CHAPTER 1: REGIME CHANGE, PARTIES, AND THE POLITICS OF ACCESS

"The potential for instability exists when any significant group of people ends up as permanent losers."

Lani Guinier, Tyranny of the Majority

In the decades before World War I, Europe witnessed its most intense foray away from autocracy and into democracy through liberalizing reforms instilled upon the masses by autocratic rulers. Amidst varied economic, cultural, and social conditions, party systems reorganized as political parties splintered in parliaments, and social movements transitioned into representative political organizations. The processes that led to broader political inclusion reshaped Europe's diverse and complex political tapestry, as governing elites gradually democratized their grasp on political power to the diverse masses. In some cases, these reforms successfully transitioned states into democracies; in other cases, they ushered in decades of violent autocratic backlash.

By the end of the twentieth century, farmers tilling vast estate lands, industrial workers in close-knit quarters, and the religiously and ethnically diverse populace either found a legal, free, and fair path to the secret ballot (Mares 2015; 2022; Albertus and Menaldo 2018), or they picked up weapons and set up barricades. The uneven underlying process of mass inclusion is rarely marked by a groundbreaking "moment" that definitively breaks people, parties, and institutions

away from the dictatorial past. Instead, the unevenness of the process that collectively transformed state-society relations through incremental liberalizing episodes has guided, or failed to guide, societies toward the purported zenith of democracy, mass free and fair inclusion and representation (Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010; Bartolini 2013). Yet, while some liberalizing states in the nineteenth century settled into democracy, others—most others—did not (Lipset 1959; Collier 1999; Ziblatt 2017; Skanning 2020). Why are some processes of liberalization more prone to autocratic backlash? This book shows that patterns of inclusion—access—to state and civil society also spell patterns of exclusion, which can affect the democratic nature of the liberalizations as groups organize according to patterns of inclusion and exclusion from *the middle*.

Through an analysis of patterns of inclusion and exclusion across regimes and social groups, this book demonstrates how homegrown ultra-nationalist movements organized over time, in and outside groves of inclusion created by liberalizing reforms by incumbent autocratic parties. In cases where liberalizing reforms failed and led to the autocratization of the regime,[1] they did so at the behest of formally excluded parties who maneuvered outside the liberalizing regimes' institutions and gained mass support *against* the regime through the activation of civil networks and organizations. Mass support and unintended and untended windows of opportunity eventually led previously excluded ultra-nationalist parties

[1] I follow Lührmann and Lindberg (2019, 1095) when they define "autocratization" as "the decline of democratic regime attributes". As I detail below, I define a regime, as a "bundle of reforms that structures how organized interests are transformed into governance" and regime change as "the cumulative reconfiguration of institutions that define and constrain access, for individuals and social groups, to the state and society".

to autocratize the state through two possible routes: a "settled fascism" route that results in the fascist consolidation between state and society following liberalization, *or* an "autocratic pluralism" pathway characterized by ideological pluralism, party competition, the continuation of domestic peripheral threats, and regime cycling. What determines which route was taken depends on *who* had access to the state during the processes of liberalization and how the excluded organized in response.

Questions of how and why autocratic actors liberalize access to the state are particularly relevant in ethnically, religiously, and nationally diverse imperial and post-imperial settings where, into the contemporary period, collective rights are illiberalized and repressed while individual civil rights are liberalized in favour of a democratic national identity (e.g. Aktürk 2025; Mcmurry 2025; Weber 1976; Lust-Okar 2001; Gutman 2009; Shapiro and Kymlicka 2001). Paradoxically, as this book shows, processes of liberalization can lead to *illiberal* outcomes as institutions fail to skew organized mass interests in favour of democracy and towards autocracy. Liberalizing reforms that privilege individual civil rights over collective rights can fuel social inequalities between groups and preserve old hierarchies in new regimes, even as more individuals gain access to the liberalizing state. Patterns of liberal inclusion into the state in the absence of recognized collective political rights are, therefore, also a story of group exclusion (Gutman 2009; Bracic 2020). Exclusion that eventually triggers collective backlash against the liberalizing regime from *the middle as parties organize in civil society around excluded collective* identities.

This book is about the failure of liberal politics in diverse societies as it pertains to regime change. It is about the intended and unintended consequences of parliamentary parties' decision-making during two paths that structure regime liberalization to illiberal autocracy. Why do some people get liberal civil rights—access to the state—during liberalization; why do political parties liberalize access to some individuals over others; and how do those without access respond to sustained political exclusion and repression? As may be clear, this book is a study of the "negative cases" of Europe's first wave of democratization (Huntington 1991; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Zöcsik et al. 2024). Much of the scholarship on European regime change during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries remains analytically divided (Ziblatt 2017, 11). One body of work examines the introduction of formal democratic rules at "threshold" moments, moments when democratic transition was, at least formally, achieved (e.g. Ahmed 2013; Collier 1999; Lizzeri and Persico 2004; Teele 2018; Bateman 2019). Another focuses on the breakdown of democracy in the twentieth century, either analyzing the immediate political dynamics of regime collapse or tracing its failure to deep historical roots in earlier political, social, and economic structures focusing on patterns of agricultural commercialization, industrial capital, and the legacies of feudalism and class conflict (e.g. Janos 1989; Linz and and Stepan 1978; Luebbert 1991; Bermeo 20003; Capoccia 2005; Moore 1966, cited in Ziblatt 2017, 11 ft. 33). Despite the analytical disconnect, both literatures generated valuable insights but until recently few accounts combined the two approaches to explain the long-term trajectories of transitions (Ziblatt 2017, 12; Albertus and Menaldo, 2018).

This book complements existing studies on patterns of democratization, but studies two patterns of autocratization following long processes of liberalization that result in periods of settled fascism or in autocratic pluralism despite periods of liberalization.[2] The former is ideologically fascist (ultra-nationalist and violent), it is characterised by moments of intense political competition along multiple dimensions followed by the complete absence of parliamentary competition (by decree), it is domestically grown, paramilitary groups are subsumed into the state, violence is sanctioned against perceived threats to both incumbency and the "nation", and its proponents espouse an exclusionary ingroup national identity constructed by outbidding along multiple dimensions of ethnic national identity. Examples from the first wave of democratization include Italy (following 1938), Hungary, Spain, Croatia, Serbia, and Romania. The latter path cycles between liberal and illiberal change along multiple dimensions. Political competition is ideologically pluralist, though it waxes and wanes; it remains moderate in parliament *and* civil society. Autocracy is driven by peripheral threats to the regime that evolve over time, and its proponents are more likely to espouse a more inclusionary national identity rooted in civic nationalism. Examples from the first wave of democratization include Germany, Austria, and Poland.

[2] Settled or "unsettled" democratization is all but one set of analytic outcomes to Capoccia and Ziblatt's "historical turn to democratization", mirrored as settled fascism, or autocratic pluralism.

Table 1.1: Two Patterns of Autocratization in Interwar Europe

		Settled Fascism[3]	**Autocratic Pluralism**
Interwar Cases		Kingdom of Italy (post 1938), Hungary (post 1939), Spain (post 1936), Yugoslavia, Romania, Turkey (post-Ottoman), Kingdom of Greece (including Second Hellenic Republic), Nazi Germany	Kingdom of Italy (1861-1938), First Austrian Republic, Czechoslovakia, Second Polish Republic, France (Vichy), Kingdom of Italy (1861-1922), Weimar Republic
Independent Variables during Liberalization	Party competition	High	Fluctuates
	Cleavage of party competition	Dominated by centre-periphery cleavage	Changes
Observable Outcomes following Liberalization	Basis of social dominance	National identity	Varies; instrumentalist for the ruling party
	Party competition of the resulting regime	None; fusion of party with state through legal and political institutions, *and* violence; one-dimensional nationalist party competition	*De jure* bans on party competition are rare, even in the case of one-party systems; paramilitary groups may be present but contained to civil society, and there is multi-dimensional party competition.
	Regime	Stable autocracy until an exogenous shock (usually from the international system)	Tends towards regime instability, with cycles between democracy and autocracy or between autocratic sub-types without sliding to consolidated one-party rule.

Caption for Table 1.1: Ideal-typical features of two patterns of autocratization in interwar Europe. The "settled fascist" path is characterized by stable, parliamentary-driven exclusionary regimes rooted in nationalist identity secured by state-mandated violence, while the "autocratic pluralist" path involves fluctuating party competition, peripheral threats, and regime cycling. Examples drawn from the interwar period illustrate how patterns of pre-WWI liberalizations manifested in different European cases. As covered in Chapter 2, cases are classified at the regime level (not country) according to the pathway decided upon by parliamentary parties during liberalization, not the outcome (Ahmed 2013, 14).

[3] Fascism conceptually differs from conservative authoritarianism, though observable outcomes might be similar (Kallis 2015). Fascism, as I show in the empirical chapters, is a merger of party and state that emerges as a coalition between fascist social movements and conservative authoritarian parties, where fascism (due to its distinctive use of violence to enforce order) overtakes more moderate (less ideological) and instrumental conservative autocratic parties.

Like Ziblatt (2017) and Capoccia and Ziblatt (2010), this book approaches liberalizing moments in regime change not as discrete episodes, but as interconnected chapters part of a longer, multidimensional process, processes that can reverse as reforms are introduced and change the nature of the regime.

The argument of the book is simple: Sustained exclusion along lines of collective identity gives groups the window of opportunity to organize, politicize, and mobilize along the lines of that identity in civil society as governing elites fail to subsume them into the state (c.f Aidt and Leon-Ablan 2025; Bartolini 2000; Wood 2000). Where governing liberal elite actors fail to incorporate social groups from the masses into the liberalizing regime's state, organized parties arise *from the middle* to threaten incumbents and eventually structure political competition along an exclusionary identity cleavage. The cleavage compounds several excluded collective identities that (Huber and Suryanarayan 2016), when organized, politicized, and mobilized against the liberalizing regime, can subvert and unravel liberalizing and democratizing procedures passed from the top and replace them with repressive political and social solutions to past exclusion (Chandra 2005; Rokkan 1999). The political and social consequences of early moments of inclusion (and exclusion) are therefore vast. But simply in reference to the resulting regime: seemingly democratic liberal reforms can inadvertently set the stage for autocratic consolidation by actors (parties) who emerge from *the middle* (civil society) to politicize, mobilize, and organize the masses initially left behind. Liberal inclusion and widespread group exclusion during moments of liberalization create the incentives for illiberal parties

to organize, politicize, and mobilize marginalized groups around nationalist identities and ideas that usher in settled fascism.

ARGUMENT OF THE BOOK

Regime change is a multi-faceted and non-monotonic process, comprised of underlying processes and junctures bound sequentially together in long causal chains that often, though certainly not always, converge on *democracy* (Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010, 941). As actors organize and interests change the cumulative reconfiguration of institutions results in a regime, the evolution of which is usually characterized by systematic and piecemeal reforms strategically engineered by governing parliamentary parties in the face of threats to their political power from organized competitors in parliaments and civil society (Ahmed 2013; Ansell and Samuels 2014; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Albertus and Menaldo 2018). Yet, liberalization from "the top" alone does not start or end regimes as they rise and fall through dramatic coups, or mass revolutions (Collier 1999; Miller 2021; Moore 1966; Luebbert 1991; Reidl et al. 2020). Democratic experimentations that increase political competition "from the top" can also backfire and lead to violent civil conflicts between neighbours (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2018) or regime reversal (Nord et al. 2025). Just as autocratic institutions are purposefully unraveled into democracy by elites (often for instrumentalist intentions) (Mares and Queralt 2015; Albertus and Menaldo 2018; Suryanarayan *n.d*), liberal democratic institutions can also be unraveled into autocracy (Bermeo 2016), often, quietly and incrementally, from within mere years after initial liberalizations took place (Capoccia 2005; Bermeo and Yashar 2016; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). This book shows that when a liberalizing

regime experiences reversion, it usually occurs through the efforts of previously excluded actors marked with different civil origins, bases, ideologies, and resources than their liberal predecessors (settled fascism) or is part of the longer process of regime-cycling (autocratic pluralism), where exogenous intervention often, eventually, leads to stability. In both cases, the main decision-making actors that set states on their paths are political parties.

PARTIES: GATEKEEPERS OF THE REGIME

Parties are the actors driving political change for the organized interests of elites but also everyday people; they are the ideological cartels of liberalizing legislatures, which create the formal rules and procedures of the regime (Aldrich 1995; Cox and McCubbins 2007; Higashijima 2022; Levitsky and Way 2012; Meng 2021). In turbulent, liberalizing, and illiberalizing contexts, political parties behave strategically, prioritizing more than immediate electoral payoffs, but positioning themselves to maximize future governing opportunities by responding organizationally to change and competition (Arriola et al. 2021; Katz and Mair 1993; Chandra 2001; Rohr and Martin 2025; Scheppele 2022; Lachapelle et al. 2020; Shen-Bayh 2018). Legislative struggles over procedural rules—the fundamental "rules of the game"—are as much about partisan concerns as ideological battles over the souls of the nation (Boix 1999; Ahmed 2013; Teele 2025, 486-487). Debates over "who gets to play" and "how they play" are neither minor nor mechanical ways of staying in power; rather, they frequently represent intensely ideological clashes at the heart of the regime's partisan divide on *who is included in the regime* and can shape the trajectory of political competition decades to the future (Seton-Watson 1972 (Viator

1908); Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Rohr and Martin 2025; c.f. Shefter 1994, 66). Historical and contemporary examples underscore how bitterly contested these seemingly procedural debates can be (Bateman 2019; Teele 2018; Ahlquist et al. 2018; Castillo 2023). For example, consider even the most seemingly mundane debates about mail-in ballots, voter ID laws in the United States, or debates about lowering the voting age in parts of the EU and the United Kingdom, or debates about abroad or "near-abroad" voters in Hungary. These issues, though legal and institutional, are indeed, foundational social and ideological partisan disputes regarding the "articulation" of the state and its institutions: who is eligible to vote, who can access power, and how are positions are allocated within the regime (Alarian and Zonszein 2025; Ackerman 2020; De Leon et al. 2015; Eidlin 2016; Kovacs 2020; Østergaard-Nielsen and Lafleur 2019; Waterbury 2025; Blatter and Schmid 2022; Wellman 2021).[4]

The fate of a liberalizing regime that teeters between democracy and autocracy hinges on how political actors, in this case—political parties—mediate between the institutional inclusion of individuals and exclusion of rising organizing interests in the state, or how parties articulate the political and social consequences of liberal and illiberal decision making to a diverse populace with a diverse array of identities endogenous to democratic politics (Chandra and Boulet *n.d*; Andersen

[4] The sociological "articulation" approach emphasizes the active role of political actors in creating, shaping, or "articulating" cleavages that were not previously politically significant (De Leon et al. 2015). This perspective treats cleavages as endogenous to politics and party formation. While early work in this tradition, rooted in Marxist thought, highlighted "integral" parties that mobilized deep social divides with transformative ambitions (De Leon 2014, 148; De Leon et al. 2015, 28–31), later studies also examined how parties strategically suppress cleavages, managing which issues enter political debates (Mische 2008).

1983; Waters 1990; Posner 2005). When ruling autocratic parties use democratic procedures to either liberalize or illiberalize, they include some people in the state while excluding or marginalizing others. In doing so, they inadvertently sow the seeds of further exclusion (King 1995; 1999).[5]

Therefore, liberalizing regimes, even those that experience free and fair elections with mass inclusion like Germany, Japan, Austria, or even the United States often "U-turn" into autocracy (Nord et al. 2025), fascist or otherwise, not only through top-down repression or bottom-up insurrection, but through the *middle-down* dynamics of party politics that respond to real or perceived experiences of past inclusion and their exclusion (Lamot and Molnár 2002). Political parties are crucial mid-level political actors that not only decide when, how and whose rights are liberalized (and whose are not) when in government or opposition but they also link (or fail to link) ordinary citizens in society to the state (Poertner 2024; Martin et al. 2022), their active presence can forge enduring democratic institutions, whereas their absence or exclusivity can fatally undermine democratization and democracy (Bermeo and Yashar 2016; Jamal 2009).

In deeply divided societies, if incumbent liberal parties slowly enfranchise broad segments of society, partisan politics and social networks become structured along a cross-cutting cleavage as parties are incentivized to appeal to voters along multiple dimensions of national identity for votes (Chandra 2005, 236; Lipset and

[5] Party bans are, for the most part, a phenomenon of the interwar period. During liberalization, parties were *de facto* excluded by the mechanics of a low threshold of inclusion (sustained disenfranchisement of the masses). This led extra-parliamentary parties to compete against the reigning liberalizing parliamentary order, which, only liberalized—strategically—*for some*.

Rokkan 1967; Dunning and Harrison 2010; Paler et al. 2020; Huber and Suryanarayan 2016). Yet, during moments of political *development*, cleavages are politicized by political parties (Rabushka and Shepsle 1972; De Leon et al. 2015), and as parties themselves gatekeep access to the ballot box, some very large social groups are left out of processes of liberalization and instead experience sustained exclusion (Roberts 2008; Sears 2007, 92; Scalia 1998; Smith 1993; 1997, 39; King 2000; Katznelson 2005; c.f Hartz 1991, 31). These social groups—citizens denied the vote, barred from existing civil organizations, and prohibited from running for or holding office—were initially politically excluded from the state on the grounds that liberal politicians deemed their social *and* economic positions incompatible with their party and "the public" interest (Castillo 2023).[6] This political logic worked to sustain the disenfranchisement of lower classes, women, and racial and ethnic outgroups (Scalia 1998, 372).

In sum, patterns of inclusion (and therefore exclusion) crafted by political parties at the helm can be detrimental to liberal democracy. Where there is widespread exclusion from the state, liberal parties lack the incentive to appeal and mobilize excluded groups, cleavages are less likely to crosscut, and actors emerge from the middle in resistance to the reigning liberal order. Here, cleavages cumulate with liberalization, deepening nationalist party competition, as externally mobilized parties appeal to abandoned *national* identities (King 2000, 25; Horowitz 1985;

[6] The political rationale predates the eugenics rationale. As I show, the eugenics rationale for political inclusion follows from liberalization in the pathway of "settled fascism" and is consistent with the construction of national identities in diverse states according to the *jus sanguinis* logics of national identity. (For a discussion on similar processes in the United States during the interwar period, see: King 2000, 87-93).

Rabushka and Shepsle 1971; 1972; Chandra 2005). In cases where large groups of the population experience sustained exclusion during moments of parliamentary liberalization, common in post-Imperial and post-colonial liberalizing contexts (Lee and Paine 2024), competing political parties can politicize and mobilize "national identity" across multiple dimensions: linguistic, economic, religious, racial, and educational.[7]

Simply put, party competition in liberalizing (yet not democratic), diverse, developing nation-states is endogenous to the autocratic parliamentary competition of the Imperial period. Liberalizing reforms to the regime unfold gradually, while multiple dimensions of national identity are politicized, organized, and mobilized through parliamentary decisions over who to include in, or grant access to, the emergent state. It was through these procedural decisions, over suffrage rules, association rights, and eligibility for office, that parliamentary parties institutionalized mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, shaping not only immediate political competition but also the long-run boundaries of national identity and citizenship. As Table 1.2 shows, during liberalization, excluded groups often mobilized outside the burgeoning system, setting the stage for authoritarian backlash. This dynamic is familiar in post-colonial contexts with overseas metropoles, where native populations were incorporated or excluded according to settler demographics (Lee and Paine 2024). As this book shows, continental empires,

[7] While we may expect stable democratic party competition (even in the minimalist sense) as parties change their appeals to different ethnic categories (Chandra 2005, 236), this is rarely the case outside a few well-studied exceptional cases, including the world's largest multiethnic democracy—India.

their colonies, and their rump successor states were subject to similar outcomes, albeit shaped by different institutional logics driven by domestically born and bred parties.

Table 1.2: Mechanisms Driving Two Patterns of Autocratization in Interwar Europe

		Settled Fascism	**Autocratic Pluralism**
Interwar Cases		Italy (post 1938), Hungary (post 1939), Spain (post 1936), Yugoslavia, Romania, Turkey (post-Ottoman), Greece (post 1936)	Austria, Germany (until 1933), Poland, Greece (until 1936), France (Vichy), Norway, Sweden
Top-Down Mechanisms (Actors: internally mobilized parties during liberalization)	Inclusion mechanism	Liberal (individual) legal requisites	Group-based legal requisites
	Resulting exclusion	Sustained exclusion of the diverse masses	Sustained exclusion of high-threat groups
	State policy towards minorities	Assimilation	*De facto* acculturation
Middle-Down Mechanisms (Actors: the *de facto* excluded externally mobilized parties during liberalization)	Politicization (during liberalization)	Need-based; Social service provision to the excluded and divided masses by religious or nationality-based externally mobilized parties. Broad access to associations during exclusion from the state defines boundaries of a homogenous (class, language, and religion) national identity.	Ideological reactive backlash by disparate groups in civil society to different aspects of liberalization (secularization, democratization, economic liberalization). Narrow access to associations during mass exclusion from the state defines the boundaries of a heterogeneous (class, language, and religion) national identity.
	Excluded parties share grievances regarding liberalization	Yes	No

	Resulting mobilization (following mass participation)	Nationalist: Consolidation of a politicized religious-national identity unites ingroup rural and urban voters, rich and poor, and institutionalizes politics in civil society through religious associations and organizations	Responsive to changes in party competition; varies by election
	Ease of consolidating rule across divided society	Easy	Hard

Caption for Table 1.2: Mechanisms underpinning two ideal-type patterns of autocratization in interwar Europe. The "settled fascist" pathway relied on access to the state during liberalization, defined through individual legal requisites, led to broad-based exclusion, and nationalist politicization and mobilization through the need-based provision of social services by religious and nationalist associations. The "autocratic pluralist" pathway relied on group-based requisites of inclusion (access) to the state during liberalization, targeted exclusion to groups that threatened the incumbency or order of the regime, and led to reactions in civil society by an *assortment* of civil groups, producing heterogeneous national identities, making it harder for autocratic parties to consolidate the state with society.

Processes of liberalization decided upon by parliamentary (internally mobilized) parties leave behind enduring "breadcrumbs" of past regimes' social and political patterns of inclusion and exclusion, shaping individuals, groups, local and regional communities, and diasporic networks alike (Mylonas 2013). These groves of inclusion and exclusion create the windows for new emergent parties (extra-parliamentary externally mobilized parties) to mobilize the excluded through regime change.

REGIME CHANGE AS A BUNDLE OF REFORMS

A *regime* is best understood as a *bundle of reforms* that structures how organized interests are transformed into governance. *Regime change* occurs when this bundle of

reforms is reconfigured, when institutions and legal procedures shift substantially to alter who is included or excluded from political power.[8] These reforms, which affect elites as well as everyday people, affect the payoffs attached to political action for individuals and groups of both, embedding incentives and constraints into the political system (North 1990; Ostrom 1986). Organized interests, such as parties, social movements, civil associations, and kinship networks, mobilize through and around these institutions and procedures in an attempt to influence policy, all while navigating internal dilemmas of collective action (Olson 1965; Dahl 1961; North 1990, Chapter 9; Poertner 2024).

Regime change is not a simple shift from autocracy to democracy or from democracy to autocracy; it is not a single moment of wishing "good night" to one and "good morning" to the other. Instead, it unfolds as a series of incremental liberalizations and illiberalizations as elites alter suffrage, civil liberties, bureaucratic autonomy, military oversight, and judicial authority over decades, sometimes centuries. Together, these liberal and illiberal changes to institutions and legal procedures redefine *who* can make claims on the state by defining who has access to the state. Some reforms expand participation and contestation; others restrict them. What matters is the *cumulative trajectory* of these reforms, not whether one single "threshold" in the participatory, competitiveness, or legal rights and freedoms domain is crossed. Therefore, this conceptual distinction between liberalization and

[8] Regime change is the cumulative reconfiguration of institutions that define and constrain access, for individuals and social groups, to the state and society.

democratization is necessary for understanding the logic of the book's antecedent assumptions, theory, and implications, which I outline in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

Democratization is typically studied through a *threshold model*: once a critical reform such as universal suffrage or competitive elections is introduced, the process is labeled a "democratic transition." It is evaluated retrospectively, focusing on outcomes at the macro-level, and progress is judged against an endpoint of consolidation (Ziblatt 2017, 12). On the other hand, *liberalization* emphasizes the *process* rather than the endpoint. It captures incremental, often uneven reforms to rights, institutions, and political access. Liberalization (and illiberalization) is evaluated as reforms occur, focusing on origins and sequencing rather than outcomes. Importantly, liberalization does not always lead to democratization, nor does democratization guarantee liberalization (Schumpeter 1942; Levitsky and Way 2010; Zakaria 1997). Distinguishing the two processes highlights how liberalization can accumulate in multiple directions: bundled reforms may lead to democracy, stall within different types of regimes within the umbrella of authoritarianism, bounce between regimes harnessing both autocratic and democratic tendencies, or unfold unevenly without ever converging on a steady state. The distinction moves us away from studying "failed" or "successful" cases of (il)liberalization and democratization. Instead, it directs attention to how and why liberal and illiberal reforms occur when they do, as units in long causal chains that reshape state-society relations regardless of the outcome. The focus, then, is on the character of the

liberalizing pathway itself.[9] The distinction also highlights two different types of "rules" or institutions that elites can reform: those that change whose preferences are aggregated— "who gets to play"—and those that change how preferences are aggregated— "the rules of the game."

Reforms that change *who gets to play* expand or contract the franchise through legal requirements of inclusion and exclusion, such as property, tax, gender, age, literacy, or residency criteria. These reforms decide which social groups gain or lose access to voting and office-holding—in other words, whose preferences count (e.g., Bateman 2018; Teele 2018; Cortesi *n.d.*), but not how those preferences are aggregated. By contrast, reforms to the rules of the game, long the justified focus of political science because they coincide with the liberalization of contestation (e.g., Ahmed 2013; Benoit 2007; Boix 1999; Mares 2015; Renwick 2017), alter the electoral system itself. Examples within the realm of electoral politics include proportional representation, plural voting, and the adoption of the secret ballot. These reforms reshape how the preferences of those with access are aggregated.[10]

Table 1.3 illustrates the motivation for the study of the former, highlighting the sheer frequency of suffrage reforms that change access to the state using data

[9] This approach is entirely in line with Ziblatt (2017)'s empirical approach in Chapters 3 to 9. However, I would argue that the label attributed to the Weimer case should be "reversed liberalization" (50-53), given the intensely undemocratic features of the Prussian case (Mares 2015; 2022).

[10] This distinction applies beyond the electoral arena, for example, in the realm of parliamentarism (see Boucoyannis (2021), where she makes this distinction but implicitly regarding the origins of inclusive institutions).

originally collected from 167 reforms across 22 liberalizing European states from 1848 to 1945.

Table 1.3: Type of Suffrage Reform, from 167 changes to Electoral Law across 22 European States[11]

	Number of changes	"Who gets to play" or changes to the "rules of the game"?
Electoral system change	85	Rules of the game
Direct voting	51	Rules of the game
Plural voting (equal + unequal)	37	Rules of the game
Electoral census (tax payment)	71	Who gets to play the game
Age	42	Who gets to play the game
Gender	33	Who gets to play the game
Education (Including occupational restrictions/liberalizations)	22	Who gets to play the game
Residency	20	Who gets to play the game
Secret Ballot	20	Who gets to play the game
Welfare (free of state tutelage)	18	Who gets to play the game
Literacy	12	Who gets to play the game
Familial relationships (including widow status)	11	Who gets to play the game
Compulsory voting	9	Who gets to play the game
	431 changes to the electoral law	

Caption for Table 1.3: distinguishes between reforms that determined who gets to play—changes to suffrage rules based on property, gender, age, literacy, or residency—and reforms that altered the rules of the game, such as changes to electoral systems. Of 167 reforms across 22 European states, many combined both types of changes, showing how incumbents could expand access selectively while simultaneously reshaping competition to protect their dominance. Source: Enfranchisement in Europe Dataset, Author's Own (2025)

The data, which disaggregates sections of public law, show that both types of reforms were common in liberalizing states. For example, of 167 electoral reforms across 22 European states, 71 changes were made to census requirements (who

[11] The countries included: AT, BE, CH, DK, FI, FR, DE, GR, HU, IS, IR, IT, LU, NL, NO, PT, ES, SE, GB, and RO.

plays), while 85 changes were made to restructure electoral systems (rules of the game). Often, reforms expanding participation in one domain were paired with restrictions in another, illustrating how incumbents could liberalize selectively in separate domains to preserve power. By distinguishing between "who gets to play" and "the rules of the game," we begin to understand that reforms were rarely uniformly inclusive and instead usually targeted individuals as part of larger social groups. Requisites in law were part of the mechanisms of inclusion and partisan strategies, crafted by incumbents to manage threats from organized interests inside and outside parliament. This distinction grounds the analysis of regime change not in abstract thresholds, but in the contested, piecemeal reforms through which political access was fought over and defined in law.

READING THIS BOOK

This book covers a wide terrain of concepts, history, and both quantitative and qualitative data. Therefore, readers may approach it in different ways depending on their interests. For those curious about the conceptual logics of liberalization, how regimes gradually open political and social access without necessarily democratizing, Chapter 2 offers a clear point of entry to the main concepts and definitions, as well as the motivations for the case selection, including positioning voting rights as a case of liberalization, and research design. The chapter also empirically situates the Austro-Hungarian Empire within a wider comparative framework of regime change across Latin America, parts of South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, allowing readers to see how these cases fit into global patterns of liberalization and nation-

state consolidation following decades of imperial rule. Readers drawn to the theoretical architecture of the book will find Chapter 3 to be of interest. Here, I present a three-part theory: parliamentary parties as strategic actors deciding when, why, and whom to enfranchise; and extra-parliamentary parties as organizations that mobilized the excluded in civil society. This chapter builds on existing political economic models but embeds ideological and sociological concerns associated with nation-building with the political incentives of decision-making actors (parliamentary parties). I show *how* internally mobilized (parliamentary) parties acted with incomplete information, constrained resources, and adaptive strategies, and why these dynamics matter not only for incremental liberalizations but also for the long-run political development of the regime into settled fascism or autocratic pluralism. The second part of the theory shows *why* excluded actors relied on apolitical civil associations to politicize, mobilize, and organize the masses, largely due to need-based politicization, which occurred through the non-state state access and delivery of necessary *club* goods to ingroup members. Finally, the third part of the theory ties the two together to demonstrate both the logic of how a long-held cap on party competition can backfire following mass inclusion and qualitatively shows the ideological dynamics that lend these dynamics to fascism.

The empirical heart of the book lies in Chapters 4 and 7. These chapters detail how parliamentary incumbents in Austria and Hungary, then both part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918), liberalized access to the ballot box selectively, not out of democratic conviction, but to preserve their hold on power and keep organized out-group nationalists out of power to maintain the Hungarian

(Magyar) hegemony. Chapter 4 traces the legislative politics that led to the reforms, which shifted access to the state from groups to individuals, reshaping representation in the late nineteenth century. Here, I focus on the 1868 Nationalities Law in the eastern half of the Empire and the 1873 centralizing reform in the Habsburg western half. Chapter 5 offers four paired case studies of suffrage reforms, contrasting early inclusion from the periphery with late inclusion from contentious political centers. Readers interested in the mechanics of electoral law and the partisan strategies behind seemingly technical reforms will find answers to why, how, and when parliamentary parties liberalize electoral law here. Each case can be read on its own, though I recommend reading them in their paired logic and in sequence to appreciate the comparative logic. For those interested in how parties forged constituencies outside of electoral competition, Chapter 6 is essential. It develops the concept of *associational endowments* to show how parties became welfare entrepreneurs in pre-1918 Hungary, politicizing civil society through education, mutual aid, and welfare provision. In contexts where the state did not provide, parties filled the gap, transforming social networks into partisan loyalties and shaping the boundaries of future constituencies. Chapter 7 shifts focus to the intersection of nationalism, religion, and fascism. It traces how associational life in the aftermath of empire gave rise to religious nationalism, which parties used to unify diverse and often divided social groups. Through case studies of previously apolitical associations that targeted different group identities during liberalization: youth, women (men), farmer (industrial), religious (Catholic and Jewish), I show how civic nationalism gave way to religious nationalism as parties sought new bases

in an era of mass participation following periods of mass exclusion (disenfranchisement), creating the conditions under which fascism could splinter from national movements in interwar Hungary to take over the state, but not in interwar Austria. Finally, the conclusion (Chapter 8) brings the threads together. It argues that fascism emerged not only from crises of the interwar period but also as the unintended consequence of earlier liberal reforms that individualized political access while leaving social provision to partisan and religious networks. For readers seeking a broad overview of the book's contribution, the politics of enfranchisement, the partisan logics of inclusion and exclusion, the non-state origins of the welfare provision, the making of nationalist constituencies, and the long-run consequences of liberalization, the conclusion offers such an account.