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FORESIGHT

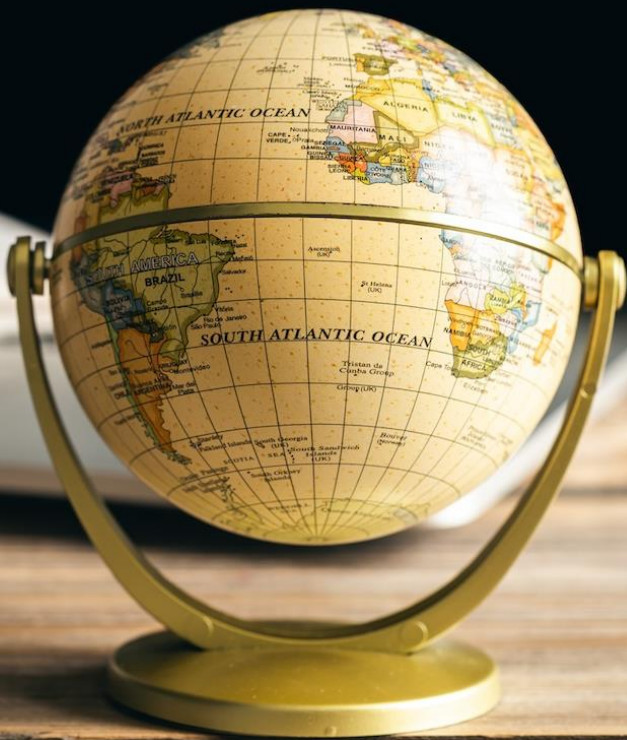# "Alternative Futures" HTS of FSA Report on Initial Research Findings

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Contents

Introduction

Dear colleagues,

This is a long document. For the rest of the project, we will stick to PPT presentations in the FSA template. Yet, we felt that some of the initial research contained interesting, eye-opening, and in part quite powerful statements. And since we're discussing narratives, they're not easily compressed into a PPT bullet point.

The first half of the document presents findings in a matter-of-fact way. The second half of the document goes in more depth into some of the narratives spun in different political and socio-economic contexts. This may be insightful reading over the holidays.

Methodology and sources of initial research

Our initial research was semi-structured, in that we followed the two categorizations provided by you ("democracy, authoritarian regimes, mixed countries and authoritarian tendencies in democratic countries" as well as the categories globalization, climate change, demographic change, family and gender roles, human rights and technological change). During our research we deviated sometimes deliberately from that script, when we stumbled upon different categorization attempts in the sources that we have encountered. We have tried to graphically illustrate in spider diagrams and violin plots where the investigated regions fall (cf. chapter "How useful is it to differentiate…"). The alignment in the spider diagrams followed this pattern:

Globalization: in favor (5), ambivalent (3), opposed (1)
Climate Change: actively combating (5), aligning with other priorities (3), denial (1)
Demographic Change: Total Fertility Rate >2.3 (5), TFR ~ 2.1 (3), TFR < 1.5 (1) Here we relied on CIA data, as they seemed the most complete and up-to-date (2024)
Human rights: Here we used the Freedom in the world (FIW) index by Freedom House. It's a flawed index, as it focuses on political oppression only. Interestingly, other, more inclusive indices contained no or insufficient data on the U.S. or EU countries.
Family and gender roles: liberal (5), ambivalent (3), conservative / traditional (1)
Technological changes: positive attitude (5), ambiguous attitude (3), negative attitude (1)

The "Discussion of Findings" Chapter includes a discussion of flaws and biases with this categorization and makes modest proposals for changes.

For the most part we relied on publicly available sources that are documented in 92 footnotes in the appendix. We made a notable exception for the U.S. The U.S. research draws from three books:

- Fiona Hill, *There Is Nothing for You Here*
- J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy, a memoir of a family and culture in crisis*
- Arlie Russel Hochschild, *Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right*

We quoted heavily from Hochschild's book, as it was published recently (September 2024) and draws on excellent field research spanning 8 years conducted by one of the most renowned social scientists in the U.S.

We have mostly stayed away from interpretation for brand needs, as this seems premature at this point. We have inserted a few initial hypotheses in the chapter "Discussion of Findings".

Enjoy the read!

Jan Berger, James Hoefnagels, Louisa Kastner, Carina Stöttner, Felix Tegeler

Summary of Findings

In this section we briefly present the findings of attitudes towards globalization, climate change, demographic change, family and gender roles, human rights and government attitude towards technological change in nine distinct countries and regions of the world: Iceland, China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United States, the Eastern EU, Argentina, and South Africa. We have allocated these countries and regions to a suggested structure of democracies – authoritarian regimes – mixed countries – authoritarian representatives within democracies.

Democracies

This section only discusses Iceland as "typical" for a Western liberal standard. We picked the country as an example of a "democracy" for the sake of comparison and because it scores highest on several democracy indexes. We conducted no in-depth research into social dynamics in Iceland.

Iceland

Globalization (4)

Iceland adopts a cautiously positive approach to globalization, leveraging its benefits for prosperity while protecting its sovereignty, environment, and cultural identity. Globalization has driven economic growth, migration, and recognition, but the 2008 banking collapse highlighted its risks.

Climate Change (5)

Iceland is committed to climate action, leveraging its natural resources and renewable energy focus to achieve Paris carbon neutrality goals by 2040.

Demographic Change (2)

With a total fertility rate (TFR) of 1.9, Iceland is below the replacement rate of 2.1.

Family and Gender Roles (5)

Family and gender roles in Iceland reflect progressive attitudes, high gender equality, and shared responsibilities. Iceland ranks among the most gender-equal nations, embracing diverse family structures, including single-parent and LGBTQ+ families, with same-sex marriage and adoption widely supported.

Human Rights (5)

Iceland ranks very high in the Freedom in the World (FIW) index with 94 out of 100 possible points.

Government attitude to Technological Change (4)

Iceland's government embraces technology for economic growth, sustainability, and progress, leveraging innovation and renewable energy expertise while addressing challenges like equitable access and import reliance.
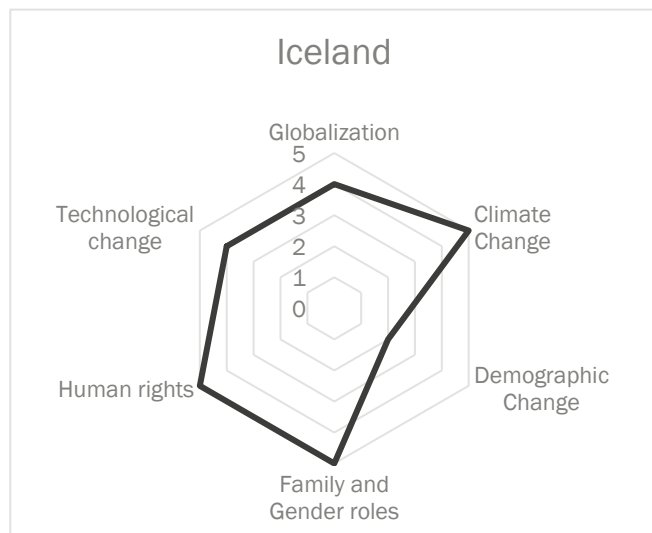
Authoritarian regimes

We picked China and Saudi Arabia as exemplary for what would be in the West described as authoritarian regimes. Our choice was informed by strong ideological differences between both countries, as well as very different forms of government. We conducted extensive research into China and only cursory research into Saudi Arabia.

China

Modern China remains deeply influenced by the "Century of Humiliation" (1839–1945), with socialism, economic pragmatism, and traditional values competing for dominance. This era serves as both a cautionary tale and a source of national identity, fostering a determination to prevent similar tragedies and a "victimization narrative" that fuels suspicion of foreign influences.
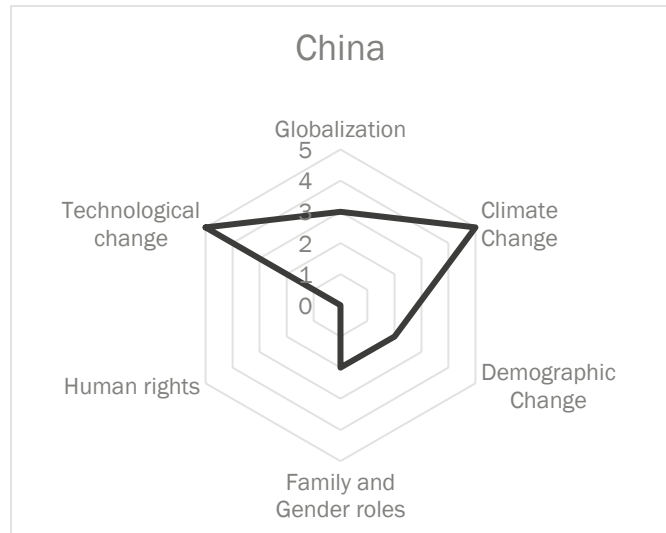
Globalization (3)

China holds ambivalent views on globalization, with the government promoting an anti-hegemonic narrative. It criticizes Western globalization as a tool to impose liberal democracy and market capitalism, which it sees as incompatible with Chinese culture. Instead, China emphasizes political order and state capacity as key drivers of modernization over liberal democracy.

Climate Change (5)

China's government has moved from demanding climate equity from the West to imposing global climate leadership ('yinlingzhe'), actively shaping international rules and driving reforms in global climate governance, rather than remaining a follower or passive observer. In contrast to Western countries, the Chinese population's opinions on climate change are less divisive and contentious.

Demographic Change (1)

With a TFR of 1.5, China is far below the replacement rate of 2.1. The Chinese government recognises the significant challenges posed by demographic change, particularly the continuing decline and ageing of the population. Official efforts include consensual policies to increase fertility rates, improve health care for the elderly and encourage greater labour force participation.

Family and Gender Roles (2)

Gender equality in China is threatened as the CPC's former line that women 'hold up half the sky' is being replaced by pronatalist policies favoring a return to traditional values on family and gender roles as a means of countering societal ageing. Western gender debates are often framed as 'cultural imperialism' and a threat to traditional socialist values. Feminist and LGBTQ+ activism is cracked down on under the pretext of preserving social order and strengthening cultural cohesion.

Human Rights (2)

China scores 9 points on the FIW index. China's government argues that approaches to human rights should be determined by each country's unique context. It rejects external criticism, which it sees as intrusion in domestic affairs, and promotes the principles of non-interference and non-universality as central. Given its own unresolved historical issues, the hypocritical West would have no hegemonic right and is in no position to criticize China for human rights abuses.

Government attitude to Technological Change (5)

President Xi prioritizes zìlìgēngshēng (self-sufficiency), particularly in critical technologies, through initiatives like "Made in China 2025" to enhance domestic innovation and reduce reliance on the West. Economic and technological decoupling aims to bolster China's resilience, while Western strategies, seen as efforts to maintain dominance, evoke memories of cultural marginalization.

Saudi-Arabia

Globalization (4)

Saudi Arabia has benefitted from globalization due to its large exports of oil. The Kingdom's attitude toward globalization is pragmatic and evolving. While the country embraces economic, technological, and cultural globalization to diversify its economy and modernize its society, it seeks to maintain control over the process to preserve its cultural and religious identity. The Vision 2030 agenda reflects a strategic effort to integrate into the global economy while addressing domestic priorities and balancing global influences with national values.
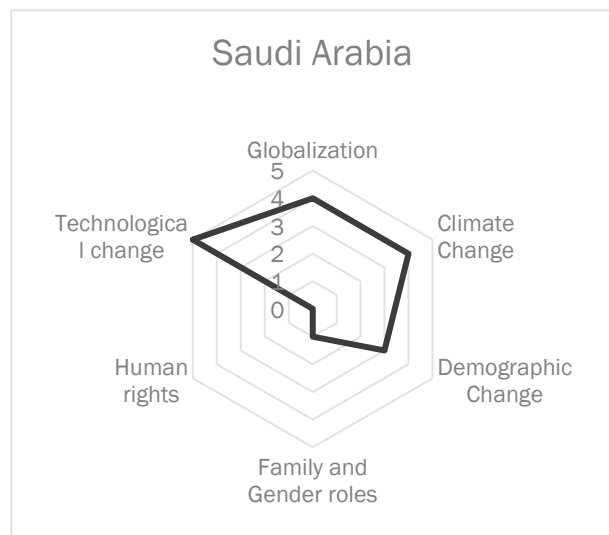
Climate Change (4)

Saudi Arabia has benefitted from globalization through oil exports and takes a pragmatic approach to it. While embracing economic, technological, and cultural globalization to modernize under Vision 2030, the Kingdom seeks to maintain control to preserve its cultural and religious identity, balancing global integration with domestic priorities.

Demographic Change (3)

With a TFR of 1,9, Saudi Arabia is below the replacement rate of 2.1.

Family and Gender Roles (1)

Saudi Arabia's approach to climate change balances ambition and pragmatism. Acknowledging the urgency of climate issues, it pursues renewable energy and carbon reduction through initiatives like the Saudi Green Initiative and Vision 2030. However, its efforts are tempered by its economic reliance on oil, aiming to lead the global energy transition while maintaining stability.

Human Rights (0)

Saudi Arabia scores 8 on the FIW index, reflecting a human rights stance shaped by Islamic law and its socio-political system. While progress has been made under Vision 2030 in areas like women's rights and economic reforms, the country faces significant criticism for restrictions on freedom of expression, political dissent, and LGBTQ+ rights.

Government attitude to Technological Change (5)

Saudi Arabia's government views technological change as essential to achieving its Vision 2030 goals, diversifying its economy, and asserting global leadership in innovation. By investing heavily in AI, renewable energy, digital infrastructure, and education, the government aims to position the country as a hub for cutting-edge technology. While challenges remain, Saudi Arabia's proactive approach underscores its commitment to leveraging technology for economic and societal transformation.

Mixed Countries

Only one country or region of interest fell into the category of "mixed countries" if we go by the EIU classification of full and flawed democracies, hybrid and authoritarian regimes. (cf. image on the right.)

Democracy Index 2023
Only 8% of the world's population lives in a "full democracy"
Source: EIU.
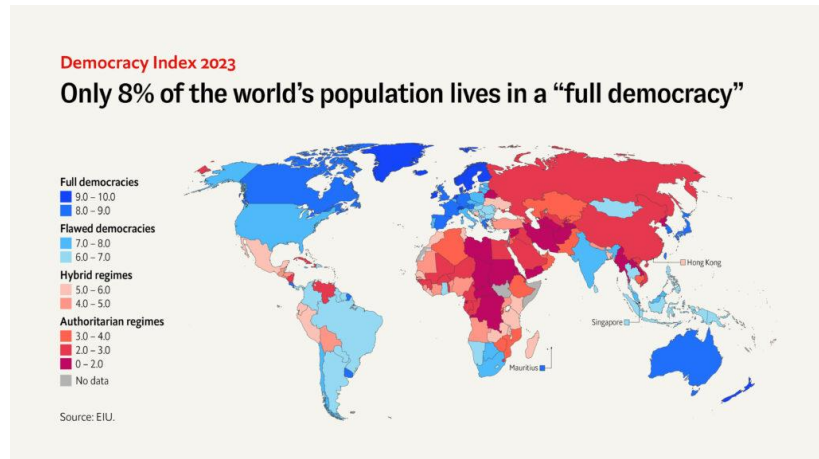
Turkey

Turkey's social and political consensus has been in flux since the Young Turks era of the 1890s. Today, its polarized political landscape centers on four ideologies: Kemalism, Ultranationalism (Turanism), Progressivism, and Political Islam, often linked to Neo-Ottomanism. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP, rooted in Political Islam, has dominated recent decades, co-opting nationalist stances to attract Ultranationalist and Kemalist voters while marginalizing the Progressive movement, which aligns with Kurdish political groups against Erdoğan.
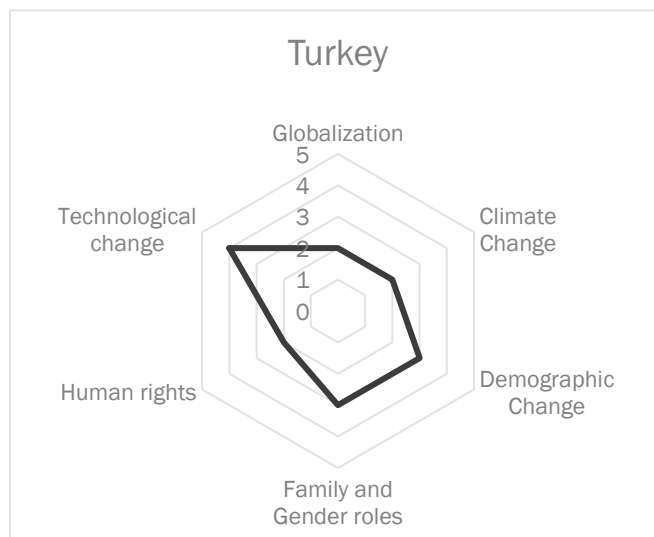
Globalization (3)

Globalization is increasingly viewed as a threat to national sovereignty in Turkey. This perception has moved the country away from the outward-looking principles of early Kemalism. Coupled with a resurgence of irredentist ambitions, Turkey seeks to expand its influence abroad while remaining wary of foreign involvement at home.

Climate Change (3)

Climate change is regarded as a secondary concern compared to immediate economic development. While environmental issues are acknowledged, they rarely take precedence over national growth objectives.

Demographic Change (3)

With a TFR of 1,9, Turkey is below the replacement rate of 2.1. Demographic change is not a dominant public issue in Turkey. Relatively higher birth rates and a less critical view of migration sets Turkey apart from its European neighbors.

Family and Gender Roles (3)

These topics are deeply polarizing in Turkish society. Atatürk's reforms left the Republic with a progressive legacy, particularly regarding women's rights and secular governance, which was groundbreaking for its time and region. However, recent political movements have sought to reverse these changes, leading to intense societal discourse on the role of tradition vs. modernity.

Human Rights (2)

Turkey scores 33 points on the FIW index. Human rights do not play a significant role in Turkey's rejection of Western liberal values. While human rights are a topic of international criticism, they are not central to the domestic ideological debate. Erdoğan's attitude toward human rights appears increasingly authoritarian, prioritizing state security and loyalty over individual freedoms. While his government initially pursued reforms aimed at aligning Turkey with EU norms, recent years have seen a marked deterioration in fundamental rights, judicial independence, and freedoms for opposition voices.

Government attitude to Technological Change (4)

Erdoğan views technological change as a vital element of Turkey's economic growth, national security, and global influence. He strongly supports domestic technological innovation and infrastructure development in the pursuit of technological self-sufficiency. However, his approach is intertwined with concerns over state control, particularly in regulating digital platforms and managing the societal impact of technology. This duality reflects a broader strategy of leveraging technology for power while maintaining tight oversight over its use.

Democracies with significant authoritarian tendencies

In this category we reviewed five countries or regions of interest that fall into the category of "authoritarian representatives within democracies". We renamed this category slightly, as we didn't want to single out particular representatives of authoritarian political tendencies. Instead, we focused on social and cultural dynamics that feed support to authoritarian movements. This approach enabled us to differentiate between different and distinct driving forces.

United States (Trump voter base)

The perceived "anti-democratic" tendencies in Trump's Appalachian voter base stem from deep-seated shame imposed by negative stereotypes ("racist rednecks," "white trash", "welfare moms") and nostalgia for the pride of their coal-mining past. Job losses due to technology, globalization, and the imposition of elite urban lifestyles are linked to the Democratic Party, fueling resentment. Trump exploits this shame, promising to restore their pride, and while voters may distrust his promises, their anger at a system they feel has abandoned them outweighs their doubts about him.
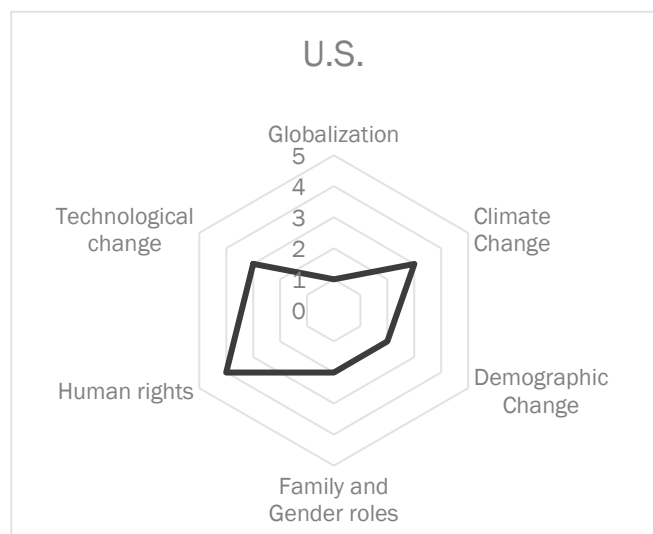
Globalization (1)

Once the backbone of America's industrial energy supply through coal, Appalachia has experienced the outsourcing of jobs and a decline in traditional industries, leaving its residents feeling left behind and undervalued. Many blame globalization for eroding their local pride and cultural identity, as it prioritizes corporate profits and distant markets over the well-being of their communities.

Climate Change (3)

Many in Appalachia are skeptical of **climate change policies**, viewing them as contributors to the coal industry's decline and economic hardships. However, there is significant concern for **local environmental issues**, such as mountaintop removal mining, water contamination, and natural habitat destruction. This skepticism seems driven more by distrust of external policies than by a lack of environmental concern.

Demographic Change (2)

With a TFR of 1,8, the U.S. is below the replacement rate of 2.1. The state of Kentucky's TFR is slightly above U.S. average with 1.83.

Family and Gender Roles (2)

Traditional family and gender roles in Appalachia remain deeply rooted, with men often in dominant positions and women expected to serve and support. However, women demonstrate remarkable resilience, frequently stepping into primary caregiving roles amid hardships like losing spouses to dangerous jobs. Many in the community express discomfort with LGBTQ rights and visibility, seeing them as part of a broader challenge to traditional norms and values.

Human Rights (4)

The U.S. scores 83 on the FIW index, with Kentucky's legal system operating within national norms, often issuing rulings that challenge traditional Appalachian values. Appalachians feel deeply disenfranchised within the U.S. political system, fueled by pervasive negative stereotypes portraying them as racist, uneducated, or dependent, which they view as discriminatory and reject outright.

Government attitude to Technological Change (3)

The reviewed materials describe a nuanced mix of skepticism and cautious optimism toward technological change, influenced by experiences of displacement and devaluation. While there is a desire for government support, it is tempered by deep mistrust of federal overreach or misaligned priorities. Meanwhile, the government faces challenges in balancing laissez-faire principles with the need for proactive policies to address the technological divide.

Eastern EU

In recent years, Eastern Europe has distanced itself from Western liberal narratives, reflecting skepticism toward post-Cold War values and institutions. Leaders increasingly use terms like **"liberal fascism"** to reject perceived overreach in progressive ideologies, while embracing illiberal democracy, championed by Hungarian Prime Minister V iktor Orbán. **Sovereignism**, emphasizing national self-determination, opposes globalization and Western cultural influence. This shift prioritizes **national identity, traditional family structures**, and religious conservatism, driven by external pressures and demographic challenges. The divide is particularly pronounced between rural areas, which uphold these values, and more liberal urban centers.

Globalization (2)

In Eastern Europe, globalization is increasingly viewed as a threat to national identity. Sovereignist rhetoric portrays foreign influence—be it economic, cultural, or political—as inherently damaging, fostering an **island mentality** and skepticism toward institutions like the European Union.

Climate Change (2)

Climate Change is acknowledged across Eastern Europe, but it is typically regarded as a secondary or even tertiary issue, particularly in the face of pressing national development goals and recent security concerns.

Eastern EU

Demographic Change (1)

With a TFR of 1,3 (Poland) to 1,6 (Romania), the Eastern EU is below the replacement rate of 2.1. Demographic change is a central issue driving Eastern Europe's counter-movement. Low birth rates and high emigration have created a sense of demographic decline, exacerbated by the refugee crisis. For many, these trends symbolize a loss of continuity and identity, fueling nationalist and anti-resemble the "Great Replacement" theory of the Western Alt-Right movement.

Family and Gender Roles (2)

The emphasis on traditional family structures and gender roles in Eastern Europe reflects a deeper anxiety about identity loss. The nuclear family is celebrated as a cornerstone of society, often in opposition to progressive views on gender and LGBTQ+ rights. This stance serves as an outlet for broader fears about cultural erosion.

Human Rights (4)

Eastern European countries rank in the FIW index between 80 and 83. The Eastern EUR, by and large, shares the same intellectual heritage of Humanism and Enlightenment as the West, and basic views on human rights differ little. Nonetheless, the interpretation and prioritization of certain rights -- particularly those related to identity and expression -- can diverge significantly, reflecting local cultural and religious traditions.

Government attitude to Technological Change (5)

Attitudes toward technological change in Eastern Europe are notably open and forward-looking. Unlike parts of the West, where skepticism about technology's impact on jobs, privacy, and societal cohesion is more common, Eastern Europeans often embrace technological innovation as a pathway to modernization and competitiveness.

Argentina

Argentina's societal and political conflicts are shaped by the dominant ideologies of **Peronism, Kirchnerism**, and the recent rise of **anarcho-capitalism**, each offering distinct visions for the country's future. Peronism, rooted in populism and its "three flags" of economic independence, social justice, and political sovereignty, emphasizes state intervention and working-class empowerment. Kirchnerism, a left-wing offshoot, champions progressive policies and welfare expansion
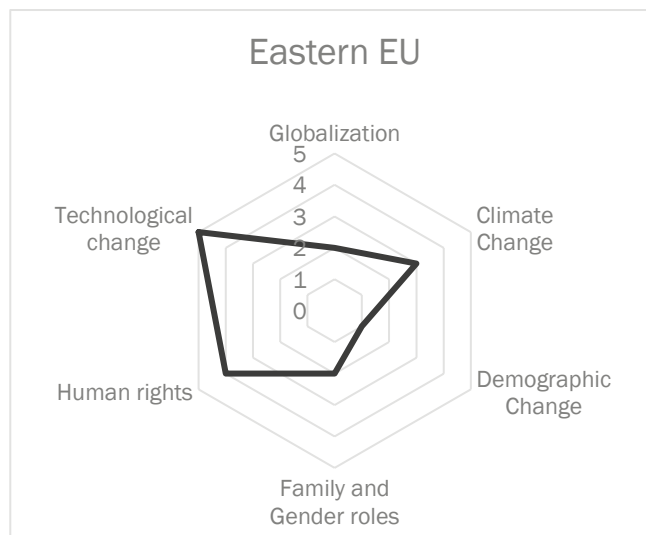
while maintaining nationalist principles. In contrast, anarcho-capitalism, led by Javier Milei, rejects state intervention, advocating for radical free-market policies. These ideological clashes reflect Argentina's ongoing tensions between collective welfare, nationalist populism, and libertarian individualism.

Globalization (3)

Javier Milei often invokes Argentina's "Golden Age," when it was a global economic power before World War I, thriving as a major grain and meat exporter and a top destination for European migrants. However, the past century has been marked by cycles of modest growth and severe economic crises. While Argentina still exports agricultural products, its economy is burdened by over $400 billion in sovereign debt, one of Latin America's largest. Repeated defaults highlight deep structural issues.

Climate Change (3)

President Javier Milei's dismissal of climate change as a "socialist hoax" starkly contrasts with public opinion in Argentina. A 2023 survey found that 85% of Argentinians believe climate change impacts their daily lives, and 83% support stricter government measures to encourage climate-friendly behavior. This disconnect reflects a broader trend where *voters prioritize immediate concerns*, like inflation and employment, over other issues, often backing candidates like Milei for economic policies despite disagreeing with parts of their agenda.

Demographic Change (4)

With a TFR of 2.15, Argentina is just above the replacement rate of 2.1.

Family and Gender Roles (3)

Family and gender roles in Argentina reflect a blend of traditional values and progressive reforms. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner has supported gender equality and family-focused social policies, aligning with feminist movements. In contrast, Javier Milei's push for minimal state involvement and his conservative stance on gender roles may hinder progressive initiatives. These contrasting approaches highlight Argentina's broader societal debates on balancing tradition with modernity.

Human Rights (4)

Argentina scores 85 on the FIW index. Javier Milei's policies and rhetoric present potential challenges to human rights, particularly in gender equality, social welfare, labor rights, and environmental protection. While his focus on individual liberty and free markets appeals to some, critics warn that rolling back protections and weakening social safety nets could disproportionately impact marginalized groups. His confrontational style and dismissal of progressive movements risk fostering an environment less conducive to upholding universal human rights.
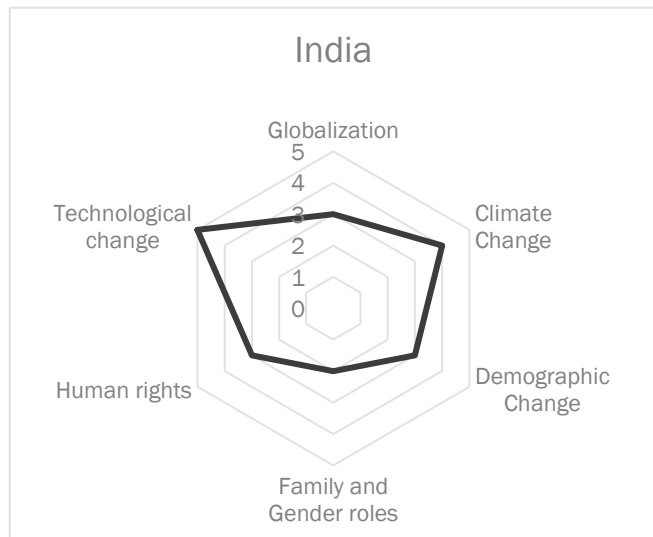
Government attitude to Technological Change (4)

The key difference between Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and Javier Milei lies in their ideological approach to technological change: Kirchner emphasizes **state-led development**, prioritizing public

investment in education, R&D, and domestic technological sovereignty. Milei promotes **market-driven innovation**, focusing on deregulation, private investment, and openness to foreign technology. Each approach has trade-offs, with Kirchner's model fostering inclusion and sovereignty but risking inefficiency, while Milei's approach promises efficiency and foreign investment but may deepen inequality and limit public access to technological benefits. The direction Argentina takes will impact its ability to harness technological change for sustainable and inclusive development.

India

While Indians share universal aspirations with people around the world, such as economic opportunity, a positive outlook for the future, and safety and security for basic needs, the expression and discussion of the following topics differ significantly from Western debate due to the unique cultural context of India. Indian universal aspirations ar e expressed through distinct cultural and religious frameworks. The nation's complexity demands nuanced understanding that goes beyond traditional Western perspectives, recognizing that topics like progress, democracy, and identity are filtered through unique social structures and cultural values. This requires a deeper appreciation of how religion, tradition, and modernization collectively influence the expression of these fundamental human aspirations.

Globalization (3)

India's relationship with globalization reflects the common challenge of balancing the winners and losers. 71% of Indians view international trade positively, but there is a significant disparity between those with higher or lower education levels. A positive orientation toward international commerce has served India well, contributing to steady GDP growth. However, the distribution of globalization's benefits has been markedly uneven, creating a shift in concerns for Indians. Curr ent data reveals that the top 1% of India's population commands 23% of all income and controls 40% of the nation's wealth—the highest concentration of wealth since 1922. This rising inequality has begun to influence political outcomes, as evidenced by recent election results.

Climate Change (4)

The discussion of climate change in India contrasts sharply with Western perspectives, emphasizing practical responses over ideological stances. 52% of Indians report being personally affected by environmental changes—among the highest globally. This awareness centers on immediate challenges rather than the less tangible issue of CO_2e emissions. Climate protection efforts focus primarily on adaptation strategies, such as improving irrigation, securing drinking water access, and providing farmer relief, rather than emissions reduction.

Demographic Change (3)

With a TFR of 2.0, India is just below the replacement rate of 2.1. A notable aspect is that three-quarters of the population belongs to historically disadvantaged classes, highlighting persistent

social stratification. The country faces complex migration dynamics. 64% of Indians view emigration as problematic, with 49% considering it a very serious issue.

Family and Gender Roles (2)

Family dynamics in India blend traditional values with modernization. While 54% support dual-income households, 43% still see men as primary earners, and 64% believe wives must obey husbands. Views vary by religion, education, and region, with urban, educated Indians favoring more progressive roles. India has advanced LGBTQ+ rights through decriminalization and transgender recognition but still faces challenges in achieving equality and social acceptance.

Human Rights (3)

India scores 66 points on the FIW index. It presents a complex portrait of human rights and democratic values, with seemingly contradictory attitudes coexisting. While 77% express satisfaction with democracy—higher than any European nation—85% simultaneously show support for authoritarian systems. Religious tolerance is widely considered fundamental to Indian identity, yet interreligious tensions persist. Recent political developments highlight this complexity, with anti-caste movements gaining prominence while concerns grow about media freedom and civil society restrictions.

Government attitude to Technological Change (5)

India's approach to technological advancement is characterized by ambitious government-led digital transformation initiatives, with "India Stack" serving as a cornerstone of this strategy. This comprehensive API framework, which is the largest in the world, enables the delivery of digital services across government and private sectors, promoting paperless, cashless transactions and digital identity verification. The government has demonstrated a strong commitment to technological integration, viewing it as fundamental to India's development trajectory and economic modernization.

South Africa

South Africa is a multilingual, culturally diverse nation with 12 official languages, including Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, and English. Universal voting rights were introduced in 1994 after decades of apartheid. Now a liberal democracy, South Africa remains highly unequal, with a Gini coefficient of 63%. Its population is 81.4% Black, 8.2% Coloured, 7.3% White, and 2.7% Indian or Asian. Cultural mindsets vary: "Western" and Afrikaans culture, often indivi dualistic, contrasts with African cultures, such as "Ubuntu" ("I am, because we are"), which emphasizes interconnectedness, community, and flexible perceptions of time.
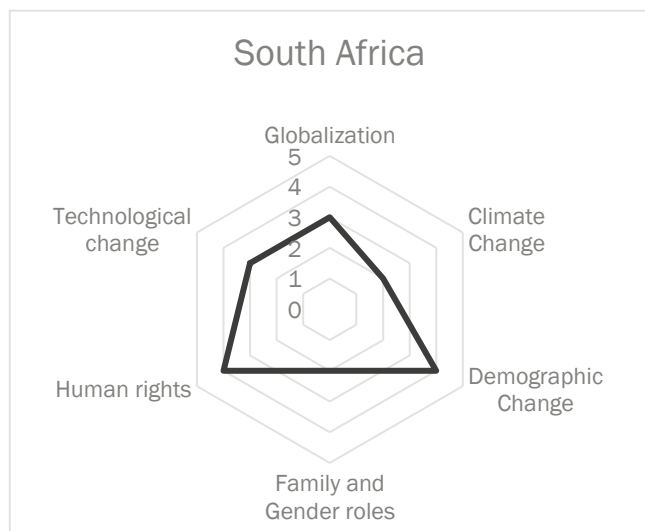
Globalization (3)

South Africa is viewed as a leader in Africa, promoting an 'African Renaissance,' but its symbolic leadership is undermined by material weaknesses and mixed foreign policy results. As a member

of BRICS+, the African Union, and the G20, it maintains a non-aligned stance, avoiding alignment with China, the U.S., or broader East-West divides. Russian financial influence has raised concerns about its impact on South Africa's diplomacy. Skepticism of globalization, seen as perpetuating Western dominance, fuels calls for economic sovereignty and protectionist policies, as advocated by groups like the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF).

Climate Change (2)

The South African government acknowledges the urgency of climate change and has made commitments to address it, but its approach is hindered by economic, social, and political challenges. With 80% of its power from coal, transitioning to renewables faces obstacles like job losses, poverty, and unrest from coal plant closures. Persistent power outages and mismanagement at Eskom further erode public trust. Communities feel abandoned as promises of jobs and retraining remain unfulfilled. Public concern about climate change is low, with only 13% expressing worry, as economic hardships take precedence.

Demographic Change (4)

With a TFR of 2,3, South Africa is above the replacement rate of 2.1. In South Africa, the population is predominantly young (28.8% under 14; 65.2% between 15 and 64; 6% over 65). Socioeconomic disparities, such as wealth inequality, education access, and geographic divides, overshadow age as defining factors.

Family and Gender Roles (2)

South Africa exhibits contradictory family and gender role patterns. Polygamy is legal in South Africa under customary law but not under the Marriage or Civil Union Acts. Men with multiple wives are common in some cultural contexts, e.g. former President Jacob Zuma, who has four wives. Same-sex marriages were legalized in 2006, but societal acceptance remains low, with 70% of South Africans viewing homosexuality negatively. Urban areas show more tolerance, while rural regions remain resistant. Gender roles are shaped by economic realities; for example, limited energy access forces girls to do household chores, hindering their education and perpetuating inequality.

Human Rights (4)

South Africa scores 79 points on the FIW index. Human rights in South Africa are viewed through both Western liberal and African communitarian lenses. The African perspective, rooted in ubuntu, emphasizes communal relationships and collective well-being, often prioritizing harmony over individual autonomy, contrasting with Western individualism. While the legal framework is robust, economic disparities, cultural traditions, and governance challenges shape how these rights are understood and experienced across the country.

Government attitude to Technological Change (3)

The South African government recognizes the importance of technological change for economic growth and social development but faces challenges in ensuring equitable access due to persistent socioeconomic disparities, with only 10% of households having internet access as of 2021. While embracing Western technologies introduced by global corporations, the government must navigate the legacy of colonialism, which influences perceptions of science and technology. This tension is evident in areas like biomedical research, where Western individualistic ethical frameworks, such as informed consent, may clash with African communal values prioritizing collective decision-making and community interests.

![THEMIS FORESIGHT logo]

Discussion of Findings

Approaching different thought structures

The approach to different thought structures in a matrix of democracies – authoritarian regimes – 'mixed countries' – authoritarian representatives within democracies shows that the political thought structure reveals very little about the attitudes towards globalization, climate change, demographic change and technological change as demonstrated by the violin plots on this and the following page.

Globalization is even viewed with a small amount of skepticism in Iceland. India and Saudi Arabia score a 4, as well.
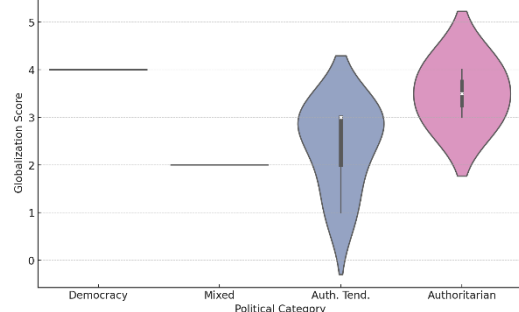
Climate change is not only a top priority in the "democracy" of Iceland, but also in the "autocracies" of China and Saudi Arabia. Other countries that fall under the research on democracies with strong authoritarian tendencies balance climate mitigation against other population needs. The interpretation of climate mitigation in India doesn't follow Western standards of greenhouse gas emission reduction. And even in bastions of Trump's electorate, there are strong concerns for environmental issues, however not an abstract climate notion but issues such as mountaintop removal and toxic waste.

Demographic change affects all countries differently. You see low birth rates across all regimes, with only South Africa and Argentina witnessing TFRs above the replacement rate of 2.1.

An unambiguously positive government attitude towards *technological change* exists only in the "autocracies" China and Saudi Arabia. Iceland, as a "democracy" scores relatively high. Another "democracy" like Germany would score below the center mark of 3. The democracies with "authoritarian tendencies" show a spread of attitude between 3 (U.S. Appalachia) and 5 (Poland).

There are noticeable differences in *family and gender roles*. Here, however, the outlier nation is the "democracy" Iceland, while Turkey as a "mixed country" exhibits higher scores than the majority of the authoritarian tendencies in democratic countries. There are also noticable differences between the "autocracies" China and Saudi Arabia, with the trend

development pointing in China towards more traditional roles, while in Saudia Arabia steps have been made towards modernization in family and gender roles with the exception of LGBTQ+ rights.

The only significant differentiation can be seen in the category of *human rights*, where autocracies score extremely poorly, democracies highly, democracies with authoritarian tendencies relatively high and the sole mixed country with a relatively low score.
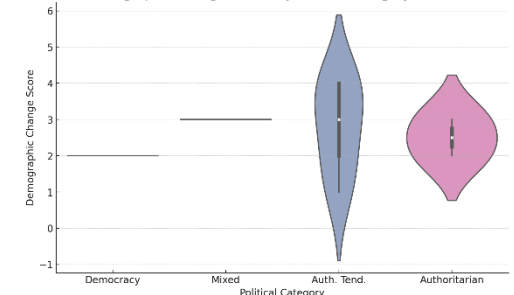

Violin Plot: Human Rights Scores by Political Category (All Values Reflected)
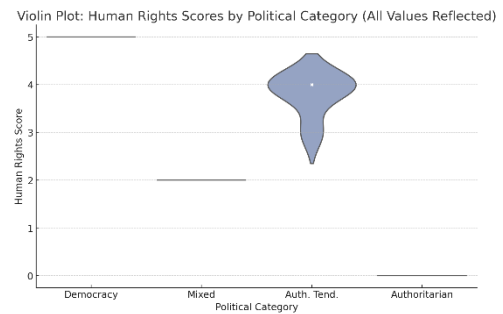
How useful is it to differentiate between "democracies" and "autocracies"?

This raises the question whether this categorization should be kept throughout the remainder of the project. The problem is further exacerbated by the lack of a universal definition of democracy. Even different publishers of democracy indices use significantly divergent criteria. Some look predominantly at freedom of expression (like the Freedom House index that we used for categorizing the countries and region), others include the GINI score that has little significance for evaluating a political regime. The EIU index (see map above) classifies Singapore as a "flawed democracy" in the 6.0 – 7.0 bracket (i.e. barely a democracy) – a notion that would be hotly contested by most Singaporeans.

Still, we argue in favor of *keeping this matrix*. Because a solid finding that *looking at the world through the lens of a particular political organization scheme conceals more than it reveals* is a useful finding per se.

Other findings

- During our research we have found repeated hints that the political stability of a regime largely depends on the question of *whether a society functions* in the eyes of most of its members. By and large *people do not want to be political*. And they *react negatively to being forced to take a position on contentious political issues*. This may have *strong implications for brand positioning*, especially when brands act globally. Universal values such as the improvement of an individual's position in life may be received more warmly than even an innocuously seeming reference to climate neutrality (which is perceived negatively in the former coal regions of Appalachia).
- We have noticed that different versions of *"sovereignty"* play out in the narratives of tendencies that are perceived in the Western liberal value system as "authoritarian".
  - The Eastern EU countries have a long history of resistance to great power subjugation spanning from the "Spring of Nations" in 1848 to subjugation under Nazi rule and subsequent dominance by the Soviet Union. Sovereignty is argued by different political camps in different ways. Even moderate conservatives and mainstream liberals in Poland, Czechia, and Hungary are proud of traditions of national resistance to great powers. However, their political thought-structures have a humanist reference point dating to liberation struggles in the early-to mid-19th century. Countries like Romania, Ukraine, and the Baltics whose national independence movement awoke after 1848 reference national heroes that harbored strong sympathies with fascism or even collaborated (temporarily) with the Nazis during WWII.
  - The Communist Party of China uses the narrative of the "Century of Humiliation" as a cautionary tail never to let such a situation happen again.

- o Anti-colonial feelings run strong in India, just like anti-Apartheid sentiment is still a powerful narrative in South Africa with rampant wealth divisions along ethnic lines. Western initiatives around climate change or technological advancement are often met with skepticism.
- o Even in the U.S. you will find a strong notion of national sovereignty expressed in the Trump campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" appealing to voters who feel that American interests, as opposed to interest of "globalist elites", need to be put first.

In summary, in a world climate of different forms of "deglobalization", national interests expressed in **narratives of national sovereignty** find strong resonance, even though the narratives are fed by different historical experiences.

Other Biases in the Matrix

We have found that the six categories globalization, climate change, demographic change, family and gender roles, human rights, and technological change and government attitude toward it come with varying degrees of biases, and thus may, too, conceal more than they reveal in reference to brand positioning.

Globalization: This term has very **negative connotations** among nationalists all over the world. But here, too, the motives are different. While Trump supporters in the U.S. bemoan the loss of the industries that provided for their livelihood, Chinese and Indian nationalists argue with an anti-colonial narrative and criticize "Western hypocrisy". South African Black traditionalists reject globalization, because it comes with individualistic values that run counter to Ubuntu traditions of "I am because we are", which is at face value a positive collective outlook even in the understanding of a Western liberal. Countries like Saudi Arabia and again India are also aware that they have benefitted from the effects of globalization. Still, they are wary about Western narratives around it. There is no "one size fits all" term that could replace globalization in this matrix that would capture opposition to globalization in different national contexts equally. Furthermore, support or opposition to globalization says little about whether the motives for support or opposition are "just" or "unjust". So, we argue for **keeping this category** while being cognizant of all its flaws.

Climate change: This term gained popularity in Western liberal thought through environmental concerns that were pushed to the fore by a strong environmentalist movement in the Western hemisphere. However, climate change addresses only one aspect of environmental policies. A former Appalachian coal minor may react very negatively to a climate change narrative, while feeling strongly about environmental protection of his countryside. In India, fresh water supply or pollution concerns outcrowd climate concerns, because in many regions, this is the problem "closest to home". Thus, a rejection or s*kepticism towards climate change says very little about actual susceptibility to environmental protection*. We argue for replacing the term with *environmental protection*, so as not to mis-categorize the notions of the populations in many countries and social contexts.

Demographic change: We feel that this category doesn't add much to the research. It spills over to family roles, in that e.g. the Chinese government just like Polish or French or German nationalists or American nativists use the fact of shrinking populations for advocating for traditional family roles where the primary role of a woman is to bear and raise children. This aspect, however, is addressed in the family roles category. For the dialogue formats, it is nevertheless perhaps a useful exploration point for other values that extend beyond family policies. So, we can keep it.

Family and gender roles: We argue for **separating** these two categories, as they lump two issues together, thus leading to skewed results. Saudi Arabia has made significant progress on women's

rights considering from where they started two decades ago. Yet, LGBTQ+ rights are nowhere near a broader discussion and homosexual and trans people still have to fear for their lives. Turkey, including AKP nationalists differentiate between the right of a woman to work and LGBTQ+ rights. We see similar tendencies in South Africa. Supporters of "anti-democratic" movements or parties in Eastern Europe, Appalachia or India may shrug their shoulders when asked what they feel about homosexuals or trans people. But they are likely to go into opposition when forced to take a pro-active stand for LGBTQ+ rights. This is a different attitude than the one described in Saudi Arabia or Turkey.

Human rights: This category exhibits similar problems to the category "democracy". Human rights are interpreted differently in different national and social contexts. The UN's definition of the term in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) includes states that "Human rights are the fundamental rights and freedoms that belong to every person, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, or any other status. They are inherent, inalienable, and universal, designed to ensure dignity, equality, and freedom for all individuals." But as indicated above, the metrics for human rights or democracy indices vary widely. With an eye to the dialogue sessions, *we suggest parceling out the component parts of the UDHR definition* rather than subsuming them all in a term that is for different reasons and different political motivations negatively perceived as Western infringement on national cultural traditions, e.g. in South Africa, China, Saudi Arabia, or Russia.

Technological change and government attitude towards it: We felt that in our initial research, a positive or negative or ambivalent attitude toward technological change was not expressed along lines of political and socio-economic power structures, but along the lines of actual economic growth. Governments of countries that exhibit higher economic growth tend to be more open to technology adoption (except for media technologies where the picture is very uneven) than countries whose economies are stagnating or only growing moderately.

Expert suggestions for the dialogue sessions

We suggest for the dialogue sessions to interview individuals that fit the following criteria:

Trumpism: We will try to convince Arlie Russell Hochschild to join the session as she has explored the topic in-depth and with scientific rigor. Lacking that, we will look for moderate representatives of the MAGA movement like John Matze.

Euroscepticism: We suggest to conduct a dialogue with Alexander von Bismarck, a former CDU politician who moves freely in the AfD and Sarah Wagenknecht camps.

Communist Party of China: We will try to convince Yan Xuetong, a Chinese political scientist and distinguished professor and dean of the Institute of International Relations at Tsinghua University to join a dialogue. He is also the author of the well-known book *Ancient Chinese Thought , Modern Chinese Power*. Absent his agreement we will look for an adequate replacement.

Muslim world between tradition and modernity: Here we are looking for representatives from Saudi Arabia or Turkey's AKP. Interest has been voiced by Dr. Meslet AlHajri, Human Resources Development Fund, Deputy Director General for National Labor Observatory of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Putin regime: We have secured a solid agreement from Vladimir Kotenev, former Russian ambassador to Germany.

India's BJP: still looking for suitable candidates

Ubuntu nationalism in Southern Africa: still looking for suitable candidates

A Milei or Chavez supporter in Latin America: We are trying to convince Eduardo Feinmann, colloquially known as the Joe Rogan of Argentina.

Appendix

This section discusses aspects of the requested research in more detail.

China

Introduction

China's view of the world and its approach to the defining issues of our time are still very much shaped by the country's experience of the "Century of Humiliation" - a historical period of foreign invasion and domination - and the collective trauma that resulted from it[1]. On the one hand, three different political value systems - Marxism, economic pragmatism, and traditional Chinese values - have been competing ever since[2], and the Chinese are struggling to come to terms with their socialist heritage and find a unifying, identity-forming vision for their society[3]. On the other hand, there is a collective fear of being hurt, humiliated, and marginalized again. For China, the "Century of Humiliation" serves not only as a grim reminder of historical suffering, but also as a cautionary tale for the future. This perspective has fostered a national mindset centered on the determination to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again[4], as well as a "victimization narrative", both of which have contributed to a heightened suspicion of anything foreign to Chinese culture and traditions[5].

Globalization

While there is no "monolithic view" of economic globalization in China, its characteristic interdependence is perceived as a potential source of vulnerability.[6] As a result, the Chinese government repeatedly promotes an anti-hegemonic narrative, claiming that the West is using globalization to impose its model of liberal democracy and market-driven capitalism on the world.[7] From the Chinese perspective, the latter is neither compatible with Chinese culture nor with the Chinese understanding of progress: Rather, the democratic chaos currently afflicting the West[8] is perceived to be due to the absence of strong governments or "regimes", the latter understood as the social whole that we are now accustomed to seeing mostly in fragmented form[9]. In China, political order and state capacity are seen as more influential drivers of modernization than liberal democracy, emphasizing the need to disentangle and separate the conditions of progress from the Western framework of liberal democracy.[10]

Climate Change

China's quest for sovereignty, coupled with its pragmatic approach to policy-making, also appears to be influencing its stance on climate change, as the government has moved from demanding

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1 The Diplomat, China's 'Never Again' Mentality [Link]
2 Yan, Xuetong, Chinese Values vs. Liberalism: What Ideology Will Shape the International Normative Order ? [Link]
3 Asia Society, Xi's "China Dream" Proves a Hard Sell [Link]
4 ICS Research Blog, Of Western Prejudice and Chinese Victimhood [Link]
5 Stanford Center on China's Economy and Institutions, How Do Narratives of Historical Victimization in China Shape National Identity and Regime Support? [Link]
6 Roberts, Anthea & Lamp, Nicolas, Navigating Complexity: Globalization Narratives in China and the West [Link]
7 Ibid. [Link]
8 South China Morning Post, Western-style Democracy behind Wars, Chaos and Human Misery, Chinese President Tells Top Officials [Link]
9 Hendriks-Kim, Eric, Why China Loves Conservatives [Link]
10 World Economic Forum, Tariffs, Timeframes and Markets as 'Tools': What the West Gets Wrong About China [Link]

climate equity from the West to imposing global climate leadership[11]: President Xi Jinping has emphasised that China should position itself as a global leader ('yinlingzhe'), actively shaping international rules and driving reforms in global climate governance, rather than remaining a follower or passive observer.[12] In contrast to Western countries, Chinese residents' opinions on climate change tend to be less divisive and contentious, probably due to different political dynamics and dominant media narratives.[13] Opponents within Chinese society often interpret Western actions on climate change in one of two ways: some see it as a strategy to hinder China's growth under the guise of environmental concerns, while others criticize Western nations for hypocrisy and double standards in addressing climate issues.[14]

Demographic Change

The Chinese government recognises the significant challenges posed by demographic change, particularly the continuing decline and ageing of the population. While official efforts include consensual policies to increase fertility rates, improve health care for the elderly and encourage greater labour force participation, President Xi Jinping's recent speeches show a strong focus on pronatalist policies and reflect an explicit return to traditional values regarding family and gender roles as a means of countering societal ageing.[15] Since 2021, for example, it has become more difficult to get a divorce in China. Party-controlled courts have been instructed to limit divorce approvals, resulting in 66% of applications being rejected at the initial stage.[16] As result, young people of both sexes are turning away from consumerist lifestyles. Instead, they are opting for lower-paid jobs that offer greater personal fulfilment, and are increasingly forgoing marriage and parenthood altogether.[17]

Family and Gender Roles

Gender equality in China is currently under threat as the Chinese Communist Party's former propaganda that women 'hold up half the sky' no longer appears to be valid: The party is presently moving from rhetorical support for gender equality to a stronger embrace of traditionalist gender roles as part of its political platform.[18] In turn, Western gender debates are often framed as 'cultural imperialism' or a threat to traditional socialist values. Feminist and LGBTQ+ activism is cracked down on under the pretext of preserving social order and strengthening cultural cohesion.[19] The resurgence of traditional gender roles, shaped by Confucian values that emphasise family stability and binary distinctions, fosters resistance to more fluid, individualistic gender concepts common in the West. Public understanding of gender diversity remains limited, with many still, or again, viewing transgender and non-binary identities as mental health issues.[20] This "progressive hyper-idealism" - the belief that an "egalitarian utopia would materialize if only critics and moderates did not stand in the way of historical progress" - is painfully reminiscent for the Chinese of Mao's Cultural Revolution, a period of intense persecution of "class enemies" in the name of cultural

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[11] East Asia Forum, Understanding China's Changing Climate Change Rhetoric [Link]

[12] Yang, Jilong, Understanding China's Changing Engagement in Global Climate Governance: A Struggle for Identity [Link]

[13] Yang, Jianxun, Gounaridis, Dimitrios, Liu, Miaomiao, Bi, Jun, Newell, Joshua P., Perceptions of Climate Change in China: Evidence from Surveys of Residents in Six Cities [Link]

[14] Zhang, Fang, Xu, Manchi, Yan, Yikuan, Huang, Keman, Public Discourses and Government Interventions Behind China's Ambitious Carbon Neutrality Goal [Link]

[15] World Economic Forum, Here's How China is Dealing With its Rapidly Ageing Population [Link]

[16] Griffiths, James, Divorces Fall 70% in China After Government Orders Couples to Cool Off [Link]

[17] Bogusz, Michal, A Disaster of Their Own Making. The Demographic Crisis in China [Link]

[18] Minzner, Carl, Beijing's Message to the National Women's Congress: Gender Equality is Out, Family and Childbirth are in [Link]

[19] Spears, Kinsey, Prey, Emily, Why U.S.-China Relations Need a Gender Analysis [Link]

[20] Wong, Brian, China's Complicated Relationship with LGBTQ+ Rights [Link]

equality. Such woke ('baizuo') thinking tends to be perceived as excessive, which in turn has led not only to divisive identity politics, but would even pave the way for intolerance, repression and worse.[21]

Human Rights

China also emphasises national sovereignty in the area of human rights, arguing that approaches to human rights should be determined by each country's unique context. It rejects external criticism, which it sees as intrusion in domestic affairs, and promotes the principles of non-interference[22] and non-universality as central.[23] Given its own unresolved historical issues, the hypocritical West would have no hegemonic right and is in no position to criticize China for human rights abuses.[24]

Technological change and government attitude toward it

Championing a broad concept of 'national security', Xi Jinping has emphasised the goal of achieving zìlìgēngshēng - self-sufficiency - especially in critical technologies. Initiatives such as 'Made in China 2025' aim to boost domestic innovation and reduce dependence on the West, protecting China in key areas such as semiconductors. Economic and technological decoupling - i.e., achieving self-reliance in both areas, which is seen as consistent with China's quest for national sovereignty - is used as a means of minimizing Western influence and strengthening China's resilience. Chinese officials argue that instead of recognizing China's hard-won technological and economic achievements and its crucial contributions to technological change, Western countries are reverting to Cold War thinking and perpetuating a "China threat theory" as a pretext to justify geo-economic policies aimed at containing China's rise. This criticism suggests that the West's approach is not based on objective assessments of China's growth, but on strategic efforts to maintain global dominance and push China back, thereby triggering a collective memory of cultural marginalization.[25]

Other

Since all six categories above are subject to strong state-led narratives and censorship, using them as a lens to view Chinese attitudes towards the West may only scratch the surface of the Chinese value system. To gain a deeper understanding of how and where the latter is currently evolving, it is worth looking at the specifically Chinese sources of collective hope and fear. Given the country's deep-rooted trauma, it seems worthwhile to further explore the emotional and mental ambiguities and trigger points of its inhabitants caused by its history.

Conclusion

This cursory analysis has revealed a deep, historically rooted fear of being vulnerable (again). This fear has led to a struggle for both identity finding and self-reliance that is reflected economically, politically, culturally, socially, legally, and technologically in an aggressive quest for sovereignty and a hostile demarcation from the West.

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[21] Hendriks-Kim, Eric, Why China Loves Conservatives [Link]
[22] Zhang, Minlu, China's Stance on Non-Interference in Human Rights Affairs Gains Support [Link]
[23] The Conversation, China's Concerning New Strategy on Human Rights: Unite the World Behind a 'Selective' Approach [Link]
[24] Szarejko, Andrew A., Responding to Chinese 'Whataboutism': On Uyghur and Native Genocides [Link]
[25] Roberts, Anthea, Lamp, Nicolas, Navigating Complexity: Globalization Narratives in China and the West [Link]

Turkey

The social and political consensus in Turkey has been in a constant state of renegotiation since the rise of the Young Turks movement in the Ottoman Empire during the 1890s. Today's increasingly polarized political landscape revolves around four major ideological centers: Kemalism, Ultranationalism (Turanism), Progressivism, and Political Islam, which is often associated with Neo-Ottomanism. To better understand the interplay between these movements, refer to the accompanying graphic.
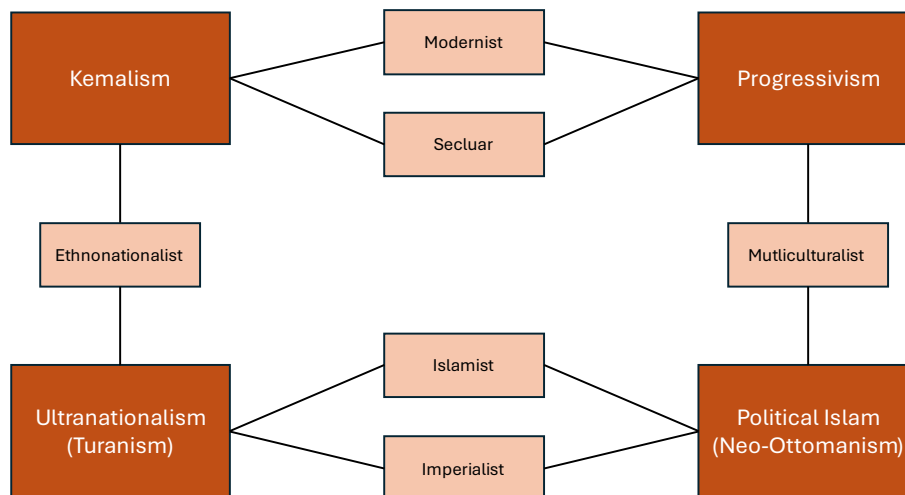
In recent decades, Turkish politics have been dominated by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP, a party rooted in the irredentist Political Islamist tradition. However, the AKP has also co-opted nationalist stances, appealing to both Ultranationalist and Kemalist voters. This strategy has largely marginalized the Progressive movement, which has found itself aligned with Kurdish political groups in opposition to Erdoğan's government. With this general framework in mind, we can analyze the relevant issues through these ideological lenses:

Globalization

Similar to trends in Eastern Europe, globalization is increasingly viewed as a threat to national sovereignty in Turkey. This perception has moved the country away from the outward-looking principles of early Kemalism. Coupled with a resurgence of irredentist ambitions, Turkey seeks to expand its influence abroad while remaining wary of foreign involvement at home.

Climate Change

As in Eastern Europe, climate change is regarded as a secondary concern compared to immediate economic development. While environmental issues are acknowledged, they rarely take precedence over national growth objectives.

Demographic Change

Unlike many European nations, demographic change is not a dominant public issue in Turkey. Relatively higher birth rates and a less critical view of migration set Turkey apart from its European neighbors.

Family, Gender Roles, and Religion

These topics remain deeply polarizing in Turkish society. Atatürk's reforms left the Republic with a progressive legacy, particularly in women's rights and secular governance, which was groundbreaking for its time and region. However, recent political movements have sought to reverse many of these changes, leading to intense societal discourse on the role of tradition versus modernity.[26] CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has emphasized respect for individual lifestyles and identities, stating, "You have to respect everyone's lifestyle. I don't make people's lifestyles into an object of politics." He has also dismissed claims that LGBTQ+ identities undermine traditional family structures. In contrast, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) have adopted a more conservative approach, often expressing opposition to LGBTQ+ rights. Erdoğan has stated, "We will bury those pro-LGBT in the ballot box," and emphasized that his party will "never be pro-LGBT because family is sacred to us."[27]

Human Rights

These issues do not play a significant role in Turkey's rejection of Western liberal values. While human rights are a topic of international criticism, they are not central to the domestic ideological debate. Erdoğan's attitude toward human rights appears increasingly authoritarian, prioritizing state security and loyalty over individual freedoms. While his government initially pursued reforms aimed at aligning Turkey with EU norms, recent years have seen a marked deterioration in fundamental rights, judicial independence, and freedoms for opposition voices.

Technological Change and Government Attitude toward it

Erdoğan views technological change as a vital element of Turkey's economic growth, national security, and global influence. He strongly supports domestic technological innovation and infrastructure development. However, his approach is intertwined with concerns over state control, particularly in regulating digital platforms and managing the societal impact of technology. This duality reflects a broader strategy of leveraging technology for power while maintaining tight oversight over its use.

Conclusion

In summary, Turkey's political dynamics reflect a complex negotiation between historical Progressive Kemalist legacies and modern ideological battles influenced by Islamism and Irredentism. This interplay shapes Turk's attitude towards Western narrative and their widespread rejection.

United States

This section doesn't investigate the United States as a whole. It narrowly examines the white middle-class pauperized by the effects of 1980s Reagonomics and subsequent globalization. This section of the middle class voted heavily for Donald Trump in the 2016 and 2024 elections. It is based on three books:

- Fiona Hill, There Is Nothing for You Here
- J.D. Vance, Hillbilly Elegy, a memoir of a family and culture in crisis
- Arlie Russel Hochschild, Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right

Hochschild's book examines the socio-economic struggles and emotional landscapes of Appalachia as a microcosm of the broader political and cultural divides in the United States. Through interviews

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[26]   https://www.thesquarecentre.org/2022/06/30/the-controversial-path-of-womens-rights-in-turkey-gender-and-policies-in-the-age-of-akp

[27] https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/05/11/turkey-presidential-election-candidates-lgbt-views/?utm

and personal narratives, the book explores the intersections of pride, shame, and identity, and how these emotions drive political allegiances, particularly in regions hard-hit by economic decline and social upheaval. Hochschild delves into the appeal of right-wing nationalism in vulnerable communities, offering a nuanced perspective on the factors that fuel polarization and resentment. Her book is based on 8 years researching the themes, conducting interviews and analyzing the socio-political dynamics that shaped this book.

She conducted her research primarily in Pikeville, Kentucky, located in Appalachia, a region in the United States known for its economic struggles and cultural uniqueness. She chose this location because it represents a microcosm of broader socio-economic and political dynamics in red-state America, particularly among rural, white, working-class communities experiencing economic decline and cultural displacement. Pikeville is the center of Kentucky's 5th Congressional District, which is both "the second poorest of the nation's 435 congressional districts" and "the whitest.[28]" Hochschild aimed to understand the emotional and structural factors driving political polarization and the rise of right-wing nationalism, which she saw as amplified in regions like Appalachia, where the loss of traditional industries, pride, and cultural identity created fertile ground for such movements.

Globalization

In *Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right*, the people of Pikeville view globalization with a mix of resentment and resignation, seeing it as a force that has stripped their region of economic opportunities while enriching urban and coastal areas. Once the backbone of America's industrial energy supply through coal, Pikeville has experienced the outsourcing of jobs, automation, and a decline in traditional industries, leaving its residents feeling left behind and undervalued. Many blame globalization for eroding their local pride and cultural identity, as it prioritizes corporate profits and distant markets over the well-being of their communities. This discontent fosters a deep skepticism of policies perceived as favoring global elites, fueling political allegiances rooted in nationalism and resistance to external influences.

Demographic Change

The total fertility rate (TFR) for the state of Kentucky is approximately 1.83 births per woman, which is below the replacement threshold of 2.1. Pikeville is beset by an aging, predominantly white population with lower levels of education and economic hardship. Many young people, particularly those with education and opportunities, have left in search of better economic prospects, contributing to the region's "brain drain." Hochschild notes that Pike County's population has declined significantly, and it is projected to continue shrinking as well-paid jobs vanish and migration to urban centers persists. Those who remain often express a mix of pride in their community and frustration over the loss of youth, talent, and vitality to more prosperous areas.

Climate Change

Many people in Pikeville express skepticism and resistance toward climate change **policies**. They often associate environmental regulations, particularly efforts to reduce carbon emissions, with economic harm, blaming such policies for the decline of the coal industry. This connection fosters a perception of climate change as a distant, abstract concern imposed by urban and coastal elites, further fueling local resentment.

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[28] Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes in this section are from Arlie Russell Hochschild, Stolen Pride: Loss, Shame, and the Rise of the Right.

However, while many are skeptical of climate change policies due to their perceived economic impact, they often express concern about *local environmental issues* that directly affect their communities. For instance, residents lament the destruction caused by mountaintop removal mining, water contamination, and the degradation of their natural surroundings. This suggests that their skepticism is more rooted in distrust of external policies and priorities than a lack of care for the environment.

"There was another terrible loss Andrew [a former City Commissioner] wasn't counting. In search of coal, companies had begun using monster machines to blast off the tops of mountains. 500 across Appalachia, 300 of those in Kentucky alone, some in Pike County just off the Hillbilly Highway, Route 23. Tons of soil had been dumped into streambeds, contaminating water and harming wildlife. Some companies, such as Black Jewel in Harlan County, promised to remediate the damage they caused, but declared bankruptcy before doing so.

The nation's most eloquent defender of rural life, Kentucky based writer Wendell Berry, sat in at the governor's office in a protest against mountaintop removal. 'Coal, you burn once, and it's gone. But the mountaintops you blast off, the water you contaminate, the wildlife you disrupt, those injuries last forever,' Barry was to remark later"

Family and Gender roles

The book describes traditional family and gender roles in Pikeville as deeply ingrained, with men often occupying dominant positions within the household and public life while women are expected to serve and support. At family gatherings, for example, men traditionally sit and eat first, while women serve and then dine separately, a practice some women, particularly younger and more educated ones, find frustrating. However, the book also highlights the resilience of women, especially in the face of challenges like losing spouses to dangerous jobs, often taking on primary caregiving roles and ensuring the survival of their families in difficult circumstances.

Hochschild touches upon LGBTQ issues, including community reactions to gender fluidity and public expressions of non-heteronormative identities. One notable event mentioned is a small gay pride parade in Pikeville, which drew criticism from some locals for its visibility, particularly in public spaces where children were present. The book reflects a sense of discomfort and tension among many in the community toward LGBTQ rights and visibility, viewing such changes as part of a broader disruption to traditional norms and values.

J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy* recounts a childhood anecdote that highlights his grandmother's pragmatism on the issue of homosexuality:

"I stumbled upon a broadcast by some fire and brimstone preacher. The man spoke about the evils of homosexuals, how they had infiltrated our society, and how they were all destined for hell, absent some serious repenting. At the time, the only thing I knew about gay men was that they preferred men to women. This described me perfectly. I disliked girls, and my best friend in the world was my buddy Bill. Oh no, I'm going to hell. I broached this issue with Mamaw [his grandmother], confessing that I was gay and I was worried that I would burn in hell. She said, 'Don't be a fucking idiot. How would you know that you're gay?' I explained my thought process.

"Mamaw chuckled and seemed to consider how she might explain to a boy my age. Finally, she asked, 'J.D., do you want to suck dicks?' I was flabbergasted. Why would someone want to do that? She repeated herself, and I said, of course not. Then, she said, 'you're not gay. And even if you did want to suck dicks, that would be okay. God would still love you.' That settled the matter. Apparently, I didn't have to worry about being gay anymore. Now that I'm older, I recognize the

profundity of her sentiment. Gay people, though unfamiliar, threaten nothing about Mamaw's being. There are more important things for a Christian to worry about."[29]

Issues of race or gender are mostly non-issues for rural whites, unless they're being turned into political issues by external forces like right-wing evangelicals, neo-Nazis, or left liberals as the following section highlights.

Human Rights

Hochschild's book does not discuss "human rights" as an abstract notion. However, it delves deep into feelings of pride, shame and infringement on identity. And she links it to the discussion of race in the U.S. Some quotes:

"As he explained, 'it's like you're always having to say, yes, we're poor rural whites, but no, we're not racist. Yes, I speak with a regional accent, but no, I know the name of the President of the United States. Yes, my mother had me young, but no, she's an intelligent person. Yes, I'm on disability, but no, I really have a disability. Yes, I grew up on the wrong side of the mountain, but no, I'm not blind to how you see me.'"

"You know that white nationalist guy who's leading the [April 2017 white nationalist] march? He's coming to Eastern Kentucky because he thinks we're poor, dumb, white hillbillies who don't know any better than to follow him, okay? I am poor, and I am dumb, and I am white, okay? So, he's coming for who he thinks I am, but I'm not who he thinks I am."

"'We think in narratives. We've got two main ones, and people like me don't fit either one.' David began. 'First, you've got a white middle class narrative. You hear these success stories, a person comes from nothing and gets to something. So, you say, congratulations, you're smart, hardworking, really something. But you look at the guy who says he came from nothing, and you see something he had to start with. He's got a story of going from being something to being something better. And that's the normal narrative for whites.

'Then you have a second narrative for blacks, and people say, Oh, you're a black person. That means you're poor. You didn't have something to begin with, and you don't have something now. And that's because you're a victim of racism. But that leaves a problem for people like me. If I'm a Morris Trailer Park white trash person, the only narrative I have tells me that I'm white, so I'm privileged. That's the something I have. And that must put me ahead. But what if it doesn't put me ahead? I'm not left with nothing because of racism. I'm left with nothing because I'm lazy and stupid. There's no excuse. If you're white and poor, people think, what's wrong with you that you're stuck at the bottom? If I just look at my own life, I came from nothing, and I got to nothing. And I'm not a victim of racism because I'm white. So, to most Americans, I'm less than nothing. If it's such a privilege to be born a white male, what could explain me except my own personal failure?"

Hochschild discusses the attitude of Pike County's white population to the issue of race. Most people get offended by the notion that they could be racist. Digging deeper, she unearthed what she calls "empathy bridges". Analyzing a national census on attitudes toward race, she found that empathy for Blacks is highest among either upper middle-class whites, and even higher among the poorest whites.

"White responses to a statement about government aid to Blacks reveals a further clue. The survey asked how much they agreed with this sentiment. The government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of Blacks. Most likely among Whites to

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[29] J.D. Vance, Hillbilly Elegy

favor government help for Blacks were, as before, the richer and more educated on the upper deck, 53%, compared to 33% among the poor and least educated. But the highest white support for help to Blacks was among the precarious poor whites, those who most feared losing their jobs at 66%."

Yet, for a white rural poor to express sympathy with urban Blacks and to point out similarities in each demographic's situation, often gets the white person into trouble:

"Feeling rejected by both conservatives and liberals, David devised a label for himself. 'I'm a fake racist.' 'What's a fake racist?' I asked. Looking out the window, David answered slowly, 'A fake racist is what the left would make of me because I don't go along with them.' It was a mocking self denigration, a protest against being misunderstood. The word fake seemed like an answer to some leftist who accused him of racism in order to shut him up about his own deprived childhood."

Technological Change and Government Attitude toward it

The people described in the book exhibit a complex mix of skepticism and guarded optimism toward technological change, shaped by their experiences of displacement and devaluation. Their relationship with government intervention in technology is similarly ambivalent—there is a desire for support, but also a deep-seated suspicion of federal overreach or misaligned priorities. The government, on the other hand, struggles to balance laissez-faire ideology with the need for targeted, forward-thinking policies that could help bridge the technological divide.

Summary

So, why do people in Pikeville vote for Donald Trump, even though in their own words, they're neither racist, nor particularly opposed to homosexuals or trans people, and feel the pain of the destruction of their environment? Arlie Russell Hochschild explains this with a deep sense of shame imposed on Pike County people through external narratives ("racist rednecks", "white trash hillbillies", "drug-addicted losers", "women who give birth early instead of pursuing education") and a longing for the pride of days gone by when Appalachian coal miners "kept America alight" during WWII. Technology replacing jobs, globalization leading corporations to move jobs abroad, speaking of rural whites as "deplorables" or "garbage" and "imposing" a coastal elite lifestyle onto rural communities is associated with the Democratic Party. Trump skillfully plays on this shame and promises to restore the pride of these rural communities. So, people vote for Trump, even if they don't trust that he will come through with his promises. But they hate a system that has put them in such a miserable position more than they distrust or dislike Trump.

An anecdote in the book by a Trump voter in 2016 and 2020 summarizes these feelings aptly:

"'First I thought, okay, Trump's my guy. Pro coal, pro life, pro gun, anti tax, and lovable, right? But then he picks fights with decent people. And at first, I thought, well, never mind, he's my guy. Then came January 6th, and I thought, that's it, I'm done. I'm done. But I hate seeing the Democrats gang up on him. Each time they do, I go back to him. I liked Mitch McConnell okay, but Trump felt betrayed by him and turned against him. I don't like that he hates Mitch, but I say, okay. He turns on Vice President Mike Pence. I don't like that he turns on Mike Pence, but I hate how the press beats Trump up, so I say, okay. Each time I'm done with Trump, the Dems bear down on him and I'm back to rescuing him. Then he talks about immigrants as poisoning the blood of America. I'm done with him again. But then he needs me. And I'm back. I'm miserable, but I'm married.'

After Trump's indictments, his legal expenses mounted, and now a portion of any donations to the Republican National Committee was directed to his personal lawyers. This bothered some of his supporters, but Peter said: 'It's like having a partner, good friend or relative sent to jail. You're not

going to like it, but you're going to go down to the county lockup and put money in his commissary account. A lot of local and state officials are in this boat, too, I think.'"

In summary, the promise of the "American Dream" is broken for the majority of the rural white working-class. And they're pursuing alternatives that may bring it back.

Eastern European Union

In recent years, Eastern Europe has visibly distanced itself from Western liberal narratives, reflecting a broader skepticism toward the values and institutions associated with the post-Cold War order. This divergence is marked by the increasing use of terms like **liberal fascism**[30] by Western-skeptic leaders, signaling a rejection of perceived overreach in progressive ideologies. At the heart of this shift is the embrace of **illiberal democracy**,[31] a concept championed by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán[32] and echoed across the region: *"The new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state. It does not deny foundational values of liberalism such as freedom, but it does not make this ideology the central element of state organization."*[33] Illiberal democracy emphasizes majoritarian rule while downplaying the liberal elements of democracy, such as the protection of minority rights and judicial independence, freedom of expression or the media.

A reoccurring term in the rhetoric of Eastern European leaders is **Sovereignism**. This ideology underscores the primacy of national self-determination, often in direct opposition to the perceived encroachments of globalization and Western cultural influence. The values these leaders uphold— **national identity, traditional family structures, and religious conservatism**—reflect a reaction to both external pressures and internal demographic challenges described below. This resistance is particularly sharp in rural areas, which often contrast starkly with the more liberal urban centers, mirroring a divide seen in many Western nations.[34]
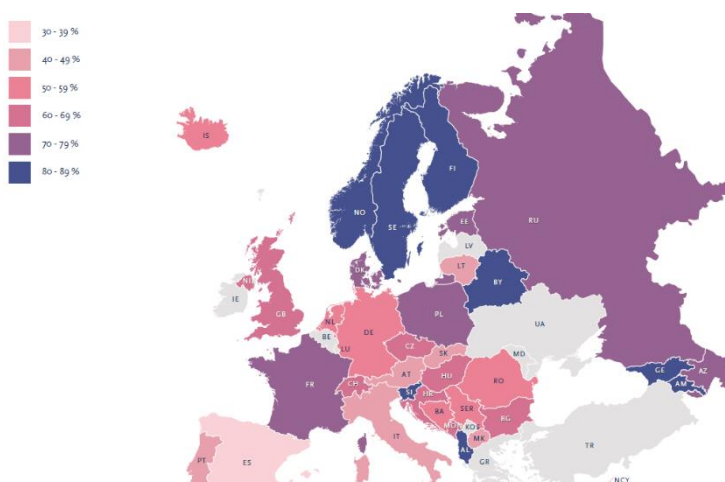
The amount of people willing to go to war for their country. Source: https://assets.pubpub.org/0k7l6nt3/51652084537989.pdf

To understand the origins of this turn, one has not look back too far in history: The fall of the Berlin Wall had once inspired hopes for a better, Western-style society, but for many, that model has failed to materialize.[35] While postmodernist philosophies in the West deemed **Nationalism** and **Religiousness** as undesirable and backwards, Eastern Europeans understand these as integral parts of their identity. Unlike in the West, where such values have been eroded by progressive thought,

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[30] https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20241205-georgian-pm-vows-to-eradicate-opposition-amid-pro-eu-protests

[31] https://books.google.it/books/about/The_Future_of_Freedom.html?id=YYeMFgrMJcwC

[32] https://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/viktor-orban-there-is-no-such-thing-as-liberal-democracy-only-liberal-non-democracy

[33] https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp

[34] Europe's widening rural–urban divide may make space for far right | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

[35] Explaining Eastern Europe: Imitation and Its Discontents | Journal of Democracy

Eastern Europeans see them as compatible with their interpretation of liberalism, which comes closer to its form during the 1848 "Spring of Nations".

Most issues are seen as important for individuals in the East as in Western Europe.[36] This includes some of the topics examined:

Globalization

Globalization is increasingly seen as a threat to national identity in Eastern Europe. Sovereignist rhetoric frames foreign influence—whether economic, cultural, or political of any couleur—as inherently harmful. This sentiment has fueled **Island mentality** and skepticism toward institutions like the European Union.

Climate Change...

...is acknowledged across Eastern Europe, but it is typically regarded as a secondary or even tertiary issue, particularly in the face of pressing national development goals and recent security concerns.

Demographic change...

...is the central issue driving Eastern Europe's counter-movement. Low birth rates and high emigration have created a sense of demographic decline, exacerbated by the refugee crisis. For many, these trends symbolize a loss of continuity and identity, fueling nationalist and anti-resemble the "**Great Replacement**" theory of the Western Alt-Right movement.[37]

Source: https://assets.pubpub.org/0k7l6nt3/51652084537989.pdf
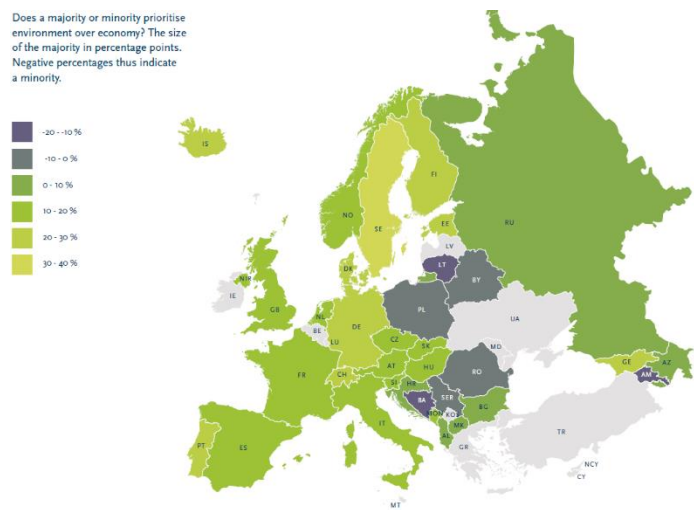
Family and Gender roles

The emphasis on traditional **family structures and gender roles** in Eastern Europe reflects a deeper anxiety about **identity loss**. The nuclear family is celebrated as a cornerstone of society, often in opposition to progressive views on gender and LGBTQ+ rights. This stance serves as an outlet for broader fears about cultural erosion.

At the heart of Eastern Europe's turn away from Western values lies a **profound fear of losing identity**. As Ivan Krastev puts it: "*this is the fear that there are not enough of us, that we're living in the world in which we are going to be replaced, in which our numbers are shrinking and in which we are going to lose*
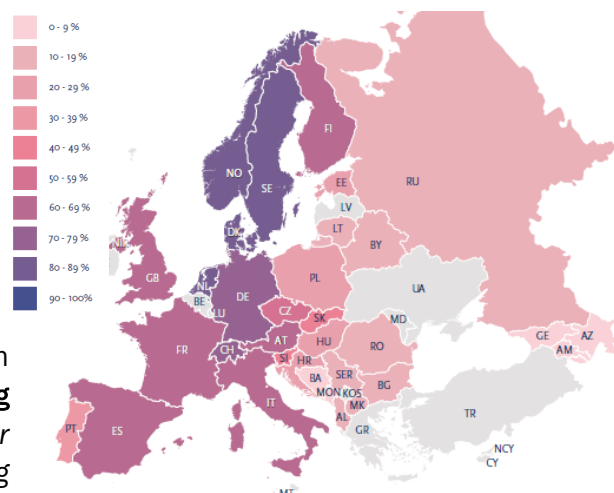
The amount of people who consider homosexuality justified Source: https://assets.pubpub.org/0k7l6nt3/51652084537989.pdf

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36 [Public Opinion in Europe 30 Years After the Fall of Communism | Pew Research Center](#)
37 https://hac.bard.edu/amor-mundi/-the-great-replacement-in-hungary-2022-08-06

our identity." In "The light that failed: Why the West is losing the fight for democracy".[38]

This anxiety is deeply rooted in demographic change, with nations grappling with population declines that threaten their cultural and economic futures more than in Western societies.[39] The trauma of mass emigration and low birth rates has left a void that sovereignist leaders fill with promises of national revival and protection.[40]

Human Rights

Eastern Europe shares the same intellectual heritage of Humanism and Enlightenment as the West, and basic views on **human rights** differ little. Nonetheless, the interpretation and prioritization of certain rights—particularly those related to identity and expression—can diverge significantly, reflecting local cultural and religious traditions.

Technological Change and Government Attitude toward it

Attitudes toward **technological change** in Eastern Europe are notably open and forward-looking. Unlike parts of the West, where skepticism about technology's impact on jobs, privacy, and societal cohesion is more common, Eastern Europeans often embrace technological innovation as a pathway to modernization and competitiveness.

Other

Finally, there is a lingering **fear of external domination**, reminiscent of Soviet-era control. The rejection of Western liberalism reflects not only cultural conservatism but also a desire to resist what is perceived as another form of being "ordered around" by external powers. This combination of demographic anxiety, cultural preservation, and resistance to globalization defines Eastern Europe's distinctive political trajectory in the modern era.

Argentina

Introduction

To understand today's societal and political conflicts, one needs to dive deeper into Argentina's dominant ideological streams that have shaped its modern landscape. Central among these are **Peronism**, **Kirchnerism**, and, more recently, the rise of **anarcho-capitalism**, each representing distinct visions for the nation's political, social, and economic future. These ideologies reflect Argentina's historical struggles with inequality, sovereignty, and governance, influencing the polarized debates seen today.

Peronism, with its foundation in populism and the "three flags" of economic independence, social justice, and political sovereignty, has long dominated Argentine politics. Its focus on empowering the working class and promoting national industry created a legacy of strong state intervention and resistance to foreign influence. Within this tradition, **Kirchnerism** emerged as a left-wing evolution, championing progressive social policies and welfare expansion while maintaining a nationalist stance. However, its critics highlight economic mismanagement, inflation, and unsustainable state dependency as enduring weaknesses. Contrasting sharply with these movements, **anarcho-capitalism**, embodied by Javier Milei's presidency, rejects state intervention altogether, advocating for minimal governance and a radical free-market approach. This ideological clash reflects the

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[38] The light that failed: Why the West is losing the fight for democracy | Request PDF
[39] Population and Climate Change: Consensus and Dissensus among Demographers - PMC
[40] Explaining Eastern Europe: Imitation and Its Discontents | Journal of Democracy

broader tensions in Argentina between collective welfare, nationalist populism, and libertarian individualism, shaping the nation's ongoing conflicts and debates.

Aspect	Peronism	Kirchnerism	Anarcho-Capitalism
Origin	Founded by Juan Perón in 1946	Emerged under Néstor & Cristina Kirchner (2003–2015)	Based on ideas from thinkers like Murray Rothbard (1970s); Javier Milei is a self-described anarcho-capitalist
Core Ideology	Populism, economic independence, social justice, sovereignty	Left-wing populism, progressive social policies, nationalism	Radical free-market ideology, no state intervention, voluntary agreements
Economic Focus	Self-sufficient national economy, industrialization	Welfare state, state intervention in economy	Unrestricted free-market, private property rights, no government regulations
Political Views	Anti-elitism, empowerment of working class, anti-foreign interference	Progressive nationalism, social welfare, state sovereignty	Total rejection of the state, individual autonomy, free contracts
Social Justice	Focus on reducing inequality and promoting workers' rights	Focus on social welfare, anti-poverty measures	Minimal to no focus on social justice, prioritizing individual freedom
Relationship to State	Advocates for a strong state to protect national interests	Proponent of state intervention to achieve social welfare	Advocates for abolishing the state, replacing it with private governance
Political Legacy	Dominant in Argentine politics, with factions across the political spectrum	A division of Peronism that added a more leftist populist tone	A niche but growing ideology, mostly outside mainstream political structures

Prosperity & Security

Among the main topics shaping today's discourse in Argentinian society are inflation, security and regulation. President Javier Milei's rise to power in Argentina is largely attributed to his direct approach in addressing pressing economic issues. As he campaigned for President, Argentina faced deep economic turmoil, with inflation surpassing 200% and 40% of the population in poverty. In October 2024, Argentina's annual inflation rate was about 193%, marking the sixth consecutive month of disinflation and the year's lowest rate, down from 209% in September. However, this is not a new problem: Also, historically, inflation has been an issue, it averaged 190.51% since 1944, with a record high of 20,262.8% (!) in March 1990.[41] During that time, people lost their savings and faced housing insecurity due to the devaluation of savings and incomes – riots and lootings followed.[42] So, Milei's promises are tapping into a long-standing collective memory of economic instability and disillusionment with traditional political solutions. He keeps blaming a corrupt "casta" of politicians, journalists, unionists, and academics, for these problems, advocating for a radical downsizing of government to address the crisis. This focus resonated with many people,

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[41] https://tradingeconomics.com/argentina/inflation-cpi#:~:text=Inflation%20Rate%20in%20Argentina%20averaged,de%20Estadística%20y%20Censos%20(INDEC)
[42] https://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/01/world/food-rioting-worsens-and-spreads-in-argentina.html

especially as traditional left-wing parties prioritized less pressing topics, which, while important, could not successfully address the immediate economic hardships faced by many Argentines.

He has vowed to abolish the Argentinean peso in favor of the U.S. dollar.[43] Argentines have used U.S. dollars for significant purchases and long-term financial planning, viewing it as a safeguard against the peso's volatility. However, the previous government has intermittently imposed restrictions on purchasing U.S. dollars to protect foreign reserves, complicating access to the currency.[44]

Argentina's labor market has been characterized by significant challenges, including high unemployment rates and a substantial informal employment sector. In 2023, approximately 50% of the employed population was engaged in informal employment[45], lacking formal contracts and job security.

Milei's policy attract especially young male voters: "We had a society that talks all the time about rights, and they didn't have any rights," he remarked, highlighting the disconnection between political discourse and lived experience.[46]

Despite his promises, Economic disparities have led to average salaries falling below the poverty line, contributing to a deeply divided society. In the first six months of Milei's presidency, the poverty rate surged from nearly 42% to 53%, with extreme poverty rising from 11.9% to 18.1%.

Globalization

Javier Milei often invokes Argentina's "Golden Age," when it was a global economic power before World War I, thriving as a major grain and meat exporter and a top destination for European migrants.[47] However, the past century has been marked by cycles of modest growth and severe economic crises. While Argentina still exports agricultural products like wheat, beef, and soy, its economy is burdened by over $400 billion in sovereign debt[48], one of Latin America's largest. Repeated defaults, including a major one in 2001 after an International Monetary Fund (IMF) intervention, highlight deep structural issues.[49]

Climate Change

President Javier Milei's dismissal of climate change as a "socialist hoax" contrasts sharply with the views of the Argentine populace. A 2023 survey revealed that 85% of Argentinians believe climate change affects their daily lives, and 83% support stricter government measures to promote climate-friendly behavior.[50]

This divergence highlights a broader trend: voters often prioritize immediate concerns, such as inflation and employment, over other issues. **Consequently, they may support candidates like Milei for their economic policies, even if they disagree with other aspects of his political agenda.** This suggests that electoral decisions are increasingly driven by pressing needs rather than comprehensive ideological alignment. **This rather apolitical, issue-based, or pragmatic voting** might

[43] https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2024/12/09/javier-milei-wages-war-on-argentinas-government
[44] https://finance.yahoo.com/news/argentina-restricts-us-dollar-purchases-090009194.html
[45] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1037255/informal-employment-share-argentina/
[46] https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2024/12/09/javier-milei-wages-war-on-argentinas-government
[47] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_history_of_Argentina
[48] https://money.usnews.com/investing/news/articles/2023-12-13/argentinas-400-billion-debt-bomb-threatens-default-number-10
[49] https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/argentinas-struggle-stability
[50] https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2023-304-8-argentinians-in-10-demand-stricter-climate-policies-eib-survey-reveals

seem strange to Western liberal voters, as **value-based voting** is a privilege that emerges in relatively stable economic environments. Stability—whether at the national level or within certain socio-economic classes— could allow voters to prioritize broader principles like social justice, climate action, or human rights. In contrast, where urgent survival issues such as security, unemployment, or poverty dominate daily life, voters might more likely focus on candidates offering immediate, tangible solutions, regardless of alignment with their full ideological values.

Conclusion

Argentina's societal and political conflicts reflect a tension between deeply rooted ideological streams and immediate, survival-driven priorities. Peronism, Kirchnerism, and Milei's anarcho-capitalism exemplify this divide, offering highly contrasting visions of governance. However, the rise of Javier Milei underscores a broader trend of pragmatic, issue-based voting that prioritizes urgent needs—such as economic stability, inflation control, and job security—over comprehensive ideological alignment.

This shift, particularly visible among disillusioned young voters, highlights a departure from traditional Western liberal value-based voting. Argentina's turbulent history of economic crises, from hyperinflation to debt defaults, has created a populace that demands immediate, tangible solutions rather than abstract ideals.

India

Introduction

Understanding the Indian market requires moving beyond traditional right vs left Western thinking to appreciate the complex interplay of cultural traditions, strong religious identities, and deeply rooted caste systems that shape behavior. While Indians share universal aspirations with people around the world, such as economic opportunity, a positive outlook for the future, and safety and security for basic needs, the expression and discussion of the following topics differ significantly from Western debate due to the unique cultural context of India.

Globalization

India's relationship with globalization reflects the common challenge of balancing the winners and losers that many countries face. Survey data indicates that 71% of Indians view international trade positively, but there is a significant disparity between those with higher or lower education levels.[51] This positive orientation toward international commerce has served India well, contributing to steady GDP growth and increasing integration with global markets over the past decade.

However, the distribution of globalization's benefits has been markedly uneven, creating a shift in concerns for Indians. Current data reveals that the top 1% of India's population commands 23% of all income and controls 40% of the nation's wealth—the highest concentration of wealth since 1922.[52] This rising inequality has begun to influence political outcomes, as evidenced by recent election results where economic concerns took precedence over other issues that have dominated previously, particularly Modi's focus on Hindu traditionalism and religious identity.[53] It seems as though there is a growing number of Indians that are losing from globalization and are urging a more equitable distribution of its benefits.

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[51] How Indians Feel About Political, Economic and Social Issues | Pew Research Center
[52] The political economy of populism in India | Feature from King's College London
[53] In Modi's stronghold, voters chose jobs over new Hindu temple | Reuters

Climate change

The discussion of climate change in India contrasts sharply with Western perspectives, emphasizing practical responses over ideological stances. While 52% of Indians report being personally affected by environmental changes—among the highest globally[54]—this awareness centers on immediate challenges rather than the less tangible issue of CO_2e emissions. Climate protection efforts focus primarily on adaptation strategies, such as improving irrigation, securing drinking water access, and providing farmer relief, rather than emissions reduction.[55]

Demographic change

India's demographic landscape is undergoing significant shifts, with population growth moderating since 1990 despite remaining robust. A notable aspect is that three-quarters of the population belongs to historically disadvantaged classes, highlighting persistent social stratification.[56] The country faces complex migration dynamics as well: 64% of Indians view emigration as problematic, with 49% considering it a very serious issue. Regarding immigration, the population shows restrictive preferences, with 29% favoring reduced immigration levels—reflecting concerns about resource allocation and social integration.[57]

Family and gender roles

Family dynamics in India reflect complex attitudes toward gender roles, with traditional values remaining influential despite some modernization. While 54% support both spouses earning income, 43% still view men as primary breadwinners. Traditional values persist strongly, with 64% of Indians—including 61% of women—believing wives must obey husbands. Views vary significantly by religion, education, and region: Sikhs and Buddhists generally favor more egalitarian roles, while Muslim communities often maintain more traditional perspectives. Urban, educated Indians typically hold more progressive views, though regional differences remain pronounced.[58]

Human rights

India presents a complex portrait of human rights and democratic values, with seemingly contradictory attitudes coexisting. While 77% express satisfaction with democracy—higher than any European nation[59]—85% simultaneously show support for authoritarian systems[60]. Religious tolerance is widely considered fundamental to Indian identity, yet interreligious tensions persist.[61] Recent political developments highlight this complexity, with anti-caste movements gaining prominence while concerns grow about media freedom and civil society restrictions.[62]

Technological change and government attitude toward it

India's approach to technological advancement is characterized by ambitious government-led digital transformation initiatives, with "India Stack" serving as a cornerstone of this strategy. This comprehensive API framework, which is the largest in the world, enables the delivery of digital

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[54] 2023-11-29-climate-literacy-AZ.pdf
[55] India: Climate change not an issue in the election campaign – DW – 15.05.2024
[56] Population growth and religious composition in India | Pew Research Center
[57] How Indians Feel About Political, Economic and Social Issues | Pew Research Center
[58] Gender roles in the family in India | Pew Research Center
[59] https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/18/satisfaction-with-democracy-has-declined-in-recent-years-in-high-income-nations/
[60] https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/02/28/who-likes-authoritarianism-and-how-do-they-want-to-change-their-government/
[61] https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/06/29/religion-in-india-tolerance-and-segregation/
[62] 'In India, a lower caste revolution is underway'

services across government and private sectors, promoting paperless, cashless transactions and digital identity verification.[63] The government has demonstrated a strong commitment to technological integration, viewing it as fundamental to India's development trajectory and economic modernization.[64]

Civic and cultural values

Indian identity is defined more by civic and cultural values than by religious or linguistic markers. This is evidenced by how Indians prioritize certain characteristics as essential to being "truly Indian": 88% view respecting elders as crucial, while significantly fewer emphasize religious identity (57% for being Hindu) or language ability (56% for speaking Hindi). Interestingly, supporting India's cricket team is considered equally important as speaking Hindi, highlighting how shared cultural experiences contribute to national identity.[65]

Conclusion

Indian universal aspirations are expressed through distinct cultural and religious frameworks. The nation's complexity demands nuanced understanding that goes beyond traditional Western perspectives, recognizing that topics like progress, democracy, and identity are filtered through unique social structures and cultural values. This requires a deeper appreciation of how religion, tradition, and modernization collectively influence the expression of these fundamental human aspirations.

South Africa

When talking about South Africa's narratives, it is crucial to understand that there are many different cultures and mindsets coexisting within this country. It is a multilingual nation with 12 official languages, including Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, and English, each one **with different cultural perspectives and traditions**[66]. Universal rights to vote were introduced 30 years ago, following decades of apartheid, a system of institutionalized racial segregation enforced by the National Party starting in 1948. After widespread activism led by the African National Congress (ANC) and other groups, apartheid laws were repealed in the mid-1980s, **culminating in the first universal elections in 1994.** Since then, South Africa has been a liberal democracy with representation for all racial groups, structured as a parliamentary republic with nine provinces. Despite its progress, South Africa remains one of the most unequal countries globally, with a Gini coefficient of 63%, reflecting high economic disparities[67].

South Africa's population is demographically and culturally diverse, with 81.4% black, 8.2% colored, 7.3% white, 2.7% Indian or Asian, and 0.4% other.[68] While these categories are no longer legally enforced, they remain socially and statistically relevant. **There are two dominant cultural mindsets coexisting:** "Western" or also Afrikaans culture, often associated with those speaking that language and present in international contexts, is primarily influenced by Dutch, German and French settlers. In comparison, it is rather leaning to individualism, highlighting values such as self-discipline or

63 Emerging Technology is Transforming Governance in India
64 Modi government committed to pursue ongoing reforms, with cutting-edge technology and transparency: Nirmala Sitharaman | India News - Times of India
65 https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/06/29/nationalism-and-politics/
66 https://www.concourt.org.za/images/phocadownload/the_text/english-2013.pdf
67 https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=1W-ZA&most_recent_value_desc=true
68 https://census.statssa.gov.za/assets/documents/2022/P03014_Census_2022_Statistical_Release.pdf

personal agency[69],[70]. Fewer than half of the Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers are white.[71] In contrast, African culture, embraced by the majority, emphasizes communalism. In Zulu culture, e.g., there is a rather flexible perception of time[72]. It reflects a relationship-based approach to trust[73], where nurturing strong personal connections is fundamental to achieving successful business outcomes.[74],[75]

Globalization

South Africa is often seen as a dominant leader on the African continent, leveraging its post-apartheid vision of an 'African Renaissance'. However, its perceived hegemonic role is undermined by material weaknesses and inconsistent foreign policy successes, leaving Pretoria with symbolic leadership positions in international forums.[76] Internationally, South Africa is a member of BRICS+, the African Union, and the G20, highlighting its role in global and regional geopolitics: *„South Africa has used its economic and political role to position itself as non-aligned. In other words, it does not want to be forced to choose between China and the United States, or between the East and the West."*[77] Apart from Western influences, there is also Russian influence, which has manifested through financial contributions. This association has raised concerns about the impact of foreign funds on South Africa's political decisions and its diplomatic positions.[78] Non-Western-liberal viewpoints in South Africa often regard globalization with skepticism, viewing it as a mechanism that perpetuates Western dominance and economic exploitation. There's a strong emphasis on economic sovereignty, advocating for protectionist policies to shield domestic industries and promote self-reliance – the party Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) are just one example to promote this.

Climate change

Though there is growing awareness about climate change in South Africa, the reality becomes more complex when it comes to implementing concrete transitions. 80% of its power comes from coal.[79] This heavy reliance on coal presents significant economic and social challenges in shifting to renewable energy. While renewable projects are being introduced as part of climate commitments, the immediate effects of coal plant closures, such as job losses, poverty, and social unrest, reveal the deep (short- and mid-term) trade-offs involved. Adding to these challenges, South Africa's persistent power outages, known as load-shedding, are deeply intertwined with corruption and mismanagement within Eskom, the state-owned electricity utility, **not necessarily generating trust within the society**.[80] It is the same company, that wants to build renewable energy sources.

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[69]   https://www.classace.io/answers/compare-and-contrast-the-afrikaans-and-zulu-cultural-practices-traditions-and-values-how-do-these-cultural-aspects-shape-their-identities-and-perspectives#

[70] https://erinmeyer.com

[71] https://www.southafrica.net/za/en/travel/article/the-rich-and-diverse-afrikaans-culture

[72] https://erinmeyer.com

[73] ibid.

[74] https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-47584-4_2

[75]https://www.studocu.com/en-za/document/south-african-college-of-applied-psychology/psychology/comparisons-between-the-african-and-western-perspectives-on-social-psychology/17122087

[76] https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/ip.2014.47

[77] Article from *Cedric de Coning*: **South Africa's position in a changing global order** https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/south-africas-position-in-a-changing-global-order/

[78]   https://www.voanews.com/a/south-africa-s-anc-received-big-donation-from-russian-oligarch-linked-firm-/6994504.html

[79] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-59135169

[80] https://cde.org.za/bad-policy-choices-poor-governance-weak-leadership-are-wrecking-sas-economy/

While the closure of coal power plants is necessary to address climate change, it has profound short- and mid-term social and economic consequences for local communities. Residents, such as those in Komati[81], feel abandoned by the government, as promises of job creation and retraining through renewable energy projects remain unfulfilled. This has led to unemployment, poverty, and even family disintegration, as described here in this interview in the case of <u>Dumisani Mpungose</u>, whose life was upended by the plant's closure. The example shows: a lot of people do not care about the climate change, especially if their livelihoods and well-being are immediately affected by the closure of a coal plant. Public concern about climate change in South Africa has been relatively low compared to other nations, with only 13% of respondents expressing worry about the issue as of January 2024.[82] "Mostly they are angry," said party campaign worker Poppy Vilakazi in an interview with Reuters.[83]

Demographic change

In South Africa, the term "demographic change" is not really a topic, as the population remains predominantly young (28.8% under the age of 14; 65.2% between 15 and 64; and only 6% aged 65 and older (2019 estimates[84]); The fertility rate is 2.41 children per woman.[85]). Within this demographic structure, there are **stark socioeconomic differences** that define people's experiences and opportunities far more than age or other demographic factors. Wealth disparities, access to education, and geographic divides play a more critical role in shaping the country's demographic landscape.
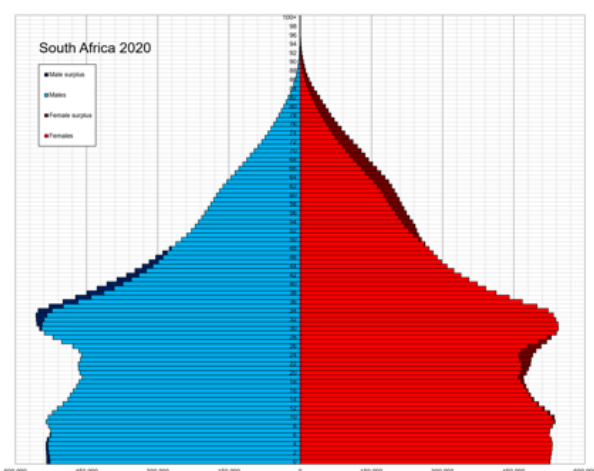
With 32%, the level of unemployment is very high.[86] In 2023, approximately 7.8 million people were employed in the informal sector, reflecting a significant reliance on informal employment due to limited formal job opportunities.[87] Western concepts like an employee-centered culture, which prioritize individual development and well-being, may not hold the same prominence and should be explored further in the conversations.

Gender Roles and Family

Polygamy is legal under certain circumstances in South Africa. In many African cultural contexts, traditional family structures often include men with multiple wives and large numbers of children, though these men may not actively participate in all aspects of their children's lives. Even former President Jacob Zuma currently has four legally-recognized wives. Polygamous marriages in South Africa are recognized under customary law, where courts consider the interests of all parties and may impose conditions to validate such unions. However, polygamy is not permitted under the Marriage Act or the Civil Union Act.

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[81] https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/south-africas-anc-walks-political-tightrope-over-coal-plant-shutdowns-2024-05-16/
[82] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1266564/share-of-south-africans-worried-about-climate-change/
[83] https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/south-africas-anc-walks-political-tightrope-over-coal-plant-shutdowns-2024-05-16/
[84] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_South_Africa
[85] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1069710/fertility-rate-south-africa-historical/
[86] https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/south-africas-unemployment-rate-falls-321-q3-2024-11-12/
[87] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1296024/number-of-informal-sector-employees-in-south-africa/

Same-sex marriages and partnerships were legalized under the Civil Union Act in 2006. Despite these legal advancements, the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in South Africa often diverge from that. According to the 'Progressive Prudes' survey of attitudes towards homosexuality and gender non-conformity in South Africa, '[a] large majority (about 7 out of 10 South Africans) feel strongly that homosexual sex and breaking gender dressing norms is simply "wrong" and "disgusting"'[88]. While urban regions may show greater tolerance and acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, in rural and traditional settings, open expressions of homosexuality are often met with significant resistance.

Gender roles remain deeply intertwined with economic and infrastructural realities, rather than being purely value-based. For example, limited access to reliable energy infrastructure forces girls to stay home and perform household tasks, like laundry, instead of attending school, perpetuating educational and economic disparities.

Human rights

Human rights are interpreted through both Western liberal and African communitarian lenses, leading to distinct perspectives. The African communitarian perspective, deeply rooted in the philosophy of **ubuntu**, prioritizes communal relationships and collective well-being. Ubuntu, encapsulated by the phrase "I am because we are," or "a person is a person through other persons" underscores interconnectedness and mutual respect, suggesting that individual rights are realized through community. This viewpoint can sometimes conflict with Western notions of individualism, as it places communal harmony above personal autonomy. [89,90]

Technological change and government attitude toward it

Global corporations have introduced a wide array of Western products and technologies to South Africa, making them accessible to segments of the population. However, stark socioeconomic disparities hinder uniform access across the country. For instance, only about 10% of South African households have internet access (2021)[91]. Consequently, acceptance and utilization of technology are uneven. Moreover, the legacy of colonialism continues to influence perceptions of science and technology in South Africa. Modern Western science, deeply intertwined with colonialism, often conflicts with African cultural values. The Western emphasis on individual autonomy and rights may clash with African communitarian ethics, which prioritize collective decision-making and community interests. This divergence can impact practices such as informed consent in biomedical research, where Western ethical principles may not align seamlessly with African communal norms.[92]

Prosperity

The concept of prosperity varies significantly between cultural contexts. In the West, it often involves building long-term assets, establishing a stable career, and planning for the future. In contrast, in South Africa, especially in the above-mentioned African culture groups, perceptions of prosperity are frequently focused on short-term needs and immediate gratification, driven by a survival-oriented mindset. This contrast could create challenges for individuals navigating both worlds, as they are often torn between cultural expectations rooted in African cultural values and the Western emphasis on long-term planning and career development.

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[88] https://www.ibanet.org/article/854B8E51-E931-403D-BDC3-1386B30F9591
[89] https://www.athensjournals.gr/law/2022-8-2-2-Nicolaides.pdf
[90] https://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/ahrlj/v11n2/11.pdf
[91] https://www.borgenmagazine.com/technology-access-in-south-africa/
[92] https://www.citizen.co.za/news/opinion/1science-must-fall-why-it-still-needs-to-be-decolonised/

The link from prosperity to politics: The loyalty to parties like the ANC and now also the MK Party, stems from a deep sense of gratitude towards them, because they are seen as the liberators from colonialism and apartheid. Even 30 years after the end of apartheid, many fear that *not* supporting these parties could lead to a return of white-dominated rule. The government benefits from the widespread poverty of many of their voters (and thus doesn't care to resolve it) because impoverished people consistently support them. Despite unfulfilled promises, these parties continue to secure votes, also largely because South Africa's high inequality leaves many without access to reliable information sources like radio or TV. As a result, voters often make uninformed choices, perpetuating the cycle of support for the ruling parties.

Conclusion

Many people in South Africa embrace African communitarian values that emphasize collective well-being over the Western focus on personal autonomy. Rooted in the philosophy of *ubuntu*, which underscores interconnectedness and mutual respect, this worldview resonates with communities striving to preserve traditional norms while addressing the lingering impacts of colonialism. Inequality and poverty further shape a survival-oriented mindset that prioritizes immediate needs over the long-term strategies often associated with Western ideals of prosperity and governance. Politically, loyalty to liberation-era parties like the ANC stems from gratitude and fear of regression, rather than a shift toward liberal ideologies. These dynamics collectively foster a preference for cultural authenticity, economic sovereignty, and community-focused solutions over Western-liberal paradigms.

Book recommendations to dive deeper into this topic: Architects of Poverty.

Podcast recommendation: Jordan B. Peterson, Sacrificing the Poor to NOT Save the Planet.