Should the Struggle Against Authoritarian Regimes Be Based on Aristotle's or Freud's Psychology, or Rather on Neuroscience?

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1 Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa w Nysie

Abstract

The prevailing global social and geopolitical situation is perceived as unfavorable by most people. According to the authors, many worrying threats are linked to the mental state of the planet's inhabitants. Thus, they believe that the emergence of authoritarian regimes, the constant instigation of wars, and the poor living conditions in many communities require explanations grounded in accurate psychological concepts.

The authors refer to their previous work that connects authoritarian regimes with conservative personality traits, particularly those found in far-right, populist groups. These regimes often promote a patriarchal social structure and rely on religious taboos to maintain control. The authors expand on this theory by exploring Sigmund Freud's concepts of "totem" and "taboo," examining how these ideas might explain the behavior of authoritarian regimes. They also refer to Carl Jung's theory of the Shadow and the collective sense of inferiority.

The article concludes with suggestions on how to counter the spread of authoritarian regimes. The authors advocate for a balanced approach that focuses on finding ways to coexist with authoritarian individuals. They draw parallels between the different neurophysiological functions of the brain's two hemispheres and the potential coexistence of multiple

geopolitical blocs.

The authors reflect on a country that recently shifted from far-right, populist, national governance back to a liberal democratic pattern. They also propose a tool to record personal civic feelings, which can help assess whether a particular region is moving toward or away from autocratic governance.

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Contents

1. Introduction

The article does not present results from extensive, independent research. It merely summarizes the thoughts of scientists active in the field of public health, who attempt to analyze the global social and geopolitical situation from the perspective of citizens of a country that recently experienced a significant shift in political leadership.

The topic defined in the title of the paper can be justified by the statement from the front page of the World Justice Project website, where we read "Over 6 billion people live in a country where the rule of law is declining" [1]. This concern is even more justified by the fact that the authors live in a country adjacent to an aggressive nuclear-armed empire, ruled by an authoritarian leader with widespread support among its citizens.

The interest in a convincing explanation for how such a situation arose is even greater when considering that the authors of this article come from a country whose citizens have struggled with attempts to implement an authoritarian regime over the last eight years. Moreover, the authors' concerns may deepen upon noting that recent public opinion polls in a nation once heralded as the birthplace of democracy now suggest a significant risk of seizing power by an individual with authoritarian ambitions, leveraging populist rhetoric.

People concerned about such social transformations in their own countries are also prone to consider the thesis that there exists a global competition, struggle, and temporary unstable equilibrium between powers representing either a liberal-democratic order or totalitarian authority.

An interesting article was recently published whose author recognizes the importance of insight from psychological knowledge, which would enable an understanding of the causes of the outlined situation [2]. The author of the cited article essentially calls for the cultivation of proper character traits, almost in the manner of Aristotle's ancient appeals to possess good virtues. According to him, everything depends on the desired values of society.

We recently called for an urgent need to understand the essence of the liberal-democratic, and especially conservative, attitude, which often lately turns into a populist, far-right stance [3]. Our attempt to explain the occurrence of this socio-political phenomenon referred to the views of Jonathan Haidt and his followers, highlighting the deep neurophysiological conditioning of different attitudes of liberals and conservatives. We further complemented these considerations by drawing attention to the analogy between the specialization of cognitive functions of the two brain hemispheres and the emerging

polarization of two geopolitical blocs [4].

Confronting these two quite different theoretical approaches, we noticed that both theories require augmentation by providing an explanation of why, in the psychological profile of conservatives, there is a strong link between the component described as the need for "purity" and the tendency to control and dominate others. The search for an explanation for such a confluence of personality tendencies inevitably leads to considerations of Freudian psychodynamic concepts.

We believe that presenting these connections is important for the possibility of formulating potential remedial measures aimed at preventing the spread of authoritarian regimes, which is the goal of this article. Our current deliberations necessitate initially presenting reviews of the two aforementioned ways of describing the phenomenon.

2. An attempt to explain why some countries might fall under authoritarian power through the analysis of dominant values in society

We will reproduce the argumentation of George Monbiot's article reviewing the main theses of his article[2]. We will also provide references to the works of psychologists that the columnist cites.

So, George Monbiot emphasizes that certain psychologists suggest that our values often align with specific orientations, termed "intrinsic" or "extrinsic." Individuals who predominantly hold intrinsic values lean towards characteristics such as empathy, closeness, and self-acceptance. Such people are generally receptive to new challenges and transformations, show a keen interest in universal rights and equality, and demonstrate a commitment to safeguarding others and the natural environment.

Individuals with a pronounced orientation towards extrinsic values gravitate more towards notions of prestige, status, image, recognition, authority, and affluence. The allure of personal accolades and commendation predominantly drives them. Such individuals are prone to treating others as means to an end, exhibiting discourteous and aggressive behavior, and overlooking the consequences of their actions on society and the environment. They show scant regard for collaborative efforts or communal life. Those who prioritize extrinsic values tend to experience higher levels of frustration, discontent, stress, anxiety, irritability, and impulsive actions.

The value systems are not innate but are rather sculpted by interactions with others, societal norms, and the political climate surrounding us. Living under oppressive and greedy governance can lead to the normalization and internalization of such conditions, with individuals adopting and manifesting the dominant extrinsic values, paving the way for even harsher political regimes.

Conversely, residing in a nurturing environment where destitution is rare, and societal values emphasize compassion, empathy, community, and freedom from deprivation and fear, people's values are inclined to evolve towards the intrinsic spectrum. This phenomenon, known as policy feedback or the "values ratchet," functions both at the collective and

individual levels, indicating that a prevalence of extrinsic values may stem from insecurity and unmet needs, which in turn perpetuate further insecurity and unmet needs.

Individuals who have cultivated strong extrinsic values are more inclined to support leaders who mirror these values, those who possess what they aspire to achieve.

The columnist references the scientific publications of numerous psychologists[5][6][7][8][9][10][11]. The article posits that the shift towards extrinsic values is not just a political phenomenon but a deeper societal issue, contributing to various social dysfunctions.

George Monbiot bases his explanation on research by psychologists that was published quite some time ago. In search of more recent considerations by psychologists, we did not find many published works. Only the paper by Danny Osborne et al. attracts attention, however, it mainly concerns attempts to formulate differences between authoritarianism stemming from left-wing and right-wing political movements [12].

Attempting to articulate the essence of the cited deliberations, it should be stated that they essentially boil down to referring to "intrinsic" or "extrinsic" values, which is fundamentally an appeal to the virtuous and negative character traits, as already discussed by Aristotle [13][14].

2.1. Aristotle psychology - shortly

As we know, Aristotle, a Greek philosopher living from 384 to 322 BC, developed an extensive concept of virtues (character traits) within his ethics, most fully presented in his works "Nicomachean Ethics" and "Eudemian Ethics" [13][14]. His concept of virtue posited that a virtue is a state of character associated with choice, lying in a mean between excess and deficiency. Hence, for Aristotle, virtues were the mean between two extremes, known as the "golden mean". Aristotle distinguished two main categories of virtues.

Intellectual virtues are related to the operation of reason and the acquisition of knowledge. These include practical wisdom, theoretical reason, understanding, and art.

Moral (ethical) virtues are related to proper behavior and character. Aristotle listed many moral virtues, each defined as a golden mean between two extremes. Examples of moral virtues include courage, temperance, liberality, truthfulness, magnanimity, justice.

Aristotle argued that virtues are acquired through practice and habit. Consistently acting in a virtuous way leads to the development of a stable, virtuous character. He believed that achieving happiness, the highest good for a human being, requires living in accordance with virtues.

3. Our previous attempts to explain the formation of authoritarian power

We presented recently an attempt to elucidate the attitudes, behaviors, and psychological and cognitive traits that

distinguish liberal and conservative citizens, considering the findings of neuroscience [3]. The formulation of our theses is based on the well-known findings of Jonathan Haidt and some of his followers [15][16][17][18][19][20][21][22]

Haidt maintains that liberals are more open to new experiences, while conservatives prefer familiar and traditional things. He distinguishes five moral foundations (behavioral attitudes): 1. apprehension of harm and appropriate care, 2. appreciation of fairness and reciprocity, 3. reverence for traditional authorities (authority), 4. a sense of group affiliation and alignment with its members' beliefs (ingroup), and the maintenance of so-called 5. purity [15][17]. Liberals primarily focus on the first two foundations, while conservatives value all five. Liberals are more likely to devalue the remaining three moral foundations, seeing them as related to xenophobia, authoritarianism, and puritanism.

The essence of Haidt's theory is effectively revealed in a chart that is easily accessible at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Haidt-political_morality.png

The description of the differences between the attitudes of liberals and conservatives, based on J. Haidt's findings, leads, in our opinion, to an important conclusion regarding social and political consequences. Namely, we believe that from this description emerges the thesis of the inevitability of the constant emergence of authoritarian regimes.

3.1. The probable cause of the steady emergence of authoritarian regimes

The steady emergence of authoritarian regimes can be attributed to the fact that the key attitudes defining conservatives do not contain features that appreciate freedom of speech and respect for the rights of all citizens, that is, the need to maintain democratic interpersonal relations. On the contrary, conservatives believe in the need to respect tradition and conform to the views of the leader and his supporters [3][15][16][17]. Consequently, it is almost inevitable that within a group of conservatives a leader will arise, eager to seize power, and reluctant to relinquish it. Such a leader often manages to rally numerous followers, as they are similarly conservative in mindset, and see no issues with the dissolution of democratic societal oversight. Further, both the leader and their conservative supporters endorse, and may even favor, what is referred to as "strong-arm rule." Intrinsic to the conservative persona is a bias towards tradition, including religious customs, and a resistance to liberal attitudes, which contributes to the preservation of a patriarchal societal structure.

The described psycho-sociological phenomenon explains, in our opinion, Fukuyama's mistake, who famously predicted the "end of history," believing that soon a liberal-democratic order would prevail in all countries worldwide [23][24].

In the past few years, several studies have raised concerns and provided additions to Jonathan Haidt's theory [25][26][27][28][29][30]. Factor analysis and cluster analysis have been employed in studies investigating attitudes, beliefs, and convictions. However, the conclusion presented here, that a distinctive set of beliefs consistently leads to the emergence of authoritarian regimes, has not been challenged by these newer studies.

3.2. Authoritarian regimes typically rely on a patriarchal social structure and references to a religious system of taboos

In countries governed by authoritarian regimes, power often consolidates around individuals with conservative views. This aligns with Jonathan Haidt's observations that such persons gravitate towards conventional patterns of behavior. Embracing these traditions typically involves upholding principles derived from religious teachings. The moral codes enforced by the three major monotheistic religions tend to be puritanical. Consequently, in these societies, freedom and liberty are constrained not only by the frameworks set up by those in power but also by the dominant taboo system [31][32][33][34].

The taboo system of Western societies was established in the distant past at the beginnings of the Abrahamic religions [35]. It was a time of thoroughly patriarchal societies. This is emphasized by competent researchers, for example, by Carol Meyers [35], Susan Ackerman [36], and Stephani Lynn Budin [37].

Additionally, it should be considered that in the aforementioned three major monotheistic religions, the promise of afterlife is dependent on obeisance to moral commandments and prohibitions. This can be briefly put as "immortality for purity."

There is also an undeniable feature of human mentality referred to as shame[38][39][40][41][42][43][44]. The inclination to feel shame, however, depends on the above-discussed attitude that places great importance on the trait termed "purity," sometimes described as "adherence to chastity." Feelings of shame and prescriptions for purity are shaped in the minds of children largely by parents who, in turn, hold views consistent with the prevailing system of taboo [41][42]. According to the views of Sigmund Freud, the essence of the phenomenon of conscience primarily results from the internalization of parental beliefs [43][44].

The discussed dependencies thus determine the link between religious views and the realm of sexuality and their impact on maintaining the patriarchal structure of many societies [45][46].

3.3. The elusive, mysterious link between the puritanical stance and the desire to impose one's will and control over others

It is worth noting that people wishing to maintain power or control over others always want to limit freedom of speech and freedom of thought. Furthermore, the more intensified this need for limitation is, the more it interferes with actions that would seem entirely private. It is not surprising, then, that it ultimately also involves the most intimate realms [47][48]. To illustrate this, it will be helpful to recall the social and mental situation in communities professing the monotheistic religion that historically emerged at the latest. It is known that dogmatic prohibitions, proclaimed there by clerics, also pertain to thought content, and later to social, family, marital, and intimate behaviors. In a nutshell: "If we compel you and you agree to obey moral behaviors, then you will also agree to our authority."

4. The utility of Sigmund Freud's reflections on the concepts of taboo and totem for a deeper understanding of the functioning of authoritarian systems

Sigmund Freud's exploration of the notion of taboo is most prominently presented in his book "Totem and Taboo -

Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics", originally published in 1913. In this work, Freud investigates the psychological underpinnings of primitive cultures. He delves into the similarities between the ritualistic practices and superstitions of "savage" societies and the obsessions and compulsive behaviors observed in neurotic individuals in more "civilized" societies.

Freud uses the term "taboo" to describe prohibitions of certain actions, objects, or words that are considered sacred or untouchable within a culture. He theorizes that these taboos carry an emotional charge similar to the obsessional prohibitions found in individuals with neurotic disorders. Freud argues that the origins of taboos, like the origins of neuroses, can be traced back to unresolved emotional conflicts and the human psyche's mechanisms to cope with them. Through this comparative study, Freud aims to bridge anthropology and psychoanalysis, offering insights into the universal structures of the human mind and the genesis of religion, morality, and social organization.

In our opinion, acquaintance with Freud's idea of psychoanalytical anthropology is very useful today. So, we revisit here a few of its fundamental concepts and relationships.

The notion of a "totem" is a concept that originates from the belief systems of indigenous peoples, particularly those of Native American and other tribal societies around the world. A totem is typically an animal, a plant, or a natural object that serves as a symbol or emblem for a group of people, such as a family, clan, or tribe. The significance of the totem goes beyond its physical representation; it is imbued with sacred and spiritual meanings and is often considered an ancestor, guardian, or spiritual guide for the group.

Totems play a crucial role in the cultural and religious life of the communities that adopt them. They are central to the group's identity, rituals, and social organization. The relationship between a group and its totem is based on respect, reverence, and a set of taboos that dictate the interactions with the totem or its representations.

In the light of psychoanalytical anthropology, the totem is also seen as a key element in the formation of collective identities and the origins of certain social norms and moral principles. Freud suggested that the totem serves as a substitute for the father figure.

The concepts of "totem" and "taboo" can be useful in analysis, pointing to the deep, cultural aspects that underlie social behaviors in authoritarian societies [45][47][48].

Individuals with a conservative stance may distinguish certain values as very important and abide by a certain set of taboos, as well as recognize the equivalents of totems. Taboos associated with violating these values reinforce their sanctity and protect against changes, which corresponds with the conservative preference for what is known and traditional. An example of a totem analog in patriarchal societies could be the traditional image of male dominance in power structures. Taboos against violating this structure hinder the achievement of gender equality. Social changes can be interpreted as a process of "breaking" these taboos. Religious mandates can act as totem analogs, solidifying customary patterns that ensure the durability of the patriarchal system. Taboos associated with violating these mandates support the maintenance of social discipline and obedience, which complicates customary changes.

Totems and taboos can also relate to the more deeply rooted, anthropological aspects of patriarchal societies, where the conservative concept of "purity" is maintained by internally assimilated feelings of shame or embarrassment. Taboos around violating "purity" strengthen group affiliation and obedience, which makes it difficult to question patriarchal structures [46]. In this context, "totem" symbolizes deeply ingrained values and beliefs that unite the group and define its identity, while "taboo" protects these values from being questioned or changed, which may hinder social and cultural transformations, especially in the context of combating patriarchy.

Applying Freud's analysis of the taboo system offers a useful framework for understanding why a society might gravitate towards a far-right, populist politician. Freud's exploration into the parallels between the ritualistic practices of "savage" societies and the compulsive behaviors in "civilized" individuals suggests that both are manifestations of deep-seated emotional conflicts and the psyche's mechanisms to manage them.

In this context, the rise of a far-right, populist politician can be seen as a societal expression of taboo, where the politician embodies a totemic figure that represents and enforces certain sacred, untouchable values or ideas within the culture. These values often revolve around nationalism, traditionalism, and a clear demarcation of the in-group versus the out-group, which can be akin to the purity and contamination taboos.

The emotional charge that propels a society to support such a figure might stem from collective anxieties, fears, and unresolved conflicts within the social body. These could include economic insecurities, perceived threats to cultural identity, or a sense of disenfranchisement within the global order. The populist politician, through rhetoric and symbolism, taps into these deep emotional currents, offering simple, clear-cut solutions and scapegoats that resonate on a primal level with the electorate's anxieties and desires for order and security.

This Freudian perspective suggests that the societal embrace of a far-right, populist leader is not merely a political or ideological choice, but a psychological phenomenon rooted in the collective unconscious. The leader's appeal lies not just in their policies but in their ability to symbolically represent and enact the deep, often unarticulated emotional needs of the population.

The populist leader, as a totem, becomes a focal point for the projection of collective desires and fears. Their rhetoric, often laden with references to past glories, traditional values, and a clear delineation of friend versus foe, resonates with the collective psyche's need for simplicity and certainty in the face of modern complexities. This dynamic is akin to the role of taboos in traditional societies, where they serve to simplify the world into clear-cut categories of allowed and forbidden, sacred and profane.

The act of voting for such a leader can be seen as a ritualistic reaffirmation of these taboos, a collective performance that reinforces the group's identity and values. It's a way for the society to assert a sense of control and order, much like how individuals with neurotic compulsions find temporary relief in the repetition of their rituals.

However, just as Freud pointed out the potential destructiveness of unresolved neuroses in individuals, the societal enactment of these psychological dynamics can have perilous implications. The simplification of complex social issues

into us-versus-them narratives, the demonization of out-groups, and the glorification of an idealized past can exacerbate divisions, incite conflict, and erode the foundations of democratic pluralism.

In sum, from a Freudian standpoint, the rise of far-right populism can be interpreted as a manifestation of societal neuroses, where the leader serves as a totem that both unites and protects the in-group through the reinforcement of sacred taboos. This psychoanalytic lens offers a deeper understanding of the emotional undercurrents driving contemporary political phenomena, highlighting the importance of addressing the underlying anxieties and conflicts that fuel such movements [47][48].

5. Sources of low self-esteem among supporters of populist regimes

When examining sociological phenomena and the prevailing attitudes in countries where populists have temporarily taken power with significant societal support, it's clear that these leaders often gain power through individuals who frequently have a low sense of self-worth and a strong aversion to social groups perceived as elites. To understand these dynamics theoretically, one can refer to concepts proposed by Carl Gustav Jung [49][50][51].

5.1. Jung's theory of the Shadow

Carl Gustav Jung developed the concept of the "shadow" as the unconscious part of the psyche that contains personality traits deemed undesirable by the individual [49]. Jung argued that the shadow often manifests one's own unacceptable qualities to other people. In a social context, individuals with low self-esteem might project their frustrations and dissatisfaction onto "elites" or other social groups they view as the source of their problems or injustices.

5.2. Identification with authority and 'collective sense of inferiority'

Jung also discussed archetypes, which are universal, inherited psychic patterns. One such archetype is the "Ruler" or "Hero," which can be appealing to those feeling powerless or undervalued. Populists, who often present themselves as strong leaders, might be seen as embodying this archetype by their supporters. These followers might experience a temporary elevation in self-worth through identification with such a leader.

Low self-esteem can also lead to compensation, another defensive mechanism described by Jung. Individuals feeling inferior might look for ways to enhance their value through affiliation with a group that appears to have clear, strong goals and identity [50]. Populism often offers a simple "us versus them" narrative, which can serve as such a form of compensation.

Additionally, there is a theory that entire social groups can experience a collective sense of inferiority, which is particularly pertinent in divided societies [51]. This phenomenon can favor the emergence of populist movements that promise to reverse the perception of marginalization and restore the "dignity" of these groups.

Populists may exploit the emotional and psychological needs of their followers, promising simple answers to complex

issues. This, in turn, can lead to an increase in their influence and consolidation of their power, often at the expense of a deeper understanding and resolution of real social problems.

6. Characteristics of events leading from authoritarianism to totalitarianism and principles for assessing whether the 'point of no return' has been crossed

Throughout history, countries with a democratic system, recognizing the necessity of an alternating transfer of power, have emerged relatively recently. Excluding the prototypes from ancient times, the transfer of power was introduced by the Constitution of the United States. There is also a certain tradition of recognizing power elected by the people in Great Britain, and currently in most European countries. However, such constitutional principles are being challenged. We can point to countries where power is held by a leader and a group of his supporters who, although they are not immortal beings, act as if they "never want to give up power." Such a power-holding group has varying degrees of legitimacy and social support. It must also be acknowledged that "some monarchies were not oppressive and absolute."

Sometimes the so-called "point of no return" has not yet been crossed, and a significant part of society still believes in the possibility of returning to the rules of a democratic state. For people living in such "transitional," "politically unstable" countries, it is important how close these societies are to this "point of no return." One of the aims of this article is to attempt to define "how to make such an assessment."

To illustrate such a mental task, it will be helpful, in our opinion, to first recall the dynamics of social processes that occurred in countries where power was seized by a group of people who, as later historical events showed, never intended to relinquish power.

Germany - 1933

After gaining power in Nazi Germany, several legal and institutional changes were implemented to consolidate and maintain control. The Enabling Act of 1933 was a crucial legal change, allowing "the leader" and his cabinet to enact laws without the Reichstag's approval, effectively sidelining the legislative body and legalizing the regime's actions. The Reichstag Fire Decree, issued shortly before, suspended many civil liberties and allowed for the arrest of political opponents, mainly Communists, and the suppression of their publications.

Institutionally, the Nazi regime restructured the government to centralize power. The establishment of the "Secret Police" allowed for widespread surveillance and suppression of opposition. The regime also merged the positions of President and Chancellor into the Führer, following President Hindenburg's death, granting "the leader" unchecked power.

Furthermore, the regime employed propaganda and control over media to manipulate public opinion and reinforce Nazi ideology. The Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda controlled the arts, media, and information. Education was also overhauled to indoctrinate the youth with Nazi beliefs.

Soviet Union - 1917

After the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia in 1917, they initiated several legal and institutional reforms to solidify their control and prevent the relinquishment of power. One of the first acts was the Decree on Land, which abolished private property and redistributed land to the peasants, aiming to secure the support of the rural population. The Decree on Peace, calling for an end to Russia's participation in World War I, aimed to fulfill one of the key promises of the Bolsheviks and to consolidate support among war-weary citizens.

Legally, the Bolsheviks dissolved the Constituent Assembly in 1918 after it was seen as a threat to their power and banned opposition parties, effectively eliminating political pluralism. The establishment of the Cheka, a secret police force, enabled the suppression of political dissent and the enforcement of Bolshevik policies.

Institutionally, the Bolsheviks centralized power through the creation of the Soviet system, where local soviets (councils) reported to higher-level soviets, culminating in the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. This structure minimized the influence of non-Bolsheviks and ensured strict control over the decision-making process.

Furthermore, the Bolsheviks engaged in the nationalization of industry and banks, bringing the economy under state control, which was intended to dismantle the existing capitalist structures and consolidate the Bolsheviks' economic foundation.

These measures, coupled with a propaganda campaign to promote communist ideology and the establishment of a one-party state, were designed to cement the Bolsheviks' grip on power and transform the societal and political landscape of Russia.

Point of no return

Psychological factors play a significant role in why citizens in authoritarian regimes, such as Nazi Germany and post-1917 revolutionary Russia, might support or fail to oppose their governments, even participating in sham elections [52][53][54][55]. Fear is a predominant factor; the fear of repression, persecution, or social ostracism for dissenting can compel conformity and even outward support. Propaganda and control of information shape perceptions and beliefs, making it difficult for citizens to critically evaluate their government's actions or to even be aware of alternative viewpoints [55].

Authoritarian regimes often employ a narrative of us vs. them, creating a perceived external or internal enemy, which fosters a sense of unity and loyalty among citizens against a common threat. This can be particularly effective in times of economic or social upheaval, where the regime promises stability, order, and a return to national greatness, appealing to a sense of nostalgia and national pride.

Moreover, the human tendency towards the status quo bias, where individuals prefer things to stay the same by default, can lead to passive acceptance of authoritarian rule, especially if it has been established for some time. The gradual erosion of freedoms and the normalization of government control can desensitize citizens to the loss of their rights and freedoms, reducing the likelihood of resistance.

7. The proposed survey estimating the actual state of society, which might have reached a point of no return

Recalling past critical historical and geopolitical events, often referred to as drawing conclusions from "history lessons," leads to the conclusion that autocratic regimes that have transformed into totalitarian regimes do not retreat from the societal changes they initiate. Since these changes are destructive, they typically lead to economic and military disaster. A totalitarian regime can only be stopped by decisive resistance from outside and a simultaneous economic collapse. An important practical issue for citizens living in such countries is assessing whether a point of no return has already been crossed. Consequently, we suggest the following framework for a straightforward focus group study of public opinion, designed to evaluate whether the "point of no return" is approaching.

1. **Fear of repression:** On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents no fear and 5 represents extreme fear, how much do you fear facing negative consequences (like persecution or ostracism) for expressing dissent against the government?

2. **Exposure to propaganda**: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates you rarely encounter government propaganda and 5 indicates you always encounter it, how frequently do you come across government propaganda in your daily life?

3. **Access to information**: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means full access and 5 means no access, how would you rate your access to a variety of viewpoints and sources of information about your government's actions and policies?

4. **Us vs. them narrative:** On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means you strongly agree and 5 means you strongly disagree, how strongly do you agree with the government's narrative that divides people into "us" (supporters) and "them" (enemies)?

5. **Economic and social promises:** On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means you are very convinced and 5 means you are very unconvinced, how convinced are you by the government's promises of stability, order, and national greatness during times of upheaval?

6. **Status quo bias:** On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means you strongly prefer to maintain the current political situation due to its familiarity and 5 means you strongly prefer change, how strongly do you prefer to maintain the current political situation?

7. **Awareness of rights erosion:** On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates no awareness and 5 indicates full awareness, how aware are you of a gradual erosion of personal freedoms and rights?

8. **Numbness to government control:** On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means fully numb and 5 means not numb at all, to what extent do you feel numb or indifferent, desensitized to increasing government control over various aspects of life?

9. **Likelihood of resistance:** On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means very unlikely and 5 means very likely, how likely are you to participate in or support acts of resistance against the government?

10. **Point of no return perception:** On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means strong belief in returnability and 5 means strong belief in a point of no return, do you believe your society has reached a point of no return in terms of returning to a less authoritarian form of governance?

This survey aims to gauge the psychological climate and the extent of authoritarian control perceived by individuals within such a regime, providing insights into the society's readiness for change or resistance. A reference point for the readers of

this article may be the authors' own results. They estimated their feelings from a few months ago, before the political change, at around 40 points (out of a possible 50).

8. Insights into how to oppose the expansion of an authoritarian regime

One might assume that if a society agrees to live in a country governed authoritarily, it should be accepted. Unfortunately, historical events over the last two hundred years and the current geopolitical situation prove that authoritarian regimes threaten neighboring countries and intensify the enslavement of citizens living in such countries. Aggression towards neighbors usually stems from the need of the rulers of such countries to justify and legitimize their power. The intensifying enslavement of citizens, on the other hand, mainly results from the regime's effort to retain power and never relinquish it. Thus, the question arises whether the theories presented above, trying to explain the origins for the formation of socially uncontrolled power, lead to conclusions on how to prevent the emergence of such regimes and how to counter the advancement of authoritarian regimes.

In trying to answer this question, we list such possibilities but discuss them only briefly, as specifying each of these actions effectively would require a separate extensive article. Nevertheless, each of the listed possible actions is considered as a part of a set of purposeful and possible actions. We assign them a short alphabetical symbol.

Spreading and strengthening so-called intrinsic moral and social values. George Monbiot shows in his article a process of intensifying such social attitudes over several decades. He describes in his article also how, for decades, there has been a promotion of the opposite values, known as extrinsic. From his article emerges a call to publicists, writers, teachers of all levels, and liberal-democratic politicians to promote the formation of the beneficial intrinsic values. Such an expectation is, of course, directed at all levels of education and all cultural creators. Symbol: ***"1-Intrinsic"***

Maintaining Aristotle's centuries-old proposal to cultivate good character traits. They spoke mainly to the elders and enlightened citizens. The call to cultivate positive character traits is an urging directed at those who influence the upbringing and education of young people. Symbol: ***"2-Aristotle"***

Efforts to diminish the patriarchal structure of society. A prerequisite for undertaking such actions is understanding the different organizational structures of such systems [34][48]. Possible actions that would dismantle the structures of patriarchal society were discussed in our previous work [3]. We even wrote there that the measure of a country's community's transformation in terms of moving away from patriarchy is the percentage of female parliamentarians. Parity of around 50% has already been achieved in the parliaments of many Scandinavian countries. The advocacy for increasing the social and political significance of women in society is not just a call to politicians but also to the country's educational system and cultural creators. Symbol: ***"3-Non-patriarchal"***

Transformation of customary patterns conditioned by religious commands. In our previous cited article, and in the above discourse, we argued that old, demanding entrenched societal customs ensure the durability of the patriarchal system and simultaneously enforce citizens' obedience to authoritarian authorities. Transformation of customs, especially

those related to sexuality, is a challenging task that requires long-term efforts from all systems influencing the mentality of community members. By its very nature, this is a challenge for contemporary active clergy. Symbol: *"4-Religion-mores-expectations"*

Raising awareness of the impact of exaggerated demand of "purity. The patriarchal structure of society is reinforced by upholding and promoting the value referred to as "purity." Expectations and demands of such behavioral patterns facilitate enforcing obedience. This can lead to exclusionary practices and unrealistic expectations, alienating those who don't conform. The emphasis on purity often results in rigid rules and judgmental attitudes, overshadowing the value of diversity and human complexity. Symbol: *"5-Anti-puritanical-resistence".*

Implementation of sexual education programs. Only a fraction of citizens align with the assertion that school curricula should include sex education as a separate subject, distinct from parental guidance. These educational initiatives are only implemented in a few countries. Within the realm of sex education programs, three distinct methodologies can be identified. The prevalent approach primarily addresses the risks associated with sexual activity. The most comprehensive curricula, referred to as holistic programs, extend beyond mere cautionary advice to explore the role of sexuality in enhancing health, personal development, and overall well-being. In our prior research, we thoroughly examined the essence and benefits of holistic sex education [56]. In our previous works, we proposed an outline of a holistic sexual education program [3][57]. Symbol: **"6-Sexual education".**

Raising awareness that the mentality of a significant portion of society can be shaped by imposed taboos and references to totems. The spirit of societies guided by authoritarian, populist, far-right politicians can be described by the analogy formulated by Sigmund Freud. According to the above presented discussion of his work "Totem and Taboo", such societies are characterized by a neurotic obsessive-compulsive state. Society organized according to the conceptions of populist politicians from the far right often appeals to the simplest emotions and fears. Anxiety and concerns are widespread and intensified. The supposedly threatening dangers that are highlighted are described in simple terms. They often correspond to ancient objects that bear the characteristics of totems. Likewise, the visions presented by far-right politicians are symbolized by simple, easy-to-visualize objects or figures that can be treated as possibly simplified totems. Symbol: *"7-Anti-neurotic-taboo-totem-change".*

Raising awareness of the anthropological conditions. Taking into account the analogy formulated above between the difference in neurophysiological functions of the two cerebral hemispheres and the coexistence of two geopolitical blocks indicates the possibility of seeking consensus between the actions of individuals with liberal-democratic and conservative attitudes. Such non-confrontational cooperation is possible when the authoritarian stance is softened, and we are dealing only with conservative views that respect the rule of law. Symbol: **"8-Rule-of-law conservatism".**

Identifying the causes and preventing a sense of low self-esteem (feeling of inferiority, wounded dignity). Politicians resorting to populist arguments often appeal to social groups experiencing a sense of inferiority, even wounded dignity, and aversion to the so-called elites. Appropriate measures to reduce existential, living, material, and social disparities are needed. In addition to these tangible actions, requiring financial outlays and under the jurisdiction of central and local authorities, suitable cultural and educational efforts are necessary. This will only be possible if talented

individuals who understand the significance of the challenge and have the necessary skills to "enhance the value of those with a sense of inferiority" are involved. It seems that the closest group to undertake such efforts is talented writers, filmmakers, and mass media managers, including social media. **"9. Counteracting the sense of inferiority, wounded dignity".**

The ability to reach the consciousness of far-right conservatives. Recent publications discuss the conditions and skills required to formulate messages that reach the consciousness of individuals supporting authoritarian regimes. Peter Pomerantsev suggests using the experiences gathered by Sefton Delmer during his effective actions of reaching the consciousness of people intoxicated by Nazi propaganda [58]. The results of these real actions speak to the validity of several key statements cited here: „Propaganda is successful when it gives people a satisfying part to play, someone to love and hate". „Today's propagandists play on the same needs. In a time of rapid economic, social, and technological change, it can be comforting to be part of a large, angry crowd. Online conspiracy theory communities are particularly effective at pulling together a sense of being part of a group with a secret knowledge and mission". "The aim is to distance people from propaganda by amplifying its absurdity". This approach highlights the importance of engaging individuals based on their own interests rather than dictating what they should value. Understanding the conditions and needs of individuals is crucial. Instead of adopting a superior or lecturing tone, one should try to comprehend the concerns of people, making them feel integrated into a community that prioritizes their interests more effectively. **"10 - Addressing individual needs, sense of belonging, and protection of interests."**

It should be noted that proposing the above ten possible directions of action aims to convince the readers of our article that each of us can immediately engage in defending the democratic order by taking action in any of the enumerated areas. For each action listed, one can attribute novels, newspaper articles, scholarly articles, films, series, YouTube video presentations, and social media posts that advocate for such attitudes. There is no need to wait for top-down actions; everyone can start identifying such cultural products and contribute to their dissemination. We initiated such activity two years ago by creating an appropriate website [57].

9. The necessity of co-existence. The analogy between the difference in neurophysiological functions of the two cerebral hemispheres and the coexistence of two geopolitical blocks

Referring to previous significant efforts to elucidate the social and geopolitical landscape, it is important to acknowledge the well-known theory proposed by Fukuyama, who, as history shows, erred in predicting the imminent global establishment of democratic rule of law in all countries [23][24].

This did not happen. In the eyes of many commentators, the constant emergence of authoritarian regimes has led to the development of two blocks of political thought and psycho-social orders — the liberal-democratic and conservative-authoritarian. One might even assume an analogy between this divide and the differences in cognitive functions of two cerebral hemispheres [4].

However, this bipolar view of the world is questioned by publicists, who see the emergence of a multipolar world model. There is increasing focus on countries in the so-called Global South. Therefore, there's a need to determine how our above reflections on the opposition between liberal-democratic and conservative-authoritarian attitudes relate to this multipolar world model. This need is particularly pertinent given that, in some authoritarian-run countries, especially in many Global South countries, the current authorities enjoy genuine support from the majority of citizens. Therefore, assessing the state of rule of law and social righteousness of these governments cannot rely solely on noting whether the authorities of a given country conduct free, unaltered parliamentary elections.

Thus, our considerations must return to the concepts of Aristotelian virtues mentioned earlier, or the criteria applied by the World Justice Project, and apply a two-level criterion:

1. The government of a certain country should be subject to social control, meaning that the ruling party can be removed in subsequent free and fair parliamentary elections.
2. The community in the given country should embrace Fukuyama's "end of history" concept through voluntary, enlightened choice, implying respect for the existing international legal order (and current borders) as an evolutionary model that could serve as a basis for sustainable and peaceful human development in the future.

The mentioned second criterion might provoke aversion or even opposition from many leaders, social movements, and even entire nations, citing painful historical events and experienced injustices. However, it should be noted that in those regions of the world where a widely accepted liberal-democratic order is already established, such demands for necessary corrections or significant changes, including territorial ones, are often addressed and regulated through the recognition of autonomy and conciliatory compensatory agreements.

Many readers might recall that in some countries where the ruling party hasn't changed for many years and parliamentary elections aren't fair and equitable, such regimes often start to claim rights over their neighbors. This situation raises interesting questions about where the influences to enforce this two-level criterion should come from. Essentially, this consideration delves into whether a global system of order exists, similar to the League of Nations, the UN, or bodies like the G-7 and G-20, which could effectively pursue the desired mission of restoring elementary global order. However, the theoretical question of how humanity should ensure the effectiveness of such order-keeping missions is intriguing but goes rather beyond the scope of this article. In this topic, we will present, in the following subchapter, only an essay based on our previous discussions, developed by GPT-4.

11. The way to design a system that prevents wars and ensures peaceful coexistence

We asked OpenAI's ChatGPT-4 the following request: *Try to formulate the essence of a system that humanity should implement on our planet to prevent wars, meaning ensuring that even countries that have not established democratic order with rule of law do not start wars. Try to create a response based on the some chapters of my article.*

The answer was:

[“To design a system that prevents wars and ensures peaceful coexistence, especially in countries without democratic governance, a comprehensive approach is required. It involves embracing multipolarity, strengthening global governance mechanisms, and fostering international cooperation. Here's an outline based on your article section and broader considerations:

1. *Multipolar Perspective:*

    The traditional bipolar model of liberal-democratic and conservative-authoritarian regimes is evolving into a multipolar system. This development acknowledges the emerging influence of countries in the Global South and the various geopolitical orders that go beyond the traditional West-East dichotomy. Accepting this multipolar reality is a crucial step toward achieving global harmony.

2. *Strengthening Global Governance:*

    The world needs a robust global governance system that can act as a mediator and peacekeeper among nations. This could be achieved by reforming existing institutions like the United Nations, G-7, and G-20 to make them more inclusive and effective in resolving conflicts. These institutions should have the authority to intervene in situations where authoritarian regimes threaten neighboring countries or global peace.

3. *Enforcement of a Two-Level Criterion:*

    The two-level criterion suggested in above is a practical framework for promoting peace: (1) Social Control and Free Elections: This criterion ensures that governments are subject to social control, allowing for free and fair elections. It also allows for a peaceful transition of power, reducing the likelihood of internal or external conflict. (2) **Voluntary Embrace of International Legal Order (VEILO):** Countries should agree to respect existing international laws and borders, promoting stability and discouraging expansionist tendencies. This would also require a collective commitment to resolving disputes through dialogue and peaceful means.

4. *Promoting Aristotelian Virtues and Enlightenment Ideals:*

    Embracing Aristotelian virtues, such as justice, wisdom, and moderation, can create a culture that values peace and cooperation. Additionally, the Enlightenment ideals of rationality and tolerance should be promoted to foster understanding among different cultures and political systems. Perhaps the condition for the peaceful attitude of all societies is not only the acceptance by the majority of community members of the Enlightenment slogans (égalité, liberté, fraternité) but also elementary psychological knowledge, even that which results from the previously discussed concept of C.G. Jung's Shadow.

5. *Incentives for Cooperation:*

    Authoritarian regimes often gain support through nationalistic or populist rhetoric. To counteract this, the international community could offer incentives for cooperation, such as economic benefits or trade agreements, to encourage countries to align with a peaceful global order. Additionally, addressing historical injustices through compensatory agreements or territorial autonomy can foster goodwill and reduce conflict.

6. *Effective Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:*

    Establishing clear and effective mechanisms for resolving disputes is critical. This could include international arbitration, mediation, and other forms of conflict resolution that can address territorial disputes, human rights

violations, and other sources of conflict without resorting to war.

By implementing these strategies, humanity can create a global system that not only prevents wars but also promotes peaceful coexistence among nations, irrespective of their internal governance systems. This approach acknowledges the evolving multipolar world and seeks to build a framework that accommodates diverse political ideologies while maintaining global peace and stability."]

12. Experiences from a country that has undergone a change in power

It is rare that, instead of a report on an experiment conducted by the authors, an article is much more contributory by pointing out the changes taking place in a large European country, which one can observe and experience firsthand. Interested individuals can even come to Poland and see what is happening.

Furthermore, after specifying possible actions to counter the rise of authoritarian regimes, as listed in the preceding chapters, it would be possible to present an organized and factual discussion based on published facts, describing how the listed actions are being implemented.

It should be noted that almost all the possible actions listed above are contingent upon having control over a significant portion of mass media, including not only radio and television broadcasting stations but also popular journalistic websites and social media platforms. Observing countries for which there is likely "no turning back," it is striking that no larger group of citizens possesses such capabilities anymore. The existence of this pattern supports the assertion that as long as it is possible to disseminate truthful messages, the potential for the "common sense of society as a whole" to prevail is maintained.

Presenting the ongoing transformations would require a separate article. However, its message would likely not be unequivocal and convincing. Instead of such a report on the changes taking place, we propose here an unusual equivalent. It might be interesting because it boils down to co-participation in observing an extraordinary experiment that is taking place before our eyes on a global scale. The essence of this co-participation would involve completing a very short survey provided below.

13. The possibility of personal assessment of the ongoing transition on the axis {liberal democracy – far-right attitude}

The possibility of a personal assessment of the impact of social changes, following shifts on the {liberal democracy – far-right attitude} axis, occurs due to two transitions in opposite directions of the axis. Eight years ago, in Poland, where the authors of the article are from, there was a takeover of power by the "far right-wing" group of politicians. Some months ago (December 2023), the takeover of power occurred, and now the current social changes are being implemented by a liberal-democratic coalition.

In a few months, a similar change of the "political option" may occur in the United States.

Moreover, the elections to the European Union Parliament, which will take place on June 9, 2024, will enable estimation of the significance of the possible changes in the ideological preferences of citizens from all EU countries.

To deepen the understanding of the ongoing transformations, we suggest filling out the form provided below. This form was developed taking into account the advice and experience of other researchers who consider the attitudes of people living in countries threatened by authoritarianism [59][60][61][62].

This survey concerns the feelings of citizens in a country managed "more or less authoritatively". The obtained result indicates the "degree of deviation" from the desired social order that respects citizens' freedom.

Nr	The content of the question:	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
1	Do you fear difficulties or troubles caused by individuals associated with the current government?	Often	Sometimes	No
2	Do you often refrain from expressing your opinion on current events because you consider it might be dangerous?	Often	Sometimes	I am not afraid to say what I think
3	Does it bother you now, currently, that many of our compatriots do not have access to diverse viewpoints and sources of information about ongoing events and government actions?	Yes	It is not important	There are no such difficulties
4	Do you perceive a current gradual erosion of personal freedoms and rights?	Yes	Not really	It does not occur
5	Do you often observe a governmental narrative that divides people into "us" (supporters) and "them" (enemies)?	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
6	Women's rights, including their autonomy in making personal decisions, are both assured and respected.	Not fully	Not really	There is intention to improve
7	The participation and importance of women in social life are increasing and have reached a state comparable to the role of men.	Hard to agree	Not really	The status of women is improving
8	Minority rights are assured and respected.	Not fully	Not really	There is intention to improve
9	I think that society views the future very optimistically.	Yes	Not really	Optimism is increasing
10	Is the opinion of other societies about the situation in our country, especially regarding the rule of law and human rights, positive?	It is not positive	I don't know	It is positive
	Sum of points			

Using the above form, we conducted a focused survey. Details of this study are presented in another paper. However, for the purpose of this discussion, it might be useful to provide some basic data to help readers assess their own situation.

The above questionnaire is designed so that a person who approves the current situation selects the response options listed in column 5 (Option 3). Those who completely disapprove of the current social order select the responses listed in column 3 (Option 1). You can assign numeric values to options 1, 2, and 3 as 0, 0.5, and 1.0, respectively. Thus, a person fully satisfied with the current situation will score a total of 10 points. You can then calculate the average value of this index for the entire surveyed group.

Our focus study, conducted with a group of 91 people (students from a higher education institution (University of Applied Sciences) located in a medium-sized provincial town, mostly women, aged between 34 and 53), showed that the current average index value for this sample from Poland is now 4.04. According to the design assumptions of the survey questionnaire, a person fully approving the change in power would score 10 points.

The obtained result, in our opinion, indicates that despite the parliamentary victory of the liberal-democratic coalition and its intensive efforts to restore the rule of law, a vast portion of society does not perceive this change positively and remains distrustful of the new political direction. The sample studied most likely does not represent the WEIRD social group [58].

If we accept not very rigorous methodological rules, it is possible to conduct small focus studies and obtain averaged data for different groups of respondents in other countries.

Perhaps readers from other countries will find our survey a tool enabling a preliminary assessment of the situation in their countries. It would be highly interesting to know the results of such an assessment made in countries of the so-called "Global South," especially since it is always possible to refer to somewhat similar indices calculated by the World Justice Project [1].

14. Conclusions

1. The comprehensive integration of several psychological and sociological theories allows for a convincing formulation of an explanation for the consistent emergence of authoritarian regimes and the outbreak of wars.

2. It is possible to specifically outline actions that would likely lead to the restoration of the rule of law in individual countries.

3. In some countries, authoritarian regimes gain support from the majority of citizens. Therefore, it is necessary to apply a two-tiered criterion for assessing the peaceful reliability of these countries in their international relations.

4. The two-tiered criterion for peaceful reliability in international relations requires that the community of the country, through voluntary and enlightened choice, decide to respect the existing international legal order (and current borders) as an evolutionary model that could serve as a basis for sustainable development.

5. Intellectual and research efforts should be continued to improve the effectiveness of the international system that prevents wars and ensures peaceful coexistence.

6. Stabilizing the social situation across the globe would allow for the beginning of the sustainable and peaceful development of humanity.

7. The presented theory on methods to counteract authoritarian regimes and strengthen the international system to prevent wars should be part of educational programs at all levels of education.

Statements and Declarations

Declaration in accordance with the guidance from "The use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in writing for Elsevier"

https://www.elsevier.com/about/policies-and-standards/the-use-of-generative-ai-and-ai-assisted-technologies-in-writing-for-elsevier

During the preparation of this paper, the authors used suggestions from OpenAI's ChatGPT-4 while formulating chapters number 7 and 11, however, they take full personal responsibility for the sensibility of these sections of the work.

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