

# Strong States, Populism and Freedom

Francis Fukuyama believes that the ability of a nation to develop a strong State is a virtue in so far as it is accompanied by the respect for the rights and freedoms and by a good system of accountability before the society. In that case, the governors and civil servants have in their hands a powerful tool capable of contributing to an important extent to achieve a just and useful order for everyone.

In his latest book *The Origins of Political Order*, Fukuyama traces the great nations' history from ancient China to revolutionary France. Through this vast historical outlook, he reveals the complex process by which peoples reach what Fukuyama calls “political development.” In his opinion, a country achieves this development when it fulfills simultaneously three fundamental characteristics: a strong State, respect for the rights and freedoms (rule of law) and a system of accountability before society. In the case that each of these characteristics arises separately, they tend to acquire exaggerated proportions, and they become distorted, producing negative consequences. Indeed, when there is a strong State in a society where the law is not respected and accountability is not enulturated, there is a risk of absolutism, by which governors and civil servants become masters of the State, subjecting society to an unjust regime, detrimental to its welfare. In fact, according to Fukuyama, the history of nations shows almost always a disproportionate combination of these three elements and, therefore, there are few historical examples of a balanced political development.

Following this line of thinking, Fukuyama has published alongside authors like Tulio Halperin Donghi, Enrique Krauze and Natalio Botana, another book whose thesis analyzes the political problem in Latin America by comparing it to the existing problem in Europe, especially in France, before the great Revolution of 1789. At that time, France succeeded in forming a seemingly strong State, so that it even remained in the collective memory as the greatest State in history, embodied in the powerful Louis XIV. However, despite its external bombast, the prerevolutionary State had a defect that would continue in the Spanish colonial State and in the current Latin American States, direct heirs of the latter. According to Fukuyama, the defect of Latin-American States would lie, first, in that, despite their great size and structure, they are not strong enough to impose a just order on individual interests. However, this defect becomes a virtue, because if these were indeed strong States, considering the lack of a culture of rule of law and the lack of accountability in our societies, the Latin-American States would turn into absolutist regimes of Asian kind. In this sense, Latin American States are characterized by a kind of weak absolutism which, unable either to enforce the law with equality and justice fairly or to subject its people by force, incorporates different social groups to the State to sustain itself in power.

Thus, the Latin American State would be of patrimonialist tradition, where governors and civil servants, far from being bounded by the law and by transparent accountability,

feel themselves as owners of their positions and even of public affairs, while including some particular social groups by making them enjoy these privileges to perpetuate themselves in power. The governments of the conservative elites of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and even military dictatorships, perhaps with the exception of Cuba, have come and remained in power thanks to this methodology. The renewed way of this Latin American multisecular patrimonialism would be that of the current populist States governing in several countries of the region which, in the manner of the existing patronage system around the Royal Court of the Old Regime, obtain and preserve power by offering part of the public patrimony to private sectors in exchange for electoral support, a significantly detrimental system to the political and economic development of these peoples.

If we analyze the current situation of the rest of the countries in the world taking as a reference Fukuyama's thesis, it seems that in nearly all of them there are different configurations from those that characterize patrimonialism and populism in Latin America. China has always been dominated by the tendency towards a strong State, bureaucratic and meritocratic, and therefore only partially patrimonialist, albeit without the compensation of respect for freedoms: hence the presence of an outright absolutism. In India, however, the State is weaker and less efficient but at least it is limited by the respect for the diverse local cultural identities. In Russia the State absorbed in its midst any resistance from civil society, accentuating its absolutist tendency but without the characteristics of an efficient and meritocratic bureaucracy as in the Chinese model. In the post-war Western Europe, the State has been strong, bureaucratic, and relatively efficient, but so has been the growing respect for the law and accountability, a tradition that comes from the Anglo-Saxon world with origin in England and in the United States. It was in the latter nations where the strong State was best kept over the recent centuries, reaching a remarkable balance with the other two elements. That allowed both countries to become universal models of modern political development. However, they are not the creators of the rule of law, for this is rooted in the European tradition of respect for the *law of nations*, *natural law* and, ultimately, for the Christian idea of a *divine right* that is above any political power.

However, not only in Latin America and Asia but also in Europe and the U.S., the balance between a strong State able to impose a just order, respect rights and supraprivate freedoms and accountability is always unstable and represents today an ongoing challenge. In fact, there is a current concern in the developed countries about the uncontrolled growth of State powers for security reasons against terrorism, to the detriment of individual natural rights and accountability. The same thing could be said about the expansion of State's powers in sensitive subjects such as biotechnology where natural law and freedom of conscience are subordinated to the technocratic or utilitarian designs of positive legislation enacted from the State. In the economic field, this imbalance appeared clearly from the global financial crisis onwards, largely caused by a kind of patrimonialist association between State regulators and private interests at the expense of law and accountability. The latter situation does not seem to have been modified after the crisis but it has been even increased with bailouts and the expansion of protectionist tendencies, in some cases aggressive, by many States, which imply a deepening of this imbalance.

The articles in this issue of *Cultura Económica* roam some aspects of this complex problem. The first of them, by a member of our Editorial Board, the economist Ernesto O'Connor, shows the risks of the resurgence of strong States in a context of free trade decline and weakness or absence of republican institutions, especially in the case of China, Russia and some Latin American countries. A second article by a researcher of the School of Government at the University Adolfo Ibañez of Chile, Gonzalo Bustamante Kuschel, analyzes the ideological origins of the current Latin American neopopulism, especially in Ernesto Laclau's version. Thirdly, we present an article by Roberto Bosca, professor at the Austral University and renowned specialist in politics and religion, who studies the Christian

origin of the contemporary rule of law, largely represented by the doctrine of Human Rights formally declared in 1948, and promoted especially by the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain. Ultimately, the article by the Professor of Philosophy at UCA Ricardo Delbosco, reveals the Christian foundations of contemporary democracy, this time in the thinking of the Italian Catholic philosopher Augusto Del Noce, which, in his opinion, has at this point a deep accordance with Maritain.

In our Documents section we present the homily of the Bishop of Baltimore, Josef Lori, held at the Cathedral of that diocese in June of this year in the context of what became known as *Fortnight for Freedom*, an event with the participation not only of Catholics but also of members of other Christian confessions, and of Muslim and Jewish communities. This homily, which evokes the emblematic figures of John Fisher and Thomas More, expresses the protest against the advance of the State at the expense of freedom of conscience and of the Church's and other religious institutions' freedom, before the bioethical legislation approved by President Barak Obama.

C. H.