1 | *Introduction: contradictions and ambiguities of democratization*

The history of democratization has often been told as a story of increasing inclusivity where democracy gradually comes to know and understand its pluralist character. To be sure, many recognize that democracy often began in limited form and sometimes experienced significant setbacks, but as the story goes, these problems were overcome through successive waves of reforms, the net result of which was a more inclusive polity. Implicit in this view is the notion that contradictions in the process of democratization are the result of competing forces, where pro-democratic factions push for inclusionary reforms and anti-democratic factions push for exclusionary safeguards. For this reason exclusionary safeguards are seen as temporary, though often necessary, evils, eventually to give way to greater inclusion as anti-democratic forces are defeated. This teleological view, however, fails to capture some of the more important dimensions of historical democratization. It results from too great a focus on the blatantly undemocratic measures employed by elites to resist democratic expansion and ignores the many ways in which elites used the very institutions of democracy to safeguard their position in the new democratic order.

The story told in this book offers a different perspective, which views democratization as an inconsistent and often contradictory process in which inclusionary reforms and exclusionary safeguards go hand-in-hand and become a *permanent* part of the new democratic order. I return to the historical democratizers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because our theories of democratization are in many ways (either implicitly or explicitly) informed by these historical examples. By offering some important correctives to the prevalent narrative on the path of democratic development in the first wave of democratization, this work aims to move past the teleological determinism which has hindered efforts to theorize the complexity of democratization, both historically and in the contemporary context.

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Focusing on the choice of electoral systems at the time of democratic expansion in early democratizers, I demonstrate that the electoral institutions in use in advanced democracies today were in fact initially devised as electoral safeguards through which elites aimed to counteract the impact of suffrage expansion. I argue that the contradictory nature of democratization, combining inclusionary reforms with exclusionary safeguards, resulted not only from the struggle between competing forces, but from conflicting impulses within the democratic project itself. There were certainly anti-democratic forces at work in the push for electoral safeguards. But they were often joined by those who most vehemently supported suffrage expansion. Outspoken champions of democracy such as J. S. Mill argued for the need for some electoral safeguard to "keep popular opinion within reason and justice, and to guard it from the various deteriorating influences which assail the weak side of democracy" (Mill 1998 [1861], 317).

Pro-democratic and anti-democratic elites may have disagreed on the decision to expand suffrage, but most agreed on the need for electoral safeguards. Moreover, while it is true that some of the safeguards introduced during this period, such as measures for indirect voting and onerous voter registration requirements, were blatantly undemocratic and did eventually give way to democratic pressures, other safeguards such as the various schemes of "minority representation" were on their face perfectly democratic, and continue to play a prominent role in contemporary democracies. Indeed, as we delve further into the politics of electoral system choice, the picture that emerges is one in which the line separating what is and is not democratic is constantly blurred, and the familiar story of democracy steadily moving along a path of greater inclusion is riddled with ambiguity.

Rather than posing an obstacle to theorizing, this ambiguity holds the key to understanding the politics of institutional choice in the context of democratization. The combination of inclusionary democratic reforms and exclusionary electoral safeguards reflects a fundamental ambivalence on the part of elites toward the democratic project. This ambivalence one can imagine is shared by many democratizing elites, torn between the need for increased participation on the one hand and the desire to maintain their influence over the democratic order on the other.

Though most would agree that nineteeth-century democratization was largely an elite-led enterprise, many are quick to point out that this

was often a matter of political expediency. Indeed, Barrington Moore, who declared unambiguously "no bourgeoisie, no democracy," maintained that it was a "material stake in human freedom" that led upper-class elites to support democratization (Moore 1966, 424). Others have argued that political elites were at best indifferent and often even hostile to the very reforms they were implementing, highlighting the many ways in which they simultaneously worked for and against democracy (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). Even those who identify political elites as the primary agents of nineteenth-century democratization recognize that their motivations for doing so were often instrumental (Luebbert 1991; Collier 1999).

To be sure, certain aspects of democratization were embraced. For democratizing elites, broadening the sphere of political participation was desirable for a variety of reasons. It was seen as important for political legitimacy. Many saw it as an opportunity for political gains. Others believed it would be beneficial in cultivating the civic virtues of the electorate. And others still were genuinely committed to democratic principles. However, the participation that elites embraced was one that would reproduce the existing political dynamics on a larger scale, not one that would radically transform the political order. Popular participation was a political necessity, and for some maybe even a political good, but in conceding participation, elites were not prepared to concede a preponderance of influence to the newly enfranchised electorate.

They wanted what perhaps all democratizing elites want: to democratize without losing power. This was certainly true of more conservative elements, but even the most committed democrats envisioned a democratic order in which they would continue to play a central role. Their goal was to broaden the sphere of participation without significantly altering the dynamics of power and influence which prevailed under the old order. The reconfiguration of electoral institutions became central to this effort. As pre-democratic[1] parties championed democratic reforms that would radically expand the sphere of participation, they pursued electoral safeguards to preserve their own influence and the social order in which it was embedded.

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[1] The term "pre-democratic" refers to the period of political liberalization prior to the expansion of suffrage, which in many countries involved competitive elections but excluded large portions of the electorate. For historical democratizers, the "democratic" period is understood to begin (though certainly not end) with manhood suffrage, which opened up the sphere of political participation.

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It is precisely the recognition that participation may be divorced from influence that makes electoral systems the site of fierce contestation in the process of democratization. For this reason, the politics of electoral system choice offer a unique perspective into nineteenth-century democratization. Contrary to the received wisdom which casts pre-democratic elites as non-democrats attempting to resist suffrage expansion or undermine participation through intimidation and fraud, I find that elites often embraced both suffrage expansion and mass participation, either out of conviction or out of necessity. As I will show, the dynamics of electoral system choice among early democratizers reflected a desire, not to undermine the participation of new electors, but to limit its influence by either channeling it through established parties or minimizing the representation of independent workers' parties.

The notion that elites may engineer electoral dominance through a fully participatory democratic system puts the politics of electoral system choice into a conceptual no-man's land with regard to existing definitions of democracy, challenging both Schumpeterian minimalist notions of democracy as free and fair elections as well as the more robust Dahlian conceptualization of democracy requiring participation and contestation. The resulting regimes satisfied these procedural requirements, but their institutions were designed to ensure the continued electoral dominance of pre-democratic elites.

Such arrangements must lead us to reexamine some of our core assumptions about what is a democratic institution and indeed what is a democrat. Moving away from the typical binaries which have characterized both structural explanations of democratization and actor-centered accounts of transitions reveals a process which is much more fluid than was once understood, where democratic and authoritarian moments exist side by side, each playing an essential role in the process of democratization and in the resulting democratic order. In this regard, the safeguards that will be examined in this work are especially instructive, as they were not eventually eliminated by more democratic forces. In fact many of the electoral arrangements introduced during this period continue to play a prominent role in democratic politics. What is more, they are no longer considered safeguards. Though some may debate the relative benefits of majoritarian vs. proportional electoral systems, few today would question their democratic credentials. The forces they were meant to guard against have long since disappeared and in their absence these electoral arrangements now appear to be a normal and even essential part of the landscape of democracy. Only the history of their origins

betrays their exclusionary nature, and the enduring impact they have had on the structure of democratic competition.

If this perspective is important for understanding democratic development in historical contexts, it is critical for the study of contemporary cases of democratic development, as our theories of democratization are in many ways informed by an idealized model of historical democratization – a model that has never actually existed but is held up as the standard to which new democracies must aspire. Many of the contradictions of democratization found in these historical cases are present in democratizing countries today. In contemporary cases, however, where democratization is understood to be a more or less uni-linear process of increasing liberalization and growing inclusiveness, the use of safeguards or other exclusionary measures is taken to be a sign of authoritarian retrenchment, usually earning the offender a hyphenated prefix qualifying their democratic status. This study will suggest that the source of this teleological conception is an erroneous understanding of historical democratizers, which posits democratization as moving along a progressive, albeit bumpy, path which reaches its final destination in a highly inclusive participatory political system. The model of historical democratization presented here casts exclusionary safeguards as a part of the process of democratization itself, without which democratic reforms would not likely have been passed. Further, it shows that the safeguards need not give way to the irresistible force of democracy, but may become permanent. Finally, and perhaps more challenging for our understanding of democracy, the exclusions engendered in these safeguards may also become permanent.

The path of democratic development in these historical cases suggests a different understanding of democratization, not as the victory of democrats over non-democrats, but rather as a process which determines who the democrats will be, who will have a seat at the table, and who will be allowed to compete for power in the new political order. Moreover, this is not a technical but rather a deeply political process, the outcome of which rests as much on the strategic interaction of the main actors as it does on their *a priori* ideological commitments. The resulting institutional arrangements necessarily reflect this power struggle as much as they reflect what might be considered democratic ideals. In this way, a more accurate understanding of the process of democratization in historical context can help to elucidate broader patterns of democratic politics and move past the various "determinisms" which have hindered efforts to theorize democratization in the contemporary context.

The great electoral transformation

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, electoral systems in European democracies underwent dramatic transformation. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the electoral systems that prevailed in most countries were haphazard combinations of single- and multi-member districts, elected under either plurality or majority rule. Little attention had been paid to the design of these systems under restricted suffrage. As countries embarked on the great democratic experiment, however, the design of electoral systems came under increasing scrutiny. There was an explosion of institutional innovation, with politicians, academics, and activists interrogating every aspect of electoral system design. Electoral reform societies were set up throughout the democratizing world, promoting various systems that advocates argued would improve the character of representation in the new democratic order. By the Second World War, this period of institutional upheaval had settled, with countries moving either to a system of proportional representation (PR) or single-member plurality (SMP).

The reconfiguration of electoral systems during this period has received a great deal of attention. At stake in this historical puzzle is our very understanding of the process of democratization and the nature of democratic politics. Was the reconfiguration of electoral systems an extension of democratic reforms or a reaction to them? Was it demand from below or elite maneuvering that determined the outcome? Moreover, the design of electoral systems has been linked to a variety of political outcomes, from the number of effective parties to the success of distributive policies. But do electoral institutions have an independent effect or are they merely epiphenomenal, reflecting deeper structural conditions?

I aim to shed light on these questions through grounded historical analysis of the dynamics of electoral system choice in nineteenth-century democracies. Relying on broad cross-regional comparison of the pool of 18 parliamentary democracies[2] as well as detailed examination of four

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[2] The cases examined include: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

crucial cases – the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, and the United States – I reconstruct this period of institutional transformation in order to understand both the determinants of electoral system choice and their relationship to the broader democratic project. By taking seriously the highly contingent nature of decision-making under conditions of uncertainty, I am able to offer an original explanation that accounts for both the outcome and the process of electoral system choice.

My findings reveal that the reconfiguration of electoral systems was a crucial part of the democratization process itself. Indeed, the passage of democratic reforms was often contingent on the passage of new electoral arrangements to accompany them. The aim of electoral system change, however, was not usually to foster greater inclusion. Rather, it was to safeguard the established political order and particularly the position of pre-democratic "right" parties.[3] As elites increasingly accepted suffrage expansion, they searched for ways to regain some of the control that had been ceded in the process. They turned to electoral system reform as a means of restraining the power of numbers that had been unleashed by democratic expansion. Though today PR and SMP appear to be an essential part of the landscape of democracy, both were initially devised as "exclusionary safeguards"(Ziblatt 2006) to accompany inclusionary democratic reforms. Moreover, both systems were departures from pre-democratic electoral arrangements which usually consisted of an *ad hoc* combination of single- and multi-member districts elected under either plurality or majority rule. Each system played a different role in right parties' efforts to contain working-class mobilization, and particularly, the rise of socialist parties with an agenda of radical social transformation.

By placing electoral system choice into the broader context of democratization, I am able to offer a more nuanced explanation of the microfoundations of decision-making. I argue that the choice of electoral

[3] The term "right parties" here denotes parties that pre-date democratization. Though there is some variation, in most cases this consisted of a Liberal and a Conservative party that would typically find themselves to the right of the median voter after suffrage expansion. Though these were often rival parties with highly antagonistic positions toward each other, and some even held very progressive positions on various issues, their shared interests in protecting the institutions of capitalism and liberal democracy against socialist influence puts them on the "right" end of the political spectrum in the democratic era. A more detailed discussion of these parties in comparative perspective can be found in Chapter 2.

systems can only be understood as a choice between *containment* and *competition* in the contingent and evolving strategies employed by pre-democratic right parties to protect themselves from the impact of democratization. "Strategies of containment" combined repressive and accommodationist measures that were aimed at blocking working-class mobilization and attracting workers to the ranks of right parties. "Strategies of competition" were reconfigurations of the electoral system that would allow right parties to be more competitive with any existing workers' party. Both SMP and PR were devised as electoral safeguards to serve this end; however, each had distinct advantages and disadvantages with regard to the broader goal of containment. The choice of one or the other ultimately turned on right parties' assessment of the feasibility of containment and the compatibility of different electoral arrangements with that goal.

The politics of electoral system choice reveals the highly fluid nature of nineteenth-century democratization, and particularly the role of pre-democratic elites in the process. For the most part, studies of historical democratization have focused on the ways in which elites fought to block suffrage expansion as a means of protecting their power (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992; Acemoglu and Robinson 2005). However, too great a focus on the fight over suffrage has obscured the many ways in which elites fought to maintain dominance *within* the framework of the new democratic order. In fact, if used properly, suffrage itself could be an important tool in their effort to hold on to power. In many ways the fight over suffrage simply opened up a new arena for competition, the results of which would have important consequences for democratic politics. This study seeks to move our understanding of nineteenth-century democratization forward, by disaggregating the process and looking at electoral system choice as a particular "episode" (Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010) of institutional transformation. Rather than treat democratization as a single unified event, this conceptualization sees it as a more disjointed process comprising various "asynchronic" moments of institutional change (Ziblatt 2006). In this view, suffrage expansion, rather than being *the* watershed moment, is one of many episodes that contributed to the final outcome. Such an approach provides a framework for understanding some of the contradictions inherent in the democratic project, highlighting the ways in which various episodes of institutional change often work at cross purposes.

Explaining electoral system choice

What accounts for the reconfiguration of electoral systems in nineteenth-century democracies at the time of suffrage expansion and what explains the choice of SMP or PR? A rich body of scholarship has yielded vastly divergent and as yet unreconciled perspectives on these questions. Much of the recent work builds on previous generations of scholarship. Stein Rokkan's seminal study in particular has been highly influential over the contemporary wave of scholarship. In his study, Rokkan linked the post-war move to PR in many Western European countries to the dynamics of democratization and particularly to the rise of socialist parties after suffrage expansion. He maintained that "the influx of new voters altered the character of the system" and explained the move to PR as an attempt to restore the status quo and bring the system "back to equilibrium" (Rokkan 1970, 155). Majoritarian systems were only acceptable where right parties could make common cause against the socialists. But where the "inheritance of hostility and distrust" made a coalition of the right impossible, right parties moved to proportional systems in the hopes that the lower threshold of entry would allow them to continue to compete independently (Rokkan 1970, 158).

For Rokkan, the choice of electoral systems was part of the broader social and political transformation taking place and was driven by a multiplicity of motivations. Building on Rokkan's work, the recent wave of scholarship has sought to identify discrete motivations behind the choice of PR or SMP. Most agree that the choice was a function of the rise of socialist parties after suffrage expansion; however, the determinants of the choice and its connection to the broader democratic project have been fiercely contested. For some, electoral reform was motivated by incumbent right parties' desire to protect themselves against the electoral threat presented by new socialist parties. For others, electoral reform was a concession to socialist parties, who, along with suffrage expansion, demanded more inclusionary electoral institutions. Both perspectives, while offering useful insights, have been unable to adequately account for electoral system choice. I will argue that the problems these explanations face are both methodological and substantive, and that the drive to identify the proximate causes of electoral system choice has inhibited scholars' ability to understand it as a historical process embedded in a much larger project of democratization.

Partisan electoral engineering

One school of thought on the origins of electoral systems in early democracies holds that the choice was a function of partisan electoral engineering following suffrage expansion. Scholars advancing this perspective see electoral system choice as the result of self-interested incumbents, conceived either as individuals or as parties, seeking institutional arrangements to ensure their future electoral success. This school of thought holds that despite the difficulty of implementing electoral reform, it is one of the most effective ways of shaping or reshaping the political landscape. For example, it is much more effective and much easier than trying to change public opinion or realigning your own party. Moreover, it is often argued that electoral systems lend themselves to such engineering. Giovanni Sartori characterizes voting systems as "the most specific manipulative instrument of politics" (Sartori 1968, 273). If understood, their outcome can be anticipated. Likewise, their features can be used to produce specific outcomes.

Building on one of Rokkan's central propositions, Carles Boix (1999) has expanded and formalized the argument, hypothesizing that the choice depended on two factors: the electoral threat presented by new socialist parties and the coordinating capacity of established right parties. Based on this, Boix identifies three possible scenarios following suffrage expansion. The first was that a weak socialist party would emerge, unable to challenge the established right parties, in which case SMP was maintained. The second was that a strong socialist party would emerge but the right would successfully coordinate, leading to the rise of a dominant right party. In this case too SMP was maintained. According to Boix, since a dominant right party emerged and its electoral standing was not threatened by the new entrant, "the dominant party acted rationally in maintaining a highly constricting electoral rule" (Boix 1999, 609). It was only in the third scenario where the new socialist party was strong and the right remained fragmented, unable to coordinate around a dominant right party, that PR was adopted.

While usefully operationalizing some of the key concepts in Rokkan's work, this explanation has run into considerable difficulty on historical and analytical grounds. Critics have been quick to point to a number of cases that deviate considerably from the causal mechanism specified (Andrews and Jackman 2005; Blais et al. 2005; Calvo 2009). One is Belgium, where PR was adopted despite the successful electoral