

Francis Fukuyama. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, pp. 658.

Francis Fukuyama has written a great deal about political development over the past ten years, and has marshalled an impressive body of scholarly literature in attempting to build on Samuel Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968). The first volume, *The Origins of Political Order* (2011), broaches the issue of how political order emerged, hypothesizing about pre-historical political communities, and carrying his analysis to the early industrial period. With *Political Order and Political Decay* (2014) Fukuyama is more interested in broader and more ambitious lines of inquiry: What are the essential components of state formation? What factors contribute to the emergence of stable, effective, and accountable states in some regions, while other regions fail to produce strong states? What factors contribute to state and institutional breakdown? Fukuyama's willingness to ask big questions, and his mastery of such a broad universe of social science literature, mark *Political Order and Political Decay* as a major contribution to the literature.

Humanity's original sin, according to Fukuyama, is the sin of "patrimonialism," the tendency of people with political power to extend benefits to close family members as a means of securing loyalty. "Much of what passes for corruption," according to Fukuyama, "is not simply a matter of greed but rather the by-product of legislators or public officials who feel more obligated to family, tribe, religion, or ethnic group than to the national community and therefore divert money in that direction" (pp. 185-86). With this primordial feature of human nature in mind, Fukuyama argues that many of the failures of modern governance are a function of weak states, weak institutions,

and weak commitment to the ideals and values that provide the justification for “good government” – meaning “capable, impersonal, well-organized, and autonomous” (p. 38) – and not merely “accountable,” in terms of responsiveness to key constituencies. Fukuyama’s recognition that democracy and good government do not necessarily go hand-in-hand represents a departure from the classical development literature and helps explain why U.S. attempts at nation-building failed in the opening decade of the twenty-first century (p. 134).

An important element of Fukuyama’s project is to investigate why some regions of the world have struggled to produce effective, accountable political institutions. In Latin America, for example, he notes the “birth defect” of inequality that was part of the bequest of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism, but also observes that Latin America did not experience the threat of sustained warfare, which compelled European nations to gradually modernize over a period of time. In contrast to European elites, Latin American politicians instead have tended to collude with one another to maintain authoritarian and inequalitarian political institutions, confronting the greater perceived threat posed by populist revolutionary movements, and allowing persistent inequities to fester in the region.

In Africa, the geography and dense jungles of central Africa prevented the emergence of strong, accountable indigenous institutions. Political leadership in pre-colonial central Africa tended to be highly personalistic, largely transactional in nature, and as a consequence the very notion of political identity in the pre-colonial era was highly fluid. Fukuyama, citing an extensive Africanist scholarship, notes that tribal societies in the pre-colonial era were generally “consensual and egalitarian, with plenty of checks on the power of the Big Man” (p. 306). In the absence of nascent domestic institutions, colonizing powers attempted to use variations of “indirect rule” to empower local elites and provide them with the extractive capacities that they required in order to make colonialism worth the investment of political capital. The results, paradoxically, were weak but authoritarian institutions in the post-colonial era unable to break out of crushing cycles of patrimonialism and clientelism that have worked to retard economic growth, which, according to Fukuyama, is a crucial element for the development of accountable and autonomous states. In discussing the horrors of the civil war in Sierra Leone, which wracked that West

African nation from 1991-2002, Fukuyama rejects the conventional wisdom – that the atrocities were driven by a stripping away of a thin veneer of western civilization, and a return to a more primitive mode of tribalism – and persuasively argues that the political “vacuum was filled not by traditional African society but by a half-modernized hybrid of deracinated young men who organized themselves to take advantage of the global economy and exploit natural resource rents from diamonds and other commodities” (pp. 301-02).

Similarly, in the United States – whose birth defect was a nearly universal and inveterate mistrust in a strong, centralized government – the Framers created a prudential system of checks and balances that has subsequently transmogrified over time into a “vetocracy,” in which the two-party system combines with the separation of powers to produce a proliferating number of additional checks (e.g. divided government; the disaggregating influence of increasingly adversarial interest groups; an increasingly unaccountable regulatory state, etc.) that steadily impairs governing capacity, and severely wears down trust in government. Fukuyama’s assessment of the obstacles to reform is at once sober and somewhat pessimistic. To illustrate, he observes that the “typical American solution to perceived government dysfunction has been to try to expand democratic participation and transparency” (p. 504), while warning that the public is ill-suited to engage in such large-scale, complex public policy deliberations. Fukuyama concludes that the “obvious solution to this problem would be to roll back some of the would-be democratizing reforms, but no one dares suggest that what the country needs is a bit less participation and transparency” (p. 504). Fukuyama’s discussion of the “repatrimonialization” of American political institutions is a must-read for any American Government instructors seeking insight into the current dysfunction confronting the U.S. system, and the daunting hurdles confronting any attempts at reform.

Students of comparative politics will also benefit from Fukuyama’s discussion of the Arab Spring, and the struggle of Islamic societies to create and maintain effective and responsive regimes. Fukuyama draws an intriguing historical parallel between the Arab Spring and the European revolutions of 1848, noting that

... the initial toppling of authoritarian regime and the organization of democratic elections is only the beginning of a much longer process of political development. Democracy is built around the institutionalization of mass participation in an agreed political process, which requires in the first instance well-organized political parties. The middle-class liberals who lead the revolution have to go on to organize themselves to be able to contest elections, and they have to be able to form coalitions with other groups (p. 432).

Fukuyama observes that the political and social transformations that regions like the Middle East are currently experiencing produce fertile ground for both authoritarians and radical revolutionaries. Unfortunately, the “rise of political Islam in the last part of the twentieth century does not therefore ... reflect the return to an eternally unchanging Islam, as both proponents of radical Islam and their critics maintain, but rather is a response precisely to the half-modernized state in which much of the Middle East finds itself” (p. 434). The fact that religion rather than appeals to national identity have dominated the politics of the Middle East further complicates the challenges of producing modern state institutions. As with Europe a century ago, there are no assurances that the rapidly rising middle classes of Middle Eastern countries will side with the forces of democracy or authoritarianism.

In conclusion, readers will search in vain for pithy declarations that often punctuated the great works of the 1960's and 1970's (e.g., Barrington Moore, Jr.'s “No bourgeoisie, no democracy,” or Charles Tilly's “War made the state, and the state made war”). Fukuyama benefited from the prodigious comparative and ethnographic research achievements of the 1980's and 1990's, and his subtle and careful analysis of this huge array of scholarship enables him to correct some critical lapses in earlier modernization theorist's assumptions on the nature of state formation. More importantly, perhaps, Fukuyama's project was not yoked into the Cold War dynamics that swayed the earlier development and modernization scholarship; as a result, he has been able to delve deeper, ask broader, more penetrating questions, and

reach more forthright conclusions than previous scholarship. In short, *Political Order and Political Decay* is a significant work, and likely to be favorably compared to classics such as Huntington's or Barrington Moore's *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966). Anyone interested in or concerned with the challenges of effective governance will benefit from reading this book, as well as its companion volume.

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