

## **The Dictator Cometh: The Psychology of Rising Authoritarian Strongmen**

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1. The historic political challenge: Reversals from democracy to dictatorship, from ancient Athens to our times. The unexpected rise of strongmen and dictatorships in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
2. The failure of revolution as the solution: rhetoric and behavioral change from the French Revolution (1789) to 21<sup>st</sup> century revolutions (e.g., Arab Spring).
3. My experiences during the revolution in Iran (1979); change and continuity in the post-revolution period in Iran.
4. The challenge for psychological science: understanding, predicting and influencing socio-political change generally and 'political plasticity' in particular.
5. The mismatch between what is needed to understand change and political plasticity, and the characteristics of traditional psychology, focused on individual behavior and on one-hour laboratory experiments. Through meeting this challenge, psychological science is developing in constructive new ways.
6. Understanding the 'immortal dictator' – how do we explain the continuing appeal of strongmen?
7. The *Escape from Freedom* (Erich Fromm, 1941) explanation, based on individualism and 'detached' conception of freedom.
8. My alternative explanation based on the promises of strongmen and 'attached' freedom: Freedom and glory through the group, the strongman promises to resurrect the group and bring attached freedom to individuals through the greatness of the ingroup. Thus, the appeal of the strongman is not an 'escape from freedom,' but a surge toward attached freedom, glory and greatness through authoritarian leadership.
9. Strongman highlights threats and crises; empirical psychological research (and the experiences of history) on the consequences of perceived threat for support for civil liberties and human rights.
10. The role of globalization in the rise of strongmen and decline of democracy. Heightened perceived threats associated with globalization.
11. Threat of invasions by 'alien people:' mass movements of people across national boundaries, sudden contact, and 'catastrophic evolution.'
12. Threat of invasions by 'alien cultures,' actual and virtual. Perceived threats and social media, echo chambers, radicalization and mutual radicalization.
13. Other factors that are weakening democracy around the world: illiberal education, politics as showbusiness, expanding undemocratic bureaucracies.
14. Exploring solutions: Democratic peace theory and the individual and collective benefits of open societies, why we must and how we can return to a path of democratization.
15. The long-term goal of achieving actualized democracy; the serious shortcomings of contemporary 'democracies'

16. The role of plasticity: (a) The extensive research on brain plasticity (b) the focus on plasticity in applied areas, e.g., clinical/abnormal behavior, organizational behavior, and criminal behavior.
17. The need to study plasticity in political behavior: how malleable is human political behavior? How much and how fast can we change human cognition and action in political domains?
18. Mechanisms of socialization for plasticity: the family, schools, communities. But toward what goal? What are the psychological characteristics needed for citizens capable of actively participating in and sustaining an actualized democracy?
19. The democracy circle begins with “I could be wrong” and ends at “Not all experiences are of equal value”. These ten behavioral characteristics of the ‘democratic citizen’ reflect an ideal we should strive toward.
20. Toolkits are needed to nurture these characteristics as basic social and cognitive skills, through practical exercises. These toolkits are needed in schools, social clubs, sports centers, and other places where young people receive education and training.

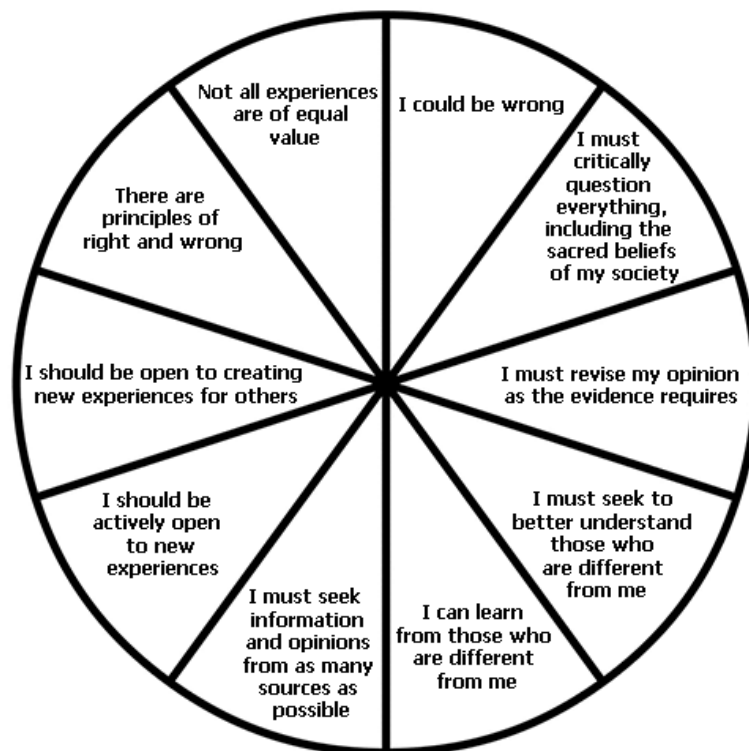


Figure 1: Ten characteristics of the pro-democracy individual (Moghaddam, 2016, *The Psychology of Democracy*. Washington DC.: American Psychological Association Press)

**Further Readings:**

Moghaddam, F. M. (2013). *The psychology of dictatorship*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association Press.

Moghaddam, F. M. (2016). *The psychology of democracy*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association Press.

Moghaddam, F. M. (2018). *Mutual radicalization: How groups and nations push each other to extremes*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association Press.

Moghaddam, F. M. (2019). *Threat to democracy: The appeal of authoritarianism in an age of uncertainty*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association Press.

Moghaddam, F. M. (2021). *Shakespeare and the experimental psychologist*. New York: Cambridge University Press.