

income more in America than it does in Canada or Europe. And the odds of escaping poverty are about half as high in the United States as in more mobile countries like Denmark.²¹

We shouldn't underestimate the effects of immobility on our national psyche. Social mobility, after all, is central to how people in the United States interpret the America Dream. It has always been part of our self-conception, our self-understanding, and it's being stripped away.

Complicating matters still further is that we are living through a period of enormous economic transformation and disruption, caused in part by huge advances in technology and automation of production. This allows businesses to do more with less, thus making greater and greater profits with fewer and fewer workers.

It's often said that the American manufacturing sector is in decline, but in fact manufacturing is declining in terms of *employment*, not in terms of *output* or its share of the economy. The increasing efficiency of American manufacturing has come at the expense of lower-skilled workers. Jobs, including even higher-skilled jobs, are being outsourced to countries like China and India as the economy grows more globalized. Arguably the increased labor-market competition resulting from recent mass immigration puts downward pressure on wages for Americans with lower levels of education and skills, even as it reduces the cost of living for Americans higher up the income distribution.

So what does all of this have to do with the frustration and anger aimed at politicians? The answer is simple, probably too simple: a majority of middle-class adults put most of the blame squarely on the government for the economic difficulties they have faced, and people blame Congress more than any other institution.²²

I say "too simple" because we have experienced historic shifts in the global economy over the last several decades that politicians did not cause and were often powerless to stop. The entrance of China and other Asian nations into the global economy brought more than a billion low-wage workers into direct competition with American workers in this century. There are intrinsic limitations on what politicians can (and should) do to stop globalization, automation, and advances in technology. The horse-and-buggy industry gave way to the automobile industry, which was a disruptive but unquestionably positive change.

We live in an increasingly high-skill economy, which means opportunities for lower-skill workers are dwindling. This requires political responses and government action that have not been forthcoming, but the changes themselves are not the *fault* of government.

For now, though, many Americans remain anxious and unnerved, worried about the long-term trajectory of the economy, and they believe the political and governing class has let them down.

POLARIZATION, DISTRUST, INVECTIVE

Moving from the realm of immense cultural change and long-term economic anxiety to the actual practice of politics, we find dysfunction rooted in polarization, the result of the Republican and Democratic Parties having become "more internally homogeneous and more ideologically distant from each other."²³ Many Americans are rightly upset because politics has become an arena for intensely heated and largely unproductive conflict. (If the conflict was heated but productive, it would at least be tolerable.)