

Lecture Series: The American State in a Multipolar World

“Covid-19, Climate, and the Coming Challenges to Global Democracy”

By Francis Fukuyama

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Transcript¹

Victor Nee: I'd like to welcome our audience here in Klarman Hall as well as around the world to the launching of the year-long lecture series sponsored by the Center for the Study of Economy and Society in the Cornell College of Arts and Sciences. My name is Victor Nee, Director of the Center and the lecture series is entitled, "The American State in a Multipolar World." The Center has had a long-standing interest in studying the interaction between economic and social forces in moments of historical transition and we are certainly in the midst of one such transition. It is a period when the assumption of American exceptionalism is being called into question daily on multiple counts. To what extent has post-World War II American democracy relied on American global hegemony? Is a new Cold War against China and Russia consistent with the need for interstate cooperation, addressing climate change and a global pandemic? Is the international future of science at risk? We hope our series will address the urgent need for a broad and thoughtful exchange of views both inside and outside Cornell as American foreign policy confronts a critical inflection point.

We are truly delighted and honored to have Cornell's always eloquent president, Martha Pollack, here with us in Klarman Hall today to introduce a most distinguished Cornell alumnus,

¹ Edited for clarity. The complete lecture is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhYe9wiHDvE>.

world-renowned Francis Fukuyama, who flew here from the Bay Area just for this lecture to launch our series and also many thanks to these wonderful staff of eCornell who have worked with us closely to make this lecture in-person, live on the webinar, available to interested audience across the world. Martha.

Martha Pollack: Hi everybody. I'm really glad to be able to welcome you all to the inaugural lecture of the Center for the Study of Economy and Society's new series, which as Victor notes is called, "The American State in a Multipolar World." And the topic of this series really does seem particularly apt today when the world's most pressing challenges from climate change to the corona pandemic to pandemics of misinformation all cross-national boundaries and all demand solutions that do the same. And I'm especially delighted that the speaker beginning this series is an extremely distinguished fellow Cornelian, Francis Fukayama, Class of '74. Professor Fukayama is the Olivier Nomellini Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies and he's also Director of Stanford's Ford Dorsey Master's program in International Policy. On top of that, of course, he's a professor of political science.

Professor Fukuyama has written widely on issues in development and international politics and his 1992 book, which I'm sure everyone in this room has read, *The End of History and the Last Man*, has appeared in over 20 foreign editions. His most recent book published in 2018 is called *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*. Professor Fukayama received his B.A. from Cornell in classics and his Ph.D. from Harvard in political science. He was a member of the political science department at the Rand Corporation and of the policy planning staff of the United States Department of State from 1996 to 2000. He was the Omar L. and Nancy Hurst Professor of Public Policy in the School of Public Policy at George Mason University and then from 2001 to 2010 he was the Bernard L. Schwartz Professor of International Political Economy at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University. He also served as a member of the President's Council on Bioethics from 2001 to 2004.

Professor Fukuyama holds honorary doctorates from Connecticut College, Doan College, Doshisha University in Japan, Kansai University in Japan and Aarhus University in Denmark, as well as from the Pardee RAND Graduate School. He is also a non-resident fellow at the Carnegie

Endowment for International Peace and at the Center for Global Development, as well as a member of the American Political Science Association and the Council on Foreign Relations.

Many people came together to make today's event and this whole series possible, and I would like to thank the Center for the Study of Economy and Society and, in particular, Victor Nee, the Frank and Rosa Rhodes Professor of Economic Sociology at Cornell for organizing the series. I also want to thank the staff at eCornell for their partnership in facilitating the online broadcast and I thank the Dean's Office at the College of Arts and Science for its support. And finally, of course, many thanks to Professor Fukuyama for having flown from Palo Alto to Ithaca - I understand with some delayed or missed flights as is always true today. We're really delighted that he's here with us, so please join me in welcoming Professor Francis Fukuyama.

Francis Fukuyama: Thank you very much for that very kind introduction, Professor Pollack. It's a great pleasure for me to be back at Cornell. I cannot believe it's been more than 45 years since I graduated from this university, time really does fly when you're having fun. But, I'm pleased to see that the Quad actually does not look all that different from the way it did when I was a student here by the way.

I should note President Pollack, that I was actually quite glad that Cornell won that competition to set up the new campus in New York City and not Stanford, because as a member of the Stanford community I thought it actually would have been the wrong thing for us to do. Good on Cornell that you've got that. And I want to thank Victor Nee, an old friend, for inviting me to give this lecture which is really on a pretty important topic which has to do with international cooperation in the face of different global challenges.

I have a fairly long and involved series of points that I want to get through in this lecture so let me give you a little overview. I'm going to begin by talking about what those global challenges are. I'm then going to talk about a focus on how global warming and carbon emissions specifically is probably the biggest of those challenges that we face, what the governance requirements are, and what some of the obstacles to dealing with them will be, including whether there are new international institutions that we need to create to deal with this. I'll give you a bottom line: I do not believe that this is actually the right way to go for both practical and normative reasons. I believe that nation states will still be the primary actors in dealing with this challenge but that they themselves need to get their act together if they're

actually to do this. Finally, we're going to get to one of my favorite topics which is the American state, because I think our state has a lot of problems right now and unless we actually fix them on a national level we're not going to be able to exercise any leadership in this issue and we're not going to step up to the challenges that are posed by climate change.

So let me just begin by reviewing with you something that you probably don't need to be reminded of. Since the beginning of the millennium, we've been faced with a whole series of global crises beginning with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, continuing through the financial crisis in 2008, followed by a Euro crisis in 2010, and then finally the pandemic that we are still in the midst of that began in 2020. All of these transcend national borders, as President Pollack pointed out. They cannot be solved by any single country acting on its own. But, I have to say that the record in global cooperation has been disappointing and it has been deteriorating.

If you think about the three big crises we have faced over the last 20 years, the September 11th attacks brought forth actually a significant amount of cooperation on the part of NATO. A number of NATO allies joined in the American effort to defeat the Taliban after 2001. The 2008 financial crisis actually produced a fair amount of cooperation among central banks around the world to support one another as they went through this grave liquidity crisis that everyone was facing. It led to the creation of at least one new institution, the G20, out of a recognition that the old G7 could not really handle a global financial crisis of this sort.

I am sorry to say that the most recent crisis, the pandemic, did not produce a single durable political institution in its wake and, in fact, I think produced a lot of conflict in itself even on a national level. So, you think about the United States - in general, we assume that a grave external threat like a deadly virus is an occasion for national unity. But, what's happened in the United States is in fact that very threat has become a point of division. The polarization in this country has led to simple responses like wearing masks or getting vaccinated becoming a political marker of a political tribalization that preceded the pandemic, but in many ways, a pandemic has made it worse and so you have a significant number of Americans that do not want to get vaccinated. As a result, the United States has fallen to the bottom of the rich world rankings in terms of the proportion of its population that has received the vaccine and the pandemic has continued.

The reasons for this lack of cooperation, I think, are several-fold. One of them is a return to geopolitical competition. Russia, China, and the United States, rather than seeing the pandemic as an occasion for cooperation, saw it as an occasion for competition in terms of who would get their vaccine, their national vaccine, out to other countries and use that for unilateral diplomatic advantage. The second reason really had to do with the rise of populist nationalism in the years preceding the pandemic. Many countries around the world, beginning unfortunately with the United States, were looking for an opportunity to close their borders to people coming from abroad. The epidemic gave them a perfect opportunity to do this as well as to grab new executive powers that they could then use once the once the epidemic was over. And then finally, we are living in a really different technological world today than when I was a student here. With the rise of the internet there were hopes when the internet first came into being and was came into widespread use in the 1990s that this would be the occasion for greater global unity because you could now communicate very easily across borders. What we've seen instead is the spread of filter bubbles of hate speech, of polarization directly, as a result of the fact that people can communicate. But they don't communicate either as nations or as a global community they organize themselves into political tribes and that has been feeding a lot of the political conflict in much of the world.

For all of these reasons, we've seen these disappointing results. We have to do better the next time, because we are going to face another pandemic. I mean, that's almost a certainty, extending out into the future, and we know that global warming is upon us already and we know that we need further cooperation and so we need to desperately create institutions that are sufficient to address this problem.

That is the basic setting. That's the challenge we have in front of us and now we need to think about what kind of governance institutions are needed to deal with this. Before I get into that I want to talk a little bit in the abstract about why these different global challenges differ from one another.

A former colleague of mine at Johns Hopkins, Scott Barrett, an economist, wrote a very nice book a while ago called *Why Cooperate?* and he deals with several global public goods that face the world that need to be addressed and he tries to explain why some of them are relatively easy to fix and others are extremely difficult and so the examples are several. For example, a comet that is on a collision path with Earth that will produce an extinction level event. How does

the global community deal with that? There is the depletion of the ozone layer as a result of chlorofluorocarbons, there are pandemics, and then finally, there's global warming. He uses pretty simple game theory to think about why some of these are actually much more solvable than others.

It turns out that the comet racing towards earth is the easiest of all of these problems to solve. It's easy because the threat is immediate. It's going to hit everybody simultaneously in the near-term future and it's also one that doesn't require a lot of cooperation to solve, so that if, for example, Russia or the United States or China could actually deflect the comet using a nuclear weapon or something they're just going to do it. They don't have to ask anybody's permission, because they're going to get fried once this comet hits and so they've got every incentive to take matters into their own hands.

It turns out the ozone problem was solvable because the number of producers of chlorofluorocarbons was limited, there were alternatives to using these chemicals and refrigeration and air conditioning and so forth, so the Montreal Protocol was sufficient to do this.

But, unfortunately, global warming is the hardest cooperative problem to solve because of the nature of the incentives that face everybody. The first problem is that the bad effects of global warming are not immediate. They're down the road. There's a time delay between the moment that you emit the carbon and when you feel the warming effects and moreover, some of the worst effects don't affect your country. They affect poor people living in distant places like Bangladesh. So, if you're a politician you don't really have to worry about your Bangladeshi constituents voting against you if you don't take appropriate action as an American elected official and moreover, the costs of mitigating carbon are all paid up front. It's very costly to switch to alternatives. We're now going through a big energy crisis in Europe and in China as a direct result of that effort to switch away from hydrocarbons and so Barrett argues that there are a lot of reasons why this is a problem that's not really been grappled with effectively by countries up until this point. And so that's a general scene setting - that not all of these global problems are equally difficult, but of them the global warming problem is really one of the worst.

Now I'm going to take a little detour. I read two science fiction novels over the summer that I want to tell you about. I actually think that science fiction is one of the most effective ways to think about political futures. The best science fiction novels are ones in which the world is actually kind of similar to the one that we are familiar with but the technological premises are

changed in certain key ways and then the author thinks through how that's going to affect society.

The first of these novels is one called *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson. Former President Obama listed this as one of his favorite books when it was published a year or two ago and this novel is set in the mid-21st century. It begins with a massive heat wave that manages to kill about 20 million people in the course of a single week in India and then as different societies experience a, just, desperate crisis because of global warming, they begin to react. This reaction then produces, for example, effective action by the Indian government that gets its act together, becomes a leader in certain forms of geoengineering. It stimulates a terrorist movement, an eco-terrorist movement, called the Children of Kali who start assassinating executives of fossil fuel companies and attacking jetliners that are spewing carbon into the atmosphere. The central action is really done by central bankers who agreed to create a carbon bond or a carbon currency in which countries and companies are paid to sequester carbon rather than to take it out of the ground and this creates the incentives that are necessary to actually deal seriously with the problem of stocks.

There's a problem that even if we hit our COP21 goals of keeping levels from rising more than one and a half degrees, we've still got this huge stock of carbon in the atmosphere. It's still going to change our climate and you've got to find a way of sequestering all that carbon, removing it from the atmosphere. And so, this actually happens in the course of this novel as a result of this action by central banks and by the end of the 21st century global temperatures are not just stabilized but they're actually coming down.

So, this is a very optimistic novel. It basically gives you this model of political action in which people are basically shaken awake by this massive crisis that everybody is facing and it impels them to a kind of collective action of all different sorts: geoengineering, but also collective action by central banks, by national governments, by so forth and although it does produce reactions basically everything works and in fact things are so rosy in this novel that it kind of makes me think that the author may be trying to indicate why it's not going to happen. Because for everything to go right you've got to make a lot of assumptions about political behavior and the fact that these kinds of challenges are going to stimulate cooperative behavior rather than competitive behavior and I must say that nothing that's happened over the last decade makes me think that that's terribly likely to happen.

The second novel hasn't been published yet, it'll come out next month I believe, but this is a novel called *Termination Shock* by Neil Stevenson, the veteran cyberpunk novelist. This is a very different one and it has to do with a phenomenon called snapback. Many environmentalists believe that what may happen in the future is that there'll be a big political change on the part of conservatives.

Right now, conservatives around the world and especially in this country simply don't believe that global warming is happening. They deny the reality of the change, but the theory in the novel is that at a certain point things get so bad that even the most die-hard conservative, all the Rush Limbaugh's of the future finally have to admit that something is happening. But instead of climbing on board a general climate consensus behind mitigation they move immediately to geoengineering, to very ambitious geoengineering schemes, and in particular there's one Texas billionaire that on his own comes up with an effective scheme to put lots and lots of sulfur dioxide into the upper atmosphere which deflects sunlight and then has a marked effect in cooling the planet and this is one individual that succeeds in doing it and it turns out that the real interest in the novel is the politics of this, because the problem with geoengineering is that the long-term impacts are unpredictable and many people think that they're going to have very disparate impacts.

And, in this novel, turns out it's really good for China. It gives them more rain and a more mild climate but it makes the monsoon in India fail and so all of a sudden, because of this one super empowered individual in the United States you get this big geopolitical conflict that occurs in Asia. I'm not going to spoil the ending of it. You've got to read the novel when it comes out to figure out what happens, but it indicates that the politics of climate change are going to be really complicated and they're going to be complicated in ways that we have not really foreseen and actually I sort of think that the conflictual scenarios that Neil Stephenson presents are a lot more plausible than the happy outcomes that Kim Stanley Robinson talks about.

All right, so let me move on to the actual problem of carbon emissions and just point to some of the political conflicts that are already present in our dealing with it. According to the IMF, between 2020 and 2050, the new carbon emissions that will be pumped into the atmosphere from China, India, and then the rest of the developing world collectively are - the high end estimate is 40, 15, and about 30 percent of all new emissions, which means that the rich world, that is to say Europe and North America are only going to be putting about 20 percent of the new

emissions into the atmosphere. And what that implies is that there's actually very little that the rich world can do on its own to solve this problem, that the big action really is going to be in the developing world, and it's going to be in two specific countries - in China and India.

This should not be an excuse for people in rich countries, existing Western rich countries to relax and not act but you need to be realistic about where the real important decision points have to be. But, it is simply morally impossible for those rich countries to go to China and India and other developing countries and say, well you can't develop because that's going to put too much carbon in the air. It's simply unacceptable because it is the rich world that's put all the existing stock of carbon there in the first place and to tell these countries that they can't grow economically, it simply won't wash. It won't wash morally and it won't wash as a matter of any kind of practical argument and so therefore you really need to break that link between economic growth, the next unit of GDP and carbon emissions if you're ever going to get hold of this problem.

Another conflict that has been on the table for some time is a fight over whether mitigation or adaptation should get a priority. Many environmentalists believe that the real solution is in mitigation. It's in a carbon tax reducing carbon output. Basically, whatever the impact on economic growth is. And, a lot of them feel that if you put money into adaptation that's actually going to give a free pass to the fossil fuel industry that will then see that they've got the opportunity to continue what they do and not mitigate emissions. I personally think that this dichotomy - it's not a dichotomous choice and I actually think that you're going to have to do everything. I think that the seriousness of the crisis is such that we are going to have to both mitigate and adapt simultaneously and as a matter of fact we're already doing this.

I'm going to give you several examples in this lecture from my home state of California. We are - I don't know whether you can say this in a public lecture at Cornell - but we're really up shit creek in California. Right? Because we've got forest fires that are now an annual event. Every single year, they get larger and larger. Average temperatures hit new records. I actually heard that my part of the state got a little bit of rain yesterday. But, Sacramento went 232 days without a drop of water. That was a historical record. They're not getting any rain whatsoever and they only got about a tenth of an inch last night, so there's already a crisis. It is clear that the Sierras are not storing nearly as much water as they used to. That is really the source of all of the water in the southern part of the state.

California could not exist without these extremely ambitious infrastructure projects that were all put in in the first half of the 20th century, basically, to take all of the water from the northern part of the state and send it down south. And, as the climate warms, we are already adapting insurance rates. For anybody living in a wooded area, they have gone up very substantially just in the last two or three years because it doesn't pay to insure people living in what are basically going to be uninhabitable parts of the state. We're already adapting when we take away the federal subsidies for insuring barrier islands and people that want to live in coastal regions that are subject to sea level rise and so forth.

These are all techniques of adaptation and we are doing them today and it's ridiculous I think to say that you shouldn't adapt. Now, we can't wait until the middle of the 21st century to make the kinds of changes that we need to make and, in particular, in my state of California we have to do a lot to build new infrastructure. You're going to need a new system of reservoirs, of canals, of desalination plants, of all sorts of very expensive investments if the state is going to be livable in another generation or two. And so, this is the challenge that's in front of us now when we think about the governance of this.

Many people believe that this is going to necessitate moving beyond the nation-state. This is a very common refrain: the nation-state has failed in either mitigation or adaptation. It's saddled the next coming generations with a problem that they have not been able to solve. They're simply passing the buck on and therefore we need a new approach. And the idea, basically, is to create an international body that actually has some teeth.

If you think about the existing international bodies like the COP26 meeting that will occur in Glasgow at the end of this month they have no enforcement power whatsoever and in fact they don't have much shaming power. Agreement is completely voluntary and then actual implementation is up to each individual country and many of those countries that made promises, let's say at COP21 in Paris, have failed to meet those targets, including the United States. So, the existing international mechanisms are too weak. They do not have the power to compel compliance with the goals that are set by them and therefore there is an argument that we need a new kind of international body that has the sufficient authority and capability of actually compelling compliance and I believe that this is wrong.

I don't think that either as a matter of practical politics or as a normative solution that this is going to be the right way to go and I actually think that it is a distraction from the changes to

our national level governance mechanisms that are much more urgent. So, why do I think this kind of body won't work?

Well, first of all, what this all is about is power. A state a national state has power, that's what a state is. Max Weber - our friend Max Weber - gave this famous definition of the state as a legitimate monopoly of force over territory and I believe that that's still the best definition of the state that's out there. States are all about building power and what that means ultimately is who controls armies and police forces and can actually enforce compliance with the state's rules. If you think about a new international body that is more serious than the voluntary ones that exist right now, you would have to think about a deliberate delegation of real power, the power to arrest a recalcitrant official in another country, to this to this body. And this is where I think the practical politics really kicks in.

You could imagine a small state agreeing to an arrangement like this if you're Nauru and you're going to not exist as a country in another decade because of sea level rise, then yes you want the help of this kind of body. But, can you imagine China or the United States even under a more dire future scenario agreeing to let an international body override its sovereignty and reach into their societies to force compliance? I don't think so. I don't think that the biggest countries in the world are going to permit this and therefore I don't think it's going to happen. I think that there's a normative argument to be made as well. The state is, as I said, all about power, but in our modern liberal democracies we have a couple hundred years of experience not only creating modern states but also in figuring out how to constrain them. We have other institutions like constitutional checks and balances, we have a rule of law, we have rules regarding democratic accountability, we have independent media that act as watchdogs over states, and the whole point of this structure is that on the one hand, we want to have power to do things. We want to enforce laws and compel compliance. On the other hand we don't want those states to get out of control and become dictatorships or corrupt or all of the other things that bodies with unconstrained power have and so all of our political systems, if they're working properly, are a balance between, on the one hand, state power and institutions that constrain staying power and we do not have any experience at an international level creating this kind of body.

You would have to imagine creating a transnational executive, but then also creating a transnational court system, a transnational legislature that could watch over that executive and make sure that its power was not exercised in an arbitrary corrupt or tyrannical way, and quite

frankly, we have no idea how to do this. We really don't have any idea. The part of the world that is furthest along in figuring this out is the European Union. That does have the commission, that's the state part. It has the European parliament. It has a court system, the European Court of Justice. But, anybody that knows Europe well will recognize that these do not operate very well as a package. It's too weak in many areas and a lot of people would say it's too strong in others.

All right, so getting this balance right is something that is extraordinarily difficult and the final problem is really with this idea of a global consciousness. I think that you cannot have a political institution that is legitimate and stable if you don't have an underlying normative consensus about the legitimacy of that institution and the problem, I think, with human beings is that we are the most loyal to friends and family and then our altruism and mutual support begins to taper off the further away people get.

The nation state, at the moment, is the largest social unit that really attracts tremendous loyalty. In fact in some cases a little bit too much loyalty. But, that does not exist at an international level and as I was saying, our technology has actually been pushing us in the wrong direction, not towards the development of a global normative scheme but rather in the direction of compartmented communities that are transnational, but really don't have any sense of broader public purpose. And until you get - I mean I do think it exists for a very narrow section of elites, mostly in Western rich countries but that is far from being anything like a global consensus. So, for that reason I think that most of the actual governance action really is going to have to take place as a result of cooperation between existing states and I as I've said before, I think that worrying about the creation of this kind of transnational entity is going to be a distraction from the real work, which is fixing the governance mechanisms at a smaller scale.

So, then the question is, what needs to be done at a national level to make individual countries better able to adapt? Here, there's a back and forth argument. For example, I had a debate with a professor a few years ago in Norway who believed that democracies are intrinsically less able to deal with climate change than autocracies and the main example he had was China. In fact, I think that there have been some cross-national studies - although this is something that actually social scientists ought to look into much more carefully - that don't overall show an aggregate strong correlation between the regime type, that is to say whether you're democratic or authoritarian, and effectiveness in dealing with climate. He was thinking about China, but if you look at China I think that their record is actually quite problematic. They

are the largest carbon emitter in the world. The efficiency of their manufacturing industry in terms of carbon output per unit of GDP is significantly higher than that in Europe and in the United States. They're still building coal plants.

Now, their government has said good things. They just announced a couple weeks ago that they're going to stop building coal plants as part of the Belt and Road initiative which is a good thing, but the fact remains that something like 90 percent of the energy projects under the Belt and Road initiative are fossil fuel based. They're basically moving from coal to natural gas or to oil. And within China, I think you can see why the incentive structure is so critical. The government wanted to wean everybody off of especially coal and that has produced an electricity crisis in many Chinese cities. A lot of Chinese manufacturers have not been able to get sufficient electricity. That has hurt GDP output in the aggregate and as a result the government has had to reverse course. They had been closing down coal mines and stopping coal production but they've just reversed that and they're going to increase because in the short run they really don't have an alternative and these decisions have nothing to do with regime type. I think that any country would face similar kinds of - whether they're democratic or not - pressures because there are very few regimes, authoritarian or democratic that can simply shut down entire industries in order to comply with a global mandate on carbon emissions.

However, there are definitely things that China does better than a lot of Western countries that we need to think about very carefully. And here, I want to be very careful because I don't want to endorse Chinese methods overall, but I think that in the area of infrastructure Western democracies really do have a problem and I this is something that I've come to realize over the last few years because I spent a lot of time thinking about governance and governance institutions and infrastructure as the paradigm of the governance challenge.

So, why is infrastructure important as a challenge to democracy? It's a challenge because of the following. Any infrastructure project seeks to create a public good, whether it's an electrical grid, a road network, a telecoms system, and so forth - they are meant to serve public interest. But, you cannot build an infrastructure project, a big ambitious one, without trampling on the individual interests of certain stakeholders who are going to have their nice view of the ocean obstructed or they're going to have land taken from them under eminent domain or they're going to have a noisy multi-story building in their nice suburban neighborhood, which is the big fight that's going on right now in California. And, I would say that in general a lot of modern

democracies have privileged the protection of those narrower interests over the need to create public goods in a way that leads to what I have labeled vetocracy. Meaning, we end up with a governance system in which it is really easy for multiple stakeholders to veto a project that is trying to serve some common objective and as a result you find it extremely difficult to build anything in a Western democracy.

China doesn't worry about this so much. If the Chinese government decides it's going to build a road or an airport or something, they do compensate people for land that's taken and so forth but ultimately you don't stand up to the Chinese state in a situation like that. When they built the Three Gorges Dam a couple of decades ago, they had to move something like 1.2 million people out of the floodplain. They did this all in a year. This could not possibly happen in a Western country that there would be that kind of just rolling over people's rights. But, what I want to leave you with in this general discussion of infrastructure is that the choice is not between the current Chinese system and a kind of idealized Western system, because I don't think either of those are adequate. The Chinese are not sufficiently observant of the rights of different stakeholders and I think that many Western governments privilege too many stakeholders and therefore make collective action very difficult and I think in terms of addressing the governance challenges that we really need to address, we have got to change the balance. Not moving to the Chinese model but moving to a position where it gets a little bit easier to build things.

That brings me to a very specific discussion of the American state. The American state is in your title of the lecture series and that's one of my favorite topics because I think we need to talk specifically about the things that will prevent our American state from actually dealing with the challenges of both mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

And, here I would say that there are two broad issues that affect us. The first one, frankly and unfortunately, is polarization. If we cannot, as Americans, agree on getting vaccinated as a matter, not of helping people over there, but actually keeping ourselves from dying. If we can't agree on that, how the hell are we going to agree on some costly new measure to deal with climate change? Our recent experience does not speak well to our ability to make those kinds of difficult decisions. I would say that looking at the international system right now, polarization is the single biggest weakness that America has at the moment. I mean it's not just agreeing on health measures. We can't even pass an annual budget, one of the most basic functions of any

political system. We can't even pass an annual budget on a regular basis because of this disagreement between Republicans and Democrats and this is a problem that is getting worse.

There was an article written a couple weeks ago in [*The Washington Post*](#) by [Robert Kagan](#) which I endorsed very strongly. He argues that we are in the midst right now of a very serious constitutional crisis, because what's splitting Republicans and Democrats is not a dispute over policy issues, it is a dispute over democracy itself. As a result of our past president's insistence that the last election was stolen from him, Republican legislatures all over the country are trying to make it more difficult for Democratic voters to vote. More importantly, they are awarding themselves the ability to designate electors in the next presidential election and to potentially override the popular vote if it goes against them. It is an authoritarian set of policies that will I think truly undermine the legitimacy of an election if they are allowed to carry this out and especially if the election is at all close.

The stakes right now for American democracy are very great. I don't think that any of the policy disputes like whether the reconciliation bill should be \$3.5 trillion or \$1.5 trillion - I think those kinds of issues pale in comparison to the threat our basic democratic institutions face at the present moment. And so, if we don't fix that, we're not going to fix global warming or pandemics or any number of challenges that we're going to face in the future. That's a whole different lecture that I could give about how you're going to fix that and I don't have any brilliant ideas at the moment. Maybe we can talk about that in a little in the Q&A, but the second part predated the rise of Trump and American populism because the American state wasn't working well prior to this.

I think that this is the result of both American political culture and the specific design of American institutions culturally and this is something my mentor Seymour Martin Lipset wrote about extensively. The single longest-standing aspect of American political culture is hostility to the state. Americans do not like the government and this is something that is shared both by the right and by the left. They dislike different parts of it. So, under Trump you had all this complaining about the administrative state and the deep state and the attempt to dismantle that as much as possible, but it exists on the left as well. A lot of people on the left want to defund the police. They do not trust a lot of police departments to be neutral arbiters of the law, but really believe that they're part of a larger power structure and so forth. And one of the results of that is that our state was created later than the states of other developed democracies. It has been less

extensive and it is of less – well, I mean there are certain parts of the state that are extremely high quality, but there's other parts of it that are either missing or very weak and actually Suzanne Mettler, a professor here, has written about. Just one example of this American dislike of the state is what she calls the submerged state. We don't like a state that actually has the power to subsidize certain activities and so instead we grant tax exemptions or tax breaks and that means that we actually have a big state, but it's just not visible because no politician wants to get up and say, yeah I think we should spend tax dollars to do x and y and rather they give out the equivalent amount of money through tax credits. Right, so this is this is a problem.

We allow way too many political appointees. Most European parliamentary systems turn over maybe a couple dozen officials every time there's a change after an election between political parties. In the United States, it's between four and five thousand officials across the entire federal government. Many of them are subject to Senate confirmation and, talk about vetocracy right now, Ted Cruz is holding up about 50 senior appointments in the State Department because he wants to use that as a point of extortion to get some other thing on his agenda and our system allows him to do that.

I'm running short of time here and I do want to allow a discussion. Let me return to my state of California just to tell you how climate adaptation is made more difficult by the governance rules that we have created, because of all of the 50 states in the Union, I think California is the one that puts up the most obstacles to building anything and that will face the biggest challenges in this respect.

In California, we have something called CEQA this is the California Environmental Quality Act it was passed around the same time back in 1970 as the National Environmental Protection Act, NEPA, and it's an interesting law. It doesn't actually set environmental standards. It basically empowers private enforcement of environmental rules. People somehow think that this new Texas abortion law is a big innovation because it allows for private attorney generals. Anyone can sue an abortion provider, but actually we Americans do a lot through private enforcement. And one of those measures is CEQA - that provides standing and a very easy access to the courts in order to enforce environmental compliance. And then as a result of the case law that has expanded the reach of CEQA, virtually every public and private project in the state comes under its jurisdiction and virtually everything that gets built except for the most routine kinds of home modification projects are liable to CEQA lawsuits.

One of my colleagues estimates that the California high-speed rail, if built in China, would probably cost about 20 billion dollars. This is this high-speed rail between Los Angeles and San Francisco, current estimate for that is about 90 billion and that extra 70 billion is largely driven by CEQA litigation because virtually every kilometer of that railroad track is being sued by somebody and it's not being sued for environmental reasons, they're being sued by labor unions, business competitors, a homeowner that doesn't want to lose the nice view that they've got of something and mounting a CEQA lawsuit is a way of blocking action. So, this is an example of vetocracy in action. It really doesn't have to be that way. You don't have to go to the Chinese extreme, you could be more like a number of European countries that reduce standing, that have a more efficient arbitration system rather than using litigation in this fashion so on and so forth. I'll conclude with that particular example.

We are not in a position, we meaning me and my state of California, but we Americans in general and I would say a lot of liberal democracies in the West, are not set up to deal with the kinds of big decisions that we are going to have to make in order to deal with climate change. These kinds of infrastructure problems are endemic in other democracies. Not quite as bad as California, but you look at the new Berlin International Airport or the fifth runway at Heathrow or any number of other projects that have really not taken place on anything like a reasonable time scale and at a reasonable cost to see that we've got a huge national-level governance problem and these things are going to get worse as time proceeds and therefore I say that we ought to deal with those things that we can actually deal with in a realistic way as the first order of business, because unfortunately these pending global challenges are going to get worse with every single passing year. We've got to fix our institutions to deal with it.

So, with that I'll stop and I look forward to any questions or comments that you have. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Victor Nee: Thank you. Well, we can field questions first from the in-person audience and then we'll shift after 12 minutes maximum to the online audience from all over the world watching this event. I will be the moderator. There is a question in the back there. Yes.

Audience Member: Thank you so much. I wonder in terms of the impasse that you are describing now with liberal democracy do you envision, perhaps venturing into the science

fiction terrain, a possibility of legitimacy, political authority being relegated to AI in certain aspects of our life. Perhaps potentially in dealing with climate change.

Francis Fukuyama: So, that's an issue that a lot of people have been thinking really hard about, particularly back at Stanford and I'm sure here as well. I think that AI is a solution to a certain category of problems but it is not a solution to the basic political conflicts that we are going to be facing. Because those are based on outright conflicts of interest. They're based on conflicting values and those are ones that preeminently have to be solved by human beings deliberating with one another and asking themselves, how do we balance a public good like a new reservoir canal against the damage that's going to be done to this piece of property or so forth? And, that's not something that a machine is ever going to solve.

There are applications for artificial intelligence, for example, in a lot of governance mechanisms like under the Administrative Procedure Act every rule change has to be subject to notice and comment. I had a student, a CS student, actually, who designed a system. So, when the FCC wanted to change its rule on net neutrality, they put it up for notice and comment and they got something like two and a half million comments and he actually designed an AI system that went through that entire body of comments and put it into different bins according to the nature of the comment and it was actually quite a brilliant solution. It was very useful. It turned out that like a third of them came from one organization, which had not been obvious before this analysis. So, there are applications, but I think that so much of governance is based on real conflicts of interest and real conflicts of values and for that the machines aren't going to help us

Audience Member: Thank you. I have a question about the polarization of the political system. How would you assess the chances that that the two big parties or the Democratic party and the Republican party will split up at some point? So, in the Republican party you would have like probably Trumpists and more traditionally conservative people and the Democratic party, a left-wing progressive party and a centrist party. And, don't you think that could be a step towards a solution or at least an improvement regarding the polarization of the political system?

Francis Fukuyama: Well, it would definitely be an improvement, but I don't think that it's possible for that to happen under the current institutional rules. In political science, there's this

thing called Duverger's Law that says that first-past-the-post electoral system where you can win by simple plurality, it tends to produce a two-party system.

The Bush v. Gore fight in Florida is a good example of this because Ralph Nader tried to run as a third-party candidate and all he succeeded in doing was throwing the election to George W. Bush. That's going to be a big obstacle to anybody that wants to set up a third party in the United States. I agree that actually there's really at least four parties in the United States. One solution that my colleague Larry Diamond really likes is to move to rank choice voting, which maintains some single member districts but creates an incentive for alliances and softens some of the polarized conflict between two parties. It doesn't always work and actually you really would need to move towards proportional representation as they have in many other democracies I think and that's really the only condition I can see that you could get to a multi-party system in the United States.

I would be more than happy to see those electoral rules change in the U.S. and actually there's nothing in the constitution that prevents our adopting proportional representation but it's a big political ask and right now I'm not sure how realistic it is.

Audience Member: So, are there other places in the world that effectively dealt with the kind of barriers to infrastructure creation that you've seen in California. Are there good examples of this and if not, can you give some ideas as to how to push back against these kinds of problems?

Francis Fukuyama: In general, yes I think that even if you look across the United States, New York for example has the equivalent of CEQA but it doesn't have the broad standing. It doesn't have the same kinds of detailed provisions and so it's actually a lot easier to build stuff in New York State than it is in California. Germany puts a strict statute of limitations on any kind of litigation. Other countries don't allow this to be litigated in the regular court system. They have as either a system of special administrative courts or you can actually negotiate these things politically in a bureaucracy without having to go to expensive litigation. Or you could just have the state enforce these rules. I mean this is something that - Americans somehow we don't like the state, so you know - but in Europe the first instinct would be okay you've got an environmental rule, let's have our EPA police these things and put fines on people that violate the rules and so forth. So you could replace this litigation system of private enforcement with

actually a state-based one. So yes, I think there are things that we could do, that don't involve going to the China model, but will make things easier than what we have now.

Audience Member: [...] has a brother on the faculty of the Harvard Law School who wrote a book published a couple of years or so ago about the work of the founding fathers in creating the constitution. Many pages of that book sound as if they could have been written yesterday about the dysfunction in which we exist now. The question, then, is to what degree are the seeds of our dysfunction clearly present in our constitution and the degree to which, if we're going to get over it, do we need a fundamental re-engineering of the founding document of the nation? And, what's the likelihood of that?

Francis Fukuyama: No, that's a great question. I think the answer is some of them are definitely located in the constitution. Others are completely extra-constitutional and could be changed overnight if we wanted to do that. I mean, an example is the filibuster, right? I mean you could just with a majority vote among the Democrats you could get rid of the filibuster rule and make it much easier go back to the system that existed 20 years ago and make it much easier to pass legislation, which frankly I think they ought to do.

So that's not constitutional at all, however, the fundamental - if you compare constitutions across other democracies, other developed democracies - we have more checks and balances than let's say Germany or France or Britain. And, in fact, Britain under the old Westminster system was sometimes called a democratic dictatorship because really the only check was an election. A British government that had a majority in parliament could basically do anything it wanted to and the reason it didn't become a dictatorship was really more of a cultural sense of moderation rather than an institutional rule.

We Americans like checks and balances and I must say - I started making this argument about vetocracy before Donald Trump was elected and I remember a lot of my colleagues saying you just wait you're going to be glad you've got all those checks and balances and sure enough the fact that all these checks and balances existed meant that Trump couldn't do a lot of the stuff that he wanted to. I mean he tried to get around them as much as possible, like building his border wall and so forth but he wanted to ban Muslims from coming into the country and a court

told him no you can't do that and so I think when you have a bad leader, you should be grateful that the American system puts this many obstacles in the way of action.

But, those exact same rules prevent a better leader from actually getting anything done and I would say just witness the problem Joe Biden has right now trying to get these big bills through the legislature. And, by the way even if they pass reconciliation and the infrastructure bill, that's not going to be the end of the story because these will be endlessly challenged in the courts. It's never over until it's over in the United States and so I just think that we do have a system that privileges the blocking of action. We ought to get rid of those blockages that are not hardwired into the Constitution we ought to make decision-making more obtainable. But, we should also be glad that we have got this.

The way I regard it is, it's kind of a matter of your risk tolerance. The American system is a very low risk tolerance kind of political system where we're more worried about abuses of power than we are about the effective use of power and other countries, other democracies, have a different balance where they think it's more important for governments to be able to actually do stuff than it is to block them from doing things and I just think that we could easily move more in the direction of making it easier to do stuff and our system doesn't necessarily prevent that.

Audience Member: Hi. Thank you for your talk. Circling back to the discussion of climate change, I'm curious to hear your thoughts on the dichotomy between space travel and we need to fix our problems on our planet first. Personally, I think it's interesting people perceive that any developments done to travel to a different planet, that technology wouldn't be helpful in solving problems here on earth as well. So I'm curious to hear your thoughts on that debate between investing and traveling versus investing and fixing here.

Francis Fukuyama: Yeah, you know, Kim Stanley Robinson who wrote *The Ministry for the Future* also wrote the *Mars* trilogy which is exactly that scenario that Mars gets colonized and then terraformed because Earth has become unlivable and people need an alternative planet to go to. I think that - I'm really of two minds about this, because I actually do think that people's horizons really need to be broadened and you're not going to do that unless you take certain risks and kind of dream big about what is out there in the future.

On the other hand, I really do not like this model of privatized space travel. I mean right now what's driving the development of Blue Horizon and SpaceX and everything else is the prospect of carrying these rich billionaires into outer space. It's ridiculous. That should not be - there should be a public use for this and a clear sense of public purpose behind it and so that's why I would actually support NASA's - I mean I remember watching the current Mars rover Perseverance come down I must say when that thing touched down on the surface of mars I said, "God damn! I'm really proud to be an American." At this point, that they can actually pull something as difficult as that off so smoothly. But, I do think that it's not a solution to any of the problems that I outlined. None of these global problems is really going to be addressed by any of that space technology and so we gotta prioritize

Audience Member: Are there any practical solutions to disinformation? And if not, I mean are we just headed on an endless downward spiral in terms of partisanship? And, I just would also like your advice for students what could we do you know right now to try to help in any sort of way.

Francis Fukuyama: Yeah, so that's again the subject of another complete lecture. I think that the way to deal with this, there's several different approaches. Most of them are regulation and that's what's being done in Europe right now. So, you have privacy rules that prevent these big platforms from using the data they have about you in other domains. There's antitrust law. We've been very lax on antitrust over the last 30 years for a number of historical reasons. Again, the Europeans have been much more vigilant about that sort of thing and then there's just outright regulation. I mean you've got this new Digital Services Act that the European Commission has proposed that will put limits on what platforms can do. That is a little bit more problematic in an American context, because we're so polarized.

You know in a way both the Republicans and the Democrats agree that these big platforms should be regulated except that the Republicans want to regulate them to allow Donald Trump on and the Democrats want to regulate them to keep him off. So, there's a fundamental conflict there, but that would be the first step I think that in terms of what students can do.

There's a couple different layers to this. One of the things that you can just immediately do, I think, is to actually get off of social media. You shouldn't be living your life comparing

yourself and how many likes you've gotten for your latest post to everybody else in the world. The thing is that these platforms have spent a lot of time and effort hiring the best psychologists in the world to draw you into this to make you spend as much of your time as possible on the platforms and you don't need to do this. And so, getting off of social media is one thing that I think you can do.

The other thing is that that's not going to help. I mean it's true that Facebook has been losing young subscribers. I think that the more competition there is out there the better we'd all be and then I think you need to pay attention to public policy, because there are many regulatory things we could be doing in this space that we've not been doing because people aren't angry about the way that, let's say Facebook, violates your privacy every single day in order to sell further ads. I frankly think it's pretty outrageous. It doesn't have to be that way, but everybody says I get to communicate with my friends, so that's worth it to me or I get a free email account and that then lets me give all my information to Google who can then sell it to somebody else. So, I think you need to pay attention to public policy because there are going to be times, and I think we're moving to, that the opinion about these big platforms has shifted 180 degrees in the last few years so there's going to be regulation coming down the pike and I think we need to support the right form of it.

Victor Nee: Well, thank you Cornell audience for the questions and now we're going to switch to the global audience. There is a Mr. Anonymous, who asked: your challenges did not include nuclear proliferation and potential catastrophes, whether local, regional, or global. Do you consider the problem solved?

Francis Fukuyama: No, I just don't want to be excessively pessimistic in one single lecture and in fact over lunch we were talking at some length about the possibility of military conflict with China, which is another one that I actually think is more probable and more likely in our near-term future than nuclear first use.

There's a lot of problems out in the world and I think you've got to deal with them one by one I think nuclear proliferation has not been solved. In certain ways, it is getting worse but that's another problem that we'll address separately.

Victor Nee: Okay, now we have Mr. Raj Paul from Seattle. Question: Dr. Fukuyama based on intrinsic values and economic models, Eastern societies have an advantage for action on climate. They're deploying AI to reduce social pressures and forestation to sequester carbon. Will the West's disadvantage erode its global soft power?

Francis Fukuyama: Like I said, I think the track record of Eastern societies is not so clearly in favor of a - they're doing better I mean. So, there are two separate issues that face any government.

The first is do you actually want to do something to mitigate carbon emissions and then secondly, do you have a governance system that allows you to act on whatever it is you want to do? And as the China example indicates, they clearly have a governance system that allows them to do stuff more effectively when they decide to do it. But they still face this problem: that mitigating carbon also cuts economic growth and that's also a big priority for them and so it's not clear to me that many societies in Asia are actually going to meet both of those challenges. And in particular, I didn't say much about India, but India is going to play a really big role in global warming because of coal. The single biggest source of energy that exists in that country is coal. They've been growing as a carbon emitter very rapidly. If they privatize coal and they make that whole supply system more efficient it's going to grow even faster. Is the Modi government going to agree to give up a point and a half of economic growth in order to meet a global climate challenge because he's living in East Asia?

I don't think so. That's why I think you just have to think in terms of the concrete incentives that face individual governments rather than making generalizations. I mean I do think it's a valid generalization to say that in East Asia in general, the state has more authority. People are less uppity about protecting their rights and complaining and protesting and so forth. I mean that's clearly the case, but when push comes to shove Western governments have been able to do difficult things as well and so I think it's in that margin of state action that the real choices are.

Victor Nee: Okay, next we have Massimiliano Dore. In the post pandemic order, which ones are in your opinion the main actors of the new multipolar system us China, Russia, India, and question mark?

Francis Fukuyama: I believe that the United States has been in a long-term decline for a number of reasons. I think that its political system has been decaying. It's been perceived by its own citizens as less legitimate and it's been riven by this kind of polarization that I described. I can imagine scenarios whereby we will come out of it in the next decade, it's not impossible.

But if that's the case I do think that America's relative weight in the world stage is going to decline but so is China's and so is Russia's. I mean China right now I think is at a kind of peak in terms of global influence. But as the current slowdown indicates they're facing a lot of challenges as well. The biggest one is a demographic one of declining populations. They're following Japan, South Korea, Singapore down this demographic decline which is going to affect growth rates. Their economic model has got lots of problems - too much debt accumulated and you're seeing that already with this real estate collapse that they're facing. The Russian model - a former colleague of mine Thane Gustafson at Georgetown has just written a new book on this and although in the short run, climate change will allow Russia to open up parts of Siberia to further agriculture, in the long run the decline of fossil fuels is going to hit them harder than almost any other great power because they don't have a balanced economy. It's all fossil fuel driven and so they also are facing a pretty bleak future.

Victor Nee: Okay, so we have a Cornell alumnus, Class of '71, John D'Addario who is a physician. What happens to the extreme tribalism polarization and special interest group roadblocks to progress in America if Trump wins the presidency in 2024?

Francis Fukuyama: It's funny because even professors are not supposed to be overtly partisan when they give public speeches and I actually don't want to. I don't say this as a partisan, because I really do feel that American democracy itself is really the issue. Like I was saying I don't think the contest between the two parties right now is over policy. I think it is much more over fundamental democratic values and democratic institutions. And so, another Trump presidency in 2024 I think is going to be a total disaster, because at this point he tried to steal the last election, he didn't get away with it, but in the meantime he has been - he and other Republicans - have been trying to figure out how to do it better the next time and it's going to be a little - Viktor Orban's doing something very similar in Hungary where through gerrymandering and changing the political system he's made it very hard for his political party fides to ever be voted out of

office and that I think is the danger where you change enough of these rules and even if you get - I mean right now the Democrats are working at a big demographic disadvantage because of the Senate and because of the way districting is done, the Senate massively overrepresents Republican voters and then they've been also monkeying with the House districts and so forth. And so, now the popular vote margin by which Democrats have to win elections in order to get representation, actual representation either in the presidency or in Congress has been increasing and it could kind of lock itself in in the future and that's, you know, the Democrats aren't going to sit around and accept that so if you're kind of thinking of scenarios whereby you could get overt violence in this country you don't have to think very hard about what could happen over a contested 2024 election, when so much of the country is actually pretty well armed and very angry at the other side.

Victor Nee: Mary Ellen Howe has a question. What is your view of the global climate crisis? What, in your view, is the way in which it is most quickly and effectively addressed? That's a tough one, quickly and effectively addressed.

Francis Fukuyama: Well, it's not going to be quickly and effectively addressed. I mean the only thing on the horizon that I can see is if they make a breakthrough in fusion power. In fact, there's just an article in the *Times* today about this, that there's a lot of private money going into this, and there's actually a lot of private investors that actually think that commercially viable fusion power is something that could happen in the next decade. And if that actually takes place then I think that really solves a lot of the problem. In the absence of that, it's just going to be this slow slogging grind of shifting to alternatives, pricing carbon so that it really prices out the externalities in terms of changing individual behavior based on different kinds of incentives, and then dealing with this global problem.

Because the biggest source of the problem is not in the United States and it's not in Europe. It really is in the developing world and how you go about doing that is pretty tough. One more example of this: I have a colleague at Stanford who is an epidemiologist but has spent a lot of his career working in Bangladesh and one of the issues he's been looking at are basically charcoal fired kilns in Bangladesh and in India and in Pakistan. And according to him, collectively these charcoal fired kilns emit as much carbon as all of the vehicles in North

America and so actually from an American taxpayer standpoint, it would be much more efficient to subsidize the conversion of these kilns all throughout South Asia and move them onto gas-fired kilns. But politically, who's going to support that in Congress? Who's going to support subsidizing people in South Asia to do something that doesn't have a direct immediate benefit for Americans? It's not going to happen and so these are kind of some of the political challenges that I think are created by this funny incentive system that global warming presents.

Victor Nee: So, no quick and effective solution immediately. That's the real realism.

Francis Fukuyama: Fusion.

Victor Nee: Marcus Monenerkit has a question: where can we find the lessons that will teach us how to solve problems of multipolar consciousness, which I sense is a problem of conflict and competition?

Francis Fukuyama: Well, isn't that the subject of most international relations courses? Right, I mean most international relations courses are about the world in which you've got multipolar conflict and what IR specialists study is, where does that conflict come from? How does it get organized? How do you mitigate it? And so forth. And, so I think you've got actually a whole academic field that's kind of devoted to that. That doesn't mean that anyone's got a solution to the actual problems that we face and one thing I would say is that there is a kind of solutionism among policy intellectuals that leads them to think that every problem out there has a solution and I'm not sure that that's correct.

This is something I've thought repeatedly about the Korean nuclear program, that as far as I can see there's actually no good solution to this problem. It's not through diplomacy, not through military action not through ignoring it. I don't think any of the solutions out there will actually work and so it's kind of an unsolved problem that I don't expect to be solved anytime in the future.

So, if that's not sufficient to depress you, I don't know what is.

Victor Nee: Well, perhaps we'll end the lecture at this particular point. It will certainly cause us to think and contemplate the challenging future. Thank you so much.