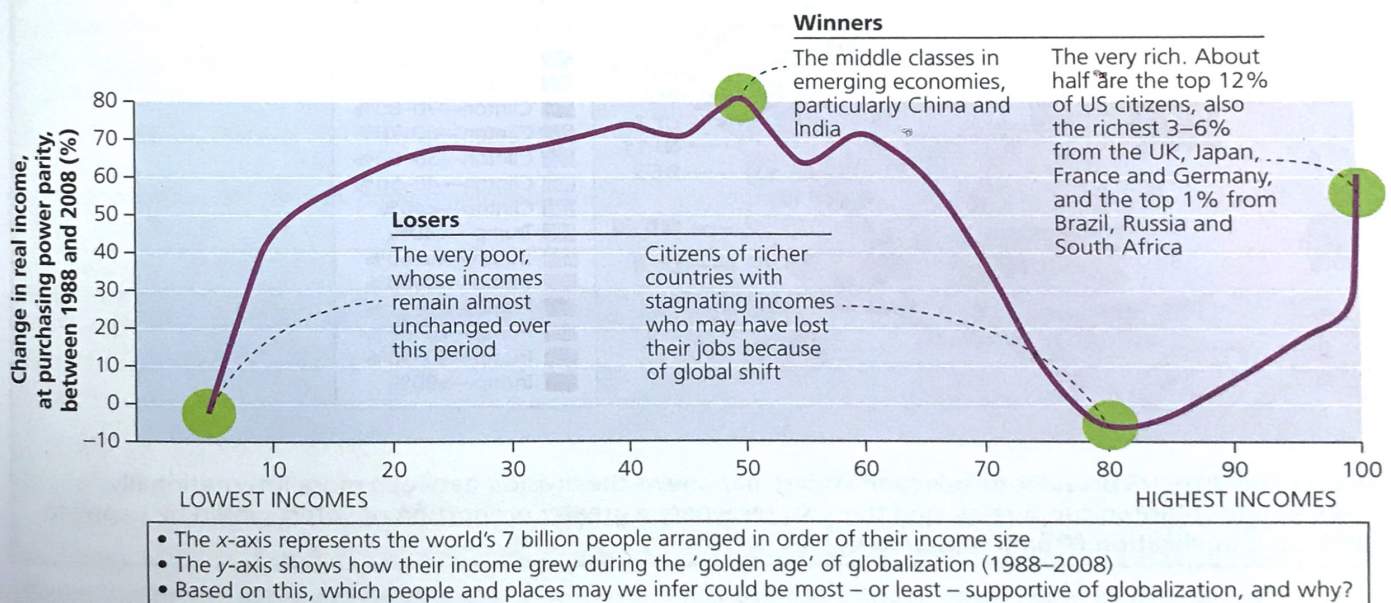# Globalization and tribalization

Unit 5.1 explored the resurgence of **populist** and nationalist movements in different places. Other commentators have established a common link between a wide range of localized movements, including 1) conflict in the Middle East and North Africa and 2) support for anti-immigration parties and policies in the USA, UK, France and other developed countries. In all of these contexts, there is rising skepticism that globalization is a force that remakes places and societies for the better; instead some groups of people view it as a process which has bettered the lives of others but made their own worse.

The result has been what sociologists and psychologists call the **tribalization** of politics. Resistance movements have grown within countries that oppose 'business as usual' politics and support for globalization. Instead, a growing number of citizens appear to be adopting a new defensive form of identity politics.

Figure 6.12 shows evidence that may help explain this trend. The Milanovic 'elephant chart' identifies two groups of people who have fared especially poorly from the past two decades of global growth:

■ The poorest people in developing countries such as Chad, DRC and Eritrea, where there has been limited foreign investment (in contrast to the recent success of emerging economies).
■ Those citizens of richer developed countries who are most likely to define themselves as 'blue collar', 'working class' or 'ordinary people'.

According to Milanovic's data, neither of these groups has experienced a rise in real incomes since 1988, while others have benefited more. As a result, the argument goes, so-called tribalization politics are strongest in these groups.

> **Keyword definition**
>
> **Tribalization** The rise of 'us and them' political movements, which are often opposed to globalization or Westernization.
>
> **Populism** The idea that every political decision in a democracy should reflect what the majority of citizens believe, not what the majority of politicians believe.

Winners

The middle classes in emerging economies, particularly China and India

The very rich. About half are the top 12% of US citizens, also the richest 3–6% from the UK, Japan, France and Germany, and the top 1% from Brazil, Russia and South Africa

Losers

The very poor, whose incomes remain almost unchanged over this period

Citizens of richer countries with stagnating incomes who may have lost their jobs because of global shift

- The x-axis represents the world's 7 billion people arranged in order of their income size
- The y-axis shows how their income grew during the 'golden age' of globalization (1988–2008)
- Based on this, which people and places may we infer could be most – or least – supportive of globalization, and why?

Source: Branko Milanovic

Figure 6.12 The Milanovic 'elephant chart' shows globalization's winners and losers

■ What next for globalization?

It is important to remember that even those groups who claim to be opposed to globalization or Westernization do not necessarily want to turn back time to an age before the internet. Campaigning anti-globalization movements such as Occupy want to curtail the influence of global corporations and the World Bank. Yet they retain a strong belief in global citizenship and use global media networks to spread their anti-capitalist message worldwide.

It may also be true that the case against globalization has been exaggerated. Some academics have suggested that the Milanovic curve has underestimated the financial success of poorer groups in developed countries and that the reasons for the rise of **populism** in Western democracies have far more complex causes than opposition to free trade and immigration alone. Nonetheless, the 2016 summit meetings for the powerful G7, G20 and OECD groups all agreed on one thing: in order to counter tribalization and the rise of disruptive and sometimes dangerous populist movements, there needs to be a greater global effort to reduce inequality and ensure that globalization has benefits for more people and places in the future.
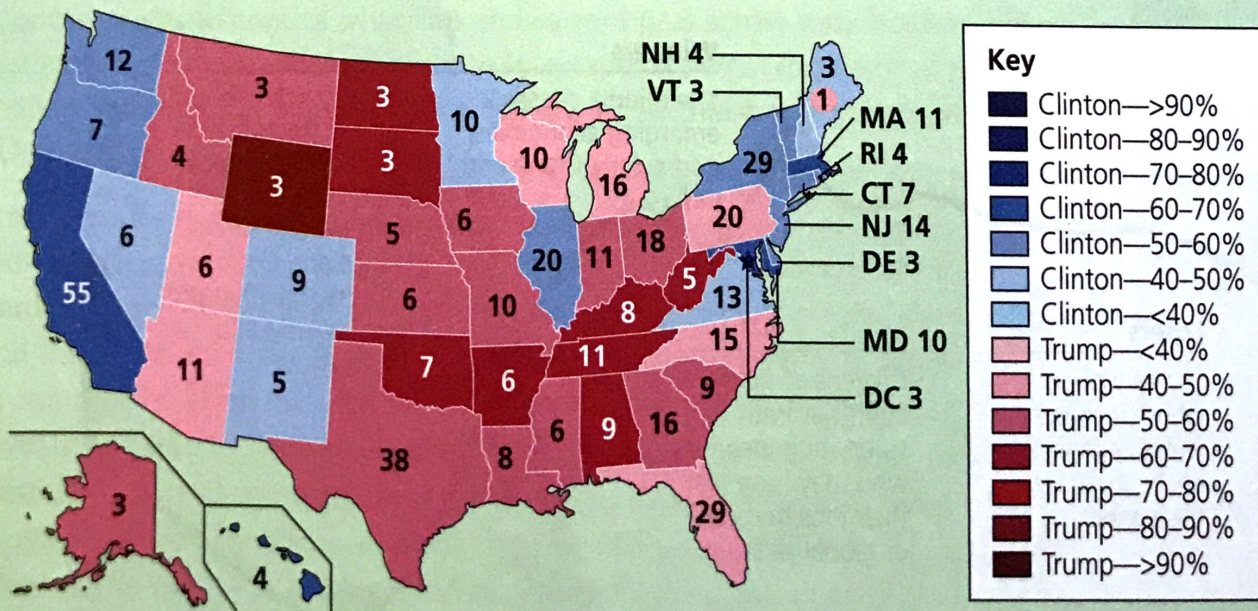
CASE STUDY

ANTI-GLOBALIZATION PROTEST VOTING IN DEVELOPED WORLD REGIONS

In the USA, opposition to globalization assumed the form of Donald Trump in 2016 – his anti-global rhetoric was one way he convinced sufficient US voters to elect him as their president. In the UK, it takes the form of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) while France's National Front party now has the support of 45 per cent of working-class (or 'blue-collar') voters – but less than 20 per cent of professionals.

These movements share a common aim, which is to 'regain control' of their borders. Theirs is a nationalist philosophy that is relatively lacking in enthusiasm for multiculturalism and internationally minded politics.

Deep schisms in British society were revealed by its referendum on EU membership. The country was not united in its desire to quit. Support for 'Brexit' was high among pensioners, rural communities and urban areas in northern England, whereas younger voters, Londoners and Scots favoured remaining.

In the USA too, the divisions that have emerged are geographically and sociologically complex. Coastal states like California and places with a high proportion of Hispanic voters supported Hillary Clinton's broadly 'business as usual' pro-globalization manifesto in the 2016 election; while some rural interior states and deindustrialized urban areas with the highest proportion of white, poorer and older voters chose Donald Trump to be their leader (Figure 6.13).

Key
- Clinton—>90%
- Clinton—80–90%
- Clinton—70–80%
- Clinton—60–70%
- Clinton—50–60%
- Clinton—40–50%
- Clinton—<40%
- Trump—<40%
- Trump—40–50%
- Trump—50–60%
- Trump—60–70%
- Trump—70–80%
- Trump—80–90%
- Trump—>90%

Figure 6.13 The 2016 US presidential election voting map shows the division between more internationally minded US states (Clinton supporters) and those states where a greater proportion of voters would be happy to retreat from globalization (Trump supporters)