

The totalitarian communist governments of Europe's Eastern bloc were disintegrating as the 1980s ended and the 1990s began. The end of the Cold War was approaching, and it appeared that Western democracies had triumphed. Francis Fukuyama claimed at the time that this was the "end of history," and the phrase, as well as Fukuyama himself, became instantly renowned.

Was that, however, the end of the world as we knew it? And, after the fall of communist governments, has democracy actually flourished?

We'll look at how democracies throughout the world are faring, with a particular focus on the United States. By examining the ways in which American democracy is in severe decline, you may gain a sense of how democracy's future might look, as well as which institutions are required to ensure democracy's survival. Such findings are critical in safeguarding the future of democracy in an era of increasing populism.

In the following chapters, you'll learn:

- how Washington's 12,000 registered lobbying companies are harming democracy;
- why a dwindling middle class is a major issue; and
- In what way the US Forest Service is a perfect illustration of a failing American institution.

## Chapter 1 - The foundation of American politics is democracy.

The term "democracy" is frequently used in political arguments, intellectual debates, and cultural concerns. It's also the major topic of these chapters, so let's set the stage for democracy before we go any further.

Explicitly put, democracy is a form of government run by and for the people. In 1789, the United States Constitution radically combined democratic principles of equality and fair representation.

Sadly, during most of the country's early history, the Constitution's ideals were overlooked, and the United States had a poor and severely corrupt political structure right up until the nineteenth century. Goods and services were exchanged for political alliances, and it's no surprise that the wealthy and powerful had the most political influence.

Things began to shift near the close of the nineteenth century, and the American federal government began to evolve. It had evolved into an autonomous, effective, and value-driven political player by the mid-twentieth century.

The Progressive movement, led by politicians like Theodore Roosevelt, was crucial in dismantling large economic monopolies. The politics of the New Deal, which provided health insurance and a basic pension to US residents, pushed this effort forward.

Industrial growth also influenced traditional social institutions and acted as a catalyst for social transformation. A slew of new majority political players, ranging from African-Americans to suffragists, started to shake up the old, corrupt political system.

In 1989, it appeared that democracy had triumphed. In his landmark work *The End of History*, the author claimed that the fall of Communism signaled the victory of democracy and that its global spread was an unavoidable route for the future.

In reality, the number of democracies throughout the world rose from 35 in 1970 to over 120 in 2010, accounting for roughly 60% of the world's countries. However, as democracy spread, it was met with its fair share of obstacles — and this is true even in the United States. However, before we go into these concerns further, let us first understand what makes a democracy function.

## Chapter 2 - A stable democracy requires a big and powerful middle class.

Philosophers have maintained that the middle class is necessary for healthy governments and democracies since Aristotle's time. What, though, is the middle class? It might be complex to describe.

In political science, the term "middle class" refers to a social and educational status classification. Consider a poor person with low social status and a weak educational background who is offered a new, higher-paying job.

According to a political scientist, he would rise to the middle class, but if he lost his work, he would fall back into the lower class. He'll probably be too preoccupied with trying to make ends meet each week to organize a political demonstration against his return to poverty.

Consider a middle-class person with a university education who is unable to find work. They have sunk to a lower socioeconomic level as a result of their continuous joblessness. This individual, on the other hand, is far more inclined to get involved in politics and oppose poverty.

What if the middle class expanded dramatically, surpassing all other social classes? If something went wrong, there would be a lot more complaining voices. And it was precisely the development of the global middle class that drove democracy to expand.

According to international research, middle-class individuals place higher importance on democracy and individual liberty. They are also more accepting of alternative lifestyles than those from lower social strata.

According to American economist William Easterly's study, a big middle class is associated with higher rates of economic growth, education, health, and civic stability. This is linked to

middle-class ideals such as self-discipline, a strong work ethic, and a focus on long-term saving and investing.

Denmark and France owe their democratic transitions in the nineteenth century to their middle classes. Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom, and many other countries were completely democratic by the early twentieth century, thanks to the efforts of their middle classes. The middle class has long been seen as the backbone of democracy in the Western world.

## Chapter 3 - America's middle class is suffering from low wages and dwindling employment opportunities.

By 1970, the top 1% of wealthiest households in the United States received 9% of the nation's gross Domestic Product. In 2007, the figure had risen to 23.5 percent. What does this mean for middle-class families?

The truth is that since the 1970s, there has been a concealed trend of the middle-class income decrease. Around this period, the introduction of women into labor resulted in an increase in average household income – but this concealed the reality that salaries were shrinking.

The use of cheap, subsidized loans as a replacement for progressive taxation was another element masking economic stagnation. This looked like a wonderful idea to politicians. Although there was a government-backed property boom as a result, it ultimately led to the 2008 financial catastrophe.

Another factor that makes life tough for the middle class is technology, which, curiously enough, benefited them throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the coal, steel, chemical, manufacturing, and construction industries, important technical breakthroughs provided innumerable jobs for low-skilled people. To acquire a steady job on a Henry Ford assembly line, which simplified down the process of producing a car into basic, repeatable stages, you just needed to have completed fifth grade.

While these innovations helped to create a big middle class and, as a result, democracy, they have had a quite different influence now. Technological advancements have resulted in the abolition of a large number of low-skilled but well-paid professions. Simultaneously, new, higher-paying occupations emerge, rewarding people with increased abilities.

Math geniuses didn't have many opportunities to benefit from their abilities in the eighteenth century. Today, as software engineers, bankers, or geneticists, they take home far bigger shares of national income.

## Chapter 4 - Lobbyists utilize their riches to sway government policies, leaving citizens feeling powerless.

Have you heard of the concept of repatriation before? This phrase refers to the hegemony of wealthy and powerful individuals over democratic institutions, who pursue their own interests at the cost of the rest of the population. One of the most damaging impacts on American democracy and government is repatriation. Now, how does it work in practice?

Lobbying, a legal method of trading political power for money, is one-way repatriation occurs. Gift exchange is tolerated, even though political bribery is legally prohibited nowadays. The notion is that those who are given presents will feel obligated to repay the favor. The whole American lobbying business – and it isn't a tiny one – is built on this indirect kind of bribery.

In Washington, DC, lobbying and interest organizations have grown tremendously. There were 175 registered lobbying companies in 1971. This number skyrocketed to 2,500 in 1981. By 2013, over 12,000 companies had gladly spent more than \$3.2 billion on lobbying. These corporations corrupt American public policy in a variety of ways, one of the most crucial of which is the tax system.

While the United States' nominal corporate tax rates are greater than those of most other industrialized countries, the amount that American businesses pay in the end is far lower. How so? As they've used lobbying to get special exemptions and perks for themselves.

Repatriation is producing a crisis of representation as lobbying continues to rise. Lobbyists and other calculated and crafty campaigners utilize their power to make the people feel unrepresented and unheard.

Consider, for example, the National Rifle Association (NRA), which fights for gun rights and is one of Washington's most powerful organizations. It has unmatched clout with politicians and policymakers, and it preserves that clout at the price of ordinary citizens' safety.

## Chapter 5 - The growth and collapse of the US Forest Service show the flaws in democratic institutions.

Let's take a look at the growth and fall of one American government agency, the US Forest Service, to see how political institutions may become corrupt.

The United States Forest Service (USFS) was established in 1905. It was a textbook example of American state-building during the Progressive Era, which lasted from the 1890s through the 1920s. The USFS personnel consisted of university-educated foresters and agronomists. Unlike many other public posts at the time, they were chosen primarily on merit and technical knowledge, rather than patronage — that is, through deep ties and benefits. The meritocratic and self-governing USFS represented some of America's greatest democratic principles.

The USFS, on the other hand, is now known for its dysfunctional administration. What went wrong, and where did it go wrong? It all started with a misalignment of community expectations. The USFS was founded with a single goal in mind: to promote the sustainable use of American forests. However, the USFS eventually took over the task of putting out forest fires.

This posed a major problem. Homeowners whose houses were threatened by forest fires put pressure on the authorities to safeguard their investments. Meanwhile, environmentalists demanded that the organization pursue a "let burn" policy, citing recent research suggesting that forest fires are important components of ecosystems.

These opposing groups took use of the USFS's connections to Congress and the courts to further their own agendas. As opposing factions pressed and directed the organization to fulfill their various interests, the tiny, united agency evolved into a vast, unwieldy one.

As a result, USFS officials were more focused on expanding their employment and budgets by complying with these groups' demands, rather than on achieving their goal of forest protection. This downward spiral is symbolic of what occurs on a huge scale throughout federal institutions in the United States.

## Chapter 6 - In the United States, institutional failure to adapt to change is a major driver of political deterioration.

So, what can we learn about government organizations from the tale of the US Forest Service? Well, how these organizations adapt to change has much to do with their strength.

Institutions have an inherent resistance to change; in fact, it is sometimes viewed as a strength. Samuel Huntington, a political scientist, characterized institutions as having "stable, valued, repeating patterns of conduct" that allow them to promote collective human activity.

Members would have to reestablish behavioral standards at every step if there were no clear, permanent regulations. This would take a long time and very certainly result in conflict. Individuals, on the other hand, accept institutional restrictions in order to profit from their stability.

Humans have achieved a higher level of social collaboration than any other animal species thanks to institutions. Most fundamental human needs are provided by institutions, which range from public schools and colleges to transportation and energy infrastructure that connects us.

Institutions, on the other hand, have the potential to stifle growth in human communities. How? By failing to adjust to changing conditions.

The incapacity of institutions to adapt effectively to quickly changing conditions is sometimes blamed for the democratic decline, especially as new social groupings with new political demands spring up and challenge the existing quo.

Political deterioration, on the other hand, may lead to and is arguably required for, political progress. Why? Because the old must fall apart in order for the new to arise. Old institutions, on the other hand, will never create a place for new institutions if they are extremely resistant to change or ineffective at absorbing various points of view.

That is only one of many issues at the core of today's American politics. There are no easy solutions to these problems. However, better understanding the intricacies of power conflicts is critical to comprehending not only US politics, but the world overall.

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

In American politics, democracy is fundamental. However, as great as democratic principles are, they continue to confront several challenges. The dwindling middle class, a crisis of representation brought on by aggressive lobbying, and institutions' incapacity to adjust to changing conditions are just a few of the problems that American democracy is currently facing.

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