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Centre Write

Summer 2019

Identity crisis?

Nick Gibb MP | Lord Holmes | Rachel Maclean MP | Prof John Curtice

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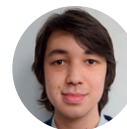
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Deputy editor's letter



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It is impossible to dispute the importance of identity in our lives. The feelings of attachment and belonging to a community, a political movement, or simply a football team, are often immensely powerful. They can move us to do great things, to be charitable and compassionate to others, to fight for a good cause.

But 'us' has to be followed by 'them'. Just as shared identity brings some of us closer together, it also creates divides with others. If these differences are understood, respected or, at the very least, tolerated, then we do not have to fear them.

Yet, such divides are now increasingly stretched into unbridgeable chasms by a large variety of forces. Understanding is replaced by mistrust, respect by fear, and tolerance by the belief that there can be no compromise with 'the other'.

As our acute political crisis is starting to feel like a chronic condition, where fundamental clashes over identity are dominant, this edition of *Centre Write* attempts to take a step back, to examine how we got here, and to offer some remedies to this current state of affairs.


Political scientist and electoral expert, **Professor John Curtice** (p.7) explains how Brexit is now threatening to completely unravel our two-party system, while **Professor Will Jennings** (p.9) looks at longer term trends behind the vote, emphasising the ever-widening gap between cities and towns. Meanwhile, **John Lamont MP** (p.10) and **Professor John Denham** (p.12) discuss the trajectory of Scottish and English

nationalism in the context of Brexit.

But our crisis of identity is not unique, with many western countries grappling with similar political issues and cultural divides. Director of the UK division of the German think tank Konrad Adenauer Foundation **Felix Dane** (p.14) emphasises the importance of taking nation-states seriously across Europe, while the Ditchley Foundation's **Emerson Csorba** (p.17) highlights the negative effect of identity politics on Canada.

So what should be done? Editor of *Areo Magazine*, **Helen Pluckrose** (p.20), argues that if we are to maintain an open and liberal society, we must look beyond the extremes of our political opponents and avoid exaggerating and catastrophising about those who disagree with us. Meanwhile, **Rachel Maclean MP** (p.26) calls for all of us to stop pitting social groups against each other, such as the young against the elderly.

Yet, it is important to remember that many of our divides continue to have real and significant consequences. Swimmer and Paralympic Games winner, **Lord Holmes** (p.21), discusses the barriers that disabled people still face in Britain and how they can be addressed. And the former director of the Equality Trust, **Duncan Exley** (p.23), thinks that we need to rethink social mobility if we are to address our class and regional divides.

I hope this edition provides some food for thought on the many issues of identity that currently permeate our politics, and are likely to continue to do so. 

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Director's note



Ryan Shorthouse is the Founder and Director of Bright Blue and editor-in-chief of *Centre Write*

The centre-right is on the back foot in this country. The Conservative Government has failed to deliver its overriding aim of recent years, Brexit. After nearly a decade in power, it is struggling to create or communicate a compelling case for being in government. It is bleeding supporters, largely to the Brexit Party, but also to the Liberal Democrats.

A new Conservative Prime Minister, with a better character and vision, does offer some hope. Don't get carried away, though. Brexit remains a gigantic block. Britain has become consumed and defined by it. It must be resolved first, before the Conservatives can think about securing a majority through a new programme of domestic reform.

Sooner or later, there will be a realisation that a final showdown to decide Britain's fate with Europe, between No Deal or No Brexit, is coming. It is patently clear that a way forward cannot be found in this hung parliament. Frankly, parliamentarians should be ashamed that they have failed to agree to a compromise, forcing Britain with this incredibly divisive and disappointing choice. Years of political energy have been wasted.

An inability to give ground, to settle on a softer Brexit, could very well come to haunt Remainers. Playing politics to undermine Theresa May's Government, or to hold tight in the hope of overturning the 2016 referendum result, may have seemed clever in the short-term, but the long-term impact of this strategy could be very costly indeed. In the final showdown – an election or a confirmatory referendum – No Deal could well win. Since forecasts of economic disaster following the 2016 referendum

did not materialise, why would Leave voters be persuaded of similar predictions with No Deal?

A confirmatory referendum is likely to be the condition and result of another significant Brexit extension beyond Halloween. But, I suspect, the showdown will come earlier, in the guise of an election. Boris is the frontrunner for the Tory crown. He has promised that we'll be out of October, come what may. Don't expect him to wiggle out of that, despite the absurd hopes and prophecies of some of his newfound supporters.

Since the EU won't budge on the Irish backstop, which is a necessary part of any withdrawal agreement barring the UK remaining part of the Customs Union, Boris will be leading this country to No Deal. There are enough Tory MPs to ensure that this parliament blocks such an outcome, including a vote of no confidence in his government. The inevitable outcome of this stranglehold over a Boris Government, then, is an election.

An election, in fact, is likely to come sooner than many people think. Boris might be persuaded that the best strategy is to get on the front foot and call an election immediately upon assuming office. That way, he can stand as the candidate for Brexit, seeking a mandate for a final-hour renegotiation with the EU before October and, if that fails, No Deal.

Polling suggests he could Hoover up Brexit Party supporters and defeat Jeremy Corbyn, giving him a convincing majority. And, cunningly, this will cause problems for Labour, who will have to finally choose

whether they stand for Remain or not, since the policy of constructive ambiguity would be flattened. With Boris having a new mandate and majority, the hope is that the EU might well blink and concede ground. If it doesn't, Boris has the numbers for No Deal anyway.

“A final showdown to decide Britain's fate with Europe, between No Deal or No Brexit, is coming.”

One positive from all of this: this election will probably, finally give Britain freedom from the miserable and crippling current Brexit stalemate. But a centre-right government will then face bigger problems. The consequences of a deeply disruptive and damaging No Deal. Further necessary and messy negotiation with the EU. And public opinion and political discourse that has become more receptive to leftist thinking, both economically and culturally.

Our social identity has become much more important in influencing political opinions and votes. In different Western countries, voters are increasingly divided by age, gender, educational attainment and ethnicity, rather than the traditional cleavage of socio-economic class.


From this, 'identity politics', admittedly an often ill-defined and over-used term, has intensified, unhelpfully pitting social groups against one another. Sinisterly, from the extreme right, this is usually on ethnic or national grounds. But, from the political left, the well-intended but simplistic intersectional thesis of there simply being

>> strong and weak, powerful and powerless, social groups in society is increasingly gaining traction.

Supporters of such leftist identity politics do have a point: individuals of certain social groups have historically faced – and still do, sadly – injustices as

a result of discrimination. But critics also have a point: there is a creeping tendency to define oneself, and judge others, based on social group membership. This can be highly illiberal and unjust, restrictive of how we view not only others, but ourselves.

The desired end-state, surely, should be

to find a way of quietening the influence of our social identity on individual psychology, perceptions, relationships, decisions and activities in life. This is a road to greater – more profound – individual liberty, a positive vision for the centre-right in this new age of identity. 

Letters to the editor

Send your letters to anvar@brightblue.org.uk



I applaud Tim Farron MP's defence of people's right to hold a variety of religious beliefs in your last issue ('Faithful to politics?', Autumn 2018). Appealing to John Stuart Mill, Tim Farron MP provided a robust defence of a truly liberal attitude to religious beliefs where the 'pluralistic' nature of personal beliefs is upheld and where it is possible to hold views which diverge from the norm. Tim Farron MP warned against a consensus being set by 'liberal elites' of disdain for religion and individual belief.

Perhaps if Tim Farron MP had articulated his belief in classical liberalism during his leadership of the Liberal Democrats in this way, questions around his own personal faith would have not dogged him in the way they did.

Matthew Sachak *Bright Blue member*

In his piece ('There, when we need it most...', Autumn 2018), Revd Mike Long does extremely well in explaining the value of religious experience as an incredibly strong factor for social cohesion. Based on his first-hand experience of Grenfell, Revd Mike Long rightly asserts the undeniable power of faith, regardless of the contingent tradition or confession, in uniting people and helping them find common purpose.

Hence, the work of faith-based organisations is indispensable if we are to succeed in promoting a society where the sense of community is stronger. It seems to be the case, as Revd Mike Long points out, that the role of religion is not as private as some would like it to be; to its adherents, at least, it has clear social ramifications.

In a turbulent climate of uncertainty, then, we would all do well in rethinking the great potential of faith in contributing to a stronger social fabric.

Arturo Morselli *Bright Blue member*

It was refreshing to see Mohammed Amin's piece on prejudice towards Muslims ('An end to Islamophobia', Autumn 2018), as the author takes such a firm moral stance.

As he commented, hate spreads easily and results in all sort of domestic problems. More rage and radicalisation are the least this country needs now. And by tackling the hostility that this minority faces, the Conservative Party will positively affect not only Britain but the party itself, considering the large fraction of the electorate that is expecting a strong position on this issue.

As mentioned by Mohammed Amin, the party already had some progress with Muslims in the 2015 election and it certainly can repeat such success in the future.

Leonardo Vizioli *Bright Blue member*

The fast rise and fall of the two-party system

Even before the European elections, the failure to deliver Brexit this March was proving to be a turning point for the two main parties, argues **Professor John Curtice**



John Curtice is Professor of Politics, Strathclyde University, and Senior Research Fellow at the NatCen Social Research and The UK in a Changing Europe

One of the most remarkable features of the last General Election was how the Conservatives and Labour between them managed to dominate the electoral scene. Over four in five (82%) of all votes cast were given to one or other of those two parties, a higher proportion than at any election since 1970. After years of appearing to be under threat, it seemed that the country's two-party system had suddenly been restored to rude health.

This development was all the more surprising given the backdrop against which the general election was being fought – the debate about Brexit. This is a subject on which opinion cuts across the distinction between 'left' and 'right' that typically divides Labour and Conservative supporters. Consequently, both parties found that their voters were divided in the EU referendum. Although on balance those who had voted Conservative backed Leave over Remain in the 2016 referendum, still as many as two in five voted Remain. Similarly, although most Labour supporters backed Remain, a substantial minority of around one in three supported Leave.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, Brexit was not a subject about which either party felt it possible to be dogmatic about during the 2017 election campaign, as they tried to keep their divided supporters together. This was in stark contrast to UKIP, nearly all of whose voters had backed Leave and which was clearly in favour of a 'hard' Brexit, or indeed to the stance adopted by the traditionally pro-EU Liberal Democrats who were already in favour of a second

EU referendum. Yet, even though the 2017 general election was meant to be about Brexit, UKIP's vote collapsed while the Liberal Democrats barely registered any recovery at all from the slump in their fortunes that had occurred in 2015.

However, a look underneath the surface raised questions about the idea that the two-party system had returned. Despite the ambiguity in their positions on the subject, voters appeared to be using a vote for either the Conservatives or Labour to express their views about Brexit. This was particularly evident in the pattern of support for the Conservatives, who gained ground among those who had voted Leave, including not least many a voter who had backed UKIP in 2015, whereas they lost ground among those who had backed Remain. As a result, the party garnered an electorate whose views on running the economy were often at odds with those of the party's traditional allies in big business, creating a potential tension in the Conservative coalition.

Labour, in contrast, did manage to increase its support both amongst those who voted Leave and those who voted Remain. Even so, the increase was markedly greater among those who had backed Remain. That helped ensure that the party was highly popular among younger voters and the single most popular choice of university graduates. However, the party's Leave-inclined voters were to be found disproportionately among the party's more working-class supporters, a group whose interests the party above all seeks to represent. Brexit therefore presented

Labour with a difficult balancing act too – in its case on top of existing divisions and tensions generated by divergent attitudes towards Jeremy Corbyn's leadership.

Nevertheless, for more than a year after the 2017 general election the country's two parties appeared to be maintaining the large coalitions they had assembled in 2017. On the eve of the unveiling in mid-November 2018 of the draft withdrawal treaty between the UK and the EU, the two parties stood in the polls at 39% apiece in Great Britain, in both cases just down a little on their performance in 2017.

However, as Parliament continued incessantly to debate Brexit but failed to reach a conclusion, so support for both the Conservatives and Labour began to fall away. By the time the original deadline for leaving the EU was approaching, support for the Conservatives had fallen by three points to 36%, while Labour's had dropped even further – by five points to just 34%. In Labour's case, it is debatable how far the party's loss was occasioned by its stance on Brexit. The party's support fell among both Remainers and Leavers, suggesting that either voters in both groups were unhappy with its handling of Brexit, or that the issue was less important than another development, that is, an intensification of the row about Jeremy Corbyn's handling of allegations of antisemitism in the party. Indeed, this row contributed to the defection of eight Labour MPs to form a new Independent Group now known as 'Change UK'.

In the case of the Conservatives, however, there was little doubt that the

>> drop in the party's support represented an early sign that the coalition it had gathered at the 2017 election was at risk of unravelling in the wake of the government's inability to deliver Brexit. All of the fall in the party's support between mid-November 2018 and March 2019 occurred among those who had voted Leave in 2016. Much of this loss was to UKIP whose support rose by two points to 7%.

However, once the Government had failed to meet its target of leaving the EU on 29 March, what once might be regarded as a trickle came to look more like a steady stream. Within less than a fortnight support for the Conservatives had fallen by another six points, with much (though not all) of this further loss occurring among those who voted Leave. Again, the principal beneficiaries were UKIP, together with the nascent Brexit Party, which enjoyed a further four-point increase in support to 11% – not far short of what UKIP achieved in 2015.

Many UKIP supporters had switched to the Conservatives in 2017 because they thought that doing so was the best way of ensuring that Brexit would happen. Once the Conservative party had failed to deliver, much of that vote was at risk of switching back again. Labour certainly did not profit from this first signs of a potential collapse in Tory support – the party's vote simply remained at 36%, and thus the combined tally of support for the two largest parties had now slipped below the two-thirds mark.

Thus, even before it became clear that the UK was going to have to hold European Parliament elections, there were clear warning signs of what might happen. Voters had already shown signs of melting away from both parties in the wake of the Brexit impasse. Meanwhile, a European Parliament election provided an electoral environment in which voters were especially likely to express whatever concerns they had about the parties' stance on and handling of Brexit. Such elections have long since been occasions when voters are more willing to give the

incumbent government a kicking and to vote for smaller parties, and especially those articulating a Eurosceptic point of view. Moreover, the man who had made UKIP such a formidable Eurosceptic force before the 2016 referendum. Nigel Farage, had returned to the electoral fray as the head of the newly-formed Brexit Party.

In the event, what hitherto been a stream of defections away from both the Conservatives became a flood. Over a half of those who voted Conservative in 2017 switched to the Brexit Party in the European election, nearly all of them people who had voted Leave in 2016 and who felt the UK should have left the EU on March 29 come what may. However, now the party was also losing the confidence of many of those who voted Remain, with one in five of those who voted Conservative switching to one of the pro-second referendum parties, most notably the Liberal Democrats.

Meanwhile, Labour's apparent difficulties in maintaining the coalition of Remain and Leave supporters that it had been trying to keep together through a stance that combined support for Brexit in principle while keeping open the possibility of submitting the issue to a second referendum intensified. Among its Leave voters, the party found itself being challenged by the Brexit Party, and lost around one in eight of its 2017 voters in that direction in the European election. At the same time, it also lost a lot more ground – amounting to more than 40% of its support in 2017 – to those parties that were unambiguously arguing for a second referendum.


Thus, when the ballot boxes were opened the Conservatives found themselves with just 9% of the vote, while Labour fared little better with 14%. Between them the two parties now commanded the support of just 23% of those who voted, a far cry from the 82% that had done so two years earlier, and by far the lowest proportion recorded in any

election since Labour first started fighting elections on a nationwide basis in 1918.

However, this result was obtained in the very particular circumstances of a European election when voters are more likely to support smaller parties. The key question is what the outcome of the European elections portends for Westminster.

Not as bad as in the European elections, but bad enough. That, at least, is the immediate message from the polls. The first ones taken in the immediate wake of the European election have on average put Labour on 24% and the Conservatives on 20%. Whereas once the Conservatives enjoyed the support of over half of those who voted Leave, now only around a quarter do so, and it is the Brexit Party that dominates among Eurosceptic voters. Similarly, where once the Labour party was backed by a half of Remain voters, now only around a third do so, no more than are opting to back the Liberal Democrats.

Still, one might wonder how durable such figures might be. As the European election fades in voters' memory, might not its impact simply wear off? Maybe. Except that the issue that has exposed the fragility of their respective electoral coalitions two years ago – Brexit – is unlikely to go away soon. Moreover, as we have seen, both Conservative and Labour support had been falling in the wake of the Brexit impasse well before the European elections (or Nigel Farage's Brexit Party) had come anywhere close to the horizon. In short, while the immediate impact of the European election on the standing of the parties might well fade somewhat, there is little reason to anticipate that the status quo ante will be easily or readily restored.

The Conservatives and Labour both rode the Brexit tiger successfully in 2017. However, the failure to resolve Brexit has now made the ride a much more uncomfortable one. As a result, Britain's two-party system now looks rather fragile once more. 

A tale of two Englands

As fortunes diverge between towns and cities, so too do their politics, writes **Professor Will Jennings**



Will Jennings is Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at the University of Southampton

The Brexit vote and 2017 general election exposed the deepening geographical divide in British politics: between places that have prospered in a globalised knowledge economy – predominantly major cities – and those on the periphery, towns and rural areas.

In the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, core cities tended to vote Remain, while towns – with the exception of university towns – tended to vote Leave. In the 2017 general election, Labour made large gains in cities, picking up wins in constituencies such as Kensington and Chelsea, while the Conservatives experienced substantial swings in towns, taking seats like Mansfield and Walsall North against the tide of the national swing.

“The growing division between cities and towns is creating opportunities for a politics of resentment to take hold, driven by populist attacks on the political and economic ‘establishment’.”

Similar dynamics are apparent in the USA, where support for the Democratic Party is increasingly concentrated in densely populated urban areas, while the Republicans have made advances – most notably in the 2016 US Presidential election – across rural and small-town America. In Europe, too, support for radical right populist parties has often been



focused in peripheral rural areas and post-industrial towns.

These political divisions map onto patterns of relative decline, driven by long-term processes of social and economic change. Deindustrialisation, economic agglomeration, the expansion of higher education and immigration have all contributed to a fundamental fracturing in the demography of towns and cities in Britain. Major cities are becoming younger, more ethnically diverse, more educated and better able to exploit opportunities afforded them by creative, knowledge and digital sectors, even when substantial parts of their population are in precarious work. At the same time, the populations of towns are aging, less diverse, and possess lower levels of skills and education. Coastal and post-industrial towns in particular suffer

from high rates of deprivation and health problems, as well as lower levels of social mobility.

These divergent demographic trajectories underpin differences in values and identities: on average, the sorts of people who live in towns tend to be more socially conservative, uncomfortable with social change and are more likely to identify as English. While city-dwellers tend to be more socially liberal on issues such as same-sex marriage or immigration and more plural in their sense of identity.

A recent report by Hope Not Hate with the Centre for Towns mapped out some of these deep divides. Concern or hostility towards immigration was highest in the former industrial towns and isolated coastal communities that have experienced sustained economic decline. Major cities and university towns were much more

>> welcoming and embracing of diversity. While public disaffection with politics – and the political class in Westminster – is widespread, it intensifies the further away one gets from London. Similarly, people from towns are more likely to believe that politicians don't care about them or their area. As such, the growing division between cities and towns is creating opportunities for a politics of resentment to take hold, driven by populist attacks on the political and economic 'establishment'.

How can the political parties buck these trends and build a wider base of support? Neither party can afford to ignore those places and people where it has been losing ground. The Conservative Party quickly needs to find a way to enhance its appeal to younger professionals comfortable with social change and more liberal in their outlook. Doing so in the context of Brexit will be extremely tricky, especially since it threatens to undermine the reputation of the party for competent handling of the economy. Becoming distracted with US-style culture wars and hyped-up controversies over freedom of speech on


university campuses – egged on by certain parts of the media – will only exacerbate the party's lagging performance with younger, more socially liberal voters.

“Coastal and post-industrial towns in particular suffer from high rates of deprivation and health problems, as well as lower levels of social mobility.”

At the same time, the Conservatives need to deliver for those places that have increasingly turned to them following extended periods of decline. There otherwise is a risk that further disappointment will lead many voters to look to other parties, or simply stay at home.

The Labour Party, on the other hand, faces substantial challenges in rebuilding their appeal in towns to older, working-class voters suspicious of the party's record on immigration, the economy and its ability to speak to the re-emergence of Englishness as a political identity. At the same time, Labour's fudging of its

position on Brexit increasingly is putting its support in its city strongholds at risk among Remainers, who are turning to the alternatives offered by the more clearly pro-European Greens and Liberal Democrats – as was demonstrated to devastating effect in the recent elections to the European Parliament.

While these geographical divides make it increasingly difficult for any party to construct broad electoral coalitions, the underlying demographic fractures are also creating divergent sets of policy problems. With ageing populations, shortages in skills and qualifications, and poor transport connections, many towns face acute problems in terms of public services, pressure on social and health care, and structural obstacles to economic growth. Cities also face a distinct set of challenges in terms of the cost of housing, congestion, and sizeable localised inequalities. Without rebalancing our national approach to economic growth there is a risk that the political divides discussed here will deepen – leaving our politics increasingly fragmented and volatile. 

Taking back control?

Brexit is not strengthening but weakening the case for Scottish independence, observes **John Lamont MP**



John Lamont MP is a member of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee

Like many people across the UK, it took me some time to digest the news that was breaking on the morning of the 24th June, 2016. Whatever side of the argument you were on, the result of the EU referendum was a surprise to most people.

However, one person in the UK wasted no time to jump on the vote, so sure was she of the implications. As soon as

the result had been declared, the First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, hastily called a press conference at Bute House, her official Edinburgh residence. She stood in front of assembled media and declared that a second referendum on Scottish independence was now firmly back on the table, asserting that Scots were so outraged about leaving the EU they would now want to leave the UK.

Her political calculation was that she would be able to exploit the fact that the majority of Scots voted to Remain to get her flagging campaign to break up Britain back up and running.

This press conference has set the tone for the political debate in Scotland since. The SNP have time and time again confidently asserted that Brexit makes Scottish independence much more likely.

>> At every available opportunity they have sought to utilise Brexit to argue the only option is to leave the UK. It is almost a weekly occurrence for the First Minister or one of her senior Ministers to repeat that Brexit makes Scottish independence a sure thing.

After the EU referendum, a re-energised SNP embarked on a nationwide campaign to sell their new independence message. They commissioned a so-called 'Growth Commission', led by economist Andrew Wilson, to refresh the hugely discredited economic case for leaving the UK which Scots rejected in 2014.

Given the First Minister's confidence, an outside observer might be led to conclude that Scottish independence is a likely outcome of Brexit. But three years on from that Bute House press conference that is not how things have turned out.

“Unpicking more than 300 years' worth of political, economic and fiscal union would be a huge undertaking, much more substantial than Brexit.”

Poll after poll shows that support for Scottish independence is actually falling, despite the SNP's best efforts. One of the most recent, commissioned by former SNP MP Angus Robertson, showed support for the Union is up to 62%. At a time when the political establishment in the UK is consumed by Brexit and the nationalists are focused entirely on independence, support for the SNP's cause is falling, not rising.

The SNP's 'Growth Commission' came back with the conclusion that leaving the UK would result in an extra ten years of austerity, far beyond anything the UK Government has imposed, and it has now been quietly shelved by the SNP leadership.

And in 2017, the First Minister's impulsive reaction to Brexit resulted in her losing a third of her MPs, including Alex Salmond and former SNP leader Angus Robertson, both to Scottish Conservatives like myself campaigning against another independence referendum. And the closer we get to Brexit, the more support for independence falls.

“Most Scots are, to use a good Scottish phrase, scunnered by the endless constitutional debate.”

The SNP clearly miscalculated that Brexit would push people towards independence. So, why are Scots still backing the United Kingdom? There are, in my mind, two main reasons: first, many independence supporters actually want to leave the EU. The SNP kept a tight lid on them during the EU referendum, but since then, senior figures such as former deputy leader of the SNP Jim Sillars have been vocal supporters of leaving the EU. A NatGen report found that over a third of SNP voters backed Brexit.

This makes sense; pro-Brexit Scottish nationalists are at least consistent. Why would you campaign for Holyrood to have more powers, only to want to hand large parts of them back to Brussels? The impact of the SNP's posturing on Brexit has been that many of these voters have stopped supporting independence.

The second reason that support for independence is falling is that most Scots are, to use a good Scottish phrase, scunnered by the endless constitutional debate. The vast majority of my constituents, whether they voted Leave or Remain, just want Brexit to happen so we can talk about something else. And the last thing they want their politicians to be focusing on is another debate about breaking up the United Kingdom.


If Brexit has shown us anything it is that leaving a political union is challenging.

And because the UK is a market worth four times more to Scottish businesses than the EU, Brexit would look like a walk in the park compared to leaving the UK. And unlike with the EU, Scotland is a significant net beneficiary to the UK, meaning independence would result in an instant hit to public finances, even if trade was miraculously left unaffected.

Time and time again I listen to speeches from SNP Members of Parliament outlining how damaging leaving the EU would be for Scotland. Yet, in the same breath, they argue in favour of leaving the United Kingdom. Unpicking more than 300 years' worth of political, economic and fiscal union would be a huge undertaking, much more substantial than Brexit. So people look back on the SNP's claim in 2014 that independence could be negotiated and delivered in 18 months and realise that this was complete nonsense. In many ways, Brexit makes the argument for leaving the UK much weaker and that is something the SNP leadership misjudged back in 2016.

“At a time when the political establishment in the UK is consumed by Brexit and the nationalists are focused entirely on independence, support for the SNP's cause is falling, not rising.”

Most Scots continue to support remaining part of the UK, but that could change. The SNP should not be underestimated. They have an army of highly motivated volunteers and everything their politicians do is designed to try to boost support for independence.

While we must continue to highlight the weaknesses of the SNP's argument, the focus for politicians who want the UK to survive and thrive must be on showing Scots how they benefit from remaining part of the UK. 

The invisible English

Professor John Denham thinks those who regard themselves as English, rather than British, are the 'left behind' who voted Brexit



John Denham is Professor of Knowledge Exchange at the University of Winchester. He was previously Communities Secretary and Business Secretary in the last Labour Government

It's a paradox. England and the English are ever present in our culture and politics. They shaped the momentous decision of Brexit. Yet England – as England – is barely mentioned in our national political debate. If English identity is discussed, it is to be disparaged and abused as nationalist, proto-imperialist or racist.

“These English Leave voters would rather turn their back on the Union, let alone demand a new empire, to get England a fair deal.”

Brexit has revealed a deeply divided nation, but England's divisions were not created by Brexit. We've been growing apart for years; along fault lines of geography, age, class, wealth, education and race. We are not one single nation, united by a broadly similar experience of life and a shared view of the world.

We experience the world differently and see the world differently. We have come to believe in different things, to hold different values, to live in different places, with different experiences and expectations. But if we have been growing apart for years, we should drop any pretence that things will simply return to normal if or when we put Brexit behind us. Unresolved, our divisions will disrupt politics for the foreseeable future and on issues unrelated to Europe.

The political forces that academics Professors Matthew Goodwin and Roger Eatwell call 'national populism' have disrupted politics across Europe, including

in countries where EU membership has not been a central issue. Hope Not Hate polling says that 68% say no political party speaks for them. Meanwhile, 55% think the political system is broken. And, just as a reminder that the left-right divide has not gone away, 76% think politicians put the interests of big business before theirs.

Feeling marginalised, not having a voice, sensing your identity is under threat: all of these sentiments are pregnant with disruptive political potential.

But why talk about England?

England outside London voted Leave. Those who identify as English were most likely to vote Leave. Voters with the same demographics voted Remain in Scotland and Leave in England. The social divisions are widest in England. Many liberal and non-English commentators blame the English and English nationalism for Brexit. Leavers say they wanted sovereignty; but where does that sovereignty lie?

“The ‘more British’ are in the cities and the ‘more English’ in smaller communities. English identity is emphasised by those least happy with the economic and social change of the last decades.”

Fundamentally, England is a divided nation, and a divided nation lacks the shared values and aspirations that can deliver for the common good. Yet the UK government – the Government of England

– and the Official Opposition, the Greens, Liberal Democrats and Change UK all barely acknowledge England at all.

This refusal to acknowledge England as a political nation comes from the unfinished journey England and the Union are making from a Britain at the heart of Empire to the haphazard construction of a post-imperial state.

This legacy is what I call the 'presumption of unionism': a hangover from the unitary imperial state that says that the way our constitution is currently ordered is the only way that it can be ordered. Deep in political consciousness is the idea that the UK should govern England from London; that the national identity of England should be British; that to question the constitution, governance and identity of England is a distraction from 'the things that people really care about'; and that the maintenance of the Union depends on England being denied its nationhood.

England is a nation of multiple identities. For most people, English and British identities are intertwined, but they have different meanings, and we combine them differently. As we track across our mixed identities from 'English not British' through 'equally English and British' to 'British not English', the overall picture is clear.

Towards the English end of the spectrum we find people who are more rooted in a locality – a town, county or region. This, incidentally, explains the multifarious nature of Englishness; why English people will often also stress that they are from Yorkshire, Devon or Birmingham. It is not a monochrome

>> identity, but a shared national identity built on local roots. The more English have the strongest sense of distinct English political interests, are patriotic and associate their identity with positive characteristics.

“It was the England that wants its own parliament, does not feel well represented, and wants fair funding that was most attracted by ‘take back control’.”

At the British end we find people who are less rooted in any part of England, more likely to be European, and are less patriotic, have less pride in their identity and are more likely to reject Englishness completely.

The ‘more British’ are in the cities and the ‘more English’ in smaller communities. English identity is emphasised by those least happy with the economic and social change of the last decades.

This is reflected in the politics of our different identities. The people who most emphasise their English identity are not, generally, the people who are in power in England. They live in the ‘wrong’ places, they’ve had the ‘wrong’ education, they are, largely, the ‘wrong’ class, and they hold socially conservative rather than liberal metropolitan values. These are not, by and large, the people we find in powerful positions in corporate business, politics, the media or academia.

It is Britishness – an outlook widely shared amongst the political class – that is all too often the badge of power.

There is no evidence that English leave voters support the ‘greater British’ unionism conjured up by Anglo-centric Brexiteers like Boris Johnson, nor the proto-imperialism imagined by those who blame ‘English nationalism’ for Brexit. Indeed, there is no political nationalism of any significance. These English Leave voters would rather turn their back on the Union, let alone demand a new empire, to get England a fair deal.




Of course, many Leavers will have clung to ideas of England standing alone; these ideas of the nation have been inculcated in stories from the Armada to Dunkirk. Historic myths can be genuinely inspiring. But, as poor history, they can also be a poor guide to our real nature, and a hindrance to engaging with a changing world. Denied any national forum, and national debate about its own identity, England, alone of the nations of the UK, has had no chance to question whether these stories work so well for us today; no opportunity to reimagine itself as a modern twenty-first century nation.

England’s role in Brexit was to grasp the chance to express these suppressed demands for identity and sovereignty. It was the England that wants its own parliament, does not feel well represented,

and wants fair funding that was most attracted by ‘take back control’. It was the same people who in 2015 feared SNP influence on a hung parliament and gave Cameron his majority.

“This refusal to acknowledge England as a political nation comes from the unfinished journey England and the Union are making from a Britain at the heart of Empire to the haphazard construction of a post-imperial state.”

Brexit – however disruptive – was a demand to be heard and that’s why it should light the fuse for England’s democratic moment. 

A Europe comfortable with nation-states

There is a difference between patriotism and nationalism, says **Felix Dane**



Felix Dane is the Director of Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) UK and Ireland

This is the Age of Identity. In the US, conflicting visions of Americana jostle with one another. The desire to 'Make America Great Again' can be seen as the claiming of an identity, harkening back to an undefined time perceived as better and more American.

In Britain, Brexit has given rise to a similar hypothetical nostalgia, which is ultimately founded in identity. This was particularly clear in the debates at the time of the EU referendum.

“The patriot is but a nationalist who feels heard and unafraid.”

In the wider sociocultural sphere, in which identity politics reigns supreme, disparate elements attempt to define themselves with regard to their group identity, for example gender-related, or of sexual orientation.

Meanwhile, third generation immigrants, and others, are being seduced by moral-religious identities that appear to grant them purpose and meaning; some then leave Europe to become terrorist fighters.

The rise of nationalistic movements within Europe fits squarely within this very human behavioural pattern. Italy's Salvini has mentioned a desire to return to Europe's Judeo-Christian roots, while Poland's Morawiecki warned that without resistance, "Europe will no longer belong to Europeans."

We hear in the media that, following a long period of integration, we are now witnessing a return to instinctive national

sentiments, that the 'End of History', as Professor Francis Fukuyama famously wrote, is over, and that these sentiments occur because people are afraid, and because they are seduced by the strongman talk of security which the radical populist offers.

Maybe nationalism is a crisis of identity. Maybe the reaction to change and modernity, globalism and multiculturalism, epitomised in the feeling of 'left-behindness', has led people to a narrow reactionary focus on nation, history, and past, tinged with fear of the other. Maybe this is a brutish sectarian urge which can be understood merely by analysing the latent racism and xenophobia of its proponents. Without denying the clear reality of the globalisation pushback, I believe such a view is neither sensible nor justified.

For not only is the search for identity a human trait – from the tribal fighter to the keyboard warrior – but it is also a positive trait. It is how we form relationships and care about groups wider than our own immediate circle. Besides which, the pure global citizen, unmarred by any form of national, religious or social identity, entirely adrift, un-anchored in community, is a character that does not exist, and I wonder whether he or she would have any opinions, morals, or beliefs if they did.

Not enough has been made of the difference between patriotism and nationalism. Yet, the patriot is but a nationalist who feels heard and unafraid; the nationalist, thus, an unheard frightened patriot. Which brings us to populism. The populist offers radical solutions, capitalising on fear, and exploiting the

patriotic sentiment, but above all exploiting the vacuum left by centre-ground politics – thereby making the nationalist feel heard.

“Not only is the search for identity a human trait – from the tribal fighter to the keyboard warrior – but it is also a positive trait.”

The more concerned voices inveigh against nationalism, equating it with racism and ignorance, the more it will intensify. Those being seduced by the populists will find themselves ever more pushed away by the political centre, and pushed together. And few things strengthen in-group identity more than out-group rejection.

Is this to say that the rise of right-wing radicalism and anti-European sentiment is to be welcomed? No. No more than left-wing radicalism, or religious radicalism. The seductive and ruthless simplicity of radicalism is rarely the answer to a multifaceted world full of individuals with differing viewpoints and experiences. History has shown us this, both on the political left and the right, both in the secular and religious domain.

The EU needs reform. And this reform cannot overlook nation-states: they provide democratic legitimacy and identification. The EU, despite flag, anthem and constitution, has not quite succeeded to offer a sense of common identity. The ideology of ever-closer union and vilification of nationalism has alienated many in Europe, and made them wary of the EU.


So, how should Europe respond to the

>> rise in nationalism?

With intelligent analysis and an open attitude for reform. With tolerance for diversity of all kinds – including of opinion. A simple democratic remedy: listening rationally to the concerns of the people, and acting dispassionately upon them.

Each European state has to address the rise in nationalism individually, with actions ranging from reinstating national service, to addressing inequality, to increasing the political education of the citizenry, to opening the debate on migration and border control. But above all with a change

in attitude towards those that feel unheard.

Turn the nationalist into a bogeyman and he will vote for a radical populist. Be willing to review one's own actions and listen to their concerns, and they will vote for the political centre. And that makes for a better Europe for all. 

Commonwealth 2.0

The Commonwealth should be central to the UK's future foreign policy, **Lord Howell** argues



Lord Howell of Guildford is the Chairman of the International Relations Committee and the President of the Royal Commonwealth Society

The current Western preoccupation is the relationship with China.

What are the Chinese giant's true intentions as its networks snake through every continent and into the heart of Europe and of the British economy? Is it friend or foe, and how should we react?

Much less attention gets given to a far bigger trans-continental network in which, more by accident of history rather than blueprint design or strategy, Britain happens to be deeply embedded – the fifty-three nation Commonwealth of 2.4 billion people.

“A nation recovering from the divisive trauma of Brexit badly needs a story and a purpose as it seeks to re-position itself in the new global power pattern.”

The reason analysts and commentators find it so hard to focus on the modern Commonwealth is that nothing like this has ever existed before. This is not the old British Empire, not the British Commonwealth of the last century, not some kind of hierarchy with Britain at its hub or centre, not remotely comparable to

most other multinational or supranational structures, such as the EU, and not even primarily a conventional intergovernmental organisation.

“Nations we used to think we were teaching now have much to teach us.”

In fact, in its modern form, it is almost entirely a product of the digital age of connectivity and the communications revolution. Measuring it by the old standards of trade and investment flows, or conventional diplomatic relations between governments, fails to show what is happening and where its enormous potential lies.

The nature of international trade and business has now changed fundamentally, with services, knowledge products and data flows rivalling traditional physical commerce. This now puts a premium on soft power relationships, such as educational and cultural networks, common working language, agreed business standards, common law procedures, tight cooperation in science, medicine and technology, and a thousand other familiarising links which trade

statistics fail to pick up.

The British establishment has been dismally slow to perceive this transformation, still half convinced that its main trade interests lie in shipping goods to Europe and America, with the rest of the world as an afterthought. This would not matter if the old twentieth century view of the Commonwealth nations, as a string of low income societies, politically immature and in need of assistance from time to time under royal patronage, was still even vaguely accurate.

“The time may well be approaching when global presence on the high seas may best be organised through joint Commonwealth naval power in Commonwealth war-and-peace ships.”

But this picture could now be hardly further from the truth. The Commonwealth today includes a dozen of the fastest growing economies in the world and the largest prospective middle-income markets of all times. Many of them are now part of a new Asia: of increasingly converging



>> business structures and rising global impact. Whether or not they are on good terms with the biggest of all, China, their economies are becoming steadily more interwoven as they look eastwards rather than to the West.

“This is not the old British Empire, not the British Commonwealth of the last century, not some kind of hierarchy with Britain at its hub or centre.”

The Asian Development Bank estimates that of the \$30 trillion of consumption growth in world markets due between now and 2030, a mere £1 trillion will come from the Western economies. In 1990, more than 60% of the people of East Asia lived in extreme poverty. As of 2018, that proportion had dropped to 3%.

Of course, today's Commonwealth,

has its patchwork of rich and poor. This pattern, too, may be changing fast as nations like Bangladesh or Kenya move up into digital and online maturity at speeds which seemed impossible only a decade ago. Certainly, this still leaves a long tail of smaller states needing help and support of the most tailored kind, not least in combatting environmental and climate challenges which come in many different forms. This is precisely the kind of assistance that the Commonwealth, and Britain in particular, can provide, in more focussed forms than grandiose UN programmes.

As British connections with the rest of neighbouring Europe are re-ordered, and as the bedrock relationship with the United States starts looking less reliable, the old jibe about Britain being left without a role again begins to be heard. Yet a nation recovering from the divisive trauma of Brexit badly needs a story and a purpose as it

seeks to re-position itself in the new global power pattern.

Inside today's Commonwealth system, Britain can now find a dual new role, one part concerned with survival, and the other with national direction and purpose.

The markets of Asia, Africa and Latin America, once called the developing world but now acquiring a new status and momentum, are the ones in which Britain must succeed to survive and to which our whole economy must be regeared. And the struggling smaller island and coastal states of the Commonwealth, and the hundreds of millions still without clean water, sanitation or electricity, present the forum in which Britain can exercise its worldwide duties, pour out its talent and resources, and fulfil its global mission.

Somehow the policymakers of Britain must shake off their old, Western-oriented mindset and understand where the new priorities now lie. It has taken

>> them a long time to get their heads round this completely new situation, with the penny beginning to drop in many official quarters only when confronted by Brexit. Some have still failed to grasp what has changed.

The new building blocks of Britain's twenty-first century strategy reset are there in front of us and ready to be assembled. First, intensified but new kinds of trade and security links with a changing Europe. Second, much deeper engagement, country by country with the surging powers of Asia. Third, new links of all kinds and at many levels, with awakening Africa and the Americas.

Now comes the need for clever new architecture based on new visions and insights. In many ways India, the world's biggest democracy, with half the Commonwealth's population and now with


a larger economy than Britain, is the key to the new situation. Trade itself is only one part of the story. Linking Britain's big aid budget more closely to our new interests is another. Security, cyber relations and defence are all just as much part of the networking agenda, as well as soft power links of every kind.

Soft, hard and smart power must be woven together and projected with new agility and imagination. For instance, the time may well be approaching when global presence on the high seas may best be organised through joint Commonwealth naval power in Commonwealth war-and-peace ships.

The Commonwealth network is one of the entreées to this altered world, a precious and obvious gateway to be opened wide. Britain must return to its Commonwealth family and friends in a

spirit of respect and some contrition after decades of disregard and neglect. Nations we used to think we were teaching now have much to teach us.

“The Commonwealth today includes a dozen of the fastest growing economies in the world and the largest prospective middle-income markets of all times. Many of them are now part of a new Asia.”

The face of the future, to use the Queen's own phrase about the Commonwealth, now confronts us. It is one which we must recognise and smile upon with as much warmth, friendship, inspiration and foresight as we can muster. 

Divided, we will fall

Canada needs to resist the call of identity politics, writes **Emerson Csorba**



Emerson Csorba is the Network and Outreach Lead at The Ditchley Foundation

The issue of identity politics has gained traction in Canada in recent years, just as it has in other Western nations and particularly in the case of our neighbours to the south. Appeals to identity have been especially apparent throughout the tenure of Justin Trudeau, Canada's current Prime Minister, with words such as 'diversity' and 'inclusion' featuring prominently in his speeches and budgets – the 2018 Federal budget labelled, by pundits, the 'gender budget' given its introduction of Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) into its calculations.

This emphasis on identity, however,

does not seem particularly Canadian, and I do not see it persisting in Canadian public debate. Canadians pride themselves on their multiculturalism, which is inclusive of identity and is more based on unity than it is on the accentuation of individual or group traits. It is multiculturalism, not identity, that is fundamental to what it means to be a Canadian. It is the integrity of Canadian multiculturalism that will need to be preserved if Canada is to respond effectively to global pressures such as mass migration and climate change, which will only intensify over time.

In October 1971, Canada became the first country in the world to adopt

a multiculturalism policy, with the then Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, stating in his address to the House of Commons that: "The Government will support and encourage the various cultures and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society. They will be encouraged to share their cultural expression and values with other Canadians and so contribute to a richer life for us all." This would, also in the elder Trudeau's words, "help to break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies." The Canadian Multiculturalism Act was later passed in 1988, which recognised the central role of multiculturalism in shaping Canada's future.

>> When speaking about multiculturalism, the elder Trudeau stressed the importance of a full participation of different individuals and communities in Canadian society. There is a clear sense in his writing that Canadians, regardless of their origins or language, must shape the country together, and that it is vital that they are able to do so.

“It is multiculturalism, not identity, that is fundamental to what it means to be a Canadian.”

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act established that multiculturalism is fundamental to what it means to be Canadian, and I believe that the vast majority of Canadians would agree that this is reflective of how they think today. And while perhaps rather timid in most situations – not including, of course, when supporting the Canadian men’s and women’s ice hockey teams – many Canadians feel great pride in the country’s multiculturalism and in the genuine respect that all kinds of individuals and groups are shown, regardless of where they are from, what language they speak or the colour of their skin.

One concrete example can help to show what I mean. In the several years prior to my first departure to the UK for postgraduate studies, my home city of Edmonton launched a project called ‘Make Something Edmonton’. As part of this initiative, the Mayor and other city leaders encouraged Edmontonians of all backgrounds to come together to launch new creative projects. I can still remember the Mayor at the time, Stephen Mandel, saying that “It doesn’t matter where you come from, where you went to school, or what your family name is. The only thing that matters is whether you work hard and are willing to build something together with others.” The idea was that if you have a great idea and are willing to roll up your sleeves to begin on it, others will support

you regardless of who you are.

This to me is a very Canadian way of thinking: each person and community is respected, but this respect also implies that others will help to ensure that Canada remains a place where individuals and communities can express themselves in the ways that are best for them. In other words, Canadians must work hard to maintain the integrity of their political, social and cultural institutions, and that all share some responsibility in this.

The discussion in this way is more than one of just identity, self-expression and recognition of difference. One’s identity matters, but one’s expression needs to make some contribution, even if small, to the flourishing of the country’s institutions and communities, and to the preservation of the welcoming spirit that is true of the Canadian experience. This is not to deny that identity is important; rather it is to suggest that identity politics is very un-Canadian, and that it runs counter to what most Canadians would probably say is part of their collective make-up.

Given that multiculturalism is part of the Canadian social fabric, a rise in identity politics would suggest to me that something is beginning to go badly wrong in Canada – for instance, that Canadians are losing faith in their public services, or that social inequality within the country is increasing rapidly. But this is not the case and Canadians have much to be proud of in these areas. Indeed, the idea of ‘social class’ is a shock to most young Canadians upon moving to the UK, where it is apparent that education and accent matter very much in one’s life and work opportunities.


But Justin Trudeau has attempted identity politics, and in recent elections the Conservatives have attempted to create wedge issues related to ethnicity. The move to the political right in the United States and in other Western nations is also worrying for Canada, and many Canadians are rightly on guard about the potential for division based on race, gender and other

markers of difference.

The recent Alberta provincial election was the most vitriolic in the province’s history, and identity politics did figure into the campaigning across the main left and right parties. There is little doubt that the Canadian federal election will be similar, particularly given the emphasis that the current prime minister has placed on identity over the last five years. So, there is good reason to worry and to not take for granted the welcoming spirit that Canadians have worked hard to build over the last 150 years.

On the whole, identity politics does not seem to me to be an effective approach to governance in Canada. It is a short-term approach to politics that puts self-interest and a desire to win above rigorous long-term thinking. It is instead a commitment to multiculturalism that instills pride in Canadians, even if this is a quiet pride. And they can see when a political leader is taking them for a ride; Trudeau’s public support has plummeted over past years, due in no small part to his failure to follow through on his many supposed commitments to inclusion.

“One’s identity matters, but one’s expression needs to make some contribution, even if small, to the flourishing of the country’s institutions and communities.”

A Canadian population growing from 40 million to 100 million by 2100, as some believe is possible, will require considered reflection on multiculturalism. I do not believe Canada will go the same way as other societies, characterised by their internal divisions. Canadians embrace difference and see this as one of their major strengths. It is the continued embrace of difference within Canadian multiculturalism, over the long-term, that will be Canada’s real test and opportunity for leadership as other parts of the world seem to move in the opposite direction. 

Guilty past pleasures?

Dr Zareer Masani looks back to the impact of Britain's imperial past



Dr Zareer Masani is a historian and the author of *Macaulay: Britain's Liberal Imperialist*

As Britain prepares to leave the EU, the debate over its imperial past grows ever sharper. In some ways that's not surprising given that the European Common Market succeeded what was once the world's largest free trade zone, namely the British Empire. As the lure of Europe recedes, it's logical to ask if Britain's former colonies might again make natural trading partners.

Contrary to the mantras of the anti-colonial left, damning the Empire for looting and exploiting its subjects, serious economic historians like Professor Tirthankar Roy at the London School of Economics have documented the many ways in which its subject populations benefited from transfers of technology, skilled personnel and scarce capital from the mother country. Those subject nations in return have enriched Britain's multi-cultural perspectives and its labour markets, both skilled and unskilled. It's reasonable to expect that a decline in Britain's European ties can be matched by a return to its symbiosis with successful, advanced economies like Canada, Australia and New Zealand and the even more dramatic opportunities offered in a rapidly developing India and Africa.

"The Empire is wrongly blamed for the sins of extreme Brexiteer nationalism today."

It's unfortunate that the continuing relevance of our imperial past has made it the target of many who are committed to remaining in the EU. The Empire is wrongly

blamed for the sins of extreme Brexiteer nationalism today. It's true that the Empire did not set out to civilise the world, rather to profit from it. But the mercantilism of early trading companies and the early phases of buccaneering, conquest and plunder were soon replaced in the mid-nineteenth century by intelligent forms of capitalism, designed to create stable and prosperous markets and partnerships.

Take the Indian railways, so often claimed as both an achievement of Empire and an attempt to extend British control. In fact, it was both. That arch-imperialist, the reforming Viceroy, Lord Dalhousie, saw the railways as a means of transporting British troops, but also as a way of integrating India's far-flung markets, especially in food grains, thereby enriching farmers and reducing famines. The Raj left India with the world's largest rail network, built initially by a huge investment of British private capital, bought at far less than world market rates, and replaced from the twentieth century by nationalised state ownership.

The imperial railway success story might be a model for how British capital, skilled managers and engineers might again fan out across the world, enriching both Britain and the recipient countries. The Commonwealth, long just an amicable talking shop, might find a new future as an English-speaking, free trade bloc, which even Ireland might be tempted to join. And that in turn might make the Irish border no longer an issue.

The Brexit movement has been driven far more by nationalism than any residual imperialism. But one positive fallout might

be the demise of the post-colonial guilt that dominates our media and universities. From news headlines, to academic seminars, to social media, there seems to be an assumption that the British Empire is a past to be apologised for and lamented. The few who have dared to challenge these anti-colonial tropes are branded as racist neo-fascists or, in the case of people like me, imperialist toadies. Our academies have been in danger of a takeover by loony left campaigners demanding 'decolonisation', without any idea of what that might entail, other than no-platforming speakers they dislike and getting more black faces into the lecture-halls and the curriculum, not on merit, but simply for their race.

"The imperial railway success story might be a model for how British capital, skilled managers and engineers might again fan out across the world, enriching both Britain and the recipient countries."

A post-Brexit Britain is likely to be far less tolerant of such 'woke' absurdities and rightly proud of how Empire opened up our vistas to the outside world. Britain's imperial past seems to me a guarantor that 'Little Englander' attitudes have no future and that we'll remain truly cosmopolitan, whether in or out of the EU. Memories of Empire might form the basis of a new global leadership role for Britain as a powerhouse of art, literature, ideas, technology and skills, freely traded across most of the known world. 

Limited extremes

Helen Pluckrose warns those on the centre-right and centre-left of exaggerating the influence of the extremes on the other side of the political spectrum



Helen Pluckrose is the editor of *Areo* magazine

Do I believe liberal universalism is being abandoned across the political spectrum? The short answer to this question is no.

This sometimes surprises people because I dedicate so much time to defending the need for a consistent and universal liberalism and criticising failures of it in relation to right-wing and left-wing identity politics. I clearly see a problem happening in which this core feature of liberalism, universality, so central to a productive and harmonious society, is being neglected.

“It is encouraging that whether it is ‘lefties’ catastrophising about the extreme right or right-wingers catastrophising about the extreme left, they highlight their illiberalism. Liberalism still seems to have considerable cultural cachet.”

Nevertheless, I do not believe that many Britons have abandoned the idea that all individuals are entitled to common rights, freedoms and opportunities regardless of their identity. I doubt that many on the political right oppose this principle, even though they have on their fringes those who support white nationalism and oppose LGBT rights and gender equality. It is highly unlikely that many on the political left oppose it even though they have, on their fringes, those who call for censorship and the demonisation of groups in society

perceived as privileged.

I think the vast majority of Brits continue to hold an individual sense of fairness and reciprocity, in which they seek a society that allows all individuals to access all the freedoms and opportunities the UK has to offer. I believe most of us are suspicious of those who don't support this conception of society but instead seek to promote the interests of special groups and advocate for rights and privileges based on identity.

The longer answer to the initial question is no, but the desire to protect it from various threats is causing well-intended people to undermine it.

When I wrote about this phenomenon with my American collaborator, James A. Lindsay, we termed it ‘Existential polarisation’. We meant that there is a reactive quality to politics at the moment in which people are highly motivated to defend society against the illiberalism of the other side – leading them to condone, downplay or even defend illiberalism on their own side. Issues such as the Syrian refugee crisis and Brexit in the UK, as well as rapidly increasing ideological polarisation in the US, has led to an increase in the perception that the extremes of the other side are presenting an existential threat.

It is very uncommon to hear someone express a sentiment like “I hate brown people and they shouldn't be allowed to live in our country”, but much more common to hear “Islam presents a threat to liberal democracy and we should ban it.” You occasionally hear someone say “I hate white men and they should be denied human

rights”, but it's much more common to hear “Patriarchy and white supremacy are oppressing women and BAME people.” What even these extreme statements reveal is not a mindless hatred of demographic groups but a (catastrophising) perception of illiberalism which must be opposed urgently.

“What we are seeing is the extreme fringes of both the political left and right abandoning liberal universalism and the moderate majority of each side reacting to that and unwittingly reinforcing it.”

This makes the problem much harder to address because the concerns they speak to are present in the moderate and liberal majority who lean either way. If you are a ‘liberal conservative’, you won't want to ban Islam and Muslims from the country, but you might well think there are illiberal aspects of Islam that need to be addressed. But you could be way more concerned about the extremist fringe on the political left which tells you that to talk about these concerns is white supremacy, Islamophobia and ethnonationalism. You could easily make the mistake of thinking this fringe is much bigger than it is, whilst thinking your own extremist fringe is too small to be much of a threat.

If you are a ‘liberal leftie’, you probably won't believe yourself to be living in a white supremacist patriarchy, but you might well think there is still a way to go before gender and racial equality are fully

>> achieved. Yet you are likely to be far more concerned about the extremist fringe on the political right, which tells you that if you are not white and culturally Christian, you don't belong here. You could start to believe that these attitudes are widespread on the political right and feel that, while your own extremist fringe is a bit mad, its heart is in the right place. And so the polarisation grows.


When Bright Blue asked me if I felt universal liberalism to be being abandoned across the political spectrum, I appreciated that the question encouraged me to consider illiberalism on both sides. However, I think we must be wary of seeing it as ubiquitous. It is my, and James Lindsay's, belief that what we are seeing is the extreme fringes of both the political left and right abandoning liberal universalism and the moderate majority of

each side reacting to that and unwittingly reinforcing it.

“Most of us are suspicious of those who don't support this conception of society but instead seek to promote the interests of special groups and advocate for rights and privileges based on identity.”

It is encouraging that whether it is 'lefties' catastrophising about the extreme right or right-wingers catastrophising about the extreme left, they highlight their illiberalism. Liberalism still seems to have considerable cultural cachet. However, we must be careful not to feed into the perception that such illiberalism defines

either side or both. This can only result in withdrawing into apoliticism, or picking a side to react unhelpfully against.

Bright Blue is a liberal conservative organisation so I urge its presumably mostly conservative readers to avoid catastrophising about the political left as a whole. Instead, they should keep their criticisms measured, while focusing on those on the political right who undermine their efforts to build an ethical, liberal conservatism. I, for my part, will avoid catastrophising about the political right while disagreeing with you, and continue to focus on getting through to those illiberal lefties who undermine my attempts to build an ethical and liberal left. The best hope we have for a peaceful and fair society is for liberals on both sides to marginalise their extremists so we can have reasoned and productive debates with each other about real issues. 

Accessing talent

Lord Holmes discusses the challenges that disabled people still face in Britain



Lord Holmes of Richmond was Director of Paralympic Integration for the London Olympics

I lost my sight at the age of fourteen. Ironically, one of the most challenging aspects was the fact that people immediately stopped seeing me. The attitudes of those around me became everything.

Practical challenges can be solved with practical solutions. But access to practical solutions – and the willingness of people to consider, or provide, these solutions – can be the difference between inclusion and opportunity, and an insurmountable barrier.

Attitudes and culture remain one of the major challenges faced by disabled people in modern Britain. Humans are social animals and we are predisposed

towards 'people like ourselves'. It feels safer and it is natural, but expanding our definition of who is included is an essential part of creating a civilised society. Qualitative research conducted in advance of the 2012 Paralympics found that almost no one would be likely to buy tickets for the Paralympics. Respondents were quoted as saying “why would I spend money, when I spend my life trying to avoid people like that.” Thinking about disability can make people without disabilities, or without direct experience of disability, feel awkward and frightened. Disability, when viewed as weakness or a personal tragedy, is something that sets

an individual apart from the 'ordinary' and outside social norms.

“Disability research is often the ground-breaking, boundary-pushing work that leads to technology we all become familiar with, such as text-to-speech software and predictive text.”

One of the most successful ways we challenged these attitudes and stereotypes was with the Channel 4 'Meet the Superhumans' campaign. Part of the

>> campaign was a ninety second advert, soundtrack by Public Enemy, introducing Paralympic athletes. Simultaneously showing people with disabilities whilst inverting presumptions of weakness, the advert also showed short, shocking glimpses of a car crash, an IED, a neo-natal scan; in so doing connecting us all to the experience and challenging assumptions of difference. Disability is not 'other'. It happens to you. It happens to me.

People in the end did buy tickets, did come and watch the Paralympics, did enjoy an incredible world-class summer of sport. After the games many people reported feeling for the first time that their disability was not perceived as a negative thing. Attitudes can change, and we can all be part of effecting that change.

“I lost my sight at the age of fourteen. Ironically, one of the most challenging aspects was the fact that people immediately stopped seeing me.”

Further challenges exist – around equality of opportunity in education and employment. In 1995, a Conservative Government passed the Disability Discrimination Act, which subsequently became part of the Equality Act 2010. This Act enshrines the principles of equal access to education and employment. But despite this, currently, we are not where we must be.

The Head of Ofsted has recently described the lack of support for children with diagnosed special educational needs as a “national scandal”. Twenty seven percent of children on the autism spectrum have been excluded from school. A BBC investigation in 2017 found that, over the previous five years, numbers of children with special educational needs being home-schooled had grown by 57%.

We must not allow the clock to be turned back to a time when the visually

impaired were offered careers as piano tuners or basket weavers. This “national scandal”, as the Head of Ofsted describes it, harms us all. Failing to ensure equal access to high-quality education misses out on a pool of talent that will be a devastating waste, not just to the individuals but to all of us.

“Creating opportunities for disabled talent is not looking to give anyone an unfair advantage. An equitable, inclusive, fully accessible jobs market puts everyone on the same start line.”

The consequences of failing with education inevitably impact on employment. Just over 51% of people with disabilities are in employment, significantly below the employment rate for people without disabilities which now sits at just over 81%. Forty percent of young people with visual impairments do not reach employment and are instead condemned to a life on benefits. Again, the core principles are individual opportunity and enabling talent; talent in its broadest most brilliant form, not just that of a tiny elite. Creating opportunities for disabled talent is not looking to give anyone an unfair advantage. An equitable, inclusive, fully accessible jobs market puts everyone on the same start line. It allows everyone to run whatever race they choose with fairness, dignity and respect.

One of the areas that does give me hope is the potential for technology to furnish us with incredible, enabling solutions. The mainstreaming of assistive technology demonstrates just what a difference the new tools we have will make to all our lives. Disability research is often the ground-breaking, boundary-pushing work that leads to technology we all become familiar with, such as text-to-speech software and predictive text.

Artificial intelligence, nano-technology, 3D printing, genetic sequencing, to name but a few, are turbo-charging this process. Correctly deployed, the ‘Fourth Industrial Revolution’ will enable, include and transform our world. As ever, though, we must root it all in ethical principles, with a ruthless focus on the society we want to create and the lives we want to live. No one must be left behind, no talent wasted, no individuals excluded.

I have been working recently on two specific issues of access and inclusion: access to the public realm; and, representation in public appointments. In the public realm, a street-design approach known as ‘shared space’ has been transforming our high streets. Pedestrian crossings and pavements are removed to create a space that is ‘shared’ by vehicles and pedestrians. However, without a clear demarcation between safe space and road space visually impaired pedestrians lose the ability to navigate independently. Many others suffer too; children armed with the green cross code cannot stop, look and listen when there is no obvious place to stop. I commissioned my own research into the problem and have been working for years to raise awareness of the issues and help direct government policy to ensure our high streets are safe and accessible for all.


“Disability is not ‘other’. It happens to you. It happens to me.”

Public appointments have an equally significant impact on all our lives. Public bodies, and the appointees that constitute them, are responsible for the distribution of £200 billion of public funds across, but not limited to, healthcare, education, the criminal justice system, energy, security and defence. Currently – shockingly – just 3% of public appointees declare a disability. I was invited to conduct an independent review for the Government

>> into why this figure is so low and make recommendations to ensure that public appointees better represent the society they serve. My recommendations call for a more innovative and flexible approach at all stages of the recruitment process. There are also important recommendations

around improving data collection and transparency, including setting a target of 11.3% of all public appointments being for disabled people. I look forward to the government response to the review.

If you believe in individual rights, freedom and opportunities, and desire a

world in which all people can contribute their talents and benefits, then there is work to be done. Currently, talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not. There is much that we can all do to change this. The rewards, should we succeed, will be great indeed. 

Rebuilding the British dream

We need a rethink on social mobility, claims **Duncan Exley**



Duncan Exley was the director of the Equality Trust, and is the author of *The end of aspiration? Social mobility and our children's fading prospects*

One of the key dividing lines between Leavers and Remainers is that the former are more likely to feel that their – and their country's – best days are behind them.

A feeling of growth is written in the air above London, and to a lesser extent some of our other metropolitan centres, by the number of construction cranes on the skyline, but there aren't so many elsewhere. As the *Financial Times*' Chris Giles pointed out six years ago, there are more in London than in the rest of the country put together.

At ground level, we are now, as a nation, more likely to experience downward social mobility – to have a job further *down* the occupation hierarchy than our parents had at the same age – than we are to 'go up in the world'.

When we feel that the opportunities we have worked and studied hard for are slipping further from our grasp, we are more likely to resent those who do attain those opportunities, especially if we suspect they did so as a result of some unfair advantage.

This is one of the reasons why attitudes towards the 'political class' (as Nigel Farage likes to call it) have soured as much as they have. They are widely

seen as coming from a different social class as the rest of us, and not without reason: our politicians disproportionately do come from unusually privileged backgrounds. The expensively-educated Nigel Farage being a case in point, alongside the expensively-educated leader of Momentum.

"I found numerous examples of upwardly mobile people undergoing a process of adaptation: self-censoring their own culture, opinions and experiences and replacing them with those with which others are comfortable."

The same resentment is felt towards other parts of 'the establishment' – in the media, business and elsewhere – who also disproportionately come from privileged backgrounds. This is one of the reasons why those of them who advocated a Remain vote tended to see their efforts backfire. For example, in 2014, sitting on the steps of Glasgow's Tenement House museum, I spoke to a woman who'd

arrived, like me, shortly before opening time. We talked about the Scottish independence referendum that would take place the following week. She'd initially been inclined to vote 'No' to independence, but "since the banks have been saying 'vote No', I'm leaning towards 'Yes'". Just over a year later, a former corporate chief executive was appointed as chair of the 'Britain Stronger in Europe' campaign.

The resentment towards those whose opportunities appear to be expanding while others' are receding also has consequences for social cohesion. When 'establishment' organisations such as political parties and the BBC proudly showcase their efforts to promote people from minority groups (as they should) but are perceived to make less effort to promote people from different socioeconomic and regional backgrounds, then there's a backlash. It doesn't help that while people from minority ethnic groups continue to look like people from minority ethnic groups when they get into 'the establishment', people from working-class and regional backgrounds often feel pressure to hide it. An example is student teachers being told to 'tone down' their accents, and thus make themselves less relatable as potential role-

>> models for their pupils.

Those from outside the 'metropolitan elite' don't just see themselves apparently being kept out of 'the establishment', they also see their views being kept out. As the former Education ministerial adviser Sam Freedman says, they encounter a "... strong social incentive to shift their views." In researching my book, I found numerous examples of upwardly mobile people undergoing a process of adaptation: self-censoring their own culture, opinions and experiences and replacing them with those with which others are comfortable.

To break down this divide we have to improve our rates of social mobility so that 'the establishment' becomes more relatable. But as I show in my new book, *The end of aspiration?*, the way 'the establishment' currently talk about social mobility is itself divisive and alienating.

'Mobility' suggests that individuals should have no objection to leaving behind the identity, people and places they may love, in order to 'leave to achieve'. Some on the political left have used this point to accuse others of thinking that 'the only good working-class person is one who is in the process of becoming something else'.

But the conclusion of those left-wing criticisms of social mobility (that while collective aspirations are legitimate, individual aspirations for ourselves and our family are not) isn't right either. Two thirds of people think fairness is more closely related to 'getting what you deserve' than it is to 'equality', but don't see these as being in conflict with collective values relating to, for example, the NHS.

Optimism or pessimism about the opportunities to attain our (and our children's) aspirations may be a dividing force, but it can be turned into an opportunity to help unite the broad middle of the UK, especially as downward social mobility is now being felt across large swathes of middle Britain, who see their graduate offspring struggling to get a job that matches their qualifications or get on




the housing ladder. Not by talking about jargonistic concepts like 'social mobility' but by talking about the aspirations that unite the majority: a fulfilling job, a home to call our own, and the ability to live a life determined more by our choices than our background.

As my book about the formative experiences of people who achieved 'ideas above their station' suggests, the programme for allowing as many of us as possible to attain those aspirations also appeals to commonly-held, uniting values: secure family incomes and homes with secure tenancies, in which aspirations can be developed and pursued; socially-mixed schools, neighbourhoods and extra-curricular activities, in which individuals from different backgrounds can explore each other's aspirations; removing some of the 'toll roads on the route to opportunity'

such as the cost of uniforms and equipment that deter some families from applying to high-performing state schools; and an ambitious strategy for attracting and nurturing high-quality jobs.

"It doesn't help that while people from minority ethnic groups continue to look like people from minority ethnic groups when they get into 'the establishment', people from working-class and regional backgrounds often feel pressure to hide it."

Opportunity may currently divide us, but aspiration can unite us. 

Through the glass ceiling

On both sides of the Atlantic, women are mobilising into a powerful political force, argues **Virginia Crosbie**



Virginia Crosbie is the director of Women2Win

Women are becoming the most powerful force in US politics. Three of the most influential US activists – Cecile Richards, Alicia Garza and Ai-jen Poo – have launched ‘Supermajority’, with the goal of rallying two million women over the next year to become political leaders in their communities.

Women are having a voice and using it; the Women’s March the day after the inauguration of Donald Trump was the largest single-day protest in US history. The 2018 mid-term elections saw a record number of women, including women from ethnic minority groups, elected to Congress and the US now has the highest number of women ever running for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination.

“Unless we have representation on our green benches in Parliament, we are not going to have the policies that reflect the electorate.”

The political phenomenon, Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, has had a meteoric rise to Congress and is now the second most talked about politician in the US after Trump with her ‘winning hearts and minds’ approach to campaigning.

Women now realise that if they don’t get involved then things won’t change. With a record level of women in office, these are the women who create opportunities for other women to follow. There is still a long way to go; women make up over half the US population, but they are

still underrepresented in every aspect of leadership from local politics to the boardroom.

So what does this mean for the UK? We too have seen an increase in participation of women in politics. ‘Processions 2018’ saw tens of thousands of women across the UK march to celebrate 100 years of suffrage. In 2018, the first statue of a woman, Dame Millicent Fawcett, the women’s right-to-vote campaigner, was erected in Parliament Square. Later this year, as a result of a crowdfunding initiative, a statue of Lady Nancy Astor, the first female MP to sit in UK Parliament, is to be erected in Plymouth to celebrate 100 years since her election. The campaign to have a woman scientist on the new £50 note has been loud and clear and we will know the result this summer. These are just a few high-profile examples; everywhere, women are raising their voices, getting involved and getting results.

So how do we harness the talents and enthusiasm of women willing to enter the political debate? Groups like 50:50 Parliament are successfully encouraging women from all parties to come forward with its #AskHerToStand campaign. Brandon Lewis MP, the Conservative Party chairman, has announced his ambition of having 50% women candidate lists. The Conservative Party is holding its first Women’s Conference in Birmingham, featuring policy discussions and skills workshops.

Why does this matter? Is this just political correctness? No. It matters because politics often reflects the experiences of those making the policies; unless we have representation on our



green benches in Parliament, we are not going to have the policies that reflect the electorate. And without policies that reflect the electorate we are going to find it even harder to win elections.

“Women now realise that if they don’t get involved then things won’t change.”

Women have different perspectives because they have had different life experiences; not better or worse, but different. Women make up 50% of the talent in the UK: let’s make sure we all benefit from it.

Cease the intergenerational conflict



Rachel Maclean MP is
PPS to the Government
Equalities Office

Rachel Maclean MP feels that attempts to pit the young against the old are destined to backfire

The generational divide is a hot topic in politics now. Generally, there is a view on the political left, and from some in the centre-ground, that younger people have been unfairly disadvantaged, or even discriminated against, by older generations.

Our policies should focus on how we grow the pie for everyone to benefit from, and not squabble over how the pie is divided up. A divisive approach to generational resource sharing will alienate all generations of voters. A new approach is needed if Conservatives are to successfully appeal to a younger generation.

“You cannot win votes by promising to take things away from one generation or social group to give it to another.”

Though I have long left behind any claim to be part of the younger generation, I am the parent of four children aged between 20 and 26, as well as a veteran of a decade of doorstep campaigning in marginal constituencies across the West Midlands.

I know that older voters care as much about the prospects of the next generation as their children and grandchildren. They are acutely aware that the world is different to when they grew up and worry about the future.

As the Conservative Party faces the huge challenge of renewing ourselves from within government, while grappling with Brexit, much of the thinking at the moment is explicitly around bold new policies to

attract younger voters. We know that younger people are reluctant to vote for us, but that they share many of our values. We know broadly what young people care about and the legitimate reasons they have to feel the system is unfairly stacked against them as they seek to get a start in life.

However, I take issue with the ‘generational war’ narrative promoted by some commentators. Even well-meaning contributions – for example to the social care funding problem – have generated ideas suggesting differential age-related taxation.

I don’t think this approach is the right one for Conservatives. We risk creating further division and alienating voters of all ages. Crude age-related indicators alone cannot be the answer. There is a huge diversity of wealth and income among older age groups, and older people must grapple with declining health and vitality, their own mortality and existential questions of their own as they plan for the end of their working lives.

It is a natural human response when faced with perceived injustice to look for blame. And it is true that the distribution of wealth between generations has been shifting unfavourably away from the younger generations to the older generations for some years now, especially when housing wealth is taken into account.

Various policy suggestions to tackle intergenerational inequity, from both the political left and right, would have the effect of redistributing wealth from older to younger generations. My challenge to this idea is based on some basic human

social psychology.

You cannot win votes by promising to take things away from one generation or social group to give it to another. The result of this is that both groups perceive it as unfair.

“Our policies should focus on how we grow the pie for everyone to benefit from, and not squabble over how the pie is divided up.”

Why? Let’s delve for a moment into some deep-seated psychological truths. As a veteran of two psychology degrees, I often think that we lack insight into the interaction between politics and psychology. We would do well to apply some ‘Psychology 101’ to political views. We constantly compare ourselves with others, both above and below us. And we are programmed to believe the best about ourselves.

So if we are part of a relatively well-off generation, we tell ourselves it’s because we worked hard, paid in all our lives, made sacrifices. If we are part of a relatively badly-off generation, we wouldn’t label ourselves feckless, lazy or stupid. Instead, we make sense of this with a narrative that it’s someone else’s fault – the system, the government, or the older generation.

Linked to this is another basic piece of psychology – the theory of cognitive dissonance. Imagine you have worked hard all your life and have been rewarded with success. You are likely to hold a belief system which prizes hard work and believes



>> it will be rewarded. Imagine, then, that there is objective evidence to demonstrate that your value system could be wrong. For example, your neighbour somehow becomes successful without doing any work. This causes cognitive dissonance.


Since you cannot explain this state of affairs, the only way to reduce or avoid this unpleasant mental state is to find an alternative explanation. It cannot be that hard work does not equal rewards, so it must be that the neighbour got lucky somehow. Perhaps they inherited the money. Perhaps they are a criminal. And so on.

These psychological principles explain why an older person will instinctively and unconsciously resent and reject policies that attempt generational redistribution.

The ideas at the heart of such policies will set off unconscious processes of social comparison and the associated cognitive dissonance. Older voters will instinctively reject the policies, because of the implied challenge and comparisons implicit in them – even while ostensibly appearing to say that society should support the next generation. And younger voters will relate policies to their own family and conclude that their own parents and grandparents aren't personally at fault.

These are unconscious processes, so it will be difficult to draw this out in focus groups or on doorsteps. They involve people facing up to uncomfortable truths about how our brains work and what we believe. For us politicians, the upshot is

that voters of all ages will be uncomfortable with such generational redistributive policies, will not find them credible, and will be unlikely to vote for them.

Creating solutions to the very difficult challenges of paying for social care, our health services, and an ageing population, without penalising older people, is an enormous challenge. To rise to it we need an honest conversation about government spending, the wealth tied up in property assets and pensions, and the cost of social care and the NHS. These questions go to the heart of fundamental values held by voters about fairness and justice. Unfortunately, simply sharing out a pie with demands from all corners won't be enough. 

Why I'm a Bright Blue MP



The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
is the Minister of State for
School Standards

Economic conservatism and social liberalism go hand in hand,
writes the **Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP**

I take an optimistic view of human nature; that through freedom, protected and upheld by the rule of law, the ingenuity and enterprising spirit inherent in us all will be inspired to find the solutions to our problems and help deliver people's aspirations and quality of life.

"We are a nation that generally doesn't worry too much about what other people do unless it impinges on the lives of others."

Hand in hand with economic freedom goes social liberalism. I am, unashamedly, a socially liberal Conservative. How could I not be?

My life has been completed by legislation introduced by Tony Blair and David Cameron to recognise same-sex relationships. Having always believed that

marriage and family were the cornerstone of a strong, free and happy society, being able to marry as a gay man was the greatest moment of my life.

And what have I discovered since? That my joy has been shared by so many of the people I work with every day, by members of the Bognor Regis and Littlehampton Conservative Association, by constituents who I meet at my surgery, at community coffee mornings, in local businesses and out on the street.

I simply don't buy the argument that the British are a moralistic or disapproving people. In fact, in my experience, we are a nation that generally doesn't worry too much about what other people do unless it impinges on the lives of others.


And what about the relationship of conservatism to social liberalism? Far from being incompatible, 'change to conserve' is a mantra as old as Conservatism itself. As Edmund Burke put it, "A state without

the means of some change, is without the means of its own conservation".

For me, being a socially liberal Conservative means knowing the value of what we already have – our culture, our accumulated traditions, our values – as well as the wisdom to update, adapt and evolve when necessary.

This message is more vital now than ever before. The pace and upheavals of modern life make adaptation a matter of survival. Yet, the experience of recent years, the rancour and the rise of civil discord, also makes clear the need to cherish what we hold in common.

"Being able to marry as a gay man was the greatest moment of my life."

We must change to conserve, and conserve to avoid changing beyond recognition. 

Research overview



Sam Lampier is a
Researcher at
Bright Blue

Sam Lampier updates us on Bright Blue's research programme

Over the past six months or so, Bright Blue's energy and environment team have continued their strong output of influential research reports. So much that we have been

shortlisted for the fourth year in a row as the UK Energy and Environment Think Tank of the Year in the 2019 Prospect Magazine awards.

Last Autumn, Bright Blue published

Clearing the air, which examined the scale of, consequences of and public attitudes towards air pollution in the West Midlands. It recommended new transport policies to reduce air pollution in the region, including

>> allowing local and combined authorities to make reasonable profits from the administration of their clean air zones.

Most recently, we published *Pressure in the pipeline*. The report argued that deeper decarbonisation of gas is essential if the UK is to meet its current and likely future greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. We were pleased to see the Government adopt one of our policy recommendations in the Spring Budget – an obligation on gas suppliers to ensure a certain proportion of green gas through the network.

“Bright Blue’s research team has maintained its output of high-quality research reports into the pressing problems faced by Britain.”

Bright Blue will soon publish two further reports – one into how national government

can better reduce air pollution post-Brexit, as well as a manifesto for domestic and international conservation.

Meanwhile, a few months ago, we published, *Helping hand?*, which explored the impact of the unique and key design features of Universal Credit during critical stages of the claimant experience. The report included 11 recommendations and received significant media coverage, including in *The Times*, *The Sun* and *The Guardian*.

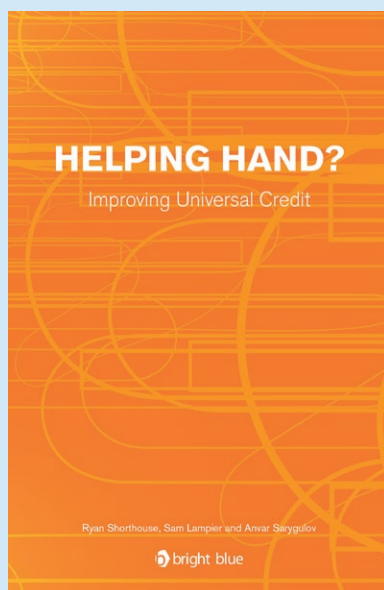
In the coming months, the key focus for our work on social policy will be a report examining public attitudes to welfare policies in Scotland. This also marks the ongoing expansion of Bright Blue Scotland, building upon the publication of recent analysis by Murdo Fraser MSP, which proposed new quasi-federal constitutional arrangements for the UK after Brexit.

After over a year of research, we will also shortly be publishing a ground-breaking new report into the importance

and drivers of neighbourhood trust and social integration. This will not only map levels of neighbourhood trust in every local authority in England, it will also be able to identify the most socially integrated areas in the country.

We are also working with the Fabian Society on a report examining the case for, and nature of, an independent pensions commission.

British politics continues to be dominated by Brexit. The latest delay means it is likely that this, and the Conservative Party leadership contest, will continue to overshadow other issues. However, Bright Blue’s research team has maintained its output of high-quality research reports into the pressing problems faced by Britain. With several exciting projects lined up for the rest of 2019, Bright Blue will continue to propose evidence-based domestic policies based on our liberal, open, democratic and meritocratic values. 



Latest report

Helping hand? Improving Universal Credit

Ryan Shorthouse, Sam Lampier and Anvar Sarygulov

Universal Credit is one of the most significant reforms of the welfare system in the UK for decades. Initially, it enjoyed widespread support. But as Universal Credit has gone from idea to implementation, the cross-party consensus has dissipated.

This report explores the impact of the unique and key design features of Universal Credit during three critical stages of the claimant experience: accessing, managing on, and progressing on Universal Credit. Original policies are proposed to minimise some of the common challenges faced by a sizeable minority of claimants, as well as to ensure that more claimants can enjoy the positive experiences many already have.

Tamworth Prize winner 2019

The Tamworth Prize is our annual essay competition for young people aged 21 or under. It is a chance for young people to explain what sort of centre-right Britain needs today.

Toxic tide: Can we live without plastic?

Anya Nash

Plastic comes in all shapes and sizes: from bags and packaging, to microplastics that are found in cosmetic products that many people use daily. Due to this, plastic has been found in every known ecosystem on the planet. It is predicted that by 2050 there will be more plastic in the oceans than fish. This could change if we remove plastic from our lives. However, there is a huge economic backlash to this idea and it would be very difficult to implement.

Plastic is particularly problematic as it doesn't biodegrade quickly; it usually takes about 450 years, although this varies with the type of plastic. The oldest plastic waste is about 120 years old, but the majority of it was created after the 1960s, when plastic became ubiquitous. This means that most plastic currently found across the planet is going to remain intact on Earth for at least 400 years.

Human mismanagement of this material has had disastrous impacts. Ninety percent of birds have plastic in their stomachs and millions will die from it. The plastic does not break down so cannot pass out of the bird's system. Consequently, they feel less hungry as their brain thinks that their stomach is full, so they don't get the food and nutrients they need.

Plastic is destroying life and ecosystems on our planet. So can we adapt to live without it?

We could use bioplastics as an

>> alternative as they are made from renewable biomass sources, such as vegetable fats and oils, food waste and woodchips. As of 2014, they made up only 0.2% of the global polymer market. It is possible to use them in the same way as chemically created plastics. Bioplastics also leave a smaller energy footprint and do not contain BPA, which is a toxic substance that can be found in petroleum plastics. BPA can leach into food and cause health complications, especially during reproduction, with offspring being born heavier and more likely to be insulin resistant.

Bioplastics are not totally beneficial to the environment, as they do not always biodegrade faster than petroleum plastics. Additionally, they are difficult to dispose of correctly as consumers are unsure if they are biodegradable or not. Their production is also known to cause eutrophication, where water is over-enriched by nutrients, deoxygenation of water and consequently the death of aquatic organisms.

“It is predicted that by 2050 there will be more plastic in the oceans than fish.”

However, bioplastics are an alternative to traditional plastics. Due to the vast use of plastic, we will need to replace petroleum plastics with a number of different materials.

Another alternative is paper and cardboard. This would replace plastic utensils, cups and bags as well as other items. This is better than plastic as the material is recyclable, and trees are a renewable resource if we plant them and chop them down at a sustainable rate. For example, paper cups generate 28% fewer greenhouse gases than plastic cups and biodegrade 3,650 times quicker.

However, paper cups are heavier than plastic cups, hence they require more energy to transport. Furthermore, plastic cups use half the amount of water in




production than paper ones. In a world where the UK will not have enough water to meet demand by 2050, this is another key issue to consider, before fully moving towards paper cups.

More widely, there are huge economic complications to removing plastic from the global market. Petroleum plastic comes from crude oil, which drives the global economy. A general decrease in the demand for oil globally would have serious consequences for countries like Saudi Arabia, whose economies rely on oil. It is not just the source that is affected, but plastic products would have to change. Toys, clothes, packaging and bags would have to change or disappear. This would mean all businesses concerned would be affected. Manufacturers particularly would be affected by ending plastic completely. It will be incredibly costly and may cost some smaller businesses a significant portion of their profit. Removing plastic from our lives will cause economic damage on a global and a local scale and with the global economy still recovering from the 2008 crash, removing a product that makes up around 3% of the global economy is unthinkable. Hence, the removal plastic from our lives and

consequently the global economy is not economically viable.

“It is much easier, and more impactful, to make smaller changes.”

Overall, the removal of plastic from our lives would visually benefit the environment and in many ways would reduce pollution. While alternatives to plastic can be better for the environment in some cases, often they are worse for the environment in other ways. Theoretically, we could live without plastic but, in reality, alternatives may cause more problems than they solve.

Furthermore, the economic factors mean that it is incredibly difficult to end plastic in a way that will benefit everyone. Due to the difficulty in mobilising people and the immense backlash that would come from countries and businesses alike, it is not plausible to live entirely without plastic. It is much easier, and more impactful, to make smaller changes. 

Anya Nash is the winner of the 2019 Tamworth Prize and is currently a student at JAGS sixth form.

ARTS & BOOKS

Enlightenment now by Steve Pinker



Ryan Shorthouse is the
Director of Bright Blue

Professor Pinker, in his latest tome, continues his crusade to convince us that the world really is getting better, regardless of Donald Trump.

“Some would say he is a libertarian techno-optimist. But, he stresses that both market forces and state regulation have helped drive progress.”

He is armed with historical data on an abundance of outcomes, from equal rights to the environment. Chapter after chapter, he charts the progress which has been made in both the developed and developing world since the European Enlightenment, but especially in recent decades.

Some of the facts are astounding. The global child mortality rate falling from 18% to 4% between the 1960s and 2000s. The growth in protected areas such as national parks and wildlife reserves across the globe in the last two decades being equivalent to an area twice the size of the United States. A typical American firefighter will now see just one burning building every other year. An average American today will work a quarter less of their lifetime than one in 1960.

There is also some useful puncturing of prevailing but erroneous arguments. It's not true, as the Easterlin Paradox famously professed, that personal happiness stops rising after certain levels of income have been met. Rather, richer people within a country are happier, richer countries are happier, and people get happier as their countries get

richer. Even winning the lottery makes people happier, contrary to popular belief.

His dogged extraction and presentation of data is deeply impressive. And, according to Pinker, moral: “A quantitative mindset, despite its nerdy aura, is in fact the morally enlightened one, because it treats every human life as having equal value”. But, my goodness, its repetitive. We get the story, but Pinker gives you so many graphs, and covers so much ground, ensuring any ‘progressophobia’ is well and truly knocked out of you.

And, although I very much subscribe to his thesis, I do have doubts about comparing data from centuries ago with today, when statistical sampling and collection must have been very different.

Pinker blames two types of people for cynicism and catastrophising about the state of the modern world. First, journalists, who fixate on crises. Unsurprisingly, he's got data that confirms that American media has become more negative in tone since the middle of the last century.

Second, intellectual, cultural and political elites who like to put down rivals and gain praise. He cites experiments showing that critics who pan a book are perceived as more competent than those who praise it, claiming the same may be true of “critics of society”. He detects some snobbery too, towards the rising proletariat and bourgeois who – with more money and time – will be consigned to ghastly careerism and consumerism.

Pinker is understandably frustrated with the lack of gratitude and perspective among the doom-mongers: “Those who

are nostalgic for traditional folkways have forgotten how hard our forebears fought to escape them...Today we enjoy a world of personal freedom these characters could only fantasise about, a world in which people can marry, work, and live as they please”.

Indeed, the writing is most powerful away from the relentless recital of hard, cold facts, when he shares stories of how horrible the past could be: “Small children stood on boxes to tend dangerous machinery in mills, mines and canneries, breathing air thick with cotton or coal dust, kept awake by splashes of cold water in their faces, collapsing into sleep after exhausting shifts with food still in their mouths”.

“There is also some useful puncturing of prevailing but erroneous arguments.”

The scare stories can also be dangerous, Pinker professes. The arms race during the Cold War was exacerbated because of apocalyptic language about nuclear destruction.

Pinker, though, is careful to tell us he is not complacent. Progress is not inevitable. Anthropogenic global warming is a real and serious danger. There has been a slowdown in increases in national and individual wealth in the developed world. And authoritarian populists are ascending again.

But he tells us that these problems are solvable by human ingenuity, if we are led by enlightenment values of reason, science and humanism. Some would say he is a libertarian techno-optimist. But, he stresses that both market forces and state regulation

>> have helped drive progress: “The ascent of safety was led by some heroes, but it was advanced by a motley of actors who pushed in the same direction inch by inch: grassroots activists, paternalistic legislators, and an unsung cadre of inventors, engineers, policy wonks, and number-crunchers”. The

number of “libertarian paradises”, where countries are rich but have little social spending, is zero, he reminds.

Pinker is one of the greatest thinkers of our time. But he should remember that those messengers of melancholy can be useful: they focus minds and get the

problem-solvers to work. 

Enlightenment Now,
Steve Pinker;
Penguin Books;
576 pages (Paperback).
Published 13 February 2018.

Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism

by Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart



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Much ink has been spilled about Trump, Brexit and the phenomena of populism over the last few years, and the quality of those outputs has been varied, to say the least. That said, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart are eminent political scientists, and their contribution is exactly as one would expect. Their book is detailed, insightful and chock-full with data, tables and graphs, but it is also an academic work first, making it a significantly denser reading than some would like.

The book's thesis is a simple one. In post-war Western societies, increasing affluence, demographic changes, improvements in racial and gender equality, urbanisation and increasing access to university led to profound and fundamental social structural change. These shifts led to a silent revolution in cultural values, particularly amongst the young, during the end of the twentieth century, with societies becoming increasingly socially liberal, while attachments to nation and religion weakened.


This set the stage for the titular cultural backlash, as older, rural voters and those without university degrees feel increasingly disconnected and displeased with the political leaders and the direction they set

for their country. An ‘authoritarian reflex’ occurs amongst such voters, as they feel that their political tribe is under threat, leading them to placing more emphasis on conformity, need for security against the threat, and loyalty to group leaders who are seen capable of accomplishing this. This process is reinforced by the long-term economic conditions and recent immigration trends, as this group of voters does not only feel under threat culturally, but also economically.

Ultimately, success of authoritarian populism only occurs when the above trends are translated into actual seats, meaning that the difference in electoral systems also explains the difference in fortunes of such parties across Europe. However, when they rise to power, such parties and leaders delegitimise checks and balances, remove constraints and dismantle tolerance. Such changes might pass once the populists are out of power, but they can also take root in the system, undermining liberal democracies.

Each part of their thesis is meticulously supported by a range of data and case studies, making it difficult to disagree with their overall argument. Yet, the book's main weakness is its focus on macro trends

and institutions, while side-lining the role of leadership. When discussing Trump, Orban or Salvini, the effectiveness of their movements is not only linked to the long-term trends that led to their rise to power, but to the individuals themselves. This is partly caused by the choice of their methodology, as you cannot statistically analyse political leadership in the same way you can attitudes of voters, but a greater acknowledgement of the former's importance would be welcome.

The argument of Norris and Inglehart is not new – in fact, it is a major expansion of their widely read paper from 2016. And the role of culture has taken centre-stage in discussions around Trump, Brexit and populism a while ago. So do not expect to be provided with major new insights. But if you are interested in a powerful and comprehensive reinforcement of the above argument, you could not find a better book. 

Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism,
Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart;
Cambridge University Press;
300 pages (Paperback).
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The invisible killer: The rising global threat of air pollution and how we can fight back

by Gary Fuller



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Air pollution has attracted increasing attention, both in the UK – as reflected in a newfound flurry of media coverage – and internationally due to the World Health Organisation (WHO) warning of it as “the greatest environmental risk to health of our time”. Gary Fuller’s new book succinctly outlines the historical action on, current threat from, and options to tackle dirty air.

“Getting behind the current wave of alarmist news articles to contextualise, humanise, and – most importantly – politicise air pollution.”

An initial point to foreground when reviewing this book is that it is not just a techno-scientific analysis of how to measure air pollution or how it medically harms us. Fuller moves beyond just explaining the problem through metrics, powerfully asserting how it is wrong that all of us are subject to polluters “using our air to dispose of their waste”.

Fuller begins his book with stories of how air pollution became known as a problem, focusing on the important individuals who contributed to the early work trying to measure air pollutants and theorising what their impacts might be on us. This is a refreshing way into the issue, setting it up in its historical context before jumping into the science of the matter – the effect of which is to give a sense of how far our understanding of air pollution has come.

The reader is then offered snippets of how air pollution has evolved over the twentieth century – from The Great Smog of London in 1952, creating a dense pea soup within which Londoners had to live, to the unintended consequences of mistakes such as including lead in petrol.


“Setting it up in its historical context before jumping into the science of the matter.”

Indeed, these stories are made pleasantly entertaining by Fuller. The Great Smog was terrifying, contributing to the deaths of 12,000 Londoners, but at the same time Fueller humourises it, by telling us about newspaper stories of a duck flying into a man in the Fulham area due to a lack of visibility.

It has to be said that it is not afraid of being political, which environmental science books can be shy of. Fueller complains about poor policy decisions. As evidence mounted in the late twentieth century of the damage posed by diesel cars, they were still promoted by governments as more environmentally-friendly due to their lower tailpipe CO₂ emissions. Today, this has generated the NO₂ crisis in the UK, with Client Earth’s mounting successive and successful legal challenges against the UK Government. Policymakers are charged with trusting polluters and drowning “out the voices of environmental and health scientists”.

Overall, the book is a brilliant intervention, getting behind the current wave of alarmist news articles to

contextualise, humanise, and – most importantly – politicise air pollution as an issue we all contribute to and suffer as a consequence of. Clearing our air, Fueller says, is “like trying to take the milk out of your coffee: once it’s in, it’s in”.

Fuller finishes on a few points of optimism – that low-carbon lifestyles and industries are “no longer a potential goal but the only obvious and rational choice”. A highly recommended read to properly ground air pollution as an issue with a history and very important future. 

The Invisible Killer
“This compelling book is a must-read for all.”
Damian Carrington, *The Guardian*
The Rising Global Threat of Air Pollution – and How We Can Fight Back
Gary Fuller

The invisible killer: The rising global threat of air pollution and how we can fight back, Gary Fuller;
Melville House UK;
279 pages (Paperback).
Published 29 November 2018.

Future politics

by Jamie Susskind



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Recent years have seen concerns mount over the role of technology in our economy and society. Where once innovations such as the internet and social media were seen as democratising, positive forces, today they are viewed with suspicion and distrust.

“Susskind argues that the powers of the supercharged state and tech firms must be counterbalanced by greater powers for people to hold them to account.”

Susskind is quick to highlight the very real basis of these fears. As technology grows to be increasingly sophisticated and omnipresent, both the state and ‘big tech’ firms will have at their disposal new and terrifying powers. Certain technologies will be able to force us to do – or not do – certain things, for instance self-driving cars that refuse to deviate from the speed limit or park in a non-designated space. Others will be able to scrutinise us in unprecedented ways – think of the controversy around Amazon’s Alexa, for instance. As the debate around social media shows, technology already has the potential to decide what news reaches us, thereby shaping our very worldview.

Control and coercion will also have an economic dimension. We have already grown accustomed to terms such as ‘social media giants’ or ‘tech titans’, and this is hardly surprising, considering that “nearly 80% of mobile-based social media


traffic runs through platforms owned by Facebook” and “nearly 80% of search advertising revenue goes to Google’s parent company, Alphabet.” In future, wealth could increasingly flow towards a small elite of capital owners as technology replaces workers and the ‘network effect’ – where services become more valuable as more people use them – takes hold.

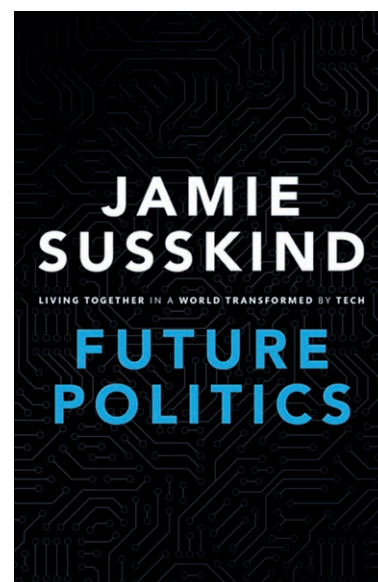
Against this bleak backdrop, it would be very easy to fall into a Luddite polemic, or to argue for large-scale state intervention to break up the tech firms and bring key assets into public ownership. But Susskind recognises that technology can still have a positive role to play. In any case, it is vital that the market continues to be a “vital engine of innovation” and to ensure that, in trying to stop tech firms becoming too powerful, we do not create another monster in the form of a state “supercharged” with all the powers technology has to offer.

Rather, Susskind argues that the powers of the supercharged state and tech firms must be counterbalanced by greater powers for people to hold them to account.

The supercharged state should be tamed by a fundamental rethink of how we do democracy. Susskind offers several strategies for this, which range from familiar concepts such as deliberative or direct democracy to radical ideas such as ‘Wiki’ democracy, in which citizens co-write legislation as they might a Wikipedia article. To restrain tech firms, Susskind suggests regulation to make them more transparent, as well as a “digital separation of powers” to ensure that no one firm is allowed

significant control over the capabilities of force, scrutiny, and perception-control.

Of course, many of these tentative ideas are beset with practical difficulties, while the sheer breadth of Susskind’s work sometimes leaves the reader wanting to drill down deeper into the specifics of a particular problem. Where Susskind succeeds is in demonstrating that we are at a historical crossroads, but that with enough political will we can yet steer ourselves away from an Orwellian technodystopia. It’s now up to us to stop being passengers and get in the driver’s seat. 



Future politics,
Jamie Susskind;
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