



ATTITUDES TOWARDS REFUGEES, IMMIGRANTS, AND IDENTITY IN FRANCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JULY 2017



**More in
Common**

About More in Common

More in Common is a new effort to build communities and societies that are stronger, more resilient and more open. The More in Common initiative took shape from work undertaken since 2015 to understand why advanced democracies failed to respond more effectively to the refugee crisis and its impact on domestic politics.

The refugee crisis was a harbinger of what happens when the forces of right-wing populist hate and division gain the upper hand, and those in favour of open and diverse societies do not come together in defense of those values. If the battle for hearts and minds is lost to authoritarian populists, advanced democracies will not be able to respond adequately to such profound collective challenges as climate change, inequality, technological disruption of the job market, population ageing and global public health threats. Holding diverse and inclusive societies together will become increasingly difficult.

More in Common's objective across its different streams of work is to build closer and more inclusive societies, which are resilient to the appeal of xenophobia and authoritarian populism. We aim to support the efforts of civil society and key influencers who share the values of open and inclusive societies, and help catalyse other new initiatives that advance these values.

More in Common is a non-profit organisation with teams in France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. Purpose builds and supports movements to advance the fight for an open, just, and habitable world. The co-founders of More in Common are Tim Dixon, Mathieu Lefevre, and Gemma Mortensen.

For more information, please visit www.moreincommon.com



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Executive Summary

France stands out among the world's major democracies for the prominent role played by far-right populist parties in mainstream French politics for several decades. In contrast to most western democracies, where xenophobic nationalism and nativism existed only on the margins of politics, Front National (FN) - France's main far-right political party - has been championing these sentiments in the country for many decades, and with growing success. Front National has significantly influenced a series of high-profile national debates about immigration, cultural integration, Islam and France's response to the refugee crisis in Europe. The debate in France has also had reverberations across Europe, inspiring far-right populist movements in other countries.

This report provides insight into the appeal of populist sentiments relating to French identity, globalisation, immigration, refugees, and Islam. Its unique contribution is that it identifies five segments of the French population, who are distinguished by their differing attitudes towards these issues. By dividing the population in this way, it is possible to study the traits and trends within each segment and better understand what motivates and concerns individuals. In our view, this research portrays a more complete and nuanced picture of French public opinion than past reports, in particular, by highlighting the conflicted views of a majority of the population, which belong to one of the three 'middle' groups. In doing so, this research helps to explain why opinion polls can report views that appear to be contradictory.

This report is the first in a series of major country reports from More in Common, a not-for-profit organization incubated by Purpose Europe in 2017. It was commissioned in conjunction with the Social Change Initiative with generous funding provided by the Human Dignity Foundation. More in Common is working on understanding and responding to threats that divide communities and undermine open and democratic societies. This series of reports aims to provide deeper insights than have previously been available into attitudes towards national identity, immigrants, refugees and community. The reports make it possible to identify commonalities and differences among countries (starting with France and Germany, with reports forthcoming in 2018 for the United States, Netherlands, Italy, Sweden and Greece). In addition to providing insights, More in Common's reports are intended to assist those who work to promote the values of openness and inclusion, to influence policy outcomes and to resist efforts to divide communities and marginalise newcomers such as refugees and immigrants.

The Limitations of Existing Public Opinion Research

This report aims to fill a gap in the existing body of public opinion research data in France. Most polls on these issues involve responses to a small set of direct questions about specific issues, providing limited explanation for those responses. Some studies go further by making associations between responses and other social and economic issues, or demographic and psychographic factors such as respondents' values. Few studies have attempted to build a more complete picture of the interconnected nature of attitudes towards identity, immigration and France's response to the refugee crisis.

Media coverage often focuses on people who hold strong views at the opposite ends of the spectrum. At one end are those with more cosmopolitan values who welcome immigration and celebrate the diversity of French society. At the other end are those who are anxious about threats to French national identity, immigration, and France's place in the world. This second group is typically identified with the Front National party.

Much less attention has been paid to the large number of French people who hold mixed views about their country's refugee intake, its immigration policies and France's place in the world. As noted above, this report suggests that a majority of the population belong to groups with mixed views (sometimes described as the "conflicted middle" or "anxious middle"). Middle groups are typically more open to changing their views. However, existing research has not identified the populations that are most open to changing their views, the messaging that would be most persuasive, or the most trusted messengers. This report makes a start towards achieving these goals.

Key Findings

The report provides a set of findings about overall levels of public opinion in France on a range of related issues around French identity and "otherness," and what different segments of the population think about those issues. Segmentation research retains a much longer "shelf life" than ordinary public opinion research because of the deeper insights that it provides into the public mindset. Although the responses are influenced by events in the months immediately before September 2016 when the quantitative data was collected (such as terrorist attacks), attitudinal segments typically remain reasonably stable over a period of several years. This is the first population segmentation of its kind that has been conducted on these issues in France, and our goal is to revisit it in future years to identify trends in public opinion.

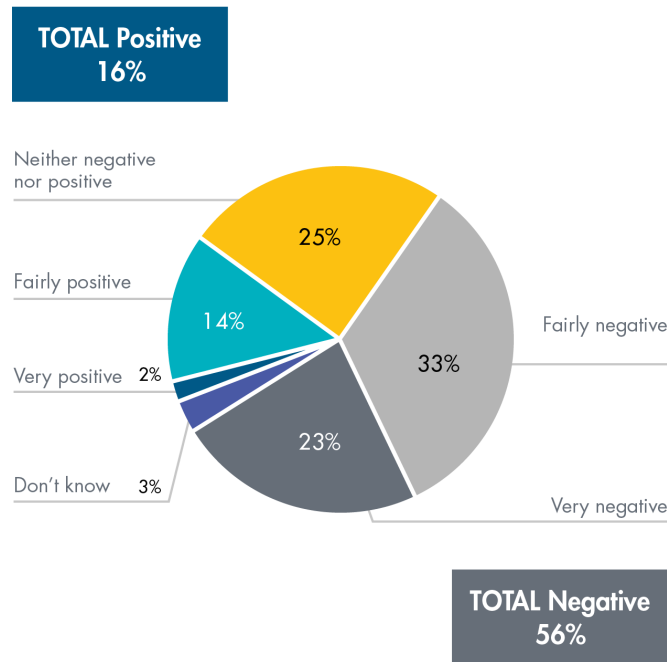
The following key findings reveal the overall levels of public opinion in France:

- 1. France is marked by pessimism and anxiety about the future.** 65 per cent of people describe France as "fearful" and 50 per cent describe it as "angry." A key driver of this pessimism is the perception of economic decline. The proportion of people expecting economic conditions to worsen outnumbers those expecting improvement by more than five to one (51 per cent versus 9 per cent, with 34 per cent not expecting a change). It remains to be seen whether the political upheaval since May 2017 will lead to changes in the fundamentals of French public opinion.
- 2. The majority of people are concerned about, and demand protection from, the effects of globalisation.** 58 per cent of people agree that the economic consequences of globalisation are very negative for France, while only 13 per cent disagree. An even higher proportion agree with the proposition that France needs to do more to protect itself from the world (61 per cent, with 15 per cent in disagreement), and that France is losing its identity (59 per cent, with 20 per cent in disagreement).
- 3. The risk of terrorism is an issue of high public concern,** with 53 per cent of people citing it as one of the three most important issues facing France. The proportion citing unemployment and jobs as among the country's most important issues is approximately the same (52 per cent of respondents).
- 4. The French public believes that immigration has increased significantly in recent years.** 85 per cent agreed with this proposition (62 per cent saying that the number of immigrants had increased a lot, and 23 per cent a little), and only 1 per cent disagreed. Immigration was the third most frequently cited issue of concern (cited by 37 per cent respondents). In fact, the level of immigration has been fairly stable in France for the past decade.

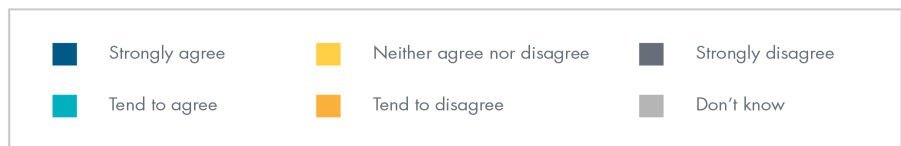
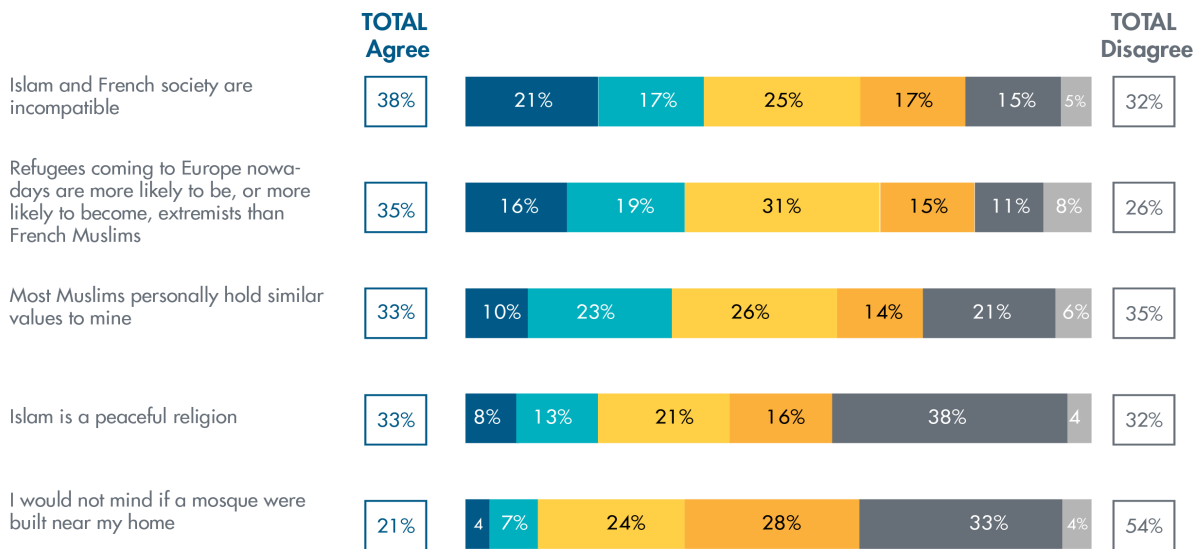
¹see Hope Not Hate, 2011 and 2016

5. **The public has strong negative perceptions of the impact of immigration on France.** 56 per cent believe its impact has been negative (23 per cent “very negative”), while just 16 per cent believe it has been positive (and just 2 per cent “very positive”). These views are tied to the perceived failure of integration efforts both in cultural and economic terms. Furthermore, only 22 per cent agree that immigrants generally make efforts to integrate into French society; 47 per cent disagree.
6. **The perception of Islam in France is a central determinant of people’s views on refugees, immigrants, and otherness in general.** A sizeable minority believe that Islam is incompatible with French identity and loyalty to France. 38 per cent of respondents agree with the proposition that Islam and French society are not compatible (32 per cent disagree, and 25 per cent neither agree nor disagree).
7. **There is a relatively high level of understanding of the difference between refugees and immigrants** (with 55 per cent agreeing, compared to just 17 per cent disagreeing, that refugees are different from immigrants because they had no choice about leaving their home country).
8. **The high level of understanding of refugee status does not translate into strong public support for accepting refugees.** 45 per cent agree with the proposition that France cannot accept any refugees right now, and that it should close its borders (29 per cent disagree). Far-right populists appear to have successfully persuaded others that individuals claiming to be refugees are not genuine and are in fact coming to France for economic reasons: 51 per cent agree with this proposition (19 per cent disagree).
9. **In principle, the public supports the notion that France has an obligation to assist those who are fleeing war and persecution.** However, the combination of anxieties about immigration, economic decline, terrorism and its links to radicalised Muslims, has led many to doubt whether France has the capacity to take in more refugees right now, despite the scale of the global refugee crisis.
10. **There is a strong link in the public mind between domestic terrorism, immigration and the intake of refugees.** This reflects a series of terrorist incidents in France, beginning with the Charlie Hebdo attacks in early 2015. 53 per cent agree with the proposition that it is too dangerous to let refugees into France as a major threat of terrorism is posed by the people who come to France as refugees (20 per cent disagree).
11. **There is anxiety over the erosion of the ‘social contract’ in France, in particular towards immigrants.** The notion of a reciprocal contract between members of French society is a longstanding element of social and political debate in France. There is widespread concern that the social contract is no longer working. A consistent feature of the narrative of far-right populists in France is that certain groups such as immigrants are given priority over established residents for benefits, housing and public services (51 per cent agree, 23 per cent disagree). An even higher proportion believe that immigrants claim benefits and use public services without contributing something in return (65 per cent agree, 12 per cent disagree).
12. **Despite the public’s anxieties about immigration and integration, there is widespread concern about the rise of racism and discrimination.** 71 per cent agree with the proposition that they are worried by it, of which 38 per cent “strongly agreed”, while only 13 per cent are not concerned. Likewise, 79 per cent agree with the proposition that extremism exists in all religions (and just 9 per cent disagree).

Question: Generally speaking, would you say immigration has had a positive or a negative impact on France?



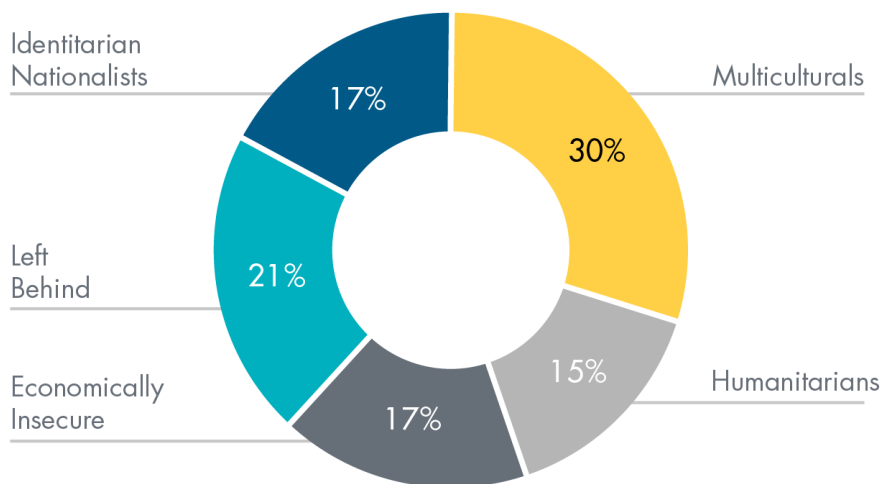
Question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Segmentation Analysis

This study is based on a multivariate analysis that makes it possible to identify, based on different traits, groups that share attitudes and perceptions. The survey asked a wide range of questions about attitudes towards national identity, immigrants and refugees to a representative sample of 2002 people.

Segmentation Analysis (% of the Total Population)



According to the attitudinal segmentation, French society can be divided in five distinct groups. On a continuum, there are the Multiculturals, more open to the rest of the world and with more positive views of immigration and refugees and, opposite to them, the Identitarian Nationalists, who are wary of globalisation and oppose welcoming newcomers. There are three groups in the middle sometimes described as the “conflicted middle” or “anxious middle”: the Humanitarians, the Economically Insecure, and the Left Behind. Members of these middle groups often hold a mix of positive and negative views, even though those views may conflict with each other. This study suggests that on issues of national identity, immigration and refugees, France’s conflicted middle represents 53 per cent of the total population.

The Outliers

Multiculturals (30 per cent)

The Multiculturals represent 30 per cent of the French population, and are the largest of the five groups. They are more open-minded and have more positive views of immigrants and refugees. They have a more optimistic – or at least a less pessimistic and less closed - outlook on France’s future and their own prospects. They are more likely to believe that immigration has a positive impact on both economic and cultural life.

Demographics: Multiculturals are slightly younger than the average and are present in all regions, although they have a slightly higher presence in Paris.

Identitarian Nationalists (17 per cent)

At the other end of the spectrum, the Identitarian Nationalists represent 17 per cent of the population. They are characterised by their strong opposition and negative attitudes towards immigrants and refugees and their perception of economic, cultural and security threats to France. Identitarian Nationalists believe that France is losing its identity and consider immigration to be one of the main challenges facing the country today. They perceive immigration to be a threat to security and believe that France should close its borders and protect itself from the rest of the world.

Demographics: Identitarian Nationalists are more likely to come from rural areas and small villages, have a higher proportion of men than women, and are more likely to be in the 25 to 49 years old age group.

The Conflicted Middle

Humanitarians (15 per cent)

The Humanitarians represent 15 per cent of the total population and are characterised by a more optimistic outlook than the other segments in the conflicted middle. Many in this group are in older age groups and identify with the political left. Compared to the population overall, they have positive opinions of immigrants, refugees, and the impact of immigration. They are also more likely than any other group to empathise with refugees and immigrants, believing that most refugees had no choice about leaving their country. Humanitarians believe many immigrants undertake jobs that other French people are reluctant to do.

The Humanitarians are distinct from the Multiculturals in their higher levels of pessimism. Many perceive France as an anxious country. Unlike the Multiculturals, they do not believe that they benefit from economic growth. Humanitarians also have higher levels of concern for domestic issues such as France's education system and the environment.

Demographics: There are more women than men in this segment. Humanitarians tend to be present in large cities, especially Paris. They are significantly older than the average of the population.

Economically Insecure (17 per cent)

The Economically Insecure segment represents 17 per cent of the population. More than any other group, they are highly pessimistic about France's economic predicament. Almost all expect continued economic decline in France, and they describe their country as worried, angry and weak. They believe that it is becoming more difficult for people like them to succeed in France. They also feel that their region does not benefit as much as other parts of France from economic growth.

The Economically Insecure believe that France needs to do more to protect itself from the rest of the world. This economic anxiety shapes their reservations about immigration and refugees. A large majority of the group believe that refugees should go back to their country of origin once the situation has improved.

Demographics: There are more women than men in this group, on average they are younger, and on a professional level, there are in fact more inactive people and less labourers than in other segments.

Left Behind (21 per cent)

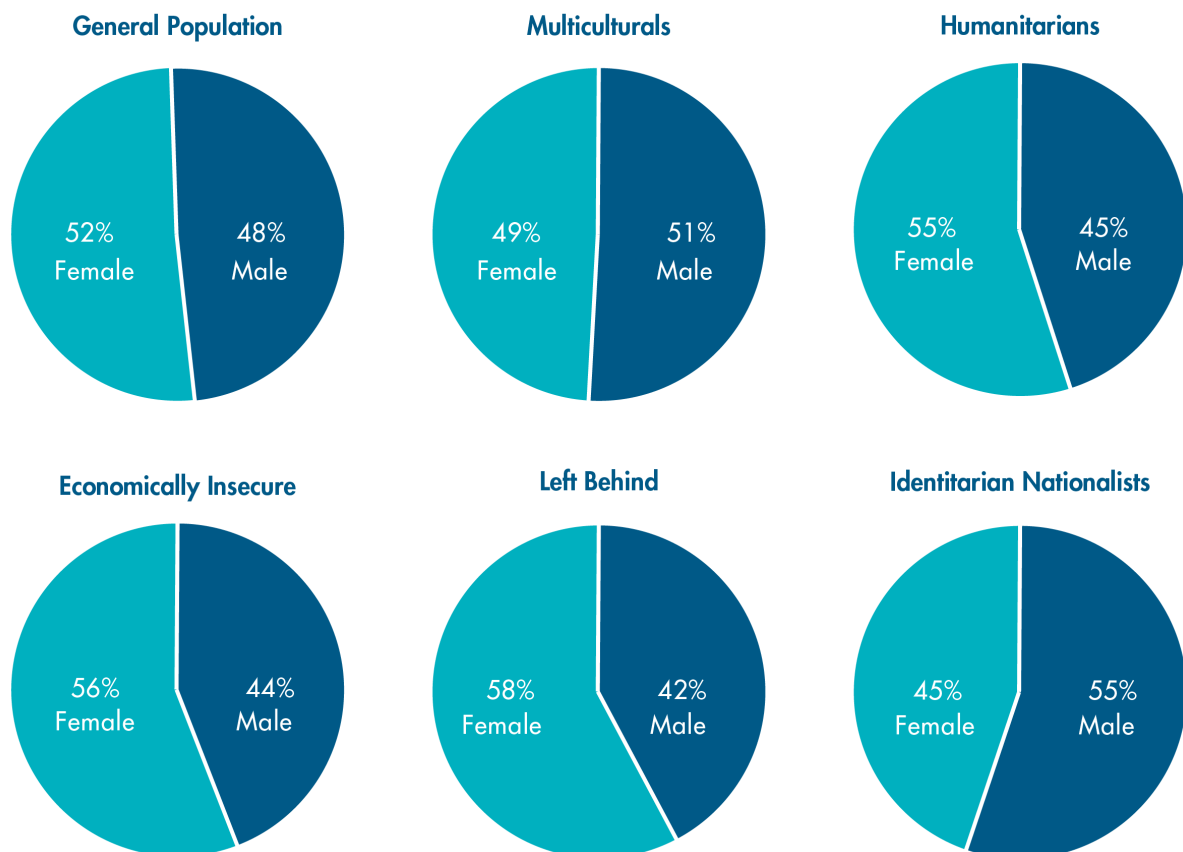
The Left Behind group represents 21 per cent of the population. This segment is more likely than any other group to believe that their personal circumstances have recently deteriorated. One of their main concerns is a lack of upward social mobility. They are more worried about economic challenges than other groups. The Left Behind group thinks that France should protect itself from the outside and that

globalisation has a negative impact on them and the country. They hold negative opinions of immigrants but differentiate between immigrants and refugees. Even though they share some of the views of the Identitarian Nationalists, the motives behind their beliefs are different. The views of Left Behind are mainly driven by their sense of abandonment and perceived deteriorating social and economic position. They believe that French identity is threatened, but this issue is secondary to other concerns. Unlike the Identitarian Nationalists, they are worried about an increase in racism and discrimination.

Demographics: There are significantly more women than men in this segment (58 to 42 per cent). The Left Behind are more likely to live in rural areas and small towns, but they also have a presence in Paris and other large cities. In this segment, there are more 50-64 year olds than the national average (33 per cent vs 22 per cent) and fewer 25-35 year olds.

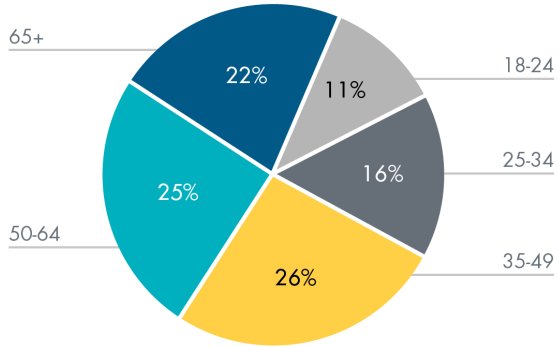
Socio-demographic profile of the French population (total and by segments)

GENDER

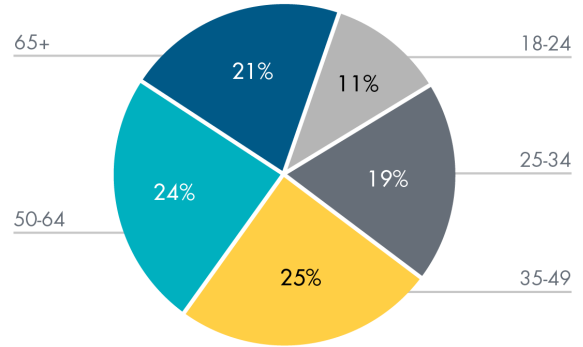


AGE

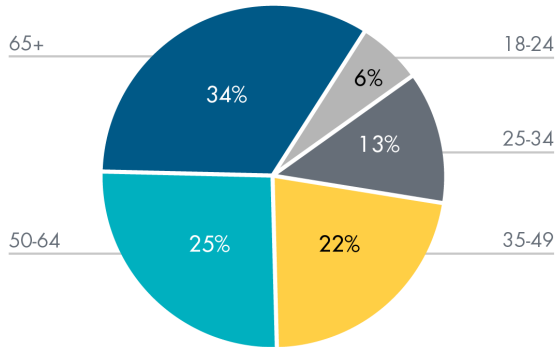
General Population



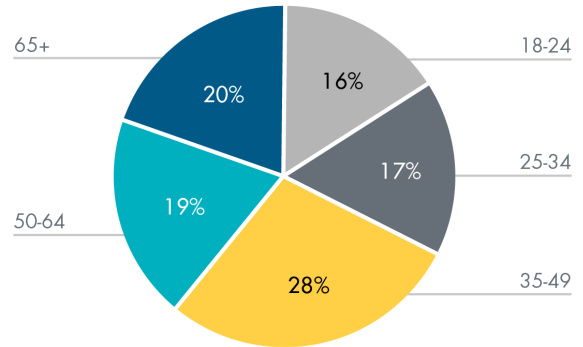
Multiculturals



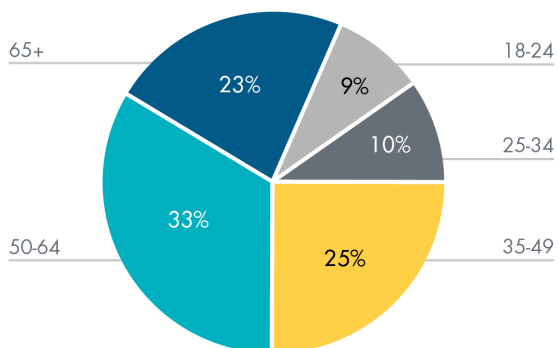
Humanitarians



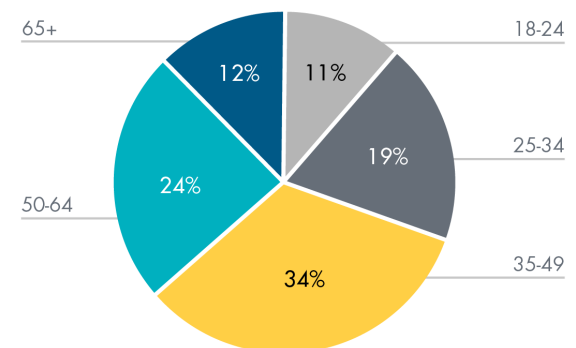
Economically Insecure



Left Behind

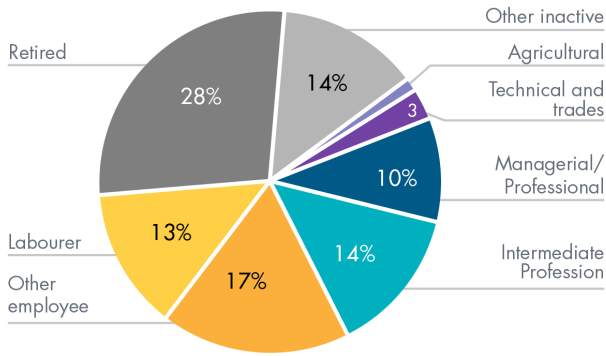


Indentitarian Nationalists

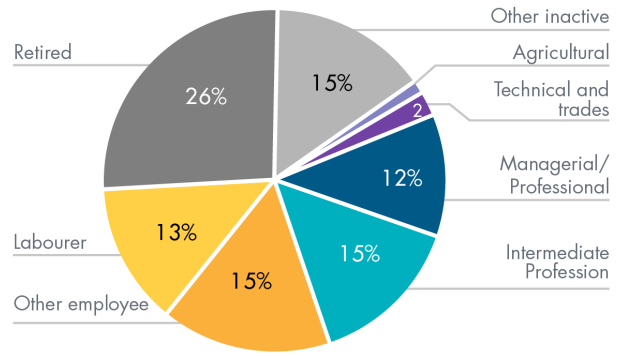


PROFESSION

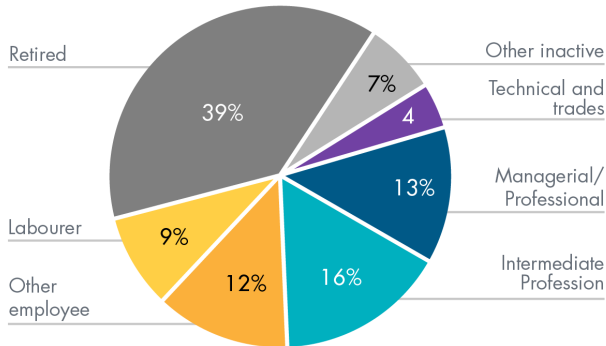
General Population



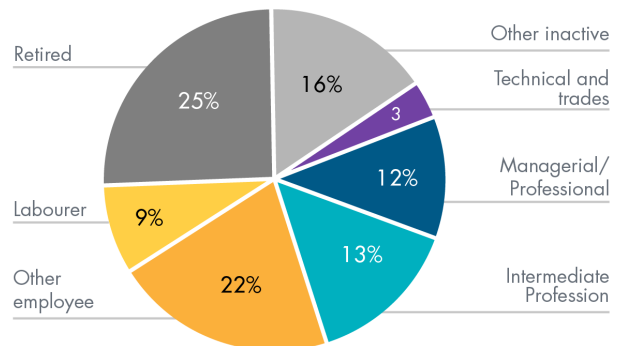
Multiculturals



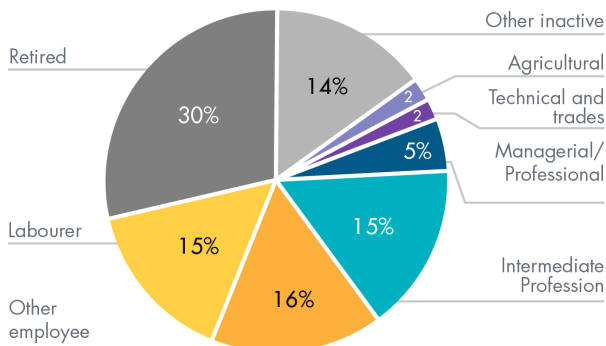
Humanitarian



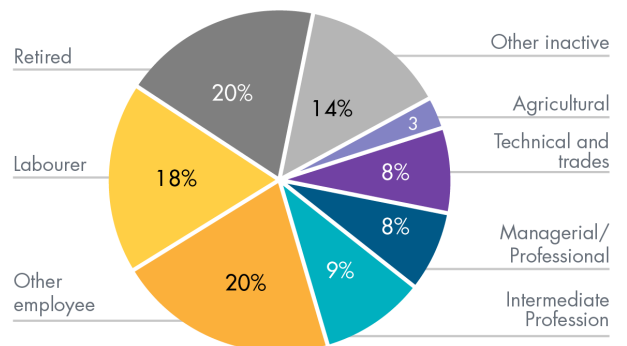
Economically Insecure



Left Behind



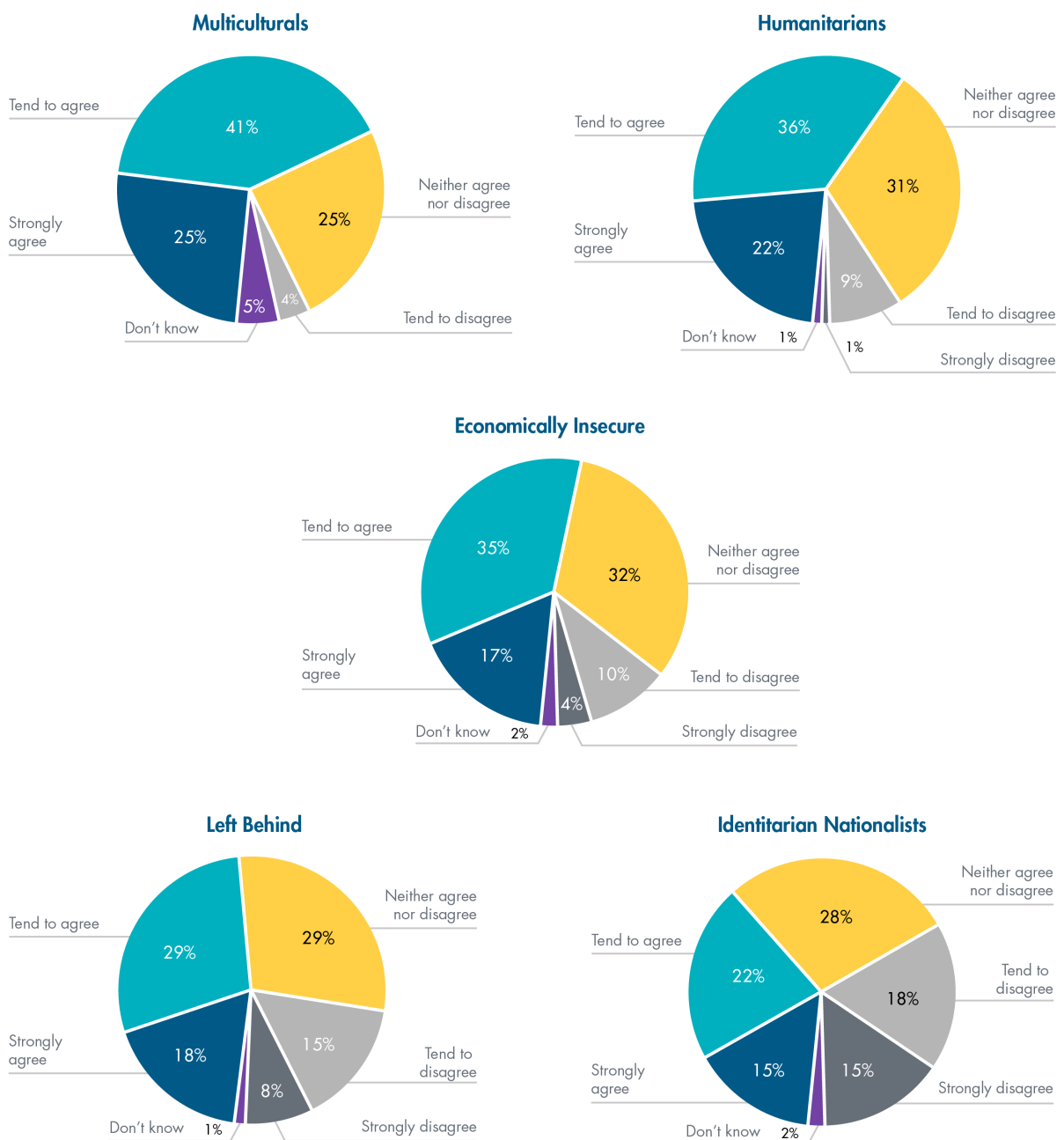
Identitarian Nationalists



Substantive Differences: French Landscape, Immigration, Muslims and Refugees

French Landscape and Perceptions of Immigration, Refugees, and Islam

The segmentation analysis highlights the extent to which attitudes to immigration, refugees and Islam are connected to broader perceptions of France's place in the world, confidence or anxiety about the future, and otherness. Unsurprisingly, personal economic conditions are a major influence on people's perceptions of these issues. However, identity and culture also play very significant roles in shaping perceptions.

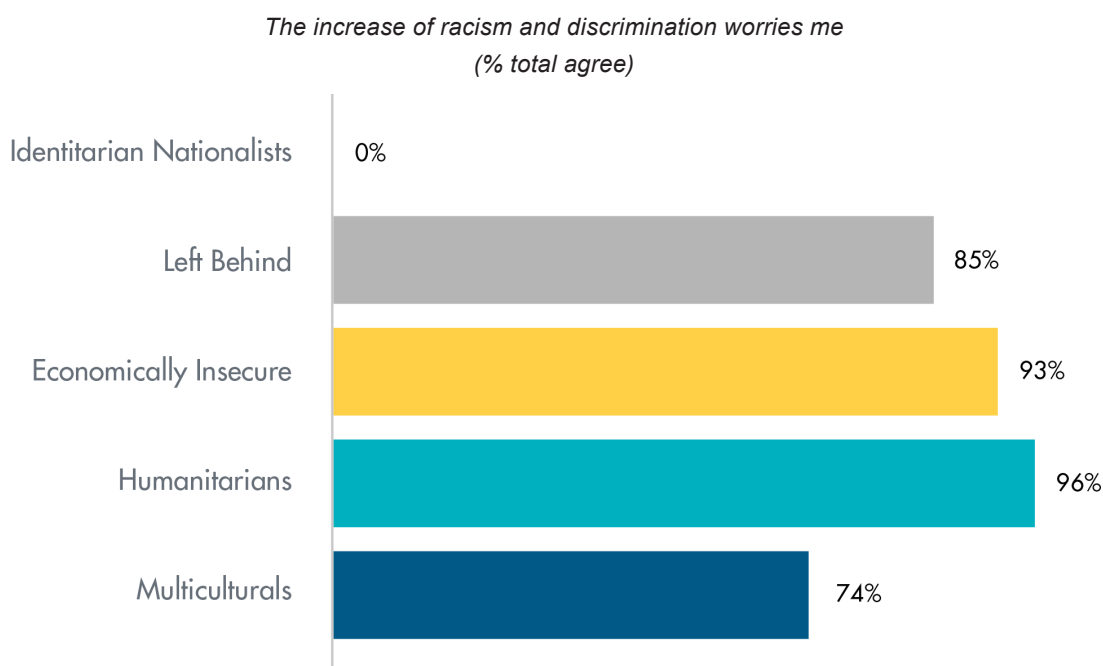


There are significant differences between the segments in perceptions of the degree to which people feel that they can be proud of their French identity. Multiculturals are most proud of their identity, with 66 per cent in agreement (and 25 per cent agreeing strongly) and none who strongly disagree. Falling levels of agreement are evident in the Humanitarian, Economically Insecure, and Left Behind segments until the lowest point of confidence is reached with the Identitarian Nationalists. Those in this group appear deeply discontented with their country. Equal numbers strongly disagree that they can be proud of their identity as those who strongly agree (15 per cent). Overall, only 37 per cent of them agree that French people can be proud of their national identity.

Perhaps the most striking outcome of the segmentation analysis concerns the intensity of the Identitarian Nationalist segment. Across a wide range of questions about identity, culture, and engagement with "others," the Identitarian Nationalists consistently hold the most opposed views. What is striking is that while for the most part, the differences in the responses of the segments are relatively modest, there are often large differences between the Identitarian Nationalists' responses and those of other groups. For example:

- While all the segments have low confidence in the willingness of immigrants to integrate into French society, Identitarian Nationalists almost unanimously reject this proposition (only 5 per cent agree, compared to 19 per cent in the closest segment, the Left Behind).
- While middle groups such as the Left Behind and the Economically Insecure hold some strong anti-immigration views, these concerns seem to relate most of all to economic anxieties. The Identitarians go much further in attributing alternative motives to immigrants and refugees. For example, 39 per cent even reject the proposition that refugees are different from other migrants because they did not have a choice to leave their home country. Among the middle groups, a much smaller proportion reject this proposition (ranging from 14 to 17 per cent).
- The rise of racism and discrimination is recognised as a concern by overwhelming majorities of all segments of the population with the exception of the Identitarian Nationalists. Remarkably, nobody in this segment expressed a concern about rising racism. Identitarian Nationalists appear unwilling to even recognise the existence of racism, and in this respect they are very different from the rest of French society.

Question: Thinking specifically about refugees coming to France nowadays, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

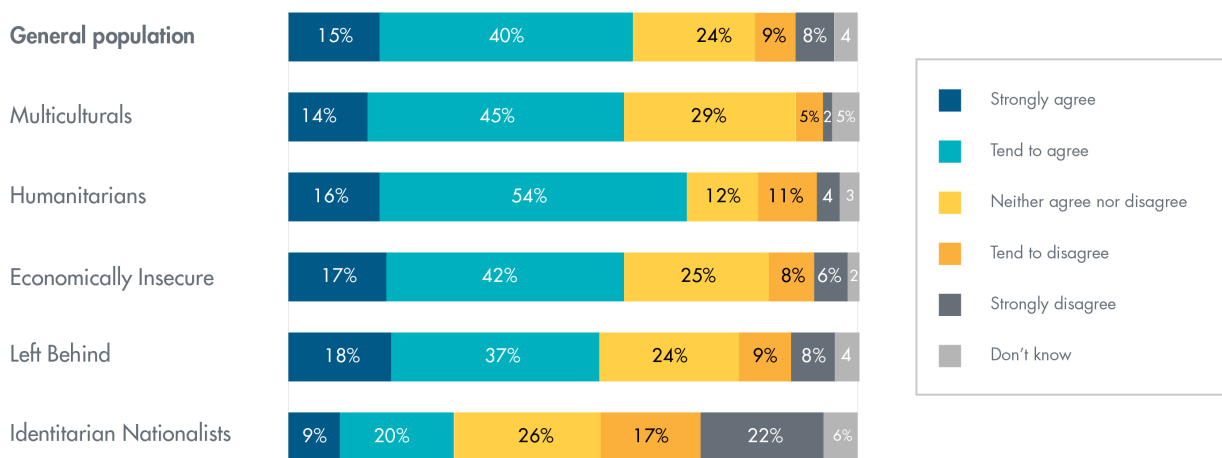


In contrast to the Identitarian Nationalists, the views of the Multiculturals differ from the middle segments far less dramatically:

- Multiculturals are only marginally more likely to believe that immigrants make an effort to integrate into French society (30 per cent, compared to 27, 21 and 19 per cent among the conflicted middle segments).
- Multiculturals are often accused of being naïve in ignoring the abuse of systems of welfare and asylum, yet 39 per cent of them agree that there are many people who claim to be refugees but who are not genuine refugees (with the middle segments ranging from 41 to 59 per cent agreement).
- On several issues (such as those relating to Islam), the Multiculturals and Humanitarians hold similar views. In fact on some issues, the Humanitarians have stronger views in support of immigration and refugees. Only 22 per cent of Multiculturals believe that immigration has had a positive impact on France, while 29 per cent of Humanitarians hold this view. However, the Multiculturals overall appear to be motivated more by affirmation of the value of diversity and appear more open to cultural differences, while the Humanitarians, an older group, are motivated more by compassion and humane values (but are less comfortable with cultural diversity).

Question: Thinking specifically about refugees coming to France nowadays, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Refugees are different from other migrants, because they had no choice about leaving their home country



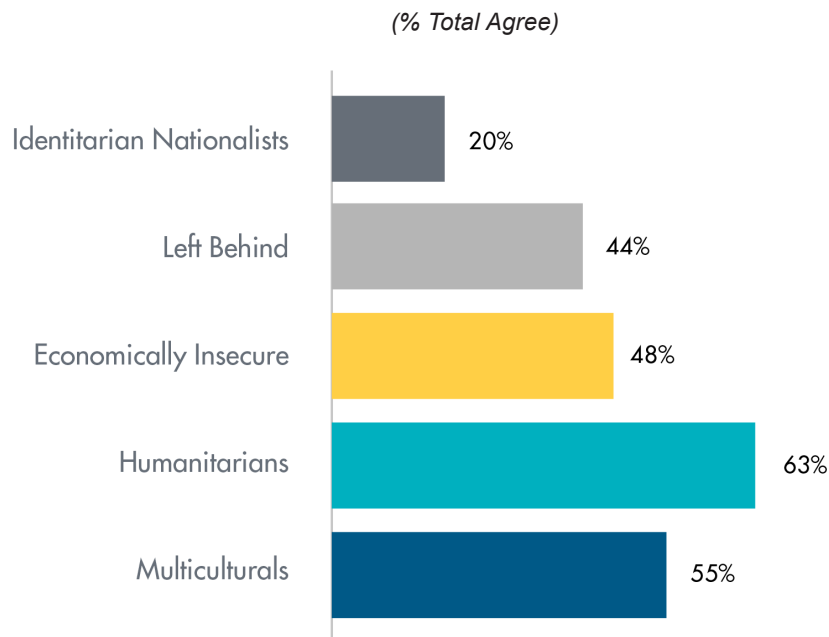
Analysis of the views of the Economically Insecure and Left Behind groups shows that on many issues they are closer to the Multiculturals and Humanitarians than to the Identitarian Nationalists. To that extent, the polarisation in attitudes in French society around issues of identity and otherness appears to be strongest between the Identitarians and all four other groups.

The Economically Insecure and Left Behind share deep concerns about France’s place in the world, but compared to the Multiculturals and Humanitarians, they are more sceptical about the benefits of immigration, the willingness of newcomers to integrate, and France’s capacity to assist refugees. Economic anxieties appear to play the greatest role in shaping their attitudes and explain the stronger views held by the Left Behind in comparison to the Economically Insecure. While these two segments have anxieties about the place of Islam in France, views differ by around 10 percentage points from the Humanitarians to Multiculturals (63 and 55 per cent respectively), but they are far less anxious than the

Identitarian Nationalists. Almost half of the Left Behind and Economically Insecure groups accept the principle of asylum for refugees (48 per cent and 44 per cent respectively), which places them closer to the Humanitarians and the Multiculturals, and a long way from the Identitarian Nationalists (just 20 per cent agree with the statement).

Question: Thinking specifically about refugees coming to France nowadays, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

People fleeing from war or persecution should be able to find refugee in other countries, including France



Conclusion and Recommendations

- 1. Beyond the specific issues of refugee and immigration policies, the study points to a wider French anxiety about the notion of "otherness."** It is striking that only 16 per cent view immigration as positive for the country, when one in four French people have at least one grandparent who was an immigrant. This is related to the perceived threats of terrorism, crime and economic and cultural decline. It is also a result of a widely shared perception that France has not integrated immigrants successfully. This has made people reluctant to accept further new arrivals such as refugees. In other words, the refugee crisis is perceived through the prism of immigration policy and the perceived failure of this policy. (In contrast, our research in Germany suggests that Germans perceive immigration through the prism of refugee policy, reflecting the much higher intake of refugees in recent years.)
- 2. Many questions arise from these findings on the pessimistic assessment of the French experience of immigration.** A key question is whether public debate has been distorted by the genuine shortcomings of immigration policy to the extent that it has obscured the many examples of successful integration that make up a majority of stories of immigration in France. A key challenge for policymakers is how to restore public trust in France's system of integration.
- 3. Perceptions of Islam are a major influence on French people's perception of refugees, immigration and otherness in general.** The findings show that it is critical to find ways to disentangle misleading perceptions about Muslims in France, increase people's understanding of what it means to be Muslim in France, and put forward what French people have in common rather than that which divides French Muslims from the rest of French society. In particular, the place of women in Islam comes up as a frequent point of criticism by groups all too keen to find a rationale for their rejection of Muslims. The narrative constructed around the role of women in Islam (one of oppression and lack of agency) is powerful and needs to be addressed if the rejection of Muslims is to be alleviated in France.
- 4. For a majority of the French population, ambivalence prevails on questions related to immigration and identity.** Commentators have written extensively in recent years of a fault line or fracture between an "open" and a "closed" France. Our study acknowledges that "conflicted middle" segments often hold contradictory but no less legitimate views on questions of immigration. The right frames and messages need to be tested in order to understand and take this ambivalence into account. A frame of "inclusive patriotism" composed of both rights and duties seems to be most effective with this ambivalent middle.
- 5. People's attitudes towards refugees and immigration in France are shaped by perceptions and public debates, and often not by hard facts.** For example, an overwhelming majority of French people believe that immigration has increased over the last five years. In fact, it has not. Similarly, a majority of individuals believe that most people who receive refugee status in France are not "real" refugees. These findings point to a loss of confidence in the ability of authorities to manage immigration flows. This lack of confidence is being exacerbated and exploited by extremist parties. Efforts to recognise public concerns and restore confidence are needed.
- 6. A persistent perception of a "competition of the poor" exists in France.** People in conflicted middle groups often question France's ability to show compassion to refugees from outside of France in light of the problem of "our French homeless." It is far more difficult to win public support for assisting refugees while a large number of people think they must choose between helping those in need within France versus helping those in need from outside of France. These genuine concerns about poverty and inequality within France must be addressed if the case for refugee assistance is to win greater support. Specifically, a broad government-led plan on homelessness and poverty,

may well have positive consequences in addressing the anxieties identified in this report and on the perception of immigrants and refugees.

- 7. Gender plays an important part in the demography of the conflicted middle groups.** Women make up a disproportionate share of the “conflicted middle” segments, particularly in groups that appear more open to extremist messages (the so-called “ante-chambers” of the Front National). This highlights a significant risk: should these women join the ranks of the closed groups, the electoral map of France would be redrawn. This warrants urgent further examination.
- 8. Research points to deep and widely held anxieties about France’s place in the world and the place of “the other” within French society.** While the research was undertaken prior to the 2017 election cycle, these anxieties are sure to re-emerge as the surge of optimism around political renewal in 2017 wears off. France rejected its political establishment in the 2017 elections. The danger is that if the French public concludes in coming years that its experiment with the new centrist force of *Republique en Marche* has failed to deliver, the public may well turn to the extremes. To that extent, this report sounds a clear warning of the urgent need to come to terms with the concerns of a majority of the French population, and build a new and more inclusive sense of French identity that brings people together and restores confidence in France’s place in the world.
- 9. This research highlights the profound questions that France is currently facing on the issues of identity, otherness, and its place in the world.** This methodology is, of course, imperfect and the segmentation analysis needs to be placed within the wider context of research into the experiences and perspectives of all members of French society. However, the report makes an important contribution in highlighting the many ways that French people feel displaced, lack confidence in their own identity and worry about difference within their society. Far more needs to be done to identify how to bring people together, including those who feel most excluded and left behind. Yet it is not just those on the margins who feel left out. Some form of identity crisis is felt in all the segments mapped out in this report.
- 10. The danger is that French people with divided opinions turn against each other.** Nonetheless, throughout its history, France has demonstrated its ability to unite and come together. France today is at a critical moment. On the shoulders of a young president lies a responsibility to bridge deep divisions in French society to reinvent a new aspirational narrative for the country. But the capacity of governments to build social trust is limited, and the challenge is as great as perhaps any president has faced. What is also needed is the engagement of ordinary citizens from all communities, in an ambitious and inclusive effort to support national unity and improve the welfare of all.

