IPPR

ALIEN NATION?

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE WHITE WORKING CLASS AND DISENGAGEMENT IN BRITAIN

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Institute for Public Policy Research

ABOUT IPPR

IPPR, the Institute for Public Policy Research, is the UK's leading progressive thinktank. We are an independent charitable organisation with more than 40 staff members, paid interns and visiting fellows. Our main office is in London, with IPPR North, IPPR's dedicated thinktank for the North of England, operating out of offices in Newcastle and Manchester.

The purpose of our work is to conduct and publish the results of research into and promote public education in the economic, social and political sciences, and in science and technology, including the effect of moral, social, political and scientific factors on public policy and on the living standards of all sections of the community.

IDEAS to
CHANGE BRITAIN

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INTRODUCTION

Until recently, class was considered an increasingly outmoded way of understanding the organisation of British society. Rather than the 'working classes', politicians spoke about the 'socially excluded' or 'the hardest to reach'. Today, class is back on the political agenda, largely due to the debates taking place about the political disengagement of various groups in British society, particularly the white working class.

The political left is divided on how best to approach this phenomenon. Some commentators have called for Labour to stop worrying about the need to re-engage working-class voters, as they 'are no longer numerically, or ideologically, the Labour party's 'base'; instead it is 'the professional middle classes, together with the young, and black and minority ethnic voters' who need to be engaged with (McTernan 2014). Others, however, have warned that a Labour party that the working class do not want to vote for lacks legitimacy (Mann 2014, Rawlinson 2013).

For many on the right, the phenomenon is seen to offer an opportunity to re-engage with groups who used to vote Conservative (particularly during the Thatcher era), but who have drifted away and may now be attracted by the ideology of Ukip and other right-wing parties. In an effort to position themselves as supporters of 'hard-working people' in places like Essex and regions outside of the South East, some within the Conservative party have advocated a strategy of 'blue-collar modernisation' to appeal to working-class voters (Skelton 2013).

These are critical debates which look set to transform the national electoral landscape in the future. However, re-engaging the white working class – both politically and more broadly – will require more than a clever 'retail offer' designed to appeal to this section of the electorate in the short-term. In fact, this approach is likely to further entrench the problem.

This collection aims to move beyond immediate questions of electoral strategy and sketch out a more robust, long-term approach to addressing white working-class alienation. In this introduction we start by exploring the different ways in which this group has been defined, and find that many of these definitions fall short of capturing the complexities of modern British society. We then look at issues of disaffection and alienation – two terms regularly applied to the working class, the meanings of which range widely from 'propensity to vote' to far more intangible ideas about levels of aspiration and hopes for the future. We also highlight some of the findings of new polling, conducted by YouGov on behalf of IPPR, which seeks a better understanding of contemporary white working-class attitudes and experiences in the UK.[1]

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1   YouGov polled a representative sample of 3,514 British adults on behalf of IPPR in September 2014, asking a broad range of questions about their views on the economic and financial situation of their own households and of the country as a whole, political representation in Britain, and recent immigration trends. In our analysis, we focused particularly on 'white working class' respondents, who we defined as those with a white British background who fell into the 'C2DE' occupational category. While this is, as we discuss in the introduction, an imperfect proxy, the results for this group mapped almost identically on to those of respondents who self-identified as white working-class.

Who are the 'white working class' in Britain?

Britain has always been a nation obsessed by class. However, whereas in the past people tended to 'know their place', class hierarchies have now become much harder to define. The results of polls that ask people to identify their class clearly reflect this fact: they vary widely, with between one-in-six and half of all Britons self-identifying as working class.

The term 'working class' has been defined according to a number of different types of criteria. First, there are those based on the structure of the labour market, in line with sociological definitions advanced by John Goldthorpe and others. Goldthorpe's analysis sorted society into classes based on occupational markers, and now forms the basis for the UK's official National Statistics Socio-economic Classification scheme. According to these definitions, the working classes are those who fit into the 'C2' and 'D' and 'E' occupational markers. These groupings encompass skilled and unskilled manual workers and the unemployed (from all ethnicities).

However, by the Office for National Statistics' own account, 'changes in the nature and structure of both industry and occupations have rendered this distinction (between manual and non-manual occupations) outmoded and misleading' (ONS 2010). This point is illustrated by the fact that, in 1964, half of the workforce was engaged in manual work, and 70 per cent of voters had no formal qualifications, but by 1997, over a third of the workforce was in what would be classified as a professional, middle-class job (Cooke 2011). More recently, however, there has been growth not in the professional or managerial occupations that define the middle classes, but largely in lower-level service-sector employment.

Goldthorpe's approach has been criticised for being too narrowly focused on occupation, and for being overly male-centric because it analysed the position in the class structure of only the heads of households, despite rises in the number of dual-earner families as more women entered the workforce (Cooke 2011). Polling conducted by IPPR which investigates white working-class identity affirms the fact that occupational markers are not always a good guide to the way that people view themselves. Twenty-eight per cent of the respondents in our sample who were categorised as being in the 'A', 'B', or 'C1' occupational classes ('ABC1', encompassing those in professional or managerial roles) self-identified as belonging to the working class, and 33 per cent of those in the 'C2DE' category considered themselves middle class.
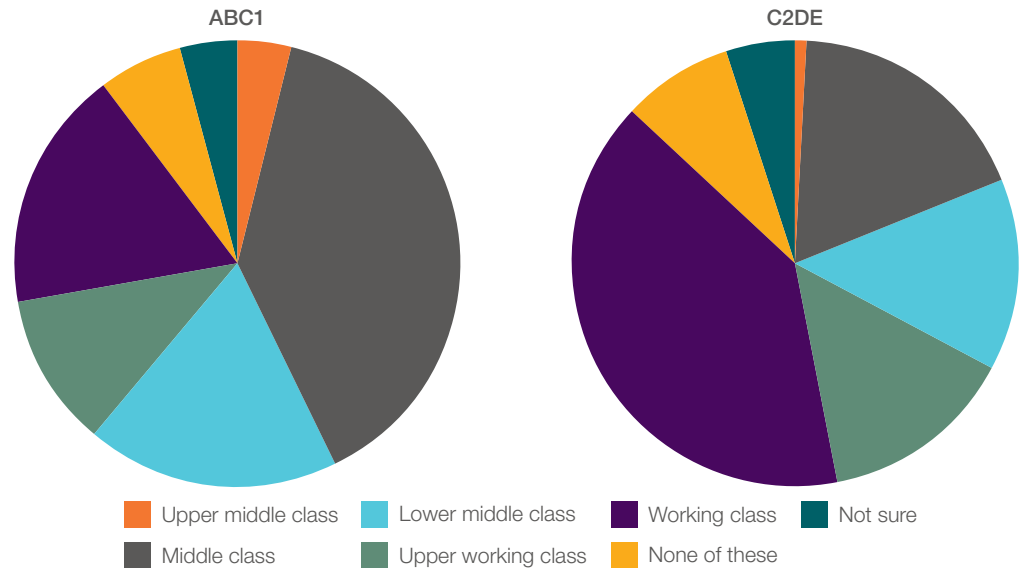
In recent years there have been a number of experiments with alternative categorisation, with the aim of providing a more contemporary account of the British labour market. The most ambitious of these was the BBC's Great British Class Survey, a poll of 160,000 people which divided British society into seven categories: the elite, the established middle class, the technical middle class, new affluent workers, the traditional working class, emergent service workers, and the 'precariat' (BBC 2013). The latter group was described as 'having insecure labour relations, insecure social income (without non-wage benefits or community support), and insecure occupational identity' (ibid).

A second cluster of definitions has focused on where people live – with housing estates used as an identifier (Pearce and Milne 2010). Rogaly and Taylor (2011) explore the role of estates in building class identities, and suggest that the idea of 'positional suffering' is essential to working-class identities. Other studies, such as Open Society Foundations' research in Higher Blackley, Manchester (OSF 2014), and the National Community Forum's work (Garner et al 2009) on sources of resentment, also pinpoint estates – particularly those on the outskirts of cities where migration has been low – as contemporary hubs of white working-class identity.

Figure A.1
Occupational class versus class self-identification
Class self-identification (%) among ABC1 and C2DE respondents

ABC1   C2DE

| ■ (orange) Upper middle class | ■ (light blue) Lower middle class | ■ (purple) Working class | ■ (dark teal) Not sure |
| ■ (grey) Middle class | ■ (green) Upper working class | ■ (yellow) None of these | |

Source: IPPR/YouGov survey
Note: total sample size for ABC1 was 2,301, and for C2DE, 1,213.

However, there are challenges to geographic definitions such as these. Particularly in London, the traditional identification of the white working class with the inner city has broken down (Kaufmann 2014), as many white working-class people have moved to the suburbs and other parts of the South East. Likewise, areas traditionally regarded as middle-class, such as seaside towns, are taking on characteristics traditionally associated with the urban working class (CSJ 2013).

A third set of definitions suggest that work, income and place are less important than culture in determining class. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) argues that classes are not real, objectively constituted groups, but rather are formed in terms of social practices. David Cannadine (2000) describes class in Britain as being determined by 'unique informal hierarchies relating to ancestry, accent, deportment, mode of dress, patterns of recreation, type of housing and style of life'. Tastes, lifestyles and consumption patterns sit at the heart of this account of class. But here too there is no clear consensus on whether Britain's class structure has become more entrenched, or whether culture has smoothed out some of the differences. For example, access to higher education and homeownership, two of the markers of culturally-defined middle-class identity, have both expanded significantly in recent decades.

A fourth type of definition relates to the role of ethnicity and immigration in forming class identity – an increasingly central one as Britain becomes more ethnically diverse. Experts such as Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin have put forward the theory that white working-class identity increasingly revolves around a narrative of being left behind in favour of other ethnic and non-native groups (Ford and Goodwin 2014). Many formerly white working-class areas have been transformed by immigration, and debates about entitlement have played out most divisively in these areas – largely because they are where levels of competition for resources (particularly in housing) have been most intense (Blake et al 2008).

However, classifying the white working class solely in terms of their heightened concerns about immigration or hostility to ethnic diversity is overly simplistic, as Phoebe Griffith discusses in chapter 1 of this collection. Studies such as Open Society Foundations' (OSF's) reports on Higher Blackley (OSF 2014) and Waltham Forest in London (Beider 2014 forthcoming) show that white working-class attitudes to race are as nuanced as those of other socio-economic groups. Survey data shows that generational differences tend to be more significant than class, and that concerns about migration are increasingly shared across different ethnic groups. It was the cross-class nature of many of these concerns that made Ukip's message about reducing immigration so resonant in the run-up to the May 2014 local elections.

Polling conducted for this report tested this theory by asking respondents whether they would support the reduction of immigration, even if doing so would be bad for Britain's economy. A staggering 60 per cent of white working-class respondents agreed with this statement. However, this was not hugely out of line with the views of the general population: 47 per cent of all middle-class respondents and 51 per cent of all respondents shared this view.

Table A.1
Responses to the question, 'Which, if either, of the following comes closest to your view?'

	Total	White working class	Middle class
I'd support reducing immigration even if it was bad for Britain's economy	51%	60%	47%
I'd rather keep current levels of immigration because reducing them would be bad for Britain's economy	21%	15%	25%
Neither	18%	16%	20%
Don't know	9%	9%	9%
n	3,514	1,114	2,301

Source: IPPR/YouGov

White working-class disaffection

At a basic level, political disaffection can be measured by electoral turn-out. While this has declined across most groups in recent decades, some of the sharpest disparities have been between different socio-economic groups. In the 1987 general election there was only a four-point gap in the turnout rate between those in the highest and lowest income groups; by 2010 this had jumped to 23 points (Birch et al 2013). Levels of political participation are also markedly lower among white working-class groups than among those of other ethnicities (Heath et al 2013).

Previous IPPR reports have suggested that declining political participation is a cause as well as a consequence of inequality. As argued by Glenn Gottfried in chapter 2, unequal electoral turnout matters because it reduces incentives for governments to respond to the interests of groups that do not vote. It thus threatens a central claim of democracy – that every citizen's preference, regardless of their status, should count equally.

IPPR's analysis of the 2010 spending review demonstrated that voters received preferential treatment: those who did not vote in the 2010 general election faced cuts equivalent to 20 per cent of their annual household income; those who did vote faced cuts worth 12 per cent of their household income. These cuts have disproportionately affected the young and the poor – the groups that vote with

least frequency (Birch et al 2013). In other words, political disaffection leads to a 'vicious cycle' of disadvantage in which groups that disengage from politics have their interests considered less by policymakers. And as policy becomes less responsive to their interests, more and more decide that politics are immaterial to their lives.

However, as argued in the Open Society Foundations' study of Higher Blackley in Manchester, political disaffection is a symptom of alienation from a wider set of actors.

> *'What is clear is the cultural divide between the socially liberal world of individuals and institutions in positions of power – termed the 'do-gooders' – and many white working class communities.'*
> OSF 2014

It goes beyond political processes to encompass government, public bodies and public-sector providers, as well as the broader institutions of civic life (sometimes referred to as the 'other' democracy).[2] This alienation is driven by both a sense of abandonment and a sense of not being listened to, and is explored in greater depth by Rick Muir in chapter 3.

'Alienation' also encompasses low levels of aspiration and confidence in the future. Poor educational attainment among the white working class is considered a reflection of this form of deeper disaffection.[3] Recent analysis has looked at this phenomenon by comparing the educational outcomes of white and non-white working class groups. For example, Professor Steve Strand has found that white pupils from low socio-economic status backgrounds are today the lowest attaining group (Strand 2014).

The level of educational underperformance among white working-class children is shocking, but not new. White British children who are eligible for free school meals (FSM)[4] have consistently been the lowest-performing group of young people (DfE 2012),[5] and the performance gap between them and those of the same ethnicity who are not eligible for FSM is wide and entrenched, even from their earliest years (DfE 2013 and 2014).

Even by the age of five, only 32 per cent of white British children who are on FSM achieve the expected benchmark,[6] compared to 56 per cent of white British children who are not on FSM (DfE 2013). By 16 the gap has widened – 32.3 per cent of children on FSM achieve five A*–C-grade GCSEs, compared to 64.5 per cent of white British children not on FSM. This problem is not confined to white working-class boys: girls outperform boys in all ethnic groups, but white working-class girls remain the lowest performing group within their gender (DfE 2014).

Similarly, recent changes in the labour market have been particularly challenging for white working-class young people. Whereas their parents or grandparents may not have needed to succeed in education to secure a life-long job in a local factory or industry, secure jobs are increasingly being replaced with high-skilled, technical

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2   See Sloam J (2013) 'The Outraged Young: How Young Europeans Are Reshaping the Political Landscape', *Political Insight* 4(1): 4–7

3   http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/142/14202.htm

4   Receipt of FSM is the existing measure for defining 'disadvantage' in the education sector, and the measure that sits behind all references to 'working class' in this essay. It is by no means a perfect proxy, as is explored elsewhere in this collection, but is the best that we have in terms of consistent, comprehensive performance data.

5   White British children eligible for FSM have had the greatest underperformance among all numerically significant groups since 2006, with the only exceptions being smaller white sub-groups like Romany Gypsy or Irish traveller, data on whom is limited.

6   That is, achieved or exceeded the expected standard in all 17 'early learning goals' in early years foundation stage profile teacher assessments.

jobs which require young people to have significant prior educational achievement. The poll conducted for this report found that extremely high numbers of people – when asked, 'To what extent do you think a person's level of education affects his or her opportunities in Britain today?' – thought that level of education *does* affect opportunities – 80 per cent of white working class and 85 per cent of middle class respondents believed this.

What are the drivers of disaffection?

Explanations for white working-class disaffection broadly fall into political, cultural and economic interpretations. Political explanations place the burden of responsibility on elites. Electoral tacticians have increasingly focused on a middle-class, aspirational section of society in the belief that they are more likely to deliver electoral victory. At the same time, politics has become more professionalised and distant, conducted by people 'who [don't] look like you and [don't] act like you'.[7] As parties have invested themselves in elitist strategies, they have sacrificed grassroots activism and become much less visible in the day-to-day lives of working-class communities. The nature of the UK's first-past-the-post political system has also resulted in much less attention being paid to seats in working-class areas considered to be 'un-losable'.

In this political interpretation, proposed solutions focus primarily on addressing the challenge of representation – such as by increasing the number of working-class MPs, regulating expenses, and introducing compulsory voting – as well as reforming the practices of political parties. However, our polling suggests that more substantial change is required: only 19 per cent of the white working-class respondents believed that the political system in the UK was addressing problems faced by people like them 'fairly' or 'very well', compared to 68 per cent who did not. This group was notably more pessimistic than middle-class respondents, among whom the comparable split was 30 and 59 per cent.

Figure A.2
White working-class people have less faith in the political system than others
Responses to the question, 'Generally, how well or badly do you think the political system in the UK addresses problems faced by people like you?'

| White working class | Middle class (ABC1) |

Legend: ■ Very well ■ Fairly well ■ Fairly badly ■ Very badly ■ Don't know
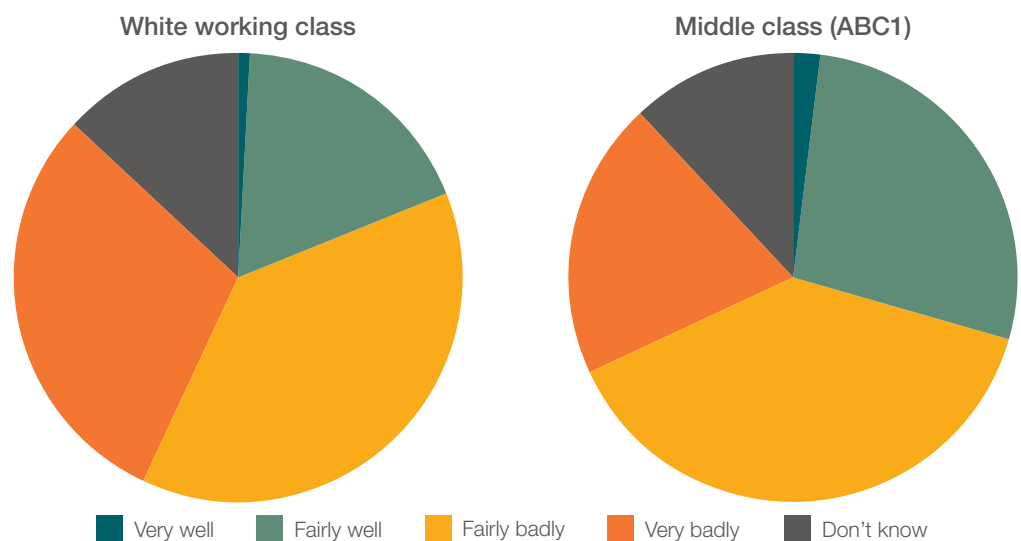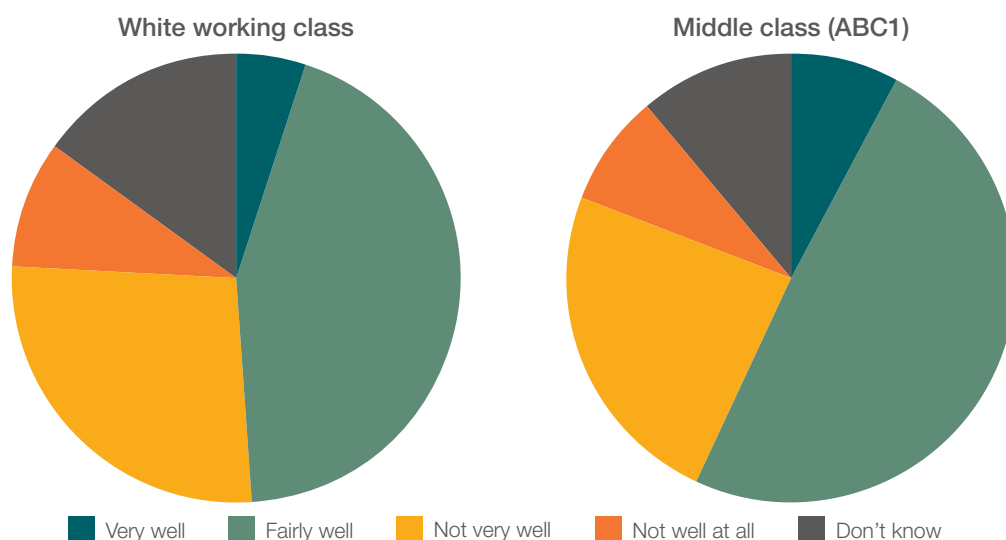
Source: IPPR/YouGov

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7   IPPR interview with Matthew Taylor, May 2014

The trend towards greater professionalisation in politics has permeated policymaking more generally. A growing body of work, such as IPPR's research on the relational state, argues that while many reforms under Labour did much to transform infrastructure, they have both been widely perceived as being imposed from the outside,[8] and have left individuals dependent on bureaucratic systems that struggle to respond to their personal circumstances, thereby exacerbating a sense of powerlessness.

As an example, in our polling only 49 per cent of white working-class respondents said that the education system in Britain today met their needs 'very' or 'fairly well', compared to 57 per cent of all middle-class respondents.

Figure A.3
Perceptions of the education system are broadly positive
Responses to the question, 'How well do you think the education system in Britain today meets the needs of people like you?'

Source: IPPR/YouGov;

Economic explanations for disaffection put socio-economic change at their heart: whereas white working-class people once benefited from both job security and an identity that was firmly grounded in work, this clarity and security no longer exists. The labour market is 'polarising', with growth in professional and managerial occupations as well as in lower-level service sector employment. Meanwhile, mid-skilled manual and administrative jobs have gradually been hollowed out (Plunkett 2012). The growth of white working-class dependence on insecure work has also led to a loss of trust in the compact that hard work leads to a reasonable standard of living. Moreover, the transformation of Britain's occupational structure has also swept away many of the key institutions which acted as the bedrock of white working-class identity, such as trade unions. As Mathew Lawrence argues in chapter 4, wider reforms to the UK's political economy may be needed, such as an industrial strategy that pursues a more active role in managing markets and protecting those most at risk from dislocation.

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8   See http://extra.shu.ac.uk/ndc/downloads/reports/Tracking%20Economic%20Deprivation%20in%20 New%20Deal%20for%20Communities%20Areas.pdf, and http://www.theworkfoundation.com/ downloadpublication/report/321_updated_people%20or%20place_urban%20policy%20in%20the%20 age%20of%20austerity.pdf

The structure of this report

In this introduction, we have attempted to delineate some of the tensions and conflicting positions in accounts of the white working class in Britain today, and why it is not only political strategists that should be concerned by the issue. The rest of this report consists of a series of short essays by IPPR experts which consider different aspects of white working-class disengagement and disaffection, focusing on the areas of community (chapter 1), political equality (chapter 2), the state and public services (chapter 3), and the economy and workplace (chapter 4).

Each of these chapters explore the context, discuss our polling results in greater detail, and suggest strategies for how to tackle white working-class disengagement, where it exists. The issues covered reflect some of IPPR's current priorities, and we recognise that they do not represent an exhaustive set of questions: many critical issues – such as welfare reform, housing and other policy issues of importance to the prospects of the white working-class – are not covered. A final concluding section pulls together our analysis, challenging the view that Britain is today a society of two extremes, and reasserting the need for policies that engage with the concerns of white working-class communities in a way that acknowledges the pressures of rapid social and economic transformation, but does so in the spirit of reinvention rather than recalcitrance.

1. CHANGING COMMUNITIES
PHOEBE GRIFFITH

Anxiety about migration is not restricted to the white working class. However, white working-class people have often been the most directly affected by the impacts of immigration. There is evidence to suggest that some types of migration may be having a small negative impact on wages and the availability of jobs at the bottom of the labour market in some parts of the UK (CEP 2012). But migration has also had social impacts, with many newer arrivals having moved into traditionally white working-class neighbourhoods. In the words of one white working-class man we spoke to in Normanton (a ward in inner-city Derby), 'It's not just the factories that have gone. It's the pubs and the caffs for the working man'.

Polish 'Skleps', Ukrainian car washes, Asian supermarkets and Pentecostal churches now form the backdrop to everyday life in many working-class communities. It is these changes that sit at the heart of the social insecurity that exists in many white working-class communities, a sentiment that Nigel Farage tapped in to when he stated that he'd 'rather be poorer but with fewer immigrants'.[9]

The current government's immigration strategy has prioritised border controls over other concerns. But limiting the numbers of migrants coming to the UK each year is unlikely to address concerns about the social changes being caused by migration in working-class areas. It may even make the problems worse, as it implies that it is possible to 'turn the clock back', whereas diversity and social change are already woven into the fabric of many working-class communities and will only increase further in the years ahead. In this context, abstract discussions about the overall number of immigrants (and emigrants) have little bearing on how people feel about the changes they see in their local communities.

IPPR's poll results bear this out. When asked, only 12 per cent of white working-class respondents said that they thought other people coming to live in the UK had been good for the country's economy, compared to 42 per cent who thought it had been bad and 43 per cent who thought it had been both good and bad. Just 15 per cent thought that immigration had been good for Britain's culture, compared to 44 per cent who thought it had been bad and 37 per cent who thought it had been mixed. Notably, younger people among those classed as white working-class seem to hold less negative views on these issues than those who are older (see tables 1.1 and 1.2 below).

Addressing these challenges requires us to properly take account of the deep effects that processes of social transformation have had on people's confidence and sense of place. Our survey highlighted a general negativity about the changes that have taken place, and lack of faith in the future, on the part of the white working class. In general, white working-class respondents were much less positive about Britain today compared to 10 years ago: 56 per cent thought it was worse for them and their family (compared to 12 per cent who thought it was better and 27 per cent who thought it was about the same). Respondents had even less positive views about the country as a whole, with 71 per cent thinking it was worse now compared to 10 years ago, 8 per cent thinking it was better, and 16 per cent thinking it was about the same.

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9   http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2535110/I-Britain-fewer-immigrants-makes-poorer-says-Farage.html

Table 1.1
Poll responses (%) to the question, 'Generally speaking, would you say people from different countries coming to live in Britain is good or bad for Britain's economy?', by age bracket, white working class vs ABC1s

Age	18–24		25–39		40–59		60+	
Social grade	White working class	ABC1	White working class	ABC1	White working class	ABC1	White working class	ABC1
Very good	10	10	4	6	2	3	1	1
Mostly good	23	30	7	23	10	16	6	12
Total good	**33**	**40**	**11**	**29**	**12**	**19**	**7**	**13**
Both good and bad	40	34	48	43	40	46	45	47
Mostly bad	16	13	24	17	23	19	24	22
Very bad	8	3	14	9	22	14	23	16
Total bad	**24**	**16**	**38**	**26**	**45**	**33**	**47**	**38**
Don't know	3	11	4	2	2	1	1	1

Source: IPPR/YouGov Poll; IPPR calculations

Table 1.2
Poll responses (%) to the question, 'Generally speaking, would you say people from different countries coming to live in Britain is good or bad for Britain's culture?', by age bracket, white working class vs ABC1s

Age	18–24		25–39		40–59		60+	
Social grade	White working class	ABC1	White working class	ABC1	White working class	ABC1	White working class	ABC1
Very good	12	13	3	9	4	4	1	2
Mostly good	24	25	12	23	11	19	9	12
Total good	**36**	**38**	**15**	**32**	**15**	**23**	**10**	**14**
Both good and bad	29	28	44	38	36	39	36	37
Mostly bad	16	16	23	18	22	21	24	28
Very bad	14	8	12	10	24	16	27	19
Total bad	**30**	**24**	**35**	**28**	**46**	**37**	**51**	**47**
Don't know	4	10	5	2	2	1	2	2

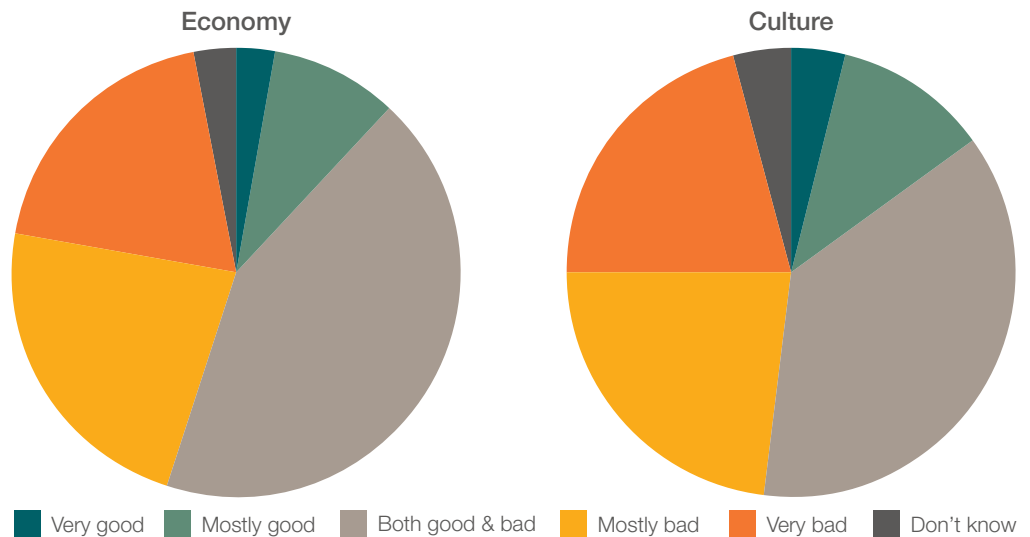Source: IPPR/YouGov Poll; IPPR calculations

Table 1.3
Poll responses (%) to the question, 'Generally speaking, do you think things in Britain are better, worse, or about the same than/as they were 10 years ago for… (white working class vs ABC1s)

…you and your family	Total	White working class	Middle class (ABC1)
Better	18	12	22
Worse	49	56	44
About the same	28	27	30
Don't know	5	5	5
…the country as a whole			
Better	10	8	11
Worse	67	71	64
About the same	17	16	19
Don't know	6	6	6

Source: IPPR/YouGov

Figure 1.1
The perceived effect of immigration on Britain's economy and culture among white working-class respondents
White working-class responses to the questions, 'Generally speaking, would you say people from different countries coming to live in Britain is good or bad for Britain's economy?' and '…for Britain's culture?'*

Economy   Culture

■ Very good   ■ Mostly good   ■ Both good & bad   ■ Mostly bad   ■ Very bad   ■ Don't know

Source: IPPR/YouGov
*Note: two separate questions were posed regarding 'the economy' and 'culture', using the same formulation.

Furthermore, when asked about their own lives and opportunities, high percentages of all respondents in our poll stated that they thought a person's social class affected their opportunities in Britain today (with 70 per cent of white working-class and 69 per cent of all middle-class respondents agreeing with this statement). Somewhat encouragingly, 38 per cent of white working-class respondents agreed with the statement that 'anyone with talent who is willing to work hard and put the effort in can rise to the top, regardless of their background', although 52 per cent thought that 'success' is reserved for those with privileged backgrounds who knew the right people.

Recent work on white working-class communities suggests that social change has caused a form of retreat. This is less a physical case of 'white flight' (those with few resources are likely to have their housing choices dictated by policies and financial constraints rather than preference), and more an emotional withdrawal into what is most familiar – a private sphere dominated by a combination of resentment and resignation – and disengagement from mainstream political processes and mainstream society. It also involves disengagement from their neighbours, who may increasingly arrive from elsewhere.

Steps to ensure the fair distribution of public goods and to give people greater security at work are critical, as discussed in other essays in this collection as well as previous work by IPPR (2014). However, these measures are unlikely to have a major effect on people's day-to-day lives. They must therefore also be complemented with active measures to ensure that the changes taking place in working-class areas feel manageable at an everyday level. Sound community policy will be central to achieving this goal.

The recent devolution of community policy opens up many opportunities. Ultimately, local authorities, front-line public servants and civil society organisations working on the ground are best placed to build trust, understand the dynamics of local areas and design policies to meet local challenges. In our research we have found many examples of innovative practices being put in place to promote greater interaction – from Hull's experiments in restorative community processes, which facilitate dialogue and reconciliation among the most alienated groups, to Glasgow's drives to encourage newcomers to put down roots (Ali and Gidley 2014).

However, the combined pressures of austerity and high inflows of migrants have been enormously challenging for many local areas. Many local authorities lack up-to-date information on the size and composition of local migration flows. This data black-hole impedes effective planning and helps magnify people's sense of the scale of change. Misinformation breeds a climate of uncertainty, and leaves local leaders unable to provide reassurance about their area's ability to manage increased diversity or keep the rate of change in perspective.

However, collecting and disseminating better information about the nature of local demographic changes only goes so far in addressing people's anxieties. As IPPR and others have shown, campaigns designed to counter myths about immigration and present accurate statistics have sometimes hardened people's views (IPPR 2014, Goodhart and Katwala 2013). Too often they have sought to persuade rather than inform, and have failed to offer people a real opportunity to be heard. One of the recurring frustrations voiced in studies of white working-class communities is that 'nobody listens'. Efforts to inform need to be embedded within other, more inclusive methods, such as deliberative forums and citizens' juries. These would both give people the opportunity to air their frustrations and give authorities a forum in which to give an honest account of the issues and choices that they face.

Moreover, resources to deal with the most corrosive issues, particularly the practices of rogue landlords and antisocial behaviour, are increasingly constrained. Our research has found that these everyday infractions (from groups loitering on street corners to tenants dumping rubbish on the street) are the greatest irritants for established communities.

Areas of rapid social change need everyday contexts that are conducive to positive social interaction. However, the services provided by key public institutions, from well-maintained local parks to welcoming libraries, are becoming increasingly stretched. The considerable cuts in funding have also had an impact on the types of groups working on the ground. In many areas, the civil society 'offer' has become highly polarised between volunteer-led faith groups and other groups that are tasked with dealing with the most challenging forms of exploitation and deprivation. This polarisation has taken place at the expense of groups that formerly played an important role in reaching out to members of all communities.

Many commentators have argued that migration is not in and of itself the root cause of white working-class alienation, and they are right in many ways. White working-class attitudes don't differ greatly from those of the mainstream. However, it is important to note that working-class areas have felt the effects of migration most directly. Those who advocate a less crudely 'restrictionist' stance on migration need to recognise that active community policy needs to become part of the equation.

2. POLITICAL INEQUALITY
GLENN GOTTFRIED

The cornerstone of democracy is that all citizens are treated as political equals, and that every person has the same opportunities to influence political decision-making. When this isn't the case – and when the system appears to have become skewed in favour of a select few – then we must question the health of our democracy. In recent years it seems that many within the UK's white working class have been doing just that, and are becoming ever more marginal to the policymaking process.

The evidence suggests that Britain's working-class citizens have become increasingly politically disaffected, and IPPR's polling confirms the depth of this cynicism. Nearly two out of three white working-class citizens surveyed in this poll believe that democracy in Britain does not adequately address their interests. Furthermore, a staggering 86 per cent believe that politicians don't understand the lives of people like them. It should be noted, however, that in this regard the views of the white working-class do not differ much from those of the rest of the country. Figures for middle-class respondents were only a little more encouraging, with just 18 per cent saying that they felt politicians understood their lives, compared to 78 per cent who did not.

Figure 2.1
'Politicians don't understand our lives'
Responses to the question, 'How well do you think politicians understand the lives of people like you?', white working class vs ABC1

White working class | Middle class (ABC1)

Very well | Fairly well | Not very well | Not well at all | Don't know
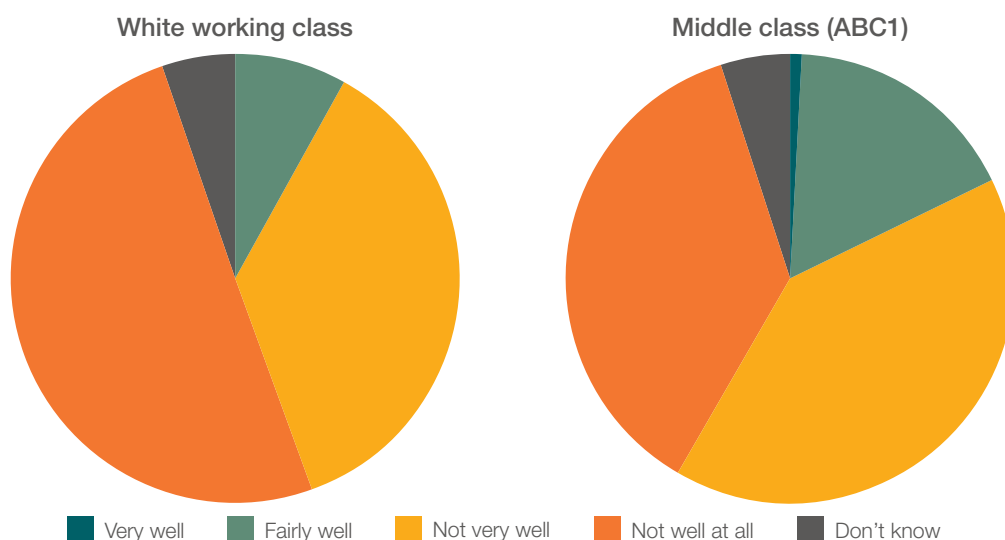
Source: IPPR/YouGov

As a result of this exclusion – whether real or perceived – increasing numbers of the less affluent are removing themselves from participation in electoral politics. In the 2010 general election, only 53 per cent of those within the lowest income quintile voted, compared to 75 per cent of those in the highest income quintile (Birch et al 2013).

Unequal turnout in elections matters because politicians tend to prioritise the preferences of those who do vote over those who don't. Birch et al (2013) demonstrated this empirically through their analysis of the 2010 spending review, in which they showed that non-voters were likely to experience cuts equivalent to 20 per cent of their income, compared to just 12 per cent for those who did vote. Furthermore, as politicians do more to cater to the interests of groups that do vote, those within non-voting groups see less reason to participate in elections. The less they participate, the less likely it is that politicians will heed their interests, and the less politicians address their concerns the less likely they will turn out to vote – thus leading to a 'vicious cycle' of political disaffection.

Inequality in political voice goes beyond electoral politics. While there is no formal exclusion of citizens from British politics, there is reason to believe that some individuals exert more political influence than others through channels outside voting. For example, in the US it is well-documented how, over the last 40 years, the affluent have become more effective at using their wealth to influence political parties in favour of their policy preferences (Hacker and Pierson 2010). Although our democratic system differs greatly from that of the US, there are worrying signs that political lobbying is becoming more prevalent in the UK, too. In recent decades, lobbying has become a multi-billion-pound industry employing an estimated 14,000 people (Parvin 2007). In 2011, it was estimated that the financial services industry alone spent nearly £92 million lobbying politicians and regulators in the UK.[10]

Those able to afford privileged access to political elites are best placed to influence policy. Their shortcut to the process of political relationship-building is to hire the services of ex-employees or colleagues of those with political power – the so-called 'revolving door'.[11] Research has found that each year between 400 and 800 former civil servants seek permission to take up outside appointments (Wilkes-Hegg 2014). For lobbyists, the opportunities provided by having deep connections with people operating within government are immense (Crouch 2014: 59).

As winning elections becomes increasingly expensive, political parties have become increasingly reliant on political donations. In the US, Martin Gilens (2012) analysed voting frequency, campaign volunteering and political contributions, and found that of these three activities, political donations – rather than voting or volunteering – gave the more affluent greater political influence than the poor and middle classes, whose interests politicians were less likely to pursue. Britain may be at risk of replicating a similar pattern. According to the Electoral Commission's register of donations to political parties, 164 individuals donated £50,000 or more to one of the three main political parties in 2010, up from 28 individuals in 2001, while 6 per cent of those in the AB occupational class made a political donation compared to just 1 per cent of DEs (Wilkes-Hegg 2014).

It is the rise of political inequality that represents the real crisis in British democracy. Low levels of public trust in the political class and low turnout rates are merely symptoms of this wider issue. The British public – particularly the white working class – undoubtedly feel much less confident in their ability to influence the political process, and have less faith in the idea that government treats – and listens to – all citizens equally, than they once did. The less they see politics as having anything to say to them, the more likely it is that they will drop out of the political process or seek alternatives to mainstream politics. It is naïve to think that the growing popularity of Ukip among the working class is simply a reflection of their views on immigration and Europe. Rather, it speaks to a much more profound dissatisfaction with the entire political class (see Ford and Goodwin 2014).

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10   http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2012/jul/09/finance-industry-lobbying-budget-revealed
11   http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/mar/12/lobbying-10-ways-corprations-influence-government

In our poll, white working-class respondents were not disproportionately inclined to identify with Ukip: only 9 per cent said they identified themselves with the party, compared to 32 per cent who generally thought of themselves as being aligned with Labour, 18 per cent who thought of themselves as Conservative, and 26 per cent who did not identify with any party (the equivalent figures for all respondents were 28 per cent Labour, 25 per cent Conservative, 7 per cent Ukip, and 25 per cent none).

Table 2.1
Responses to the question 'Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Ukip, Scottish National Party or Plaid Cymru, or don't you usually think of yourself as any of these things?', white working class vs ABC1

	White working class	Middle class (ABC1)
Labour	32%	25%
Conservative	18%	30%
Liberal Democrat	5%	7%
Scottish National Party	2%	2%
Green Party	2%	3%
Ukip	9%	5%
Don't think of myself as any of these	26%	24%
Don't know	5%	3%
n	*1,114*	*2,301*

Source: IPPR/YouGov Poll; IPPR calculations

However, our polling shows that in terms of party support the white working class remains an important political constituency for all parties (table 2.2). Nearly one in three of those who said they intended to vote Tory or Lib Dem in the next general election fell under the white working-class category, as did 43 per cent of those who intended to vote Labour. Ukip is the party whose prospective vote is composed of the largest proportion of white working-class voters – half (50 per cent) of all those who intended to give them their vote. On first reading, these results would appear to show that the white working class feels that Ukip is the party that best reflects their interests.

Table 2.2
White working-class voting intention as a percentage of each party's vote, versus voting intention by party among white working class as a whole

	% of each party's intended voters that are white working class	% of total white working class that intends to vote for each party
Conservative	31	25
Labour	43	41
Liberal Democrat	32	5
Ukip	50	19
Other party	–	10

Source: IPPR/YouGov Poll; IPPR calculations.
Note: Respondents were asked how they would intend to vote if an election were held tomorrow. The calculations exclude both the 'don't knows' and those who would not vote.

Looking at the full breakdown of all white working-class voters, however, shows that this isn't yet the case, though it could present problems for both the Conservative and – particularly – Labour parties in future. Labour still

overwhelmingly receives the largest portion of white working-class support (41 per cent of the white working class as a whole).[12] Ukip, on the other hand, is set to receive 19 per cent of all white working-class votes. As Ukip expands its appeal to the white working class, Labour will therefore have the largest base to potentially lose.

A one-size-fits-all solution will do nothing to reverse the public's growing sense of detachment and powerlessness in politics. New democratic reform must both pursue greater transparency and accountability in government, and make the political process more accessible for all citizens.

IPPR advocates a reform agenda that focuses both on the need to tackle concentrations of political power (Lodge and Gottfried 2014), and on measures aimed at reanimating political life among groups and communities where alienation is deepest.

Tackling concentrations of power is necessary precisely because political disaffection is rooted in a belief that our political institutions and economic structures are set up to serve the interests of a privileged elite rather than the population as a whole. Democratic reform needs to focus on overhauling party funding, which currently offers a direct route into public power for wealthy elites and privileges office-holders in unions and parties over ordinary members. The lobbying world also needs to be exposed to much greater scrutiny before it can be claimed that access to political power is meaningfully democratic. Similarly, concentrations of power can be more readily broken up if sites of power are dispersed: we should therefore seek a significant devolution of resources and responsibilities to England's cities and counties. Decentralisation can also help to address concerns about the remoteness of Westminster, by bringing real power closer to the communities that depend on it.

Democratic politics, if it is to be trusted again as an expression of the common good, must also tackle vested interests in the market economy. The deregulated free market is increasingly concentrating power in the hands of large corporations rather than spreading it among market actors. Strategies for shaping markets, reining in financialisation, institutionalising employee power, and sharing profits all come into play here. The fact that our political institutions are prone to privileging some interests over others means that keeping political elites in check is an important role for civil society.

Our second goal – of reanimating political life among the most deeply alienated groups and communities – will involve interventions to overcome the growing estrangement between the political class and wider society, and finding ways for political leaders to better understand and empathise with the needs of alienated groups. One means of achieving this is by expanding Teach First-style programmes that enable graduates from leading universities to undertake public service in disadvantaged communities. Decentralisation will also create new sites of political power that will offer greater opportunity for excluded groups to participate in democratic life.

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12   These figures exclude the 'don't knows' and those who have decided to not vote.

3. RECLAIMING THE STATE
RICK MUIR

One of the causes of the working-class alienation described in this report is a loss of agency. This, in turn, reflects two overlapping trends.

First, the institutions of mutual self-help, such as cooperatives and trade unions, that used to play a prominent role in working class communities have been in decline. Only 14 per cent of white working-class respondents in our survey reported that they belonged to a trade union – just below the national level of 15 per cent. Communities whose patterns of work, family life and leisure were once shaped by mass production in large-scale industries and the trade union tradition have been utterly transformed in the wake of deindustrialisation and the emergence of a more fragmented and insecure labour market.

Those grassroots movements provided assurance to working-class communities that by acting together they could change the conditions in which they lived. They also linked the working class to the country's political institutions, particularly to the Labour party. The loss of these important instruments of agency and inclusion has contributed to the sense of powerlessness and exclusion that underlies the alienation described in this report.

Second, there has been a crisis of confidence in the institutions of the postwar welfare state. These institutions, such as the NHS and the social security system, were born of the collectivist settlement, reached after the war, of cradle-to-grave protection from unemployment, illness, squalor and other social ills.

However, over time these same institutions became associated with top-down and bureaucratic modes of administration. People's experiences at the job-centre counter, in the housing office or at the doctor's surgery have long been profoundly disempowering. While in theory the institutions of our welfare state symbolise and embody the idea of mutual support, they are often experienced very differently, as bossy, unresponsive and lacking a human touch. Sometimes this sense of disempowerment manifests itself as annoyance at middle-class 'do gooders' making decisions about the lives of people they do not understand.

So, what is to be done? And by whom?

The first level of response must be from within communities themselves. The unions, co-ops and workers educational association branches of the 19th and 20th centuries were examples of 'people helping people',[13] often in the absence of state support or in contest with the state. Precisely the wrong way to respond to a loss of working-class agency would be with a technocratic policy agenda crafted by professional policy experts. Tackling this challenge involves going beyond policy and into the direct business of organising within communities.[14]

We have seen a growth in 'community organising' through groups such as Citizens UK and Movement for Change, which share a philosophy of community self-organisation and seek to help people come together to achieve their goals. They often

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13   This was the title of a summit on public service reform organised by NESTA and the Cabinet Office, held on 3 September 2014.
14   See http://www.matthewtaylorsblog.com/uncategorized/beyond-belief-towards-a-new-methodology-of-change/

make demands on actors other than the state: applying pressure on businesses, for instance, to pay their workers a living wage. These are important initiatives, although they have tended to be most successful where they have organised through existing centres of civic activity, such as mosques and churches. Where civic institutions are much weaker, as they arguably are in many of the communities discussed in this report, the challenge is harder.

Nevertheless, addressing the issue of how the state acts is vital, because of the immense power it holds. The second level of response must therefore be reforms to the state and public services themselves so that they *enable* social action rather than simply 'deliver services'. If the bureaucratic state is to tackle alienation, it has to start by recognising that the power relationship between the citizen and the state must change. It is no longer a case of, 'We pay our taxes, you solve our problems'.

In part this is because many of the problems we now face are so complex that they are not amenable to top-down, standardised solutions. This includes problems such as long-term health conditions, mental illness, long-term worklessness, reoffending and antisocial behaviour, which now account for a great deal of public expenditure. Tackling these problems requires bespoke responses that are tailored around people, as well as much more active roles for people themselves. The frustration and alienation we see is in part a response to the fact that the state promises to solve problems that it is not designed to solve. What follows is delivery failure, and disenchantment with services and politicians.

One potential solution is that rather than seeing tax revenues as a pot that is handed over to politicians, who decide how to use it on our behalf, the public should see at least some of that revenue as a pot that can be accessed directly and used to engage in social action and mobilise community resources. Personal budgets have already been successfully rolled out in recent years, and have allowed older and disabled people to directly purchase their own care and support. We should consider in what other areas direct payments of this kind might be appropriate, including direct funding to community organisations in precisely the communities where the old institutions of collective action have declined.

Where services require commissioning by public authorities, we need to decentralise those services. Rather than services being structured as bureaucratic delivery silos, they need to be designed through and around community-based institutions over which communities can exercise control.

For example, the criminal justice system operates at several steps' remove from local communities, and this distance has tended to corrode public confidence in it, particularly in the most disadvantaged communities where crime is higher. Many more incidents of first-time low-level crime and antisocial behavior in particular could be tackled in communities themselves. There are already examples of neighbourhood justice panels in operation around the country, in which local volunteers are trained in restorative justice methods. Restorative justice seeks to deal with crime and antisocial behaviour directly by bringing victims and offenders together, rather than expecting the formal justice system to deal with it.

Another example is the development of neighbourhood networks, backed by local councils but led by local volunteers, to support those with lower-to-medium-level social care needs. These networks, organised around lunch clubs and day centres, are hugely important in preventing the isolation of older people in their homes.

The alienation described in this collection is in part a reflection of communities' lack of power, and a perception that those who do have power are not tackling the problems that they face. Part of the solution must therefore be to organise within communities so that 'people can help people' directly, and communities can have greater control over the public resources and services upon which they depend.

4. ECONOMIC SECURITY
MATHEW LAWRENCE

The UK's economy generates stark concentrations of power, agency and reward. One in three employees report being afraid in some way at work,[15] 13 million people say that they are not using their potential and skills at work, nearly one-fifth of all people in work earn less than the Living Wage,[16] while the Office for National Statistics has estimated that real wages have fallen consistently since 2010, the longest period of decline since the mid-1960s.[17]

This has led to a deep sense of unease about future prospects. In our poll, white working-class respondents appeared to be more pessimistic about the financial situation of their own households, and of the UK as a whole, than other groups. Forty-three per cent stated that they believed their household's financial situation would get worse over the next 12 months, compared to just 32 per cent of middle-class respondents. Similarly, 39 per cent of working-class respondents believed that that the general economic situation in the country would get worse over the next 12 months, compared to 26 per cent of middle-class respondents.

Table 4.1
Responses to the question, 'How do you think the financial situation of your household will change over the next 12 months?', white working class vs ABC1s

	White working class	Middle class (ABC1)
Get a lot worse	12%	7%
Get a little worse	31%	25%
Stay the same	39%	44%
Get a little better	10%	17%
Get a lot better	1%	2%
Don't know	6%	5%
n	*1,114*	*1,213*

Source: IPPR/YouGov

Table 4.2
Responses to the question, 'How do you think the general economic situation in this country will change over the next 12 months?', white working class vs ABC1s

	White working class	Middle class (ABC1)
Get a lot worse	13%	7%
Get a little worse	26%	19%
Total worse	**39%**	**26%**
Stay the same	31%	33%
Get a little better	20%	32%
Get a lot better	1%	2%
Total better	**21%**	**34%**
Don't know	10%	7%
n	*1,114*	*1,213*

Source: IPPR/YouGov

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15   http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/ses2012/[hidden]resources/4.%20Fear%20at%20Work%20Minireport.pdf
16   http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Low-Pay-Britain-2013.pdf
17   http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-25977678

While white working-class respondents' perceptions of their own employment prospects were fairly consistent with those of the rest of the population (with 28 per cent of all white working-class respondents stating that they were worried about becoming unemployed in the next 12 months, compared to 24 per cent of respondents as a whole), splits by voting intention were more interesting. Those who said they would vote Labour or Ukip if an election were called tomorrow were notably more likely to be worried about becoming unemployed in the next 12 months: 33 per cent of intended Labour voters, 27 per cent of Ukip voters, 18 per cent of Liberal Democrat voters and 17 per cent of Conservatives were 'very' or 'fairly' worried about this.

Table 4.3
Responses to the question, 'Thinking about the next 12 months, how worried are you that you may become unemployed?', by Westminster voting intention

	Con	Lab	Lib Dem	Ukip
Very worried	3%	8%	5%	5%
Fairly worried	14%	25%	13%	22%
Not very worried	46%	38%	57%	39%
Not worried at all	33%	22%	21%	26%
Don't know	4%	8%	5%	8%
n	*804*	*1,151*	*174*	*377*

Source: IPPR/YouGov

A deep sense of pessimism was also evident in white working-class responses to questions about how the economic system in the UK works now compared to how it worked in the past. Only 14 per cent of white working-class respondents thought that the UK's economic system was now generally better for people like them than it had been previously, compared to 48 per cent who thought it was generally worse. Furthermore, 24 per cent thought that the economic system had always been bad for people like them, and that there had been no change, compared to just 14 per cent who thought it had been consistently good for people like them.

Across the board, relatively low numbers believed that they had much personal influence over the way in which important decisions were made at their place of work. White working-class respondents in our poll believed themselves to be particularly lacking in this regard: only 17 per cent of those in employment believed that they had any influence in important decision-making at work, compared to 75 per cent who did not.

This sense of insecurity is, of course, not restricted to working-class households. However, the profound structural changes that the UK economy has undergone over the last 40 years – deindustrialisation, the rise of the service sector, labour-market polarisation – has had a disproportionately negative impact on forms of employment that once constituted the bedrock of traditional white working-class communities in terms of both economic security and social identity.

If the institutional framework of the economy is, in part, responsible for generating these deep-rooted feelings of dislocation, insecurity and alienation, it is vital that we change the structure of the UK's political economy to support the creation of more and better jobs. Long-term trends in the economy towards de-standardised forms of production and consumption and more fluid labour markets are set to accelerate. The challenge is therefore to reconcile the immense creative potential of these changes in terms of economic and social life with a renewed and deepened sense of security, particularly for communities that have atrophied socio-economically

under current conditions. This will require deep, programmatic reform that can embed institutions that support the dispersal of economic power and nurture new democratic collectivities through which working-class communities can regain a sense of agency and pride. Three practical suggestions are worth considering.

First, trade unions were traditionally the vehicle for expressing the economic and social power of white (and non-white, though often male) working-class people, but this form of countervailing power has been in long-term decline. Only 14.4 per cent of workers in the UK private sector were union members in 2013 (BIS 2014). Moreover, the settled labour markets of a 'Fordist', mass-production economy that were conducive to labour organisation have been replaced by increasingly insecure labour contracts, a far more flexible labour market, and the hollowing out of traditionally organised industries. Without a fundamental rethink of how labour's interest is organised and represented, and its power applied, white working-class employees – along with other disempowered actors in the labour market – will continue to lack institutions capable of fostering strong collective or individual agency.

This could be achieved in part by a trade union movement that is more focused on organising in insecure, temporary labour markets, in which a disproportionate number of working-class people are employed (Alakeson and D'Arcy 2014). More broadly, however, new institutions of employee voice are required within the UK's industrial relations and corporate governance framework. It is currently narrow and hierarchical, privileging managerial prerogative and shareholder rights. Embedding sites of voice along the lines of the Dutch or German work council systems, adapted to the specifics of the UK's political economy, would give alienated people a stronger sense of power over their working lives (Lawrence and McNeil 2014). Similarly, experiments in organising workers in precarious forms of employment – for example, decentralised networks capable of organising the growing number of self-employed workers – could be one means of giving often marginalised labour a stronger voice.

Second, deepening social solidarity through a redesigned skills and vocational system is possible within the framework of a liberal market economy. As leading political economist Kathleen Thelen has recently demonstrated (Thelen 2014), certain forms of liberalisation can be reconciled with high levels of solidarity and more egalitarian outcomes. She points to rising levels of inequalities in coordinated market economies due to increasing 'dualisation' within the labour market between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and contrasts them with recent policy innovations in forms of embedded flexibilisation in Scandinavia and the Netherlands. These have introduced new forms of flexibility and liberalisation into the labour market and training systems, but have done so under the 'umbrella of a continued strong and encompassing collective framework,' where 'instead of an individualisation of risk, these kinds of policies – publically funded and underwritten by the state – involve a collectivisation of the risks that accompany liberalisation' (ibid).

This is important because it means that substantially more solidaristic, egalitarian forms of market liberalisation are plausible within the context of UK's political economy. Given that Scandinavian tax-levels or German-style codetermination are not currently a politically feasible means of redressing entrenched patterns of inequality and alienation in the UK, it suggests that a more proactive role for the state in reshaping our labour market and economic institutions could help achieve a more substantive dispersal of assets and capabilities among all citizens. Better labour-market activation policies, extended childcare provision and a reformed skills policy regime[18] can all help to reconnect alienated working-class communities to wider economic life, ensuring that the UK's institutions better serve their interests.

18   For examples of potential policy in these areas see Lawton K, Cooke G and Pearce N (2014) *The Condition of Britain: Strategies for Social Renewal*, London: IPPR. http://www.ippr.org/publications/the-condition-of-britain-strategies-for-social-renewal

Finally, it important to recognise that alienation can take many forms. However, material exclusion has accentuated these anxieties, particularly as people lack the adaptive buffer that a deep pool of resources provides. The fact that, in 2012, the wealthiest fifth of households possessed 62 per cent of all private household wealth in the UK, and the richest 1 per cent possessed as much wealth as the poorest 55 per cent put together (ONS 2014), surely underpins these feelings of alienation and exclusion. One means of addressing this would be by bolstering alternative forms of ownership, in which voice and reward are far more evenly distributed. Reforming the financial and legislative ecology that supports mutuals, cooperatives and employee-owned firms would be one effective way of pluralising economic power (Lawrence and McNeil 2014). While this would only represent a first, incremental step, the cumulative transformation of the UK's political economy into one that supports more democratic, rooted forms of economic and social life is a plausible strategy for tackling economic alienation.

The way in which the institutions of an economy are organised is a vital factor in how power, agency, esteem and reward are distributed within society. Alienation is therefore in part a consequence of the hierarchical nature of the UK's economy, with too many groups, including many white working-class communities, excluded from the productive vanguard of economic life. Rather than engage in a rear-guard defence of the institutions of the political economy of the 20th century, those who want to bring about a radical dispersal of economic and democratic power must therefore turn themselves to the task of constructing a political and economic programme that will actively reshape our economy, and better enable all individuals to lead fuller, richer lives.

CONCLUSIONS

Recent debates about class in Britain paint a picture of a nation starkly divided. On one side are the 'winners': those who have everything to gain from social change and globalisation. They have an abundance of optimism, are willing to do what it takes to thrive in a globalised economy, and can ride the wave of change. At the other extreme there are those who are 'left behind', who are struggling on stagnant incomes and feeling threatened by the ways in which their communities and country are changing all around them.

This polarised caricature of British society has permeated the political debate. Those on the margins have reached out to increasingly hard-edged identities, such as Scottish separatism and an emerging brand of English nationalism, as well as anti-migration and other far-right tendencies. These are widespread trends that are most apparent among the white working class. The best response to this, as Kenny argues, is not to disengage from debates about the 'national popular' in the name of universal values; nor is it recycling the 'simplicities of nationalist-populist rhetoric on issues such as immigration'. Rather, he proposes, the most enduring alternative is to work harder and more imaginatively to express and give grounding to alternative ideas of the nation (Kenny 2014).

The results of our polling show that we are less divided than we are often assumed to be: on many of the key issues – such as the effects of migration, and concerns about insecurity at work and the future of public services – attitudes differ relatively little across social groups. Even where attitudes differ most markedly, such as those concerning respondents' sense of detachment from the political process, each group's responses to our survey questions do not differ by more than 15 percentage points for any given answer. On other questions, attitudes are indistinguishable, such as those in relation to future economic prospects and the cultural impacts of migration. Our analysis suggests that differences in opinion are most pronounced between generations rather than between social groupings.

Our findings challenge simplistic views of class, which often posit unhelpful dichotomies between people who are either open or insular, adaptable or stagnating, forward- or backward-looking. These views presuppose that people continue to fit into distinct and predefined social groups, whereas our evidence (and that of many other studies) demonstrates that people's identities and attitudes are no longer so distinct and coherent. Simplistic dichotomies have been at the heart of negative and stereotyped characterisations of white working-class groups, which has helped fuel rather than address alienation not only in the UK but, as has been documented by OSF (2014), across Europe.

The essays in this collection propose strategies that challenge prevailing views of 'class' in the UK, and recognise that a desire to preserve what is 'of value' is not in itself anathema to a belief that politics should be focused on building a tolerant and open future. Rather than chastising those who are fearful of change, our strategies recognise that social change, whether caused by mass migration or economic restructuring, is deeply unsettling, and that life in a volatile age is difficult. They acknowledge people's need for security, cultural identity and social connections, not just as deeply-held human desires but as valid and reasonable aspirations. These needs are essential not only to an alienated white minority, but to all British people.

The essays in this collection reflect on the past as a way of thinking about the future. They go beyond giving well-worn accounts of the demise of institutions like political parties and trade unions, and rather than proposing that we restore these institutions to their former glory, the essays call for reinvention suited to the realities of the present. In Mathew Lawrence's words, rather than engaging in a 'rear-guard defence' of 20th-century institutions, we need to construct 'a political and economic programme that will actively reshape our economy, and better enable all individuals to lead fuller, richer lives'.

Lawrence calls for a rethink of how the interests of workers are organised, and for new institutions that can foster greater collective agency and which focus on the most insecure workers. Most ambitiously, he argues for reforms that would enable greater employee voice and bolster alternative forms of ownership such as cooperatives and employee-owned firms.

At the level of public services, reinvention is required to replace the 'delivery state' model that purports to 'solves' people's problems with one that gives people a more active role. Rick Muir proposes a number of strategies, including greater individual and community 'ownership' of public resources (through personal budgets and community resources), and decentralised services designed around community-based institutions and in which communities can play a more active role.

In terms of community policy, Phoebe Griffith sets out policies which aim to provide people with active reassurance at an everyday level, including opportunities for open but constructive deliberation, and a strong emphasis on preserving the everyday public goods that people value, from children's centres to public parks.

Finally, Glenn Gottfried calls for political reinvention, arguing that inequalities in political influence must be tackled through greater transparency and accountability, and political detachment addressed through greater accessibility and a reanimation of local politics.

The aim of this report is to revitalise the debate about the lives of working class people in a complex and insecure age. The essays within it make clear that we need to move beyond conceptions of British society that label people and characterise them simplistically according to their 'class'. Politicians and policymakers have a role to play in revitalising the debate about the lives of working class people. In this time of uncertainty and austerity, this is an urgent undertaking. Our aim must be to reconceive British society in a way that takes account of 'communitarian' concerns and considers how we can overcome them to address the challenges of a 'cosmopolitan' age.

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Note: all figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The total sample size of the polling conducted for this report was 3,514 adults, and fieldwork was undertaken between 9 and 11 September 2014. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18 and over).

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