in power anyway. But as an opposition, they do address the right topics to begin with.*  
*Sie sind ja nicht an der Macht. Aber als Opposition setzen sie schon erstmal die richtigen Themen.*
- *They (the AfD) say what many think.*  
*Sie (die AfD) sprechen das aus, was viele denken.*

Nonetheless, the Party clearly inspires mixed opinions, and inspires fiercer condemnation from its critics than its supporters are able to match with their public enthusiasm. We witnessed the strongest views against the party in Essen, Frankfurt and Berlin, where the AfD was regarded by some participants as a 'Nazi party' benefiting from protest votes rather than any level of substantial support for its platform. Moreover, the AfD was frequently described as an 'East German problem', in terms that alluded to the perceived cultural distinctions that remain between the two sides of the country.

- *We are not in Eastern Germany here, there you would certainly get different answers.*  
*Wir sind hier ja nicht in Ostdeutschland, da würdest du bestimmt andere Antworten kriegen.*
- *Essentially, they are Hitler for the poor, nothing different. The NSDAP [the Nationalist Socialist party under Hitler] is forbidden, now we have the AfD. They are all idiots, you can ignore them. They are right-wing extremists, they try to make things look beautiful under some disguise. They are brown [nb. a reference to Hitler's 'brownshirts'] ragtag, many of them do not have a right to exist for me.*  
*Das ist ja im Prinzip Hitler für Arme, das ist ja nichts anderes. Die NSDAP*

*ist verboten, jetzt haben die die AfD. Das sind auch alles Idioten, die kannst du alle in die Tonne treten. Das sind Rechtsradikale, die versuchen da unter irgendeinem Mäntelchen ein bisschen schön zu reden. Es sind braune Socken, viele und die haben für mich keine Daseinsberechtigung.*

- ***They could only get that many votes because there were so many protest voters. They must never get to power.***

*Die wollen das gesamte soziale Netze abschaffen, die wollen die Renten abschaffen, die gesetzliche. Nur die konnten nur so viele Stimmen kriegen weil so viele Protestwähler da waren.*

- ***For me, [the AfD] is a Nazi Party.***  
*Für mich ist es eine Nazi-Partei.*

It is certainly true that we witnessed numerous distinctions in the priorities, language and preferences expressed in our focus groups in the East compared to the West; one of the most alarming differences was the palpable fears expressed in East Germany that the nation was heading on an inevitable path towards some form of momentous upheaval. We even witnessed quite a large number of shocking references to an impending civil war.

- ***Well, I have only very little hope that we will not end up in War. And the next financial crash is lurking around the corner.***

*Tja, also Hoffnung habe ich noch Minimum, dass wir keinen Krieg bekommen. Und der nächste Finanzcrash steht bevor.*

In Dresden, some participants appeared to relish in the thought of collapsing the existing political system and reshaping the nation's governance – although there were clear distinctions between those who seemed intent on retribution and were motivated to cause chaos and disruption, including proposing the 'quarantining' of politicians and deporting of migrants, and those who hoped to create a more democratic, representative order.

- ***I am in favour of dissolving the party system, that's clear. And I am for a system of direct candidates that are directly elected in cities, communities and so on. Like in the republic of councils how it used to be. Like after reunification with these round tables, which was a good democratic approach, even though the East was then swallowed by the West.***

*Ich bin für die Auflösung des Parteiensystems, ganz klar. Und ich bin für ein System von Direktkandidaten die in den Städten, Gemeinden gewählt werden, wie in der Räterepublik früher mal. [...] so dass wie nach der Wende, diese Rote Tisch Geschichte die es da ja mal gab, was*

ja ein sehr guter demokratischer Ansatz war, obwohl der Osten ja dann vom Westen geschluckt wurde.

- *The image I have of today is that the Government and all politicians are put under quarantine. They have nothing to say and must cure their illness. And the people purge the country from fellow citizens who do not want to adapt. And it is said in big, bold letters: the people govern themselves. It's not that all foreigners have to go, which is nonsense as well. Only the ones who do not comply with German law, those may go. And it would be a very peaceful purge, without the Government.*

*Das Bild von heute war: die Regierung und alles was man so an Politikern hatte war in Quarantäne gestopft, die hatten nichts zu sagen und mussten erstmal ihre Krankheiten auskurieren. Und das Volk hat das Land bereinigt von Mitbürgern die sich nicht anpassen wollen. Da stand ganz groß drüber, dass deutsche Volk regiert sich selbst. Es war nicht zu sehen, dass alle Ausländer raus müssen, das ist auch Quatsch. Sondern einfach die, die sich nicht an deutsches Recht halten, die dürfen wieder gehen. Und es wurde ganz friedlich bereinigt, ohne die Regierung.*

At its most extreme, one of our focus groups contained a participant whose views reflect the Reichsbürger dissident movement, which rejects the legitimacy of the modern German state. This individual escalated the discussions regarding civil war to the language of 'extermination'. These types of opinions are not widely shared, but represent a dangerous and growing streak of marginal thinking within pockets of German society<sup>765</sup>.

- *It is close already, this civil war. And everyone should prepare himself for a tough ride. There are plans to exterminate all Germans. The German body of thought, German thoroughness, German accuracy, that should be exterminated... We are supposed to be exterminated. That is planned. To produce a mixed race with an IQ between 80 – 90, so intelligent enough to work, but too stupid to recognize the truth and think for themselves.*

*Der steht kurz bevor der Bürgerkrieg. Und jeder soll sich warm anziehen. Das ist geplant die Deutschen auszurotten. Das deutsche Gedankengut, die deutsche Gründlichkeit, die deutsche Genauigkeit, die soll vernichtet werden. Weil das nicht zu schaffen ist. Wir sollen ausgerottet werden. Das ist geplant. Eine Mischrasse auf die Beine zu stellen mit einem IQ zwischen 80 und 90, die intelligent genug sind zu arbeiten aber zu dumm um die Wahrheit zu erkennen und nachzudenken und das ist gesteuert.*

Many of these discussions became tense and restless. When the focus groups

were asked what makes them hopeful for Germany's future, one participant responded that shooting their Kalashnikov rifle was the only sense of security they felt confident in. Others mentioned that they had resigned themselves to war, and that "the mood is shifting" ("die Stimmung kippt") in such a direction with a sense of giddy momentum. Some citizens were clearly anxious about the febrile atmosphere, and concerned that the systems and institutions they felt disappointed by could in the end be replaced by more repressive and restrictive regimes.

- *I am hopeful, and I can feel the mood in the population shift. It feels the way it did in 1988. It is bubbling under the surface. At some point, it will explode and then the state will be different from today. What I hope is that we end up with a better state than the one we have right now. But I am afraid that it turns, and new forces come to power that are even worse.*

*Ich habe eine Hoffnung und zwar spüre ich einen Stimmungswechsel in der Bevölkerung. Das ist ähnlich wie es damals war 1988. Es gärt, es wird irgendwann zum Ausbruch kommen und dann wird der Staat ein anderer sein als er heute ist. Was ich hoffe, dass es ein besserer Staat sein wird als heute. Was ich fürchte ist das es umschlägt und Kräfte an die Macht kommen, die noch schlimmer sind.*

- *But when the change comes, will it be peaceful? How will it come to pass? Right now, these different mentalities are clashing already, and it frightens me.*

*Aber wenn es zum Umbruch kommt, wird das friedlich? Wie geht das über die Bühne? Es knallen ja Mentalitäten aufeinander, also das macht mir Angst.*

- *We have lived through it before, that a whole state fails with dignity. And I hope that the current state will fail with dignity as well.*

*Wir haben schon mal erlebt, dass ein Staat in Würde scheitert und ich hoffe, dass auch dieser Staat in Würde scheitern wird.*

## **The European Union and Germany's Role in the World**

Despite Germany's economic strength, its difficult historical legacy with power and its reliance on NATO for security encouraged the country to work with France to foster European partnerships. The Franco-German relationship was the cornerstone of early European integration, and it was generally thought that "if a Franco-German deal could be stitched together even on issues difficult for one or both, the other participants in the negotiations would generally fall into line."<sup>766</sup> Germany demonstrated its own commitment to integration by becoming the

largest net contributor to the European Community's budget, and by shaping the key institutional arrangements.<sup>767</sup> Over time the Franco-German partnership diminished, as France fell behind Germany economically, and Germany became the leader of managing the Eurozone crisis, by virtue of its strong economy and status as principal creditor.<sup>768</sup>

As of 2016, Germany contributes €23.277 billion, or 0.73 per cent of its GNI, to the EU Budget, receiving only €10.082 billion of EU spending in return.<sup>769</sup> Germany is the largest contributor to the EU, contributing 19 per cent of the total European Union budget in 2016.<sup>770</sup> The next largest contributors are France (16.63 per cent), the UK (13.45 per cent), and Italy (12.49 per cent). Together with Germany, these four nations make up 60 per cent of all EU contributions, with the majority of other countries contributing less than two per cent of the budget.<sup>771</sup>

According to the most recent Eurobarometer in November 2017, 45 per cent of Germans had a positive image of the EU. This is a vast improvement from early 2016, as the country was reckoning with the migrant crisis, when only 29 per cent had a positive image of the EU.<sup>772</sup> At that point, Germans were more negative about the EU than the average EU citizen, whereas now they are more positive than average, by five percentage points.<sup>773</sup> 64 per cent are optimistic about the future of the EU.<sup>774</sup> The public is split on calls for Germany to take on a world leadership role, with 52 per cent advocating restraint during international crises.<sup>775</sup>

Our focus groups demonstrated that German citizens are aware of their leading status in the European Union, and of the exceptional financial contribution they make, however while they were often clearly frustrated about this, the issue does not seem to provoke a fierce sense of indignation or anger compared to many of the other issues discussed. There is clearly annoyance that Germany is often tasked with 'bearing the load', and the calls for solidarity ring false, however it is evident that many citizens simply regard the EU as an element of the status quo and sitting at an abstract level divorced from their daily preoccupations. We would therefore classify the German attitude regarding EU integration and the burden of EU contributions as an enduring concern, rather than an active passion.

- *The development of the EU in the direction of more EU integration... That is a barrel without a bottom, because we continue paying billions voluntarily without really having them.*  
*Die Entwicklung der EU in Richtung mehr EU...Ist auch ein Fass ohne Boden, weil wir immer freiwillig Milliarden reinzahlen obwohl wir sie gar nicht haben.*

- *In my opinion, the EU dictates too much. Already concerning fruits and vegetables, the cucumber has to have a certain form, if it is a little bent it cannot be sold, and has to be destroyed. I would say there are more important problems than checking whether an apple weighs 89 grams or 95 grams.*

*Ich finde, dass die EU viel zu viel diktiert. Allein schon was Obst und Gemüse betrifft, die Gurke muss so und so ein Maß haben. Wenn sie ein bisschen krummer ist, darf sie nicht verkauft werden, muss vernichtet werden. Ich würde auch sagen, es gibt wichtigere Probleme als zu gucken ob ein Apfel 89 Gramm wiegt oder 95 Gramm wiegt.*

- *That is an imbalance as well. Because here you get so much as Hartz IV [social welfare benefits], and in other countries you get nothing or 20 or 30 Euro. They should all be on one level. That then would have something to do with a European Union. [...] Why do all countries around us say they are not taking any refugees? Everyone says it, doesn't matter whether they are Poles, French – we are not taking anyone anymore. You cannot simply say, one gives and one takes and all the others only take in refugees. That isn't healthy.*

*Das ist auch ein Ungleichgewicht weil hier kriegst du das und das an Hartz IV, in anderen Ländern kriegst du gar nichts oder kriegst du 20 oder 30 Euro. Die müssen alle auf einem Level müssen die sein. Dann hast du vielleicht irgendwas mit der Europäischen Union mal zu tun. (...) Warum sagen denn alle Länder um uns herum, Flüchtlinge nehmen wir keine auf? Jeder sagt nein, ist egal wer, Polen, Frankreich nimmt keine mehr auf. Aber das musst dann doch regeln irgendwo. Du kannst doch nicht nur sagen, einer gibt und einer nimmt und die anderen nehmen alle nur. Das ist ungesund.*

- *I know what politicians mean if they say 'more responsibility': pay more. They only want money. Pay more for the EU, that is more responsibility. Because now that England isn't paying any longer, one of the biggest net-contributors. That has to be balanced.*

*Was die Politik damit meint ist mir schon klar. Mehr zahlen. Die wollen nur Geld haben. Mehr in die EU einzahlen, das heißt Verantwortung übernehmen. Weil ja jetzt England ausgefallen ist, einer der größten Netto-Zahler. Das muss ausgeglichen werden.*

- *Sure, we are supposed to take up more responsibility. They want more money from us. Then you look East, they take everything for themselves. They found that out.*

*Klar sollen wir mehr Verantwortung, die wollen mehr Geld von uns. Und dann*

*guckst du dir alles in dem Osten, die schieben sich das alles in die privaten Taschen, das haben die festgestellt, das alles versickert.*

- ***I blame the Euro for that. This 'Europe global Euro'. With that they made us all poor. I would normally have had a good pension if I would have received it in D-Mark. Now I receive Euro and that is just half the amount. That is the big problem.***

*Ich schieb das alles zurück auf den Euro. Dieser Europa globale Euro. Damit haben die uns in Deutschland alle arm gemacht. Ich hätte an sich eine ganz gute Rente wenn ich in DMark bezahlt werden worden würde. Ich krieg jetzt in Euro und das ist alles ne Hälfte. Das ist der ganz große Knackpunkt.*

- ***I think we are already doing a lot. Too much. Too many commitments. Well, financially I would say. Towards other countries.***

*Ich denke wir tun schon einiges. Zu viel. Zu viele Zugeständnisse. Also finanziell würde ich mal sagen. An andere Länder*

- ***Regarding the EU, all right, so far so good. But for my sense is all this is going too far lately. And one thing has been forgotten on the way. To involve the Russians. And now we have something like a Cold War again and sometimes I ask myself, how long will it take until we have a 'hot' War again?***

*Mit der EU, so weit so gut, für meine Begriffe geht das eigentlich viel zu weit in letzter Zeit und man hat eines dabei vergessen, die Russen miteinzubeziehen äh und plötzlich haben wir wieder so etwas wie den Kalten Krieg und manchmal frage ich mich, wie lange dauert das noch, bis wir wieder nen heißen Krieg haben?*

- ***What we are doing today is a shifting back and forth. The banking crisis from Germany to Greece..***

*Das was mer heute machen, ist ein Verschieben, ein hin und her. Die Bankenkrise von Deutschland nach Griechenland,*

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the relative ambivalence regarding the EU is also held within a context of increasingly benign attitudes towards Russia and its leader, Vladimir Putin. Particularly in the focus groups conducted in the East of Germany and in Berlin, we saw a strong feeling that antagonism with Russia is counter-productive, and relatively widespread admiration for his 'strong leadership' on a national level. Moreover, many participants expressed disdain for the 'imperial' or 'arrogant' United States, and in reflecting on their attitudes towards America, they considered that Russia was not singularly, especially corrupt or problematic.

In her speech to the party's annual conference in 2017, Die Linke leader Sahra Wagenknecht made a small joke: "It is almost funny to see the US seriously discussing whether Putin can be held responsible for Trump's election. Their mantra is, Putin is responsible for all the evil in the world anyway, so obviously he has to be responsible for Trump." Wagenknecht's comment marks a longstanding tendency, especially in East Germany, to align more naturally with Russia than the United States.

A majority of Germans (58 per cent) now want closer ties with Russia.<sup>776</sup> Supporters of the AfD especially favour improved relations, at 81 per cent, as do those in Die Linke, at 72 per cent.<sup>777</sup> This is thematically reflected in AfD policies, such as calling for an end to sanctions, and a controversial visit undertaken by a party delegation to Crimea.<sup>778</sup> Nonetheless, close ties with Russia are not limited to fringe parties: after his political career, former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder took up a post with a Russian oil company,<sup>779</sup> which many saw as a lobbying for the Russian Government.<sup>780</sup>

Meanwhile, although a majority of Americans think US-German relations are in good shape, most Germans believe the opposite.<sup>781</sup> This seems to be the result of an especially negative German view of Donald Trump. As he was elected to office, Germans' approval of the American President dropped from 86 per cent, for Barack Obama, to 11 per cent.<sup>782</sup> In general, Angela Merkel has taken a harder line with Donald Trump than other leaders.<sup>783</sup> This approach is supported by most Germans, who tend to regret the fact that Donald Trump is President; only AfD supporters are more positive, with 53 per cent saying it is a good thing Trump is the US president.<sup>784</sup>

- *Assuming responsibility would mean to quit NATO and enhance trade relations with Russia. That would be responsible.*  
*Verantwortung übernehmen.. ich meine es wäre verantwortlich, wenn Deutschland aus der NATO austritt und die Handelsbeziehungen zu Russland wieder aufblühen lässt. Das wäre verantwortungsvoll*
- *The Russians [...] pray for us that the Germans find their identity. Putin, he really looks after his people. He doesn't allow others to meddle.*  
*Die Russen [...] beten für uns dass die Deutschen ihre Identität finden. Der Putin, der kümmert sich. Der lässt sich nicht von außen reinreden.*
- *[There is] worry due to the military threat, not from Russia, but from the US.*  
*Der Angst vor der militärischen Bedrohung, nicht von Russland, sondern den USA.*

- *I like Putin. Well, for me he is honest.*  
*Ich mag den Putin. Na für mich ist der ehrlich.*
- *I did not feel close to the Russians back then. But if I compare that with today, how everyone bullies the Russians, at least in comparison to um, Trump. Then I feel much closer to the Russians than to Trump, or his predecessor, George W. Bush.*  
*Aber dann kommt da wieder mein Gedanke, wo ich, ja, die Russen standen mir früher nie so nah aber wenn ich das mit heute vergleiche, wie man auf die Russen einhakt, äh, sind mir die Russen dann doch, zumindest im Vergleich zu, äh, Trump wesentlich näher als Trump oder sein Vorgänger, George W. Bush.*
- *I hope that we gear towards the Russians, because Putin is the smartest statesman, since he is putting up with a lot, he is provoked all the time.*  
*Ich hoffe, dass wir uns an den Russen orientieren, denn der Putin ist der klügste Staatsmann der Welt, weil er sich viel bieten lässt, ständig provoziert wird.*

## Conclusions

More than any other country we visited for our research, it was clear the tremendous impact that regional identities and mythologies play in the construction of German attitudes. Even amongst participants relatively homogenous in terms of their socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, the vast differences in viewpoints on issues such as immigration and freedom of speech between cities was incredibly striking.

Overall, the state of the economy was the singularly most uniting issue for all Germans – striking in a country considered to have been the economic beacon of European growth over recent years. There is a clear sense that headline figures of growth mask a considerably more uneven picture at the level of workers, with citizens perceiving that the balance of power has been shifting in favour of employers at the expense of their own security. Regional experiences have also been profoundly different; in the former industrial heartland of Essen, new high-tech manufacturing firms and leading universities suggest a buoyant revival, however unemployment remains a scourge, and many of those who lost out during de-industrialisation do not feel that they have recovered.

Government policies are also seen to have exacerbated economic inequalities, with the 'Hartz IV' welfare reforms in particular singled out as a topic of immense distress across our focus groups. Many participants felt they had found themselves personally financially disadvantaged by the reforms, and

others observed that they had increased the incidence of poverty across society. Introduced by the social democratic party, the SPD, Hartz IV are seen by many citizens as a clear example of how the party has become detached from the needs of its former working-class constituencies.

Discussions on the topic of welfare naturally led to the subject of immigration, and issue that has consumed the country's politics for the past three years. Participants explained the varied and often unexpected impacts that the migration crisis had had on German society and on individual communities, which they felt the Government did not fully appreciate. The scale and pace of the arrivals felt 'overwhelming', the impacts on local services were considerable, and the subject had divided families and ushered in a febrile, fractious national 'mood'. Participants questioned how the Chancellor, after years of impressing on citizens the need to save, had been able to conjure funding to support such a tremendous task of integration. More concerningly, we witnessed extensive discussions regarding the perception that the Government was actively suppressing migrant crime statistics, which is encouraging citizens to imagine that public safety has been fundamentally compromised. Moreover, that the welfare of migrants, and the reputation of the Government, had been elevated above the most visceral needs of the German people.

Another area of shared concern within the German focus groups was the feeling that social and political values are in decline, however, the specific root of these observations varied significantly by geography. In the East, the feeling of constraints being placed on free expression was the most animating issue, and in the West, anxieties regarding the rise of a new nationalist movement. Participants in the East described the 'silencing' effect of a form of political correctness, which labelled their reasonable criticisms of the state as 'right-wing' and therefore unconscionable. Meanwhile, those in the West spoke extensively about the snowballing and legitimisation of perspectives that invoke the very worst of the nation's history. Of particular concern were the widespread opinion we witnessed in the East that the country was on the path to a momentous upheaval, fracturing or even a civil war; the anxieties towards a systemic level of change should trouble both the Government and the media, seen as inseparably complicit in upholding a 'suppressive' liberal orthodoxy.

The ideological and historical divisions between the two German halves at times felt immense in our focus groups, and it was clear that Germany in 2018 does not feel especially cohesive nor at ease with itself – a development clearly evident in the fragmentation of its political system in the 2017. The contested narratives about the country's contemporary state necessarily gave rise to the contested narratives of the past, and highlighted the tremendous variances of personal and

collective experience held by those in the East and the West. In a country where history can feel at once both unseen and yet felt omnipresent, both the past and the present cannot be settled.

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# Technology and Nostalgia

Across all three of our case study countries, we witnessed widespread concerns regarding the role that technology is playing in damaging social relations, and acute anxieties regarding its future influence on national labour markets and the structure of the economy. The extent to which these views were shared across wide varieties of demographics, and the consistency of the specific concerns across Britain, France and Germany, suggest we stand on the edge of a watershed moment in Western society. With the looming spectre of de-industrialisation continuing to hang over many communities, some decades after their degeneration, the issue of managing the economic and social impacts of future technological change appears urgent on an historical scale.

It should be noted that digital technologies can themselves prove to be instruments of activating and deepening the processes of nostalgia. Indeed, the Internet, a catalogue of human achievement, knowledge and communication, represents a kind of global historical library, connecting us with the people, places, experiences, mythologies and narratives of our past lives. So too does Facebook, the supreme social media platform, carefully document and organise our past experiences, to remind us of our ‘memories’, connections we might have lost touch with, and places we have visited. Indeed, technology is becoming increasingly sophisticated at harnessing our propensity for nostalgia, building entire innovation industries focused on the commercialisation of “nostalgia on demand”<sup>785</sup>.

Nonetheless, there is a clear distinction in citizens’ minds between these forms of personalised, social and active engagements with technology, and the broader, more amorphous forms of ‘technological change’ with the potential to wreak havoc on national labour markets, and the conception of robotics and artificial intelligence with the capacity to displace human interactions. While the former feels grounded in a veneer of choice, the latter two are seen as processes to be inflicted and imposed on society, representing an inevitable tidal wave of upheaval.

Estimates differ significantly on how many jobs are at risk of automation globally, and by when. A 2013 Oxford University study put the figure at 23 per cent, while a PwC report suggested the number could be as high as 30 per cent, and the OECD suggested 10 per cent.<sup>786</sup> While McKinsey estimated a midrange figure of 15 per cent globally, its research highlighted how advanced economies appear to be particularly vulnerable to automation’s impacts. In Germany

and the United States, for example, around a third of the workforce could be vulnerable to changing labour market structures, with occupations focused on administration, customer service, manual and menial forms of labour, and the agricultural sectors, all especially exposed<sup>787</sup>. The French Government's Conseil d'orientation pour l'emploi estimated that around 10 per cent of current jobs are at high risk of automation, particularly routine jobs in manufacturing. A further 50 per cent of jobs will not disappear, but are liable to change significantly in nature.<sup>788</sup>

The primary question at the heart of these studies of looming change is whether new technologies will be able to create sufficient new positions to replace those which are lost in the processes of transition, with business leaders broadly divided on whether they will.<sup>789</sup> Moreover, whether Governments have learned the lessons of the uneven consequences of previous waves of technological change, and can apply these to address the social impacts of such profound economic upheaval. For example, many researchers and economists have highlighted the fact that education and training systems have generally not been future-proofed<sup>790</sup> and will therefore necessitate significant transformation to address a structural shift from youth apprenticeships to mid-career retraining. One imagines that even more complex for politicians than the policy decisions compelled by automation, are the communications challenges a new era of 'winners and losers' could inspire.

Currently, the French report being broadly happy with the technologies they use on an everyday basis, although they tend to be less evangelistic about technological benefits more broadly. Some 95 per cent of French say their computers are important to their day-to-day happiness, with 65 per cent calling it essential.<sup>791</sup> However, only 65 per cent of the French feel technology makes life better overall, compared to 71 per cent in Germany and 76 per cent in the UK.<sup>792</sup>

British citizens tend to take a fairly bleak view of the impact of technology on the economy as a whole, with 60 per cent believing that robots and artificial intelligence will lead to fewer jobs within ten years.<sup>793</sup> However, Demos research in late-2017<sup>794</sup> found that only 35 per cent of Britons personally feel that their specific occupation is at risk from the next wave of technological innovation, with the figure as high as 50 per cent only amongst residents in the service economy of London. Nonetheless, 54 per cent of Britons believe the benefits of the next wave of technological change will not be shared evenly across society and will further entrench inequalities.

In France, almost a fifth of over-60s report experiencing severe difficulties

keeping up with technological advances, with a further 52 per cent feeling they are somewhat behind.<sup>795</sup> Moreover, half of French citizens feel that human relations will deteriorate due to new technologies, while only 20 per cent feel they will improve.<sup>796</sup> When it comes to cutting-edge innovations such as Artificial Intelligence, the French are even more sceptical, with two-in-three citizens concerned generally about these developments, and more than 70 per cent believing such new technologies will destroy more jobs than they will create.<sup>797</sup>

In the short-term, Germans are not especially worried about automation, with only one in eight workers believing their job might disappear due to automation over the next five years.<sup>798</sup> In the longer-term, however, citizens are decidedly more pessimistic, according to a study carried out by Germany's Federal Bureau for Education and Research. 42 per cent of Germans believe new technologies will generally have negative effects on the world of work by 2030, compared to 33 per cent who believe the changes will be positive. Moreover, 58 per cent believe more jobs will be lost than created and 84 per cent believe inequality will worsen due to technology.<sup>799</sup>

Political engagement with the topic of automation has been extremely mixed across the three countries, broadly reflecting the desire to harness the economic benefits of technological innovation for competitive growth, while the social consequences of change and citizens' fears have been less comprehensively addressed.

In Britain, the Government has recognised the economic potential of technological change and sought to construct a positive narrative, however there has been scant discussion regarding its looming social challenges. Theresa May used her speech at Davos' 2017 Summit to paint an optimistic picture of how technology can boost productivity, jobs and wages<sup>800</sup>, reflecting the important role given to high-tech innovation within the Government's most recent industrial strategy. The Secretary of State of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has also actively championed the benefits of technological research and development, and called for Britain to become a leading hub for high-tech engineering<sup>801</sup>.

By contrast, Opposition Leader Jeremy Corbyn has taken an explicitly critical line, arguing that automation is an urgent challenge, and a "threat in the hands of the greedy"<sup>802</sup>, seeking to position technological change as a further threat to social equality. In its 2017 Election Manifesto, the Labour Party did propose a National Education Service, which would offer all workers a chance to retrain when their jobs come under threat from automation.<sup>803</sup> However, as plans to fund retraining were revealed to come from industry taxation – a 'robot tax'

– debate on the subject was quickly lost amidst accusations that Labour was seeking to stifle innovation<sup>804</sup>.

France has often been at the forefront of automation. For instance, the first driverless metro car was on Paris' Line 14, opened in 1998. The country's high wages and strong striking culture have also made automation a tempting prospect for employers. The risk of automation proliferating is curbed, however, by the country's relatively large service industry, which is much more difficult to automate.

French President Emmanuel Macron is an enthusiastic supporter of new technologies. He has promised to turn France into "start-up nation", pledging 10 billion euros to realise this ambition<sup>805</sup>, and relaxing immigration rules in favour of foreign technology.<sup>806</sup> In March 2018, the President promised a further 1.5 billion euro investment in Artificial Intelligence technologies<sup>807</sup>, claiming this would mean that France would not once again miss the benefits of innovation and positioning the country on the forefront of change. In an interview with Wired Magazine, he expressed a calm acceptance of the ways in which technology was shaping society, and positioned change as an opportunity for France. "There is a huge acceleration," he said. "I think Artificial Intelligence will disrupt all the different business models and it's the next disruption to come. So, I want to be part of it."<sup>808</sup>

Echoing the Labour Party in Britain, former Parti Socialiste Presidential candidate Benoit Hamon advocated for a "robot tax", to fund training for workers displaced by new technologies. Marine Le Pen did not explicitly advocate such a tax impost, but did commit to creating a new Government body dedicated to dealing with economic change due to robotisation, automation and the sharing economy.<sup>809</sup> President Macron has vehemently rejected the notion of a 'robot tax', suggesting its champions "refuse to see modernity". Acknowledging the trade-offs inherent in the transition ahead, he said, "Yes, there will be bad news, some jobs will disappear [...] We will protect people, but we must be a land of freedom for innovation, for creation, because it is in our DNA."<sup>810</sup>

In Germany, there is a consensus of optimism across the political parties towards technological change, with most political figures keen to present themselves as future-oriented in economic terms. Even the AfD, prone to evoking cultural and social forms of nostalgia, has declared its intention "to promote Germany as a beacon of technology by way of policies which support innovation and technology. Scientific findings should be converted into marketable products more easily. We equally want to promote entrepreneurship."<sup>811</sup>

At the 2017 Election, the CDU/CSU Manifesto pledged to attract “future-proof jobs”, especially in digitisation, biotechnologies and environmental technologies.<sup>812</sup> “Research and innovation are the foundation of growth and prosperity”, it states, focusing extensively on the topics of Artificial Intelligence, 5G internet and 3D printing. Similarly, the SPD Manifesto promised to invest in “Industry 4.0”, including, bio- and nanotechnologies and robotics. While both the major parties’ manifestos pledged support for training and retraining programs to guide people into growing industries at any age, the SPD was unique in its suggestion of ‘open dialogues’ to reduce citizens’ fears about technologies.<sup>813</sup>

In Britain, a relatively sizeable proportion of participants in our focus groups recognised the benefits of convenience that had been brought by new technologies, and a number questioned whether future technological change would prove to be as destructive as feared.

- *There are always predictions like that, that technology is going to reduce number of people working in shops or is gonna take away this many jobs... I mean they're even now talking about whether computer graphics can replace actors! There's always something that says, 'this is going to affect the job market, we're gonna lose this many jobs'. But quite often, it creates as many as what we lose with the technology.*

Similarly, in France, some participants highlighted the advantages technology offered in terms of travel, communication and the immense opportunities it presents to the younger generations.

- *I disagree [that technology presents a threat]. I see it as an opportunity. Moi je ne suis pas d'accord. Moi je trouve que c'est une opportunité.*
- *You can travel more easily, physically and on the internet. Communication has become easier. On peut voyager plus facilement, on a Internet, on peut voyager physiquement, et sur Internet. C'est plus facile. La communication est plus facile.*
- *But on the other hand, young people can now get to know the whole world through the internet; learning languages is easier; we have lost things but we have gained others. Autant sur Internet les jeunes peuvent accéder, faire connaissance avec le monde entier; apprendre les langues ça devient plus facile; on a perdu mais on a aussi gagné.*

Nonetheless, the dominant mood across all three countries was one of concern, hesitancy and disappointment, particularly in terms of its encouragement of individualism and societal isolation, its potential impacts on labour markets and the very nature of the human existence. In Britain, participants were especially agitated regarding the extraordinary efforts required to ‘keep up’ with the pace of technological change, feeling older citizens were being alienated and maligned by a relentless quest for progress.

- *They don't consider the older people, who have never had computers and have no idea. And at our age, you don't want to be trying to do things.*
- *You've got to hold on [to keep up with technology]. It's like water-skiing, you know, hold on and try and keep on there, as once you drop off you're left far behind. And this is what's happening, there's a gap between those that are keeping up with it and those that aren't.*
- *If you don't get in touch with technology, you just get left behind and that's it.*

By contrast, in France, participants were especially concerned with the psychological and social impacts of technology on young people, feeling it was encouraging poor mental health and exposing them to undue risks.

- *Young people are glued to their phones from dusk till dawn and it is a bad thing. It is a bad use of technology. They do not communicate with their parents anymore.*  
*Les jeunes sont collés à leur portable du matin au soir, c'est pas positif. Il y a un mauvais usage. Il n'y a pas de communication avec les parents.*
- *Before you didn't have young girls taking their own life because they had shown her breasts somewhere in the internet. Now you've got suicidal people because social networks are manipulated, but you don't even think about your own neighbour.*  
*Et les réseaux sociaux ! Avant, il n'y avait pas une jeune adolescente qui se suicidait parce qu'elle avait montré sa poitrine sur les réseaux sociaux ! Maintenant, souvent, ils se suicident parce que les progrès des réseaux sociaux sont dévoyés ! Ils ont les réseaux sociaux mais ils ne pensent pas à leur voisin de palier.*

French participants also described the inescapable nature of technology, which has eroded the concept of ‘leisure time’ and compels citizens to work longer, and harder.

- ***In the past, when you would go on holiday, you'd be on holiday, but now you are a portable, contactable computer.***  
*Avant quand on prenait des vacances c'était les vacances, mais maintenant on est joignable portable ordinateur*

There was a strong feeling that French society was losing the art of communication and the value of language, which had been such a critical element of its cultural identity.

- ***When we used to write each other letters, we would carefully consider our words, but now it is all immediate and direct, like a text message, usually I don't even understand them.***  
*Quand on écrivait on réfléchissait à ce qu'on allait mettre, mais maintenant c'est du direct, les SMS, la plupart du temps je ne comprends pas.*
- ***There is a lack of communication between people, I think it is due to the arrival of the internet; we used to be able to communicate with each other, but now we don't.***  
*Il y a un manque de communication entre les gens, notamment avec l'arrivée d'internet ; avant, il n'y avait pas, maintenant il y a.*
- ***Smartphones [...] are badly used: there is this misuse of technical progress. We arrive at this level of technological achievement, but there is profound mental alienation.***  
*Smartphones, [...] on a mal utilisé ; il y a une mauvaise utilisation des progrès techniques. En fait, on arrive même avec ce niveau technique à l'alienation mentale.*

In France, technological innovation is also fostering participants' insecurities about their financial solvency and individual agency in the marketplace of the future, with explicit concerns expressed regarding the impact that robots and automation would have on the availability of jobs.

- ***It is also the robots, they will replace us in the future. In some cases, it has already happened.***  
*C'est aussi les robots qui vont remplacer demain. Qui remplacent déjà dans certains cas.*
- ***Man has been displaced by progress.***  
*L'homme a été déplacé par le progrès.*

In Germany, we witnessed similar discussions regarding the impact of technology use on family relations and community connectedness, and quite a significant number of direct juxtapositions between fond memories of the past and the damage that technology was wreaking on society.

- *The difference is, the time has changed, so that back then you used to have time for a conversation, time for your family, time to go out. Life was somehow easier, brighter. And today, everyone keeps to himself. Back then you used to play games together, eat together. Today, everyone sits in front of their mobile phones or computers.*

*Der Unterschied ist ja, die Zeit hat sich so gewandelt, früher hatte man Zeit für ein Gespräch, man hatte Zeit für die Familie, man hatte Zeit nach draußen zu gehen. Das Leben war irgendwie leichter, froher. Und heute die Zeit, jeder ist für sich. Früher hat man in Gesellschaftsspielen zusammen gesessen, heute sitzt jeder vor dem Handy, vor dem Computer, sonst wo.*

However, discussions on many other aspects of technology in Germany took on a level of seriousness and urgency not often reached in other countries. For example, a number of focus groups explored the political and philosophical dimensions of automation.

- *At the end of the day, it is like this: what of this technological change actually reaches the people, the citizen? First, there is the loss of jobs. How do you deal with that? Will we only have beggars left? And, is our politics ready for an unconditional basic income? Humans want to do something.*

*Im Endeffekt ist ja so: was kommt an vom technologischen Wandel beim Volk, beim Bürger? Da ist zunächst mal der Wegfall von Arbeitsplätzen.[...] Wie fängt man das ab? Hat man dann nur noch Almosenempfänger? Oder ist die Politik bereit für ein Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen? [...] Aber der Mensch möchte etwas tun.*

- *Digitalization is providing us with the next poverty industry. We are all an example of that. We work for low wages now.*

*die Digitalisierung hat uns schon wieder die nächste Armutsindustrie beschert, wir sind ja alle ein Beispiel dafür. Wir arbeiten ja alle, im Grunde genommen zu Billiglöhnen*

Consistent with other discussions of ‘civil war’ in Germany, we regularly heard the connection made between technological change as posing a form of existential threat to human existence, through its capacity to erode meaningful work opportunities.

- ***My dad always says there will be a war, so that we are all in work again. Because if technological development continues as it has, there will be no more work at all very soon.***  
*Mein Papa sagt immer, es wird ein Krieg kommen, damit alle wieder Arbeit haben. Denn wenn die technische Entwicklung so ist, werden wir bald alle keine Arbeit mehr haben.*

Furthermore, for citizens who had grown up during the GDR era, the augmented power held by major technological organisations over their users' information carried haunting parallels with life under an authoritarian state. They questioned whether social media companies boasting revenues in line with the GDP of many smaller nations could and should be inherently trusted to wield users' data in an ethical manner.

- ***Well, that's all nice with 'technological development'. But it is also complete surveillance. You are being surveilled everywhere.***  
*Ich finde das ja auch sehr schön alles mit den Technologien aber ist ja auch die totale Überwachung so. Überall wird man überwacht.*

Reflecting on these extraordinary comments from citizens, which capture a considerable diversity of concerns, shared widely across focus groups, it is evident that the subject of technology inspires a considerable level of anxiety within these three advanced democracies. We especially focus here on technology, because it has become intrinsically linked to citizens' conception of the future; often these discussions would arise out of questions as to the future of the country, or whether things were travelling 'in the right direction'. Few participants were able to articulate a vision of what the future will look like in a new era of technological change; for many, the only certainty they feel is that power dynamics will have shifted further away from a society and a political system that will support their individual agency. As such, the future comes to represent something abstract, but also menacing, and in comparison, the past a more certain, simple time.

In such an environment, the scale of the political challenge is clear. While politicians are keen to be seen to be actively seizing the myriad economic opportunities that technological development can bring in a competitive global marketplace, it is evident that considerable efforts will also need to be invested in the process of managing change – both in terms of the policy responses and the leadership to bring citizens along on this next wave of transformation.

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# Reflections and Responses

These case studies reveal three countries with profoundly different histories, political cultures and national psychologies. And yet, it is evident from this project that France, Great Britain and Germany are also bound together by a common affliction. In these great nations, each with, in historical terms, momentous levels of prosperity, standards of living, and global influence, a substantial minority – or even majority – of citizens are gripped by a kind of malaise, a sense that something is fundamentally rotten at the heart of their societies. Moreover, an omnipresent, menacing feeling of decline; that the very best of their culture and communities has been irreversibly lost, that the nation's best days have passed, and that the very essence of what it means to be French, or German, or British is under threat. While the political consequences of this condition are unique to each country, our research demonstrates that many of their antecedents are shared.

Over recent years, as scholars, pundits and politicians have sought to understand the immense social and cultural fractures revealing themselves within our societies, perhaps the most dominant thesis that has emerged has been of the 'left-behinds' of globalisation – those who fell on the wrong side of economic transformation. It is palpably clear from this project that the processes of de-industrialisation have had extremely long-term consequences for communities and their residents, even casting a shadow across the optimism and ambitions of generations born long since the last mines or factories closed their doors. Looking back, we can identify myriad ways in which these processes were poorly managed, and where political contempt, incompetence or naivety ultimately left vulnerable workers with few transferable skills to scramble from destitution.

The loss of a central industry is a hugely shocking experience for the towns and cities that have been built to grow, and thrive, around them. Even more discombobulating is the perception that Government 'turned a blind eye' or 'chose to forget us' – a feeling that can fester over time to manifest in social disengagement, and feed conspiracy thinking about endemic corruption in political institutions. In a 'permanent campaign' environment in which politicians are forever conscious of voters to be won, it can be easy to forget how quickly they can be lost. Certainly, too few have acknowledged the critical link between industry, community and identity, and the psychological effect of living in a town described as "once-thriving". As we have described across all three countries, the transformation between a hub of industry to a sleepy backwater can take place within a generation.

The turbulence of de-industrialisation has also coincided with the decline of many of the institutions that have traditionally given representation and voice to the working classes. While France and Germany's social democratic parties appear especially anaemic, yielding catastrophic results in their respective 2017 elections, so too in Britain, the Labour Party's successes in building the size of its membership masks profound shifts in terms of the diversity and influence of its constituencies. As the focus groups made clear, many of these parties' former voters feel alienated by the staunch cosmopolitanism and intellectualism of their contemporary representatives, and are naturally attracted to smaller parties offering to defend the values and former ways of life that once defined their personal and vocational identities.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that displaced manual workers are not the only groups of citizens whose economic opportunities have been compromised by globalisation. The ongoing effects of the global financial crisis, which accelerated labour market shifts towards short-term, insecure contracts, has exposed much larger numbers of citizens to financial precariousness. Even in Germany, whose economy has long been the envy of Europe, the stress of financial vulnerability and the sense of hopelessness wrought by 'dead-end jobs' without progression, is leading many to doubt the promise of social mobility that had once felt deeply embedded. For older citizens who have known a 'fairer' system built on the expectation that hard work would, in time, be rewarded, the economic settlement of the past can appear a land of milk and honey.

The focus groups across all three countries made clear that the feeling of dislocation consuming citizens is not confined to economic, or even material, losses. In France, Britain and Germany alike, they observe the fragmentation of communities, as we enter an age of isolationism; the erosion of respect, as societies emphasise rights over responsibilities; and the collapse of public safety, as crime and opportunism menace the streets. Moreover, the forces that once held us together – our shared cultures, traditions and values – are being displaced by an emphasis on pluralism, with citizens perceiving Governments are failing to actively defend and promote their nation's heritage. In Britain and France, this trend is seen to derive from an elite orthodoxy fixated on multiculturalism; in Germany, politicians ever-mindful of the country's 20<sup>th</sup> Century history appear reticent to foster patriotism lest it unleash a new wave of dangerous nationalism.

It is palpably clear to any outside observer that immigration has been a consuming issue in each of these three countries over recent years. The experience in Britain has been one of steadily increasing migration over more than a decade, reaching historically high levels, and transforming the

demographic make-up of many towns. In France, economic disadvantage, civic unrest and spikes of violence have cast a shadow across already invariably tenuous social relations. In Germany, we see a nation struggling with the long-term consequences of a decision to accept an unprecedented number of migrants in a very short space of time. The circumstances are unique, but many of the practical challenges and concerns of citizens are shared.

When considering the role that attitudes towards immigration play in the salience of nostalgic rhetoric, it is simple to presume that citizens are finding comfort in the memories of a 'Whiter' image of the nation. Cultural homogeneity, offering as it does a sense of the inherent proximity implicit in 'likeness', may certainly be appealing to some extent. It appears, however, that there are two other forces at play that contribute to the link between immigration and nostalgia – the responsibilities of the dominant culture in integration, and social competition.

It must be acknowledged that immense progress has been made over recent decades in the liberalisation of social attitudes on a number of issues, including racial prejudice. The issue of immigration is now primarily discussed in the frame of a civic conception, with citizens conscious of migrants' social and economic contribution. Our focus groups emphasise a sense of frustration that, somewhere between the Government not addressing the topic of immigration, or 'enforcing' a multicultural doctrine, citizens feel the balance of responsibility for integration is too often placed on their shoulders. They describe the exhaustion of feeling they are constantly compelled to 'adapt' and accommodate new cultures, traditions and ways of life, and the consequence is feeling as if they are 'walking on eggshells'. In this respect, the past can appear a less demanding time when less was asked of them.

Citizens in our focus groups consistently presented a simple set of expectations: that migrants learn the national language, greet their neighbours, and seek employment. While the question of whether migrants undercut wages of local workers has been a prominent theme in both France and Britain's political discourses, it is the topic of welfare reform that most energises citizens. Particularly for those in low socio-economic groups, the issue of immigration is often conceived through a lens of social competition; in a mind-set that perceives a scarcity of resources – whether in terms of jobs, state provision or even political agency – new arrivals can be seen as posing an existential threat. Moreover, citizens spoke extensively in our focus groups about their belief that their Government was privileging the needs of migrants – compensating their integration, funding their cultural activities, protecting their rights – above their own.

In depressed towns in Britain, we heard disbelief about migrants being allocated scarce council housing. In France, participants questioned how the Government could, in good conscience, provide support to migrants when “there are thousands of homeless people lying in the streets”. In Germany, pensioners living on the breadline on modest pensions in the East were confounded that the Government had found billions to integrate migrants, when they had been forced to live for years under a doctrine of enforced saving. When the state’s resources are seen as a zero-sum game, the environment in which citizens consider immigration is underpinned with an acute level of anxiety that their own meagre access and power will be compromised.

It is not simply the policies of immigration or integration that are important to consider here, but the language of politicians, the narratives they are able to build, and their willingness to engage with the contentious and challenging aspects of change. The hesitancy, and even active resistance, of political leaders to create space for open, constructive debate about issues of migrant crime, in particular, has fostered a cottage industry of conspiracy thinking, and reduced citizens’ propensity for tolerance and understanding of cultural difference. If comprehensive, transparent information is not made available, if public safety is not seen to be prioritised, and if politicians cannot acknowledge the outrage of citizens, then isolated acts of criminality are quickly extrapolated into an impression of an irreconcilable cultural incompatibility, aided by a broken, corrupt system.

There is a clear compound effect of these social, cultural and economic anxieties, which manifest together to create an overall impression of the nation’s health. This picture then translates into their perception of the country’s global standing, and also the willingness of citizens to engage internationally – especially when seen in competition with addressing issues of urgency at home. In Britain, the Brexit vote is forcing the nation to confront its status and role in the international community, which also necessitates coming to terms with its long-ignored history of empire. In France, a new President offers hope for the restoration of the country’s global clout, but sceptical citizens are also wary he will prioritise Europe’s future over their own. Germany’s most pressing geographical challenge lies within its own borders, with old divisions continuing to shape hearts and minds.

As our societies, economies and cultures diversify and pluralise, the galvanising forces of unity become more difficult to conjure, the task of leadership more complicated. Contemporary life in Britain, Germany and France brings advantages that previous generations could only have dreamed of, as our scientific and technological achievements advance health, convenience, mobility

and communication. As the focus groups in this project revealed, for some citizens, however, the trade-offs between these gains are not sufficiently off-set by the tangible losses they observe in terms of security, community and cohesion.

Even more significant in size and, perhaps, in political terms, was the large majority of citizens we identified whose nostalgia does not compel them to return to the past, but simply to reject further change. Recognising, on balance, the benefits of modernity, they are acceptant of recent societal transformations but unwilling to embrace further upheaval. In this mind-set, change is seen as a continuum, of which same-sex marriage, for example, can be seen as reasonable development, and transgender bathrooms, for example, is seen as a ‘tipping point’, and an unreasonable level of change. In considering that governance in a globalised age at its most simplistic form is essentially a process of managing change, this inclination represents an equally challenging phenomenon to the effective functioning of our political systems.

It is evident that citizens are not only dissatisfied with the present, but fearful of the future – which looms as an amorphous, metallic force in their minds. While the British surveys demonstrated that short-term optimism could be gained by feeling to have fallen on ‘the right side’ of a historical decision, such as Brexit, the focus groups reinforced that this buoyancy cannot be maintained beyond the coming decade. The immense level of anxieties regarding technological change and the influence of automation on our economies and human existence illustrate the abstract, menacing form that a ‘tech-driven future’ represents to many citizens. The change ahead is anticipated to be cataclysmic in nature, with the economic, social and political world order all considered vulnerable to upheaval. The only certainty that many citizens were able to express regarding their country’s future landscape is that they would inevitably find themselves on the bottom of the pecking order, with technology’s spoils in the hands of a new elite.

Reflecting on what this research reveals regarding the role of nostalgia as a cultural and political force, a number of conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, that Britain, France and Germany are experiencing profound level of social, economic and cultural transformation, and the breadth and depth of this change has been alienating for many citizens to the extent that many feel unwilling or even incapable of looking to the future. Secondly, each country holds a varied and complex history of nostalgic narratives, some of which have gained renewed salience in a period in which citizens no longer accept a doctrine of progress. Thirdly, these narratives are being skilfully harnessed by insurgent politicians of varied ideological inclinations to galvanise a force of protest against the status quo, rejecting a vision for the future that positions citizens as passive in the

process of change. Finally, to surmise that the cost of mainstream politicians failing to respond to these developments may well be our societies becoming more exclusionary and less communal, underpinned by a more desperate, dangerous form of social competition – in short, the imperilling of our liberal democracies.

Those who benefit from citizens' anxieties about change are those peddling the promise of 'control', not just over immigration, or laws, or even whether the national flag is displayed with gusto, but over time itself. Time is presented as a wild and unruly force, which can be secured, regained, and tamed. Our studies of the use of nostalgic rhetoric in the recent French and German election campaigns, and the European Referendum in Britain, demonstrate the pervasive extent to which language evoking past glories has infiltrated contemporary political cultures. The currency of the past, so to speak, is so influential that even those guardians of the status quo are seeking to define their legitimacy in historical terms. While it is certainly the case, as our research shows, that nostalgia has long been a feature of Western politics on both the Left and the Right, there is a particular urgency around the issue at the moment due to the sheer depth of dissatisfaction in our societies, as we stand on the cusp of another era of major economic transformation.

Despite the tremendous volume of nostalgic rhetoric speaking to the restoration of a 'golden age', a particularly striking finding of the research has been the extent to which the word 'nostalgia' itself is seen in a pejorative light. It is a relatively small niche of citizens and politicians who will openly proclaim themselves to be nostalgic, or to speak in such explicit terms, and the content analysis and focus groups reinforce the extent to which the term is used as a liberal slur. In our study of the Brexit referendum, we witness the ongoing efforts of those involved with, and convinced by, the campaign to Leave the European Union to define its legacy as fundamentally future-oriented.

It is true that if we accept that nostalgia reflects the complex compounding of citizens' experiences and observations about their present condition, we cannot dismiss nostalgia itself as irrational, hyperbolic or feeble. Nor should we undermine the value of evidence that can be harnessed from the past, to demonstrate the gains that can be wrought, over time, in democratic societies. Moreover, we should not ignore the opportunity to face up to urgent questions about the processes of decline, and how governments and societies can work together to prevent them from happening again.

Our research underscores that governments continue to be seen as responsible for both the conceptualisation and preservation of national

identity, for harnessing economic opportunity and shielding citizens from the consequences of economic transformation, and for upholding the standards and responsibilities of civic life. The discontent evident within French, British and French societies will necessitate significant political responses, which may include:

- Transformative efforts from Government and business to promote local economic growth, rendering the ‘forgotten communities’ more attractive places to live, work and invest;
- Considering how greater security could be achieved within the labour market in an age of precarious employment, while also ensuring economies remain dynamic and competitive;
- Extensive preparation to redesign skills, education and welfare systems to face the significant changes that lie ahead in the age of the fourth industrial revolution, and addressing the dichotomised visions of technology as offering either a utopian or dystopic future;
- Greater proactive investment to promote integration on social and also cultural levels, recognising that this is a fundamental responsibility of the state in exchange for the economic benefits immigration can bring;
- A stronger emphasis on international engagement within the education curriculum, moving beyond the histories of empire and conflict to demonstrate the ongoing, contemporary value of international leadership and collaboration; and
- Courage from political leaders to engage with contentious issues, to defend freedom of expression, and create greater space within politics and society for more robust, constructive and open debate.

There remains huge capacity to influence not only the material health and prosperity of citizens, but also their sense of the nation’s trajectory and sense of purpose. Due to its importance in the formation of national narratives, mythologies and identity, this process will, somewhat paradoxically, necessarily involve some interrogation and harnessing of the past – reconciling the forces of cosmopolitanism, globalisation and pluralism with citizens’ clear desire for a greater emphasis on national patriotism, values and community. These are by no means mutually exclusive; while diversity necessarily renders unity more difficult, it is by no means a *fait accompli* that politicians have surrendered the capacity to build common ground and consensus within European societies.

In conclusion, there are two imminent challenges for politicians at stake, both of which necessitate the full power of Government both as a vessel for policy action and for national leadership. First, to address citizens' concerns about the present through frank and open debate and robust policy responses, and second, to securitise them with a compelling, pragmatic vision, which helps them to feel confident that the social, economic and political settlement that lies ahead warrants looking to the future with hope, not fear.

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An appeal to a glorious past has been a prominent feature of European politics in recent years. While there are common elements to the nostalgic discourses seen across European politics, nostalgic narratives are clearly heavily mediated and contextualised by a nation's esoteric cultural and historical background. This report sets out the findings of our qualitative and quantitative research into nostalgia in contemporary Great Britain, France and Germany – three leading European nations in which the past feels ever-present.

The research leads us to conclude that there are two imminent challenges for politicians at stake, both of which necessitate the full power of Government both as a vessel for policy action and for national leadership. First, to address citizens' concerns about the present through frank and open debate and robust policy responses, and second, to securitise them with a compelling, pragmatic vision, which helps them to feel confident that the social, economic and political settlement that lies ahead warrants looking to the future with hope, not fear.

**Sophie Gaston** is a social researcher, whose work addresses cultural and political crises, democracy and governance, trust, and the media. She conducts citizen-focused projects, exploring social and political trends in Europe and the United States. Sophie holds a master's degree in political communication and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts. She tweets at @sophgaston.

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