TRADE UNIONS AND THE THREAT OF POPULISM & THE FAR RIGHT

ETUC/ETUI Conference

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More in Common - Introduction

To counter authoritarian populism and addressing threats to democracy from social fracturing and polarisation.

Offices in France, Germany, US, UK. Relationships with unions at national and international level.

More in Common’s work concentrates on

- Detailed research on public attitudes and in which we segment national populations based on values and psychology (France, Germany, US, Italy, Netherlands, Greece) - note new 2019 studies for France and Germany
- Building inclusive narratives that engage populations in the ‘middle’
- Connecting people across the lines of difference
The forces that are driving social fracturing are similar across Europe (though national differences matter too).

- Income inequality
- The disruptive impact of automation and globalization on labour markets and regional economies
- Anti-status quo public sentiment
- Social media is driving polarization and conflict
- Large-scale immigration program
- Spillover effects from polarization in other countries
- Coordination by far-right activists (and foreign interference)
- Social democratic parties have failed to reinvent
The appeal of populism

• Today’s populists are tapping into powerful aspects of our human psychology: preying on people’s sense of insecurity, loss of status and identity.

• A combination of economic insecurity, cultural change, anxiety about the future and loss of social connection has left people hungry for a sense of identity and belonging.

• Many people also feel that they have been ignored or treated with contempt by the ‘establishment’ – and feeling disrespected can soon turn into resentment.

• Populists tap into these powerful currents of emotion, identity and belonging. For human psychology these are so much much more powerful than policy arguments, facts or rational arguments.
Mapping open vs closed values | Insight 1

The political landscape is being reshaped by a division between cosmopolitans with open values, and nationalists with closed values.

Typically:

• 25-35% are ‘open’
• 15-20% are ‘closed’
• 40-55% are ‘conflicted middle’.
The middle groups | Insight 2

• There are generally **two or three distinctive middle groups**, making up around half the population.

• They are different in each country, but they tend to be less ideological, less deeply engaged in issues and often hold conflicting views.

• Views are shaped more by emotion rather than reason.

• Some are more concerned about economic issues, others cultural issues, and some disengaged.
Population segmentations

FRANCE
- Identitarian Nationalists: 17%
- Multiculturalists: 30%
- Left Behind: 21%
- Humanitarians: 15%
- Economically Insecure: 17%

GERMANY
- Radical Opponents: 17%
- Liberal Cosmopolitans: 22%
- Moderate Opponents: 18%
- Economic Pragmatists: 20%

ITALY
- Defenders: 17%
- Catholic Humanitarians: 16%
- Italian Cosmopolitans: 12%
- Hostile Nationalists: 7%
- Left Behind: 17%
- Security Concerned: 12%
- Disengaged Moderates: 19%

NETHERLANDS
- Confident Multiculturalists: 30%
- Engaged but Conflicted: 28%
- Disengaged: 16%
The middle is angry and anti-status quo | Insight 3

• For example, in Italy two of the three middle groups believe strongly that Italy needs a strong leader willing to break the rules

“To fix Italy, we need a strong leader willing to break the rules” (% total agree)

Basis: Sample size - 2,000. Source: Ipsos poll commissioned by More in Common
80% believe the American government is rigged to serve the interests of the rich and influential.

Among the Exhausted Majority (67% of the population) this feeling is even stronger: 89% believe the system is rigged against them.

The middle is not centrist. It is angry.
Angry middle groups are vulnerable to us-versus-them narratives | Insight 4

- Populists are turning anger at the system into anger against minorities, creating a story of a narrower ‘us’ who have been treated with contempt for too long.

- Populist narratives focus on the threat of ‘them’ against us - whether it’s refugees, migrants or other minorities.

- We cannot respond at the level of policy issues. We must respond at the level of identity and belonging.
Middle groups feel a tension between values of inclusion and us-versus-them fears | Insight 4

- Many in the conflicted middle believe Italy, as a Catholic country, has a duty to help migrants

“As a Catholic country, we should help provide for the needs of those entering Europe as migrants” (% total agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>% Total Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italian Cosmopolitans</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Humanitarians</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengaged Moderates</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Behind</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Concerned</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Defenders</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile Nationalists</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Basis: Sample size - 2,000. Source: Ipsos poll commissioned by More in Common
Three clusters of opinion take a very strong line against boat arrivals from the Mediterranean.

"Italy should start sending the people smugglers’ boats back across the Mediterranean, even if it causes the loss of life" (% total agree)

- Italian Cosmopolitans: 8%
- Catholic Humanitarians: 5%
- Disengaged Moderates: 10%
- Left Behind: 53%
- Security Concerned: 60%
- Cultural Defenders: 51%
- Hostile Nationalists: 78%

Basis: Sample size - 2,000. Source: Ipsos poll commissioned by More in Common
Connecting with the angry middle | Insight 5

• The angry middle doesn’t want status quo - they want change
• They want to feel heard and respected, and want a sense of status
• They want to feel a sense of belonging but they are less likely to draw this from an institution (trade union, church, community association) and more likely to draw it from something more identity-based (eg nationality)
• Authority figures are distrusted; the most credible messengers are people like them
• We need to show that the populists are working against their values eg populists are trying to divide our country, take advantage of us
Beware of the deep disconnect between cosmopolitans and the middle| Insight 5

- Cosmopolitans do not comprise a majority in any country. There is no pathway to a majority without some of the middle groups.

- The angry middle groups need to be engaged on their terms, not on the cosmopolitans’ terms. The challenge is that cosmopolitans not like the middle groups:
  - Other groups feel that cosmopolitans talk down to them and view them as stupid, racist and morally backwards.
  - They often highlight and celebrate differences, instead of what we have in common.
  - For example, 80% of Americans think political correctness is a problem in their country, but only 30% of the most cosmopolitan group (Progressive Activists) agree.
Disconnection | Insight 5

COSMOPOLITANS ARE OUT OF STEP WITH OTHER GERMANS’ PERCEPTION THAT MUSLIMS DON’T HOLD THE SAME VALUES

“Most Muslims hold similar values to me personally” (% agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Cosmopolitans</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Pragmatists</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian Sceptics</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Opponents</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical Opponents</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concluding insights

- Speak to the need for belonging and identity, but through the frame of a ‘bigger us’
- Find ways to address the gap between the left’s metropolitan urban middle class vs declining industrial base: answer the need for belonging and identity
- Engage people more through identity culture, emotion and values (and less transactional politics)
- Tap into the themes of inequality, corruption and the rigged system
- Frame authoritarian populists as playing one group against each other and dividing countries
- Speak to people’s loss of agency and their desire to be empowered
- Forge new coalitions with unusual alliances
Why ‘othering’ and polarization create a vicious cycle against migrants |

1. **Tackling opposition to immigrants and refugees requires an understanding that goes beyond a view of supporters and opponents and single-issue analysis:** the hostile rhetoric against immigrants and refugees is part of a wider phenomenon.

2. **In polarized societies, people begin to view issues through the lens of their in-group versus other out-groups.** Polarizing narratives persuade the public that a minority out-group poses a threat.

3. **Narratives about the threat of out-groups are extraordinarily powerful.** Social psychology research finds that as humans we would rather everyone is worse off (including us) than someone gets ahead of us.