

I learned in my college days that when somebody on campus yelled "Power to the People!" that it was time to take cover. I am allergic to mobs, which are what human beings become when they abandon thought.

The Populist movement is not new. Roman senators as early as 60 BC knew they could buy the favor of voters by putting on a great show: a circus, a great feast, and a big parade. What the senators wanted was their votes, after which they need never concern themselves with the "unwashed masses" until the next election.

Our own Founding Fathers were allergic to mobs too. They established a complex system of checks and balances, a guarantee that change would be orderly and slow, a system that has mostly served us well. But others around the world are not so lucky. We are now seeing countries that we hoped were wedded to our kind of democracy giving up the checks and balances in return for promises of security. This is an alarming revisiting of the political atmosphere in Europe before World War II when country after country embraced fascist or communist dictatorships. The ugliest and most consequential, of course, was the rise of Hitler who won a plurality in a election, seized power, and held no more elections. We know how that one ended.

* Poland. Today, we watch Poland, a country so eager to get out of the clutches of the Soviet Union, which is morphing from a republic to a dictatorship, complete with control of the press, judgeships, and police.

\225 Hungary, during World War II and under Communist control, was run by a nasty dictatorship. After a brief romance with democracy, they are going back to what seems to be their default position, an ugly authoritarian and racist state. Pity the poor Gypsies living there, once more facing extermination.

\225 Turkey. This former model of the best democratic institutions in the Muslim world has morphed into one with a stealthy, relentless Islamist dictatorship. Increasingly dictatorial Erdogan took his time and whittled away at checks and balance, jailing journalists, intellectuals, and judges. When Turkish military attaches to NATO suddenly defect and request refuge in Europe, we know that Turkey is in trouble.

Yes, he won three elections, the last of which obviously tainted, yet has enjoyed popular support. The Power to the People movement in Turkey, which elected him in the first place, came from the flood of poor, pious, and ignorant rural people from the impoverished eastern villages. They fled their misery and settled in slums surrounding the major cities and they voted. Because they are pious, their population explosion numbers lets them outvote the educated western-oriented urban centers of western Turkey. An increasing number of alarmed Turks are seeking refuge elsewhere.

\225 Russia, a country with a long history of authoritarianism, went inevitably from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union (just the leadership changed, not the misery). When the Soviet Union (empire) collapsed, Russia had its first opportunity to join the culture of participatory democracies. Under Vladimir Putin, a telltale creeping dictatorship has returned, the product of populism: Power to the People. They have the power to elect, but get very little out of it afterwards. Any buyers\222 remorse is quickly squashed by the newly revived secret police and tainted judges.

\225 Philippines. With a newly-elected autocratic president, Duterte, the government has looked back to honor their former dictator, Fernando Marcos, who died years ago. He is to have a state funeral, signaling that dictatorships are once more in style.

\225 Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe, 92, is clutching to the power he has abused since 1987. His greatest talent was transforming a rich country, Africa\222s breadbasket, to a miserable, frightening, murderous disaster. People wonder if when he dies, will his supporters stuff him and maintain the system he created?

\225 Spain. Hundreds of Spaniards nostalgic for the nation\222s fascist dictatorship gathered in Madrid to commemorate the 41st anniversary of Francisco Franco\222s death.

Every dictatorship in the world misreads us if they think we are joining them in a

dictatorship. Our system for protecting us is being tested now.

685 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of God's Law or Man's Law. You may contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.