



PROJECT MUSE®

The End of History Revisited

Yascha Mounk

Journal of Democracy, Volume 31, Number 1, January 2020, pp. 22-35 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0002>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/745951>

THE END OF HISTORY REVISITED

Yascha Mounk

Yascha Mounk is associate professor of the practice of international affairs at Johns Hopkins University and the author of *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It* (2018).

Until a few years ago, the optimists reigned supreme. Liberal democracy, many argued, was the most just and attractive political regime. It had already triumphed in many of the most militarily dominant, economically advanced, and culturally influential countries in the world. In due course, others would surely follow suit.

The most prominent manifestation of this optimism was Francis Fukuyama's thesis of the "end of history." Writing a few months before the Berlin Wall fell, Fukuyama argued that humankind's ideological evolution had come to an end. Although various twentieth-century political movements had promised to supersede Western liberalism, by the end of the century their impetus had been exhausted. Communism might still have "some isolated true believers" in such far-flung places as "Managua, Pyongyang, or Cambridge, Massachusetts,"¹ but it was no longer a viable contender for ideological hegemony. Devoid of credible alternatives, the world was safe for liberal democracy: "The state that emerges at the end of history is liberal insofar as it recognizes and protects through a system of law man's universal right to freedom, and democratic insofar as it exists only with the consent of the governed."²

Many social scientists dismissed Fukuyama's work out of hand. But the truth of the matter is that scholars who would never have deigned to make the bold pronouncements that turned Fukuyama into a worldwide celebrity were committed to equally far-reaching assumptions. Indeed, perhaps the most influential empirical article on the fate of democracy published since 1989 made a claim that, properly understood, was even more triumphalist. According to Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, countries that had changed governments through free and fair elections at least twice, and that had reached a level of annual per capita

income higher than that of Argentina in 1975 (a figure that they gave as \$6,055 “expressed in constant U.S. dollars computed at purchasing-power parities and expressed in 1985 prices,” or close to \$14,500 in 2019 terms), were consolidated democracies. They could expect to enjoy life eternal.³ As Przeworski, Limongi, and two other colleagues had put it in an earlier article in the *Journal of Democracy*, at or above this level of per capita income, “democracy is certain to survive, come hell or high water.”⁴

Now, as the tides of history are rapidly turning, the hypotheses of theory are being reversed. Over the span of less than a decade, Great Britain voted for Brexit, the United States elected Donald Trump, authoritarian populists took the reins of power from Brazil to India and from Italy to the Philippines, and elected strongmen started an all-out assault on liberal democracy in Ankara, Budapest, Caracas, Moscow, and Warsaw (as well as many other places that get far less attention in newspapers and academic journals alike).

As the certainties of yesteryear have melted into air, it has become fashionable to gloss recent political developments as “the end of the end of history.”⁵ In many books and essays on this topic—including my own—the significance of recent developments is explicitly framed in terms of evidence for the failure of Fukuyama’s thesis.⁶ History, a swelling chorus sings from the new hymnbook, has not ended. The values of liberal democracy are no longer hegemonic, if ever they truly were. Some authors go even farther: As the conditions that made liberal democracy possible fade away, they predict, it is likely to be supplanted by illiberal democracy, competitive authoritarianism, or outright dictatorship. Whatever may come next, the democratic era is sure to end. But these conclusions, born from trauma, risk being just as rash as the more optimistic ones that preceded them.

The Triumphalist Philosophy of History

The triumphalist view of history that held such great intellectual sway until recently is so easy to dismiss in part because it has, all along, been so poorly understood. In the case of Francis Fukuyama, that misunderstanding begins with the very title of his most famous work. Influenced by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Alexandre Kojève, Fukuyama intended his essay not as a prediction that historical events would no longer occur, but rather as a rumination on the purpose of history: “This is not to say that there will no longer be events to fill the pages of *Foreign Affairs*’ yearly summaries of international relations,” he slyly wrote in the pages of the august journal’s upstart rival, the *National Interest*, “for the victory of liberalism has occurred primarily in the realm of ideas or consciousness and is as yet incomplete in the real or material world.”⁷

For most of the ancients, there were a small number of basic political regimes, each of which was liable to prove unstable. Until the eighteenth century, virtually all philosophers shared this assumption: The realm of politics was, in their minds, marked by cyclical revolution rather than

Fukuyama intended his essay not as a prediction that historical events would no longer occur, but rather as a rumination on the purpose of history.

purposive evolution. Fukuyama argues that this account is unsatisfactory because it does not pay sufficient attention to the human ability to accumulate knowledge.

Knowledge, according to Fukuyama, shapes human societies in two crucial ways. First, the existence of ferocious military competition favors the development and survival of societies that embrace the scientific method.

Second, the scientific method will also produce “directional historical change” by means of the “progressive conquest of nature for the purpose of satisfying human desires.” Economic development, in this view, requires an ever more sophisticated division of labor, which disrupts traditional societies and erodes their modes of governance.

But while the existence of science helps to dispel purely cyclical notions of history, it does not give human societies a clear destination. Indeed, while Fukuyama thought that the greater ability of markets to coordinate complex economic activities would ultimately give capitalist societies an evolutionary advantage over those governed by central planners, he disputed the classic assumptions of “modernization theorists” such as Seymour Martin Lipset. As the experience of societies such as Singapore or (later) China showed, it was possible to experience rapid economic growth and an exponential increase in educational standards without transitioning to liberal democracy.⁸ To understand Fukuyama’s belief that history is moving in the direction of liberal democracy, it is therefore necessary to locate a second motor of history: *thymos*.

It is the human desire for recognition, Fukuyama argues, that pushes societies in the direction of greater equality. In a monarchy, in which only one person’s desire for recognition is satisfied, a great number of the king’s subjects will aspire to a greater status. In an aristocracy, in which only a few men and women of noble birth enjoy honor, the lowly will be tempted to plot revolution. It is only in a society that is capable of recognizing the equal status of all that such internal contradictions will be minimized. Most human beings, Fukuyama writes, “have a thymotic pride in their own self-worth, and this leads them to demand democratic governments that treat them like adults rather than children, recognizing their autonomy as free individuals.”⁹

This helps to explain why liberal democracy, according to Fukuyama, holds greater appeal than any other political system. Communism and theocracy both fail at commanding broad consent and allowing citizens a significant scope of freedom. Only liberal democracy affords individual citizens a great amount of leeway to live life in accordance with their predilections *and* an ability to determine their collective fate. This is the source of its lasting appeal, and the reason why history ultimately tends toward its triumph.

This also helps to explain why Fukuyama could have believed that liberalism had triumphed “in the realm of ideas or consciousness” even though it remained “as yet incomplete in the real or material world.” As a result of the failure of totalitarian alternatives such as fascism or communism, liberal democracy has revealed itself to be the only credible way of satisfying humankind’s desire for recognition. While democracy has hardly conquered the whole world—and some democracies may even collapse—no other political system has a credible claim to rivaling its appeal.

This caveat both flows from Fukuyama’s deepest theoretical commitments and effectively demolishes the most simplistic objections to his theory. As he puts it, it would be a mistake “to cite the failure of liberal democracy in any given country, or even in an entire region of the world, as evidence of democracy’s overall weakness.” And yet, his insistence that “cycles and discontinuities in themselves are not incompatible with a history that is directional and universal, just as the existence of business cycles does not negate the possibility of long-term economic growth,”¹⁰ invites an obvious concern: Is Fukuyama’s thesis unfalsifiable?

Although Fukuyama is not nearly as clear about what facts or developments might disprove his thesis as one might wish, I do not believe that he is putting forward a proposition that is unfalsifiable (and thus, as acolytes of Karl Popper would readily remind us, outside the realm of scientific knowledge).¹¹ In particular, two kinds of findings would, if true, suggest that Fukuyama’s theory is in need of serious revision.

First, since the desire for recognition is universal among human beings who live in societies that have reached a certain stage of historical development, we can assume that citizens of liberal democracies should cherish their political arrangements. This implies that the residents of countries such as Germany, Italy, or the United States should, despite all the discontent they might feel with particular policies or governments, ascribe great importance to living in a democracy and reject authoritarian alternatives to the status quo. If they fail to do so, this suggests that the internal contradictions of liberal democracy are more substantial than Fukuyama concedes. Call this the “democratic-consent condition.”

Second, citizens of countries that are not liberal democracies should, over the short or long term, bristle at their political arrangements to some

significant extent. This implies that residents of countries such as Russia or China should, despite all the legitimacy that these governments might derive from political stability or economic performance, seek to gain greater individual liberty and collective self-determination—ideally, in the form of liberal democracy. If some new form of regime should manage to fulfill its citizens' longings for recognition, reconciling its internal contradictions to the same extent as liberal democracy does, then no one will be able to claim that history has ended. Call this the "autocratic-contradictions condition."

Empirical Political Science Says History Has Ended

Many political scientists have ignored Fukuyama's ideas, scoffed at them, or somehow managed to do both at the same time. This is in part owing to a general academic tendency to shy away from headline-grabbing hypotheses. But it is also connected to a larger disciplinary shift that gathered speed throughout the 1990s and early 2000s: the decisive victory of quantitative political science (with its focus on high-N statistical studies or rational-choice models) over qualitative political science, whether in the guise of political theory or of empirical work rooted in deep knowledge about particular countries and cultures. The irony of this *hauteur* is that quantitative political scientists arrived at conclusions that are astoundingly similar to Fukuyama's.

For most of the postwar period, so-called modernization theory dominated large parts of the social sciences. According to Lipset, all good things went together: As societies developed economically and citizens' level of education rose, their social attitudes became more liberal, and they demanded a greater say in their political affairs. Observing that rich societies were far more likely to be democratic, Lipset suggested that the process of economic growth caused widespread democratization. The implication was highly upbeat: As economic growth spread to more parts of the world, so would democracy.¹²

But just as Fukuyama complicated this account by observing that some societies with high economic development never seemed to make the transition to democracy, so too did some of the leading political scientists of the 1990s begin to challenge this "endogenous" theory of democratization. In their influential essay, Przeworski and Limongi argued that the usual story, according to which economic progress caused the emergence of democracy, is mistaken. In fact, while middle-income countries experienced transitions to democracy more frequently than did the poorest countries, the richest dictatorships proved to be the most stable. On the whole, there seemed to be little evidence for the idea that economic development caused autocratic countries to transition toward democracy.

Instead, the strong association between democracy and economic development is best explained by "exogenous" factors: While democratic

experiments emerge at random, in both poor and affluent societies, a country's level of economic development strongly influences the likelihood of success. As they put it:

Suppose that dictatorships are equally likely to die and democracies to emerge at any level of development. . . . Even if the emergence of democracy is independent of the level of development, the chance that such a regime will survive is greater if it has been established in an affluent country. We would thus expect to observe democracies to appear randomly with regard to levels of development, but to die in the poorer countries and survive in the wealthier ones. Thus, history gradually accumulates wealthy democracies, since every time a dictatorship happens to die in an affluent country, democracy is there to stay.¹³

The empirical data seemed to prove this hypothesis in spectacular fashion. As Przeworski and Limongi wrote in 1997: "The simple fact is that during the period under our scrutiny or ever before, no democracy ever fell, regardless of everything else, in a country with a per capita income higher than that of Argentina in 1975: \$6,055."¹⁴

This seminal article never mentioned Fukuyama. Nor did the authors utter the already famous phrase about "the end of history." Yet it is hard to interpret their claims in any other way. Democracies, a growing consensus in the literature held, are very difficult to establish. But once they fulfill some basic criteria—once they have changed governments through free and fair elections a few times, and reached a certain level of economic development—they are "consolidated."¹⁵ They then become "the only game in town,"¹⁶ and can "expect to last forever."¹⁷

The staggering implications of these claims cannot have escaped readers at the time. After all, a large number of countries already fulfilled the conditions stipulated by Przeworski and Limongi. North America and Western Europe, large swaths of Latin America, and some parts of Asia all qualified as regions filled with "consolidated democracies." These areas would, henceforth, constitute the indestructible heartland of democracy. Moreover, it was natural to assume that those parts of the world that were not yet democratic would continue to experience some economic growth; if they continued to experiment with democracy at random intervals, it was very likely that they, too, would eventually enter the democratic column. Liberal democracy, in short, would dominate the world.

Three Challenges to the Triumphalist View

Recent years have posed a fundamental challenge to this extraordinary self-confidence. An onslaught of bad news, from the election of Donald Trump to the death throes of democracies in Hungary and Venezuela, has inspired a lively literature of democratic crisis.¹⁸ After the hubris of the preceding decades, these works provide an important

wake-up call. But because they focus on a wide range of phenomena and draw on a disparate set of methodological and disciplinary approaches, the nature of the challenge raised by these works to the triumphalist philosophy of history remains poorly understood.

Three unexpected empirical developments have undermined belief in the assured stability of liberal democracy in its traditional heartland of North America and Western Europe, not to speak of democratic hegemony around the world. First, as Larry Diamond has chronicled, there has been a long “democratic recession”: For each of the past thirteen years, more countries have moved away from democracy than have moved toward it. Second, as Roberto Stefan Foa and I have shown, large numbers of people seem to have fallen out of love with liberal democracy: In countries from the United Kingdom to Australia, citizens have grown both more critical of liberal democracy and more open to authoritarian alternatives. Third, and perhaps most important, populist forces intent on challenging the most basic rules and norms of liberal democracy have risen across a great swath of democratic countries. While these developments are closely interrelated, each presents a distinct challenge to the triumphalist assumptions of what is rapidly coming to seem like an earlier age.

The Democratic Recession: The most straightforward, and at first glance most potent, challenge consists in the aggregate retreat of democracy that the world has seen over the past thirteen years. Looking back through iterations of Freedom House’s annual *Freedom in the World* survey, Larry Diamond pointed out in 2015 that more countries had moved away from democracy than had moved toward it in each of the preceding seven years. “Around 2006,” he wrote, “the expansion of freedom and democracy in the world came to a prolonged halt.”¹⁹ In the years since Diamond first noticed this worrying trend, democracy’s losing record has continued year after year. By the time Freedom House published the 2019 edition of *Freedom in the World*, the organization was lamenting what it called “the 13th consecutive year of decline in global freedom.”²⁰

In countries as diverse as Kenya, the Philippines, and Russia, the retreat of democracy has caused human suffering on a massive scale. In all these countries, worsening Freedom House scores correspond to jailed journalists and murdered critics, to growing corruption and a spreading sense of dread. Yet the aggregate retreat of democracy is not, in and of itself, an especially potent challenge to the triumphalist philosophy of history, in either its idealist or its empiricist vein.

That is because the current democratic recession may not be all that damaging to the future prospects of democracy. After all, most of the worsening scores recorded by Freedom House come from countries that political scientists had never expected to become “consolidated” democ-

racies. Kenya, the Philippines, and Russia, for example, all remain below the economic threshold identified by Przeworski and Limongi (as of 2018, those countries' GDPs per capita in current U.S. dollars were estimated respectively to be \$1,711; \$3,103; and \$11,289). A similar defensive maneuver is also available to Fukuyama. If it turns out that the idea of liberal democracy is not strong enough to weather inhospitable circumstances—such as those in which the scientific motor of history has not yet brought about sufficient material progress—this may delay the idea's full manifestation in the empirical world, but it does not suggest that this manifestation will never arrive.

Indeed, many long-held theories in political science can easily accommodate—and perhaps even predict—Diamond's observation. As Samuel P. Huntington argued in a seminal article for the *Journal of Democracy*, the spread of democracy has historically come as a series of waves.²¹ Each of these waves was eventually followed by a powerful reverse wave, which helped to explain such phenomena as the rise of fascism in the 1920s and the fall of democracy in newly established African democracies in the 1960s. From this perspective, the bulk of Diamond's democratic recession should simply be understood as the ebb that we should, all along, have expected to follow in the wake of the dramatic democratic expansion of the late twentieth century.

A Change in Attitude: Were democracy in crisis only in parts of the world where its historical roots are shallow and the economy is not yet mature, the challenge to the triumphalist philosophy of history could likely be contained. But the most remarkable development of the past two decades is not the democratic backsliding experienced by Kenya, the Philippines, or Russia; rather, it is the extent of popular discontent with the system that has become evident in longstanding democracies such as Britain, France, and the United States.

Even before Donald Trump was elected president of the United States and the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, Foa and I warned in these pages that citizens of some of the world's supposedly most firmly consolidated democracies were starting to take a bleaker view of their political systems.²² Younger citizens today, for example, are far less likely than their elders to say that living in a democracy is of the utmost importance to them. Worryingly, it is not only that citizens value democracy less than they once did—across age groups, they are also more likely to favor straightforwardly authoritarian alternatives to democracy.

Because they come from consolidated democracies with developed economies and long democratic traditions, these findings about political attitudes cast graver doubt on the triumphalist philosophy of history than does the democratic recession. The political scientists who promised that democracies such as that of the United States could expect to

live forever assumed that democracy would be the “only game in town” once the system had taken hold. The extent of popular disaffection with democratic institutions, as well as a surprising openness toward non-democratic alternatives, suggests that this is no longer the case.

For parallel reasons, these findings also sit uneasily with Fukuyama’s thesis regarding the end of history. Liberal democracies, he claimed, are especially adept at satisfying the basic aspirations of humanity. It is only natural to expect that these regimes would, in that case, enjoy deep support from the citizens whose aspirations had been satisfied. Far from feeling contented, however, citizens are in fact deeply dissatisfied with their societies. It would appear, then, that liberal democracies may suffer from more fundamental contradictions than Fukuyama was willing to recognize. The democratic-consent condition has apparently been breached.

Although suggestive, these findings are not enough to destroy belief in the triumphalist philosophy of history altogether. For one, these findings are still preliminary. While there is strong evidence of a significant loss of regime legitimacy in important liberal democracies, it is not yet clear just how far this will go. In order to answer the crucial question of whether liberal democracy generates as much loyalty to itself as both Fukuyama and empirical political scientists have long assumed, we will have to await both new data and the passage of time. For another, talk is cheap. A rising willingness to lambaste liberal democracy suggests that the contradictions within liberal democracy are stronger than most believed. But are these contradictions enough to bring about the rise of viable antidemocratic forces? We have yet to find out.

The Rise of the Populists: In the year 2000, populists were represented in seven European governments and on average commanded about 8 percent of the vote across the continent. By the end of 2018, they were represented in fifteen governments, and commanded 26 percent of the vote.²³ The situation is arguably even more dramatic outside Europe: Donald Trump is now the president of the United States, Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, and Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil. As of late 2019, three of the largest democracies in the world—Brazil, India, and the United States—are all ruled by populists.²⁴ This is, without a doubt, the most important reason why the triumphalist mood of the 1990s has, of late, been deflated.

In virtually all countries in which populist movements come to power, they begin to undermine the liberal elements of the political system. As a first step, populist leaders attack the rights of critical individuals or unpopular minorities. In most cases, they quickly go further: As they weaponize their claim to exclusively represent the people against any attempt to limit their power, populist leaders become implacable enemies of the rule of law and the separation of powers. It is this tendency that is neatly captured by the term “illiberal democracy.”

But while it is indeed accurate to say that populists usually attempt—and frequently manage²⁵—to transform countries into illiberal democracies, it is important to point out that this form of regime appears to be highly unstable. For when a popularly elected president or prime minister manages to dismantle the rule of law, there are no longer independent institutions which can ensure that the opposition enjoys the most basic rights, that the vote is counted fairly, or indeed that the ruler leaves office if the will of the people swings against him. This is why illiberal democracies often find themselves in an existential struggle: As the opposition attempts to reverse the slide toward illiberalism, populist leaders seek to gain ever greater control. Where they succeed, illiberal democracy turns out to be but a way station on the path to an elected dictatorship.

There is now sufficient evidence of this process playing out in supposedly consolidated democracies to challenge political science’s version of the triumphalist philosophy of history. Take the case of Hungary. Since becoming a fledgling democracy in the early 1990s, the country has had several changes of government through free and fair elections. Thanks to astonishing economic growth, it now enjoys an annual GDP per capita that the International Monetary Fund estimates at 17,296 in nominal dollars and 33,707 in Purchasing Power Parity dollars.²⁶

Yet the country has rapidly ceased to be a liberal democracy: In recent years, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party have neutered the courts, taken over much of the media, and mounted a sustained attack on free speech. In light of the extreme power that they now hold, it is no longer tenable to call Hungary an illiberal democracy.²⁷ In short, Hungary is one of the first countries to complete its transition from a liberal democracy that could, according to Przeworski and Limongi, “expect to live forever” to what is, for all intents and purposes, an elected dictatorship. As such, the country poses a fundamental challenge to the optimism that reigned supreme among political scientists until very recently.

But has Hungary’s transition from a liberal democracy to an elected dictatorship—or, for that matter, the rise of populism more broadly—also disproven Fukuyama’s version of the triumphalist philosophy of history? What is obvious is that the country’s citizens do not value individual liberty and collective self-determination enough to defend liberal democracy against its populist enemies. Much more conclusively than the changes in attitudes observed in countries such as the United States, this demonstrates a breach of the democratic-consent condition, demolishing a key building block of the argument that liberal democracy is history’s terminal station.

Curiously, however, what philosophers in a different time and place might have called the “world-historical significance” of the events in Hungary does not extend to the second key building block of Fukuyama’s optimism. Indeed, while there is now very strong reason to be-

lieve that the contradictions of liberal democracy go much deeper than he had assumed, it is far too early to tell whether populists will be able to build political regimes in which these tensions are less severe. If populists prove capable of obtaining the consent of their populations over the long run, the autocratic-contradictions condition would also be violated; little would then remain of Fukuyama's optimism. But there is, for now, strong reason to suspect that the project of justifying autocratic rule with the promise to speak for the people will, over time, prove at least equally difficult to sustain.

The Contradictions of Populist Dictatorships

While there has of late been extensive speculation about the future of liberal democracies, there has been far less reflection on how dictatorships that issue from populism may fare in the long run. Yet this question is just as crucial for assessing the long-term prospects of liberal democracy: Will countries such as Hungary that have of late transformed from liberal democracies into elected dictatorships remain autocratic—or might these new autocratic regimes, in turn, prove to be short intervals on a zigzagging course toward the consolidation of liberal democracy?²⁸

In their beginning stages, dictatorships often enjoy a strong bonus drawn from charismatic or revolutionary authority. Indeed, the widespread popularity that strongmen frequently enjoy during their first years in office allows the regime to limit the extent of repression it undertakes.²⁹ As a result, the great majority of citizens are able to escape the most negative aspects of autocracy by staying clear of politics; as long as they refrain from opposition activity, their lives—within the family, and even in civil society organizations such as churches or chess clubs—are much as they were before.

But charismatic or revolutionary authority usually fades. The failings of the founding dictator become more evident as the years go on; memories of the revolution grow fainter; an autocrat's successors do not enjoy the same political skill or source of legitimacy. This loss of legitimacy becomes especially dangerous for autocratic regimes when it is compounded by exogenous shocks—a worldwide economic crisis or a fall in the prices of the country's leading exports—or when the long-term effects of regime mismanagement, such as hyperinflation, begin to close in. Under such circumstances, an autocratic regime that once looked stable can quickly enter into a vicious cycle as the loss of legitimacy necessitates greater repression, which in turn leads to a further fall in legitimacy.

This dynamic, of course, applies to many dictatorships—plenty of which manage to survive for decades, or even centuries, by ratcheting up repression to the necessary degree. Yet there are reasons to think

that it may prove particularly challenging to dictatorships whose roots lie in a populist revolt. There are two reasons for this: First, these countries have recently been free, so citizens will likely prove restive when repression starts to affect their daily lives. As Machiavelli pointed out, it is particularly difficult to impose autocracy on people who are accustomed to liberty.³⁰ Second, unlike in autocratic regimes that claim forms of religious or traditional authority or ground themselves in an explicit rejection of democracy, the legitimacy of many of these governments strongly depends on their claim to be *more* democratic than their predecessors. It is one thing for an imam to claim the need for repression in the name of Allah, or for a fascist to justify his persecution of dissenters by citing his desire to build an organic, hierarchical society; it is quite another for a populist who was elected on the promise of sweeping aside antidemocratic elites to turn his tanks on his own people.

The past years have, in short, shown that many citizens of countries such as Hungary are willing to go along with a regime that *claims* to preserve individual freedom and collective self-determination while actually destroying these fundamental values. This shows that the democratic-consent condition no longer holds. Yet since autocracies rooted in populism are so young, we have very little information about whether they will be more adept at managing their own internal contradictions. And if it should turn out that the autocratic-contradictions condition still applies, then the elected dictatorships erected by rulers such as Orbán may ultimately prove to be but a detour on the tortuous route to democratic stability.

It follows that the tempting phrase “the end of the end of history” is, for now, premature. The past decade has taught us that the democratic-consent condition has been breached: The internal contradictions of liberal democracy go deeper than many have long assumed. The autocratic-contradictions condition, however, may yet hold: At this juncture at least, it does not seem at all obvious that any systematic alternative to liberal democracy will do better at avoiding internal contradictions.

Perhaps a growing share of citizens say that they do not care about individual liberty and collective self-determination—and are willing to vote for populist parties and candidates—because liberal democracy is far less able to fulfill the most pressing human desires than its partisans have long believed. Even after they lose their freedoms, the former citizens of liberal democracies might not bemoan their loss. But it seems just as plausible that the rise of authoritarian populists will eventually bring about a counterreaction. In that hopeful scenario, the citizens who have fallen out of love with democracy will recognize what they have lost when they wake up to the lived reality of an autocratic regime—and will once again embark on the momentous struggle to bring the real and material world into accord with their ideas and their consciousness.

NOTES

1. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 18.
2. Fukuyama, "End of History?" 5.
3. Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, "Modernization: Theories and Facts," *World Politics* (January 1997): 155–83, http://pages.ucsd.edu/~mnaoi/page4/POLI227/files/page1_13.pdf.
4. The earlier article is Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, José Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, "What Makes Democracies Endure?" *Journal of Democracy* 7 (January 1996): 39–55. The quote is from page 48.
5. One of the earlier uses of this phrase is found in Robert Kagan, "The End of the End of History," *New Republic*, 23 April 2008. More recent uses include Shadi Hamid, "The End of the End of History," *Foreign Policy*, 15 November 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/11/15/the-end-of-the-end-of-history>; and Eli Friedman and Andi Kao, "The End of the 'End of History,'" *Jacobin*, 1 April 2018, <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/04/china-capitalism-communist-party-democracy-xi-jinping>.
6. Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 3. See also Edward Luce, *The Retreat of Western Liberalism* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2017).
7. Fukuyama, "End of History," 4.
8. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 125.
9. Fukuyama, *End of History and the Last Man*, xix.
10. Fukuyama, *End of History and the Last Man*, 48–50.
11. "It must be possible for an empirical scientific system to be refuted by experience." Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 19.
12. Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* 53 (March 1959): 69–105.
13. Przeworski and Limongi, "Modernization: Theories and Facts," 158–9.
14. Przeworski and Limongi, "Modernization: Theories and Facts," 165.
15. See Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell, and J. Samuel Valenzuela, eds., *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992) and Andreas Schedler, "What Is Democratic Consolidation?" *Journal of Democracy* 9 (April 1998): 91–107.
16. Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan, "Toward Consolidated Democracies," *Journal of Democracy* 7 (April 1996): 14–33.
17. Przeworski and Limongi, "Modernization: Theories and Facts," 165.
18. See, for example, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2018); William A. Galston, *Anti-Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); and Mounk, *People vs Democracy*.

19. Larry Diamond, "Facing up to the Democratic Recession," *Journal of Democracy* 26 (January 2015): 141–55.

20. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2019: Democracy in Retreat*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019/democracy-in-retreat>.

21. Samuel P. Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," *Journal of Democracy* 2 (Spring 1991): 12–34; www.ned.org/docs/Samuel-P-Huntington-Democracy-Third-Wave.pdf.

22. See Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect," *Journal of Democracy* 27 (July 2016): 5–17; Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "The Signs of Deconsolidation," *Journal of Democracy* 28 (January 2017): 5–15; Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "Online Exchange on 'Democratic Deconsolidation,'" www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exchange-democratic-deconsolidation (2017), and Mounk, *People vs. Democracy*, ch. 3.

23. Martin Eiermann, Yascha Mounk, and Limor Gultchin, "European Populism: Trends, Threats and Future Prospects," Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 29 December 2017, <https://institute.globallinsight/renewing-centre/european-populism-trends-threats-and-future-prospects>.

24. Indonesia, a large (population about 260 million) electoral democracy rated Partly Free by Freedom House, might be said to be under populist rule, but is the least clear-cut of these cases.

25. Yascha Mounk and Jordan Kyle, "What Populists Do to Democracy," *Atlantic*, 26 December 2018, www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/12/hard-data-populism-bolsonaro-trump/578878; as well as Jordan Kyle and Yascha Mounk, "The Populist Harm to Democracy: An Empirical Assessment," Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 26 December 2018, <https://institute.globallinsight/renewing-centre/populist-harm-democracy>.

26. In 1975, Hungary had a GDP per capita of barely \$1,200 per year. In the late 1990s, around the time Przeworski and Limongi were writing, it was less than \$5,000 per year. See www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/hungary/gdp-per-capita.

27. János Kornai, "Hungary's U-Turn: Retreating from Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 26 (July 2015): 34–48.

28. In a masterful study of European political development, Sheri Berman argues that this kind of zigzagging course has in fact been the default mode of democratic consolidation in the past. See Sheri Berman, *Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe: From the Ancien Régime to the Present Day* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

29. For classic reflections on the role of charismatic authority in democracy and dictatorship, see the first volume of Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds., *Max Weber—Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, 3 vols. (New York: Bedminster, 1968). See also Carl J. Friedrich, "Political Leadership and the Problem of the Charismatic Power," *Journal of Politics* 23 (February 1961): 3–24; and Ian Kershaw, "'Working Towards the Führer.' Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship," *Contemporary European History* 2 (July 1993): 103–18.

30. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, bk. 1, ch. 4.