



There is nothing straightforward about political success and political failure, however stark the difference between them. Getting politics right remains a fearsomely difficult business.

**NOT THE END OF HISTORY**

However, at some moments in history this gets quickly forgotten.

One such moment occurred in 1989. The end of the Cold War was so sudden and so welcome that it was tempting to read it as a morality tale. Democracy had won. Communism had lost, confirming the final defeat of totalitarianism over the course of the twentieth century. The difference between good politics and bad politics looked glaringly obvious. History seemed to have given its answer to the problem of politics. The answer was Western liberal democracy.

The person who often gets blamed for pushing this simplistic view is Francis Fukuyama, thanks to an article he published in the summer of 1989 (a few months before the Berlin Wall came down), which he called ‘The End of History’. Blaming Fukuyama for over-egging the events of 1989 is not really fair. He did not argue that history was coming to an end in that year. His article merely claimed that over the course of modern political history the advantages of liberal democracy had become increasingly apparent, to the point that it was hard to come up with any viable alternatives. It didn’t follow that democracy was about to triumph everywhere, or that the existing democracies were going to have it all their own way. Fukuyama thought plenty could still go wrong. He was worried that, without plausible alternatives, Western democracy was liable to become stale and unimaginative. Just as Hobbes has an undeserved reputation as a pessimist, Fukuyama has an undeserved reputation as an optimist. He felt the coming ascendancy of democracy ought to be approached with considerable trepidation.

Fukuyama was right to be worried. But he was worrying about the wrong thing. Victory in the Cold War did not leave Western