
To What Extent Do Non-Westerners Tolerate Political Oppression?

They Have Their Own “Impossible Tyranny”!

ABSTRACT This paper seeks to challenge the interpretations found in Western political philosophy on Oriental or Asian tyranny. The main research questions are: Is tyranny the inevitable fate of non-Western societies? To what extent do these societies tolerate political oppression? To provide initial answers, the paper analyzes certain aspects of tyrannical phenomenon found in some non-Western countries, in Arab, Asian, African, and Latin American contexts. It offers two new interpretive terms: “possible tyranny” and “impossible tyranny.” It suggests that each country inevitably has its own share of tyranny in both quantity and quality, for a period of time. However, if this type of tyranny oversteps certain boundaries in a country, that country will likely experience another kind of tyranny: impossible tyranny. The study offers preliminary definitions, an initial justification of these two terms, and suggests many questions for future studies. **KEYWORDS** democratization, comparative politics, non-Western politics, Arabs, possible tyranny, impossible tyranny

It is not easy for a person to do any great harm when his tenure of office is short, whereas long possession begets tyranny. (Aristotle 2012, VIII)

The third world is not a reality, but an ideology. (Arendt 1970, 2)

CAN NON-WESTERNERS DEMOCRATIZE THEIR SOCIETIES?

There is no doubt that the literature on tyranny (or despotism) is indeed broad, and philosophers, thinkers, and researchers have provided thousands of studies offering several perspectives. The West and the East have both tasted the horrors of tyranny during different periods in history and for different lengths of time. The West has managed to bridle its tyranny to a great extent, while many Eastern societies have struggled to do the same.

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Some researchers distinguish between societies in this regard, declaring certain societies to be a favorable environment or an incubator of tyranny for either long or perpetual periods. Such a distinction is essentially based on the subtle idea that human beings actually differ in their humanity, a natural characteristic that makes certain societies fight against tyranny and others accept it and host it in their present and future political repositories with a passive obedience. This paper challenges these previous interpretations such as those found in Aristotelian political philosophy on “Oriental Despotism and their lack of spirit,” wherein Aristotle states that “there is another sort of monarchy not uncommon among the barbarians, which nearly resembles tyranny. But this is both legal and hereditary. For barbarians, being more servile in character than Hellenes and Asiatics than Europeans, do not rebel against a despotic government” (Aristotle 1999: 73). De Montesquieu (*Asian Despotism*) claims that despotism is the most fundamental feature of Asia, and he states that despotism “requires the most passive obedience; and when once the prince’s will is made known, it ought ineffably to produce its effect” (De Montesquieu 1949, 27).

Several Western thinkers claim that tyranny is a necessary characteristic of the East by tying tyranny to certain persistent social or structural factors of these societies, thereby suggesting that tyranny will continue as long as these factors exist. One of the most prominent of these thinkers is Marquis de Condorcet, who claims that “Islam led to slavery, stupidity and despotism” (cited in Curtis 2009, 58). In a more generalized view, Count Volney depicts Orientals (Arabs, Chinese, Indians, Tartars, and Africans) as if they were engulfed in an inevitable darkness, because of the presence of these same factors (Curtis 2009, 59). Friedrich Hegel also used the concept of “Oriental despotism” in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1914), claiming that in the Eastern world, the only free person was the ruler. In more modern times, Karl Wittfogel suggests, in *Oriental Despotism and Hydraulic Civilizations* (1957) (i.e., agricultural societies), that such civilizations—not necessarily always those in the Orient—are in basic ways very different from their Western counterparts (Wittfogel 1957). Some researchers consider such points of view as a kind of Eurocentrism (e.g., Sunar 2016). Here we can recall Hannah Arendt’s words: “the third world is not a reality, but an ideology” (Arendt 1970, 21). Others go further, such as the Argentinian Walter Mignolo, when they ironically ask, for example, “Can non-Westerners think?” (Mignolo 2013).

Notably, Michael Curtis states that the postmodern view has considered Oriental despotism as a term or mechanism to be “used less for understanding

and analyzing the realities of Eastern societies and politics objectively than for buttressing arguments for colonial or imperialist control by the West over those societies, or for internal Western political purposes” (Curtis 2009, 67), which also often support “the West’s willingness to sell arms to any regime, no matter how repressive” (Smith 2003, 275).

Further still, some contemporary Western political perspectives also believe in the inevitability of such despotism, albeit implicitly rather than explicitly. Given this particular implicit view, some Western researchers have claimed many specific conditions to ensure there are non-authoritarian governments in place in these non-Western countries, such as the adoption of secularism and liberalism in the culture, ethics, media, and neoliberalism in their economies, including full freedom of the market and privatization and high levels of individualism (Fukuyama 1992; Smith 2003; cf. Zakaria 1997).¹ Logically and historically, since it is impossible for non-Western societies to accept all Western ideas and mindsets, this view means that there will be a persistence of tyranny in these societies, which returns us again to zero. The problem is not only here, however, as several people in some non-Western societies also hold opinions that support the inevitability of Oriental despotism (e.g., in the Arab context, see Suliman 2005). The famous Arab sociologist Malek Bennabi described this kind a view reflected an inferiority complex, emphasizing the importance of being creative when developing the most suitable democratic model for these societies (Bennabi 1971).

Briefly, all these biased views might suggest that many non-Westerners societies will not survive their own tyranny because these cultures are characterized by very complex societal and geographic characteristics. For this reason, the main questions we seek convincing answers to in this paper are clear: Is tyranny an inevitable fate of non-Western societies? To what extent do these societies tolerate political oppression? Of course, these questions do not mean all non-Western societies, but most of them. This research recognizes that some non-Western countries have cultivated a good democratic experience, others have practiced a mixture of totalitarianism and incomplete democracy, while most suffered from various types of authoritarian rule (Smith 2005).

1. In the opposite direction, Zakaria (1997) states that “Western liberal democracy might prove to be not the final destination on the democratic road, but just one of many possible exits” (24).

IN SEARCH OF MISSING TERMS!

In recent decades, globalization has brought forth widespread universal ideas and spread the values of democracy, freedom, and human rights on a large scale, thus mobilizing the masses in an ever-increasing number of countries to fight against corruption, tyranny, and all forms of political enslavement (Williams and Warren 2014). In fact, political life is very complex because of the many factors that always influence its formation and development over time. We cannot understand this political complexity without developing interpretive theories and models to understand as many of the most influential factors as possible. This function is one of the most important tasks of rigorous scientific research. Analytical concepts are essential components for increasing the interpretive capacities of such theories and models, as they are a clear representation of the network of the relationship between the significant factors based on particular and precise observed patterns.

Well known to nearly all historians, the phenomenon of tyranny has existed from the dawn of humanity. It seems that we need new tools (i.e., new terms) that can help to penetrate this phenomenon and understand its internal dynamics so as to understand, dismantle, and weaken it as much as possible. At present, tyranny, in all its diverse forms and levels, remains a stubborn obstacle that stands in the way of progress and development in different countries.

Our lives, so often proceeding on different paths, are full of complicated social phenomena. Yet, while these phenomena are there, right before our eyes, we do not have or often even seek the necessary terms to express adequately their precise dimensions and dynamics. This failure means that we come up against what Abdel-Wahab El-Messiri calls “*Missing Terms*” (El-Messiri 1988). To answer the main research question offered herein, some of the facets of the phenomenon of tyranny are analyzed, focusing on non-Western countries, and an attempt is made to determine the accuracy of the inevitable continuation of tyranny in these countries. Based on this analysis, this discussion offers two new terms (only from some aspects): “possible tyranny” and “impossible tyranny,” which may hopefully contribute theoretically and practically, even if in small measure:

- (1) to understanding the phenomenon of tyranny in a more contextual manner and developing tools for qualitative exploration and quantitative measurement of this complex phenomena in future studies (using a strong theoretical framework and precise definitions in subsequent studies); and

- (2) to urging politicians and/or their consultants and followers to reconsider their positions and understand the terrible consequences of tyranny, thus decreasing the tyrannical burden they are imposing on their people.

MOVING BEYOND THE TYRANT'S PERSPECTIVE

The literature on tyranny has two main broad research perspectives. The first emphasizes the tyrant and the second the people or the public with a given obvious bias toward the first. This bias is not recent. In his theories on tyranny, Roger Boesche stated that “Plato took great care to describe the tyrant” (Boesche 1995, 29). In the same manner, Aristotle focused heavily on the manifestations of tyranny as the result of unnatural behaviors by the tyrant, as did Tacitus by referring to “politics of pretense” (51, 85). It is difficult to omit Niccolò Machiavelli in this debate and his work *The Prince* (written 1513), wherein he explains what the tyrant must do to ensure he continues to rule and enslave his people (McCormick 2012, 716). Although we can argue that these two perspectives are the two sides of the same coin, ambiguity and/or complexity may lead us to focus more on one side to discover or understand some interesting dynamics.

From the tyrant’s perspective, we can find many precise and clear contributions that address, for example, the psychology of the tyrant, the personality of the tyrant, his thinking and leadership patterns, and so on. There is no doubt that this research perspective is very useful, as it has produced multiple theories, models, and concepts that are pivotal to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon. However, this perspective also has several methodological disadvantages. These may include the following:

- (1) The tendency to consider tyranny as an individual phenomenon rather than a collective one, even given the presence of references or research treatments on certain aspects related to the public. Indeed, it is difficult to separate the aspects of the tyrant from those of the public or the tyrant’s subjects. In this regard, Boesche (1995) argues that Plato “thought that there was no qualitative difference between the tyrant and the subjects,” and further argues that both the tyrant and the city experience disharmony and disease (signifying injustice), and thereby considers tyranny as an “extreme illness of a city” as well as “an evil condition of the soul” (28–29).

- (2) The inclination to marginalize the impact of political culture and its dynamics, including the role played by the public in the phenomenon of tyranny in terms of its origin and development or even turning this phenomenon into one or another scenario.
- (3) The tyrant's perspective may lead to a kind of confusion about the fate of tyranny, as it tends to describe tyranny as a permanent inevitable destiny in certain *societies*, which is completely untrue. Tyranny, no matter how long it continues in some countries, is bound to end in one way or another, as will be discussed below. It is like water reaching its boiling point. However, we must not rush to discuss this analogy, unless we determine the location and its ecological system. For example, at altitude, water boils before it reaches the usual 100 degrees centigrade. Perhaps nothing prevents us from deciding that the boiling point of societies is also different, i.e., the rejection by society to continue to live in tyranny if it exceeds the limits that can be tolerated.

All the above points emphasize the importance of the public's perspective in the investigation of tyranny. In the next sections, greater clarification of this perspective will be offered. The new concepts presented here fall within this perspective and indeed strive to enrich it.

IS TYRANNY AN INEVITABLE PHENOMENON?

This paper claims that each country inevitably has its own share of tyranny (in quantity as well as quality) imposed by its political leaders for a certain period of time (which may be short or long, past or present). The current research is based on the distinction between two kinds of tyranny: possible tyranny, i.e., acceptable tyranny, which has its own limits or boundaries and means that if this kind of tyranny goes beyond its boundaries quantitatively and/or qualitatively, the country will be expected to experience the second kind of tyranny; and impossible tyranny. The word "impossible" in this instance refers to two types, namely, the impossibility of society accepting tyranny and the impossibility of exercising tyranny through the ruler.

In the following sections, a clarification and a justification of these two terms are presented in a simple way. However, there is no claim that the paper will present a sophisticated framework or provide solid evidence for the notions of possible tyranny and impossible tyranny, but rather a very preliminary approach to understanding it.

Before starting this investigation, it is worth mentioning that the term “tyranny” belongs to a family of political terms that describe one type or another of non-democratic political systems or regimes that threaten the rule of law, constitutionalism, justice, and freedom (Kalyvas 2007, 412). This philosophical family includes, in addition to tyranny, such terms as “dictatorship,” “despotism,” “totalitarianism,” “autocratic,” “Caesarism,” and “Bonapartism” (Richter 2005; Kalyvas 2007; Turchetti 2008).

Although some researchers distinguish between these terms (including putting them in a particular spectrum), others do not and use them interchangeably. This paper considers the whole family of terms, without any distinction between its members. Thus, in case you favor a specific term, such as dictatorship, then you can say here possible dictatorship or impossible dictatorship (or possible despotism/impossible despotism), and so on. In any case, all these terms are meaningful in this discussion.

Possible Tyranny

From the beginning of history, each society has created its own way to legitimize a sort of tyranny in some specific measure (type and level) for a certain period of time. Indeed, a mixture of religious, social, economic, and political factors contribute to an inescapable phenomenon. Plato, in his *Republic*, expressed it explicitly as “the people have always some champion whom they set over them and nurse into greatness . . . this and no other is the root from which a tyrant springs; when he first appears, he is a protector” (quoted in de Vries 2006, 195). Moreover, he sees this tyrant as “a person governed by desire” (Boesche 1995, 32). In the same sense, Aristotle argues that creating tyranny is an easy task, saying: “an ambitious man had no difficulty, if he desired, in creating a tyranny, since he had the power in his hands already, either as king or as one of the officers of state. Thus, Pheidon at Argos and several others were originally kings, and ended by becoming tyrants; Phalaris, on the other hand, and the Ionian tyrants, acquired the tyranny by holding great offices” (Newton 2010, 32). Aristotle stated that “it is not easy for a person to do any great harm when his tenure of office is short, whereas long possession begets tyranny” (Aristotle 2012, VIII). Many rationales can be offered to support the notion of the inevitable existence of this phenomenon. Of these reasons, we focus on the inevitability of leadership and some of its related factors and consequences. By definition, leadership requires having the power to influence the people and their prospects in a specific direction until achieving a declared set of goals. It is difficult to

imagine that the overall process of political leadership can be a completely dictatorship-free phenomenon, since it is impossible to consult all the people and attain all their objectives, interests, and hopes.

This analysis leads us to state that there may be an unavoidable bias toward specific people (interest groups), ideas, options, etc., at the cost of others' interests and rights, even sometimes at the expense of the legal system and justice. Such a bias carries with it or creates a sort of tyranny. All these issues work synergistically through very complicated and accumulated processes to make people accept or, at least, not refuse a strong tyranny or dictatorship at a certain level, time, and of a certain type. It should also be noted that in certain developing countries it is extremely difficult to distinguish between government and the state, given the tight control of almost everything by the government (Englehart 2007). Under these conditions, tyrants may even be described as "leaders who take personal advantage of a chaotic situation" (de Vries 2014, 164).

What is the reason behind such an acceptance or tolerance of this type of tyranny? Mainly, tyrants in these conditions are "skilled at the fine art of boundary management" (de Vries 2014, 6). This art refers to their tremendous ability to know the mood of the masses and recognize the acceptable levels of tyranny and types of possible dictatorship, i.e., acceptable tyrannical behaviors and practices.

Here, a truly significant question arises. Does this acceptance include all citizens and political actors? Of course not, but it does refer to the most influential strata in the socio-political scene, and it does not deny the existence of opposition by the elite, whether inside or outside the country. It also does not deny the occurrence of social protests. Yet, all this must not affect the ruler's ability to govern, control, and continue to maintain enough sufficient internal and external legitimacy to retain power, i.e., to continue a possible tyranny.

One of the important factors that make tyranny acceptable for large segments of the people is that it can often be classified or defined as *developmental tyranny* (Al-Beraidi 2011; Hellmann 2018) or *bureaucratic-authoritarian* practices as in Latin America (Haynes 1999). These kinds of tyranny refer to that political rule that runs a country in an authoritarian manner with an ability to develop an ambitious vision that leads that country to attain major developmental achievements in a relatively short period of time.

Supporting cases are various and located in different spectra of possible tyranny, such as Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay (Smith 2003), Singapore

(McCarthy 2006) and South Korea (Han 2004). Usually in these cases we find that this type of tyranny undergoes a gradual democratization process after achieving its vision or it becomes less cohesive and weak from the inside and thus unable to resist the movement of the community toward justice, reform, and democracy. Thus, it can be said that tyranny, however powerful and deceptive, can usually only have a short life. This factor introduces the notion of the impossibility of tyranny.

Impossible Tyranny

History teaches us that tyranny in many countries works to destroy both resistance and social mobility with all the force and intelligence necessary. It causes many people to despair and may even lead them to believe that the tyranny will last forever. Examples supporting this inference are numerous. Among them is what happened to the Libyan dictator, Muammar Gaddafi, who ruled his country for more than forty years (1969–2011). During this period, Gaddafi practiced the worst forms of injustice and persecution, including the imprisonment, exile, and murder of his opponents. In addition, he disrupted all development and infrastructure projects and forced Libyan society to live in poverty with none or little development. The state of desperation there reached very high levels and many of the people believed there was no escape from this “permanent” tyranny. After these many long decades, vibrant social dynamics that were reworked during the Arab Spring, i.e., in its own pre-figurative context (van de Sande 2013), were able to root out the tyrant and eventually killed him in a tragic event (Webb 2018).

As shown in the Libyan case, possible tyranny has its own limits, which means that if leaders or governments start moving away from certain limits toward types or levels of tyranny that society cannot bear, then the country will move in the direction of impossible tyranny. It should be stated as well that in most cases if there is no adequate political reform, a possible tyranny will be transformed, sooner or later, into a form of impossible tyranny. Therefore, the country will bounce between two conditions, namely possible tyranny and impossible tyranny. Let us, therefore, clarify certain other aspects of impossible tyranny.

In such cases, where there is no good social contract, the political leadership turns out to be a form of *pulsion d'emprise* (instinct for mastery), in which the leaders, according to Laplanche and Pontalis, tend to have an inclination toward cruelty. This cruelty is not aimed so much at hurting others as it is aimed at ignoring them, unless they contribute to sustaining the leaders' authoritarian rule (cited in Hijazi 2005).

In such conditions, the political leaders will develop personal traits that perpetuate autocracy and increase the levels of the exercise of tyranny, especially in any era of reification, i.e., treating people as merely material objects. The most important features of this tyranny are egotism and narcissism (reinforced by the leaders' sycophants), which let these leaders transcend the barriers of tyranny that society can tolerate and eventually reach one form or another of impossible tyranny.

In the early stage of such an impossible tyranny, leaders will seek to subdue the public through a varied practice of behavioral modification, including "sweetened control" and "perception management" where minimum living requirements are provided, in addition to the full presence of the tyrants in the public consciousness, along with both mechanisms of magnification and a glorification of these leaders (Hijazi 2005, 101, 122).

History tells us that these mechanisms do work for some time, but it is impossible for them to continue indefinitely. Given the passage of time, the phenomenon of tyranny turns into what can only be described as a "self-destructive despotism" (Englehart 2007, 144) or self-destructive tyranny. This evolution negates the magic of the art of boundary management.

In fact, there are many reasons why people cannot continue to accept impossible tyranny. These are intertwined and mutually reinforce each other. Among them are the following:

- (1) Tyrants do not usually see any restrictions on their actions, thereby enticing them to indulge in selfishness and narcissism and are governed only by desire (as Plato stated). It makes them behave in a way that serves their personal privileges and enhances the pragmatic utilization of corrupt interest groups. Under these conditions, the tyrannical regime will appear to be a pattern of unbearable tyranny, which is potentially acutely unacceptable by citizens as time progresses, with more and more lack of respect for the humanity of citizens and even a total disregard of their actual personal needs.
- (2) Public awareness develops rapidly, including the truth that democracy becomes a universal value and/or idea. It is, therefore, difficult to imagine that the tyrant will be able to market his despotic rule at the expense of what the people believe in for their society. In these situations, people develop an internal hatred of authoritarian behavior and this hatred continues and constitutes ongoing social trends. This depiction is confirmed in the context of

the revolutions of both information and social networks, which are then integrated by accelerating the movement of public awareness of their own political rights, especially democratization of their country and their lifestyles.

- (3) These information and social media revolutions will establish a comparative mentality that make people tend to compare things in their own country continuously with what is happening in other countries that they believe share some of the same features (regardless of accuracy). Zygmunt Bauman argues that we live in a world of universal comparison, i.e., we compare ourselves with people all over the world (Bauman 2013). In general, people will “have sky-high expectations about the future” (de Vries 2014, 164) and be frustrated when they see that the gap between their hopes and actual reality only increases over time. This frustration generates a growing dislike of the tyrannical regime, which eventually appears to be an intolerable tyranny in their eyes, i.e., an impossible tyranny.
- (4) The repeated failure of politicians to achieve fundamental reforms and fight corruption and unemployment will lead to a situation that can be characterized by the absence or even death of the reformist role model in a country. This circumstance will lead to despair and skepticism toward government projects and distrust of the government’s goals, outputs, and even public benefits. Conditions may develop for a kind of reluctance or non-participation in the government and other activities, which can force the tyrant to institute patterns of “leadership by terror” (de Vries 2014, 2–3). It is clear that this kind of leadership will only hasten to make the tyranny unacceptable to the masses and make tyranny impossible in the future after being possible in the past.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS OF NEW TERMS

Impossible tyranny means the hindrance of public freedoms, popular participation, and reform programs, on the one hand, and the manifestation of corruption, impoverishment, and class inequality, on the other. In impossible tyranny, the ruler is guaranteed absolute power to control everything or most things without returning to the people or any legislative framework. This kind of rule is above the people as well as the law. This kind of tyranny produces injustice, arbitrariness, humiliation, and exclusion, but it does offer stability and security.

As discussed above, the tyrant's perspective tends to marginalize or even ignore the fundamental influence of the people. In order to clarify such a marginalization or neglect, let us analyze some concepts that are closer to the tyrant's perspective. Indeed, these concepts are numerous in the literature, for example, *unlimited tyranny* as opposed to *limited tyranny* and *temporary tyranny* (Kalyvas 2007, 413–14) compared with *permanent tyranny* (Taylor 1822, 76). These concepts focus more on the influence of the tyrant, as if the tyrant were the only one who decides when tyranny is limited or temporary and when it is unlimited or permanent, i.e., the *Hero* is the tyrant and the *Extra* is the public.

On the other hand, the public's perspective does not ignore nor marginalize their fundamental influence on the phenomenon of tyranny. This aspect allows the formula for tyranny to include societal factors, such as taking into account their historical and present aspects. The two concepts, possible tyranny and impossible tyranny, are thus closer to the public's perspective.

After this explanation of the most important aspects of possible and impossible tyranny, we can now formulate initial definitions of these two types of tyranny as follows:

- (1) Possible tyranny: a quantitative and qualitative form of non-democratic rule, as practiced by a despot for a period of time in a manner accepted by the society.
- (2) Impossible tyranny: a quantitative and qualitative form of non-democratic rule, as practiced by a despot for a period of time in a manner unacceptable by the society and thus having an inevitable negative end.

It is very important that we analyze the most significant keywords in these definitions, namely “a quantitative and qualitative form,” “acceptable/a manner unacceptable by the society,” and “an inevitable negative end.” Both the acceptability and unacceptability of tyranny either quantitatively and/or qualitatively are tied to the interpretations of their meaning by the society under investigation, i.e., the forms are subject to internal societal dynamics. As for “an inevitable negative end,” it could be in planned revolutions (such as the cases of Mexico, 1910; Cuba, 1959; and Nicaragua, 1979) or spontaneous ones (such as the cases of China, 1912; Ethiopia, 1974; and Tunisia and Egypt, 2011).

The literature shows that the mobilization and revolution of societies can stem from so many causes, but they can be placed in three main factors: ineffectiveness and inadaptability of required reforms in their proper time, legitimacy of regime, and low economic development (Johnson 1966; Gurr 1968; Huntington 1968). These factors are relative since a specific society may accept a tyrannical rule for a period of time, whereas the same rule will not be acceptable in a different society even for a shorter period. Here, it might be of value to consider Gurr's (1968) theory of relative deprivation, stating that individuals make comparisons of what they think they deserve and what they have actually obtained based on their perception and reality.

To illustrate, let us examine the South Korean case. The tyrannical rule by the South Korean Park Chung-hee was acceptable for almost two decades (starting in 1961), meaning that it was a type and level of possible tyranny. He thus represented what has been called *enlightened* or *benevolent despotism*, wherein the tyrant "typically instituted administrative reform, religious toleration and economic development but did not propose reforms that would undermine their sovereignty or disrupt the social order" (*Encyclopedia Britannica* n.d.). Indeed, South Korean society did undergo major changes that made it reluctant to accept this tyranny for a longer period of time (i.e., becoming an impossible tyranny). This issue led to the demise of this tyrant with his assassination in 1979, i.e., *tyrannicide*. This example reflects the state of transition that can occur from possible tyranny to impossible tyranny because of specific internal dynamics over time, i.e., where South Korean society became more democratic. However, what about the geographic factor?

Consider then the following scenario. South Korean society, as mentioned above, was ruled by the dictator Park during the 1960s and 1970s, and that society accepted the tyranny of this ruler. Then imagine the North Korean totalitarian ruler Kim Il-sung being transferred to South Korea during these decades. Would we expect the South Korean society to accept Kim's rule? The logical answer is "no," of course not, although Kim's rule was a possible kind of tyranny in North Korea at that time (McEachern 2018). Unfortunately, we now see that North Korean society is still currently able to accept greater doses of this despotic tyranny. However, the "North Korean Moment" (its boiling point), i.e., democratic moment, is certainly coming sooner or later.

Not far from Korea, India has witnessed a transformation from what can be described as a central Hindu government to a less centralized type of

government (Sadanandan 2012). The Indian experience tells us that Indians gradually dealt with some of the dimensions of the diseases of their political despotism. How? They have succeeded in reducing the levels of tyranny and changing the nature of its “religious centralism,” which can be described as in John Stuart Mill’s *A Tyranny of the Majority* (Mill 1895). Partially, the Indians have turned their political system into a more democratic model by injecting their democracy with more religious and cultural openness to the extent that a Muslim politician, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam (2002–07), actually rose to the post of president. However, it should be said that any democratic system is subject to setbacks in its corrective and developmental path. An example of this is the imbalance in political representative justice that took place in the Indian Parliament where the representation of Muslims decreased from nine per cent in 1980 to only four per cent in 2014 (compare this with Indian scores in table 1). This was despite the great growth in their population, i.e., from sixty-eight million in 1981 to 172 million in 2011 (BBC News 2019). All the aforementioned makes us cautious when drawing conclusions and stresses the need to look at the complete picture in its historical and civilizational context.

Although the above illustration is somewhat useful in understanding some dimensions of these types of tyranny (possible and impossible), some may say that the most pressing question is: What is the threshold that distinguishes these two types? This is a very complex question, and I do not see a better answer at this stage of research than to say that society is what sets this threshold. Here, I can recall the notion of boiling water, i.e., each society has its own boiling point in rejecting its tyranny. For example, some argue that Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s in Tunisia regime made good “macro” economic progress (5 per cent economic growth throughout the last decade, superior to Middle East and North African (MENA) countries and its per capita income touched US\$3720 in 2010, while formerly it was US\$2713 in 2005, with low job creation) at a time (18 December 2010) when the Tunisian people decided unexpectedly to turn his rule into a form of impossible tyranny that could not be tolerated any longer (Achy 2011). Generally, it can be said that one important signal could be going beyond the state of equilibrium (Johnson 1966), i.e., to reach the state of impossible tyranny. I understand that this is very broad, but it may be a profound answer, and that it does not narrow the prospects for interpreting the ideas of possible and impossible tyranny because it allows enough margin for open or even creative interpretations about various approaches to the answer in future

research. The rush to crystallize an answer to a good question is like bringing good eggs from the farm, but breaking them clumsily. In the next section an analysis will be provided that may shed some light on other cases in different political conditions.

POSSIBLE AND IMPOSSIBLE TYRANNY: FURTHER DISCUSSIONS

Previous sections indicate that it is so hard for tyranny to last forever, which means that impossible tyranny will eventually evolve into another political pattern. This circumstance creates an important question: What possibilities can occur in an impossible tyranny society? The broad answer is this society is doomed to take one of two potential paths:

- (1) The democratic path as clearly exemplified in the South Korean and Chilean societies (for the case of Chile, see Angell 1993). Waller Newell argues that such a democratic path necessitates “a long period of character shaping before they [citizens] can become the rights-bearing individuals of a fully developed liberal democracy” (Newell 2013, 497).
- (2) The non-democratic path, where there are many possible scenarios (Engelhart 2007):
 - (A) The scenario of the social revolution, wherein the popular movement begins to grow like a snowball rolling downhill and soon turns into a revolution that overthrows the autocratic government and starts building a new state (as in the Tunisian case discussed below).
 - (B) The failing state scenario wherein the state is challenged by local conflicting forces (the elite, interest groups, criminal gangs, etc.) that have the ability to influence the course of events but an inability to make effective national decisions and have a developmental consensus, thus leading to a failed state status (as exemplified in Libyan society).
 - (C) The collapsed state scenario, wherein the government and local conflicting forces have no power or influence on either public life or welfare and security (as in Yemeni society). This anarchic situation is likely to continue for some time until the community finds a better national reformer and favorable international conditions. This reformer will then take the first steps toward building a new state.

In light of our initial development of the notion of impossible tyranny, a difficult question can thus be raised: How can we classify the potential transformational patterns of any impossible tyranny? It is difficult to offer a detailed answer or even claim to have a thorough answer to such a preliminary endeavor. There are only some initial answers to put forward here. Resistance of course varies from one society to another. One possible scenario of resistance is to work on the democratization of tyranny, which in the end can lead to a democratic system or at least a less despotic rule. This resistance can be presented as an imaginary message to the ruler, using the jargon of telecom companies as in: “Dear Governor: regarding the political packages that you use, we would like to inform you that it has been decided to stop the ‘*Unlimited Package of Tyranny*.’” Resistance may also occur in another scenario through mass movement. Such a movement may reach the boundaries of revolutionary action, which may become very costly to everyone, including the politicians themselves.

Given the difficulty of giving an accurate answer to this issue as noted above, one can still push the preliminary answer several steps forward and contribute to improving the internal structures of an interpretive model in future studies, on the one hand, and facilitate the understanding of it, on the other. The potential patterns for political transformation that can result from impossible despotism are a transition to:

- (1) Good democracy (a negligible amount of tyranny as clarified previously).
- (2) Medium democracy (the least amount of tyranny).
- (3) Limited democracy (turning to possible tyranny).
- (4) Less authoritarian (possible tyranny).

In order to make the previous proposal both clear and practical, we also offer preliminary examples. Each possible pattern is represented by two countries from three continents (Latin America, Asia, and Africa) with political tyrants representing one or another kind of impossible tyranny or the like. The quantitative model of democracy in the world, the *Democracy Index* (Economist Intelligence Unit 2006, 2008) is also used to compare countries. To summarize, we note the above patterns in table 1.

As noted, some countries may oscillate along the ladder of democracy, where their scores are decreased in the democracy index and the like, i.e., India in this case decreasing by nine per cent from the previous index. This

TABLE 1. Potential Patterns of Transformation for Impossible Tyranny

Potential patterns of transformation	Exemplary countries	Recent tyrants	Democracy index, 2006	Democracy index, 2018	Change (%)
A: Good democracy	South Korea	Park Chung-hee (1963-79); Chun Doo-hwan (1979-88)	7.88	8.00	1.5%
	Chile	Augusto Pinochet (1973-90)	7.89	7.97	1.0%
B: Medium democracy	India	Central Hindu Government (1950-95)	7.68	7.23	-9.1%
	Argentina	Juan Perón (1946-55, 1973-74); military dictatorship (1976-83)	6.63	7.02	5.6%
C: Limited democracy	Tunisia	Habib Bourguiba (1957-87); Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011)	3.06	6.41	52.3%
	Singapore	Lee Kuan Yew (1959-90)	5.89	6.38	7.7%
D: Less authoritarian	Senegal	Léopold Sédar Senghor (1960-80); Abdou Diouf (1981-2000)	5.37	6.15	12.7%
	Morocco	Mohammed V (1957-61); Hassan II (1961-99)	3.90	4.99	21.8%

Source: Author.

change stems from the inability to control the internal dynamic factors that promote the democratic approach, especially for those countries that are in the middle of the road. In all its features, processes, forces, and factors, democracy is a dynamic and not a static process. Therefore, we can state that democracy is getting better by believing in it, working with its dynamism, and gets worse due to the infidelity of democracy and its dynamic factors and the destruction of civil society and the narrowing of the margins of freedom and thought in those societies.

After its national independence, Habib Bourguiba ruled the Republic of Tunisia with an authoritarian approach for thirty years, restricting public freedoms, constricting the margins of expression and recruiting ideological endorsers from intellectuals, academics, and the media to glorify him. Nevertheless, some will view Bourguiba as embodying a form of *developmental*

tyranny, as he succeeded in developing Tunisian education remarkably well and also markedly improved both government performance and infrastructure. In 1987, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali carried out a coup against Bourguiba and then ruled the country in a totalitarian manner for twenty-three years. He eliminated the available margins of freedom of expression and religiosity with a sharp drop in modernization and development and a marked increase in corruption and nepotism (Yuksel and Bdngo 2013).

At a certain point in any history that man has the power to change and reshape, this tyranny turned from being possible, in the past, to an impossible tyranny. This is why the Tunisians overthrew this tyrannical ruler in a mass popular revolution called the “Jasmine Revolution” that occurred from 18 December 2010 to 14 January 2011. The Tunisians reached a stage of transitional democracy on the grounds of the “*legitimacy of transition*” (El-Sayed 2014) and have been struggling to preserve democratic trajectory against a so-called counterrevolution. In the early stage of its democracy, Tunisia had free and fair elections in October 2011 and established a new constitution that guaranteed public freedoms, political participation, and human rights on 26 January 2014. Therefore, we can state that Tunisia achieved a huge leap in the democracy index—as seen in table 1—with a positive change of fifty-two per cent in only ten years, undoubtedly a major accomplishment. However, Tunisia still has to face enduring concerns, especially the fact that the country “is not ‘out of the woods’ economically” (Bellin 2013, 6).

In a more peaceful manner, Morocco achieved, impressively, an almost twenty-two per cent change in its democracy index as shown in table 1. This North African country is a non-oil-producing Arab monarchy of moderate wealth and its economy is characterized by a medium degree of openness toward the outside world enabling foreign trade.² Morocco has suffered from authoritarian rule since the early days of its independence from France. In this brief section, we cannot talk in detail about the negative political aspects of Morocco. Interestingly enough, though, Morocco has undertaken numerous political reforms, introducing amendments to the constitution and authorizing the government to have greater power to move forward toward

2. Morocco is ranked 75 out of 125 countries, according to *The Global Enabling Trade Report* (World Economic Forum (WEF) 2010), and ranked 52 out of 134 (WEF 2014) and 49 out of 136 (WEF 2016).

the application of the principles of constitutional monarchy (Saliba 2016).³ This progress occurred after the Arab Spring.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The initial definitions proposed for the terms of possible and impossible tyranny do create other important questions, including the following:

- (1) How do we identify the “type” of either possible or impossible tyranny? (qualitative studies).
- (2) How do we determine the “amount” of either possible or impossible tyranny? (quantitative studies).
- (3) Can we develop qualitative and quantitative tools to use both to explore and to measure tyranny on its two paths toward the possible and the impossible?

The transition between situations of possible tyranny and impossible tyranny offers unlimited horizons for future scientific research and creates many challenging questions, including the following:

- (1) What factors establish a welcoming environment for possible tyranny and for how long?
- (2) What are the stages that precede possible tyranny and its subsequent stages, and those interim stages that may occur?
- (3) What is the role of religion, ideology and history in establishing tyranny and making it possible or acceptable in a society?
- (4) How can we distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable levels of tyranny in different countries in terms of their political, economic and social dimensions, taking into account both time and geographic factors?
- (5) What societal, political and economic consequences may result from having an impossible tyranny?
- (6) What are the reasons for both instances of success and failure in democratization in the developing world?

3. Saliba (2016) refers to several fundamental changes in the constitution, which include that “the king is no longer described as “sacred”, but the integrity of his person is inviolable” and “now the king has to select the HoG from the largest party in Parliament,” further mentioning that “the new constitution entails a comprehensive body of human rights and fundamental freedoms” (54–56).

Researchers in the political and social sciences are invited to find convincing answers to these problematic questions. Destiny tells us that the inevitable portion of tyranny will continue (possible tyranny in one form or another), but fate itself does give us an opportunity to cheat it and overcome impossible tyranny or at least weaken it considerably. This paper simply seeks to present two analytical concepts in their initial forms as a viable attempt to pave the way for the construction of interpretive models of the phenomenon of tyranny. ■

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