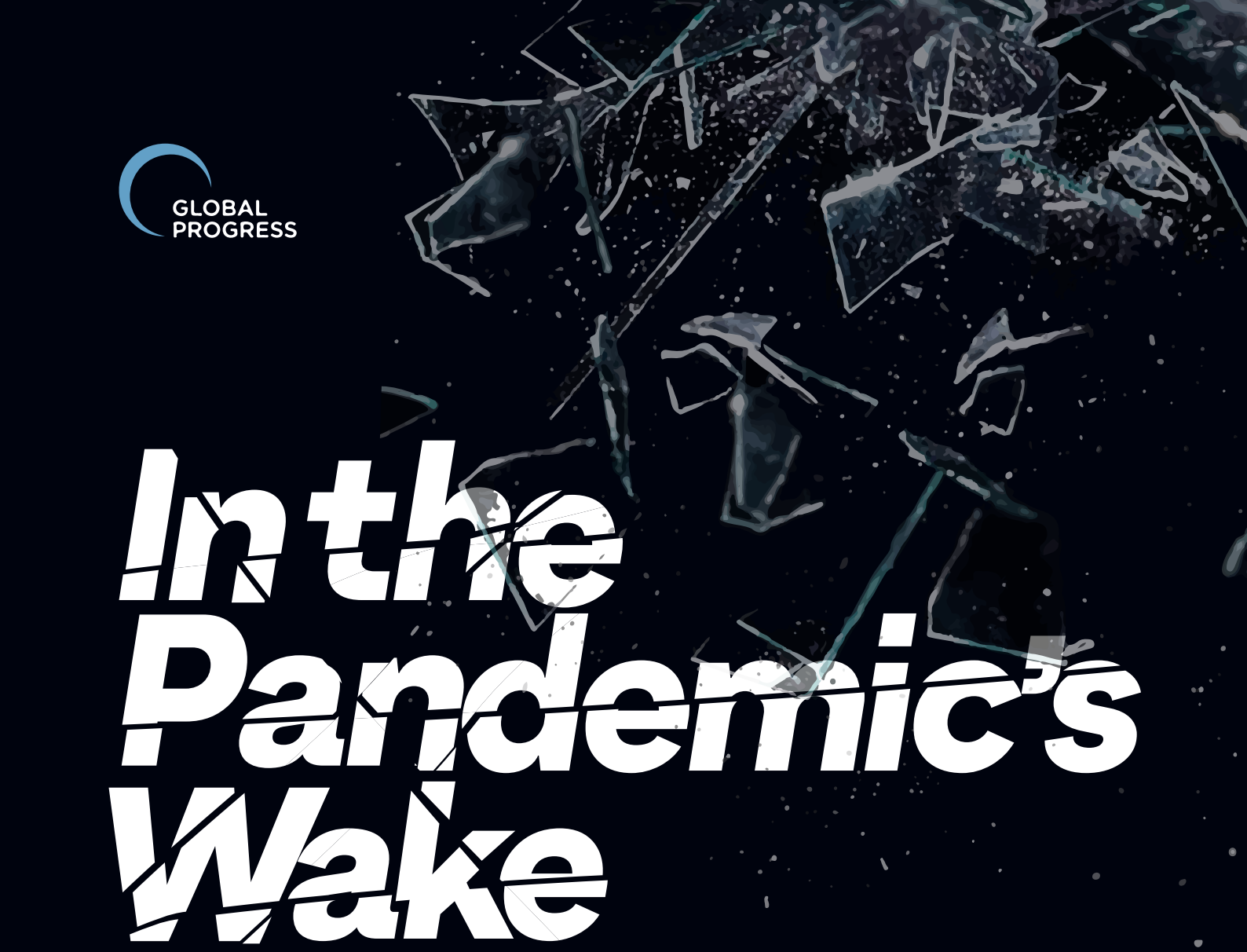

GLOBAL PROGRESS

In the Pandemic's Wake

Rethinking the future of progressive politics

JOHN CURTIN RESEARCH CENTRE
Labor ideas for a better Australia

Progressive Centre UK

Canada 2020

"We want to take a chance on more democracy."

Willy Brandt

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Special thanks are due to Alex Schmitt for her constant efforts in co-ordinating our discussions and editing the chapters contained herein, and to Jonny Will Chambers for working over the holidays to finalise this volume.

This volume is dedicated to the memories of Mike Moore, a true progressive internationalist, and Erik van Bruggen, whose commitment to Global Progress was unrivalled. We will do our best to honor your memories and passion, and to continue to dream out loud.

INTRODUCTION:
NO TIME TO CELEBRATE

Matt Browne and Alexandra Schmitt

Progressives around the world are asking what lessons can be taken from Joe Biden's presidential victory as they look to push back against populism and nationalism and set out an agenda to recover and rebuild following the COVID-19 pandemic. What were the decisive factors of Biden's winning political strategy and agenda, and how do they overlap with more general concerns about how the pandemic has transformed the environment in which progressive politics coheres?

In many ways, the impact of Biden's victory is already beginning to be felt beyond the United States, particularly in Europe. For one, the sense of inevitability that nationalism is in the ascendancy and that populism is impossible to beat—without at least playing along with the populists' agenda—no longer holds. Where once the nationalist Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán may have asserted that the future of Europe resembled Hungary's illiberal democracy[1], increasingly nationalist leaders such as Orbán and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, or the leadership of Poland's Law and Justice Party, now appear to be on the wrong side of history. Moreover, with President Donald Trump newly cast as a political loser, it is doubtful that Matteo Salvini, leader of the far-right Northern League in Italy, will take quite as much pride in being labeled Italy's Trump.

President-elect Biden's victory could also change the geopolitical environment for nationalists. In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Johnson is now much less likely to run roughshod over the Good Friday Agreement, which ended years of violence in Northern Ireland,[2] or continue to pursue antagonistic relations with Britain's European Union neighbors given the importance that Biden attaches to the agreement and the incoming administration's likely support for a stronger EU.[3] The nationalist governments in Poland and Hungary have been forced to compromise on linking EU funds to the rule of law, in the medium term they will need to seek accommodation with EU institutions. Similarly, calls for economic nationalism—such as those of Marine Le Pen's National Rally (formerly the National Front)—also sound tin-eared. A renewed spirit of multilateralism seems to be taking hold, and Biden's pledge to hold a Summit for Democracy will likely further underscore this trend.[4]

In what follows, we analyze how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the opportunities and challenges facing progressives across the mature democracies and, where relevant, draw out the lessons from Biden's presidential election victory. This summary, and the chapters presented in this book are informed by a series of discussions that Global Progress launched in March 2020, as the pandemic took hold in Europe and the United States. Over the course of the past nine months, bringing together progressive thinkers, policymakers, and strategists from across 30 countries spanning four continents, these discussions facilitated an exchange of views examining the new challenges that COVID-19 presents for progressives as well as an evaluation of how existing challenges are being transformed.

We draw three main lessons from these discussions.

First, the COVID-19 crisis and its economic, social, and public health implications have not necessarily created a favorable political landscape for progressive policies—even in places where the pandemic is being mismanaged by incumbent conservative governments or denied by populist opposition leaders. Over the course of the pandemic, and particularly during the early months of the crisis, citizens across mature democracies rallied around the flag. Support for and the approval ratings of governments tended to rise, whatever the nature of their response or their political leanings. Except on very rare occasions, the response to COVID-19 will not determine the outcome of elections or the political course of a nation. The United States is, of course, an outlier of these trends; many analysts suspect that Trump could have won a second term had his administration handled the coronavirus response better given the United States' good economic performance pre-pandemic.[5]

In societies across the globe, however, the pandemic exposed structural weaknesses that progressives have long sought to redress. In the same way that the virus preys on comorbidities in one's body, those who suffer from societies' inequalities and injustices are more likely to be harmed by the economic, social, and health impacts of

the pandemic. Moreover, media coverage of the pandemic and its effects has also tended to make people more aware of the plight of others, the difficulties they face, and their contribution to society. These trends—combined with the rebirth of communitarian spirit and the rise of younger generations who are more receptive to tackling long-standing societal inequality[6]—may create a space for progressive policies to be advanced if pitched correctly.

Second, for now, it seems that political parties of all persuasions have become social democratic, at least when it comes to economic intervention. As the pandemic took hold, and the economic consequences became ever more apparent, governments of all political persuasions—even the most conservative—began dramatic interventions into the economy to support incomes, businesses, and services. As the renowned Australian right-wing strategist Lynton Crosby noted in the early days of the crisis, "The state is back"—and it most likely will remain so for the foreseeable future.[7] The pandemic presented a problem on a scale that only government can solve—such as addressing scarce medical supplies and vaccine distribution across entire countries—thus bolstering support for the role of the state in solving some of today's most pressing challenges. The emergence of a new social democratic consensus around the economy and the key role of government presents both opportunities and challenges for progressive ideas.

In this context, the fundamental political question to address is how to distinguish progressive agendas from their conservative and nationalist rivals. Some on the left seem persuaded, through a sort of confirmation bias, that the current political environment provides the foundations for greater spending on their predisposed policy interest—be that universal basic income, a Green New Deal, or otherwise. Yet as the chapters in this volume argue, a more appropriate response would be to pursue a more pragmatic economic recovery agenda focused on work and place. Moving beyond traditional tax-and-spend policies and redistribution, this agenda should be focused on pre-distribution and empowerment of workers, families, and communities. Such an agenda is advantageous not only because it will allow social democratic and labor parties to rediscover their political roots but also because it provides an opportunity to rebuild connections with those parts of the working class and the blue-collar workers with whom they've lost touch.

Third, even if the above challenges are met, progressives will still face two crucial challenges: technology and culture. The economic precarity that many societies feel is in large part driven by the enormous impact of technological innovation on economies and long predates the pandemic. To recapture an agenda for the future, progressives will need to illustrate that they understand technology. But more importantly, they will need a plan and strategy to ensure that technology works for the many and not the few; can be harnessed to improve public services, create high-quality jobs, tackle racial and other injustices; and be used to help solve the world's most pressing global challenges such as climate change. Notably, by building and implementing this agenda, progressives may also be able to form alliances with groups, particularly among the entrepreneurial class, that have often been skeptical of their motives.

When it comes to culture, it is depressing to note how COVID-19 has become the latest front in the so-called culture wars, whether it be conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus, misinformation about how the virus is spread or the efficacy and dangers of therapeutic responses and vaccines, or indeed the anger stoked about social distancing, wearing masks, or implementing lockdowns.

Of course, COVID-19 is but the newest axis in what Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, the well-known American scholars of populism, have termed the "cultural backlash" driving populism,[8] a trend that Global Progress has analyzed in greater detail in previous reports.[9] In responding to today's cultural backlash, the political challenge for progressives is to hold together a coalition that is sympathetic to its ambitions. Ensuring that those parts of the population that agree with the sentiment behind calls for tackling social and racial injustices—but may disagree on the policy changes needed—can trust progressives to provide balanced management of the issue will be key. To achieve this balance, progressives will need to address the interplay between culture and technology, and in particular tackle the negative effect social media can have in the public square and on democratic discourse in societies. Indeed, tackling "truth decay,"[10] as former President Barack Obama has noted,[11] has become a first-order issue in the defense and renewal of democracy, and thus the revival of progressive politics.

The lessons—both good and bad—from across the globe as well as from President-elect Biden's victory help progressive leaders toward navigating these three sets of challenges and the new political environment produced by the pandemic.

Moreover, the opportunities presented by a future Biden administration to cooperate on pressing global challenges, and indeed the possibility to create new geopolitical architecture, could also help reshape the context in which these domestic political contests will play out. In the final analysis, however, the revival of progressive fortunes will remain a largely domestic challenge, albeit one that can be informed from lessons around the globe and a renewed spirit of and a new approach to multilateralism.

Politics and the pandemic

Given the profound effect that the coronavirus has had on world economies and societies, it is not surprising that many have sought to question whether the pandemic might not also be the determining factor in domestic politics and recent elections.[12] After all, the United States has now lost more than 250,000 people to the virus, and almost 12 million people have been infected.[13] Could Trump's defeat have been avoided had he not so disastrously mismanaged the pandemic? Conversely, in New Zealand, where a little more than 2,000 people have contracted the virus, 25 have lost their lives, and the virus has been practically eradicated, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern resoundingly won reelection in early October.[14]

While gaming out counterfactual scenarios might be an interesting pastime, there is no clear evidence that a government's management of the pandemic favored progressives or conservatives. Rather, as a general rule, the advent of the pandemic seems to have helped incumbents in advanced democracies. To this extent, the cases of New Zealand and the United States may be extreme outliers from which it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions. More generally, although the policies and responses implemented to tackle the coronavirus challenge have varied, most advanced democratic governments—besides the United States—received strong public support for their handling of the pandemic. Polling in European countries, Canada, Australia, Japan, and South Korea this past summer suggests that most people believe their country has done a good job handling the outbreak.[15]

Political party and ideology also did not appear to affect public perception of an incumbent's handling of the coronavirus crisis. As Canadian strategist and researcher Don Guy notes in his chapter, a key takeaway for progressives is that voters have rallied around conservative and progressive political leaders alike. In Canada, for example, the liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the conservative Ontario Premier Doug Ford received almost equal favorability ratings in polling during the pandemic.[16] In the Netherlands, despite a slow reaction at the beginning of the pandemic—the country still shipped medical masks to China as a sign of goodwill as the virus was spreading—center-right Prime Minister Mark Rutte's job approval and electoral support for his party has shot up.[17]

Similar trends in Norway and elsewhere have made it hard for progressive parties in opposition to gain traction in the political debate.[18]

Indeed, support for the measures that governments have adopted seem similar regardless of the approach so long as they appeared to be taking some action. In Hungary, as Daniel Rona and his colleagues write in their chapter, Orbán's response was viewed positively by a slight majority of respondents even though most of the government's efforts focused on publicity rather than effectively addressing the pandemic itself.[19] Perhaps the most notable exception to this trend of rallying around the incumbent is in France, where President Emmanuel Macron's approval ratings remained at the same low levels that predated the crisis.[20] As Bruno Jeanbart, managing director of OpinionWay, notes in his contribution to this volume, the historical lack of trust the French people have in their government led officials there to impose uniquely stringent lockdowns with archaic restrictions and surveillance mechanisms,[21] which may partially explain this divergence. There is also little evidence that the French trust other political leaders to handle the crisis any better. For the United States, Trump's reluctance to assume federal authority for the coronavirus response meant that governors and mayors played the more central role in devising measures to contain the pandemic—and received much higher favorability ratings as a result.[22]

While confidence in government responses do vary somewhat from county to country, these seem more reflective of differences across countries with regard to trust in government. In few if any countries, save perhaps the United States, does the public assume that opposition parties would do a dramatically better job.[23]

Focus groups indicate that, in most countries, the public tends to believe that the pandemic is a nightmare scenario that would be problematic regardless of who is in power and that the trade-offs the pandemic imposes on society are always going to be difficult to navigate.

While the pandemic seems to have had little effect on the overall fortunes of one political tradition over the other, it is clear that the injustices and inequalities it has exposed have changed public perceptions of the societies in which they live. Addressing the disparities and inequalities exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic must be central to any progressive approach to recovery. It will be impossible to attain pre-pandemic GDP levels without rehiring women and supporting their reentry into the workplace.[24] Similarly, the pandemic makes it all the more important that issues of racial injustice are redressed. And when it comes to the elderly, the pandemic has highlighted the necessity of tackling labor market failures in nursing homes and care; many of the deaths attributed to the virus were spread by care workers who were forced to work multiple jobs or unable to take sick leave due to the precarious nature of their contracts.

Inequality and the pandemic

At the time of writing, there have been more than 60 million coronavirus cases worldwide and more than 1.4 million deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic.[25] Although mortality rates have declined as doctors have developed more effective treatment and new therapeutic drugs, excess deaths in countries have continued to climb. Notably, infection and mortality rates skew disproportionately toward communities of color—among both the general public and front-line service workers—pointing to what many see as the consequences of structural racism across mature democracies. In the United States, for example, people of color make up more than half of all deaths despite being just 40 percent of the U.S. population.[26] Similarly, a U.K. study found that British people of color were between 10 percent and 50 percent higher risk of dying from the virus than white British people at the height of the outbreak this summer.[27]

The economic impact of COVID-19 has also been skewed. Among those to be hit hardest by the pandemic are the economically worst off, women, and people of color. Workers in low-income industries around the world have been devastated by job losses and reduced hours or pay.[28] U.S. data show persistently higher rates of unemployment for Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American workers than white workers.[29] The pandemic has also created the first recession that is disproportionately affecting women (referred to by some as a "she-cession"), threatening to erase decades of progress toward gender equality.[30] Women make up 39 percent of global employment but account for 54 percent of overall job losses, according to one study.[31] A major reason for this disparity is that women tended to assume more child care responsibilities as schools closed, leaving them with no choice but to leave their jobs.[32] Moreover, because people of color, and especially women of color, around the world are more likely to work in front-line sectors such as health care or essential services, they have been doubly affected by the pandemic.[33]

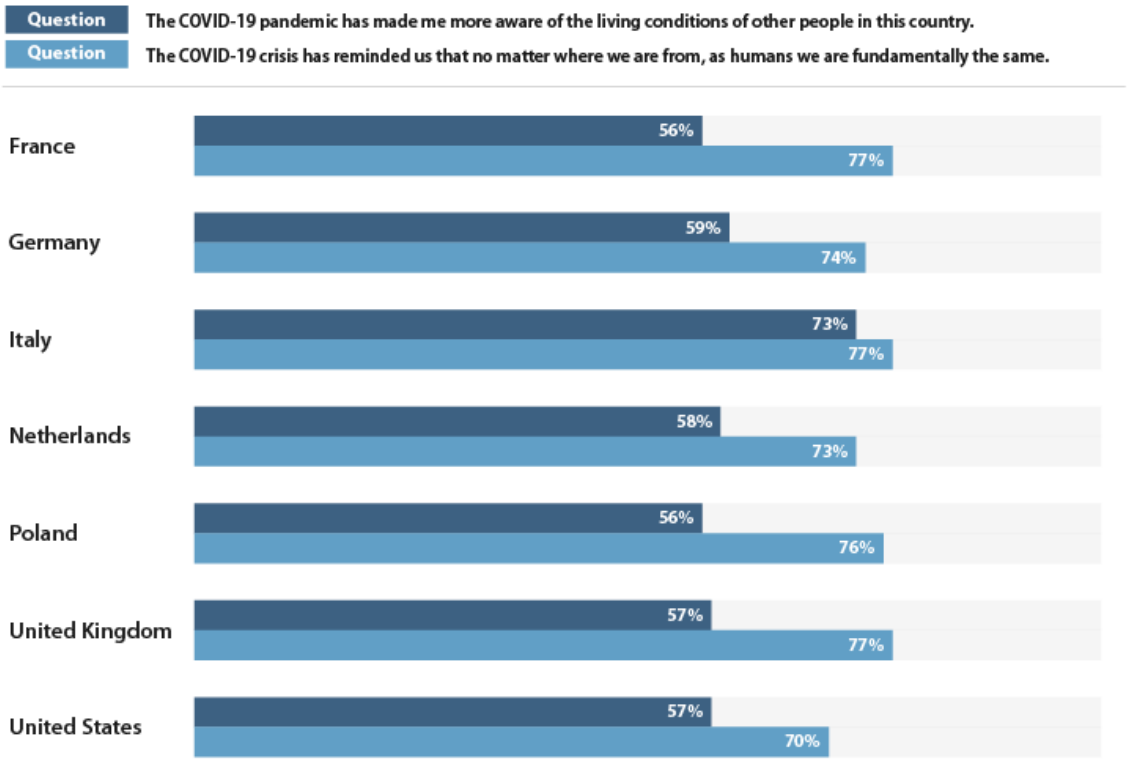
The elderly also suffered disproportionately from COVID-19 outbreaks, particularly during the spring. Nursing homes and care facilities for the elderly were linked to up to half of all deaths in Europe, according to one World Health Organization study in April.[34] In Belgium, during the peak of the crisis, elderly care residents accounted for 2 out of 3 deaths in the country over the summer.[35] People in care homes made up more than half of England's coronavirus-related deaths as of midsummer; in Australia, they accounted for about three-quarters of deaths.[36] And in the United States, adults 65 years and older accounted for 80 percent of deaths, with significantly disproportionate numbers of deaths in care facilities.[37]

The pandemic also seems to have raised people's awareness of the situation that others in their societies find themselves in as well as peoples' sense of shared humanity. Recent comparative research by More in Common has shown that a majority of people in the United States, U.K., France, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy feel that they have become more aware of how others live and also reminded that "we are fundamentally the same."[38] Comparative data suggest that this awareness has been accompanied by a revival of communitarian spirit and that volunteering is on the rise amid the pandemic. A study by LinkedIn found a surge in workers in the United States adding volunteer experiences to their profiles.[39] In China, data collected from a digital app also demonstrated a surge in volunteerism.[40] In the U.K., a government call for 250,000 volunteers to support the National Health Service was forced to cut off applications after more than 750,000 people signed up.[41]

FIGURE 1

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded people around the world of their shared humanity

Polling from More in Common suggests that COVID-19 has made people more aware of others' living conditions and reminded them they are fundamentally the same



Source: More in Common, "The New Normal?", available at https://www.moreincommon.com/newnormal/ (last accessed December 2020).

Anecdotal evidence—and viral social media posts—also suggests a rise in the communitarian experience. Early videos from March in Italy showed quarantined neighbors and well-known opera stars singing from open windows and balconies.[42] A 99-year-old English army veteran walked 100 laps in his garden and raised millions of pounds for front-line health workers, completing his final lap live on the BBC.[43] In Spain, a viral video showed a fitness instructor leading a workout from a rooftop for dozens of neighbors on balconies and indoors nearby.[44] And survivors of the Spanish flu told stories of surviving their first pandemic and spent quarantine sewing face masks.[45]

For many progressives, the rise in awareness and communitarian sprit has been seen as an indicator that, at least in the medium term, progressive politics that support broad social welfare initiatives may benefit from the pandemic. It is unfortunately too early to tell whether this will be the case.

As the pandemic has become more prolonged, traditional divisions and new political tensions have begun to emerge, and the economic and financial costs being incurred continue to mount. A recent study found that the pandemic is now having a divisive effect: 48 percent of respondents in the 14 advanced economies surveyed thought that divisions in national unity have grown.[46] Again, the United States is an extreme case: A staggering 77 percent of Americans feel the country is more divided.[47] An early indicator in many countries will be the public response to vaccine distribution plans that prioritize at-risk groups over the general population; support for such efforts could demonstrate a continuance of this communitarian spirit even as pandemic fatigue has set in.

The next phase of the pandemic response may bring an inflection point in the politics of the pandemic. Tensions between generations have started to become more pronounced, particularly with regards to social distancing and the spread of the virus by younger generations that are less fearful of its health implications.[48] So too have differences between rural and urban areas, between people with school-aged children at home and those without—each often have dramatically different experiences of the pandemic—sparked tensions. In the early days of the pandemic, many progressives seemed concerned with the effect that digital tracking and contact tracing systems might have on individual privacy.[49] But today, as governments are looking to break the trade-off between public health and reopening the economy, most people now seem more frustrated with the efficacy of the systems they have in place. Yet on the conservative side, the supposed civil liberty infringements associated with social distancing and lockdowns have become a new populist rallying call and look set to intensify not just in the United States but also across Europe.[50] These tensions are likely to be further exacerbated once vaccines are ready to be rolled out, when some groups will be eligible for vaccination before others, which may be perceived as fair or not depending on how governments communicate distribution plans. Unfortunately, the impact of disinformation campaigns regarding the prevalence of the disease and unproven cures are soon likely to combine with those about the supposed dangers of vaccination. This is but a further illustration of the disruptive and destructive role that social media platforms play in today's politics as well as their role in driving so-called "truth decay."[51]

Rising tensions between different cohorts of society represent a challenge for progressives. To effectively harness the politics of recovery, progressives will need to balance these tensions and demonstrate progress in the next phase of the pandemic. The initial understanding that many citizens felt for governments dealing with unprecedented crises is waning, and a new front in the culture wars threatens to exacerbate tensions. Policy solutions to the pandemic will need to harness this renewed communitarian spirit by helping out those who are suffering most. Transparency in the decision-making process behind vaccine distribution plans, with clear explanations of why prioritizing some groups is important for the overall recovery, will be critical. Economic policies, discussed below, must provide relief to those who have been most affected by the crisis such as women, people of color, and lower-income workers. Progressives will need a carefully crafted message to convince constituents of their governing capabilities and the merits of a smart agenda for implementing their ideas.

A new 'social democratic' consensus

No country has escaped the economic fallout of the pandemic. Economists have predicted that the global recession will be long-lasting as GDPs have taken a hit and unemployment has risen (or will rise once government-sponsored employment programs run out). To keep economies and citizens afloat, government spending has necessarily skyrocketed.[52] The United States passed an unprecedented $2 trillion stimulus deal, and the EU passed an $857 billion package to help less-wealthy states in the European bloc.[53] Government debt around the world has increased as countries have sought to support workers and businesses through the pandemic, as the text box below illustrates.[54] Tax, mortgage, and rental obligations were suspended or reduced to ensure that working people were not put in more difficult financial straits. Grants and loans were given to suffering businesses, and direct government support was provided to prop up critical industries such as health care and other social services.

International responses to the economic fallout from the pandemic

- *Supporting workers who experienced unemployment or lost income: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Hong Kong, Italy, and the U.K. released early economic stimulus packages with funds dedicated to supporting vulnerable workers. To prevent mass layoffs, the British government covered 80 percent of salaries of retained workers, and Denmark agreed to cover 75 percent.[55] Australia, Hong Kong, and the United States provided one-time payments to citizens to help stimulate the economy and provide relief to working families.[56]*

- *Supporting small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs): Many European countries took steps to directly support businesses. Germany provided "unlimited" credit access to businesses through its national development bank and pledged to underwrite companies' debts.[57] France, Denmark, and Japan pledged to guarantee loans for SMEs.[58] At the regional level, the European Central Bank pledged to support commercial banks who were lending to SMEs.[59] The United States started a Paycheck Protection Program that provided forgivable low-interest loans to small businesses to support employees.[60]*

- *Reducing fiscal and tax burdens: Another common intervention was to reduce tax, mortgage, and rental obligations by suspending or deferring repayments. Spain and Italy froze mortgage payments through the end of the year.[61] The U.K. and the United States passed eviction moratoriums, preventing landlords from evicting tenants who could no longer afford rent.[62] Indonesia and Thailand, respectively, suspended and reduced income tax to stimulate spending.[63]*

- *Supporting health care providers: Many governments also dedicated relief funds to supplementing the health care sector. South Korea reserved a portion of its stimulus package for medical institutions and quarantine efforts.[64] The U.K., Italy, and New Zealand pledged additional funds for health services and workers.[65] Spain, Japan, and the United States invoked laws to nationalize certain supply chains or procure supplies.[66]*

Among the first to enact such policies was the Danish Social Democratic government led by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, whose policies attracted a great deal of international interest.[67] The Danes' lead was soon followed by governments of all political persuasions. In essence, the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic created a social democratic moment or consensus, but one that was not dependent on the presence of a social democratic parties in government.[68]

While a number of conservative governments have indicated that they might wish to end government economic support sooner than those led by social democratic parties—notably Johnson's Conservatives in the U.K.[69] and Scott Morrison's Liberals in Australia[70]—they have often been forced to reverse course as new waves of the pandemic have hit. Indeed, current polling suggests that so long as the pandemic persists, the public in most countries will continue to support borrowing and investment in the economy. In the United States, less than half of U.S. adults called the deficit "a very big problem" this summer even as it grew from $779 billion at the end of fiscal year 2018 to $2.8 trillion in July 2020.[71] In Canada, as Don Guy notes in this volume, until the pandemic has retreated and economic activity has recommenced, voters overwhelmingly support borrowing and investment of management of deficits and debt,[72] while in Europe public support for sharing the economic burden remains high.[73] Among the elite policy community, it is also noteworthy that the International Monetary Fund and United Nations have also encouraged greater spending to help countries survive the economic crisis.

In September, the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development declared that "bold public spending [is the] only way to recover better from COVID-19."[74]

Despite this broad consensus, perhaps unsurprisingly, conflicts between progressives and conservatives have emerged over the specific use and allocation of funds. Progressive parties in opposition have often distinguished between merited or productive support for workers, families, and businesses and what they have termed "corporate welfare," or support for businesses that asks for little if anything in return for the investment or grants received.[75] In the Netherlands, for example, the leader of the Dutch Labour party, Lodewijk Asscher, has been highly critical of the unconditional support that the Rutte government has given to airlines and online platforms that have previously acted in a cavalier manner toward the local community or done little to move toward a more sustainable footing.[76] Second, and more recently, progressives have also begun to question the manner in which emergency contracts—whether for personal protective equipment or testing—have been allocated. In the U.K., for example, there have been growing concerns about the lack of transparency in this process as well as the cozy relationships many of those award contracts have with the Conservative Party or ministers.[77]

Indeed, it is with regards to the future direction of the economy, and how current funds might be used to help to direct it, that dividing lines are most stark and indeed likely to become more pronounced. On the one extreme, there are those best exemplified by Australian Prime Minister Morrison, who is advocating for a "snap back" of the economy and a return to the way things used to be.[78] On the other extreme stands the idea of "build back better," a central pillar of the Biden-Harris campaign—and now transition—which has also become a mantra for progressives globally and was adopted by the World Economic Forum.[79] On this policy area, the response to the pandemic is reaching an inflection point. Many policymakers will admit that as the pandemic hit, support for the economy was as much about avoiding the worst consequences of the downturn as it was about thinking about the strategic direction of the economy as a whole or specific businesses and industries in question. Now that the initial crisis moment has passed and it is clear that significant funds will likely need to be invested in economic recovery, this will increasingly become a battle line.

What is clear from the contributions to this volume is that any progressive recovery project should not simply focus on the big-picture direction of the economy and government investment but also on the way in which this might be structured. As Marcus Roberts, director of international projects at YouGov, illustrates in his analysis of the challenges facing the U.K. Labour party, a truly progressive agenda must understand the importance of ensuring that working people have agency over their lives. Part of this means ensuring that "hard work will pay off, without the need for what is sometimes felt to be charity from government in the form of tax credits or welfare payments."[80] To achieve this, Roberts advocates for a genuine left-based political economy that delivers pre-distribution rather than redistribution, ensuring that wealth no longer simply flows from top to the bottom but rather is generated at all levels of society. Companies that have benefited from the pandemic should be expected to pay their fair share in the new economy.

Regional growth and workplace democracy, Roberts argues, can be the engines of this change through an ambitious program of regional bank development with high market capitalization. Similarly, a radical program of workplace democracy involving the empowerment of workers in pay remuneration committees and worker representation on boards could empower workers with shared responsibility for wage decision-making. Lower wages, he argues, can rise rather than welfare being called on to alleviate in-work poverty. All of this amounts to a "politics of control" in which workers themselves feel genuine agency over their time, money, and power. Taking this notion of agency one step further, Dutch political strategist Hans Anker posits a creative approach to worker empowerment through a points system for lower-income workers that helps them earn credits that could be used for educational courses, job coaches, and sabbaticals and thus enables them to take more control over their employment prospects.[81]

A similar approach to workplace agency is advocated by Nick Dyrenfurth, executive director of the John Curtin Research Centre in Australia, in his analysis of the challenges facing the Australian Labor Party for the Centre. Codetermination policies, he argues, are also a way to lift worker productivity and increase workplace collaboration.[82] For Dyrenfurth, such democratization initiatives should also be extended beyond the workplace to public services too, further empowering citizens and communities. He also proposes establishing tripartite boards constituted of caregivers, patients, and family members to assure appropriate governance.

The message here is clear: Progressive leaders need to follow in the footsteps of the former German Social Democratic Chancellor Willy Brandt and "dare more democracy."[83]

Underpinning this strategic recommendation is a recognition that this agenda may also allow progressive parties (which these authors assert have become too preoccupied with identity politics and the postmodern concerns of urban voters) to reconnect with a voting base they have alienated—namely blue-collar workers—that had previously been the genesis of the progressive movement.

Interestingly, this outreach to alienated blue-collar and small-town voters seems to speak as much to the challenges facing progressives in Central and Eastern Europe as it does those in the mature Western democracies. As Konrad Golota, Adam Traczyk, Dani Rona, and others argue in this volume, progressives in Poland and Hungary have far too often failed to take seriously the economic and social woes facing working-class and rural voters in their countries. An integral part of Fidesz's strategy in Hungary, or Law and Justice's strategy in Poland, has been to effectively become the natural party of those who have lost out from globalization or the transition from communism to capitalism. Failing to recognize the real financial and social support these parties provide to these voters has helped to further alienate them from progressive opposition parties. This alienation is often compounded by the opposition's focus on abstract issues concerning democracy and the rule of law—which have little resonance among people who are struggling to make ends meet—combined with a rather condescending attitude toward this group's disinterest in these matters. Indeed, the need to move beyond the politics of condescension and to identifying ways of engaging more respectfully with those who have different worldviews is now a crucial challenge for many progressives and one on which progressives could learn much from President-elect Biden's tone and demeanor.

For the progressive movement moving forward, the key challenge in the economic recovery from the pandemic is not garnering support for mass spending initiatives but effectively guiding the direction of this spending. Progressives should seize the opportunity of the pandemic recovery to restructure the fundamentals of the economy in ways that empower those who have lost out over the past few decades such as lower-wage workers, while also redressing long-standing systemic inequality and racism inherent in the political structures of advanced democracies.

Tackling culture and technology

Whatever has changed during the pandemic, two core challenges remain for progressives: effectively addressing culture and identity and dealing with technology and change. In the future, progressives' ability to outline a position on cultural issues—whether on racial injustice, migration, or other areas—will become more important as these issues become inevitably more challenging. Politically, this requires building a coalition that is supportive of the sentiment of those who advocate for greater racial justice, more openness, and the acceptance of refugees but who are not necessarily convinced of all of the policy responses that progressives propose.

A key example of this is how, for the first time, the politics of climate change were a central feature of the 2020 U.S. presidential campaign. This is perhaps unsurprising, as the catastrophic human impact of climate change has become ever more apparent, whether through wildfires ripping through states or record-breaking tropical storms hitting the homeland.[84] These climate crises have also increased migratory pressures, as climate refugees from the global south are forced to seek safety elsewhere.[85] In this context, it is not just that the cultural politics of identity will become more intense in advanced countries around the world, though they inevitably will, but rather that the need to accelerate the transition to a net-zero carbon economy will become more acute.

The key challenge for progressives is for their agenda to be pitched correctly. When it comes to public opinion, a recent comparative survey conducted by More in Common indicates that there is an appetite for the funds invested to bring about positive change rather than a return to normal.[86] The polling indicated that the desire to see such change is greater in those countries that have seen poorer management of the pandemic, which might also explain why they are also more skeptical about whether positive change can be achieved.[87] In this regard, there is a potential opportunity for progressives to advance an agenda to tackle big global challenges—in particular climate change—capable of garnering public support.

As the chapters in this volume note, even though the public seems less concerned by climate change now and considers it less of a priority than they did before the pandemic, they still remain largely supportive of investments that will create jobs, spur economic opportunity, and help make the transition to a carbon-neutral economy.[88] That said, progressives need to understand that public support for public borrowing and spending is not limitless and that, while they hope it will lift others out of poverty, they are also of the mind that it must be a tide that lifts all boats. Framing for these policies matters; whether an issue is pitched as helping others versus helping everyone can easily affect how much public support it garners. Progressives need to make the case that their priorities are not narrowly tied to helping a particular class or group of people but that they are broadly conceived to help everyone in tangible ways. The pandemic is an opportunity to help explain how interlinked we all are and how much our individual prosperity depends on the rising tide that lifts all boats.

Another related political challenge here, and one successfully navigated by the Biden-Harris team over the past year, is how to hold a progressive coalition together. All too often in progressive politics, the so-called sensible politicians that appeal to moderates don't seem radical enough to the more progressive wings, while what the so-called radical progressives find appealing doesn't seem sensible or credible to more moderate voters. While there is a raging debate about which constituency was core to the Biden-Harris victory—and which political strategy may or may not have cost Democrats seats in the U.S. House of Representatives[89]—what is not in question is that the Biden policy team has been able to present a relatively radical progressive economic recovery agenda while holding the support of more moderate voters and broader elements of the progressive coalition together. It is unclear whether any other Democratic candidate could have performed this feat. Biden continually outperformed the Democratic Party across the country. Moreover, Biden was able to win back a high proportion of unionized and former unionized voters in "blue wall" states such as Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania[90] as well as, and perhaps more importantly, suburban women more generally.[91]

Biden's economic agenda

The "build back better" economic policy proposals[92] articulated by President-elect Biden demonstrate the concept of tying progressive ideas to priorities that affect working families.

- *"Mobilize American manufacturing and innovation to ensure that the future is made in America, and in all of America." This policy approach prioritizes creating union jobs in manufacturing and technology to support U.S. economic recovery.*
- *"Mobilize American ingenuity to build a modern infrastructure and an equitable, clean energy future." This calls for building a clean energy economy and addressing environmental injustice.*
- *"Mobilize American talent and heart to build a 21st century caregiving and education workforce which will help ease the burden of care for working parents, especially women." This policy direction addresses the unique impacts of this pandemic and recession on women and prioritizes their needs in recovery.*
- *"Mobilize across the board to advance racial equity in America." This approach calls for tackling systemic racism, closing the racial wealth gap, and investing in marginalized communities.*

Tackling culturally sensitive issues in a way that keeps a progressive coalition together and is framed as improving prospects for everyone will be crucial. Increasing global migration is one such emblematic issue, where conservatives and populists continue to portray migration as a threat to lower-wage worker prosperity rather than an asset to national economic development.[93]

When it comes to migrants and refugees, progressives will need to address these challenges through two channels: embedding this policy in a rights and responsibilities agenda and accelerating the process of social and economic integration of newcomers to societies. Here, policies such as integration loans, which also have the benefit of reassuring blue- collar workers that funds needed for integration are not being reallocated from other communities in need, are worthy of further investigation. These types of policies help illustrate, at the very least, that progressives are not outsourcing the solution of this challenge to the most radical members of the progressive coalition.

Another challenge for progressives will be how to handle the broader issues of technological innovation and its impact on societies, economies, and democracies. Technological change will have a broad range of effects and indeed is driven by a multitude of strategies. Will some forms of technological change imply little more than the automation of existing jobs to drive up efficiency and simple profitability? That well could be the case, however the technological innovation associated with the transition to a carbon-neutral economy, for example, presents the opportunity to both retain existing industries—through the production of carbon-free steel and cement—as well as create new jobs associated with the infrastructure required to shift to renewable power sources. What is most challenging about the shift toward the carbon-neutral and digital economy, and the economic disruptions associated with it, is that such a shift hits political tensions at the heart of many progressive coalitions, namely between urban-value voters and those voters employed in the blue-collar manufacturing sector. In this regard, the challenge for progressives will be to ensure that there is a set of flanking policies that ensure any transition is not just focused on job creation but on economic justice, ensuring that those who suffer economic disruption are supported. Indeed, if such a frame is not created, then the likelihood that such a transition would not merely be resisted but actually feed populism that prevents it happening is exceptionally high.

The current environment of political protests is also exacerbated by the challenge of technological change.[94] The polarization and fragmentation of the political debate, aided and abetted by social media platforms, means that it is far easier today to mobilize opposition to change than it is to build consensus around the necessary policy solutions. It is, therefore, more important than ever for progressives both to reaffirm the idea that progress is possible—understood as advancement and improvement for all of society[95]—and also work to build broad support around an inclusive agenda that limits the political space for populists. Again, tackling disinformation—or challenging how some social media platforms' insistence on treating denial of climate change as a matter of opinion—will also be critical.[96] Rumors and false information about the viability of vaccines or therapeutics for COVID-19 treatment will be an immediate testing ground for technology companies in this regard—one they currently seem likely to fail, according to a recent report by the Center for Countering Digital Hate.[97]

Once progressives have accepted that, alongside culture and identity, technological change is the political challenge of this generation, then the goal becomes one of designing a progressive agenda that resonates with the public based on the reaffirmation of core progressive strengths and objectives. These include an honest drive to ensure that the public at large can benefit from the practical benefits of new technology, whether that be through revolutionizing health care and education through predictability and personalization, or a renewed focus on building an agenda for inclusive, high-technology prosperity. With regards to this latter point, public investment—perhaps through the creation of an Advanced Research Projects Agency in every country—and smart regulation to promote public interest development is going to be needed to counter the commercial interests of Big Tech companies. These corporate behemoths should not have a monopoly on shaping the future nor on reaping the profits from the transition toward it.

In shaping a bold ambition for the public good, progressives may well open themselves up to building new—and what at the outset might seem unlikely—coalitions for change. Whatever their differences, technologists and progressives often share a common goal: making the world a better place. Moreover, creating a diverse rather than uniform society, one that is flat rather than hierarchical, is a common ambition for both. This suggests that progress toward common goals may be more achievable than previously assumed.

A way forward

While it is tempting to suppose that recovery from the pandemic presents a new dawn for progressive politics, it is perhaps more accurate to think of the pandemic as the prelude for what is to come. Now is not the time to be complacent. President Trump may have lost the election, but Trumpism is yet to be defeated, and populism remains a formidable force around the globe. There is also much still that requires focused, full, and immediate attention.

This, then, is no time to celebrate.

The structural trends driving politics in Western democracies have not been fundamentally disrupted by the pandemic. If anything, it seems that they have been accelerated and intensified. Looking ahead, the choice facing Western democracies could well continue to be between a progressive politics of inclusion and hope focused on tackling real-world problems or a populist politics of division based in a denial of reality and refusal to tackle global challenges.

Undoubtedly, a Biden-Harris administration presents new opportunities for the progressive movement to change the odds of which of these political options will prevail. Renewed international engagement will be more important than ever not only in establishing mechanisms for better cooperation on global challenges but also in underwriting democracy. Here, as CAP has continually argued, the United States should draw on its formal alliances and partners with democracies from Europe to Asia and beyond to create a progressive alliance.[98] By bringing together partners with shared values into a broader security architecture, the United States and other democracies will be better able to collaborate on regional and global security issues as well as pressing global challenges.[99]

President-elect Biden has already pledged to hold a Summit for Democracy.[100] While the agenda for such a gathering has yet to be defined, it seems increasingly clear that the first order of business there must be to tackle the disruptions to the public square and "truth decay" driven by social media. The disruption of democracy, or rather the future of democracy, has now become a first-order issue. It will be impossible to solve for issues of economic and social inequality, racial injustice, and climate change, among others, unless we can have a reasonable and reasoned debate about the true nature of the challenges we face, and the solutions progressivism can bring to them.[101]

Beyond this, however, the summit must focus on making progressive policies deliver results for working people and tackling the cultural and technology transformation that lay before us. The time for progressives to unite around this agenda as a priority is now.

LABOR IN VAIN?
PROSPECTS FOR NATIONAL RENEWAL IN POST-COVID-19 AUSTRALIA

Nick Dyrenfurth

The world—and Australia—changed indelibly in 2020. COVID-19 uprooted life as we knew it. Millions of people have been infected or lost their lives at the hands of an invisible enemy. Australia has, fortunately, recorded relatively few deaths. At the time of writing, there have been 27,848 cases and 907 deaths, mostly in the state of Victoria and in private aged care residences.[102] Yet the economy is in recession for the first time in three decades. Severe un(der)employment and economic insecurity are now the lot of working people.

COVID-19 exploits the underlying conditions of our bodies, in medical terminology, comorbidities. Similarly, the virus has exposed the frailties of Australia's economy, its rundown sovereign capability, industrial relations system, and health care. The same is true of COVID-19's impact on the flag bearer of antipodean social democracy, the 129-year-old Australian Labor Party (ALP). COVID-19 can either hasten Labor's decline or herald a national renaissance in its fortunes.

Two Labor Parties

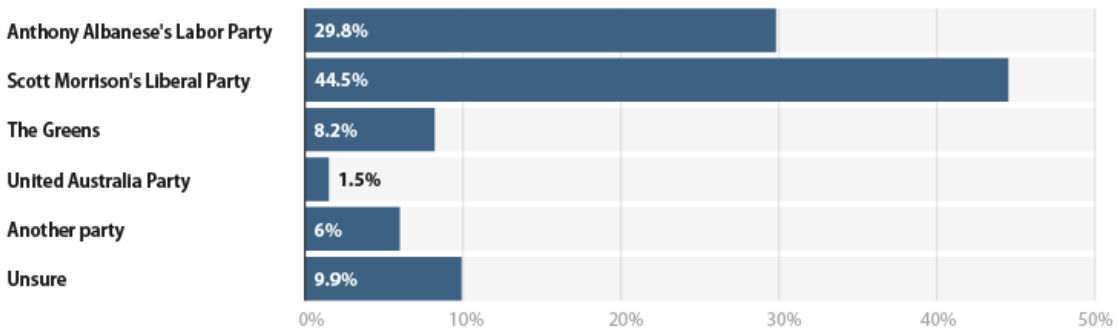
At a national level, the federal parliamentary Labor Party has largely been rendered impotent in the face of the governing conservative Coalition (Liberal-National Party) ascendancy and its highly popular prime minister, Scott Morrison.

Having been reelected for a third term in May 2019, despite cycling through three prime ministers in 5 1/2 years, at times crippling internal divisions, boasting a mediocre record of economic management, and despite its disastrous handling of Australia's horrific 2019–2020 bushfire season, Morrison's government is riding high in opinion polls. Recent polling of crucial marginal seats indicates the government would benefit from significant swings if an election were held now, winning working-class seats from federal Labor without the need to win preference allocations. Scott Morrison is preferred prime minister by a considerable margin, and his government is considerably favoured to lead the economic recovery and protect and create jobs and is regarded by a majority as the best to represent workers.[103] Recent polling conducted by the Redbridge Group finds primary support for Anthony Albanese's Labor Party is 29.8 percent among eight key suburban and inner-regional Labor electorates scattered across Queensland, NSW, Tasmania, and Western Australia, compared with 44.5 percent for Scott Morrison's Liberal Party.[104] (see Figure 1)

FIGURE 1

Voters in Australia support Scott Morrison's Liberal Party over the Labor Party

Federal vote intention if the election were held today, November 2020



Permission granted by Kosmos Samaras.

Source: Kosmos Samaras, "Crisis and Resources – November Poll" (2020), available at http://kossamaras.blogspot.com/2020/12/crisis-and-resources-november-poll.html.

This merely confirms the Coalition's electoral dominance in recent decades. Since 1996, the ALP has won just one federal election outright (2007), with one draw (2010), after which it formed an ill-fated, one-term minority government (2010–2013). In the past three elections, Labor's primary vote has slumped to between just 33 percent and 34 percent. By comparison, in a similarly bleak electoral period during the 1950s and 1960s, Labor's House of Representatives primary vote averaged 45 percent over nine elections. If, as expected, the Liberals win the next election and serve a full term, the Coalition will have held office nationally in all but six of the last 29 years.

Effectively, federal Labor is in its worst electoral position since 1906, when the ALP was just 15 years old. Modern Labor has arrived at a historic tipping point—a three-decades-in-the-making existential crisis. If not for compulsory, preferential voting, it would be in the position of its European comrades, polling less than 30 percent. A growing chasm exists between Labor and its working-class base in Australia's suburbs and regions. Working-class voters began leaving federal Labor in the early 1990s—these voters and their children and grandchildren have not returned.

By contrast, at a state and territory level, Labor holds government in five of Australia's eight jurisdictions (Victoria, Queensland, and Western Australia, along with the smaller populaces of the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory). During COVID-19, Labor governments have been widely regarded as competent and are popular. Even in Victoria, home to the majority of COVID-19 deaths in Australia, where severe lockdowns have crippled the economy, and set against a vociferous anti-ALP campaign conducted in the conservative media, the Andrews Labor government is likely to be reelected in November 2022. Again, this merely confirms long-run electoral trends. During the 2000s, for a period, Labor was in office in every single state and territory. It has governed there for 66 percent of the time since 1996.

For two decades, effectively two Labor parties have been in existence: state and federal. In the manner of its health and economic impact, COVID-19 has acted to accentuate the ALP's state-based strengths and further expose its frailties federally. In the short term, state Labor's domination bears out a national and global trend of COVID-19 benefiting incumbents, but over the long-term, reflects the ALP's strengths in state government service delivery: health, education, essential services, and infrastructure. At a federal level, issues of economic management and national security dominate, and since 1996, the ALP has repeatedly been subjected to effective scare campaigns on these grounds. This need not be the case.

COVID-19 has acted to prevent federal Labor renewing its policies, personnel, and internal culture. Labor continues to send out the impression that it is intent on prosecuting many debates of the 2019 election, if not the outcome. By implication, Labor still believes it was swindled and had the better set of policies on offer (which it did, but this is irrelevant politically). Labor has failed to create a national mood for changing the government, despite scoring several tangible policy "wins." Most Australians desire a return to normality, or "snap back" in the prime minister's rhetoric.[105] They have not been convinced of the real need for major national reconstruction. Labor has failed to make this case in consistent terms and has not grounded such plans in the everyday concerns of Australians: family, work, and love of country. It remains wedded to a "progressive" framing of issues, continues to struggle to reconcile the needs of its working-class and progressive middle-class constituencies, and is distracted by culture wars and identity politics. Yet every federal election is a referendum on economy. Elections held during and after COVID-19 will be no different. The key questions are: Who has the more credible plan to lead the recovery, to protect jobs and wages, and to pay back mountainous debt?

It is difficult to avoid the impression that federal Labor is sleepwalking to yet another defeat at the next election to be held any time before 2022, which would be its fourth consecutive loss and eighth in the last 10 elections. The ALP is bereft of an overarching national vision tied to two to three cut-through, tangible polices, explaining how Australia can emerge as a stronger, fairer, and better country post-COVID-19. Labor's slogan—"No one held back, no one left behind"—won't cut it.

This is a tragedy in the making. Millions of Australians depend on Labor to get its house in order and lead national reconstruction. Unless action is taken, this period will be regarded as akin to the interregnum under Simon Crean (2001–2003), when Labor wandered in the wilderness under a well-regarded former Cabinet minister, before terminating his leadership with extreme prejudice. All is not lost, but change is urgently needed. If not, every option must be on the table.

The COVID-19 effect

COVID-19 has played out most dramatically in Australia's aged care sector. Tragically, 685 aged care residents have died with COVID-19.[106] More than 90 percent have occurred in Victoria. There have been thousands of cases among staff. The overwhelmingly majority have been in private, commonwealth-regulated homes, where systematically underpaid and insecurely employed workers, mostly female and increasingly migrants, move from workplace to workplace spreading the virus, and staff-to-resident ratios have deteriorated to the point of dysfunction. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has revealed that not only was the sector completely unprepared for COVID-19, it is still not prepared for renewed outbreaks. Its report specifically found that the Morrison government's response was "insufficient," leaving the aged care sector's overworked, under-resourced workers "traumatised."[107] As discussed further on, an opportunity presents for Labor to radically overhaul aged care, but as part of a more general rethink of how to "do reform" in Australia.

The coronavirus pandemic has sent a wrecking ball through an already weak economy. Unprecedented social distancing restrictions and lockdowns, centred in Victoria, means that Australia is experiencing the biggest contraction in gross domestic product (GDP) since the Great Depression. The latest national accounts show a staggering 7 percent contraction in the June quarter, amid record falls in household consumption and business investment.[108] The most conspicuous feature, however, of this economic catastrophe has been its impact on employment. In April 2020, the national unemployment rate increased to 6.2 percent; underemployment rocketed up by 4.9 points to 13.7 percent, and underutilisation jumped by 5.9 points to 19.9 percent. Youth (15–24 years old) unemployment increased to 13.8 percent. May brought worse news: unemployment jumped to 7.1 percent. June to August have brought slight relief. However, unemployment still sits at 6.8 percent: More than 1 million Australians are presently out of work.[109]

Even then these numbers do not tell the full story. For those fortunate enough to keep their jobs, COVID-19 has sent private wages backward. Millions of Australians who are not working but retained on JobKeeper (a short-term federal wage subsidy) do not appear in the jobless statistics. More than 2.5 million Australians are looking for work or looking for more work, and new jobs are skewed toward part-time and casual employment. Commentators speak of a "jobless" recovery amid predictions of an unemployment rate above 6 percent for the next five years—this is nearly a percentage point higher than pre-COVID-19.[110] Australia's key economic indicators are not predicted to return to pre-pandemic levels for at least another 12 months.[111]

COVID-19 has fallen especially hard on young Australians. It has exacerbated a decade-plus trend of intergenerational inequality and economic insecurity.[112] They have suffered a decade of falling incomes due to government policies, been forced into precarious employment, and permanently locked out of the property market. Australians aged between 15 and 24 in 2020 have a similar disposable income to a person of the same age in 2001. Young people have been hit the hardest by the recession, given the disproportionate impact on youth-dominated industries such as hospitality. For the first time since the Depression, 2 in 3 young people do not have enough work to make ends meet. 290,000 people aged between 15 and 24 have dropped out of the labour market.[113] An estimated 600,000 Australians, mostly young people, have in effect self-funded their recoveries and reduced their retirement balances to zero,[114] widening the generational wealth divide and damaging national savings.[115]

Australia is also living through its first "pink recession." Australian women are more vulnerable due to their economic insecurity and overrepresentation in affected sectors of the economy—health care, hospitality, retail, child care, and education—and more women have been exposed to the actual virus because of their employment.[116] Women are more likely to have been made unemployed or forced into insecure work, while the cessation of free child care and ending of the JobKeeper program in early childhood centres affected women across the Australian community.[117] COVID-19 is seriously jeopardising women's long-term financial security and well-being.

Australia has a long-running housing problem with declining rates of homeownership and declining affordability and security, trends accentuated by COVID-19, which has seen a sharp increase in people not being able meet rent or mortgages. The number of Australians experiencing housing stress almost doubled between April (6.9 percent) and May (15.1 percent). Many government-legislated eviction moratoriums were set to expire in October, and the federal government is intent upon winding up JobKeeper and slashing JobSeeker (dole) payments. About 3.5 million Australians rely on the former payment; 1.6 million subsist on the latter.[118]

Without these measures, COVID-19 would have thrown 2.2 million Australians into poverty, lifting the number from 1.6 million before the crisis to 3.8 million (15 percent of the population).[119] Government cuts to these payments are predicted to shrink the economy by tens of billions of dollars.[120] Fiscal stimulus is of heightened importance as the (independent) Reserve Bank of Australia has little room to move on monetary policy: interest rates rest at record lows.

In other ways, the pandemic has rewritten the political rulebook and economic policy, presenting a major challenge to Labor's strategy. It has exacerbated the prime minister's partial shift to the left on economics while holding the line on social and cultural issues. The government's pragmatic 2020–2021 federal budget boasts the most generous tax and spending package to support aggregate demand in Australian history. It flags the staged withdrawal of government support for the economy in the run-up to the next election due before 2022, whereas governments ordinarily rein in spending in their first budget after an election before spending big in their final effort to win reelection. The Coalition has abandoned its long-standing policy of balanced budgets over the course of the economic cycle, making it difficult for Labor to push from the left or urge even greater spending and higher taxation (though the federal budget calculations are based on the assumption, possibly brave, of a COVID-19 vaccine being available in 2021). The deficit is well over $200 billion, and government debt exceeds $1 trillion for the first time as government revenue has collapsed and spending has grown to gargantuan levels. Australia's gross debt-to-GDP ratio is 55 percent—the highest level since the 1950s, albeit among the lowest debt levels of developed countries.

Included in the government's budget are many measures which would ordinarily be considered bread-and-butter Labor policy, such as $1 billion in new subsidies for employers to take on 100,000 apprentices to keep younger workers employed and preempt future skill shortages, along with support for manufacturing, small business, large-scale infrastructure spending and income tax cuts for middle Australia. Opinion polling of what has been described as the most important budget in decades is overwhelmingly positive to date. Four in 5 voters support the government's income tax cuts, claiming they will be better off, with a majority of Australians believing the budget stimulus will drag the economy out of COVID-19 recession.[121] Granted, there are serious faults with the government's short-term and long-run COVID-19 recovery strategy, in particular the budget's stimulus measures. Australia remains at risk of missing out on a golden nation-building opportunity to build a long-term focussed, resilient economy, and rebuild its sovereign capability. This has, in many ways, been the message of Labor's well-performing shadow treasurer, Jim Chalmers, long mooted as a potential future party leader, who has argued that the budget lacks ambition, notably in relation to bringing down unemployment.[122] Yet this message has been muddied by a continuation of Labor's bifurcated grievance politics: The major focus of Labor's attacks has been to the highlight the effect, correctly in purist policy terms, of the budget's inequitable impact on women, leading to a major policy announcement aimed at making private childcare more affordable. COVID-19 presents a major political opening if federal Labor can get its policies and messaging in order.

National sacrifice, national reward: Labor's opportunity

In the 1943 federal election, the victorious John Curtin-led Labor government campaigned on a slogan of "Victory in War; Victory in Peace."[123] His government, like that of Clement Attlee's Labour Opposition in Britain, promised Australians that their sacrifices during the Second World War would be rewarded by "winning the peace" and not reliving the horrors of the Great Depression—mass unemployment and poverty—memories of which remained vivid.[124]

Australia's battle against COVID-19 mirrors the earlier tumult of the Great Depression and World War II. As noted earlier, the prime minister, along with the new national Cabinet, is regarded as having performed competently in preventing mass deaths. Morrison's government has acted prudently, albeit imperfectly, to protect the economy, embarking on large-scale stimulus packages it once scolded the Rudd-Swan Labor government for implementing during the 2008–2009 global financial crisis. Morrison is the most popular prime minister since Labor's Kevin Rudd more than a decade ago, benefiting from the public's desire for national unity and bipartisanship. This has deprived Labor leader Anthony Albanese of political oxygen and meant Labor has had to strike a difficult balance between offering constructive support and negative attacks.

In this environment, Labor's framing of the Morrison government is crucial. The ongoing battle against COVID-19 involves an implicit bargain struck between government and the people.

Australians have placed their trust in leaders and medical authorities, accepting restrictions to personal liberties. Protecting human life was upheld at the cost of recession, mass job losses, and business closures. Labor's narrative must proceed on these lines: national sacrifice demands national reward. Australians will uphold their end of the COVID-19 bargain so long as government protects them and takes this opportunity to build a stronger, fairer nation. Protecting Australians is a bargain entailing years not months. Long term, it demands smart, activist government—not a megaspending big state—to plan a substantive post-COVID-19 economic strategy and deliver a genuine pandemic dividend: rebooting growth; vanquishing unemployment by generating secure, better paying jobs; building better institutions from workplaces to aged care; addressing the affordable housing crisis; and rebuilding sovereign capability. These challenges existed pre-COVID-19, to say nothing of budget deficits and government debt, neglected by the Coalition for seven years and greatly added to, albeit for a necessary cause.

It is tempting to regard Morrison's reelection as a fait accompli. Yet he is a popular leader in charge of a government viewed ambivalently by voters, seeking a fourth term. The Morrison government's deflect blame strategy presents a major opportunity for Labor. After all, the commonwealth has ultimate responsibility for Australia's border security—spelt out in the constitution, Quarantine Act (1908) and Biosecurity Act (2015). A global pandemic ought to have demanded hyperstringent oversight of returning citizens—especially once COVID-19 became a "known event"—and a far lengthier period of quarantine. Then there is private aged care: unquestionably the regulatory domain of the commonwealth. The crisis playing out in the sector is the direct result of operators prioritising profits ahead of health and safety of elderly residents and staff. The chickens of insecure employment have come home to roost. COVID-19 is many things, yet with workplace transmissions accounting for 80 percent of all cases, it is a work virus, preying on the working poor, especially migrants.[125]

Labor needs to insist that strong leadership means taking responsibility. Ultimately the prime minister cannot dodge 1 million-plus unemployed Australians, or millions more defined as underemployed or underutilised, subsisting on welfare. This is the elemental case Labor must now make, along with relentlessly pointing out that Australia would be in a far stronger position to make its recovery had it not been for free-market utopianism advocated by libertarian ideologues during the last three to four decades. Australia needs to be a country that makes things again and a country that does not cut corners when it comes to essential services and people's health and safety. Reasserting its sovereign capability will be critical to the economic recovery.

Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue

What's next?[126] In the wake of the global financial crisis, cracks first began to appear in the post-1970s ascendancy of an elite, cosmopolitan neoliberalism. First weakened by the 2008–2009 global financial crisis, this orthodoxy appears fatally wounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic insecurity not seen since the 1930s and a power imbalance between labour and capital, driven by the emasculation of the union movement, have conspired to disrupt liberal democratic politics. Far from aiding parties of the left and unions, popular anger over these trends is lessening support for social democrats. It is driving the working class into the arms of populist, far-right demagogues who seek to divide people on the basis of race and religion. Australia has not been immune to the global, populist trends: The rise of Donald Trump, the alt-right, Brexit in the United Kingdom (and Corbynisation of the British Labour party) have been mirrored by One Nation's electoral reemergence in our polity, and growth of other micro right-wing parties. In the 2019 election, these parties took votes from Labor, and their crucial preference votes flowed to the Coalition.

In 2020, there is a centre-left, social democratic alternative: a post-liberal, communitarian politics of the common good. Taking as its starting point people's grounding in family, community, and nation, this politics rejects market fundamentalism yet is sceptical of centralised statism. It upholds virtue, hard work, decency, responsibility, and patriotism. It seeks not to ape populism but rather broker a popular common good, or settlement, in the national interest. This, after all, was the animating idea of Australian labourism in its most successful electoral phases: the Curtin (1941–1945) and Hawke-Keating (1983–1996) Labor governments.

What must hallmark Labor's national reconstruction plan during and after COVID-19? In effect, we have a Labor government without Labor in office. Yet we are not all Keynesians again, nor should the public's acceptance of an increased role for government during this crisis be mistaken for the return of a pre-1980s statism.

Rather, Labor's focus should be strengthening national institutions, fixing structural faults in the national economy, building nation-building infrastructure, and rebuilding national sovereignty. The labour market is not fit for purpose. An insecure workforce composed of more than 50 percent casual, part-time, and contract workers was a recipe for disaster. COVID-19 merely exposed such folly. We can't, however, seek to ban casual or gig economy work. Instead, government must recommit to a genuine full employment goal, focused on reducing underemployment. This entails a thorough revision of enterprise bargaining between labour and capital and reinstating the value of vocational education. COVID-19 has seen business and labour come together to save jobs and people's livelihoods. Labor should institutionalise these arrangements to prepare the economy and its workplaces for future crises. Following the lead of Germany and much of Europe, large companies should be required to have employees represented on their boards. Co-determination has been shown to lift productivity and workplace collaboration, especially adaptation to new technology. Companies would better reflect the interests of all stakeholders on executive pay, long-term strategy, operational issues, and shift away from a short-term profit ethos. It is the perfect vehicle to ensure working from home operates fairly and effectively and matching skills and training to a technologically transformed labour market.[127]

Co-determination is also a potential solution to the aged care crisis exposed by COVID-19. Nationalisation is not the answer, even if aspects of privatisation have been an unmitigated disaster for elders and workers. And nor does more funding, heavier government regulation, or lifting staff-to-resident ratios constitute single silver bullets. While the commonwealth has failed to enforce standards and properly fund aged care, the real problem stems from a view that sees operators prioritise short-term profits over the needs of residents and employees, and their own self-interest. Aged care reform should start in boardrooms: what ought to be the first line of defence against bad behaviour. As a first step, employees and families of residents should be included as directors on the boards of private aged care home companies. These directors would provide a much-needed balance of interests, bringing greater urgency to discussions around ratios, insecure work, and quality of care.[128]

More broadly, a co-determination-driven new Accord should see government, business, organised labour, and civil society meet on a quarterly basis to meet the challenges of a post-COVID-19 world, a project that will take years. It entails rethinking global supply chains and addressing our poor sovereign capability in a riskier, multipolar world; diversifying economic production and ending overreliance on Chinese exports; onshoring high-tech manufacturing, including AI-inspired machinery and pharmaceuticals; and providing workers with the necessary skills and training and stable employment to rebuild national industrial capacity. Australia's poor levels of R&D spending must also increase so that we are at the global cutting-edge of energy policy, food and water security, and pandemic diseases. COVID-19 won't be the last. We must be better prepared. All this has the potential to revive vocational education, with clearly enunciated national standards around skill competencies and outcomes, linked to industry policy and paired with improved labour market entry. It is time for governments to dig out the shovels and start building new hospitals, aged care facilities, and clean energy infrastructure. Public and private affordable housing should also be a priority. We must build using Australian-made products and seize the nation's sovereign advantage: abundant reserves of renewable energy sources, from solar to wind, and hydrogen, an emerging clean energy technology.

This is the path to renewed full employment. The key measure should be underutilisation, which combines unemployment, underemployment, and active and inactive job seekers. Full employment will mean this: Underutilisation must never rise above 5 percent and ideally rest between 2 percent and 3 percent. We cannot abide the human and economic opportunity cost. Full utilisation must become Labor's watchword.

Coming to the party

What's holding Labor back? The 2019 federal election sharply exposed federal Labor's long-run cultural and structural problems. In the eyes of many, it has become associated with middle-class progressivism and baleful influence of identity politics. Progressivism is no longer seen in terms of social democratic economic reform, when it should be Labor's core business. Progressive ideology, while not wrong on many subjects, ranging from the justness of same-sex marriage to acting on climate change, adopts a near Manichean view of the world: black and white, right and wrong. It starts not where people are and not by first taking account of things they care about most—family, work, and place—but from where progressives would like people to be, that is, in agreement with progressives. Many progressives, while championing diversity and inclusivity, barely tolerate diversity of thought.

An ALP that defines itself primarily as progressive will not be able to appeal, economically and culturally, to the diversity of working-class Australia, "small c" conservatives, a disparate middle-class, people of faith, and rural and regional voters. It is an insurmountable roadblock to building a coalition for national government.

In Australia and places like Britain, Labo(u)r's refashioning as "progressive" cut it adrift from the working class and poor voters whom it was established to serve. Labor was once a working-class party that needed to attract middle-class votes to win; it has become a university-educated, white-collar party that needs blue-collar, nontertiary-educated, precariously employed votes to win. It won just 33 percent at the 2019 election.[129] Labor is culturally disconnected from the suburban and regional people it purports to represent and their lived experiences. Too many Labor members of Parliament (MPs) and activists look and sound the same as their Greens party rivals to the progressive left. And even when Labor's policies seem to capture the national zeitgeist, the party's cultural problems and structure means it "wins" many policy debates—in recent times, the Coalition has capitulated on the National Broadband Network—and yet the party has triumphed in only two of the past nine elections. If Labor cannot win the debate and an election fought over mass unemployment and levels of economic insecurity not seen since the Great Depression, it is in serious political strife.

Labor needs to change in three major ways. Internally, Labor must become less urban, middle-class "progressive" in structure, culture, and outlook, and it must actively seek to recruit new members from the suburbs and regions of working Australia. The ALP needs to be honest with itself: The late 1960s Whitlamite party revolution went too far. That project was designed to make the working-class-dominated party reflective of modern Australia. This was brilliantly achieved. Tertiary-educated, middle-class progressives were encouraged into the party and parliament. It set the stage for Labor to win seven of the next 11 federal elections. Today, however, it is impossible for a blue- or even white-collar worker to rise through the ranks: Labor is increasingly a party for but not actually made up of working people. Labor has now lost seven of the last nine federal elections.

Yet Labor has shown no appetite for internal reform. There is no effort to recruit tradespeople, hairdressers, electricians, aged care, and essential service workers, assembly-line workers, teachers, cleaners, retail employees, or plumbers. Many are on the front line of the war against COVID-19 or people who have been left jobless, unable to pay their rent or mortgage, and frightened for their families. There has been no attempt to reform Young Labor, which draws upward of 90 percent of its members from our university campuses; in other words, not from the 72 percent of Australians without tertiary degrees. There are no efforts to recruit apprentices, vocational education students, and young workers who do not attend university. This is not an academic point. Young Labor sets the culture for the party and its MPs.[130]

Labor can also apply a neglected lesson from the Blue Labour project in Britain. Co-founder Maurice Glasman's platform (and his peerage) emerged directly from his community organising, and Blue Labour developed its first constituency in the party and among the media as a result of its Citizens UK campaigns, such as pushing for a living wage. Community organising embodies the Blue Labour idea of being "radical and conservative." An example is faith-based organisations, many clearly not progressive, working in alliance with secular groups to achieve reform. Real organising would help Labor rebuild concrete links with working-class communities and pay attention to their issues. It could empower those communities to identify, foster, and train leaders from within. Otherwise, Labor is asking working-class people to join a largely middle-class, highly secular entity whose rules and institutions are stacked against them, or worse, where they are made to feel like their views and presence is unwelcome. In this, affiliated trade unions are critical.

Labor presented a vast suite of policies to the electorate in 2019. Critics argue there were too many complex policies, open to what were highly successful scare campaigns. Labor does not need more policy but policy that is better conceived and more attuned politically. There is scope for a transformative agenda, moving beyond an obsession with "tax and spend" politics and "nudge" economics. Labor exists to gain power in order to redistribute wealth and power, rather than expand the state to redistribute wealth without power and create rights-based legislation. Pulling back from a statist form of progressive politics can help rebuild trust in social democratic institutions and may ease the pressure on Labor governments to live up to the hallowed standards of the Hawke-Keating reform mythology, what I have termed Labor's "1983 and all that" complex. Labor must break from a state of mind that looks exclusively to the state or leaves it to the market. Here it can take a leaf out of Gough Whitlam's reimagination of Labor's reason for being. He reframed the debate away from the state-versus-private-ownership dichotomy and income redistribution. Whitlam insisted Labor talk about more than industrial relations and focus on "quality of life" concerns.

Pause over the term quality, and there is Labor's 21st-century inspiration: improving our institutions—from Parliament to our boardrooms and workplaces—while addressing economic insecurity and a democratic deficit.

Culture and language are important. Labor is a Labor Party. The hint is in the name. This does not mean it is an exclusively union party or only concerned with work, wages, and the regulation of work. And being the party of the labour interest is not incongruent with aspiring to be a party of government for all Australians. But Labor must shed its image and rhetoric of itself as a progressive party. Perhaps 20 percent of the Australian population explicitly identifies as progressive. To cast the Labor Party in this mould potentially alienates 80 percent of the national electorate. This is not an argument for Labor to focus exclusively on blue-collar workers, or religious and socially conservative voters, though they sorely deserve more attention. Rather in robust nation-building terms, Labor must seek to draw together the overlapping material interests and immaterial values of working-class and middle Australia.

Labor, to that end, should unashamedly reembrace the language of patriotism, understood as a dignified pride in one's country and a desire to make Australia a better place to live. It means more than being trusted with national security, as important as that is. A robust Labor patriotism can mobilise voters emotionally, bind them together in a common project, maintain our historically high rates of social cohesion, and preserve Australia's attachment to economic egalitarianism and social solidarity. It is no surprise that the best Labor prime ministers, Curtin and Hawke, naturally gravitated toward the language of patriotism, telling an enchanted story of the Australian people, what distinguished us as a people and binds us together. In 2020, Labor patriotism means talking about what we need to preserve in our national life as much as change. The public need to hear more from Labor about what makes Australia tick, its historic achievements as much as its failings.

Conclusion

In 1964, future parliamentarian Barry Jones circulated a private memo entitled "The Two Labor Parties" Jones singled out the hard-left-controlled, poorly performing Victorian branch of the ALP as a "toothless tiger." "I find little hatred or fear of the ALP nowadays—it seems to be a very old toothless tiger—but the party does excite much good-humoured derision. Many voters feel sorry for the party and would like to see it restored—even if only as an effective opposition, but do not trust it enough to give it a vote." There were three reasons, he continued, for "Labor's persistent failure": "Lack of public confidence in evasive or contradictory policies," "A feeling that the party lacks sufficient competence to govern," and "The narrowing basis of party support." Jones was threatened with expulsion for disloyal conduct: He was guilty of sympathising with "Santamaria," "McCarthyism," and "generally being an undesirable reactionary."[131] Jones was not expelled and his "Participants" grouping, along with key unionists such as future prime minister Bob Hawke, and soon-to-be federal leader and later Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (1972–1975) would successfully intervene in the Victorian branch in 1970. This intervention transformed Labor, laying the groundwork for the federal party's return to government in 1972 after 23 years in the wilderness and the unprecedented electoral success of the 1980s and 1990s. Jones' tripartite diagnosis of Labor's ills remains valid, if for different reasons.

In 2020, Australia can develop a new policy framework for economic prosperity with fairness, preparing its citizens for the rolling challenges of the present crisis and future pandemics. Labor's task will be to inspire and convince Australians that it is the only party capable of protecting the economy and jobs, and national security, broadly conceived. Only it can be trusted to secure the national recovery and build a stronger nation. As Australia deals with a once-in-a-century pandemic and plots its recovery, a once-in-a-generation nation-building opportunity is upon Labor.

Yet Labor must change itself before it can change Australia. Jones concluded his memo with a damning indictment of party culture: "Arthur Calwell expressed a common Labor attitude when he said in December 1963, 'We were not defeated in the recent election. The Labor Party doesn't know the meaning of the word 'defeat.' It is not in our vocabularies.' Unless the party can reform from within, we shall have to look the word up."[132] It took two further defeats in 1966 and 1969 for Labor to act. In 2020, Labor does not have that luxury. Change must come, for Australia's sake.

NEITHER TOO HOT, NOR TOO COLD: OPPORTUNITIES FOR POST-PANDEMIC PROGRESS IN CANADA

Don Guy

Like many places around the world, politics in Canada this year has been driven by the ebb and flow of the pandemic and its impact on the economy. At the same time, Canada has been confronting race relations challenges, an ethics imbroglio, and ongoing trade and diplomatic tensions with China and the United States. As a border state of the United States, the presidential election has claimed an outsize share of media and political attention as well. The pandemic is accelerating election calendars and rewarding incumbents—regardless of partisan stripe or ideological inclination. We expect that to be the case as long as the pandemic threat continues, for reasons outlined in this paper.

The Canadian political system

As a refresher, Canada is a federal state consisting of 10 provinces and three sparsely populated northern territories. At the federal level, the centre-left Liberal Party and centre-right Conservative Party have taken turns in office since the country's 1867 founding, with a social democratic party (NDP) on the left, a small Green Party, and a regional Quebec block interest party (Bloc Quebecois).

It has long been my belief that the moderate, progressive politics of Canada at the federal level are a direct result of the existence of a viable progressive party in the middle that speaks to middle-class voters, those aspiring to join the middle class and those struggling to stay in it. That is Canada's secret sauce, politically.

The federal government is led by the Justin Trudeau Liberals, who hold a plurality of seats in the House of Commons. As the figure below illustrates, the Liberals maintain confidence in the House with support on specific measures of either the NDP or the Bloc Quebecois (BQ). The BQ currently functions as a federal extension of the conservative nationalist provincial government in Quebec. In previous years, it has functioned as the federal extension of the social democratic nationalist provincial government. The Official Opposition Conservatives recently elected a new leader in an at-large, partywide membership vote: Erin O'Toole, a veteran Ontario suburban member of Parliament and former Cabinet minister, air force navigator, and Proctor & Gamble corporate lawyer. O'Toole won the leadership in a multiballot one-member, one-vote contest with strong support from social conservatives and gun culture advocates. The federal Green Party also has named a new Leader, Annamie Paul, a Toronto lawyer and activist. She is the first Black Canadian and first Jewish woman to be elected leader of a major federal party in Canada.

The Conservatives start any federal election with a strong regional base in the western provinces, to which they must add exurban and suburban seats in the greater Vancouver and Toronto areas, and ideally seats in rural and southern Quebec and Atlantic Canada. For the Liberals to hold power, they must put forward an idea of best plan to help you and your family get ahead, which ensures that middle-class, centrist voters' interests are advancing in some degree of equilibrium with other interests. In their last two elections, the Liberals have been successful pushing back against this with a message and policies that support the middle class, women, youth, and equity-seeking groups moving forward.

Canada in 2020

So where are Canadians as 2020 draws to a close, and what lessons can be drawn for progressive politics? In our campaign work over the last three decades,[133] we have refined a survey question at Pollara Strategic Insights that we regard as the best predictor of voting intention: Who has the best plan for you and your family to get ahead? We have found that elections are essentially a contest of which party and leader can establish a frame, a message, and a set of considerations that provide a pathway to ownership of this question.

The issues and attributes will vary according to times and circumstances, for example: a strong leader, someone on your side, health care, education, jobs and economy; however, the ideal metamessage has more often than not revolved around that question of who has the best plan for you and your family to get ahead. This question acknowledges that the balance of retrospective/prospective, sociotropic/pocketbook and altruistic/self-interest in Canada tilts toward the right side of the trade-offs. Campaign commitments for the future are more important than track record in government. "What are you going to do for me?" is more important than "What will you do for others?" However, this does not mean that Canadian voters are generally selfish.

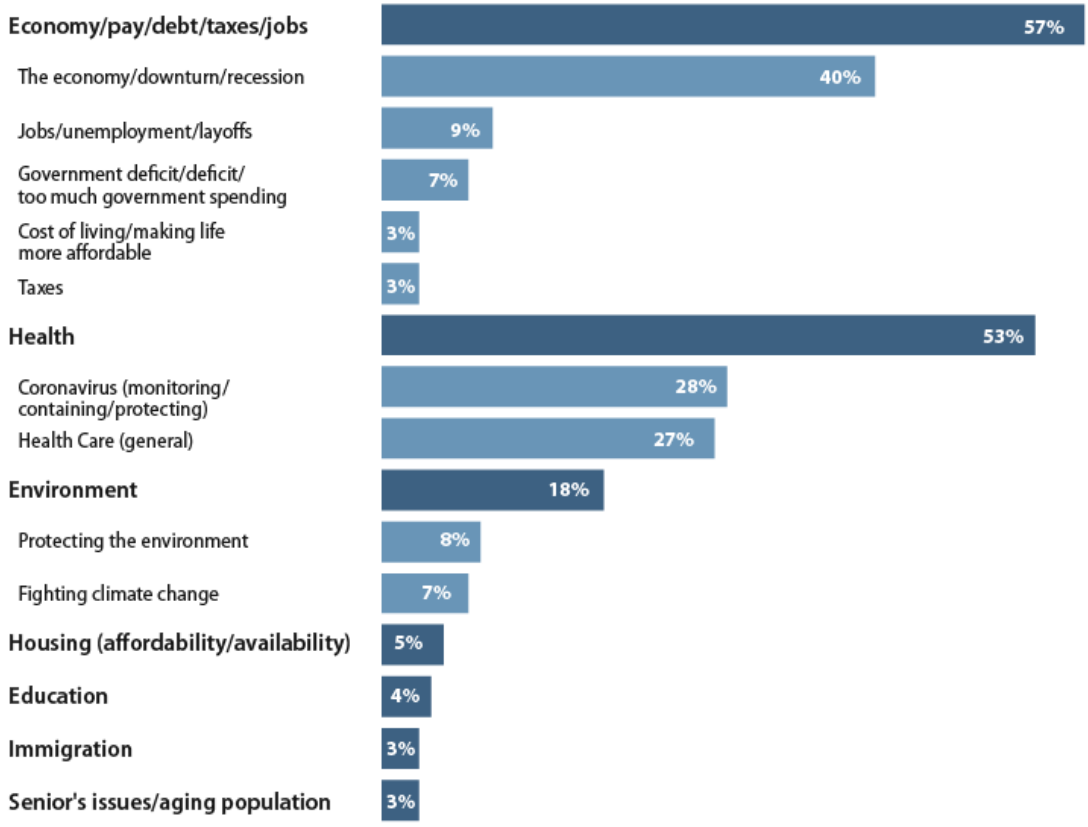
Most Canadian voters demonstrate significant empathy for people whose situation is different from their own. We continue to see widespread concern for societal issues and support for social measures as long as these centre-left and centre-right voters are (a) not feeling vulnerable themselves, and (b) feel that they are also part of the agenda. We have generally found that the best way to think about the centre-left and centre-right voters who make up the majority of the Canadian electorate, particularly the provincial electorates, are that they are homeowners who embrace a rising tide lifting all boats, as long as their own boats move up. There is an elasticity to the relationship between the tide lifting some boats and the tide lifting my boat, varying depending on circumstances. It is not an accident that climate change and the environment didn't break through as a voting issue with a sizeable cohort of voters, most notably Millennials and Gen Z, until it was framed as a threat to human health. One of the reasons that we see less concern for catastrophic climate change among voters aged 65+ is that some perceive the timeline for major consequences as beyond their own anticipated life span.

For the past eight months, the most important issues Canadians have cited as top of their mind in polls are overwhelmingly related to either the coronavirus or the economy.

FIGURE 1

For the past 8 months, the most important issues Canadians have cited in polls were overwhelmingly related to either the coronavirus or the economy

Share of Canadian respondents who believe the following issues are most important



Permission: Granted by Pollara Strategic Insights.
Source: Pollara Strategic Insights, "Most Important Issue Facing Canada Today" (Toronto: 2020), available at https://www.pollara.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Fig1-IssuesFacingCanadaToday-scaled.jpg.

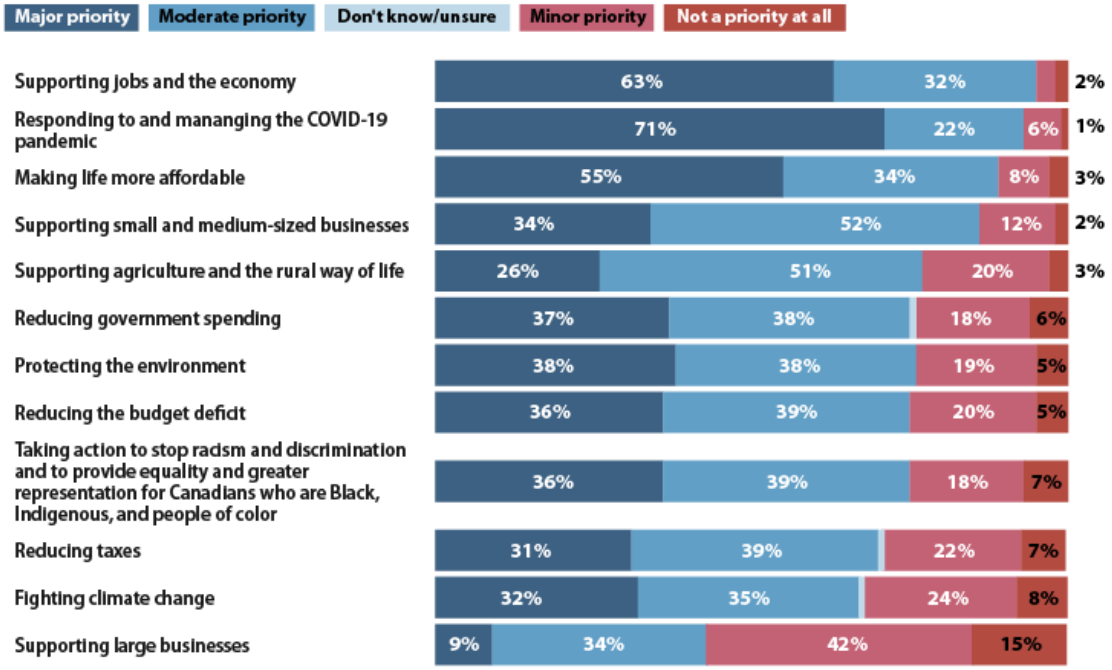
Majorities say that a priority for the federal Liberal government should be responding to and managing the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting jobs and the economy, and making life more affordable as major priorities, the only three issues that garner this level of priority.

FIGURE 2

Majority of Canadians say that the federal government should prioritize responding to the pandemic, supporting jobs and the economy, and making life more affordable

Share of Canadian respondents who believe the following policy areas should be short-term priorities for the federal government

Question: "Overall, how much of a priority should the federal Liberal government, led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, place on each of the following issues over the next one to two years." (Base N = 2,605)



Permission: Granted by Pollara Strategic Insights.
Source: Pollara Strategic Insights, "Short-term priorities for the federal government" (Toronto: 2020), available at https://www.pollara.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Fig2-ShorttermPriorities-scaled.jpg.

The pandemic has led to a "bumping down" of the number of Canadians citing climate change as top of mind and aided questions about major priorities for federal government action. At present, the Canadian public want to hear about two things: how governments and other actors are responding to the pandemic to keep their family safe and how governments and other actors are responding to keep their incomes and jobs safe. But we have seen no evidence of erosion of support for action on climate change, and we have seen evidence that climate change resiliency is the top priority of a majority of Canadians for stimulus infrastructure investment.

Politics at the provincial level are different from the 2+3 federal system, ranging from two party left-right systems to a nationalist/federalist divide in Quebec. The pattern in two-party left-right systems will be familiar to many readers. The conservatives are almost always seen as too close to business and the wealthy, while the left is almost always seen as too close to unions and the public sector. When conservatives are in office, political change in these provinces happens generally when centrist, middle-class voters feel that business and the wealthy have been advancing their interests much more extensively than their own or those of working people.

When the left is in power, political change tends to happen when centrist middle-class voters feel that the public and third sectors have been advancing their interests much more extensively than their own or those of small- and medium-sized business. The pandemic, and the realignment of voters' issue priorities into two broad pandemic-related categories, threaten to upend these perceptions and considerations, as well as voter party preferences.

Perceptions of politics and economy amid COVID-19

Across the country, voters have rallied in about the same proportions, around conservative and progressive political leaders alike, with roughly two-thirds indicating favourable impressions across the board. So far in three provincial pandemic elections in Canada, incumbent social democratic (BC), moderate conservative (New Brunswick), and populist conservative (Saskatchewan) have all been returned with strengthened hands to carry out their program and deal with the pandemic. These provinces aren't outliers.

The shift to a softer tone in dealing with the pandemic emergency is working particularly well in the largest province of Ontario, where the federal Liberals and Ontario provincial Conservatives won roughly the same number of seats, and many of the same seats, in the battleground suburban/exurban seats in elections in 2018 (provincial) and federal (2019). In fact, in Ontario, Liberal Prime Minister Trudeau and Conservative Premier Doug Ford currently have almost equal favourability ratings (Trudeau at 59 percent favourable, Ford at 57 percent overall) and for their handling of the pandemic. These are both up substantially from pre-pandemic ratings. Ford had fallen into second or even third place in some polls last year.

Now, only 28 percent of Ontarians agree that Conservative Premier Doug Ford is doing a worse job than Prime Minister Trudeau, despite the fact that more than 9 in 10 public dollars invested in Ontario in fighting the pandemic have been spent by Trudeau's government. By the same token, only 27 percent of Ontario voters disagree that Doug Ford is a better premier than his Liberal predecessor in the office, Kathleen Wynne. The degree of spending on fighting the pandemic does not seem to impact impressions of leadership or favourability ratings. The federal government is spending more than 9 in 10 dollars in fighting the pandemic nationwide and is projecting a deficit for this fiscal year of $350 billion, up from $26.6 billion in last year's budget.

Provincial conservative governments have claimed that they are constrained in their ability to respond by falling revenue and higher debt levels. But it hasn't made a difference in favourability ratings for their premiers. Instead, it appears that all levels of government are benefiting from the federal pandemic spending. Voters are not differentiating, at least in the short term. The one exception is the province of Alberta, where conservative Premier Jason Kenney, elected just two years ago with 55 percent of the vote, has seen personal approval numbers decline precipitously, dragging down voting intentions for his party, in response to his continued pursuit of an aggressive financial retrenchment.

Pocketbook pandemic perceptions as a driver toward incumbency?

For the past five years, Pollara Strategic Insights has been running an annual national survey, "In Search of the Middle Class," and this year's results came out of the field as coronavirus cases started to rise again at the end of August.

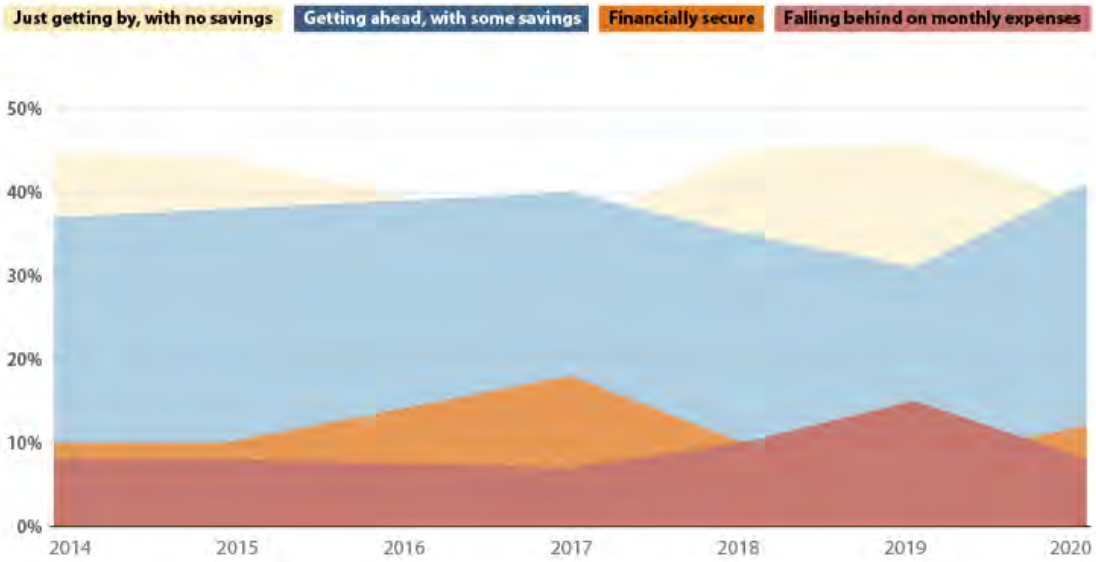
Changes some Canadians made to their personal financial behaviour (such as reining in lifestyle and debt and increasing the savings rate) as well as the unprecedented income support that the Trudeau Liberals have extended to Canadians—the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) for workers who lose their jobs, the Canada Emergency Wage Supplement (CEWS) for employers to keep workers on the job, and other supports—have actually lifted the overall and average sense of economic security and outlook of Canadians compared with previous years.

FIGURE 3

The percentage of those who worry about their cost of living and personal financial situation has increased during the pandemic

Canadians' perception of their social and financial place

Question: "Thinking about the cost of living and your personal financial situation, are you currently …" (N = 1,002)



Permission: Granted by Pollara Strategic Insights.
Source: Pollara Strategic Insights, "Perception of Social & Financial Place Trending Up" (Toronto: 2020), available at https://www.pollara.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Fig3-PerceptionofFinancialTrend-scaled.jpg.

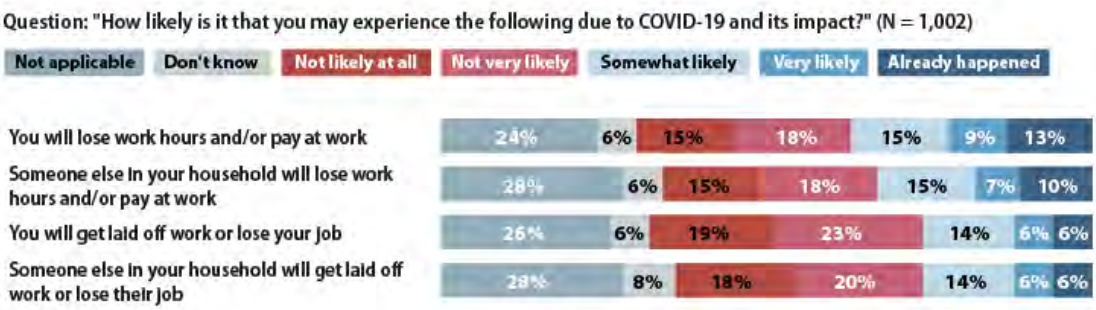
More Canadians are feeling financially secure or feel they are getting ahead with savings. Fewer say they are falling behind on their monthly expenses or are just getting by with no savings. Indeed, compared with 2019, fewer Canadians feel that their financial situation and quality of life have declined and that they are having trouble making ends meet.[134] A slight majority of Canadians continue to feel their income has not kept pace with their cost of living, although fewer are feeling this way since 2018. And one-quarter still feel that their household lives beyond their means.[135] Most, though fewer, Canadians continue to express high levels of anxiety about the future. Six in 10 are worried about having enough savings for retirement, though fewer are worried in 2020 compared with the previous years. Likewise, in comparison to 2019, fewer say that their household would run out of money in one month if they lost all income, or two months for that matter.

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has caused obviously increased level of job and income instability for some compared with 2019. Since the outbreak, 1 in 10 have either themselves or had a family member lose work hours or pay. Two in 10 Canadians feel it is likely that they or someone in their household will yet lose work hours or pay or get laid off due to the impact of COVID-19.

FIGURE 4

Canadians are worried about the economic impact of COVID-19

Share of respondents who believe it is likely that they or someone in their household will lose work hours and/or pay or will get laid off due to the impact of COVID-19



Permission: Granted by Pollara Strategic Insights.
Source: Pollara Strategic Insights, "Two-in-ten feel it is likely that they or someone in their household will lose work hours/pay or will get laid off due to the impact of COVID-19" (Toronto: 2020), available at https://www.pollara.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Fig4-HouseholdFuture-scaled.jpg.

Half say their personal financial situation and quality of life have declined since the outbreak. One-quarter say their household now carries a new or more debt because of the pandemic. Most troubling, among those who feel their financial situation has worsened, just 1 in 10 expect it to return to pre-COVID-19 levels or better in less than a year. Most feel it will take more than a year to up to 4 years, while one-tenth don't expect their financial situation to ever fully recover. Millennials are most optimistic about bouncing back, while baby boomers ages 55+ are least optimistic, with fewer years and fewer opportunities to replenish savings.

As the figure above on government priorities indicates, there is some concern on the right about government spending—37 percent say that reducing government spending is a major priority, and 31 percent say reducing taxes is a major priority. For the federal Liberal government and their provincial progressive cousins, these numbers suggest that fiscal responsibility can be parked for stimulative spending for the time being, but almost all Canadians, including progressive-inclined voters, will want to hear a plan for reining in deficit spending at some point. Given a choice of strategies for reducing the deficit, one-third of Canadians like the idea of a stimulative tax cut to grow the economy and government revenues, one-quarter choose reducing government spending by cutting and reducing government services, while just 8 percent like the idea of increasing taxes to increase government revenues. If tax increases are required, voters express clear preferences toward raising taxes on the wealthy and sin tax increases.

The key insight inferred from these findings is that voters, including moderates and progressives, want strategies and policies from government to fix the financial problems voters are facing before government fixes their own fiscal problems with tax increases. They want government to take responsibility for fixing their own fiscal problems. They want governments to have a plan. But it will take a rising tide again before voters will have an appetite for broad-based tax increases, which may not come until the pandemic is well behind us and full employment is within reach.[136]

Race relations

The killing of George Floyd in the United States, a widely seen video of an Indigenous elder being beaten by police, and other incidents have ignited long-overdue attention to the plight of racialized Canadians. These incidents, and the public outcry resulting, have forced Canadians to confront the question of systemic racism squarely.

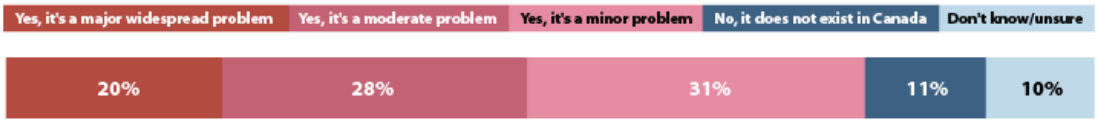
Some 72 percent of Canadians believe that in Canada, visible minorities and Indigenous peoples are excluded, treated unfairly, discriminated against, bullied, or assaulted because of their difference. On the other hand, 31 percent of Canadians believe that whites and 29 percent of Canadians believe Christians face the same treatment. Majorities also agree that governments should help level the playing field for those with less advantages than others and that Canada needs to do more to try to achieve equality for people from marginalized and minority populations. Fully 80 percent of Canadians say that systemic racism is a problem in Canada, though perceptions of the depth of the problem vary widely (20 percent reported major, 28 percent moderate, 31 percent minor). This represents significant advancement in awareness among Canadians. Just 11 percent say that systemic racism does not exist in Canada.

FIGURE 5

The majority of Canadians feel that racism is a problem in their country

Share of respondents who think systemic racism is a problem in Canada

Question: "Systemic racism is a form of racism, either based on 'race,' ethnicity, skin color, or visible minority appearance that is embedded as a normal practice within a society, institution, or organization. Do you believe that systemic racism is a problem in Canada?" (N = 1,005)



Permission: Granted by Pollara Strategic Insights.
Source: Pollara Strategic Insights, "Expressions of Systemic Racism in Canada?" (Toronto: 2020), available at https://www.pollara.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Fig6-SystemicRacism-Where-scaled.jpg.

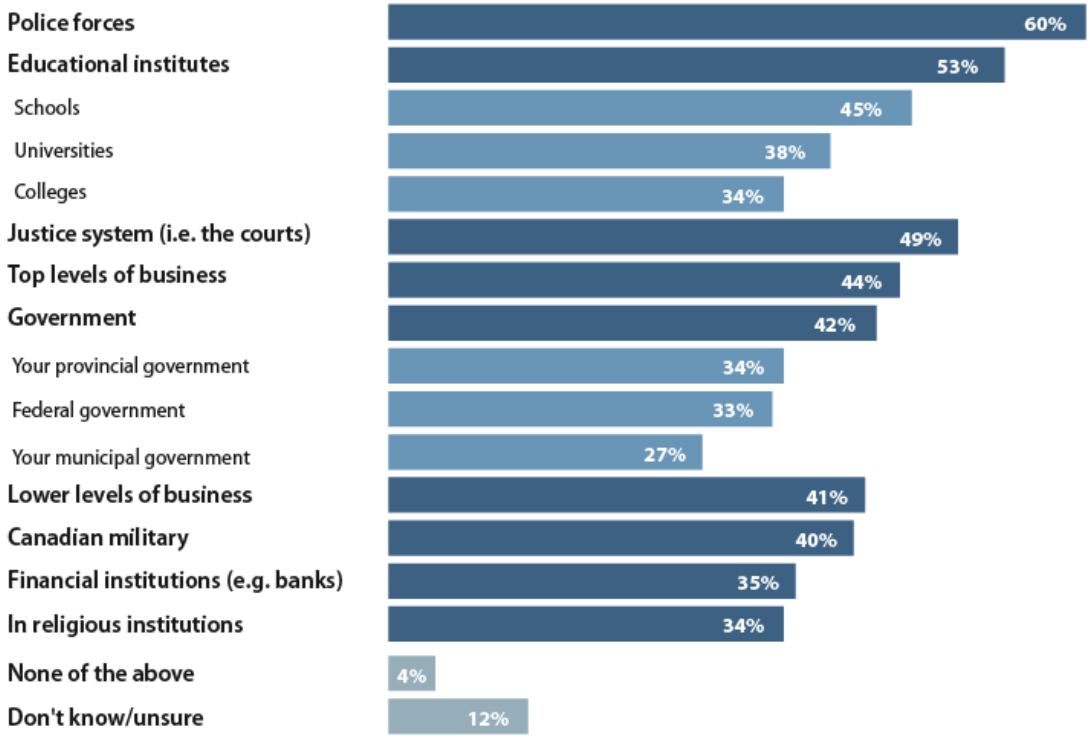
The plight of Canada's Indigenous people has also been brought into relief again by recent events. A majority of respondents agree that Canadians should be ashamed of how our Indigenous peoples have been treated, but pluralities also believe that some accomplishments have been made toward addressing the challenges facing Indigenous peoples in Canada. Of those who acknowledge the existence of systemic racism in Canada, most are most likely to say that it exists among the police, followed by the education system and the courts.

FIGURE 6

Those who acknowledge systemic racism in Canada believe that it is most likely to be expressed among the police, the education system, and the courts

Institutions where respondents believe that expressions of systemic racism are most likely to occur in Canada

Question: "Where do you believe systemic racism exists in Canada?"



Permission: Granted by Pollara Strategic Insights.
Source: Pollara Strategic Insights, "Expressions of Systemic Racism in Canada?" (Toronto: 2020), available at https://www.pollara.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Fig6-SystemicRacism-Where-scaled.jpg.

Underneath that top-line sentiment, the progressive policy agenda in confronting and overcoming systemic and specific racism faces a complex landscape in Canada. For example, the defund the police movement has been active in many parts of Canada in response to these incidents. The defund movement has had some success in raising awareness but has had little success in raising public support. Canadians are overwhelmingly opposed to the defund movement broadly, or even more modest goals like a 10 percent reduction in police budgets, because for most Canadians, including most Canadians of colour, the defunding proposals make them feel less safe.

A further complication is that a majority of Canadians have latched on to COVID-19 as a reason to express a preference that Canada should reduce or stop immigration, arguing that immigration levels should not increase until the pandemic threat is reduced or until the economy has recovered. The federal government has announced an ambitious immigration plan, in part to offset shortfalls in this pandemic in 2020.

There will be a temptation among some progressives to decry opposition to expanded immigration as racist. For most Canadians, who acknowledge above the challenges of systemic racism, this will ring hollow. The government is doing the right thing, but it will need to go an extra mile or more communicating the pandemic safeguards that are in place, and the economic benefits of increased immigration at this time of high unemployment and in the future. Progressive allies will need to do the same.

The calls for racial justice for existing Canadians demand an answer from progressives in government and those hoping to form government. That demand is urgent, and the effort will need to be sustained. Most voters acknowledge systemic racism and the need for action. On issues like police reform, voters want action to treat racialized and marginalized citizens safely, fairly, and appropriately to their needs, without reducing how safe they feel themselves. That's where the progressive agenda should be focused.

Another important issue for progressives in Canada will be responding to the fallout of the WE imbroglio. Over the summer, revelations surfaced that a charitable organization (WE) that had been awarded a contract to administer and recruit participants for a Canada Student Service Grant program employed then-Finance Minister Bill Morneau's daughter. It was further revealed that the finance minister and his family had gone on an international trip with the charity and had inadvertently not paid WE back for the expenses.[137] Prime Minister Trudeau's mother, a professional advocate and public speaker, had also accepted speaking fees from the charity for various events.

Pollara's polling indicated that the issue had trouble breaking through a very crowded news environment of the pandemic, economic fallout, and racial justice. Understanding of the issue was divided along partisan lines, which was key to the Trudeau government's ability to right itself. The Liberals also appointed a new finance minister, Chrystia Freeland. Her appointment as Canada's first female federal finance minister was widely saluted, particularly by the female professional class and opinion leaders that make up a large proportion of the Liberal voting universe. In response to the WE imbroglio, the Liberals were transparent, reasonable, cooperative, and undeterred from their duty. Both those strategies have served them in good stead. They didn't get distracted. They kept governing. They kept tweaking existing pandemic supports and developing new ones, procuring personal protective equipment (PPE) and vaccines. They kept their eye on the ball, and that is a lesson all of us could use.

The future progressive agenda

The federal government's speech from the throne on September 23, 2020, is a good guide for the state of public opinion among the progressive parties and their voter universes.[138] The summer preceding the speech was riddled with speculation about the potentially ambitious nature of a new Trudeau agenda to "build back better." In the end, the resurgence of COVID-19 caseloads led to a shelving of any kind of "turn the corner" talk beyond a signalling of how, when the time comes, the government will be choosing priorities for a "build back better" agenda for a greener, fairer economy and society.

Instead, given rising COVID-19 count projections, the speech provided a road map for how the Trudeau Liberals would combat the pandemic going forward and support people economically, including a strong reference to bringing feminist, intersectional understanding and values to these questions, as well as other rising and pressing concerns. Tactically, the throne speech provided an opportunity for the minority government to get a renewed vote of confidence behind it that can sustain it until next year's budget vote. In particular, the speech draws the kind of middle-of-the-road route between fiscal constraint and expansionary government spending referenced earlier.

The key elements of Trudeau's plan include individual support and economic support, with a campaign to create more than 1 million jobs and transition to better employment insurance and extend wage subsidies. The plan also includes a focus on women, with an Action Plan for Women in the Economy to help bring women back to the workforce with feminist, intersectional approaches to the pandemic. Other policies referenced include increased taxation to address extreme wealth inequality, increased investments to rapid housing and incentivizing first-time home buyers. Finally, the plan addresses climate by supporting efforts to meet a net-zero future and creating clean jobs and a pledge to fight climate change in part by planting 2 billion trees.

The Conservatives announced immediately that they would vote against the government's plan as it does not contain enough about western alienation and supports for the oil and gas sector. Prior to the throne speech, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh planted his flag on single-payer national pharmacare. Universal pharmacare enjoys wide support in the 70 percent range, but single payer has very little support outside hardcore progressives (less than 25 percent). The throne speech reiterated a commitment to national pharmacare but stopped short of single payer.

After a short negotiation, the NDP announced that they would vote for it in exchange for confirmation of enriched sick leave benefits for workers, which also enjoy wide support. NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh hinted that his party could continue to support the government for the full life of the Parliament (another three years) if they could keep getting things done for people.

Polls tell us that Canadians support widely the idea of national universal pharmacare, but that does not necessarily mean single-public-payer in their minds. Notional support turns to stubborn opposition if it means that Canadians who are satisfied with their existing employer plans would have to give that up for perceived inferior public plans so that others may get coverage. The opposition entrenches even further if the price tag is so large that taxes must go up or other important social priorities go unaddressed. Instead, these centrist voters want a common-sense approach—equal access to drugs at little or no cost for those who don't have it, a much more modest and quickly achievable target. Canadians support others advancing, but not less for themselves.

Some commentators and political strategists in Canada have speculated that the orientation of centrist, middle-class Canadians could change because of the pandemic and that increased approval ratings for political leaders investing heavily to combat the pandemic could cross over into increased confidence in the public sector to make major new social program investments—an echo of post-World War II. As the pharmacare example above demonstrates, the interplay of these considerations is slightly more complex. Coming out of World War II, taxes in Canada were high and were slowly reduced as the government was laying the social program infrastructure that carries us to this day. Today, taxes are low relatively speaking and debt being incurred to fight the pandemic will have to be serviced.

As we have seen, there is no correlation between government spending to combat the pandemic and government pandemic handling or overall approval ratings. For that reason, we are not convinced that public support for progressive government emergency spending in a pandemic will transfer to support for ambitious progressive government spending to spur a recovery. Pandemic circumstances appear to have made middle-aged, middle-class voters even more tax sensitive than they were pre-pandemic.

Addressing financial insecurity

Because of the economic impacts of the pandemic, there is now a cohort of Canadians who are experiencing an improved sense of financial security because the $2,000-a-month Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) is paying it more or equal to what they would get slogging it out in a difficult, low-wage and often high-risk job. Though the Conservatives and some employers fiercely attacked the CERB as a disincentive to work, the CERB has been a boon to these Canadians, generally younger and more at risk. It has also been a lifeline to older workers who have had their employment curtailed. The government confirmed in the throne speech that it would phase the CERB out in favour of an expanded version of traditional employment insurance, which pays less and is generally time limited.

Transitioning these younger, often racialized Canadians, who may have felt "seen" for the first time by a government, from the CERB to a better, safer, more secure situation than what they had previously to the pandemic, perhaps through wage enhancements and access to employment benefits, is a huge opportunity. The Trudeau government signalled that direction on sick leave benefits in the throne speech (with NDP support), but more needs to be done.

There is opportunity for government to step in to help transition the 55+ voters who have seen their retirement plans compromised by pandemic economic consequences identified above. This is unlikely to come from conservative governments, though the demographic—particularly among men—skews in their direction. A fair and generous transition to retirement could lead to a realignment of partisan leanings for some of these voters.

But the largest electoral opportunity is found in Canadians who kept their jobs and had seen their hours reduced or lost their jobs. There are considerably more of these Canadians than "CERB bump" recipients above. This cohort skews heavily female, and many have been forced to reduce hours or in some instances leave jobs to raise children left out of childcare or kids home from school. If the second wave hits the hours and pocketbooks of these Canadians as hard, or even harder, than the first wave, then one should expect that their public policy preferences will tilt even further toward job stimulus and supports, at the expense of virtually everything else.

Worse, if schools begin closing en-masse in response to a second wave, mothers will rightly be enraged by the choices that are being thrust upon them, again being forced to take something less than what they had rather than "better."

The government signalled strongly in the throne speech that they have heard women faced with this situation and that their concerns would be at the centre of the ongoing pandemic response and eventual recovery plan. Training, with childcare and benefit support for laid-off female workers, with sensitivity to the needs of female single-parent households, is not only an economic recovery imperative, it is a huge political opportunity for progressive parties to build enduring attachments.

Go local, not global

Local action for local benefit has replaced the idea for many of local action for global benefit, for the time being.

Canada is experiencing a wave of small- and medium-sized business bankruptcies resulting from the first wave, and the second wave is anticipated to hit already struggling businesses hard. Small-business owners in many parts of the country also come from marginalized, racialized backgrounds. Again, the government signalled a strong intention to extend existing and build new supports for struggling small business, but there is risk of a perception that some multinationals and large Canadian enterprises are doing quite well at the expense of local businesses. The government has responded with a strong procurement program from domestic, local, and equity-seeking Canadians. This is overwhelmingly popular with Canadians—for example, in one survey, we found an 86 percent preference for the federal government to procure PPE through local businesses where possible rather than Amazon.

Policy that can help level risk, provide access to capital and opportunity for local businesses will be contested political space for progressive and conservatives. Canada's Conservatives have already begun a Donald Trump-style pivot away from the Harper government's "anything for a trade agreement" strategy from 2006–2015. Progressives need to meet the challenge for the millions of diverse Canadians starting and restarting local businesses.

Addressing the fiscal challenge

Finally, we will be watching how the government manages the politics of the fiscal situation, the need for pandemic supports for Canadians, and the need to raise revenue at some point to pay for supports, as well as for any new programs to build back better. This debate hasn't been a feature of the three pandemic elections held in Canada, and we don't expect it to be in pandemic elections in 2021.

Once the pandemic is behind us, the recovery is underway, and politics returns to normal, we expect the federal and provincial fiscal situations will likely define the politics of Canada for the next generation. Much as the politics of the past generation was driven by the debate over whether Conservative cuts or progressive taxes were the better approach to dealing with the fiscal and economic consequences of past downturns we expect the same questions to return.

Conclusion and the way forward

This once-in-100-years pandemic could well provide an equivalent once-in-100- years opportunity for progressives to provide positive, meaningful change to millions of potential voters, much like the New Deal did in the United States for the Democrats and the 1944–1945 Mackenzie King social policy reforms did for the Liberal Party of Canada, paving the way for a long secure period of progress.

There is no evidence that big expensive government is a winning brand for progressives in this climate, nor was it then. Attentive, responsive, solutionist government is a winning brand.

There are amazing opportunities within a framework of extending help to Canadians who need it, without taking needed supports away from other middle-class Canadians. Middle-class Canadians are ready for a progressive fairness and growth agenda that sees others succeed as well as themselves. They are not on board with a socialist redistributive agenda that attempts to level the playing field by taking things away for them that they rely on.

Recovery strategies from more recent recessions do not provide the necessary template for progressives. Instead, we are drawn to the enduring attachments that were built for Democrats in the United States by the New Deal and for the federal Liberals in Canada by the postwar reconstruction agenda of Mackenzie King through analogues like the GI Bill, housing supports, etc., updated for today's gendered and racialized economic and social challenges.

Action to meet these needs will inevitably meet with opposition from conservatives, and indeed define them for another generation with these voters, setting up a metaframe of "build back better," supporting and protecting progressive investment versus the conservative "let's go back to the way things were" retrenchment message.

Those are campaigns that Canadian progressives know how to win.

BEYOND FRACTURE: TOWARD A NEW PROGRESSIVE COALITION IN FRANCE?

Bruno Jeanbart

Over the past three years, France has undergone unprecedented political change. The old governing parties have almost disappeared, and the cleavage between the traditional left and right has narrowed as new political forces have emerged. A progressive president has arrived without the support of the traditional partisan and institutional machinery—a feat never seen before under the Fifth Republic.

These upheavals were a long time in the making. As early as 1992 and the creation of the euro under the Maastricht Treaty, a new political divide arose around the agreement. This new cleavage between supporters of national withdrawal from the European Union and those who supported greater integration was gradually added to and superimposed on the traditional left-right opposition. And it partly explains some of the most striking political events of the past 30 years: far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen's qualification for the second round of the 2017 presidential election; the rejection by referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005; and the results of the 2017 presidential election, when the candidates of the Socialist Party and the Conservative Party—traditional political forces that have produced France's presidents since 1965—were eliminated in the first round.

For many decades, the French political landscape was organized around three divides: ideological, social, and territorial. These sometimes overlapped perfectly: a left-wing France rooted in the working classes and regions indifferent to religion versus a right-wing France inserted into the various strata of the bourgeoisie and the peasant world and located in the territories of Catholic culture. These old political, social, and territorial cleavages have not disappeared. They still leave their mark on the political orientations and choices of French voters. For example, in the 2012 presidential election, the classic left-right confrontation reappeared in the second round and revealed, albeit imperfectly, a class cleavage and geography of votes that led to the runoff between François Hollande, then-leader of the Socialist Party of France, and the incumbent conservative president, Nicolas Sarkozy.

In addition to this traditional division, there are now more transversal divisions at work in many areas of social, cultural, economic, and political life in French politics. Three of them in particular make it possible to understand the decisive changes that have affected the political orientations of the French today: The first stems from the globalization that began at the end of the 1980s and the reactions that it provoked in a context of economic and financial crisis (since the 1990s, more than 60 percent of the French have seen globalization as a threat).[139] The second refers to the construction of Europe, which over time has given rise to growing skepticism and opposition (73 percent considered France's membership of the EU in 1987 as a good thing, whereas only 45 percent did in 2020).[140] The third is rooted in a postmaterialist revolutionary movement that is producing a whole new set of expectations and demands from citizens.

The progressive narrative in France: Defensive and divided

Today's crises have disrupted and opened up spaces for the process of political radicalization. While we are far from the scenario of 1929 and the Great Depression years that followed, France today faces significant chances for protests: 55 percent of French people are ready to take part in a demonstration to defend their ideas.[141] Over the past 10 years, the proportion of those ready to take to the streets has wavered between 50 percent and 66 percent of the population. Strikingly, 42 percent of French people think that a demonstration is the most effective way of exerting influence on policy decisions in France, while only 50 percent think that voting is the most effective way.[142] France is one of the only countries in Europe where the act of public demonstration is adorned with so much virtue.[143] Many French people are not happy with the world as it is and are looking for alternatives.

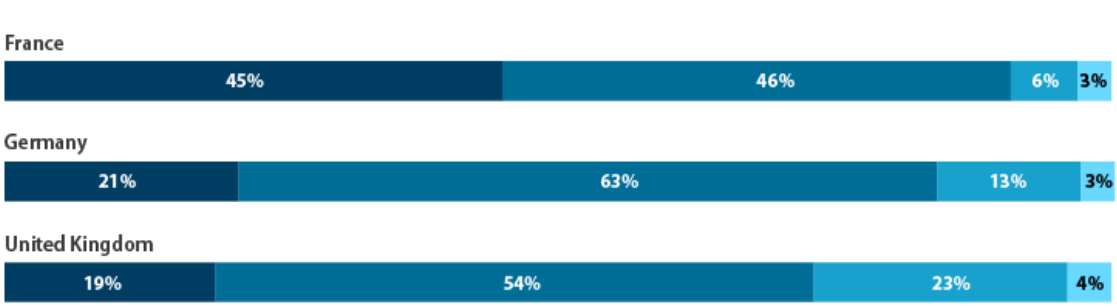
These alternatives involve questioning the capacity of the national political system to protect the country from the pernicious effects of globalization: 49 percent of French people want the capitalist system to be thoroughly reformed. Sixty percent of those polled have a poor opinion of globalization, and only 23 percent consider that France must open up more to the world today.[144] For a majority of French people, globalization is associated with a litany of negative effects: Between 55 percent and 65 percent believe it has had a negative impact on the environment, purchasing power, employment, and wages.[145] These responses cast French respondents as an ultracritical camp that has little equivalent in other countries. Already by 2011, compared with 10 countries, France came last in its positive perception of the market economy and capitalism and the country's place in global economic competition.

FIGURE 1

There is strong support in France to reform capitalism

Support for reforming the capitalist system extensively or in some ways in France, Germany, and the U.K.

Question: "Would you personally prefer for the capitalist system to be…"? (N=1,766)



Permission: Granted by author and OpinionWay.

Source: OpinionWay, "Political Trust Barometer" (Paris: 2020), available at https://www.sciencespo.fr/cevipof/sites/sciencespo.fr.cevipof/files/Barome%CC%80tre_vague11b%20.pdf.

Yet progressives in France have been particularly uncomfortable for years on this subject. The progressive movement has not managed to respond to the concerns raised by globalization among the popular categories, which formed the electoral base of most progressive-leaning parties. It is badly affected by two consequences of this phenomenon: Globalization exposes workers to increased economic pressures, weakens the welfare state, and significantly reduces the productive and restorative capacities of public authorities. For a long time, progressives have given the appearance of verbally opposing globalization without having any policy consequences against the forces of globalization when the party was in power. It has exacerbated the sense that politics is meaningless and politicians powerless in this new world. Instead, the progressive movement is stuck between a strategy of demonizing globalization (and its corollary, the choice of a so-called 'Frexit', or even the rejection of the market economy) or a strategy of defending the beneficial effects for the country in order to better correct the upheavals it has induced.

This has led many French progressives to adopt a purely conservative and defensive attitude toward the welfare state as it existed rather than one of transformation in order to make it more effective in protecting workers in the era of globalization. It has also made the majority of French progressives defenders of the achievements of the past rather than visionaries for the future. Since his emergence as a political leader, Emmanuel Macron has been trying to change this approach by tackling globalization at its core and making it a major cleavage with the populist extreme right. For the president of the Republic, it is not a question of refusing globalization—which would be illusory—but of accepting it, understanding the destabilization it brings to our societies, and responding to it. To date, however, he has not succeeded in convincing the voters who are concerned about globalization that the responses he proposes will lessen its most harmful effects.

Moreover, since 2002 and the end of Lionel Jospin's government, the left has not been able to bring together all of its elements—the Socialist party, Communist party, and ecologists—in a coalition. This coalition had allowed the Socialists to govern the country multiple times (1981–1986, 1988–1993, and 1997–2002). But under the presidency of François Hollande, the Socialist Party ruled without the radical left and quickly without the ecologists. Today, these three political forces are competing and even opposing each other. Although the parties all agree on a number of important points such as immigration or climate change, strong divisions are appearing on the issue of France's relationship to the EU. The divide is now between a radical left that is almost secessionist on one side and the socialists and ecologists who remain in favor of European integration on the other.

Former socialist Prime Minister Manuel Valls summed up this situation in 2016 by referring to the emergence of "two lefts", now irreconcilable.[146] He answered with this expression to the radical left, which began to consider President Hollande as "worse" than conservative President Sarkozy or even the far-right National Front.[147] There was no longer any chance to build a future progressive coalition with political leaders who denigrate the center-left so much and refuse to assume the reality and responsibility for the exercise of power. In addition to the divide between the traditional left-wing parties, there is also a divide within Macron's movement. To win the presidential election, Macron brought together the left-wing (by capturing two-thirds of the socialist electorate) and center-left progressives in a movement that resembled former U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair's Third Way. But in a country that loves to wield symbols in politics, and in which social liberalism has always been considered heretical, the historic parties of the left have swung into radical opposition to the president by challenging, among other things, his economic policies.

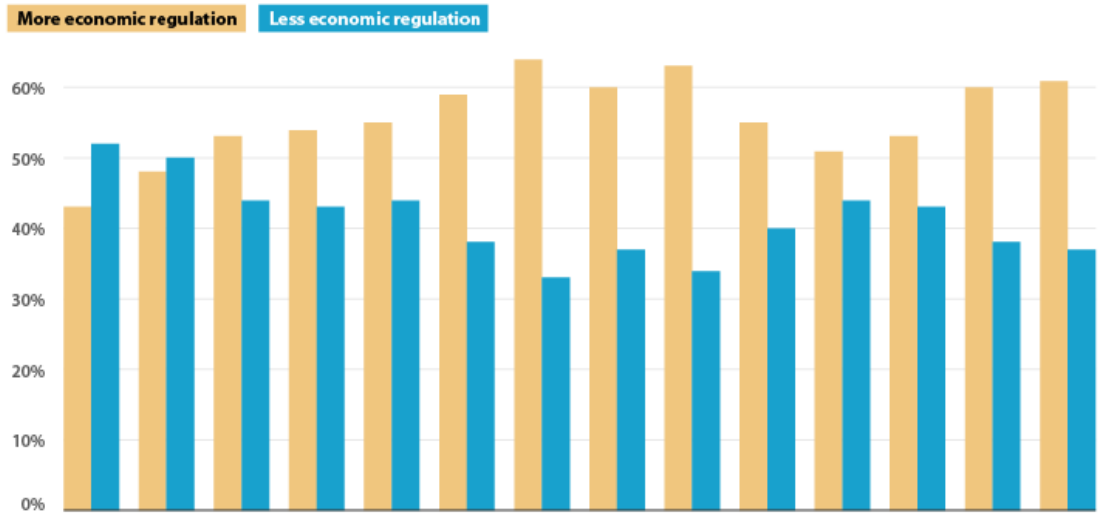
The progressive-leaning parties in France have, however, significant assets that could allow them to become the country's main political force. Over the past 20 years in France, and even before the collapse of Lehman Brothers, progressive ideas gained strength in economic and social terms, to the detriment of liberal ideas: Public opinion is now expecting more economic regulation to repair the fractures caused by the 2008 financial crisis.[148]

FIGURE 2

There is strong support in France for more economic regulation

Public support for economic regulation in France, 2006–2020

Question: "In order to deal with economic difficulties, do you think that we need…?"



Permission: Granted by author and OpinionWay.

Source: OpinionWay political polling conducted between 2006 and 2020. See Opinion Way, "Derniers sondages publiés," available at https://www.opinion-way.com/fr/sondage-d-opinion/sondages-publies/politique.html (last accessed December 2020).

However, the advantage that progressives can gain is not absolute: While the French are getting closer to progressive positions, they are also getting closer to those of the Gaullist, neo-Colbertist right (favorable to the economic intervention of the government), embodied by Sarkozy during his 2007 campaign.

After the financial crisis at the end of 2008, these trends have become more pronounced: The demand for state intervention in the economy and the trust placed in the trade unions is becoming even stronger. There is, therefore, a real opportunity to seize upon the potential for confidence in collective institutions (the state, and trade unions in particular), especially as it counterbalances the rise of individualism in French society, to advance a progressive policy agenda.

Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

The temptation to retreat reinforced

The global coronavirus pandemic and the fears it raises are strongly aligned with international economic, cultural, and political issues that France already faced in the multiple challenges of openness and globalization.

OpinionWay's research shows a clear movement toward withdrawal in the French electorate during the COVID-19 crisis. Indeed, there has been a 10-point gain among those who believe that France should "protect itself more from today's world"—from 54 percent to 64 percent between February and April—and remains at these high levels in September 2020 (63 percent).[149] This demand for protection is expressed mainly on economic issues, with an increase from 55 percent to 69 percent among those who express a desire for more economic protection. At the same time, the demand for protection in the face of migratory flows remains at a particularly high level (83 percent).

This protectionist backlash seems to be affecting a specific segment of voters who were previously open to internationalization but who are concerned about the general economic situation of the country in the aftermath of the pandemic. This movement of closure is fueled by anger rather than fear and reflects, at least in part, the dissatisfaction of these voters with the government's management of the health crisis.

The crisis also reinforces a demand for protection, which potentially goes hand in hand with a demand for an increased role of the state, but not necessarily in the sense that the progressives understand it. Seventy-three percent of French people want more control of national borders and believe that it is up to the French state, and not the EU, to control them.[150] The issue of protection in today's world is not disconnected from the demand for state control. Eighty-five percent of those who want more protection believe that borders will have to be better controlled in the future, and 82 percent of respondents believe that it is up to the state and not the EU to do so, even though this was not a self-evident consideration. This return to state power is also characterized by the fact that 82 percent of respondents think it is important to have strong executive power in the face of health or environmental crises.

A first analysis of the political effects of the health crisis linked to the coronavirus pandemic could lead one to think that the rejection of neoliberalism and globalization implies the return in force of progressive ideas. Certainly, there is a surge in confidence in major public services, especially in the hospital sector; a high level of trust in the information provided by doctors, much more so than in official statistics from the government; and a strong demand for economic protection. This could indicate that the French have shifted to the left of the political spectrum. However, the distribution of political positions has not changed between February and April 2020—and this stability is surprising: 19 percent of the French in both polling sets are on the left; 34 percent in the center; 27 percent on the right; and 20 percent outside the scale.[151] There is therefore no evidence of a partisan shift, and the left remains a minority opinion.

The state, yes—but an effective, not impotent, state

Because of the French welfare state, debates in France don't focus on health insurance but instead are much more about the ability of hospitals to care for people sick with COVID-19 during the emergency. This has been a huge issue in France because of an ongoing, yearlong social movement of hospital staff.

Public spending on hospitals, wages of hospital staff, coordination between hospitals and general practitioners, and between public and private hospitals, are ongoing issues in the public debate. The French have always been taught that they have the best health system in the world, so many found it surprising that they were not doing better than other countries in fighting this virus.

To that extent, the COVID-19 crisis reactivated one of the most important issues addressed during the national debate last winter, following the yellow vest protests of late 2018. In a country where public spending is one of the highest in Western countries (56 percent of GPD),[152] people are pretty disappointed by the weakness of the state's policies, especially on health. A tax revolt was at the roots of the yellow vest movement in a country where the anti-fiscal sling has historically enjoyed great legitimacy. Protests against taxes also played a major role in the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789; and at the end of the 19th century, leagues of taxpayers mobilized against the state's tax claims and extended their action when income tax was introduced in 1907. It has resurfaced today, amid the pandemic. Many discovered on this occasion that France, for example, has only 5,000 resuscitation beds—four times fewer than in Germany. This situation has shocked the French in a country of both high level of tax and public spending, and this misunderstanding - challenges, once again, France's national model.

French peoples' distrust in society is a key driver of populism

Political mistrust is a fundamental movement that affects all democracies, and, in particular, affects confidence in institutions and governments. The French situation combines a twofold mistrust that is much stronger than that of our neighbors: distrust of the government, which has been confirmed by the health crisis, and distrust in interpersonal relations. If the French trust their family circle, they find it much more difficult to cooperate in a society with strangers. Only one French person in five says they can spontaneously trust others, compared with one Brit in two or two Danes in three. The French show a very high satisfaction rate when asked about their individual happiness but an incredible pessimism about their collective situation.[153] This is partly due to their mistrust of the rest of the population. Only half of the French population considers that their fellow Frenchmen have shown civic-mindedness during the lockdown, compared with 80 percent in Germany or the United Kingdom.

This distinction between the inner circle and the rest of society is reflected in trust in institutions: the French generally place their trust in their mayor, at a close local level, while mistrust increases as the institution moves further away. The country's very vertically organized and hierarchical structure has not allowed a strong civil society to flourish. This disfunction is evident in the French education system, where pedagogical practices are still marked by the reign of the lecture. In the Programme for International Student Assessment surveys, 70 percent of teenagers say they have never worked in groups on collective projects—a far contrast from the cooperative efforts observed in northern countries or even in Italy.[154] This vertical functioning is then found in companies with a degree of autonomy and delegation that is the lowest of all OECD countries and in a state where decision-making is highly centralized.

At every stage of their lives, the French are faced with a hierarchical power that does not cultivate mutual trust. The coronavirus crisis has also laid bare the mistrust of French institutions and government toward its own citizens. In no other country in Europe has the lockdown been accompanied by such bureaucratic surveillance, with multiple attestations to be signed for any permitted activity. This is a unique infantilization of the population, which reflects French authorities' lack of trust toward the citizens and their capacity for social cohesion. It is a brake on restoring citizens' confidence in democracy in order to combat the temptation of political authoritarianism that threatens the country.

In this context, it seems necessary to invent new ways of exercising democracy. Over the past two years, several experiments have been carried out in France to remedy this divide. In 2019, President Macron launched a national debate[155] throughout the country to enable citizens to express their priorities for the country. In 2020, a Citizen's Climate Convention debated for several months on solutions to the problem of climate change and drew up 149 proposals.[156] The yellow vest movement in 2018 called for the implementation of a citizens' initiative referendum to better take into account the expectations of the population. The referendum, which has not been used in France for 40 years (except on European treaties), is nevertheless a tool that has a long tradition in French political life and is rather defended by the conservatives (the first to use it was Bonaparte, hence its

political inscription on the right). For now, neither the great debate nor the citizens' convention have helped to overcome this mistrust, as few of the demands made by these bodies have so far led to political decisions. One of the main difficulties for this is that the French distrust not only the elites but also other citizens, making the decisions taken or demanded by some of their fellow citizens suspect. In this sense, reactivating the use of referendums would probably be more likely to renew the democratic link.

The fight against climate change, more than ever, as an opportunity for political differentiation

Between 2010 and 2020, climate change has emerged as the main environmental concern of the French.[157] This subject is now well ahead of natural disasters in polling responses. Indeed, the latter is proving to be less worrying than it was after storm Xynthia in 2010. Similarly, pollution of aquatic environments and the increase in household waste no longer seem to worry the French as much. However, citizens' sensitivity to environmental protection varies according to the socioeconomic context. When concerns about unemployment are high, the environment appears to be a less crucial issue. Conversely, the French are more concerned about environmental issues when the national economic situation improves. In fact, environmental awareness tended to decline after the 2008 crisis and in a context marked by the deterioration of the job market, while it has increased sharply over the past two years, when unemployment had been falling.

The French public has not yet been exposed to the potential seriousness of the economic situation thanks to government measures on partial unemployment. However, initial data on the economic impact of the lockdown shows that France has experienced one of the deepest recessions in Europe in the first half of the year. One explanation is linked to the structure of the French economy, which is highly dependent on tourism. Labor relations are another factor; the French are very reluctant to return to work because they are suspicious of the ability of companies to enforce health regulations.

The impact of the coronavirus crisis on unemployment levels, which began to show up in public opinion in September, relegates the climate issue to the background once again, from the second to the fourth most important issue.[158] This will likely occur despite the fact that climate change constitutes a strong dividing line between progressives and populists and allows the former to impose their own agenda on an issue to which the populists provide no response.[159] If climate change becomes less of a priority in France after this year's crisis, there will likely be a growing divide between the two camps, and positions are likely to become increasingly irreconcilable. That could make the climate issue all the more an opportunity for political distinction for progressives. In France, however, it is the environmentalist party that embodies this political issue, and it is tending more and more to tip over into radical opposition to President Macron. This political difficulty will therefore have to be resolved in French politics moving forward.

The path for a new progressive agenda

The world is likely experiencing a paradigm shift: a moment when a society redefines its hopes and fears, classically happening in the crucible of crises. Deep tensions exist between health and work during the COVID-19 pandemic: two rival definitions of security are at play, one older and one newer. To gain protection against some risks, we inevitably must expose ourselves to others. This is the core dilemma for numerous countries between returning to work or remaining confined. Today's dominant paradigm, directed toward low unemployment, is severely tested by the pandemic. Society's tolerance for environmental and sanitary disasters has become narrower, and some risks we lived with in the past are now unacceptable—and the 20th-century paradigm shaped around economic security cannot generate credible solutions alone. Moreover, a belief in prosperity, the very cornerstone of the 20th-century paradigm, is no longer convincing to many people. Growth may exacerbate regional, urban, and environmental problems; but without growth, the cost of confronting global warming—not to mention aging populations, emerging health problems, or the artificial intelligence revolution—will be more difficult.

The struggle to reconcile economic and environmental objectives is an intellectually sophisticated effort marked more by trade-offs than win-win outcomes. For the progressives in many countries, this means the construction of a new political coalition that allows this compromise.

In France, with the election of Macron in 2017, the political landscape is restructured into three poles: an ecosocialist democratic left, a globalizing liberal center, and an identity-conservative right.

This recomposition has taken place under the influence of two cleavages—one dominantly cultural (cosmopolitan versus identity-based) and the other dominantly economic-social (anti-globalization versus liberal). Alongside the two poles of the main cleavage between national identities and liberal-globalizers, an ecological pole is developing that is likely to gather left-wing voters who despair of its current leaders and parties to take their concerns into account.

In order to advance a progressive agenda, the issue is therefore to succeed in the fusion or alliance between the historical left-wing movements and these new ecological currents. The advantage of this strategy is its sociological complementarity: on the one hand, environmentalist parties attract a young, educated, urban electorate that leans to the left but is not always easy to mobilize and is sometimes tempted by a radical left that is less and less in a position of exercising power but of purely expressing protest. On the other hand, the traditional parties of the social-democratic left could focus on winning back its historic electorate, namely the working and middle classes.

In parliamentary democracies that use proportional representation, it is relatively easy to imagine such an alliance being established through government agreements. In countries that use majority voting, such as France, this is done through alliances between the two rounds. It has been done in several cities during this year's municipal elections, as in Paris, Lyon, or Montpellier.

This union between social democrats and ecologists is not new in France. But since the local elections of 2020, it has taken on new strength for two main reasons. First, because this alliance is no longer just a rallying point for ecologists and socialists as a back-up force to win a runoff and thus a simple support for the social-democratic social political agenda. The balance of power between the Socialist party and the Greens is now more balanced and is therefore, depending on the territories, behind a leader who is sometimes socialist but sometimes also ecologist. In the 2020 local elections, it allowed the left to win the election, both with a socialist candidate as Anne Hidalgo in Paris or green candidates as Grégory Doucet in Lyon or Michaël Delafosse in Montpellier.

On the other hand, part of the French population seems tired of the old political parties and is looking for new forms of organization. In this context, greens have appeared to be better able to embody this political renewal than the Socialist party, which is perceived nationally as a party of the last century, and their alliance makes it possible to get around this obstacle.

However, what this implies for the progressive movement is to rethink its place within the political landscape in depth, integrating environmental policies much more strongly into it. It is a question of finding a historic compromise between the usual priorities of the social democrats (the search for growth, increased employment, and improved working conditions for workers) and those of the greens, the preservation of the environment, of course, but also the defense of minorities (ethnic or sexual) or the fight against gender inequality.

This task will not be easy and today may be more feasible to implement in metropolitan areas, as was the case before, than at the national level. It is not only a question of promoting these new stakes for progressives but also, above all, of thinking about how to reconcile them so as not to abandon historical objectives that are more topical than ever with the post-COVID-19 economic crisis. If they don't, it could be deceptive for a popular electorate that has never enjoyed abundance and pushes it even more toward populist political offers.

COVID-19 IN HUNGARY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRESSIVES

Dávid Dorosz, Krisztina Hegedűs, Dániel Prinz, Dániel Róna, and László Sebián-Petrovszki

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Hungary at a unique moment in the evolution of the current political regime. Since coming to power in 2010, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's government has sought to build a new political system that he calls "illiberal" democracy.[160] By the fall of 2019, the illiberal project was nearly complete in Hungary: The government and the governing party controlled all nominally independent institutions and the vast majority of even nominally independent media. This centralized power structure is complemented by an extensive system of graft and a new oligarchy.

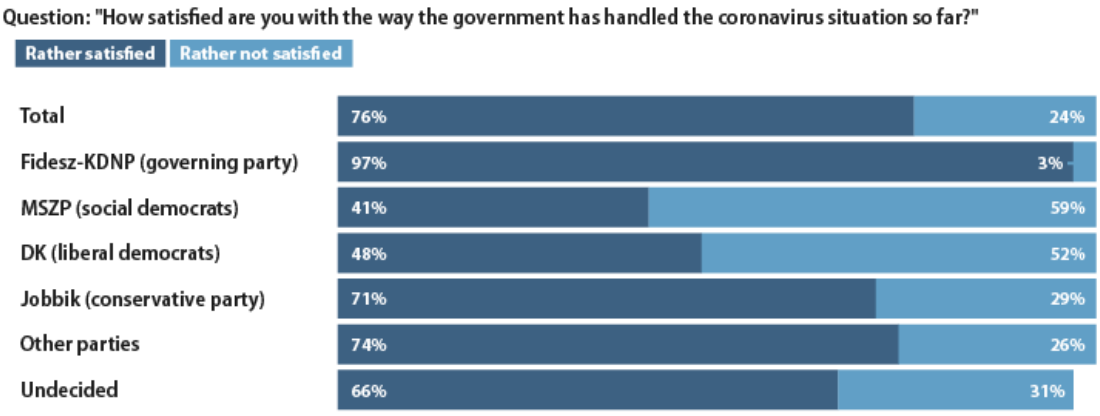
But the October 2019 municipal elections posed a unique challenge to the government: While the government's side still received the majority of votes in national elections, opposition parties won elections in a number of larger cities and in the country's capital. In this sense, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the government at a vulnerable time. The government's public health and economic response was slow, and when the government did finally respond, it invested heavily in publicity rather than in effectively addressing the challenges facing Hungarians. Yet despite these failures, according to current polling data, the government's crisis management is still viewed positively by a slight majority. (see Figures 1 and 2)

The recovery from COVID-19 in Hungary has played out within the post-2010 Hungarian illiberal democracy and against the backdrop of recent wins for progressives in local elections. This paper discusses the government's economic and social response to the pandemic and identifies opportunities for progressive alternatives in the short and long term.

FIGURE 1

Voters from the governing party in Hungary are very satisfied with the government's handling of the pandemic, while other voters are much less satisfied

Hungarian satisfaction with how parties have handled the pandemic



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Source: Nagy B. György, "A remény rabjai a magyarok - felmérés a kormányról, az egészségügyről és a hitről" (Budapest: Publicus-Népszava, 2020), available at https://nepszava.hu/3072220_a-remeny-rabjai-a-magyarok-felmeres-a-kormanyrol-az-egeszsegugyrol-es-a-hitrol.

FIGURE 2

Most Hungarians feel confident that the government can handle the virus

Perceptions of the government's ability to handle COVID-19, March 2020

Permission granted by *Népszava*.

Source: Nagy B. György, "A remény rabjai a magyarok - felmérés a kormányról, az egészségügyről és a hitről" (Budapest: Publicus-Népszava, 2020), available at https://nepszava.hu/3072220_a-remeny-rabjai-a-magyarok-felmeres-a-kormanyrol-az-egeszsegugyrol-es-a-hitrol.

Hungary's illiberal turn since 2010

Since coming to power in 2010, Prime Minister Orbán has systematically changed Hungary's political system. As a result, in the past decade Hungary has turned from a functional democracy into a hybrid regime where free and fair political competition is limited. This democratic backsliding has been extensively illustrated by the drop in the country's ranking in international democracy (Freedom House gave Hungary's democracy 49 points out of 100 and categorized it as a transitional or hybrid regime;[161] among European Union member states, Hungary came last in the Global Freedom Status index[162]) and in the freedom of press reports (On the World Press Freedom Index, Hungary ranked 73rd in 2018 and 89th in 2020).[163]

These changes are motivated by the ever-growing concentration of power and are complemented by the rise of a new oligarchy, intimately connected with Orbán's inner circle. In our view, the erosion of the core functions of a democratic state—rule of law, free speech, etc.—is inherently intertwined with the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small group of oligarchs and even the prime minister's family. From this perspective, the story of Hungary's past 10 years could be viewed as a classic case of state capture.

The move toward illiberal democracy and the concentration of power in Hungary is demonstrated by several events:

- The government's introduction of a new electoral system in 2011, which represented a strong move toward majoritarian representation and gave an edge to Fidesz, the ruling party, over the opposition. The unfair system has been plagued by serious gerrymandering. For example, if the opposition receives 48 percent of the popular vote and the government 45 percent, it will probably result in the same number of seats. The opposition needs to have an even bigger advantage in order to gain a majority.
- The appointment of Fidesz politicians, former members of Parliament (MPs), and other friendly figures to institutions that are supposed to operate as checks and balances, including the president, the prosecutor general, the Constitutional Court, the National Office for the Judiciary, and the State Audit Office, among others.
- The extending of control over most of the country's media. The extensive and well-financed public television and radio networks operate as mouthpieces of the government, and oligarchs closely associated with the government control most of the private networks and online and print outlets.
- The establishment of a new oligarchy financed through extensive graft, including from development funding from the EU.
- The use of extensive advertisement campaigns financed from public funds to support the government's narrative, including campaigns against the EU, George Soros, nongovernmental organizations, and refugees. During the 2018 national election campaign, the government outspent the entire opposition by a margin of 10 to 1.

The government's political base

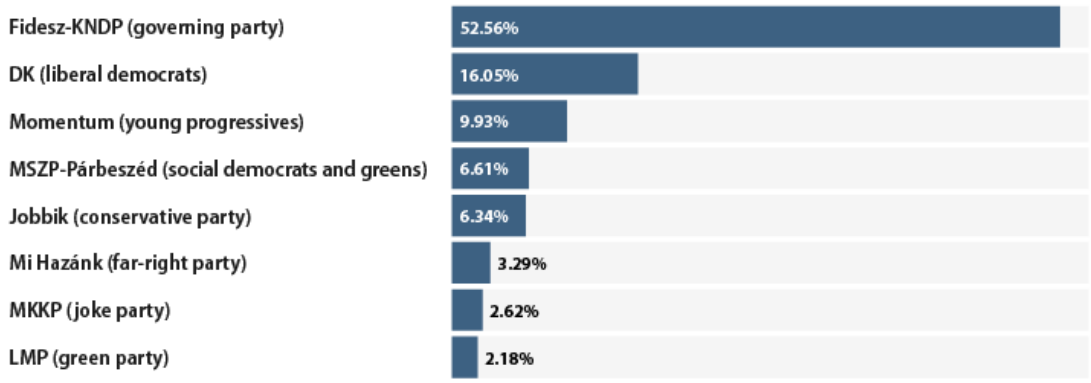
The government's popularity has fluctuated somewhat since 2010: It received 53 percent of the popular vote in 2010, 45 percent in 2014, and 49 percent in 2018. Yet due to changes in electoral law, the government has maintained its supermajority in parliament and has asserted tight control over the country. The ruling party currently controls about 50 percent of the popular vote versus 50 percent of the public, which supports the divided opposition. For example, in the May 2019 European Parliament election (which is a purely proportional election), Fidesz received 53 percent of the vote, while various opposition parties captured between 16 percent and 2 percent between seven different parties.[164] (see Figure 3) Fidesz's lead is considerably smaller among Hungarian expats, although it is still the most popular party followed by Momentum Movement and the Democratic Coalition (DK). (see Figure 4 for the results of the 2019 European Parliament elections among people who cast their ballots at foreign missions) Thus, Fidesz's high popularity can be partly explained by its huge advantage in resources such as media and money—but it is the most popular party even among those who use websites as a primary source of information. (Online media outlets are much less controlled or influenced by the government than traditional media outlets, according to an independent media analysis group.[165])

In the October 2019 municipal election, an opposition coalition was able to capture several major urban centers and Budapest; the countryside, however, is still dominated by Fidesz. These results put Fidesz into a somewhat vulnerable position (although it is still clearly more popular than the progressive opposition) and may serve as a springboard for future challenges, including in the 2022 general elections. Opposition parties will likely need to unify to build stronger support.

FIGURE 3

The governing party in Hungary, Fidesz, received a majority of votes last year

Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections in Hungary



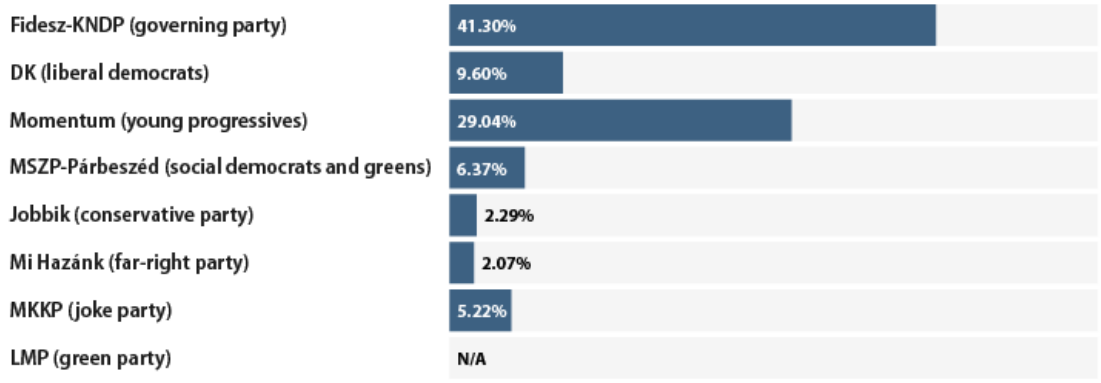
These data are publicly available in Hungary.

Source: Hungarian National Election Office, "Európai parlamenti képviselők választása 2019 - külképviseleti szavazási adatok," available at https://www.valasztas.hu/kulkepviseleti-szavazas-eredmenye_ep2019 (last accessed December 2020).

FIGURE 4

Support for the progressive party in Hungary was much higher among those who cast their ballots at foreign missions

Results of the 2019 European Parliament elections in Hungary from those who voted abroad



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There are several factors behind the popularity of Prime Minister Orbán and his ruling party, Fidesz. One of the most important factors is the economic vote. Since 2014, Hungary's economy has produced stable economic growth—around 4 percent in most years, the first period of sustained growth since the early 2000s. More importantly, before COVID-19 hit Hungary, most people perceived their economic situation to be better than (or at least as good as) the previous year. This growth has been partially fueled by the influx of significant EU funds as well as a favorable international environment. But the current crisis and its associated economic downturn will make it challenging for the government to maintain its popularity among those whose support is based on the economic security it provides.

As the largest party, Fidesz is popular among all strata of the society. Surprisingly enough, among all groups, the underclass is the most predictably pro-government: Approximately 70 percent of people with low levels of education, low-income workers, public workers, Romani citizens, and people living in small towns support the government. One possible reason for this is voter intimidation: Underprivileged citizens are the most exposed to intimidation. This does not necessarily mean violence or direct threats (e.g., the threat of losing a job) but rather that many towns are run by a loyalist mayor who sets the rules and norms for the public sphere, and that can influence voter's perceived choices. Another component is media bias: The reach of the government media is much bigger, in general, and is especially dominant in the countryside. Overall, small villages tend to be more conservative, traditionalist, and religious—not just in Hungary. Finally, the economic vote theory also applies to these voters: Before COVID-19 hit Hungary, only 30 percent of the underclass felt that their economic situation had deteriorated recently.

COVID-19 and recent developments

Since early March, the government has shifted gears. Using the fight against the virus as pretext and under the cover of the pandemic-focused public attention, Prime Minister Orbán has further concentrated power. For example, during the first two months following the onset of the crisis, the government has introduced new laws that:

- Allowed indefinite rule by decree on matters related to the virus broadly defined
- Further eroded the transparency of public spending

- Made the financial details of the Sino-Hungarian Budapest-Belgrade railway project—part of the Belt and Road Initiative—a state secret (the project will likely result in huge financial gains for Fidesz-friendly oligarchs)
- Reallocated tax revenues from local municipalities to the central government—a move that hurts municipalities run by newly elected opposition mayors
- Banned the previously allowed official change of gender
- Adopted a political declaration to reject the Istanbul Convention that combats violence against women
- Cut 2020 public funding for parties into half, which hurts opposition parties enormously
- Arrested some local opposition figures with the (false) charges of "fearmongering" and "posting fake news"[166]

This activism, however, may well have come to an end for the time being. In June, the parliament revoked the enabling act introduced when COVID-19 hit Hungary.

On the public health side, Hungary was relatively successful in handling the pandemic during the first wave of infections. The infection and death rates were under control, especially compared with other European countries. It was partly due to the fact that soon after the first positive cases were detected, the government shut down schools and imposed a lockdown on the whole country. Apart from essential services and workers, everyone else was urged to stay at home. However, the government seems less successful in handling the second wave of infections, which has been unfolding since the beginning of September. It was clear that the lockdown imposed during the spring hit the economy very harshly—and consequently, the government has concluded that imposing such strict restrictions cannot be the solution once again. Therefore, as of writing (late October 2020), there have not been strict restrictions imposed, and in line with that we have been seeing a drastic increase both in the number of new infections as well as deaths. The trajectory is similar in the other Visegrad 4 countries, although the situation in Poland and the Czech Republic is clearly worse at this point.

By the end of October 2020, there have been around 66 000 people diagnosed with the virus in Hungary, even though many believe this number to be higher. Hungary has a poor performance in terms of testing capacity: Among 48 European countries, Hungary is only at the 42th place in the ranking of number of tests per 1 million people.[167] Given the sufficient technologies and infrastructures, Hungary has not managed to prepare for the second wave of the pandemic appropriately, and it's clearly alarming whether the health care system will be able to handle the worsening situation.

Progressive opportunities in national politics

Progressive leaders can do very little about many of the fundamental factors that allow the government to use its powers to consistently appeal to constituents. But there are plenty of other things they can do.

First, progressives should make it a priority to clearly communicate policies to the underclass and the countryside a priority. Most opposition MPs are from Budapest, and the party organizations are also concentrated in the capital. All too often, opposition messaging targets intellectuals, and even the language used is hard to comprehend for everyday Hungarians. Progressives should focus on reaching these populations as effectively as the government does to explain how the progressive agenda works.

Disengaged Hungarians are another neglected group. Opposition parties often aim to mobilize their core supporters by offering harsh criticism of Orbán's anti-democratic measures. But disinterested and disaffected people are not mobilized by messages about democratic institutions or by ideological and historical debates (or even by crying "dictatorship"). Instead, these voters care about the economy, health care, and other everyday issues. The progressive opposition should make these issues central to its agenda.

Finally, message discipline is not a strong suit of the opposition. Most opposition politicians change their message very often, and daily press releases and interviews fail to create a comprehensive narrative. Fidesz, on the other hand, offers a stable, comprehensive narrative which is reflected in most of its statements.

As a result, most people are well aware what the intentions of Orbán are—but only a few know what the opposition stands for. Unifying around common themes and campaign ideas will be key to developing a progressive narrative that appeals to all Hungarians.

Four avenues present themselves to progressives at the national level:

- Collaborate with NGOs to expand access to independent news everywhere. Modeled on the award-winning NGO, "Print It Yourself!" ("Nyomtass Te is!"), progressives should prioritize expanding access to independent journalism across the country. The bottleneck is not the existence of high-quality reporting on government corruption or economic and social problems but the lack of access to that reporting. Creating a platform that expands access to independent news sources would solve this problem. Opposition parties should finance this platform jointly and allow independent NGOs to manage it.
- Launch a campaign for free and fair public media. The government's takeover of widely accessible public media as a regime mouthpiece makes it more difficult for progressives to get their message across. Moreover, it is in the interest of all opposition parties to make public media free and fair. There are several opportunities to campaign for free and fair outlets because the operations of public media can be challenged legally and through activism.
- Establish a local presence everywhere. To grow support for progressive policies, opposition parties need to find creative ways to establish face-to-face presence everywhere. Now-French President Emmanuel Macron's Grand Marche could serve as an example of a campaign that explicitly centered around learning citizen's concerns while facilitating face-to-face interactions. The opposition party Momentum's consultations and attempts at establishing action groups in different places to solve local problems are also good examples but need to be expanded and systematized.
- Use municipal governments to make the case for progressive politics. Municipal governments have the ability to implement progressive initiatives (such as the basic incomes initiatives implemented in several districts of Budapest) in order to show what the progressive opposition parties would do at the national level and to demonstrate their ability to govern.

It is worth questioning whether October 2019 is a turning point. The progressive fight in Budapest and the municipalities in the recent elections were the first time the opposition managed to stage a concerted challenge against Orbán. These elections made the weak spots of the political system and culture created by Orbán painfully apparent and resulted in flipping Budapest and 12 of the country's 23 biggest cities back to the opposition. This was the first crack in the wall that has injected new energy into opposition forces, and could be used as a springboard for more progressive policies at the municipal level.

Although the aim of the new mayor of Budapest was to have a normal partnership with the government, the first electoral defeat for Orbán's party in nine years did not change the government's hostile attitude to the opposition. To prove the supposed incompetence of the opposition-led municipal governments, the government reduced municipal autonomy, cut local governments' funding, and used every opportunity to blame elected local leaders of the opposition for each and every issue. The government routinely mentions the opposition's responsibility and inability to solve problems to deflect blame from their own policy failures.

As the directly elected leader of the capital, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony is effectively the leader of the opposition in the sense that he has by far the most media appearances, both in the independent media and the government-controlled outlets. Representing the people of Budapest, Karácsony has sought to negotiate with the government on key issues rather than simply oppose. For example, the capital has the most sport investments in the country, making it very important for Orbán's ambitions. But Karácsony has called for prioritizing the development of health care, public transport, and green areas first and said sports investments should come only after these are funded.

Four strategic priorities guide the progressive agenda in Budapest:

- Implementing progressive policies locally. The municipality of Budapest implements progressive policies locally and encourages districts of the city and other municipalities to do the same. There is a strong emphasis on involving NGOs in local decision-making and using participatory budgeting to better involve citizens in the process of deciding how public money is spent. To fight against social

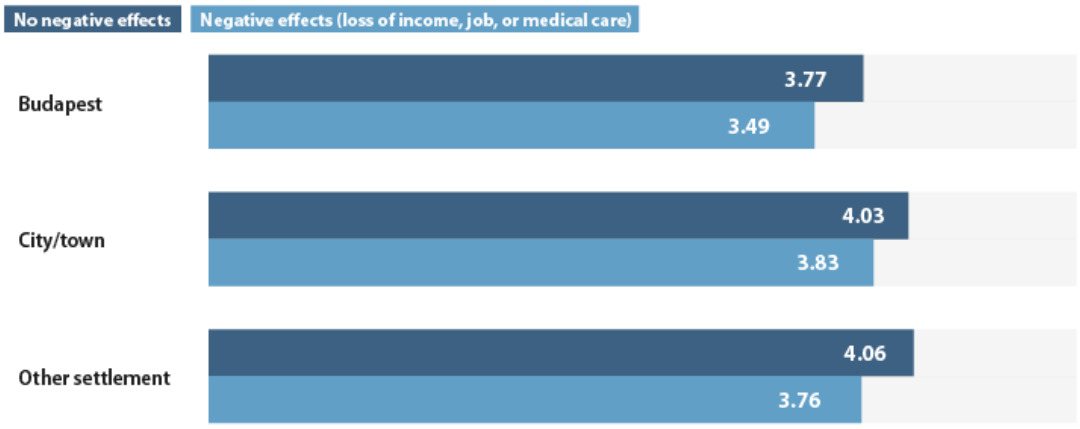
inequalities, the municipality offered rent allowance to those citizens who were negatively affected by the pandemic and renewed 70 flats to provide safe temporary placement for homeless people.

- Staying ahead of the government. During the pandemic, the municipality of Budapest was always one step ahead the government: Budapest closed theatres and cinemas before the government decided to; when there were not enough masks for citizens, Budapest ordered them from abroad; and the municipality not only urged the government to take up COVID-19 testing spots in the country but was also first in organizing those spots. (For people's opinion on how satisfied they were with the actions of the local government, see Figure 5)
- Increasing the city's independence from the government. Budapest's progressive leadership has taken steps to increase the city's economic independence from the state. The municipality places strong emphasis on lobbying European institutions in order to convince them to give direct access to funds from the European Green Deal to large cities such as Budapest at the forefront of climate protection.
- Creating international visibility. The city increased its efforts to become more visible at international level, and the mayors of Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava, and Budapest signed the "Pact of Free Cities" against populist national governments in the Visegrad 4 (V4) region, (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary are often being referred to as the V4 group given their geographic closeness to each other as well as the fact that they usually share the same views on European issues.)

FIGURE 5

Hungarian respondents' satisfaction with the government response to the pandemic varies by where they live in Hungary

Satisfaction with local government responses to COVID-19 — average values on a scale of 1 to 5



Permission granted by Tárki Social Research Institute.

Source: Tárki Social Research Institute, "Economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic: distribution and opinion of the involved parties on the measures accompanying the epidemic" (Budapest: 2020), available at https://tarki.hu/sites/default/files/2020-07/-Covid_ENG_fin_FB.pdf.

COVID-19 and Hungary's economy: Challenges and progressive responses

The exact size of the economic downturn resulting from the pandemic is hard to predict. The Hungarian government's most recent prediction is that in 2020, the economy will contract between 7 and 9 percent of GDP.[168] The European Commission predicts a 7 percent contraction in 2020, followed by 6.3 percent growth in 2021.[169] The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected a 2.8 percent contraction in 2020, followed by 4.2 percent growth in 2021.[170] Crucially, the size of the economic downturn depends on the dynamics of the pandemic, the outside economic environment, and the government's economic policy response.

Compared with the 2008 crisis, Hungary is facing the current crisis with low budget deficits and a better ability to implement appropriate economic and social policies from a budgetary point of view. The key challenge is that the government has built a case for work-based society over the past 10 years, making the country more unequal and implementing several key policies that are essentially regressive. The government's economic and social policy framework is not well suited to deal with the current crisis.

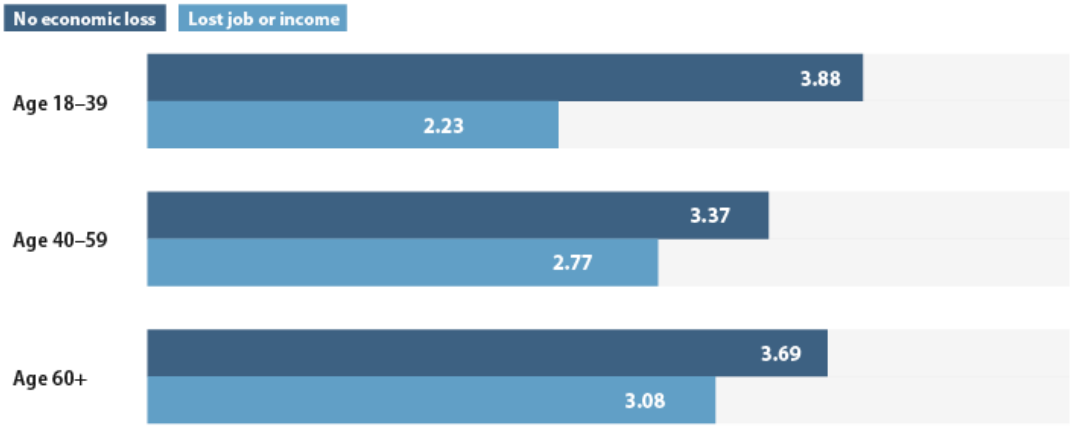
Evaluating the government's economic and social policy response

The government's economic and social policy response has been slow and insufficient in size, and it has failed to address job losses and social problems. Its budgetary resources are also poorly structured. Overall, the government's response fails to sufficiently cushion the economy and protect jobs and people, and it risks sustained and otherwise avoidable damage to Hungary's economy. (On how satisfied people were and are with the measures introduced by the government, see Figure 6)

FIGURE 6

Hungarian respondents' satisfaction with the government's response to the pandemic varies by age range

Satisfaction with economic measures — with average values on a scale of 1 to 5, by age segments



Permission granted by Tárki Social Research Institute.

Source: Tárki Social Research Institute, "Economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic: distribution and opinion of the involved parties on the measures accompanying the epidemic" (Budapest: 2020), available at https://tarki.hu/sites/default/files/2020-07/-Covid_ENG_fin_FB.pdf.

Hungary's government was slow in announcing its economic policy response relative to its regional counterparts. Hungary's main economic response package came one to three weeks after measures were announced in Austria, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, and Poland. The total size of the response is still considerably smaller than those of other countries.

While other countries are financing large fiscal responses from substantial increases to their budget deficits, Hungary's government is proposing to fund its response largely from taxes and the reallocation of budgetary funds without much new spending. Most likely for political reasons, budget reallocations include substantial cuts of local government budgets and a 50 percent cut in state funds allocated to political parties. The latter measure represents just 3.4 million euros—0.2 percent of the costs of the government's plan—but puts opposition parties on the brink of bankruptcy.

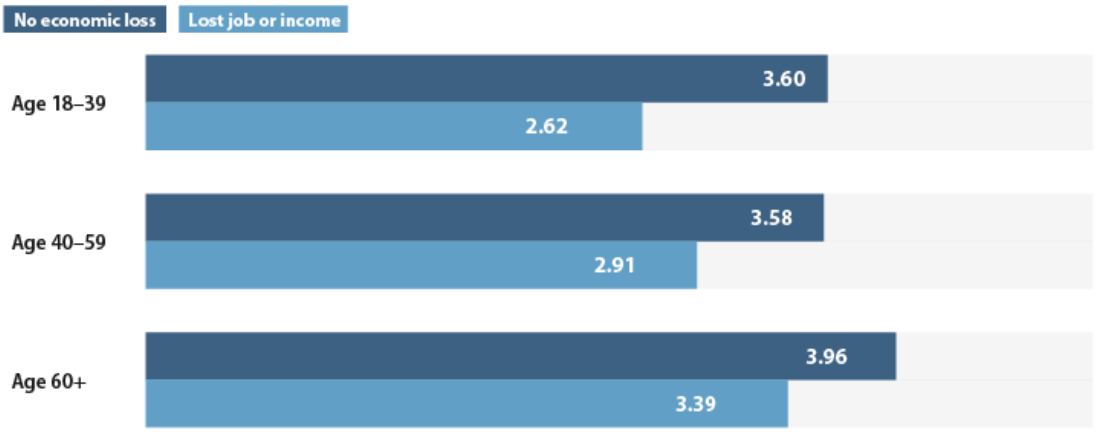
The government is doing much less to protect jobs than most of the region. Hungary's government passed "a special Hungarian version of Kurzarbeit"[171] that is limited to employers that reduce working hours by at least 15 percent but no more than 75 percent, compensates 70 percent of the lost working hours for three months, and comes with a complex application procedure that runs the risk of funds being allocated in a nontransparent and inefficient way. Payments are capped at 315 euros.

The government has also not adopted any measures that would address the needs of the large number of Hungarians who face job loss. The three-month duration of unemployment insurance was already the shortest in the EU pre-crisis, and no extension has been announced. There have been no announcements of any substantial income support programs to support families in need either. The government has instead focused on a program work-based society: The idea is that people should not get government transfers unless they work. (On how satisfied people were with the medical care provided by the government, see Figure 7)

FIGURE 7

Older people in Hungary tend to be more satisfied with the state's health measures in response to COVID-19

Satisfaction with health measures — with average values on a scale of 1 to 5, by age segments



Permission granted by Tárki Social Research Institute.

Source: Tárki Social Research Institute, "Economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic: distribution and opinion of the involved parties on the measures accompanying the epidemic" (Budapest: 2020), available at https://tarki.hu/sites/default/files/2020-07/-Covid_ENG_fin_FB.pdf.

There is, however, a progressive alternative to the current policy, one defined by three strategic priorities that progressives should pursue: fast and determined action, social solidarity, and budget restructuring.

In the current situation, policymakers should not be searching for the perfect measures but instead should act fast. Inaction and even slow decisions are going to be costly, as economic linkages are constantly decaying. Measures that are not large enough will not be sufficient to cushion the economy. The economic downturn is causing a social crisis which creates new challenges for social policy. Therefore, more progressive social policies are needed, including the widening and deepening of the safety net along with more progressive taxation. Failure to implement such social policies now will create economic damage in the longer term.

The government needs to relax its relatively strict budget policy to finance critical economic and social policy measures. A restructuring of the budget needs to rely on a combination of increased tax progressivity, reallocation of funds from less urgent needs, and, perhaps most importantly, the loosening of tight budget rules.

Economic policy

If employers let workers go and companies collapse, the costs of restarting them will be very high. Therefore, the government's goal should be preventing the collapse of otherwise sound companies and preventing mass layoffs. Key measures that the government should implement in this area include a broad wage guarantee program based on Germany's Kurzarbeit, opening credit lines and even transfers to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), replacing lost income with expanded unemployment insurance and other transfer programs, and strengthening active labor market policies.

Social policy

The economic downturn is likely to create mass unemployment and even poverty. Workers are going to be furloughed and laid off. Since people are facing substantial fixed expenses such as rent, food, and mortgages, the government needs to implement programs to help people directly. Key measures that the government should implement in this area include increasing cash benefits for families, focusing help for the poorest areas, transfers to municipalities and NGOs earmarked for helping the most vulnerable groups, and introducing some form of guaranteed minimum income.

Budget restructuring and expansion

To implement the necessary economic and social policies, the government should restructure the budget, create progressive revenue sources, and, perhaps most importantly, use expansionary policies. At this time, the government has fiscal space to increase spending, even if it requires temporary increases in the budget deficit. Key measures that the government should implement in this area include reviewing spending items in the budget and reconsidering low-return expenditure items; introducing more progressive taxes; and financing increased spending from temporary deficits as necessary.

What can be done at the European level?

The Eurosceptic discourse of the Hungarian government is quite surprising in view of the substantial financial support arriving from the EU. Hungary has been allocated 25 billion euros from the European structural and investment funds between 2014 and 2020. With a national contribution of 4.63 billion euros, Hungary had a total budget of 29.63 billion euros to be invested in various areas, including infrastructure networks in transport and energy, SME competitiveness, employment measures, environmental protection measures, the low-carbon economy, research and innovation, as well as investments in social inclusion and education.

Still, the government is moving away from the widely recognized interpretation of democracy, rule of law, and respect for fundamental rights and finds itself on a collision course with the EU and many of its member states.

The ineffectiveness of EU action toward Hungary is all too apparent. The flaws of the institutional design of the EU, and the powers given to it by its member states, proved insufficient to deal with the rule of law crisis in Hungary. While the EU is founded on the principles of democracy, rule of law, and the respect of fundamental rights, it was given limited powers to address systemic threats to these values by a member state—so few that only one tool is available under the EU treaties to capture these systemic threats.

For this reason, the key goal of the Hungarian opposition parties was to have this systemic threat recognized by EU institutions for many years. The European Parliament triggered the infamous Article 7 procedure under the Treaty on the European Union in 2018, but negotiations in the council to determine the existence of a clear risk of a serious breach of the values by Hungary remain inconclusive to date. In this regard, the expectations toward the incoming German presidency are therefore quite high. However, given the institutional design of the EU, the success of Article 7 is dubious.

It is not clear what the opposition should do about this tension. An overwhelming majority of Hungarian society supports EU-membership, and public trust toward EU institutions is generally higher than that of national institutions. And yet, Orbán's anti-EU rhetoric also perceived well by the electorate.

While the best way to leverage Europe domestically may be up for debate, there are still five clear policies that could be pursued by partners at the European law to help underwrite democracy in Hungary:

- Ensure stringent and enforceable rule of law conditionality for the use of EU funds. With negotiations underway on the seven-year budget of the union, the Multiannual Financial Framework, and a proposal on rule of law conditionality on the table, the opposition parties are in a good position to push for such a regulation through contacts with council and their respective political groups in the European Parliament.
- Push for Hungary's membership in the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO). The task of the EPPO is to investigate and prosecute fraud against the EU budget and other crimes against the EU's financial interests, including fraud concerning EU funds of more than 10,000 euros. Given the lack of independence of the Hungarian public prosecutor and its consequent inaction in investigating and prosecuting the business circles of Fidesz for mismanaging and misappropriating EU funds, having EU competence in Hungary in this regard would be of key importance. Applying pressure on the government to join EPPO and finding ways to link the use of EU funds to EPPO membership in EU legislation is a worthy cause to follow.
- Direct EU funds for local governments. The government allocates EU funds along pre-agreed objectives with the EU. Municipal governments led by opposition parties face a precarious situation with measures taken by the Hungarian government and budget cuts but no prospects of receiving EU funds. Therefore, it is crucial that parts of the EU funds allocated to Hungary are directly managed by the European Commission and made available for these municipal governments.
- Reframe the debate on the state of the rule of law in Hungary. Most of the debates in the EU focus on the state of the rule of law, but it is rarely debated why the state of the rule of law in a member state is so important for the proper functioning of the EU. In its ground-breaking ruling of June 24, 2019, on the Supreme Court of Poland, the Court of Justice of the European Union opened a new way for scrutinizing rule of law in a member state. The court said that under the EU treaties, all national courts are EU courts with the responsibility of ensuring the full application of EU law and of providing remedies sufficient to ensure effective judicial protection for individuals in the fields covered by EU law. In essence, it established that assessing the independence of the judiciary is a fair game for the EU and, more specifically, for the court itself. This should change how the state of the rule of law is viewed in Hungary.
- Leverage the Conference on the Future of Europe. The two-year conference would have been launched on May 9, 2020, but was postponed due to the pandemic. Preparations are underway, and the current European Commission is determined to kick-start it as soon as possible even though officials are still divided on which European leader should preside over the debates. The aim of this conference is to assess the current EU treaties and legislation and find the issues where reform is needed. While Hungarian opposition parties may have diverging political aims in what they hope to achieve during these two years, reforming the Article 7 procedure and expanding the scope of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU seem to be a common denominator.

Other policy objectives would involve the EU's direct financial assistance to Hungarian media outlets suffering under the Fidesz regime as well as to political parties whose financial situation is more and more dependent on action taken by state authorities captured by Fidesz.

Besides the possible policy objectives, the main political goal for the opposition should be the expulsion of Fidesz from the European People's Party (EPP). For many years, the EPP willingly stood by the Hungarian government, protecting its destructive policies. Before the European Parliament elections, the EPP suspended Fidesz's membership from the party, which many saw as electoral maneuvering. Since this suspension did not entail their suspension from the EPP group in the European Parliament. As a result, they were given important positions in the parliamentary committees in the new legislature. A decision on renewing the EPP's suspension has been postponed several times, and their status remains up in the air.[172]

Toward a new progressive narrative in Hungary

Progressive politics in Hungary faces a number of interrelated challenges. The government has established an illiberal regime that leaves few opportunities for its opposition. The progressive opposition is also fragmented and has access to very limited resources. Yet as the October 2019 municipal elections showed, it is possible for the opposition to win elections and gain political ground even under these difficult circumstances. Unsurprisingly, the government since then has been trying to make the opposition's work harder in a number of ways, but the COVID-19 pandemic has also created opportunities for progressives to push progressive policy ideas forward. Going forward, it will be crucial for progressives to establish more extensive cooperation and build a narrative that is robust enough to take on the government.

This narrative needs to be able to speak to broad swaths of the population and offer opportunities for progress at the municipal and European levels (where progressives are currently represented) in order to make progressives stronger at the national level. One such narrative—which could be supported by various forces in the fragmented opposition and also has the ability to speak to the Hungarian population—is the narrative of a new justice and fairness. Justice can incorporate anti-corruption with possible action at the municipal and European level and promised swift action at the national level when progressives come into power. But fairness can also motivate offering a fair deal to all Hungarians through progressive economic and social policies that can already be implemented at the municipal level. The word "justice" is very popular—albeit slightly idealist.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Iván Hóka for his valuable help in their study.

BE BOLD, OR REMAIN SILENT FOREVER: RESHAPING THE FUTURE OF PROGRESSIVE POLITICS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Hans Anker

On the eve of a new parliamentary election on March 17, 2021, it is hard to understand contemporary Dutch politics, and especially the position of progressives, without understanding the impact of the assassination of Pim Fortuyn in 2002. The flamboyantly gay Fortuyn was a populist maverick who successfully cast himself as the playful alternative to a class of boring technocratic leaders who spanned the entire political spectrum from left to right. Fortuyn's message consisted of a powerful two-pronged argument, focusing first on the welfare state's inability to provide essential social services—especially loving elderly care—in spite of massive public wealth as indicated by a budget surplus, and second on putting an end to immigration. This message resonated very strongly then and still does today.

Just minutes before Fortuyn was shot, a young reporter from a youth station asked him if he supported the idea of reducing the ticket price for movie theatres. "No way," he snapped. "Are you out of your mind? You guys should find a job, make yourself useful and stop whining. Go fill the shelves in the grocery store. Work hard, study hard, and have some fun once in a while, that's all fine…as long as you use your own money to pay for it."

High-ranking Labour politicians confided to me afterwards that they were jealous of Fortuyn's candid answer. They knew that, if asked the same question, they would not have dared to press Fortuyn's streetwise reciprocity buttons. Instead, they would have found themselves pandering to the youth vote, by lamenting the fact that prices were going up (who the hell knew, anyway?) and that the government should do something about it.

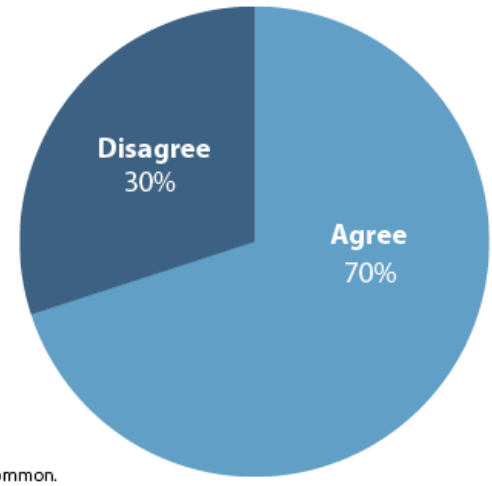
Fast forward to 2020: today, a whopping 70 percent of the Dutch electorate subscribes to the view that, in order to put the country in order, the Netherlands needs a leader who is willing to break the rules. (see Figure 1)

FIGURE 1

There is clear support in the Netherlands for a strong leader in government

Share of Dutch respondents who believe the Netherlands needs a strong leader who is willing to break the rules

Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
Statement: 'To put the Netherlands in order, we need a strong leader who is willing to break the rules.'" (N = 2,006)



Permission granted by More in Common.
Source: More in Common, "The New Normal?" (2020), available at https://www.moreincommon.com/media/y2clqzwx/more-in-common-the-new-normal-comparative-7-country-en.pdf.

This broad desire for a strong man raises the question: Where did Dutch progressives' messaging fail to resonate, and what does the future of progressive politics look like?

Electoral support for the PvdA, 2002 to 2020

Over the past two decades, the PvdA has experienced many ups and downs in electoral support. But over time, the party's detractors appear to be winning. (see Figure 2) Following a resounding defeat in the election following Fortuyn's assassination, the PvdA staged an impressive comeback. With new party leader Wouter Bos, they almost succeeded in making the PvdA the largest party in the country, in what would have undoubtedly been the most dramatic political comeback in Dutch political history.[173]

The party reached its next peak in 2006, when it successfully framed the municipal elections as a referendum on the embarrassing existence of food banks in such a wealthy society. The party, however, failed to sustain this stratospheric level of support, and the 2006 parliamentary elections brought a disappointing result. This did not stop the PvdA from reentering government, as the party benefited from one of the major quirks of the Dutch political system: Electoral outcomes are not always reflected in the composition of the government that follows.

After joining government, the party began hemorrhaging votes again. For the 2010 parliamentary elections, the party engineered a solution by changing its leader: Wouter Bos was out, replaced by popular Amsterdam Mayor Job Cohen. The ploy almost worked, but Cohen fell two seats short in the 150-seat assembly, and the PvdA retreated into opposition.

FIGURE 2

Electoral support for the Netherlands' Labour Party (PvdA) has clearly declined over the past two decades

Electoral support for the PvdA, 2002–2020

Permission granted by Peil.nl.

Source: Based on regular surveys conducted by Peil.nl, a Dutch polling company, from 2002 to 2020. More information can be found at Peile.nl, "Informatie over Peil.nl," available at https://home.noties.nl/peil/informatie/ (last accessed December 2020).

After falling three seats short in the next election in 2012, the only feasible government coalition to form a parliamentary majority lumped the Conservative Party (VVD) with the PvdA, the two archenemies from the left and the right. The fallout of the financial crisis left no time to prepare voters for this surprising plot twist, and many found it hard to comprehend how two opponents could be at loggerheads with each other during the election campaign only to form a coalition two weeks later.

Electoral support for the PvdA took a nosedive after the party formed this coalition with the VVD. (see Figure 3) But rather than doing the hard work of coming to compromise on thorny policy issues, the coalition parties took turns choosing their favorite policies to pursue.

While the original idea was that coalition partners should grant each other some political successes, the resulting "success stories" did not match up with the partisan color of the government ministers. Consequently, PvdA ministers ended up defending the VVD's sacred cows and VVD leaders ended up defending the PvdA's articles of faith. This proved to be incredibly damaging in the Dutch context.

Moreover, the PvdA's organization had atrophied further, no longer able to provide fresh policy ideas. The party's rhetoric emphasized the abstract notion of "ideals," which quickly started to sound hollow. The party was also in denial about the very essence of politics: conflict. While voters do not like quarrelling politicians, they do want to see their representatives taking clear positions and fighting for all they are worth. Instead, Dutch voters were presented with policies that came out of the blue, reducing the political process to a black box, and leaving voters bewildered initially and alienated shortly thereafter.

Within six months of the start of the cabinet, the PvdA's support was down to an historically low—and hitherto unfathomable—10 seats in the polls. Toward the end of the term, the party even ceased to defend its own record in government, adding further poison to an already toxic mix. The poisonous icing on the cake was an untimely internal leadership election, won by the current party leader Lodewijk Asscher, who curiously found himself accused of mustering the courage to draw a contrast with his opponent.

FIGURE 3

Support for the Netherlands' Labour Party (PvdA) declined precipitously after it joined a coalition with the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)

Electoral support for the PvdA, from November 2012 to January 2017

These data are publicly available in the Netherlands.
Source: Peilingwijzer, "Peilingwijzer 2012-2017," available at https://d1bjgq97if6urz.cloudfront.net/Public/Peilingwijzer/20170314/Peilingwijzer+2012-2017.html.

This perfect storm had turned the 2017 parliamentary election into a mission impossible. After all votes were counted, the PvdA ended up with just nine seats, by far its worst performance ever. But even under these difficult circumstances, focus groups and internal surveys showed a clear path out of the misery. Rather than talking about abstract ideals, the electorate was encouraging the PvdA to talk about moving the country forward by taking responsibility for its record in government and asserting that the party had laid the foundation for doing so by putting public finances in order.

This would have allowed the party to call for change by reclaiming the issue of work—which the party had ceded by buying into the right-wing talking point that governments do not create jobs—by claiming credit for falling unemployment, while also jumping on Asscher's European policy successes in ending the abusive exploitation of workers. Combined with an agenda that sought to punish bad corporate behavior, such as not paying taxes and questionable behavior by banks, and by addressing Fortuyn's second pillar of migration—better screening of refugees and a reciprocity policy that provides clear guidance for those who are allowed to stay in our country—this approach presented a clear and credible path forward for the PvdA. PvdA's policy should have been:

> *Moving the country truly forward, we can do that now. We put our public finances in order; unemployment is falling. Now it's time for the next step. Ending the exploitation of workers. Making large companies pay their taxes, like all of us. Bringing the banks further under control. Better screening of refugees and better guidance for those who are allowed to stay in our country. Progress is possible, and together we can do it.*

This narrative defeated the conservative message hands down in electorate surveys. Unfortunately, the party failed to get this message out. In retrospect, it seems the PvdA had been beaten down so much that it may have been hard to believe that the impossible was actually entirely feasible.

COVID-19 in the Netherlands: Renewed appreciation for essential workers

In the beginning of 2020, the Dutch government—a four-way coalition of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD, conservative liberals), the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), Democrats 66 (D66, progressive liberals), and Christian Union (orthodox Protestant), under the leadership of Prime Minister Mark Rutte—was slow to react to the emerging pandemic. When the virus started to spread, the country was still shipping its certified medical masks to China as a token of goodwill, adding to the shortage experienced during the first wave of the pandemic.

For the first time in almost half a century, the prime minister addressed the Dutch population directly. With expectations sky-high, the speech was less memorable than expected and also seemed to hint at a strategy focused on developing herd immunity. This position was quickly abandoned and traded for the now-familiar measures of washing hands, social distancing, and working from home. By mid-March, the policy had morphed into what the government dubbed an "intelligent lockdown"—a semantic invention that left some government ministers very pleased with themselves.

The government's approach to the COVID-19 pandemic is aimed at "keeping the virus under control as much as possible in order to protect vulnerable groups and make sure the healthcare system can cope."[174] During press conferences, the prime minister stands in front of a background with the slogan "Only together can we get corona under control." During the first wave, all government measures enjoyed high levels of popular support. Rutte's job approval and electoral support for his party shot up, as indicated by political opinion polls.[175]

But cracks in government support became visible with concerns expressed about the pandemic's impact on the economy, resulting in a false juxtaposition between public health and the economy. These critical voices gained particular traction after the first wave of infections was brought under control.

Transparency concerns have also plagued the government response. Daily talk shows on TV with virologists provided platforms for sharing information, but many experts struggled to respond to legitimate questions from some groups of citizens. Some have questioned the stand-alone policy to not require masks; they also identified aerosol transmission as a missing piece in understanding how the virus spreads. The government tried to reach out to these groups but did so mainly behind closed doors. The government's inability to create transparent mechanisms is also reflected in the formation of the Outbreak Management Team (apparently, nobody was able to find an appropriate Dutch name), which is primarily staffed with medical experts, especially immunologists and virologists. Behavioral experts, economists, psychologists, data scientists, and communication specialists are all missing from this group, which meets behind closed doors. Probably Rutte's biggest mistake was promising to carry out all recommendations from the Outbreak Management Team. In doing so, he voluntarily ceded his democratic mandate to an opaque group with a very one-sided composition.

At the end of the summer, the government once again was slow to react when the infection rate started to go up. Rather than instituting successful measures to get the spread back under control, the government's coronavirus app was a fiasco, and instead turned to scapegoating young people and trying to use social media influencers to spread public health messages. Notably, the government has shown little interest in the COVID-19 policies of other countries or in sharing such insights with the Dutch people. Instead, the government has made it their priority to teach others, translating its coronavirus campaign material into Arabic, English, Spanish, Polish, Turkish, Papiamento, Papiamentu, German and French.

With the onset of a second wave of coronavirus infections, the government appears to be on the verge of losing control. An overall grid for policy measures—allowing for regional flexibility depending on the relative number of infections, like a traffic light system—is sorely lacking. Another huge challenge concerns the COVID-19 testing program, which forces people to drive hours in order to obtain a test. A systematic test, track, and trace policy is still not in place.

It should be noted that Prime Minister Rutte has not announced whether or not he will stand for reelection, even though all signs point in that direction. It is a public secret that, in spite of pretending otherwise, he is keen on breaking Ruud Lubbers's record as the longest serving prime minister of the Netherlands. For that, he will need another year in office. On balance, Rutte and his party still stand to gain electorally from the COVID-19 pandemic, but he remains vulnerable. The tectonic plates could easily shift and cause a political earthquake.

Performance during the COVID-19 pandemic

An overwhelming majority of the Dutch population views commonsense coronavirus measures, such as social distancing and washing hands, as a civic duty. More than four out of five respondents, or 83 percent, supported the statement, "It's my duty as a citizen to follow social distancing and other rules."[176]

The Dutch population expresses real appreciation for all front-line workers directly involved in bringing the coronavirus under control, including nurses, doctors, other caregivers, and volunteers. There is great appreciation for the job done by intensive care nurses (99 percent of people surveyed described their performance as "good," with a hugely impressive 64 percent reporting "very good"), nurses (98 percent responded "good," of which 53 percent selected "very good"), and essential workers (98 percent answered "good," of which 42 percent responded "very good").[177] (see Figure 4)

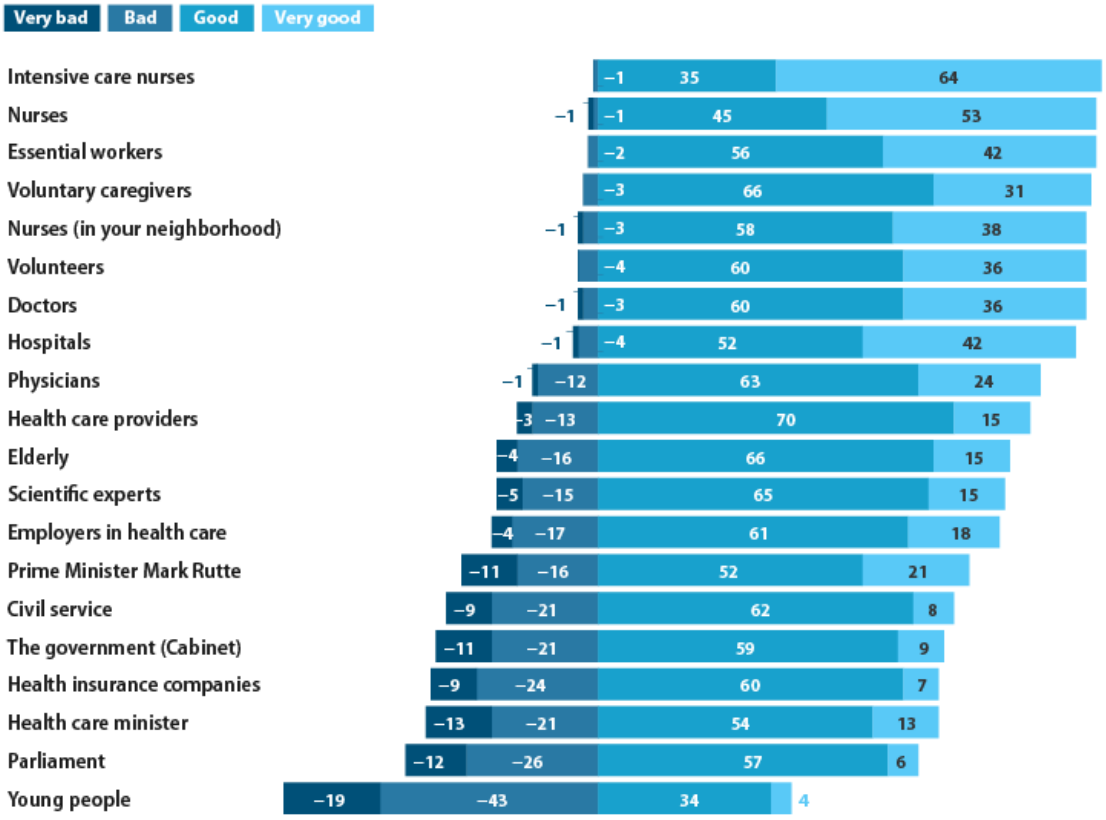
Many political actors also receive positive ratings (see Figure 4), including Prime Minister Rutte (73 percent of participants described his performance as "good," with 21 percent reporting "very good") and Christian Democratic Health Care Minister Hugo de Jonge (63 percent "good," of which 13 percent was "very good"). Young people, scapegoated by the government, are the single group with a net negative performance score, at just 38 percent "good" and 62 percent "bad" (a net score of -24 points, seen in the bottom row).

FIGURE 4

Health care staff and essential workers have very high performance ratings among Dutch respondents

Performance ratings of health care staff, essential workers, government officials, and others during the coronavirus crisis, by occupation

Question: "How would you rate the performance of the following actors during the coronavirus crisis?" N=1,011



These data are publicly available in the Netherlands.
Source: Peilingwijzer, "Peilingwijzer 2012-2017," available at https://d1bjgq97if6urz.cloudfront.net/Public/Peilingwijzer/20170314/Peilingwijzer+2012-2017.html.

The COVID-19 pandemic as a magnifying glass

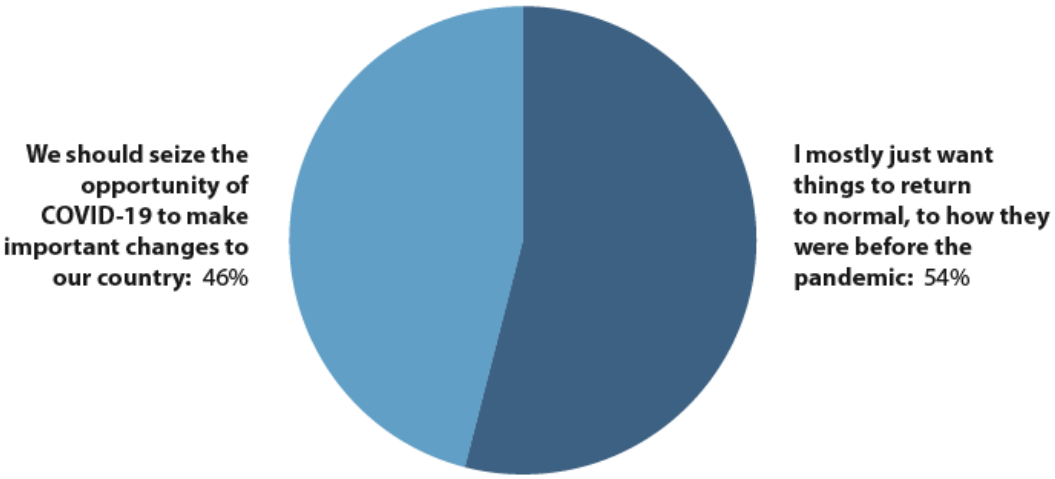
As with any major crisis, there has been a lot of talk in the Netherlands about what the COVID-19 pandemic will do to the country's culture and political system. Will things swing back to normal, or will there be a new normal? Progressives are understandably eager to emphasize the need for a new normal but must be aware that voters do not necessarily agree. In fact, a majority (54 percent, as seen in Figure 5) want things to return to normal, while only 46 percent of the Dutch population would want to seize the opportunity to make important changes to the Netherlands. Progressives, in other words, are vulnerable to crossing the swirling river to find out that they left more than half of their company behind.

FIGURE 5

More Dutch respondents would prefer things to return to how they were before the pandemic.

Share of Dutch respondents who believe it is time for a new normal

Question: "Which of the following statements do you agree with more?" (N = 2,006)



Permission granted by More in Common.

Source: More in Common, "The New Normal?" (2020), available at https://www.moreincommon.com/media/y2clqzwx/more-in-common-the-new-normal-comparative-7-country-en.pdf.

Progressives elsewhere, especially in the United States, have tried to solve this conundrum by emphasizing the need to "build back better." This mantra, however, inevitably leads the public back to the past rather than the future, even though a future-oriented narrative is virtually always key to gaining political ground. The call for a "reset" falls in the same category.

Progressive parties in the Netherlands appear to be enjoying some success with the analogy of the pandemic as a magnifying glass. The premise here is that the most important way in which the COVID-19 pandemic manifests itself is by highlighting preexisting wrongs in society. A deep-rooted respect deficit for front-line workers is one of them; excessive gaps between the richest members of society and the middle class is another. The pandemic has highlighted poor living conditions for too many people, particularly children, and has also exposed serious shortcomings in care homes for the elderly.

The COVID-19 pandemic also highlights new opportunities: With commuter traffic down, this could be a good moment to give the streets back to children and their parents, to acknowledge that when the gym club moves its equipment onto the street it strengthens the community, and to realize that this might also be the right time to start to convert office space into affordable housing.

Figure 6 shows the Dutch preexisting condition, revealed by the COVID-19 magnifying glass: a dramatic attention deficit for poor people (39-point gap), medical staff such as doctors (38-point deficit), the elderly (33-point gap), small-business owners (28-point gap) and front-line workers such as supermarket and public transport employees (24-point gap). In sum, the government is failing to pay proper attention to the very same people who have been helping others through the pandemic and to the small businesses that create most of the jobs in our country.

So, then, are there also groups in society that receive too much attention, and if so, what would they be? The answer is a clear yes: wealthy people (37-point surplus) and big-business owners (29-point surplus). Our magnifying glass also shows that attitudes toward immigrants (6-point surplus) continue to remain layered and still lean toward immigrants receiving too much attention from the Dutch government.

These numbers form a clear indication that COVID-19 times call for progressive policies. The current Dutch center-right government understands this; they have moved conspicuously to the left, accepting a much stronger role for government and, for now, pausing their austerity mindset. Dutch politics is entering a new phase, with interest rates on the national debt rapidly approaching zero. There is broad consensus that new funds should be directed toward increasing the country's earning power. But when it comes to action, the center-right is still slave to its impulses, recently issuing a giant €4 billion blank check for corporations in spite of negative recommendations from venerable government institutions.[178]

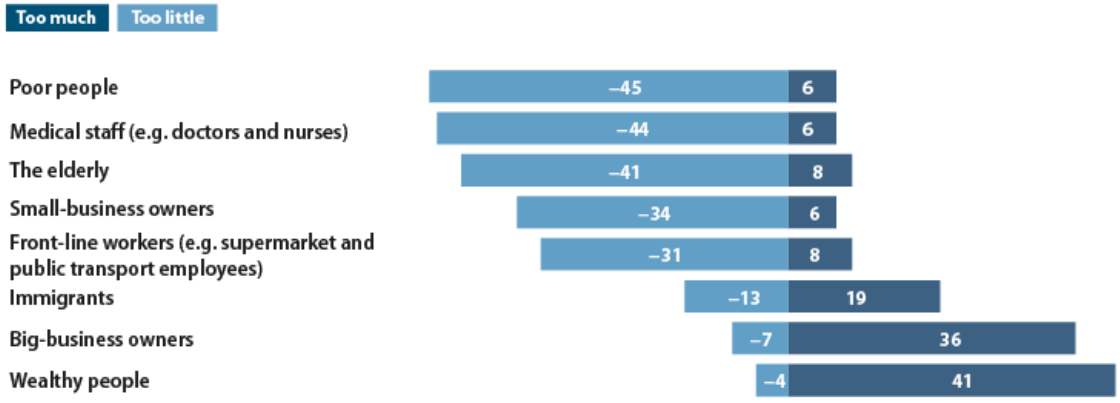
There is, then, a clear opportunity to advance truly progressive policy ideas.

FIGURE 6

More people feel that the government in the Netherlands cares too little about poor people and essential workers and too much about wealthy people

More people feel that the government in the Netherlands cares too little about poor people and essential workers and too much about wealthy people

Question: "Please indicate how much the Dutch government seems to care about the following groups in its response to the COVID-19 situation: The government cares about this group …" (N = 2,006)



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Source: More in Common, "The New Normal?" (2020), available at https://www.moreincommon.com/media/y2clqzwx/more-in-common-the-new-normal-comparative-7-country-en.pdf

The magnifying glass points to another critically important element in the positioning of progressive ideology: It must align with small businesses. Today, increasing numbers of Dutch workers are sole proprietors, some of them voluntarily and many against their will, with employers trying to cut fiscal corners.

Outlook

Seven out of 10 voters believe that, in order to put the Netherlands in order, the country needs a leader who is willing to break the rules. Does that mean that the Netherlands—that tiny, liberal country on the North Sea—is close to converting to fascism? Can we already hear the boots clicking through the streets of Amsterdam? Will brown soon be the color of fashion?

Not so fast. What Dutch voters detest—and in this they are probably not alone—is the technocratic way of governing. Over the past few decades, economists have achieved hegemony. The neoliberal paradigm achieved dominance, thereby undermining—eradicating might be a better word—the belief that government can be a force for good.

In addition, economists have acquired pivotal roles in evaluating almost every decision the government makes, and their power goes mostly unchecked. Many traditionally schooled economists, however, find it difficult to put a price tag on key aspects of a flourishing society, such as a vibrant and robust democracy, a thriving civil society, and people simply being happy. These aspects are routinely left out of their models, which means that they disappear from the decision-makers' radar screens entirely. When politicians surrender to these models, common sense disappears from their decisions. This was one of Fortuyn's major grievances back in 2002; now, with hindsight in 2020, it is fair to say that he was right.

Dutch people want to have their politics back, in the good sense of the word: deliberation, real information being put on the table, active listening skills, and government actors showing responsiveness to people's needs. This is where, interestingly enough, there is a lot of common ground between communal parties such as the PvdA and Christian Democrats on the one hand and the populist right-wing parties on the other.

The reality in Dutch politics is that the party system is imploding, or perhaps has already imploded. Together, the PvdA and the Christian Democrats currently have around 30 seats in the polls, a far cry from the 106 seats they occupied after the 1986 elections. New parties have risen to great heights; there have also been wild swings in electoral support for newcomers in between elections, many of which did not materialize, or did so only partly, on Election Day.

Contrary to popular belief, party mergers are an essential element of the Dutch political system, which is marked by proportional representation with an exceptionally low electoral threshold. The CDA, the Christian Union, and the GreenLeft are all examples of smaller parties uniting to win elections. In the 2019 European elections, the organization that provides an electronic voter guide was forced to announce a delay after the PvdA and Greens submitted, unbeknownst to each other, identical answers to all 30 policy statements. Without a tiebreaker, voters would not have been able to differentiate between the two parties. This is a clear sign that closer cooperation can benefit both parties.

The combined total number of seats for both parties gives us an optimistic ballpark estimate of what the PvdA and the Greens could accomplish together. We can easily see that by joining forces, PvdA and the Greens are well-positioned to mount a serious challenge against Rutte. That opportunity, however, has not been seized. Both parties are entering the elections with their own manifesto and their own slate of candidates. That means the PvdA will likely choose plan B: going it alone.

The PvdA may not realize this, but the party is in the midst of an epic battle between relevance and oblivion. With the party system imploding and most politicians behaving like technocrats, voters find it hard to see any meaningful differences between a broad swath of system parties, all the way from the Greens on the left to the VVD on the right.

Where does this leave progressives?

When voters ask for a leader who is willing to break the rules, what they are really asking for is a leader to espouse bold policies that will offer a sense of direction and break the current paralysis. The COVID-19 magnifying glass also shows that voters want to move to a fairer, more honest society. This creates an enormous electoral opportunity for a bold candidate capable of building consensus in the center.

Progressives must learn to be bold again. In principle, this applies to all policy domains, but three policy areas are absolutely essential. Two of these issues are what Fortuyn identified all those years ago: work and immigration. And today, affordable housing is also crucial.

Work

First, progressives must take a bold stance on work. Figure 6 shows that work and work-related issues, such as honest taxation, evoke very strong emotions. These emotions far outweigh the emotional intensity surrounding reducing carbon emissions and protecting the environment. (see Figure 7, lowest bar)

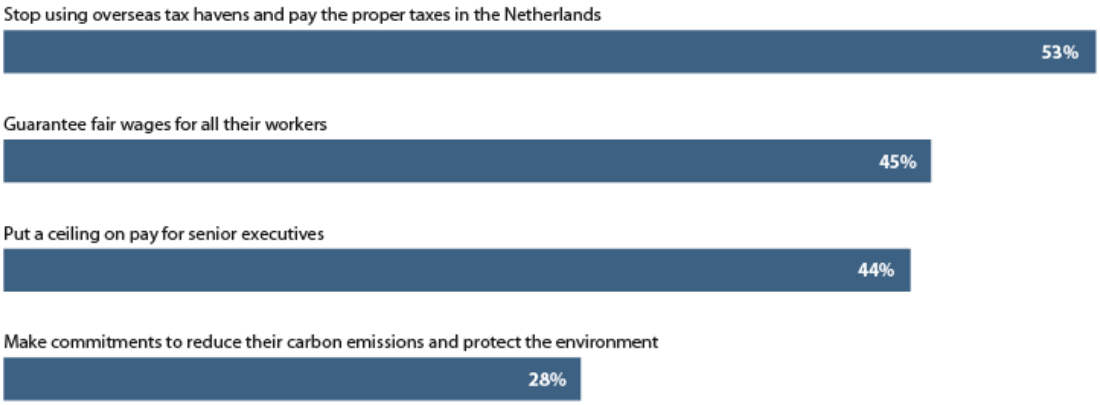
Unemployment in the Netherlands has already doubled after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Public opinion tends to indicate that the Partij van de Arbeid, the Party of Labor, is no longer resonating on the issue it was founded for: work.

FIGURE 7

Work evokes strong emotions

Share of Dutch respondents who strongly support measures to support average workers

Question: "The government is currently working on measures to help the economy and support businesses. What do you think: To what extent would you support or oppose requiring companies to fulfill the following criteria if they are to receive government aid?" (N = 2,006)



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Source: More in Common, "The New Normal?" (2020), available at https://www.moreincommon.com/media/y2clqzwx/more-in-common-the-new-normal-comparative-7-country-en.pdf.

A bold progressive agenda on work should build on the following elements:

- 500,000 new green jobs. The PvdA must dare to take responsibility for job creation. Progressives must focus on creating a system that produces jobs; it is not about the party leader going around and magically pulling new jobs out of a black hat. For example, in 1998, the PvdA was able to claim the creation of half a million jobs and promised half a million more. Progressives should push for similarly bold promises in the runup to the 2021 election and demand that the government play an essential role in laying the foundations for businesses to prosper and provide jobs.
- Leading people from work to work. The Dutch government is currently helping companies survive the pandemic but should be much bolder in asking for something in return: a commitment to lead redundant workers to jobs elsewhere. This is also about corporate citizenship and reciprocity. PvdA has already begun to articulate this position, with very positive reactions.
- A savings system to earn rights. The government should be bold in applying the logic of video games and loyalty programs to the welfare state. Progressives should insist that the next government design an out-of-the-box point system that enables workers to earn points that represent a monetary value. Workers should then be able to spend their points in a virtual store, filled with courses, job coaches, sabbaticals, and more. As a result, workers would see an increase in their employability, and employers will benefit from a better trained work force. Moreover, the government will be equipped with a new currency that conceivably allows for targeted policy interventions—for example, granting credits to people who are currently not employed, including long-term unemployed workers and immigrants. The currency could also come in handy by enabling workers with more physically demanding occupations, such as street builders and people in the military, to retire earlier than certain white-collar workers.

Affordable housing

Second, progressives must reconnect with its central tenet of affordable housing. In the first decades of the 20th century, social democratic aldermen initiated bold housing programs for the big cities, thus changing the country in fundamental ways. In the 2006 municipal elections, I got an early peek into what now has exploded into a major issue: affordable housing. At the time, this issue was not really on the agenda, but in focus groups, voters were screaming at me about how they saw their life goals, especially those of their children, go up in flames by out-of-control housing prices. I remember redoing the focus groups, because of the unexpected emotional intensity and this possibly being a quirk of the recruiting process, only to find the exact same pattern play out again. Now, 15 years later, things have taken a turn for the worse.

A bold affordable housing agenda could be built around the following elements:

- End speculation once and for all by introducing the Bernhard tax. A government that is on the side of ordinary, hardworking people must take bold action to stop housing speculation across the whole country. There is a villain for this policy: Prince Bernhard, the king's cousin, owns 590 Dutch properties, 349 of which are in Amsterdam.[179] No one needs 590 houses, and the current tax code treats housing speculators as if they are royalty. A simple solution would be to impose a capital gains tax (e.g., 30 percent) on profits obtained on real estate that is not a primary residence. The proceeds could then be funneled back to the cities and municipalities where the tax is levied.
- Build, build, build. The government should promise to launch a large-scale building program aimed at building affordable and green houses in close cooperation with prospective owners and tenants.
- Eliminate mortgage deduction. Interests rates are negative. By now, virtually every property owner has been able to refinance their mortgage. That creates an excellent opportunity to do away with the mortgage subsidy for good.

Do not forget immigration

Voters have big hearts but hate being taken advantage of. Voters have put the PvdA under a special surveillance program to make sure they do not apply preferential treatment to immigrants. First and foremost, any progressive reform efforts must start with being honest and open about these issues. The government should embrace reciprocity as its guiding principle when it comes to immigration.

- Favorable loans to pay for government services. Asylum-seekers make use of the government apparatus to process their asylum applications. By simultaneously sending a bill—not unlike the way Dutch citizens see hospital bills before their health insurance kicks in—and providing a student loan-like option with favorable payment conditions, newcomers would be socialized into a system that tells them their rights and responsibilities. Successful immigrants will pay back their loan in time.
- Public deliberation with local citizens. Fast-tracking refugee families for housing and other services should not be off the table but should be the outcome of an open-ended deliberation process with other citizens. This allows local citizens to be heard, while also encouraging the exchange of arguments (e.g., children not being able to concentrate on their schoolwork in asylum centers). Engaging in informed discussion will also improve the overall quality of the decision-making process.

Finally, gaining political traction depends on more than just policy agendas. It is also about how policymakers go about decision-making. Voters are rattling the doors of public institutions and want to play a bigger role. Willy Brandt is more relevant than ever: this is about "daring more democracy."[180] When progressives succeed in popularizing a progressive policy agenda, their first assignment will be to find novel ways to share that newfound power with other citizens. Doing so successfully will yield another scarce commodity in Western democracies: mutual respect between political leaders and citizens.

Conclusion

On the eve of a new parliamentary election, progressives in the Netherlands are still figuring out how best to respond to the challenge put forth by Fortuyn two decades ago. This soul-searching has come with wild swings in the electoral fof the PvdA. The party is currently polling at less than a third of its high-water mark. Better times lie ahead if a progressive movement is inclusive of middle and working class dreams. To that end, progressives must regain agency on the issue of work, take a very bold stance on housing speculation, and articulate a clear position on immigration with reciprocity at its core. The imploding party system leaves no alternative: be bold or remain silent forever.

ANTI-EUROPEAN RULE IN A PRO-EUROPEAN SOCIETY: CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRESSIVES IN POLAND

Konrad Golota and Adam Traczyk

Progressives in Poland operate in an extremely hostile environment. The political imagination of Poles is dominated by two political blocs: one symbolically represents the victories of the transformation after the overthrow of communism, while the other represents those who have lost out. Jarosław Kaczyński's Law and Justice Party (PiS) has consolidated support among people who perceived themselves to have lost out, not just through conservative policies but also through social policies that provide economic security and a sense of personal dignity to an electorate that often felt neglected by liberal elites.

To overcome this, progressives in Poland will need to move beyond a polarized culture war and tell a new story about Poland's future that appeals not only to the young, to women, and to the highly educated, but also to those left behind by today's politics. This will require a new economic agenda and a less condescending and identity-driven progressivism. However, all this may still not be enough to break the existing duopoly. Therefore, the left in Poland must also support social movements that may contribute to a fundamental reshuffling of the political scene in the country. As the recent mass protests against abortion restrictions demonstrate, there is a visible appetite for change. Though it is too early to draw conclusions, one thing is certain: The progressive Polish movement is at the forefront of the biggest protests seen in Poland in 30 years. How these protests evolve will shape the future of politics in Poland for the foreseeable future.

The roots of success and the governing style of the Law and Justice Party

In 2015, the national conservative Law and Justice Party ended the eight-year rule of the liberal-conservative Civic Platform (PO) by winning both the presidential and parliamentary elections, gaining a majority in both chambers of Parliament. The party managed to repeat its success in the next election cycle, led by Kaczyński. In 2019, Law and Justice and its small coalition of partners once again obtained a majority in the Sejm, the lower house of the Polish Parliament, but lost the majority in the Senate by a slim margin. In 2020, despite the controversy surrounding the postponed elections—due in theory to the COVID-19 pandemic—Andrzej Duda was reelected as president of Poland.

Since taking power, the Law and Justice Party has overhauled Poland's political institutions. Carried out with revolutionary zeal, it is not surprising that outsiders often portray PiS' image as an illiberal, authoritarian, power-hungry party that has taken over Poland. But this portrayal tells only half the story. In addition to the well-known mixture of a conservative worldview infused with democratic backsliding, culture war rhetoric, xenophobia, and homophobia, the nationalist right in Poland has also introduced at least a seemingly inclusive and pro-social model of development, which is widely supported by Poland's economically underprivileged electorate.

It is this latter aspect that drove PiS' electoral victory in 2015. The party crafted an electoral narrative based on the promise to introduce a child benefit of about $120 USD a month and to lower the retirement age to 60 for women and 65 for men after it was previously raised to 67 years by the Civic Platform in 2013. Although Poland is not a country with great social inequalities—the Gini index score for Poland is approximately 0.3, less than that of Germany or France[181]—there is a strong sense of division between two competing visions of Poland. This new divide, which replaced the traditional cleavage of post-Solidarity and postcommunism in the mid-2000s, suggests that on one side of the barricade are those who consider themselves "winners" from the transformation after the fall of communism and the "losers" on the other.

For many Poles, Law and Justice does not appear to be an anti-systemic party that turned the democratic order upside down.

Rather, many voters view PiS as a guarantor of stability and security, and especially of social security. In fact, satisfaction with the way democracy is functioning in Poland has reached its highest numbers since the fall of communism in 1989.[182] Support for PiS' flagship social policy, the child benefit Family 500+ programme, exceeds the party's own poll numbers by far: Two-thirds of Poles support the policy, while only 40 percent of the population actually voted for the party.[183] Polling results also indicate that Law and Justice is able not only to mobilize voters from the eastern, more traditionalistic regions of Poland, but also former voters of the Democratic Left Alliance and the Civic Platform in other parts of rural and small-town Poland. This means that some voters support the ruling party not because of its cultural conservatism or dismantling of democratic institutions, but because they fear that an opposition win could pose a threat to their recently gained economic well-being. In other words, while some voters may be concerned about PiS actions that undermine rule of law and democracy, they believe that PiS' social reforms lead to a higher quality of life and are working to catch Poland up with European social standards.

Since coming to power in 2015, three pillars have defined PiS' political strategy:

- Economic redistribution: Flagship policies redistribute monthly unconditional child benefits and provide extra benefit payments for pensioners. These policies appeal to those disgruntled voters who previously felt that they had no stake in the transition from communism to capitalism.
- A conservative revolution: Based on fearmongering and a politics of blame, framed in Poland as a fight between good and evil, voters have rallied against a host of perceived enemies, from elites, banks, Germans and Russians, the LGBTI community, and even European institutions themselves.
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the redistribution of prestige: Many Poles felt excluded and betrayed by so-called big-city elites, feeling that this group looked down and condescended toward them. PiS targeted messages to these people and sought to restore not just their economic dignity but also their sense of self.

While direct transfers give people who were previously economically excluded the feeling that they are finally participating in the economic transformation of the country, it is actually the redistribution of prestige that restores their sense of dignity and personal or group respect. This combination of policies and outreach has created a historically popular formula for PiS. As a consequence, progressives' strategy has often backfired. All too often, in aiming to mobilize one part of the country, progressives can alienate other key constituencies and groups they need to support their policy agenda—offending rural and lower-income voters, for example, by characterizing them as stupid, bigoted, or backward.

Though PiS' initial victory was a surprise, it is clear that their political strategy and campaign tactics are now a permanent feature of Polish politics.

Beyond a divided opposition and toward a progressive movement

Law and Justice's main political rival is the Civic Platform. The PO, like the Law and Justice Party, has its roots in the post-Solidarity camp of Polish politics; however, unlike the party currently in power, it represents a moderate, pragmatic, and centrist current of conservatism. Its conservative-liberal course under the leadership of Donald Tusk, the former president of Poland and former president of the European Council, ensured its electoral victories in 2007 and 2011. At the same time, the image of the PO as a nonideological party practicing postpolitics was consolidated. To this day, the party can be best characterized by Tusk, who described his political goals as providing "warm water in the tap."

In the last four parliamentary elections—2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019—the PiS and PO together won about 70 percent of all votes cast. The other parties competed for third place on the podium. In the 2019 parliamentary election, these included the progressives, the far-right Confederation, and the conservative Polish Peasants' Party.

The Polish left camp currently consists of three parties: the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, or SLD), Spring (Wiosna), and Razem (Together). The SLD was formed after the dissolution of the communist party in 1989 and won the parliamentary elections in 1993 and 2001; in 1995 and 2000, its candidate Aleksander Kwasniewski won the presidential elections.

The SLD has been the party with the clearest pro-European agenda in Poland. The SLD-led government finalized Polish accession to the European Union and produced the compromise which gave Poland a new constitution. It has been a party of modernization and progress and the only one fighting for the separation of the state and Catholic Church.

Since 2005, the SLD has paid a huge price for corruption scandals that rocked the party. Since then, the party has been in a continual search for a new agenda and new alliances. These attempts have been mostly unsuccessful, and the party has continued to lose support. Indeed, the party seems to offer a nostalgic social democracy that lives in the past. This decline culminated in the poor results in the 2015 parliamentary elections, where the United Left coalition failed to pass the 8 percent threshold required for coalitions and thus was excluded from Parliament for the next four years.

It is in this context that, in 2019, the SLD, Wiosna, and Razem joined together to take on Law and Justice and the Civic Platform. Together, they would receive more than 13 perecent of the vote. This new alliance brings together a new generation of politicians and proposes a combination of typical social democracy, progressivism, and socialism.

Wiosna was established in March 2019 as a new progressive movement initiated by Robert Biedroń, the first openly gay man to sit in the Polish Parliament and later mayor of Słupsk, a midsized town in the north of Poland. In the European Parliament elections of 2019, Spring received 6.6 percent of the vote. Starting from the assumption that the number of left-wing voters in Poland is relatively small, Wiosna initially focused on an agenda that went beyond classic left-wing issues in order to attract other voter groups. These included not only big-city liberals but also voters from the provincial areas, based on Biedroń's image as an effective and people-oriented small-town mayor. In the course of the campaign, however, the thematic focus shifted from a mix of progressive policy proposals—including women and minority rights, modern social policy and health care, and environmental and climate policy issues, which gave the impression of a catch-all party—to identity politics.

Razem was founded in 2015 by the nonparliamentary left-wing circles critical of the SLD and modeled on the Spanish party Podemos. In the 2015 parliamentary elections, it won 3.5 percent of votes. This result did not allow the party to enter Parliament but provided it with funding from the state budget until the next elections.

In the 2019 parliamentary election, all three parties formed a coalition and ran together on one list, which reflected the diversity of a potential left-wing electorate. The Democratic Left Alliance appealed both to the traditional postcommunists and to the more conservative electorate from medium-sized towns. Spring was a magnet for at least some liberal voters and Razem attracted young progressive social leftists.[184]

This internal diversity and collective leadership allowed the Left to return to Parliament after a four-yearlong absence. Together, the unified list received well above 10 percent of the votes, making the Left the third-largest group in the Polish Parliament behind the PiS and Civic Platform. This was a much better result than what would be achieved in the following presidential election in 2020.

The challenge of "two Polands" and the 2020 presidential elections

A comparative study on the heterogeneity of Polish values by Lisa Blaydes and Justin Grimmer shows that, apart from Romania, no other society in the world is as divided on fundamental values as Poland.[185] Effectively, two different societies live side by side in Poland, and as another study by Paulina Górska shows, these two groups are extremely hostile to each other.[186] The deep mistrust and mutual aversion of government supporters and opponents extends to the dehumanization of the other. Interestingly, progressives often have a worse image of PiS supporters than PiS supporters do of them, which contributes to the difficulty in developing a strategy that appeals to both groups. The 2020 elections were emblematic of the challenges facing progressives in Poland. Four key candidates stood in this election: the incumbent President Andrzej Duda, from the Law and Justice Party; the Civic Platform candidate, former Parliament Speaker Malgorzata Kidawa-Blonska; the candidate of the Left and leader of Wiosna, Robert Biedroń; and the candidate of a new anti-establishment movement, TV celebrity and journalist Szymon Holownia, who offered a strange combination of progressivism and conservatism and the promise of a new politics.

Polish elections consist of two rounds if no candidate receives more than 50 percent of votes in the first round. The contest for the election was strange, as it was held in the middle of the first wave of the pandemic in April and May. Candidates could not meet voters and were limited to online statements, except for President Duda, whose daily appearances among the people were presented as presidential duties. Additionally, for much of the campaign, the opposition called for postponing the elections, asserting that it was more important to save lives and jobs than to engage in political campaigning. After many disputes and a short political crisis, elections were postponed for just a few weeks, from May 10 to June 28.

Rafal Trzaskowski, acting mayor of Warsaw and vice president of the European People's Party, joined the campaign after the elections were postponed, replacing Kidawa-Blonska as Civic Platform's candidate. He benefited from being a newcomer, when all opposition parties helped him obtain the required 100,000 signatures of support he needed to stand. This provided a real boost to his campaign—he ended up receiving more than 1.6 million signatures, which helped reinforce the perception that he represented the progressive wing of conservatism.

In the first round, Hołownia received support from voters tired with political elites and typical political divisions in Poland. Biedroń had lost support ad momentum during the preelection lockdown and did not recover once the campaign began. Despite having a very active campaign and a comprehensive progressive program, much of his support moved to Trzaskowski as voters began choosing the strongest candidate to take on the president, and Biedroń and the Left were the first ones to support Trzaskowski for the second round. In the second round, incumbent President Duda, won reelection with 51.03 percent of the vote compared with 48.97 percent for his rival.[187]

An analysis of the demographics of the two voter groups, PiS and opposition supporters, illustrates that there were only minimal differences between male and female voters but clear generational and educational divides. Trzaskowski won younger voters decisively with a 64.4 percent share, more than two-and-a-half times his result among the same group in the first round. This suggests that thee Civic Platform was effective in attracting the younger supporters of all opposition parties between the first and second rounds. Among older voters, however, Duda received 61.7 percent of the vote in the second round.[188]

Similarly, Trzaskowski decisively won among the higher educated Poles, with 65.9 percent among people with university degree or higher.[189] However, this was canceled out by Duda's exceptionally high support among voters with only primary education (77.3 percent) or vocational training (74.7 percent).[190] Regional divides are stark, too. Trzaskowski won in the largest cities, reaching 66.5 percent of support. But the incumbent president won 63.2 percent of communities with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants in the second round, up from 55.9 percent in the first round.

However, there is reason for hope for the progressive movement. The 2020 election was not really a clash between ordinary people and the elites. The opposition candidate was still able to win in small cities, if not in the most rural districts. The election was also a victory for turnout for the progressive movement: More young people and women, who typically support progressive candidates and policies, went to the polls this year than in any previous national election.

Moreover, even if the PiS has recognized the needs of small cities and villages and has politically captured large parts of this electorate, many issues remained unsolved in these communities, such as transport-related exclusions, lack of attractive jobs in rural areas, climate change, and rising energy prices and water supply problems. In the future, this will present progressives with the chance to make further inroads into these parts of the country. At the same time, progressives have a clear opportunity to solidify support among women, although there is still much work to do to appeal to them more effectively. Overall, in the future, it will be much harder for the governing majority to cover up Poland's problems by simply raising their voices, disseminating their propaganda, and presenting attacks against Poland's imaginary enemies.

The challenge for progressives, then, is to solidify support among women and young voters and to build a broad coalition that includes people who are attracted to current PiS policies but are beginning to realize they want the government to go further in addressing the issues they are facing. To do this, however, progressives must avoid the pitfalls of polarization and seize the opportunity to shape a new narrative.

Toward a new progressive policy agenda in Poland

The key to unlocking the opportunity for progressive change will lie in developing a new agenda and a new approach to governing. At the center of this, progressives must present a fresh, coherent story about post-Law and Justice Poland. This must be a story which meets the needs and aspirations for quality of life, stability, and security of the opposition's core electorate, especially for young people under 35. This vision and narrative, however, must also be capable of demobilizing support for the PiS' conservative policies in the short run and convincing people to support progressive ideas the long run.

This strategy will be defined by four core pillars: confronting nationalist ideology where it is strongest and exposing the weaknesses of Poland's welfare state, moving beyond a politics of condescension, building a new media strategy, and adapting to governing in the time of COVID-19.

Confronting nationalists in the field where they are strongest and exposing the limits of Kaczyński's welfare state

In view of the successes and high popularity of various cash transfers at the center of PiS' government policy, one might argue that the working class has no reason to shift its support from the populist right to the progressives. However, to cede the realm of social policy—a crucial part of any progressive narrative—to the populist right would undermine progressives' long-term chances of policy success and leave the government's narrative uncontested.

Moreover, as Łukasz Pawłowski points out in his recent book, the "second wave of privatization" is underway in Poland.[191] This latest round of privatization will result in a fall in quality and availability of public services across the country. Today, two-thirds of Poles are dissatisfied with the state of public health services.[192] This is why more and more people have turned to the private sector. Of the 26 million Poles who pay health insurance, more than 2.5 million are already covered by additional, private insurance. In the long run, the victims of such divisions will largely come from low- and middle-income families, who will not be able to afford the fees of private clinics and schools, as well as the residents of rural areas and small towns without private providers of such services. Of course, the outbreak of the pandemic is likely to further expose the weaknesses of Poland's chronically underfunded public health care system. According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data, public spending on health care represents only 4.34 percent of Poland's gross domestic product, and the total expenditure is 6.3 percent of GDP. The average for OECD countries is 8.8 percent,[193] putting Poland far below the average.

As such, progressives should not shy away from confronting the PiS on this policy agenda, even if social welfare currently seems like the party's strongest asset. In doing so, the Left can push back against the idea of an ethnically religious national community threatened by outsiders and minorities by promoting the vision of a civic community of solidarity, one in which no one is left behind. Ultimately, shifting the center of gravity of the political rivalry to competitive visions of the welfare state may be the key to advancing progressive policies.

Moving beyond the politics of condescension

At present, the majority of support for progressive policies comes from liberal parts of society. Despite divisions among left-leaning voters in the first round of the presidential electorate, exit polls after the second round suggested that as many as 85 percent of Biedroń's voters in the first round supported Trzaskowski in the second.[194] This indicates an extreme hostility toward PiS on the left and that opposition to the government is one of the key motivating factors.

Appealing beyond this core constituency is no easy task considering that Poland has long been locked into the deeply polarizing rivalry discussed above. Nevertheless, the progressive movement must try to defuse it and aim to reach out to Poles across the political spectrum. While a first step will be the development of a reform agenda for the welfare state that appeals to those who currently benefit from the government's limited redistributive agenda, their electoral success will also require a change in tone and attitude.

Here, the current discussion on restrictive abortion laws is instructive. Today, the left's previously marginal proposals to liberalize abortion access—a symbol of progressive change—are becoming more mainstream. Meanwhile, the Civic Platform agenda of compromise and accommodation with the Catholic Church is being rejected by huge masses of new politically active groups, especially younger people.

Build a media strategy for a hostile environment

The so-called public media in Poland is now an instrument of direct propaganda for the government. Polish state television, including flagship nightly news programs such as "Wiadomości" and thee information channel TVP Info, are tools that the incumbents use to disseminate manipulated mass messages and mobilize the core voters of the governing party.

Normally, politics should be about the contest of ideas. But in Poland, politics is presented as a battle of good and evil between the incumbents and everyone else. PiS is always portrayed by state media as morally higher than the opposition. The government's decisions are always portrayed as wise, far-sighted, responsible, and in accordance with the raison d'état. Therefore, even if their policies fail, the government has always been able to effectively communicate failures as the fault of the opposition, which is selfish, destructive, and inefficient and defends corrupted elites. Opposition parties are often referred to as the "total opposition" and portrayed as simple obstructionists whose sole aim is to create political chaos, spread fake news and disinformation, or cause a constitutional crisis. Even the mildest of criticism is presented as a savage and unjust attack on the government. Each news segment follows the same structure: applauding the wise decisions of the government defending ordinary people, attacking the opposition, and refusing to mention scandals in the governing camp.

State media, then, has become a very powerful tool to keep the core electorate in an imaginary world, especially since 30 percent of the country's population does not have cable or access to different TV stations. To counter state-run media narratives, progressives need to build a counter-information infrastructure. This will begin by engaging and harnessing the power and energy of social media. Progressives should build or finance their own news outlets as well as fact-checking portals to counter government propaganda. The Left should also collaborate more effectively with like-minded nongovernmental organizations, think tanks, and grassroots organizations that can reach groups they have historically found hard to connect with, thus helping amplify and expand the reach of progressive messages. This strategy should be complemented by a proactive grassroots campaign that reaches out to the provinces, in all of the regions that progressives have lost or ignored.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the focus of the progressive message needs to change. For too long, progressives have focused on issue of process, such as the rule of law, democracy, and judicial independence, rather than speaking to the material economic and social issues confronting much of the population in their day-to-day lives.

Adapt to governing in the time of COVID-19

Despite serious risks, the COVID-19 crisis has not yet had a major impact on Poland's democracy. Postponing the presidential election averted the worst-case scenario, in which the election result could have been called into question and triggered a more serious constitutional and political crisis. In the end, Poles were able to cast their votes in a presidential election that, while not necessarily fully fair, was free.

While the risk of democratic backsliding cannot be ruled out, the pandemic also presents an opportunity for the Left. The social policy of the right-wing government is based on generous money transfers, but the quality and availability of public services remains lamentable. The current economic recession and crisis in the health care system could put an end to the right-wing vision of the welfare state and open a window of opportunity for a more progressive agenda.

While Poland managed the first phase of the pandemic reasonably well, the true challenge seems to be ahead. In early autumn, the country experienced a peak in new cases, exceeded 2,000, despite the government's constant claims that the pandemic is well under control.

An additional factor that could advantage progressives is that the majority of Poles expect that the experience of the pandemic will result in closer cooperation among member states of the European Union.[195] That means that if right-wing policy solutions are adopted at the European level, Poles might quickly come to the conclusion that their isolation in Europe, stemming from PiS' hostility to the EU and its institutions, is a mistake.

Looking forward

Regardless of the pandemic, the biggest challenge for progressives in Poland is finding a way to overcome the two dominant political narratives that overshadow the Polish political scene—or at least to establish a clear progressive agenda.

This does not mean that the left in Poland should not copy the language of liberals, but it does imply the need to improve messaging and make it more concrete for Polish people. Especially in the case of the overhaul of the judiciary, it is necessary to translate the language of values into the language of the interests of specific groups. An example of how to do this was given by Joe Biden in the first U.S. presidential debate: When asked about the Supreme Court nomination, he did not talk about procedures, political customs, or even point to the hypocrisy of the Republican Party. Instead, he focused on the negative effects of nominating a conservative judge for the poorest Americans and women, citing the potential repeal of the Affordable Care Act and overturning of Roe v. Wade. He referred to the hard interests of two key groups, not abstract values. This is something that the Polish opposition has not been able to do successfully thus far.

In the long run, in order to affect Poland's policy agenda, the progressive movement must strive to bring together a diverse political coalition by presenting an alternative vision of the Polish welfare state. However, the duopoly of Poland's politics will not be dismantled without a significant reshuffling of the political scene, similar to the one that took place in the mid-2000s. Such a change may come from outside the party system. Poland remains a country where a conservative counterrevolution is in place, despite the fact that no liberal revolution has occurred. But this strategy might backfire for Poland's conservatives. Generational change and the increase in women's political activity might lead to a reconfiguration of the political scene. The recent mass protests in the face of the abortion law being tightened by the verdict of the Constitutional Court are proof of this.

Today, a progressive coalition must be a loyal ally of grassroots social movements, even if this support does not immediately translate politically.

THE SOUND OF THE FUTURE ARRIVING: A STRATEGY FOR STARMERISM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Marcus Roberts

Sir Keir Starmer faces a multiplicity of challenges as he seeks to rebuild the United Kingdom's Labour Party in the wake of its shattering defeat in the December 2019 general election and prepares to offer a new approach to politics in a post-COVID-19 world. The task is massive, as it involves detoxifying the Labour brand, ending divisions over Brexit, and reversing the long-term decline of working-class support for the party. There are strong indications that these problems will be addressed head-on, as Sir Keir has already demonstrated with a tough, no-nonsense approach to one of the most poisonous legacies of the Corbyn era: anti-Semitism within the party.

Labour's 2019 defeat—its worst general election result since 1935—stemmed from a combination of long-term structural problems and bad short-term politics. As a major study from Labour Together concluded,[196] key elements included the long-term decline in support for Labour among crucial working-class voters; Jeremy Corbyn's deep unpopularity; and Labour's confusion over Brexit. These problems were exacerbated by the ever-growing gap between the two core constituencies to which Labour has traditionally looked to secure electoral success: more-liberal, progressive, higher-education, higher-income voters and more immigration-sceptic, lower-education, lower-income voters who have suffered from the worst successes of globalisation and unregulated capitalism. At the 2019 general election, these issues combined to leave Labour out of touch with its working-class voters and out of trust with the electorate at large.

On becoming leader, Sir Keir was faced with two immediate challenges: the internal crisis of anti-Semitism within Labour and the external crisis of the coronavirus pandemic. So far, it is Sir Keir's response to these challenges that have defined his introduction to the public.

The presidentialisation of UK general elections has made leader ratings a deciding factor for success at the ballot box. Early signs that Labour is once again a strong challenger to the Conservatives and that the personal poll ratings of Labour's leader are much higher than those of Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson gives us an initial indication that Labour, as a party, is once again a strong challenger to the Conservatives.[197]

Between now and the anticipated general election of 2024, Sir Keir faces the following three strategic challenges: to once again bring together the two wings of Labour's traditional electoral coalition, middle-and working-class voters; to detoxify the party's brand; and to offer a new politics focusing on work, family, and place for Britain's post-pandemic future. These objectives can be summarised succinctly: It is time to replace the essentially right-wing economic settlement of the Thatcher/Reagan years with a new left-wing settlement that can endure for the decades to come. The model to be followed is former Prime Minister Clement Attlee's reforms of economic and political power, which long outlived his electoral defeat in 1951, rather than the New Labour settlement, much of which did not survive the loss of power in 2010. This is not to minimise or condemn the successes of New Labour but rather to note that its most enduring legacy is to be found in the social and constitutional change it achieved rather than its public spending settlements.[198]

This paper will consider how Sir Keir has already embarked on a project of Labour renewal, what he has achieved so far, and what Labour should do next in order to forge a strategy to win back power.

A new leadership

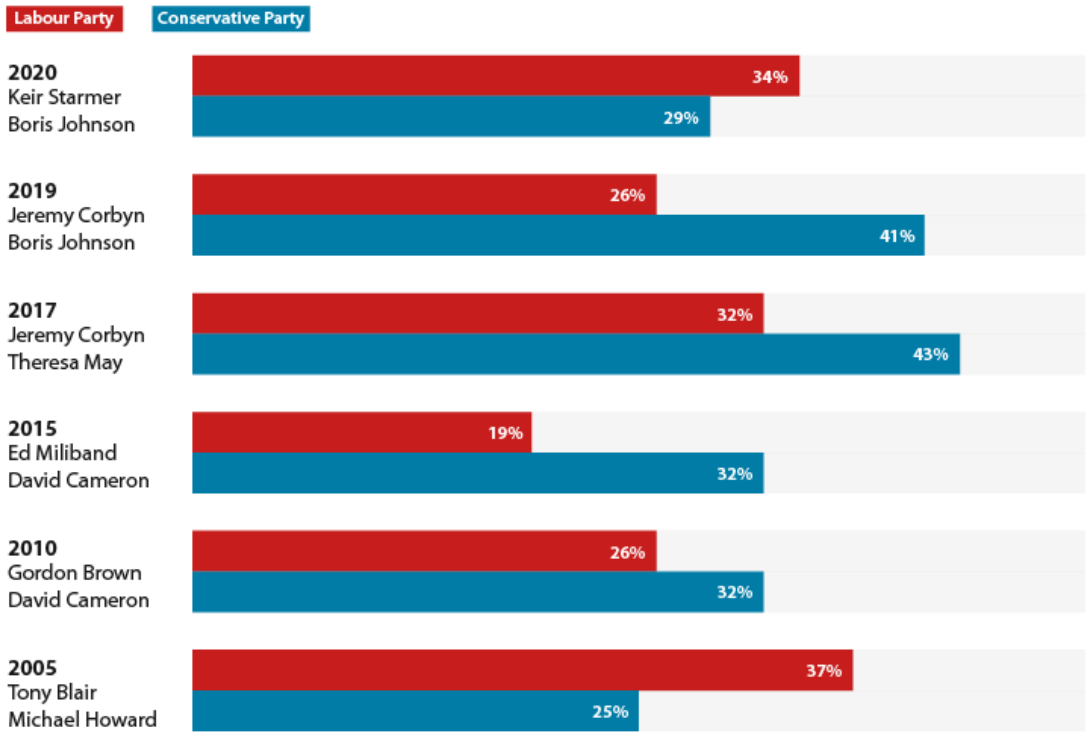
Central to a winning strategy for 2024 is Sir Keir himself. When Labour has won, it has historically enjoyed a leading position in polls comparing and contrasting best prime minister choices. When Labour has lost, it has been because it was woefully behind on this key metric. To take the most recent examples, Tony Blair was well ahead of John Major, William Hague, and Michael Howard as the preferred choice of prime minister when Labour won the 1997, 2001, and 2005 elections.

By contrast, Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband were well behind David Cameron in 2010 and 2015. Jeremy Corbyn's two general elections are also highly instructive. In 2017, voting intention for Labour rose in line with Corbyn's personal favourability ratings, so that by the time the election was held Corbyn was almost level pegging with Theresa May as to who would make the best prime minister. In contrast, in 2019, Boris Johnson was the country's clear choice over Corbyn, not only because of Johnson's own personal and brand strengths in that election but also because of the collapse in Corbyn's own numbers over the preceding two years.

FIGURE 1

Popularity of the prime minister candidate matters in the United Kingdom

Respondents in the United Kingdom on their preferred candidate for prime minister



Permission granted by YouGov.

Source: YouGov, "Best Prime Minster (GB)," available at https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/qr00flfuy0/YG%20trackers%20-%20Best%20Prime%20Minister_W.pdf (last accessed December 2020).

To deliver this advantage, Labour must ensure that voters have clear reasons—both rational and emotional—to fire the sitting Conservative prime minister and to hire Sir Keir for the job.

To that end, Labour must work tirelessly on developing Sir Keir's brand and designing the shape, style, and substance of his relationship with the British people in general and with Labour target voters in particular. The goal is to ensure that both the general public and target voters understand and appreciate that Sir Keir will deliver what they want in terms of competence for government, responsibility with the nation's finances, patriotism and love for country, and respect for the voters themselves. A down-to-earth approach will be necessary to achieve this, as Sir Keir's personality and style would likely preclude a Bill Clinton-style attainment of an overt emotional bond with voters. Instead, the Barack Obama-style respect for middle America, developed and demonstrated over years of town halls in Illinois and Iowa prior to his presidency, constitutes an effective and achievable template.

Finally, Labour should learn from the successes of Prime Ministers Attlee, Wilson, and Blair, who all won general elections after they demonstrated they were capable of changing both the style and substance of the Labour parties they inherited to make them fit for government. Historically, Labour leaders have only won power after they have forced their parties to confront the truths that are so obvious to voters yet ignored by Labour's unsuccessful leaders. As we shall see, Sir Keir has already begun this effort in earnest.

Detoxifying Labour

Labour's brand was exposed as self-evidently toxic in 2019, with Brexit and the party's long-term structural decline playing equal roles. On Brexit, Labour found itself facing both ways to middle-class Remainers and working-class Leavers, unable to defend one without offending the other. Brexit itself was the manifestation of a long-term disconnect between Labour and working-class voters, a pattern familiar to centre-left parties the Western world over.

While the left's middle-class voters have overwhelmingly been the beneficiaries of globalisation, the left's traditional working-class voters have often been left behind by deindustrialisation, deregulation, feelings of unfair wage competition with immigrants and the general pace of cultural change at a time of economic insecurity. This has resulted in a logical desire to seek a radical alternative to their status quo, and both Brexit and their 2019 Conservative party vote was the expression of this. And so, Labour has come to face a problem between the two essential halves of its electoral coalition, with middle-class voters increasingly stressing the importance of liberal, cultural politics, and working-class voters feeling distanced from a Labour Party that at times has seemed more comfortable with cities, corporate boardrooms, and international organizations than towns, trade unions, and the nation.

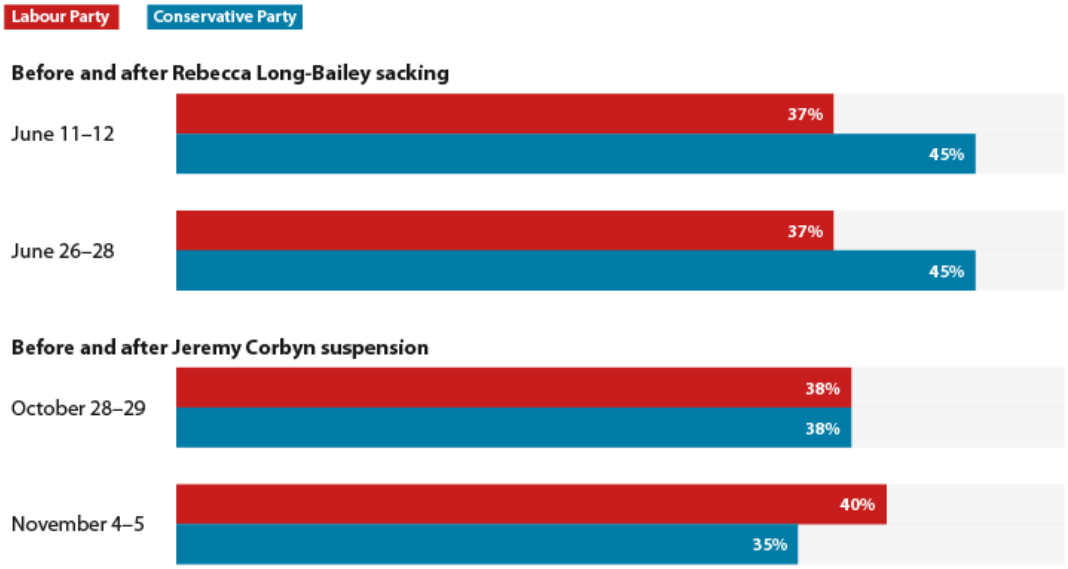
Labour is already making strong progress in party detoxification through Sir Keir's initial "under new management" soundbite and "A New Leadership" party slogan.[199] This explicit tying of Sir Keir to the party identity will allow for a far faster detoxification of the brand than would otherwise be possible. By linking Sir Keir's new leadership with a post-Corbyn Labour Party in such a direct manner, Labour can emotionally make the break with the Corbyn years in the hearts and minds of voters. Parallel to this will be the long, hard, and painstaking work of removing what Sir Keir has called the "stain" of anti-Semitism from the party and rebuilding trust with the Jewish community.[200] Evidence of this approach in action can be seen first in Sir Keir's firing of his former leadership contest rival, Rebecca Long-Bailey, as part of his "zero tolerance for anti-Semitism" policy in the wake of a tweet scandal. Then came the Labour Party's decision to suspend Corbyn for his failure to accept the scale and severity of the anti-Semitism problem in Labour.

In both instances, the electorate was given clear demonstrations of Labour's changed nature, thus speeding up the detoxification process. It is telling that despite threats of splits and newspaper headlines about civil war, both Labour and Sir Keir's poll ratings remained steady throughout these tumultuous events.[201]

FIGURE 2

U.K. voter intentions were swayed after Sir Keir Starmer's actions cleaned up the party

Voting intention rates before and after certain political events, by party



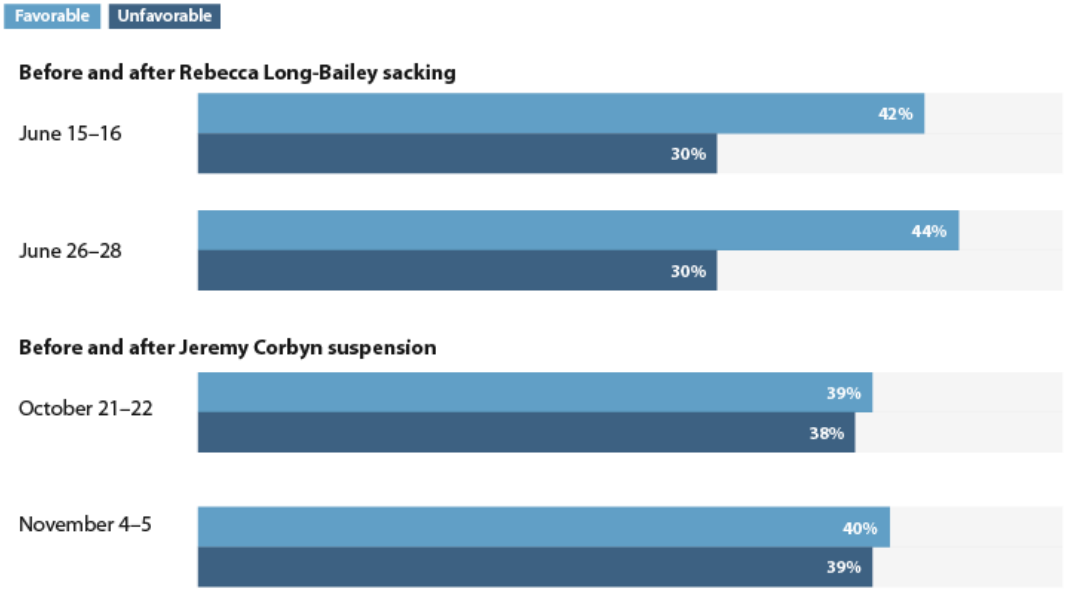
Permission granted by YouGov.

Source: YouGov, "Voting Intention," available at https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/explore/issue/Voting_Intention (last accessed December 2020).

FIGURE 3

Sir Keir Starmer's poll ratings remained relatively steady despite tumultuous party events

Starmer's favorability ratings before and after certain political events



Permission granted by YouGov.

Source: YouGov, "Keir Starmer," available at https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/explore/public_figure/Keir_Starmer (last accessed December 2020).

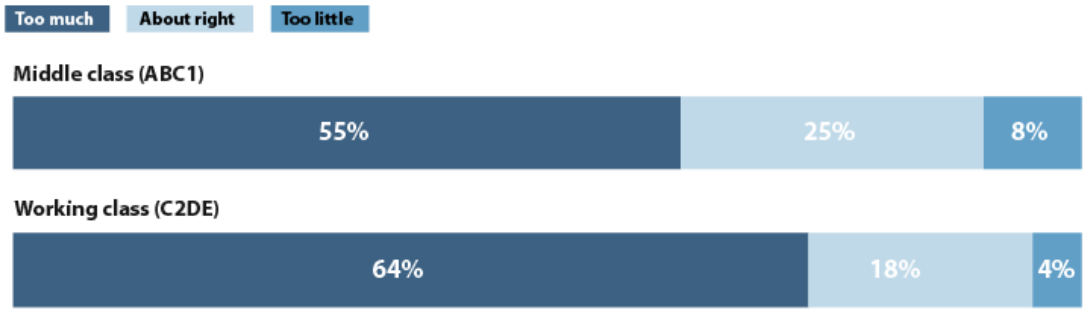
On Brexit, Labour should begin the work of rebuilding trust with clarity on its position. Sir Keir's Labour Party can argue for a closer relationship with the European Union as long as it accepts that Brexit itself is the settled will of the British people for the foreseeable future and that people are exhausted by the idea of opening up the discussion again—even as the majority now think it was wrong[202]. Critical to this is an acceptance that there can be no rapid return to the free movement of people, for it makes no political sense for Labour to respond to both Brexit and the loss of its heartland seats with an argument for open borders.

Concern over immigration and support for the principle of control receives majority support among both working-class and middle-class voters.[203] Should Labour reject these starting principles and adopt the pro-open borders politics that much of its liberal, middle-class minority desires, then the party might well expect to see vote shares fall in line with many of its struggling European counterparts—that is, stuck in the 10s and 20s in the polls from Germany to Holland.

FIGURE 4

Working- and middle-class British society thinks immigration levels are too high

Immigration perceptions among the working and middle class in the United Kingdom



Permission granted by YouGov.

Source: YouGov, "Do Brits think that immigration has been too high or low in the last 10 years?", available at https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/trackers/do-brits-think-that-immigraion-has-been-too-high-or-low-in-the-last-10-years?crossBreak=abc1 (last accessed December 2020).

Yet there is a need for immigrants, as the desperate shortages of staff[204] at all levels in our hospitals and care homes across the country have shown during the COVID-19 crisis. There is a balance that can successfully be struck. Labour should accept an end to free movement whilst also arguing for a liberal position on refugees and a generous, but controlled, programme for economic migrants.

Thus, it is clear that detoxification requires reconnection. To do this, Sir Keir must demonstrate through his words and deeds where his priorities lie. There is an overriding need to find the common causes that middle- and working-class voters share, the common problems that they face, and the common values that they hold—and then to demonstrate that these are the causes that Labour embraces, the problems that it will tackle, and the values that it holds. It is a mistake to believe that policy can solve these brand problems when they are problems of connection, respect, and understanding that must be addressed first, before any policy can even get a hearing. By spending his time in communities where Labour is seen as out of touch, Sir Keir can win back trust. Labour can then go on to put flesh on the specific policies that address these issues and then, in government, deliver a full policy agenda that not only ameliorates the problems such voters face but also addresses their long-term causes as well.

This is all part of a wider, new politics that is now within Labour's grasp and to which our attention turns next.

Work

The politics that Britain and so many other Western industrialized democracies face in the 2020s is a politics driven by voter anger and discontent stemming, in part, from the effects of globalisation, which produces losers as well as winners. At the same time, the left has gradually chosen to lean toward its social liberal side over its economically radical politics, whilst failing to curb the devastating effects of unbridled or insufficiently regulated capitalism caused through the often reductionist approach of mere tax and spend.
What is needed is a politics for the left that creates a genuine left-based political economy that would enjoy enough popular support that it would successfully outlast the government that created it.

This politics has its roots in the Fabian thinking of Anthony Crosland, who argued in the 1950s that the future of socialism lay in taxing the worst excesses of capitalism and using that money for the purposes of redistribution of wealth through welfare and public service spending to aid those on lower incomes.[205] In the 1990s, Clinton in the United States, Blair in the UK, and particularly Schroder in Germany effectively took Croslandism to the limits when they chose to accept the free market economics of the Thatcher/Reagan era, hoping to couple this with increased amelioration of its adverse effects. Thus, the Blair and Clinton administrations decided to emphasize generous public spending settlements and working families' tax credits to bolster low-paying jobs through the welfare state. The problem with this approach was that as soon as a change of government occurred, these public spending settlements could be undone and welfare payments cut. In the UK, this was particularly true in the wake of the 2008 financial crash, when the Cameron government, coming to office in 2010, introduced its policy of austerity that undid so much of New Labour's good work in this area for lower-income people.

A future progressive politics would put work and family at the heart of the left's politics again and create a new political economy of the left to promote opportunity and combat economic inequality. We must learn from the lasting success of the Thatcher/Reagan axis in embedding a political economy so well that their successors, regardless of party, continued to uphold it. This new political economy should be based on core principles of responsibility as well as fairness and would emphasise empowerment and agency—not just equality. This is a politics which seeks a radical redistribution of power, not just wealth—with forms of workplace democracy ranging from worker representation on boards, worker influence over remuneration, pay transparency, salary ratios, an embrace of partnership and mutual models of employee ownership, and a dramatic expansion of shareholder democracy.

On the macro level, such a settlement bolsters the mixed economy. It encourages individuals, groups, companies, and corporations to establish or expand their own enterprises and compete with each other on a level playing field. At the same time, Labour would ensure that key regulatory elements were in place to underpin this settlement. These would include powers to ensure that the playing field is indeed level. This should be done through financial arrangements such as taxation, to ensure both the quantity and quality of public services required to enable people to work and the private sector to thrive. It also means supporting prevention of adverse developments such as the emergence of monopolies and the prevalence of massive companies who pay little or no taxes by comparison with their UK turnover; and it also includes effective instruments to deny control of key economic assets such as telecoms or power stations by foreign interests that are inimical to the UK's interests.

There is also a need to prioritise the needs of entire regions over cities; in the current model, megacities effectively dominate subservient and subsidy-dependent towns and districts. This requires a radical devolution of both power and money. The left should never advocate surrendering the possibility of economic opportunity in the towns and country beyond our cities. Rather, Labour must ensure a regional renaissance of power and prosperity beyond the megacities.

Such an agenda would include a proper system of regional banks—with attendant large-scale capitalization—and lending tied to small and medium enterprise.

It would also see a deprioritization of our dependency on financial services, particularly in terms of the disproportionate share of GDP that they take up—not reducing these sectors as an end in itself but rather pursuing growth in other areas of the economy in order to shift the balance of the economy overall.

To assist this, an ambitious industrial policy strategy to rejuvenate the manufacturing sector must be pursued with the objective of bringing manufacturing as a share of GDP more akin to that of Germany—which, per the OECD manufacturing value added index, stands at 21 percent—than that of the Anglosphere (9 percent in the UK; 11 percent in the United States).[206]

Labour could further underpin this regional approach by committing to an investment ratio that disproportionately benefits less prosperous regions. The same principle could be applied to education, so that instead of prioritising new university places in richer areas of the UK, a far greater emphasis in access to and funding of vocational education throughout the UK occurs.

Value should be placed on work. This new political economy would see the transformation of minimum wages into living wages and precarious work into full-time, secure jobs. The left needs to accept that welfare is no substitute for wages—and can indeed be seen as insulting rather than empowering by many of the very voters the left most wants to empower. Agency over one's own life includes knowing that hard work will pay off, without the need for what is sometimes felt to be charity from government in the form of tax credits or welfare payments. Guaranteeing good, full-time and well-respected jobs through well-funded, accessible training programmes in all sectors and across all regions is vital to this approach. This represents a shift from a traditional social democratic focus on the redistribution of wealth through taxation to the redistribution of the creation of wealth in the economy.

To this end, a genuine left-based political economy would seek predistribution more than redistribution as a means of ensuring that wealth did not flow from top to the bottom but rather was generated at all levels of society. Regional growth and workplace democracy are engines of this change. Regional growth can be achieved through an ambitious programme of regional bank development with high market capitalisation.

Paired with these initiatives, a radical programme of workplace democracy—involving the empowerment of workers in pay remuneration committees and worker representation on boards—offers a vision of the worker as a genuine partner of capital as opposed to a servant. By empowering workers with shared responsibility for wage decision-making, lower wages can rise rather than welfare being called on to alleviate in-work poverty. All of this amounts to a politics of control, in which workers themselves feel genuine agency over their time, money, and power.

The ultimate ambition for the left in this area should be to develop a political economy as rewarding in terms of agency and self-respect for blue-collar workers as for the middle class—underpinned by proper pay and decent jobs. What's more, the left must ensure that these good, full-time, respectable jobs are to be found in the existing communities in which workers live. Ensuring good work exists beyond big cities is critical not only to the vital regeneration of high streets and communities, struck first by globalisation and now by the pandemic, but also to honouring a true respect for the places in which voters live, work, and love.

Family

The natural temptation of the left is to talk about the challenges people face and the actions government can take in terms of large-scale statistics and big central government programmes. In blatant contravention of what is known about voter psychology, the left prefers to argue its points through statistics—not stories—and at the level of the general rather than the personal. Sir Keir's Labour Party instead should return politics to the personal level. It should talk about the challenges of COVID-19 and the economy and view this frighteningly fast-changing world through the prism of individual voters' stories. Families worried about grandparents in care homes, parents on furlough, and children losing out from exam fiascos are a powerful means of forging a genuine emotional connection between the state of the nation as a whole and the need for genuine and meaningful change in a voter's real-life experience.

A greater emphasis on the politics of family will also allow the left to avoid potentially divisive social politics and embrace powerful and positive themes of commonality and feeling instead. This was the case with the marriage equality advance over the past decade.

Rather than dwelling on the legal sphere of the debate, marriage equality campaigners enjoyed marked success by making arguments based on a simple respect for love between partners. Arguing its politics through a language of family and love, and indeed love of family, makes the left more capable of winning even difficult arguments on immigration or refugees.

The left should be sure to connect its values concerning family and work and not treat these as separate matters. For most people, control over their life includes the freedom both to enjoy a decent, well-paying, fulfilling job and either to raise a family and spend meaningful time with it or to enjoy some other lifestyle outside of work. It also includes making sure that older generations are taken care of and families aren't forced to make large financial sacrifices to look after grandparents. For too long, too many voters have had to choose between time with family and the demands of work, and Labour should be explicit in its efforts to free voters to enjoy both. By stressing the politics of family, Labour will also be able to couch important arguments on issues such as the gender pay gap in terms that are not just based on equality or statistics but in emotion as well. This family-led approach means creating a more equitable housing market, a fairer welfare system, and early interventions such as state-led early years education.

Finally, an emphasis on how politics affects families and on the importance of understanding what matters to their own family is far more important for most voters than what matters beyond their family. Sir Keir's Labour Party can test the likely efficacy of positioning messaging policy or politics in terms of its likely impact on a voter's family.

Place

In December 2019, Labour lost dozens of seats in its former heartlands as a result of losing touch with voters and failing to come up with a convincing response to Conservative promises to regenerate their communities. Since the election, the Johnson administration has promoted its vision of a "Levelling Up" agenda that would prioritise local and regional growth, especially for towns hard hit by the worst success of globalisation and economic decline.[207] However, the coronavirus pandemic means that in practice little has been done to implement this agenda. Moreover, in the longer run, Conservative success in this area will, by definition, be limited by the Conservative worship of the free market and refusal to tackle the root causes of inequalities of power and wealth.

As a result, Sir Keir's Labour Party has both a moral mission and a political opportunity to pursue in exposing the failures and broken promises of the Conservative "Levelling Up" agenda and the need for real and meaningful change that a Labour government can provide. Such an alternative is not about policy alone. Labour in the future must be as passionate about the politics of community as it is about the politics of the state and must look to protect communities from the worst ravages of globalisation and the aftermath of COVID-19. There is a clear and present danger that the long-term consequence of the COVID-19 crisis will be to make globalisation's winners win even more and its losers lose even more. Sir Keir's Labour Party must protect, preserve, and promote communities in all their varied forms with the full range of political and policy responses from recovery grants (not loans) to sustain small business, shop-local campaigns to counter online shopping's dominance, and a recovery tax on the tech giants that have enjoyed war-profiteering throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

Labour must embrace community through the politics of place, of pride in place, and through a commitment to the restoration of towns and communities—not just the acceleration of big cities. Labour must understand the importance of high streets as the cornerstones of what makes for decent societies in local communities, where services such as local post offices and the prosperity of local shops are essential to a community's success and perhaps to its very survival.

Achieving this will require Labour to ground itself emotionally, culturally, geographically, and politically with the major urban centres and to reconnect with voters who are proud of the places they live in and who rightly feel disrespected when offered work elsewhere or welfare instead. Labour must prove through the candidates it selects, the local campaigns it runs, and the policies it develops that it understands, feels, and shares a deep and meaningful commitment to the community's voters, to their lives, and to the places in which they live.

Power and democracy

As important as new leadership and the new politics of work, family, and place are to Labour's reemergence, they are insufficient if a different way of doing politics is not also embraced. Taking inspiration from the great Willy Brandt, Labour must "dare more democracy."[208] Sir Keir must challenge the left to think about how to apply a radical expansion of democratic empowerment not just in its politics but particularly in its economics. Empowering workers and putting agency at the heart of the left's policy prescriptions are the keys to success in making this new politics work for Labour. Labour should consider establishing an agency test for its future manifestos and party platforms. Indeed, it should even set in place an agency test in policymaking—similar to the equality tests the last Labour government established—so that no piece of legislation or policy initiative is considered without asking the question: "Does this increase or decrease an individual citizen's or a local community's actual control over their lives and decisions?" It is no longer sufficient for Labour to simply act unilaterally for the good of others. Labour must act with others to serve the common good and indeed empower others to act in the common good for themselves and with their communities.

Whilst some on the left believe that the correct response to the result of the Brexit referendum or the consistent election and re-election of Conservative governments is to trust voters less and centralise power more, Labour must reject such thinking and indeed embrace the opposite. Brexit was as much a cry for political control as it was a wave of anger at the existing economic settlement. Democracy is Labour's way out of the entire problem. It is precisely when voters might be inclined to make what some may see as dangerous decisions that it becomes more important than ever to trust them. For why should voters trust politicians who do not trust them? Trust is the gift of voters, and trust is the prerequisite of politicians.

A radical politics of democratisation in society, the economy, and in power itself can help rebuild that trust and provide the mandate that Labour needs for the sweeping structural, political, and economic change that is needed to attack the root causes of the problems Britain faces. In practical terms, this means the devolution of decision-making and power on a true basis of subsidiarity. It means using such measures as participatory budgeting, total place experiments, and the establishment of cooperatives that share power within companies and organizations in order to push power beyond politicians. Ideas such as the thirds model—whereby those who use services, those who run services, and those who pay for services are all equally represented at the senior decision-making level—can offer new ways of practicing what we preach in terms of democracy and agency.

All of this amounts to a kind of communitarian democratization of political power. A communitarian approach is one that emphasizes the local place that a person comes from; their community, both geographic and professional, that contributes to their identity; as well as the importance of family in understanding their motivations. Democratisation is a means by which a greater sense of control can be felt by voters who are now more easily able to actively participate in a range of decision-making, from political power, to the workplace, to their own neighbourhoods. By tying the two together, communitarian values can be advanced and communitarian interests protected by democratization. What's more, an emphasis on the real experiences of voters in the realms of work, family, and place is a better expression of democracy than the left's traditional emphasis on big national programmes to further a politics removed from the real lives of citizens.

This is an attractive prospect in terms of making manifest the all-too-often ethereal politics of agency. But it is not without its own problems. A political weakness in this approach would be the extent to which its individual atomisation could be exploited by the right. However, contra-that, is the potential strength of the left as the only actor that can credibly challenge the power of the market. The left achieves this not by threatening, as it has in the past, to replace a bullying and overweening market with a bullying and overweening state. Rather it does so, once again, by creating a balance of interests between the market, the state, and the community. Similarly, there's a danger of middle-class capture in the politics of meeting-itis, by which the left feels better because there are participatory budgeting programs and more powerful tenants resident associations and parent teacher associations.

In order to mitigate these weaknesses, Labour needs to improve access to these forums whilst making it easier to take part at a variety of levels. Peer-to-peer recruitment, flexibility of scheduling, and greater online access would make such participation more attractive. Doing so will allow working-class access to the secret passageways of power that the middle classes have enjoyed and exploited for so long. Participation takes up valuable time, which someone working full time cannot afford.

Levelling up the playing field by improving child care access and increasing flexible working hours would make life better for everyone—gig workers, single parents, as well as traditional families. This is where the state should harness its power to regulate in order to shape markets and society rather than to redistribute after the fact in order to deliver social justice, guaranteeing time off, holidays, and basic working rights for all citizens. As well as being right in and of itself, this would also allow more people time to get involved in their communities should they so wish. This all leads back to a politics that has the potential to win back the trust, faith, and votes of working-class people.

This is why, even though the approach outlined above risks a degree of individualisation, that individualisation is likely critical to the success of this politics; unless blue-collar voters themselves are practically able to wield greater power for higher pay and more flexible time off on their own terms, the politics will work on paper but not in practice. Collective action through renewed trade unions, guilds, and other structures can be a means of mitigating the risk of getting the balance between the individual and the collective wrong.

Conclusion

The strategy for Labour's victory at the next general election requires Sir Keir's success in forging a relationship of approval, trust, and respect with the electorate. Labour must develop a politics that unites the working- and middle-class wings of its electoral coalition through a policy emphasis on work and place and a messaging emphasis on family. Delivery should be local, community-led, and citizen-controlled. A radical embrace of a dramatic double devolution of power and money from central government to nations, regions, localities, communities, and citizens themselves will show Labour's willingness to dare to embrace more democracy. No longer will Labour merely threaten to replace an overweening and bullying free market with an overly centralised state whose bureaucracies too often bully rather than empower citizens.

Instead, Labour's new politics of work, family, and place will replace this, establishing a new balance of interests between the market, the state, and the community and placing each on a more equal footing. When combined with Sir Keir's clear patriotism and demonstrated respect for the voters themselves, this will give Labour the means to prove—in both style and substance—the party's changed nature in opposition and its changed approach to government. This combination of reassuring leadership and inspirational politics can win back the trust of voters, demonstrating in both word and deed that Labour is once again responsive to the needs and aspirations of society as a whole, from the most vulnerable and left-behind to those whose prime fear is that Labour would threaten the progress they have already achieved.

Starmerism is a forward-looking, patriotic reimagining of what it is to be Labour. It is as proud of the values and history of the nation as it is of the Labour movement. Starmerism speaks to the hopes and fears of working people, both middle- and working-class alike, who previously abandoned Labour but whose support is crucial to taking the party back into government.

As Sir Keir himself said: "What we say at the next general election isn't written yet. But it will be rooted in Labour values. It won't sound like anything you've heard before. It will sound like the future arriving."

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION:
No Time to Celebrate

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[134] Poll respondents indicate those feeling financially secure (12 percent, or +4 points) or feel they are getting ahead with savings (41 percent, or +10 points), whereas fewer say they are falling behind on their monthly expenses (8 percent, or -7 points) or are just getting by with no savings (39 percent, or -7 points). Indeed, compared with 2019, fewer Canadians feel their financial situation (43 percent, or -7 points) and quality of life (38 percent, or -9 points) have declined, and that they are having trouble making ends meet (35 percent, or -14 points).

[135] A slight majority of Canadians continue to feel their income has not kept pace with their cost of living, although fewer are feeling this way since 2018 (56 percent, or -11 points from 2019 and -22 from 2018). And one-quarter (26 percent, or -5 points) still feel that their household lives beyond their means.
[136] Of note, the last broad-based tax increase attempted in Canada was in British Columbia, where centre-right Liberal Gordon Campbell attempted to sign on for the federal HST (a VAT). It led to such a furor that it forced his resignation and a referendum where it was defeated. The last broad-based tax increase implemented in Canada was Ontario Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty signing onto the HST to spur business investment at the depths of the 2009 recession. Despite sending more than $4 billion directly to consumers in transition supports, McGuinty fell from 71 seats to 53 in the next election, reduced from a majority to a minority.
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