1

Insecurity, Inequality, and Democracy

In the last four decades, world democracy has seen some dramatic changes. In the 1980s democracy was restored to Brazil with a landmark constitution, after two decades of military rule. In the early 1990s came the historic end of the autocratic regimes of the Soviet Union and its allies in eastern Europe, soon followed by another historic end, that of the apartheid regime in South Africa (and of the regime of Augusto Pinochet in Chile somewhat earlier). In the late 1990s democracy was restored in Indonesia (after many decades of military rule) and Nigeria (after military rule off and on in previous decades). In the three decades up to 2010 the world's largest democracy, India, saw a remarkable widening of its democratic empowerment of hitherto subordinate social groups and castes (which some have described as tantamount to a social revolution).

Along with these positive developments the last four decades have also seen some broad economic and political changes that have ended up shrinking the horizon of democracy. These decades have seen a rise of finance capital in much of the capitalist world (widening the gulf between Wall Street and Main Street), with its excesses causing not just the worldwide financial crisis of 2007–2009 but a general public distrust

in economic and political institutions that form the basic foundations of democracy. There has also been a grotesque rise in economic inequality in most of the world in this period; even in countries (like some in Latin America) where inequality has not sharply increased, its level often remains very high. The *World Inequality Report* data have shown that between 1980 and 2018 the share of national income going to the richest 1 percent has increased rapidly in China, India, the countries of North America, and Russia and more moderately in Europe. The International Monetary Fund's *World Economic Outlook Report* for April 2017 shows that labor share in national income has been by and large declining since at least the early 1990s in both advanced and developing economies. Such inequality is harmful to democracy, as it weakens the voice of the majority of workers and allows the elite to rig the democratic process (through various forms of influencing, media shaping, lobbying, and dominating campaign finance for business-friendly parties).

THE RISE OF POPULIST DEMAGOGUES

How do voters see these ongoing events? One of the most striking political phenomena in different parts of the world over the last decade or so has been the rise of so-called populism—in Brazil under Jair Bolsonaro, in Hungary under Viktor Orbán, in India under Narendra Modi, in the Philippines under Rodrigo Duterte, in Poland under the ruling Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) party, in Russia under Vladimir Putin, in Slovenia under Janez Janša, in Turkey under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in parts of the United Kingdom culminating in Brexit, in the United States under Donald Trump, and so on. There have also been strong populist opposition parties, as in France with Front National (now renamed Rassemblement National), in Italy with Lega Nord (and the Fratelli d'Italia), in Germany with Alternative für Deutschland (AfD),

in Spain with Vox, in Portugal with CHEGA and IL, and in Sweden with Sverigedemokraterna. Most of these cases of populism come mainly from the right. There have also been some cases of left-wing populism, particularly in Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela), although—in reaction particularly to what is called "the specter of Venezuela"—a hard right-wing movement is also noticeable in parts of Latin America.

By *populism* different people, of course, mean different things. There are differences in the use of the term *populism* even among academic social scientists—between, say, economists and political scientists. Economists associate it with short-termism, where long-term interests of the economy are neglected often by policies of macroeconomic profligacy. But there is a distinct political science interpretation of populism, where a leader, supposed to embody the popular will, tramples upon due process and the rules and institutions of representative government. We are mainly concerned with the latter interpretation here. This applies more directly in the cases of the right-wing populism mentioned above, though even in some left-wing cases there have been violations of democratic procedures. (The Latin American left-populist cases also provide some direct examples of the economists' interpretation of populism.)

Populist upheavals have often upended or considerably weakened the established centrist democratic parties. One frequently hears the complaint that the latter have been insufficiently responsive to rising inequality, with the rich getting richer, while the poor and the middle classes have faced stagnation (or worse) in their incomes and standards of living. In the general public discussion on populism it has been quite common, both in media and in academia, to attribute its rise to the high and increasing inequality. The widely noted 2011 protest movement in New York, Occupy Wall Street (and similar Occupy movements spawned by it elsewhere around that time), was directly a protest against inequality and the top 1 percent in the income distribution,

though its organization style seems to have been inspired more by left-wing anarchism and sentiments for direct democracy than by right-wing populism. In Chile—off and on, several times over the last decade—protests have broken out against the stark inequalities and against the privatization of public services (protests on similar grounds also erupted in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru in recent years). Though the Occupy movement soon fizzled out, the Chilean protest movement was protracted and resulted in a successful constitutional referendum, partly because the inequality protests were combined with widely perceived grievances about injustices flowing from privatized education and pension system. Recently a young left-wing leader who came to prominence during those protests won the presidential election.

Inequality does not seem to be the real substantive issue in many other populist agitations around the world. More often than not, when the demagogues tell the workers about the callousness of the political establishment to their economic plight, they enthusiastically rally to their banner and do not care that these leaders themselves often belong to the top 1 percent—as in the case of multimillionaires like Babiš, Erdoğan, Nigel Farage, Orbán, Putin, or Trump. In the United States prior to the rise of Trump there was the large antitaxation and anti-liberal-elite Tea Party movement stoked by an organization that was bankrolled by the billionaires Charles and David Koch. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild in her 2016 book *Strangers in Their Own Land* reports from her field survey of that movement in Louisiana that the poor white workers there are more resentful of minorities and immigrants than of the large petrochemical companies that have poisoned their land for decades. In India, Modi's Hindu fanatic supporters are more resentful of the usually much poorer Muslims than the crony capitalists that Modi seems cozy with. In general, the discontent that inequality may generate can be quite opaque and not always directed at the very rich, except rhetorically. Sociologists have often pointed out that the part of inequality that is salient to us is the contrast between our own

lifestyle—and housing and school choices—and that of those who may be just above us. The inequality with the billionaires or the top 1 percent is too distant.

INSECURITY, MORE THAN INEQUALITY, AGITATES PEOPLE

It is arguable that, more than inequality, it is the rising insecurity that common people have faced over the last few decades that has fueled much of their dissatisfaction with established political parties and with the traditional rules and processes of representative democracy. Let me elaborate on this argument.

The insecurity I have in mind is of different kinds—much of it economic, but some of it also cultural, and even ecological and physical or existential insecurity in many contexts. The economic insecurity mainly refers to income and job insecurity. With increasing global integration, and particularly the rise of China, manufacturing jobs in advanced and also in some developing countries have been outsourced, and this has led to a sharp decline in many regional industries and economies. Whole areas have been blighted, and the local workers have found it difficult to change jobs or residence or adjust in other ways. There is widespread anxiety and despair.

The impact of "China shock" has now been documented and quantified for the US economy and some European economies. In the United States, the most well-known work, by David Autor and colleagues (2020), shows that in areas subject to larger import penetration there has been long-lasting decline in manufacturing employment and in relative earnings of low wage workers; and in the harder-hit areas there have been stronger political shifts in a right-wing direction (particularly if the areas have a sizable non-Hispanic white population). Also, in the

United States, the fabled land of high mobility of people, the actual extent of immobility has astonished many researchers, and geographic or place-based inequality turns out to be very high. Intergenerational mobility has also declined. It has been estimated by Raj Chetty and colleagues (2017) that for children born in 1940, there was a 90 percent chance that in their midthirties they'd earn an inflation-adjusted income higher than that of their parents; for the cohort born in 1980 that chance has declined substantially, thus darkening the aspirational horizon of a lot of middle-class families.

For Europe it is well known that support for Brexit has been particularly strong in the Midlands and Northern England, for Front National in deindustrializing areas of France, and for AfD in eastern Germany. In Europe, support for the European Union (EU) is often identified with support for economic integration and generally liberal policies. Using data from 63,417 electoral districts across all EU countries in the elections for the European Parliament, Lewis Dijkstra, Hugo Poelman, and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose (2020) show that voting for anti-EU parties is considerably higher in areas of industrial decline. Using European Social Survey data, Italo Colantone and Piero Stanig (2018) find that regions adversely affected by Chinese imports are less supportive of democratic institutions and less likely to hold liberal values.

There are no such detailed quantitative studies for India, but even there, it is easy to see that markets have been flooded by cheaper Chinese goods. This is not just in consumer electronics like cell phones and laptops; it has been widely noted that in religious festivals even idols of Indian gods and goddesses and the festive lights to illuminate them are made in China. China's larger scale of production—apart from subsidies and favored allocation of land and capital, in some cases—and India's worse infrastructure and worker skill levels make Indian domestic products often uncompetitive. Concomitantly, support for some protectionism and right-wing politics has increased in the last decade.

GLOBAL INTEGRATION INTERACTING WITH AUTOMATION

At the same time, on a more general level it would be a mistake to look for a widespread backlash against globalization. There has recently been some decline in international trade largely due to supply chain disruption during the 2020 pandemic and the brewing geopolitical tension between China, Russia, and the United States, but as a fuel for the rise of populism one should not exaggerate its importance for a whole range of countries. Even at the height of populist upheavals, a survey of eighteen countries ("What the World Thinks About Globalization" 2016) reported in *The Economist* magazine suggested that the majority of respondents were quite positive on globalization in Denmark, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, among other places (if China had been included in the survey, it probably would have been on the same list). Support for globalization was low in Australia, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In the longer perspective, what we have seen is the expected fallout in rich countries from the decline in their domination for more than a century in international trade and investment and the growing assertiveness and weight of developing countries (particularly in Asia). An early 2020 survey carried out by YouGov Deutschland, as reported in Coka and Rausch (2020), just before the COVID-19 pandemic on attitudes toward globalization, in fifteen countries (some developed and some developing, including China), roughly confirms the 2016 findings. Support for globalization is stronger in developing than developed countries—strongest in the poorest country in the sample, Nigeria, and the weakest in France.

It is interesting to note that while people in rich countries are getting pessimistic about future generations being better off than the current generation, this is not the case in some of the low- or middle-income countries participating in the global integration process. For example, according to the Global Attitudes Survey of 2017 by the Pew Research

Center, as reported in Stokes (2017), in Europe and North America a median 60 percent of respondents (it is as high as 71 percent in France) believe that when children grow up they will be financially worse off than their parents; the corresponding numbers in India, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Indonesia are 12, 23, 24 and 26 percent, respectively.

In rich countries, in particular, what has interacted with the effect of global integration is the labor displacement effect of automation, digitization of tasks, robotization, and artificial intelligence. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2020), about 46 percent of jobs in rich countries are either totally or partially (in terms of some tasks) likely to be subject to automation. Even in jobs where humans work with robots, many of the tasks are now increasingly performed at an intolerably accelerated, dehumanizing pace. Globalization and import penetration attract more public attention, as one can fix the blame on foreign companies and foreign government policies (and even though in most medium to large economies "nontradeables," like various services, form a big fraction of total output). But in many cases automation may have destroyed just as many jobs; this is particularly evident in the data where total value added increases even as employment falls.

This has political effects. Across eleven countries, using European Social Survey data, Zhen Jie Im and colleagues (2019) find that the likelihood of voting for radical Right parties is considerably higher for occupations affected by automation, and this effect is more pronounced for individuals reporting (very) low income security.

WHY A MOVE TO THE RIGHT, NOT THE LEFT?

A question that is pertinent here is why the recent job and income insecurity has been associated almost invariably with the rise of radical right-wing, but not left-wing, politics—except in some countries, like

Portugal, Spain, the Wallonia region of Belgium, and Mexico, where the Left has done better than the Right in reaction to the pressure for austerity policies to cope with the crisis. In Brazil and India the economic downturn after the financial crisis of 2007–2009 made the incumbent social democratic parties—the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) and the Congress Party, respectively—unpopular, along with charges of rampant corruption against them, and the anti-incumbent turn to the right-wing party is understandable. But in Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and elsewhere the crisis (particularly in jobs and household debt) and the attendant austerity policies pushed voters mainly to the right rather than toward leftist parties advocating more redistribution.

One possible reason may be that, outside the United States, most right-wing parties (e.g., in France, Germany, India, or Poland) were not in favor of seriously weakening the preexisting worker welfare policies, which partly neutralized the attraction of leftist parties. In Poland the populist party PiS has been quite active in child assistance policies. In Turkey one signature policy of Erdog˘an was to expand universal health care policy. Even on an explicitly redistributive issue, Thomas Piketty, in his book *Capital and Ideology,* reports the data from a survey of voters in the first round of 2017 presidential elections in France, that in response to a question about "taking from the rich and giving to the poor in order to achieve social justice," 46 percent of voters for Emmanuel Macron agreed that it was a good idea, but the percentage is significantly higher not just for the far-left voters for Jean-Luc Mélenchon (67 percent) but also for the right-wing voters for Marine Le Pen (61 percent). But the more important Left versus Right distinction in opinions may have to do with the fact that economic insecurity was often intertwined with cultural insecurity, which the Right was in a better position to exploit. Let us now examine this more closely.

CULTURAL INSECURITY

Cultural issues are, of course, different between rich and poor countries. There are more empirical studies available in Europe and the United States in recent years on how economic insecurity may have triggered cultural insecurity among certain sections of the population. In many places, particularly small towns and rural areas, there is evidence of the rise of cultural intolerance and majoritarian high-handedness, even violence, toward ethnic minorities and other nonstandard identity groups. With economic decline and depopulation in some areas, the local residents are anxious about preserving the identity of their traditional community (including its traditional status hierarchies). Psychologists point out that a sense of status insecurity and anxiety about one's diminished personal standing sometimes get expressed in aggression toward and intimidation of outside groups.

Related is the spreading anxiety about losing social / cultural status among the (lower) middle classes in many countries. Barbara Ehrenreich has vividly captured this for the United States in a book titled *Fear of Falling* (1989). This kind of social vertigo in an increasingly competitive world has alienated many from the mainstream political system. In India, with the widening of democracy in the last decades of the last century, the rise of the lower castes in the political hierarchy roused similar status anxiety in the middle classes. In Brazil similar effects were produced by the vigorous affirmative action programs pursued by the PT regime.

There is an interesting contrast in the dissatisfaction between right-wing and left-wing voters. Yann Algan and colleagues (2017) find that in the 2017 French presidential election, voters with low interpersonal trust were likely to vote for Le Pen. Even though left-wing voters for Mélenchon had similar low incomes and a sense of misery as the Le Pen voters, the former had more trust and wanted the government

to address injustice. In the United States, Rafael Di Tella, Juan Dubra, and Alejandro Lagomarsino (2019) find that distrust in the government leads to skepticism about redistributive policies that the Left may advocate. Long-run data from the General Social Survey and the Pew Research Center suggest that interpersonal trust and trust in government have been at historically low levels in the United States in recent times. World Values Survey data, as reported in Ortiz-Ospina and Roser (2016), suggest that, in general, trust in government has been going down in OECD countries in recent years. Elsewhere, interpersonal trust is very low in highly unequal countries like Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and South Africa.

A part of the distrust of government is reflected in the hostility and suspicion against bureaucrats and politicians, and the "experts" and technocrats, in distant Brussels or Washington, DC, where the "deep state" has its supposed tentacles. "Take back control" is a popular slogan. In developing countries, officials and politicians are widely perceived to be corrupt—for example, a Pew Research Center survey in India in 2018, as reported in Devlin and Johson (2018), shows that two-thirds of respondents see politicians as corrupt—so skepticism about redistributive programs is not uncommon. In contrast, many religious charitable organizations are perceived as doing a good job in providing basic social services to the poor. In many cases these organizations are affiliates of populist right-wing parties (for detailed fieldwork evidence on the work of such grassroots affiliates in India, see Thachil [2014]). The contrast with frequently callous and corrupt government officials is clear, and poor voters may feel more attached to such populist religious parties on this ground than to left-wing parties promising redistributive social services through the usual bureaucratic channels.

The politically sensitive cultural issue that often divides the Right and Left is, of course, that of immigration. The early 2020 survey carried out by YouGov Deutschland, as reported in Halpin (2021), shows that in France, Germany, Mexico, and Russia a majority of respondents

consider immigration to be a negative force. Support for anti-immigration parties in France and Italy are now quite high in opinion polls. (Even social democratic parties in Scandinavia have been compelled to adjust their policy toward immigration.) Immigration is, of course, both an economic and cultural issue, and its intensity varies with the immigrants' skill levels in labor market competition with native workers and their cultural distance from the local population.

But that it is primarily a cultural issue becomes apparent when one sees that the tension about immigrants remains even when people can be convinced that their net effect on the economy is often positive and that they are not a drain on the welfare budget. Of course, such convincing is itself a difficult task, as there is a wide gulf between popular perception and reality on the numbers involved: Albert Alesina, Armando Miano, and Stefanie Stantcheva (2019) show from survey data that the proportion of migrants in the population is perceived to be two to three times as large as the actual levels in the United States and western Europe. The false stereotypes and generally adverse perception is higher in areas where immigrants are fewer than in big cities and urban hubs, where immigrants mostly are, and populist politicians usually get more support in the former areas. In Germany, for example, the anti-immigrant extreme right-wing AfD gets more support in the eastern part of the country, where there are very few immigrants. Yotam Margalit (2019) shows, from a number of studies, that there is negative attitude to immigrants even among workers whose jobs are not directly affected. It is possible that the anxiety arising even from nonlocal stories of economic insecurity and job churning on TV and social media heightens the general sense of insecurity.

In addition, there is special aversion to Muslim immigrants, particularly in Europe—Muslim masons face more hate and discrimination than do Polish plumbers. This is partly because of the large cultural gulf in social norms with the natives, partly the stereotypical Islamophobic association of all Muslims with international terrorism, and

partly because of an exaggerated looming sense of massive numbers of Muslim immigrants in Europe from nearby countries taking over—which is, for example, captured in the novel *Submission* by the French writer Michel Houellebecq on a dystopian speculation about a time when France has become an Islamic state. There are accounts by right-wing intellectuals of what is called the Great Replacement (of the indigenous by immigrants). In French politics, even Macron and his ministers are fuming against "Islamo-leftism" (a term for liberal appeasement of Muslims, and also a familiar trope for supporters of Modi or Trump), and Le Pen has softened her party's economic policies (now not so much against the euro, and even calling for "green reindustrialization") while hardening its stance on Islam and immigration.

In southeastern Europe the populists sometimes invoke selective historical memory. Christian Ochsner and Felix Rosel (2019) point out how in recent elections the right-wing parties in Austria stoked the memory of Ottoman pillaging around Vienna in 1529 and 1683 and harvested votes more in the previously pillaged than nonpillaged municipalities, in an area where there was no difference in anti-Muslim sentiment between the two kinds of municipalities before. (During the Bosnian War, such stoking by ethnic group leaders of long-dormant hostilities between Serbs and Muslims was quite common.)

Such anti-Muslim sentiment and the practice of stoking historical resentment among Hindu nationalists has become quite rampant in India. The nationalists have also created a false sense that Hindus are soon to be outnumbered by the Muslims due to the latter's higher fertility rates, even though Hindus constitute about 80 percent of the population and the fertility rates of Muslims in areas of higher levels of mass education (e.g., Kerala) are significantly lower than those of Hindus in less educated areas (e.g., Uttar Pradesh). What is overlooked is that, more than religious affiliation, a major determinant of fertility rates is the level of a mother's education, and that the latter often

depends on vigorous public education policies of the local government (as in Kerala). In general there is a manufactured sense of Hindu victimhood, running on the same lines as ideas about white victimhood and a loss of entitlement that white supremacists in Europe or the United States have created. The Hindu militant cultural organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh not only provides the main political leadership in the ruling party but is also reported to have infiltrated some sections of the military and the police.

Religious / cultural majoritarianism is also the main fuel for right-wing populist parties in other developing countries like Brazil and Turkey. In Turkey the secular-religious divide has polarized people for many decades, and the association of the secular with the military, which often brutally persecuted religious people, as well as the Left, made some prodemocratic forces initially side with the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; AKP) led by Erdoğan, which rallied many of the poor and moderately religious people. But over time the party became more Islamist and hostile to non-Muslims, Kurds, and atheists and gave up on democratic pretensions. Its organizations and networks, however, were widespread, including the membership of Islamic trade unions, and its large housing and other construction projects and health policy had popular support. (Very recently, Erdoğan's mismanagement of the economy has caused some disaffection among the poor).

In Brazil, evangelists, particularly from Pentecostal churches, succeeded in mobilizing support for the populist leader, Bolsonaro, among many poor people. Some military groups offer powerful backing, too, as Bolsonaro is one of their own. The police have also been largely militarized. In the virulent culture wars raged by these Bolsonaro supporters much of the fomenting of hate and associated hate crimes are directed against cultural minorities—black people, women, followers of African religions, and LGBTQ people. (Of late, Bolsonaro's gross mismanagement of the pandemic has led to a slump in his popularity.)

RESENTMENT OF THE ELITE

Those who consider inequality the source of populism point out that the populists are anti-elite. But the right-wing populists' target is often not the financial elite but the cultural elite. In Europe, India, Turkey, the United States, and elsewhere, the perceived appeasement of minorities—assumed to be implicit in the liberal support for minority rights—fosters resentment among the majority, which finds the liberal rhetoric of diversity and political correctness condescending if not outright threatening. Conversely, a Modi or a Trump's thinly veiled rantings or spewing of venom, taken as raw antiestablishment spontaneity ("He tells it like it is"), energize this base. In Hochschild's book (2016), her white working-class respondents in Louisiana sense that all demographic groups other than theirs receive sympathy from liberals. Hochschild quotes a gospel singer, an avid Rush Limbaugh fan, saying, "Oh, liberals think that Bible-believing Southerners are ignorant, backward, rednecks, losers. They think we're racist, sexist, homophobic, and maybe fat." A Tea Party enthusiast claims, "People think we're not good people if we don't feel sorry for blacks and immigrants and Syrian refugees. . . . But I am a good person and I don't feel sorry for them."

In different parts of the world, ethnic and cultural minorities are often oppressed and pushed to the wall by the leaders of majoritarian parties who, as I have noted, succeed in stoking in the majority communities feelings of victimhood and being under siege. In India (or Turkey) one will hear Hindu (or Muslim) fanatics ranting about the danger they face from terrorist Muslims (or Kurds); in Hungary one will hear about being deluged by (largely nonexistent) immigrants. As a result, there is now considerable tension between the politics of electoral mobilization and the procedural aspects of democracy. Mobilized followers do not care much about the procedural niceties of a liberal order. They often show impatience with the encumbrances of due process and affirmative action. They hanker for strong leaders who can

embody the will of the people, surpass those encumbrances, and provide seductively simple solutions to problems. The organizational norms of traditional political parties that once disciplined mass fanaticism are being cast aside; voters are choosing political outsiders, or, within established political parties, leaders who defy traditionalists (like the bullying shambolic showman Boris Johnson in the British Tory Party), or (as in the US primaries) the more radical sections of the party get more voice. In some populist leaders brazenness, incivility, and in-your-face aggressiveness activate cultural tribalism and are taken as a sign of "authenticity," in contrast with the duplicitous, wily, and politically correct style of established leaders. Even when a centrist leader like Emmanuel Macron wins, as in the April 2022 election, large numbers consider him aloof, as reflected in the substantial vote share for Le Pen and the low voter turnout.

Among some recent writers there is a general critique of liberal modernity, popular with postmodernists and cultural theorists, that resonates ideologically with the turn toward populism. This critique usually associates modernity with cutthroat capitalism, and the ravages of imperialism with a presiding technocratic nation-state. It traces the poison all the way back to the Enlightenment, even though it should be pointed out that Karl Marx and Mao Zedong are as much the children of this modernity as are Adam Smith and Milton Friedman. This critique of modernity is now quite familiar from the reading lists of any self-respecting cultural studies department. Here I shall confine myself to its exposition in Pankaj Mishra's *Age of Anger* (2017), in which the critique is directly related to the populist anger that concerns us here.

Going back to the eighteenth century, Mishra recalls Jean-Jacques Rousseau's romanticist reaction to the Enlightenment's rationalist narrative of unyielding progress, finding a reflection of that reaction in today's illiberal challenge, from the angry worker in the US Rust Belt all the way to the Islamist suicide bomber. *Ressentiment,* born out of "an intense mix of envy and sense of humiliation and powerlessness," is

undermining civic society. We are made to believe that *Homo economicus,* in its hyperrational pursuit of greed and self-interest, is the culprit.

For all of the faults of capitalism (and economics, for that matter), I think this is too sweeping a judgment. In trying to explain too much, it actually explains very little. Contrary to Mishra's image of an angry East reacting to the destabilizing effects of Western capitalism, this rage appears to be less intense in those parts of the East (including East, South, and Southeast Asia) where capitalist growth has been relatively successful, than in North Africa and West Asia, where capitalist growth has been stunted and economic misery has been accentuated by corrupt political tyranny. The highly popular Arab Spring, soon snuffed out, was a rebellion not against Western liberalism but against domestic tyranny and youth unemployment. The traditional Islamists seem disturbed less by the rational pursuit of money (Islam has nothing against profit seeking) than by the collusion between domestic and foreign oligarchies. In fighting the "crusaders," the Islamists try to build an apparatus with all its modernist technomilitary paraphernalia.

Contrary to Mishra's view, there is an intellectual tradition that suggests that economic interests can in fact tame human passions. In *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), John Maynard Keynes writes, "Dangerous human proclivities can be canalized into comparatively harmless channels by the existence of opportunity for money-making and private wealth, which, if they cannot be satisfied in this way, may find their outlet in cruelty, the reckless pursuit of personal power and authority, and other forms of self-aggrandizement." Albert O. Hirschman's *The Passions and the Interests* (1977) has a more nuanced discussion of the relationship between interests and passions. Yet both Keynes and Hirschman were talking about earlier times in Europe. Today, when the opportunities for moneymaking have opened up in countries such as China and India, passions are channeled by the ruling party into the service of a national aggrandizement that capitalist growth has at last made possible.

Of course, in recent years the gulf between the working class and the liberal elite has widened. The blue-collar working-class supporters of populist demagogues are often older, less educated, and residents of small towns and rural areas. They are socially more conservative and their life is centered around often decaying local communities. The elites, meanwhile, have become isolated by effectively segregating themselves in large gentrified cities, marrying within their class, and adopting mostly professional occupations and lifestyles. This liberal professional elite is more cosmopolitan in outlook; they are "globalists" in Trump's pejorative term, or "citizens of nowhere," as described by Theresa May, the former UK conservative prime minister. In Western countries this liberal elite has provided much of the support base for the type of politics practiced by Tony Blair, the Clintons, Emmanuel Macron, or Barack Obama, which has driven away significant numbers of the white working class disillusioned about social democratic parties (we'll come back to this in chapter 6). The elite politics have often connived at some pruning of the welfare state and public services, macroeconomic austerity policies, trade and financial liberalization, and openness to immigration and to the increasing diversity of identity groups (based on race, gender, or sexual orientation)—all of which have in one way or another alienated many among workers.

As I have mentioned, anti-elitist populist wrath in developing countries is similarly not against the financial elite. In India, for example, Modi, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is, as I have noted, quite cozy with billionaire businessmen, some of whom get special state favors for their companies—in particular in the terms for loans from public banks, relaxed terms for default on such loans, tax concessions, and waivers from or the dilution of regulations, including those for protecting the environment and forest people. In return the BJP gets corporate donations, many times larger than all the other political parties combined, through a process that was always murky but has recently been made murkier by a system of electoral bonds on which there is

hardly any requirement for disclosure. Crony oligarchy is the prevalent mode in the economic sphere. Meanwhile the Gini index of wealth inequality in India (measured from household survey data that usually understate such inequality) has almost reached the same range as in Latin America, which alongside West Asia is usually considered to be the most unequal region in the world. The top 1 percent in India holds nearly one-third of all wealth. Politically, as Gilles Verniers and Christophe Jaffrelot (2020) show, the BJP, in spite of its rhetoric of inclusion, primarily recruits its parliamentary candidates from the traditional elite (its upper-caste representation is substantially more than that of other parties) and from strong local and regional business networks.

Populist wrath is instead focused against the liberal cultural elite, which is supposed to be "soft" on minorities, and particularly Muslims. Muslims are among the poorest groups in India, often discriminated against by the majority Hindu population in jobs, housing, and social interaction; they are victims of hate crimes and violence perpetrated by vigilante mobs, highly underrepresented in politics (while they are 14 percent of the population, they hold only about 4 percent of seats in the Indian Parliament). Yet the BJP has succeeded in creating a false narrative of Muslim perfidy (with Muslim-majority Pakistan next door as the perpetual bogeyman), citing the history of Muslim conquest many centuries back and recent cases of international terrorism and illegal immigration. In his campaigns Modi has invoked what he calls Hindu anger. As we have seen, this trope of false victimhood, manufactured resentment, and the imaginary danger of being outnumbered often works. The BJP has figured out that stoking intercommunity tension helps the party mobilize majoritarian impulses and consolidate large numbers of low-caste Hindu votes for a party of mainly the socioeconomic elite, somewhat like the Republican Party in the United States serving the interests of the business elite, while stoking culture wars to consolidate party votes among the socially conservative lower classes.

Even though the right-wing populist parties in both India and Turkey draw upon religious majoritarianism, there is an important difference in

the development of the party support base in the two countries. In Turkey the poor, the less educated, and the rural middle classes were always major supporters of the AKP, and over time the party succeeded in mobilizing a more cross-class coalition. In India the BJP was initially mainly a party of Hindu upper castes, traders, and urban middle classes; only in recent years has it succeeded in making alliances with some middle and lower castes and appealed to some poor people through its Hindu nationalist slogans, national security alarms, and, in particular, Modi's personal oratorical discourse of affinity with the aspiring groups coming up from below, resentful of the Westernized liberal elite. Demonizing Muslims as potential traitors and terrorists served the BJP's cause. Similarly, in Brazil, Bolsonaro's main support base was the urban elite and middle classes, alienated by the pro-poor welfare and affirmative action programs of the earlier PT government, but it succeeded in mobilizing the poor through campaigns against crime in the favelas (against so-called bandidos) and through evangelical appeals. In India and Brazil most major metropolitan cities have mainly supported the right-wing populist parties, whereas in Turkey, as in the United States, the major metropolitan cities largely voted against them. One difference between Brazil and India, however, is that the religious and cultural majoritarianism of the BJP in India is more organized and disciplined than in the case of Bolsonaro's party. The media, judiciary, and civil society organizations have also been much more resistant in Brazil than in India. This may be one of the reasons the move to the right is likely to be more durable in India.

THE TOXIC ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

It is now well known that in propagating false narratives, spewing ethnic vitriol, sharpening polarization, and spreading conspiracy theories the internet and social media have played a crucial role. All over the world the right-wing troll armies have been much more effective in spreading their message than the Left has been in countering the damage and

spreading its own message. Regulated more lightly than traditional media, capable of reaching people more directly, and with algorithms that reproduce narratives and send them to like-minded people, the social media have been instrumental in creating vast echo chambers of falsehoods and stereotypes, insulated from checks and balances or correcting narratives. The platforms have also provided a new and easy way for extremists to recruit and crowdsource funds. Populist governments, recognizing all of this, sometimes even hire private firms that specialize in spreading disinformation and discrediting their opponents.

In a gathering of the party's social media volunteers in 2018, Amit Shah—the then-party chief of the BJP, currently the home minister of India—boasted (as quoted in the *Wire,* September 26, 2018), "We are capable of delivering any message we want to the public, whether sweet or sour, true or fake. We can do this work only because . . . of our WhatsApp groups. That is how we (a)re able to make this viral." In an op-ed in the *New York Times,* Shoshana Zuboff (2020) described the social media platforms as "hyper-velocity global blood streams into which anyone may introduce a dangerous virus without a vaccine." There is also a lot of evidence now that false stories spread much faster than true ones, and to a much larger number of users—and the more outrageous tales spread even more rapidly (and the tech companies of social media have a vested interest in virality). Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow (2017) find in their data that in the three months before the 2016 presidential election in the United States, false stories on Facebook favoring Trump were shared about thirty million times, while false stories favoring Clinton were shared eight million times. As early as 1710, Jonathan Swift had said, "Falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it."

Conspiracy theories create an atmosphere of suspicion about established institutions and of lurking danger, for which the populist leaders are self-acclaimed guarantors of protection. A 2019 survey by YouGov and the Cambridge Globalism Project of twenty-six thousand people in twenty-five countries asked respondents whether they believe there is "a single group of people who secretly control events and rule the

world together." Thirty-seven percent in the United States replied that this is "definitely or probably true"; the numbers were 45 percent for Italy, 55 percent for Spain, and 78 percent for Nigeria. Trust in standard democratic procedures and institutions is bound to suffer in such circumstances. No wonder that a Pew Research Center survey of thirty-four countries in 2019 found that a median of 52 percent of respondents are dissatisfied with democracy in their country. A more recent study of 160 countries by Foa et al. (2020) for the Centre for the Future of Democracy at Cambridge University finds that, worldwide, an average of 58 percent of citizens are dissatisfied with democracy (it was 39 percent in 2005); this is particularly the case among the young.

In this chapter I have associated the rise of right-wing populism and the decline of faith in democratic institutions and practices in different parts of the world with the rise in economic and cultural insecurity. Let us note here that other kinds of insecurity in recent years may also be involved. In several ways, issues of even physical or sheer existential insecurity have been uppermost in many minds. These include a rise in terrorism (particularly since September 11, 2001); war and civil strife; ecological catastrophes arising from extreme climate events like hurricanes, forest fires, floods, and mudslides; and long-running problems like the rise in sea levels, overfishing, deforestation, soil erosion, and desertification. Such problems have displaced many livelihoods and led to mass migration—the World Bank has estimated that by midcentury about 143 million people in Latin America, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa will be climate change refugees. An increase in crimes (particularly against women, their numbers exceeding the simple increase in reporting) has further heightened anxiety. And all of this has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which upended life and livelihoods in 2020 and beyond for masses of people. The age of insecurity continues to cast its pall over society and polity all over the world.