

The Authoritarian Populism and Social Pathologies Pulling Democracies Apart

Kyle Hiebert, University of Manitoba, Canada

Abstract

The vast, entrenched inequality caused by globalization has created a deep sense of alienation within electorates suffering from social breakdown, fractured realities, and a loss of faith in the democratic process. Into this gap have jumped uncompromising strongmen who seek to tear down institutional checks and balances of power through a coherent set of anti-democratic tactics that appeal to maligned and disaffected populations. As a result, the transformative changes that numerous democratic societies are undergoing will render them less capable of dealing with the overarching global challenges presented by both the coronavirus pandemic and accelerating climate change. This article seeks to build upon a well-established line of thought within sociology around reasons for the backlash against globalization by offering analysis of how the resulting economic and social change in democratic societies everywhere has followed a practiced, over-arching strategy—one that leverages hyper-individualist views of reality. For evidence, it weaves together a range of intellectual commentary, cultural theory, research reports, journalistic accounts, statistics, and current affairs. The article ends with a call for citizens and scholars alike to connect disparate forms of struggle with one another as a means to rebuild the collective empathy and imagination necessary to solve shared problems.

Keywords: populism, democracy, globalization, inequality, immigration, social media, climate change, morality

Over the past several years, authoritarian populist movements have demolished political and social norms wherever they have taken hold, particularly in America. For many, the November 2020 U.S. elections hold promise to reverse this trend. They feel that American politics and society could revert to form if President Donald Trump is removed from office. Such a result would set a precedent for confronting other regressive, authoritarian, populist governments around the world—or so the theory goes.

But any change in national political leadership will resolve little if the economic and social conditions that enabled the initial rise of authoritarian populist movements are not meaningfully addressed. Such movements—generally defined as those favoring a dominant and impatient winner-take-all assertion of populism, an ideology rooted in the belief that the struggles of ordinary people are ignored by political, cultural, and economic elites—have sprung up on both the political left and the right, winning elections in various democratic societies ranging from neoliberal America and Britain, to post-Communist Hungary and Poland, to Muslim-majority Turkey. Brazil, Germany, Italy, India, Indonesia, Mexico, the Philippines, and Venezuela are among others. These authoritarian populist movements are all symptoms of deeper societal ills borne of inequalities caused by globalization, which have been left to fester. The irony is that rectifying these ills, and working to solve over-arching global challenges, has now been made more difficult precisely because of the transformative changes to society triggered by these movements.

In each of their own parallel projects to reinstate a mythical past into the present world, authoritarian populist movements have all main-streamed fringe conspiracy theories and overt expressions of hate, xenophobia, anti-intellectualism, and anti-institutionalism. Hardly idiosyncratic products of national history, authoritarian populist movements everywhere instead follow very similar patterns of behavior and intent, including President Trump and his supporters in America. Combined with localized grievances against the very real harms of globalization, which get distorted through ever more digitized human interaction free of the traditional counter-balances of in-person dignity and communal bonds, these movements have weaponized pre-existing social schisms and actively splintered previously shared senses of reality and resultant ethics within democratic societies. One grave consequence is that different groups appear to be losing completely their willingness to empathize and compromise with people unlike themselves.

Taken all together, the democratic world has slid into what Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci labelled an *interregnum*, an era in history characterized by an uncertain, tumultuous transition from the hegemony of an established ideology to one that has not yet been fully articulated (Hedges 2019:303). For Steve Bannon, Donald Trump's former chief strategist and architect of Trump's successful 2016 presidential campaign that stunned the world, it is not a question of whether the future of politics in democratic nations tips toward populism. For Bannon, the question is whether democracies embrace populism of the right, driven by

aggressive economic nationalism, or populism of the left, characterized by resurgent socialism and big, interventionist government (Munk Debates 2018).

Democracy is a fragile thing. And where the democratic world goes from its current vulnerable instability is uncertain. But the growing disparity between the objective material conditions of individuals and their subjective expectations and aspirations is fueling discontent and eroding faith in the democratic process among electorates across the globe. For the foreseeable future, these dynamics will also be compounded by the dual challenges of dealing with the coronavirus pandemic and the chaotic, all-encompassing effects of accelerating climate change, two immense global challenges that authoritarian populism is uniquely ill-equipped to address.

Inequality and the Backlash Against Globalization

One of the wonders of globalization, defined here as the worldwide integration of markets and media, the development of multilateral institutions based on capitalism and liberal democratic values, and the transnational movement of labor, capital, goods, services and technologies, is that it has rendered a limitless number of potential life paths. And yet globalization's innate paradox is that many of these paths remain inaccessible to the vast majority of people. The globalized capitalist economy in particular has succeeded in producing a world that has never been wealthier or more connected in human history. But this is only made possible through the brutal, intentional exploitation and marginalization of significant portions of the global population and the environment. At the heart of humanity's collective advancement is the dissonance that it has come at great expense and suffering for countless individuals (Harari 2016). This includes massive numbers living in high-income nations.

In his recent outgoing report, the United Nations' special rapporteur on poverty condemned the developed world for how, "Despite vast resources, many high-income countries have failed to seriously reduce poverty rates under national measures, which are often in the double digits, and in some cases, poverty has risen alongside increasing homelessness, hunger, and debt" (Alston 2020:9). Meanwhile, an estimated \$36 trillion is stashed away in tax havens (Cardin 2020), as the world's richest individuals and corporations pay lower effective tax rates than middle class families, and governments are denied tax revenues that could enhance social programs or modernize dilapidated infrastructure. A stark example comes from the *New York Times* investigation into Donald Trump's personal tax returns. In September 2020, the investigation revealed that Trump—with an estimated net worth of \$2.5 billion—paid just \$750 in federal income taxes in 2016 and 2017 during the first two years of his presidency, and paid no federal income tax in ten of the fifteen years between 2000-2015 (Buettner, Craig, and McIntire 2020).

This intractable inequality becomes even more pronounced in times of crisis. During the first several months of the coronavirus pandemic, America's billionaires increased their wealth by a staggering \$700 billion; over that same period some 50 million Americans lost their jobs (Americans for Tax Fairness 2020). And many of those jobs may be gone forever, given how businesses have been using the disruption caused by the pandemic to fast-track a decade's worth of labor-replacing automation in a matter of months, especially in low-skilled occupations filled most often by low-income workers, the young, and people of color (Muro, Maxim, and Whiton 2020). At one point during the pandemic, Amazon founder and CEO, Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man, added \$13 billion to his fortune in a single day. Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of people that work for his companies are refused paid sick leave, hazard pay, and safe working conditions. Rather than provide such benefits, Bezos, among other things, is now funneling billions of dollars into an attempt to colonize space (Mosher 2019).

Especially in democratic, capitalist societies, whose axiom is that merit and hard work can produce social mobility, financial security, and self-actualization, the relentless stream of evidence of other people living comparatively better lives is deeply alienating. It is akin to the principle of relative deprivation found within Karl Marx's conflict theory in *Wage Labour and Capital* (1847): "A house may be large or small; as long as all neighboring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirements for a residence. But let there arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut. The little house now makes it clear that its inmate has no social position at all to maintain, or but a very insignificant one." Traditionally perceived in material terms, relative deprivation today has taken on an even more caricatured form in cyberspace, where individuals experience imagined deprivation in relation to digitized ideals of affluence, body image, and career success that are promoted as the most worthy goals for which to strive. And yet, that these new ideals are nearly impossible to achieve through sheer individual agency is left unspoken.

Even maintaining middle class status has now become something of an illusion. As political economist Mark Blyth describes, belonging to the contemporary middle class is based more on juggling debt successfully than on building wealth (Ayed 2019b). Indeed, as coronavirus-related lockdowns have painfully shown, vast numbers of jobs in the service-based economies of developed nations are wholly dependent on supporting the consumption habits of the relatively affluent (Galbraith 2020).

Western citizens in particular have also seen their faith in the judgment and leadership of their political and economic classes severely damaged over the past two decades. One blow was the 2008 global financial crisis that caught establishment experts by surprise. Another has been the disastrous US-led post-9/11 global war on terror, with ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen that have together cost the U.S. alone \$6.4 trillion and counting, while also killing at least 800,000 people and displacing

upwards of 59 million others (Costs of War Project 2020). For comparison, forgiving all existing student loan debt in the U.S. would cost America \$1.6 trillion, just over double the country's annual military budget.

Similar conditions in other democratic societies around the world have provided fertile ground for authoritarian populism to grow. These movements have become a safe haven for maligned and disaffected groups to channel their rage over the disorientation they experience as a result of globalization having spurred massive social change and economic displacement in their localities. At the helm of populism are savvy, amoral opportunists who have learned from each other in their quests for power.

A Wolf in Wolf's Clothing:

The Dismantling of Democracy by the Populist Strongman

For Turkish writer Ece Temelkuran (2019), the descent from democracy to dictatorship involves taking seven essential steps, as modeled by perhaps the world's prototypical authoritarian populist strongman, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. They are, in order: create a movement, disrupt rationale and terrorize language, eschew shame in favor of telegraphing brazen intent, dismantle judicial and political mechanisms, design your own citizen, let the public laugh at their own horror, and finally, build your own country.

First, in creating a movement, it is essential for populist strongmen to paint their nation as exceptional to disaffected groups by invoking a nostalgic, embellished, and revisionist past. Elevating downtrodden groups to economic and social primacy is pitched as indispensable to reviving former national glory as part of a new national vision. Equally important is suggesting simple solutions to complex, multi-layered problems, often in the form of vague slogans devoid of substance. Two prominent examples come from 2016. First, the Brexit referendum saw the Leave campaign deploy the vacuous tag line of "Take Back Control" to persuade voters to secede from the European Union and supposedly return Britain to its imperialist heyday of the early 1900s when it ruled over a quarter of the world's population. Later that year, then presidential candidate Donald Trump's campaign mantra of "Make America Great Again" was plagiarized from the Ronald Reagan era, a time that has since become lionized among America's conservative right for reining in liberal excesses of the 1970s and defeating Communism.

Second, disrupting rationale and terrorizing language takes on many forms, but mostly revolves around the rejection of logical forms of argument and critique and the embrace of *ad hominem* attacks, while also pitting 'the people' versus the so-called 'elite.' For the sake of political expediency, elites become an amorphous and self-contradictory group that perpetually changes to include the opponent of the day. Lumped together are the political opposition,

multi-lateral institutions, outspoken business leaders, cultural icons, the press, intellectuals, academia, minority groups, NGOs, and even former allies.

As George W. Bush's former speechwriter, conservative intellectual and author David Frum says about populism,

It claims to speak for the people, but it always begins by sub-dividing the people, and saying *some* of the people – because of their skin, or the way they pray, or their gender, or whom they love, or how they conduct themselves, or some other reason – some of the people are not *the* people, they are *those* people. Populism begins by dividing *those* people and *us* people, saying those people do not matter and our people do. (Munk Debates 2018)

Never mind that authoritarian populist leaders are rarely representative of 'the people,' but rather some failed derivative of the very same imagined elite they rail against. Trump is a billionaire who inherited the entire basis of his wealth, and whose anti-immigrant rhetoric belies the fact that his own grandfather was an immigrant to the U.S from Germany. Likewise, Brexit's deceitful Leave campaign to liberate Britain from the "unelected elites" and technocrats in Brussels was led by Nigel Farage, a career banker who became rich working in London's financial district for nearly two decades, and current British prime minister, Boris Johnson. As a child, Johnson attended Britain's top private schools before studying classic literature at Oxford and eventually becoming a two-term mayor of London, one of the wealthiest, most cosmopolitan cities in the world. Johnson's privileged upbringing was a result of his own father having worked for both the World Bank and the very same European Commission in Brussels painted by the Leave campaign as an opaque, tyrannical bureaucracy that infringed on Britain's sovereignty.

Third, this hypocrisy matters little to the supporters of the movement, who instead revel in the fact that their chosen leader, the 'elite' one fighting for them, eschews shame, humility, and even the rule of law in favor of resolute force and decisiveness, refusing to gain consent from broader society for their policy decisions. Those who seek to govern through negotiation, diplomacy, and consensus-building processes are slandered by populists as weak and ineffectual.

Fourth, dismantling judicial and political mechanisms that act as levers of accountability becomes strategically necessary, and is achieved through tapping unqualified loyalists for key institutional appointments and cracking down on freedom of the press and the right to free assembly, two core components of functioning democracies. In its 2020 World Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders (2020), a Paris-based press freedom watchdog, warned that the decade of the 2020s represents an "existential risk" to journalism due to conditions that all either stem from, or are aggravated by authoritarian populist governments. Even the election process becomes something to be actively subverted. After the wreckage of the pandemic in America dented Trump's approval ratings due to his stark politicization of the public health

crisis, and it became clear that in-person voting for American elections during an ongoing pandemic would represent a major public health risk, Trump, without supplying evidence, began to attack universal mail-in voting as an alternative ripe for fraud and an illegitimate result. “Universal mail-in voting is going to be catastrophic, it's going to make our country the laughing stock of the world. . . . The problem with the mail-in voting, number one, is you're never going to know when the election is over,” said Trump in August 2020. Both Trump and US Attorney General William Barr, a staunch Trump ally, have also repeatedly suggested that foreign countries could rig American elections by distributing counterfeit mail-in ballots, something that election officials, ballot-printing companies, and political scientists all say is virtually impossible (Beckwith and Niquette 2020).

Blocking mechanisms for accountability enables the type of jingoism and unilateralism authoritarian populists admire, both at home and abroad, as leaders play to their aggrieved base of supporters who loathe compromise. Examples are found in Turkish President Erdoğan's efforts to revive a neo-Ottoman Empire and his contempt for NATO, of which Turkey is a member, his securing economic and geopolitical interests via military adventures in war-torn nations, first in Iraq and Syria, and then Libya, his opportunistic mass jailing of 40,000 uninvolved members of civil society following a failed 2016 coup, and his cynical use of refugees as political pawns in order to gain concessions from the European Union, while also developing closer ties with Vladimir Putin's kleptocracy in Russia, including through the purchase of highly sophisticated Russian weapons systems. In the case of Donald Trump, the evidence is too numerous to name all at once – a trade war with China; the Muslim travel ban; the shredding of international alliances and the withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord, the Iran nuclear deal, the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, the UN Human Rights Council, and the World Health Organization; the militarization of the southern US border, and recently, the deployment of federal security agents using counter-terrorism weaponry and tactics to quash rallies supporting the Black Lives Matter protests for racial justice in Portland, Oregon.

Fifth, in designing their own citizen, authoritarian populists use of religion instrumentally to curry favor with their preferred ethno-religious, nationalist base which sees itself as the true, pure, rightful inhabitants of a sovereign nation. This in comparison to immigrants, who supposedly embody globalization's trampling over sovereignty, or other citizen heretics who are branded as traitors for wanting to advance a secular agenda of pluralism and universal human rights over privileged treatment of a fundamentalist base.

President Erdoğan has tried to shape modern Turkey—founded as an intentionally secular country with a 1928 constitutional amendment removing Islam as the official religion—into an avowedly Islamic nation, and the foremost purveyor of political Islam in the Middle East and North Africa. This was highlighted in July 2020 by the conversion of Istanbul's iconic 1,500-year-old landmark, Hagia Sophia, from a museum to a mosque as a gift to his hardline supporters. Meanwhile, Trump's mutually beneficial dalliance with the evangelical right in

America has been well documented: stocking U.S. courts with 200 new conservative judge appointees, striking down protections for LGBTQ+ persons, moving the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, restricting access to women's reproductive rights through funding cuts for family planning services such as Planned Parenthood, and reinstating the "Global Gag Rule" banning foreign aid from going to NGOs that either provide or advocate for abortion services overseas.

Sixth, as the authoritarian populist agenda comes into focus, it is necessary to let citizens laugh at their own horror. Political punditry, culture wars, protests, policy decisions and the unravelling of social cohesion as filtered through round-the-clock corporate news networks and personalized social media feeds become the basis of a sort of grim entertainment—"a theatre for an ongoing performance aimed at capturing and keeping the audience's attention" (Wigura and Kuisz 2020). In the U.S., Trump's following has been built on the back of evangelical-style, big tent revival rallies that, pre-pandemic, brought in crowds of tens of thousands of supporters from across state lines. Once the pandemic made these types of gatherings a public health risk, Trump began to hold daily White House press briefings to preserve his visibility on U.S. broadcast networks. These briefings would often devolve into rambling ad-hoc presentations that lasted for hours. Meanwhile, Trump's presidency has also generated record ratings for left-leaning late-night comedy talk shows that perpetually satirize both Trump and the Republican Party. Ironically, these shows also contribute in their own way to the problem of social polarization, imbuing a type of condescension and cleverer-than-thou sentiment among left-leaning voters, especially millennials. In 2016, former CBS executive Les Moonves, whose network hosts *Late Night with Stephen Colbert*, quipped about Donald Trump's presidential campaign, "It may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS."

Finally, Temelkuran argues that once these steps have been completed, the guiderails of democracy are lifted and it becomes possible for authoritarian populists to build their country anew in the image of their preferred ethno-religious, nationalist base. Patronage and quid-pro-quo for preferred groups replace effective governance for all. Loyalty to leader and party replaces competence, objectivity, sound judgement, and expertise as the ultimate value in an anti-intellectual society. In the U.S., Donald Trump appointed a former coal industry lobbyist and vocal climate change denier to run the Environmental Protection Agency, and appointed a deep-pocketed donor and Republican fundraiser as postmaster general of the U.S. Postal Service once it became clear that the November 2020 elections would rely on mail-in voting to an unprecedented degree. In India, the world's most populous democracy, roughly one third of President Narendra Modi's current cabinet ministers face criminal charges ranging from attempted murder and rape, to fraud and criminal intimidation. In Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro, a former army captain, has severed important connections to the country's political system by stocking his inner circle of advisors and ministers with current and former members of the military.

All told, in its zero-sum approach to governance, authoritarian populism creates institutional voids and vacuums, and undermines the traditional democratic belief in institutions as sacrosanct, and in checks and balances of power as essential.

From Despair to Despotism:

The Social Conditions that Make Authoritarian Populism Appealing

In political, social, and economic terms, authoritarian populism is a self-reinforcing cycle. Its allure appeals to tens of millions of people that have suffered the negative consequences of globalization. However, now that it has been mainstreamed, it will also aggravate the intrinsic harms of globalization, while also spurning globalization's latent capacities for good by hindering beneficial flows of goods, finance, talent, technology, and ideas.

Perhaps nowhere in democratic societies have the social consequences of globalization become more vividly apparent than in the disintegration of livelihoods and opportunity in municipalities that have seen their industries out-sourced to far-away nations where companies can increase profit via less regulation and lower labor costs. This loss of industry has produced huge swathes of society caught in a seemingly inescapable loop of precarious, low-paying, monotonous work that provides neither meaningful occupation nor chances for social mobility. A 2017 study by MIT economist Peter Temin argues that escaping poverty in America now takes, on average, 20 years of not just hard work, dedication, and ingenuity, but also a level of near impeccable luck, such as an uninterrupted run of good health and continuity in both family and living arrangements (White 2017).

The result, according to journalist and author Chris Hedges who has extensively documented the decay of post-industrial America, is a profound loss of self-esteem for the losers in globalization—a collective state of *anomie*, as first articulated by French sociologist Émile Durkheim. “A decline in status and power, an inability to advance, a lack of education and health care, and a loss of hope are crippling forms of humiliation. This humiliation fuels loneliness, frustration, anger and feelings of worthlessness” (Hedges 2019:41). Not only is this happening in America, but in all other democratic societies as well. Hedges goes on to describe how we are witnessing *en masse* what German cultural critic and theorist Friedrich Nietzsche, understood to be the fundamental ill of modernity, “aggressive despiritualized nihilism” (2019:45).

One of the more visceral outcomes has been alarming spikes in addiction and suicide, especially among working-age men, producing what are known as ‘deaths of despair.’ When combined, accidental overdoses and suicide have now become the leading causes of death for American males under 50 years old, surpassing car accidents, homicides, and deaths from HIV/AIDS, and in rates comparable to those experienced by males who lived through the

collapse of the Soviet Union. Recently, both the US and the western Canadian province of British Columbia, the epicenter of Canada's opioid crisis, have seen their overall life expectancy reduced for the first time in close to a century due to mounting overdose-related deaths. Meanwhile, since the advent of social media on smartphones beginning in 2009, hospital admissions for non-fatal self-harm in the U.S. have gone up 62% for girls aged 15-19 years old, and nearly tripled for girls aged 10-14 years old, largely due to unrelenting pressures to conform to unrealistic standards of physical beauty (Orlowski 2020).

For others, Hedges notes, the social vacuum created by loss of meaningful work, institutional supports, and interpersonal bonds in post-industrial communities has been filled not by addiction and self-harm, but by converting to cultures of gambling and sadism.

Starved of ways to achieve meaningful improvement in their lives, millions of Americans have turned toward the gambling industry to deliver them a windfall. Data from 2016 show that the predatory casino gambling industry in the US generates more than \$37 billion annually, a sum greater than America's much more celebrated professional sports (\$17.8 billion), movie (\$10.7 billion), and music (\$6.8 billion) industries combined (Rosengren 2016).

Meanwhile, decades of progress in gender equality and women's rights are being rolled back by an increase in violent misogyny. Laura Bates, the founder of the Everyday Sexism project, writes in her book *Men Who Hate Women* (2020) about the ways in which extreme misogynist communities have flourished in remote corners of the internet over the past decade, and how their ideas and malicious fantasies have percolated down into mainstream Western society. This correlates with the re-wiring of sexuality on a mass scale, largely stimulated by the growth in constant, unfettered access to ever more extreme, desensitizing forms of pornography catering to bored, frustrated men at the touch of a button on smartphones in their pocket. As Hedges describes: "Porn is a throwback to another era, one of masculine and imperial domination, racism, slavery, baronial splendor and unchallenged, white male supremacy. It is the darkest fantasy of white males. The evocation of the past is the evocation of a world where all women knew their place" (2019:144).

In this sense, authoritarian populism's reversion to an alleged golden era of ethno-majority male domination feeds the desire of such movements to strip away rights for women, minorities, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ individuals. In general, these groups have been agents of progressive social change empowered through globalization and its emphasis on liberal democratic values. But they in turn challenge heterosexual male dominance within the economy and society, prompting a toxic backlash, often modeled by behavior from the highest political office.

Donald Trump, who currently faces sexual assault allegations by no less than 17 women, called Mexican immigrants thugs and rapists at the launch of his 2016 presidential campaign, and was recorded by *Access Hollywood* saying he could do "whatever he wanted" with women because of his celebrity. Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro, dubbed the Trump of the Tropics, has

boasted that he would be incapable of loving a homosexual child, and once suggested a female politician in Brazil was “too ugly to be raped.” Hungarian President Victor Orbán has channeled warlike tones in claiming Europe is “under invasion” by immigrants, and that “Africa wants to kick down our door.” Filipino president Rodrigo Duterte in 2019 told a nearly all-female audience at a gender equality event that they were “bitches” for supposedly taking away his freedom of expression. Most recently, Poland’s president, Andrzej Duda, during his 2020 re-election campaign in June, painted queer life as “an ideology more destructive than Communism.” Over the last several years, local councilors in 100 municipalities across Poland, equal to roughly one-third of the country, have voted to convert their districts into so-called “LGBT-free zones” (Boffey 2020).

Here surfaces the question of what undeniable role Christianity—evangelical Christianity, in particular, though some scholars argue that outsized support for Trump is present among all branches of Christianity including Catholics (Whitehead and Perry 2020)—has played in aiding the rise of authoritarian populism, especially among white voters. And not only in America, but also in Brazil, Hungary, Poland, and elsewhere. A majority of Christian voters in the U.S. voted for Donald Trump in 2016, including 81 per cent of white, evangelical Christians (Martinez and Smith 2016). American Vice President, Mike Pence, Trump’s chief enabler, regularly claims with great pride that he is “a Christian, a conservative, and a Republican—in that order,” while at the same time upholding socially destructive and morally bankrupt policies such as separating immigrant children from their families at the southern U.S. border and holding them in cages. Some observers suggest that a large portion of Christians truly view Trump, a thrice married womanizer, compulsive liar, and self-professed serial cheat, as being God’s “imperfect vessel,” a modern-day King Cyrus to be used as an unwitting instrument of God’s will to re-shape America into a pious Christian society (Burton 2018). But has authoritarian populism instead illuminated how religious conviction becomes a subordinate aspect of identity when traditional economic, social, and race-based privileges become threatened by a shift toward a more pluralistic society? Or, as Canadian scholar Michael Ignatieff has said, is it simply that all the old biblical questions—*Am I my brother’s keeper? Who is my brother? Who is my sister?*—have just become immeasurably harder to grasp and reconcile in the modern, globalized world (Ayed 2019a)?

True, several Christian intellectuals have eventually spoken out against Donald Trump, including Mark Galli, editor-in-chief of *Christianity Today*, the influential evangelical media group founded by Billy Graham. During Trump’s impeachment hearings, Galli (2019) wrote that Trump had “dumbed down the idea of morality in his administration,” and that his Twitter feed alone “is a near perfect example of a human being who is morally lost and confused.” Galli advocated that Trump should be removed from office, saying “the impeachment hearings have illuminated the president’s deficiencies for all to see.”

Elsewhere, some 30 different evangelical leaders from across the political spectrum have also come together to publish the book, *The Spiritual Danger of Donald Trump* (Sider 2020). In his contribution to Sider's collection, Stephen Hayes (2020) unpacks the theological concern at the center of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life: the failure of the German church to resist political co-optation in Nazi Germany. Then, after detailing and comparing the support of German Christians for Hitler with American evangelical support for Trump, he asks of Christian Trump supporters: "Tell the rest of us what Trump would have to do to lose [your] support. How far would he have to slide into immorality/corruption/unconstitutionality to convince [you] that God is not on Trump's side, that he is not the 'chosen one,' that he is doing more to undermine than to restore the moral order?" (Haynes 2020:113). And as Bonhoeffer famously replied to Germans who thought they could remain loyal to Christ while working to reform the Nazi-fied German Reich Church from within, "If you board the wrong train, it's no use running along the corridor in the opposite direction" (Haynes 2020:114).

Yet the history of these recent German and American expressions of Christian authoritarian populism traces all the way back to the children of Israel's post-exodus formation of national self-governance in Canaan. With monarchy being the international norm, and democracy still millennia from being an option, Israel began as a form of theocracy expressed through judges. But the system was ineffectual, culminating in Samson's self-interest and ineptitude, and the people demanded a king like every other nation. God relented and gave them King Saul, but monarchy also unraveled, culminating in Ahab's equally egregious self-interest and ineptitude. Israelite "populism" thus got what it wanted, to its regret, as Samuel warned (1 Samuel 8). The lessons of both ancient and modern history forgotten, it is difficult to imagine the majority of Trump's rank-and-file Christian followers abandoning him come November 2020, and even more difficult to pin down fully the reasons why.

Democracy in the 21st Century:

Fractured Realities and the Loss of a Shared Morality

Going forward, what does this all mean for democratic societies, in which the majority of citizens still ostensibly cherish the ideals of freedom of expression, human rights, and rule of law, but in which a generalized distrust of institutions and each other is being actively stoked? Seemingly, unless there is concerted effort to bridge gaps in understanding by committing to long-term non-partisan projects to improve equality of material conditions between competing groups, and to shore up faith in the democratic process, the symptoms of social breakdown will only worsen and metastasize. Unfortunately, two major obstacles remain.

One is overcoming the hyper-individualist paradigm that forms the basis of atomized neoliberal politics and consumerist identities, both of which have fragmented individuals' experiences of reality (Temelkuran 2019). Another is mitigating how authoritarian populist

movements have all been adept at using some form of conspiracy theory as a tool of modern politics to discredit contemporary bureaucracies and institutions that are necessary to hold together large, diverse populations within democratic societies (Applebaum 2020).

The latter phenomenon is illustrated by two different examples. First, purveyors of the racist “White Replacement” theory claim that immigration is being used deliberately by governments to humiliate and diminish the white race. This conspiracy inspired the March 2019 mass murder of 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, by a 28-year-old white Australian male who live-streamed the shootings online. Second, the QAnon communities, whose members number over 4 million across 15 democratic nations, are growing rapidly (Wong 2020). The QAnon movement believes that Donald Trump and his supporters are locked in battle with an evil “deep state,” shadowy world government group intertwined with child sex trafficking rings that harvest the blood of children for ritual medicinal purposes, and is comprised of prominent Democrats and Hollywood celebrities, including Oprah Winfrey, Tom Hanks, and Ellen DeGeneres. Thoroughly debunked and labelled a domestic terrorism threat by the FBI in 2019, QAnon beliefs have nevertheless spilled over from cyberspace into real world actions.

A nascent version of the conspiracy first gained notoriety in December 2016, when a 28-year-old man from North Carolina fired his assault rifle multiple times into the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria in Washington, D.C. The man, Edgar Maddison Welch, travelled to Washington to “self-investigate” claims circulating on social media that the restaurant’s basement was a hub for human trafficking and pedophilia involving then Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton and high-ranking members of the Democratic Party. Less than four years later, in August 2020, a QAnon supporter, Marjorie Taylor Greene, won a Republican primary vote in a staunchly pro-Republican congressional district in the southern state of Georgia, comfortably positioning her to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. That same month, immediately after California senator Kamala Harris was tapped as the Democratic nominee for vice president, QAnon supporters attempted to link her to the same deep state cabal. Over a dozen other QAnon supporters are now running as candidates in local and state elections in the U.S., according to the *New York Times*.

Furthermore, the emergence of authoritarian populism has damaged the public realm by mainstreaming the rejection of traditional consequences for breaking democratic orthodoxy. Shamelessness and belligerence have become ingrained in public life, even celebrated, reflecting Temelkuran’s second step in turning a democracy into a dictatorship—disrupting rationale and terrorizing language. Discourse over policy issues and effective governance is discarded in favor of pandering to one’s own political group on issues of race and identity, polarizing debate in the process. Divisive and dehumanizing rhetoric is deployed against those not seen as part of one’s ethnic, religious, political, or social tribe, which occurs on both the right and the left, as captured memorably in Hilary Clinton’s description of Donald Trump

supporters as “a basket of deplorables” during the 2016 presidential election. Social interaction between competing groups then becomes poisoned. Dialogue devolves into political point-scoring and dog whistling, rather than thoughtful and constructive discourse regarding solutions to urgent contemporary issues, such as alleviation of poverty, provision of affordable housing and mental health supports, improvements to education and health care, racial justice and police reform, fighting climate change, the ethics of new technology, and how to care for rapidly aging populations. When left to carry on unabated, subjecting those who are feared and loathed to violence and cruelty, and rejoicing in their suffering, becomes the primary communal bonding experience within hardline groups (Sewer 2018).

Two years into Donald Trump’s presidency, Canadian novelist Stephen Marche (2018) presented a convincing case that the brinkmanship displayed by both the American left and right has turned the country into a tinderbox that could realistically descend into low-level civil war. Marche’s vision played out to a degree during the summer of 2020, as demonstrations and protests for racial justice by the Black Lives Matter movement at times led to riots, looting, and arson in American cities, which in turn was met by armed violence against demonstrators by right wing supporters of Donald Trump. This dynamic was encapsulated during a night of turmoil in Kenosha, Wisconsin on August 25, 2020, when a 17-year old avid supporter of law enforcement, Kyle Rittenhouse, from nearby Antioch, Illinois, traveled 30 miles to Kenosha and allegedly killed two people and injured a third after opening fire with a semi-automatic rifle into a crowded street of Black Lives Matter protestors. Protestors were demonstrating after an unarmed Black man, Jacob Blake, was left paralyzed from the waist down days earlier after being shot seven times in the back by a Wisconsin police officer.

For historian Jared Diamond, this withdrawal into like-minded tribal camps and echo chambers, and the heightened tolerance for violence and dehumanization, is a direct symptom of the wholesale shift of interpersonal human engagement from face-to-face interaction—as it has been throughout human history—toward novel digital interaction through screens (Diamond 2020). With digital screens now having become the dominant medium through which we all interact with others and consume information, truth has become commodified, particularly on social media platforms. In this sense, truth has become a product to be bought and sold, where commercially driven algorithms are the gatekeepers determining what media and information individuals see, and do not see (Wijnberg 2020).

Data from the Pew Research Centre has shown that roughly one in two American adults now rely mostly on social media platforms for political news, especially Facebook (Suciu 2019), and those that do are often less knowledgeable about current events than those that look to print, radio, newspaper websites, or even cable and network TV for their news (Mitchell et al. 2020). Profit-driven and highly-personalized algorithmic news feeds on social media differ dramatically from one user to another, and most often serve to reiterate and galvanize pre-existing beliefs and prejudices to the point that they create conflicting, insular views of a

particular chosen reality, rather than serving as a means through which users access new information to broaden their perspectives. In the documentary film *The Social Dilemma* (Orlowski 2020), Tristan Harris, former Silicon Valley engineer and the co-founder of the Centre for Humane Technology, notes how social media platforms, increasingly powered by artificial intelligence, have been intentionally designed to maximize their profits by exploiting the principles of persuasive psychology and moving “away from a tools-based technology environment, to a manipulation and addiction-based technology environment.” According to Harris, social media should no longer be considered a neutral tool of communications technology because “it has its own goals, and it has its own means of pursuing them by using your own psychology against you.”

Indeed, in their drive to generate ever more user data to sell to third parties, social media platforms prioritize unproven, sensationalist content that provokes an emotional reaction and engagement from users regardless of its veracity. For example, false news stories are 70% more likely to be shared than true stories; sometimes true stories can take six times longer to reach 1,500 people than fake stories (MIT News 2018). Outrage, it seems, generates more profitable user activity than the banality of fact-based information. In the words of Tristan Harris, this means “misinformation has a six times head start on the truth” (Orlowski 2020). In an analysis of the political economy of the U.S. media ecosystem, the communications director for former Canadian prime minister Jean Chrétien describes how sensationalist politics, particularly in the U.S. “is an endless cycle that radicalizes viewers and monetizes that radicalization” (Donolo 2020).

With social media so fundamental to their messaging and success, authoritarian populists have all become adept at manipulating this process, spreading misinformation for political gain, and further rupturing common sense truths and understanding. To achieve their political goals, they actively fan the flames of the so-called post-truth era of “alternative facts” and “fake news” that shuns critical thinking and evidence-based analysis in favor of playing off emotion, fear, and bias. Using the example of how the flat-earth conspiracy began circulating in Turkey in 2017, Temelkuran (2019) describes how mistruths are first floated in internal forums, such as private chat groups or political party communications. These mistruths are then spread virally through social media with the aid of a legion of bots (automated non-human accounts) and social media’s outrage-for-profit model, before being picked up by sympathetic channels within mainstream or state-owned media that profess to follow certain editorial codes of conduct. Here, baseless conspiracy theory is rejuvenated by being wrapped in a veneer of corporate or state-backed credibility. A similar example is Donald Trump’s promotion of the racist birther conspiracy during President Barack Obama’s time in office, which questioned whether America’s first Black president was actually a U.S. citizen. According to fact-checking done by the *Washington Post*, once in office himself, Trump in his first three years as president went on to publicly make over 16,000 false or misleading claims. In the first several months of

the coronavirus pandemic, a torrent of misinformation around the origin and nature of the virus emanating from a range of social media sites and individual users garnered over 52 million engagements in the forms of likes, shares, or comments from other users (Orlowski 2020).

Micro-targeting voters through paying social media companies to promote certain politically motivated content on newsfeeds of individuals based on their age, race, location, and online behavior is already a well-established tactic to manipulate public perception and sabotage political opposition. In coming years, the disintegration of shared reality will be further accelerated by the maturation of digital tools that will enhance the micro-targeting of online content to specific voter blocs using both “deep fake” material—digital forgeries impossible to distinguish from authentic audio, video, or images—and algorithms powered by increasingly sophisticated artificial intelligence (Kendall-Taylor, Fantz, and Wright 2020). So long as social media platforms remain unregulated, and tens of millions of citizens in democratic societies continue to rely upon these platforms for information about their world, anyone with motive and financial wherewithal—foreign states, especially Russia, China, and Iran, who all have an interest in undermining western democracies in particular—will be able to continue to directly influence and agitate huge portions of divided electorates by feeding users misinformation that indulges their biases.

If the Pandemic Does Not Cure Ailing Democracies, Climate Change may Kill Them

The global coronavirus pandemic has revealed how incredibly vulnerable democratic societies can be in times of crisis when also absent of trust in scientific experts, strong institutions, and solidarity and cooperation both within society and on the world stage. All these elements are antithetical to ideologies held by authoritarian populist movements. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the countries that have seen the highest death tolls and economic ruin from COVID-19 are all led by populists— the U.S., Brazil, India, Mexico, and the U.K.

Meanwhile, looming in the background, runaway climate change threatens to dwarf all the destitution wrought by the current pandemic. Property and infrastructure will be damaged during more frequent extreme weather events, human health hazards will multiply—the likelihood of future pandemics will increase through the destruction of wild habitats and ecosystems, which forces natural vectors for disease into closer proximity to humans—and havoc will be dispersed upon agriculture, fishing, and tourism industries that employ millions and provide subsistence for tens of millions more. Based on current climate change trends, the world’s overall economy may shrink 3% by 2050 due to a lack of climate resilience, a cumulative loss estimated to amount to \$8 trillion annually versus 2019 (EIU 2019). For comparison, the

ongoing coronavirus pandemic, which has thrown the global economy into a once-in-a-century tailspin, left tens of millions of people without work, and caused widespread social scarring, is estimated to produce a global economic contraction in 2020 that will amount to a loss of \$6 trillion compared to 2019 (Suleymanova 2020). And what is certain is that even though the world's richest 1% cause double the carbon emissions as the poorest half of the globe (Harvey 2020), this future economic pain will not be felt equitably. The International Organization for Migration (2014) has warned that economically and socially marginalized groups face the most profound consequences of a destabilized climate, given their lack of resources for adaptation and fewer opportunities for alternative livelihoods. This means those groups already at a disadvantage because of the dynamics of globalization, and therefore more likely to buy into authoritarian populism, will be personally set back even further by the consequences of climate change.

Meanwhile, the World Bank predicts that by 2050, just three regions, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia, will produce 143 million more climate-induced migrants, more than double the current record of roughly 70 million displaced persons around the globe, as the poorest areas of the world are hit the hardest (Rigaud et al. 2018). A separate report released by the Institute for Economics and Peace (2020), a multinational think tank headquartered in Sydney, Australia, forecasts a much higher rate of displacement. It estimates that upwards of 1.2 billion people across 31 of the world's least climate-resilient countries, which are also some of the world's least peaceful nation states, could be displaced over the next three decades due to environmental change and the resulting conflict and civil unrest that will ensue.

While nearly all of these climate migrants will be displaced internally in their home nations, sheer desperation will motivate some, particularly upper-middle class citizens with the money to do so, to use the climate crisis to migrate to advanced nations through dangerous, unauthorized channels. And against all odds, they will succeed. This is evident in attempts by migrants and refugees escaping poverty, war, drought, persecution, and dictatorship in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East to cross into Europe via the Central Mediterranean Route, the world's deadliest migration pathway. Formed in Libya as it descended into a failed state amid a conflagration of civil and proxy warfare following the 2011 NATO-backed overthrow of dictator Muammar Gaddafi, migrants embarking on the Central Mediterranean Route stretching across the waters of the Mediterranean Sea to Italy pay smugglers and human traffickers upwards of \$15,000 each to be crammed into overcrowded, unseaworthy vessels just for the chance to reach European soil. Migrants knowingly risk beatings, torture, rape, starvation, mutilation, arrest and detention, forced disappearance, being sold into slavery, and repeated extortion at various points along the way as they are handed off throughout the human trafficking process. Since 2014, statistics from the U.N. Refugee Agency indicate more than 16,500 have drowned while attempting to cross this route, with countless others having

died along the way. Over 60,000 others have been intercepted in the Mediterranean by the Libyan coast guard and returned to Libya with the assistance of the European Union, while over 325,000 have made it safely ashore in Italy. An estimated 600,000 other migrants and refugees, many of them women and unaccompanied children, are still currently stranded in Libya (Amnesty International 2020; Varella 2020; ACAPS 2020).

However, Europe's migration crisis of 2015 showed how even relatively meagre increases in unauthorized immigration can be leveraged by political leaders and movements using the politics of fear of the "other" as a means to secure and wield power, regardless of reality. The upwards of 1.5 million migrants that fled to Europe during its migrant crisis in 2015, sparking much of the nationalism and xenophobia that has roiled the continent ever since, amounted to 0.3% of the European Union's total population of around 508 million. Likewise, the peak of unauthorized immigration to the U.S. actually occurred in 2007 during the George W. Bush administration, when 12.2 million unauthorized immigrants arrived in America, constituting 4% of its population of 300 million people at the time. And while anti-immigrant rhetoric in America has escalated sharply over the ensuing years, the number of unauthorized immigrants in America actually declined by 1.7 million by the time Donald Trump took office in 2017, representing 3.2% of America's population of 330 million people (Budiman 2020). Indeed, research from 2018 has shown that that citizens across a range of nations regularly overestimate the number of foreign-born nationals in their country by double, on average, with persistent views of foreign nationals as less educated, more dependent on government handouts, and more culturally and religiously alien than they really are, views held to a degree by even the most educated and sympathetic respondents (Alesina et al. 2018). As if to underline the disproportionate salience of immigration as a political issue, Germany's interior minister said in 2020 that "Europe's fate will be determined by its migration policy" (Rankin 2020).

Complicating all of this are mounting demographic pressures. Experts have long argued that in order to maintain their economic and social systems, democracies with rapidly aging populations will actually need to boost their immigration levels substantially in the coming years to maintain the size of both their labor force and taxpayer base. Otherwise, they will suffer the consequences of diminished productivity and the need to restrict social spending in light of reduced government tax revenue that comes as Baby Boomers retire and birth rates among younger generations plummet to the point that a "jaw-dropping" crash in children being born is imminent (Gallagher 2020). This has been given even more urgency in light of the coronavirus pandemic ravaging labor markets, as financial distress and career uncertainty are two main factors in couples choosing to delay having children, or not have them at all (Ibbitson and Bricker 2020). To illustrate, mere weeks before the pandemic hit North America, Canada's minister of immigration, refugees, and citizenship, Marco Mendicino, was criticized in some corners for claiming in a February 2020 speech that Canada's future "hinges on immigration."

Seven months later, the Royal Bank of Canada released a report warning that pandemic-related slowdown in immigration already posed a serious and immediate threat to Canada's economy (Canadian Press 2020).

Increased immigration and economic peril are two primary drivers of authoritarian populism in the first place, and now combined, are poised to grow exponentially as a result of climate change, placing even more pressure on democratic systems of governance and further weakening social solidarity in democratic societies. Also, like the coronavirus pandemic, climate change represents the type of globalized problem that requires the multilateral solidarity and cooperation that authoritarian populism actively rejects. As David Frum points out, "North American lungs breathe Chinese air pollution," and vice-versa (Munk Debates 2018).

On the eve of Trump's 2016 election victory, Slovenian Marxist philosopher Slavoj Žižek gave an interview with the UK's Channel 4 broadcast network where he said that while he was "horrified" by Donald Trump the man, a Trump presidency might represent something of a chance for a "great awakening" that could spur the collective urgency necessary to create the framework for a more just way of life in democratic societies.

In some ways Žižek's hypothesis was right, as the pushback against Trump's presidency was immediate and has been in many ways unprecedented. It began with the historic Women's March on January 21, 2017, where the day after Trump's inauguration an estimated 4.6 million people in America (and countless others worldwide) took to the streets in the largest single-day demonstration in American history. This has been followed up by, among other concerted actions, months of global protests since May 2020 in support of long-overdue racial justice in the wake of the killing of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer in Minneapolis.

However, in many ways Žižek's hypothesis has also been proven wrong. The great awakening he foresaw has been playing out at a smaller scale than what seems necessary to achieve substantive change, and by what now may be outdated rules that no longer apply in our current era of fractured realities and vastly diminished moral consensus (Temelkuran 2020). As the ongoing demonstrations for racial justice unfortunately seem to show, traditional actions of dissent by like-minded citizens mobilizing in the streets may accomplish very little in a democratic society if its institutions have been disempowered in the name of populist interests (Packer 2020).

Democracy is at a critical juncture. Will societal angst over pandemic-induced economic crises and skyrocketing unemployment in democratic nations led by populist strongmen feed into the nativist, anti-elite, anti-science, and anti-institutional urges they rode into power? Or, has the pandemic provided a necessary trauma that will illuminate the fallacy of trying to govern a modern, diverse democratic nation based on those same regressive principles. Is democracy, especially liberal democracy, actually stronger than it appears? If it is the former, then democracy as we have historically understood it may enter a prolonged period of terminal decline and morph into something along the lines of the illiberal democracies as described by

Indian-American political journalist and author Fareed Zakaria (1997). If it is the latter, then there is still hope that democratic nations can leverage the best qualities of free markets and smart regulation to address inequalities and stave off the most disastrous parts of climate change, while at the same time instituting social protections to shelter individuals and communities from the worst of what will still remain a globalized capitalist economy.

Social malaise, the coronavirus pandemic, and climate change have revealed a striking need in democracies for a societal wide shift toward long-term thinking, which is glaringly absent from authoritarian populism. Such thinking might heal social divisions if it leads to the rediscovery of empathy as a shared value rather than a perceived liability, and places the well-being of human life, including the lives of those unlike one's self and the environment above short-term thinking that gravitates toward tribalism, perpetual electioneering, and the sheer, self-indulgent accumulation of wealth. In that regard, sage advice for democratic societies that find themselves in a tumultuous period of soul-searching comes from an unlikely source, Chinese artist and dissident Ai WeiWei (2020). In describing how the West should confront another emergent threat to the global order—the rise of a sophisticated and antagonistic China—he notes that “the West needs to reconsider its systems, its political and cultural prospects, and its humanitarianism.” The same could be said for how to confront the social pathologies thriving within democracies themselves. To do so, one place to start would be for citizens and scholars alike to heed the advice of philosopher Edward Said, who in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1977), noted how the “task of the critical scholar is not to separate one struggle from another, but connect them.” The more that individuals within democratic societies can begin connecting their own lives and their own communities to the struggles of others, the greater the chance we can rebuild the collective empathy and imagination necessary to solve our shared problems.

References

- ACAPS. 2020. “Countries: Italy – Central Mediterranean Route.” Retrieved August 19, 2020 (<https://www.acaps.org/country/italy/crisis/central-mediterranean-route>).
- Alesina, Alberto, Armando Miano, and Stefanie Stantcheva. 2018. *Immigration and Redistribution*. National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Alston, Philip. 2020. *The Parlous State of Poverty Eradication: Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights* (Advance Unedited Edition). New York: United Nations Human Rights Council.
- Americans for Tax Fairness. 2020. “Billionaires’ Pandemic Wealth Gains Burst Through \$700B.” Retrieved August 11, 2020 (<https://americansfortaxfairness.org/issue/billionaires-pandemic-wealth-gains-burst-700b/>).

- Amnesty International. 2020. "Between Life and Death: Refugees and Migrants Trapped in Libya's Cycle of Abuse." 2020. September 24. Retrieved September 24, 2020 (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde19/3084/2020/en/>).
- Applebaum, Anne. 2020. *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*. Toronto: Doubleday.
- Ayed, Nahlah. 2019a. 'Accepting refugees isn't a gift – it's a human right: Michael Ignatieff'. *CBC Radio*, September 16. Retrieved August 5, 2020 (<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-23-ideas/clip/15736381-accepting-refugees-gift-human-right-michael-ignatieff>).
- Ayed, Nahlah. 2019b. "'Global Trumpism': Bailouts, Brexit, and battling climate change." *CBC Radio*, October 15. Retrieved August 7, 2020 (<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-23-ideas/clip/15741293-global-trumpism-bailouts-brexit-battling-climate-change>).
- Bates, Laura. 2020. *Men Who Hate Women: From Incels to Pickup Artists, The Truth about Extreme Misogyny and How It Affects Us All*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Beckwith, Ryan Teague, and Mark Niquette. 2020. "Barr Floats Foreign Mail-vote Fraud that Experts Call Impossible". *Bloomberg*, September 15. Retrieved September 18, 2020 (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-15/barr-floats-foreign-mail-vote-fraud-that-experts-call-impossible>).
- Boffey, Daniel. 2020. "Dutch Town Ends Ties with Polish Twin Declared 'Gay-free Zone'". *The Guardian*, July 16. Retrieved September 18, 2020 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/16/dutch-city-ends-ties-with-polish-twin-declared-gay-free-zone-nieuwegein-pulawy>).
- Buettner, Russ, Susanne Craig, and Mike McIntire. 2020. "The President's Taxes: Long-concealed Records Show Trump's Chronic Losses and Years of Tax Avoidance". *The New York Times*, September 27. Retrieved September 28, 2020 (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/09/27/us/donald-trump-taxes.html>).
- Burton, Tara Isabella. 2018. "The Biblical Story the Christian Right Uses to Defend Trump". *Vox*, March 5. Retrieved August 18, 2020. (<https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/3/5/16796892/trump-cyrus-christian-right-bible-cbn-evangelical-propaganda>)
- Carden, David L. 2020. "To Pay for the Pandemic, Dry Out the Tax Havens". *Foreign Policy*, July 16. Retrieved July 20, 2020 (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/16/tax-havens-apple-costs-pandemic/>).
- Canadian Press. 2020. "Pandemic-related Immigration Slowdown Threatens Canadian Economy, RBC Report Says". *The Globe and Mail*, August 20. Retrieved August 20, 2020 (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-immigration-slowdown-due-to-covid-19-threatens-canadian-economy-rbc/>).
- Costs of War Project. 2020. Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs. Retrieved September 9, 2020 (<https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures>).

- Diamond, Jared. 2020. "Under Pressure: Have We Arrived at Another Turning Point in American History?" *The Globe and Mail*, July 4. Retrieved July 4, 2020 (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-under-pressure-have-we-arrived-at-another-turning-point-in-american/>).
- Donolo, Peter. 2020. 'Trumpism Won't Happen in Canada – But Not Because of Our Politics'. *The Globe and Mail*, August 21. Retrieved August 22, 2020 (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-trumpism-wont-happen-in-canada-but-not-because-of-our-politics/>).
- Dizikes, Peter. 2018. "Study: On Twitter, False News Travels Faster than True Stories." *MIT News*, March 8. Retrieved August 4, 2020 (<http://news.mit.edu/2018/study-twitter-false-news-travels-faster-true-stories-0308>).
- Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). 2019. "Resilience to Climate Change?" London. Retrieved August 12, 2020 (<https://www.eiu.com/n/global-economy-will-be-3-percent-smaller-by-2050-due-to-lack-of-climate-resilience/>).
- Galbraith, James K. 2020. "Rebuilding the Economy will Require Joe Biden to Think Very Differently than 2009." *The Intercept*, September 1. Retrieved September 8, 2020 (<https://theintercept.com/2020/09/01/biden-economic-policy-us-economy/>).
- Galli, Mark. 2019. 'Trump Should be Removed from Office'. *Christianity Today*, December 19. Retrieved August 18, 2020 (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/december-web-only/trump-should-be-removed-from-office.html>).
- Harari, Yuval Noah. 2016. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. Toronto: Signal.
- Harvey, Fiona. 2020. "World's Richest 1% Cause Double CO² Emissions of World's Poorest 50%, says Oxfam." *The Guardian*, September 21. Retrieved September 21, 2020 (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/21/worlds-richest-1-cause-double-co2-emissions-of-poorest-50-says-oxfam>).
- Haynes, Stephen. 2020. "'If You Board the Wrong Train . . .': American Christians, Dietrich Bonhoffer, and Donald Trump." Pp. 107-116 in *The Spiritual Danger of Donald Trump: 30 Evangelical Christians on Justice, Truth, and Moral Integrity*, edited by Ronald J. Sider. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.
- Gallagher, James. 2020. "Fertility Rate: 'Jaw-dropping' Global Crash in Children Being Born." *BBC*, July 15, 2020. Retrieved July 15, 2020 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/health-53409521>).
- Hedges, Chris. 2019. *America, The Farewell Tour*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.
- Ibbitson, John, and Darrell Bricker. 2020. "COVID-19 Will Make the Global Baby Bust Even Worse – But Canada Stands to Benefit." *The Globe and Mail*, August 8. Retrieved August 8, 2020 (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-covid-19-will-make-the-global-baby-bust-even-worse-but-canada-stands/>).

- Institute for Economics and Peace. 2020. "IEP: Over One Billion People at Threat of Being Displaced by 2050 Due to Environmental Change, Conflict and Civil Unrest." *Associated Press PR Newswire*, September 9. Retrieved September 9, 2020 (<https://apnews.com/PR%20Newswire/4327fa448799528c49c0d4fbcc434ac2>).
- Kendall-Taylor, Andrea, Erica Fantz, and Joseph Wright. 2020. "The Digital Dictators: How Technology Strengthens Autocracy." *Foreign Affairs*, March/April. Retrieved September 11, 2020 (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-02-06/digital-dictators>).
- Marche, Steven. 2018. "America's Next Civil War." *The Walrus*, October 22. Retrieved August 27, 2020 (<https://thewalrus.ca/americas-next-civil-war/>).
- Marx, Karl. 1847. *Wage Labour and Capital*.
- Maro, Mark, Robert Maxim, and Jacob Whiton. 2020. "The Robots are Ready as the COVID-19 Recession Spreads." *The Brookings Institute*, March 24. Retrieved July 30, 2020 (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/03/24/the-robots-are-ready-as-the-covid-19-recession-spreads/>).
- Martinez, Jessica, and Gregory A. Smith. 2016. "How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis". *Pew Research Centre*, November 9. Retrieved August 18, 2020 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>).
- Mitchell, Amy, Mark Jurkowitz, J. Baxter Oliphant, and Elisa Shearer. 2020. "U.S. Adults Who Mostly Rely on Social Media for Political News are Often Less Knowledgeable about Current Events." *Pew Research Centre*, July 30. Retrieved September 16, 2020 (<https://www.journalism.org/2020/07/30/u-s-adults-who-mostly-rely-on-social-media-for-political-news-are-often-less-knowledgeable-about-current-events/>).
- Mosher, Dave. 2019. "Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos Have Profound Visions for Humanity's Future in Space. Here's How the Billionaire's Goals Compare". *Business Insider*, June 9. Retrieved August 8, 2020 (<https://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-jeff-bezos-space-mars-colonies-spacex-blue-origin-2019-6>).
- Munk Debates. 2018. 'Be it resolved: The future of Western politics is populist not liberal'. Retrieved August 19, 2020 (<https://munkdebates.com/podcast/populism>).
- Orlowski, Jeff. 2020. *The Social Dilemma*. Netflix: US. Retrieved September 12, 2020.
- Packer, George. 2020. "Shouting into the Institutional Void". *The Atlantic*, June 5. Retrieved August 16, 2020 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/protests-are-sign-despair/612724/>).
- Budiman, Abby. 2020. "Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants." *Pew Research Centre*, August 20. Retrieved August 25, 2020 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/20/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>).

- Rankin, Jennifer. 2020. "EU Proposes to Ditch Refugee Quotas for Member States". *The Guardian*, September 23. Retrieved September 23, 2020 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/23/eu-proposes-to-ditch-refugee-quotas-for-member-states>).
- Rigaud, Kanta Kumari; de Sherbinin, Alex; Jones, Bryan; Bergmann, Jonas; Clement, Viviane; Ober, Kayly; Schewe, Jacob; Adamo, Susana; McCusker, Brent; Heuser, Silke; Midgley, Amelia. 2018. *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration*. World Bank, Washington, DC. Retrieved August 12, 2020 (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29461>).
- Rosengren, John. 2016. "How Casinos Enable Gambling Addicts." *The Atlantic*, December issue. Retrieved August 18, 2020 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/12/losing-it-all/505814/>).
- Said, Edward. 1977. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.
- Sewer, Adam. 2018. "The Cruelty is the Point." *The Atlantic*, October 3. Retrieved August 16, 2020 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/10/the-cruelty-is-the-point/572104/>).
- Sider, Ronald J. 2020. *The Spiritual Danger of Donald Trump: 30 Evangelical Christians on Justice, Truth, and Moral Integrity*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.
- Suciu, Peter. 2019. "More Americans are Getting their News from Social Media". *Forbes*, October 11. Retrieved September 16, 2020 (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuciu/2019/10/11/more-americans-are-getting-their-news-from-social-media/#762cef433e17>).
- Suleymanova, Radmilla. 2020. "Austerity Could Trigger Double-dip Recession, UNCTAD Warns". *Al Jazeera English*, September 22. Retrieved September 22, 2020 (<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/9/22/austerity-could-trigger-double-dip-recession-unctad-warns>).
- Temelkuran, Ece. 2019. *How to Lose a Country: The 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship*. London: 4th Estate.
- Varella, Simona. 2020. "Deaths of Migrants on the Central Mediterranean Route 2014-2020." *Statista*, August 3. Retrieved August 21, 2020 (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1082183/deaths-of-migrants-in-the-central-mediterranean-sea/>).
- WeiWei, Ai. 2020. "Think 'Sanctions' Will Trouble China? Then You're Stuck in the Politics of the Past." *The Guardian*, August 6. Retrieved August 10, 2020 (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/aug/06/sanctions-china-politics-us-showdown>).

- White, Gillian B. 2017. "Escaping Poverty Requires Almost 20 Years with Nearly Nothing Going Wrong." *The Atlantic*, April 27. Retrieved August 5, 2020 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/04/economic-inequality/524610/>).
- Whitehead, Andrew L., and Samuel L. Perry. 2020. *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*. New York: University of Oxford Press.
- Wijnberg, Rob. 2020. "Truth be Sold: How Truth Became a Product," *The Correspondent*, March 5. Retrieved September 20, 2020 (<https://thecorrespondent.com/322/truth-be-sold-how-truth-became-a-product/7514229030-36b9d1cf>).
- Wigura, Karolina, and Jaroslaw Kuisz. 2020. "In Poland We've Become Spectators at the Dismantling of Democracy." *The Guardian*, August 17. Retrieved August 17, 2020 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/aug/17/poland-democracy-andrzej-duda-politics-populism>).
- Wong, Julie Carrie. 2020. 'Revealed: QAnon Facebook Groups are Growing at a Rapid Pace Around the World'. *The Guardian*, August 11. Retrieved August 11, 2020 (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/aug/11/qanon-facebook-groups-growing-conspiracy-theory>).
- World Press Freedom Index. 2020 "Entering a Decisive Decade for Journalism, Exacerbated by Coronavirus." Reporters Without Borders (RSF). Retrieved July 15, 2020 (<https://rsf.org/en/2020-world-press-freedom-index-entering-decisive-decade-journalism-exacerbated-coronavirus>).
- Zakaria, Fareed. 1997. "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy." *Foreign Affairs*, November 1. Retrieved September 18, 2020 (<https://fareedzakaria.com/columns/1997/11/01/the-rise-of-illiberal-democracy>).

Direct correspondence to Kyle Hiebert at hiebertkj@gmail.com