Democracy, extension of suffrage, and redistribution in nineteenth-century Europe

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The recent literature on democratization has traced this process back to the extension of suffrage. However, democratization concerns different aspects, not only the extension of suffrage, but also the extent of the powers of parliament. These two different dimensions of democracy are interdependent and can even be opposed. We show that the political elite may grant universal suffrage to counter pressure exerted by the bourgeoisie in favor of a widening of the powers of the parliament. By extending suffrage to the masses, the political elite makes it less advantageous for the bourgeoisie to seek a more powerful parliament. However, the entry, even in a parliament without powers, of representatives of the working class leads the political elite to ensure some form of redistribution. The historical experiences of some Western European countries during the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century confirm this thesis.

1. Introduction

Recently there has been a significant return to studies on the determinants of franchise extension. As will be shown in Section 2, these studies take up and develop past approaches. While the contributions advocating the “revolutionary threat” hypothesis continue the strand of literature that has its origins in Gerschenkron (1946) and Moore (1966) and links franchise extension to the inequality of income distribution, the “political competition” hypothesis was anticipated in an important work by Schattschneider (1942), which saw franchise extension as the result of elites competing with each other.

Common to both hypotheses is the assumption that franchise extension implies a higher level of democracy. This assumption neglects the fact that democratization involves several different elements, in particular, the extension of suffrage, the extent of the powers of parliaments, and the maintenance of civil rights. By neglecting this fact, the traditional literature implicitly assumes that the right to vote has the same value in an institutional context where parliament has broad powers as in a context where parliament’s powers are limited.

Once the power of parliament is taken into account, it becomes possible to explain why the speed of universal suffrage achievement is conditioned by the institutional framework in which it occurs; to put it more precisely, it is faster when parliament has no power. In countries where parliament has limited (considerable) powers the costs (in terms of lost power) of enlarging suffrage incurred by the political elite are low (high), and for this reason the process of extending suffrage in these countries tends to be faster (slower).

The main assessment of the article is that the political elite may grant universal suffrage to counter pressures from the bourgeoisie to give more power to parliament. By extending suffrage...
to popular masses, the political elite makes it less advantageous for the bourgeoisie to seek a more powerful parliament. The historical experience of Western Europe during the nineteenth century provides historical support for this position.

Over time, the granting of universal suffrage in a context in which parliament has low powers encourages a learning process among the representatives of popular masses, who come to realize that they can participate in policy choices by increasing the powers of parliament. Indeed, the introduction of universal suffrage in Bonapartist France and Bismarckian Germany implied the entry of lower-class representatives into parliament in significant numbers. These representatives, in turn, began to exert pressure to be allowed to take part in decision making. The political elite of France and Germany tried to counter these demands by adopting redistributive policies in favor of the popular masses. It is no coincidence, then, that Germany was the first country to introduce universal suffrage and also the first to adopt a welfare state system.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 surveys the literature. Section 3 establishes a theoretical framework to explain the process of suffrage extension in Europe in the nineteenth century. Section 4 shows that under some circumstances there is a trade-off between the power of parliament and the extension of suffrage. Section 5 concludes the article.

2. The literature

For a long time the relationship between socio-economic development and democracy has been explained in terms of modernization theory. This theory owes much to the seminal contributions of Lipset (1959, 1960), who saw economic growth and the social changes that accompany it as favoring the emergence of a democratic culture. While Rostow (1960) takes Lipset’s approach to its extreme conclusions, arguing that the path from economic modernization to democracy is inevitable, Moore (1966) maintains that socio-economic development is conducive to democracy only under certain conditions. In particular, he attaches crucial importance in this process to the formation of a middle class: “no bourgeoisie, no democracy”. ¹ Modernization theory has been subjected to numerous empirical tests,² the results of which have proved mixed.³

Some forty years after the publication of the first contribution by Lipset, Przeworski and other scholars⁴ reconsidered the link between socio-economic development and democracy. The empirical tests they conducted led these scholars to conclude that development does not result in the emergence of democracy, although it favors its preservation. Consequently, the debate about the origins of democracy takes on a new shape. The functionalist perspective that had been inspired by the seminal contributions of Lipset is left behind and attention is shifted to the behavior of economic players and politicians.

Recent explanations of the reasons that underlie democratization as franchise extension fall under the heading of rational choice.⁵ The contributions that emphasize the role of competition

¹ See Moore (1966, p. 418).
³ For a discussion of the reasons for the variety of empirical results, see Przeworski and Limongi (1997) and Sirowy and Inkeles (1990).
⁴ See Cheibub (1996), Przeworski and Limongi (1997), and Przeworski et al. (2000).
⁵ Only ideological explanations fall outside the rational choice hypothesis. These explanations attribute the extension of suffrage to the influence of ideologies, such as the Enlightenment, which insisted on the equal rights of all individuals. See, among others, Elster (1989), Goodin (1992), and Cohen (1997).
between states on policy and institutional choices clearly belong to the area of this hypothesis. For example, when considering the United States, Engermann and Sokoloff (2005) attribute the fact that the US international border states extended franchise before others to the scarcity of work they suffered from. In short, franchise extension was seen as an incentive to the populations living in neighboring regions to immigrate.

Aside from these explanations, which can only relate to specific cases, the two main strands of explanation for franchise extension are the “revolutionary threat hypothesis” and the “political competition hypothesis”. The latter hypothesis emphasizes the role of the intra-elite conflict. This aspect was emphasized initially by Schattschneider in his well-known contribution of 1942. There he argued that franchise extension in the United States was not a concession by the elite in response to demand from below. It was rather the outcome of conflicts between interest groups and the attempt by some of these groups to reinforce their political power by granting disenfranchised people the right to vote. The plausibility of this hypothesis is confirmed by some historical evidence, including that provided by Himmelfarb (1966), who explains how the competition between Whigs and Tories had led Benjamin Disraeli to extend suffrage with the British Reform Act of 1867.

Collier (1999) shows that in the first wave of democratization franchise extension played a marginal role.

A party, or certain interest groups, may be in favor of expanding the franchise, believing that they will have the support of new voters and will be better able to pursue a certain objective or to acquire and consolidate political power. Taking up the ideas of Weber (1982), Lizzeri and Persico (2004), for example, show that in certain situations elites have an incentive to democratize or to extend the franchise to redirect the political process from the fulfillment of private interests to the provision of public goods. Similarly, Ticchi and Vindigni (2009) believe that the extension of voting induces certain sections in societies to be more committed to war. While also part of the “political competition hypothesis”, the approach taken by Llavador and Oxoby (2005) is different, emphasizing namely that the ruling party favors expanding the franchise to certain interest groups with the aim of increasing its electorate and, thus, its political power.

There are numerous recent contributions that are based on the “revolutionary threats hypothesis”. In these contributions, franchise extensions occur under a revolutionary threat from an unfranchised group: democratization is a device whereby elites avoid revolutions by the poor. In this way, the unfranchised group obtains the right to participate in the political process of redistributing resources.

The elite decides to grant the extension of the vote when the loss of income (after deducting the costs for the defense of its privileges) this entails is less than the loss of income resulting from revolution. Conversely, the poor are prompted to threaten and, if necessary, actually carry out a revolution, when inequality is particularly high.

In their main work, Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) see the democratization process as the outcome of the distributive conflict between rich and poor. Extension occurs when the rich

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6 See Tiebout (1956).
7 Other economic historians such as, for example, Lee (1994) maintain that the threat of violence played an important part also in the reform of 1867.
8 They formalize what Schattschneider (1942) maintained.
10 This problem has been addressed by Acemoglu and Robinson in the light of Meltzer and Richards’s model (1981).
11 Nevertheless, as Tullock (1971) notes, the costs of obtaining the franchise by force are too high both because of collective action problems and because of the uncertainty of the outcome.
are seriously concerned about threats of revolution voiced by the poor. In general, income inequality promotes democratization. What happened in England in the nineteenth century confirms this view: the growing income inequality produced by the industrial revolution caused the rich to grant franchise extension through the Reform Act of 1832.  

However, the higher the degree of inequality, the greater is the loss of income suffered by the rich through Democratization, which is what induces them to resist the extension of suffrage. Therefore, on the one hand, growing economic inequality leads to a growing demand for democracy, while on the other, an increase in income inequality makes the elite less willing to extend suffrage, or in other words to yield distributive power to the poor.

This problem is solved by Acemoglu and Robinson with the hypothesis that the relationship between inequality and democratization resembles an inverted U-shaped curve: franchise extension is more likely when there are moderate levels of inequality. Boix (2003) focuses both on inequality and on the different degrees of mobility of the different sources of income: where these sources have a low degree of mobility, as in the case of land, the resistance of their owners to franchise extension is higher.

The conclusions of the “revolutionary threat hypothesis” seem to find confirmation in various econometric tests. These tests show that even when one takes into account other possible causes, the role of the threat of revolution remains important in determining franchise extension.

Both the political competition hypothesis and the revolutionary threat hypothesis make it possible to overcome some limitations of modernization theory. On the one hand, they show that the extension of the vote is not a deterministic process based on the increase in per capita income due to the process of industrialization. The process of democratization is rather the outcome of competition between interest groups with regard to the distribution of income and political power.

On the other hand, the two hypotheses, by showing that democratization is a complex and gradual process which in certain situations may come to a halt or even go backward, make it possible to overcome the dichotomy between democracy and repression by introducing the possibility of a third outcome of political struggle: partial democracy.

These achievements, however, are based on some simplifications, notably, the identification between the democratization process and the extension of the franchise to new interest groups.

Collier (1999) opportunely points out, however, that a democracy is characterized by three elements: the adoption of universal male suffrage, the definition of the autonomy of the legislature, and the establishment and protection of civil rights.

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12 Confirmation of the connection between inequality and democratization can also be found in the case of other countries. See Tilton (1974), Paige (1997), Kurtz (2004), and Riedinger (1995).
13 Acemoglu and Robinson’s (2006) and Boix’s (2003) hypotheses which see a close connection between inequality and democratization is at odds with others, including those proposed by Ansell and Samuels (2008), according to which democracy results not from requests for redistribution but from an interest group’s demand that its property rights be protected.
14 This conclusion is similar to that reached by structuralist scholars who maintain that landholding inequality is not completely identical with income inequality, since it is accompanied by social norms which undercut democratization by determining a hierarchy of prestige and power independent of income distribution. See, among others, Rueschemeyer et al. (1992).
15 See, among others, Kim (2007), Przeworski (2009), and Aidt and Jensen (2014).
16 Collier writes (Collier, 1999, p. 24): “Democracy, as a regime type, may be defined in terms of three components: constitutional, electoral, and legislative. As such it includes the following attributes: 1. Liberal constitutional rule, in which government leaders and state actors, including the military, are constrained from arbitrary action by the
Achieving these three elements of democracy has in many cases been asynchronous. This has at least three implications. First, there is no sequential order to achieving the three founding attributes of democracy. In some cases, for example in Germany, the adoption of universal suffrage preceded parliament’s autonomy from the executive; in other cases, as in England, the opposite occurred.\textsuperscript{17}

Elsewhere, as in France, the process of democratization experienced ups and downs: extensions of voting rights were associated with narrowing of the powers of parliament, and the extension of the powers of that institution was in many cases accompanied by a narrowing of the right to vote.

Second, given that the three elements of democracy can be achieved at different times, the goal of bringing each of these about can be pursued by different coalitions of interest groups. For example, the coalition of interests that supported the adoption of universal suffrage in Germany was different from that which demanded the expansion of the powers of parliament and its autonomy from the executive.

Third, it also follows that achieving one of the three components of democracy can be used to prevent or delay the achievement of the others. As will be seen later, France under Napoleon III and Germany under Bismarck are cases in point: in these countries the granting of universal suffrage was used to counteract the demand made by the bourgeoisie for an extension of the powers of parliament. These reflections suggest a series of questions. First, was the process of achieving universal male suffrage faster where the powers of parliament were more limited and slower where parliament was more powerful? Second, can there be a trade-off between the introduction of universal male suffrage and the other components of democracy, in particular the extension of the power of parliament?

\section*{3. Modeling the historical experience of Europe in the nineteenth century}

The limits of traditional approaches to the extension of suffrage illustrated above can be, at least in part, overcome by taking into account the possible interconnections between extension of suffrage and the powers of parliament. Starting from the joint consideration of these two dimensions of democracy we can reach some conclusions through a simple theoretical model based on Acemoglu and Robinson (2006).

In this model the political elite is identified with the interest groups that hold political power. It is assumed that there are three interest groups: the rich, the middle class, and the workers. The total population is normalized to one; workers are the most numerous, followed by the middle class, and the rich. Further, we assume that the rich have an above average income, while the income of the other groups is below average, with the middle class being richer than the workers.

The political system determines a tax rate, $\tau \geq 0$. Taxation is proportional to income and its revenue is redistributed lump sum. There is an aggregate cost of taxation, $C(\tau)y = \tau^2 \bar{y}$. For any group $i = r, m, w$ the preferred tax rate maximizes income after taxation and redistribution:

$$\hat{\tau}^i = (1 - \tau)y^i + (\tau - C(\tau))\bar{y} = (1 - \tau)y^i + (\tau - \tau^2)\bar{y},$$

rule of law; 2. Classical elections; and 3. A legislative assembly that is popularly elected and has substantial autonomy from the executive power.”

\textsuperscript{17} On the asynchrony between the extension of suffrage, the autonomy of legislature and the establishment of civil rights, see Ziblatt (2006, 2008).
where the term \((1 - \tau)\tilde{y}\) is after-tax income, the term \((\tau - \tau^2)\bar{y}\) is the lump-sum redistribution, and \(\bar{y}\) is average income. The preferred tax rate for each class is equal to \(\tau^i = (\bar{y} - \tilde{y})/2\bar{y}\). Since the rich are richer than average, their preferred tax rate is zero; in contrast, the preferred rate of the other groups, whose income is below average, is greater than zero. As the middle class is richer than the working class, \(\tau^m < \tau^w\).

Initially, the government is run only by the rich, who apply a level of taxation equal to zero. Parliament, with no decision-making powers, is composed exclusively of representatives of the rich and the middle class. Being part of the parliament, even with no powers, has a value because only groups in parliament can pose a credible threat to the system. Wishing to participate in the management of power, i.e., in decisions about the level of taxation, the middle class demands that full power is assigned to the parliament. Otherwise it threatens to make a coup.

The timing of the game is shown in figure 1. In the first stage, the political elite sets the tax rate and decides whether to maintain the status quo or counteract the threat from the middle class by giving full suffrage to workers. In the second stage, the middle class chooses whether or not to effect a coup designed to give full power to parliament. In the last stage, the workers, if in parliament, may challenge the regime and ask for a powerful parliament. The elite in power can respond to the workers’ threat by promising redistribution.

Let us analyze the subgame perfect equilibrium of this game. First we consider the case where the political elite let the middle class choose freely whether or not to carry out a coup. If they make a coup, a fraction \(\mu\) of the economy’s income is destroyed, but the parliament assumes full powers. Since the middle class represents the median voter among the enfranchised, it can choose the policy. The return for each group \(i\) if the middle class undertakes this coup is

\[
V^i(PSFP, \mu) = (1 - \mu)((1 - \tau^m)\tilde{y}^i + (\tau^m - (\tau^m)^2)\bar{y}).
\]  

A coup is advantageous to the middle class if its utility following the coup is higher than its utility under the status quo. Under the status quo the policy is chosen by the rich, and therefore the tax rate is equal to zero; following the coup the policy is set by the middle class, and its utility is shown by equation (2). The coup threat is binding if \(\mu\) is sufficiently low.18 If this condition

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18 If \(\mu \leq \tau^m(\bar{y} - \tilde{y} - \tau^m\bar{y})/(1 - \tau^m)(\tilde{y}^m + \tau^m\bar{y})\).
applies, the middle class carries out the coup: the parliament, composed of the wealthy and the middle class, obtains full powers.

Now consider the case in which the ruling elite, i.e., the rich, decides to oppose the middle class’s request for full powers to be given to parliament and its threat to effect a coup if the request is rejected. In this case, the political elite may decide to grant universal suffrage. This decision makes the granting of full powers to parliament worthless to the middle class. Indeed, following the extension of suffrage, the middle class would be in a minority in parliament.\textsuperscript{19}

This leads to the First Proposition: “the political elite can use the granting of universal suffrage to counter pressures from some members of parliament, particularly the middle class, to extend the powers of parliament.”

This proposition is complementary to the Acemoglu and Robinson (2006) hypothesis according to which, in a parliament with powers, the political elite puts up resistance to extending suffrage to others. Therefore, in that context, the extension of suffrage is gradual. Going beyond the Acemoglu and Robinson hypothesis, Proposition 1 explains why, in cases where parliament does not have powers, universal suffrage can be granted in one shot.

In systems where parliament has no powers, granting universal suffrage exposes the political elite to other threats to its power. Indeed, once universal suffrage has been granted, the political elite will have to deal with the request of the representatives of workers to participate in policy decisions, i.e., to shift power from the government to parliament. Such a request may be reinforced by the threat of a coup. As before, the threat is credible if workers income after the coup is greater than their income under the status quo. The return for each group $i$ if the workers’ revolt is undertaken is

$$V^i_{\text{redistr}} = y^i + p\tau^i(y - y^i - \tau^2\bar{y}).$$

The threat of revolt is binding if workers prefer revolution to the status quo.\textsuperscript{20} The political elite can prevent revolution by implementing redistributive policies in favor of workers, for example, by establishing or expanding the welfare state. The expected payoffs from the promise of redistribution are

$$V^i_{\text{redistr}} = y^i + p\tau^i(y - y^i - \tau^2\bar{y}).$$

According to equation (4), the utility of each group is a weighted average between the preferred tax rate of the rich and the preferred tax rate of workers, with a weight equal to $p$, which is the probability that the workers’ threat is credible.\textsuperscript{21}

Hence the Second Proposition is: “given a parliament elected by universal suffrage, but without any power, the political elite may implement redistributive policies to counter the demand for regime change on the part of workers’ representatives”.

\textsuperscript{19} In a parliament with universal suffrage the median voter is a worker. Conversely, under the status quo, the tax is set by the rich. The middle class will prefer the status quo to a coup if $\tau^w > (1 - \mu)(1 - \tau^w)y^w + \tau^w(1 - \tau^w)y^r$. This condition is satisfied when $\tau^w > (1 - \mu)(y^w + \bar{y})/2$, that is, when middle-class income is very distant from the income of workers.

\textsuperscript{20} Under the status quo the policy is chosen by the rich; hence the tax rate is zero. The threat is binding if $\tau^w \leq \tau^w(y - y^w - \tau^w\bar{y})/(1 - \tau^w(y^w + \tau^w\bar{y}) = \mu^w$.

\textsuperscript{21} Redistribution will put an end to workers’ threat if workers’ income under redistribution, equation (4), is higher than their income in the event of a coup, equation (3). This happens if $\tau^w > (1 - p)\mu^w$. The political elite will oppose the middle class’s threat by granting universal suffrage and redistribution if $V^i_{\text{redistr}} > V^i_{\text{PSFP, } \mu}$. This happens when $p < [(1 - \mu)\tau^w(-y^r + \bar{y} - \tau^2\bar{y}) - \mu y^r]/\tau^w(y - y^r - \tau^2\bar{y})$. 

The historical experience of the European countries can be taken as a yardstick to verify the conclusions of the model just described. As shown in table 1, the introduction of universal suffrage happened at different times and in different ways. In some cases, as in Germany, it happened suddenly; in others, it happened after several electoral reforms. In the latter countries, achieving universal suffrage was the result of a gradual process. What are the fundamental reasons for these differences?

The principal explanations for the extension of suffrage offer no answer to this question. This is due to the fact that these explanations do not take account of the different dimensions of democratization.

Both the “revolutionary threat hypothesis” and the “political competition hypothesis” emphasize only one dimension of democracy, namely, suffrage extension. Therefore, they tend to give the same political weight to the right to vote, irrespective of whether it is exercised in a regime in which parliament has no substantial powers or in a regime in which parliament has significant powers.

Historical experience shows that the extension of suffrage depends on the powers of the parliament, as shown by the First Proposition of the model. Table 2 shows that in European countries where parliament had broad powers the extension of suffrage came later and the opposite happened in countries where the parliament had limited powers.

Emblematic and opposite are the historical experiences of Germany and Great Britain. In Britain, after the Glorious Revolution, the parliament, holding the most important bases of power—the control of public finances and the budget—became able to limit the royal prerogatives up to the point of making them purely formal: the right to vote had high capability to influence policy making. Because of this salience, in Britain the extension of the right to vote was gradual.\(^\text{22}\) It took place through a process that was divided into three major stages during the

\[^{22}\text{On the extension of the franchise in Germany and the UK, see, in particular, Acemoglu and Robinson (2000, 2006), Art (2012), Aidt and Franck (2015), Aidt and Jensen (2014), Boix (2000), Llavador and Oxoby (2005), and Przeworski (2009).}\]
nineteenth century: the three Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884. Large sections of the British population (including much of the working class) were incorporated into the political system within the space of about half a century. This process was completed in 1918, the year universal suffrage was introduced. In contrast, in Germany, universal suffrage was granted in 1871, in a sudden rather than a gradual way, under a regime in which parliament had limited powers.

The First Proposition of the model, according to which countries with a powerless parliament tend to extend suffrage suddenly, instead of gradually, can be tested. The instrument used for this purpose is the survival analysis: in our case the event under study is the delay with which universal suffrage was introduced.

We proceeded as follows in the analysis. First, we calculated the years between 1840, taken as the base year, and the year in which each country adopted universal suffrage. Second, we divided the countries into two groups: those with a parliament with full powers and those with a parliament with limited powers at the time universal suffrage was introduced. The composition of the two groups of countries and the modalities followed in the formation of the two groups are given in Table A1 of Appendix A.

Figure 2 shows the survival curves for the two groups of countries. The pattern of the two survival curves yields a clear result: in countries where parliament had broad powers the

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Table 2. *Universal suffrage and power of parliament*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Power of parliament</th>
<th>Parliamentary responsibility</th>
<th>Legislative effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
<td>Partially effective(^a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Complete(^b)</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Partially effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
<td>Partially effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>Partially effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Flora et al. (1983) and Banks (1971).
\(^a\) If the executive's power outweighs that of the legislature.
\(^b\) If the Executive is constitutionally and effectively dependent upon a legislative majority to continue in office.
\(^c\) If the legislature possesses significant governmental autonomy. For a detailed legend see Table A2.

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\(^{23}\) This technique is widely used in medicine and has been used in labor economics.

\(^{24}\) Based on the data of table A1 of Appendix A, the group of countries characterized by a parliament with limited powers is made up of the following countries: Austria, Germany, France, Russia, Spain, Hungary, and Switzerland. The group of countries where parliament has substantial powers comprises the following countries: Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the UK, and Italy.
4. Is there a trade-off between the introduction of universal suffrage and the power of parliament?

As shown in the model, we find not only interdependence between suffrage extension and the powers of parliament but, in some cases at least, there may also be antinomy. Some historical experiences, like that of France under Napoleon III and Germany under Bismarck, raise the question as to whether, in some circumstances at least, the process of democratization was characterized by a trade-off between the introduction of universal suffrage and extent of the powers.
of the parliament. To answer this question, we estimated a probit model to analyze the determinants of the introduction of universal male suffrage in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe.

We considered ten countries in the period from 1840 to 1922. The dependent variable of the model is a dummy variable having a value of one in the years when universal suffrage was introduced and preserved (table 1). The independent variables are described in table A2 of Appendix A. The main descriptive statistics for these variables are shown in table A3. The results of the estimates are given in table 4.

Based on these results, it would appear that one of the main determinants of the introduction of universal male suffrage was the increase in the level of schooling (SCHOOL). In contrast, indicators of the degree of modernization, such as the level of GDP per capita (GDP per capita) and the degree of urbanization (URBANIZATION), were not significant.

However, for the purpose of this study the most important result of the estimates is the significance of the indicator of the powers of parliament (PARLIAMENT POWER). The negative sign of this variable confirms the hypothesis of a trade-off between suffrage and the powers of parliament.

The estimated model has a satisfactory goodness of fit, as shown by the analysis of correct specification. As demonstrated in table 5, the sample results indicate that the probit model recorded about 73 percent of the episodes of the introduction of universal male suffrage, with a total prediction accuracy of almost 70 percent.

The results of the econometric test confirm the existence of a trade-off between the extension of the powers of parliament and universal suffrage. This trade-off, however, cannot be explained only by the greatest resistance of the incumbents to granting representation in parliament to interest groups previously excluded. As assessed in the First Proposition of the model, in countries where parliament is powerless the political elite may introduce universal suffrage to discourage the economic elite from seeking an extension of the powers of parliament.

The historical episodes that prove the validity of this conclusion are the introduction of universal suffrage in France in 1851 by Napoleon III and in Germany in 1871 by Bismarck.

In December 1851, Napoleon III re-established the universal suffrage the French people had first gained with the 1848 revolution and then lost when it was abolished by the liberal bourgeois

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Table 4. Probit analysis of manhood universal suffrage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard errors</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>log(PARLIAMENT POWER)</td>
<td>-1.11</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URBANIZATION</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>log (GDP per capita)</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>No. obs. 472</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Robust standard errors.

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25 The countries are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Spain, and the UK.
coup d’état of May 1851. His aim was to establish a direct relationship with the people by circumventing parliament.

Bonapartist propaganda insisted that there should be no intermediaries between the people and its ruler. In this context, parties were regarded as obstacles to the direct relationship between leaders and people. Hence the electoral reform which abolished the poll list and restored the single-member system done away with by the Revolution of 1848. As Napoleon III wrote: “By choosing each candidate in isolation, the people can more easily evaluate the merits of each one of them.”

Napoleon III’s innovative idea, namely to preserve and consolidate the power of the political elite by introducing universal suffrage and at the same time reducing the powers of parliament was taken over twenty years later by Bismarck. During his time as Prussian ambassador in Paris in 1862, Bismarck had witnessed the establishment of the Bonapartist regime in France.

Upon the establishment of the German state in 1870, Bismarck saw to it that the German parliament, the Reichstag, had limited powers. Its consent was required for all laws. It could amend laws and delay their approval or rejection; if it did so, however, it was immediately dissolved. Finally, it did not exert any form of control over the actions of the Chancellor.

Nevertheless, Bismarck considered the Reichstag an important component of the German political system. Despite its limited powers, it represented the symbol of national unity. Some parties in the Reichstag, in particular the National Liberal Party and the Progressive Party, who represented the enlightened bourgeoisie, were in favor of extending parliamentary rights and put pressure on each federal state to have an assembly of elected representatives. Bismarck saw these demands and this pressure as a threat to both the newly formed state and the existing political regime, in other words, to the power of the emperor and, ultimately, to his own power. To counteract these pressures he resorted to the revolutionary measure of granting suffrage to all males over the age of twenty-four.

At the time of this concession there were no workers’ organizations in Germany: trade unions and the Social Democratic Party were set up later. Thus it cannot be argued that suffrage was won thanks to pressure from below. It was given freely by the emperor at the suggestion of Bismarck.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5. Classification matrix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Episodes of</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years with universal suffrage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years without universal suffrage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correctly classified: 69.1 percent; Type I error: 27.3 percent; Type II error: 32.3 percent

---

26 See Napoleon (1861; vol. 3, p. 274).
27 Sheehan (1982, p. 131) writes: “Bismarck resisted liberal demands on this matter because he feared parliamentary interference in the affairs of the state and because he did not want to establish a ministerial system for the Reich similar to the one with which he had had so much trouble in Prussia. Liberals, on the other hand, saw that some kind of constitutionally defined executive was necessary if the Reichstag was ever going to be able to hold the government responsible for its actions.”
Berghahn writes \((\text{Berghahn 1984}, \text{p.} \ 19)\): “Introduced by a Prussian conservative, Otto von Bismarck, this [universal suffrage] was indeed a surprising, if not revolutionary feature of the Reich constitution. Bismarck had his own “Bonapartist” reasons for opening the flood-gates of mass politics”.

Wehler \((\text{1985}, \text{p.} \ 53)\) made a similar point: “He had done this for, as was well known, exclusively demagogic reasons”, and, as Max Weber put it, “as part of his Caesaristic struggle against the obstinate bourgeoisie of the time”.

In 1867, the year before the introduction of equal manhood suffrage in the North German Confederation, Bismarck wrote: “In a country with monarchical traditions and legal sentiments the general suffrage, by eliminating the influences of the liberal bourgeois class, will also lead to monarchical elections.”

The Chancellor believed that a large number of conservative voters in the countryside would allow him to overthrow “parliamentarism by parliamentary means”.

Both in Bonapartist France and Bismarckian Germany the maximum extension of the suffrage eased the pressure of the bourgeoisie for increasing the powers of parliament. However, it was not without drawbacks.

Both in France and Germany, the extension of suffrage to the masses meant a significant increase in the electorate. In particular, representatives of workers increased. These representatives soon realized that formal power could become substantive power. They began to put pressure on the political elite to participate in decisions about the distribution of income.

As asserted in the Second Proposition of the model, the political elite tried to contain these pressures in two ways. On the one hand, both regimes severely limited the rights of association and trade unions. On the other hand, both regimes adopted redistributive policies favorable to the popular masses.

Napoleon III introduced forms of economic interventionism (such as the promotion of large public works and rent freezes in cities) that encouraged the growth of income of the poorer classes. Similarly, Germany adopted important insurance laws for workers, in particular the right of workers to retirement and sickness insurance (table 6).

With the adoption of redistributive measures in favor of workers, both in Bonapartist France and in Bismarckian Germany, the political elite, on the one hand, remarked that policy choices were its sole prerogative and, on the other hand, established a direct relationship with the mass of workers. This therefore reaffirmed the fact that parliament had limited powers.

\[28\] According to Höbelt \((\text{1987})\), in 1907 Franz Joseph too introduced universal suffrage in Austria as a way of holding back, the pressure of the middle class. Extending suffrage increased the importance of the socialists and the working class in parliament, which reinforced the power of the emperor. This point of view takes further the thesis of Taylor \((\text{1948}, \text{p.} \ 212)\), according to which “... In Hungary, universal suffrage had never been more than a tactical threat, in Austria, it seemed a way of escape from the nationalist conflicts of the middle-class politicians”.

\[29\] Quoted by Craig \((\text{1978}, \text{p.} \ 45)\)

\[30\] See Wehler \((\text{1985}, \text{p.} \ 57)\).

\[31\] The existence of a trade-off between universal suffrage and the powers of parliament may mean that if the former is introduced due to exogenous factors, the political elite may find it advantageous to narrow the powers of parliament. This is what happened in the British Caribbean colonies with the abolition of slavery in 1838. In that circumstance, as shown by Dippel \((\text{2011})\), the local political elite, not wishing to share political power with the newcomers, preferred to ask the motherland for a reduction in the powers of the local elected assemblies.

\[32\] Tocqueville \((\text{1951}; \text{vol.} \ 15, \text{II, p.} \ 182)\) described these measures as “pure and simple socialism”.
5. Conclusion

The democratization process involves three components: suffrage, the power of parliament and civil rights. Most literature on democratization tends to reduce the democratization process to the extension of suffrage. By doing so it disregards other dimensions of democratization—in particular, the extent of the powers of parliament—and reduces the competition between different interest groups to matters of policy, in particular, decisions about income distribution. This is the case in both the “revolutionary threat” and the “political competition” hypotheses.

These hypotheses are based on the assumptions that the state has fiscal capacity and that parliament has full powers. The former assumption inevitably poses the problem of the connection between fiscal capacity and the process of democratization. This will be an issue of further research. By focusing solely on the distributive conflict, the latter assumption, which is the focus of this article, ends up, on the one hand, taking it for granted that the powers of parliament have no consequences for the process of extending the vote, and on the other, fails to take into account that competition between interest groups may regard issues of polity rather than policy, in particular the powers of parliament.

If one takes this latter aspect into account—namely, the competition between interest groups regarding the political system—it is possible to show that there is interdependence between the different dimensions of democracy. Indeed, the costs that the political elite bears when it extends the franchise are lower where parliament has limited powers than where it has broad powers. This helps explain why Britain was slower in the process of franchise extension than Germany or the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where parliament had narrow powers. It is not surprising that in countries like Britain, where parliament had extensive powers, the resistance of the political elite to extending suffrage was strong. This explains why extending the powers of parliament and the extension of suffrage did not evolve at the same time, although they were closely interdependent.

In some circumstances, this interdependence has taken on (and can take on) the characteristics of an opposition. It may happen, for example, that the political elite is looking to preserve the existing regime and its own power and that the economically powerful interest groups who are unrepresented in the political elite try to acquire it. To this end, they put pressure on the political elite for a change in the system that involves an extension of the powers of parliament. In order to defuse these pressures and prevent the extension of the powers of parliament the political elite extends the franchise to interest groups that have little economic power but are more numerous than those that are economically powerful. In this way, the economic elite no longer
finds it advantageous to press for an extension of the powers of parliament since, due to the maximum extension of the franchise, it finds itself in a parliamentary minority. In this context, the two dimensions of democracy, namely franchise extension and the powers of the parliament, stand in opposition to each other: franchise extension is a means whereby the political elite hinders the achievement of broader powers by parliament.

In Bonapartist France and Bismarckian Germany, by granting universal suffrage the political elite were able to thwart the attempt by the bourgeoisie to increase its political power through an extension of the powers of parliament. In France, the universal suffrage introduced by the revolution of 1848 and repealed in early 1851 by a liberal counterrevolution was reintroduced at the end of that year by Napoleon III. He established an institutional framework which limited the powers of parliament, reformed the electoral system as a bulwark against the formation of political parties, and fostered a direct relationship between the political elite and the “people” without the intermediation of parliament.

In Germany, Bismarck’s decision to grant universal suffrage in 1871, in other words, at the moment the German state was founded, constitutes a case of electoral authoritarianism before its time. This concession was designed to preserve the regime, that is, the power of the political elite, in the face of demands for change of regime coming from the liberal bourgeoisie. By extending the franchise to all male citizens Bismarck established a direct relationship between the executive and the masses, marginalizing parliament and thus excluding the economic elite from political power.

In these historical experiences the establishment of a special relationship between the political elite and the popular masses politically marginalized the middle class. However, the acquisition of the right to vote put popular masses in a position to exert pressure on the political elite. The latter tried to contain these pressures in two ways. On the one hand, both in France and in Germany, restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to strike were introduced. On the other hand, in both countries the political elite adopted redistributive policies that favored the popular masses. A prime example is Germany, where extensive welfare state protections for workers were introduced earlier than in other industrial countries.

Acknowledgements

We thank Daron Acemoglu, Toke Aidt, the participants to the Silvaplana workshop in Political Economy, and two anonymous referees for their helpful comments and suggestions.

References


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Appendix A

Table A1, Table A2, Table A3.
We have included in the “low parliamentary power” group all countries with a value of PARLIAMENT POWER lower than four (this index ranges from 0 to 6), and in the “high parliamentary power” group all countries with a value equal to or greater than four. The description of the variable Parpower is in Table A2.

### Table A1. Parliamentary power index (PARLIAMENT POWER) in the year of universal suffrage in the countries included in the survival analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Low parliamentary power” countries</th>
<th>“High parliamentary power” countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Countries</strong></td>
<td><strong>Year of</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>suffrage</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>1907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>1867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>1848</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A2. Description of the variables used and respective sources

PARLIAMENT POWER: It is the sum of Banks’s (1971) indexes of parliamentary responsibility and legislative effectiveness. It assumes values from 0 to 6. In the probit we have consider its logarithm. The index of parliamentary responsibility refers to the degree to which a premier must depend on the support of a majority in the lower house of the legislature in order to remain in office. It is equal to:

- 0. Irrelevant. Office of premier does not exist.
- 1. Absent. Office of premier exists, but there is no parliamentary responsibility.
- 2. Incomplete. The premier is, at least to some extent, constitutionally responsible to the legislature. Effective responsibility is, however, limited.
- 3. Complete. The premier is constitutionally and effectively dependent upon a legislative majority for continuance in office.

The index of legislative effectiveness is equal to:

- 0. None. No legislature exists.
- 1. Ineffective. There are three possible bases for this coding: first, legislative activity may be essentially of a “rubber stamp” character; second, domestic turmoil may make the implementation of legislation impossible; third, the effective executive may prevent the legislature from meeting or otherwise substantially impede the exercise of its functions.
- 2. Partially effective. A situation in which the effective executive’s power substantially outweighs but does not completely dominate that of the legislature.
- 3. Effective. The possession of significant governmental autonomy by the legislature, including, typically, substantial authority with regard to taxation and disbursements and the power to override executive vetoes of legislation.

SCHOOL. Primary school enrollment per capita (Banks 1971 database).

URBAN. Population in cities of 100,000 and over per capita (Banks 1971 database).

GDP per capita. The logarithm of it (Banks 1971 database).

### Table A3. Descriptive statistics of independent variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Parliament power</th>
<th>Primary school enrollment</th>
<th>Population in cities</th>
<th>GDP per capita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>12.44</td>
<td>10.65</td>
<td>2,438.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>5,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. dev.</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>930.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>