**Excerpt from an 11,000-word academic article in the fields of contemporary history and migration.**

Political institutions have a natural tendency to be perpetuated and moved by **inertia**. Usually, these creations transcend the will of their members and acquire a life of their own. Their mechanisms become progressively more complex and, thus, more resistant to any external change. Sometimes these institutions even manage to emancipate themselves from their original purpose and fight only for their own survival. In a broad study of political order throughout history, Francis Fukuyama refers to this concept as the ‘law of the conservation of institutions’:

There is something like a law of the conservation of institutions. Human beings are rule-following animals by nature; they are born to conform to the social norms they see around them, and they entrench those rules with often transcendent meaning and value. When the surrounding environment changes and new challenges arise, there is often a disjunction between existing institutions and present needs. Those institutions are supported by legions of entrenched stakeholders who oppose any fundamental change.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Fukuyama considers this principle of self-preservation as inherent in political institutions, just as it is in the human condition itself; likewise, he affirms that it is the main cause of political decay throughout history. Institutions created by society to meet specific needs become rigid and are incapable of adapting to new circumstances when those original needs change or disappear. And that inefficiency inevitably leads to failure.[[2]](#footnote-2) Some authors criticise this theory for its simplicity; they accuse Fukuyama of ignoring the fact that inertia is an inherent aspect of political development and avoiding a genuine analysis of 'how social and political inertia is related to the complex of social power, economic interest and ideology'.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, even while considering these objections and remaining open to some nuance, this theory about the inertia of institutions is undeniably astute; it offers an interesting point of view from which to analyse the political and social reality, past and present.

Migration is one of the areas in which this gap between political institutions and social reality is most evident. Frequently, migration policies implemented by states and supranational organisations, such as the European Union, are the subject of research that criticises precisely this lack of adaptability to the reality of migration. As Moya quips, 'political rhetoric, like bananas, is sometimes just that, and migration clearly obeyed mightier laws than those produced in national legislatures'.[[4]](#footnote-4)

1. F. Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (New York 2011), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. F. Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy* (New York 2014), 27. This work is a continuation of the volume cited above. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. B. Zantvoort, ‘Political Inertia and Social Acceleration’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 43, 7 (2017), 715. In this case, the author refers to the thorough analysis found in Pierre Bourdieu and the first generation of the Frankfurt School. This article focuses on an interesting comparison between Fukuyama’s proposal and the theory of social acceleration outlined by Hartmut Rosa. See H. Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (New York 2013). For a broader philosophical approach, see B. Zantvoort and R. Comay (eds) *Hegel and Resistance: History, Politics and Dialectics* (London 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. J.C. Moya, ‘A Continent of Immigrants: Postcolonial Shifts in the Western Hemisphere’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 86, 1 (2006), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)