BEYOND THE ANGER AND ANXIETY

Insights into the Attitudes and Actions that Threaten Our Democracies—and What to Do About It

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LEADERS IN OUR COUNTRIES WHO WANT TO DELIVER BETTER LIVES FOR THEIR CITIZENS HAVE TO FIRST LISTEN WITH RESPECT, UNDERSTAND, AND MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE—THEN LINK ARMS TO BUILD THE BRIGHTER FUTURE THEIR PEOPLE WANT AND CAN COME TO SEE.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this paper, John Austin delves into the global rise of nationalist and anti-democratic sentiments, particularly in economically declining industrial heartland communities in Europe and the United States. Based on the learnings from the Industrial Heartlands and Democracy Study Tour in November 2023, the paper outlines the reasons behind people's dissatisfaction and anger. Factors such as economic decline, geographic inequality, social alienation, and political disillusionment emphasize the urgent need for leaders to understand the underlying emotions and experiences driving these anti-democratic sentiments.

To determine how one can transform this anger into hope and democratic momentum, the paper effectively develops strategies to combat anti-democratic sentiment, accentuating empathetic leadership, community empowerment, and narrative reframing as crucial pillars. The paper concludes by demonstrating that it is both possible and necessary for policymakers to survive democratic crises by listening, understanding, connecting and creating inspiring narratives to facilitate a just and inclusive future.

THE ROOTS OF THE ASSAULT ON DEMOCRACY

The last few decades have seen the collision of social and economic forces that have spawned the rise of nationalism, anti-democratic and anti-system behaviors that threaten democracy worldwide—emanating from geopolitically influential heartland communities in democratic countries.

A *"geography of despair"* has emerged in many nations, as working-class Whites, particularly men, face diminished job prospects for their low-skill labor in once prosperous industrial regions. Sixty-five percent of voters in Europe *describe themselves as anxious or highly-anxious*, fueled by questions about their economic future, personal (and family) advancement—as well as new concerns about inflation, energy, migration, and now war. Many residents of communities in decline, seeing no hopes for the future, retreat to drugs and drinking and face reduced health and life expectancy. Some find identity and outlets for frustration with extremist and conspiratorial groups, and many respond to nationalist and nativist movements and messages coming from right-wing politicians. The *Center for Strategic and International Studies* found the number of terrorist attacks by far-right perpetrators quadrupled in the US between 2016 and 2017 and that far-right attacks in Europe rose 43 percent over the same period.

This complex of reactions to disorienting change is generating a "geography of discontent" (*as detailed for Europe* by the European Commission) in once economically mighty industrial heartland regions that remain stuck in decline. In places such as Battle Creek, Michigan; Newcastle, England; and Sonneberg, Germany, residents feel ignored, looked down upon, and have rising anxiety and anger about their diminished prospects and place in society.

These combined forces create a perfect storm of resentment-driven scapegoating and ethno-nationalist populist politics that authoritarian demagogues stoke—blaming immigrants, black people, urban elites, and marginalized communities for their condition and society's ills—and viewing these "others" as advantaged at the expense of the White working class.

This phenomenon is an international concern. In countries that include the US, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and the UK (among others), these dynamics drive the well-documented anti-democratic, nostalgic, nativist, nationalist, and isolationist movements.

It is imperative to better understand the attitudes, emotions, and experiences of the people animating these movements if leaders at all levels are to succeed at nurturing new economic opportunity and optimism as an alternative to the scapegoating and resentment-driven politics offered by destructive leaders who prey on anger and anxiety.

Transatlantic Lessons in Turning Anger to New Ambition

The November 2023 study tour across Europe for Midwest leaders and economic change-makers, organized and facilitated by our partners at the German Think Tank *Das Progressive Zentrum* and supported by the German Ministry for Economy and Climate Action's European Recovery Program, added nuance and new understandings around the fundamental issues facing our democracies: *What lies behind the anxiety and anger that has led so many to embrace a populist message and engage in actions that quite literally threaten not only democratic norms but the system itself? What can turn the anxiety and anger into affirmative steps towards a brighter future, versus destructive acts to tear down a "system" that isn't working for them?*

Our study tour took us in person to a number of iconic heartland mining and steel regions of Europe: Charleroi, in Belgium's Wallonia region; the Saarland linking Germany and France; and Leipzig and the Saxony region in Germany's former East. In each we saw a community fabric that mimicked other iconic and more familiar former coal and steel regions whose economic and political evolution *we have*

reported on—such as Germany's Ruhr, Pittsburgh, and Western Pennsylvania.

Additional transatlantic convenings, discussions and learning exchanges that were also part of the tour took us virtually to many other communities and regions. Guided by leaders and economic change agents from North America, the UK, Europe, and further East, as well as several *transatlantic convenings* hosted by the European Commission in Brussels and Das Progressive Zentrum in Berlin along the way, we gathered additional insights about the challenges and community responses to help the regions and their residents navigate through economic change to a brighter tomorrow.

These virtual "travels" took us to Macomb County, Michigan, part of the auto capital that is Detroit; Newcastle and North of Tyne, England; Midland, Michigan, a chemical town; the rural Loire Valley of France; Fort Wayne, Indiana, nestled at the crossroads of the Midwest; Saarbrücken and Saxony in Germany; Wausau, Wisconsin; Washington, Pennsylvania and many other smaller industrial places In these regions.

From all we saw and heard we gathered fresh insights into what lies behind the anger, resentment, and even sadness felt by residents of communities in decline, that when tapped and triggered can spark dangerous-to-democracy movements. Armed with this understanding, leaders at all levels will be better equipped to find language and actions that help those feeling ignored and disrespected in the neglected regions of our countries find and follow an affirmative path of promise and hope, versus the destructive path of blame and blowing up an unresponsive "system."

What Lies Behind the Anger

Weight of the past. *"The anger and anxiety that leads to embrace of extreme populism is concentrated in regions in industrial transition that had been mighty—in the wake and the weight of the past. It's a past that weighs heavily. It's an*

identity, it is a psychological issue, for residents of regions that had been prosperous, now having to reorient themselves." That's how the European Commission's Director at the Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy Peter Berkowitz kicked off the transatlantic hybrid session: *Treating the Geography of Discontent* in Brussels, Belgium on November 11, 2023.

The discontent is most intense among residents of regions that are experiencing the relative change in their communities and their own and their families' prospects. As keynoter Cathryn Clüver Ashbrook of Germany's Bertelsmann Foundation noted: *"What unites the American and European experience and their slip toward populist attraction is the sentiment of "relative deprivation" that often morphs into real deprivation—and that manifests in a vote for populists at the ballot box, whether they deliver or not."*

This psychological issue—this discontent—evolves for residents of once-mighty-now-declining regions into sadness, fear, and anger. *"There is despair, there are depths of despair, a common feeling of despair in communities when economy has gone upside down. What do you do when an entire town is depressed, no one has a future to imagine?"* Kenneth Thompson of Pittsburgh's Virtual Hands Collaborative told us. *"When you are deeply sad and you don't see a way forward, you have rage, you have anger. We have to address the anger and rage."*

During the visit to Charleroi, Belgium, the ailing steel and coal region of that country, Wallonia State Secretary Thomas Dermine made the direct link between the work they are doing to create new economic opportunities in the geographies reeling from decline from their glory days, and strengthening democracy. *"It is essential to redevelop regions that have suffered much, to provide residents hope for the future, or they will lose faith in democracy, and in our national and international institutions."*

Inequality Among Places, Not People. In Brussels, the University of Manchester's Phillip McGann, who coined the term the "geography of discontent," made the point that the inequality that drives populist fervor is one of different economic conditions and opportunities between different places—different communities and geographies—not between individual people. *"It's about the foundations of our communities, which are basically collapsing. When this occurs, people lose aspirations and civic engagement diminishes. All the roles people want to play in life get undermined."*

Noting that rural French residents are supporting right-wing nationalists, French City and Intermunicipality Councilor Quentin Lequoy captured the place-based common conditions felt by residents. *"People are isolated, they don't know what they are missing. People in rural places, young and old, don't have opportunities—to travel, for social meetings, to go to theater, to connect, to go to a university. One result is they spend too much time on social media."*

When communities are disconnected from the world, as well as within a community, the familiar relationships and routines of community life—work, social engagements, gathering places and activity centers like union halls, schools, social clubs—disappear, residents feel unmoored.
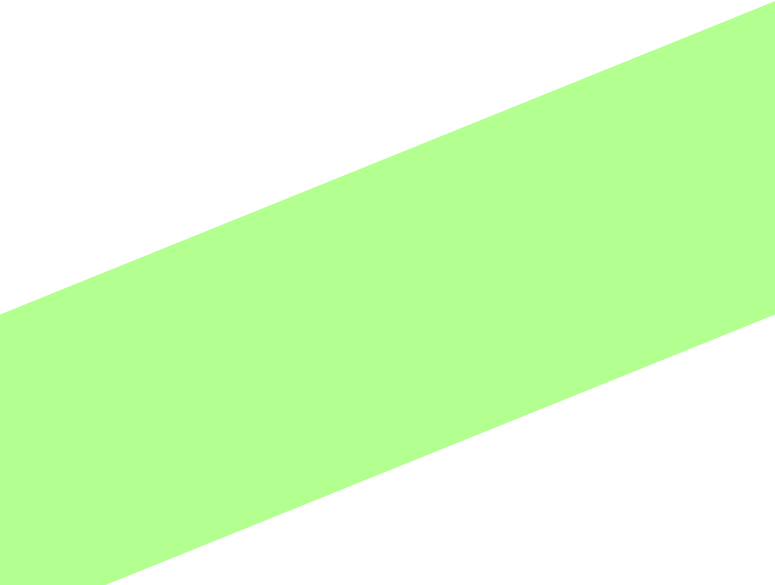
As Cathryn Clüver Ashbrook points out: *"There is a feeling of rootlessness. Voters are in freefall. The great mobility that once powered globalization is turning into a need for connection, for simultaneous rootedness."*

"No One Listens to Us. No One Represents Us." That's what the UK's North-of-Tyne Mayor Jamie Driscoll told us he heard from constituents in his battered industrial region of Northern England, in the runup to their vote for Brexit—constituents who thought politicians of all stripes were focused on political game-playing in London and their own careers. His voters did not talk about the European Union—the supposed bogeyman driving Brexit—but about the fact that they weren't being seen or heard by those in power in their own country.

Florian Ranft of the German think tank Das Progressive Zentrum shared similar sentiments in Germany, coming from a *study and interviews* in selected struggling German regions. *"There's a big distrust of the federal government and politicians irrespective of party."* Former Congressman Andy Levin of Macomb County, Michigan, one of the blue-collar Michigan counties that moved over to Trump in 2016, echoed the theme. *"Working class voters were feeling the impact of industrial disinvestment, growing inequality, trade policies and deregulation that did not work for them. Republicans and Democrats were guilty too. Led to a lot of anger. Donald Trump took advantage of this anger."*

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"They Think We are Losers." Being looked down upon is as damaging as being ignored—perhaps more so. As Jürgen Hein, Director of the University Alliance of the Ruhr, has told our group: _"If I call a region "rust belt," it betrays my condescension and at the same time adds to it, compounding the alienation and widening the gulf between heartland region residents and well-intentioned 'elites' seeking to help. Think of the reaction to Hillary Clinton's famous description of Trump supporters as 'deplorables,' or then-candidate Barack Obama talking about rural Pennsylvania voters as those 'who cling to their guns and their religion.' Anyone who sees themselves as the target of these remarks recoils at this demeaning of their own self-image. When language like that is used the 'targets' feel humiliated, disregarded and without perspective and opportunity."_

Relatedly there is a damaging phenomenon when outsiders, even well-intentioned ones, push a change that assaults a point of local pride. Pittsburgh's former Mayor Bill Peduto offered one example: _"Hillary Clinton lost Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia when she said. 'You are all going to be coders.' (Workers there) don't want to be coders, they want to make steel."_

A similar reaction is related by Germany's Florian Ranft. There is among many a tremendous pride in the German economic model, which brought Germany such success. But it is a model reliant on cheap energy from Russia and the East. _"Why must we change to clean energy? And give up our successful model? Some residents of rural and heartland Germany see a 'Berlin-driven policy' as destroying the German model."_

As former German Consul General Wolfgang Mössinger noted: _"There is, in industrial heartland regions, a nostalgia for an economic past—but also a concept of economic dignity, a self-actualized stewardship composed of several elements—the capacity to care for family and experience its greatest joys: the pursuit of potential and purpose and economic participation without domination and humiliation. These_ 'feelings' matter."

"The System Doesn't Work for Me." The populist backlash is an understandable symptom of the sensation that the current economic and political system just doesn't work for residents in many places, suggested UK's Philip McGann: _"When there is a discontinuity in systems, you get winners and losers—and it leads to a psychological response."_

Newcastle Mayor Driscoll put it a little differently, relating what he felt was the break in the reciprocal obligation bond between citizens and the State. _"For a long time, the deal was the government makes sure that if you work hard, you will succeed, and in return you will support the state. That bond has been broken."_

When people don't see the "system" or the "government" working for them, it can lead to dangerous anti-democratic actions, particularly when encouraged by populist demagogues. Donald Trump in the US encourages his followers to turn out the "deep state" and overturn democracy. Florian Ranft noted a similar phenomenon in Germany: _"Some are encouraged to feel that 'Berlin Policy' is destroying their German way of life, and that democratic institutions should be put out of the way of the will of the people."_

Georgetown University's Jeffrey Anderson extended this disconnection and distrust to international institutions and alliances: _"People don't see much in our transatlantic relationships—they just see the arguing and disagreements with our allies. We have to help people see we are not alone in our efforts."_

"I See Change That Only Hurts Me." The growing differentials in economic opportunities and living conditions between different geographies nurture a subtle resentment that the heartland residents are bearing the negative brunt of economic and social changes.

As Cathryn Clüver Ashbrook explained in regard to the evo-

lution of regional "resentments" in Germany: *"The simple 'east-west' divide of different opportunities and structural inequalities was now morphing into a more distinct tension between cities and rural communities, with infrastructure, medical care, educational, and community offerings atrophying in rural areas of East Germany, leaving behind disillusioned voters with limited mobility as sitting ducks for right-wing populists."*

The resentments become particularly acute when heartland and hinterland voters feel they are being hit hard by changes being driven from the "center" or by out-of-touch elites running the country—who with their advantages aren't affected by new policies. These sentiments are strong on both sides of the Atlantic around topics such as the great green transformation, and efforts to ameliorate climate change touch the lives and livelihoods of heartland voters.

Corinna Zierold, Head of Just Transition Coordination, with IndustriAll, an international alliance of workers unions, related in Brussels: *"There is a growing feeling among voters in rural and older industrial communities that climate policies are designed for the affluent, that jobs for the urban, the educated are not at stake in this transition. This leads to support for right-wing nationalist populism."*

New Change Leads to New Anxiety. While discussions with leaders at many junctures during the study tour reaffirmed the fundamental premise undergirding the transatlantic work to improve economic prospects in key geographies to defuse support for populist movements, the group worked to better understand spiking support for right-wing nationalists occurring recently in Germany, Netherlands, and elsewhere where economic conditions were arguably good.

Saxony State Secretary Thomas Kralinski, noting the spike in voting for the AfD rightwing party in his and neighboring German regions that are arguably better off today than ever before, helped us understand how economic dynamics and political dynamics intertwined. *"Just when the ground resettled under people's feet after the big disorienting change of unification, we were hit by other shocks! First the Great Recession, then crises of Covid, of migration, of inflation, and the war with Ukraine; now the green transformation. People are feeling anxious that maybe their little bit of luck right now could disappear again. They are worried. And they express their fears with their votes."*

There is, in industrial heartland regions, a nostalgia for an economic past—but also a concept of economic dignity, a self-actualized stewardship composed of several elements—the capacity to care for family and experience its greatest joys: the pursuit of potential and purpose and economic participation without domination and humiliation. These 'feelings' matter. — Wolfgang Mössinger

THE STAKES ARE HIGH

Cathryn Clüver Ashbrook reinforced this notion that even as economic conditions appear okay, residents remain anxious that they could change. *"Globalization and lack of re-distribution has given rural populations a sense of economic and cultural endangerment—of always living on cliff's edge."* Clüver told the group in Brussels. *"The fear of potential loss, including loss due to social and economic transformation, has informed European voting patterns in return."*

"Mutinies Have No Plan." A key insight, reinforced by many during our transatlantic discussions, was to remind all not to look for some ideological or policy agenda behind the attitudes and actions of angry, anti-system voters. The Canadian "truckers' strike," the votes for Brexit, for Trump, and for other anti-democratic leaders promising they can "fix" the system that isn't working for the people, are *"best understood as a mutiny,"* reminded University of Manchester's Philip McGann, *"and with a mutiny there is no plan of what comes next."*

Or Cathryn Clüver Ashbrook: *"Our people are in pain and too often the ballot box is the only valve."*

"Political contests cannot be won without the support of residents of rural and de-industrialized regions." — Cathryn Clüver Ashbrook

"This time it is different. There are now geopolitics at stake and involved. There is a paradigm shift in how we need to think about development... Have to rethink and retool (how we build) local participation. We must have real local owner-ship—make real that what is being done is for the benefit of communities". — Peter Berkowitz

The weight of the past. Inequality between places, not people. New change leads to new anxiety. "No one listens to us. No one represents us." "They think we are losers." "The system doesn't work for me." "I see change that only hurts me." Mutinies have no plan.

Given the origins of the public's attitudes and beliefs, what can turn anxiety and anger into affirmative—not destructive—forward movement?

There is a lot at stake, and a lot being done to try and meet the challenge of place-based inequities that underpin anti-democratic movements. The US is now making *unprecedented investments in place-based industrial policy* and more inclusive economic growth. In the UK, both the in-power Conservative government and opposition Labour party share an agenda to *"level-up"* the country's in-decline regions, which the resurgent Labour Party bills as *"From Security Comes Hope."* The European Commission, its member states' governments, universities, civic organizations, and policy partners are focused on enhancing and improving regional structural adjustment and cohesion policies to diminish the political damage and the political threat to member countries. The OECD is *doubling down on efforts* to bring countries together to share knowledge and develop road maps and inventories based on successful transformations—*more purposefully now for the political reason of tamping down anti-democratic sentiment and movements.*

These efforts will likely make a big difference over time. But with *2024 being the "year of the election"*—when voters in 64 countries holding nearly half the world's population head to the polls—time is one thing democracy is running out of. As Cathryn Clüver Ashbrook put it in Brussels: *"The European Parliament elections in June will likely lay bare the degree to which traditional party politics is failing to shape a credible narrative for motivated voters amidst an accelerating degree of changes to their lived realities."*

How Do Leaders Proceed?

Leaders Listen First. To be effective, leaders must understand: what is animating voters is not facts or policies. It is about emotion. It is about identity. Many voters are anxious and angry. As US Congressman Ro Khanna—a frequent contributor to transforming industrial heartland international dialogues—recently *said to the New York Times*: *"We have to meet people where they are. And they don't think we are in a great place right now."*

Leaders who truly understand, feel, and share that anger—that people's lives, their futures, their communities, their kids' prospects aren't what they should be—and can communicate it have a chance to start a positive engagement with disaffected voters. Community empowerment starts with an openness on the part of leaders to be available to constituents, to listen open-endedly to their concerns, to even "walk a mile" in their jobs and shoes—like US Congresswoman Cheri Bustos who spent days working alongside her constituents in various occupations to understand what they face in their life and work.

You can't persuade people the economy is better with the fact that it is; all you can say is, "If you are not feeling it, I'm not done!"

Then Deliver First. Effective leaders see and understand things as residents do: the hollowing out of communities; the loss of local schools and sports leagues; degraded main and high streets; and lost cultural facilities, union halls, local papers, family-owned shops, taverns, and restaurants.

Then leaders like Newcastle's Mayor Driscoll focus on meeting some of their tangible and immediate needs—for example, getting the transport to work when it is needed. In doing so they can earn constituents' "permission" to do larger things. As Mayor Andy Burnham of Manchester told us last year at another forum: *"Start with the little things, fix up and get the graffiti off the high street, get the buses running on time and where they need to be."*

If done well, this can create trust between communities and leaders—trust that will nurture support and acceptance of additional investments that can move communities forward in more substantive ways, such as with larger-scale investments in people, infrastructure, and innovation.

Don't "Other" Your Constituents. So much of the alienation is because voters, particularly the working class in communities in economic decline, can't identify someone in charge who wants to help and support them, who also actually listens to them, that represents them. These voters turn to those they feel do listen.

We know that top-down doing-to-communities doesn't work. Outsiders talking down about "changes *you* need to make," only begets the digging in of heels.

Joe Biden talks about delivering *for* middle class families on issues *they* care about sitting at their kitchen table. Donald Trump, meanwhile, is *at* the kitchen table promising retribution. US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, at the height of the Great Depression, talked to citizens about what "we" face: *"My firm belief is that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."* Don't talk about policies. Talk about identity: *"We are going*

to make the system work for *us.*"

Tap the Pride. Call on people's pride. Ask them what they want to do and create in their communities. The study tour and its discussions offered many examples of communities rebuilding pride and identity towards fashioning a positive future. Pipefitters in Wausau, Wisconsin, leading infrastructure repair: *"We are ready to teach people."* Former Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto about his region: *"Let's go back to the regions that built the world once, let's give them the challenge to do it again."*

People want to be seen and acknowledged for their hard work. Successfully rebuilding this pride can be one of the most powerful boosters of industrial heartland regeneration. Conversations must shift from a deficit mindset to one that highlights the assets, resiliency, and vibrancy that outlasts economic and industrial cycles in these areas. Effective local leaders find ways to build on the community and its historic roots to reinvigorate residents' pride in themselves and their community.

Nowhere is this seen more dramatically than in the Saarland, the historic steelmaking valley connecting France and Germany. Leaders here were not pushing a radically different economic model to residents, but were leaning into the region's industrial identity as one of Europe's largest steelmaking and auto parts suppliers. We found among the region's economic development officials and steel workers union an optimism and determination to lead the green transformation. Workers Council head Stephan Ahr told our group: *"We have to do this! Change is necessary, and when we do make the green transition we will show the nation and we will show the world that the Saarland can secure the future of the industry. We will show the way."*

Locals in Charge of Change. Mayor Driscoll pointed the way to do better: *"We must get out of centralization, get people on the ground—business owners, community groups, local governments—in charge of the change. We won't fix*

our political problems unless someone in the Northeast of England thinks someone speaks for them."

Return decision-making to the local level, give local leaders the resources and tools and time to do their job. Trust that they can. And well-intentioned leaders need to up their game. No leader, no matter how well intentioned, can force change on people, or do *"for"* or *"to"* people. The message from leaders must be, *"It is not okay that your prospects and your communities' conditions aren't what they should be. We see and hear you. We understand why you are upset with the conditions of your community. You and your community and future success are a national priority. We are here to support you and your own ideas, for building a brighter future."*

Reconnect to the World. Serious political leaders on both sides of the Atlantic have responded with efforts to reconnect residents of rural and former industrial heartland communities to economic opportunity—with many examples afforded by participants in the study tour and transatlantic dialogue. Broadband as a public utility. Transportation options that get people where they need to go when they need to go. More universities—in Europe and around the world—in rural and remote communities. Reconnection both nurtures new economic activity and eases feelings of isolation and alienation. As communities find their path to renewed success, it restores community pride and optimism about the future, and diminishes the appeal of polarizing, political movements.

Build Belonging Within. *"When you have a whole county that is depressed, you need to move to the political, to the societal level—can't take care of it one person at a time. As a community you have to find a politics that acknowledges the deep sadness—the loss."* Pittsburgh's Kevin Thompson.

Reconnecting communities to the broader world must be coupled with rebuilding connection within communities to break the isolation and the feelings of rootlessness—as efforts in Midland, Michigan, Washington, Pennsylvania, and other communities are trying to do. Putting residents' emo-

tional well-being at the center of their community regeneration efforts is key. *"You can't underestimate how important belonging is to people, to businesses, to community organizations—to feel that you are part of a community, a community that includes you, values you, to which you belong."*

How Do We Turn Rage into Hope?

The challenge confronting leaders offering thoughtful long-term solutions to the crisis facing democracy today is that they are often focused exclusively on policy. Leaders seriously working to tackle big problems—whether it's closing yawning economic divides for residents in our neglected heartland regions, tackling climate change with meaningful green transformation, rebuilding infrastructures, or closing the digital skills divides with needed education and training programs—are offering policy solutions. Policies that will take time to be felt. Policies that are hard to explain.

These important societal transitions (green, digital, "just") *do* have to be delivered to rebuild local economies and retain national democracies. This is the job taken up by serious politicians who want to provide a constructive, versus destructive response to the legitimate frustrations and anxieties of working families.

Meanwhile, populists don't have to deliver anything—they just channel anger and disaffection. They tell people who to blame. They pledge to bring back the past and protect voters from change. They encourage blowing up the system. They don't even pretend to address the root causes animating voters' feelings of unease, frustration, and anger. Damaging demagogues turn the understandable anger and anxiety of heartland residents into anti-system actions.

Democracy "preservers" still need to do the hard and messy work of delivering policy, but they need to speak very differently—right now. It is important to give people voice, give people hope. As Ro Khanna also *told the New York Times*: "We have to talk about creating wealth, we have to talk about production….The central concern people have is that the American dream has slipped away, that people don't think that their lives or their kids' lives are going to be as good as the lives of their parents…. So how do we capture the economic imagination of the country to believe that their prospects are going to be better? By doing things in communities that have [for example] lost steel; saying look, we're going to put up new steel plants in these communities."

Those who care about making a difference, who care about democracy, must be just as active, just as aggressive as the demagogues—but they must be more inspiring, offering more of what Khanna calls "economic imagination."

The election in Poland that occurred in October 2023—just before the study tour—offered participants a hopeful counterpoint to the handwringing and assaults on democracy. A larger than expected popular vote turnout—fueled by young people and others eager to embrace Europe and the world, eager to start the important work of rebuilding democracy—showed that the "will of the people," when allowed and inspired to speak, can steer things in a different direction.

President Barack Obama demonstrated, by getting elected President twice in America, that hope can overcome fear. The Ukrainian students *I recently met in Poland* showed me that a fierce determination to think freely, be free, and lead the change in society can and will conquer despots.

Leaders in our countries who want to deliver better lives for their citizens have to first listen with respect, understand, and meet people where they are—then link arms to build the brighter future their people want and can come to see.

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ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

The *Transforming Industrial Heartlands Initiative* is a transatlantic collaborative partnership coordinated by John Austin. The initiative, its learning exchanges, convenings, events, study tours, presentations, publications, and other learning products, are conducted with partners including the Brookings Institution; the Georgetown University BMW Center for German and European Studies; the Jefferson Education Society; the Ruhrkonferenz of North-Rhine Westphalia; Policy Manchester at the University of Manchester, UK; the

University Allianz Ruhr; the German Consulate General in Chicago; the European Commission Directorate of Regional and Urban Policy; and the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, among others.

To learn more about the initiative, receive the initiative's newsletter, and participate in events and learning exchanges, **contact John Austin at the University of Michigan: jcaustin@umich.edu**

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