



Can It Happen Here?: Authoritarianism in America

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“What makes Trump immune is that he is not a president within the context of a healthy Republican government. He is a cult leader of a movement that has taken over a political party – and he specifically campaigned on a platform of one-man rule. This fact permeates “*Can It Happen Here?* . . . which concludes, if you read between the lines, that “it” already has.” – *New York Times Book Review*

“Several of the contributors...agree that American politics is susceptible to creeping authoritarianism and provide the intellectual underpinning.” – *Washington Post*

With the election of Donald J. Trump, many people on both the left and right feared that America's 240-year-old grand experiment in democracy was coming to an end, and that Sinclair Lewis' satirical novel, *It Can't Happen Here*, written during the dark days of the 1930s, could finally be coming true. Is the democratic freedom that the United States symbolizes really secure? Can authoritarianism happen in America?

Acclaimed legal scholar, Harvard Professor, and *New York Times* bestselling author Cass R. Sunstein queried a number of the nation's leading thinkers. In this thought-provoking collection of essays, these distinguished thinkers and theorists explore the lessons of history, how democracies crumble, how propaganda works, and the role of the media, courts, elections, and "fake news" in the modern political landscape—and what the future of the United States may hold.

Contributors include:

Martha Minow, dean of Harvard Law School Eric Posner, law professor at the University of Chicago Law School Tyler Cowen, economics professor at George Mason University Timur Kurian, economics and political science professor at Duke University Noah Feldman, professor of law at Harvard Law School Jonathan Haidt, social psychologist and Professor of Ethical Leadership at New York University's Stern School of Business Jack Goldsmith, Professor at Harvard Law School, Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, and co-founder of Lawfare Stephen Holmes, Professor of Law at New York University Jon Elster, Professor of the Social Sciences at Columbia University Thomas Ginsburg, Professor of International Law and Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences Cass R. Sunstein, Robert Walmsley University Professor, Harvard University Duncan Watts, sociologist and principal researcher at Microsoft Research Geoffrey R. Stone, University of Chicago Law school professor and noted First Amendment scholar

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From Reader Review Can It Happen Here?: Authoritarianism in America for online ebook

Peter O'Kelly says

A couple reviews to consider:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/12/books/review/can-it-happen-here.html>
<http://www.thenationalbookreview.com/reviews/can-it-happen-here>

Helen says

This is an excellent book of essays (or chapters) written by constitutional law professors, political scientists, psychologists, and so forth, about whether authoritarianism could occur in the USA, and thereby either overtly or covertly/subtly take down democracy. Each essay was very informative, although one or two were tough going - rather dull - and the conclusion that I draw is that it's quite possible the unthinkable could happen here in America. The "model" of Putinism - continuing the forms of democracy (elections) but otherwise taking over the levers of power (media, intimidating the judiciary, etc) - could happen here. Probably why Trump is so "entranced" by Putin..

The quality of these writings is exceptional, and I recommend the book to anyone interested in gaining more insight into what has happened in American politics the past few decades (since the buildup to Trump didn't just occur since 2015 - when he threw his hat in the ring). One bit of to me at least startling information - no matter what, about one-third of the populace has authoritarian tendencies. Usually, they are kept in check, if things are going satisfactorily (enough) and it seems as if the American Dream is still in effect. However, if the long-term prospects evaporate, such that the Dream turns into a nightmare wherein it seems clear that future generations will not live a better life than their predecessors, then authoritarian-leaning Americans may "activate" - their latent pro-authoritarianism may become visible. As we can see at Trump rallies. Trump supporters aren't going anywhere so the task at hand is to understand what happened, reform American politics, and safeguard democracy (freedom of speech, elections, separation of powers, etc) - i.e. hope our democratic institutions resist Trumpism. Even if Trump is impeached though, unless there is reform such that politicians act in the peoples' interests rather than in the interests of their mega-donors, the trend toward authoritarianism, which is also a reaction against globalization/cosmopolitanism/the elites, will continue.

Anyway, I have (as usual selected many quotes) which I shall organize by chapter.

From Posner chapter "The Dictator's Handbook, US Edition:"

"Trump is unique in modern history as an outsider who came to power by overcoming his party's leadership."

"In principle, Trump could try to create his own Brownshirts by rewarding supporters for their loyalty with offices and other compensation, along with pardons if they are convicted of crimes."

"Imagine that Trump ...harasses agencies that pose a threat to his power (intelligence agencies?) while lavishing resources and attention on those that support him (immigration agencies?)..."

"Congress can defy a dictator, but maybe not if it believes that voters love their leader and will vote against members of Congress who oppose him."

"Over time, our political system has become...increasingly oligarchical."

"When representatives are responsive not to the interests of the public in general but to a relatively small group of individuals and groups, we have oligarchy."

"...leaders...spend more and more time enriching a small group of important backers that keep them in power."

"In the United States, oligarchy has resulted from the gradual breakdown of the party system...and from long-term changes in the structure of mass media, which have encouraged political distrust, exacerbated polarization, and merged politics with entertainment."

"A small class of wealthy donors has disproportionate control over the Republican policy agenda."

"...the causes of constitutional rot [include] (1) political polarization; (2) loss of trust in government; (3) increasing economic inequality; and (4) policy disasters, ...like the Vietnam War, the Iraq War, and the 2008 financial crisis."

"...polarization, loss of trust, economic inequality, and policy disaster -- mutually reinforce each other."

"In an oligarchical system...a relatively small number of backers effectively decide who stays in power."

"Our constitutional system is still formally democratic, but it has become more oligarchical in practice over time."

"...the power of the press to protect republican government has been weakened."

"The American system of freedom of the press ...was undermined [in 2016] not by state censorship but by Trump's very effective hacking of the media..."

"...Russia and allied groups in Eastern Europe engaged in successful propaganda campaigns during the 2016 election season, designed to enhance Trump's chances and sow discord and confusion in the United States."

"Propaganda...attempts to put everything in dispute, so that nothing can be established as true and everything becomes a matter of personal opinion or partisan belief."

"...if people stop believing in the truth of what they read, they don't have to think hard about political questions."

"Propaganda...undermines truth to destroy the concept of the public good and to encourage tribalism."

"As a political system becomes increasingly oligarchical, it also becomes less equal and more polarized..."

"...people have lost so much faith in government that they are willing to gamble on a demagogue."

"Constitutional rot ...allowed Trump to rise to power; it also has given him incentives to increase and exacerbate constitutional rot to stay in power."

"Polarization...[keeps] Trump in power because it binds his supporters to him. He exacerbates polarization by fomenting outrage and internal division."

"Polarization and upheaval are good for [Trump]... Crisis is his brand."

"Although Trump ran as a populist who promised to protect the working class from the depredations of globalization, as soon as he entered the White House, he reversed course. His cabinet is full of wealthy individuals, and many of his top advisers are from the very financial class that he excoriated in his campaign."

"...he has quickly allied himself with the most conservative elements of the Republican party, and he ...supported a health care bill that is likely to harm many working-class Americans."

"The central goal of the Republican agenda...is to deliver benefits to the donor class, either through tax cuts, government expenditures, or deregulation."

"From the standpoint of populism, the Republicans' proposed health care bills have been an utter travesty; they withdraw important benefits and protections from working-class Americans to benefit the very wealthiest."

"Trump ran as a populist but he now governs as a sellout. This is not an unusual phenomenon among populist revolutionaries."

"Trump is a huckster, with few actual ideological commitments."

"...Trump's very strategies for gaining power--dividing the country and fomenting mutual hatred -- mean that he should align his policies with members of his own party against the Democrats. That means that he will not govern as an economic populist, although his rhetoric will remain rabidly populist."

"Trump may have run a populist campaign, but now that he is in power, he has pretty much embraced oligarchy. His populism is mostly sloganeering..."

"Trump is the last president in the Reagan regime...the regime's policy agenda was tax cuts and deregulation above all..."

"...Trump is the last Reaganite."

"The United States has failed to reconcile globalization with democracy."

"The central question is how to preserve republican government in the face of a changing global economy."

"The history of the American Constitution is a series of struggles for greater democracy, equality, and inclusiveness in the face of well-entrenched opposition. Trump's presidency signals the beginning of yet another contest."

From Cowen chapter "Could Fascism Come to America?"

"A would-be fascist...promise[s] them a new social order in which violence is raised in social status, and in which violence is deployed for something other than just the protection of property rights."

"Democracy is alive...at...least in the social democracies with government running at 40 to 55 percent of GDP."

"...the Nazi state moved the German government away from transparency, including fiscal transparency...."

"Hitler...used...persuasion, force, and terror to make the state do his bidding."

"...real consumption [in Germany] fell over that decade [of the 30s], and most of the spending boosts were for the military, which...did not create real wealth for the citizenry."

From Sunstein chapter "Lessons from the American founding"

"According to "The Federalist Papers," small republics ...often end up destroying liberty, and themselves...because of the power of well-organized factions."

"Publius argues...that in a well-ordered functioning deliberative democracy, a wide range of perspectives and diversity of views are a virtue rather than a vice..."

"Opposition [to ratifying the Constitution] was especially intense in New York.Hamilton was the major impetus behind "The Federalist Papers;" he recruited John Jay and James Madison for the effort."

"...passion and interest...can be harmful to "the rights of other citizens" and to "the ...aggregate interests of the community."interest plays a role...when nations confiscate property, or when majorities harm minorities whom they see as competitors."

"In a small republic, a self-interested private group could easily seize political power and distribute wealth or opportunities in its favor."

"Self-interest...would ...result from differences in natural talents and property ownership."

"...a large republic would provide crucial safeguards."

"An extended republic, with diverse interests, creates a built-in protection against oppression."

"...bicameralism...enlists diversity both a safeguard and as a way of enlarging the range of arguments."

"[Hamilton, No. 79:] "The complete independence of the courts of justice is peculiarly essential in a limited constitution."

"...the system of checks and balances, in a large republic, would help to improve deliberation."

"...the constitutional system would serve republican goals better than the traditional republican solution of small republics, civic education, and close ties between representatives and their publics."

"...the president appoints the nation's judges, and we can imagine a federal judiciary that is supine in the face of presidential aggression."

From Power chapter "Beyond Elections: Foreign Interference with American Democracy"

"One possible source of our relieve complacency now is that Russia's attempts to meddle in our democracy proved largely unsuccessful during the Cold War."

"...foreign powers like Russia and china, or non-state actors like ISIS, today have a much greater ability to use "fake news" or "alternative facts" to influence a democratic electorate than they did during the Cold War."

"Russia has keenly exploited our growing reliance on new media..."

"...the content disseminated by these [Russian] accounts and ads reveals a multifaceted strategy to support Trump's election...and sow political discord among Americans."

"...the Russians had prepared a social media campaign, in anticipation of Secretary Clinton's victory, to amplify doubts about the validity of the results and "cripple her presidency from its start.""

"...the great dangers of a media environment manipulated by targeted social media interventions. As demonstrated by decades of behavioral science research on agenda-setting, "elements emphasized by the mass media come to be regarded as important by the public.""

"European countries have been on the receiving end of similar Russian measures..."

"...the echo chamber's walls are so soundproof that...President Putin'sfavorability among Republicans rose ... between 2015 and President Trump's inauguration, from 12 percent to 32 percent, while ... among Independents [it increased] from 12 percent to 23 percent."

"An electorate that in the Cold War would have been hard to differentiate today comprises individuals whose particular likes and dislikes are intimately understood by big business, technology companies, and political campaigns -- and, seemingly, well-resourced foreign entities with an interest in impacting public opinion."

"...it is already commonplace for governments to manipulate public opinion over social media by contracting directly with strategic communication firms."

"...now that there is a genuine risk of foreign powers who, in Washington's words, "practice the arts of seduction, to mislead public opinion," it is incumbent on the rest of us to enhance our vigilance."

From Goldsmith chapter "Paradoxes of the Deep State"

"...every presidential administration from FDR through Nixon used the Deep State to collect political intelligence on potential rivals."

"...no statutory laws governed Deep State activities inside the united States, and intelligence agencies "simply ignored" the Constitution, concluded the Church Committee."

"[Watergate "Deep Throat" Mark] Felt... was ratting on one of the most corrupt presidencies in American history."

"...the Deep State...can preserve democratic values though the revelation and correction of antidemocratic action in secret."

"The government...has never prosecuted a member of the media for publishing secret government information."

"...leaks of government information are not always an absolute bad, and ...can serve a vital function in checking a too-secretive Deep State."

"...the US government ...is unable to control its leakers, whopossess enormous discretion to use the secretly collected information to sabotage persons, policies, and initiatives they do not like."

"...a profusion of sensitive leaks from the Deep State [as never before in US history] with ...an overtly political aim to bring down senior leadership [of the Trump administration]."

"...we have never faced a situation in which the National Security adviser, and perhaps even the president of the United States, presented a credible counterintelligence threat involving one of our greatest adversaries."

From Ginsburg and Aziz chapter "How we Lost Constitutional Democracy"

"[In a hypothetical scenario] ...the new president...handpicks allies for key judicial vacancies..."

"Despite the Civil War, two world wars, and countless economic and security emergencies, national elections have never been postponed."

"The United States...is ...vulnerable to the most prevalent form of democratic backsliding: the slow ...descent toward partial autocracy."

"...the quality of democracy can decline precipitously even as formal elections continue to be held."

"...democracy...relies on transparency, legality, impartiality, and constraint."

"...democracy needs liberal rights of speech and association so those with alternative views can challenge government on its policies, hold it accountable, and propose alternatives."

"The rule of law ...is essential."

"...would-be autocrats find it critical first to control the public narrative, often by directly attacking or intimidating the press."

"Leaders who wish to roll back democratic institutions...tend to depict those institutions' defenders as representatives of a tired, insulated elite engaged in self-dealing to the detriment of the people."

"...an independent judiciary and institutional checks such as legislative oversight...can prove significant barriers to democratic backsliding."

"The institutional checks on national political power rest on theoretical assumptions that have proved in practice rather fragile."

"...the Republican move to lay off federal workers and reduce the benefits of those who remain is so significant..."

"...the First Amendment, for good or ill, arguably protects sources of outright propaganda -- sites spreading lies about politicians, for example -- which could in tandem with presidential attacks on the media lead citizens to distrust all news sources."

From Feldman chapter "On "It Can't Happen Here""

"Because populist movement sometimes feature demagogic leaders, it's easy to conclude that those leaders are the necessary precondition for their movements."

"...it could be argued that the rapidity of democratization in Eastern Europe has impeded the development of the robust civil society ecosystem necessary to resist de-democratization."

From Stenner and Haidt chapter "Authoritarianism is not a Momentary Madness, but an Eternal Dynamic within Liberal Democracies"

"There is a fundamentally antidemocratic mood afoot that has lost patience in particular, with the strictures of political correctness."

"Whatever these political brands might once have represented, "left" versus "right" is being overturned in a new game of "insiders" versus "outsiders" ... or so it seems."

"From the perspective of Stenner's "authoritarian dynamic," this "far-right populist" tangle simply represents the activation of authoritarian predispositions (in the roughly one-third of the population who are so inclined) by perceptions of "normative threat" (put most simply: threats to unity and consensus, or "oneness and sameness")."

"Authoritarianism is substantially heritable ...and mostly determined by lack of "openness to experience" ...and by cognitive limitations...these are two factors that reduce one's willingness and capacity (respectively) to tolerate complexity, diversity, and difference."

"In contrast to status quo conservatism, authoritarianism is primarily driven not by aversion to change (difference over time) but by aversion to complexity (difference across space). In a nutshell, authoritarians are "simple-minded avoiders of complexity more than closed-minded avoiders of change"..."

"...suppression of difference and achievement of uniformity necessitate autocratic social arrangements in which individual autonomy yields to group authority."

"...there was no socio-demographic variable whose impact on populist voting exceeded that of our basic "child-rearing values" measure of authoritarianism: not education, income, religion, gender, age, or urban/rural residence."

"...non-authoritarians' "activation" -- in defense of freedom and diversity over obedience and conformity -- includes rejection of populist candidates and causes that fail to share this vision of the good life."

"...evidence in support of the notion that populism is mostly fueled by economic distress [is] weak and inconsistent..."

"Trump ascended to the American presidency, Britain exited Europe, and the French flirted with the National Front because Western liberal democracies have now exceeded many people's capacity to tolerate them--to live with them, and in them."

"...there is ...little evidence that living in a liberal democracy generally makes people more democratic and tolerant."

"Democracy in general and tolerance in particular, might actually be better served by an abundance of common and unifying rituals, institutions, and processes."

"The gleeful reactions of Trump's supporters to his "strongman" posturing attested to their anger and bitterness regarding the "political correctness" of the "liberal elite," and the pleasure they seemed to derive from watching someone who sounds like "us" finally sticking it to "them.""

"Liberal democracy has now exceeded many people's capacity to tolerate it."

Lisa says

This book is an interesting collection of essays dealing with the question of the possibility of a rise in authoritarianism in America, and just how possible that eventuality is. The essays don't deal so much with the question of the Trump presidency, as most of the arguments are based on the premise that the presidency is simply a symptom of a much deeper crisis America is facing.

Many of the arguments deal with the issue of authoritarianism and the American political culture, and while most of them are of the opinion that an all out transition to an authoritarian regime is not a feasible possibility, the crisis of the erosion of the American Constitutional system is. Many of the essays are more educational in tone, and avoid the alarmist approach. However, they are still honest and frank in their assessment of the aspects of the eroding constitutional standard that is undermining our government today.

The majority of the essays are short, making it a book that you can read in segments -- and most are well written, documented and reasoned. It is an interesting look into many of the problems that our country is facing, while at the same time maintaining an optimistic perspective that there are things that can be done to check the crumbling downward spiral that our country's government seems to be caught in.

Kent Winward says

This essay collection has its moments. In answer to the question? Kinda, but here is where you can help and here is what to look out for.

Ted Lehmann says

Can It Happen Here? - Edited by Cass Sunstein – Book Review

The essays in *Can it Happen Here?: Authoritarianism in America* (Dey Street Books, March 2018, 496 pages, \$11.99/12.18) vary widely in accessibility, readability, and sense of audience. They represent a set of, largely academic papers that may raise more issues than they settle. Nevertheless, I came away, despite the pessimism of some of the essays, with the sense that if Americans act with courage and fortitude, our institutions will survive the Trump assault on them. Most of the writers, drawn from top, mostly American, universities suggest that, while there seems to be world-wide skepticism toward liberal democracy, we can weather the storm by relying on the checks and balances established in the Constitution, maintaining a free press, and the engagement of the electorate in the political process.

The title of the book is drawn from Sinclair Lewis's satirical novel, *It Can't Happen Here*, written in 1936, which followed the career of a fictional governor, much like Huey Long, the populist governor of Louisiana, who took a run against Franklin Delano Roosevelt before his assassination in 1936. Lewis' autocratic, totalitarian character, perhaps modeled on Adolf Hitler is elected president on a platform of populism and traditional values. Sound familiar? The title of Lewis' book is turned into a question, which each of the writers examine in their own fashion.

The writers are drawn almost entirely from Academia and selected from elite institutions dominated by the Ivy League and the University of Chicago. Including editor Cass Sunstein, there were nineteen writers distributed thus: Harvard – 5, Chicago – 5, Yale – 2, NYU – 2, Columbia – 1, Princeton – 1, Cornell – 1, Duke – 1, George Mason – 1. In terms of specialties, they were distributed this way: Law – 11, Economics – 2, Diplomacy – 1, varied social sciences – 5. Several were described as being multi-disciplinary. Given these distributions of institutions and specialties, it's little wonder that many of the entries were jargon-filled and somewhat repetitive. One of the contributors, Samantha Powers, also happens to be married to editor Sunstein, although I can see no reason why she doesn't belong in this distinguished group.

Can It Happen Here? considers whether the inclinations and indications from the Trump administration can or will lead to the loss of our democracy and the imposition/acceptance of an authoritarian form of government in the United States. While, in his preface, Sunstein suggests that this dark vision of what America might become isn't yet happening, those who can imagine such outcomes are writing and speaking about it. They belong to a long history of those who've written about an apocalyptic view of democracy and freedom.

The essays range from thoughtful and insightful analyses of Donald Trump's mind and approach to stunningly difficult to read and interpret research studies written for an academic audience. They often are much in need of interpretation for even the intelligent lay reader. As such, it seems to be a book in search of an audience who can find enough sustenance to make it worth purchasing. It contains too much jargon and too many statistics to be useful to the general reader, and too little for the specialist.

The general tenor of this collection is to suggest that while Trump, his authoritarian vision and the alignment of his appointees towards the very forces he campaigned against, while deeply upsetting and destructive, is likely to fail as other efforts to exert control over the government and people of America have failed in the past. But the ride isn't going to be pleasant and the destruction may take years to heal. Since there are few examples of authoritarian or anti-constitutional governance in this country, several of the writers depend on authoritarian influences in Hungary and Poland, which have pulled back from democracy. They also rely on

the rise to power of historical figures like Louis Bonaparte in France, Hitler, and Mussolini, all of whom overthrew representative governments to install autocratic rule before failing.

Most of the essays strike a center-left middle ground, as one might expect from a group of writers dominated by men (only two women contributed chapters) trained in law who also teach it in elite settings. There's a strong presumption that the principles enshrined in the Constitution and embodied in the checks and balances and the Bill of Rights, with special emphasis on the role of the press, whose voice is guaranteed by the First Amendment will prevail. Meanwhile, the concerns of the unruly extremes of both parties is under-emphasized as the writers place their faith in the good sense of the center.

According to Amazon, "Cass R. Sunstein is the Robert Walmsley University Professor at Harvard Law School, where he is the founder and director of the Program on Behavioral Economics and Public Policy. He is by far the most cited law professor in the United States. From 2009 to 2012 he served in the Obama administration as Administrator of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. He has testified before congressional committees, appeared on national television and radio shows, been involved in constitution-making and law reform activities in a number of nations, and written many articles and books, including *Simpler: The Future of Government and Wiser: Getting Beyond Groupthink to Make Groups Smarter*."

Can it Happen Here?: Authoritarianism in America (Dey Street Books, March 2018, 496 pages, \$11.99/12.18) edited by Cass Sunstein consists of seventeen essays edited and curated by Cass Sunstein examining the rise of Donald J. Trump to the Presidency of the United States and its possible outcomes. Relying on the history of several authoritarian rises and failures in world history as well as a social psychological approach to American predictions, the book speculates about the possible continued worldwide rise of authoritarian rule and its possibilities. With regard to the U.S., the essays hold out some optimism, assuming that Americans and our institutions stand tall and act bravely. The essays are uneven, but many deserve careful, thoughtful study. They are marred by their tone and the denseness of the prose in some. The book was provided to me by the publisher as a digital download through Edelweiss, and I read it on my Amazon Fire.

Robert says

An interesting and challenging book. Each chapter is written by a different person who has their own take on the question "Can It Happen Here?"

Some chapters are relatively short while others felt tedious and the author sometimes felt like they were being garrulous for the sake of extra time in the book. That said, there were multiple great chapters that challenge the mainstream narrative and ideas.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the concepts of democracy and authoritarianism.

Vladimir says

Many people should read this, because there is not enough high level discourse about politics beyond the bounds of specific policies or outcomes of particular elections. There's no way to gauge the likelihood that

Trump ends up materially impacting the institutions underlying the republic, or to effectively counteract that threat, without exploring the possibilities.

Understanding the vulnerabilities of the present system also shows what needs to be reformed to strengthen it.

A few favorites:

Karen Stenner and Jonathan Haidt's essay on the psychology of authoritarian dispositions is a useful framing for understanding other reporting on trump loyalists.

Duncan Watts articulates how "common sense" is a dangerous lie in political discourse.

Stephen Holmes ties in the weakness of democracy with rising economic inequality. Voters will rationally not bother to make "rational" voting decisions in their economic interests when political elites of all viable parties perpetually side with economic elites.

Caroline says

This was definitely an uncomfortable read. The point that many (not all) of the authors make is that our country has a robust government and lots of institutions that by their nature (either because of their inertia which can be useful, or because of their mission) will forestall the worst abuses of a true authoritarian. The disheartening part is that even since this was written, it is possible to see some of those institutions already co-opted by partisans, and also to see the pervasive loss of interest in democracy by large segments of the voting public.

I took away a star because some of the essays were a little academic - I don't mean that as a slur on academics, as our professors and students of politics and law have a lot to tell us, it just means that some of the essays won't really reach even an educated general audience. I have to confess that I skipped the one that was 20+ pages about how Napoleon III progressed from elected senator to emperor and what were the points at which he could have been checked but wasn't. And the statistical analysis of voting by people with authoritarian tendencies was pretty dry.

I thought the last essay (by one Geoffrey Stone) was the best because it summarized a handful of times in our history when "it" actually happened - the Sedition Act of 1798, the suspension of habeas corpus by Lincoln during the Civil War, the espionage statutes enacted during 1917 when the US was ready to get into World War I (this one was least known to me), the internment of Japanese Americans in 1941 (horrible), and attacks on civil liberties during the Vietnam era. In each of these cases, Congress legislated this stuff, supported by the president, and the courts upheld it all, only later backtracking after the supposed crisis was over. On the one hand - our institutions have already failed to protect us from authoritarian periods. On the other - they all passed. We may be in for a longer siege here because the courts and press are being subverted, but perhaps even this time we will come out of the fever. Who knows?

I wish the book had been more accessible to a general audience; if you run across it in the library, just sit in a chair in the corner and read the last essay.

Sam Seitz says

This was an excellent edited volume, covering a range of perspectives both on Trump and on populism and democratic backsliding more broadly. These kinds of books tend to be hit or miss, and it is hard to find one in which every essay is well-written and engaging. Sunstein, however, has managed to curate a remarkably thoughtful and diverse set of authors who provide commentary from myriad perspectives and backgrounds, including psychology, political science, bureaucratic analysis, and history. Not every piece was original, but all were engaging and thought-provoking. This book meets all my standards for book-buying: It is incredibly relevant for today's politics, both in the U.S. and abroad, but it also contains more theoretical and timeless analyses that will remain important decades into the future.

Note: I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway, so take that as you will. Also, because the version I read was prerelease, it was full of typos. I doubt this is the case for the final version, but I haven't had time to check.

Charles says

Cass Sunstein has gathered an ensemble cast of today's intellectual Davoisié (several of whom taught me in law school) to tell us, in seventeen separate essays, whether Trump is the harbinger of American structural doom, and if so, how. It is illuminating to read this book immediately after having read Glenn Reynolds's "The Judiciary's Class War," with its distinction between the ruling Front-Row Kids and the ruled Back-Row Kids. This is because ultimately nearly all the authors presented here believe that "it" can't, or is extremely unlikely to, "happen here," because they expect the Front-Row Kids to be able to stop "it." That is, in different ways but with the same result, the authors expect that people just like them will continue to rule, Trump and the peasants be damned.

That's not to say that they're not worried. Some of them are very worried. In particular, more than half of them explicitly recoil in horror at what's happened in Hungary and Poland, where people just like them have had their power democratically eroded. Of course, if people like the authors lose power, it's not really democratic, since history only goes one way, in their favor, so it must be "authoritarian." I will talk more of Hungary and Poland at the end of this review, but this example of loose use of terminology points up how this book, as a whole, is hampered by a lack of definition of terms. Each author gets to pick his or her own definitions, which lends a somewhat scattered, ends-directed feel to the book. Still, it's worth treating each author fairly, in turn, so off we go.

Most of these authors are law professors, and no exception is the first up, Eric Posner, son of now-doddering former federal judge Richard Posner. Now, Posner may seem like an odd choice for this book, since his public profile has been highest in the recent past for his 2011 book, written with Adrian Vermeule, "The Executive Unbound," in which he argued that under the American system, as it exists today, an extremely strong executive is both inevitable and mostly very desirable. But that was in Obama's day, and now Posner has changed his tune. Still, Posner answers the title question in the negative. Like most of the authors in this book, he takes the concrete, anti-Trump, tack, rather than an abstract tack about possible American authoritarianism in general. Posner lists actions that Trump, specifically, would need to take to become a dictator—attack the press in various ways; attack Congress; attack the bureaucracy; attack the courts; attack state and local governments; attack the party system; attack civil society. He throws out a few historical examples of each type of attack, and concludes Trump can't effectively execute any such attacks, because #Resistance from the Front-Row Kids.

Next is Jack Balkin. His contribution starts off sounding like it will be interesting, an analysis of

“Constitutional Rot,” but it immediately careens off the rails. Balkin identifies causes of constitutional rot, “decay in the features of our system that maintain it as a healthy republic,” as political polarization, loss of trust in government, increasing economic inequality, and policy disasters (e.g., the Iraq War and the 2008 financial crisis). Whatever the validity of this framework (and Balkin makes no effort to justify it or evaluate alternative criteria), Balkin’s application of it is ruined by his only focus being unhinged ranting about Republican evil, which we are told is all-encompassing, and the main manifestation of which is the supposed fact that the Republican party merely exists to implement the (unspecified) demands of its “donor class.” On just a single page Balkin refers six times to these ghastly donors, usually with a modifier such as “wealthy donors” or “powerful donors,” and then adds metonyms such as “masters.” To the (very limited) extent Balkin actually seems to try to apply his framework, it is to show that Republicans are rotten, create rot, and spread rot, like the zombie fungus *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*. Bad, bad Republicans. Then he tells us that, despite Trump being a fine example of where this (Republican) zombie rot has brought us, “I remain hopeful.” Why? Because Reaganism is dead, and now we will have “the possibility of a new beginning in American politics,” the exact nature of which is not specified, but about which we know it will give us, if we are fortunate, “greater democracy, equality, and inclusiveness in the face of well-entrenched opposition.” This essay is not worth reading except to gaze in wonder at its eye-popping awfulness.

Third is Tyler Cowen, left-libertarian economics professor and blogger. He tells us “fascism” (not defined) can’t happen here, or at least anytime soon, because the federal government is “so large and unwieldy.” Authoritarian takeovers are easier in a night watchman state, Cowen claims. Where there is a large bureaucracy, on the other hand, it is harder to convince them to “adopt fascism.” The proof given is that 4.3 percent of the population of Washington, D.C., voted for Trump. “I do not myself consider Trump to be an appropriate stand-in for the concept of fascism, but the point is that a lot of these people did make that association, to varying degrees, and they voted accordingly.” This isn’t real convincing, either Cowen’s disavowal or that such voting proves a fear of fascism under Trump. After all, only 7.3% of the District voted for Romney (not that Cowen notes that; I had to look it up), and I’m pretty sure “proto-fascist” wasn’t a serious criticism of Romney. But both statistics do give weight to my contention that the entire bureaucracy in the District should be rusticated to rural America, and what they do say is that the District is radically Left, by philosophy and by economic interest, and would likely vote in the same percentages in favor of a fascist of the Left. (More generally, the reader has the sneaking suspicion about almost all of these authors that their resistance level to any actual Left authoritarianism would be, uh, less than vigorous.) The rest of the article is rambling, pulling in Hayek and Friedman, denying the Khmer Rouge were Communist (instead saying “whatever label you wish to attach to their ideas”), and concluding that if fascism does arrive, it’ll not be by takeover of the government, but as a result of its collapse. That last claim is probably true, as is the idea that Right fascism won’t be possible as long as the federal government exists in its current form with its current power.

The next offering is from the editor himself, Cass Sunstein. This is one of the best essays in the book (a low bar, admittedly). Rather than focusing on Trump, Sunstein offers a good thumbnail sketch of the Federalist/Anti-Federalist debate (with some dubious claims, such as that the Federalists contemplated that “[a] central function of the independent judiciary would be to interpret the Constitution, and thus to ensure that the other institutions would be kept within their lawful bounds as established by We the People.”) And while certainly the American system has changed from what Publius anticipated, in its broad outlines it has worked well and continues to work well, including to prevent the rise of authoritarianism. The word “Trump” barely appears, and the reader leaves better informed than he arrived.

Fifth, though, is an unreadable steaming pile by the execrable Samantha Power, where, hopping off her broom to lecture us, she screeches about “Foreign Interference with American Democracy.” She’s not a law professor (she’s a journalist by trade, and a hack by practice), and it shows. Russia is bad, Fox News won the

election for Trump by repeating falsehoods about Hillary Clinton (not by repeating truth disgorged from the DNC, which would be called “whistleblowing” if it had harmed a Republican), and we need to get back to the good old days, when the ruled only got their news from “mediated platforms” where any news was carefully selected by “professional gatekeepers.” Power doesn’t seem to have a real point other than to demand homage from the peasants, and she never answers the title question. Ugh. Let’s move on.

We seem to be falling into a rhythm where a bad essay is followed by a better essay. So next is Jack Goldsmith’s evaluation of the “Deep State,” a term used for different groups of entities, but here explicitly limited to intelligence agencies. Goldsmith admits there is a Deep State and identifies, since World War II, its occasional use of “political abuse” (actions to coerce non-state individuals, such as Martin Luther King) and “political sabotage” (actions to achieve political ends of policy or personnel; e.g., Hoover keeping files on politicians to ensure good behavior vis-à-vis the FBI). (No mention, of course, is made of the recently exposed massive political abuse and political sabotage by the Deep State under Obama, only the tip of the iceberg of which we probably know about, although to be fair some of that, such as the criminal IRS persecution of conservative groups, was not done by the Deep State as Goldsmith defines it.) The earlier era of the Deep State ended with the Church Commission in 1976, where Congress permitted continuing extensive intelligence activities but mandated greatly increased oversight, largely eliminating political abuse until 2008. But political sabotage continued, and Goldsmith divides that activity into the categories of “abusive” (Hoover) and “virtuous” (Mark Felt), although he admits “[i]t is sometimes hard to say precisely when and why opportunistic use of secret information to sabotage democratic leaders is deemed virtuous.” You can say that again. But Goldsmith even-handedly uses this framework to analyze the publication of various recent leaks by the New York Times, Edward Snowden, and so forth. He then admits that “[t]here is significant evidence that the Deep State so understood—either as part of a concerted movement or via individuals acting more or less independently—has used secretly collected information opportunistically and illegally to sabotage [Trump] and his senior officials.” Goldsmith notes that most of this anti-Trump activity is totally unprecedented, not only in amount but in type. Nonetheless, he refuses to conclude this Deep State behavior is “not virtuous,” muttering in essence that extraordinary times require extraordinary measures, but it clearly makes him very uncomfortable, and “the whole ordeal has already done great damage to both the presidency and the national security bureaucracy.”

Seventh is Tom Ginsburg and Aziz Huq, shilling for Huq’s upcoming book, who talk about “democratic backsliding,” among other places in Hungary and Poland (a topic which I will, as I say, discuss below). Their basic point is that sudden descents into autocracy (or whatever exactly the “it” of the title is) are not required to get to autocracy, or even likely. Slow erosion of democracy is more likely, more plausible and more historically demonstrated. (Ginsburg and Huq are occasionally unintentionally funny, as when they say flatly, “[D]emocracy can’t work if the ruling party has the courts and bureaucracy firmly in its pocket.” By that standard democracy is already over, and Trump and the Republicans lost.) Then they go on at length to tell us that Republicans are trying hard to erode democracy, but, God willing, their evil will not succeed, and if it is prevented, it will not be prevented by the Constitution (contra Sunstein), but by the people who, united, can never be defeated.

Noah Feldman parses each of “it,” “can’t,” “happen,” and “here,” to conclude that “it” means the erosion or end of “liberal democracy,” a term and concept he notes is found nowhere in the Constitution and is a post-1787 creation. Thus “it,” meaning material political transformation, has occurred, is occurring, and will continue to occur. What that will look like, though, is hard to say. True enough, I suppose.

Next was the essay I held out the most hope for, by Karen Stenner and Jonathan Haidt, both psychologists, with Haidt being the foremost voice on the Left today for attempts to reach across the aisle, encourage real debate and discussion, and arrive at negotiated ends. I was not disappointed, though it took a while to get

there. This is a long essay; most of it is taken up with technical discussion of surveys of the “authoritarian dynamic” in individuals, how that differs from “conservatives,” and how those measures correlate with public opinion in the United States (especially with respect to voting for Trump) and Europe (especially with respect to voting for Brexit or Marine Le Pen). I found this fairly boring, though your mileage may vary. But at the end Stenner and Haidt turn to suggestions, among them Haidt’s often-made statement that diversity is not our strength, but instead democracy needs “an abundance of common and unifying rituals, institutions, and processes,” which will bring us together and blunt the authoritarian temptation. Speaking of Trump haters without specifying, they note that “the sentiments that seem to fuel those [populist] movements are often considered merely the products of frustration, hatred, and manipulation by irresponsible populist leaders—certainly not serious, legitimate preferences that a democracy must attend to.” This is especially true of immigration—Stenner and Haidt explicitly reject that any and all immigration must be good. “If citizens say they’re concerned about the rate of immigration, we ought to at least consider the possibility that they’re concerned about the rate of immigration, and not merely masking a hateful racism or displacing their economic woes onto easy scapegoats. . . . It is implausible to maintain that the host community can successfully integrate any kind of newcomer at any rate whatsoever, and it is unreasonable to assert that any other suggestion is racist.” Some level of intolerance is inherent and natural; to pretend otherwise is silly and is likely to itself destroy liberal democracy. Thus, this essay, which began dry, ends with a frankly radical approach relative to others in the book, many of which also name-check Francis Fukuyama, but none other of which suggest that not only was he wrong about the end of history being liberal democracy, but that further movement toward that end may be exactly the wrong thing to push.

Bruce Ackerman then offers a brief essay, recycling (by his own admission) his proposal that institutional frameworks for Presidential action in emergencies be put in place now, before an emergency allows an ill-intentioned president to distort the existing Constitutional system. Maybe, though my guess is that if a President uses an emergency as an excuse to seize broader power, such structures won’t matter much.

Next up, Timur Kuran offers a long article, trying (loosely) to use Hayek’s framework of the “road to serfdom” to explain how “cascading intolerance” can lead to that serfdom, defined as authoritarianism not arrived at by collectivism, but by suppression of communication and pandering to grievances. Kuran lays out an even-handed framework of how communities of intolerance have arisen on the Left, through many adopting identity politics enforced and advanced by political correctness, and on the Right, through many (allegedly) adopting “nativist” politics, enforced and advanced in a way not really specified. These groupings are fair enough, though Kuran ignores that the former is massively powerful and dominates American culture, while the latter, especially in its more extreme manifestations, has no power or real influence at all, and in its mainline manifestations, such as Fox News, has limited power and is much closer to the majority of American thought than are Left identitarians. (Also, Trump may “flaunt” the law, but I think Kuran means “flout”). In any case, these intolerances are mutually reinforcing, and further reinforced by “availability chambers” (i.e., echo chambers). Despite occasional howlers, such as the suggestion that we can reduce intolerance by all getting our news from CNN, to get “exposed to diverse perspectives firsthand,” this is a pretty good analysis. Kuran concludes that Tocquevillian associations are destroyed by this process (although he seems to think they have not already been destroyed, an odd claim in light of Robert Putnam’s work), and that our only hope is a restoration of the “mushy middle” as against this increasing chasm between us.

The twelfth essay, by sociologist Jon Elster, is a somewhat offbeat offering about Louis Napoleon, Napoleon III (the nephew of the original Napoleon), who seized power in France in 1852. This is a fascinating account, featuring Tocqueville again, although here not with respect to his opinions on America, but as a direct participant in the action. (Tocqueville appears in some form or another in most of the essays in this book, followed, surprisingly, in number of references, as far as political thinkers go, by Carl Schmitt—not for the

latter's Nazi connections, but rather for his substantive political thought. This is frankly shocking to me—I had no idea the Schmitt revival had reached deep into the Front-Row Kids, not that any writer here endorses Schmitt, but several of these writers very evidently find his thought extremely valuable and important.) The point seems to be that Louis Napoleon could have been stopped at many points, but for a variety of reasons, he wasn't. Nor was Trump. And to the extent Trump, or someone else, actually tries to become authoritarian, other opportunities to stop him will exist, and they should be taken. At least I think that's the point.

Next Martha Minnow, the dean of Harvard Law School, asks “Could Mass Detentions Without Process Happen Here?” Her frame is the infamous Korematsu case, still valid law but part of a group of decisions generally “abhorred and rejected,” what she calls the “anti-canon,” by which she means not a machine to defend against artillery pieces, but an “anti-canon.” Minnow notes that there is every reason to believe that in a future emergency equally bad behavior would be endorsed by the courts. Her point in this short article seems to be that Korematsu, which “remains like a loaded weapon” (a canon, perhaps?), needs to be formally overruled, and the upcoming Supreme Court decision on Trump’s travel ban on foreign citizens coming to the United States from certain Muslim-majority countries is the place to do it.

Duncan Watts then talks at great length, much greater length than necessary, about how common sense is a bad basis for leaders to base political decisions on, and that we need a scientific approach, although he admits that isn’t all that much better in practice. (The name “Edmund Burke” does not appear, though Thomas Paine does.) Watts offers a very interesting Obama quote, “Nothing comes to my desk that is perfectly solvable. Otherwise, someone else would have solved it. So you wind up dealing with probabilities. Any given decision you make you’ll wind up with a 30 to 40 percent chance that it isn’t going to work. You have to own that and feel comfortable with the way you made the decision. You can’t be paralyzed by the fact that it might not work out. On top of all this, after you have made your decision, you need to feign total certainty about it. People being led do not want to think probabilistically.” Still, more scientific approaches mean, on average, more legitimacy for decisions, and I presume the message is that makes authoritarianism less likely.

[Review continues as first comment.]

Matt Tandy says

A collection of essay's exploring weather authoritarianism could and is happening the United States under the current regime. While the premise is interesting, too many of these articles are repetitive, almost all come to the conclusion that no, authoritarianism can't happen, and many get far too technical within their chosen discipline. An interesting loaner from the library, this doesn't really cover any new ground but has a few interesting points about the setup of the American political and economic system.

Fernando Hoces de la Guardia says

Duncan watts essay was remarkable

Brenda says

From no to maybe to yes, thoughtful takes on the question. Essential and timely at any time.

Vincent Li says

A collection of essays written about the possibility of fascism in the US. For people tired of hearing the same talking heads on TV, this book can be a refreshing change, as a few dozen experts write about the applicability of their scholarship to fascism in the US. I picked up the book mostly because of the many impressive contributors, and I did not regret reading through the book.

A few of the pieces were not that strong, being either simply assertive polemics or just mere summaries of commonly known ideas, but there were enough gems in the book to make the admission price worth it. In particular, there were a few essays that blew my mind, because they were such novel arguments (at least to the extent I've been exposed to them).

My favorite essay was probably the one by Cowen, which makes the argument that as an empirical matter, the night watchmen state is self-defeating because small governments dominated by people used to force are likely to be easily turned into fascist states. Ironically, bureaucratic governments might be good protectors of individual rights because its very inefficiency acts as a ballast against radical change.

A close second was the empirical work by Haidt (the only empirical work in the entire work), which showed that parts of the population may have pre-existing propensity to find authoritarianism attractive and that common aspects of liberal democracies that are celebrated (such diversity, and immigration) can enhance the attractiveness of authoritarianism to those segments of the population. Haidt notes that it's with a certain irony that liberal democracies that celebrate difference, ignore at their peril the fact that some people might be different in that they don't want difference.

I also enjoyed Goldsmith's article on the deep state, in which I learned about the history of the deep state (and the grand bargain), the need for leaks but also the lack of congruence between leaker incentives and social incentives. It seems somewhat prophetic, that the article argues that the deep state has an incentive to become involved in politics, but in doing so loses its legitimacy to the American people.

The Power piece on Russian meddling in the US election was a much needed breath of fresh air on the topic, providing evidence on the scale and nature of foreign interference in social media. The essay explores the nature of the loss of gatekeepers (in national media i.e. TV and print), the use of social media to divide Americans by foreign governments, the harvesting of data on voters and the "post-truth" environment such factors create.

I found Elster's piece on the historical rise of Napoleon III surprisingly interesting. Napoleon III who started out as an adventurer, and was exiled from France because of his famous uncle, eventually rose in the country to become a new emperor. The essay argues that his rise was not inevitable, but was the result of the misguided idealism of the government's trust in democracy in allowing him to enter politics, the gap between the governing elites and the population, and the rivalries of the existing government.

Watt's essay expanding on his work on "common sense" was interesting. The essay discusses how common

sense isn't that "common" because they tend to be culturally generated conclusory statements, and how common sense can fail in the face of complex systems (with more than first order effects or aggregates individual decisions in counterintuitive ways). The essay concludes that science needs to communicate better to the public how it works in order to gain the legitimacy needed for science to overcome "common sense".

Feldman, Minow, Stone and Strauss's essays focused on more traditionally "legal" topics. Feldman raises questions about how to define fascism, including what the baseline is, Minow discusses the historical example of Japanese internment during WWII, Stone discusses historical overreactions to emergencies (like internment and in the wake of WWI, the red scare) while Strauss argues that judges should respond to slow moving emergencies by choosing interpretations that reduce the chances of tyranny.

In short, the book is a collection of interesting ideas, some of the essays are better than others, but the variety and novelty of some of the essays is enough to make the book overall worth reading.

Paul Froehlich says

It has just happened to a former democracy in Europe. In Hungary, Victor Orbán invoked Islamic terrorism and the migration crisis to enhance his power, even though his country is not in the crosshairs of either. With his recent re-election, Hungarian democratic institutions are comatose, with the effective stifling of opposition and a free press. Could it happen here?

This book is a collection of essays by 18 authors plus editor Cass Sunstein about how democracies perish, and about how American democracy is susceptible to authoritarianism. The writers are mainly prominent professors, most of them law professors. Former UN ambassador Samantha Power warns about foreign interference with American elections, which is much easier in the social media age than it was during the Cold War. There is an interesting variety of perspectives, although not a Trump defender in the bunch.

The most constructive and persuasive essay is from Bruce Ackerman. His simple argument, which he made in his book on the subject, *Before the Next Attack* (Yale U. Press, 2006), is this: There will be future acts of terrorism in the US that may kill thousands. After that occurs, the president may well declare a state of emergency, and the emergency powers he invokes and their duration may well threaten our democratic tradition.

Some countries have explicit constitutional limits on emergency powers, but the US Constitution does not. History suggests that we can't count on the SCOTUS to stop abuses of power under those circumstances. Consequently, Ackerman recommends that Congress act now, before the next 9/11, to legislate specific checks and balances on states of emergency. The purpose is to guarantee that the extraordinary powers and suspension of constitutional rights lasts no longer than "the period of their obvious necessity." That logic is hard to argue with. In a separate essay, Tom Ginsburg and Aziz Haq basically agree with Ackerman.

David Strauss makes an argument for the liberal interpretation of the law by courts to protect democracy, even if they have to stretch the law to do so, as was done on occasion during the civil rights era. Judges should resist the slide toward authoritarianism by applying established principles, not merely the letter of the law. That's what federal judges did to the first two Trump executive orders banning Muslim immigration. Though immigration law gives the president broad discretion in making rules, the courts nonetheless opted to limit executive power rather than to permit it.

Though the authors see the threat to democracy as transcending any one person, they sometimes refer to President Trump. Duncan Watts critiques Trump's reliance upon common sense. Though politicians in both parties make appeals to common sense, Donald Trump bases public policy on what he calls common sense. This is harmful, argues Watts, because it excludes expertise in policy making, and it's divisive, since only unreasonable people could oppose genuine common sense.

Several authors refer to the mass evacuation and detention of 120,000 Japanese Americans during WWII, which even J. Edgar Hoover opposed. They point out that the SCOTUS decision upholding that egregious policy has never been overruled. When Trump proposed the Muslim travel ban, some supporters cited Korematsu. Because it hasn't been overturned, the Korematsu precedent "provides potential authority for federal or state officials who assert public necessity as a basis for detaining a group of people based on race, religion, ethnicity, or national origin." Justice Scalia said, "You are kidding yourself if you think the same thing will not happen again. Because...in times of war, the laws fall silent."

Jon Elster says Trump's narcissistic megalomania also afflicted French kings Louis XIV and Louis XV. This psychological makeup predicts failure, because success requires listening to competent advisors who might then take credit. What prevented these kings from great achievements was their refusal to appoint competent advisors or to listen to their advice. The rapid turnover in the White House reflects Trump's disinclination to listen to advisers. Tyler Cowan makes a similar point: "The problem with Trumpian rule has been one of chaos much more than totalitarianism."

Timur Kuran describes polarized politics as "competing intolerances." It's the nativists on the right vs. the identitarians on the left, who both see their main goal as crushing their rivals, not improving society. Neither side is interested in genuine compromise with the other, and both embrace fragrant double standards. "Intolerant communities are never satisfied with sharing political power" because they despise their opponents. "They lay the foundations for tyranny by creating constituencies prepared to suspend the rule of law for some higher purpose." There is currently a rough equilibrium between the two sides; neither can impose its will on the other. What could lead to the loss of American democracy is if one side gains ascendancy, and proceeds to punish and attack the other.

One of the most fascinating essays is by psychologist Jonathan Haidt and political scientist Karen Stenner. Their research reveals that about one-third of the population has authoritarian predispositions, which are activated by normative threats to identity. Growing ethnic diversity in the West has activated the authoritarian predisposition.

Economic factors were weak and inconsistent predictors of populism and intolerance, contrary to popular explanations for populism. Populists may frame their opposition to immigration in economic terms, since that's more politically acceptable than ethnocentrism; the research indicates the source is not economic distress, but opposition to immigration.

Haidt and Stenner make suggestions to lower the defensive reaction by the authoritarian one-third of the population. Society would "be better served by an abundance of common and unifying rituals, institutions and processes." It would be better to recognize that people have a need for oneness, identity, cohesion and belonging, and that need should not be ridiculed or casually dismissed. Human nature has two critical parts: "the desire to liberate and enable the individual, and the impetus to protect and serve the collective."

Not all the contributors in this volume foresee authoritarianism. Tyler Cowan writes that the complex, sprawling bureaucracy is difficult to control. Eric Posner sees two factors reducing the threat. First, most laws are enforced at the state and local level, so a president who wanted to repress his political opponents

might face substantial resistance from state and local officials. Second, the free press is not subject to libel laws in the US the way it is in Russia and Turkey, though Trump has said he'd like to change our libel laws.

This book offers well-informed perspectives on a subject about which all Americans have a stake. ###
