



## CHAPTER 1



# Overcoming Presentism

*One trap is “presentism,” the idea that whatever is happening now will keep happening.*

—E. J. DIONNE

For many decades, foreign policy experts assumed that communism was entrenched in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Those countries’ leaders had built powerful authoritarian states that monitored citizens, punished dissidents, and kept their parties in power. A few academics thought these regimes had internal contradictions that would lead to their inexorable demise.<sup>1</sup> But those forecasters were seen as contrarians and not taken very seriously by mainstream opinion leaders. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and the Soviet Union dissolved two years later, the internal politics and economies of nearly twenty European and Central Asian countries were transformed, disrupting political alignments around the world.

Top financial investors were shocked in 2008 when leading Wall Street firms collapsed and a Great Recession unfolded. Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers closed their doors, stock markets around the world lost as much as half their value, and many banks stopped lending money. Following decades

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during which no one could conceive the possibility of another Great Depression, the world suddenly came perilously close to a global financial meltdown.<sup>2</sup> The devastating economic impact unleashed public anger against large financial institutions and governments, and aggravated the plight of the working class in many countries.

Most people in the Western world were caught off-guard in 2014 when a group of Muslim fighters calling themselves the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), declared a caliphate after taking control of large parts of Iraq and Syria.<sup>3</sup> Establishing a theocratic empire led by a single religious and political figure seemed medieval to much of the world, and ISIS leaders did little to dispel that impression when their followers publicly beheaded hostages and burned adversaries alive.<sup>4</sup> Observers around the world wondered how this kind of barbarism could exist during an era of globalization, secular cosmopolitanism, and extraordinary scientific progress.

In 2016 people in the United Kingdom confounded the experts by voting 52 to 48 percent to leave the European Union (EU). In the weeks leading up to the referendum, financial and diplomatic authorities had warned of dire consequences to fiscal stability, economic growth, and international trade if the exit were approved. But riding a wave of nationalist and anti-Brussels sentiment, voters supported withdrawal from the EU and an independent future for Great Britain. The move startled the EU bloc, led to a dramatic sell-off of the British pound, and rattled financial and political decisionmakers around the world.<sup>5</sup>

**I**t is no accident that large-scale change is taking place in the contemporary period. Many of the beliefs and institutions that once anchored international and domestic affairs have grown weak. Political tidal waves have occurred in many parts of the world. We live in an era where major events occur on a seemingly regular basis.<sup>6</sup> *Megachange* refers to dramatic shifts in social, economic, or political phenomena. These alter-

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ations can include economic disruptions, political upheaval, or social strife, among other things. Any one of these can generate ramifications that go beyond the small-scale, incremental shifts that historically typified many societal developments.

While the extent and pace of change today seems exceptionally dramatic, the current period is not the first to show evidence of large-scale change. Throughout history, empires and civilizations came and went with regularity. Nations rose in prominence and then collapsed due to economic challenges, foreign invasion, internal conflicts, or natural disasters. Dramatic scientific discoveries disrupted business practices, or new societal orders such as the Reformation and the Industrial Revolution fundamentally altered people's lives.

In more recent times, there also have been major shifts. For example, the United States faced substantial transformations in the 1860s during and after the Civil War, again in the 1930s due to the Great Depression, and in the 1960s with the rise of the civil rights, women's liberation, and environmental movements. In a relatively short time, large-scale disruptions altered society and politics and left a lasting imprint on those eras.

In various epochs, there have been significant fluctuations in public policies or citizen attitudes associated with social, political, or economic change. For example, following a period of social and religious turmoil, an American prohibition on the production and sale of alcohol was adopted nationally in 1920 and remained in effect until 1933. After women began organizing politically in the late 1800s, Western countries gradually adopted female suffrage, including the United States in 1920 through a constitutional amendment. Reflecting the shifting cultural mores of a later period, a dramatic 1973 U. S. Supreme Court decision legalized abortion across the country.<sup>7</sup>

It never is easy to disentangle causes and consequences of large-scale transformations. As I describe in this volume, change is chaotic and multifaceted and therefore hard to pin

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down precisely. One has to look over a period of time to see what is shifting and what forces are generating the most substantial alterations.

Yet through case studies, it is possible to elucidate the megachanges that have affected global affairs and American politics in recent decades. Domestically, we see megachange in shifting attitudes toward same-sex marriage, tobacco smoking, marijuana legalization, income inequality, terrorism, and border security. Globally, we have witnessed the rise and collapse of the “Arab Spring,” the reemergence of religious zealotry, the violence of nonstate actors, and challenges to the open flow of people, goods, and services long associated with globalization.

Sometimes, what happens internationally influences domestic politics, or vice versa. Extremism in one locale can provoke tensions far from the original site. In an era of global communications and speedy information transmission, seemingly small events can reverberate elsewhere and become a catalyst for dramatic change in domestic or international affairs.

The term “quantum leap,” borrowed from physicists, has come to popularly mean large-scale changes that leap-frog existing knowledge and introduce new ways of thinking. Philosophers talk about “paradigm shifts” where theoretical frameworks change dramatically. Biologists refer to models of “punctuated equilibrium” in which there is a time of great change followed by periods of equilibrium.<sup>8</sup> Digital experts emphasize “disruptive technology” that challenges old ways of doing things and leads to the rise of companies that take advantage of, or even help create, new market realities.<sup>9</sup>

Unusual developments also periodically take place in politics. As pointed out by commentator Jeff Greenfield, “There are times in politics when the Black Swan shows up; when a highly unlikely, highly improbable event shatters years’ worth of assumptions.”<sup>10</sup> Political earthquakes no longer seem very rare,

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as demonstrated by the unlikely emergence of Donald Trump in 2016.

In the area of economics, Tyler Cowen argues that “average is over.”<sup>11</sup> Because of the great stagnation after 2008, he now believes it is going to be difficult to generate robust and sustained economic growth. The past is not prologue to the future. Rather, a number of factors will restrict prosperity unless substantial action is taken to reverse the current tide.

Extending that notion is a book by economist James K. Galbraith. He has written about the “end of normal.” Analyzing macroeconomic performance, he says that people should not project economic growth from the 1950s through 2000 into the future. Many of the conditions that gave rise to strong performance have disappeared, and it is going to be difficult to maintain past trends in the near-future.<sup>12</sup>

Economist Robert Gordon argues that we are seeing a major change in growth patterns. In his recent volume, *The Rise and Fall of American Growth*, he claims the dramatic growth that marked the period from 1870 to 1970 has ended and there no longer are major advances in labor productivity or societal innovation. With an aging population and high inequality, the U.S. standard of living is likely to stagnate or even fall.<sup>13</sup>

Running through each of these notions is the idea that something big is happening in the current period. Social, economic, and political patterns no longer are fixed but are generating rapid and transformative shifts. People need to be prepared for a scope of change that is grander than typically envisioned. Until we better understand these tectonic movements, it will be difficult for individuals and societies as a whole to deal with their extraordinary impact.

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### Big Moves Abroad

Internationally, there are numerous signs of major developments and shifting alignments. For most of the past seven decades, strong international norms seemed to guarantee the sanctity of national borders. Given the widespread aggression leading up to and during World War II and the great loss of life that resulted, modern nations generally have refrained from foreign invasions. They do not want to risk international conflagrations and the high human costs that result. Global organizations make many efforts to discourage countries from violating sovereign rights of other countries—all in hopes of keeping the peace and maintaining friendly relations across the international order.

Yet that long-held norm is breaking down. Western leaders were unprepared in 2014 when Russia invaded and annexed Crimea and then moved into the eastern part of Ukraine with the stated goal of protecting Russian interests. Crimea had been ceded to Ukraine in 1954 by the Soviet Union and had become a vital part of that country. The peninsula on the Black Sea used Ukrainian currency and had representation in the national parliament.

Despite international condemnation of the annexation, Russia refused to reverse course. Western leaders used impassioned rhetoric against the takeover, imposed trade and banking sanctions on the invader, and increased aid to Ukraine. Yet for more than two years the world has not figured out how to change the on-ground reality. Few leaders wanted to send troops to counter what they considered blatant Russian aggression.

Along with its rapidly increasing economic power, China has become much more active in regional and global affairs, and it has imposed limits on foreign organizations and multinational corporations that operate within its borders. It has challenged Japanese sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands in

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the East China Sea. Although these spots have been controlled by Japan for a long period of time, China asserted its territorial rights after oil reserves were discovered. It said that its geographical prerogatives pre-date those of Japan. The Chinese military sent boats and planes to the region in order to protect its own geographic claims and has installed surface-to-air missiles on one disputed island.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, China has built seven artificial islands on reefs in the South China Sea and declared Chinese sovereignty over the twelve miles surrounding each construction.<sup>15</sup> This expansion in territorial claims has complicated U.S. military operations in the region and threatened the ability of some commercial ships to travel freely through those passages. These fears were heightened when China began installing long runways, military barracks, and missiles on the Paracel Islands. Neighboring countries—most of them U.S. allies and trading partners—worried that these moves were a sign of bald geopolitical ambitions on the part of China.<sup>16</sup>

In one encounter with an American military jet in the South China Sea, Chinese sailors sought to force the pilot away from the area. “Foreign military aircraft. This is Chinese navy. You are approaching our military alert zone. Leave immediately,” the unnamed person warned.<sup>17</sup> Even though the plane was in international airspace, China claimed territorial rights in this encounter and sought to extend those rights to nearly 80 percent of the South China Sea. This put China in direct conflict with nations such as Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Taiwan, all of which had sovereignty over parts of this waterway.

The Arab Spring uprisings caught nearly all governments and political commentators flat-footed. Most were surprised in 2010 when street protests erupted in Tunisia and sparked demonstrations in several Middle Eastern countries.<sup>18</sup> Grievances against incompetence and corruption by authoritarian regimes throughout the Arab world resonated with ordinary

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people, thousands of whom surged into the region's streets in an extraordinary series of protests. As they had done in other periods, governments moved to suppress the complaints and arrest protestors.

But the political movements toppled several authoritarian leaders who had seemed entrenched in power, notably President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. Hardly any knowledgeable analyst anticipated the series of revolutions that quickly swept through North Africa and the Middle East. In short order, there were provisional governments in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. Syria and Yemen fell into devastating civil wars as rival factions jockeyed for political and economic power, and Libya has faced similar turmoil after the ouster and execution of Muammar Qaddafi.

Through these and other examples, I argue that many of the social, economic, and political forces that once constrained large-scale international change have grown weak. Old alignments have broken down and new ones are emerging—or in some cases new alignments are not even apparent as yet. Great power conflict, which seemed unimaginable in the nuclear era, has returned as a possible danger. The idea that nations would limit their territorial claims has given way to extensive jockeying among nations, testing geographic boundaries and violating traditional norms.

The post-1989 world order dominated by the United States has developed into one that now features an ascendant China, an aggressive Russia, and violent non-state actors such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab, and Boko Haram. The latter groups apply strict religious laws to territories they control and employ primitive practices such as systematic rape, sexual slavery, and feudal governance.<sup>19</sup> Limits on Western power are apparent, and the ability of America and Europe to take effective action is seriously constrained.

In essence, the globe has moved from a bipolar world during



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the Cold War, to a unipolar one following the collapse of the Soviet Union when the United States became the dominant power, and since 9/11 to a multipolar world reflecting the emergence of new powers and non-state actors. Bipolar and unipolar world orders generally are stable because of the dominance of a limited number of powers that often can control local and regional conflicts. However, the shift to multipolarity signals a rise in instability as various powers jockey for advantage and no single power (including China, Russia, Europe, or the United States) has the capacity to dictate outcomes.<sup>20</sup>

Some of the new global complexities reflect long-standing conflicts over natural resources, economic interests, or old-fashioned political rivalries. An intertwined world seems to have an increased number and intensity of disputes over trading practices, business relationships, or national policies. This destabilizes cross-country ties and generates social, economic, and political disputes.

Yet some of this turmoil reflects new sources of unpredictability. For example, there are failed states or ungoverned areas in many locales around the world.<sup>21</sup> A handful of places, especially in Africa and the Middle East, have governments that lack authority and are unable to limit aggressive behavior. Criminal networks and informal organizations have gained power and are able to control streets, neighborhoods, or even entire sections of countries. These networks affect both international relations and domestic politics, and they test the limits of conventional behavior.

Religious strife has entered an ominous phase as well. There has been an emergence of fundamentalism in each of the world's three monotheistic religions—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—complicating geopolitics. As noted by Michael Walzer in his book *The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions*, an epic battle is taking place between the forces of modernity and secularization versus those who believe

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those forces are absolutely wrong.<sup>22</sup> Religious conflict takes a variety of forms in different locales, but disagreements regarding the role of women, homosexuality, and cultural permissiveness permeate many regional and global tensions.

Digital technology has complicated global politics by speeding up communications and altering traditional patterns of social and economic interaction.<sup>23</sup> Advances in communications make it easier than ever before for those who are dissatisfied to organize. What used to be local disputes can go viral and spread rapidly—even worldwide—through social media and digital technology. In an era of globalization, international communications channels have brought people of diverse backgrounds and interests into virtual but remarkably intimate contact with one another. Differences that previously could be papered over or even ignored now come into people's personal space and force them to think about natural disasters, political conflicts, or social turmoil thousands of miles away. The result often is an increase in anxiety, ill feelings, and global tensions.<sup>24</sup>

### Disruptions at Home

It is not just global affairs that have become unsettled. In the same way that things have been in flux on the international scene, startling developments have roiled U.S. domestic politics during the past two decades. They include the impeachment but failed removal of a president (Bill Clinton), the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Great Recession, the election of an African American chief executive (Barack Obama), a woman and a democratic socialist running for president (Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, respectively), a populist billionaire seeking the top job (Donald Trump), and the death of a key justice (Antonin Scalia) on a sharply divided Supreme Court.

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These events illustrate how much political turmoil there has been in recent years. In the post-World War II period, many observers viewed incrementalism as the best description of American politics.<sup>25</sup> This is the perspective that small-scale shifts and gradual evolution represent the norm, rather than revolution or large-scale developments. Because this idea seemed both to describe actual policy processes and the virtues of small-scale shifts, analysts touted it as the dominant paradigm of the last fifty years.<sup>26</sup> Change, it was argued, occurs slowly because many social, political, and institutional factors constrain large-scale transformation.

In at least the past two decades, though, domestic politics have become more extreme and more polarized—and as a result proposed solutions have become more radical in nature because negotiation and compromise no longer are fashionable. Some of the things that have destabilized the international order and broadened the range of possible actions also are apparent domestically. Large forces have shaken the social and political foundations of civil society and affected a wide range of areas.

Broad political developments such as the Reagan Revolution in 1980 placed the country on a more conservative policy course. The 1994 midterm elections accentuated that trend by putting Republicans in charge of the House of Representatives for the first time in forty years. After this outcome, the GOP would hold the House for eighteen of the following twenty-two years and use this power to attempt to downsize government and curtail social welfare programs.

However, the Great Recession upended GOP control, at least for a time. The United States elected its first African American president in 2008 and gave him big Democratic majorities in the House and Senate. He would use that advantage to enact comprehensive bills to stimulate the economy, regulate large financial institutions, and transform American health care.

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Obama's success generated an intense backlash, however, enabling Republicans to again take control of Congress and thus stymie nearly all of his subsequent initiatives.

These types of widespread swings in political power, leading to dramatic policy initiatives, no longer are unusual. As noted by John Piescik and his colleagues, comprehensive policymaking in large organizations is very much in vogue during the contemporary era.<sup>27</sup> During recent years, there have been major shifts in tax policy (large cuts for the wealthy under George W. Bush), financial regulation (the Dodd-Frank legislation under Obama), climate change (a historic agreement with China on reducing carbon emissions), and a hefty increase in income tax rates on the wealthy under Obama (as part of the "fiscal cliff" negotiations). Legislative efforts to adopt comprehensive immigration reform failed amidst partisan gridlock, but Obama responded by adopting major changes through an executive order, though he has been challenged in court.

As is the case globally, a variety of forces enable broad-based domestic change. There is a widely shared sense that things are floundering in the United States, and this creates an appetite across the political spectrum for more substantial actions. Rather than stick with small-bore measures, politicians of the left and right have advocated such widely divergent proposals as banning Muslims from entering the United States due to terrorism concerns, privatizing Social Security, abolishing the Internal Revenue Service, restructuring or even ditching the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), dropping out of international trade agreements, and providing free community college tuition for all students.

For much of American history, the nature of party coalitions discouraged radicalism and promoted bargaining, compromise, and negotiation. Old models talked about the "median voter" as the primary object of party competition. The idea was that public opinion resembled a bell-shaped curve with most

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people in the political center and smaller numbers on the left and right, respectively. In that situation, the winning political strategy was clear. Candidates should aim for the middle, propose moderate steps that seemed workable, and compromise with the other party to govern and pass legislation. Such a process slowed the pace of politics and made incrementalism an accurate description of policy change.

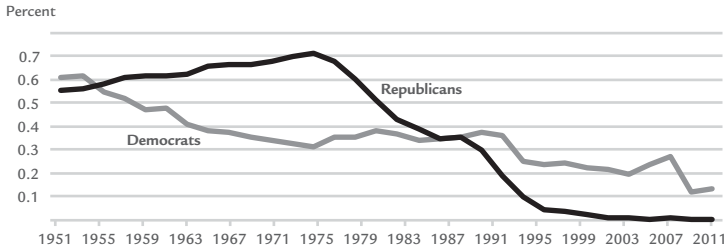
In recent years, though, fighting for centrist voters has given way to playing to the extreme base in both parties. With low voter turnout and polarized electorates, candidates have determined that it often makes more sense to mobilize left- or right-wing voters than play to the middle. Many candidates and party activists prefer “red meat” appeals that generate excitement rather than complex or nuanced proposals that reaffirm the status quo. Also, donors, who have become increasingly vital to the political process because of the enormous costs of campaigns, often have more extreme viewpoints than the electorate as a whole—and so they help push candidates to the far edges.

Figure 1-1 shows the percentage of Democrats and Republicans in the House of Representatives who had centrist voting records between 1951 and 2013. At the beginning of that period, nearly 60 percent of the representatives in each party tended to vote for “moderate” positions. By 2013, though, the number of moderate Democrats had fallen to 13 percent while those within the GOP almost completely disappeared.<sup>28</sup>

In Congress and many state legislatures, those who are willing to cross party lines and support bipartisan compromises are seen as traitors to the cause. That is especially the case among Republicans since the rise of the Tea Party in 2010. Conservatives outraged over fast-rising government debt and increased public spending, among other perceived ills, organized to “take back” the future and return to cherished values from the past. But the collapse of moderation also has taken

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**FIGURE 1-1.** *Democrats and Republicans  
Who Are Moderate*



*Source:* Keith Poole, “The Polarization of the Congressional Parties,” March 21, 2015.

place on the Democratic side, as demonstrated by the surprisingly strong support for socialist Bernie Sanders in the 2016 nominating process.

The result in both parties has been that politicians of many stripes have put forward proposals for radical change and strongly resisted proposals from the opposing side. Many legislators want to “think big” and produce dramatic shifts in public policy, encouraged by voters upset with their own diminished financial fortunes or motivated by their negative views of government.<sup>29</sup> Research has shown a strong tie between economic disruption and political extremism. An examination of congressional voting patterns and local job losses demonstrates that “areas hardest hit by trade shocks were much more likely to move to the far right or the far left politically.”<sup>30</sup>

Changes in the news media furthermore have promoted major alterations in the political sphere. With only a few exceptions, the news media have fragmented into competing “echo chambers” that tell people what they want to hear, based on market research rather than serious journalistic values. Moreover, many individuals (especially young people) no longer rely upon the mainstream media for daily information. Instead,

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they get news, or what they perceive as news, through social media and digital platforms. The result is a media system that, too often, pushes people apart rather than brings them together. Public discourse ends up being based more on opinions than facts, and there is little agreement on the challenges facing the country.

## Extremism Begets Extremism

In today's world, domestic and foreign policy interact in sometimes disturbing ways. People of the world no longer are isolated and cut off from distant lands. Through instant communication, they can see injustice and unfairness, whether it's committed on the other side of the planet or is directed at members of their own racial or ethnic group, gender, religious faith, or social class. Provocations in one place can set off political disturbances far from the original scene.

The emergence of the Internet has boosted access to information exponentially and made it easy to inflame tensions by disseminating false or misleading claims, as well as valid information. Similar to Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in 1440, digital technology has been profoundly disruptive of existing power relationships. By reducing publication costs through mass production, the printing press is said by sociologist Paul Starr to have sparked the Protestant Reformation, undermined the Catholic Church, intensified religious conflict, and played a role in several civil wars across Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>31</sup>

Through modern-day technology, such as the Internet and social media, contemporary events can ripple around the globe and affect people's impressions. Many countries today contain a heterogeneous set of races, religions, ethnicities, and political

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viewpoints. Amidst this kaleidoscope of orientations, people in one place pay attention to how like-minded individuals are treated elsewhere. In this situation, it is easy to feel outrage over real or perceived injustice.

One egregious example of this occurred in the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. After ISIS-inspired terrorists murdered fourteen innocent civilians in San Bernardino, California, in December 2015, Republican candidate Donald Trump argued that the United States should ban Muslims from entering the country (a claim he repeated after the Orlando mass killings at a gay nightclub). The East African terrorist organization Al Shabaab then used his exclusionary and intolerant rhetoric to recruit fighters on grounds that the United States was waging war on Islam.<sup>32</sup>

Following the March 2016 ISIS bombings in Brussels, that group made a video in which it used comments by the GOP billionaire to bolster its claims about the scale of the carnage. The video quoted Trump as saying: “Brussels was one of the great cities—one of the most beautiful cities of the world 20 years ago—and safe. And now it’s a horror show—an absolute horror show.”<sup>33</sup>

On the CBS television show *Face the Nation*, moderator John Dickerson asked Trump about his provocative stance on Muslims. The presidential candidate responded by saying the United States had grown weak and was placing unreasonable restrictions on military operations. “The ISIS people chop off the heads and they then go back to their homes and they talk. And they hear we’re talking about waterboarding like it’s the worst thing in the world, and they’ve just drowned 100 people and chopped off 50 heads. They must think we are a little bit on the weak side. . . . We are playing by rules, but they have no rules. It’s very hard to win when that’s the case,” he argued.<sup>34</sup>

While there sometimes can be cycles of virtuosity in which good deeds in one place inspire similar deeds elsewhere, it also



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is the case that bad deeds can cause vitriol elsewhere. Extremism and violence are especially prone to generating overreaction because they poison the well for societal or international cooperation. It is surprisingly easy to spread “misinformation” or “unverified rumors” through online media, especially when people’s information sources are narrow in nature and the social system is polarized.<sup>35</sup>

American Enterprise Institute President Arthur Brooks has written about “‘motive attribution asymmetry,’ in which proponents of each side of an argument attributed their own group’s aggressive behavior to love, but the opposite side’s to hatred.” He argues that “millions of Americans believe that their side is basically benevolent while the other side is evil and out to get them.”<sup>36</sup> This kind of attribution inevitably hardens views about both domestic and foreign adversaries.

In this situation, it is easy for political leaders to point to excesses in other places to justify their own extreme steps. They denounce real or imagined adversaries and use their own strong response to solidify political support. Extremist attacks also can be used to explain the need to spend more on defense, engage in surveillance of enemies, or even go to war. What Brooks calls the “victimhood culture” makes it difficult for people to understand the viewpoints of others or see that foes might have reasonable or valid positions. Empathy and tolerance are in short supply in a world filled with extremism and zealotry.

In today’s world, there are few penalties for taking extreme political positions. Some people glorify radical ideas as “out-of-the-box” or bold and visionary. Playing to the base has become a common tactic. Political leaders use strategies that target the angriest and most vocal among their own supporters; this is one way of being assured of core support. In the words of political scientists Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, the “race to the base” has become the dominant political strategy in many countries.<sup>37</sup>

Some argue that political polarization makes it difficult to

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adopt large-scale remedies due to the tendency of democratic institutions to be gridlocked. But the experience of recent decades shows that legislative inaction also creates frustration and encourages leaders to think of new solutions. Ironically, political paralysis can lead to far-reaching ideas that are revolutionary in nature. High levels of polarization can push the public's appetite for change, sometimes even just for the sake of change. Radical ideas that previously would have been discredited now garner serious debate. This was confirmed by a Quinnipiac University survey in 2016 that found two-thirds of U.S. voters agreed with the statement that "the old way of doing things no longer works and we need radical change."<sup>38</sup>

Polarization speeds up change in another way, too. Political parties fight to control the government, and when they attain power they realize they have limited time to get things done. In a gridlocked epoch, people are impatient for action. As explained by Republican Senator Cory Gardner of Colorado, "The temperament of the electorate is getting shorter. The American public is no longer giving people time to turn the ship around. They're wanting it done in two years. So in two years if we don't perform, the same kind of wave election is coming back in 2016 except in the opposite direction."<sup>39</sup>

Impatience leads politicians to confront adversaries, advocate massive reforms, and—for the short period when they hold a political advantage—attempt far-reaching policies that they think will transform the country.<sup>40</sup> Rather than generating no change or small-scale alterations, gridlock and polarization encourage attempts at large-scale policymaking. Leaders often have just a few months or a year where they are in control of government and therefore in a position to act. If they don't take action, someone else is likely to do so and gain an advantage over them. As noted in a speech by singer Bob Dylan, "Times always change. They really do. And you have to always be ready for something that's coming along and you never expected it."<sup>41</sup>

### Plan of the Book

My approach in this book is to use a series of case studies to illustrate the scope and nature of megachange. I include examples from global affairs, American politics, and political developments in other countries to demonstrate how large-scale change happens and how it affects politics and policy. The world is deeply interconnected in an age of globalization and what happens locally can reverberate in many other places.

Chapter 2 looks at examples of megachange in foreign affairs such as globalization, 9/11 terrorism, the Arab Spring uprising, Russia's Crimea invasion, the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* murders and Paris attacks, and the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom. An era that started with an emphasis on international cooperation and trade agreements thought to benefit many different nations has ended in a period of global strife, intense conflict, and disputes over religion, economics, and politics. The hope of globalization has given rise to the fear and anxiety of international terrorism and military aggression, and discontent regarding whether globalization represents a desirable course of action.

Chapter 3 presents case studies of several domestic policies and trends that have undergone large shifts. It investigates religious revival, the Reagan Revolution, Obamacare, same-sex marriage, marijuana legalization, income inequality, Trumpism, and border protection. Across a period of several decades, the United States moved from a time of political conservatism to a complex blend of social liberalism and nationalistic sentiments. There have been profound shifts in public opinion and public policy in a number of areas. Terrorism has pushed many Americans toward tougher reactions, and the subsequent U.S. policy choices have inflamed opinions abroad.

Chapter 4 discusses examples of Thermidorian reactions in megachange. During a period of transformation, moves and

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countermoves often show major fluctuations from side to side. I look at how liberal protests in the 1960s spawned conservative reactions, alterations in attitudes about smoking, shifts in public sentiments about the HIV/AIDS virus, the Catholic Church transition from Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI to Pope Francis, and changing views about diplomatic relations with Cuba. Large shifts in one direction mobilize countershifts from opponents upset with the transformation. The result often is incomplete revolutions.

Chapter 5 investigates the complications of religious zealotry in large-scale change. Religious intensity is one of the factors that have fueled megachange at home and abroad. I look at how fundamentalism in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity affects global affairs and domestic politics. There are clashes of values both across and within each of these great faiths. Disagreements in these areas have had dramatic impact on many contemporary issues, encouraged extreme behavior, and discouraged the tolerance and mutual understanding that people need in an interconnected world.

Chapter 6 argues that during a period of megachange we need to find ways to deal with individual, societal, and governance challenges. Adjusting to a faster and larger-scale nature of change requires basic adjustments in institutional arrangements and governance strategies. Many of our traditional political processes are geared toward slow deliberation and incremental change. With extremism on the rise and comprehensive policymaking in vogue, we need to alter our institutions to cope with fast-changing developments.

Chapter 7 explores strategies for dealing with megachange. People need to broaden their horizons, find anchors that help them deal with large-scale transformations, understand that small shifts can have tremendous impacts over time, and end the winner-take-all mentality that elevates the stakes of great

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change. Unless we learn how to deradicalize civil society, it will be difficult to solve contemporary problems.

Chapter 8 concludes the book by looking at several political, economic, and existential possibilities for future megachange. They include Iran (or non-state terrorists) getting a nuclear bomb, robots taking a high proportion of jobs, global warming flooding the coasts, Europe turning right and undermining democracy, and microbial life found to be existing around the universe. Each of these scenarios represents plausible possibilities for large-scale transformation. We need to anticipate their emergence and determine how to deal with them before they provoke full-blown crises.