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# The Historical Turn in Democratization Studies: A New Research Agenda for Europe and Beyond

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## Abstract

This article lays the theoretical and methodological foundations of a new historically minded approach to the comparative study of democratization, centered on the analysis of the creation, development, and interaction of democratic institutions. Historically, democracy did not emerge as a singular coherent whole but rather as a set of different institutions, which resulted from conflicts across multiple lines of social and political cleavage that took place at different moments in time. The theoretical advantage of this approach is illustrated by highlighting the range of new variables that come into focus in explaining democracy's emergence. Rather than class being the single variable that explains how and why democracy came about, scholars can see how religious conflict, ethnic cleavages, and the diffusion of ideas played a much greater role in Europe's democratization than has typically been appreciated. Above all, the authors argue that political parties were decisive players in how and why democracy emerged in Europe and should be at the center of future analyses.

## Keywords

democratization, Europe, critical junctures, structured episode, institutional change

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After lying dormant for over a decade, the study of Europe's historical transition to democracy (1848-1970s) has stirred. As comparative social scientists understandably focused their attention on the short-term, often rapidly changing, and dramatic post-1990 development of democracy throughout the world, the remarkable historical achievement of European democracy was excluded from the immediate post-cold war debates about democracy's causes and prospects. There were arguably two main reasons for this "antihistorical" turn. On the one hand, Europe's experience, increasingly in the distant past, was mistakenly presumed by many as fundamentally "unproblematic," therefore sharing few commonalities with the often violent and painful nature of more immediate contemporary cases of democratization. On the other hand, the European historical experience was regarded as such well-trod empirical terrain that the prospect of new insights, new propositions, and new lessons seemed not particularly promising.

Yet as the post-cold war enthusiasm for democracy seemed to ebb in the late 1990s (Carothers, 1999), a series of important controversies over *historical* cases of democratization emerged, leading scholars to ask, what are the appropriate lessons to be learned from Europe's own difficult historical transition to democracy for new democracies today (e.g., Berman, 2007)? What theoretical implications about the contemporary effects of electoral rules can be drawn from analyzing the electoral reforms that accompanied the rise of universal suffrage (Boix, 1999, in press; Cusack, Iversen, & Soskice, 2007, in press; Rodden, 2009)? Other scholars have also begun to revisit the turbulent history of democratization in Europe, asking foundational questions about key features of that momentous process: What prompted the initial move toward suffrage expansion beginning in 19th-century Europe (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2000; Llavador & Oxoby, 2005; Przeworski, 2008; Ziblatt, 2008, 2009b)? What explains cross-country differences in the process of democratization after those initial openings (Boix, 2003; Berins Collier, 1999; Iversen & Soskice, 2009b; Tilly, 2004, 2007)? And finally, what explains the diverse patterns of regime outcomes in Europe between the First and Second World Wars where democracy appeared so fragile (Berman, 2007; Bermeo, 2003; Bernhard, 2001, 2005; Capoccia, 2001, 2005; Ertman, 1998; Kopstein and Wittenberg, 2003)? In sum, because of the richness of the empirical material and importance of the topic, history sits again at center stage of the comparative study of democratization, and the question of how democracy was stabilized in Europe has captured the imagination of a diverse group of scholars, appearing once again to offer possible insights for democratization more broadly.

The collective "return to history" reflects a growing appreciation among political scientists of the conclusions that can be drawn from the history of

democratization and of the constraints imposed by history on the prospects of democratization. Furthermore, though history may not be a laboratory, it can help solve enduring problems of causality and endogeneity that plague standard ahistorical approaches (cf. Banerjee & Iyer, 2008; Rodden, 2009). As a diverse range of scholars therefore turn to historical case studies to bolster and refine their propositions and as methodological debates have emerged (e.g., J. Diamond & Robinson, 2010; Kreuzer, in press) over how best to do social scientific historical research, it is time to ask, how is historically minded comparative analysis of democratization most effectively done? The purpose of this essay and the volume as a whole is to answer this question. We reconceptualize the process of democratization in Europe and propose a methodological approach that allows uncovering important and often underappreciated *political* factors, thus suggesting future directions of research in the study of democratization in Europe and beyond.

## The Use of History in Democratization Studies: Methodological Foundations

It is important to begin by noting that this revival of interest among contemporary political scientists owes a great debt to earlier generations of scholarship. Crucially, however, this literature does not simply replay old debates. To paraphrase Robert Merton (1957/1968, p. 30), just as it is a mistake to ignore the work of earlier generations to seek unearned originality, so too can excessive veneration of the classics degenerate into banality. Thus, rather than dubbing older work “classics” and placing them into an untouchable museum of antiquities, this work, as the articles in this symposium demonstrate, has productively begun to actively engage and argue with earlier scholarship, challenging and supplementing it in theoretical and empirical terms.

Thus, our approach proposes a set of ideas that build on yet depart in important ways from the long “classical” tradition on the development of political regimes in Europe, seen most prominently in Barrington Moore’s (1966) masterpiece of historical analysis but also extending through to Luebbert’s (1991) and Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens’s (1992) work. These particular works shared three core methodological and theoretical dispositions. First, they sought to explain sweeping national *trajectories* of regime development, focusing less on short-term moments of regime transformation of the kind stressed in more recent “transitions” approaches such as O’Donnell and Schmitter’s (1986). Second, they generally tended to downplay international factors and instead highlight the impact of *domestic* variables on democratization. The third theoretical disposition of this work

was an overwhelming emphasis on *class* variables as determinants of regime change. Although Moore's innovative framework highlighted socioeconomic conflict on the land (between peasants and landlords), Rueschemeyer et al. focused on the strength of working class movements and parties and Luebbert emphasized the ability of liberal parties to co-opt working-class parties as crucial. In general, though self-consciously rejecting the assumptions of modernization theory (e.g., Almond & Coleman, 1960; Lerner, 1958; Lipset, 1959), all of these accounts shared a primary focus on the impact of class actors and class coalitions on regime change.

Our approach to the study of European democratization builds on the core insights of these older works in several ways. It shares their commitment to historical sensitivity and their methodological orientation toward comparative historical analysis (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). At the same time, though, we propose to rethink the predominant temporalities of the analysis of European democratization used in past work. When social scientists "do" history, they tend to follow one of two models. They use history as a source of data to test or to illustrate deductive theory (e.g., Bates, Greif, Levi, Rosenthal, & Weingast, 1998). Alternatively, social scientists use the core elements of history—such as timing, sequencing, critical junctures, path dependency, change, continuity—as building blocks of their theory (e.g., Orren & Skowronek, 2004; Pierson, 2004). It is this latter approach in particular that the work in this volume embraces. In brief, our approach elaborates the idea (initially found in Almond, Flanagan, & Mundt, 1973) that history does not always move smoothly from period to period but instead moves via crises, or sharply punctuated episodes of change that have lasting consequences. To study the emergence of democratic institutions in light of this "historical turn" means that the analyst must "go back" to systematically analyze *the historical episodes in which democratic institutions were created or substantially reshaped*.<sup>1</sup>

Although we are certainly interested in the long-run development of democracy, we contend that the long run itself was created in a chain of episodes of institutional changes that deserve closer scrutiny in their own right. The focus on these episodes, their causes, and their consequences results in an approach that is more attuned to capturing the causal complexity of institutional creation and the impact of democratic institutions, once created, on future political outcomes. This move allows us to highlight key empirical regularities that would otherwise be simply overlooked and to lay the foundations for generating empirically robust causal propositions. By contrast, alternative approaches miss these regularities because they exclusively focus either on the "grand sweep" of European democratic development and its retrospectively identified "trajectories," or on dichotomously defined "moments" of democratic transition.

## The Three Pitfalls of Studying Democratization Without History

Building on but making more explicit our understanding of “historical causality,” the approach proposed here allows analysts to self-consciously address three common methodological challenges or pitfalls that plague *ahistorical* accounts of democratization. The result of such ahistoricism is reoccurring empirical anomalies, a misconstruing of how events actually unfolded, and fundamental ambiguities in important causal claims. These theoretical and empirical problems are the consequence of three methodological pitfalls: ignoring causal heterogeneity, giving insufficient importance to micro foundations and the consequences of strategic interaction, and not accounting for the possible reciprocal causality between variables, thus inadequately appreciating path-dependent effects on the development of democratic institutions. These three pitfalls make clear why analyzing the unfolding of democratic institutions without a more careful and self-conscious strategy can be problematic. This section elaborates each of these themes.

First, as empirically powerful as cross-national analyses are in identifying the structural correlates of democratization, such accounts usually rest on a model of causality that requires the *assumption of unit homogeneity*. This assumption (that a change in the value of variable  $x$  will produce a change in the outcome  $y$  of the same magnitude across all cases) is difficult to reconcile with closer empirical analysis of democratic institutional development. One example makes this point clear. Empirical analysis has, at one level, quite convincingly demonstrated a robust correlation between the probability of democratic transition and declining socioeconomic inequality (i.e., an enlarged middle class; Boix, 2003). Others have seen working-class mobilization as consistently the decisive factor driving democratization (e.g., Rueschemeyer et al., 1992). However, at another level of analysis, careful in-depth case study work has found, for example in Berins Collier (1999), that the introduction of universal male suffrage in Europe was driven by at least *three* combinations of different causal factors: first, middle-sector democratization; second, elite competition; and, third, joint liberal-labor projects (for a similar insight, see Iversen & Soskice, 2009b). Berins Collier’s important insight is that although all of these collective actors may have been present in moments of democratization (Berins Collier, 1999, p. 35), their impact was not uniformly important in the same direction across all cases. Put differently, the causal logic of most cross-national empirical work is premised on the assumption that the impetus for democratization is always the same across all cases and comes “from below” from specific segments of the population at large. Recent and innovative case study and comparative work

(e.g., Iversen & Soskice, 2009b; Llavador & Oxoby, 2005; Ziblatt, 2008) has demonstrated that elite competition “from above” is also often a driving force of democratization. In short, with these multiple pathways, the causal logics underpinning the relationships leading to democratization may not be homogeneous.

The same argument on causal heterogeneity can be made with reference to cross-time units: The fact that a certain set of variables that caused a democratic reform at Time  $t_2$  was also present at Time  $t_1$  did not necessarily mean that it had the same effect in *both* circumstances. In fact, even in the same country, democratization at  $t_1$  could have been caused by a *different* set of factors. In his work that informed Stein Rokkan’s analysis of the adoption of proportional representation in early-20th-century Europe, for example, Karl Braunias notes that the causes of the push for proportional representation in the 1880s and 1890s were very different (seeking “elite protections”) than in 1918 and beyond, when it was a more strictly antisocialist measure (Braunias, 1932, pp. 201-204; also see Ahmed, 2008; Boix, 1999). The conditions under which democratic institutions are reformed change, inducing actors to adapt their strategies. Moreover, actors do not start *ex novo* each time in their struggles over democratic institutions: Just as prodemocratic activists may learn new and more effective strategies of mobilization from earlier instances of democratization, so too do autocratic incumbents, whether after 1848 or in 1989, look to the dynamics of regime change in other countries to learn new “repertoires of repression” (Beissinger, 2002, p. 327). In sum, often broad cross-national analyses assume, generally for reasons of parsimony, unit independence across time and space. However, different causal logics may be at work not only in different countries but also in different phases of the process of democratization within the same country (Hall, 2003).

A second constraint on causal analysis that flows from inadequately conceptualizing the temporal element in the analysis of democratization is the tendency to provide accounts of democratization that lack in micro foundations and thus, in many cases, to underestimate the importance of the *actual unfolding of the strategic interaction* that led to the establishment or the reshaping of democratic institutions. Important recent analyses of democratization, while stretching back in time to historical cases and covering long periods, give greater priority to assessing causal effects than identifying causal mechanisms. The results are often robust empirical findings that are, however, based on a series of intriguing but untested assumptions about causal processes. One common assumption, for example, is that the relevant actors are social classes (e.g., Cusack et al., 2007) or even “income groups” (e.g., “the rich,” “the poor,” and “the middle class”; e.g., Acemoglu & Robinson,

2006; Ansell & Samuels, 2008; Boix, 2003). Political parties, often the crucial actors in the democratization process, are therefore assumed to be merely “representative” (i.e., mere stand-ins) of these social aggregates.<sup>2</sup> Other assumptions, often not explicitly articulated in these accounts but crucial to such arguments, are, first, that these social actors have correct and full information on what their collective interests are and, second, that they are sufficiently farsighted and instrumentally rational that they can and will act in the long-term interest of their constituency. Although these views may be analytically useful and may empirically hold in some instances, assuming they *always* do without any empirical verification suggests the need for the new kind of historical empirical work that we advocate here (Rodden, 2009, p. 349; cf. Iversen & Soskice, 2009a, p. 452).<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, to assess the limits of existing findings, or to bolster the plausibility of existing arguments, we contend that it is crucial to pay attention to the micro foundations of the often contentious process by which democratic institutions are built (e.g., Skowronek & Glassman, 2007, p. 2). Attention to micro foundations involves first and foremost empirically testing the assumptions mentioned above, which are generally observable from the historical record: Do the constituencies of the political parties whose leaders take key decisions on the creation of democratic institutions overlap significantly with class or income group divisions? Is there any historical evidence that these actors understood the long-term interests of these constituencies and acted in pursuit of that rather than other objectives, such as the short-term electoral interests of the party or of their clique within the party organization? And if the assumptions do not hold, are there alternative micro foundations that lead us to different conclusions? Taking historical analysis seriously can take us a long way toward answering these and other important questions and toward building compelling theoretical arguments.

Giving due attention to micro foundations almost invariably reveals the importance of the strategic interactions that lead to the creation or the reshaping of democratic institutions, at times with a significant degree of independence from underlying socioeconomic conditions or class alignments. Even holding such “structural” conditions constant, scholarship has demonstrated that politicians embrace suffrage reform (e.g., Przeworski, 2008; Ziblatt, 2008) or introduce other important changes in the rules governing national elections (e.g., Capoccia, 2010b) when it is in their electoral or strategic interest in the short term. Moreover, several theoretical accounts have convincingly argued that institutional creation often takes place in conditions of high uncertainty, in which actors’ perceptions and unforeseen, contingent events may have a large impact on institutional formation (e.g., Stinchcombe, 1987, p. 102; also



see Berlin, 1974; Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Mahoney, 2001; Mayhew, 2006; Pierson, 2000; Shapiro & Bedi, 2006). This suggests the potential causal importance of political mistakes, misperceptions, and unintended consequences (e.g., Turner, 1999) on both strategic behavior and institutional outcomes. Without sensitivity to these dynamics, we may miss the actual process by which democracy emerges.

Finally, a third pitfall of studying democratization without history is the problem of circular causality, seen in the reoccurring debate about the *direction of causality* between correlates of democratization and democratization itself. One source of the difficulty is that ahistorical accounts are generally ill suited to do full justice to the often-lasting impact of institutional arrangements on political and economic outcomes. For example, one of the most important debates in current studies of democratization centers on the issue of whether democratization is *exogenous* or *endogenous* to the correlates of socioeconomic development. Early cross-national findings presumed an endogenous relationship: Increased wealth was thought to lead to more stable democratization (Lipset, 1959). Przeworski and Limongi (1997), however, have challenged this point, arguing that democracies are created “for many reasons” and that the correlation between wealth and democracy reflects the greater stability of wealthy countries, once they have already democratized.

But most recently, Boix and Stokes have provided additional evidence of democracy’s endogeneity to development. The authors quite convincingly contend that universal suffrage and expanded voting rights (a subset of democracy’s core institutions) do *not* explain economic growth and industrialization (Boix & Stokes, 2003, p. 539). However, they also note that another subset of the institutions of modern democracy created at an *earlier* point in time (i.e., liberal constitutional structures) likely contributed to the very socioeconomic growth that subsequently gave rise to further changes in democratic institutions in Europe (Boix & Stokes, 2003). Thus, embedded in this endogenous account of democratization is the notion that democracy is more than the short-run product of its socioeconomic correlates but instead is itself the outer tip of a much longer historical chain. Therefore, to fully explain the correlation between economic development and democratization requires unbundling our concept of democracy itself and being attuned to the possibly asynchronous sequence (Ziblatt, 2006) by which its different institutional components emerge, their causes, and their consequences.

In sum, theoretical ambiguities will likely persist unless we make use of substantive historical knowledge (both original research and “off the shelf” knowledge) of how democratic institutions actually emerged. This helps us untangle the *directionality* of our most important empirical findings. Moreover,

coming to analytical grips with the problem of circularity means that scholars tend to rely, at least implicitly, on notions of path dependence and “feedback effects” of institutions (Pierson, 1993; Skocpol, 1992). If democratic institutional arrangements created at an earlier stage may constitute important resources for political actors in *later* struggles that lead to institutional change in other, connected, arenas (e.g., a fight for expansion of suffrage may have different outcomes depending on the state of *other* existing democratic institutions), then both history and path dependence are crucial. Yet there has been a tendency to refer to history somewhat selectively, not incorporating either history or path dependence explicitly and systematically in such debates, although it is clear that accounts of democratization without either are fundamentally incomplete.

### *How to Study Democratization in Time*

Given the difficulties of trying to reconstruct causality without history, we should be clear about our purposes. Though we are highlighting the ambiguities and complexities of democratization, the correct response to complexity is certainly not to abandon the pursuit of empirical generalization. Instead, we propose an empirical strategy that offers a tractable way of addressing these issues systematically while providing the building blocks of a richer but still parsimonious theoretical account. Our approach to the study of democratization can be summarized in five interrelated propositions.

First, we propose the adoption of an explicitly *historical approach to causality*. Following both classical analyses and recent insights in the institutionalist literature (e.g., Bloch, 1949/1954; Pierson, 2004), we stress that history should be read “forward” and not “backward.” Rather than looking at outcomes at a single moment in time and their relationship with their contemporaneous correlates to “explain” democratization or retrospectively explain contemporary variations, we go back to investigate the foundational moments when democratic institutions were actually created and undertake a thorough analysis of the ideologies, resources, and institutional legacies shaping the choices of actors involved in the process of institution building. This approach uses contemporary social science techniques to test theories rigorously but with an eye to the knotty set of factors associated with the creation of institutions and their successive endurance. Thus, armed with a historical approach to causality, we can develop explanations of democracy that do not rely on the common and misleading assumption that the contemporary functions of particular political institutions can always explain their historical emergence (Pierson, 2004).

Second, the articles in this volume make clear the value, especially in the European historical context, of conceptualizing democratization not as a process that was achieved in single moments of wholesale regime transition but rather as a protracted and punctuated “one institution at a time” process, in which the institutional building blocks of democracy emerged *asynchronously* (Ziblatt, 2006). In this view, democracy is metaphorically best seen as a “collage” rather than a canvas (Bermeo, 2010). It is true that democratic regimes are in principle normatively coherent, primarily consisting of institutions that distribute power and protect rights in a manner that make rulers accountable to the electorate and provide channels of participation for the adult population (e.g., Dahl, 1989). However, it is crucial to emphasize that the complex institutional configuration of democracies rarely emerges all at once. On the contrary, different institutions often emerge at different times, often for different reasons. Thus, it is important to narrow our analytic look from the whole regime to a more detailed analysis of the emergence of the discrete democratic institutions that together define the content of political regimes.<sup>4</sup>

Third, because democracy as a whole protractedly emerges one institution at a time, a powerful research strategy in the study of democratization is to reconstruct the political fault lines structuring democratization by the analysis of key *episodes of institutional change*. This strategy allows an accurate reconstruction of what actors were actually fighting about, turning the researcher’s attention to new variables that were previously overlooked and bringing the politics of institutional change more directly and explicitly into the study of democratic development (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Ziblatt, 2009a). As explained in more detail below, depending on the range of choices available to actors and the potential impact of their decisions, episodes of reform potentially constitute important *critical junctures* in the development of each specific institution, in which events or political decisions may have long-lasting path-dependent effects (Capoccia, 2010b; Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; also see Mayhew, 2006; Skowronek & Glassman, 2007). The analysis of episodes shows, among other things, that conflicts over democratic institutions do not occur “sealed off” from each other, merely reflecting domestic conditions at the time. Instead, past experiences of successful or failed democratization may alter the distribution of power and arm actors with competing causal narratives or “lessons” from the past, thus significantly shaping their behavior.

Fourth, by adopting this distinctive approach, we can move beyond a singular emphasis on class or socioeconomic variables as *the* drivers of democratization to instead highlight that *multiple lines of conflict* motivate and shape actors participating in the crucial bargains or struggles that give

rise to democratic institutions. Democratic institutions have important consequences, even though sometimes unintended, on future political interactions, empowering some groups over others (e.g., Przeworski, 1993; Thelen & Steinmo, 1992). It is the important effects of political institutions that in no small part explain the high level of conflict associated with moments of democratization.<sup>5</sup> As the articles in this volume demonstrate, when one “goes back and looks” at the conflicts that shape the creation of democratic institutions, religious, ethnic, and ideological divisions generally play an important role alongside socioeconomic factors—and often they are the crucial determinants. If these factors have not “been there” in previous studies of European democratization, it is because we have not looked closely enough. In this respect, it is necessary to start rethinking the autonomous role played by *political parties*, as key strategic actors—often decisive in the European context—in shaping democracy’s emergence in crucial episodes. Though theories of parties and party systems are a key component of contemporary political science, our theories of how and why parties behave when it comes to democratization are often simply theories of social class and interest redeployed to explain party behavior. Parties existed in Europe even before democracy. Thus, a focus on within- and between-party power dynamics as well as the relationship of parties to interest groups in important moments of institutional change is crucial to explain patterns of European democratization.

Finally, recasting the study of democratization in terms of episodes in which democratic institutions historically emerged and were reformed helps us rethink how democracies are created and develop over the long run. Democratization is not only the passing of singular momentous thresholds of democratic transition as the “transitions” literature sometimes presumes but instead is itself a long-term process that can usefully be thought of as a *chain of big and small events*, not always moving unidirectionally toward full democracy. In Europe, democratic institutions developed over the long run at discrete but decisive moments over many decades, the most momentous of which were the “turning points” of 1848, 1918, 1945, and 1989. Though these were “transformational” events, which changed “the very cultural categories that shape and constrain human action” (Macdonald, 1996; Sewell, 1996, p. 263), a contention running through this volume is that political scientists’ conventional periodization schemes that exclusively rely on such well-known “switch points” is potentially deeply misleading. Indeed, if the analytical focus is shifted from the development of democracy as a whole to single democratic institutions (e.g., the extension of suffrage, the approval of a new constitution, the reform of the national electoral system, rules preventing electoral fraud), “smaller” episodes of democratization then sit at the center

of analysis as potentially important critical junctures *for those institutions*, leaving open the possibility that democratic reforms may stall or come under retrenchment. These junctures become crucial sites of causality for democracy as a whole: Friction or complementarity between different institutional arenas, or the different timing in their development (Orren & Skowronek, 2004), may have important consequences for democracy as such, generating different types of democracy and different levels of regime stability.

### *Multiple Registers of Causation, Critical Junctures, and Episode Analysis*

An analytical focus on episodes of institutional reform *connects* the creation or the restructuring of democratic institutions to their actual causal determinants in each case (e.g., Elster, 2006), thus combining the advantages of historical sensitivity to micro foundations with attention to the potential impact of impersonal causes. The purpose of episode analysis is therefore not just identifying correlates but attempting to systematically reconstruct which variables have causal force in leading to institutional reform in the moments in which institutions come into existence or are substantially reformed (e.g., Cartwright, 1989). As explained below, one point of contact of this approach with recent epistemological work in historical sociology is the reference to multiple registers of causality, including structural as well as conjunctural determinants, which can be decisive in different circumstances (e.g., Sewell, 1996, pp. 268-269; also see Turner, 1996, 1999).

In some cases, conjunctural determinants prove decisive. Following Capoccia and Kelemen's (2007) recent theoretical innovation, in cases where the range of choices available to decision makers expands significantly and so does the impact of their decisions, an episode constitutes an important *critical juncture* in the development of a specific institution. In these cases, an institutional outcome is overwhelmingly the result of events or decisions taken during a short phase of uncertainty, in which the relaxation of structural influences on political agency opens up opportunities for a small number of powerful actors to generate lasting institutional change (e.g., Mahoney, 2001; Skowronek & Glassman, 2007). In other cases, however, the outcome of institutional reform overwhelmingly reflects the impact of structural antecedents on the strategic interaction leading to institutional change (e.g., Collier & Berins Collier, 1991).<sup>6</sup> In this respect, this research directly engages with classical democratization theories, assessing how structural factors often seen as driving long-term trajectories of democratic development actually influence the politics of democratic reform in key episodes.<sup>7</sup>

“Reading history forward”—that is, adopting an *ex ante*, rather than hindsight, approach—is crucial to reconstruct what actors were actually fighting about and assess the respective causal force of structural and conjunctural factors in creating democratic institutions. Episode analysis identifies the key political actors fighting over institutional change, highlights the terms of the debate and the full range of options that they perceived, reconstructs the extent of political and social support behind these options, and analyzes, as much as possible with the eyes of the contemporaries, the political interactions that led to the institutional outcome (e.g., Bloch, 1949/1954, p. 125; Trevor-Roper, 1980). In this sense, the assessment of how much an observable institutional outcome can be explained by more contingent political decisions rather than by earlier antecedents or later developments is above all a matter of empirical investigation and of comparing the “criticalness” of different episodes in the chain leading to that outcome (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, pp. 360-363).

This analytical strategy not only provides the tools to generate more accurate accounts of institutional change but also has the advantage of uncovering analytically interesting “near misses,” which would otherwise disappear from history, thus seriously biasing our understanding of democratization processes. It is often the case that key decisions in democratic institutional reforms were the object of debate among elites and larger sectors of the public, in which alternatives were articulated and considered, and at times narrowly defeated, to the surprise of most contemporaries (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 352; Ziblatt, 2008). In these instances, episodes of “quasi-reform” where outcomes might plausibly have gone another way are analytically as interesting as episodes of successful reform (e.g., Weingast, 1996). Examples might include a suffrage reform that nearly achieves a parliamentary majority but falls to defeat by only a very narrow margin (Ziblatt, 2008) or an uprising of powerful antidemocratic forces barely avoided by the close result of a presidential election (Capoccia, 2005, pp. 163-165). Whether the “near-miss” outcome is the result of predominantly structural and impersonal conditions or the product of essentially exogenous decisions and events, it is important to underscore that such “negative-case” episodes are fully amenable to empirical study: Plausible, near-miss counterfactuals can be supported by historical evidence as much as “factuals” (e.g., Lebow, 2000a). Reconstructing the motivations and structural forces shaping pivotal decision makers in a narrowly failed reform can be empirically investigated as much as the study of events that actually happened (Fearon, 1991; Lebow, 2000b; Levy, 2008; Tetlock & Belkin, 1996; Turner, 1999). In short, historically informed and theoretically driven counterfactual reflection on the possible consequences of the nonselected options of institutional reform is essential to “bring back

to history” the full range of difficulties and contradictions that characterize democratization, thus avoiding the implicit selection bias that would result from an exclusive focus on “positive” cases of democratic reform (e.g., King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994).

In light of the above, what is the model for writing up an episode? The work in this volume deploys a variety of empirical strategies, but one particular approach is worth highlighting because it is innovative for comparative historical work: leveraging “within-case” data for the analysis of important potential moments of democratization. This approach allows one to systematically test macro theories (i.e., one “rounds up the usual suspects” of possible independent variables) with micro-level quantitative data, using those to estimate the actual impact of socioeconomic factors on decision makers. It also allows the analyst, with a close knowledge of the cases, to formulate and then test *new* possible hypotheses. For example, reconstructing moments of decision, we can ask, what is the relative electoral leverage of important groups, including churches and large landowners, on MPs deciding on key democratic reforms (Capocchia, 2010a)? Did land inequality play a role in decision making of political leaders in a decisive moment of possible democratic transition (Ziblatt, 2008)? Was the ethnically diverse constituency of a political party decisive in constraining (or empowering) the party leadership in supporting (or opposing) the creation of a certain institutional arrangement (Kopstein & Wittenberg, 2010)? Systematically taking into account how these antecedent factors influence strategic interaction, the study of episodes extends the view to long-term factors and corrects the “research design bias” that would follow from the exclusive focus on short-term and voluntaristic factors typical of many case studies (Pierson, 2003).

Last but not least, studying democratization through the analytical focus outlined above leaves space for analysts to see path-dependent phenomena in the development of democracy. Key episodes of reform and important critical junctures have lasting consequences in at least two senses: First, because they have the potential to entrench power relations that may outlast their social foundations, setting the parameters for future strategic interactions and thus influencing the possibility and the direction of further institutional changes (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; North, 1990; Pierson, 2000; Shepsle, 2008); second, participants in important episodes (e.g., the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Easter Uprising) can sometimes turn them into “iconic” or “transformative events” that provide a narrative for reformers in subsequent episodes of reform (Beissinger, 2002, 2007; Sewell, 1996, 2005). The broader point is that the research presented in this volume recasts European democratization as the *successive and linked establishment of institutional arrangements*



across a cluster of institutional realms that make rulers accountable and enlarge and regulate popular participation. “Episodes of institutional change” matter because they often generate self-sustaining institutions and narratives, which influence political outcomes. Therefore, episodes are not to be seen in isolation: The institutions put in place in an earlier episode often become important antecedents of a later one.

In sum, an approach based on these methodological foundations helps us recast in a significant way the analysis of how democratization in Europe occurred. Current conceptualizations operate with starkly bifurcated research designs that presume either that countries pass from nondemocracy to democracy at singular “transition” moments or thresholds or, alternatively, that countries develop on what sometimes appear to be “preset” trajectories of development to “fascism” or “democracy,” whose smaller institutional steps of reforms and setbacks do not matter to a country’s broader path of development. Naturally, scholars recognize *conceptually* that democracy in Europe developed in leaps and bounds and that democratic institutions were created at different times. But despite this conceptual awareness, our *empirical work* has not come to grips with this point. That is precisely what the methodology proposed here does: If democracy is built one institution at a time, our research designs must make room for this.

## **Theoretical Insights: Cleavages, Ideas, and Political Parties in European Democratization**

The approach outlined above offers methodological guidance to analyses of democratization inspired by the “historical turn” and provides us an alternative way of thinking about how democracy emerged. But does it generate useful and original insights into *why* stable democracies emerged in Europe in the way they did? By abandoning the epistemological assumptions of ex post analyses that implicitly read history “backward” and only look at democracy’s “finish line” and its retrospectively identified correlates, several theoretical insights emerge. When we see democratization not as an automatic outgrowth of economic development or the predominance of a single class or a class coalition but rather as emerging in nonlinear and punctuated fashion, in moments of choice and change that occur asynchronously in different institutional arenas and whose outcomes are often only indirectly shaped by socioeconomic conflict, a set of underexplored causal dynamics and empirical regularities begins to appear, generating hypotheses for further study.

Three major themes that have been increasingly highlighted by scholars working on European political development and related fields, but that have



not yet been systematically integrated into the study of democratization, are brought to the foreground: first, the importance of *nonclass factors*, including religion, church–state relations, and ethnicity in driving institutional change; second, the role of *ideas and ideational transfer* in molding democratic institutions; third, and most important, the autonomous role played by *political parties* in the emergence of democracy in Europe. Political parties existed in Europe in different forms before democracy emerged and accompanied its development all along, bringing nonclass divisions and ideational factors to bear directly on the fight over democratic institutions. By focusing on parties as actors in their own right rather than considering them as “empty vessels” (Katz & Kolodny, 1994), that is, passive agents of socioeconomic interests, we see more clearly that it is not only class conflict that shaped European democratization. It was the intersection of multiple cleavages, mediated, expressed, and at times activated by political parties that shaped where, when, and why democracies emerged where they did in Europe’s history. We review these themes below and outline the contours of a research agenda that can usefully guide future research on European democratization.

### *Beyond the Class Cleavage: The Role of Religion and Ethnicity*

Since at least Moore (1966), socioeconomic factors have played a central role in theories of democratization. To be sure, important “material” constraints and opportunities do shape the strategies of decision makers and organized interests (e.g., Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Boix, 2003; Rueschemeyer et al., 1992). When focusing on episodes rather than sweeping trajectories, it becomes important to reconstruct as accurately as possible the ways in which key political actors interpreted their world (the existing constraints and opportunities) and how such interpretation affected their decision making. Hence, in addition to socioeconomic divisions (sectoral conflict, class conflict), our attention turns to the kinds of factors that Rokkan (1970) long ago identified as crucial for European political development: religious and ethnic cleavages. Indeed, the literature on democratization in other parts of the world has also highlighted how nonclass variables are often the driving force of democratization (e.g., Slater, 2009).

Part of what has made Rokkan’s theoretical insights difficult for democratization theorists to fully assimilate is the elaborate macro-conceptual framework that guided his mapping of European political development. The approach proposed in this volume, by contrast, provides a methodologically more tractable way of incorporating these important insights into our theories of

democratization. A focus on episodes of institutional reconfiguring highlights how ethnicity and religion may get activated along with socioeconomic and class divisions in moments of political conflict over democratic institutions.

Important recent works on European political development have highlighted the importance of such nonmaterial factors for shaping both the durability and the structure of democratic regimes. For example, Andrew Gould (1999) has shown that the electoral strength of liberal parties, themselves decisive actors in the stabilization of 19th-century European democracies, hinged not on levels of economic modernization but instead on the nature of religious cleavages and church–state relations. Similarly, Stathis Kalyvas (1996) has demonstrated that “a marriage of convenience” between some conservative parties and church institutions was a crucial part of the secularization and transformation of many European polities. Also, Jason Wittenberg (2006) has shown how partisan loyalties, a key building block of democracy, survived from the interwar period to the postcommunist period in East-Central Europe chiefly on the shoulders of religious networks and institutions. Finally, recent work has similarly emphasized the importance of ethnic conflict on contemporary European politics (e.g., Birnir, 2007). In sum, the persistence and salience of these noneconomic cleavages point to the fact that the politics of European democratization was in most cases *multidimensional*. This characteristic is unlikely to be adequately captured by the mono-dimensional redistributive models underlying strictly class-based theories of democratization.

### *Ideas and Ideational Transfer: Diffusion and Political Learning*

In a similar fashion, viewing the history of European democratization through the lens of historical episodes allows us to assess the impact that *political ideas* (beliefs, symbols) may have, in interaction with the existing institutional and structural conditions (e.g., Hall, 1989, p. 390), on both the process and the outcome of institutional reform. Approaches focusing on the power of material interests to explain the emergence of democratic institutions generally assume that individual or collective actors, if similarly placed vis-à-vis the market, have similar preferences on which institutional arrangements best foster their “objectively” defined material interests.<sup>8</sup> However, the importance of ideational factors for institution building has been emphasized in recent developments in related bodies of literature. First of all, several works have argued that the more uncertain the objective conditions surrounding institutional creation are, the more likely political actors are to rely on ideational filters to interpret reality and orient their strategies, thus giving ideas

an independent causal role (e.g., Darden, 2009; Elster, Offe, & Preuss, 1998; Hall, 2006). In other words, if the future is highly unpredictable, the range of plausibly rational strategies expands accordingly, and actors who are similarly positioned socioeconomically may interpret their world in very different ways, and accordingly pursue different projects of institutional change (e.g., Jervis, 1976; Parsons, 2007, p. 130).

Indeed, in struggles over the reform of democratic institutions, ideas generally play an important role through dynamics of spatial and temporal diffusion, which are often crucial in shaping what is perceived as desirable and feasible (Bermeo, 1992; Brinks & Coppedge, 2006; Elkins & Simmons, 2004; Kopstein & Reilly, 2000; Simmons, Dobbin, & Garrett, 2008; Weyland, 2007). With few exceptions, however, earlier accounts of European democratization have treated cases and episodes of democratization as if they were largely sealed off from each other. The articles in this volume instead emphasize that episodes of democratization are often linked through processes of spatial and temporal diffusion (learning).

This can happen in several ways. First, the institutional outcomes of important moments of democratization can be in large part explained by the process by which decision makers adopted earlier models from other national contexts. Just as economic historians often must remind us that globalization before 1914 more closely approximated our own period than we often imagine (e.g., Berger, 2003; Frieden, 2006; Rodgers, 1998), so too is it useful to remember that democratization experiences may also be driven by global trends, today as well as in this earlier era. This dynamic is particularly apparent in constitution making in European states starting already in the 19th century. A second mechanism focuses less on the diffusion of formal institutional models and instead highlights the impact of what we can call “iconic events” (e.g., the Easter Uprising, the Prague Spring, the fall of the Berlin Wall) that become, in Edelman’s terms, “condensation symbols” (Edelman, 1964). Such events may generate a larger interpretative framework that shapes subsequent democratization episodes by providing both democratic reformers and authoritarian incumbents with powerful “lessons” from the past. Moreover, iconic events may sometimes generate new externally provoked critical junctures, expanding the realm of political action and opening possibilities for institutional change (e.g., Beissinger, 2002, p. 15). For example, the momentous events of 1830 and 1848 in France and 1917 to 1919 in Russia unleashed a wave of diffusion on the European continent. These events—but also the postepisode *narrative* of these events—had the effect of suggesting to both elites and the public in other countries that revolutionary change had become desirable *and* feasible. The same dynamics is observable within a single country,

for example, in the succession of suffrage reforms in Great Britain after 1832 (McLean, 2001, pp. 61-77). In those and other cases, the impact of *past* historical episodes opened up causal space for ideational factors and repertoires of mobilization that were often decisive in facilitating subsequent antiregime mobilization (Beissinger, 2007).<sup>9</sup>

### *The Importance of Political Parties in Democratization*

The articles in this collection analyze the building of different democratic institutions, at different times from the 1830s to the 1970s and in different European countries. Yet, in virtually all of them, *political parties* emerge as crucial actors on the democratization stage.

Of course, decision makers generally are individual politicians in powerful positions, but the scholarship in this volume shows how their decisions are often constrained and enabled to an important extent by the logic of within- and between-party competition and coalition rather than exclusively by the influence of social classes or income groups. And yet our theories of democratization to date remain largely theories that explain the preferences and strategies of *social classes and interests*, with the assumption that this too explains the actions of political actors. As all articles in this collection make clear, though, treating political parties as mere passive “agents” of social interests is likely to paint a misleading picture of the process of democratization in Europe.

Generally speaking, two important points have been lost in recent theories of democratization: first, that although class parties are present in all European countries (Bartolini & Mair, 1990), the social constituencies of European political parties do not always neatly overlap with economically defined social groups (Flora, Kuhnle, & Urwin, 1999; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan, 1970, Rokkan & Urwin, 1983; also see Kommisrud, 2009; Lawson, Römmele, & Karasimeonov, 1999).<sup>10</sup> In several European party systems, for example, both the “Left” and the “Right” are represented by *multiple* parties, a circumstance that has historically opened up manifold possibilities for strategic coalitions over specific institutional reforms that do not just replicate class divisions. Second, European political parties have historically proved quite flexible and proactive in *reshaping* their social constituencies to adapt to social change (Kitschelt, 1994; Mair, 1997). As a consequence, party ideologies, conflicts, and alliances within and between parties and the relationships of parties with interest groups are likely to generate *independent* incentives for institutional reform that are at least as important as those deriving directly from socioeconomic divisions in the electorate. The insight that these factors can have major consequences for political outcomes has traditionally been at

the core of a large literature on parties and party systems (e.g., Duverger, 1951/1954; Katz & Mair, 1994; Sartori, 1976) but has never been systematically brought to bear on analyses of democratization, which is what we propose to do here.<sup>11</sup>

Before articulating these themes and their importance for democratization, though, two caveats are in order. First, we do not impute agency to party organizations per se. On the contrary, we maintain that an episode-based approach is a powerful device to untangle how party *elites* navigate organizational and structural conditions (e.g., Kitschelt, 1994). Second, given the indispensability of “theory-generation” for what Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers (1980) usefully call larger “research cycles,” it is important to underscore that the overall purpose of this essay and volume is to *generate* hypotheses and outline an agenda for future research (also see Collier, 1991). Making room in our analyses of democratization for party-related factors generates more specific hypotheses linking party interaction and ideology to democratization. The hypotheses advanced in this volume require systematic testing in future research; however, it should be emphasized that they came into view in no small part because of the approach to the study of democratization advocated here.

To begin with, *party ideology* can have an independent impact on the formation of political coalitions in favor or against a certain institutional reform and at times may be decisive in determining whether democratic institutions will endure at all. When parties represent a constituency made of a coalition of social groups, ideology is crucial in aggregating their potentially contrasting “material” interests; even in the case of class parties, their ideological setup can *define* class interests differently. In both cases, ideology may have important consequences for institution building. For example, European socialist and communist parties, though representing putatively similar interests (i.e., labor), were often divided in the 20th century on the very desirability of democratic institutions (e.g., Berman, 2006). Even within the same party family, different ideological profiles could also play an autonomous role for policy choices that in turn may have crucial consequences for democratic institutions, as Berman illustrates in her comparison of the German and Swedish Social Democrats’ responses to the Great Depression (Berman, 1998).

Similarly, power dynamics *within parties themselves*, or *within the party system*, can also at times be the main determinant of political alignments, independent of socioeconomic structure, that are important in struggles for institutional change. In general terms, the political decision makers who are protagonists of episodes of institutional change have multiple interests and identities, and so do their actual and potential electors (e.g., Hall, 1996, 2006).

Thus, decision makers act not only as direct representatives of their electoral constituency, operating on behalf of economically or culturally defined segments of society, but also as self-interested power holders or power seekers within the party organization itself, facing a separate set of inducements and constraints. These “within-organization” inducements and constraints can derive from both the struggle for power within the party and the logic of political alliances and oppositions within the broader party system.

To be sure, intraparty conflicts over an institutional reform may at times be from divisions within a party’s constituency along socioeconomic, religious, ethnic, or ideological lines. However, in other cases the promotion of new institutional reforms may increase a faction’s *power* within the party itself (e.g., Panebianco, 1988; also see Weir, 2006). In such circumstances, rather than intraparty splits reflecting social divisions, it is faction leaders who mobilize different identities within the party’s electorate to pursue their power strategy and legitimize it by appealing to electors (e.g., Chandra, 2004). Furthermore, in most cases when parties or intraparty factions negotiate and clash over the reform of democratic institutions, they also negotiate and clash about their power relations with one another in the context of the broader party system. They will be considering which possible allies could help them achieve their goals, whether they have realistic prospects of leaving the existing alliances, and whether other alliances are available. The outcome of such considerations is often determined by the short-term electoral and power prospects of these actors, more than their willingness to cater to the long-term interests of socioeconomic constituencies. For example, the rise of the Sudeten German Nazis (SdP) after 1933 gave the right wing of the Czechoslovak Agrarian party, a party that was a pivotal coalition partner within the government, the opportunity to reassert the influence they had lost over the previous decade. Their plan to include the SdP in the national government had the purpose of shifting the balance of power in their favor within both the party and the government coalition. The resistance to this project opposed by the *internal* left wing of the Agrarians and their political allies led to the introduction of important institutional reforms that increased emergency powers and sanctioned political extremism to an extent never seen before in European democracies (Capoccia, 2002, 2005, pp. 83-90). In brief, political dynamics related to the pursuit of power within the party organization and the party system often shape clashes over the reform of democratic institutions.

Finally, parties’ *relationship with interest groups* may also have an autonomous influence on democratic reforms. A well-developed literature makes clear that parties’ stances on all issues may at times appear as “two-level games,” reflecting party leaders’ relationship not only with the electorate as

a whole but also simultaneously with their supporting interest groups, complicating what might appear a predictable position on key issues (e.g., Karol, 2009). Parties may dominate their interest groups, giving them greater autonomy; they may be captured by them on a broad or narrow range of issues; or parties may be on the search for new interest group partners, giving greater flux to partisan positions entirely. These dynamics by no means can be predicted directly from socioeconomic structures alone. For example, the opposition of the German Conservative Party before 1914 to suffrage reform in Prussia (a move that would have fostered democratization in Germany more generally) can be explained by the party's weak internal structure, leaving it dependent on and thus "captured" by a well-organized interest group—the radical Agrarian League—whose influence on the party's policy stances was completely out of proportion with its actual position in the economy. Furthermore, party competition within Prussia left the same party fearing that it would lose out electorally in a situation of full suffrage, beyond the distributional threats triggered by democratization (Ziblatt, 2008, 2010).<sup>12</sup>

In sum, future research on European democratization would benefit from moving away from a nearly exclusive focus on how socioeconomic conflict broadly construed translates into politics to also consider the way in which the often interrelated conflicts over party ideology, the pursuit of power within party organizations, the dynamics of competition within party systems, and the interface of parties and their supporting interest groups shape the struggle over democratic institutions.

## Empirical Illustrations

The articles in this collection range across a broad spatial and temporal scope, illuminating the themes outlined above. Demonstrating the analytical reach of the approach we have developed, the empirical contributions in this volume, taken together, tell the story of Europe's *long* democratization. By focusing on how a variety of often underappreciated factors, ranging from the structure of ethnic and religious cleavages to partisan strategies, have shaped some of the major episodes of Europe's democratic development, the articles tell the collective story of how and why Europe's democratization has proceeded in the way it has, suggesting that these and similar episodes have had a cumulative effect over 200 years of fundamentally transforming, and indeed arguably *making*, modern Europe.

Taking stock of the prior discussion, the overarching theme of the articles is that the creation and reform of democratic institutions often owe more than is normally assumed to *political interactions* rather than to the direct and



automatic translation of socioeconomic dynamics into politics. As soon as they emerged on the scene in European politics, political parties became the main protagonists of this interaction, shaping outcomes in important ways. But it is important to remember that political variables mattered for the construction of democratic institutions even before the onset of what we might call the “era of parties” that has characterized European politics over the past two centuries.

This is first seen in Zachary Elkins’s (2010) account of European early-19th-century constitution making. Elkins’s account boldly turns diffuse skepticism over the epiphenomenal nature of “parchment” institutions on its head, as he maintains that the approval of a formal constitution, even if quickly reversed, has a positive impact for a country’s democratization. After tracing the complex genealogy of European constitutional documents in the 19th century, Elkins maintains that in many cases the institutions designed in Europe’s predemocratic constitutional assemblies bore little resemblance to domestic factors such as the power of different social classes or income groups. He illustrates this point with a fascinating reconstruction of the connections between the 1812 Cadiz constitution of Spain and the 1822 Portuguese constitution. He shows how the historically influential 1812 Spanish document was drafted by a largely *unrepresentative* assembly, in which, for idiosyncratic reasons having to do with the French invasion and the prior development of transatlantic commercial routes, liberal elements and church representatives were overrepresented whereas conservative elements (mainly landowners and traditional ruling classes) were underrepresented. The liberal institutions designed in Cadiz in 1812 transferred almost unchanged to the 1822 Portuguese constitution despite the different social composition of that constitutional assembly and, through complex turns, influenced the subsequent waves of constitution making in Portugal until the early 20th century.

In the second article in the collection, Thomas Ertman’s (2010) analysis of the momentous 1832 Reform Act in Britain, we also see how nonclass dynamics intruded on a major episode of democratization. Here, however, we also begin to see the impact of party politics on democratization. Ertman’s innovative contribution demonstrates that, although a revolutionary shadow certainly hung over events in Britain, it was not class conflict directly but rather *religious* conflict in the late 1820s that initially put parliamentary reform on the agenda. After legislative discrimination against Nonconformists and Catholics was lifted in 1828-1829, the Ultra Tories within the Conservative Party contended that such anti-Anglican legislation passed only with the aid of corrupt rotten boroughs and pushed for reform. Though it was a Whig government that eventually pushed through parliamentary



reform in 1832, it was a diverse coalition that reduced the number of “nomination” boroughs and expanded the suffrage by 45%. According to Ertman (2010), the years 1828-1832 were a critical juncture in which “a fundamental, unforeseen transformation of a political regime occur(ed) over a relatively short period of time as a result of decisions by a small number of actors” (p. 1001). The 1828-1832 juncture had momentous consequences: Not only did the electoral reform provide a “precedent” for subsequent reforms but also, in the conflicts of those years, a stable two-party system emerged that was initially centered around religious cleavages. This party system, Ertman contends, even though it was transformed by the rise of labor, provided a bulwark of institutionalized stability, supported by a strong and moderate conservative party, helping keep democracy intact despite the polarizing dynamics of the interwar period in the 20th century.

In the volume’s third contribution, we also see the predominant role of parties in helping the consolidation of democracy. Stephen Hanson’s (2010) analysis focuses on the power of ideational factors carried by political parties during critical junctures. In phases of high uncertainty, Hanson argues, when ordinary constraints on political agency are loosened, political actors proposing clear and consistent ideological messages stand a better chance of emerging politically victorious. He applies this insight to the tumultuous developments and political reversals accompanying the birth of the French Third Republic in the 1870s, in which the ideologue Leon Gambetta ultimately emerged as the *demiurge* of Republican France. Hanson’s narrative suggests that although structural and modernization variables such as the level of industrialization and others were important “background factors” in the stabilization of the Third Republic, these could just as likely have been mobilized in an antidemocratic direction as in a democratic one. Instead, Hanson emphasizes, it was the power of clear and consistent ideological messages articulated by political leaders that directly and gradually rallied the support of a large constituency, built a party organization, and ultimately shaped France’s Republican institutions. Like the authors of other articles in this volume, Hanson emphasizes that the effects of the creation of the democratic institutions in question *outlasted* the conditions of their creation and provided a common framework for competition also to new radical forces that emerged in the subsequent decades. In sum, Hanson’s analysis engages existing accounts of democratization, proposing a potentially more general explanation for the outcome of constitutional battles in political transitions that can guide future research.

In Amel Ahmed’s (2010) article, we turn to a key set of electoral reforms (e.g., the rise of proportional representation [PR] and single-member district

plurality system) in the late 19th century that *indirectly* helped democracies consolidate by reducing the “threats” posed to old elites by democratization. Ahmed analyzes the political struggles leading to the adoption of the single-member plurality (SMP) electoral system in Britain in the 1880s and the adoption of PR in Belgium in the 1890s. In both contexts, Ahmed supplements standard accounts that emphasize either socioeconomic factors or strictly partisan calculations in explaining electoral reform. Although it is often argued that PR was introduced to counteract the effects of suffrage expansion for established traditional elites, Ahmed’s insight is that not just PR but *both* SMP and PR were intended to counteract the distributional and various risks associated with democratization. If PR insures incumbents against the danger of overrepresenting the Left, SMP opens up the opportunity to “play the game” of partisan redistricting, which can be used to secure minority representation. The adoption of each system reflected whether or not *other* strategies of “containment” (including Lib-Lab agreements, suppression of labor, etc.) were successful. Furthermore, she notes importantly, splits within parties were crucial for shaping institutional outcomes, but these splits were not driven by the electoral geography of their support, rather in key instances by the ideas of the actors themselves.

Jeffrey Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg (2010) tackle the issue of why important Eastern European countries turned democratic or became authoritarian in the interwar years. The analysis of the key turning point of 1925–1926 in both Czechoslovakia and Poland allows them to reject conventional class-based accounts of regime development in the region and to show that the apparent correlation between the strength of the bourgeoisie in Czechoslovakia and Poland and the regime outcome, respectively democratic and authoritarian, says very little about the actual way in which these regimes came about. The episode of 1925–1926 shows in all its strength the key importance of *ethnic* rather than class cleavages, and cross-ethnic rather than cross-class distributional tensions, to regime outcomes in the post-Versailles order. Once the ethnically dominant group had appropriated state spoils and resources in the wake of independence, dominant ethnic parties could only ensure the country’s governability by building multiethnic coalitions. The more ethnically accommodating ideology of the Czechoslovak Agrarians, Kopstein and Wittenberg argue, gave the party more credibility in negotiating a cross-ethnic coalition with their Sudeten–German counterparts, which would stabilize the regime for a decade until contrasts emerged again within and between key actors. In Poland, the chauvinist ideology of the National Democrats made a cross-ethnic coalition unviable, and ethnic incorporation could be achieved only under Pilsudski’s authoritarian regime. The in-depth

analysis of these years challenges conventional accounts of democratization, showing that the achievement of political democracy in Eastern Europe ultimately ironically required *sidelining* the urban bourgeoisie of the dominant ethnic group.

The power of ideas and diffusion, the cross-class nature of political parties, and the importance of cross-organizational alliances emerge as determinant factors for Nancy Bermeo's (2010) comparative analysis of the creation of the Portuguese Republic in 1911 and the democratic transition in Portugal in 1974. Bermeo emphasizes how these factors were crucial, in different ways, in both circumstances, above and beyond the effect of sociostructural and class factors. In 1911, structural conditions (high level of inequality and low level of development) would be considered unfavorable to democracy by most structuralist accounts of democratization. Structural conditions certainly correlate with the outcome. However, the historical analysis of the process leading to the establishment of unfair elections shows that the religious and the monarchy–republic cleavages, rather than distributional ones, drove the political conflict. In 1974, class dynamics also appear unrelated to the actual unfolding of the process of democratization. On one hand, all main political actors on the scene (the political parties and the military) had cross-class social constituencies. On the other hand, the very negative example of the *unfair* election that resulted from the 1911 opening itself had an important impact on the public at large, binding political actors to commit to fair elections even though that was not in their immediate interest. Furthermore, a very important point of contrast between 1911 and 1974, Bermeo notes, is the external sponsorship of Portuguese parties by their democratically minded Western European sister parties. These supported the organization of the newly reconstituting Portuguese parties and helped convince them to abandon the practices of electoral fraud that had hindered democratization in 1911.

In the final article in the collection, Kurt Weyland (2010) asks a crucial question for the volume as a whole: Under what conditions do democratic “openings” occur in the first place? The implication of most analyses of Europe's historical democratization is that the conditions for a “democratic opening” arise from within regimes, as conflicts among classes and leaders reach a breaking point, or where the risks of democratic change are so low as to make democratization unthreatening. Systematically incorporating the insight that democratic openings may be exogenous to domestic social dynamics and can come from diffusion processes, Weyland fills the gap in the study of Europe's historical democratization. His contribution goes beyond the established literature's focus on domestic conditions by examining the impact of external impulses on European democratization from

1830 to 1940. Specifically, Weyland's article analyzes the diffusion of regime conflict and how precedents of regime collapse, such as the overthrow of French kings in 1830 and 1848, tended to produce dramatic waves of political contention across Europe, which then resulted in different outcomes. In sum, Weyland offers a new perspective that supplements the traditional emphasis on economic development and economic collapse as determinants of such openings.

## Conclusion

This volume outlines the contours of a wide-ranging research agenda not only for studying Europe's past but also for making sense of the difficult, incomplete, and often protracted process by which democratic political institutions are created *today* and often remain vulnerable to dynamics of competitive authoritarianism or democratic backsliding (e.g., L. Diamond, 2008; Levitsky & Way, 2002). The approach developed here conceptualizes democratization as an inherently long-run chain of linked *episodes* of struggles and negotiations over institutional change. It is often in these *ex post*, less visible moments that the political institutions of democracy are created and reshaped. This conceptualization has two main consequences for future research. On one hand, a focus on episodes of struggle over institutional change should supplement the normally dominant concerns about single "transition" thresholds, or broad trajectories of democratization over several centuries. The methodology outlined in this article offers scholars a potentially powerful *research strategy* to do so, allowing them to test and generate competing explanations "on the ground" in key moments of decision, where broad macro factors "play themselves out" in interaction with more conjunctural determinants. On the other hand, scholars need to ask, what links these episodes together into long-run patterns? Analyses of institutional change in political economies have started to fully develop this insight (e.g., Hall, 2010, p. 209). In the study of democratization, the outcomes of earlier episodes of institutional change constitute important antecedents of later political struggles, empowering certain political actors, disadvantaging others, and providing important narratives to both along the way.

Armed with this approach to the study of democratization, the articles in this collection show that democratization in Europe was neither the inexorable outgrowth of economic modernization nor the "best fit" for a newly dominant socioeconomic class. Rather, it was the result of intense domestic conflicts over different lines of cleavage and was shaped by transnational impulses, intellectual exchanges, and momentous events that had an impact that traveled across national boundaries in a fashion that we often myopically imagine is distinctive to our own age. Furthermore, the analyses presented here

highlight the importance of political parties in shaping democratic reforms, often not as simple intermediary factors that merely “complicate” the translation of social pressures into institutional outcomes but as “prime movers” of democratization itself. Future research should therefore place political parties at the center of analysis: Ignoring the role that they played in the fight over democratic institutions may deeply misconstrue the process of democratization.

Finally, this new literature also makes clear that the solidity of our contemporary definitions of democracy and our neatly compact periodization schemes of “democratic waves” can potentially mislead us to overlook other important episodes of change as well as “near misses” in the long-run process of European democratization. Despite its normative coherence, democracy is more often the result of “crooked lines” (Eley, 2005) than of linear and sweeping changes. By challenging conventional images of democratization, our approach not only contributes to a more nuanced and accurate understanding of European democratization but also provides a research strategy for coming to empirical terms with this core feature of our political reality, whether one studies democracy’s past or present.

### **Authors’ Note**

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## Notes

1. As explained below, this includes the cases in which reform was possible but narrowly failed.
2. Needless to say, we recognize that these categories and assumptions are often primarily intended as analytical tools that are deployed for purposes of analysis and communicative convenience. Our argument is in response to the not uncommon situation when such categories are reified, taking on a life of their own, thus giving rise to misleading conclusions.
3. In recent work, Boix (in press) and Cusack, Iversen, and Soskice (in press) undertake historical case work as we suggest here, indicating a broader move to this type of analysis in the study of democracy's institutional development.
4. To those who insist that after singular threshold moments of democratic "transition" (e.g., post-1989) "democracy" is achieved wholesale, we note the growing practice of combining elections with authoritarianism *despite* the presence of democratic constitutions (e.g., Levitsky & Way, 2002; also see Ziblatt, 2009b). It is thus crucial to focus on single democratic institutions and the long run of development of democratic regimes.
5. Indeed, in many European countries democratic institutions have historically been closely linked to the establishment of *additional* institutional arrangements—for example, federal, "corporatist," "consociational," "militant," specific electoral rules, particular forms of executive–legislative relations (e.g., Lijphart, 1968; Loewenstein, 1937a, 1937b; Schmitter, 1974).
6. For an innovative elaboration of "critical antecedents," see Slater and Simmons (2010).
7. Methodological scholarship warns about the pitfall of "selection bias" in the use of secondary sources in comparative historical research (e.g., Goldthorpe, 1991; Lustick, 1996; Trachtenberg, 2006). In analyzing discrete episodes of institutional change, however, it is generally feasible both to analyze the necessary primary evidence and to use the appropriate secondary sources in an unbiased fashion.
8. One illustration of this idea is seen in Dahl's (1971, p. 95) discussion of the elaborate steps necessary to translate "objective" economic inequality into political grievances.
9. A similar logic is seen in Ekiert's (1996) analysis of the diffusion of communist regime crises in East-Central Europe (1956, 1968, 1980–1981) that in no small part contributed the subsequent "bigger" crisis in the communist world in 1989.
10. It should be noted here that Rokkan's influential framework has been convincingly criticized for being retrospective and ultimately functionalist (Berntzen & Selle, 1990, p. 132; Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 344).
11. One partial exception is Acemoglu and Robinson's (2006, p. 179) tantalizing but brief suggestion that political parties can be seen as "specific investments" that

contribute to democratic consolidation because of the sunk costs associated with their creation.

12. The importance of party and interest group relations is also highlighted in Cusack et al. (in press).

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