


2015

## Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy by Francis Fukuyama

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### Recommended Citation

Quest, Linda (2015) "Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy by Francis Fukuyama," *International Social Science Review*: Vol. 91: Iss. 1, Article 15.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr/vol91/iss1/15>

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**Fukuyama, Francis. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2014. 672 pages. Hardcover, \$35.00.**

Political science, history, economics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology are all included in this very readable book. Fukuyama's multilayered, interdisciplinary, cross-cultural erudition is coupled with narrative as engaging as that of Jared Diamond (e.g., *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, 1997; *Collapse*, 2005; *The World Until Yesterday*, 2012). It is comprehensive, comparative across time and place, cohesive, intelligibly presented, objective, mesmerizing. Fukuyama does with this volume, together with *Origins of Political Order* (2011), what Neil deGrasse Tyson did with *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey* (2013-2014). They push the scope of their subjects past previous parameters. They transform us, as persons, into individuals who are substantially more than any self-conceit or Big Man aspirations. How this plays out in *Political Order* and *Political Decay* is illustrated by the story of Robert and his wife, who started-up a soybean company in Nigeria. Its growing success had the potential of a win-win for everyone—farmers, consumers, employees, the treasury—but it was turned into a lose-lose by kleptocratic officials—local, state, national—who saw a business to plunder for their personal gain, and couldn't, wouldn't, didn't take the longer-term view of public benefit, tax revenues, and future political acclaim. Such examples are real, commonplace, and contrary to development.

“End,” “history,” and “liberal” are three terms that need conscientious examination with regard to *Political Order and Political Decay*. “The End of History” (*The National Interest*, Summer 1989) is the title popularly associated with Francis Fukuyama. As a political scientist, this article made his name and elevated his status to world-class public intellectual. Initial excitement was stirred by the phrase from Lenin and by some historians' very literal interpretation. However, let us understand “end” as purpose, point, aim, or *raison d'être* of something—in Fukuyama's case, history. History can entail researching, reporting, and studying accounts of significant events chronologically arranged. The point of that is to benefit from others' experiences, avoiding their mistakes, and making some anticipatory scenarios of one's own. Fukuyama's work demonstrates that our future is contingent on the most reliable possible history as a global commons. However, “history” can also mean obsolete, no longer timely, or “not modern.” In *Political Order and Political Decay*, “modern” often refers to impersonal, merit-based, rule of law, transparent, and accountable, as distinguished from personal, nepotistic, patrimonial, arbitrary, autocratic *history*. *The End...* was not the end but the spring board.

Academic history presents both opportunity and hazard through publication and study of significant events chronologically arranged and intelligibly analyzed. It can consciously and deliberately be used by persons who wish to differentiate themselves from their antecedents or who want to modernize what they do. Contrariwise, persons who would prefer to resurrect the past can block or reverse modernization. Fukuyama documents repatrimonialization, a technique to do that. As Fukuyama says, “No one living in an established liberal democracy should therefore be complacent about the inevitability of its survival” (p. 548).

“Liberal” is another word at which to take a closer look in reading Fukuyama's work. The possible meanings of it in *liberal democracy* matter. ‘Rule of law’ is one version of liberal. Political rights and civil liberties constitute another. A further version is ‘public goods,’ including open-access services and infrastructures associated with health, education, and welfare. Students need to be alerted to the risks of cognitive dissonance regarding the word “liberal.”

Alternative paths are possible and feasible, connecting economic growth, social mobilization, broad political participation, and democratic institutions. Political goals differ. Fukuyama highlights meaningful correlations, such as middle classes wanting rule-of-law protection of their rights and property, particularly from predatory governments that foster graft and cronyism or selective income redistribution. Especially sensitive would be redistributions such as social security and public goods favoring classes that would use their political participation to support such benefits and their benefactors. Large owners of property and minimum wage workers might be traditional in their thinking and clientelistic in their practices, essentially patrimonial, more like feudalism than liberal democracy. “There is no automatic historical mechanism that makes progress inevitable, or that prevents decay and backsliding” (p. 548).

In the interest of utilizing recorded history as feedback on what has worked and how it worked or failed, let students start by reading the textual material. Cross-checking and authentication are crucial, so let faculty start by inspecting notes and sources. Such division of labor has enriched classroom dialogue. What significant books or articles would faculty have included that Fukuyama did not—perhaps C.W. Cassinelli’s *The Politics of Freedom* (1961), David Spitz’s *Patterns of Anti-Democratic Thought* (1981, c1965), and others that—at second-, third-, or fourth-hand— have influenced generations of students, journalists, and scholars. How would the narrative or argument have been affected? The analogy would be a puzzle of a scenic panorama. Does the customer want a version with twenty-four pieces, forty pieces, eighty-four pieces, or more? Is it the same picture? State, rule of law, legitimate coercion to agreement, transparency, and accountability are pieces to be kept in the puzzle of developing and sustaining prosperity and liberal democracy—in the sense not only of good order, but also political rights and civil liberties. However, “one of the characteristics of modern developed democracies is that they have accumulated many rigidities over time that make institutional adaptation increasingly difficult” (p. 451). One more source—or ten more sources—could alter the impression of Fukuyama’s analysis and narrative.

Inescapably, entropy is a real side of life: “In fact, all political systems—past and present—are liable to decay” (p. 451). Just as the map is not the territory, the sources are not the institutions. History books, ingenious philosophies, and political science texts are not the life, although Fukuyama’s *Political Order and Political Decay* shows ways to tie them together. In a six-credit interdisciplinary political science and history course, it did just that.

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