

POLITICAL PLASTICITY

Fathali M. Moghaddam

Georgetown University

Web: fathalimoghaddam.com; Email: moghaddf@georgetown.edu

1. The historic political challenge: Reversals from democracy to dictatorship, from ancient Athens to our times. The unexpected rise of authoritarian strongmen and dictatorships in the 21st century.
2. The failure of revolution as the solution: rhetoric and behavioral change from the French Revolution (1789) to 21st 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 political plasticity, and the characteristics of traditional psychology. The causal model, the roots of psychological experiments (Moghaddam, 2021).
6. Understanding the 'immortal dictator' – how do we explain the continuing appeal of authoritarian strongmen? The Erich Fromm (1941) tradition.
7. My focus on the role of perceived threat and the strongman's appeal to 'attached' freedom (Moghaddam, 2019): 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.
8. 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.
9. The role of globalization in the rise of strongmen and decline of democracy. Heightened perceived threats associated with globalization.
10. Threat of invasions by 'alien people:' mass movements of people across national boundaries, sudden contact, and 'catastrophic evolution.'
11. Threat of invasions by 'alien cultures,' actual and virtual. Perceived threats and social media, echo chambers, radicalization and mutual radicalization.
12. Other factors that are weakening democracy around the world: illiberal education, politics as showbusiness, expanding undemocratic bureaucracies.
13. 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.

Moghaddam, F. M. (July 2021). *Shakespeare and the Experimental Psychologist*. Cambridge University Press.

Moghaddam, F. M. (2019). *Threat to Democracy: The Appeal of Authoritarianism in an Age of Uncertainty*. American Psychological Association Press.