

## **Introduction**

- recounts the failed plan by a militia group in Michigan to kidnap Governor Gretchen Whitmer in the weeks prior to the 2020 election, saying that news of it did alarm the author but did not surprise her as she has studied and been on the ground of many civil war events
- in the last few decades, scholarship on how civil wars start, how long they last, how many people die, and why they fight has grown more than it ever has in the past, with a large bank of it housed at Uppsala University in Sweden
- in 1994, the US government convened the Political Instability Task Force (PITF), a group of academics and data analysts looking at civil war data from around the world and building a model that could predict where instability was most likely to occur (author joined this group in 2017)
- their goal was to watch for signs in other nations so that the US would be prepared to respond but the author began to realise the same signs were happening in the US
- “Civil war in the twenty-first century is distinctly different from civil wars of the past. Gone are the large battlefields, the armies, and the conventional tactics. Today, civil wars are waged primarily by different ethnic and religious groups, by guerrilla soldiers and militias, who often target civilians.”
- most Americans assume that civil war couldn’t happen in their country, that their democracy is too resilient, nation too wealthy, and government too strong for that and the attacks they see on the news are just isolated incidents of the crazy fringe: “But this is because they don’t know how civil wars start.”
- “To understand how close modern America is to erupting into conflict, we must acquaint ourselves with the conditions that give rise to, and define, modern civil war. That is the purpose of this book. Civil wars ignite and escalate in ways that are predictable; they follow a script. The same patterns emerge whether you look at Bosnia, Ukraine, Iraq, Syria, Northern Ireland, or Israel. The pages that follow will explore these patterns: We’ll examine where civil wars tend to start, who tends to start them, and what tend to be the triggers.”
- the book will also look at what to do to stop them
- all with the premise that the trends in the US are headed in the direction of civil war

## **Chapter 1: The Danger of Anocracy**

- details the actions of the American military after the 2003 invasion of Iraq and how this led to civil war, mainly the removal of Saddam’s Baath party members from their positions which led to tens of thousands of bureaucrats, more than 350,000 officers and soldiers, and more than 85,000 regular Iraqis, including schoolteachers all losing their jobs
- “Over the past one hundred years, the world has experienced the greatest expansion of freedom and political rights in the history of mankind. In 1900, democracies barely existed. But by 1948, world leaders had embraced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was signed by almost all of the UN member states. It asserted that every person had the right to participate in his or her government, the right to freedom of speech, religion, and peaceful assembly, and that they had these rights no matter their sex, language, race, color, religion, birth status, or political views. Today, almost 60 percent of the world’s countries are democratic.”
- goes through the benefits of democracy, including that democratic governments are less likely to go to war against their own citizens or against another democratic country than a dictatorship, but also points out that the road to democracy is a dangerous one that often leads to civil war
- civil wars most typically happen when a country is moving towards or away from democracy, a zone called ‘anocracies’ as they are neither autocracies or democracies: “Citizens receive some

elements of democratic rule -perhaps full voting rights -but they also live under leaders with extensive authoritarian powers and few checks and balances.”

-research has found that the best predictor of instability was not income inequality or poverty, it was what is called a nation’s polity index score (a scale from -10 to +10 that ranks how democratic a nation is, with the anocracies ranking in the middle range and being most unstable)

-“Anocracies, particularly those with more democratic than autocratic features—what the task force called ‘partial democracies’—were twice as likely as autocracies to experience political instability or civil war, and three times as likely as democracies. All the things that experts thought should matter in the outbreak of civil war somehow didn’t. It wasn’t the poorest countries that were at the highest risk of conflict, or the most unequal, or the most ethnically or religiously heterogeneous, or even the most repressive. It was living in a partial democracy that made citizens more likely to pick up a gun and begin to fight.”

-the government in anocracy is weaker and less willing to subdue citizens than an autocrat would, it is also often facing internal divisions with strong opposition willing to go to extreme measures to weaken the leader, it struggles to provide basic services and security

-therefore, people can easily find both reason and opportunity to rebel against the government

-“A primary reason for revolt is that democratic transitions create new winners and losers: In the shift away from autocracy, formerly disenfranchised citizens come into new power, while those who once held privileges find themselves losing influence. Because the new government in an anocracy is often fragile, and the rule of law is still developing, the losers—former elites, opposition leaders, citizens who once enjoyed advantages—are not sure the administration will be fair, or that they will be protected. This can create genuine anxieties about the future: The losers may not be convinced of a leader’s commitment to democracy; they may feel their own needs and rights are at stake.”

-this is particularly key when the previous winners are a minority of people with oversized economic power, and they are now facing rule by the majority

-the faster and bolder the move to democracy, the greater the chance of civil war, but if a country takes its time and evolves its political system gradually, democratization is possible

-after a surge of growth in democracy and democratic rights, some nations have begun to move in the other direction and once-safe liberal democracies have had their polity index scores lowered, which has civil war experts worried

-“Democratic countries that veer into anocracy do so not because their leaders are untested and weak, like those who are scrambling to organize in the wake of a dictator, but rather because elected leaders—many of whom are quite popular—start to ignore the guardrails that protect their democracies. These include constraints on a president, checks and balances among government branches, a free press that demands accountability, and fair and open political competition.”

-those leaders who move a nation away from democracy tend to persuade citizens that democracy will lead to more corruption, bungling of economic and social policy, and they attack the compromises that are a necessary part of democracy as signs of ineffectiveness and failure

-these leaders promise ‘strong leadership’ and ‘law and order’ and get voted in because people will often sacrifice freedom to feel more secure

-any change, both toward democracy and away from it, creates losers that need to be addressed

- “Why do some countries safely navigate the road through the anocracy zone, while others become engulfed in cycles of chaos and violence? The story of Iraq again offers a clue. When I asked Noor to describe what changed before civil war erupted in her homeland, she looked at me for a moment. Soft-spoken and reserved, she radiated the quiet confidence of someone who doesn’t break easily. Her face, however, was heavy with sadness. ‘People began asking whether you

were Shia or Sunni,' she said. People had never asked her this before, she explained. In Baghdad, there were no Shia or Sunni neighborhoods; she had never been told she couldn't marry someone from a different ethnic or religious group. She had no sense that she was a minority or that religion mattered; she didn't even know which of her friends were Shia or Sunni. 'But then people started asking about it publicly. What are you? Where are you from? What is your religion?' Noor shook her head. 'I would say, 'I am Iraqi. Why are you asking me this?'"

## **Chapter 2: The Rise of Factions**

- gives the details of the rise of ethnic fighting in Yugoslavia after the death of Tito
- points out that earlier civil wars were fought over ideological or class differences but, since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, more and more civil wars were fought by difference ethnic and religious groups, rather than political groups, but this was only the case in nations where ethnicity or religion was connected to power (where political parties in a country break down along ethnic, religious, or racial lines) and where they tried to exclude others from power
- factionalism is when a country has political parties based on ethnic, religious, or racial identity rather than ideology, and these parties then seek to rule that the exclusion and expense of others
- factionalism alongside of anocracy predicts better than anything else where civil wars are likely to break out
- "Countries that are considered 'factionalized' have identity-based political parties that are often intransigent and inflexible. Boundaries between them are rigid, leading to intense competition and even combat. The groups that are competing are often about the same size. In fact, it's this balance of power between the two groups that creates such fierce rivalry; the stakes of winning or losing are high. These parties can also be personalistic in nature, revolving around a dominant figure who often appeals to ethnic or religious nationalism to gain and then maintain power. A coherent policy platform is often absent."
- factions are most present in anocracies because they don't have the ability to have power in both democracies and autocracies
- factionalism is "unyielding, grasping, identity-based politics" that seeks its identity and power at the expense of the other
- "Factionalism, experts have found, tends to emerge in a predictable way. Elites and supporters of a particular group sense an opportunity—perhaps a moment of weakness in the regime, or a demographic change that heightens their sense of grievance or vulnerability. They then encourage loyalty, not by rallying people around policy issues but by using words and symbols related to identity—religious phrases, historical rallying cries, visual images. The rhetoric gradually reinforces the group's separateness, creating tension in society, and if the faction is in power, it will often use its position to suppress rival factions: eroding due process and encouraging open militancy. This increases fear and distrust among rival groups, which further escalates tensions, leading groups to consider force to resolve differences."
- politicians who have the support of a hardened faction have the leeway to pursue a narrow tribal agenda that benefits them and their followers, preaching compromise as a sign of weakness, and opportunistic leaders tap into fears and resentments and then release small groups of well-armed thugs on the population to secure their power
- this causes the rest of the citizenry to feel insecure about the future and to lose confidence in the government to resolve conflict and they then tend to be driven to the post partisan parties – the ones who promise to protect their lives, their interests, way of life, and conception of what society should be: "Politics goes from being a system in which citizens care about the good of the country as a whole, to one in which they care only about members of their group."

- data shows that once these sorts of political parties emerge in a country, the likelihood of civil war almost doubled and, if the country is also an anocracy, it was as much as thirty times more likely to become unstable
- a superfaction is a group whose members share not only the same ethnic or racial identity but also the same religion, class, and geographic location (where people move together and congregate in regions where people interact exclusively with their own kind)
- the presence of a superfaction makes war even more likely
- the most volatile countries are the ones whose societies are divided into two dominant groups
- one of the greatest fault lines that tend to emerge among superfactions is the urban-rural divide, one that has become only deeper in an age of globalization and technological innovation, as cities increasingly become places of diversity, younger, more liberal, more educated, and less religious – a source of distress for rural citizen who value stability and tradition
- defines ethnic entrepreneurs as individuals who promote identity politics, provoking and harnessing feelings of fear as a way to lock in votes or gain support for taking power
- most often they work with the fears of people who are at high risk of losing power or have recently lost it, saying that this is due to a threat from an out-group, and they must band together to counter the threat
- these leaders also work to persuade those in their group that they are superior and deserve to dominate
- “The fear-mongering rhetoric becomes self-sustaining as circular, as entrepreneurs use the words and actions of their rivals to confirm and inflame the beliefs of their own supporters.”
- average citizens see through the rhetoric of the entrepreneurs most of the time, but they are still willing to support them if they feel that there is a mounting threat to their way of life and that this leader might protect them
- “Politicians are not the only ones who stoke division over identity. There are also lesser ethnic entrepreneurs: business elites (perhaps seeking brand loyalty), religious leaders (seeking to expand their congregation), and media figures (seeking to grow *their* audience and revenue). These elites also stand to lose in a changing society.”
- discusses how quickly things can change from diversity to factions when there are pressures and stresses in the system, when it is seen as “us or them”
- the trend to politics around religion, ethnicity, race, and urban/rural divide is happening in some of the most established democracies, pulling citizen away from secular social ideals and toward identity politics
- leaders are exploiting the human tendency to band together and protect their own during times of rapid change and uncertainty
- citizen do not organize themselves into narrow, intransigent factions overnight, but they start to adopt or agree with things said about their group and the other group, they do this as a way to protect their families and communities from what they see as emerging threats

### **Chapter 3: The Dark Consequences of Losing Status**

- groups are most likely to turn to violence if they are in a position of “downgrading” – they once held power in the form of a political say, land ownership, or job opportunities but saw it slipping away
- “Downgrading is a psychological reality as much as it is a political or demographic fact. Downgraded factions can be rich or poor, Christian or Muslim, white or Black. What matters is that members of the group *feel* a loss of status to which they believe they are entitled and are embittered as a result.”

- humans are much more motivated to try to reclaim losses, especially when they lose status in a place they believe is theirs, than they are to try to make gains
- many of the downgraded ethnic groups that go to war fit the model of 'sons of the soil' – either indigenous to a region or play a central role in its history, they think themselves as the rightful heirs to it and deserving of special benefits and privileges, they deserve to dominate the area because they inhabited or conquered the territory first and all others are outsiders
- “In their dominance, sons of the soil can easily lose sight of their privilege because it is so pervasive; it just seems natural. Their elders are the leaders of the country or their region; they make political decisions for the population as a whole. Their language is the 'official' —and often only—state language. It is their cultural practices and symbols that are celebrated, their holidays that are recognized, their religious schools that get preferential treatment. But when a new group begins to arrive in large numbers, the ground shifts. Outsiders bring their own culture and their own languages. In time, they can swamp the local population.”
- describes Assam and the struggle there against Bengali immigrants, starting with politic struggles and then escalating into the Nellie massacre
- economic factors are important but it doesn't have to be a great disparity in income distribution to have people become resentful about loss of economic status and power
- the loss of economic status and power also need not be deliberate for resentment to be felt, such as in the case of modernization, the process by which rural, traditional societies are transformed into urban, secular ones, which favours citizens with the education and newer skills
- immigration is very often the flashpoint for conflict, which is especially alarming that the world is entering an unprecedented period of human migration, in large part due to climate change
- climate change will likely lead to a greater number of natural disasters and economic crises and it is in these times that citizens will feel the pain of discriminatory political and economic policies and inept government more acutely
- “If a country was already at risk of civil war, natural disasters tended to make things worse. In a world where drought, wildfire, hurricanes, and heat waves will be more frequent and more intense—driving greater migration—the downgraded will have even more reasons to rise up.”

#### **Chapter 4: When Hope Dies**

- goes through the history of the Catholics in Northern Ireland, all of their time of peaceful protest and pushing to try to get more equality and rights and how they believed that the British government, if they got involved, would force the Protestants to treat them more fairly, up until the British army arrived beginning in 1969 and suppressed the Catholic population
- “Scholars know where civil wars tend to break out and who tends to start them: downgraded groups in anocracies dominated by ethnic factions. But what triggers them? What finally tips a country into conflict? Citizens can absorb a lot of pain. They will accept years of discrimination and poverty and remain quiet, enduring the ache of slow decline. What they can't take is the loss of hope. It's when a group looks into the future and sees nothing but additional pain that they start to see violence as their only path to progress.”
- “People are fundamentally hopeful. They want to believe that their life, no matter how bad, will get better with effort. Hope makes the present more bearable and creates incentives for even the downtrodden to work within a system rather than burn it down. But hope requires uncertainty. Citizens can be hopeful because they don't know how the future will unfold and, in their minds, they can anticipate something better.”
- when groups lose faith in the existing system, extremists step in to offer an alternative

- protests don't lead to civil war, they are a sign that the people still have hope, that they believe that their government will listen to them, and their lives will improve' it's the failure of protests that eliminates hope and incentivizes violence
- “Protests are a last-ditch effort to fix the system—the Hail Mary pass for optimists seeking peaceful change—before the extremists take over.”
- protests can be destabilizing in anocracies, which are often too weak institutionally to root out extreme elements and respond in a measured way
- when a country become factionalized, it becomes easier for the government to decide not to respond to the protests of a particular group as they are the other and easier to isolate and punish
- while the number of protests around the world are increasing, the success rate of large peaceful protest to create change is dropping significantly: in 1990s it was at 65% and since 2010 the success rate has dropped to 34%
- elections are also destabilizing events in highly factionalized anocracies, especially when a downgraded group loses
- “Like protests, elections per se are not dangerous. In fact, most citizens are eager to participate in elections, seeing them as a hallmark of a democracy. Elections give people hope. They focus citizens' attention on the long game; people believe that even if they lose today, they could win tomorrow. And the more hopeful citizens are about the future, the more likely they are to try to peacefully work within the system.”
- however, if the losing side thinks it will not gain or regain the power that they once had, then hope disappears
- elections provide important information about a group's ability to garner votes and win power through democratic means
- instability coming from an election most often happens in a winner-take-all system such as presidential or majoritarian systems: all of the democracies that experienced civil war between 1960 and 1995 had majoritarian or presidential systems, none were based on proportional representation
- if the party in power is manipulating the voting process, then an election can also signal to excluded groups that they no conventional means to address their grievances
- elections can also generate or increase factionalization, as politicians strategically play on grievances, fears, and stereotypes to mobilize the support they believe they need to gain power and winning or losing becomes tied to a person's identity and hope for the future
- regular people losing hope don't start civil wars, rather it is the extremists who already have plans who emerge into the limelight when they gain the support of enough of the populace
- a government's response to an emerging militant group, if it is thought to be excessive, can grow local support: “A government's attack on its own citizens has the power to transform the man on the street into a radical.”
- many extremists know that this is the case, and they purposefully try to goad their governments into violent reaction and repression
- extremists will also try to push peaceful protests into more action, arguing that this is the only way to get what they are asking for, and at the same time escalating the government's perception of the level of threat and possibly having them respond with force
- why don't governments provide concessions to protestors if it would help them avoid a war? - some governments believe that their survival is at stake (they might be the future losers); others, particularly those with many factions in their country, might believe that granting concessions to one group might lead to others making their own demands; other governments are beholden to

powerful political, economic or ethnic groups that push the country to take a hard stance; still others are ignorant of the situation on the ground and end up triggering a wider conflict

### **Chapter 5: The Accelerant**

-recounts how the opening of the country to internet access and Facebook did in Myanmar's hope for democracy after military autocracy

"Every year since 2010, the world has seen more countries move down the democratic ladder than up it. This backsliding has occurred not just in places where democracy is new, but also in wealthy, liberal countries whose longtime democracies were once considered sacrosanct. Some elected leaders have attacked free speech and remade their constitutions to concentrate power in their own hands. Others have attempted to undercut representative elections. All have tried to convince their citizens of the need for more autocratic measures."

-Africa looked like it was going to be the one region to buck this trend, also the region with the lowest internet access, but as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have made inroads into Africa, the level of hate speech and conflict began to rise there too

"It's not likely to be a coincidence that the global shift away from democracy has tracked so closely with the advent of the internet, the introduction of smart phones, and the widespread use of social media. The radically new information environment in which we live is perhaps the single biggest cultural and technological change the world has seen in this century. Facebook was initially hailed as a great tool of democratization. It would connect people, encourage the free exchange of ideas and opinions, and allow news to be curated by citizens themselves rather than major news outlets. It seemed like the perfect tool to put power in the hands of the people. Dissidents had a new way to organize and communicate, which promised to usher in a new era of freedom and reform. Facebook became the world's most popular platform in 2009. By 2010, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram were all popular and growing. By 2013, 23 percent of Americans received at least some of their news from social media. By 2016, over 62 percent of Americans did. Today it's over 70 percent."

-however, the age of information sharing has created unregulated pathways to the spread of misinformation or disinformation (intentionally misleading) as well as given a platform to Charlatans, conspiracy theorists, trolls, demagogues, and anti-democratic agents who previously had been shot out of having much of an audience

"As social media penetrated countries and gained a larger share of people's attention, a clear pattern emerged: ethnic factions grew, social divisions widened, resentment at immigrants increased, bullying populists got elected, and violence began to increase. Open, unregulated social media platforms turned out to be the perfect accelerant for the conditions that lead to civil war."

-the central problem is that social media's central concern is on making money by engaging people in more and more views, which is done by giving them more of what can be tracked that they will look at: things that promote fear, falsehood, and outrage

-studies have shown that information that keeps people engaged is exactly the type of emotion-based information that leads them toward anger, resentment, and violence and all three platforms' 'recommendation engines' are designed to ramp this up in order to maintain your engagement

-most powerful is eliciting the feeling of "indignant disagreement"

-these platforms are particularly powerful in giving outweighed voice to the political fringe during elections, where in the past if a politician wanted to influence voters, they had to go through gatekeepers that served as controls

-this is making a whole new face for civil war, rather than populists with antidemocratic views having to stage a military coup, it is now a fight for the minds of voters

-“This is happening in large part because social media allows candidates to sow, or capitalize on, doubts that citizens might have about democracy as a form of government. Disinformation campaigns can be used to attack institutions, undermining people’s trust in representative government, a free press, and an independent judiciary, reducing tolerance and support for pluralism. They can be used to stoke fear, which helps get far-right, law-and-order candidates elected. Finally, they can cause citizens to question the results of an election, claiming fraud and convincing at least some voters that the election has been stolen. To make good decisions about candidates in democracies, voters must have good information, and social media has flooded voters with bad information. As people lose faith in the democratic process, they are more apt to support an alternative system—and to willingly place power in the hands of the charismatic individuals who promise protection and a certain future.”

-social media also helps to spread the myths, emotions, and politics of grievances that are needed to help factionalism spread as well as the platform to help organize and fund extremist groups

### **Chapter 6: How Close Are We?**

-“No one wants to believe that their beloved democracy is in decline, or headed toward war; the decay is often so incremental that people often fail to notice or understand it, even as they’re experiencing it. If you were an analyst in a foreign country looking at events in America—the same way you’d look at events in Ukraine or the Ivory Coast or Venezuela—you would go down a checklist, assessing each of the conditions that make civil war likely. And what you would find is that the United States, a democracy founded more than two centuries ago, has entered dangerous territory.”

-due to the violent speech and interference with the 2016 election, and then with Trump’s expansion of executive power, refusal to cooperate with Congress and courts, continuing violence by his supporters, the US polity index score dropped from +10 to +5, the lowest score it has had since 1800 and moving it into anocracy status

-good news lies in the fact that the courts refused to entertain Trump’s more than sixty lawsuits that he filed claiming election fraud in 2020 and the military refused to follow his orders to use active-duty troops to control Black Lives Matter demonstrators or to get involved in the election

-after Biden was successfully sworn in and the charges were laid against the January 6 insurrectionists, the score rose back up to +8

-“A partial democracy is three times as likely to experience civil war as a full democracy. Recall, too, that the risk of civil war for a decaying democracy rises significantly soon after it enters the anocracy zone. A country standing on this threshold—as America recently was—can easily be pushed toward conflict through a combination of bad governance and increasingly undemocratic measures that further weaken its institutions. The question for America moving forward is whether voters can be persuaded that their democracy works (and is critical to their safety)—and whether leaders will choose to reinstate its guardrails.”

-discusses the growth of factions and identity-based politics in the US, centering around issues of race and religion – with leaders focusing on issues like black and gay rights, law and order, urban/rural divide, immigration policy, and abortion to make votes all about moral imperatives and cultural identities

-many in the Republican party at first saw Trump as dangerous and “utterly amoral” but, when he was able to whip up support in such large numbers, they came around to the idea of being able to secure a majority that would allow them to pass tax cuts for the rich, business deregulation, and environmental rollbacks

-now the Republican party is stuck with having to cater to a strongly factionalized base



-the election of Obama, a dark-skinned president with a Muslim middle name whose cabinet was majority non-white, shattered the myth that white men were the proper leaders of America and caused a great deal of anxiety for those who benefited from that myth

-many white citizens, particularly those in rural areas, were already feeling left behind economically: “Since 1989, the quality of life for the white working class with no college education had been declining according to almost every measure: Their share of income had fallen, their homeownership and marriage rates had plummeted, and their life expectancy had dropped. (The same was not true of working-class Latinos or Black families, or of households headed by white college graduates; living standards for these groups remained steady or improved slightly between 1989 and 2016.)”

-in the past, working class whites had been seen as the backbone of America, but now global trade agreements were benefiting coastal cities and urban dwellers at their expense and immigration was changing the racial and religious make-up of the nation

-“Trump intuitively understood that this deep feeling of alienation could carry him to power. And so he didn’t just focus on division, denigrating Muslims or Black Americans as the ‘other.’ He also emphasized the downgrading of the former white majority—America’s own sons of the soil. Like other ethnic entrepreneurs before him, he put the grievances of white, male, Christian, rural Americans into a simplified framework that painted them as victims whose rightful legacy had been stolen. He spoke often about what was being taken away: religious rights, gun rights, job opportunities. His campaign slogan promised a return to glory: ‘Make America Great Again.’ In him, people saw someone unlike any other candidate, someone who recognized their lives.”

-this faction has the makings of a superfaction, as white Americans are now disproportionately concentrated in rural and central areas, while non-whites tend to be concentrated in urban areas and along the coasts

-“Movements that are geographically concentrated and predominantly rural are more likely to mobilize violent resistance because it’s easier to recruit soldiers, collect funding, and evade police in areas far from the capital.”

-discusses how social media and ‘alt-right’ news was used to spread misinformation and accelerate Trump’s popularity

-“Trump showed future candidates how to lock in a subset of white voters and rally them to go to the polls. One particularly compelling study showed that the best predictor of voters who switched from Obama to Trump was not a change in financial well-being—which had little impact on candidate preference—but instead concerns about status threat, including deep anxiety about the rise of a majority-minority America. Justin Gest showed that the best way to predict Republican support was simply to ask white working-class Americans how much power and status they felt they had lost in the past few decades. White Americans who perceived that they were losing power voted overwhelmingly Republican. In another study, researchers found that by experimentally triggering threats to whites’ social standing, they could greatly increase whites’ support for punitive policies against minorities.”

-those who scored highest on a widely respected racial resentment measure voted for Trump and those who scored lowest voted for Clinton

-draws parallels between the “Lost Cause” reaction to the Civil War that led to those issues never being settled and the reaction to Trump losing the 2020 election

-with the loss of power in 2020, Republican voters are beginning to lose hope that they will be able to regain power through democracy

-“Americans across the political spectrum are becoming more accepting of violence as a means to achieve political goals, not less. Recent survey data show that 33 percent of Democrats and 36

percent of Republicans feel “somewhat justified” in using violence. In 2017, just 8 percent of people in both parties felt the same way. Another recent survey found that 20 percent of Republicans and 15 percent of Democrats say the United States would be better off if large numbers of the other party died. But when does sporadic violence escalate into civil war? How do you pinpoint the moment when hope is lost?”

-lays out three stages for a homegrown extremism group to grow: first is the pre=insurgency phase, in which common grievances and collective identity is built and members are recruited; second is the insurgency state, which is marked by discrete acts of violence meant to publicize their views and provoke the government to take action against them; third is the open insurgency stage in which more sophisticated attacks and weapons are used and extremists try to force the population to choose sides, in part by demonstrating to citizens that the government cannot keep them safe or provide basic necessities, with the goal to incite a broader civil war

-the US is currently a factionalized country on the edge of anocracy that is quickly approaching the open insurgency stage

### **Chapter 7: What a War Would Look Like**

-using research from many recent insurgencies and the trends in the US, creates a scenario of how civil war might play out in America, kicking off in 2028

-points out that civil wars today do not play out like the Civil War of the 1860s, they involve guerrilla warfare and domestic terrorism against democratic governments to make them look ineffective

-discusses the various texts that American radicals are currently reading and cementing their views around, including *The Turner Diaries* and *Siege*, both of which talk about race wars and attacking the government to bring about liberation

-6 stages of ethnic cleansing

1. Classification: identity group in power begins to highlight differences among a country's citizens
2. Symbolization: adoption of certain markers for themselves and for the others
3. Discrimination: dominant group denies or suppresses the rights of others by means of law or custom
4. Dehumanization: those in power use public discourse to turn regular citizen against the targeted minority, denigrating them as criminals or subhuman
5. Organization: dominant group begins to assemble an army or militia and formulate plans to eradicate the other group
6. Polarization: dominant group escalated the propaganda, further demonizing and separating the target group; often interaction between groups is discouraged or prohibited, and moderate members of the dominant group – those who resist or protest these efforts – are imprisoned or killed
7. Preparation: dominant group forms an army and leaders indoctrinate the populace with fear of becoming the victim, claiming that ‘if we don't kill them, they will kill us’
8. Persecution
9. Extermination
10. Denial

-says that the US is currently solidly in stage five, perhaps entering stage six

-stage 7 is significant because it's when the logic of genocide develops as a means of self-defence: “It's common to think that ethnic cleansing is driven by hate. There is hate, yes, but the real fuel is

fear – fear that you are threatened and vulnerable. Violence entrepreneurs tap into this anxiety, exploiting the survival instinct that cues you to destroy your enemy before he can destroy you.”

-“This existential fear leads to a domestic arms race, in which one group is made to feel insecure and, in an attempt to feel more secure, forms militias and purchases weapons, which in turn makes the rival group feel insecure, and so it, too, forms militias and purchases weapons—which then triggers the original side to arm itself even more. Both sides believe they are taking defensive measures, but the effect is to create ever more insecurity, which can spiral into war.”

-“America extremists today subscribe to an idea known as accelerationism: the apocalyptic belief that modern society is irredeemable and that its end must be hastened, so that a new order can be brought into being. In a way, it’s their language for pushing the country up the insurgency scale and perhaps also toward ethnic cleansing. Adherents believe that they are not making enough progress through regular means—rallies, election of right-wing politicians—and as a result must precipitate the change through violence.”

-they are looking for any excuse to set off a chain reaction of violence, which will, in turn, cause moderate citizen to open their eyes to government oppression and social injustice

-discusses the adherence of many of the extremists to a tactic called “leaderless resistance” that avoid large groups and huge rallies, saying that they don’t work because they are too easy to uncover and track, so decentralization to small independent groups and lone actors is the only way to succeed

-tactics generally are to use violence and intimidation to force politicians to give concessions to the extremists either through direct threats to the politicians or inflicting pain and disruption on citizens until they push the government to concede or vote people in office that would be more sympathetic to the cause of the extremists

-with multiple groups, you often see an ‘outbidding’ trend emerge, where groups will escalate to even-more extreme speech and acts of violence, to prove themselves stronger, more capable, and more dedicated to the cause than other groups

-these groups will also engage in ‘spoiling’ when they will do targeted attacks when they feel like moderate groups are making inroads to some concessions and possible reconciliation

-whether or not the US will find itself in a security dilemma depends on whether those on the left feel threatened enough that they decide they should also arm themselves, which is what will be used to justify a move to open violence by the right

-“The United States is not on the verge of genocide. But if militias were to rapidly expand, and violence entrepreneurs were able to work citizens into a frenzy over the need for self-defense, stage seven could be on the horizon. If militias become more brazen, and a sense of insecurity grows, right-wing terrorism in the United States could accomplish a more immediate objective: It could shift the country even more willingly toward authoritarianism.”

-America was lucky that its first modern autocratic president was neither smart nor politically experienced but there are others who are willing and prepared to do better

### **Chapter 8: Preventing a Civil War**

-points out the example of how close South Africa was to civil war as proof of the power of leaders – business leaders, political leaders, opposition leaders – to fight for change and reasonable compromise that addressed the people’s grievances (including the impact that international sections were having on the economy and businesses)

-“Violence often springs from a sense of injustice, inequality, and insecurity—and a sense that those grievances and fears will not be addressed by the current system. But systems can change.”

- key to avoiding civil war is strengthening the quality of governance, which includes increasing democracy, creating more transparent and participatory political environments, and limiting the power of the executive branch
- improving the quality of a country's governance was significantly more important than improving its economy
- three key features of strong governance: the rule of the law (equal and impartial application of legal procedure); voice and accountability (the extent to which citizens are able to participate in selecting their government through free and open elections, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media); and government effectiveness (the quality of public services and the quality and independence of the civil service)
- the US has a significant problem with the decline of free and open elections, having no independent body that ensures a standard procedure and no way to handle disputes that doesn't involve politicized courts, so reforming this would be an important first step
- the electoral college system in the US does a lot to fuel the urban-rural divide and switching to a system where the popular vote determines the winner would make it virtually impossible to win without appealing across racial lines because it would make each citizen's vote count equally rather than giving preferential treatment to the white, rural vote
- reform also needs to happen to overcome the belief that the US government serves special interests more than voters
- "Today, Americans are distrustful of their government. They believe, quite rightly, that their democratic institutions often don't serve the people's interests. The solution is not to abandon democracy but rather to improve it. America needs to reform its government to make it more transparent, more accountable to voters, and more equitable and inclusive of all citizens. Rather than manipulate institutions to serve a narrower and narrower group of citizens and corporate interests, the United States needs to reverse course, amplifying citizens' voices, increasing government accountability, improving public services, and eradicating corruption. We need to make sure that all Americans are allowed to vote, that all votes count, and that, in turn, those votes influence which policies are enacted in Washington. Americans are going to regain trust in their government only when it becomes clear that it is serving them rather than lobbyists, billionaires, and a declining group of rural voters."
- more citizens need a stronger education about the key levers of power in democracy, what power is, what forms it takes, who has it, who doesn't, why that is and how it is exercised
- the US government also has to seriously address its problem with extremist groups and domestic terrorism, particularly as they grow and attract recruits from law enforcement and the military
- "The best way to neutralize a budding insurgency is to reform a degraded government: bolster the rule of law, give all citizens equal access to the vote, and improve the quality of government services"
- this would include undoing fifty years of declining social services and prioritizing high-quality early education, universal healthcare, a higher minimum wage, immigration reform, affordable housing, lower college costs, and access to effective addiction treatment
- "The government should obviously take a zero-tolerance stance on hate, and punish domestic terrorism, but it could weaken support for extremism by addressing the legitimate grievances that many citizens have."
- the government also has to show that it can protect citizens, that it will promptly and fairly prosecute those who break the law, and supply hard evidence that playing within the system is more fruitful than not

-we hear that the US is too polarized and there is no chance any more of the two sides meeting in any middle: “But political polarization does not increase the likelihood of civil war. What increases the likelihood of civil war is factionalization—when citizens form groups based on ethnic, religious, or geographic distinctions—and a country’s political parties become predatory, cutting out rivals and enacting policies that primarily benefit them and their constituents. ”

-nothing abets and accelerates factionalization as much as social media and if you “take away the social media bullhorn and you turn down the volume on bullies, conspiracy theorists, bots, trolls, disinformation machines, hate-mongers, and enemies of democracy”

-conspiracy theories and myths fuel factionalism, providing an “other” to target and along with the belief that this enemy is steering the country to their disadvantage

-quote from Voltaire: “Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.”

-calls for strong regulation on social media, which would have the effect of strengthening liberal democracies around the world

-some of the ways that people are currently trying to reform the US include the rebuilding of civil society and participation at the community level

-“America faces a monumental challenge: to create a truly multiethnic democracy, one that can survive and thrive as global migration continues to mold the country’s demographics and identity. The world has changed dramatically since the late 1700s. Democracy is no longer just for white men who own farms. It now includes women; rural, urban, and suburban families; people who were born here and people who risked their lives to come here; white, Black, brown, mixed race, and everything in between. We need them all: Countries with low birth rates that try to stop immigration will slowly die because their populations will dwindle. Our democracy will have to protect the rights of small groups while also forging a unifying national identity. We will need to show the world that a transition to multiethnic democracy can be done peacefully and with no decline in prosperity.”

-the US will be the first Western democracy where white citizens lose their majority status, but other countries will soon follow

-far-right parties in the countries undergoing this transformation have promoted the myth that the rise in power and status of non-whites will cause the economic and social decline of whites but people are starting to see that this is not the case

-“To fulfill the promise of a truly multiethnic democracy, the nation must navigate deep peril. We need to shore up our democracy, stay out of the anocracy zone, and rein in social media, which will help reduce factionalism. This will give us a chance to avoid a second civil war. If we can do that, we might be in a position to tackle another looming threat: climate change. A warming planet will increase the number and severity of natural disasters, endangering our coastal cities, and causing heat waves, wildfires, hurricanes, and droughts. It will also certainly increase migration from the global south to the wealthier, white north. In the absence of a strong and effective government response, it will tear at our social fabric.”