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POLITICAL ORDER IN CHANGING SOCIETIES

With a new Foreword by **Francis Fukuyama**

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Political Order in Changing Societies

Samuel P. Huntington

Foreword by Francis Fukuyama

For Nancy,
Timothy, and Nicholas

Foreword by Francis Fukuyama

It is an immense honor for me to write the Foreword to the new paperback edition of Samuel P. Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies*. This book, which first appeared in 1968, was one of the classics of late twentieth-century social science, a work that had enormous influence on the way people thought about development, both in academia and in the policy world. The breadth of knowledge about developing countries, as well as the analytical insight that *Political Order* brought to bear, was astonishing, and cemented Samuel Huntington's reputation as one of the foremost political scientists of his generation.

In order to understand the book's intellectual significance, it is necessary to place it in the context of the ideas that were dominant in the 1950s and early 1960s. This was the heyday of "modernization theory," probably the most ambitious American attempt to create an integrated, empirical theory of human social change. Modernization theory had its origins in the works of late nineteenth-century European social theorists like Henry Maine, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Max Weber. These authors established a series of concepts (e.g., status/contract; mechanical/organic solidarity; *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft*; charismatic/bureaucratic-rational authority) to describe the changes in social norms and relationships that took place as human societies made the transition from agricultural to industrial production. While basing their works primarily on the experiences of early modernizers like Britain or the United States, they sought to draw from them general laws of social development.

European social theory was killed by the two world wars; the ideas it generated migrated to the United States and were taken up by a generation of American academics after the Second World War at places like Harvard's Department of Comparative Politics, the MIT Center for International Studies, and the Social Science Research Council's Committee on Comparative Politics. The Harvard department, led by Weber's protégé Talcott Parsons, hoped to create

an integrated, interdisciplinary social science that would combine economics, sociology, political science, and anthropology.

The period from the late 1940s to the early 1960s also corresponded to the dissolution of European colonial empires and the emergence of what became known as the third or developing world, newly independent countries with great aspirations to modernize and catch up with their former colonial masters. Scholars like Edward Shils, Daniel Lerner, Lucian Pye, Gabriel Almond, David Apter, and Walt Whitman Rostow saw these momentous developments as a laboratory for social theory, as well as a great opportunity to help developing countries raise living standards and democratize their political systems.

Modernization theorists placed a strong normative value on being modern, and in their view, the good things of modernity tended to go together. Economic development, changing social relationships like urbanization and the breakdown of primary kinship groups, higher and more inclusive levels of education, normative shifts towards values like "achievement" and rationality, secularization, and the development of democratic political institutions were all seen as an interdependent whole. Economic development would fuel better education, which would lead to value change, which would promote modern politics, and so on in a virtuous circle.

Political Order in Changing Societies appeared against this backdrop and directly challenged these assumptions. First, Huntington argued that political decay was at least as likely as political development, and that the actual experience of newly independent countries was one of increasing social and political disorder. Second, he suggested that the good things of modernity often operated at cross-purposes. In particular, if social mobilization outpaced the development of political institutions, there would be frustration as new social actors found themselves unable to participate in the political system. The result was a condition he labeled praetorianism, and was the leading cause of insurgencies, military coups, and weak or disorganized governments. Economic development and political development were not part of the same, seamless process of modernization; the latter had its own separate logic as institutions like political parties and legal systems were created or evolved into more complex forms.

Huntington drew a practical implication from these observa-

tions, namely, that political order was a good thing in itself and would not automatically arise out of the modernization process. Rather the contrary: without political order, neither economic nor social development could proceed successfully. The different components of modernization needed to be sequenced. Premature increases in political participation — including events like early elections — could destabilize fragile political systems. Huntington thus laid the groundwork for a development strategy that came to be called the "authoritarian transition," whereby a modernizing dictatorship provided political order, a rule of law, and the conditions for successful economic and social development. Once these building blocks were in place, other aspects of modernity, like democracy and civic participation, could be added. (Huntington's student Fareed Zakaria would write a book in 2003, *The Future of Freedom*, making a somewhat updated variant of this argument.)

The significance of Huntington's book must be seen against the backdrop of U.S. foreign policy at the time it was published. The year 1968 was a high-water mark in the Vietnam War, when troop strength swelled to half a million and the Tet offensive undermined the U.S. public's confidence. Many modernization theorists hoped their academic work would have useful implications for American policy; Walt Rostow's book *The Stages of Economic Growth* was a guide for the new U.S. Agency for International Development as it sought to buffer countries like South Vietnam and Indonesia against the appeals of communism. But by the late 1960s, there were not a lot of success stories to which Americans could point. The competing communist and Western nation-building strategies in North and South Vietnam ended with the latter's eventual defeat.

Huntington suggested that there was another way forward, through modernizing authoritarianism, a point of view that brought considerable opprobrium on him in the highly polarized context of the United States in the late 1960s. But it was exactly this kind of leader — Park Chung-Hee in Korea, Chiang Ching-Kuo in Taiwan, Lee Kwan Yew in Singapore, and Suharto in Indonesia — who brought about the so-called Asian Miracle, even as Vietnam was going communist.

It is safe to say that *Political Order* finally killed off modernization theory. It was part of a pincer attack, the other prong of which was the critique from the Left that said that modernization theorists

enshrined an ethnocentric European or North American model
of social development as a universal one for humanity to follow.
American social science found itself suddenly without an overarch-
ing theory, and began its subsequent slide into its current method-
ological Balkanization.

What are we to make of Huntington's arguments, nearly four
decades after they were originally laid out? Many developing
countries are now more than two generations removed from
independence. Enormous changes, including the East Asian Mira-
cle, the collapse of communism, and what Huntington himself
would label the Third Wave of democratizations, have occurred in
the years since *Political Order* was written. In what ways do these
events confirm, bolster, or weaken his observations?

There are many ways in which Huntington's observations have
been vindicated. He argued that both traditional and modernized
societies tended to be stable; problems occurred in the early stages
of modernization, when traditional social structures were up-
ended by new expectations. Economic growth could be stabilizing,
but growth followed by sudden setback created potentially revolu-
tionary situations. It remains largely true that the worst cases of
instability have occurred in countries at relatively early stages of
modernization, or in countries facing setbacks.

The problem of social mobilization outpacing political institu-
tionalization clearly continues to occur. The most notable example
was the Iranian revolution of 1978, when excessively rapid state-
driven modernization ran afoul of traditional social actors; mer-
chants in the bazaar combined with radical students to produce an
Islamic revolution. Today in Andean countries like Venezuela,
Bolivia, and Ecuador, new social actors (particularly indigenous
groups left out of the formal political system) are undermining
weak institutions and leaving chaos in their wake. The Suharto
regime in Indonesia was destabilized by the 1997–98 financial
crisis, which came against a backdrop of steadily rising expecta-
tions, and one could argue that radical Islamist terrorism is driven
at least in part by the massive drop in Saudi per-capita income that
occurred in the two decades prior to September 2001.

Huntington is further correct that political development follows
its own logic independent of economic development. While there
is evidence that long-term economic growth breeds stronger dem-
ocratic institutions (or, more exactly, makes them less vulnerable

to setbacks), this is true only at a relatively high level of per-capita GDP. For poor countries, political order and competent institutions are a precondition for economic growth. Sub-Saharan Africa's internal conflicts and weak governments are powerful inhibitors of the other dimensions of development.

Finally, *Political Order* was clearly prescient in focusing on political decay as a special object of study. The post–Cold War world has been subject to substantial political decay, from the collapse of the former Soviet Union to series of weak and failing states like Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, and Afghanistan.

If one compares the periods before and after the book was written, the years 1945–68 saw a far higher level of political disorder than 1968–2006. In the first period, coups, insurgencies, and peasant revolts occurred in virtually every part of the developing world, while in the second period, large areas of stability have emerged. Part of the reason for this change is that successful political development has occurred in many places, especially in East Asia. These developments suggest that Huntington was pointing to a transitional problem to some extent. But the degree of overall stability is surprising. The Arab Middle East, for example, has seen relatively little political violence since the end of the Lebanese civil war, with the exception of Iraq and the on-going Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the post-1968 period, long-serving leaders in Morocco, Libya, Jordan, Syria, and Egypt either have turned over or are preparing to turn over leadership to their sons. Indeed, many observers argue that the region is *too* stable; the political stasis that has overtaken most regimes there has blocked political participation and bred resentment. Since the return of democracy in the 1980s, Latin America has weathered debt and currency crises without military coups or return to authoritarianism, despite recent trouble in the Andes and Haiti. While agrarian revolts drag on in Nepal, Colombia, and the Philippines, they are far less common now than in the 1950s and 1960s.

One development that doesn't fit neatly into *Political Order*'s framework is the collapse of the former Soviet Union. The book's first page contains the remarkable assertion that the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union were equally developed in political terms, although the first two countries were liberal democracies and the last a communist dictatorship. The notion that a country could have a high degree of political institutionalization

without being democratic shocked many people at the time but underscored Huntington's point that political order and democracy were not necessarily interdependent and could work at cross-purposes.

In retrospect, it would appear that the former Soviet Union's apparent degree of political development was something of a Potemkin village. Through sheer political willpower and violence, the Bolsheviks created a remarkably artificial system that looked very powerful, virtually until the moment it collapsed. The problem was a moral one: people living under the system, including many who eventually climbed to the top ranks of the Communist Party, ultimately did not believe in its legitimacy. Thus, while democracy can be destabilizing in the short run, it can also confer resilience in the long run.

It is in the area of political decay that Huntington's thesis needs to be not so much amended as extended. As noted above, we see a number of contemporary cases of classic Huntingtonian political decay, where participation has outrun institutionalization. But if one looks at the universe of weak and failed states that has emerged in the past two decades, there are clearly other forces at work. One factor in particular is the peculiar nature of the contemporary international system, one that despite good intentions arguably promotes political decay.

If one examines historical cases of state formation and state building in the regions of the world that have strong states (primarily Europe and East Asia), the uncomfortable truth emerges that violence has always been a key ingredient. Charles Tilly has argued that the modern European state emerged out of the military competition that took place among the decentralized political actors there. The Chinese, Japanese, and Korean states were all forcibly unified at the beginning of their histories, and required continuing violence to keep them together. Even the United States, which prides itself on being a constitutional democracy, owes its national unity to a bloody civil war that took the lives of more than half a million of its citizens.

Today's international system does not look kindly on interstate violence and the kind of wars of conquest and consolidation that as recently as the 1870s produced the present-day countries of Italy and Germany. Africa, for example, was saddled with an irrational political map upon decolonization, one that corresponded to

neither geography, ethnicity, nor economic functionality. The international system supported that region's leaders' decision to retain those boundaries, even as decreasing transportation and communications costs made those boundaries more porous, and the political units more susceptible to mutual destabilization.

Today, we have a situation in which things that weaken states and promote political decay—like weapons, drugs, laundered money, security advisors, refugees, and diamonds—can cross international borders with relative ease, while the world's normative structure and the institutions built around it (e.g., the United Nations, the African Union, and the various nongovernmental organizations devoted to human rights) inhibit the kind of muscular state-building that was necessary to political development in other parts of the world. (Try to imagine what the outcome of the American Civil War might have been had it taken place in today's globalized world.) Even the well-intentioned activities of international donors and nongovernmental organizations devoted to promoting economic development have had the unanticipated effect of weakening state capacity by creating aid dependency and bypassing indigenous governments. In an ironic twist, there is enough violence and conflict in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia to promote untold human suffering, but not enough (or not enough of the right type) to produce strong political institutions.

Samuel Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies* was perhaps the last serious effort to produce a grand theory of political change. Since then, there has been a good deal of relatively useful middle-range theory related to issues like democratic transitions, institutional design, and specific regions, as well as somewhat less-useful mathematical models coming out of rational-choice political science. Perhaps all grand theories are ultimately doomed to failure owing to the underlying complexity of the subject matter or to changing circumstances over time. Or perhaps the problem is that there are simply not many thinkers of Huntington's ability, insight, and ambition, who could hope to produce a book of this scope. In the meantime, we will have to be satisfied that this classic work will remain available for future generations of students interested in the problem of political development.

Preface

The "political order" referred to in the title of this book is a goal, not a reality. The pages following are, consequently, filled with descriptions of violence, instability, and disorder. In this respect this book resembles those volumes which purport to deal with "economic development" but whose actual subjects are economic backwardness and stagnation. Economists who write about economic development presumably favor it, and this book originates in a parallel concern which I have for political stability. My effort here is to probe the conditions under which societies undergoing rapid and disruptive social and economic change may in some measure realize this goal. The indices of economic development, such as per capita gross national product, are reasonably familiar and accepted. The indices of political order or its absence in terms of violence, coups, insurrections, and other forms of instabilty are also reasonably clear and even quantifiable. Just as it is possible for economists to analyze and to debate, as economists, the conditions and policies which promote economic development, it should also be possible for political scientists to analyze and to debate in scholarly fashion the ways and means of promoting political order, whatever their differences concerning the legitimacy and desirability of that goal. Just as economic development depends, in some measure, on the relation between investment and consumption, political order depends in part on the relation between the development of political institutions and the mobilization of new social forces into politics. At least that is the framework in which I have approached the problem in this book.

My research and writing were done at the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. This work was supported in part by the Center from its own resources, in part by a Ford Foundation grant to the University for work in international affairs, and in part by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation to the Center for a research program in Political Institutionalization and Social Change. The impetus for the overall elaboration of the

argument of the book came from the invitation of Professor Robert Dahl and the Council on International Relations of Yale University to deliver the Henry L. Stimson Lectures in 1966. Portions of chapters 1, 2, and 3 appeared in *World Politics* and *Daedalus* and are incorporated into this manuscript with the permission of the publishers of these two journals. Christopher Mitchell, Joan Nelson, Eric Nordlinger, and Steven R. Rivkin read the manuscript in whole or in part and made valuable comments on it. Over the past four years my thinking on the problems of political order and social change has benefited greatly from the insight and wisdom of my colleagues in the Harvard-MIT Faculty Seminar on Political Development. During this period also many students have helped me in collecting and analyzing data on modernizing countries. Those who made substantial contributions directly relevant to this book are Richard Alpert, Margaret Bates, Richard Betts, Robert Bruce, Allan E. Goodman, Robert Hart, Christopher Mitchell, and William Schneider. Finally, throughout my work on this book, Shirley Johannesen Levine functioned as an invaluable research assistant, editor, typist, proofreader, and, most importantly, chief-of-staff tying together the activities of others also performing these roles. I am profoundly grateful to all these institutions and individuals for their support, advice, and assistance. With all this help, the remaining errors and deficiencies must clearly be mine alone.

S.P.H.

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