

Trump and the Crisis of Liberalism

A Conversation With Francis Fukuyama

Thu, 11/21/2024 - 06:00

Transcript

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

Donald Trump's victory comes at a moment of **turbulence for global democracy**. It's been a year of almost universal backlash against incumbent leaders by **voters apparently eager to express their anger with the status quo**—and also an era when liberalism has been in retreat, if not in crisis.

Francis Fukuyama, a political scientist now at Stanford University, has done as much as anyone to elucidate the currents shaping and reshaping global politics. He published "The End of History?" more than three decades ago, and in the years since he has written a series of influential essays for *Foreign Affairs* and other publications. So I wanted to speak to Fukuyama to understand what Trump's return to the presidency might mean for liberal democracy and whether its future in the United States and around the world is truly at stake.

Frank, thanks so much for joining me as we start to attempt to make sense of what Donald Trump's return to the presidency means for global democracy and also for America's role in the world going forward.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

That's a big question that we're going to be thinking about a lot in the next few weeks.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

That's right. So let me start by going back to a piece you wrote in *Foreign Affairs* a few months ago called "The Year of Elections Has Been Good for Democracy." You were taking stock of the first part of a year in which something like half the global population was voting for new leadership, and that was from the UK and France to India and Indonesia and Mexico and many others. You noted in that piece that "fears that this year would reflect the **global triumph of a liberal populism have so far been proved wrong**." But you did note that the big test would come in the United States, and we have now seen the results of that test.

How do you assess the year of elections now? What exactly does Trump's victory mean for liberal democracy here and abroad, and how should it shape the way we think about the state of global democracy in this moment?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

My colleague Larry Diamond wrote another piece for you that updated what I had written, and I think we had the same bottom line that the **American election** was the most important election of all of the ones occurring around the world. It **would set a pattern for global politics thereafter**. And I think that it's not good for global democracy.

I think that **Trump's victory has already been celebrated by all the wrong people**, from my point of view as a committed liberal democrat. People like Viktor Orbán and Vladimir Putin and a whole bunch of political leaders that are not terribly committed, especially to a liberal form of democracy, **have all, I think, taken encouragement**. And I think that it means in Europe, for example, that the National Rally in France, or Brothers of Italy, other populist political parties are going to jump on the bandwagon and push the entire region to the right. We saw that Bolsonaro was imitating Trump when he was elected in Brazil, and so you could get other imitators popping up in other parts of the world.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

You've been writing about the crisis of liberalism for years. I think this goes back long before Trump. And I'm curious, as you assess Trump's reelection, if you see this as a kind of historical hinge point—a real change in the direction of history—or just one more step in liberalism's retreat. And I suppose as we do this, it would be worth defining liberalism for people who are thinking of this in the American political context.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

Okay, let's begin with the definition part. So, **liberal democracy is a political system with two separate parts**. The **democracy** really has to do with **accountability to populations** through elections, hopefully free and fair elections. The **liberal part** has to do with **constraints on the power of the state imposed by checks and balances and a constitution**, and fundamentally by **a rule of law that limits what the state can do to its own citizens as it tries to exercise power**. And **in the case of these populists, the real threat is not to democracy**, because they are for the most part legitimately elected: Erdogan in Turkey, Modi in India, Donald Trump in the United States. **What they threaten in the first instance is much more the liberal part of liberal democracy**—that is to say, the rule of law. And so they want to skirt the kinds of checks that exist on their power by **packing courts**, by **intimidating journalists**, by trying to **revamp the bureaucracy** so that it will carry out their wishes more fully.

And I think that this is something that is true in every one of these cases where an illiberal populist has been elected, and **I expect that's going to happen in the United States**. Now, does that mean in this country that it's the end of liberal democracy? I rather doubt it. There was this big discussion of fascism in the last couple of weeks of the election campaign, and I think that was the wrong framing for what we should fear and expect because you weren't going to get a March on Rome or brown-shirted people

saluting Donald Trump. What I think it would look like is much more like what happened in Hungary since Viktor Orbán came back to power in 2011, which is a gradual erosion of the liberal institutions in Hungary as he put more and more of them under his control.

Now, the **United States** is not Hungary; it's **a much bigger, more complex society, with many more checks and balances, among which is something like federalism.** So I think you are going to get a pretty vigorous pushback from blue states and other places. It's going to put a real damper on his ability to deport undocumented immigrants as he's promised to do because a lot of them live in blue jurisdictions where there's not going to be a willing cadre of enforcement officers that will follow a national dictate.

And so I think that it's going to be a slow process of erosion where the **normative changes are probably the most significant** in terms of what presidents think they can do and what they can get away with, **but it's still going to be a democracy.** And I think **there's a chance**—some of his policies seem to be so counterproductive, like across-the-board tariffs of 20 percent and the attempt to deport millions of people that are embedded in communities and critical to the labor force—that you could get a big reaction to this, and **in the 2026 midterms, you'll see the Republicans thrown out.** So that's democracy working as it should. I don't want to venture a prediction of how that's going to play out, but I think **we should be far from thinking that somehow our system isn't going to continue to work.**

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

I want to turn to some of those forward-looking questions in a moment, but I want to first linger on **some of the explanations for how we got here.** In your account of the crisis of liberalism, you focused on **a few failures as you see them.** The first of those, and I believe the most important in your framework, is **the turn toward what is often called neoliberalism in economic policy.** And that's used in often sloppy and inaccurate ways, but I think it broadly would refer to **too much faith in markets,** not enough attention to concentrations of power in certain industries, and inequality, and other defects of the market system.

The Biden administration could have been reading your account of that crisis. They explicitly turned away from this. You saw this in domestic policy in various ways. And you also saw it in international economic policy: Jake Sullivan, the national security adviser, gave a couple of very notable speeches pronouncing the end of neoliberalism and global economics. And there was not much in the new way of trade deals, and a lot of the signature initiatives were much closer to what someone who was in the anti-neoliberal camp would've suggested.

What did you make of those policies, and especially the international dimensions of that, and why didn't it work politically? Why did that not seem to have effects on working class voters in the United States?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

It's something we're going to have to be analyzing for some time in the future. One thing that the blogger Noah Smith noted is that people care much more about inflation than about employment. And something like the IRA or the CHIPS Act that were industrial policies that were intended to shift manufacturing to the United States may have been good for employment, but they were not very large scale and average people simply did not feel the effects of a semiconductor plant in Phoenix. But everybody feels **inflation, and that really hit a lot of working-class pocketbooks** very hard, and I think that swamped any positive impact. An industrial policy meant to build the manufacturing base in the United States, no matter who does it, that's a really long-term project, and I think that that's one of the reasons why we didn't really see much of a political benefit to the Harris campaign from those sorts of things.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

One thing that is striking to me is how we're seeing in some ways similar manifestations of this crisis in places with very different political models, very different kinds of politics, and you can look at a whole set of different countries around the globe where you're seeing similar kinds of crisis. I went back to a piece that you wrote in 2020 in *Foreign Affairs* called "The Pandemic and Political Order."

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

That's very dangerous. Reading my old stuff is really dangerous.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

But this one I think you're going to be happy to hear because this was, of course, very early in the process of grappling with what the pandemic would mean. We were right in the middle of that first phase of it. You did note that, and I'm quoting you here, "Future historians will trace comparably large effects to the current pandemic; the challenge is figuring them out ahead of time." But you note that some of them were likely to be the **proliferation of conspiracy theories**, the **turn against establishments**. How much of that is driving this global anger at incumbents and turning against incumbents globally?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

Yeah, I think that's huge. We didn't realize it I think at the time as we were living through the end of the pandemic, but it had a big effect in discrediting existing governments. And a lot of that discrediting was unfair because a lot of them were trying to do their best, but the measures and the way it affected ordinary people were really quite large. Shutting an entire society down for months at a time. In a way, it's amazing if that doesn't have a big effect.

And I think that in terms of the specific Trumpian narrative about the government being untrustworthy was vastly reinforced by the pandemic, and it reflected some real policy—I would say not malign intentions, but—mistakes. So for example, in a lot of blue states in the United States and in other countries abroad, they closed schools for too long. That was oftentimes a result of political pressure from teachers unions and this sort of thing, but it really convinced a lot of people that the government was more attentive to these interest groups than they were to the welfare of children in general and I just think it made people very grouchy.

On the Democratic Party side, I think the lockdown really accentuated the big progressive reaction after the killing of George Floyd in mid-2020. And all of a sudden, all of this could come out in a lot of demonstrations, violence, and that in turn sparks this big reaction on the right, where people say, “Oh, so that’s what the Democrats are really about. It’s trashing city centers and that sort of thing.” So I just think that we’re living with these consequences and it’s going to be very hard to restore any basic faith and trust in the ordinary operations of government after that experience.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

I want to go back to one other thing you wrote. This one was before, I think, Donald Trump was even a prominent figure on the scene, at least on the political scene. And that’s the book you did on *Political Order and Political Decay*—I think about a decade ago, this was published. You note the inability of institutions to adapt to changes, and changes that are in some cases accelerating. We would’ve thought, I think, that Trump would have been the shock that would force institutions to change and adapt. It seems like that did not happen. That did not happen under Trump. It did not happen as much as you would want in the Biden administration. Does that tell you that the system is so sclerotic and fixed that there’s little hope of real adaptation? How do you account for that stasis and what would change it?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

Look, it’s not just Trump. We’ve had two other really **big exogenous shocks**. So the first was the financial crisis in 2008, and the second was the pandemic. And both of these are big things that affect everybody in the society. **They’re the sorts of events that should trigger in the first place national unity**, and then hopefully lead to a consensus that there are structural things wrong that need to be fixed. And **instead, every single one of them deepened the existing polarization** and made it less likely that we would actually confront some of these problems because we can’t agree on the solutions. And that weakens us overall and makes real reform even more difficult. And I do think it just demonstrates how rigid our institutions are.

If you were writing a new constitution today from the ground up, you would change many, many aspects of what the founding fathers bequeathed. **The Constitution itself makes its own revision so difficult** that in a still divided society, it’s really hard to make

those adjustments. So that reinforces the general point I was making in that Political Order book, that that's what **political decay** is: it's when **institutions that were created in one time period to deal with the issues of that time period become so rigid that you can't fix them.** That's the moment when the system gets into a lot of trouble.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

Turning back to what we may see in the months and years ahead: you had a relatively optimistic account earlier of the ability of the system to survive, of the democratic system in the United States to survive even a more extreme Trump administration. We of course saw **last time that the kind of institutional guardrails that were designed to prevent overreach from a president largely held.** That was true even on January 6, when despite the attack on the Capitol, it did not end with the overturning of the election. And you saw figures within the administration at various points blunting some of Trump's more antidemocratic impulses. **Do you expect those guardrails to remain in place?** Are there things that you are particularly focused on as sources of resilience or, on the flip side, as sources of risk?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

I've actually been focused more on the weaknesses. I think that Trump and his colleagues realized that he did not accomplish a lot of things in the first term because of personnel, that he had inherited an apparatus in the White House and in the agencies that was really mainstream Republican. And he didn't like that. He went through 44 senior officials, 26 cabinet ministers in the course of his four-year term, and they either resigned or were fired because he didn't like the way that they were implementing what he wanted to have done. And so **this time around, they've been quick in making a lot of appointments because they've been gathering names for people that Trump believes will be adequately loyal to him to fill these positions quickly.**

I think the biggest threat on the horizon is this return to Schedule F. This was an executive order at the end of the first Trump term basically **putting all federal bureaucrats on an at-will basis where he could fire them,** not for cause, and replace them with people that were loyalists. That, basically—that was a system that existed in the nineteenth century before the passage of the 1884 Pendleton Act that implemented merit requirements for hiring and promotion in the federal bureaucracy. And **now everybody's going to be political,** and that has big consequences for expertise in government. It's going to, as in the nineteenth century, be **a huge opportunity for corruption** where people can simply buy their way into office. **And it's also going to enable Trump to accomplish,** I think, much more of his agenda than he was able to in the first administration. So that's why I think that we're in for a much more determined and turbulent time in the next four years.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

I want to turn the conversation toward some of the foreign policy and global dimensions of the next four years. So I want to start by reflecting on a tension that we see in a lot of these discussions between the pessimism of the domestic conversation and the domestic mood in the United State, and an America that remains in a very, very good position internationally, that in many ways is as good a position as it's ever been in, whether you look at its share of the global economy and the record of economic growth, the dominance of its companies, the strength of our alliances internationally has also been a striking feature the last few years. It seems we're either not paying a price for the domestic political dysfunction, or somehow that dysfunction is a sideshow, or somehow causes us to miss these underlying strengths. How do you understand that tension, that seeming paradox? What do you think accounts for it?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

I disagree with your assertion that it hasn't already weakened our international position. I've felt for some time now that the single thing that is the real measure of American decline is our internal polarization, because it doesn't matter how good your economy is or how powerful your military is. If you can't agree on how to use those resources, then you might as well not have them. And I think that's the situation we're in right now. You see this in the case of Ukraine, where we could really push back the Russians very decisively, but Republicans last winter cut off all military assistance to that country for six months, and that was a big issue within the campaign. I think that deterrence depends on credibility, and I think there, you're not going to know it until you hit a crisis where it becomes evident that you don't have that credibility.

But I think that if Russia subdues Ukraine and then moves on to other targets in the former USSR, I think that they're going to be much less worried about a strong pushback from the United States. Same thing in east Asia. If I were Xi Jinping, I might actually be tempted to test the United States because although Trump talks tough about China and other threats, he really hasn't delivered on that. He's really reluctant to use force. He keeps talking about the danger of World War III, and so forth. So I think that we're already living in an era where our domestic internal divisions are weakening our global credibility.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

Let's stick with Ukraine because I think that is the foreign policy crisis at the moment that is probably most at risk of a sharp change in U.S. policy in the near term. Trump has, of course, said that he wants to end the war on day one. You have various figures in his administration, starting with JD Vance, who have talked about a settlement that would look quite similar to what Vladimir Putin would propose and what he would want.

What do you expect in the first months on Ukraine? And if we do get a quick settlement, if that's something that allows Putin to keep the 20 percent or so of Ukraine that's in his hands currently, what will that mean going forward globally? How do you expect that to play out?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

First of all, I don't think that you can have a peace settlement in Ukraine because I don't think any Ukrainian government will formally agree to cede those territories that Russia now occupies. What you could get is a cease-fire that would, in a way, freeze the current frontlines for the time being. But getting Ukraine to agree to that is actually going to be pretty difficult without a NATO guarantee, basically. It's interesting, over the last year, there has been a change in Ukrainian attitudes. A year ago, when I was in Kyiv, people would say, "Not a single inch of territory. We're going to keep fighting until we've recovered everything." I think now there's a little bit more realism, and so they would probably be willing to trade a cease-fire for a NATO guarantee. It doesn't mean that they formally give up on those occupied territories, but it's something they wouldn't have done a year ago. But it does depend on that guarantee, and I just don't see that being forthcoming. And so I would worry a great deal about your ability to get some kind of settlement.

Now, if it is really a pro-Russian deal . . . The one thing that makes me a little bit hopeful that the worst will not happen is that the one thing Donald Trump really does not like is to be seen as a loser. And if the Russians get such a favorable deal that they can then roll their tanks into Kyiv, that's not going to look good for Trump, and I think he knows that. He knows how bad the Afghanistan withdrawal was for Joe Biden. That's really the moment when his poll ratings really cratered because it looked so disgraceful. And I think he probably doesn't want to put himself in a similar position with regard to Ukraine. So that may stay his enthusiasm for too pro-Russian a deal, but it's going to be hard one way or the other because what the Russians will agree to and what the Ukrainians will agree to at this point is so far apart. And whether we would really be willing to strong-arm the Ukrainians to do something they really didn't want to do, I'm not sure that's possible, even with Republican control of both houses of Congress.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

And does that mean we get a gradual disintegration of the Ukrainian position that leaves us in a similar place?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

Yeah, it could be. Their military position is deteriorating and they simply don't have the manpower to maintain a front that long. And so I would worry that we actually would have to escalate in certain ways if we are going to keep that from happening.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

And then looking at **China**, which you also mentioned earlier, I can imagine a confident China, a confident Xi Jinping, who feels a little bit more assured about his own position, being patient in this moment and accepting that we'll see American alliances gradually diminishing, and that his position will get stronger in time. You could also imagine them grabbing at opportunities in the near term for the reasons that you laid out earlier. How do you think those discussions will play out in Beijing, and what will that mean for the U.S.-Chinese relationship next year?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

This gets even more speculative. The **one thing I would note is that Xi Jinping is not a risk-taker the way Putin is**. He has in his career been pretty cautious about rolling the dice in a really big way, and moving on Taiwan is really a huge risk for him. But he may be tempted to do other things. A lot of it depends on the relative strengths of the coalitions.

So one big thing that's affecting both the **far East and Europe** is that there really is this **"axis of evil" that's appeared**. We talked about this at the time of the Iraq War in 2003, but **right now Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran are cooperating militarily**. And **at the same point, our alliances are fraying**. There's a question about whether Trump really wants to support European countries that he claims aren't paying their dues. And then in the Far East you've got this situation where both Korea and Japan have, in a way, leadership crises, where they have weak leaders. Japan in particular, right now, the ruling party lost its majority, and the current prime minister, although he was recently reconfirmed, he's not an Abe type that projects a lot of self-confidence.

So I think there's things to worry about in terms of—you don't have to risk an all out assault on Taiwan; you could have a naval blockade, you can step up economic pressure. There's a lot of things that China could do, and they may well be tempted to push on that in the near term.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

You wrote in 2012 in *Foreign Affairs* that "The single most serious challenge to liberal democracy in the world today comes from China, which has combined authoritarian government with a partially marketized economy." That model doesn't look as good right now. That's not to say that we should declare the end of that system, but it doesn't look like it's delivering results in the way that it did in 2012. Do you think that will have a significant effect on these dynamics, given what Xi Jinping is contending with economically and every other way?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

It could have an effect but we don't know what the sign is, whether it's positive or negative. If they really are going into a period of prolonged stagnation, that means that they have fewer resources to use to build their military, they have to worry about public opinion being really unhappy at declining incomes, and that sort of thing. On the other hand, it may stimulate them to act now because they may figure that in ten years it'll be worse, or that the United States and the West could recover. So it's one of those things that you could easily imagine the leadership pushing in opposite directions, given that economic decline that you talked about.

I do think that in the long run, it should make some difference in terms of the appeal of their model, because Xi Jinping is basically—he's still a communist in many ways, and he really wants to have state control of the economy, he doesn't want to allow the development of private sector power centers that might challenge the Communist Party, and that's the model that's really floundering. And so in the very long term, that's probably not good for China, but in the short run, I'm not sure it makes much of a difference.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

Does it in some ways give you hope in the viability of the liberal democratic model, in that there's not a clear ideological alternative offered by China at least?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

That was always the meaning of my assertion about the end of history. It wasn't that there weren't competitors and nationalists and antidemocratic forces, but there wasn't a really plausible alternative model that was very attractive to people. For the last 30 years, I've felt that China was the single system that could play that role because they were very successful economically, they were socially stable, politically coherent. But I think in the end, it's revealed certain weaknesses, when you concentrate that much power in a single leader. And I'm still not convinced that that's the most sustainable model. Now, of course, the American democratic model doesn't look that stable or powerful either. So maybe we're going to face a period of competitive decline.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

You noted the weakness of governments in South Korea and Japan. You could go across Europe and look at a number of governments that are struggling, whether it's the German coalition that's falling apart or Macron in France, a new UK Labour government that is having a fairly tough time dealing with the economic problems there. There really doesn't seem to be a leader of a liberal democratic society that can take up the mantle of this cause globally in the years ahead.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

No, that's right. That's something very worrisome. So the question that this raises then is, is there some systematic or systemic reason why the West is not producing strong leaders? It's a question that I wonder about. I don't have an answer to that. I hope it's not the case that there's something deeply buried in the DNA of modern democracies that prevents the emergence of—and in the end, I would have to say that I don't believe that that's the case, because if you just look historically, we've gotten the Lincolns and the Roosevelts and the Churchills and other people that have risen to the occasion, and I don't really see why that couldn't happen in the future. But it is a roll of the dice whether that kind of leader appears in any given generation.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

I was struck going back again to work you've done in *Foreign Affairs* in the last few years. You wrote a piece around the time of the start of the war in Ukraine drawing on a book you'd published on liberalism around that time. When you saw Ukraine as, in some ways, a useful wake-up call, a necessary wake-up call, in that it reminded liberals of the importance of nationalism and identity. I think Biden in some ways got that, he certainly tried to give speeches to that effect, but it didn't ultimately connect. Do you see other ways of trying to build that sense of identity that would be consistent with the kind of liberal democratic politics you support?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

Well, Biden's message was contradictory because the big alternative on the left has been some form of identity politics in which you don't actually stress patriotism and a single national identity, but you celebrate all the particular identity groups in your coalition. He didn't necessarily give up on that approach to American politics. And Kamala Harris, she didn't stress her identity as a woman and as a person of color too overtly, but she also didn't break with the kind of identity politics popular on the left wing of the Democratic Party, which I think she probably could have.

So I do think that there's room still for a person on the left to cultivate national identity. Harris tried to do this: she talked about patriotism and having a strong military and so forth, but I just think that in the time that she was a candidate, she wasn't able to sound too credible on all of that stuff. And I think that that would be a task for any future Democrat running for national office.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

The other piece of this, in Biden's rhetoric and to some extent in Harris's, though less so, was to talk about the global battle between democracy and authoritarianism. This was true in the context of Ukraine, the kind of free world versus threats to it. It was also true in the way he talked about his foreign policy more generally. Were you surprised by just the extent to which that did not seem to be effective for him?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

Yes, I was. I guess what a lot of people that supported Harris were surprised by was the power of economic discontents to overwhelm anything like support for global democracy. And this is what Biden kept saying: “The economy is actually doing well, unemployment is very low, we got control of inflation, and what are people so upset about?” And I think that the baseline for discontent has dropped a lot, for a lot of complicated reasons, and therefore politicians are going to have to pay much more attention to the way that ordinary people are being affected by these conditions.

The other thing is these are really problems of the working class, and there’s been this big shift as the working class has moved from the Democrats to the Republicans, and I think that the Democrats in particular continue to take for granted the support of working people and especially working people of color and Hispanics, and it turned out that that simply wasn’t working any longer. So yeah, there’s a lot of adjustments that they’re going to have to make.

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

Since you mentioned “*The End of History?*” I will bring it up. I was not going to since you’ve been talking about this for 32 years almost without stop, but if you could go back and tell yourself in 1992 about the course of the last decade or two, what would surprise you and what wouldn’t, or would challenge that framework and what would not?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

The single thing that would challenge the framework the most is what’s happened in the United States, because with new democracies—if **Poland** elects a populist party or **Hungary** goes bad, I think that **doesn’t really challenge the core of the thesis, but for the world’s most powerful and oldest democracy to succumb to the kind of populism that we’ve seen and weakening of its commitment to rule of law, that’s something I really would not have expected to see.** I always had this, what looks like now a naive faith that American voters could make a mistake, but they would correct that mistake over time. And **with this last election, I think they’ve doubled down on the mistake instead. And I’m not sure when and if self-correction is going to happen.**

DAN KURTZ-PHELAN

We will end on that note, and I will say that we will look forward to reading you and I hope publishing you on a lot of these still quite big questions in the months and years ahead. Frank, thanks so much for doing this.

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

Okay, thanks very much, Dan.

Notes

Donald Trump's victory in the 2024 U.S. presidential election comes at a moment of turbulence for global democracy. It's been a year marked by almost universal backlash against incumbent leaders by voters apparently eager to express their anger with the status quo—and also an era when liberalism has been in retreat, if not in crisis.

Francis Fukuyama, a political scientist at Stanford University, has done as much as anyone to elucidate the currents shaping and reshaping global politics. He wrote *The End of History and the Last Man*, a seminal work of post-Cold War political theory, more than three decades ago. And in the years since, he has written a series of influential essays for *Foreign Affairs* and other publications.

He joins Editor Dan Kurtz-Phelan to consider what Trump's return to the presidency means for liberal democracy—and whether its future, in the United States and around the world, is truly at stake.

Sources:

"The Year of Elections Has Been Good for Democracy" by Francis Fukuyama

"How to End the Democratic Recession" by Larry Diamond

"The Pandemic and Political Order" by Francis Fukuyama

Political Order and Political Decay by Francis Fukuyama

"The Future of History" by Francis Fukuyama

"A Country of Their Own" by Francis Fukuyama

The End of History and the Last Man by Francis Fukuyama

The Foreign Affairs Interview is produced by Julia Fleming-Dresser, Molly McAnany, Ben Metzner, and Caroline Wilcox, with audio support from Todd Yeager and original music by Robin Hilton.

Stay up to date on new podcast episodes with *The Foreign Affairs Interview* newsletter. Delivered every other Thursday. Sign up [here](#).

Copyright © 2024 by the Council on Foreign Relations, Inc.

All rights reserved. To request permission to distribute or reprint this article, please visit ForeignAffairs.com/Permissions.

Source URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/podcasts/trump-and-crisis-liberalism-fukuyama>