

# The 'End of History' Thesis Revisited: Reflections on the Ideological Landscape of the Global Age

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20 years ago, Francis Fukuyama published his seminal article, 'The End of History' in *National Interest*. Ultimately expanded into a book-length study (*The End of History and the Last Man*, 1992), the main thesis was built around the Hegelian notion of the 'end of history', allegedly marked by the passing of Marxism-Leninism as a viable political ideology. For Fukuyama, this 'end point of mankind's ideological evolution' reflected the total exhaustion of any conceivable systematic alternatives to neoliberalism. He then went on to postulate the emergence of a 'deideologized world' and downplayed the significance of rising religious fundamentalism and ethnic nationalism in the 'New World Order'. Indeed, Fukuyama predicted that the global triumph of the 'Western idea' and the spread of its consumerist culture to all corners of the earth. Driven by unstoppable processes of globalization and the unleashing of powerful new technologies, U.S.-style neoliberal democracy had emerged as the 'final form of human government'.

**What do we make of Fukuyama's end-of-history thesis twenty years later?** Does its pronouncement of the 'unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism' correspond to the actual ideological landscape of the global age? Has 'struggle' given way to 'exhaustion' and instrumental 'system-maintenance'? Responding to these questions, this essay argues—contra Fukuyama—that neither history nor ideology have come to an end. In fact, the Hegelian notion of 'struggle' is still very much what characterizes the transformation of the modern social imaginary and its affiliated political ideologies. Seeking to make sense of the changing nature of the contemporary ideological landscape, this essay posits that today's ideologies are renewing themselves by articulating the rising global imaginary into competing political programs and agendas. Rather than living in Fukuyama's 'deideologized world', humanity finds itself engaged in the great ideological struggle of the 21st century. Though still the dominant ideological paradigm, neoliberalism is on the wane, increasingly challenged from the Left by neo-Keynesianism and 'justice globalism' and from the Right by reactionary national-populism and 'religious globalism'. The paper ends with a brief assessment of the prospects of a global neo-Keynesianism in the light of current global economic crisis.

**Manfred B. Steger** is Professor of Global Studies and Director of the Globalism Research Center at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. He is also a Senior Research Fellow at the Globalization Research Center at the University of Hawai'i-Manoa. He has served as an academic consultant on globalization for the US State Department and as an advisor to the PBS-TV series, *Heaven on Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism*. He is the author or editor of seventeen books on globalization, the history of political ideas, and nonviolence, including: *The Rise of the Global Imaginary: Political Ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror* (Oxford University Press, 2008); the award-winning *Globalisms: The Great Ideological Struggle of the 21st Century*, 3rd ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009) and the bestselling *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2009).

Lecture in English / No prior registration necessary

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