

Finding France

A people
in search of
their country



**Destin
Commun**

More in Common France

ABOUT DESTIN COMMUN (MORE IN COMMON FRANCE)

Destin Commun is the French arm of More in Common, an international initiative set up in 2017 to build societies that are stronger, more united, and more resilient to the increasing threats of polarization and social division. We work with a wide range of groups in civil society, business, faith, education, philanthropy, media and government to connect people across lines of division. More in Common's teams in France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States work together and share a commitment to advancing our mission.

For more information please

visit www.moreincommon.com and www.destincommun.fr

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This study was conducted in close collaboration with the polling firm Kantar Public France.

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a uniquely wide-ranging survey of French society and democracy. It provides fresh insights into the deep-seated fractures that exist within French society – and also points towards opportunities for healing those divisions.

Destin Commun’s study finds three “Frances” living parallel lives, with few occasions for contact. We also find signs of growing polarization on questions of national identity. Our methodology suggests that the fragmentation of French society can be explained by looking at profoundly held core beliefs and value systems.

Although there is no denying the worrying state of division in France, this study also gives us real reasons to be hopeful: despite their deep divisions, 83% of French people are convinced that they can face problems together and 61% consider that the country’s divisions are surmountable. Our conversations with people from all across France showed that new common social projects – such as protecting the environment – have the potential to unite people from across our social divisions.

This study tells the story of a people in search of a common narrative and a sense of shared destiny. This English language summary provides key insights from the much longer French language study *La France en Quête* available on www.lafranceenquete.fr.

Finding France: Key Figures

89%

of people think that the nature of public debate in France is becoming increasingly aggressive.

83%

of French people want the country to stick together and face problems jointly and

61%

believe that the country's divisions are surmountable.

68%

agree that the environment is an issue that can bring people together beyond their divisions and 78% think about environmental issues often.

Six French segments

emerge from our research.

Disillusioned Activists (12% of the national total),

Stabilizers (19%),

Optimistic Pragmatists (11%),

Disengaged (16%),

Left Behind (22%)

and **Identitarians** (20%).

Among Optimistic Pragmatists and Stabilizers,

64%

think that democracy is functioning well, compared to 31% among other groups.

46%

of the Disengaged and

33%

of the Left Behind have no local, civic or political engagement.

73%

of people in France think hard work and effort determine people's success while 27% think luck and circumstances explain how well people do in life.

Overall, 43%

of French people think French identity is dynamic and constantly reinventing itself. This drops to 21% among the Left Behind and 17% among Identitarians, who overwhelmingly think the country's identity is disappearing.

59%

of people think that France does not need to apologize for its history in order to move forward while 41% think France must acknowledge the dark pages of its history, especially those of France's colonial past, to heal divisions and face the future.

Disillusioned Activists, the group with the most progressive values, are isolated from the views of the rest of France. They are significantly more pro-European and cosmopolitan in their outlook - for example, only

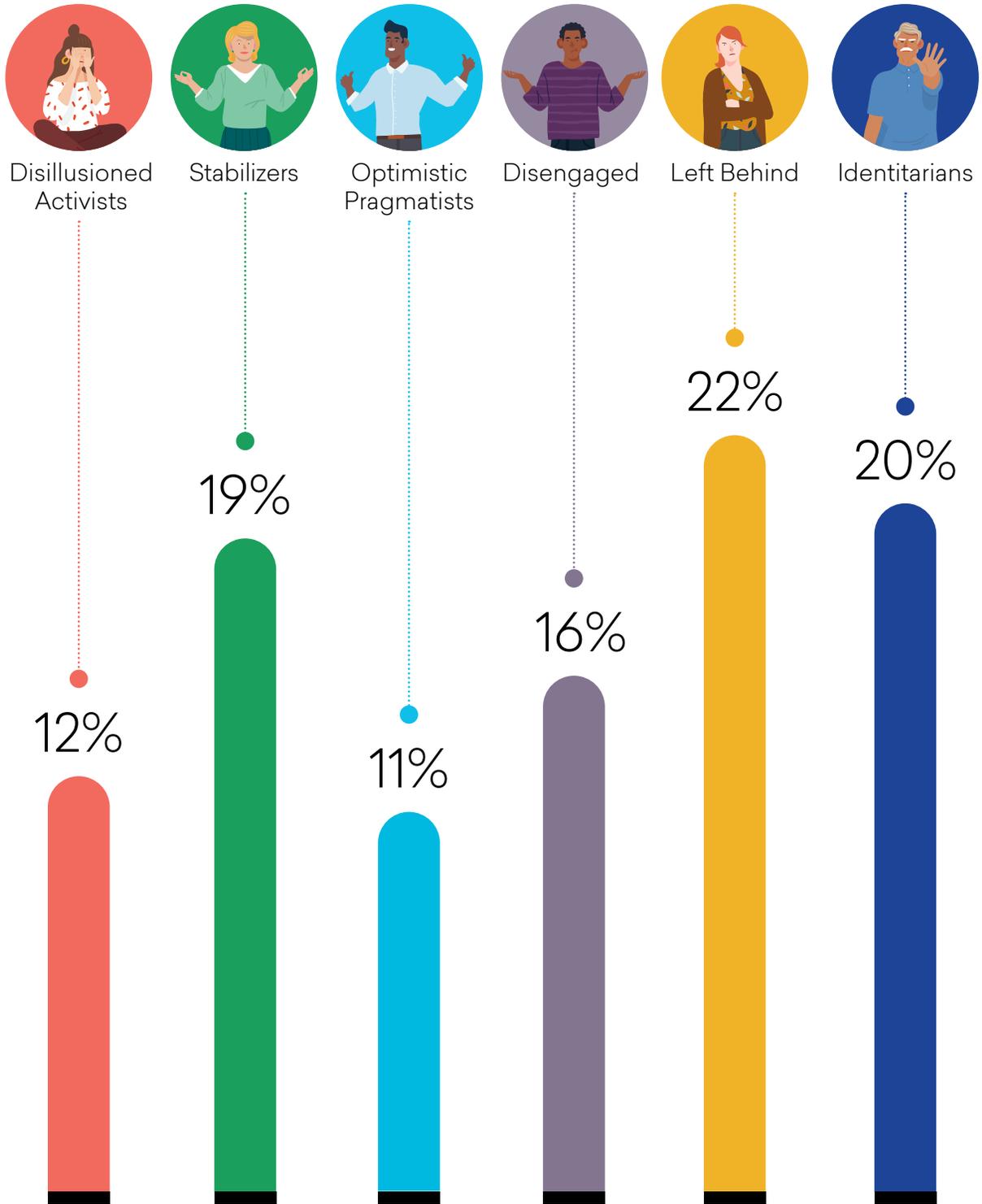
37%

say being French is important to them, compared with 76% on average.

62%

of French people are concerned about a growing climate of hostility towards Muslims. This figure exceeds 50% in all six segments, including Identitarians (55%).

FIGURE 0.1. SIX FRENCH FAMILIES



This report is only a starting point. It is part of a broader strategy for Destin Commun as a new hub of ideas and action for those seeking to contribute to a more united French society, whose members are convinced that what they have in common is greater than what divides them. We believe that France will only be able to meet the many challenges it faces if the vicious circle of fragmentation and polarization is broken. We hope to contribute a useful new lens through which to examine the roots of France's divides and identify concrete ways to re-unite a deeply divided nation. This contribution to the public conversation in France is based on a wide-ranging quantitative survey, carried out in March and December 2019 with Kantar Public in France, on a representative national sample (6,000 people). This survey was supplemented by qualitative interviews, a dozen focus groups and tens of conversations with a multitude of individuals and organizations, from civil society and campaigning groups, to trade unions, large companies and government departments, all over France. Part of this study's originality lies in the methodology we applied, which has not been used before in France. We have attempted to map the hidden architecture of beliefs in France by showing how belief systems and core values help explain the most divisive issues facing French society. These core beliefs inform the way individuals interpret the world around them.

We examined six main factors, drawing from social psychology and social science research:

- _ **Group identity**
- _ **Moral foundations**
- _ **Perception of threat**
- _ **Optimism and pessimism**
- _ **Parenting style and authoritarianism**
- _ **Agency and personal responsibility**

Eight Key Findings

1. First key finding

Six French segments emerge from our research.

Disillusioned Activists (12% of the national total)

- _ educated, cosmopolitan, progressive, not religious, pessimistic

Stabilizers (19%)

- _ moderate, engaged and established, participating in civic life, rational, compassionate, holding mixed opinions

Optimistic Pragmatists (11%)

- _ young, individualistic, pragmatic, confident, entrepreneurial

Disengaged (16%)

- _ young, detached, lacking confidence, individualistic

Left Behind (22%)

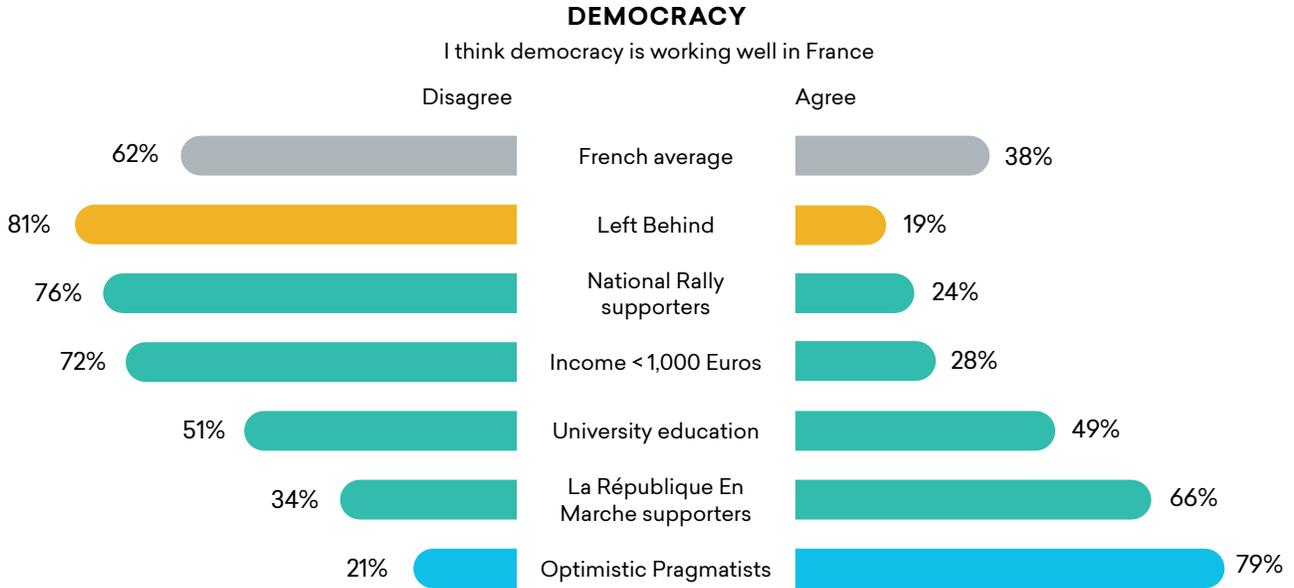
- _ angry, defiant, feeling abandoned

Identitarians (20%)

- _ older, conservative, nativist, uncompromising, believing in national decline

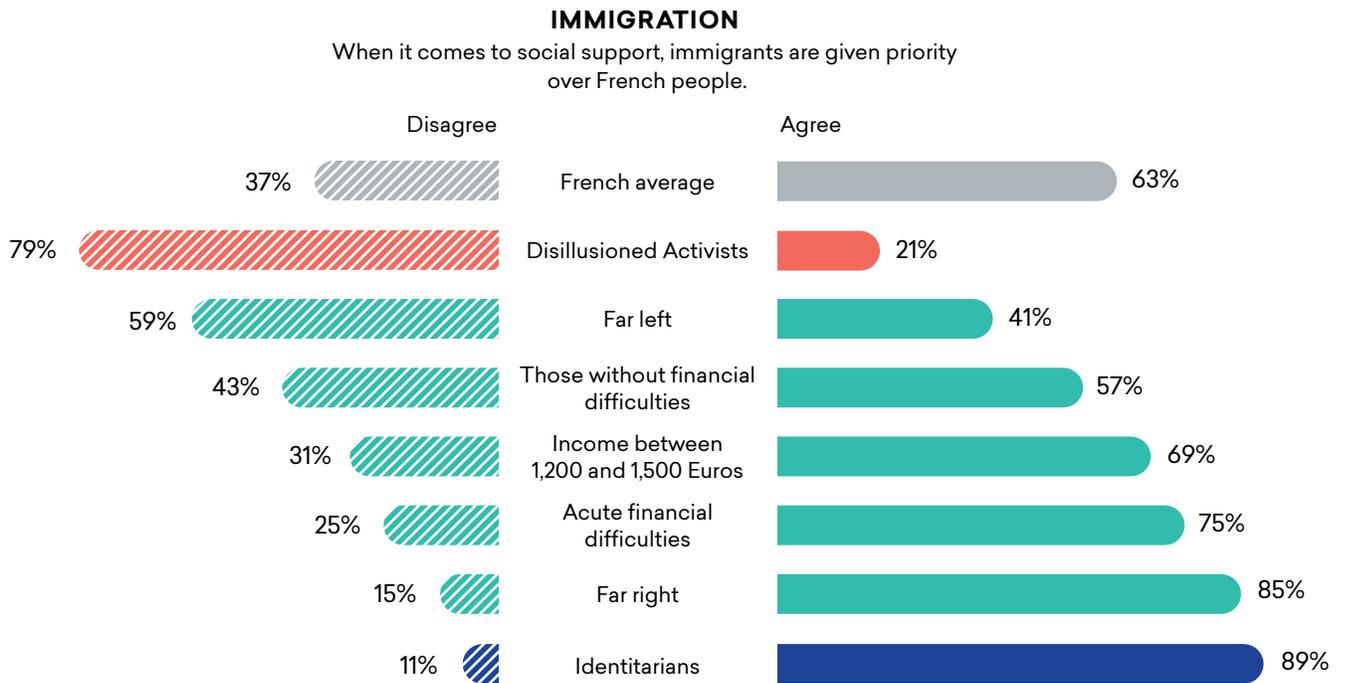
FIGURE 0.2. CORE BELIEFS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Looking at French public opinion through the lens of core values often proves more predictive as compared to traditional socio-demographic analysis.



Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I think democracy is working well in France

Source: Destin Commun (2019)

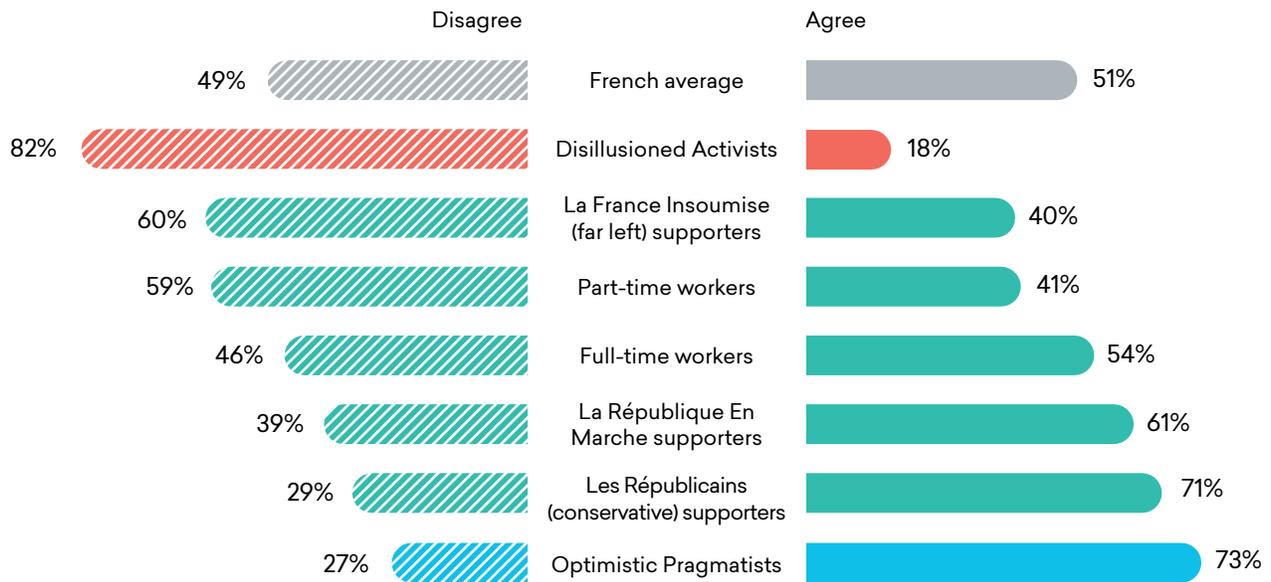


Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? When it comes to social support, immigrants are given priority over French people.

Source: Destin Commun (2019)

WORK

Unemployed people could find work if they really wanted to



Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Unemployed people could find work if they really wanted to.

Source: Destin Commun (2019)

These groups were found by applying a technique called cluster analysis, based on participants' answers to a series of questions about their core beliefs and their level of social and civic engagement. While we know the socio-demographic characteristics of our segments (such as age, income, education and political self-positioning), we did not use demographic categories to create our segmentation. Likewise, we did not use people's answers to questions on current social and political issues to create the segmentation. Instead, it is based on deeper elements of people's values, identity and worldview. The result of this methodology is striking: we find that on a wide range of issues, these segments are more predictive of people's opinion than traditional socio-demographic attributes or even people's self-declared political identity.

2. Second key finding

Three Frances appear to be living side by side, mapped along a two-dimensional axis of open versus closed worldviews and social integration.

- _ **Settled France (30%):** made up of the Stabilizers and Optimistic Pragmatists
- _ **Polemic France (32%):** bringing together Disillusioned Activists and Identitarians
- _ **Forgotten France (38%):** composed of the Left Behind and the Disengaged

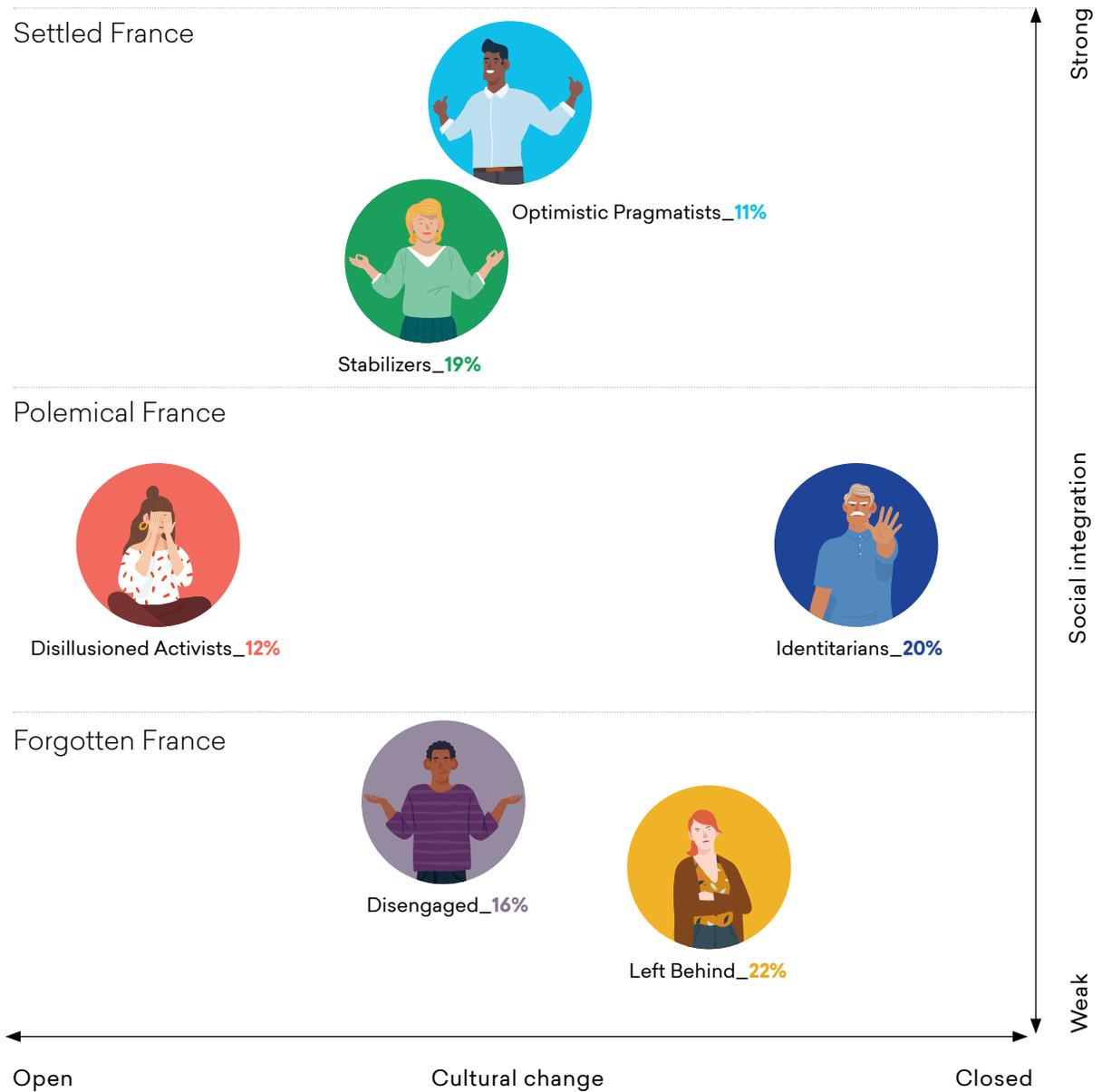
Settled France is broadly satisfied with the system, has open worldviews and is highly socially integrated. Its members are broadly committed to the French social model and are ideologically flexible. But their attachment to the existing model can make them tone deaf to the aspirations and discontent of the two other Frances, which they don't understand or engage with. This Settled France lives in a comfortable bubble.

Although they hold opposing worldviews and core beliefs, we have chosen to group Disillusioned Activists and Identitarians within a loud and polarized **Polemic France**. They have coherent value systems and clear worldviews that are largely defined along a traditional left-right axis. They dominate the public conversation but their firmly held opinions drown out the more measured and often mixed opinions of the other two Frances. Nationally, 89% of people say they are concerned that public debate in France is becoming increasingly aggressive. This is largely a sign of exasperation at this loud, polarized Polemic France.

Forgotten France is much harder to understand even though it is the largest group, with 38% of the total population. This group stands out because it is disengaged from local, civic and political life. Even though a visible minority of this group refused to be forgotten by donning a bright Yellow Vest in recent months, the majority of this group has largely withdrawn from the national conversation.

FIGURE 0.3. THREE FRANCES

Three distinct Frances live side by side, defined on two axes: an open vs closed and a social integration axis



3. Third key finding

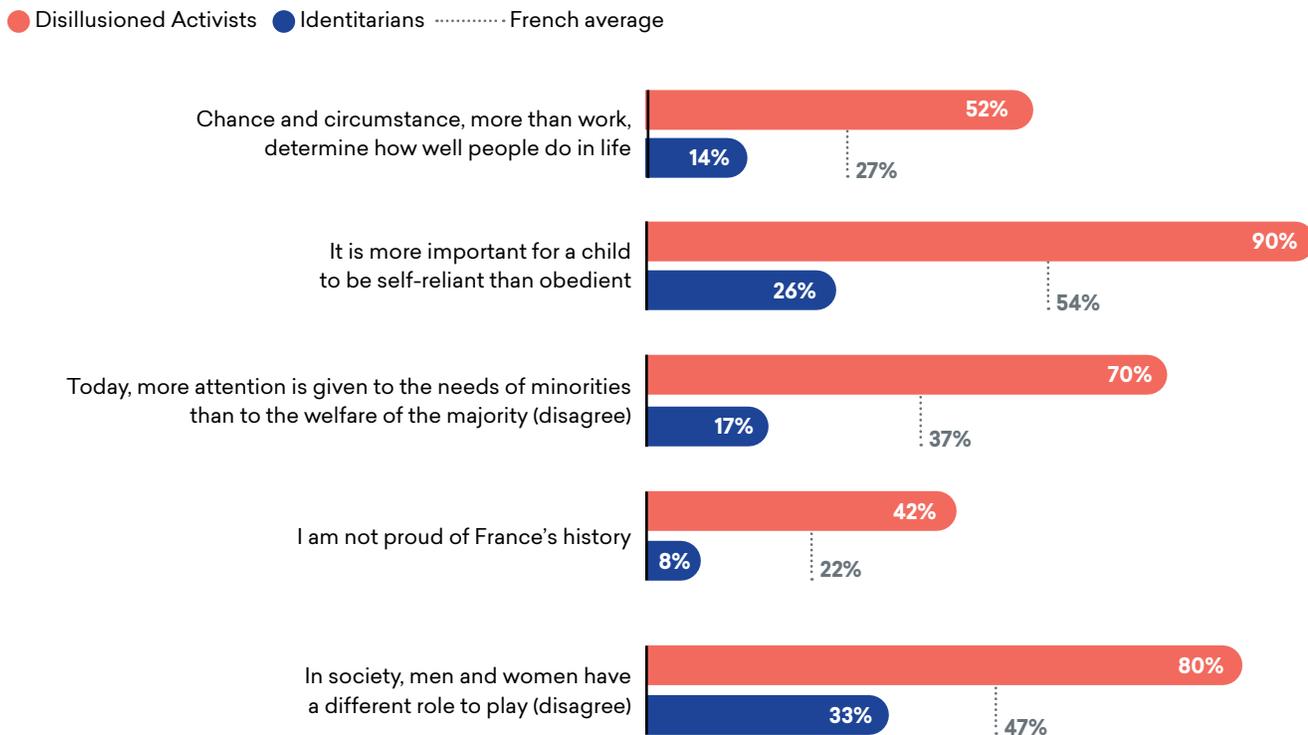
Like other Western democracies, France is experiencing growing polarization between the two loudest groups on the wings of the political spectrum: **Disillusioned Activists and Identitarians**. They are in conflict over the very essence of French identity.

Identitarians are particularly sensitive to defending a homogeneous national community. In their eyes, sharing cultural traditions and norms is a sine qua non condition to living together in a world they perceive as increasingly dangerous and threatening. For them, belonging is defined largely in ethnic and cultural terms. They have narrow view of who has a right to be French. **They place emphasis on loyalty as a key value.**

At the polar opposite of the spectrum, **Disillusioned Activists** have a universalist worldview in which traditions and historically defined notions of belonging are of secondary importance. They value equality, especially between men and women, and are strongly committed to the protection of minorities. **In their eyes, identity matters far less than equality and justice.**

Watching French cable news, reading the national media or scrolling through Twitter in French, an observer might assume that France is a 50-50 country, split down the middle on issues such as the Muslim headscarf, refugees or pension reform. This is in part an illusion. The shouting simply reflects how much of the public conversation is hijacked by this loud and polarized Polemic France. While they are the main (and often the only) protagonists of these debates, they do not reflect the views of the majority of the French population. We have drawn similar conclusions from our research in other countries, where the loudest voices dominating public debate are those of wing segments.

FIGURE 0.4. CORE BELIEFS OF DISILLUSIONED ACTIVISTS



4. Fourth key finding

Growing opposition between ‘cosmopolitans’ with ‘open’ values and ‘nationalists’ with ‘closed’ values often masks another important axis between those who feel fully integrated into French social and democratic life and those who feel left out and abandoned by the system.

The Settled France of the Stabilizers and Optimistic Pragmatists has the highest degree of social and civic integration. Sixty four percent consider that democracy is working well (versus only 31% in other groups). Their confidence in representative institutions is far higher than among our other segments. They demonstrate a high level of commitment and social engagement. They feel valued and recognized. 72% of them consider that the social protection system in France is fair and equitable, compared to only 45% among other groups.

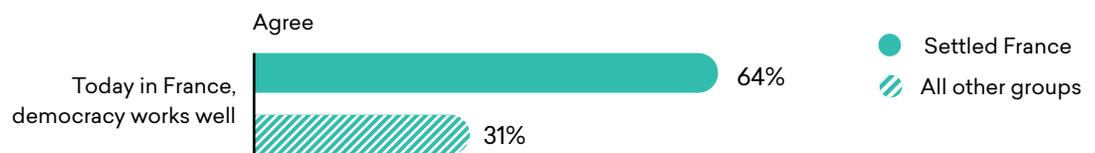
"We live in bubbles, everyone in their own group. We don't feel the divides because we spend time with people who agree with us."

AN OPTIMISTIC PRAGMATIST, HEARD IN FOCUS GROUPS

Forgotten France shows the opposite attributes. They are the least involved in local, democratic, social and civic life. They have no interest in party politics: fully a third of them do not identify with any political orientation. The Disengaged and the Left Behind avoid taking part in the national conversation: 65% say they do not want to express their views in debates with others, compared to 35% on average in other segments.

FIGURE 0.5. SETTLED FRANCE IS THE MOST INTEGRATED

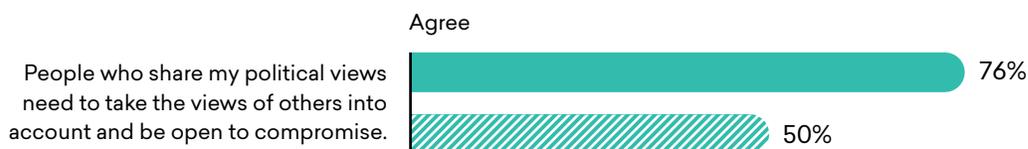
Trust in democracy and institutions



Contempt and consideration

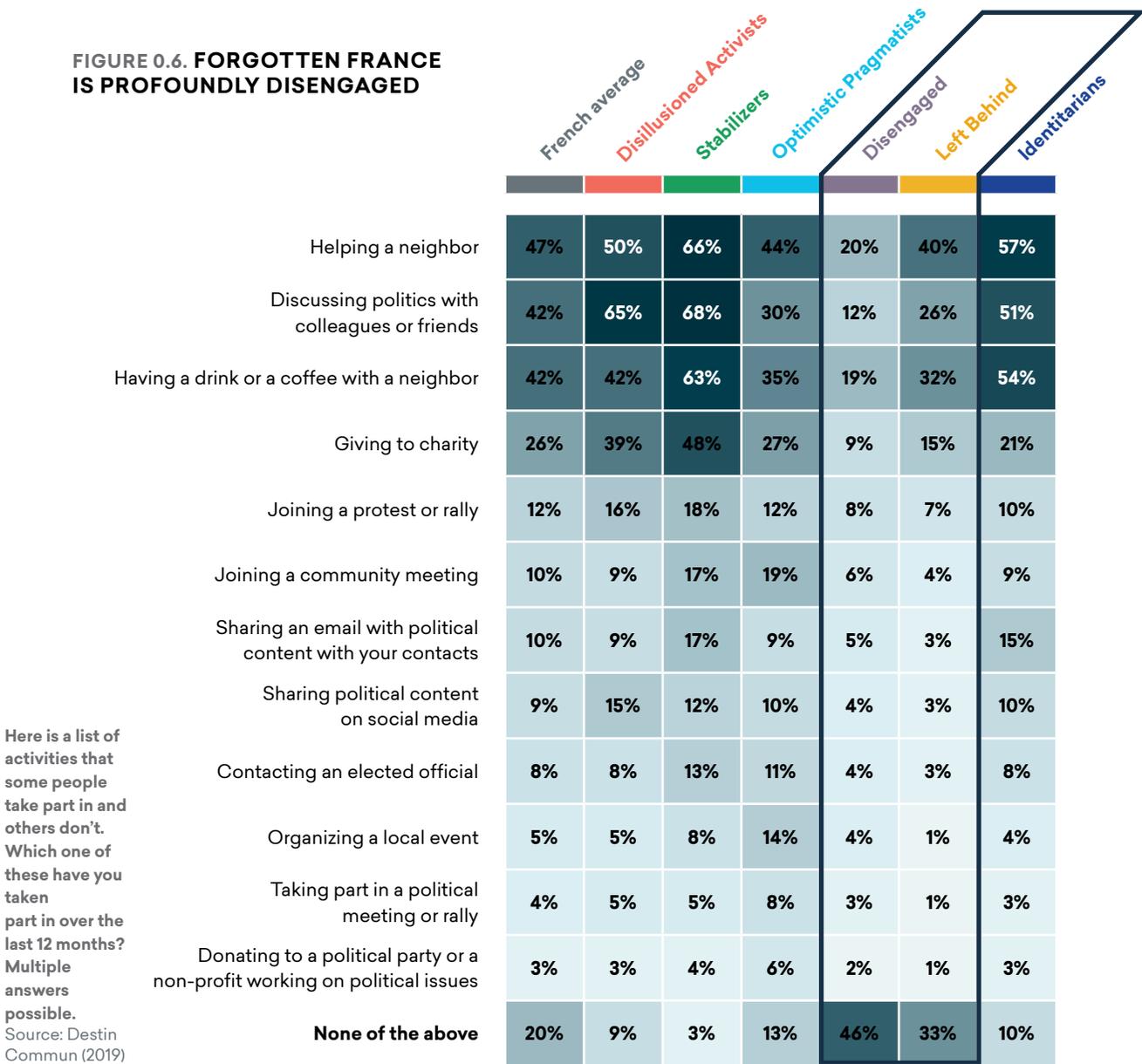


Compromise over conflict



Source: Destin Commun (2019)

FIGURE 0.6. FORGOTTEN FRANCE IS PROFOUNDLY DISENGAGED

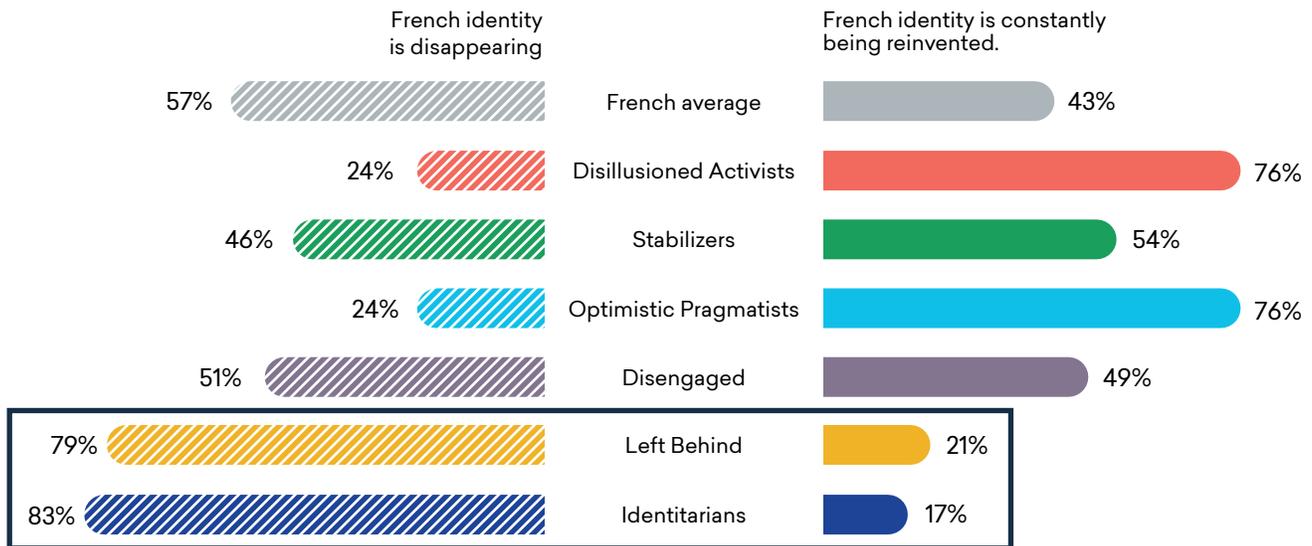


5. Fifth key finding

Because Forgotten France has weak affiliations and few social ties, **this group is particularly vulnerable to 'Us versus Them' narratives** that provide them with a sense of belonging by narrowing membership in the national community on the basis of specific ethnic and cultural attributes. This is particularly the case for the Left Behind, whose opinions on immigration and Islam are close to those of the Identitarians, even though the aspirations of these two groups differ fundamentally. First and foremost, the Left Behind want a more just society with fewer inequalities. Identitarians want a France that is defined by its traditional identity. The danger is that the anger of the Left Behind (who make up a large proportion of the Yellow Vest movement) towards "the system" and their feeling of abandonment can easily be manipulated and channeled against any group representing a "them": religious minorities, migrants or refugees, whom authoritarian populists describe as a threat to the interests of their narrow vision of the national community.

FIGURE 0.7. THE RISK OF THE IDENTITARIAN NARRATIVE

The French Left Behind are particularly vulnerable to « us vs them » narrative

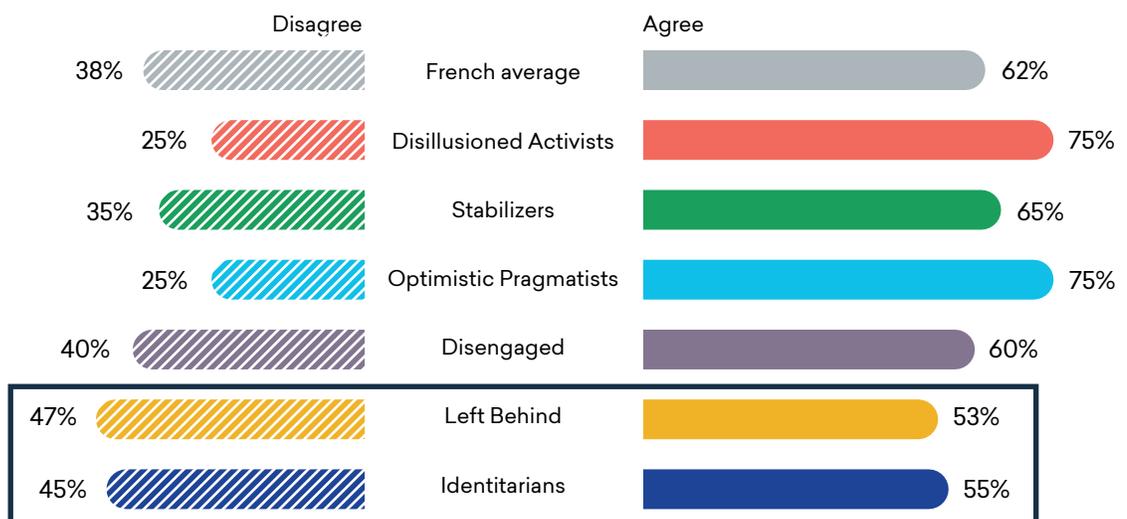


Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Source: Destin Commun (2019)

FIGURE 0.8. PERCEPTIONS OF HOSTILITY TOWARDS MUSLIMS

There is a growing climate of hostility towards Muslims in France today and that concerns me.



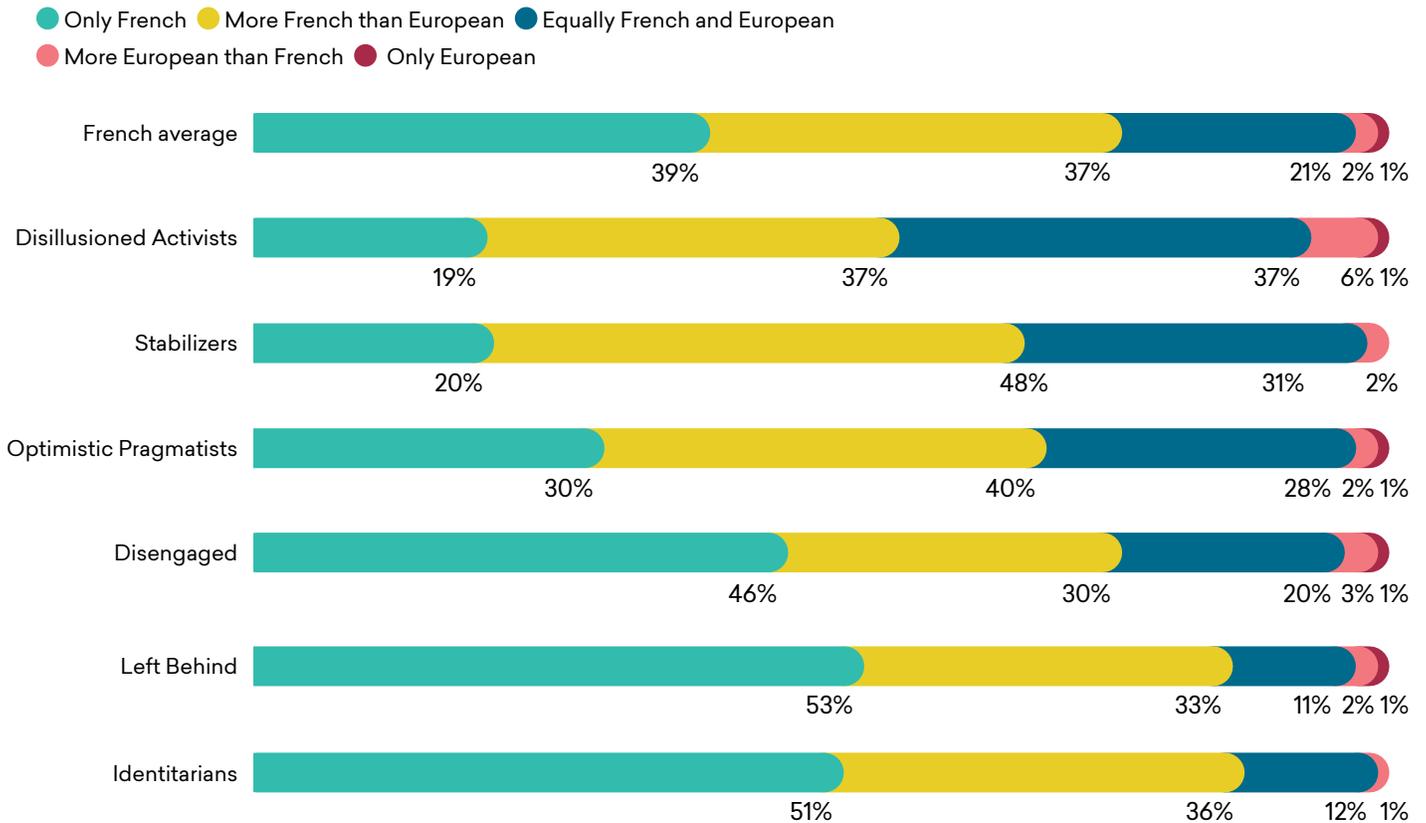
Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Source: Destin Commun (2019)

6. Sixth key finding

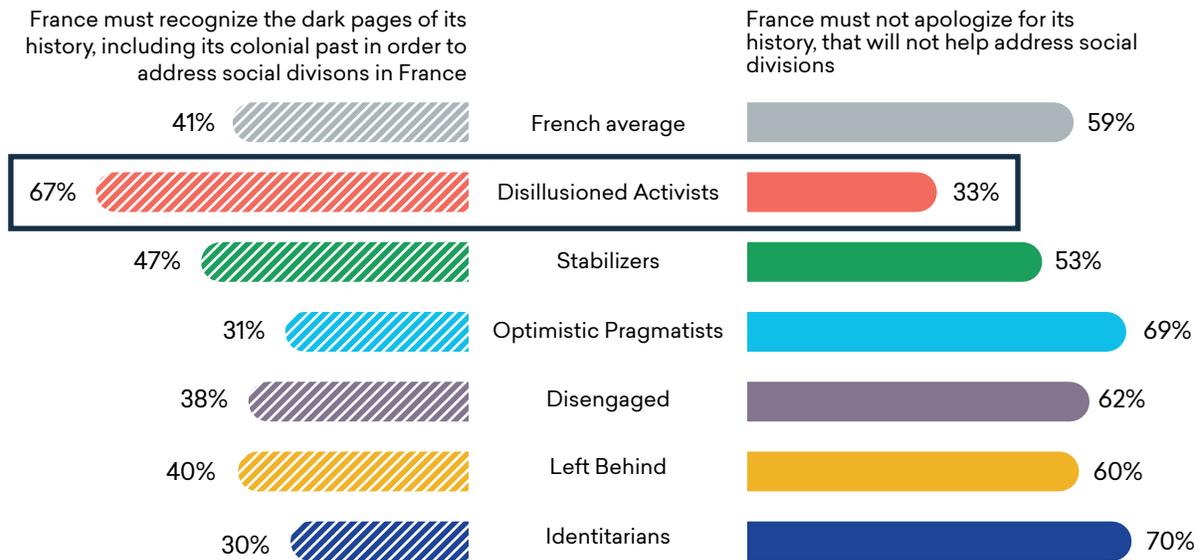
Disillusioned Activists are remarkably isolated from other groups on a range of issues. They have a much weaker attachment to the nation: they are the only group that feels closer affinity to the world and to Europe (69%) than to France (65%). Only 37% of this progressive segment consider it important to be French, compared to 76% on average. They tend to value diversity and difference more than what people have in common, and they are often suspicious of a story of French national identity, because they see this as a means of excluding specific groups rather than including all. Their isolation reflects a deep feeling of disillusionment: they think they are losing the cultural and ideological battle in France. Compared to similar population segments with strong progressive views in other western democracies, they appear considerably more pessimistic and frustrated.

FIGURE 0.9. FRENCH AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY



Thinking about yourself, do you feel...?
 Source : Destin Commun (2019)

FIGURE 0.10. DISILLUSIONED ACTIVISTS ARE OFTEN ISOLATED



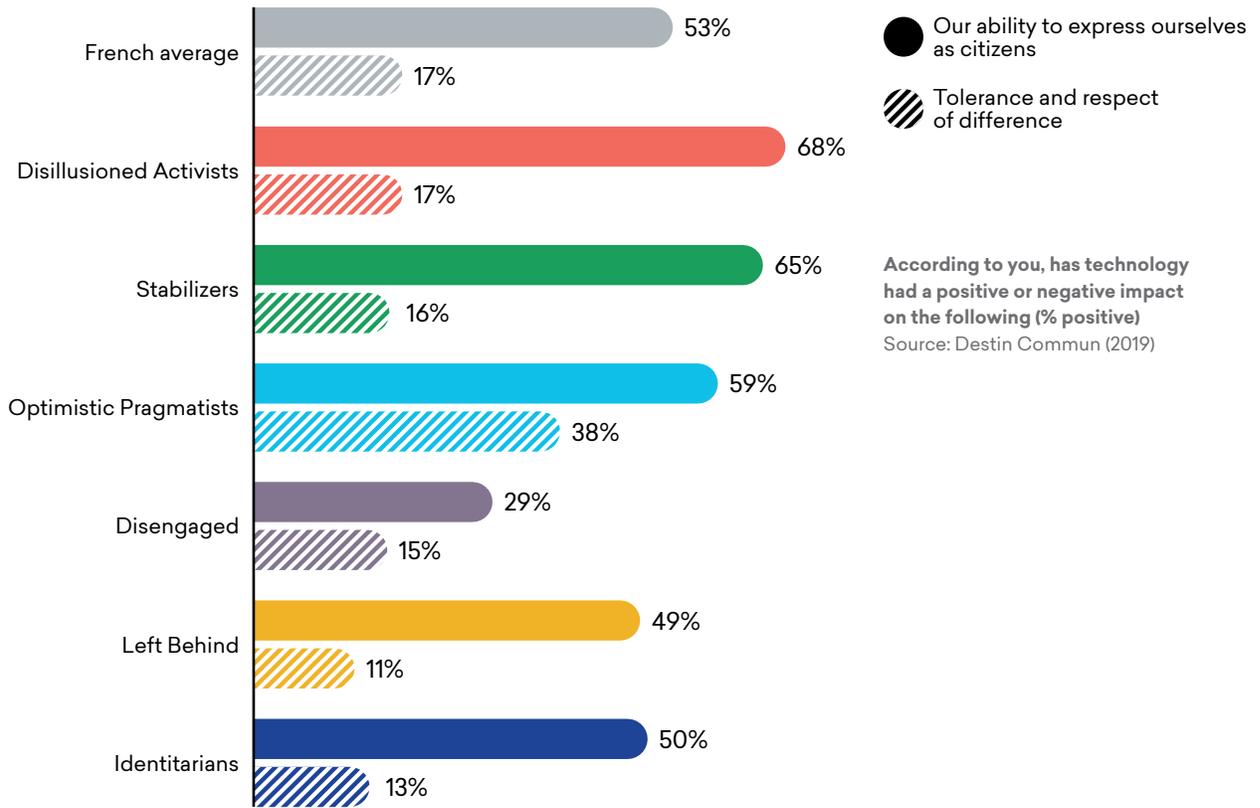
Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?
 Source: Destin Commun (2019)

7. Seventh key finding

French people recognize the opportunities presented by technology and the digital public square in terms of freedom of expression, but they disapprove of the decline in tolerance and respect of difference that online discourse seems to create. Digital engagement tends to divide and polarize, not unite in France.

FIGURE 0.11. INTERNET : THE DIGITAL PUBLIC SQUARE IN FRANCE

The opening of digital space has had a positive impact on the following areas

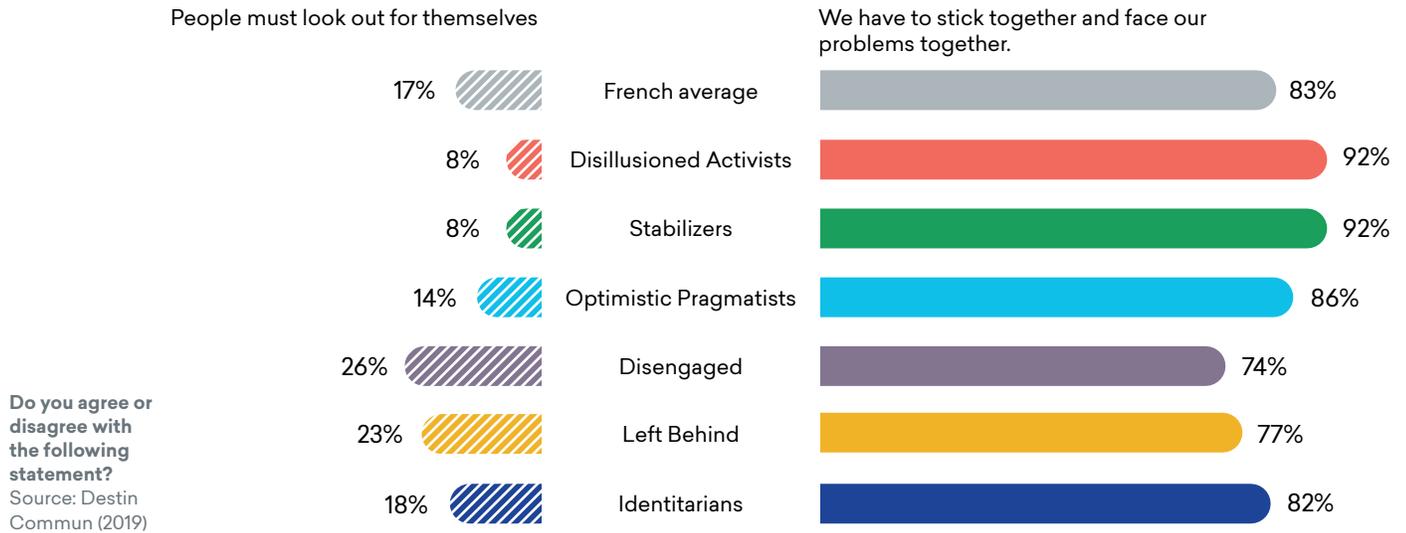


8. Eighth key finding

A new way forward is possible in France, but it will require sustained, intensive and bold action from a wide range of actors across society. French people have a strong desire for unity: 83% of them are convinced that they must stick together and face problems together. Sixty one percent of people in France think that divisions can be overcome and that they can move forward together. This figure is lower than in Germany (71%) or the United States (77%), but the fact that this is still a clear majority is a sign of hope. Public services and the welfare state (such as the health system or schools) remain among the most trusted and beloved institutions in France and they will likely play a key role in building any new common story of French identity and hope.

FIGURE 0.12. **STICKING TOGETHER**

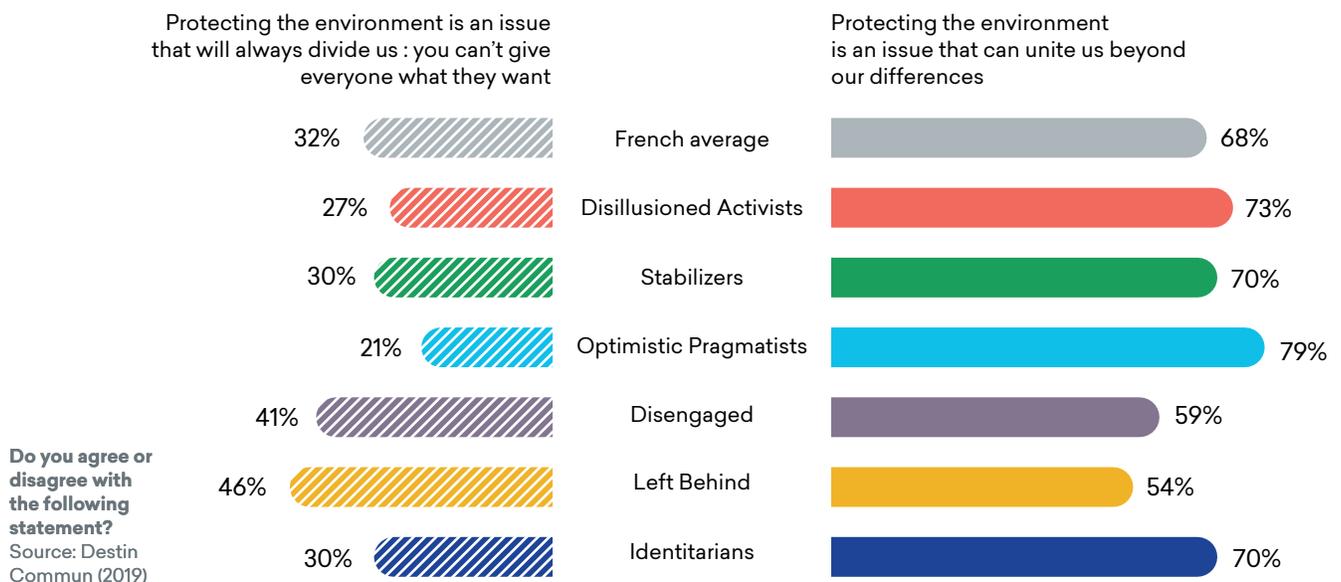
An overwhelming majority of French people think they ‘are all in this together at the end



Among the major challenges facing France, **protecting nature and the environment** emerges from our research as an issue that has the potential to unite the French across lines of divisions. This is true for 68% of the French people and includes a majority in all of our segments. But this does not start with traditional political messages and messengers on climate and environmental issues. These are not resonating, particularly within Forgotten France. This suggests that a **new narrative about nature could unite France**, provided that this story engages the values of the majority, not a minority, and speaks to the issues of identity and belonging that resonate with many French people. Destin Commun has started a new strand of work specifically on this topic.

FIGURE 0.13. **THE GREEN TRANSITION, NEW FRAME FOR A FRENCH « STORY OF US »**

All French families see the environment as an issue that can bring them together



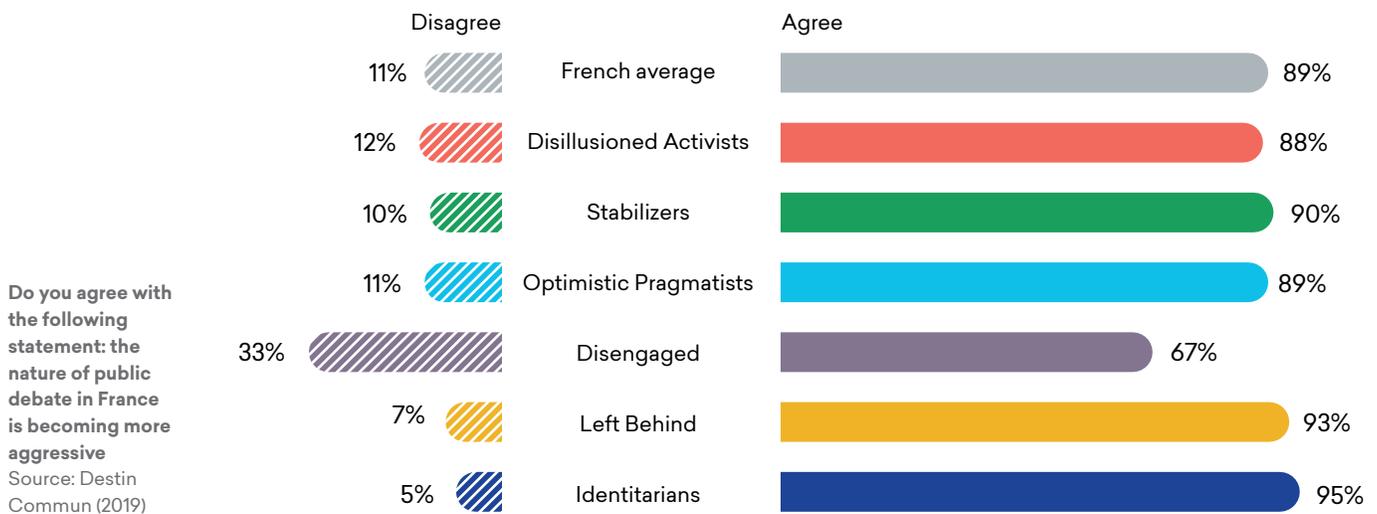
France is going through its most acute period of social unrest in half a century as evidenced by the Yellow Vest movement and the prolonged strikes that dominated French headlines at the opening of the 2020s. The purpose of this report is not to paper over France’s deep divisions or hastily suggest a sweeping narrative that can take France merrily into the future. Rather, we aim to highlight the urgency and the potential of working on this task together. Without a coherent frame to think about the many challenges facing France, it is too easy for people to see France only through the distortions of their own circles and assumptions. A contest between a global France and a traditional France could see a narrow French ‘story of us’ dominate in the decades ahead, based solely on the myths of the past and built as a defense against, not with, the ‘other’. That would be terrible for France, for Europe and for the world.

This report does not seek to offer a politically centrist solution aimed solely at reaching a tepid compromise on the important issues of our time. We believe it is vital in a democratic society that different worldviews be able to co-exist in peaceful and healthy disagreement. The challenge France faces today is that these disagreements quickly turn into hatred and violence, putting common ground beyond our reach. We need a stronger sense of shared endeavor and common purpose, against which our many disagreements can be put into context and expressed in constructive and peaceful ways.

The first step presented here is to expose and better understand the hidden architecture of values and outlooks that underpin our differences of opinion. This can, we hope, help us better understand each other, and take into account the interests and aspirations of others. The question is not about giving up one’s own beliefs and values, but putting the opinions and beliefs of others into a more human context in order to engage in desperately needed dialogue.

The study shows our need to change the tone of our national debates. The fact that 89% of French people consider the tone of public debate to be increasingly aggressive speaks to the imperative to fight what the French call “la culture du clash”, which turns disagreements into hatred and violence. Opinion leaders and the media have a major role to play in this respect.

FIGURE 0.14. IS PUBLIC DEBATE BECOMING MORE AGGRESSIVE?



Bringing Forgotten France back into the fold is another clear, urgent and cross-cutting priority that emerges from our work: the Disengaged and the Left Behind are increasingly disconnected from the rest of France. In order to re-engage them, new approaches, policies, partnerships and narratives are badly needed (some recommendations for policy makers are included in the full report). This will start by hearing and responding to long standing and deeply held feelings of abandonment. Forgotten France aspires to justice, equality and the need to be part of a collective. But these aspirations to be heard go far beyond one single group. When describing their ideal France, most French people cite a desire for people to listen to one another and treat each other with more respect.

FIGURE 0.15. **THEIR IDEAL FRANCE**

	French average	Disillusioned Activists	Stabilizers	Optimistic Pragmatists	Disengaged	Left Behind	Identitarians
A more open France, to the world and to other cultures	21%	49%	21%	28%	25%	12%	9%
France that is prouder of its roots and traditions	34%	12%	31%	35%	29%	31%	52%
France as a leader in the fight against climate change	29%	49%	34%	29%	25%	26%	18%
A more confident France	17%	13%	17%	27%	27%	10%	13%
A France with lower inequalities	44%	65%	48%	32%	37%	53%	36%
A France where order is respected	34%	4%	27%	32%	40%	38%	50%
A France where people feel safe	46%	20%	38%	38%	45%	60%	62%
A France where people are more respectful of one another and listen to one another more	49%	65%	56%	47%	39%	53%	39%
A more innovative and competitive France	24%	22%	27%	31%	30%	16%	20%

Describe your ideal France. Among the following characteristics, which ones match your aspirations for your country? (Three ranked choices, total citations)
Source: Destin Commun (2019)

The task of reuniting France is as urgent as it is immense. It calls for the mobilization of a large new coalition of actors sharing a collective commitment to a narrative that can bring France together again before it is too late. We hope this study will contribute to that ambition.

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