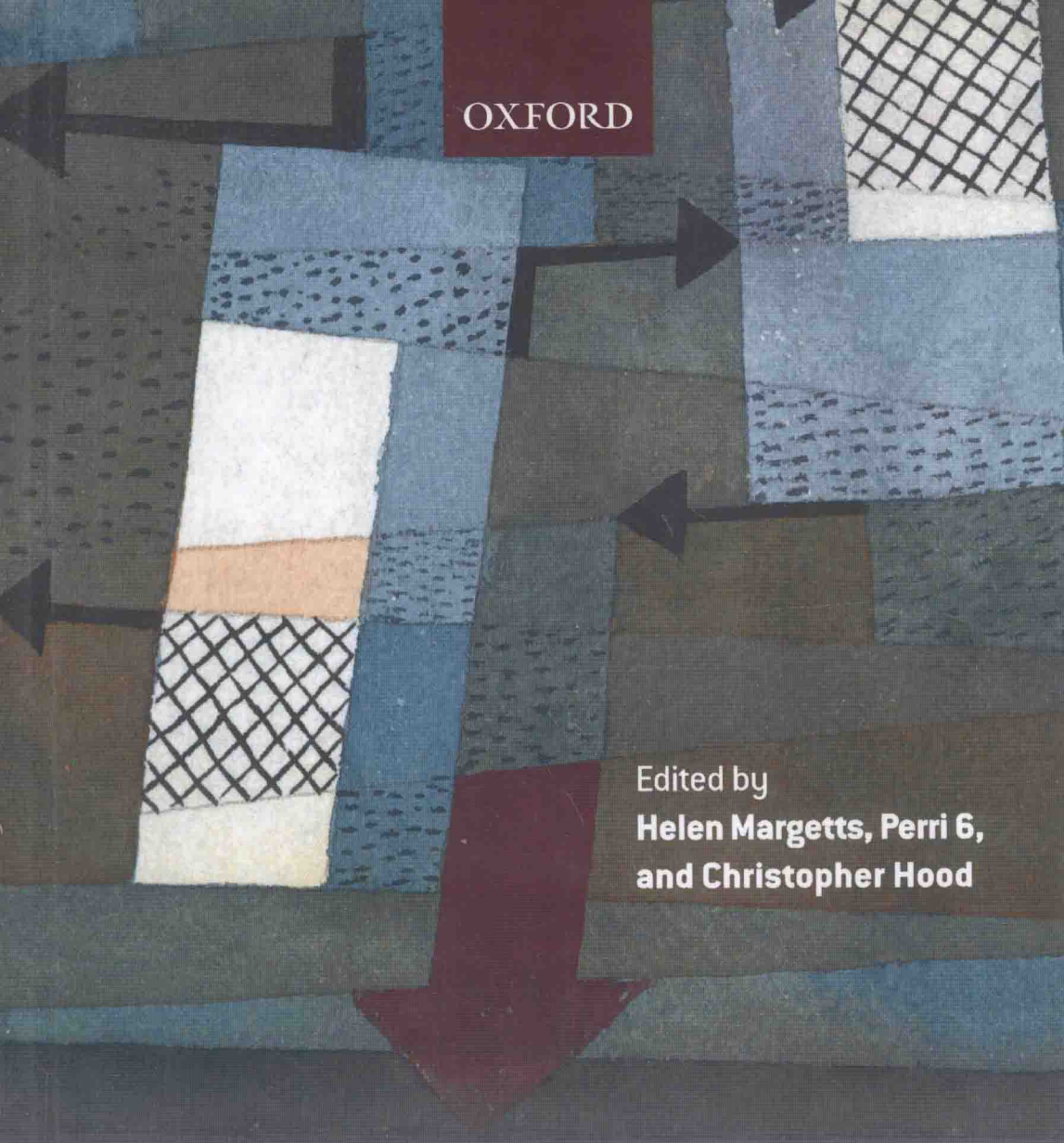

Edited by
Helen Margetts, Perri 6, and Christopher Hood

PARADOXES OF MODERNIZATION

Unintended Consequences of Public Policy Reform

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Preface to the Paperback Edition

We originally wrote this book because we were fascinated by how and why 'modernizing' initiatives of various kinds can lead to outcomes that no one intended and few anticipated. So we wanted to delve into what the beguiling idea of modernization means. We assembled a set of cases of modernization initiatives with effects that were unintended, ranging from happy surprises through unwelcome side-effects to serious failures. And we set out to explore what are the distinctive characteristics of public policy reforms with modernization aims that go wrong.

Since the book was written, there have been dramatic large-scale events which make an exploration of modernization more timely than ever. One major example is the world financial crisis stemming from the failure of the complicated and ostensibly modern regulatory systems designed to manage financial risk. A once-feted system of risk-based regulation applied to technologically based market operating systems (such as derivatives, trading algorithms, dividing risk into smaller tradeable units) has been, quite literally, tested to destruction, with catastrophic results. No less dramatically, some of the established characteristics of the modern state system have been challenged by a social backlash on a scale anticipated by few people. Across Europe, North America, and beyond, there has been negative feedback against banks, governments imposing spending cuts, and even against modern capitalism itself by the aggrieved and disenchanted. That backlash has manifested itself in demonstrations, protests, capital outflow, and even riots, the extent of which have surprised policy-makers.

In North Africa and the Middle East, a wave of demonstrations, riots, and armed rebellions unanticipated by those steeped in 'orientalist' conceptions of that region caused some regimes to fail or have to face civil war. Some mobilizations have been successful in overturning autocratic and repressive regimes and have earned the 'revolution' label, with moves towards democracy in places where until recently it seemed impossible. There have also been disastrous results not only for those regimes themselves but for the many citizens who were killed or impoverished, and for

the international legitimacy of the western countries which had for so long supported those regimes.

All these sets of events illustrate what can happen when modernization of the state lags behind technological modernization in society at large. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, it became clear that states and policy-makers had placed their faith in 'light touch' regulatory strategies which were entirely inadequate to address technological modernization in the markets at which they were aimed. Policy-makers can find themselves in catch-up mode, relying on technologies and strategies which mean that they struggle to divine where, when, and how the next event will take place. Even the rioters that terrorized streets in some English cities in the summer of 2011, defined by some policy-makers as belonging to the 'underclass', not generally known for technological sophistication, were using Blackberrys, which provided secure messaging. Although police intelligence officers were able subsequently to access Blackberry data sets to identify suspects, they did not have access to the data while the riots were going on. To the frustration of many citizens, police in England therefore had to concentrate on using technologies to assist in arrests after the events rather than in intervening with 'red-handed' suspects.

In technologically less sophisticated regimes, the technological and informational capacity of police and security agencies to control and manage demonstrations and protests has been weakened by the capacity of ordinary citizens to mobilize, organize, and coordinate using an ever-changing cast of social media platforms. In at least some cases, this has been a happy rather than an unhappy surprise. Some autocratic regimes toppled or threatened by the revolutions of the Arab world and North Africa might have been able to do more to save themselves if they had understood better — as, at least until now, the regimes in Iran and China appear to have done — what their people were doing with communications technologies. In Syria, for example, while the country threatened to erupt into civil war in a succession of civilian demonstrations and riots and military crackdown, officials asked potential supporters of the protest at the airport if they 'have the facebook' in their luggage. Far from furthering the rationalization of the state that early modernizers predicted (and anti-modernist commentators decried), societal use of technologies that outstrip and outwit those of the state may bring policy-makers ever more uncertainty and surprise.

This book's analysis has something important to offer to those seeking to understand such epoch-making institutional collapses, as well as the more everyday types of surprises represented by our case studies. We argue that

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unhappy outcomes often stem from unbalanced combinations of modernization and insufficient variety in institutional forms and consequent blinkering of institutional ability to listen and learn. That explanation applies just as strongly to rare catastrophic events such as global financial crises and regime collapses as it does to the more commonly occurring cases of underachievement, waste, futility, and unwelcome side-effects from the modernization initiatives that are explored in this book.

Ever since 1929 (and no doubt earlier) political scientists have liked to tease economists about financial crashes — 'why did you not see it coming?' But events such as the 2011 'Arab spring' put the joke on us political scientists. By looking in detail at modernization reforms — trying to understand the modernization processes that succeed and those that do not — we hope this book will inform policy and institutional design, making us a little less vulnerable to complete surprise and shock from the next major development on the horizon.

Helen Margetts
Perri 6
Christopher Hood

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I

Understanding Modernization's Paradoxes

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