

The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution

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A New York Times Notable Book for 2011
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Virtually all human societies were once organized tribally, yet over time most developed new political institutions which included a central state that could keep the peace and uniform laws that applied to all citizens. Some went on to create governments that were accountable to their constituents. We take these institutions for granted, but they are absent or are unable to perform in many of today's developing countries—with often disastrous consequences for the rest of the world.

Francis Fukuyama, author of the bestselling *The End of History and the Last Man* and one of our most important political thinkers, provides a sweeping account of how today's basic political institutions developed. The first of a major two-volume work, *The Origins of Political Order* begins with politics among our primate ancestors and follows the story through the emergence of tribal societies, the growth of the first modern state in China, the beginning of the rule of law in India and the Middle East, and the development of political accountability in Europe up until the eve of the French Revolution.

Drawing on a vast body of knowledge—history, evolutionary biology, archaeology, and economics—Fukuyama has produced a brilliant, provocative work that offers fresh insights on the origins of democratic societies and raises essential questions about the nature of politics and its discontents.

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Origins of Political Order
PART ONE Before the State
THE NECESSITY OF POLITICS
The third wave of democratization and contemporary anxieties about the future of contemporary liberal democracy; how both the Left and the Right entertain fantasies about the abolition of government; how contemporary developing countries represent the fulfillment of these fantasies; how we take institutions for granted but in fact have no idea where they come from
During the forty-year period from 1970 to 2010, there was an enormous upsurge in the number of democracies around the world. In 1973, only 45 of the world's 151 countries were counted as "free" by Freedom House, a nongovernmental organization that produces quantitative measures of civil and political rights for countries around the world.¹ That year, Spain, Portugal, and Greece were dictatorships; the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites looked like strong and cohesive societies; China was caught up in Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution; Africa saw the consolidation of rule by a group of corrupt "presidents

for life"; and most of Latin America had fallen under military dictatorship. The following generation saw momentous political change, with democracies and market-oriented economies spreading in virtually every part of the world except for the Arab Middle East. By the late 1990s, some 120 countries around the world--more than 60 percent of the world's independent states--had become electoral democracies.² This transformation was Samuel Huntington's third wave of democratization; liberal democracy as the default form of government became part of the accepted political landscape at the beginning of the twenty-first century.³ Underlying these changes in political systems was a massive social transformation as well. The shift to democracy was a result of millions of formerly passive individuals around the world organizing themselves and participating in the political life of their societies. This social mobilization was driven by a host of factors: greatly expanded access to education that made people more aware of themselves and the political world around them; information technology, which facilitated the rapid spread of ideas and knowledge; cheap travel and communications that allowed people to vote with their feet if they didn't like their government; and greater prosperity, which induced people to demand better protection of their rights. The third wave crested after the late 1990s, however, and a "democratic recession" emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Approximately one in five countries that had been part of the third wave either reverted to authoritarianism or saw a significant erosion of democratic institutions.⁴ Freedom House noted that 2009 marked the fourth consecutive year in which freedom had declined around the world, the first time this had happened since it established its measures of freedom in 1973.⁵

POLITICAL ANXIETIES At the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, malaise in the democratic world took several distinct forms. The first was the outright reversal of democratic gains that had occurred in countries such as Russia, Venezuela, and Iran, where elected leaders were busy dismantling democratic institutions by manipulating elections, closing down or buying independent TV and newspaper outlets, and clamping down on opposition activities. Liberal democracy is more than majority voting in elections; it is a complex set of institutions that restrain and regularize the exercise of power through law and a system of checks and balances. In many countries, official acceptance of democratic legitimacy was accompanied by the systematic removal of checks on executive power and the erosion of the rule of law. In other cases, countries that seemed to be making a transition from authoritarian government got stuck in what the analyst Thomas Carothers has labeled a "gray zone," where they were neither fully authoritarian nor meaningfully democratic.⁶ Many successor states to the former Soviet Union, like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia, found themselves in this situation. There had been a broad assumption in the years following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 that virtually all countries were transitioning to democracy and that failures of democratic practice would be overcome with the simple passage of time. Carothers pointed out that this "transition paradigm" was an unwarranted assumption and that many authoritarian elites had no interest in implementing democratic institutions that would dilute their power. A third category of concern has to do not with the failure of political systems to become or remain democratic but rather their failure to deliver the basic services that people demand from their governments. The mere fact that a country has democratic institutions tells us very little about whether it is well or badly governed. This failure to deliver on the promise of democracy poses what is perhaps the greatest challenge to the legitimacy of such political systems. An example of this was Ukraine.

Ukraine surprised the world in 2004 when tens of thousands of people turned up in Kiev's Maidan Square to protest manipulation of that country's presidential election. These protests, which came to be known as the Orange Revolution, triggered a new election and the rise of the reformer Viktor Yushchenko as president. Once in power, however, the Orange Coalition proved utterly feckless, and Yushchenko himself disappointed the hopes of those who supported him. The government quarreled internally, failed to deal with Ukraine's serious corruption problem, and presided over a meltdown of the economy during the 2008-2009 global financial crisis. The result was the election in early 2010 of Viktor Yanukovich, the very man accused of stealing the 2004 election that had triggered the Orange Revolution in the first place. Many other species of governance failure plague democratic countries. It is well understood that Latin America has the highest level of economic inequality of any region in the world, in which class hierarchies often correspond to racial and ethnic ones. The rise of populist leaders like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia is less a cause of instability than a symptom of that inequality and the feeling of social exclusion felt by many who are nominally citizens. Persistent poverty often breeds other kinds of social dysfunctions, like gangs, narcotrafficking, and a general feeling of insecurity on the part of ordinary people. In Colombia, Mexico, and El Salvador, organized criminality threatens the state itself and its basic institutions, and the failure to deal effectively with these problems has undermined the legitimacy of democracy. India, to take another example, has been a remarkably successful democracy since its independence in 1947--an achievement all the more remarkable given its poverty, ethnic and religious diversity, and enormous size. (Why a longer historical view of Indian political development should lessen our surprise is the subject of chapters 10-12.) Nonetheless, Indian democracy, like sausage making, looks less appealing the closer one gets to the process. Nearly one-third of Indian legislators, for example, are under some form of criminal indictment, some for serious crimes like murder and rape. Indian politicians often practice an overt form of patronage politics, in which votes are traded for political favors. The fractiousness of Indian democracy makes it very hard for the government to make major decisions on issues like investments in major infrastructure projects. And in many Indian cities, glittering high-tech centers of excellence exist next to African-style poverty. The apparent chaos and corruption of democratic politics in India has frequently been contrasted to the quick and efficient decision making of China. Chinese rulers are not constrained by either a rule of law or democratic accountability; if they want to build a huge dam, bulldoze neighborhoods to make way for highways or airports, or mount a rapid economic stimulus package, they can do so far more quickly than democratic India. A fourth broad source of political anxiety concerns the economy. Modern global capitalism has proved to be productive and wealth-creating beyond the dreams of anyone living before the year 1800. In the period following the oil crises of the 1970s, the size of the world economy almost quadrupled,⁷ and Asia, based on its openness to trade and investment, saw much of its population join the developed world. But global capitalism has not found a way to avoid high levels of volatility, particularly in the financial sector. Global economic growth has been plagued by periodic financial crises, striking Europe in the early 1990s, Asia in 1997-1998, Russia and Brazil in 1998-1999, and Argentina in 2001. This instability culminated, perhaps with poetic justice, in the great crisis that struck the United States, the home of global capitalism, in 2008-2009. Free markets are necessary to promote long-term growth, but they are not self-regulating, particularly when it comes to banks and

other large financial institutions. The system's instability is a reflection of what is ultimately a political failure, that is, the failure to provide sufficient regulatory oversight both at a national and an international level.⁸The cumulative effect of these economic crises has not necessarily been to undermine confidence in market-based economics and globalization as engines of economic growth. China, India, Brazil, and any number of other so-called emerging market countries continue to perform well economically based on their participation in global capitalism. But it is clear that the political job of finding the right regulatory mechanisms to tame capitalism's volatility have not yet been found.

POLITICAL
DECAY

Other Books

Values in Foreign Policy. This book throws light on whether Asian values constitute a specific genre that differentiates Asia from the West and feeds into its nations' foreign policies, and whether there is a basic difference of opinion on values or merely an aspect of contemporary power politics.

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