

The Origins of Nationalist Constituencies:

The Interests that Mobilized the Passions

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Lotem Halevy, University of Pennsylvania¹

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In 2013, Peter Mair spoke of the democratic deficit in parliamentary politics today as politicians struggle to “rule the void” of unattached voters. In this piece, I go back in time to a period of mass disenfranchisement—a historical void in politics, to see what we can learn about how political parties formed constituencies in mass society. How did everyday people start associating with political parties?

During democratization, incumbent political parties struggled with “ruling the void” of a diverse and changing society, but some emergent parties managed to carve out constituencies in civil society.² Unlike the democratic constituencies in much of Western Europe, which largely fail to represent the democratizing experiences of much of the religiously, ethnically, and nationally diverse world, I travel to democratizing Hungary (1867-1914), to understand how parties filled the void of politics with *nationalist* politics. When the state does not provide for its people, sectarian parties rise from civil society to fill the gap.

How do sectarian parties succeed? I propose a process inspired by historical events, which highlights how new parties form constituencies with widespread disenfranchisement. History is not a crystal ball which reveals the future, but we can learn from the past to try and unpack our future.³

In a nutshell

In the period before free and fair elections, parties with restricted access to parliaments formed linkages with unattached people in the Kingdom of Hungary. While civil society was less developed in Hungary than its Western neighbour—Austria, voluntary associations were opening rapidly. Between 1862 and 1878 the number of associations registered with the state increased from 579 to 3995 (Mannová 2006, 64).⁴ I show how non-state actors, in this case emergent political parties, cultivated constituencies through the construction of voluntary associations in civil society.

In an era of low provision of social services and goods by the state, some associations provided necessary services to the disenfranchised populace. Parties from across the ideological spectrum cemented themselves into civil society, but civil society was itself fragmented. Through *de jure* and *de facto* restrictions on access to associations based on socio-economic and national identity, requisites defined access to civil organizations. Nationalist leaders had access to a group of dependent everyday

¹ Thank you to Professor Dawn Teele and the Price Lab for Digital Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania, for funding the digitization of the data in this piece.

² The most successful of these parties in Western Europe would be the Social Democratic parties that emerged at the turn of the 20th century (Bartolini 2000).

³ There is no persistence argument in this short piece, I study political processes throughout history to study how democratization interacted with ethnic and national diversity for the sake of understanding the original dynamics, not because I necessarily want to predict the future.

⁴ Though there was nearly 600 percent increase in the number of associations over a 12-year period, one must interpret this statistic with caution because registration of associations during the period before the 1867 Compromise was far from complete. Unlike Austria, Hungary did not have a ban on associational life during any of this time-period.

people who regularly visited a physical location and were easily mobilized out of need for necessary goods and services (Cammett 2014, 59).

Works that consider how political parties form links in civil society highlight civil associations' ability to mobilize subsets of the population across time and space (Berman 1997; Greskovits 2020; Ziblatt 2017, 190). Meanwhile an extensive literature on the development of the European welfare state stresses that sectorial coalitions, emergent groups in politics and the power-relations between groups are causal factors driving not only the development of the state but also who has access to its resources (Baldwin 1990; Esping-Andersen 1990; Korpi 1983). Here, I focus on nationally defined social groups, not class-based or occupational groups.

In places where the state ignores large parts of its population, emergent parties and civil associations have other functions (Aldrich 1995). When nationalist parties substitute for the role of the state in deeply fragmented societies, they are likely to be successful at forging constituencies by choosing whom to include and whom to exclude (Cammett 2014, 4).⁵

How associations form linkages

Civil associations transmit social, political and cultural norms, which can mobilize everyday people into politics, and often affect the nature of the emergent state (e.g. Berman 1997; Butugli 2022; Charnysh and Peisakhin 2022; Lankina 2021; Jamal 2009; Varshney 2003). But the first stage underlying the transmission-of-norms-process, assumes that linkages, networks or brick-and-mortar associations exist in the first place to foster and facilitate the transmission of these values.

In *Making Democracy Work* (1994), Putnam excluded Italian clientelistic associations when explaining why democracy in Northern Italy is more robust than in Southern Italy. In her corresponding study about the “dark side” of social capital, where associational density does not lead to the proliferation of democratic norms, Jamal (2009) focuses on clientelistic associations. She shows that the *context* where linkages and social capital are cultivated matters for the development of interpersonal trust amongst individuals (or lack thereof), which in turn affects support for democratic institutions.

But ties between emergent political organizations form without widespread electoral participation. This severely limits the explanatory power of the social capital hypotheses tested against the backdrop of elections (though not necessarily free and fair), as well as theories of vote-seeking parties in ethnically diverse patronage democracies (Chandra 2004; Huber and Suryanarayan 2015; Thachil 2014).

This is where I turn to the social policy literature. Across regions and regimes, there is widespread consensus that the state is not the sole provider of social services throughout history and in the contemporary period (e.g. Cammett 2015; Cammett and MacLean 2014; Post et al. 2017; Tsai 2007; Ansell and Lindvall 2021). Here, but more thoroughly in my dissertation, I argue that emergent parties' provision of goods and services *through meso-level associations* created organized constituencies from previously disorganized mass society. Linkages *form* from a need that is fulfilled by an emergent

⁵ For a provocative take on how Catholic worker associations at a time of internal migration (industrialization) facilitate the rise of Catholic parties in German-speaking Switzerland see the innovative work of Walter (2022). However, Walter's focus on decentralized federal Switzerland, which democratized in 1848, is quite different than the democratizing experience of not only Europe, but much of the world.

political party or movement. The aggregation of individual linkages create constituencies and these constituencies can be mobilized through the transmission of social norms.

Associations in civil society can provide social services such as employment protections, childcare, food, and shelter; many of these service providing associations are affiliated with emergent political parties and social movements (Cammett and MacLean 2014).⁶ But in the multinational state of Hungary, and many religiously and ethnically diverse states today, access to associations, and therefore services, was reserved for members of the religious or national ingroup.⁷ Meaning that the provision of services created and defined constituencies according to national and/or religious identity.

Civil associations transmitted norms and cultivated social capital amongst groups that ultimately became constituencies, but first, they served a functional purpose for the disenfranchised populace.

Europe was ruled by nationalist leaders before and after the institution of free and fair elections. These leaders evoked a strong sense of an exclusive national identity based on religious, ethnic, or racial principles, claiming to protect their territory from perceived threats to “the nation”. When parties can point to their history of nation-building they receive an electoral boost following the democratization (Grzymala-Busse 2011, 330). My argument is that social-service provision is part of the nation-building process, a part that creates interest-based constituencies which are later easily mobilized through exclusionary nationalist appeals.

Nationalist leaders, as Wimmer writes, believe that “members of the nation, understood as a group of equal citizens with a shared history and future political destiny, should rule the state, and ... they should do so in the interests of the nation” (2019, 27). Nationalist constituencies are therefore mobilized to protect the national ingroup. This happens during elections but also in their absence. Once mobilized out of need (interest) into politics, nationally defined constituencies can easily turn nationalist social divisions (passions) into political divisions.⁸

Welfare activism in Central Europe and the formation of identity-based constituencies

The most powerful constituencies are those that, once mobilized, are sufficiently large to influence policy. But, unlike policies, constituencies are created from everyday people. In the period before mass enfranchisement, the average person was poor and disenfranchised from the state and any of the minimal services it provided.

Early welfare in Central Europe largely depended on how the central government sought to manage the many nationalities residing in the region. After the Compromise of 1867, which created the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, the federal-like arrangement in Austria gave German and Czech nationalist movements relative freedom to improve the well-being of the nation through a series of initiatives (Zahra 2006, 1381). The nationally segregated social welfare system spread through the

⁶ In much of Western Europe labour and Socialist organizations filled this role as well

⁷ Here I adopt a conservative view of access, where associations are either exclusive or inclusive towards members of outgroups.

⁸ The politicization of everyday people and the formation of nationalist constituencies can be explained by a host of variables. The process is not monocausal.

Bohemian and Moravian lands in the Austrian half of the Empire, gradually becoming an explicit model for a “separate but equal” welfare system for the German and Czech populations.

While the emergent Austrian federal state was structured in a way that gave peripheral governments and authorities purposeful freedom in establishing systems of care, the Eastern half of the Empire—the Kingdom of Hungary, took a more liberal approach to welfare (Neumann 2003, 866).

The Kingdom was nationally divided without a majority group.⁹ Hungarian parliamentary elites worked on one hand to suppress the Slovak, Serbian, Romanian and Ruthenian nationalist movements mainly through rule-of-law,¹⁰ but on the other hand, limited provision of short-term relief to the most vulnerable people in Hungary meant that even the ingroup was not cared for by the state.¹¹ The individualist attitude towards welfare in the emergent Hungarian during the Dualist period (1867-1914), created a window of opportunity for social movements to establish their own institutions in place of state-run welfare associations. Examples include: the Serbian Industrialists’ Association (*Szèrb Iparosok Művelődési Egylete*), the National Union of Catholic Young Craftsmen and Workers (*Keresztény Ifjak Országos Egyesülete*), The Aid Association for Sick Hungarian Craftsmen (*Magyar Iparosok Betegségéhező Egyesülete*), and the Slovenska Jednota—the first chain of credit unions in Europe which opened in 1845 in Upper Hungary to support Slovak innovation and spread throughout Slovak enclaves across the rest of Hungary.

Like much of Europe, social care remained the responsibility of religious institutions until the nineteenth century (e.g. Ansell and Lindvall 2021; Esping-Andersen 1989; Morgan 2006; Van Kersbergen and Manow 2009; van Molle 2017). In Hungary provision increased over the turn of the century but remained fragmented across national groups with religious institutions and charitable societies shouldering most of the care for the mostly rural and poor Hungarian ingroup (Kušniráková 2017, 850). Similarly, economic protections for workers and their families came from civil associations, many with a religious or national affiliation. Throughout democratization, non-state organizations remained the main providers of social services and benefits to the average Hungarian agricultural and industrial worker.

Types of associations

To be expected of Europe during this period, the most common associations were had some sort of religious access requirement. Some of the associations such as the National Corps of Catholic Agrarian Youth Associations (*Katolikus Agrárfiúsági Legényegyesületek Országos Testülete, KALOT*), were multi-denominational, yet they were designed to cater to the needs of Christian *Hungarians* living in

⁹ Hungarians (Magyars) represented 41.2 percent of the 15,642,102 person population. Romanians comprised 15.4 percent; Croatians and Serbians 15 percent; Germans 12.5 percent; Slovaks 11.9 percent; Ruthenians 2.3 percent. The measure for nationality in the census was mother tongue which made it hard to classify groups such as Jews, who were variably seen as part of the ingroup and assimilated into the ingroup differently dependent on denomination.

¹⁰ The Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 saw a renewal of the Magyarization campaigns of the late 1800s, and education was under attack once again by elites who were trying to assimilate minorities through language and education policy.

¹¹ Although interesting to the extent that any services existed, they worked to advance the interest of the nation over the individual. Most of the state-run services administer through the Hungarian state during the Dualist period were assimilative over protectionist, as they targeted education and language (Kwan 2012; Judson 2006)

the rural countryside.¹² The chain of over 3,000 associations aimed to create a better-educated peasant youth and raise the living standards of the rural poor (Farkas 1988, 298 quoted in Wittenberg 2006, 79). KALOT organized various programs and initiatives for young men living in rural Hungary starting as early as 1879, including vocational workshops, and community-building events. The associations, through the Catholic Church, established cooperative societies to help young men access affordable credit and other resources necessary for agricultural production.

The KALOT associations were the most numerous in the land that would remain Hungary after WWII, but while the KALOT associations were *not* directly affiliated with a political movement or party, other associations in Hungary were. For example, railway workers' families received the earliest form of insurance for fatal workplace accidents from the National Economic Association of Hungarian Christian Socialist Railway Workers (*Magyar Keresztény Szocialista Vasutasok Országos Gazdasági Egyesülete*). The association provided free legal aid to members, arranged vocational exercises for members and gave members' children free study and group family vacations to the Lake Balaton district in Hungary. The Christian Socialist Party had People's libraries, women's circles, and farmer's cooperatives across the Kingdom of Hungary, while Serbs, Slovaks and Jews created a duplicated system of provision with beautification associations (for Jews Chevre Kadisha associations), libraries, Sunday schools, youth groups, hospitals, and sick funds, as well as credit unions and worker organizations.

In the figure below we can see the associational growth in the Kingdom of Hungary by religious denomination. The first figure tracks the number of new associations (the y-axis) opened in each year by religious affiliation. Please note that the y-axis is different for every panel.

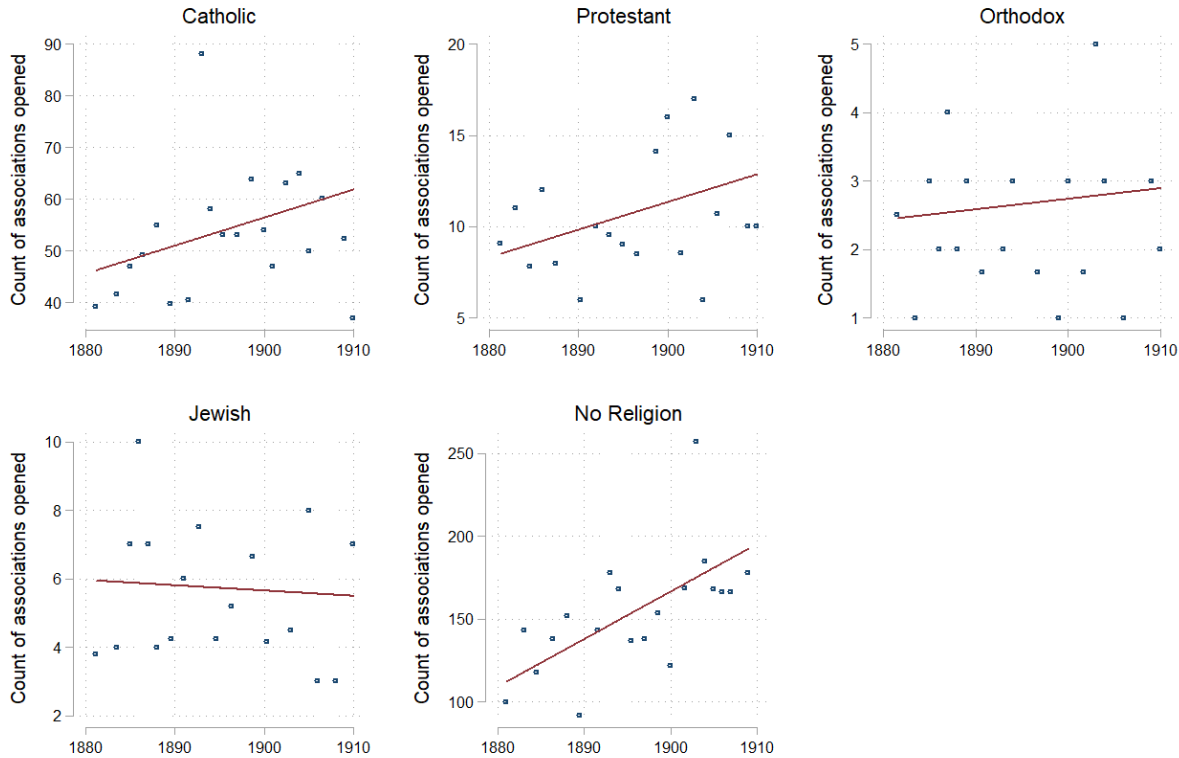
The data are from a newly digitized directory of all known voluntary associations in Greater Hungary constructed from 1848 to 1945 (N=18,488).¹³ The directory was compiled by the Hungarian Cultural Institute under Edit Pór in 1988. The directory includes reading circles, child welfare associations (kindergartens), women's circles, smallholder cooperatives, working men's and women's clubs (by national and religious denomination), singing circles, youth groups (by gender, religion and nationality), professional circles (for teachers, doctors, and lawyers), trade union associations (by gender, religion, and nationality), casinos, and language circles. The directory lists the year the association was founded in the village (*falu*). Physical addresses are not provided, and neither are dates of closure. Therefore, I do not calculate the cumulative count of associations in this descriptive analysis to avoid any assumptions about how long associations stayed open during the 19th and early 20th centuries. After the collapse of the Empire, the Kingdom of Hungary split into several new

¹² The ingroup Hungarians, or Magyar ingroup, were religiously diverse, divided between Calvinism and Catholicism.

¹³ The data are far from even and complete. A discussion of data issues and how I deal with them is beyond the scope of this piece but can be found in the data appendix of my dissertation and will be available on my website when the digitized data are made public. To my knowledge the secondary source presents the most complete collection of voluntary associations to date that includes associations from a diverse array of religious, national, and ideological groups. The appendix of the volumes (1351-1353), highlight why and how the data were compiled by the researchers. The data exclude charity organizations which redistributed *money*. Almost all charity organizations were affiliated with specific religions and redistribution occurred through Churches and synagogues. The inclusion of such charities, not associations, would therefore count religious infrastructure and not civil associations. The directory does include charity organizations (affiliated with a party and otherwise) which were constructed to aid women, children and the poor which redistributed goods and services. The researchers which compiled the directory, note that they cannot discern the date that an association closed but are able discern the year it opened (1349) and for that reason I code the year the association opened.

emergent states which include parts of contemporary Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine, Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina, and Croatia.

Figure 1: Associations Opened in the Kingdom of Hungary 1880-1910, by Religious Affiliation



Caption for Figure 1: Raw scatterplot for the number of associations opened in the Kingdom of Hungary (1880-1910), overlaid with a line of best fit that tracks the relationship over time. Data digitized from Pór (1988). Religious categories do not necessarily mean that goods and services were exclusive to the members of the ingroup, but rather the figure breaks down the growth of Hungarian associational life by religious subgroup.

But the process which creates the initial incentive for constituencies to form so that leaders can politicize and later mobilize everyday people, is more than presence. Instead, the provision of public goods and services by meso-level associations increases the probability that mobilization *can* occur. During a period of mass disenfranchisement from the state, rising political parties infiltrated civil society with ideas and norms but *first* they created groups of people incentivized to participate in civil society through initial engagement with civil associations.

Constituency Formation: Service-based Mobilization and Fragmented Access

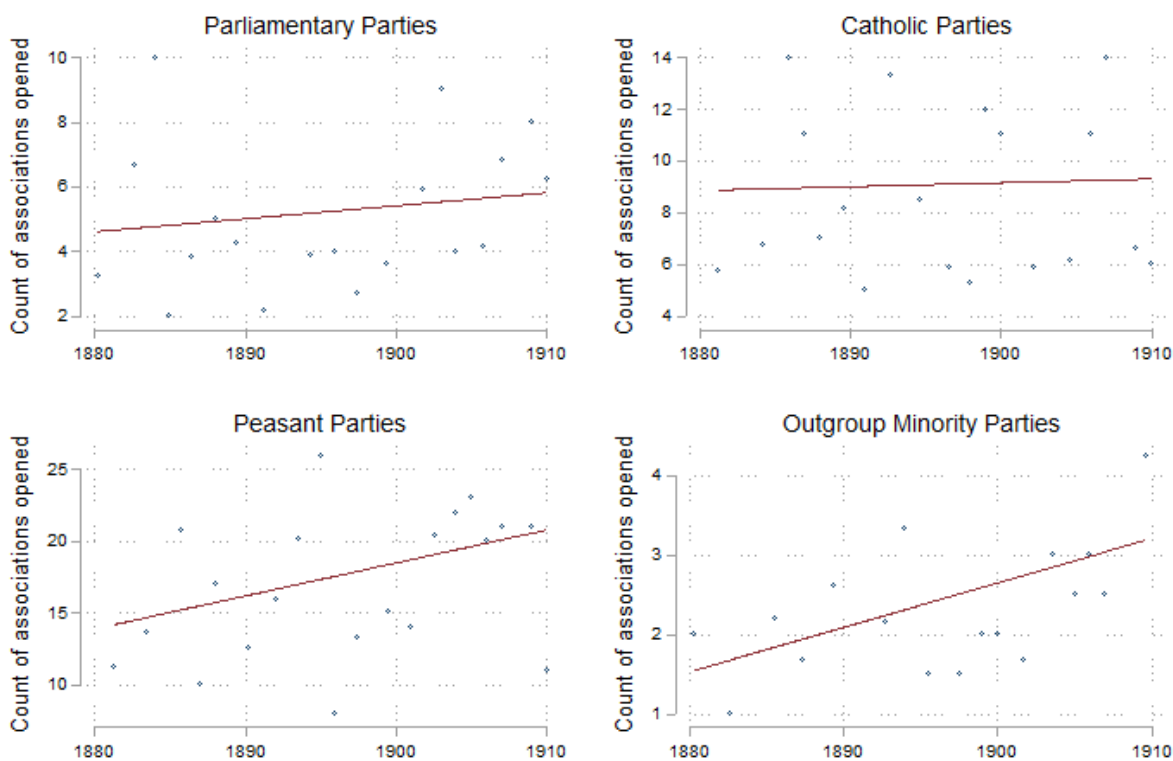
For brevity, in the descriptive analysis below I link an association to at most one political party, I relax this assumption in other work. Often a party affiliation is identified from the name of the association. For example, the *Matica Slovenská* (Slovak Foundation) was affiliated with the Slovak National Party (*Slovenská Národná Strana*, 1871-1938).

But in most cases, associations bore names without a clear connection to their party or social movements; I searched the digital archives of the National Hungarian Archives and several other archival databases for Hungarian newspapers from the time for mention of associations in party

materials.¹⁴ Party newspapers mentioned associations where party leaders spoke, in some instances, donations from transnational communities and donors were celebrated in newspapers, and services such as sick funds, hospitals, and orphanages were most often the direct result of these donations.

While a total of 2,734 associations are affiliated with a political party, no link could be made for most associations.¹⁵ The figure below shows what parties opened associations during the democratizing period. Please note that the range of the y-axis is different across the four panels. From the figure, we can see that parliamentary parties are less active at constructing civil associations compared to their extra-parliamentary counterparts.

Figure 2: Associations Opened in the Kingdom of Hungary 1880-1910, by Political Party Family



Caption for Figure 2: Raw data scatterplot for the yearly trend of associations opened in the Kingdom of Hungary (1880-1910), overlaid with a line of best fit that tracks the relationship over time. Data digitized from Pór (1988). Note that the count on the y-axis is different for every plot.

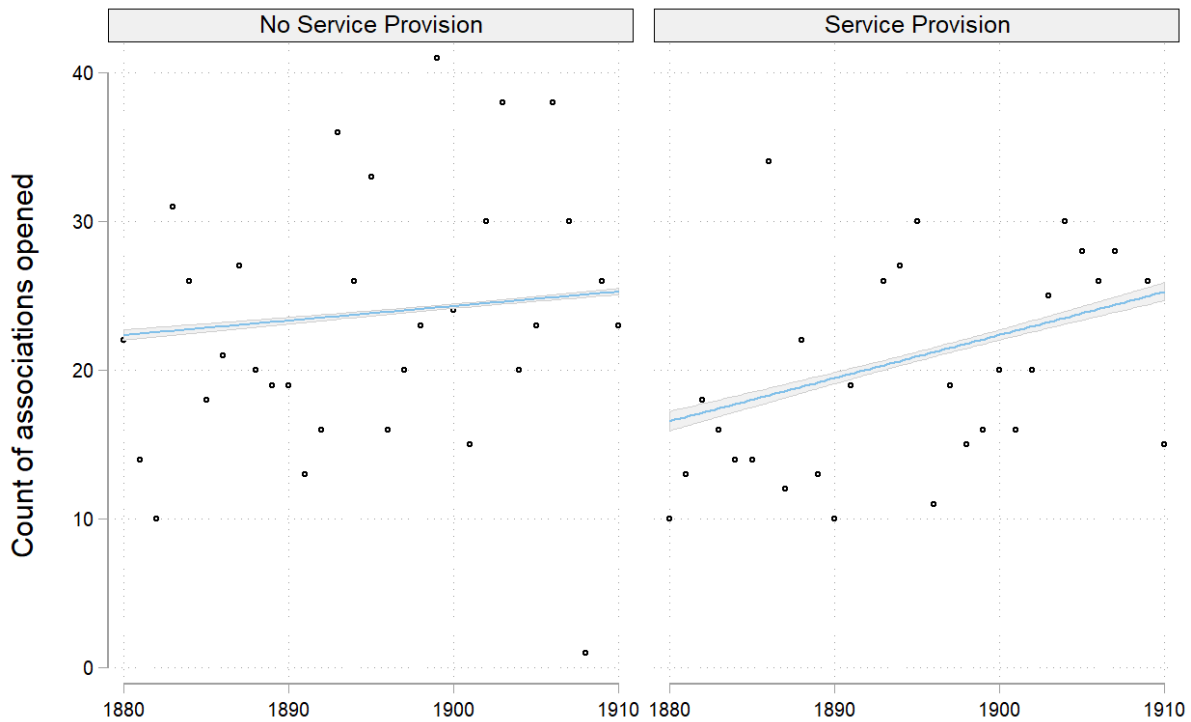
The rate of openings was also not the same across parties. Notably, associations affiliated with the Catholic parties open throughout the time-series. The figures plot the total number of associations and do not differentiate between associations that provided services and those that did not.

¹⁴ Online archives accessed through *Arcanum Digitheca*, *Hungaricana* and The National Hungarian Archives online database. Documents pertaining to the Jewish associations in Hungary are kept in the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives in Budapest, since documents are not digitized, fieldwork was conducted in December 2022.

¹⁵ No party-association link was made for 7849 affiliations in the sample, meaning that until the 1910, most associations were not affiliated with a political party.

Coding services: I code the primary function of each association using a dummy variable—was the association delivering services or goods? Reading circles, choirs, casinos, cultural, and student/alumni associations are coded as zeros (0). Meanwhile, associations such as food canteens, aid societies, burial societies, agricultural cooperatives and credit unions, associations meant for the training of craft and industrial workers, libraries, language teaching circles, and child welfare associations, are coded as ones (1). I only consider the provision of club goods, those goods and services that are excludable.

Figure 3: Associations Opened in the Kingdom of Hungary 1880-1910, by Service Provision



Caption for Figure 3: The two-sample t-test confirms that we can reject the null and confirms there is a significant difference between the means of the two distributions ($\mu_1=24.39$ $\mu_2=21.20$; $t=16.98$, $p<0.001$). Line of best fit plotted with 95 percent confidence intervals. Additionally, the lines are statistically different from one another ($p<0.001$). One-sided p-value reported.

In Figure 3, we see that as time goes on more associations in civil society open to provide social services. This marks the emergence of the welfare state by non-state actors in Hungary. After, the collapse of the Empire and the passing of the Treaty of Trianon, which saw Hungary lose two-thirds of its population and land, many of the movements and parties that provided social services during the democratizing period entered parliaments. The provision of goods and services by emergent parties provides a partial explanation for why the dominant parties of the old regime were fully replaced in the interwar period with the parties which rose to fill the void during the Dualist period. During democratization extra-parliamentary parties created constituencies by fulfilling the needs of everyday people who were disenfranchised from the state.

Conclusion

The historical development of the Hungarian welfare state *by non-state actors*—parties who rose to represent the *needs* of the disenfranchised populace, speaks to the interplay between political, social, and religious factors shaping the provision of social services in diverse states. The process highlighted

above shines a light on the mixed results of small-N and large-N studies that contradictorily finds that a mobilized civil society can be both good and bad for democracy (Berman 1997; Bernhard et al. 2020; Ekiert and Kubik 2001; Riley (2010) 2019). *How* constituencies form determines which, if any, bad actors can infiltrate their ranks (Chambers and Kopstein 2001).

The case of Hungary demonstrates the doubled-edged sword of the emergent welfare state. The void left by the state led to the fragmentation of social care financing and delivery, and made it easy for emergent parties to mobilize, by providing for the needs and interests of everyday people disenfranchised from the state. Emergent parties created constituencies ripe for nationalist mobilization. This mobilization, in turn, influenced the development of the Hungarian inter-war state, and party system.

Many countries across the world experienced a rise in nationalist politics in the 21st century—Trump in the United States, Orban in Hungary, Netanyahu’s far right-wing coalition in Israel and the new dominance of the Bharatiya Janata Party across much of India. Exclusionary identity-based appeals are part of the package which helps these parties win elections and dismantle liberal democratic institutions, but these appeals are only possible because parties first cultivated homogenous need-based constituencies.

Huntington (1968) argued that political parties are key to understanding the nature of political order during moments of institutional development; they allow for the steady absorption of mobilized masses which would otherwise be tempted by corruption or violence. This might be true, but political parties both construct institutions and mobilize constituencies cultivated from mass society. Parliamentary parties during moments of political change constructed political institutions, but parties barred from political power created the masses. Ideas, trust, and social capital spread through networks but the way these networks formed, linked with governing actors, and were or were not sustained through regime change, deserves further attention.

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