

The Collapse of Democracy in Afghanistan: A Critique of Fukuyama's Anglo-American Dream of Global Democratic Triumph

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Abstract

This article critically examines the 2021 collapse of the Afghan government, challenging Francis Fukuyama's "End of History" theory and his Anglo-American Dream of Global Democratic Triumph, which posits that liberal democracy is the final form of governance. Despite two decades of international efforts to establish democracy in Afghanistan, the Taliban's rapid takeover reveals the complexity of political evolution shaped by deep-rooted cultural, historical, and political factors. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, this study situates Afghanistan's failed democratic project within global trends, such as the persistence of authoritarian regimes and the rise of populism. The findings suggest that political progress is not linear and is influenced by economic, geopolitical, and cultural forces, urging a reevaluation of Fukuyama's thesis.

Keywords: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Regimes, Global Governance, Ideological Development, End of History

Introduction

Francis Fukuyama's "End of History" thesis suggests that the worldwide triumph of liberal democracy marks the conclusion of humanity's ideological evolution, signaling that the struggle over political ideologies has come to an end and that democracy will eventually become the globally accepted system of governance. According to Fukuyama, with the defeat of communism and authoritarian regimes, liberal democracy stands as the final and ultimate form of government (Strand, 2016). However, the recent events in Afghanistan challenge this optimistic view, proving that history is far from over and that the future of global political development remains highly uncertain and contentious. The collapse of the Afghan government in 2021, after two decades of international efforts to establish a democratic system, reveals that the spread of democracy is neither guaranteed nor universally embraced (Murtazashvili, 2022).

The disintegration of democracy in Afghanistan, especially after the U.S. military withdrawal and the Taliban's resurgence, underscores the complexity of political progress. Despite spending over \$145 billion on reconstruction and attempts to build democratic institutions, Afghanistan's governance faltered due to widespread corruption, mismanagement, and a lack of connection between the central government and local communities (U.S. Department of State, 2022). The Bonn Agreement, which centralized political power in Kabul, ignored Afghanistan's diverse social and cultural structure, resulting in alienation and creating an opportunity for the Taliban to present themselves as a more legitimate alternative. This collapse highlights a larger global trend where democratic aspirations clash with local political realities, entrenched power structures, and historical legacies (SIGAR, 2023).

The situation in Afghanistan is not an isolated case; it reflects the growing power of autocratic and anti-democratic movements worldwide. While liberal democracy is still

championed by many international actors, the political landscape is increasingly fragmented. Authoritarian regimes like those in China and Russia continue to challenge the idea that liberal democracy is the inevitable outcome of modernization (Helms, 2024). These regimes thrive on state control, national interests, and economic stability, offering alternative governance models that appeal to countries facing their own political and economic challenges (Ekiert, 2023). China, for example, has achieved significant economic success while maintaining strict political control, presenting a challenge to the idea that economic growth necessarily leads to democratization (Arestis, Karagiannis, & Lee, 2021). At the same time, the rise of populist movements in Europe, the United States, and other regions signals a shift away from established democratic norms (Pintsch, Hammerschmidt, & Meyer, 2022). Events such as Brexit and the election of populist leaders reflect increasing discontent with the political establishment and a desire for more sovereignty and protectionism. These movements often prioritize national identity over liberal democratic principles, suggesting a more diverse and fragmented global political future (Wajner, Destradi, & Zürn, 2024).

The experience of Afghanistan demonstrates how deeply local cultural, historical, and geopolitical factors influence a nation's political development. Afghanistan's failed attempt to build a democratic state serves as a cautionary tale about the challenges of imposing democracy in contexts where traditional power structures and local values hold strong influence (NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2011). Globally, the rise of nationalism, authoritarianism, and anti-liberal sentiment highlights the limitations of the idea of a singular, inevitable political trajectory. Instead, societies around the world are engaged in ideological struggles, shaped by their unique histories and contexts, making the global march toward liberal democracy far from assured (Spytska, 2023).

Given these global dynamics, Fukuyama's thesis requires a rethinking. While liberal democracy remains an important model, it is clear that its universal adoption is far from guaranteed. Rather than moving toward a single endpoint, the future of global political development is one of ongoing ideological competition, with different systems of governance vying for influence across the world. The resurgence of authoritarianism and the challenges to liberal democracy make it clear that history is still unfolding, shaped by ongoing struggles for power, legitimacy, and governance (Berman, 2011).

Francis Fukuyama's Theory of the "End of History"

This theory posits that the triumph of liberal democracy marks the final stage in humanity's political evolution. Emerging after the Cold War, this theory suggested that with the fall of totalitarian regimes and the dominance of liberal democracies, a universal political system had been established (Fukuyama, 1992). Fukuyama argued that this moment symbolized the culmination of humanity's ideological development, where Western liberal democracy would become the global norm. His claim was more than a mere observation of political events; it was a profound philosophical statement regarding the trajectory of human society (Fukuyama, 1989). His argument was rooted in historical and philosophical traditions, particularly the ideas of thinkers like G. W. F. Hegel and Karl Marx, who viewed history as a linear march toward greater rationality and freedom (Britannica, 1998). Since the French Revolution, liberal democracy had continually proven itself superior to other systems in terms of ethics, politics, and economics. He argued that liberalism could resolve all contradictions in human life, rendering other political and economic systems obsolete in meeting fundamental human needs for freedom and rights (Mounk, 2020).

This article challenges Fukuyama's theory, arguing that the "end of history" is far from being realized. The assumption that liberal democracy would inevitably spread around the globe fails to acknowledge the resilience and adaptability of non-democratic regimes. Nations such as China and Russia provide compelling examples of how authoritarian governance can not only survive but thrive in opposition to liberal democratic ideals. These regimes have shown considerable stability and strength, emphasizing that liberal democracy is not an inevitable outcome, but rather one of many potential governance models (Levitsky & Way, 2002). Additionally, recent global political developments reveal a resurgence of ideological conflicts that contradict Fukuyama's belief in a linear progression toward liberal democracy. This emerging trend suggests that instead of moving toward a singular endpoint of liberal democracy, we are witnessing a complex political landscape filled with competing ideologies and power struggles (Galston, 2018).

In his later writings, Fukuyama acknowledged some of these complexities, clarifying that his original thesis did not suggest a world devoid of conflict or cultural diversity. Rather, he argued that while liberal democracy may prevail in many areas, it does not eliminate ideological struggles or societal tensions (Fukuyama, 2021).

Failure to Account for Resilience of Authoritarian Regimes and Worldviews

Philosophers such as Alexander Dugin provide a broader critique of liberalism, questioning its ability to address the complexities of modern life (Lucchese, 2023). Fukuyama's prediction that liberal democracy would eventually dominate the globe fails to account for the continued power of authoritarian governments like those in Russia and China. These regimes have not only resisted pressures for democratization but have also strengthened their hold on

power (Kagan, 2008). In Russia, Vladimir Putin's leadership has involved systematically dismantling democratic institutions, restricting free speech, and consolidating state control. These actions illustrate the resilience of authoritarianism and challenge the belief that liberal democracy is the inevitable outcome for all societies (Stoner, 2023). Similarly, China's one-party system under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has thrived despite its refusal to embrace liberal democracy. The CCP has used its economic successes to justify political repression, presenting its model as a valid alternative to Western-style democracy. This demonstrates that authoritarian regimes can flourish alongside significant economic growth, undermining the assumption that democracy naturally follows economic development (Zhu, 2012).

Philosophical critiques, such as those offered by Alexander Dugin, challenge liberal dreams. Dugin's Fourth Political Theory, which was first proposed in his 2009 book, rejects the three dominant ideologies of the 20th century liberalism, communism, and fascism, arguing that they have all failed to address the complexities of modern existence (Shamir, 2014). For Dugin, liberalism represents a decadent and shallow ideology, focused on individualism and universal rights, which ultimately leads to societal fragmentation and a loss of connection to tradition. Dugin believes that liberalism's focus on individual freedoms ignores the importance of cultural identity and historical context, which are essential to understanding human existence (Ibid.)

Dugin's theory places significant emphasis on Russia's unique cultural heritage, arguing that Russia must resist Western influence and pursue its own path in global politics. Drawing on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, Dugin highlights the importance of cultural identity and national sovereignty in shaping political ideology (al-Hussein & Shabib, 2025). For Dugin, Russia's distinct cultural and historical identity provides the foundation for a new political model that transcends the limitations of liberalism. His Fourth Political Theory calls for a pluralistic

approach that respects different cultural identities while fostering a strong national narrative. This vision encourages the revival of traditional values, while rejecting the homogenizing forces of liberalism and globalization (Ibid.).

A Postmodern Critique of Fukuyama's Historicism

Philosophers such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx embraced the idea that history progresses in a linear, dialectical manner, driven by underlying processes (Barlas, 2022). Hegel's philosophy viewed history as an unfolding, rational process aimed at achieving greater human freedom and self-awareness. He introduced the concept of the dialectic, where each historical stage (thesis) gives rise to its opposite (antithesis), and the conflict between the two results in a synthesis. This dialectical progression, according to Hegel, represents the development of human freedom and consciousness, ultimately leading to the realization of an ideal, "perfect state" (Maybee, 2020).

Karl Marx adapted Hegel's dialectical method but grounded it in material conditions. Marx's historical materialism argued that economic forces and class struggles drive historical change, with each stage of history resulting from contradictions in the economic base of society (Patel & Guru, 2012). For Marx, this progression inevitably leads to socialism, and ultimately to communism, as the final form of societal development, where class conflict is resolved and true human freedom is realized (Ibid.)

Fukuyama's "end of history" theory is rooted in this same modern view of history as a linear, progressive journey. Fukuyama's view echoes Hegel's and Marx's teleological frameworks, as he suggests that liberal democracy represents the culmination of history's political development (Fleming, 2022). Just as Hegel and Marx believed that history progresses

toward a specific, inevitable outcome, Fukuyama claims that the triumph of liberal democracy is the endpoint of this progression (Ibid.)

Postmodern thinkers have criticized this linear view of history. Jean-François Lyotard, for instance, challenges the concept of a grand, singular historical narrative. In the Postmodern Condition, he argues that such "metanarratives" oversimplify the diversity and complexity of history (Lyotard, 1984). Lyotard posits that history is not a unified, teleological process but is composed of multiple, often contradictory, narratives. This perspective suggests that history is not inevitably headed toward one final political system but is instead shaped by a multitude of forces and viewpoints, each with its own validity (Ibid.).

Afghanistan and Efforts to Build Democracy

After the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, a significant international initiative was launched to establish a democratic government. This effort aimed to stabilize the country after decades of conflict and prevent it from once again becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda (Schweitzer & Eran, 2021). The process began with the Bonn Conference in December 2001, which laid out a roadmap for Afghanistan's transition to democracy. This conference appointed Hamid Karzai as the head of an interim government and formalized plans for creating democratic institutions through the Bonn Agreement, officially titled the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions. Signed on December 5, 2001, the agreement aimed to share power among Afghanistan's various factions while excluding the Taliban, who had been ousted from power (Fields & Ahmed, 2011).

Initiating a bottom-up approach by allowing regional strongmen and warlords to help overthrow the Taliban, The Bonn Agreement outlined an interim governing structure, starting with the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA), inaugurated on December 22, 2001, with a six-month mandate. This interim phase was designed to lead into a two-year Transitional Authority (TA), culminating in free elections to establish a permanent government (Jalali, 2009). The agreement emphasized drafting a new constitution, establishing an independent judiciary, and conducting free and fair elections. It prioritized inclusivity by advocating for the participation of various ethnic and social groups in governance, aiming to create a system where all Afghans could have a voice in shaping their nation's future (United Nations Peacemaker, 2001). Recognizing that security was essential for political stability, the agreement proposed the creation of a unified national army and police force. This reform sought to demilitarize the warring factions and integrate them into a cohesive national defense system, crucial for establishing law and order throughout the country (Ibid.)

To support the Bonn Agreement, international partners committed substantial resources to Afghanistan's rebuilding efforts, especially in rebuilding Afghanistan's National Army (Jalali, 2002). Over nearly two decades, approximately \$145 billion was spent on initiatives to establish democratic institutions, strengthen security forces, and promote economic development. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), under NATO leadership, played a pivotal role in stabilizing the country and supporting governance reforms (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Finance, 2008). During this period, Afghanistan achieved significant progress in several areas. Healthcare access and outcomes saw considerable improvement, with internationally funded initiatives boosting vaccination rates and enhancing maternal health services (Ibid.). Education also underwent a remarkable transformation, particularly for girls who

had been excluded from schooling under Taliban rule. Enrollment rates surged as foreign aid supported the construction of schools and educational programs, contributing to higher literacy rates and creating greater opportunities for Afghan youth (Ibid.)

Another notable development was the expansion of media freedom. Numerous newspapers, television networks, and radio channels emerged, fostering public discourse and increasing citizen engagement with political issues. This represented a significant shift from the restrictive environment of previous decades (Reporters Without Borders, 2016). Millions of Afghans participated in elections, including the landmark presidential elections of 2004 and 2014, which were pivotal moments in the democratization process. These elections reflected both the will of the people, and the progress made toward embedding democratic practices in Afghan political life (Byrd, 2015). The post-Bonn Agreement efforts to build democracy in Afghanistan involved a delicate balance between local aspirations and international support (Andisha, 2021). While notable advances were achieved in establishing democratic institutions and promoting human rights, these efforts were fraught with challenges that later complicated the country's political trajectory. Despite these obstacles, the framework laid out by the Bonn Agreement set a foundation for governance and civil society engagement, leaving a legacy that would influence Afghanistan's future direction (Ibid.).

The Failure of Democracy in Afghanistan

The failure of democracy in Afghanistan became unmistakably apparent in August 2021 when the Afghan government rapidly collapsed following the withdrawal of U.S. forces (Saxena, 2021). Despite two decades of international intervention aimed at building a democratic state, persistent problems with governance, corruption, and the lack of local legitimacy ultimately led

to this failure. The Taliban quickly regained control, marking a significant reversal of the progress made over the previous years (Murtazashvili, 2022).

Corruption and governance issues severely weakened the Afghan government, undermining its ability to function effectively and alienating citizens. Many Afghans saw their government as distant and unresponsive to their needs, fueling widespread frustration and bolstered support for insurgents (Jalali, 2021). Corruption infiltrated all levels of government, from local officials to high-ranking leaders, creating an environment where public trust was eroded. Reports revealed that many government officials exploited their positions for personal gain, diverting resources meant for public services and development (SIGAR, 2023). This widespread corruption not only hindered effective governance but also bred resentment among the population, which felt betrayed by a system that was supposed to serve them (Ibid.).

The political system created after 2001, under the Bonn Agreement, failed to account for Afghanistan's diverse social and ethnic makeup. The agreement led to a strong presidential system that centralized power in Kabul. This disconnection between the government and local communities bred resentment against a system seen as ineffective and corrupt (Worden, 2011). Many rural areas, with their own local leaders and traditional governance structures, felt sidelined by the centralized approach that failed to reflect their interests. As a result, local communities turned to alternative sources of authority, including the Taliban, who promised to restore stability and order (Murtazashvili, 2022).

The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) became heavily reliant on U.S. support for training, resources, and leadership, leaving them ill-equipped to operate independently once international forces began withdrawing. The rapid decline in their security capabilities significantly weakened the Afghan government's ability to maintain control (Noor,

2021). When U.S. forces withdrew in 2021, the ANDSF suffered from low morale, poor leadership, and a lack of preparation, resulting in swift territorial losses to the Taliban. The absence of a self-sustaining security apparatus left the government vulnerable to the insurgents' advances (Hassan, 2023).

The Taliban's return to power was not only a political shift but also a significant rollback of the rights and freedoms that had been achieved during the previous government. Women's rights to education, employment, and free speech were severely restricted under Taliban rule. The group's rise to power marked a cultural regression for many Afghans who had hoped for a more open and democratic society (Ibid.).

The role of the international community in Afghanistan's failed democratic experiment is also crucial to understanding its collapse. While international actors initially committed substantial financial aid and military support to Afghanistan's transition to democracy, they ultimately struggled with persistent issues like corruption within the Afghan government (Partaw, 2023). The United States invested billions of dollars in reconstruction efforts, but these investments often failed to yield effective governance or build public support for the Afghan state. (Lutz & Desai, 2014)

A Challenge to Fukuyama's Democratic Vision

After the U.S.-led invasion in 2001, substantial resources were invested to build democratic institutions in Afghanistan. Despite the expenditure of billions of US dollars on reconstruction and governance projects, the Afghan government eventually collapsed under the weight of entrenched corruption, political centralization, and a lack of legitimacy among its citizens (Murtazashvili, 2022). The Bonn Agreement created a highly centralized presidential

system that alienated many Afghans, particularly in rural regions where traditional power structures and cultural values conflicted with the imposed democratic framework. This disconnect led to a legitimacy crisis that the Taliban capitalized on (Yildirim, 2022).

The Taliban's resurgence was not simply a reaction to foreign occupation; it also reflected widespread disillusionment with the Afghan government. Numerous reports, including those from SIGAR (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction), highlighted the Afghan government's failure to adequately prepare for the withdrawal of U.S. forces, underestimating both the Taliban's resolve and military strength (Ghaffari Hashjin & Karimi Shiroodi, 2024). The perception that the government was corrupt and disconnected from the everyday struggles of ordinary Afghans, boosted support for the Taliban, who presented themselves as a legitimate alternative rooted in religious authority rather than Western democratic ideals. The Afghan experience illustrates that ideological struggles are ongoing, and anti-democratic movements can flourish despite extensive efforts to promote democracy (McNally & Bucala, 2015).

The return of the Islamic Emirate under Taliban rule marks a dramatic reversal of two decades of progress toward democratic governance and human rights. Under the Taliban, Afghanistan has seen a severe rollback of freedoms, particularly regarding women's rights and civil liberties. (Baltar Rodríguez, 2023).

A Need for Reassessment

The critique of Fukuyama's theory calls for a fresh examination of global politics. The ongoing challenges to liberal democracy, evidenced by the rise of autocratic regimes and anti-liberal forces, underscore the necessity for a broader understanding of political development, one

that acknowledges the persistence of these regimes and the complex dynamics that shape global political landscapes. This requires not only a reevaluation of Fukuyama's thesis but also a more nuanced perspective on the various factors influencing political trajectories worldwide (Spencer, 2019).

Culturally, many societies possess deep-rooted traditions and values that may not align with Western democratic ideals. The situation in Afghanistan, where two decades of international efforts to establish a democratic regime ultimately failed, illustrates how local contexts and historical legacies can shape political outcomes in ways that challenge simplistic narratives about progress toward democracy (Ibrahimi, 2017). Similarly, in some parts of the world such as Asia, nationalist sentiments and historical grievances often fuel resistance to liberal democratic frameworks. Economically, disparities in development levels can also impact political stability and governance (Roy, 1952). Countries undergoing rapid economic changes may experience social unrest if political institutions fail to evolve concurrently to meet new demands for representation and accountability. Fukuyama himself acknowledged that effective governance requires a strong state and rule of law, elements often absent in regions where economic growth occurs without corresponding political development (Fukuyama, 2016).

Geopolitically, global power dynamics play a crucial role in shaping political systems. The influence of major powers like China and Russia offers alternative models to liberal democracy that some nations find appealing. These regimes frequently promote narratives of stability and economic success that resonate with countries dealing with their own governance challenges (Kutlay & Öniş, 2023). As a result, the ideological contest between liberal democracies and authoritarian models is likely to persist (Plattner, 2010). Given these factors, it is essential to reassess Fukuyama's thesis within a broader framework that recognizes the

complexities of global political development. A more comprehensive understanding would consider how cultural differences, economic conditions, and geopolitical influences interact to shape political realities across different regions. This approach would not only enrich our analysis of contemporary politics but also offer valuable insights into potential future governance models (Bloor, 2022).

Conclusion

The trajectory of global political development, as illustrated by the case of Afghanistan and the resurgence of authoritarian regimes, presents a compelling challenge to Francis Fukuyama's thesis of the "End of History." The Afghan experience, marked by the collapse of a democratically constructed government and the return of the Taliban, underscores the complex interplay of cultural, political, and historical factors that defy the simplistic narrative of inevitable progress toward liberal democracy. The global landscape, rather than converging toward a singular model of governance, remains fragmented, with competing ideologies and systems shaping national and regional politics. The rise of populism, the persistence of autocracies, and the growing influence of alternative governance models, exemplified by China and Russia, demonstrate that the path toward democratic consolidation is neither linear nor guaranteed. In many instances, societies are not moving toward liberal democracy but are instead navigating a turbulent political terrain defined by ideological struggles, deep-rooted cultural values, and evolving economic realities. These dynamics challenge Fukuyama's assumption that liberal democracy is the inevitable outcome of modernization and global intervention. As such, it is imperative to reassess the "End of History" thesis and embrace a broader understanding of political development. A more nuanced approach must take into account the diverse, often

conflicting forces that shape political systems around the world. Cultural traditions, economic disparities, geopolitical influences, and the resilience of autocratic governance all play significant roles in shaping the future of global politics. The future is not a predetermined endpoint but a fluid and contested process, where power, legitimacy, and governance models are continuously evolving.

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