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The divided continent: Understanding Europe's social landscape in 2020 and beyond

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Executive Summary

The political upheaval and dysfunction of recent years have focused political minds on better understanding the volatility underpinning European electorates. Interest in public opinion research has soared, yet it can be difficult to draw the findings of such surveys and focus groups into something meaningful and cohesive, from which genuine insights can be drawn. It is pertinent that policymakers at both the national and EU institutional levels grasp a clear and incisive idea of what is taking place culturally, socially and politically in EU member states, and that these tea leaves can be interpreted and harnessed to produce responsive, targeted policies.

This research analysis report sets out the findings of a major survey conducted across 13 EU member states (i.e. Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands), which were selected to provide a representative snapshot of the bloc as a whole. This survey was expansive in its scope and unique in its focus on social and cultural issues, as well as politics, leadership and economic security. The data is interpreted through three distinct themes, each of which is likely to play a critical role in Europe's 'mood music' over its coming parliamentary term: nostalgia, intergenerational conflict and democratic legitimacy. These themes have become the subject of much amateur punditry, although institutional understanding of their complex nature is often shallow. Therefore, this paper seeks to shine a more evidenced-based contextual light around their formation and nuances of application.

Chapter 1 considers the theme of nostalgia as a lens through which to explore dissatisfaction with the contemporary social, economic and political settlement. Chapter 2 examines the roles that gender and age play in the formation of public opinion in Europe, focusing particularly on the burgeoning intergenerational and gender-based conflicts brewing across social and political issues. Chapter 3 captures the inconsistent support for democracy across EU member states and interrogates citizens' preferences for different styles of consensus-driven and more authoritarian forms of leadership. To conclude, reflections on the practical lessons of these trends and their consequences for national and EU-level institutions and political leaders are offered in the report's final chapter, "Recommendations for Governance".

With the EU's new parliamentary term set in place, it is incumbent on both national governments and EU institutions to consider how a long-term understanding of public opinion – beyond the daily churn of political polls – can be more cohesively integrated into policy planning. The EU has emerged from one of the most politically challenging periods of its history, and if it is to move forward with a renewed sense of purpose, it must learn from its past shortcomings and consider how to reinstate citizens at the heart of its mission. This report seeks to assist policymakers, journalists, civil society and all those who hold a stake in the future health and strength of the Union and its democratic foundations to appreciate the nature and scale of the challenges that lie ahead. And, in doing so, to highlight where best to focus attention and resources in the future.

Methodology

REPORT DATA

The YouGov survey fieldwork dates were 2-8 February 2019, and the sample size was a minimum of 1,000 respondents in each of the 13 EU member states studied within this project: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain and the Netherlands. Altogether, they represent 75% of the membership of the European Parliament.

Where pan-European data is discussed, this reflects averages across the 13 member states studied as part of this project. Rounding is taken to the closest whole decimal point.

A number of the findings discussed within the report have been drawn from the composite data of a series of related thematic questions. The list of questions that formed the basis of these data points can be found in the report's Appendix. All figures in this report are based on the data collected in the survey and were produced and generated by this author.

THEMATIC FOCUS

The design of the survey and the analysis of its findings have been approached through three distinct themes: nostalgia, intergenerational and gender battlegrounds, and support for democracy. These have been chosen to reflect three of the most crucial social trends shaping national EU political environments: challenging the supremacy of traditional centre-left and -right parties, precipitating the formation of new parties and movements, and the rise of anti-establishment campaigning and rhetoric. The manifestation of these three frames will critically affect the functioning of the EU and also the stability and security of liberal democratic governance in each of its member states.

Moreover, while common trends are evident from a pan-European perspective, these three themes also provide a useful lens through which to appreciate the inconsistent expression of social developments within and between member states. They remind us that although there can be a 'European story', for example in the pervasive distribution of nostalgic sentiments, at the same time, the driving forces behind such trends and their likely influences on policymaking are deeply esoteric to particular national contexts.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that although the findings of certain questions have been separated between the themes, there is often a degree of overlap between the issues at stake. There are, for example, clear distinctions between ages and genders in the issues of nostalgia and democratic support, too. Moreover, nostalgic sentiments are clearly encouraged by a multiplicity of social, economic and cultural factors. For this reason, the three chapters of this publication are presented as a singular report, and the development of policy recommendations and principles for governance has been undertaken as a single task, spanning the full scope of the challenges addressed in the survey as a whole.

Key findings

CHAPTER 1. NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia and perceptions of declining communities are deeply embedded in contemporary European society and must therefore be taken seriously as political phenomena.

- 44% of Europeans across the 13 member states believe that the quality of life in their country has declined throughout their lifetimes, while 29% believe it has improved and 27% believe it has stayed the same.

- Estonia is the only country where a majority of citizens (65%) believe that life has improved in their country, while majorities in Bulgaria (50%), France (70%), Greece (75%), Italy (62%) and Spain (54%) all believe that the quality of life has declined in their country.

The economic liberalisation of the post-communist experience in Central and Eastern Europe is generally recognised in the citizens' optimism. In contrast, the short- and medium-term effects of the 2008 financial crisis and ensuing eurozone crisis are clearly visible in the nostalgic attitudes of Southern Europe.

- 42% of Europeans believe employment opportunities, jobs and the labour market have declined, 32% believe they have improved, and 26.5% believe they have stayed the same throughout their lifetimes.

- Majorities in Poland (59%) and Estonia (53%) recognise the economic advantages of their country's post-communist life. Interestingly, citizens of Denmark also cite economic improvement. Deeply pessimistic, however, are the Greeks (79%), Italians and Spanish (both 71%) and the French (65%), whose more recent experiences since the economic crisis appear to have left a strong impression.

Nostalgia is mediated not only by economic concerns, as citizens are also perceptive of shifts in the status of their communities, and national strength and influence.

- 44% of Europeans believe that the strength of communities in their country has declined throughout their lifetimes, while only 19.5% believe it has improved.

- 39% of Europeans believe that their country's status on the world stage has declined throughout their lifetimes, 33% believe it has stayed the same, and 27.5% believe it has improved.

- Again, the only country where a majority of the population believes that their country's status has improved is Estonia (70%) – a complete outlier, with Germany the second most likely, at just 33%. The four countries where national decline is a major conviction include France (61%), Greece (66%), Italy (61%) and Hungary (50%). Only 9% of Italians and 10% of the French believe that their countries' standing has improved.

Nostalgia is not evenly dispersed within the member states and appears highly correlated with age, socioeconomic status and gender. It is also deeply aligned with the emergence of new populist, authoritarian and anti-feminist movements.

- Demographically, the most nostalgic Europeans tend on average to be those with lower levels of education, those residing outside of major urban areas and the unemployed. Distinctively from other surveys, we find that women appear to be somewhat more nostalgic than men across these 13 countries as a whole.

- Those who harbour populist, authoritarian and sexist instincts are more likely to be nostalgic than other Europeans due to a direct relationship between these ideologies and nostalgic discourses, and also the correlation between certain demographic traits (i.e. age) and an increased predisposition to said ideologies discourses. The perception of being on the 'winning' or 'losing' side of contemporary politics also plays a strong role in the formation of nostalgia.

CHAPTER 2. INTERGENERATIONAL AND GENDER BATTLEGROUNDS: THE ECONOMY, IMMIGRATION AND 'THE NATION'

Many of the areas of greatest polarisation both within and between member states – such as economic inequality, immigration and national values – are most clearly expressed within significant gaps of public opinion between the younger and older generations, and men and women. For example:

- Women and older Europeans are most sensitive to economic inequality and insecurity.

- Younger Europeans in the west, north and south are more likely to be positive towards immigration and value multiculturalism, while it is the older generations in Central and Eastern Europe who are the most supportive of diversity.

- Older Europeans are more nationalistic than younger Europeans, and women are more likely to value the preservation of national traditions than men.

2.1 The economy

While overall, Europeans are more pessimistic than optimistic about economic conditions in their country and are especially concerned about rising inequality, it

is women and older Europeans who are most sensitive to issues of economic fragility.

- Overall, 30% of Europeans in the 13 surveyed member states describe their nation's economic conditions as 'poor', a further 36% describe them as 'only fair', 31% describe them as 'good', and just 3% describe them as 'excellent'.

- 70% of Europeans agree that economic inequality is growing in their country.

- Women are broadly more likely to feel pessimistic about both economic inequality and economic conditions. Older Europeans are more likely to feel as though they are being 'left behind' than their younger counterparts.

2.2 Immigration

Concerns about immigration are widespread across all member states and demographics, although they are most saliently concentrated in Central and Eastern Europe.

- Overall, a fifth of all European citizens in the 13 member states hold a 'very negative' view of immigration, and the same proportion holds a 'very negative' view of Islam and Islamic migration specifically. Concerns around the effects of immigration on public safety, national unity and national culture are widely experienced.

- The states most hostile towards immigration are Hungary and Poland, and the least hostile are Germany, Denmark and Spain.

- 40% of citizens either 'strongly' or 'somewhat agree' that their country 'would be stronger' if all immigration were halted. These opinions are most pronounced in Hungary and Bulgaria.

In the west, north and south of Europe, younger Europeans are more tolerant and pluralistic while in Central and Eastern Europe, older Europeans are more tolerant and pluralistic.

- On average, younger Europeans are more tolerant and pluralistic than older Europeans, who appear especially agitated regarding the issue of social integration of Muslim communities.

- However, a striking East-West divide is in play. In Western and more established member states, older citizens are the most likely to hold negative views towards immigrants, while in the Eastern and newer states, it is the young who are most hostile towards immigration.

- Nevertheless, an average of 15% of Europeans strongly agree that 'immigrants are human beings, and it is our moral duty in Germany to help them' and a further 30% somewhat agree, with just 12% in strong disagreement. The most consistently ardent defenders of a moral position towards migrants are the young.

2.3 The Nation

The EU project has not dented patriotic feeling in Europe, and national attachments remain more profound for most citizens than their European identity.

- Nationalistic and patriotic feelings remain high in Europe. Overall, an average of 37% of European citizens describes themselves as 'very proud' of their nation and a further 40% as 'quite proud', compared to 18% who are 'not very proud' and just 5% who are 'not at all proud'.

- Older Europeans consistently possess the highest levels of national pride, with younger Europeans clearly showing less patriotism. Men are also found to be more likely to express national pride than women.

- Europe has been successful in cultivating a shared identity, but it remains a largely secondary identity to the principle framework of self-recognition compared to the nation. Overall, 60% of citizens identify with their nationality first, and European second. A further 20% identify solely within their national environment and do not consider themselves as European. Only 8% identify as European first, and a further 4% as European solely.

Europeans are concerned about fragmentation within their countries and desire a greater sense of 'unity'.

- Three-quarters of Europeans either agree 'strongly' or 'somewhat' that their nations should be more unified, with older Europeans the most likely to believe this.

- Similarly, an average of 69% of Europeans says it is 'very important' for them to live in a country where its traditions are upheld and respected, although this figure does capture the disproportionate level of agreement by the older generations.

- This opinion is strongest in Eastern European member states, where such topics are central in national political debates; and weakest in states with looser historical national identities, such as Spain. Women are more likely to favour the preservation of culture and traditions than men.

CHAPTER 3. DEMOCRACY: ENDURING SUPPORT?

Half of the EU electorate does not participate in EU elections, with women, youth and those without further education especially disinclined to vote.

- Overall, a slight majority of the surveyed Europeans (50.5%) indicated that they would definitely vote in the May 2019 European elections. 21% declared they 'probably' would vote, 13% that they would 'maybe' vote,

and a further 11% that they either would 'probably not' or 'definitely not' vote. The actual turnout across all member states in May stood at 50.62%.

- The definite intention to vote was highest in Denmark, at 64%, then Belgium and Greece. In Belgium, where voting is compulsory, 88.47% of citizens eventually turned out to cast their vote in the May elections, while in Denmark it was 66% – one of the highest levels on record. By contrast, both Greeks and Italians ultimately overestimated their likelihood to vote, with only 58.7% and 54.5% reaching the ballot box respectively.

- The highest percentage of citizens declaring they definitively would not vote was found in France, at 10% – twice as high as other member states.

- Women were much less likely than men to be certain that they would vote in the EU Parliamentary elections, as were younger Europeans and those with lower levels of education.

Only around a third of Europeans support democratic principles consistently – and support is weakest amongst the newest democracies in Eastern Europe.

- Only 37% of Europeans consistently backed democratic principles, compared to 63% who were inconsistent in their support. Consistent support for democracy was most prevalent in Denmark (68%), Austria (57%) and Germany (56%); and weakest in post-communist Poland (19%) and Bulgaria (just 15%).

Individual demographic characteristics play a strong role in engendering support for democracy as a style of governance.

- Those most likely to consistently support democratic principles are older, male and highly educated.

- Europeans harbouring strong authoritarian predispositions and sexist attitudes were generally much less likely to support democracy, and those who identify with populist and anti-establishment views were the most likely to support democracy.

Support for democracy appears to have become increasingly partisan.

- Those who place themselves on the centre-left of the political spectrum are the most likely to support democracy consistently, while those on the right are the least consistently supportive.

Trust in national and EU parliaments is relatively poor but not entirely absent and is shaped by contemporary experience. Those who trust national parliaments are more likely to trust the European Parliament.

- A quarter of the surveyed Europeans declare that they have 'no trust at all' in their national parliaments, with 16.5% leaning towards a lack of trust, a further quarter leaning towards trust, and just 16% expressing high levels of trust.

- Trust is highest in Germany and Austria, where a quarter of the population has 'very high' levels of trust, in stark comparison to Bulgaria and Greece, where just a fraction (3% to 4%) do.

- In Greece, more than twice as many citizens consistently express trust in democracy than in their national parliament.

- The proportion of Europeans who trust their respective national parliaments is similar as those who trust the European Parliament, indicating that citizens can be divided between those who trust institutions and those who do not more clearly, than distinguishing between those who trust national and EU institutions.

Europeans appear to value compromise, consensus-building and support for human rights in their leaders, despite many voting for parties and candidates who do not promote these.

- The majority appear to be attracted to leaders who make compromises – 27% of citizens say they would be 'much more likely' to vote for a candidate who was prepared to make compromises, with a further 40% 'somewhat more likely' to do so. By comparison, 18% say they would be 'somewhat less likely' to vote for such a candidate, and 8.2% are actively less likely to do so.

- Spaniards are the most likely to find appeal in political compromise, followed by Germans and Estonians. The least enamoured with compromise are Greeks and Italians.

- Europeans are very supportive of leaders standing up for human rights, with a majority (54%) reporting that they would be 'much more likely' to vote for a candidate who stood up for human rights, and a further 30% saying they would be 'somewhat more likely'. Only around 10% of the population finds this unappealing.

- Once again, Spaniards are the most supportive of this style of leadership, with an astonishing 73% of the population saying they would be 'much more likely' to support human rights-focused candidates, with strong support also evident amongst the Bulgarians and Greeks.

- Europeans also strongly support the prospect of leaders being consultative around different points of view. 40% indicated that they would be 'much more likely' to support leaders with this approach, a further 40% said they would be 'somewhat more likely', and 14% found this approach objectionable.

- Again, Spaniards lead the pack in terms of their support for leaders seeking alternative points of view, followed by the Bulgarians and Hungarians. The least supportive of this approach were the Belgians and Austrians.

There are mixed views on the Article 7 process and economic sanctions, but clearly a greater level of support than outright objection.

- When asked their view on the notion of economic sanctions being imposed upon EU member states in response to democratic backsliding, Europeans clearly hold mixed opinions on this contentious issue. Nonetheless, they tend to lean towards support, with around 50% strongly or somewhat supporting it and only 15% actively opposed.

- Support is strongest in Germany, Bulgaria and Spain and weakest in France and Italy.

Only around a quarter of Europeans feel empowered in their national politics, although this reflects 'protest cultures' and current political rhetoric.

- When asked to assess their levels of democratic empowerment, only 27% of Europeans strongly or somewhat agreed that they could make a difference in the functioning of their national government, and 35% disagreed.

- Empowerment is highest in France, where 40% of citizens agree that they can make a difference in their national politics, followed by Spain and Italy (34%). Empowerment is markedly lowest in Hungary, where more than a third (35%) of the population strongly disagrees that they can make a difference, followed by Bulgaria and Germany.

Recommendations for governance

Based on the findings of this survey, ten possible responses and principles for governance are set out, directed towards both EU institutions and national political leaders.

1. EUROPEAN LEADERS MUST SERIOUSLY CONSIDER THE THREAT THAT NOSTALGIA POSES TO OUR POLICYMAKING AND POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS.

As awareness of the social salience of nostalgic narratives has grown amongst political parties, leaders from all sides of the political spectrum in a wide variety of member states have sought to harness their emotive potential during election campaigns. In a national context, leaders should be aware of the dangers of indulging such a powerful evocation of the past to the capacity to build support and consent towards addressing future challenges. European institutions that are vulnerable to a perception of 'crisis politics' should also consider their role in promoting forward-looking agendas, to ensure that the EU can anticipate emerging obstacles to governance and effectively deploy its collective strength towards regional and global issues.

2. CITIZENS' PROPENSITY FOR NOSTALGIA LIES IN THEIR DISSATISFACTION WITH CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS.

Traditional politicians will find it difficult to forge compelling messages about their policy agendas or restore degraded levels of trust without addressing the sources of citizens' dissatisfaction in the present. As our survey demonstrates, concerns are spread across a number of different policy areas (e.g. the trajectory of the economy and job opportunities, the state of communities, the global standing of the nation), but they also come together in a powerful, more diffuse sense of dissatisfaction and alienation.

Simply forging ahead without acknowledging that the policy approaches of the past – whether on globalisation, migration policy or restrictions to the franchise of national welfare states, for example – have borne winners and losers will only entrench the sense that politicians have become divorced from the reality of ordinary people's lives. This is not simply a matter of 'communicating policies more effectively', but being open to considering that the received wisdom of the past, the settlements it created and the promises it offered must be revisited.

Moreover, our survey finds distinct demographic characteristics that correlate with a higher propensity for nostalgic sentiments. Particularly those with lower levels of education, the unemployed and those living outside of major urban areas are clearly less convinced that the architects of our multicultural and globalised societies are sufficiently inclusive and responsive to their needs. In the first instance, these patterns indicate that policy and political levers should especially target citizens and communities at risk of alienation and disengagement from the contemporary economic and social settlement, in the manner of the state providing a more robust 'safety net' to the power of market forces. More broadly, policymakers must take seriously the risks to governance posed by encouraging and permitting social change at a pace which can only command a deeply polarised degree of consent.

3. THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS HAS LEFT A PROFOUND IMPACT ON THE CAPACITY OF CITIZENS TO TRUST THEIR POLITICAL SYSTEM TO DELIVER BENEFITS IN THE FUTURE.

Our survey makes clear that citizens of member states that were particularly exposed to the 2008 financial crisis continue to be the most vulnerable to nostalgic impulses. These findings underscore the 'long tail' of the crisis, both in terms of its impact on individual and collective economic securities, as well as its substantive influence on citizens' trust in the model on which national growth and prosperity had been predicated. Furthermore, citizens are especially concerned about the degree of economic inequality, which they perceive to have metabolised in the aftermath of the financial crisis – especially women, who appear to stand on the frontline of economic fragility.

Politicians must consider the lessons of the crisis, and not only through the lens of the need for structural changes (e.g. increasing robust regulatory environments) but also in terms of what its consequences reveal about the responsibility of governments to educate citizens on the trade-offs underpinning our models of economic growth and the irreversibly interconnected nature of the global economy. With the fourth industrial revolution at Europe's doorstep, another significant transition lies ahead, bearing uneven opportunities and challenges across segments of the population still reeling from the disruption wrought from the financial crisis. Policymakers must heed their knowledge of the grave democratic implications of poor change management and stand on the frontline of anticipating and proactively managing the disruption that this new wave of technological and economic upheaval will necessarily inspire.

4. ECONOMIC LIBERALISATION HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN STOKING OPTIMISM, SECURITY AND PROSPERITY WHEN IT HAS BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE.

Estonia repeatedly stands out in our survey as a beacon of what can be achieved – politically, economically

and socially – when nations find a distinct competitive advantage in the global economy and successfully organise their government to help fulfil their ambitions. Its successes in delivering widespread relative prosperity are clearly visible, as are the important consequences this holds for citizens' levels of trust, optimism and social cohesion.

5. POLITICIANS SHOULD CONSIDER HOW TO TACKLE SOCIAL SEGREGATION AND ENCOURAGE COMMUNITIES TO THRIVE.

European citizens are very perceptive to shifts in their communities, and our survey confirms the relationship between the belief in community decline and broader dissatisfaction with contemporary politics. Previous research also indicates that in fact, this particular concern about communities captures a multifaceted spectrum of issues, including elderly social isolation, anxieties about technology and growing cultural and socioeconomic segregation. Many of these issues not only reflect the changes in how people live, work and create families, but can also stem from the consequences of misguided or careless policymaking – in particular, a lack of consideration for the deeply intertwined relationship between industry and community, and a dearth of investment in managing transitions to a more globalised economy. Politicians must ensure that the importance of 'place' becomes a more central aspect of their policy consciousness and that greater investments are made to facilitate social integration within and between communities.

Citizens' concerns about community also extend to the nation: our survey indicates that Europeans – and particularly older citizens – are anxious about social polarisation and seek a greater sense of unity and shared purpose. There is a clear opportunity for politicians who can resist the temptation to foster competition and conflict between social groups to lead national and European conversations about shared values, purpose and identity in a modern world. Our survey suggests that the expression of a civic-based form of patriotism should form part of this narrative, with citizens' enduring identification with their nations harnessed inclusively rather than be presented as a binary choice between xenophobic nationalism and a pluralistic European future.

6. INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT IS LIKELY TO REACH A FEVER PITCH OVER THE COMING YEARS, SO POLITICIANS MUST CONSIDER HOW TO CREATE MORE BALANCED POLICY ENVIRONMENTS.

Over recent decades, policymaking has become too focused on the needs and interests of the older generations and those able to accrue capital assets such as housing and pension funds. There is an urgent need to redistribute the balance of citizens' political power in Europe by ensuring that both national and EU-level policymakers take the concerns of the younger generations, and redress the deep generational imbalances in access to many of the foundational building blocks of our societies. The issues of climate change and housing ownership are likely to stand as particularly significant battlegrounds in the short- and medium-term.

This process of redistribution will understandably be fraught with conflict as older citizens grow anxious that their own preferences and needs are being made secondary; however, moving forward, it is simply unsustainable for such imbalances in political agency and representation to exist. Nonetheless, politicians must of course also ensure that in seeking to restore the intergenerational contract, they do not contribute to further social and political isolation amongst vulnerable older populations, which are already sensitive to economic inequality and feel 'left behind'.

7. EU POLITICIANS MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THAT CULTURAL ANXIETIES ABOUT IMMIGRATION ARE WIDESPREAD AND THAT THERE IS NO SINGULAR STORY ON IMMIGRATION SENTIMENT.

Our survey underscores the degree to which concerns about immigration and its cultural and practical implications are deeply entrenched across Europe. Moreover, that there is no singular demographic group across the EU that as a whole specifically represents the apex of immigration anxieties: while older Europeans in Western and Northern Europe are the most hostile to immigration, it is the younger generations in Eastern and Central Europe which hold the highest levels of concern. As such, immigration anxieties cannot be dismissed as a niche preoccupation, nor can any particular demographic be depicted as especially intransigent in their views on a political level. The heterogeneous nature of immigration concern compels a complex range of responses across both the policymaking and political arenas in order to securitise citizens and rebuild their trust in governments' capacity to lead on this policy area.

8. POLITICIANS MUST CONVINCE ALL OF THEIR VOTERS THAT THE LATTER'S VOICES MATTER IN A REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY.

While optimism can be drawn from this research regarding the relatively resilient support for democracy in Europe, it is deeply inconsistent both within and between member states. Many citizens are disenchanted with representative democracy and remain unconvinced that their voices can make a difference. Politicians should be especially concerned at how this disenfranchisement manifests in voter turnouts, with women and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds especially dissuaded about their political efficacy.

Policymakers must urgently consider the full suite of positions, responses and agendas that is offered to their electorates, and how they can coalesce to present

a feeling of alienation towards certain demographic groups. Moreover, focused attention should be directed towards the ways in which women, minorities and those without further education are represented within the political class.

More broadly, it is clear that representative democracy is currently under siege from a powerful populist movement taking hold of Europe, purporting to address citizens' feelings of disengagement through the more 'responsive' systems of direct democracy. In more fragile and/or recent democracies, our survey demonstrates that citizens remain sceptical of its supremacy as a political model. In order for representative democracy – the basis of our liberal democratic model, seeded in the West and exported to the world – to endure such an environment, citizens must be convinced that it provides sufficient scope for accountability, transparency and receptiveness.

It is also evident from our survey that many of the tenets of liberal democracy are increasingly becoming politicised in a partisan manner. Politicians who feel frustrated with the functioning of national democracies and the EU more generally should seek to promote reforms rather than challenge conventions and norms that served as critical underpinnings and safeguards for decades, or even centuries. They should also take guidance in the lesson learnt from our survey results: citizens across all of the surveyed member states value the principles of compromise, consensus-building and human rights, and a number of them would feel especially compelled to support candidates who emphasise these qualities in their election platforms.

9. EU LEADERS AND NATIONAL LEADERS SHOULD HELP TO SUPPORT TRUST IN ONE ANOTHER'S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS.

The combative approach of some national leaders towards the EU creates a temptation for the EU, in turn, to also regard national leaders as obstacles to their success. This symbiotic cycle of blame may provide short-term benefits to any side at a particular time, but it also threatens, in the longer term, to erode citizens' trust in both levels of institutions.

Our survey reveals that Europe is increasingly divided between 'the trusting' and 'the untrusting', with those who trust national parliaments to also likely trust the European Parliament and vice versa. This close relationship suggests that EU leaders who are concerned with the anaemic levels of trust in their institutions should consider how they can support national leaders to cultivate and uphold trust in their respective parliaments, courts and other major democratic institutions.

10. THE EU SHOULD HELP TO FOSTER ACTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY ENVIRONMENTS IN MEMBER STATES.

When asked about the degree to which they feel their voice can make a difference in their national political environments, citizens of countries with diverse and active civil society groups and lively traditions of peaceful protest were more likely to recognise a strong sense of political agency. While the EU has come to recognise that civil society is important to a nation's democratic health and functioning, this suggests that it also has a direct impact on citizens, thus providing the essential 'connective tissue' to fostering political engagement.

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