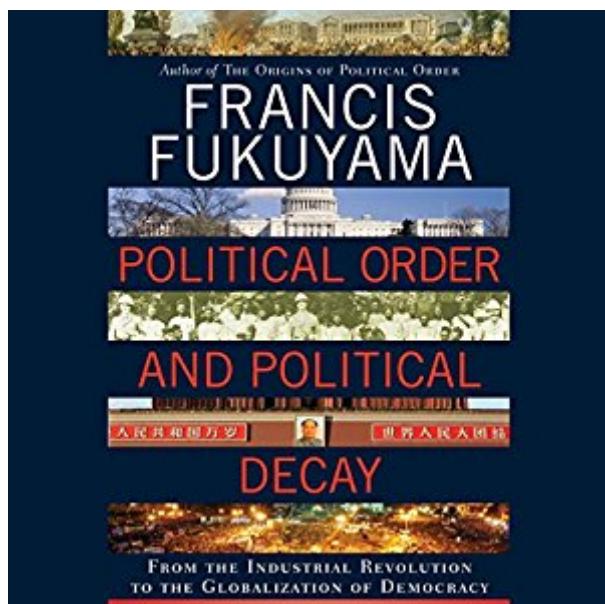


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Political Order And Political Decay: From The Industrial Revolution To The Globalization Of Democracy



Synopsis

The second volume of the best-selling landmark work on the history of the modern state. Writing in the Wall Street Journal, David Gress called Francis Fukuyama's *Origins of Political Order* "magisterial in its learning and admirably immodest in its ambition." In the New York Times Book Review, Michael Lind described the book as "a major achievement by one of the leading public intellectuals of our time." And in the Washington Post, Gerard DeGrott exclaimed "this is a book that will be remembered. Bring on volume two." Volume two is finally here, completing the most important work of political thought in at least a generation. Taking up the essential question of how societies develop strong, impersonal, and accountable political institutions, Fukuyama follows the story from the French Revolution to the so-called Arab Spring and the deep dysfunctions of contemporary American politics. He examines the effects of corruption on governance, and why some societies have been successful at rooting it out. He explores the different legacies of colonialism in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, and offers a clear-eyed account of why some regions have thrived and developed more quickly than others. And he boldly reckons with the future of democracy in the face of a rising global middle class and entrenched political paralysis in the West. A sweeping, masterful account of the struggle to create a well-functioning modern state, *Political Order and Political Decay* is destined to be a classic.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A mess - the world, not the book which is excellent. InÂ The End of History and the Last ManÂ Dr.

Fukuyama asked the question "is there a direction to political evolution?" In *Trust: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* he explored the impact of high trust vs low trust societies on the evolution and nature of political governance. In his tour de force *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* we were given an in depth history of political development across many nations and regions. In it Dr. Fukuyama postulates that effective governance requires three sets of political institutions in some kind of balance: the state, the rule of law, and political accountability. In *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy* he left me with the feeling that such an outcome (sustained effective governance) was "to dream the impossible dream." Parts I and II discuss the "State" and "Foreign Influence." In an excellent historical overview he demonstrates that what would appear to be similar circumstances lead to disparate outcomes. Much less than in previous works Dr. Fukuyama treats us to current unanswered questions; how none of the current theoretical constructs adequately explain what has transpired and as such can not give clear guidance on how to proceed. "The State made War and War made the State." In Part III the discussion turns to Democracy. Although revered on an intellectual basis we find that historically democracy is not the panacea one hopes. Periods of semi-benevolent autocracy have many times been fundamental to the development of the modern state. The extension of suffrage has in many cases resulted in clientism - the political elites purchasing votes from the newly empowered reinforcing rather than reducing the elites' political control. In Part IV we get to political decay. Fundamental to human nature is the acquisition of power and the desire once obtained to hold on to it. In a constantly changing world this usually leads to a disparity between the needs and desires of the "in group" and the needs and desires of the "out groups." As the balance between state, law, and accountability becomes more and more out of sync and the "out groups" gain power political upheaval, frequently in the form of armed conflict, is the result. But in Part IV we are once again reminded that there are many paths to and outcomes from political upheaval. I found this book to be both enlightening and frustrating. As an American who in Dr. Fukuyama's words "has a reverence to the Declaration of Independence and the U. S. Constitution" his thoughtful analysis of how our political system has contributed to the current state of American governance: political scandal, incompetent bureaucracy, overt and inappropriate power by special interest groups, approval of Congress in the single digits, was hard to accept - but accept it I did. Frustrating is that there does not appear to be a clear path to resolution. As the book gets closer to modern times I am reminded of Dr. Fukuyama's question in "The End of History." He said (I paraphrase) are we evolving over time to a better form of political governance? Inherent in evolution are two facts: it takes a long time and many

evolutionary paths result in dead ends. This suggests that the "mess" the world is in today may be a perturbation in the long term trend of political evolution. On a personal note I found this a enjoyable book. As can be inferred from the time between its publication and my review I spent a couple of long nights engrossed in reading rather than sleeping. The book is more descriptive than prescriptive. If you are looking to justify your political outlook you will not find it here. Likewise if you are looking for the elegant solution to the world's problems it is not here either. But if you want to be educated into just how complex an undertaking of providing a balance between state, law and accountability this is your book.

Francis Fukuyama of "The End of History and the Last Man" fame has written a lengthy history of comparative government from 1800 to the modern era. In Political Order he discusses why certain governments succeed while others fail. His sweep covers the globe from Europe to the Americas, to Asia and to Africa. Though too long the narrative is breathtaking. His thesis is that successful governance requires a coherent state, laws that are equally enforced and system of accountability, usually, but necessarily through elections. Weak governance gets one or all three of these factors wrong, Fukuyama although in many ways quite conservative, is political progressive in the early 20th Century sense in that a successful state needs a highly trained impartial bureaucracy.

Examples of such are the U.S. between 1900- 1950, Germany and England in the 19th century. To be sure bureaucracies that become too independent can go out of control. His example of this is the German military on the eve of World War 1. On the other hand there can be too much accountability. In this instance he highlights the role of interest groups in the U.S. who in total possess veto power over what the state can do, a "vetocracy" if you will. Fukuyama's book should be read in conjunction with Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson's "Why Nations Fail." Simply put both argue that the success of rent seeking clienteles have the power corrupt government for their own ends. Although "Political Order..." is a great text, it is a tough read for the lay reader, hence four stars.

This book describes the rise of modern nation-states, from the French revolution to the present. Fukuyama focuses on three features that influence national success: state (effective bureaucracy), rule of law, and autonomy (democratic accountability). Much of the book argues against libertarian ideas from a fairly centrist perspective, although he mostly avoids directly discussing libertarian beliefs. Instead, he implies that we should de-emphasize debates over big government versus small government, and look more at effectiveness versus corruption. Many of these ideas build on what Fukuyama wrote in Trust - I suggest reading that book

first.-----One of the book's thread's overlaps substantially with Ian Morris' book War! What Is It Good For?. Fukuyama believes that war sometimes causes states to make their bureaucracy more efficient. Fukuyama is more credible here than Morris because Fukuyama is more cautious about the effects he claims to see. The book suggests that young nations have some key stage where threat of conquest can create the right incentives for developing an efficient bureaucracy (i.e. without efficient support for the military, including effective taxation, they get absorbed into a state that does better at those tasks). Without such a threat, states can get stuck in an equilibrium where the bureaucracy simply serves a small number of powerful people. But with such a threat, politicians need to delegate enough authority that the bureaucracy develops some independence, which enables it to care about broader notions of national welfare. (Fukuyama talks as if the bureaucracies are somewhat altruistic. I think of it more as the bureaucracies caring about their long-term revenue source, when individual politicians don't hold power long enough to care about the long term). It seems plausible that China would have helped to lead the industrial revolution if it had faced a serious risk of being conquered in the 17th and 18th centuries. China's relative safety back then seems to have left it complacent and

stagnant.-----Fukuyama hints that the three pillars of modern nation-states (state, law, autonomy) have roughly equal importance. Yet I don't buy that. I expect that whatever virtues are responsible for the rule of law are a good deal more important than effective bureaucracies or democratic accountability. Fukuyama doesn't make a strong case for the value of democracy for national success, presumably in part because he expects most readers to already agree with him about that. I'll conjecture that democracy is mostly a byproduct of success at the other features that Fukuyama considers important. It's likely that democracy is somewhat valuable for generating fairness, but that has limited relevance to what Fukuyama tries to explain (i.e. mainly power and wealth).-----Full-fledged rule of law might be needed to get all

the benefits of the best modern societies. But the differences between good and bad nations seem to have originated well before those nations had more than a rudimentary version of rule of law. That suggests some underlying factor that matters - maybe just the basic notion of law as something separate from individual leaders or ethnic groups (Fukuyama's previous book says Christianity played an important role here); or maybe the kind of cultural advance suggested by Greg Clark. Fukuyama argues that it's risky to adopt democracy before creating effective states and the rule of law. He's probably right to expect that such democracies will be dominated by people who fight to get the spoils of politics for their family / clan / ethnic group, with little thought to national wellbeing.-----National identity is important for producing the kind of

government that Fukuyama likes. It's hard for government employees to focus on the welfare of the nation if they identify mainly as members of a non-majority ethnic group. He mentions that the printing press helped create national identities out of more fragmented cultures. This seems important enough to Europe's success that it deserves more emphasis than the two paragraphs he devotes to it. He describes several countries that started out as a patchwork of ethnic groups, and had differing degrees of success at developing a unified national identity: Tanzania, Kenya, Nigeria, and Indonesia. I was a bit disappointed that the differences there seemed to be mostly accidents of the personalities of leading politicians. He talks as if the only two options for such regions were to develop a clear national identity or be crippled by ethnic conflict. Why not also consider the option of splitting into smaller political units that can aim to become city-states such as Singapore and Dubai?

-----He makes many minor claims that sound suspicious enough for me to have moderate doubts about trusting his scholarship. For example, he tries to refute claims that "industrial policy never works", mainly by using the example of the government developing the internet. (His use of the word "never" suggests that he's not exactly attacking the most sophisticated version of the belief in question). How familiar is he with the history of the internet? The entities in charge of internet tried to restrict commercial use until 1995. Actual commercial use of the internet started before the government made a clear decision to tolerate such use, much less endorse it. So Fukuyama either has a faulty understanding of internet history, or is using the phrase industrial policy in a way that puzzles me. Then there's the claim that the Spanish conquered important parts of the New World before the native nations had declined due to European diseases. Fukuyama seems unfamiliar with the contrary evidence reported by Charles C. Mann in 1491 and 1493. Mann may not be an ideal source, but he appears at least as reliable as the sources that Fukuyama cites.

-----That leads into more general doubts about history books, especially ambitiously broad books aimed at popular audiences. Tetlock's research into the accuracy of political pundits has led me to assume that a broad range of "expert" commentary is roughly equivalent to random guessing. Much of what historians do [1] seems quite similar to the opinions of the experts that Tetlock studies. Neither historians nor political pundits get adequate feedback about mistaken beliefs, or get significant rewards for insights that are later confirmed by new evidence.

That leads me to worry that the study of history is little better than

voodoo.-----In sum, I can't quite decide whether to recommend that you

read this book.[1] - i.e. drawing inferences from aggregations of data. That's not to say that historians don't devote lots of time to reporting observed facts. But most of those facts don't have value to me unless I can generalize from them in ways that help me understand the future.

Historian's choices of what facts to emphasize will unavoidably influence any generalizations I draw.

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