

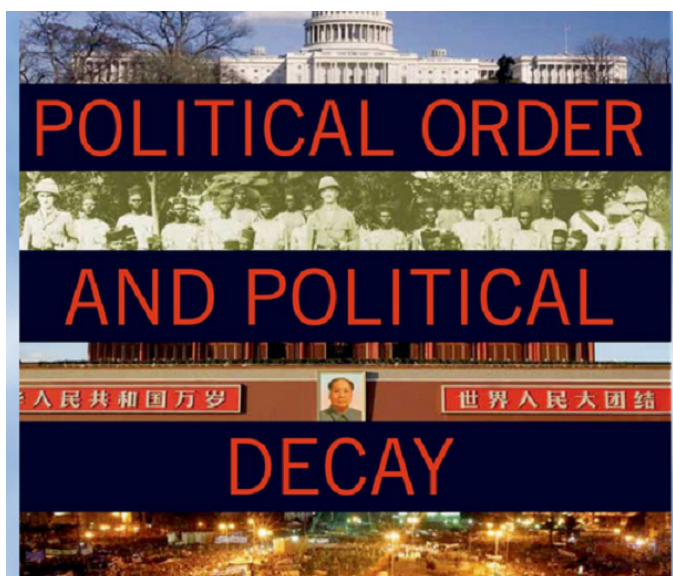
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REVIEW

POLITICAL ORDER AND POLITICAL DECAY: FROM THE INDUSTRIAL RE- VOLUTION TO THE GLOBALIZATION OF DEMOCRACY

*Author: NFUKUJAMA, Francis. New York. Publisher: Farrar, Straus and
Giroux, 2014. 672 pages. ISBN: 0374227357*



Yoshihiro Francis Fukuyama, North American author, of Japanese origin, was born in Chicago in 1952. As a Political Scientist, he has a wide repertoire in the field of international politics and development, although he obtained his most important international recognition as a writer in 1992 with the publication of *The End of History and the Last Man*, which has been translated into 23 languages. He studied at Cornell, Yale, and Harvard Universities, and keeps in contact with the academic world teaching at Stanford University. Of neo-conservative ideas, he has had an active role in the politics of the United States during the terms of office of the last three presidents, particularly as a member of the Project for the New American Century, in support of the United States world leadership. Presently, he is acknowledged as one of the great thinkers of our days.

In *The End of History*, he theorized about the end of the Cold War and the triumph of liberal democracy which the author considers, above all ideologies, will mark the last stage of human evolution. Although the first edition of this book saw the light in 1992, it was in the summer of 1989, months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, when his essay on the end of history was published in the magazine *National Interest*.¹ Since the beginning, the confinement of his theory on Hegelian postulates, a circumstance that has allowed him to show liberalism as a homogenous and universal political regime, has won him the majority of his criticisms. In addition, his approach, focused mainly on the evolution of the Chinese and Soviet peoples, extrapolates conclusions which many scholars oppose.

One of the most famous replies to his exposition was made by Samuel Huntington when, in 1993, he detracted importance to the role of liberalism in a world where liberalism had not reached more than half of the regions, and had not been raised to the status of unavoidable in the rest. Thus, from Huntington's perspective, it is the clash of civilizations and the battles that the latter will endeavor, the real determining factor of politics in the future.

Political order and political decay, which came out in September of 2014, was conceived as the second part of *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*, published in 2011, the revealing work of the political thought of Fukuyama who analyzes the peak and the decadence of political institutions since pre-history to our days. To do so, to gauge the total meaning of this author, one must read both works. Going from the origins of political order to the decadence of the system through both works not only implies a historic introspective but also a critique to our own survival.

For Fukuyama, political order is based on three elements: state building, rule of law, and accountable government. Democracy, as an expression of accountability, previously needs the existence of a strong state and the rule of law. The order of these factors is very important in Fukuyama's theories. Many nations have diverse combinations of such elements, although not always in the correct order: China has a strong

1 <https://ps321.community.uaf.edu/files/2012/10/Fukuyama-End-of-history-article.pdf>.

state, but lacks the other two elements. India, on the other hand, has the rule of law and democracy, but not a strong state. The failure of different African countries is due to the attempts to develop a democracy without having a state. Japan would be a good example to attain democracy with the existence of a strong central government. In spite of it, some countries have not followed this order, such as the case of the United States where it was democracy that generated a strong state, with great effort and throughout many years.

Fukuyama still considers liberal democracy as the best system to guarantee political order and prosperity, and no alternative is perceived. Some other countries, such as Denmark, for example, are a reality for the author, and, at the same time, a metaphor of order. The contrary would be the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the worst case. The author analyzes the signs of decadence, derived from an inadequate implementation and which may be observed in the North American model: “*vetocracy*” or the capability of small groups to veto decisions; “*repatrimonialization*”, derived from the preponderance of private interests imposed by pressure groups (lobbies, universities, families, corporations), and independent from public interest; the accountability systems, which make the decision making process slow and laborious within a very protectionist and bureaucratic system; and the existence of ruling elites that perpetuate the structures of power. Corruption, injustice and inequality are some of the signs of this decadence which require urgent adjustments.

Another key idea of Fukuyama is the connection between war and political development, and the existence of conflicts between nations which lead to the search for a democratic system as an end, as happened with the countries involved in the two world wars. Based on that, Fukuyama justifies the political instability in Latin America, an interesting analysis which is related to the one made by Gregory Treverton and Nicholas Taleb, published in *Foreign Affairs Magazine* in 2015. *Anti-fragile*, title of Taleb’s last essay, would be those states that strengthen themselves in the midst of chaos or of conflict, as a concept that goes beyond resilience. For these analyses, they establish five key indicators of fragility: a centralized government, a non-diversified economy, a high level of debt, absence of political alternation, and the absence of a past and a history of overcoming conflicts. For these authors, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Venezuela, Russia, Iran, Greece, and to a lesser degree, Japan, Brazil, and Nigeria, would be anti-fragile and, thus, exposed to higher risks.

Another idea that could nourish a debate beyond those borders stands out, based on the American model: the immutability of a Constitution that is considered sacred, and that limits the capabilities of the United States to adapt to the new environment.

An enormous variety of factors (identity, geography, trade, tradition, and even chance) influence the historical evolution of the countries that the author analyzes, but those factors do not definitely determine their fate. The political decisions adopted are the ones which determine the present and the future. He cites Costa Rica as an example of a country that has adopted right decisions, while in Argentina they have adopted wrong ones.

It is an enjoyable, profound, and daring work for its dimension, but too cautious in providing recipes for the problems posed, or of making projections about the future. One of the few future predictions he makes is about China, considering that the growth of a strong middle class will force the government to open the system to avoid a breakdown of the political order. In that case, China will have the advantage, as previously mentioned, of having a strong central government.

It is a splendid showcase of historical passages, some more detailed than others, which leaves the reader breathless and with almost no hope. Although the author admits he feels helpless, his forecast is that decadence can only be fought with changes, although even in a demonstration of humility, the author admits he does not feel capable of suggesting a single one. The work is as short in modesty as long in ambition because it only makes room for his premises, and intends to formulate a global and universal treatise on political order, though not lacking a large amount of reality. Along these lines, its reading may be completed with works such as *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* or *The End of Order*. In any case, an author and work worthy successors of the efforts of Alexis de Tocqueville, a thinker and the ideologist of liberalism in the 19th century.

In a world that changes furiously, and in which economic, social, and technological factors gain greater importance, focusing the guarantee of political order on the states could be one of the aspects that deserves more debate. The development of non-state powerful actors, the current crises of democracies, the loss of faith on institutions by the citizens, the power of international corporations, the weight of financial markets, or the growing influence of the large cities may lead to thinking of a more diffuse power, needing new balances.

As Nik Fraser commented in *The Guardian*, it is one of those books one must read, even if it is just not to forget the warnings.