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PREFACE

I wrote this book because of the urgent need to gain a deeper understanding of the widespread decline of democracy and the unnerving movement toward dictatorship in the 21st century. We are confronted by serious and unexpected challenges to our freedoms and human rights. By the end of this century, the United States, the European Union, and other societies that are at present relatively open may be overtaken economically and militarily by China and other dictatorships. Closed societies might well become the dominant global powers and the ones that set the norms around the world.

Open societies are not only facing threats from the outside. The election of Donald Trump and the rise of populist far-right “strongmen” (leaders who use threat, intimidation, displacement of aggression onto minorities, and various other tactics that undermine democracy) movements in a number of countries signal threats to open societies from the inside.¹ The recent history of authoritarian strongmen, including Hitler (1889–1945) and Mussolini (1883–1945), who for a time enjoyed wildly popular support, is not promising in terms of preserving open societies. Of course, as Federico Finchelstein² pointed out, the fascism of the 1930s is different from the populism of the 21st century, just as the strongmen of the 1930s are in some respects different from Trump and other 21st-century strongmen. However, 1930s fascism and 21st-century populism have in common the direct threat to the free press, rule of law, and democracy.

We need to gain a deeper understanding of threats to democracy in the context of *globalization*, the increasing economic and cultural integration of societies around the world, and the international populist backlash that is sweeping across national boundaries. No doubt, the threat to democracy is to some degree linked to the excesses of free-market capitalism, as Karl Polyani³ (1886–1964) and a number of more recent authors⁴ have argued. However,

the irrationalist dimension of 21st-century populist antidemocracy movements is of the greatest importance and also requires analysis, and I argue that psychological science is a necessary and fruitful foundation for understanding the plight of contemporary democracy.

The puzzle of how to explain and combat populist support for authoritarian leadership became central to my life when I returned to Iran in early 1979. The 1979 revolution in Iran toppled the dictator Shah but soon after brought to power the dictator Khomeini through populist support. What explains this populist enthusiasm for authoritarian rule? The psychological literature presents possible answers, with psychoanalytic explanations and Erich Fromm's "escape from freedom"⁵ thesis being widely influential. Fromm's analysis concludes that freedom in the modern world is associated with anxiety, alienation, and other painful experiences from which people want to escape.

My focus on Fromm's analysis is justified by its high level of historic and continued influence. At the time of the publication of this book, Fromm's seminal work, *Escape From Freedom*, had been cited about 7,000 times, and the number of citations it had received increased from between 100 and 200 each year in the first decade of the 21st century to more than 300 citations each year in the second decade, indicating rising influence. Although my ideas as expressed in this book have been influenced by a variety of perspectives, including cognitive psychology, cognitive neuroscience, social psychology, and political psychology, I pay particular attention to Fromm because of his continued and global influence. *Escape From Freedom* has been translated into numerous languages, and I have witnessed Fromm's ideas being discussed in various non-Western societies, including in Iran, where the book is available in Farsi.

But Fromm's explanation is unconvincing in many ways. From my own research in Iran immediately after the revolution, it was clear that most Iranians followed Khomeini not to escape from freedom but to enjoy the freedoms and the "better life" he promised. The problem is that most Iranians were misled because at that time few understood Khomeini's real plans and motives. The Shah's censors had made sure that Khomeini's highly backward views about women, democracy, and human rights had remained hidden. As I discuss in later chapters, this proved to be a foolish policy, with terrible consequences for Iranian society. Second, from about 1977, a group of Western-educated and relatively liberal Muslims surrounded Khomeini and filtered his communications, so he (misleadingly) came across as being in support of openness, freedom, and democracy (after he became dictator, Khomeini actually had most of these liberal Muslims killed or sidelined in other ways). Most Iranians who supported Khomeini did so because they believed he was leading them on a path to greater liberation and glory, not to an escape from freedom.

The same is true in other cases of populist support for authoritarian strongmen, including in the United States. To label Trump supporters as "deplorables" is to neglect their deeper motivations. Supporters of Donald Trump see him as "Making America Great Again" and as leading them to greater freedom and glory, not escaping from freedom and glory.

The target audience for this book includes (a) the lay public and academics interested in better understanding the psychology of dictatorship and threats to democracy in the United States and around the world and (b) students and teachers in courses on politics, government, and political psychology.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to Rom Harré, David Lightfoot, Donald Taylor, Philip Moore, Bill Bryson, Jonathan Cobb, Duncan Wu, and other colleagues for rich conversations through which I have gained valuable insights. A number of anonymous reviewers and students (particularly Sierra Campbell) provided feedback on earlier drafts of this book. Christopher Kelaher of the American Psychological Association played an important role in the launching of this project, and I am grateful to him for his insights and support. Katherine Lenz provided insightful editorial guidance in the final stages of the project, and I am grateful for her input.

ENDNOTES

1. As Jon Stone (2018) reports, far right populists are surging in influence across Europe.
2. Finchelstein (2017).
3. Polanyi (1944).
4. For example, see Kuttner (2018).
5. Fromm (1941).

THREAT_{to} DEMOCRACY

Introduction

ESCAPE

Mehrabad Airport, Tehran, Iran. November 1983. I was trying not to show signs of emotion, but my heart was racing even faster than my mind. We had just watched security guards triumphantly confiscate the passport of a middle-aged Iranian woman immediately in front of me in the winding line of people fearfully waiting to get through customs and security, and finally out of Iran. The security guards had discovered a dozen or so small diamonds hidden in the lining of her suitcase and gleefully held up the jewels for all to see, while snatching away her passport. Having lost her chance of leaving Iran legally, she collapsed to the floor begging for mercy. Now her only option would be to pay smugglers who could slip her across the border into Turkey or Pakistan, or rob her and slit her throat.

We had all become truly desperate. I was part of a flood of people frantic to escape the growing despotism, postrevolution turmoil, and utterly senseless war plaguing Iran in the wake of the despotic shah's fall.¹ Everyone felt compelled to try to hide something of high monetary value in their luggage—gold coins, jewelry, small antiques—anything that could be sold to support oneself outside Iran, now suffering under Khomeini's dogmatism and ruthlessness. Getting through airport security was only the first step, and we all knew it was essential to have some money to restart our lives wherever we could find shelter in the world outside Iran.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0000142-001>

Threat to Democracy: The Appeal of Authoritarianism in an Age of Uncertainty,
by F. M. Moghaddam

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How dramatically my life had changed in just 5 years. As I stood watching the guards feverishly tear apart my luggage, the two small cases I would eventually leave with, I recalled myself as a younger, more idealistic person, eager to rejoin and serve Iranian society. I had been a student in England as the anti-shah movement gained momentum in the 1970s and when the revolution erupted and the shah's corrupt American-backed dictatorship collapsed in 1978–1979. Eager to help build a democratic Iranian society, I had rushed back to the country of my birth. I had driven overland from London to Tehran in a caravan of cars filled with Western-educated Iranians, all of us hopeful for the future of Iran and the Middle East. We believed that the growth of Iranian democracy would ignite reforms and launch peace movements in the surrounding societies of the Islamic world and the entire region would make huge progress. We dared to dream that the democratization of the Islamic world would improve Arab–Israeli relations.

As soon as I arrived in Tehran I began teaching at universities, writing and speaking out about social issues and democracy for a broader audience, reveling in the political and cultural freedoms that we now enjoyed. In the 1979 Spring of Revolution, one could taste freedom on the jubilant streets of Tehran. We were young, wildly enthusiastic, and idealistic.

Women were experiencing exhilarating improvements in their lives—free to actually decide for themselves whether they wanted to wear the Islamic *hijab* (veil), liberated to play a larger public role in the wider society. The shah's father, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, had forced women to remove the veil; now Islamic extremists wanted to force women to wear the full hijab, but in the giddy revolutionary atmosphere of early 1979, no one had the power to force them to do anything. Women became far more active in the political and cultural life of Iran, almost as publicly visible as men. Along with women, all manner of religious, political, and ethnic minorities had burst into the public arena. In 1979, everything seemed to point to Iran becoming a more open, tolerant, and democratic society. But that proved to be a tragic and costly mirage, both for Iranian society and for me personally.

FREEDOM FOUND, FREEDOM LOST

Iranians had moved from the sterile stability of the shah's regime to a more exciting and unpredictable situation. A people who were used to being ordered what to do and what to think suddenly found themselves with new possibilities. This was an exciting and exhilarating experience for many people, as we looked with wonder and hope at the power vacuum that had opened up. But we failed to recognize that Khomeini and his followers were preparing to use whatever means necessary to take charge and fill that power vacuum. Their vision of the ideal Islamic society did not involve openness, freedom of expression, minority rights, or even basic human rights for the general population.

Khomeini used a two-pronged approach to end freedoms and reinstate dictatorship, this time with himself instead of the shah as absolute dictator. First,

he presented himself as the champion of freedom and justice for all, the leader who would safeguard their aspirations for liberation and collective glory. He told the people that they were superior to the West because they had Islam. They did not need to copy the West because Islam had given them an authentic identity, one that would liberate them from the yoke of Western oppression. They would find their freedom, justice, glory, and authenticity through Islam. This message was consistently broadcast in 1978 and 1979.

The second prong of Khomeini's strategy consisted of brute force, ruthlessly applied. Particularly since 9/11, I have heard people claim that "terrorism does not work." They are wrong: Sometimes it can be incredibly effective. In 1979, terrorist tactics were effectively used in Iran by a fanatical religious minority, determined to capture all power and gain absolute control of the country. The Islamic fanatics following Khomeini used bombings, assassinations, kidnappings—an array of violence to terrorize the Iranian population into submission, to enable them to reinstate a dictatorship, this time with extremist mullahs controlling the reins of power. The shah's regime had evaporated, but now we faced Islamic dictatorship and quickly learned how easy it is for religious fanatics to kill "with God on their side." Instead of freedom, we were now experiencing the bitter taste of terror on the streets under the new dictator Khomeini.

By early 1980, it had become a chaotic, dangerous time to live in Tehran. The Hostage Crisis at the American Embassy (which began November 4, 1979, and ended January 20, 1981) was still in its infancy, but it had already brought a feverish atmosphere to the city; freedom was methodically being suffocated. Khomeini's fanatical followers used the Hostage Crisis to monopolize attention and resources, as they branded their political competitors as "spies" and "enemies of Islam." Several secular political groups were also still active in 1980, but they now struggled to survive, while Islamic extremists fought to suppress any challenge to their monopoly of power. Car bombs, sudden disappearances, and assassinations became routine, and amid the bloody confusion, Iranian women were pressured to return to the Islamic veil and get out of public life. Those "immoral" women who had become *be-hijab* (without the veil) were forced to "mend their ways," sometimes by having acid hurled at their faces. The Islamic extremists were adamant that women should be driven back to their traditional role inside the home—even those millions of women who had been educated in universities, many with advanced degrees from elite Iranian and Western universities.

To consolidate his power, in 1980 Khomeini directed his fanatical followers, who claimed that God had placed the image of his face on the moon, to launch a so-called Cultural Revolution. The specific targets of the Cultural Revolution were the universities, which were the last bastion of resistance against the reinstatement of dictatorship.² I was teaching at both Tehran University and the National University at that time and was a witness to Khomeini's brutal attack on universities. He sent in mobs wielding clubs, chains, and knives to shut down the institutions; students and faculty who resisted were violently attacked. Khomeini accused those professors who dared oppose him of being un-Islamic traitors who

had sold out to the West and who had “rotten brains.” Some faculty and students were imprisoned or killed.

Soon the prisons, which had recently been joyfully emptied during the anti-shah revolution, were brimming once again with brutalized political prisoners—all “in the name of God!” As in the case of the Bolsheviks in the 1917 revolution in Russia,³ in Iran a fanatical minority used ruthless aggression to opportunistically grab power in the postrevolution turmoil. The focused, categorically thinking, unquestioning determination of would-be dictators, such as Khomeini, gives them a huge advantage over the “wishy-washy” open-minded democratic opposition. We are reminded here of Alan Bullock’s insight that “like Hitler, Stalin could afford to be an opportunist because, unlike his opponents, he was clear about his aims.”⁴

I was thinking about Tehran’s rapidly expanding Evin Prison with its alarming number of new political prisoners when the security guards gave up searching my suitcases and grudgingly waved me through to the airport departure area. Tears filled my eyes. Although almost free, I was leaving my mother behind. I would see her only briefly again before she died in Iran 16 years later.

Should I have known Iran would move from the shah’s dictatorship to the even more brutal dictatorship of Khomeini and the mullahs? Had I been too naive and overly optimistic? Did we supporters of democracy use the wrong tactics; could we have prevented the Islamic dictatorship in Iran? As I slowly and tortuously rebuilt my life in the West, first in Canada and then in the United States, I have continued to anguish over these questions. Recent experiences, from the ill-fated, poorly planned, and disastrously implemented attempt to export democracy to Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) to the disappointing outcome of the Arab Spring (2010–2012), reinforce the idea that we were too naive in imagining that we could transform Iran from a dictatorship to democracy in a matter of months or even a few years. The prodemocratic forces in Iran proved incapable of changing individual and collective behavior fast enough to achieve a more open society.

I had individually escaped from the dictatorship of the mullahs, but Iranian society had returned to suffocate in the clutches of another dictatorship, just as so many other societies have found themselves trapped in a new, different type of dictatorship after what was imagined to be a successful antidictatorship revolution. I had reached the relative freedom of Western societies, but collective escape from dictatorship has proved far more difficult for Iran as a nation. I argue that limits on *political plasticity*, the ability to change (or not to change) social relations when structures change,⁵ mean that the road from dictatorship to democracy is a long one, for all nations.

The concept of political plasticity leads us to explore how fast and in what ways political behavior can be changed, at the individual and collective levels. For example, moving societies away from dictatorship toward democracy requires changes in styles of leadership and changes in leader–follower relations. Dictatorial leadership involves decision-making and power being concentrated in the hands of the dictator, whereas in democratic societies decision-making is less centralized and involves participation and input from ordinary people.

Plasticity in this domain refers to the question of how fast a society used to dictatorial leader–follower relations and decision-making can successfully move to a democratic style leader–follower relations and decision-making. As I discuss in later chapters, what happens after revolutions suggests that the style of leader–follower relations is slow to change: The general trend has been for revolutions that topple a dictatorship to be followed by another dictatorship. This suggests that at least in some domains, there is low behavioral plasticity in the domain of politics.

THE DICTATORSHIP–DEMOCRACY CONTINUUM

We can conceptualize Iran and all major societies as lying on a continuum, with one end represented by *absolute dictatorship*, in which a dictator has absolute power over a population with no room for resistance or self-expression, and the other by what I have termed *actualized democracy*, in which there is “full, informed, equal participation in wide aspects of political, economic, and cultural decision-making independent of financial investment and resources”⁶ (see Figure 1). Historically, movement along this continuum has tended to be away from absolute dictatorship toward democracy. However, movement is not always from dictatorship to democracy; in certain historical periods, movement is “backward” from democracy to dictatorship, as in the case of Germany in the 1930s and Turkey, Venezuela, and some other countries early in the 21st century (discussed in more depth later in this book). Also, at present, there are no absolute dictatorships or actualized democracies.

I believe actualized democracy is the ideal goal for all societies. This is because in actualized societies, citizens have been educated to achieve the psychological characteristics necessary to participate fully in decision-making as free and independent individuals (for more in-depth discussions, see the critical debates on actualized in *The Road to Actualized Democracy*⁷). Also, individual freedom can be maximized in actualized democracy. Although contemporary societies, including those in North America and the European Union, are still far from becoming actualized societies, it is important to articulate such an ideal from the perspective of psychological science and to examine the psychological characteristics citizens and leaders need to acquire to be able to achieve and sustain actualized democracies.⁸

Historical development along the dictatorship–democracy continuum has been in four main overlapping stages⁹: (a) primitive dictatorship (e.g., Iran, North Korea), (b) transitional dictatorship (China, Russia), (c) semideveloped democracy (United States, European Union countries), and (d) actualized democracy (not yet achieved by any country). These broad, overlapping

FIGURE 1. The Dictatorship–Democracy Continuum

Absolute Dictatorship ----- Actualized Democracy

categories, discussed in more depth in what follows, help us to better understand the big picture regarding changes from dictatorship to democracy. Although any proposal that political development takes place in “stages” can be criticized as simplistic, even when the overlapping nature of such stages is emphasized, I believe this conceptualization serves a useful purpose as a framework for analysis.

THE FOUR OVERLAPPING STAGES OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

There are no absolute dictatorships, but unfortunately there are still many primitive dictatorships.

Stage 1: Primitive dictatorships are unsophisticated, brutal, and widely recognized for what they are. North Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia—these regimes that are dogmatic, corrupt, and brutal in their ideologies and methods of repression against their own people. Political opposition to authority is punished in these regimes by imprisonment, torture, and sometimes death.¹⁰ They adopt modern technology mainly to keep control of the population and to strictly instill their particular ideology.¹¹ In the case of North Korea, technological advancement in missile and nuclear technology has been rapid relative to advancement in political and social domains.¹² The ideology of primitive dictatorships can be religious, such as versions of fundamentalist Islam, or secular, such as versions of Marxism or nationalism. Irrespective of the characteristics of the ideology used by the regime, in primitive dictatorships, this ideology is rigidly enforced and used to maintain a high level of obedience and conformity in both elites and the masses. In important respects, this is how all dictatorships used to function before some of them evolved to become more sophisticated.

In primitive dictatorships, ideology is used like a sledgehammer against potential or actual opponents of the regime, including in areas that do not seem directly to touch on politics, such as social relationships, fashion, and the arts. Gender roles are rigidly enforced through ideology. For example, in Islamic dictatorships such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, there is a heavy emphasis on the enforcement of hijab for women and the separation of men and women in physical spaces. One of the favorite government tactics is to displace aggression onto women and hit hard at their “immoral behavior” as a way of distracting attention from larger political and economic issues and as a strategy for mobilizing support from traditionalist men with low education. This group of men feel particularly threatened by liberated women with advanced university degrees and are eager to help the government keep women “in their place.”¹³

The threat felt by traditional, low-education men in Islamic primitive dictatorships has intensified in part by the increasing success of women in higher education. For example, in Iran, despite systematic government policies to thwart progressive gender roles, women outnumber men among students gaining entrance to universities.¹⁴ The Iranian government counters this by ensuring that there are major obstacles confronting women in the employment market, so no matter how well women do in education, after graduation, they

are confronted by numerous dead-ends. Iranian women can shine outside but not inside Iran, as did Maryam Mirzakhani when, in 2014 as a professor in the United States, she became the first woman in history (and the first Iranian) to win the Fields Medal (the equivalent of the Nobel Prize) in mathematics.

Because of their rigid adherence to backward ideologies, primitive dictatorships remain stunted economically, although they invest heavily in their militaries.¹⁵ For example, North Korea remains behind economically¹⁶ and in human rights,¹⁷ despite its advances in weapons technology. Because Iran and Saudi Arabia exclude at least 50% of the brainpower of their societies (i.e., women!) from constructively contributing to the workforce, they remain at a disadvantage in the economic competition between nations, despite their enormous oil and gas reserves.¹⁸ (Saudi Arabia made “advances” in 2018 by permitting women to drive cars, under certain conditions!)

Stage 2: Transitional dictatorships, the most important examples being China and Russia, involve a monopoly of power by an individual or a clique but do not rigidly enforce a uniform ideology. For example, in China, there are still posters of Chairman Mao and Karl Marx in public places, and the Communist Party monopolizes power but does not enforce communist ideology—far from it. The main goal of the regime is simply to maintain a power monopoly, without worrying about the paradox of a Marxist state having huge group-based inequalities and so many billionaires. Similarly, in Russia, the main ideology pushed by the Putin regime is associated with nationalism, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the cult of President Putin. Anyone who is a threat to Putin’s power is attacked and neutralized, irrespective of their ideology.¹⁹ Internationally, transitional dictatorships, and Russia in particular, use varieties of direct and indirect tactics, including the use of sophisticated electronic communications and *lawfare*, the use of law to accomplish military goals, to fight democracy.²⁰

The transitional dictatorships are becoming subtler in their use of propaganda and economic incentives, but they still use brutal policies toward dissenters. Anyone who poses a serious threat to the regime is hammered into oblivion, sometimes even after escaping abroad. For example, in April 2018 Russian agents poisoned Russian defector Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury, England, where they had taken refuge.²¹

However, social life, social relationships, and gender roles are more flexible in transitional dictatorships. Women have a great deal more freedom in how they appear in public, the careers they pursue, and their relationships with men. As long as women support the dictator individual or cult, they are given room to develop their talents, make progress in the private sector, and even enter politics. Nonetheless, in transitional dictatorships, there are still taboos against LGBTQ people, and attempts are made to rigidly enforce traditional gender roles.²² There are also some restrictions on the arts, particularly when artists attempt to use their creations as a way to criticize the central authority, such as the case of the all-female rock band Pussy Riot, whose members were arrested after playing in Savior Cathedral in Moscow on February 21, 2012, in protest against the Russian Orthodox Church’s support of Vladimir Putin’s reelection. If they had not attacked Putin through protest songs such as “Holy Shit,” band

members could have continued their careers as punk musicians in Russia. What got them into trouble was their attacks on centralized power, not their “devious” music. The Putin government gives a lot of freedom to artists, and to the general public in social life more broadly, as long as Putin’s power is not challenged.

Transitional democracies can move forward toward democracy, but also backward toward dictatorship. There is a group of countries, including Turkey, Venezuela, Poland, and Hungary, that, by the end of the 20th century, seemed to be emerging from being transitional dictatorships and moving closer to democracy, but at the start of the 21st century, they are sinking back toward primitive dictatorship. These countries are in a transition, and it will become clear in the next few decades whether they sink back completely to primitive dictatorships or move forward to becoming more open societies. A lot will depend on their leaders, such as Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey. Unfortunately, for such countries, the “success” of Erdogan and other strongman leaders means increased monopoly of power in the leader’s hands, corresponding to backward political movement for their countries (see the discussion of Turkey in Chapter 2, this volume).

Stage 3: Semideveloped democracies comprise the countries of North America, the European Union, and all the other countries typically labeled *democratic*. Again, we must not assume that semideveloped democracies only experience forward movement toward greater openness and stronger democracy. There are warning signs that some semideveloped democracies could slip back toward dictatorship in the 21st century.

A danger in semideveloped democracies is the increasing dislocation of power and rifts between the elites and the masses.²³ Backward movement can arise when ruling elites that are interconnected across political, financial, industrial, military, educational, mass media, show business, and other key sectors of society manage to gain popular support, but then use this support to create a more closed, less democratic society. For example, Donald Trump has used populist support to attack the free press and flout the rule of law.²⁴

In Trump’s case, electoral success was achieved through a merging of show business and politics, so that his political rallies, which have continued during his tenure in the White House, were intended primarily to entertain and to rally his base, rather than to serve as critical, informed discussions or provide correct factual information about his policies. The tax and health care changes Trump brought about after his 2016 election success have provided enormous financial benefits for the ultra-rich²⁵ but have decreased government tax revenues and harmed the living standard of the poor.²⁶ The danger is that in the next few decades, social services and welfare programs for the lower and middle classes will be cut to pay for the decrease in government tax revenues and the resulting trillion dollar government annual budget deficits. Throughout the 2016 election campaign and since, Trump has ignored the issues of wealth inequalities and redistribution. Despite this, support for Trump has continued among his core supporters,²⁷ most of whom are lower and middle-income and will in the longer term suffer from his economic policies because the government services they rely on will be reduced to pay for tax cuts.

Research suggests that Trump owes his success in part to *displacement of aggression*,²⁸ that is, action intended to harm others by a person who feels provoked against a third-party target who is not responsible for the provocation. Trump has channeled discontent onto Hispanics, African Americans, women, and other minorities seen by many right-wing voters as “getting an unfair break.”²⁹ Although the exact role of education in support for Trump is disputed,³⁰ clearly his supporters negatively target ethnic minorities, women, immigrants (whom he has repeatedly referred to using derogatory language³¹) and those whom they see as upsetting what they believe to be a meritocratic America.³² Trump also channels displaced aggression onto elites and the “rigged system,” which he claims only he can fix.³³

Trump represents a serious danger of backward movement in the United States and other semideveloped democracies. This backward movement may lead to the evolution of a new type of dictatorship, in which, paradoxically, freedom (misleadingly) seems to be limitless, information boundless, and possibilities for enterprise endless. But within this “open” system, there are actually strong limitations, in part arising out of tensions in globalization. Dani Rodrik³⁴ identified one such important tension, which seems to question basic ideas in Adam Smith’s free trade thesis.³⁵ For supporters of free trade, open-door economic policies would increase wealth, make nations more interdependent and peaceful, and improve lives for everyone. But Rodrik argued that globalization is leading to a “trilemma”: national sovereignty, democracy, and global economic integration cannot all take place at the same time. Any two of them can exist together, but the three are incompatible. This becomes clear when we consider that globalization and economic integration requires free trade and the elimination of transaction costs, including import tariffs. But nation states rely on transaction costs and increased nationalism is usually associated with trade barriers and “putting up walls” of all kinds, as reflected in Donald Trump’s Make America Great Again campaign, with increased tariffs, trade wars, and actual or proposed walls against outsiders.

This “trilemma” leads to new tensions, contradictions, and movements, such as the populist “antiglobalization” movements that have led to the rise of Trump and other right-wing nationalists. Another aspect of the trilemma is that globalization and economic integration is seen by some as weakening local democracy, putting power in the hands of powerful decision-makers far removed from ordinary people. An example is the centralization of power in Brussels, the capital of the European Union, far away from locals in countries such as the United Kingdom. The outcome for many people in the United Kingdom was a feeling of being “taken over” by undemocratic powers in Europe, with Brexit being a solution to return to national sovereignty. Of course, national sovereignty and a “make us great again” sentiment leave the door open for strongman leaders with antidemocratic tendencies. These developments imply that we should pay close attention to the conditions in which backward movement could take place toward dictatorship.

According to the *springboard model of dictatorship*,³⁶ dictatorship arises when two conditions are met: First, the springboard to dictatorship comes about;

second, there is available a potential dictator motivated to use the springboard to rise to power. The springboard is a particularized context that is optimally suited to the rise of a dictator. Among the key elements of the springboard are people in a society experiencing a high level of subjective threat (e.g., the threat of attack from external or internal forces), economic insecurity, low levels of trust, collective helplessness, and fear of impending decline. Contextual factors that increase the probability of dictatorship include the presence of elites who try to use the dictator to further their own interests (e.g., changing tax laws and other regulations to benefit themselves).

Under these conditions, a potential dictator is helped to power through crisis incidents. Hitler created a crisis and a “justification” for ending civil liberties from a simple incident, a left-wing radical setting fire to a government building.³⁷ Khomeini used the “hostage crisis” (involving the 1979 invasion of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and the taking of the 52 American diplomats as hostages) to monopolize power and wipe out his competitors in Iran. Similarly, crisis incidents in Western countries, such as major terrorist attacks in the United States or war between the United States and a nuclear power such as North Korea, could help dictators come to power in Western societies.

Stage 4: Actualized democracy, a fully developed democracy,³⁸ has not yet been achieved. The Scandinavian countries and Switzerland are probably closest to this ideal. These are relatively small societies, ranging between 5 million and 10 million in population. Organizing democracy in these small, affluent societies has proven to be more feasible.³⁹

THE ROLE OF POPULISM AND THE STAGES OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The term *populism* is notoriously difficult to define,⁴⁰ although there is general agreement that at the start of the 21st century what Cas Mudde called a “populist *zeitgeist*” has emerged⁴¹ and there is now more fertile soil for the growth of populist movements internationally, with support from the American ultra-right⁴² (Eric Oliver and Wendy Rahn have shown⁴³ that Trump used more populist language, such as antielite slogans, than all other candidates in the 2016 presidential U.S. election, including Bernie Sanders). For the purposes of this discussion, I identify five main features shared by the different populist movements. First, populism is based on the belief that the people have the right to rule society directly and without restrictions. This involves a rejection of checks and balances on the “will of the people.” Second, the people are seen as the “silent majority” who know what is right and what should be done. The people instinctively sense what is right, without having to rely on science and “elite learning.” Third, populism involves antagonism toward the elite, who are seen as not just aloof but also “immoral” and a threat to the sovereignty of the people. Political parties, government functionaries, elite “representatives,” and other forms of intermediaries between the people and political power are rejected. Fourth, another group that threatens the interests of “the

people" are "the others," those who are different and devious, those who do not belong to the people. These include minority ethnic and religious groups, immigrants and refugees, criminals, and those who are seen to act as "leeches" on society and threaten the interests of the people. A final characteristic of all populist movements is faith in a strong leader who is "from the people," an individual who fights the elites, attacks the dissimilar "others," and protects the true interests of the people.

Populist leaders succeed by reinforcing and propagating a tribal view of the world. This view depicts the in group, "us," "our people," "our kind," "our blood," "we the honest, law-abiding, good, virtuous," "we who belong on this land, the land of our fathers," against those "others," they who are "animals," "outsiders," "invaders," "devious," "false," "foreign," "profiting from us," and "taking what rightly belongs to us." The populist leader positions the elite as conspirators against the people, in collaboration with the others, the aliens, the outsiders who are invading our land. Who will save the people? Only the populist leader can save them; only he can protect them against the threats from the inside and outside.

Populist movements play an important role in determining progress along the stages of political development. The impact of populist movements is to push society away from democracy and the higher stages of political development, toward dictatorship and the lower stages. This is because populist movements reject rule of law, constitutionalism, checks and balances, political parties, representative democracy, pluralism, minority rights, and other important pillars of the open society. The overwhelming priority of populist movements is the interests of "our own tribe," and a strong leader who represents "our" interests to the exclusion of others. The rise of populism in the 21st century has coincided with the weakening of the open society and the emergence of a populist form of democracy.⁴⁴

MESSAGE OF THIS BOOK

I argue that the failure to achieve actualized democracy and the continued pull of dictatorship arise for two main reasons. First, under certain historical conditions, people support potential or actual dictators, populist "strongmen," because they see them as the best avenue for protecting their freedoms and *sacred groups*, the nation-state, ethnicity, religion, and other groups to which people have the strongest attachments and for which they are willing to make the highest sacrifices; sacred groups are the groups with the strongest social identities. They are not escaping freedom; rather, they are attempting to safeguard their freedom and (albeit mistakenly) see the strongman dictator as their savior. However, there are different kinds of freedoms (a topic discussed in detail in Chapter 4), and those who support the strongman tend to give priority to what I have termed *attached freedom*, glory and liberation achieved through membership in a positively evaluated sacred group, such as a "superior" nation-state or race, or a "God-favored" religion. Attached freedom is very different from *detached*

freedom, which celebrates the independent, mobile individual. From the perspective of the populist masses, the strongman dictatorial leader provides the best path for achieving attached freedom, and so they enthusiastically elect him, eventually to discover that his promises are utterly false.

To recognize how this kind of situation can arise, consider the enormous popular support for Adolf Hitler⁴⁵ and various other authoritarian strongmen in recent history. In his monumental work on Hitler and Josef Stalin (1878–1953), Alan Bullock pointed out that in the late 1930s, Hitler had developed a popular image of being a “man of the people . . . as providing Germany, for the first time since Bismarck, with the authoritarian leadership that many Germans in all classes regarded as authentic German political tradition.”⁴⁶ Hitler’s supporters saw him as leading them to attached freedom and glory.

The dictator uses the promise of individual empowerment through collective strength to lure supporters and get them to buy into his schemes and narratives. Individuals sense that they are far stronger and more capable as part of a sacred group; the psychological research on empowerment also reflects the far greater capabilities of individuals in collectives.⁴⁷ Identification with the sacred group inspires and directs individuals to achieve higher level performances. The dictator harnesses this collective energy to achieve his own goals, which inevitably involve giving himself more power and eliminating his competitors.

Second, achieving fully developed democracy has proven to be extremely difficult because the changes necessary in people’s psychological characteristics to move societies away from dictatorship toward actualized democracy are extremely slow and difficult to achieve, even under favorable conditions. Almost all of the research focus has been on the process of revolution and the overthrow of dictatorship. Too little attention has been given to what happens after the defeat of a dictatorship and specifically on the changes in cognition and action that need to take place for a society to move toward a more democratic system of government. In practice, these changes have been difficult and slow to achieve, a topic I discuss later in more depth.

The escape back to dictatorship under conditions of threat, particularly the endangerment of sacred groups, is reflected in the emergence of a number of national leaders with extraordinary talent for opportunistically facilitating and strengthening dictatorships, both within their own national borders and around the world. Vladimir Putin of Russia is the most prominent of these leaders, but Xi Jinping of China will prove to be more globally influential in the long term, even though he is less flamboyant. Putin and Xi Jinping are leading a global effort to strengthen movement toward dictatorial rather than democratic governance. In terms of personality characteristics, Donald Trump naturally fits with this global movement away from democracy, and internationally his relations are with the leaders of dictatorships (e.g., Russia, North Korea) rather than with democracies (e.g., Canada, the EU countries). However, within the United States, he is constrained by institutions, primarily the U.S. Supreme Court and the U.S. Congress. But as *The Global Risks Report* of the World Economic Forum⁴⁸ pointed out, an impending global danger is the rise of “charismatic strongman

politics,” spearheaded by Putin of Russia, Xi Jinping of China, and now Trump of the United States.

After 2,500 years of struggle, democracy continues to be fragile and underdeveloped, including in Western societies. The progress necessary to bring about actualized democracy requires psychological changes—transformations in how people behave, how they interact with others, and how they problem-solve. But are we humans capable of making the necessary changes at the collective level? We know that many individuals can make the necessary psychological changes, but such individuals might be exceptional. The larger question is about the changes needed in the masses of ordinary people: How plastic, how malleable is our behavior at the collective level?

In postrevolution Iran, I learned that the behavioral plasticity of ordinary people is at the heart of progress toward democracy. If we want to move from dictatorship to democracy, it is not enough to topple a dictatorship, write a new constitution, and adopt slogans about freedom and independence. We need to change the way the ordinary masses think and act, from thought and action supportive of dictatorship to thinking and action supportive of democracy. It proved to be impossible to make this change fast enough in Iran, just as it has proven to be impossible to make this change fast enough after most major revolutions.

Two and a half centuries after the American Revolution and the birth of the United States, democracy in America remains seriously underdeveloped, and the United States is failing to serve as the flag bearer for democracy. The rise of China is presenting the world with an alternative, nondemocratic path to economic prosperity. As things stand, it is not clear whether the democratic or the dictatorial tendencies will win out and become dominant across the globe at the end of the 21st century. For those who desire and work for a victory for democracy, it is essential that we more fully understand the conditions that have resulted in weakening of democracies and a swing in favor of dictatorships.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

Part I follows this Introduction; Chapter 1 explores patterns of change in history, contrasting images of historical change as linear with images of historical change as cyclical. I point out the different psychological foundations of change as linear and change as cyclical. The continuation of dictatorships in different guises supports a cyclical view of historical changes. The case of Turkey is examined in Chapter 2, as an illustrative example of how “backward” movement can take place away from democracy and toward dictatorship. The four chapters in Part II explore the relationship between freedom and dictatorship. The overall message of Part II is that dictators gain support by seeming to safeguard attached freedom gained through membership in sacred groups. Chapter 3 puts forward an alternative to the traditional psychoanalytic explanation of the enigma of the “immortal dictator.” Dictatorship does not come

about because of a need to “escape freedom”; rather, support for dictators is a misguided path to safeguard attached freedom. In Chapter 4, attached freedom is further distinguished from detached freedom, which envisages freedom as realized when an individual is a self-regulating, self-directed entity, and acts independently from collectives. In Chapter 5, attached freedom is examined in relation to *sacred groups*, such as the nation-state, for which people are ready to sacrifice and die. Chapter 6, the final chapter in Part II, further explores the concept of political plasticity and the malleability of behavior in political contexts.

The two chapters in Part III explore the relationship between globalization and dictatorships. A perfect storm is being created for the development of dictatorships through 21st-century conditions. We are entering a new phase in which the dictator’s personality is in harmony with the opportunities made available to grab power. Globalization in the 21st century is “fractured,” the main characteristics of *fractured globalization* being the following:

1. Technological and economic forces are pushing us toward greater global integration and transformation into “one world.” However, our identity needs are still pulling us to remain local and attached to the nation-state, our religion, and other sacred groups.⁴⁹ The slogan “global economy, local identity” captures this pull in opposite directions.
2. These oppositional forces are associated with dangerous collective identity threats, and people feeling, in particular, that their sacred national and religious groups are under attack from “invaders.” In Western societies, these invaders are seen to be refugees, illegal immigrants, “radical Muslims,” and other “outsiders.” In non-Western societies, the invaders are seen as Western corporations and military powers, but also “Hollywood culture” and Western values.⁵⁰
3. The appeal of the local and particularly nationalism feeds populist anti-globalist sentiments. Potential dictators thrive in this climate of severe collective identity threats to sacred groups.

The dictator takes advantage of conditions created by globalization (discussed in Chapter 7) and the “springboard to dictatorship” to spring to power. The symbiotic relationship between dictators and their core followers is explored in Chapter 8. In some cases, the availability of a potential dictator and the springboard to dictatorship enables the reversing of political development (as in the example of Turkey under Erdogan, discussed in Chapter 2).

In Part IV, two chapters explore future trends. The factors that continue to pull us toward dictatorship are examined in Chapter 9. The vast majority of middle and lower class people around the world, including in Western societies, are already feeling humongous economic pressures. More and more of the wealth in their societies has flowed into the hands of fewer and fewer people. The middle classes read about this huge wealth concentration in best-selling books such as *Capital in the 21st Century* by Thomas Piketty,⁵¹ among others,⁵² but they feel helpless to do anything about it. They feel depressed upon reading

Walter Scheidel's⁵³ thesis that, historically, war has served as the "great leveler" and provided the most effective remedy to the trend of increasing income inequality—surely rational policies should be able to do better than war at leveling the playing field? But not so far in human history, it seems. This sense of collective helplessness is exasperated by the rapid, "out-of-control" pace of technological change, which pushes particularly the middle class to adapt and work harder but has not brought increases in their standard of living or productivity.⁵⁴

Those who attempt to reform the system are confronted by enormous bureaucracies, which can hide officeholders from responsibility and nurture *authoritarianism*, the strict obedience to authority and the abandonment of personal freedoms. A second seemingly neutral trend that helps authoritarianism, and eventually dictatorship, is the failure of mass education to include robust civic training. Even in the healthiest democracies, many citizens do not participate in politics; those who vote tend to be richer, Whiter, and older, and the knowledge base of many citizens is poor⁵⁵ (to varying degrees, similar problems exist in all Western democracies⁵⁶). Only one in four U.S. high school seniors is at least "proficient" in civic knowledge and skills.⁵⁷ Education for the elites is in the process of abandoning the goal of educating the "whole person," despite some resistance from supporters of liberal arts education. Instead, elite education is moving toward training specialists in narrower and narrower fields of expertise.⁵⁸

Received wisdom tells us that the computer revolution, together with the World Wide Web, Facebook, Twitter, Google, and other related innovations, should help better inform and educate people. After all, we can now interact with so many other people, and seek information and ideas from so many sources. Surely these trends will help democracy around the world? But with their current training, people tend to use the Internet in ways that endorse their existing worldviews and biases, exchanging information and ideas in echo chambers with like-minded others.⁵⁹

Another factor is the use of the Internet by Putin and other dictators as part of their schemes to strengthen authoritarianism around the world.⁶⁰ These trends influence the evolution of what I call *global authoritarian integration*, the increased tendency for authoritarian forces to connect with and support one another and act as an integrated force across national borders. This is a case of similarity attraction, such as Russian and Chinese dictatorships supporting the Iranian dictatorship, with both Russia and Iran supporting the Syrian dictatorship, and China and Iran supporting the North Korean dictatorship.

This perfect storm creating the springboard to dictatorship includes a fusion of show business, politics, business, and sport, erasing traditional boundaries. It is not new that people can move from show business to politics; Ronald Reagan did that very successfully in the 1980s. The change today is far more radical: Now politics *is* show business, just as show business *is* politics, and so is sport, and so is business, and so are Facebook and Twitter. This complete fusion has meant that persuasion and success in politics can now come about almost

completely through appeals to emotions and identity, to how people feel about things and the groups they identify with, rather than based on facts and logic.⁶¹ “Alternative facts” matter more than real facts. Politics as show business, as exemplified in Trump’s America, means that make-believe and fiction can be even more persuasive than cold facts and science.

In the final chapter, I explore solutions to the current global trends away from democracy. We have to fight hard and be persistent to prevent further decline of democratic freedoms around the world, to safeguard the openness that we already enjoy, and we must fight even harder to move societies forward to achieve actualized democracies.⁶² The program for resilience and fighting back must be based on reforming the education system, starting with schools but including higher education. Civic education and civic engagement must become central to education. The pro-democracy movement has gained renewed energy and has “fire in the belly,” so the future looks more hopeful in the fight against dictatorship. This book is part of the democratic renewal.

ENDNOTES

1. Abbas Milani (2011) has written the seminal work on the last shah.
2. Khomeini targeted the universities and raged against Iranian intellectuals whom he saw as thinking outside the Islamic framework; see <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer88/khomeini-we-shall-confront-world-our-ideology>.
3. See Marples (2000).
4. Bullock (1993, p. 459).
5. Moghaddam (2018c); Moghaddam and Howard (2017).
6. Moghaddam (2016b, p. 4).
7. Wagoner, de Luna, and Glaveanu (2018).
8. Researchers need to give far more attention to the characteristics of the ideal society from a psychological perspective (Moghaddam, 2016b).
9. I developed this four-stage model after studying the research on political development. A very good source is the series of books published by Princeton University Press, starting with Pye (1963).
10. I am not suggesting that torture and the mistreatment of government opponents only takes place in primitive dictatorships; see Donnelly and Whelan (2017) for a discussion of torture and the misuse of power in global context.
11. Marguleas (2017).
12. For an assessment of North Korean advancement in the nuclear domain and Western engagement strategies, see Cha and Kang (2018).
13. A number of authors have pointed out the threat traditional Muslim men feel from educated women; for example, see Hanif (2012).
14. See Salehi-Isfahani (2008). Also, in 2014, there were 18,481 women out of a total of 43,544 faculty members <https://www.msrt.ir/en/page/20/statistics#Graduates>.
15. For a critical discussion of Saudi Arabian society and economy, see Al-Rasheed (2018). A great deal has been published on revolutionary Iran; for example, see Axworthy (2016). However, a “conspiratorial” approach has been taken by some authors, focusing on the ways in which the U.S. government has misrepresented Iran to the American public and attempted to manipulate events inside Iran; see Benjamin (2018) and Crist (2013).
16. Kim (2017).
17. Yeo and Chubb (2018).

18. The growth failure of oil economies such as Iran and Saudi Arabia have been discussed from different angles (e.g., Nili & Rastad, 2007), but the bottom line is that the governments in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other oil-producing countries have remained corrupt and removed from the needs of the people.
19. For discussions of Putin's Russia, see Gel'Man (2015), Laqueur (2015), Van Herpen (2013, 2014), and Wegren (2016). For a view that gives Putin more credit, see Sakwa (2014).
20. See Orde Kittrie's (2016) highly insightful and timely examination of how law is increasingly being used as a weapon of war. Also, Sanger, Sullivan, and Kirkpatrick (2018) revealed how Russia targets its critics abroad.
21. Swinford (2018).
22. For example, see Scher (2018) regarding LGBTQ Russians.
23. Shipman, Edmunds, and Turner (2018) reflect a new focus by authors on the increasing chasm between the elite and nonelite.
24. Particularly since 2016, the mainstream media routinely reports on Trump's attacks on the free press and his flouting of the rule of law; for example, see Toobin (2018).
25. Sorkin (2017).
26. As Robert Shapiro (2018) has convincingly argued, the poor are worse off under Trump.
27. Silver (2018).
28. See Moghaddam (2013, pp. 107–110), and N. Miller, Pederson, Earlywine, and Pollock (2003).
29. See D. N. Smith and Hanley (2018).
30. Manza and Crowley (2017) provided evidence that casts doubt on the general image of Trump supporters as low in education.
31. Foley (2018).
32. Cech (2017).
33. Sinclair, Smith, and Tucker (2018).
34. Rodrick wrote about the inescapable "trilemma of the world economy" in specialized papers earlier, but the most accessible discussion is in his 2011 book *The Globalization Paradox*.
35. A. Smith (1776/2017).
36. I developed this "interactional" model based on the idea that both the context and the individual are essential components of how dictatorship evolves, as opposed to models that only focus on the personality of the dictator (Moghaddam, 2013).
37. See Moghaddam (2013) for a further discussion of the use dictators make of "crisis incidents."
38. See Moghaddam (2016b) for an in-depth discussion.
39. Lipset (1959).
40. For discussions of populism and its definitions, see Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008), Judis (2016), and Mudde (2007).
41. Mudde (2004, p. 542).
42. For example, Steve Bannon, who helped Trump become president, has helped strengthen networks of European ultra-right populists (Horowitz, 2018).
43. J. E. Oliver and Rahn (2016).
44. For a discussion of populist forms of democracy, see Pappas (2014).
45. See Chapter 3 in Crew (1994).
46. Bullock (1993, p. 451).
47. There is a wide range of research on individual empowerment through collective processes; for examples, see Saab, Tausch, and Cheung (2015); Voegtlin, Boehm, and Bruch (2015).
48. World Economic Forum (2018).
49. Moghaddam (2008b).

50. Moghaddam (2008a, 2010).
51. Piketty (2014).
52. Dorling (2014) and Atkinson (2015) are particularly good on documenting the rise of inequality. However, Scheidel (2017) also provided excellent evidence on this; see particularly Table 15.1.
53. Scheidel (2017).
54. Gordon (2016) presented convincing evidence that the productivity leap achieved in 1870–1970 was special and perhaps unique, and since the 1970s, productivity has been relatively stagnant.
55. See Coley and Sum (2012); Galston (2004); Kahne and Sporte (2008); Sherrod, Torney-Purta, and Flanagan (2010); U.S. Department of Education (2012); and also Moghaddam (2016b, pp. 111–112)
56. Banks (2015).
57. Robelen (2011).
58. Moghaddam (1997).
59. The intuitive idea that there is an echo chamber is now backed by some empirical evidence; see Goldie, Linick, Jabbar, and Lubienski (2014).
60. For a broader review of control in dictatorships, see discussions in Corner and Lim (2016).
61. The role of emotions in persuasion has been experimentally studied by social psychologists at least since the mid-20th century but in recent decades most successfully through the elaboration likelihood model; see Petty, Cacioppo, and Kasmer (2015); Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983).
62. For more detailed discussions of actualized democracy, see readings in Wagoner, de Luna, and Glaveanu (2018).