

Thirty Years after *The End of History?*

EAFIT Lecture*

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Hello, my name is Francis Fukuyama and I am delighted to be able to participate in this symposium at EAFIT, on *The End of History?* I am a Senior fellow at Stanford University and in the summer of 1989, I published an article in the journal *The National Interest* titled *The End of History?* 30 years have passed since the publication of this article and this was a good opportunity to reflect on what has happened to the state of global democracy and global politics in those three decades.

In the summer of 1989, we were in a very dynamic historical period. We were in the middle of what my mentor at Harvard University, Samuel Huntington, labelled the third wave of democratization. This began with the transitions to democracy by Spain and Portugal in the early 1970s, followed by Greece and Turkey. And then, in the late 1970s and 1980s, transitions by many of the military dictatorships in Latin America: in Chile and Argentina, in Brazil and other countries.

The number of democracies increased from approximately 35 in the year 1970 to perhaps 110 or 115, depending on how you measure democracy, by the year 2010. I think it is pretty obvious that today we are living in a very different historical era. Since the mid-2000s we have entered what my colleague at Stanford, Larry Diamond, calls the global democratic recession. This has a couple of components; one is the fact that we now have some large authoritarian states, namely Russia and China, that are self-confident, aggressive, and asserting an alternative form of government. This is, in a sense, a familiar challenge from the Cold War, when authoritarian powers

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challenged the democratic world. But perhaps a more insidious threat that we now face is the rise of global populism, that is to say, popularly elected governments in established democracies that are seeking to overturn the liberal part of liberal democracy; the constitutional checks and balances, the rule of law that restrains executive power in a properly functioning liberal democracy. This has happened in Hungary and Poland, right within the European Union, in countries like Turkey and unfortunately in my own country, the United States, with the election of Donald Trump in 2016. This trend has spread to Latin America with the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil over the last year.

For Marx, the end of history was communism or a communist utopia that was the final form of human society that he said would emerge after the victory of the proletariat. The phrase “the end of history” was further taken up by an important Russian-French philosopher, Alexander Kojève. He taught one of the most important seminars in Paris in the 1930s, right between the two World Wars. Kojève said, rather mischievously, that history had actually ended already. It ended in 1806 at the Battle of Jena because at that point the Prussian monarchy was defeated by Napoleon, who was bearing the principles of the French revolution, the principles of equality and liberty to the rest of Europe and his argument meant, I think a bit tongue in cheek, that essentially nothing had happened in terms of the ideational or philosophical basis for a modern society since that original victory of the ideals of the French revolution.

And so, the question of *The End of History*, and by the way, my original article had a question mark at the end of it. The question raised by the concept of the end of history is, first of all, is there such a thing as history? Are we progressing? Are we moving towards some form of society that is better than the previous ones? And if so, what is there at the end of that process? My argument back in 1989 was that it did not look like there was any alternative to liberal democracy, there did not seem to be a higher form. Communism, which claimed to be a higher form of society, had proven to be an illusion that no society was actually going to succeed in arriving at.

In my writings over the years, I have argued that there are

basically two drivers of the historical process of a progressive universal history. The first has to do with technology; the changing nature of technology and its cumulative nature ensure that history is never going to fully go backwards. That is to say, every set of economic production possibilities that's determined by a certain level of technology at that time shapes the society around it. So, the age of steam and coal created highly centralized societies that were urbanized, in which you had large concentrations of population that were run by centralized states. The information age produced a different set of conditions that tended to dissolve these centralized structures and spread power out among a larger number of people. Therefore, this continuing technological innovation would drive a historical process and would affect societies in similar ways regardless of their cultural starting points.

The other driver that I argued was very important was one that Hegel himself pointed to, which was the struggle for recognition. The human psyche is not simply driven by the rational utility maximization that economists talk about, there's a third part of the soul that Socrates describes in Book IV of the *Republic* in which he says, human beings have a certain inner sense of their worth, they have a certain pride. He used the Greek word *thymos* to describe this; *thymos* in English is translated as spiritedness or pride. People want a recognition of their inner dignity and oftentimes they will sacrifice economic values in order to get that recognition. Hegel argued that essentially the advent of the French revolution and all of the titanic struggles that consumed the politics of Europe in his day were really struggles over recognition. That is to say, a liberal democracy that grants people the rights of man, recognizes people. The central issue is one of recognition. It recognizes the personhood of every citizen, treats them equally under a juridical system of law and therefore, creates a society that can be self-governing, in which people are recognized as individual agents, or moral agents that have a right to participate in a democratic political process.

Many people have asked me over the years whether I intended to rewrite *The End of History?* in light of things that have happened and what I have learned in the subsequent years, and my answer

to that is yes. I have actually already done that rewriting. In 2011, I published a book called *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French revolution*; and, in 2014, I published a second volume entitled *Political Order and Political Decay: from the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*, and together, those two books constitute my effort to rewrite *The End of History and The Last Man*.

I would say that there are really two major modifications, things that you'll see in those two books that did not exist in the original book, *The End of History and The Last Man*. The first modification really had to do with my growing realization that achieving a modern state, not democracy, not even the rule of law, but actually a modern state is actually a much harder thing that I appreciated back in 1989. A modern state differs from a patrimonial state in the following way. A patrimonial state is a state that is used by its rulers, by the elites as a means of enriching themselves, they are predators who use political power to extract resources from the rest of their societies and use it for their own benefit. A modern state by contrast is impersonal, it treats people equally on the basis of citizenship, it tries to provide basic public goods like security, infrastructure, health, education. And there's a sharp distinction between public and private. You cannot, as a public official, appropriate public money for your own private benefit, that is something called corruption. And that, I think, is one of the most difficult forms of government to achieve, it is relatively easy to create a system where you have competitive elections, some degree of law with courts and the like, but having a modern state that is impersonal, that treats citizens in this way and looks to public interest without high levels of corruption, is something I think we've seen is extremely difficult to achieve.

The second concept that I introduced in my political order books that was not present in the original *The End of History and The Last Man* was the concept of political decay. The idea that societies cannot simply go forward in terms of modernization but can go backwards as well. And this to me, happened primarily through a process that I labeled re-patrimonialization. That is to say, the elites in any society have a natural tendency to reward friends

and family and a modern state that is impersonal, that treats public interest as separate from private interest is actually something that is very difficult to maintain and I argued that this is something that continues to the present day. And in fact, in the United States, you could see this process happening with the rise of very powerful interest groups that have used the American state to protect their own private interest.

I want to conclude this brief intervention by giving you a reason to perhaps not be so pessimistic about the current global recession of democracy, the rise of populism and authoritarian government, because I think that there are still factors that will mitigate those forces and keep democracy hopefully on track into the future. The most important driver of this trend is simply the fact that people do not like living in authoritarian governments that treat them at best like children, and at worst as a kind of human garbage that can be used by the regime for its own purposes. And so, we continue to see, revolts against these kinds of authoritarian governments, we've seen them in Venezuela, in Burma, in Algeria, in Sudan, in Ukraine, in Armenia, and most recently in Hong Kong.

I appreciate the fact that EAFIT is holding this symposium. I wish you great success in having discussions. I want to remind you that *The End of History?* was raised as a question and not as an assertion. It is the starting point for discussions about the state of democracy, the drivers of the historical process and the reasons for the emergence of different political forms in different parts of the world.

So thank you very much for your attention and I wish you all the best 🍀